



Seminar for Arabian Studies 2016 Paper Abstracts

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Mecca Society at the End of the Middle Ages

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The history of Mecca is one of the most important, and at the same time one of the most unknown, amongst all of the cities of the medieval Islamic world. Even though this city was marked by its religious position, numerous traits such as its economic, political, cultural and social situations bring it closer to and distinguish it from the other large cities in the region. This study should lead to a better outlining the great Meccan families who lived in this city between 1250 and 1517, and to observe the role that they played in all domains.

This study is essentially carried out according to the prosopographical method. The counting of sources is based on a Filemaker database in French and in Arabic, that gathers together all known information corresponding to individuals, classed by name. The study of kinship and intermarriage allows for genealogical trees to be drawn up for different families.

The final objective of this work is to define the political and social profile of every large Meccan family for the two and a half centuries that my work covers. In this paper, I will use the example of the Ṭabarī family, one of the most imminent families in Mecca during the course of the studied period. The history of this family can be traced up to nearly six centuries, or twelve generations. Through the study of the data of these five sources, the irregularity of influence of the Ṭabarī family.

Keywords: Mecca, Ethnography, Family, Database

A Document of Ibādi Jurisprudence related to the Architecture of Mosques

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Ibādi intellectual literature is still largely unknown in spite of numerous researchers interested in this community and its historical, social, religious history — and even its architectural constructions. The present research follows the pioneering works of Joseph Schacht (1954), and Pierre Cuperly (1988)

about Ibādism. It aims to cast light on Ibādi literature for this represents a real source of information for the study of Ibādism, past and present.

This article analyses an Ibādi manuscript from the twelfth century, written by the scholar Abū l'Abbās Aḥmad. This document was the primary reference for the most important sources of Ibādi legislation and is still in use by the community in its three main centres: M'zab (Algeria), Djerba (Jarbah, Tunisia) and Oman. The study of this document, along with other Ibādi scholarly literature addressed some essential questions about mosques and their design and construction. These sources showed that Ibādi jurisprudence regulated, in detail, the construction and management of mosques according to their importance in the formation and organization of the Ibādi community.

Keywords: Ibādi jurisprudence; Ibādi *fiqh*; *`urf*; mosque; Oman

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Pearl merchants of the Gulf and their lives in Bombay

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Many merchants from the Gulf States relocated to Bombay during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and spent the rest of their lives there. My paper will discuss the activities of merchants from the Arab Gulf States in Bombay, mainly specialising in pearls, who included Ḥajji Muḥammad 'Alī Zainal from Jeddah; the Āl Ibrahim from Kuwait; the Hajra family from Bahrain, the Madfa' from Sharjah, and the Sayegh family from Dubai. The paper is intended to shed light on the lives of those merchants, and illustrate how they interacted with Indian society. It will illustrate mercantile connections between the Gulf and Bombay, and characterize the growth of family-based trading networks in the western Indian Ocean region during the height of the pearling industry.

Furthermore, I will explore the human experiences that arose from this historical connection. These merchants loved Bombay and some of them composed beautiful poetry about the small Arab community there. During a series of field trip to India over the last two years, I have retraced their steps and visited the various places where they lived; walked in the streets they made business, and even sat in their famous Eastern restaurant. I have also visited the small cemetery that contains the graves of the major Arab personalities who lived and died in Bombay, including Sultan Taimur bin Faisal bin Turki of Oman, and Ḥajji Muḥammad 'Alī Zainal, 'the King of Pearls', from Jeddah.

These connections are not forgotten, and by exploring them in the archives, though interviews and though visits to the places and architecture associated with the merchant families, I intend to shed light on a neglected but important part of regional history.

Keywords: pearls, Bombay, Oud, spices, Katwari.

Sources. Bombay Archives, New Delhi Archives; Interviews with Arabs living in Bombay including the late Faisal Kuwaiti.

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Corpus of Soqotri Oral Literature: work in progress

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In 2014, the present speakers, in collaboration with a team of Russian and Soqotri-Yemeni colleagues and friends, published the 750-pages first volume of their Corpus of Soqotri Oral Literature (CSOL I). The book, the first of its kind since the ground-breaking collection of Soqotri folklore published by David Heinrich Müller in 1905, comprises a detailed philological and linguistic introduction; thirty specimens of the oral lore of the islanders in semitological transcription, the Arabic-based Soqotri script developed by the team, and translations into English and Standard Literary Arabic; a 250-pages Soqotri-English-Arabic glossary; and a large collection of photographic documents illustrating various kind of Soqotran *realia*.

Ever since the appearance of CSOL I in 2014, our team has been working on the continuation of this serial publication, as it has been abundantly clear to us that the thirty texts featuring in the first volume are just the very tip of the immense iceberg of the Soqotri oral literature. The corpus of CSOL II, again consisting of thirty carefully annotated texts, is now complete. The members of the team are working on the final version of the Glossary. Expected to be submitted to Brill Academic Publishers by the end of the current year, the volume will allow an interested readership – in less than two years – to have another glimpse into the unique oral lore of the islanders.

The present paper surveys the contents of CSOL II, with a special focus on the nature of the texts it comprises, particularly on their thematic diversity and the continuity between the newly published texts and their forerunners in the Vienna Soqotri corpus. The texts constituting the corpus of CSOL II can be provisionally classified according to their contents, as follows:—

- *Narrative folklore*, by far the most substantial part of the text corpus of CSOL II (about two thirds of the texts). Quite a number of compositions included into CSOL II have striking parallels in the Vienna corpus of Soqotri texts (Müller 1902; 1905), and some of them reflect widespread folklore motifs attested in a variety of oral traditions of the Old World (particularly, the Near East, the Mediterranean, South India and the Horn of Africa), notably 'Cinderella' and 'Hänsel and Gretel'. Of special interest are a few compositions of ethiological nature, previously known to be extremely rare on the island (cf. Naumkin, Kogan & Cherkashin 2015, Naumkin et al. 2015).

- *Riddles* (30 items), some of them with transparent forerunners in Müller 1905 (whose corpus of riddles is, however, considerably more impressive in terms of both size and originality).
- *Ethnographic texts*, namely, descriptions of traditional technological processes such as palm cultivation and date processing; preparation of milk products; meat preservation; manufacturing a leather bucket; building a traditional house.
- *Records of personal nature* (notably, informants' meetings with *jinni* women) and a historical record about punishment of thieves under the sultans of Mahra and Soqatra.

Not unlike CSOL I, the second volume of the series will include a detailed Soqotri-English-Arabic glossary and a rich pictorial inventory illustrating the specific *realia* pertaining to the everyday life of the islanders.

Keywords: Yemen: Soqatra; oral literature; Semitic languages

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Incense and Imagery: mapping agricultural and water management systems on the island of Socotra, Yemen

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Situated at the entrance to the Red Sea, the island of Socotra features prominently in historical texts as an important source of exotic resources such as aloes, dragon's blood and incense. The intensive cultivation of these products, particularly during the first centuries BC/AD, has been suggested as the reason for an extensive set of walls and enclosures found across the island (Naumkin & Sedov 1993; Doe 1992; Weeks et al. 2002). Little has been done, however, in terms of understanding how these potential agricultural systems would have functioned within their local landscape. As in many arid environments, the management and control of water resources would be key to any type of intensive production. While ethnographic accounts stress the reliance of the island's population on seasonal rains for agriculture, the presence of ancient water control systems such as cisterns, wells, dams and terraces found throughout the island, suggests the need for additional irrigation and water conservation systems. How these systems relate to the intensification of agricultural production on Socotra in antiquity has yet to be adequately explained, or examined. In this paper I will demonstrate how remote sensing of satellite imagery together with the evidence from archaeological survey and excavation, paleo-climatic and environmental studies, and historical

accounts, has now made it possible for us to begin to understand how these systems may have functioned.

Keywords: Socotra; agriculture; water management systems; remote sensing; incense

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