Yemeni Inscriptions, Iraqi Chronicles, Hijazi Poetry: A Reconstruction of the Meaning of Isrā’ in Qur’an 17:1

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Abstract

The term isrā’, based on the first verse of sūra 17, is typically rendered as ‘Night Journey’. There is little compelling evidence that this was the original meaning of the Qur’anic text, and medieval lexicographers and exegetes preserved a number of alternative meanings, such as that asrā was a denominal verb meaning ‘to travel through the uplands (al-sarāh)’. Another explanation is that asrā is a denominal verb of the noun sariyya (pl. sarāya), a military expedition. By drawing on early historiographical descriptions of sarāya and South Arabian inscriptions, which give evidence that the word sariyya is of Sabaic origin, the Qur’anic meaning of asrā was evidently something like ‘to send on a royal expedition’.

Early Islamic Arabic poetic texts also offer extremely compelling evidence that the first Muslims were familiar with some of the key concepts of South Arabian royal authority as they appear in Sabaic inscriptions.

Keywords: Jahiliyya; poetry; Sabaic; al-Waqidi; Quran; Night Journey

1. Introduction

Any consideration of the isrā’ narrative, usually translated as Muhammad’s ‘Night Journey’ from Mecca to Jerusalem, must begin by taking account of its ‘one disadvantage’ that ‘none of this was at first glance to be found in the Scripture itself’, as Josef van Ess puts it, with reference to both Q. 17:1 and Q. 53:1–18.1 In Ibn Ishāq’s early Sīra narrative, the isrā’ (based on Q. 17:1) denotes the Prophet’s journey in the company of the angel Gabriel to Jerusalem, where he meets Abraham, Moses and Jesus.2 The mi’rāj (based on Q. 53:1–18) denotes his ascent to Heaven where he meets many of the same figures, and is given the five daily prayers.3 At some point these two narratives were fused.4 However, Q. 17:1,

1 J. van Ess, ‘Vision and Ascension: Strat al-Najm and its Relationship with Muhammad’s mi’rāj’, Journal of Qur’anic Studies 1 (1999), pp. 47–62, 48. His discussion relates more to Q. 53.
2 Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra al-nabawīyya li-bn Hishām, (ed.) M. Saqqā, I. al-Abýārī, ‘Abd al-Ḥafiz Shalabi (Cairo, 1955), ii, pp. 396–403.
3 Ibid., I, pp. 403–408.
4 H. Busse, ‘Jerusalem in the Story of Muhammad’s Night Journey and Ascension’, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam XIV (1991), pp. 1–40, 15–21 for combined isrā’–mi’rāj narratives, predominantly in ṭafṣīr and ḥadīth.

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the clearest base text for the narrative, is conventionally understood as, ‘Glory be unto He who took His servant on a night journey (asrā bi-`abdihi laylan) from the sacred place of prayer (al-masjid al-harām) to the furthest place of prayer (al-masjid al-aqṣā) upon which We have sent down Our blessing, that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the all-hearing, the all-seeing.’ Extensive scholarly discussion has revolved around the identification of al-masjid al-aqṣā with the terrestrial Jerusalem. A number of orientalists have argued that the original Qur`anic isrā’ was a journey to Heaven, a stance most recently defended by Heribert Busse. Angelika Neuwirth and Uri Rubin have both argued for a terrestrial understanding of al-masjid al-aqṣā. The original reception by the Qur`anic audience is obscured by Umayyad-era and later polemic about whether Muhammad could have had a physical vision of God, according to Josef van Ess.

Absent from the debate, however, is much attention to the etymology of the verb asrā, from which the noun isrā’ (not itself found in the Qur’an) is derived. Moving away from meanings connected to ‘night travel’ helps partially explain an unsatisfying redundancy in the Arabic that perplexed medieval Muslim exegetes: why is the adverbial laylan (by night) used if asrā itself means ‘to send on a night journey’? Asrā can, however, be elucidated even further based on three sources: the Sabaic inscriptions of South Arabia, early Arabic historiographical usage, and pre-Islamic poetry. Rather than read asrā, a form IV verb, as a transitive form of the form I sarā meaning ‘to travel by night’, it is preferable to read it as a denominial verb derived from sariyya (pl. sāriyyā, sārayāḥ), a military expedition taking place at any time of day or night, thus meaning ‘to send on a royal or military expedition’. The word sariyya is cognate with, and probably derived from, a Sabaic usage found in monumental sixth-century inscriptions of South Arabian monarchs.

The sariyya military expedition forms part of a small cluster of ideological terms that the early Muslim polity inherited from the defunct South Arabian monarchy, just as they inherited religious terms. Early Muslims did not simply adopt the institution of the sariyya without modification; it was distinguished as an instrument of Prophetic delegation, thus allowing for the relative centralisation of his authority. At the same time, at some point it attained both a proselytising as well as a military role. The sariyya was a ‘mission’, both military and religious.

The sariyya was not the only institution imported from South Arabia, and early Arabic poetry in particular offers a hitherto poorly exploited resource for establishing the cultural

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5 The translation is Michael Sells’, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘an*, s.v. ‘Ascension’.
6 Busse, ‘Jerusalem’, p. 35.
7 A. Neuwirth, ‘From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple’, in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, (ed.) J. D. McAuliffe (Oxford, 2003), pp. 376–407; U. Rubin, ‘Muhammad’s Night Journey (isrā’) to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā: Aspects of the Earliest Origins of the Islamic Sanctity of Jerusalem’, *al-Qantara* XXIX (2008), pp. 147–164. As Neuwirth and others have noted, the consistency with which the periphrastic phrase used elsewhere in the Qur’an, al-araf atasi bi`abdihi laylan (as in Q. 7:1, 21: 71, 21:81, 34:18), which closely resembles the bāṣa`ala bi`abdihi of Q. 17:1, refers to Palestine makes it difficult to imagine that al-masjid al-aqṣā does not refer to Jerusalem.
8 van Ess, ‘Vision and Ascension’. Although his discussion deals primarily with Q. 53, note that in Ibn Ishāq there are also two versions of the isrā’, one dealing with a dream vision, and the other with a corporeal journey.
9 Most recently H. Hayajneh, ‘The Usage of Ancient South Arabian and Other Arabian Languages as an Etymological Source for Qur`anic Vocabulary’, in *New Perspectives on the Qur‘an: The Qur‘an in Its Historical Context* 2, (ed.) G. S. Reynolds (London, 2011), pp. 117–46. See also C. Robin, ‘Himyar et Israël,’ *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* CIIl (2004), especially pp. 875–881.
and political mechanisms through which the early Islamic Hijaz interacted with South Arabia. *Mukhādram* poets contemporary to the first Muslims depict a worldview in which South Arabian notions of monarchy mixed side-by-side with emergent Islamic notions of Prophetic rule, and they offer a view into some of the military and ideological preoccupations of early Islam that were later discarded.

Early poets may also help us speculate as to the reception of the Qur’ānic *isrā’,* if we understand it as God ‘sending the Prophet on a divine *sariyya’.* This *isrā’* may well have been understood by its contemporaries as a long-distance military expedition of the sort undertaken by South Arabian monarchs or Hijazi tribal leaders. The goal of such an expedition must thus have been understood as the terrestrial Jerusalem, either as a territorial heritage of the early Muslims, or as a backdrop for the Prophet *qua* folkloric Arabian spiritual hero, supressing the symbol of older religions.

2. *Isrā’: Problems of Definition in *Tafsīr* and Qur’ānic Usage

The exegetic tradition, from a very early date, presupposes the *Sīra* narrative of *isrā’* in interpreting the word *asrā.’ This is already the case in the *tafsīr* of Muqṭīl ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), the earliest completely extant Qur’ānic exegetical text. He understands *al-Qaṣr al-ṣāliḥ* as Jerusalem (*bayt al-maqdis*), where Muḥammad was prescribed the five prayers, given the opportunity to drink from one of the three rivers (milk, honey, and wine, from which he chose milk), and saw Burāq, his steed. This led in time to attempts to explain the redundancy of the expression *asrā bi-‘abdihi laylan.* Such attempts were initially implicit rather than explicit. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) relies on a variant attributed to the Companion Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamān, *min al-layl,* to gloss the adverbial *laylan,* but he does not discuss the issue further. Al-Zamakhshārī (d. 538/1144), in his *al-Khashshāf,* returns to this variant in his reading of the verse, and was the first to explicitly pose the question, “If you asked, ‘does not *isrā’* always take place by night, so what then does it mean to mention *laylan?’” He states, “I would respond that *laylan,* in the indefinite, signifies the short length of the *isrā’* (*taqfīl muddat al-issā’*), and that He sent him on a forty-night journey from Mecca to Syria in the space of a single portion of the night, thus the use of the indefinite indicates the meaning of portion-ness (*al-ba’diyya*).”

Al-Zamakhshārī is relying, implicitly, on the variant *min al-layl* (of the night), which could indeed mean *ba’d al-layl* (part of the night). In addition to Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamān, he cites Ibn Masʿūd as a source for this phrasing. However, neither al-Ṭabarī nor al-Zamakhshārī are interested in the possibility that *laylan* might offer a different meaning from its variant *min al-layl.* Moreover, *min al-layl* could have other meanings, and the *Sīra* narratives are obviously dictating the interpretation of the Qur’ānic text. Nevertheless,

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10Muqṭīl ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr Muqṭīl ibn Sulaymān,* (ed.) A. M. Shihāţa (Beirut, 2002), II, pp. 515–516. Interestingly, Burāq is mentioned as one of the *āyāt* referred to in Q. 17:1, not explicitly as the Prophet’s mount.

11Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ‘an ta‘wīl āy al-Qur’ān,* (ed.) al-Ṭurkī (Cairo, 2001), xiv, p. 411.

12Al-Zamakhshārī, *al-Kashshāf‘an hawājī ghabwāniṣ al-tawzīl wa‘yyūn al-aqṣāf,* (ed.) Ā. A. ‘Abd al-Mawjūd, ‘A. M. Mu‘awīd (Riyadh, 1998), iii, pp. 491–492.

13W. Wright, *A grammar of the Arabic language,* 3rd edition (Cambridge, 1896), ii, p. 135.
Another inadequacy of these explanations, from an historical point of view, emerges from their atomistic approach, typical of the ta‘ṣīr genre. Comparisons are not made across the Qur’anic text, but if one does do so, it becomes evident that the usage of temporal adverbs denoting night with the verb asrā is not consistent with the exegetes’ explanations. Not all usages, after all, can be explained as signifying a swift journey, only taking part of the night. Now, aside from Q. 17:1, asrā appears in five additional places in the Qur’ān, in all cases in the imperative. In two identical formulations, Lot is told to flee the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with the expression asrī bi-ahlīka bi-qit‘īn min al-layl (so go forth with your family in a portion of the night).\(^\text{15}\) In three locations, God commands Moses to take the Israelites out of Egypt.\(^\text{16}\) In two of these cases no time is specified, but in one, the setting is night: fa-asrī bi-‘ibādī laylan (go forth by night with my servants).\(^\text{17}\)

Scholars have noted that perhaps a ‘night journey’ is not the most accurate rendering of isrā’. Having surveyed the above passages, John Wansbrough has argued that the original referent of ‘abd in Q. 17:1 was Moses, not Muḥammad.\(^\text{18}\) Angelika Neuwirth, while continuing to read ‘abd as a reference to Muḥammad, sees a translation of ‘exile’ as more compelling than ‘night journey’, especially as in the larger context of Q. 17 the Muslims fearful of being driven from Mecca are implicitly compared favourably with the disobedient Jews driven from Egypt.\(^\text{19}\) In addition to contemporary Western scholars, the medieval lexicographical tradition provides further support for a re-definition of asrā; Abū ʾIshāq al-Fārisī (d. after 377/987) explains asrā in this verse as sayyara (he made him travel, he sent him), no doubt suggested by the identical root letters.\(^\text{20}\)

There are thus several reasons for rejecting the interpretation of the Qur’ān’s usage of the verb asrā as ‘to travel by night’. A necessary first step is to examine all instances of Qur’ānic usage comparatively. The verb asrā is thus seen to be characterised by several other features. Lot is not really being exiled, per Neuwirth; God is commanding him to avoid catastrophe, and the Qur’ān gives no basis for construing his departure as an unjust expulsion in the same vein as the Jews’ exodus from Egypt or the Muslims’ emigration from Mecca. What the passages using the verb asrā have in common is, firstly, that the only subject or speaker to use the verb is divine or supernatural, namely, God or an angel. Secondly, all of the situations are clearly hierarchical. In five out of the six usages, the verb is used in the imperative, and in all of them the subject is either explicitly or implicitly an ‘abd or servant of the divine will. A further hierarchical level exists if we consider Lot or Moses as intermediaries between the divine realm on one hand, and their human kin or the Israelites on the other. The divine

\(^{14}\) Al-Rāzī, Mašfīḥ al-Ghayb (Beirut, 1999), xx, p. 292; al-Bayḍawī, Ta‘ṣīr anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta’wil, (ed.) M. al-Mar‘āshī (Beirut, 1997), iii, p. 247.

\(^{15}\) Q. 11:81; 15:65.

\(^{16}\) Q. 26:77; 26:42; 44:23.

\(^{17}\) Q. 44:23. It is worth noting that here, al-Taḥṣīr, for example, follows the most obvious adverbial meaning of laylan, rather than trying to interpret it as meaning min al-layl as he had with Q. 17:1 (Taḥṣīr, al-Ta‘ṣīr, xxi, p. 34: sīr bi-him bi-layl qabla al-sabāḥ).

\(^{18}\) J. Wansbrough, Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation (Oxford, 1977), pp. 68–69.

\(^{19}\) Neuwirth, ‘From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple’, p. 382 n. 33.

\(^{20}\) Ibn Manẓūr, Li‘l an-‘Arab (Beirut, 1993), xiv, p. 382a (s.v. ‘SRY’).
command goes out to representatives of human groups who are, in turn, in command over their kin group, be it a tribe or a smaller family unit—the distinction between the two being quantitative rather than qualitative in such social contexts. This then implies a certain socio-political context to the use of the verb, especially in the situation of the Israelites following Moses, who are frequently depicted in a military context in the Qur’an; the Jews under Moses are consistently encouraged to bravely wage war for the Holy Land.\textsuperscript{21} The \textit{isrā’} verse is followed by Q. 17:2–7, which describes the Jewish Scripture’s (\textit{al-kitāb}) foretelling of two Israelite transgressions and two subsequent punishments; for most Biblically literate readers this evokes the destruction of the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE and the Second by the Romans following the Jewish revolt of 66–70 CE, but most Muslim exegetes saw the cause of the first destruction as the killing of the prophet Zachariah and the precipitating sin of the second the killing of John the Baptist (Yahyā ibn Zakariyyā’).\textsuperscript{22} In either case, the Jews here are engaged with politico-military forces, albeit against the backdrop of the consistent Biblical and Qur’anic spiritual struggle for monotheistic purity.

A final, grammatical characteristic of the verb \textit{asrā} in the Qur’an sets it apart from extra-Qur’anic usages, in that it is consistently used transitively with the preposition \textit{bi-}. This is worth emphasising since \textit{asrā bi-hi} is evidently distinguishable from the verb \textit{asrā}, used intransitively and meaning quite clearly ‘to travel by night’, by the use of this preposition. According to the lexicons, there is no difference between \textit{asrāhu}, where the object is expressed by a pronominal suffix, and \textit{asrā bi-hi}.\textsuperscript{23} This is a problematic assertion, however, as in this case the \textit{bi-} must be superfluous (\textit{zā’ida}), but it is also said that the preposition in \textit{asrā bi-hi} functions as it does in \textit{akhadha bi-l-khitām} (take hold of the nose-rein), which would typically be considered as expressing close attachment or adherence (\textit{išq})—it is not superfluous.\textsuperscript{24} In fact, \textit{asrā} in the earliest sources is always intransitive. For example, all three examples given in \textit{Lisān al-ʿArab} are intransitive: from Labīd we have the expression \textit{asrā al-qaymu} (the tribe departed in the night), \textit{asrat ilay-hi min al-Jawza} (from al-Nābigha), and the proverbial \textit{isrā’ qumfiḍh} (the night travel of a porcupine).\textsuperscript{25} To all appearances then, the \textit{bi-} in \textit{asrā bi-hi} is to make the verb transitive (\textit{bā’ al-ta’diya}), but this construction is typical of Form I verbs, not Form IV. The construction \textit{asrā bi-hi} is used consistently in all six instances of the verb in the Qur’an, while it is not

\textsuperscript{21}Q. 2:58; 4:154; 5:21; 7:161.

\textsuperscript{22}Al-Ṭabarī, \textit{Tafsīr}, xiv, pp. 436–505 (=Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī/Brāqī xv, pp. 21–44). For al-Ṭabarī, there are two issues each for both the first and second catastrophes: the sin and the agents of destruction. The sin of the first destruction was either the killing of Zachariah (emphasised in Ibn ‘Abbās traditions) or Isaiah (as emphasised by Ibn Išāq); see especially xiv, p. 468. Candidates for the agent of the Lord’s destruction in this case included “Ṣanāḥbīn (Ibn ‘Abbās tradition, p. 457), Shapur II (Dhīl al-ʿAkwāf, from Ibn Wahb, p. 437), and Nebuchadnezzar (from a prophetic hadīth transmitted by Ḥudhayīfah ibn al-Yāmān, p. 458), but was most likely, according to al-Ṭabarī, either Jālīt/Goliath (several sources, pp. 471–472), or Semnacherr (several sources, pp. 472 ff., p. 485). It is possible there was no combat (pp. 476–479). As for the second destruction, there is no dispute, al-Ṭabarī tells us, that it was due to the killing of Yahyā ibn Zakariyyā’ (p. 469, 479 ff.), and most versions give Nebuchadnezzar as the destroyer (pp. 479 ff.). There is no reference to the Romans, except for a ‘king of the Romans’ (mudūk Rumayyā) named Qāṭīq ibn Išāṣūs, perhaps a corruption of Titus, the son of Vespasianus (pp. 458–459, with variants of the name given in 489 n. 1 and in al-Thā’labī, \textit{Tafsīr}, (ed.) Ibn ʿĀshūr, (Beirut, 2002), vi, p. 70)?

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Lisān}, xiv, p. 381b, s.v. ‘SRY’.

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Lisān}, xiv, p. 382a; c.f. Wright, \textit{Grammar}, II, p. 159.

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Lisān}, xiv, p. 381b; and Labīd, \textit{Sharḥ dīwān Labīd ʿalī Rabīʿ al-ʿĀmirī}, (ed.) l. ʿAbbās (Kuwait, 1962), p. 49; W. Alhwardt, \textit{The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets Eμmāghī, ʿAntara, Thāfā, Zuhair, ʿAlqama and Imruʾulqais} (London, 1870), p. 6, no. 5, l. 11.
used at all in the poetic corpus (discussed below), or if it is, with such rarity that the examples would have little evidentiary value. This hints, despite lexicons’ assertions, at differential etymologies for \( \text{asr} \) and \( \text{asr} \; \text{bi-hi} \).

As used in the Qur’an, the meaning of ‘night travel’ for the verb \( \text{asr} \) is thus untenable. It is used irregularly with adverbs of time denoting night, a redundancy; it is used in hierarchical situations where another dimension of meaning besides nocturnal movement seems to be intended; and its grammatical construction, frequently in the imperative and always with the preposition \( \text{bā} \), suggests an idiomatic construction with a specific meaning. The traditional meaning of ‘night travel’, and more particularly the canonical interpretation of ‘in a single night’ for \( \text{laylan} \) (or rather, for the variant \( \text{min al-layl} \)), relies on the Prophet’s biography. All these considerations argue for seeking another candidate for the meaning of \( \text{asr} \) than ‘night travel’, either from Arabic or from another Semitic language.

3. \( \text{Sariyya: Lexicographical Definitions in Light of Non-Arabic Sources} \)

The term \( \text{asr} \) is partially elucidated by a comparison with other Semitic languages. Among the Northwest Semitic languages, the root \( \text{SRY} \) does not mean ‘to travel by night’, but denotes in all cases, e.g. Hebrew \( \text{sārā} \), ‘to loosen’, a meaning absent from Arabic \( \text{sārā} \) (\( \text{SRY} \)), but present in \( \text{sārā} \) (\( \text{SRW} \)), as in \( \text{sara'utu al-thawb ‘annī} \) (I threw off the garment from me).\(^\text{27}\) In Aramaic and its dialects, the meaning of ‘to untie’ leads, through the sense of the motion of unpacking, to the verb \( \text{šērē} \) (or \( \text{šērē} \), \( \text{šērē} \)) meaning, ‘to encamp, to dwell’.\(^\text{28}\) There is no particular reason to assume that the Qur’anic \( \text{asr} \) is derived from \( \text{SRY} \) rather than \( \text{SRW} \), as the distinction would not be manifest in most form IV conjugations. Thus, the Arabic verb \( \text{asr} \) (\( \text{SRW} \)), a denominal form derived from \( \text{sārāḥ} \) (the back or highest part of anything, mountains), does not mean ‘to travel by night’, but ‘to travel towards or in the uplands’. At least one commentator has suggested that this may be the meaning of \( \text{asr} \; \text{bī-‘abdhi} \) in Q. 17:1.\(^\text{29}\) For that matter, \( \text{SRW/Y} \) gives us at least two other Arabic words: \( \text{sārā} \) (\( \text{SRW} \)) can also mean ‘to be liberal, generous’, and its Form VIII, \( \text{īstārā} \), can mean ‘to select the best of something’.

Amongst Arabian Semitic languages, in Safaitic, however, we do find that \( \text{s’r} \) means ‘to travel’ and perhaps even ‘to travel by night,’ although it is only attested twice in the corpus of inscriptions for that language.\(^\text{30}\) In Sabaic there are no other common words from \( \text{SRW/Y} \), although \( \text{s’r} \) means a valley or wadi.\(^\text{31}\) This could have several etymologies, but \( \text{sārī} \), meaning ‘a stream, rivulet’, in Q. 19:24, is a very likely cognate. If this is the case, the root of \( \text{s’r} \) could be \( \text{SRY} \), and both words related to the Arabic verb \( \text{yāsrī} \), used of water flowing. A general etymological connection is evident in both Arabian and other Semitic

\(^{26}\)M. Zammit, \textit{A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur’anic Arabic} (Leiden, 2002), p. 220.

\(^{27}\) \textit{Liṭān}, xiv, p. 382b.

\(^{28}\) \textit{Dictionary of Targumim, Talmud and Midrashic Literature}, p. 1630, s.v. ‘\( \text{SR} \).’ This field of meaning seems the second most probable to me, after my own, argued here. The verb is much more common in Aramaic than in Hebrew (thanks to Michael Rand for pointing this out to me).

\(^{29}\) Lane, \textit{Lexicon}, p. 1355, s.v. ‘\( \text{asr} \).’

\(^{30}\) KRS 169 and KRS 1670, cited and translated in A. al-Jallad, \textit{An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions} (Leiden, 2015), pp. 256, 261. My thanks to Ahmad al-Jallad for his observations on this passage.

\(^{31}\) A. F. L. Beeston et al., \textit{Sabaic Dictionary/Dictionnaire sabéen} (Louvain-la-Neuve/Beirut 1982), p. 128, s.v. ‘\( \text{S’RR I} \).’
languages: to loosen; to travel; to alight; to travel (by night); to flow; river-valley. Again very generally, this larger context is helpful for realising that reading asrā as ‘night travel’ means passing up numerous other fields of meaning associated with movement. However, a view too wide, or a longue durée approach to a word’s meaning lacks historical specificity. If it is possible to read asrā as something other than ‘night travel’, it must be situated within the context of the pre-Islamic Arabian milieu.32

Once we abandon assumptions about Muhammad’s night journey, a large number of possibilities present themselves. As we have seen, Neuwirth has suggested ‘exile’, although this is insufficient in explaining all usages in the Qur’ān. Two additional possibilities from the medieval Arabic lexicographical tradition have already emerged, that asrā means to travel into the sārāh (highlands), or that it means simply sayyara, or some similar term denoting travel without reference to night. These meanings are not incompatible with the pre-Islamic Arabian milieu. A final, stronger possibility is that asrā is the denominal verb of an as-yet unsuggested noun; the word sariyya suggests itself, as it carries with it notions of hierarchy and command that seem implicit in the Qur’ānic usage of asrā, and there is more evidence for its usage in pre-Islamic inscriptive and Arabic texts. Instances of asrā (form IV) meaning ‘to send forth a sariyya’ are admittedly lacking, but sara (form II) can mean just that, and form IV asrā could carry the same meaning as its form II, sara, as is so often the case with Arabic verbs.

Ironically, medieval lexicographers also struggled to relate the word sariyya, a sort of military expedition, to night travel. This confusion results from the medieval lexicographical strategy of explaining a non-Arabic word with reference to a more well-known Arabic root. Thus in al-Azhari’s (d. 380/980) Tahdhib al-lugha, we find that the sariyya is so named “because it travels by night (tāsīn layl) in secrecy, so as not to give any warning to the enemy, who might then be cautious and avoid it”.33 This is etymologically possible, but what little evidence we have suggests that there was no actual relationship between the sariyya and time of day. The earliest texts give examples of sariyya meaning a military expedition taking place during the day. For example, during the battle of Dhāt al-Riqa’, al-Wāqūdī tells us that the Prophet sent sārāyāh that returned at nightfall.34 A hadith related by both al-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd on the authority of Ṣakhir ibn Wadā’a al-Ghāmidī has the Prophet sending all armies and sarāyā at dawn (idhā ba‘atha sariyya aw jawshan ba‘athahu min awval al-nahār).35 Lane

32It is also for this reason that reading asrā as, for example, a metathesis of SYR (a possibility already anticipated by al-Fārisī; see n. 20, above), which is clearly in some way semantically related, is not satisfying. That all these roots belong to overlapping fields of meaning sheds no specific light on the cultural or social valence of the vast array of derived lexemes in our region and period.

33Al-Azhari, Tahdhib al-Lugha, (ed.) M. ’Awād Mu‘īb (Beirut, 2001), xiii, p. 39.

34Al-Wāqūdī, Kitāb al-Maghāzī láll al-Wāqūdī, (ed.) M. Jones ([London], 1966), p. 396. Bahrat al-sariyya fa-raja’t ilayhi ma‘a al-layl. Lane also gives a verse from the Ḥanāfī that I am unable to locate. Al-Wāqūdī does, in his descriptions of sārāyāh, sometimes describe the combatants as travelling secretly by night (in 13 out of 50 cases, nos. 3, 10, 14, 21–24, 27, 31, 34, 35, 39, 43; see Appendix 14). The fact that he specifies this tactic in some cases indicates that the sariyya did not by definition take place at night.

35Al-Tirmidhī, Sunan al-Tirmidhī, (ed.) A. M. Shākir, M. F. ’Abd al-Baqī, I. Uṭywa ’Awād (Cairo, 1975), iii, p. 509, no. 1212: Ibn Mājah, Sunan Ibn Mājah, (ed.) M. F. ’Abd al-Baqī, ([Cairo], 1952), ii, p. 752, no. 2236; Abū Yūsuf, Kitāb al-Khatān, (ed.) T. ’Abd al-Ra‘ūf Sa‘d and S. H. Muhammad (Cairo, 1999) p. 211. Ella Landau-Tasseron supposes that the later tradition would have felt discomfort around surprise attacks that did not summon the enemy to Islam, but Abū Yūsuf does not connect the time of day the sariyya departed with the summons to Islam: see E. Landau-Tasseron, ‘Features of the Pre-Conquest Muslim Armies in the Time of Muhammad’, in
attempts to rationalise these inconsistencies away by supposing that this is the origin of the word, but that it came to be “afterwards applied to such as March by day”, as was the case in later medieval usage.

There are two arguments that could be brought against such a reconstruction based on traditional Arabic lexicography. The first is the Sabaic origin of the word sariyya.36 The Sabaic inscriptions were left by monarchs, governors, and other notables of South Arabia, emerging early in the first millennium and continuing until the mid-sixth century CE.37 By the sixth century Yemen was controlled by Abraha, a general of Kalēb Ella Aṣbāha, the emperor of Aksum, located in present-day Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. Abraha had seized power following a Byzantine-supported Aksumite invasion and subsequently ruled from about 535–565.38 While not ethnically South Arabian, Abraha continued to use the inscriptive language and regnal titles of previous Ḥimyarite monarchs, although he replaced the Judeo-monotheistic formulae of the later Ḥimyarites with Christian expressions. He also followed Ḥimyarite practice in attempting to exercise control over the Arabs of the southern and central Arabian Peninsula via a group of Arab client-tribes, many of whom (e.g. Kinda), well-known to the Arabic literary sources, were still present at the advent of Islam. His military campaigns were recalled in a legendary fashion in Q. 105 (Sūrat al-Fīl).39 These legends had some basis in reality; one of his inscriptions, Ry 506, dated to 552 CE and located at Murayghān, about half-way between Sanaa and Mecca, offers one such testimonial to the suppression of a tribal group called Maʿadd. Inscriptions disappear after 558 CE, and the literary tradition tells us that the Sasanians exercised loose control over Yemen from the 570s, a state of affairs that prevailed until Islam’s appearance.

If we look to one particular inscription, CIH 541, dated from March 548 CE, chiefly commemorating Abraha’s rebuilding of the famous Maʿrib dam, we find a cognate and the likely source of the Arabic word sariyya, the Sabaic s’unut. CIH 541 records the suppression of a revolt of one Yzd (perhaps as the Arabic Yazīd) bn Kbs’t, who had been named governor (ḥīfī) over the Arab tribe of Kinda (Kdt). A larger number of other notables joined in the rebellion, but when Abraha led an expedition himself, Yzd came to him and reaffirmed his allegiance. At this time, news of a breach in the important dam at Maʿrib reached Abraha and he successfully concluded the affair in order to return and oversee repairs, with which the rest of the inscription deals.

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36Evidently, the Sabaic usage was introduced from Geʿez by Abraha. See W. Müller, review of Etymological Dictionary of Gurage (Ethiopic). Vol I: Individual Dictionaries. Vol II: English-Gurage Index. Vol III: Etymological Section, by Wolf Leslau, ZDMG CXXXI (1981), p. 402; A. Sima, ‘Der Lautwandel s > s’ im Sabäischen: Die Wiedergabe fremden Wortgutes’, ZDMG CLIV (2004), p. 22.
37N. Nebes, P. Stein, ‘Ancient South Arabian’, in The Ancient Languages of Syria-Palestine and Arabia, (ed.) R. D. Woodard (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 147–178.
38C. Robin, ‘Ḥimyar, Akṣūm, and Arabia Deserta in Late Antiquity: The Epigraphic Evidence’, in Arabs and Empires Before Islam, (ed.) G. Fisher (Oxford, 2015), pp. 127–171.
39Kister originally proposed the connected between Q. 105 and Abraha’s Ry 506 inscription in M. J. Kister, ‘The Campaign of Hulubān: A New Light on the Expedition of Abraha’, Museum (UNESCO) LXXVIII (1965), pp. 425–436.
In three locations in CIH 541, the word s’nut is used.\(^{40}\) The word can be rendered several ways, as ‘soldiers’, ‘troops’, or ‘expeditionary force’.\(^{41}\) In the first instance, the s’nut seem to refer to Himyarite (Hmyrm—as opposed to Aksumite) soldiers under the command of two ‘governors’ or ‘generals’ (hlyf) named Wattaḥ and ‘Awīdhāh.\(^{42}\) These troops were sent against the rebels and were sufficiently numerous to lay siege to the rebels’ fortified area, Kadsr.\(^{43}\) After submitting, the rebels travelled to Ma’rib in the company of these s’nut in order to give their allegiance again to the king. This s’nut is the most likely candidate for the etymology of sariyya, rather than ‘night travel’;\(^{44}\) it was a large-scale, logistically complex, hierarchical endeavour, and in this case, overseen by a regional monarch and taking place over a wide (ranging between Ma’rib and Hadramawt) geographical area.

This usage of s’nut as a group of soldiers actually accords much more fully with definitions given in some of the lexicographical and historical sources. Based on the inscriptive evidence, if we were to hypothesise about another Arabic word cognate with it, it could be the word sari (SRW), meaning ‘generous, noble, a chief’.\(^{45}\) Perhaps a sariyya then is led by an individual of the sari rank. There is, unfortunately, no textual or inscriptive evidence for this. Together hlyf, s’nut forms two modes of deputisation which are strikingly similar to Muhammad’s, who would leave a khaliṣa in charge of Medina when he went out on expeditions and put an amūr in charge of a sariyya when he was unable to personally take charge.

The second argument against the reconstructed derivation of sariyya from ‘night travel’ comes from lexicographical sources, where the sariyya is simply a part of an army of a certain significant size, and in fact, there is much more evidence that this is the original sense than any speculative etymological connection with night travel. The lexicon al-Ṣiḥāh by al-Jawharī (d. ca. 393/1003) defines sariyya as qit’atun min al-jaysī (a part of an army), stating that the best sariyya is four hundred men.\(^{46}\) The number four hundred originates in a hadith, quoted by al-Wāqīḍī (207/822), that “the best [number] of companions is four men, the best of all sarāyā has four hundred men, and the best of all armies (juyūsh) four thousand”.\(^{47}\) In his

\(^{40}\) Lane, Lexicon, s.v. ‘sarrat’.
\(^{41}\) A. F. L. Beeston et al., Sabaic Dictionary, p. 128, define s’nut in Arabic as sariyyat qitāl.
\(^{42}\) Al-Jawharī, al-Ṣiḥāh, Thī al-ḥigha wa-ṣiḥāh al-‘Arabiyya, (ed.) A. ’Abd al-Ghafīr ’Agār (Beirut, 1987), vi, p. 2375, s.v. ‘sarrat’.
\(^{43}\) Al-Wāqīḍī, al-Maghāzī, p. 890; al-Tirmidhī, Sunan al-Tirmidhī, iv, p. 125, no. 1555. The hadith appears in several canonical collections, see e.g. Sunan al-Tirmidhī, iv, p. 125, no. 1555. Al-Wāqīḍī actually gives us quite enough data to test whether this hadith may have been put into practice. Excluding assassinations, he gives numbers for 33 expeditions. The arithmetic mean is indeed 303.67, not far off from 400, but the median is 50. The standard deviation (σ) is 711.96, meaning the data have no particular coherence. There is no particular reason to trust his figures, but they are of realistic size and also increase at a fairly probable rate (see Appendix 1a): no. 1: 30 riders, no. 2: 60 riders, no. 3: 20 men, no. 4: 12 riders, no. 9: 100 riders, no. 10: 125 men, no. 11: 7 men, no. 12: 7 men, no. 14: 30 men, nos. 15–17: 40 men each, no. 19: 170 men, no. 20: 25 men, no. 21: 500 men, no. 23: 500 men, no. 24: 100 men, no. 27: 30 men, no. 29: 30 men, no. 30: 130 men, no. 31: 300 men, no. 32: 50 men, no. 34: 24 men, no. 35:
lexicon *al-Muhkam* (458/1066), Ibn Sidah gives two definitions: that a *sariyya* ranges from five to three hundred, or that it consists of four hundred horse (*khayl*). This is similar to what we might infer from the Sabaic attestations, however, the term *sariyya* as such has never been adequately explored.

As we have seen, the term *asā* in the Qur’an assumes a distinctly hierarchical and perhaps military context. The reading of *asā* as a denominal verb meaning ‘to send a *sariyya*’ is grammatically plausible and should be understood as the best fit for the hierarchical contexts in which the term appears in the Qur’an. A brief survey of the meanings associated with *s’rwt* has demonstrated that *sariyya* originates in South Arabia, and that the original meaning was suited to use by regional monarchs in a strongly hierarchical social milieu. It may not have been the case that this meaning was imported lock, stock, and barrel into Arabic, but the term *sariyya* has unfortunately never been the object of individual study. An examination of the historiographic texts is therefore necessary to confirm the etymological impressions given thus far.

**4. The Sariyya in Early Muslim Historiography**

Ella Landau–Tasseron, in an important essay on the pre-conquest Muslim armies, has distinguished several types of warfare, based on strategic and tactical considerations: caravan looting, raids against bedouin, attacks on settled communities, frontal encounters, and defensive warfare. She points out that it is difficult to discern a linear development among these modes, but nevertheless, in an examination of Muḥammad’s system of delegation, concludes that the expeditions’ command structure was ad hoc and innovative. She does not therefore extensively analyse pre-Islamic forerunners of the early Muslim military structure, although she does note that early Muslims were urban, and that Qurashī logistical affairs (in contrast to those of the Muslims) are depicted as relatively centralised and sophisticated.

In discussing delegation, Landau–Tasseron neglects to distinguish between two types of expedition named in early historiographical texts, the *sariyya* and the *ghazwa*. A further consideration of the distinction between these two types of expedition in early Islamic history and historiography is therefore necessary to elucidate the issue. Both are often rendered as ‘raid’, but they are discussed by early Islamic historians as two distinct types of expedition. The *sariyya*, in particular, was delegated by Muḥammad to a deputy. Landau–Tasseron’s analysis of Muḥammad’s military delegation has recently been further explored in a very comprehensive article by Michael Cook in which he examines whether there is any common

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15 men, no. 36: 3000 men, no. 37: 500 men, no. 38: 300 men, no. 39: 14 to 16 men, no. 41: 330 men, no. 43, 20 men, no. 45: 300 men, no. 46: 150 men on 100 camels and 50 horses, no. 50: 3,000 men, of which 1,000 were mounted on horseback. Ibn Hishām gives very few numbers: no. 1: 30 riders, no. 2: 65 or 80 riders, no. 3: 8 men, no. 4: 8 men, all camel-mounted, no. 11: 40 men, no. 12: 7 men, no. 28: 3,000. Multiples of 30 are favoured. For some further considerations of numbers in these texts, with additional citations, see Landau–Tasseron, ‘Features of the Pre-Conquest Muslim Armies’, pp. 303 n. 14, 306 n. 32, 314 n. 69.

48Ibn ‘Abd al-Hamīd Hindāwī (Beirut, 2000), viii, p. 570, s.v. ‘SRY’.

49Ibn Sīdār, *al-Muhkam wa-l-mutil al-aʿzam* (ed.) ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī (Beirut, 2000), viii, p. 570, s.v. ‘SRY’.

50Ibid., p. 309.

51Ibid., pp. 316, 334.

52Ibid., p. 329.
stratum of historical reality behind the numerous references to Muhammad’s deputies in Medina during his campaigns in the second- and third-century AH historiographical sources, chiefly al-Waqidi, Ibn Hisham (d.218/833), and Khaifa ibn Khayyat (d. 240/854).\(^53\) Cook provides lists of every deputy mentioned in these sources, and while there is a certain degree of overlap between them in terms of the individuals named, there is wide disagreement regarding which individual was put in charge of Medina during any given expedition. Cook offers two plausible explanations for the disagreement: that at some point (but not at the earliest stage) in the development of Islamic historiography, information about deputies became a generic necessity, thus causing compilers to generate names for each ghazwa that the Prophet participated in; and that the names of some deputies were lost if they lacked powerful or numerous offspring to transmit their deeds. Nevertheless, he argues, “the assumption that the sources do in fact convey to us a significant measure of truth … does not seem unreasonable”,\(^54\) a point that I agree with.

Our present concern lies not in the deputies themselves but in the terms used for the expeditions: ghazwa and sariyya, which appear to be terminologically different. As we have seen, an etymological difference may have underlain the difference in usage, as sariyya is drawn from the Sabaic s’runt. The more common word for a military expedition, ghazwa, is also present in Sabaic inscriptions as gzt or gzw (pl. gzw).\(^55\) However, cognates of ghazwa are found quite widely in other Arabian Semitic languages; it was, for example, also used for raids in Safaitic, indicating that GZW is an older and more widely-spread root, and perhaps that its use entered into the sedentary Sabaic language cultures from nomadic Arabian tribes.

In the Arabic sources, historians clearly felt that ghazwa should be used for raids led personally by the Prophet, while a sariyya was deputised. For example, Ibn Hisham in an appendix to his biography of the Prophet asserts, citing Ibn Ishaaq, that the Prophet led 27 ghazawat (wa-kama jami’ mar ghazaa rasul Allaa … bi-nafsih sab’ an wa-‘ishrin ghazwa).\(^56\) In contrast, “those expeditions that he sent, and his sarayaa, were 38 in number (wa-kamath bu’uthuhu … wa-sarayahu thamaniyan wa-thalithiin)”.\(^57\) Al-Waqidi operates on a similar assumption, although giving some different numbers: the Prophet led 27 ghazawat (al-ghazawat … allah ghazaa bi-nafsihi), of which he fought personally in nine.\(^58\) His sarayaa were 47 in number.\(^59\) Khaifa ibn Khayyat does not give a central list of sarayaa, and in fact his text possesses much less information than either al-Waqidi’s or Ibn Hisham’s, but his chronicle does feature year-by-year lists of sarayaa, all of which are marked as delegated by the word ba’atha (‘he dispatched’).\(^60\)

The question emerges, however, as to whether or not these prefatory and summary statements match the historians’ actual documentation of the battles, since there are immediately evident internal inconsistencies. A fuller discussion of this issue is impossible here, but a summary of the consistency of this usage in the three historians Cook makes use of is of some

\(^{53}\) M. Cook, ‘Muhammad’s Deputies in Medina’, al-‘Ujar al-Waqqaa XXIII (2015), pp. 1–67.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 42.

\(^{55}\) Beeston et al., Sabaic Dictionary, p. 55.

\(^{56}\) Ibn Hisham, al-Sira al-nabawiyya, ii, p. 608.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., ii, p. 609.

\(^{58}\) Al-Waqidi, al-Maghazz, p. 7.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) Khaifa ibn Khayyati, Ta’rikh, (ed.) A. Diyya, al-‘Umarri (Najaf, 1967), p. 39.
value both in the present discussion, and as a continuation of his research. While Cook in his article lists the dates and locations of expeditions led personally by Muḥammad, along with the personality to whom the oversight of Medina was delegated, we are concerned here with the obverse activity, the expeditions delegated by Muhammad to a commander while he remained in Medina. Following Cook’s methodology, I have taken al-Wāqiqī’s list of deputised expeditions in the introduction to the Ṭaḥārīʿ as my basis. Following al-Wāqiqī’s chronological sequence for the sake of convenience, I give data on the same expeditions as found in Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Ḥishām and Khalīfā ibn Khayyāṭ. The complete data is given in Appendix 1 but can be summarised here. There are several issues: the terminology of saḥāyā and ghazawatā, and the nature and composition of the saḥāyā; the ideological and ritual aspects of delegation; and the identity of the commanders of the delegated expeditions.

The data on the terminology is quite noisy, but the early historians all operate on the assumption that there is a distinction between ghazawatā and saḥāyā, and that this distinction is not merely terminological, but rather inherent in their sources. Al-Wāqiqī is the most consistent on this point. In his list, despite his count of 47, there are 50 deputised expeditions, 12 of which are termed ghazawatā in the list, while 38 are termed sariyya. In the body of his text, 38 are termed sariyya, eight ghazawatā, and four have no clear appellation. Ibn Ḥishām seems to give almost the opposite impression, in that the term ghazawatā predominates in his descriptions of deputised raids. While he asserts that the Prophet delegated 38 expeditions, I count 40. Seven are termed sariyya in the body of the text and 14 are termed ghazawatā. The rest have no specific appellation. This inconsistency may be the result of a lack of terminological rigour; he also uses both terms, sariyya and ghazawatā, for at least two expeditions, and two expeditions are termed baʿṯ (expedition) and one simply maṣr (journey). Crucially though, both Ibn Ḥishām and al-Wāqiqī strictly avoid use of the term sariyya for those expeditions led by the Prophet. Khalīfā’s terminology also favours the term sariyya as a term for a delegated expedition, although since he usually simply gives lists without using either term in detailed narrative exposition, his text provides less data.

Al-Wāqiqī gives the most information about the composition of the saḥāyā. He uses the term for three types of expedition: military offensives, assassinations, and once, a proselytising mission. Khalīfā largely observes the same usage, the logic being that any delegated expedition is a sariyya. Ibn Ḥishām also observes the same usage in his lists but is not as consistent in the body of his text, describing some assassinations as ghazawatā, for example.

For the purpose of potential comparison with the Qur’anic isnāʿ, the most interesting use of the term sariyya is as a military-cum-missionary activity (indeed, the English term ‘mission’ carries both senses as well). After the conquest of Mecca, al-Wāqiqī describes how the Prophet sent Khālid ibn al-Walīd to bring Islam to the nearby tribe of Jadhūma.

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61For a cogent discussion of the emergence of chronological schemas in early Arabic historiography, including al-Wāqiqī, see F. Donner, Narratives of Islamic Origins (Princeton, 1998), pp. 230–248.
62The saḥāyā are nos. 1–6, 8–10, 13, 15–17, 19–35, 38–40, 43–46, 49, the ghazawatā nos. 11, 12, 14, 36, 37, 41, 47, 50, and the remainders 7, 18, 42, 48.
63The saḥāyā are nos. 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 34 the ghazawatā nos. 5, 8, 19–21, 22, 26, 28, 29, 31, 36, 38–40.
64Nos. 3 and 30 are termed both sariyya and ghazawatā. Nos. 11 and 17 are baʿt, and no. 32 is a maṣr. I have excluded from my count those expeditions which are simply listed by Ibn Ḥishām, with no narrative given.
65E.g., his no. 5, the assassination of ‘Aṣmāʾ bint Marwān, is a ghazawatā, but no. 6, of Abū ʿAfak, is a sariyya.
66Al-Wāqiqī, al-Maghāzī, pp. 875–884.
When he made contact with them, they asserted that they had already adopted Islam. The various accounts are contradictory, but Khālid clearly felt Jadhmā’s professions of faith were some kind of tactical ruse, and thus imprisoned them, and then ordered the prisoners executed. The accounts accordingly emphasise that the sariyya was sent in peace; al-Wāqiḍī has it that, “the Prophet sent him to Banū Jadhīma, and he sent him to call them unto Islam (dā’iyan la-hum ilā al-īslām), he did not send him for combat (muqāṭīlān)”.

This was, according to Ibn Iṣḥaq, part of a larger operation: “the Prophet sent sarayā calling to God Almighty, and he did not command them to engage in combat”. Many other missions were in fact potentially proselytising, as the Muslims were enjoined to call the enemy to submission to Islam before engaging in hostilities. As this protocol became normative in Islamic law, we would be right to be on guard for retrojection in the sources. Without assuming that the call to submission was standardised during the Prophet’s lifetime, the controversy around Khālid still suggests that the observance of such a protocol was being advocated for from the earliest period.

The act of delegation of command was accompanied by ritual acts. Both Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqiḍī consider it important to note the first sariyya delegated by the Prophet. This was, according to al-Wāqiḍī, the sariyya led by the Prophet’s uncle, Ḥamza ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalīb, which intercepted a Qurashi caravan taking the road by the sea from the Levant to Mecca, without, however, engaging in combat. There were competing accounts, however, for this prestigious claim, and according to other sources followed by Ibn Hishām, ‘Ubayda ibn al-Ḥārith, a cousin of the Prophet and early convert, was the first commander of a delegated expedition. He encountered Quraysh at a watering place called Thaniyyat al-Murra, but there was no fighting here either. Ibn Hishām does also cite a poem put into the mouth of Ḥamza, al-Wāqiḍī’s candidate, about commanding the first expedition.

Both writers, however, depict the command as an honour conveyed by the Prophet accompanied by a bestowal of a banner (Ibn Hishām uses the term nāya, and al-Wāqiḍī liwā ṣaḥīḥ that the Prophet ‘bound’ (ʿaqadḥā), presumably to a spear, as seen below.

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67 Ibid., p. 875.
68 Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya, ii, p. 428.
69 See for example al-Wāqiḍī, al-Maghāzī, p. 1079.
70 Al-Wāqiḍī, al-Maghāzī, pp. 9–10.
71 Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya, i, p. 595.
72 Ibid., i, p. 596.
73 Ibid., i, p. 595.
74 Al-Wāqiḍī, al-Maghāzī, p. 9. The liwā ṣaḥīḥ may, aside from its usual military role, have been a ceremonial office among pre-Islamic Quraysh. See, e.g., Ibn Ḥalīb, al-Munāmaf fi abhār Quaysh, (ed.) Khurshid Ahmad Fāṭiq (Beirut, 1985), pp. 32, 34, 421; Landau-Tasseron, pp. 316 n. 79, 318; Hawting, “The Sacred Offices” of Mecca from Jahlīya to Islam, JSH XIII (1990), p. 67. The custom became important in later legal texts. See, e.g., Abū Yūsuf, Kitāb al-Khaṭṭābī, p. 211.
75 As an aside it is worth noting here that both Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqiḍī specify that the first two expeditions consisted of ‘riders’ (tālib) (al-Wāqiḍī, al-Maghāzī, pp. 9, 10, and Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra al-nabawīyya, i, pp. 591, 593) which typically refers to camel-riders rather than horsemen. The presence or absence of horsemen is not otherwise noted very frequently in the accounts of sariyya, so it is difficult to see if there is any evidence for the lexicographical definitions of sariyya as consisting of khayl (cavalry). In general, there is little description of tactical procedures distinctive of the sariyya, although ‘Abī’ ṣaḥīḥ’s expedition to Yemen does provide a description of what amounts to a large-scale nazzīa, with some of the men on camels and some on horses, with horses being used for a dawn raid (al-Wāqiḍī, al-Maghāzī, pp. 984–989). This tactic, however, appears singular in the material dealing with sariyya, and cannot be taken as representative.
Aside from the liwā‘ or rāya, the headgear (or turban, ‘imāma) of the commander of a sariyya is also sometimes specified. Before leaving on an expedition to Dūmat al-Jandal, the Prophet re-wrapped the black cotton turban of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf so that “about four fingers (in length) hung loose in the back.” A highly elaborated version of the conferral of the liwā‘ and ‘imāma together are given for the expedition of ‘Aūlī to Yemen:

the Prophet of God bound his banner for him on that day; he took a turban (‘imāma) and folded it and refolded it (mathnīyyatun murabbā‘utan) and bound it to the head of the spear, and gave it to [‘Aūlī] and said, “thus is the banner (al-liwā‘)”. Then he tied his turban on his head, wrapping it thrice, leaving a cubit (dhūrā‘) [hanging] in front and a span (shibh) behind. Then he said, “thus is the ‘imāma’. The liwā‘ on the spear represents the authority conferred upon and borne by the leader of the sariyya. The specific manner in which the ‘imāma is folded, with its ends intentionally left hanging, resembles nothing so much as a provincial version of the Hellenistic diadem, “a flat strip of white cloth tied around the head with the ends left loose and hanging”. Versions of the diadem were adopted throughout the Near East. Among others, the Sasanian kings of kings were prominently depicted with diadems in their rock reliefs. The Arabic accounts dealing with the ‘imāma perhaps represent later attempts to put a Prophetic imprimatur on an obscure early practice. For our purposes, the relevant question is whether the tradition represents an early Hijazi practice—not whether it was necessarily Prophetic—and there is no reason to doubt that this was the case.

The commander of a sariyya is invariably called an amīr. The term does not appear as such in the Quran or in early poetry, and scholars have thus tended to assume that it is an Islamic innovation. If this is the case, it is most likely emerged at a very early stage; the expression is used frequently in hadith where the amīr of a sariyya is described, and it appears in the earliest Egyptian papyrological evidence (in Greek as amiras) from 22/643, about ten years after the death of the Prophet. The term could be used for almost any level of military leader, up to provincial leaders, governors, and apparently even the caliph. It is possible that the

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70Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya, ii, p. 632. Cf. also al-Wāqīḍī, al-Maghāzī, p. 560.
71Al-Wāqīḍī, al-Maghāzī, pp. 1079.
72M. Canepa, The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship Between Rome and Sasanian Iran (Berkley, 2010), p. 197.
73Ibid., pp. 197–198, for an illustration of the Sasanian relief at Bstatān, Iran, and with further citations.
74They are cited, for example, by al-Ṣāḥī, in his work on Abbasid court protocol: al-Ṣāḥī, Rusūm dīr al-khīlāfā, (ed.) M. ‘Awzād (Beirut, 1986), pp. 198 ff.
75It appears only once in pre-Islamic poetry, as far as I can tell, and in the context of non-Arabian—and probably South Arabian—cultural imports, as I have argued elsewhere: N. A. Miller, ‘Warrior Elites on the Verge of Islam: Between Court and Tribe in Early Arabic Poetry’, in Cross-Cultural Studies in Near Eastern History and Literature, (ed.) Szana Svirad and Robert Rollinger (Münster, 2016), pp. 156–157.
76A. A. Duri in El: the term amīr is “basically Islamic”, s.v. ‘Amīr’.
77E.g., al-Bukhārī, al-Jāmī‘ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-mukhtasar min umūr rasūl Allāh, (ed.) M. Z. ibn N. al-Nāṣir, M. F. ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut, 2000), iv, p. 67, no. 3045.
78E. Kießling, F. Preisigke, F. Babel (eds.), “Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten (Nr. 8964–9641)" (Wiesbaden, 1965) vi, p. 9576, provenance Ilnās/Hercalopolis, cited in P. M. Sjöstejhn, Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official (Oxford, 2013), p. 52 n. 28.
79Sjöstejhn, Shaping a Muslim State, pp. 49–113 passim. For the term amīr used of the caliph see, e.g., al-Ṭabarī, where ‘Anūr ibn al-‘Āṣ refers to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as ‘an amīr above me’, (Al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh al-Tabaht, Ta‘rīkh al-rasūl al-wal-mulūk, (ed.) M. Abū al-‘Aṭīf Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1968), iv, p. 105 (= de Goeje i, p. 2581) and an Arabic tax demand notice in marble from northern Syria, dated to the reign of Mu‘awiya.
command structure of the pre-Islamic *sariyya* as inherited from South Arabia entailed an *amīr*, but there is no inscriptive evidence for this.

The term occurs copiously in early historiography and other texts. This is evident, for example, in the formula al-Waqqāḍī uses multiple times in his list of *saraḥā*: *thumma sariyyat ... amīrūhā* (then the *sariyya* of such-and-such, its commander so-and-so). A particularly interesting usage is the term *amīr al-muʾminīn* (commander of the faithful) for the leader of a *sariyya*, a term that was later, of course, reserved exclusively for the caliph. In many passages, al-Waqqāḍī gives the clear impression that the *sariyya* by definition was led by a surrogate for the Prophet. For example, Saʿīd ibn Zayd was *amīr al-qaʿīm* (the commander of the group) until the Prophet arrived, and the phrase *amīr al-nabī* (the Prophet’s commander) appears twice.

There are two points on which the evidence relating to the *amīr* of the *sariyya* in early Islamic texts may appear suspiciously consistent: the names of leaders, and the use of the actual term *amīr*. With regard to the first, the leaders of the *saraḥā* according to Ibn Hishām, al-Waqqāḍī, and Khalīfa are exceedingly consistent. As Cook phrases it, “We tend to be suspicious if the sources agree too much or too little with each other—too much because it would suggest interdependence, too little because not enough is corroborated.” While there are some deviations between al-Waqqāḍī, Ibn Hishām, and Khalīfa—in particular, Ibn Hishām includes three unique reports of expeditions, and Khalīfa six—for the most part they overwhelmingly agree on the names of the leaders. There is, however, a small quantity of isnād evidence given in Ibn Hishām and al-Waqqāḍī to cautiously suggest that they were not drawing on the same sources. There are four instances in which both al-Waqqāḍī and Ibn Hishām give isnāds for *saraḥā*: al-Waqqāḍī’s expedition nos. 11, 23, 36, and 38. In all but no. 23 (Dūmat al-Jandal II), the isnāds have no common links.

In the case of the deputies put in charge of Medina, Cook supposes that at some point, “the idea emerged that no account of an expedition led by Muḥammad was complete without the identification of his deputy in Medina.” In that case, the earlier historian Ibn Ishāq appears to very infrequently (only four out of 27 times) mention the delegated ruler of Medina during Muhammad’s expeditions, while the later historians al-Waqqāḍī and Ibn Hishām disagree fairly frequently on the leaders but consistently identify someone or other as being in charge. In our case, it seems to be rather that the information on the leaders of delegated expeditions appears earlier; in the case of Ibn Hishām, he directly cites Ibn Ishāq

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(40–60/661–80) found in 2003 by Rādī ʿUqda, and given and translated by R. Hoyland, ‘New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State’, *BSOAS* LXIX (2006), pp. 395–416, 416.

86 Al-Waqqāḍī, al-*Maghāzī*, pp. 3–7.

87 Al-Waqqāḍī, al-*Maghāzī*, p. 19. See also Landau-Taseron, ‘Features of the Pre-Conquest Muslim Army’, pp. 317–318.

88 Al-Waqqāḍī, al-*Maghāzī*, p. 547; for *amīr al-nabī*, pp. 160, 301.

89 Cook, ‘Muhammad’s Deputies in Medina’, p. 41.

90 For no. 23, however, the isnād both share ʿĀṭaʿ ibn Ṭāibi al-Rabīṭ as a common link, with ʿĀṭaʿ reporting from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭaʿlab ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who reportedly participated in the action. In general, though, there are numerous points on which these accounts differ; for example, in al-Waqqāḍī’s version, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar is a participant in the *sariyya*, while he merely transmits the report in Ibn Hishām: al-Waqqāḍī, al-*Maghāzī*, p. 560; Ibn Hishām, al-*Sīna al-nabawiyyya*, ii, p. 611.

91 Cook, ‘Muhammad’s Deputies in Medina’, p. 41.
for 25 out of 41 expedition leaders.\footnote{He names Ibn Ishāq for expeditions (Appendix 1b) nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 8–11, 14, 15, 17–20, 22, 25, 26, 29, 31–33, 36, 18–40.} If the data on the leaders is accurate, we can conclude that, unlike the information on the deputies put in charge of Medina described by Cook, the Islamic community recorded the names of the leaders of deputised military expeditions at an earlier point. It might also more tentatively be posited that this information is more likely to be accurate than the names of deputies in charge of Medina.

There is however, a growth or increasing consistency over time in the use of the term \textit{amīr}. I only find two instances in all of Ibn Hishām where the term is used.\footnote{Ibn Hishām, \textit{al-Sīna al-nahawīyya}, i, p. 601, and in a poem in ii, p. 183. Here, the phrase \textit{la sariyya Marthad wa-anthalā} (Marthad, the chief of the \textit{sariyya} and its \textit{amīr}) appears in a poetic text attributed to Ḥassān ibn Thābit, but it is a passage that Ibn Hishām reports was considered suspect by poetry specialists in his day.} It is quite possible that while accurate information on the leader of the \textit{sarāyah} was recorded at an early date, and enough evidence points to the Prophet clearly delegating the role to his subordinates, the terminology in historiographic texts became more consistent with time. It is curious that while the Egyptian papyrological evidence shows the term had widespread currency, it is not used by the Baghdad-based Ibn Ishāq. Perhaps there were regional differences in early usage.

In sum, the solidity of an early stratum of real records on the \textit{sarāyah} is somewhat more convincing than in the case with Cook’s subject, the delegated governorship of Medina. It is worth noting, in passing, that Cook concludes that the term \textit{khalīfah} for the ‘governor’ of Medina is earlier than \textit{`amīl}; \textit{khalīfah}, like \textit{sariyya}, has a Sabaic cognate.\footnote{Cook, ‘Muhammad’s Deputies in Medina’, p. 4.} As noted above, cognates of these two terms appear in close proximity in \textit{ṣaḥîḥ} 541, implying that Muhammad’s system of delegation had something in common with that used by Abraha.\footnote{The cognate of the Arabic \textit{isṭakhlaṣa} is also found in \textit{ṣaḥîḥ} 542 or 547 CE: Abraha appoints (\textit{w-l-`iff-hu}) one \textit{`imm bn Mdhn} (‘Amr ibn Mundhir) over the tribal confederation Ma’add. My thanks to Suleyman Dost for pointing this out to me.} As far as the \textit{sariyya} is concerned, there is a fair degree of uniformity with regard to its being a delegated expedition, and with regard to the names of the leaders involved. Early historians do not seem to have been drawing on the same sources for this information, and they also debate with each other over significant ritual acts: the \textit{ḥiuw} or \textit{ruya}, the \textit{rumūh}, and the \textit{`imāma}. In both places, they were probably drawing on earlier material. They almost certainly did so with regard to nomenclature, particularly in using the term \textit{sariyya} and even more so with regard to \textit{amīr}.

The \textit{sariyya} then, as it was brought into early Islamic governance, entailed a ritualised system for delegating authority. This system does not appear to have existed in nomadic Arabian culture, and the nearest sedentary polity on which the early Muslims could have drawn was Himyar. Although numbers are unreliable, these expeditions could have been larger, up to 3,000 men, and long-range, reflecting political concerns akin to those of the South Arabian monarchs. Early Muslims modified the \textit{sariyya} for their own ideological needs, endowing the military ‘mission’ with a proselytising function that was undoubtedly messier in early practice than in later theory.

The \textit{sariyya} was thus central to early Islam. Muslims adapted an institution of regional royal power and remade it as a vehicle for Prophetic authority and military hierarchy in an
otherwise relatively egalitarian community, and an instrument of an idealistic ‘foreign policy’ of missionising/conquest.96 It is by no means arbitrary then, that although it does not appear as a noun in the Qur’an, it should underlie the verb āṣā. It only remains to demonstrate that there is significant further evidence, in the form of poetry corroborated by inscriptive usage, for such ideological borrowings from South Arabia.

5. Ḥimyar Revisited: Poetic Connections between the Hijaz and Yemen

The relationship between the early Muslim Arabians of the Hijaz and South Arabia has already drawn extensive scholarly attention, most of it revolving around a few key topics such as the massacre at Najran in the year 523 CE or the so-called expedition of the Elephant connected to Q. 105.97 To a large extent, concern for these topics has revolved around their inherent interest as sources of influence on early Islam, that is, they are viewed through the lens of religious developments.98 Scholars have generally been swift to suppose that epigraphic evidence might shed light on obscure areas of the Qur’an’s text,99 but there has been less analysis of the political influence of the South Arabian polity on the early Islamic state.

Yet some degree of political influence must also have occurred. Christian Robin has argued consistently for a very strong reading of South Arabia’s influence on Arabia Deserta, including the Hijaz. Abraha left inscriptions describing his dominance of local Arabs in Murayghān, about halfway between Sanaa and Mecca. In this he was continuing earlier incursions by the Ḥimyarite monarchs, dating back at least to the mid-fifth century. These inscriptions describe the suppression of the tribal confederations of the Ma`add and Mu`dhr.

What were the mechanisms of South Arabian influence on the Arabs of the peninsula? The mid-fifth century CE Ry 509, at Ma`sal al-Jumḥ, is approximately 1,000 km north of Zafar, the Ḥimyarite capital, yet carefully describes the military equipment that the kings travelled with—lower ranking noblemen (qul, pl. ’qul; Arabic qayl, pl. qayyāl), some sort of equestrian corps (ṣyd), officials and tributary Arab tribes. As Robin points out, “a document that describes the peaceful movement of all the accoutrements of royal pomp, without mentioning any other power, implies Ḥimyar’s political domination of the region”.100 We can

96 I mean egalitarian in comparison with Sasanian Persia or Byzantine Rome. For a discussion of the question of Muhammad’s style of rule, see M. Cook, ‘Did the Prophet Muhammad keep court?’ in Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries, (ed.) A. Fuess, J. Hartung (Oxford, 2011), pp. 23–29.

97 For the massacres of Najran, in addition to C. Robin, ‘Ḥimyar, Aksu, and Arabia Deserta,’ see S. Smith, ‘Events in Arabia in the 6th Century A. D.’, BSOAS XVI (1954), pp. 425–468 and now N. Nebes, ‘The Martyrs of Najran and the End of Ḥimyar: On the Political History of South Arabia in the Early Sixth Century’, in The Qur’an in context: historical and literary investigations into the Qur’anic milieu, (ed.) A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai (Leiden, 2010), pp. 61–114.

98 There are numerous other reasons to consider South Arabia’s role in the development of Islam central, despite a great deal of recent attention to Syriac sources to illuminate the Qur’an. This point has recently been made forcefully by Suleyman Dost in his dissertation, S. Dost, ‘An Arabian Qur’an: Towards a Theory of Peninsular Origins’, (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2017), which offers a useful synthesis of a number of Qur’anic issues illuminated by Ethiopian and South Arabian sources.

99 For a survey of several important Qur’anic exegetical issues in the context of South Arabian inscriptions, see C. Robin, ‘L’Arabie dans le Coran. Rééxamen de quelques termes à la lumière des inscriptions prédramiques’, in Les origines du Coran, le Coran des origines, (ed.) F. Déroche, C. J. Robin, M. Zink (Paris, 2015), pp. 27–74.

100 C. Robin, ‘Le royaume ḥujrīde, dit ṭuyran de Kinda’, entre Himyar et Byzance’, Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres CXL (1996), pp. 665–714, 680.
imagine the impression that such a spectacle would have made on Arabian tribesmen. And yet, in contrast to the fairly copious information preserved in the Arabo-Islamic literary tradition on Kinda and the Ḥjurids, there seems to be little awareness of Ḥimyarite power amongst the Arabs, a fact that Robin himself notes.101

In fact, on several points, it is difficult to say with much precision anything about Kinda’s relationship with Ḥimyar. Although the Ḥimyarites were Jewish (or more precisely, Judaism monotheists), less is known about Kinda’s religious affiliations—although at least some members of the tribe were likely also Jewish.102 While inscriptive evidence confirms, as found in the Arabo-Islamic tradition, that the Ḥjurids claimed kingship for themselves,103 Ḥimyar did not actually grant this title, and we are left to speculate about the Ḥjurids’ actual political duties, perhaps as tax-collectors.104 It is often asserted that Kinda’s capital was Qaryat al- Ḩaw,105 but this rests on inscriptions found in southern Arabia testifying to South Arabian monarchs’ attacks on ‘Qryt dht-Khlm’, associated with Qaryat al-Ḥaw by its excavator, A. R. al-Ansary.106 Kinda is mentioned in connection to the region, but it is far from clear that Qaryat al-Ḥaw functioned as their ‘capital’. The findings at Qaryat al-Ḥaw are outstanding and are still not well-enough known, but all that can be said with certainty linking the site with Kinda is that there is some kind of relationship.

Because several inscriptions have been found at Ma’al al-Jumḥ, Robin speculates that this was the “seat of Ḥimyar’s power in central Arabia”,107 and that it was perhaps the site of pilgrimage or markets.108 Again here, there is little evidence of any awareness of the site in the Arabo-Islamic tradition. Robin asserts that Ma’al al-Jumḥ’s “strong symbolic power” is confirmed by its appearance several times in pre-Islamic poetry.109 This is not at all the case; rather, the term ‘Ma’al’ (the term appears on its own, which already weakens its association with Ma’al al-Jumḥ) appears in conventional lines of poetry that list place names with little specificity. Al-Namir ibn Tawlib, for example, opens a poem, as so many poets do, bemoaning the dereliction of the former abodes (atūl) of his beloved, Jamra, which entails naming them:

101C. Robin, ‘Les Arabes de Ḥimyar, des «Romains» et des Perses (IIIe–Ve siècles de l’ère chrétienne)’, Semitica et Classica I (2008), pp. 167–208, 174 n. 44. He is following Olinder’s 1927 study on the Ḥjurids: G. Olinder, The Kings of Kinda of the Family of Aksū al-Murar (Lund, Sweden, 1927), pp. 21–23, who describes the impression in literary sources that Kindite power was autonomous of outside support.
102The Arabic evidence for Judaism among Kinda has been marshalled and carefully analysed by M. Lecker, ‘Judaism among Kinda and the Ridda of Kinda’, JAOS CXV (1995), pp. 635–650; the non-Arabic sources have been surveyed by C. Robin, ‘Les religions pratiquées par les membres de la tribu de Kinda (Arabie) à la veille de l’Islam’, Judaïsme ancien – Ancient Judaism I (2013), pp. 203–261, especially pp. 233–235 for the sparse epigraphic evidence.
103I. Gajda, ‘Amr roi de Kinda et l’établissement de la domination himyarite en Arabie centrale’ Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies XXVI (1996), pp. 65–73.
104Robin, ‘Les Arabes’, p. 138.
105E.g. G. Fisher, Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity (Oxford, 2011), p. 89; Robin, ‘Le royaume Ḥjurid’, p. 666; C. Robin, ‘Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta’, p. 138.
106A. R. Ansary, Qaryat al-Ḥaw, A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilization in Saudi Arabia [(Riyadh, 1982), pp. 15–16.
107Robin, ‘Les Arabes’, p. 187.
108Robin, ‘Le Roïaune Hjurîde’, p. 694.
109Robin, ‘Les Arabes’, p. 189.
Ma’sal is the abode of wild animals, Jamra’s former abodes; Sharâ’ and Yadhbûl are desolate—she no longer dwells there.¹¹⁰

Labîd, in ubi sunt mode, describes how death comes for every created thing, no matter where it dwells, even in mountainous redoubts:

If anything were to live forever (kâna ... khâlidan), the white-footed [ibex] that haunts the sunny slopes of Ma’sal, might find a safe refuge ...¹¹¹

Pre-Islamic poetry is replete with such toponyms; they almost certainly represented real places, but great care must be taken in locating them precisely.¹¹² In both of these instances of Ma’sal’s usage, for example, the poem rhymes in lâm, which perhaps dictates the particular toponyms mentioned.

Robin is, however, certainly correct to look for the influence of South Arabian modes of rule on tribal Arabia and, by extension, early Muslims, urban Hijazis as they were (rather than nomadic pastoralists). There are several terms from Sabaic that made their way into Arabic, most likely reflecting an actual exchange between the two cultures. Setting aside the numerous cognates in religious language, several early Arabic political and military terms have Sabaic cognates. Šariyâ and s’rubut have already been extensively discussed, and, in passing, we have seen that Cîh 541 uses the term blîbî for a ‘governor’ or some such subordinate ruler, evidently cognate with Arabic khalîfâ; this governor was normally a vassal from within Kinda.¹¹³

Other examples are worth citing; Sabaic lâm’s, meaning “the main force of an army” is cognate with the Arabic khamûs, meaning “army”, which medieval lexicographers strove to relate to ‘five’ (HMS); Sabaic ms’ut meaning ‘fortification’ is found in Q. 26.129, ‘Do you build fortresses (mašānî) because you hope to be immortal?’, the term for nomads used by (urban) Muslims, A’râb, has a long history, but seems to be cognate with Sabaic ‘rb.¹¹⁴ These people are constantly spoken of derisively in the Qur’an, indicating that the sedentary Hijazis and South Arabsians viewed them similarly.¹¹⁵ The lexical borrowings from South Arabia are in all likelihood more extensive than from any other Semitic source. Martin Zammit has noted that the number of Qur’anic cognates with terms found exclusively in South Semitic (8.9% of the Qur’anic corpus) almost equals those of purely Northwest Semitic usage (9.4%), which is “particularly significant given that the lexical evidence available from this area of Semitic is no match for the extensive lexical resources available in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac”.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰Al-Namîr ibn Tawîhib al-’Ukaylî, Dîwan al-Namîr ibn Tawîhib al-’Ukaylî, (ed.) M. N. Ta‘rîfî (Beirut, 2000), p. 95.
¹¹¹Labîd, Sharh Dîwan Labîd, p. 272.
¹¹²For example, the toponyms mentioned by Imru’ al-Qays in his famous lightning-storm description are spread throughout the Arabian peninsula, giving that section of the text all the appearance of a pastiche according to U. Thulo, Die Ortsnamen in der aluranischen Poesie; ein Beitrag zur vor- und frühislamischen Dichtung und zur historischen Topographie Nordarabiens (Wiesbaden, 1938), pp. 12–13; in contrast the toponyms used by ’Antara are relatively consistent, having recently been carefully located, with the help of a professional cartographer, by J. Montgomery (trans.), ’Antara ibn Shaddâd, War Songs (New York, 2018), p. lixii.
¹¹³Robin, ‘Himyar, Akṣûm, and Arabia Deserta’, p. 118.
¹¹⁴Q. 990, 97–99, 101, 120; Q. 33:20; Q. 48:11, 16; Q. 49:14.
¹¹⁵Webb, Imagining the Arabs (Edinburgh, 2016), pp. 33–34, 121.
¹¹⁶Zammit, A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur’anic Arabic, p. 587.
Very few Sabaic cognates of the sort discussed occur with any frequency in pre-Islamic poetry, nomadic (or pseudo-nomadic) as it is, leading one to suppose that they were part of the vocabulary of urban Arabs, reflecting a more cosmopolitan interaction with sedentary South Arabia. However, in order to demonstrate the influence of South Arabian culture on Arabia Deserta, poetic evidence is helpful, drawing frequently as it does on lines of transmission very different from the prose accounts of pre-Islamic lore. Three examples are relevant to our discussion: on the usage of sariyya in poetic texts; an instance of a military conflict between Hijazi tribes and Himyarite client-tribes named in inscriptions; and most significantly, an instance of South Arabian titulature found in a poem in praise of the Prophet.

The poetic tradition makes use of other words derived from the root SRY that clearly have to do with night travel. The word al-sūrī (night traveller) is used quite often and is invoked most frequently as the object of hospitality. Al-Nabīgha, for example, boasts that he camps in the open, where his fire is visible to any guest, as evidence of his wealth and generosity. When a poet wishes to boast about his own night travel, however, the verbal noun for night travel (al-sūrī) is used, most often projected onto the speaker’s weary but persevering camel. Suwayd ibn Abī Kāhil al-Yashkurī, for example, describes his camels as “[emaciated] as thin arrows, experienced in night travel (‘anfātin li-l-sūrī)”. Although these examples are by no means exhaustive, usage of the terms al-sūrī and al-sūrīyah are largely confined to these themes, both of which are relatively common, thus prohibiting extensive analysis here.

On the other hand, the verb astā and the noun sariyya are extremely uncommon in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. The usage of astā is virtually restricted to the line of Labīd cited in lexicons, and which is indeed also found in his diwān. When it does appear it is intransitive and means ‘to travel by night’, and I can find no example of astā bi-hi. The word sariyya barely occurs in canonical anthologies of early Arabic poetry. It is absent from the Mufaddalīyyāt of al-Mufaddal al-Dabbī (d. 163/780), al-A’lam al-Shantamarī’s (d. 476/1083) collection Al-Shu’ara’ al-sitta al-jähiliyyān, and the poetry of the Hudhayl tribe compiled by Abū Sa’īd al-Sukkārī (d. 275/888), Ashīr al-Hudhalīyyān. Since the terms sariyya and astā (bi-hi) are quite common in the Qur’an and in early Islamic historiography, we can conclude tentatively that they are reflective of urban Hijazi usage rather than that of the semi- and pseudo-nomadic tribal elites of Najd and the Hijaz who produced the bulk of extant poetry.

The noun sariyya occurs relatively conclusively in only two early poetic texts that I have been able to locate. In `Antara, the speaker’s enemies are described as fighting in sanayā:

As if the sanayā between Qaww and Qāra
were flocks of birds making for water [...]

117 Chronologically speaking, it is probable that the use of authoritative poetic citations (shauṭūd) antecedes the attempted application of the ‘night travel’ semantic range to sariyya and astā as discussed above.
118 Al-Mufaddal al-Dabbī, al-Mufaddalīyyāt, 10th edition, (ed.) A. M. Shākir, ‘A-S. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 2010), p. 193, no. 40, l. 26. See also, for example, `Antara, l. 28 of the Mu’allaqa (Alhwardt, Six Divans, p. 36). While this motif is common enough in the pre-Islamic period, it becomes de rigueur in the central ṭabīḥ section of the tri-partite qaṭīda only in the Umayyad period. This usage is absent from poets such as those of the Hudhayl tribe that lack pre-Islamic camel-boasts and ṭabīḥs.
fighting-bands (kaṭāʾib), above each of which a banner (liwāʾ) fluttered like the shadow of a passing bird.¹²⁰

The term sariyya appears to be synonymous with kaṭība, a word which denotes a larger-scale military expedition. The saniya are not associated here either with small-scale raiding, or with night travel. As in al-Waqqādī, the groups are designated by a liwāʾ, a term which in this context indicates a tribal grouping’s banner. Labīd compares the bray of an onager to the scream of a leader fearing saniya and unexpected attack (iḥtiyāḥ).¹²¹ Here too, the point seems to be that the onager is hoarse, as a man screaming in the midst of a particularly extensive battle, indicated by the use of the term saniya.

There are several other texts of less certain authenticity or transmission where the word sariyya occurs. While little can be concluded from these usages, there does seem to be a trend of tribes associated geometrically (i.e. they inhabited the southern Hijaz) or politically with early Muslims to use the term. In an elegy for her brother, Suʿdā bint Shamardal (Juhayna) calls him ḥāḍi sariyyatin (the guide of the sariyya).¹²² Khūfaḵ ibn Nadba, or Nudba, (Sulaym) laments the death of Ṣakhir and Muʾawiya, the brothers of the poetess al-Khansa; Ṣakhir was “abandoned to the sariyya (li-l-sariyyatin ghādarūhi)”.¹²³ An almost certainly inauthentic lament for al-Muṭṭalib, the brother of the Prophet’s paternal grandfather ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, attributed tentatively by Ibn Hishām to Maṭrūd ibn Kaʾb (Khuzāʾa) describes the Hashimites as “ornaments of the saniya”¹²⁴. A poem by al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās (Sulaym) refers to the saniya of which the Prophet of God is the amīr.¹²⁵ This usage, of course, contrasts strongly with the amīr as the leader delegated by the Prophet that we have seen already. Finally, Taʿabata Sharran (Fahm), puts a boastful self-description into the mouth of one Um Mālik, who sees him and his companions “dishevelled and dust-covered after a sariyya”.¹²⁶

These are not a particularly reliable set of citations. Of these five instances, those of Suʿdā, Khūfaḵ, and Taʿabata Sharran rely on variant readings, while the poems of Maṭrūd and al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās (and perhaps the folkloric Taʿabata Sharran as well) are probably inauthentic. Taken in addition to the two lines by Labīd and ’Antara, we have in total seven instances of sariyya being used in poetry and the data perhaps has some collective value. There is a noteworthy tribal distribution; with the exception of ʿAntara, all of the poets hail from tribes that are either southern Hijazi (Sulaym, Juhayna, Fahm, Khuzāʾa)

¹²⁰Ahlwardt, Six Divans, p. 35.
¹²¹Labīd, Sharḫ Diwān Labīd, p. 84.
¹²²Al-ʿAsmaʿī, al-ʿAsmaʿ ʿyyāt, (ed.) A. M. Shākir, ʿA-S. M. Hārūn, (Cairo, 1964), p. 103, no. 27, l. 17. Hārūn and Shākir read this as ḥāḍi sariyyatin (the guide in night travel). This is probably preferable, as ḥāḍi sariyyatin does not fit the poet’s metre (kāmil) unless we read the long T in ḥāḍi as short, which is possible (see Wright, Grammar, ii, p. 383D), or suppose a slight metrical irregularity, which is not uncommon with poetry from this period.
¹²³Al-Jāḥiṣt, Kubāʾ al-ʿAghānī, (ed.) I. ʿAbbās, (Beirut, 2008), xv, p. 60 = Bīlāq xii, p. 139. According to a variant, for li-l-sariyya should be read ‘al-Sharabba’, a placename. It is common in elegies for the poet to mention the location of the resting place of the deceased.
¹²⁴Ibn Hishām, al-Sīna al-nabawiyya, i, p. 140.
¹²⁵Al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās, Diwān al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās, (ed.) Y. al-Jabbārī (Beirut, 1991) p. 141.
¹²⁶Al-Jāḥiṣt, Ḥāṭan, xxii, p. 119; Taʿabata Sharran, Diwān Taʿabata Sharran wa-akhdhārī, (ed.) ʿAlī Dīn al-Faqār Shākir (Beirut, 1999), p. 99. For tabaʾas li-ṭāḥiṭi l-sariyya the variant qaṭla l-ʿināʾi wa-l-halība (with few vessels or milk-camels) exists, and the accompanying anecdote tells the comical story of Taʿabata Sharran and some companions on a sariyya—here clearly meaning a dawn raid to steal camels—being defeated by disguised women. It is likely the transmission of the poem was affected by its attachment to the prose account.
or who directly interacted with the early Muslims (as did Labīd, who reportedly converted). Particularly prominent are poets connected to the tribe of Sulaym ibn Mansūr; Su’dā, although of Juḥayna, laments her brother killed by a Sulamī, while al-ʿAbbās is Sulamī himself, as is Khufāf. Three of the texts are from elegies and bear some similarity to the style of the Sulāmiyya al-Khansā’, and indeed, al-ʿAbbās was said to be al-Khansā’’s son,127 and Khufāf her cousin.128 Even if the poems represent distorted oral traditions or outright forgeries, the overall tone of these texts could reflect a historical kernel. Taken collectively, these citations seem to support the entrance of the word sariyya into Arabic via a Hijazi adoption of the South Arabian term.

Two further examples of interaction between South Arabia and the Hijaz more fully confirm the strength of interaction. One example is military. Aṣmaʾiyya no. 70, by al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās, records a long-range feud between his tribe Sulaym, who, as we have seen, made the most use of the term sariyya in the poetic tradition, and a clan called Zubayd, which dwelt somewhere far to the south of Mecca. The relevant portion of the poem is:

6. But leave [this talk with Asmāʾ]—has she not heard of how we drove forth lank steeds,129 weighed down [with armour], against our enemies?

7. with a force making for both sons of Ṣuḥār,
and Zubayd’s people (al-Zubayd),

8. upon strong young camels, ascending the barren heights,
where the chameleon sits like a graying old man,130

9. we made our way for twenty-nine nights,
crossing the settled valleys (al-a ṭād),
traversing the mirage-filled wastes.131

The names are initially obscure, but the overall context is clear. The speaker is leading a long-distance expedition, and he gives the distance in terms of nights travelled. This method of reckoning (counting nights rather than days) appears to be the same as we find in early Islamic historiography, both for lunar month dating and for military expedition distance and is not necessarily related to ‘night travel’, as is evident from his description of the

127This is probably not the case. There is no internal evidence in their poetry for the relationship, and al-ʿAbbās and al-Khansā’ as two famous Sulamī converts were simply associated with each other. For sources on the issue see Yahyā al-Jabburī’s introduction to the edition of al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās, Dirān, p. 10.

128Ibn Quraybah, Al-Shīr wa-l-shīr arā, (ed.) A. M. Shākir, (Cairo, 1966), p. 341.

129Al-thīqa al-kawādis, following a variant from al-Aghānī that Hārūn and Shākir endorse, would typically refer to horses. In line 8, qubh refers to camels. It would appear the Sulamīs travelled by camel through the desert and then attacked on horses.

130Literally, ‘in which [deserts] you would think the hirāḥa were an old man, with white in his black hair, sitting’. The hirāḥa most likely refers here to the veiled chameleon, the males of which are green, with yellow or blue bands. Their present-day range of Yemen and the southern Hijaz is exactly the territory Ṣuḥār is describing. The contrast between the chameleon’s colours is compared with the contrast of white and black of a man whose hair is going grey.

131Al-Asmaʾī, Aṣmaʾiyya, p. 205, al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās, Dirān, (ed.) Yahyā al-Jabburī (Beirut, 1991), pp. 90–95. Al-a ṭād is a local term. According to Lane it means ‘the towns, or villages, of El-Hijāz,’ or ‘certain towns, or villages with their territories, i.e. certain provinces, or districts’ between El-Hijāz and El-Yemen (Lane, Lexicon, p. 2008, s.v. ‘ ṭād’). For another example of this usage, see al-Asmaʾī, Aṣmaʾiyya, p. 22, l. 3, in a poem by the Sulamī Khufāf ibn Nudba.
chameleon, which proverbially stares at the sun, and is a stock feature of scorched desert landscapes. The expedition is heavily armed and includes horse-mounted cavalry and the use of (expensive) armour. The scale of such an undertaking indicates a political conflict, rather than local concerns over bloodwit or pasture.

A prose summary of the expedition is given by Abū al-Faraj al-İṣbâhání in the Kitāb al-Ağhâni, on the authority of Abū ‘Ubayd Ma’mar ibn al-Muthannâ (d. ca. 210/825).132 Abū’l-Faraj’s use of insula is not always rigorous,133 but his account from Abū ‘Ubayda has a ring of authenticity. He identifies the tribe attacked as a southern or Yemeni one, namely, Murâd, even though they are not directly named in the text of the poem. ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib was said to have responded to al-‘Abbás’s poem.134 ‘Amr does not belong to Murâd, but he does belong to its sister tribe, Sa’d al-‘Ashîra.135 Abū al-Faraj does not quote the entirety of al-‘Abbás’s poem, as he states that only the beginning is sung, and therefore the rest is not of interest.136 He does not quote from ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib at all, although he gives the location of the battle as ‘Tathlîth, in Yemen’, a southern site according well with a battle with Murâd or Sa’d al-‘Ashîra. All of this gives the air of an editor transmitting genuinely received material, the content of which he is uninterested in altering or distorting.

‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib’s text confirms (or is the source of) the battle location at Tathlîth, and his poem survives as citations in disparate sources, one of which is Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrî’s (d. 487/1094) geographical dictionary, Mu jam mā ista jam, in the entry on ‘Tathlîth’. Al-Bakrî quotes al-Hamdânî (d. 334/945) as stating that Tathlîth lies three and a half stages (marâhîl) to the north of Najrân, and as belonging to Banû Zubayd, ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib’s clan.137 The geographer Yaqût states that the site is mentioned numerous times elsewhere in the Arabic poetic tradition as a location of battles.138 It is not, thus, in Yemen, as Abū al-Faraj asserts, but apparently near present-day Tathlîth governorate (mulâfâzâd) in Saudi Arabia, about 500 km southwest of Mecca and 300 km to the north of Najrân. In the text cited by al-Bakrî, two lines are given:

O, al-‘Abbás, if our horses had held at Tathlîth,
you would not be manhandling brave [prisoners] after [encountering] me.

132 Al-İsbahânî, al-Ağhâni, xiv, pp. 200–201 = Bûlãq, xiii, pp. 67–68.
133 While the fictive nature of Abū al-Faraj’s asana is often recognised, it is often assumed that one of the names he mentions is the real source. For example, Manfred Fleischhammer notes that ‘the wording of the, for the most part, verifiable citations often deviates only slightly from the Leiden edition’ of al-Tabârî’s Ta’rikh (M. Fleischhammer, Die Quellen des Kitâb al-Ağhâni, Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes LV (Wiesbaden, 2003), pp. 16, 21, 126–27). This is often not the case, however. For instance, the first story in Kitâb al-Ağhâni’s chapter on al-‘Abbás ibn Mirdâs is about an idol named ‘Imnâr that he worships (al-İsbahânî, al-Ağhâni, xiv, pp. 192–3 = Bûlãq, xiii, p. 62), given on the authority of al-Tabârî with a detailed insâd going (unprobably) directly to Mirdâs. The story of the idol, however, is not given in the earlier Ta’rikh al-nasil wa-al-mulâk, Hilary Kilpatrick gives a detailed and comprehensive account of the range of literary and other uses of the insâd in the Ağhâni: H. Kilpatrick, Making the great Book of songs: compilation and the author’s craft in Abû l-Faraj al-İsbahânî’s Kitâb al-ğhâni (New York, 2003), pp. 10, 13, 94–119.
134 There are three recorded exchanges between ‘Amr and al-‘Abbás. See al-‘Abbás, Dâwûn, p. 16.
135 See W. Caskel, Ġanhatan an-nasab: Das genealogische Werk des Hûlân ibn Muhammad al-Kallîf (Leiden, 1966), tables 248 (Madhîjî) and 270 (Sa’d al-‘Ashîra), which latter gives ‘Amr’s complete lineage within Zubayd. For a slightly different lineage, see Ibn Qutaiba, al-shîr wa-l-shu’arâ’, p. 372.
136 Al-İsbahânî, al-Ağhâni, xiv, p. 201.
137 Al-Bakrî, Mu jam mā ista jam min asna al-bilâd wa-al-mawâdî, (ed.) M. Saqqâ (Cairo, 1945), p. 305.
138 Yaqût, Mu jam al-bulûn, (Beirut, 1977), p. 15.
But they had been led through [the mountains of] Ṣaʿda, and only stumbled, then, on three legs.139

This text, of which only two lines are given, was clearly composed in response to al-ʿAbbās’s poem. As a muʿānda, both are written in the same rhyme (-iṣrā) and meter (al-tau’il). ʿAmr’s poem addresses al-ʿAbbās directly and gives the placename of Tathlīth. Without relying on al-Ḥamān, it is identified internally as near Ṣaʿda, in the northwest of present-day Yemen (about 350 km south of Tathlīth). Such a location, distant from Sulaym’s territory, accords with the long-distance journey described by al-ʿAbbās (Tathlīth is about 900 km south-southeast of Medina). Finally, the authorship of ʿAmr or someone from his tribe is tentatively confirmed by a line, cited elsewhere but evidently originating in the same poem, mentioning “baḥī Ṣūm”, another ancestral clan of ʿAmr.140

Given all these details in multiple sources, there is little reason to doubt the general outline of the narrative of Abū ʿUbayda/ Abū al-Faraj in explication of al-ʿAbbās and ʿAmr’s poems. Further confirmation of their pre-Islamic content comes from several important South Arabian inscriptions. To begin with, ʿAmr’s father bears the name of South Arabian nobility—Maʿdikarib—indicating that his tribe was not only a military client, but culturally influenced by South Arabia. For example, Madhhij, which according to classical genealogical handbooks was the father-tribe of ʿAmr’s tribe Saʿd al-ʿAshāra, is mentioned as supporting the Ḥimyarite king Maʿdikarib Yaʿfur on a military expedition commemorated in an inscription at Maʿsal al-Jumḥ, Ry 510, dated to 521.141 Murād, Saʿd, and Madhhij are all mentioned as military clients of South Arabian monarchs, sometimes in inscriptions found in the area dealt with in the poems. Ja 1028, for example, deals with the events connected to the massacre at Najrān in 523 CE, and is located 90 km north-northeast of Najrān, almost midway between it and Tathlīth. Both Madhhij and Murād (inscriptional Mdḥgm and Mrdm) are mentioned there supporting the Ḥimyarite noble Sharahʾ il Yaqbul dhu-Yazʾan in retaking control of Najrān.142

The most striking appearance of these tribes, however, is that of Saʿd (generally understood as Saʿd al-ʿAshāra) and Murād together in Ry 506, dated to 552, in which Abraha commemorates his victories in Arabia Deserta, with Saʿd among his vassals. This inscription was found at Murayghān, about 20 km from present-day Tathlīth, lending historical credibility and a sense of the political stakes at play to the fight at Tathlīth between al-ʿAbbās and ʿAmr. Given that Yāqūt mentions that numerous battles in the ‘Ayyām al-ʿArab” tradition took place at Tathlīth, it thus very much appears that al-ʿAbbās and ʿAmr were continuing the long-distance feud instigated by Abraha’s incursions into Arabia Deserta, and that warfare between two groupings of tribes, Hijazi and Yemeni, continued for some time around this strategic site.

139Bakrī, Muʿjan mā istaʿjam, p. 304. For a reconstruction of the poem from various other sources, see ʿAmr ibn Maʿd Karīb, Shiʿr ʿAmr ibn Maʿd Karīb al-Zubaydī, (ed.) M. al-Ṭarāḥīdī (Damascus, 1985), pp. 124–127.
140ʿAmr ibn Maʿd Karīb, Shiʿr ʿAmr ibn Maʿd Karīb al-Zubaydī, p. 126, l. 7, sourced from Shāh al-qaṣīda al-dāmīgha of al-Ḥamān (a personal MS is cited, the ‘fascimile of Ḥamad al-Ｊasir’s MS”).
141Robin, ‘Ḥimyar, Akṣūm, and Arabia Deserta’, p. 156.
142Ibid., pp. 158–160. Murād and Madhhij are also mentioned together in ‘Abadān 1, and Ry 508. Madhhij is also mentioned in al-ʿIrāfā 1.
We have, then, one model by which cultural interaction continued to take place in the early sixth century at the time of Islam’s emergence. The poems of al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās and 'Amr ibn Ma’dikarib indicate not only that the client-tribes of the South Arabian monarchy continued to inhabit approximately the same territory as in the early-sixth century, but that South Arabian culture continued to influence them, and that military conflicts continued to take place between South Arabia and the Hijaz. The raid described by al-ʿAbbās can be seen, in effect, as an antecedent of the sariyya sent to Yemen carried out by ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib as commanded by the Prophet, and both, in turn, as a continuation of events set off by Abraha’s incursion. It is within this context that the exchange of military and logistical terms such as sariyya and khalīfa would have taken place. Continued long-distance military feuds between client-tribes would have continued long after the dissolution of the South Arabian monarchy, but because of their lesser political significance to any chroniclers, they would have received less attention. After the Second Persian War between the Byzantines and Sasanians (540–545), the Ghassānids and Lakhmids, their Arab clients, continued fighting for years afterwards, but in their case Procopius (d. 565 CE) took note of the struggle. Absent the attention of a Procopius, some local or sub-imperial conflicts—independent of but engendered, maintained, or exploited by imperial powers—will have left their traces in history only in the form of poems and etymologies.

A second example of poetry seems to indicate that Arabians of the Hijaz were actually aware of South Arabian royal titulature, and that it potentially offered a model for their own ideological projects. Beginning in the year ca. 445 CE, the kings of Ḥimyar began to add the title, ‘kings … of the Bedouin of the highlands and the coast’ (mlk … ’rb Ṭiwd w-Thmt) to their titulature. This expression first appears in the inscription Ry 509, located at Ma’sal al-Jumh, and continued in use until 558 CE, about two generations preceding the advent of Islam. Robin argues that Ṭiwd refers more or less to what is known as Najd in Arabic (both words meaning ‘upland’), and that it was inhabited by the tribal confederation Maʿadd. Ḥimyar ruled it via the client Ḥujrid dynasty of Kinda. There is a fair degree of evidence for such an arrangement from Byzantine chronicles dealing with Roman diplomacy in Arabia, and some inscriptional evidence. There is less evidence for Thmt, but Robin equates it with the Hijaz, particularly its northern oases, inhabited by a confederation known as Muḍar and ruled over by the pro-Byzantine Banū Ṭhāʾlabā. He does also suppose that Quraysh would have fallen under Muḍar’s sway.

There has hitherto been essentially no direct evidence—as opposed to the indirect testimonial of the impact of Abrahā’s elephant in their collective memory—that Quraysh was directly affected in other ways by South Arabian incursions. Robin broaches the possibility, however, that the pairing of ’rb Ṭiwd w-Thmt is paralleled by the pairing of Najd and Tiḥāma in Arabic. The opposition of Najd and Tiḥāma is actually relatively widespread in Arabic, and forms a merism, a

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143S. N. C. Lieu, G. Greatrex, The Roman eastern frontier and the Persian Wars: Part II AD 363-650 (London, 2002), p. 123, gives a translation of Procopius and further citations.
144Robin, ‘Ḥimyar, Aksum, and Arabia Deserta’, pp. 144–145.
145Robin, ‘Les Arabes’, p. 171.
146Ibid., pp. 173–176.
147Ibid., pp. 176–178.
148Robin, ‘Ḥimyar, Aksum, and Arabia Deserta’, pp. 138, 152.
common rhetorical device, especially in Semitic languages, by which entirety of a thing is expressed via two contrasting opposites (as in the ‘heavens and the earth’ to refer to all of creation). Kister had already noted a tradition according to which the Persian emperor Kavadh I (488–531) attempted to impose Mazdakite teachings on all Arabs, al-ḥilal al-Najd wa-Tihāma (the people of [both] Najd and Tihāma). As Kister recognised at the time, this tradition is probably spurious, and the meaning “the Arabs of the highlands and the lowlands”, i.e. “all Arabs”, may have no political valence. Such is the case in the vast majority of similar usages.

A poem preserved in the Ashʿār al-Hudhalīyyīn in praise of the Prophet by one Usayd ibn Abī Iyās of Kūnānī gives one such example of the Najd/Tihāma pairing used in a political sense. Al-Sukkarī tells us, transmitting from al-ʿAṣmaʾī, that the Prophet had declared Usayd’s blood licit, and that Usayd came to the Prophet while the latter was at al-Tāʾif to apologise. From the poem, it appears that Usayd had composed invective against the Muslims. Of interest here is the first line:

\[\text{taʾlām raṣūla lāḥī annaka qādirun} \]

\[‘ālā kuli ḥāyyīn, matḥiniyn īn-wa-munjidi\]

Know O Messenger of God that you hold power over every tribe, those of Tihāma and those in Najd.

This poem deals with more than a rhetorical merism. If the poem were an inauthentic later fabrication, one would expect a more common expression of the totality subjected to Islam, such as that of al-ʿAjam wa-l-ʿArab (Arabs and non-Arabs/Persians), a merism of more interest to post-conquest Muslims. Usayd opts, however, for a geography which does not even encompass the entire Arabian Peninsula, but which very closely resembles the Sabaic inscriptive formula describing Arabia Deserta, Ṭīḥ and Ṭhmt, the ‘highlands’ and the ‘lowlands’. We have, then, another merism, but one with a political valence; the speaker is clearly paying allegiance to Muhammad, as his addressee, and makes use of an imagined historical geography which obtained among Muslims only for a very short time, describing the largest relevant political sphere as the ‘highlands and the lowlands’ of Arabia Deserta last dominated, a generation or two before Muhammad, by Abraha and Ḥimyar. Muhammad is being addressed, in effect, as a successor to the defunct monarch of South Arabia. Given that Muhammad sent expeditions to conquer/convert Yemen in his lifetime and given that his system of delegation owed something to South Arabian influence, Usayd is making an apt assumption.

149 M. J. Kister, ‘Al-Ḥira: Some Notes on Its Relations with Arabia’, Arabica XV (1968), pp. 143–169, 145 n. 2. His source is the unique Tübingen MS of Ibn Saʿīd al-Andalūsi’s Nashwāt al-tāṣābī fī ṭaʾrīkh ǧāḥiliyyat al-ʿArab; this has since been edited: Ibn Saʿīd al-Andalūsi, Nashwāt al-tāṣābī fī ṭaʾrīkh ǧāḥiliyyat al-ʿArab, (ed.) N. ʿAbd al-Rahmān (Amman, 1982) p. 327. Interestingly, the edited text has al-ʿArab al-Maʿaddiyya mīn āḥl Najd wa-Tihāma; Kister’s citation lacks al-ʿArab al-Maʿaddiyya.

150 For one rhetorical example, see Jarḥ’s attack on al-Akḥal, for, as usual, being Christian and hence of low status: ḫa-mā lā-ka fī Najdīn bāḥūm taʾiddāḥā “wā-nā lā-ka mīn gharṣay Tihāmata ʾaṭṭāḥā (There are no men (lit. ‘number’)) in Najd on whom you can count; and you have no soft-pebbled stream in Tihāma’s lowlands [by which you can graze]”, sc. in no part of the world do you have any power or territory). Jarḥ ibn ʿAṣiya, Dīwān Jarḥ bi-shāṭḥ Muhammad ibn Ḥalīth, (ed.) N. M. A. Tīhā (Cairo, 1986), p. 840.

151 Al-Sukkarī, Shahīṣ ashʿār al-Hudhalīyyīn, (ed.) A.-S. A. Fārāj (Cairo, 1963), p. 627.

152 Ibid.

153 Early sources for Ibn Hishām also convey the notion that they conceived of Muhammad’s realm as Hijazi, for example a pre-Islamic Jew refers to Muhammad as malik al-Ḥiḍā: (the king of the Hijaz). A. Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra al-nabawiyya, ii, p. 336.
6. Conclusions

If this essay may seem to have wandered fairly far afield from *isrā*, this is in the nature of the subject, which if it does not fly express by night across the broad swath from Mecca to Jerusalem, equally well requires us to cast our gaze south towards Yemen, traipsing over the mountains of the Hijaz alongside tribal poets. Through such a survey, the range of alternatives to *isrā* as ‘night journey’ has been established, and indeed, there is no good reason except for fidelity to the *Sūrah* to continue to suppose that *isrā* means a ‘night journey’. The classical lexicographical and exegetical tradition continued, throughout the pre-modern period, to preserve alternative meanings. It was also aware that the use of *asrā* with *laylan* was redundant. The usage of *asrā* in the Qur’an is unique in early Arabic, and indicative of a context of authority, command, and hierarchy. It is for these reasons that an etymology relating *asrā* to *sariyya* has been proposed here. This has necessitated a larger excursus on the term *sariyya*, which had hitherto not yet been adequately examined, and on cultural interaction between the pre-Islamic Hijaz and Yemen more broadly. On both of these fronts further research would certainly bring relevant new material to light.

It is worth speculating briefly what an ‘indigenous’ Hijazi *isrā* may have meant to the early community of Muslims, and—for what need not at all have been the same thing—what it meant to contemporary audiences of Arabian converts, most of whom can be assumed to have been essentially coerced.154 My reading alters the nuance, and not the denotation of Q. 17:1. Rather than, “Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the holy mosque to the further mosque”,155 I would prefer something like, “Glory be to Him, who sent his servant forth by night on a [royal] mission, from the holy mosque to the further mosque”. Such a translation at first glance solves none of the problems that we associate with the *Sūrah* narrative or related scholarly discussions; it does not clarify whether the journey was corporeal or took place in a dream state and it does not conclusively identify either the Prophet or Jerusalem as the referents of obscure nouns (*ʿabdahu*) and periphrastic phrases (*alladhi bāraKENā ʿawlahu*).

Beyond this, however, an etymology of *asrā* rooted in *sariyya* suggests a shift in the reading of Q. 17. Several alternatives to the traditional biographical account, which relies on *Sūrah* and other accounts of revelation (*āshāb al-nuzūl*), have been suggested by scholars, but one of the most compelling is that of Angelika Neuwirth. In seeking the cause of the traditional accounts’ concern with prayer (most *Sūrah* accounts of the *isrā* feature Muḥammad leading previous prophets in prayer, while the *miʾāj* accounts, later merged with it, feature negotiations between God and the Prophet over the number of canonical prayers in Islam), she notes that Q. 17 is punctuated (Q. 17:78–80, 110–111) with fairly detailed instructions regarding prayer; she thus argues that the early community would have understand *ayātina*
of Q. 17:1 as revelations concerning prayer rituals and, specifically, a new understanding of sacral states. According to Neuwirth, this early understanding served as the basis for the mythologising narratives that later emerged.

The sense of a ‘mission’ to Jerusalem, however, implies a more political sense of the topographia sacra. Neuwirth mentions, and in this regard Q. 17 ought to be read, not only against Q. 3 (Sūrat al-Nāḥi‘), as is traditionally the case and as Neuwirth does, but also against Q. 30 (Sūrat al-Rūm), which opens with its prediction of the favourable outcome for the Romans of their war with the Sasanian Persians. Both suras are widely viewed as Meccan, and as such we would not expect the early community to show much concern with jihād. The root of isrā’ in a military term does not change this, but there is, nonetheless, a military aspect to the early community’s sense of belonging to a sort of ‘greater Hijaz’, encompassing Syria and Yemen. The Muslims in Mecca would have understood the revelation of both Q. 17 and Q. 30 first and foremost in terms of their embattled situation in the city. As Neuwirth notes, the early Muslims sense of kinship to the Israelites led by Moses serves as an archetype for their own possible expulsion from Mecca. Yet the scriptural geography—the Christian, Jewish, and in sum, monotheistic world—that the early Muslims inhabited is not that of those other communities. Constantinople or the Mesopotamian centres of Jewish learning held no such significance for them as they would have for Late Antique Christians and Jews. Instead, the Muslims inhabited a monotheistic Hijaz; they encountered regionally inflected versions of Judaism and Christianity. While this initial environment is difficult to reconstruct, it would go on to have significant political consequences. Both early revelation and military activity are directed to the north and south, not to the east or (via the Red Sea) west. The prophecy of Q. 30, and the spiritual isrā’ of Muḥammad, anticipate the sariyya of Tabūk. The Qur’ān is interested in Saba’, and, as we have seen, ‘Alī was sent on an expedition to Yemen. Yet Muḥammad, as Landau-Tesseron observes, never invaded Yamāma in Najd, although it was a locus of significant military and political activity in the sixth century.

Q. 17 is no less concerned with prophecy than Q. 30. The Torah foretells the destruction of the Second Temple: “We decreed for the children of Israel in the Scripture (al-kitāb): “you shall wreak corruption in the earth twice…”” (Q. 17:4). The Jewish scripture is then contrasted with the Muslims’ revelation, hādhā al-Qur’ān (Q. 17:9), which foretold ‘great reward’ (ajrān ‘azīman) to the believers. Again, this certainly does not amount to jihād, but universalist spiritual claims in Late Antiquity would necessarily serve as a basis for the early understanding of sacral states.

156 Neuwirth, ‘From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple’, p. 393.
157 Ibid., p. 382. This is both the view of most exegetes and of Nöldeke, in his Geschichte des Qo‘ān.
158 On the sense of pre- and early Hijazi geography, see Webb, ‘Pre-Islamic al-Shām in Classical Arabic Literature’, Studia Islamica CX (2015), pp. 135–164. Webb takes a somewhat constructivist approach to the issue. Dost (based on Qur’ānic and other evidence), ‘An Arabian Qur’ān’, Chapter 3, and N. Miller, ‘Tribal Poetics in Early Arabic Culture: The Case of Ash‘ār al-Hudhayfyin’, (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2016), pp. 244–310, argue for a more historical early Islamic Hijazi self-consciousness or identity.
159 Neuwirth, ‘From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple’, p. 392.
160 For the possible use of the Red Sea as a route to the invasion of Upper Egypt, see T. Power, The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate: AD 500–1000 (Cairo, 2012), pp. 96–100.
161 Landau-Tasseron, ‘Features of the Pre-Conquest Muslim Armies’, p. 313. The invasion of Iraq was quite likely coopted rather than initiated by the early Muslims, as argued by F. Donner, ‘The Bakr b. Wā’il Tribes and Politics in Northeastern Arabia on the Eve of Islam’, Studia Islamica L (1980), pp. 5–38.
have entailed territorial claims. For the Qur’an, it was the prerogative of God to bequeath both land and scripture.\(^{162}\)

The early Muslims would not only have identified with the Banū ʿIsrāʾīl as exiles, but also experienced a sense that they had surpassed them spiritually, just as they had the Meccans; the sins of pride in plentiful sons and wealth, and the resulting hubris and polytheistic disregard for God’s sovereignty, are shared by both the Jews and Quraysh according to Q. 17, as Neuwirth points out.\(^{163}\) While on a more immediate polemical level, the Muslims are promised to inherit the Meccan polytheists, the community may have been catching a glimpse of the possibility that they would also be heirs to the entire toponymia sacra of the Hijaz. The same language of the righteous ‘inheriting the earth’ is used of corrupt pre-Islamic communities (bywords for the transitory nature of the world’s glories), for the Jews in the Holy Land, and for the Muslims’ territories in the Hijaz, principally Yathrib.\(^{164}\) The ʿistrāʾ as a spiritual ‘mission’ to Jerusalem anticipates this reality, which Muḥammad and the first generation of Muslims’ military-proselytising ʿarāʾyāʾ would later strive, eventually successfully, to fulfil.

The militaristic connotation of ʿistrāʾ also has repercussions for how the understanding of the mythologising night journey narratives came about.\(^{165}\) The earliest Muslims consisted of a core of more or less devout believers, and a much larger body of Arabian converts (nomadic tribes, Quraysh in Mecca and Thaqīf in al-Ṭāʾif) who submitted to Islam for more pragmatic reasons. These two groups would have viewed the personality of the Prophet differently and it is the latter who would have contributed to the origins of the mythologising ‘night journey’ narratives. Based on the evidence discussed above, some features of the early days of the ʿistrāʾ narrative can here be suggested.

Usayd ibn Abī Iyās’s dim awareness of Sabaic royal titulature allows us to conjecture that early converts imagined God the king with some of the lineaments of a South Arabian monarch. Depicting long-distance military expeditions was the prerogative of such a figure. As befitted such a monarch’s status, these expeditions would have been mounted and initiated with suitable delegation ceremonies such as we see in the earliest ʿarāʾyāʾ described in the Sīna, which also notes that the fighters were mounted (rākib).

Early converts would have imagined Muḥammad being similarly deputised by God. In the case of Muḥammad’s ʿistrāʾ, the mount becomes mythologised as Burāq, a figure that several scholars have noted is evidently an indigenous Arabian element in the narrative, rather than, say, a later accretion influenced by Jewish apocalypticism. Neuwirth notes that the interpretation of ʿistrāʾ as a “movement on horseback” is “alien to the horizon of qur’ānic imagery”, while Reuven Firestone supposes that Burāq’s presence reflects the strong equestrian culture of pre-Islamic Arabia.\(^{166}\) Al-Azraqī also notes that Abraham used Burāq to travel between

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\(^{162}\) See Q. 35:32 and 49:43 for examples.

\(^{163}\) Neuwirth, ‘From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple’, passim.

\(^{164}\) For the first, see Q. 44:28, for the second Q. 7:128, 137, and 26:59, and for the third, Q. 33:27.

\(^{165}\) Recent research has uncovered numerous reasons not to believe that any element of the ʿistrāʾ narrative obtained at all in the earliest days of Islam: there is no reference to it in the Dome of the Rock, which one would expect if the trip to Jerusalem existed in historical consciousness before the 690s (Busse, ‘Jerusalem’, p. 36); the heavenly journey has clear roots in Late Antique Jewish apocalypticism (Busse, ‘Jerusalem’, pp. 6, 21–23); and the debates about whether Muḥammad saw God in person, and the related question of whether the night journey was physical or a vision, are, per van Ess, most likely Umayyad.

\(^{166}\) R. Firestone, Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis (Albany, N.Y. 1990), p. 70. R. Paret, EI², ‘Burāq’: ‘The possibility must also be envisaged that the name Burāq goes back to a
Syria and Mecca, and if this is an ancient report, Muḥammad’s journey on Burāq may reflect his status as a new Abraham from the originally non-Muslim but henotheistic, Arabian perspective of early converts. They would, after all, have associated Abraham and the Meccan sanctuary before the emergence of Islam; the Qur’ān presupposes the connection.

A final concession is in order. What if there is no connection between isrāʾ and sariyya? This is possible. Ideally, further evidence for the connection awaits discovery, but it may not exist. Be that as it may, the purpose of this essay is certainly not at all to simply be contrarian, but rather to attempt a serious methodological exercise, one that simultaneously keeps in view documentary and literary evidence—inscriptions, chronicles, and poetry. There is really no compelling reason to continue to interpret Q. 17:1 in light of the Sīra, which constitutes the only basis for reading it as ‘night journey’ in the first place. Once this is recognised and the Sīra-inspired interpretations are discarded, we must seek elsewhere for more logical etymologies, and only some of these may be found in traditional tafsīrs. In the past few decades, a great deal of critical work has gone into unpicking what we thought we knew about early Islam. Much has been done to restitute early Islam in the Late Antique milieu. Although they have not been entirely neglected, sources relevant to the fact that Islam was, after all, an Arabian religion have been downplayed and under-utilised. The reasons for this are self-evident: early Arabic poetry is difficult, some of it is fabricated, and South Arabian inscriptions require specialised knowledge. Both fields are understudied.

Thus, even if there is no connection between isrāʾ and sariyya, the methodology here employed has, through the careful sifting of related evidence, still produced a number of compelling conclusions. By contrasting early historiographical texts with inscriptive evidence, we have seen that Muḥammad’s system of military delegation via the sariyya owed something to South Arabian practice, probably via Quraysh’s interactions with Abraha and his successors. Some adaptations took place, the extent of which is difficult to estimate, but the sariyya’s roots in interaction between the Hijaz and Yemen remain palpable. The same political interaction is visible in the poetic texts, again reading them against inscriptive evidence, of al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās, ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib, and Usayd ibn Abī Iyās. The conflicts between Abraha and the Arabians of the Hijaz continued into the seventh century CE and provided one vector for the exchange of cultural and political concepts. Usayd ibn Abī Iyās gives us a glimpse of how, drawing on indigenous Arabian notions of leadership, coerced converts would have constructed an acceptable and appealing image of the Prophet as a political leader. This is a valuable insight into the earliest moment of mass conversion to Islam. Further, and potentially very valuable insights, await the continued use of such interdisciplinary material.

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pre-Islamic tradition now unknown to us. In general, much that is reported about the steed of the miraculous ‘night-journey’ will derive from pre-Islamic tradition; Neuwirth, ‘From the Sacred Mosque’, p. 386, 7.

167 Al-Azraqī, Akhba ār Makkah wa-maʾ jāʾa fi-hi min al-aḥār, (ed.) Ibn Duhayshah (Mecca, 2003), p. 120 = F. Wüstenfeld, Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka (Leipzig, 1857), p. 34.
### Appendices

#### 1a: Muhammad’s Deputised Military Expeditions According to al-Waqqādī

| Date     | Battle                        | Amr al-sa‘īyya | Citation |
|----------|-------------------------------|----------------|----------|
| 1        | Ramadān 1                    | Ṭr Quraysh     | Ḥamza b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib | 9        |
| 2        | Shawwāl 1                     | Rābhīh         | ʿUbayd b. al-Ḥarith    | 10       |
| 3        | Dhin’l-Quḍā’1                 | al-Kharrāt     | ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaḥsh    | 11       |
| 4        | Rajab 2                       | Nakāhā         | ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaḥsh    | 13       |
| 5        | Ramadān 2                    | ʿAṣmāʾ b. Muḥān | ʿUmayr b. ʿAdī b. Kharāsha | 172     |
| 6        | Shawwāl 2                     | Abū Ṭāfākī     | Sā&utm b. ʿUmayr       | 174     |
| 7        | Rabī’ I 3                     | Ibūn al-Ashraf  | Muḥammad b. Maslama    | 184     |
|          | Muḥarram 4                    | Sufyān b. Khālid b. Nubayb | ʿAbd Allāh b. Umays    | 531     |
|          |                               | al-Hudhāltī      |          |          |
| 9        | Jumāda II 3                  | al-Qarada       | Zayd b. al-Ḥaritha    | 197     |
| 10       | Muḥarram 4                    | Qaṭān / Banū Asad | ʿAbū Ṣalāma b. ʿAbd al-Asad | 340     |
| 11       | Saʿīr 4                       | Biʿr Maʿūna     | al-Mundhir b. ʿAmr     | 346     |
| 12        | Rabī’ I 4                    | al-Rajīṣ        | Marthad b. Abī Marthad | 354     |
| 13        | Dhin’l-Hijja 4               | Ibūn Abīl-Ḥuqayqī | ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿArt    | 391     |
| 14        | Muḥarram 6169               | al-Qurṭṭī / Banū Bakr | Muḥammad b. Maslama   | 534     |
| 15        | Rabī’ II 6                   | al-Ghamar       | ʿUkāsha b. Muṣṭan     | 550     |
| 16        | Rabī’ II 6                   | Dhin’l-Qaṣṣa    | Muḥammad b. Maslama    | 551     |
| 17        | Rabī’ II 6                   | Dhin’l-Qaṣṣa (sic) | Abūn ʿUbayda b. al-Jarrāḥ | 552     |
| 18        | Rabī’ II 6                   | al-Jamāʿīn (Banū Sulaṭyīn)* | Zayd b. Ḥaritha      | —        |
| 19        | Jumāda II 6                  | al-Ṭīṣ         | Zayd b. Ḥaritha       | 553     |
| 20        | Jumāda II 6                  | al-Ṭuraf       | Zayd b. Ḥaritha       | 553     |
| 21        | Jumāda II 6                  | Ḥiṣmā          | Zayd b. Ḥaritha       | 555     |
| 22        | Rajab 6                      | Wādī al-Qurṭ / Umm Qīrṭī† | Zayd b. Ḥaritha    | 565     |
| 23        | Shaʿbān 6                    | Dūmat al-Jandal II | ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf | 560     |
| 24        | Shaʿbān 6                    | Banū Saʿd / Fadak | ʿAbī b. Abī Ṭālib    | 562     |
| 22b       | Ramadān 6                    | Wādī al-Qurṭ / Umm Qīrṭī† | Zayd b. Ḥaritha    | 565     |
| 25        | Shawwāl 6                    | ʿUṣayr b. Zārum† / Khaybar | Abūl Allāh b. Rūwāḥa | 566     |
| 26        | Shawwāl 6                    | ʿUraynā         | Kurz b. Ḫabīr        | 568     |
| 27        | Shaʿbān 7                    | Turba / ʿAjuw Ḥawāzīn | ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb   | 722     |
| 28        | Shaʿbān 7                    | Najj           | Abū Bakr b. Qurāfī    | 722     |
| 29        | Shaʿbān 7                    | Fadak          | Bāṣīr b. Saʿd         | 723     |
| 30        | Ramadān 7                    | al-Mayfāʾa, Najj / Banū ʿAbd b. Thaʿlab          | Ghālīb b. ʿAbd Allāh | 726     |
| 31        | Shawwāl 7                    | al-Junāb       | Bāṣīr b. Saʿd         | 727     |
| 32        | Dhin’l-Hijja 7               | Banū Sulaṭyīn  | Ibūn Abīl-ʿAwjā       | 741     |
| 33        | Safar 8                      | al-Kaḍīd       | Ghālīb b. ʿAbd Allāh   | 750     |
| 34        | Rabī’ I 8                    | Banū Ṭāmīr b. Muaṭṭawwāl / al-Sī  | Shuṭa b. Wāḥib     | 753     |
| 35        | Rabī’ I 8                    | Dhiyy al-Ṭāfā / Shām, near Balaṭa  | ʿAbī b. Umayr al-Ghiṭṭār | 752     |
| 36        | Jumāda I 8                   | Mu ṭa          | Zayd b. Ḥaritha       | 755     |
| 37        | Jumāda II 8                  | Dhiyy al-Saḥāṣil | ʿAmm b. al-ʿĀṣ        | 769     |
| 38        | Rajab 8                      | al-Khaḥāṭ       | Abī ʿUbayda b. al-Jarrāḥ | 774     |
| 39        | Shaʿbān 8                    | Khāḍīra         | Abū Qatāda             | 777     |

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169. There is an inconsistency regarding this expedition. The date is given first as 5 Muḥarram, month 35 (al-Maqāḥaṭa, p. 3), but in the body of the text as 5 Muḥarram, month 54 (p. 531). This latter seems to be an error, as month 35 was Muḥarram, but month 54 was Shaʿbān. Later in the list (p. 7), the same sa‘īyya is said to have taken place in Muḥarram year 6, which would be month 59.

169. The date is given as both year 6 (p. 4) and Muḥarram, month 55 (p. 534), which is inconsistent; Muḥarram year 6 was month 59.
### 1b: Muhammad’s Deputised Expeditions According to Ibn Hishām/Ibn Ishaq

| Date | Battle | Anṭr al-sariyya | Citation |
|------|--------|-----------------|----------|
| 1    | Ramadān 1 | Sīfa al-Bahr (ʾIr Quraṣḥ) | Hamza b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib | 1:595 |
| 2    | Shawwāl 1 | Thaniyyat al-Murra (Rāḥīgh) | ʿAbayda b. al-Ḥārith | 1:591 |
| 3    | Dhū‘l-Qa‘da 1 | al-Kharrār | Sa’d b. Abī Waqṣaṣ | 1:600 |
| 4    | Rajab 2 | Nakhla | ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaḥāḥ | 1:601 |
| 5    | Ramadān 2 | ʿAṣmāʾ b. al-Maṭṣūn | ʿUmayr b. ʿAbbās al-Khīṭāmi | 2:636 |
| 6    | Shawwāl 2 | Abī Ṭālāb | Sālim b. ʿUmayr | 2:635 |
| 7    | Rabī‘ 1 | Ibn al-Aṣrafa | Muḥammad b. Maṣlama | 2:54 |
| 8    | Muḥarram 4 | Sufyān b. Khālid b. Ṣubayḥ al-Hudhāh | ʿAbd Allāh b. Umayrah | 2:619 |
| 9    | Jumāda II 3 | al-Qaraḍa | Zayd b. Ḥāritha | 2:50 |
| 10   | Muḥarram 4 | Qataṭ / Banū Asad* | Abū Salama b. ʿAbbās al-Asad | 2:612 |
| 11   | Safar 4 | Bīr Maṭna | al-Mundhir b. ʿAmr | 2:183 |
| 12   | Rabī‘ 4 | al-Rajī | Marthad b. Abī Marthad | 2:169 |
| 13   | Dhū‘l-Hijja 4 | Khaybar (Ibn ʿAbd al-Huqayq) | ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṭāk | 2:274 |
| 14   | Muḥarram 6 | al-Qurṭba / Banū Bakr* | Muḥammad b. Maṣlama | 2:612 |
| 15   | Rabī‘ 6 | al-Ghamra (al-Ghamri) | ʿUkāsah b. Miṣṣan | 2:612 |
| 16   | Rabī‘ 6 | Dhū‘l-Qaṣṣa (ṣiṣ) | Abū ʿUbayda b. al-Ḥārith | 2:609 |
| 17   | Rabī‘ 6 | al-Jamūm (Banū Sulaym) | Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha | 2:612 |
| 18   | Jumāda II 6 | al-Turāf* | Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha | 2:616 |
| 19   | Jumāda II 6 | Ḥudaym (Ḥismā) | Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha | 2:613 |
| 20   | Rabī‘ 6 | Waṣṭ al-Qurā / Umm Qurfa | Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha | 2:617 |
| 21   | Sha‘bān 6 | Dūmat al-Jandal II | ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. ʿAṣw | 2:631 |
| 22   | Sha‘bān 6 | Banū ʿAbd Allāh b. Sa’d / Fadak* | ʿAbbās b. Ṭālāb | 2:611 |
| 23   | Ramadān 6 | Waṣṭ al-Qurā / Umm Qurfa | Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha | 2:617 |
| 24   | Shawwāl 6 | al-Yusayr b. Rizām (b. Zārīm)* | ʿAbbās b. Ṭalāh b. Rawwāh | 2:618 |
| 25   | Sha‘bān 7 | Turba / ʿĀmīr (ʿAṣūr Hazwāzīm)* | ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb | 2:609 |
| 26   | Sha‘bān 7 | Fadak* | Bashīr b. Sa’d | 2:612 |
| 27   | Dhū‘l-Hijja 7 | Banū Sulaym* | Ibn Abīl-ʿAwjā | 2:612 |
| 28   | Safar 8 | Banū al-Muṣlawwā (al-Kaṭīd) | Gharīb b. ʿAbbās | 2:609 |
| 29   | Rabī‘ 8 | Dhaṭr ʿAbīl / Shām, near Baṣṭāt* | Ka’b b. ʿUmar al-Ghaffar | 2:621 |
| 30   | Jumāda I 8 | Muṭa | Zayd b. Ḥāritha | 2:373 |

(Continued)
### 1c: Muhammad’s Deputised Expeditions According to Khalifa b. al-Khayyaf

| Date     | Battle                      | Ani`r al-Sariyya | Citation |
|----------|-----------------------------|------------------|----------|
| 1        | Ramaḍān 1                   | Siṭ al-Bahr (Ir Quraysh)) | Ḥamza b. `Abd al-Muṣṭalib | 21       |
| 2        | Shawwāl 1                   | Thaniyyar al-Murra (Rābiḥ) | `Ubayda b. al-Ḥārith | 20       |
| 3        | Dhu’l-Qa’da 1               | al-Kharrār        | Sa’d b. Mālik (b. Abī Wāqīṣā) | 21       |
| 4        | Rajab 2                     | Nakhlah           | `Abd Allāh b. Jābsh | 21–22    |
| 5        | Muḥarram 4                  | Suqīn b. Khālid b. Nubayḥ al-Hudhayf | `Abd Allāh b. Unays | 39       |
| 6        | Saḥar 4                     | Bi’r Ma’īna | al-Mundhir b. ‘Arām | 38       |
| 7        | Rabī’ I 4                   | al-Raḥt | Marthad b. Abū Marthad | 36       |
| 8        | Muḥarram 6                  | al-Quṣṣa’ (al-Quṣṣa’) | Muḥammad b. Maslama | 40       |
| 9        | Rabī’ II 6                  | al-Gharnā (al-Ghamr) | ‘Ukāsha b. Mūsān | 48       |
| 10       | Jumāda I 6                  | al-Turāt | Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha | 48       |
| 11       | Jumāda II 6                 | Juddhā (Hissmā) | Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha | 48       |
| 12       | Sha’bān 6                   | Dumat al-Jandal II | `Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Awf | 42       |
| 13       | Sha’bān 6                   | Fadak (Barūt Sa’d) | `Ālī b. Abī Ṭālīb | 42       |
| 14       | Ramaḍān 6                  | Wādī al-Qurā’/ Umm Qirfā | Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha | 39       |
| 15       | Shawwāl 6                   | Khaybar (Yaṣṭr b. Rūzmān) | `Abd Allāh b. Rawḥā | 41       |
| 16       | Sha’bān 7                   | Turba / ‘Āmir (Ajuz Ḥawāzīn) | ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb | 40       |
| 17       | Sha’bān 7                   | Fadak* | Bashīr b. Sa’d | 40       |
| 18       | Shawwāl 7                   | Khaybar (al-Jināb) | Bashīr b. Sa’d | 41       |
| 19       | Dhu’l-Hijja 7               | Banū Sulaym* | Ibn Abī ’l-‘Awjā | 48       |
| 20       | Saḥar 8                     | al-Kadīr* | Gahlib b. ‘Abd Allāh | 40       |
| 21       | Rabī’ I 8                   | Dhuṭ Aṭṭā’/ Shām, near Balqā’* | Ka’b b. ‘Umayr al-Ghifār | 41       |
| 22       | Jumāda I 8                  | Mu’ta | Zayd b. Ĥāritha | 49       |
| 23       | Jumāda II 8                 | Dhuṭ al-Saltāl | ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās | 48       |
| 24       | Ramaḍān 8                  | Raṭ’ā [b. Qays]: (Iṣām) | Ibn Abī Ḥadrad | 48       |
| 25       | Shawwāl 8                   | Banū Judhayma | Khālid b. al-Wālī | 51       |
| 26       | Rajab 9                     | Uraydār b. ‘Abd al-Malik / Dumat Jandal III | Khālid b. al-Wālī | 56       |
## Additional Deputised Expeditions given only by Khalīfa

| No. | Expedition Details | Commander Details | Year |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|------|
| 27  | Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb† | 'Amr b. Umayya     | 39   |
| 28  | al-Qārra           | 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb | 39   |
| 29  | Banū Mālik b. Kināna | Bilāl b. Mālik al-Muzanī | 39   |
| 30  | al-Ḥārith b. ‘Abd Manāh b. Kināna | Bashār b. Suwayd al-Juḥānī | 39   |
| 31  | al-Ahlīf, Tayyī', and Asad | Abū 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ | 40   |
| 32  | vengeance against killers of Bashār’s companions (at Fadāk) | Ghālib b. ‘Abd Allāh | 40   |

†Assassination  
* Data given in lists of expeditions, but without transmitting a fuller narrative in the body of the work.

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170See *al-Maghāzī*, p. 723.