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## **Philosophy, Worldview & Arabness: Fatalism in the Mu'allaqat: Thoughts of mythopoets about destiny & death**

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Philosophy, Worldview & Arabness: Fatalism in the *Mu'allaqat*.  
Thoughts of mythopoets about destiny & death.

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Philosophy

Global and Comparative

Dr. Ahab Bdaiwi

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Figure 1: *Fate concealed and waiting for an opportunity to strike*<sup>1</sup>  
'By *Mny* son of *Mtn'* son of *B'mh* and he grieved for loved ones and Fate lay in wait.'



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<sup>1</sup> Josef Bloomfield, "BES20 1129," *OCIANA* (July 2025), <https://ociana.osu.edu/inscriptions/45059>.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Where does the adventure begin?*

You and I close our eyes and travel to the Arabian Peninsula, at 100 CE. The destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) and a series of Jewish-Roman wars (66-135 CE) forced Jewish refugees to flee to Arabia. You and I find ourselves in Petra (modern-day Jordan). Seizing it in 106 CE, the Roman Empire reached its greatest extent under Emperor Trajan. With the completion of the Apostolic Age, intercommunal dissension threatened Paleo-Christianity's momentum. Full-fledged persecution forced Christians to find shelter in the Levant. Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787 CE) laboured to establish orthodoxy, expelling authorities embracing heretical doctrines. Priests retreated to Arabia, living as hermits and anchorites.<sup>2</sup> Christianity spread across the Peninsula without episcopal control over its monastic affairs.<sup>3</sup> Poets, the custodians of Arabic oral culture, encountered new religions and languages in their travels. They heard sacred expressions in hymns, litanies, and liturgies. You and I close our eyes again, this time travelling to Yathrib (renamed Medina) after Muhammad's death in 632 CE. We are struck by wonder. A new religion - *Islam* - had emerged, re-articulating Arabic poetic ideals into sanctified monotheistic values; tribal ethics were 'purified.' This 'purification' found expression in the *Qur'an*, which the young Muslim community (*ummah*) - strained as it was over its Prophet's succession - recited until transcribing. The did the same with the poetic collection that is the focus of this thesis. You and I close our eyes one last time and return to the present.

The Arabian Peninsula, between the Roman annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom (106 CE) and the end of Muhammadan Islam (632 CE), was a financially integrated, culturally vibrant region. Missing political unity did not keep nomadic and sedentary tribes from sharing identity markers. This period is known as Pre-Islamic, Late Antique Arabia, or the *Jahiliyyah* (the Age of Ignorance). Pre-Islamic Arabia refers to any activity in the Peninsula before the advent of Islam; Late Antique Arabia refers to any activity in the Peninsula in line with Late Antique trends; and *Jahiliyyah* refers to any activity in the Peninsula as remembered by Islamic sources or contrasted with Islamic messages. I will alternate between using these terms. The enquiring minds residing in the Peninsula switched from carving petroglyphs (monumental and informal inscriptions) to uttering rhymed prose (e.g., the *Ayyam al-Arab*) and poetic odes (*qasidas*). In the zenith of the *Jahiliyyah*, the intellectual curiosities of its best mythopoets aestheticised the landscape of the desert that surrounded them, capturing their vision of a purposeful life. The most famous *qasidas* from the poetry of the Age of Ignorance (*al-shi'r al-Jahili*) make the *Mu'allaqat* (The Hanging Poems). This thesis examines the presentation of *al-Dahr* (Time/Death/Fate) in the *Mu'allaqat*, the most sophisticated poetic product of Arabia, inspired by its rebuttal in the *Qur'an*, Islam's scriptural authority, and informed by pre-Islamic inscriptions. I aim to reconstruct the poetic

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<sup>2</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 41-43.

<sup>3</sup> Ibrahim Mumayyiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry in Pre-Islamic Arabia* (Garant, 2010), 61-63.

expression of the *Jahili* worldview and the role of fatalistic transcendence in it. Disentangling it from the *Qur'anic* lens that renders it an atheistic, amoral source of inevitable decline, I explore the philosophical commitments the *Jahili* society of poets ascribed to in their examination of destiny and death.

## 1.2 *The Mu'allaqat*

The *Mu'allaqat* was orally composed mostly in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, but recorded as an anthology during the 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>4</sup> The grouping of the poems by Hammad al-Rawiyah, and the name given to the collection (reportedly, the odes were inscribed in gold and hung inside the walls of the *Kaaba*), point to their unparalleled esteem within the larger poetic production of pre-Islamic Arabia.<sup>5</sup> The 'standard' collection includes seven poets, yet I include ten: Imru' al-Qays, Antarah, Tarafah, Amr, Labid, Zuhayr, Harith ibn Hiliza, al-A'sha, al-Nabighah, and al-Abras.<sup>6</sup> Standing out at poetic contests held at marketplaces like that of 'Ukaz, they come from a mixed society of nomads and urban aristocrats.<sup>7</sup> Orientalist views suggest their life was marked by the struggle to balance between three superpowers. The Romans, Sassanids, and Abyssinians wanted to profit from their lucrative commercial territories; yet the poets mention these neighbours briefly and casually. Their biographies recount life in exile and in royal courts. Each *Mu'allaqah* is an autobiography and a personal retelling of events; in its authentic nucleus lies the confidential information about each poet's life and matters he thought were worth reciting, along with how they made him feel.<sup>8</sup> The protagonists live in a fatalistic cosmos. Their existentialist anxieties make them contemplate their end. This urged me to investigate the "ideal hunter," *al-Dahr*.<sup>9</sup> *Al-Dahr* knows no continuity; it brings forgetfulness and oblivion.<sup>10</sup> Beyond its poetic qualities, the philosophical propositions of the *Mu'allaqat* and the coherence of the worldview it transmits are the primary subjects of my investigation.

Why has this early Arabic poetic collection attracted academic interest? One, the corpus offers an opportunity to bridge the ancient Semitic world with that of Late Antiquity. In his study of Safaitic prayers (carved since the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC), Ahmad al-Jallad points to an incentive for fatalistic philosophy. With the inscriptions:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan C. Brown, "The Social Context of Pre-Islamic Poetry: Poetic Imagery and Social Reality in the *Mu'allaqat*," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2003): 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 105.

<sup>6</sup> *The Mu'allaqat for Millennials: Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes*, edited by Bander al-Harbi, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Ithra, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Paul Smith, eds., *The Wine of Love: An Anthology* (New Humanity Books, 2012), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, viii.

<sup>9</sup> Nadia Jamil, *Ethics and Poetry in 6th Century Arabia* (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2017), 113.

<sup>10</sup> Jamil, *Ethics and Poetry*, 40.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals of the Nomads of Pre-Islamic Arabia: A Reconstruction Based on the Safaitic Inscriptions* (Brill, 2022), 10-16.

[People begged for] security, [...] reunion, [...] rains or a change of circumstances, [...] invoking curses on [...] [vandals] and blessings on those who leave [the inscription] alone.

These pleadings, asking to be alleviated from the pain and agony people were destined to, did not touch their gods: Deities were unwilling or unable to help humans escape *mny* (Fate).<sup>12</sup> Its performed poetic tradition and practised worldview can bridge the two eras. But why talk about bridging if the *qasidas* were composed during Late Antiquity? Because a close reading of their text shows Late Antique thought was not internalised. As Peter Brown writes, “Arabs [...] remained ignorant of Homer, of Thucydides, of Sophocles.”<sup>13</sup>

Second is the framework from which the *Qur'an* and *Islam* emerged. Scholars divert attention from Prophet Muhammad – his engagement with Judaism, Christianity, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and Paganism – to the reflections of his audience, especially his adversaries, whom he tries to proselytise; the *Qur'anic mushrikun* (associators). Muhammad either initially belonged to or was surrounded by this monolatric community that worshipped *Allah* along with other lesser deities, unequivocally believing in intercession.<sup>14</sup> This is important since recent scholarship argues that the pre-Islamic usage of *Allah* invokes Him as a creator who gave light, like other biblical gods.<sup>15</sup> Monolatry is “the restriction of worship to one god, when other gods may be held to exist [...] [marks] the transition from polytheism to monotheism.”<sup>16</sup> This system, encompassing a dual belief in one creator god and lesser deities invoked to intervene, shapes the emerging field of critical *Jahili* studies.<sup>17</sup> As no text of his opponents survives, revelation conveys their doubts about bodily resurrection, their denial that God both creates, regulates, and judges the world, and their dismissal that Muhammad can have divine status as God’s messenger while being human.<sup>18</sup> Their accusations carry the high resonance of an intellectually threatening community. The *Mu'allaqat* provides a window into *mushrik* thought as its *qasidas* were uttered in proximity to the associators’ generation. The *Qur'an* was sent down while Labid was a poet, two generations away

<sup>12</sup> Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 73-77.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750* (Thames & Hudson, 1971), 186.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Crone, *The Qur'anic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, edited by Hanna Siurua (Brill, 2016), 52 & Ahab Bdaiwi, “Arabian Monotheism before Islam: Some Reflections on the Pagans of the Qur'an,” *Leiden Medievalists Blog* (2022) <https://www.leidenmedievalistsblog.nl/articles/arabian-monotheism-before-islam-some-reflections-on-the-pagans-of-the-qur%CA%BEan>.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmad al-Jallad, “Ancient Allah: An Epigraphic Reconstruction,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* (2025): 47. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgaf012>.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford University Press, 2006. <https://www-oxfordreference-com.leidenuniv.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780198614425.001.0001/acref-9780198198614425-e-3887>.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Webb, Cry me A Jahiliyyah: Muslim Reconstructions of Pre-Islamic Arabian Culture – A Case Study,” in *Islam at 250: Studies in Memory of G.H.A. Juynboll* (Brill, 2020), 237. <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/2966373>.

<sup>18</sup> Crone, *The Qur'anic Pagans*, 103, 156, 317.

from Tarafah.<sup>19</sup> It is likely that the Prophet had heard, repeated, and memorised its verses himself. Placing the arguments of the *mushrikun* and the premises attested in the *Mu'allaqat* in parallel, I noticed a *sui generis* commitment to fatalism. One that rejects the idea that the body can survive death but allows, through the art of poetry, memory to survive. This entails an intricate theory of the soul that must prove its worth - against the malicious schemes of *al-Dahr* - for its heroism to be worth recitation.

### 1.3 Roadmap

This thesis takes a diverse trajectory. Focusing on a poetic collection that explores a rarely read territory (the discursive space of *Jahili* Arabs), the first section summarises the ten odes. The translation I use consults *the Book of Songs* by al-Isfahani (897-967 CE) for the historical framework and main messages of each poet. I continue with a general overview of the philosophical value of poetry and list the elements that make the *Mu'allaqat* philosophically relevant. I define what fatalism and worldview mean to lay out the conceptual framework with which I study *al-Dahr*. The elements of a worldview adopted emerge from the Islamic worldview, and their application to the *Jahili* worldview invites reflection. The section concludes by linking fatalism with other elements of the *Jahili* paradigm. The second and largest section presents scholarship on the *Jahili* world. By order of analysis, the five research niches are intercultural influences; Arabian women; literacy; religious practices; and the composition of communities. *Prima facie*, these do not sound ideal for poetic fatalism. The literature review shows the *Mu'allaqat* is marginal in the study of pre-Islamic Arabia, and, how different its *status questionis* would be, were it principal. These niches address the linguistic syncretism of a vast region, milestones in the development of the Arabic script over five hundred years, and major historical events that shaped the peninsula. They attempt three, near-impossible tasks: (i) Collect every dialect of an oral culture; (ii) discover every petroglyph that is a progenitor of Arabic; and (iii) establish the most impactful events on a period/region that did not produce its own historical sources. What we get is a taste of a people comfortable with multiplicity, in a fortune-shifting epoch. Next, I reflect on the different schools of thought, the methodological approaches employed, and some research gaps. The section ends with the hermeneutical method I chose, focusing on the meaning-making accomplished by the collection, and the role of fatalism in corroborating the overall worldview. The third section unites each poet's appreciation of truth claims and value judgments about *al-Dahr*. This process clarifies the corpus's commitment to fatalistic transcendence. If the mythopoeists persevere calamities in their lifetime and their soul demonstrates its nobility, courage, and generosity, upon the end of their life, their memory can overcome physical limits and live forever. The section concludes with establishing the relationship between each element of the *Jahili* worldview, demonstrating how a fatalistic futurology consolidates a fame-creating teleology. A short epilogue of the philosophical journey in the intellectual history of ideas we have taken closes this dissertation.

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<sup>19</sup> Dalia Urbonaitė, "Mystic Mythopoesis of Pre-Islamic Arabic Odes," *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* 6, no. 2 (2005):108. <https://doi.org/10.15388/AOV.2005.0.3967>

## 2. Poetry & Philosophy: For Ancient Societies & Modern Research

### 2.1 *The Jahili qasidas*

I make a start by summarising each ode, keeping any reference to *al-Dahr* in the original text. The full text of each poem appears in the appendices (*see pages 61-102*).

Imru' al-Qays begins by crying at the ruined abode, even if his friends admonish him to get a grip of himself (Appendix A, vv. 1-6). He remembers his past lovers, for whom he slaughtered a she-camel, but especially Fatimah, who ruled over his heart (Appendix A, vv. 7-22). When he slips through one woman's guards (Appendix A, vv. 23-26), she exclaims, "I don't see the veil of your error lifting" (Appendix A, v. 27). Still, she follows him; they spend the night together, after which he describes her beauty in length (Appendix A, vv. 28-41). The scene closes with the advice he did not take about her (Appendix A, vv. 42-43). The next scene finds him staring at the stars, having an intense existential episode over his feeling that time has stopped (Appendix A, vv. 44-48). A hunt day ensues, in which the poet trumpets his horses' value (Appendix A, vv. 49-58), using the oryx to refer to hunting rituals (Appendix A, vv. 59-63) and closes with a communal meal (Appendix A, vv. 64-66). A cloudburst catches the poet's attention: Soon, it turns into a storm so reckless, no sign of life seems to survive it, except the songbird, who watched the setting be blighted, staying quiet until it passes (Appendix A, vv. 67-78).<sup>20</sup>

Tarafah begins by remembering Khawla bint Tha'labah. Although his companions try to cheer him up, sorrow gets the best out of him as he watches the caravans depart (Appendix B, vv. 1-5). He depicts a woman, zoomorphised as a gazelle and mare, with the brightness of chrysolite, fortified like a Byzantine archway, soft as the finest trade goods from the Tigris River, Damascus, and Yemen (Appendix B, vv. 6-31). Highly perceptive, the she-horse has achieved a harmonious partnership with her rider (Appendix B, vv. 32-39). Peril imposingly appears, and Tarafah is asked to assist; his brave soul accepts the challenge and delivers aid (Appendix B, vv. 40-47). He praises his allies, with whom he feasts once too many, until ostracised (Appendix B, vv. 48-55). Immortality being out of reach, courage and generosity can make one's legacy live on (Appendix B, vv. 56-63). The grave of a man who kept all his money to himself and one who spent every penny are the same, both become dust; life is a gift, and we must enjoy it since it lessens day by day (Appendix B, vv. 64-67). The scene ends: "By your life, death never misses his mark. A loose rope, this life, its end in death's hand" (Appendix B, v. 68). Next, Tarafah speaks of his poor family relations; no matter how much he assists his kin, he is a disgrace (Appendix B, vv. 69-79). He is thankful for the life he lives; the life God gave him. Inseparable from his Indian sword, he embodies the ultimate warrior figure (Appendix B, vv. 80-93). He asks women to remember him with the reputation he earned: That of being steadfast, bold, and benevolent (Appendix B, vv. 94-

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<sup>20</sup> Imru' al-Qays, "Mu'allaqah," Appendix A, vv. 1-78, in *The Mu'allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 28-84.

102).<sup>21</sup> Finally, he warns of the unpreparedness that we will experience when encountering our faith (Appendix B, vv. 103-105):<sup>22</sup>

I see death, the well-spring to which all men flock, on a day not too distant, and how close today is to that. The days will reveal to you what you know not, and news will come to you from one you least expect. News will come to you from one you didn't furnish and on a day for which you haven't planned.

Zuhayr starts with the deserted campsite, reminiscing about activities women conducted near their tents, as if transhumance did not define their lives, as if they were to settle (Appendix C, vv. 1-15). The next scene recounts an oath that was supposed to secure a peace treaty between two confederations. The oath, although sworn and taken upon the *Kaaba*, with animals given as reparations, was disrespected, and the two fought each other for a long time (Appendix C, vv. 16-25). Zuhayr accuses those who are not genuine, emphasising that God knows what each soul conceals, and death, zoomorphised as the mother of an eagle, will find the breaker in revenge (Appendix C, vv. 26-43). Retribution is cruel from both sides (Appendix C, vv. 43-46). He advises how to cultivate a good character: Anyone rejecting a peace offer suffers harsh conflicts; anyone keeping their promise is innocent of blame; no one can be saved from death no matter where they hide; anyone will be despised if they do not help their family; anyone letting others take advantage of him will face consequences; anyone travelling without caution mistakes enemies for friends; anyone who holds back is the one getting harmed; anyone who does not act with kindness will be humiliated; and anyone who wants to heighten their honour can use goodness as his armour. (Appendix C, vv. 47-55).<sup>23</sup> Lastly, he reflects on the knowledge he has gained at his age, most definitely of which is that truth will become known and that no one knows their future (Appendix C, vv. 56-59):<sup>24</sup>

I've seen the Fates stomp like a camel blind: whoever they strike dies, who they miss grows old. A man's nature, whatever it may be though he thinks he can hide it, will be told. Today and yesterday, I know them well but I'm blind for tomorrow and can't behold.

The prelude of Labid is so idyllic, it is melodious. Starting with a ruined encampment, he describes the imprint of nature (water), which does not change during sacred or secular months, like the inscriptions on rock (Appendix D, vv. 1-11). The women depart, and Labid remembers a lover he could not find (Appendix D, vv. 12-19). The lonely *rahil* starts (Appendix D, vv. 20-24) in which he sees typical desert fauna being subjected to the injustices of *al-Dahr* (Appendix D, vv. 25-52), most obvious in the assertion: "They chanced upon it unawares and struck - Fate's arrows never miss their mark" (Appendix D, v. 39). In a captivating play of words, Labid says he must

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<sup>21</sup> Tarafah, "Mu'allaqah," Appendix B, vv. 1-102, in *The Mu'allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 85-160.

<sup>22</sup> Appendix B, vv. 103-105, 161.

<sup>23</sup> Zuhayr, "Mu'allaqah," Appendix C, vv. 1-55, in *The Mu'allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 163-200.

<sup>24</sup> Appendix C, vv. 56-59, 201.

address the needs of his heart, for which he is willing to tie knots in ropes but also cut them. He is ready to leave a place he finds unpleasant “unless his own soul’s fate overtakes him there” (Appendix D, vv. 53-56). He recalls fun nights and days under the joy of wine, and battles he survived thanks to his horse, from which he only descends when the night falls (Appendix D, vv. 57-69). Boasting about kindness and hospitality, he refers to the men and women who were granted shelter by him, and the camel he slayed to feed them following the rules of gambling, “by the fate-sealing arrows whose shafts look alike” (Appendix D, vv. 70-77). The last scene reflects the hierarchy of tribal councils: A chief advisor, a divider of possessions, and a bountiful man of great virtue. He comes “from a clan whose fathers set for them their law - For each tribe has its leader and its law.” His virtue cannot be stained, and everyone must be satisfied with what he assigns to them, including the trust to protect each other and the destitute (Appendix D, vv. 78-88).<sup>25</sup>

‘Amr does not cry about women leaving; instead, he rejoices over drinking wine, which can pacify a lovestruck man and make him indifferent to his wealth (Appendix E, vv. 1-4). He is merry but conscious that “the Fates will surely take us by surprise - they’ve been foretold for us, and we for them” (Appendix E, v. 5). In *vino veritas*, he admits women’s absence and caprices leave him distressed (Appendix E, vv. 6-14),<sup>26</sup> so much so that (Appendix E, vv. 15-17):<sup>27</sup>

My grief’s worse than a camel cow who’s lost her calf, so she returns back crying doomed,  
or a widow, grey-haired, whose terrible luck has left nine sons, not one of them untomed.  
That’s fate—today, tomorrow, and thereafter are pledged to destinies we do not know.

He states his tribes’ military achievements, the crown of glory they wear, that, if met with hatred, shows their enemies’ true colours (Appendix E, vv. 18-26). In battle, they are merciless, and their swords are like “ribbons tossed about in child’s play,” but their legions also gather to settle disputes (Appendix E, vv. 27-43). He mentally interrogates ‘Amr ibn Hind, whom he will not obey, referring to his ancestry and his confederation’s lengthy triumphs (Appendix E, vv. 44-81). ‘Amr praises the women who follow his tribe; how they scold them if they avoid their duty of protection or oaths they swore (Appendix E, vv. 82-89). His boast ends with his lineage becoming world rulers (Appendix E, vv. 90-94).<sup>28</sup>

Antarah presents a complicated progression of events. He asks whether the poets have left a rip unsewn (Appendix F, v. 1). Then he talks about the lover whose departure upset him, Ablah, whose family he accidentally killed (Appendix F, vv. 2-12). He describes her beauty, her ivory-white teeth and how pampered she is (Appendix F, vv. 13-21). His journey starts at night, and his camel is the reason he makes it (Appendix F, vv. 22-34). He asks ‘Ablah to appreciate him for who he is - easy when he suffers no abuse, harsh in revenge, but always generous (Appendix F, vv. 35-41). Next, he retells his heroic behaviour in battle (Appendix F, vv. 42-58). Just like he

<sup>25</sup> Labid, “Mu’allaqah,” Appendix D, vv. 1-88, in *The Mu’allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 202-251.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Amr, “Mu’allaqah,” Appendix E, vv. 1-14, in *The Mu’allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 252-270.

<sup>27</sup> Appendix E, vv. 15-17, 271.

<sup>28</sup> Appendix E, vv. 18-94, 272-293.

prayed to God to catch a doe, he prayed to have 'Ablah (Appendix F, vv. 59-62), but her family was not impressed by his gifts (Appendix F, vv. 63-65). The last scene is a fierce battle; he elevates his soul and cures it when his battle mates applaud for him (Appendix F, vv. 66-77).<sup>29</sup> He exclaims (Appendix F, vv. 78-80):<sup>30</sup>

I'd hate to die before the Wheel of Death had ground these boys of Damdam into rot, who mocked my honour when I hadn't theirs and craved my blood before we'd even fought. And if they act? Well, I left their father dead, a dinner for hyenas, lame and stout!

Al-Harith admits that sobbing when he sees women leaving brings him shame (Appendix G, vv. 1-8). He relies on his camel to escape this sorrow (Appendix G, vv. 9-14). His problem is that his tribe is held accountable, after false accusations, for misdeeds they have not committed (Appendix G, vv. 15-24).<sup>31</sup> He mentions the gravity of fate (Appendix G, vv. 25-26):<sup>32</sup>

Fate batters us, as if stoning a black mountain, its peak with clouds disguised, shored up against misfortune, not reduced by destiny's unceasing hammer thuds.

He resorts to tribal councils that are to tell between the sick from the healthy, the high from the low, the just from the unjust (Appendix G, vv. 27-31). There was a raid which no one could combat (Appendix G, vv. 32-36). Because even kings are mortals, foolish aggressions need to stop, and truce must be redeemed under the initial agreement (Appendix G, vv. 37-43). Al-Harith enlists famous breaches of other tribes, which cannot bring blame to his (Appendix G, vv. 44-61). The law of God prevailed - that is, shelter to the pure and death to the traitors - and a marriage secured allegiance between the tribes (Appendix G, vv. 62-83).<sup>33</sup>

Al-A'sha starts by watching the departing caravan, which is unbearable. Hurayrah, the girl he cannot stomach saying goodbye to, seems quite happy (Appendix H, vv. 1-8). He describes her beauty during the night and the day (Appendix H, vv. 9-14). Hurayrah is in love with somebody else, and al-A'sha presents the endless cycle of unrequited love, each paramour "longing for another, delirious and stricken, approaching and retreating, confounding and crazed" (Appendix H, vv. 15-18).<sup>34</sup> After she rejects him, he admits the troubles that come with love, rhetorically asking (Appendix H, vv. 19-21):<sup>35</sup>

Didn't she see me, an old, dim-sighted man, afflicted by treacherous Fate and by Time, the senile and precarious.

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<sup>29</sup> Antarah, "Mu'allaqah," Appendix F, vv. 1-77, in *The Mu'allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 294-338.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix F, vv. 78-80, 339.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Harith, "Mu'allaqah," Appendix G, vv. 1-24, in *The Mu'allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 342-363.

<sup>32</sup> Appendix G, vv. 25-26, 364.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix G, vv. 27-84, 365-380.

<sup>34</sup> Al-A'sha, "Mu'allaqah," Appendix H, vv. 1-18, in *The Mu'allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 381-402.

<sup>35</sup> Appendix H, vv. 19-21, 403.

Thinking about instances where he caught his enemies by surprise, he asks her not to judge him by his appearance, which does not matter (Appendix H, vv. 22-24) since (Appendix H, vv. 25-26):<sup>36</sup>

Many a time, I set out to the tavern at daybreak, followed by a sharp, shrewd, swift skewering meat handler, in a crew of men like Indian swords who know well that, shod or shoeless, we will all perish.

The rest of the poem has a softer tone, expanding on the themes of wine and beautiful singing girls (Appendix H, vv. 27-32), journeying through the wild desert where only *jinn* reside (Appendix H, vv. 33-35), tracking a horrible rainstorm that drives out fauna from its resting place (Appendix H, vv. 36-43). He refers to spiteful intertribal disputes that spread bitterness over lineages initially not involved, resulting in grave human loss (Appendix H, vv. 44-54). Lastly, he establishes that revenge and war tactics must be equal (a chief for a chief, both should be mounted or on foot) (Appendix H, vv. 55-64).<sup>37</sup>

Al-Nabighah begins with a desolate campsite, emptied within a day. By the evening, it was left for "Time [who] overtook it as it overtook Lubad" (Appendix I, vv. 1-6). He starts his journey, where he notices the reactions of animals and draws lessons from them. He constructs the thoughts animals would utter (Appendix I, vv. 7-17).<sup>38</sup> One says (Appendix I, vv. 18-19):<sup>39</sup>

When 'Shredder' saw his comrade killed on the spot, and no means of bloodwite or revenge,  
the dog said to himself: I have lost my taste for meat: My friend is dead; the hunt is over.

Arriving at the palace of al-Numan, al-Nabighah makes the famous comparison of al-Numan with Solomon, highlighting his righteous character, generosity, and wisdom, which are said to have been bestowed by *Allah* (Appendix I, vv. 20-31). He apologises and flatters him as a just ruler, capable of discerning whether the accounts given about al-Nabighah were truthful or deceitful; hence, he deserves pardon. He insists his own tribe would side with al-Numan no matter his decision, and that he has run out of luck (Appendix I, vv. 32-49).<sup>40</sup>

Finally, al-Abras starts with a deserted campsite in which multiple people lived together; that makes it seem more desolate (Appendix J, vv. 1-3); destruction is more evident (Appendix J, vv. 4-6):<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Appendix H, vv. 22-26, 407.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix H, vv. 27-64, 407-421.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Nabighah, "Mu'allaqah," Appendix I, vv. 1-17, in *The Mu'allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 422-441.

<sup>39</sup> Appendix I, vv. 18-19, 442.

<sup>40</sup> Appendix I, vv. 20-49, 443-455.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Abras, "Mu'allaqah," Appendix J, vv. 1-6, in *The Mu'allaqat*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Ithra, 2020), 473.

Their places taken by wild beasts, their land unmade by what has come to pass, a land bequeathed unto destruction and pillaged of the folk who dwelt there and were slain, or otherwise died out.

He refers to the wisdom he has gained over the years, and at his age, he can provide honest advice (Appendix J, vv. 7-13). He does so in length, telling people not to lean on possessions or false hope; death is a journey without return; those with offspring (the successful) cannot be compared with those without (the losers); help is to be sought only by God and not others; God has no associates and knows what is concealed; success can be achieved by the weak and clever men can be fooled; the heart is prone to temptations; one should help others, but not to the point of deterring relations with their kin; and that people struggle to accept the truth so the longer they live they longer they suffer (Appendix J, vv. 14-26). He dedicates the last scene to his horse, perfect in anatomy and battle. An eagle captures a fox, which, alas, finds no escape (Appendix J, vv. 27-48).<sup>42</sup>

## 2.2. What is the philosophical value of poetry?

Continental philosophers revisited the relationship between poetry and philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose collaboration and antagonism go back millennia. Ancient societies witnessed an intimate connection between literacy, orality, and performance: The *pepaideumenoí* (educated individuals or mythopoeists) were “self-conscious rhetorical virtuosos, [displaying] their abundant knowledge of traditional history and literature [before] large audiences.”<sup>43</sup> Expressing themselves almost entirely in verse or rhythmic patterns, they made their teachings easier to memorise. These lessons are collected in wisdom literature, sacred hymns and epic poems. They left profound imprints in the societies that uttered and successfully repeated their lessons until writing them. Popular examples are the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Vedas*, the *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. Orality prevailed as literacy was repeatedly lost and regained every time civilisations rose and collapsed. Narratives of critical past events and advice were passed down by word of mouth. The *Mu'allaqat* similarly preserves the practical philosophy of the *Jahililyyah* in eloquent form. The relationship between poetry and philosophy in their quest for truth was symbiotic: Creative language and literary devices transmitted philosophical thought and practice from generation to generation. Poetry liberated societies from the fear of forgetting how to critically reflect on their values and conduct, due to the scarcity of writing materials or a general inability to write. Poetry was the interlocutor of philosophy, intellectual endeavour, indeed all thought.

When poets started using poetry to mock prominent figures, poetry censorship ensued.<sup>44</sup> Islamic canonical texts (the *Qur'an*, the *Ahadith*, the *Sirah*) and narratives (al-Kalbi’s *The Book of Idols*, al-Tabari’s *History of Prophets and Kings*) communicate an adverse historical memory of the

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<sup>42</sup> Appendix J, vv. 7-48, 474-489.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Minchin, eds., *Orality, Literacy and Performance in the Ancient World* (Brill, 2011), 231.

<sup>44</sup> Ranjan Ghosh, eds., *Philosophy and Poetry: Continental Perspectives* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 6.

*Jahiliyyah*. Their devotional boundaries present everything pre-Islamic as inferior. The *Qur'an* registers the accusation that the Prophet was a poet himself,<sup>45</sup> and devotes an entire *surah* to poets, stating:<sup>46</sup>

Only those who are lost in error follow the poets.

In the *ahadith* (collections of reports attributed to the Prophet), *Allah's* Messenger is sometimes hostile, saying:<sup>47</sup>

It is better for anyone of you that the inside of his body be filled with pus which may consume his body, than it be filled with poetry.

Other times, he appears more lenient:<sup>48</sup>

Some eloquent speech is as effective as magic.

Muhammad admitted that some poetry contains wisdom.<sup>49</sup> While striving for the betterment of the *ummah*, the Prophet noticed that 'false beliefs' are exaggerated in poetry. The 'falsity' of poetry is the 'wickedness' of those acting according to pre-Islamic moral conduct (*din*); a standard of fairness in conflict with what the *Qur'an* posited as good and bad. His reprimands did not halt poetry production; instead, Muhammad guided poetic creation to the Islamic message. He urged Hasan ibn Thabit to satirise Islam's adversaries,<sup>50</sup> and praised Labid for his poetry.<sup>51</sup> Their 'correctness' was their alignment with Islamic principles; Islamic poetry later jewelled the Arabic poetic tradition.

### 2.3 Why is the *Mu'allaqat* philosophically relevant?

The *Mu'allaqat* narrates the ideal Arabian *modus vivendi*, presenting the values and righteous behaviour essential for a good life.<sup>52</sup> Its corpus describes oath-making (*hulf* agreements); 'Amr boasts about himself and his lineage by saying (Appendix E, vv. 57): "We shall be found the firmest in our duty and truest to the vow that has been made."<sup>53</sup> With the metaphor of tying,

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<sup>45</sup> *The Qur'an*, trans. Abdel M. A. S. Haleem (Oxford University Press, 2016), 21:5.

<sup>46</sup> *The Qur'an*, 26:224.

<sup>47</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Imam al-Bukhari, trans. & eds. Muhammad Mohee Uddin Ibn Ahmad, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Libri Plureos, 2020), no. 6155.

<sup>48</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, no. 5767.

<sup>49</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, no. 6145.

<sup>50</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, no. 3212.

<sup>51</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, no. 3841.

<sup>52</sup> Jose Miguel Puerta Vilchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought: From Pre-Islamic Arabia through Al-Andalus*, trans. Consuelo López-Morillas (Brill, 2017), 30.

<sup>53</sup> Appendix E, vv. 57, 285.

characters take oaths of loyalty, alliance and allegiance.<sup>54</sup> If the knot or rope is binding, the covenant is respected; if splitting or untwisting is mentioned, perjury occurs, as in the case of Labid asking (Appendix D, v. 55): "For did Nawār not know that I am both He who ties the knots in rope and he who cuts them?"<sup>55</sup> The conceit of weaving an oath means coordinated action is possible via a firmly tied intention; uniting for a common goal means surviving and disunity in disaster.<sup>56</sup> Andrew Marsham argues that oaths were the political institution of the peninsula: Their sacred significance generated the rhetoric of receiving blessings after fulfilling, or punishment after violating one. Naming a deity as the guarantor for oaths was a means to authorise them; in case of breach, divine displeasure turns into rage - that is, a justification to impose sanctions.<sup>57</sup> In the same line of thought, Emran Iqbal El-Badawi depicts oaths as the strictest of tribal laws: A *hadith* says Abu Talib (Muhammad's uncle) raised the Prophet because of one.<sup>58</sup> As oaths secured the function of Arabian communities, the practice survived the consolidation of the new faith: Before Islam, oaths are in the poetic corpus (a contractual due to protect one's neighbour), inscriptions (a promise to avenge one's relative), and in votive offerings (vassal oaths in temples). In Muhammad's preaching, the rhetoric of observing covenants was wired into the *Qur'an* and the *Charter of Medina*.<sup>59</sup>

Another custom was defining one's identity based on one's *l* (any social unit from family to tribe). 'Amr identifies one common ancestor, then asserts the multiplicity of lineages that sprout out of that figure (Appendix E, vv. 27, 73): "We claim this glory, as father Ma'ad knows [and later] all the tribes of Ma'ad surely know."<sup>60</sup> Even in the case of banishment, as with Imru' al-Qays by his father, his *l* remains his identity marker.<sup>61</sup> Roman honorary titles also being an *l*, prompted studies dedicated to four Arabian governing families; the Nasirids, Jafnids, Hujrids, and Himyarites (who ruled over the Lakhmids, Ghassanids, Kindah, and Sabaeans respectively). While their dynasties were multigenerational, evidence of their kingdoms is anecdotal. Another norm registered in the corpus is what Michael Macdonald renders as an "epigraphic mania."<sup>62</sup> A habit of carving rocks started in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, turning into a frenzy by the 4<sup>th</sup>, with archaeologists still discovering tens of thousands of inscriptions over South and North Arabia.<sup>63</sup> Labid compares the permanent mark left from strong water streams on a valley to these drawings

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<sup>54</sup> Jamil, *Ethics and Poetry*, 165.

<sup>55</sup> Appendix D, v. 55, 243.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 30-31.

<sup>57</sup> Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 8-9, 55.

<sup>58</sup> Emran Iqbal El-Badawi, *Queens and Prophets: How Arabian Noblewomen and Holy Men Shaped Paganism, Christianity and Islam*, (Oneworld Academic, 2022), 219.

<sup>59</sup> *The Qur'an*, 2:27 & Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document* (The Darwin Press, 2004), 32-39.

<sup>60</sup> Appendix E, vv. 27 & 73, 277 & 289.

<sup>61</sup> *The Mu'allaqat*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Michael C. A. Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity in Pre-Islamic Arabia* (Routledge, 2009), 178.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Shepard, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500-1492* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 173.

(Appendix D, vv. 2): “And the torrent channels of Wadi Rayyan, their tracings laid bare, preserved as surely as inscriptions [...] in rock.”<sup>64</sup> The graphemes are neatly organised in two corpora (DASI and OCIANA).<sup>65</sup> Thankfully, they are deciphered. They preserve shrines, memberships, priestesses, onomastics, historical conflicts, pilgrimage, offerings to deities, invocations, confessions of sins and curses.<sup>66</sup> The reason for the break from rock-carving followed by the production of the *Jahili* odes is unclear. The literature summarised below does not discuss this transition from written records back to a vibrant oral culture, of which the *Mu’allaqat* is the greatest literary achievement.

Beyond aestheticising their practical philosophy, personal actions and societal organisation, the poets recount tragic phenomena. The foundational depiction of the commitment to fatalism is destruction. The annihilation of all settled life marks the *Mu’allaqat*.<sup>67</sup> Calamities, man-made (war) or God-sent (natural catastrophe), make people submit to the laws of fate (laws of nature) - that is, to cosmic order (predestination). Imru’ al-Qays begins his most celebrated *qasida*, dictated by Lafiz (his personal *Shaytan*), looking at the deserted abode (Appendix A, vv. 1-2):<sup>68</sup>

Stop, my friends, and we will weep over the memory of a loved one.  
And an abode at the dune's edge of Siqt al-Liwa, between al-Dakhul, then Hawmal,  
Then Tudih, then al-Miqrat, whose trace was not effaced  
By the two winds weaving over it from south and north.

Looking at the ruins triggers fatalistic reflection, as in the verses of al-Abras (Appendix J, vv. 4-6):<sup>69</sup>

Their places taken by wild beasts, their land unmade by what has come to pass,  
a land bequeathed unto destruction and pillages of the folk who dwelt there,  
and were slain, otherwise died out.

Already, the importance of remembrance is implied. The *Mu’allaqat* presents destruction alluding to architecture, a ‘disrespectful’ art. One does not expect descriptions of trailblazing architectural projects in the bare desert. Palaces and castles are posed as defiance, as one’s creation elevates its creator, then flattens. These architectural products are seen, remembered, and praised. Neither hubris nor the same moralising tone censures temporary structures (neighbourhoods, tents). In any case, the slighting of both makes the poets emotionally devastated. The euphoric engineering

<sup>64</sup> Appendix D, v. 1-2, 221.

<sup>65</sup> Alessandra Avanzini, eds., *Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Inscriptions (DASI)* (Scuola Normale Superiore, 2016), <https://dasi.cnr.it/>. & University of Oxford, *Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (OCIANA)* (Khalili Research Centre, 2017), <https://krc.orient/ox/ac/uk.ociana/>.

<sup>66</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 182.

<sup>67</sup> Vilchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought*, 34-35.

<sup>68</sup> Appendix A, vv. 1-2, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Appendix J, vv. 4-6, 473.

works alluded to by Tarafah (Appendix E, vv. 19, 23),<sup>70</sup> and al-Nabigha (Appendix H, vv. 22-23),<sup>71</sup> show more than man's incompetence to *al-Dahr*, but that of lesser deities too: All creative individuals operate under the spell of *jinn*, but their buildings submit to *al-Dahr*, sinking into solid rock.<sup>72</sup>

So why is poetry the art par excellence? What makes the *Mu'allaqat* the *zeitgeist* of pre-Islamic Arabia? Unlike towers and citadels, its verses survive *al-Dahr*, the passage of time. It reminds, educates, and corrects without ending. This thesis examines fatalistic transcendence: The mythopoeists of the *Mu'allaqat* confront the blind envy of *al-Dahr*, which has predetermined their distress and end. This causal power is not a deity, is not worshipped, and is unfavourable without exception. This philosophy calls for moral action: It urges the mythopoeists not only to be steadfast amid vicissitudes, but also to strive for the highest ethical achievements possible. *Al-Dahr* motivates the characters of the *Mu'allaqat* to act as virtuous agents, to the extent that the memory of their courage and generosity endures their death, whether at the summit of their achievements or in old age.

#### 2.4 How are modern definitions of fatalism helpful?

Every examination needs language. Modern definitions of fatalism offer the vocabulary of my analysis, but I am not forcing what fatalism currently means in ancient thought. Al-Abras states that God is the provider of everything that is good and He has no associate (Appendix J, vv. 18-20), affirms that everyone is free to believe in what they want to (Appendix J, v. 21), and then says (Appendix J, v. 22):<sup>73</sup>

A man who cannot learn from Fate cannot be taught by people, not even if they take him by the scruff.

The *Qur'an* expresses heavy charges against fatalists, quoting Muhammad's adversaries saying:<sup>74</sup>

'There is nothing beyond our life in this world: we shall not be raised from the dead, [or] there is only our life in this world: we die, we live, nothing but time destroys us.'

Yet, the iconic statement:<sup>75</sup>

'What? When we become dust, shall we be created anew?'

captures it best. This phrasing is not identical in the *Mu'allaqat*. The *Book* has an agenda and is more to the point; a poetic corpus has no reason to be epigrammatic. Islamic determinism is a

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<sup>70</sup> Appendix E, vv. 19 & 23, 117 & 119.

<sup>71</sup> Appendix H, vv. 22-23, 445.

<sup>72</sup> Vilchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought*, 32-33, 46-47.

<sup>73</sup> Appendix J, v. 22, 479.

<sup>74</sup> *Qur'an*, 6:29, 45:24.

<sup>75</sup> *Qur'an*, 13:5.

good example of borrowing, continuity, or evolvment between the two. In the *Qur'an*, *qadar* (divine decree) is coupled with God's knowledge and Islam's theory of creation.<sup>76</sup> One's *naseeb* (lot or share in life) is outdone by one's righteousness, and only *Allah* knows one's destiny.<sup>77</sup> The Islamic espousal of determinism is thus based in epistemology, adopting older views about life's fragility but rejecting that one's *naseeb* belongs to anyone else but God.

When examining poetic claims, I extract the proposition from the relational, symbolical truth claims of the poets. The poets talk about the inevitability of death and man's impotence to *al-Dahr* (Fate/Time/Divine Agency) cinematically.<sup>78</sup> Tarafah asks (Appendix B, vv. 56-57):<sup>79</sup>

O you who blame me for diving into battle and pleasure, pray do tell, can you make me immortal? If you cannot ward off my death, then let me face it with all I have.

Labid presents *al-Dahr* as a meticulously concealed hunter (Appendix D, v. 39):<sup>80</sup>

They chanced upon it unaware and struck - Fate's arrows never miss their mark.

These propositions define fate in terms of time, intervention, and invisibility; the *Jahili* espousal of fatalism is thus based in etiology and ontology. The language of the two sources is polysemous and sometimes cryptic, yet a parallel analysis shows the *Qur'an* does not fully reject the fatalism of the *Mu'allaqat*; the vocabulary the two share betrays how high *mushrik* expectations were in relation to cosmological deliberation, and the pressure Muhammad was put under when he balked at this brilliant, strongly disputatious community.<sup>81</sup>

Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty define fatalism as the view that "one's fate is fixed [...] so that any acts to alter the inevitable future are done in vain."<sup>82</sup> For Thomas Maunter, fatalism means "that all human actions and [...] events are predetermined, so [...] all attempts to change the course of events are futile."<sup>83</sup> Simon Blackburn sees fatalism as "that what will be, will be," while determinism leaves room for human action to be effective.<sup>84</sup> Robert Audi includes fatalism with determinism: If human action is "determined [...] beyond their control," then free agency is not the basis for moral responsibility.<sup>85</sup> The poets underline *Al-Dahr* exists on account of negative etiology. As Nadia Jamil puts it, *al-Dahr* is "a negative force of change and chance to which all

<sup>76</sup> *The Qur'an*, 54:49.

<sup>77</sup> *The Qur'an*, 49:13, 65:2-3.

<sup>78</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, viii.

<sup>79</sup> Appendix B, vv. 56-57, 133.

<sup>80</sup> Appendix D, v. 39, 237.

<sup>81</sup> Crone, *The Qur'anic Pagans*, 150-154.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty, eds., *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Continuum, 2010), 87.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Maunter, eds., *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Penguin Books, 2005), 216.

<sup>84</sup> Simon Blackburn, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford University Press, 2016), 64.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Audi, eds., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 375-377.

destruction is ultimately traced.”<sup>86</sup> The *Mu'allaqat* promotes the sureness of *al-Dahr* and man's powerlessness confronting it, while the *Qur'an* promotes *Allah's* decision of one's death (followed by Resurrection and the Day of Judgment). The poets and the Prophet paint the darkness of Fate, only the *Qur'an* displays *Allah* in lighter ones. *Jahili* and Islamic mentalities do not fully oppose each other. The *Jahili-Qur'anic* relationship is close: Fatalism in the *Jahili* worldview refers to the inability to act or refrain from acting against *al-Dahr*, an unmediated causal agent. *Al-Dahr* does not stick the characters into sulking or negativity; it motivates them to act in ways that will let them enjoy lasting, indisputable fame. They labour to be remembered as noble, generous, and brave through love, loss, and battle. The deeds they commit, driven by the caprices of *al-Dahr*, must be monumental enough for their self-praise. This boast risked recklessness; the *Qur'an*, striving for moral reform, attacks fatalists for their irresponsibility and, in its view, indolence.

### 2.5 What is a worldview? How does fatalism fit in the *Jahili* worldview?

The *Mu'allaqat* emanates from a concrete, mature and impressive paradigm. It presents desert nomadism at its finest while it emerges in an urban setting, that of literary competitions held at pan-tribal meetings ('Ukaz, Majanna, Dhu al-Majaz).<sup>87</sup> This is not surprising, as travelling is itself one of the major themes of the corpus. Did the gatherings at these markets feel patrial or home soil? Labid, who belongs to Banu Amir – a tribe that dominated Najd - discusses the Wadi Rayann (Appendix D, v. 2), the Hejaz (Appendix D, v. 17), and Yemen (Appendix D, v. 19) in the same poem.<sup>88</sup> Did his distance from these marketplaces of ideas matter? What if he had not visited but had memorised popular locations from other recitations? In any case, their poetic cartography paved the way for a sense of national identity; it strengthened their shared Arabness. The *Mu'allaqat* gained poetry status over public discourse, as poets managed to capture crowds with their exciting documentaries of the human mind.<sup>89</sup> They offer a snapshot of the thought processes and sensory overload we would bear, were we to share the experiences narrated, trying to build an exemplary personality. The conviction that difficulties are inevitable, as inflicted by *al-Dahr*, meaningfully contributes to the broader belief system that one should work hard for their reputation to surpass the end of their life. Self-mythmaking becomes a powerful tool in the meaning-making process that its verses are meant to achieve. It now seems logical to establish the essence of a worldview and why the *Jahili* worldview led its mythopoeists to favour fatalism.

Leo Apostel spoke of a worldview as:<sup>90</sup>

[A] coherent set of bodies of knowledge concerning all aspects of our world. It allows people to construct a global image of the world and understand as many elements of their

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<sup>86</sup> Jamil, *Ethics and Poetry*, 114.

<sup>87</sup> Vilchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought*, 30.

<sup>88</sup> Appendix D, vv. 2, 17 & 19, 221, 225 & 227.

<sup>89</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 118-119.

<sup>90</sup> Diederik Aerts, Bart D'hooghe and Nicole Note, eds., *Worldviews, Science and Us: Redemarcating Knowledge and its Social and Ethical Implications* (World Scientific Publishing, 2005), 1.

experience as possible. [It is] a map that people use to orient and explain, and from which they evaluate and act, and put forward prognoses and visions of the future.

A worldview is a method of scrutiny; one can figure out why things unfolded the way they did, thanks to processing them via their worldview. Mark Koltko-Rivera says a worldview is:<sup>91</sup>

[A] way of describing the universe and life within it, both in terms of what is and what ought to be. [It is] a set of beliefs that includes limiting statements and assumptions regarding what exists and what does not (either in actuality, or in principle), what objects or experiences are good and bad, or what objectives, behaviours, and relationships are desirable or undesirable. [It] defines what can be known or done in the world, and how it can be known or done. In addition to defining what goals can be sought in life, [it] defines what goals should be pursued. Worldviews include assumptions that may be unproven, and even unprovable, but these assumptions are superordinate, in that they provide the epistemic and ontological foundations for other beliefs within a belief system.

One's belief sustains their worldview; a worldview draws the boundaries of experience (what is possible within a paradigm) even if the premises remain unexamined. John Valk identifies a worldview with what it means to be human. A worldview is the notion that reinforces our understanding of behaviours, values, and beliefs.<sup>92</sup> He distinguishes religious worldviews as being open to the transcendent from secular ones that are closed to the here and now.<sup>93</sup> Yet he notices both require faith. There are non-rational vows that one must take (one must believe in the truth of the worldview's propositions), and creative agency in ascribing to a worldview (one must make them sound real). We contribute by articulating the harmony our beliefs have, which, if high, makes the worldview robust (if low, it makes it frail). In poetry, one's creativity enriches their worldview; poets capture their interpretation of reality, their verse shapes their worldview and legacy.<sup>94</sup> Underlining the way worldviews are practised, lifestyles manifest worldviews better than theories, because living practice shows loyalty to a tradition.

The point is not to directly apply these explanations to Arabia, or to any pre-medieval society. One can replace modern terms with late antique ones (e.g. 'world' with *οικουμένη*), but my focus is to fathom why the *Jahili* worldview warranted continuity. Both in the *Mu'allaqat's* initial composition and subsequent transcription, what is it that deserves praise and, currently, rigorous academic analysis? Most obvious is that it records historical memory. As Daniele Mascitelli explains, the titles 'history' and 'fiction' come late in Arabic literature. The narration of events was named 'fables,' 'legends,' and 'evening conversations.' Historians and philologists relied on the traditional record of the past - speeches of eyewitnesses (via a chain of transmission)

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<sup>91</sup> Mark E. Koltko-Rivera, "The Psychology of Worldviews," *Review of General Psychology* 8 (2004): 4. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1037/1089-2680.8.1.3>.

<sup>92</sup> John Valk, *Worldviews: A Comprehensive Approach to Knowing Self and Others* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3.

<sup>93</sup> Valk, *Worldviews*, 12-13.

<sup>94</sup> Valk, *Worldviews*, 9-10.

and the folklore of *rawis* (rhapsodes). They proved that a verse of a respected poet was more reliable than the speech of a discreditable witness. Scholars knew the *Mu'allaqat* was neither history nor mythology proper; the preserved work evokes historical facts and shapes legends, but it tells its own narrative, the worldview of the poets.<sup>95</sup> To create conditions that would favour imitation, the poets designed standard themes that were memorable. Their verses, made for recitation, maintained nomadic, tribal community and lifestyle.<sup>96</sup> Their listeners cared to transmit them, seeing that their tradition was refined and idealised.

With the function and essence of worldviews established, and the differences between secular and religious worldviews flattened, an Islamic view can explain the *Jahili* paradigm. I use Safaruk Chowdhury's list of worldview elements:

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<sup>95</sup> Daniele Mascitelli, *ARABI: Arabs Recount Arabia Before Islam*. Part 1 (L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2015), 3-5.

<sup>96</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 99.

An ontology	Beliefs about what exists and is real
An epistemology	An account of the sources and criteria of knowledge
An axiology	Goals, values and morals
An etiology	A model or explanation about the origins of all things
A praxeology	Prescriptions and proscriptions for behaviour
A futurology	Forecasting and predicting
A teleology	Ultimate goals and afterlife outcomes
A semiology	A language and symbolic system to describe the world

Table 1: *Elements of a Worldview*<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Safaruk Z. Chowdhury, "Suffering, Islamic Consolation Literature and the Process of Meaning-Making," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 8 (2024):189. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-20240013>.

From this table, I realised the endorsement of a fatalistic futurology does not conflict with having a teleology; it excludes an account of eschatology. I will return to this point. In my effort to reconstruct its worldview, semiology is the biggest obstacle. The linguistic choices of the corpus are “higher realities,” at times so abstract, they seem to fly away.<sup>98</sup> This thick, multilayered term called *al-Dahr* coexists with more than composite symbolic clusters. The existentialist posture of the corpus and the epistemological stance that repetition is a valid way of knowing, enables a futurology of fatalistic transcendence. From a preliminary reconstruction of the *Jahili* worldview, in its ontological system, truth exists beyond the material world. Damaging events are fated from the world of metaphysics. The mythopoeists contemplate divinity; what keeps their praxeology pragmatic are constant threats and sorrows. *Al-Dahr* is not the creator of their cosmos, but a negative force defining the horizon of reality. As a cosmic force, it implies divine presence. They do not worship *Al-Dahr*, a destructive entity, but other deities, which are real and not restricted within the material world. They are virtuous agents who uphold axiology, especially its concept of virtue – *muruwwa* (manly ethic compared to rock), because this malicious hunter, Fate, might catch them. By the time death seizes them, they must have proven their heroic stature so that their legacy lives on. I continue with the literature review that details the instruments, conductors, and audience of the *Jahili* orchestra.

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<sup>98</sup> Jamil, *Ethics and Poetry*, 89.

### 3. Literature Review: What did the *Jahili* world look like?

A long, fruitful literature depicts Arabia before Islam, notably with respect to its history. Three nominal works set the stage for research produced in Modern Europe. The first is Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published in 1776. The second is William Jones' translation, titled *The Moallakat, or Seven Arabian Poems, which were Suspended on the Temple at Mecca*, published in 1782. The last is Abraham Geiger's *What did Muhammad borrow from Judaism?* published in 1833. They aimed to grasp Rome's relationship with Arabia, interpret the *Jahili qasidas*, and trace *Qur'anic* origins to pre-existing scripture. More than a century later, these aims crystallised into five research niches: Intercultural influences; Arabian women; forms of literacy; religious practices; and the composition of communities. Many wanted to discover the history of the groups called 'the Saracens.' Others routinely mention the shift from polytheism to monotheism but seldom explain religious concerns. This portrayal leaves the impression that the residents of an entire peninsula lacked religiosity. Against this, I emphasise that the *Mu'allaqat* manifests religious orientation and commitment. My presentation of the five topics mentioned above serves one purpose: I could not structure the *Jahili* worldview without describing the *Jahili* world. Next, I touch upon the methodology investigators employed, selecting sources centuries before and after the *Jahiliyyah*. Certainly, this thesis cannot sketch the entire philosophy of the period. Each pole of enquiry is a benchmark for a large body of scholarship, unravelling the environment of the *Mu'allaqat* and the ways analysts decoded it. In its totality, this poetic product inquires knowledge, values, language, reason, and the mind. I only explore its commitment to fatalistic transcendence, providing well-studied inscriptions and chief *Qur'anic* challenges, to glue the pieces of the paradigm it stems from together.

#### 3.1 Intercultural Influences

This introductory section considers intercultural exchange. Arabia's connection with the *οικουμένη* is based on global events, relations with Rome, India, Iran, and extensively on its liaison with scriptural communities.

Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, Lucian Reinfandt and Yannis Stouraitis gather a vast dataset on the migration history of Late Antiquity. One table includes the conflicts, disasters and religious conversions that defined the Arabian political landscape. The authors capture long-lasting hostilities between Romans and Persians, translating into wars among large Arabian confederations. Their sponsorship and religious indoctrination had serious civic repercussions, which worsened when mortality skyrocketed due to pestilence and the collapse of one of the engineering wonders of the ancient world. South Arabian kingdoms were doomed to disappear, and a new creed would unify Arabia, this time, under Muhammad's call.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, Lucian Reinfandt, and Yannis Stouraitis, eds., *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone: Aspects of Mobility between Africa, Asia and Europe, 300-1500 C.E.* (Brill, 2020). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwxf8>.

Date	Event
226 CE	Foundation of the Sassanid Empire
241 CE	Annexation of the Hatranite Kingdom
270 CE	Rise of the Himyarite Kingdom
303 CE	Diocletian's Prosecution of Christians
309-379 CE	Roman-Sassanid Wars
313 CE	Edict of Milan
340 CE	Ezana converts to Christianity
359-363 CE	Roman-Sassanid Wars
421-442 CE	Roman-Sassanid Wars
502-506 CE	Roman-Sassanid Wars
520 CE	Yusuf Dhu Nuwas converts to Judaism
524 CE	Najran Massacre
525-532 CE	Roman-Sassanid Wars
540-562 CE	Roman-Sassanid Wars
541 CE	Justinian Plague
550 CE	Collapse of the Ma'rib dam
560 CE	Axum attempt to invade Mecca
570 CE	Sassanid Occupation of Himyar
571-590 CE	Roman-Sassanid Wars
594 CE	The Lakhmids convert to Christianity
602-628 CE	Roman-Sassanid Wars
611 CE	Day of Dhu Qar

Table 4: *Major Migration Events (226-611 CE)*<sup>100</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Preiser-Kapeller, Reinfandt and Stouraitis, *Migration Histories*, 21-26.

Ehtesham Bin Hasan explores the unity among Arabs and Indians since ancient times. Hasan's bold argument is that the Banu Qais and Ghassan (known as Byzantinised) became "Indianised in their culture and manners." He argues pre-Islamic poetry reflects the friendship between Indian casts and Arabian tribes, employing the Indian *muhannad* (sword) and the name *Hind*. Based on the common worship of idols, lunar deities and heavenly bodies in their temples, Hasan presents Indians and Arabians as co-religionists. He recounts the translation movement to Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age and concludes that Indian beliefs were respected in a peninsula where tales to arithmetic were Arabicised. His claims over Arabic confederations lack historical evidence, but he uniquely accounts for the bond between Arabs and Indians.<sup>101</sup> Mahjoob Zweiri and Ismail Zahirovic argue Iran's historical memory consists of the conquest of Iran by the Arabs, the adoption of the Arabic script and the change to *Shi'i* Islam. Historical memory creates simple 'historical truths' that raise awareness of the self and the other, stating: In the four hundred years preceding the advent of Islam, Arabian tribes settled near the Sassanian borders, becoming their clients. This power disparity defined the alliance between Persia and the Lakhmids of al-Hirah. The Early Muslim conquests reversed it. After centuries of exhausting Roman-Sassanid wars, Islam did not amend late antique rivalries, which found alternative expression in the Iranian struggle for independence. Islam entrenched the opposition between the Iranian civilised self and the Arabian uncivilised other; *Shi'ism* was a new battleground for Iranian distinctiveness to prevail, and pre-Islamic imperial Iran eased this triumph. Weaving and braiding historical interpretations, twisting and turning events to create a negative perception of the other and a positive perception of the self, excluding the civilisation shared over the millennia.<sup>102</sup> Their work could be complemented by the Arabic version of events.

Sidney Griffith examines the history of the Bible, based on the multitude of its scriptural-liturgical languages and doctrines. Muhammad's confessional milieu is painted by Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Manichean literary presences. His research about an Arabic Bible asks: (i) How did 9<sup>th</sup>-century historians like al-Yaqubi gain expertise in Judeo-Christian exegetical traditions? (ii) What kind of Jewish/Christian-made translation was the *Qur'an* familiar with? (iii) If an Arabic translation did not occur, where does the *Qur'an* owe its biblical knowledge? To answer them, he turns to the precedent of Late Antique Jews and Christians in translating their faith. Jews lives in Himyar, Galilee, Sura, and Pumbedita, and the Christians in Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Ctesiphon, and Tikrit. Their biblical lore shaped the world that birthed Islam; patriarchs, prophets, priests, saints, and apocryphal stories would not appeal to a scripturally illiterate crowd. Griffith argues that an Arabic transcript of the Bible did not exist among pre-Islamic Arabic speakers. The hard copies of the Bible were in Hebrew or Aramaic among Jews and Greek, Aramaic, or Syriac among Christians. Their Abrahamic narratives circulated orally in Arabic liturgies, later elevating Islam as the continuation of earlier scripture, properly observed in good, clarifying Arabic. Snippets of their narratives do not use literal quotes or chapter/verse

<sup>101</sup> Ehtesham Bin Hasan, "The Impact of Indian Thought on Arabian Society Before Islam," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 46, (1985): 630-637. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44141412>.

<sup>102</sup> Mahjoob Zweiri and Ismail Zahirovic, "The Arabs and Iranians: What Went Wrong? And Why?", *Sociology of Islam* 8, 1 (2020): 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-00801005>

number from the Bible. On the contrary, the *Qur'an* edits biblical and para-biblical tales. Based on the ecclesiastical lore of the first complete Arabic Bible, he argues that the *Qur'anic* Christians are the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians.<sup>103</sup>

Jews and Christians are often co-presented in the *Qur'an* as the *ahl al-kitab* (The People of the Book). The Christian resonance of its non-Arabic vocabulary, the requirement of biblical literacy, and the disputation of Judeo-Christian beliefs hint at the medium in which Christian knowledge flowed through the Arab world. Christological doctrine, not language, defined each denomination's ecclesiastical identity. The translation of these doctrines occurred in the Arabian periphery by Euthymius (377-473 CE) and Mar Ahudemeh (d. 575 CE). Jacobite Ghassanids, Nestorian Lakhmids, Christian Najranites and Judeo-Christian Kindites could enact Arabic as the *lingua franca* of the regions they controlled. By the time Muhammad sent his disciples to seek refuge in Abyssinia in 614 CE, Christians and Muslims had secured trust with each other. The *ummah's* homecoming in Medina brought Christian terms in *Qur'anic* diction. The Syriac and Aramaic of the Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian communities, squeezing into Arabia in the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century, own most of the *Qur'an's* foreign vocabulary. Literate companions, informants, and listeners surrounding the Prophet had detailed biblical knowledge as the Bible, its creeds and liturgy orally reached the Arabian middle, transmitted by the Arabian corners. The *Qur'an*, not an Arabic-Christian text, widely recorded the revelation of the *Torah* and *Gospel* in Arabic.<sup>104</sup>

Griffith emphasises that the *Qur'an* does not interpret Judeo-Christian echoes uniformly. Biblical narratives populate the Meccan *surahs*, but firm opposition to Christological controversies populates the Medinan *surahs*. As prophetic history seemed misrepresented, Muhammad seemed misinformed about the contents of the Bible, hence, did not reproduce it in its exact form. But the Biblical remembrance of the *Qur'an* - the prophets of the *Diatessaron*, the Syriac background of patriarchs and narratives - is not an account of Bible history. It is a subtext and scriptural warranty for Islam. The Medinan *surahs* do not include confessed Jews/Christians with the Believers (*al-mu'minun*), clearly portioning Christian groups. First flattered as God's helpers (*an-nasara*), the text sets them apart from *ahl al-kitab*. The New Testament Christians, who resemble Jesus' followers in his own day are approved, but the Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians are rejected. Griffith then presents popular *Qur'anic* verses attacking the doctrine of the Trinity and Jesus' hypostatic union. The view expressed is that Jesus could not be divine without Mary being as well, teaching that God has no offspring. At that time, Nestorians dismissed the title *Θεοτόκος* (Mother of God) while Jacobites celebrated it. Lastly, Jews are berated for claiming they crucified Jesus; whether Jesus experienced suffering was contested by Jacobites; Griffith thus concludes that Christology was a matter of interest to everyone within the *Qur'an's* purview. The Judeo-Christian vocabulary of *Qur'anic* tenets survived in Late Antique confessional traditions. This glossary is too grand to belong to the repertoire of small Judeo-Christian heresies; no memory of

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<sup>103</sup> Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 1-9.

<sup>104</sup> Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 9-23.

such group survived. The *Qur'an's* critical text against the *ahl al-kitab* denounces their views; it cannot be reduced to a retelling of Judeo-Christian *theologoumena* or revival.<sup>105</sup>

Griffith argues that Biblical passages circulated from synagogues, churches, shrines, monasteries, rabbis, priests, and monks who had texts. The diffusion of midrashic knowledge - without an Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible before Islam - as well as apocryphal, liturgical, and legal texts, was embellished with texts of non-biblical character. Arabs learnt homilies and songs by heart, translated them for Arabic-speaking worshippers on the spot, and spread them across the Peninsula. *Periodeutes* lived in traditions of oral translations between Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic. The Gospel and Psalms were partially copied down, as we read Muhammad's adversaries blaming him in the *Qur'an*: "he has had stories of the ancients written down." Notes of salvation accounts were taken down in Arabic. Nevertheless, the *Qur'an* is the first Islamic and Arabic book; memory-aid notes do not prove the existence of a written Arabic Bible. As the *ummah* attempted to gather the *Qur'an*, the Bible was translated into writing late in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The oral transmission of ecclesiastical lore was not done carelessly until then; complicated narratives were successfully transmitted. The written collection of the *Qur'an* triggered the first written Arabic translation of the Bible, to give a 'true' version of the *Qur'anic*-biblical telling of events and meet the growing needs of Christian Arabs.<sup>106</sup>

### 3.2 Arabian Women

This section considers the positions of authority women held in Arabia, focusing on the intersection of gender, politics, and religion.

Emran Iqbal El-Badawi investigates power dynamics in Zosimus' *New History* and the *Qur'an*. She presents the inclusion of legendary and historic women in as a means to magnify Muslim and Christian men's piety (Solomon defeats Bilqis, Aurelius arrests Zenobia). She details the political actions of a series of Arabian queens, ending with Khadijah.<sup>107</sup> From 738BC to 636CE, she focuses on priesthood - the institution transforming one from human into God. She argues that priesthood was exploited to create the figure of a believer-queen.<sup>108</sup> Starting with the female divinities of ancient Mesopotamia, she unravels how the practice of sacred marriage and the cultic offerings came into existence. Women had healing powers in a pagan, agricultural society (Huldu, Shagilath and Gamilath), then became a prophet's matron in an Abrahamic, urbanised one (Zenobia, Mavia and Khadijah).<sup>109</sup> Roman empresses (Julia Domna, Julia Maesa, Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea) represent the theological positions that blossomed throughout greater Syria; the point of interest is which theological current each empress adopted. Gnosticism and Collyridianism presented Mary as mother-goddess. Adoptionism grew from the sacred marriage of *El* and *Asherah*, offering a genealogical connection with queen-favouring traditions.

<sup>105</sup> Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 23-39.

<sup>106</sup> Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 39-53.

<sup>107</sup> El-Badawi, *Queens and Prophets*, 1-44.

<sup>108</sup> El-Badawi, *Queens and Prophets*, 45-70.

<sup>109</sup> El-Badawi, *Queens and Prophets*, 70-88.

Queen Zenobia chose Paul and Queen Mavia chose Moses as their people's bishop, delegating their power to a holy man.<sup>110</sup> Stories - Mavia divorcing Hatim, Muhammad's father refusing to have intimate relations with a priestess - show that female glorification was abandoned for male piety.<sup>111</sup> Al-Mundhir III (d. 555 CE) revived the worship of the *Daughters of Allah* (hence paganism) in the corridor of al-Hirah, Aliyat Najd and Mecca. This reaction to Roman hegemony and the Christian Trinity of the 6<sup>th</sup> century preserved female power. However, it was followed by a holy man, who had a female mentor, but preached total submission to *Allah*.<sup>112</sup> Finally, she mentions Roman conquerors and exiled monks who founded churches in Arabia, and the tribal chiefs who intensified warfare in the *Jahiliyyah*. The persecution of Jews, Christians, and the violence erupting in marketplaces removed women from it. These radical changes incentivised Arabs to look for a male ancestor in their effort for unification; they invented the lineage of *Adnan* ending with the tribe of the Quraysh and the Prophet himself. The cycle of delegating power from women to men was broken.<sup>113</sup> El-Badawi transmits 'herstory' in ancient Arabia but leaves open how the age-old worship of *El* and *Asherah* survive into Late Antique Arabia.

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<sup>110</sup> El-Badawi, *Queens and Prophets*, 89-138.

<sup>111</sup> El-Badawi, *Queens and Prophets*, 139-178.

<sup>112</sup> El-Badawi, *Queens and Prophets*, 179-228.

<sup>113</sup> El-Badawi, *Queens and Prophets*, 229-264.

Figure 2: *Monotheistic Inscriptions*<sup>114</sup>

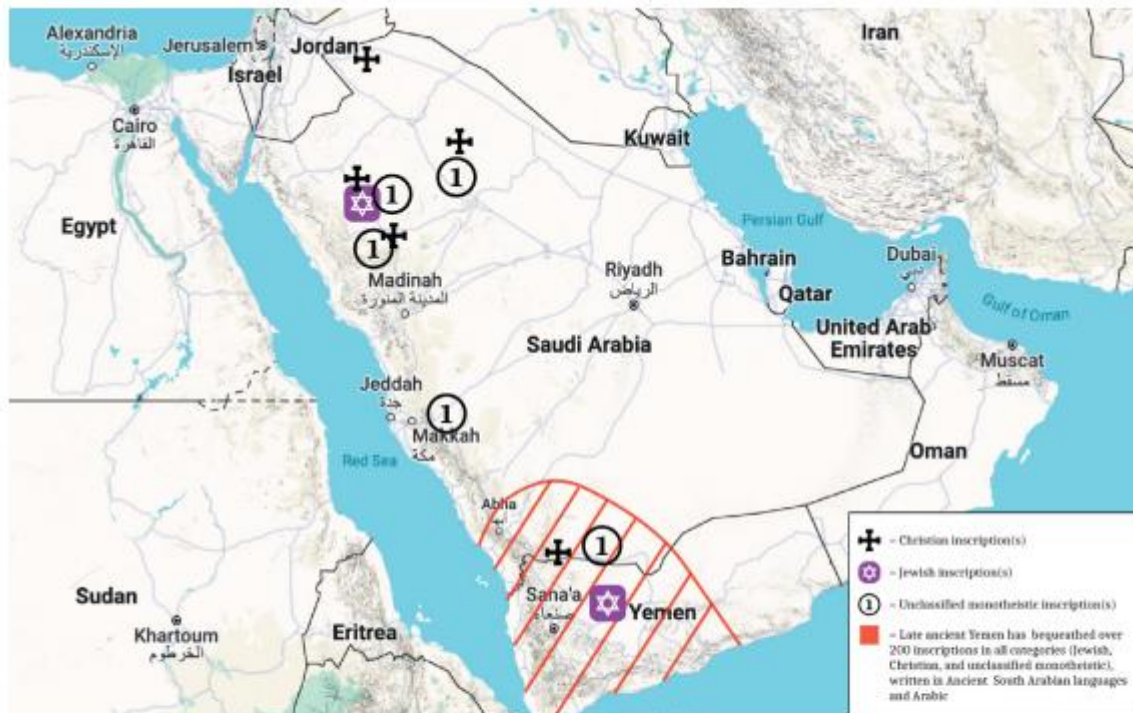


Figure: A map showing the inscriptions dated to 400–600 CE (a burgeoning corpus) found in modern Saudi Arabia and Yemen, published in academic outlets, including digital databases run by scholars. No polytheistic inscriptions have been found from this period so far. Map background: Google Maps. The locations shown on the map above are indicative rather than exact; a symbol may refer to a number of inscriptions, not just a single text. Jordan has also bequeathed a number of Christian inscriptions for this era, but they are not included in the map.

<sup>114</sup> Ikka Lindstedt, "A Map and List of Monotheistic Inscriptions of Arabia, 400-600 CE," *Hadis ve Siyer Araştırmaları* 10, no. 2: 276. <https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/publications/a-map-and-list-of-the-monotheistic-inscriptions-of-arabia-400600-/>.

Joseph Suad and Zeina Zaatari study Near Eastern societies and their common worship of the mother-goddess. First recorded in the Sumerian texts, women were worshipped as birth-givers. Celebrating women, ancient communities saw the emergence of images, statues and figurines representing female deities. Female figures drawn on rocks in Shaka, Jubbah, and Bir Hima capture their religious importance and high social status, exemplified by the size of their images and the motifs (horns) accompanying them. They raise their hands to the sky, dance, and perform rituals; their hairstyle shows their rank. With the invention of writing, the mythological corpus of *Nissaba*, goddess of grain and provider of the reed stylus, made her the patron of knowledge. The *naditu* were priestesses and scribes. The myths they recorded connected life and nature, such as *Enki* and *Ninhursag*; *Inanna* and *Dumuzi*. For Suad and Zataari, these legends paved the way for the legend of Eve, the Abrahamic mother of humankind, while Eastern Arabian legends laid the groundwork for the depiction of the Terrestrial Paradise. In Arabian mythology, the mother goddesses are *Inanna*, *Ishtar*, *Arinnitii*, *Ashtaroth*, *Atargatis*, *Tanit*, *Isis*, *Allat*, *al-'Uzza* and *Manat*. Male deities usurped female deities centuries later. Until then, a high priestess connected laypeople to the mother-goddess. Their legends mythologise history to cover narrative gaps over periods of peace or war and offer a sense of continuity.<sup>115</sup>

Epigraphic evidence in Arabia records saints and priestesses over two millennia ago. Hasaeen, Nabataean, and Palmyrene inscriptions of matronyms on burial places show that sacred marriages and prostitution continued until the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The *kahinat* (spiritual intermediaries) were indispensable to the decisions of Arabian tribes; piety and spirituality gathered in their face. Female sanctity is recorded in the *Qur'an*: Sarah (the Jewish Matriarch), Hagar (the custodians of the *Kaaba* descend from her), and Mariam (the exemplar of womanhood). The image of Mariam holding Jesus, like *Isis* holding *Horus*, continues the worship of the mother-goddess. Regal women took power on behalf of their minor sons when their husbands died. Julia Domna (a worshiper of *Baal*) and Julia Mamaea (a Christian) sought resolutions over religious conflicts. Themselves descending from families of high priestesses, they venerated the sun God (Jesus) and created dynasties that fuelled the imagination of female power. As the caravan routes moved south, poetic contests gained prominence. Al-Khansa's elegies, deeply marked by fatalism, lament her brother, whom she could not save him from the blows of death. Women's markers of influence (faith, power, and trade) imprinted where they spent their time (temples, royal houses, and caravan cities).<sup>116</sup> Suad and Zataari's work enriches our understanding of female agency in the public sphere, yet female voices are mostly unwritten.

Jerome Norris examines the Hismaic inscriptions discovered by William Jobling in 1980. AMJ2 is a bilingual Nabataean-Hismaic graffiti, with a Nabataean onomasticon, and a prayer to Dushara. It reads 'And *Fs'l* daughter of *Gt* of the lineage of *Glmt*.' The author of this signature inscription has the name of a Nabataean princess related to Cypros, daughter of Herod. While Hismaic inscriptions carry royal names, the patronym *Gt* is exclusive to masculine bearers. Norris

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<sup>115</sup> Joseph Suad and Zeina Zaatari, eds., *Routledge Handbook on Women in the Middle East* (Routledge, 2022), 19-29.

<sup>116</sup> Suad and Zaatari, *Routledge Handbook on Women*, 29-40.

claims that tent-surrounding tasks justify the rarity of women-carved graffiti. AMJ2 is the first instance of the feminine form of the relative pronoun, introducing a lineage name, while written by a woman. It illustrates women produced identical texts as men, consisting of genealogy and group, not referring to their husbands.<sup>117</sup> Still, women carved little of pre-Islamic inscriptions.

Nikki Keddie argues that women's lives are unrestrained compared to the impression of a literal reading of the *Qur'an*.<sup>118</sup> She explains that obsession with genealogy prompted controlling elite women's public movements, but the continuity of practices (patrilineal kinship, the honour surrounding virginity, marriages ensuring family property) does not make them ever-present. Nomadic life required women to participate in labour; confederations did not have the means to restrict them. Pre-Islamic poetry refers to women enjoying independence, husbands preferring to live with their wives' families when they were stronger, and the ease of divorce. In the *Mu'allaqat*, women determine each poet's reputation: Tarafah begs women to grieve for him justly (Appendix B, vv. 94-95).<sup>119</sup> Exegetical approaches to the *Qur'an* differ. One presents Muhammad's reforms as a sign that women were treated as inferiors before Islam; other stresses women's active public role, arguing the *Qur'an* only instructs inheritance rights to go directly to women. The most recent strand sets "original Islam" (that morally addresses both genders) apart from later legalistic revelations (that address men and women distinctly). Keddie concludes that female support for Muhammad ended when the period of conquest did.<sup>120</sup> Her study highlights how the *Mu'allaqat* and the *Qur'an* can support the historicity of practices. The author warns against a literal reading of the scripture but does not do the same for the poetic corpus.

Daniele Mascitelli studies why poetry was Arabia's historical archive. From genealogical accounts within mythological narratives, scholars dug out the history of groups to remodel individual and tribal identity. The historical literature produced in the first two Islamic centuries was a collection of accounts of events, using poetic mythography as a history of history-writing. External sources can uphold the historicity of events recited, yet the fictional elements of their delivery depended on each *rawi*. Different reviews were created, both of poetic pieces and Islamic narratives, that copyists handed down with mistakes in verse order and variations in content.<sup>121</sup> Mascitelli presents tales that mix the legends of powerful families of the Himyarite Kingdom, ancient Arabian ancestry, and Biblical-*Qur'anic* stories. Reciters managed to align tales with the content of South Arabian inscriptions, tracing the dynastic sequence of the names carved on rocks to create an "extra-dynastic parenthesis" explaining how Himyar succeeded Saba in the common era.<sup>122</sup> This "kind of inception-myth" justified the authority of the regals. Two tales are thought-provoking. The first is *the Birth of Abu Karib As'ad al-Kamil*. Dedicated to As'ad (390-440 CE), it is a narrative of his life from childhood until the end of his reign: His pilgrimage to Mecca, his

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<sup>117</sup> Jerome Norris, "A woman's Hismaic inscription from the Wadi Ramm desert: AMJ 2/J.14202 (Amman Museum)," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 28, (2017): 90-109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aae.12086>.

<sup>118</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 1-12.

<sup>119</sup> *The Mu'allaqat*, 157.

<sup>120</sup> Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 12-25.

<sup>121</sup> Mascitelli, *ARABI*, 1-7.

<sup>122</sup> Mascitelli, *ARABI*, 8-18.

vesting the *Kaaba*, and the introduction of Judaism in Himyar. His virgin conception and miraculous birth are identical to those of Jesus. The second is *the Four Kings and Their Sister Abda'a*. Queen Abda'a had children with a Jewish servant and picked whichever man she liked before that. Her Christian brothers wished to replace the location of pilgrimage to Sana'a from Mecca - so Christian devotees would visit Himyar - refusing to give a royal title to the sons of a Jew. Abda'a is a crypto-Jew who rebelled against the *status quo*. Her story documents 4<sup>th</sup>-century Himyarite monotheism in the Rahmanic, Judeo-Christian form. When a royalty confessed to any of the three, they were placed against the clans ruled over, the economic interests lurking behind their faith, and the superpower's favour. Abda'a's brothers conspired to steal the Black Stone from the *Kaaba* and move it to Sana'a, but their sister slaughtered them and was killed herself.<sup>123</sup>

### 3.3 Forms of Literacy

This section considers the forms of literacy attested in Arabia, and the transmission thereof from the metropolis to the oasis and the desert.

Michael Macdonald captures the development of Ancient Arabian alphabets from the first millennium BC, spreading from the South to the North of the Peninsula by the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Literacy was so widespread, especially in North-Western Arabia, that it reached outside the elite scribal class to the functionally literate (reading or writing was necessary for their bureaucracy, commerce, and religions) settled and nomadic inhabitants. The Safaitic graffiti of the Syro-Arabian desert draw lifestyle, social structure, wars, and feelings.<sup>124</sup> In their second language (Greek or Aramaic) and in Old Arabic dialects they registered their customs, major events of the desert and the *οικουμένη*, next to their prayers, curses, and blessings. These do not come down to us from their neighbours.<sup>125</sup> Popular inscriptions (*στρατηγησάντι Αουδηνών κε φυλαρχησάντι; στρατηγός παρεμβολών νομάδων*) show the Roman recruitment of liaison officers from Arabian tribes. This external perception of nomads as Desert Police is in direct contrast with the Safaitic texts, which do not point to a single community; there are no ancient people called *les Safaïtes*. The corpus includes stock-raising, fears of a more powerful tribe, seasonal migration, search for water, the author's family, and friends. All emphasise personal pursuits.<sup>126</sup> Next, he produces a rich linguistic map.

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<sup>123</sup> Mascitelli, *ARABI*, 19-43.

<sup>124</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, vii-viii.

<sup>125</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 48-107.

<sup>126</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 303-388.

<u>Languages</u>	<u>Scripts</u>
<p><i>North Arabian</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ancient North Arabian               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Oasis North Arabia: Taymanic, Dadanitic, Dumaitic, Dispersed Oasis North Arabian</li> <li>b. Safaitic</li> <li>c. Hismail</li> <li>d. Thamudic B, C, D and Southern Thamudic</li> <li>e. Hasaitic</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Arabic               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Old Arabic                   <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. 'Pure'</li> <li>ii. 'Mixed': Safeo-Arabic, Dabaeo-Arabic, Dadano-Arabic, Nabataeo-Arabic, Aramaeo-Arabic</li> </ol> </li> </ol> </li> </ol> <p><i>South Arabian</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ancient South Arabian               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The Sahaydidc languages: Sabaic, Madabic, Qarabanic, Hadramatic</li> <li>b. The non-Sayhadic languages: The spoken language of the Himyarites</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><i>North Arabian</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Taymanitic</li> <li>2. Dadanitic</li> <li>3. Dumaitic</li> <li>4. Dispersed ONA</li> <li>5. Safaitic</li> <li>6. Hismaic</li> <li>7. Thamudic (which includes several different scripts itself)</li> </ol> <p><i>South Arabian</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Monumental South Arabian               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Sabaic</li> <li>b. Madhabic</li> <li>c. Qatabanic</li> <li>d. Hadramitic</li> <li>e. Hasaitic</li> <li>f. <i>Zabur</i> or minuscule scripts</li> <li>g. Dhofar dipint (undeciphered)</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Ethiopic syllabary</li> </ol>

Table 2: Summary of languages and scripts in Ancient and Pre-Islamic Arabia<sup>127</sup><sup>127</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 29-37.

He proposes to consider the location of the epigraphic material before its content, which is economical with the truth. From communal rituals to confessions of sins, the essential elements of ancestral liturgies stand out. Maybe liturgy was sacred, and translating it impious, so the authors carved it in the original tongue. Popular inscriptions (*Ζεὺς Σαφαθηνός; Μεσάμερος ιππεός; Κορηναϊκῆς γένος Νάβας; Θαμοδηνῶν ἔθνος*) again represent military units.<sup>128</sup> He discusses the Greco-Roman projection of Arabia. The terms *Ἀραβας, σκηνίτης, and Αραβάρχη* were replaced with *Σαρακηνοί*, along with the *topoi* of brigandage, *Arabia Felix* and *Arabia Deserta*.<sup>129</sup> The political entity of Nabataea was a multilingual society that developed the Aramaic script. Nabataea had city dwellers; it was not a Bedouin state; the term *nbtw* meant being a subject to a Nabataean king or having origins in Nabataean areas of influence.<sup>130</sup> He returns to the Saracens in the works of Ptolemy. Ammianus Marcellinus used the term as a general ethnonym for all nomads, after whom Greco-Roman writers made a universal category. Roman authorities needed to tell between the inhabitants of *Provincia Arabia* and the nomads at the edge of the empire. Because *νομάδες* and *σκηνίται* referred to multiple groups, Saracens must have been one town's word for local nomads; *saracen* would mean "one whose occupation is to migrate to the inner desert."<sup>131</sup> Although trade in Arabia was the most profitable in antiquity, little is known about its goods and markets. He urges us to shift our attention from aromatics to the exact commodities exchanged for their acquisition.<sup>132</sup> Macdonald concludes against using inscriptions for the study of identity but does not explain why merchandise is of more value.

Cotton, Cockle, and Millar examine the north-western corner of the Arabian Peninsula. They study documents discovered in the administrative divisions of Roman Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Judaea in an investigation of society, government, and the public usage of languages. These bilingual and trilingual archives come from the 1<sup>st</sup> - the 7<sup>th</sup> century, employing Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Palestinian Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Syriac, Parthian, and Middle Persian. Because the locations of production are not called borders, the authors argue that borders played a minimal role in people's lives. They record military and civilian provincial administration, legal settlement of disputes, and private transactions that require multilingualism. The access and use of written documents in those small towns and villages, away from Late Antique Near Eastern metropolises, is spectacular, and so is the personal literacy in every language used by the people involved.<sup>133</sup> The exclusion of literary texts is a bit confusing in a governmental investigation, for at that time, the sacred and the profane fused in the political realm.

Paul Smith provides a biography of each poet of the *Mu'allaqat* and talks of its worth.<sup>134</sup> In its corpus lies the history of Arabian political life and culture, plus a point of origin for the Arabic

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<sup>128</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 177-190.

<sup>129</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 1-30.

<sup>130</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 102-118.

<sup>131</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 1-14.

<sup>132</sup> Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity*, 333-347.

<sup>133</sup> Hannah M. Cotton, Walter E. H. Cockle, and Fergus G. B. Millar, "The Papyrology of the Roman Near East: A Survey," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995): 214 - 235. <https://doi.org/10.2307/301063>.

<sup>134</sup> Smith, *The Wine of Love*, 39-95.

language. The functions of the poet embody these elements, being a “historian, soothsayer and propagandist.” Poetry started as words of praise and disdain. The prestige of one’s tribe was defended in poetry competitions. Disputing the rigidity of nomadic life and tribal confederations and praised the solitude of the desert was a teaser, to attract more listeners. They celebrated their “communal values and way of life.” Their tribe was their identity marker, and exultation raised their status. Their verses were memorised until those high-end among them made the *Mu’allaqat*. Two elements make its corpus unique. One is its eloquent expression, which gives the *Jahili qasidas* a recognisably intense vocabulary, expressing their small, loosely connected molecules. Second is the *nasib* (romantic prelude), in which the poet stands at the ruins where his beloved used to be, from which he begins his recitation. Although the *Mu’allaqat* opposed the values of the nascent *ummah*, it illuminates Early Islam and the linguistic choices of which the *Qur’an* is the pinnacle.<sup>135</sup>

### 3.4 Religious Practices

This section considers the multitude of devotional practices originating in and brought to Arabia. Emphasis is placed on ritual acts and attempts to define the sacred.

Sigrid Kjær investigates the concept of God via the pre-*Qur’anic* usage of the theonym *Rahman-an* in late Sabaic inscriptions from the 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> century, concluding with its evocation as the ultimate arbitrator in a peace agreement in 628 CE. He argues that three Judaisms existed in South Arabia: Judaism, a bare form of monotheism, and the Judaism of the Palestinian diaspora. The last group carved in the original Hebrew, Judaising *Rahman*. *Rahman* originally designated the god of Himyar, a God of monolatry or henotheism. Later, *Rahman-an* is called “Lord of the Heavens,” while those attributed to Himyarite rulers - Sumyafa Ashwa (460-535 CE) and Abraha (535-570 CE) - denote the Father (the Christian god). The translatability of the divine name was eliminated. Intertribal competition was fanning out in the religious realm: The attraction of pilgrims in the cathedral of Sana’a displeased the Meccans, severing their reaction to Muhammad calling *Allah, al-Rahman* (the Compassionate). Pressured to swear an oath to *al-Rahman* in the Treaty of *al-Hudaybiyah*, the Quraysh saw this attribute as belonging to a non-Meccan, non-Islamic but identifiably biblical and monotheistic God. Muhammad’s adoption of *Rahman* excluded the eminentist Meccan gods, reminding its inhabitants of intertribal conflict on the name of a “biblical god against the holiest pilgrimage site in Central Arabia.”<sup>136</sup> When God became synonymous with His epithets remains unknown.

Ahmad al-Jallad reconstructs the world of the nomads, based on their depictions in the Safaitic corpus.<sup>137</sup> Mourning practices initiated the need for writing that literate nomads safely conserved. Their “personal, public expressions [...] [of] a homogeneous writing tradition” have remarkable structural consistency: Prayers ask for *slm* (security), longing for *qbl* (reunion), or the

<sup>135</sup> Smith, *The Wine of Love*, 6-7.

<sup>136</sup> Sigrid K. Kjær, “‘Rahman’ before Muhammad: A pre-history of the First Peace (*Sulh*) in Islam,” *Modern Asian Studies* 56, no. 3 (2022): 776–795. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000305>.

<sup>137</sup> Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, x.

*t(n)zhr-smy* formula (he awaited the rains).<sup>138</sup> His description of rites includes pilgrimage to a cult site or shrine, ritual purity, and the healing properties of sacred water, which continue as Muslim practices today. The erection of *nsb* (cult stone) is prominent: *Baïτολοι* ('house of god') were stone stelae were "vessels that divinities [occupied during] a ritual."<sup>139</sup> Al-Jallad argues that *Allat* is the chief divinity of the corpus, and *Dusares* comes second, with their residence being the sky. In that High Place, *Allat* and *Dusares* make the divine family. Assistance may follow from performing a ritual, but nothing can guarantee reciprocity.<sup>140</sup> *Manaya* (fate) is "a ruthless force that dooms humans, indiscriminate and inevitable." Some beg for help from misfortune and adversity, while others say divinities only postpone the day one meets their fate.<sup>141</sup> They request passengers "to read (*qr' dy*) [...] [hoping] a kinsman, loved one, or a sympathetic person [would] recite a prayer for the author's security."<sup>142</sup> Al-Jallad concludes that manifestations of the sacred gave the authors a harsh view of life: Hierophanies of gods and fate determined how they "conceptualised the world and their place in it."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 3-12.

<sup>139</sup> Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 14-28.

<sup>140</sup> Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 37-71.

<sup>141</sup> Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 73-77.

<sup>142</sup> Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 88-90.

<sup>143</sup> Al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 91.

Figure 3: 15<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction of Ptolemy's Map of the Levant<sup>144</sup>



<sup>144</sup> Johan Reger, "Quarta Asie Tabula," The National University of Israel, accessed December 15, 2025. [https://www.nli.org.il/he/maps/NNL\\_ALEPH990023689210205171/NLI#\\$FL17245208](https://www.nli.org.il/he/maps/NNL_ALEPH990023689210205171/NLI#$FL17245208).

Daniele Mascitelli presents a folktale of a marriage between humans and *jinn*. In his hunt, al-Hadhah saves a gazelle from a wolf. He follows her until a colossal city (Ma'rib) magically appears, where the gazelle turns into the most beautiful woman to have ever existed. Al-Hadhah marries al-Harura and has a daughter, Bilqis. Al-Harura is wise, and al-Hadhah prefers her advice. Their synergy created a dynasty of shrine-keepers. Because dams were in the middle of valleys and shrines were built nearby, human sacrifices were offered in water exchange; otherwise, the *wadi* was dry. The belief in sacred marriage provided coherence to the sacred structures people built, so the next generation of custodians was guaranteed for the sanctuary. The construction of these holy sites aimed to reverse the subjugation of society to nature. The tale celebrates the Ma'rib dam, which maintained the tribes that lived near it, providing irrigation for one millennium. Taking care of life-giving water infrastructure was a divine duty, guaranteed to the offspring of a sacred union, such as the one of al-Hadhah and al-Harura.<sup>145</sup> Notably, the *jinn* are not feared, unlike their portrayal in the *qasidas*.

Jose Vilchez examines the value of aesthetics in the *Mu'allaqat*, where *al-Dahr's* revenge intensifies the poets' need to appreciate beauty. Strong dramatic elements portray the causal relationship between Fate and humans, showing "the artist's individual self" and the unfairness of this world, because of what Fate decided from the one above.<sup>146</sup> Propositions about beauty emerge in a combination of "codified terminology [and] archetypal aesthetic images." He regards the *Mu'allaqat* as an initial attestation of the language of Revelation and the Arab self. The subject of experience is a Bedouin who embodies the virtues of life in the desert. Poets adopt universal images to compete with the pantribal "aesthetic consciousness [...] [and] literary criticism." But these images do not confer the mythical status of the corpus; its origin does: Only the *jinn* could initiate poetic creation, bestowing the gift of shaping words. These occult forces entered the world and turned the poet's life into legend, augmenting the "fear, admiration, and respect for the power of the word." The aesthetics of the corpus rely on sensory images (of nature and women) and the aesthetic constituent of light. Spontaneous, bare life-like depictions address the physical, calling attention to ethics. Imru' al-Qays contrasts a woman's body with luminosity (Appendix A, vv. 31, 34, 39), likening maidens to marble statues. Al-Nabigha equates both beauty with fear (Appendix H, vv. 30, 46): The thought of his beloved makes his heart – the organ of affective perception – tremble. Vilchez argues that Ancient Near Eastern worship rites find expression in the "ideal of the feminine." The poets inherited a culture of sun-worship, mother-gods, and fertility rites. Romanticising their daily experience and accessing a "lexical, figurative tradition," they rhapsodised their beloved. He reconnects aesthetics with fatalism: Extraordinary edifices inevitably face divine wrath, personified in a climatic catastrophe.<sup>147</sup>

Andrew Marsham studies the sacral authority and priestly status of late antique caliphs (Muslim monarchs), based on the ancient custom of covenant and its ritual dimension. His work

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<sup>145</sup> Daniele Mascitelli, "The wedding of al-Hadhāh and al-Ḥarūrā: Glimpses of paganism in Arabia," *Folia Orientalia* LV (2018): 195-209. <https://doi.org/10.24425/for/2018.124684>.

<sup>146</sup> Vilchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought*, 1-4.

<sup>147</sup> Vilchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought*, 29-47.

begins with the formation of cults around gods, examining the guardians of their shrines, who became priests and founders of federations. He relates them to consensual political customs that merged with superpower-inspired rituals of ascension and succession. From their northern neighbours, Arabians heard stories of the King of Kings receiving his coronation by God. From their western neighbours, they heard of a popular vote from “the army, senate and people” to men carrying God’s favour, becoming emperors. From Jews and Christians, they heard of God’s covenant with David and Solomon. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the royal powers of South and North Arabia launched expansive raids to monopolise the caravan routes of the interior, gaining control over oases and coasts. Pastoralists resorted to pledged covenants for security. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, reliable groups still united based on pacts. Animals were sacrificed in sacred locations, and the imprint of hands after dipping them in their blood was left on rocks. The testifiers transcribed their agreements in documents (*kutub*) for all sides to keep a copy; Meccans kept theirs in the *Kaaba*. Panegyric court poetry preserved these interactions, honouring *hilf* agreements, reminding the “mutual obligation to avenge injury” and the perjurer’s fate. Inscriptions differ from poetic formulae; an inscription about obedience to a powerful patron claiming authority from *Rahman*, should not be confused with an oath of “voluntary, mutual cooperation” concluded by the approval of a divinity.<sup>148</sup> Not much is known about the tribal hierarchy and the holy position of enacting pacts.

### 3.5 *The Composition of Communities*

This section considers community structure in Arabia, concerning social, political, and economic arrangements.

Valentina Grasso studies the political elites of Arabia. Its ruling families cautiously converted from polytheism to monotheism, keeping up with the swings of Late Antiquity, while assuming a neutral position between Axum, Byzantium and Ctesiphon.<sup>149</sup> She argues that the ethnicon ‘Arab’ is an Islamic creation, relying on the spread of Arabic, and that Christianity was a tool of North Arabian rulers but of limited interest to the lower classes.<sup>150</sup> Two Himyarite communities stand out in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century: The political establishment who became Jewish sympathisers, and the local Jewish population that influenced them. Christianity was Rome’s and Axum’s official religion, and Zoroastrianism that of Persia. The Himyarite conversion to Judaism gained them approval of the three, and the lay Arabian they ruled over.<sup>151</sup> Conversion was a politically motivated act used as a *casus belli*. The Jafnids best used the Roman aegis, which gained them prestige.<sup>152</sup> By the 6<sup>th</sup> century, “flexible henotheism” and Jewish-Christian teachings had

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<sup>148</sup> Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 1-37.

<sup>149</sup> Valentina A. Grasso, *Pre-Islamic Arabia: Societies, Politics, Cults and Identities during Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 8.

<sup>150</sup> Grasso, *Pre-Islamic Arabia*, 40.

<sup>151</sup> Grasso, *Pre-Islamic Arabia*, 70-74.

<sup>152</sup> Grasso, *Pre-Islamic Arabia*, 150.

paved the development of Muhammad's "strict monotheism."<sup>153</sup> Lastly, the *Qur'anic mushrikun* (associates) were a distinct social entity, after intense Judeo-Christian proselytisation. The associates worshipped a "pagan god who assumed biblical character [like] sympathising monotheists who venerated *Allah*."<sup>154</sup> Whether Arab ruling lineages benefited from adopting a 'state religion' is not clear, as they did not rule over one.

Greg Fischer and Philip Wood study how the ruling clan of the Lakhmids entered history from the late 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their operations display political rivalries, their intermediate role between Ctesiphon and Rome, and Christianity's advancement in the Peninsula.<sup>155</sup> The Lakhmids were the client state that mitigated the conflict between Himyar and Persia. They hesitated to embrace Christianity, but Miaphysitism reasoned with Marcionite and Manichaean teachings in al-Hira. 5<sup>th</sup>-century Syriac hagiographies depict their conversion (Christian light overcame their pagan darkness). Shifting alliances with Byzantium and Ctesiphon gained them wealth, but al-Mundhir III and Abraha interfered in 6<sup>th</sup>-century Arabia; a dynamic interstate competition unfolded. These conflicts show that Arabian tribes enjoyed the freedom of deciding their future without the inspection of the imperial powers sponsoring them. The Lakhmids *σύμμαχοι* (allies), not *υπόσπονδοι* (*foederati*), acted "without fear of sanction, by launching [their] own campaign[s] against [their] enemies."<sup>156</sup> Nearing the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the global forces disengaged from Arabian dynasties, which soon collapsed, leaving a power vacuum that Muhammad raised to fill.<sup>157</sup>

Greg Fischer aimed to write the history of Late Antique Arabia from the perspective of its participants, reconsidering the terms tribe, state, and Arab. Kingdoms supposedly arose when confederations upgraded themselves into "separate entities." The Nasrids, Jafnids, and Hujrids were frontier allies able to promote Arabic. He argues that the "individual Arab elites Arethas or Alamoundaros" whose kingship stood for "local consumption," ending with the defeat of their kings, do not attest their kingdoms existed. The Hujrids declined from Thalabat-Himyarite attacks and the Roman control of Qaryat al-Faw. The Nasrids attacked the Romans under al-Numan and al-Mundhir, but the Persians overtook al-Hira. The Jafnids did not assume civilian posts, and the vulnerability of standing between Romans and barbarians, not absorbed by either, led to their fall. Because the Romans and Sassanids funded only famous leaders, their "identity, culture, politics or religion" remains unknown. Fischer sees the ethnic value of three concurrent cultural phenomena: Epigraphy; the *Jahili* odes; and the powerful Arab dynasties explored. He concludes these are "visible, measurable [...] [advances in the creation of an Arab identity] within the framework" of superpowers expanding or withdrawing from the Near East.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Grasso, *Pre-Islamic Arabia*, 177.

<sup>154</sup> Grasso, *Pre-Islamic Arabia*, 180.

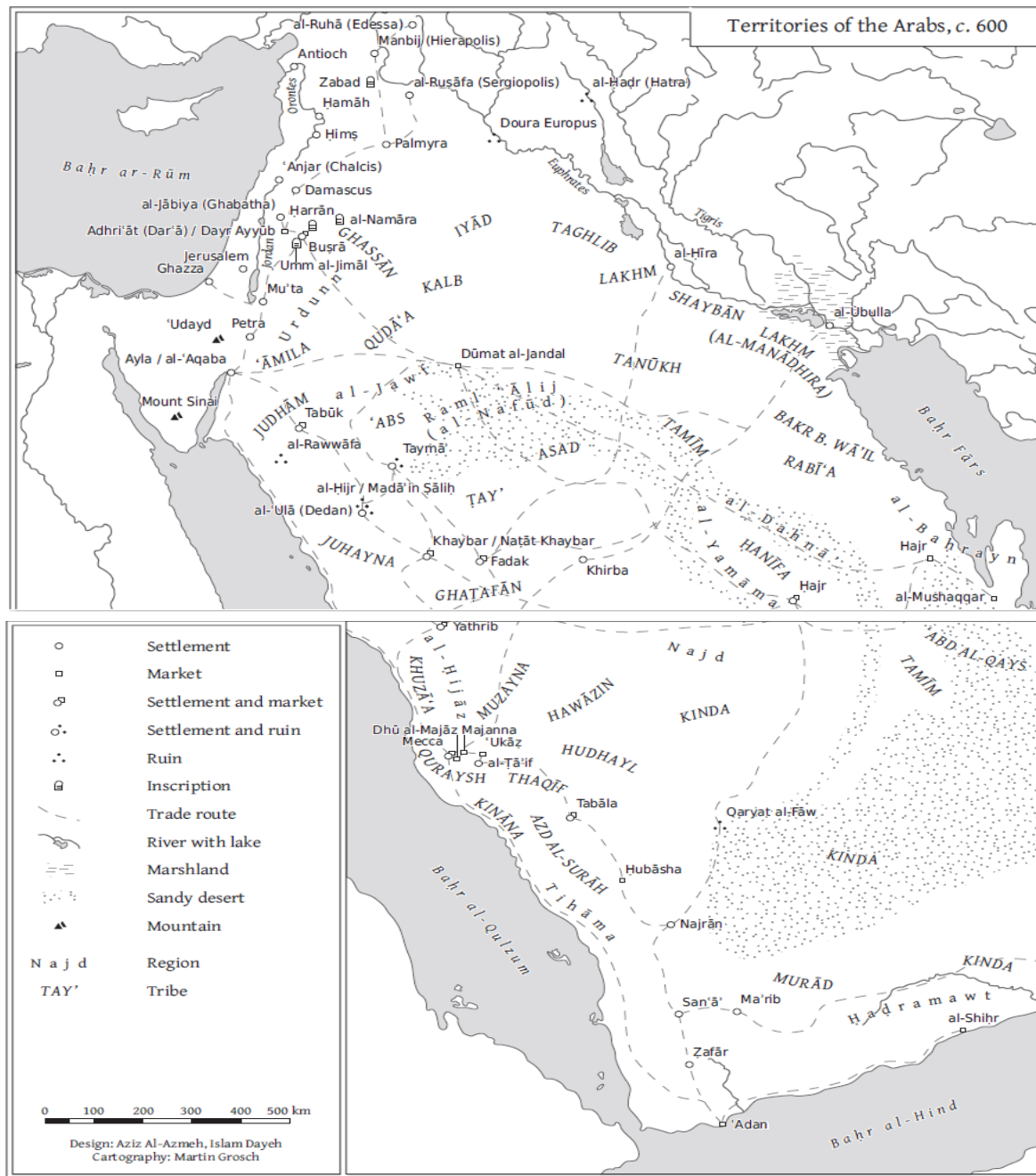
<sup>155</sup> Greg Fisher and Philip Wood, "Writing the History of the 'Persian Arabs': The Pre-Islamic Perspective on the 'Nasrids' of al-Hīrah," *Iranian Studies* 49, no. 2 (2016): 247-248. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44000440>.

<sup>156</sup> Fisher and Wood, "The History of the 'Persian Arabs,'" 248-267.

<sup>157</sup> Fisher and Wood, "The History of the 'Persian Arabs,'" 271-277.

<sup>158</sup> Greg Fisher, "Kingdoms or Dynasties? Arabs, History, and Identity before Islam," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4, no. 2 (2011): 246-267. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jla.2011.0024>.

Figure 4: Map of North and South Arabia<sup>159</sup>



Map 1 Territories of the Arabs, c. 600

<sup>159</sup> Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), xxii.

Ibrahim Mumayiz studies Arabia's poetic tradition and societal fabric focusing on their biblical roots. Poetry matured over five hundred years before the *Mu'allaqat* emerged. Its biblical roots manifest themselves in the monotheistic vocabulary of the rhapsodists, and in the adoption of Collyridianism and Gnosticism across Arabian social strata. The corpus has three standardised formal elements - its cinematic aesthetic, stream of consciousness, and metaphysical conceits. Based on the linguistic maturity of this unified poetic system, he argues that the Arabic *koine* of the *Jahili* odes was agreed long before their transcription; during intertribal meetings taking place in sacred months. These meetings served the flattening of differences in technical terminology and expression. The prestige of the *Mu'allaqat* grew from the reputation that poets spontaneously expressed themes and meter, drawing their tribe as their label. The military triumphs of Queen Mavia prompted the celebration of heroic battles through verse, establishing self-exultation and tribal supremacy as representative subjects of that linguistic moment.<sup>160</sup>

Starting with Arabian virtue, the poets combine an obvious lack of humility with "giving [...] shelter to the destitute and the oppressed." Conceptualising Arabia as Bible Land, he talks about two Semitic emblems of sagehood - Job (a biblical figure who remained faithful to God despite suffering) and Luqman (a legendary sage who rose from slavery to divine wisdom). In a world of war, the code of chivalry upgraded the pre-Islamic moral conduct (*din*). Being Arab was something subtle; *muruwwa*, war, an eclectic mix of pagan customs and believing in a Supreme Being (preserving ancient animism and rituals).<sup>161</sup> He continues with the impact of the Nabataean kingdom. Mixing Aramaic and Hellenistic culture, the Nabateans gained great wealth from trading incense, a commodity used across ancient religions. Arabs imitated their efficient sea trade and impressive genealogies, including the biblical appellations Ishmaelites and Saracens; Ishmael and Sarah were "their glorious ancestors." Meccans were unfamiliar with idol worship until the Nabataeans brought the idol of *Hubal* to Mecca. Studying popular inscriptions from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, he illustrates the progression of the Arabic script.

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<sup>160</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, vii-xii.

<sup>161</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 3-13.

En' Avdat Inscription, 88-126 CE	A bilingual Aramaic-Arabic inscription: First record of Arabic written in the Nabatean script discovered
Raqush Inscription, 267-269 CE	Carved on a tombstone: Earliest Arabic document discovered
Namarah Inscription, 328 CE	Funerary monument of Imru' al-Qays: Still using the Nabataean alphabet, it is a classical Arabic inscription
Two Jabal Ramm Inscriptions, 147/8 and 338-350 CE	While the first is a graffiti in Nabataean, the second is the earliest inscription both in the Arabic alphabet and language
Sakakah Inscription, 4th/5th cent.	A bilingual Arabic-Nabataean inscription: It repeats the name of Imru' al-Qays and exemplifies the contribution of the Hijaz in advancing the Arabic script
Umm al-Jimal Inscription, 5th/6th cent.	A bilingual Nabataean-Greek tombstone and graffiti on the walls of a Byzantine Church
Zebed Inscription, 512 CE	A trilingual Arabic-Greek-Syriac inscription commemorating the construction of a martyrium for St. Sergius
Jabal Usays Inscription, 528 CE	Entirely written in Arabic, it attributes the title <i>malik</i> to the Jafnid leader al-Harith
Harran Inscription, 568 CE	A bilingual Arabic-Greek inscription: Commemorating the erection of a martyrium for St. John

Table 3: *Pre-Islamic Arabic Inscriptions*<sup>162</sup><sup>162</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 20-22.

He explains that pastoralists “were familiar with the art of writing,” belonging to confederations with a scribal class. He affirms Nabataean aniconism initiated considering the *Kaaba* the sacred house of God, and that Venus in Petra was venerated in Arabic. Although deities resided inside idols, their deliverance was restrained in comparison with *Allah*.<sup>163</sup>

Next, he described the Byzantine Oriens and the spread of Christianity in it. From Syria to Palestine, the popularity of liturgy and the alliance of tribes with Byzantium furthered the use of the Arabic script. The commensurability of *murruwa* in Christianity eased conversion; native Arabian beliefs seemed reinvigorated in Christian dogmas. The stories of deuterocanonical texts circulated word of mouth, memorised until addressed centuries later in the *Qur'an*. Arabia did not have organised churches; Christian cults were small assemblies of teachers and students celebrating knowledge. Gnosticism spread without “domineering ecclesiastical authority.” The promise of attaining individual illumination and that redemption is possible imprinted in the Arabian psyche. Soon, Docetism claimed Jesus only appeared to be on the Cross and was not crucified. Docetism “survived in [Arab] consciousness” until validated in the *Qur'an*.<sup>164</sup> Monks’ explanation of an ethical path had to prevent “exegetical discord among the scripture.” They believed the Gospel made their pardon possible. Acutely conscious that death is near and being able to communicate with the supernatural world, they fought demons in Jesus’ name. Monks viewed their sacred texts as remedies against sin, and Arabians viewed monks as healers from demons. Still, Hijazi Christian tribes lacked a hagiographical reading tradition. The Abrahamic monotheism called *Hanifiyah* (an archetypal monotheism of Abraham’s followers deviating from pagan rites), influenced Christian Meccans. As neither *Hunbal* nor *the Daughters of Allah* fostered a discourse of enlightenment, many relied on the “monks’ fountains of ancient wisdom” to fill their thirst for guidance.<sup>165</sup>

This conversation leads to the *Θεοτόκος*, Christianity’s principal icon of virginity. Mary’s veneration created Collyridian cults, which from 350-450 CE “worshipped [Her] as a goddess.” Named after the bread rolls they sacrificed in Her name, the Collyridians were her priestesses. The narratives of her miraculous passing refined Marian’s offerings, and the promise of divine protection justified her elevation as queenly mother of Jesus. Descending from Prophet David, genealogy-obsessed Arabs respected her bloodline, building the *Masjid Maryam* from Mecca to Medina, and swearing allegiance to Her. The Daughters of the Covenant vowed celibacy, liturgically led, and maintained a ministry “by women for women.” Mary’s soteriological role stood upon her disparity with Eve, freeing women from Eve’s original sin. Marian-Collyridian cults venerated Mary, and the *Qur'an* later exemplified her.<sup>166</sup> Moving to Mavia, she ascended to power in 375 after the death of “the Saracen King” of the Tanukh. She resented Valens’ Arian Christianity, led an extensive revolt against the Romans, and chose an orthodox bishop for her subjects. Mavia chose Monk Moses of the eremitic community of Raithou or Mt. Sinai, espousing

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<sup>163</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 19-32.

<sup>164</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 37-50.

<sup>165</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 55-69.

<sup>166</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 73-85.

the Nicene creed. Valens, having to combat the Goths and Persians, could not afford to fight her army. The *Saracenorum gentis regina* was not interested in an “Arab national church.” Her daughter married a Roman officer, violating the prohibition of weddings between provincials, barbarians, and gentiles. Her military advancements inspired poets; they engineered the Mavian odes with *fakhr*, improving the reciters’ Arabic proficiency. A supremacist ego was born, based on the sovereignty of the poet’s tribe and himself. Her conquests proved that the horse was a lethal weapon of the Arabs.<sup>167</sup>

The *Mu’allaqat* represents a standardised oral genre. Each *Mu’allaqah* coherently narrates the poet’s life, devised and arranged in advance. Poetry judges appreciated the corpus enough to place it inside the *Kaaba*. The poets’ “active visual imagery [...] [cultivated] the art of description.” Their odes seem disjointed because they pair successive “thematic sections, molecules, and *topoi*.” Molecularity (the paratactic juxtaposition of themes) is fixed: Each ode recycles “a mandatory list of subjects.” The *nasib* (weeping for the departing beloved), *fakhr* (self-exultation), the *rahil* (travel), the *hayy* (families living together), the *atlal* (the deserted campsite) and the *majhul* (the unknown) are stable molecules. The poets diligently dissociated and recombined them to create the artistic entity of a *qasida*. Each molecule has a symbolic meaning, understood when related to the rest. The *atlal* symbolises society’s departure, whose ephemerality the poet grieves. The *nasib* is felt after the campsite is ruined, as he realises human mortality. He takes a *rahil* to the desert, where the *majhul* dazzles his soul; the soul must now prove its bravery. His *fakhr* impresses his audience, captivated by his exploration “between time and space” and the self-evaluation this leads to. The desert (the theatre of the corpus) makes him vulnerable, giving him epiphanies in conjunction with its fauna (the she-camel, wild ass and oryx). He learns he cannot overcome death; thus, he should not fear it and should defeat it with his verse. Far from his war-torn community, he is tested, and longs for peace. The continuity of these technicalities speaks to the depth of symbols and structure the Arabic language reached. Its metaphysical conceits express the overwhelming information concentrated in the mind.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 88-99.

<sup>168</sup> Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 103-119.

Figure 5: *Nobleman of Qaryat al-Faw*<sup>169</sup>



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<sup>169</sup> Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (Psychology Press, 2001), 51.

### 3.6. Methodological Approaches & Concerns

Philosophical research posits an argument or interpretation over a topic. An evaluation of the limits and impact of the methodology employed also conveys criticism. Looking at philosophical inquiry as a science and an art, I wish to be transparent about how the methodology aligns with the expected outcomes and how it suits the research question. The literature presented results from Ancient Near Eastern, Late Antique, Islamic and Western Islamic studies. Within them, scholars are changing hats, wearing that of the historian, philosopher, literary critic, epigraphist, linguist, translator, or religious scholar. Regional expertise, distinct chronological frameworks, linguistic landscapes, and belief systems locate the epistemic space of the *Mu'allaqat*, contextualising the production of its philosophical claims. This process, if excessive, can render the corpus a Late Antique product; therefore, cutting it off from the Arabian founding principles that led to its creation. Lacking primary sources from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, epistemic justice over its core statements seems difficult to obtain. Keenly aware of the flaws the overuse of artefacts, archaeological finds, and secondary sources has in study design, I turn to the methodology of the literature summarised above. I state certain anxieties regarding the paths researchers have taken to create the *status quaestionis* before explaining my own.

### 3.7 Which Methods Have Been Employed so far?

If Arabia is like the human circulatory system, it has been studied by following certain veins. One vein is the meta-narrative. Feminist scholars create one overarching story that traces Sumerian and Babylonian legends in later Near Eastern thought. El-Badawi and al-Fassi draw nearly two millennia of sources to argue that 'traditional' gender roles are later inventions, not ancient or pre-Islamic Near Eastern ones. They ground their research on *the Descent of Inanna into the Underworld*, which manifests the power goddesses had. Marsham also constructs a meta-narrative for sacralised leadership from ancient Arabia until Early Islam. Another vein is material culture. Epigraphy, coins, and archaeological remains draw the political landscape of the region. When confronted with the epigraphic archipelago, Macdonald pays attention to epigraphic silence. For instance, ancestor-worship is not inscribed. Kjær studies South Arabian Jews from Jewish-like epigraphic expressions at a time when neither Jewish nor Ethiopic sources mentioned them; al-Tabari later did. A third vein is the Roman projection of Arabia. Fischer and Wood use Roman sources to debate their projection of large Arabian confederations. For instance, *the report of Nonnosus* (the envoy sent by Justinian I for the diplomatic mission of 547 CE in Himyar) suggests Byzantine influence extended. Mumayiz uses the *Suda*, the *Actia Dousaria* and the *Panarion* to point to the religious shift in the Ancient Mediterranean to Jewish-Christian gospels. Apocrypha, like *Tobit* or *Sirach* along the *Acts of John*, the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and Joseph's *Hypnomestikon* reflect different Christologies and Marian devotion. Smith underlines that Early Muslim scholars recorded the *Mu'allaqat*, which pronounces practices related to wine, sex, and gambling, to argue that the social functions of poetry justified this leniency. Vilchez argues exegetical discourse on the *Mu'allaqat* achieved a national underpinning of selfhood.

These studies mostly use one method, following one vein of research. An interdisciplinary approach has also been used. Griffith presents the historical memory of pre-Islamic events in the *Qur'an*, coupled with epigraphical material and Roman sources, to infer their historicity. He depicts Jewish presence in Arabia as pictured in the Syriac martyrological tradition, the Tiberian correspondence following the Najran Massacre, the Jewish tribes mentioned in *the Constitution of Medina* and their direct addressing in the *Qur'an*. He bases Christian presence on the *ahadith* that report Waraqah ibn Nawfal copied portions of the Gospel in Arabic, that Medinan Christians kept the *Diatessaron* in sacred spaces that hosted liturgy, and the *Qur'an's* mention of monasteries. Christological controversies are mentioned by Julian of Halicarnassus, condemned by Severus of Antioch, mentioned in the *Qur'an* and commented on by Muslim exegetes. Keddie, who begins her work with a meta-narrative, studies the *Mu'allaqat* and the *Qur'an* to reconstruct the history of women living before Muhammad rose to power. Early Islamic narratives are thus integrated.

### 3.8 Methodology and Research Gaps

Since the study of Arabia is mainly historical, it is quite surprising that scholars do not draw chronological limits between Ancient, Pre-Islamic, Late Antique Arabia and the *Jahiliyyah*. A provisional timeline of when each starts and ends, justified by distinguishing features, would be helpful. The *Jahiliyyah* in specific, which I understand as a loaded historiographical concept instead of a historical period, sometimes encompasses anything pre-Islamic, while other times it is placed shortly before Muhammad was born.<sup>170</sup> This is a brilliant example of how the *Mu'allaqat* can contribute in rewriting pre-Islamic history and reconstructing its intellectual landscape. Nadia Jamil presents many of its verses showing the synergy among *hilm* and *jahl*, their interactive dynamic, and combined potential (rejecting the previous binary opposition between knowledge and ignorance).<sup>171</sup> Renate Jacobi also explains the perfect Bedouin regains *hilm* after *jahl* (folly due to intense emotion). He gets over it by following the tribal norm of going into the desert mounted on his camel.<sup>172</sup> Such remarks pave the methodological revision of the transition from pre-Islamic Arabia to Early Islam.

The next issue is that most primary sources produced during the period of investigation (e.g. Syriac hagiographies) come from the Levant, making the Fertile Crescent the centre and the Arabian Peninsula the periphery; this also makes the desert, the core of Arabian life, peripheral. The undefined epistemic space of the *Mu'allaqat* remains critical. Within the study of Arabia from a Fertile-Crescent-centrist perspective, Late Antiquity is a polestar that explains the Biblicalisation of Arabia; it reads the *Qur'an* through Jewish and Christian categories. This separates Islamic scripture from the poetic tradition, presenting monotheism as an exported doctrine instead of an

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<sup>170</sup> Gerhard Bowering, Patricia Crone, and Mahan Mirza, eds., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2013) 269-270; Peter Webb, "Al-Jāhiliyya: Uncertain Times of Uncertain Meanings," *Der Islam* 91, no. 1 (2014): 69-94. <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2014-0005>.

<sup>171</sup> Jamil, *Ethics & Poetry*, 11-15.

<sup>172</sup> Renate Jacobi, "The Origins of the Qasida Form," in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, ed. Stefan Sperf and Christopher Shackle (Brill, Leiden), 34.

internal evolution. Since its text does not exclusively praise a king, replicate the theory of forms, or use Old Testament figures, the *Mu'allaqat* does not sound like a Late Antique product. Maybe Late Antiquity had not impressed the desert until Muhammad voiced it. This assumption that Late Antiquity gives credibility to studying Arabia, creates more problems. Christian-Roman sources portray Christianity as being more impactful on Arabia than Judaism. Without Jewish sources, the *Qur'an* and the *Constitution of Medinah* make this seem incorrect. Then, an emphasis on the canonisation of Abrahamic religions would render questions like 'Should exiled monks be described as missionaries or apologists?' central to the study of the region. This seems far-fetched. Most severe is that a critic of Orientalism, with its confessional prejudices, is entirely missing. This is unusual in decolonial and Islamic studies. Appreciating the canonisation European, textual scholars created should not keep us stuck in using Biblical history and Comparative Semitics to argue that Islam derives from high Late Antique religions, or that the mythopoets of the *Mu'allaqat* are authors instead of bards. The history narrated shows that Muhammad enjoyed a linguistically resourceful and philosophically poetic upbringing. The *Mu'allaqat* is a crop of Arabian indigenous logic that survived by performance, not writing; a musical creation free from educational restraints, encoding classic expressions of indigenous knowledge systems (proverbs of sages), and a tool to restore Arabia's intellectual landscape.

Two subtle methodological concerns come last. It could be that Arab/Muslim scholars today do not view these mythopoets as philosophical sages, like Kenyan scholars do with their ancestors.<sup>173</sup> This missing glorification of an ideal past should not be an obstacle to outlining how the corpus offers its own realm of possibilities of what is or can be known. Besides, Islamic scripture preserves the mentality of the *Mu'allaqat*: Presenting *Qur'anic* challenges indicates the Islamic lens, despite which, or in line with, the corpus was assembled. The best-hidden omission is the unacknowledged dominance of the Sunni paradigm in Islamic studies.<sup>174</sup> The way Sunnism shapes the remembrance of the past adds an extra stratum of complexity in the study of Arabia: Sunni identity was crystallised in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, two centuries after the *Mu'allaqat* was recorded. Hence, early commentaries predate its doctrinal hallmark, implying theological concerns did not drive Arabic philologists, or were secondary. Do 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>-century works not convey the Sunni view? Is the projection of pre-Islamic Arabia in Islamic narratives just Abbasid?

### 3.9 Interpretative Method: Focus on Meaning

While researching Arabia, scholars dealt with the paucity of historical sources from the period, the otherness of Roman/Christian ones, and the porosity of early Islamic ones. Many resorted to creating a fragmented *longue durée* of enduring Ancient Mesopotamian structures (since 3100 BC), gleaning historical events from ecclesiastical history (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries) and the Islamic Golden Age (8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries). A disorderly feeling emerges over reading about the

<sup>173</sup> Odera Oruka, eds., *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Brill, 1990).

<sup>174</sup> Sajjad Rizvi and Ahab Bdaiwi, "Decolonising Islamic Intellectual History: Perspectives from Shi'i Thought," *Global Intellectual History* 9, no. 5 (2024): 465-475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2024>.

creation of ghost communities, pressure to find Arabic identity in the pre-Islamic era, and the unvoiced logic behind collecting the *Mu'allaqat* in the first place. With the *Mu'allaqat* becomes the primary focus of enquiry, the academic scene changes; an opportunity to restore logic appears. Jonathan Brown created a typology of four methods taken on to construe *Jahili* poetry and society: The source approach, which directly translates statements in the corpus into social facts, thus is uncritical of rhetorical devices; the literary approach, which deals with the corpus in isolation; the source/tradition critical approach, which explains the impact of the early Abbasid period on the collection; and the critical-alternative approach, which studies the principles underlying its construction (social conscience and ritual dimension), substituting the absence of historical sources during its utterance.<sup>175</sup> Embracing disciplinary narrowness, the shift is to study the *Jahili qasidas* based on what they offered at the time of composition.

Looking at each *qasida* as an ingeniously crafted literary product means distancing my analysis from the veins of research explained earlier and seeing the *Mu'allaqat* as an artery. It is the finest output of the *Jahiliyyah*, transferring oxygenised blood (refined ideas) from the heart to the body. This is the artery of early Arabic historiography. Mascitelli used it to study the pre-Islamic era based on biographies, speeches, battles, raids, and poetry. The five research niches detailed depict habits of religious societies. Arabs saw priests and priestesses, betyls, holy books, regals, and disaster even as embodiments of divine presence. Poetry must be seen via the same sacred optic. Categorising the *Mu'allaqat* in its surviving form as a conscious meaning-making artefact is not a methodological innovation. It derives from a research design that assumes poets skilfully answer the question 'How do you get out of the valley of disappointment?' Each *qasida* in general and fatalistic transcendence in specific adds to the coherence of the *Jahili* worldview that cements the odes into one body of work: Deriving from (a) a nomadic, lineage-based ontology defined by the landscape of the desert, (b) an ethical universe of loyalty, courage and mercy, (c) an empirical, physically-experienced epistemology, (d) an ancestral praxeology, (e) an abstract semiology constantly referring to communal symbolic clusters, and (f) an etiological account which renders *al-Dahr* to be a negative causal force, (g) the determinism of *al-Dahr* generates (h) the metaphysical defiance of honour. Its futurology generates the final cause of human action; to act in a way that your reputation outlasts *dahr* (death). *Al-Dahr* is the ultimate arbitrator, whom only fame can surpass. Fundamentally, I read the *Mu'allaqat* like I read the *ahadith*; its verses in the extant form were attributed to the poets, according to the historical memory of transmitters and later transcribers, to preserve the lifestyle, viewpoint and ethic the poets would assert. This effort, to preserve ideal advice, allowed the creation of the self-help book known as the *Mu'allaqat* and the restoration of moral sensibilities known as the *Qur'an*.

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<sup>175</sup> Brown, "The Social Context of Pre-Islamic Poetry," 31-32.

#### 4. Fatalistic Transcendence

##### 4.1 *The body submits to Dahr, the soul rises against it*

The poets are lyrical, elegiac and delicate with their expression. They do not cry at a goddess of Fate whose worship is pointless, nor do they share the conviction that all events in one's life are predetermined solely based on individual experience. On the contrary, what colours their understanding of *al-Dahr*, the force overseeing and irrevocably barging in their world, is the repeated observation of misfortune and change of circumstances in their surroundings. Ecocides, disease, and damage impair all life to the point of ending it. In an utterly unfair world – a world in which faith, prayer and rites are not enough to bring ease – *al-Dahr* batters the strong and the weak. *Al-Dahr*, a synonym for hardship and uncertainty, leaves everyone powerless. The belief in its existence and effects is unwavering: All poets agree that Fate decides their turnarounds in life, and most importantly, their passing. Baffled by their great losses and loneliness, they intellectually rebel against Fate. They versify not only their accomplishments, but their calamities to prove the resilience of their soul. By doing so, their poetry defies *al-Dahr*. Their verses are the medium for their soul, memories, and characters to live eternally once their bodies decay. As long as they achieve moral excellence in this world, their legacy can live in the one above; they are confident in the unseen, they trust the world of metaphysics.

Patching the poetic remarks on *al-Dahr*, demonstrating the logical flow among them, weaves their perspectives together, from which the *Jahili* worldview emerges. The first thing we read is that even after a horrible night ends, no relief awaits in the daybreak (Appendix A, vv. 46).<sup>176</sup> Immortality is unavailable (Appendix B, vv. 56-57), as death picks one's most prized possessions when holding the short rope of life (Appendix B, vv. 66-68); death approaches, and bad news catches people off guard (Appendix B, vv. 103-104).<sup>177</sup> Death will find us no matter where we hide (Appendix C, v. 49), and the Fates cannot be reasoned with; the way they choose who to strike is more arbitrary than a blind camel dancing (Appendix C, v. 57).<sup>178</sup> The gamble is no longer playful (Appendix D, v. 39), for Fate is never the one to lose; it is the ultimate player that always reaches its goal (Appendix D, v. 73).<sup>179</sup> Every moment we live has been pre-designed (E, v. 5), our future is sworn to a destination we are not aware of (Appendix E, v. 17).<sup>180</sup> Death is like a wheel; it will turn around our way (Appendix F v. 78).<sup>181</sup> Fate is like a mountain veiled by clouds; we try everything to prevent its collapse, yet the sound of Fate's beating drum haunts us (Appendix G, vv. 25-26).<sup>182</sup> Fate and Time mean betrayal, danger and decline (Appendix H, v.

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<sup>176</sup> Appendix A, vv. 46, 69.

<sup>177</sup> Appendix B, vv. 56-57, 66-68 & 103-104, 133, 139 & 161.

<sup>178</sup> Appendix C, vv. 49 & 57, 195 & 201.

<sup>179</sup> Appendix D vv. 39 & 73, 237 & 247.

<sup>180</sup> Appendix E, vv. 5 & 17, 267 & 271.

<sup>181</sup> Appendix F, v. 78, 339.

<sup>182</sup> Appendix G, vv. 25-26, 365.

20).<sup>183</sup> Time outdoes even those of the highest rank, as happened with the last vulture of Luqman (Appendix I, v. 6).<sup>184</sup> Ultimately, every creation will be undone (Appendix J, v. 4), which is unavoidable (Appendix J, v. 48).<sup>185</sup>

#### 4.2 *The Jahili Worldview Celebrated*

Earlier, I mentioned that the *Mu'allaqat* answers the question 'How to get out of the valley of disappointment?' When reading its text, one cannot help but wonder, why do the characters not explicitly resign and leave tomorrow in Fate's hands? How come they live such industrious, productive lives? Why does a fatalistic futurology not coincide with a miserable, purposeless praxeology? The answer lies in its fame-gaining teleology. In the moral landscape of the desert, the corpus revolves around humans, animals, and divinities - spirits, forces, and deities (ontology). One detached causal cosmic force called *al-Dahr* decides people's accidents and death (etiology), mocking the rationality they wish would define the way events unfold in their lifetime. *Al-Dahr* does not allow them to make robust predictions of their future, other than that vicissitudes will certainly ensue (futuresology); their decisions never seem informed enough, as sickness, misfortune, and loss afflict them. The only thing that is universal in their world is that with the passage of time comes death, the last point of existence; one meets their end, not purpose or designer (*contra* eschatology). So why is the *Mu'allaqat* not a work of vanity?

The magic of the corpus is the connection between collective moral consciousness, the tribal landscape, and the significance of loss. Using relational semiotics, the poets draw *al-Dahr* as a creator of dreadful circumstances; the pain imposed on them is meaningful because their soul manages to navigate suffering and create a meaningful poem. The multi-layered term *al-Dahr* can be translated as Time, Fate, Death, Eternity, Change, Doom, Divine Agency. It generates the cycle of pain; it is the origin of their misfortune. Capturing its essence is challenging since poets directly use it and evoke it, constructing images of its detrimental consequences. *Al-Dahr* governs from above, and people live in its shadow, realising they cannot hide from it. Tradition and the instructions of their forefathers guide them (epistemology), as they are expected to cultivate virtue in this cruel world - to be brave in battle, help the destitute and those in need, and cleanse their souls (axiology). They must weigh their actions, stay equal to the circumstances, obey the oaths they have sworn, and never succumb to the caprices of their heart (praxeology). Their actions must construct such an exemplary temperament that their final breath (futuresology) does not pose an obstacle to their appreciation by their kin and poetic community; their righteousness alone can earn the ascendancy, liberation, and remembrance of their soul (teleology). Most importantly, they must idealise their reality, crafting a language of intricate lineages, military achievements, past lovers, connection with nature and hatred towards discriminatory, vengeful, and despicable gods (semiology). They must do all the above in a culturally transforming verbal

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<sup>183</sup> Appendix H, v. 20, 403.

<sup>184</sup> Appendix I, v. 6, 435.

<sup>185</sup> Appendix J, vv. 4 & 48, 473 & 489.

Thoughts of mythopoets about destiny & death.

art, powerful enough to include any kind of cognition, feeling, experience or perception. So much so that it survives the millennia.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 *Philosophically exploring Arabia, the Mu'allaqat & al-Dahr*

This thesis took a journey to Arabia, between the Annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom and the death of the Prophet Muhammad. I focused on a work produced in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, during the apogee of the *Jahiliyyah* (the Age of Ignorance), known as the *Mu'allaqat* (The Hanging Poems). Analysing its commitment to fatalistic transcendence, my study reconstructed other elements of the *Jahili* worldview, arguing that its futurology might exclude eschatology, but fosters a teleological discourse around legacy. Being remembered is the ultimate, teleological end. Other teleological vectors (e.g. generosity) ensue. We took several twists and turns to get there. In my introduction, I mentioned some key historical events that occurred in or had a significant impact on the peninsula. I then explained how the *Mu'allaqat* is a record of Arabian thought and practice. The first section summarised ten *Jahili qasidas*, before consulting modern definitions of fatalism to see how modern language can help me understand the inscriptions, the poetic corpus and text of the *Qur'an* - the main sources of this thesis. Finally, I mentioned the elements of a worldview to establish the interaction of its components. The literature review and largest section of this thesis analysed five poles of research done in pre-Islamic Arabia to re-imagine what the *Jahili* world looked like. These were intercultural exchange; the role of women; literacy; devotional practices; and the composition of communities. I presented the methodological approaches taken so far and the impact they had on the study of Arabia. My methodological commitment was to look at the *Mu'allaqat* as a work that facilitates the meaning-making process of the poets and audience. The final section outlined how the soul, the propositions of each ode and the poems themselves are stable even if the world of the poets is not. Finally, I reconstructed the *Jahili worldview*.

### 5.2 *Where does the adventure end?*

You and I opened and closed our eyes many times. Our journey ends with a raw, desert-shaped ontology from which emanates a system of determined metaphysics. In its account, *al-Dahr* is uncontrollable, unexplainable, and perpetual, unlike anything worldly, which is transient. It generates vitriolic changes, which cannot be foreseen within human limits; the only thing the mind of the poets can conceive is that everyone's last breath marks their predetermined end. Consequently, the poets embrace a kind of metaphysical defiance; their intellectual labour is devoted to making their verses survive. The knowledge of their forefathers (epistemology), the fairness to opponents and delivery of aid to the weak (praxeology), the moral guide of *murruwah* (axiology) and the poetic language (semiology) of the *Mu'allaqat* are worth living, reciting, and ultimately, dying for.

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7. Appendices

Here is the full text of each ode, reproduced without revision from *The Mu'allaqat for Millennials*.

**Appendix A:** The *Mu'allaqah* of Imru' al-Qays

*Adventures of youthful passion* (originally appears on pp. 43-89)

1. Stop, my friends, and we will weep over the memory of a loved one  
And an abode at the dune's edge of Siqt al-Liwā, between al-Dakhūl, then Hawmal,
2. Then Tūdiḥ, then al-Miqrāt, whose trace was not effaced  
By the two winds weaving over it from south and north.
3. You see the droppings of white antelope  
Scattered on its wide grounds and dried-up puddles like peppercorns.
4. On the morning when they loaded the camels to depart, before the tribe's acacia trees,  
I wept splitting bitter colocynth.
5. My friends stopped their mounts there over me and said:  
"Don't die of grief, control yourself!"
6. "There is no cure for me but pouring tears,  
And is there a better place to weep than the worn traces of a ruined abode?"
7. Console yourself as once before you did for Umm Huwayrith  
And her neighbour at Mount Ma'sal, Umm Rabāb.
8. When they rose there wafted from them a fragrance, redolent  
As the East breeze when it bears the scent of clove.
9. Then out of ardent love my eyes sent flowing down my neck  
A flood of tears until they soaked my sword-belt.
10. And the many days of delight with the damsels!  
And, best of all, the day at Dārat Juljul!
11. The day I slew my she-camel for the maidens –  
How amazing when they loaded up her saddle and its gear!
12. All day the playful maidens tossed pieces of her meat  
And of her fat, like twisted fringes of white Damascus silk.
13. And how about the day I entered the howdah, 'Unayzah's howdah,  
And she said, "Damn you! Look what you've done! I'll have to go on foot!"
14. She kept on, as the high-sided saddle lurched to one side,  
"You've crippled my camel, Imru' al-Qays! Get down!"
15. So I said to her, "Just keep going and loosen his reins,  
Don't keep me from a second taste of your sweet fruit."
16. Many a woman, like you, pregnant and nursing, I have visited at night  
And distracted from her amuleted one-year-old.
17. When he cried from behind her, she turned her upper half toward him,

- But the half that was beneath me did not bud
18. Then one day, on the back of a dune, she rebuffed me,  
And swore an oath never to be broken.
19. O Fātimah! Enough of this teasing!  
And if you have resolved to cut me off, then do it gently.
20. If something in my character has hurt you,  
Then pull my clothes away from yours — they'll slip right off.
21. Were you emboldened to abuse me because your love is my slayer  
And whatever you command my heart to do, it does?
22. Your eyes do not shed tears except to pierce  
With their two arrows the pieces of my slaughtered heart.
23. With many a pale and curtained maiden whose tent none dares approach,  
I took my pleasure, unhurried.
24. I stole past guards to get to her, past clansmen,  
Eager, if they could conceal it, to slay me.
25. When the Pleiades were spread out across the sky  
Like the pleats of a sash with alternating gold and gems,
26. I came when she, before the tent curtain, had shed her clothes for sleep  
And was clad in nothing but an untied shift.
27. She cried, "By God, there's no way to dissuade you!  
And I don't see the veil of your error lifting!
28. I led her forth from her tent and as she walked she trailed  
Over our tracks the train of her gown of figured silk.
29. Then, when we had crossed the clan's enclosure  
And made our way to a sandy hollow surrounded by long winding dunes,
30. I drew her temples toward me, and she leaned over me  
With a slender waist, but full where her anklets ring.
31. Her skin white, her waist thin, not full,  
Her collarbone shone like a polished mirror.
32. Like the first inviolate bloom, white mixed with yellow,  
Nurtured on water limpid, unmuddied.
33. Now hiding, now baring a cheek full and smooth,  
She guards herself with the glance of a wild doe at Wajrah with fawn.
34. Her neck, like the neck of a white antelope,  
Is not overly long when she raises it, nor lacking in ornament.
35. A jet-black head of hair adorns her back,  
Full and thick like dates upon a cluster-laden palm.
36. Some locks are secured on top, while others  
Stray between the braided and the loose.
37. Her waist is as fine as a twisted bowstring, trim;  
Her calf like a papyrus reed, well-watered, tender.

38. She takes with fingers smooth, uncalloused, as if they were  
The soft dry worms of Zaby Dune or the tender twigs of ishil trees.
39. At nightfall she lights up the dark  
Like the lamp in the night-cell of a hermit monk.
40. Late into the morning her bed is fragrant as though strewn with crumbs of musk,  
And she, still in her loose night clothes, sleeps on 'til noon.
41. At one like her the staid man gazes with ardour  
When she stands at her full height between woman's gown and maiden's shift.
42. Grown men find consolation for the follies of their youth,  
But my heart refuses solace for its love for you.
43. How often did I quarrel over you  
And reject sincere advice that, though reproachful, was generously given.
44. Many a night like the billowing sea let down its veils over me  
With all kinds of cares to torment me.
45. Then I said to it when, like a huge camel, it stretched out its spine  
Then raised its haunches and heaved its ponderous chest
46. "O long night, will you not dispel to reveal the dawn?  
Though the dawning day will be no better for me!
47. "O what a night you are! as if each of your stars  
Were tied to Mount Yadhbul with a tightly twisted rope.
48. "And the Pleiades stand in midcourse motionless,  
As if suspended by flaxen cords from obdurate rocks."
49. At daybreak I ride forth, the birds still in their nests,  
On a huge steed, sleek and swift, like a lasso for wild game.
50. Now wheeling, now charging, advancing, retreating, all at once,  
Like a mighty boulder the torrent has washed down from the heights.
51. A dark bay: the saddle pad slips from its back  
Like raindrops rolling off hard rock.
52. His gallop, like a downpour, still bursts forth  
When the dragging hoofs of flagging coursers kick up dust.
53. Lean yet full of vigour, as if his pounding gallop  
When he seethes with heat were a cauldron's boil.
54. The slender youth slips from his back;  
The sturdy riders' robes fly out behind.
55. His gallop streams like a boy's pebble-on-a string  
When he tightly twirls the string with his two hands then pulls!
56. He has the flanks of a gazelle, the ostrich's two legs,  
The wolf's lope, the fox-cub's canter.
57. Full in the flanks; from behind a thick tail fills the gap  
Between his legs, reaching almost to the ground, not crooked.
58. As if, when he heads off, his rump, hard and smooth, were a stone

- On which a bride pounds perfume or bitter colocynth is crushed.
59. As if the blood on his throat – blood of the herd’s frontrunners –  
Were henna on an old man’s combed white hair.
60. Then an oryx herd appeared before us with does like virgins  
Circling round a sacred stone in long-trained gowns.
61. Then they turned like a string of onyx beads, alternated black and white,  
On the neck of a child of two noble families.
62. He took us straight to the leaders of the herd,  
Leaving behind those that lagged in an unbroken cluster.
63. One after another he overtook a buck then a doe,  
But still was not awash with sweat.
64. Some cooks laid out the meat in strips to slowly roast on embers;  
Others threw it into pots to quickly boil.
65. At evening, our glances shied before this steed:  
To whatever part we raised our gaze – dazzled, it dropped.
66. All night he remained, with his saddle and bridle upon him.  
All night he stood beneath my eye, not loose to graze.
67. Friend, can you see lightning? Look, there is a faint gleam,  
Like two hands flashing in the cumulus’ high crown.
68. Its flash lights up the sky – or like the sudden flare of a monk’s lamp  
When, tilting it, he soaks the twisted wick with oil.
69. I sat with my companions between Dārij and ‘Udhayb.  
How distant was the storm at which I gazed!
70. Over Mount Qatan, as I read the signs, the right flank of its downpour falls,  
Over Mount Sitār, then Mount Yadhbul, falls the left.
71. By late morning it began pouring down its rain around Kutayfah,  
Overturning the lofty kanahbal-trees upon their beards.
72. As the fringes of its rain passed over Mount Qanān  
They drove white-footed goats down every path.
73. In Tayma ’ Oasis it did not leave a single palm trunk standing  
Nor a single stronghold but those of gypsum-plastered stone.
74. As if Mount Abān in the first rains of the storm  
Were a tribal chieftain wrapped in a striped cloak.
75. As if the peak of Mount Mujaymir in the morning  
Ringed with dross left by the torrent were wool on a spindle.
76. The storm set down its burden on the desert of Ghabīt  
Like a Yemeni merchant alighting with his fabric-laden bags.
77. It was as if the song-birds of the valley at daybreak  
Had drunk a morning draught of fine spiced wine,
78. As if the wild beasts drowned at evening in its remotest reaches  
Were wild onions plucked-out bulbs.

**Appendix B:** The *Mu'allaqah* of Ṭarafah ibn al' Abd

*Rebellion and philosophy of life and death* (originally appears on pp. 104-162)

1. Traces of Khawlah loom at Burqat Thahmad  
like the hints of a tattoo on the back of a hand.
2. My companions halted their mounts above me and said:  
Toughen up, don't let this grief do you in.
3. And the departing caravans of the tribe of Mālik appeared  
at dawn like ships sailing the valley of Dadi.
4. A ship of 'Adawl or Yemen, its sailor now floating astray  
and now coming back to course.
5. Its forepeak parts the water as it pushes forth  
like a child's hand plowing through soil.
6. In the tribe is a gazelle dark-eyed, her slender neck reaching  
to the Arāk fruits, adorned with strings of chrysolite and pearl.
7. Oblivious, she loiters in a lush garden with her peers,  
and tugs at the branches of Arāk until they drape her.
8. Her wine-colored lips smile revealing teeth like a bloom  
sprouting through the pure sands of a dew drenched dune.
9. They sparkle as if sun-kissed and  
against her kohl tinted gums, brighter they shine.
10. As if the sun has let down its robes  
upon her face, unblemished and washed in light.
11. But when grief sets in, quick I ride off on a swift  
lean mare that races day and night.
12. Trusty like the planks of a coffin when I drive her down  
a road striped with tracks like a cloak.
13. Stallion-like she sprints as if she were an ostrich  
luring a sleek grey male.
14. She contends with the light-footed she-camels and strikes  
hindleg after foreleg on the beaten track.
15. She grazes on the twin hilltops among milk-less peers,  
in lush pastures greened by second rains.
16. She jolts at the driver's call and guards against the advances  
of a dark mud-caked stallion with her bushy tail.
17. A tail as if prickled on its sides with falcon  
feathers, pierced deep into the bone with an awl.
18. She swings it once over her flanks and once  
over her udders, dry like empty waterskins.
19. Built to perfection, her meaty thighs stand

- like the smooth flaps of a high citadel gate.
20. Her ribs curl around her barrel, and the bottom of her neck  
is supported by bone packed on bone.
21. As if her armpits are two caves wrapped in thickets.  
Her ribs curve like bows held together by a sturdy spine.
22. Her forearms open wide at the elbows and bend  
like those of a water carrier burdened by two heavy pails.
23. Built high like a Byzantine archway whose builder swore  
to raise up brick and mortar high on both sides.
24. Her chin hair is reddish and her back-bone stout,  
her stride wide and her forearms lashing.
25. Twisted and flexed out, her forearms arch like the  
weighed down roof beams.
26. She veers to one side, plunging forward. Her head large  
and her shoulders raised into a lofty structure.
27. The saddle-strap marks on her sides are smooth and white  
like wasteland stones burnished by coursing water.
28. These marks intersect and then diverge,  
like the frayed lining of a tattered shirt.
29. Her neck is long and, when she raises it,  
like a ship's bow emerging out of Dijlah.
30. Her skull is like an anvil, its sides welded together  
with jutting bones as sharp as files.
31. Her cheeks are as smooth as a Damascene's parchment  
and her lips like tanned Yemeni leather.
32. And her eyes are two mirrors tucked in the caves  
of her sockets like pools carved in rock.
33. They shield the dust, batting like the dark eyes  
of an oryx frightened for her fawn.
34. And two perked ears that pick up the sounds of night,  
secret whispers and muffled echoes.
35. Keen ears and in them you read her noble lineage  
like the ears of a wild oryx of Hawmal.
36. An alert throbbing heart, jittery yet firm  
like a great stone in a cage of rock slabs.
37. A slit lip, a pierced nose and a lofty snout which she points  
toward the path and then sprints.
38. Well-tamed, she quickens,  
when I wish and slows when I wish, fearing the stings of twisted leather.
39. If I wished, her head would level with her back  
and she'd floated, forearms paddling like those of an ostrich.

40. On one like this I set out when my companion says:  
    in this, my life for yours and yours for mine,
41. when the soul swells in the chest and one could see  
    danger looming even when not expecting it.
42. When people ask: who is the valiant one? I feel it is me  
    they call and I rush neither hesitant nor sluggish.
43. When I waved my whip over her she rushed forth  
    as mid-day mirages fumed over the rocky terrain.
44. She strutted like a slave-girl dancing for her master  
    dragging behind her the long white train of her robe.
45. I am not one to hide in highlands  
    for fear. No! When the people ask for help, they find me there.
46. Look for me when the tribe assembles and you'll find me.  
    Hunt for me in the taverns and you will catch.
47. Come to me and, if you wish, I'll treat you to a quenching  
    morning draught, if not then as you wish.
48. When the tribe all comes together,  
    you will find me at the head of that lauded noble house.
49. My companions are pure and they shine like stars.  
    And among us, a singing girl in a sheer robe or a saffron tinted gown.
50. Her neckline is cut low and, loosely dressed,  
    her nakedness is soft to the drinker's touch.
51. When we say, "sing," she starts a song,  
    her eyes languid, without strain.
52. She sings and her voice echoes like the moans  
    of a mother oryx grieving for a slain fawn.
53. Thus, I persisted in pleasure, drink after drink,  
    squandering all that I owned, acquired and inherited.
54. Until the entire tribe shunned me and cast  
    me out, like a tar-smear'd manged camel.
55. The dust-covered poor took me in  
    when the dwellers of high tents turned their backs.
56. O you who blame me for diving into battle  
    and pleasure, pray do tell, can you make me immortal?
57. If you cannot ward off my death then let me  
    face it with all I have.
58. If it weren't for three that make life worth living,  
    on my life, I wouldn't have cared if I were to die now.
59. One is my beating the nay-sayers to a drink  
    of deep red that froths when mixed with water.
60. And one is my rushing to the aid of a distressed call

- like a wolf startled on its way to a waterhole.
61. And one is my shortening a long rainy day, under  
the flaps of a high tent with my soft plump lover.
62. Her bracelets and anklets are as if strung  
on smooth and thick tree-stems.
63. I am a generous man and I drink life to the fullest.  
You'll know when we die which of us dies thirsty.
64. I see the grave of a miser who hoards his riches  
and the grave of the reckless who squanders his, alike.
65. All you see are two mounds of dust  
and slabs of silent stone piled on top.
66. Death chooses the noble and the generous  
and picks at the most prized of a miser's spoil.
67. I see life a treasure that shrinks every night.  
What time and days chip away at will soon be gone.
68. By your life, death never misses his mark.  
A loose rope, this life, its end in death's hand.
69. Why is it so then, I and my cousin Mālik,  
whenever I come close he draws away?
70. He blames me and I don't know why,  
the way Qurt ibn A 'bad disparaged me in front of them all.
71. He made me despair of every favour I asked  
and bury every hope of it as if in a deep grave.
72. All this for no fault I committed other than  
asking assistance for Ma 'bad in gathering his lost herd.
73. I had hope in our kinship and, by your fortune,  
I am one to persevere till the very end.
74. When called upon in calamity I rise to defend  
and if enemies strive to pain you, I strive back.
75. And if they slander you I will give them a drink  
straight from death's cup. No time lost on threats.
76. I was reviled, scorned, cast out,  
and treated as guilty, without a crime,
77. Had my master been another,  
he would have eased my pain and granted me hope.
78. But my master is himself my strangler  
whether I thanked and pleaded or sought to save myself.
79. The cruelty of kin is more biting and strikes  
deeper than a sharp Indian sword.
80. So let me and my deeds be. I'll forever be grateful  
to you even if my tent is all the way on mount Darghad.

81. If God willed, I could've been another:  
Qays ibn Khālid or 'Amr ibn Marthad
82. I would have had all the riches one desires.  
Lords and sons of nobles would have flocked for my favour.
83. I am the quick one, you know well, alert  
like a serpent's darting head.
84. I swore never to part with my double bladed  
Indian sword, forever nestled on my side.
85. No pruning axe, is this sword with which I seek victory.  
It splits with one strike no need for a second.
86. Trustworthy, it doesn't spare a target. If someone cried: "easy,"  
its holder would answer: "too late."
87. When the enemy rush to their arms, you'll find me  
unyielding with that sword in my hand.
88. I startled many a slumbering herd  
when I approached with my naked blade.
89. An old majestic mare passed by, rough and thick,  
the prized property of a withered petulant man.
90. He cried, when she fell, her leg and shank split,  
"Don't you see what calamity you've brought."
91. "Do you see this impetuous drunkard"  
He said to his people "Intent on doing us harm."
92. But he then told them "Let him have what he's taken  
but guard the rest of the herd or he'll keep on killing."
93. And so, the maidens enjoyed the roasted flesh of mother and foal  
and servants continued to serve carved cuts of the prized hump.
94. If I die, mourn me with what I deserve  
and rend your robes in lament O daughter of Ma'bad.
95. Don't turn me into a man whose ambitions are less  
than mine and who could never be me or cast my shadow.
96. Slow to greatness quick to depravity,  
lowly, bullied around by men.
97. If I were a weakling, a leech, I would have feared the enmity  
of all men, the loner and the one with friends.
98. But my valor and daring have driven enemies away  
as did my honesty and my noble name.
99. I swear by your life, I am not one to brood,  
neither my day darkens nor my night extends.
100. Many a times I stood resolute in battle  
to guard the weak and distressed, true to my honor and my name.
101. I stood fast where the bravest fear death,

where shoulders tremble and panic strikes.

102. Many a yellow gambling arrow, I heard crackle in the flame.

My hopes set on it, I entrusted it to a losing hand.

103. I see death the well-spring to which all men

flock, on a day not too distant, and how close today is to that.

104. The days will reveal to you what you know not and news

will come to you from one you least expect.

105. News will come to you from one you didn't furnish

and on a day for which you haven't yet planned.

**Appendix C:** The *Mu'allaqah* of Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā

*The canticle of peace* (originally appears on pp. 172-201)

1. Was there a mute stone at Umm Awfā's home  
in Mutathallam's badlands, and Darrāj?
2. This faded camp of hers in Raqmatayn –  
like tattoos drawn, it conjures a mirage
3. wherein white cows and wild deer do roam  
and hungry calves rise out of camouflage.
4. It's twenty summers since I came here last  
and memory serves me only when I scan
5. the black stones where she hung her cooking pot,  
the tent-gutter not yet obscured by sand.
6. And when I recognize her home, I cry:  
Good day, dear campsite! Well may you remain.
7. Look up, my friend: do you see women there  
borne high on litters over Jurthum's streams?
8. They put Qanān's rough country to the right.  
Qanān! Where many foes and friends have stood.
9. The ladies' howdahs? draped with cloths and veils  
and fringes rosy-red like sappanwood.
10. The women come to Sūbān's Gorge, then pass  
on Qaynī camels sleek and full-bodied.
11. They climb Sūbān and sit up in the saddle  
with coyness like those reared in luxury.
12. The dyed-wool bits they leave behind are like  
some violet nightshade berries still untouched.
13. At dawn they rose and left in early morn,  
plunging into Wādī Rass like hand to mouth.
14. And when they reached the waters brimming blue,  
they struck their tents in place as if to stay:
15. a joy for gentle eyes, a sight to see,  
well worth the heed of those who love beauty.
16. Two men from Ghayz ibn Murrah tried for peace  
after great bloodshed split the tribes in two.
17. I swore upon the Ka 'abah – round which walk  
Quraysh and Jurhum, tribes who built it true –
18. a solemn vow: what fine lords are you two!  
whether the thread by one or two is struck.
19. You've healed 'Abs and Dhubyān after long strife

- and killing-oaths made over Manshim's musk.
20. You said: If we make peace that's broad and firm  
through largesse and fair talks, we live secure.
  21. From then on you were in the best position,  
far from rebellious pride or sin impure,
  22. you two chiefs, highborn stock of father Ma'add –  
who makes a prize of glory will be great.
  23. Then they herded your birthright to this folk:  
purebred young camels, marked by an ear-slit.
  24. Those hundred beasts did heal the tribal wounds,  
making their giver free of any fault.
  25. A redress paid from one tribe to the next,  
not spilling even a cupper's glass of blood.
  26. You! Take this message to the allies and  
Dhubyān: Did you swear every binding vow?
  27. Don't keep from God what lies within your souls  
thinking you'll hide – God knows what's hidden low.
  28. Either it's delayed, written down and stored  
for Judgment Day, or brought out and chastised.
  29. War is all you've ever known and tasted;  
it's not a random tale or vague surmise.
  30. When you cast it from your lands, it's disgraced,  
but when you kindle it, it blazes fire
  31. then grinds you like a millstone on its pad,  
giving birth twice a year to twins of ire
  32. and bearing cursed boys all like Ahmar  
of 'Ād, then gives milk and then weans them off.
  33. War's harvest yields what Iraq's towns do not  
with all their silver and measured foodstuffs.
  34. Tell this to a tribe lodged where they guard  
from harm when dark nights bring trouble and woe.
  35. They're big-hearted – no spiteful man can win,  
nor do they give up outlaws to their foes.
  36. Like camels did they pasture, then came down  
to drink at pools gushing weapons and blood;
  37. they dragged each other to their several deaths,  
then went to graze on dire and noxious weeds.
  38. By my life! what a worthy tribe is this  
that Husayn ibn Damdam did them wrong.
  39. He kept a secret purpose in his heart,  
nor telling them nor setting off headlong,

40. but said, I'll reach my goal, then will fight off  
my foe with a thousand horses at my back.
41. He charged and did not wait to strike the tents  
where Death, the vulture's mother, laid its pack.
42. He's like a well-armed lion, fierce in war  
with lush mane and claws that are never blunt,
43. daring and swift to vengeance when attacked,  
returning hurt wherever it confronts.
44. Yet on your life, their spears did not spill blood  
of Ibn Nahik nor of Muthallam's slain,
45. nor did they share in Nawfal's blood or in  
Wahab's slaughter nor in Muhazzam's ruin.
46. I saw them redress each death with a thousand  
paid in blood wit, and then a thousand more.
47. Who spurns the blunted lance they gave in peace  
must kneel to sharpened blades atop their spears.
48. Who keeps his word is blameless, and who sets  
his heart on grace's comfort should not fear.
49. Who fears the way Death might come – yet it comes  
even if he mounts a stairway to the sky.
50. Who holds back wealth and aid from his own folk,  
will soon find he's dispensed with and reviled.
51. Who always makes others ride upon him  
and doesn't stop doing it, will have regrets.
52. Who fares abroad thinks enemies are friends,  
who values not himself, gets no respect.
53. Who doesn't shield his cistern sees it smashed,  
who hesitates to strike, himself is beat.
54. Who eases not another's heart in life  
is crushed by fangs and trod by camel feet.
55. Who makes goodness a shield will boost his honour,  
who doesn't guard from insult is defamed.
56. I'm tired of life's burdens – who lives to be  
eighty years old, believe me, feels the same.
57. I've seen the Fates stomp like a camel blind:  
whoever they strike dies, who they miss grows old.
58. A man's nature, whatever it may be  
though he thinks he can hide it, will be told.
59. Today and yesterday, I know them well  
but I'm blind for tomorrow and can't behold.

**Appendix D:** The *Mu‘allaqah* of Labīd ibn Rabī‘ah

*The mute immortals* (originally appears on pp. 220-251)

1. Effaced are the abodes, brief encampments and long-settled ones;  
At Mina the wilderness had claimed Mount Ghawl and Mount Rijan.
2. And the torrent channels of Wādī Rayyān, their tracings are laid bare,  
Preserved as surely as inscriptions are preserved in rock.
3. Their grounds are now dung-darkened patches over which, since they were peopled,  
Years have elapsed, the profane and sacred months all passed away.
4. They were watered by the rain the spring stars bring:  
Upon them rained the thunderclouds, downpour and drizzle,
5. And every night-faring cloud, each early morning horizon-darkener,  
And evening cloud with resounding rumble.
6. The ayhuqan thrust up its shoots and on the two sides of the valley  
Gazelles and ostriches have borne their young.
7. Wide-eyed oryx cows, newly-calved, stand above their newborns, motionless,  
While on the plain the yearlings, in clusters, caper.
8. The torrents have exposed the ruins, as if they were  
Writings whose texts pens have inscribed anew
9. Or as if they were tattoo marks that emerge  
As the tattooer re-applies lampblack to patterns needle-pricked on hands.
10. Then I stopped and questioned them, but how do we question  
Mute immortals whose speech is indistinct.
11. Stripped bare where once a tribe had dwelt and then one morn departed;  
The trench around the tents now lay abandoned and the plugs of thumam grass that  
filled the holes.
12. The clanswomen departing stirred your longing when they loaded up their gear,  
Then climbed inside their howdah frames with creaking tents,
13. Each howdah’s wooden frame was shaded by a double woolen carpet  
And covered by fine veil and figured drape.
14. In clusters the women departed, as if the howdahs bore the oryx cows of Tūdiḥ  
And the white does of Wajrah, tenderly inclining over their young.
15. They were urged on, and the mirage dissolved them ‘til they were like  
The windings of the riverbed of Bīshah with its tamarisks and boulders.
16. What then do you remember of Nawār when she has gone away,  
And her bonds, both firm and frayed, are cut asunder?
17. A Murrite woman who alit in Fyad and then dwelt near the people of Hijāz –  
How could you ever hope to meet with her again?
18. To the east of Tayyi’s two mountains she alit or on Muhajjar’s Mount,  
Then the land of Fardah contained her; then its nearby Mount Rijam.

19. Then in Suwā'iq, if she headed toward the Yemen, so that by now  
    She is most likely in Wihāf al-Qahr or in Tilhām.
20. Cut off your love from one whose bond is wavering,  
    For the best binder of affection's bond is he who cuts it.
21. Be generous to him who treats you well, but only the cutting of bonds remains  
    When affection falters and its foundation fails.
22. And depart on a camel-mare jaded by journeys that have reduced her to a remnant,  
    'Til she is emaciate of loins and hump.
23. Even when her flesh has dwindled and she is exhausted  
    And, after great fatigue, her leathern shoe straps are cut through
24. Still she is as nimble in the reins as if she were a rose-hued cloud,  
    Rain-emptied, running with the south wind, sprightly.
25. Or is she like a she-ass, teats milk-swollen, pregnant by a white-bellied stallion  
    That is gaunt from repelling rivals, biting them and kicking.
26. Much scratched and bitten, he leads her up the hump-backed hills,  
    Perplexed by his pregnant mate's recalcitrance and cravings.
27. Above the jagged heights of Thalabūt he scouts the empty lookout posts,  
    Fearful of hunters hid behind the piles of stone.
28. Until, when Jumādā passed and winter's six months of grazing on lush herbage,  
    While avoiding water holes, came to an end,
29. The two mates made a resolution, twisted tight –  
    For the success of resolve lies in firmness – to head for water.
30. Then the dry blades of buhma grass pricked at her pasterns,  
    And the summer wind picked up in passing gusts and fiery blasts.
31. Back and forth the asses tugged a train of stirred-up dust  
    Whose shadows rose like smoke when the tinder is lit,
32. Then fanned by the north wind, then mixed with the 'arfaj tree's green wood,  
    Like the smoke of a mighty blaze with leaping flames
33. Then he kept on and drove her on before him, for it was his custom,  
    When she strayed or lagged behind, to drive her on ahead.
34. He flung her in the direction of the stream  
    And they cut through to a brimming spring growing thick with reeds,
35. Enclosed on all sides by stands of canes  
    That shaded it with fallen stalks and stalks still standing.
36. Is my camel mare like this or is she like the oryx cow, her calf the wild beasts' prey,  
    Who, though the lead cow was her guide, had lagged behind the herd,
37. A snub-nosed cow bereft of calf, who amid the stony tracts between the dunes  
    Does not leave off her roaming and her lowing
38. For a calf half-weaned and white, its limbs torn back and forth  
    By ashen wolves, impatient, hungry
39. They chanced upon it unawares and struck –

- Fate's arrows never miss their mark.
40. She spent the night beneath a cloud that shed an unremitting rain  
And let a ceaseless downpour fall upon the dense-grown dunes.
41. All through the night, whose stars were veiled by clouds,  
Uninterrupted raindrops fell on her spine's track.
42. She took shelter beneath the branches of a contorted tree  
Set apart upon the edges of the dunes whose drift-sands slope
43. And in the first watch of the night her lustrous face  
Gleamed like the diver's pearl, its string drawn forth,
44. Until, when the dark dispelled and dawn shone forth,  
Her hoofs slipped on the early morning's rain-soaked earth.
45. Bewildered, she wandered to and fro among the sandy tracts of 'Ālij  
For seven full nights coupled with their days
46. Until, hope's stores exhausted, and udder, once milk-swollen,  
Neither from suckling nor weaning now gone dry,
47. She heard the buzz of human voices – she could not tell from where –  
That filled her with alarm – for men to her meant death.
48. So she rushed forth, fearing for head and tail  
Dangers from in front and from behind,
49. Until, when the hunters, despairing of their bow and arrow,  
Set on her their rawhide-collared, flop-eared hounds.
50. The hounds overtook her and she returned their charge  
With a horn like a Samharī spear in point and shaft
51. To ward them off – for she knew  
If she did not repel them she would die.
52. 'Fetch' was first to fall, smeared all in blood,  
Then 'Blackie' was left for dead where he had charged.
53. On such a she-camel when the sun's shimmerings dance in full forenoon light,  
And the hillocks don the cloaks of the mirage
54. I attend my own heart's needs, not neglecting them for fear  
That others will think ill of me or rebukers blame me.
55. For did Nawār not know that I am both  
He who ties the knots in ropes and he who cuts them?
56. He who leaves a place that does not please him,  
Unless his own soul's fate overtakes him there?
57. And don't you know how many a night mild in its weather,  
Delightful in its sport and in its revelry,
58. I spent as its convivial, and rushed to many a merchant's banner  
When it was raised and the price of wine was high?
59. I paid a dear price for a well-aged wine, in a darkened wineskin  
Or in a pitch-lined jug, ladled into cups, its seal broken.

60. And many a morning draught of a pure wine and a slave girl with a lute,  
Plucking with her thumb on its taut strings,
61. My first cup I downed before the cock could crow in daybreak,  
To take a second when its sleepers woke.
62. And many a bitter morn of wind and cold I curbed,  
When its reins were in the hand of the north wind,
63. I defended the tribe, my battle gear borne by a winning courser,  
Her reins my sash when I went forth at dawn.
64. Then I mounted a lookout post on a narrow, wind-blown peak  
Whose dust rose to the banners of the foe.
65. Until when daylight dipped its hand into the all-concealing night  
And darkness veiled the crotches of each mountain pass,
66. To the plain I descended and my mare held erect her neck  
Like the date palm's stripped trunk at which the picker's courage fails.
67. I spurred her to a speed fit for the ostrich chase,  
Until when she was heated through and her bones were nimble,
68. Her light leathern saddle slipped, sweat flowed from her neck,  
And her saddle girth was soaked with froth,
69. She coursed, head held high and thrusting in the bridle, racing headlong  
Like a thirsting dove to water when her flock beats urgent wings.
70. And in many a chief's domed tent, where unknown strangers sojourn  
In hope of favor and of displeasure fear,
71. There were men, burly-necked, lionlike, braced for revenge,  
Planting their feet in the ground like the Jinn of Badi.
72. Their false claims I denied, their due rights recognized,  
And no nobleman among them could vaunt his glory over me.
73. And many a gambling-camel, its death I called for  
By the fate-sealing arrows whose shafts look all alike,
74. Summoning the arrows to gamble for a she-camel, barren or with foal,  
Whose meat we will bestow on all whom we have granted refuge.
75. Then for the guest and for the foreign refugee it is as if  
They had descended to Tabalāh Valley, a lowland ever green.
76. Every indigent woman, emaciated, rag-clad, like a starved she-camel  
Hobbled at her master's grave, seeks the refuge of my tents.
77. When winter's winds wail back and forth her orphans plunge  
Into streams of flowing gravy which my clan crowns with meat.
78. When tribal councils gather there is always one of us  
Who contends in grave affairs and shoulders them,
79. A divider of spoils who gives each clan its due,  
Demanding their rights for the worthy, the rights of the worthless refusing.
80. Out of superior virtue, he is munificent and with his bounty succors;

- Openhanded, and yet, a winner and plunderer of all that he desires,  
81. From a clan whose fathers set for them their law –  
    For each tribe has its leader and its law.  
82. Their honor is not sullied, their deeds not without issue,  
    For their judgment is not swayed by passion's flights.  
83. He built for us a high-roofed edifice,  
    To which the tribesmen mount, both youths and full-grown men.  
84. Be then content, O enemy, with what the sovereign allotted you,  
    For virtues were allotted us by him who knows them.  
85. When trust was appointed to the tribes,  
    The apportioner allotted us the greatest share.  
86. They are the first to act when the tribe is stricken;  
    In war, its horsemen; in disputes, its arbiters.  
87. They are a springtime to those that seek refuge  
    And to indigent women, their food stores exhausted, when the year stretches long.  
88. They form a band so tight that none of them impedes it out of envy,  
    Nor, out of treachery, leans toward the foe.

**Appendix E:** The *Mu'allaqah* of 'Amr ibn Kulthūm

*Boast and questions of freedom* (originally appears on pp. 266-293)

1. Get on up with your bowl, girl! Bring a drink  
and don't spare us from Andarīnā's wines,
2. sparkling wines, as if dyed with saffron pale  
when they're mixed, our largesse can't be confined!
3. It turns the lovestruck man from his lust  
after he's drunk, then back to calm constraint.
4. See the pinchfist? When the cup passes by  
he quickly holds his riches in disdain.
5. The Fates will surely take us by surprise –  
they've been foretold for us, and we for them.
6. Lady. Stop a while before you leave  
so you and I can tell the truth in sum
7. about a vile day of blows and thrusts  
that cooled your cousin's eyes – they say they've won.
8. Stop, lady, and we'll ask if you dropped by  
only to leave again or hurt a friend.
9. She'll show you – if you find her secretly  
And while she's safe from peeking, hateful foes –
10. arms like a long-necked, snowy camel cow  
that fed in sandy tracts and fields of stone
11. and two soft breasts, white like an ivory bowl  
kept safeguarded from any wandering hands
12. and two thighs with a body smooth and long,  
her rump toiling beneath a weight so grand.
13. My youth! I reminisced with longing when  
I saw her camels driven here by night
14. and when I saw Yamāma'sh towns appear  
shining like blades held by men off to fight.
15. My grief's worse than a camel cow who's lost  
her calf, so she returns back crying doomed,
16. or a widow, grey-haired, whose terrible luck  
has left nine sons, not one of them untombed.
17. That's fate – today, tomorrow, and thereafter  
are pledged to destinies we do not know.
18. Father of Hind, don't rush it! Give us time  
and we will tell you that it's truly so –
19. how we hoist up white banners to the fray

- then bring them back all crimson-soaked with blood;
20. we'll tell of glory days splendid and long  
when we defied the king and wouldn't budge.
21. We'll talk of many tribal chiefs who're crowned  
with glory's crown, guarding all those who seek –
22. we killed those chiefs, their horses left nearby  
with one hoof bent, the reins looped on their necks.
23. The dogs of the tribe snarled at us, and yet  
we stripped our rival's weapons off like thorns.
24. When we turn the mill of war onto a clan,  
in that encounter they are crushed like bones.
25. That millstone's cushion reaches east of Salmā  
and all of Qudā 'ah makes the grain it grinds:
26. it's true, loathing upon loathing is spread  
against you, showing us your hidden blights.
27. We claim this glory, as father Ma'ad knows,  
and guard it with our spears till all behold.
28. If tent-poles of the tribe are fallen in  
on furnishings, we shelter their abode.
29. Longtime we've fought their rivals back and back  
and bear them all the burdens that they load.
30. When foes stand far away, we launch our spears;  
and when they get up close, we strike with swords.
31. By tawny spears from Khatt, supple and long  
or white, refulgent sabers lifted high –
32. with these we split the heads of warriors true  
and slit their necks just like grass with a scythe.
33. You might think that the heroes' skulls were just  
a camel's freight that's cast upon the rocks;
34. we hack their heads off without mercy and  
they can't tell how to deal with our attacks.
35. It's like our swords, flashing between us all,  
were ribbons tossed about in child's play,
36. or like our clothes and theirs had all been smeared  
and dyed with purple pigment on that day.
37. When they grow all afraid to charge the foe  
because they shrink from what might come to pass,
38. we dig in like Mount Rahwah, razor-keen,  
and march out to the front in awful mass
39. with boys who think it best to die in war  
and greybeards battle-hardened long ago:

40. a match for all the hosts of men together,  
wagering all their sons against our own.
41. Upon the day we worry they shall die,  
we charge and strike, our loins all girt with steel,
42. but on the day we do not fear for them,  
our legions meet in council to appeal,
43. led by the chiefs of Jusham ibn Bakr  
with whom we march all over, rough or flat.
44. On what account, 'Amr ibn Hind,  
should we be slaves to your little king-brats?
45. On what account, 'Amr ibn Hind,  
do you feed us to blamers and throw shade?
46. Threaten us and frighten us – but wait!  
Since when were we your mother's serving maids?
47. Mark well: before your time, our spears refused  
to ease their cruelty on our rushing foes;
48. our spears, which when they're bit by other blades,  
shove back just like a stubborn camel does.
49. A stiff camel! When bent, the spear snaps back  
and clank it strikes the straightener's neck and head.
50. Have you been told that Jusham ibn Bakr  
fell short in ancient battles or had fled?
51. We claim the pride of 'Alqamah ibn Sayf  
whose courage won us glory's manor hall,
52. and I, Muhalhil's heir and better still:  
Zuhayr, a treasure cherished here by all.
53. I claim 'Attāb and Kulthūm both together  
by whom we gained the noblemen's bequest,
54. and Dhū l-Burah whose story you've been told,  
in whom we and all refugees find rest,
55. and Bold Kulayb before him, one of us –  
what glory is there that we didn't take?
56. When we twist up our rivals like a camel,  
we either break the knot or snap the neck.
57. We shall be found the firmest in our duty  
and truest to the vow that has been made,
58. and we who, the day war-fires burned Khazāz,  
helped our tribe more than the others did
59. and we, who helped by keeping to Dhū Arātā  
till all our milch-herds had to eat dry shoots,
60. and we, who justly rule obedient folk,

- and we, who justly punish when they revolt,  
61. and we, who cast aside what roils us,  
and we, who take the pleasant things we find.  
62. We held the right flank in the mighty clash,  
while on the left our brothers stood combined.  
63. Fiercely those brothers fought the foes who came,  
and no less so did we our rivals meet.  
64. Our brothers brought back spoils and captives too  
and we led kings with chains around their feet.  
65. So watch out, Banū Bakr! Take your guard –  
haven't you figured out yet who we are?  
66. Do you not know that both your troops and ours  
did thrust their swords and shoot bolts in the air?  
67. Helmets we wore, and shields of camel skin  
Yemenī-made, and blades both curved and straight  
68. and all manner of glossy coats of mail  
puckered with dimpled folds above the waist  
69. which, if those champions took them off one day  
would show their rusty skin as if from wear,  
70. like the shimmering coats of mail were a pond  
rippled by zephyrs blowing here and there  
71. Our crop-haired steeds do march on frightful days:  
we've known them since the time that they were won,  
72. bestowed upon us by our fathers true  
and which we'll give, when we die, to our sons.  
73. Now, all the tribes of Ma'add surely know  
when we pitched camp down in the valley-flats  
74. that we are guardians in the famine years  
and benefactors to all those who ask,  
75. and that we stop those who attack near us  
whenever blades of steel do quit their sheaths.  
76. We are their staunch defenders when we can  
and cruel slayers whenever we're besieged!  
77. We drink the purest water, even as  
the others always gulp the murky moss!  
78. Go ask Banū al-Tammāh and Du'mī too  
about our case: What do you think of us?  
79. You came our way and stayed with us as guests.  
Swiftly we met you, lest you put us down.  
80. Well we received you just before the dawn  
and greet you with a giant grinding stone –

81. that millstone's cushion reaches east of Najd  
and all of Qudā 'ah makes the grain to press!
82. Fair noble ladies follow us in war,  
them do we shield from insult or duress,
83. litter-borne maids from Jusham ibn Bakr  
who finely mix good breeding and good deeds.
84. They and their husbands struck a solemn vow  
that if those ladies met with signal squads
85. they'd plunder coats of mail and polished blades  
and captives clapped together with a chain.
86. When those ladies go out, they go with calm  
and strolling in their walk like drunken men.
87. They feed our horses but say, You are not  
our husbands if you don't keep us from harm!
88. If we defend them not, then let us die!  
nor let us remain after they are gone.
89. Nothing will guard them like cutting our foes  
with cuts that send forearms flying like dolls.
90. Though kings are cruel to their own nation-folk  
we won't let cruelty slip between our walls.
91. Let no one act the fool on us or else  
we'll top those foolish folk in all their folly.
92. The world and all therein belong to us and  
when we storm, we storm with awful fury,
93. like tyrants though we haven't yet oppressed,  
but soon we'll start to drive with rods and whips.
94. We filled the sea until it held no more  
then filled it up some more, with all our ships.

**Appendix F:** The *Mu‘allaqah* of ‘Antarah ibn Shaddād

*Love and war* (originally appears on pp. 302-342)

1. Now, have the poets left a rip unsewn?  
    And did you see her old haunts, overgrown?
2. Oh tell me, ‘Ablah’s home! here in Jiwā’;  
    good day, peace and good will to ‘Ablah's home.
3. Right there I propped my camel like a fort  
    and scratched the itch to pause before I roam.
4. One time, ‘Ablah had settled in Jiwā’  
    and we in Hazn, Sammān, Mutathallam.
5. Long live you scars of sand, left long ago;  
    vacant after ‘Ablah, Mother of Haytham.
6. She joined our foes, who stun with lion’s roar;  
    hunting you is hard now, Makhram’s daughter.
7. By chance, I loved her while I killed her kin,  
    no idle boast – I swear – from all the slaughter
8. You’ve settled in my heart (make no mistake)  
    where loved and honored folk can settle in.
9. But can we find you in ‘Unayzatayn  
    when we’re far off in Ghaylam for the spring?
10. When you resolved to leave, it must have been  
    when they packed up the mounts, in dark of night.
11. One thing upset me: pack camels distressed  
    and crunching prickly poppy near the site,
12. and milch-cows two and forty, black as all  
    a raven’s hidden, ancillary plumes.
13. She cages you at once with ivory teeth,  
    sweet to the kiss, a pleasure to consume,
14. She wafts her scent, a merchant’s balmy musk  
    that reaches you before her smiling gaze
15. or virgin fields that rainfall coaxes forth;  
    the land is sparsely dinged and hardly grazed,
16. where weeping clouds have kissed it all with drops  
    and silver coinlike pools that flash and gleam
17. deluging and decanting every night,  
    the water runs in one unbroken stream.
18. Look here: a fly sits singing endlessly,  
    squeaking like a drunk who wails in tune
19. and scratching leg on leg – out comes its chirp!

- a one-armed man bent over the flintstone.
20. She spends her days and nights on cushioned pads;  
and I, atop a black and bridled beast,
21. a saddle for my pillow, on a steed  
with stout legs, rounded flanks and thickened waist.
22. I never should have made it on this cow  
from Shadan: a camel cursed, its milk is gone.
23. The night's march left it twitchy-tailed and strutting,  
feet like hammers smashing sand and stone,
24. as if tonight I'm grinding hillocks with  
a dock-eared ostrich, feet drawn up and close,
25. and which the chicks will flock to, like a herd  
of Yemen's camels chasing a garbled voice.
26. They chase the ostrich's head, draped like a berth  
that lies upon a tented bier above;
27. slight-skulled, it turns around to Dhul 'Ushayrah  
looking like a lop-eared, fur-decked slave.
28. My camel cow drank up at Duhrudān  
then made a mad-eyed sprint from Daylam's wells,
29. as if twisting to flee a beast at night  
whose trace is there, whose grumble swells and swells:
30. a tomcat at the flank! each time my mount  
turns with rage, this feline bares tooth and claw.
31. The trip left my camel with strong-built back,  
raised up on props, like tent-pitchers would draw
32. then my camel knelt at Ridā's waters, groaning  
as if kneeling on deep, husky reed flutes;
33. and sweat syrupy thick, like molten pitch  
that's used by smiths to heat the sides of pots,
34. flows down its neck – this riding cow, born free,  
highstepping, big as a bite-scarred stud.
35. Ablah, if you unveil to me, what then?  
I'm good at crushing armored knights in blood.
36. Admire me for what you know of me  
I'm easy when I suffer no abuse,
37. but if I'm wronged, then what I give is harsh,  
like vine-of-Sodom's sharp and bitter juice.
38. How often did I drink wine in the heat  
that seared into the coins I'd spent for draft,
39. from a tawny glass handpainted with lines,  
paired with a jug that's sealed and on my left.

40. And when I drink, well, I recklessly spend  
my substance and give my honor unasked;
41. then when I'm sober, I still don't hold back  
my gifts, as you know from my noble cast.
42. How many good husbands did I lay flat,  
blood shrieking like a harelip's hissing jaw;
43. my hands raced on with supple spearhead-thrust,  
then sap-red fountains from the gaping maw
44. Why don't you, Mālik's daughter, ask the horsemen  
about matters that you can scarcely know?
45. How I can stay atop a burly beast  
swimming through knights who charge him blow by blow;
46. now I open my horse to spear-thrusts, now  
it harvests a crop of countless cuts.
47. Those who saw the thing will tell you how  
I rush into the fray and flee from loot.
48. How many bristling foes shunned by all warriors,  
nor quick to flee nor apt to yield in fear,
49. have my hands blessed with lunges quick and light  
from a well-tempered, tall and strong-backed spear,
50. as I land two-edged gashes with a thud  
that in the night makes hungry wolves advance.
51. I split both mail and frock with my great pike —  
even the best are not safe from my lance! —
52. then leave him carrion for beasts to dine,  
all of him, from his head down to his wrists.
53. And tight-linked armor did I rip with sword  
from off the standard bearer in their midst.
54. He was lavish! Deft hands at dice in winter,  
he wrecked the pub's supply and closed the inn.
55. When he saw me come down to take his life,  
he flashed his teeth — only not in a grin.
56. I rammed him with my lance, then overtook  
him with a shiny, keen-edged Indian blade;
57. midday I saw him caked with blood, as if  
his head and hands with indigo were stained.
58. A born hero, like a Meru tree in clothes;  
reared strong in leather boots, an only boy.
59. O fawn, why can't I hunt you, but they can?  
I wished to God that I could chase this doe.
60. I sent my handmaid to her: Go and find

- what news of her, then tell me. Don't you wait!
61. She said: I saw the foes were off their guard  
and the fawn's there to have if you shoot straight,
62. then turned like a snub-nosed gazelle would turn,  
with spotted lip, offering its tender throat.
63. I was warned: 'Amr didn't care for my gifts,  
which carelessness can sink a giver's heart.
64. Well did I keep my uncle's words at morn  
as his lips curled back from clear white teeth,
65. grimacing in pangs of death, which true heroes  
do not deplore except with muffled breath.
66. My battlemates pressed me into the pikes:  
though trapped, I held on fast and didn't run.
67. When in the battle's dust I heard the cry  
of Murra go up; and Rabī'a's sons
68. with Muhallim they strove below their banner,  
while death itself stood near Muhallim's flag,
69. I knew that meeting them would bring a clash  
so strong, it could drive a bird from her eggs.
70. When I saw the nemesis charge en mass  
and goad each other, flawlessly I pressed.
71. 'Antarah! they taunted, with taut spears  
like pulley-ropes dug into my stallion's chest.
72. And on and on I charged the steed at them,  
withers and throat, till all in blood was dyed.
73. My horse pulled back from lances at its front  
and whimpering, it protested and cried;
74. had it the gift of gab, it would complain,  
and could it speak at all, would vex my ears.
75. Baying, the horses dove into the earth,  
whether long-bodied stallions or giant mares;
76. my soul was sick and cursed, but all was healed  
when my comrades cried out, Go 'Antarah!
77. My camels all submit. Wherever I go,  
there goes my heart, alive with anima.
78. I'd hate to die before the Wheel of Death  
has ground these boys of Damdam into rot,
79. who mocked my honor when I hadn't theirs  
and craved my blood before we'd even fought.
80. And if they act? Well, I left their father dead,  
a dinner for hyenas lame and stout!

**Appendix G:** The *Mu‘allaqah* of Al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥillizah

*From the records of victory* (originally appears on pp. 354-381)

1. Asmā’ called out: Now, soon I will depart!  
How many lodgers bored me with their stay
2. after Asmā’ had left from Shammā’s dunes  
and then at Khalṣā’, near her hideaway,
3. then at Muhayyāt, then Ṣifāḥ, then the heights  
of Dhūl-Fitāq and ‘Adhib, then Wafā’,
4. the gardens of Qatā, and then the vales  
of Shurbub and Shu‘batān and Ablā’.
5. I see no more the girl I dwelt with there.  
I madly weep, but that brings only shame.
6. Before your eyes, Hind lit the fire at night  
and then the highlands coaxed it to a flame;
7. she kindled it near ‘Aqīq and Shakhṣān,  
bright as the noonday sun, with aloeswood.
8. I saw it from far off in old Khazāz,  
but how distant its warmth from where you stood!
9. When sorrow comes, and swift escape makes off  
with camp dwellers – in those times I rely
10. on a quick camel, tall like an ostrich  
who mothers her chicks in the desert dry;
11. an ostrich, frightened by a hunter’s step,  
past mid-afternoon as the night draws near.
12. You see back where this bird has stepped and strode –  
a dustcloud, little sand-specks there and here,
13. and footprints, then more footprints falling close  
that soon the wasteland all but hides from view.
14. On this cow, I romp in the noonday heat  
while others, care-worn, are like blind camels too.
15. News came about Arāqim’s tribe, and what  
we heard troubled us, causing worry and grief:
16. our brothers Arāqim have gone too far,  
harassing us and offering no relief,
17. confusing guilty and guiltless in our ranks –  
as if innocence helps us not a bit!
18. They claim that those who drive the wild asses  
are clients to us, and we their respite.
19. Arāqim planned by night, and with the dawn

- they rose and filled the air with cries and yells,  
20. some calling, some responding, all mixed in  
with neighing horses and foaming camels.  
21. Hey big mouth! You who spin your web of lies  
to 'Amr—you think these fibs will last a day?  
22. Do not suppose your smears will stick to us!  
You're not the first to slander in this way.  
23. We're here despite the hatreds that we faced,  
upheld by noble birth and strength unswayed.  
24. Times past, our frantic shouts have daubed the eyes  
of people blind with envy, scorn, and pride.  
25. Fate batters us, as if stoning a black  
mountain, its peak with clouds disguised,  
26. shored up against misfortune, not reduced  
by destiny's unceasing hammer thuds.  
27. Whatever ill designs you have, commit  
them to us, and let tribal councils judge.  
28. If you search Milhah and Sāqib where we fought,  
you'll find the dead, avenged and unavenged;  
29. or probe deep—which people take pains to do—  
then you'll find sickness, while we're on the mend.  
30. But if you quit your slander, then we'll be  
just like a man who shuts his mote-filled eyes.  
31. If you refuse our questions, who can then  
claim to be higher than us, high as the sky?  
32. Don't you know of days when people were sacked  
and raided, every quarter filled with screams?  
33. It was then we drove our camels from Bahrayn  
till they were stopped at the seawater's foam.  
34. then swerved upon Tamīm until the month  
of truce, with Murr's daughters to serve us well.  
35. The mighty stayed no more in smooth terrain  
nor did escape give profit to the frail,  
36. nor could it rescue those who fled in fright  
to seek the mountain head or rocky tract.  
37. We reigned till Mundhir ibn Mā' al-Samā'  
returned as king to rule and take it back.  
38. He, the lord who saw the battle day  
of Hiyārayn, that true and awful test;  
39. he, a king and the bravest mortal—there  
is none like him who'd hope to the best.

40. So stop this folly and aggression now!  
Your blindness has in it a kind of plague.
41. Recall the oath at Dhūl-Majāz! and how  
we made a promise there and struck a pledge,
42. against betrayal and hostility –  
can whims alone rub out what's in the scrolls?
43. Know well! that you and we, touching the terms  
made on the day of truce, are both equal.
44. Are Kindah's misdeeds on us if they raid  
your cattle? And then must we pay the fine?
45. Or Hanīfah's crimes? Or what the famine years  
have done to make Muhārib flee decline?
46. Or Banū 'Atīq's sins? For those who broke  
the truce, their wars are not on our account.
47. Or 'Ibād's trespasses – are they on us  
like burdens on the backs of camel mounts?
48. Or Qudā'ah's offenses, when there is  
no mark against us for their many scandals?
49. These sword-hacked soldiers are not ours, nor still  
is Qays nor al-Haddā ', nor yet is Jandal.
50. Is Iyād's crime on us? as once was said  
to Tism, "Your tribe-brother's a rebel now"?
51. False conflict! Oppression! Just like gazelles  
slaughtered instead of sheep, to make a vow.
52. Eighty men from Tamīm – who in their hands  
had spears with points that held a fate much worse –
53. did not leave Banū Rizāh in the wilds  
of Nitā ' with so much as breath to curse.
54. They hacked them all to pieces, then returned  
with spoils enough to mute the drivers' cries;
55. and then came for their own camels again,  
but neither black nor white camels would ride,
56. so the men left from there with shattered backs  
and no water could cool their raging chase.
57. Then came a band of horseman with Ghallāq  
riding against you, without mercy or grace.
58. Each Taghlabī they slew, his blood was left  
unpunished, while his death was seen by Ruin.
59. Just like the pains brought on by Mundhir's blitz –  
are they like saying, "Are we shepherds to Hind's son?"
60. When he pitched Maysūn's tent in al'Alāt,

- and 'Awsā' was the nearest home of theirs,  
61. the poor and pinched of every tribe came out  
to him, like eagles flapping in the air.  
62. He gave them dates and water – Allah's law  
prevails, and gathers wretches with their like.  
63. When in conceit you wished they'd come to blows,  
and cocky pride did drive them out to strike,  
64. then no surprise they fell upon you there,  
while in mirage and morn-light they did hang.  
65. You spiteful man! Lying on us to 'Amr –  
will you ever stop this phony harangue?  
66. A just king, 'Amr, best of all who walk  
on earth – his virtues outstrip any praise;  
67. of Iram's stock, he's famed among the jinn,  
and even all his rivals stand amazed!  
68. Three times he's seen the signs of our good deeds,  
and every time the proof did speak for us.  
69. One of these signs was east in Shaqīqa  
when every tribe came bearing its colors  
70. round Qays, all armor-clad and with a chief  
of Karaz and a white stone of renown,  
71. and a band of noble champions who are stopped  
only by thrusts that pierce down to the bone.  
72. We struck their brows so hard, the gore flowed out  
like water spurting from a drinking-skin.  
73. We drove them to the boulders of Thahlān,  
all in a heap and with gushing thigh-veins,  
74. and did God knows what to them, all without  
recompense for the blood of those destroyed.  
75. Then we fought Hujr, son of Umm Qatām,  
with his Persian phalanx in green arrayed,  
76. a lion in the fight, tawny and sly,  
yet kind as the spring rain in years of lack.  
77. We loosed the shackles from Imru' al-Qays  
after long years of bondage and attack,  
78. and forced the lord of Ghassān to repay  
for Mundhir's sake, when boundless blood was shed,  
79. and with nine princes we did ransom them,  
noble princes whose costly spoils were had.  
80. And with Jawn from the tribe of Banū Aws,  
came soldiers swooping in like eagles' flight.

81. We didn't flinch under the dust-cloud when  
they turned, as fires of war waxed hot and bright.
82. 'Amr, son of Umm Anās, is like our son  
or near-kinsmen after the wedding meal;
83. such kinship must bring fealty from the tribe,  
and vast meadows of favour and goodwill.

**Appendix H:** The *Mu'allaqah* of al-A'shā al-Qaysī

*A lesson in insight* (originally appears on pp. 396-421)

1. The caravan is departing, and man,  
    if you can bear it, bid Hurayrah farewell.
2. Her face glows, her hair flows, and her smile glints.  
    She walks in grace, a gazelle tiptoeing over soft soil.
3. To her neighbour's she walks like a cloud  
    floating, neither heavy nor rushed.
4. You can hear her bracelets tinkle when she retreats  
    like the wind rustling through acacia beads.
5. She is not one her neighbours avoid.  
    You will find her aloof not eager for their chatter.
6. She rises to meet them listless,  
    if she didn't push herself, she'd be held back.
7. She spends an hour with a friend, but soon tires and returns,  
    her full hips and behind quivering.
8. Her shoulders wide, her waist not even there.  
    When this beauty walks towards you you'd think she might break in two.
9. Nothing is sweeter than to lie with her on a cloudy morning,  
    a pleasure not for the uncouth.
10. Her hips round and her arms slender,  
    she treads softly as if on heels of thorns.
11. The scent of musk trails her when she rises,  
    the air of roses and lilies, from her sleeves, overflows.
12. No garden lush and verdant on a difficult hillside,  
    quenched by heavy relentless rain,
13. where the sun flirts with bright bobbing blossoms  
    wrapped in cloaks of green,
14. is ever more fragrant or overwhelming in beauty  
    than she in the early evening light.
15. I fell for her and she for a man other than me  
    and for yet another woman that man fell.
16. And still another whom he didn't want, fell for him,  
    and she, that other, had a cousin mad in love for her.
17. And yet another, whom I didn't fancy, fell for me  
    and thus all tangled up in love we all wasted and pined.
18. Each longing for another, delirious and stricken  
    approaching and retreating, confounding and crazed.
19. Hurayrah shunned me without a word.

- Oblivious, that Umm Khulayd, of the promises she had made.
20. Didn't she see me, an old dim-sighted man,  
    afflicted by treacherous Fate and by Time, the senile and precarious.
  21. When I came visiting, Hurayra said:  
    "woe to you and woe to me because of you"
  22. If you see me barefoot, that's the way it is.  
    One day in shoes and one day without.
  23. I steal by the master of the house, unaware.  
    No matter how wary he may be, I'll catch him off guard
  24. One day I might lead youth by its horns and it will follow.  
    My companion will be a handsome hot-blooded flirt.
  25. Many a time, I set out to the tavern at daybreak,  
    followed by a sharp shrewd swift skewering meat handler,
  26. in a crew of men like Indian swords who know well that,  
    shoed or shoeless, we will all perish.
  27. We kick back sharing sweet words and a tangy wine  
    that flowed from a moist clay jug.
  28. After a round or two it overwhelms them  
    and they only come to ask for more.
  29. A Saqi, agile and quick, serves it,  
    running back and forth with his shirt tucked in.
  30. And when the singing girl, lounging, sings a tune,  
    you'd think the 'ud speaking to the Persian harp.
  31. How many a beauty trailing her silk gown  
    and many a girl lifting the heavy wine flask on her curvy hips
  32. have I enjoyed in the midst of all this  
    and the more one indulges, the more pleasure and love.
  33. And many a barren land like the back of a shield  
    where only the jinn hum in its desolate corners.
  34. Only the persistent and unrushed dare venture  
    on its treacherous terrain in the heat.
  35. Yet, I have crossed it on a travel-worn, gaunt,  
    and swift mare whose well-parted elbows easily show.
  36. Do you see that cloud I've been tracking,  
    as if the lightning lines its edges with flaming sparks?
  37. It looms with more clouds rising behind it.  
    Its dense center stretches, enveloped by the unceasing downpour.
  38. I spotted it and nothing could distract me  
    neither occupation nor pleasure in a cup.
  39. So I said to my drunk companions in Durna:  
    "Track it with me. Look!" And what can the drunk see?

40. They said there over Numār, then Khal, it has drenched them both.  
Then Asjadiyyah and Ablā' then Rijal.
41. It rose over the slopes of Khanzīr then its Burqa  
then pushed on over Watr and Hubal,
42. Until it overwhelmed with water the grouse gardens  
and the lush slopes of Ghīnah beyond their fill.
43. It continued to target these abodes with its waters,  
until it drove the cattle and the herds out.
44. To Yazīd of Banī Shaybān, this word:  
Stop eating your heart out Abū Thubayt!
45. Stop taking jabs at our noble roots  
that nothing can mar as long as burdened mounts moan.
46. You egg Mas 'ud's kin and brothers against us.  
When we meet, you throw a spark and retreat.
47. You are like a mountain goat butting against a rock to split it:  
the rock unharmed, yet the horn cracked.
48. I know you well and know that  
when war blazes nothing can be hoped from you but forsaking.
49. You feed the rage of Dhi al-Jaddayn's sons our spears but  
when you have to face them you withdraw.
50. No don't retreat when you have fed this fire.  
You will soon be pleading and seeking refuge from its scorch.
51. Ask the sons of Asad of us, for they know well  
that you will soon receive wondrous news of our deeds.
52. And ask the tribes of Qushayr, Abdullah and Rabi'ah, all.  
Let them tell you what we can do.
53. No matter how mighty and impetuous,  
will fight them when the day comes and crush them.
54. There were among the people of Kahf  
When they fought and the Jāshiriyyah arbiters and contenders.
55. By the life of the one to whom  
camels plod and horned butting cattle are led,
56. if you were to kill a chief who didn't stand in your way,  
we'll kill one of yours, his equal.
57. When you are afflicted by us on the battle day,  
you'll find that we are not ones to turn away from the tribe's blood right.
58. You will not desist and nothing but  
a stabbing onslaught will stay the transgressor's hand.
59. Until the chief of your tribe collapses  
and lies only protected by failing bereft women,
60. struck by an Indian sword that got him

- or by a Khattian spear straight and supple.
61. You claimed that we wouldn't fight you Lo!  
We are for the likes of you killers.
62. We are the riders at high noon on the day of al-'Ayn,  
near Futaymah, no wavering, no turning back.
63. If you mount for the battle, that is what we do  
and if you say on foot, then we are the ones to dismount.
64. We will stab a chief in the hollow of his thigh  
and a champion's blood, unavenged, on our spears will spill.

**Appendix I:** The *Mu'allaqah* of al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī

*Plea of the accused* (originally appears on pp. 434-455)

1. O abode of Mayyah on rise and slope!  
    It lies abandoned, And so long a time has passed it by!
2. I stopped there in the evening to question it;  
    It could not answer, for in the vernal camp no one remained –
3. Nothing but tethering pegs that I made out only slowly  
    And the tent trench, like a trough newly dug in the hard ground.
4. A slave-girl had repaired the caved-in sides  
    Packing down the moist dirt with her hoe.
5. She cleared the blocked drain channel  
    Until it reached the tent's two curtains and the piled-up gear.
6. By evening, the abode lay empty, by evening, its people had packed up and left;  
    Time overtook it as it overtook Lubad.
7. Turn away from what you see, for there is no returning to it  
    And raise the saddle-rods on the back of a she-camel, like an onager, sturdy and brisk,
8. Piled high with compact flesh, with teeth that creak  
    Like a pulley when the rope runs through it.
9. At high noon, when we passed by al-Jalīl, where the panic grass grows,  
    It seemed as if my saddle were mounted on a lone and cautious bull
10. From the oryx of Wajrah, with black-spotted legs, as though painted,  
    And a belly slender and gleaming like a sword polisher's matchless blade.
11. At night in the rising of Orion a rain cloud overtook him,  
    And over him the north wind drove freezing hail.
12. The voice of the hunter calling his hounds alarmed him,  
    So he stood awake through the night, beset by fear and bitter cold.
13. When the hunter set his hounds on him,  
    The bull kicked violently with sharp-hoofed, hard-sinewed feet.
14. 'Slim', when the hunter sicced him on the bull,  
    Lunged like a brave warrior thrusting his spear.
15. Then the bull pierced the hound beneath the shoulder with his horn,  
    And drove it through, like a farrier lancing a camel's abscessed leg.
16. The horn protruding from the dog's side  
    Looked like a meat-skewer that drinkers forgot on the fire.
17. The dog kept chewing at the horn's protruding tip, contracted in pain  
    And biting at the hard, blood-blackened, unbent horn.
18. When 'Shredder' saw his comrade killed on the spot,  
    And no means of bloodwite or revenge,
19. The dog said to himself: I have lost my taste for meat:

- My friend is dead; the hunt is over.
20. This she-camel conveys me to Nu‘mān,  
Whose beneficence to mankind, both kin and stranger, is unsurpassed .
21. I see no one among the people who resembles him —  
And I make no exception from among the tribes —
22. Except for Solomon, when Allah said to him:  
Take charge of my creatures and restrain them from sin.
23. And subdue the Jinn, for I have allowed them  
To build you the palace of Tadmur With stone slabs and marble columns.
24. So, whoever obeys you, reward his obedience  
In due measure and guide him on righteousness’ path.
25. And whoever defies you, chastise him with a chastisement  
That will deter the evildoer — but do not harbour rancour,
26. Except toward him who is your equal or whom you outstrip  
Only as a winning steed outstrips the runner-up.
27. I see no one more generous in bestowing a gift,  
Followed by more gifts and sweeter, ungrudgingly given. He is:
28. The giver of a hundred bulky she-camels,  
Fattened on the Sa‘dān leaves of Tūdiḥ, with thick and matted fur,
29. And white camels with wide-set legs, already broken in,  
On which fine new Hiran saddles have been strapped,
30. And slave girls kicking up the trains of trailing mantles,  
Like desert gazelles pampered by cool shade in midday heat.
31. And steeds that gallop briskly in their reins  
Like a flock of birds fleeing a cloudburst of hall.
32. Be discerning in your judgment like the keen-eyed girl of the tribe:  
When she looked at a flock of doves hastening to drink at a drying puddle.
33. As they flew between two mountain-sides she followed them with eyes,  
Not red, inflamed, or lined with kohl, but clear as glass.
34. She said: If only we had these doves  
And half again their number together with our single dove!
35. So they counted and found them as she had counted  
Ninety-nine, no more, no less.
36. Together with her dove that made a hundred —  
She had counted them quickly to precisely that number.
37. No — I swear by the life of Him whose Ka‘ba I have stroked  
And by the blood I have spilled on stone altars,
38. And by the Protector of the birds who seek refuge in the sanctuary,  
Unharmd by the riders of Mecca between the spring of Ghayl and Sa ‘ad thicket —
39. I never said an evil word of those reported to you!  
If I did, let my hand wither till I cannot raise my whip!

40. It was nothing but the calumny of enemies, for which I suffered;  
    Their lies were like a stab that pierced my liver.
41. I was told Abū Qabūs has threatened me –  
    And no one can withstand the lion when it roars.
42. Don't rush to judge me! May all the tribes be your ransom,  
    And all my increase both of herds and progeny!
43. Don't throw at me the full weight of your unequaled might,  
    Even though my foes should rally to support you.
44. Not even the Euphrates, when the winds blow over it,  
    'Til its waves cast up foam on its two banks,
45. And every wadi pours rushing into it, overflowing and tumultuous,  
    Sweeping down heaps of thorny carob bush and broken boughs,
46. And the terrified sailor clings to the rudder,  
    Weak from exhaustion and soaked in sweat,
47. Not even the Euphrates is more generous than he is in bestowing gifts,  
    Nor does a gift today preclude a gift tomorrow.
48. This is my praise: I hope that it sounds good to you,  
    But – May you never be cursed – I have alluded to no recompense.
49. For it is an apology: If it has done no good,  
    Its author has at last run out of luck.

**Appendix J:** The *Mu‘allaqah* of ‘Abīd ibn al-Abras

*Meditations of life* (originally appears on pp. 472-489)

1. Malhūb is empty of its people.  
    Al-Qutabiyyāt, too, and al-Dhanūb
2. and Rākis, and Thu‘aylibāt  
    and Dhāt Firqayn and al-Qalīb
3. and ‘Ardah, and the back of Mount Hibirr  
    where not a single one of them remains,
4. their places taken by wild beasts,  
    their land unmade by what has come to pass,
5. a land bequeathed unto destruction  
    and pillaged of the folk who dwelt there
6. and were slain, or otherwise died out.  
    To live to show grey hair is a disgrace,
7. you, whose eyes drip with tears  
    like a water-skin whose seams are
8. coming apart, or like a rushing freshet  
    coursing in a gully down a hill,
9. or like the brook that branches from the wadi  
    whose bed is roiled by the surge,
10. or like the fleet canal that parts the shadow  
    of the canopy of a palmy grove.
11. But these are kids’ games. How can you play?  
    How, when you are menaced by gray hair?
12. For lands to be abandoned is nothing new,  
    nor cause for wonder,
13. any more than if the valley empties of its people  
    whenever drought and famine grip the land.
14. Whoever enjoys bounty is stripped of it.  
    Whoever holds out hope is sore deceived.
15. Whoever possesses capital bequeaths it.  
    Whoever gloats on spoils is despoiled.
16. Whoever makes a journey might yet come back from it,  
    but for the dead there is no coming back.
17. Are the childless like those with children?  
    Is one who takes the prize like one who fails?
18. The one who asks of people meets rejection.  
    The one who asks of God is never failed.
19. All good that is attained is due to God.

- The claim that some is thanks to others is messed up.
20. God is one without associate.  
From him, who knows all, no heart hides.
21. Live by what you will.  
Weakness does not preclude success. A man of expertise can still be duped.
22. A man who cannot learn from fate cannot be taught by people,  
not even if they take him by the scruff.
23. What are hearts but inborn tempers?  
How many hate their former friends?
24. Lend a hand in any land while you sojourn there.  
Never say: "But I am alien to this place."
25. In favour of alliance with a stranger from afar,  
nearby relations are sometimes severed.
26. And as long as a man may live, he is in denial.  
Long life is punishment.
27. I do remember fear along the paths I beat  
through arid waste to stagnant waters
28. with pigeon feathers at their rims,  
where fear of drinking set the heart aflutter.
29. Onward from them in the morning,  
my companion was a stout trotter.
30. Her backbone nice and smooth, her withers like a dune,  
my camel was the wild ass's equal.
31. Her tooth of seven years had been supplanted.  
She was no four-year-old, nor an aged mare,
32. but like a pied wild ass at the head of his herd  
with the battle scars to prove it,
33. or like the oryx bull who crops the flowers  
combed by the North Wind, so was my camel.
34. That was ages ago. In memory,  
I also see myself atop a horse, a swift mare long-bodied
35. without defect in her structure,  
her forelock parted by her face.
36. Smooth as oil she ran, with slackened neck veins  
a lithe one with a supple frame,
37. coasting like an eagle on the hunt, into whose nest  
the prey lands heart downward.
38. High upon a landmark, the eagle roosts in open sky,  
her vigil like a wizened mourner's,
39. until the frosty dawn comes  
and ice crystals flake from her feathers.

40. Then, across the barren waste,  
    she spots a speedy fox.
41. She shakes her limbs  
    and feathers before her launch.
42. The fox hears, and jerks his tail, overcome  
    with fear as of a wolf.
43. She launches at speed,  
    and aims for him along a gliding path.
44. The fox shrinks low and out of view,  
    eyes to the sky with the white part showing.
45. She flips the fox and lays him out below her  
    and makes him feel the anguish of the prey.
46. In her grip, the prey goes limp.  
    She hurls it down for rocky ground to gash it.
47. She bears it up again.  
    Aloft, she gives the fox a twist and drops it.
48. The fox cries! The eagle's claws are in his side.  
    There is no escape. His chest is punctured.