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Towards a Historical Semantic of the Bedouin, Seventh to Fifteenth Centuries: A Survey

Abstract: Arabic literature is exceptionally rich in references to the Bedouin component of society. The main terms used by Arabic authors to refer to the Bedouin and their ways of life reveal the significant approach to nomadism in the Near East and Arabic North Africa and expose specific concepts which changed over time. Arabic terminology, in our reading, does not support a sharp and categorical dichotomy between sedentary and Bedouin ways of life, although distinctions based on socially mediated normative contexts appear marked, and Bedouin may thus appear simply as a social category, so that their actual way of life may fade into insignificance. What we suggest is to explore the extent to which the category “Bedouin” is applied in different cultural and conceptual contexts. Various historical attitudes may be distinguished approximately, not only on the basis of the terms applied, but also in light of the semantic features determining their application. Whereas in the early Islamic period, Bedouin tribal groups (*aʿrāb*) not allied with the emerging Muslim community of Medina were regarded with contempt, particularly with respect to their political role, they gained – and to some extent preserved previous – prominence in the classical period as representatives of the linguistic and cultural Arab heritage. This position was undermined, almost parallel to the critical appraisal by Ibn Khaldūn, when a general attitude of urban-inspired distrust and exotic fantasy towards the Bedouin gained ground. This development was accompanied, and sometimes overshadowed, by the continuous ambivalence of the figure of the Bedouin, not only expressed in terms of ubiquitous stereotypes, but also reflecting specific experiences in various realms of the relationship between Bedouin and non-Bedouin Arab society.

Keywords: Bedouin, nomads, mobile pastoralism, Arabian steppe, *ʿarab*, *aʿrāb*, *badw* (*badū*), *ʿurbān*, cultural history of the Bedouin, Arab language, Ibn Khaldūn, Arab identity.

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Introduction

A multitude of specific terms are used in relation to the Bedouin component of Arab societies: the terms derived from the root *b-d-w*, such as *ahl al-bādiya*, the people of the steppe and related terms, as well as the terms used for the steppe, *bādiya*, pl. *bawādī*, and its variants such as *badw*. These notions are also sometimes used to refer to nomads or nomadic ways of life generally. Related to the early Islamic, respectively pre-Islamic and classical periods, we find the use of the terms *ma'add* and *a'rāb*. Particularly in medieval times, the general term for Arabs, *'arab*, alongside *'urbān*, gain importance, and we observe the appearance of the simplified term *badw* (= *badū*). These terms signify individuals or groups living as Bedouin or in close contact with them. The common English term “Bedouin” is taken from the plural, *badawīyyīn*, of the Arabic *badawī*, a nominal form used as both an adjective and a noun that means “belonging to the *badw* (i.e., the person of the steppe)”. Arabic literature is exceptionally rich in references to the Bedouin component of society and reflects the persistent presence of the Bedouin as historical agents and a subject of discourse.¹ The many terms employed to refer to the Bedouin are not necessarily – and not even regularly – neutral and factual; rather, they reflect and conceptualize them: they establish contexts, reveal particular perspectives, display assessments and may express concepts that categorize the Bedouin systematically and diachronically. Because such concepts are, ultimately, related to configurations of power and discourse, one may ask how much they echo the status and reputation of the historical Bedouin and how they indirectly reflect their activity and impact.

Over the centuries, a variety of concepts have been used. They focus on major aspects of the Bedouin way of life, such as mobility and political autonomy, or particular cultural features, such as language, manners and attitudes. In the following, we intend to relate specific terms to concepts. One must keep in mind that this can only be done approximately and, as such, concepts cannot be equated with specific notions, but usually bundle together several terms or expressions related to each other by their reference to certain facts and circumstances.²

1 This article elaborates on a previous version (“Nomadische Lebensformen und ihre Wahrnehmung im Spiegel der arabischen Terminologie”, *Die Welt des Orients* 34 [2004]: 72–104). My thanks to the co-editors of this special section of *Der Islam*, Kurt Franz and Johann Büssow, for their suggestions.

2 Reinhart KOSELLECK, “Einleitung,” in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, 1:XXIII, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004.

The following appraisal is meant to explicate the terminological coordinates that determine the categorization of the Bedouin. Evidence, of course, is much richer, more detailed and complex than can be discussed in this survey. References to nomadic ways of life may also reflect regionally variant forms of mobile pastoralism and thus draw attention to the factual and descriptive dimension of the evidence studied here. North Africa and the area around the Fertile Crescent, for example, appear to be distinct with respect to the range and extent of Bedouin mobility and its interrelation with settled peoples. More generally, many expressions and statements concerning the Bedouin in cultural and political contexts seek to appreciate or, in contrast, to depreciate the Bedouin. As their use is informed by historical perspectives and interests, they are likely to be related to common attitudes and affected by historical circumstance. When seen in the *longue durée*, it is evident that the presentation of the Bedouin as epitomizing common Arab values and features during the Classical period becomes less obvious in later medieval times. However, the significance of the Bedouin has survived till today and, in some aspects, has even seen a cultural revival.³

The Bedouin Component and the Semantics of Distinction

We propose here that Arabic terminology does not support a sharp and categorical dichotomy between sedentary and Bedouin ways of life. Rather, it reflects close contact, interaction and interdependency, transitions and intersection between Bedouin and non-Bedouin Arabs. This can be verified by reference to the oldest layers of Arabic prose available and echoes the fluidity of historical livelihood patterns,⁴ specifically the rural-Bedouin spatial and social continuum. More notably, we suggest that there is evidence of a conceptual framework that deliberately avoids rigid divisions, but does not ignore differences and particularities. It reflects intersecting cultural identities established long ago and

3 Dawn CHATTY, "The Persistence of Bedouin Identity and Increasing Political Self-Representation in Lebanon and Syria," in: *Reshaping Tribal Identities in the Contemporary Arab World: Politics, (Self-)Representation, and the Construction of Bedouin History*, ed. Laila Prager (*Nomadic Peoples* 18/2 [2014]), 16–33.

4 Robert G. HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, London: Routledge, 2001, 101–102.

is thus a precedent for the view recognized in modern research for the past few decades.⁵

Delineations of cultural and political differences between Bedouins and others are prevalent, of course, but they have to be seen in the light and under the umbrella of an approach that essentially emphasizes commonalities: the Bedouin constitute an intrinsic component of Arab society and history. It should not puzzle the observer that, on the one hand, Bedouin-related terms often fail to make a clear distinction with respect to economy and material circumstances or to make allowances for a mix of circumstances, and, on the other, that distinctions based on socially mediated normative contexts appear marked. If these distinctions become dominant, the Bedouin emerge simply as a social category, so that their actual way of life may fade into insignificance. What we have to acknowledge is the extent to which the category “Bedouin” arises from the cultural and conceptual context in which it is used.

Our semantic approach takes into account the fact that the reference function of a linguistic sign may pertain to different objects or sets of objects. It denotes the object through its meaning,⁶ which is constituted by means of a set of features. These must refer not only to the individual object denoted by a specific term, but also to the set of objects to which the term refers. So it is the semantic features that determine the use of a linguistic sign that are the purpose of this study, as they represent the term denoting that class of objects.⁷ This approach may help us to resolve a fundamental difficulty: Arabic has so many terms relating to individual aspects of Bedouin life that it would be virtually impossible to survey all of them. When concentrating on lexemes that refer to Bedouin, or to aspects of Bedouin life, as a whole (which occur in more easily surveyed numbers), one has to consider the variety of conceptual meanings that need to be deduced from their semantic features.

5 Emanuel MARX, “Nomads and Cities. The Development of a Conception,” in: *Shifts and Drifts in Nomad-Sedentary Relations*, ed. Stefan Leder and Bernhard Streck, Wiesbaden: Reichert 2005, 3–16. For a short review of the research introducing this perspective see also the preface by Stefan Leder and Bernhard Streck; further references are given below, footnote 18.

6 See Edmond HUSSERL, *Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. 2, parts I–II, in: *Collected Letters*, vols. 3–4, ed. Elisabeth Ströker, Hamburg: Meiner, 1992, I:54. For the famous semantic triangle: meaning – linguistic sign – object denoted, see Charles K. OGDEN and Ivor A. RICHARDS, *The Meaning of Meaning* [1923], ed. and intro. W. Terrence Gordon, London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1994, 16.

7 See the illustration of the relationship between linguistic signs, subject areas and semantic features in Herbert E. BREKLE, *Semantik*, Munich: Fink, 1972, 30–36, based on Charles W. MORRIS’ *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, Chicago, 1938.

Since this is a complicating factor even within one language, it is easy to see that conceptual equivalence between unrelated languages is rare and even more complicated. It is not surprising, therefore, that Arabic, as a language that reflects mobile pastoralism, displays references and conceptual associations in its terms for nomads and nomadic ways of life that are at variance with the Western conceptual apparatus.

Our observations in this chapter are based on medieval Arabic lexicography and findings both in geographical and historical literature and in juridical and exegetical writing. There are also peripheral references to medieval *Adab* literature and poetry. Modern Arabic writing on nomads or Bedouins is not considered here, as the terminology it uses is suspected of already having been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by European concepts, thereby making it difficult to gain a view of the earlier contextual and conceptual meanings unaffected by such interference. An example of this is given by WAŞFĪ ZAKARIYYĀ (1889–1964), a Syrian agricultural engineer, who was active for many years in the border areas of the steppe and who wrote a remarkable book on the Bedouin tribes of Syria: he repeatedly uses the Western-inspired neologism “semi-nomads” (*nişf ruḥḥal*) to distinguish between sheep- and goat-breeding nomads and camel herders and expands this term by using a colloquial expression (*‘urbān al-dīra*) that can be roughly translated as “Bedouins of the (local) grazing area”.⁸

The application of Arabic terms changes over time, which suggests a change in perception. In the whole of the period documented, these terms reveal a contrast, both actual and constructed, between Bedouin and settled ways of life, based on a variety of assumptions and still traceable up to the present day.

This terminological distinction follows in part from consideration of the characteristics of mobile pastoralism compared with settled forms of life. These elements are not, however, in themselves sufficient to explain the application of corresponding terms. Rather, it is the assignment of distinctive features, customs, abilities and attitudes that plays a greater role in determining the terms used. These factors remain significant today. Although modern technology has extensively supplanted the traditional way of life, in particular the animal husbandry of Arab mobile pastoralists, it is possible for Bedouins who have adopted settled ways to retain their Bedouin identity.⁹ In modern Saudi Arabia, the term *badū* can also denote socially distinctive features unrelated to mobile pastoralism, giving

⁸ Aḥmad WAŞFĪ ZAKARIYYĀ, *Ashā’ir al-Shām*, 2 vols., 2nd ed., Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1403/1983, 119.

⁹ Ricardo BOCCO, “La notion de *Dirah* chez les tribus bédouines en Jordanie: Le cas des Bani Sakhr,” in: *Terroirs et sociétés au Maghreb et au Moyen Orient*, ed. Byron Cannon, Lyon: Maison de l’Orient, 1987, 195–215.

prominence to the common reference to specific norms and social behaviors.¹⁰ By the same token, “Bedouin” (*badū*) can become a term of exclusion from the prestige-driven lifestyle values of urban-oriented “modern” society.¹¹

Similarly, it can be observed for the entire period under study (seventh to fifteenth centuries) that identification of self or others by the application of appropriate terms may convey prestige-driven meanings in various ways. Arabic terminology reflects an ambivalent evaluation of the Bedouin, which results, on the one hand, from the close connection, at least up to the twelfth century, between aspects of high culture, such as philology or geography, and the language, poetry and values of the Bedouin, and, on the other, from the difference between the worlds inhabited by the Bedouin and the settled population and the partially divergent nature of their political interests. The otherness of Bedouin life, often considered inferior to the lifestyle and legal order of urban and state-organized societies, and the military potential of nomadic groups, frequently dominant in a regional context and representing a way of supplementing their income from pastoralism, were familiar phenomena up to the first half of the twentieth century.¹²

Nomadic Ways of Life and the Bedouin of the *bādiya*

The polarized nature of the evaluation context referred to above fails to make clear that the exchange of goods and services closely bound nomadic pastoralism with the agriculture, crafts and trade of settled communities, as well as with state authorities. The traditional dichotomy between nomadic and settled peoples is a rather abstract notion, far removed from actual circumstances, which are often shaped by hybrid ways of living and the interaction between them. One difficulty in determining what ‘Bedouin’ denotes in general is the fact that, in reality, mobile and settled ways of life cannot always be as sharply differentiated as the conceptual distinction suggests. Derivative terms, such as “semi”- or “part-nomad” are of no help. It is better to make distinctions based on the type, degree and function of mobility.¹³

¹⁰ Madawi AL-RASHEED, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1997, 119–120.

¹¹ According to Helga UNGER-HEITSCH’s analysis of the conditions in northern Jordan at the end of the 1980s in UNGER-HEITSCH, *Kontinuität und Wandel im Widerstreit: Kognitive Dissonanzen und ihre Verarbeitung in zwei Beduinendörfern Jordaniens*, Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1995, 155–163.

¹² Jibrail S. JABBUR, *The Bedouins and the Desert: Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East*, tr. Lawrence I. Conrad, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 3–9.

¹³ Compare Günther SCHLEE, art. “Nomadismus,” in: *Das Afrika-Lexikon: Ein Kontinent in 1000 Stichworten*, ed. Jacob E. Mabe et al., Wuppertal: Hammer, 2001, 456.

Nomadism is generally defined as a sort of mobility that is mostly seasonal and cyclical, shapes life-style and involves groups, usually families. Mobility provides the fundamentals of life through extensive pastoralism and other means of livelihood. Pluralism of resources is so widespread that it can be regarded as essential. Characteristically for our context, these other sources include plunder and tribute.¹⁴ Nomadic ways of life can be seen as a cultural type¹⁵ that is differentiated from other mobile ways of life by specific features such as, for example, type of dwelling. According to a number of objective criteria, nomads differ from settled peoples in material and socio-political aspects, as well as through their perception of self and of strangers; at the same time, various types of interaction bind them closely with settled living.

The characteristics of mobility stated above are intended to distinguish between nomads and those who lead similar ways of life, such as mobile individuals or itinerant workers or scholars. The extent of nomadic roaming, in terms of distance and time, varies greatly and is therefore not of primary significance in defining the concept.

The above characterization of the nomadic economic system represents an extension of the concept of pastoralism, via the Greek *ποιμός* “pasture”, etc. Anthropological research has long adopted this extended use of the term “nomad” to include non-pastoral mobile forms of subsistence.¹⁶ One advantage of this extension in meaning is that it can include other nomadic groups that exist near to and alongside mobile pastoralists but who, to a significant extent, also rely for their livelihood on other sources, such as trade.¹⁷ Nevertheless, in the context of medieval Arabic terms and concepts, animal rearing, especially camel rearing, is seen as one of the distinctive features of the nomadic way of life.

Interaction with settled peoples only recently came to be acknowledged as an essential component of nomadic life, but this is in accord with the historical perception examined here. That said, it remains open to question whether

14 Andrew BELL-FIALKOFF, “Nomads and Their Origins,” in: *idem* (ed.), *The Role of Migration in the History of the Eurasian Steppe: Sedentary Civilization vs. “Barbarian” and Nomad*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, 181–182.

15 Compare Fred SCHOLZ, *Nomadismus: Theorie und Wandel einer sozio-ökologischen Kulturweise*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995, 20, 23.

16 See Aparna RAO, *The Other Nomads: Peripatetic Minorities in Cross-cultural Perspective*, Cologne: Böhlau, 1987, 2–10; Anton ESCHER and Frank MEYER, “‘Wir waren wie Nomaden ...’: Mobilität und Flexibilität, die Basis der Existenzsicherung von ‘Nawar’ in der Arabischen Republik Syrien,” in: *Räumliche Mobilität und Existenzsicherung: Fred Scholz for his 60th Birthday*, ed. Jörg Janzen, Berlin: Reimer, 1999, 201–224.

17 See William and Fidelity LANCASTER, art. “Şulayb,” in *EP*, 9:814–815; JABBUR, *Bedouins*, 325–356.

nomad contact with settled communities is driven by economic necessity because nomads, contrary to previous widely-held beliefs, are not subsistence but rather specialist farmers;¹⁸ or whether contact is shaped by intentions to form political relationships;¹⁹ or whether coalitions between villagers and Bedouin tribal groups are due to specific circumstance.²⁰ In any case, the basic nature of this facet of the nomadic life suggests that ways of life that entail complete isolation or continuous separation from settled groups, as may be the case, for example, with hunter gatherers, are excluded from this definition of the term “nomadic”. This perspective may also affect the evaluation of the role of Bedouin agency in historical events.²¹

In addition to socio-economic factors, certain practices, values and norms play a decisive role in characterizing nomadism. As previously mentioned, the Arabic terms used to describe Bedouins clearly support this point of view. Nomads are grouped on the basis of territorial, as well as political and social, coordinates. There are statements about farming practices and rural ways of life, but they remain closely associated with the features of a cultural boundary between settled and non-settled peoples.

Numerous derivatives of the Arabic root *b-d-w* are linked with aspects of nomadic ways of life. Both the classical linguistic usage and the basic underlying meaning of this root indicate a territorial association. Even in one of the earliest examples of Arabic lexicography, the *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, attributed to Khalil b. Aḥmad (d. after 175/791), *al-badw* and *al-bādiya* are interpreted as the antonyms of *al-ḥaḍar* und *al-ḥāḍira*.²² These two expressions contrast land on which no long-term settlements exist with regions containing fixed settlements. “Those belonging to settled land (*ahl al-ḥāḍira*) live in or near (*wa-l-ḥaḍra: qurb al-shayʿ*)”²³ to cities (*amṣār*) and villages”; on the other hand, *al-bādiya* signifies a tract of

18 Anatoly M. KHAZANOV, *Nomads and the Outside World*, tr. Julia Crookenden, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, XXXI, 16, 82; Emmanuel MARX, “Are There Pastoral Nomads in the Arab Middle East?” in: *The Anthropology of Tribal and Peasant Pastoral Societies: The Dialectics of Social Cohesion and Fragmentation ...*, ed. Ugo Fabietti and Philip Carl Salzman, Como: Ibis, 1996, 104–105.

19 William and Fidelity LANCASTER, “Desert Devices: The Pastoral System of the Rwala Bedu,” in: *The World of Pastoralism: Herding Systems in Comparative Perspective*, ed. John C. Galaty and Douglas L. Johnsen, New York: Guilford Press, 1990, 177, 185, 190–191.

20 Jihād AL-MUḤAYSIN, *al-Qabila waʿl-dawla fī sharq al-Urdunn fī ʿahd al-imāra (1921–1946)*, Amman: Manshūrāt al-Bank al-Ahli al-Urdunni, 2003, 33–39.

21 Kurt FRANZ, “The Bedouin in History or Bedouin History?” *Nomadic Peoples* 15/1 (2011): 13.

22 Khalil b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, ed. Mahdī al-Makhzūmī and Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʿī, 7 vols., Bagdad: Dār al-Rashīd, 1982–1984, 3:101–102.

23 *Ibid.*, 102: *kuntu bi-ḥaḍrat al-dār*.

land “on which no settlement area (*al-ḥaḍar*), that is, no long-term inhabited settlement, exists”.²⁴ The contrast with settled land is characteristic of non-settled tracts of land, i.e., *bādiya* (pl. *bawādī*), situated far from human dwellings.

One of the properties of these tracts of land is that they contain usable pasture. The verb *badā*, whose original meaning is ‘to step forward, to come to light’, is also used to denote a sojourn in, or a move out into, the steppe.²⁵ The important thing here is that it is the removal from the region of fixed settlements into the steppe that sets up the contact between the settled zone and the steppe. Moreover, the movement appears to be deliberate, as the reason for staying in the steppe is usually to exploit the resources there. “When [people] leave the settled area (*al-ḥaḍar*) for the pastures (*al-marāʿi*) and desert (*al-ṣaḥrāʿ*)”, we say: *badaw*”, i.e., they go out into the region denoted as *al-badw* or *al-bādiya*.²⁶ The defining feature of the steppe, therefore, is land with remote pastures and no fixed settlements.

The connection between the meaning of the verb *badā* and the derived term *bādiya*, denoting steppe, is explained by the open, exposed character of the steppe (*li-burūzihā wa-ḡuhūrihā*);²⁷ waterless, uncultivated barren land (*barriyya*) is called *bādiya* because it is lying there, exposed.²⁸ This explanation seems quite convenient, as it would correspond to the idea of “open land”, “open plain”, as the steppe is sometimes described. Similarly, the adjective “open” would then be also understood in a geographical sense as relating to the nature of the surface of the land, but this, for Khalil b. Aḥmad is not specific enough.²⁹ We may therefore propose that the term was originally used metaphorically, in an attempt to provide an etymological explanation, and thus was designed to distinguish the *culturally* “open” from the “covered”, with its fixed settlements and all its attendant legal and political phenomena. This contrast between steppe and settled land, which for lexicographers is based first and foremost on the types of dwelling, gives authors in various branches of literature the opportunity to compare Bedouin and settled ways of life from numerous cultural perspectives.

²⁴ *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, 7:83 (s.v. *badā*). See Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1312), *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 15 vols., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d., 14:67, who quotes al-Layth (b. al-Muẓaffar), the editor of *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* (see Fuat SEZGIN, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 7: *Lexikographie*, Leiden: 1982, 52, 159).

²⁵ “*Qad badawat lahu idhā ḡaharat*”: Ibn Sida (d. 458/1066), *al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamid Aḥmad Yūsuf al-Hindāwī, 8 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005, 6: 414; *idem*, vol. 7, 343: “*wa-badā al-qawm badāʿan kharajū ilā al-bādiya*”.

²⁶ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 14:67.

²⁷ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 14:67, col. 2, ll. 8–9.

²⁸ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 14:67, col. 2, ll. 9–10.

²⁹ *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, 3:102. The author refers to the fact that this term would also be applied to other tracts of land in addition to those labeled *bādiya*.

For geographers the distinction between steppe and settled land is less sharply drawn. For example, Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 362/973) describes the remote, arid regions of the Arab steppe (*mafāwiz al-bādiya*) by comparing them with others: “(There one finds) grazing lands and tribes of [Bedouin] Arabs, cities, villages ... and (all these regions), almost without exception, lie in an area occupied by some tribe (of people) or other roaming them in search of pasture”.³⁰ Ibn Ḥawqal, therefore, sees *bādiya* as generally meaning “arid zones” and as the geographical area used for grazing by the nomads. Similarly, al-Muqaddasī (d. after 380/990) uses the term to mean the steppe, which is predominantly, though not exclusively, used by nomadic tribes for grazing: “Steppe, which has water [courses], contains pools and wells, springs and hills, few mountains, many [Bedouin] Arabs, which is hard to penetrate,³¹ has fresh air and foul tasting water”.³² The steppe is, therefore, not without inhabitants, as the concept of “pasture” certainly implies; the term *bādiya* implies a Bedouin population. This confirms the spatial proximity of settled and nomadic peoples, at least on a temporary basis, as is the case in many Arab steppe regions around the Fertile Crescent.³³ Although steppe is indeed seen as the opposite of settled land, it is primarily territory used by Bedouin, and in that sense may be seen, as Ibn Ḥawqal suggests, as an area that does comprise fixed settlements.

The Bedouin of the *ḥāḍira*

This view accords with the way lexicographers describe going out into remote regions of the steppe, seeing it as a form of mobility, which does not result in the permanent or entire separation of those exploiting the resources of the steppe by their way of life from settled peoples, as the territories of steppe and settled land are closely connected. Ibn Manẓūr writes in his dictionary *Lisān al-‘arab*:

The people who move into the steppe (*al-bādiya*)³⁴ remain at their [summer] resting places (*maḥādir*) as soon as the grass (of the pastures) withers, preferred forage plants become scarce and the rainwater in the pools dwindles away. Thus, they remain there (*lā yazālūna*

³⁰ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, ed. Jan Hendrik Kramers, 2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 1938, 401.

³¹ *Mukḥifāt al-subul, khafīyyat al-ṭuruq*.

³² The reference here is to the steppe lands of northern Arabia and southern Syria, *bādiyat al-‘arab*; al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma‘rifat al-aqālīm*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje, Leiden: Brill, 1877, 248.

³³ Michael B. ROWTON, “Enclosed Nomadism,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17 (1974): 1–30.

³⁴ Used here in the plural form (in addition to *bādūna*) of the nomen agentis *bādin*; see also William LANE, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:171, 3.

ḥāḍīratan) and drink from water sources, which do not dry up during the year (*al-mā' al-'idd*), until the pasture grass (*rabi'*) forms on the ground, in autumn or winter. Then they scatter in search of suitable pastures (*nuj'a*). In so doing, they follow the rains, lead their animals to grass and forage pastures ..., drink collected rainwater (*kara'*) and continue their constant (mobile) search for pasture until the grassland withers (*yahiju*) and the pools dry up the next year. Then they return to their (summer) resting places next to the water sources, which do not dry up during the entire year.³⁵

Nevertheless, a contrast is drawn between “people who move into the steppe” and those remaining in the settlements. The poet Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. after ca. 49/661) uses a *merism* when speaking about “all” as village dwellers and Bedouins (*ahl al-qurā wa-bawādī al-a'rāb*).³⁶

Seasonal migration, which means alternating between staying in fixed encampments and wandering through the steppe, may result in a temporary spatial proximity between nomads and settled peoples, but the term for nomads remaining (in the summer camp) (*al-ḥāḍīra*) is in any case also linked conceptually with the practice of living in settlements, as the term used for permanently settled people has the same root. The lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr writes:

The term for people moving into the steppe (*al-bāḍiya*) contrasts with the term for people staying in summer encampments or on, or close to, settled land (*al-ḥāḍīra*). The latter are people who halt by the waters (*yaḥḍurūna*) and settle (*yanzilūna*) by them in the heat of the summer; when it cools they move on (*za'anū*) from the region of plentiful water into the steppe (*badaw*) in search of (regions) close to grass pastures. These then are such people who dwell in the steppe after they have lived on settled land.³⁷

This contrastive juxtaposition of different terms for the same group is probably due to the pleasure taken by the lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr in linking antonyms. The use of these terms is, however, also attested by a man who was equally familiar with nomads and scholars. Ibn Manẓūr refers here to Abū Manẓūr al-Azharī (d. 379/980),³⁸ who, as he writes in the foreword to his work, had been forced to live with Bedouins for a time.³⁹ In fact, his lexicon shows itself in several places to be a rich source of descriptions of nomadic living conditions.

³⁵ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, 7:347 (s.v. *naja'a*).

³⁶ *Bawādī* is here the plural of (the present participle) *bāḍiya*; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 2 vols., Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, n.d. [ca. 1980], 1071 (“The Battle of al-Khandaq”).

³⁷ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, 14:67 (s.v. *badā*).

³⁸ al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-luḡha*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn and Muḥammad 'Alī al-Najjār, 15 vols., Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma, 1384–1387/1964–1967, 4:199.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:7. See Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifat al-adīb [Mu'jam al-udabā']*, ed. David Samuel Margoliouth, 7 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1907–1926, 6:299.

Al-Azharī uses the term *al-ḥāḍira* both for those who settle in cities or populated regions, and for the nomads returning to their summer encampments after their seasonal wanderings.⁴⁰ The terminological contiguity between life in the summer encampments and permanently populated zones risks weakening the distinction between nomadic and settled ways of life, something that al-Azharī himself feels. He therefore introduces, in the same passage, the term *ḥāḍir* for settled people, in order to make a clear distinction between the ways of life:

Whoever lives by water that does not dry up during the year and does not give up this way of life in either summer or winter is settled (*ḥāḍir*). [This includes people], whether they dwell in villages, rural areas or permanent houses, or pitch tents (*al-akhbiya*) at [i.e. near to] water sources and lead their livestock onto the surrounding pasture.⁴¹

He makes a distinction between this settled or, as a result of restricted mobility, partly nomadic way of life, and the Bedouins (*al-a'rāb*, see below), who make only temporary stops at year-round water sources. This distinction is a fair reflection of the norms and conditions determining identity in the tenth-century Middle East. We shall find this concept again, in fourteenth century North Africa, in Ibn Khaldūn, whose work is based on the nomadic lives of camel herders and their perception of themselves as a distinct group. It remains a valid observation, however, that, in the term *ḥāḍira*, lexicographers closely connect people exploiting the resources of the steppe with those inhabiting populated areas.

The exploitation of pasture through mobility and seasonal rotation between grazing areas is a persistent feature of nomadic practice. Naturally, different types of nomadic mobility may be portrayed in different circumstances and through the particular perspectives of authors. For example, in his description of the wilderness steppe of the southern Sahara, al-Idrīsī (d. ca. 560/1165) emphasizes the attachment of cyclic nomadic wandering to specific grazing areas:

In these areas there are mobile population groups (*aqwām rahḥāla*), which roam about from one end to the other, leading their livestock to pasture. They know no permanent stay in one place and no shelter (*muqām*) on the earth, instead spending their existence (*yaqfa'una dahrahum*) constantly roaming back and forth (*fī al-riḥla wa'l-intiqāl*), without crossing the bounds [of their grazing area] or leaving their territory.⁴²

⁴⁰ al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughā*, 4:199, l. 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² al-Idrīsī, *Description de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne* [*Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*], ed. and tr. Reinhart P. A. Dozy and Michael Jan de Goeje, Leiden: Brill, 1866, 33 (2nd clime, pt. 2). See also the description of the basic features of Bedouin life in Erich BRÄUNLICH, *Bisṭām Ibn Qais: Ein vorislamischer Beduinenfürst und Held*, Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1923, 8–9.

Nomadic mobility in general is designed to exploit natural resources through extensive pastoralism; its radius, or its extent in terms of distance and time, together with the social forms it takes, depend on local factors. But authors' perspectives may also affect the way the behaviors of nomadic groups are portrayed. The emphasis placed by al-Idrīsī on their territorial ties should therefore not lead to the assumption that they never, or rarely, come near populated areas; rather, he sees this as characteristic of their way of life, in that they form a closed group "having nothing to do with others [i.e., settled peoples?], and also not trusting those who live close by, instead remaining always on guard and concerning themselves only with their own affairs".⁴³

Nomadic roaming is frequently denoted by the verb *za'ana* ('to migrate, to journey')⁴⁴ and is an important indicator of a nomadic way of life: "Whoever resides in the steppe or lives close to its nomadic inhabitants (*jāwara al-bādīna*), moves with them (*za'ana*) and seeks out specific regions of pasture, belongs to the nomadic Arabs (*a'rāb*, see below)".⁴⁵ Nouns formed from the root *z-ʿ-n* are predominantly linked to the camel, such as *za'ūn*, pack camel, *za'īna*, "women's (hauling) litter" for the camel and "woman" in general in the Bedouin context, so that the use of terms from this word group to refer to migration and those migrating is linked to the idea that camels are the means of transport. As a rule, therefore, these terms point to a nomadic type of mobility. More neutral terms for mobility, also frequently used, are derived from the verb *raḥala*, "to set out, to break camp".

The augmentative verbal adjective *raḥḥāl* (pl. *ruḥḥal*, *raḥḥāla*) is similarly sometimes used to denote nomadic groups,⁴⁶ also being combined by Ibn Khaldūn with a term derived from *za'ana*;⁴⁷ however, the word is often used to denote the widely travelled, indeed restlessly itinerant scholars, who constantly roamed the land in search of highly venerated traditions in very distant locations

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See above, quotation, note 32.

⁴⁵ al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-luġha*, 2:360–361 ('*arab*).

⁴⁶ For example, in the case of al-Idrīsī, see above; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'Ibar ...*, vol. 1: *al-Muqaddima*, pt. 2, ed. Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ, Tunis: al-Qayrawān lil-Nashr, 2007, 469: *wa-akthar al-umam al-badawīyya al-raḥḥāla*.

⁴⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'Ibar ...*, vol. 1: *al-Muqaddima*, pt. 1, ed. Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ and Iḥsān 'Abbās, Tunis: al-Qayrawān lil-Nashr, 2006, 112 (al-iqlīm al-thālīth): They (the Turkish peoples) are nomads, camel, sheep, cattle, and horse herders (*wa-hum zawā'inu raḥḥāla ahl ibl wa-shāt wa-baqar wa-khayl*). *Zawā'in* is the plural of *zā'in*, 'migrating, nomadic'; see also the verses of Shabīb b. Yazīd b. al-Nu'mān: *ṭaribtu wa-hājatnī 'l-ḥumūlu 'l-zawā'inu / wa-fi 'l-za'ni tashwiqun li-man huwa qāṭinun*; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 5 vols., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d., 1:220.

and who shaped the face of Islamic centers of learning for centuries.⁴⁸ Thus, Arab scholars insisted on a terminological distinction between nomadic mobility, predominantly linked to the camel, and other forms despite some degree of overlap.

Variants of Nomadic Pastoralism and the Bedouin-Rural Continuum

Given the variable nature of nomadic mobility in terms of the forms it takes, and the periods of time and distances it involves, the question arises as to whether different forms of nomadic ways of life were perceived differently. Mention has already been made of the distinction drawn by al-Azharī between seasonally migrating, camel-herding nomads and dwellers in fixed tents who grazed their livestock across more restricted areas. The way of life of nomads driving herds of sheep and goats, known predominantly as *shāwiya*,⁴⁹ is rarely reported. However, a significant distinction in terms of the socio-economic description of nomadic conditions is given in the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406). His famous study of the economic, social and cultural foundations of the historical development of civilization contains a section on the “people” (*jil*) of the Bedouin Arabs (*al-‘arab*), in which he points out that their way of life and farming practices should be viewed as determined by natural conditions and ways of making a living. Ibn Khaldūn also uses the term *‘arab* to denote Arab nomadic camel herders as a special group within the broader category of nomad peoples. Taking this comprehensive approach, he distinguishes between various types of nomadism and sees nomads as related to other peoples who use primitive fixed dwellings. He thus expands the view of nomadic economy based on pastoralism, emphasizing the role of farming and, particularly in the case of nomadic camel herders, raiding:

We have already said that the people of the steppe (*ahl al-badw*) hold on to earning their livelihood by natural means (*muntaḥilūn lil-ma‘āsh al-ṭabī‘ī*) through cultivation (*al-falḥ*) and herding (*al-qiyām ‘alā al-an‘ām*), limit their food, clothing, dwellings and other necessities of life and culture to the bare essentials and abstain from everything that is not a primary or secondary requirement, making their dwellings out of goat or camel hair, branches and

⁴⁸ E.g. see Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*, 8 vols., Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsi, 1350/1931–1351/1932: *al-Ḥāfiẓ al-raḥḥāl* (Abū Quraysh Muḥammad b. Jum‘a, year 313), *al-Muḥaddith al-raḥḥāl* (Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Iṣbahānī, year 516), *al-Ṣūfi al-raḥḥāl* (of Yaḥyā b. Maḥmūd al-Thaqafi, year 584), and many others.

⁴⁹ See William and Fidelity LANCASTER, art. “Shāwiya,” in *EP*, 9:372.

twigs, clay or unworked stones. These are meant only to provide shade and give shelter, no more; sometimes the people also live in crevices and caves. They take little food and this is unprepared or almost so, apart from using a small fire to cook it.⁵⁰

The mention of eating habits as reduced to the most simple level corresponds with the conditions faced by nomadic camel herders, as depicted in modern reports,⁵¹ and tallies with a portrayal provided by the lexicographer al-Azharī:

If the people of the steppe (*ahl al-bādiya*) have enough curdled milk for food and have good pasture, then they prefer that to any other food, such as dates, raisins or grains; if they lack curdled milk and have grains or dates, then they appease their hunger with these and ‘eat earth’, since they call all food such as meat, bread or dates ‘earth’ (*thufī*).⁵²

Against the background of the early Islamic call to abandon Bedouin life, reference to the indigestibility of the food eaten by settled people in early Islamic Medina was used by the Bedouin (*ahl al-ḍarʿ*), accustomed to milk and curdled milk, as an appropriate excuse to return to their former life based on animal husbandry.⁵³

But Ibn Khaldūn here presents a more comprehensive picture, which is not void of distinction between nomadic and rural modes of life, yet conceives of a rural-nomadic continuum, called in his terminology “Bedouin civilization” (*al-ʿumrān al-badawī*), which is united by its contrast to [people of] refined urban civilization (*al-ḥāḍirūn*, *ahl al-amṣār waʿl-buldān*). This concept of the Bedouin may be inspired by the historical widespread practice of combining mobile pastoralism with irregular farming characteristic of North Africa.⁵⁴ In a chapter concerning forms of social organization in various geographical areas, Ibn Khaldūn explains that there are few urban types of settlement in North Africa. The Berber form of society would be Bedouin (*badawī*)-dominated, with conditions for urban settlement unable to prevail. Bedouin customs and way of life (*badāwa*) would persist because they would best suit the population. Handicrafts would also be

⁵⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1:217 (ch. 2, sect. 2).

⁵¹ LANCASTER and LANCASTER, “Desert Devices”, 185–186.

⁵² al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-luḡha*, 15:90 (*thufī*).

⁵³ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, Muḥammad Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Bāqī et al., 4 vols., Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1400/1979, 4:41, no. 5727.

⁵⁴ For the impact of nomadic society on the juridical administration of Roman agricultural domains in North Africa see Charlotte SCHUBERT, Roxana KATH and Anne KUHNERT, *Geteilte Räume, Die Römische Raumordnung und ihre Bedeutung für den Kontakt zwischen Nomaden und Sesshaften in Nordafrika*, Halle: ZIRS 2014 = Mitteilungen des SFB “Differenz und Integration” 15, 1–3, 65–66.

alien to them, as they would be rooted entirely in steppe life.⁵⁵ This description is confirmed by regional historical tradition: an eleventh-century Ibāḍī author from the area that is now Algeria cites the merits of the Berber by referring to a saying of the Prophet, according to which Islam would achieve greatness through the people of the Maghreb, through the people who possess no cities in which they can live, no fortifications with which they can protect themselves and no markets in which they can trade.⁵⁶

Within the larger framework of “Bedouin civilization”, Ibn Khaldūn’s remarks concerning various types of nomadic pastoral farming practices are reasonable and consistent:

On the other hand, for one who earns his living through farming and agriculture, a settled life is better than roaming (*ẓaʿn*). The inhabitants of permanent houses (*sukkān al-madar*), villages and mountains are usually Berbers or non-Arabs. Those of them who earn their living by grazing livestock, such as sheep or cattle, are mostly mobile pastoralists (*fa-hum zuʿʿan*), because they migrate towards pasture and water sources for their animals. For them, rotation of pasture use (*al-taqallub fī al-arḍ*) is appropriate. They are called *shāwiya* because they live off sheep and goats. They do not take themselves into the desert (*al-qafīr*), however, because they will not find good pasture there.⁵⁷

Although basic features of mobile pastoralism and agricultural activity together constitute “Bedouin civilization” in Ibn Khaldūn’s eyes, traits of social organization and common attitudes that he considers typical, such as self-reliance and resolve, are exemplified by the nomad-Bedouin model.⁵⁸ Bedouins leading a nomadic way of life thus constitute a role model for the “Bedouin civilization”. Accordingly, Arab nomadic camel herders are treated as a separate group:

However, whoever earns his living from camel breeding, migrates more and further into the wilderness areas Moreover, the nomadic Arabs (*ʿarab*) are perhaps driven away by the people of the hill country defending their lands, with the result that they penetrate deep into the wilderness regions in order to avoid retaliation and punishment for their hostile actions (*nafratan ʿan al-nuṣafa minhum waʿl-jazāʿ li-ʿudwānihim*). They are in this respect the wildest of people, and that is why they are counted by settled people as savages, whom one cannot get the better of (other than by using violence), and are viewed as predatory

⁵⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddīma*, 2:32–33 (ch. 4, sect. 7).

⁵⁶ Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Abī Bakr, *Kitāb Siyar al-aʿimma wa-akhbārihim al-maʿrūf bi-taʿriḫ Abī Zakariyyā*, ed. Ismāʿīl al-ʿArabī, Algiers: Dīwān al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Jāmiʿiyya, 1984, 52.

⁵⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddīma*, 1:217–218 (ch. 2, sect. 2).

⁵⁸ Stefan LEDER, “Beduinentum, Araber, Nomadenmythos in der Montage von Ibn Khaldūn,” in: *Der imaginierte Nomade: Formel und Realitätsbezug bei antiken, mittelalterlichen und arabischen Autoren*, ed. Alexander Weiß, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2007, 86–87; Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddīma*, 1:223 (ch. 2, sect. 5).

animals. These then are the nomadic Arabs and similar to them are the nomadic Berber (*zu'ūn al-barbar*), the Zenata in Morocco, and the Kurds, Turks and Turkmens in the east. Indeed, the nomadic Arabs seek out the most remote pasture lands and advance furthest into the steppe (*ashadd al-badāwa*) because they have devoted themselves entirely to camel breeding, whilst the others also keep sheep and cattle.⁵⁹

According to his view of civilization, arrived at by taking account of the good as well as the bad in the life of Arab camel herders, they appear as the people most distanced from settled ways of life. The complex associations behind this characterization of nomadic life lead to an explanation of the exceptional role of Arabs in history, based upon their particularly strong group solidarity (*'aṣabiyya*) and creed.⁶⁰ Bedouin, here meaning nomadic Arabs, represent the most extreme opposite to materially, socially and politically developed forms of society (see above) and act destructively when they conquer the lands of such societies.⁶¹ They are not comfortable with crafts,⁶² know only a spartan way of life and, like nomadic peoples in general, are accustomed to dealing with it.⁶³ Trapped in tribalism typical of *badāwa*, they possess hardly any of the types of social organization necessary for politics and government.⁶⁴ However, their perseverance in such primitive living conditions produces positive qualities, such as courage, initiative and fortitude (*ba's*),⁶⁵ as well as internal cohesion based on a collective spirit (*'aṣabiyya*).⁶⁶ Thus, Ibn Khaldūn observes that the social formations of nomadic and settled ways of life do not exist in isolation, but rather interact with each other⁶⁷ because, among other things, the comforts afforded by settled living, for which all social organizations strive,⁶⁸ are also desirable to the Bedouin.

In addition to these rather general categories, he turns his analytical gaze to the results of his careful observations in an attempt to identify basic behavioral patterns. The statement that Bedouins (*ahl al-badw*) organize their housing and food to cater for only basic necessities is typical. In making it, he is rejecting the idea that Bedouins only use non-fixed types of dwellings, without blurring the

59 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1:217–218 (ch. 2, sect. 2).

60 Stefan LEDER, "The Arabs of Ibn Khaldūn," *Al-Abḥāth* 57 (2009): 57–59.

61 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1:263 (ch. 2, sect. 26).

62 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 2:112–113 (ch. 5, sect. 20).

63 *Ibid.*, 2:45 (ch. 4, sect. 13).

64 *Ibid.*, 1:286–289 (ch. 3, sect. 9).

65 *Ibid.*, 1:223 (ch. 2, sect. 5); 300–304 (ch. 3, sect. 15).

66 *Ibid.*, 1:229–230 (ch. 2, sect. 8).

67 See Gerd SPITTLER, "Ibn Khaldūn: Eine ethnologische Lektüre," *Paideuma* 48 (2002): 268–270.

68 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 2:56–57 (ch. 4, sect. 18).

distinction with settled ways of life. Nomadic mobility appears here less related to a type of dwelling and more to a whole way of life.

A more common distinction between nomads and settled peoples is based on whether they live in tents or houses, a difference referred to, for example, by al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/946).⁶⁹ And, of course, temporary encampments (*maḥall*, pl. *maḥāll*) and mobility based on knowledge of the terrain are universal features of nomadic life, as is shown in the report of a military expedition undertaken by the Prophet against nomadic groups.⁷⁰ When the Muslims arrive at the Bedouin encampments, the Bedouins have left for the mountains, and the attackers have to withdraw without achieving their objectives for fear of a surprise counter attack.

While mobile pastoralism certainly is the basis of nomad livelihood, Ibn Khaldūn's concept of the Bedouin does not count it as their only resource. He also refers to raiding as an obvious source of income, not prohibited by law or custom.⁷¹ Bedouin attacks on travellers passing through the steppe are well documented in historical sources of various periods, sometimes more frequently, sometimes less. Al-Muqaddasī, the above mentioned geographer, also sees banditry and control of the steppe regions by Bedouins as characteristic of their way of life, alongside their frugal eating habits. He reports that the steppe could only be navigated with military support from, or under the protection of, a (Bedouin) escort.⁷² Thus, (temporary) life in the steppe, exploitation of resources through mobility and livelihoods based on a combination of herding, agriculture and plunder make up the set of features characteristic of the Bedouin way of life as described by medieval Arab observers.⁷³

The information on mobility and forms of dwelling suggests a diversity that needs closer examination in both regional and historical contexts. In the Maghreb, for example, the geographer al-Idrīsī is evidently talking about the connection between city and Bedouin life.⁷⁴ In the Arab east, the existence of urban neighborhoods created by tribespeople, often on the outskirts of cities, suggests

⁶⁹ *Wabrahā wa-madarahā*, referring to tents (from the hair of goats and sheep) and simple houses; al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa'l-ishrāf*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje, Leiden: Brill, 1894, 79; see tr., 115.

⁷⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. Eugen Mittwoch, Eduard Sachau et al., 13 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1905–1918, 2/1:43.

⁷¹ E.g. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1:261 (ch. 2, sect. 2). The reference here is to robbery in general, the violent appropriation of the property of others (*intihāb*), not intra-Bedouin raids (*ghazwa*).

⁷² al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 252.

⁷³ These features are common to nomadism more generally, see Rudi Paul LINDNER, "What Was a Nomadic Tribe?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24 (1982): 691.

⁷⁴ al-Idrīsī, *Nuzha*, 92: al-Ghadīr is a beautiful city, whose inhabitants are Bedouin (*badw*), who farm and own fruitful land.

that members of the same core group pursued both nomadic and settled ways of life, the latter possibly only temporarily.⁷⁵

Cultural Boundaries, Political Distinctions: *badāwa* and *a'rābiyya*

The observation made by Ibn Khaldūn, quoted above, that nomadic life is a matter of satisfying the simplest needs, shows that his characterization of the nomadic way of life is linked to the perception of a cultural difference between it and settled living. This is demonstrated by the use of the verbal noun *badāwa* (or *bidāwa*).⁷⁶ The basic meaning of the term is “leaving to go into the steppe” or “staying in the steppe”.⁷⁷ It is an antonym of *ḥaḍāra*, which signifies “staying in settled lands”. The meaning of the latter term has expanded and also serves to signify settled ways of life, including the products of their culture. For example, Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217), the Andalusian famous for his travelogue, talks of *rawnaq* (beauty) and *ḥusn al-ḥaḍāra* to describe the advantages and comforts of settled life.⁷⁸ There is also a later definition as “that which has been made by the hand of man” in al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1632).⁷⁹ In modern parlance, its use corresponds broadly to our term “civilization”.

The meaning of *badāwa* has also expanded to signify “the Bedouin way of life”. In this process, the idea of opposition to *ḥaḍāra* is frequently observed, though not as an opposition between civilized and uncivilized people; rather, it is individual cultural aspects that are emphasized. The “original” nomadic tribal Arabs were long regarded by Arabic authors as a prototype for the supremacy of the pure Arabs, probably in contrast to people who were seen as having acquired the

75 al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh ar-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje et al., 3 series, Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901; rp. Beirut: Maktabat al-Khayyāt, 1965, 2:258: *fa-maḍā 'alā wajhihi yataladdadu fī aziqqat al-Kūfa ... ḥattā kharaja ilā dūr Banī Jabala min Kinda*. See *ibid.*, 2:1231 (Ibn Ḥabība): *nazaltu dūr Banī Asad fī manāzil al-Zubayr*.

76 Ibn Qutayba, *Adab al-kātib*, ed. Max Grünert, Leiden: Brill, 1900; rp. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1387/1967, 576; see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, 14:67, col. 1, l. 27.

77 Khaṭṭābī, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm al-'Izbāwī, 3 vols., Mecca: Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā, 1403/1983, 1:344: *wa'l-badāwa al-khurūj ilā al-bādiya*.

78 Ibn Jubayr, *Travels of Ibn Jubayr [al-Riḥla]*, ed. William Wright and Michael Jan de Goeje, Leiden: Brill, 1907, 249.

79 al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭib min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb*, ed. Reinhart P. A. Dozy, 2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1855–1861, 1:297 (referring to Cordoba): ... *akthar faḍlan bi'l-naẓar ilā ghayrihā min al-mamālik li-ttiṣāl al-ḥaḍāra al-'azīma*.

Arabic language and spirit. Characterizing poetic styles, for example, al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 429/1038) contrasts the purity of language emerging from the Bedouin way of life (*faṣāḥat al-badāwa*) with the elegance resulting from settled life.⁸⁰ However, this ideal is later contrasted with criticism of a coarse manner of speaking denoted as “Bedouin”. In his theory of style, Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239) cautions against a certain richly expressive style including unfamiliar (*waḥshī*) and uncouth (*mutawā‘ir*) language, as in his opinion, it displayed the uncultured nature of Bedouin life (*‘unjuhiyyat al-badāwa*).⁸¹ This is a familiar reproach that the representatives of the Shu‘ūbiyya movement, who resisted Arab claims to cultural superiority, had already formulated by the ninth century, polemicizing against the “conceited coarseness” of the Bedouin and thereby trying to de-legitimize the Bedouin use of language as a cultural ideal that proved Arab superiority.⁸² The work of al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) indicates a further development of the concept. Alongside using the term *badāwa* to denote the way of life of nomadic peoples in general, he also employs it to explain the absence of literacy in several languages, thereby investing it with the accompanying concept of a lack of development.⁸³

When we compare the statements of Ibn al-Athīr and al-Qalqashandī to that of al-Tha‘ālibī, we may assume that a change of attitude occurred concerning the linguistic Bedouin model, which seems to have lost its appeal by the thirteenth century. We shall pursue this further below, emphasizing here that the Bedouin way of life does not exclusively, or even primarily, represent a particular type of pastoral economy, but is seen rather as belonging to a separate cultural and social sphere, and that the perception and assessment of difference changes over time and varies as it focuses on specific aspects of Bedouin society. The Bedouin thereby frequently appears as a type, i.e., an archetypal embodiment of certain behaviors and properties. A full and proper consideration of the diversity and significance of the figure of the Bedouin in medieval Arabic literature is not intended here.⁸⁴ Instead, we may point to specific terms that were, or still are, in use and can be related to historical perceptions of the Bedouin.

⁸⁰ al-Tha‘ālibī, *Yatīma al-dahr*, 1:34; see also 3:357.

⁸¹ Ḍiyā‘ al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-sā‘ir*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥūfī and Badawī Ṭabāna, 4 vols., Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr lil-Ṭab‘ wa’l-Nashr, n.d. [ca. 1975], 1:185; see also 1:194.

⁸² Declaimed and refuted by al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa’l-tabyīn*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 4 vols., Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānī, 1405/1985, 3:12. For his altercation with the Shu‘ūbiyya, see also *ibid.*, 1:383–384, 2:5–6; Ibn Manẓūr (*Lisān al-‘Arab*, 13:513) defines *‘unjuhiyya* as arrogance, stupidity and ignorance.

⁸³ *Alladhīna taghallaba ‘alayhim al-badāwa ka’l-atrāk wa’l-sūdān*; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā fī qawānīn al-inshā’*, 14 vols., Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1332–1357/1914–1938, 1:167.

⁸⁴ See Sarah BINAY, *Die Figur des Beduinen in der arabischen Literatur (9.–12. Jahrhundert)*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2006.

In ancient Arabic epigraphy and poetry, reference is often made to *ma'add*, a collective term for a number of tribes⁸⁵ which served to represent a hard life, far removed from the comforts offered by settled living.⁸⁶ The explanation given by al-Azharī for the well-known expression “they have become *ma'add*-like (*tama'dadū*)” is that they were seen as people leading a harsh life in filth and misery.⁸⁷ The word was also used to refer to those abandoning a comfortable life and fine clothes. Referring to Layth,⁸⁸ he adduces that ‘to be like a *ma'add* (*tama'dud*)’ means to be fundamentally disposed to this type of life, both when travelling and at home.⁸⁹ Even if there is no unequivocal reference here to the nomadic way of life, there is historical evidence of it: references to *ma'add* in inscriptions allow us to infer that they were camel-herding nomads distinguished by their mobility and military effectiveness.⁹⁰ In poetry, they are also noble companions, ready to take up arms. Even in the early Islamic period, the poet al-Akḥṭal (d. ca. 92/710), extolling the virtues of his own tribe (protection of the weak, hospitality, valor), refers to the warlike *ma'add*,⁹¹ who nevertheless must be credited with being wily and cunning at all times.⁹²

A'rāb: A Political Category of Bedouin Groups

Classical Arabic offers a further conceptual distinction by use of the term *a'rāb*. Its early Islamic signification marks a political demarcation between Muslims and certain Bedouin groups. The emerging notion of a society embracing all believers (*'umma*) produced new distinguishing features. A conflict arose, reflected in the Quran and tradition (*ḥadīth*), between the concern of the early Islamic commu-

85 Jawād 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī tārikh al-'arab qabla al-Islām*, 10 vols., 2nd ed. (Baghdad: Jāmi'at Baghdād, 1413/1993), 1:382–390, here 383–384; Michael J. ZWETTLER, “Ma'add in Late-Ancient Arabian Epigraphy and Other Pre-Islamic Sources,” *Wiener Zeitschrift zur Kunde des Morgenlandes* 90 (2000): 255 and *passim*.

86 'Alī, *Mufaṣṣal*, 1:385; ZWETTLER, “Ma'add,” 256.

87 al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-luġha*, 2:260 (referring to a statement attributed to the second caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb).

88 See footnote 24.

89 al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb*, 2:260.

90 ZWETTLER, “Ma'add,” 267, 285. However, the extent to which these attributes apply only to those groups labeled as *ma'add* remains open to question.

91 al-Akḥṭal, *Shi'r al-Akḥṭal, ṣan'at al-Sukkarī*, ed. Fakhr al-Dīn Qabāwa, 2 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadida, 1979, 2:750: *bi-nā yu'sam al-jirānu aw yurfadu l-qirā / wa-ta'wī ma'addun fī l-ḥurūbi wa-tasrahū*.

92 'Alī, *Mufaṣṣal*, 1:386.

nity in Medina to bind as many nomadic tribespeople as possible to the cause of the believers, and the attitude of the Bedouin, who did not view this type of arrangement as binding.⁹³

In the language of the Quran, which as revelatory text sets norms and guiding concepts covering all areas of life, “Arab” (*‘arabī*) is seen, linguistically, as the converse of “non-Arab” (*a‘jamī*).⁹⁴ Later, in the ninth century, we find the notion that the adjective *‘arabī* means “belonging to the Arabs”, irrespective of their way of life, “even if he is not Bedouin.”⁹⁵ But this does not reflect the older usage of the term at the time of the emergence of Islam, when the prospect of a trans-tribal social and political community was just emerging. The absence of a common term for Arabs in the pre-Islamic period has been noted repeatedly.⁹⁶ It seems that *‘arab* as an ethnic descriptor may have developed in the context of the rise of the Muslim community, designating tribal groups allied with the coalition of *muhājirūn* and *anṣār* in Medina.⁹⁷ The Quran only documents the idea of a common Arabic language (*lisān ‘arabī, Qur’ān ‘arabī*).⁹⁸

The Quranic term *a‘rābī* (pl. *a‘rāb*), deriving from the same root, is commonly seen as suggesting a terminological distinction between nomadic and non-nomadic peoples. This interpretation is evident in a dictionary definition of the term that decouples its meaning from the etymological connection with the ethnonym “Arab”, making reference to the nomadic way of life and referring merely to social links with Arabs:

⁹³ Fritz STEPPAT, “Those who believe and have not emigrated’: The Bedouin as the Marginal Group of Islamic Society”, in: *Islam als Partner: Islamkundliche Aufsätze*, ed. Fritz Steppat and Thomas Scheffler, Würzburg: Ergon, 2001, 333.

⁹⁴ Q 41 (*Fuṣṣilat*): 44: “Then they would say: why were his verses not explained in detail? (What is this,) a non-Arabic (Quran) and an Arab (messenger)?” (*Law lā fuṣṣilat āyātuhū – a‘jamiyyun wa-‘arabiyyun*).

⁹⁵ *Wa-in lam yakun badawīyyan*: Ibn Qutayba, *Adab al-kātib*, 40; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, 1:586.

⁹⁶ Albert DIETRICH, “Geschichte Arabiens vor dem Islam,” in: *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, sect. 1, vol. 2, pt. 4: *Orientalische Geschichte von Kyros bis Mohammed*, 2nd fasc., Leiden: Brill, 1966, 294.

⁹⁷ Jan RETSÖ, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 71, 74, 77.

⁹⁸ Other concepts emerge subsequently. Al-Azharī refers to the principle of ancestry in the tenth century. *Tahdhīb al-lughā*, 2:360: *rajlun ‘arabiyyun idhā kāna nasabuhū fī al-‘arab thābitan, wa-in lam yakun faṣīhan*.

A man is *a'rābī*, if he is Bedouin (*badawī*), seeks pasture (*nuj'a*), searches for pastureland (*intiwā'a al-kal'*) and follows after places on which rain has fallen (*masāqit al-ghayth*), whether he is an Arab or *one of their (non-Arab) clients*.⁹⁹

However, this perception has not gained common recognition. The term does not generally place so great an emphasis on Bedouin mobile pastoralism that non-Arab nomads are also labeled *a'rāb*. Rather, it is generally the case, as Ibn Manẓūr observes, that “Arab” began to function as a generic term, while *a'rāb* denotes those “Arabs” who live in the steppe.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, the term *a'rābī* is applied to someone, who is at home in the steppe, not in a settlement, and who thereby may differ from other members of the same tribe or clan.¹⁰¹ Equally, the term signifies the type of steppe dweller whose conspicuous otherness is at times inspired by feelings for the natural world and ideas that are unaffected by the customs of settled people.¹⁰²

However, the origin of the distinctive term *a'rābī* is rather political, as we shall see, and not primarily related to a categorical difference between nomadic and non-nomadic peoples. Its connotations did not therefore apply to every context and usage. In this light, it is quite plausible that, from the classical period onwards, and more regularly in later medieval times, *'arab* is used inclusively, so that Bedouin particularly can be labeled with this term.¹⁰³

The term *a'rābī* appears several times in the Quran, where it refers to “steppe-dwelling Arabs”. For example: “When the groups [allies of the enemy Meccans] should come again, they would wish they had moved into the steppe

99 al-Azhārī, *Tahdhīb al-lughā*, 2:360. Compare Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, 1:586

100 *Ibid.*, 1:587, col. 1, ll. 12–13.

101 al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar*, ed. Charles Pellat, 7 vols., Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi'a al-Lubnāniyya, 1965–1979, 3: § 2146: *qadīma 'alā al-Ḥajjāj ibn 'amm laḥū a'rābī min al-bādiya*.

102 Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq* (facsimile ed. Madīna; on Ḥusayn b. 'Alī), 14:244–245: (...) Ḥishām b. Muḥammad: “When the water ran over Husayn's grave, it broke up after 40 days and wiped away his tracks. Then a Bedouin (*a'rābī*) came from the Banū Asad [the majority of them were Bedouin] and kept taking handfuls and repaired it, until he flung himself over it and said: how good you were with my parents (*mā aṭyabaka*), and how good is your tomb now that you are dead”.

103 This is true of Ibn Khaldūn's language usage, but can also be seen everywhere later. The more traditional al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) quotes a bequest made by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 12/634), in which the latter recommends that *'arab* should be particularly cared for, because they are the “stuff of Islam” (*Ta'rīkh*, 1:2724). The reference here is to the tribal Arabs, predominantly Bedouin, so vital for the conquests. See DIETRICH, “Das politische Testament des zweiten 'Abbasidenkalifen al-Mansur,” *Der Islam* 30 (1952): 138. Ibn Manẓūr himself does not consistently follow his own terminological distinction (*Lisān al-'arab*, 8:347).

with the Bedouin Arabs [and be safe]”.¹⁰⁴ Or, to distinguish the settled inhabitants of Medina from the Bedouin environment: “And amongst the Bedouin Arabs in your neighbourhood are hypocrites, and there are some of the inhabitants of al-Madīna who persist in hypocrisy”.¹⁰⁵

When the Quran reproaches the Bedouin Arabs for being more deeply ensnared than others in unbelief and hypocrisy¹⁰⁶ and for being untrustworthy allies,¹⁰⁷ it reflects the historical fact of Muhammad’s slowly growing influence, albeit not without setbacks, on the nomadic tribes, as can also be seen in Tradition literature.¹⁰⁸ The obligation to complete the *hijra*, the requirement to leave the tribal community and join the believers in Medina, is particularly stressed. Thus, *hijra* appears as an opposite of ‘*arabiyya*’ (*a’rābiyya* would be better – see below) as used in later parlance, and therefore contrary to Bedouin life.¹⁰⁹ The Prophet himself is said to have made a distinction between recognition of his rule including the performance of the *hijra* (*ba’yat hijra*) and recognition of his rule without meeting this demand (*ba’yat ‘arabiyya*).¹¹⁰ Unwillingness to perform the *hijra* and to submit to the rule of the Prophet was so clearly associated with steppe-dwelling insubordinate Bedouin that Mu’āwiya, who was born in Mecca and later became a caliph, and who was by no means a Bedouin, was labeled *a’rābī* by his adversary ‘Alī.¹¹¹

Bedouins wishing to be excused from a military campaign frequently appear in accounts,¹¹² and such appeals are not always refused.¹¹³ Nomadic groups (*ahl al-bawādī min al-a’rāb*) do not necessarily respond positively to requests to support military operations, even campaigns linked to the Prophet.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Quran recognizes the sincere faith of the Bedouins,¹¹⁵ and there is a

104 Q 33 (*al-Aḥzāb*): 20: *yawaddū law annahum bādūna fī ‘l-a’rāb*.

105 Q 9 (*al-Tawba*): 101: *wa-mimman ḥawlakum mina ‘l-a’rābi munāfiqūna wa-min ahli ‘l-madīnati maradū ‘alā ‘l-nifāq*.

106 Q 9 (*al-Tawba*): 97.

107 Q 48 (*al-Faṭḥ*): 11; see also 49:14.

108 Suliman BASHEAR, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997, 8–13.

109 *Ibid.*, 10. In the *Muqaddima* (1:216), Ibn Khaldūn also refers to the difference in social standing between those who have completed the *hijra* and the Bedouin allies.

110 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4/2:66.

111 Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn, Aḥmad al-Zayn, and Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, vol. 4, 2nd ed., Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1961, 4:304; Bashear, *Arabs*, 11.

112 E.g. Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* 2/1:119 (Tabūk).

113 Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’riḥ madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ‘Alī Sirī, 80 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995–2001, 12:100.

114 Ibn Hishām, *Sira*, 1133 (*al-Ḥudaybiyya*).

115 Q 9 (*al-Tawba*): 99.

tendency to restrict Quranic censure to individual tribal groups rather than to the Bedouin as a whole.¹¹⁶

It follows that the pejorative meaning of the term *a'rāb* is less to do with a nomadic lifestyle as such and more to do with politics, influenced by considerations of power. The Prophet is said to have explicitly excluded a group of Sulaym from being called *a'rāb* because they, “as people of our steppe regions” (*ahl bādīyatīnā*) have agreed terms with the “inhabitants of their centres of settlement” (*ahl qāriyatihim*), respond when they are called, and send help when it is needed.¹¹⁷ Once Mecca was captured by the Muslims, the *hijra* lost its significance and participation in the struggle between the Muslims and the surrounding peoples (*jihād*) became the criterion for not referring to people as Bedouin.¹¹⁸ 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb thus reports that he would label the inhabitants of Basra *a'rāb*, justifying this by saying that it is only through *jihād* that one ceases to belong to the Bedouin.¹¹⁹ Sarakhsī interprets (in the second half of the eleventh century) that the state of being *a'rābī*, i.e., *a'rābiyya* in his terms, was caused by religious ignorance,¹²⁰ or in other words, indifference to the Prophet's call. However, it should not be inferred from these traditions that early, and later authoritative, Islam pursued an anti-Bedouin policy. Even the second caliph, 'Umar, whose caliphate was the most idealized in Sunni Islam, recognized the importance of the partially nomadic tribal groups¹²¹ and paid heed to the needs of Bedouin groups who provided military service.¹²²

It is possible that the Quraysh in Mecca viewed the habits and customs of Bedouins, especially those who did not respect their holy shrine, as inferior and shameful. Although it is true that the inhabitants of Mecca were intertwined with the nomadic tribes through many and various alliances, the Quraysh were part of the Ḥums alliance, which had an elitist character because of its restrictions on marriage, and their way of life might have been seen as strange by tribal Arabs

116 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1405. Compare BASHEAR, *Arabs*, 8.

117 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:215; Ibn Zanjawayh, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ed. Shākir Dhīb Fayyād, 3 vols., Riyadh: Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal lil-Buḥūth wa'l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, 1406/1986, no. 779; see (more recent) versions in BASHEAR, *Arabs*, 53.

118 al-Sarakhsī in his commentary on al-Shaybānī's *Siyar* (Law of War) (*Sharḥ kitāb al-Siyar al-kabīr li-Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, 3 vols., Cairo: Maṭba'at Miṣr, Sharikat Musāhama Miṣriyya, 1957–1960, 1:94–95).

119 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4/1:80.

120 al-Sarakhsī, 1:95.

121 See note 91; BASHEAR, *Arabs*, 32; STEPPAT, “‘Those who believe’,” 335–336.

122 He dismissed the Bedouin after the end of the great drought in the year al-Ramāda so that they could search for pasture; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 3/1:233.

used to Bedouin life.¹²³ The Prophet's rebuke concerning the "Bedouin-ness" (*a'rabīyya*) of one his fellow warriors could be linked to a similar attitude.¹²⁴ This attitude was then also reflected by al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869), unless his remark is seen as 'Abbāsīd apologetics: In his epistle "Homes and Countries," he remarks that among the qualities of the Quraysh is that they would have nothing of the coarseness of the Arabs (*'arab*) and the Bedouin (*a'rāb*) and nothing of their savage greediness (*min jafā'ihim wa-ghilaḥ shahawātihim*).¹²⁵

It is clear here that partly similar characteristics are attributed to *a'rāb* and to *ma'add*, which is also reflected in the commentary on the Quran by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who adduces that the *a'rāb* were known for their coarseness (*jafā'*) and hard-heartedness (*qaswat qulūbihim*) and for the fact that they would hardly ever have experienced (the behavior) of people living in luxury (*ahl al-khayr*).¹²⁶

The prescriptive authority of Quranic statements, especially when not interpreted in the light of their historical context, urges a delineation between Bedouin and settled Arabs. Al-Azharī thus stresses that anyone who does not generally distinguish between Bedouin and Arabs would be wishing to denigrate the latter.¹²⁷ From this perspective, the circumscription of the Bedouin Arabs berated in the Quran may help establish a positive self-image for the identity associated with *'arab*. This attitude is also echoed in a delighted response, said to have been made by the Bedouin themselves, to being addressed as "Arabs", while showing anger at the use of the word "Bedouin" (*yā a'rābī*).¹²⁸

123 Meir J. KISTER, "Mecca and Tamīm (Aspects of their Relations)", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8 (1965): 137, 140–141; see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 7/2, ed. Muḥammad Ya'lāwī, Berlin: Schwarz, 2002, 13. Ugo FABIETTI ("The Role Played by the Organization of the 'Ḥums' in the Evolution of Political Ideas in Pre-Islamic Mecca", in: *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. Francis E. Peters, Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1998, 348–356) interprets *ḥums* as an organization based upon religious bonds and thus different from the traditional one defined by the membership of one tribal group.

124 Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, 4 vols. (rp. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.), 1:44.

125 al-Jāhīz, "al-Awṭān wa'l-buldān," in: *Rasā'il al-Jāhīz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, vol. 4, Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1399/1979, 109–147, 117. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb also provides a list of the merits of the Quraysh over other Arabs (*al-Munammaq fī akhbār Quraysh*, ed. Khūrshīd Aḥmad Fāruq, Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1405/1985, 24–25).

126 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, part 11, Cairo: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-aulādūhu, 1374/1954, 3 (referring to Q 9:97).

127 al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughā*, 2:361.

128 *Ibid.*

Symbolic Significance and Changing Conceptual Frameworks: *A'rāb*, *'arab* and *badū*

For medieval Arabic scholars, only a partial dissociation from the Bedouin was possible, however, as it was they who provided the authoritative language model based on the poetic and linguistic heritage collected from them by Arab philologists. In a striking parallel with the prominent position of early Arabic heritage in language,¹²⁹ the Bedouin was also construed as a model of virtue. One of many possible examples is the political address by a Bedouin Arab (*a'rābī*) to the Caliph Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 96–99/715–717). The speaker is unhindered by formal etiquette and political considerations and objects to the exercise of power delegated by the caliph to his deputies; in this, he can be seen as an example of Bedouin civilization.¹³⁰ References to philologists' Bedouin informants do not distinguish coherently between the terms *a'rāb* and *'arab*, as their informants' knowledge came to be seen as a common Arab heritage.¹³¹ Al-Mas'ūdī's (d. 345/956) idealistic appreciation of Bedouin (*'arab*) virtues, such as courage and inner nobility, seen as arising from their permanent, unrestricted mobility outside the confines of settlements, gives evidence of the symbolic meaning of the Bedouin for the conceptualization of authentic Arab characteristics in the context of his comparative approach to human geography.¹³²

Al-Mas'ūdī's contemporary, the famous poet al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965), famously articulates the significance of the Bedouin representing a state of nature, and of his dwelling in the open country embodying the ideal refuge from the complications of life typical of an urban social context. His vision demonstrates the potential of an imaginary driven by the meaning of "living in the steppe" that the Bedouin symbolizes. But the poet does not otherwise succumb to a romantic idea: he comments satirically on the Bedouin's restiveness and poverty and

129 In this respect, see also Isabel TORAL-NIEHOFF, "Der edle Beduine". In: *Der Alteritätsdiskurs des Edlen Wilden: Exotismus, Anthropologie und Zivilisationskritik am Beispiel eines europäischen Topos*, ed. Monika Fludernik et al., Würzburg: Ergon, 2002, 281–295.

130 al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 4: § 2161.

131 Marie-Andrée GOUTTENOIRE, "Les enjeux de l'écriture biographique relative aux savants iraqiens du II/VIII^e siècle et à leur transmission du fond arabo-bédouin," *Bulletin des Études Orientales* 57 (2006/2007): 52–54.

132 Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 2: §§ 1108–1109; Stefan LEDER, "Nomads and Sedentary People – a Misleading Dichotomy? Bedouin and Bedouinism in the Arab Past," in: *Shifts and Drifts in Nomad-Sedentary Relations*, ed. Stefan Leder and Bernhard Streck, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005, 409.

thereby confirms his political alignment with the prince of Aleppo, who fights the insubordinate tribal groups.¹³³

It should be noted that there are countless references to Bedouin people and life in narrative descriptions which contain none of the terms under consideration here. Reference to Bedouin society may be implicit when mention is made of certain individuals or groups, or when a specific circumstance is described. Of course, this also presents ideas and concepts of Bedouin life and customs. An example of this is the way in which Abū 'Amr al-Shaybānī (d. 213/828), a lexicographer and collector of traditions by and about poets, relates an episode in the life of Zayd al-Khayl (d. after 9/630), the Bedouin poet and hero of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods:¹³⁴

Zayd left to collect his herd from the Banū Badr [with whom he had left it to graze]. At the same time, 'Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl carried out a raid against the Fazāra [to whom the Banū Badr belonged], carried off a woman called Hind and drove away a herd. Because of this, the Badr said to Zayd [when he arrived]: "Right now, we have need of your flock please" [because they had just suffered a severe loss]. Then Zayd followed the robber [to assist the Badr and to be able to keep his own flock]. The former said to Hind, after he had rushed far away from the place where it had happened: "Hind, what do you think [your] people can do now?" – "I think they will look for you and will not give up." Then he struck her with the flat of his hand on the behind and said: "Her arse [at least] isn't saying anything!" This then became a saying. Zayd finally reached him, saw 'Āmir and was not amused by his sturdy build and handsome appearance. He snuck up on the camp, at which point 'Āmir arrived. "Let the woman (*al-ḡa'īna*, literally 'she who sit in the camel litter' – see above) and the flock go," said Zayd to him. "Who are you, then?" – "I am a Fazāri." – "No," replied 'Āmir, "you do not belong to those whose mouths are full of yellow teeth!" – "Let them go!" – "Not before you tell me who you are." – "I am one of the Asad." – "No, really, you are not one of those who [hang] on their horses like tossed sacks." – "Just let them go." "Tell me the truth first!" – "I am Zayd al-Khayl." – "Yes, I believe you," replied 'Āmir [and was afraid of the famous hero]. "What is it to you, if you kill me now? If you do that, the Banū 'Āmir will soon find you, and the Fazāra will also be wiped out until no one remembers them." – "Then let them go!" – "Will you spare me, then, if I let you take the woman and the flock?" – "Only if you yield." – "Very well," said 'Āmir. Then he shaved his lock, took away his lance and led Hind and the flock away to return them to the Badr. He recited verses about this incident ...

This eventful tale, told through the changing perspectives of the actors and with the rising suspense of the question and answer interchange, appeals to certain

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 411–417.

¹³⁴ On Zayd al-Khayl, see Fuat SEZGIN, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 2: *Poesie*, Leiden: Brill, 1975, 223–225. The tale is preserved by Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (*Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 24 vols., Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1345–1394/1927–1974, 17:263), who quotes (see p. 256) from an original manuscript written by Abū 'Amr's son.

notions firmly associated with Bedouin society, such as raiding (*ghāra*), the importance of tribal affiliation, and insulting rival tribal groups. Pastoralism, which is linked here to hired pastoralist services, appears as a secondary consideration. Furthermore, the style and intention of the storyteller is to paint a picture of heroic thirst for action and of honor, which even allows the conflict to be resolved without bloodshed, although subsequent verses written by the poet suggest a more violent scenario. ‘Āmir’s earthy attitude and style is a stereotypical representation of the Bedouin.

While literature and history, particularly in the Umayyad period, very often present the Bedouin in a positive light, as a model and example of virtue, the difference between Bedouin and settled people is much in evidence in religious law and politics. In these areas, contempt is frequently shown for the Bedouin and, as mentioned above, is a politically significant message indicating the struggle for power.

The distinct legal status of the Bedouin is set out in an utterance of the Prophet, the practical meaning of which cannot be critically examined here. It states that a Bedouin (*badawī*) may not testify against a villager (*ṣāhib qarya*).¹³⁵ A twelfth-century commentator saw the reason for this ruling in that Bedouin were said to be uncultured, clueless in matters of religion, and ignorant of the revealed law; also, they would not give their evidence transparently (*lā yaqbiṭūna al-shahāda ‘alā wajhihā*) – an interesting notion that has no parallel in the usual stereotypes.¹³⁶ There are probably more examples showing the difficulties of incorporating the Bedouin into Islamic law, in particular in relation to tax laws.¹³⁷

A common notion is that of the Bedouin’s unpolished and rough nature, often presented to show their cultural inferiority. An utterance of the Prophet states that he who would live in the steppe takes on the crudeness (*jafā*) of the Bedouin.¹³⁸ The characteristic of crudeness, when attributed to the Bedouin, is often linked to the word *jilf*; this means primarily an animal hide, as well as a skinned and dismembered animal carcass, but also figuratively denotes the uncouth and the

135 Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *al-Sunan* [together with al-Khaṭṭābī: *Ma‘ālim al-sunan*], ed. ‘Izzat ‘Ubayd al-Da‘ās, 5 vols., Homs: Nashr wa-Tawzī‘ Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Sayyid, 1388/1969, 4:26 (*al-aqḍiyya*, XVII). Concerning the Bedouin in the legal system, see also Astrid MEIER, “Bedouins in the Ottoman Juridical Field. Select Cases from Syrian Court Records, Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries,” *Eurasian Studies* 9/1–2 (2011): 187–211.

136 Majd al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya min gharīb al-ḥadīth wa’l-athar*, Cairo: Būlāq, n.d., 1:68.

137 See, for example, Ibn Zanjawayh, *Amwāl*, 3:1267: Even the steppe dwellers must give alms tax on the occasion of the *fiṭr*-feast.

138 Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 3:278 (*al-ṣayd*, IV); Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi‘ bayān al-‘ilm*, pref. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Khaṭīb, 2nd ed., Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1402/1982, 255; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 14:67.

crude¹³⁹ and quickly took on the meaning “crude Bedouin Arab”.¹⁴⁰ The word appears as a term of insult in political pronouncements – speeches and short statements – in classical literature, in order to indicate the gap between the Bedouin and those of a superior culture. The reference is always to disqualification, which not only suggests inferiority but also supports the right to exercise power over those labeled in this way. In the epistle of ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā (d. 132/750), for example, al-Daḥḥāk b. Qays al-Shaybānī (d. 128/746), the leader of a powerful rebel army, is scolded as “the enemy of God, the uncouth, the crude, the Bedouin Arab ...”¹⁴¹ Similar phrases are repeatedly found in political speeches,¹⁴² where the polemical content of the word can also be applied irrespective of the way the rebuked person actually lived.¹⁴³ Historically, the reason why Bedouin are seen in this light is that they may belong to a population group outside the control of the state and whose political autonomy and military potential is a threat to central authority. In fact, powerful, highly mobile groups of camel herders in the Near East, ranging over wide areas and organized on a tribal basis, repeatedly confronted urban-based state authority and with some degree of success.¹⁴⁴

The term *aʿrābī* encapsulates how the nomadic way of life is portrayed as different. In terms of language, skills and customs, in particular his thirst for freedom and manly virtue, as well as his sense of justice, the Bedouin Arab is seen as a model, which betrays quite early an appreciation of cultural heritage. When it comes to political matters, however, where such attributes are of relevance to claims to power, a critical judgment prevails. It is clear that the early Arab Bedouin heritage became less significant over time. Nevertheless, ambivalence in the judgment of the Bedouin Arab was reflected in the literature for a long period, though out of an entirely antiquarian desire to preserve appropriate traditional material.¹⁴⁵

139 Ibn Qutayba, *Adab al-kātib*, 59: *jilfun ayy jāfin*.

140 Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, 9:31.

141 Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat, *Jamharat rasā’il al-‘arab fī al-‘uṣūr al-‘arabiyya al-zāhira*, 3 vols., Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d., 2:406.

142 See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḥ*, 1:3271–3272.: Mu’āwiya speaks to one of ‘Ali’s messengers (*la-qad kaḏhabta wa’la’umta ayyuhā al-a-‘rābī al-jilf al-jāfī fī kull mā dhakarta wa-waṣafta*); al-Jāhīz, *Bayān*, 2:310: al-Ḥajjāj writes to al-Qaṭarī b. al-Fujā’a: *ghayra annaka a-‘rābī jilf ummī*.

143 Abū al-Faraj, *Aghānī*, 23:241: Mu’āwiya’s calumny; see also al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḥ*, 2:323: *lā yughir-rannakum min dīnikum hādḥā al-jilf al-jāfī*.

144 See Kurt FRANZ, *Vom Beutezug zur Territorialherrschaft, Beduinische Gruppen in mittelislamischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden: Reichert 2007.

145 For example: Usāma b. Munqidh, *Lubāb al-ādāb*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1400/1980, index s.v. *a-‘rābī*; al-Ibshīhī, *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf*, ed. Mufid Muḥammad Qumayḥa, 2 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1403/1983, 2: chs 59, 76.

The use of the term *a'rabī* is paralleled, as we have seen, by the use of the term *'arabī* already in classical times, but the use of the former decreases from about the twelfth century onwards, when nomads are increasingly referred to as troublemakers and immoral people. There is – as far as we can see – a general linguistic shift towards the use of the term *'arab* (and *'urbān*),¹⁴⁶ with the result that the generic noun for Arabs often comes to mean tribally based nomadic peoples. This terminological change also marks the wide gap that appeared between the urban, Arabic-speaking population and the steppe-dwelling nomadic groups as a result of the fact that the latter played no role in the development of the complex institutions that came to shape everyday urban life in the areas of education and science, administration and justice. The complaint of the scholar al-Subkī (d. 771/1331) concerning government-backed Bedouin emirs in Mamluk times makes this clear. For al-Subkī, only elements relating to disorder and lawlessness are worth mentioning:

Concerning the current Bedouin emirs: These [Bedouin, *al-'arab*] are those who [periodically] roam and make camp. God has granted them [their emirs] a rich living and huge rentable land, so that they would not afflict the Muslims with their devastation. Alongside their mischief is now the fact that, as soon as the sultan seizes a tract of rentable land from one of them, he then sets about making the ways unsafe and harming those who have done him no harm, and robbing those who have committed no wrong. In doing all this, he does not shrink from spilling blood. ... Many Bedouin do not marry legally, simply taking the woman to themselves. In this, it may be that she already belongs to somebody, but then another emir has dismounted by her, asked her father for permission and simply taken her away from her husband.¹⁴⁷

In addition, the terms *badw* (= *badū*) and *badawī* begin to appear,¹⁴⁸ without replacing other words such as *'arab* and *'urbān*. *Badū* is a synecdoche, which uses the geographical area, the steppe, or the sojourn there, if *badw* is under-

146 See, for instance, al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), *al-Mawā'iz wa'l-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa'l-athār*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, 5 vols., 2nd augmented ed., London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2013, vol. 5 (*al-Kashshāfāt al-taḥlīliyya*): 596–597, *'arab* and *'urbān*. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā* (see note 83), mostly uses the term *'arab* and rarely *'urbān*.

147 al-Subkī, *Mu'īd al-ni'am wa-mubīd al-niqam*, ed. Muḥammad Faṭḥī al-Nādī, Cairo: Mu'assasat al-'Alyā' lil-Nashr wa'l-Tawzī', 1429/2008, 47–48.

148 For example: Ibn al-'Adīm (d. 660/1262), *Bughyat al-talab fī ta'rīkh Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār, 11 vols., Damascus: s.n., 1408–9/1988, 1: 501: *al-badū wa-hum al-a'rāb*; Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) cites the poet Ibn Munīr al-Ṭarābulṣī (d. 548/1153): “*aftaku min faṣāḥati-l-badw*”, *al-Wāfī bil-wafāyāt*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, 8 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, ca. 1990, 1:157; Ibn Iyās (d. ca 930/1524), *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, reprint of the 2nd ed. in 6 vols., rearranged indices in 2 vols., Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2010–2012), indices 1:123, uses both terms, *badw* (= *badū*) and *badawī*.

stood as a verbal noun, to denote a population group (“people of the ...”). The deliberate decision not to use the word *ahl* (“people, those who belong to”) may be interpreted, somewhat pointedly, as intended to bring about the exclusion of the Bedouin from their own culture. Indeed, the word occasionally appears in early classical literature, but this may result from an erroneous omission of *ahl*;¹⁴⁹ however, its use becomes firmly established only later and even today has a widely pejorative meaning.

Conclusion

The common terms for Bedouin in classical and medieval Arabic literature evince that a close connection is seen between the Bedouin way of life, which consists of exploiting the resources of the steppe, and cultural characteristics, which differ from those that arise in settled ways of life. The sources reveal that the perception of the Bedouin cannot be limited to the particularities of pastoralist economies.

The Bedouin component of society is defined by exploitation of the resources of the steppe, whereas the type of dwelling they used, as well as the extent of their mobility, in terms of both distance and time, play a subordinate role. This approach includes temporal and spatial configurations of great proximity between Bedouin and settled peoples. At the same time, the steppe, together with the nomadic way of life and nomads themselves, are defined by an otherness from settled ways of life, which, once the polemical elements introduced by an outsider’s perspective have been stripped away, can be seen as characterizing Bedouin cultural and political autonomy. In this respect, the Arab concepts of the Bedouin offer an important contribution to our comprehension of nomadism in general and in the region in particular.

The prevalent ambivalence in assessments of the Bedouin that is apparent across all the various terms and concepts is not significant as such. More precisely, Bedouin autonomy is so influential a feature in these conceptions that an appreciation of Bedouin life, detached from pastoralism, as a way of life set apart by its laws and customs, fits well in with Arabic terminology. It also corresponds

¹⁴⁹ al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad’ wa’l-ta’rikh*, ed. Clément Huart, 6 vols., Paris: Leroux, 1899–191; rp. Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, n.d., 4:71. See also Mahmoud TAHMI, *L’encyclopédisme musulman à l’âge classique*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998, 19–20.

with modern Bedouin concepts of self,¹⁵⁰ and there is good reason to assume that the political independence of tribal nomads is a feature of their way of life.¹⁵¹ With respect to what Bedouin life means to Bedouin today, LANCASTER and LANCASTER remarked pointedly, on the basis of conversations with Rwala Bedouin in the late twentieth century:

Once we can get away from the idea that pastoralism was a subsistence economy and look at it through Bedu eyes we can stop wringing our hands over the destruction of a traditional lifestyle; the Rwala do not see it like that at all. For them camel pastoralism provided the basic equipment to live independently from towns and the mobility to interact with settled people on their own terms. Under modern conditions camels no longer confer these advantages, which must be achieved in other ways. ... The ends have remained the same; it is the means that differ.¹⁵²

As far as the sources considered here are concerned, references to the otherness and independence of the Bedouin way of life are usually linked to claims to hegemony by settled peoples and therefore express a political relationship. This is particularly obvious in the evaluation of the role of the steppe-dwelling Arabs not allied with the emerging Islamic community. In the classical period until about the tenth century, Arab Bedouin heritage was culturally significant, and the Bedouin, although an ambivalent figure, was held in esteem as the source of the philologists' study of Arabic and as a model of virtues shaped by the life in the steppe. A romantic portrayal of Bedouin life in literature can be found as early as in the 'Udhri love story.¹⁵³

In the medieval period, we observe the loss of this notion and the emergence of another set of terms that gives priority to the perception of the Bedouin as an alien and object of contempt. Such alterations of stance must not be understood as being total and univocal. In the narrative literature of the late Middle Ages, the urban populace relished the stories of heroes played out in the world of the Bedouin, accounts far removed from the realities of life, yet preserving elements

150 Thus, the 'old' days, not that long ago, in which the Balqa' tribes lived outside state control, are referred to today as the time 'before government'; see Andrew Joseph SHRYOCK, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

151 Philip Carl SALZMAN, "Peasant Pastoralism," in: *The Anthropology of Tribal and Peasant Pastoral Societies: The Dialectics of Social Cohesion and Fragmentation ...*, ed. Ugo Fabietti and Philip Carl Salzman, Como: Ibis, 1996, 164.

152 LANCASTER and LANCASTER, "Desert Devices," 193.

153 Stefan LEDER, "The 'Udhri Narrative in Arabic Literature," in: *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Friederike Pannewick, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004, 162–189.

of Bedouin tradition and world values in characteristic fashion.¹⁵⁴ But it is rather the image of the exotic Bedouin, going hand in hand with a condescending attitude.

This survey is clearly not comprehensive, and not detailed enough to fully encompass the contextual complexities of the concepts outlined above. But it may be enough to demonstrate that the Bedouin component is a matter of considerable scope and depth in Arab representation.

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¹⁵⁴ Thomas HERZOG, “Wild Ancestors: Bedouins in Medieval Arabic Popular Literature,” in: *Shifts and Drifts in Nomad-Sedentary Relations*, ed. Stefan Leder and Bernhard Streck, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005, 421–442, here 436–437.

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