

# NOMADEN UND SESSHAFTE

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*Sonderforschungsbereich Differenz und Integration*  
Wechselwirkungen zwischen nomadischen und sesshaften Lebensformen  
in Zivilisationen der Alten Welt

Herausgegeben im Auftrag des SFB  
von Stefan Leder und Bernhard Streck

BAND 2

WIESBADEN 2005  
DR. LUDWIG REICHERT VERLAG

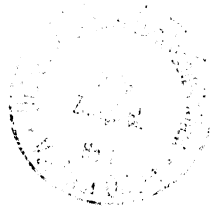
Shifts and Drifts  
in Nomad-Sedentary Relations

Ed. by Stefan Leder and Bernhard Streck

WIESBADEN 2005  
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Gedruckt mit Unterstützung der  
Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft

Umschlagabbildung: Barchan, Station an der transkaspischen Bahn  
(fotografiert zwischen 1888 und 1893) von A. H. Mishon o. Michon  
(Lebensdaten unbekannt, aktiv in Baku von 1879 bis 1905)  
Archiv der Bibliothek der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Halle



06 SA 1516

Bibliografische Information Der Deutschen Bibliothek  
Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbiografie;  
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

© 2005 Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden

ISBN: 3-89500-413-8

[www.reichert-verlag.de](http://www.reichert-verlag.de)

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Gedruckt auf säurefreiem Papier  
(alterungsbeständig pH7 -, neutral)

Printed in Germany

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# Nomadic and Sedentary Peoples – A Misleading Dichotomy? The Bedouin and Bedouinism in the Arab Past

Stefan Leder

Arabic written and oral traditions conceptualise Bedouin life in various ways. From the early Islamic period onwards throughout the Middle Age, and again during modern times, we can observe a constant flow of references to ideas concerning the features and the significance of Bedouin existence. In this vein, the Bedouin, or more precisely his representation, is insistently and pervasively present in sedentary contexts. These representations entail various forms of idealization as well as denigration. On the one hand, the Arabic language was conceived by philologists as having a close relationship with Bedouin patrimony. Moreover, poetic tradition, moral values and concepts of Arab identity were perceived as having a Bedouin heritage as well. On the other hand, the Bedouin was also presumed not to meet the standards of “civilized” people, by reason of the arduousness and narrowness of his way of life, the peculiar simplicity and coarseness of his character, as well as aspects of his religious beliefs and moral ideas.

Typically, these representations of the Bedouin, both the positive and the negative, rely on an antithesis between nomadic and sedentary ways of life. Images of the Bedouin, which are current among sedentary peoples and are frequently promoted by the nomads themselves, implicitly or explicitly assume a dichotomy of nomadic and sedentary ways of life. As a basic logical order, this dichotomy posits distinctions and implies boundaries, both social and cultural, which do not reflect the realities of the relationship between nomads and sedentary peoples. As modern research has spelled out, both groups often intermesh and interact in a wide range of social activities.

Arab authors of the past were themselves aware that Bedouin existence was not isolated, but interrelated with sedentary life in all kinds of ways. Their awareness of this interrelationship is especially evident in their references to the socio-spatial dimensions of nomadic life. They understood clearly that the Bedouin habitat, as well as patterns and modes of their mobility, brought them into geographical proximity with sedentary people and thus shaped the framework of their contact with such people. Indeed, the term “Bedouin” as used by Arabs in both the near and distant past, does not necessarily refer to pastoral nomads. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century Saudi-Arabia the Bedouin (“badu”) were perceived as a cultural category com-

prising pastoral nomads as well as those who lived in settlements, but maintained “badu” identity and values.<sup>1</sup> Taking a similar perspective, M. von Oppenheim suggested that the sedentary population of Transjordan should be considered as Bedouin, since they were impregnated by Bedouin manners, language and tribal affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Arab authors persistently ascribe a particular cultural identity to the Bedouin, even in the case where some of these authors otherwise recognize that nomadic and sedentary groups are related and interact with one another. In the classical tradition, for example, representations of nomads regularly attribute specific political, social, moral and mental characteristics to such people. At the same time, the classical tradition has little to say about the intricate economic relationship of nomadic and sedentary groups and so fails to describe or theorize how exchange relationships systematically brought them, and bound them together.

As classical authors continuously characterized and stereotyped the nature and behaviour of the Bedouin, they maintained that nomadic qualities stood in sharp contrast to sedentary qualities. One may thus construe that their assertions result from a certain conceptual framework which was applied in different ways and in a variety of contexts over a long period of time. An analysis of the many applications and amazing productivity of this conceptual framework may provide insights into a number of issues.

Stereotypes convey general, often emotionally biased assessments, concerning particular social groups, historical processes, and cultural problems. Stereotyped characterization of the Bedouin can be recognized, for example, in repetitive references to his coarseness (*jafā*'), which suggest imputations concerning his political and social conduct. On a more general level, the Bedouin became a literary character in *adab* literature. As such he is represented by a repertoire of motifs, such as wit, candour, misconception of religion, etc. The figure of the Bedouin thus was used as a device in an intricate play of interrelated meanings, produced by a continuous re-adaptation of established motifs. Furthermore, the characteristics of the Bedouin can also be understood as a function of discursive practices, or interpretative codes. As the latter frequently aim at producing descriptions and objects which seem solid and unquestionable, the inferior status of the Bedouin serves the purpose of making value attributions and assertions.

The subtle and complex relationship between speech or text and social practices<sup>3</sup> can not be dealt with in detail, since the analysis here is limited to an outline of how the Bedouin is represented in pre-modern Arabic literature. However, this is merely a practical limitation. Despite the disjunction between the imagery of the Bedouin as distinct and different and the fusion and blending of nomadic and

<sup>1</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Arabian Oasis*, 119.

<sup>2</sup> Oppenheim, *Beduinen*, II, 184.

<sup>3</sup> Potter, *Representing Reality*, 105, 110.

sedentary ways of life, the representations of the Bedouin are not disconnected from the realities of nomad-sedentary relations. On the contrary, they can be conceived as features that accompany this very relationship, and therefore are features that embrace friendly and adversary terms, receptive and repulsive attitudes. Strictly speaking, conceptualizations of Bedouin life cannot be confined to the delineation of cultural segregation, just as they cannot be exhaustively understood as constructions of otherness. "Bedouinism" i.e. the representation of the Bedouin, often appears intimately related to Arab self-images and thus conveys various cultural propositions and identity constructions. This means that any analysis of the representation of the Bedouin must bear in mind that both, the "real" Bedouin way of life, and Bedouinism intermingle in the Arab past and to a certain degree continue to do so in the present. More specifically, it would be a rewarding undertaking to demonstrate in detail how representations referring to the antithetical structure of qualities pertaining to Bedouin or sedentary milieus are part of nomad-sedentary interrelations, since both sides contribute to this concept and make use of it. – However, only a modest prelude can be presented at this stage.

Nevertheless, by way of a preliminary consideration it may be helpful to refer to the speech act theorist John R. Searle's approach to what he calls the construction of social reality. In moving from the philosophy of language to a philosophy of society, his suggestions concern conventions and how to explain them beyond the simple principle of the maximization of utility by individuals. According to Searle, social facts are based on the collective imposition of function, which is not intrinsic to the physical nature of the phenomena in question, but is "assigned from outside by conscious observers and users".<sup>4</sup> In this manner, features of Bedouin life are invested with functions, too. Mobility, for instance, is seen as avoiding servitude, and hardship is understood as safeguarding the capacity of self defence. Searle's theory intends more than this, of course, reaching out beyond the elucidation of concepts in an attempt to explicate common practices. His conceptions of "collective intentionality"<sup>5</sup> and collectively recognized status<sup>6</sup> are meant to explain how collective action may arise from the use of speech, i.e. from the commitments established by using speech. Critics have more than once challenged the significance of these terms as a plausible explanation of society in general.<sup>7</sup> However, we may retain the idea that the representations of the Bedouin contribute to the constitution of collective intentions which tend to accommodate or to banish Bedouin impact on sedentary society.

As a consequence, these representations do more than to bestow symbolic meanings upon the nomadic pastoralist, such as the ascription of naturalness or self-determinism for example. Instead "Bedouinism" should be recognized as being

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<sup>4</sup> Searle, *Construction*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 41, 121.

<sup>7</sup> Koepsell, *John Searle's ideas*.



part of a social reality to which it contributes by establishing two main configurations of nomad-sedentary relations. An inclusive pattern of representation serves to define values perceived as being common to both groups. This is mainly achieved by assigning noble attributes, such as moral dignity or linguistic and rhetorical capacities, to the Bedouin Arabs. An exclusive pattern of representation corroborates the insurmountable differences between nomads and sedentary peoples. It maintains a cultural frontier used mutually – but mainly in a sedentary context – to construct the image of otherness. Beyond this binary structure, there are representations of the Bedouin not confined to delivering any unambiguous assessment. They thus offer a creative and thought-provoking ambivalence.

In the following, we will give an outline of these patterns of Bedouinism. In order to retain a certain temporal coherence, we will concentrate roughly upon the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. As a first step, we will explore Arab authors' perceptions of distinctions and interrelations between Bedouin and sedentary people. From this perspective we will examine what effect these assessments have when assigning particular functions to elements of nomadic life.

Research mostly conducted during the last decades has done much to deconstruct, or correct, established ideas regarding nomadic pastoralists. Neither can it be maintained that they are generally engaged in autonomous subsistence economy based upon animal husbandry, nor that their movements are determined by natural environment, or that insurmountable boundaries between nomadism and sedentary life prevent nomads from changing their livelihood and ways of life.<sup>8</sup> It has become a generally acknowledged fact that multifarious aspects of interaction characterize nomad-sedentary relations in past and present.<sup>9</sup> Modern studies highlight their multi-resource economy, since raising livestock in natural pasture almost everywhere is accompanied and replenished by other productive activities, such as cultivation, hunting, fishing, caravanning, smuggling, predatory raiding and extortion or the selling of labor.<sup>10</sup> Transitions, even temporal, of peasants to nomadism, as well as shifts in the status between the inferior *shāwīyah*, sheep and goat-herding status and the superior *badw*, camel-herding status show that boundaries often are fluid. Although many aspects of these relationships have been elucidated so far, more exploration concerning typology and role of this interaction in differing socio-political configurations is needed in order to understand the functioning of nomadic existence and its impact.

The insight gained from modern research is concordant with visions offered by Arab authors mostly of the tenth/eleventh centuries. They do not dispose of the same critical and self-critical approaches of course, and do not focus on understanding nomad-sedentary relations. But their descriptions and concepts differen-

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<sup>8</sup> Marx, "Are there pastoral nomads?", 103f., provides a summary of the positions most liable to revision.

<sup>9</sup> Lancaster/Lancaster, "Who are these nomads?"

<sup>10</sup> Salzman, "Introduction", 23.

tiate between particular modes of nomadic pastoralist activity and provide evidence for their perception of narrow interrelations between nomadic and rural populations.

The geographer Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 973), describes the *Djazīrah*, i.e. roughly the plateaus stretching between the upper Tigris and Euphrates, as a region where nomads and sedentary population intermesh: “The *Djazīrah* consists of large steppes, desert-like regions and salt marshes used for their salt and alkaline substances. Tribes from Rabī‘ah and Muḍar used to live there, holders of horses, sheep and some camels. In their majority they are in close contact with villages and their population, and they are therefore ‘sedentary nomads’ (*bādiyah ḥādirah*).”<sup>11</sup> When the same author compares the thinly populated deserts of the Iranian plateau to the *bādiyah*, the steppes of Arabia, he states that in the latter even desert-like areas are inhabited by nomads and settled people. “Even in the arid zones of the steppes (*mafāwiz al-bādiyah*) one finds pasture, Arab tribes(people), towns and villages.” “In northern Arabia one would hardly find a place,” he continues, “which does not belong to the confines of a tribal group moving around in search for pasture.”<sup>12</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal obviously regards these steppes as a zone where pasture used by nomads and sedentary settlements are intertwined.

Likewise, al-Muqaddasī (d. 990) describes the Arabian steppes as having “watering places, ponds, wells and springs, hills and sand areas, villages and date palms, some mountains and many (Bedouin) Arabs, dreadful roads, fresh airs, but bad water”.<sup>13</sup> It is tempting to compare these statements to the modern notion of “enclosed nomadism”. Rowton postulated a sharp contrast between two types of nomadism. In the instance of enclave nomadism, the grazing lands visited by nomads constitute contained areas partly or completely within the sedentary zone while in the instance of external nomadism, the grazing lands were located outside sedentary zones in the deserts and arid steppes of Arabia.<sup>14</sup> The views of Arab authors do not insist on such a contrast, but stress instead the presence of sedentary groups even in the Arabian steppes thus confirming the spatial proximity of nomad and sedentary existence in general terms. This suggests that Rowton’s categories are flawed. At the same time, Ibn Ḥawqal’s sketch of the particular mode of nomadism in the *Djazīrah* is consistent with the idea of a distinctive nomadic existence in the midst of sedentary peoples.

Terms applied to define nomads and sedentary life by Arab authors also reflect the intermeshing of both ways of life. To illustrate this, we may refer to the lexicographer al-Azharī (d. 980), whose first hand experience with Bedouin confers him to be a particular authority in these matters. He was held captive for several years in

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *Sūrat al-ard*, 227f.; trans. 222.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 401; trans. 392.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsim*, 248; Engl. trans. 223.

<sup>14</sup> Rowton, “Enclosed nomadism”, 1f.

Arabia and describes his experience of hardship and deprivation:<sup>15</sup> “(Years ago) I had been afflicted by being taken prisoner the year when the Qarmatians attacked the annual pilgrim caravan at al-Habīr.<sup>16</sup> The people to whose share of booty I belonged were mostly from the (tribal confederation) of Hawāzin mixed with some groups of the Tamīm and Asad at al-Habīr. (These people) live and grow up in the steppe, where they habitually follow the rainfalls when seeking for pasture, and then come back to where watering places are perennial. They are tending their herds and live on the milk they get from them. They talk according to the natural disposition of people living in the steppe, and according to their ingrained gifts. In their speech, linguistic errors and mistakes hardly ever occur.<sup>17</sup> I remained a long time in their captivity and we used to spend the winter out in the steppes, sought firm grounds in the time of rainfall and fresh pasture, and spent the summer heat covering us (against the sun). From talking to them and listening to their talk among each other I have learned many expressions and rare dicta.”

Al-Azharī’s esteem for the linguistic authority of the Bedouin was a common scholarly attitude representative of Arab philology from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Bedouin speech was consulted systematically in an effort to safeguard and standardize the Arabic language. His lexicon bears particular witness to this method, since he quotes many expressions and dicta which he claims to have heard from these people. It may be due to his expertise in these matters, that his distinction of “Bedouin” and “sedentary”, *bādiyah* and *ḥādirah*,<sup>18</sup> which later was quoted by Ibn Manẓūr in his wide-spread *Lisān al-‘Arab*, does not preserve the conception of an opposition between both terms. Instead, “sedentary” may designate a temporary status valid for members of both groups. Thus *ḥādirah* is applied to those “who return to populated areas (*mahādir*) for the hot summer season in order to camp at perennial watering places, which they do not leave before the earth offers pasture and ponds are filled.”<sup>19</sup> The author describes in some detail Bedouin water management in different seasons including times of drought, when water is transported on camel back from watering places to those who cannot easily cover the distance, and when the frequency of watering the beasts is drastically reduced. He therefore is naturally conscious of the fact that seasonally “settled” life of the Bedouin is caused by their need of water.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, rhythm and range of mobility indeed brings Bedouin and sedentary people regularly into contact,<sup>21</sup> and al-Azharī’s use of the term *ḥādirah* takes this circumstance into account. He applies this term also to settled people including holders of

<sup>15</sup> Al-Azharī, *Tabdhīb al-lughah*, I, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Here the sandy region in the north east of Arabia; cf. Ibn Hawqal, *Ṣūrat al-ard*, 35. This incident happened in the year 312/924; cf. Zakkār, *Qarāmīṭah*, 212.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Versteegh, *Arabic Language*, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Plural form of *bādin* resp. *ḥādir*.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Azharī, *Tabdhīb al-lughah*, IV, 199, 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> See S. Sowayan’s contribution in this volume.

livestock living in tents: "Those who stay close to perennial watering places, not moving away in winter or summer, are settled people, regardless of whether they live in villages, in the open countryside, in huts made from mud, or in tents built close to water places, as long as they live a settled life using only the pasture of their surrounds to graze their animals."<sup>22</sup>

Al-Azhari's conception thus distinguishes non-mobile pastoralists from camel herding Bedouin (*bādūnah*) who move around in the steppe seeking grazing grounds, the location of which is, especially in Arabia, unstable and is dependent on scarce rainfalls. When he describes the particular Bedouin search for pasture (*nuj'ah*),<sup>23</sup> he refers to *a'rāb*, an ambivalent term, which specifies here the camel herder, as we may infer from the context.<sup>24</sup>

The distinction between pastoralists who practise animal husbandry based on low-scale mobility, and Arab camel herding Bedouin reappears in the famous work of Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406). His concept of "people of the steppe-zone" (*ahl al-badw*) includes inhabitants of the countryside living from agriculture, as well as pastoralists (*shāwīyah*) who tend sheep, goats and cows. Different from these are nomadic Arab camel herding Bedouin, who are considered, according to Ibn Khaldūn as the most savage human beings living on a level with wild untamable animals and predators.<sup>25</sup>

His perception of nomads combines observation and theoretical conception. He maintains that a common feature of the Bedouin way of life consists in its restriction to elementary necessities with respect to housing, clothing, nourishment, etc., and he conceives "Bedouin" as representing the non-urban population of the steppe-areas in general. This is probably an adequate description of the central North-African countryside where agricultural and pastoral activities were often combined and where rudimentary or temporary settlements existed.<sup>26</sup> The idea of a sharp contrast between Bedouin and urban population is the result of a theoretical elaboration, which therefore allowed him to organize and corroborate his data.

In his view, civilization, or more precisely, the aggregation of people which gives shape to their civilizations, results from people's need to secure their livelihood.<sup>27</sup> Differences in the type of livelihood thus determine the antagonism between "natural" Bedouin and sedentary society in an urban setting, which tends to be preoccupied by leisure and luxury and succumbing to uncontrolled desires. In contrast to that, Bedouinity is characterised by courage (*shajā'ah*), vigour (*ba s*),

<sup>22</sup> Al-Azhari, *Tahdhīb al-lughab*, IV, 199, 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 360f.

<sup>24</sup> Because he refers to tracking or camel-caravanning (*za'ana*); cf. Leder, "Nomadische Lebensformen", 82f.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 212f. (chap. II, sec. 3); Engl. trans. (Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*), I, 252f.

<sup>26</sup> Hasan, *al-Madīnah wa-l-badīyah* ("Town and Steppe in Ifrīqiyyah during the Ḥafṣī Period").

<sup>27</sup> Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*, 69.

resistance (*man'ah*), a natural human disposition for goodness (*khair*) and other concomitants. These virtues correspond to a rather common perception which also may have been maintained by Bedouin themselves even until present times.<sup>28</sup> When Ibn Khaldūn makes use of this image, he primarily intends to sustain the logical order of a Bedouin-urban opposition. But he does not postulate a static relationship; instead he sees the dynamics resulting from the tendency of Bedouin existence to find its final purpose in attaining the comfort of urban civilization by peaceful and other means.

However, Arab camel herding Bedouin are singled out, because they are more deeply rooted, or more accomplished, in Bedouin existence than other people and penetrate deeper into the deserts.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence they are less willing to subordinate to others, depend more than anybody else on their solidarity-group (*aṣabiyyah*) for defence, and are accustomed to restricted empowerment of leadership.<sup>30</sup> Ibn Khaldūn thus envisions the Arab nomads as an ideal-typical representation of the modes of livelihood and manners of people living in the *bādiyah*; as they are identified as the extreme opposite to the sedentary way of life, they appear as less adaptable to it than anyone else. Wherever they come into contact with sedentary civilization, they tend to make use of it for their one purpose and destructively affect its edifices and institutions.<sup>31</sup> They also have no affinities for developing crafts which only sedentary civilization brings forth, and this disposition has had an imprint on societies dominated by these Arab nomads throughout Islamic history.<sup>32</sup>

The extremeness of camel herders' existence in a hostile environment, their – temporary – isolation in remote areas as well as their self-determinism, probably are pre-conceived ideas, which inspired Ibn Khaldūn's characterization of the particularities of this type of Bedouin life. It is sufficiently clear from the terse extracts above, that his representation of the Bedouin carries the imprint of a theoretical conception of history. In a likely manner, the attribution of characteristics of Bedouin life often betrays particular conceptual frameworks. However, they may concord with the image endorsed by the Bedouin themselves. In this vein, William and Felicity Lancaster suggested that the image of nomads generally defined as people living in a harsh physical desert environment upon the herding of camels, sheep and goats, originated from what the Bedouin said about themselves, and further betrays the idea that "physical environment determines human institutions".<sup>33</sup> Already twenty years prior to that, Emanuel Marx argued, that the image of the Bedouin, spread by the travellers, missionaries, and administrators of the

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>29</sup> *Aktharu bidāwatan min sāriri l-umam wa-ab'adu majalan fi l-qafr*, see *Muqaddimah*, 267 (chap. II, sec. 28); Engl. trans., I, 306.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 263f. (chap. II, sec. 26); Engl. trans., I, 303.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 720f (chap. V, sec. 21); Engl. trans., II, 353.

<sup>33</sup> Lancaster/Lancaster, "On the nature of power", 145.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as an “individualist, a lover of freedom, who struggles heroically with nature’s forces, a lover of adventure and war who behaves chivalrously to the defeated” etc., is not entirely imaginary, but rather represents the Bedouin as he sees himself, or as he represented himself to his addressee.<sup>34</sup>

The idealization of Bedouin mobility and relating concepts of strength, courage, lack of restrictions is a common ground for sedentary and Bedouin representations of nomadic life. One of the most distinct elaborations of this perception was produced by the historian, geographer and encyclopaedist al-Mas‘ūdī (d. ca. 956). Contrary to the critical stance of Ibn Khaldūn, his characterization of Bedouin existence conveys an optimistic vision of Arab identity. In this aspect, his approach is typical of the glorification of Arab patrimony which was envisioned as being closely related to the features of Bedouin life.

“The Arabs (i.e. here the Bedouin) were of the opinion that roaming upon the earth (*jawalān al-ard*), and choosing the places to stay for only a short time, was the most appropriate for those who possess inner nobility (*‘izz*), and was the right thing to do for people who have a proper pride in themselves. Therefore they resolved that to proceed at random with the land, and to stay wherever one likes, would be more suitable than anything else. For this reason they chose the steppes as their habitat. Others maintain that when God assembled in the ancient Arabs’ (nature) great inner dignity, noble high-mindedness and a sense of high destiny, excessive pride, repulsion against shame and turning away from ignominy, was when they first began pondering over settlements and appreciating residences. But then they contemplated the nature of towns and buildings, and discovered that living there engendered disgrace and deficiencies. Knowledgeable, distinguished people among them said: ‘Territories fall ill, like human bodies, and they are afflicted by ruin. It is therefore a necessity to choose locations in accordance with the state of their probity, since the climate, for instance, may become strong and adverse and then affects bodies and minds of people.’ Mindful people therefore said: ‘To be enclosed in buildings and encircled by walls means to be prevented from moving around unrestrictedly on the earth, and it means to be cut off from the possibility of roaming. It puts high-mindedness in fetters, and detains the natural disposition to competition for gaining eminence (*al-musābaqah ilā l-sharaf*). (For these reasons) there is no benefit in remaining in such a state.’ (...) So they preferred to live in the steppes and to set up their camps in the wilderness. This is why they are the strongest with respect to endeavour and patience, and why they are physically most healthy, most noble in granting protection, defending honour (*dhimār*) and displaying generosity. (...) The Arabs (Bedouin) distinguish themselves from other nomadic people (*bawādī l-umam*) because of what we said about their selection of the best places and seeking their domiciles.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Marx, “The ecology and politics”, 41f.

<sup>35</sup> Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, II, 246f., § 1108f., cf. Ziauddin, “Al-Mas‘ūdī’s conception”, 94.

Although al-Mas'ūdī, where he refers to the notion of *iq̄līm*, Arabic version of the Greek *κλίμα*, does not resort to the doctrine of seven *climata*, but rather picks up the Iranian concept of district (*keshwār*),<sup>36</sup> he obviously postulates climatic influence on the Bedouin's healthy nature and character in this passage. But more interesting than the climatologic aspects of his elaboration is the use he makes of it. The natural environment of the Bedouin is brought into play as an argument demonstrating that their temperament is nurtured by the effects of climate and thus relays on solid foundations not liable to change. Prior to this argument is the author's decision to invest the Bedouin with virtuous attributes inspiring them to shun away from sedentary life.

Contrary to what appears in this passage, al-Mas'ūdī does not entirely ignore the fact that that Bedouin migration in search of pasture is bound by natural and political restrictions, in that it is seasonal, demanding periodical gathering at watering places, and is normally confined to areas and watering places known as belonging to a specific group.<sup>37</sup> Instead, the guiding idea of his exposé is to offer a historical<sup>38</sup> and geographical explanation of Arab nomadism connected with an assignment of virtues and functions which glorify the Bedouin Arab legacy. In a likewise manner this cliché is summarized in an explication of the Arab nomadic way of life, which is said to have been recited to the Iranian king in pre-Islamic times. When asked to describe the innate nature of these people, the Arab ambassador claims that the (Bedouin) Arabs were characterized by "nobility of character, the practice of ceremonial hospitality, the habitude to offer refuge to the fearsome and to protect unconditionally those who ask for it, to lend support to laudable action and to sacrifice their life for an honourable cause. They are masters of night-journeying and sudden attack, they populate the desert, and make man live in the wasteland, they are accustomed to contention, detest submissiveness and practice blood revenge, they feel repulsion against shame and protect their honour."<sup>39</sup>

When al-Mas'ūdī pictures nomadism as a deliberate choice motivated by a predilection of mobility as a mode of life granting unrestricted use of the genuine capacities and ambitions of the Bedouin, he draws on concepts of virtue and self-determinism which had been attributed to Bedouin existence well before he expressed his views. From his point of view, Arab and Bedouin patrimony is undistinguishable, and the characteristic ascribed to the Bedouin as one that emerges from a nomadic mobile life-style comprises qualities which are a legacy to Arabs in general. His conception constitutes an inclusive pattern, which describes a moral universe common to Bedouin and sedentary Arabs.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., I, 100, § 189; cf. Miquel, "Iklīm"; cf. Kramers, "Tradition iranienne".

<sup>37</sup> Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, II, 249, § 1112.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., II, 244, § 1102.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., II, 248, § 1111; tradition quoted from al-Haytham b. 'Adī.

Values and virtues ascribed to the Bedouin are not only an established model in the sedentary tradition; the image of Bedouin life, which here is elaborated in a rather unique manner, corresponds, generally speaking, with the paramount Arab self image constructed from the testimonies of a heroic pre-Islamic and early Islamic past. This image also appears in a corresponding manner, when non-sedentarized Arabs emphasized the merits of their existence in comparison with sedentary life. The poet al-Quṭāmī (d. ca. 720), for instance, refers to warrior qualities which resulted in the Bedouin self-determination. "Who is proud of what sedentary life provides, has not seen the men of the steppe.//Whilst they bind the donkey (in front of their doors), we possess sharp lances and excellent horses."<sup>40</sup>

Many a verse from ancient Arabic as well as contemporary Bedouin poetry could be adduced in order to illustrate reference to the canon of values and virtues mentioned above.<sup>41</sup> More intricate would be the endeavour to compile passages which explicitly compare nomad and sedentary ways of life, such as the famous verses, said to have been produced by Maysūn, a Bedouin wife of the caliph Mu'āwiyah (d. 680): she prefers the simple life in the steppe, despite all its hardships, since she does not need the luxury which sedentary life offers her. As she declares in this context, a weak camel foal which moves slowly and thus holds up the moving convoy is dearer to her than any swift mule.<sup>42</sup>

Nostalgia for the homelands is a literary motif often applied in literature, and in Arabic poetry it includes the longing for a life in the steppe.<sup>43</sup> Within the intrinsic scheme of confrontation between natural simplicity and artificial luxury, which is easily recognizable, more specific topics may be spotted in an effort to elucidate the signification of Bedouin representation. Again, mobility is identifiable as an idea related to various issues, which manifest what Bedouin existence signifies in sedentary context.

The poet al-Mutanabbī (d. 965), contemporary of the abovementioned authors from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, was quite familiar with the Bedouin milieu because he stayed several times for shorter and more extended periods in the steppe between Syria and Iraq.<sup>44</sup> In his poetry, he deals quite frequently with Bedouin and concepts of Bedouin life. In contrast to the political realities of his time, he was fervently in favour of an "Arab" leadership,<sup>45</sup> which he finally saw represented in the Ḥamdānīd prince of Aleppo, Sayf al-Daulah (reg. 943-969). The virtues he praises for his patron may be described as an amalgam of Bedouinism and Arab

<sup>40</sup> Al-Quṭāmī, *Dīwān*, no. 18.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Jabbur, *Bedouins*, 309-322; Mashāriqah, *al-Hayāt al-ijtimā'iyah*, 186-211.

<sup>42</sup> Kaḥḥāla, *A'lām al-nisā'*, V, 136f.; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḥ Dimashq*, I.XX, 136f.

<sup>43</sup> Arazī, "al-ḥanīn", 307-315.

<sup>44</sup> Blachère, *Un poète*, 22, 55-73.

<sup>45</sup> "People are as good as your kings, therefore Arabs whose kings are non-Arab (*'ajam*) do not prosper." (*Wa-immamā l-nāsu bi-l-mulūki wa-mā/tuḥḥu 'urbun mulūkubā 'ajamū*), al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, IV, 179; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, I, 326.



ideals. But unlike al-Mas'ūdī, he does not refer to an idealized image of Bedouin existence. There are several reasons for this. His poetry evolves from, and echoes a literary movement, which endeavoured to replace the matrix of ancient Arabic poetry and its Bedouin imprint through stylistic and thematic innovation, often critical of inherited concepts and motifs. Since his hero, the prince of Aleppo, had to oppress Bedouin rebellion several times, al-Mutanabbī did not hesitate to praise the triumph of his patron by using invective poetry and slander against his Bedouin enemies. And finally, his personal ambitions, intellectual horizon and luxurious life-style set him in contrast to the modesty of a precarious Bedouin existence.

In his poetry al-Mutanabbī thus pursues inclusive and exclusive strategies concerning the Bedouin. Aspects of Bedouin existence in the steppe remain an anti-thesis to the enfeebling effects of sedentary life; the restrictedness of Bedouin society is satirized, and the naturalness of the Bedouin is ambivalent, since it represents limitation and potential.

To illustrate these tendencies, few examples may suffice. In a poem written in Egypt, where the author's expectations had been disappointed, the empty space of the desert is shown in contrast to the treacherous company in the city, the endurance of hardship and the roaming in the steppes to the motionlessness and sticking to a place.

“Let me be in the open waterless country, where I don't need a guide, and in the midday heat, where I don't need to hide.

I find rest in this and that, and feel exhausted when I have to reside.” (...)

“I may find the watering place without any sign, except some clouds and flashes of light.

My Lord and my sword protect my life, if ever the lonely soul needs someone at his side.

I avoid the misers' hospitality, even if an ostrich's egg is the only meal at night.

Since friendship became swindle, treacherous smile with smile I smite.

And I suspect whom I once trusted, since I know him to be of human kind.” (...)

“When the doctor says: ‘You ate unhealthy food, disease is caused by your diet’,

His science ignores that I am a racer diseased by respite.”<sup>46</sup>

The poet does not intend to describe Bedouin life in these lines; instead he pictures yearning for an escape from complications typical of social life in urban context. When he associates roaming in the steppe with strength, health and self-determination, and when he asserts that the hardships of a lonely life in the wilderness is compensated by the absence of disappointing human relationship, he draws on a repertory of values inherent to Bedouinism. The values ascribed to Bedouin life

<sup>46</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, IV, 272–279; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, IV, 134–144. First verse: *Malūmukumā yajillu 'ani l-malāmi/wa-waq'u fa'alibi fawqa l-kalāmi* (for the translated verses, see appendix no. 1).

may imply, and in this case explicitly aim at a censure of urban civilization. An analogous idea is that naturalness which can be conceived as a superordinate concept entails strength as well as beauty endorsed by “naturally” decent manners:

“Not are the faces deemed as good-looking in the city like a well-formed Bedouin maiden’s face.

Beauty in sedentary confines is fashioned by cosmetic art, but in the Bedouin way of life is a natural grace.

What a difference there is between a tamed goat and a white antelope in regard to scent and beauty – with or without her attentive gaze!

I would give my life for the desert antelope who does not twist her words nor dyes her eyebrows (to cause maze).

Nor does she return from the bath ostentatiously, with polished heels and hip-swinging pace.”<sup>47</sup>

The mere opposition of natural and artificial does not possess anything specific to nomad-sedentary relations. But al-Mutanabbī repeatedly refers to female Bedouin beauty, and thereby evokes the conventional imagery of the fantastic Bedouin scenery. As an inheritance of ancient Arabic and Umayyad poetry, it is the stage of free and spontaneous meetings between men and women, of conversations and even clandestine – and dangerous – visits.<sup>48</sup> Beyond this usual setting, his associations betray an assessment of Bedouin life, centred upon, again, mobility and naturalness:

“I am in love with a Bedouin girl, who lives at my heart in a tent, but has not tightened its ropes (for staying).”<sup>49</sup>

Bedouin mobility is associated with endurance and thus denotes strength of character:

“Beauty travels in the two eyes of a young antelope which are moved around (in the steppe) by a Bedouin girl fascinating everyone at the camp.

Victuals complain about her ceaseless moving away, and her resistance – to whom will she ever arrive?”<sup>50</sup>

The Bedouin girl, in the natural environment of the steppe, disposes of many means to avoid unwanted persons and to safeguard her autonomy. Whereas nature

<sup>47</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, I, 288ff.; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, IV, 41ff. First verse: *Mani l-ja’adhiru fi ziyā’i l-a’arībī/humru l-ḥulā wa-l-matāyā wa-l-jalābībī* (for the translated verses, see appendix no. 2).

<sup>48</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, II, 51ff.; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, I, 174ff. First verse: *Al-yawmah ‘ahdikumu fayayna l-maw’idū/hayhāta laysa li-yawmi ‘ahdikumu ghadū*.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, I, 238; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, I, 342ff.: *Hāma l-fu’adu bi-a’rābiyatīn sakanat/baytan mina l-qalbi lam tamdud lahū tunubā*.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, IV, 17; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, IV, 353: *(Al-ḥusnu yarḥalū) Fi muqlatay rasha’in tudiruhumā/bada’wiyatun futinat bi-hā l-hilālū.//Tashkū l-matā’imu tūla hijratihā/wa-ṣudūdihā wa-mani lladhī taṣilū?*

here is a protection, the naturalness of the Bedouin may also be seen as a stigma, since it makes the Bedouin live on a level with the animal-world.

“The dog is crouching like a Bedouin warming at the fire, with compact arms and legs, which can not easily be twisted.”<sup>51</sup>

The simplicity of Bedouin life implies coarseness<sup>52</sup> and restrictions in many respects. Even ceremonial hospitality, a sanctuary of Bedouin life, is repetitive and tiring.

“Who will tell the Arab Bedouin that after them I found a man combining the qualities of Aristotle and Alexander?

I am fed up with the slaughtering of their mother-camels. Now I am the guest of a man who slaughters the gold coin purse for those he entertains.”<sup>53</sup>

Bedouin rebellion striving to resist the Arab prince reveals their savage animal-like nature. They are incapable to bow even to legitimate authority.

“You, Sayf al-Daulah, bring sedentary people and Bedouin alike under your control, in a manner such as Arabs never have had the habit.

The Bedouin Arabs sense (your power) just like wild animals smell human scent: they despise it and are taken by the wish to contradict.

They never have shown obedience to any other person, so that they could know how to subordinate and submit.”<sup>54</sup>

Despite his unambiguous refutation of Bedouin assertiveness, their rebellious nature remains related to values which Bedouin and sedentary Arabs share. They are however excluded in these lines from the realms of political power, wealth and refinement. Al-Mutanabbī's treatment of the Bedouin, however influenced by literary canon, conveys an attitude connected with the political realities of his day.

The longevity of concepts and their dependency on changing historical frameworks can be observed in the contents of the exclusive pattern of Bedouinism. It remounts to early Islamic times. Already in the Qur'ān and in exegetical literature we find the allusion to nomad-sedentary boundaries with reference to *a'rāb*, people related to a nomadic life and discussed as being politically problematic.

In ancient days, before Islam, the term Arab was not yet used among Arabs themselves. A group of tribes distinguished by their ability to cover large distances

<sup>51</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, III, 320; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, III, 107: (*Al-kalb*) *Yuq'ī julūsa l-badawiyyi l-muṣṭali/bi-arba'in majdūlatin lam tujdali.*

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Th. Bauer's contribution to this volume; Jabbur, *Bedouins*, 488–490.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, II, 276f.; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, IV, 288: *Man muḥliḡhu l-a'rābi innī ba'dahā/-shāhadtu Raṣṭālisa wa-l-Iskandarā//Wa-maliltu nahra 'ishārihā fa-aḏāfanī/man yanḡaru l-bidara l-nudāra li-man qarā.*

<sup>54</sup> Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, II, 203; *Sharḥ Dīwān*, III, 464f.: *Wa-akhdhun li-l-ḡawāḏiri wa-l-bawāḏi/bi-dabtin lam tu'awwadhu Nizāru/ Tashammamuhū shamīma l-wahshi insan/wa-tunkiruhū fa-ya'rūhā nifāru//Wa-mā nqādat li-ḡhairika fī zamānin/fa-tadri ma l-maqādatu wa-l-ṣaḡhārū.*

probably with the aid of the *shadād* saddle, as Zwettler suggested, was called Ma‘add.<sup>55</sup> Reference to this group already was used as a claim to certain prestigious “Bedouin” values, such as pride and fortitude, and to warn against their unsteadiness in political affairs. With the advent of Islam, the ambivalent relationship between trans-tribal governance and pastoral Arab tribal people is reflected by the term *a‘rāb*: Although related to the pastoral Arab nomads, the assessment of the political and social position of a man, or group, often was the decisive motive for applying the term.<sup>56</sup>

Resulting from this early use of the term with reference to political and cultural categories, the ambivalence of the image of the *a‘rābī* was further developed. His coarseness (*jafā’*) and political unreliability are often evoked in polemical context.<sup>57</sup> He exemplifies heroism, virtue and mastery of the Arab language, but does not fulfil the requirements of urban sophistication according to the qualities repeatedly evoked and firmly related to this term. Conceptualizations of the *a‘rābī* Bedouin cultivate, promote and finally obliterate an Arab past bound to the image of the Bedouin. Later, when the image of Bedouin Arab had lost its significance for the educated Arab elite, a re-creation of the heroic nomad was undertaken in popular literature.<sup>58</sup>

Within the various tendencies which arise from the representation of the Bedouin, we meet a vast domain where role and function of the Bedouin are not subjugated to unambiguous assessment. As might be expected, this holds true especially for literary testimonies, which by nature show resemblance with interrelated motives. Here the character of the Bedouin provides specific possibilities to reflect attitudes resisting the officially prescribed correctness.

Among the very common and numerous Bedouin jokes in the compendia of Arab humour is the following: A tribesman poses a legal question of pressing urgency: If [at the end of time] the Antichrist (*dajjāl*) appears while people are starving [during the turmoil of this circumstance], and he serves a tasty dish of meat soup with bread (*tharīd*), would it be permissible – he asks – that I first eat as much as I want and only then declare him to be a liar?<sup>59</sup>

This joke features a characteristic said to be typical of those shrewd and yet simplistic people: They have a striking predilection for approaching things with regard to their utility and for always seeking, in any given situation, the chance to gain an immediate advantage.

<sup>55</sup> Zwettler, “Ma‘add”.

<sup>56</sup> For more detail, with reference to Retsö’s thesis, see Leder, “Nomadische Lebensformen”, 91–94.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 98; Binay, *Die Figur des Beduinen*.

<sup>58</sup> See Th. Herzog’s contribution to this volume.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Ḥuṣrī, *Jam‘*, 37; Marzolph, *Arabia Ridens*, no. 486.

In this example, the holy and the secular, Antichrist and food, collective destiny and individual interest, the great horizon of God's salvation plan and the small interest in everyday survival are set in a sharp contrast to each other.

According to the image represented in many jokes the Bedouin's attitude contrasts with the officially recommended morale especially with respect to religion: Even religious practice must be instrumental to some sort of immediate gain. One more example: Asked, when he would like to die, a Bedouin says: If at all necessary, at the first day of Ramaḍān.<sup>60</sup>

The idea behind that answer could be that death would spare him an abominable and useless month of ritual fasting. But most probably, the calculation is a little more complex: The man seems to refer to a sort of religious merit system, reckoning that he would gain, with a minimum of effort, the merits of dying while fasting. Although there is some cunning implied, it is of a rather simple and selfish nature. This impression is even enhanced by the fact that both jokes chosen here, display the Bedouins' obsession with food and eating and thereby refer to his disadvantaged situation.

But both jokes also demonstrate immunity against the internalization of religious precepts and they thus display an attitude liberated from the excessive weight of religious obligation. Relief is a common effect of many jokes, of course, but our examples can not be reduced to this feature. The Bedouin in these examples can not arbitrarily be replaced by any other character, even though the figure of the fool in the universal history of laughter shows some parallels.

Tradition elaborated a rich repertoire of attitudes, characteristics, and values ascribed to the Bedouin. They were put to use, by Bedouin and settled people alike, as instruments of expressing stratagems, interests and leitbilder. Often it is possible to relate the concepts and ideas to the real nomad and his historical role.

When Anatoly Khazanov<sup>61</sup> once wrote that the myth of the nomad has had an impact beyond the economic potential of nomadic life, he implicitly suggested, or we could understand him in such a way, that these conceptualizations merit to be studied. Bedouinism, the Arab myth of the nomad, is a rich and persistent tradition which reflects Bedouin-sedentary relations in the Arab world.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., no. 1247.

<sup>61</sup> Khazanov, "Myths and Paradoxes".

## Appendix (as referred to in notes 46, 47)

		١
ووجهي والهجير بلا لثام	ذراني والفلاة بلا دليل	(٢)
وأثعب بالإناخة والمقام	فإني أستريحُ بذِي وهذا	(٣)
سوى عدِّي لها برقُ الغمام	فقد أُرِدُ المياهَ بغيرِ هادٍ	(٥)
إذا احتاجُ الوحيدُ إلى الدمام	يُذمُّ لمهجتي ربي وسيفي	(٦)
وليس قرى سوي مُخَّ الثعام	ولا أُمسي لأهل البخل ضيفاً	(٧)
جرتُ على ابتسامٍ بابتسام	فلما صار وُدُّ الناس خيباً	(٨)
لعلمي أنه بعضُ الأنام	وصرتُ أشكُ فيمن أصطفيه	(٩)
وداؤكُ في شراكِ والطعام	يقول لي الطبيبُ أكلتُ شيئاً	(٣٥)
أضرَّ بجسمه طولُ الجمام	وما في طبِّه أني جوادُ	(٣٦)
		٢
كأوجهِ البدوياتِ الرعابيب	ما أوجهُ الحضَرِ المُستحسناتُ به	(١١)
وفي البداوةِ حُسنٌ غيرُ مجلوب	حُسنُ الحضارةِ مجلوبٌ بتطريةِ	(١٢)
وغيرِ نظرةِ في الحُسنِ والطيبِ	أين المعيرُ من الآرامِ نظرةً	(١٣)
مَضَعُ الكلامِ ولا صُغَّ الحواجيب	أفدي ظباءَ فلاةٍ ما عرَفُنْ بها	(١٤)
أوراكهنَّ صقيلاتِ العراقيب	ولا يرزُنْ من الحمامِ مائلةً	(١٥)

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