

NASAB: ON THE HISTORY OF A CONCEPT

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It appears to be an all but indelible *idée fixe* of Islamic scholarship that genealogy has always been somehow an integral, inseparable part of the Arab nomads' culture, and a unique distinguishing feature, as it were, of the Arab or nomadic 'world-view', whatever that may mean¹. The term *nasab* is usually understood to be the Arabic equivalent of 'genealogy', especially genealogy on the patriline, which may be memorized by generation after generation of tribesmen, or else documented in the form of genealogical trees or chain-like lists enumerating the names of ascending generations of male ancestors². The individual tribes' genealogies, or *nasabs*, can be and are linked together by those concerned to form one national genealogy, tracing origins back to the remotest past of pre-Islamic Arabia.

Thus, what is known as the genealogical paradigm is traditionally seen as the very framework in which Arab nomads have always perceived their world and all social relations therein. Whether we should really give credit to this deeply entrenched notion will be the subject of this paper. To formulate the basic dilemma: whereas early Bedouins were certainly quite preoccupied with something that they called *nasab*, the hackneyed equation of this *nasab* with 'genealogy' throughout Arabian history is by no means so self-evident as later Muslim literati would have us believe. For reasons of space constraints, I shall largely limit my argument here to the linguistic aspects of the issue, which I have analysed at more length elsewhere (Szombathy 1999).

The usual understanding of *nasab* as genealogy rests almost exclusively on the work of mediaeval Muslim scholars, whose model of pre-Islamic *nasab* is strikingly similar to what modern anthropological literature offers to say about segmentary lineage systems. We should entertain few doubts that the description of the Bedouins' *nasab* structure promoted by mediaeval Arab genealogists has profoundly influenced segmentary lineage theory, advocates of which may well have seen it as a historical proof of their own hypotheses³. This is especially obvious if we compare the views of Ibn Haldūn on the role of genealogy (*nasab*) in Bedouin society with the descrip-

¹ E.g. Nöldeke 1886:177; Hitti 1970:28; Khalidi 1994:5; al-Wardī 1965:57; Kister & Plessner 1976:50; aš-Šalqāni 1977:32; Bonte et al. 1991:16.

² E.g. Nöldeke 1886:179; Caskel 1966: 1, 24; Chelhod 1965:129; Hamès 1987:99; Varisco 1995:151.

³ In this context, noteworthy is the fact that that once-so-popular pet of social anthropologists, segmentary lineage theory, seems to be under ever-growing siege and is less and less tenable in the eyes of many anthropologists. See Kuper 1982:92.

tion of segmentary lineage society and its genealogical basis by, say, Evans-Pritchard or Gellner⁴. That many twentieth-century anthropologists drew heavily upon the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Haldūn in forming their own theories on lineages is undeniable, and indeed some of them have acknowledged this debt in so many words. We ought to be, however, rather more wary of accepting the views of mediaeval Muslim scholars on ancient Bedouin society, never mind basing hypotheses on them, for the Bedouins' culture and society were almost as alien to these urban Muslim intellectuals as they are to us, and their interpretations of many facets of Bedouin folklore and traditions are apparently the product of totally baseless fancies arising from a lack of a solid grasp of Bedouin society and its workings. To this may be added the quite natural tendency among mediaeval Arab scholars to idealize the Arabs' pre-Islamic past, which was instrumental in bringing about such obviously anachronistic yet widely accepted myths like the existence of sciences, inter alia genealogical science (*'ilm an-nasab*), among pre-Islamic Bedouins⁵. Instead of relying on the views of the urban literati of Abbasid-era Iraq, one would perhaps do better to peruse the available early sources and try to figure out what is really meant when *nasab* is being talked about.

To anticipate somewhat, the most important observation to be made after a careful scrutiny of the Arabic nomenclature of kinship and tribal segmentation is that the Arabic terminology of this semantic field is as a rule remarkably vague, with most if not all kinship terms being used in a literal or primary sense as well as in a figurative or extended one⁶. Such terms include *ab* ('father'), *umm* ('mother'), *ġadd* ('grandfather'), *aḥ* ('brother')⁷, *ibn* and *walad* ('son, offspring'), *bint* ('daughter'), *'amm* ('paternal uncle'), *ḥāl* ('maternal uncle'), and a host of other words, all of which tend to lack any exactitude of meaning. Thus the term 'father', *ab*, will often refer to a very distant ancestor, as will 'grandfather', *ġadd*. The plural forms *ābā'* and *aġdād* (or *ġudūd*) are especially prone to being used in the sense of 'ancestors' (Cuisenier, Miquel 1965:26). Similarly, the terms *a'mām* (or *'umūma*) and *aḥwāl* (or *ḥu'ūla*), properly meaning 'paternal uncles' and 'maternal uncles', respectively, will more

⁴ Cf. Evans-Pritchard 1940:192; Gellner 1981:33-34.

⁵ Cf. Ibn Sa'īd, *Naṣwa* I, 80-81; al-Andalusī, *Tabaqāt* 39-42; Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl* 119-120; al-Ġāhiz, *Bayān* I, 137, 384.

⁶ A distinction apparently disregarded altogether in Seligman 1923-25.

⁷ On the loose use of *aḥ* (and *ġadd*) in contemporary Yemen, cf. Dresch 1991:9.

⁸ A source cites the poet al-Farazdaq addressing Sukayna bt. al-Husayn, the Prophet's granddaughter (through Fātima) as 'daughter of God's Messenger' (*yā bint rasul Allāh*)! See al-Bayhaqī, *Mahāsīn* 246.

often than not refer to one's whole agnatic and uterine kin⁹. The common phrase *awlād/banū al-amm* is seldom used in its primary sense of 'parallel cousins', being as it is the usual idiomatic equivalent of 'one's own tribe', 'one's own people' (in varying senses) (Chelhod 1965:122; Ashkenazi 1965-69:663)¹⁰. Literal interpretations of such loose usages are an invitation for misunderstanding, and it is worth noting here that mediaeval genealogists were fond of deliberately taking figurative expressions in a literal sense as a way to create consistent genealogies out of a confused medley of names; although space does not allow me to elaborate on this point here¹¹.

The hierarchy of the various levels of tribal segmentation, which is the very backbone of both Arabic *'ilm an-nasab* and modern anthropological theories on segmentary lineages, totally disintegrates under an analysis of the terminology¹². Arabic has an impressively wide array of original terms for tribal segments (such as *qabila*, *'imāra*, *šā'b*, *batn*, *fahid*, *ašīra*, *fasila*, *hayy*, *zahara*, *bayt*, *usra*, *ahl*, *raht*, *sulāla*, etc.), which may lead one to the false conclusion that Arabs used to have an elaborate genealogi-

⁹ Instructive in this respect is the common phrase *karīm al-a'mām*, 'noble through and through', literally, 'noble on the paternal line'. In a story, the caliph Harūn ar-Rašid is informed by a man in his entourage of the presence of a visitor who, it is said, belonged to the 'caliph's maternal kin, the *Ansār* [tribes of Medina]' (*min aḥwālīka l-ansār*); see al-Bayhaqī, *Mahāsīn* 266. Likewise, a man of the *Kalb* tribe relates that, having committed a capital offence, he was forced to leave his kin and seek safety among his maternal relatives, the *Murra* tribe (*aḥwālī Bani Murra*); see al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* II, 276.

¹⁰ For examples, mediaeval and modern, cf. al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* I, 326 [a black woman addresses the black poet Naṣīb b. Rabāh, totally unrelated though he is to her, as her 'paternal cousin']; III, 81 [the pre-Islamic poet 'Urwat aš-Ša'ālīk is referred to as the 'paternal cousin' of a scholar of the Abbasid era]; XX, 216 [a poem by Abū l-'Atāhiya calls the caliph al-Amin 'the Prophet's paternal cousin']; al-Ibšīhī, *Mustatraf* 71 [the poet 'Umar b. Abī Rabī'a is called the 'paternal cousin' of the Omayyad caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd-al-'azīz]; Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif* 129; al-Mas'ūdī, *Muruğ* II, 211; Asad 1986:104; Dickson 1996:101-103; Bonte 1987:54; Miner 1953:144.

¹¹ On the frequent mistranslation of *awlād*, cf. Mohamed 1980:36. Mediaeval scholars are as a rule rather reticent on the methods that they used to arrive at a certain genealogical construct, other than quoting their immediate authorities if there are any. Rare as they are, the following methodological remarks by two mediaeval authors are therefore particularly illuminating: 1: 'I do not recall seeing the *nasab* of Muṭī' [b. Iyās] transmitted by anyone as an uninterrupted chain up to Kināna, but [there is] one account that I shall cite shortly in which the transmitter (*rāwī*) says that Abū Qur'a al-Kinānī was a grandfather (*ğadd*) of Muṭī'. Now, I do not know for sure if he is [Muṭī's] actual grandfather to whose name I should join his *nasab* directly, or else he is a more distant ancestor' (*a-huwa ġadduhu l-adnā fa-asila nasabahu bihi am huwa ba'idun minhu*); see al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* XIII, 301. 2: 'Abū 'Abdarrahmān as-Sulamī claims that Zarqān b. Muhammad was the brother of Dū n-Nūn al-Miṣrī. I, however, think [it more likely] that he was his 'brother' in the sense of being his intimate friend, rather than that of real kinship (*wu-azunnu annahu aḥuhu mu'āḥātan lā uḥuwwata nasabīn*), for he was one of [Dū n-Nūn's] close associates and companions'; see al-Ibšīhī, *Mustatraf* 156.

¹² Incidentally, the same appears to be the case with other societies alleged to be 'segmentary', like the Nuer of Southern Sudan, whose usual term for 'lineage' may actually refer to just any level of segmentation. See Evans-Pritchard 1940:195.

cal system based on different levels of tribal segmentation. This is precisely the idea suggested by mediaeval Muslim intellectuals and keenly accepted by most scholars up to this day, but apparently wrong when we consider the fact that the plethora of terms used for tribal sub-sections of various sizes form no consistent system, and indeed are often quite interchangeable. In the totally chaotic inventory of words, we can distinguish only two basic meanings: 'a tribe' (usually but not exclusively expressed by *qabila*), and 'any subdivision smaller than a tribe'. There are, of course, many shades of meaning attached to certain terms, yet the fact remains that, at the end of the day, these words have never come to compose any semblance of a hierarchical, segmentary system. Significantly, the mediaeval genealogists themselves, drawn as they were towards systematization and precision, could never settle on a final definition of each term for tribal segments¹³.

To proceed to the question of *nasab* itself, one finds an equally palpable vagueness of meaning clinging to it in most early sources on Bedouins, wherein the usual rendering as 'genealogy' or 'chain of male ancestors' will prove to be the result of so apparent misinterpretation as to make it utterly untenable. Such texts abound, and in fact there are precious few passages in which rendering *nasab* as 'genealogy' seems to be contextually possible at all, let alone really plausible. Thus, in many passages the act of 'giving one's *nasab*' (*intisāb*) must obviously have involved little more than mentioning the name of one's parents or the tribe to which one belonged¹⁴. Just how artificial the habit of using *nasab* chains must have seemed to the Arabs even in Omayyad times is indicated by a story in which the occurrence of a *nasab* consisting of a mere four ascending names in a poem of Durayd b. as-Simma prompted the following sarcastic remark from the caliph 'Abdalmalik: 'This Durayd has traced Du'āb b. Asmā' almost back to Adam!' (Abū 'Ubayda, *Ayyām* 582). True enough that mediaeval dictionaries like the *Lisān al-'Arab* do mention 'tracing someone's descent to his first known ancestor' (*rafā' ta fi nasabihi ilā gaddihi l-akbar*), but this explanation bears the hallmark of the mediaeval scholars' pedantry, and is supplemented anyway by a number of vaguer, and no doubt earlier, meanings like 'kinship' (*qarāba*), 'kinship links' (*qarābāt*), and 'belonging' in a variety of senses (by ancestry, by dwelling-place, by métier, etc.) (Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān* VI, 4405). Ibn Sīda, having mentioned 'kinship' (*qarāba*) as the primary meaning of *nasab*, proceeds to add that it *might* have the more specific meaning of 'agnatic descent' (*wa-qila huwa fi l-ābā'i ḥāssatan*) (*Muḥassas* III, 147). However, the fact that *nasab* originally covered uterine relations just as

¹³ Cf. al-Qalqaṣandī, *Nihāya* 20-21; as-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb* I, 28; Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl* 108; Ibn 'Abdalbarī, *Inḥāb* 45; Ibn Durayd, *Istiqāq* 14; Abū 'Ubayda, *Ayyām* 353; as-Sukkarī, *Naqā'id* I, 238. Contemporary Bedouin tribes in the Arab world continue to use a confusing and distinctly unsystematic terminology for tribal subgroups; cf. Cunnison 1966:9; Asad 1986:104; Jaussen 1908:11-13, 111-114; Ingham 1986:34-35; Chelhod 1965:150; Cuisenier 1962:85; Bédoucha 1987:144; Bonte 1987:54.

¹⁴ See the appendix of this article, in which I quote a number of such passages from various works, along with tentative translations, which I hope will serve to give substance to my argument here.

much as agnatic ones, and affinal ties just as much as consanguinous ones, is also testified by such expressions like two persons being 'connected by *nasab* through women' (*wa-kāna bayna Ayyūba bni Mahrūfin wa-bayna Awsi bni Qallāmin hādā nasabun min qibali n-nisā'i*), or 'marriage [being] one of the two types of *nasab*' (*fa-inna n-nikāha ahadu n-nasabayni*) (al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* II, 90; Ibn Qutayba, *Fadl* 118). In fact, *nasab* might occasionally cover an even wider area of meaning, as demonstrated by the highly metaphorical adage 'acquaintance is [a sort of] *nasab*' (al-Bayhaqī, *Mahāsin* 189)¹⁵.

Closely connected with *nasab* is the word used to describe people reputed to be particularly knowledgeable in matters of genealogy, *nassāb* or *nassāba*. Given that *nasab* in the early period seems to have been quite far from designating 'genealogy', neither is *nassāb* to be understood as 'genealogist' when applied to pre-Islamic Bedouin men. First of all, there is nothing to suggest that the faculty of being a *nassāb* ever entailed an institutionalized position within the tribe, like that of a poet (*šā'ir*) or a soothsayer (*kāhin*). Instead, a *nassāb* seems to have been simply, and not surprisingly, anyone who happened to know a lot about his fellow-tribesmen, their relationships, the tribe's legends (*ahbār*), and indeed the gossip current within the group. Gossip is actually a very important element of a Bedouin *nassāb*'s erudition, as attested by a number of texts that leave no uncertainty in this respect. Thus, when the Prophet Muḥammad wanted to retaliate for the poetical lampoons to which the Meccans subjected him, he sent his poet Ḥassān b. Ṭābit to the future caliph Abū Bakr, a famous *nassāb*, who then instructed him as to which Meccan women he should allude to in his poems to cause pain to the Qurays. The kind of information that Abū Bakr furnished to the poet is labelled in a work *ma'āyib al-qawm*, 'the disgraces of the people' (al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* IV, 145-146; al-Maqdisī, *Istibsār* 52-53)¹⁶. Just how close early concepts of *nasab* must have been to petty gossip is shown by a remark of al-Asma'ī: 'Beware by God of the maleficence of the [tribe's] old women, for they know the ancestors (*ista'idū bi-llāhi min šarri l-'aḡā'izi fa-innahunna ya'rifna l-ābā'a*)!' (al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb* I, 24). Likewise, it is for good reason that another famous early *nassāb*, Abū Ḡahm b. Huḍayfa, should be said to have been 'feared for his tongue' (*wa-kāna yuhāfu li-lisānihi*) (Ibn Durayd, *Istiḡāq* 139). As I have stated above, however, the knowledge of a pre-Islamic *nassāb* went far beyond the limits of mere news mongering to encompass tribal legends and tales (*ahbār*), recollections of tribal skirmishes (*ayyām*), and even poems. In their capacity as narrators of the past, they

¹⁵ We find a similar figurative usage of *nasab* in a line by a celebrated poet of the Abbasid epoch, al-Attābi: 'But kinship is of no avail after an angry split, for amity is the closest of kinship ties!' (*fa-ida l-qarābatu lā tuqarrību qātī'an wa-ida l-mawaddatu aqrabu l-ansābi*); see al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* XIII, 131.

¹⁶ For a different version, cf. al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb* I, 22.

are not unlike the early *qussās*, popular story-tellers¹⁷. The wisdom expected of a Bedouin tribesman regarded as a *nassāb* might apparently include even predictions for the future¹⁸.

The emergence of Arabic genealogy as a genuine discipline cultivated by learned urban scholars, and, later, its spectacular success in becoming a firm part of Arabic and Muslim popular culture, are topics that I cannot discuss here¹⁹. A lengthy analysis of the later career of the term *nasab* in various Muslim societies, Arab and non-Arab alike, would be beyond the scope of this paper as well. Let it suffice to say that while the acquired and now all too familiar meaning 'genealogy', 'pedigree' or 'family tree' has never ceased to dominate the popular interpretation of this concept, there seems to have been an ongoing use of the term in a highly varied and ill-defined sense alongside the technical one, which is especially true of non-Arab Islamic communities, in which the meaning of *nasab*, implicitly, often approximates 'kinship', 'origins' or simply 'identity', in spite of the characteristic efforts of many groups to procure prestigious if totally baseless Arabic pedigrees. The continuing use of *nasab* in both an ill-defined and a highly technical sense has remained an abundant source of misconstructions and false theorizing among scholars. Just how confused, and confusing, the use of *nasab* may be even in written scholarly texts is demonstrated by the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Haldūn, who was wont to use the word *nasab* for 'kinship', 'descent', and 'genealogy' alike, and would then draw far-reaching – and, it must be said, thoroughly wrong – conclusions about the origins and social function of genealogy among Arabs on the basis of this indiscriminate linguistic usage²⁰.

Having suggested a possible course of the development of *nasab* from being a commonly used and rather vague linguistic item into the position of a full-fledged *terminus technicus* of Islamic scholarship, I feel it important to note that this semantic development is far from unique in Arabic, as we know of a great many terms that, having originally been rather unspecified items of Bedouin vocabulary, ended up in a similar manner as veritable *termini technici*. It must be added that many of these terms gave rise to similar misinterpretations on the part of the mediaeval Muslim scholars who would instinctively project their usual, specialized understanding of the

¹⁷ To get a glimpse into what kind of stories the repertoire of the early *qussās* contained, cf. the stories told by 'Abid b. Šariya to the caliph Mu'āwiya about the ancient Arabian races; see Ibn Hišām, *Ṭiğān* 325-328.

¹⁸ The renowned Bedouin *nassāb* Dağfal as-Sadūsi was asked by a man concerning the time the latter was going to die. The *nassāb*, however, would not undertake to answer such a query. See Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* I, 89.

¹⁹ On the issue of the influence of literacy and its attendant cultural patterns on ostensibly non-literate and highly 'traditional' societies (as Bedouins have tended to get portrayed), cf. Goody 1975:1, 4-5; Finnegan 1974:53.

²⁰ I have discussed this observation at length in my unpublished PhD thesis, titled *Arabic Genealogy Between Muslim Scholarship and Popular Culture*.

term back into the past and make false assumptions accordingly. Instances of such a failure to grasp the realities of semantic change include words like *rāwī*, or *qussās*²¹. To take *qussās* as an example, mediaeval Arabic authors do not seem to be bothered at all to distinguish between a *qāss* of early Islam and another of the Abbasid era, obviously perceiving this métier to have remained essentially the same throughout its career, albeit gradually sinking in esteem for various reasons. The fact that it originally had not been a regular métier at all but a casual activity open to virtually anyone was alien to their mechanical understanding of the term²². Interestingly, Ibn Haldūn, whose mistaken views on *nasab* I have already pointed to, was apparently not unaware of historical changes in semantics in some cases, which is well demonstrated by his valuable observations on the modifications in the connotations of words like *qādi* or *mu'allim*. As I have argued, the implications arising from the mechanical mis-translation of early *nasab* as 'genealogy' are absolutely distorted yet have continued to help fuel far-reaching anthropological hypotheses on nomadic lineage societies.

The issue of *nasab*, as I hope to have made clear, is not a matter of merely linguistic significance having no further consequences, because interpreting *nasab* as 'genealogy' has had a profound impact on our understanding of traditional Bedouin society. Genealogy – that is, an elementary tool to link any group to every other one, an 'organizing principle' of society – is traditionally thought, and often expressly stated, to have been a distinguishing feature of nomadic Arab culture, a contribution of the pre-Islamic Arabian society to the sophisticated culture of mediaeval Islam. In other words, we are usually told that in the elaborate science of genealogy (*ilm an-nasab*) we are to recognize a more refined version of a pre-Islamic nomadic tradition that was already an inherent part of the culture of pre-Islamic Arabs, a 'proto-science' as it were. Whereas no one would seriously consider the use of the term *hadīṭ* in an early Bedouin context as evidence of the germs of *hadīṭ* scholarship amongst Bedouins, a very similar anachronism concerning *nasab* is still given credit by many. As I have argued, the roots of *ilm an-nasab* are to be sought anywhere but in pre-Islamic Bedouin society, and the word *nasab* seems to have originally expressed a concept fundamentally different from that it has come to signify.

APPENDIX

1 (al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* XX, 173):

وحدثني الفتح غلام أبي تمام الطائي {...} فقال سألت مولاي أبا تمام عن نسب دعبل فقال هو دعبل بن علي الذي يقول ضحك المشيب برأسه فيكى...

²¹ The issue of *hadīṭ* is by now too well known to need much comment. On the varying implications of *rāwī*, cf. Zwettler 1978:85-88; aš-Salqānī 1977:72, 90.

²² Cf. the names listed in Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Qussās*.

This was narrated to me by al-Faḥḥ, the servant-boy of Abū Tammām at-Tā'ī: 'I asked my master Abū Tammām about the *nasab* of Di'bil [al-Ḥuzā'ī], and he told me that he had been Di'bil b. 'Alī, the author of [the well-known line of poetry]: "With all the greyness on his head laughing, he could not but weep".'

2 (Ibn Qutayba, *Šī'r* 111):

يقول النصف من نسبي في خير عيس وأحصي النصف الآخر وهو نسبه في السودان بالسيف...
[ʿAntara b. Šaddād] means [by the previously cited line of his poem]: 'half of my *nasab* connects me to the very best of the 'Abs tribe, while I protect the other half of it' – that is his *nasab* among the Black Africans – 'with my sword...'

3 (al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* IV, 4):

كان كيسان جدهم هذا يتيماً صغيراً يكفله قرابة له من عنزة فسياه خالد مع جماعة صبيان من أهلها فوجته بهم إلى أبي بكر فوصلوا إليه [...] فجعل أبو بكر رضي الله عنه يسأل الصبيان عن انسابهم فيخبره كل واحد بمبلغ معرفته حتى سأل كيسان فذكر له أنه من عنزة...

This Kaysān – their ancestor – had been orphaned as a small child and was brought up by some of his relatives from the 'Anaza tribe. Now, he and a group of children from that area got captured by Ḥālid [b. al-Walid], who sent them to Abū Bakr. On reaching him, [...] the children were interrogated by Abū Bakr about their respective *nasabs*, every child telling him as much as he knew. He finally asked Kaysān, who informed him that he was from the 'Anaza tribe...

4 (Abū 'Ubayda, *Ayyām* 274-275):

ثم إن بني عيس ارتحلوا عن بني عامر فساروا يريدون بني تغلب فأرسلوا اليهم أن أرسلوا الينا وقد أرسل اليهم بنو تغلب بثمانية عشر راجياً فيهم ابن الخمس التغلبي قاتل الحارث بن ظالم وفرح بهم بنو تغلب وأعجبهم ذلك فلما أتى الوفد بني عيس قال لهم قيس انتسيبوا نعرفكم فانتسيبوا حتى مر بابن الخمس فقال أنا ابن الخمس...

Then the *Banū 'Abs* tribe packed up and left the [territory of] the *Banū 'Amir* for [that of] the *Banū Taglib*, to whom they sent a message requesting that a delegation [from the *Taglib*] be sent to meet them. And the *Taglibites* did send eighteen horsemen, among whom was Ibn al-Ḥims at-Taglibī, the killer of al-Ḥāriṭ b. Zalim. The *Taglibites* were quite glad [to meet] them; and when the delegation reached the *Banū 'Abs*, Qays asked them: 'Please tell us your *nasabs*, so that we could know you.' Thereupon they gave their respective *nasabs*. When it was Ibn al-Ḥims' turn, he said: 'I am Ibn al-Ḥims.'

5 (al-Maqdisī, *Istibsār* 66-67):

وروي عن الربيع أنها قالت كانت أسماء بنت مخزبة تباع العطر في المدينة {...} فدخلت علي ومعهما عطرها فسألتني فانتسبت لها فقالت أنت بنت قاتل سيده تعني أبا جهل فقلت بل أنا ابنة قاتل عميده...

The following is narrated from ar-Rubayya: 'Asmā' bt. Muḥarriba used to peddle perfumes in Medina [...]. One day, she came to my house, carrying her perfumes, and asked me [who I was]. I told her my *nasab*, to which she reacted thus: "You are,

then, the daughter of him who murdered his master", alluding to Abū Ġahl. I replied: "I would rather say I am the daughter of him who murdered his slave!"

6 (al-Ibṣīhī, *Mustatraf* 29):

وقحكى أن رجلاً تكلم بين يدي المأمون فأحسن فقال ابن من أنت قال ابن الأدب يا أمير المؤمنين قال نعم النسب انتسبت إليه...

There is a story that a man delivered an impeccably composed speech in front of [the caliph] al-Ma'mūn. The latter asked him whose son he was, and he replied: 'I am the son of erudition (*adab*), oh Commander of the Faithful.' [al-Ma'mūn] said: 'What a splendid *nasab* you have given yourself!'

7 (Qurān, 23:101):

فإذا نُفخ في الصور فلا أنساب بينهم يومئذ ولا يتساءلون

When the trumpet is blown, that day there shall be no *nasabs* [to connect anyone to anyone]; and no one shall ask about anyone else.

8 (al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* I, 353-354):

إنما يهتر إذا عشق من انتسب عذرياً فأما أنت فما لك ولهذا...

A man who is deeply in love only loses his senses if his *nasab* links him to the 'Uḏra tribe; so what on earth do you have to do with all this!'

9 (al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* I, 308-309):

حدثني اسحاق بن يعقوب العثماني مولى آل عثمان عن أبيه قال [...] كنت جالساً أيام الحج فما إن دريت إلا برجلٍ على راحلةٍ على رحل جميل وأداة حسنة معه صاحب له على راحلة قد جنب إليها فرساً وبغلاً فوقها عليّ وسلاني فانتسبت لهما عثمانياً...

This was narrated to me by Ishāq b. Ya'qūb al-'Uṭmānī, a client of the lineage of 'Uṭmān [b. 'Affān], on the authority of his father: '[...] on one of the pilgrimage days, I was sitting somewhere when, all of a sudden, there appeared a man on a riding-camel with a beautiful saddle and nice accessories, accompanied by another man on a riding-camel to which a horse and a mule were tied with a rope. They stopped before me, inquiring [who I was], and I gave my *nasab* as a descendant of 'Uṭmān.'

10 (al-Isfahānī, *Agānī* II, 307):

فبينما ذات يوم أنا وابن ميادة جالسان على قارعة الطريق عشاءاً إذا راكبان يوجفان راكبتين حتى وقفا علينا فإذا أحدهما بحر الريح وهو عثمان بن عمرو بن عثمان بن عفان معه مولى له فنسبنا وانتسب لنا...

Of an evening, when I was sitting on the roadside together with Ibn Mayyāda, suddenly two camel-riders appeared trotting towards us. Reaching us, [I saw that] one of them was 'Windy Sea', which is the nickname of 'Uṭmān b. 'Amr b. 'Uṭmān b. 'Affān; while the other was a client of his. He asked about our *nasabs* and told us his own...

11 (al-Ibšihī, *Mustatraf* 519):

وقال الأصمعي أتاني رجل من قريش يستشيرني في امرأة يتزوجها فقلت يا ابن أخي أقصيرة النسب أم طويلته فلم يفهم علي فقلت يا ابن أخي أما قصيرة النسب فالتفتي إذا ذكرت أياما اكتفت به والطويلة النسب فهي التي لا تعرف الا حتى تطيل في نسبها فإياك أن تقع مع قوم قد أصابوا كثيرا من الدنيا مع دناءة فيهم فتضيع نسبك فيهم...

al-Asma'ī narrates the following: 'A man from the *Qurayṣ* tribe came to me, inquiring about a certain woman whom he wished to marry. When I asked, "My cousin, does she have a short or a long *nasab*?" he apparently did not understand my meaning. Therefore I clarified: "Oh my cousin, a woman's having a short *nasab* means that if she remembers a mere couple of days [of the past], she is perfectly content with that; whilst one's having a long *nasab* means that you cannot identify her unless you cite a whole long *nasab* for her. Beware, then, of associating yourself with a lot who, albeit possessing all manner of worldly riches, are nevertheless of a despicable kind, for you are in danger of losing your *nasab* among such people..."

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