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The Attitude of the pre-Islamic Arabs Toward Crafts and Artisans

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Abstract

Did Jahili Arabs really despised Crafts and Craftsmen?

From the late Roman period the Saracens (the people of Arabia) were described by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (380 CE.) as wandering over extensive lands, having no home and no fixed abode. In such lifestyle, they abstained of works and handicrafts that obligate their executors to be settled.

Such being the case, it would be important to ascertain the real attitude of the Arabs towards arts and crafts and, more importantly, to understand its original compelling reasons. One possible way to do this is to make a distinction between the views of the townsfolk and those of the Bedouin in Arabia. It is also necessary to study this issue within the historical and cultural milieu of the ancient Near East. Special emphasis should also be given to the links of the pre-Islamic Arabs with neighboring cultures such as those of the Mesopotamians, the Palestinian and Babylonian Jews and the Hellenists. The whole issue is of special importance in the study of the economic, social and artistic history of Islam. Here, one should ask questions like: Was there any continuation of the pre-Islamic attitudes within the Islamic milieu? If the answer is yes, what impacts did these attitudes have on Islamic society, economy and art?

Keywords: Jahili Arabs, nomads, handicrafts, Jahili poetry, blacksmithing, artisans, Islamic art.

As in other fields of the history of the Jāhilī Arabs, the lack of monumental and archaeological data from that period (200c.-600c.) leads us to judge their attitude towards handicrafts and artisans according to the information that we may find scattered amongst the so-called Jāhilī Arab tales and poetry.

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However, from the late Roman period the Saracens (the Arabs of Arabia) were described by Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 380 CE.) as follows: "Nor does any member of their tribe ever take plow in hand or cultivate a tree, or seek food by the tillage of the land; but they are perpetually wandering over various and extensive districts, having no home, no fixed abode…"[2]Without a doubt, he meant by this the Bedouin tribes especially those who used to invade the Roman territories in Syria and Palestine. Relying on such information, Goldziher, in a short article, concluded a long time ago that the Arab tribal society despised most of the handicrafts and that mostly foreigners or people of low status were engaged in them in Arabia.[3]

In fact, it was not unusual for Bedouin Arabs to pour scorn on handicraft occupations. Engaging in them by free people of low status, slaves and foreigners is well known in other and older cultures. Such was the case in the ancient Near East during the first millennium (in the Assyrian empire and the Achaemenid Empire)[4]. In the ancient Jewish sources, in general, there is an ambivalent attitude towards the occupation of handicrafts. Fundamentally, labor was highly respected, so that Rabbis said, "Great is labor, for it honors the worker."[5] The expressions of *umanūt pgūma* (defective craft) and *umanūt miʿūlah* (excellent craft) were common in the tongue of the Palestinian and Babylonian *ḥakhamīm* (scholars), which means that there was a prestigious classification of crafts. Accordingly, occupations such as the arts and crafts of perfumery and of the goldsmith were favored while tanning, pottery making, weaving, blacksmithing

[2] Ammianus Marcellinus, *the Roman history*, XIV, 3, 4, p. 11.

[3] Goldziher, "Die Handwerke," pp. 316-318.

[4] On the situation in the ancient Near East, see Zaccagnini, "Patterns," pp. 245-264; Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 92.

[5] *Babylonian Talmud*, *Nedarim*, 49b, *Avot*, 2: 2

and dyeing were despised crafts.[6] Furthermore, the dictum was: "A man should not teach his son to be an ass driver, a camel driver, a barber, a potter, a wagon driver, a sheep herder, or store keeper, because these are the trades of thieves." One Rabbi said: "A man should always teach his son a clean and easy craft. For there is no craft that does not [potentionally] contain poverty and wealth, for neither poverty nor wealth is due solely to the craft, but depends also on one's merit."[7] The Rabbis expressed a negative attitude towards some crafts, saying: "He whose business is with women has a bad character e.g., goldsmiths, carders, [handmill] cleaners, peddlers, wool-dressers, barbers, launderers, blood-letters, bath attendants and tanners. From any of these, neither a king nor a High Priest may be appointed. What is the reason? Not because they are unfit, but because their profession is, mean."[8] The following craftsmen can sin if they are not especially careful: the scribe, the doctor, the teacher of young children, the town judge, the shop-keeper and the butcher.[9] It seems that one of the most despised craftsman is the blood-letter to whom ten bad things were ascribed: "He walks veering to one side, he has a conceited spirit, he leans back when sitting, he has a grudging and an evil eye, he eats too much and excretes too little, and he is suspected of adultery, robbery, and bloodshed."[10]

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[6] See Ayālī, *Po'alīm vi-Ummanīm*, pp. 79-83, 97-100.

[7] Nuesner, *the Talmud*, vol. 26, ch.4, 7.b, pp. 251-252; *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushīm*, fol. 82a.

[8] *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin*, fol. 82a; in *Bava Bathra*, fol. 16b one Rabbi stated, "The world cannot do without either a spice-dealer or a tanner. Happy is he whose occupation is that of a spice-dealer and woe to him whose occupation is that of a tanner."

[9] *Babylonian Talmud*, *Avot*, 36:5.

[10] *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin*, fol. 82a, [Gemara].

Another ambivalent attitude towards crafts and craftsmen existed also in Greek culture. On the one hand, in the late 6th and 5th c. BC a positive attitude towards artisans took place; they were highly appreciated and compensated in Corinth and in Athens, yet many of them could not enjoy full citizen rights as their slave or metic (foreigner) status would not permit it. On the other hand, Plato, Aristotle and others had a high estimation of the products of the artisans but a very low one of their producers. God composed people of metals of various quality claimed Socrates, therefore: "Some have the power of command, and in their composition He has mingled gold, wherefore they also have greatest honor; others He has made of silver, in order to be auxiliaries; others again who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen He has composed of brass and iron." According to Aristotle: "The good man and the statesman and the good citizen ought not to learn the crafts of inferiors except for their own occasional use; if they habitually practice them, there will cease to be a distinction between master and slave." [11] For the Roman Cicero "the workshop was irreconcilable with the condition of the free man" and for Seneca "the artisan's task was 'vile' and 'vulgar' and had nothing to do with the true qualities of man." Thus, they relegated the craftsman to a less than human level or to the rank of a second-class citizen.[12]

Back to the Arabs, on the one hand, the impression of scorn is perceived from one of the meanings attached to the term *mahana* or *mihna* (pl. *mihan*) synonymous to the term *ṣanʿa* and both with the same denotation, handicraft. It is a "mostly domestic profession, service and handiness", *māhin* is the one who serve others skillfully (*ʿabd*), and on this background, it can easily be confused

[11] Plato, *The Dialogues*, vol. 3, 415a-c, p. 104; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278a2-12, p. 108. See also Tanawy, "Arts and Crafts" pp. 45-54; Hasaki *Companion*, vol. 1, pp. 255-272; *the Cambridge Companion*, pp. 154-155.

[12] Morel, "The Craftsman" p. 214-244.

with the verbs *mahana* and *imtahana* signifying "to submit, to be humiliated" and *mahāna* (abasement) or *ihāna*, demeaning.[13] The derivation *mahīn* recurs in the Quran in four verses (Q32:8, 43:52, 68:10 and 77:20); in all of them, it means weak, despised and few, and when it refers to a man in Q68:10, it also means one who is light-headed.[14] It is possible that the negative meaning of the word *mahāna* has nothing to do with the real attitude of the Jāhilī Arabs toward crafts but one asks what is the source of the scornful attitude in Jāhiliyya, as we shall see later, and in Islamic times. For example, the well-known Abbasid scholar al-Jaḥiẓ, said that craftsmen will never gain wealth from their occupations, and even the late famous Ibn Khaldūn called the craftsmen *al-mustaḍʿafūn*, the weak people that usually are despised by the higher classes.[15] On the other hand, reading through the poetical and literary sources will show that in fact the demeaning attitude differentiated between one craft and another.

To understand the attitude of the Jāhilī Arabs towards handicrafts and artisans, it is better for us to recognize first the background from which they came. References to the peoples in north Arabia began early in the beginning of the first millennium in Biblical and Assyrian texts where they are referred to "usually in that tone of superiority so commonly adopted by settled states toward the nomadic peoples on their borders."[16] At the same time, it is assumed that the tribes of north Arabia took an important part in the traffic of aromatics from south Arabia to the Mediterranean world. Be that as it may, most of the pre-Islamic sources described the Arabs, certainly those of north Arabia and the

[13] *Lisān al-ʿArab*, art. m-h-n; Fayrūzabādī, art. m-h-n. See also Ghabin, *EI²*, "ṣināʿa".

[14] Tabari, *Tafsir*, 18:601, Q32:8; Ibn Qutayba, *Tafsīr*, p. 478.

[15] al-Jaḥiẓ, *al-Hayawān*, 4:434, Ibn Khaldūn (1436/2015), *Muqaddima*, Darwīsh al-Juwaydī (ed.), Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, pp. 35-36.

[16] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 59.

border regions of the settled lands, during the first millennium as people who lived in non-state organizations and as breeders of a new animal, the camel, which enabled them to use it for military purposes during their several frictions with neighboring empires. From early Assyrian times, different Arab individuals and peoples in north Arabia and in a diverse range of places in the Middle East were drawn into world history through their employment by the Ancient empires as guards of border areas, as a police force in Mesopotamia, and even as officials in the service of the empires. In addition in antiquity sources, different Arabs from different places were referred to as holders of a wide range of occupations and as leading different ways of life.[17] Diodorus Siculus (60-30 B.C.), referring to the Arabs who inhabited the eastern parts between Syria and Egypt, described them as: "Being difficult to overcome in war they always remain unenslaved; in addition, they never at any time accept a man of another country as their overlord and continue to maintain their liberty unimpaired," so that no king was ever able to enslave this nation.[18]

The title 'Arabia Felix' was given to south Arabia because of its fertile fruits and the growing of plants and trees of spicy scents, of which a plethora of fragrant sustenance was produced.[19] He also wrote that the people of Arabia used

[17] Retsö, *the Arabs in Antiquity*, p. 577-587; Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 58-83; Franz, "The Bedouin in History", pp. 22-25. See also the wide diversity of professions that different Arabs from different places occupied in Macdonald, "Arabs, Arabias and Arabic", pp. 280-285. Herodotus, pp. 4, 7, p. 172, 88, 209, praised their military expertise by saying that whoever wanted to invade Egypt should first obtain from the king of the Arabs a "safe passage" through his territories. Thus did Cambyses the Persian when he invaded Egypt.

[18] Diodorus *History*, 2.1.

[19] Diodorus, *History*, 2.48-49.

to mine a substance which they called 'fireless' gold and which they gathered in abundance as nuggets, perforating and alternating them with transparent stones to form a fine adornment worn on the wrist and the neck. It was also distinctive and incomparable with its brilliant white, smooth and heavy precious stones (Diodorus, 2.49-52, 3.45-46). Strabo gave a similar impression of the wealth of the Arabs when he asserted that the Arabs, among others, were not "so entirely destitute of the luxuries of civilization" (1.2.32). At the same time, Diodorus (19.94) described some of the customs of the Arabs thus: "They live in the open air, claiming as native land a wilderness that has neither rivers nor abundant springs that could enable a hostile army to obtain water. It is their custom neither to plant grain and set out fruit-bearing trees and use wine nor to construct any permanent abode; and if any man is found acting contrary to this, his penalty is death". About 300 years later, the Roman historian, Ammianus (C. 330), described several customs of the Saracens – the tent-dwellers of Arabia -, although not with any special affection, as clad in dyed cloaks down to the waist, ranging widely with the help of swift horses and slender camels in times of peace or disorder, they look for their prey, seize it and disappear swiftly. More interestingly: "nor does any member of their tribe ever take plow in hand or cultivate a tree, or seek food by the tillage of the land; but they are perpetually wandering over various and extensive districts, having no home, no fixed abode or laws; nor can they endure to remain long in the same climate, no one district or country pleasing them for a continuance."[20]

[20] See above Ammianus, *the Roman history*, 14.4. It should be noted that Ammianus gave the "earliest full description of Saracens" in which he referred to nomads who had previously been called Arabs but were not subjects of *Provincia Arabia*, see Macdonald, "On Saracens, the Rawwāfah Inscription and the Roman Army", VII, p. 1-2. See also Hoyland, *Arabia*, p. 253.

Thus the Greek and Roman historians referred to the Arabs as those who lived in three main geographical regions: in South Arabia known also as Arabia Felix, the Border regions of the Hellenistic, Roman and Persian worlds, Palmyra, Petra (Arabia Petraea), Mesopotamia and the inner and northern parts of Arabia (Arabia Deserta).[21] The Arabs of Arabia Felix and Arabia Patraea were tillers of diverse crops including aromatic frankincense and spices of Arabia Felix, with which the countries of the Mediterranean world were familiar and consequently many of them traded in these products. However, from north Arabia, we have "thousands of graffiti in a South Semitic script that indicate a nomadic lifestyle", and Macdonald noted that the inscriptions were found in the remote deserts and that "their content deals entirely with the nomadic life".[22] In contrast, the people of the deserts of Arabia, especially those of north Arabia, were better known as groups of nomad tribes living in tents, moving over wide expanses, invading settled lands, abstaining totally from cultivating trees or planting grains for their living. They thus practiced their freedom and rejected any kind of submission to foreign ruler. They nevertheless bred camels and used them successfully in their inroads but also in their scent trade with the settled world.[23] In our own interest,

[21] This geographical division of Arabia relies on Greek and Roman Geographical sources such as Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy, see Hoyland, p. 64.

[22] Franz, the "Bedouin in History" p. 22-24; Macdonald " Nomads and the Ḥawrān" pp. 311-313.

[23] Herodotus (484-425 BC) was the first Greek historian to draw the attention to the particular role of the Arabs in this trade; see Herodotus, *History*, *Thalia*, 107-108, pp. 243-244. According to him, Arabia was the only region that grew frankincense, myrrh, cassia, cinnamon and labdanum. See also the detailed reference of Diodorus, *History*, 2.49, to the importance of the aromatic and frankincense trade for the people of *Arabia Felix* and for the inhabited world of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Also Strabo (64 B.C.-21 A.D.), *Geography*, 1.2.32, described the wealth acquired by Arabia from

it is important to understand their estrangement from farming work. From archaeological and anthropological points of view, nomad societies naturally tend to adopt farming work – pasture and/or land cultivation - as their way of making a living, not beyond the bare subsistence level.[24] In other words, adopting farm work by nomads is only to get the bare necessities for living, not more; meaning this is not a real 'specialization' in farming in this style of living. This tendency still exists in contemporary Bedouin society of Saudi Arabia, where the major part of agricultural products of the tribe is assigned for domestic consumption only.[25]

However, principally, deep specialization in agriculture requires practicing a sedentary lifestyle and waiving the love for freedom to rove freely in the expanses of the desert. Perhaps here lies hidden one of the reasons for the scorn shown by nomads for sedentary people, some remnants of which still exist in our time. I mean the mutual scorn between those of Bedouin origin and the townsfolk in the Middle East.[26] For the Bedouin, living in a town means to be involved in its everyday life, to accept its laws, to be under the authority of its ruler, to live in it permanently and, more importantly as regards our own interest, to be

producing and exporting aromatics to the Roman world. See also the recent research of Mclughlin, *Rome and the Distant East*, pp. 61-81, 141-178.

[24] Ibn Khaldūn indicated this clearly by saying that pasture and tillage are the main occupations of the nomads, *Muqaddima*, (Beirut 1436/2015), p. 114. Lancaster, "Tribal formations" p. 154-155; concluded that for the tribes of Arabia keeping the principle of autonomy precedes "any acquisition of wealth". See also Cole, "Bedouin and social change" p. 130

[25] Cole, "Bedouin and social change", p. 130.

[26] It is needless to say that still in our time the Bedouin use the title '*fallāḥ*' (farmer) as an 'insult' to the townsfolk while the townsfolk answer the Bedouin with the opposite 'insult' '*badawī*'.

engaged in different occupations and crafts for a living and in doing so to serve others. However, the existence of this attitude of contempt did not mean that crafts and artisans were absent in the milieu of the Bedouin Arabs.

Numerous archaeological findings from different places in Arabia have shown that Arabia was exposed early on, from the second millennium up to the rise of Islam, to the cultural developments of the surrounding world. For instance in east Arabia, a large variety of everyday items was explored, much of which belonged to the international trade that thrived during the second millennium BC and the Greek and Roman periods. Hoyland claimed that the majority of the objects used in east Arabia would have been locally made and the existence of a large number of crafts was attested. According to him, the exploration of mine sites, hammerstones, kilns for smelting, moulds for casting and many necessary items for daily life all testify to the existence of the mining craft, its importance in daily life and its status as an industry.[27] Confirmation of this 'local ability' is found in Strabo's Geography where he mentions:

> "Both the Sabaeans and the Gerrhaeans (Hajar in east Arabia) have become richest of all; and they have a vast equipment of both gold and silver articles, such as couches and tripods and bowls, together with drinking-vessels and very costly houses; for doors and walls and ceilings are variegated with ivory and gold and silver set with precious stones".[28]

As result of this exposition, in the first six centuries A.D., wherever they lived the Arabs practiced a number of different life styles and lived in "different types

[27] Hoyland, pp. 32-35

[28] Strabo, *Geography*, (Harvard University Press), book 16, p. 349.

of society".[29] This information should not surprise us in the light of the additional reports that we receive from the inscribed texts of Hatra, about 110 km. south-west of Mosul (north modern Iraq). In these texts, there is a mention of numerous crafts and offices. In one text, we are told that in the beginning of the first century C. Hatra was under the rule of Santaruq I who called himself 'the King of the Arabs', and that Arab tribes roamed throughout north Iraq, called in the texts *ʿArabāya*. The texts mentioned several craftsmen who served the king or the sanctuary:

ʿabīd : *ṣāniʿ*, artisan. (107:4, 198:3)

ardiklā: a chief builder, in the Abbasid times was called *ardakhil* and in Hebrew *ardikhal* and *adrikhal*, all with the same meaning: a professional builder. In all cases, the word is a solecism from the Akkadian expression *arad-ēkallūtu*, which means a palace servant.

ashfar: cloth cleaner or weaver who worked for the sanctuary.

ashkaf : cobbler

asī : physician

binyā : builder, in Arabic *bannā'* (106:2, 3)

jalfa' : sculpture (237:2)

marbīnā : educator. In Arabic *murabbī*

najrā : carpenter, in Arabic *najjār*.

qīnyā : blacksmith, in Arabic *qayn*. It also means one who works with iron, copper and even gold.

More interesting is the fact that the inscribed texts contain not only the mentioned names of the crafts and offices but also the names of the artisans who

[29] It should be noted that our interest in this article is only to investigate the Arab attitude toward crafts during the Jāhiliyya period which is 300-200 years before Islam. For expansion, see Ficher, *Arabs and Empires*, pp. 75-89.

practiced these crafts and offices mostly in the service of the sanctuary or the royal palace.[30]

Similar references to crafts and artisans occurred in other Nabataean, Thamudic and Lahyani inscriptions from al-Ḥijr (Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) in north Arabia:[31]

al-ṣāʾigh : the jeweler

qayn : blacksmith

m-r-z-y-a : (ا-ز-ر-م): builder

asā : physician

f-a-s-l-a : sculptor (Hebrew: פסל, Arabic: *naḥḥāt*),

b-n-y-a : builder (*al-bannāʾ*).

ḥ-a-n-ṭ-ā : bears two meanings, (either) one who produces wheat (*ḥinṭa*) (or) one whose craft is to mummify.

s-s-n-ā : one who grows crops and fruit.

It is important to note the frequentness of the term *f-a-s-l-a* (sculptor) in the first half of the first century CE Nabataean inscriptions from al-Ḥijr (known also as Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) in northwest Arabia. The title is being added to the names of persons who occupied the profession. It seems that this art was widespread and profitable enough not only on the fringes of the Arabian Peninsula but also inside it. Furthermore, we may conclude that this art was socially accepted and the

[30] Follow these terms in Safar, "Kitābāt al-Ḥaḍar", pp. 21-62, see inscribed texts nos. 106:2b, 3b; 189:3; 190:1; 202:4. See also Ṭāha, "al-Alqāb wal-Waẓāʾif", 441-464.

[31] Al-Theeb, *Nuqūsh*, see for example inscriptions nos. 23, 37, 98, 129 with the word *f-s-l-a*, nos. 19, 78 with the word *ṣ-ī-gh-a* (jeweler), and no. 206:1 with the word ṣ-a-nʿa (made by). See the same author, *Nuqūsh Um Jadhāydh*, see inscriptions nos. 5:2, 27:1, 33:2, 71:1, 76:3, 174:1 188:1, 211:2. Laḥyānī inscriptions see Abū al-Ḥasan, *Nuqūsh Laḥyāniyya,* see inscriptions nos. 213, 220. In nos., 65 and 124 the verb built is being used.

works so much appreciated that the artisans felt free to inscribe their names on their works. In later inscriptions from the Liḥyān dynasty in Dadān we twice come upon the word *ṣāniʿ* (artisan). It was annexed as a title to the commemorated persons. Thus, in the inscribed texts of Hatra and of the Nabataean al-Ḥijr, we face a variety of crafts and general occupations that certainly existed during the first two centuries CE in the Arab communities of Hatra and the Nabataeans whose hegemony originated in the inner lands of Arabia.[32] However, one should remember that Hatra was an important cultural center in which mostly Arab urban and nomad populations were in contact.[33]

Moving ahead to the three centuries before the advent of Islam, we notice an increasing hegemony of the nomad elements over Arabia and deterioration of the civilized populations in the south and in the bordering areas in the northeast and northwest. We already noted that the nomads of Arabia led a free lifestyle, free of any form of rule, and as tough fighters they kept themselves unenslaved and never accepted the authority of foreign lords. Furthermore, Eusebius, 'father of church history' (d. 339 CE), included the Arabs within the nomadic people among whom one will never find a banker, modeller, painter, architect, geometer, singing-master and actor of dramatic poems.[34] In spite of these one-sided descriptions there existed continuous relationships between the nomads and the settled people inside and outside Arabia. No doubt, both sides needed each other, the nomads were in need of the products of the settled people, such as cloths, tools, vessels and weapons, and vice versa, the settled were in need of the nomad's dairy products, wool, leather and meat. Certainly, between the two

[32] Hoyland, *Arabia*, p. 77-78.

[33] On the role of these centers before Islam, see Dignas and Winter, Rome, pp. 152-172; Fisher, *Arabs and Empires*, pp. 35-39.

[34] Eusebius of Caesarea, 6.10

sides existed a kind of complementary economic relationship that brought both sides to "share certain techniques, beliefs, and kinship organizations".[35] A very prominent example is the institution of *ilāf* that the pre-Islamic Meccans concluded with some Bedouin tribes in order to enable a peaceful traffic of their trade caravans through the territories of these tribes.[36]

Anyway, the main economic sources for the people of Ancient Arabia were three: First, breeding of pack and meat animals (such as goats, sheep and camels), usually done by the nomad tribes of the Peninsula. Second, tilling soil and growing agricultural products, mostly occupied by sedentary and semi-sedentary elements, and third, local and transit trade in which both nomads and sedentary urban people took part. Trade activated the two other sources and it was due to its international and transit form that the Arabs grasped their fame and wealth. In addition, archaeological excavations in diverse places in Arabia showed that mining crafts existed in the Peninsula from the end of the third millennium and continued until the advent of Islam. Western Arabia had been an important source of gold and silver in Antiquity. The classical Greek, Roman and Persian sources, such as Diodorus, Pliny and Strabo, had attested this. Archaeological studies in west Arabia led to the discovery of about one thousand locations with signs of mining activity dating from antiquity and increasing in the early Islamic times. For example, the mines of Mahd al-Dhahab, Ṣukhaybayrat (187 miles east of al-Madīnah), al-Maṣāniʿ (northwest of Najrān), al-ʿAmār and al-Ḥajar were

[35] Hoyland, *Arabia*, p. 98-101

[36] *Ilāf* was reported in several sources such as Ibn Ḥabīb, al-*Munammaq*, (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub) pp. 41-45. On the nature of this Jāhilī institution and its creation see among others Kister, M.J. "Mecca and Tamīm" *JESHO*, 8, pp, 116-124; Crone, P. (1987), *Meccan trade and the rise of Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; Simon, *Meccan trade*.

active in ancient times and early Islam, and are still active at present.[37] Furthermore, ores of iron and copper were available in some of the precious metals sites or separately. For instance, the mines of Rughāfa, Nuqum and Ghumdān in Yemen and of Qusās in the land of Banū Asad contained iron ore. Residuals of mining and manufacturing were found in Jabal Tahlal in ʿAsīr, and many basins carved in the rock that were definitely used for smelting iron ore were explored.[38]

According to Arabic sources, precious metals played an important role in creating the wealth of pre-Islamic Arabia and chiefly in the trade traffic of the Meccan Quraysh during the rise of Islam. Heck rightfully discerned, I believe, that the Arabic geographies "generally tend to be more empirical than other more traditional Islamic sources."[39] In the primary sources, many gold mines (*maʿdan*, pl. *maʿādin*) are noted in different locations in Arabia.[40] One of the most important sources is the work of al-Ḥasan bin Aḥmad al-Hamadānī (280/839 H.-336/947 c.), *Kitāb al-jawharatayn al-ʿatīqatayn al-māʾiʿatayn: al-safrāʾ wal-*

[37] Heck, "Gold mining," pp. 364-367, 386-389; idem. *Islam, Inc.,* pp. 35-43; Windsor, "The Other minerals", 25-30; Nehlig and Salipeteur. See also Hoyland, *Arabia*, p. 110-112. For wider understanding of the political and economic conditions of Arabia in Antiquity, see Potts, "The Arabian Peninsula", pp. 27-64.

[38] Hamadānī, *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-ʿArab*, p. 321; Al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam*, 1:344. See also al-Ṣamad, *al-Ṣināʿāt*, p. 111.

[39] Heck, "Gold Mining," pp. 389-390.

[40] Heck, in his excellent article "Gold Mining," pp. 372-388 extracted most of the mines referred to by the primary sources and tried to show their geographical locations and their impact on the rise of Islam. It is important to refer the reader to the abundant documentation that he made in the footnotes. See also Crone*, Meccan Trade*, pp. 87-95.

bayḍāʾ (Book of the two jewels and fluid stones, the yellow and the white).[41] In this "metallurgical treatise",[42] the author presented original information on the technical matters of extracting gold and silver, smelting and cultivation. In the chapter on the mines of Arabia he listed about 20 names of gold mines in west Arabia, mainly in Ḥijāz.[43] A well-known one is *maʿdin* Banū Sulaym, which in fact was the name of several mines belonging to the tribe of Sulaym and which was activated intermittently before Islam and during its first 30 years.[44] The same al-Hamadānī again referred to these mines in another work of his *ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿarab*. For example, he wrote that the mine of al-ʿAqīq included *maʿdin* Ṣuʿād, north of Najrān and belonged to the tribe of ʿUḳayl. It was the most lucrative gold mine in Arabia and the Prophet described it by saying: *muṭirat arḍ ʿUqayl dhahaban* (It was gold that rained down on the land of ʿUqayl).[45] Mines of silver, copper and iron have also been reported as active in early Islam. In Najd, there was the mine of Shamām, which was rich in silver and copper and, before Islam, was run by thousands of Majūs, the Sasānīds, who apparently "opened up an

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[41] The book was published in two editions: a) the first edition of this work was in the form of a manuscript written and commented on by Christopher Toll and published in Upsala 1968. b) Ḥ. Al-Jāsir ed. Dār al-Yamāma, Riyadh 1987. c) Aḥmad F. Bāshā ed., Dār al-Kutub wal-Wathāʾiḳ al-Ḳawmiyya, Cairo 1425/2004. In this work, I will use the edition of Cairo 1425/2004.

[42] Dunlop, "Sources of Gold," p. 33.

[43] al-Hamadānī, *Kitāb al-Jawharatayn* (Cairo 1425/2004), pp. 97-99. See comments and translation on the sources of gold in this book in Dunlop, "Sources of Gold," 29-49.

[44] al-Ḥarbī, *al-Manāsik*, pp. 333-335. Heck, "Gold Mining," pp. 372-377 in his analysis of the sources shows several mines that were run by the tribe of Sulaym or his offshoots.

[45] Al-Ḥamadānī, *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿarab*, p. 293. Other mines are referred to in pages 154, 208, 233, 245, 263, 265, 267, 301

overland route through central Arabia to transport silver from the region to Persia".[46] In the raid of Qarada in Najd, it is related, that the Muslims attacked a Meccan commercial caravan loaded with a large amount of gold and silver (300 *mithqāl*s of gold, *nuqar* [bullions] of silver and silver vessels all weighing 30.000 *dirham*s) on its way to Syria but, misleadingly, on the way to Iraq.[47] Interestingly, Ibn Isḥāḳ attested that silver was the main portion in their trade (*wa-hiya ʿuẓumu tijāratihim*). In Hamadān of Yemen were *maʿdin* al-Raḍrāḍ and Qaryat al-fiḍḍa, which, according to al-Hamadānī, were rich with silver and were probably run by Persians during the Jāhiliyya times and in Islam until its destruction in 270 in the Abbasid era.[48] In several traditions (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet, there are indications for the prevalence of precious metals and stones. Within his

[46] Al-Hamadānī, *Kitāb al-jawharatayn*, (Cairo 1425/2004), p. 99; *idem*. *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿarab*, 263. See also Heck, "Gold mining," p. 368. A list of other mines could be extracted from the geographical source of al-Iṣfahānī, *Bilād al-ʿArab*, see for example pages 45, 148, 154, 159, 166, 174, 179, 198-200, 236, 370, 379, 387, 398, 401, 403. See also al-Ḥarbī, *al-Manāsik*, pp. 316, 321-325, 330-335, 468, 618.

[47] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, vol. 2, 50; Wāḳidī, *Maghāzī*, (ʿĀlam al-Kutub ed.), 1:197-198; Ib Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaḳāt*, vol. 2, 36. al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam*, 2: 655. For the meaning of *nuḳar*, pl. of *nuḳra*, see al-Fayrūzabādī, vol. 2, p. 152, art. *naqara*. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, p. 88-89, accepted the idea that "Arabia was silver-bearing in the past" but she rejected the idea that the Meccans were silver or gold exporters. While Heck, "Arabia without Spice," pp. 552-553, 575-576 refuted the claims of Crone concerning the possibility that the Meccan merchants exported silver to Syria as it may be conceived from the report on the raid of al-ʿĪṣ in year 8/630.

[48] Al-Hamadānī, *Sifat jazīrat al-ʿArab*, p. 154. The same author in *Kitāb al-jawharatayn*, (Cairo 1425/2004), p. 99-101 reported that in Qaryat al-Maʿdin there were 400 ovens and the remnants discovered from Jāhiliyya times surpassed those of the Muslim era.

instructions concerning the obligation to pay *zakāt,* he defined its proportion upon owning mines and interred precious metals and stones.[49]

Without being involved in the 'classical' debate between the scholars on the impact of the Meccan trade on the rise of Islam, I believe, the above information on metallurgy and mineralogy in pre-Islamic Arabia constitutes serious proof, at least, of the existence of the arts of jewelry smithing, blacksmithing and other related crafts. In addition to the metal crafts, there are enough evidences of the existence and flourishing of other crafts in Arabia such as tanning and leather making, textile production, weaving and perfumery.[50] As we shall see later, most of our knowledge about the attitude of the Jāhilī Arabs towards handicrafts comes from oral sources both poetic and narrative.

Anyhow, one may discern some signs of the attitude of the Jāhilī Arabs toward crafts in the antagonistic attitude of settled people toward the Bedouin and their culture in the Middle East. This hostile attitude was recorded in written texts and throughout time accumulated and procreated a foundation upon which the relations between the two societies were built in the pursuing periods including the Islamic one.[51] Perhaps it was upon this infrastructure that Ibn Khaldūn indicated the contradiction between Bedouinizm and civilization, considering

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[49] See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1: 262; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 241-242, tradition no. 1710; al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, vol. 4, pp. 196-197; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, vol. 3, p. 21; al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan*, pp. 388-389. For the legal meaning of the terms, see al-ʿAsḳalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bāri*, vol. 3, pp. 423-429, tradition no. 1499. See also Ibn Zinjawyh, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, vol.2, pp. 738-758. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, pp, 332-337, mentioned the same traditions and attested the activity of such mines in the days of the Prophet by stating that he (the Prophet) allocated to Bilāl bin al-Ḥarth the mine of Qabaliyya in Jabal Quds near al-Madīna,

[50] Heck, *Islam, Inc.*, pp. 55-62.

[51] Sowayan, "*Badw* and *ḥaḍar*", pp. 367-368.

the first as savagery that preceded the urban culture.[52] The most savage of these are the Arabs who wandered deep in the desert and were more Bedouinized. It is clear that Ibn Khaldūn made no distinction between the Bedouin people of Arabia and the settled Arabs who lived in Yathrib, Mecca and other urban centers before Islam. Modern scholars, especially those of the Arab world, explained this ambiguity by saying that at the time of Ibn Khaldūn the name applied to the Bedouin Arabs only who were also called 'Aʿrāb'[53] by the Quran and the settled Arabs. 'Anyway, it seems that he meant by 'the Arabs as *umma waḥshiyya*', the Bedouin who wandered deeply inside the deserts far away from the civilized centers. In other words, this expression is an objective description that in the eyes of the settlers is a dispraising one but in eyes of Bedouin is praising.[54] Perhaps, upon this background the negative attitude toward crafts was created. I mean that attitude was part of the contradictory styles of life between the Bedouin who had no time and practical ability to develop crafts and the *ḥaḍar* (settlers) of Arabia who lived in comfortable conditions and could be engaged in different crafts.

This meaning is being asserted by Ibn Khaldūn himself when he referred to the attitude of the Arabs toward handicrafts. In fact, he was the first to indicate the negative attitude of the Arabs towards handicrafts (*ṣanā'iʿ*) in his *Muqaddima*. He titled Section 20 of Chapter 5 "*The Arabs, of all people, are least familiar with crafts*". He explained this view saying: "The reason for this is that the Arabs are more firmly rooted in desert life and more remote from sedentary civilization,

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[52] *Muqaddima*, p. 115.

[53] See Luʿaybī, *al-Fann wal-Ḥiraf,* pp. 9-10. In the Quran the Aʿrāb are described as unbelievers and hypocrites, see Q9:97, 101. It is needless to say that in the modern Arab Middle East the name ʿArab, in addition to its general indication, continues to indicate, by the settlers, the Bedouin who live as nomads or wander around.

[54] Muqaddima, p. 115. See also al-Wardī, *Manṭiq Ibn Khaldūn*, pp. 83-86.

the crafts, and the other things which sedentary civilization calls for, (more than anybody else)". Meanwhile, the non-Arabs (Persians and Christians) in the Near East are well versed in the crafts because they are deeply rooted in sedentary civilization and are very far away from the desert. In the same sequence Ibn Khaldūn indicated the lack of crafts in the homelands of the Arabs before and during Islam and their extensive presence in the non-Arab countries.[55]

Before making any conclusion two points should be clarified. First, Ibn Khaldūn is speaking about the Muslim Arabs and he referred to them as still 'rooted in desert life', by this he meant the nomad Arabs, usually called *aʿrāb*. Second, he explained the absence of *ṣanāʾiʿ* (crafts) among the Arabs not because they despised them but because they were unable culturally to achieve them. Third, for Ibn Khaldūn crafts are different *ṣanāʾiʿ* in which people specialize in order to supply each other's different needs and thus to ascend in the process of urbanization (*ʿumrān*). Meaning, crafts do not comprise only the simple handicrafts that employ poor and untalented people and reward them with minimal gains. Craft (*ṣināʿa*) is any occupation that people engage in for their living and convenience such as carpenter, weaver, singer, official, physician, teacher, merchant, scribe and so forth. It is the specialization that man makes for himself not only for earning a living but moreover for making and securing his portion in this world. Therefore, the issue of attitude towards crafts and craftsmen does not exist in the view of Ibn Khaldūn.[56]

At any rate, it seems that the best source that we so far possess about the social view of the Jāhilī Arabs towards crafts and handicrafts is the verbal Jāhilī poetry and traditions. In spite of its problematic authenticity, it remains the main source of our knowledge of the day-to-day life of the Jāhilī Arabs during the 200 years

[55] The quotations are after the translation of Rosenthal, vol.2, p. 353.

[56] See *Muqaddima* (Rosenthal trans.), vol. 2, pp. 346-347.

before the advent of Islam. However, one should keep in mind that this information was collected from verbal sources and edited during the first 300 years of Islam, and thus does not reflect precisely the situation in pre-Islamic time.

To start with, the craft of blacksmithing was one of the most despised handicrafts and it extensively served the poets in their defamatory poetry. During the battle of Badr, the poet of the Prophet, Ḥassān b. Thābit, derogated al-ʿĀṣī bin al-Mughīra a *qayn* (smith who replaced Abū Lahab in the duel that opened the battle, and was killed) saying: You, Banū *al-qayn* (people of blacksmiths!) Are you proud of your blacksmiths' *kīrs* (bellows), do not you see that your father built his bellows before he built his house! Just dissolve the ash of your bellows and you will discover that you are ignoble.[57] It is clear that in this poem the nickname Banū al-Qayn indicated people who were professional blacksmiths. The same Ḥassān was defamed by another poet for being a son of a Yemenite smith who worked blowing the fire in his bellows.[58] Perhaps the poet here intended to defame him as being of Yemenite origin for whom blacksmithing was a familiar occupation. Qays b. al-Khaṭīm (d. 620 C.) slandered someone from the Khazraj tribe by saying that there is nothing to expect from him; after all, he came from a people of smiths.[59] Similar defamation was expressed by ʿAmr bin Kulthūm towards the king of al-Ḥīra al-Nuʿmān bin al-Mundhir. He described him as "what could his mother hope for from the dwellers of al-Khawarnaq (his palace); they are all smiths (*qayn*s) and weavers (*nassāj*), or what good can we get from a man whose uncle blows the *kīr* (the blacksmith's goatskin bellows used for blowing) and *yaṣūgh* (shaping) earrings

[57] Ḥassān, *Dīwān*, pp. 63-64; al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ Dīwān Ḥassān*, pp. 201-202.

[58] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, Art. y-m-n.

[59] Qays b. al-Khaṭīm, *Dīwān*, p. 148.

and nose-rings in Yathrib".[60] Another poet defamed him for being a son of a coward and an ignorant goldsmith (*ibn al-ṣā'igh al-Jabāna al-jahūla*).[61] The poet Aws bin Ḥijr (530-620 C.), declared his contempt frankly by saying that blacksmiths (*qayn*s) are unfaithful.[62] The same poet and others referred to specific persons as blacksmiths, such as Mujaddaʿ and al-Khafajiyy (some blacksmith from the tribe of Khafaja). Yet these smiths remained of unknown pedigree, perhaps intentionally, in order to hide their 'unworthy' occupation.[63] Furthermore, some referred to blacksmiths as liars and unfaithful people. The saying إذا سَمِعتَ بسُرَى القَيْن فإنَّهُ مُصيبٌ، وهُو سَعدُ القَيْن (If you hear that the smith is leaving the tribe at night it means that he will stay); a proverb based on the saying that when a person is known as a liar no one believes him when he tells the truth. According to the sources, this proverb originated from a wandering smith called Saʿd. Because he felt unemployed in the tribe, he

[60] ʿAmr b. Kulthūm, *Dīwān*, p. 25, 30; *Aghānī*, vol. 11, p. 61.

[61] Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, vol. 4, 379; *Aghānī*, 11: 16. This verse occurred in different versions and was ascribed to at least two poets. According to al-Jāḥiz the poet is the Jāhilī ʿAbd al-Qays b. Khufāf al-Burjumī, who ascribed the defamation to the well-known poet al-Nābigha. In his version *Ibn dhā al-ṣā'gh al-ẓalūma al-Jahūlā*, while in the version of al-Aghānī it is *Wārith al-ṣā'gh al-Jahūlā*, meanin al-Nuʿmān himself. In a third version it is said *rabdha al-ṣā'gh,* the rag used to paint the camel. Apparently, the goldsmith here is being titled ironically with the name of his working tool, a rag for painting!

[62] Lisān, art. q.y.n; Aws b. Ḥijr, *Dīwān*, p. 1.

[63] Aws bin Ḥijr, *Dīwān*, p. 19; al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, p. 310.

used to declare every evening 'I am leaving tonight', but in fact, he never did and said this in order to induce people to hire him.[64]

Before continuing, it would be fruitful to pay special attention to the meaning of the word *qayn* and its uses in Jahiliyya times. In *Lisān al-ʿArab* several meanings are given to the term blacksmith, one who works with iron, and every artisan (*ṣāniʿ*). The verb *qāna* means to work with metal and to repair metal ware, while the verbs *taqayyana* and *iqtāna* means to adorn oneself with different ornaments. The feminine name *qayna* means a singing girl, a job that only slave girls did; consequently, *qayn* and *qayna* became synonymous with slave, both male and female, because both singing and iron blacksmithing, are occupations of slaves and not of free people. The name *al-Qayn*, *banu al-Qayn* or *Balqayn*, occurs in the sources as the name of one or more Arab tribes, that descended from Quḍāʿa such as al-Nuʿmān (al-Qayn) b. Jasr bin Shayʿ al-Lāt b. Asad, b. Mālik b. al-Qayn, and al-Hālik b. Asad b. Khuzayma, who was considered the first to work with iron in the *bādiya* (the desert).[65] Ibn Ḥazm gave a long list of sub-tribes that descended from Banī al-Qayn b. Jasr and their successors in Islamic times. It seems that the grandfather of Banu al-Qayn was al-Nuʿmān b. Jasr; known also as al-Qayn b. Jasr after a slave called Qayn that he embraced.[66] In another extraction al-Qayn is a *baṭn*, subdivision from the tribe of al-Fahm b.

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[64] Al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ al-Amthāl*, vol. 1, p. 41, proverb no. 155; al-ʿAskarī, *Jamharat al-Amthāl*, vol. 1, p. 26; Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb al-Amthāl*, p. 47. See also *Lisān al-ʿArab*, art q-y-n.

[65] *Lisān al-ʿArab*, art. q.y.n; al-Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, art. q.y.n; Ibn Sīda, *al-Muḥkam*, art. q.y.n. People from Banu al-Qayn are mentioned extensively in *Aghānī*, vol. 3, pp. 80, 202; vol. 4, p. 140; vol. 12, pp. 300, 311-312; vol. 14, pp.73; vol. 16, pp. 49, 120, vol. p. 19, 20; vol. 24, p. 34. See a similar extraction in Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Maʿd*, p. 647.

[66] Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat Ansāb*, p. 424; al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 7, p. 674.

ʿAmrū.[67] It seems that the tribe of Banū Asad descended from Banū al-Qayn, therefore they received their nickname as *quyūn*.[68] In Yāqūt's Muʿjam we read that Farān was a watering place in the land of Banū Sulaym and it was called *maʿdin* Farān after Farān b. Balī b. Quḍāʿa who lived there with his people and became part of Banū Sulaym; later they were known as Banū al-Qayn, obviously because they worked as smiths in that mine.[69] It is also possible that they were smiths who found in the land of Banū Sulaym the right place, perhaps the mine, to live in, and this is why Banū Sulaym were also known as *quyūn*.[70] Lecker gave a different suggestion. He claimed that it is possible that Banū Farrān had an ancestor called al-Qayn, so that "*quyūn* means the descendants of al-Qayn", not "the blacksmiths".[71] However, this suggestion does not fit with the version of al-Bakrī who claimed that they, Banū al-Akhtham, were called *quyun* because they settled in *maʿdin ḥadīd*, in an iron mine. Furthermore, a verse from Khufāf b. ʿUmayr assured their involvement in blacksmithing. Khufāf asked in a rhetorical question: "When did the two Qayns, the Qayn of Ṭamiyya and the Qayn of Balī, own two mines in Fārān?" It is clear that he meant two *qayn*s/smiths, one from Ṭamiyya, a mountain (about 270 km. to the north-east of Medina) on the way to Basra, rich with water springs and with a mine nearby. The second *qayn* came from the tribe of Balī that settled and merged with b.

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[67] *Aghānī*, vol. 21, pp. 28, 138, 148, 157.

[68] Caskel, W. "ASAD", *EI*², s. v.

[69] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, vol. 4, p. 245, art *Farān*. Interestingly, Yaqūt, elsewhere in vol. 4, p. 225, mentioned the name Fārān (with *alif* after the *fā*). He explained it as a Hebrew name mentioned in the Old Testament as one of the names of Mecca or its mountains.

[70] Watt, M., "al-QAYN", *EI*², s. v.

[71] Lecker, *Banū Sulaym*, p. 200, see also note no. 73.

Sulaym and undoubtedly worked with them in their mine known also as Mahd al-dhahab or Farān.[72]

By contrast, al-Bakrī, defined Fārān as *maʿdin ḥadīd* (an iron mine) that existed in the territory of Banū Sulaym and that was run by Banū al-Akhtham who are the same Banū Farrān and originated from Banū Balī. They all became part of Banū Sulaym and were called *quyūn*. It should be noted that according to most of the traditions the reference is to people who came to the land of Banū Sulaym and found it convenient for their specialization and perhaps for their social status as outsiders. This was asserted clearly by H. al-Jāsir who claimed that the Persians activated mining in Yemen. According to him, two groups of people were known as *quyūn*, Banū al-Akhtham b. ʿUṣayya who worked in it and Banū Farān who took part in the work of *maʿdin* Banū Sulaym (*mahd al-Dhahab*). Interestingly, al-Jāsir suggested that Banū Farān were the remnants of Amalekites. It seems that he based this suggestion on al-Bakrī's tradition that Banū Farān lived there with ancient Arabs, *al-ʿāriba al-ʾulā* who originated from Banū Fārān b. ʿAmr b. ʿImlīq; meaning ʿImlīq could be a solecism of the Biblical Amalekites, a nomadic nation who lived in south Palestine and Sinai neighboring with the Midianite people.[73] According to the Old Testament, they

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[72] See al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam*, vol. 1, pp. 28-29. The verse says: مَتَى كانَ للقينين قينِ طَمَيَّةٍ وقينِ بَليٍّ معدِنانِ بفارانِ ;

al-Ḥarbī, *al-Manāsik*, p. 316; Lughda al-Aṣfahānī, *Bilād al-ʿArab*, pp. 150-154, 174, 403. For Mahd al-Dhahab look pp. 148, 174, 402.

[73] The views of Ḥamad al-Jāsir were brought here on the authority of Lecker, *the Banū Sulaym*, p. 198-201, see the bibliographical notes in these pages. See also al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istuʿjim*, 1, pp. 28-29, see Fārān, in vol. 3, p. 1013; al-Hamadānī, *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿArab*, p. 285, claimed that Maʿdin Farān was called after Farān b. Balī, while the 'Biblical Fārān' (the mountains of Mecca) are named after Fārān b. ʿAmr b. ʿImlīq.

were descendants of Esau, moved in areas of pasturage close to Palestine and sometimes wandered into its valleys and hills. In the Arabic sources, there are ambiguous traditions on the connection of the Arabs with the Amalekite people. One tradition said that the Amalekites settled in Mecca but they made wrongs in the Ḥaram (the Kaʿba), therefore God returned them to their homeland and later destroyed them.[74] In all cases, neither the Old Testament nor the Arab sources consider the Amalekites pure Arab or Ishmaelite, meaning, people who affiliate themselves with the Amalekites, such as the above ʿImlīq, were appropriate persons to be *quyūn* and to do the kinds of work that only outsiders used to do such as mining and blacksmithing. In conclusion, we see that several tribal groups bore the title/name *qayn* or *balqayn* in Jāhiliyya times, and in Islam they were dispersed in different lands such as Syria and al-Andalus.[75]

Early on, Th. Nöldeke made a very interesting suggestion that Banū al-Qayn or Balqayn are descendants of the Kenites of the Old Testament. A close observation in both expressions will show several supportive points. First, the etymological semblance in the root *qyn*. In the Old Testament, the derivations of the root *qyn* recurred in different contexts. In Gen. 4, some identified the Cain narrative as the origin of the Kenites, while in Num. 24:21-22 the name Cain is associated with the Hebrew קיני. In Syraic, Assyrian, Palmyran and Biblical Hebrew the word means "spear" and metalworker.[76] In Arabic, as in the previous

[74] For more about the Amalekites see: Sparks "Israel and the Nomads" pp. 9-26, see especially pp. 20-22; Leeman, *Queen of Sheba*, pp. 120, 169-170; Pacini, "In search of Amalek", pp. 111-123. For the Arab tradition see *Aghānī*, vol. 15, p. 14. For the origin of the Amalekites see: Brown, F. *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, art. עמלק, p. 766; Torn and Horst, *Dictionary*, art. Amalek, p. 26.

[75] Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat Ansāb,* p. 424.

[76] *Hebrew and English lexicon.*

Semitic languages, the word means "to forge", to fabricate, (make artificially) and "metalworker". It occurs in fifth century B.C. South Arabian inscriptions under different meanings: administrator of god or king, governor of a town, slave of god, and its plural *aqyān* perhaps means a clan of artisans or smiths.[77] The name *qyn* and *qn* recurred also in Thamudic and Safaitic inscription always in the meaning of blacksmith and slave.[78] The same root *qyn* occurred in personal names of Aramaic inscriptions including the name *qaynu* of the Qaderite ruler Qynū b. Jashmū from the fourth century B.C.[79] Thus, "Etymologically, the name could be derived from Cain, with a diminutive ending *-an*. *Qênan* could be interpreted as meaning 'smith,' 'javelin' or 'little Cain'; the Arabian *Qaynan* was probably a patron deity for smiths and metalworkers."[80]

Returning back to the Bible, It seems that the etiological legend of the Kenites as smiths is enclosed in the story of Tubal-Cain, a grandson of Cain. In Gen. 4:22, it is related that Tubal-Cain was "the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron", i.e. the inventor of metallurgy. Similarly, the Islamic narrative tells almost the same story; Zillah, the daughter of Lamech bore Tubalqayn and he was the first to cultivate brass and iron, thus in this compound name the metal craft is included. In Arabic, we have the name Balqayn, perhaps a compound of Banū al-Qayn given to a tribal group from Banū Asad. In all cases, it seems that

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[77] Biella, *Dictionary*, p. 454.

[78] See al-Theeb, *Nuqūsh Thamūdiyya*, p. 66, ins. No. 48. In Nabataean it is *qayna* and in Syraic *qynya*, both with the same meaning, Smith, see al-Theeb, *al-Muʿjam,* p. 345.

[79] Al-Turkī, *Mamlakat Qīdār*, p. 126, 132-133. Ryckmans, *Les noms*, vol. 1, p. 30, suggests *Qayn* is a lunar deity. It should be noted that that the Qīdārite name Qaynu Jashmu appeared on Aramaic inscriptions on the Tell Maskhuta bowels from northeastern Egypt.

[80] Mondriaan, "Who are the Kenites", pp. 414-430, see specially p. 417.

in this legend we have the aetiological story of the meaning *qayn* in all Semitic languages.[81] In spite of this, modern scholars doubted the existence of the name Cain (*qayin*) in the Biblical period. Hess expressed it thus, "Cain (*qayin*) seems related to the Semitic *qyn*. This root does not occur in Hebrew of the biblical period. It appears in Arabic of a later period with the meaning smith."[82] In any rate, a comparison between the lifestyle of the Biblical Kenites and that of the Arab tribe Qayn or Banū al-Qayn (Balqayn) will show many semblances that should urge scholars to think about some kind of relation between the two sides.

Scholars were close to the Biblical division of occupations between the sons of Lamech with whom the Kenites were related. They considered them a non-Israelite nomad tribe, the first who introduced metallurgy, became migrating smiths wandering in the deserts of Sinai, the Negev, Median and Edom and to the north of Palestine. Undoubtedly, their occupation as metalsmiths necessitated itinerant lives, partly in order to gather their raw materials for their products and partly because they were among the very few who possessed the metallurgical specialties and skills. Nevertheless, "it is usually the case that the smiths remain a separate ethnic group. Some scholars attribute this relative marginality to suspicions that arise in response to the magical appearance of metalwork".[83] It is also possible that the metalsmiths preferred to be separated from others

[81] It should be noted that the similar way of interpreting priorities and beginnings of things in this world was adopted by Muslims. Accordingly, the source for everything is Adam who bequeathed his knowledge to his descendants directly or indirectly. Thus, Prophet Idris was the first to know calligraphy and weaving, Noah was the first carpenter. See Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 165; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya* , vol. 2, 222; Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, p. 66-67.

[82] Hess. *Studies*, pp. 24-25.

[83] Sparks, "Israel and the Nomads" p. 23.

intentionally in order to protect and control the access to their specialization. Such strategy could be clearly seen in the organization of the different crafts in Islamic society as in other cultures such as in Medieval Europe, where the guilds were intended to keep the craft under the control and protection of its members.[84] In all cases, Bedouin Arabs before Islam and during Islam disdained handicrafts and metalsmithing was one of the most despised crafts in their eyes.[85] It was definitely for this reason that it was engaged in mostly by non-Arabs or at least by settled people who had lost their tribal characteristics such as our Banū Farān, Fārān or Farrān.

In *Lisān al-ʿArab* it is related that smiths (*quyūn*) used to do their work while wandering from tribe to tribe and to declare their presence in order to be hired by the people of the tribe before leaving it.[86] Geographically, the smiths of Balqayn as part of Banū Asad wandered in the deserts of Najd and Ḥijāz. The significance of this is that both the Biblical Kenites and the Arab tribe of Balqayn lived in similar climates and spaces. Above all, there is the resemblance in traditional and social attitudes towards blacksmithing and smiths in both cultures. It seems that the spurning attitude towards smiths and craftsmen existed early among the Israelites, as in other cultures, and according to one scholar this may be one reason for the virtual disappearance of the Kenites. In addition, these artisans were regarded to be from inferior tribes and for this reason they were

[84] A complicated process of affiliation to the different crafts was documented with detail in late Islamic anonymous manuscript called *al-Dhakhāʾir wal-Tuḥaf fī Bīr al-Ṣanāʾiʿ wal-Ḥiraf*, Gotha, MS no. 903.

[85] This disdain is evident in many verses from the Jāhiliyya times and continued into Islamic times. Follow our references to this point in the course of this article.

[86] *Lisān al-ʿArab*, art. q.y.n.

socially and economically marginalized.[87] As we see in the course of this article, almost the same attitude towards *quyūn* (smiths) and other handicrafts existed within the pre-Islamic tribal society.

A last and very interesting point in this comparison is the possibility of the shared origin of both people. In Biblical studies, it is accepted to consider the Kenites as part of the Midianite people who lived around the Gulf of Aqaba and in the deserts of north Arabia and it is to them that Moses fled from the Egyptian authorities and married Zippora, the daughter of Jethro, the high priest of the Midianites. The interesting point here is the strong possibility that the Midianites are in fact an Arabian tribe or a people who mingled with the Arab tribes of west and north Arabia. Anyway, they were considered as descendants of Abraham from his third wife Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2, 12, 37:28, 36). In addition to their nomadic lifestyle, they certainly were involved in the caravan incense trade that passed through their lands and were also engaged in metal and pottery working.[88] Scholars acquiesce to the idea that the Midianites, including the Kenites, lived in land teeming with metals, especially copper, and that they were very active as metalworkers. It is possible that their large involvement in melting copper and other metals brought them to sanctify metallurgy by creating a special deity and building a special temple for it. It is possible that the source for this is the

[87] Mondriaan, "Who are the Kenites", pp. 427-428. On the social and traditional classification of crafts in Jewish history see also Ayali, *Puʿalīm vi-ʾUmmanīm*, pp. 97-100 [Hebrew].

[88] See Hastings, *Dictionary*, p. 616, art. Midian; Fleming, *Bridgeway*, art. Midian; *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, art. Midian. In Islamic tradition, Ibrahim's third wife is Canaanite called Qaṭūrā bint Yaqṭin and she gave birth to 6 sons, one of them is Midian whose offspring are the Midianites and Shuʿayb (Jethro) their high priest. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 309; Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*, p. 240.

Canaanite cult of bronze serpents and it had continued in different ways among the Midianites, the Israelites and others.[89]

In concluding this point, we see that the 'metallic culture' in the Ancient Near east was not far geographically and historically from the world of the people, Arabs or others, who lived in the deserts of Arabia or in its neighborhood. Previously we referred to the wealth of Arabia, mainly of Ḥijāz, based on mines of precious metals and copper. To these, we should add the mines of north Arabia and its neighboring areas such as the Negev in south Palestine, especially Wadi Araba and Timna, and Sinai.[90] This rich Geography and history of metallic activity certainly constitutes a suitable background for any people to be involved in metallic production and crafts. Against this background, one should expect a more positive attitude of the people of north Arabia, Bedouin as settlers, toward the metal crafts. Indeed, the 'despising' attitude should not lead people, nomads and others, to keep away from using the products of the despised crafts or even from engaging in them. Primarily, nomads wherever they are, in order to secure their existence, always need much of the products of different crafts, such as blacksmithing, carpentry, spinning, weaving, pottery and tanning. Therefore, they were compelled to engage in those crafts that were necessary for making their essential products and for which they already had the raw materials. In other words, the Bedouin handled 'preliminary crafts' and worked them only to the level of self-sufficiency and not beyond.

With this background, we turn back to the pre-Islamic Arabs. In their scornful view the poets, in fact, did not differentiate between iron-smithery and gold-

[89] See on this Amzallag, N. "Yahwa", pp. 377-404, see especially pp. 398-400; *idem*, "The Material" pp. 80-96 *idem*, "Furnace" pp. 233-252.

[90] For archeological finds in these areas see for example Martin and Finkelstein, "Iron" pp. 6-45.

smithery. Both the blacksmith and the goldsmith were called *qayn* and were equally scorned, though in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī we find *bāb al-qayn wal-ḥaddād*, apparently, in order to attest that *qayn* here is a blacksmith (*ḥaddād*).[91] In any case, the *qayn* could bear different meanings: blacksmith, goldsmith and even slave-girl singer. It seems that this equalization originated from the fact that in both smithing crafts almost the same tools were used, the *kīr* (bellows), the *kūr* (melting pot) and the blazing fire, and in all of them exists the aspect of giving service (*khidma*) to others. The Arabs, mainly the Bedouin, adopted the same scornful view towards all kinds of handicrafts such as tanning, weaving, spinning, tailoring and tilling. I previously pointed out some scorning traditions concerning smithery and the Yemenite Arabs as humble tanners and weavers. We also may deduce this attitude from traditions ascribed to the Prophet. It is said that on one occasion he was invited by some tailor to have dinner in his house and he accepted the invitation. The meaning of this conduct is that notable people (*ashrāf*) could eat in the house of an artisan, be it a tailor, goldsmith or other, and that the abstention of the Jāhilī Arabs from associating with artisans was wrong.[92] In Islamic literary sources, one can find repercussions and reflections of this Jāhilī scornful attitude towards crafts and artisans. One of the most striking examples is the poetical *Naqā'iḍ* of two famous Umayyad poets: Jarīr (d.110) and al-Farazdaq (38/658-110/728).[93] A quick survey of its verses

[91] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, p. 9; al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-qārī*, vol. 11, pp. 297-298. See also ʿAlī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, vol. 7, p. 543.

[92] al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-qārī*, vol. 11, pp. 300-302.

[93] In this kind of poetical work, we have a collection of defamatory *qaṣā'id* and verses that each one directed at the other within a poetical duel that flared up between the two during 40 years and in many times it deviated to personal insults. The work was collected by Abū ʿUbayda Muʿammar bin al-Muthannā (d. 209).

shows that Jarīr, in many of his verses defaming al-Farazdaq, satirized him for being a grandson and son of a smith (*qayn*) who blew bellows, (*yanfukh bil-kīr*). In different verses he called him, his father, grandfather and his tribe satirically with the expressions *qayn ibn al-quyūn*, the son of *nāfikh al-akwār* (pl. of *kīr*,) *dhā al-kīr* and *Banū al-aqyān*.[94] It is clear that these defamations are from the early Islamic era, but in most of them the poet, among others, intended to slander al-Farazdaq through his father and grandfather who had worked as smiths in the Jāhiliyya days and for this, he persisted in calling him *qayn* or son of *qayn*.[95] Anyway, it is obvious from the verses that being a smith or a descendant of a smith was considered very shameful. In one *qaṣīda*, Jarīr repeated this 'shaming' of al-Farazdaq at least fifteen times.[96] A contemporary poet of the two was asked to express his view in their defamation contest. He answered with defaming verses aimed at both of them saying that al-Farazdaq was a *qayn* in his tribe and it is known that the *qayn*'s work degrades its occupier (*wa-inna al-qayna yaʿmalu fī safali*).[97] In a report ascribed to the Umayyad caliph, al-Walīd I, we find one of the earliest classifications of crafts in Islam. It is said that he ordered *ṣāḥib al-sāḥil*, probably the governor of the coastal areas in Syria, to classify the craftsmen as follows: the spinner and the shoemaker, the cupper and the veterinarian, the cloth dealer and the money changer, the teacher and the eunuch, the slave dealer and the Satan, every pair in the same rank.[98] Furthermore, in the

[94] Abū ʿUbayda, *Dīwān al-Naqāʾiḍ*, vol. 1, pp. 78, 187-188, 190, 197, 219, 289, 332, 333, 334, 353, 360; vol. 2, pp. 109, 110, 123, 124, 161, 167, 169, 194, 237.

[95] Abū ʿUbayda, *Dīwān al-Naqāʾiḍ*, vol. 1, p. 78 al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-Adab*, vol. 1, p. 221.

[96] *Dīwān al-Naqāʾiḍ*, vol. 2, pp. 223-245.

[97] The poet is al-Laʿīn al-Minqarī, see Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wal-Shuʿarāʾ*, p. 499.

[98] al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī, *Moḥāḍarāt*, vol. 1, p. 459.

different attitudes towards craftsmen in Islamic sources we find that the most despised were spinners, weavers, tanners, cuppers, smiths and sweepers, apparently because they all shared a low income and hard, dirty working conditions.[99]

As for the clothing crafts such as, spinning, weaving, wool and cotton carding, dyeing and tailoring, there is no doubt that the people of pre-Islamic Arabia engaged in them from very early times since clothing and bed-clothing are some of the essential needs of every society, nomads as well as urbans. Ibn Khaldun described weaving and tailoring by saying: "These two crafts are very ancient in the world, because it is necessary for man in a temperate civilization to keep warm."[100] For the limited scope of this article, it is enough to observe the abundant prevailing terms of clothing – cloth items, bed-clothing, colors, working tools, materials and the like – in the Jāhilī poetry. A survey of this poetry will show clearly that the people of Arabia used to produce and to import all kinds of clothing. On the one hand, fabrics and dress items were known under the name of their place of production or called after their style of decoration, technique or kind of fabric. For instance, as *al-thiyāb al-Yamaniyya* (the cloths of Yemen), *al-Thiyab maʿāfiriyya* (Maʿāfir, a town in Yemen), *al-ʿadaniyya* (from Aden), *al-qaṭariyya* (from Qatar), *al-hajariyya* (from Hajar in Bahrain). On the other hand, the Arabs imported silk fabrics such as *dibāj*, *ibrīsam*, *istabraq* and *sundus*, all are non-Arabic names of kinds of silk. In addition, the Jāhilī poetry supplied us with a variety of the names of tools of spinning and weaving crafts such as *ṣīṣa* (weaver's implement called also *shawka*, with which he makes

[99] al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī, *Moḥāḍarāt*, vol. 1, pp. 459-465; al-Ābī, *Nathr al-Durr*, vol. 7, pp. 168-175.

[100] Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, p. 516-517, the translation is after Rozenthal (computerized version).

the warp and the woof), *al-ṣinnāra* (the head of a spindle), *nūl* or *minwāl* (loom), *maghzal* (spinning wheel). In the verses, we find mention of different textile crafts and craftsmen such as *nawādif* (pl. of *naddāf*) the cotton carder, (p. 135) *ghazzāl* (spinner), *nassāj* or *ḥāʾik* (weaver).[101]

Again, we face the same situation with the craft of blacksmithing. The settled people of Arabia, Yemen, Najrān, Mecca, Hajar and Bahrain engaged more fully in the clothing crafts, while the Bedouin practiced it primitively just to meet their limited needs. For the Bedouin, it was domestic work done by women, while the settled people specialized in clothing crafts as a source of livelihood. In spite of everything, spinning, weaving and other related crafts were among the most despised crafts in the eyes of the Arabs. A well-known saying came from an arrogance-demonstrated session that took place in the court of the first Abbasid caliph Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ. It was between the Yemenites and the Northern Arabs (Muḍar). Khaled b. Ṣafwān, speaker for the Northern Arabs, defamed the Yemenites by saying "Your people are only trainers of monkeys or tanners or weavers of striped garments".[102] It seems that this attitude became more effective in Islam when the Qurayshī Arabs became the masters of the empire so that the remembrance of the civilized past of the Yemenites was belittled in comparison with that of Quraysh (Muḍar) as masters of the Kaʿba and leaders of Islam.

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[101] These terms are a very few examples drawn from a vast vocabulary that one can make by scanning all the Jāhilī poetry. Such work was done by al-Jabbūrī, *al-Malābis*, see for example pp.14-34. See also Manṣūr, "Ahamm Ṣināʿāt" pp. 121-174. See especially p. 135; Muʿṭī, *Tārīkh al-ʿArab*, pp. 160-166. On the place of the cloth, industry and trade for the Meccans see Crone, *Meccan Trade*, pp. 105-103.

[102] See this story in Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb*, pp. 97-98; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, vol. 5, p. 448.

As for the tanning industry and leather products: First, one should take into account that the climate and nomadic conditions of the life in Arabia obligated its population to widely use everyday leather utensils: tents, basins, buckets, saddles, water skins, oilskins, butter skins, belts, sandals, cushions and writing sheets. Second, Arabia was the habitat of the tree of *quraẓ* from which the material for tanning was produced. Third, the Arabians bred the animals, camels, cows and sheep, from which they got the hides.[103] According to the *Ilāf* pact that Hāshim b. ʿAbd Manāf, the great grandfather of the Prophet, concluded with the Byzantines, the Meccan merchants were supposed to export to them fine *udm* leather products and fine Ḥijāzī-made cloths.[104] Generally, different kinds of leather products were made in many places in Arabia, in Mecca, Yathrib, and Ṭāʾif. al-Hamadhānī described Ṭāʾif as an ancient city in Jāhiliyya that became known through its *dibāgh* (tanning), where leather was tanned by scraping. Therefore, it is believed that the leather trade suggested by Hāshim to the Byzantines was that of Ṭāʾif and the surrounding tribes.[105] Further, it is related that the gifts that the Negus of Ethiopia preferred best of all to receive from Meccans such as ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ were their fine leather items.[106] Regardless of

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[103] Heck, "Arabia without Spices", pp. 568-569; Shahīd, *Byzantium*, vol. 2, pt.2, p. 51.

[104] Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 42; al-Qālī, *Dhayl al-amālī*, p. 199. ʿUthmān b. al-Ḥuwayrith the would-be king of Mecca (around 570 c.), asked Quraysh to pay hides and sacks of *qaruẓ* as tribute to the Byzantine governor in Syria in order to let them continue trading in his land. Abū al-Baqāʾ, *al-Manāqib*, vol. 1, p. 65.

[105] Al-Hamadānī, *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿArab*, p. 233; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, vol. 4, p. 9, said that in the town a watercourse flowing with water from its *madābigh* (tanning workshop) gave off such a strong stench that birds flying over it were dying from its bad odors. Ibrahim, "Social and Economic", pp. 343-358, see especially p. 345.

[106] Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. 1, p. 232; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīyra al-Nabawiyya*, vol. 1, 334, Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, 742. It is related that ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ sold perfumes and

how sophisticated was the production of leather that the Jāhilī Arabs exported to the Byzantine world, scholars accepted the idea that the tanning industry existed all over the peninsula because the pastoral economy enabled it and because of the large need for its products.[107]

With this brief background of the tanning industry in pre-Islamic Arabia, one wonders what kind of attitude towards leather crafts should have been expected. On the one hand, there are reasons that should lead to a scornful attitude such as the bad smell, dirty water and grinding work connected with this occupation. The poet Abū Kabīr al-Hudhalī said in one verse: "I entered into a very clean house! Not one item of tanning-matter!"[108] On the other hand, the Arabs in Arabia had the raw materials for this occupation – the various animals as the source of hides and the *quraẓ* tree – as well as the large need for leather as material for many utensils and tools. As for the Bedouin, one wonders, is it possible for them to despise an occupation that brings them important advantages: their livestock is the source of hides and they very much need the leather products (tents, receptacles, utensils, cloths and the like). Undoubtedly, if there was a scornful attitude among the Muslim Arabs towards tanning and tanners, they very likely adopted such an attitude not as a continuation from the *Jāhiliyya* times but more on account of the great change in their lifestyle after the establishment of their

leather commodities in Egypt. See Heck, "Arabia without Spices", p. 98. According to these sources, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ and his companion presented a large quantity of fine kinds of leather to Negus in order to persuade him to throw Muhammad's refugees out from his land.

[107] For more about the importance of the tanning industry in pre-Islamic Arabia see: Khan, A. "The Tanning cottage" pp. 85-100; Crone, *Meccan trade*, pp. 99-101; Simon, *Meccan trade*, p.91; Crone, "Quraysh" pp. 63-88.

[108] *Dīwān al-Hudhaliyyīn*, pt.2, p. 100. See also *Lisān al-ʿArab*, art. s.n.kh

empire and becoming its rulers. In this new situation, they abandoned their pre-Islamic occupations and became masters.

In spite of all this, when talking about the attitudes of the pre-Islamic Arabs towards crafts one must distinguish between those of the tribesmen and those of the townsfolk. Accordingly, the Arabic sources of *Jāhiliyya* informed us that even the permanent people of Quraysh were engaged not only in trade businesses but also in different handicrafts such as tanning, blacksmithing and tailoring as well as butchery and carpentry. Under the title *Ṣināʿāt al-ashrāf* (the occupations of the nobles), Ibn Qutayba recorded a long list of the crafts and occupations of pre-Islamic Meccan and other Arab nobles.[109] For our purpose, it is enough to signify the following personalities with their occupations:

- Two Meccans, al-ʿĀṣ b. Hishām and al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra occupied in blacksmithing.
- Three nobles, al-ʿAwwām (father of al-Zubayr) and ʿUthmān b. Ṭalḥa (the Prophet consigned in his hands the key of the Kaʿba) and Qays b. Makhrama occupied in tailoring.
- ʿUtba b. Abī Waqqāṣ was a carpenter.
- Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf and Ṭalḥa were cloth dealers (*bazzāz*).
- Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ sharpened arrows
- Abū Ṭālib, Muhammad's uncle traded with perfumes.
- Al-Zubayr, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ and ʿĀmir b. Kurayz were butchers.
- Al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil was a hostler.

[109] See the list of permanent Qurashī personalities, everyone with his craft occupation in Ibn Ḳutayba, *Kitāb al-Maʿārif*, pp. 575-576 and in Thaʿālibī, *Laṭāʾf al-Maʿārif*, pp. 77-78. Almost the same list is given in al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Maḥāsin wal-aḍdād*, p. 93; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, p. 98.

Two important points deserve our attention. First, Ibn Qutayba gave in this list the crafts and occupations of pre-Islamic and Islamic *ashrāf* (dignitaries), meaning they were free of any shame or scorn in practicing these crafts and occupations, or in other words, these crafts were 'typical' for the *ashrāf*. Indeed, most of them were citizens of Mecca or Medina, yet this strongly contradicts the attitude of scorn that existed – if at all – among the nomad Arabs in Jāhiliyya times. The second point is diversity of occupations and crafts that these pre-Islamic dignities practiced. In the list, we find representation for most of the known crafts and occupations including those that people of the tribes used to despise.

A similar list of crafts and occupations of pre-Islamic Meccan personalities exists in a very extraordinary treatise called *Kitāb al-Mathālib* of Abū al-Mundhir Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Sāʾib al-Kalbī (d. 204 H.)[110]. Before discussing the list of Ibn al-Kalbī, I think it is important to signify the nature of his treatise. Its title is *Kitāb al-Mathālib*, meaning the book of faults or vices (*mathlaba* = a vice or fault). Thus, as opposed to the view of Ibn Qutayba, Ibn al-Kalbī from the beginning intended to signify the 'vices' of the mentioned people, the Arabs, mainly those of Mecca. In this treatise, there is a chapter called *bāb al-tijārāt* (the chapter of trades) and another one called *bāb al-ṣinʿāt* (the chapter of the crafts). In the chapter of the trades, Ibn al-Kalbī gave a long list of Meccan cloth dealers (sin. *bazzāz*). In addition to the four mentioned by Ibn Qutayba, he mentioned about 14 pre-Islamic Arab personalities who worked as cloth dealers and another 13 who engaged in perfumery. Of them we may

[110] The book was studied and edited as a doctoral thesis by Amjad Sayyid Ḥasan and presented to the Arabic department in the University of Lahore, Pakistan 1397/1977. Later it was edited and published by Najāḥ al-Ṭāʾī, Beirut-London: Dār al-Hudā 1419 /1998, in this edition our main interest is in pp. 41-48.

emphasize Abū Ṭālib (the father of ʿAlī) who engaged also in perfumery, the famous companion of the Prophet Abū ʿUbayda al-Jarrāḥ, al-Ḥārith b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (uncle of the Prophet). Here one wonders whether such occupations in cloth and the perfume trade should be included in the vices (*mathālib*) of the Arabs that Ibn al-Kalbī presumed to include in his treatise. Trade in general was the favored occupation of the Meccans and in fact it was their main one so that some considered it as one of the *manāqib* (virtues) of Quraysh.[111] As for blacksmithing, Ibn al-Kalbī added five personalities that engaged in blacksmithing: Hishām b. Rabīʿa, ʿUmayr b. al-Ḥuṣayn, Ṭaʿīma and Muṭʿim the sons of ʿAdiy and another two, Hāshim and Hishām. He also related that someone from Banū Usayd (or Asad) defamed the grandson of al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra on account of the blacksmithing craft of his grandfather, saying to him: "I was not a blowing smith and neither was I striking on the anvil".[112] A similar defamation is mentioned by al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār.[113] It says: "I do not blow on blacksmith's bellows and neither play on cords (i.e. play on a stringed instrument)", meaning I am not a singer who plays on a stringed instrument. Others occupied different crafts such as arrow sharpener (*yabrī al-nibl*), physician (*ṭabīb*), dates business (*tammār*), *shʿāb* (repairer of wares by soldering), shoemaker (*khaṣṣāf*), dyer (*qaṣṣār*), camel saddle maker (*yaʿmal al-aqtāb*). From Quraysh Abu Sufyān and Abū Qays b. ʿAbd Manāf were both teachers who taught the Meccans and from the rest of the Arabs several were teachers in Ṭāʾif and among the tribes. Two Meccans were tailors: ʿUthmān b. Ṭalḥa and Qays b. Makhrama b. ʿAbd al-Muṭalib b. ʿAbd Manāf; some said that he was a Jew from Khaybar. According

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[111] al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil*, pp. 155-160.

[112] Ibn al-Kalbī, *Mathālib*, (al-Ṭāʾī ed.), p. 42 (Lahore ed.), p. 19; it reads: لم أكن نافخ قين ولا ضارب علاة

[113] al-Zubayr bin Bakkār, *Jamharat*, p. 448. It reads: والله ما أنا بنافخ كير ولا ضارب زير

to Ibn al-Kalbī several Qurayshī Meccans and others, pre-Islamic and Islamic, practiced the greatly despised crafts of *ḥijāma* (blood-letting) and *dibāgha* (tanning), *khatn* (circumcision) and *ḥilāqa* (hairdressing). The Qurayshī Al-Ḥārth b. Jubayra al-Sahmī, Abū Lahab the famous uncle and oppositionist of the Prophet and Taslīm b. Khalid b. ʿAbd Manāf, all were tanners in Mecca, and al-Ḥakam b. al-ʿĀṣ and ʿAmr b. Ḥurayth were hairdressers in Mecca. In addition to the names of the craftsmen Ibn al-Kalbi as well as Ibn al-Haytham b. ʿAdiy supported their claims with a lot of poetical verses of different poets demeaning different personalities for their engagement in diverse crafts. For example, Thuwayb or Tuwayt bin Ḥabīb b. Asad b. ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā was defamed poetically by some Qurayshī, perhaps Abū Ṭālib who said: "Give Tuwayb a message from me: you are a son of a slave! A slave who practices blood-letting."[114]

More information on pre-Islamic crafts comes from the part of the same treatise that is ascribed to al-Haytham b. ʿAdiyy (130-207/748-822).[115] On the subject of blacksmithing, he informed us about several *quyūn*s (pl. of *qayn*) from Banū ʿAmr b. Asad b. Khuzayma: two of them, Surayj the first and Surayj the second made *al-suyūf al-sarījiyya* (swords called after their name), and Bulth b. ʿAwf who also specialized in making swords. The sub-tribe of Tamīm, Mujāshiʿ, engaged in blacksmithing and its people were called *quyūn*. One of them was Jubayr whom the Umayyad poet Jarīr mentioned when he satirized al-Farazdaq. The smith (*qayn*) of Banū Sulaym named ʿUtba b. Farqad al-Sullamī and Banū al-Akhtham from the same tribe were blacksmiths. Also named, as blacksmiths

[114] Ibn al-Kalbī, *Mathālib*, (Lahore ed.), pp. 25-26; in al-Ṭāʾī ed. pp. 43-48.

[115] ʿUqla and Khrīsāt, "Kitāb al-Mathālib" pp.23-45. They attributed this part of the treatise to al-Haytham and considered it a separate work. However, Najāḥ al-Ṭāʿī, the newest editor of this book considered this part as part of the treatise of Ibn al-Kalbī. See p. 125-126 in al-Ṭāʿī edition.

were Mawraq al-ʿUdhriy from Quraysh and Abzā the smith and slave of Budayl b. Warqāʾ from Khuzāʿa.

Before making any conclusion, one must first understand the nature of the *mathālib* literature. First of all, the treatise of Ibn al-Kalbī and also that of al-Haytham are called *Kitāb al-Mathālib*, not *Mathālib al-ʿArab*, meaning the author of the book did not mean the *mathālib* of the Arabs in general but only of the Arab persons that he mentioned. Furthermore, in the course of the book the author is not using the word *mathālib* or *mathlaba* when he mentions the crafts of the diverse persons.[116] Second, it should be clarified that we are dealing with an unusual kind of literature. In the early centuries of Islam *Mathālib* (pl. of *mathlaba*) were "applied to subjects of shame for the tribes, the ethnic groups or even the clans", and the works of *mathālib* were "usually written by genealogists" or others. According to the Muslim sources, they each bore their own special grudge against the group to which they attributed vices and defects such as Shiʿīs against Sunnīs, Abbasids agains Umayyads and even individuals who felt anger towards a tribe or an ethnic group.[117] Thus, Serjeant, in his critique of Ibn al-Kalbī's lists of pre-Islamic Qurashī nobles who occupied demeaning professions, explained that, in fact, Ibn al-Kalbī intended to sneeringly express

[116] See on this ʿUjayl, "Makhṭūṭat", pp. 368-386, see especially p. 375-376.

[117] Pellat, Ch., "mathālib" *EI*². s. v. This is not the place to discuss the *mathālib* in detail. The reader may see that Asfahānī, in *al-Aghānī*, 20, p.87, related that this kind of writing began by Muʿāwiya's unidentified governor Ziyād b. Abīhi, who wrote a *Kitāb al-Mathālib* in which he attributed every shame and vice, true or false, to the Arabs and others followed him like al-Haytham b. ʿAdīy. As to Hishām Ibn al-Kalbī, Ṭabrī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 8, p. 172-173, related that Khalif al-Mahdī ordered Hishām to write a *mathālib* of the Umayyads of al-Andalus in reaction to what they did to the Abbasids. For more see Ḥusayn, "Mathālib al-ʿArab," pp. 37-92; ʿUqla, and Khrīsāt, "Kitāb al-Mathālib," pp. 23-45.

his disdain for those whose descendants were the opponents of the Prophet in Mecca (the house of ʿAbd Shams from which came the Umayyads) and of ʿAlī's house, such as the first three caliphs, the Umayyad caliphs and others.[118] It is highly possible that Serjeant's conclusion is correct but this does not mean that the contempt felt towards some crafts deterred the Meccans from occupying them. He also argued that the crafts of tanner, butcher, blood-letter, barber and circumciser were considered demeaning in all Arabia, and all kinds of craftsmen were despised. Tailors and blacksmiths, Serjeant says, had quite a respectable status in the eyes of the townsfolk.[119]

As for the information about the occupations of the Jāhilī Arabs it is clear that many of the people of Mecca and of Yathrib (Medīina) as residents of urbanized towns felt no shame in being engaged in crafts including the 'most despised' ones. According to Ibn al-Kalbī and al-Haytham there was the blacksmith, the tanner, the butcher, the blood letter, the hairdresser, the dyer, shoemaker, seller of wine (*khammār*) and seller of dried dates (*tammār*). If there was any shame in practicing these crafts, it was more in the eyes of the nomad Bedouin, an attitude that continued in Islam and extended among the Arabs in general when they became masters of the new empire. At any rate, the existence of this large variety of crafts and occupations among the Jāhilī Meccan Arabs is a good indication of the positive attitude of the townsfolk towards all kinds of crafts.

Relying on the poetical sources that we mentioned above, it is likely that the nomads were those who despised and refrained from all kinds of handicrafts that might put an end to their free mobility. Anyway, it is also possible that the poor hygienic conditions such as bad smells, dirty water and materials and physical

[118] This list appeared in Ibn al-Kalbī's *Kitāb al-Mathālib*. See Serjeant, "Meccan Trade," pp. 475-476 referring to that work.

[119] Serjeant, "Meccan Trade", p. 475.

fatigue distanced certain people such as high-class townsfolk as well as the Bedouin from these occupations. This trend is felt even in one tradition ascribed to the Prophet in which he compared the bad table companion (*jalīs al-sūʾ*) to one who sits with a smith who blows into bellows and will be soiled by the black soot or burned by the hot fire.[120] Relying on the poetical sources that we mentioned above, it is likely that the tribesmen were those who despised and refrained from all kinds of handicrafts that might put an end to their free mobility. Anyway, it is also possible that the poor hygienic conditions such as bad smells, dirty water and materials and physical fatigue distanced certain people such as high-class townsfolk as well as the Bedouin from these occupations. It is believed that the people of this tribe practiced different metal crafts. They made various kinds of spears such as the *khaṭṭī* (called after the town Khaṭṭ), the *rudayniyya* (after Rudayna, a woman who made spears), the *samhariyya* (after Samhar the husband of Rudayna), and the *kharṣāniyya* (after a place in Bahrain called Kharṣān). In addition, the people of ʿAbd Qays engaged in pearl diving off the seashores of Bahrain and Qatar, an occupation that brought good profits to its workers in Jāhilī times and still does in our time. Even one of the most despised crafts, weaving, existed in this tribe. They produced the well-known Qaṭarī (from Qatar) and Hajarī (from Hajar) cloths and many other items of cloths and bedding. [121] An interesting viewpoint regarding one of the most despised crafts, weaving, came from a Muslim Bedouin who engaged in weaving. He reacted to someone who criticized him for his craft saying that for

[120] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, p. 11, vol. 3, p. 314; al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-Qārī*, vol. 11, p. 313, vol. 21, p. 200; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, (Cairo 1415/1994), *bāb al-birr* 146, vol. 8, p. 427; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *bāb al-adab*, no. 4829, vol. 4, p. 259.

[121] al-Maʿīnī, *Shuʿarāʾ ʿAbd Qays*, p. 60-77. See also Jawād ʿAlī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, vol. 5, p. 423-425.

him it was better to be a weaver than to be supported by others.[122] These views towards crafts and material life indicate that a short time before Islam there was no homogenous attitude towards the occupation of crafts. In all cases, it should be emphasized that we are talking about a social attitude that had nothing to do with religious beliefs. This attitude changed drastically during the first two centuries of Islam when the Arabs, both Bedouin and townsfolk became rulers and masters of the new empire or as a result of the political, social and economic developments that swamped the Arab population of Arabia.

In all cases, scorning handicrafts in the pre-Islamic Arab society cannot serve as evidence of the lack of these crafts in that society. On the contrary, the existence of this scornful view proves that its targets – the crafts – really did exist. We previously pointed this out in the Meccan community and, to a lesser extent, in the tribes. Furthermore, both communities, according to their own necessities, were consumers of the products of the different crafts and, after all, they had completed the process of separation of artisanal production from agriculture and, as we have seen above, they practiced a wide variety of crafts including the working of hot metal. We have also seen that Meccan notables occupied one of the most 'despised' crafts, blacksmithing[123]. They certainly produced arms and various tools for agriculture and other needs. However, it is agreed that this scornful view was that which relegated most of the handicrafts in Mecca and the tribes to be performed by slaves, strangers and people not related by blood to the tribe (*ḥalīf*, *mawlā*). The Meccan society showed openness towards various kinds of allies, strangers and outsiders, both groups and individuals, enabling them to build homes in Mecca, to contribute to its

[122] al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī, *Moḥāḍarāt al-Udabā'*, vol. 1,p. 539.

[123] See Belyaev, *Arabo*, *Islam*, p. 69-71; Marwa, *al-Naza'āt*, vol. 1, p. 196-200.

economic development and to rise gradually in social status.[124] For instance, the aforementioned smith or armorer Khabbāb bin al-Aratt was one of the *mustaḍʿafūn* (the weak ones) in Mecca who "rose from the position of slave to that of a client (*mawlā*), subsequently becoming an ally (*ḥalīf*)."[125] Another example is Baqūm, the proclaimed Byzantine or Abyssinian builder of the Kaʿba in 608 (or 605?). Be that as it may, he was a stranger who lived in or arrived by chance in Mecca and the Meccans needed his special skills – which they themselves lacked - in order to build the Kaʿba as a "new type of temporary pantheon representing an open multiplicity and undefined openness."[126] In other words, the employment of Bāqūm was designated to renovate the Kaʿba according to new types of architecture, perhaps like the Abyssinian or Byzantine churches, that local craftsmen could not undertake; yet this does not mean that in Mecca there were no artisans who could supply the local demands for the day-to-day life.

Artistic Heritage

In the light of the aforementioned information about the different lifestyles of the pre-Islamic Arabs, we can sum up with several points concerning the artistic legacy of the Jāhilī Arabs. In doing so, we must keep in mind the essential differences between the urban society in the few settled islands of Ḥijāz (Mecca, Yathrib and Ṭāʾif) and the nomad bulk wandering throughout the barren spaces of Arabia. Creswell, the well-known scholar of early Islamic architecture, had

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[124] See the illustrative article of Kister, "On strangers and allies in Mecca," in *JSAI* 13 (1990): 113-154. There he gave many examples of allies, slaves and strangers who managed to live in Mecca and gained impressive success.

[125] Simon, *Meccan Trade*, appendix 1, p. 105. The quotation is from Kister, "On strangers," p. 127.

[126] Simon, *Meccan Trade*, p. 104.

initially stated that the pre-Islamic Arabs brought nothing architectural to the conquered countries and that the very few settled people of Arabia lived in hovels while the Bedouin suffered from "congenital claustrophobia" and Arabia constituted "an almost perfect architectural vacuum."[127] In his evaluation of the pre-Islamic heritage, Ettinghausen made no distinction between both societies. For him, it was about a primitive society that imported its "finer material of things" and even borrowed the names of these things from foreign cultures. There was nothing in their primitive religion and mode of life that indicated an understanding of figural and other arts.[128] M. Aga-Oglu, who gave greater emphasis to the differences between the two societies, opposed this view. Life in the settled centers of Ḥijāz, especially that of Mecca, he argued, was "in marked contrast to that of the nomads," and the people of these centers were "familiar with the material culture of an urban standard."[129] Depending on our aforementioned discussion of the Jāhilī mode of life, I tend more to accept the view of Aga-Oglu. No matter how developed was their international commercial activity, in principle the Meccans conducted their economic and cultural activities with foreign lands to such a level that its citizens "had lost all taste for fighting and were content to employ a hired militia – the *Aḥābīsh*,"[130] which undoubtedly made them familiar with the wealth and material aspects of life.

[127] Creswell, *Early Muslim* vol. 1, pp. 40-41.

[128] Ettinghausen, "The Character," pp. 251-253.

[129] Aga-Oglu, "Remarks" pp. 178-179. Before him O'Leary, *Arabia*, pp. 184-185, pointed out that "it is very evident that Islam cannot be described correctly as evolved amongst the simple Arabs of the desert… a city such as Mecca must have been susceptible to outside influences in the pre-Islamic age."

[130] O'Leary, *Arabia*, p.184.

More opposition to the views of Creswell and Ettinghausen come from al-Faruqi.[131]

In spite of Baqūm's proclaimed building of the Kaʿba, there are some indications that the Arabs in general had architectural tastes of their own. In my reference to pre-Islamic architecture, I indicated the acknowledged existence of architectural and other artisanal terms and features in the Arabic lexicons and poetry, which means that both settlers and Bedouin, were well aware of forms of building, arts, crafts, materials, tools and even tastes. Ettinghausen could be correct in attributing many of these names and terms to foreign cultures but this does not mean that they were not part of their own culture. The fact that these terms were Arabicized means that the Arabs were aware of and impressed by the foreign world of art and architecture that existed all around them and it is likely that they took advantage of it. In the other domains of arts and crafts, despite the so-called derogatory attitude, we saw that the people of Arabia were well-acquainted with different kinds of arts and crafts. In the cities of Ḥijāz, they had city life, commerce, "products and symbols of high civilization in considerable quantity and variety".[132] All of them, settlers and Bedouin alike, acquired in their annual markets, such as ʿUkāẓ, indigenous and imported products of perfumes, textiles, jewelry, blacksmithing, weaponry, leather and the like.[133]

Understanding the artistic heritage of a people occurs largely through an appreciation of the impacts of that heritage on the succeeding culture of the same people, i. e. the impacts of the Jāhilī Arabs on Islam. In doing so, one must discern between direct and indirect impacts that the Jāhilī culture made on the Islamic one. Most studies on the history of Islamic art found it very difficult, if

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131 al-Fārūqī, "Misconception," pp. 29-49, see especially pp. 33-35, 39-41.

132 Torrey *the Jewish foundation*, p. 29.

133 Ibrahim, "Social and Economic," pp. 347, 349-350.

not impossible, to speak about any pre-Islamic Arab traditions which could have had any direct and decisive influence on the future of Islamic art. In her consideration of some aspects in Umayyad art, M. Rosen-Ayalon observed correctly: "Two other spheres of interest should be taken in consideration when studying the Umayyad period. The first one has not only been overlooked, but has literally been banned as nonexistent – the possible contribution to Islamic art of Arabian pre-Islamic elements in Arabia proper, and the degree of its contribution."[134] In another study, she pointed out the advance in our knowledge about pre-Islamic art in Arabia in the last decades that could stimulate scholars to make reevaluation of that art and its influence on Islamic art. More important, in that study she concluded that the "portrayal of certain female representations" in the entrance hall of the Umayyad palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar was undoubtedly an innovation that belonged to what she called the "Brave New World of the Umayyads."[135] The abovementioned portrayal is a series of female figures sculptured in full-size with naked upper bodies.

Professor Rosen-Ayalon indicated correctly that the iconography of these figures is close to literal expressions that exist in the literary sources of the Umayyads and continued into later Islamic sources. What interests us here is the new type of female stucco figures, which "are fleshy, somewhat plump and with full bosoms." Concerning this depiction, one should recall some desired characteristics of the woman's body as had been expressed and favored by Jāhilī and, later, by Muslim poets. ʿAmr bin Kulthūm in his *muʿallaqa*, described his

[134] Rosen-Ayalon, "Further considerations," p. 97. In a more recent article, "From Jāhiliyya to Islam" pp. 483-505, she pointed out the increasing knowledge about the pre-Islamic art in Arabia in recent decades that could lead to re-consideration of the subject.

[135] Rosen-Ayalon, "From Jāhiliyya to Islam" pp. 483-505

beloved girl as tall with heavy and wide buttocks (*rawādif*, *maʾkama*, *ʿajīza*); which is why she can hardly pass through the door. He simulated her legs to two columns made of ivory or marble.[136] Another poet described some beautiful girls as *quṭuf al-mashiy*, walking slowly and plumply because of their fat bodies (*budnan*).[137] In *al-Aghānī* there is an interesting description of a maidservant that al-Mundhir the Great (king of al-Ḥīra) sent as a gift to the Sassanian king Anushirwān. Among others, al-Mundhir described the maidservant as follows: she is *ʿẓīmat al-hāma* (with large head), *ʿarīḍat al-ṣadr* (with wide bosom), *ḍakhma* (fat), *radāḥ* (has a wide waist), *laffāʾ* (with fleshy thighs), *ḍakhmat al-maʾkimatayn* (her buttocks are fat) and *qaṭūf al-mashiy* (walking slowly with short strides).

It is related also that the Sassanian king adopted this depiction officially as an ideal for royal maidservants.[138] One Bedouin (*aʿrābī*) gave a description for the most beautiful woman according to his taste. Among other things, he said, she is the one who has plump thighs and wide hips. These characteristics continued to be much desired in the Islamic period. The prettiest girl is the one who is *laffāʾ al-fakhdhayn* (has fleshy thighs), *thaqīlat al-ardāf* or *ḍakhmat al-ʿajīza* (with heavy buttocks) and *malīʾat al-tarāʾib* (big breasts).[139] Thus, we see that in the imagination of the Arabs before and in Islam, the ideal woman was pictured as

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[136] ʿAmr bin Kulthūm, *Dīwān*, p. 69.

[137] The poet is al-Marrār b. Munqidh al-ʿAdawī, who lived in the Umayyad period. See *al-Mufaḍḍaliyāt*, p. 89

[138] *Aghānī*, vol. 2, pp. 115-116. For more characteristics of Arab women see Ibn al-Sikīt, *Kanz al-Ḥuffāẓ*, pp. 314-331.

[139] Jāḥiẓ, *al-Maḥāsin wal-Aḍḍāḍ*, pp. 124, 130-131; *idem*, *Rasāʾl*, vol. 2, p. 120. The same characteristics are repeated in the so-called erotic literature such as al-Qayrawānī, *Zahr al-Ādāb*, vol. 2, p. 109; al-Tījānī, *Tuḥfat al-ʿArūs*, pp. 338-343; *Thalāth Makhṭūṭāt*, pp. 56-60.

one whose body was stout and fleshy, with large head and bosom, heavy waist, heavy buttocks and fleshy thighs. Comparing this description with the female figures of Khirbat al-Mafjar that Rosen-Ayalon described as "fleshy, somewhat plump and with full bosoms," will show striking similarity, especially in the preference in both cases for women with heavy but balanced bodies. With this similarity, one may ask: is it not possible that simulations and imaginations that rose from the greatest of all Arab arts, poetry and prose, were a source of inspiration in the arts of the Muslim Arabs? In other words, could we not consider their artistic poetry and prose as part of their artistic legacy?

A. Badawi did a daring study on the contribution of the pre-Islamic Arabs to the Muslim art in 1964 in which he considered the legacies of both south-west Arabia and the rest of Arabia as sources of inspiration for Muslim art.[140] Concerning the artistic legacy of south-west Arabia (Ancient Yemen), he notes that we are in fact dealing to a greater extent with a legacy profuse with eastern and classical Greco-Roman traditions that according to him found their way into Islamic monuments.

The "vertical recessed paneling in Maʾrib", he argued, resembles that used in Muslim monuments such as that of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem while the "battered façades in the Ḥimyarite palace in Ḥajar" found its way into early minarets of Fatimide Cairo and North Africa. He referred the Islamic Muqarnaṣ to Mesopotamian traditions while the Kufic script and its monumental use he referred to south Arabian inscriptions.[141] In all cases, one should remember that in spite of its assumed destruction before the Jāhilī period, the Yemenite civilization continued to be part of the collective memory of at least the Muslim Arabs of Yemenite origin. Concerning the contribution of people of barren

[140] Badawi, "The Contribution," pp. 261-285.

[141] Badawi, "the Contribution," pp. 261-276.

Arabia, Badawi argued: “There must have been in existence other powerful factors, which through their impact on the indigenous cultures created an artistic movement characterized by a certain uniformity. These factors are to be sought in the intrinsic qualities of the Arabs as well as in their physical environment” As a matter of fact, he suggested considering the mode of life in nomad Arabia as a cultural heritage that indirectly inspired in the Muslim Arabs many characteristics of their art. Thus, the Bedouin ideal of freedom expressed in Arabic poetry and prose led to the denial of naturalism, to abstract conceptions in architectural settings and decorations and to their “horror vacui”.

The endless sand dunes of the desert with its moving caravans and the iteration of motifs in poetry and prose led to the iteration of elements in Islamic architecture and decoration.[142] Close to Badawi‘s view is Titus Burckhardt. Writing on the foundations of Islamic art, he suggested tracing some nomadic modes of life in several important characteristics of Islamic art. He attributed the technique of the knotted rug, for example, to a nomadic origin in which geometrical forms are iterated. “Similar preferences,” he argued, “are apparent throughout almost the whole of Islamic art, and this is very significant with respect to the spirit which those preferences manifest themselves; the Islamic mentality shows a relationship on the spiritual plane to what the nomadic mentality is on the psychological plane.” He raised similar arguments concerning architectural elements and settings (such as the first mosque of the Prophet). In the decorative art of arabesque, "the geometrical genius meets the nomadic genius" mainly in the Arabic rhetoric and poetry.[143]

[142] Badawi, “the Contribution,” pp. 276-278.

[143] Burckhardt, *Sacred art*, pp. 104-111.

The conclusions of Badawi on the impacts of pre-Islamic heritage on Islamic art could be exaggerated, especially when he referred almost every characteristic of Islamic art to non-artistic practices of the Jāhilī Arabs. Nevertheless, speaking about the heritage of Jāhilī Arabia, three points should be remembered. First, it is agreed that there were two populations, the Bedouin in the barren deserts and the sedentary in the few cities of Ḥijāz. Of these cities, Mecca was the oldest and the largest religious and economic center in the region. It had the main features of urban society: a variety of religious, economic, social and semi-political institutions and offices, an aristocratic wealthy class (Quraysh), a low class of the weak, the strangers and the slaves, a system of alliances, local markets and cosmopolitan commerce. In other words, the Meccans were familiar enough with the material culture of an urban standard.[144] Second, the Bedouin tribes held close commercial, social and religious relations with the sedentary population, mainly of Mecca. They took part in the local trade, especially in the various markets of Arabia and to some extent in the trade of Mecca.

The significance of this is that they also were not apart from the influences of the materialistic culture. The contents of their poetry and prose prove that they had not only the nomadic ideals and modes of life but also some knowledge of the material culture that they received through their contacts with the Meccans and other sedentary centers. Third, one should remember that soon after the conquests the Muslim Arabs initiated imperial works of art – mosques and palaces – that reached the highest level in Islamic art. These works were designed to satisfy their new religious and secular needs, particularly in accordance with their special tastes.

[144] Aga-Oglu, p. 179. On the economic and social conditions of pre-Islamic Mecca, see Ibrahim, "Social and Economic," pp. 244-358.

Undoubtedly, they adopted many alien architectural forms and elements but according to their own special selection and coordination. Consequently, we can likely trace in these works their own "spiritual complexion", which they derived from their Arabian environment.[145] Burckhardt considered the nomadic mentality of the Arabs and perhaps of other nomadic peoples who embraced Islam, as one of the important foundations of Islamic art. Among other things, he expressed this saying: "The sense of rhythm, innate in nomadic peoples, and the genius for geometry: these are two poles which, transposed into the spiritual order, determine all Islamic art."[146]

[145] Christie, "Islamic minor art," p. 108.

[146] Burckhardt, *Sacred Art*, p. 107.

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