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The *Sālfah* as a Narrative Genre

Abstract

The "Arabian oral historical narrative" (*sālfah*) is examined with regard to subject matter, literary style, and language, with an additional section describing common physical gestures that may accompany the narration of a *sālfah*. It is emphasized that a *sālfah* does not occur in a set canonical form and that only the events occurring in it are received through tradition. The actual form of the narrative is recreated with each rendition and owes much to the skill of the narrator and his knowledge of the events. There is also no specific register or vocabulary involved. The language is the Bedouin dialect used to its optimum degree by a skillful raconteur. Stylistic characteristics noted are 1) the involvement of minor characters, 2) the introduction of detailed information, and 3) the use of picturesque expressions and formulae.

Key words: Shammar — Ḍhafīr — Najdi dialect — heroic literature — gesture — minor characters

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Introduction

THE *sālfah* genre, though familiar to dialectologists studying the dialects of the Arabian Peninsula, may be less well known among other researchers in the area. Luckily we now have an excellent general study on the subject by Sowayan (1992) which may bring this genre to the attention of a wider public. Sowayan describes the genre as the "Arabian oral historical narrative," which defines it fairly accurately. The qualification "Arabian" is, I think, important, since the type is generally confined to the area of central Arabia and the allied Bedouin tribes of the Syrian desert. The word *sālfah* is derived from the root *salaf* 'to go before, to happen previously' and in that dialectal area is associated also with the verb *sōlaf* 'to speak'. The *sālfah* narrates important events arising in the history of intertribal raiding, warfare, rivalry, personal disputes, and the rise and fall of individual leaders, occurring mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but in some cases as far back as the seventeenth century. These *suwālif* (plural of *sālfah*) are viewed as narrations of events historically important to the society, and are felt to embody its values and mores. The characters occurring in them are historical figures known throughout the Bedouin world, and although the narratives usually refer to events concerning a particular tribe, their circulation is by no means confined to the tribe of origin, since the values they express are important in Bedouin society as a whole.

The *suwālif* operate within a tradition in which other forms, such as poems (*guṣīd*), proverbs (*amṯāl*), and riddles (*alġāz*)—equally important as vehicles of tradition—are preserved orally and passed down from generation to generation, with the editing and reanalysis that inevitably accompanies this process. They do not have a received canonical form; each narrator re-creates the composition and actual wording with each act of narration, although particular segments of direct speech or specific turns of phrase describing important phases of the action do recur in separate renderings. Consequently one ren-

dering may be far longer than another, depending on the version told by the narrator and on his personal skill. In addition, certain events in a particular rendition may be either emphasized or played down depending upon the tribal background of the narrator and feelings of loyalty towards particular participants in the action. In certain cases (usually minor) I have heard disputes, not about the accuracy of the narration of the events, but about who the actors actually were, with people claiming them for rival tribes or factions. As SOWAYAN also mentions (1992, 23), an individual narrative does not form a discrete literary unit; rather, the events embodied in it are discrete units operating in a "grid" of interconnected units, so that a long narrative is often a cluster of smaller narratives. Occasionally a narrator will be diverted by the course of events in one narration to bring in another *sālfah* which is the background to the first. SOWAYAN expresses this very strikingly:

> The narration of a *sālfih* is not a recital. It is a creative process. The linear stringing of its episodes and the establishment of connections between its events is complex and trying. The task is made more difficult by the fact that various events are intertwined like a grid, forming a complex network of episodes interconnected in a crisscross fashion. Actually a long narrative is a cluster of smaller narratives which are embedded and interlinked with each other. The swarming of the various narratives to the narrator's mind as he starts, and the disentanglement of the various episodes as they come in the way of one another and crowd in his breast "*tidāḥam b-ṣadruh*" can be likened to the flocking of thirsty camels to the drinking-trough at a water well, or as they say "*as-suwālif tirid.*" Only a competent and experienced herdsman can water the jostling camels in an orderly way. By analogy, only a skillful narrator can tell an extended, complex narrative in a coherent linear fashion. (1992, 23)

Particular events occurring in a *sālfah* are often enshrined in a poem or *guṣīdah* which is recited in accompaniment to the *sālfah.* It does not have a particular place in the narrative and may be recited at the beginning, the end, or sometime during the narrative. The poem is regarded as a seal of authenticity, since it is more permanent in form than the narrative and is not re-created at each telling, although variations in rendering do occur.

When considering the Bedouin *sālfah* as a narrative genre, one is struck by the existence of a definite style, characteristic of the genre,

which some raconteurs command and others do not. It is possible to hear a story told in colloquial Arabic that has all the correct dialectical features and the usual themes and subject matter, but that lacks the required style of the genre. LAWRENCE (1935, 278–79) relates an occasion where he himself imitates the narrative style of ᶜAudah Abu Tāyih in a good-humored jest at the latter's expense. Regardless of one's opinion concerning the veracity of that work, Lawrence's passage definitely catches the spirit of a Bedouin narrative (although his is a personal narration rather than a traditional story), showing in particular the introduction of incidental detail and the use of time expressions involving natural phenomena. In the following pages I hope to demonstrate how these and other features are characteristic of the genre.[1]

Having said this, it is necessary to point out that the actual form of the language used does not differ from that of normal speech in any structural way—i.e., there is not a special register for the *sālfah* that can be defined in terms of morphology, syntax, or even vocabulary. The language of the genre is only that of the Najdi dialect used to the optimum degree by a skillful raconteur. Although it may seem to non-Najdis that the language is archaic and unusual, this is only because the dialect itself is archaic, preserving many features common to Classical Arabic that are not present in other dialects. The stylistic techniques used in the *sālfah* are also used in ordinary conversation by skilled speakers, although perhaps not by those less skilled. One must see the *sālfah* in the context of a society where large gatherings of men[2] are common and where the narration of events to an audience is an appreciated skill. The origins of the *sālfah* genre are of course to be sought in an earlier time, when face-to-face contact was the only way of spreading information. Even today, though, when modern communication media are widespread, the *majlis* society persists among both nomadic and settled Bedouins, and the stories told are mainly those of the earlier period. Modern events, both important and trivial, may also be narrated in the same style, enriching the genre with new subject matter, but at the moment the majority of *suwālif* continue to narrate events of the premodern era.

SUBJECT MATTER OF THE *SĀLFAH*

It is possible to distinguish two types of oral literature, "folk literature" and "heroic literature," both of which can be found in the Arab world. Folk literature in this definition is the literature of the ordinary people, whether urban or rural, and usually deals with legendary events. These may originate in actual historical events, but are now outside the ken

of society and are not necessarily treated as "true." They generally introduce a good deal of fantastic material in the course of the story, such as miraculous events, fantastic creatures, and the intervention of the elements or the gods. The hero in these tales is very often of a knavish quality and is fond of using ruses and tricks to solve the problems encountered in the story. Heroic literature, on the other hand, deals with actual characters and events that are known to the society, even if only at second hand. Here, even if the characters are fictitious (which the society presumes they are not), they still function within a world known to the hearers, and the deeds they perform are within the range of possibility, although a certain amount of exaggeration and idealization may be involved. Heroic literature is essentially the literature of a warrior society or ruling warrior class and enshrines the military values of that group, including bravery, truthfulness, loyalty to the clan or chief, and steadfastness in difficulty. In the Bedouin context we can add to these the essential virtues of hospitality and generosity. This type of literature is exemplified in the West by the Homeric *Iliad*,[3] the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, and the Old French *Chanson de Roland*. It is possible to come across forms which mix both types of subject matter; the *Odyssey* of Homer, itself a written adaptation of earlier oral tales, is one example, since Odysseus, the hero of the tale, is a warrior hero, but also faces numerous fantastic opponents and has a wide repertoire of tricks and stratagems to help him (ARNOTT 1972, 25).

In both the nomadic and settled Arab world the folk literature genre is exemplified by the Bani Hilāl cycle (originating in the twelfth-century emigration of the Bani Hilāl from the Arabian Peninsula to North Africa) and tales of az-Zīr Sālim and other such legendary pre-Islamic heroes (all of whom are thought to have had historical origins, even if compound, but whose exploits have been embroidered and added to over the centuries). Nevertheless, the classic type of the Bedouin *sālfah* is of the heroic literature genre, where the participants are considered to be real people living in the same world as the hearers and whose deeds are possible even if occasionally exaggerated. This is not a hard-and-fast classification, however, and in fact a story can pass from one genre to the other. I have heard renderings of the Bani Hilāl stories from the Kawāwilah ("gypsies") of southern Iraq and Khuzistan which involved mythical animals—including an *irbīd* 'man-eating serpent', *āfah* 'dragon', *ḥuṣān ṭayyār* 'flying horse', and an unspecified animal called a *kumurṭān* (apparently a rhinoceros, an animal outside the ken of most Arab populations)—and in which events that in Bedouin culture would have one meaning take on quite a different

significance in the context of the story.[4] The hero in these stories, Abu Zaid, can speak the language of the animals, foresee the future by drawing in the sand *ytaxxit ibtaxt irramul*, and disguise himself, becoming at one time a Syrian doctor and at another a slave, i.e., a Negro (INGHAM 1982a, 157). In contrast I have heard Bedouin renderings of the Bani Hilāl stories that did not differ in character from the usual Bedouin *sālfah*, and in which the events were the same as those of the narration of a *ghazw* 'raid' of the early twentieth century (INGHAM 1982a, 111). Similarly, it is possible in some cases to see the transformation of the *sālfah* into a generalized Bedouin romance. This can happen when the story is related outside the community in which it originated. In these circumstances, the significance of small details and incidental events or characters can be lost, misunderstood, or reinterpreted in a general way. Thus in the version of the poem of the Shammari al-Ḥithrubi given by de LANDBERG and recited by a Christian bard of the Ḥaurān region, the stanza

lo yaᶜruḍilli lābis aṭṭōg wišnūf	Even if a girl adorned with jewelled belt and earrings should come to me,
ḥittēš law innah ᶜala rrūḥ ᶜazzām	What use would it be even if she were intent on love.

(1919, 11, lines 6a and b)

which is in fact a reference to the amorous advances of the sister of al-Ḥithrubi's host, is taken to be a general comment on his inability to take an interest in romantic love while under the obligation of revenge, and does not link up with anything specific in the accompanying narrative. This generalizing of events can of course also happen within the Bedouin tradition, so that in the same story the reference to Abu al-ᶜAuf in the line

tafrij liḥālin cinnah ḥāl abu l ᶜōf	Take pity on one who has become like Abu al-ᶜAuf.

was explained by my informants as referring to a bird with many feathers but little meat, while AL-KAMĀLI glosses it as "a small creature slightly bigger than an ant" (1964, 316). Which is correct, or whether both are possible alternates, is not plain. That the simile signifies an unfortunate state is, however, obvious in both cases.

As stated earlier, the subject matter of the genre comprises Bedouin life and the martial values that regulate it. In a great many cases, therefore, the stories involve raiding and wars between tribes.

In other cases, however, although there is a background of war, the actual events are not warlike and may be more concerned with the virtues of generosity, hospitality, and loyalty. Stories of the romantic love of a heroic character also exist, although these are not always revealed to the foreign investigator due to the protective character of Bedouin society towards its womenfolk.

As an example of the type of subject matter the *sālfah* deals with, of how it embodies the values of the society, and of the way it relates to important events in the history of the area, I present here an English rendering[5] of the story of the wife of Ibn Rashīd and the slave Ḥusain, along with a small segment of the accompanying poem.

> One day ᶜAbdallah Ibn Rashīd, the regent of Ḥāyil, was forced to flee from the Jabal Shammar under pressure from the attacks of his enemies. He fled at night, taking with him his wife, who was near childbirth, and a slave called Ḥusain. During the night the enemy closed in on them and Ibn Rashīd had to leave his wife with the slave to save himself, knowing that according to Bedouin custom no harm would come to the woman, and that the slave who was protecting her would probably also be spared. Before leaving he gave instructions to Ḥusain that if his wife gave birth he should determine whether the child was a boy or a girl and then kill it, since the baby could not possibly survive in the open desert and its presence might endanger them. Almost immediately after he left, the lady went into labor. Under difficult conditions at night, in the open desert, and surrounded by enemies, she gave birth to a boy child. The slave, Ḥusain, assisted in the birth and afterwards tore strips of cloth off the long sleeves of his clothes[6] and used them to wrap up the child and to bind the lady's stomach for support after the birth. He immediately felt compassion for the child and was unable to carry out his master's orders, but himself carried the child wrapped in strips of material inside his robes. As soon as his mistress was able to walk and when they felt that they were safe, they set out over the rocky landscape to rejoin Ibn Rashīd. The lady was weak and barefoot and unused to this type of traveling, and soon her feet became bruised and lacerated from thorns and rocks. Ḥusain bound her feet with strips of material and from that point on chose a path across soft sand, avoiding hard ground. Eventually they rejoined Ibn Rashīd and presented him with the boy, who grew up to be Muḥammad Ibn Rashīd, the most famous ruler of Ḥāyil. Ḥusain, however, was troubled and embarrassed, having been with Ibn

Rashīd's wife alone and under such intimate circumstances. Ibn Rashīd, on perceiving this, recited the famous poem in praise of Ḥusain, exonerating him from any shame and describing his flight with his mistress from Ḥāyil.

1. *irm al-ḥḍi li-mġēzil al-ᶜēn ya ḥsēn* *w-igṭaᶜ laha min ridin ṭōbak liyānah*	1. Give your sandals to the gazelle-eyed one, O Ḥusain, and cut bindings for her from the sleeve of your robe.
2. *jannib šiṭāṭ al-ḥazim w-itbaᶜ baha l-līn* *w-ugṣir xṭa rijlēk w-imš mšayānah*	2. Avoid the stony ground and lead her over the soft sand, shorten your pace and walk as she does.
3. *ya ḥsēn wallah ma lha sabt rijlēn* *ya ḥsēn šayyab ba-ḍ-ḍimīr ahkaᶜānah*	3. O Ḥusain, see that she has no shoes. O Ḥusain, her limping has made my heart grow old.
4. *in šiltaha ya ḥsēn tar mā bha šīn* *tara l-xawi ya ḥsēn miṭl al-amānah*	4. If you carry her, Ḥusain, there is no shame in it For a companion is like a thing entrusted.
5. *ya ḥsēn ma yištakk kūd ar-ridiyyīn* *willa tara ṭ-ṭayyib wsīᶜin ibṭānah*	5. O Ḥusain, only the base man holds doubts, The good man's heart is tolerant.

The last two lines are often quoted, and serve as a *maṭal* 'saying' castigating one of suspicious nature. The above is a good example of a *sālfah*, exemplifying the intimate connection of the poem with the text. It is told against a background of war and rapidly changing conditions, with the events throwing the characters into unusual circumstances from which they extract themselves by means of ingenuity and courage. Note that although the wife of Ibn Rashīd is a central figure in the story, we do not learn her name and she remains a passive participant. The story embodies the virtues of courage, fortitude, loyalty, and respect for the women of the tribe.

Literary Style of the *Sālfah*

The style of the *sālfah* is basically linear, relating events chronologically as they occur in time. Classically they set a scene in which tribes or characters stand in a certain relationship, pose a problem arising out of this relationship, then produce the solution to the problem. This is

perhaps no more than the normal storyteller's technique of introducing expectations, inserting a twist in the tale that interrupts these expectations, then by some further twist resolving it. In many cases the story is very basic and serves only as a background for the poem or poems that accompany it, whereas in others the story is quite elaborate and full of interesting detail, and is the main component of the complex. As mentioned above, a story is thought to be incomplete without an accompanying poem, which is regarded as a stamp of authority for the story. Nāyif ibn Ḥamūd al-Suwaiṭ, one of my informants among the Ḍhafīr, refused to relate to me stories that did not have an accompanying *qaṣīdah*, since he felt that these would be regarded by other Bedouins as unauthenticated. This, even though he was himself the son of a previous ruling shaikh, Ḥamūd ibn Nāyif, and regarded as an authority on tribal history.

Having said that the style of the *sālfah* is basically a simple linear representation of events, it is possible to note certain features of the genre that embroider it and lend it interest. Three main characteristics are treated here: 1) the involvement of minor characters in the narrative, 2) the introduction of detailed information, and 3) the use of picturesque expressions and formulae. These are not to be taken as defining characteristics, but are nevertheless quite marked in the genre and add to its literary character.

The Involvement of Minor Characters in the Narrative

Minor characters are often introduced into the narrative who do nothing to affect the course of the plot but who add what seems to be another, perhaps more human, angle to the story. Often these minor participants are women, relatives of the main participants, or sometimes slaves. I give here three illustrations of this. In each a minor character comes into the tale and makes a contribution to the story in the form of a verbal comment. The contribution of the characters does nothing to affect the final outcome of the story, and it is arguable that if they had been omitted nothing would have changed in the course of events, with the possible exception of 1) below. However, these characters often unwittingly make important pronouncements or augur future events. Parallel examples are easy to find in Western literature, the classic example perhaps being that of Hector's infant son shying away from his father's plumed helmet before the latter's fatal battle with Achilles. Here and throughout the article I present segments of stories that I hope constitute reasonably comprehensible units, though out of context. Reference to the source is given for those who wish to see the segments within their wider context. The translation is very

literal so as to convey something of the style of the original. Items added within the text for clarification are placed in brackets.

1) The daughter of ᶜUgūb ibn Suwaiṭ

In this narrative the Āl Suwaiṭ, shaikhs of the Ḍhafīr, are involved in a dispute with the Āl Saᶜdūn, shaikhs of the Mintifij. The Saᶜdūn enlist the help of the Āl Rashīd to overpower the Suwaiṭ. However, the Suwaiṭ are saved from murder at the hands of the Saᶜdūn by the intervention of the Ṭwālah clan of Shammar. In order to appease the Saᶜdūn, the Ṭwālah suggest that the Saᶜdūn be allowed to take camels from the herds of the Ḍhafīr as a form of penalty. The Saᶜdūn descend on the herds of the Ḍhafīr and confiscate a group of camels. However, they unwittingly take these not from the herds of the Ḍhafīr but from those of a tent neighbor, a woman of the Muṭair tribe who was living with them. The Ḍhafīr then return home to their families and herds. ᶜUgūb, one of the Āl Suwaiṭ, is greeted by his young daughter:

> When they returned first of all to their families on the way, ᶜUgūb ibn Suwaiṭ, God rest his soul, was with them and his daughter, who died only recently, burst in on him and said, "Oh father, if only you had been here." He asked, "What? What has happened?" She replied, "Because of our neighbor. Her camels were taken, and she cried out and tore her dress." He said, "She cried out?" She said, "Yes, she cried out." And he struck his hand on the camel saddle on which he was leaning[7] [and collapsed forward against it], and when they approached him they found that he was dead.

Here ᶜUgūb, a member of the Āl Suwaiṭ, the shaikhly lineage of the Āl Ḍhafīr, dies because of the shame he feels (*min alqahar*) at the violation of his tent neighbor's rights at the hands of Ibn Saᶜdūn, shaikh of the Mintifij (INGHAM 1986a, 84). His daughter, in her innocence, unwittingly brings him the news that causes his death. The death of ᶜUgūb is an event accorded extreme importance in the traditions of the Āl Ḍhafīr, a tribe that, even more than other tribes,[8] prides itself on the steadfastness of its protection of fugitives and tent neighbors. In order to visually mark their tents as a haven for fugitives, the Āl Suwaiṭ sew a small white square of cloth in the roof of the tent over the center tent pole. This is still done to this day, even though the function of tribal shaikhs as protectors of fugitives is much diminished.

2) The wife of Ibn Garmalah

This narrative involves the long series of wars between the Gaḥṭān and the ᶜUtaibah tribes to gain control of the pasturelands of central Najd. Ibn Ḥumaid, leader of the ᶜUtaibah, is struck by drought and comes to ask the permission of Ibn Garmalah of Gaḥṭān, then in control of central Najd, to pasture his flocks in Wādi al-Rishā where there is sufficient grass for all (INGHAM 1982a, 109–11). Ibn Garmalah refuses and Ibn Ḥumaid leaves the tent in anger:

> When he [Ibn Ḥumaid] left, the wife of Ibn Garmalah was watching him. She said, "O Ibn Garmalah, why didn't you give permission to Ibn Ḥumaid to graze on the spring vegetation in Najd?" He said, "Go away, O harlot. I suppose you found him attractive." She said, "By God, I was not attracted to him, but O my husband, I thought that he would come back and attack you." He said, "Go away, you have no knowledge of the matter!"

Here the words of Ibn Garmalah's wife portend her husband's defeat at the hands of Ibn Ḥumaid, whose tribe from that point on occupied central Najd and is to this day acknowledged as the most important tribe of the area. Ibn Garmalah mocks and abuses her, revealing a less pleasant side of his character.

3) The slave of the Sharīf

In this story the Sharīfs of Mecca are involved in a war in the Ḥijāz with Ibn Suwaiṭ of the Ḍhafīr. The latter, faced by an adversary too powerful to resist, sends a messenger to the Iraq marches and seeks the help of Ibn Qashᶜam, then ruler of the deserts of southern Iraq (INGHAM 1986a, 52–53). The latter asks Ibn Suwaiṭ to be patient until the cool weather of winter arrives to facilitate travel. When autumn comes he comes south to join him:

> When autumn arrived, Ibn Qashᶜam brought his army over [from Iraq to Ḥijāz] and they fell on the Sharīfs and defeated them. That was when the Sharīf said—he had a slave called Baiṣ—"What news, Baiṣ?" He replied, "Uncle [the usual term of address of a slave to his master], this is an enemy who does not recognize Baiṣ," meaning that the Qashᶜam were strangers and had not fought with him before. They didn't know him, didn't know his bravery.

Here the words of the slave Baiṣ sum up the situation, pointing

out that the participation of Ibn Qashᶜam, an unknown quantity from the Iraq marches, had turned the scales against the Sharīfs, the rulers of the Ḥijāz.

Many other examples of minor characters in the *suwālif* can be cited: the daughters of Ibn Suwaiṭ and Ibn Hadhdhāl in the story of al-Ḥithrubi (de LANDBERG 1919, 8–9, INGHAM 1982b, 257 and 1986a, 60–61), the sister of his hosts Khalaf and Khulaif (INGHAM 1986a, 50), the daughter of the Amīr of the Bani Hilāl in the war against Zanāti Khalīfah (INGHAM 1982a, 111), the slave of the ᶜUmūr, shaikhs of the Bani Khālid, in the war against Ibn Hadhdhāl (INGHAM 1986a, 78), and many others. In all of these cases the minor characters add a note of authenticity and reality, give added human interest, and sometimes serve as a mouthpiece for the narrator in commenting on the action from the sideline.

The Introduction of Detailed Information

Information is often introduced into the narrative which provides added detail on the course of the action. It is sometimes incidental insofar as it does nothing to affect the final outcome of the story, but it adds authenticity and reality, the implication being that these facts could not have been known unless the actions had been witnessed. Examples of this are given below.

1) The cloak of Ibn Ḥumaid

In the story referred to in 2) above, Ibn Ḥumaid comes to the tent of Ibn Garmalah to ask permission to graze his herds on the latter's territory. The narrator mentions the appearance of Ibn Ḥumaid at an early stage of the tale, noting his fine clothing, his dignified entry, and the way his cloak drags along the ground as he walks, a sign of nobility and nonchalance marking an Arab chief:[9]

> When he [Ibn Ḥumaid] approached the *majlis*, behold his clothes reached the ground. He was wearing robes, wearing a *jūkhah*,[10] wearing robes.

But later when he rises to leave the tent having been rebuffed by Ibn Garmalah:

> Ibn Ḥumaid gathered himself up and left the *majlis* in anger. And when he left behold his clothes did not reach halfway down his shins, which were dragging [on the ground] before. Anger carried him off.

The narrator again refers to the cloak of Ibn Ḥumaid mentioned earlier. Ibn Ḥumaid's anger is such that his body swells up and his chest becomes rigid so that the clothes become shorter and the long, magnificent cloak reaches only to his shins.

2) The horse of Furaid the ᶜIlijāni

This narrative involves a surprise attack planned by Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir, ruler of al-Ḥasa in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, against Ibn Suwaiṭ, who at that time was in southern Iraq (INGHAM 1986a, 69–71). Ibn Suwaiṭ learns of the impending attack after intercepting one of Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir's advance spies. In order to avoid facing his powerful opponent while unprepared, Ibn Suwaiṭ devises the stratagem of leaving his camp under cover of night, leaving a member of the tribe behind to tend the campfires. In this way the enemy, believing them to be there, will wait to attack at dawn as was the custom, thereby giving Ibn Suwaiṭ and his tribe time to escape. The one chosen to stay behind is Furaid, a member of the ᶜIlijānāt branch of the Ḍhafīr, who owns a particularly good horse called Mitᶜibah 'the tirer', and who can thus be expected to evade capture by fleeing at the last minute:

> When the sun rose [before the sun rose] the raiding party of Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir charged down, coming from al-Ḥasa. When al-Furaid mounted his horse and spurred it on, he found that it was in retention (*agṭat*), which means it could not stale. Al-Furaid was the owner of Mitᶜibah. When a horse is in retention, it cannot gallop at all.

At this point al-Furaid is captured by Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir and mounted on his own horse with one of Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir's slaves. Then when they have gone a short distance:

> The horse pulled at him. It pulled the reins and stopped after being in retention. If a horse cannot stale, it cannot move and cannot gallop. When it had staled and finished, al-Furaid took the reins, threw off the slave, mounted up, and galloped off. As he passed the shaikh he said, "Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir, my greetings to you. I am Furaid, mounted on Mitᶜibah." And he spurred the horse and galloped off. The horsemen charged after him in chase. They chased and chased him from sunrise until noon. They were unable to catch him, the horsemen of Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir.
>
> At dawn al-Furaid, unable to flee because his horse is in retention,

is captured by Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir. Later, however, the horse recovers and Furaid gallops off, chased by Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir's horsemen. They chase him until midday, by which time they are thoroughly exhausted, the result being that Ibn ᶜUraiᶜir retires to al-Ḥasa and gives up the idea of attacking Ibn Suwaiṭ. Here the equine technicality adds authenticity to the story and introduces a twist of suspense.

The Use of Picturesque Expressions and Formulae

These are of various types, generally comprising conventionalized epithets that refer to particular recurrent situations. They include instances of synecdoche, the substitution of a part for the whole; of metonymy, where the name of an object is used for the thing it symbolizes; and of metaphor, where a name or quality is attributed to something to which it is not strictly applicable. Also important is the use of natural—sometimes meteorological—phenomena as marking the passage of time. The presence of such set formulae in oral poetry has led to the development of the "oral-formulaic" theory, in which such poetry is viewed as being composed mainly of a stock of set expressions that are woven together around a plot or theme in never-ending rearrangements by professional bards, the composition normally occurring during the performance. This view was developed mainly by LORD (1960), following the seminal ideas of Milman Parry based on his observations of Yugoslav epic poetry.

SOWAYAN has discussed the relevance of this theory to Nabaṭi poetry (1985, 183–208). He does not consider it applicable, because of the importance accorded to accuracy of transmission in the genre and because of the absence of professional bards of the type found in the cultures on which the theory is based. The theory was evolved to account for the nature of oral poetry and is not necessarily concerned with prose, but it is nevertheless worth noting, I think, that the *sālfah* genre is even less susceptible than Nabaṭi poetry to any characterization as "formulaic." With a number of exceptions, *suwālif* are not particularly long and are not necessarily told by professional bards. Most of the examples that I recorded were narrated by ordinary tribesmen (though often of high status) who were regarded as authorities on tribal history and who had a certain facility with language and a good memory for verse and prose. Moreover, perceived accuracy in the relation of events is extremely important in the *sālfah*, since the characters and events are generally well known in the Bedouin world and are relevant to the present relationship of tribes and clans. The language is not, in fact, particularly elaborate, and the style is rather laconic and bare, with a somewhat staccato quality in many cases. Literary de-

vices and formulae nevertheless exist, and a number of examples are given here in illustration.

1) *Bairag* 'war banner' symbolizing a raid

The word *bairag* (pl. *bayāriğ*) is often used to signify a raid or attack. This must be seen in the context of Bedouin warfare, which usually takes place on horse or camelback in the generally flat, featureless landscape of central and northern Arabia. In these circumstances a colored war banner fluttering in the breeze would probably be the first thing one saw of an approaching raid, and must thus have loomed large in the minds of a people who at that time were often under the threat of attack. This device occurs in such contexts as:

yōm ftanaw wilya bērag ibn siᶜdūn ᶜalēham	Suddenly they noticed the war banner of Ibn Saᶜdūn bearing down upon them.
al-badu yxāfūn yijtamᶜūn bi-l-barr ᶜan al-bayāriğ	The Bedouins were afraid to gather together in the desert because of the war banners [raiders].

2) *Ṣidīğ* 'friend' and *ᶜaduww* 'enemy' in complex expressions

The concepts of *friend* and *enemy* are commonly used in qualifying a head noun, principally to produce an unfavorable qualification. Thus *gahwat ᶜaduwwak* 'coffee fit for your enemy' would indicate extremely bad coffee. A number of examples can be cited, such as *ḥāl ᶜaduwwak* 'a condition fit for your enemy', *binyān ᶜaduwwak* 'tent making fit for your enemy', *akil ᶜaduwwak* 'food fit for your enemy', etc. The phrase *ᶜaduww ᶜēnak ḥāḍir ḏāk alyōm* 'the enemy you loathe to see should have been present on that day' describes a terrible battle. Similarly the word *ṣidīğ* 'friend' is used negatively in the expression *kōnin ma yḥaḍurh aṣ-ṣidīğ* 'a battle at which you would not wish your friend to be present', meaning a most terrible battle.

3) Falconry metaphors

Expressions comparing men to falcons, implying bravery and fierceness, are common in poetry. In prose the most common metaphor used in approbation for men is *ṭēr šalwa* 'a Shalwa falcon'. The word *šalwa* apparently refers to a locality from which good falcons could be obtained, though I was unable to ascertain exactly where it was.

4) Natural phenomena as markers of the passage of time

Bedouins, as a people living close to nature, measured time by natural phenomena, and this is often reflected in the telling of stories. Time is not measured mathematically by days, weeks, or months so much as by seasons and markers of seasons, since the yearly cycle of Bedouin life is intimately connected with the passing of the seasons. In the summer they gather around permanent sources of water, like wells in Najd and rivers in Iraq. In the winter and early spring they spread out with their flocks in search of grazing, wherever it can be found. Thus an expression such as *ila abraḍ al-barād* 'when the cold weather comes' is more relevant to the Bedouin way of life than "in two months" or "in three weeks," since the change of weather—which will facilitate travel—is the more important factor.

Seasonal changes are not for them merely a matter of relative convenience as they are for us in the West—they are of vital importance, and the expressions connected with them show an intimate familiarity with the natural world. Examples are phrases such as *ila abraḍ al-ᶜūd* 'when the twigs bud' (i.e., in the early spring), and *ṭaggt al-ᶜūd* 'at the time when the twigs become brittle [break audibly]' (i.e., at the peak of the hot season). Other expressions relate to star lore, such as *ila ṭalaᶜ shēl* 'when Canopus appears', marking the start of the autumn grazing period and the beginning of the nomad year,[11] *ba-l-cannah* 'during the concealment [of the *ṭrayyah* 'Pleiades']', signaling the height of the hot season. Expressions relating to the time of day include *ila kisar al-fayy* 'when the shadows have crossed over to the other side', meaning just after noon; *inkāft al-gannāṣ* 'when the hunter comes home' and *ila ḥḍalat al-bil* 'when the camels come back around the tent', both meaning at the close of day. Equally, when relating a journey such expressions as *ᶜaššaw* 'they stopped for evening', *saraw* 'they carried on traveling at night', and *aṣbaḥaw* 'they were in the morning at a particular place' are immediately expressive since they relate to the physical conditions of traveling at particular times of the day.

Expressions relating time to the activity of camels and other animals are more immediate and meaningful in such a society than those that use calendrical dates. Thus the expression *ila wardat al-bil* 'when the camels come back to the wells' (SOWAYAN 1982, 62) indicates the end of the winter and spring grazing period when graze has grown scarce. The expression *tġīrūn wa hi ma waldat* 'you will launch your raid before she [the horse] has foaled' (SOWAYAN 1992, 156) is more meaningful than, for example, "within three months." The duration of time can also be related to the sun. Long battles are often said to last *min ṭalᶜat aš-šams lēn garrab maġībaha* 'from the rising of the sun until near

its setting'. A more homely metaphor for a short period is *ḥamsat ghawah* 'the time it takes to roast a handful of coffee beans'.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE *SĀLFAH*

As mentioned earlier, the language of the *sālfah* does not constitute a special register and is not distinguished syntactically or morphologically from the language of everyday speech. Rather, it represents the Najdi dialect used to its fullest capacity by a skillful narrator. Because these stories are told against the background of Bedouin life, technical vocabulary involving camels, tents, and desert topography frequently appears. This is appreciated by the hearers as a means of lending atmosphere to the tale, but it is not contrived and is a natural feature of the genre and its subject matter. Younger hearers, who may not have been brought up in a nomadic environment although they might have spent time among nomadic relatives, appreciate the authentic character lent by these features. There are, however, certain constructions and usages that are employed to a greater degree in the *sālfah* and that contribute to its effectiveness. These add to the dramatic effect of the story and have the effect in some cases of involving the hearer in the action. The following six features can be observed to operate in this manner.

1) The use of the transferred second person pronoun

It is quite common for the actor to speak as though he is addressing the participants in the narrative. This has the effect of enlivening the text, since it is as though the participants are there with the speaker. The narrator will use the second person pronoun *int* 'you' followed by the vocative particle *ya* 'oh' and the name of the participant. In conformity with this, past actions are signaled by the imperative,[12] so that it is as though the narrator is orchestrating the action of the story. This is usually done at a point where an important or dramatic phase of the action takes place, as in:

w-iskit ya bn swēṭ w ṭir minham w-injiḍiᶜ bhāk aš-šijarah	Fall silent, O Ibn Suwaiṭ, and rise from them and recline by that tree! [signifying "Ibn Suwaiṭ fell silent and stood up and went and lay down by that tree."]
w xaḍa l-jlāl w-jdiᶜu w-irǩab ᶜalyah	He took the reins and throw him off and mount upon it! [signifying "He took hold of the

reins of the horse, threw off its rider, and jumped onto it."]

The strategy of addressing the participants can also be used to mark out more explicitly the actor of the verb in a sequence where many different participants are involved, as in:

gāl: 'min haḏōla' hu aṣgah ma yasmaᶜ, int ya ġānim	He said, "Who are these people?" and he was deaf. He couldn't hear. You O Ghānim [i.e., it was Ghānim who was deaf].
gām ᶜalēh ba-s-sēf wi-ḏbiḥu ᶜammak ya ḍāri uxūk ya snētān	He fell upon him with the sword and killed him. Your uncle, O Ḍhāri. Your brother, O Sunaitān [i.e., the killer was the uncle of Ḍhāri and the brother of Sunaitān].

2) The ethic dative

Another rhetorical use of the second person pronoun is in what has been referred to as the "ethic dative."[13] In this usage the hearer is involved in the narrative by the use of the object pronoun *-k* 'you' or the complex *-lak* 'to you' suffixed to the verb. Again, this occurs at points of dramatic interest. Interestingly, it often seems to occur when the physical movement of people from place to place is involved, as in the following examples:

yġazi wi-yšīl-lak al-bērag min ǧaryah	He mounted up a raiding party and brought [for you] the war banner from Ǧaryah.
w yaṭwi bētu wi-yšīl wi-yṣūl-lak ᶜalēh	He folded up his tent and moved camp and attacked him [for you] with all his tribe.

The suffix *-k* is often used with the verb *ja* 'to come'. Sometimes the verb *ja* occurs in isolation and sometimes with a following active participle. Examples include the following:

w-ᶜaššaw wila ba xēṭān jāyyik maᶜih šōḥaṭ, ᶜaṣa šōḥaṭ	And they halted at evening and there was Abu Khaiṭān coming [to you] carrying a *šōḥaṭ*, a *šōḥaṭ* stick.

wila dġayyim jāyyak as-sēf bi-ḏrāᶜu	And there was Dughayyim coming [to you], cradling his sword on his arm.

The function of this use of the second person pronoun is to bring the hearer into the story, making it less remote.

3) The use of the demonstrative *hāk*

The demonstrative *hāk* denotes a remote object which is either out of sight in the immediate environment or exists in a previous period. As a demonstrative of reference its use implies that the referent is known to the hearer. However, it is often used in narratives to refer to objects that are obviously not known to the hearer. The function of this usage is again to form a link with the audience by implying familiarity, as though the hearer already knows the story (though in fact he may not). This is parallel to the uses of *-k* and *-lak* in 2) above. Examples include:

w ṯir minham w-injiḍiᶜ bhāk aš-šijarah	And he went and lay down by that tree.

4) The use of the "presentative particles"

In the Najdi dialects there is a class of deictic particles that has been termed "presentative" particles. These can be translated as "behold" or "lo" for general purposes. They are to some extent syntactically bound in that they commonly introduce a main clause beginning with a noun or pronoun and following a past-time clause introduced by *yōm* 'when'. The use of these particles as syntactic markers of a complex sentence involving a past-time clause has been discussed elsewhere.[14] Since the *sālfah* relates past events, these particles occur commonly in the genre. However, skillful narrators increase their use of the particles so that they appear in a wider range of contexts, i.e., not only in the main clause in the type of complex mentioned above, but preceding almost any type of clause. Again, the function of this is to add dramatic atmosphere to the narrative, to highlight important phases of the action, and to involve the hearer in the story, since it is as though the narrator is pointing to the participants as the story unfolds. Certain narrators have a definite propensity towards the use of these particles, as can be seen from the following passage. The presentative particle is underlined in the Arabic and translated as "behold" in the English.

al-amīr dġayyim uxūh slēmān ba-d-dēwān wlawinnah al-xēl jāy wila

dġayyim yamm al-ḥaram ma diri baddaᶜwah wila l-jarba jāyyin miᶜ iṯaru ᶜišrīn xayyāl yabūnu wila slēmān yōm gāl: 'ya ṣfūg' . . . wila dġayyim yamm al-lajjah wila hu jāy min al-bēt wlawinn dġayyim jāyak as-sēf bi-ḏḏrāᶜu: 'wiš al-ᶜilm'

The Amīr [at that time] was Dughayyim. His brother Sulaimān was sitting in the council tent and [behold] the horsemen came and [behold] Dughayyim was in the women's quarters and was unaware of what was happening and [behold] the Jarba arrived on his tracks and with them twenty horsemen seeking him. And [behold] when Sulaimān said, "O Ṣfūg" [the name of the Jarba shaikh] . . . and [behold] Dughayyim arrived at the tumult and [behold] he was coming from his tent and [behold] Dughayyim appeared cradling his sword on his arm [saying], "What is the matter?"

5) Use of the historic present

In a similar way to that in many European languages, the imperfective, which normally indicates a present, future, or past continuous action, can be used to indicate a past punctual. This is employed in very much the same way as the narrative imperative shown above in 1) to mark out sudden dramatic phases in the narrative and changes in the course of events. Typically, the imperfective is preceded by the independent subject pronoun and the copula *w-* 'and'. Use of the imperfective serves to enliven the narrative and vary the nature of the syntax, since otherwise in a passage relating past time almost every verb form would be in the perfective. The following passage illustrates this usage. Verbs showing the historic present use of the imperfective are underlined, as are their equivalents in English. In all cases what is translated as a past tense, e.g., "packed up," would in a more literal translation be translated as present, "packs up."

yōm samᶜah w hu yaṭwi bētu wi-yšīl w-yanzil ᶜala bn swēṭ w-yiddī lham hāḏi l-guṣīdah.	When he heard it, he packed up his tent and moved camp and dismounted at the camp of Ibn Suwaiṭ and gave them this *qaṣīdah.*

6) Omission of expected items

In order to speed up the narrative and add a more lively quality, certain verbs that can be presumed present in the meaning are often omitted in the text. This gives the narrative a telegraphic staccato quality.

The most noticeable instance of this is in passages of direct speech where the verb "to say" is often omitted, as in the last sentence of the passage given above under 4). It is also possible to omit the verb "to go" or "to travel" and allow the preposition *yamm* 'towards' or *ᶜind* 'at, beside' to imply the verb. It would seem obvious that in tales which involve the movement of individuals and groups (as is frequent in nomadic life) and where the actual words of the participants are presumed to be used, the verbal functions of "to go" and "to say" would be frequent. By omitting these the narrator introduces a lighter and less ponderous character to the narrative, as in the following examples:

arkab jēš w-yamm ibn sibhān	He mounted up a force and [went] to Ibn Sibhān.
gāl: 'wiš ar-rāy'. gālaw: 'ar-rāy ᶜala bin garmalah'	He said, "What is the decision?" They said, "The decision is [that we ride] against Ibn Garmalah."
yōm jōh: 'hāh ya walad wiš int' gāl: 'wallah adawwir-li nāgi-tin rjaᶜat xalūj ᶜala wlidah'. 'wēn al-ᶜarab'. gāl: 'wallah al-ᶜarab šaddaw ams w-agfaw min hāḏa'	When they reached him [they said], "Well young man, who are you?" He said, "I am looking for a she-camel that has gone back looking for its foal." [They said], "Where are the ᶜarabs?" He said, "Well the ᶜarabs have broken camp and moved away yesterday from this area."

The above devices all serve the purpose of enlivening the narrative by varying the syntactic structures involved. The use of the narrative imperative and the historic present, along with the omission of common verbal items, serves to break the monotony by reducing use of the perfective tense and thus altering the rhythm. The use of the ethic dative, the demonstrative *hāk*, the presentative particles, and the transferred second person pronoun serve to break down the one-way nature of the narrative by involving the listeners in the action (the ethic dative), implying familiarity with the events (the demonstrative *hāk*), and addressing the participants (the transferred second person pronoun), thereby bringing the listener into the role of the narrator.

Narrative Gestures

The use of gesture is an important accompanying parallel feature to the verbal act of narration. Since the narrative is recited in a face-to-face situation with the hearers, gesture enlivens the story and further involves the hearers in the narrative action. As with the features mentioned in the above section on language, gesture is present also during ordinary speech, but may be used to particular advantage by the practiced storyteller. Although the use of gesture is not extensive (the attention of the audience is sufficiently held by, for example, the lively declamatory style and frequent use of direct speech in a stentorian voice representing one participant calling to another on horse or camel across a distance), a number of conventional gestures are used to illustrate particular situations, as noted below. Despite the universality of gesture, the actual gestures used in a given language are conventional and not necessarily readily interpretable by a nonnative speaker out of the linguistic context. It is useful to remember that Bedouin storytelling takes place while all are seated on the ground in a rectangle around the sides of a house or tent. The narrator generally sits cross-legged, that being the most physically economical posture and the one that allows him to move his arms and address the audience over 180 degrees. However, gestures are confined to the use of the forearms, with the upper arms staying by the sides or, at most, extending slightly forward. To actually raise the arms from the shoulders and wave them around or spread them sideways would be considered a sign of unrestrained and uncivilized behavior, since Bedouins and other Arabs of the peninsula are reserved and formal in their demeanor in public and refrain from wild and violent gestures or changes of facial expression. The following is a selection of gestures that are particularly common in storytelling in that they indicate situations recurrent in the stories.

1) The galloping gesture

To accompany the description of galloping horses or camels, the two hands are held in what can be called the camel's head mode, i.e., with fingers and thumb joined together at the tips, palms down, with the wrists crooked and the hands facing forward. One hand is held forward from the body, the other closer to the body. The two hands are then moved forward and backwards from the body in unison, while the hands open and close. The two hands thus represent the heads of two mounts chasing each other, one behind the other.

2) The gunshot gesture
Here the hands portray the holding of a rifle. The left hand is extended slightly forward from the body to the left and the right hand held in to the body at the right shoulder or cheek. Then in unison the fingers and thumbs of both hands are first curled back into the hand, palms down, and then flicked forward along an imaginary gun barrel, as if propelling a small object off the thumb as in the schoolboy practice—probably now extinct—of flicking a ball of blotting paper. It is possible that this gesture had its origin in the use of the old matchlock or flintlock rifles, so that the two hands flicking represent the ignition of the powder chamber on the one hand and the release of the ball from the muzzle on the other.

3) The escape gesture
To denote a quick escape, the fingers of the right hand are held bunched together with the palm contracted, the fingers straight and joined at the tips. The backs of the bunched fingers are struck downwards into the open left palm, then flicked forward from the elbow, the hand traveling round the wrist on a horizontal axis palm down (as though throwing an object forward with a flicking motion from the elbow, with the hand turning about the wrist at the end of the cast). The two phases of striking and casting forward would appear to represent the two phases of mounting up and running off.

4) The scarce grazing gesture
To denote scarcity of grazing—an important factor in Bedouin life since it often instigates a particular state of affairs or an important political development—the right hand, again held in the camel's head mode as in the galloping gesture above, is swayed from left to right forward from the elbow, with the fingers being opened and closed from the thumb at the end of each swing. Thus the hand represents the head of a camel that cannot graze straight forward as it walks, as it would do if grass was abundant, but has to look for grass from side to side.

5) The time-and-space distance gesture
To denote that a person or event exists at a point far removed either in physical distance or in time, the right hand makes the clicking action used in the West to mark time in music. It is then cast over in a slow looping arc from the right to the left side of the body, as though portraying the throwing of an object over a long distance.

6) The looting gesture

To denote that all the possessions of a person or tribe were carried off in a raid so that, in the words of the Bedouins, they were left *gāᶜdin ᶜala d-dār* 'sitting at the tent door', the right hand facing downwards is grasped by the left hand. The right hand is then slowly pulled upwards free of the left hand until it springs out to stand vertical from the elbow. This imitates the action of skinning an animal and can be linked to the word *ṣalx* 'skinning', which is a synonym for looting.

7) The enforcement gesture

To denote that either the speaker or an actor in the narrative is obliged to do something against his will, the crooked index finger is placed at the tip of the nose and drawn downwards, pulling the nose with it. This symbolizes the ring attached to the nose of a camel or bull to lead it by force. But if the tip of the nose is tapped lightly with the tip of the index finger this indicates willingness and readiness to do something for someone. The same meaning may be conveyed by an alternate gesture, the touching of the cheeks just below the eyes with the tip of the extended index finger.

SUMMARY

In the above I have attempted to show the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of the *sālfah* and have referred also to the type of subject matter involved. It is obvious, I think, that there is no standard textual version of any of these stories, only a received version of the events. Thus in telling the story the narrator will in the majority of cases produce the linguistic text as he goes along, although there will be segments, particularly segments of direct speech, in which the same words will always occur. In some cases segments of verse or semi-verse will come in at specific stages in the text, either cast as the words of the participants or brought in as the comments of the narrator. These are usually an essential part of the story and serve, as does the accompanying poem, to add authority and authenticity.

The use of the linguistic features mentioned above in the section on the language of the *sālfah* are a definite part of the storyteller's art and also constitute the skills of the raconteur in ordinary conversation. The authenticity of the dialect in terms of usage, vocabulary, and syntax is also important in creating the atmosphere of the tale. Although the speech of Arabia has not changed substantially regarding phonology and morphology in the post-oil period, considerable differences in usage, vocabulary, and syntax may occur in speech when discussing matters of modern everyday life, particularly among formally educated

speakers. Such features are absent in a good rendition of a *sālfah*, either because the speaker avoids them, consciously or unconsciously, or (and I think this is more likely) because he never uses them, as they do not form part of his linguistic repertoire. It is important to remember that although the actual nomadic population of the area may be small and most Bedouins are now settled, they may have given up full-time nomadic life only in the mid-1960s.[15] Hence the language of a considerable proportion of them was formed in a nomadic milieu. In addition, even those who grew up in towns and villages are accustomed to spending considerable periods among their nomadic relatives and to going on hunting and hawking trips in the desert. Therefore a familiarity with this sort of vocabulary and usage is quite widespread and a tale produced in this form is appreciated. It must be emphasized, however, that this is quite different from having a special style or register appropriate for storytelling which only a professional class of bards commands. It is not impossible that at some time in the future this may be the case. At the moment, however, the language, style, and content of the *sālfah* is that of a society still within the living memory of sections of the population and the property of the society as a whole.

NOTES

1. This study is based mainly on two sources: texts recorded by the writer among the Āl Ḍhafīr tribe and contained in INGHAM (1986a), and the Shammari material contained in SOWAYAN (1992). Both of these were recorded from Bedouin informants in Saudi Arabia. Other important sources include de LANDBERG (1919), which contains a fairly long story of Bedouin origin; MUSIL (1928), which gives close translations of Bedouin texts with occasional segments of Arabic text inserted; MONTAGNE (1935); PALVA (1979); STEWART (1987); KURPERSHOEK (to appear); SOWAYAN (1981); and INGHAM (1982a, 1986b). Much useful editorial comment was provided by Saad Sowayan, who also gave valuable additional information on physical gesture and on expressions of time measurement.

2. Although most of the literature on Nabaṭi poetry and Bedouin *suwālif* consists of the work of male composers, women also have a part in this literature. Women poets exist in the Bedouin world, although they are less common than men. Muwaiḍi al-Barāziyyah of the Muṭair tribe was a well-known poetess of the time of Muḥammad ibn Rashīd, and many stories are told about her. ABU LUGHOD (1986) has described and recorded the poetry of the women of the Awlād ᶜAli of the western desert of Egypt, and points to essential differences in subject matter between the poetry of women and that of men in that area. Women not only compose poetry but also appreciate the poetry of men, and it is not unknown for women of high status and advanced age to receive poets and listen to their compositions.

3. Although the *Iliad* is thought to consist of oral Bronze Age poems written down in the Iron Age, it nevertheless speaks of an actual society and actual characters

who behave as ordinary men living under the conditions of the people at the time of writing (FINLEY 1977, 25).

4. In particular, the custom of the virgins of the tribe baring their breasts and riding in front of the tribe to encourage the warriors in battle is reinterpreted in this story: the heroine ᶜAlyah does this to distract the enemy with whom she is engaged in single combat, itself an unlikely situation in the Bedouin world. See INGHAM 1982a, 156, 161 and INGHAM 1973, 553.

5. This is not a translation but a rendering produced from notes taken down in Arabic and English in London, 1983, during a relating of the story in Arabic by Ḥamad bin Rukhwān, a member of the Āl Murrah tribe.

6. Remember here that in the earlier period sleeves were wide and hung almost to the ground, as in medieval European clothes.

7. The *šdād* 'camel saddle' is often used as tent furniture, to rest the arm on while sitting on the ground.

8. See also DICKSON (1949, 129–30), GLUBB (1948, 136–37, 150–51), and AL-SAᶜID (1986, 115). HMG (1915, 198) puts it quaintly as follows: "They (the Ḍhafīr) bear the character of being more cruel and blood-thirsty than the generality of Bedouins; but they claim a species of freemasonry among other tribes—any ragamuffin among them enjoying the privilege of protection in an extraordinary way."

9. Reminiscent, at least in part, of Doughty's references to the manner of important personages in Arabia: "Riding further, I overtook some sheykhly tribesman: seen from the backward, I already guessed him by the smooth side-sweeping, square from the shoulders, of his stiff striped mantle, and the delicate and low bare-footed gait, to be a coffee-fellow of Zeyd's:—the head is elated from a strutting breast, arms kimbowed from the hips, the man holds a mincing womanish pace. This is sheykhly carriage in the wilderness, and of principal personages. They are noblemen born, lapped in the stern delicacy of the desert life" (DOUGHTY 1964, 549).

10. *Jūkhah*, a type of garment rarely seen nowadays and a mark of distinction for the wearer. It consists of a long coat or tunic of a material called *jūkha*, a kind of brocade or silk elaborately embroidered, which buttoned up the front and was worn over the *thōb* and under the *bisht* 'cloak'. This was worn by shaikhs or famous warriors. MUSIL describes it as "a woolen jacket lined with silk worn by cavalrymen. In olden times such a jacket was a mark of rank and distinction" (1928, 387).

11. See also DICKSON (1949, 248–54) for further details on the importance of Canopus in the nomad calendar.

12. This has been referred to as the "narrative imperative" and is discussed in PALVA (1977) and originally remarked on by BLANC (1970, 139–40). SOWAYAN (1992, 46–57) also treats these features in detail under his section "Oral Narrative Style and Technique." He refers to the "descriptive imperative," "direct address" and "the *-k* of courtesy." He points out that these techniques cannot always be shown to have the function of marking dramatic actions or avoiding ambiguity as regards the identity of the subject, but can in some cases be seen more usefully as exponents of an "idealized principal listener" in a performance event.

13. See also JOHNSTONE (1968), who refers to this in detail.

14. SOWAYAN (1992, 59–65) and INGHAM (1991, 47–48, 54–56). The most commonly occurring particle is *wila-* 'behold'. However, other particles with the same function also occur, such as *wila mēr*, *wila mēr ṭari*, *lawinn-*, *win*. Among the Āl Murrah and ᶜAjmān tribes the particles *ṭimm ilē-* and *humm ilē-* are used.

15. This statement is based on information from many informants of different

tribes and from non-Bedouin informants in Qatar. One factor influencing this in Saudi Arabia seems to have been financial inducements offered by the government to Bedouins to sell their herds and build houses. These included cash offers and help in building houses and buying land.

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