EMPIRE THROUGH LANGUAGE:
AL-ḤAJJĀJ B. YŪSUF AL-THAQAFĪ AND THE POWER OF ORATORY IN
UMAYYAD IRAQ

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By

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This dissertation examines the speeches and the literary-historical figure of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī (d. 714), the governor of Iraq under the Umayyad dynasty (661-750), to explore the role that public speech played in the process of building the Islamic empire as its key ideological tool. The first part of the dissertation (Chapters 1-3) establishes that al-Ḥajjāj is an exceptionally opportune case study of Umayyad oratory. It challenges the perceived image of the governor as notoriously brutish tyrant and mere servant of the Umayyads; explains the formation of this image; and provides an alternative account. Al-Ḥajjāj emerges as a semi-autonomous ruler of the Islamic East who made use of a vast array of cultural means to buttress his legitimacy and participated thereby in laying down the ideological principles of the Umayyad empire. Ḥadīths and other sources indicate that among these cultural means, Friday speech played an especially important role for al-Ḥajjāj. The second part (Chapters 4-6) deals with al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches and, more generally, with Umayyad oratory, which has remained an unexplored field because of authenticity-related issues. Chapter 4 discusses the ideology that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches project and draws attention to their performative quality. Appendix I contains translations of nineteen speeches. Chapter 5—through a detailed analysis of ten variants of one celebrated speech—develops a method in dealing with the authenticity question and highlights oral patterns of transmission based on memorization. The oral transmission of this speech runs against the
general view that regards early Islamic oratory as literary inventions of Abbasid historians. Appendix II offers a further excursus into matters of transmission. Finally, Chapter 6 explores the practice and the developing perceptions of Umayyad oratory through different types of material in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* by al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868). This study offers an example of a memory formation in the case of a key early Islamic figure and his oratory and draws attention to the phenomenon of Umayyad public speech both as a crucial political tool in building the Empire in its own time and as a cultural product fundamental to Arab self-identification and identity in later period.
To my mother, Ludmila, who made it all possible
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I feel deep gratitude as I look back upon my years as a doctoral student. I am grateful to the institutions that made my studies possible: Georgetown University, where I did my Ph.D., and the Orient-Institut, Beirut, where I spent the sixth year as a doctoral fellow. I’m also much indebted to many individuals. When I arrived in Washington D.C. in August 2011, it was my first time in the United States. I didn’t know anyone in D.C., I had no relatives in the country, and I was still hesitant to speak (let alone write) in English. It is, in large part, thanks to the people I met on the way that I completed the program and learned to do scholarship. Many helped me immensely; others supported me with their friendship and inspired me. Most of those mentioned here at some point read over a piece of my writing, corrected my English, and shared their ideas. These wonderful people were all essential not only in shaping my work but also in helping me grow as a person. In fear that I might omit one or more of them, I sit down to write my acknowledgements.

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The last year or so of my Ph.D. was difficult as it usually is the case, but it was also filled with memorable moments. The summer before my last year, I studied Syriac at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML) at St John’s College in Minnesota. During these magical five weeks, I fell in love with Syriac (and the flora and fauna in Minnesota), and I would like to thank Dumbarton Oaks for giving me the chance. There I met Charlie Kuper, and I am grateful for his support during the last year. I will always admire his discipline and dedication to Greek, Latin, and Syriac. I would like to thank Jack Tannous for organizing truly enlightening seminars for graduate students at Princeton and for opening doors to students from other universities. I learned an extraordinary amount during both the seminar on papyrology with Petra Sijpesteijn and on pre-Islamic Arabic with Christian Robin. The end of my PhD accidentally circled around Princeton, as I returned two more times to attend the Holberg Seminar. This was a great honor and an important experience. Michael Cook in 2014 won the Holberg Prize and decided to use it as a funding for an intensive graduate seminar for a group of selected students, to discuss their unpublished work as well as major issues and trends in the field of Islamic history. The format was phenomenal and profoundly impacted my scholarship. I am extremely grateful to Michael Cook for coming up with the idea and for realizing it, and to the faculty who offered their time and expertise: Antoine Borrut, Khaled El-Rouayheb, and Jack Tannous. I attended the Holberg Seminar in 2017 and 2018 and I sincerely thank my fellow student members from these years for their constructive feedback and collegiality, and for providing inspiration on how to do scholarship: Matthew Keegan, Christian Mauder, Edward Coghill, Sébastien Garnier, Najah Ahmad, Lidia Gocheva, Theo Beers, and Daisy Livingston. I was also very fortunate that during my different visits at Princeton last year, I could discuss my work with Peter Brown and Christian Robin, who have since gone out of their way to share their impressive research and good will with an unknown grad student.
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In general, I use the Library of Congress system in transliterating Arabic terms and names, with the exception that I do not use ‘h’ for tā marbūta. Also, I transliterate Arabic names that contain Allāh as a second part in an idāfa construction as one word, e.g., ‘ʿabdallāh for ‘ʿabd Allāh.’ I do not transliterate geographical names whose English equivalent is widely used, e.g., Kufa, Basra, Taʾif, Hijaz, Iraq, Syria, Khurasan, etc.

In Chapter 5, I depart from this system in transcribing al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches to reflect their aural aspect, which is relevant to the argument I make in this chapter. For details see p. 276.
INTRODUCTION

“People of Kufa, indeed, I see heads that have ripened and are ready for harvesting. I am their master! I can almost see blood glistening between turbans and beards.”

These lines are the most famous lines of Umayyad oratory. They are taken from a speech that can be found in many medieval historical works and most classical adab anthologies. Generations of Arabic speakers memorized this speech and continue to do so to this day. It is said that when the orator finished this speech, people raced to fulfill his commands, so much that they overcrowded a bridge outside of Kufa. These famous lines encapsulate the traditional image of the speaker and his speeches: The speaker, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafi (41/661-95/714), the powerful Umayyad governor of Iraq and the East, has been seen for centuries as a brutish tyrant. His speeches have been seen merely as a string of threats. However, this image is highly reductionist. This dissertation argues that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches project a coherent ruling ideology, thereby offering an insight into some of his actual rhetoric, and that oratory was one of many other cultural means that the governor

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2 The terms ‘oratory’ and ‘rhetoric’ and the Arabic terms ‘khatāba’ and ‘balāgha’ can have different meanings and so need to be defined. 1) In this study, I use oratory, primarily, in its meaning as “the practice of public speaking,” equivalent in Arabic to the term khatāba, and, secondarily, as literary rendering of this practice in the books of history and adab. For a full definition of khatba, see below. 2) I use ‘rhetoric’ to mean ‘persuasive strategies,’ especially in Chapter 4 for the discussion of the legitimizing strategies found in al-Ḥajjāj. 3) ‘Rhetoric’ or the ‘science of rhetoric’ in the context of the Arabo-Islamic civilization can also mean ilm al-balāgha, i.e. the discipline cultivated by al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), al-Sakkākī (d. 626/1228), and al-Qazwīnī (d. 792/1390). 4) ‘Rhetoric’ is also used to refer to the tradition of Greek rhetoric in Arabo-Islamic thought; however, in this case, the term khatāba was used in the Arabic tradition to translate Aristotle’s Rhetoric. This meaning of the term khatāba should not be confused with khatāba of 1). For a detailed discussion of the terms see Philip Halldén, “What Is Arab Islamic Rhetoric? Rethinking the History of Muslim Oratory Art and Homiletics,” Peace Research Abstracts Journal 42.4 (2005): 19-38.
3 I will discuss all the early versions of the speech in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.
used to consolidate his power over Iraq and the eastern part of the Islamic empire. And so the image of al-Ḥajjāj as a brutish tyrant and of his oratory as mere threats begins to crumble. Through this case study, I aim to gain a better appreciation of Umayyad oratory. While a great deal of scholars’ ink has been spilled over classical Greek and Roman rhetoric, classical Arabic oratory, and more specifically, Umayyad speeches, have remained a neglected field. This study argues that this neglect is regrettable, as speeches were central to the project of building the Islamic empire and Arab identity.

In this introduction, I will briefly comment on the nature of sources, situate al-Ḥajjāj and his speeches in up-to-date scholarship, discuss the different layers of speeches and their audiences, clarify the periodization that I use, and finally, and most importantly, offer a roadmap that lays out the study’s organization and narrative in a condensed form.

0.1. A NOTE ON SOURCES

Scholars of early Islam have engaged in decades-long debates over the reliability of sources used to understand the early Islamic period; debates that “have hung like an ominous cloud over the field.” This study not only provides an example of accessing an early Islamic character, but centers on the elusive topic of public speech. To explain, al-Ḥajjāj and his speeches fall into a period during which no contemporary written Muslim narrative sources were preserved. All of the rich historical material about early Islamic history (0/622-ca.

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5 See more below. On the disproportionate scholarly attention to Arabic rhetoric (balāgha) vs. oratory (khatāba), and on the possible reasons for the neglect of the latter see Halldén, “What Is Arab Islamic Rhetoric?”

beg 3rd/9th cent)\(^7\) that we have comes from later compilations. Though much of this material is older, as the later sources quote earlier ones that have been lost, it is often mixed with potentially spurious and unreliable accounts or is framed to serve the intentions of the later compilers. As a consequence, some scholars, notably Albrecht Noth (see below), have seen especially the more ‘literary’ material such speeches as ‘inauthentic’ and mere ‘fiction.’

It should be noted, however, that terms such as ‘literary/historical,’ ‘fact/fiction,’ ‘authentic/inauthentic’ are problematic because of their anachronistic nature. In this dissertation, they serve as starting points and are problematized throughout, especially in Chapter 5. The blurriness of these terms does not mean that I take the charge of inauthenticity lightly. I argue nonetheless that there is much we can say about both al-Ḥajjāj and Umayyad public speech and I suggest ways to fruitfully approach the two topics.

To that end, I pay keen attention to the sources’ specificity (narrative sources, biographical dictionaries, oratory, and *adab*). Most chapters of this dissertation are case studies that explore how each type of source offers a different perspective on al-Ḥajjāj (Chapters 1-3) and his speeches (Chapters 4-6) and that develop a method to access them. Chapter 2, which places al-Ḥajjāj’s oratorical activities in the context of his larger cultural policies, is the only one that is not source-driven. Moreover, I emphasize the need to attempt to view early Islam on its own terms and to resist interpreting it through the lenses of later Abbasid writers whose accounts have been preserved. Such attempt requires detective work: listening not only for what the sources tell us but also for what they suppress and unveiling the concerns of their own time.

\(^7\) See 0.5. A note on periodization (early Islam vs. medieval Islam).
On the basis of such work, I will argue that the image of both al-Ḥajjāj and Umayyad oratory changed over time; that we can observe the changes; and that we have access, accepting a level of approximation, to the historical al-Ḥajjāj and to the social, cultural, and political function of oratory in the Umayyad society. The following section outlines the importance of al-Ḥajjāj and his speeches, reviews previous research in the two respective topics, and explains the contributions of this study.

0.2. SITUATING AL-ḤAJJĀJ B. YŪSUF AND HIS SPEECHES IN MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The Commander of the Believers, ʿAbd al-Malik, used to say: “Al-Ḥajjāj is the skin between my eyes and my nose.” I say: “He is the skin of my whole face.”

Caliph al-Walīd I (r. 86/705 – 96/715)\(^8\) Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Ṭhaqafī\(^9\) was indispensable to the caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd, as the above quote indicates. He was not only a prominent figure of Islamic history, but also of memory, as he is remembered as the villain of Islamic history. As a famous orator, furthermore, he is also an important figure of classical Arabic literature. This dissertation deals with these and other aspects of his persona: Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 cover his historical figure and rule, Chapter 3 his later memory, and Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on his speeches and on the phenomenon of public speaking in the Umayyad period more generally. This study goes beyond the confines imposed by the modern term

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\(^9\) His full name was al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Ṭhaqafī b. al-Ḥakam b. ʿAqīl al-Thaqafī; his kunya, Abū Muḥammad.
‘literature’ and takes the speeches and persona of al-Ḥajjāj as a case study to explore larger historical issues of power, culture and language in Umayyad Iraq.

Al-Ḥajjāj’s career shone among political figures of the Umayyad caliphate (41/661-132/750). This man of modest origins from the Hijaz came to rule a vast region of the Islamic empire, from Iraq to India, as the most famous and most capable governor under the Umayyads. Al-Ḥajjāj’s service to the ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65/685-86/705) and al-Walīd was invaluable. Under ʿAbd al-Malik, he unified the empire after defeating ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 731/692), the main rival of the Umayyads; he also consolidated the Empire by suppressing several dangerous rebellions. Under al-Walīd, he expanded the empire in the East. ʿAbd al-Malik’s figure usually dominates scholarly accounts of the vital Marwānid period as he and his reforms were key in transforming the caliphate from a polity managed through the indirect rule of the Arab aristocracy (ashrāf) over the tribes into a centralized state, continuing in the tradition of Near Eastern empires. Nonetheless, we should not forget that al-Ḥajjāj was crucial to this process. The governor directly controlled a territory larger than the area that ʿAbd al-Malik ruled and is credited with initiating two key reforms: the final codification of the Qurʾānic text and the Arabization of the tax administration in Iraq.

The legacy of al-Ḥajjāj is enormous. As the modern Palestinian scholar and author of the most rigorous monograph of al-Ḥajjāj in Arabic, Iḥsān Ṣidqī al-ʿAmad, noted, hardly

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10 The modern term ‘literature’ in its meaning as written texts of lasting merit, that includes poetry, novels, short stories and the like, and implying an opposition between literature and science and literature and truth is problematic when applied to pre-modern written and oral cultural production and creates dichotomies that did not exists.

a single Arab historical, religious, literary, and even geographical source is free of an account about al-Ḥajjāj. He figures prominently in works of history by al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), in works of *adab* by al-Jāḥiz (d. 255/868), Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), al-Mubarrad (d. 286/898), and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), and in biographical dictionaries such as that of Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 279/892). Al-Qālī (d. 356/967) and Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 571/1176) record titles of now-lost works about the governor and his rule by Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774), Abū ʿUbayda (d. 209/825), al-Madāʾinī (d. 225/843), and Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd (d. 278/891-2). Al-Ḥajjāj also plays an important role in the *Chachnama*, the 7th/13th century Persian (alleged) translation of a lost 2nd/8th century Arabic chronicle about the Arab/Muslim conquest of Sind. This book, in turn, became “a foundational text for the state of Pakistan” according to Manan Ahmed Asif, and so al-Ḥajjāj’s memory lives in the national imaginings of modern-day Pakistanis.

Al-Ḥajjāj has been a deeply polarizing figure from the time he assumed office until today. Most medieval sources depict him as a bloodthirsty tyrant and unjust ruler. Occasionally, however, they express appreciation for his unswerving loyalty to the

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caliph.\textsuperscript{16} Over the course of time we can witness a gradual redemption of al-Ḥajjāj’s memory, as Chapter 3 will demonstrate in an analysis of the governor’s biographical entry in Ibn `Asākir’s \textit{Tārīkh Dimashq} (“History of Damascus”). Later in the 8\textsuperscript{th}/14\textsuperscript{th} century, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) considered al-Ḥajjāj a skillful ruler.\textsuperscript{17} Some modern historians and novelists, inspired by Arab nationalism, have expressed admiration for his political and rhetorical skills and for his contributions to the unification of the empire.\textsuperscript{18} In the current official Saudi discourse and in the propaganda of the \textit{salafī} insurgent groups in Syria, he and the Umayyads are recast as positive figures and imbued with past glory.\textsuperscript{19} Elsewhere the attitudes vary; regardless, al-Ḥajjāj’s figure has become part of popular culture. He recurs, for instance, in the works of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century Urdu novelist Naseem


\textsuperscript{19} The \textit{salafīs} use him differently in different countries. In the Saudi context, the official government-sponsored \textit{salafī} discourse is favorable to al-Ḥajjāj and the Umayyads. The Saudi official ideology considers any rebellion against a Muslim ruler as a grave sin, arguing that there will always be someone who undermines a ruler’s legitimacy. Al-Ḥajjāj’s image as the enemy of the Shiites is also appealing to the Saudis. One of the academic works on al-Ḥajjāj in Arabic, Mahmūd Ziyāda, \textit{al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafi, al-muṣṭarā alayhi} (1946), which portrays al-Ḥajjāj as a political genius and accuses Arab historians of falsifying stories about him and for maligning him is influential in the \textit{salafī} circles. See for example Ziyāda, \textit{al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf} (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1995), 3-7. A prominent representative of the Saudi opposition the London-based Muhammad al-Maṣʿārī on the other hand denounces the governor and the Umayyads asserting that al-Ḥusayn’s rebellion was legitimate and so was the caliphate of `Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr. For his views see his \textit{Muḥāṣabat al-hukkām} (London: Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights, 2002) or see his discussion about the book on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= _d1TAfBcpFs. In the context of the ongoing Syrian war, the \textit{salafī} insurgent groups like \textit{Jaysh al-Islām} claim to be restoring Umayyad rule. Their leader, now killed Zahrān al-ʿAllūsh talked about al-Ḥajjāj in his propaganda videos, called to make Damascus Umayyad again, and to expel Zaynāb from there (a reference to the mosque of Sayyida Zaynab in Damascus). The Shiites on the other hand use a slogan that says “Zaynāb shall not be taken captive twice” (\textit{lan tusbā Zaynab marratayn}).
Hijazi; a Syrian television series was made about him in 2003; and a line from his famous speech is used in the title of a 2002 Egyptian novel. From Pakistan to Egypt and possibly beyond, the Umayyad governor remains vivid in people’s memory, oscillating between the two extremes: a villain and a hero.

The importance of al-Ḥajjāj’s figure contrasts with the paucity of Western scholarship on him. This is partly due to the ‘geographic reductionism’ of modern scholarship that limits the beginnings of Islam to the Hijaz, the Umayyads to Syria, and the Abbasids to Iraq. As a result, Umayyad Iraq has been overlooked, al-Ḥajjāj’s reign downplayed, and Wāsiṭ—the residential and garrison city that he built and that Ibn Khaldūn considered to have been once the capital of the empire—nearly forgotten. The meager Western scholarship on al-Ḥajjāj has followed the Muslim sources and dealt with him in an antithetical fashion, portraying him as a villain or a hero, a tyrant or a genius ruler. Jean Périer describes him as a man who,

\[\text{References:}\]


21 Mahmūd Wardānī, Awān al-qiṭāf (Dār al-kutub, 2002). The novel was translated by Hala Halim as Heads ripe for plucking (Cairo: AUC Press, 2008).


25 The above-mention Ḫūsain Ṣidqī al-ʿAmad, for example, portrays him as a figure of genius, and so does Mahmūd Ziyāda. See note 19 above.

26 Jean Périer, Vie D’Al-Ḥadjdajādī Ibn Yousof (41-95 De L’Hégire = 661-714 De J.-C.) D’après Les Sources Arabes (1904). Périer examined the classical Arabic sources about the governor available to him in his time. One of the sources that was not available in Périer’s time is Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārīkh Dimashq,
par son énergie, fit triompher la cause des Omayyades, en revanche, par la politique rancunière, intolérante et cruelle des dernières années de sa vie, il rendit impopulaire cette dynastie qu’il avait élevée et prépara lui-même sa décadance et sa chute.27

This study, by contrast, leaves aside contemplations whether al-Ḥajjāj was in reality a skillful ruler or tyrant, whether he was clear-sighted or cruel, or whether he consolidated the Umayyad rule or undermined it because, for one thing, these are not mutually exclusive. Most recently, Mohamed El Yamani wrote a dissertation (2014), also in French, in which he examined al-Ḥajjāj’s representation in al-Balādhurī, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Masʿūdī from a literary perspective drawing on Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur.28 El Yamani’s work signals that we may be experiencing a change of approach and a renewed interest in the governor after a long time. In my dissertation, I ask first and foremost how al-Ḥajjāj used cultural means at his disposal—specifically oratory and language—to achieve his goals, strengthen his power, and build the empire; secondly, I deal with the issue of how we can access this sort of historical knowledge and how it was remembered by the generations that followed, from the time of al-Ḥajjāj until deep into the Abbasid period, when he and his speeches became, in different ways, enshrined in Arabic cultural self-representation.

which contains a long biography of al-Ḥajjāj. I deal with this biography in detail in Chapter 2. The only other publication on al-Ḥajjāj in a Western language is Z. I. Oseni, *Al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf Al-Thaqafī: A Formidable Umayyad Viceroy in Iraq* (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen, 2012). It is however essentially a compilation of al-Ḥajjāj’s biographical data without critical treatment of sources or dealing with Western scholarship. Périer is, for example, not cited. Better is Bassam Darkazally’s dissertation (1977) on al-Ḥajjāj, in which the author argues for rehabilitation of the Umayyad governor. He claims that the governor has been vilified as a brutish and impious tyrant only because he successfully carried out policies necessary for the wellbeing of Iraq. Darkzally focuses on al-Ḥajjāj’s political, social, and economic reforms, and portrays al-Ḥajjāj almost uncritically as a brilliant governor. Bassām Darkzally, “Al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf Al-Thaqafī: The Consolidation of Umayyad Authority in Iraq (75-95 A.H./694-714 A.D.),” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1977).

27 Périer, *Vie*, xi.

This study, nonetheless, is not yet another biography of a great man. The view that history is comprised of the doings of great men belongs to the 19th century.\textsuperscript{29} It has been criticized mainly for not taking into consideration the effect of society on the individual\textsuperscript{30} and for focusing solely on the elites.\textsuperscript{31} Here, I use al-Ḥajjāj as a window into the larger trends characteristic of his time, taking him as a product of his society and culture. Scholarship on early Islam especially, which has often followed the lead of the main Muslim historians and their writing of the history of great men, has focused mainly on religious and military matters, while Umayyad culture has been overlooked. This study therefore contributes to our knowledge about the Umayyad period by examining the cultural side of building the first Islamic empire with the focus on speech and language. Chapter 2 especially focuses on al-Ḥajjāj’s performance of authority through cultural means. While premodern popular culture is highly elusive,\textsuperscript{32} I also attempt to go beyond the elite perspective by giving space to voices of al-Ḥajjāj’s contemporaries and interlocutors from different social groups, religions, and genders, and by paying attention to the silences present in our narrative sources. In Chapter 1, I draw attention to the silenced non-Muslim elements; in Chapter 6, I attempt to expand the scope of speech to include non-elite parts of the Umayyad Arabic-speaking society. I will argue that al-Ḥajjāj was no brutish ruler because he used a sophisticated array of cultural means. I will show how his

\textsuperscript{29} The ‘great man theory’ was popularized by Thomas Carlyle who said that “the history of the world is but the biography of great men.” See his \textit{On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History} (New York: Fredrick A. Stokes & Brother, 1888).

\textsuperscript{30} Herbert Spencer most famously formulated this critique of the ‘great men theory.’ See Herbert Spencer, \textit{The Study of Sociology} (New York: Appleton, 1896), 31.

\textsuperscript{31} A counter movement in history was the so called “history from below” that examines historical events from the perspective of common people. The French Annales school stressed the need to study long-term social history. Perhaps the most famous relatively recent (1980) example of “history from below” is Howard Zinn’s \textit{A People’s History of the United States}.

image varied from that of religious leader that he wanted to project to that of archetypal tyrant that was created by those hostile towards him and I will display how he was later partially redeemed as a legitimate political leader.

My earlier claim that Umayyad oratory has been neglected in modern scholarship does not mean that Umayyad speeches have not been used at all. They have but been mainly as a source of specific information to support one’s argument. When Umayyad speeches have been discussed for their own sake it was mainly to assess their authenticity. Scholars have paid little attention if any to the cultural practices of oratory, to its function in the society, and to the rules that governed its production and later collection. This will be the focus of Chapter 6. Similarly, little work has been done on oratory as independent literary genre. A seminal step in this direction was Tahera Qutbuddin’s article, “Khuṭba,” which offers an overview of the genre, its thematic typology, main characteristics, and an appendix with the translation of fourteen orations, which includes al-Hajjāj’s inaugural oration at Kufa. Recently Jaako Hämeen-Anttila argued that the speeches of Khālid b. Ṣafwān have an important place in Arabic literature, though they probably come from a later time than Khālid’s. The paucity of scholarship on early khuṭba especially stands out when we compare it to the considerable number of works on later speeches and popular preaching. The only monograph on early khuṭba in a Western language remains Stefan

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36 Some of the main works that have dealt with Islamic preaching are: Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, tr. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (London 1971), II, 150-9; Johannes Pedersen, “The Islamic
Dähne’s *Reden der Araber*. Dähne translates and analyzes twenty-one speeches in an attempt to create a basis for classification of the material. Not one of these was a speech of al-Ḥajjāj.

The main reason why Western scholars have ignored early Arabic oratory is its perceived unreliability as a historical source. Scholars have looked at early Arabic literary production with distrust for decades. In the case of poetry, almost a century-long debate was led about its authenticity only to conclude in a general agreement that it is a reliable historical source reflecting its time. A new and powerful wave of skepticism towards Muslim narrative sources entered the study of early Islam in the 1970s. Some scholars

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37 Other reasons have been ideological, such as that modern scholars did not consider Arabic oratory to live up to Western standards. See Hallidén, “What Is Arab Islamic Rhetoric?” Linda Jones, *The Power of Oratory*, 4-5.

38 In 1925 British orientalist D. S. Margoliouth and Egyptian scholar Tāhā Ḥusayn published two influential studies, in which they undermined the authenticity of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. These studies prodded many others into entering this debate. Most notably Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Asad focused on the transmission of poetry and argued that writing was used more than had been previously thought, arguing against the charges of inauthenticity. In the 1970s, Zwettler and Monroe adopted a theory of Milman Parry and A.B. Lord, moving the debate in a new direction and interpreting the question of authenticity. They argued that ancient Arabic poetry has to be understood in its oral-formulaic nature. Their contribution was novel because it provided a new understanding of orality as a different mode, which should be studied on its own terms. Gregor Schoeler has most recently rejected the Lord-Parry theory, adopted many of al-Asad’s arguments and proposed to view orality and literacy as coexisting modes of transmission in early Islam. For more on orality and literacy see Chapter 5.
began to promote contemporary material culture and non-Muslim sources over the later Muslim literary sources. Early Arabic speeches, in particular, have been discarded as later inventions of Abbasid historians, who inserted them into the mouths of historical figures to embellish their narratives. Albrecht Noth in his influential source-critical study *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition* says: “It must be stated at the outset that the question of the authenticity of these speeches […] does not even need to be asked: we must view them as fictions from beginning to end.” Dähne also concluded that for the most part he cannot prove that the speeches he studied were either authentic or inauthentic.

Tahera Qutbuddin has argued for the authentic core of Arab oratory based on what we know about their cultural context and thus represents an isolated voice in Western academia. She has proposed that due to the high degree of orality at the time, people could memorize lengthy pieces of artistic production; that this oral transmission has been accompanied by note-taking; and that the speeches were delivered in front of large crowds of people which makes their preservation and transmission all the more plausible. This study accepts her contextual arguments but attempts a more nuanced position, both bolder and less bold. Bolder, because I show—through a comparison of multiple versions of selected al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches in Chapter 5—that we can say more about the authenticity of

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39 Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 87. (The German original is titled *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichts-Überlieferung* and it was published in 1973 in Bonn). Noth refers here to the ancient tradition of putting words into the mouths of historical figures, which began with Thucydides already in the 5th century BC. His *History of the Peloponnesian War* contains numerous speeches, the most of them being Pericles’ funeral oration and the historian himself writes on account of the speeches that they are not verbatim records, but that they represent the main ideas of what was said and what was, according to Thucydides, “called for in the situation.” Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.22.1.

selected speeches. I draw attention to the oral patterns of transmission that they display, suggesting that they first circulated prior to being written down. Less bold, because I do not claim that these results can be applied to the whole body of early Arabic oratory. Though a few case studies cannot result in any sweeping arguments about the transmission of Umayyad oratory as a whole, they should however call into question the preconceived attitudes of Western scholarship towards speeches in Arabic historical writing.

0.3. What is Umayyad khutba?

The Umayyad khutba, speech, differed from its later counterparts. Those familiar with the later medieval world of Islam will imagine under the term khutba the sermon of the Friday congregational prayer, whose main political significance consisted in mentioning of the caliph’s name. This sermon is performed by a designated preacher (khaṭīb) and has primarily a symbolic value of confirming the legitimate ruler.

By contrast, in early Islam including the Umayyad period, the khutba was delivered by the caliphs, governors, and city-rulers. Maxim Romanov placed the shift sometime during 200/816–300/913.\footnote{Maxim Romanov in his dissertation applied computational methods to al-Dhahabī’s Ṭārīkh al-Islām with a focus on the group of preachers (mainly be examining their nisbas). Maxim G Romanov, “Computational Reading of Arabic Biographical Collections with Special Reference to Preaching in the Sunnī World (661-1300 C.E.)” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013), 185.} He also noted that the most frequent nisbas of early preachers are al-Amīr, al-Umawī, al-Qurashī, and al-ʿAbbāsī, which confirms the political character of the early khutba.\footnote{Romanov, “Computation Reading,” 182.} It also included occasional oratory, i.e., speeches delivered at the occasion of important political events, alongside the emergent Islamic ritual khutba delivered on Fridays and on the two Muslim feast days (ʿīd al-fīṭr and ʿīd al-adḥā).
Friday *khutba* had become, by the Umayyad times, a crucial means to channel imperial ideology to the Muslim elite. Each Friday, Muslim male inhabitants of the cities would gather to listen to the Friday sermon, which was—at least occasionally—delivered by the effective ruler of the given city, in contrast to later periods when designated preachers fully took over this function. In a world without newspapers or Internet, the Friday *khutba*—with its unvarying regularity and authoritative nature—represented the most important source of authoritative news and religious and political instruction.

Chapter 6 will show that the Umayyad *khutba* was not limited to the mosque or to the caliphs, governors, and city-rulers. Speeches were performed at various places, in the mosque from the pulpit, to be sure, but also in a ḥalqa, at the court and in the caliph’s antechamber, at the battlefield, in the open, and at the walls of a city. Besides the rulers, those who rebelled against them or their enemies were also known as eloquent speakers. We will also see that a class of hired orators existed who could be envoys, people who incited others to fight, or those who praised their patrons and attacked their enemies. A surprising number of women are credited with giving eloquent speeches too.

The richness of Umayyad speech is further complicated by its overlap with other forms of speech activity, *qaṣṣa* and *waʿz*. *Qaṣṣa*, to give an important example, has been rendered as “to preach,” conveys a rich variety of edifying, religious, entertaining, and exhortative speech. In contrast with the verb *khaṭaba*, *qaṣṣa* is usually not connected

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with important political leaders and rulers but rather with scholars and pious men. The term "Waʿẓ" or mawʿīza (the related verb rarely appears) conveys the meaning of a pious sermon that could be performed by people from both upper and lower classes of society. It appears that already in the early period, quṣṣāṣ and wuʿʿāẓ could be appointed to their office by authorities. As Linda Jones has pointed out, the boundaries between khuṭba, qāṣṣ, and wuʿʿāẓ are not strict.

This is not surprising as most of our definitions come from a later period when scholars were narrating and organizing the past. We can easily imagine that similar actions could be termed differently in the early period or that the same figures could engage in different acts of public speech, as sources like al-Jāḥiz’s corroborate in many instances.

The thematic and functional range of khuṭba is wide. "Khuṭba could be translated as exhortation, admonitions, sermon, homily, debate, and speech," explains Tahera Qutbuddin, who has provided a detailed typology of the early Islamic khuṭba in her

45 Among the 109 quṣṣāṣ that Armstrong collected, where Armstrong conflates between instances of qāṣṣ and quṣṣāṣ (i.e., a mention of qāṣṣ in relationship to any figure would render that figure a qāṣṣ) there are only four of such political leaders: Prophet Muhammad, the caliph Abū Bakr, the tribal leader Abū Sufyān, the general and governor ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ.

46 Armstrong cites a number of cases where the sources mention that someone was appointed over qasas in a certain city (e.g., al-Julāḥ in Alexandria) or that someone was a qāṣṣ of a certain mosque or a city (Ibn Abī al-Sāʾīb in Medina). Likewise, someone could be called the wāʿiz of a city (Bilāl b. Saʿd al-Ashʿarī in Damascus). See Armstrong, Quṣṣāṣ, 285-314. It should be noted however that the professional wuʿʿāẓ are more widespread in later period.

47 See Jones, Power of Oratory, 10 and esp. Chapter 6. She counters the usual division of preaching into the official khuṭba and the popular forms of preaching found in Swartz and Pedersen. Merlin Swartz, “Arabic Rhetoric and the Art of Homily in Medieval Islam,” in Religion and Culture in Medieval Islam, eds. R. G. Hovannisian and G. Sabbagh, 39-65 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Johannes Pedersen, “The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher,” Die Welt des Islams 2 (1932), 215-31. Al-Jāḥiz’s treatment of the topic confirms their fluid nature, when he mentions, for example, that a Muʿtazilite of his time named al-Fadl was the most skilled man in oratory (akhtab al-nāṣ), but also later referred to him as a mutakallim and a qāṣṣ, a theologian and a preacher. Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:306. Al-Jāḥiz also mentions numerous other people who were wāʿiz, khaṭīb, qāṣṣ.
foundational article.  

Albrecht Noth has created a thematic typology that helps to appreciate the variety of early Islamic khutba.

1. Caliph’s speech to a departing army
2. Waṣīya (Testament).
3. Oration in the mosque
4. A caliph receiving his bay’a (acclamation) from the people
5. Orations offering a specifically Islamic link between religious trains of thought and very concrete practical instructions.
6. Army leaders and tribal chiefs igniting the enthusiasm of their warriors, before or during battle.
7. The theory of state.
8. Speeches detailing the views of supporters and opponents.
9. Speeches with a legal content.

Given the complexity and variety of early Islamic khutba, it is beneficial to explain how I understand the term. My definition of khutba is organized according to the three elements of speaking: the speaker, the audience, and the speech. Here are the criteria, which—when taken together—define early khutba:

Definition of khutba based on speaker, audience, and speech

Speaker: The speaker is distinguished physically from his or her audience. Muslim sources make an exceptional emphasis on pairing the verb khaṭaba with the act of standing up or ascending the pulpit (e.g., qāma khaṭīban, qāma fa-khaṭaba, ṣaʿida al-minbar wa-khaṭaba, …). His position on the pulpit physically removes the speaker from his or her audience and lend him or her higher authority.

Audience: The audience is expected to be silent and to either act (e.g., go to fight) or change its state of mind (e.g., become afraid). The audience is not expected to respond

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or engage in a conversation as in a dialogue (*munāẓara*). In fact, according to some medieval scholars, silence is mandatory during the Friday sermon.

**Speech:** A) The speech is filled with formulaic structural elements. For example, it has an introductory praise section (*taḥmīd*)\(^{50}\) where the speaker praises God with a Qurʾān-inspired line. The fact that *taḥmīd* was a fixed element of the early *khūṭba* is most clearly evidenced by the famous *khūṭba* by Ziyād b. Abīh, which was labeled in the books of history and *adab* as al-Batrāʾ, “Amputated,” precisely because it lacked the *taḥmīd*. It is also obvious from the fact that historical and *adab* sources endlessly repeat before each *khūṭba* that the speaker “praised God and lauded Him and then he said” (*fa-hamida Allāh wa-athnā ‘alayhi thumma qāla...*). The formula *‘ammā ba’d* is also present in most *khūṭbas*.

B) The speech is serious and deals with important matters. The root *kh-t-b* can also refer to “a great thing or affair,” which may be connected with the seriousness of most *khūṭbas*. This condition would thus exclude some *qaṣṣ* sessions that would be of entertaining character. C) The speech is, predominantly, in prose although it often includes Qurʾānic verses or poetry.

This definition includes *khūṭba* as well as well as some types of *qaṣṣ* and *waʿẓ* as it also should because these categories in early Islamic were rather fluid, as we have said. As this study explores the mechanisms of how power is *performed* through speech, my main focus here is on political speech, or better said, on speech that aims at direct political effect. This can be achieved either by the high authority of the speaker or by a hired person who

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targets a concrete political goal. For this reason, a qāṣṣ or wāʾiz who centered on the importance of the afterlife would be outside of the scope of this study, but al-Ḥajjāj speaking on these topics falls in it because of the authority of his office and so does a hired orators who disseminated his speeches.

0.4. EXPANDED AUDIENCES: ADDRESSED, INVOKED, AND LITERARY

The role of speech in a society is intimately connected with how others perceive it. A speech that is meant to persuade, change people’s mind, and prompt them to action is useless without an audience. This study turns its attention to audiences and examines how they perceived public speech and how their perception changed over time. Here, I want to make explicit the different audiences of the Umayyad speeches that I consider. To that end, we need to expand our understanding of audience. By audience I do not mean only the crowds gathered in front of the speakers, but also those who heard their speeches from transmitters or read them in manuscripts. I am not interested only in the immediate effect of the speeches, but also in their transmission through generations long after the time of their first delivery. In the field of Islamic studies, Konrad Hirschler has done important work on the topic of reading practices in medieval Egypt and Syria (mid-6th/12th to mid-7th/13th c.), tracing the increase of the written word and its spread among non-elite groups.51 Schoeler described a similar trend of popularization of readership in the 3rd/9th century.52 However, we know little about audiences in the early period. Unfortunately, the absence

of manuscripts does not allow us to apply Hirschler’s methods (e.g., study of samāʿāt) and thus we have to rely on later historical and literary records relevant to the practice of oratory. In the field of rhetoric and communication, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford made a distinction between “audience addressed” and “audience invoked,” between the audience physically present to the speaker’s performance and the audience that the orator considers while speaking. Philip Forness has recently applied this distinction to the homilies of the 5th-century Syriac author Jacob of Serugh, including the written transmission of his homilies, as his “audience invoked.”

The question that arises is whether al-Ḥajjāj and other Umayyad orators took deliberate action to disseminate their speech. The traditional view of Arab speeches, as we will note with al-Jāḥiẓ, stresses their immediate, improvised, spontaneous nature, which, at first glance, precludes much deliberation about transmission. I will argue that the Umayyad orators-leaders did have transmission in mind and that the fetishization of improvisation was partially a myth, and a common topos well known in classical and medieval rhetoric, tied to the higher orality of the pre-modern world. I will argue that speeches were memorized, written down and transmitted both through institutional and non-institutional channels. As I prove in Chapter 5, al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches show signs of oral

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54 Philip Forness, Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East: A Study of Jacob of Serugh, Forthcoming.
56 This goes back to the key role of memory. People were able to memorize large portions of material, which was then readily at their disposal.
composition and transmission, and as I show in Chapter 6 the sources record instances of people hired to do record them in memory and to disseminate them. The audience who would hear the speeches second-hand would be then the “audience invoked.”

Finally, we will add another type of audience to the Ede-Lunsferd typology, an unintended one—the readership of the Abbasid works of *adab* and history. I will call it the “literary audience,” because in the approximately 150 years that had passed between al-Ḥajjāj and al-Jāḥiẓ, a new ‘writerly’ culture had boomed that took great pains to preserve Umayyad memories.58

The situation of oratory can be compared with that of poetry. Suzanne Stetkevych has argued that the transition from a predominantly oral Jāhilī tradition to a predominantly written one in the Abbasid period caused a “radical change in the role of poetry.”59 According to her, the meter and rhyme as well as the ‘rhetorical’ devices (*istiʿāra*, *tajnīs*, etc.) originally had mainly a mnemonic function and poetry served to preserve information. In the Abbasid period, however, the rhetorical devices became functionally redundant and poetry became ‘an expression of cultural identity.’60 In my analysis of the Inaugural speech (Chapter 5), I will show that the transmission of oratory and poetry displays similarities. I will highlight the characteristics of oratory that point to a mnemonic function and argue that Umayyad oratory acquired new meanings in the Abbasid period, also tied to Arab


60 See Part 1 in S. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām*. 
cultural identity. Having examined the different perception of oratory (Chapter 6), I will argue that its social role changed. While in the Umayyad period oratory was mainly seen as a tool of political power and medium of ideology, in the 3rd/9th century, oratory became part of an ideology—the ideology of Arabness. It transformed into a key cultural product that was imbued with notions of the glorious Arab past and that constituted an argument for the superiority of Arabs over other nations.

These three levels of audiences roughly correspond to what I will refer to during my study as the three stages of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches. This is necessary for clarifying what stage of speeches we are discussing in each chapter.

First-stage speeches: audience addressed (i.e., the actual speech that al-Ḥajjāj delivered)

Second-stage speeches: audience invoked (i.e., the speeches that were memorized, and circulated in society whether during his time or after his death, and before they were written down in books of history and adab as we know them today)

Third-stage speeches: literary audience (i.e., speeches in books of history and adab; reperformances of past speeches)

0.5. A NOTE ON PERIODIZATION (EARLY ISLAM VS. MEDIEVAL ISLAM)

As there is no one agreed-upon periodization in the field of Islamic history, I will explain my chosen terminology and the rationale behind my division of time periods.

Regarding the term ‘medieval Islam,’ I acknowledge the problematic nature of the term ‘medieval.’ Daniel M. Varisco was particularly critical of it. His major objection,

leaving aside its Eurocentrism, is that ‘medieval Islam’ renders the long centuries in which various Islamic societies lived as one homogenous block (echoing Schlomo Goitein’s plea for the periodization of Islamic History).\textsuperscript{62} This is because most historians place the Middle Ages between 500 and 1500 but not all. However, Varisco failed to acknowledge that the term ‘late antiquity’ has successfully established itself in the previous decades. As for “early Islam”, I use it to signify the Islamic counterpart of ‘late antiquity,’ i.e., the period when Islam was part of the late antique world and distinct from the medieval period. I thus use the term ‘medieval Islam’ not to paint Islamic cultures as homogenous but, on the contrary, to make a point about it not being homogenous.\textsuperscript{63} Varisco’s preferred term “Caliphate” would not be helpful in making this distinction.\textsuperscript{64} Nor would be Marshall Hodgson’s “post-axial” age lasting from 200 until 1800.\textsuperscript{65} I do see it useful to operate with notions such as ‘medieval’ and ‘late antique’ for cross-cultural comparative purposes and cross-cultural clarity.

I draw the line between ‘early Islam’ and ‘medieval Islam’ at the beginning of the 3\textsuperscript{rd}/9\textsuperscript{th} century rather than with the agreed-upon 132/750 date (Umayyad vs. Abbasid


\textsuperscript{63} Not all scholars would agree with this break. Garth Fowden has argued for a wider comparative framework (first millennium AD) to include also what he calls the exegetical and mature phase of Islam. I fully agree with that, yet for the purposes of this dissertation, I prefer to position the break based on cultural changes directly relevant to the phenomenon of public speaking investigated here; i.e., the break the pre-writerly culture of early Islam and the writerly culture of medieval Islam. Fowden, Garth. Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused. 2017., See Garth Fowden, \textit{Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

\textsuperscript{64} See Varisco’s article also for other proposed terms and types of periodization; “Making ‘Medieval’ Islam Meaningful.”

This is because the beginning of the 3rd/9th century coincides with important cultural movements such as the vast spread of literacy and book culture, the creation of a literary canon, the maturation of Islamic theology with the work of the great Muʿtazilite figures like Abū al-Hudhayl (d. 235/840), the flourishing of the translation movement, cultural competition known as *shuʿūbīya*, among others. From there began the Abbasid ‘Golden Age’ which was in many ways represents a new world in which the Arabo-Muslim civilization becomes aware of itself.

0.6. **Umayyad Oratory and Abbasid Eloquence: A Roadmap**

Let me begin this roadmap with two observations about how Abbasid sources depict Umayyad oratory and how it has been thus traditionally perceived. The first observation is that in Abbasid works of *adab* and history, *many* Umayyad political figures, such as caliphs, governors, army leaders, are portrayed as eloquent orators who delivered famous speeches. We can think of famous speeches by Ziyād b. Abīh (d. 53/673) when he became the ruler of Iraq, by Zaynab bint ʿAlī (d. 62/681) in the court of Yazīd after the battle of Karbalāʾ, by Ṭāriq b. Ziyād (d. 101/720) when he conquered al-Andalus, or of the pious speeches of Khārijites. This wide-spread use of oratory by leading political figures, as depicted by the sources, is unique to the early Islamic period, as I mentioned earlier. And so the question arises how later Abbasid literary figures such as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), al-Mubarrad (d. 286/898), or Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) viewed the relationship between

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66 Antoine Borrut has argued that alternative periodizations existed and that the 132/750 is an Abbasid construct. Borrut, “Vanishing Syria.”
67 See below.
oratory and politics. It seems that the underlying assumption is not far from Cicero’s view of eloquence as a civilizational force, which he expresses clearly in his *De Inventione* 1.2:

If we wish to consider the beginning of this thing we call eloquence…we shall find that it arose from honorable causes and continued its way from the best of reasons….a man—great and wise [the orator]…when through eloquence and reason (*ratio atque oratio*) they [the savage people] transformed them from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk through reason and eloquence.69

What is implicit in Abbasid *adab*, Muslim philosophers in the Arabo-Greek tradition such as al-Farābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037) state explicitly. For them, it is the orator, more than anyone else, who is to be credited with building polities. As already noted, most modern scholars dismiss the speeches that have been preserved as the mere literary embellishment of historical narratives, composed in the Abbasid period. Though there might be some truth to the dismissal of Umayyad speeches as later literary inventions, it does not give us the full picture as my dissertation shows. I will argue that this first observation—the connection between Umayyad oratory and politics—has historical grounds.

The second observation concerns the centrality of eloquence in the Abbasid Arabo-Islamic culture and I will argue that it reflects a later development. To illustrate the appreciation for eloquence, let us read an anecdote that al-Jāḥiẓ, the great 9th-century polymath from Basra, included at the beginning of his *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*:

It has been said to Buzurjimihr b. al-Bukhtakān al-Fārisī: “What can help someone who is unable to express himself (*ʿayy*)?” He said: “Reason can embellish him.” They said: “What if he did not have reason?” He said: “Money can cover it.” They said: “What if he did not have money?” He said: “His friends can speak on his behalf.” They said: “What if he had no friends to speak on his behalf?” He said: “Then he should be quiet.”

They said: “What if he couldn’t be quiet?” He said: “Then death is better for him than staying in abode of the living.”

This appreciation for eloquence may be a trait common to all literary cultures; it features in European Renaissance Humanism, for instance. However, in the Arabo-Islamic context, eloquence acquired a special meaning because it became an attribute of the Arabic language itself. In other words, Arabic came to be seen as not only a sacred language but also as an inherently eloquent one. This played an important role in Arabo-Islamic cultural and religious identity. The eloquence of the Arabic Qurʾān came to be seen as an argument for the Scripture’s miraculous nature, and the Arabs came to be seen as distinguished over other nations precisely by this eloquence and nothing else. Different scholars have pointed to the medieval Islamic obsession with language but even today, when Islam has become a truly global religion, Arabic still retains its special religious status. This was not a given. Compare Christianity in this regard: at least in its early phases, its adherents did not care much in which language its message was being spread.

Combining the two observations, what does it mean to be an eloquent speaker in a situation where eloquence is an attribute of the language itself? It means that the purer you are as an Arab the purer is your language and the more eloquent you are. Hence al-Jāḥīẓ said that among the ‘civilized nations’ (Indians, Greeks, Persians) only the Arabs were

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naturally gifted orators capable of improvised and spontaneous speech, speaking
effortlessly as if they were inspired:

We know of no speeches (*khuṭbas*) except those by the Arabs and Persians. [But while
speeches of the Persians are the result of long contemplation and study of books], the
speech of the Arabs [arises entirely from] spontaneity and improvisation, as if through
inspiration (*kaʾannah ilhām*). 73

Now, I kept repeating “came to be seen” to emphasize the second observation: that this
ideology around eloquence and language with so-to-speak ‘nationalistic’ and religious sub-
tones emerged gradually, and that it was fully formulated only in the Abbasid period. In
this dissertation, I show that much confusion is caused by mixing of the two observations.
To repeat, while I argue that the Abbasid view of Umayyad period as the golden age of
political oratory is historically grounded, I maintain that this second view is a post-
Umayyad development. And so, Umayyad oratory should be seen primarily in its own
terms, as a powerful political tool in its time.

Al-Ḥajjāj is one of the most famous Umayyad orators. And aside from his famous
speech, he is a fascinating character in himself, as this introduction and especially Chapter
1 shows: Of humble origins, having started as a schoolmaster in Taʾif, al-Ḥajjāj became—
during the reign of the great caliph ʿAbd al-Malik—one of the most powerful men of the
Umayyad caliphate, and around the year 700 C.E., directly controlled half of it—a territory
from Iraq to India. I had a more concrete reason to choose al-Ḥajjāj for this study, however:
namely that he forces us to rethink the political role of oratory in his period and our ways
of dealing with literary and historical sources. To this end, we need to re-evaluate al-
Ḥajjāj’s figure, because reducing his speeches to mere threats and stylistics only underlines

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his image of a tyrant, with his eloquence being a mere function of his Arabness. Both of these images are later constructions.

Chapter 1 examines al-Ḥajjāj’s image in narrative historical sources with a focus on 3rd/9th century al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk (“History of Prophets and Kings”). While al-Ṭabarī is usually considered to be the most influential source for later writing of history, it is peculiar that in his account, al-Ḥajjāj does not have the generally agreed-upon image of a tyrant. He is depicted mainly a commander-in-chief, intervening personally in all the battles in Iraq, commanding his officials and army leaders in the Eastern provinces. In comparison, the great caliph ʿAbd al-Malik is left somewhat in the background of the narrative. Furthermore, I will point to other members of al-Ḥajjāj’s family who ruled or conquered other large portions of the caliphate, arguing that we may even be able to speak of an Umayyad-Thaqafite collaboration, which in fact was a continuation of a pre-Islamic practice.

In contrast, the entry on al-Ḥajjāj in Ibn ʿAsākir’s (d. 571/1175) biographical dictionary Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq (“History of Damascus”), which forms the core source for Chapter 3, provides a very different picture from al-Ṭabarī’s account. The biographical entry consists of 234 reports (akhbār) about al-Ḥajjāj. These akhbār at first glance seem to be rather loosely arranged together, following a rough chronological division. Instead of focusing on al-Ḥajjāj’s political actions, his conquests, and his participation in battles—as have seen in al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh—most of the akhbār evaluate the governor morally. They depict him as an unbeliever (kāfir), accuse him of blasphemy, describe his torture of pious men, and recount that the Prophet Muḥammad himself had foretold the governor’s rule, referring to him as the ‘Destroyer.’ I will argue that these accounts originated as part
of an anti-Ḥajjāj propaganda and later transformed him into the archetypal tyrant and sinner. Due to Ibn ʿAskir’s meticulous recording of the chains of transmission (asānīd) for each report (khabar), we can even trace how the image changed, because the asānīd reveal in which circles the stories circulated, which in turn can give us insights into the motivations behind their transmission. Moreover, I will argue that the organization of the eighty-nine-page long entry by Ibn ʿAsākir himself shows another, later stage in the development of al-Ḥajjāj’s image which points to his gradual rehabilitation. A strategy that Ibn ʿAsākir uses throughout the entry, as I will show, is to first present contrasting evidence but end the section with a report in al-Ḥajjāj’s favor. The message that Ibn ʿAsākir sends, through his organization of the seemingly randomakhbār, is primarily political—even such an unjust ruler as al-Ḥajjāj must be obeyed; and secondarily moral—even such a sinner as al-Ḥājjāj has hope for paradise. I will also explain how this message fit within Ibn ʿAsākir’s contemporary political and cultural context.

The analysis that I carry out in Chapter 3 of Ibn ʿAsākir’s entry on al-Ḥajjāj renders another important finding which directly relates to al-Ḥajjāj’s activities as public speaker. The entry’s organization suggests that Ibn ʿAsākir considered the gravest sin of al-Ḥajjāj to be his religious innovation (bidʿa) which consisted in the postponement of the Friday prayer. Digging deeper, especially into hadīth material, this enigmatic accusation turns out to be connected to an Umayyad-era controversy of prolonged Friday speeches. This controversy at whose center stood the very al-Ḥajjāj constitutes perhaps the most important evidence for the political and religious importance of Friday speeches in the Umayyad period and for the centrality of al-Ḥajjāj in Umayyad public speaking—not as a literary construction but as an Umayyad reality.
Furthermore, I argue in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 that al-Ḥajjāj’s oratorical endeavors must be seen in their cultural context. In Chapter 1, I place them in the context of the rich late antique heritage of public speaking in the same region that the Arabs came to govern, which additionally strengthens the argument that the repeated mentions of orators and speeches in later historical sources to which I point are not mere literary tropes. In Chapter 2, I place al-Ḥajjāj’s public speaking in the context of the cultural means and policies through which he attempted to legitimize his power in Iraq; to construct his authority; and to compete against other segments of the multicultural Empire. Among these cultural means and policies were: the foundation of al-Ḥajjāj’s own city Wāsiṭ in place of the city of Kashkar, an ancient Christian center of learning—to send a message of dominance to both Muslims and non-Muslims; his efforts to meddle with the codification of the Qurʾān to curb the influence of the Kufan religious authorities; his use of Arabic in administration as the symbol of the Empire, targeted both at Arabs and others; and his use of poets that would liken his mission to that of the Qur’ānic prophets and depict him as the guardian of public order. In this way, the image of a brutish tyrant ruling through sheer force falls apart as a later constructed memory.

To recapitulate, in the first part of the dissertation (Chapters 1-3), we see the image of al-Ḥajjāj transform in different ways. It begins with the traditional medieval images of him as a tyrant and servant of the Umayyads and concludes that these are mere narrative strategies of later authors aimed at either vilifying al-Ḥajjāj or deflecting the blame from the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. Al-Ḥajjāj emerges as a semi-autonomous ruler of the Islamic East who employed cultural mechanisms to portray himself as an Islamic religious leader and inheritor of more ancient Near Eastern traditions. The first part in this way prepares
grounds for understanding al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory as part of these cultural efforts and adds much needed nuance to the image of the governor, who, rather than being a brutish tyrant, governed through a sophisticated mix of soft and hard power. Furthermore it follows the later legacy of the persona and speeches of al-Ḥajjāj through the examination of Ibn ʿAsākir’s entry, which reveals—despite hints at a gradual political rehabilitation—the deep-rootedness of the governor’s image as an impious sinner as well as the central place of al-Ḥajjāj’s oratorical activities in it. Furthermore, the first part exemplifies that any strict dichotomy between ‘literary’ and ‘historical’ sources is misleading. That is, the different images and later ‘literary depictions’ of al-Ḥajjāj come from what we would generally call ‘historical sources.’ Once this dichotomy collapses, we can be more open to listening to what ‘literary’ material can tell us about ‘history,’ for it was precisely due to their ‘literariness’ and perceived inauthenticity (a scholarly opinion that I term the ‘rhetorical speeches hypothesis’) that early Islamic speeches have been neglected in modern scholarship. A rejection of these dichotomies is what motivates and underlies the dissertation’s second part (Chapter 4-6), which focuses on al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches and Umayyad oratory more broadly.

Chapter 4 analyzes the contents of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches and the ideas that they project. The main corpus consists of nineteen speeches, which have been preserved in different 3rd/9th century works of adab and history (and are thus third-stage speeches, see section “Expanded audiences” above) and whose translations are available in Appendix 1. This chapter shows that the speeches are more than strings of threats. Although collected from different sources, they project a coherent religious rhetoric centered around the idea of obedience to the ruler as a religious duty, the caliphs as direct representatives of God,
and the governor as the instrument of both God and the divinely appointed caliph. They employ strategies of mythic concordance that allegorically connect al-Ḥajjāj with previous caliphs and prophets and construct an ideal social hierarchy at the top of which stood the muhājirūn, the military elite—as the soldiers of God. They seem to reflect the ideals of al-Ḥajjāj’s conquest society and to be competing against other types of rhetoric in place—most importantly the rhetoric based on noble tribal genealogies abundantly used against him in contemporary poetry. The muhājir ideology invites anyone who joins the army, regardless of his origin, to be part of the elite; a very fitting idea for a man who could not boast of any tribal genealogy or Islamic credentials. In a somewhat contradictory manner, the speeches most clearly reflect the rift between the geographical identities of Syrian and Iraqi soldiers. The fact that the rhetoric of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches is coherent and particular to his time and region and conflicts with the usual later image of him, suggesting that they may reflect some of his actual ideology and propaganda, as it was mediated by later audiences.

Furthermore, the analysis of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches brings to light their performative quality. Al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches are not merely a way to express the governor’s opinions as the ‘rhetorical speeches hypothesis’ would suggest. Some of them are carefully crafted ‘re-performances,’ that is reconstructions or imaginings of past performances, framed through narratives that accompany them and providing testimony to the performance and circumstances of the speech and to its effectiveness. The best example is a short narrative preceding the famous words that opened this introduction. The narrative describes the scene right before al-Ḥajjāj delivered his famous speech at Kufa: he the enters the mosque, fully armed but with his face hidden, climbs the pulpit and remains silent. Mark Twain said
once that “the right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly
timed pause.” This is very true in this case—al-Ḥajjāj’s silence creates suspense among the
audience, heightens pressure, and as the narratives tell us, some people even begin to
collect pebbles to throw them at the governor, to boo him off the stage, so to speak. But
when he begins the famous speech, the audience is so taken aback that pebbles fall from
the men’s hands. These are all comments on performance that the medieval narratives
record for us and that show that the speech represents a memory al-Ḥajjāj’s oratorical skills,
rather than a mere expression of his opinions.

Finally, a comparison of ten variants of this Inaugural speech from the 3rd/9th and
4th/10th centuries, carried out in Chapter 5, sheds light on matters of ‘authenticity’ and
transmission. It shows, for one thing, that the text of the speech is much more stable than
the narratives around it—because it is transmitted with an emphasis on wording and not
only on meaning like the historical narratives. For another thing, this comparison proves
that this speech must have been transmitted orally. While patterns of oral transmission can
be observed in many instances, contrasting al-Balādhurī’s version against most others
produces the clearest results. We can observe almost identical passages being narrated in
different order. It was not the literate al-Balādhurī who would make such changes to the
text. Rather, these variations indicate that different passages of the speech were memorized
and then reperformed in changing order, a phenomenon known from poetry. This analysis
has three important consequences.

First, there is the issue of authenticity. The Inaugural speech must have been in
circulation before the Abbasid historian wrote it down, and thus cannot be seen as a ‘literary
invention’ of the Abbasid historian. At this point it is most clear that the notion of
‘authenticity’ itself is problematic. On the one hand, we cannot call the Inaugural speech ‘authentic’ because we will never know if al-Ḥajjāj ever pronounced a particular speech and what exact words he used. On the other hand, we cannot call the Inaugural speech ‘inauthentic’ in Noth’s sense because it had a reality outside of the Abbasid historians’ minds—as a specimen of verbal art handed down from one narrator to another, a second-stage speech.

Second, the analysis brings to light a noteworthy fact regarding the transmission of the speech. While oratory would be generally categorized as prose, the transmission of the Inaugural speech seems to have been closer to the transmission of poetry than to that of historical prose.

Third, the analysis prompts a change of approach on Umayyad oratory. Since we can ascertain that the Inaugural speech was circulated among people and had a real existence in society (and, if we are to trust its asānīd, in different parts of the empire), I argue that we should turn our interest from the authenticity question to an examination of oratory as a social phenomenon, and ask questions such as: Who narrated a speech like this and others? Who disseminated them? For what purpose?

The last point brings us to Chapter 6, where I examine the Umayyad practice of oratory and the perceptions of it. This time, we will approach these matters not through the study of the corpus of ‘literary’ (because of their contested authenticity) speeches, but through what other sources can tell us about oratory and orators. In this regard, an invaluable source is Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn (“Book of Clarity and Clarification”) by al-Jāḥīẓ (d. 255/868) and more specifically the Umayyad poetry commenting on oratory
collected there. History chronicles, in turn, record valuable cursory comments about oratorical practices.

Most importantly, the sources reveal the intimate relationship of oratory to the performance of power in the Umayyad period, devoid of the later Abbasid dimensions of Arabness and sacredness of the Arabic language, to which I pointed in the initial second observation. In the poetic imagery, the pulpit (minbar)—as the place of the orator—becomes a powerful symbol of political authority. In one instance, Umayyads are lauded as orators and knights on the pulpit, in another, the pulpit becomes personified, having the agency to either submit to a political leader or to reject another one. This perception of oratory further confirms the view of oratory as mainly a pragmatic political tool of power in the Umayyad period.

Two findings with regard to the practice of oratory are worth mentioning here. First, we should not imagine oratory as an art that came to the early Arabs naturally, “as if through inspiration,” as al-Jāḥiẓ would have us believe. For we find descriptions—in al-Jāḥiẓ’s *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* no less—of oratorical training and of meticulous preparations made by orators before they delivered their speeches. The admiration and myth of improvisation is something common to classical tradition and modern cultures as well, as mentioned above. Mark Twain may be quoted again in this respect: “It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good *impromptu* speech.” Additionally, the records about preparation and training in oratory offer further confirmation that speeches were passed on. Second, aside from the famous Umayyad orators who were political leaders, there appears to have existed a group of non-elite orators who were forgotten; a group whom I term “professional orators.” Some these non-elite orators were in charge of
memorizing and disseminating the speeches. Others were epideictic orators, that is, hired orators who praised and blamed others. They did not enter later Islamic memory as examples of Arab eloquence but played probably an important role in the early transmission of the speeches. These two findings further confirm the Umayyad concern for oratory and its political, pragmatic nature.

To conclude, when we combine the contemporary perception of Umayyad oratory as related to power and rulership with the ritual Friday sermon, which periodically brought together the early Muslim community, and when we realize the impact of it as a weekly broadcast of state ideology, we must recognize that Umayyad oratory was one of the most important cultural forces in building the early Islamic empire and that it deserves attention as such. This recognition opens the doors to research on oratory as a social phenomenon of the Umayyad period and, more broadly, of late antiquity. The pivotal position of al-Ḥajjāj in the controversy about prolonged preaching, his considerable effort to legitimize his rule through cultural means (including oratory), and his use of hired, professional orators, all show that the governor’s deliberate use of public speaking was ideologically driven. Finally, the analysis of the re-performances of his Inaugural speech provides one important example of a speech being a part of an actual oral tradition—verbal art rather than later literary invention, as speeches are usually seen. Other speeches are analyzed using the same method in Appendix II. The results suggest that not all Umayyad speeches can be discarded as ‘fictions’ and that they should be studied as a genre of their own. Al-Ḥajjāj’s case offers a remarkable example of building the early Islamic empire through language, and it should hopefully trigger further research in this direction.
CHAPTER 1

TYRANT AND LOYAL SERVANT? BIOGRAPHY OF AL-ḤAJJĀJ B. YŪSUF

WITH A FOCUS ON 3RD/9TH-CENTURY TĀRĪKH AL-RUSUL WA-L-MULŪK BY

AL-ṬABARĪ

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The life story of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf was truly exceptional: from a teacher in Ta’if to the ruler of half of the Islamic empire. To be able to discuss al-Ḥajjāj’s use of cultural tools and language, we first need to get acquainted with his biography because it will help clarify several issues central to this study. His humble origins, for example, make for an important context to his multi-faceted efforts at legitimation. His Thaqafite tribal belonging is relevant to his close collaboration with the Umayyads. And only the importance of Ibn al-Zubayr whom he defeated explains the high position in the state that this victory brought him. Finally, his rule in Iraq elucidates the magnitude of power that he acquired.

This chapter has two parts. In the first part, it presents chronologically major events of al-Ḥajjāj’s life based on Muslim narrative sources with a focus on al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and his Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk (“History of the Prophets and the Kings”). Al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh is chosen as the most authoritative account of this period. Yet we will see that despite the influence that this work has had on Islamic historiography, the image of al-Ḥajjāj that it paints is not the one that eventually prevailed. Al-Ṭabarī’s depiction of al-Ḥajjāj is more positive than that of al-Masʿūdī and al-Balādhurī who adopted a more
pronounced anti-Ḥajjāj stance. The second part, based on the biography, reevaluates the historical figure of the governor, his speeches, and his time. In this way, this chapter offers a historical background and a number of methodological and historiographical considerations. I present two insights regarding public speech. First, I highlight the strong presence of speeches in Ṭabarī’s narrative. Second, I read between the lines of al-Ṭabarī’s narrative for evidence of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, arguing for the importance of acknowledging the shared cultural space of early Islam as the starting point for any historical treatment of the period. In the case of public speech this is especially important given the rich cultural heritage of rhetoric, the practice of oratory, and preaching in the late antique Near East.

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1 El-Yamani, “Al-Ḥajjāj.”
1.2. BIOGRAPHY: AL-ḤAJJĀJ B. YŪSUF, THE RULER OF THE ISLAMIC EAST

Table 1: Major events of al-Ḥajjāj’s life and rule

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<td>'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr 60/680 –73/692²</td>
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<td><em>Marwānid rule</em></td>
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<td>Marwān b. Ḥakam (64/684 – 65/685)</td>
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<td>'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (65/685 – 86/705)</td>
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<td>Al-Walīd (86/705 – 96/715)</td>
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<td>'Umar b. 'Abd al-‘Azīz (99/717 –101/720)</td>
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<td>‘the counter-al-Ḥajjāj’</td>
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² See below.
1.2.1. Birth, Origins and Youth in Ta’if

Al-Ḥajjāj, or Kulayb (‘Little Dog’), was born in 41/661 in Ta’if, the sister city of Mecca (62 miles/100 km southeast of Mecca), to the tribe of Thaqīf. Already in pre-Islamic times the ruling tribes of the two cities, Quraysh and Thaqīf, kept close relationships (through trade and intermarriage). This collaboration is significant because it continued and flourished especially under the Umayyads (a clan of Quraysh). I will argue that we can even speak of an Umayyad-Thaqafite Empire during the rule of al-Ḥajjāj.

The genealogy of Thaqīf is unclear. Of the different theories about the origin of Thaqīf, one is especially relevant because it was abundantly used in later ideological campaigns against the governor. This is the alleged connection of Thaqīf to Thamūd, the ancient tribe whose existence is attested already in the 8th century BC and that is mentioned in the Qur’ān as a deterring example of people annihilated by God for their disobedience. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), the famous religious authority of Basra reportedly had to escape from the governor precisely in relation to a comment he made about al-Ḥajjāj’s Thamūdic connection. What complicated things for al-Ḥajjāj, even more than this alleged

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3 The nickname Kulayb survives in many sources and some say that this is the name that his mother gave him. An anonymous poet comments on al-Ḥajjāj’s profession as a schoolmaster and his nickname Kulayb in al-Mubarrad, Kāmil, 2:79 Bar Hebreus records that when al-Ḥajjāj was about to die from tuberculosis (sill), he asked his astrologer: “Can you see that a king will die?” The astrologer replies to him: “Yes, I see that a king, whose name is Kulayb, will” whereupon al-Ḥajjāj exclaims: “Indeed, I am Kulayb; that is how my mother named me.” al-Ḥajjāj has the astrologer beheaded, and himself dies soon afterwards. Ibn al-ʿIbrī, Tārīkh mukhtasar al-diwal, ed. Anṯūn Ṣāliḥ Ān (Beirut: Dār al-Sharq, 1992), 113. For references to other sources that recount the incident such as Ibn Qutayba, Maʿārif or Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, Ḥqd see Périer, al-Ḥadidād, 6, n.2.

4 In the Qur’ān Ta’if is mentioned along with Mecca as “the two cities,” (qaryatān). See Q 43:31.


6 See al-ʿAmad, al-Ḥajjāj, 77-82.


8 Ibn al-Kalbī tells us that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī challenged al-Ḥajjāj’s argumentation that he must be from the good people from Thamūd who survived. This may reflect al-Ḥasan’s rhetoric used against al-Ḥajjāj. It was also the reason, we read, why al-Ḥasan had to hide from the governor the latter died. Al-ʿIṣfāhānī, Kitāb al-Aghānī (Cairo: Al-Hay’a al-Miṣrīya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1927-1974), 4:303. On al-
Thamūdic connection, was the fact that his family did not rank high in the Thaqafite tribal hierarchy. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih and Ibn al-Athīr record that al-Ḥajjāj’s ancestors carried stones on their backs and dug wells with their own hands. Not much is known about his father, Yūsuf b. al-Ḥakam, except that he fought in the army of Marwān al-Ḥakam and worked as a schoolmaster in Taʿíf. Al-Ḥajjāj’s mother was named al-Fāri’a and before Yūsuf, she had been married to al-Mughīra b. Shu’ba, the companion of the Prophet and later governor of Kufa. The two divorced, if we were to believe the sources, because of her poor hygiene. Al-Ḥajjāj had a brother, Muḥammad, who would become the governor of Yemen, and a sister, Zaynab.

The humble origins were repeatedly used in the contemporary propaganda against him. During the most dangerous rebellion that al-Ḥajjāj had to tackle, the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath, a descendent of the kings of Kinda, the poet Aʿshā Hamdān compared the ancestry of the two rivals in this way:

May God and the glory of Ibn Muḥammad (i.e., Ibn al-Ashʿath)
And his kingly ancestors from the time before the Thamūd
Forbid that you become familiar with the reprehensible folk
Whose roots, when they are traced, are roots of slaves.


9 Périer, Vie, 4; Dietrich, “Hadjdjāj,” EI2.
10 Ziyāda, al-Ḥajjāj, 12, n.2.
11 Périer, Vie, 6.
12 Her full name was Fāri’a bint Hammām b. ʿUrwa b. Masʿūd al-Ṭhaqafī.
13 Mughīra is said to have divorced Fāri’a because he saw once that she had food left in her teeth. The account should however be understood to be more more critical of Mughīra himself than of his wife because it tells us that he immediately regretted his decision. He foresaw that she would bear a future ruler. The account further confirms his prophetic vision when it tells us that Yūsuf, al-Ḥajjāj’s father dreamt on his wedding night that he impregnated his wife with a “destroyer (mubīr).” The story, thus, despite its initial entertaining tone, expresses a mixed feeling of dread and reverence for both al-Ḥajjāj and his mother. See Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 12:116.
15 Al-İṣfahānī, Aghānī, 6:46.
The poet, who was one of the main spokespeople of the rebellion, presents the discrepancy between the two men and their armies as so great that they should not even meet in battle. God forbid that the inferior people should win. History did not stand with the poet, but his verses illustrate the sort of genealogical claims and ridicule that al-Ḥajjāj had to combat throughout his life.

Al-Ḥajjāj and his father worked, as most sources agree, as teachers, which in that time presumably meant that they taught the Qurʾān, grammar and perhaps akhbār to young boys. While Ibn Khaldūn claims that in al-Ḥajjāj’s time only the leaders of their people would teach the Qurʾān, the many instances of people mocking him for his profession suggest otherwise. A poet, for instance, says:

*Were it not for the Marwānids, Ibn Yūsuf, would now have been a slave immersed in humiliation, like the slave of Iyād he was, teaching village boys every morning and evening.*

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17 The tradition has it that the author of these verses is Mālik b. al-Rayb, a famous Umayyad brigand poet from the tribe of Tamīm. But Mālik’s traditional death date 60/680 makes him too early a figure to have witnessed al-Ḥajjāj’s rise to power. Though death dates in this period can be uncertain we know that the poet participated in a campaign to Khurasan, led by caliph ‘Uthmān’s son, Saʿīd b. ‘Uthmān b. ’Affān in 56/676 because he mentions this event in his famous self-elegy (*A-lā layta shiʿrī hal abiṭanna laylatan...*) Mālik is believed to have died soon after the campaign, which confirms that it was probably a later poet who uttered these insulting verses about al-Ḥajjāj.

18 See Ibn Ṭālha, *Al-ʾIqd al-farīd*, 5:275. The reference to the tribe Iyād raises questions because genealogists, like Ibn al-Kalbī, count the Thaqīf among the larger tribal confederation of Qays and not Iyād. Yet, this and other literary sources hint that in earlier times Thaqīf was considered to be part of Iyād or that there was a controversy about the matter. It is possible that since Qays is a more prestigious tribe than Iyād, calling al-Ḥajjāj “the slave of Iyād” was a way to exacerbate the insult. That the connection to Iyād was displeasing to the governor is confirmed in another anecdote in which al-Ḥajjāj refuses this connection, when asked about it by ‘Abd al-Malik. See al-Burrī, *al-Jawhara fī nasab al-nabī*, 407.
This is because working for others was seen as lowly and the prestige lay with the Arab military.\textsuperscript{19} If al-Ḥajjāj indeed was a schoolteacher this would explain his excellent command of and care for the Arabic language and letters later in life. Some sources suggest other options too when they insulted al-Ḥajjāj for being from a family of goat herds \textsuperscript{20} for having worked as a tanner.\textsuperscript{21}

Al-Ḥajjāj’s origins raise questions because they combine low and elite elements. On the one hand, many of his opponents, like Aʿshā, mocked him for his low origins and for his and his father’s profession. On the other hand, different accounts suggest that al-Ḥajjāj’s family rose to prominence. Ibn Qutayba records that ʿAbd al-Malik briefly appointed his father over a district,\textsuperscript{22} and later his brother became the governor of Yemen. When al-Ḥajjāj became first the ruler of Hijaz and then Iraq and the entire East, he and his immediate family ended up ruling a large portion of the empire. It is difficult to tell whether the appointments of his father and his brother were directly related to al-Ḥajjāj’s blossoming military career or whether their success helped his ascendancy to power. What is clear is that the rapid rise of al-Ḥajjāj’s family was not worth much in a society that put great emphasis on genealogies. For his opponents al-Ḥajjāj remained a nobody and the son of a nobody.


\textsuperscript{20} Yazīd b. al-Ḥakam al-Thaqaffī, whom al-Ḥajjāj appointed the ruler of the city of Fars, is said to have insulted him in this way, after al-Ḥajjāj criticized Yazīd’s praise poem. Yazīd rejected the appointment, and before he left to join al-Ḥajjāj’s enemy Sulaymān b. ʿAbd al-Malik, told al-Ḥajjāj in anger that while he, Yazīd, inherited from his ancestors honor and great deeds, al-Ḥajjāj inherited only goats. See āānī, 12: 474.

\textsuperscript{21} The poet Kaʿb al-Yashkurī said about al-Ḥajjāj, reportedly in front of al-Muhallab and al-Ḥajjāj’s messenger, a poem in which he calls him a tanner (dabbāgh). Al-Iṣfahānī, Aghānī, \textsuperscript{1}4:291.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibn Qutayba, \textit{Maʿārif}.395 in Oseni, \textit{Ḥajjāj}, 60-61.
1.2.2. MILITARY CAREER AND THE ENCOUNTER WITH ʿABDALLĀH B. AL-ZUBAYR

Young al-Ḥajjāj was too ambitious to be satisfied with a teacher’s life or with any of the mundane professions and kept trying his luck in the military. He and his father are mentioned first in the infamous battle of al-Ḥarra (63/683), in which the armies of the caliph Yazīd fought ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr and killed many of the Prophet’s companions (ṣaḥāba) from Medina. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam remarks that they took part in the campaign of Marwān in Egypt. Their presence is also noted in the battle of al-Rabadha (65/684) that turned sour for the Umayyad army. Though al-Ḥajjāj does not seem to have played a great role around this time, it is said that he was offered the rule over a town called Tabāla in Tihāma (the Red Sea coastal region of Arabian Peninsula). This would indicate that he was already on the rise. Things definitely changed when he moved to Damascus at the beginning of ʿAbd al-Malik’s reign and joined the caliphal guard (shurṭa). The sources narrated that al-Ḥajjāj caught the attention of the caliph when he disciplined troops that were preparing to fight the Zubayrids. It was during the military campaign against ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr that he rose to the heights of the Umayyad imperial hierarchy.

23 See Périer, Vie, 28; al-ʿAmad, al-Ḥajjāj, 101-102.
26 Ibn Nubāta says that ʿAbd al-Malik made him the offer because he refused to pray behind (and hence recognize the authority of) one of his opponents. Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī, Sarḥ ʿuyūn fi sharḥ risālat Ibn Zaydūn (Cáiró, 1964), 173. According to the sources, he rejected the rulership of Tabāla because it seemed too easy to him, which is where the proverb “more trivial than Tabāla for al-Ḥajjāj/ahwan min Tabāla ʿalā al-Ḥajjāj.” Ibn Qutayba, Maʿārif, 396, al-Jāḥiz, Ḥayawān, 1:323 in al-ʿAmad, al-Ḥajjāj, 104, 108.
The challenge that ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr posed to the Umayyads was so serious that Chase Robinson has convincingly argued that the Zubayrid was the actual caliph and ʿAbd al-Malik the rebel. Ibn al-Zubayr first contested Umayyad sovereignty when Muʿāwiya appointed his son Yazīd as his successor and initiated thereby the tradition of hereditary rule, usually referred to in Muslim sources as *mulk*. Upon Yazīd’s death, Ibn al-Zubayr claimed the caliphate, which spread across the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, Iraq, Iran, part of modern Afghanistan, and for a brief period also Egypt. His Islamic credentials were flawless: Ibn al-Zubayr was the son of one of the Prophet’s closest Companions, al-Zubayr, and of the first caliph Abū Bakr’s daughter Asmāʾ, the first child born among the Muhājirūn (“Emigrants”) in Medina. He took part in the foundational battle at Yarmuk (15/636), in which the Muslims gloriously dispersed a Byzantine army and began the era of the conquests. These credentials placed Ibn al-Zubayr at the pinnacle of in the Islamic social hierarchy.

As Robinson reminds us, the main threat to Ibn al-Zubayr was not so much the Umayyads at first as the Khārijite rebels and the Alids. The Umayyads were still rather weak as late as the early 70s/late 680s, and still in 70/689-690 they were paying a tribute to the Byzantines. In 69/688-689, only four years before they would claim the whole empire, they faced an internal conflict in the heart of their lands—in Damascus. The Khārijites were a religio-political group that emerged in 37/657 during the first civil war

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30 Ṭāʾīr b. Saʿīd al-Ashdaq, an Umayyad nobleman rebelled against ʿAbd al-Malik and took over the city. Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:783ff.
(fitna) and rejected the authority of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib after he had agreed to arbitration with his rival Mu‘āwiya at Sīfīn (37/657). At first, they joined Ibn al-Zubayr, but then they left him in 64/684 because he did not want to dissociate himself from ‘Uthmān. Al-Ṭabarī includes the speech with which they challenged ‘Abadallāh b. al-Zubayr and a comment by a witness who says: “I never heard any speaker who spoke more eloquently or more appositely in what he said than he [i.e., the Khārijite ‘Abīda b. Hilāl].”’31 The Khārijites, famous for their eloquent orators, were nevertheless seen by the Muslim sources as extremists, and they continued to resist the central power well into al-Ḥajjāj’s time.

The revolt of Mukhtār al-Thaqafī (66-67/685-687), though a short-lived one, was a dangerous Alid movement in Kufa a few years before al-Ḥajjāj’s arrival in the city. Mukhtār, seen by some as a diviner (kāhin),32 claimed to speak on behalf of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīya, ‘Alī’s son. In 66/685 he announced a revolt to avenge the blood of another son of ‘Alī, Ḥusayn, whose death at Karbalāʾ transformed into the event that most profoundly shaped the Shiite narrative.33 Sean Anthony has interpreted this revolt as an attempt at transforming Kufa into an autonomous city-state on the principles of ‘Alī’s former theocracy.34 Muṣ‘ab b. al-Zubayr, the brother of ‘Abdallāh and his governor of Iraq, subdued the rebellion quickly and brutally, but he could not completely uproot the Kufans’ hopes for autonomy and ‘Alī’s legacy, all of which came to haunt al-Ḥajjāj.

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32 According to al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Zubayr said about him “God damn him! He has been sent as a liar and self-proclaimed soothsayer. If God extirpates tyrants, then al-Mukhtār is one of them.”
Despite the initial division of power in favor of the Zubayrids, Muṣ'ab’s grip over Iraq was weakening and Umayyad pressure was growing. In addition, Muṣ'ab had to face the rebellion of the Zanj, East African slaves, in 70/689-90 in the surroundings of Basra.35 His best troops were in Sūlāf (Khuzestan)36 fighting the Khārijites under the leadership of al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra.37 The last blow to Muṣ'ab’s rule over Iraq was the Umayyad campaign in which al-Ḥajjāj took part.38 The armies met in 72/691 by the Monastery of the Catholicos (dayr al-jāthlīq)39 in a place that later would become part of Baghdad, and Muṣ'ab was defeated and died a heroic death.

Al-Ḥajjāj must have distinguished himself in some way in the battle at the Monastery of the Catholicos, because from now on he assumed the leadership of the army against 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr.40 Things gained speed. On the way to Mecca, the young al-Ḥajjāj took over his native Ta’if and used it as his base. Al-Ṭabarī narrates that he arrived in Mecca at the beginning of Dhū al-Ḥijja and led the pilgrimage fully armed instead of wearing the usual pilgrim’s garb.41 Rather than a pilgrimage, this was a performance of power. During his six-month siege of Mecca, al-Ḥajjāj notoriously used the catapult [manjanīq] to bombard the Ka’ba when the pilgrims were gathered there. When lightning

35 These were black slaves captured in East Africa and brought to drain the swamps and convert them into productive sugarcane fields. Junius P. Rodriguez, “Zanj Slave Revolts,” Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion (Greenwood Publishing Group), 585.
36 Yāqūt, Mu’jam al-buldān (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1995), s.v. “Sulāf.”
37 H. Lammens, Ch. Pellaṭ, “Muṣ’ab b. al-Zubayr,” EI².
38 According to al-Mas‘ūdī he led the rearguard. Périer, Vie, 32.
39 Yāqūt only mentions that the battle took place there and that the Monastery of Catholicos is close to another monastery—Dayr al-thā’ālib. He also includes a poem that mentions the monastery. Yāqūt, Mu’jam, s.v. “Dayr al-Jāthlīq.” The Chaldean Society on kaldaya.net provides more information. According to them, the monastery is from the Sassanian period, its name was originally dayrā kīlā yeshū’ (“Monastery of Jesus’ Wrath,” ܕܝܪܐ ܟܠܝܠܐ ܝܫܘܥ), and the monastery acquired its name only when the Catholicos Timothy I (d. 823) was buried there.
40 Al-Ṭabarī tells us that the reason was that al-Ḥajjāj had a dream in which he flayed Ibn al-Zubayr. Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:829.
41 Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:830
struck some of al-Ḥajjāj’s men, they were about to quit, but he persuaded them to continue with a compelling speech. In 73/692 ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr died by the Kaʿba, his caliphate ended, and the empire was re-unified under Umayyad banners.

The Umayyads were the leading clan of Quraysh, the tribe that ruled Mecca on the eve of Islam. That they eventually won—not only over the Zubayrids but also over ʿAlī, who represented the Prophet’s family (ahl al-bayt) and the descendants of the Anṣār, “the Helpers,” the Prophet’s Medinan community—should be seen as a victory of the pre-Islamic tribal system over the new Islamic order, which attempted to impose new social hierarchies. Al-Ḥajjāj’s crucial role in this historic moment made him one of the most powerful men of the Umayyad empire.

Robinson contrasts Ibn al-Zubayr, this perfect Islamic hero, with the flawed family history of ʿAbd al-Malik, whose grandfathers vehemently opposed the Prophet. To explain, ʿAbd al-Malik himself did not participate in any of the early conquests like Ibn al-Zubayr, and therefore in terms of sābiqah, “the precedence in Islam,” and overall Islamic merits, ʿAbd al-Malik’s family and the whole Umayyad clan scored very low. But if there was a gap between Ibn al-Zubayr and ʿAbd al-Malik, there was an abyss between Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Ḥajjāj. At least in terms of tribal genealogy, a matter still vitally important in early Islamic society, both the Zubayrids and the Umayyads were part of Quraysh, the ruling tribe of Mecca. In contrast, al-Ḥajjāj, the man who actually subdued the—according to many—rightful caliph and instituted the Umayyad dynasty, had no noteworthy origins and

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42 For a translation of this speech and an analysis of this account see El-Yamani, “Al-Ḥajjāj,” 32-38.


44 Robinson, ʿAbd al-Malik, 17-18.

no Islamic merits. This discrepancy is reflected in the speech that he reportedly delivered in Mecca after the death of Ibn al-Zubayr. Al-Ḥajjāj, otherwise prone to insults, does not diminish the persona of the deceased but rather, in an excellent rhetorical move, compares the defeated Islamic hero to the prophet Adam, who like him rebelled against God (here God’s caliph), fell, and was expelled from Paradise.\footnote{See Appendix, “Killing of Ibn al-Zubayr” (1). For the discussion of the speech see Chapter 4.}

1.2.3. Governor of Iraq and the East

1.2.3.1. Suppressing rebellions

After the defeat of ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr and the Umayyad conquest of Hijaz, ‘Abd al-Malik made al-Ḥajjāj the governor of Medina.\footnote{Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:854.} But already in the following year, 75/694, he became the governor of Iraq after the death of Bishr b. Marwān, ‘Abd al-Malik’s brother, who was previously in charge of this region. Three years later al-Ḥajjāj’s jurisdiction was augmented into a super province composed of Iraq, Khurasan, and Sijistān.

The immediate task for the new governor was to subdue the Khārijites and bring the autonomy-minded Kufans to obedience. He needed them to join al-Muhallab, who had sworn allegiance to the Umayyads after Muṣ‘ab’s defeat and went on fighting the Khārijites. To that end, the then thirty-three-year-old al-Ḥajjāj went to Kūfa and delivered his famous inaugural speech, which I will thoroughly discuss in Chapters 4 and 5. As many sources have it, the Kufans were so terrified that they immediately rushed to war against the Khārijites. A similar scenario occurred in Basra. People were reluctant to go and fight,
but after al-Ḥajjāj’s *khūfba* they changed their mind and set out, though a tension among the troops continued.48

The Iraqis had good reasons for their reluctance, as the Khārijites were feared for their brutality and fanaticism. As al-Muhallab was fighting the Azraqite groups of the Khārijites in Sābūr (in current western Iran),49 their Ṣufrite branches rebelled against al-Ḥajjāj in Iraq.50 One of the Azraqite leaders was Qaṭārī b. al-Fujā’a, famous for his eloquence. Both al-Ḥajjāj and Abū Ḥamza (d. 130/748),51 a leader of the Ibāḍī sect of Khārijites that in the late Umayyad period seized Mecca and Medina for some time, had their speeches recorded in books of *adab* alongside those of Muslim caliphs and Islamic heroes.

Among the Ṣufrite Khārijites, Ṣāliḥ b. Musarriḥ took the lead. He was from the city of Dārā (between Nisibis and Mardin)52 in Jazīra (Upper Mesopotamia), and was known as a teacher and interpreter of the Qurʾān, *qāṣṣ*, and ascetic. When he and his men set out to fight al-Ḥajjāj, they must have been a scary folk, because despite the fact that there were supposedly only 120 of them, the people of Dārā, Nisibis, and Sijar fortified themselves against them.53 Even Muḥammad b. Marwān, the brother of ʿAbd al-Malik and governor of Jazīra, had difficulty suppressing them. When al-Ḥajjāj’s troops killed Ṣāliḥ in 76/695,

49 Yāqūt mentions that *sābūr* is 25 *farsaks* = 142 km from Shiraz. *Farsak* is approximately 5.7 km. Yāqūt, *Mu jam*, s.v. “Sābūr.” The village of Sabur, written *šabūr* in modern Persian, still exists.
Shabīb b. Yazīd assumed leadership. Shabīb was the son of a Greek mother and one of the qurrāʾ. Although his revolt lasted only one year, historical sources describe it in minute detail. The same earlier motif repeats: despite their small number (around 70 this time) they have a terrifying effect on people. 3000 men hide from them in the monastery of Khurrazād, and even proclaim themselves mushrikūn (“those who falsely associate something with God,” i.e., unconverted polytheists rather than heretical Muslims), so that the Khārijites do not kill them and accept them in their ranks as new converts. It is interesting to see this topos—a small group defeating a much larger one—in connection with Khārijites because it is usually employed to underline the heroism of early Muslims. But here al-Ṭabarī, by exaggerating the disproportions in the numbers, rather points to the intensity of their belief. It illustrates the perceived extremism of Khārijites who did not consider anyone but themselves to be true Muslims and the terror that Shabīb’s groups elicited.

The symbolism of Shabīb’s campaign is noteworthy. After the conversion incident, Shabīb raided the city of Madāʾin/Ctesiphon, the former capital of the Sasanian empire, and it is recorded that the inhabitants of the city tried to protect the ancient buildings from him. Is it possible that he would be targeting Sasanian cultural heritage deliberately?

55 Muslim sources also dedicate much attention to it. In al-Ṭabarī’s case that is 86 pages in De Goeje edition. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:894-980.
56 It is unclear to me as to whether these were Christians or men hiding from him in the monastery. One of them was from the tribe Bakr b. Wā’il. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:895.
59 This belief and practice of calling one’s opponents non-Muslim is called takfīr. Al-Ṭabarī mentions disapprovingly that the Khārijites took Muslims captive (ṣabī). Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1007. This rhetorical device was more the standard than the exception in this time.
After Madāʾin/Ctesiphon, he turned to Nahrawān, the place where ʿAlī massacred the first Khārijite group almost 40 years before. If this itinerary is real, we are witnessing a tour around places imbued with symbolic meaning to the region and to their sect, ‘sites of memory,’ before facing the actual enemy—al-Ḥajjāj in Kufa. The Khārijite takeover of Kufa is also filled with symbolic performances. The accounts in al-Ṭabarī somewhat differ but according to the one of Abū Zayd (ʿUmar b. Shabba), Shabīb was accompanied by Ghazāla, his wife, who then recited the sūras “al-Baqara” (Q 2) and “Āl ʿImrān” (Q 3) in the mosque of Kufa. According to Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, Shabīb’s mother al-Jahīza was also present in the mosque standing by their side. We need to realize that these are the two longest sūras of the Qurʾān and their recitation would require hours to complete, which then makes for a powerful statement of political and religious authority.

Al-Ḥajjāj was widely ridiculed for this incident, especially that the Khārijite poet ʿImrān b. Ḥittān described his perceived cowardice in front of Ghazāla and compared him to an ostrich who gets alarmed when someone whistles and flees immediately:

*He is a lion to me but in wars*
*He is a black ostrich that flees from whistles.*
*Why didn’t you stand up to Ghazāla in the war clamor?*
*Why did your heart get suddenly bird’s wings?*

Al-Ḥajjāj, reportedly, chased the poet across the Islamic world, from Iraq to Syria to Oman and back to take vengeance of him for these words that entered many later accounts of this

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61 The “sites of memory” or “lieux de mémoire” is a concept established by Pierre Nora. In the field of Islamic studies, Antoine Borrut has employed these concepts most systematically. See Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, esp. 168-204.


64 Al-ʾIsfahānī, *Aghānī*, 18:1, 4-121.
incident. This suggest that the insult was seen as effective and humiliating. But the Khārijite glory did not last long; within a year of the occupation of Kufa in 77/696-697, Ghazāla was killed and soon afterward her husband Shabīb drowned at the Ahwāz Dujayl Bridge.

More rebellions arose, but none surpassed in danger the revolt of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ashʿath. In 80/699 the governor sent al-Ashʿath with 70,000 men on a punishment mission to Sijistān against the Turkic ruler Zunbīl who had destroyed a Muslim army. The sources dubbed Ibn al-Ashʿath’s troops ‘Peacock Army’ (jaysh al-ṭawāwīs) for their splendid equipment. The revolt started as a military mutiny, first against al-Ḥajjāj and then against the Umayyads. Scholars have seen it as a result of the hostility of the Arab aristocracy towards the plebeian al-Ḥajjāj (as a descendent of the kings of Kinda, Ibn al-Ashʿath belonged the upper echelon of ancient Arab nobility); as the revenge of the mawālī, many of whom participated in it; as a reaction of the soldiers to the practice of stationing troops in the outposts for a long time (tajmīr al-buʿūth); and as an expression of Iraqi anti-Syrian sentiments. Many qurrāʾ, the somewhat mysterious group of people traditionally understood as Qurʾān reciters, joined. Redwan Sayed has seen their participation as

65 See the entry on ʿImrān in al-Īṣfahānī, Aghānī, 1-123.
68 His name may have been also Rutbīl, see al-Faruque, “The Revolt,” 289.
71 G. H. A. Juynboll, following Shaban’s suggestions, argued that the qurrāʾ originally referred to ‘villagers’ ahl al-qurāʾ but in the aftermath of of Ḥay’s caliphate it came to mean readers of scripture See G. H. A. Juynboll, “The Qurrāʾ in Early Islamic History,” Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient 16 (1973); M. A. Shaban, Islamic History A. D. 600-750 (A. H. 132), a new interpretation. Seyd rejected that on philological and historical grounds. Most recently Mustafa Shah defended the
related to the cause of the *mawālī* and as lending the movement an important religious dimension. Wellhausen claimed that they hijacked the movement. Muslim sources blame personal antagonisms between the two men and al-Ḥajjāj’s rudeness toward the noble Kindite.

The sources also lend an important role to letters and speeches. Having received a threatening letter from al-Ḥajjāj, who wanted him to penetrate deeper into the enemy’s territory, Ibn al-Ashʿath made a speech in which asked his people what to do. The rhetoric of Ibn al-Ashʿath’s speech gives the impression of a man dealing with his equals and stands, in this way, in stark opposition to al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches, in which he speaks down to the people as their absolute master, as we will see in Chapter 4. Al-Ṭabarī narrates that after Ibn al-Ashʿath ended his speech, one of his army leaders stood up and delivered the following speech that convinced people to rebel against al-Ḥajjāj:

> O servants of God, if you obey al-Ḥajjāj he will make this land your land for as long as you live. He will keep you out in the field in the manner of Pharaoh, who, I have been informed, was the first to keep armies out in the field (*tajmīr*); I think that most of you will be dead before seeing your loved ones. So give the oath of allegiance to your *amīr*, set off against your enemy, and expel him from your land [that is, Iraq].” [At this] the people rose up to ‘Abd al-Rahmān and gave him the oath of allegiance.

This speech identifies as a major grievance of the Iraqi soldiers the practice of keeping them out in the field for a long time (*tajmīr al-buʿūth*). We will encounter the same motif in al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches (see Chapter 4). The importance of this issue is also confirmed in verses of many Umayyad poets complaining about the distance from home and harsh traditional meaning of *qurrāʾ* as the reciters of the Qurʾān. Mustafa Shah, “The Quest for the Origins of the *qurrāʾ* in the Classical Islamic Tradition,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 7.2 (2005).

72 Redwan Sayed, *Die Revolte des Ibn al-ʿAšʿaṭh und die Koranleser*.

73 Wellhausen J. *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*. Translated by Margaret Graham Weir (Beirut: Khayats, 1963), 234.

conditions in foreign lands.\textsuperscript{75} This speech also connects al-Ḥajjāj through this practice with the most detested tyrant of Qurʾānic lore, the Pharaoh;\textsuperscript{76} an accusation that becomes a trope in later sources about him.\textsuperscript{77} As such this speech, whatever its provenance, seems to reflect actual rhetoric and slogans of the time.

Ibn al-Ashʿath first gathered his forces at Dayr ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, “the Monastery of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān,”\textsuperscript{78} but the war culminated by Dayr al-Jamājim, “the Monastery of Skulls” in 82/701. At this point the Kufans pledged their allegiance to Ibn al-Ashʿath, but fights were still going on. We find al-Ḥajjāj on the way to al-Qādisīya, but the Iraqis prevented him from stopping there, so he took refuge in Dayr al-Qurra, “The Monastery of Satisfaction.” Ibn al-Ashʿath with his army stopped at Dayr al-Jamājim, “The Monastery of Skulls.” Al-Ṭabarānī comments on the names of the monasteries:

Al-Ḥajjāj used to say subsequently, “Couldn’t ‘Abd al-Raḥmān augur from the birds when he saw that I had stopped at Dayr Qurrā and he had stopped at Dayr al-Jamājim?”\textsuperscript{79}

And indeed, the battle that took place at the monastery with such an ominous name turned out to be fatal for Ibn al-Ashʿath and his people. But the outcome was by no means clear during the one-hundred-day-long battle itself.\textsuperscript{80} At one point the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik even sent envoys to make an offer to the people of Iraq: in exchange for their obedience he was ready to remove al-Ḥajjāj from office.\textsuperscript{81} But the Iraqis refused because they felt empowered enough to disavow the Umayyads entirely. They paid the highest price for this decision; a

\textsuperscript{75} See my “Poets on the Periphery,” in preparation. For late antique comparanda in epigraphy see Mark Handley, Dying on Foreign Shores: Travel and Mobility in the Late-Antique West. JRA Supplementary Series 86 (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2011).
\textsuperscript{76} On Pharaoh as a literary trope in Arabic historiography see Konrad Hirschler, “‘The Pharaoh’ Anecdote in Pre-Modern Arabic Historiography,” Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies 10 (2010): 45-74.
\textsuperscript{77} See Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{78} Al-Ṭabarānī and Rowson, History, 2:930.
\textsuperscript{80} Al-Ṭabarānī, Tārīkh, 2:1094; Al-Balādhurī, Ansāb, 7:340.
\textsuperscript{81} Al-Ṭabarānī, Tārīkh, 2:1073.
total defeat. Afterwards, al-Ḥajjāj made another famous speech to announce his victory and scold the rebels (see Chapter 4 and Appendix II). Once again, the governor of Iraq unified his lands and preserved Umayyad sovereignty. This revolt was a key moment for those who later evaluated his rule. Some sources like al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī seem to suggest that the revolt was popular and justifiable, others like much later Ibn ʿAsākir focused on the idea that no revolt is justifiable. The revolt was also turning point in al-Ḥajjāj’s career the sense that, while he was on the brink of losing everything, he eventually won, finally fully establishing his rule over Iraq. From now on, he could turn his attention to the expansion of the Empire.

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82 El-Yamani argues that this is the view of the two accounts. El-Yamanī, “Al-Ḥajjāj,” 383.
1.2.3.2. Directing conquests and expansion to the East

When al-Ḥajjāj assumed rule over Khurāsān and Sijistān in 78/697-698, he first appointed his officials there and then began planning the conquests. He appointed al-Muhallab, who had distinguished himself in the war with the Azraqite Khārijites, as the ruler of Khurāsān, and ʿUbaydallāh b. Abī Bakra over Sijistān. ʿUbaydallāh then set out to conquer the land of the Turkic leader Zunbīl in Kābul. But this campaign proved disastrous: some of the men who returned were so hungry that when they finally ate, they died immediately. And we have already noted that the punishment mission of Ibn al-Ash’ath turned into a rebellion.

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83 Center for Middle Eastern Studies website, The University of Chicago. http://cmes.uchicago.edu/page/maps
85 Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:1038.
Other campaigns were much more successful. A newly appointed army leader named al-Mufaḍḍal conquered Bādgīs, a territory in modern Afghanistan, and set out to Akharūn and Shumān, to the southeast of Samarkand.\textsuperscript{86} Mujjā’ a b. Si’r conquered Oman and Muḥammad b al-Qāsim al-Thaqafī India.\textsuperscript{87} Perhaps the most famous and successful official of al-Ḥajjāj in the East proved to be Qutayba b. Muslim, who like his master is known for his eloquent speeches and who greatly contributed to the Arab extension in what is now Afghanistan and Central Asia.\textsuperscript{88} He arrived in Khurasan in 86/705 and in a couple of years conquered Bukhara (87-90/706-9), Khwārazm and Samarkand (91-3/711-12), and went as far as Farghāna in modern Uzbekistan and Kāshghar in China (94-6/713-15). In al-Ṭabarī’s rendition, the audience with the king of China turns into an exhibition of the most exquisite perfumes, garments, and weapons that the Muslims possess whereupon the king of China agrees to pay them taxes. The poetry included in the narrative, however, bears witness to the hardship of the Muslims in the distant land:

\begin{quote}
There is no disgrace in the delegation you sent
To China, if they followed the right way.
They broke their eyelids against the motes, out of fear of death
Except for the noble Hubayra b. Mushamraj.
He wanted nothing but to seal their necks
And to take hostages, handed over [as a pledge] for the remission of tax\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

The verses do not speak of the impression that the Muslims made on the king of China; rather they speak of the Muslim soldiers’ fear. So scared were the soldiers of death that

\textsuperscript{86} Al-Ṭabarī, \textit{Tārīkh}, 2:1144.
\textsuperscript{88} Bosworth, “Kutaiba b. Muslim,” \textit{EI2}.
they were closing their eyes to hide from it, despite the fact that their eyes were full of tiny motes of dust. Here poetry offers insights—perhaps more realistic ones—which are at odds with the celebratory narrative.

Notwithstanding the occasional setbacks and the grievances of soldiers in the conquest armies, preserved in contemporary poetry, the success of al-Ḥajjāj’s governors and army leaders in the East was extraordinary. It is partly thanks to his apt directing of the conquests that under the reign of al-Walīd, the Islamic empire reached its largest extent.

1.2.3.3. Al-Ḥajjāj’s administrative measures in Iraq and non-Arab populations

Al-Ḥajjāj was not only active on the battlefield, which sources like al-Ṭabarī focus on, but he also engaged in large-scale agricultural, fiscal, and architectural projects, which further brings out the semi-autonomous nature of his rule in Iraq. He rebuilt canals, erected dams and sluices; he continued the efforts of Sasanian kings before him to drain the marshes of southern Iraq and improve the fertility of the land that has been used since the world’s earliest civilization in Mesopotamia; and he took measures to make the peasants stay in the countryside and to force them back when they fled to town, even if they converted to Islam. Some sources mention that he would brand them on their necks to make sure that they could not flee again. What was at stake were revenues from the land tax (kharāj) and poll tax (jīzya) and sufficient workforce in the rural areas.

In general, the relationship of the non-Arab populations of Iraq with the Arab ruling elite under al-Ḥajjāj was tumultuous and uneven. On the one hand, the converts participated in most of the Umayyad rebellions, though no revolt was led in their name. Many of them

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joined al-Mukhtār and his defeat only exacerbated their grievances. They also participated in the Khārijīte movement, attracted by their egalitarian rhetoric. But we should remember that not all converts were treated in the same manner, and not all became mawālī, clients of an Arab tribe.\footnote{See for example Šāliḥ Saʿīd Āghā, \textit{The Revolution Which Toppled the Umayyads: Neither Arab nor ʿAbbāsid.} (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 255ff.} So on the other hand, many mawālī attained important positions in the Umayyad state and society. Al-Ḥajjāj himself appointed the first non-Arab judges of Iraq; the mawālī married into the Umayyad family; and the governors of Qinnasrīn and Baalbak were mawālī under ʿAbd al-Malik.\footnote{A. J. Wensinck, “Mawlā,” \textit{EI2.}}

The Muslim sources themselves make a point of the prominence of mawālī among the learned Umayyad class through a report about a conversation between ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Zuhrī. The caliph asks the eminent scholar about the most excellent learned people of Mecca, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Jazīra, Khurasan, Basra, and Kufa, and whether they are Arab or mawālī. Al-Zuhrī names the towering scholars of each city and they all mawālī. In the end, he names one Arab for Kufa. The caliph is relieved to hear that and complains that “the mawālī excel over Arabs in these lands; preaching to them from the pulpits while the Arabs are standing beneath [listening].”\footnote{Al-Dhahabī, \textit{Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ} (Beirut: Muʿassasat Risāla, 1985), 5:85-86.} This conversation may have never taken place, but it reveals that later sources were keenly aware about the prominent role of mawālī in Umayyad society. The converts were not a homogeneous social group. While the rural converts in the Marwānid period faced much mistreatment from al-Ḥajjāj and others, some of those living in cities and with access to Arab education were granted ample opportunities in the administration and learned circles.
Al-Ḥajjāj’s fiscal policies were a continuation of ʿAbd al-Malik’s 76/695 reform, when the aniconic dīnārs and dirhams replaced the Byzantine gold and Sassanian silver coinage.94 This is confirmed by numismatic evidence.95 But coins like the one in Figure 2 prove that al-Ḥajjāj’s Sassanian-type figurative coins were minted even after ʿAbd al-

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94 Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:939.

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Figure 2: Arab-Sassanian coin of al-Ḥajjāj. Dated 79/698-699, with the text al-Ḥajjāj bin Yūṣuf in Arabic. Obverse margin has lā-ilaha il-Allāh wāhdahu Muḥammad rasūl Allāh and the reverse field a typical Arab-Sassanian fire-altar with attendants with mint (Bīshāpūr). (Islamic-awareness.org)
Malik’s reform and that the transition was gradual and not immediate. A Jew by the name of Sumayr was put in charge of the new coins, which were then called *sumayrīya* after his name. The new coinage elicited backlash from some contemporary scholars who deemed it inappropriate to have God’s name on coins that may fall into the hands of infidels. Al-Ḥajjāj founded his own mints, first in Kūfa and then in Wāṣīṭ, which is where we will move next.

Wāṣīṭ, the “Middle city,” is al-Ḥajjāj’s greatest architectural project. Baḥshal, the author of *Tārīkh Wāṣīṭ*, “The History of Wāṣīṭ,” records:

He bought the city […] for 10,000 *dirhams* in the year 75 [694] and he stayed in it and commanded the constructions to begin. He built a palace, mosque and two walls and dug a trench in three years. And he finished it in the year 78 [697] and he spent the five years of tax revenues of all of Iraq on it […] He made four gates for his palace and widened the streets leading from each gate to 80 *dhīrāʿ* ‘cubit.’

The account is meant to celebrate the lavishness of al-Ḥajjāj’s project: its construction cost an amount that equaled five years of tax revenues from the whole region of Iraq. Unlike Baḥshal, most accounts place the foundation of the city, more plausibly, after the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath in 83/702. The name Wāṣīṭ, according to the Muslim sources, denotes the city’s central position relative to Kufa, Basra, al-Madāʾin/Ctesiphon, and al-Ahwāz.

According to the Muslim sources, al-Ḥajjāj built the city by himself and for his Syrian troops and forbade non-Arabs to reside in the city. Some sources, in which we can detect animosity towards all non-Arab, note that due to this measure the Arabic of the

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98 Other traditions estimate the costs to a large part of the tax revenues from Iraq, 43 million out of 120 million. See Darkazally, “al-Ḥajjāj,” 192.
99 Baḥshal in his *Tārīkh Wāṣīṭ* places the date for the foundation of Wāṣīṭ between 75/694 and 78/697. Sakly, “Wāṣīṭ,” EI2.
100 Wāṣīṭ is situated 25 km/15 miles north-east of al-Hayy and 70 km/45 miles south-east of al-Kūt and its ruins are known today as al-Manāra. In medieval sources it has a number of names like Wāṣīṭ al-Ḥajjāj, Wāṣīṭ al-Uẓmā, Wāṣīṭ al-Īraq.” Sakly, “Wāṣīṭ,” EI2; Darkazally, “al-Ḥajjāj,” 191.
inhabitants of Wāṣīṭ was the purest of all Iraqis. Scholarship has usually seen the foundation of Wāṣīṭ as al-Ḥajjāj’s attempt to keep the Syrian troops separated from the Iraqis, thereby securing their absolute loyalty to him and to the Umayyad cause.

The regional identities and the special position of Syrians in Iraq are highlighted in historical sources and feature prominently in al-Ḥajjāj’s rhetoric, as we will see in Chapter 4. Al-Ḥajjāj brought the Syrians during the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath and kept them in Iraq when the war finished as his personal forces, Paul Cobb saw the dissonance between universalist-theocratic and regional ideologies as related to the collapse of the Umayyad empire.

Wāṣīṭ remained an important city centuries after al-Ḥajjāj’s death. The most telling in this regard is its flourishing mint production. As Mondher Sakly mentions, the reform dirhams from Wāṣīṭ by far outnumber all other dirhams in more than eighty other Umayyad mints, a result of the minting monopoly that al-Ḥajjāj granted to the city. Al-Ḥajjāj’s city also prospered after his death, well into the Abbasid period: it continued to be an important source of food supplies for Baghdad and, judging by the estimate of 40,000 lost lives, it vehemently resisted Hülegü Khan, famous for his pillage of Baghdad in 656/1258. Until in the 9th/15th century, the city remained one of the most important minting centers.

Considering all his battles, his controversial legacy, and the many rebellions and radical policies, it is paradoxical that al-Ḥajjāj died most probably a non-violent death.

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101 Bahshal, Tārīkh Wāṣīṭ, 41.
104 When al-Ḥajjāj moved to Wāṣīṭ he closed all other mints under his control. This monopoly did not last for the entirety of his rule. He reopened other mints in Khūzistān, Jībāl, Fārs, Khurasan and Sījistān but kept Wāṣīṭ the main mint. Sakly, “Wāṣīṭ.”
Different stories tell that he died of cancer of stomach,\textsuperscript{105} of tuberculosis,\textsuperscript{106} or that he was bitten by a dung beetle.\textsuperscript{107} Al-Ṭabarī gives as his death dates Shawwāl or Ramaḍān 95 (June or July 714).

1.3. RECONSIDERING AL-ḤAJJĀJ’S FIGURE, HIS SPEECHES, AND HIS TIME

While the previous section laid out the biography of al-Ḥajjāj and his prominent position on the Umayyad/Marwānid scene, this section goes deeper in the analysis of al-Ḥajjāj’s biography to suggest a untraditional portrait of his figure, speeches, and time by bringing out details in the narrative that could be missed otherwise. For one thing, the idiosyncrasies of Muslim sources can obfuscate the view of the past. Al-Ḥajjāj made such an imprint on Islamic history that his legacy was manipulated years and centuries after his death, and so must carefully look through these later images. I will make a case here for reconsidering the usual image al-Ḥajjāj as the loyal servant of the Umayyads. Furthremore, the sources focus only on the narrow Muslim elite; yet I will point to details in the narrative that give a testimony of a shared cultural space of Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs.

For another thing, it is often the bias of modern scholarship that muddle our view of the time in which al-Ḥajjāj ruled. For instance, the role and the independent demeanor of women such as Ghazāla and Jahīza are noteworthy and arguably characteristic of the early Islamic period, yet gender studies have not had a prominent voice prominently in the field.\textsuperscript{108} Hind b. Asmāʾ should be mentioned too because the later literary sources portrayed

\textsuperscript{105} Dietrich, “Hadīdajī,” \textit{EI2}.
\textsuperscript{106} See note 3.
\textsuperscript{108} We have observed the Ghazāla and Jahīza, the wife and the mother of the Khārijite leader Shabīb preaching and reciting the Qurʾān in a symbolical act that announced the Khārijite takeover of Kufa. Ibn ʿAsākir in his \textit{Tārīkh Dimashq} records al-Ḥajjāj’s interrogation of a Khārijite captive where he attempts to
her as the woman of al-Ḥajjāj’s life. She was married many times and among her husbands were the most powerful men of her time, including ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād, al-Ḥajjāj, and ʿAbd al-Malik. The Aghānī narrates that al-Ḥajjāj divorced her because she was not so impressed with his palace in Wāṣiṭ but always regretted the deed. Her contempt for the governor became so notorious that stories about it entered the Thousand and One Nights.

The women in al-Ḥajjāj’s life would be worth their own study, yet they are beyond the scope of this dissertation. What is, however, at the heart of this dissertation is the use public speech in this period and we could note the sources are replete with mentions about the acts of public speech, their effectiveness, and their importance in politics; about the power of rumors and allegations; and about the power of poetry. All these mentions are evidence of the power of speech in this period, which have gone unnoticed in modern scholarship.

learn about the whereabouts of another Khārijite female leader called al-Farāsha, “Butterfly,” but the Khārijite does not yield. She is not identical with Ghazāla because she is from the tribe of Azd while Ghazāla was from the tribe of Shaybān. Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 12:180. And there are more. A witness of a battle between the Khārijite forces of Qaṭarī and al-Ḥajjāj’s soldiers narrates:

I saw fifteen Arab [Khārijite] women, all of them as comely and pleasing to the eye as your Lord willed, except for one old woman among them. I charged at them and drove them off toward Sufyān b. al-Abnad [a general in al-Ḥajjāj’s army]; but when I had brought them up close to him, the old women lunged at me with her sword and struck my neck with it, cutting through my underhelmet and nicking a piece from my neck. I brandished my sword and struck at her face; the blow broke through her skull and she fell dead.


109 The Aghānī tells that when she saw the palace Qubbat al-khadrāʾ in Wāṣiṭ, she told al-Ḥajjāj that she had never seen a greatest palace than the Red Palace of ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād, her former husband. After that al-Ḥajjāj divorced her. Al-Isfahānī, Aghānī, 20: 366–368.

110 In Thousand and One Nights, she mocks al-Ḥajjāj for his impotence. The Book of Thousand Nights and One Night, tr. Powys Mathers (London: Routledge, 2016), 348-349.
The following lays out the arguments for the reevaluation of al-Ḥajjāj, comments on the use of speeches in al-Ṭabarī’s narrative about him, and moves to a discussion of shared cultural space of early Islam.

1.3.1. CASE FOR AL-ḤAJJĀJ

Al-Ḥajjāj, a towering figure of early Islamic history, was used and re-used for different purposes so that often his depiction reflects more the concerns of later historians, biographers, and men of letters (adībs) than it provides a balanced account of al-Ḥajjāj’s rule in Umayyad Iraq. Medieval sources, as I mentioned earlier, usually depict him as the harshest and cruellest tyrant of Islamic history. The only thing that sometimes receives praise is his loyalty to the caliph, and indeed his relationship to ʿAbd al-Malik is depicted as one of absolute dependence, obedience, and subordination. The caliph reportedly insults him on different occasions. For instance, once he calls him “son of a woman who stuffed her vagina with raisins,” accusing his mother of promiscuity. But al-Ḥajjāj never pays him back in his own coin; he apologizes and obeys. By contrast, when Muʿāwiya—in al-Ṭabarī’s account—admonished his then governor of Fārs, Ziyād b. Abīh, against conspiring with al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, Ziyād delivered a speech in which he called him “the son of a woman who stuffed her vagina with raisins,” accusing his mother of promiscuity. This insult appears in a letter that ʿAbd al-Malik sent to al-Ḥajjāj. In this letter the caliph reproaches the governor for his harsh treatment of Anas b. Mālik. Aghānī, 17:122. Lane explains that istaframat means: “stuffed her vulva, or vagina with the stones of raisins and the like” and explains that the women of Thaqīf, “having a wideness in that part, made this use of the stones of raisins, desiring thereby to contract it.” Lane, Lexicon, 2388. Al-Maʿānī has the same meaning and uses al-Ḥajjāj’s khabar as example. This points to the promiscuity of the women of Thaqīf. This insult as well as growing raisins was thus related to the whole tribe of Thaqīf and not necessarily only to al-Ḥajjāj. On the other hand, it is also said that he was the first person to have sold raisins in al-Ṭāʾif, and thus the recurring theme of raisins may point to an episode of his past. Take also the example of his quarrel with Anas b. Mālik. When Anas complaints to ʿAbd al-Malik, and ʿAbd al-Malik scolds him, al-Ḥajjāj apologizes. Périer, Vie, 90; see also note 112.

111 See Chapter 3.

112 “yā bn al-lakhnaʿ al-mustafirma bi-ʾajami al-zabīb.” This insult appears in a letter that ʿAbd al-Malik sent to al-Ḥajjāj. In this letter the caliph reproaches the governor for his harsh treatment of Anas b. Mālik. Aghānī, 17:122. Lane explains that istaframat means: “stuffed her vulva, or vagina with the stones of raisins and the like” and explains that the women of Thaqīf, “having a wideness in that part, made this use of the stones of raisins, desiring thereby to contract it.” Lane, Lexicon, 2388. Al-Maʿānī has the same meaning and uses al-Ḥajjāj’s khabar as example. This points to the promiscuity of the women of Thaqīf. This insult as well as growing raisins was thus related to the whole tribe of Thaqīf and not necessarily only to al-Ḥajjāj. On the other hand, it is also said that he was the first person to have sold raisins in al-Ṭāʾif, and thus the recurring theme of raisins may point to an episode of his past. Take also the example of his quarrel with Anas b. Mālik. When Anas complaints to ʿAbd al-Malik, and ʿAbd al-Malik scolds him, al-Ḥajjāj apologizes. Périer, Vie, 90; see also note 112.

113 See also Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, Ṭiqd, 5:276ff.
of the liver-eater” referring to his mother Hind and the famous story according to which she bit on the liver of the dead Ḥamza b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (3/624), the Prophet’s uncle, after the battle of Uḥud. Wellhausen notes that ‘Abd al-Malik treated al-Ḥajjāj very differently from the way Mu’āwiya treated his governor of Iraq, Ziyād, suggesting that al-Ḥajjāj’s position was much more inferior when compared to Ziyād’s.\footnote{Wellhausen, \textit{Arab Kingdom}, 221.}

I want to suggest that this depiction of al-Ḥajjāj and his relationship with ‘Abd al-Malik is tainted by later Abbasid attitudes to al-Ḥajjāj, ‘Abd al-Malik, and the Umayyads in general. There is not one Abbasid narrative of the Umayyads.\footnote{Borrut and Cobb, \textit{Umayyad Legacies}, 10; See Borrut’s discussion of different historiographic filters in Borrut, \textit{Entre mémoire et pouvoir}, 61-108.} This is clear in the case of al-Ḥajjāj. Early on, as part of the anti-Umayyad propaganda, the governor is vilified. This is where his demonic image comes from. Later, in Ibn ʿAsākir, he turns into a prototype of an unjust ruler and is used to reflect on the contemporary issue of legitimate rulership (see Chapter 2). We can trace another interesting use of his person that concerns his relationship with ‘Abd al-Malik. Borrut describes the process of the redemption of Umayyad memory, whereby the Umayyads, no longer posing a major threat, transformed into representatives of political continuity.\footnote{Borrut, \textit{Entre mémoire et pouvoir}; Borrut, “La ‘Memoria’ Omeyyade,” in \textit{Umayyad Legacies}, 50ff.} Here al-Ḥajjāj’s tyrannical image comes in handy because it helps deflect the blame of the Umayyad ‘crimes’ from the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik. All evil of his time is ascribed to al-Ḥajjāj and so the caliph remains virtuous, his main sin being employing such a villain.

In the light of these later appropriations of al-Ḥajjāj’s image, we should reevaluate the depiction of the governor as a historical figure. I propose that al-Ḥajjāj was the ruler of
the East in his own right, neither an exceptional tyrant and villain, nor a submissive and dependent servant of ’Abd al-Malik. Let us take these claims one by one.

1. Al-Ḥajjāj was the ruler of the East in his own right. The title of this section is a nod to Robinson’s argument for considering Ibn al-Zubayr a caliph.\(^\text{117}\) However al-Ḥajjāj, unlike Ibn al-Zubayr, never claimed the caliphate for himself and probably opted for collaboration with the Umayyads because of his inadequate pedigree. Despite that, al-Ḥajjāj ruled the Eastern super-province with a great degree of autonomy, to the extent that much later Ibn Khaldūn considered Wāṣīṭ the capital of the empire, as I mentioned earlier. This goes against the usual portrayal of ’Abd al-Malik’s rule as the era of fast centralization moving away from the Sufyānid practice of ruling through the noblemen toward a more state-like empire. While the this progress is undeniable, attested most tangibly in contemporary coinage, the case of al-Ḥajjāj suggest that we should not imagine this centralization to mean an absolute ’Abd al-Malik’s rule over the entire caliphate.

The most striking information in this regard is that al-Ḥajjāj directly controlled a larger territory than ’Abd al-Malik himself. With his brother ruling Yemen, his nephew Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Thaqafī campaigning in India, and his son Muḥammad fighting the Daylamites at the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, we should rather speak of two dynasties in collaboration: the Thaqafites in Iraq, Yemen, and the Eastern provinces and the Umayyads in Syria (’Abd al-Malik and later his son al-Walīd), Egypt (’Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān, brother of ’Abd al-Malik), Hijaz (’Umar b. ’Abd al-‘Azīz, nephew of ’Abd al-Malik and future caliph), Jazīra and the North (Muḥammad b. Marwān, the half-brother of ’Abd al-Malik and later Maslama, the son of ’Abd al-Malik). Marriage politics confirms

\(^{117}\) Robinson, ’Abd al-Malik, 35.
this Umayyad-Thaqafite collaboration. Al-Ḥajjāj’s niece married the caliph Yazīd II (r. 101-105/720-724) and gave birth to the future caliph al-Walīd II (r. 125-126/743-744), and his daughter married a son of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik.

Another indication of his autonomy is that al-Ṭabarī, at the end of each year in his History where he outlines the political landscape of the caliphate, regularly mentions al-Ḥajjāj as the ruler of Iraq and the East in its entirety.118 We saw that al-Ḥajjāj appointed governors and administrators, directed conquests, had a personal army, founded his own residential city, and minted his own coins. Numismatic evidence is especially telling, and not only because it reveals his fiscal monopoly, as we have already seen. The minting patterns attest to the autonomy of the Eastern super-province because they change with each governor, not each caliph, which means that from the time of al-Ḥajjāj, control over the coinage lay in the hands of the governors.119 Based on all this, it almost seems that al-Ḥajjāj was running a largely autonomous Eastern super-province of the Umayyad-Thaqafite empire.

2. The historical al-Ḥajjāj was not the tyrant of Islamic history par excellence as the sources depict him. To be sure, he may have been a harsh and even cruel ruler and I certainly do not want fall into the trap of the celebratory scholarly literature that attempts to remove the blame from him and praises him as a genius.120 My point is simply that he did not differ much from other rulers of his time and his image is mainly a result of the fierce propaganda directed against him already during his time. Think of all the rebellions

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120 I have already pointed to some studies that deal with al-Ḥajjāj in this manner: Ziyāda, al-Ḥajjāj, al-ʿAmad, al-Ḥajjāj, Darkazally, “al-Ḥajjāj.”
and the anti-Umayyad sentiments in the early Abbasid period, when the Umayyad legacy was still feared. We can suspect that claims that about 120,000 people died in his prisons are exaggerated. And even if they were true, we must realize that others were not less ‘tyrannical’ than he was; the difference consists mainly in that their smear campaigns were ‘forgotten’ by later compilers.

Yet we can see some traces, especially when we look in less mainstream sources. For example, sources that are more interested in the life of Christians under Islamic rule, such as Pseudo-Methodius or Bar Hebraeus, describe in detail the horrific crimes of Muḥammad b. Marwān, the governor of Jazīra and the brother of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. In an infamous incident, he invited all the Armenian chiefs into one church which he then set on fire.\(^1\) While the mainstream Muslim narratives mention Muḥammad b. Marwān only in passing, he becomes the villain in the Syriac sources.\(^2\) The Chronicle of 1234 for example includes a section entitled “The evils committed by Ḥajjāj and Muḥammad bar Marwān in their lands,” placing Muḥammad b. Marwān on par with al-Ḥajjāj.\(^3\) Or take the case of ʿAbd al-Malik, the caliph celebrated both in Muslim medieval sources and in modern scholarship. Even the Abbasid historians appreciated his leadership abilities,\(^4\) modern scholars note with admiration his epoch-making reforms and the fact that he was the father of the four following caliphs. We can find traces of propaganda against the caliph


in speeches of rebels, like the governor of al-Madāʾin who called both ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj “tyrants and despots who follow their own vain opinions, seizing people on idle suspicions and killing them out of simple anger.” Bar Hebraeus records a much more vivid image when he claims that the caliph had rotten teeth and his mouth attracted a lot of flies, which is why he was called ‘Father of flies.’ That this depiction circulated among his opponents is confirmed by one of Ibn al-Zubayr’s speeches. When ʿAbd al-Malik killed ʿAmr b. Saʿīd al-Ashdaq (‘Eloquent’), the noble Umayyad who had rebelled against him and taken over Damascus, Ibn al-Zubayr made a speech in which he said: “The Father of Flies killed the one Afflicted by the Devil.” This incident with the ʿAmr the ‘Eloquent’ also sheds light on some darker sides of ʿAbd al-Malik’s personality. When the caliph besieged Damascus, he first offered ʿAmr life if he surrendered. But when the rebel surrendered, the caliph broke his promise, tortured him, broke his front teeth, and then cut his throat with his own hand. But incidents like this one usually go without a commentary by the Muslim sources and the propaganda agisnt him, exemplified here by the ‘Father of Flies’ sobriquet, was largely ‘forgotten’ in Muslim sources.

3. Al-Ḥajjāj was not a submissive, loyal servant. This is the image that we usually get from later sources, as I pointed above. On various occasions, the sources show the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik scolding his servant for his misdeeds and harshness and insulting. But I want to suggest that these incidents are part of a narrative strategy through which the

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125 Al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, History, 22:145.
126 Bar Hebræus, Gregorii Barhebræi Chronicon Syriacum, 111.
127 Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 2:95. Lord of the Flies is the translation of “abū al-dhabbān.” Elsewhere ʿAmr also calls him Ibn al-Zarqāʾ, “Son of the Blue-Eyed Woman.” Fishbein explains it that in Arabic poetry, blue eyes are considered a defect, either a sign of poor vision or a sign of hostility. Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:786; Al-Ṭabarī and Fishbein, History, 139, n.498.
caliph emerges as remorseful for al-Ḥajjāj’s misdeeds. In this way, they imply that ʿAbd al-Malik’s only sin consists in employing someone as tyrannical as al-Ḥajjāj not in being a tyrant himself. These reports are meant to humiliate the governor and to deflect the blame from ʿAbd al-Malik. But al-Ḥajjāj’s power and autonomy speak differently as we just discussed and hence, we should see the relationship between him and the caliphs as a fruitful collaboration instead of a servile dependency. Over the years al-Ḥajjāj made himself indispensable to the Umayyads and assumed much greater power than originally intended. Not only did his family intermarry with the Umayyads, he even influenced the succession of Umayyad caliphs when he pushed for al-Walīd against ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān, and his autonomy accordingly increased when al-Walīd indeed became a caliph. Though al-Ḥajjāj never claimed the caliphate, he put much effort into constructing his political and religious authority as the sole ruler of Iraq and the East. We will see the cultural side of these efforts clearly in the following chapters.

1.3.2. USE OF SPEECHES

We notice that in the story of al-Ḥajjāj’s life as portrayed by al-Ṭabarī, much use is made of public speech. To be sure, many of the speeches recorded in the books of history are probably the result of the historians’ effort to enhance the narrative and to express the motivations of their characters, parallel to the practice in Arabic, Latin, Greek, Armenian, and other historical works of the time. In Chapter 4, I will show that this was not always


130 See the discussion of speeches in Sebeos and Thomson, The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), lii ff. Averil Cameron has discussed the rhetorical speech in the 6th century work of Procopius. See Averil Cameron, Procopius and the Sixth Century (London: Routledge, 1985), 45 n. 75, 68, 146, 148, 149, 150.
the case and that some of these speeches had been transmitted orally before they were written down by these historians. But here I want to draw our attention to a different matter: often these speeches are not mainly a platform to express different points of view, but play an active role in the historical narratives. Similarly, rumors, poems, and other speech forms that carry different ideologies and messages are granted an important place in the narratives. In other words, they form the core of the narrative unit and change the course of events: al-Ḥajjāj’s famous inaugural speech is said to have pushed the Kufans to hurry to fight his enemies; a speech is said to have convinced the army of Ibn al-Ashʿath to join him in his revolt; ‘Amr the deputy of ʿAbd al-Malik in Damascus announced his rebellion in a speech; Ghazālā claimed the takeover of Kufa through the symbolic act that consisted of a prolonged Qur’anic recitation in the main mosque; Sajāḥ convinced the whole tribe of Tamīm to join her war against Muḥammad through her own prophetic proclamations; and there is more. In connection with important battles, conquests, or the death and succession of a new caliph, a speech is often mentioned. Al-Ḥajjāj too has famous speeches after the Battle at Dayr al-Jamājim and on the occasion of the death of ʿAbd al-Malik, and we will further analyze these speeches in Chapters 4 and Appendix II.

The active role of speeches in the narrative may remind us of a distinction that Wolfhart Heinrichs made between commentary poems and ‘action poems.’\textsuperscript{131} Heinrichs showed that while some poems may have just literary devices while others may have actually driven the narratives. Accordingly, the examples just mentioned could be called ‘action speeches.’ While it is often hard to decide whether the speeches were already part of the reports handed to al-Ṭabarî, or whether he embellished the narratives, in many cases

other accounts corroborate that the speeches took place. This will be further elaborated in Chapter 5. My point here is that the historical narratives do not only preserve the speeches themselves, but also comment on their performance and effect, thereby arguably retaining insights about the cultural relevance of public speech.

The Khārijites are especially connected with the practice of oratory and their speeches, recorded in later works of history and *adab*, are praised as masterpieces despite their reputation as fanatics. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940) justifies their inclusion in his *al-ʾIqd al-Farīd* ("Unique Necklace"), claiming that their speeches are beyond comparison. He also includes the testimony of Anas b. Mālik himself, the famous Companions, who admired Abū Ḥamza’s speech. This points to the fact that the speeches were an earlier material. How so? It is implausible that he would make these speeches up if their inclusion seemed problematic. On the contrary, it appears that the Khārijite speeches were too famous to be left out, even despite the contemporary reservations against them. In this regard they have something in common with al-Ḥajjāj, their fiercest and most implacable enemy, whose eloquence is also noted, while preserving the general distaste with his persona, as if to justify the presence of his speeches among those of the luminaries of Islam.

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132 Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *ʾIqd*, 4:145. This is part of his preface to the central book of his *ʾIqd* titled "*Kitāb al-wāṣita fi al-khutab."

133 Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih includes a few short accounts about how various Islamic figures evaluated the oratorical abilities of others, and al-Ḥajjāj is one among those whose eloquence was noted in one account. The account has it that ʿAbd al-Malik asked the Kufan scholar Khālid Ibn Salama al-Makhzūmī, who the most eloquent person (*akhtabu al-nās*) was. Khālid first names himself, then Rawḥ b. Zinbāʾ who was ʿAbd al-Malik’s right hand in Damasc, and then Al-Ḥajjāj, whom he calls Ukhayfish Thaqīf, i.e., "The Little, Weak-Sighted one (*ukhayfish*) of the Thaqīf." The last one whom Khālid mentions is ʿAbd al-Malik. This report conveys to us two thing about al-Ḥajjāj. One the one hand, it mentions him as one of the most eloquent people of his time; on the other hand, it shows that the one who held him in such esteem eloquence-wise, did not think of him much otherwise. Calling someone "The Little, Weak-Sighted one" clearly does not show much affection. This may perhaps serve as a way for Khālid (but also for Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih) to dissociate himself from al-Ḥajjāj, while still acknowledging his eloquence. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *ʾIqd*, 4:146.
1.3.3. SHARED CULTURAL SPACE

1.3.3.1. Monasteries and the inwardness of sources

In al-Ḥajjāj’s biography, we could note a number of monasteries, as passive observers of the events taking places, either as sites of battles or havens of refuge. Monasteries evoke opportunities of cultural interchange. Elizabeth Key Fowden has described the cultural convergence of Roman urbanism, Christian pilgrimage, Arab pastoralism, and trade in her study of the Ghassānid shrine complex of St. Sergius at Rusāfa, and we could think of many of these monasteries in similar terms. Their main pragmatic function in this time was to supply the constantly fighting Muslim troops with the necessary provision. Al-Ṭabarī tells us, for instance, that in the monastery of Abū Maryam a general of al-Ḥajjāj’s army, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Sabra, “had provided the mounted troops with barley and clover heaped up like castles and slaughtered for them all the meat that they could wish for…” We may imagine that it would be key to secure the support of the monks and the provision that the wealthy monasteries offered that the Muslims must have made some agreements with them. They were the places where Muslims came in contact with Christian monks and their rituals. Later 4th/10th century diyārāt literature (a genre

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134 I am using the cursory mentions of monasteries in al-Ṭabarī, as an example of the inwardness of the Muslim sources that push any non-Muslim non-Arab elements far to the background. Other examples could be found too, such as the diḥqān. The diḥqān were the Sasanian landed gentry who controlled rural areas and collected taxes well into the Islamic period and are often mentioned in the same campaign as the monasteries below as part of Shabīb’s entourage. They, however, never play any role in al-Ṭabarī’s narrative. See for example al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, History, 2:912. Despite the fact that the diḥqān must have been essential in seizing any success in the territory that they knew so well, they are almost entirely left out of the main narrative, appearing here and there not as agents but as characters that display amazement, fear, or humiliation. Occasionally, we hear of incidents of injustice against them that go unpunished. An example would be an incident when families of two diḥqāns, who had been killed, come to complain, but al-Ḥajjāj does not hear their complaint. Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:941.

135 Elizabeth Key Fowden, The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

136 Al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, History, 2:939.
devoted to monasteries) depicts them as places where urban Muslims went to enjoy their gardens and orchards, to consume wine and engage in amorous adventures, to enjoy Christian festivals, to heal the sick, to make a pilgrimage to sites of shared religious heritage, or to see miraculous objects like a roof that altered its dimensions every time someone tried to measure it.\(^{137}\) Though these functions of monasteries may belong to the Abbasid period, some seeds may have been already sown under the Umayyads. For instance, contemporary Christian monks and saints like John of Daylam had won fame as healers. Christian sources narrated that he healed 'Abd al-Malik’s daughter or son and in return asked for churches to be build. Interestingly, he is also credited with curing al-Ḥajjāj from cancer.\(^{138}\) This and similar narratives suggest that already then Muslims would visit monasteries to seek cures when disease struck them. In this regard it should be mentioned that the main herald of the Umayyad cause, the poet al-Akḥṭal was Christian\(^ {139} \) and that the Umayyads relied the on the support of Christian Arab tribes, such as Banū Taghlib, and employed non-Arab and non-Muslim administrators.\(^{140}\)

Monasteries not only provided actual opportunities for cultural exchange but also carried symbolic significance. The thick network of shrines, sacred places, sites of holy men, and monasteries created a distinctly Christian sacred topography from Egypt to Mesopotamia. With the coming of the new Islamic power, the Umayyad caliphs at times made use of the divine authority of these places, as the close association of the mosque


\(^{140}\) For Christians as part of the Umayyad state see the recent Fred Donner and Antoine Borrut, eds. Christians and Others in the Umayyad State, (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2016).
with the shrine at the Rusāfa complex indicates. At other times, they constructed a distinct caliphal space and Umayyad visual culture through a network of the famous ‘desert castles’, which also served as the stops on routes of the caliphs who affirmed their power through the practice of itinerant kingship.

Nothing of this emerges when we read al-Ṭabarī’s narrative, as if the Christian sacred landscaped is being deliberately erased. Let us take as an example his account about the incident that begins Shabīb’s rebellion and takes place in the monastery of Khurrazād close to Nahrawān (near modern-day Baghdad), mentioned earlier, in which the 3000 men of Taym b. Shaybān were so terrified of Shabīb’s seventy men that they hid from him in the monastery. The narrative is conspicuously silent about the monks. What happened to the monks of the monastery? Were they killed, were they left alone, were they part of the negotiations? The monastery of Khurrazād must have been a large complex if it could accommodate 3000 men, but we read nothing about it. The monks and their monastery are written out of the story of Shabīb’s rebellion and deliberately marginalized.

In this case and elsewhere, al-Ṭabarī portrays the world of early Islam as if it were a playground of a handful of elite Arab-Muslim families, their sons and grandsons. His narratives cannot be taken at face value, as they were produced by and for an Arab military elite. The fact that the various non-Muslim elements are often omitted from the main

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142 See Borrut, “Pouvoir mobile et construction de l’espace dans les premiers siècles de l’islam;” For a discussion of the Umayyad desert castles see Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 412-435. These two ways are not incompatible as some of the castles were originally monasteries.
143 Take the narrative of the early Islamic competition for power. It is essentially a story of the struggle between two families, the Sufyānids, and Hāshimites, the family of the Prophet, with the Hāshimites as the losers: Abū Sufyān was the military leader of the Meccans against Muhammad at the battles of Uḥud (3/624) and the Battle of the Trench in (5/627). Abū Sufyān’s son, the caliph Muʿāwiya was the greatest enemy of the ‘Alī, the last caliph of the Rightly-Guided caliphs, and Muhammad’s son-in-law. Muʿāwiya’s son, Yazīd defeated ‘Alī’s son Ḥusayn, whose killing became the key element of Shiite memory and self-identification.
narratives does not mean that the Arabs lived in isolation from the non-Arabs; rather it reflects both the Arabs’ particular self-interests and a conscious effort at forging an exclusively Arabo-Muslim narrative.

Non-Muslim sources are not any better at transcending the self-interest of the author’s group. We have seen earlier that the identity of the tyrant depends on whether our sources are Muslim Iraqi or Christian Syrian. The difference lies only in focus and not in method. The inwardness is also characteristic for other late antique sources. Shai Secunda, for instance, in his recent work that sets the Babylonian Talmud in the world of late antique Sasanian Iran notes that the “most vexing” problem of his material: both the Babylonian Talmud and Middle Persian literature seem to be “so generally uninterested in each other.”144 This, as he explains, reflects more their elite status and divergent interests than the actual cultural segregation of the scholars that engaged in their study, transmission, and advancement; scholars who were “inhabiting the same cities and neighborhoods, shopping in the same markets, housing each other in times of peace and war, engaging in religious disputation, exchanging greetings and gifts, and supporting each other’s poor.”145 Like Jews and Zoroastrians in pre-Islamic Iran, so Muslims, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, pagans, and others lived next to each other in the multilingual, multi-confessional and multicultural world of early Islam and the wider late antique world.

It is thus the elite nature of sources written for the Arab-Muslim rulers and readership that skews our image of the early period into seeing it as a predominantly Arab-Muslim affair. Jack Tannous has pointed out the elite status of the Christian sources and

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their misrepresentation of early Christian-Muslim interactions.\footnote{Tannous, “Syria Between Byzantium and Islam” Part III, 378ff. “We should not think about Christianity in terms of a set of propositional doctrines, I argue, but rather as an adherence to a set of Christian symbols and rituals which provided means for dealing with very concrete and real difficulties in life.” (18)} Michael Penn also points to the prescriptive value of his sources (e.g., accounts of conversion and near-conversion, circumcision, intermarriage, and the sharing of shrines) and shows that their authors are primarily concerned with boundary-setting in a world where boundaries between Muslim and Christian were not so clearly combined with the need to cooperate with Muslims.\footnote{Michael Philip Penn, Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). See especially Chapter 4.} To write early Islamic history, we need to overcome these boundaries.

\subsection*{1.3.3.2. Islam as a late antique phenomenon}

Ever since Peter Brown’s groundbreaking \textit{The World of Late Antiquity} (1971), it has become a trope for late antique specialists to see Islam as part of the late antique world with all the connotations of multiculturalism, multilingualism, and transformation that this label carries. Brown proposed the term ‘late antiquity’ for a period between the $2^{\text{nd}}$ and $8^{\text{th}}$ century to describe a time of transition from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages. He argued against the traditional view of this period as a decline, depicting it rather as a period of evolution and growth and crucial transformation of the Abrahamic religions. Seeing the beginnings of Islam within the shared space of late antiquity is an important development, especially given the deep-rooted tendency to portray Islam as the essential ‘Other’ of the West, as Edward Said expounded in \textit{Orientalism} (1978) and Joseph Massad most recently in \textit{Islam in Liberalism} (2015).
Long before Peter Brown, Orientalists in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, whose study of the Bible and rabbinic Judaism provided their point of departure for the study of Islam, emphasized the similarities between Islam and their own traditions. But their discourse about influences was not value-free, because it portrayed Muḥammad and the early Muslims passively receiving and adopting a patchwork of Judeo-Christian beliefs, which, slightly modified, were then labeled Islamic.\textsuperscript{148} This Orientalist model did not strike the right chord with Muslims and sometimes the concept of late antiquity is perceived with similar suspicion. Muslims emphasize Islam’s difference from (and superiority over) previous religions and see their civilization as a result of the Qur’ānic revelation, the sunna of the Prophet, and struggles within the early community. As a result, the emergence of Islam has been dealt with in two contrary ways: either Islam as borrowed from other traditions or Islam as internally self-generated. Clearly, both are problematic. Recently scholars have approached the embeddedness of Islam in the late antique world in four ways.

The first approach is an effort at large-scale comparison. Aziz Al-Azmeh’s \textit{The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity} (2014) is a serious attempt to understand Islam as both part of the late antique world and an independent intellectual tradition. Al-Azmeh sees Islam as a culmination of long-term processes that began in 3\textsuperscript{rd} century Arabia and that were parallel to larger trends of the region. On a similar note, Antoine Borrut has recently argued for taking Arabia seriously as a part of the late antique world.\textsuperscript{149} Garth Fowden in \textit{Before and After Muhammad} (2014) suggests expanding our temporal framework of reference to the First Millennium, which allows for a comparison of Judaism, Christianity,

\textsuperscript{148} As one example can serve the work of Abraham Geiger and his 1833 essay “Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?”
\textsuperscript{149} Borrut, “Islamic Late Antiquity.”
and Islam in their maturity and the geographical framework eastward, which would embrace Iran. The second approach consists in tracing the continuities between the pre-Islamic past and early Islamic present in one specific region, as seen in Michael Morony’s classic *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (1984), which presents copious arguments for continuity. A third approach concentrates on the Christian-Muslim interaction in the shared, and largely Christian space of early Islam, represented by Jack Tannous’s dissertation (2010) and his forthcoming *The Making of the Medieval Middle East* (2018). A fourth approach has been to explore a certain phenomenon that cuts across religious communities. Thomas Sizgorich has focused on the centrality of violence to the self-understanding of Christians and Muslims between the fourth and ninth centuries in *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity* (2014). My dissertation takes the last approach, as it focuses on public speech as a phenomenon of early Islam while bearing in mind the wider late antique framework.

But once we acknowledge the embeddedness of the early Islamic world in this framework, another question arises: How can we talk about the parallels between the different cultures and traditions? Speaking about influences and borrowings is not particularly productive, as we have seen. Moreover, influences and borrowings are not always the mechanisms of cultural exchange. Recently, Mathieu Tillieur noted very close judicial procedures in Islamic Egypt and the East-Syrian patriarchate. Since the two were not part of the same administrative tradition, he posits the similarities being based on

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151 See also Michael Penn’s *Envisioning Islam* which shows how Syriac Christians made sense of the new Muslim order.

deeper common ground of shared legal traditions.\textsuperscript{153} Shared cultural space would then be one answer. Even when two cultures come into contact, this does not have to imply direct influences and borrowings. Daniel Boyarin has argued that the dialogue between Jews and Christians in 6\textsuperscript{th} century Syria was more alive than the Talmud, which denies any direct contacts, admits.\textsuperscript{154} He also does not speak in terms of influences but rather a shared discursive space.\textsuperscript{155} Shai Secunda has presented six different ways that scholars of Jewish Studies have interpreted parallels.\textsuperscript{156} It seems that because the Jews lived as part of larger political systems for centuries, scholars in Jewish Studies have thought more closely about how to talk about shared cultural space. Michael Satlow has proposed in his programmatic article\textsuperscript{157} “a historical model that avoids the traditional dichotomy between ‘Jewish’ and ‘alien’ cultures” (wherein alien refers to Hellenism or Christianity), and rather sees Jews as fully embedded in their cultural environments.”\textsuperscript{158} In terms of methodology, he suggests four steps: 1) to focus on people and their agency rather than on abstractions; 2) to recognize the fluid nature of identity and identity formation; 3) to assume similarities and to explain differences instead; 4) linking different types of data. This is what this study


\textsuperscript{155} Boyarin, “Dialectic,” 235.

\textsuperscript{156} These six interpretations of parallels are: 1) false friends 2) widely held beliefs 3) effects of shared circumstances 4) direct influences 5) related but variant expressions of two communities participating in a broader cultural project, 6) light influence through reception, incorporation, rejection, and reaction. See Secunda, \textit{The Iranian Talmud}, 112-114.


\textsuperscript{158} Satlow, “Beyond Influence,” 39.
attempts to do, focusing on one key figure, bringing to light his contributions to the forming Arab identity, and crossing the boundaries of literature and history. We still have a long way to go on the ‘assuming similarities’ front which is why I emphasize them in this and the following section.

At the same time, we have to account for differences too. We need to acknowledge, for example, that the level embeddedness of individual rulers in their multicultural environment differed. M. Sprengling noted the difference between ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjaj and the earlier Sufyānids such as Muʿāwiya. Muʿāwiya came to Syria when he was young and his “children and grandchildren were born there [in Syria] and in their youth played with desert Bedouin in springtime, but with Greeks and Syrians at court the rest of the year. Small wonder that a grandson of his was interested in Greek science.” In contrast, ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjaj abandoned the Arabian Hijaz for the multicultural environment of Syrian and Iraq when they were adults, which may have been one of the factors that contributing to their politics aimed at enforcing a distinctly Arabo-Muslim identity.

1.3.3.3. The late antique heritage of public speech in Byzantium and east

To shed light on the importance of Umayyad oratory and on the reverence of the spoken word in this period, we must understand these in their late antique context. For the Arabs conquered territories infused with ancient rhetorical traditions. Once rhetoric was the elementary art that anyone who wanted to be accepted among the elite had to practice. The 4th century witnessed the famous school of Libanius (d. 393) in Antioch, which was no

159 M. Sprengling, “From Persian to Arabic,” The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 56.2 (1939), 193-194.
isolated phenomenon. In the Roman East of the 4th century there was a thick and vital network of schools of rhetoric.\textsuperscript{160} This heritage did not disappear even during the 7th and 8th centuries, when Byzantium was going through what was once called the “dark ages”.

While classical learning (including the teaching of rhetoric) was slowly diminishing, public speech retained its importance. Averil Cameron showed that this was the age of both literary and actual disputation\textsuperscript{161} and used the terms “frenzy of argument” to describe it.\textsuperscript{162} This period witnessed the “great dispute” between Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), probably the most prominent Christian thinker of the 7th century and the deposed patriarch of Constantinople in front of large audience in Carthage in 645 on the question of monothelitism. This dispute had a great impact, three councils were convened as a result, and it stirred an anti-monothelitist movement among the bishops of Africa.\textsuperscript{163}

Furthermore, many councils took place in the 7th and 8th century and attracted large audiences. This table, which I put together, provides only a very schematic overview of these:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Date} & \textbf{Title} & \textbf{Location} & \textbf{Main issue} & \textbf{Attendance} \\
\hline
29/649 & Lateran Council & Rome & monothelitism & 105 bishops \\
61-62/680 & Third Council of Constantinople & Constantinople & monoenergism and monothelitism & 37; 151 bishops (opening and closing sessions, resp.) \\
73/692 & Quinisext Council & Constantinople & ritual observance & 215 bishops \\
137/754 & Synod of Hieria & Constantinople & icons & 333 bishops \\
171/787 & Second Council of Nicaea & Nicea & icons & 350 bishops \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Christian councils in the 7th and 8th centuries}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{160} Raffaella Cribiore, \textit{The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 82.

\textsuperscript{161} Most of them appeared in the 4th or 5th century. Averil Cameron, \textit{Dialoguing in Late Antiquity} (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, 2014).


Not only were hundreds of bishops present during these councils but also large crowds of onlookers. The councils’ proceedings were carefully written down. Public speech and debate retained an eminent social and political role in Byzantium and even flourished.

Public speech was not limited to elite rhetors and bishops nor was it limited to Byzantium. Pauline Allen has identified a wide variety of preachers (patriarchs, bishops, priests, deacons, monks, etc.) and their audiences (imperial families, bishops, metropolitans, etc.) across Byzantium of the sixth century. In the east, preaching was widely practiced there as well. Adam Becker sees a tendency toward public debate as an important feature of East Syrian scholasticism and explains that East Syrians in the School of Seleucia and the School of Nisibis were trained to debate publicly also with members of other communities. The School of Seleucia itself was founded according to the Chronicle of Siirt (4th-5th/10th-11th centuries) in the aftermath of a famous public debate between a Christian and a Zoroastrian, which had taken place in the same location. And the sixth-century Simeon of Beth Arsham—a bishop, known as an eloquent and passionate disputant for the Miaphysite cause—reportedly bested the East-Syrian Catholicos himself in a debate. These debates, legendary or not, clearly indicate that public debate was seen as a powerful tool.

Aside from such legendary debates, the sources tell of many men, like Simeon of Beth Arsham, who went and preached Christianity among Arabs of Mesopotamia. The

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166 Becker, Fear of God, 158.
167 Beth Arsham was located near Seleucia-Ctesiphon.
168 Becker, Fear of God, 130.
most famous among them is another Simeon—the fifth-century Simeon the Stylite, who earned his name and glory for living for 37 years on a pillar close to Aleppo as act of ascetic devotion to God; a practice that others followed. Theodoret of Cyrrhus who knew Simeon personally describes Simeon’s preaching:

Making exhortations two times each day, he floods the ears of his hearers, as he speaks most gracefully and offers the lessons of the divine Spirit, bidding them look up to heaven and take flight, depart from earth, imagine the expected kingdom, fear the threat of hell, despise earthly things, and await what is to come.\textsuperscript{169}

Theodoret also describes the Ishmaelites as converting to Christianity in hundreds when they saw and heard Simeon the Stylite.\textsuperscript{170} This may be a hyperbolic statement, yet it shows that the inhabitants of Syria came into contact with Christian preaching. Simeon by no means was the only influential ascetic in his time and region. “The rise of the holy man is the leitmotiv of the religious revolution of Late Antiquity,” says Peter Brown in his influential article.\textsuperscript{171} He describes how the hermits of Syria in the fifth and sixth centuries, who were seen as men with supernatural powers, actively engaged in the lives of Syrian villagers, acting not only as spiritual guides but also as mediators, arbitrators, and community leaders. It is important to realize that much of their influence was exercised through preaching.

It may and it may not be a coincidence that both Umayyad oratory and Byzantine rhetoric in this period witnessed a rise of what George Kennedy called ‘external rhetoric,’ i.e., the “use of external means of persuasion: application or threat of force, torture, or


\textsuperscript{170} “The Ishmaelites, arriving in companies, two or three hundred at the same time, sometimes even a thousand, disown with shouts their ancestral imposture; and smashing in front of this great luminary the idols they had venerated and renouncing the orgies of Aphrodite.” Theodoret, \textit{Religious History}, 166-167.

arbitrary imposition of authority." While Kennedy uses the example of the second trial of Maximus in 662, in the Muslim tradition what first comes to mind is al-Ḥajjāj’s threatening and violent rhetoric in the inaugural khutba at Kufa and the use of external means to strengthen his words, in this case killing an old man who did not follow its orders. This threatening and violent language does not apply only to al-Ḥajjāj but one can also think of Ziyād b. Abīhi’s famous al-khuṭba al-baṭrā’. Muḥammad Abū Ẓahra characterized in similar terms all Umayyad oratory.

Now, given the undeniable spread of public speaking—both in the form of the genre of homilies and in the form of actual preaching—among peoples in late antiquity, we should not be surprised to find that public speaking held an equally important place in early Islamic culture and perhaps even shows certain similarities. The shared cultural heritage of public speech suggests that the Abbasid depictions of the glory of Umayyad oratory are more than imaginative recreations of the past but reflect a reality, where public speaking widely practiced and appreciated.

1.4. CONCLUSION

Focusing on al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh, this chapter laid out the main contours of al-Ḥajjāj’s life to understand place his public speaking in its proper context. We followed al-Ḥajjāj’s trajectory from his days as a schoolteacher in Ta’if, through his military career, until his
time as the ruler of a great part of the Empire. And so emerged a figure of a man who with an immense power who closely collaborated with the caliphs, appointed governors, directed conquests, and supervised large administrative projects. It is rather a different picture than the one that the traditional depicts—that of the tyrannical loyal vasal of the Umayyads. It seems that al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf was a semi-autonomous ruler of the Islamic East.

He however had a crucial blemish: his low pedigree, which undermined his legitimacy and ultimately also his power. As contemporary poetry records, it was also the main thing that was used against him by his opponents; a fact that incidentally also speaks about the power of contemporary propaganda. The effectivity and effect of different types of oral performances—such as speech, poetry, Quʾānic recitation—is evidenced on multiple instances in the narrative sources. We will see that it is precisely this blemish that al-Ḥajjāj keeps battling his whole life by employing different cultural means, most importantly, his public speaking.

His public speaking must be, this chapter also argued, considered in the larger context of the contemporary late antique rhetorical traditions of the region. A close analysis of the narratives concerning al-Ḥajjāj’s rule revealed many hints at interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims and at the spaces that they shared, while at the same time exemplifying a clear disinterest of the Muslim sources in such things. This however should not detract from seeing Umayyad public speech as part of the larger world which had cherished and cultivated it for centuries. The following chapter will contextualize al-Ḥajjāj’s speaking differently—as part of his larger cultural program.
CHAPTER 2

CULTURE AND POWER: SACRED SPACE, HOLY WORD, ARABIC LANGUAGE, AND PANEGYRIC POETRY

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Do you not wonder about this sinner? He climbs the steps of the pulpit and speaks like prophets; then he descends from it and murders like tyrants—he speaks in accordance with God and he acts in contradiction to Him.

Al-Ḥasan al-Ḍārī about al-Ḥajjāj in Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ “Nahj al-Balāgha”¹

Muslim medieval sources have repeatedly expressed wonder about the discrepancy between al-Ḥajjāj’s eloquent speaking and tyrannical acting, here in the mouth of al-Ḥasan al-Ḍārī. They understand al-Ḥajjāj’s eloquence as an oddity, an aberration of his otherwise brutish personality. In contrast, this chapter will make evident that the governor’s famed eloquence was very much in harmony with his overall politics in that it formed part of his larger use of cultural means to bolster his power.

First let us look, however, at the accounts of al-Ḥajjāj’s eloquence. Muslim sources portray al-Ḥajjāj as an eloquent man and credit his speeches with an enormous effect on people. The great philologist al-ʾAṣmaʿī (d. 216/828) called al-Ḥajjāj the most eloquent of those who never erred in language.² The governor was also compared in eloquence to al-Ḥasan al-Ḍārī (d. 110/728), the famous scholar and religious authority of Basra,³ and in intelligence to Iyās b. Muʿāwiya, the qāḍī of Basra, famous for his astonishing perspicacity

¹ in Ṣafwat, Jamhara, 2:288, nr.284.
³ Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 12:116-117.
(firāsa). The same al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is recorded to have wondered about the governor’s impressive oratory, as we saw above, and the ascetic Mālik b. Dīnār, whom we met above, reportedly said that when he heard al-Ḥajjāj speak from the pulpit about all the good things he did for the Iraqis, he was almost ready to believe him. We will see that narratives that accompany al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches describe the great effects that his speeches had on his audience.

Furthermore, countless anecdotes portray the governor as someone who valued eloquence above anything and could, on this basis alone, grant life and fulfill all wishes, but also exile, torture, and kill people. These anecdotes are scattered across books of history and adab, many of them can be found in Kitāb al-Aghānī (“Book of Songs”) by Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/967). Al-Ḥajjāj for example puts an end to his killing of Iraqi war prisoners only when one of them eloquently objects. The story goes: “Al-Ḥajjāj was beheading war prisoners one by one, when one of them said: ‘By God, we may have acted wrongly and sinned, but you are no better than us in forgiveness.’ When al-Ḥajjāj heard these words, he exclaimed: ‘Ugh, these corpses! But there is one among them who can speak like this!’ Then he put an end to the killings.” On other hand, he exiles a grammarian because he points out that the governor makes a few mistakes in speech.

Modern scholars have sometimes the tendency to dismiss such stories about eloquent figures of the past as literary fancy of the Abbasid litterateurs for whom eloquence was the number one commodity. They, while undoubtedly deformed through Abbasid lenses, need to be seen as part of a broader imagining of language—as an extremely

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4 Al-Jāḥīz, Bayān, 1:100.
5 Al-Jāḥīz, Bayān, 2:193.
6 Al-Jāḥīz, Bayān, 1:259.
7 This man is Yaḥyā b. Yaʿmur, see Chapter 3.
effective tool of warfare and pragmatic politics. This is attested, for instance, in contemporary poetry commenting on the potency of different types of speech on the battlefield. For instance, Naṣr b. Sayyār (d.131/748), the governor of Iraq and Khurasan towards the end of the Umayyad period, described words as capable of beginning war:

Through openings in the wall of ashes around me, I see embers’ sparkle
   Threatening to burst into flames
   As two sticks make a fire
   So words begin the struggle of war.
   I said in wonder, if only I knew:
   Are the Umayyads awake or asleep?
   If they have slept till this point,
   Tell them: Wake up! Your sleeping is over.  

While in the second line Naṣr says that words can incite war, in the third and fourth he actually tries to apply this truth and attempts to incite the Umayyads to war. Ṭahrīḍ, “the incitement to war,” was a common theme across genres, poetry, oratory, qaṣaṣ, and rajaz, and we encounter it below in connection with al-Ḥajjāj. Another Umayyad poet, Thābit Quṭna (d. ca. 110/728) uses a metaphor in which he compares his weapons to speech. Thābit, a one-eyed9 warrior-poet who participated in, and composed many verses about, the wars of conquest in Khurasan, Samarqand, and Transoxania, said:

   If I am not the most skilled orator among them all,
   Then I deliver the speech through the brown spear and sword.  

The usual metaphor depicting speech to be as powerful as a weapon is reversed in the poet’s verse, showing the equivalence of the two. The early Islamic poet Rabīʿa, in turn, expressed the power “eloquence, tongue, and debate” to an elephant, a feared war animal:

   How many a tight situation have I solved
   Through eloquence, tongue, and debate

8 Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:158-159.
9 Thābit Quṭna lost his eye in a fight and was covering it with a cotton band, hence his nickname “Quṭna.”
10 Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:231.
If an elephant or its driver tried to do the same he would have failed.\textsuperscript{11}

Ka‘b al-Ashqarī, the main poet of al-Muhallab, records how the Qur‘ān was used on the battlefield. These verses are part of a long poem which commemorates al-Muhallab’s encounters with the Khārijites at Rāmhurmuz and other places. According to al-Mubarrad, Ka‘b recited a poem in front of al-Ḥajjāj, when al-Muhallab sent him to the governor as envoy, which describes a scene of Qur‘ānic recitation on the battlefield. \textsuperscript{12}

\begin{quote}
The lines of men across the plain, like two mountains
With flashes of lightning between them that rivet the eye
On a zeal that none will give up,
Each side fighting to the recitation of Qur‘ānic chapters.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Imagine the turmoil of war and on the background, as the two armies are chanting the Qur‘ān. The aural dimension of the \textit{sūras} alongside the religious one made for a deep emotional effect on the audience.

These examples show that in al-Ḥajjāj’s time spoken word was seen as capable to incite a war, to harm the enemy like a spear, to mediate peace, and to dazzle and move the soldiers. We need to bear in mind these larger views on speech when examining al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory, which functioned in a similar way—as a powerful political tool. The regularity and ritual dimension of the Friday speech, it’s most usual venue, added to its effect a deeper symbolical meaning. Through the Friday speech the ruling elite on a weekly basis formulated the identity of the Empire and of the universal and local community and asserted their authority, bringing together multiple cultural elements and symbols of power.

\textsuperscript{11} Al-Jāḥiz, \textit{Bayān}, 1:265.


\textsuperscript{13} Al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, \textit{History}, 22:160, Tr. Rowson.
Rectifying al-Ḥajjāj’s image as a brutish tyrant endowed with anomalous eloquence, this chapter argues that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches must be understood as part of the many cultural means that he deployed. Only in this way can they and their speaker be fully appreciated.

2.2. CULTURE AND POWER IN UMAYYAD IRAQ

Men and women do not easily submit to a power which does not weave itself into the texture of their daily existence. And this is one reason why culture remains so politically vital.

Terry Eagleton

This chapter, to paraphrase Eagleton, examines how al-Ḥajjāj wove his power into the texture of his subjects’ daily existence by his use of cultural means. Al-Ḥajjāj used a wide range of cultural means that he used to strengthen his grip on power and claim authority vis-à-vis different segments of Islamic subjects. Some of the most important examples are his building activities, his alleged interventions in the process of the codification of the Qurʾān, the reform of the Arabic script and the Arabization of the administration ascribed to him, and his engagement with contemporary poets and poetry.

The image of al-Ḥajjāj as a brutish tyrant reflects a more generation rhetoric of Abbasid sources that far too often portray the Umayyads as irreligious and uncultured. According to the usual image, poetry was the only art that flourished while all serious learning, translation efforts, and a true cultural renaissance is connected with the Abbasids. Several recent and not so recent studies, however, point to the fact that Umayyad culture has been much underestimated. One field that has received sufficient scholarly attention

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https://solidarity-us.org/atc/137/p1943/
from the outset is Umayyad architecture, a fact which has created a view of imperial culture as mainly Byzantine.\footnote{A summary of modern scholarship on Umayyad architecture is found in K. A. C. Creswell and James W. Allan, \textit{A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture} (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1989).} But a glance into Umayyad poetry, which testifies to the continuity with the cultural traditions and values of pre-Islamic Arabia, reveals that this view is imbalanced, and that we need to comprehend the diverse cultural means in their entirety. The Umayyads, ruling a universalist multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire, needed to appeal to different Near Eastern sensibilities. Already in 1930s Ruth Mackensen pointed to the wide range of literary activities under the Umayyads.\footnote{Already in 1936 Ruth Mackensen and recently Antoine Borrut called for the reassessment of Umayyad culture. Ruth S. Mackensen, “Arabic Books and Libraries in the Umayyad Period,” \textit{The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures} 52.4 (1936): 245-253; Antoine Borrut: “Islamic Late Antiquity, Byzantium, Iran,” Dumbarton Oaks Symposium “The Worlds of Byzantium,” 2016.} Others have recently emphasized the role of cultural life and its connection with the regime: George Saliba has placed the origins of Islamic science to the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik arguing that the Arabization of the \textit{dīwān} referred to much larger body of texts than usually thought, which also included scientific texts;\footnote{George Saliba, \textit{Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance} (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007).} Antoine Borrut has documented the state-sponsored culture of history writing under the Umayyads;\footnote{Antoine Borrut, \textit{Entre ménage et pouvoir: l'espace syrien sous les derniers Ommeyades et les premiers Abbassides} (v. 72-193/692-809) (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 33-60.} Steven Judd has studied the collaboration between religious scholars and the Umayyads; and Suzanne Stetkevych has designated the Umayyad period to be “culturally decisive moment when the panegyric ode was effectively established as the vehicle for the expression of a specifically Arabo-Islamic political allegiance and legitimacy.”\footnote{Suzanne P. Stetkevych, \textit{The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 80. See also her “Al-Akhṭal at the Court of ʿAbd al-Malik” in \textit{Christians and Others in the Umayyad State}, eds. Fred Donner and Antoine Borrut (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2016); \textit{The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic poetry and the Poetics of Ritual} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).} Al-Ḥajjāj is an excellent example of an Umayyad-era ruler
who attempted to weave his power in the texture of his subjects’ daily existence through some epoch-making cultural policies.

2.3. POWER THROUGH SPACE

Erecting new buildings and remodeling old ones in places of cultural and religious importance is a crucial way of asserting power. ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd were well aware of that judging from their programmatic efforts to establish a specifically Umayyad landscape.\(^{20}\) The most famous Umayyad examples are the Dome of the Rock that ʿAbd al-Malik built in 72/692-3 in Jerusalem and the Umayyad mosque in Damascus. In both cases, the caliphs were claiming ancient sacred topographies. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem—the holy city of Christendom and Judaism—was built where the Second Jewish Temple once stood, the mosque in Damascus on the site of the Basilica of St. John the Baptist—previously the Temple of Jupiter. ʿAbd al-Malik’s al-Aqṣā Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem has not been preserved but a Christian pilgrim witnessed that it was built on ancient ruins, which were probably the ruins of the Herodian Royal Stoa—at the time of its construction one of the largest buildings in the world.\(^{21}\) These are all magnificent examples of the Umayyad appropriation of space that was sacred to Muslims, Christians, and Jews—all of whom were the recipients of the message of Islam’s victory


and its continuation in previous religious and imperial traditions. Many traditions confirm the sacred status of Jerusalem and Syria in this period.²²

Al-Ḥajjāj, too, left architectural traces in Syria. An interesting account by Ibn Khallikān states that in Jerusalem the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik commanded al-Ḥajjāj “to build a gate and write his [the caliph’s] name on it. So he did, and built another one for himself,”²³ two gates—one with ‘Abd al-Malik’s name on it and another with that of al-Ḥajjāj in the holy city of Jerusalem—are yet another indication that the relationship between the caliph and his governor was one more of collaboration than of dependency and servitude, going back to our discussion in Chapter 1. Another example of al-Ḥajjāj’s building activities in Syria is a palace at Beth Qubayeh “on which he had lavished much expense,” which Dionysius of Telmahre mentions in relationship with the severe earthquake in 749 that destroyed it.²⁴

Al-Ḥajjāj is nonetheless mainly connected not with the construction but with the destruction of another structure, the Ka‘ba in Mecca, the most sacred place of Islam towards which all Muslims oriente their prayers. The shrine was established according to the Islamic tradition by the Prophet Abraham himself. Therefore, if al-Ḥajjāj’s bombarding of the Ka‘ba was a military decision, it also had an important symbolic dimension. His was one among multiple early Islamic incidents of manipulating the sacred space of Ka‘ba. The sanctuary was demolished and rebuilt one time after another, and al-Ḥajjāj, when he became the governor of Hijaz, he removed Ibn al-Zubayr’s additions. The point of

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²³ Elad, Medieval Jerusalem, 25, n.15.
²⁴ Tr. Hoyland. Theophilus, and Robert G. Hoyland, Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the circulation of historical knowledge in late antiquity and early Islam (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 271, see also n. 821 for the location of the place.
contention was whether \( \text{hijr Ismāʾīl} \)—the crescent shaped area adjacent to the Kaʿba—should or should not be part of the structure.\(^{25}\) The \( \text{hijr} \) (Figure 3) was the legendary place where Ibrāhīm/Abraham built a shelter for his son Ishmael/Ismāʾīl and his mother Hājar/Hagar. The conflict over the sacred space, which al-Ḥajjāj joined, stemmed from more than a scrupulous search for the ‘original Kaʿba.’ It was a battle for enforcing one’s religious authority by manipulating one of the most sacred spaces in Islam.

![Figure 3: 3-Ḥijr. Source: al-Islam.org.](image)

Another, more famous instance of struggle over sacred Islamic space was the manipulation of the prayer direction (\( qibla \)) and here again al-Ḥajjāj plays an important role. As Muslim tradition has it, the \( qibla \) was Jerusalem at first but the Prophet changed it to Mecca early

\(^{25}\) The Syrians had already destroyed the Kaʿba once during the caliphate of Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya. Al-Ṭabarī narrates that they besieged Mecca in 64/683 and hurled stones on Kaʿba and set it on fire. Ibn al-Zubayr then leveled it to the ground, made the \( \text{hijr} \) part of it, and then put the Black Stone by it in an ark. He rebuilt it in the next year and gave it two doors. He claimed that he heard a \( \text{hadīth} \) from his mother on the authority of ʿĀʾisha to whom the Prophet said: “If it were not that your people had only recently been in a state of unbelief, I would restore the Kaʿba on the foundations of Abraham and I would add to the Kaʿba part of the Ḥijr.” When al-Ḥajjāj became the governor of Medina, he dismantled Ibn al-Zubayr’s reconstruction of the Kaʿba and “restored it to its original form.” Al-Ṭabarī, \( Tārīkh, \) 2:427; 2:537; 2:592-593; 2:854 See also the transl. al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, History, 22:1, where Rowson provides a bibliography on \( \text{hijr} \) in n.4.
on (see Q 2:144). Yet, archeological research showed that the qiblas of al-Ḥajjāj’s mosque in Wāsiṭ and another one near Baghdad point far too north (i.e., towards Syria) for this narrative to be correct, a fact that was interpreted in different ways. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, for instance, based on these qiblas and literary evidence from Egypt from the same time, which records that Muslims prayed towards east (i.e., Syria, and not south, i.e., Arabia), argued that Mecca was only the secondary pilgrimage site. Some scholars however believe that ’Abd al-Malik changed the qibla from Mecca to Jerusalem during Ibn al-Zubayr’s caliphate in Hijaz, when Umayyad power was limited to Syria, and built the Dome of the Rock as a substitute for the Ka’ba. All this seems to suggest that still around 700 the qibla was not uniquely directed to the Ka’ba and that al-Ḥajjāj meant to underline the sacredness of Syria. On the other hand, David King explains that the Iraqi qiblas that they faced winter sunset.

We do not know whether Wāsiṭ’s direction of qibla was a contentious matter in al-Ḥajjāj’s own time; however, it was seen as such in the early Abbasid society. A comment by al-Jāḥiẓ shows that he was aware of the Umayyad interference with the qibla and disapproved of it. In his Nābita epistle, he succinctly enumerated the main crimes of ’Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj, one of which is the changing of the qibla:

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28 As for the literary Egypt, they relied on Jacob of Edessa and Severus b. al-Muqaffa’. See Crone and Cook, Hagarism, 23, p.28.
29 See Robinson, Abd al-Malik, 99 on the similarities between the Dome of the Rock and the Ka’ba.
30 King, “From Petra back to Makka.”
31 In other sources there is a tendency to absolve ’Abd al-Malik from blame. The sources portray him ambivalent and hesitant about the bombardment. Al-Ḥajjāj, the actual leader of the army, is depicted as the real culprit.
And they [ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj] one more time destroyed the House [of God] and attacked the sanctuary (ḥaram) of Medina. They destroyed the Kaʿba, violated its sacredness, changed the qibla of Wāṣiṭ, and postponed the Friday prayer until sunset.

Al-Jāḥiẓ was thus well aware of the strange direction of the qibla in the mosque of Wāṣiṭ, later discovered during modern archeological excavations, and he considered it a Marwānid aberration. The northern, i.e., possibly Syrian, direction of the qibla may be related to a report, noted by Robinson, that ascribes to al-Ḥajjāj the blasphemous pronouncement that people who circumambulate the Prophet’s tomb in Medina should circumambulate ʿAbd al-Malik’s palace instead.32 While this may be slander by an opponent, it still points to the fact that al-Ḥajjāj was blamed for overly exalting the figure of the caliph and imbuing it with holiness, a theme that also appears in his speeches (see Chapter 4). Making the qibla in the direction of Syria may have been part of these efforts.

In Iraq al-Ḥajjāj’s spatial politics targeted both at Muslims and non-Muslims. Ibn al-Nadīm preserves a record about a schism between the Manicheans and the role of al-Ḥajjāj’s governor of Madāʾin/Ctesiphon who showed much support to one of the schismatic groups and built churches for them.33 This points to a good relationship between al-Ḥajjāj’s administration and some Manichean groups of Madāʾin/Ctesiphon and its involvement into their internal affairs. Al-Ḥajjāj clearly felt entitled to interfere in the religious affairs of non-Muslim groups. Religious establishment exerted power over non-Muslim audience and so al-Ḥajjāj had an interest in intervening in them. He deposed Ḫnaṇīšhoʿ I, 34 Catholicos of East Syrian Church in the midst of internal struggles and

32 Robinson, ʿAbd al-Malik, 90.
34 Ḫnaṇīšhoʿ died in 699/70. After he was deposed he retired to the monastery of Mār Yunān, where he wrote a gospel commentary. In a part on anti-Jewish polemic he also briefly refers to “some new folly” that sees Jesus only as a prophet. See Michael Penn, When Christians First Met Muslims, 139. It is interesting that, although deposed by a Muslim ruler, he still showed so little interest in Islam.
forbade the election of a new Catholicos; a policy similar to that of Khusraw Parvēz before him, as Morony notes.35 These and other interventions document al-Ḥajjāj’s effort to fashion himself as an inter-confessional broker and authority.

The founding of Wāsiṭ, al-Ḥajjāj greatest accomplishment of spacial politics should be also seen from this perspective despite the fact that Muslim sources have not paid attention to its significance beyond the Arab-Muslim community. Al-Ḥajjāj founded his own city in the fashion of Near Eastern rulers. It is striking how little interest Muslim sources, and modern scholars for that matter, have for this monumental project. They usually mention that in either 83 or 84 al-Ḥajjāj built Wāsiṭ, “The Middle City” 36 as a central point between Basra and Kūfa—some add also Madāʾin and al-Ahwāz—by the village of Kaskar (see below).

Yāqūt records a foundation story according to which the Persian dihqāns did not want to sell the governor the land explaining that it was too swampy, and it was hard to build on it, that the air was so hot that birds fall dead, and people live short lives. But al-Ḥajjāj bought it nevertheless. Yāqūt also quotes another account that derides al-Ḥajjāj for building a city in the middle of the Anbāṭ (in this case: the peasant Aramaic population of Iraq) because he could not protect it from them and they slowly penetrated the city. It is a common motif, that al-Ḥajjāj, having completed the construction of the city, expelled all the Anbāṭ. In the same condemnatory tone, Yāqūt includes a narrative about a man who predicted al-Ḥajjāj’s crimes against the city’s inhabitants and 120,000 victims. Al-Ṭabarī’s foundation story is more positive because it predicts a long life to the city. He reports that al-Ḥajjāj decided to build the city to divide the Syrian troops from the Iraqis ones, because they

39 See also Al-Jahiz, Bayān, 1:275.
40 Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:1125-1127.
clashed. When he was looking for an appropriate place at the fringes of Kaskar he saw a monk on a she-ass (atān). The she-ass urinated, and the monk dug up the urine and threw it into Tigris. When al-Ḥajjāj asked him why he did that, the monk answered: “We find [it written] in our books that there will be built in this place a mosque in which God will be worshiped as long as there remains on earth anyone who proclaims His oneness.”

Building a mosque on a place where a she-ass halted is a theme that resonates profoundly in Islamic imagination and shares symbolic elements with Judeo-Christian thought. To explain, the Prophet Muḥammad entered Medina on his she-camel, which was led by God to halt on the place chosen for building the mosque. The account about Muḥammad shares imagery with the Christian narrative according to which Jesus entered Jerusalem on his she-ass. A talking she-ass also played a beneficent role in in the myth of the false prophet Balaam/Balʿam. In the case of Wāsiṭ, we can see a reflection of these ancient myths in combination with new elements: the urinating she-ass indicates a place where a mosque will be built, which is clearly a reference to the Prophet Muḥammad, with the difference that a she-ass and not a she-camel is used because she-ass is symbolically connected with Christians. The Christian prophecy of the monk and the she-ass serve in this narrative to attest that the future flourishing of Wāsiṭ was a fulfillment of a divine plan. Despite this shared Abrahamic symbolism, the stories of Yāqūt and al-Ṭabarī attribute the foundation of the city to internal Arab reasons, be it the equidistance from Kufa and Basra or conflicts between the Syrians and Iraqis. The location itself is insignificant, and rather unsuitable swamp. A solitary monk makes an appearance only to confirm the future prosperity of the city.

Having noted already the tendency of Muslim accounts to eclipse non-Muslims/non-Arabs, we should not be misled by them but understand the foundation Wāsīṭ within the framework of the shared cultural space of Muslims and Christians. The location of the city is essential to understand the symbolic dimensions of al-Ḥajjāj’s project. The governor did not build his residential city in an obscure swamp but in a space imbued with a profound significance for the Christian populations. The city of Kaskar (Ar.) or Kashkar (Syr.) across the river from Wāsīṭ was the capital of a Sassanian district of the same name and one of the oldest dioceses of the Church of the East. That the Christian apostle Mari consecrated its first bishop may be a legend, but the 4th century bishop ‘Abdīsho‘ is already a historical figure. And as Vööbus and Fiey point out, it is precisely in Kashkar of 4th century that we hear for the first time about monastic practices in this region. The figure of the fifth century saint John of Kashkar and a monastery named after him shows that monasticism continued there. Not only are bishops, monks, and saints connected with the region of Kashkar; it was also “a center of learning for centuries.” In the 6th century the metropolitan of Nisibis, Gregory of Kashkar, founded schools there when he returned to his homeland. And as Fiey notes some of the most important members of the court of Khusraw II (590-628), including his main astrologer and doctor and his treasurer, were from Kashkar. While in the 6th century Kashkar goes through a period a crisis caused by

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42 Michael Morony discusses the geographical extent of the province in his “Continuity and Change in the Administrative Geography of Late Sasanian and Early Islamic al-ʿIrāq.” Iran, 20 (1982), 30.
44 Fiey, Assyrie chrétienne, 152.
45 Fiey, Assyrie chrétienne, 3:156.
46 This monastery was restored around 550 and is still mentioned in the 9th century. Fiey, Assyrie chrétienne, 3:157.
47 Becker, Fear of God, 159.
48 Becker, Fear of God, 159. Cf. Fiey, Assyrie chrétienne, 3:162, who contends that Gregory was from Mesene.
49 Fiey, Assyrie chrétienne, 3:163.
outside intra-religious conflicts, after the Muslim conquest it continued to flourish. We encounter the monk Theodore of Kashkar who pleaded with ‘Umar’s governor of Kashkar to reduce the poll tax. Another notable figure is Mar Sergius Duda who built a monastery in the region. Still roughly in the time of al-Ḥajjāj, Mar Aba II, the bishop of Kashkar, was writing a commentary on Aristotle’s logic. This short sketch of the Christian religious and educational history of Kashkar reveals the cultural significance of the city and the region. Al-Ḥajjāj founded his city continuing in the Sasanian administrative division and appropriating a site of key importance to the Christians. We should not forget that in al-Ḥajjāj’s time, the vast majority of his subjects were Christian. This map of the dioceses in the 10th century reminds us that even late into the Islamic period, Christianity was an important feature of the Islamic world.

50 Concretely, this crisis is caused by the schism between two patriarchs Narsai and Elisha, 524-537. It was in Kashkar that the final council took place that anathemized Elisha. The account of the schism is given in the Chronicle of Seert. Chronique de Séert II in Patrologia Orientalis, vol.7 (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1911), 147-152.

51 That would be either Sa’d b. Abī Waqqās, the founder of Kūfa, or the later appointed al-Mughīra b. Shu‘ba.

52 This information is given by the 14th-century ‘Abdīsho’ bar Brīkhā. Abā reportedly died at the age of 110 in 751AD. Baumstark, Geschichte, 214-215, in Tannous, “Syria Between Byzantium and Islam,” 70-71. Aba was elected patriarch in 740/741. Fiey, Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus, 102.
It is no coincidence, in my view, that al-Ḥajjāj placed his city in a location with a long tradition of Christian learning and religious practice. We have already noted his willingness to enter into inter-confessional politics in order to exercise power beyond the Arab-Muslim elite. The founding of his own city in a location imbued with Sasanian and Christian legacy must be understood for its symbolic value that targeted both the Muslim and non-Muslim populations of Iraq. The new city of Wāsiṭ quickly subsumed the old city of Kashkar and assumed all its past significations. In this light, the records that al-Ḥajjāj built Wāsiṭ for the Syrian troops and expelled all non-Arabs from the city become even more significant. They

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point to the politics of appropriation of past cultural symbols and their subordination to the new regime. Now the Arabs came to rule a place that for centuries had been the center of Christian learning, religion, and culture in the region and made the new center exclusive to them. We cannot be sure that al-Ḥajjāj in fact expelled the non-Arabs from the city but we know that two new monasteries were built around Wāsiṭ after his death.\(^\text{54}\) This shows the lasting relevance of Kashkar-Wāsiṭ to Christians.

The appropriation of Christian space took a very concrete, physical form when the city was being constructed. Al-Ḥajjāj built a congregational mosque, a castle and the “Green Dome” (Qubbat al-khadrā'). He also built several canals and dams around Wāsiṭ, uprooted the reeds of the swamps, and populated them.\(^\text{55}\) Most interesting is his taking doors as *spolia*. Different accounts mention that he removed exquisite doors from the cities of Zandaward, al-Dawqara, Dārūsāt, Dayr Māsirjasān (“Monastery of Mar Sirjis”), and Sharabīṭ, despite the complaints of their inhabitants, and used them for his palace and mosque.\(^\text{56}\) Māsirjasān, discussed previously, is the monastery of Mar Sergius. Yāqūt mentions that Dawqara was a Christian village that al-Ḥajjāj destroyed. As for Zandaward, Yāqūt records—in addition to the legend that it was founded by King Solomon’s satans—that the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr also took doors from there and that there was a famous Zandaward monastery in Baghdad. Zandaward thus apparently survived al-Ḥajjāj’s pillage and remained mainly a Christian town. Removing ornamented doors from surrounding


\(^{55}\) Balādhurī and Hitti, * Origins*, 450.

\(^{56}\) Al-Balādhurī corroborates this account and gives precisely the name names. This is the transcription found in al-Balādhurī and Hitti, *Origins*, 450. Also cited in Hugh Kennedy, “How to Found an Islamic City,” in *Cities, Texts, and Social Networks, 400–1500: Experiences and Perceptions of Medieval Urban Space*, edited by Caroline Goodson, Anne E. Lester, and Carol Symes (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 54, as “Zandaward, al-Dawqara, and the monastery of Mar Sarjis and Sarābīṭ.”
Christian cities is an example of a literal cultural appropriation and promulgation of a new order to the local ancient communities.

Al-Ḥajjāj used all spacial symbolical tools at his disposal to, on the one hand, appropriate earlier cultural and religious traditions of Iraq, and on the other hand, establish the exclusive status of his office, court, and Syrian army. The best example is his construction of Wāṣīṭ—garrison city for the Syrian soldiers—in the place of an ancient Christian center of learning, having pillaged the Christian towns in its vicinity. Like ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd, al-Ḥajjāj manipulated sacred spaces to claim continuity with and superiority over previous Near Eastern religious traditions, while at the same time creating a distinctly Islamic space.

2.4. Power through the Holy Word

The Muslim and the Christian sources assign al-Ḥajjāj an important role in the process of codification of the Qurʾān and the related reform of the Arabic script. Muslim sources agree that the caliph ʿUthmān (r. 23/644-35/656) commissioned the first and the main codification of the Qurʾān and ordered that copies of it be sent to all great cities of the empire and that any non-official compilations be destroyed. Many qurrāʾ opposed this policy and resented the Umayyad imposition of unity and continued to recite the Qurʾān relying on their knowledge of Arabic and on what they had heard and sanctioned. The most important of them was Ibn Masʿūd, the revered companion of the Prophet, who exerted an enormous influence over scholars in Kufa (see below). Omar Hamdan shows that the Muslim sources presents al-Ḥajjāj as the iniatitor of the ‘second maşāhiḥ project,’ which
was the decisive for the consolidation of the ‘Uthmānic text.\textsuperscript{57} Al-Ḥajjāj is said to have eleven minor orthographic changes to the Uthmānic codex, divided it into thirty parts for the purposes of recitation, and, like ‘Uthmān before him, sent the copies to all provincial capitals. Al-Ḥajjāj also ordered that his new edition be publicly and regularly read in the mosques on Thursdays and Fridays.\textsuperscript{58} According to the traditional narrative, al-Ḥajjāj’s version is thus the one that we have today. Later on, seven method of readings of the Qur’ān (qirā’āt) became canonical, which are all based on the Uthmānic codex and its rasm.\textsuperscript{59}

As part of preparing the sacred text for critical revision, the Islamic tradition also ascribes to him ‘the second orthographic reform’ of the Arabic script. Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿālī, also believed to be the inventor of grammar (naḥw) of Islam, is credited with the first reform, which was supervised by al-Ḥajjāj’s predecessor in Iraq, Ziyād b. Abīh (d.53/673), and consisted in a system of large colored dots to differentiate consonants and indicate vowels. Al-Ḥajjāj repeatedly introduced dots to distinguish between similarly written letters like bāʾ, tāʾ, and thāʾ and Syriac vowel signs equivalent to damma, fathā, and kasra.\textsuperscript{60}

Both ‘the second maṣāḥif project’ and ‘the second orthographic reform’ narratives have been challenged by scholars. I will first briefly present the debates and then provide my comments on these policies of al-Ḥajjāj. As for the latter, already Alan Jones has pointed out that based on the bilingual PERF 558 document,\textsuperscript{61} this traditional account

\textsuperscript{57} For the Muslim accounts of the Qur’ānic codification and al-Ḥajjāj’s role therein see Omar Hamdan, “‘The Second Maṣāḥif Project: A Step towards the Canonization fo the Qur’ānic Text,” in The Qur’ān in Context, ed. Angelika Neuwirth (Leiden Brill, 2009), 795-836.

\textsuperscript{58} Hamdan, “The Second Maṣāḥif Project,” 829.

\textsuperscript{59} Seyfeddin Kara, In Search of Ali Ibn Abi Talib’s Codex: History and Traditions of the Earliest Copy of the Qur’an (Gerlach Press, 2018). The book is forthcoming and I haven’t had access to it yet.

\textsuperscript{60} Hitti, History of the Arabs, 219. Omar Hamdan provides the most detailed account of the traditional narrative. See Hamdan, “The Second Maṣāḥif Project.”

\textsuperscript{61} Hoyland, “Birth,” 66; Gruendler, The development of the Arabic scripts.
cannot be correct. Christian Robin also argued that Arabic script underwent important changes early on. While none of the three pre-Islamic inscriptions have any dots, these start to appear on early Islamic documents. Robin has therefore argued, against the traditional Muslim narratives, that the Arabic script underwent a reform already during the caliphate in Medina.62

With regard to al-Ḥajjāj’s ‘second maṣāḥif project,’ it is necessary to point out that the larger tradition narrative of the codification of Qurʾān, i.e., decisive ῥUthmānic codification, has been been a matter of controversy for decades.63 John Wansbrough, in his Qurʾanic Studies (1977) challenged the attribution of the main codification of the Qurʾān to the third caliph, ῥUthmān. Wansbrough, one of the most notable revisionists, argued that the structure of the text suggests it to be “the product of an organic development from originally independent traditions during a long period of transmission,”64 and posited a redaction as late as the 3rd/9th century. But today due to the Qurʾanic manuscripts that emerged since and the method of carbon dating, such position is no longer defensible and some scholars today argue for a very early date for the Qurʾān. The ῥSanʿāʾ palimpsest and the recently discovered Birmingham Qurʾān66 were both dated to roughly the first half of the 1st/7th century differ from the text of the Qurʾānic vulgate only in details. Compare

64 47.
65 Radiocarbon dating places the parchment (and hence the palimpsest) to the period before 671 with the probability of 99%, before 661 with the probability of 95.5% and before 646 with a probability of 75%. See Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “꿀Sanʿāʼ 1,” 8; Sadeghi and Bergmann, “The Codex,” 352-4.
66 The parchment was radiocarbon dated between 56BH/568 and 645/25. The leaves preserve parts of sūras 19 and 20. It is part of the Mingana Collection, held by University of Birmingham.
the ‘major variants’ between the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest (C-1) and the text of the standard tradition below in a made by Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi.\textsuperscript{67}

**Table 3: Examples of variants between Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest and the standard text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variant description</th>
<th>The text of the standard tradition</th>
<th>The text of the C-1 tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Q 2.196, C-1 does not have the word ruʾunakum.</td>
<td>Do not shave your heads until the offering reaches its destination.</td>
<td>Do not shave until the offering reaches its destination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Q 2.196, C-1 has fa-in kāna abadun instead of the standard fa-man kāna.</td>
<td>If any of you be sick</td>
<td>Should one of you be sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Q 2.196, C-1 has aw nusukin instead of the standard aw ṣadaqatin aw nusukin.</td>
<td>Fasting, or alms, or an offering</td>
<td>Fasting or an offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Q 2.201, C-1 has wa-l-ākhirati instead of the standard hasanatan wa-fī l-ākhirati hasanatan.</td>
<td>There are people who say, “Our Lord, give us in this world,” and they have no portion in the world to come. Then, there are those who say, “Our Lord, give us good in this world and good in the next.”</td>
<td>There are people who say, “Our Lord, give us in this world,” and they have no portion in the world to come. Then, there are those who say, “Our Lord, give us in this world and the next.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Q 63.7, C-1 has min hawlihi after yanfaḍḍū.</td>
<td>They are the ones who say, “Do not spend (alms) on those who are with the Messenger of God in order that they may disperse.”</td>
<td>They are the ones who say, “Do not spend (alms) on those who are with the Messenger of God in order that they may disperse from around him.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, have argued, on the basis of the (non-ʿUthmānic) Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest and the method of radiocarbon dating for a very early date for the formation of the Qurʾānic text, even before the Uthmānic codification.\textsuperscript{68} In contrast, other scholars are inclined to see the codification of the Qurʾānic text as part of Marwānid-era

\textsuperscript{67} Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “Ṣanʿāʾ 1.” 21.
\textsuperscript{68} Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “Ṣanʿāʾ 1.”
general efforts at a greater uniformity and different processes of canonization. François Déroche, the leading expert in Islamic paleography has documented transition from the austere ḥijāzī script to a more formalized Umayyad style in the Marwānid period. Alfred-Louis de Prémare argued for a later official mushaf that post-dated ʿUthmān. Using literary evidence, he shows that even in the Marwānid period we can find traces of variant Qurʾānic texts seen for example in the inconsistencies between John of Damascus’s anti-Islamic (or anti-Ishmaelite) polemic and the Qurʾān or in the mentions of different mushafs particular to different cities. Other divergences can be found between the vulgate and early Islamic inscriptions that contain many excerpts, amalgamations, and variations on the Qurʾānic text. Frédéric Imbert had labeled these variant Qurʾānic verses recorded on the rocks “le Coran des pierres.” It seems that variant versions of the Qurʾān—though rather minor if we consider the table above—and perhaps variant codices circulated in the Umayyad/Marwānid period. Having noted the discrepancies between the main contours of

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70 François Déroche, Qurʾans of the Umayyads: A First Overview (Leiden: Brill, 2013).


72 An example would be a passage where John ridicules the book of the Ishmaelites for a motif of camel of God which appears in Qurʾān details that do not: the she-camel does not have a father or a mother, she cannot pass through mountains, she has a camel that follows her. De Prémare, “ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān et le Processus de Constitution du Coran,” 187ff. It may be argued, however, that John was replying to exegetical narratives which circulated in that time and are in fact attested later.


the traditional Muslim narratives and documentary evidence, I will now look closer on the
accounts of the alleged ‘second maṣāḥif project.’

The most important sources for al-Ḥajjāj’s role in the codification of the Qurʾān are Ibn Dāwūd (d. 316/928), Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif and two Christian sources. The first one is the 2nd/8th century Lewond text that contains the correspondence between ‘Umar II and Leo
III,76 and the other is the apology of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī from the 3rd/9th or 4th/10th century.77 In comparison to the Muslim account above, Lewond’s text sees al-Ḥajjāj’s intervention in the scripture as much more serious:

As for your (book), you have already given us examples of such falsifications, and one knows, among others, of a certain Al-Ḥajjāj, named by you as the governor of Persia, who had men gathered up your ancient books, which he replaced by others composed by himself, according to his taste, and which he propagated everywhere in your nation, because it was easier by far to undertake such a task among the people speaking a single language. From this destruction, nevertheless, there escaped a few works of Abu Turab [i.e.,ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib], for Al-Ḥajjāj could not make them disappear completely.79

To Lewond al-Ḥajjāj essentially falsified the holy scripture of Muslims. In a similar fashion, al-Kindī’s account ascribes extensive meddling with the sacred text to al-Ḥajjāj, who gathered together every single copy he could lay hold of and caused to be omitted from the text a great many passages. Among these, they say, were verses revealed

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77 The first one to study this text was W. Muir in 1887 and he suggested the date of 830 AD. See W. Muir, The Apology of al-Kindy written at the court of al-Maʾmūn circa.A.D. 830 (1887).
concerning the House of Umayyad with names of certain persons, and concerning the House of ʿAbbās also with names. Six copies of the text thus revised were distributed to Egypt, Syria, Medina, Mecca, Kufa, and Basra. After that he called in and destroyed all the preceding copies, even as ʿUthmān had done before him. ⁸⁰

We have to understand these texts in the context of the Christian-Muslim polemic, as disproving the authority of the Muslim Holy Text. Al-Kindī’s text is close to the anti-Umayyad positions of some Shiite ghulāt, who accused the Umayyads of the manipulation with the text of the Qurʾān. Similarly, we could undermine the Muslim account about the eleven minor changes as a way of later engagement in the qirāʾāt discussions. If you say that al-Ḥajjāj changed sharīʿa into shirʿa then you make an argument for the original reading of the text. What is interesting, however, is that al-Ḥajjāj figures in all these accounts. Scholars who acknowledge al-Ḥajjāj’s role in the process like Dietrich, De Prémare, Hamdan, and Déroche suggest different reasons for his policies; ⁸¹ others, like Sadeghi and Bergman refuse, on the basis of manuscript evidence, any possibility of his intervention. ⁸² Sadeghi also dismisses the literary evidence because of the bias of the later narrators—whether these were Kufan Qurʾān reciters, al-Kindī in the Abbasid court, early Abbasid ghulāt. ⁸³

For all these reasons we must recognize that with regard al-Ḥajjāj’s Qurʾānic reforms, we stand on weak grounds; yet the accounts about al-Ḥajjāj are not useless. While it is beyond my expertise to judge the arguments of scholars basing themselves on

⁸¹ Dietrich expresses the opinion that al-Ḥajjāj intended to end the dispute over different readings and to purify the text of anti-Umayyad allusions. Hamdan disagrees with this scenario arguing that al-Ḥajjāj would not have been able to remove anything from the text without it being noticed by the hostile sources. According to Hamdan, al-Ḥajjāj primarily wanted to restore the image of the Umayyads to win the loyalty of their subjects (p. 799). Déroche (2013) proposes two goals: to achieve greater uniformity and to support the prestige of the Umayyad dynasty (p.138)
⁸² Sadeghi and Bergmann, “The Codex,” 365, n. 36.
paleography and carbon dating, I am inclined to believe that arguments from silence cannot preclude al-Ḥajjāj’s attempts at codification, even if they were unsuccessful, and that especially the early Łewond text reflects some near-contemporary propaganda and allegations against the governor. Moving away, from ‘what really happened’ we can however interpret these narratives as insights into minds of those who transmitted them. We shouldn’t take the accounts literally, keeping in mind their own interest and idiosyncracies, as later sources about early Islamic period often provide a more clear-cut view of the past than the much more complicated and messier reality. The most illustrative example is the awā’il, the mythical genre of “the firsts,” the inventors and people doing something for the first time.84 We need to take these accounts metonymically—as a later commentary representing larger processes in his period. These reports may reflect al-Ḥajjāj’s efforts to counter and limit the religious authority of his opponents by his own top-down managed projects that involved the holy word. They point to a moment in history when the Empire begins to use the text of the Qur’ān for political reasons: to mandate uniformity and to weaken its internal opponents.

We can see al-Ḥajjāj’s codification efforts in the background of his tense relationship with the qurrā’. We have already seen that many of these men took up arms against him. Other reports depict him harshly persecuting revered Companions;85 incidents strongly condemned by later sources that transformed it into a motif of the pious men

84 There is a dissertation on the topic. See Katherine H. Lang, “Awā’il in Early Arabic Historiography: Beginnings and Identity in the Middle Abbasid Empire,” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997).

85 Al-Ṭabarî narrates that when al-Ḥajjāj was in charge of Medina, he wanted to humiliate the Companions of the Prophet and forced them to wear seals around their necks. Al-Ṭabarî, Tārīkh, 2:855. But al-Baladuhrī tells us that the governor put seals on their hands “as it done with the dhimma,” an older practice to indicate tax payments. Al-Ṭabarî and Rowson, History, 22:2. On the corresponding practices among Byzantines and Sasanians see Morony, Iraq after the Muslim Conquest (Princeton, 1984), 112ff. The most infamous is al-Ḥajjāj’s treatment of Saʿīd b. Jubayr and Anas b. Mālik. See Chapter 2.
versus the tyrant. But they narrativize real tensions between the religious authorities of Iraq and the new governor who had no claims to religious authority other than his teacher’s knowledge of the Qurʾān.86

Now is the time to return to Ibn Masʿūd, the revered Companion, religious scholar, and reciter of the Qurʾān, who refused the ʿUthmānic muṣḥaf and whose reading was still followed in Kufa. Although long dead (d. 32/653) by the time that al-Ḥajjāj arrived in Kufa, the spirit of Ibn Masʿūd still haunted the young governor. So it seems from his speech where he admonished people against Ibn Masʿūd’s qirāʾa: “Woe onto the slave of Hudhayl who reads the Qurʾān as if it were rajaz of Bedouins. For, if I were to catch him, I would surely cut his head off; [to be clear, ‘Abd Allāh b. Masʿūd’s head.]”87 The passionate hatred felt from this speech can only be understood if we realize the extent of Ibn Masʿūd’s legacy in Kufa, which al-Ḥajjāj ultimately failed to undermine. In fiqh, Abū Ḥanīfa, one of the most important jurists of Islam, often relies on Ibn Masʿūd. In qirāʾāt, the most important of the Seven Readers ʿĀṣim received his reading from Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who reportedly has taken much of his material from Ibn Masʿūd (and ʿĀli). In ḥadīth, most Kufan reports go back to Ibn Masʿūd. From this perspective al-Ḥajjāj’s attempt to enforce the ʿUthmānic (i.e., Umayyad) reading, was a continuation of an older conflict between the Umayyads and the Kufans over religious authority.

The excerpt from al-Ḥajjāj’s speech may be pointing to yet another conflict; one between the urban folk and the Bedouins. As Khalil Athamina discussed, this was a

86 His knowledge of the Qurʾān was emphasized by his own propagandists. Ibn ʿAsākir records on the authority of Ibn ʿAwn that al-Ḥajjāj knows Qurʾān well. Muḥammad al-Ḥimmānī reports that al-Ḥajjāj during the division of the Qurʾān used to recite it every night. Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 12:116. Muhammad al-Ḥimmānī was one among the people in charge of the maṣāḥif al-Bukhārī, Tārīkh al-Kabīr, 3: 294; al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-Islām, 9:130.
87 This is from the speech I titled ‘Obedience’ see Appendix. The clarification in the brackets is by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih.
decisive dichotomy in Umayyad society. The Islamic tradition records that when ʿUthmān gathered the committee he chose the language of the Quraysh as the basis for his Qurʾān. The two main dialects of Arabic were the dialect of Hijaz (i.e., Quraysh/Umayyad) and that of the Tamīm, who inhabited the Najd. The Hudhayl, the tribe of Ibn Masʿūd, were the Bedouins of Mecca, but their dialect was closer to the Tamīm, and we could perhaps posit that the real division was between urban and Bedouin Arabs, where Najd stands for the Bedouins and Hijaz for Mecca and Taʾif. In any event, this is what al-Ḥajjāj is objecting to: the non-Quraysh/non-Umayyad Bedouin way of reciting the Qurʾān. This is where language comes into play, yet the concern is by no means merely aesthetic. The rift between the urban population and Bedouins is one of the defining, well-documented traits of the period, and the objection against Ibn Masʿūd’s qirāʿa can be well reflected this dichotomy. Al-Ḥajjāj, addition to suppressing the religious authority of his Kufan opponents and the legacy of Ibn Masʿūd, was, it seems, also suppressing what Ibn Masʿūd represented—the Bedouin subversive element.

Furthermore, the Qurʾānic text had a symbolical potency that went beyond its religious dimensions and even beyond Arab-Muslim affairs. Qurʾānic verses functioned also to symbolize the new imperial establishment and delimiting it against others and all those who did not belong among its elites. Inscriptions which parallel Qurʾānic verses appear on the ceiling of ʿAbd al-Malik’s Dome of the Rock. They proclaim faith in the One God and reject the pagans/associators (mushrikūn) and so express a decidedly anti-trinitarian message. John of Damascus confirms this Muslim view of Christians as

89 There is rich scholarship on the topic. See, for example, Khalil Athamina, “Aʾrāb and Muhājirūn in the Environment of Amṣār,” Studia Islamica 66 (1987), 5-25.
associators in his “Heresy nr. 100.” Similar formulas (e.g., *Allāh Aḥad, Allāh al-Ṣamad*) can be found on Islamic coins, which were also used on a daily basis by Christians, Jews, Zorastrians, Manicheans, Arameans, etc. They all had their holy books, and thus efforts at uniformity and redaction of Scripture could also be understood in light of these cultural pressures. In any case, codification of Scripture goes hand in hand with the building of empire. Not so long after al-Ḥajjāj, Charlemagne, for example, ordered the text of the Bible to be corrected as part of his efforts to create a Christian realm, promote correct language and learning. Al-Ḥajjāj’s codification efforts fit well among other imperial projects aimed at uniformity and consolidation so characteristic of the Marwānid period.

The symbolic potency of the materiality of Qur’ānic codices is connected with the second reform discussed above, the reform of the Arabic script. While al-Ḥajjāj was not the first to introduce dots, which have been there since the early days of Islam, Qur’ānic manuscript evidence confirms an accelerated development of Arabic script in this period. Déroche documents the transition from idiosyncratic personal scripts in the early Umayyad era to the highly regularized, anonymous scripts of the later Umayyad era. Script becomes more ornate, larger and more fitting for imperial self-presentation, possibly to rival Christian luxury Bibles.

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90 Jean Damascène, *Écrits*, 216-219 in
93 Déroche, *Qur’āns*, esp. 75-106.
The symbolic use of Arabic went beyond Qur’ānic codices. Qur’ānic verses were engraved on public buildings and on coins. Especially the new aniconic, Arabic-writing-only Islamic coins introduced by ʿAbd al-Malik received much attention from scholars. We should also think holistically about the new visual culture of Arabic that was in the making, of which these coins formed part. The Arabic inscription on Figure 6, containing a Qur’ānic verse (Q 38: 26), near Mecca, dated 699–700, is an example of the new Umayyad imperial style. Arabic script itself, not only the holy content it records, acquires a symbolic value. It is from this perspective that we should read the orthographic reform narratives about al-Ḥajjāj—whatever extent they may have and however successful they may have been—as reflecting efforts at state-sponsored use of the Arabic script. The cultivation of script became an imperial project. The following section moves to another policy by al-Ḥajjāj, which also deployed the symbolic power of Arabic though in a different way.

2.5. POWER THROUGH LANGUAGE

The Arabization of tax administration traditionally refers to a policy of ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj who around the year 80/700 transferred administration, previously run in Greek, Persian and Coptic, into Arabic. Once again, we will observe a discrepancy between

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95 It should be mentioned that there are other accounts that talk about al-Ḥajjāj’s orthographical reforms—the accounts about the resistance against it. As late as Mālik b. Anas (179/795) is said to have reprimanded the use of al-Ḥajjāj’s maṣāḥif and removed his innovations. This may be either because al-Ḥajjāj indeed imposed some reforms other than the dots, or because all Umayyad evil was ascribed to the governor.
96 Al-Jahshiyārī says that there were two dīwāns in Basra and Kufa. One in Arabic was for recording the stipends and it had been established by ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. The second in Persian was for all categories of revenue (wujūh al-amwāl). (These two are traditionally dīwān al-jund and dīwān al-kharāj) He also notes that the situation was similar in Syrian where there was one dīwān in Arabic and one in Greek. Al-Jahshiyārī, Kitāb al-Wuzarāʾ wa-l-kuttāb, eds. ʿAbd al-Ḥafīẓ Shalabī, Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, and Ibrāhīm Abyārī (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938), 38.
the Muslim narratives and documentary evidence. While the narrative sources speak of a break and monolingualism, papyri and biographies of secretaries suggest continuity, gradual transitions, and multilingualism. Let us first familiarize ourselves with the traditional narrative, then weigh it against other types of evidence, and then to attempt to make sense of the discrepancies.

Muslim sources such as al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Balādhurī, Yāqūt, Ṣūlī, Jahshiyārī, Ibn Shadhān, Nuwayrī, and others portray al-Ḥajjāj’s policy of Arabization in Iraq—the primary account of Arabization according to Sprengling—as a clear break with the past: Arabic replaces Persian in the most important administrative body, the dīwān al-kharāj, the tax register. A similar process, the translation of administration from Greek to Arabic, is said to have taken place also in Syria, under the supervision of ʿAbd al-Malik, when he deposed the great Greek Christian secretary Sarjūn ibn Manṣūr (said to be the father of John of Damascus). Finally, during the first years of al-Walīd’s reign the same process was repeated in Egypt, as recorded by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam and al-Kindī. As I will explain below, the stories of transition may more reflect the projections of later Muslims onto the past than what actually happened. The characters of the stories, however, were real historical figures.

Let us look closer at the Iraqi story, here in al-Balādhurī’s rendition.

In addition to al-Ḥajjāj, the story has two main actors: Zādānfarrūkh, the old Persian secretary, who, by the time of Ḥajjāj, had been in charge of the administration of

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97 For a list of Muslim sources on the Arabization of administration see Wadad al-Qadi, “The Names of Estates in State Registers before and after the Arabization of the ‘diwans’” in Umayyad legacies: medieval memories from Syria to Spain, eds. Antoine Borrut and Paul Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 255, n.1.
98 Some say that his grandfather was the chief personal guard of Chosroes II and others that he was the Persian who suggested to the second caliph ʿUmar to keep a register of soldiers’ pensions (the first dīwān al-ʿatāʾ). Martin Sprengling, “From Persian to Arabic,” The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 56.2 (1939), 176 ff.
Iraq for over thirty years and who came from an old Persian family of administrator\textsuperscript{99} and the bilingual Ṣāliḥ b. Ṭāhfrūkh b. Bīrī as his secretary. Zādānfarrūkh had with him Ṣāliḥ b. Ṭāhfrūkh b. Abū al-Raḥmān, a client (mawlā) of Banū Tamīm, who wrote for him both in Arabic and Persian, and whose father was a captive from Sijistān. Zādānfarrūkh brought this Ṣāliḥ to the governor, who grew fond of him.

One day, Ṣāliḥ tells Zādānfarrūkh: “You are nothing to the emir; I think he is fond of me and I am afraid that he might place me ahead of you and that you might be dismissed!”

“Don't believe that,” says Zādānfarrūkh, “he needs me more than he needs you because he won't find anyone other than me who would be able to take care of the accounts to his satisfaction.”

But Ṣāliḥ retorts: “By God, If you wanted me to translate the accounts into Arabic I could do so!” Zādānfarrūkh tells him: “Let's see. Translate one line of it!” So he did.

Only now does Zādānfarrūkh get worried and order Ṣāliḥ to feign illness. However this ruse does not work and Zādānfarrūkh is forced to call the mawlā back to work. Soon after, the old secretary dies and Ḥajjāj employs Ṣāliḥ in his stead. Balādhurī continues the story:

Then Ṣāliḥ told the governor about what had happened between him and Zādānfarrūkh with regard to the translation of the dīwān. And so, Ḥajjāj decided to make the dīwān [be written] in Arabic and assigned Ṣāliḥ to take care of it.

But Mārdānshāh, the son of Zādānfarrūkh, asked Ṣāliḥ: “What will you do with dahawayh and bīstawayh?”

He replied: “I will write tenth and half tenth.”

Mārdānshāh doesn't give up: "And what will you do with wīd?

Ṣāliḥ replies: “I will write that too”; (“for wīd is ‘surplus’ (nayyif): the added increase.”)

So, Mārdānshāh cries out: "May God wipe out your lineage as you wiped out the lineage of the Persian language!\textsuperscript{100}

The Iraqi account shares similar motifs with the Syrian and the Egyptian stories, though the Egyptian one lacks in detail. The table below helps us see the motifs.

\textsuperscript{99} Sprengling, “From Persian to Arabic,” 187.
\textsuperscript{100} Al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ al-buldān, ed. 'Abd Allāh Anīs al-Ṭībā (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Ma ārif, 1987), 421-422.
Table 4: Accounts of administrative translation in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IRAQ in 679: Governor Ḥajjāj, Zādānfarrūkh, Sālih b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān</th>
<th>reason: Ḥajjāj heard about a conversation between his secretaries</th>
<th>reaction: Mārdānshāh to Sālih: &quot;May God wipe out your lineage as you wiped out the lineage of the Persian language!&quot; (Balādhurī, Futūḥ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SYRIA in 700: Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, Sarjūn b. Manṣūr, Sulaymān b. Saʿd</td>
<td>reason: A Greek secretary urinated in his inkwell</td>
<td>reaction: Sarjūn b. Manṣūr to a group of Greek secretaries: &quot;Look for a different source of living than this profession, for God has divested you of it.&quot; (Balādhurī, Futūḥ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGYPT in 706: Governor ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Malik, Athanasius Bar Gūmōyē, Ibn Yarbūʾ al-Fazārī</td>
<td>reason: none given</td>
<td>reaction: none given (but accompanied by &quot;ʿAbd Allāh forbade wearing of burnus (the hat of Coptic priests)&quot; (Kindī, Wulāt)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All record the process of Arabization as if it happened overnight and the reason they give is accidental and trivial. All have three participants: the ruler, the old foreign secretary, and the new Arab(ized) one. The Syrian and the Iraqi stories point to the unruliness and haughtiness of the old foreign guard of secretarial elite. In Balādhurī’s account of the Iraqi translation, we read that Zādānfarrūkh at first is not concerned about Sālih’s warnings because he thinks that Ḥajjāj needs him. In the case of Syria, it is either a scandalous behavior of a Greek secretary (he urinated in an inkwell) that prompts ʿAbd al-Malik to change language of the register or the reluctance of Sarjūn himself to obey ʿAbd al-Malik’s orders and his feeling of irreplaceability. 101

These accounts also show the distress of these old elites, as they see their power and status slipping away. We saw the representative of the old elite cursing Sālih: "May God wipe out your lineage as you wiped out the lineage of the Persian language! In other story, after the arrival of Ḥajjāj in Iraq one of the dahāqīn predicts a dark future for their

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101 Al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ, 271; al-Jahshiyārī, Kitāb al-Wuzarāʾ, 40.
whole class.\textsuperscript{102} Sarjūn b. Maṃṣūr, in turn, warns his Greek fellow secretaries that their days in office are numbered.\textsuperscript{103} The new secretary in all cases is either Arab or an Arabized mawlā, who longer has a position of an highly honored courtier as the old foreign guard of administrators but rather that of a slave.\textsuperscript{104}

Egyptian papyri tell a very different story—one in which Arabic was used in administration from early on, as we saw above but where Greek and Coptic were not replaced in 700 but survived in Egyptian administrations into the 9\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{105} Contemporary internal Egyptian correspondence from the same time shows that Arabic was supplementary to Greek.\textsuperscript{106}

How to make sense of these two contradictory narratives? Petra Sijpesteijn has rejected the usual explanation of the discrepancy as the difference between ideal and practice, pointing out that an extensive change like the implementation of aniconic coins suggest that ʿAbd al-Malik was able to carry out what he had determined to do. She has dismissed the Arabization policy story as expressing a view from a later 9\textsuperscript{th} century context, when Arabic was everywhere, and measures were taken against non-Muslim

\textsuperscript{102} When the situation worsened in Iraq after the arrival of Ḥajjāj, dihqāns came to complain to Jamīl b. Buṣbuhrī how they fear Ḥajjāj. When Jamīl heard that he is from Hijaz he labeled him as a worthless and arrogant man. When he heard that he was reared in Syria he realized the dangerousness of the situation and told them that it would be best for them if he did not appoint one of them. He explains his words with a parable: An axe-blad (without a handle) is thrown in a forest, so the trees start telling one to another that this can't mean anything good. But an old tree (=Jamīl) calms them down: "Don't be afraid (of the axe-blade) unless it acquires a handle from among you.”. However, this is exactly what happened, when Ḥajjāj appointed Zādānfarrūkh. Jahlshiyārī, \textit{Wuzarā‘}, 39–40.

\textsuperscript{103} Al-Balādhurī, \textit{Futūḥ}, 272.

\textsuperscript{104} In the case of Iraq, for example, al-Ḥajjāj tells Sāliḥ in an account that he can kill him at any point “Your blood is now permitted for me!” It is also narrated that Ḥajjāj made Sāliḥ execute one of the Khārijite leaders with his own hand. This may however have been related to the accusations that Sāliḥ had some connections with the Khārijites.


\textsuperscript{106} Qurra b. Sharīk, governor of Egypt (709-715) to Basilios, the magistrate of Aphrodito/Jkōw. The Arabic versions post-date the Greek original. Michail, \textit{From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt}, 81.
administrators. That the story was shaped by later perceptions is evident given its discrepancy with the material evidence. The motifs shared by the three accounts hint into way how it was created. To explain, these shared motifs suggest that the accounts were later unified to resemble each other. This is especially clear in the case of the Egyptian story because we have Christian accounts to compare them with. In contrast to the Muslim narrative, they emphasize the good relationship of Athanasius/Asnās, as a representative of the Copts, with the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik and his brother ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, who preceded ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Malik as a governor of Egypt;¹⁰⁷ there is no mention of Athanasius being dismissed from his office;¹⁰⁸ they speak of two men in charge of the Egyptian administration Athanasius and Isaac al-Shabrāwī. We have already witnessed similar tendencies of our sources earlier. Also here, our Muslim sources main interest in the non-Arabs/non-Muslims lies in portraying them first as haughty and then as subjugated. Christian sources also have their biases, especially inter-sectarian, and they are interested in the Muslims only in so far as to their relationships to them. In the Muslim narrative, we can see the process of smoothing the past and organizing it into a simpler scheme; it seems as if one of the stories was taken as the primary one and the other two fashioned after it. Momentous decisions are ascribed to caliphs’ and rulers’ whims. Despite all this, I want to suggest that the Muslim narratives are still instructive and offer important insights. Not

¹⁰⁷ The pope asked Athanasius and Isaac of Shabrā to put in a good word with ‘Abd al-‘Azīz for the opening of churches. Isidorus, 2: 121. On Athanasius see Muriel Debié, “Christians in the Service of the Caliph: Through the Looking Glass of Communal Identities,” in Christians and Others in the Umayyad State, 29-52. Michael the Syrian says about the appointment of Athanasius: “This Athanasius, called Bar Güm y, was from Edessa. He was a noble and an intel- ligent man. He had studied a lot, both ecclesiastical and secular books, and was famous everywhere. When he heard that he was such a learned man, ‘Abd al-Malik summoned him to Damascus and entrusted him with his younger brother ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, who became the emir of Egypt, and asked him to be his secretary and his preceptor. “To put it briefly, all the countries submitted to the Arabs (ayyāy) were placed under the direction of Athanasius.” (Transl. Debié, “Christians,” 55.)

¹⁰⁸ Michail, From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt, 43.
only do they involve real historical figures, but they also provide—in an anecdotal form—a graphic image of a larger social phenomena. We should understand them as a synecdochal commentary by later Muslim sources on some extremely important social changes:

The first change was the rising symbolic value of Arabic. Although Arabic did not immediately replace Greek and Coptic as the sources would want us to believe, its status rapidly increased. The use of Arabic, in bilingual documents when it is improbable that the people who read them would understand Arabic, becomes purely symbolic and functions as the reminder of imperial power.109 We are not dealing with a replacement of one language for another, but with the coexistence of two—one carrying a symbolic function and the other pragmatic. The sources thus do not reflect assimilation but subordination of other languages to Arabic.110

The second change was the rising role of Arabized mawālī in administration. As already mentioned and as the story of the Ṣāliḥ b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān nicely illustrates, this was a time of great opportunities for these Arabized converts. Bilingual secretaries, who could run the administration in various languages, like Ṣāliḥ (from a slave to a ‘minister’) were in demand.111 Saʿd b. Sulaymān, for instance, the successor of Sarjūn b. Manṣūr had

109 Cf. Mikhail about this phenomenon “the very existence of a dossier composed of Arabic translations of Greek papyri is puzzling and defies a simple explanation. Dispatching an Arabic letter to Aphrodito (where the document was found) seems meaningless and redundant. Nothing suggests that Basilios, to whom the letters were addressed, was bilingual...Most likely the Arabic translations of the early eight century were simply a half-hearted attempt to comply with the 705 CE mandate to Arabize the bureaucracy.” Michail, From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt, 82.

110 Lavan, Payne, and Weisweiler in their recent study that examines cultural techniques through which ancient empires managed difference identified two main forms of cosmopolitan politics: “Assimilation works by eliding the cultural difference between universal rulers and local elites, whereas subordination operates by recognising, preserving and organising difference.” Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler, Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

111 In fact, the first time that an order targeting non-Muslims in administration was issued was only in 741/2 when Yūsuf b. ʿUmar sent a note to his governor of Khurāsān to no longer employ polytheists. Sprengling, “From Persian to Arabic,” 214.
Christian origins and thus probably knew Greek. The name of Walīd's secretary of seals, the mawlā Shuʿayb al-Ṣābī reveals Sabian origins.

The biographies of secretaries provide a unique window into the Umayyad society and show a high degree of continuity. Despite the narratives of change predicting the doom of the old foreign administrative elites, their biographies tell a different story. For instance, the members of Zādanfarrūkh's family reappear in administrative positions until the Abbasid times. Something similar is the case for the members of the Manṣūr family. Like the old guard of foreign secretaries, this new class also established long lasting dynasties. Although we don't know what happened to his son, Ṣāliḥ founded an administrative dynasty through his students. Among the most famous belong Ibn al-Muqaffa` and ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Yahyā, both Persian mawālī. A secretary of al-Ḥajjāj, Ziyād b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, had a son who was a secretary to the caliph Manṣūr. ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Farwa, a mawlā of Muṣʿab b. Zubayr had a grandson who served the caliph al-Manṣūr. In contrast with the ‘Arabization’ narratives, the secretaries’ lives and genealogies speak about continuities. They also speak about great social mobility and opportunities for those who were able to master Arabic alongside their heritage languages regardless of their origins.

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112 An example is the story of one of ʿAbd al-Malik's secretary and general Hassān Nu'mān al-Ghassānī. ʿAbd al-Malik sent him to the Maghrib and Ḥassān achieved great victories. However, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz detained his brother's secretary and appointed in his stead Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, mawlā of Lakhm. Is it just a literary topos referring to the two pre-Islamic Arabic kingly families (Ghassan and Lakhm) or sign of continuing rivalry between the two?

113 Sprengling, “From Persian to Arabic,” 12.

114 We know of Stephen Manṣūr (d. ca 807), writer and monk; Theodor Manṣūr who was exiled in 734; Sergios b. Manṣūr (mid ninth century) and Iliyyāʾ b. Manṣūr both patriarchs of Jerusalem. Sidney Griffith, “The Manṣūr Family and Saint John of Damascus: Christians and Muslims in Umayyad Times,” in Christians and Others, 32.

115 Sprengling, “From Persian to Arabic,” 208.


117 Jahšiyārī, Wuzarāʾ, 44.
2.6. **POWER THROUGH POETRY**

Poetry and similar oral performances in the Umayyad period were closely related with effective power, more than with the Abbasid idea of eloquence. They were interwoven into courtly protocols and ceremonies and they were the main means of political and courtly negotiation and communication. If we think of Umayyad poetry, the triumvirate of al-Akhtal, al-Farazdaq and Jarir first comes to mind. They were authors of court panegyric as well as of satiric exchanges (*naqāʿ id*), which they performed before the caliphs, their courtiers or urban audiences, and key ideologues of the empire. Much poetry and other types of eloquent speech were also performed at the battlefield, used in the context of war and political conflicts, to achieve a concrete goal, or to present a complaint.

The power of poetry should be seen within the larger Umayyad perceptions of the potency of the spoken word, to which I pointed at the beginning of this chapter and which also features prominently in narratives about al-Ḥajjāj. In Chapter 1, we have observed that the historical accounts about al-Ḥajjāj’s life give speech an important place; that someone like the poet Aʿshā in service of Ibn al-Ashʿath threaten al-Ḥajjāj’s political authority and undermine his power; that the governor is deemed to have changed the course of history through his powerful speeches; and that some of his most dangerous opponents—the Khārijites—were especially famous for their speeches and poetry.

An example of a very pragmatic and highly political use of poetry in the Umayyad period is the genre called *shakāwā al-aʿrāb* (“complaints of the Bedouin”) wherein the poets speak out against injustices by government officials in their countries. Many of

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118 On this topic see especially S. Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy.*
these poems begin with the sentence “Deliver a message to the Commander of the Believers.” The name connected with this genre is that of the Umayyad Bedouin poet al-Rāʾī al-Numayrī (d. 90/708), who said, for example:

*Deliver a message to the commander of the believers,*
*Complaining to you about wrongdoing*

...  
*The tax-collectors disobeyed your orders*
*If only you knew! They brought disasters upon us*  
*They took the tribal leader, standing in fetters*
*And beat his chest with a whip.*

This poem serves as an accusation about a group of tax-collectors and their misbehavior toward the locals. Their offence is all the more serious because they tortured and humiliated the tribal leader, the most respected man of the tribe. Al-Rāʾī and other poets produced a large number of similar poems. Even al-Farazdaq, one of a famous Umayyad trio of poets, complains about Khālid al-Qasrī (d. 125/743), the governor of Iraq, in this genre because he built a church for his Christian mother. These poems form part of the poetics of supplication and negotiations and should be understood with their political and ceremonial


functions. The supplicant poets at the outset recognize the authority of the addressee and by ceremonially presenting their complaint, describing their abject situation, and appealing to the justice of the ruler, they compel him to react. On a related note, we have several documents in Greek from the Umayyad period showing that the administration was quick to address complaints about taxation and that complications would ensue when it did not. In short, eloquence in speech was much valued in Umayyad society in as social and political phenomenon and for its profound effects on others. This explains al-Ḥajjāj’s involved, though sometimes turbulent, engagement with the poets of his time.

Muslim sources record numerous encounters and clashes between al-Ḥajjāj and the poets. In what follows, we will focus on two key examples. The warrior poet Aʿshā Hamdān will stand for the tense relationship of al-Ḥajjāj with the poets and Jarīr as an example of ideologue on his side.

Before that a comment on the structure of these reports is due. The verses usually come as action poems, i.e., poems which are the focus of a narrative! report. For example, in one case al-Ḥajjāj agrees to remove his official in al-Yamāma as a reward for a poem by the poetess Laylā al-Akhalīya. On the other hand, he is merciless to those who defame

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122 On the poetics of supplication see Chapter 4 in S. Stetkevych, Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy.
123 E.g., three letters (P.Heid.Arab. I 3, P.Ross. Georg. IV 16, and P.Cair. Arab. III 153) from 91/709 and 92/710 that Qurra b. Sharīf, the governor Egypt (r. 709-715), sent to his subordinate in Ishqūh in the matter of unjust taxation as a reaction of complaints. Another letter from the last quarter of the 1st/7th century was sent by a group of unsatisfied inhabitants of Nessana organizing a protest against heavy taxation and inviting a church official to join their protest. These documents are discussed in Mostafa el-Abbadi, “P.Cair.Arab.III 167: A Discussion of the Akhmīm Declaration,” in Documents and the History of the Early Islamic World, eds. Alexander T. Schubert and Petra M. Sijspesteijn, 133-142 (Brill: Leiden, 2015).
124 For a full account of al-Ḥajjāj’s encounters with the poets see Muḥammad ḉ-Ḥasan al-Muṣṭaṭfā, Al-Shīr fr rikāb al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafi (Kuwait: Kuwait University, 2008).
125 Laylā al-Akhalīya (d. ca. 80/700) was a famous Umayyad poetess who also praised the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, exchanged lewd satires with the poet al-Nābigha al-Jaʾdi, and most famously wrote poems about her lover Tawba ibn Humayyir, whom her father had forbidden her to marry. On this occasion, she praises al-Ḥajjāj who wants to reward her grandiously. She has, however, a different reward in mind. She complains to the governor about his unjust official in al-Yamāma (central Arabia), and al-Ḥajjāj removes
him. He ordered that the house of Saʿd b. Nāshib, a brigand (ṣaʿlūk) poet, be burnt; he tracked down the Khārijite poet ʿImrān b. Ḥiṭṭān across a vast part of the Islamic word on account of his verses that compare al-Ḥajjāj to a fearful ostrich, which we saw in Chapter 1. ʿUdayl b. al-Farakh, according to the legend sought refuge from him with the Byzantine emperor. But al-Ḥajjāj threatened the emperor with “an army so large that it will spread from Iraq to Constantinople,” whereupon he sent ʿUdayl back to him.126

These narratives serve as a window on the perceptions of language and al-Ḥajjāj. The case of ʿUdayl, for example, lets us in on the might and authority that the narrators of the verses ascribed to the governor and on the extent of the threat that poetry represented the said official from power. Al-İsfahānī, Aghānī, 11:249. In the report to which I refer Laylā is portrayed standing in front of Al-Ḥajjāj for the first time. She praises him as a good administrator, who can heal the sick their sick country, and who does not let rebels achieve their goals. As the story continues, Al-Ḥajjāj gives her a generous reward. But she is not content with that and makes a complaint about an ʿarīf in Yamāma: “The ʿarīf harmed us in collecting the ṣadaqa, ruined our country, and broke our hearts.”125

126 The khabar has it that ʿUdayl b. al-Farakh (d. 100/718) got entangled in honor killings and escaped to Byzantium, convinced that the governor could not reach him there and mocked him because of that pointing to the “wide vast land” between them. But al-Ḥajjāj threatened the Byzantine emperor and ʿUdayl was immediately sent back to al-Ḥajjāj’s court and apologized with a praise poem, which makes it clear that al-Ḥajjāj can reach him anywhere.

Even if I were in Salmā Ajāʾ and its mountain trails,
al-Ḥajjāj would find a way to me in the end,
friend of the Commander of the believers and his sword,
every leader has a chosen one and a friend.

He built the Dome of Islam,
as if he were a prophet leading his people from error.

This poem is successful because it erases the effects of the poet’s original insults and underlines the religious prophet-like authority of the governor. The place names are significant because they contain veiled references to ancient Arabian mythology. Salmā and Ajāʾ are two mountain ranges in the abodes of the tribe Ṭayyi’, in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, close to the modern-day city of Hā’il. A legend, which also revolves around a crime and its punishment, surrounds these mountains. Ajāʾ was one of the ancient giants that inhabited this part of the world and he fell in love with Salmā, who reciprocated his feelings although she was married. When the two lovers heard that Salmā’s brothers and husband had learned about their relationship they escaped but were caught and killed in the mountains, which since that time bear their names. Al-İsfahānī, Aghānī, 22:330-331. The legend of Salmā and Ajāʾ is mentioned for example in the 11th-century Khizānat al-adab or in the 13th-century Mu’jam al-buldān. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī, Khizānat al-adab (Cairo: Al-Khānjī, 1997) 11:187; Yāqūt, Mu’jam, s.v. “Salmā,” “Ajāʿ.”
to rulers. The “ostrich verses” were most probably part of anti-al-Ḥajjāj propaganda during the Khārijite rebellion and are meant to humiliate al-Ḥajjāj and undermine his authority. The incident with Saʿd b. Nāshib is one of many that portrays al-Ḥajjāj destroying someone’s house. It seems that razing his opponents’ houses was al-Ḥajjāj’s way to suppress them and so the verse most probably reflects a contemporary reality. Again, Laylá’s praise poem for al-Ḥajjāj illustrates the degree of political influence that later audiences ascribed to court poets like her.

One motif that repeats in these stories is noteworthy because it sheds life on the culture of memorization. In these clashes with poets, al-Ḥajjāj or his courtiers are presented as reciting the offensive verses, which the poets composed against the governor, as accusatory evidence. This reveals wide-spread expectation that people memorize poetry and use it as a tool of propaganda.

We should also think about the cultivation of these arts in terms of the governor’s claim to traditional authority.\(^\text{127}\) Like the kings of Ḥīra before him, he patronized poetry and the language arts connected with the heritage of pre-Islamic Arabia. Al-Farazdaq, who also praised al-Ḥajjāj, in a poem lists twenty-two, mainly pre-Islamic, poets as masters in his art; a direct claim to cultural continuity.\(^\text{128}\) Panegyrical poetry and oratory was al-Ḥajjāj’s way to speak in the language of Arab nobility and their values. It was also a way to build his charismatic authority and we will see a clear instance of that in Jarīr’s poetry below.

\(^\text{127}\) Max Weber suggests a three ideal types of authority: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational.\(^\text{127}\) Traditional authority is based on continuity with past power structures; charismatic authority is organized around the exceptionality of his persona. Max Weber, \textit{Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), esp. 215ff.
\(^\text{128}\) Mackensen, “Arabic Books and Libraries in the Umayyad Period,” 54.1, 42.
2.6.1. PERSECUTING POETS: AL-ḤAJJĀJ AND AʿSHĀ HAMDĀN

Let us now look closer at one of the clashes, the encounter between al-Ḥajjāj and the poet Aʿshā Hamdān. The narrative displays al-Ḥajjāj as an astute judge of poetry. It also offers an example of a poem as a tool of warfare and it will serve also as an example of how to read such ‘literary’ material. The khabar is recorded in a variety of sources.\(^{129}\) Aʿshā Hamdān (“The Dim-sighted/Blind One of the tribe of Hamdān;” d. 82/702) was the main poetic voice of the rebellion of the ‘Peacock Army;’\(^{130}\) a rebellion so powerful that it threatened to topple the Umayyad regime, as we have noted in Chapter 1. But al-Ḥajjāj was able to subdue the rebellion in the end and took many Iraqi rebels captive. Aʿshā was among them. Al-Ḥajjāj commanded that the poet be brought and recited back to him what he composed to rouse the Iraqis. The poet, in turn, presented al-Ḥajjāj with an eloquent praise as an apology. While the courtiers liked it and encouraged the governor to accept it, he refused, proclaimed it a provocation, and ordered Aʿshā to be beheaded.

Why did the poem fail, if everyone else deemed it a splendid piece of praise? Not

\(^{129}\) Al-Īṣfahānī (d. 356/967), Aghānī; al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), Murūj al-Dhahab; al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) Tārīkh; Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), Kāmil; al-Baghdādī (d. 245/859) in Asmāʾ al-mugḥṭālīn min ashrāf fī al-jāhilīyah wa-al-Islām. For the differences between these versions and for the precise references see Mohammad Alqanaei, “Poetry and the Destabilization of the Umayyad State” (PhD diss., University of Indiana, 2013), 88-90.

\(^{130}\) The army was dubbed so due to its equipment. Aʿshā composed many invective poems (hijāʾ) against al-Ḥajjāj. For example, he ascribes to the governor and to his people “the roots of slaves,” an insult which stands up especially with the kingly origins of Ibn al-Ashʿath, whom the poet praises. Al-Īṣfahānī, Aghānī, 6:46.

\[\text{God forbid that the honorable Ibn Muḥammad (=Ibn al-Ashʿath) the ancestors of kings from time before the people of Thamūd Come close to the lowly people whose roots, people say, are roots of slaves (al-Ḥajjāj and his people).}
\]

\[\text{يأبى الإله وعزة ابن محمد وجدود ملك قبل آل ثمود أن تأنسوا بمذم مين، عروقهم في الناس إن نسبوا عروق عبي}
\]
because it was not good enough, as Muhammad Alqanaei argues in his dissertation, but because it was too good: the poem had a second hidden layer, and Aʿshā died because al-Ḥajjāj was able to see through it. The poem’s double rhetoric was targeted at two audiences and at achieving two goals. The addressed audience was al-Ḥajjāj and his courtiers, whom it was meant to appease, and the less obvious, but still intended, one was the defeated Iraqis whom it was meant to incite to war. This is, at least, the understanding that the accompanying narratives help facilitate, as I explain below.

The poem begins with the humiliation of the Iraqis, continues with praise of al-Ḥajjāj and the Marwanids, and ends with a request for forgiveness. Aʿshā first invokes the defeat of the Iraqis, a result of God’s will and their breach of the pledge of allegiance:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{God willed to fulfill His light} \\
\text{And to extinguish sinners’ fire; it dwindled.} \\
\text{Humiliation has descended on Iraq and its people} \\
\text{Because they violated the binding covenant.} \\
\text{He recalls their bid’a (“religious innovation”):} \\
\text{And all the innovations and appalling things} \\
\text{That they said did not reach God.}
\end{align*}
\]

131 I disagree here with Muhammad Alqanaei’s interpretation and assessment of the poem. He dedicates one chapter of his dissertation to it and concludes that the poem was a literary failure because it did not live up to the literary convention of the classical Arabic qaṣīda, in particular, to the tripartite structure of classical Arabic ode (naṣīb, rāḥīl, gharad: the elegiac introduction, the journey part, and the part in which the actual goal of the poem is stated). Building on Marcel Mauss’s theory of gift exchange and Van Gennep’s concept of the rite of passage, and S. Stetkevych’s application of these theories on the Arabic qaṣīda, Alqanaei argues that the poet’s abandonment of the classical conventions resulted in a failed gift exchange. Had the poet used the tripartite structure, it would have enabled him to move from the status of the defeated rebel to a new state of a pardoned upholder of the Umayyads, which was his goal. Alqanaei, “Poetry and Destabilization,” 110-113.

132 Al-ʾIṣfahānī, Aḡānī, 6:60.

أبى الله إلا أن يتم نوره ... ويطفىء نار الفاسقين فتخمد
وينزل دُلّ بالعراق وأهله ... كما تفضوا إِلَى [1] العهد الوثيق الموَّدُحا

133

فما أحدثوا من بدعة وعظيمة من القول لم تصعد إلى الله مصعدا

This line alludes to the Qurʾānic verse which says: “To Him mount up (all) Words of Purity (al-kalim al-tayyib): it is He Who exalts each Deed of Righteousness (al-ʿamal al-sāliḥ).” (Q 35:10) According to this verse only good words and deeds reach God, which in the poet’s interpretation explains why the pleas of Iraqis went unheard.
And describes their final defeat and death at the battle of Dayr al-Jamājīm (81/701):

As we were slowly moving toward al-Ḥajjāj, out of delusion
We were like two clouds flashing and thundering
We crossed two moats
But, in reality, we crossed over to Death itself, observing
us. 134

The poet then crowns the image of Iraqi humiliation with pictures of women crying with their kohl smeared all over their faces: 135

They left their possessions and families behind
And pale virgins, dressed in gowns,
Who are calling out to them, shedding tears,
With kohl smeared on their cheeks.

Having depicted the humiliation of the Iraqis, the poet also lauds the Marwanids as “most magnificent leaders distinguished by the greatest forbearance (ḥilm) and dominion (suʾdud),” 136 and in the last four verses lines he turns to ask for forgiveness, first directly:

May the commander of the believers have compassion on them [the Iraqis],
For they left this foolish and destructive matter.
They will perhaps repent this year
And you will know their respect and love. 137

And then through an analogy, disguised as a reproach to Ibn al-Ashʿath:

Ibn al-Ashʿath, this year you brought misfortune onto the city [i.e., Kufa],
While the Kufans have—in vain—kept waiting for the bird of good fortune.
In the same way as God doomed al-Nujayr and its people through your grandfather,
Who was even more miserable and wretched. 138

134
لم ا دلفنا لابن يوسف ضلة [٣] ... وأيّر منا العارضان وأرعدا قطعنا إليه الخنقيان وإمّا ... قطعا وأفضينا إلى الموت مرصدا

135
فقد تركوا الأموال والأهل خلفهم ... ويبذّرون الجلابيب نَرّدا ينادُونهم مستعرات إلّهم ... وذينين دعا في الخندود وإملهم

137
تعطّف أمير المؤمنين عليهم ... فقد تركوا أمر السفاحة والدّي لعلّهم أن يعدّوا العام توبة ... وتعلّف نصّها منهم وتدّوا أ

138 Al-İsfahānī, Aghānī, 6:62.
The analogy consists in making a reference to Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s grandfather, al-Ash‘ath (d. 661). He was of the many tribal chiefs who abandoned the cause of Islam after the Prophet died, during the so-called “apostasy” (ridda) wars; al-Nujayr is the name of the fortress where Muslims besieged and defeated al-Ash‘ath. By way of comparison, al-Ḥajjāj’s army is elevated to represent the early Muslims themselves and Ibn al-Ash‘ath is connected back to his grandfather, the defeated rebel. This makes a potent argument for mercy, because al-Ash‘ath did not die at al-Nujayr, but was sent to Medina, where the caliph Abū Bakr pardoned him. In these two lines, A’šā thus indirectly invites al-Ḥajjāj to live up to the eminent example of the first caliph and show forgiveness.

As we know, this did not happen, because al-Ḥajjāj saw through the hidden layer of the poem, which was an incitement to war (tahrīd) through humiliation. Tahrīd is one of the classical goals of a poem; but in this case it could not be expressed overtly as the poet was at the mercy of his enemy. So, Aʿshā attempted to awaken the crushed Iraqis by relying on their honor and pride: the poem humiliates the Iraqis so graphically as to provoke them to action. The underlined lines make plain the humiliation of the Iraqis; the ones depicting their virgins, helpless, and with smeared kohl are especially clear cues. In a shame-honor society, the mention of humiliated and shamed women serves as a particularly powerful incitement to restore the community’s honor, and so Aʿshā hopes that images like these will shake the defeated Iraqis into action.

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لقد شَمْتَ ابن الأشعث العام مصرنا فظل و ما لاقوا من الطير أسعُدا
كما شاءم الل ه النُجير وأهله بجدك من قد كان أشقى وأنكدا

139 The anthropologist Ruth Benedict popularized the terms who in 1946 described American culture as “guilt culture” as Japanese culture as “shame culture;” The Chrysanthemum and the Sword (Boston: Houghton, 1946). In the field of classical Arabic literature Geert Jan van Gelder used the terms to contrast pre-Islamic tribal society with the new Islamic ethos of guilt; The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes Towards Invective Poetry (Hija) in Classical Arabic Literature (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989).
The *khabar* that accompanies and frames the poem supports this view. It does so in two ways: through the mouth of al-Ḥajjāj and through an analogical narrative. These are usual techniques of Muslim narrative sources. *Adab* compilations like *Aghānī* rarely state things through an authorial voice. They leave it up to the reader to make his or her conclusions based on analogies inherent in a series of narrative units, with the help of hints put in the mouth of different figures, as if taking to heart the advice always given in creative writing workshops: “Show, don’t tell!” In our case, al-Ḥajjāj’s role in explaining the poem is clear, as he says explicitly: “Aʿshā meant to incite his companions to fight” (*tahrīd*)! And, in case the reader does not see the *tahrīd* in the poem, the compiler adds an additional narrative that clarifies matters by portraying the poet performing *tahrīd* through humiliation, this time explicitly and rather graphically: Aʿshā is in the heat of battle, inciting people against al-Ḥajjāj. When he sees the Iraqis faltering, he descends from his horse, removes the saddle and his armor, puts them in a pile and defecates on them. Naturally, people are shocked, but he responds: “You too, shat your pants out of terror!” The only difference is that while you hid it, I did it in public.” Aʿshā’s ridicule provokes the Iraqis to fight more fiercely than ever and to win this fight. This second story thus also helps the reader understand the poem, and in what way it functions as a *tahrīd*.

The al-Ḥajjāj-Aʿshā narrative shows multiple layers of the sedimentation of memory. Poetry is the most ancient core of the narrative unit, with the narratives providing an interpretative framework. They reveal how the poem was received and understood by

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140 Daniel Beaumont describes a related feature of early Muslim traditions by comparing them to the “hard-boiled” school in Western literature, represented by writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Daniel Hammett. These authors, like the Arabic *akhbār*, often maintain completely external view in their prose, and the character’s emotions are expressed entirely through their actions. Daniel Beaumont, “Hard-Boiled: Narrative Discourse in Early Muslim Traditions,” *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 5-31.

those who narrated it early on. The most recent layer can be observed in the organization of the material, which shows how the Abbasid compiler, al-İṣfahānī, understood the material. To be clear, we cannot be sure that the encounter between Aʿshā and al-Ḥajjāj took place. What we do know, is that later narrators and of this poem have considered it as a potentially effective tool of warfare, deserving the death sentence. Aʿshā’s poems were a key ideological tool during and after the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath and they are enshrined in later works of adab within narratives that frame their past imagined performances.

2.6.2. CONSTRUCTING LEGITIMACY: AL-ḤAJJĀJ AND JARĪR

Jarīr, one of the famous Umayyad poetic triumvirate, dedicated five panegyric poems to al-Ḥajjāj, whose selected excerpts will allow us to see the value of poetry in constructing image and legitimizing power. Jarīr borrows profusely from Qurʿānic imagery and paints the governor in grandiose colors. I focus on three recurrent themes, which show how the poet constructs the governor’s image and legitimacy through poetry as well as how he is aware of the power of speech in this ideological warfare. The poems here are only excerpts and the titles are mine.

Theme 1: Al-Ḥajjāj is like Qurʿānic prophets and his army like God’s angels. Al-Ḥajjāj’s victories over his enemies, portrayed in detail and in their military glory, are sustained by God’s will. Hence al-Ḥajjāj’s harsh punishment that he inflicts on those who have rebelled against him is just. Through their disobedience, the Iraqis have relegated themselves to the position of the ancient Qurʿānic unbelievers who rejected the true prophets.

Theme 2: Al-Ḥajjāj is the guardian of public order. Thanks to his firm grasp of power, the holy war can go on and people are prevented from committing crimes against
religion. Through his sword his cures the land from its diseases, i.e., the rebels, and his harsh punishment scares the thieves and robbers.

*Theme 3:* Speech of different kinds (oratory, confidential talk, rumors, etc.) is a powerful tool of pragmatic politics. People should be wary of secret talks and spreading rumors because they undermine public order and lead to discord (*fitna*). Al-Ḥajjāj’s speech, on the other hand, functions as a means to restore order. His public speech scares his opponents to death. The more so because they know that his words will turn into acts.

In the first poem, “Noah’s Prayer,” Jarīr emphasizes the piety of the governor and compares the power of his prayer to that of Noah:

‘Noah’s Prayer’

...Al-Ḥajjāj prayed in the way of Noah
He chanted to the Lord of heavenly ladders who answered.
You mindfully fettered your soul, Ibn Abī ʿUqayl
How do you see your reward?
For, had you not satisfied your Lord
He wouldn’t have sent you angels of fury with victory

... You cured [us] of the devils of Iraq
And they bowed their necks in front of you...\

The Noah-al-Ḥajjāj analogy is interesting on different levels (*theme 1*). The Qurʾānic Noah\(^{143}\) complains to God that he had “spoken to [people] in public and secretly in private” (Q 71:9) but failed to convince them that they follow the true religion. And so, Noah prays

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143 In the Qurʾān, a whole sūra is dedicated to Noah (Q 71) and there are many references to him throughout the text.
to God to not leave a single unbeliever on the earth. (Q 71:26) And we all know how it ended. In Jarīr’s rendering, al-Ḥajjāj assumes the role of Noah and the Iraqis take the place of the Qur’ānic unbelievers. Like Noah, al-Ḥajjāj preached to the people (theme 3) but they disobeyed him and turned to the wrong path. The governor’s rightful speech acts that—unsuccessfully—attempted to bring people to their right minds can be seen in contrast to a theme that appears in the nasīb (introductory part of the poem). There al-Jarīr describes his beloved, a stable theme of the nasīb, as a balanced woman who does not befriend the one who spreads rumors (nammūm) and does not insults her neighbor. The two parts of the poem the lyrical nasīb and the madḥ (praise) of al-Ḥajjāj are connected through the theme of right and wrong speech.

Al-Jarīr’s parallel goes beyond a simple juxtaposition of al-Ḥajjāj and Noah; he specifically draws an analogy between the two figures’ prayer that was answered, and thereby compares al-Ḥajjāj’s crushing of the Iraqi rebels to the Flood (theme 1). The rebels, dubbed “the devils of Iraq,” have been subdued by God’s will and the “angels of fury” that He sent.

In another poem, “Our Guardian,” al-Jarīr praises al-Ḥajjāj as a guardian most capable of maintaining the public order (theme 2):

‘Our Guardian’

*Who shut the door on their hypocrisy?*
  *Who attacks in the way that al-Ḥajjāj does?*
  *Who can protect women like him,*
  *When they cannot trust the protection of their own husbands?*

*Know and be certain that Ibn Yūsuf*
  *Has penetrating insight and takes a clear path.*
*Through his will, he walks through all adversities*

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144 Jarīr, Sharḥ, 16.
During all kinds of gloomy nights
He forbade bribery and showed you the ways of right guidance
Through severe punishment he stopped robbers from their night excursions
So, organize yourselves and identify the ways of right guidance
Leave alone the whisperer [najī] for this is not the time of secret talk
How many a man who broke two pledges
Did he [al-Ḥajjāj] leave with his beard colored in blood from his jugular vein
When the enemy charges against you, you charge back
From the highest top of the mountain of ʿAmāya or from the hill of Suwāj
And when you see hypocrites who chose the ways of wicked bellowing (dajjāj)
You stand up with the most powerful speech in return.  

In this poem, Jarīr paints the governor as the guardian of his people (theme 2) who most efficiently protects their women and rids them of hardships like bribery and robbery through his will and harsh punishment. One image especially catches the eye. This is the image of blood covering the beards of the men who are culpable of a double-betrayal—of the governor and the caliph—as al-Ḥajjāj cuts their heads off. Al-Ḥajjāj’s enemies are depicted as hypocrites (munāfiqūn), which is a term with a strong Qur’ānic resonance.

The Qur’ān repeatedly admonishes the people against hypocrites who though outwardly Muslim, spare no effort to undermine the Muslim community. They are the enemies, the

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145 Jarīr, Sharḥ, 90-91.

146 Another interpretation is that Jarīr talks about a specific man who broke two pledges.

147 In the Qurʾān, a whole sūra is dedicated to the hypocrites (Q 63) and there are many references to them throughout the text.
rebellious transgressors, who shall not be forgiven (Q 63: 4-6). Al-Jarīr with the label of munāfīq transposed these connotations to the Iraqi opponents of al-Ḥajjāj.

Here, too, the power of speech is brought up (theme 3). First, it is in the form of secret conversations and confidential talk (najī, tanājī). These secretive talks are put in direct opposition to order and right-guidance. Second, it is by way of a bellow (dajjāj), which stands for the wicked propaganda of the hypocrites as well as for al-Ḥajjāj’s powerful answer in oratory.

In the poem “Hūd,” similar themes appear. Jarīr compares al-Ḥajjāj to the Arabian prophet Hūd and his opponents to the people of ’Ād who disobeyed him (theme 1). He also describes both types of speech, the subversive and the order-maintaining one (theme 3). The concrete goal of the poem is presented in a passage (not included here) in which Jarīr complains about general poverty and harsh conditions, which he hopes to remedy with his poetic plea to the governor.

‘Hūd’

Al-Ḥajjāj witnessed prosperity and victory
Despite the hypocrites and the envious ones
People of Iraq prayed like Hūd
But they went astray like Hūd’s people
As of those who spread rumors, in their intoxication,
Were Christians on the morning of their feast.
They thought that their meeting with him would relieve them
Instead they were thunderstruck by his threats [waʿīd]148

148 Jarīr, Sharh, 120.
Hūd is one of the Qurʾānic prophets who do not have their Biblical counterparts and are unique to Muslims.\textsuperscript{149} In the Islamic tradition Hūd, a descendant of Noah, lived among the people of ʿĀd who had become wealthy and built magnificent buildings but forsook God and returned to idolatry. Therefore, God raised Hūd as a prophet to bring them back to the right path. But as it is usually the case with the Qurʾānic narrative, the people of ʿĀd reviled, mocked, and disobeyed Hūd. They ignored his preaching for a long time until God sent a thunderous storm that wiped out the wicked people. (Q 46:24-25). In this poem Jarīr mocks the Iraqis by saying that they prayed as if they were Hūd—in other words, that they spoke and represented themselves as devoted to the One God, while in reality they were like the people of ʿĀd, disobedient and doomed to perdition. In this mythic concordance al-Ḥajjāj assumes the place of Hūd.

The two types of speech (theme 3) here are the dangerous rumors that the rebels spread and al-Ḥajjāj’s threats against them. Spreading rumors (irjāf) carries a Qurʾānic connotation because this is what the Hypocrites did trying to bring discord into their society (Q 33:60). An interesting insight into some contemporary inter-religious perceptions offers the line where Jarīr compares the zealous rumor-mongers in their intoxication by erroneous beliefs to the wine-intoxication of Christians on the morning of their festival. Christians with their many festivals and celebrations attracted Muslims’ attention and comments;\textsuperscript{150} Jarīr sees this as a folly and an opportunity for mockery. Returning to the theme of powerful

\textsuperscript{149} A sūra is dedicated to Hūd (Q 11) but again references to him appear throughout the text. He is though sometime attributed to Eber, mentioned in the Old Testament. Brannon M. Wheeler, A-Z of Prophets in Islam and Judaism (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), “Hud.”

speech, al-Ḥajjāj’s threats stand here in opposition to malicious rumors. The poet likens its
great effect of the governor’s words on the rebels to that of a lightening.

“Light, rain, and protection” is an excerpt from another poem in which Jarīr praises
al-Ḥajjāj for suppressing the Iraqi rebels (theme 1) and for safeguarding the public order
(theme 2):

‘Light, rain, and protection’

...You put out the flames of Iraq
Smoke and fire rose and shone
Only a compulsive thief will now embezzle
Having seen your punishment
To us, you are light, rain and preservation
Vegetation and saliva to the one who desires your dew
How many a wicked rebel
You left gasping for air with his jugular veins bleeding

In this excerpt the poet celebrates al-Ḥajjāj’s victory over the Iraqi rebels, comparing their
destructive impact to fire that he put out, and ends the poem with an image similar to a one
that we have already come across: image of a rebel whose head had been cut off and who
gasps for the last time before meeting his end (theme 1). Public order comes to the table
(theme 2) in the second line: Only a sick person would dare to misappropriate public money
having witnessed how al-Ḥajjāj punished those had done so before them. In the third line,
Jarīr goes a step further in his praise when he depicts the governor as a life-giver and life-
guardian: “light and rain, and preservation (ʿiṣma).”

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151 Jarīr, Sharḥ, 399.
In the last poem, Jarīr praises both the caliph and his governor; together—the caliph through his justice and al-Ḥajjāj through his sword—they guarantee public order (theme 2):

‘al-Ḥajjāj’s Sword’

*...If it were not for the Commander of the believers*
*If he were not our imām and decisive justice for to all creatures*
*And if it were not for al-Ḥajjāj’s hand expending with sword*
  *Then the holy war wouldn’t be led, and our women would be captured.*

[...long description of al-Ḥajjāj’s military victories...]
*Obey, else al-Ḥajjāj shall not let you live*
  *Nor the two-winged Gabriel shall overlook your sins*
*How many a bully have you brought to the staff of obedience*
  *And removed his buttocks from the kingly pulpit*
*Shabīb wished a wish that brought him down*
  *And Qatarī was deluged by calamities*
*When you speak your speech is faultless*
  *And you do what you said you would do.*

The public order that the caliph and his governor safeguard, in the first part of the poem, goes beyond the usual preventing criminals from their misdemeanor (theme 2). They guarantee the wellbeing of the Islamic community itself, for without them there would the holy war (*jihād*) would be halted and their women would be captured by enemies. In the second part of the poem, al-Ḥajjāj is paired with the angel Gabriel (theme 1). In Islam, Gabriel is most prominently connected with bringing God’s revelation to Muḥammad (and other prophets) but Jarīr invokes here a different aspect of this ancient mythological figure,

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152 Jarīr, *Sharh*, 440-442.
that of a destroyer. Gabriel, like al-Ḥajjāj, will not forgo the defiance of the Iraq rebels and will destroy them. Jarīr reminds the audience that al-Ḥajjāj himself won over numerous arrogant and oppressive men, two of whom—the Khārijite leaders Shabīb and Qaṭarī b. Fujā’a—are mentioned in the following line. The poet phrases al-Ḥajjāj’s victory in a manner that signals the connection between public speaking and rulership (theme 3). He says, that al-Ḥajjāj removed the buttocks of these men from the ruler’s pulpit (minbar al-mulk). For early Muslims, as we will observe in Chapter 6 the pulpit, the place of public speech, symbolized power and rulership, like the in Western imagination more common throne. The whole poem ends with invoking the power of al-Ḥajjāj’s words; his speech has no blemishes and it is backed up by deeds (i.e. it is effective performatively speaking).

Jarīr presents al-Ḥajjāj as a just, prophet-like, and divinely-guided ruler. He also paints him as the guardian of public order and emphasizes the power of the governor’s speech therein. Oratory, poetry, and other types of public speech acts, were recognized for their political effectivity and the ability to mold and disseminate various ideologies. Al-Ḥajjāj’s generous rewards for poets that praised him, and especially his harsh treatment of those who attacked him, confirms that he was well aware of this.

2.7. CONCLUSION

Far from being the brutish tyrant with the anomalous gift of eloquence that the sources portray, al-Ḥajjāj deliberately used an array of cultural means to construct his authority over the diverse segments of Umayyad Iraq. In this chapter we discussed his building activities targeting both Muslims and non-Muslims; his intervention into the codification

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153 The rabbis understood that the man sent to destroy Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel was Gabriel.
of the Qurʾān aiming to promote his image as a pious ruler and suppress the legacy of Ibn Masʿūd in Kufa; his language policies through which he, in coordination with ʿAbd al-Malik, promoted Arabic as the primary administrative language; and his investment in eloquence and poetry as well as deep engagement with the poets of his time hoping that his patronage would enhance his charismatic authority of a religious leader comparable to the Qurʾānic prophets. Of these cultural policies his deliberate employment of the Arabic language to symbolize the Empire arguably left the most lasting legacy.\footnote{154} The cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz defined culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols.” Al-Ḥajjāj surely knew how to use crucial symbols of the emerging Arabo-Islamic culture to strengthen his grip on power. As a consequence, he also played an important role in formulating and shaping these very symbols. The following chapter will show that despite all his investment in the most powerful media of the day, it was the media of his opponents that shaped how he would be remembered for centuries to come.

\footnote{154} I will discuss the development of the statues of the Arabic language and al-Ḥajjāj’s crucial role therein in a separate article.
CHAPTER 3

REDEEMING THE IMPIOUS SINNER: REMEMBERING AL-ḤAJJĀJ IN THE
6TH/12TH-CENTURY HISTORY OF DAMASCUS BY IBN ‘ASĀKIR

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In 1968, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, the Egyptian theologian and one of the most influential contemporary Muslim scholars, published a short book with the title ‘Ālim wa-tāghiya: Saʿīd b. Jubayr wa-l-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (“The Scholar and The Tyrant: Saʿīd b. Jubayr and al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf”). The book is a historical play that depicts the conflict in which the tyrant kills the scholar.1 The back cover of the English translation of the book (2002) reads: “The author highlights the steadfastness of truth and its strength in front of false tyranny represented in the personality of al-Ḥajjāj, whom Allah had taken mercy away from his heart […]”

This is how al-Ḥajjāj is primarily remembered today in religious Muslim circles—as the tyrant who killed the revered Companion of the Prophet. The same drama also has an important role in the extensive biographical entry that Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176), a famous Sunni scholar, dedicated to the governor in his Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq (“History of

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1 The publication date of the play suggests that al-Qaraḍāwī had on his mind the contemporary clash between Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood, in the context of which Sayyid Qutb was condemned to death.
Damascus”), where al-Ḥajjāj is the unquestionable sinner and tyrant and Saʿīd the celebrated martyr.

Yet Ibn ʿAsākir did not only want to “highlight Saʿīd b. Jubayr’s steadfastness of truth” to quote the cover al-Qaraḍāwī’s book; he also proceeded to examine the larger political and moral consequences of al-Ḥajjāj’s status as a sinner. Should men and women follow an impious leader or should they condemn him? Does the fact that he was a sinner make him an unbeliever? I will argue that these are the questions that guide the structure of Ibn ʿAsākir’s 89-page biographical entry. By paying attention to the structure, we can therefore also read his answers to these questions. I will show that Ibn ʿAsākir through this biography of a paradigmatic sinner offers his commentary on political and moral questions of his own time. He presents al-Ḥajjāj as deeply flawed yet legitimate ruler and as a grave sinner yet a Muslim with hope for salvation. Analyzing the organization of the biographical entry, we will unveil his greatest sin, which, opportune for us, has a connection to his practice of the Friday khutba sermon (khutba).

Through this case study, this chapter examines how al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (and his khutbas) were remembered centuries after his death. Ibn ʿAsākir’s biography is an excellent object for this exercise. It is the first extensive biography dedicated to al-Ḥajjāj (as opposed to a few lines about him in previous kutub al-rijāl). He does not have his own entry in the two large earlier biographical dictionaries that were major sources for Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh Baghdād (“History of Baghdad”) by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) and Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā (“The Great Book of Classes”) by Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845). Later, al-

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Dhahabī in his *Tārīkh al-Islām* dedicates thirteen pages to al-Ḥajjāj, having copied most of them from Ibn 'Asākir.⁴

Furthermore, Ibn 'Asākir offers a view of al-Ḥajjāj’s memory prior to his own time because he meticulously preserved full chains of transmission (*asānīd*) for most reports. This is useful because it can lead us to the previous narrators of the reports. We will note in many of these *asānīd*, we find multiple narrators that shared one interest—e.g., philologists, theologians, akhābārīs, Shiites, and Khārijites. Therefore, even if we may not be able to tell with certainty which narrator is responsible for putting the story in circulation, the *asānīd* can lead us to the circles that narrated a particular story and help us to interpret their stakes in it. In this way, we can observe the change of perspectives on al-Ḥajjāj from the time of these narrators to the time of Ibn 'Asākir.

The value of such observation rests naturally on the assumption that the *asānīd* are not a mere embellishment of the accounts and that they reflect some reality. And indeed they do. Ibn 'Asākir worked with books⁵ and notebooks, collected and memorized them, and secured permissions to transmit them (*ijāzas*), and also carefully copied their *asānīd*. In the instances when modern scholars have compared his work with earlier written sources they have concluded that he “reproduced [them] […] with meticulous accuracy.”⁶

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⁵ See Jens Scheiner, “Ibn 'Asākir’s Virtual Library as Reflected in his *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq,*” *New Perspectives*, 156-258.
This chapter, therefore, also queries how to read, interpret, and use accounts \((akhbār)\)\(^7\) about al-Ḥajjāj preserved in much later sources which, in some cases, are clearly not reflecting a historical reality. Are these to be discarded? My answer, clearly, is no. They provide us with insights into the evolving legacy of an important early Islamic figure. They also offer instances of manipulating history for the purposes of contemporaries, an intellectual exercise of enduring relevance. I offer examples of different methods throughout. The basic differentiation that we need to make is whether a given narrative was narrated to make a point about him or to make a point unrelated to him. Even the latter offers an insight into his image, perhaps even more so because, in such a case, his image is taken for granted. We also need to understand that one narrative could have one meaning from Ibn ʿAsākir’s perspective and another one from the perspective of his narrators.

Before we delve into the structure and layers of Ibn ʿAsākir’s biographical entry, let us discuss two fascinating narratives about al-Ḥajjāj from al-Masʿūdī (d. 346/956) and Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) that will serve as examples of the basic differentiation (making a point about al-Ḥajjāj or not) where the meaning can be clearly understood from the content only. They are also examples of stories that most probably never happened; yet still important for us to understand the formation of al-Ḥajjāj’s archetypal image of a tyrant and sinner. I will call the two narratives by al-Masʿūdī and Ibn Khallikān, “Devil at birth” and “Fornication” respectively.

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\(^7\) In this chapter and throughout the dissertation I translate \(khabar\), pl. \(akhbār\) as accounts, narratives, anecdotes, and stories.
3.2. Two narratives: al-Ḥajjāj as the archetypal tyrant and sinner

The first narrative, which I call “Devil at birth,” is taken from al-Masʿūdī, Murūj al-dhahab (“The Meadows of Gold”) and describes the circumstances of al-Ḥajjāj’s birth:

…[al-Ḥajjāj] came to the world deformed, without the anus, and so his rear had to be punctured. Then he refused to nurse from his mother’s and any other woman’s breast and everyone was clueless. It is said that the devil appeared in front of them in the form of [the legendary physician and Companion] al-Ḥārith b. Kalada […] and told them “Slaughter a black kid and let him [al-Ḥajjāj] taste its blood. If the situation remains the same the next day, repeat the procedure. On the third day, repeat the procedure but with an older black goat. On the fourth day, slaughter a black serpent, let him taste its blood and turn the baby’s face towards the serpent.” They did as he said […] and he [al-Ḥajjāj] accepted the breast on the fourth day.\(^8\)

This story has a clear goal: to ridicule, defame, and vilify al-Ḥajjāj. The ridicule comes with image of puncturing his rear, which, perhaps, could be understood as an act symbolizing rape. The rest of the account amounts to an etiological myth that explain the devilish origin of al-Ḥajjāj bloodthirstiness. The infant was meant to die, and it was only through the intervention of the devil in disguise of a famous physician\(^9\) and through his dark magic that he lived. His life however came at a price: the boy tasted blood from his first days on earth and he would never lose a hankering for it. Al-Masʿūdī makes it explicit: “They did this to him and he was impatient to shed blood because of these events at the beginning of his life. For al-Ḥajjāj used to say about himself that one of his greatest

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\(^9\) According to al-Masʿūdī al-Ḥārith b. Kalada was also the first husband of al-Ḥajjāj’s mother. However, in most sources, the first husband of al-Ḥajjāj’s mother is Mughīra b. Shu’ba. We may suspect that the confusion because of al-Ḥārith’s appearance in the “Devil at Birth” which al-Maṣʿūdī, *Murūj* immediately follows this information.
pleasures was shedding blood…”¹⁰ This story in this way partakes in the process of the formation of al-Ḥajjāj’s image as the archetypal tyrant.

Throughout her work, Suzanne Stetkevych has argued for the value of akhbār regardless of their capacity to inform us about historical events, emphasizing their role as interpretative framework of the poems. On the example of the ṣu‘lūk poet al-Shanfarā’, she has described the akhbār’s key function in constructing poetic personalities “of a mythic, folkloric, and archetypal nature.”¹¹ Although we are not dealing with a poet here, but with a governor, this is precisely what al-Masʿūdī’s story is doing.

The second narrative, which I call “Fornication,” is from a much later source, Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-aʿyān (“The Deaths of Noble Men”) and is placed in time after al-Ḥajjāj’s death:

It was said that a man came to al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] and said: Oh, Abū Saʿīd, I swore by an oath of divorce that al-Ḥajjāj is in Hell, what do you say [that I should do]? Should I stay with my wife or should I withdraw myself from her [bed]?
He [al-Ḥasan] told him: Al-Ḥajjāj indeed was an impious sinner (fājir fāsiq) but I don’t know what to tell you, for Divine mercy can reach anyone.
Then the man went to Ibn Sīrīn and informed him about the oath and gave an answer similar to al-Ḥasan’s.
Finally, he went to [the Muʿtazilite] ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd and he told him: [Go home] and lie with your wife, for if God the Almighty forgave al-Ḥajjāj, then fornication won’t do you any harm.¹²

This story, unlike the first one, is not making a point about al-Ḥajjāj; rather it makes a tongue-in-cheek argument for the Muʿtazila position in one of the oldest theological

¹⁰ Al-Masʿūdī, Les Prairies d’Or, 5:290.
¹² Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-aʿyān, ed. Iḥsān Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1978), 2:70. Ibn Qutayba is the earliest source, to my knowledge, and he quotes it without an isnād. In his version, the last scholar who sends the man home to his wife’s bed is not ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd but Muhammad b. Sīrīn, which can Ibn Abd Rabbihī substituted the last scholar for Shabrama. Ibn al-Jawzī then transmitted the story referencing Ibn Abd Rabbihī, but his version differs considerably. See below. Ibn Qutayba, ‘Uyūn al-akhbār (Beirut, Dār al-ʿUlūm al-ʿandboxīya, 1418H), 2:267-268; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihī, al-ʿIqd al-Farīd, ed. ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Tarḥīnī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿandboxīya, 1983), 4: 211-212. After Ibn al-Jawzī, the narrative appears in Ibn Khallikān and after it spreads into a variety of sources.
problems in Islam—the problem of the sinner, i.e., whether a Muslim who commits a grave sin is still to be considered a Muslim/believer. The legendary origins of the Mu’tazila are connected to a disagreement over this issue between al-Ḥaṣan al-Baṣrī,13 present in this narrative, and Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’ over the legal state of the sinner. On a more theoretical level, this question inquires into what constitutes faith (imān). Are actions part of imān or not? Al-Ḥasan’s answer was negative because for him actions are not part of imān and even a sinner can be a muʿmin. (This would be the irjāʾ position.)14 Wāṣil disagreed and withdrew (iʿtazala) from his study circle and formed a new one, where he was joined by ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd, who appears in the “Fornication” narrative. They created a new category of sinner (fāsiq) that would have an intermediary position between a believer and unbeliever.

The “Fornication” narrative builds upon the old sinner argument and inquires into what happens to a sinner in the afterlife through a story about a man who is worried about the validity of his marriage because he swore by it to express his conviction that al-Ḥajjāj is burning in Hell. Now, he needs to make sure that al-Ḥajjāj is indeed is in hell, otherwise his marriage is invalid, and he may commit fornication by having sexual intercourse with his wife/ex-wife. Al-Ḥasan expresses a standpoint accepted by most Sunnis, that we must postpone judgement on the matter, God can forgive whomever He wishes as His mercy is all-encompassing. ‘Amr stands for the Muʿtazilite position that God cannot forgive sinners based on the principle of the promise and retribution (al-waʿd wa-la-waʿīd). His judgement, embellished with a grain of sarcasm, can be deconstructed into the following steps:

13 On al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī see Suleiman Mourad, Early Islam between myth and history: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728CE) and the formation of his legacy in classical Islamic scholarship (Leiden: Brill, 2006.)
14 This position is not accepted by later Sunnis although they would accept the idea that God can forgive sinners (see below) but they would not limit imān to mere belief. Īmān can increase and decrease based on one’s acts (＝Al-īmān yazīdu wa-yantūṣ). Māturīdīs among the Sunnis continued to adhere to the original Muṣrī’ite principle of limiting īmān to belief. (＝Al-īmān taṣāfiq).
1. Suppose, al-Ḥajjāj is forgiven.

2. Then, based on Divine justice, all sinners would have to be forgiven, including those who commit Fornication. You’re fine. (Here is the sarcasm; what follows is what is unsaid but implied on the basis of his Muʿtazilite convictions.)

3. But God does not forgive sinners according to the principle of al-waʿd and waʿīd.

4. Therefore al-Ḥajjāj cannot be forgiven.

5. So, your marriage is valid.

A comparison with another version of this narrative, by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), a contemporary of Ibn ʿAsākir, confirms its theological use. Although Ibn al-Jawzī transmits it referencing Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihī, one detail differs: Only al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī figures in it as an authority and instead of sending the man to his wife, al-Ḥasan makes his disapproval clear and rebukes the man for making an oath that might have turned him into an adulterer. In this way, the same narrative assumes the opposite, Sunni position.16

What becomes clear is that al-Ḥajjāj is not the real matter of discussion here; the standing of the sinner in the afterlife is. He symbolizes the worst possible sinner here, and his status is not questioned—even al-Ḥasan who is uneasy to condemn him to the fires of Hell, takes it from granted that he is a grave sinner. This narrative thus does not participate in any discourse about al-Ḥajjāj per se; at the same time, it shows that his image as an exemplar of the gravest Muslim sinner had already been formed and does not need to be argued for.

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In what follows, we will see that Ibn al-ʿAsākir builds on the debates present in the “Fornication” narrative. He would disagree with ʿAmr’s position and argues for al-Ḥasan’s. It is almost as if Ibn ʿAsākir crafted his biography of al-Ḥajjāj as a refutation to Amr b. ʿUbayd, the Muʿtazilite theologian who was certain about al-Ḥajjāj’s place in Hell. This may also explain why this narrative does not appear in his extensive biography, granted that he was only aware of the more common version that circulated and not that of Ibn al-Jawzī. Ibn ʿAsākir, however, goes further and addresses questions of political nature, revolving about the ideology of rulership, and reflecting the concerns of his own time.

3.3. THE BIOGRAPHY OF AL-ḤAJJĀJ IN IBN ʿASĀKIR’S TĀRĪKH MADĪNAT DIMASHQ

Ibn ʿAsākir was one of the dominant figures of the intellectual life in Damascus of the 6th/12th century. He was a Shāfiʿite in law and Ashʿarite in theology, but he was most accomplished as a hadīth scholar. He compiled several hadīth collections and taught in various places in Damascus including the Umayyad mosque.17 His magnum opus was Tārīkh madīnât Dimashq which has eighty volumes in the modern edition and contains the biographies of all kinds of important men (and women)18 who passed by Damascus. It

17 For bibliography see Scheiner, “Ibn ʿAsākir’s Virtual Library,” 157, n. 4, 5.
18 Volumes 69 and 70 of Tārīkh madīnât Dimashq are dedicated to women.
belongs to the genre of biographical dictionaries and the subgenre of the histories of cities.\textsuperscript{19} He modeled it after al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s \textit{Tārīkh Baghdaḍ.}\textsuperscript{20}

At first glance, the full \textit{asānīd} give the impression that Ibn’Asākir was a comprehensive compiler, who gathered all data that he could find about a given person, which he then rather haphazardly organized in his dictionary. This, in turn, seems to conform to the general view of Muslim historians as impartial compilers who employed little creativity.\textsuperscript{21} Far from that, Ibn’Asākir’s biography of al-Ḥajjāj was not an impartial recording of available materials rather it promoted a clear message.\textsuperscript{22} Ibn’Asākir clearly

\textsuperscript{19} The genre of biographical dictionaries is not clearly defined. It can be further divided into different subgenres. The earliest of them \textit{ṭabaqāt} literature (e.g., \textit{Ṭabaqāt} by Ibn Sa’d). Most of the \textit{ṭabaqāt} literature is dedicated to scholars, and among them to scholars of \textit{ḥadīth}, \textit{muḥaddith}. It is called after its main organizational principle the \textit{ṭabaqāt}, the generations of scholars, which are further subdivided according to regions. Another subgenre are the histories of cities, such as Ibn ‘Asākir’s \textit{Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq}. These are more comprehensive than the \textit{ṭabaqāt} and contain all important men related to a city, although scholars prevail. Ibn’Asākir’s \textit{Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq} is not ordered in \textit{ṭabaqāt} but it is organized alphabetically. The last subgenre is universal histories (e.g., \textit{Tārīkh} by al-Dhahabī). On biographical dictionaries in general see Wadad Al-Qadi, “In the Footsteps of Arabic Biographical Literature: A Journey, Unfinished,” in the Company of Knowledge “Journal of Near Eastern Studies 68. 4 (2009): 241-252, and also her “Biographical dictionaries: Inner Structure and Cultural Significance,” in \textit{The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East}, ed. George Aityeh, 93-122 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). For more bibliography on the definitions of the genre and studies on the structure of biographical entries see Letizia Osti, “Scholarly Competition in third/ninth century Baghdad: The Case of Tholab and al-Mubarrad,” \textit{Quaderni Di Studi Arabi} 1 (2006), 89-91.

\textsuperscript{20} Scheiner, “Ibn’ Asākir’s Virtual Library,” 156.

\textsuperscript{21} Hoyland quotes two prominent representatives of this view—Gustave von Grunebaum and Patricia Crone. He himself grants the Muslim authors more creativity than that, arguing against a strict division between fact and fiction, suggesting instead to see the two as occupying the same continuum. Robert Hoyland, “History, Fiction, and Authorship in the First Centuries of Islam,” in \textit{Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam: Muslim Horizons}, ed. Julia Bray (London: Routledge, 2006), 16-19.

\textsuperscript{22} Scholars have already pointed out that Ibn’Asākir could employ various strategies to convey a desired message. For example, Fred Donner in his study on the Rightly-Guided Caliphs in \textit{Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq} shows that Ibn’Asākir efficiently used strategies of selection, of placement, and of repetition to achieve his objectives and that he preferred these strategies over a direct manipulation—adding or deleting. Fred Donner, “Uthmān and the Rāshidūn Caliphs,” in \textit{Ibn Asākir and Early Islamic History}, ed. James Lindsay E. (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 2001), 47, 61. Others have also observed such using and reusing material for different purposes in relation to other authors. Letizia Osti, for instance, examined the material about the life and work of al-Ṣūfī and showed that he is portrayed in one work as a decent scholar, in the other an entertaining figure, and in the third used only as an excuse to discuss chess. Fedwa Malti-Douglas’s article discusses how the material on the reign of al-Mu’tadid is presented differently in chronicles, biographies, and in \textit{adab} works. See Letizia Osti, “Tailors of Stories: biographer and the lives of the \textit{khabar}”, \textit{Synergies Monde Arabe} 6 (2009): 283-291; Fedwa Malti-Douglas, “Texts and tortures: the reign of al-Mu’tadid and the construction of historical meaning” \textit{Arabica} 46 (1999): 313-336.
considered al-Ḥajjāj a crucial figure as he dedicated almost ninety pages to his biography, while most biographies in his work do not exceed ten pages. The Umayyads in general take up a large portion of the Tārīkh, as Ibn 'Asākir wants to emphasize the importance of Syria in the construction of the Islamic empire.

In the following section I examine the structure of Ibn 'Asākir’s biography of al-Ḥajjāj, identify some of his rhetorical strategies and argue that Ibn 'Asākir’s biography partially redeems the image of al-Ḥajjāj in order to provide his contemporaries with a political and moral message concerning the legitimacy of rulers and the hope of every Muslim for salvation.

At first glance, there is nothing conspicuous about the main organization of the biography. On the 89 pages of the biography, I counted 234 akhbār. The five main sections—introduction, al-Ḥajjāj’s birth, his time in Ḥijāz, his time in Iraq, his death—are ordered chronologically and follow the formalities common to biographical dictionaries. Rather, it is the internal organization of these sections that deserves our attention. For a better orientation, I include here a schematic outline of the biography. It shows sections and subsections that I have identified as well as clusters of stories and the individual reports that will be discussed below. The outline is accompanied by a detailed (single-spaced) description of each section and subsection. Next section provides a more general analysis.

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23 Lindsay, “Ibn 'Asākir,” 16.
24 One third of all biographies are dedicated to figures of the early Islamic and Umayyad period. Lindsay, “Ibn 'Asākir,” 15.
3.3.1. OUTLINE OF THE BIOGRAPHY 26

1. Introduction, *akhbār* 1-23: {narrated from & to, genealogy, original *isnād*, birth}
   3-4. Sample *ḥadīths* {4. Marwānid genealogy}
   6. Untrustworthy narrator {*jarḥ wa-ta dīl*}
   7-11. Birth {establishing the date, prophecy at his birth about the arrival of the “Destroyer”}
   12, 17-22. *ḥajj* {establishing the dates when he led the pilgrimage}
   13-16: His abilities {knowledge of the Qur’ān, eloquence, perspicacity}

2. In *Ḥijāz*, 24-46:
   26-29. Bombarding Mecca
   30-37. Prophet foretold the coming of two liars from Thaqīf, one of them is al-Ḥajjāj, the “Destroyer”.
   38. Jesus has no father
   39-42: Ibn ʿUmar cluster {40, 41 *bidʿa*, postponing prayer}

3. In Iraq, 47-186:
   A. General evaluation of his rule
      47-52. Threatening speeches
      54-64. Pious speeches
      65. “State authority”
      66. “Prosperity”
   B. Concrete accusations
      I. Blasphemy, 91-107.
         91-102. “Blasphemy” stories
         103-107. “In defense of the unjust ruler” stories
      III. Bidʿa 165-167. Postponing prayer

C. Discussion of al-Ḥajjāj's status: believer, unbeliever?

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26 All numbers, divisions, and titles of reports or clusters of reports are mine. Needless to say, there are no formal graphic divisions, titles, etc. in the work itself.

27 (40) Here we have to move to Ibn Manẓūr’s *Mukhtaṣar* of Ibn ʿAsākir’s work because the only modern edition includes by mistake pages from a different part of the book—only on the right side. Ibn Manẓūr follows Ibn ʿAsākir very closely except that he adds a report. He however does not include the whole *asānīd* only the earliest narrator in the chain. This misplacement of pages continues to report (51) on page 12:133 of Ibn ʿAsākir’s *Tārīkh*. 

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168-183 Unbeliever, poor in religion, no judgment, not as bad as ‘Amr b. Ubayd
184. Sins may be forgiven.
186. Do not insult your ruler even if he is an oppressor.

4. Death and afterlife: 188–234:
188, 191. Died in poverty
197. “Sa’īd b. Jubayr’s goodbye”
198-201. “Last words” stories {198 "Forgive me, God"}
203-211. “Happy reactions to his death” stories
212-227. Establishing the date
228-234. Afterlife {Hell, Hope, 234. “No more insults”}

3.4. DESCRIPTION OF THE OUTLINE

1. The introduction (akhbār 1-23) is typical of a biographical dictionary and similar to Ibn ‘Asākir’s other entries. Steven Judd explains that in his entries Ibn ‘Asākir usually starts with scholar’s name, lineage, birth date, transmitters from whom he learned hadith and who learned from him, adds a sample hadith transmitted on the scholar’s authority, anecdotes assessing his abilities and comparing him to other scholars. This is exactly what Ibn ‘Asākir does here, treating al-Ḥajjāj as if he were a scholar. First, he lists the scholars from whom he learned hadith and who learned from him, writes out his Thaqafite lineage, and includes even a sample of Prophetic hadiths (3-4) that al-Ḥajjāj narrated. Ibn ‘Asākir then provides the variant dates of al-Ḥajjāj’s birth (7-11) and adds the dates in which he led the pilgrimage to Mecca (12, 17-22).28 Finally, as he does with other figures, Ibn ‘Asākir provides anecdotes about al-Ḥajjāj’s abilities. According to one he had great knowledge of the Qur’ān,29 according to another he was second in eloquence only to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and according yet another he was exceptionally perspicacious and could compete in this regard with Iyās b. Mu āwiya.30 The introduction shows that Ibn ‘Asākir follows the norms of the genre. The main goal of biographical dictionaries was to evaluate scholars and the information about them served to determine whether they were reliable narrators of hadith. As Ibn ‘Asākir states in his introduction, evaluation was his main goal.31 Although Al-Ḥajjāj was no scholar and information such as the hadiths he narrated and from whom he heard ḥadith or that he was an untrustworthy narrator (7) seem irrelevant in the case of a governor, Ibn ‘Asākir conforms to the requirements of the genre of ḥadith.

28 Recording who led the hajj in which year was a historical practice. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, notes at the end of each year he narrates two pieces of information—who were the governors of various provinces and who led the ḥajj.
29 Abu Muhammad al-Ḥimmānī, considered among those in charge of the masāḥif project, narrates that as they were dividing the Qur’ān, for the period of four months, al-Ḥajjāj used to read the Qur’ān every night.
30 Iyās b. Mu āwiya was a judge from Basra, whose cleverness and perspicacity became a favorite topic of Arabic lore. It was not any learned or supernatural knowledge that he possessed. Rather, based on external hints and signs he was able to guess hidden thoughts and concerns of people.
31 Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārīkh, 1:5.
One report however does stand out. It is one of the two reports containing Prophetic ḥadīth narrated by al-Ḥajjāj. The report (4) depicts him in a pious sermon narrating a ḥadīth about the Prophet looking at a grave and weeping. The content is not interesting but the isnād is. Al-Ḥajjāj claims his sources to be the sermons of Marwān b. al-Hakam and Uthmān b. ‘Affān. While in general most reports are selected for their content and the isnād is a way of authenticating them, in this case the isnād plays the main role. In addition to al-Ḥajjāj’s Thaqafite lineage, this isnād provides him with an alternative political genealogy and depicts him as the heir of the Umayyad caliphs in the Marwānid line in terms of not only knowledge (ḥadīth) but also their caliphal duties (preaching). This story foreshadows Ibn ‘Asākir’s evaluation of the governor. He does not judge him simply as a sinner, but as a sinning ruler.

2. The second part is dedicated to al-Ḥajjāj’s time in Mecca. Ibn ‘Asākir includes reports about al-Ḥajjāj bombarding the Ka ba (26-29) and about Muḥammad’s prophecy that foretells the arrival of two liars from Thaqīf, al-Ḥajjāj being identified as one of them (30-37). An interesting anecdote presents him as a wise ruler, giving his subject a riddle, in which the last question is: Who is the only son with no father. The answer is Jesus, whereby he refutes the Christian doctrine of Jesus as the Son of God (38). Others turn to his marriage to a Shiite woman (43-44) and to his impiety vis-à-vis a pious Bedouin (45).

The most significant cluster of reports in the second part are the “Ibn Umar stories” (39-42). Ibn Umar (d. 74/693) is remembered as the preeminent defender of the sunna and fighter against bid ʿa. He remained neutral during the war between Ibn al-Zubayr and ʿAbd al-Malik, the second fitna, which is also what the first story refers to. It informs us that when al-Ḥajjāj became the ruler of Mecca and in this capacity led the Friday prayer, Ibn Umar prayed behind him. The significance of the story is such that it provides an example of an exemplary Muslim who prayed behind an impious imām. In doing so the pious Ibn ʿUmar showed respect to the impious ruler’s religious and political authority. This despite the that Ibn Umar was not certain about his legitimacy. He also figures in the two following reports that treat al-Ḥajjāj’s innovation (bid ʿa)—namely the postponement of the prayer time.

39. Ibn Umar, the exemplary Muslim, prays behind al-Ḥajjāj (=respects the authority of the imām/ruler even if he is impious).
40. Ibn Umar accuses Al-Ḥajjāj of postponing the time of the prayer.
41. Ibn Umar accuses Al-Ḥajjāj of postponing the time of the prayer due to his long khutab which are only nonsense anyway.

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32 The other was considered to be the al-Mukhtar al-Thaqqafī (d.687), who led a rebellion against the Umayyads in Iraq when Ubaydullāh b. Ziyād ruled there.
33 This is an interesting subject in itself because Bedouins were very rarely considered pious or religious. They represented quite the opposite. This story however in its tone strongly resembles Christian stories about pious monks and holy men facing the impiety of rulers. Saʿd b ʿAbī ʿArūba narrates that al-Ḥajjāj was going through the desert on a hot day when he met a Bedouin who was fasting, out of piety. Al-Ḥajjāj was trying to convince the Bedouin to break his fast and join him for a meal and fast the next day. But the Bedouin replied that he would only stop fasting if al-Ḥajjāj could guarantee him that he would last until the next day. Such a thing of course only God can guarantee and so the impious ruler was taught a lesson.
34 Ibn Manzūr adds another report to this cluster (42). Ibn Umar stands up to Al-Ḥajjāj when the latter accuses Ibn Zubayr of making changes to the Book of God. Ibn Umar refuses this accusation saying that no one has the power to do that, not even al-Ḥajjāj.
The accusation of bid'a is serious. For bid'a can amount to kufr and kufr invalidates ruler’s legitimacy. Theologians debated (and still continue to) whether one can pray behind an innovator and what kind of bid'a would disqualify ruler’s authority. Ibn ‘Asākir by grouping these reports presents his own view on the issue here: Ibn Umar considers al-Ḥajjāj an innovator, he rejects his religious opinions and holds his religious speeches in contempt, yet he respects his religious and political authority, as is indicated by his praying behind the imām during Friday prayers. Ibn ‘Asākir presents here one of the main arguments of this biography, which is a call for paying due respect and obedience to even an unjust ruler.

3. The third part (47-186) is dedicated to al-Ḥajjāj’s time as the governor of Iraq and predictably takes up the largest part of his biography. It is in this section that one can start clearly seeing Ibn ‘Asākir’s view on al-Ḥajjāj and the message that the compiler wants to convey through this biography. The organization of these records is consistently repeated: Ibn ‘Asākir begins with the most negative reports and accusations only to end with mitigating counterarguments. This part can be further divided into three subsections: (A) a general evaluation of his rule, (B) concrete accusations and (C) a discussion of his status as a believer (or unbeliever).

3.A. Ibn ‘Asākir starts the first group—stories shedding light on the character of al-Ḥajjāj’s rule in general—with al-Ḥajjāj’s political speeches, famous for the violent threats they contain. He lessens their effect with a series of Ḥajjāj’s pious speeches, and further proofs that al-Ḥajjāj’s was a respectable ruler to follow: he distributed money as a good representative of power (65) and invited people to his table (66). To mitigate the deep-rooted image of al-Ḥajjāj as tyrant Ibn ‘Asākir lists some twelve examples of him displaying leniency towards people who found themselves at his mercy (67-79). In these al-Ḥajjāj first sets free many of his prisoners and then after a conflict takes place between him and Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā, a prominent grammarian, instead of killing or imprisoning the man, al-Ḥajjāj sends him into exile to Khurasān. All of these serve to show that the governor could not be such a tyrant as people imagine. The “leniency stories” end with a report about a man, who insults al-Ḥajjāj to his very face, not recognizing that the governor is standing in front of him. When he finds out who he is, the man claims that he had an epileptic seizure that made him say these words. That al-Ḥajjāj lets even him go shows that he was able to show a great degree of leniency. Leniency or forebearance (ḥilm) was one of the greatest of virtues a man of power could possess as it confirms the power of the mighty ruler over life and portrays him as a life-giver and death executor. Mu‘āwiyah, for instance, was famous for his ḥilm.

Reports directly evaluating his rule are next. Through a wise saying he shows that he is a man of action (81, 82), and through verses he explains the hardships he faced in Iraq, his harsh rule and kharāj policy (83). Anecdotes follow that depict him as respecting the law.

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35 For a contemporary discussion of the issue see a debate from 2003 on the website of Shaykh Munajjid https://islamqa.info/en/20885. See also note 19.

36 The saying ascribed to him reads as follows: “Yesterday is certainty, today is work, and tomorrow is hope.”

37 Report (85) shows him reluctantly cutting of the hand of a thief. He tells the thief “If a good justification could save you from the hadd, you would have been saved.” But al-Ḥajjāj is aware that no one can remove a hadd punishment. Report (86) is rather interesting. Here al-Ḥajjāj is shown to be dining with
While an anecdote (88) reveals his hot-temperedness, the following one (89) reminds the reader that even the Abbassid caliph al-Manṣūr admired al-Ḥajjāj’s loyalty to his caliph.38 Finally the last report of this subsection, which I call the “Doubt story (90),” presents him as steadfast in his politics and loyalty. Thus, the overall image that we gather from these anecdotes is one of a ruler who is not perfect but respectable. Ibn ʿAsākir shows al-Ḥajjāj’s forbearance, his respect of the law, his occasional hot-temperedness, and his loyalty to the caliph.

3.B. Next, after a general evaluation of al-Ḥajjāj’s rule Ibn ʿAsākir deals with the concrete accusation that have been leveled against the governor. (I.) The first of these is the accusation of blasphemy. Around ten stories record al-Ḥajjāj’s blasphemous statements.39 Al-Ḥajjāj is recorded as claiming that the caliph still can receive Divine revelation (91), that the caliph is more important than the Prophet, and the caliph ʿUthmān was like Jesus (95). Ibn ʿAsākir includes here also his derogatory statements about Ibn Masʿūd, a revered companion of the Prophet (97-99). This subsection (I) is ended by five reports all of which share the theme of defending the unjust and oppressive ruler. While one report argues that no one should insult (sabb) al-Ḥajjāj because it would diminish from his sins and add to the sins of the insulter, another one argues that no one should insult their own ruler. In another report (107) al-Ḥajjāj uses famous verses to argue that to oppress is the only way how not to be oppressed. Similar to the Ibn ʿUmar cluster, the group effect of these stories next to each other produced a strong pro-establishment message: Even if your ruler is unjust and oppressive, and what is more even if he blasphemes, you still cannot curse him and undermine his authority.

(II.) The second accusation is expressed through a large group of stories that exemplify al-Ḥajjāj’s oppressive rule (109-162). The first cluster of stories is connected through the theme of al-Ḥajjāj’s relationship to the pagan Jāhilīya (109-125). This section includes reports about al-Ḥajjāj’s belonging to the remainder of the people of Thamūd, an accusation discussed in Chapter 1. One report even has him refute the accusation that he is a magician of Thamūd ironically—in sajʿ, a type of rhymed speech also used by the pre-Islamic diviners.40 Others record people claiming he is an unbeliever and one records al-Ḥajjāj himself self-critically saying that if the devil met him he would greet him (118). This group ends with reports about the caliphs ʿUmar and ʿAlī who foretold the coming of a Thaqafite who would rule over people in the way rulers ruled during the Jāhilīya.

From (128) the reports deal with al-Ḥajjāj’s mistreatment of people. The long list begins with the famous Companion, Anas b. Mālik. Al-Ḥajjāj is said to have branded his neck to the caliph al-Walīd. After the meal is taken away, al-Walīd invites al-Ḥajjāj to drink nabūḥ (date or grape wine) with him but the governor refuses. He explains that although he knows that nabūḥ is ḥalāl he forbids his subjects to drink it and hence cannot disrespect his own laws. (This story has a Kufan isnād and according to the faqīhs of Kufa, nabūḥ is ḥalāl.)

38 In this report (89) al-Manṣūr asks about the last will of al-Ḥajjāj. It turns out that in his last will al-Ḥajjāj professed his obedience to the caliph and divided his 900 shields: 600 to fight the ‘Hypocrites’ of Iraq, 300 to fight the Turks (More shields to fight the Iraqis than the Turks!) When al-Manṣūr hears that he says: “This what I call loyalty!” Borrut mentions a similar story in which al-Manṣūr is impressed by the loyalty of Hishām’s companions. Borrut, Entre mémoire et pouvoir, 197.

39 In addition to outright blasphemous statements whose examples I mentioned in the following lines, I included among those also other reports which end this group and according to which al-Ḥajjāj slanders the king and prophet Solomon and Ibn Masʿūd.

humiliate him. Incidents of brutality against an anonymous Khārijite, an ascetic, and a Bedouin and their defiant attitude serve here as further proofs. Al-Ḥasan al-Ḍarsī had to hide from al-Ḥajjāj multiple times. At one point al-Ḥajjāj found him and brought him to his palace. First, he ordered al-Ḥasan’s hair and beard to be cut and argued with him about the treatment of rulers, the issue that seems to be the leitmotif of the whole biography. Here al-Ḥajjāj argues people should respect their rulers because they are God’s shadow on earth. Al-Ḥasan affirms that the Prophet instructed people to respect their rulers because they are God’s power and shadow on earth but added a condition—only if they are just (136). But in other reports al-Ḥasan is shown warning against fighting al-Ḥajjāj during the rebellion of Ibn al-Aṣākir, arguing that God sent al-Ḥajjāj as His punishment and one should not face God’s punishment with a sword but with a prayer. Saʿīd b. Jubayr (reports 149-152), the scholar whom we encountered at the beginning of this chapter was a famous muḥaddith, like Ibn ʿAsākir. He did not share al-Ḥasan al-Ḍarsī’s opinion and joined Ibn al-Aṣākir’s rebellion because he considered al-Ḥajjāj an unbeliever. This is a very delicate issue for Ibn ʿAsākir because so emblematic a figure as Saʿīd acted in contradiction to Sunni political beliefs. In any case, al-Ḥajjāj had this pious man killed. This rather long section that collects evidence about al-Ḥajjāj’s oppressive rule is crowned with the numbers of dead and prisoners during his rule. No doubt, Ibn ʿAsākir confirms that al-Ḥajjāj was an oppressive ruler (ḥākim ẓālim). Yet, to somewhat counterbalance the effect of all these accusations, he again at the very end of this section includes a report that shows a man who stands up to the caliph ʿUmar II in defense of the deceased governor, pointing out that it was only thanks to him that the Umayyads are now in power.

(III. 165-167) Here comes the last and the most serious accusation against al-Ḥajjāj—at least in the eyes of Ibn ʿAsākir—the accusation of bidʿa, already brought up in the Ibn ʿUmar cluster (39-41) at the end of the second part. The last position in each section is noteworthy and I will return to it below. As mentioned, the bidʿa consisted in the governor’s postponement of the prayer times. Report (165) speaks about men who were listening to al-Ḥajjāj’s Friday ḥuṭba and nervously looking at the sun to see whether there is enough time for their prayer before sunset. Al-Ḥajjāj snaps at them and shouts: “We do not worship the sun or the moon.” In another report ʿUmar refers to the “sunna of al-Ḥajjāj,” which he rejects on the basis that the governor did not honor prayer times (166).

3.C. It is the last grave accusation of bidʿa that paves the way for the last subsection of al-Ḥajjāj’s rule in Iraq: a collection of almost twenty reports in which various scholars give their opinions on al-Ḥajjāj’s standing as a Muslim. As usual, Ibn ʿAsākir starts with the most hostile depictions of al-Ḥajjāj, who is labeled an outright unbeliever, someone who “was undoing the knots of Islam,” and deficient in religion. After these harsh judgments more lenient views follow, dominated by the idea that only God can make the judgment whether one is a kāfir or muʿmin. An interesting angle offers a story suggesting that al-Ḥajjāj was not as bad as Amr b. Ubayd the Muʿtazilite because while al-Ḥajjāj only killed people, ’Amr caused bidʿa and fitna among people (181). The strongest arguments in defense of al-Ḥajjāj come again towards the end: In one anecdote Ibn Sīrīn reminds us that sins can be always forgiven (184). In another Sufyān [al-Thawrī?] is asked whether al-Ḥajjāj (here along with Abū Muslim) is in Hell. His answer is, yes unless he avowed the unity of God (tawḥīd). Naturally no one can know that and hence no one can make such a judgement with certainty. Once Ibn ʿAsākir establishes that the question of al-Ḥajjāj’s religious standing cannot be answered with certainty, he returns to the issue of the unjust ruler (ḥākim ẓālim).

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A report has it that one should not insult rulers even if they are oppressive, because if the oppressed does not cease insulting the oppressor, eventually their sins will even out. Thus in this section Ibn 'Asākir collects the opinions of various Muslim scholars as to whether al-Ḥajjāj is a Muslim or a kāfir, concludes that only God can know the answer to this question. All of this leads him to reiterate that (given this new evidence) one must not insult their ruler.

4. The final part of the biography is dedicated to al-Ḥajjāj's death and afterlife (188-234). It is mentioned that al-Ḥajjāj died in poverty, which could either point to his disastrous economic abilities or it to his generosity and uprightness. Then a discussion about al-Ḥajjāj’s last moments unfolds. According to some, Saʿīd b. Jubayr whom al-Ḥajjāj killed, appeared in front of the governor as he was drawing his last breath. The inclusion of this story in this last section indicates the gravity that Ibn 'Asākir attributes to al-Ḥajjāj’s killing of the pious ṭābiʾī muḥaddith. Again, Ibn 'Asākir tends to downplay the gravity of al-Ḥajjāj’s deeds and plays his strongest cards towards the end with a group of stories dedicated to his last words. The first of these has it that ʿUmar said that he envied al-Ḥajjāj only one thing —the fact that his last words were “God, forgive me.” Now, this is a key issue with regard to al-Ḥajjāj’s afterlife. As Sufyān earlier alluded, the ahl al-hadīth believe that the last deed of a Muslim can be decisive for his or her standing in the afterlife. That means that if al-Ḥajjāj’s last words were “God, forgive me” would considerably improve his chances of entering Paradise. But according to ahl al-sunna one can never be sure, God is omnipotent and merciful at the same time. His is the final decision. Reports that follow (203-211) show various people celebrating the oppressor’s death and some also praying to God that He let al-Ḥajjāj’s sunna (=his way of rule) die with him. Once Ibn 'Asākir provides all possible dates of his death he turns to the last cluster of stories that depict al-Ḥajjāj in the afterlife, mainly through the dreams of others. The gruesome initial reports show al-Ḥajjāj being tortured in Hell carrying his insides in his hands. However, as usual more lenient views follow. Ibn Sīrīn in his capacity as the acclaimed interpreter of dreams comments that he believes that there hope for al-Ḥajjāj. And in the very last report, a dream teaches al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī that he should not insult the deceased governor and ask God to punish him. In his dream he sees al-Ḥajjāj and is curious about what God did to him after his death. Al-Ḥajjāj answers that God first thoroughly destroyed him but then sent him to await the Day of Judgment with the monotheists. Having heard this answer, al-Ḥasan never insulted the late governor again. Ibn ‘Asākir closes also the last section with the leitmotif of his biography— the instruction to respect one’s ruler.

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41 Similarly, it was reported about the caliph ʿUmar that he died in poverty because he distributed all wealth that he acquired.

42 Muslim, among many others, narrated this well-known hadīth in his Šaḥīḥ: “[…] If one among you only performs deeds of Paradise (= good deeds) until there is only one foot separating him from it and his destiny is to perform a deed of Hell, then he shall enter it; and if one among you only performs deeds of Hell (= evil deeds) until there is only one foot separating from it, and his destiny is to perform a deed of Paradise, he shall enter it.” See Muslim, al-Šaḥīḥ, ed. Muḥammad Fu’ād al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyāʾ, 1954-1955), ḥ.nr. 2643.
3.5. Commentary on the Biography and Ibn ‘Asākir’s Message

Ibn ‘Asākir’s training as a muḥaddith is palpable throughout the biography. For one thing, Ibn ‘Asākir introduces al-Ḥajjāj as if he were a scholar, as irrelevant as such introduction is when it comes to al-Ḥajjāj’s qualities as a ruler. And for another, Ibn ‘Asākir narrates akhbār about al-Ḥajjāj in the same way as the muḥaddiths narrated Ḥadīth about the Prophet. Compare his biographical dictionary to Siyar al-aʿlām al-nubalāʾ, the standard biographical dictionary by al-Dhahabī (d. 1348) who limits his entries mainly to the names of those from whom the persons in question heard Ḥadīth and to whom they narrated it, the opinions of other scholars about them, and perhaps a few famous stories about them. Ibn ‘Asākir provides an extensive list of stories about al-Ḥajjāj which are mostly unrelated to the transmission of knowledge, all with a full asānīd. As a result, the biography resembles books of Prophetic Ḥadīth rather than a biographical dictionary like al-Dhahabī’s Siyar. The difference is of course that Ibn ‘Asākir is collecting ‘Ḥadīth’ about al-Ḥajjāj. On the whole, Ibn ‘Asākir, in his entry on al-Ḥajjāj, relies on mainstream Sunni material. Although he includes reports with a Shiite, Hāshmite, or Khārijite inclination, their tone is light and their transmitters generally accepted within the Sunni tradition.43

Although Ibn ‘Asākir’s biography of al-Ḥajjāj gives the appearance of an objective compilation of stories about the governor, an analysis of its internal structure proves that the reports follow a sophisticated order and flow through various lively discussions. They

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43 For example, Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān, a Shiite, and Abū ʿUbayda al-Ībāḍī, a Khārijite, both appear in main Sunni collections. When I say that their tone is light I mean that Ibn ‘Asākir’s reports do not display their sectarian and ideological inclinations too overtly. For instance, in the stories about al-Ḥajjāj and Khārijites, he omits to mention the story of Ghazāla, the famous Khārijite female leader who humiliated al-Ḥajjāj, or at least explain who she was, although he includes verses that explicitly mention her name (147). This story appears to reflect pro-Khārijite propaganda.
always return, however, to two main issues, one political, concerning the legitimacy of rulers, and one theological, concerning the individual’s hope for salvation.

The rhetorical strategies that Ibn ʿAsākir uses are consistent; the structure is repetitive and easy to interpret once we lay it out. He begins with the negative accusatory reports and lists one after the other. This makes him look ‘objective’, as he is not hiding any unfavorable reports, as so he lays out the evidence of al-Ḥajjāj’s blasphemy, oppression, and bidʿa. Then he usually diminishes its effect by presenting more positive reports about the governor. However, the main clues lie at the end of each section. Let’s take them one by one. At the end of “Introduction” (1) Ibn ʿAsākir lists the admirable abilities of the governor, such as his knowledge of the Qurʾān, his eloquence, and perspicacity. He places the Ibn ʿUmar cluster that deals with his bidʿa at the end of “In the Hijaz” (2), which points to the gravity of this accusation. The section “In Iraq” is the longest and subdivided into various subsections. He ends the “General evaluation of his rule” (3.A) with accounts that point to his difficult situation and portray the governor as hot-tempered but decisive, abiding by law and obedient to the caliph. The “Concrete accusation” (3.B) section provides even a clearer example of rehabilitating al-Ḥajjāj. The two first further subsections are ended with a defense of unjust rulers (3.B.I) and with a defense of al-Ḥajjāj himself (3.B.II) wherein the speakers points out to the caliph ʿUmar II that without al-Ḥajjāj, Umayyads would have had lost their power by then. The last and gravest accusation is, once again, the accusation of bidʿa. This one cannot be so easily dismissed and therefor it is followed by a whole section (3.C) dedicated to the discussion of al-Ḥajjāj’s status, and addressing the question whether this bidʿa, makes him an unbeliever. Various opinions are present (Ibn ʿAsākir wants to preserve his reputation as a thorough scholar) but the section
end with two accounts—one of them reminding that sins may be forgiven and another warning against insulting rulers, however oppressive they may be. Finally, the “Death and afterlife” part (4) reiterates the same two messages. It ends with Ibn Sirīn, the famous interpreter of dreams whom we encountered in the “Fornication” narrative, stating that there is hope for al-Ḥajjāj, he does not have to end up in Hell. The last narrative tells how al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī stopped insulting al-Ḥajjāj after his death. The two main messages then are a) political: A ruler, however oppressive he may be, is legitimate and should be obeyed and respected; b) theological: A sinner, even one as grave as al-Ḥajjāj, has a hope for salvation.

So this biography is first and foremost Ibn ʿAsākir’s answer to the political issue how to respond to an unjust ruler. His answer is typical of the ahl al-sunna, and of the Ashʿarites. A century before Ibn ʿAsākir, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, also an Ashʿarite, held that an imām’s sinful behavior does not constitute a legitimate reason for his removal. Ibn ʿAsākir is thus joining the general debate and assuming the position of his madhhab. His contribution is that he provides an extensive case study of notorious sinner and unjust ruler to support it. In agreement with al-Juwaynī’s and others’ stance on the issue, for Ibn ʿAsākir the only thing that may legitimate a rebellion against a ruler is disbelief (kufr). However, since no one can determine someone’s kufr but God, he argues, a rebellion can never be justified. Even in the case of rebellion against so blasphemous, oppressive, and perhaps innovator (mubdi’) a ruler as al-Ḥajjāj, mere fact of being a Muslim ruler requires that he still should be respected and obeyed. Ibn ʿAsākir’s position

44 Al-Juwaynī, Ghiyāth al-umam fī litiyāth al-zulam, 70-81. For a survey of various views on this question see the section “Rebellion as forbidding wrong” and “Forbidding wrong and rebellion” in Michael Cook, Forbidding Wrong in Islam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 79-82; 108-110.
is then decidedly pro-establishment that he does seem to think much of rebuking unjust rulers either. Rebutting unjust rulers was a less radical solution to the issue than an outright rebellion. It was occasionally seen as a duty, and many pious Muslims participated in it.\footnote{See the section on “Rebuking rulers as forbidding wrong” and “Forbidding the wrongs of rulers” in Cook, Forbidden Wrong in Islam, 74-79; 108-110.}

This theme also appears in Ibn ‘Asākir’s biography as we could see with one Ibn ‘Umar story (42) and one al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī story (136), however it does not spark a discussion of its own.

This is not where the efforts at political rehabilitation of al-Ḥajjāj stop. Already in the highly formalistic introductory part Ibn ʿAsākir manages to make a political claim when he shows al-Ḥajjāj narrating a Prophetic hadīth whose isnād positions him within the caliphal tradition in the Marwānid line (4). The author also presents an evaluation of al-Ḥajjāj’s political rule (3.A), where he shows that despite his image of a tyrant, al-Ḥajjāj also able of leniency and forgiveness (like Muʿāwiya) that he respected the law and was decisive, and, most importantly, that he was fiercely loyal to the caliph. the most hated among the Umayyad governors, may have to do with Ibn ʿAsākir’s general efforts to redeem the memory of the Umayyad dynasty and to uphold a special place for Syria in the history of Islam.\footnote{As already mentioned Ibn Asākir dedicates around one third of his Tārīkh to the time of the Rāshidūn caliphs and the Umayyads. He also dedicates one chapter to defend Syria against those who have defamed it, where he collects akhbār about its virtues. Paul Cobb writes about Ibn ʿAsākir’s effort to retain a special place for Syria and about the discourse of the sacred status of Syria in general. See Paul Cobb, “Virtual Sacrality: Making Muslim Syria Sacred before the Crusades,” Medieval Encounters 8.1 (2002): 35-55.}

If he showed that even the most hated of all representatives of the Umayyad power was a legitimate ruler that would by extension confirm the legitimacy of the entire dynasty. Alternatively, by depicting al-Ḥajjāj as a grave sinner, he may have also
wanted to divert the blame from the Umayyads themselves to their servant, a strategy observed in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbiḥ’s *Iqd al-Farīd*.47

Besides, the political message, there is a second, theological one which is especially visible in the discussion of al-Ḥajjāj’s standing as a Muslim in this world (3.C) and the afterlife (4). Is he a believer or unbeliever? Ibn ‘Asākir redeems the memory sinning ruler and accepts him to the community of believers repeatedly concluding that God’s mercy can reach everyone. Who knows, perhaps al-Ḥajjāj repented before his death and God forgave him. It is up to God to decide and everyone has hope. Hope, however, in the Sunni worldview, always goes hand in hand with fear: even the most pious Muslim can never be certain of salvation, must fear God and strive to be a better person. The moral layer of the message that dominates Ibn ‘Asākir’s biography of al-Ḥajjāj can be seen as an exhortation to piety and to constant effort at self-improvement; as a message of “fear and hope.”48

Ibn ‘Asākir’s cultural environment may explain all this Sunni fervor. He was a Sunni, Ash’arī, from a respected family of Shāfī’i judges, and a loyal supporter of the Zangid ruler of Syria, Nūr al-Dīn (d. 1174).49 The didactic tone of this biography can be related to his active involvement in political and social life in Damascus.50 His close relationship to Nūr al-Dīn earned him the position as a head of the new institution dedicated

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48 I am alluding here to al-Ghazālī’s chapter that deals with this issue. See “Fear and Hope” (*al-khawf wa-al-rajam*) in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, eds.ʿAbd al-Salām Muhammad Ḥārūn and Aḥmad Zaydān (Cairo: Islamic Inc. for Publishing & Distribution, 1997).


50 For a discussion of his life see Lindsay, “Ibn Asākir, His *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* and its Usefulness for Understanding Early Islamic History,” 2-9. Ibn ‘Asākir’s moralizing tendency has been noted for example by Fred Donner. See Donner, “ʿUthmān and the Rāshidūn Caliphs,” 50.
to teaching the sciences of ḥadīth, Dār al-hadīth. As Konrad Hirschler has demonstrated, Ibn ‘Asākir’s time was marked by the popularization of knowledge, and a work like Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq could then have an impact on wider audiences. Ibn ‘Asākir himself read from his works to audiences that were not confined to scholars⁵¹ and thus felt compelled to participate in debates that went beyond pure scholarly discussions. In the time when the Zangid Syria found itself threatened on one side by the Crusaders and on the other by the Shiite dynasties, Ibn ‘Asākir through the medium of his biography of al-Ḥajjāj called for an unconditional political obedience and for holding fast to the Sunni beliefs of piety and self-improvement.

Now that we have discussed what Ibn ʿAsākir conveys through al-Ḥajjāj’s biography, we should also note what he does not. Compared to al-Ṭabarī’s depiction of al-Ḥajjāj’s reign (see Chapter 1), Ibn ‘Asākir is almost entirely silent about the great conquests and rebellions. We would not learn about any of the conquests, if it were not for the fact that one report records the date of al-Ḥajjāj’s hajj together with his conquest of Balkh and Soghd (22). Or, take the dangerous rebellion of Shabīb, to which al-Ṭabarī dedicates more than 80 pages. It is entirely missing from this biography. The famous revolt of Ibn al-Ash’ath and his “Peacock Army,” which threatened to topple Umayyad rule and which Ibn Khaldūn considered it the most important event of this period,⁵² would not have been mentioned if it were not for the fact that Saʿīd b. Jubayr took part in it. The protagonists of this biography are not Ibn al-Ash’ath, Shabīb, and Qutayba b. Muslim; the heroes are Anas b. Mālik, al-Ḥasan al-Ḵaṣrāʾī, and Saʿīd b. Jubayr. The drama revolving around a revered

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Companion Saʿīd b. Jubayr, who rebelled against his ruler and who remains a hero of the pious Sunnis even today, as we have seen with al-Qaraḍāwī’s book, is for Ibn ʿAsākir more important than the whole rebellion of Ibn al-Ashʿath.

That Ibn ʿAsākir does not use al-Ṭabarī does not mean that he did not know him. He includes al-Ṭabarī’s biography in his Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq, recognizes his fame, and uses him as a source (although vary sparingly) elsewhere. The two also shared sources.  Thus, as Steven Judd has pointed out, Ibn ʿAsākir’s neglect of al-Ṭabarī must be deliberate. Judd suggests that the reason behind such neglect may be Ibn ʿAsākir’s determination to rely as much as possible on Syrian sources. This may as well be the case somewhere else, however in this biography Ibn ʿAsākir uses very few Syrian sources (e.g., Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī). I believe that Ibn ʿAsākir’s neglect of al-Ṭabarī does not, in this case, stem from a regional bias, but simply because he did not see the stories of rebellions and conquests as instrumental in delivering his intended message of belief in the establishment and hope for individual salvation.

The image of al-Ḥajjāj differs even further in the works of Ibn ʿAsākir and al-Ṭabarī. Al-Ḥajjāj is the main protagonist of al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh for more than four hundred pages in De Goeje’s edition. As we have seen in Chapter 1, in al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh, al-Ḥajjāj is the one who makes decisions, sends troops to battles, appears on the field, executes rebels, persecutes opponents, with ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd at his back, to the extent that

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54 For Judd’s discussion of al-Ṭabarī as a source of Ibn ʿAsākir see Judd, “Ibn ʿAsākir’s sources,” 93-96.
55 Al-Ḥajjāj turns into the main actor of al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh for over 300 pages. From the time he was appointed by ʿAbd al-Malik to fight Ibn al-Zubayr until his death. See al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:830-1269.
Shaban call this time period “the age of al-Ḥajjāj.”⁵⁶ The picture that one gets from al-Ṭabarî’s narratives is not entirely negative. Indeed, at times al-Ṭabarî includes records like the one that claims that 120,000 or 130,000 people died in bonds during his rule, which are clearly meant to vilify him, but overall al-Ḥajjāj comes off as a ruler like any other, if harsher then also more decisive and successful. In contrast, in Ibn ʿAsākir, his status as a sinner and tyrant is taken as a starting point, weighted against a more positive evidence. However, this difference does not have to do only with a different genre of writing about the past; it is rather a reflection of one’s personal ideologies. In the “Devil at birth” story, we have seen al-Masʿūdī, another historian, complicit in promoting the image of al-Ḥajjāj as an archetypal tyrant. El-Yamani who has described the different approaches to al-Ḥajjāj in multiple works (but not in Ibn ʿAsākir’s Tārīkh) confirms the especially negative image of the governor created by al-Masʿūdī, al-Balādhurī, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih.⁵⁷ Yet, Ibn ʿAsākir’s treatment al-Ḥajjāj as a legitimate ruler is rather new. He connects the older discussions about the standing of a sinner with al-Ḥajjāj’s archetypal tyrannical image and produces an elaborate plea for his legitimacy through the organization of his biographical entry.

Comparing Ibn ʿAsākir’s treatment of al-Ḥajjāj with the “Devil at birth” and “Fornication” stories, we note that he stands in the middle—he intends to deliver a message unrelated to the governor but at the same time he uses the governor’s image to do so. We note also that Ibn ʿAsākir’s overall message at times directly contradicts some of the reports that he uses. While he makes a case for rehabilitation and redemption of the sinful governor, some of his reports portray Ḥajjāj as a kāfir and were thus presumably used in

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⁵⁶ M. A. Shaban, Islamic History: A New Interpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 100-126.
⁵⁷ El-Yamani, “al-Ḥajjāj.”
their day to urge people to rebel against al-Ḥajjāj. Therefore, IbnʿAsākir entirely inverts their anti-establishment message. In the following section, I will point to this and other discrepancies that exist between IbnʿAsākir’s and his transmitters’ use of stories.

3.6. Individual Narratives and IbnʿAsākir’s Transmitters

What perspectives do the narratives offer when taken independently? And how do their asānīd help us to identify these perspectives? While Ibn ʿAsākir mainly relies on mainstream Sunni material, it does not mean that his transmitters were limited to Sunni muḥaddiths like himself. As is the custom of ḥadīth scholars, he uses all kinds of sources that bring information about the subject. We can find individuals in his asānīd of various professional and sectarian affiliations: e.g., historians, akhbārīs (i.e., scholars of akhbār), muḥaddiths, jurists/judges, grammarians/philologists, Shiites, Hāshimites, and Khārijites.58 A disclaimer must be made. Although IbnʿAsākir himself seems to be a rigorous compiler as already mentioned, we cannot know whether the asānīd record the actual transmission history of each report. Some reports may have their asānīd extended to an early eye-witness by a later authority. But the precise origin of the stories is secondary in this study. The asānīd are extremely useful for a different reason: They indicate the various inclinations of their transmitters, whether professional or sectarian, regardless of whether they recorded them, transmitted them, put them into circulation, embellished them, or fabricated them. This is help us understand how the meaning of a report or a cluster of

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58 I based these categories on what the tradition tells us about the individual transmitters and consulted works such as al-Dhahabi’s Siyar aṭām al-nubalā’. As I will show, these categories are not fixed, for scholars may have multiple interests and participated in various discourses. This is one of the reasons why the concept of discourse is more appropriate than a focus on the transmitters and their professional/ideological motivations.
reports changed over time. We are mainly interested in the early generations of scholars who either disseminated or collected the narratives before they were written down in books in the 3rd/9th century. In the discussion that follows I will refer to the titles of the stories as per the outline above.

3.6.1. Individual Reports: In One Version

What follows is a series of examples of individual akhbār that show a different perspective on al-Ḥajjāj from how Ibn ʿAsākir understood them, used them, and organized them. The shorter narratives are translated in full, the longer ones summarized.

3.6.1.1. Al-Ḥajjāj: Believer or Unbeliever?

The essential question of this biography is whether al-Ḥajjāj was an unbeliever (kāfir) or a believer (muʾmin). In (169) al-Shaʿbī clearly states that “al-Ḥajjāj is a believer in idols and tyranny and unbeliever in God.” The khabar thus directly contradicts the overall message of Ibn ʿAsākir’s biography, yet we have seen how he manipulate the material to reach the opposite conclusions. An interesting report shows al-Ḥajjāj trying to counter these allegations. The story is meant to be entertaining; it has a suspense and a surprising denouement:

Isnād: [...] Al-ʿAṣimaʾi > Abū ʿĀsim al-Nabīl > Abū Ḥafṣ al-Thaqafī:

(113) One day, al-Ḥajjāj was delivering a speech. He turned to his right and said: “Indeed Al-Ḥajjāj is a kāfir!” and bowed his head. Then he turned to the left and said: “Indeed al-Ḥajjāj is a kāfir.” He repeated this more than once. Then he said: “A kāfir, people of Iraq, in Allāt and al-ʿUzzā!”

This narrative shows al-Ḥajjāj first acknowledge that he is a kāfir, bow his head as if in repentance, and then clarify that he is an unbeliever in the pagan gods Allāt and al-ʿUzzā, thereby proclaiming himself as a believer. In this case, the isnād does not tell us much: the
philologist al-ʿAṣmaʿī, present here, collected all interesting stories about the past. The story is also narrated in a similar version (115) on the authority of Ibn Shawdhab and Mālik b. Dīnār, two pious men, muḥaddiths and ascetics. These stories suggest that al-Ḥajjāj was accused of kufr already during his time and that he was attempting to disrupt this image and to depict himself as a believer. We have seen his legitimizing efforts in the previous chapters and will observe them especially in Chapter 4, with the analysis of his speeches.

3.6.1.2. Al-Ḥajjāj: legitimate or illegitimate ruler?

In terms of the isnād, the report about Ibn ʿUmar pro (39), proves interesting:

Isnād: [...] al-Shāfiʿī > Muslim b. Khālid > Ibn Jurayj > Nāfiʿ:

Ibn ʿUmar withdrew to Minā during the war of Ibn al-Zubayr, while al-Ḥajjāj happened to be there too. Ibn ʿUmar followed him in prayer.

Ibn ʿUmar famously refused to take sides during the war between Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Ḥajjāj, i.e., he did not recognize either candidate as a legitimate ruler. Later commentators such as Ibn ʿAsākir would therefore take this account to argue that one should follow an illegitimate ruler in prayer; i.e., respect the religious and political authority of a ruler in place. However, if we zoom in on the isnād another interpretation comes to the surface. Ibn Jurayj the second narrator was the faqīh of Mecca during the time of Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Ḥajjāj and form some time afterwards. Al-Ḥajjāj however did not have much impact on the city, he stayed there as the governor of the Hijaz for a year and then he left for Iraq. The two competing religious and scholarly legacies were those of Ibn al-Zubayr and Ibn ʿAbbās. Ibn Jurayj was a follower of Ibn ʿAbbās and so was Ibn ʿUmar. In this light, the narrative makes a different point: During the fitna Ibn ʿUmar rejected Ibn al-Zubayr’s authority, left Mecca, and even preferred al-Ḥajjāj’s leadership over it. It is thus an attack.
on Ibn al-Zubayr’s legacy not an argument for acquiescence to unjust ruler. Al-Ḥajjāj is here rather tangential to the story but seen as more legitimate than Ibn al-Zubayr.

3.6.1.3. Al-Ḥajjāj: loyal or ruthless?

Another khabar, narrated on the authority of al-Shāfi’ī (90) tells that the caliph al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik instructed one of his courtiers to ask al-Ḥajjāj about whether he ever had any qualms about all the blood he had spilled. Al-Ḥajjāj answers the courtier in the negative claiming that he always acted out of obedience to the caliph and boasting about the amount of obedience with which God has endowed him. Ibn ʿAsākir placed this story among others that evaluate al-Ḥajjāj’s rule positively (80-90), wherefore we can infer that he takes it to reflect on al-Ḥajjāj’s decisiveness and loyalty. The presence of al-Shāfi’ī in the isnād alerts us to the theological aspect of the story. Doubt was a concept contested in theological discussions of his time. It was permissible for the Sunnis, prohibited for the murjiʾa. This is again related to the idea that imān exists in different degrees, touched upon earlier, and one should always doubt their own belief and actions. Al-Shāfi’ī used this story to warn against those who don't hesitate about their actions. This means that al-Shāfi’ī and Ibn ʿAsākir used the same story to evaluate al-Ḥajjāj in two different ways. For, Ibn ʿAsākir the focus is on al-Ḥajjāj’s loyalty and decisiveness; for al-Shāfi’ī, he is the deterring example of a ruler who lacks introspection and forbearance (ḥilm).

3.6.1.4. Al-Ḥajjāj: defeated in a debate or showing forbearance?

The “Qurʾān vs. Poetry” story (68) has akhbārī isnād, featuring Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Khallād and al-Haytham b. ʿAdī. Again it is rather lengthy, and so a summary will be sufficient. It tells us about a man who won an argument with al-Ḥajjāj because he recited
a Qur’anic verse to make his case while al-Ḥajjāj recited poetry. The governor had to release the man. For the akhbārī transmitters, this is a story about the value of poetry and the Qurʾān, not about al-Ḥajjāj. Furthermore, the governor is portrayed here as deficient in religious knowledge. IbnʾAsākir, on the other hand, places this story within a cluster of “leniency anecdotes.” Al-Ḥajjāj is thereby transformed, in IbnʾAsākir’s interpretation, from a ruler ignorant about religion to a ruler who can accept advice and show tolerance.

3.6.1.5. Al-Ḥajjāj: tyrant or a forbearing ruler?

The narrative (74) describes the clash between Juḥdar, a brigand poet, and al-Ḥajjāj. In the example of the “Fornication” narrative we have seen the process of forming of al-Ḥajjāj’s archetypal, popular figure as a tyrant. We have seen that this is also al-Qaraḍāwī’s use of al-Ḥajjāj in his political allegory. In a similar vein, numerous narratives depict the heroic struggle of an outcast against al-Ḥajjāj, the tyrant and (74) is one of these. In addition to muḥaddiths, mainly philologists and akhbārīs were interested in such stories. This one contains many verses of poetry and was transmitted through an isnād of philologists such as al-Anbārī (d. 328/940) and Ibn al-Aʿrābī (d. 231/845). It relates how al-Ḥajjāj forced the poet to fight a lion. The poet killed the lion, even though he had his hand tied to his neck, and al-Ḥajjāj set him free. The story celebrates the heroism of the outcast Juḥdar and provides the audience with a narrative of hope: A true hero can succeed in an uneven struggle against a cruel ruler. This is where we can see its folkloric character. Al-Ḥajjāj’s role here is purely symbolic and he could be replaced by any other harsh ruler. But IbnʾAsākir understands this story differently because he also lumps it in the thematic cluster of al-Ḥajjāj’s forbearance. One more time, he transforms al-Ḥajjāj from a tyrant to a model of forbearance (ḥilm).
3.6.2. INDIVIDUAL REPORTS: DIFFERENT VERSIONS

3.6.2.1. Al-Ḥajjāj’s blasphemy

Narratives (91-102) accuse al-Ḥajjāj of different blaspheming statements. Let us take the example of the first two ones and consider their asānīd.

(91) Isnad: Ja'far b. Sulayman (shiite) > ʿAwf: The narrator recounts that he wanted to hear the khutba of al-Ḥajjāj during the ʿīd. Al-Ḥajjāj then comes, swaying from one side to the other until he ascends the pulpit. He begins his speech and puts his hands to his mouth to amplify the sound of his words. He first praises the Syrians, then he attacks the Iraqis. He ends his speech with the following words:

People of Iraq, you are claiming that the message from Heaven (i.e., revelation) have been cut off from the commander of the believers. You lie, by God! The message from Heaven has not been cut off from him...

According to this khabar, al-Ḥajjāj argues that Divine Revelation continues through the caliph; this is a clear instance of blasphemy, definitely for a post-Umayyad audience.59 It is curious that one of these stories has a Shiite isnād and we can thus witness the Shiites accusing al-Ḥajjāj of theocratic beliefs.60 As we have seen in Chapter 1 pro-Alid groups were his bitter enemies. In this light, it appears to intend to defame al-Ḥajjāj and contributes to the creation of his image as a sinner.

In this version, al-Ḥajjāj is accused of considering the caliph more important than the Prophet. However, it is not he whose reputation is at stake but rather Ibn Khālid. The goal of this narrative is to explain why he, a muḥaddith and such a pious man as Ibn Khālid rebelled against his ruler, which as we have seen was a deeply problematic issue for the pious Sunnis. We can note important muḥaddiths in the asānīd.

3.6.2.2. Al-Ḥajjāj: deficient in language or in theological disputation?

The followings three reports show that the study of asānīd can explain how a narrative traveled and how it was used for different purposes. They tell us about a conflict between al-Ḥajjāj and Yaḥyā b. Yaʿmur, a famous grammarian.61 This table provides an overview of the important narrators and the different reasons the narratives give as for the reason of the conflict:

| Table 5: Three versions of the conflict between al-Ḥajjāj and Yaḥyā b. Yaʿmur |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1. (76) Isnād: Philologists (Ibn Anbārī, al-Jumaḥī, Tha lab) | Reason: al-Ḥajjāj’s lahn |
| 2. (77) Isnād: muḥaddiths (Ibn Abī Khaythama) | Reason: al-Ḥajjāj’s lahn |

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61 Yaḥyā is known as one of the scholars who were entrusted with the codification of the Qurʾānic text. See for example Shady Nasser, The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qurʾān The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādhdh (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 39.

62 Report (78) is missing because it is not a story but only an additional isnād for the previous story: to be precise, an isnād of judges of Kufa. Why would judges be interested in narrating a story about Yaḥyā’s eloquence? We find exactly the same isnād in another story, which interestingly also deals with al-Ḥusayn as does our third Yaḥyā story here. Thus it seems that in this case the isnād and the content may
The participation of philologists in a discussion about language and someone’s deficiency in it (lahn) comes at no surprise. According to the first version, Yaḥyā found mistakes in al-Ḥajjāj’s recitation of the Qur’ān. The story makes a strong argument for the usefulness of poetry when it mentions at the beginning that al-Ḥajjāj did not use to memorize poetry. The implication is that even a person as eloquent as al-Ḥajjāj will make mistakes in the recitation of the Qur’ān, if they do not memorize poetry. In this khabar, al-Ḥajjāj exemplifies an eloquent man but he is not the object of the narrative. The second version loses this detail. Regardless, the interest of muḥaddiths in al-Ḥajjāj’s lahn and in matters of language and lahn of al-Ḥajjāj may appear unexpected. This may lead us to believe that this isnād was randomly attached to the story by later historians. Yet when we dig deeper we discover that the most famous of these muḥaddiths, Ibn Abī Khaythama (d. 892), studied adab with one of the philologists from the first version of the narrative, al-Jumaḥī, and narrates other various other stories with literary character in Aghānī.63 This khabar can be simply understood to be recording an example of a famous orator who also made mistakes in language or as an attempt to detract from al-Ḥajjāj’s reputation as eloquent speaker. As for the third version, language plays no role in it. Instead, the story presents a case for the legitimacy of the ahl al-bayt. Here, al-Ḥajjāj claims that al-Ḥusayn “was not from the progeny of the Prophet (lam yakun min dharrīyat al-nabī),” i.e., he should not be considered a legitimate heir of the Prophet. The implication is that al-Ḥusayn descended from the Prophet through a woman (Fāṭima). But Yaḥyā disputes this claim with the

have been amalgamated by later collectors. This shows that even in this case we cannot speak of an outright fabrication.

63 See for example a story about Sukayna, the liberated daughter of al-Ḥusayn, who had her own literary salon. Al-İsfahânî, Aghānî, 16:4ff. Also Sulaymān b. Abī Shaykh and Abū Sufyān al-Ḥimyarî, other transmitters of this story appear in narratives dealing with langauge and related matters. See for example İsfahânî, Kitāb al-Ağānî, 16:143-144.
example of Jesus who is counted among the offspring of King David, who was related to him through Mary. Al-Ḥajjāj accepts Yahyā’s argumentation but is angry and exiles him.

The story is narrated on the authority of ʿĀṣim b. al-Bahdala (d. 745), one of the famous qurrā’ of Kūfa, and the isnād is made up of muḥaddiths and a Hāshimite narrator from a time close to the time of Ibn ʿAsākir. All of these would have reasons to be interested the transmission of this story.

It is hard to tell ‘what really happened’ between al-Ḥajjāj and Yahyā b. Yaʿmur. Yahyā was one of the people who were central, according to the sources, to al-Ḥajjāj’s project to codify the Qurʾān. He was a famous grammarian and student of Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿalī to whom the first reform of Arabic script is ascribed. Therefore, presenting Yahyā, who could humiliate the eloquent al-Ḥajjāj in matters of language, would make sense to the audience of this narrative. We may doubt that this was the reason of the discord between the two men; all historical knowledge we can glean from this narrative is that Yahyā was exiled to Khurasan. Yet, as we have seen, the narrative is rich in exhibiting how al-Ḥajjāj was used in different circles to make different points.

The close examination of several individual reports in Ibn ʿAsākir sheds light on a number of issues:

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64 He is considered one of the Seven Readers of the Qurʾān.
66 Although it would be tempting—at first glance—to ascribe this story to the later Hāshimite narrator, a close version of it appears in the earlier Al-ʿIqd al-fārūd. This dates the report earlier than the Hāshimite narrator. Ibn Abd Rabih narrates it on the authority of al-ʿAsmaʾī and it has an interesting twist. Yahyā’s argument is even stronger as he claims that al-Ḥusayn should be considered the son of the Prophet. However, with al-ʿAsmaʾī the story moves from a theological discourse to a literary one, as he focuses here on Yahyā’s excellence in argumentation; When Al-Ḥajjāj hears his arguments, he exclaims that he has not heard this Qurānic verse yet and appoints Yahyā as the main qāṭī in his country. Ibn ʿAbd Rabih, Al-ʿIqd al-fārūd, 5:281
First, we see how stories are used and re-used. At times the individual stories are in clear opposition to Ibn’Asākir’s overall message, yet he manages to detract from their weight through his skillful organization of the material. Other stories acquire a different meaning when we look at them from the perspective of the narrators in their isnād or if we interpret them based on their place in the biography. Yet other stories, recorded in multiple versions, retain evidence of how the same narrative was used and re-used in different circles and to make different points. During all these processes, al-Ḥajjāj’s image changed based on the rhetorical goal of each khabar.

Second, narratives can either use the figure of al-Ḥajjāj as an agreed-upon symbol or they can be taking part in a creating his image. In the vein of the “Fornication” narrative, many stories use al-Ḥajjāj merely as a symbol—of sinfulness, tyranny, eloquence, knowledge or lack of it, etc. The clearest example is the narrative about the poet Juḥdar, al-Ḥajjāj and a lion. Al-Ḥajjāj had become the achetype of a tyrant and his tyranny was so deeply rooted that it did not have to be argued for. His figure acquires a folkloric dimension—the anti-Ḥajjāj propaganda was so successful that it ceased to be a political ideology and became appropriated by the collective mind.67 Other stories argue for a certain image of the governor in the vein of the “Devil at birth” narrative. The blasphemy cluster or the cluster of stories connecting al-Ḥajjāj to the Jāhilīya (see the outline) are good examples. This second type of akhbar enable us to observe the formation of al-Ḥajjāj’s later image and the process how it acquired its archetypal, mythical, and folkloric dimensions. That the body of similar literature about al-Ḥajjāj must have been much larger than what has been preserved confirms al-Dhahabi’s (d. 1348) note at the end of his entry

67 Assmann calls such a process the displacement of antagonism which proceeds from the outer to the inner. Assmann, Moses the Egyptian, 215.
on al-Ḥajjāj in Tārīkh al-Īslām. Al-Dhahabī says that he has a book (mujallad) of wonderful stories (ʿajāʾīb) about the governor which he does not include because he is not sure about the stories’ truthfulness.68

Third, an examination of the individual akhbār suggests that the asānīd reflect fairly reliably the professional affiliation of the transmitters of the stories and the discourses in which these stories participated. The last example with Ibn Abī Khaythama shows that labels such as muḥaddith, which we find in biographical dictionaries, are not fixed and exclusive and that scholars could intervene and narrate knowledge in different fields. The asānīd show consistency as to who narrated what. Muḥaddiths for instance are often connected with stories of moral value. Scholars and famous ascetics like Mālik b. Dīnār and Ibn Abī Dunyā appear in the asānīd of the many pious stories that found their way into the biography. These may be remnants of their preaching (waẓ). Among these are a few stories about pious Bedouins, which much resemble Christian narratives about holy men.69 Muḥaddiths also transmitted anecdotes documenting the brave deeds of their early heroes such as Anas b. Mālik, Saʿīd b. Jubayr, and al-Ḥasan al-Ḥasan al-Ḥasan al-Ḥasan al-Ḥasan. Historians like Khalīfa b. Khayyāt or al-Madāʾnī record historical events, for example, in which year al-Ḥajjāj performed the ḥajj and in which year he was born. The sectarian affiliation of the narrators at times also comes out in the narratives. So, a story (146) features a Khārijite hero, who though he lost his life won a moral victory over al-Ḥajjāj.70

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68 Al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-Īslām, 6:327.
69 See note Note 33.
70 “The Witty Khārijite:” A Khārijite was brought before al-Ḥajjāj. Al-Ḥajjāj wanted him to divulge the whereabouts of the famous Khārijite female leader Farāsha. His answers to al-Ḥajjāj are witty but also entirely useless and highly defiant. At the end, al-Ḥajjāj orders his head to be cut off. Even as the head falls on the floor it keeps repeating the shahāda. This is another example of a folktale, clearly siding with the defiant Khārijite. Not only does he outsmart al-Ḥajjāj on many occasions during the investigation, but he also outsudgets him at the moment of his death. In the Sunni view, one who pronounces the shahāda as his last words will enter Paradise. The folktoric detail of the speaking severed head places gruesome
authority of Abū Ubayda Maʿmar b. Muthannā, a philologist of Khārijite leanings. We have noted one Shiite narrative hostile to al-Ḥajjāj and there are more. In sum, Ibn ʿAsākir’s biography retained many disparate voices and shards of earlier debates from different contexts and time periods.

The last section of this chapter returns to the issue that stood at the center of the controversy around al-Ḥajjāj; the accusation that Ibn ʿAsākir sees as the most dangerous and that sparks a whole series of reports discussing al-Ḥajjāj’s standing in this world and the other: the issue of bidʿa, or “religious innovation.”

3.7. AL-ḤAJJĀJ’S BIDʿA

For Ibn ʿAsākir, the issue of bidʿa was more serious than any other of al-Ḥajjāj’s sins however horrifying the accusations against him may have been. This is because bidʿa, the Islamic near-equivalent of heresy, may constitute kufr and it is thus the most serious threat to al-Ḥajjāj’s political authority. For the purposes of this study, the gravity that Ibn ʿAsākir ascribes to al-Ḥajjāj’s bidʿa is especially interesting because of its connection to his

emphasis of the fact that the shahīda were the very last words he pronounced. The story then suggests that even though al-Ḥajjāj threatened to send the man to Hell, he may have actually entered Paradise. Al-Ḥajjāj fails again and the Khārijite becomes the hero of the story. At the same time it could be considered as one of the reports that shows people who were saved by their words.

71 An example of a pro-Shiite story is (43). One of the transmitters is Ubaydullāh b. Ibn Rāfiʿ, ʿAlī’s scribe and whose father was ʿAlī’s mawla. This story is very hostile to al-Ḥajjāj, depicting him as an oppressor and rapist. Abdallāh b. Jaʿfar (perhaps nephew of ʿAlī), a Ḥāshimite, had to give his daughter to al-Ḥajjāj in marriage but taught her a prayer that the Prophet used to say when something annoyed him and she was saved from him.

72 Bidʿa in Islamic thought is conceptualized in opposition to sunna, which is understood to be the tradition received from the Prophet, and which is considered the most authoritative source of Muslim creed and jurisprudence after the Qurʾān. Abdallah Soufan argues that this opposition is a result of an Abbasid reconceptualization of the sunna and that bidʿa was a value-free term in early Islam. See the forthcoming Abdallah Soufan, “Tradition and Its Boundaries: A Diachronic Study of the Concept of Bidʿah (Religious Innovation) in Classical Islamic Thought” (Phd. diss., Georgetown University, 2018).
performance of the Friday sermon. Let us take one of the bidʿa reports as a point of
departure. Mālik b. Dīnār reportedly narrates:

When al-Ḥajjāj led the prayer73 we used to turn our faces to the sky to see what was
remaining of the sun. [When he saw that] he cried out: “What are you looking at? May God
render your eyes blind! We do not worship the sun nor the moon nor stones nor idols!”74

In this account, Mālik b. Dīnār (d.130/748), a muḥaddith, famous ascetic and one of the
first Muslims known to propagate Islam in India, recalls al-Ḥajjāj performing the Friday
ritual prayer while the worshippers nervously look toward the sky. The sun’s diminishing
shape was announcing that the governor was, once again, going to miss the prayer time.

The postponement of prayer times generated much controversy in Umayyad times
and was considered a bidʿa. What is interesting for us is that al-Ḥajjāj is the central figure
of the controversy, though names of other Umayyad governors in Iraq appear too,75 and
that some of his later biographers consider this to be his gravest sin, as we have seen with
Ibn ʿAsākir. The gravity of the matter is also confirmed by multiple hadīths, which must
have been put into circulation in this period to condemn the phenomenon. They narrate that
the Prophet predicted that there would be amīrs who would not abide by the prescribed
prayer times and that he exhorted people to adhere to the correct times.76 The commentators

73 Lit. “When we used to pray behind al-Ḥajjāj…” Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 12:186
74 The full isnād of this narrative is: Abū Bakr al-Laftawānī, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. Muḥammad, al-
Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad, Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar, ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad, ʿAli b. Muṣallam,
is not the earliest source. Ibn Abī Dunyā (d. 281/894) included it in his al-Ishrāf fī manāzil al-ashrāf
(Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1990), 322.
75 The Iraqi governors sometimes connected with postponement of prayer are Wālīd b. ʿUqba,
Ziyād b. Abī, and ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād. See a chapter titled “The despicability of the postponement
of prayer times” in Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ, with the commentary of al-Nawawī, (Cairo: Al-Azhar, 1929), 147-151.
See also Stijn Aerts, “Pray with Your Leader: A Proto-Sunni Quietist Tradition,” Journal of the American
76 See al-Nawawī’s chapter titled Bāb Taʾkhīr al-salāt an waqṭihā al-mukhtār wa-mā yafʿaluh al-
maʿmūn idhā akhkharhā al-imām (“Chapter on postponing prayer and on what the worshipper does when the
imām postpones it”) in Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ, commentary by al-Nawawī. Al-Nawawī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ al-
Nawawī (Cairo: Al-Azhar, 1929), 5:147-151. See al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ, nr. 560; al-Muṣlim’s Ṣaḥīḥ, nr. 646;
point their finger at al-Ḥajjāj. The great medieval hadith scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1447), for example, describes how al-Ḥajjāj misses the prayer time and Anas b. Mālik, the well-known and highly respected Companion of the Prophet, laments that nothing has remained as it was in the time of the Prophet and that even the prayer, the cornerstone of Islam, has changed.77

What does al-Ḥajjāj’s meddling with the prayer ritual have to do with oratory? The testimony of a Basran scholar78 makes the connection clear:

I witnessed al-Ḥajjāj in Mecca delivering the Friday sermon (khutba) until the prescribed prayer time was almost up. Then Ibn ʿUmar stood up [interrupted al-Ḥajjāj’s khutba] and said: “People, stand up and pray,” and they did. And so, al-Ḥajjāj descended from the pulpit and prayed. When he finished, he asked: “Who is this man?” and they told him. Al-Ḥajjāj replied: “If he were not mentally deranged, I would have punished him.”79

The Basran scholars witnessed that al-Ḥajjāj preached for too long. To understand the connection between prayer times and preaching, we need to remember three features of the Friday service, which by all indications date to the early Islamic period:80 The khutba (“sermon”) is an obligatory part of the Friday noon service; second, the khutba precedes

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77 Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Fath al-bārī, 2:13. On the development of Islamic cult and ritual during the Umayyad period see Gerhard Böwering, “Prayer,” Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān; Fred M. Donner, “Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation: The Umayyads’ Silent Heritage,” in Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain, 187-213 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), esp. 193ff; S. D. Goitein, Studies in Islamic History and Institutions (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 73-89; Gerald Hawting, ed. The Development of Islamic Ritual, 33-132 (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2006); Jawād ʿAli, Ṭārīkh al-ṣalāḥ fī al-ʾIslām (Baghdad: Maktabat Daɣāyāʾ(384,970),(610,997), [n.d.]); Sulaymān Bashīr, Muqaddima fī al-ṭārīkh al-ʾākhar (Jerusalem: Jamʿīyat al-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabīya, 1984), especially the chapter on ṣalāt, pp. 441-469; on discussion of the khutba in the Qurʾān see Patrick D. Gaffney, “Friday Prayer” Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān. 78 This scholar is the Basran Makḥūl al-Azdī, not to be confused with the famous Syrian Makḥūl. 79 Ibn Manẓūr, Mukhtaṣar “Ṭārīkh Dimashq” li-Ibn ʿAsākir (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1984), v:204. I am not citing Ibn ʿAsākir directly because this khabar was presumably on one of three pages misplaced in the modern edition (12:124, 125, 128). Similarly, Anas for example replies when other point that the prayer is still like it was in the times of the prophet: “You prayed with your back directed to the sunset? Was prayer like that during the time of the Prophet?” Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī’s Fath al-Bārī, 2:13. 80 I understand ‘Early Islam’ as the period from the rise of Islam until the beginning of the 3rd/9th century. For the discussion of my periodization see Introduction.
the actual prayer (ṣalāt); third, both must be finished by the afternoon prayer time (‘āṣr).\(^{81}\)

But reports like the first one suggest that due to his long sermons, al-Ḥajjāj missed not only the ‘āṣr but also the sunset prayer time (maghrib). This means that he would be speaking for three or four hours straight.\(^{82}\)

Scholars have provided little commentary on these strange reports about the Umayyad postponement of prayer times;\(^{83}\) at most, they ascribe it to people’s ignorance of the “elementary rules.”\(^{84}\) But the variety and number of sources that comment on this issue suggest quite the opposite: people were very much aware of the ritual and ready to use its

\(^{81}\) Overall, there has been a disagreement about the precise chronology of the development of the ritual prayer. S. D. Goitein has it that since the second Meccan period “prayer bore essentially the same character as we know it today;” Studies in Islamic History and Institutions, 84. Böwering notes that regularization of ritual prayer can be inferred from some Qur’ānic Medinan verses. (Q 4:43; 5:6) and focuses on the main change in the early practice, change in the direction of prayer hijra; Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān. Donner, on the other hand, brings evidence that details of ritual prayer were still being defined under the Umayyads, giving the example of Egypt under Muʾāwiyah; “Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation,” 195. We are here, however, concerned with the three core features that seem to be very early. As for the first two features, these are clearly early based on the evidence of Umayyad-era conflicts over the place of ḥuṭba in the ritual of the two feasts (discussed below). Becker, based on iktilāf and ijmāʿ legal material, argues that the Umayyads wanted to model the more ancient Two Feasts ritual after the Friday service and have the ḥuṭba precede the ṣalāh; he also sees the double sermon on Friday to be directly derived from Christian Sunday service. See Becker, “On the History of Muslim Worship” in The Development of Islamic Ritual, 49-74. As for the third feature—finishing the prayer by the ‘āṣr time—this is more complicated because we are not sure when uniform prayer times were established. But ‘āṣr in particular seems to be one of the two earliest prayer times. See Uri Rubin “Morning and Evening Prayers in Early Islam,” in The Development of Islamic Ritual, 105-129, where the author connects it to Jewish minḥa.

Furthermore, with al-Ḥajjāj and ʿAbd al-Malik, we are a generation after Muʾāwiyah, the example cited by Donner, and rather than a process of establishment, we can observe an open conflict over prayer times. My take on this is that conflicts over a certain ritual do not mean that people were unsure about the ritual; more likely they mean that people, through this practice, asserted their communal and sectarian belonging, as we will see below.

\(^{82}\) The five obligatory prayers are pre-dawn (fajr), noon (zuhr), afternoon (‘āṣr), sunset (maghrib), and night. Fajr must be performed by the sunrise, zuhr by ‘āṣr, ‘āṣr by maghrib, maghrib by ‘ishāʾ, ‘ishāʾ by midnight.

\(^{83}\) Recently Stijn Aerts contextualized these accusations as a tool to legitimize dissent against the Umayyads. But what was the reason of choosing such an innocuous accusation, the postponement of prayer times? Aerts, “Pray with Your Leader.”

\(^{84}\) Ignaz Goldziher said: “In the time of al-Ḥajjāj and ʿUmar II people had not idea of the times for prayer and most Muslims were unsure of the quite elementary rules.” See Ignaz Goldziher, Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien), vol.2, tr. C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern (London, 1971), 39-40.
alteration as a reason for rebellion.\textsuperscript{85} Fred Donner has conceived of the regulation of the ritual as part of Umayyad efforts at legitimation.\textsuperscript{86}

The idiosyncrasies of the Shiite and Malikite practice gleaned from legal \textit{ikhtilāf} material, provide further evidence that manipulations with the Friday noon prayer took place in the Umayyad period. While the Shiites are lenient on all other days allowing the combination of \textit{zuhr} and \textit{ʿaṣr} prayer, when it comes to Friday they strictly require that the \textit{zuhr} \textit{khuṭba} and \textit{ṣalāt} take place immediately after noon time (\textit{zawwāl}).\textsuperscript{87} This is in direct contraction to al-Ḥajjāj’s practice, who postponed the Friday \textit{zuhr} prayer time into \textit{ʿaṣr}. The Malikites, in contrast to the Shiites, and in harmony with the practice of al-Ḥajjāj, allow (exclusively) on Friday, the combination of \textit{zuhr} with \textit{ʿaṣr} and extend its time until sunset.\textsuperscript{88} The political situation may explain these discrepancies and parallels—the Shiites were clearly hostile to al-Ḥajjāj and in the case of Mālikites we could speculate about a Hijazi connection. From this perspective, particular performance of the Friday ritual, specifically the place of the \textit{khuṭba} and \textit{ṣalāt} within it, projected a particular religio-political identity.

Further historical material indicates that al-Ḥajjāj’s \textit{bidʿa} was part of a larger battle over the Friday communal prayer and the place of \textit{khuṭba} in it and that this battle was waged during the Umayyad period. In various sources, the Umayyads are accused of “killing the \textit{ṣalāt} (prayer)” and, more concretely, of attempting to change the ritual of the Two Feasts, the only regular Muslim communal worship other than the Friday service. The

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{85} See Aerts, “Pray with Your Leader.” \textsuperscript{86} Donner, “Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation.” \textsuperscript{87} See al-Kulaynī, \textit{al-Kāfī} (Beirut: Manshūrat al-Fajr, 2007), 3:239. \textsuperscript{88} Saḥnūn and Mālik, \textit{al-Mudawwana al-kabrā}, (Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmīya, 1994) 1:139; cf. 1:180. The Shiites were hostile to the Umayyads and their practice may have reflected this hostility. The Malikites, on the other hand, allow the postponement of Friday prayer (and not any other day) and so allows for al-Ḥajjāj’s practice. In this case, we can speculate about a Ḥijāzī connection.}
two types of ritual contain a prayer (ṣalāt) and a sermon (khutba) but in reverse order:

Table 6: Comparison between Friday prayer and the feast prayer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friday prayer (once a week)</th>
<th>Two Feasts (once a year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. khutba (&quot;sermon&quot;)</td>
<td>1. salāt (&quot;prayer&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. salāt (&quot;prayer&quot;)</td>
<td>2. khutba (&quot;sermon&quot;)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tradition explains that the Umayyads wanted to reverse the Two Feasts ritual to match it the Friday prayer (1. khutba, 2. salāt) to make sure that worshippers would not run off after the salāt while the caliph was still speaking. 89

“Is it possible to imagine a sillier explanation? Nobody would run off while the caliph was speaking, as this would have had dire consequences indeed,” C. H. Becker commented more than a hundred years ago. 90 But the Qurʾān itself, Q 62:11, provides an example that shows that early Muslims were at times impatient and distracted during preaching and would sometimes take off for business or amusement. The frustrated Prophet Muḥammad was left there “standing there,” preaching. 91 Once the pervasive nature and direct power of public speech in the Umayyad period is sketched in this chapter, the traditional explanation for the Umayyad manipulation of the communal worship will not seem that silly after all. While the reasons may be more complicated (we may refer back to the role that religio-political identities discussed earlier) the sources clearly speak about the great political and religious significance of the Friday speech in the Umayyad period and about the important place of al-Ḥajjāj in controversies around it.

89 The caliph Marwān is reported to have said this explicitly, see Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 57:250-251.
90 C. H. Becker suggests a different explanation. He argues that the differences between the practice of the Friday ritual and of the Two Feasts represent a development from an early practice (Two Feasts) to a more organized way of worship (Friday service). The Umayyads, according to Becker, attempted to unify the practice of the two types of communal worship and model the Two Feasts ritual after the Friday prayer. See Becker, “On the History of Muslim Worship,” 56.
91 Q 62:11 reprimands people who whenever they see an opportunity for business or amusement turn away and leave the Prophet standing as he is still preaching to them.
3.8. Conclusion

The first aim of this chapter was to inquire into the memory of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī; how he was remembered and how this memory changed over time. His biographical entry in Ibn ʿAsākir’s *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* served as a starting point to work backwards in and to peel off the layers of memory. Through a careful analysis of its contents and structure we found a dominant perspective—Ibn ʿAsākir’s—which guided the process of arrangement and organization. Ibn ʿAsākir’s perspective on al-Ḥajjāj is the following: He was an oppressive ruler (*ḥākim ṣālim*), but also very loyal to the caliph. He was also probably a sinner and perhaps even an innovator (*mubtadi*). However, for Ibn ʿAsākir, only God can make the judgment whether he was a Muslim or an unbeliever (*kāfir*). And since unbelief (*kufr*) is the only thing that may invalidate a Muslim ruler’s authority, in his view, and since no one can determine with certainty someone else’s religious standing, al-Ḥajjāj’s authority should have been accepted during his lifetime. Moreover, as any Muslim—in the Sunni worldview—he may have entered Paradise if, in his heart, he was a true monotheist and if he repented his sins before his death. Only God knows. In this way, Ibn ʿAsākir is projecting two messages, a political and a moral: 1. A ruler, even an unjust one, must be obeyed. 2. Everyone, even a sinner like al-Ḥajjāj can hope for salvation.

This chapter also inquired into the different ways in which narratives about al-Ḥajjāj were used and re-used through an examination of their *asānīd*. We see that the very same story could acquire different meanings when it moved from one narrator to another. With each new meaning the role that al-Ḥajjāj plays in it could also change. *Asānīd*, which Ibn ʿAsākir records in their entirety, help us identify the identities and motivations of earlier
transmitters. We arrived at an earlier image of al-Ḥajjāj seeping through the individual reports despite Ibn 'Asākir’s organization of the material. This earlier image of al-Ḥajjāj is often much darker than the one that Ibn 'Asākir paints. In most cases, it is taken for granted that he was a tyrant and sinner. Most of what came to us of these stories was formed during the heavy anti-Umayyad propaganda by al-Ḥajjāj’s many enemies, probably already during his reign but especially later with the rise of the Abbasids. The memory of the harsh governor was a propaganda tool. Assmann calls this strategy “normative inversion,” in which the rejected, here the Umayyads, are remembered “not for its own sake, but as the counter image of one's own identity.”\textsuperscript{92} Over time these reports about his tyrannical rule and devilish nature spread widely and al-Ḥajjāj was transformed into an archetypal or proverbial figure of tyrant, sinner, and unjust ruler. This greatly contrasts with the image that we observed him constructing in the previous chapters—that of a religious leader and inter-confessional broker.

On the whole, in this chapter we witnessed a process of rehabilitation of the Umayyad governor. We see how al-Ḥajjāj’s memory was first formed and contested, how certain unfit elements were erased, how it was reused in later debates unrelated to him, and finally how it was once again reused and synchronized in Ibn 'Asākir’s biography. Ibn 'Asākir, through his arrangement and organization, smoothes out the rough edges of the stories he collected and in some cases entirely inverts their purpose, from anti-establishment to pro-establishment propaganda.

Finally, Ibn ‘Asākir’s organization of al-Ḥajjāj’s biography led us to what he considered al-Ḥajjāj’s gravest sin—his bid‘a of postponing the prayer times. We observed

\textsuperscript{92} Assmann, Moses the Egyptian, 216.
that this accusation was part of large controversy around the Umayyad manipulations with the Friday prayer ritual, the ritual of the two feasts, and the place of the *khutba* in them. The *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* material provide ample evidence that al-Ḥajjāj played a central role in this turmoil. In this way it offers perhaps the most reliable evidence for the politico-religious significance of the Friday *khutba* in the Umayyad period and al-Ḥajjāj place in it. Al-Ḥajjāj’s *khutab* and Umayyad oratory will be the focus of the rest of this study.
CHAPTER 4

LEGITIMIZING A SCHOOLMASTER AS THE RULER OF THE EAST:

AL-ḤAJJĀJ’S SPEECHES, PERFORMANCE, AND IDEOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION: AL-ḤAJJĀJ B. YŪSUF, THE HOMO NOVUS

The one who raised the Heavens built a house for us,
Whose pillars are the mighties and the tallest;
A house that the Lord built for us—
And what the Ruler of Heavens will never be moved;
A house that gathers in its courtyard Zurāra,
Mujāshiʿ and Abū al-Fawārish Nahshal.¹

Al-Farazdaq (d. 112/730)

My father is Islam and I have no father but it,
When others boast about Qays and Tamīm.²

Nahār b. Tawsīʿa al-Yashkurī (d. after 83/702)

These two examples of Umayyad poetic boast (fakhr) exhibit two different types of argumentation for social status in Umayyad society: one based on tribal genealogy and one based on Islamic credentials. They both speak in an Islamic tone while making the opposite claim to authority. In the first poem al-Farazdaq, famous for his satirical exchanges with Jarīr (naqāʾiḍ), boasts that God made his house (understand clan or family) the noblest and most ancient (because they stand on the longest pillars). Then he lists three semi-legendary chiefs (ashrāf) of his clan—the Dārim clan, one of the leading groups of Tamīm—to prove

¹ Al-Farazdaq in al-Īṣfahānī, Aghānī, 8:45.

² Nahār b. Tawsīʿa in al-Mubarrad, Kāmil, 3:133.
the point. He clearly draws his confidence from his honorable ancestors. On the contrary, Nahār b. Tawsiʿa, much less known poet who fought in Khurasan, rejects this tribal rhetoric and substitutes Islam for his ancestors, claiming that he “has no father but Islam.” Nahār’s verses shows a move towards a new type of self-promotion—one based on purely Islamic merit which claims to do without a tribal genealogy. The caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb first established the principle of precedence (ṣābiqa) that those with higher merits for Islam (e.g. early conversion, participation in battles, closeness to the Prophet) will receive larger part of spoils. A new Islamic ‘aristocracy’ was created on similar grounds and Nahār’s verses confirm that Islamic merit was becoming to be perceived as a sufficient claim to authority. At the same time, his proclamation to allegiance to Islam as a relation of father and son, displays how deeply genealogical sensibilities were still rooted in the society of his time.

Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf could not boast about his genealogy or his Islamic merit. In Chapter 1, we have seen that his origins were lowly—he worked as a teacher of young boys in Taʿif and some of his enemies even accused him of being the descendent of slaves. His family could not claim any credit for Islam on the sābiqa principle either. His low social and Islamic status was especially striking, we noted earlier, in contrast with Ibn al-Zubayr, whom he removed from power in Mecca. This all posed a problem for al-Ḥajjāj in a society so deeply entrenched in genealogical conception of authority. Centuries earlier in Rome, another great orator and politician, Marcus Tullius Cicero (d. 43BC), faced a similar problem. He was a homo novus (lit. a ‘new man’), a newcomer in a culture that promoted men who descended from consuls and generals and who on the account of their ancestors

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possessed *nobilitas*. Despite this he reached the office of a consul in 63 BC, gained wide popularity, and remained one of the leading men in Rome until his violent death by the order of Marc Anthony. Modern scholarship has discussed at length the concepts of *homo novus* and *nobilis*, especially with regard to Cicero’s application of them and rhetorical strategies to counter the disadvantages of his *novitas*. Henriette van der Blom, for example, analyzed Cicero’s speeches and letters to show how he attempted to neutralize the claims to ancestry by the *nobiles* families by employing historical exempla and redefining the values of his society. In a similar vein, this chapter discusses how al-Ḥajjāj, one of the most famous orators and politicians of early Islam, used oratory to build his public persona and to neutralize his own *novitas*.

Compared to Cicero, al-Ḥajjāj’s position was weaker in one important aspect. The Umayyads, whose rule he represented in Iraq, were not unanimously seen as legitimate caliphs. In Chapter 1, we have seen that for a long time they were fighting Ibn al-Zubayr who ruled from the Hijaz, controlled Iraq, and was seen by many as the legitimate caliph, and that a few years before al-Ḥajjāj unified the caliphate, the situation did not seem in their favor. A study of his oratory will also show how he used it to strengthen the legitimacy of the Umayyad caliphs.

Al-Ḥajjāj’s response to the challenges posed by his *novitas* and by the unstable situation in Iraq, I argue, can be traced in his speeches. Now, al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches differ from Cicero’s in another important aspect: What we have are not speeches that we can ascertain that al-Ḥajjāj actually said nor even their contemporary texts; what survives is

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how these speeches were remembered and preserved by later generations. I argue however that these texts should be considered—not as ‘literary inventions’ of later historians—but rather as records of past performances that preserve something of the rhetoric he used to legitimize his power.

The speeches’ performative aspect can be understood not only from the texts that purport to record them but also from the narratives that at times accompany them and attest to their profound effects on the audience. In this regard, my analysis is informed by the work of Suzanne Stetkevych on the ritual form and function of Arabic poetry and its relationship to political power. The rhetorical strategies that the speeches display can be divided into three main groups: claiming religious authority for al-Ḥajjāj’s and Umayyad rule; affirming a muhājir-centric hierarchy in Iraq; and emphasizing his relationship with the caliph. I argue that al-Ḥajjāj’s rhetoric was rather specific to his own circumstances and to the Iraq of his time, providing his oratory with an unmistakably Umayyad Sitz im Leben. This suggests that it reflects some of his actual ideology.

The rhetoric of al-Ḥajjāj’s speech supports the argument made by Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds that the Umayyads understood their politico-religious authority as coming directly from God and perceived themselves as inheritors of prophethood. 

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6 In the following chapter I will argue that we have good reasons to believe that these speeches were circulated and narrated before they were written down in the Abbasid period. Therefore, we are speaking of a memory of them much closer to the time of al-Ḥajjāj than if we considered these speeches to be merely ‘inventions’ of Abbasid prose.

7 Modern scholars, most notably Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, have rejected the view of the Umayyads as secular rulers and “rude desert sheikhs living in desert castles,” arguing that all the early caliphs claimed religious authority. The expression “rude desert sheikhs living in desert castles” is taken from Fred M. Donner’s article, in which he criticizes the false dichotomy between the Umayyads seen as such and the Abbasids seen as bureaucratized and Persianized. See Donner, “The Formation of the Islamic State” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106.2 (1986): 295 and his “Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation: The Umayyads’ Silent Heritage,” in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to*
supported by S. Stetkevych’s study of al-Akḥāl’s victory ode;\(^8\) it resembles what Wadād al-Qāḍī called the late Umayyad ‘theory’ of the caliphate in her analysis of the letters of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib;\(^9\) and it showcases one among many efforts of the Umayyads at Islamic legitimation of their rule, which Fred Donner recently described as the “greatest legacy” of the Umayyads who “practically created Islam out of the inchoate and more ecumenical practices and beliefs of the early Believers’ movement launched by Muḥammad decades earlier.”\(^10\)

The chapter begins with a brief introductory section on al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches and Umayyad oratory (which builds on the definition of speech in the Umayyad period included in the Introduction) and with a short section on performance and ideology. Then, it continues with a short discussion of al-Ḥajjāj’s letters as a related genre. The core of the chapter consists in: first, a close reading of al-Ḥajjāj’s most famous speech, the ‘Inaugural speech at Kufa’ and, second, an analysis of his rhetoric in his other speeches. The Arabic texts of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches and my translations of them can be found in the Appendix.

\(^8\) S. Stetkevych, The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 101-102.


4.2. Al-Ḥajjāj’s Speeches and Umayyad Oratory

The art of public speaking and oratory (khaṭāba) has been a source of pride and identity for Arabs since at least the time of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868). His words, quoted in the Introduction, show that the early Abbasid polymath from Basra saw oratory as an art that belongs only to the Arabs and Persians and no other nations but in which the Arabs are superior because it comes to them naturally. Traditional sources depict the Umayyad period as the golden age of oratory, during which all kinds of important political figures—caliphs, governors, army leaders, and sectarian leaders among others—delivered famous speeches. Al-Jāḥiẓ also confirms this view, since he takes most examples in his al-Bayān wa-al-tabyīn, the compendium of Arabic eloquence, from the Umayyad period. In Chapter 1, we have seen many stories that attest to al-Ḥajjāj’s eloquence. This opinion is ascribed even to his enemies. So, the pious scholar al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, a contemporary, reportedly expressed bewilderment that someone so tyrannical could so eloquently exhort people to piety. From a different perspective, we have seen in the previous chapter that the hadith and fiqh material preserves evidence about a religious and political controversy around the Friday sermon and al-Ḥajjāj. Both the later memory of the khutba in Abbasid adab and the near-contemporary fiqh and hadith material concur in attesting to its cultural and political importance and to al-Ḥajjāj’s important position in it.

Umayyad oratory was a multi-faceted phenomenon that spread across various social groups and overlapped with other genres of public speaking (see Introduction and

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11 Al-Ḥasan reportedly said after a pious sermon that al-Ḥajjāj delivered: “Do you not wonder about this sinner? He climbs the steps of the pulpit and speaks like prophets; then he descends from it and murders like tyrants—he speaks in accordance with God and he acts in contradiction to Him.” Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ “Nahj al-Balāgha,” in Ṣafwat, Jamhara, 2:288, nr. 284. A similar statement is ascribed to Mālik b. Dīnār.
Chapter 6). As for Umayyad oratory as it has been preserved in later books of *adab* and history, it is mainly the speeches of caliphs, rulers, and military commanders. Among the most famous speeches of this kind are the *khutba* of Zaynab (d. 62/682) after the death of al-Ḥusayn, the *khutba* of Ṭāriq b. Ziyād (d. after 95/714), after he conquered al-Andalus, and the ‘Amputated’ *khutba* of Ziyād b. Abīhi (d. 52/673), after he was appointed the governor of Iraq, and the *khuṭab* by the Khārijite leaders like Abū Hamza (d. ca. 130/748) or Qaṭārī b. al-Fujā’a (d. 79/698).\(^\text{12}\)

An exceptional collection in this regard is Ibn Abī Ṭayfūr’s (d. 280/893) *Balāghāt al-Nisāʾ* (‘The Eloquent Discourses of Women’), which includes many speeches from the Umayyad period from both noble and common Arab women. We may suppose that Ibn Abī Ṭayfūr was not inventing a new genre but that he was continuing an earlier tradition of collecting the speeches of women. This is further supported by the gender of the speakers in question. Had Ibn Abī Ṭayfūr collected ‘the eloquent discourses’ of men, it would have been less significant as men’s identity is unmarked and all is automatically attributed to them. The same holds for famous historical figures, including men and women; they are already actors of history and one can easily imagine (as most scholars have) later attributions of speeches to these figures. A collection of speeches by women from different social classes, though some of the speeches clearly are Abbasid (judging by their stylistics and themes), is an important hint to an earlier practice.

The general image of Umayyad oratory, that we receive from later books of *adab* and history is that of a public occasional speech connected with rulers. Muḥammad Abū Zahra has observed that in the Umayyad period, oratory witnessed a surge, stimulated by

\(^{12}\) All these speeches, except for the one by Qaṭārī, have been translated by Qutbuddin in her article, “Khutba,” 238ff.
numerous political and theological disputes, as well as a change of rhetoric and that it became threatening, insulting, and exaggerated. The violent language so characteristic of al-Ḥajjāj is thus not limited to him but seems to have been typical of the age. Another salient characteristic of the Umayyad period is the rise of preachers (wuʿʿāẓ, quṣṣāṣ, etc.), who employed a more pious, edifying rhetoric, and at times entertaining rhetoric, though some also participated in battles and were of political nature.

Muslim sources record countless references to al-Ḥajjāj delivering an address from the pulpit but have not recorded many of the longer speeches he is said to have delivered. *Jamharat khatṭāb al-ʿArab*, a modern compilation of khatṭāb from medieval sources by Zakī Aḥmad Saʿwat, has nineteen speeches. This is not much in comparison with the homilies of some late antique Christian figures like John Chrysostom (over 800), Augustine of Hippo (over 560), or Jacob of Serug (over 400), yet it is a considerable amount within the landscape of Umayyad oratory. There are more speeches ascribed to al-Ḥajjāj than to any Umayyad caliph. Zakī Saʿwat divided al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches in the *Jamhara* into two categories: there are fifteen khatṭāb, ‘speeches,’ which could be considered occasional speeches because they respond to a certain occasion, and five khatṭāb waʿzīya, ‘sermons,’ which address a more general issues of life and afterlife and have a pious tone. These are

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13 Abū Zahra, *al-Khatṭāba*, 266.
15 The first edition has nineteen speeches which is the one used throughout this dissertation. The second edition has twenty; Saʿwat added one speech after the first one in the first edition, also related to the death of Ibn al-Zubayr. Aḥmad Zakī Saʿwat, *Jamharat khatṭāb al-ʿArab* (Cairo, 1st ed. 1933, 2nd edition Cairo: Al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1962).
16 For bibliography on these figures see Forness, *Preaching Christology*.
17 For a hypothesis on why the amount of Umayyad oratory is so scant see the following chapter.
18 By al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches I mean in this chapter, speeches ascribed to al-Ḥajjāj.
the speeches whose translation I provide in the Appendix, with the difference that I base my translation on the original sources and not on Jamhara.

A few generations after al-Ḥajjāj, during the Abbasid period, the *khutba* changed significantly—political leaders abandoned the practice of regularly delivering speeches in public and the *khutba* came to denote primarily the ritual Friday sermon, performed by professional preachers, with its *prima facie* political significance having been reduced to the symbolic practice of mentioning the caliph’s name and thereby recognizing his authority.¹⁹

### 4.3. PERFORMANCE AND IDEOLOGY

This chapter conceives of the surviving corpus of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches as recordings or rememberings of past performances. In other words, it proposes to consider this corpus not as either inventions or literal transcriptions of actual *khutab* but as texts that contain encoded messages about past performances and their reception. This demands full attention to the historical contexts associated with them and to the way that they are embedded in narrative. We need to identify their intentions and to study how they achieved or failed to achieve these. I will address the issue of ‘authenticity’ and the speeches’ transmission in the following chapter. Here, I will examine the body of speeches as texts that encode the memories of al-Ḥajjāj’s rhetorical strategies, of his use of oratory to wield political power, and of the reception and evaluation of this oratory by his and later generations. In other

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¹⁹ Qutbuddin, “Khutba,” 202. Even the religious sermon however continued to play a political role, even though it was not so overt as in the early period when leaders of Muslim communities performed it. See for example Fierro, “The Mobile Minbar”; Jones, “A Case of Medieval Political ‘Flip-Flopping?’”
words, we will ask from these texts as recorded in our Abbasid sources: How did al-Ḥajjāj perform authority through his oratory? What do his speeches do and how they do it?

*Doing* things with language is a reference to J. L. Austin’s account of language as performative and to his key argument that we do not only communicate pieces of information with words but also *do* things with them. Language is an active agent in social realities. The famous examples Austin uses to illustrate the performative aspect of language are sentences, such as when the bride pronounces “I do” during a wedding ceremony or when the queen says “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth.” These utterances do not simply describe a state of affairs but participate in a ritual and construct a new social reality. Entire speeches too, as we will see, can be conceived as a ritual manifestation of power. Austin stresses that to be effective, performative utterances must be pronounced by an appropriate person in accordance with some conventional procedure.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu builds on Austin in this social aspect, emphasizing that the efficacy of Austin’s performative utterances is inseparable from the set of social relations which endow the speaker with power. As we have seen al-Ḥajjāj lacked the ‘symbolic capital,’ in Bourdieu’s terminology, especially when he arrived as the new governor of Iraq. The more he needed to use all means available to him to support his power. While we have observed in Chapter 2 how he did that through other cultural means, this chapter focuses on his oratory.

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20 It should be noted that the performative aspect of language has been long discussed in the Arabic rhetorical tradition (specifically in *ʿilm al-maʿānī*; See al-Ṭabaṭabāʾ, *Naẓarīya al-af al-kalāmiya bayna falāsifa al-lugha al-mu āsirīn wa-l-balāghīyīn al-arab*, (Kuwait: Kuwait University Press, 1994))

In the field of anthropology, Richard Bauman builds on Austin et al. but goes beyond Austin’s focus on basic utterances. Rather, he discusses the performative nature of ‘verbal art’ in the specificity of its culture and location. He suggests understanding this performance as an interpretative frame within which messages are being communicated beyond the literal.22 Despite its specificities, some communicative means can be identified across cultures that can signalize its presence. These means that serve to ‘key’ the performance, using the terminology of Erving Goffman23 are special codes, e.g., archaic language, special formulae, e.g., openings, figurative language, e.g., metaphor, stylistic devices, e.g., rhyme and parallelisms, special paralinguistic patterns, e.g. changes in voice, etc. 24 We will see that these can be identified in al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches. Bauman also views the act of performance as “situated behavior […] rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts.” In the case of Arabic oratory, such a culturally-defined place for oratory that lends it a special power is the pulpit in the mosque.

In all these discussions of performance, two elements that could have been lost in a mere content analysis, emerge the importance of audience and social convention in the success of a performance and the capacity of a performance to transform a social structure. We will see that some of our texts, too, record the audiences’ evaluation of the speeches and we will investigate how socially constitutive they are.

In the field of classical Arabic poetry, Suzanne Stetkevych has applied anthropological studies of ritual to explore the poetry’s ability to perform ritual and ceremony and negotiate political and social realities, such as hierarchies of rank and status,
relationship between a patron and the poet, bestowing legitimacy on the ruler. She has described the function of the Umayyad panegyric ode (qasīda) “as an encoder and transmitter of the ideology of Islamic hegemony and as one of the insignia of legitimate (Arabo-)Islamic political authority.”

Similarly, oratory was used to channel Umayyad Islamic ideology with two noteworthy differences. First, in the case of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches and other famous speeches from the Umayyad period, it is the caliphs, governors, and army commanders themselves to whom the speeches are ascribed, not panegyrists. In a sense, they are thus more closely connected with a direct exercise of political power. Secondly, with speeches we are on less stable grounds than with poetry due to the absence of a fixed rhyme and meter that would stabilize the text. Yet, the indications of performance that they display and the ideology that they channel call for our attention.

While ideology has been defined in many different ways, I understand it here simply as “a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class.” Louis Althusser famously described ideology as closely related to the state’s exercise of power and argued that the state has two components: a repressive state apparatus that enforces its domination directly (e.g., the army, the police, and the courts) and the ideological state apparatuses (ISA) that secure the society’s assent to power indirectly (e.g., church, school). When we combine the religio-political message of Umayyad speeches in their most natural ritual setting of Friday khutba, repeated every week, with the fast pace of

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25 S. Stetkevych, Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy, 81.
26 This is one of the definitions of ideology compiled by Terry Eagleton in his Ideology: An Introduction (1991).
Marwānid-era centralization efforts, the result we get may be one of the most important ideological state apparatuses of the time. This crucial social role of Umayyad khūṭba will be further explored in Chapter 6, as this chapter focuses on the body of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches and their specific circumstances.

4.4. AL-ḤAJJĀJ AND LETTERS

Before we delve into al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches, a few words should be said about his letters, i.e. letters attributed to him in works of history and adab, which, due to the interplay of the oral and written characteristic for this period, show much affinity with speeches. Many were means to transmit an oral message. We have hints in narrative sources that letters served not only administrative but also propaganda purposes and that they were often read aloud in front of an audience. In this way, we could conceive of letters as speeches read on behalf of an absent speaker, as if he himself were present. An excellent example of the closeness between speeches and letters is an anecdote, which in some versions accompanies al-Ḥajjāj’s famous inaugural khūṭba that will be fully discussed in the following section of this chapter. The anecdote recounts that people gathered to listen to a public reading of a letter from ʿAbd al-Malik in al-Ḥajjāj’s presence. As the reader read the opening phrase of the letter, “peace be upon you” (al-salām ʿalaykum), to the audience they remained silent. When al-Ḥajjāj saw this, he interrupted the reading and scolded the Iraqis for not replying to the greeting of the caliph. When the reader pronounced the greeting a second time, everyone obediently replied. This anecdote is meant to depict the

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28 We have countless examples in literary sources, many of them also about the exchanges between al-Ḥajjāj and others. Al-Ṭabarī also mentions that the letters were sometimes read aloud. See Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:907.
fear that al-Ḥajjāj was able to instill in the Iraqis; at the same time it shows that the letter was perceived as the caliph’s direct speech. The Arabs, as other peoples in late antiquity, considered letters as conversation in absentia. This is how Jennifer Ebbeler describes late antique Greek and Latin letters.\(^{29}\)

Zakī Ṣafwat’s modern compilation of medieval Arabic letters, Jamharat rasāʾil al-‘arab contains some fifty-eight letters by al-Ḥajjāj, which range in length from a sentence to a several-pages long compositions.\(^{30}\) These letters can be divided in two categories—letter exchanges and public announcements. Even the letter exchanges were often read aloud, if we are to trust the sources. One of the longer pieces is, for example, an exchange between the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and the governor recorded by IbnʿAbd Rabbih (d. 940). The caliph is dissatisfied with al-Ḥajjāj’s rule over his territories and even contemplates removing him from power. Al-Ḥajjāj replies with a long letter that skillfully refutes the caliph’s accusations and insults, providing counterarguments one by one. The letter is so successful that the caliph exclaims: “Indeed, some eloquence (bayān) is magic,” and forgets all about his anger.\(^{31}\) The elaborate contents and the anachronistic style of the letter suggest that this particular letter may be a later literary construction or reconstruction. Yet, even then we should ask—what does this letter do? Within its explicit narrative context, it is meant to affirm performatively al-Ḥajjāj’s eloquence and its influence on ʿAbd al-Malik. On a higher interpretative level, it is meant to detract blame from ʿAbd al-Malik by


\(^{30}\) The number is not precise because sometimes Ṣafwat also includes a different version of a letter. Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat, Jamharat rasāʾil al-‘Arab fi ʿuṣūr al-ʿarabiyya al-ẓāhira (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʾilmīya, 1980).

\(^{31}\) For the whole khabar see IbnʿAbd Rabbih, Iqd, 5:281-288.
depicting him as a monarch who is uneasy about his governor’s oppressive rule and keen
to rectify it, although he is in the end.

Letters like this one that display the distinctive literary-rhetorical style of the
Abbasid period, however, are only a minority. Most of them are short pieces that display a
brief style. An example of a terse letter that ʿAbd al-Malik sent to al-Ḥajjāj when he took
the Fārs region from al-Muhallab who had just conquered it:

ammā baʿd: Let al-Muhallab have free hand over the taxes of the Fars Mountains. The
army needs strength, and the army leader sustenance. Leave him the district of Fasā and
Darā Bajirda and the district of Ištakhr.32

It is plausible that brief straightforward letters like this one they are either summaries or
samples.33 Narrators could have had access to the letters, if not in their written, then in their
oral form. In this regard, it should be also noted that a glance into al-Ḥajjāj’s ‘literary’ letter
exchanges reveals that they contain some formulas parallel to the letters on early Islamic
papyri. For instance, the part of letters that Eva Grob described as the ‘confirmation’ part
of Islamic letters on papyri (e.g. atānī kitābuka/balaghanī kitābuka/ fahimtu kitābaka/fa-
gara ‘tu wa-famihtu mā dhakarta) appears repeatedly.34

Furthermore, the abundant accounts about al-Ḥajjāj’s epistolary exchanges indicate
that he and his secretaries engaged in extensive letter-writing as part of his administrative
activities. Some these letter exchanges are even held responsible for making history; the
most famous example being a letter exchange behind the great rebellion of Ibn al-Ash‘ath

32 Al-Ṭabarī, Ṭāʾīkh, rzy: t.
33 In the following chapter, we will see that this is how for example al-Yaʿqūbī records speeches.
34 Eva Mira Grob, Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus: Form and
Function, Content and Context (New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 2010), 48-57. Ṣafwat, Jamharat rasāʾil al-
ʿarab, 2:161, 172, 175, 188: balaghanī kitāb hu al-amīr wa-kulla mā fīh qad fahimtu (161); qad atānī
kitābuka wa-qara tuhu wa-fahimtuw kulla mā dhakarta fihi (172); fa-qad fahimtu mā dhakarta li
ʿan...(175); fa-inna kitābuka atānī wa-fahimtu mā dhakarta fihi (188).
that almost toppled the Umayyad regime.\(^{35}\) Al-Ṭabarî’s report from the time when Ibn al-
Ash‘ath was still al-Ḥajjāj’s army leader in war against the Turkic leader Zutbīl/Rutbīl,
sheds light on the importance of postal services in the conquests of the eastern empires:

> Every time Ibn al-Ash‘ath conquered a new region, he quickly sent an administrator there,
he sent helpers with him, and established post offices (\textit{burud}) on the roads between each
two towns.\(^{36}\)

The fact that establishing postal offices is among the first things that the general does when
he conquers a new region, along with appointing the ruler, shows the crucial role of letters.
From early on, letters became the key component of running the rapidly expanding empire.

Muslim sources place the establishment of various administrative bodies connected with
correspondence to the time of Muʿāwiya,\(^{37}\) and epigraphic and poetic evidence
demonstrates that the pre-Islamic Arabs were already exposed to the Byzantine and
Sassanian postal systems,\(^{38}\) and thus had models to follow. Furthermore, the formulaic
language of the earliest Islamic letters on Egyptian papyri, which is not a mere translating
of the Greek counterparts, indicates that the Arabs had established epistolary practices.\(^{39}\)

Given all this, it should not be surprising to see early Islamic figures engage in letter-
writing. While some of the contents of their letters recorded in later sources may be of
dubious authenticity, the extent of the practice should not be underestimated. And the
Syriac life of John of Daylam mentions al-Ḥajjāj in the context of letter-writing: once

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\(^{35}\) See Chapter 1.

\(^{36}\) Al-Ṭabarî, \textit{Tārīkh}, 2:1045.

\(^{37}\) Sources like al-Jahshiyārī and al-Qalqashandī attest that the \textit{dīwān al-rasāʾil} (correspondence
office), \textit{dīwān al-khāṭam} (office of the seal), \textit{dīwān al-barād} (post office) were established under Muʿāwiya.
A.A. Duřī, “\textit{Dīwān},” \textit{EI}.2

\(^{38}\) Silverstein, \textit{Postal Systems}, 47.

receiving a letter from the caliph and once providing John with it, authorizing him to build monasteries.40

Enough evidence speaks for the possibility that al-Ḥajjāj’s letters contain authentic elements and in general early Islamic letters are getting more attention in recent scholarship. Alfred-Louis de Prémare postulated—based on al-Ḥajjāj’s letters—that the governor created his own proper theologico-political doctrine to justify the decisions of the caliph.41 Crone and Hinds and Uri Rubin have examined a letter sent to the garrison cities on behalf of al-Walīd II (r. 25-26/743-744) to discuss Umayyad legitimation strategies.42 Wadād al-Qāḍī has argued for the authenticity of a body of letters from a slightly later date, written by Ṭabd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d. 132/749), the secretary to the last Umayyad caliphs.43 Chase Robinson has discussed letters as an important medium of broadcasting the views of the Umayyads.44 I have not conducted a thorough analysis of their variants as I have done with some speeches (see Chapter 5) and therefore I chose to leave the examination of their ideology and the comparison of their contents with the contents of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches for further research.

4.5. ESTABLISHING POWER IN IRAQ: A CLOSE READING OF AL-ḤAJJĀJ’S INAUGURAL SPEECH AT KUFA

Everett Rowson has called the inaugural speech at Kufa the “most famous of all Umayyad orations.”45 Indeed, most Arabs upon hearing the name of al-Ḥajjāj will immediately call

43 Al-Qāḍī, “Early Islamic State Letters.”
44 Robinson, ʿAbd al-Malik, 106-113.
45 Al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, History, 13.
to mind the line “People of Iraq, people of dissent and hypocrisy, I see heads which have ripened and are ready for harvesting” (yā ahl al-ʿIrāq, ahl al-shiqāq wa-al-nifāq, innī la-arā ruʿūsan qad aynaʿat wa-ḥān qiṭāfuḥā). According to many historical sources (see below), al-Ḥajjāj delivered this speech in 75/694 when he first arrived in Kufa as the new governor of Iraq. He—a man of humble origins, no Islamic merit, and generally unknown in Iraq—was appointed to the office after Bishr b. Marwān, the caliph’s brother. The stakes were high and the impression that al-Ḥajjāj would make on his new subjects was crucial.

Having arrived in Kufa, the governor, now in his early thirties, faced the biggest challenge of his career thus far. He had established his military credentials when he defeated Ibn al-Zubayr. Now he had to prove his administrative abilities in Iraq a notorious turbulent and ungovernable region for the Umayyads. Kufa’s population especially had strong pro-ʿAlid inclinations and cherished the legacy of the revered Companion of the Prophet, Ibn Masʿūd—preferences that automatically meant an anti-Umayyad stance.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the situation was especially unstable in the aftermath of the second fitna: Khārijite rebellions were erupting at various places and Iraqi soldiers were reluctant to intervene. The inaugural speech, according to the Muslim sources, was al-Ḥajjāj’s first act in office and a very efficient one, as the narratives that accompany the speech tell us. Once hearing the speech, the people of Kufa rushed to join al-Ḥajjāj’s army in such masses that they crowded on a bridge, resulting in some falling into the Euphrates.46

Similar akhbār should not be viewed as merely entertaining stories—but rather as carefully constructed messages confirming the effectiveness of the speech.

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46 Al-Maḥṣūdī, Murūj, 3:130. Similar versions of this story appear also in al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, History, 20, and al-Iṣfahānī, Aghānī, 14: 416.
This speech should be understood as a claim to Umayyad imperial authority in a place generally hostile to the Umayyads; as a performance of al-Ḥajjāj’s taking on the military governorship in Iraq; and as a ritual of inauguration. This speech, as the sources depict it, transformed al-Ḥajjāj from a newcomer, previously a schoolmaster, controversial general, and politically unrecognized outsider to the legitimate governor of Iraq. The narratives that accompany it provide an evaluation of the speech and a testimony to its performative efficacy.

The khutba is recorded in a wide range of adab and historical sources of early provenance (3rd and 4th/9th and 10th century). I will return to the variant versions of the speech in my discussion of its transmission. For now, it is important to note that the khutba in most of these variants does not stand alone; it is always accompanied by an introductory story, in most cases followed by another one or more, and in some cases with a commentary on its difficult vocabulary. I consider here the khutba along with these elements as a whole. My translation below is based on al-Mubarrad’s version. All divisions and section titles (in blue) are mine.

4.5.1. TRANSLATION

A. Introductory story: “Creating suspense,” in prose
‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Umayr al-Laythī said: While we were in a mosque at Kufa—and these days people of Kufa were well off, for any of them would walk around with ten or twenty mawāli—a man came who said: “This is al-Ḥajjāj who has come as governor of Iraq.” He


48 Al-Mubarrad. Al-Kāmil fī al-lugha wa-al-adab, ed. by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1997), 1: 298. For other translations of this speech see Qutbuddin “Khutba,” 253-256 and al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, The History, 13-16. I produced my own translation because I, unlike Rowson, am basing it on al-Mubarrad, and unlike Qutbuddin, I also include the introductory story and the verses in the middle of the speech.
[al-Ḥajjāj] then entered the mosque with a turban on his head, which covered most of his face. He was adorned with a sword, carried a bow on his shoulder, and headed towards the pulpit. People stood up [in expectation] as he ascended the pulpit but he remained silent for a while. So, they started saying to one another: “May God disgrace the Banū Umayya for appointing someone like that as the governor of Iraq.” Then ’Umār b. Դābiʾ al-Burmūjī asked: “Shall I throw pebbles at him for you?” But others replied: “Wait a little, so that we may see.” When he [al-Ḥajjāj] saw all the people’s eyes turned towards him, he removed the veil from his mouth, stood up, and declared:

B. The khutba:

I. “Presenting his credentials”
   B.1 “Warrior,” in verse

_The times have become grave, so be strong, O Ziyam [his she-camel]!_

_The night has seated a vigorous rider on her_

_Who is neither a shepherd of camels or sheep_

_Nor a butcher by his slaughter board_

Then he said:

_B.2 “Announcement of absolute power”_

_People of Kufa, indeed, I see heads that have ripened and are ready for harvesting. I am their master! I can almost see blood glistening between turbans and beards._

Then he said:

_B.3 “Muhājir,” in rajaz_

_The times have become grave, so be strong, O Ziyam [his she-camel]!_  

_The night has seated a vigorous rider on her [the she-camel],_  

_Who is neither a shepherd of camels or sheep_  

_Nor a butcher by his slaughter board_  

Then he said:  

_The night seated a strong fearless man on her [the she-camel],_  

_Keeps going in and out of the deep-sounding desert_  

_a muhājir who is not a Bedouin._  

And he said:

_It [the war] rolled up its sleeves, so you become firm;_  

_And the war became serious with you, so you too become serious._  

_And the bow has a strong string_  

_Like the leg of a young camel or even stronger._  

_There is no escape whence there is no escape._

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_B. 4 [“Tested by Caliph,” in prose]_

_Then he said:_  

_I, by God, oh people of Iraq, the rattling sound of old water-skins shall not frighten me [as it frightens camels], and my sides shall not be squeezed like figs [to be tested]. For I have already been made to show my teeth [i.e. examined like a horse] to show my intelligence and inspected for experience. The Commander of the Believers—may God prolong his_

49 Taken from a poem by Suḥaym b. Wathīl al-Riyāḥī. He was a Mukhadram poet (d. 60/680) whose poem appears in the Asma ʻīyā. The quotation in al-Hajjāj’s khutba is the beginning line of the poem. See al-ʻAsma, Asma ʻīyā, 3.

50 The verses are attributed to Ruwayshid b. Rumayd al-ʻAnazī, al-Ḥuṭṭam al-Qaysī, and Abū Zughba al-Khazrajī. See Al-ʻṬabarī and Rowson, History, 14, n.59.

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life—laid his quiver open and bit on the shafts of his arrows to test them. He found me as the most bitter of them, the hardest to break, and so he shot me at you. For you often rushed to sedition and lay in beds of error.

II. “Threatening Iraqis”

B.5

By God, I will wrap you as I would wrap a salama tree.\(^{51}\) I will beat you as camels gone astray are beaten, for you are like the people of the town “enjoying security and quiet, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place: yet was it ungrateful for the favors of God: so God made it taste of hunger and terror [in extremes] [closing in on it] like a garment [from every side], because of the [evil] which [its people] wrought.” (Q 16:112).\(^{52}\) Truly, I do not promise without keeping my word, I do not intend something without following through. I do not measure without cutting.

III. “Command”

B.6

The commander of the believers commanded me to give you your stipends and to direct you to fight your enemy with al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra. And I swear to God that if I find in three days anyone who has taken his stipend, lagging behind, I shall behead him.

C. Commentary on difficult vocabulary.
D. Attached reports: “Salām story,” “ʿUmayr b. Ḍābiʾ story”

4.5.2. ANALYSIS

4.5.2.1. Introductory narrative (A): Building suspense

The introductory narrative frames the speech so as to dramatize the performance. This speech in all its different versions is accompanied by a brief introduction that sets the scene for the speech itself. Al-Mubarrad provides the longest introduction. It narrates how al-Ḥajjāj arrived in Kufa and entered the mosque with his face covered. The khabar then constrasts al-Ḥajjāj’s coming incognito with the Kufans’ flaunting of their wealth and haughtiness when it portrays them as each walking around with a large entourage of their mawālī. The Kufans are suspicious of the unknown man and when he ascends the pulpit

\(^{51}\) Salama is a coniferous tree.

\(^{52}\) Whenever I quote the Qurʾān it is based on Yusuf Ali’s translation, with the exception that I substitute God for his “Allah.”
and remains silent, they begin gathering pebbles to ‘boo him off the stage’ so to speak, cursing the Umayyads for sending such a worthless man. They interpret al-Ḥajjāj’s silence as his inability to perform as public speaker. Behind this narrative is an assumption of a close association between public speaking and political authority.

The narrative also draws attention to the role that the audience plays in the performance of the speech. Bauman has collected some instances of evaluating an oral performance in different cultures to show its special status in society. What we have is a record or a dramatic reconstruction of an oral performance that include the high expectations of the audience.

The narrative, further, provides details of al-Ḥajjāj’s appearance and behavior in the moments before the khutba. These details enhance the effect of the khutba through extra-linguistic means, that is, performative: al-Ḥajjāj appears carrying a sword, a bow, and wearing a turban. These elements can be interpreted as a visual declaration of war: the sword and bow are instruments of war and turban its symbol. He enters as a warrior.

His covered face and silence—as a narrative technique—further provide a sense of anticipation and create a dramatic contrast with what follows: the revealing of al-Ḥajjāj’s face and his resounding khutba. These motifs also function as a metaphor for the khutba and its bayān. Bayān (“clarity” or “eloquence”) is defined as that through which the hidden is revealed. Having arrived as an unknown entity, al-Ḥajjāj reveals his mission in Kufa and makes himself known through linguistic and extra-linguistic means.

54 According to the Kufan grammarian Tha’lab (d. 291/904) “turban is worn in war and taken off in peace.” See Ṣafwat, Jamhara, 2: 274, n.2.
55 Al-Jāḥiz defines bayān in his Kitāb al-Bayān wa-al-tabyīn, as that which “brings meanings hidden in the hearts, minds, and souls of people to life,” as that which “makes what is invisible visible, what is far close, the unknown known.” Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1: 81.
4.5.2.2. *Khuṭba* (B)

The text of the speech itself has three main parts. In the first part (B.1-B.4), al-Ḥajjāj introduces himself and his political program to his new subjects. In the middle part (B5) he violently threatens and blames them for disobedience and ungratefulness before issuing them a stern command to join the army of al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra (B.6).

I. Presenting his credentials

B.1: Warrior (in verse)

The first words of the *khuṭba* are a citation of a verse through which al-Ḥajjāj introduces himself and presents his credentials. He calls himself the “son of clarity” (*ibn jalā*), which means someone who dispels gloom but is directly connected to the act of unveiling his face, presented in the *khabar*. *Ibn jalā* can also be interpreted as an allusion to the aforementioned *bayān*. The declaration that when he removes his turban people will know him, means that when the war is over, everyone will know him by his deeds in battle. Al-Ḥajjāj’s referring to himself as the one “who climbs narrow mountain paths” conveys the image of an experienced warrior who has found his way through the most distant and difficult terrains. The warrior imagery foregrounded in the *khabar* is paralleled in these verses that set the tone to al-Ḥajjāj’s demand of recognition and obedience and self-projection and show him as embracing the warrior values.

B.2: Declaration of absolute power (in prose)

In this short prose section al-Ḥajjāj makes a claim to absolute power over his Iraqi subjects and threatens them with death if they disobey him. He famously compares their heads to

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56 *Jalā* (جلا) is here a verb in the past tense which functions here as a noun (gram. ‘*alā al-ḥikāya*)

57 *Jalā* belongs to the same semantic circle as *bayān*. *Amr jalā* means clear matter (*bayyin*, *wādiḥ*) and *jalā al-ḥaqīqa* means to revel the truth and clarify it (*kashshafahā wa-waddāhaḥahā*).
crops ripe for the harvest. These words do not merely describe but rather *prescribe* (i.e., a speech act). They define the relationship between the ruler and his subjects and in so doing create that relationship. The efficacy of such verbal acts relies on extra-linguistic circumstances as Austin and Bourdieu remind us, circumstances that initially were not favorable for al-Ḥajjāj as we have noted. However, he embodies the authority of the Empire. That weapons such as swords were recognized as symbols of royal power and ruling authority is confirmed on the coinage of the period, on which the caliph 'Abd al-Malik is portrayed standing while holding a sword.\(^{58}\) Threatening and the use of violence (what George Kennedy called ‘external rhetoric’ in the Byzantine context) are other non-verbal devices to create an aura of authority in the precarious situation.

**B.3: Islamic warrior (*muhājir*) (in *rajaz*)**

In these *rajaz* verses al-Ḥajjāj verses does two things: (i) declares the inevitability of war with the Khārijites (“the times became grave, so be strong, Ziyam\(^{59}\)… the war rolled up its sleeves, so you become firm… there is no escape from where is no escape”) and (ii) portrays himself, in the third person, as an experienced desert rider (“a vigorous rider… a strong fearless man… who keeps going in and out of the deep-sounding desert”). This may evoke tribal and Bedouin values but the verses promptly correct such impression. He is not a Bedouin but a *muhājir*, as the verses proclaim.

The term *muhājirūn* in the Umayyad period did not denote the Companions who emigrated with the Prophet (as it is generally understood today).\(^{60}\) Rather, the Umayyad

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\(^{58}\) For the discussion of the coin see Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 50-52.

\(^{59}\) Al-Mubarrad glosses *ziyam* as the name of a horse or a camel, al-Ṭabarī says that it is a word for war.

\(^{60}\) Though this may be a later back projection of the term, as Patricia Crone argued. For her this Umayyad secondary meaning of *hijra* is actually the originally one, which was then applied to talk about the Meccan companions of the Prophet. Crone, “The First-Century Concept of Hiğra.”
muhājirūn were the Muslim soldiers who had migrated from their original dwellings to the garrison cities (amṣār) during the Arab conquests. The term muhājir had a powerful resonance among the ruling military elite and formed an important part of their identity; in fact, muhājir identity was strong while Arab identity was still in the making.\(^{61}\) This is supported not only by the term’s frequent occurrence in a vast range of Muslim sources but also in the many references to the mhaggrāyē and magaritai in contemporary Syriac and Greek sources respectively.\(^{62}\) The muhājir identity enabled the military elite to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population and maintain an elite status. This social stratification was embodied in the garrison towns in Iraq and the eastern provinces, built so that the conquerors, or muhājirūn, could live in isolation from the local populace. Though this system, as Peter Webb has noted, must have already begun to collapse by al-Ḥajjāj’s time, as the muhājirūn elites became increasingly settled inside the garrison towns, al-Ḥajjāj’s use of this verse suggests that the term still had great symbolic power as an indicator of prestigious rank and status.\(^{63}\)

The verses continue to lay out a social hierarchy: after proclaiming his muhājir identity he further defines himself by what he is not: a shepherd, butcher, and a Bedouin. The first two terms refer to occupations of townsfolk. This is significant because this is exactly who al-Ḥajjāj was before he joined the military. Through these verses he thus disavows himself from his earlier, pre-military life in Ta’if and attaches himself to the

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\(^{61}\) Webb, Arabness, 141-152.


\(^{63}\) Webb, Arabness, 143-144.
military aristocracy. The last term of this act of non-identification, the Bedouin, represents the direct opposite of the *muhājir*.

The Bedouins stood at the lowest level of the Arab conquest society. In the Qur’ān, the Bedouins (*aʿrāb*) are spoken of in disparaging terms.64 The Qur’ānic prejudice, which was later used to buttress the authorities’ hostility towards the *aʿrāb*, was now understood as those who did not make the *hijra*, that is, did not emigrate to a garrison town and did not join the military structures of the state. The *muhājirūn* formed the core of the conquest community and were considered first-class believers while the *aʿrāb* were relegated to second-class.65 It is especially interesting in our context that the *aʿrāb* seem to have been excluded from the Friday congregational prayer that they could not be appointed prayer leaders, as *fiqh* evidence attests.66 Some *āthār* explicitly forbid the Friday prayer to be held among the non-urban folk (*ahl al-qurā*).67 It is also telling that deserting the military and returning to one’s original dwelling (*taʿarrub baʿda al-hijra*) was considered among the seven great sins (along with, for instance, the crime of killing, polytheism, and *shirk*), and was equated with the crime of apostasy.68

These verses must be seen as formulating (and thereby constituting) a social vision of the military aristocracy, not as an objective reflection of the society. The groups that lived together in Umayyad Iraq—Arab-Muslims *muhājirūn*, urban settled-population, and

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64 See Q 49:14-15.
65 Ḥadīths, for example, reference *dār al-hijra* and different types of *bayʿ* as for *aʿrāb* and *muhājirūn*. Athamina, “Aʿrāb and Muhājirūn,” 11; Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 79; Webb, *Arabness*, 143. On the discriminatory policies against the *aʿrāb* see Athamina, “Aʿrāb and Muhājirūn.”
66 Various authorities, such as ‘Alī, Ḥudhayfa, al-Ḥusayn, and others, are reported to have held that Friday prayer should be restricted to big cities. ‘Alī, for example, has an *athar* which reads: *Lā jumʿa wa-lā tashrīq wa-lā ṣalāt al-ṣifr wa-lā ṣalāt al-adhā illā fī miṣr jāmīʿ aw madīna ʿāzīma*. Al-Jazārī, *Al-Fiqh al-adhāhib al-arbaʿa*, 344; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 2:439. As for *imāmat al-ʿarrub* see Ibn Rajab, *Fath al-bārī*, 6:171-173.
Bedouins, \textit{mawālī}, Arab and non-Arab Christians of different confessions, Jews and Zoroastrians—made up together a complex society that was in a constant flux. They married, converted, and shared knowledge, and relied on the same magical and healing practices across religious, confessional and ethnic boundaries, as Jack Tannous has demonstrated in his dissertation.\footnote{Tannous provides numerous examples of inter-Christian, and Muslim-Christian interactions in his “Syria between Byzantium and Islam.” One instance, especially relevant to us is that a Christian hagiographical source portrays al-Ḥajjāj himself to have been cured of cancer by John of Daylam. See Tannous, “Syria between Byzantium and Islam,” 461; Brock, “A Syriac Life of John of Dailam,” 168. Lev E. Weitz, \textit{Between Christ and Caliph: Law, Marriage, and Christian Community in Early Islam} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). On conversion in this period see Papaconstantinou, ed. \textit{Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond} (2015).} Al-Ḥajjāj’s \textit{khutba} bears witness that the Umayyads were attempting to counteract these converging tendencies and to buttress the ruling Arab military elite, by defending the unique position of the Arab-Muslim \textit{muhājir}. On a larger social level these verses testify and contribute to the process of reformulation of old tribal values into the values of the contemporary military society.

We can connect these attempts to endow the \textit{muhājirūn} with symbolic authority and the status of the elite with al-Ḥajjāj foundation of Wāṣit, the last Umayyad garrison city, discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. There, I focused on the act’s significance as ‘outward’ legitimation, i.e., directed at non-Muslims.\footnote{With the terms ‘outward’ and ‘inward’ I am referren to a division that Fred Donner made. See Donner, “Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation,” 190ff.} Wāṣit, which was designed to station the Syrian troops that were coming to Iraq on rotating basis,\footnote{Shaban, \textit{Islamic History}. 121.} clearly also functioned as a tool of ‘inward’ legitimation for the Syrian military class one which al-Ḥajjāj relied. This is reflected in the Muslim foundation stories that narrated that the city was built to keep the Syrians separated from the Iraqi population and that non-Arabs were forbidden to enter the city altogether, as we have seen earlier. Thus several Muslim sources
that reflect on al-Ḥajjāj’s social policies confirm the exclusivist program promulgated in the *khuṭba* through these verses.

On the level of literary genres, the centrality of these verses to the *khuṭba* prompts us to reconsider the role of poetry in speeches. Too often, scholars perceive poems merely as embellishment of a prose text. 72 As a case in point, in her translation of this *khuṭba*, Tahera Qutbuddin omits these verses. Nonetheless, we have seen their importance: through these verses al-Ḥajjāj presents himself as the Islamic warrior-hero, the soldier in the path of God, the *muhājir* to the hostile Iraqi audience, who were defeated in the civil war and are reluctant to fight for his cause. By means of them, al-Ḥajjāj declares the state of war and warns his listeners of the futility of defiance (“There is no escape whence there is no escape”). At the same time, the governor affirms his membership in a society dominated by the *muhājirūn*, the conquering military elite. The persuasive strategy that fuels al-Ḥajjāj’s proclamation of this *muhājir*-centered hierarchy is to insinuate to his audience, that they, too, can partake in this elite group, given they pay the membership with obedience and loyalty. These verses (in *rajaz* and composed by a *mukhadram* poet (i.e. straddling Jāhilīya and Islam) thus have an important performative function both in declaring war and in establishing a certain social hierarchy. As such they must be considered an essential part of the *khuṭba*, and not a mere embellishment. I consider them an inseparable part of the *khuṭba*. They appear in almost all versions of the *khuṭba*, and, interestingly, in one early source, Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī’s *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* (wr. ca 204/819 or

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72 Poems can form the core of narrative unites as it often happens in the *Aghānī*. On the topic of poetry in historical prose and poetry’s use on history see. Bualbaki et al., *Poetry and History*; Heinrichs, “Prosimmetrical Genres,” 258-259. Van Gelder, “Poetry in Historiography.”
the line in which al-Ḥajjāj defines himself as a *muhājir* and not a Bedouin is rendered in prose. This shows that even in the case when the precise verse was lost in the process of transmission, it was transferred in meaning.\(^{74}\) This, too, demonstrates that this verse was an integral part of the speech.

**B.4: Tested by caliph (in prose)**

In this section, al-Ḥajjāj clarifies his relationship to the caliph, the most important source of his legitimacy. Having been tested by the caliph just as horses and arrows are tested, the governor was to prove more than equal to the task. On the other hand, he shall not let the Iraqis test him; he is not scared of them a bit. Of interest is the imagery that al-Ḥajjāj uses here. While horses and arrows refer to soldier’s life, they equally invoke the world of the Bedouin. And so does al-Ḥajjāj’s comment that he is not easily frightened like camels when they are prodded into running with the rattling sound of old water-skins. Despite his rejection of the Bedouin, he feels compelled to use the life-world lore of the Bedouin. We are in a transitional period where the rejected is still very much part of the imagined in the society and these metaphors are expected to have an effect on his audience.

The argument for legitimacy in this section does not consist only in his relationship to the caliph but also in the fact that the caliph tested him and found him the harshest and the most unyielding of men and hence the most suitable to govern Iraq. He builds here on the main symbolic capital he has available: his defeat of Ibn al-Zubayr, the anti-caliph who

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\(^{74}\) Chapter 5 discusses transmission in more detail.
almost removed the Umayyads from power. This reference to the past points to his military prowess and signifies that he would deal with any opponents to the Umayyads in a similar fashion and constitutes thus a not-so-veiled threat. At the same time al-Ḥajjāj identifies the Iraqis as insurgents and transgressors and thereby justifies any harsh treatment of them.

II. Threatening the Iraqis (in prose)

B.5 The motif of rebellious Iraqis taken up in the previous paragraph is fully developed in this one. Al-Ḥajjāj compares the Iraqis to camels gone astray, and declares his intention to bring them back into the fold—by whatever means necessary. He promises to keep his word and punish their transgressions, to the extent of punishing illegal gatherings and the spreading of false rumors. This is ostensibly the pronouncement of a firm ruler who seeks to control his subjects in word and deed.

Al-Ḥajjāj speaks of the Iraqis’ rebelliousness by quoting the Qur’ān (Q 16:112), whose full version reads:

God sets forth a parable: a city enjoying security and quiet, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place: yet was it ungrateful for the favours of God: so God made it taste of hunger and terror [in extremes] [closing in on it] like a garment [from every side], because of the [evil] which [its people] wrought.

Qur’ānic referencing and citation was an established aspect of Islamic eloquence which enabled the speaker to construct moral analogies between Qur’ānic characters and the people of his or her social milieu. It created a “mythic concordance,”75 which affects the audience emotionally through a reenactment of the authoritative past. In so doing, the speaker ascribes a deeper moral imperative to a political act.76 Here the parable is clear: al-

75 Paul Connerton used this term to describe the identification between the events in their original setting and then later in commemorative ceremonies. Suzanne Stetkevych used it to discuss Arabic poetry. Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember, 43. S. Stetkevych, Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy, 82.
76 This is, broadly, Vanessa de Giﬁs` description of Qur’anic referencing and its function in her Shaping a Qur’anic Worldview. Also see her “Qur’anic Rhetoric in Ninth-Century Muslim-Byzantine Diplomacy.” Most recent article on the topic is Qutbuddin, “Qur’an Citation.”
Ḩajjāj compares the Iraqis to people mentioned in the Qurʾān who denied God’s favor and were punished accordingly. They therefore deserve their punishment and any of his actions, even the most atrocious should be seen as part of God’s revenge. Perhaps even more significant is the position of this verse in the Qurʾān, where it is immediately followed by another Qurʾānic verse that reads:

And there came to them a Messenger from among themselves, but they falsely rejected him; so the Wrath seized them even in the midst of their iniquities (Q 16:113).

We may suppose that people knew their Qurʾān and that reciting the Qurʾānic verse 16:112 would automatically trigger the following verse 16:113. In this way, thus al-Ḩajjāj may be implicitly creating an analogy between himself and the divine messenger whose rejection by the people brings divine Wrath upon them. So, by employing this quotation al-Ḩajjāj not only demonstrates his knowledge of the Qurʾān (which alone would augment his authority); he also buttresses his rule in a religious directive commanding absolute obedience and threatening punishment by associating himself with the Qurʾānic prophets.

III. Command (in prose)

B.6. Here we encounter the ultimate purpose of the khutba: to command the Kufans to join the army headed by al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra against the Khārijites, while cautioning them that anyone receiving a military stipend who fails to do so in the coming three days will be executed, his possessions confiscated, and his house destroyed.

Commentary and attached reports

Al-Mubarrad comments here on some less common words in the khutba, confirming that that by his time it became an object of literary study. The reports that are attached to its end are more interesting from the performative perspective because they provide a final
evaluation of the speech. Especially Umayr b. Ḍābi’s story provides a powerful testimony to the effect of the speech because it narrates that after the stipulated period of three days passed, al-Ḥajjāj killed an old and well-respected man who refused to obey his command. The man’s death shook the Kufans who then complied with al-Ḥajjāj’s orders without further resistance. This is then a testimony that al-Ḥajjāj did not speak idly, that he matched his words with deeds; and that he successfully imposed his will. The next chapter will look into these narrative elements added to the text of the speech in more detail.

Having finished the close reading of the inaugural khutba at Kufa and the narratives attached to it, we can conclude that it is a well-structured and logically ordered piece of rhetorical art. It has three main parts. In the first part (B.1-B.4), al-Ḥajjāj introduces himself and reveals himself as a warrior of God and muhājir. In doing so he affirms a hierarchy of the Conquest society which relegates the Bedouin and urban merchant class to an inferior rank. The different literary forms—quotations in rajaz and verse—further establish his rhetorical competence. Although Ḥajjāj is not known to have composed poetry, he used it here and elsewhere with rhetorical proficiency.

The khutba as a whole is also a reconstruction of a splendid performance of al-Ḥajjāj’s assuming command of Iraq and proclamation of power. On a symbolic level, it serves as a vehicle through which he navigated a transition from an unrecognized (taken literally in the introductory narrative) man of questionable credentials to a legitimate representative of the imperial power. We can also observe yet another transition that the speech performs; a transition from tribal values toward the imperial ideal of tribeless Conquest society and its social hierarchies. Hints to this performative aspect of the speech are scattered throughout the entire narrative unit. The introductory narrative prepares the
ground for the performance of the speech by describing the expectations of the audience and the extra-linguistic means that the speaker uses. Al-Ḥajjāj in his speech further strengthens his message by violent threats and invoking prophetic authority—to overcome the Kufans’ recalcitrance and to issue his ultimate command to join the troops in fighting the Khārijites.

Tahera Qutbuddin identified five kinds of rhetorical techniques that characterize early Arabic oratory, all of which can be found in the khutba: heavy use of brief, parallel sentences; engaging the audience in the speech act; vivid imagery giving physical form to theoretical concepts; citation of Qur’anic and poetic verses; and employment of dignified yet clear language that renders the speech formal. These characteristics can be also read as special codes that ‘key’ the performance of the khutba, following Goffman, and create its distinctive frame. Al-Ḥajjāj’s khutba abounds in parallelism; for instance B.5 has the verb in the emphatic form + maf’ūl muṭlaq: la-alḥuwannakum lahwa al-ʿaṣā wa-la-aqraʾannakum qarʿa al-marwa wa-la-ṣibannakum ʿaṣba al-salama (“I will trim you as I would trim a rod; I will hit you as hard as I would hit the rock; I will wrap you as I would wrap a salama tree”). The rhythm that the parallelism serves to create a ritual aura in the speech. Al-Ḥajjāj involves the audience by explicitly addressing them the “People of Kufa” and the “People of Iraq,” bringing them in to be part of the performance and more susceptible to its effect. He uses vivid imagery when he states, for example: “and I will wrap you as I would wrap a salama trees.” By this we may understand that salama trees as coniferous trees represent the subjected Iraqis. Like Iraqis, the trees are difficult to handle;

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77 Qutbuddin, “Khutba,” 211ff.
they must be wrapped so that their cones cannot hurt whoever wants to hold them. Metaphors like these serve as rhetorical devices to enhance the impact of the message they carry. Poetry and Qurʾānic verses are used to a similar effect, i.e., to bring authoritative tradition to bear on the contemporary circumstances. Finally, his language is elevated yet clearer than other examples of oratory from the period, thereby completing Qutbuddin’s layout of main rhetorical techniques pertaining to oratory and exhibiting some of Goffman’s communicative means framing a performance. The reports attached to its end serve to confirm that the goal of the speech was achieved.

4.6. Rhetoric of Power in Umayyad Iraq: Analysis of the Body of Al-Ḥajjāj’s Speeches

So far, we have explored an emblematic example of al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory and the strategies through which he achieves his goal. We have also observed how he legitimizes his power by presenting himself as a warrior of God who is appointed by the caliph, and whose mission in Iraq resembles that of the Qurʾānic prophets of old. Taking al-Ḥajjāj’s inaugural khuṭba as a point of departure, we now turn to his other speeches to examine how these fit into his oratory as a whole. I will demonstrate that al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory reveals coherent rhetoric that serves to buttress his rule and confirm his authority.

For a better orientation of the main themes of al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory, I provide here a list of the nineteen speeches of al-Ḥajjāj in the order as they are listed in Jamhara. The texts of the speeches there are however taken from primary medieval Arabic sources. I

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78 This is based on Ibn Qutayba’s commentary. Ibn Qutayba, Gharīb al-ḥadīth, 3: 693-703. Cf. al-Ṭabarī.
79 Khārijite orators use much less common words and more saj’, to give an example of a more complicated oratorical style.
indicate my own title and number for each khutba; an editorial note on its main theme. For the full translations of these speeches and for their Arabic texts see the Appendix.

A. Khutab
1. Killing of Ibn al-Zubayr: Al-Ḥajjāj’s speech in Mecca, in which he justifies the killing of Ibn al-Zubayr by comparing the latter to Adam.

2. Inaugural speech at Kufa: Al-Ḥajjāj is appointed the governor of Iraq in 75/694, announces his appointment in Kufa, introduces himself, chastises the Iraqis for their disobedience, and declares that all who receive military stipends must depart to face the enemy within three days.

3. Takbīr in the market: Al-Ḥajjāj accuses the people of intending their takbīr (“Allāh akbar”) to signify Satan, not God.

4. Medicine in Basra: On his arrival to Basra, al-Ḥajjāj threatens the people against disobedience, likening himself to a remedy for their sickness.

5. After Dayr al-Jamājim: At Dayr al-Jamājim (the ‘Monastery of Skulls’80), in 83/701, there took place a decisive battle that ended the rebellion of Ibn al-Ash’ath, thus marking al-Ḥajjāj’s defeat of the Iraqi armies. In this speech, he threatens the Iraqis, reminds them of their defeat in the battles al-Zāwiya and Dayr al-Jamājim, and reprimands them for their disobedience.

6. People of Kufa and people of Shām: Al-Ḥajjāj threatens the people of Kufa while praising the Syrians.

7. Obedience: In Basra, al-Ḥajjāj threatens those who disobey, admonishes them against simple beliefs in God’s intervention and against reading the Qur’ān according to Ibn Masʿūd.

8. Decadence in Basra: Al-Ḥajjāj accuses the Basrans of ignorance, negligence of the Qur’ān and prayer, and warns them about the torments of Hell.


12. Ḥajj: Al-Ḥajjāj leaves for the ḥajj and announces that his son Muḥammad will replace him temporarily in office, and that he has advised him to be harsh on the Iraqis.

80 Islamic sources retain many hypotheses about why the monastery was called ‘Monastery of Skulls.’ One of them is for example that it is named after the skulls of the Persians knights that Kisrā (Khosrow II, d. 628) sent to fight the Iyād in al-Sawād, and that he ordered a monastery (dayr) to be built over them. For this and other stories about the origins of the name Dayr al-Jamājim see Yāqūt, Mujam, s.v. “Dayr al-Jamājim.”
13. **Two Muḥammads**: In one day, al-Ḥajjāj’s son and brother—both carrying the name Muḥammad—die, and the Iraqis rejoice. al-Ḥajjāj replies by scorning the worldly life and recites a poem that expresses joy in God’s satisfaction with him.

14. **Rumors**: Upon hearing news of al-Ḥajjāj’s illness, the Iraqis rejoice and start spreading rumors of his death. He refutes them in his speech, expressing the sentiment of being reconciled with his mortality.

B. **Khutbat waʿziya**

15. **Ubi sunt**: Al-Ḥajjāj reminds the people of the transience of this world and of Paradise and Hell.

16. **The ideal man**: Al-Ḥajjāj describes the ideal man, who fears God, performs virtuous deeds, reads the Qurʾān, and strives for truth in anticipation of the afterlife.

17. **Endurance**: Al-Ḥajjāj calls people to restrain their desire, because it is easier to abstain from divinely forbidden acts than to endure God’s torments in the afterlife.

18. **Error**: Al-Ḥajjāj petitions God to expose error and provide good guidance.

19. **Hour**: Al-Ḥajjāj declares that whoever spends a single hour without mentioning God, seeking His forgiveness, or thinking about the hereafter will deeply regret it.

**4.6.1. OF RULERS, CALIPHS, AND PROPHETS: CONCEPTION OF RULER**

**4.6.1.1. Al-Ḥajjāj as a prophetic and caliphal figure**

In the inaugural khutba, we saw that al-Ḥajjāj through clever Qurʾānic citations implicitly likens his mission in Iraq to that of the ancient prophets who were sent to admonish people who had gone astray. A similar comparison is made in “ḥajj” (12), in which al-Ḥajjāj likens himself to the Prophet through a speech before leaving to perform ḥajj.81

People of Iraq, I am headed to the ḥajj and I have left behind my son Muhammad to rule you—even though you did not treat him as one of your own (mā kuntum lahu bi-ahl). I commanded him with regard to you the opposite to what the Prophet prescribed [his companions] with regard to the Anṣār […]

[Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*]

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81 Al-Ḥajjāj compares the advice that he gives his son to that given by the Prophet to the Anṣār. But while the Prophet advised the Anṣār to kind to people accept their good deeds and be tolerant about their bad deeds, al-Ḥajjāj instruct his son not to accept even the good deeds of the Iraqis.
In this speech, the comparison has ironic undertones because he reverses the Prophet’s words; instead of commanding tolerance, he commands harshness. Al-Ḥajjāj also likens himself to the early caliphs. In “Rāshidūn caliphs” (10) he puts himself in the same category as Abū Bakr and ʿUmar on the Day of Judgment.  

People of Iraq, I heard that you recount of your prophet that he said: “He who rules [as little as] ten Muslims, shall come to the Day of Judgment with his hands shackled to his neck, until his justice will set him free or his injustice will ruin him.” By God, I prefer to stand [at the Day of Judgment] shackled with Abū Bakr and ʿUmar than to stand free amongst you.  

[Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, Ṣiqd]

This speech also has an ironic twist: it is a reaction to a ḥadīth warning people endowed with political power. There al-Ḥajjāj challenges the ḥadīth saying that he would happily accept the fate of the first caliphs (as examples of people with political power). We can imagine that such a ḥadīth was circulated in his time and used against him. This is a paraphrase of a ḥadīth that can be found in different versions in the authoritative ḥadīth works. Interestingly, none of these versions precisely matches the wording of this al-Ḥajjāj’s quote. This may point to an early origin of the text of the khutba, since it conveys a ḥadīth in a form that was not preserved in this exact shape in the classical works of ḥadīth.  

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82 Appendix II, nr. 10.  
83 Al-Ḥajjāj’s khutba has: Man malaka ʿashara riqāb al-muslimīna ji’a bihi yawma al-qiyāma maghlūlatan. The ḥadīth found in collections of ḥadīth read: Mā min amir ʿasharatin, illā atā Allāha azza wa-jallā maghlūlan yawm al-qiyāma...; Mā min amīri ʿasharatin illā yuʾtā bihi yawma al-qiyāma maghlūlan; and similar ones. See Ibn Abī Shayba, al-Muṣannaf, ed. Muḥammad ʿAwāma (Dār al-Qibla, 1427H) nr. 30617; nr. 33220, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad, ed. Al-Sayyid Abū al-Maʿālī al-Nūrī (Beirut, 1419H) nr. 22823; nr. 23138; nr. 9570 Man qaraʿa al-Qurʾān thumma nasiyahu, atā Allāha yawma al-qiyāma wa-huwa majdhūm, wa-aman ṣamila atāla ʿasharatin, utiyya bi-hi yawma al-qiyāma maghlūlan...; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, al-Muṣannaf, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān a-ʿAzīz (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983), nr.5989.  
84 It may naturally also point to the imprecision of later compilers, who, however, we would suppose had the classical ḥadīth works at hand and could verify the wording.
The rhetoric whereby al-Ḥajjāj associates himself with caliphs and prophets of the past shows parallels to Jarīr’s portrayal of him in his panegyric poems (see Chapter 2), and other reports confirm further it. One such report records that al-Ḥajjāj claimed that he was receiving divine revelation.\(^{85}\) Though such an account may be a part of a smear campaign against the governor, it may reflect his own claims, if even they may be distorted and exaggerated. Indeed, some tafsīr literature indicates that al-Ḥajjāj went as far as to assume prophetic-caliphal authority and to define some aspects of Islamic ritual law.\(^{86}\)

Al-Ḥajjāj’s Qur’ānic rhetoric also legitimizes his religious authority through demonstrating religious knowledge throughout his speeches. As in the inaugural khutba, he cites the Qur’ān and uses Qur’ānic parables also in his other speeches (see below). Qur’ānic quotes became one of the most stable elements of Arabic oratory, so much so that any oration lacking in Qur’ānic verses was considered substandard.\(^{87}\) In the example of the Inaugural speech we have seen that invoking Qur’ānic revelation in a new context serves as a powerful rhetorical technique, as it endows the present with the greatness of the past and by analogy associates al-Ḥajjāj with the divine, caliphal, and prophetic power.\(^{88}\) One of al-Ḥajjāj’s most effective parables appears in the “Killing of Ibn al-Zubayr” (1), which

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\(^{85}\) Al-Ḥajjāj reportedly claimed: “I only rule through revelation!” (mā aʾmilu illā bi-wahy). Ibn ’Asākir, Tārīkh, 160.

\(^{86}\) Al-Ṭabarī in his tafsīr on Q 5:6 recounts that al-Ḥajjāj in one of his speeches that he delivered in Ahwāz interpreted the sūra that regulates the acts of ritual purity in the following way: “wash your faces, your hands, and wipe you heads and feet. Indeed there is nothing else in the human being closer to his wickedness than his feet. So wash their soles, their insteps, and their feet.” The underlined part means that he ordered that the feet be washed thrice instead of only once. The rest of the text tells us Anas rejected al-Ḥajjāj’s practice. See Al-Ṭabarī. Jāmiʿ al-bayān, 10:58. Interestingly, however, washing feet thrice is the Sunni practice nowadays.

\(^{87}\) Qutbuddin, “Qur’an Citation,” 324.

\(^{88}\) Stephan Dähne characterizes this effect as a transposition of the Qur’ānic context onto a new one through scriptural quotation, thus creating a “context equivalence.” Dähne, “Qur’anic Wording,” and “Context Equivalence.”
we have already encountered in Chapter 1. In this speech he addresses people of Mecca, after having defeated and killed Ibn al-Zubayr:

Ibn al-Zubayr was one of the most learned men (*aḥbār*) of this community (*umma*). But then he desired the caliphate, fought for it, dismissed obedience to God, and shielded himself in the sanctuary (*ḥaram*) of God. If anything could have deterred the rebellious, then the holiness of Paradise would have deterred Adam. It was God the Almighty who created him with His own hands, made His angels prostrate in front of him, and opened Paradise for him! Then he [Adam] rebelled and God expelled him from there due to his sin. Adam was more precious to God than Ibn al-Zubayr, and the holiness of Paradise is greater than that of Mecca.

[Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī, *Sarḥ al-'uyūn*]

I have discussed earlier Ibn al-Zubayr’s impeccable Islamic credentials with which it would be hard for anyone, let alone the base-born al-Ḥajjāj, to compete. This speech recognizes this reality. Al-Ḥajjāj does not undermine Ibn al-Zubayr’s credentials *per se*; on the contrary, he compares the anti-caliph to Adam, the first man. Al-Ḥajjāj’s strategy consists in making the argument that even such a perfect being as Adam sinned, rebelled against God’s will, and was punished for it as a result. As great as Ibn al-Zubayr was, he was no more precious to God than Adam, and thus his punishment at the hands of al-Ḥajjāj was thus fully justified. In this allegory, al-Ḥajjāj becomes the executor of God’s will, a messenger of God, if you will.

Themes of asceticism and calls for moderation, which appear his political speeches (*khuṭab*) but are most clearly pronounced in his sermons (*khuṭab waʿzīya*) constitute another claim to religious authority. Al-Ḥajjāj reminds his audience of the transient nature of life, exhorts them to forbearance, and asks God to lead him on the right path. The exhortations are short and monothematic. In “Ideal Man,” (16) al-Ḥajjāj exhorts his audience to piety by giving them an example of the ideal man:

[A great man is] a man who finds his actions trifling, who thinks about what he reads in the record of his deeds, and what he sees in his balance [of good and evil deeds]. [A great man is] a man who restrains himself from what is merely a matter of pleasure and remembers what is a matter of great significance; who holds the reins of his heart as a man
holds his camel with a halter; whose heart, when it leads him to the obedience of God, follows it, but when it leads him to a rebellion against God, renounces it.

[Al-Jāḥīẓ, Bayān]

The emphasis on the fleeting nature of this life and the eternity of the afterlife, present in “Ideal Man” is typical of other pious speeches of al-Ḥajjāj, such as “Ubi sunt,” (15) which I named after its main rhetorical strategy:

[It is] as if what has passed from this world had never existed. As if the dead had never been alive; all that you see is merely passing. This is the sun of Ād and Thamūd, and many centuries divide us from their time; this is the sun that rose above the Yemeni and Persian kings, above their treasuries, slipping through their fingers, above their lofty palaces, and then it rose above their tombs. Where are the ancient kings? Where are the haughty tyrants?

[Ibn Qutayba, Uyūn al-Akhbār]

Al-Ḥajjāj’s solution to the ephemerality of life is to contemplate the afterlife. In a similar vein, his other sermons remind the audience of the importance of good guidance and avoidance of evil (“Error”), as well as the importance of constantly thinking about the afterlife (“Hour”). The elegiac nasīb of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda and its topos of abandoned abode provide a parallel here. Suzanne Stetkevych connected the image of the abandoned abode to a deeper “collective historical experience […] of the failure of the polity, the destruction of the social order, and the dispersal or scattering of its members,”89 which is precisely the same feeling expressed in this speech. We also find the ubi sunt motif, for example, in the poetry of the sixth century with ʿAdī b. Zayd.90

Pre-Islamic oratory seems to have served as a vehicle for more restrained type of discourse, calling to moderation and curbing one’s passions. These themes are most apparent in the subgenre of testaments (waṣāyā), which served as a depository of tribal wisdom. One famous example is the waṣīya oration by ʿAmr b. Kulthūm, one of the poets

89 S. Stetkevych, Mute Immortals, 23.
90 See Talib, “Topoi and Topography in the Histories of al-Ḥira.”
of the Seven Odes (a-muʿallaqāt al-sabʿa), which exhorts people to curb their passions and to be moderate and merciful, exhibiting very different rhetoric from that of his famous ode.\textsuperscript{91} The spiritual and otherworldly aspect is best expressed in the famous speech by the semi-legendary ‘Bishop of Najrān,’ Quss b. Sāʿida, also called ‘the greatest orator of all Arabs.’\textsuperscript{92} In his speech, recorded in various early Abbasid sources and regarded as historical material by some scholars,\textsuperscript{93} Quss says:

\begin{quote}
O People! Listen and retain! He who lives dies. He who dies is lost [forever] […] Quss swears an oath by God in which there is no sin: God has a religion that is more satisfactory to Him and better than the religion in which you believe […] When I looked at the watering holes of death, from which there is no returning—[When] I saw my people towards them going, young and old—The one who passed not coming back to me and not from those who remain, he who goes.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{91} ‘Amr b. Kultūm’s muʿallaqa mainly expresses the defiance and pride of the tribe of Taghlīb in front of the king of Ḥira ‘Amr b. Hind, though he also touches upon the themes of transience of life. In his testament oration warns against insulting, abusing, and oppressing others, while in his ode he threatens the ‘Amr b. Hind to with oppression from his tribe. In his testament, ‘Amr b. Kultūm also says that “the bravest man is he who is merciful after battle.” The virtue of mercy to enemy is not a common motif in classical poetry. In his ode, he, in contrast, boasts about the Taghlīb’s lack of compassion when he says: “We hack their heads off without compassion.” In his testament, he claims that “there is no good in the man who does not pause to think when he is angry; neither is there any good in him who, when remonstrated with, does not mend his ways.” Again, his poem expresses an entirely different sentiment. We can say that while the testament, as it praises the virtues of keeping one’s cool and listening to others’ reproaches, calls to curbing one’s passions, the poem does the opposite. See Arberry’s chapter of ‘Amr b. Kultūm’s muʿallaqa “The Regicide” Arberry, The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD., 1957), 185-209. For the Arabic original see Ṣafwat, Jamhara, 1: 48, nr.41.

\textsuperscript{92} By the semi-legendary nature, I mean that his figure has attracted many legends over the time and that he has attain monumental importance in the memory of Arabs, not necessarily that he did not exist. Quss, is, for example, credited with many “firsts” (awāʾil): He is said to have been the first one to believe in the One God and Resurrection before Islam; and more importantly for our purposes the first one who established certain rules of the art of oratory, such as using the formula “ammā baʾd.” Al-Jāḥiẓ mentions the wide spread legend that the Prophet himself narrated Quṣṣ’ khatḥa to all Quraysh and Arabs at the market in Ḱukāz, admiring the bishop’s eloquence in calling people to monotheism. That’s why, al-Jāḥiẓ concludes Quṣṣ b. Sāʿida was “the orator of all Arabs.” Dziekan, “Quss Ibn Sāʿida al-Iyadi,” al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:52.

\textsuperscript{93} The speech appears in Bayān, ‘Iqd, and Aghānī to name a few. Aboubakr Chraibi notes on the subject of its authenticity that “we cannot affirm with certainty that it was entirely invented.” He traces the process of rewriting the khatḥa over time. Chraibi, “Modèles et apocryphes,”105. D.M. Dunlop seems to regard the khatḥa as a historical material. D. M. Dunlop, Arab Civilization to A.D. 1500 (1971), 38. Marek Dziekan in his monograph on Quss claims to distinguish the apocryphal material about and by Quss from the authentic. Dziekan, Quss Ibn Sāʿida.

\textsuperscript{94} Translation by Tahera Qutbuddin, “Khuṭba,” 223-225.
As the tradition has it, Muḥammad heard this speech—which reminds of the transience of life ending with a famous image of death taking everyone, and calls people to a better ‘custom’ or ‘traditional practice’ (dīn)\(^95\)—at the fair of ʿUkāẓ before he began his mission and it had a great impact on him.\(^96\)

On the one hand these themes may be surprising coming from the mouth of one of the most infamous tyrants of Islamic history while on the other we must bear in mind that piety and asceticism were defining features of most philosophical and religious communities in the late antique Near East, beyond pre-Islamic Arabia. From the pagan Neo-Platonists in Alexandria and the Jewish Qumran community of the Dead Sea to the elusive Syriac Christian banay qyāmā, many held ascetic virtue as the ideal model for living one’s life.\(^97\) The Egyptian and Syrian deserts had been the site of holy men and woman since at least the 4th century, while churches and monasteries dominated the religious landscape well into the Abbasid period. The small Muslim elite lived among a majority population of various confessions, shared the world, and interacted with them on various levels.\(^98\) It is thus not surprising that early Islam joined in these pietistic tendencies,

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\(^95\) Dīn is a complex term and much-discussed term. It is a word of Hebrew provenience. In Hebrew beth dīn (בֵית דִּין) can be translated as ‘house of judgment’ and it referred to a court in ancient and modern Judaism. Also Yom ha-Dīn in Hebrew means ‘Day of Judgment’ and refers to Rosh Hashanah, when God weights the deeds of each person and decides what will happen with them the coming year. It can also refer to the eschatological Day of Judgement. Ronald Eisenberg, Dictionary of Jewish Terms: A Guide to the Language of Judaism (Lanham: Taylor Trade Pub, 2011), 94. In Arabic Dāna means ‘to owe,’ and dāyn means ‘debt,’ or ‘obligation’ these meanings probably being related to the act of judgement, as the Arabic expression ‘Master of the, Day of Judgment,’ mālik jawm al-dīn, found for example in the sūrat al-Fāṭihā attests. Seen from this perspective, as a term related to ‘debt,’ ‘obligation,’ ‘judgement,’ dīn must have been in early Islam far removed from the concept of religion as an abstract doctrine, or a system of dogmas as it could be understood today. Dīn had more practical meaning; it meant something along the lines of ‘someone’ ways, ‘rules of conduct.’ Gardet suggests the etymological progression to be “debt which falls due on a given date” \(\rightarrow\) “custom, usage” \(\rightarrow\) “direction,” judge (influenced by Hebrew) \(\rightarrow\) “obligation, direction, sub’ mission, retribution.” See Gardet, “Dīn,” EI2.

\(^96\) Nicholson, A Literary History, 135–136.


\(^98\) Jack Tannous has discussed many instances of Christian-Muslim interaction. Tannous, “Syria between Byzantium and Islam;” The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple
though the majority Muslims denounced instances of extreme self-denial. Nevertheless, piety was perhaps the most important form of legitimation in the early Islamic period, as Fred Donner has suggested.\footnote{Donner bases this claim on the fact that other distinctions grounded in family affiliations, historical associations, property, class, ethnicity, etc. do not appear in the Qurʾān or in the Constitution of Medina. Donner, Narratives, 98. For his treatment of Islamic piety see Donner, Narratives, 64-97.} Thus, the ascetic tone of al-Ḥajjāj’s \textit{waʿẓ}, with its emphasis on curbing passions and the transience of the world (\textit{dunyā}), fits remarkably well into this late antique and early Islamic milieu.

4.6.1.2. The caliph as a prophetic figure

Another technique of claiming religious legitimacy is al-Ḥajjāj’s presentation of the Umayyad caliph as a religious authority, or even a prophetic figure, and emphasis on his own connection with the caliph. Let us take the “Funeral speech for ʿAbd al-Malik” as our main example. In it, al-Ḥajjāj makes an analogy between the death of ʿAbd al-Malik and the death of the Prophet, and compares himself to Abū Bakr and the deceased caliph to the Prophet with the following words:

\begin{quote}
People, God the Blessed and Sublime, announced the death of your Prophet, peace be upon him, to Himself and then He said: “Truly thou wilt die (one day), and truly they (too) will die (one day).” (Q 39:30) He also said: “Muḥammad is no more than a Messenger: many were the Messengers that passed away before Him. If he died or was slain, will ye then turn back on your heels?” (Q 3:144)

[Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, \textit{Iqd}]
\end{quote}

This passage is a quotation of an earlier \textit{khuṭba} that Abū Bakr delivered after the death of the Prophet, which includes Qurʾānic quotations that emphasize the Prophet’s mortality.\footnote{Cf. al-Bayhaqī, \textit{Dalāʾ il al-nubūwa}, 218.} The Qurʾān stresses that, like many of God’s messengers, Muḥammad, too, was but a mortal man. By borrowing from Abū Bakr’s \textit{khuṭba}, al-Ḥajjāj creates a concordance
between himself and Abū Bakr and between 'Abd al-Malik and the Prophet. It cannot be known with certainty that in al-Ḥajjāj’s time this *khutba* of Abū Bakr was available; however, its different *isnāds* suggest that it was already in circulation by the time of al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742).  

Al-Ḥajjāj also commemorates 'Abd al-Malik’s religious virtues: the caliph possessed religious knowledge (‘*îlm*) and read the Qur’ān. More importantly, the speaker emphasizes the caliph’s prophetic-prophetic genealogy, when he says:

> The Messenger of God died, Peace be upon Him, and the Rightly Guided [rāshidūn wa-muhtadūn] caliphs died. There was Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, the wronged martyr, then followed Mu‘āwiya, then your wāli who is experienced like a nine-year old male camel (walīkum al-bāzil al-dhakar) whom events have tested and whom experience has made strong, possessing religious knowledge (fiqh) and the reading of the Qur’ān, and who is gentle towards people of the Truth, and violent against the people of Deviation. He was the fourth of the Rightly Guided caliphs. God chose Heaven for him and added him to them.

Then God entrusted [the caliphate] to a man similar to him in reason, bravery (murū’a), decisiveness, endurance (jalad), and the ability to carry out the matter of God and the responsibilities of his khilāfa. So listen to him and obey him. [i.e. al-Walīd]

[Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 'Iqd]

After Muḥammad come the caliphs, Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Abd al-Malik being the “Rightly Guided” of them. The most interesting observation here is that while Mu‘āwiya is mentioned he is not included among the rāshidūn wa-muhtadūn, as the number given to 'Abd al-Malik and the structure of the sentence indicate. Removing Mu‘āwiya so

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101 That al-Zuhrī circulated this *hadīth* is attested by the many different *asānīd* that lead to al-Zuhrī; see nr. 18885. This doesn’t mean necessarily that the *khutba* was not already circulation; for we have several reports the *asānīd* of which do not pass through al-Zuhrī; see nrs. 10193, 7027, 11922, 18854 in Bashshār ʿAwwād Ma‘rūf et al., eds., *Al-Musnad al-muṣannaf al-muʿallal* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2013).

102 Patricia Crone understood Mu‘āwiya to be included among the rāshidūn caliphs in her reading of the *khutba*. She thought that 'Abd al-Malik is called the fourth (and not fifth) of them by mistake. However, all the rightly guided caliphs are listed by the word *thumma* while in the case of Mu‘āwiya is added “then Mu‘āwiya followed” (*thumma tabī' ahum Mu‘āwiya*). This grammatical deviation along with the fact that such a mistake seems improbable suggests to me that Mu‘āwiya is excluded here from the category of the rāshidūn wa-muhtadūn caliphs. Crone, *God’s Caliph*, 36.
explicitly from the rightly-guided caliphs, may be a result of Marwānid vs. Sufyānid polemics. Calling ʿUthmān the wronged martyr, on the other hand, was the most current topos of Umayyad legitimation since the first fitna. ʿAlī’s name does not even appear.

The idea that ʿAbd al-Malik is the fourth of the rightly guided caliphs is accounted for by the latter’s qualities, and so the deceased caliph is considered among the “Rightly Guided” (rāshidūn wa-muhtadūn). As Antoine Borrut has argued, the traditional periodization of early Islamic history into the Jāhiliyya, Prophetic period, Rāshidūn era, Umayyad mulk, and Abbasid dawla is a construction of the Abbasid era and alternative periodizations existed before this one was standardized. As attestations in poetry and other sources suggest, it seems that the terms rāshīd, rashīd, muhtadī, and especially mahdī existed in the Umayyad period and that they were not limited to the first four caliphs but were applied to the Umayyads. The Muslim tradition has seen also ʿUmar II as the fifth of the rāshidūn caliphs. Similarly, in this speech, ʿAbd al-Malik is elevated among the righteous and divinely guided among the caliphs.

Crone and Hinds have exposed the caliphs’ centrality to the faith in two ways: firstly, their existence was believed to guarantee the existence of the community as a whole and, secondly, they functioned to guide people away from error. Similarly, Wadād al-Qāḍī, in her study of religious rhetoric in the letters of the late Umayyad ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, remarks that “the letters make three ideas clear: that the caliphate inherited

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107 On later views of ʿUmar II see Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir* 283-320.
108 Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph* 33-34.
prophethood, that it was God who made the inheritance choice, and that this choice actually honors the Prophet Muhammad and rewards him for taking charge of his community during his lifetime.”

The sanctification of the deceased ruler in this speech serves to prepare the ground for his successor, who is mentioned at the end of this excerpt. In the spirit of le roi est mort, vive le roi! al-Ḥajjāj turns ʿAbd al-Malik into a prophetic figure with the purpose of transferring this authority to the new caliph al-Walīd, “a man similar to him in reason, bravery (murūʿa), decisiveness, endurance (jalad), the ability to carry out God’s commands, and in his appointment/rule (khilāfatihi).” A death of the ruler constitutes a major crisis for any empire, as it threatens its continuity and allows for the possibility of a power-struggle. Al-Ḥajjāj’s khutba responds to this crisis and serves as vehicle to ensure the smooth transition of power. It is not a mere announcement of the caliph’s death; it functions to reaffirm ʿAbd al-Malik’s legitimate authority, remind the audience his merits, and to classify him as one of the righteous caliphs of the past. Furthermore, the khutba also serves to promulgate the new caliph and affirm his legitimacy. We can also think about this moment as a rite of passage for the whole community. At the moment of the ruler’s death, the whole Islamic community finds itself in a dangerously liminal space, which needs to be bridged. Cultural means such as poetry and oratory under these circumstances, acquire the dimensions of a ritual that helps to maintain order in the society.

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Al-Ḥajjāj’s glorification of the caliph is also evident from his other speeches and reports. In “Obedience” (7), al-Ḥajjāj refers to ʿAbd al-Malik as “the worshipper of God, God’s caliph, and God’s beloved.” He also depicts the caliph as a deputy of God on earth who enjoys His favor. Patricia Crone has provided sufficient evidence to suggest that God’s deputy (khalīfat allāh)—and not the deputy of God’s Prophet (khalīfat rasūl Allāh)—was the standard title for all Umayyad caliphs, and thus it is not surprising to find it a speech by al-Ḥajjāj. Yet it appears that al-Ḥajjāj went even further in his construction of caliphal religious authority; as Crone also notes, al-Ḥajjāj is in several instances said to have expressed the opinion that the caliph enjoys a higher status than that of the Prophet.\(^{111}\) One such instance was in the context of a *khutba* in which he rhetorically asks his audience whether they would prefer a prophet over a caliph (*rasūlu aḥadukum fī ḥājatihi akramu 'alayhi am khalīfatuhu fī ahlihi!*).\(^{112}\) Al-Ḥajjāj is also portrayed to have claimed that the caliph receives revelation from Heaven.\(^{113}\) During a speech al-Ḥajjāj is also said to have compared ʿUthmān to Jesus.\(^{114}\) Another account, discussed by Chase Robinson, relates a bizarre incident in which al-Ḥajjāj tells those who circumambulate the Prophet’s tomb in Medina to do so at ʿAbd al-Malik tomb instead.\(^{115}\)

Al-Ḥajjāj’s glorification of the Umayyad caliphs was a rhetorical strategy meant to kill two birds with one stone: to compensate for his personal deficiency in terms of noble ancestry and Islamic merit by binding himself to the Umayyads and to build the legitimacy

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\(^{112}\) Ibn ʿAsākir, *Ṭārīkh*, 158. For other references see Crone, *God’s Caliph*, 29, n. 18.

\(^{113}\) Al-Ḥajjāj states: “Do you claim, people of Iraq, that the news from Heaven was kept from *amīr al-muʾminīn*? By God you lied, people of Iraq. By God the news from Heaven is not kept from him.” Ibn ʿAsākir’s edition has “good” *khayr*, but Ibn Manẓūr’s edition has *khabar*, which makes more sense in the context. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Ṭārīkh*, 12:158

\(^{114}\) Ibn ʿAsākir, *Ṭārīkh*, 159.

\(^{115}\) Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 90.
of the Umayyad caliphs in region that was not very positively inclined towards them. It is this rhetorical strategy, I argue, that is the origin of some of the exaggerated accounts about his blasphemous statements, serving to fuel a rebellion against him,\textsuperscript{116} as well as the later accounts about his complete devotion and obedience to the Umayyads, usually meant to ridicule or vilify him.\textsuperscript{117} That, in reality, he was no obedient servant to the Umayyads but their most important ally was laid out in Chapter 1.

\textbf{4.6.2. Obedience as a Religious Duty: Conception of Subjects}

\textbf{4.6.2.1. “Obedience” speech}

The loyalty that al-Ḥajjāj ostentatiously demonstrated to the caliph was also expected from his subjects, and the governor was prepared to ensure it by appealing to divine judgment. In al-Ḥajjāj’s rhetoric, political obedience is transformed into a religious obligation. We can see this idea most clearly expressed in his “Obedience” (7) speech. The speech is carefully constructed: In the first paragraph, the command to obey is pronounced, backed up by a Qur’ānic reference that is interpreted to apply to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. In the next two paragraphs, the disobedient are named and condemned, and in the last one

\textsuperscript{116} We can only guess what these stories were used for in their own time. However, we see that in later times, some of these reports are discussed as part of the debate whether one should obey an unjust ruler. In the case of the report that has al-Ḥajjāj asking his audience whether they would prefer the caliph or a prophet, we see that his statement is taken as a clear sign of unbelief (kufr). The narrator Bazīgh b. Khālid al-Dabbī says that when he heard al-Ḥajjāj, he said to himself that he cannot follow the governor on prayer, and hence recognize his religious authority. The narrator swears that if he finds someone to fight the sinning governor, he would join. And as the commentary tells us, he indeed joined the revolution of Ibn al-Ash’ath and fought against al-Ḥajjāj in the battle of Dayr al-Jamājim and was killed there. IbnʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 158.

\textsuperscript{117} So, it is narrated, for example, that al-Ḥajjāj blamed his cruel acts on his obedience to the caliph. al-Ḥajjāj further boasts that he would not exchange his obedience even for gold of the amount of Mt Lebanon and Mt Saīn. In the eyes of others, al-Ḥajjāj was ʿAbd al-Malik’s sin IbnʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 157-158; 179-180. In exceptional cases his obedience to the Umayyads was admired. See IbnʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 157.
(mentioned only in Murūj), a lament is made half in jest, blaming the king Solomon for the imperfect state of affairs. The lament is interpreted by al-Masʿūdī in a rather uncharitable way.

1. “Fear God as much as you can.” (Q 64:16) 118 This [saying] is by God, and there is reward in it. “And listen and obey!” (Q 64:16) And the one [who is meant by this āya] is the worshipper of God, God’s caliph, God’s beloved, ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān. By God, if I order people to take a certain gate, and they take a different one, I will then consider their blood permitted by God (ḥalāl) for me to shed; even if all the tribes of Rabīʿa and Muḍar [he means here all Arabs] were killed, it would be permitted for me to shed their blood.

2. Woe onto the red-cheeked ones (ahl hādhihi al-ḥamrāʾ) for one of them is throwing a stone towards the heavens saying: “Before the stone falls back down, something good will happen.” By God I will turn you into yesterday that has passed.

3. Woe onto the slave of Hudhayl—he claimed that he was safe with God!—who reads the Qurʾān as if it were rajaz of Bedouins. For, if I were to catch him, I would surely cut his head off.

4. Woe onto Solomon, son of David, who said to his Lord: “O my Lord! Forgive me and grant me a Kingdom which (it may be), suits not another after me.” (Q 38:35)

And, indeed, he [al-Ḥajjāj] was—as far as I know—an envious, stingy man.

[Al-Masʿūdī, Murūj]

4.6.2.1.1. Paragraph 1

“Fear God as much as you can.” “And listen and obey!”—the speech begins by invoking Qurʾānic verses and drawing the connection to ʿAbd al-Malik. Al-Ḥajjāj declares that any act of disobedience, be it as trivial as entering the mosque through the wrong gate, is punishable by death. While obedience could be seen as something required by any ruler, in al-Ḥajjāj’s formulation it receives a specific religious dimension that reflects a wider rhetoric of the time. That this specific threatening passage was firmly connected with the

118 The whole āya reads: “So fear God as much as ye can; listen and obey; and spend in charity for the benefit of your own souls: And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls— they are the ones that achieve prosperity.” (Q 64:16)
figure of al-Ḥajjāj suggests the fact that it appears in very similar wording in “Medicine in Basra.”

The Qurʾān prohibits killing “except for just cause” (Q 6:151, 17:33). Al-Ṭabarī in his tafsīr, for example, comments on this verse that the killing of a Muslim is forbidden except for the cases of murder, adultery, and apostasy.\(^{119}\) In some riwāyas of the hadīths in question the apostate is endowed with a description “the one who leaves the unity (jamāʿa)” (wa-ʾl-tārik li-dīnīhi al-mufāriq li-ʾl-jamāʿa).\(^ {120}\) Terms such as jamāʿa\(^ {121}\) had powerful resonance, having been turned into political slogans and endowed with Qurʾānic sacrality, prepared the ground for al-Ḥajjāj’s rhetoric of takfīr of his enemies. Attempt to undermine the cherished jamāʿa amounted to kufr. This may remind us of the Khārijite religious rhetoric according to which any non-Khārijite is a kāfir (See Chapter 1).

This is where al-Ḥajjāj is coming from when he states here that the blood of those who disobey him is no longer forbidden, thereby becoming licit (ḥalāl), using a religious term. Clearly, disobedience constitutes for him a just cause for someone to be killed. He backs up his call to obedience with Qurʾānic verses that emphasize the fear of and obedience to God. In this way, he transposes this Qurʾānic invocation onto himself, fashioning himself once again as the executor of God’s will. Obedience, thus, becomes a religious duty for al-Ḥajjāj’s subjects. A similar rhetoric of religious obedience described Wadāḍ al-Qāḍī in her analysis of letters by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib.\(^ {122}\) The theme of fear

\(^{119}\) Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān 17:439.

\(^{120}\) On the authority of ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd. Al-Bukhārī, nr.6878, 5:9; Muslim, nr.4390,106:5 in Abū al-Muʿāṭ, al-Musnad, 18:345.


\(^{122}\) Al-Qadi, “Religious Foundation,” 273.
and obedience is further corroborated in panegyric poetry dedicated to the governor. We have seen that Jarīr depicts him as the guardian of the public order. Many verses have come down to us in which the poets express great fear of the governor and a repeated theme is al-Ḥajjāj’s ability to find and destroy his enemies no matter how far they escape from him. Al-Ḥajjāj is said to have rewarded such verses.123

4.6.2.1.2. Paragraph 2

In the second paragraph, al-Ḥajjāj admonishes the Iraqis against the red-cheeked ones, a term most probably referring to a group of Persians living in Basra.124 The point al-Ḥajjāj makes here concerns belief in direct divine intervention, mocking the Persians for their naivety. He suggests that they do not take full responsibility for their actions because they claim to blindly believe in God’s predestination. This may be a ridicule of an argument that they might be using in a campaign against him.

4.6.2.1.3. Paragraph 3

In the third paragraph, al-Ḥajjāj admonishes the Iraqis against ʿAbdallāh ibn Masʿūd’s reading of the Qurʾān.125 His followers constitute the second example of disobedience in this speech. Al-Ḥajjāj’s efforts at the codification of the Qurʾān and at the imposition of

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124 Other versions have also ḥumayrāʾ. Traditionally, the Persians were called the “red people,” while the Byzantines were “yellow,” and the Ethiopians were “black.” The references in this speech is however to a concrete group of Persians. As al-Zabīdī the author of Tāj al-ʿarūs explains the ahāmira were Persians who first temporarily settled in Basra and then permanently in Kufa. During the time of this speech, this group of Persians were thus still living in Basra. Al-Zabīdī, Tāj al-ʿarūs, s.v. “h-m-r.” Al-Ḥumayrāʾ is also the nickname of al-ʿĀʾisha, but this is not what is meant here.
125 The proponents of Ibn Masʿūd’s version of the Qurʾān claimed that it was identical with what the Prophet said and what ʿUthmān later changed. Many Kufan traditions attest to the originality of Ibn Masʿūd’s version and point to the unfitness of Zayd b. Thābit, who was in charge of the ʿUthmānic corpus, for his task. See Shnizer,”Sacrality,” 165ff.
the Uthmānic (i.e. Umayyad) reading were discussed in Chapter 2 and so was the enduring legacy of Ibn Masʿūd in Kufa. Here, we should note that al-Ḥajjāj uses the same anti-Bedouin rhetoric that we witnessed in the Inaugural speech. Al-Ḥajjāj, the townsman from Taʿif disparages him the Companion, who was from the tribe Hudhayl, the Bedouins of Mecca. In another version of the same speech, al-Ḥajjāj explicitly states that he will execute anyone who reads the Qurʾān according to Ibn Masʿūd, and vows to erase every muṣḥaf of the latter’s reading, even if it means doing so with a swine’s rib. A report, narrated among others by one of the men in charge of the maṣāḥif project, shows al-Ḥajjāj in a more positive light as someone who reads the Qurʾān daily. This and similar report were part of the ideological campaign over who can claim the authority over the Qurʾānic text in Iraq.

The vehemence of al-Ḥajjāj’s threat suggests that he expected fierce opposition, exemplified in the latter version of the speech by the muhaddith al-Aʿmash (d. 147-8/764-5), who swore to disobey al-Ḥajjāj’s command. The speech thus indeed seems to be reflecting historical disputes over the qirāʾāt and al-Ḥajjāj’s intervention in them. From a rhetorical perspective, it is noteworthy that al-Ḥajjāj speaks about the Bedouin and Persians in the third person. This confirms the role of this khutba as a channel of propaganda

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126 Ibn Masʿūd was of humble Bedouin origins from the Banū Hudhayl; on his father’s side, he was a client of a branch of the Quraysh. While his tribal origins were unremarkable, his Islamic credentials were excellent. Some sources claim that he was the third person to embrace Islam after Khadija and ʿAlī. Furthermore, he was one of the Prophet’s closest companions, who heard the Qurʾān directly from his mouth. Besides, he participated in all the important early battles, which was a crucial factor in earning Islamic credentials. While the Kufans held him in great esteem, the Quraysh look at him with suspicion, especially after he publicly criticized the Umayyad governor of Kufa al-Walīd b. ʿUqba for his scandalous behavior. “Ibn Masʿūd,” EI2.


128 This man was Rashīd Abū Muhammad al-Ḥimmānī. He narrated that they finished the process of codification in four months, and that each night al-Ḥajjāj would read the Qurʾān. Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 116. On Rāshid see al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al-Kabīr 3:294; al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al-Islām, 9:130.
directed toward the Arabo-Muslim *muhājir* elite in early Islamic society. The two groups who lay outside the elite were less likely to form part of his audience and indeed, they are not directly addressed.

4.6.2.1.4. Paragraph 4

In the last paragraph, which appears on in al-Masʿūdī’s version, not in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s, al-Ḥajjāj closes the speech with another Qur’ānic reference, quoting the prophet Solomon asking the Lord for such kingdom and power (*mulk*) that will not belong to anyone after him. The Qur’ān uses this verse to show the magnitude of God’s grace towards His obedient servant because God indeed grants him after this request power over the wind and the *shayāṭīn* and other bounties. (38:36-40). Al-Ḥajjāj’s speech uses this verse to express a different sentiment—as a lament that Solomon has been granted the greatest power over his subjects, power that none can imitate accordingly with Solomon’s request to God. This lament should be understood both as a playful association between Solomon and al-Ḥajjāj and as an expression of admiration for Solomon’s power over his subjects. An effort to portray himself as an successor Solomon, though a failed one, is in line with the Umayyad cult of Solomon, who had turned into a model of just rulership and is associated with various ancient sites in Syria.129

Al-Masʿūdī, as per his custom (see Chapter 3), interprets al-Ḥajjāj’s use of the verse to his disadvantage—painting him as envious of Solomon’s power. This is also how later Muslims understood it and considered it as blasphemous.130 This Qur’ānic quote also

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130 This statement of al-Ḥajjāj, separately, without the speech, can be found in two reports in the blasphemy section of Ibn ʿAsākir’s biographical entry on al-Ḥajjāj. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh*, 12:161.
appears in a different speech by al-Ḥajjāj in another context, which suggest that it indeed was connected with his figure.\(^{131}\)

In the scheme of al-Ḥajjāj’s political speeches obedience is also the main criterion to divide his subjects, and as it had already become apparent, the Iraqis failed miserably test thereby turning into “people of Deviation.” As early as the inaugural oration, we observed al-Ḥajjāj calling the Iraqis “people of dissent and hypocrisy” (yā ahl al-shiqāq wa-al-nifāq), an expression he frequently applies to them elsewhere. The accusation of nifāq, hypocrisy, undermines the Iraqis’ religious integrity and their standing as Muslims. The theme of nifāq would have strongly resonated in the minds of early Muslims primarily because it is a key Qur’ānic term; it appears in thirty āyas and one whole sūra was dedicated to the munāfiqūn (“hypocrites”). The Qur’ānic munāfiqūn (hypocrites) are “half-hearted believers who outwardly profess Islam while their hearts harbor doubt or even unbelief,” a reference to the men who refused to fight the Meccans in the early days of Islam.\(^{132}\)

The accusation of shiqāq is semantically related to fitna, another Qur’ānic term which gained currency especially in the first civil war between ’Alī and Muʿāwiya, has symbolized since the ever-present danger of the disintegration of the entire community of believers.\(^{133}\) In another speech, “Kufans vs. Syrians” (6), al-Ḥajjāj warns the Kufans that “fitna blossoms in secret conversations and results in doubt, which is harvested with

\(^{131}\) It appears in “Rumors” (14). See Appendix.

\(^{132}\) Camilla P. Adang, “Hypocrites and Hypocrisy,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qurān*.

\(^{133}\) The theme of fitna is prominent in most literary sources that deal with this period—including the speeches. In the abundant speeches in the early history work *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn* by Naṣr b. Muzāḥim (d.212/827) the accusation of fitna belongs among the most recurrent ones. As Chase Robinson pointed out, contemporary Syriac historians, too, were impressed by the rift in the Muslim community and even borrowed the term fitna. See Robinson, “The Rise of Islam, 600-705,” Sebeos, *Armenian history*, 1: 154. Hichem Djait, *La grande discorde: Religion et politique dans l’Islam des origines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989). See Borutto’s discussion of the meaning of the term fitna. Borutto, “Vanishing Syria,” 49ff.
sword.” Thus, in al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches, the Iraqis’ proneness to sedition is their gravest sin. Portraying Iraqis as predisposed to *fitna* was akin to accusing them not only of poor religious values but also of posing an existential threat to the *umma*. This discourse justifies al-Ḥajjāj’s insults and threats to the Iraqis, and is one of the most striking and memorable aspects of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches.

The Syrians, on the other hand, are “the people of Truth.” The Syrians (*ahl al-shām*) that al-Ḥajjāj occasionally addresses in his speeches and lauds, are the elite Syrian imperial army on which he relied (see Chapter 1). The territorial identities of Syrians and Iraqis are most clearly pronounced in his speeches. We will now have a closer look at al-Ḥajjāj’s speech “After Dayr al-Jamājim” (5) which illustrates this stark opposition between the Syrians and the Iraqis and exposes the governor’s conception of his subjects. Al-Ḥajjāj is said to have delivered the speech after the battle at Dayr al-Jāmājim, in 82/701 which ended the dangerous rebellion of Ibn al-Ash’ath. The hundred-day battle at the place with such an ominous name (Dayr al-Jamājim means “the Monastery of Skulls”) constituted one of the critical moments for Umayyad sovereignty and al-Ḥajjāj’s rule in Iraq. In Chapter 1, we have seen that at one point the situation looked so bad for the Umayyads that ʿAbd al-Malik negotiated with the rebels and offered to al-Ḥajjāj from his office. The Iraqis refused to negotiate and were defeated. The speech must be considered with these circumstances in mind: as a act of announcing the victory at the end of a rebellion that shook the empire and as an act of condemning the rebels, who had almost brought him down. By proclaiming his victory and their defeat, al-

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4.6.2.2. Translation of “After Dayr al-Jamājīm”

A. O People of Iraq! The devil penetrated you, and entered your flesh, blood, nerves, ears, limbs, organs and heart. Then he reached the brain and the ears and then he went up and nested, hatched eggs, filled you with hypocrisy and dissension, and sowed discord among you. You took him as your guide whom you follow; you took him as your leader whom you obey; you took him as your counselor from whom you seek advice. How will experience be of any use to you? Will a battle teach you a lesson? Will Islam hold you back? Will bayān be of any use to you?

B. Are you not those whom I met [in battle] at al-Ahwāz, where you employed trickery and attempted perfidy and came together to perform unbelief (kufr). You thought that God would abandon his religion and caliphate (khilāfa). I caught sight of you as you were looking for refuge amongst each other, quickly being defeated. Then the battle of al-Zāwiya, what a battle it was! You found a failure in it, disputed among each other, and withdrew, God abandoned you, and your master withdrew too. You turned back to your home like stray camels, like camels longing for their homelands and all the while no one was inquiring about his brother, the old man did not wait for his sons, when arms stung you and lances broke you. Then came the battle of Dayr al-Jamājīm, and what a battle it was! It contained many clashes and great combats, in which heads were swept from their necks and friend forgotten by friend.

C. O People of Iraq! People with whom disbelief and immorality, deceit and disloyalty, and whims [appear in recurring cycles]. If I send you to the frontiers (thughūr) you take from the spoil and betray me. If I make you feel safe, you start spreading false rumors. And if you are afraid, you become hypocrites. You do not remember a good deed and are not thankful for a benefaction. Whenever a perfidious person carried you away, a seducer misled you, a rebel incited you, an oppressor asked you for support, a debaucher asked you for help—did you not follow him and offer him refuge? Did you not support him and honor him? People of Iraq! Whenever a troublemaker made troubles, a raven croaked, an ass brayed, did you not become his followers and supporters? People of Iraq! Did religious exhortations (mawā’iz) not hold you back, or great events not restrain you?

D. Then he turned to the people of Syria and said: O People of Syria! I am to you as an ostrich, protecting his chicks, cleaning them of mud, removing stones from them, and sheltering them from rain, protecting them from fog, guarding them from wolves. O People of Syria! You are our protection and garment, you are our military equipment and boots.

Then he turned to the people of Syria as they were gathered under the pulpit and said:

E. O People of Syria! I am to you as an ostrich, protecting his chicks, cleaning them of mud, removing stones from them, and sheltering them from rain, protecting them from
flies, guarding them from wolves. O People of Syria! You are the protection and the garment, you are the military equipment and the boots.

[al-Jāḥiz, Bayān]

4.6.2.3. Analysis of “After Dayr al-Jamājim”

4.6.2.3.1. Paragraph A

As we can see al-Ḥajjāj first attacks the Iraqis on religious grounds and accuses them of being allied with Satan, the cause of their perennial dissension (fitna). Al-Ḥajjāj also presents himself as a man knowledgeable in religious matters and attacks the Iraqis for their ignorance. In “The Decadence in Basra” (8), for example, al-Ḥajjāj criticizes the Basrans’ lack of religious knowledge, their negligence in reading the Qur’ān, and reminds them of the rewards of Paradise and the torments of Hell. At the end of the paragraph, al-Ḥajjāj depicts the Iraqis as an obstinate people who are beyond all help; they refuse to learn lessons from lost battles, religious instruction, and—most important of all—from al-Ḥajjāj’s moralizing speeches. This is a rare metatextual comment on the power of oratory, which appears in al-Ḥajjāj’s scheme to have a religious and moral didactic function. At the end of his address to the Iraqis (D) he despairingly declares: “People of Iraq! Why did religious exhortations (mawāʿiẓ) not hold you back and great events not restrain you?” Thus, al-Ḥajjāj views speech-making as a means of inviting his audience to reflect on life experiences (viz., failed uprisings and lost battles) and religious teachings.

4.6.2.3.2. Paragraph B

In this passage al-Ḥajjāj speaks of the Iraqis’ defeat at the battles of Zāwiya and Dayr al-Jamājim during the revolt. This functions in the first place to humiliate and diminish his
opponents. He also uses this technique elsewhere. Most creatively in “Takbîr at the market,” (3) the governor calls his subjects “those who allow others to walk all over them as if they were mushrooms in the plain (wa al-faq’ bi-al-qarqar).” In this speech, specifically, al-Ḥajjāj’s describing the rebels’ cowardice in battle when the tide was turned against them and providing details of their final defeat has a further function. He brings it back their defeat once again and promulgates, performs his victory in speech.

4.6.2.3.3. Paragraph C

This paragraph reiterates and the wickedness of the Iraqis, “people with whom disbelief and immorality, deceit and disloyalty, and whims return in cycles.” The focus here is the Iraqis’ unruliness. Al-Ḥajjāj remarks that regardless of how he treats them, they insist upon rebellion: they betray him when he sends them the frontiers (thughūr) and spreads rumors when spared.

The first theme of spreading rumors and their suppression recurs throughout his speeches. Rumors are a powerful political tool. The lynching of a hated bishop by the urban mobs of 4th century Alexandria instigated by rumors about the death of the emperor can serve as an example.135 In our context, al-Ḥajjāj proclaims also in another speech, “Medicine in Basra” (4):

For him whom whose secret thoughts have become sick, al-Ḥajjāj’s punishment shall be the cure. And he whom sin has laid down, al-Ḥajjāj’s firmness shall set upright. He who does not have enough vigor, destruction shall not turn away from him. He whose mouth spoke too quickly (man sabaqathu bādiratu fammihi), the blood of his body shall quickly be spilled.

[Al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-arab]

In other words, one’s seditious thoughts as well as one’s words are punishable. This theme also occurs in “Funeral speech for ‘Abd al-Malik” (11), in which al-Ḥajjāj warns the Iraqis against expressing such thoughts:

Beware of me and beware you, for whoever speaks, we shall kill him and whoever is quiet, shall die from his disease, out of grief.

The second theme of sending troops to the frontiers also appears in “Hatred for Iraqis” (9). Al-Ḥajjāj claims that it is the best medicine for the disease of the Iraqis, by which he means their dissension.

O People of Iraq! I have found no better medicine for your disease than military raids and expeditions (al-maghāzī wa-al-buʿūth), if it were not for the sweetness of the night of coming back and the happiness of return, for it is followed by comfort.

Thus, al-Ḥajjāj viewed stationing Iraqi troops to the distant frontiers as a means of preventing them from rebellion. This theme also calls to mind the problem of tajmīr al-buʿūth, the practice of quartering soldiers on distant frontiers for a long time, which is a common motif in narratives about the Umayyad period and in Umayyad poetry and is especially connected with al-Ḥajjāj’s rule (see Chapter 1).

The general theme of disobedience is further expounded in “Decadence in Basra” (8). Here, the governor claims to know more about their propensity to rebel than “an veterinarian knows about a horse.” Yet this familiarity is far from affectionate, and one gets the sense from the “Funeral speech” of a man who has only reluctantly accepted the task of pacifying the Iraqis.136 We encounter a similar sentiment in “Hatred of Iraqis,” in which he states: “Were it not for my desire to carry out the orders of the Commander of the Believers, I would not have exposed myself to the sufferings you cause me.”

136 I refer to al-Ḥajjāj’s words: “Despite my familiarity with you, if I knew someone who could keep a tighter rein on you, or who knew you better, I would not be doing so myself.”
In fact, hatred towards his Iraqi subjects manifests itself in most of al-Ḥajjāj’s political speeches. In “Ḥajj” (12) al-Ḥajjāj declares that whereas the Prophet ordered his Companions to tolerate any wrong-doing by the Anṣār, he had ordered his son to show no such indulgence to the Iraqis. Al-Ḥajjāj also states that he has no desire or expectation to receive the good wishes of the Iraqis before departing on ḥajj. In “Hatred for the Iraqis” he declares: “I want to see neither happiness nor comfort from you. For I only see you detesting my words, and, by God, do I loath seeing your faces.” Perhaps the most coherent string of threats comes from “Medicine in Basra” (4), which, once again, likens to dissent to disease:

People, whoever among you suffers from sickness, I have a medicine for him. Whoever’s appointed time has become too far off, I will expedite it. Whoever’s head has become too heavy for him, I will lift his burden. Whoever’s past has become too distant from him, I will cut short the remainder of his years. Satan has his temptation, while the sulṭān has his sword.

4.6.2.3.4. Paragraph D

The last paragraph, in which al-Ḥajjāj briefly addresses the Syrians, stands in stark contrast to the rest of the speech. Instead of disease and medicine, al-Ḥajjāj speaks of protection and cooperation. He compares himself to “a male ostrich, protecting his chicks,” while the Syrians are portrayed as protectors of the empire. In “Kufans vs. Syrians” (6) he addresses the Syrians with the following words:

Your wives are sweeter than musk, your sons are closer to my heart that my own son. You are precisely as a man from Banū ǩubyān said:

If you attempt to harm the tribe of Asad,
    Then I will not know you,
For they are the armor and shield

137 Ṭayf would usually mean phantom but here it is in connection with shayṭān which invokes a Qur’ānic verse in which the meaning is closer to temptation/whispering of evil thoughts. Thought the verse uses ṭāʾ if, some variant readings of it use ṭayf: “Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil (ṯāʾ if) from satan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance, when lo! they see (aright)!” (Q 7:201)
That I wore to the battle of al-Nasār when they were protecting me.

Then he said:

Nay, you, people of Syria, are as when God be praised said: “Already has Our Word been passed before (this) to Our Servants sent (by Us). That they would certainly be assisted. And that Our forces— they surely must conquer.” (Q 37:171-173)

[Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd,Sharh]

This speech and other speeches of al-Ḥajjāj thus reflect a two-fold rhetoric towards his subjects. On the one hand, the Syrians are idealized and praised, while on the other the Iraqis are vilified and insulted. This rhetoric reflects the elite position that the Syrian troops enjoyed in Iraq, which some scholars have noted, may have contributed to the undermining of the Umayyad rule. Though Arabs and Muslims, the Iraqis are relegated to the position of second class citizens vis-à-vis the Syrians, a situation which is further exacerbated after the defeat of the great rebellion of Iraqi noblemen led by Ibn al-Ashʿath. The boundaries between the original Arab-Muslim conquerors and the conquered populace blur, and the Iraqis, as seen al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches, seem to have fallen to the category of the “conquered,” threatened and insulted by their Hijazi governor and kept in check by the Syrian troops.

Al-Ḥajjāj’s rhetoric regarding his subjects shows, in short, that in the Umayyad period in general and in Umayyad Iraq in particular, one cannot simply talk about Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs. Already in the inaugural khutba we witnessed al-Ḥajjāj imposing a hierarchy, on whose top stood the muhājir, the Islamic conqueror, with Arab-Muslim urban civilians and Bedouins below him, and non-Arabs at the bottom. However, the above excerpts show that even the elite category of the muhājir was not safe.

138 Paul Cobb has considered the dissonance between universalist-theocratic and regional ideologies—so entrenched in al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches—to have caused the collapse of the Umayyad empire. For precision, he calls it Marwānid. See Cobb, “The Empire in Syria, 705-763,” 226-227. Shaban sees as the greatest weakness of the ‘Abd al-Malik-al-Ḥajjāj system the excessive reliance of wars of conquest and ignoring the ongoing processes of assimilation. Syrians were precisely the force of conquests. Shaban, Islamic History. 121.
The Iraqi soldiers, technically *muhājirūn*, are clearly not included among the elite. Al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory thus testifies to strong regional identities and a rift between the Iraqis and Syrians. It is also worth mentioning an element of Umayyad identity that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches do not mention: the Qays-Yaman factional division, considered to be a prominent feature of the rule of Ṭāʾ Abīd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj.¹³⁹

From a performative perspective, the *khutba* “After Dayr al-Jamājim” leads the community through a transition from war to peace. However, as other types of rhetoric failed (e.g., the invitation to be part of the *muhājir* society exemplified by the Inaugural *khutba*), the main strategy used here is intimidation of the Iraqi rebels and further reinforcing of hierarchies based on regional belongings. In the *khutba* al-Ḥajjāj also reflects on his failure to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqis and blames this oratorical failure on their moral and religious depravity.

**4.6.3. The Voice of Iraq’s Governor: Al-Ḥajjāj’s Claims to Legitimacy in Context**

This last section has two parts; the first one organizes al-Ḥajjāj’s legitimating rhetoric and the second one contrasts his rhetoric with that of other early Islamic figures. The figures chosen for this comparison are the early caliphs, the caliph Ṭāʾ Abīd al-Malik; al-Ḥajjāj’s eloquent Khārijite enemy Qaṭarī b. al-Fujā’a; and Ṭāʾ Umar II, often depicted by the sources as al-Ḥajjāj’s opposite. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to deal with the issue of the authenticity of the speeches of these other figures. This comparison serves an exercise

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¹³⁹ Shaban notes that the conflict between Yaman and Qays-Muḍar existed only in the “age of al-Ḥajjāj,” as he calls this period (chapter 6). Shaban, *Islamic History*, 120.
that will help us to see both how the voice of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches is unique and how it fits within the larger corpus ascribed to early Islamic figures.

4.6.3.1. Al-Ḥajjāj’s claims to legitimacy

Al-Ḥajjāj’s claim to legitimacy and his rhetorical strategies, as found in his oratory can be divided into three main clusters of arguments: (1) religious authority (2) relationship to caliph (3) imposing a social hierarchy. We will also note that the speeches, in some instances, bear witness not only to his claims but also to (4) the counterclaims of his opponents.

4.6.3.1.1. Religious authority

Al-Ḥajjāj claimed a religious authority for his rule, in the line with the common practice of the time, which can be observed especially in poetry. During the same period, al-Akḥṭal lauded ʿAbd al-Malik as:

\[
\begin{align*}
He \ who \ wades \ into \ the \ deep \ of \ battle \\
Auspicious \ his \ augury \\
The \ Caliph \ of \ God \\
Through \ whom \ men \ pray \ for \ rain. \\
[...]
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
In \ him \ the \ common \ weal \ resides, \\
And \ after \ his \ assurance \\
No \ peril \ can \ seduce \ him \\
From \ his \ pledge.^{140}
\end{align*}
\]

In a similar fashion, we have seen in Chapter 2 Jarīr depicting al-Ḥajjāj as praying to God like past prophets who answers his prayers:

\[
\begin{align*}
Al-Ḥajjāj \ prayed \ in \ the \ way \ of \ Noah \\
He \ chanted \ it \ to \ the \ Lord \ of \ heavenly \ ladders \ who \ answered
\end{align*}
\]

\[^{140}\text{S. Stetkevych,} \ Poetics \ of \ Islamic \ Legitimacy, \ 91.\]
…and as the source of life:

    you are light, rain and preservation
    Vegetation and saliva to the one who desires your dew\textsuperscript{141}

Fred Donner identified four styles of legitimation among the early community of believers: pious, genealogical, theocratic and historicizing (i.e. history writing as a legitimizing activity).\textsuperscript{142} Given his low origins, al-Ḥajjāj could hardly use genealogical arguments to buttress his authority, and his speeches show that he indeed did not. They cannot reveal to what extent he promoted history writing as part of his legitimizing efforts.\textsuperscript{143} And indeed as the previous section showed, al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches mainly display his engagement in different forms of theocratic and pious rhetoric.

We saw that the body of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches provides a coherent rhetoric of theocratic rule with the conception of obedience as a religious duty at its core. The governor in his speeches establishes a connection between himself, the rāshidūn caliphs, and the prophets. He portrays himself to be superior in religious knowledge—the Qurʾān and theology—to his audience and with this assumption attacks the legacy of Ibn Masʿūd, the main religious and moral authority of Kufa. In the framework of obedience as a religious duty, an act of disobedience translates into a breach of the covenant with God and removal from the community of believers. Through these claims al-Ḥajjāj constructs his and Umayyad Islamic legitimacy. Al-Ḥajjāj repeatedly threatens his subjects with punishment for any rebellious deeds and words. This does not only show the centrality of obedience in

\textsuperscript{141} See 4.2.2.2.
\textsuperscript{142} Donner, Narratives, 98-122.
\textsuperscript{143} For a description of the situation of history writing under the Umayyads see Borrut, Entre mémoire et pouvoir, 33-60.
his conception of rule, but also reflects on the importance of speech (i.e., propaganda) in this unstable period.  

The Abbasids, we said, construed the image of the Umayyads as a “secular” political institution (\textit{mulk}), which usurped the religious caliphate of the first caliphs. This image does not correspond to their contemporary self-representation as al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory shows. And as we saw, it is much in tune with Crone’s and Hinds’s description of the early caliphate and its claim to religious authority. We also saw that they very much resemble the rhetoric that Wadād al-Qāḍī expounded in her analysis of ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib’s letters. These semi-authentic documents blur clear distinctions between the caliphs and prophets closer, depicting the obedience to the caliphs as the cornerstone of religion, fashioning the caliphs as the guarantors of world order, and turning the disobedient into enemies of God. While Crone and Hinds argue that this theocratic conception of rule—with the caliphs as direct deputies of God (not through Muḥammad)—was characteristic for the caliphate from its start, al-Qāḍī considers it late Umayyad. We have numismatic

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{144} For the discussion of the spread of hadiths for political purposes see Junyboll, \textit{Muslim Tradition}. Juynboll cites on p. 13 an extremely interesting account by al-Madāʾīnī (in Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd’s \textit{Sharḥ}) about Muʾāwiyā’s ways of broadcasting propaganda, which says among other things: “The people went out of their way in relating reports in this vein until they spoke thereof in glowing terms from the pulpits. The teachers in the schools were instructed to teach their young pupils a vast quantity of these until they related them and studied them just as they studied the Qurʾān and until they taught these to their daughters, wives and servants. God knows how long they persisted in this.”
\bibitem{145} ‘Abd Hamīd worked in the chancery for the caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 105-125/723-742) and Marwān b. Muḥammad (127-132,744-750).
\bibitem{146} The letters have been preserved in later literary sources but Wadad al-Qāḍī argued for their authenticity in al-Qāḍī, “Early Islamic State Letters.”
\bibitem{147} The letters’ main arguments for Umayyad legitimacy are: By God’s choice the caliph’s inherited prophethood; the caliph is God’s caliph (\textit{khalīfat allāh}) in the same way as the Prophet was God’s prophet (\textit{nabīy allāh}); Obedience is the cornerstone of religion, for without it world order would fall apart. Disobedience to God and God’s caliphs thus amounts not only to a rebellion against religion but also against the world order, and the disobedient are moved by Devil. Obedience thus becomes the main criterion in categorizing people, and the disobedient Muslims are, in effect, treated as non-Muslims See the analysis of the letters of ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib. Al-Qāḍī, “The Religious Foundation of Late Umayyad Ideology and Practice.”
\bibitem{148} Crone and Hinds, \textit{God’s Caliph}, 42, 49.
\end{thebibliography}
evidence that confirms that in al-Ḥajjāj’s time the absolute conception of religious power spread to the furthest corners of the Empire. Even earlier the eloquent Qurashi nobleman 'Amr b. Sa'id al-Ashdaq (d. 69/689), whom we encountered in Chapter 1 and who rebelled against 'Abd al-Malik, mocks precisely this rhetoric with which the Quraysh (i.e. the Umayyads) promise Heaven for obedience. His speech hints that this was the usual way in which the Umayyads legitimized their power already in the time before al-Ḥajjāj. Abū al-'Atāhiya’s verses from the early Islamic period confirm that obedience to the caliph has become part of Islamic faith. Yet, as we will see below other early Islamic figures have speeches ascribed to them that argue directly against this theocratic rhetoric of caliphs as absolute rulers and direct representatives of God on earth.

The pious style of legitimation noted in *khutab wa ʿ ziya* by al-Ḥajjāj consists in a call for piety, curbing desire, and emphasis on the afterlife. These exhortations to moderate asceticism serve to paint the leader as a pious figure, an exemplary believer, and in this way cement his religious legitimacy. Though these sermons are a genre of their own, many of al-Ḥajjāj’s political speeches also contain sections of *wa ʿ zi*. This legitimizing technique, in contrast to the first one, was common to all those who vied for any type of authority in

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149 Stuart D. Sears and Hodge Mehdi Malek discuss a drachm of an emir of Sijistan during the rebellion of Ibn al-Ash’ath whose obverse reads: “God is the guardian of 'Abdallāh b. ʿĀmir.” Sears and Malek, “The Drachms of ʿAbdallāh b. ʿĀmir al-Mujāshī.”

150 He was also an Umayyad.

151 Al-Ṭabarī narrates that when 'Abd al-Malik departed to Iraq to fight Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr, 'Amr reminded the caliph that his father Marwān promised the caliphate to him, 'Amr, after 'Abd al-Malik’s death. But 'Abd al-Malik gave him no response and so 'Amr returned to Damascus, took control over the city destroyed the house of 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Umm al-Ḥakam, ascended the pulpit at said: “No one from the Quraysh ever stood on this pulpit before me without asserting that his were a heaven and a hell, and that he would cause whoever obeyed him to enter the heaven, and whoever disobeyed him to enter the hell. But I tell you that heaven and hell are in the hand of God; nothing o that belongs to me, save that you have a claim to equal treatment and a good stipend from me.” Al-Ṭabarī and Fishbein, *History*, 21: 156, Ṣafwat, *Jamhara*, 2:218-219, nr. 212.

the early period of Islam and did not witness much change; rather it seemed to be the common discourse of most Muslims as well as non-Muslims, as we have noted earlier.

4.6.3.1.2. Relationship to caliph

Al-Ḥajjāj emphasized his relationship with the caliph. Throughout al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory the figure of the caliph is endowed with religious authority and associated with Qur’ānic prophets. Obedience to the caliph then turns to a religious obligation, for both the governor and his subjects. Stressing his relationship to the caliph formed a central piece of al-Ḥajjāj’s rhetoric of legitimacy and is particular to him, which may be ascribed to his low origins and lack of genealogical and religious symbolic capital. This line of argumentation resulted in later image of al-Ḥajjāj as a loyal servant to the caliphs, and was used as a target of ridicule against him.

4.6.3.1.3. Imposing a social hierarchy

Al-Ḥajjāj imposed a muhājir-centered hierarchy in Iraq. Al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches reflect a clear hierarchy either by directly projecting the muhājir, the Arab-Muslim conqueror as the ideal Muslim, or by denigrating other groups of the Iraqi conquest society—settled Arabs with an occupation, the Bedouins, and the Persians. One more group that appears in “Obedience” are the Persians. The Persians too are admonished as disobedient folk and, like the Bedouins in the same speech, mentioned only in the third person. Al-Ḥajjāj’s projection of a muhājir-centered hierarchy served to neutralize hierarchies based on noble ancestors and Islamic merit and perhaps also to invite all Arabs regardless of these criteria and tribal belonging to join the military aristocracy.
In practice, however, the speeches show that the subjects threatened are exclusively the Iraqis, who are assigned the inferior rank of secondary citizens, while the Syrians (ahl al-shâm) are addressed as the protected elite. The argument for their superior position is their loyalty to al-Ḥajjāj. The Iraqis, in contrast, are repeatedly described as the people of dissent and hypocrisy, the accusation of fitna looming over them. Earlier speeches suggest that the anti-Iraqi rhetoric was nothing novel or restricted solely to the Umayyads. Already ʿAlī and Ibn al-Zubayr in their speeches express their reservations towards the “treacherous Iraqi folk.”  

Al-Ḥajjāj however takes the theme of Iraqi treacherousness and transforms it into a sin against God, calling the Iraqis the “enemies of God” and accusing them of following Devil. In this way al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches display the power of regionalism and regional identities to which John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy have called attention.  

The Iraqis in these speeches occupy a liminal position between the Conquerors and the conquered. While the Iraqis—as Muslims and Arabs—should form part of the military elite, and while this is also what al-Ḥajjāj implies through his muhājir-centered rhetoric, they are at the same time the conquered people. Iraq had supported Ibn al-Zubayr and they thus came out of the war defeated and ruled by the man who defeated the leader they chose. During the Khārijite rebellion of Shabīb, al-Ḥajjāj introduced the Syrian troops to settle in Iraq and after the end of Ibn al-Ashʿath’s rebellion he built Wāṣīṭ to keep them separated from the Iraqi troops. A Thaqafite from Taʿif and a small Syrian elite effectively ruled Iraq

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153 The revered companion of ʿAlī, Ibn ʿAbbās, warns al-Ḥusayn against going to Iraq and claiming the caliphate because the Iraqis are ‘treacherous folk’ (gawm ghudur). Ibn al-Zubayr uses the same rhetoric, reinforced after the death of Ḥusayn. Ṣafwat, Jamhara, 2:35, nr. 27.
154 See “After Dayr al-Jamājim” and “Rumors,” in Appendix.
155 Haldon and Kennedy, “Regional Identities.”
and the rift between the two peoples, and the liminal position of the Iraqis on the threshold between the conquerors and the conquered is omnipresent in al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches.

4.6.3.1.4. The counterclaims of al-Ḥajjāj’s opponents

Finally, not only do al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches let us in on the ideological battles of the day as they also allow us to peek at the counternarratives of his opponents. While speeches, unlike disputations, are mainly one-directional speech performances, al-Ḥajjāj at times engages in a virtual dialogue when he replies to accusations leveled against him. The khutba have a dialogic quality. Perhaps the most interesting accusation to which al-Ḥajjāj reacts in his speeches is his alleged connection with magic.

In “Kufans vs. Syrians” (6) al-Ḥajjāj argues with the Kufans:

You claimed that I am a magician. God the Sublime said: “the magician thrives not” (Q 20:69). But I did thrive. You claimed that I know the Greatest Name (al-ism al-akbar). So why do you fight the one who knows while you are ignorant?

Al-Ḥajjāj is replying to their accusation of being a magician using two arguments, one based on the Qur’ān and one on common sense. 1. He cannot be a magician because the Quʾrān says that the magician does not thrive which implies that he does. 2. If he were a magician, as they claim, and knew the Supreme Name of God, then they should stop fighting him because he has esoteric knowledge, which renders him more powerful than they. The accusation that al-Ḥajjāj was a magician appears in other accounts as well, often related to al-Ḥajjāj’s alleged connection to the semi-legendary people of Thamūd mentioned in the Qurʾān as people who disobeyed God and were obliterated as God’s punishment. Al-Ḥajjāj’s tribe Thaqīf is sometimes thought to have been the descendants of Thamūd. In another khutba, al-Ḥajjāj refutes the same accusations with another Qurʾānic verse “When Our Decree issued, We saved Ṣāliḥ and those who believed with him.” (Q
11:66) He argues that, per this verse, if Thaqīf survived then they must have been only the good people of the tribe, even if they were the descendants of Thamūd. Accepting the premise of his opponents that he knows the Supreme Name of God he continues in his speech, noteworthy not only for its magical context but also from the performative aspect:

“God is too just to teach a Name of his Names to one of his enemies, for this enemy could then defeat His close friends (awliyāʾ) through it” [Then he flew into a white rage from his own words] “He rose up with great efforts (tahāmala) and leaned against the handrail of the pulpit (ʿalā rummānat al-minbar) and he smashed it. People started looking at each other while he was looking at them. And then he said: “ Enemies of God, what does this winking at each other mean? I challenge the auspicious gazelle, the spotted raven, and the shooting star.” Then he commanded people to fix the handrail and it was immediately fixed.156

This report shows al-Ḥajjāj rejecting the accusation of magic. At the same time, however, the report indicates that when al-Ḥajjāj became enraged his speech transformed into the diction of the kuhhān, the ancient diviners who were in the minds of people deeply connected with magic. They, like the Qurʾān in its early sūras swore by natural objects, which they considered signs of good or bad omen. Al-Ḥajjāj, in this anecdote, challenges these objects by which the kuhhān usually swore: the auspicious gazelle, spotted raven, and shooting star. It is noteworthy, that al-Ḥajjāj in his rejection of the accusation of magic, does not reject its existence. Rather, he claims that he is more powerful than the kuhhān’s magic; more powerful even, than fate itself (as something that can be revealed through the signs of good and bad omen). This speech fits into a larger discourse on al-Ḥajjāj and his connection with the Jāhilīya (see Chapter 3).

The reference to God’s Greatest Name is also noteworthy, as it was a belief belonging to the Umayyad period. We know, for example, that the Mughīrīya doctrine was

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based on the belief in the knowledge God’s Supreme Name.\textsuperscript{157} Though many count groups like Mughīrīya among the Shiite extremists (ghulāt), we may speculate that their views were not considered so extreme in their own time.\textsuperscript{158} Furthermore, al-Ḥajjāj was not the only one to have been accused of being a magician. The same was said about al-Mukhtar al-Thaqafi, who led a Kufan anti-Umayyad rebellion (66-67/685-687) to avenge the death of Ḥusayn at Karbalā (61/680). Like al-Ḥajjāj, al-Mukhtar was portrayed as a kāhin. Al-Mukhtar combined his ecstatic utterances in saj’ foretelling his victory with the veneration of a holy object—‘Ali’s chair.\textsuperscript{159} The two Thaqafites, al-Ḥajjāj and al-Mukhtar, moreover, became connected in popular memory, as some sources hint. Apocalyptic hadīth and poetry tells us that the Prophet predicted their arrival long time before they were born, called them either “two liars,” or a “liar” (for al-Mukhtar) and a “destroyer,” mubīr (for al-Ḥajjāj) from Thaqīf.\textsuperscript{160} Equating the two is surprising despite their common Thaqafite origins; for one was a dangerous rebel against the Umayyads and the other their most powerful representative. Could it be that the accusation of magical practices and kahana created this link between the two in Islamic memory? The Umayyad period was an enchanted time in which words and objects—a gazelle, raven, shooting star, relic and God’s name—had a

\textsuperscript{157} Madelung, “Mughīriyya,” EI2.

\textsuperscript{158} Sean Anthony has argued that an examination of the Sabaʾiya, the followers of ‘Abdallāh b. Sabaʾ shows that rather than seeing this group as Shiite extremists, we should see them as an early manifestation of Shiism, which was a messianistic and apocalyptic movement from its beginnings. Anthony, The Caliph and the Heretic.

\textsuperscript{159} Anthony, Caliph and Heretic, 261ff, esp.272.

\textsuperscript{160} “Indeed two liars shall come from Thaqīf, one of them harsher than the other.” Ibn ’Asākir records seven different isnāds to this hadīth. Ibn ’Asākir, Tārīkh, 121-122. A’shā Hamdān incorporated this hadīth into his poetry. Al-Īṣfahānī, Aghānī, 6:331. Al-Ṭabarī notes that A’shā walking in front of al-A’shath when he rebelled, reciting rajaz and mentioning the story of the two liars, and calling al-Ḥajjāj a ‘devilish infidel,’ and ‘Satan’s friend:’ “Their past liar and a second one. May my Lord give power to Hamdān over Thaqīf/For a day until nighttime, so consoling us for what took place [before]. We betook ourselves to the devilish infidel/[…] So tell al-Ḥajjāj, Satan’s friend, [if he can]/Stand steady against Madhḥij and Hamdān, that they will give him to drink from the goblet of poison/And will send him off to the villages of Ibn Marwān. Al-Ṭabarī and Hinds, History, 7.
profound symbolic significance. The accusation of magic then was an effective weapon aimed at de-legitimization of both men during or after their time.

This chapter does not paint an exhaustive picture of what al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches can offer us; it focused, rather, on their potential to shed light primarily on al-Ḥajjāj’s lines of argumentation as ruler sanctioned by God, on the details of his rhetoric of power, his conception of the rule, and the subjects, and their relationship. The speeches fully espouse a pious rhetoric and a specific type of theocratic rhetoric as means of legitimization of power. This is understandable as these were the two only ways available to him, given his unremarkable origins. The speeches also show the main techniques of persuasion: claiming religious authority for himself, emphasizing his relationship to the caliph, and imposing a muhājir-centered rhetoric. Secondarily, the speeches also reflect the reality of Umayyad Iraq, its conquest society, its pangs and toils, and also on the counternarratives of the subdued.

4.6.3.2. Al-Ḥajjāj and other Islamic speakers

4.6.3.2.1. Al-Ḥajjāj vs. early caliphs

In contrast to al-Ḥajjāj, the speeches of the early caliphs are distinguished by what I term “a rhetoric of equality” though we can observe a gradual tendency to absolutism. The most famous among them remains Abū Bakr’s speech, which resonates among Arabs even today. It is no coincidence that in 2014 Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the leader of ISIS/Dā`ish

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161 By “rhetoric of equality” I refer to the principles to which Abū Bakr’s speeches ascribe. It is worth reminding that we are talking here about rhetorical strategies, ways of persuasion, and forms of legitimation. I am, thus, in no way making any judgements about the politicians actual ways of conduct and beliefs.
included *verbatim* in his first sermon as so-called caliph the first half of the inaugural *khuṭba* of the original Abū Bakr.\(^{162}\)

Men, I have been placed in command over you, though I am not the most worthy of you. So if you see me acting rightly, assist me; and if you see me acting vainly, correct me. Obey me so longs as I obey God in your concerns; but if I disobey Him, no obedience is due to me from you. The strongest of you in my regard is the weakest—until I can insure justice for him; the weakest of you in my regard is the strongest—until I can exact justice from him. This is my declaration of policy, and I ask God’s pardon for myself and you.\(^{163}\)

This is not a proclamation of absolute power. Abū Bakr promulgates the principle of equality between him and his audience: He is not better than they, Abū Bakr humbly notes and then proclaims that people are only bound by obedience to him only *as long as* he obeys God.\(^{164}\) In another version the first caliph says: “I am a follower and not an innovator,” reflecting on his limited legislative power.\(^{165}\) Already in Ṭā’ār ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s speech we can detect a slight turn towards aggrandizing the caliphal figure: The second caliph calls himself the most suitable candidate for the office; yet, he still maintains that he was elected by the people.\(^{166}\) Ṭā’ār’s inauguration speech offers the most interesting

\(^{162}\) It is no coincidence that in 2014 Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the leader of ISIS/Dāʿish included in his first sermon as so-called caliph the first half of the inaugural *khuṭba* of the original Abū Bakr, word by word: “I have been placed in command over you, though I am not the most worthy of you. So if you see me acting rightly, assist me; and if you see me acting vainly, correct me. Obey me so longs as I obey God in your concerns; but if I disobey Him, no obedience is due to me from you. The strongest of you in my regard is the weakest—until I can insure justice for him; the weakest of you in my regard is the strongest—until I can exact justice from him. This is my declaration of policy, and I ask God’s pardon for myself and you.” See Beeston, “Parallelism,” 134-146.


\(^{164}\) This is the text Abū Bakr’s *khuṭba* in Beeston’s translation:

“Men, I have been placed in command over you, though I am not the most worthy of you. So if you see me acting rightly, assist me; and if you see me acting vainly, correct me. Obey me so longs as I obey God in your concerns; but if I disobey Him, no obedience is due to me from you. The most potent of you in my regard is the weakest—until I can insure justice for him; the weakest of you in my regard is the strongest—until I can exact justice from him. This is my declaration of policy, and I ask God’s pardon for myself and you.” See Beeston, “Parallelism,” 134-146.

\(^{165}\) Ṭā’ār muttabiʿ wa-lastu bi-mubtadiʿ. In other words, he says that he does not have a religious and lawgiving authority. Ṣafwat, *Jamhara*, 1: 68, nr. 64.

\(^{166}\) “I was appointed over you. And if it were not for the hope that I will be the best of you for you, the strongest of you over you, and the most the most skilled of you for you important affairs, I would have not been appointed by you.” Ṣafwat, *Jamhara*, 1:80, nr. 79.
shift. While it employs Abū Bakr’s ‘follower not innovator’ formula, it somewhat contradicts this principle in the following line, when it has ʿUthmān saying: “In addition to following the Book of God and the *sunna* of the Prophet, I have [...] to follow those who were before me [i.e. Abū Bakr and ʿUmar] in what you agreed upon and the laws you established (*ittibāʿ man kāna qablī fimā ijtamaʿ tum ʿalayh wa-sannantum*) and to establish laws of good people in which you did not reach agreement (*sann sunnat ahl al-khayr fīmā lam tasunnū ʿan al-malaʿ*) [...].”

167 This *khuṭba* shows ʿUthmān claiming a right to establish new laws in matters that the *umma* had not agreed upon. The speeches of the early caliphs indicate a slow movement towards caliphal law (i.e., law formulated by caliphs) and theocratic rule, which crystalizes in al-Ḥajjāj’s equating the figure of rulers, caliphs, and prophets. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, the caliph who is often portrayed as the pious antithesis of al-Ḥajjāj, appears to return to the rhetoric of the early caliphs (see below).

4.6.3.2.2. Al-Ḥajjāj vs. his contemporaries

ʿAbd al-Malik. While the rhetoric of ʿAbd al-Malik speeches is similar to al-Ḥajjāj’s; ʿAbd al-Malik’s speeches are fewer, less elaborate, and generally lacking narratives that purport

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- Ṣafwat, Jamhara, 1:101, nr. 103.
- It is noteworthy ʿUthmān addresses his audience as the people who established the laws: “to follow who was before me [=the caliphs] in what you agreed upon and the laws you established” which signals that he is directly addressing of the audience. ʿUthmān directs the speech to the audience and promises to respect what these very people standing in front of him established as law. In any case, it seems that it is through his office that new laws are established even though it is the people who agree upon it.
- ʿUmar is portrayed to speak directly against the idea of caliphal law and returning the authority back to the Prophet (“What God made permitted through the tongue of his Prophet will be permitted (*ḥalāl*) until the Day of Judgment. And what God prohibited through the tongue of his Prophet will be forbidden (*ḥarām*) until the day of Judgment.”) Since ʿUmar, like al-Ḥajjāj, turned into a semi-legendary pious figure, it is easy to imagine that the rhetoric of *rāshidūn* caliphs could be easily ascribed to him later. And indeed, most of his speeches are pious. Those who touch upon some aspects of rule used some expressions from different versions of Abū Bakr’s inauguration *khuṭba* (e.g. “I am not the best among you,” *anā lastu bi-khayrikum*, and “I am not an innovator,” *lastu bi-mubtadiʿ in*). Perhaps, by his period, some formulas from the early speeches had attained a legitimizing authority and were turned into formulas. In any case, ʿUmar’s speeches are very impersonal, which I will discuss below.

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to record their performance. A few speeches show a more sophisticated rhetoric than straightforward admonition, such as the deployment of parables, as we have observed with al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches.\footnote{A speech that he gave when he went on hajj to Mecca is an example. ’Abd al-Malik uses a parable of a snake and two brothers. Two brothers see a snake coming out every night with a dirham. One suggests that they kill the snake and take his treasure the other is afraid of it. When the first brother attacks the snake, it kills him. The other attempts to make a truce with the snake but the snake refuses because he knows that the man cannot have good intentions with him, since he remembers the death of his brother and the snake cannot have good intentions since he remembers the wound that his brother caused him. 

*Jamhara*, 184, nr.167.} In a speech in which ’Abd al-Malik defines himself against ’Uthmān, “the oppressed caliph,” Mu‘āwiya, “the hypocrite caliph,” and Yazīd, “the weak-minded caliph,” he shows less reverence for previous caliphs than al-Ḥajjāj would. Overall ’Abd al-Malik applies the same rhetoric as al-Ḥajjāj, accusing his subjects of sin and transgression and threatening them with punishment,\footnote{“As long as your sins increase, our punishment will increase too, until we—you and us—gather by the sword.” In Šafwat, *Jamhara*, 181, nr. 164} calling people to stay on the path of right guidance (hudā), and admonishing them against creating discord among Muslims.\footnote{Al-Qālī, Amālī, in Šafwat, *Jamhara*, 183, nr. 166.} Like most Umayyads he also invokes the killing of ’Uthmān, for example in his speech against the Qurayhs of Mecca.\footnote{’Abd al-Malik reportedly delivered this address during a hajj. “People of Quraysh, ’Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ruled with you and he was rough and harsh on you, so you listened and obeyed him. Then ’Uthmān ruled over you and he was lenient, so you showed hostility to him, and killed him. So we send Muslim [b. ’Uqba al-Murrī] against you at the battle of al-Ḥurra, and we killed many of you. We know, men of Quraysh, that you do not like us at all because you remember the battle of al-Ḥurra and we do not like you at all because we remember the killing of ’Uthmān.” Al-Mas‘ūdī, Murūj, *Jamhara*, 184-185, nr. 167.} Concerning al-Ḥajjāj, ’Abd al-Malik in his waṣīya speech advises his sons to honor the governor, because he prepared the rule for them.\footnote{Fa-innahu al-ladhī waṭṭa’ a lakum hādhā al-amr. Al-Mas‘ūdī, Murūj, in Šafwat, *Jamhara* 188, nr. 172.}

Similarly to al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches, the awareness of the political power of the spoken word is made explicit in ’Abd al-Malik’s speeches. He—like al-Ḥajjāj—complains that people, in this case the Medinans, cannot be rectified through a religious exhortation.
At the same time he is wary of the propaganda against him and threatens anyone who would not only act but also speak up against him with sword. Elsewhere he says: “Beware of speech of a speaker, of the lies of an ignorant man. For if it comes between you and me that I hear a rumor (naghwa), then I will act with the determination of a sharpened sword and attack with the rage of a seeker of blood vengeance.”

Qaṭarī b. al-Fujā’a. Qaṭarī, one of the Khārijite leaders, was one of al-Ḥajjāj’s fiercest enemies and is at the same time considered as one of the greatest orators of the Umayyad period. Al-Jāḥiẓ records an exchange of letters between the two. Al-Ḥajjāj first accuses Qaṭarī of heresy, because he disobeyed God and those in charge of his affairs (wulāt amrih) and calls him an illiterate uncivilized Bedouin (a’rābī jilf ummī). This echoes al-Ḥajjāj’s general distaste for the Bedouins, which we have observed on many other occasions. Qaṭarī rejoins with the usual anti-Ḥajjāj rhetoric when he calls the him Ibn Umm al-Ḥajjāj, attributing him to his mother and denying him any known paternity. After that Qaṭarī depicts the governor as a sinner and associates him with the Satan, images that we are familiar with from Ibn ʿAsākir’s later compilation of akhār about him: “You are lost by nature, haughty in your manners, weak in self-confidence. You do not know God nor are you afraid of your sin. You renounced God and Satan is your companion (qarīn).” Qaṭarī also sarcastically reminds al-Ḥajjāj that “fighting heroes is not the same thing as delivering a speech” (muqāraʿat al-ḥtāl laysa ka-taṣdīr al-maqāl), thereby indirectly recognizing his oratorical skills.

175 “I think that even after hearing a maw’īza only your evilness will increase.” Al-Qālī, Amālī in Jamhara, 183, nr. 166.
176 “Whoever said something with his head, we shall reply to him with our sword.” Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, Ḥaqīqat, in Ṣafwat, Jamhara, 180-181, nr. 163.
177 Ṣafwat, Jamhara, 182, nr. 165.
178 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 2:311.
ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. The rhetoric of a number of ʿUmar II’s khūṭab clearly contrasts with that of al-Ḥajjāj further strengthening the stark contrast between the two men that the sources construct. That said, many of the speeches ascribed to ʿUmar II are generic pious exhortation, calling people to do right and avoid sins, and heed the afterlife. They warn of becoming captive in the ropes of its [this life’s] affairs and fates. Even some of his inaugural speeches fall in the category of the waʿẓ, as they are recorded in ʿIqd, Murūj or al-Āmālī.

While these sources contain little comments on the speeches’ circumstances, when they do they deliver a very different image of the performance from what we have seen in al-Ḥajjāj’s inaugural speech. One of them is a report of a guard of the caliph, who used to be the guard of the previous caliphs. While the guards used to always greet the previous caliph first, when ʿUmar became caliph he greeted them first, explaining that they are in a group and he is only one. The guard also describes ʿUmar’s clothing—linen shirt, and a turban clinging to his cap (qalansuwa)—conspicuously similar to the garments of pious men and ascetics. When ʿUmar II spoke about the rich and the poor, his speech was so refined that all the people cried. When a man admiringly comments on the power of his words, ʿUmar II rejects his praise. This narrative and the speech participate in constructing the aura of piety and humility around the caliph.

The clearest contrast with al-Ḥajjāj’s rhetoric however appears in the few examples of ʿUmar II’s political khūṭab, in which he embraces the “rhetoric of equality” noted with the early caliphs. In one speech, for example, ʿUmar is portrayed as having reservations

179 ʿIqd in Jamhara, 2:198, nr. 192.
with regard to accepting the *khilāfa* and as asking people for his confirmation, which they gladly gave him. Elsewhere, he speaks directly against the idea of caliphal law:

> What God made permitted through the tongue of his Prophet will be permitted (*ḥalāl*) until the Day of Judgment. And what God prohibited through the tongue of his Prophet will be forbidden (*ḥarām*) until the day of Judgment. I am not a judge but the executor of God [’s will] and I am not an innovator. There is no one who should be obeyed in the rebellion of God the Blessed and Sublime. Surely, I am not the best among you (*innī lastū bi-khayrikum*), but I am one among you, except that God made me carry the heaviest burden. People, I am the best among worshippers of God in terms of performing religious duties (*farāʾid*) and avoiding forbidden acts (*mahārim*). This is what I say (*aqūlu qawī hādhā*).

This *khutbah* borrows some expressions from Abū Bakr’s inauguration *khutba*, namely “I am not the best among you (*anā lastū bi-khayrikum*) and from its other version “I am not an innovator” (*lastū bi-mubtadiʾin*). As Borrut has discussed ‘Umar II was seen as the new ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Through this speech, the sources symbolically associate ‘Umar II with the early caliphs.

### 4.7. Conclusion

This chapter examined how al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, formerly a schoolmaster of lowly origins, justified and legitimimized his rule over the half of the Umayyad empire through his oratory. We saw that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches reflect his efforts as a governor to portray himself as divinely-appointed ruler and to portray his mission as comparable to the mission of the Qur’anic prophets, who had been sent by God to punish those who rebelled against Him. In addition to this theocratic argumentation, unique to him and his Iraqi circumstances, al-

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Ḥajjāj engaged in the generic pious discourse of the day, which is ascribed to many orators of early Islam and forms a part of wider late antique rhetoric of asceticism.

Al-Ḥajjāj, with no respectable tribal genealogy or “Islamic” credentials to speak of, had to rely heavily on the authority stemming from his office as the Umayyad governor of Iraq. In Chapter 2 we have seen the different cultural techniques that used to cement his authority. In this chapter, we witnessed that al-Ḥajjāj through his oratory performed the act of transition from the semi-legitimate outsider and newcomer to the divinely instituted ruler of the Islamic East. The speeches carried him through the key moments in his career and help to bridge the crises of the empire; they endowed him with the Islamic legitimacy that he was lacking; and they ritually performed the command of obedience, central to his ruling ideology.

Furthermore, al-Ḥajjāj is portrayed—through his speeches—as creating a coherent politico-religious system, in which obedience to the ruler is the most essential religious duty and in which he is the extension of the caliph’s hand. Sacralizing obedience and emphasizing his own connection to the caliph as the source of authority are strategies to compensate for the flaws of his pedigree and his lack of Islamic credentials. Another strategy that we have identified in his speeches is his enforcement of a muhājir-centered social hierarchy. This allows him to do two things: to paint himself, a military-made man, as the ideal citizen and to neutralize older social hierarchies favoring his opponents (e.g. genealogical claims in the case Ibn al-Ash’ath and Islamic credentials in the case of defenders of Ibn Mas‘ūd’s legacy).

We saw that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches express a coherent system of power which is unlike any of his earlier counterparts in Hijaz or Syria. They present themselves as a
valuable source of information about their time and place: they contain not only al-Ḥajjāj’s ideology of rulership, but also many allusions to the specific realities of Iraq. However, there are two things to bear in mind. First, al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory may reflect the ruling ideology in Umayyad Iraq, rather than the actual reality; it may be prescriptive and not descriptive. Umayyad Iraqi society was probably much more integrated and mixed than the speeches would have us believe. Second, the *khutba* was an elite institution, in that it targeted mainly the male Muslim *muhājir* population. As such it also catered to their expectations and ideals. Besides al-Ḥajjāj’s ruling ideology, his speeches also reflect some of the accusations that were made against him, the accusation of his connection with magic being the most interesting of these. Most importantly, however, they exemplify the key role of oratory in broadcasting al-Ḥajjāj’s propaganda, and the power of oratory in the Umayyad period at large.
CHAPTER 5

ORAL COMPOSITION AND TRANSMISSION OF AL-ḤAJJĀJ’S SPEECHES:

BEYOND ‘AUTHENTICITY’

5.1. INTRODUCTION: THE AUTHENTICITY OF UMAYYAD ORATORY

It must be stated at the outset that the question of the authenticity of these speeches—unlike that of letters—does not even need to be asked: we must view them as fictions from beginning to end, and again attention may be drawn to a major precedent in the literature of late antiquity.

This is a quote from the influential work by Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*¹ and it best illustrates the scholarly consensus with regard to the body of early Islamic Arabic speeches that have been preserved to us in later sources. Most scholars see these speeches as later literary inventions of Abbasid historians (i.e. ‘fictions’ in Noth’s words) who used them as a rhetorical device used to express what important historical figures might have thought on a specific occasion. The major precedent in the literature to which Noth refers is the tradition of ‘rhetorical speeches’ that extends to Thucydides.²

The most ardent supporter of the authenticity of early Islamic speeches is Tahera Qutbuddin. She has argued for an authentic core of these speeches based on what we know about their cultural context: that due to the high orality at the time people were able to memorize much material, that the spread of note-taking may have helped in the process,

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² Noth specifically refers (in the later English edition) to speeches in Procopius.
and that the public delivery of speeches secured many possible transmitters. Some scholars have taken the middle ground, claiming that even if early Arabic speeches were all later forgeries, they may still contain echoes of the actual political rhetoric of the age. Generally, however, the attitude towards these speeches has been skeptical. Stefan Dähne, the author of the only monograph on early Islamic oratory in a Western language, concluded that we can never tell with certainty whether an individual speech is authentic or not.

I agree with Dähne that we cannot ascertain whether al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches reflect any of the actual words of al-Ḥajjāj; however, I disagree with him (and others) that this is the only way how to assess their ‘authenticity.’ In this chapter, I suggest that the problem does not lie as much with the speeches themselves as it lies with the parameters of authenticity that Dähne (and others) set for them. With regard to Qutbuddin’s position, I accept here contextual arguments; I however, want to make clear that I claim general authenticity for the whole body of early Islamic speeches. Undoubtedly, there is much Abbasid material among the corpus, whether on the level of entire speeches or sentences that were added. Based on an examination of the variants of al-Ḥajjāj’s most famous speech, the Inaugural speech at Kufa, I argue in this chapter that this particular speech was

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3 Qutbuddin, “Khutba,” 187-189 and A Treasury of Virtues, xvi. Among earlier scholars inclined towards the authenticity of speeches belong Gernot Rotter or R.B.Serjeant. See Rotter, Die Umayyaden, 70; Serjeant, Meccan Trade, 472-73. Stefan Dähne collected various scholarly opinions on the authenticity of speeches. See Stephan Dähne, Reden der Araber: die politische ḥuṭba in der klassischen arabischen Literatur (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2001),1-16.

4 Stefan Dähne sees early oratory as echo of the eloquence of political rhetoric of the past. Dähne, Reden, 1. Similarly, Qutbuddin, argues that even forged speeches “conform closely to early conventions of style and theme.” See Qutbuddin, “Khutba,” 189. Vanessa de Gifis, discussing Ma’mūn’s speeches and letters, writes, “either way, the documents presented in early Abbasid histories are reflections on how Abbasid caliphal ideology was understood in the collective memory of the Muslim polity” Vanessa De Gifis, Shaping, 3. Speeches that some scholars have treated as authentic include, for example, a speech by Yazīd III and Šālīḥ b. Musarrīḥ. See Van Ess, Theologie, 1:86, 2: 462. Dähne considers Abū Hamza Shārī’i’s speech to be more authentic. Dähne, Reden, 3.
transmitted orally. I describe the patterns of transmission that prove this claim and support my findings by pointing to similar patterns in three out of four other speeches by al-Ḥajjāj and their variants: “After Dayr al-Jamājim,” “Funeral Speech for ʿAbd al-Malik,” “Great Man,” and “Ḥajj.” I have selected these speeches for their content, because they exist in more than one version, and because they can be traced in early sources. To make this chapter more readable and concise, I have moved the analysis of these other speeches to Appendix II.

The speeches of al-Ḥajjāj that show patterns of oral transmission cannot be ‘fictions’ coming from the pens of Abbasid historians, as Noth has it. They must have first circulated orally before someone wrote them down. Here we have thus an example that disproves the whole body early Islamic speeches are “fictions from beginning to end.” We can identify passages of the speeches that at a certain point in time circulated among people as the words of al-Ḥajjāj. I will argue that their transmission in many ways resembled that of poetry but explain also how it differed from it. We cannot access the ‘original,’ first-stage speeches (i.e. what al-Ḥajjāj actually said); nonetheless, we can access their oral reperformances by later narrators (i.e. the second-stage speeches).

Efforts to look for the ‘original’ texts and to examine early Islamic material through the dichotomy of fact and fiction have dominated the study of early Islam—to the detriment of the study of early Islamic oratory. As already mentioned, all narrative Muslim sources about early Islam except for the Qurʾān have been preserved only in later works and this sparked fierce debates about their reliability. In these scholarly debates, different types of

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5 These scholarly debates were especially instigated during the 1970s by the so-called ‘skeptics’ who undermined all Muslim sources as products of later polemics that do not contain any historical truth. Fred Donner have offered a most useful account of these debates and a convincing critique of the skeptical
sources have been viewed differently. Nowadays, most consider the Qurʾān a 1st/7th-century source, (see Chapter 2) and many see Umayyad poetry as authentic material.⁶ Umayyad oratory, on the other hand, fared poorly with regard to its perceived reliability, which is the main reason behind the lack of Western scholarship on speeches as a genre.⁷ This chapter shows that a study of early Islamic speeches is worthwhile even if we cannot reach the ‘original speech’ because it can shed light on these speeches’ pre-written transmission. I do not claim to give a definitive answer to the question of the authenticity of Umayyad oratory, but I do hope to provide a case-study that disproves the consensus about its general inauthenticity and helps to redirect and nuance the discussion of authenticity of these speeches.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses scholarly attitudes to speeches in historical prose as a reminder that binaries like fact and fiction have their own intellectual history and that they may be therefore problematic when applied to pre-modern speeches. It also notes that the ‘rhetorical speeches’ à la Thucydides are not the only type of speeches in late antiquity but that writing down ‘actual speeches’ was spread. Moving to the matters of transmission, it introduces the question or orality and literacy and explains how it relates to authenticity. The second part forms the core of the chapter. There, I analyze the “Inaugural Speech at Kufa” and its ten versions to shed light on its composition

and transmission. I have chosen this speech for a close analysis because it has the most variants and isnāds. In this chapter, I move the attention from the ‘original speech’ to its later transmission and I argue that:

1) The selected speeches show characteristics of orally based thought.

2) The selected speeches circulated among people orally before they were written down. This will be clear from the patterns of transmission that we can observe once we have compared the variant versions.

3) The speeches’ transmission is more stable than the historical narratives that surround it and shows signs of word-by-word memorization. Although oratory is considered prose in the Arabic tradition, with regard to its transmission it is closer to poetry rather than to historical prose.

Last note is reserved for transliteration. Because this chapter is partly concerned with matters of sound and pronunciation, I exceptionally transliterate the Arabic excerpts of the speeches in the body of the chapter to reflect their pronunciation (i.e., following the rules of qamarī and shamsī letters, iltiqā’ al-sākinayn, rules of pronouncing case endings based on the pauses in the text, etc.).

5.2. SPEECHES IN HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY: RHETORICAL AND ACTUAL SPEECHES, FACT AND FICTION, ORAL AND WRITTEN TRANSMISSION

The strict authenticity criteria that we apply to historical texts and the division into fact and fiction are not universal. They are rooted in a particular history of Western historiography.

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8 For debates on fact and fiction in medieval Arabic literature see Isabel Toral-Niehoff, “Fiktionalität und Faktualität in der klassischen arabischen Literatur,” in Faktuelles und fiktionales Erzählen. Differenzen, Interferenzen und Kongruenzen in narratologischer Perspektive, ed. Nicole Falkenhayner, Monika Fludernik, Julia Steiner (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag 2015), 59-76. On fact and fiction in Arabic history see for
We should be therefore careful with terms such as ‘fictions’ (as opposed to ‘facts,’ or ‘literature’ as opposed to ‘history,’ for that matter) with regard to pre-modern speeches because it may ascribe erroneous intents to the historian who used them. Therefore, I suggest that we first examine our own parameters of authenticity and categories before we consider them ‘fictions.’ Dähne’s parameters are that (a) a particular speech was delivered and (b) it corresponds without any major changes the original speech. This would be however impossible to ascertain about any pre-technological-era speech. Reaching the ‘original speech’ cannot be done with a recording of it. Even a papyrus with a speech written on it would not suffice for us to know if the speech in question was actually delivered. That however does not mean that we should discard all pre-modern speeches. We should instead reject the impossible parameters as useless, refrain from searching for the original speech, and direct our attention elsewhere.

As a case in point the analysis of the Inaugural speech renders many noteworthy results without providing any reliable access to the ‘original speech.’ The analysis of its variants together with their isnāds suggest that what we have are versions of the speech as they circulated orally in 2nd/8th century in Medina and Kufa, among muhaddithūn, akhbārīyūn, and singers of pro-Umayyad and anti-Umayyad/ʿAlid inclinations. The fact that its echoes circulated so widely opens questions about its social relevance which will be further explored in Chapter: Why was the speech transmitted in the 2nd/8th century? Who transmitted it? For what purpose? What was the role of oratory in the Umayyad period? These questions are more fruitful than ‘What did al-Ḥajjāj actually say?’.

Speeches in historical narratives (the so-called ‘rhetorical speeches’) have been the thorn in the side of historians since the birth of history as a modern discipline. In 1697, in his influential manifesto Jean Le Clerk denounced ancient authors precisely for including speeches in their narratives because it violated what was the historian’s primary goal in his view—to tell the truth.\(^9\) He proclaimed a new objective and universal history that would follow the rules of “right Reason” which “hold for all human beings, whatever nation and whatever age we may live in.”\(^10\) Truth as the only criterion for the quality of a scientific historical work is thus a modern (i.e. temporally specific and not universally valid) phenomenon.

Seeing history through the prism of the true-false (fact-fiction, history-literature) paradigm, is still prevalent in the field of Islamic studies. As Chase Robinson notes historians of Islam—unlike the larger world of humanities—have remained all “unreconstructed positivists.”\(^11\) The clearest evidence for the prevalent text-based positivism in the field of Islamic history is that the main controversies over the past decades have concerned the reliability of our written sources. But if we take the postmodern critique of modern scientific history, most famously embodied by Hayden White, who uncovered the literary strategies that undermine modern Western writing about history, and exposed the affinity between literature and history, then rejecting speeches in historical writing as fiction stands on weak grounds. The very divide between literature and history (fiction and fact) is debatable.

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\(^{10}\) …rectae Rationis, quibus homines omnes, sine ullo gentium ac saeculorum, quibus vivimus, discrimine tenemur. In Le Clerc 1712a, Pars iii, 396 quoted in Grafton, *What Was History*, 7.

What was the goal of ancient historians, whose work Le Clerk rejected, if not the scientific truth culled out from past documents? In short, they wanted to form the character of their readers. Speeches by great figures of the past were one of the most efficient tools to that effect because they illustrated their moral and political decisions. Methodologically, ancient historians did not focus on documents and primary sources as the main sources of knowledge and authority, the main trait of modern historical science according to A. D. Momigliano. Paul Veyne explains that in ancient Greece “history is born as tradition, not built up from source materials” and historians like Livy or Dionysius of Halicarnassus narrated the earliest Roman history without asking ‘is it true?’ The authority lied with the historian as part of the tradition rather than with the documents he used. Nevertheless, this does not imply amateurism. On the contrary, the historian-as-an-authority needed to be well-acquainted with the historical tradition, gather witnesses for contemporary events, maneuver well in politics and oratory, etc. Moreover, he was closer to a today’s public intellectual than academic historian and wrote for a varied audience. His work, therefore, had more other objectives than to convey “what really happened.” The ancient historian also wanted to different degrees—based on each individual historian—to entertain, convince, and educate.

This does not mean that ancient historians were oblivious to truth. It was the concept of truth itself that differed. Truth does not have to be limited to “what actually happened;” but it can also encompass a true reflection of social relationships and values of

13 Paul Veyne, Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? See especially Chapter 1 “When Historical Truth Was Tradition and Vulgate.”
a certain time and place; the knowledge of past politics and morals, enlightening the readers of these works. It was also one of the arguments of modern defenders of historical speeches—both outside and within the study of Islam—that without them we would have been bereft of any insight in the ancient political mind. That being said, this richer understanding of truth does not preclude the concern with ‘what really happened.’ Thucydides, the founder and most famous proponent of speeches in historical narratives, famously stated that the speeches represent “broadly what [he] supposed would have been needed on any given occasion,” and scholars have widely commented upon this statement. Equally important to the debate, in my view, is the immediate continuation of this quote which reads “while keeping as closely as [he] could to the overall intent of what was actually said,” (my emphasis) and other statements showing the author’s earnest approach

14 This was the view of the 19th century British classicist Richard Jebb with regard to the Greek political thought and Thucydides’s History of the Peloponnesian War. Jebb said: “The scope of the speeches is seen best if we consider what the History would be without them. The narrative would remain, with a few brief comments on great characters or events, and those two passages in which Thucydides describes the moral effects of pestilence and of party-strife. But there would be little or no light on the inner workings of the Greek political mind, on the courses of reasoning which determined the action, on the whole play of feeling and opinion which lay behind the facts.” Richard Jebb, “The Speeches of Thucydides,” in Richard Jebb, Essays and addresses, 359-446 (Cambridge: CUP, 1907), 359. This argument is based on the presumption of and reliance on the ancient historian’s expertise. 16th and 17th century humanists, such as the Ferrarese Alessandro Sardi, La Popelinière from Gascony, and the Dutch Gerardus Vossius, maintained that ancient historians were well acquainted with the world they portray and thus should be allowed to follow probability and insert speeches; Grafton, What Was History? 44-46. In the context of early and medieval Islamic speeches, Tahera Qutbuddin, argued that even in the case of the forged speeches, “[early Arabic oratory] conform closely to early conventions of style and theme;” “Khuṭba,” 189. Vanessa de Gifis argued in a similar way. See note 4. Second line of argumentation in defense of speeches in historical prose undermines the attackers’ logic. From 16th century until modern times, scholars have noted that those who discard historical speeches treat reported speech and direct speech unequally. They object to including speeches while they do not object to summarizing of what have been said in reported speech (e.g. when describing a certain agreement). Similar to a summary of what has been said in reported speech, speeches can be conceived of as correct reportage (with certain emendations) in reported speech. Third line of argumentation emphasizes the reliability of oral transmission. The recognition of the importance of oral traditions is not the result of modern anthropology. Already Francois Baudouin in 1579 called for the use of oral traditions along with the accounts of historians, church history, and material objects, travel literature as part of his historia integra, “perfect history.” Grafton, What Was History, 94, 105. Qutbuddin, has also argued along these lines as we have seen. Below, I will provide evidence of reliability of oral transmission, based on internal structure of the speeches and a comparison of their variants.
to his material. In the same paragraph, Thucydides nearly apologizes for sacrificing rhetoric for the sake of content and his work’s permanent legacy. It seems thus that Thucydides, the founder of the genre of ‘rhetorical speeches’ himself, did not consider these speeches a mere literary device. Already in antiquity, scholars commented on the speeches in his History, showing often similar concerns to those of modern historians albeit approaching them with different methodologies. This indicates that they were no naive unscientific receivers of the tradition.

The medieval Islamic historians (i.e. akhbārīyūn, muḥaddithūn, udabā’, muʿarrikhūn, etc.) followed a variety of approaches to the past and to truth. In their case, too, the modern dichotomy of fact and fiction is misleading. As Robert Hoyland has suggested, it is preferable “to regard history and fiction as lying on the same continuum.”

On the one hand, Muslim historians would hardly acknowledge writing ‘fiction,’ if by fiction we understand a work that describe imaginary events for artistic purposes. They

15 Thucydides tells us that he applied “greatest possible rigor in pursuing every detail both of what [he] saw [himself] and of what [he] heard from others.” He almost apologizes for an insufficient degree of rhetoric in it: “It may be that the lack of romantic element in my history will make it less of a pleasure to the ear: but I shall be content if it is judged useful by those who will want to have a clear understanding of what happened — and, such is the human condition, will happen again at some time in the same or a similar pattern. It was composed as a permanent legacy, not a showpiece for a single hearing.” (1.22)

16 Ancient commentators criticized the speeches in Thucydides, but they did not do so based on the suspicion of speeches as a genre but on what they perceived as inappropriate rhetorical strategy. For example, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (d. after 7 C.E.) a Greek historian and teacher of rhetoric, criticizes Thucydides that he made Pericles speak in his last speech in a manner other than the situation called for (he provokes instead of reconciliating): “Such language as this was suitable for Thucydides writing about the man in the form of a narrative, but it was not appropriate for Pericles who was defending himself against an angry crowd especially so at the beginning of his defense before he had tempered the anger of men…For orators ought not to stir up but to calm the anger of the masses;” (Dion. Halic., De Thuc. 43–4). Trans. W. Kendrick Pritchett, Dionysius of Halicarnassus: On Thucydides (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975) in Charles Pazdernik, “Belisarius’ Second Occupation of Rome and Pericles’ Last Speech,” in Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity, eds. Greatrex, Geoffrey, Hugh Elton, and Lucas McMahon, 207-218 (London: Routledge, 2016), 212. Likewise, Aelius Aristides (d. 181 C.E.), an orator of the Second Sophistic, did not find Pericles’ last speech appropriate for the occasion and writes “Was it your work, Thucydides, or was it Pericles?” Ael. Arist., Or. 28.71–2. Translation Charles A. Behr in Charles Pazdernik, “Belisarius’ Second Occupation of Rome and Pericles’ Last Speech,” 213.

believed in the (rich) truth of their works. The lack of an Arabic word that would convey the meaning of literature or fiction is telling in this regard.18 On the other hand, to claim that they their only goal was to narrate scientific facts, when sometimes it is clearly not so, would paint them as amateurs or liars. But such judgment would be anachronistic because they often had different concerns in mind and applied different methodologies. We may think of al-Ṭabarī’s salvation history and his emphasis on reliable transmitters, of Miskawayh’s narratives of contemporaries and his concern with the ‘ibra (“moral lesson”), of Ibn Khaldūn’s sociological insights into world history and his parameter of plausibility, or of al-Jāḥiẓ’s entertaining and yet highly ideological use of the past. Tarif Khalidi has identified four modes of thinking under which history was written through interaction with other sciences: hadīth, adab, ḥikma, and siyāsa.19

Furthermore, Muslims who wrote about the past and included speeches show awareness of their methodology. Al-Jāḥiẓ is an especially important figure with regard to writing early Islamic oratory. In his Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabīn (“Book of Clarity and Clarification”) he compiled a large amount of early speeches, akhbār about orators, and included various authorial considerations on the cultural value of oratory, to which we will return in Chapter 6. On various occasions, he also commented on his method. For example, when he narrates that the Muʿtazilite founder Wāṣil b. ʿAtā’s was not able to pronounce the letter “r” (rāʾ) but managed to deliver long public speeches entirely without “r,” al-Jāḥiẓ says:

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19 Tarif Khalidi, Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
If it were not for the vast spread of the story and its spread among people until it, due to its strangeness, turned to a proverb and, due to its rarity, turned to a well-known fact (maʿlam), I would not have confirmed it. But the matter has been assured. And I do not mean his [Wāsil’s] speeches that have been preserved and his epistles that became immortalized, because that allows for the possibility of fabrication. I mean his disputations with his opponents, exchanges with his counterparts, and debates with his brothers.\(^{20}\)

Al-Jāḥiẓ here shows the awareness that the written records of Wāsil’s speeches and letters because could have been meddled with and fabricated. He downplays the importance of documents and primary sources, preferring the many direct witnesses of Wāsil’s extraordinary ability as a more decisive criterion for the reliability of the report.

Elsewhere al-Jāḥiẓ offers remarks about how the speeches of the ancients and speeches of his time differ stylistically:

Among the orations of our great ancestors and pure Bedouins, I have not found any infuriatingly bad words nor unsound themes (maʿānī madkhūla) nor a base quality nor a despicable utterance. [In contrast] we find those among the orations of the Moderns (muwalladūn)\(^{21}\) and among the speeches of the artificial urban folk and among would-be litterateurs (ahl al-ṣun'ā al-muta'addibūn), whether these speeches are improvised or the result of writing down and contemplation.\(^{22}\)

Al-Jāḥiẓ clearly prefers old speeches over those of his contemporaries based on stylistic grounds and claims that he can distinguish between the two. Al-Jāḥiẓ’s last words of this excerpt lead us to the last point to be considered before we embark on the close analysis of the Inaugural speech: Were speeches (orally) improvised or written down?

The manner of the speeches’ transmission factors into our consideration of their authenticity. We usually think of written texts as stable while oral products as ephemeral.

\(^{20}\) Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:15.

\(^{21}\) Muwallad literally refers to a person of mixed origin. In the field of literature, a generation of early Abbasid poets was called muwalladūn. This is because the famous among them like Bashshār b. Burd, were of mixed origin. These poets can also be called muhdathūn (the Moderns, as opposed the Ancients), though there is a tendency to make a distinction between the early Moderns muhdathūn and the later Moderns muwalladūn. Outside poetry the term is used to denote “post-classical.” W.P. Heinrichs, “Muwalladūn,” in Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature, ed. Jule Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 2:563.

\(^{22}\) Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 2:8-9.
and Islamic studies, too, the orality of early Islam has been first seen to have destabilizing
effect. Fred Donner has identified “the awareness of the complexities of oral tradition” as
distinctive of what he termed the ‘tradition-critical approach’ to the sources of early Islamic
history. This approach, inaugurated by Ignaz Goldziher who undermined the reliability of
authoritative collections of hadith,\(^\text{23}\) emphasized that the tradition evolved, partially orally,
over time and thus reflect the concerns of its time.

With regard to pre-Islamic poetry, on the other hand, orality has been used to the
opposite end—as a way to settle the long-debated question of its authenticity. James
Monroe and Michael Zwettler applied the oral-formulaic theory developed by Milman
Parry and Albert Lord to pre-Islamic poetry.\(^\text{24}\) Parry and Lord analyzed the formulaic nature
of oral poetry based on a study of contemporary Yugoslavian bards. They explained that
an oral poet has thousands of formulas stored in his or her memory, which he or she then
pieces together during each performance and re-performance of a given poem. The oral-
formulaic nature of poetry explains the difference between the variants of poems and
renders the search for the ‘original text’ futile. As long as we understand its oral nature, we
should view this poetry, on a whole, as authentic and as a fairly close picture of what a
great poet once said, “distorted by the vicissitudes of an oral transmission.”\(^\text{25}\) Walter Ong,
who took the discussions of orality to a new level, theorizing the transition from orality to
literacy on a larger cognitive level, explained that people in primary oral cultures cannot
‘look up’ things but have to ‘recall them;’ stressing the key role of memory to preserving


and transmitting knowledge. All oral expression must be then adapted to these needs. Oral texts therefore are replete with mnemonic devices that help memory to retain the thoughts they carry: formulas, rhythmic patterns, repetitions, antitheses, etc. We must also understand improvisation in a memory-based culture from this perspective: as a process of selection, composition, recollection from a large repository of material stored in one’s memory (the “storehouse of mental images” as Zeno called it)26 with the help of mnemonic tools. As we will see below, his characteristics of oral thought can be observed in al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches.

Other scholars have stressed that the written element in early Islam.27 In the study of early Islam, Gregor Schoeler have argued most successfully for the combination of the oral and the written.28 He argued that all material was transmitted through lectures where both the lecturer and the students could use written notes. Furthermore, late antique evidence that besides the genre of rhetorical speeches to which Albrecht Noth refers to in the initial quote, writing down of actual speeches was widely spread. As I already mentioned in previous chapter, we have hundreds of sermons by early Christian figures like John Chrysostom or Augustine of Hippo.29 While the authenticity of many of these

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speeches is disputed, a large part of them is believed to have been authored by these patristic luminaries themselves. Furthermore, preachers, like Ambrose, dictated their sermons and some of the transcriptions were preserved. Many of the Christian councils mentioned in Chapter 1, recorded their proceedings in writing. Some public debates were also recorded, as the example of the debate between Augustine and an adherent to Arianism, Maximinus of Carthage in 427 or 428 shows. Because of public demand and because many important people were present, a notary wrote down what each party said. Writing-down actual speeches was a wide-spread practice in late antiquity and we cannot exclude that speeches were written down in early Islamic society either.

In fact, we have one valuable example of a written speech from the early Islamic period: ‘Amr b. al-Āṣ’s speech on a papyrus, which according to Nabia Abbot belongs to 2nd/8th century. Here is the image of the recto of the papyrus, the transcription, and translation.


31 Philip Rousseau in his discussion of Ambrose’s preaching quotes Ambrose who said: “I do not dictate all my writings” (my italics) which shows that he does dictates one. In the same article Rousseau also presents “a relatively unpolished transcription of one of Ambrose’s sermons;” “Preacher’s Audience: A More Optimistic View” in Ancient History in a Modern University, vol. II: Early Christianity, Late Antiquity and Beyond, eds. T. W. Hillard and E. A. Judge (Grand Rapids, 1998) 391-400; esp. 395, 398-400.


33 This was recorded by Possidius, Augustine’s biographer in his Vita Augustini, 17.7. See Charles Kuper, “The Latin Controversial Dialogues of Late Antiquity” (PhD Diss., Bryn Mawr College), 103.

34 The image and transcription of the text are from Nabia Abbott, Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 43-78. Abbott also includes extensive commentary on the contents and literary qualities of the text. The translation is mine.
Figure 8: A speech by 'Amr b. al-Āṣ on papyrus. Source: Nabia Abbott, Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri III

1. 'Amr b. al-Āṣ said that every tree has a trunk and every trunk has a branch; every mountain has a plain; every piece of news has its people. Indeed, the Commander of the Believers is the trunk of the branches and a branch of (other) stems. He designated you to have advantage.

35 This is Nabia Abbott’s transcription. I do not consider the added tā marbāṭa necessary and translated it is a plural of nīya: ‘intentions.’
4. and he designated you for himself, for he selected you for leadership and he induced you to command
5. so be loyal to his demands, and seek his well-being (baqāʾ ah) though compliance and obedience
6. Good intentions in times secrecy and in times of publicness […]
7. And Yaʿqūb b. Ṭāṭāʾ said: “They took the one among you and he followed you, take
8. [A chapter on] a topic other than this, in the book about women and pleasures
9. al-Aḥnaf b. Qays said that humility in front of God is the most pleasurable and the best quality
10. for a virgin young girl in a green dress [in a red house] loudly laughing, in a house filled with the smell of incense.

As we can see the papyrus records names known from Muslim historical narratives: ʿAmr b. al-Āṣ conquered Egypt; Yaʿqūb b. Ṭāṭāʾ—if Abbott’s reading of the lacuna is correct—was the son of a famous Meccan scholar,36 and Aḥnaf b. Qays was another famed general and a Companion of the Prophet. Lines 1-6 contain ʿAmr’s speech and the rest of the recto and the verso of this papyrus record a discussion about what kind of girl (jāriya) is the best. The papyrus must be therefore coming from a collection of literary texts. The speech is very similar in style to the speeches as we have them, although it does not have a literary equivalent.37 Still, its existence among the few literary papyri that we have from this early period indicates that writing down speeches was not unknown; it also confirms that the speeches that were collected belong to the political figures of early Islam (see previous chapter).

Two further idiosyncracies of early Islamic oratory, which may be related to its transmission, should be mentioned. The first is the relatively small number of speeches that have been preserved. This paucity of speeches stands out compared with with the large number of late antique Christian homilies. It also stands out compared with the abundant information about orators. Al-Jāḥiz’s Bayān wa-l-tabyīn records about 2500 names of

36 See Abbott, Studies, 43.
37 Nabia Abbott has not found a parallel text to the papyrus in later sources. Abbott, Studies, 47. I have run various salient elements of the speech through the Shamela database but to no avail.

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eloquent men and women—many of whom are identified as orators (khutabā’) and countless stories about them.\(^{38}\) The paucity of speeches also stands out in comparison with the large body of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry and even letters. The second idiosyncracy of the early speeches is their shortness. In Chapter 3, we noted that we have evidence that under the Umayyads some rulers used to speech from the pulpit for long hours. Why are the speeches so short? I will suggest possible answers in the conclusion.

Before moving onto the analysis proper, I want to make explicit four considerations that underlie my treatment of oral vs. written rests and explain their implications for what we can say about the transmission of speeches.

1) Early Islamic period must be taken in its own terms—as preceding the 3\(^{rd}/9\(^{th}\)-century explosion of writing, book culture, and widespread literacy.

2) The oral and the written are not two opposite modes.

3) Oral composition does not equal (exclusively) oral transmission.

4) Orality (\textit{cum} literacy) takes different forms in different cultures.

1) In many ways, the 3\(^{rd}/9\(^{th}\)-century boom of books and emergence of ‘writerly’ culture, which transformed Islam into one of “the world’s most bookish societies,”\(^{39}\) represents a profound cultural break. Readership expanded rapidly and came to include also “landlords and landowners, merchants and entrepreneurs, judges and jurists, physicians, poets, and littératours, teachers, and of course, other scholars”\(^{40}\) to the extent that Michael Cooperson recently called the early Abbasid the time of “great dumbing-down of Arab lore and Islamic


\(^{40}\) Toorawa, \textit{Ibn Abî Ṭâhir}, 1.
At the same time, of course, early Abbasid time witnessed a process of sophistication of sciences, especially the language-oriented, as will be further discussed in the following chapter.

By contrast, in the Umayyad period, only the elite—the court and learned circles—had access to (written) knowledge. That being said, the oral element remained to play an important part during the transmission of knowledge, as written books were still authorized by being read aloud either by their authors or by the students back to their authors or to those who had a permission (ijāza) to transmit them. We must realize that al-Jāḥiz, whose considerations about early Islamic oratory prompted this discussion, was—in his enthusiastic embracement of books—closer our sensibilities than to those of his predecessors, many of whom are reported to have, ostentatiously, rejected writing. This does not mean that we can speak about purely oral vs. purely written culture.

2) The two modes—oral and written—have always coexisted but in different measures. Scholars after Ong have criticized the opposition that he postulated between orality and literacy and provided examples of cultures where orality and literacy coexists. Mary Carruthers shifted the focus entirely from the orality-literacy divide to memory and memorization and argued that memory has been always connected with visual culture and metaphors of writing. Schoeler, as noted above, has argued for the combination of oral

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41 His quote continues “that is, the process by which the language and culture of the Arabs, like their religion, were simplified for consumption by non-natives as well as ‘Arabs.” Michael Cooperson, “The Abbasid ‘Golden Age’: An Excavation” Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wustā 25 (2017), 54.
43 Carruthers, The Book of Memory, esp. 16-32. While her treatment of memory in ancient Greek and Latin and medieval European thinking is excellent, it should be however pointed out that her examples are coming from the pens of fully literature figures, from Aristotle and Plato, Tully, to Thomas Aquinas
and written in the field of Islamic studies, which is also how I generally understand the transmission of early Islamic material, including speeches. However, there are levels of orality-cum-literacy that needs to be distinguished. Observing the insistence of preservation of the oral element of transmission of knowledge in a society, in which the production of books have exploded, from the 3rd/9th century until today, the more, we can imagine, the oral mode played a role was before the early Abbasid spread of literacy. In the case of al-Ḥajjāj’s Inaugural speech, as we will see below, oral transmission clearly played the main role and the speech circulated among people through verbatim memorization of its passages. The way these passages are reshuffled in different order in these versions suggests clearly points to oral transmission before the text was fixed in writing. Other, smaller deviations between the versions resulting from oral transmission, to which I will also point, could have happened also after the text of the speech was written down due to the continuing co-existence of the oral with the written. Furthermore, I also point to a few examples of written transmission, the most prominent one being Ibn Aʿtham’s addition of a paragraph to the speech.

3) In the above quote, al-Jāḥiẓ speaks about the composition of speeches. (“speeches are improvised or the result of writing down and contemplation”); yet composition does not equal transmission. It is possible that even if a speech is improvised on the spot, others may transmit it faithfully for later generation—whether through memory or writing. It is important to emphasize that improvisation does not mean ephemerality. Or so al-Masʿūdī believes when he tells us that people have memorized over 480 speeches that ʿAlī had delivered spontaneously (ʿalā al-badīha), and that they “transmitted this from him in word and Dante. In contrast, Ong whom she discards, based his analysis on anthropological studies of non-literate societies.
and deed (wa-tanāwala al-nās dhālik ʿanhu qawlan wa-ʿamalan)\textsuperscript{44} Conversely, in this chapter, I only claim to prove the oral transmission of the Inaugural speech not its oral composition. While many of Ong’s characteristics of oral thought can be identified in al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches, as Schoeler has pointed out, we cannot automatically take a text that shows these characteristics and claim that it must have been orally composed.\textsuperscript{45} This is especially true in medieval Islamic culture where orality has remained to play a significant role in transmission of knowledge alongside written transmission.

4) Each instantiation of an oral (cum written) culture is different. In particular, orality does not necessarily mean improvisation and textual instability, as Lord’s and Parry’s research may imply. Already in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century the Jesuit missionary in Mexico Juan de Tovar\textsuperscript{46} who knew well the indigenous inhabitants and mastered the language of Nahuatl noted that the Indians, despite their insufficient language were able to preserve orations and poetry without modifying a word and described their methods.\textsuperscript{47} With regard to pre-Islamic poetry,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Al-Masʿūdī, \textit{Murūj}, 2:419.
\item In Schoeler’s words: “Both Zwettler and Monroe commit a logical error which we encounter again and again with proponents of the oral poetry theory: they reverse the statement they claim to be empirically proven, namely, that ‘all oral poetry is formulaic (displays scarcity of enjambment, and so on),’ and maintain that ‘all formulaic (and so on) poetry is oral.’” Schoeler, \textit{The Oral and the Written}, 91.
\item “…although they had different figures and characters with which they wrote, these were not as adequate as our script, which, without discrepancy, would relate each meaning to a written word: only concepts would agree. But to have a full memory of words and forms of speech that the orators made, and the many songs that they had, which everyone knew without modifying a word and which the same orators composed, although they represented them with their characters; but to preserve them with the same words that the orators and poets said, there was an exercise in the schools of the selected young men who were to succeed the orators and poets. Through continuous repetition they committed things to memory, without modifying a word, taking the most famous speeches that were delivered in each epoch as a method, to impose them on the young men that were to become rhetoricians. And in this way, many speeches were being preserved without modifying a word, from one person to another, until the Spaniards arrived who in our script wrote down many speeches and songs that I saw. This is how they have been preserved.” Juan de Tovar (d.1623), in a letter to the historian of the Indies, José de Acosta. My translation. For the original see Joaquín García Icazbalceta, \textit{Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga, primer obispo y arzobispo de México}, ed. R. Aguayo Spencer and A. Castro Leal. Vol. IV (Madrid: Porrúa, 1947), 92-93.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Monroe has noted in his important article, where he introduced Lord-Parry theory to this poetry and argued for its oral composition on the basis of its high formulaic content:

> On the other hand, the different recensions of individual poems made by Arab philologists, although they contain numerous variant readings for individual words, and although specific lines are often placed in a different order from version to version, are by no means entirely recast or retold in a new sequence of formulas as occurs, in the epic. This feature of pre-Islamic poetry points to a far greater textual stability than is the case with the epic [that Parry and Lord studied].

The first thing to note is that Monroe’s description of the differences between the different recensions of Arabic poems (variant readings for individual words, lines placed in a different order) resembles to what will observe with the variants of al-Ḥajjāj’s Inaugural speech shows similar traits. Monroe comments in this excerpt on the differences between the epic to which Parry-Lord theory has been applied and which encompasses long narrative poems and between pre-Islamic poetry which is much shorter. Its “far greater textual stability” points to an important place of memory in the process. What’s more, the same insistence on verbatim transmission can be observed even in contemporary oral poetry. Saad Abdullah Sowayan has examined the modern vernacular (so-called ‘Nabaṭī’) poetry of Arabia and noted that despite its oral nature, poems are memorized word by word and not recomposed as in Lord and Parry’s Yugoslavian examples. Islamic culture, early and medieval, and to an important degree today too, is a culture of memory and memorization.

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50 On memory and memorization in medieval Islamic and for a summary of scholarship on memory within the context of Islamic studies see Borrut, Entrez mémoire et pouvoir, 167-179, and Sarah Savant, The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory and Conversion (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013).
Like poetry, we will see that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches are relatively stable, while revealing signs of oral transmission. Whether they relied only on memory or partially also on writing, early Muslims paid much attention to the verbatim transmission of the speeches, as we will see on the example of the Inaugural speech. Before that, we will note the oral characteristics that the text of the speech shows.

5.3. Oral Composition in the Inaugural Speech at Kufa

“You know what you can recall” is the key theorem that in Ong’s view applies to an oral culture.51 Mnemonic patterns are essential in the process of recalling and retrieving of thoughts. Therefore, Ong argued, the oral thought comes in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antithesis, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expression, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero’s ‘helper’, and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form.52

While Ong may have overemphasized the divide between the oral and literate societies his analysis of oral literature or verbal art (such as a khutba), in Bauman’s terminology, remains valuable. The formulaic nature of language and heavy patterning serve according to Ong preserve the oral product. This is how I am using Ong’s characteristics of oral thought here—as indicators (though not ultimate proofs) that the speeches were initially oral products, that they are recordings of past performances, which were then written down.

In the previous chapter, we have already observed some of these features (e.g. parallelism, rhythm) as signs of a performance, and focused on their emotional effect on the audience. These special codes and formulae frame the performance (or key it to use

51 Ong, Orality and Literacy, 33.
52 Ong, Orality and Literacy, 34.
Goffman’s term) and provide clues as how to interpret it according to a culturally conventionalized metacommunication. They send signals that the *khutba* is a special type of speech. Oral composition, transmission, and performance are naturally closely connected. While the previous chapter focused on the performative aspect of an al-Ḥājjāj’s speeches, this one examines the manifestations of their orality and how these relate to the (memory-based) transmission of the speeches. The overall structure of the Inaugural speech’s logically ordered segments in itself, analyzed in the previous chapter, serves as indication of a memory-oriented text. As Carruthers points out, from Quintilian to the late medieval *artes praedicandi*, the *divisio* (dividing a text into short segments) and the *compositio* (putting the segments together in order) were seen as most useful ways to memorize a text. 53 In this chapter, I turn closer to the text, to the level of words and sentences.

Ong—in addition to the presence of formulas—identified further characteristics of orally based thought. Most if not all can be found in the Inaugural speech at Kufa, which then should be seen as a textual recording of on originally oral art. To illustrate this, we will examine one segment of the speech in al-Mubarrad’s version. What follows is the text of the segment in Arabic, a translation, and a list of Ong’s characteristics of oral thought with examples for the segment.

إني والله يا أهل العراق، ما يُعقع لي بالشنان، ولا يُغمر جانبي كعمار الِّتين، ولقد فُرذت عن ذَّئب، وفُنتش عن جُرية، وإن أمير المؤمنين أطال الله بقاءه نَثَر كَنَتَه بين يديه، فعَجَج عبادية، فوجدني أَمَّرَهَ عُودًا، وأصلها مُنْسَرًا، فرَماكم بي. لأنكم طالما أَوْصَعْتم في الفتنة، واضطجعتم في مَرَافِد الضلال.  

By God! People of Iraq, the rattling sound of old water-skins shall not frighten me [as it frightens camels], and my sides shall not be squeezed like figs [to be tested]. And I have been already made to show my teeth [i.e. examined like a horse] to show my intelligence and I have been inspected for experience. And the commander of the believers—may God

prolong his life—laid his quiver open in his hands. Then he bit on the shafts of his arrows to test them and so found me as the most bitter of them, the hardest to break. So, he shot me at you. For you often rushed to sedition and lay in beds of error.  

5.3.1. ADDITIVE RATHER THAN SUBORDINATE

Instead of using linking words that analytically organizes and subordinates written discourse, oral texts make use of a lot of additive elements like ‘and.’

إنى والله يا أهل العراق، ما يرقص لي بالشنان، ولا يغمر جانبي كأعظام الطين. ولقد فرَّت عن دِكاء، وَقَتَشْتُ عن تجربة، وإن أمير المؤمنين أطَل الله يباهه تَر كأنه بين يديه، فعجم عبادها، فوجدني أمَّرها عودًا، وأصلبها مكسرًا، فرماكم بَي. لأنكم طالما وُضِعتم في الفتنة، واضطجعتم في مبراق الضلال.

Highlighted in red are the additive features of a section from the speech: the various instances of ‘and’s (wa) and ‘so’s (fa).

5.3.2. AGGREGATIVE RATHER THAN ANALYTIC

Oral expression uses epithets and parallel terms and phrases to make words memorable, while literacy prefers analytical thinking and rejects these as redundant. The examined segment is solely composed of parallel structures. In brackets in red I note the repetitive grammatical structures and I indicate first, second, and third instance of the same structure with numbers. The repeating grammatical structures produce rhythm due to the system of derivation in Arabic. Rhythm is another key element of oral thought because it serves as an important mnemonic device and helps to retain the stability of verbal art.

By God! People of Iraq,

(1) the rattling sound of old water-skins shall not frighten me [as it frightens camels]/ (2) and my sides shall not be squeezed like figs [to be tested]. [2X neg. particle + 3rd p. sg. masc. passive pres. + -]

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54 See Appendix 1.
(1) And I have been already made to show my teeth [i.e. examined like a horse] to show my intelligence / (2) and I have been inspected for experience. [2X 1st p. sg. passive past. + prep ʿan + noun]
And the commander of the believers—may God prolong his life—
(1) laid his quiver open in his hands. / (2) Then he bit on the shafts of his arrows to test them / (3) and so found me as [3X 3rd p. act.past + mafʿūl bihi]
(1) the most bitter of them / (2) the hardest to break. [2X adj. superlative + tamyīz]
So, he shot me at you. For you often
(1) rushed to sedition/ (2) and lay in beds of error. [2X 2nd p. pl. masc. past + fī + --]

These parallel structures correspond to “the structural formulas” in Monroe’s classification. In Arabic tradition, this type of parallelism is called “non-artificial rhyme prose” (sajʿ ghayr mutakallaf). We will see below that sajʿ mutakallaf, “artificial rhyme” is a sign of a written discourse.

5.3.3. Redundant or ‘copious’

Redundancy and repetition keeps the speaker on track when he or she forgets an element. At the same time, it helps the listeners when they miss a word. Sparse linearity is, on the other hand, a sign of literacy. The parallel structures quoted above under (ii) can be also taken as examples of redundancy and repetition because they express a similar idea twice or thrice.

5.3.4. Conservative or Traditionalist

Oral thought makes repeats the same formulas and themes because these are known, and because what is not repeated is lost. An example of a conservative term that never changes

55 “two or more groups of words in the same metrical position, and yet sharing no key word in common… cast in the same or similar rhythmic, and often even syntactic, constructions.” Monroe, “Oral Composition,” 20-23.
in these early texts is calling the caliph *amīr al-muʾminīn*, “the Commander of Believers.” Another formula known to the audience is *aṭāla 'llāhu baqāʾh*, “may God prolong his life.”

5.3.5. **CLOSE TO THE HUMAN LIFEWORLD**

Writing allows for abstraction of human experience. Oral texts, on the other hand, remain close to the human lifeworld, and describe actions rather than abstract thoughts. In this segment, al-Ḥajjāj intends to persuade his audience about being the right person for the office but he does not say: “I am the most experienced” “I am the most qualified” or “I came to restore order.” Instead, al-Ḥajjāj conveys same idea through the actions of the caliph and effective metaphors: he describes the caliph choosing the strongest arrow from his shaft and shooting it at the Iraqis. The arrow stands for al-Ḥajjāj and the punishment that he will inflict on Iraq.

5.3.6. **AGONISTICALLY TONED**

Oral narrative focuses on external struggles, violence, and antagonism, or its opposite praise. The Inaugural speech is pregnant with tension between the new governor and his subjects, which drives the whole speech. The solution to it is offered through the command at the end, where the speaker invites his audience to fulfill their duty and fight the enemy, thereby invoking a new antagonism.

5.3.7. **EMPATHETIC AND PARTICIPATORY RATHER THAN OBJECTIVELY DISTANCED**

In oral literature, narrator, audience, and character have a close relationship, because personal disengagement can only be achieved through writing. Literate cultures can be objectively distant. In this spirit, the speech is conducted as a direct address (I and you)
with elements that are meant to bring the audience in the conversation. In this segment it is “People of Iraq!”

5.3.8. HOMEOSTATIC

Oral societies live in the present and their knowledge is directly relevant to it. So, myths and genealogies, for example, can be adjusted if present circumstances require that. It is impossible to tell, to what extent this characteristic applies here. As the analysis of variants below shows, the changes do not show deviations in the content of the speech.

5.3.9. SITUATIONAL RATHER THAN ABSTRACT

Orally based thought prefers the concrete over the abstract, the moon over circle, a concrete situation over a category. The beginning of this segment with its metaphors taken from the desert habitat show this feature most clearly:

the rattling sound of old water-skins shall not frighten me [as it frightens camels] and my sides shall not be squeezed like figs [to be tested]. And I have been already made to show my teeth [i.e. examined like a horse] to show my intelligence.

Instead of saying that he is fearless, the speaker compares himself to a camel who is not scared by rattling of water-skins; instead of saying that he shall not let the Iraqis try his patience he compares himself to a fig that won’t be squeezed; instead of saying that the caliph has tested his abilities he compares himself to a horse who has been made to show his teeth, which is the way how a horse merchant would assess its health.

Ong’s characteristics of oral thought that the Inaugural speech evinces, illustrated on this one segment, indicate an oral composition of the text. They also signal that this Khutba uses a special mode of speech (vs. ordinary speech of for example historical narration). Yet they do not constitute a conclusive proof for oral transmission. Given our
current understanding of orality and literacy as being complementary rather than exclusive, we may imagine a scenario in which an early Abbasid author would compose and write down such speech, either due to his or her oral mind or due to his or her stylistic preference. Al-Jāḥīz, the famous bookworm, often expresses himself in parallel structures and includes long passages against the artificiality (*takalluf*) of speech.

On the one hand, oral characteristics alone cannot prove that the speeches once circulated orally and therefore we need to examine their transmission by bringing in its different variants. On the other hand, characteristics can clearly indicate a literate author as we will see with Ibn A’tham’s version of the speech and his use of “artificial rhyme prose” (*saj’ mutakallaf*). For a more in-depth analysis of the characteristics of oral thought in another speech attributed al-Ḥajjāj, “After Dayr al-Jamājim,” see Appendix II.

5.4. **Stability of Text and Oral Transmission**

This section examines the written variants of the Inaugural speech to inquire into the process of its transmission. There are ten different variants of the speech (which is more than in the case of any other of al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches), which suggests that at some point ten versions were in circulation. The first thing that becomes clear is a discrepancy in transmission between the speech itself (B) and the added elements. The added elements consist of the introductory narrative (A) that describes the tense situation before al-Ḥajjāj began speaking; the different narratives attached to its end that illustrate the power of al-Ḥajjāj’s speech and the fear that he induced (C); and a commentary on the difficult words in the speech (D). The speech itself is much more stable than the narratives around it. This means

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56 These letters A-D correspond to the letters in the table below.
that the speech itself forms the core of the unit, while the surrounding elements are dependent on it.

This situation is similar to the situation of poetry in historical prose. Wolfhart Heinrichs has noted two scenarios: either the poetry is secondary as serves as an embellishment of prose (‘commentary poems’) or the poetry is primary and the prose serves as its interpolation (‘action poems’). We can apply the same division to speeches. Some speeches in historical narratives might be later embellishments, i.e. ‘commentary speeches’ (literary inventions). But others clearly are ‘action speeches,’ forming the core of the narrative. The Inaugural speech at Kufa is such an ‘action speech.’

This is also evident from the difference of transmission between the speech itself and the added elements. This is riwāya bi-l-lafz (transmission of the word) for the former and riwāya bi-l-ma’nā (transmission of the meaning) for the latter. These terms were developed in the field ʿilm al-riwāya that is first and foremost connected with hadīth material (narratives about the Prophet). As the terms suggest, riwāya bi-l-ma’nā is a type of transmission of material which focuses on the meaning without precision in wording, while riwāya bi-l-lafz is a type of transmission that claims to preserve the original wording. Within the field of hadīth transmission, different transmitters had their own method.

The following table summarizes the overall findings. All variants were compared against al-Mubarrad’s version.

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58 On ʿilm al-riwāya see al-Khaṭḥīb al-Baghdādī, Kitāb al-kifāya fī ʿilm al-riwāya (Hyderabad: Al-ʿUthmānīya, 1357H) The titles of some chapters are telling with regard to the type of transmission: “Chapter about what was said about the transmission of hadīth ʿalā al-lafz and who saw it as necessary;” “Chapter mentioning the transmission of those who did not allow exchanging one word for another” etc.
Table 7: Variants of the inaugural speech

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<td>Laythi</td>
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<td>Al-Mubarrad (d. 286/898), al-Kāmil fī al-lugha wa-adab, 1:298-303. = M</td>
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<td>Al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), Murūj al-dhahab, 3:126-131. = Mas</td>
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<td>Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), Al-ʿIqd al-fārīd, 4:208-210. = IAR I</td>
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<td>Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), Al-ʿIqd al-fārīd, 5:278-281. = IAR II</td>
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<td>Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Tārīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk, 6:202-210. = T</td>
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<td>Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), ʿUyūn al-akhbār, 2:265:266; Gharīb al-ḥadīth, 3:693-703. = IQ.</td>
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<td>Al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897), Tārīkh, 2:326, 2. = Y</td>
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<td>Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī (wr. ca 204/819 or 4th/10th c.), Kitāb al-futūḥ, 7:7-12. = IA</td>
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2. Al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), Ansāb al-ashrāf, 7:273-278. = B
3. Al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), Murūj al-dhahab, 3:126-131. = Mas
4. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), Al-ʿIqd al-fārīd, 4:208-210. = IAR I
5. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), Al-ʿIqd al-fārīd, 5:278-281. = IAR II
8. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), ʿUyūn al-akhbār, 2:265:266; Gharīb al-ḥadīth, 3:693-703. = IQ.
9. Al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897), Tārīkh, 2:326, 2. = Y
10. Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī (wr. ca 204/819 or 4th/10th c.), Kitāb al-futūḥ, 7:7-12. = IA

- P = Pebbles narrative
- M = Misunderstanding narrative
- S = Salām story
- U = ʿUmayr b. Ḍābiʾ story
- T = Takbīr story
- B = Bridge story
- PF = Pebbles falling story

Narrators:

- Al-Mubarrad: ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿUmayr al-Laythī (qāḍī of Basra before al-Ḥasan al- Busty)
- Al-Balādhurī: ʿAbbas b. Hishām > his father > Lūṭ b. Yaḥyā (= ʿAbū
The variants of the speech itself (B) are much closer to each other than those of the added elements (A, C, D). The introductory narrative (A) in one form or another appears in all versions. But while most of its versions agree on their main motifs, they significantly disagree in their wording. This is also the case of the attached reports (C) but they vary even more than that: different variants have different reports. In other words, the added narratives (A and C) are paraphrased, transmitted through riwāya bi-l-ma‘nā. The commentaries (D) are entirely different. The speech itself (B), in contrast, shares much of the same wording in all its versions. The higher stability of the body of the speech itself (B on Table) is related to specific patterns of transmission that emerge when we put all the ten variants next to each other and compare each of their sections. Overall, the differences that appear are not a result of rephrasing, but either adding to the speech shortening it, or reshuffling its parts, while keeping a very similar wording. They are transmitted through riwāya bi-l-lafẓ. (Here, I would like to state explicitly that by pointing out these patterns of transmission I do not imply intentional editorial interventions on the part of the historians and udabā’ or the existence of ‘original’ and ‘less original’ texts; quite the opposite. I am poiting to these patterns to underline the absence of such things and to argue for the oral nature of their transmission.) Furthermore, what is added to the text of the khuṭba (based on the comparison of variants) does not alter the message but enhances it through repetition or brings in more details.
The speech is the most stable element of the narrative unit and forms its core. The following analysis provides the evidence to my claims. We will begin with the added elements (A, C, D) and then turn to the text of speech itself (B).

5.4.1. ADDED ELEMENTS (PARTS A, C, D): RIWĀYA BI-L-MAʿNĀ OR PARAPHRASING

5.4.1.1. Introductory narrative (A)

The introductory narrative (A) appears in all the variants of al-Ḥājjāj’s Inaugural speech. Its versions overall differ but we can trace two main narratives: I will call one the “Pebbles narrative” and the other the “Misunderstanding narrative.” Both narratives depict the situation in the mosque shortly before al-Ḥajjāj begins his speech; both comment on the hostility of the Iraqis to the governor but their explanation differs. The “Pebbles narrative” is more common and it is also the one we have seen in the previous chapter. I include it here again in al-Mubarrad’s version for convenience:

ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿUmār al-Laythī said: While we were in a mosque at Kufa—and these days people of Kufa were well off, for any of them would walk around with ten or twenty mawālī—a man came who said: “This is al-Ḥajjāj who has come as governor of Iraq.” He [al-Ḥajjāj] then entered the mosque with a turban on his head, which covered most of his face. He was adorned with a sword, carried a bow on his shoulder, and headed towards the pulpit. People stood up [in expectation] as he ascended the pulpit but he remained silent for a while. So, they started saying to one another: “May God disgrace the Banū Umayya for appointing someone like that as the governor of Iraq.” Then ʿUmayr b. Dābiʿ al-Burmūjī asked: “Shall I throw pebbles at him for you?” But others replied: “Wait a little, so that we may see.” When he [al-Ḥajjāj] saw all the people’s eyes turned towards him, he removed the veil from his mouth, stood up, and declared:

In this version Iraqis know that the speaker is an Umayyad agent and when he does not utter a word on the pulpit they begin to collect pebbles. They want to throw these pebbles to ‘boo him off the stage’ because they are angered by his silence and think that the Umayyads sent them an incompetent ruler.
The “Misunderstanding narrative” gives a slightly different twist to the situation, when it narrates that the Kufans mistook the speaker for a Khārijite. This is al-Jāḥiẓ’s version of it:

Al-Ḥajjāj headed as the new governor of Iraq surrounded by twelve riders on camels of noble breed. He entered Kufa at the dawn of a new day. Bishr b. Marwān had sent al-Muhallab against al-harūrīya.¹ First thing, al-Ḥajjāj entered the mosque; then he ascended the pulpit, his face covered with a silk veil, and said: “Bring the people to me!” And the people took him and his companions for Khārijites and wanted to attack him (fa-hammū bih). But when people gathered in the mosque, he stood up, unveiled his face, and said:

The “Misunderstanding narratives” can be therefore understood as an attempt to exonerate the Iraqis from charges of rebelliousness because it portrays their hostility towards the new governor to be a case of mistaken identity. Al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Ṭabarī quote different isnāds (Ibn 'Abd Rabbiḥ I does not include any) but both end with the narration by 'Abdallāh b. Abī Ubayda b. Muḥammad b. 'Ammār b. Yāsir. The little we know about 'Abdallāh is that he narrated akhbār about his grandfather 'Ammār b. Yāsir, who was a companion of the Prophet and, more importantly for us, one of the closest companions of 'Alī. 'Ammār represents the 'Alid legacy in Kūfa, and his grandson 'Abdallāh is one of its later bearers, which may explain why he would want to paint the Kufans in a better light.

While the “Misunderstanding narrative” only circulated in one version because in appears almost identical in the three versions (and so it was probably copied in writing),² the versions of the “Pebbles narrative” all differ considerably in length, and wording. Some sources add entirely new elements, for example when they point to a specific person who was about the throw pebbles: either to 'Umayr b. Ḍābi‘ or Muḥammad b. 'Umayr b. 'Uṯārid. What these two figures have in common is that both were from camps traditionally opposed to the Umayyads, the former being

¹ harūrīya or muhakkima were the first group of Khārijites who abandoned 'Aļī at the battle of Šiffīn (37/657). By extension this name was applied to later Khārijites too. Levi Della Vida, G., “Kḥārijījītes,” E2.

² The only point where al-Ṭabarī slightly diverges from al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn 'Abd Rabbiḥ I is at the beginning where he provides his readers with a few words more words of context “Al-Hajjāj b. Yūsuf left from Medina, after he had received a letter from 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān about his appointment as the governor of Iraq after the death of Bishr b. Marwān” Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 6:202
one of the men who attacked the caliph ʿUthmān, and the latter being one of ʿAlī’s companions in the battle of Ṣiffīn. So in this “Pebbles narrative,” the Kufans are aware that the orator is their new governor and they are disposed towards rejecting him. They are portrayed as hostile to the Umayyads, and the initiator of the attempted attack is a representative of the anti-Umayyad camp.

Moreover, the versions of the “Pebbles narrative” reveal various patterns of transmission. Al-Balādhurī’s version (on the authority of ʿAwāna) expands on the introductory narrative, as we read it in al-Mubarrad, by adding details about what preceded al-Ḥajjāj’s arrival in Iraq, such as the death of Bishr and ʿAbd al-Malik’s reluctance to maintain his successor in Basra in power. Al-Balādhurī’s version introduces a new character into the story: a man called al-Haytham b. al-Aswad, who figures here as the interlocutor of Muḥammad b. ʿUmayr. What is interesting to us is that al-Haytham (d.100/718), a nobleman of Kufa, was known as an orator and poet. This detail thus increases the suspense of the story: al-Ḥajjāj, seemingly unable to say a word, is being observed by one of Kufa’s most eloquent men. Al-Masʿūdī’s version contains a dramatic element not found in the others—a gathering in which ʿAbd al-Malik was deciding whom to appoint the ruler of Iraq. On the authority of Ibn ʿĀʾisha, he narrates that ʿAbd al-Malik did not really want to appoint al-Ḥajjāj the governor of Iraq but did so only after he asked three times and no one wanted to take up this task. These elements are clearly meant to partially alleviate the caliph of his responsibility for appointing such a tyrant.

Ibn Aʿtham’s version is also longer than al-Mubarrad’s but not because it would include any new narrative elements. Rather, Ibn Aʿtham uses a more flowery language. For example, while al-Mubarrad states that “these days people of Kufa were well off, for any of them would walk around with ten or twenty mawālī” Ibn Aʿtham renders the very same idea with more words: “And the people of Kufa these days were well off, covered in glory, fine clothes; they had power and
were in perfect condition. A man from among them entered the mosque and with him there was a group of members of his family and mawālī, clothed in silk and similar fabrics.” The main difference here is thus the style of the narrative.

All versions of the “Pebbles narrative” agree on key motifs: al-Ḥajjāj’s veiled face, his turban, his weapons (sword & bow), a man ready to throw pebbles at him, his ascending the pulpit, al-Ḥajjāj’s silence, and the final unveiling. Even the most concise—al-Yaʿqūbī’s version—contains all of these elements:

And when he entered Kufa, he ascended the pulpit, with his turban covering his face, and with his bow and quiver in his hands. He sat on the pulpit and was silent for a long while until they were about to throw pebbles at him.

The patterns of transmission in the case of the introductory story appear to be: Summarizing longer accounts (al-Yaʿqūbī’s); elaborating on shorter accounts (Ibn Aʿtham); and adding more context (al-Balādhurī, al-Masʿūdī) sometimes with a rhetorical purpose, in order to boost ʿAbd al-Malik’s image. We can also observe that the “Misunderstanding narrative” represents an alteration of the overall message of the more common “Pebbles narrative” as it paints the Kufans in a less rebellious light. Despite these differences, all versions of the introduction’s two main narratives agree on the main motifs: al-Ḥajjāj arrives in Kufa (or Basra), enters the main mosque, ascends the pulpit with his face veiled and that the Kufans are hostile towards him, then he unveils his face and begins speaking. So, the variants of the introductory story express the same ideas with different words. They paraphrase.

To illustrate this feature clearly, I quote here as an example the different ways that the variants express the motif of al-Ḥajjāj’s silence that appears in the “Pebbles narrative:”

Motif: Silence

3 Ibn Aʿtham, Tārīkh, 7:7.
4 Al-Masʿūdī and Ibn ʿAbd al-Rabbih II emphasize al-Ḥajjāj’s silence by depicting him putting his thumb on his mouth.
5 Basra only appears in Ibn Qutayba.
Al-Mubarrad: “he remained silent for a while” (*makatha sāʿatan lā yatakallamu*),
Al-Balādhurī: “he sat silent for a while” (*jalasa sāʿatan lā yatakallamu*)
Ibn Aʿtham: “he is not saying a word” (wa-lā yanṭuqu bi-ḥarfīn) and “is silent” (*sākitun*)
Al-Yaʿqūbī: “he is not speaking” (*lā yata kullamu*)
Ibn ʿAbd al-Rabbih II and al-Masʿūdī: “he sat putting his thumb on his mouth” (*jalasa wāḍiʿan ibhāmahu ʿalā fīhi*)

All of these versions express the idea of silence differently. We will see that when it comes to the text of the speech itself, such paraphrasing does not happen.

The introductory narrative serves to prepare the ground for the speech itself, it is subordinate to it, and carries various rhetorical functions. We noted that the motif of silence, for instance, is there to create a suspense before the speech begins. It makes the Iraqis (and the later audiences who heard it narrated from later transmitters) wonder: Is the new governor going to be able to speak? Is he going to fail? In the previous chapter, we have seen that these narrative elements added to the speech, enhance its performative dimension. As the example of the silence motif shows, they should also be regarded as a rhetorical technique to capture the attention of the audience to whom this speech was narrated.

5.4.1.2. Narratives added to the end of the speech (C)

The variants of the Inaugural speech have a different number of narratives added to its end; most have two, one has four, and some variants have none. In general, whether the variant has these narratives or not depends on the type of work that records it—*adab* or history.⁶ There are five main reports (sometimes in different versions):

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⁶ If the *khutba* is part of a collection of speeches, (al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba), it has not attached reports. When it is a part of a narrative section, as in al-Ṭabarī and al-Masʿūdī, it does. For example, the speech appears twice in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, once as part of a collection of speeches and second time as part of narratives about al-Ḥajjāj; accordingly, the speech has reports attached to it only in the latter case. The only exception is al-Mubarrad, that has an attached report despite being a part of a collection of speeches. Yaʿqūbī does not have any attached reports despite being a narrative text but this instance can be easily explained because this variant constitutes a mere reference to the full version of the speech, as I explain below (under the pattern of ‘quoting’).
1. (PF) “Pebbles Falling Story” relates how fear made pebbles fall from the hands of those who had been initially ready to throw them at al-Ḥajjāj.

2. (S) “Salām Story” tells how after the khutba al-Ḥajjāj orders his servant to read aloud a letter from 'Abd al-Malik to the Kufans, starting with the greeting salām 'alaykum. The audience stands in silence, and al-Ḥajjāj shouts in anger: “Amīr al-mu'minīn has greeted you, and you do not reply to him?” When he has the servant read again, no one in the mosque dares not reply to the greeting in the letter.

3. (T) “Takbīr Story” tells how after the three days have passed, al-Ḥajjāj goes to the market and hears a man say, Allāh akbar. Al-Ḥajjāj then ascends the pulpit and makes an address (3/272 “Takbīr in the market”) accusing the Iraqis of praising Satan and of hostility and servility at the same time. In al-Mas'ūdī we see some elements of this speech in the body of the main khutba. 4. (U) “Umayr b. Ḍābi’ Story” is the most developed and comes in different versions. The gist of it, however, is the same: ‘Umayr b. Ḍābi’, whom the reader has already encountered in the introductory story, asks al-Ḥajjāj for exemption from the order stated in the khutba and offers to send his son to war in his stead. But al-Ḥajjāj is told that 'Umayr, years ago during the attack against the caliph 'Uthmān, attacked the dead caliph’s corpse. Al-Ḥajjāj then has the old man executed. Some of the accounts about 'Umayr also include poems of varying lengths (the versions of al-Mubarrad, al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih II). Most’ include the three following verses, which lament the inevitability of joining the army of al-Muhallab.

Get ready!\(^7\) Either you will visit 'Umayr Ibn ḏābi’
Or you will visit al-Muhallab.
These are two disgraceful prospects from which
   Only traveling to a white place where snow stays for a whole year \(\text{i.e. very far}\)\(^9\) can save you
   But even if he who runs away went beyond Khurasan,
      He [al-Ḥajjāj] has become so powerful
   That to him Khurasān is as close as the city market,
      Or even closer.\(^10\)

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\(^7\) Ibn 'Abd Rabbih II only includes the first two lines.

\(^8\) Al-Mubarrad and Ibn 'Abd Rabbih II have “get ready” (tajahhaz) while al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī have the “choose between” (takhayyar).

\(^9\) Muhammad Ibrahīm, the editor of Kāmil, understands the second half of the line rukūbuka hawiyyan min al-thalj ashabā to mean “traveling to a white place where snow stays for a whole year” but “riding a white horse is whiter than snow.” And so does the author of Khizānat al-arab. Given the context wherein the poet is talking about a long distance (because he suggests that the only option that one who hesitates to join the army has is to run far away from al-Ḥajjāj), I believe he would want to point out the strangeness of long snow, rather than the whiteness of his horse.

\(^10\) This is a loose translation of: fa-adhā wa-law kānā Khurasānu dinahu ra'āh makāna s-sūqi aw hīya aqabā. Another possible interpretation offered by Khizānāt al-arab is: “But even if the one who runs away went beyond Khurasān, he would see Khurasān as close as the city market or even closer.” The point of discussion here is the subject of the verb adhā—al-Ḥajjāj (my transl.) or the man who runs away (Khizānā). I believe it to be al-Ḥajjāj because in another place of al-Mubarrad’s al-Kāmil (3: 261) this line is preceded with a line about al-Ḥajjāj (mā in arā l-ḥajjāja yaghmida sayfahu yada d-dahiṭṭa yatruka t-tifla ashyabā = 1 cannot imagine that al-Ḥajjāj would put his sword into the scabbard until the child’s hair turns grey out of fear). While in my interpretation al-Ḥajjāj is portrayed as a ruler who can reach anyone wherever they go (similar to other poems about him), in the Khizānā’s interpretation, the man who runs away is portrayed as so scared of al-Ḥajjāj that any distance, however long, does not seem far enough for him. Muhammad Ibrahīm’s understanding of the pronoun -hu.

in the last line as referring to al-Muhallab is improbable, because the poem was reacting to al-Ḥajjāj’s killing of 'Umayr b. ḏābi’ and the fear induced.
There are only two options, the poet says: either to follow ʿUmayr’s destiny and die or join the army, both options being disgraceful. Not even a year of flight will help because for al-Muhallab distances do not matter; he will find you even beyond Khurasān.

5. (B) “Bridge Story” is connected to ʿUmayr’s narrative. It recounts that when people hear what has happened to ʿUmar, they rush to join al-Muhallab’s army so quickly that they block a bridge. These reports are not attached to the khutba at random; their function is related to the main khutba. The Takbīr Story (T) primarily emphasizes the message of the khutba, developing the threats to the Iraqis. The Salām Story (S) functions as evidence of the weight that al-Ḥajjāj’s words had on his audience. It also sheds light on the relationship between letters and speeches—a theme to which I will return later—as it takes letters for speeches in the absence of the speaker. The main purpose of the reports of Pebbles Falling (PF), the ʿUmayr Story (U), and the Bridge Story (B) is to show the efficacy of al-Ḥajjāj’s khutba. This is especially true for the developed ʿUmayr Story in its many versions, which seals the khutba with the execution of the man who has disobeyed al-Ḥajjāj. The word is accompanied by the deed, and as the reports show, the two create a very persuasive argument. All these narratives thus serve as testimonies about the success of the performance.

5.4.1.3. Commentary (D)

The commentaries appear in the variants of al-Mubarrad, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn Qutayba (Gharīb al-ḥadīth) and elucidate some of the difficult vocabulary of the khutba. The three commentaries differ. They all display the authorial voice of a commentator and so comes probably from the pens of these compilers themselves (al-Mubarrad, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn Qutayba). They follow the tradition of the early lexicographical works known gharībs (gharīb means rare) which selected, compiled, and commented upon difficult and obscure words, most commonly found in poetry or in the Qurʾān.

11 It is worth noting that a later compiler, Ibn ʿAsākir (6th/12th cent) included in his Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq al-Ḥajjāj’s Inaugural speech at Kufa with the commentary taken from Ibn Qutayba. Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh, 12:133-139.
In this section we have observed that the added elements (i.e., Introduction and the narratives that follow the speech) are dependent on the speech. They shed light on how later narrators understood, interpreted, and used it. In this way it can be compared to the function of narratives that often accompany poetry. As with ‘action poems,’ the speech is the core of the unit here while the narratives that embed them depend on it and provide insight into how people remembered, imagined, and re-performed the speech. The existence of a linguistic commentary further reveals parallel between the transmission of this speech and the transmission of poetry. It indicates that the speech itself was transmitted with a care for its exact wording, even if those words were no longer easily understood. What follows provides evidence to the *khutba*’s transmission with the emphasis on retaining the wording (*riwāya bi-l-lafẓ*) and to its oral channels.

5.4.2. Speech (B): Memorization, Orality, and *Riwaṭa bi-l-Lafẓ*

This section discusses the patterns of transmission when it comes to the text of the speech proper (B). We will look first at the similar variants—al-Mubarrad, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih II, al-Jāḥiẓ, and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih I, al-Ṭabarī—which best show the patterns of adding and shortening the speech. We will then move to the less similar variants—al-Mubarrad, al-Masʿūdī, Ibn Aʿtham, and al-Balādhurī—and focus on the patterns of quoting, adding, and reshuffling. It is especially the comparison of the less similar variants that proves the oral transmission of the *khutba*.

For convenience, I include the text of the speech (in al-Mubarrad’s version) in both English and Arabic, and a short summary of it.

The Inaugural Speech at Kufa: summary, Arabic text, and translation

*Summary*
The speech begins in verse, when al-Ḥajjāj introduces himself to his audience as an experience rider and warrior (B.1). He then, in prose lines, announces a rule of terror in Iraq and proclaims himself to be the absolute master of its people (B.2). Turning back to verse, rajaz this time, he declares a state of war, describes the seriousness of the situation, portrays himself as a courageous warrior and soldier of God (muhājir) and calls the Iraqis to join him (B.3). In the next section, he uses prose to the to explain that the caliph chose him precisely for his harshness (B.4). Then he transitions into a series of threats to the Iraqis and compares them to a people damned by God in the Qur’ān (B.5). Finally, he pronounces the actual goal of the speech—a command to the people of Iraq who had been enlisted in the army to take up arms (B.6).

I am a son of clarity, who climbs narrow mountain paths; when I remove my turban you will know me!12

People of Kufa, indeed, I see heads that have ripened and are ready for harvesting. I am their master! I can almost see blood glistening between turbans and beards.

Then he said:

The times have become grave, so strong, O Ziyam [his she-camel]! The night has seated a vigorous rider on her

Who is neither a shepherd of camels or sheep

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12 Taken from a poem by Suḥaym b. Wathīl al-Riyāḥī. He was a Mukhaḍram poet (d. 60/680) whose poem appears in the Aṣmaʿīyāt. The quotation in al-Ḥajjāj’s khutba is the beginning line of the poem. See al-Aṣmaʿī, Aṣmaʿīyāt, 3.
Nor a butcher by his slaughter board
Then he said:
The night seated a strong fearless man on her [the she-camel].
Keeps going in and out of the deep-sounding desert
a muhājir who is not a Bedouin.
And he said:
It [the war] rolled up its sleeves, so you become firm;
And the war became serious with you, so you too become serious.
And the bow has a strong string
Like the leg of a young camel or even stronger.
There is no escape whence there is no escape.

I, by God, oh people of Iraq, the rattling sound of old water-skins shall not frighten me [as it frightens camels], and my sides shall not be squeezed like figs [to be tested]. For I have been already made to show my teeth [i.e. examined like a horse] to show my intelligence and inspected for experience. The commander of the believers—may God prolong his life—laid his quiver open and bit on the shafts of his arrows to test them. He found me as the most bitter of them, the hardest to break, and so he shot me at you. For you often rushed to sedition and lay in beds of error.

By God, I will wrap you as I would wrap a salama tree [a coniferous tree]. I will beat you as camels gone astray, for you are like the people of the town “enjoying security and quiet, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place: yet was it ungrateful for the favours of God: so God made it taste of hunger and terror [in extremes] [closing in on it] like a garment [from every side], because of the [evil] which [its people] wrought.” (Q 16:112). Truly, I do not promise without keeping my word, I do not intend something without following through. I do not measure without cutting.
B.6 The commander of the believers commanded me to give you your stipends and to direct you to fight your enemy with al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra. And I swear to God that if I find in three days anyone who has taken his stipend, lagging behind, I shall behead him.

5.4.2.1. Similar variants: Adding and shortening


As the table above shows, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih II, al-Jāḥiẓ, and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih I are very similar (●●) to al-Mubarrad. Though the differences between these are minimal, we can still observe in their comparison the patterns of adding words to the khutba or shortening it, while keeping most of the words and phrases intact. These are most of the departures:

1. In B.1, both Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih I and II have a few lines of poetry added to the anā ibn jalā verse.
2. In B.2 Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi I and II, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Jāḥiẓ when compared to al-Mubarrad have an extra line that reads: “I carry evil in my scabbard, I match it with its own shoes, and reward it with its like.”
3. In B.3 al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih I (but not II), and al-Ṭabarī add one hemistich “it [the war] rolled up its sleeve, so you too roll them up.”
4. In B.4 Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih I, for example, adds the appellation “People of Iraq, the source of dissent and hypocrisy and wicked morals,” and al-Ṭabarī and al-Jāḥiẓ have instead of “my sides shall not be squeezed” “I shall not be squeezed.” Here Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih II exhibits different phrasing of the idea of the Iraqis’ going astray but has similar wording in the cases like “he turned his quiver upside down” (kabba kinānahu) (as it is also found in al-Jāḥiẓ) or “and bit on the shafts of his arrows to test them, he found me,” “the hardest to break” (as it is found in al-Mubarrad).
In B.5 Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih I and II adds more threats, following the same structure of the sentence (verb in the emphatic state + mafʿūl muṭlaq), which reads: “I will trim you as I would trim a rod; I will hit you as hard as I would hit the rock.” Most versions add here a variation of a threat in which al-Ḥajjāj warns against public gatherings and spread of false rumors. Al-Jāḥiẓ’s version of this threat reads: “So, beware of me; beware of the intercessors, gatherings, groups, and false rumors. ‘What do you say? And what does this have to do with you’ By God, you shall be straightened, remain on the path of Truth, else I shall leave each of you preoccupied with the condition of his body.”

In B.6 most versions are wordier when it comes the punishment for those who would disobey al-Ḥajjāj’s order and so instead of threatening with “beheading” as al-Mubarrad does, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih I records al-Ḥajjāj warning any soldier lagging behind that he shall “shed his blood, seize his property, and destroy his house.”

The observations that we can make based on the comparison of the five rather similar versions of the speech—al-Mubarrad, al-Ṭabarī, al-Jāḥiẓ, and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih I and II—are as follows: The divergences between the variants are minor. They consist in adding or shortening the speech by a few lines of poetry, by a few words that follow the existing grammatical structure, or by words of direct address. Paraphrasing is absent, which indicates that the speech itself—unlike the added elements—was transmitted with an emphasis on the wording of the speech. These minor divergences, in turn, show that we are not dealing with one version simply copied in different works, as in the case of the “Misunderstanding narrative” which is identical in the three versions. They point to an interplay of oral and written transmission. In the following section it will become clear that the transmission of this speech was oral and that its vehicle was memorization.
5.4.2.2. Divergent variants: Quoting, adding, reshuffling

The variants are those of al-Mubarrad, Ibn Qutayba, al-Yaʿqūbī, al-Masʿūdī, Ibn Aʿtham, and al-Balādhurī. The more divergent variants of the speech clearly confirm our findings. Consistently, we do not see cases of *paraphrasing* like we did with the added elements of the speech but cases of *quoting, adding* (and shortening) and *reshuffling* the *same words and phrases*. All this points to the fact that during the transmission of the speech, attention was paid to its exact words; that long sentences and passages of it were memorized; and re-ordered with a new performance.

5.4.2.2.1. Ibn Qutayba, al-Yaʿqūbī: Quoting

The shortest versions of the speech— Ibn Qutayba and al-Yaʿqūbī—may be considered references to it rather than full versions. Despite their brevity, they preserve some verbatim phrasing, found in al-Mubarrad and elsewhere. Ibn Qutayba and al-Yaʿqūbī could have summarized the speech and said that al-Ḥajjāj on that day delivered his famous speech wherein he threatened the Iraqis and commanded them to war. Instead, Ibn Qutayba quotes him saying “By God I will bind you up together as a salama tree, I will trim you as one trims a rod, will beat you as camels gone astray.” And, al-Yaʿqūbī has: “People of Iraq, people of dissent, hypocrisy, heresy, and wicked morals” “The commander of the believers laid his quiver open, and tested each of his arrows, and he found me as the most bitter of them, the hardest to break.” It seems that Ibn Qutayba and al-Yaʿqūbī reference the famous speech by quoting passages from it that everyone knows. Presumably, they would serve as ‘hooks,’ using Carruthers’s term, on which the larger speech hangs. In other words, by mentioning these famous passages, the readers would be able to recall the speech at large. We can think of a similar practice when only a few lines of long poems are quoted in works *adab* works, like *Aghānī*. 
5.4.2.2. Al-Masʿūdī and adding: Three types

Al-Masʿūdī’s version is approximately as long as most versions but it shows more departures, especially in B.4 and B.5. The variations in transmission—added and reshuffled material—come out here very clearly. An example of reshuffling is the appearance of the “salama tree” phrase which in most versions opens B.5, in the middle of B.4. B.5, in turn, has whole sentences added. The additions are of three types: 1) entirely new structures unseen in other versions 2) explanations 3) extensions of an existing phrase through repetition of the same idea, following the same rhythmical/grammatical structure.

1) An example of the first case, new structure, is a long passage added to the Qur’anic quotation in B.5 that begins: “So hasten and become righteous, remain straight and do not deviate, conform and pledge allegiance, submit, …” (fa-asraʿū wa-staqīmū, wa-ʿtadalū wa-lā-tamīlū, wa-shāyaʿū wa-bāyaʿū wa-khdaʿū, ...) We cannot know here, whether al-Masʿūdī himself or one of his sources, simply invented this passage or whether it is based on an older lost version of the speech. The rhythmical parallel repetition that is visible in this sentence and is also found in the rest of the passage may point to its oral provenience, but this cannot be taken as a decisive proof, as already mentioned. When we cannot compare with equivalents in different versions it is impossible to tell.

2) An example of the second case, explanation, would be a sentence like “I am al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf” in the middle of threats in the mixed B.4/B.5 section, or a sentence like “let each man look into his own matter, let him be wary of my acumen (firāsī),” which comes after the warning against gatherings and spreading rumors. It is noteworthy that neither of these additions adds new information. They only reinforce or explain what has been said.
3) The third case, extension, is most interesting because it gives us more insight into the text’s transmission. An example would be a phrase starting “How often you rushed to error…” (ṭālamā saʾaytum fī l-ḍalāla(ti)). In al-Mubarrad the equivalent phrase reads: “You often rushed to sedition…” (ṭālamā awḍaʾtum fī l-fitna(ti)). Al-Masʿūdī expands on this idea in the same or similar rhythm: “…and [how often] you took the path of sin, practiced error, and persevered in ignorance” (…wa-salaktum sabīla l-qhayya(ti), wa-sanantum sanana l-sūʾ(i), wa-tamādaytum fī il-jahāla(ti)). We can see that the text continues within the same grammatical and rhythmical structure, one more hint towards an originally oral performance.

Overall, al-Masʿūdī’s differences from al-Mubarrad’s version consist in adding/removing an element while keeping its structures intact. This also points to an oral transmission of the text. An oral narrator of the speech retains its structure because its rhythm helps him or her to preserve it in his or her mind but may forget a word and substitute it with another, improvise a new element that fits in the rhythm, or expands on the same idea.

5.4.2.2.3. Ibn Aʿtham and adding: Oral and written

Ibn Aʿtham’s variant is by far the wordiest. It contains extended additions to the text as we know it from most other versions. This may be either because Ibn Aʿtham have had access to a version of the speech that none other preserved source did, or because he took more liberty with his sources and added passages of his own. In most cases Ibn Aʿtham’s additions are not corroborated by other versions and so it is hard to tell.

It is my guess in this specific case that Ibn al-Aʿtham added passages of his own. We can observe him taking liberty with the text already in B.1, which is filled in with four more lines from the poem by al-Riyāḥī, one of the poets of the Aṣma ṭyāt, from which the ibn jalā verse is taken. He may have known the poem and added the lines to the speech. B.4, for example, has a sentence
is added from a different al-Ḥajjāj’s speech, “After Dayr al-Jamājim,” and another Qur’ānic quote (4:38). But these variations are inconclusive and they represent still rather minor departures from the text as we know from most other versions.

It is in B.5 where Ibn Aʿtham departs radically from all other variants. This section adds a paragraph-long sequence of threats. I read the passage as an attempt to stress al-Ḥajjāj’s image as a cruel tyrant and to add to this image the glare of a kāhin. This section departs from the rest of the text stylistically and provides an example of a passage that we can claim to be a later literary addition to an older text. Concretely, the difference consists in the type of rhyme and grammatical structures: while the older parts of the speech (the one that agrees with most versions, B.4) contain what Arab grammarians would call non-artificial rhyme prose “sajʿ ghayr mutakallaf,” the added paragraph contains artificial rhyme prose “sajʿ mutakallaf.” To understand the difference between the two, let us look at the rhyming patterns from B.4. This section appears, with some variations, in all full versions, and it is composed in sajʿ ghayr mutakallaf:

ولا أقرع كقرع المروة، ولا يُقعقع لي بالش نان ولقُد فُررت عن ذَكاء، وَفُت شتُ عن تَجر بة، وجَرَت إلى الغاية القصوى، وانتِ لألحم الرجل مكَم بفعله وأُحذوه بنعله، وإن أمير المؤمنين عبد الملك بن مروان نَكَثَ كنانتهِ فعَجَمَ عيدَانها عودًا عودًا، فوجدني أَمَرَّهَا عُودًا، وأصلَبها مَكْسَرًا وأحَزَمها أَمرًا وأصدقها مخ برًا، فوج هني إليكم ورماكم بي…

The rhyme is mainly derived from grammatical structures. A parallel negation (wa-lā, wa-lā) creates a rhythm, and so does a sequence of three verbs in the past tense and in first person singular (-tu). Then the text continues with a few sentences which rhyme through a string of nouns in the

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13 This edition has marqa. However, other versions which contain this phrase have marwa, “rock,” which makes more sense. I substituted here marwa for marqa.
accusative case (-an). The last rhyme is formed through the second person plural suffix (-kum). The only rhyme in this excerpt, not derived entirely from a grammatical structure, is found in the middle of it: fi ‘lihi ...na’lihi. Here not only the possessive suffix (-hi) but also the last radical of the noun (l) create the rhyme. Another thing to note about saj’ ghayr mutakallaf is that the rhyme is not too frequent and usually does not repeat more than three times. This is conditioned by and goes hand in hand with the natural flow of language.

This type of saj’ is typical of early Arabic prose and it is ubiquitous in the Qur’ān. For instance, this is how sūrat Baqara opens:

الٓمٓذَٲل كَ ٱلۡڪ تَـٰبُ لَا رَيۡبَ فِيهِ هُدًً۬ى لِلۡمُتَّقِينَ ٱلۡذِّينَ يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوَةَ وَمَّا رَزَقۡنَـٰهُمۡ يُنفِقُونَ...

alif lām mīm. dhālika l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi hudan li-llāhu-l-muttaqīn-alladhīna yuʾminūn a-bi-l-ghaybi wa-yuqīmūn al-ṣalāt-wa-mimmā razaqnāhum yunfiqūn... (Q:1-2)

The type of rhyme is different from the one we observed in the previous passage. Here the rhyme results from concordance not only grammatical features but also root-consonants (ma’qūlu, yaqūlu, yaṣūlu, madkhūlu, and zamānī, bayānī, and jalālī, amwālī).

Because this type of saj’ is a more difficult to achieve, the semantic or the grammatical level of the sentence may suffer and result in a less natural structure, which is why it is labeled saj’
The underlined sentence in the excerpt above that starts with *fal-yaʿqil* is an instance of an unnatural grammatical structure. The unnaturalness stems from the fact that grammar and syntax are bent to serve the rhyme. For example, terms are not grammatical equivalents: *maʿqūl* is on the same semantic and grammatical level as *lisānun, dhihnun,* and *raʿyun,* (subject/fāʿil) not *yaqūlu,* *yaṣūlu* (relative clause/jumlat ṣifa) nor *madkhūlu* (adjective). The word order *aw lisānun bi-hi yaqūlu* is strange; more natural would be *aw lisānun yaqūlu bi-hi.* The switch is made only to rhyme. Another example of a similarly unnatural structure caused by the requirement of the rhyme appears a few lines below:

People of Kufa! Aren’t you afraid that bridled horses will raid you, with the famous warriors sitting on them, and that they will leave your men as like erected bottles of wine, leaking, with their legs tied together?

First, we can observe that the rhyme is dense, whether it consists only in vowels or in vowels and consonants. This is naturally difficult to achieve, so the grammatical and semantic structures get complicated as words are chosen solely for the purpose of fitting the rhyme. The adjective *sāʾila* describes *ziqāq* and so it is equivalent grammaticaly to *nāṣiba.* But because of the rhyme between *nāṣiba* and *ʿāṣiba,* an artificial division is created between them. The meaning itself is, at least to me, rather obscure.

In addition to a stylistic change, we can note a change in tone towards short exclamations and a turn to the third person. Al-Ḥajjāj is quoted saying in the same type of *saj*: “How preposterous! When it indeed passed and it is gone. What is the news! What is the news! Al-Ḥajjāj is a male snake. Through his sword heads and necks are revealed! And every day, he has the flow
and that what deters.” This rather confusing text is not the fault of my bad translation; it is opaque in its Arabic original too. This sentence contains one Qur’ānic reference to *muzdajar*, “that which deters” (Q 54:4). This enigma (“What is the news! Al-Ḥajjāj is a male snake”), the opacity of language, the exclamations, all of this may remind us of the rhymed prose of the pre-Islamic diviners—*sāj al-kuhhān*. To be precise, it may remind us of *sāj al-kuhhān* as it was imagined by Abbasid sources. What we are witnessing here may be a stylization of al-Ḥajjāj into a figure of a *kāhin*.

Ibn Aʿtham’s variant thus shows differences between its different passages. In terms of transmission, B.4 is similar to all other full versions while in B.5 has a long passage that is unique to Ibn Aʿtham, and deviates in style, person, and tone. Based on this, we can suggest that this passage—which does not appear in any other variant of the speech—is a later literary addition. It is also clearly a literate addition as the convoluted structures and the dense rhyme make clear. These were not rhymes that one could invent on a spot, these were not structures that come naturally to an oral mind; these were words that were thoughtfully devised to rhyme as perfectly as possible and to cast the echo of the speech of pagan diviners.

Aʿtham was a qāṣṣ, “a storyteller/preacher.” As such, he had a looser approach to the sources than other historians, at least judging based on this khutba. Faithfulness to sources and veracity was not his sole claim to success; the attractiveness of the narrative played an important role. As Conrad explains, “the narrator or storyteller had to edify and entertain, in harmony with the audience's conceptions of the origins of Islam and the early growth of community.” The idea of taking the audience into consideration is crucial here. Ibn Aʿtham, it seems, wanted to enliven an older layer of the khutba, elaborating on its themes and appealing to the audience’s expected image of al-Ḥajjāj. As we noted, the style of the added passage clearly differs from the rest of the khutba, displaying a clearly later ornamentation and sophistication of language that critics would call artificial, mutakallaf.

The example of Ibn Aʿtham’s variant shows that we can see through different layers of our speeches by means of comparison of the different variants and by means of paying attention to changes in style and tone. The fact itself that we can discern different layers in the text disproves the idea of full scale Abbasid fabrication of the speech—again, if the speech was fully invented by one later author, we would expect it to be homogenous. It is also important to note that what we observe with Ibn Aʿtham are accretions and not disappearance of some of its parts. The whole body of the speech, as it appears in other versions, in subsumed in Ibn Aʿtham. This suggests that even in a case that a narrator adds something of his own, he preserves the original material. A significant detail shows insistence on preserving the material. While in all other full versions, we read about al-Ḥajjāj’s proclamation that he is not a Bedouin but muhājir in rajaz-verse, Ibn Aʿtham

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17 What further complicates the situation is that scholars disagree whether Ibn Aʿtham lived in the 3rd/9th or in the 4th/10th century. See note 73.
incorporates this as part of his prose: “People of Iraq, I am not a Bedouin who takes refuge in the roots of ‘awsaj tree.” This is one exceptional instance of rephrasing, which suggests that in this case the oral transmission was broken, yet the word remained in the narrator’s mind who felt obligated to include it. We can thus observe that in this instance Ibn A‘tham shows more reliability than in his account of the conquest of Arwād, which according to Conrad “consists entirely of topoi and stereotyped motifs.” Even this qāṣṣ-historian considered it important to transmit the entire speech without changing its wording, only adding to it, and thus even in its most deviant variant, the core of the khuṭba displays great stability.

5.4.2.2.4. Al-Balādhurī: Reshuffling

The last variant to be discussed here is al-Balādhurī’s. Al-Balādhurī significantly departs from al-Mubarrad and these departures once again, do not consists in rephrasing the speech. Al-Balādhurī’s variant has, like al-Masʿūdī and Ibn Aʿtham, some passages added in comparison with al-Mubarrad’s. But what al-Baladhurī shows perfectly is the reshuffling of the same passages. While the first half of this version follows the usual structure—Al-Balādhurī begins with the “son of clarity” (ibn jalā) verse, mentions the famous line about plucking heads ready to be harvested, and moves to rajaz—the second half is the one that interests us. This part, which would be equivalent to B.4, B.5, and B.6 in other versions, contains familiar expressions and sentences, transmitted almost word for word, but in a different order. To make the pattern of reshuffling clear, I include here the translation of al-Balādhurī B.4, B.5, and B.6 compared to the rest of the versions. The highlighted parts are the ones that can be found in al-Mubarrad’s version and distinguished

18 Yā ahla l-ʿirāq(i), innī lastu bi-ʿaʿrābīy(in) aʿūdu (sic) bi-jarāthīmi l-ʿawsaj(i). aʿūdhu should be read aʿūdu. This is a reference to the custom of the Bedouins to take refuge from wild animals with the aʿsaj tree (a coniferous tree): ya ʿsijunī bi-khawtala lā yubṣirīnī aḥsabahuHe tricked me into take refuge with the ʿawsaj tree and he sees me not taking notice of him [i.e. he thinks that I don’t see him]. See Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿarab, 2:324.
by colors based on the different parts of al-Mubarrad’s version. However, this excerpt also exhibits the relationship of al-Baladhuri’s excerpt to the other versions by indicating in brackets in which other versions each highlighten sentence/passage can be found:

By God, People of Iraq, I do not measure without cutting and I do not promise without keeping my word [all full versions]. By God I carry evil in my scabbard, I match it with its own shoes, and reward it with its like. [IAR I & II, J] God made an example of the town “enjoying security and quiet, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place: yet was it ungrateful for the favours of God: so God made it taste of hunger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment (from every side), because of the (evil) which (its people) wrought.” (Q 16:112), [all full versions]19. You are these people. Or you resemble those. So put yourself in good order, be straight and do not deviate [from the right path]. And the morning appeared to anyone who has eyes. By God I shall command humiliation for you until you turn around. I will wrap you as I would wrap a salama tree [all full versions] until you become humiliated. I will hit as hard as I would hit a rock [IAR I & II, IA, M] until you become soft. I will beat you as I would beat she-camels gone astray [all full versions] until you follow. The rattling sound of old water-skins will not frighten me [as it frightens camels], and my sides will not be tested as figs are tested [all full versions] I do not sit on my rear, I am a man who have been already made to show his teeth [i.e. examined like a horse] to show his intelligence [all full versions] and I ran towards the furthest goal. [J, T, IAR I] I was unsheathed [like a sword] out of experience. The commander of the believers, Abd al-Malik scattered the contents of his quiver (nakata kinānatahu) [all full versions & Y], took them into his hands, and bit on the shafts of his arrows to test them. He found me as the most bitter [all full versions] and he directed me towards you, threw me in your throats. For you are people of injustice and discord, of dissent and hypocrisy (baghyl wa-shiqāq wa-nifāq), how often you rushed to sedition [var. all full versions], practiced error [var. J, IAR I&II, T,IA, Mas] Are you asking what your commander said? And what does he say? This and this. Beware of me and of the gatherings and groups [var. J, T, TII, IAR I&II, IA, Mas] and what was and is; what do you say about that? Indeed, I see blood among turbans and beards [var. all full versions] whose al-Hajjāj himself caused to flow so that you take the right path and become righteous through it. Else, I shall create for each person among you a preoccupation in his body [var. J, T, IAR I]. So, accept justice, and let go off rumors, like the words of one among you who said: So and so told me quoting so and so, before I hit you, in a way that women will become widows and children orphans. And if you abstain [from injustice] you shall be in good health and gain good fortune. Each of you shall ride by himself and mind only himself!

B.2 B.4 B.5

Al-Ṭabarī I: Most of these words, including the mention of gathering and groups a few lines above appear in a second version of the speech that al-Ṭabarī includes in his Tārīkh.

M = Al-Mubarrad (d.286/898), al-Kāmil fi al-lugha wa-adab, 1:298-303
B = Al-Baladhuri (d.279/892), Ansāb al-ashrāf, 7:273-278
Mas = Al-Masʿūdī (d.345/956), Murij al-dhahab, 3:126-131
IAR I = Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d.328/940), Al-ʾiqd al-farīd, 4:208-210
IAR II = Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d.328/940), Al-ʾiqd al-farīd, 5:278-281
T and TII = Al-Ṭabarī (d.310/923), Tārīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk, 6:202-210

19 By all full versions, I mean all versions except for Ibn Qutayba and al-Yaʾqūbī, which are summaries of the speech.
One glance at this colored second excerpt as al-Balādhurī recorded it reveals that the speech from which it is taken is composed of passages in different order than that of most of its variants. These quotations are either verbatim or show some small variants, as we will see below. This clearly points to a process in which attention was being paid to the wording of the text in addition to the meaning.

Both the wording and meaning hold the whole composite together. An instance when the meaning is the cement of the speech is the following: As we can see from the passage above, in al-Balādhurī B.6—the command to the soldiers not to stay behind else they be killed after the third day—is missing from this speech. However, it is not missing altogether. It is compensated for only a few lines below the speech itself, where al-Madāʾnī’s narrative is attached, which quotes al-Ḥajjāj proclaiming a warning to the same effect.20

The comparison of the more divergent variants only confirms our findings. The text is highly stable even in these, and much attention is paid to the transmission of the precise wording. All of the differences consist in quoting, adding/shortening, reshuffling and the same or very similar sentences and passages (with the exception of Ibn Aʿtham’s variant who added a paragraph of his own). All this even more clearly points to the oral transmission and memorization of the text. We can imagine how the transmitters memorized verbatim chunks of the speech, which they

20 Al-Balādhurī’s version reads: “I only punish them with sword. For if rebellion were allowed to the people, the enemy would never be killed, the spoils (fayʾ) would not be collected, and custom/religion (dīn) would not be honored. And if the Muslims did not attack the mushrīkūn, the mushrīkūn would attack them. I gave you the period of three days, and whom from the army of Ibn Mihnaḥ I find after the third day, I am not responsible for him.” Al-Balādhurī, Ansāb, 7:275.
then delivered in different order. The analysis also revealed the oldest layer of the speech—passages that appear in all full versions.

Both the minor divergences noted in the previous sections as well as the more serious ones, noted here, can remind us of the transmission of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabic poetry. These ancient Arabic poems are also highly stable and sometimes differ in individual words, in a different order of their verses, or in having certain verses added or removed. Monroe and Zwettler explained these divergences in terms of orality. There is not fixed text in oral society; “each poet, each reciter recreates and rephrases a given poem with each performance of it.”\(^{21}\) However, as Monroe noted for the Arabic context, memory played a greater role here than in the epics that Parry and Lord analyzed.\(^ {22}\) We must understand the transmission of this speech (and others) in similar terms. A fairly stable text has circulated in society and the divergences—that for the most part do not modify the words themselves but mainly add more or change their order—are a result of its various oral performances. To account for the divergences as those seen in al-Balādhurī’s variant we must imagine the transmitters having memorized passages of the speech and at re-performing them at any occasion slightly differently, sometimes adding some elements and regrouping them. This must have happened before the text was fixed in writing.

In other cases, it is impossible to determine to what degree the process of transmission of the speech was aided by writing without documentary evidence but it its role does not seem prominent. We have encountered only one instance of clearly written text in the case of Ibn Aʿtham. The oral component is however clear and we will see it even clearly in the section that follows. For now, let us be reminded that pointing out the signs of the speech’s oral transmission are essential to the starting point of this chapter: an enquiry into the ‘authenticity’ of Umayyad

\(^{22}\) Monroe, “Oral Composition,” 40.
oratory. For, if the speech circulated orally before it was written down, this refutes the pervasive view that all these speeches were literary inventions penned by Abbasid historians.

More importantly, the oral transmission of this speech opens an entire discussion of its public performance and social significance. Based on what we have seen so far, it seemed important to the generations that preserved this speech that it be preserved in wording and not only in meaning; and shows memorization as an important element in the process. The following section, which zooms in on a portion of one speech in all its variants, brings out the patterns of transmission from a different perspective and in more detail. It is here where some patterns of oral transmission emerge most clearly.

5.4.2.3. Zooming in: Minor variations and oral transmission

Only a line-by-line comparison can reveal some of the word changes and structure transformations that occurred during the transmission of the speech. The selected passage is Inaugural speech, B.4.

As usual, al-Mubarrad’s version serves as the starting point.

Al-Mubarrad:

I. إني والله يا أهل العراق، ما يُقعقع لي بالشنان، ولا يُغَمَزُ جانبي

II. ولقد فُرزْت عن ذَكاء، وَفُتْشُت عن تَجربة

III. وإن أمير المؤمنين أطال الل  ه بقاءه نَثَرَ كَنَانَتَهُ بين يديه، فَعَجَمَ عيدَانها، فوجدني أَمَرُّهَا عُودًا. وأصلبها مكَسْرًا،

IV. فرماكم بي

I. I, by God, oh people of Iraq, the rattling sound of old water-skins shall not frighten me [as it frightens camels], and my sides shall not be squeezed like figs [to be tested].

II. For I have been already made to show my teeth [i.e. examined like a horse] to show my intelligence and inspected for experience.

III. The commander of the believers—may God prolong his life—laid his quiver open and bit on the shafts of his arrows to test them. He found me as the most bitter of them, the hardest to break, and so he shot me at you.

IV. For you often rushed to sedition and lay in beds of error.
Already the first sentence shows that none of these versions is identical. This in itself already points to an oral transmission because if these versions were copied by scribes more of them would identical. But it is the nature of the variations that is important here. If we follow the two phrases that semantically form the core of the first line (mā yaqaʿqiʿu lī bi-shinān(i) and lā yughmazu jānibī ka-taghmāzi tīn(i)) we see that their order differs from one version to another, though they are almost the same. The differences in wording between the phrases are minimal such as lā yughmazu/lā aghmazu/mā aghmazu and consists in grammatical variants (passive vs. active tense, particle of negation) not in a different word choice. Ibn Aʿtham’s version departs here more substantially from the rest of versions, as we can see the underlined word. He also uses a different maṣdar: ghamz instead of tighmāz. The added words are a phrase from a different section of the speech (based on the majority of versions) and thus his divergences still largely fall into the mechanism of reshuffling. All this, points to oral transmission—the narrators remembered these

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23 The editor has al-marqa.
phrases and uttered them as they came to their mind, keeping close to the wording and the rhyme, but at times switching the order.

In the second line al-Mubarrad’s version has only two main parts (furītītu ‘an dhakā’(in) and futtīshtū ‘an tajriba(tin)), while most versions also add a phrase “I run towards the (furthest) goal” (jaraytū ilā al-ghāya, Bal.). I will discuss the three parts in reverse order. This last phrase, which I underlined in the text shows differences in each line and so further shows that the texts are based on different versions. The second phrase furītītu ‘an dhakā’(in) shows stability across different versions, perhaps because it is short and easy to remember. The first phrase futtīshtū ‘an tajriba(tin) is also stable with the exception of al-Balādhurī’s variant which has untuḏiytū through which the phrase changes its meaning. Instead of “I was examined for experience” it becomes “I was unsheathed [like a sword] out of experience [with the Iraqis].” We can suppose that the more obscure untuḏiytū (see in the first line, in bold) was the older word which then slipped from a transmitter’s memory to be substituted by another one that follows the same structure (passive) and fits with the following ‘an tajriba; by one that is more common and more abstract.

The best evidence of oral transmission is the third phrase (underlined in the Arabic text), whose each version lightly differs, which again confirms that different variants were in circulation. Besides that, we also see that the nature of these differences points to oral transmission: The phrase in most instances retain the same rhythm which is produced by the same grammatical structure:

- *mafʿūl bihi + tamyīz*

The narrators would replace one word for another, retaining the meaning (“He found me as the most bitter of them, the hardest to break”) and structure. Only Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn Aʿtham have more semantic elements added, still keeping the same rhythmic structure. This could be through
the work of an oral transmitter but also of a scribe, whose ear led him to expand the phrase in the same rhythm. A clearly written element appears in al-Ya’qūbī’s version, which breaks the rhythm by adding the particle min.

In the second phrase, the situation is different, yet it still could point to a mind based on memory, if not on purely oral transmission. The most distinguished word here, kināna, goes unchanged, while different verbs accompany it: nathara (نثر “spread”), nakata (نكت “strike the ground”), kabba (كتب “turn upside down”), nashara (نشر “spread out”), nakatha (نكت “break, undo”). Thus, kināna serves here as the memory ‘hook.’ It is easy to see how the different verbs transformed from one to another. Nathara and nashara are very close and point to an oral transmission variant because their written forms differ. Nakatha and nakata could be the result of both, as the differences consists either in change of one phoneme or a scribal dot. Kabba stands here alone, but if we consider its form, it could be related to nakatha.

Finally, Ibn A’tham’s treatment of the fourth phrase points to a scribal intervention. Ibn A’tham’s fourth phrase reads wajjahanī ilaykum wa-ramākum bī amīran ʿalaykum. While most versions have either ramākum bī or wajjahanī ilaykum, he combines the two and adds the unnecessary explanatory amīran ʿalaykum. Unnecessary because both al-Ḥajjāj’s immediate audience and later hearers or readers were well aware that ‘Abd al-Malik sent him to Iraq to be ruler over (amīr ʿalā) its people. As we have already seen, Ibn A’tham in general tends to be wordier than others, and appears to add to his material as he sees fit, which is what we see here. In this sentence only, we have observed a mix of transmission methods.

IV. لأنكم طالما أوضعتم في الفتنة، واضطجعتم في مراقد الضلال.
(Al-Balādhurī)
Finally, the fourth sentence of the passage also shows a similar evidence of oral/memory-based transmission as the previous ones: the same structural pattern in all its variants, except for al-Mubarrad’s version which only contains its first half. Otherwise, there are two main phrases in all other variants. Al-Baladhurî for example has 1. \( \text{tālamā awḍa} \, \text{tum fī al-ḍalāla} \) and 2. \( \text{sanantum sanana al-ghayi} \). Whatever the particular words variants are, all these versions show the same structures:

- \( \text{tālamā} + \) perfect verb 2\(^{nd}\) person plural (\( \text{awḍa} \, \text{tum/sa} \, \text{aytum} \)) + fī + noun (\( \text{dalāla}, \text{fitan} \))
- perfect verb 2\(^{nd}\) person plural (\( \text{sanantum/salaktum} \)) + mafūl mufāl (\( \text{sanana/sabīla} \)) + mudāf ilayhi (\( \text{al-ghayi/al-baghi/ghawāya} \))

The close-up comparison of one passage is in line with the findings so far. The parallel structures, the closeness of all the variants, the slight differences and the nature of these differences provide evidence of three things. First, there were multiple variants of this speech. Second, the transmission process was for a large part oral or reliant on memory. Third, the oral transmission is surprisingly reliable, and allows only for minor changes. All of these phenomena can be observed in other al-speeches of al-Ḥajjāj (see Appendix II).
5.5. Conclusion

The Inaugural speech in Kufa is an ‘action speech,’ applying Heinrichs’s categories of poetry to oratory, because it forms the core of the narrative unit, drives the action, and is hermeneutically primary to the narratives that surrounds it. In this chapter, we have noted abundant characteristics of oral composition that it displays—such as rhyme, parallelism, metaphor, concrete language, etc. These do not only make the message powerfully affective and mark it as a performance, but they also make it memorable and memorizable. And, indeed, the comparison of its variants carried out in this chapter (and the comparison of the variants of other speeches of al-Ḥajjāj carried out in the Appendix II) proves that memory was the main vehicle of its (and their) transmission, and hence that the transmission at least partially took place orally. It also shows that the khutba itself is more stable than the narratives in which it is embedded, as it was transmitted with an emphasis on the same wording (riwāya bi l-lafz) while the narratives were transmitted based on their meaning (riwāya bi-l-maʿnā). The khutba’s transmission is in many ways comparable to poetry. Therefore, this analysis thus renders the generalizing ‘Abassid fictions’ hypothesis incorrect and identifies passages of the khutba that clearly circulated orally prior to their being written. Appendix II shows that the same patterns of transmission can be observed in some other speeches, whose variants have been preserved.

When were al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches written down, why are they (and other Umayyad speeches) so few, and why are they so short? These concomitant questions cannot be answered with certainty, especially since we have no contemporary sources that preserved them. Muḥammad Abū Zahra suggested that it has to do with transmission—with the lack of writing and with the fact that shorter
speches are easier to remember. Orality, however, does not preclude reliable transmission, as the case of Arabic poetry shows, and so other reasons will have to be sought. Based on indications that context, type of variations, and isnāds provide, I draw a possible transmission scenario.

**Context:** We cannot exclude that we have in our hands echoes of al-Ḥajjāj’s actual speeches as they were remembered and mediated by later narrators. Schoeler has argued in the first half of the 2nd/8th history was written down in official collections produced by order of the caliphal court by scholars like al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). However, we cannot confirm its full content or form.

More importantly, here we need to distinguish between poetry and oratory. While I have compared oratory to poetry on different occasions to differentiate it from historical prose (and ordinary speech, speaking in terms of performance), we must acknowledge that Arabic poetry is much more stable over time, and that the speeches that have been preserved—provided we accept the possibility that they indeed reflect some al-Ḥajjāj’s actual speeches—are much less similar to what he once may have said than al-Farazdaq’s verses are to what al-Farazdaq once said. The main indicator of this are the two idiosyncracies of Umayyad speeches in general mentioned earlier—brevity and scarcity—that create discrepancies with the reports about al-Ḥajjāj’s (and in general Umayyad) practice of long preaching and with the vast amount of reports about Umayyad orators and the relatively small umber of Umayyad khuṭab.

The reasons of these discrepancies are twofold, related to matters of style and status. Firstly, oratory displays enough rhyme and especially parallelism in the field of meaning that A. F. L. Beeston included—with Egyptian, Accadian, Ugaritic, Aramaic literatures, and Hebrew Old Testament—among what he labeled Near Eastern poetry. However, Arabic poetry is clearly

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24 Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Al-khaṭāba: uṣūluhā, tārīkhuhā ōf tā’līb uṣūrihā* (Cairo: Matba’a at al-‘ulūm), 213.


much more stable, tied together through a complex system of meter and rhyme that is missing in the *khutab*.

Secondly, in time of al-Ḥajjāj the status of Arabic poetry was well established—it was already seen as a tradition worthy of compiling. Ibn Qutayba’s description of the role of poetry, though coming from an Abbasid-era writer, is so felicitous for its description of its important mnemonic, or memorial (in Carruthers’s wording) function, valid also for the Umayyad period that I will quote it here in full:

Poetry is the mine of knowledge of the Arabs, their book of wisdom, the archive (*dīwān*) of their historical reports, the depository of their battle-days, the wall erected to protect their glorious deeds, the trench drawn to defend their praiseworthy acts, the true witness on the day nobility is challenged, the decisive proof when litigation occurs. He for whom they do not have a single line of poetry to point to his nobility and to the noble deeds and laudable actions he claims for his forebears—his achievements will fade, even if they are well-known, and become effaced in the course of time, even if they are substantial. But whoever binds them with the rhymes of poetry and lends firmness to them with its meters, and makes them well-known by means of an unusual like of poetry, or a saying that becomes proverbial, or a poetical idea of great elegance, he will make them outlast time and rescue them from any denial; he will remove from them the wiles of the enemy and lower the eye of the envious.27

Poetry was the main vehicle to preserve past tribal and individual glories and to immortalize the present ones. It perpetuated older cultural signs and symbols and adapted them to the requirements of its time. An excellent Umayyad example is the panegyric poetry of al-Akhtar that functioned “as an encoder and transmitter of the ideology of Islamic hegemony and as one of the insignia of legitimate (Arabo-)Islamic political authority” through “adoption or co-option of the high Jāhilī panegyric ode.”28 By contrast, al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches were more pragmatic and meant to reach direct effect (e.g., to persuade people to join the army; to announce a victory in war, to announce the death of a caliph and the election of a new one). They, too, channeled imperial ideology, as we have seen in the previous chapter, but it seems that—given their patchy state of survival—they

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28 S. Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 81.
were not considered the same key cultural product and thus were not collected and memorized with the same care as poetry was. Furthermore, the political Umayyad speeches lack one important aspect when compared to poetry: They do not commemorate the “nobility, noble deeds and laudable actions” of any “forebears;” instead they represent the views of al-Ḥajjāj and the Umayyad state. They did not speak in the tribal and genealogical language of the period and therefore people had less incentives to memorize them. The transmission of poetry and oratory could be seen through Jan Assmann’s division of memory into ‘cultural memory’ and ‘communicative memory.’ The former serves is cultivated deliberately and serves to stabilize and convey society’s self-image while the latter is handed on biologically, orally, via communication.29 While poetry—both old and contemporary—was already part of the ‘cultural memory,’ contemporary political speeches were still largely part of the realm of communicative memory.

A comparison with modern speeches can elucidate how Umayyad speeches were transmitted. Many Arabs still remember some excerpts from Jamāl ʿAbd al-Naṣīr’s speeches. Though they were often long, people would remember only a few excerpts from them—those which encapsulate the key messages of the speech, the most memorable ones, the most rhetorically effective ones. We can imagine the transmission of the Umayyad speeches in similar terms. In the case of the modern speeches, the key passages were of course frequently repeated in the media, discussed, and commented upon. The following chapter will inquire more into the channels of transmissions.

*Type of variations:* The speech displays all kinds of variations that signal oral transmission. However, not all of them can exclude the post-800 period when orality remained a mode of transmission *alongside* writing. Some of the more more serious variations, which we saw most

clearly in the divergent versions of the Inaugural speech—especially the different order of whole passages while retaining their wording —clearly show that the text was transmitted orally before the overall structure of the speech was fixed by writing.

Iṣnāds: The Inaugural Speech is the only one that offers a variety of ʿIsnāds:

Al-Mubarrad: ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿUmayr al-Laythi (qāḍī of Basra before al-Ḥasan al-ṣābīrī)

Ibn Qutayba mentions in his ʿIsnād an early lexicographic work Gharīb al-ḥadīth (“The difficult words of ḥadīth”) by Abū ʿUbayd. Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Salām (d. 94/614), originally a son of a Byzantine slave from Herat, was a lexicographer and in this book he set out to explain all kinds of difficult words. Through al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d.791) already wrote the first Arabic dictionary Kitāb al-ʿAyn, the earlier tradition of ʿgharībs, which commented upon difficult vocabulary in known Arabic lore and thereby collected it, continued. Gharīb al-ḥadīth is not limited to Prophetic ḥadīth as the title may lead us to believe. Rather, we should understand ḥadīth as what we usually refer to as akhbār: all types of sayings, speech, and stories. So, the book fulfills a similar function like the three commentaries on the speech discussed above. But in contrast to these, in Abū ʿUbayd’s book does not narrate the narratives in full but only discusses their difficult expression. In the form that this lexicographical work has been preserved, its note of al-Ḥajjāj’s Inaugural speech is limited to the following reference: “Abū ʿUbayd said that he [al-Ḥajjāj] delivered a kḥuṭba and said: ‘Beware of these suqafāʾ and gatherings (zarāfāt).’”

31 iyyāya wa-hādhīhi l-suqafāʾ a wa-l-zarāfāt. Most of the variants have a version of threat against public gatherings, especially the word zarāfāt appears in most. Interestingly, when Ibn Qutayba points to this very passage in Abū ʿUbayd’s Gharīb al-ḥadīth his quotation does not match this one that has been preserved. This can further exemplify the fluidity of early written works like Gharīb. A second possibility is that it’s a copyist’s error because the spelling of zarāfāt is difficult to read in the manuscript and the copyist might have mistyped it as a different form.
discussion of the terms *suqafāʾ* and *zarāfāt* follows. Abū ʿUbayd expects everyone to know what he is talking about. And indeed, as we have seen earlier, a similar passage appears in most variants, including the word *zarāfāt*.

The oral pedagogical setting of this early book is essential to understand the significance of such a reference. *Gharīb al-ḥadīth* was not yet written as a fixed book, in the sense that its author would conceive of it as a unit and would give its final form. Rather, what we have in front of us is a redacted compilation of his students’ notes, the ‘aides-mémoire’ of Schoeler’s discussion of this type of non-fixed notes. This can be observed in sentences such as “And Abū ʿUbayd said about the speech (*ḥadīth*) of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf when he asked al-Shaʿbī…” So when Abū ʿUbayd refers to the al-Ḥajjāj’s speech by merely mentioning a few words of it, without quoting the actual text, he clearly expects his students to have the speech memorized. Already at the beginning of the 3rd/9th century, al-Ḥajjāj’s Inaugural speech belonged to the knowledge that young men seeking knowledge had already stored in his memory.

In general, the *isnāds* of the Inaugural speech end with figures like Abū ʿUbayd (d. or 224/838), a language and *ḥadīth* scholar, ’Awāna b. al-Ḥakam (d. 147/764), an akhbārī from Kūfa, Abdallāh b. Abī ʿUbayda (2nd/8th cent), a great-grandson of ‘Ali’s famous companion ‘Ammār b. Yāsir, or Ibn ’Ā’isha (d. 126/744) a singer from Medina. If we take these *isnāds* seriously this would mean that the speech in the form as it was preserved circulated orally and was

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32 Like Abū ʿUbayd, I do not know what *suqafāʾ* means but as he explains *zarāfāt* are gatherings.
33 *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 5:532. There are five entries in the section on al-Ḥajjāj (5:531-535). They all record al-Ḥajjāj writing.
35 I have not found his death date but I have found death dates of his teachers and students: Muḥammad b. ‘Ammār al-ʿAnāsī, one of those from who he heard *ḥadīth* died in 61/681 and Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. Wāqīd, on of his students, died in 207/822.
written down already in mid-8th century. They also point to a wide variety of circles in which these speeches were transmitted. ʿAwāna b. al-Ḥakam was an early historian specialized in material about Umayyads, ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Ḥubayda, on the other hand, belonged to the anti-Umayyad pro-Shiite camp and narrates accounts about his great-grandfather. We saw that his presence in the isnād clarify the pro-Kufan leaning of the ‘Misundersting’ version of the introductory narrative. This makes it more probably that he actually narrated the speech. He was most probably from Medina like the rest of his family. His uncle’s (or perhaps father’s) name is immortalized on one of the inscriptions in the Ḣismā desert (Figure 9), on the border of the present-day Jordan and Saudi Arabia.36

Figure 9: Inscription by Salama b. Muḥammad b. ʿAmmār b. Yāsir in Ḣismā desert. The text reads اللهم اغفر لسلمة بن محمد بن عمر بن ياسر “Oh God, forgive Salama b. Muḥammad b. ʿAmmār b. Yāsir.” Www.alsahra.org

Another interesting figure is Ibn ʿĀʾisha who brings us to the famed circles of singers in Medina. Ibn ʿĀʾisha, a student of the great Maʿbad, was himself a singer and Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī dedicated a whole chapter to him in Aḥāni.37

In sum, this chapter considered in breadth and in depth the issue of authenticity of the speeches. It brought out the arbitrariness of the strict parameters of authenticity that we impose of historical text by framing the contemporary discussions in larger context of the historical emphasis

36 This website has collected images of recently found Ḣismā inscriptions. Number 33 reads: “Oh God, forgive Salama b. Muḥammad b. ʿAmmār b. Yāsir.” Salama is, according to the tradition, the brother of the Abū Ḥubayda, the father of ʿAbdallāh, who ends al-Jāḥiz’s isnād to the speech. However, it has been also thought that Salama and Abū Ḥubayda are the same person. See al-Mīzā, Tahdhib al-kamāl, ed. Bashshār ʿAwād (Beirut: Risāla, 1980), 34:21. If this is the case, then the inscription preserves the name of ʿAbdallāh’s father. http://alsahra.org/?p=17532
37 Al-Īṣfahānī, Aḥāni, 2:203ff.
on the scientific, objective Truth that was fully promulgated as the main goal of history in the specific context of 17th-century Europe. My discussion is however not a mere rhetorical tactic to avoid the question and I offer my own approach to it and intervention to the debate: the inclusion of theories of orality. In the framework of oral literature, also referred as verbal art, the issue of authenticity and search for the original text is misplaced. At the same, time if we can prove that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches circulated orally before they were written down, that would mean that they were not mere literary inventions. And I argued that we can do that and reach traces of the ‘second-stage speeches’ according to my categorization (See Introduction). A comparison of ten variants of the Inaugural speech at Kufa shows that it was first transmitted orally before it was written down and I offer an analysis of another speeches in Appendix II, which supports this finding. The conclusion suggests that the speech probably circulated in Kufa and Medina of mid-2nd/8th century in various circles. Another important implication of the oral transmission is that it prompts further questions, such as, “Why were speeches like al-Hajjaj’s memorized and transmitted, and what can we say about their practice in early Islam?” The following chapter address these questions, making a distinction between the perceptions of oratory in the Umayyad and in the Abbasid period period.
CHAPTER 6

MEMORY AND PRACTICE OF Umayyad Oratory in Al-Jāḥīz’s Al-Bayān wa-l-Tabyīn (3rd/9th-Century)

6.1. Introduction

In mid-3rd/9th century, sitting in his private library among the piles of books that eventually killed him, a prolific litterateur (adīb), Mu’tazilite theologian, and keen observer of nature and the world was writing a voluminous work dedicated to the Arab art of speaking and eloquence. This man was al-Jāḥīz, “Man with Bulging Eyes.” Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, “The Book of Clarity and Clarification,” now considered an inventory of Arab humanities, became a prerequisite for any educated man and woman in the Arabo-Islamic world since then. Ibn Khaldūn called it “one of foundations and four pillars of adab.” The centrality of this book to the medieval Islamic tradition reflects the centrality of its subject matter—eloquent speech of the pre-Abbasid Arabs. Al-Jāḥīz’s Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn will serve as the foundation for this chapter. While the previous

1 Admittedly, this story is probably apocryphal, but it nicely illustrates the point about al-Jāḥīz’s bookishness. Pellat, “Al-Djāhīz,” EI2.
3 This is an expression of Charles Pellat. Pellat, “Al-Djāhīz,” EI2.
chapter looked into the transmission of al-Ḥajjāj’s Inaugural speech, this one moves beyond the body of ‘literary’ speeches to examine Umayyad oratory from a different perspective; from the perspective of external sources (i.e. not oratory itself but sources about oratory).

I will argue that with the transforming cultural landscape, the role of oratory also changed, acquiring new meanings in the Abbasid period. Al-Jāḥiẓ, it seems, played a key role in articulating these early Abbasid perceptions on oratory and reformulating the old ones. Thus, in addition to examining the view of al-Jāḥiẓ, this chapter also attempts to access the attitudes to oratory and its practice in the Umayyad period, before the time of the great adīb, by paying attention to the different types of material that Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn contains. I will argue that oratory in the Umayyad period had primarily political functions both as a symbol of power and as its medium. I also examine Umayyad oratory as a practice, beyond the perceptions of it and its symbolism, and argue that speech was performed at all social levels, and what is more, that there was a class of ‘professional orators,’ i.e., people who were hired either to memorize or to deliver address on behalf of someone. The existence of ‘professional orators’ adds a piece to the puzzle of the Umayyad process of transmission and memorization of speeches.

While Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn provides a wealth of material on Umayyad oratory, it is not easy to navigate. We need to distinguish the Abbasid discourse from the actual Umayyad practice. At the most obvious level, Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn has three major components: poetry (both Umayyad and Jāhilī), narratives (akhbār), and al-Jāḥiẓ’s own authorial commentary. Al-Jāḥiẓ’s authorial commentary is naturally the latest layer of the work. The poetry and narratives are represented to the reader as quotations of earlier narrators and are thus ostensibly of earlier date. Looking for sources for the Umayyad period, it is my view that poetry, of these two, is the more reliable source, and therefore I will base most of my discussion on it. The akhbār cannot be
always taken at face value; they often reflect later reminiscences of the figures who appear in them (similar to what we witnessed in Chapter 3). Due to the lack of meter and rhyme, they are also much less stable than poetry in a culture of memory. Yet they still provide an important window into the social and cultural relevance of Umayyad oratory from the 1st/7th until the 3rd/9th century.

Umayyad poetry (as compiled by al-Jāḥiẓ and elsewhere) is an extremely rich source, generally considered contemporary for good reasons. The meter and verse also help to retain the words and make poetry more stable than other genres. Poetry played an important role in the Umayyad society, rulers and their political opponents patronized poets, who became influential public figures. The Muslim tradition grants poetry a key role in remembering and memorizing the past, as we have observed in previous chapter. It was said about al-Farazdaq (d. 114/732), for instance, that if it were not for his verses, half of people’s stories would have been forgotten. Poets like al-Farazdaq who lived not so far in time from the early Abbasid philologists such as al-ʾAṣmaʿī wrote down their poems after a few generations of oral (cum written) transmission. In many cases we also know the names of the narrators (ruwāt) who participated in the process. What should also be noted is that early Abbasid scholars themselves were not oblivious to the questions of authenticity. Quite the opposite: they based their name on trustworthiness and reproached those who lowered their standards for authentic poetry. It would harm their scholarly careers if they

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5 See, for example, Robinson, ʿAbd al-Malik, (New York: OneWorld Publications, 2012); Andrew Marsham, Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). Even Peter Webb has rejected an early concept of Arabness, accepted the general authenticity of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and used it as an important source. Webb, Imagining the Arabs, 68-69.


7 The first generations of scholars—Abū ʿAmr (d.154/770) and his students al-ʾAṣmaʿī (d.216/828) and Abū ʿUbayda (212/825)—traveled to the Arab tribes and took poetry directly from them. Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (232/845) in his Ṭabaqāt fuhūl al-shuʿarāʾ (“Classes of master poets”) criticized Ibn ʾIṣḥāq (d. 159/770), the author of the first biography of the Prophet (which came down to us in Ibn Hishām’s redaction) for his uncritical acceptance of all kind of poetry. Ibn ʾIṣḥāq himself is said to have been apologetic about it and acknowledged that he is no specialist in poetry. Ibn Hishām himself removed some of poetry from Ibn ʾIṣḥāq’s sīra that specialists would not recognize as
were found forging poetry. Poetry in *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-tabyīn* will thus serve as the primary source of Umayyad attitudes to oratory.

In addition to poetry, I will also make use of some of the *akhbār* that al-Jāḥiẓ narrated, to reflect on Umayyad practice of oratory. While these may not be as early as poetry, as long as they do not make an ideological point about oratory which may relate to their Abbasid-era agendas, they still may provide valuable insights about oratory as Umayyad practice. Similarly, I will use historical sources that mention professional orators not as part of a certain projected image but in off-hand comments.

6.2. REMEMBERING UMAYYAD ORATORY IN EARLY ABBASID TIMES

Let us begin with a passage in the authorial voice of al-Jāḥiẓ that aptly illustrates all the connotations and associations that oratory has for him. This passage appears towards the end of the first part of *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* and serves to outline the contents of the second part—all that, in his words, “must be mentioned” with regard to Arab oratory. I will argue that from all these points only (1), (2), and (7) belong to the Umayyad period, while the rest are reflections of the trends and developments of al-Jāḥiẓ’s time.

(1) With unseemly words did the *Shuʿūbīs* attack the Arabs’ use of rod (*mikhṣara*) during their speeches; [their use of] lance (*qanāh*) and stick (*qadīb*); their reclining and leaning on the bow; their plowing it in the ground; and their pointing with the stick. We shall mention it in the second part, God willing.


The changing attitude to transmission and greater emphasis on authenticity is illustrated by the famous anecdote about the competition between the transmitter Ḥammād al-Rāwīya (d.772) and the trustworthy scholar al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabī (d.785), wherein al-Mufaḍḍal gains the prince al-Mahdī’s favor for not forging poetry. Whether this anecdote is true, we will not know. But it expresses the distaste of the early Abbasid scholars for the previous transmitters who did not live up to their scholarly standards. For the analysis of this anecdote (p.47) and the development of poetry criticism see Rina Drory, “The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making, *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 33-49.
insignificant amount of the speech by other [Arab] kings is mentioned as oratory and art.

(3) In it, we must mention the parts of the composition of all speech and how the Qur’an differs from all rhymed and prose speech, while it is in prose and does not rhyme in the same manner as poems and saj’; and how its composition (naẓm) became one of the greatest proofs and its compilation one of the greatest arguments [for its divine nature].

(4) In it, we must mention the matter of Ismā’il, peace be upon him, and the transformation of his language when he was fourteen years old. How he forgot the language in which he had been brought up and to which he had been accustomed. How he could express anything in Arabic without having been taught and instructed to do so. What is more, he did not have a foreign accent, used Arabic correctly, and did not suffer from any speech impediment. And nothing of that [former language] habit has remained attached to his tongue, God willing.

(5) We must mention some of the speech of al-Ma’mūn. 

(6) [...] We must mention pulpits and why they were adopted [...]. Were pulpits used in any other nation than ours? [...] We have already mentioned that the nations that possess morals, manners, wisdom, and science are four: the Arabs, the Indians, the Persians, and the Byzantines [...] [We must also mention] the proof that the Arabs are most eloquent; that their vocabulary is the richest; that their expression the most perfect; that they have most parts of the composition of speech (aqsām ta’līf kalāmihā akthar); and that the proverbs that were said among them are the best in quality and the most widely circulated; the proof that their instinctive grasp [of language] is limited to them and that improvisation; that extemporaneous speech is proper to them; and the difference between their poetry and between what the Byzantines and Persians call poetry. How the erotic poetry that they introduce to their songs and melodies is told by their women. This only happens exceptionally among the Arabs. And how the Arabs precisely began fitting rhythmic structures on metered and rhymed poems (al-alḥān al-mawzūna ʿalā al-ashʿār al-mawzūna),9 applying rhythm to rhythm, while the non-Arabs (ʿajam) stretch the words, shrink them and expand them so that they fit the rhythm of the song and apply rhythm to what does not have any. [...] 

(7) We shall also mention the rest of the names of orators, ascetics, witty and elegant men, God willing. We shall mention some of the speech of al-Ḥajjāj and others and what the rest of this part allows us.10

This fascinating excerpt (which incidentally also shows that al-Jāḥiẓ can be systematic when he wants to be)11 hints at the multiple means of persuasion and layers of meaning that old Arabic

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10 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:383-385.

11 Many modern and medieval scholars have accused al-Jāḥiẓ of being disorganized, long-winded, etc. Charles Pellat, the leading authority on al-Jāḥiẓ in Western scholarship, has called his Bayān wa-tabyīn “extremely disorderly” and backs his judgement by Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. 1005). Pellat, “Dījāḥiẓ,” EI2. Cf. Behzadi, “Al-Jāḥiẓ and his Successors on Communication,” 126-127. On the reception of al-Jāḥiẓ’s work by later Islamic scholars, including Abū Hilāl see Chapter 4 in Behzadi, Sprache und Verstehen.
oratory had at its disposal in early Abbasid society. For al-Jāḥiẓ, factors beyond words and rational argument were at play when listening to or reading a khutba. Paragraph (1) illustrates how central performance was to early Arabic oratory. The orators used all kinds of traditional means such as rods and bows to enhance the effect of their words; this practice was so inextricably connected with them that some people ridiculed them for it. Al-Jāḥiẓ frames the whole plea for Arab oratory as a response to the Shuʿūbīs and their ridicule of the rods of Arab orators.12 Secondly, paragraph (2) of the excerpt highlights the intimate connection of oratory with the caliphal office and rulership. It is also telling that almost all of the caliphs (with the exception of al-Maʾmūn) whose speech is worthy of mention (paraphrasing al-Jāḥiẓ) belong to the Umayyad period. His selection of material and comments also suggest that he preferred the old, especially Umayyad-era, oratory over the new one.13

In the third paragraph (3) al-Jāḥiẓ brings up the divine use of language in the Qurʾān. This is related to the doctrine of iʿjāz, the miraculous nature and the inimitability of the Qurʾān.14 Al-Jāḥiẓ, like most of his contemporaries, believed that the language of the Qurʾān is perfect and in itself constitutes a proof of its divine nature.15 Paragraph (4) alludes to the Arabic traditions about Ismāʿīl (Ishmael).16 His father Ibrāhīm (Abraham) is a key Qurʾānic figure, the founder of the true

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12 See Chapter 2.
13 Most of orators and eloquent men in al-Bayān wa-l-tabyān come from the Umayyad period. He also includes Prophetic material and ancient Arabian lore to make his points and he holds some of his Abbasid contemporaries in high regard. In general, however, he holds that Arabic oratory has declined and that low-quality orations with fabricated themes have spread in his time. Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 2:8-9. I quote this comment in Chapter 4.
14 Traditionally the doctrine of iʿjāz is traced directly to the Qurʾānic verses that states that even if jinn and men unite their creative forces they will never be able to compose anything like a sūra of the Qurʾān. This has been termed the tahaddī, “challenge.” See Q 17:90 and Q 10:90. On the emergence of the doctrine of iʿjāz, see Sophia Vasalou, “The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qurʾān: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches,” Journal of Qurʾanic Studies 4.2 (2002): 23-53. See below for further discussion of iʿjāz.
15 A notable exception is his teacher al-Naẓẓām. He also adhered to the doctrine of iʿjāz, but he professed the theory of ʿarfā. According to this theory, the language of the Qurʾān is not miraculous intrinsically, but God made humans incapable of imitating it. Van Ess, “Al-Naẓẓām,” EI2.
monotheism to which humanity should return. The commentators considered his son Ismāʿīl to be the progenitor of Arabs. What is interesting for us is that according to the narrative Ismāʿīl becomes an Arab through language. At the age of fourteen he miraculously starts speaking in Arabic flawlessly (“he did not have a foreign accent, used Arabic correctly, and did not suffer from any speech impediment”). Likewise, in al-Jāḥiẓ’s time one could reach a high social status and effectively become an Arab through the mastery of Arabic. Al-Jāḥiẓ himself—handsomely rewarded for his works and one of the greatest advocates of the Arab culture despite his obscure, probably Ethiopian, origins—is a case in point.\footnote{The ethnic origins of al-Jāḥiẓ are unclear. On the different views among scholars see Agha, “Language as a Component of Arab Identity,” 69, n.9} Paragraph (5) mentions the speeches of al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833), who although Abbasid is still an early figure. Paragraph (6) posits the preeminence of Arabs over other ‘civilized’ nations on the basis of their language, eloquence, and superior level of language, arts and music. The Arabs have an innate talent for language, Arabic has the richest vocabulary, and only they can produce perfect extemporaneous speech. Even Arab prosody is clearly much more sophisticated than that of the non-Arabs, al-Jāḥiẓ argues. Finally (7) mentions al-Ḥajjāj as the one example among the non-kingly orators, which confirms that even after a hundred and fifty years al-Ḥajjāj was still seen as a prime example of an Arab orator. This reference only confirms the high respect that the Muslim sources, which are otherwise hostile to him, express for his oratory. It would be superfluous to repeat the numerous accounts about al-Ḥajjāj’s eloquence (see Chapter 2). Let me just reiterate that prominent early Abbasid scholars thought him to be the most eloquent among all Arabs, and that some of his enemies reportedly said that when he spoke from the pulpit they were almost ready to throw away all they knew and believe
what he was saying “because of his eloquence and his ability to connect arguments.”

It is clear that for al-Jāḥîẓ Arab oratory is much more than a string of elegant and persuasive words; it had become part of a textual canon, part of Arab cultural memory. Jan Assmann has described the key role of cultural memory for the political imagination of community and its cohesiveness. The speeches, as we can see, constitute a key cultural product in this sense. They commemorated the glory of past caliphs and other luminaries of early Islam, their effect amplified by the divine nature of the Arabic language—the mastery of which makes one a true Arab. They instill a sense of identity because, as al-Jāḥîẓ makes clear, the innate talent for extemporaneous speech belongs only to Arabs. Oratory in his time had become a corpus of texts (oral or written) of high cultural relevance, a canon.

Now, I want to suggest that (3) the divine nature of Arabic, (4) the pronounced connection between language and identity, (6) and the Arab innate eloquence and superiority over other nations through language were ideas that had fully developed only in al-Jāḥîẓ’s time as a result of larger developments in thinking about language. Therefore, they did not form part of the Umayyad perceptions of oratory.

To explain, language transitioned from the medium of discourse and the transmission of knowledge into a focal matter of study. Lale Behzadi described the 3rd/9th century as the period of a linguistic turn, when Arabic became the object of analysis in its own right and when the Arabic linguistic sciences flourished (See Chapter 2). Al-Jāḥîz was the herald of this new writing and

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18 This statement is ascribed to the pious Mālik b. Dīnār, who said that when he heard al-Ḥajjāj speak he would almost believe that the Iraqis have wronged him and that he is truthful “because of his eloquence and his ability to connect arguments (husn takhallussih bi-l-hujaj).” Al-Jāḥîz, Bayān, 1:394.

reading world captivated by Arabic and its possibilities. Michael Cooperson has described how this new culture of books and reading enabled the Abbasid authors to create a written archive of all Arabic knowledge and for the first time present it to wide audiences. Language sciences—the tool to understanding the miraculous nature of the Qurʾān—became the foundational field of knowledge.

In parallel with these developments, language gradually gained a divine aura. Al-Jāḥīẓ certainly played an essential role in establishing the divine nature of Arabic and its bayān, next to figures like al-Shāfiʿī, who argued that the Arabic language is, on the one hand, directly related to divine knowledge because in its perfection it can only be comprehended by prophets, and on the other hand, intimately connected to the pre-Islamic Arab past due to the Arabic knowledge of the Bedouin. The doctrine of iʿjāz is also important in this regard because it forms the foundation of the medieval Islamic veneration of language. It also seems to be an Abbasid construct as it emerged in Muʿtazilī circles only in the 3rd/9th century. The word iʿjāz means “incapacitation” and is also related to the word muʿjiza, “miracle.” This doctrine claims that the Qurʾān is God’s miracle and that no one is able to imitate it. The Qurʾān’s miraculous nature, as most medieval Muslim scholars agree, consists in its rhetorical uniqueness. In fact, al-Jāḥīẓ was among the first to have articulated

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24 A minority, including al-Jāḥīẓ and his teacher, the Muʿtazilī theologian al-Nazzām, upheld the theory of ṣarfa, “the turning away,” according to which God himself prevented others to imitate the style of the Qurʾān. But the general scholarly consensus (represented by such preeminent theologians such as the al-Bāqillānī, Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, or al-Khaṭṭābī) was that the Qurʾān is stylistically supreme intrinsically. Many medieval Islamic scholars have labored to provide concrete examples of stylistic devices that make the Qurʾan and its bayān, eloquence, imitable.)
the doctrine of *iʿjāz*.²⁵ He did so through a reference to exceptional Arabic eloquence:

> it is impossible that people like the Arabs, with their great number, their diversity of tastes, [the purity of] their language, which is their crowning glory, with eloquence bubbling and overflowing in their breasts, and their outstanding aptitude for fine language […] [it is impossible that among these people] no orator or poet should have dared to take up the challenge. [Yet this is what happened].²⁶

Thus, one of the first articulations of the doctrine of *iʿjāz* comes directly from the 3rd/9th century and is thus connected with the cultural agenda of its time.

Another immediate context was the already mentioned *shuʿūbīya* movement which promoted the non-Arabs, especially Persians but also Arameans and others.²⁷ These groups, now integrated in the structures of the empire, began to challenge the Arab elite and downplay the significance of Arab culture. Nonetheless, the challenge seems to have remained in the literary and cultural level and there is a debate as to the historical importance of the movement.²⁸ Judging from al-Jāḥiz’s polemical tone and the title of his chapter where this passage appears,²⁹ he considered

²⁶ The whole quotation in Pellat’s translation reads: “Muḥammad has one exclusive sign, which affects the mind in the same way that the dividing of the seas affects the eyes: namely, when he says to the Quraishites in particular and to Arabs in general (and they include many poets and orators, and eloquence, shrewd, wise, tolerant, sagacious, experiences and farsighted men): “If you can equal me in a single sura, my claims will be false and you will be entitled to call me a liar.” It is impossible that people like the Arabs, with their great number their diversity of tastes, [the purity of] their language, which is their crowning glory, with eloquence bubbling and overflowing in their breasts, and their outstanding aptitude for fine language—which has enabled them to speak of snakes, scorpions, wolves, dogs, black and other beetles, asses, pigeons and everything that crawls or runs and everything eyes can see or minds imagine—, who possess every kind of poetic form, such as the *qaṣīda*, the *rajāz*, etc., as well as prose and rhyming prose, and who moreover hurled insults at the Prophet from every quarter, just as his supporters exchanged lampoons with his opponents’ poet and debated with their orators, and his opponents asked Muḥammad riddles in public and disputed with him in assemblies, people who were the first to show enmity and declare war on him, suffering losses themselves and killing some of his supporters, [it is impossible that among these people] who were the fiercest in hatred, the most vengeful, the most sensitive to favour and slight, the most hostile to the Prophet, the quickest to condemn weakness and extol strength, no orator or poet should have dared to take up the challenge; [yet that is what happened.]” Al-Jāḥiz, *Al-Rasāʾil*. Translated by Charles Pellat, *Life and Work of al-Jāḥiz*, 47-48. Savant, “Shuʿūbīs” 513; *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran*, 27-28; y
²⁷ Ibn Wahshiyya’s *Nabatean Agriculture* is a unique example of a non-Persian *shuʿūbīya* Enderwitz, S., “al-Shuʿūbīya” *El2*.
²⁹ “Reply to the *shuʿūbīya*” (*al-radd ʿalā al-shuʿūbīya*).
the Shuʿūbīs serious enough to address their accusations. The connection between oratory and the cultural superiority of Arabs is made even more explicit in another passage.\(^{30}\) There al-Jāḥiẓ proudly states that Arabs have the greatest orators among all ancient nations: Indians have ancient books but their authors are unknown and Greeks theorized about speech but they did not have eloquent orators (!);\(^{31}\) Persians are the only non-Arabs with a tradition of oratory, but have to put much effort into composing their speeches. Arabs, then, remain the only people on the face of Earth endowed with the gift of improvised eloquent speech. This famous quote shows an idyllic view of early Arabic oratory as an immediate, improvised, and inspired manifestation.

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\(^{30}\) Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 3:27
We do not know of speeches other than those of Arabs and Persians. As for the Indians, they have written records and timeless books, which are not attributed to any known man or scholar: books that have been inherited, literary writings (ādāb) circulating and remembered on the face of Time.

The Greeks have philosophy (falsafa) and the art of logic (sināʿat manṭiq), but the ‘Master of Logic’ himself [i.e. Aristotle] was not articulate and did not distinguished himself by eloquence (bayān), despite his ability to categorize speech and describe it and its meanings, and despite his knowledge of all the properties of speech. They claim that Galen was the most eloquent man, yet they do not mention him in relation to oratory (khaṭābā) nor to that type of eloquence (balāgha).

There are orators among the Persians. However, all speech of the Persians, each of their ideas, is the result of a long contemplation, effort of the mind, prolonged solitude, counsel, support, long meditation, and study of books; [it is a result of] one quoting the knowledge of the other, and a third adding to this knowledge, until the fruits of this thought accumulated with the last of them.

In contrast, everything that the Arabic produce is through instinct (badīha) and improvisation (iirtijāl), as if it were inspiration (ilhām).

\(^{31}\) Whether or not al-Jāḥiẓ was aware of the Greek tradition of oratory, he must have assumed that his audience was not. The comparison of Arab eloquence to the presumed inarticulateness of the Greeks, whose sciences were otherwise highly esteemed, was a great rhetorical tool to highlight Arab cultural supremacy. It is plausible that al-Jāḥiẓ heard of the glory Greek rhetoric, given that he was well acquainted with other Greek works and concerned with the work of translators from Greek to Arabic, but we cannot tell how deep his knowledge of Greek literary culture was. Al-Jāḥiẓ died in 255/868-9, well after the caliph al-Mahdī (d.158/785) who commissioned the translation of Aristotle’s Topics, which deals with the art of dialectic; and well after the caliph al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833) and his ambitious translation efforts. Though the translation movement focused on scientific material, they still referred to oratory. Furthermore, we know that al-Jāḥiẓ was interested in the translation process because he criticized the work of the translations and their inadequate philosophical training; he singles out Ibn al-Bīṭrīq and Abū Qurra in this regard. See al-Jāḥiẓ, Kitāb al-Hayawān, ed. Ḥabīb ibn Ḥarīm (Cairo: al-Khānji, 1965), 76-79; also referenced in Uwe Vagelpohl, “Cultural Accommodation and the Idea of Translation” Oriens 38 (2010):183. On the history of the translation movement in general see Dimitri Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/5th-10th C.) (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012); cf. George Saliba, Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011). A useful summary of the translation movement’s history can be found in Chapter One of Uwe Vagelpohl, Aristotle’s Rhetoric in the East (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1-38.
Given the fact that these cultural attitudes to language fully developed only in al-Jāḥiẓ’s time, we cannot associate them with oratory in the Umayyad period. While their roots are Umayyad, the linguistic cultural claims matured in the 3rd/9th when the cultural canon had been formed and the culture became aware of itself through the pens of cultural brokers like al-Jāḥiẓ. The attitudes to language and language arts were essential to the development of Arab identity. Peter Webb has recently studied the Arab ethnogenesis during the Islamic period as a “as a fluid process of intellectual and social development by which disparate peoples interacted under specific socio-economic and political conditions that induced them to begin calling themselves ‘Arabs’ and to reshape their diverse, old identities into a new sense of overarching Arab community.” According to him, this process culminated in a conscious Arab identity only in the late 2nd/8th and early 3rd/9th century, as evidenced in the contemporary prose literature. He also discusses al-Jāḥiẓ’s contribution to the discourse on Arabia and Arabic. Webb is building on Rina Drory, who had explored the changing role of the Arab past from condemnation to a source of Arab ethnic identity. She also argued that Arabic poetry transformed “from a living practice into a stable archive.”

The disconnect between the perceptions of oratory, explored in this chapter, should be understood by the larger socio-cultural developments that Webb and Drory trace. In his own project aimed at heralding Arabness, al-Jāḥiẓ appropriated oratory and the art of extemporaneous speech as its main triumph. Umayyad speeches in the Abbasid period had become cultural memory intertwined with a sense of collectivity and identity. Umayyad speeches in its own time however

33 Webb, Imagining the Arabs, 126.
34 Webb, Imagining the Arabs, 296-301.
was devoid of these significations and had a different role.

6.3. Umayyad Oratory as Ritual and Performance of Power

Umayyad (early Islamic) oratory was, as perceived and experienced by its contemporaries, in the first place a tool of political power, inculcated with notions of kingship and rulership and with a profound ritual dimension. So, from the previously quoted passage where al-Jāḥiẓ discusses (mainly) Umayyad oratory only paragraphs 1 (oratory’s connection with rods, i.e., it’s performative and ritual aspect), 2 (oratory’s connection with the caliphal office and rulership), and 7 (the prominence of al-Ḥajjāj) truly apply to it; the rest reflect the concerns of al-Jāḥiẓ own time. The following two sections discuss the first two points. The rest of the chapter will attempt to look beyond the elite speakers that to al-Jāḥiẓ are connected with the glory of Arab oratory.

To fully understand the effect of speech on its listeners (i.e., it’s performative dimension) in the Umayyad period we must see it within a larger power of word in a world that was predominantly oral. The perceived power of the spoken word was greater in a society where writing and reading was not yet widely spread, and large part of any act of communication, persuasion, and commands remained in the realm of the oral. Word was deemed to have the ability to directly affect reality, which can be discerned from early Islamic poetry and akhbār. The Prophet’s personal poet Ḥassān b. Thābit, for example, described his tongue as rock-splitting and hair-shaving. A Mukhadram poet by the name of Suwayd b. Abī Kāhil (d. 60/680) praised his tongue as “sharp like a sword’s blade when it cuts.” An anonymous Bedouin described someone

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36 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:169.  
37 To repeat, the term ‘Mukhadram’ refers to (mainly) poets who lived both in the Jāhilīya and Islam.  
38 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:167.
else’s eloquence by comparing his tongue to a player’s mikhrāq, an item made of twisted rugs that boys used to beat each other in games. The early Islamic poet Jirān al-ʿŪd said that words are able to make green herbs blossom and turn thorny shrubs into colorful trees with fruit. A poet, Ash'ath b. Sumay, recited:

_Do you know the way from al-Mabdā to the mountain of al-Sanām, Where women sorceresses of words cram Whose speech heals from diseases._

The power of word can go as far as having a magical, healing effect, according to the poet. This should be, in turn, seen as part of the wider late antique beliefs in the magical power of words.

With the general power of word in mind, we can turn to the performative aspect of speech delivery. Al-Jāḥiẓ’s passage above began with the defense of the staffs and the rods, instruments enhancing the performance of Arab orators. If someone’s rod fell out of their hand, it was perceived as a bad omen. Sometimes, the rod could be replaced by a bow, especially in times of war. According to the sources, all these practices were continuations from the pre-Islamic period and the time of the Prophet who used both the pulpit and the rod (or bow). The other essential accessory of formal speech was the pulpit (minbar), whose symbolism will be discussed below.

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39 Al-Jāḥiẓ, _Bayān_, 1:169.
40 Al-Jāḥiẓ, _Bayān_, 1:281.
41 I have not found anything about him.
42 Al-Jāḥiẓ, _Bayān_, 1:282.
43 An anecdote depicting that the audience of Qutayba, al-Ḥajjāj’s official in Khūrāsān, take it as a bad omen when he drops his rod during speaking shows that the mere act of public speaking had symbolic meaning, beyond pragmatics. The anecdote narrates that Qutayba b. Muslim had to dispel the gloomy predictions of his future after his rod fell out of his hands in the middle of his speech. To make his point, Qutayba used a verse that showed that throwing away one’s rod can also have positive connotations. The verse mentions a woman who threw her staff because she decided to halt her journey and settle in a place:

_She threw her rod and the journey went to a halt with her, like a traveler delighted to finally return home._ Ibn Qutayba, _Uyūn al-akhbār_, 2:259.
44 Jawād ʿAlī, _Tārīkh al-ṣalāt_, 66-68. The sources also record different versions of the Prophet’s first khutba, but it is hard to say anything about its authenticity. In the case of the Prophet we are on a much less solid ground than with Umayyad speeches.
Here, we can note that the elevated position of the pulpit creates a hierarchy between the speaker and the audience and lends the speaker greater authority. One of the few types of khutba which does not use the pulpit is the nuptial type. 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have disliked delivering the nuptial speech, and al-Jāḥiẓ, in agreement with Ibn al-Muqaffā‘, ascribes 'Umar’s attitude precisely to the fact he had to sit among the people. By being on the same level with the audience the spatial hierarchy of power breaks down.

The orators also used their hands and voices to boost the effect of their speech. The gestures (pointing, raising hands, alternating between low and loud voice) should be seen as having a ritual dimension.45 A report describes the Prophet’s facial expressions, his resounding voice, his anger as if he is warning [his people that the enemy’s] army [is attacking].46 Ḥadīths like this one may reflect a contemporary Umayyad practice. In a similar context, Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn records stentorian voice as one of the requirements for the Catholicos of the Church of the East (jithliq).47 Public speaking was a powerful tool in Umayyad society.

Finally, we need to remember that the khutba stood at the core of Islamic rituals, which imbued it with further authority. Durkheim describes ritual as modes of action that represent the sacred and function as the interaction between the collective representation of social life and individual experience.48 Thus while the lens of performance helps us to see a speech act in its radical particularity, the ritual lens highlights the connection of the unique act to the community and its symbolism. The following section describes the place of khutba in such two fixed rituals.

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45 That these gestures were important is confirmed by the debates that surrounded them. On raising hands by the qussās see Chapter 3 in Armstrong, Qussās.
46 The hadith appears with different asānīd that have Ja‘far al-Ṣadiq as the common link. See Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf et al., eds, Al-Musnad al-muṣannaf al-mu‘allal (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2013), nr. 2552. It reads: Idhā khaṭab ihnarrat ‘aynāḥ wa-‘alā sawtaḥ wa-ishtadd ghaḍabuh ka-annah mundhir jaysh yaqūl šabbahakum massākum.
47 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:125.
6.3.1. **Khuṭba as Part of the Prayer for Rain and the Friday Congregational Prayer**

Rituals in the ancient world kept the world in motion\(^{49}\) and the failure to perform them and to perform them correctly could lead to a catastrophe. The prayer for rain, an ancient rite that was continued in Islamic form and is still practiced today in times of prolonged drought, makes the life-giving rain return.\(^{50}\) The prayer should include a *khuṭba* and it is seen as an act of asking God for forgiveness. The style of the traditional prayer (*duʿāʾ*) central to the rite, which may or may not reflect an early ritual practice, is highly rhythmic and reminds us of the speech of the ancient diviners. This is only its beginning:

> O God, pour us rain and vegetation salubrious and softening, abounding with water and ennobling our land, heavily pounding on it, covering it entirely, in one layer, continuous. (*allahumma, isqinā ghaythān maghīthān hānī an, marī an, ghadaqan, mujallīlan, sabhān, ʿāmmān, ṣabiqan, dāʿīman)*…\(^{51}\)

The speech is the essential part of the ritual because who cannot speak cannot bring rain.\(^{52}\) For the ritual to be successful, the prayer-leader (*imām*) must perform it correctly, and the *fiqh* literature provides us with instructions on how to do it. The prayer is held in an open space without a pulpit. For instance, the *imām* must raise his hands and alternate between low and loud voice. The *imām* should either be wearing a worn-out clothes or turn his clothes inside out.\(^{53}\) The Ḥanafīs and the Shāfiʿīs believe that he should also command people to fast for three days and come out to prayer.

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\(^{49}\) See Assmann’s discussion of Ancient Egyptian and Chinese culture in his *Cultural Memory*, 70ff.

\(^{50}\) That the parallel pagan rite was frowned upon is recorded in a *ḥadīth* on the authority of Mālik al-Ashʿarī: The Prophet said: “There are four things from al-Jāhilīya that they shall not abandon: Boasting on the grounds of noble descent, insult on the grounds of genealogies, call for rain through the agency of the stars, and lamentation for the dead.” See al-Nawawī, “Bāb al-adhkār fī al-istisqāʾ,” in *Kitāb al-Adhkār*, 149-51. But apparently it was too much ingrained to be uprooted and so it was adopted, and the agency turned from the stars to the Almighty God.


\(^{52}\) This is illustrated by a *ḥadīth* according to which Umar performed *istisqāʾ* and asked Ibn ʿAbbās to do it and so he prays: “We pleaded with You for our own sake and for the sake of our families; O God we pleaded with You for our cattle and ostriches who cannot speak, o God pour us rain…” implying that one must speak to be able to pray.

\(^{53}\) *al-Madhāhib al-arbaʿa*, 326.
on the fourth day, and all but the Mālikīs agree that he should command people to reconcile with their enemies. The Ḥanafīs and the Shāfiʿīs have it that the imām should command people to bring their children, their old, their disabled, and their cattle, and to remove their newborns from their mothers so that they cry more. All of this is clearly to soften God’s heart. The whole prayer is a dramatic performance of humility in front to God accompanied by a (probably pious) khutba and a ritual prayer. In this regard the absence of the pulpit is significant, because as we will see in a moment, the pulpit is intimately connected with power and authority and would then have the opposite effect. A fascinating hadīth related to the prayer for rain displays the performative nature of speech from a different angle. It narrates that a man saw a cloud on the verge of raining and heard a voice commanding the cloud to water the land of so and so. Like God created the world (‘’Be!’’ kun! ) so he manages it—through the word.

The Friday khutba is only one of the many forms of Umayyad oratory, but it is the most important one. The importance of the Friday service in strengthening and shaping Arabo-Islamic identity cannot be overstated. From early on, the Muslims in the main cities gathered at the same time to perform an act of resounding communal worship. We cannot be sure how the ritual looked in the Umayyad period but since most scholars seem to be of the opinion that the Umayyads played role in shaping and consolidating it, the core of it had probably been determined by this period. This is the basic structure of the ritual:

55 According to the tradition, Muḥammad performed the first Friday service in 1/623. C.H. Becker argues that the ritual of the Friday was fully establi
56 s only under the Umayyads. See Becker, “The Development of Islamic Ritual.”
56 Donner, “Umayyad Efforts Legitimation;” Al-Jāḥiz also gives us hints about the development of the ritual when he mentions that Muḥammad b. Sulaymān (d. 173/789) was always repeating the same khutba when he preached and quotes a line from the Qurʾān, Q 33:56 that is still used today. See al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:295.
Table 8: The basic structure of the Friday communal prayer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Call to prayer (adḥān)</td>
<td>{Muslims gather in the mosque}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Call to prayer (adḥān)</td>
<td>{Preacher is on the pulpit}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. First khutba</td>
<td>{Preacher stands up and recites: Praise to God; Prayer for the Prophet; Exhortation to piety; Qur’anic recitation}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Break: Silence</td>
<td>{Preacher sits}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Second khutba</td>
<td>{Preacher stands up and recites: Praise to God; Prayer for the Prophet; Exhortation to piety; Prayer for the believers, and caliph}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Call to prayer (iqāma)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Prayer: Ṣalāt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Friday service presents a concert of recognizable rhythmic structures, sounds, and melodies. After the repeated call to prayer, the preacher begins his first khutba with familiar formulas and recites and comments on a sūra in the Qur’ān. Then he sits and silence settles in. After this short, silent break, the imām stands up to begin with the same formulas and continues with the prayer for the community and an actual speech. The actual prayer begins only when the khutba is finished.\textsuperscript{57}

Anyone who has ever stayed in a Muslim country will associate his or her stay with the adhān. The role of church bells in medieval European society has been noted;\textsuperscript{58} similarly, the adhān shaped the medieval Islamic soundscape,\textsuperscript{59} competing with the sound of Christian clapper/SEMANTRON (Ar. nāqūs/ Syr. nāqōshā).\textsuperscript{60} Religious communities in the Near East often communicated and negotiated their space through various “lines of sound and sight” and shared a “visual and acoustic environment.”\textsuperscript{61} The khutba, too, was an inherent part of this environment.

\textsuperscript{57} See Donner, “Umayyad Efforts Legitimation;” Hawting, Islamic Ritual. See C.E. Becker for details and differences across the madhāhib.


\textsuperscript{59} The term “soundscape” has been coined by R. Murray Schafer, \textit{The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World} (Rochester Vt.: Destiny Books, 1977). Soundscape refers to the sonic environment comprised of ambient noise of all kinds.

\textsuperscript{60} Salam Rassi, “Justifying Christianity in the Islamic Middle Ages The Apologetic Theology of ’Abdīshō bar Brīkhā (d. 1318)” (PhD Diss., University of Oxford, 2015), 210-259.

The inclusion of Qur’ānic recitation in the first part and its rhythmic structures, creates a characteristic and recognizable sound and belongs to this weekly Friday ritual. This means that even the urban folk who were not part of the congregational prayer were affected by it. Rhythm can carry across confessional boundaries and function as “the sound of persuasion,” as a scholar of the Byzantine homily has argued. So the Friday khutba was able to broadcast more than words and meanings, to more than one audience. On a weekly basis, since the early days of Islam, the Friday khutba has announced Islam’s domination of the world and projected a specifically Islamic aural aesthetic—a blend of rhythms and melodies—even to those non-Arabic-speaking populations beyond the mosque, who could not understand a word of it. At the same time, the Friday communal worship in the Umayyad period was targeted at the Arabo-Islamic elite. It was only allowed in great cities, explicitly forbidden to the Bedouin, and required for male Muslims. Whether derived from the Christian Sunday ritual or not, the Friday service has defined the Islamic soundscape for centuries and may have been the single most important sign of Islamic community in early times.

These two types of khutba were connected with addressing high power and creating and renewing the Islamic community. The following section will explore the connection between speech and royal authority.

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63 Becker argues that especially the existence of two khutbas, the first one containing scriptural recitation the second prayer of the community, suggest a strong Christian influence. He provides other arguments too. Becker, “The Development of Islamic Ritual.” Muslim prayer, in general, has been connected with multiple non-Muslim practices. Goitein, for example, explained that the Muslim practice of celebrating Friday as holiday, stems from the Jewish Sabbath. Brockelmann ascribed the Muslim five daily prayers to Persian influences. See a summary of these positions in Bashîr, al-Târîkh al-Ākhar, 441ff.
6.4. ORATORY AS PURSUIT OF KINGS AND RULERS

Umayyad oratory was the undertaking of rulers. The key role of some cultural means (architecture and coins) in upholding and promoting the imperial hegemony of the Umayyads has been long recognized. More recently, scholars have begun noting the importance of language products in the process (letters and poetry). But the same has yet to be done for public speech and oratory. In a sense, it was even more closely connected with the caliphal and governor office because it was performed by these leaders themselves, while poetry was mainly recited by others in their praise. Al-Jāḥiẓ himself expresses a similar sentiment when he says that, in the Islamic period, oratory superseded poetry, which became compromised by poets who were hired to praise and blame.

Some of the most important figures of the Umayyad period were considered to be eloquent speakers: the caliphs and rivals Muʿāwiya and ʿAlī, Abd al-Malik and Ibn al-Zubayr. Abd al-Malik, reportedly, was worried about the education of his son al-Walīd, regretted that he did not send him to live with the Bedouin to acquire correct speech, and threatened him that without improving his speech he could not rule the Arabs. Some Umayyad princes, such as Khālid b. Yazīd—otherwise famous as the alleged first translator of books of astrology/astronomy, medicine, and alchemy into Arabic—are also known as eloquent orators and poets. As for Umayyad governors, we could even speak of a subtype of the “harsh but eloquent governor of

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64 With regard to Umayyad poetry see the work of Suzanne P. Stetkevych; with regard to Umayyad epistolary and administrative practices see the work of Wādād al-Qāḍī.
65 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:241.
66 All belongs traditionally among the first four Rightly Guided caliphs but he led war with the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, al-Muʿāwiya, and so I include him in the list.
67 There are many mentions of their eloquence. As one example see Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 314, though there al-Jāḥiẓ expresses some reservations about the, according to him graceless, eloquence of Ibn al-Zubayr. He wonders why Ibn al-Zubayr’s speech has filled the books of scholars; more so than the speech of more eloquent men.
68 Abott, Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri III, 4.
69 Modern scholarship nowadays regards his role in scientific role as largely legendary since “Ullmann, “Ḫālid ibn Yazīd und die Alchemie: Eine Legende.”.
70 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:328.
Iraq.” Aside from al-Ḥajjāj, famous orations are ascribed to his predecessors Ziyād b. Abīh and ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād and his successor Naṣr b. Sayyār.

Similarly, those who challenged these rulers were not inferior to them in public speaking. The Khārijites are especially famous for their oratory, and the speeches of their orators, such as Abū Hamza al-Khārijī, ʿImrān b. Ḥattān, and al-Qatarī b. al-Fujā’a, are ‘immortal’ and widely memorized as al-Jāḥiẓ tells us. We have mentioned in Chapter one, for example, that when Khārijite leader Shabīb entered Kufa, his wife recited sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2) and sūrat Āl ʿImrān (Q 3) in its mosque. Reciting the two longest sūras, which would take hours, was a resounding act of power assertion. Ibn Ashʿath, the leader of the Peacock Army that rebelled against al-Ḥajjāj, has many speeches in which he incites the Iraqis against their governor. Dāwūd b. ʿAlī (d. 133/750), one of the leaders of the Abbasid anti-Umayyad revolution and the uncle of the first Abbasid caliph, was known as a great orator. The list continues, but it is significant that the leaders of the three most dangerous rebellions under the Umayyads, the last of which removed the ruling dynasty, were famous for employing oratory in politics.

Aside from political leaders known as eloquent orators, narratives and verses that make the

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71 Ziyād the illegitimate brother of Muʿāwiya has a famous speech called *khutba batrāʾ*. See Chapter 3.
72 Naṣr b. Sayyār, the governor of Iraq and Khurasān towards the end of the Umayyad period, mentioned here as the author of the poem meant to wake up the Umayyads to fight, is known to have engaged the three arts: oratory, poetry, and letter-writing. Officials of other regions, like ʿAmr b. Saʿīd al-Ashdaq, were also occasionally known for eloquence. Bayān, 1:315.
73 He says this concerning Qaṭarī b. al-Fujā’a. Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:342.
74 The two sūras are important not only due to their length but also due to their contents; they contain many foundational Qur’ānic ideas and laws. Ibn ʿAbbās, the venerated uncle of the Prophet, recited the same sūras when he was controversially setting up pilgrimage-related customs in Basra. Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:331.
75 For example, at the battle of Dayr al-Jamājim after the Iraqis rejected ʿAbd al-Malik’s offer, Ibn Ashʿath speaks to them and discredits the Marwānids based on their origins: “The Banu Marwān are reviled on account of [their] blue-eyed (al-zargā’ i.e. non-Arab) mother. By God, they have a lineage no better than that; and the Banu Abī al-Ās are worse still, being [a lāj] from the people of Ṣaffūrīya! If this matter (that is, the caliphate) is among Quraysh, then I can adduce an origin from Quraysh, and if it is among the Arabs, I am the son of al-Ash’ath b. Qays.” Tr. Hinds, in al-Tabari and Hinds, History, 23: 24-25.
76 Al-Jāḥiẓ says about him “He was amongst the most articulated (anṭaq) people, and he was the best among them in terms of improvisation and conciseness.” Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:331.
A connection between oratory and political authority explicit abound. In one report, the caliph 'Abd al-Malik blames his grey hair on the fact that he must deliver a *khutba* every Friday.\(^77\) 'Ubaydullāh b. Ziyād (d. 67/686), the powerful governor of Iraq before al-Ḥajjāj, says that ruling is “a wonderful thing except for the clatter of letters and the preparation of speeches.”\(^78\)

Oratory is not merely an obligation for rulers. Their authority is inextricably interwoven with their public speaking. So, a poet\(^79\) praises the Umayyads as:

*Orators and knights on the pulpit,  
And speakers who are not silent.  
Even when they are silent, they are blameless,  
But when they speak they hit the mark, with no ambiguity.*\(^80\)

And the same poet says about them elsewhere:

*When one of their lords dies, another one rises  
knowledgeable of the blemishes of speech, solemn.*\(^81\)

On the other hand, inability to fulfill the standards of public speaking was ridiculed and made one unfit for office. Accordingly, a poet\(^82\) composed insults against Khālid al-Qaṣrī (r.105-20/724-38), the late Umayyad ruler of Iraq and Khurasan, both for his cowardice and for his deficient public speaking:\(^83\)

*He wet his pants from fright and terror  
and asked for water to ‘eat’ when the flight turned dangerous,  
And he makes more mistakes in speech than people all together,*

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\(^77\) A man wonders about the grey hair of ‘Abd al-Malik and so the caliph answers: “How wouldn’t I already have grey hair if I have to expose my mind to people once or twice every Friday?!” Al-Jāḥīz, *Bayān*, 1:135.


\(^79\) Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Amā (d. after 126/744)


\(^82\) Yahyā b. Nawfal

Although he is passionately devoted to loud speech. These lines invoke the governor’s panic when he learned about al-Mughīra b. Saʿīd’s rebellion in Kufa in 119/737 and was so terrified that he ‘wet his pants’ and so confused that he commanded his servants, “to feed him water,” instead of “to pour water for him.” Besides, Khālid also makes mistakes in speech and is too loud. According to the poet, both cowardice and poor public speaking are clearly incompatible with his office.

The royal and political authority of oratory can be further observed in the attribution of this authority to objects associated with oratory, pulpits and staffs. It is especially the pulpit, from which the orators preached, that is the physical locus of leadership. We find much evidence of this in Umayyad poetry. A poet, for example, boasts about his tribe:

We build and raise our mosques
and their pulpits’ seats lowered themselves in front of us.

We do not slumber on the pulpits when we ride
them, and they wouldn’t change us for any other tribe.

Here, pulpits are personified and submit to the leadership of the poet’s tribe by bowing in front of them and the tribe leaders show their aptitude to rule by their activity in preaching. In other cases, pulpits can reject unworthy leaders, and so a poet attacks a Khārijite by the name of Maṭar, who ruled Kufa during the rebellion of al-Dāḥḥāk ibn Qays (126-127/745-746):

O tribe of Tamīm, what’s happened to your pulpit
that those who sit on it do not last and that it goes from one to another.

As Wilfred Madelung has pointed out, the account of the governor’s fear are puzzling because Mughīra is said to have only six or seven companions.


For example, the Abbasid compiler Ibn Qutayba (d.276/889) in his Ḫūn al-akhbār ("The Sources of Narratives") includes an entire section on the pulpits, where he collected earlier verses on the topic.

Ibn Qutayba, Ḫūn al-akhbār, 2:258.

His name is al-Uqayshir but he is not the poet al-Uqayshir al-Asadī.

84 Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:122.

85 As Wilfred Madelung has pointed out, the account of the governor’s fear are puzzling because Mughīra is said to have only six or seven companions.


87 For example, the Abbasid compiler Ibn Qutayba (d.276/889) in his Ḫūn al-akhbār ("The Sources of Narratives") includes an entire section on the pulpits, where he collected earlier verses on the topic.

88 Ibn Qutayba, Ḫūn al-akhbār, 2:258.

89 His name is al-Uqayshir but he is not the poet al-Uqayshir al-Asadī.
Pulpits have rejected the likes of you,  
so call the tribe of Khuzayma, for then the pulpit will become stable  
They removed the commander of the believers  
and pledged a doomed-to-failure allegiance to Maṭar.  
And they pronounced Maṭar a caliph, a one-eyed speaker.  
—by your life— as a replacement for the Umayyads.  

The pulpit, again, has the agency to reject the ruler, whose unworthiness is expressed with the image of “one-eyed speaker.” Stability of pulpits is a metaphor for the stability of power. Many other verses express similar sentiments, vividly expressing the humiliations of pulpits when men unfit for their office climb on them and preach from them. An Umayyad poet graphically describes a pulpit as physically repulsed by the speaker—crying and with its nails melting; an early Abbasid poet speaks literally about a pulpit being soiled by someone’s anus; and another one compares its defilement to a menstruating woman, who has not purified herself, swearing.

The last example of this section brings together many of the elements discussed in a description of a superb speech performance imbued with a pervasive sense of authority. There is disagreement about the authorship of the poem and about who it describes. Some believe that al-Farazdaq (d. ca 112/730), one of the great Umayyad poetic trio, al-Farazdaq (d. ca 112/730) praised

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90 Ibn Qutayba, Uyūn al-akhbār, 2:259.
92 A verse speaks literally about soiling a pulpit by the anus of a certain person. Ibn Qutayba says that it is a muḥdath poet (i.e. from the Abbasid period) who says: There is no pure pulpit left which would not be soiled by the anus of Afkul, and it wouldn’t be purified even by Ibn Ṭāhir (lit. Son of Pure, word-play). Ibn Qutayba, Uyūn al-akhbār, 259.
93 He also says: From now on, I shall look at all pulpits and thrones with disgust! Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:296.
with these words the caliph Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 105-125/724-743). Note the presence of a bamboo cane, its aroma, and the way people and objects react to the master-speaker:

*In his hand is a bamboo cane with a fragrant aroma; in the hand of a wonderful man, whose nose exudes pride.*

*He lowers his eyes out of modesty and others do the same out of awe for him they speak to him only when he smiles*

When he says something, everyone loves it when he speaks, all other speech falls apart

*Ka‘ba’s corner* almost reaches out to him, Because it recognizes his hand when he approaches the corner to touch it.

Ultimately, success of a speech performance can only be judged by the reaction of others. In this case, the speaker, perhaps the caliph Hishām, speaks in a way that surpass all other speakers and immediately silences them. The authority that the man exudes, with the help of his speech, is so potent that others do not dare to look at him except when he is smiling. And even a part of the sacred Ka‘ba, the center of the Islamic rite, almost moves towards him. Political and religious authority largely overlapped in early Islam, and speech greatly enhanced both. This is the image that al-Jāḥiẓ, too, carries of Umayyad oratory. In the following sections however, we will look to *khuṭba* beyond the caliphs, governors, or even rebels, to places where an examination of the corpus of speeches or al-Jāḥiẓ’s boasting statements would not have taken us.

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94 Other theory is that the recipient of al-Farazdaq’s poem was ʿAlī b. ʿUsayn. Others believe that al-Ḥazīn al-Kinānī said these words about ʿAbd al-Malik. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Bayān*, 370, n.2.

95 lit. “pride is in the upper part of his nose”


6.5. Umayyad Oratory as a Medium of Power: Beyond Political Leaders

While the image of Umayyad oratory that we base on the body of ‘literary’ khuṭab, and that contemporary poetry also projects as we just saw, is that of an art connected with elite figures like caliphs and governors, this section brings attention to the fact that oratory was spread across all segments of the Umayyad society. We have already noted the variety of Umayyad khuṭba (see Introduction), and, surely, they were more. We could consider for example the speeches of women who resisted a ruler as a separate genre, because there are so many examples, especially when it comes to Muʿāwiya. We could add to the list the missionary practice of wandering preachers, or the speech of diviners. We will consider more types of orators below. But all of these mentioned so far can be seen as occasional orators, in the sense that they were not hired to speak and that they practiced it of their own will. However, as we will see below, we encounter, mainly in incidentals remarks scattered across historical books, reports about professional orators. These men (and perhaps also women) were commanded to disseminate the speeches of their rulers or to deliver speeches on their behalf. We also encounter men called munādī, the Islamic equivalent of the European medieval crier, who communicated the will of the authorities to people.

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98 In addition to the categories mentioned in Introduction, Linda Jones collected the main types of khuṭab. Although her list concerns a later period it is largely applicable to the early period too: Friday sermon (khuṭbat al-jum’a); Sermon of the two feasts (khuṭbat ʿīdayn); Sermons of moral exhortation and guidance (khuṭab al-waʿẓ wa-l-irshād); Sermons exhorting fighting in the path of God (khuṭab jihād); Ceremony and reception speeches (khuṭab al-mahāfil wa-l-wufūḍ); Political orations (khuṭab siyāsīya); Allegiance speech (khuṭbat al-bayʿa); Testamentary sermons (khuṭab waṣḥ); Occasional sermon (khuṭbat al-waqāʾ); Nuptial speeches (khuṭab nikāh) Jones, Power of Oratory, 40-42.

99 There are many examples in Aḥmad Ibn Abī Tāhir Ṭayfur, Kitāb balāghāt al-nisā’.

100 See below a comment by al-Jāḥiẓ about wandering preachers who spread Muʿtaṣilite ideas.

101 For example, when al-Ḥajjāj declares that no blood money shall be paid for a Syrian who had been justly killed, his crier calls out his decision to divide the Syrians and the Iraqis. Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, 2:1126.

102 See most recently Nicolas Offenstadt, En place publique: Jean de Gascogne, crieur au XVe siècle (Paris: Stock, 2013).
The sources record a wide variety of locations and functions for oratory. Al-Jāḥiẓ comment is instructive, though he is referring to oratory in his own time. This short quote mentions the ritual, military, court, and tribal context of public speech:

…an orator to deliver a speech during one of the two Feasts (khūṭbat al-ʿīd), to soldiers lined up around him in two ranks,¹⁰³ on the pulpit of Friday prayer, in the foyer (suđda) of the caliphal palace, or during days of gatherings and celebrations; or be it to reconcile tribes, to prevent shedding tribal blood, and to gently remove those grudges and that resentment…¹⁰⁴

The last line regards alert us to the reconciliatory function of speech. This is traditionally seen as an important function of oratory, continuing from pre-Islamic times. Here is an example of a short excerpt of a khūṭba in which an Umayyad professional orator expressed this view. When he was ordered to speak after the death of Yazīd b. al-Muhallab (d. 102/720), who was first al-Ḥajjāj’s governor, then enemy and later the governor of Khurasan, the orator said:

‘People, beware of discord (fītna) which comes through ambiguity and leaves through clear speech (bayān).¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, speech cannot solve all problems. And so Yazīd b. al-Muhallab himself reportedly said from the pulpit of Wāsiṭ:

People of Iraq, people of precedence and triumph, of the best manners! People of Syria, with a fatty bite in their mouths that causes their saliva to flow so they jump up in excitement! They will not leave [the matter] by way of with quarrel and debate. So wear the leather of tigers [and fight them]’¹⁰⁶

This report is probably set in the context of his rebellion against the caliph Yazīd II. Yazīd b. al-Muhallab describes the Syrians like voracious animals smelling booty, whom any rational argument will not dissuade from the attack. He was right and died that year (102/720-721).

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¹⁰³ Regarding the expression “people lined up around him in two ranks” my text has yawm al-simāṭayn, whose meaning was hard to find. The same story in al-Tawḥīdī has bayna al-simāṭayn, which refers to a speech delivered on a formal occasion between two ranks of people. We may think of modern army display to imagine the scene.

¹⁰⁴ The kalām terms that this anonymously mentioned important political figure inappropriately used were lāshā and talāshā, “annihilate” and “be annihilated.” See Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:140.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 2:16. The orator’s name is Ḥārith b. Ḥuddān. I haven’t found anything about him.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:410.
What Yazīd’s traditions bring to light is one more type of speech, namely, the funerary *khuṭba*, a classical type of oration. We have seen excellent examples of this type among al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches (see Chapter 4). The death of a ruler is precarious for an empire, because the succession is a sources of contention. The funerary speech conducted either by the ruler of the city himself or his orator is a meant to alleviate the crisis, reinstate order, and announce the new caliph.\(^{107}\) It was a ritual of renewal: *Le roi est mort, vive le roi!*

The variety of those who practiced oratory matched the variety of the genre itself. Who were the Umayyad orators and who did not belong among the leading political figures? The statement of the eminent philologist al-ʿAṣmaʿī (d. 828/216) in which he praises al-Ḥajjāj as one of the four most eloquent men of all time shows that the art of oratory was not limited to the class of rulers and governors, as we usually imagine:

There were four men who did not err in language (*lam yalḥanū*), neither in seriousness nor in jest: al-ʿShaʿbī,\(^{108}\) ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, and Ibn al-Qirrīya.\(^{109}\) And al-Ḥajjāj was the most eloquent among them (*afṣaluhum*).\(^{110}\) The four most eloquent people in al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s view are a caliph, a governor, a scholar,\(^{111}\) and a Bedouin, interestingly all of them from the time of al-Ḥajjāj and in some way connected to him.

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\(^{108}\) Al-ʿShaʿbī was one of the most influential scholars of his time. See G.H.A. Juynboll, “al-ʿShaʿbī,” *Al-ʿShaʿbī’s* connection to al-Ḥajjāj is that first the governor appointed him as leader (*ʿarīf*) of his people. Then he joined the rebellion of Ibn al-Ash’ath with the *qurrāʾ* but later apologized to al-Ḥajjāj with the words: “We saddened our people, we did not relinquish fear, and in what we have done there was no justification of the pious nor a great deed of the brave.” The governor forgave him, apparently because he admitted his fault. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006) 5: 177.


Let us now look at a selection of the representatives of orators and eloquent men and women beyond political leaders.

6.5.1. Scholars

Several accounts narrate that the only man more eloquent than al-Ḥajjāj was al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, the scholarly luminary of his time who attained legendary fame.\(^{112}\) Al-Jāḥīz’s praise of equally celebrated Wāṣil b. ‘Atā’ (d. 131/748), the founding father of the Muʿtazilites who famously could not pronounce the letter rā,\(^{113}\) is similarly well-known, though we have to take it with a grain of salt, given the author’s own Muʿtazilite inclinations. A contemporary poet\(^ {114}\) confirms that scholars could spread their teachings and ideas widely through eloquent speech. The poem also applauds Wāṣil’s Muʿtazilite followers, calling them “missionaries” (rijāl duʿāt), for crossing large distances from China to Morocco, “not afraid of anything, performing the art of dispute (ʿilm al-tashājur).”\(^ {115}\) Among later Muʿtazilite scholars famous for their eloquence is Bishr b. Muʿtamir (d. 210/825) who lived during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Al-Jāḥīz devotes to him an entire chapter in his Bayān and Hārūn al-Rashīd reportedly let him out of prison because his Muʿtazilite poetry that he was composing there became too influential and threatening.\(^ {116}\) We will hear more about him below. Sometimes the judges could act as city-rulers and khaṭībs.\(^ {117}\)

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\(^{113}\) See Footnote 22 in Chapter 5.

\(^{114}\) The author is the Muʿtazilite poet Ṣafwān al-Anṣārī.

\(^{115}\) Al-Jāḥīz, Bayān, 1:37.


6.5.2. QUṢṢĀṢ

As mentioned, the categories of quṣṣāṣ and khuṭabāʾ were fluid. Some quṣṣāṣ could master the art of oratory yet remain quṣṣāṣ due to the setting and conduct of their sessions. In general, we could say that the formality of the occasion and the pulpit was what differentiated the khuṭba from a session of the qāṣṣ. This explains why al-Jāḥiz can tell us about an Umayyad-era qāṣṣ that he was eloquent (bayyin), skilled in oratory/orator (khaṭīb), and memorized many reports and traditions (sāḥib akhbār wa-āthār). The first to have begun lecture sessions (ḥalqa) in the mosque of al-Baṣra is said to have been Jaʿfar b al-Ḥasan. We learn that he read the Qurʾān there. Reading and interpreting the Qurʾān and teaching and explaining to people the related traditions both for a mix of education and entertainment (perhaps with politico-religious interests in mind), was probably the most common activity of the quṣṣāṣ. The case of the early Abbasid ‘Amr b. Fāʾid illustrates they took the interpretation of the Qurʾān seriously. For thirty-six years he preached (qaṣṣa) in his mosque, interpreting the Qurʾān from the beginning but never finished because he remembered so many different kinds of interpretation and many “lives” (siyar) “that he could spend a few weeks interpreting one Qurʾānic verse.” Müsā b. Sayyār’s (d. 150/767) famous ability to interpret the Qurʾān to the Arabs and the Persians at the same ḥalqa, is an example that the quṣṣāṣ targeted also non-Arab audiences. Interestingly, they are recorded as being the quṣṣāṣ of a certain mosque, formulations which suggest a formal appointment.

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119 Though we have examples of khutabā without pulpits and quṣṣāṣ on them. See Armstrong, Quṣṣāṣ.
120 He studied with ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd (144/761).
121 Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:368.
122 Muslim b. Jundub was the “qāṣṣ of the mosque of the Prophet in Medina, its imām and qāriʾ.” Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:367.
6.5.3. **BEDOUINS**

The Bedouins were a controversial group in early Islam. On the one hand, they were seen as lukewarm Muslims and untrustworthy subjects; on the other hand, their tribal lore was used in the formation of an Arabic cosmopolis (see Chapter 2). The philologists of the late 2nd/8th and early 3rd/9th centuries used to visit the tribes and write down their lore, creating a corpus of correct Arab speech and at the same time a new canon. Elsewhere al-Jāḥiẓ records accounts attesting that the Bedouin cannot even understand ungrammatical speech. One such account, also useful to show the importance of vowels in an Arabic language classroom, narrates that an urban man asked a Bedouin “How is your family?” (kayfa ahluka), but did not provide the correct case endings and said: kayfa ahlik? which literally means: “How will I perish?” The Bedouin looked at him and said: “By crucifixion.”

**Other social groups.** While the rulers, rebels, and Bedouin are the categories in which we usually think about the Umayyad period, they are by no means exhaustive. Al-Jāḥiẓ’s evaluations of different strata of his society may be instructive even with regard to the Umayyad period: He criticizes the speech of the lower classes (ʿawwām), Bedouin, pseudo-intellectuals, suburban Bedouin, urban folk, cultured slave-girls and refined boys. The countryside people (baladī), for example, he deems mannerists, while the ‘suburban Bedouin,’ who live by caravan routes and markets, are the worst, because they spoiled their speech by contact with too many people

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124 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Bayān*, 1:163. For similar stories see also the following page.
125 Al-Jāḥiẓ speaks of ašḥāb al-taqʿ ʿir wa-ʾl-taqʿ ʿib, people who speak with an unnaturally guttural voice; or more generally about people who overpronounce words to sound more educated, and to cover their ignorance. I chose the term “pseudo-intellectuals” to refer to such people.
126 Al-Jāḥiẓ describes these as al-ʾārīb al-nāzīlūn ʿalā ʾṭuruq al-sābila, bi-qurb majāmiʿ al-aswāq, “various Bedouin peoples living by the caravan routes, close to the markets.”
from different parts of the world. Taking the urban folk and slave girls as an example, we know of many famous Umayyad singers from the urban cultural circles in Medina, whose speeches and eloquence are recorded in the Aghānī.

6.5.4. Women

A group that especially stands out when we look at the Umayyad period through the prism of public speaking are women. The defiant speech of Zaynab the daughter of ʿAlī at the court of Yazīd after the death of Ḫusayn at Karbalāʾ has become famous. As mentioned we could even speak about a genre of women’s confrontations with the caliph Muʿāwiya. And sources preserve innumerable other occasions when women from various social and political groups challenged men in word (and in deed). Different women eloquently refuse to marry Umayyad princes, such as the Islamic hero Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik, al-Ḥajjāj himself, and even the most powerful Umayyad caliph, ʿAbd al-Malik, speak on behalf of their tribes, their political and religious leaders, their regions and villages; challenge men in court, sometimes even when their bones are being broken; and incite men to war against their enemies on the battlefield. When Shabīb announces his rule in Kufa through Qur’anic recitation, his wife Ghazāla and his mother are standing by his side. Al-Ｊāḥiz also includes many verses that praise the speech of women, ascribing it even magical powers as we will see below. It may be noted, that in the medieval period, too,

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129 See the Arabic text and English translation in Qutbuddin, “Khutba,” 245-250.
130 Zaynab’s speech.
131 The woman was Hind bint al-Muhallab, daughter of the Muhallabid official. She refused Maslama because he killed people of her family. Ibn Abī Ṭayfūn, Balāghāt al-nisāʾ, 130.
133 The woman was Ramla bint al-Zubayr. Al-Zubayr, her father, was a revered companion of the Prophet Muhammad, who fought at the battle of Camel.
134 Ibn Ṭayfūr narrates this khabar on the authority of al-Madāʾinī. It depicts the resistance of a Khārijī woman face to face the feared governor of Iraq ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād. Ibn Abī Ṭayfūr, Balāghāt al-nisāʾ, 134.
135 See for example sections in al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:276-283.
women could serve as preachers (wāʿiźas).\textsuperscript{136}

Another famous episode that combines al-Ḥajjāj, eloquence, and a strong gender component is his encounter with Umm al-Banīn, the wife of the caliph al-Walīd (r. 86/705-96/715). During al-Ḥajjāj’s visit to the caliph, al-Ḥajjāj is in full battle-garb and the caliph is in his simple home attire. Umm al-Banīn protests his inappropriate attire, and the haughty governor brushes it off as the prattle and ignorance of women. The next day al-Ḥajjāj is summoned in front of Umm al-Banīn who gives him a long speech, reminding him of his low origins and of his crimes, such as bombarding the holy Ka‘ba and killing fellow Muslims. At the end she crowns the governor’s humiliation by reciting the famous verses about his ostrich-like behavior facing Ghazāla, the female Khārijite leader (see Chapter 1). This khabar represents a commentary on al-Ḥajjāj’s (failed) efforts to negotiate his status and expression of an archetypal tension between the great ruler and the great general. Al-Ḥajjāj attempts to assume a higher status than is his due and he is put in place in the most humiliating way—by a woman who is reminding him of a near defeat by another woman. Ḥajjāj later remarks to the caliph that he had not imagined that a woman could be that eloquent.\textsuperscript{137} The report is clearly meant to humiliate the governor,\textsuperscript{138} and perhaps also to reflect inner struggles within the Umayyad dynasty.\textsuperscript{139} Inadvertently, it also shows the perceived power and eloquence of Umayyad women. All the eloquent men and women mentioned thus far (including al-Ḥajjāj) who were called khaṭībs and produced khuṭbas, were what we may call

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Berkey, Popular Preaching, 31-32.
\item “[Mā ṣanant anna imrāʾa tablugh balāğhatahā wa tuḥsinu faṣāḥahatahā.” Ibn Abī Ṭayfūr, Balāghāt al-nisāʾ, 124-125.
\item Umm al-Banīn was the daughter of ’Abd al-Malik’s brother ’Abd al-‘Azīz, who ruled Egypt. ’Abd al-‘Azīz loathed al-Ḥajjāj for thwarting his hopes for the caliphate. ’Abd al-Malik, supported by al-Ḥajjāj chose his son Wafīd to be his successor. Furthermore, Umm al-Banīn’s brother ’Umar had very tense relationship with the Umayyad governor, and was even cast by later literary sources that glorified him almost as a saint as the opposite of al-Ḥajjāj. On the struggle within the Marwānid family see the recent Joshua Mabra, Princely Authority in the Early Marwānid State: The Life of ’Abd Al-‘Azīz Ibn Marwān (Production Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
occasional orators. They used oratory occasionally, either as a means to achieve a particular goal or as an endeavor pertaining to their office. The following section turns the attention to men and women who were either commanded or hired to speak on behalf of others, i.e. professional orators.

6.5.5. PROFESSIONAL ORATORS

Sources often in passing, mention orators who would be hired to speak on behalf of others and orators who would commit speeches to memory and transmit them. The existence of these ‘professional orators’ indicates that oratory was an institutionalized channel of propaganda, besides being a performative assertion of power.

Two groups, whom we could consider the followers and predecessors of Umayyad professional orators, figure amply in the sources: early Abbasid courtiers and pre-Islamic tribal orators. We know many early Abbasid courtiers by name, as they achieved much fame and influence. As for two such famous orators-courtiers Khālid b. Ṣafwān and Shabīb b. Shayba, al-Jāhiẓ says that people memorized their speeches widely and that he cannot imagine anyone able to add a single letter to them, that is, without people noticing it, because their speeches were so well known. We can also think of the many early Abbasid courtesans like Maḥbūba and Faḍl, who achieved fame and elite social standing through their mastery of the language arts among other things.

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140 One of them is Kulthūm ibn Ḥ Amr al-Attābī, (d. 208 or 220/823 or 835) who served the Barmakids and the caliphs Hārūn al-Rashīd and al-Maʿmūn, and mastered the three fields of eloquence: oratory, poetry, and letters. Meisami and Starkey, eds., Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature, 1:111. Al-Jāhiẓ, Bayān, 1:54-55.)
142 Al-Jāhiẓ, Bayān, 1:317.
Tribal orators (khaṭīb qawm), in turn, are mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry. For example, the pre-Islamic poet\textsuperscript{144} bewails the passing of a man who used to represent his tribe as their orator in front of kings:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Abū Dulayja, who will take care of the widows?}
\textit{Paupers in rags—they too will grieve.}
\textit{Or who will be the tribe’s orator when they gather}
\textit{In front of the cunning kings who know to speak and deceive?}\textsuperscript{145}
\end{quote}

In this poem, the tribal orator represented the tribe in front of the kings of Ḥīra (who, it should be noted, are also described by their eloquence and wit).

It is therefore only logical that oratory retained similar tasks during the Umayyad period. The poet al-Kumayt describes a group of poets and orators affiliated with the court but also performing at public gatherings. Al-Kumayt b. Zayd made his name as the spokesperson for the ‘Alid cause but he also praised the Umayyads his poem for the Umayyad prince-hero Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d.120/738) shows:\textsuperscript{146}

\begin{quote}
We visit you, refined Maslama,
with poems praise that circulate widely and for eternity
with the first-class marvelous work
of those among us who are poets and those who can silence others
We are people of discussion in gatherings
People of public speaking, people of rods
Also in assemblies and gatherings
and ritual rites of the hajj pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{144} This poet is Aws b. Ḥ ajar. \textit{Dīwān Aws b. Ḥ ajar}, ed. Muḥammad Yusif Najm (Beirut: Dār Beyrūt, 1980).
\textsuperscript{145} Al-Jāḥiẓ, \textit{Bayān}, 1:180.
\textsuperscript{147} Al-Jāḥiẓ, \textit{Bayān}, 1:371.
The people of discussion, public speaking, and rods performed poetry or oratory at official occasions, and recited famous poems “that circulate widely and for eternity.” We have reasons to believe that speeches served a similar purpose.

Sources provide evidence of at least three kinds of professional orators: epideictic (praise-and-blame) orators, orator-envoys, and ideologist-orators. Examples of the first kind are numerous. The Umayyad poet Nāfiʿ b. Khalīfa al-Ghanawī describes a scene in which a crowd of orators crowded into the antechamber of the palace of the caliph Marwân b. al-Ḥakam, waiting for their chance to praise him. The poet compares them to “a herd of bellowing camels.” The historian al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897) says that ʿAbd al-Malik performed the ḥajj in 75/695, after the defeat of Ibn al-Zubayr, and came to Medina, whose inhabitants had supported his rival. Before entering the city he first sent “his orators” to insult them and when a Medinan qāʾrī (“Qurʾān reciter”) stood up to defend his people he was beaten and badly tortured.

The role of Umayyad poetry as an essential tool of political life is now recognized. Oratory, it seems, played a similar role. As poets constructed the ruler’s legitimacy through praise and vituperated their enemies, so did the orators. Al-Ḥajjāj, too, reportedly used the services of professional orators. After the victorious battle at Dayr al-Jamājim, he entered Kufa and told his khaṭīb by the name Maṣqala b. Karīb b. Raqaba al-ʿAbdī to humiliate the defeated:

“Revile in all possible ways every man to whom we have done good; revile [each one] for ingratitude and disloyalty. Stigmatize in all possible ways everyone you know to have a defect and make him slight in his own eyes.”

As you sow, so shall you reap. And so after al-Ḥajjāj’s death the new caliph Sulaymān b. ʿAbd al-Malik, his lifelong enemy, ordered the delegations from Iraq to insult al-Ḥajjāj. They obey and

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148 Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:176.
149 Al-Yaʿqūbī, Tārīkh, 2:327.
call him “an ignorant slave (ʿabd zabāb) and slave of slaves, of no respectable genealogy among the Arabs.” But Sulaymān is not satisfied and orders them to curse him, and they do. One of the men (a grandson of the arbitrator Abū Mūsa al-Ashʿarī) stands up and tells Sulaymān:

Commander of Believers, I will tell you something about the enemy of God! […] The enemy of God used to adorn himself like a prostitute, he would ascend the pulpit and speak the words of good men but when he descended he would act like the pharaohs. When he spoke he lied more than Antichrist.

A similar accusation of the disparity between al-Ḥajjāj’s words and actions is ascribed to other early figures, such as the scholar al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and the ascetic Mālik b. Dīnār. This perception of the governor was probably spread, perhaps as a result of such a public insult.

The second type, orators-envoys and orators on all kinds of official missions appear in historical sources. Ibn al-Qirrīya, one of the aforementioned “four most eloquent men,” died because he was the one whom ʿAbd al-Malik sent to Ibn Ashʿath when he offered him the throne of Iraq in exchange for peace. Al-Ḥajjāj later killed him. Orators-envoys and their speeches have an especially strong presence in one of the earliest Muslim history books, Waqʿat Ṣiffīn by Naṣr b. Muzāḥim (d. 212/827-8). In later histories we find much less of them. Whether these speeches have any basis in real speeches or not, these accounts probably reflect early practice. Poetry confirms oratory’s presence on the battlefield in many instances. Ka ḍ al-Ashqarī—a warrior-poet, one of those whom al-Ḥajjāj persecuted, and the spokesman of the Umayyad official al-Muhallab during the wars against the Azraqites—prides himself on being a war orator:

If I don’t speak standing on the floor,

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151 We should remember that cursing, another powerful speech act, was seen as actually harmful. See for example the narrative about the encounter between Faymīyūn and the dragon (tinnīn) in Ibn Iṣḥāq’s sīra. When Faymīyūn curses the dragon, he dies. Ibn Iṣḥāq, The Life of Muhammad, tr. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).
152 Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:397
I am an orator on the back of a reddish horse.\textsuperscript{154}

The third type, ideologist-orator, was in charge of persuasively disseminating a particular idea. The speech of ʿUbaydallāh b. al-Murrī, one of the leaders of the Tawwābūn (‘Penitents’) movement, is a case in point. ʿUbaydallāh delivered an eloquent speech inciting the Kufans to avenge the death of Ḥusayn. The speech presents a multifold argument for Ḥusayn’s unique right to the caliphate and a description of his unjust killing, ending in a call to avenge his blood and fight his murderers. The \textit{khuṭba} is also introduced with a testimony about ʿUbaydallāh’s eloquence: “I haven’t seen among these people anyone more eloquent than ʿUbaydullāḥ b ʿAbdallāḥ al-Murrī in both speech [\textit{manṭiq}] and sermon [\textit{ʿiẓa}].”\textsuperscript{155} At the end, a note is added: “and he repeated this speech to us every day until everyone memorized it.”\textsuperscript{156} In other words, the orator not only presented his masterpiece, but also made sure that it spread and was memorized by frequent repetition.

Despite the aura of leadership that oratory had, it was not limited to the rulers; it was spread among all social groups. Moreover, there was a class who earned their living by speaking on behalf of others. The last account suggests that there were people who disseminated a certain ideology, a vision of the past, and revive a moment that was key to their communal identity (the killing of Ḥusayn, in ʿUbaydullāh’s case). Assmann has observed that “cultural memory has always its special carriers. They include shamans, bards, griots, priests, teachers, artists, scribes, scholars, mandarins, and others [...] Participation in cultural memory is not diffuse [...] In contrast to communicative memory, it does not spread itself around spontaneously but has to be thoroughly prepared and vetted. Its distribution is controlled.”\textsuperscript{157}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Al-Jāhiz, \textit{Bayān}, 1:231.
\item Safwat, \textit{Jamhara}, 55, nr. 49.
\item Safwat, \textit{Jamhara}, 56, nr. 49.
\item Assmann, \textit{Cultural Memory}, 39-40.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
transmission of al-Ḥajjāj’s speech in terms of the communicative memory, based on the shape of the speeches preserved. Yet, we see that despite that there was a group of professional orators, “special carriers,” who could be considered participants and specialists in cultural memory. The fact that we have so few speeches suggests either that they were not many or that the results of their work were thwarted sometimes during the tumultuous 2nd/8th century.

6.6. IMPROVIZATION OR TRAINING?

The Abbasid ideal of oratory and eloquence is tightly connected with improvisation. One of the many definitions of eloquence (balāgha), is “something that excites our hearts, and they thrust it on our tongues.” 158 Caliphs like Muʿāwiya are praised for their ability to speak ex tempore:

On the pulpits, he rides them and jumps on them [as if he is riding a horse] and delivers his resounding speech off hand.
When prattle takes it over, he brings it back, to the beginning of speech. 159

Al-Ḥājīẓ’s famous praise of the Arab eloquence ends with the assertion that

… everything that the Arabs produce is through instinct (badīha) and improvisation (irtijāl), as if it were inspiration (ilhām). 160

If all speech of the Arabs were improvised, then we would expect to find no memorizing of older poems, no transmission, no rehearsing, no studying. That would be misleading as I have already pointed out repeatedly. Mary Carruthers’s classic study elucidates the central role of memory in medieval Europe and the workings of creative activity in such a culture. She explains how, based on classical rhetoric (Quintilian), improvisation (ex tempore dicendi) is “the highest reward of our

158 Al-Ḥājīẓ, Bayān, 1:96.
159 Al-Ḥājīẓ, Bayān, 1:127.
160 Al-Ḥājīẓ, Bayān, 3:27.
long labors.” Improvisation is the result of memorizing, learning the rules, practice and training; one can only improvise when he or she has the rules of speech and all examples ready to use. Improvisation and training do not exclude each other; quite the opposite.

The Arabs were no different, despite al-Jāḥīz’s claims. The reports about the importance of memorization and about the pride of scholars in their prodigious memory are numerous, as noted in the previous chapter. We have also indirect hints to the memorization of speeches and poems in the Umayyad society; for example, the widespread motif in works like the Aghānī or Balāghāt al-nisā‘ of caliphs and their courtiers who would memorize verses of their enemies only to recite them back to them in accusation. Again, these encounters might not have happened as they are described, but the recurrence of the motif suggests that people considered it a plausible scenario. They give us a view into a process of an organic passing on memory (‘communicative memory’ following Assman)

Other accounts point to that khatāb could be prepared and rehearsed, further confirming that the ‘inspiredness’ of the Arab eloquence was a result of hard work and oratorical training. With regard to poetry, scholars like al-Asad or Schoeler have called attention to the existence of the ḥawlīyāt (“poems that took an entire year to compose”) to argue that poetry was not an improvised performance but that it could be also a painstakingly contrived undertaking. In a similar fashion, we find reports that touch upon the preparation for the oratorical performance. Al- Jāḥīz cites al-Ba‘ith, a man “most skilled in oratory” who lived during the Umayyad period, saying: “By God, I do not deliver a speech like a rough wooden stick. On the day of gathering, I want to deliver a polished speech, having mulled over it for one night.” Another example is the late

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162 Al-Jāḥīz, *Bayān*, 1:204
Umayyad-era figure, Dāwūd b. ʿAlī, the aforementioned promoter of the Abbasid movement. He is praised in an account for his oratorical skills. Specifically, it is mentioned that he did not write his speeches before their delivery.\textsuperscript{163} Such a comment, of course, suggests that many others did this, otherwise it would not be worthy of mentioning.

The following al-Jāḥiẓ’s description of the orator’s preparation for an important speech performance ties all the above-mentioned elements together:

“We haven’t seen that they […] employed the same planning with long orations as they do with long poems; but a speech that they had prepared overnight is like the one that they improvise, because they are in full command of it and because they are confident about the habit that God created in them. Still, when they needed to contemplate about great matters and important issues, they softened them [the speeches] first in their chests, and bound them in their minds, and when the spear’s sharpener straightened it and it was put in the bellows, and it rose above the sediment, they took it out perfect and polished, purified from all dirt, elegant.”

This quote by al-Jāḥiẓ shows that speeches were also thought-out and worked-on like some poems though to a lesser degree. Speeches have looser structures and they lend themselves more easily to improvisation, if we understand what improvisation is: a rearrangement of motifs stored in memory according to appropriate rules. But they could also meticulously prepare the speech and polish it to perfection (and al-Jāḥiẓ describes this process beautifully) before the speech performance. Al-Jāḥiẓ himself urges his contemporaries who want to be become adīhs to practice frequently before they publish their first piece.\textsuperscript{164}

Finally, a narrative about the famous early Abbasid Muʿtazilite scholar Bishr b. Muʿtamir contains a reference to an oratorical training session, when the scholar passes by the orator Ibrāhīm b. Jabala teaching his sons the art of oratory. On one level this report suggests that early Abbasid

\textsuperscript{163} Al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:331.
\textsuperscript{164} al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān, 1:203. “If you want to take up the study of this craft (ṣināʿa) and connect yourself to this adab, and if you have written a poem, penned an oration (ḥabbarta khuṭba), or composed a letter, do not let your self-confidence and your satisfaction with the fruit of your mind lead you to claim it for yourself. Show this fruit to learned men at public performance of letters or poetry or oratory (ʿurad rasā ʾil aw asḥāʾr aw khuṭab), and if you see ears listening to it, eyes looking at it, and people ask for it and finding it good, only then claim it!”
oratory was passed on from fathers to sons, an aspect of oratory also confirmed elsewhere. But Bishr hands the boys a pamphlet which argues that rather than learning ornamented speech, one should stick to reason. This is a narrativized and Mu'tazilite version of the late antique conflict between the simple word of the Scripture (sermo humilis) (whose role is taken by reason here) and ornamented speech, also related to wider beliefs in the magical power of the word. Al-Jāḥiz’s account, unsurprisingly grants the victory to reason, when it portrays Ibrāhīm accepting the superiority of Bishr’s way. While the khabar is meant to express the tension between a more ‘modern’ Mu’tazilite aesthetic of rational argument and the more ancient Arab tradition of oratory, it also points an oratorical training session.

Despite the fact that we have no handbooks of oratory, these reports and other reports in this chapter point to the fact that oratory was studied, prepared, memorized—mainly for political purposes. This suggests that it was most probably—in the form of short excerpts of past speeches—handed on to later generations.

6.7. CONCLUSION

In his influential book Ancient Rhetoric and Oratory (2005) Tomas Habinek rereads the history and significance of the classical rhetorical tradition from a sociological perspective. He sees

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167 The 5th century Isaac of Antioch, for example, contrasts in his poem in Syriac the true healers (men of God) who work through simple words with the false diviners who adorn their words.

*His (the doctor's) tongue speaks the truth and does not heed decoration [...]*
*He also doesn't adorn the words to restrain the ulcer [...]*
*The Spirit sang through the prophets with simple words*
*To prove that it bore distress (=felt pity) for the human kind*
*With simplicity of their words their suffering shall be perceived by us*
*To healing it was that they were sent not to adorn their words...*
ancient rhetoric as a set of social and cultural practices which take part in organizing society, “a special speech of state.” The established systems of rhetoric, which flourished in the time of Classical Greek democracy and Roman republic, served to maintain and promote the established systems of power. Traditionally, scholars have recognized the wide spread of rhetoric in the centuries to follow but looked down on it as inferior due to its classicizing formalism and its being out of touch with reality, which had profoundly changed since the classical period. The classic answer to this scholarly distaste for late antique rhetoric is Peter Brown’s *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (1992). He argues that rhetoric of this period did not only express nostalgia for the Republic but also played a political role in that it created a bond of *paideia* and a cultural bridge between divergent elite elements of Roman society.

Similarly, the reverence for Umayyad oratory in the Abbasid period was more than an expression of nostalgia for the glory of the Arab past. Speeches of the great Umayyad figures and accounts of the past eloquence became part of the textual canon that supported and informed the ideals of the Abbasid Arabo-Islamic society. And this is where we are coming to a full circle—to the construction of a cultural memory, a process in which al-Jāḥiẓ took an important part.

In its own time, Umayyad oratory was devoid of these ideological dimensions; it was mainly a powerful tool of politics that had profound religious and ritual dimensions. We need to imagine a predominantly oral world, without vast readership, without an easy access to books, where people had to rely largely on the spoken word. In this world, the word had an enhanced effect on its audiences. Poets, *qussās, rujjāz* (“rhyme prose poets”), *qurrā’* (“Qur’ān reciters”), and *kuhhān* (“diviners”) filled all corners of the public space, bearing the news, promoting their views, and competing for their place in the community through eloquent speech, creating a distinct Islamic soundscape. The Umayyad soundscape was dominated by the ādhān and especially the
Friday service, during which the ruler of the city, once a week, prayed for the believers and delivered a long khuṭba informing them about all they should know, mentioned the caliph’s name, and re-constitute the religious and political community. The speech of al-Ḥajjāj and others, from this vantage point, were not merely a religious obligation connected with his office; they constituted a weekly opportunity to recreate the Islamic polity and to disseminate news and ideologies to large crowds of the Arab Muslim elite.

Eloquent rulers, like al-Ḥajjāj, practiced oratory and so did their subjects: either as occasional orators or as professionals, in a variety of places beyond the mosque. Oratory and the objects connected with it carried an aura of leadership, and it was at the center of the Islamic rituals where a critical definition of a discrete Islamic identity and an Islamic soundscape emerged. Beyond its symbolic level, public speech also had a very pragmatic function as the most regular channel of ideology and propaganda. The group of professional orators brought to light in this chapter further confirms the use of oratory pragmatic politics.

St. Augustine in his De doctrina christiana (426) famously transformed pagan rhetoric into a useful tool for the Christian mission to convert the world. Augustine argues, according to Murphy, “that God intends all Christians to be rhetorically apostolic, that is, to be responsible for carrying God’s message to their fellow men through the use of language”168 His theory of sign states that God puts all things into the temporal world as signs to be read by men; men, too, can invents signs to show other men. Hence, men’s responsibility is to discover the meanings of God’s signs and then to share this understanding with others. Identical ideas constitute the heart of al-Jāḥiz’s theory of communication, which revolves around the concept of eloquence (bayān). Indeed, this has very little to do with world of Umayyad orators as we observed them. As little as

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Roman forensic oratory has to do with Augustine’s theory of sign. Like Augustine, al-Jāḥiẓ reinterpreted oratory, the ancient Arab practice, as a cornerstone of the Arab identity and endowed it with new cultural, existential, and religious meanings.
CONCLUSION

This study explored the historico-literary figure and the oratory of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī (d. 95/714), the governor of Iraq under the Umayyads and one of the most salient politicians and orators of early Islam. I argued for a re-evaluation of al-Ḥajjāj as the ruler of the Islamic East in his own right, largely autonomous while closely collaborating with the Marwânid caliph ʿAbd al-Malik; a ruler who, far from being a mere brutish tyrant as he is most commonly remembered, used a vast array of cultural means to legitimize his power. I contended that the speeches attributed to al-Ḥajjāj in later sources are later re-performances reflecting an earlier practice of public speaking; that they reflect a sophisticated ideology of power; and that some of them show signs of oral transmission. I argued that the practice of oratory should be considered among the most important cultural means at his disposal. In the previous six chapters, we navigated different types of source material that cover the entire spectrum between what we today call ‘literature’ and ‘history,’ or ‘fiction’ and ‘fact’. I used these terms because they are generally understandable but, at the same time, I aimed to problematize them. I aimed to show how literary reading of later sources can lead to a better historical understanding of earlier periods and how it can reveal the processes of construction of later perspectives on them. This final essay brings together the findings of this dissertation through explaining the steps—one by one—from the ‘literary’ material related to al-Ḥajjāj to the ‘historical’ knowledge, and from the Abbasid memories to the Umayyad realities, and explains the conclusions that I have reached through them. Before that, I refresh the reader’s memory outlining the general division of the study and its main sources.

The study had two main parts. The first part (Chapters 1-3) focused on al-Ḥajjāj; the second part (Chapter 4-6) on his speeches. Chapters 1 and 2 can be seen as the ‘historical’ chapters in the sense that they attempted to tell ‘what really happened’ in the time of al-Ḥajjāj and thus provide a
background for his rule and for his speeches. The basis of the biographical Chapter 1 was al-Ṭabarî’s Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk. Chapter 2, which delved into intertwining language, culture, and power, was grounded in modern scholarship on these topics and analyzed passages in the sources that refer to al-Ḥajjāj’s cultural and linguistic policies. Chapter 3 examined the later Abbasid memory of the governor through a close reading of the structure, individual akhbār and their asānīd of an extensive biographical entry on him in Ibn ʿAsākir’s Tārīkh Dimashq. Chapter 4 and 5 took the body of his speeches as their object of examination while Chapter 6 studied records about Umayyad orators and oratory at large. The three chapters approached al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches from different perspectives: Chapter 4 examined the later ‘literary’ speeches as they were recorded in 3rd/9th- and 4th/10th-century works of adab and history and exposed the ideology they project, emphasizing their performative qualities; Chapter 5 compared the variants of the versions of the Inaugural speech at Kufa to inquire into its transmission and identifying evidence of oral as well as written transmission; and Chapter 6 analyzed the references to oratory in al-Jāḥiẓ’s Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn in order to understand the perception and status of oratory, attempting to go beyond Abbasid sentiments by distinguishing between the image of it that we receive from al-Jāḥiẓ’s authorial statements and the poetry he compiled.

As we have seen, al-Ḥajjāj’s name is scattered across all kinds of later sources and his figure creates controversies even today. The medieval sources provide a fragmented representation of the governor, in that they offer many disparate, sometimes even contradictory images of him. First and foremost, al-Ḥajjāj is remembered as a tyrant, as the utmost villain of Islamic history, the sinner and the unjust ruler. The sources, however, also portray him as the loyal servant and efficient instrument of the great caliph ʿAbd al-Malik; as the instigator of the Arabization of the tax administration; as a key figure in the process of the codification of the Qur’ān; as a man
knowledgeable in matters of language, poetry, and Qur’ānic recitation; as an eloquent speaker who delivered the “most famous of all Umayyad orations,” quoting Everett Rowson; as a preacher of extremely compelling pious sermons (waʿẓ). The sources do not attempt to harmonize these images. They also do not explain the contradictions between some of these though they are aware of them. This awareness can be seen in a saying ascribed to the great scholar of Basra and contemporary of al-Ḥajjāj, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: “Do you not wonder about this sinner? He climbs the steps of the pulpit and speaks like prophets; then he descends from it and murders like tyrants—he speaks in accordance with God and he acts in contradiction to Him.”

Modern scholarship in Arabic and in Western languages—the latter being surprisingly scant regarding both al-Ḥajjāj and his speeches—have usually focused on one of these images, portraying al-Ḥajjāj either as a tyrant or a genius of a statesman. In the standard historical works that deal with the period, al-Ḥajjāj’s importance is recognized but he is seen primarily as an instrument—though a very efficient one—of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and later al-Walīd. Such depictions of al-Ḥajjāj are however one-dimensional, and do not capture the richness of his figure. As for his speeches, these are usually mentioned in an anecdotal way, either pointing to his eloquence or noting the famous speech at Kufa and its first lines. In this study, I proposed a fuller, multi-dimensional, integrated understanding of al-Ḥajjāj and his speeches.

The first step is to understand all these disparate images of al-Ḥajjāj as narrative strategies that served the concrete goals of later times. Let us take the two most prominent images of him—one as the most famous tyrant of Islam, sinner, and Pharaoh-like figure and another as the efficient instrument and loyal servant of ʿAbd al-Malik. The two images—somewhat contradictory, for

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169 Al-Ṭabarī and Rowson, History, 13.
being a tyrant requires a certain degree of independence—could serve the same purpose. Depicting al-Ḥajjāj as tyrannical could be understood in two ways: either as a way to emphasize (what were perceived as) Umayyad crimes and thus a result of an early anti-Umayyad propaganda or as a way to deflect blame from ‘Abd al-Malik by pointing an accusing finger at his governor. For the akhbār that portray al-Ḥajjāj as a deferential servant usually do so in a context in which ‘Abd al-Malik chides his governor for his mistreatment of the Iraqis. In this way they depict ‘Abd al-Malik as remorseful for the ‘crimes’, even though he did not prevent them. Anecdotes that portray him as a tyrannical villain and humble servant can be thus understood within an Abbasid context when the threat of the Umayyads was forgotten and within the larger process of the gradual redemption of Umayyad memory, which Antoine Borrut labeled as a movement “from adversity to otherness.”

‘Abd al-Malik was a suitable candidate for this redemption as the most powerful caliph of the Marwānid Empire. Furthermore, we have observed in examining al-Ḥajjāj’s later image in Ibn ‘Asākir’s entry on him, that the proverbial tyrant went through a process of redemption whereby his political authority as legitimate ruler was restored for reasons that related to Ibn ‘Asākir’s own contemporary circumstances.

If the ‘historical’ material that we use to reconstruct history reveals such post-Umayyad narrative strategies and is of a literary nature, then the second step is to ask why should we not be using material traditionally classified as ‘literary’, such as al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches, in our project? After all, the boundaries between ‘history’ and ‘literature’ are fluid, as Hayden White taught us. Al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches along with speeches of other important early Islamic figures have become part of the ‘Arabic classics’—they are still memorized in schools and have thus become a part of how many Arabs see their past. In Chapter 6, we have noted that already in the 3rd/9th century al-

Jāḥiẓ considered early Islamic speeches a key Arab cultural achievement, a foundation for the claim to Arab eloquence—intimately connected with notions of the sacredness of the Arab language and arguments for the superiority of the Arabs over other nations. Thus, already in the 3rd/9th century Umayyad oratory was part of the Abbasid self-image and a key element of the Arab-Muslim ‘cultural memory’, in Jan Assmann’s understanding of the term. This important cultural product however has been commonly seen as literary inventions, a view most forcefully expressed by Albrecht Noth. He has considered the whole genre of early Islamic speeches “fictions,” in whose case “the question of authenticity […] does not even need to be asked” and explained that the Abbasid historians inserted speeches in the mouth of the historical figures to express their opinions and to decision-making process, referring to the antique tradition of ‘rhetorical speeches’ which continued into late antiquity. This is the main reason that early Islamic speeches have been largely neglected as a historical source. This disregard, however, is unfounded when we recognize the closeness between ‘literature’ and ‘history;’ recognition which should prompts us to pay attention to the historical potential of the oratorical genre.

The following step towards a historical evaluation of the speeches is to analyze them from a literary perspective. My analysis challenged the ‘rhetorical speeches’ hypothesis in two methodological moves. First, an analysis of the speeches’ contents in Chapter 4 brought out the performative aspect of some of the *khutab* (e.g., the ‘Inaugural speech at Kufa,’ the speech ‘After Dayr al-Jamājim,’ the ‘Funeral speech for ‘Abd al-Malik’) and their enframing narratives and showed that rather than being mere instances of expressing one’s opinions, they revealed carefully

173 Jan Assmann’s definition reads: “The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image,” Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,’ 132, quoted in Marek Tamm, “Beyond History and Memory: New Perspectives in Memory Studies,” *History Compass* 11.6 (2013): 461-462.
crafted performances and at times recorded comments about their performative efficacy. The speeches are portrayed as effective speech acts, establishing the new governor, declaring war, announcing the death of a caliph and pronouncing the new one, etc. As such, I argued that they should be considered as recordings and reconstructions of past performances, i.e., ‘re-performances’. At the same time, the analysis showed that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches—although collected from different sources—project specific religious rhetoric centered around the idea of obedience as a religious duty, the caliphs as direct representatives of God, and the governor as the instrument of both God and the divinely appointed caliph. His rhetoric also created an ideal social hierarchy at the top of which stood the military men, as the soldiers of God, while at the same time reflecting the deep rift between the Syrians and Iraqis. The fact that the rhetoric of his speeches is coherent and particular to his time and space suggests that they may genuinely reflect the ideology of the governor as it was remembered by later generations (more on that below). Second, the comparison of variants of the Inaugural speech in Chapter 5 showed that the speech was transmitted orally for some time before it was written down in the forms as we have it today. A comparison of variants of four other speeches (see Appendix II) hinted in the same direction. This disproved Noth’s ‘rhetorical speeches’ hypothesis. To explain, the Inaugural speech must have been in circulation before the Abbasid historians wrote it down and thus cannot be seen as a ‘literary invention’ of an Abbasid historian.

With this step we thus moved to the matter of transmission of this ‘literary material’ and closer in time to Umayyad ‘history’, for we can claim to have in our hands some passages from speeches as they were in oral circulation before they became part of works of history and adab compilations. At this point it becomes apparent that the notion of ‘authenticity’ itself is problematic. On the one hand, we cannot call the Inaugural speech ‘authentic’ because we will
never know if al-Ḥajjāj ever pronounced a particular speech and what exact words he used—which would be the usual parameters for ‘authenticity’, as stated, for example, by Stefan Dähne in his monograph on early Islamic speeches. On the other hand, we cannot call the Inaugural speech ‘inauthentic’ in Noth’s sense because it had a reality outside of the Abbasid historians’ imaginations—as a specimen of verbal art handed down from one narrator to another. In Chapter 5, I showed that the patterns of transmission of the Inaugural speech resemble the transmission of poetry (emphasis on words) more than historical prose (emphasis on motifs). Appendix II detects the same patterns in other speeches of al-Ḥajjāj. I suggested that these findings point to a transmission of oratory particular to the genre itself, wherein only short passages of speeches were circulated among people mainly in an organic way through what Jan Assmann has called ‘communicative memory’, the type of collective memory that stays alive for 80-100 years and is passed down through direct communication. These were later collected and compiled in writing and took the shape that we know from the 3rd/9th-century works. It will of course remain in the realm of speculation to say when this speech was circulated—we can only note that some of their asānīd go back to mid-2nd/8th century. But the oral transmission of the Inaugural speech (and others) opens questions beyond those of authenticity, such as “Who narrated them?” “Why?” and “What function did they have in society?”; questions that bring us closer to ‘history’ and to the process of construction of memory.

This move to the matter of transmission brings our attention to the general transmission of all of our disparate material about al-Ḥajjāj. The records about al-Ḥajjāj and words attributed to him circulated in the society prior to finding their way to the preserved 3rd/9th-century history works of figures such as al-Ṭabarī or al-Jāḥiẓ. As we have mentioned in the Introduction, we know titles of books written about al-Ḥajjāj or events crucial to his rule, such as the battle at Dayr al-
Jamājim, that have not come down to us. We can also suppose that a large body of al-Ḥajjāj-related material was also transmitted organically as part of the ‘communicative memory’ (as opposed to the more directed and conscious ‘cultural memory’ boosted especially through the taṣnīf and tadwīn efforts at collecting akhbār about the past).\footnote{Even centuries later people kept narrating wonderous stories (‘ajā’ib) about the governor which may have never been included in literary works. This may be inferred from a centuries-later comment by also used their discernment to select reliable material supports al-Dhahabī’s (d. 1348) note in his Tārīkh al-Islām. At the end of his entry on al-Ḥajjāj he says: “And I have a book (mujallad) about al-Ḥajjāj and wonderful stories about him (ajā’ib) but I am not sure about its veracity.” Al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-Islām, vols. 52, ed. ʿUmar Abd al-Salām al-Tadmūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Arabi, 1993), 6:327} Now, we have seen akhbār about al-Ḥajjāj from different places on the historico-literary spectrum—ranging from a record stating that he assumed the governorship of Iraq to a record narrating that the devil himself saved al-Ḥajjāj’s life as newborn. While the former belongs to the realm ‘what actually happened’ (all available sources agree on this), the other is must be a result of anti-Ḥajjāj propaganda. We have to realize however, that in this time both were part of the same collective memory, and thus differentiation between history and literature makes little sense. When we speak about memory of the past the question is not only “What was remembered?” but also “What was forgotten?” Forgetting, like remembering, is an active and often deliberate process.\footnote{On forgetting, its techniques, and its cultural and historiographical relevance see Assmann, Moses the Egyptian, 215-218.} Having realized that al-Ḥajjāj’s political speeches (khutab) and pious sermons (khutab waʿzīya) were also part of this collective memory, we see that what was forgotten and erased from Arab cultural memory, was precisely the image of a religious leader that these speeches construct. The speeches themselves remained but the early 2\textsuperscript{nd}/8\textsuperscript{th}-century propaganda against al-Ḥajjāj during his time and the general anti-Umayyad sentiments of the early Abbasid era transformed al-Ḥajjāj into an archetypal tyrant and erased the speeches’ effects.
The last step is thus to ask what can we say about al-Ḥajjāj and his speeches in his own period? We have already said that there is no way of knowing whether a given speech as we have it was delivered on a certain time in a certain wording. However, we have observed the impact that al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches made on their later audiences and the level of efficacy that later narrators ascribed to them (Chapter 4). We have also seen that their transmission suggests a time-frame closer to the Umayyad period than was previously thought (Chapter 5). We have described the ideology that they project, which closely reflects the realities of its time and its specific to it, and thus we can speculate that they serve as a reliable window into al-Ḥajjāj’s self-image. This is thus what we drew from the speeches themselves.

Besides that, we have abundant material about oratory (al-Ḥajjāj’s and that of other figures) and orators, which has gone unexplored and which provides valuable insights. Poetry, cursory comments in historical prose (Chapter 6) and fiqh and hadīth material (Chapter 3 and 6)—all have something to say about orators of early Islam. This non-oratorical material closely connects Umayyad oratory with direct exercise of political power, on the level of its symbolic status and on a more pragmatic level. Umayyad poetry for example paints a picture of oratory as an undertaking intimately connected with leadership and authority. In this regard, especially the image of the pulpit (minbar)—the place of the speaker—is strikingly powerful and can only be compared with the image of the throne. Alongside this elevated view of public speech, these sources attested to other more pragmatic types of political oratory, bringing to light, for example, the existence of epideictic (i.e., engaging in blame and praise) orators, a trait of Umayyad khutba, previously overlooked. Al-Ḥajjāj, too, is recorded to have used such orators to blame others. Cursory comments in history works about orators revealed a related group of ‘professional orators,’ i.e., men and women who either delivered speeches on behalf of others or memorized and disseminated
speeches. These ‘professional orators’ should then be seen as a medium of cultural memory. They did not, however, become part of Arab cultural memory itself—their activities did not serve to boost the Arab self-image as the oratorical material ascribed to the great political figures did, and as such they were ‘forgotten’ by ideologues like al-Jāḥiẓ. Finally ḥadīth and fiqh material shed light on the profound ritual and performative aspects of public formal speech, for example in dealing with the Islamic prayer for rain and prescribing the precise words in rhyming prose for people asking for divine intervention. Furthermore, this material reveals that under the Umayyads a politico-religious controversy took place about prolonged Friday khutba and that al-Ḥajjāj was at its center. We could see the reflections of this controversy even in the 6th/12th century Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq by Ibn ʿAsākir, who considered it—as I showed through examining the organizational structure of his entry on al-Ḥajjāj—the governor’s most serious sin.

Finally, in order to fully understand the socio-cultural-political importance, status, and impact of al-Ḥajjāj’s use of public speech, I placed it in its historical context. On the one hand, I emphasized the various traditions of public speech of late antique Near East, which further reinforces our findings that the Abbasid-era admiration for Umayyad eloquence (most clearly expressed in al-Jāḥiẓ’s Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, see Chapter 6) is based on historical realities. On the other hand, I discussed al-Ḥajjāj’s larger efforts at legitimizing his rule through cultural means to show his public speaking as one—a crucial one at that—of a vast array of such cultural means. I focused on al-Ḥajjāj’s appropriation of sacred Christian space by constructing his residential city; on his interventions in the Qur’ānic text and competition with the legacy of Ibn Masʿūd in Kufa; on his symbolic use of the Arabic language in administration; and on his construction of religious authority through poetry. However, his speeches that stirred controversy, as I mention above, still stand out among all these efforts when we realized that he, every Friday,
informed his subjects about all they needed to know, shaped their opinions, and conducted his rule while at the same time formulating the identity of the Empire and constructing his politico-religious authority. Similarly, his officials in the cities of the Islamic East disseminated his ideology. Given the steady repetition, its length, and its intimate connection with the ruling power—we have noted—we should see Friday *khutba* as a central ‘ideological state apparatus’, whose power can be compared to the church in medieval Europe or the power of school in modern times, to use Louis Althusser’s terms and examples. On the level of the whole Empire, the Friday *khutba* should be seen as the key medium—alongside coins, monumental inscriptions, etc.—through which the Arabo-Islamic ‘imagined community’ was being forged, using Benedict Anderson’s term and drawing thereby a parallel with his discussing of the centrality of press in the formation of modern nationalisms.

Al-Ḥajjāj was aware of this symbolic and pragmatic use of oratory, as all these different types of sources from different periods and proveniences indicate. This long journey led us to understand Umayyad oratory as exercise of power and rulership; as the main channel of ideology and propaganda; as connected with Islamic rituals; and as critical in defining a discrete Islamic identity and an Islamic soundscape. Having striped back later layers of memory from al-Ḥajjāj, having understood the status of oratory in his time, and having drawn a fuller portrait of his time and rule, the complex, multi-dimensional, yet integrated quality of his persona fully emerges. Al-Ḥajjāj transforms from a tyrant and servant to a powerful ruler of the entire Eastern super province with large autonomy, yet closely collaborating with ʿAbd al-Malik. His role in the codification of the Qurʾān should be seen as part of his efforts to legitimize his power by presenting himself as

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monopolizing the religious authority in Iraq, especially vis-à-vis the competition from the Kufan qurrāʾ. His perceived eloquence and expertise in language are reflections of both his use of the language arts for constructing his charismatic authority and his emphasis on the Arabic language as the symbol of the Empire.

The conclusions of this study have some serious implications and pave the way to further research in several directions. On the ‘historical’ level the study suggested that at the pinnacle of Umayyad political power the empire was to a large extent split in two parts—governed by two families, the Umayyads and the Thaqafites. In a similar vein, Joshua Mabra has argued recently that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, the brother of ‘Abd al-Malik, ruled Egypt largely independently of the caliph.177 It seems then that we should further inquire about the nature of relationships between the center and the periphery and, in our case, about negotiation of power between al-Ḥajjāj and the caliphs and between al-Ḥajjāj and his own governors. On the ‘literary level’, the study has argued that a whole genre—early Islamic speeches—has gone unnoticed for baseless reasons. With regard to al-Ḥajjāj’s oratory specifically, we have seen that his speeches project a coherent ideology; therefore, a further step would be to compare his speeches with those of Ziyād b. Abīh and ‘Ubaydullāh b. Ziyād to see if we can speak of a genre of ‘eloquent Umayyad governor-orators of Iraq’ or if each of them has their particular voice and style of delivery of their speeches. The performative features and oral characteristic that the analysis revealed suggest that some speeches belonged to a tradition of a verbal art which was transmitted in its particular way. These speeches should be then studied as a genre on their own. The method developed to detect oral transmission should be tested on a larger body of speeches. On a related note, attention should be paid to the large body of al-Ḥajjāj’s letters (see Chapter 4) to see if the ideology that they project agrees with

that of his speeches. The letters could also elucidate al-Ḥajjāj’s relationships with other figures of the Empire. Finally, on the level where ‘literature’ and ‘history’ fully blend, Umayyad oratory, should be also viewed and as an important social phenomenon of in its own time. The examination of non-oratorical material about oratory Chapter 6 brought to light a wide-spread practice of public speaking and revealed a group of non-elite orators who made conscious efforts to perpetuate and disseminate oratory, some of whom were hired to do so. More systematic attention should be dedicated to this group. Once a larger picture of Umayyad oratory is painted and once we better understand the perception of speech as a key cultural locus of early Islam, their embeddedness into their late antique milieu will be imperative.
APPENDIX I

ARABIC TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS OF NINETEEN SPEECHES OF AL-ḤAJJĀJ B. YŪSUF

The Appendix includes the Arabic texts of nineteen speeches attributed to al-Ḥajjāj and my translations of them. It follows the order of the speeches in *Jamhara*, which is roughly chronological and divided into khutab and khutab waʿziya. They are however based on original sources and not on *Jamhara*’s collations. The source of each khutba is identified under the title. The footnotes indicate in which other works each speech can be found. Titles of the speeches are mine. In longer speeches, I added divisions that reflect the discussion in the body of the study.

A1.1. KHUTAB

A1.1.1. SPEECH 1: KILLING OF IBN AL-ZUBAYR

Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī, *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn*, 184:

لما قتل الحجاج عبد الله بن الزبير ارتجت مكة بالبكاء فصعد المنبر فقال ألا إن ابن الزبير كان من أحبار هذه الأمة حتى رغب في الخلافة ونازع فيها وخلع طاعة الله واستكن بحرم الله ولو كان شيء منعه لمنع آدم حرمة الجنة لأن الله تعالى خلقه بيده وأتاجه له ملائكته وأباحه جنته فليا عصاه أخرجه منها بخطيئته وأدم على الله أكرم من ابن الزبير والبَيْتة أعظم حرمة من الكعبة

When al-Ḥajjāj killed ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr, people of Mecca broke out in tears. So al-Ḥajjāj ascended the pulpit and said:

Ibn al-Zubayr was one of the most learned men (*aḥbār*) of this community (*umma*). But then he desired the caliphate, fought for it, dismissed obedience to God, and shielded himself in the

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sanctuary (haram) of God. If anything could have deterred the rebellious, then the holiness of Paradise would have deterred Adam. It was God the Almighty who created him with His own hands, made His angels prostrate in front of him, and opened Paradise for him! Then he [Adam] rebelled and God expelled him from there due to his sin. Adam was more precious to God than Ibn al-Zubayr, and the holiness of Paradise is greater than that of Mecca.

A1.1.2. SPEECH 2: INAUGURAL SPEECH AT KUFA

Al-Mubarrad, Kāmil, 1: 298:2

and the holiness of Paradise would have deterred Adam. It was God the Almighty who created him with His own hands, made His angels prostrate in front of him, and opened Paradise for him! Then he [Adam] rebelled and God expelled him from there due to his sin. Adam was more precious to God than Ibn al-Zubayr, and the holiness of Paradise is greater than that of Mecca.

A. 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Umayr al-Laythī said: While we were in a mosque at Kufa—and these days people of Kufa were well off, for any of them would walk around with ten or twenty mawālī—a man came who said: “This is al-Ḥajjāj who has come as governor of Iraq.” He [al-Ḥajjāj] then entered the mosque with a turban on his head, which covered most of his face. He was adorned with a sword, carried a bow on his shoulder, and headed towards the pulpit. People stood up [in expectation] as he ascended the pulpit but he remained silent for a while. So, they started saying to one another: “May God disgrace the Banū Umayya for appointing someone like that as the governor of Iraq.” Then 'Umayr b. Ḍābi’ al-Burmujī asked: “Shall I throw pebbles at him for you?” But others replied: “Wait a little, so that we may see.” When he [al-Ḥajjāj] saw all the people’s eyes turned towards him, he removed the veil from his mouth, stood up, and declared:

B.

B.1 I am a son of clarity, who climbs narrow mountain paths;

when I remove my turban you will know me.³

B.2 People of Kufa, indeed, I see heads that have ripened and are ready for harvesting. I am their master! I can almost see blood glistening between turbans and beards.

³ Taken from a poem by Suḥaym b. Wathīl al-Riyāḥī. He was a Mukhaḍram poet (d. 60/680) whose poem appears in the Aṣmaʿīyāt. The quotation in al-Ḥajjāj’s khutba is the beginning line of the poem. See al-Aṣmaʿī, Aṣmaʿīyāt, 3.
Then he said:

B.3 The times have become grave, so be strong, O Ziyam [his she-camel]!
   The night has seated a vigorous rider on her
Who is neither a shepherd of camels or sheep
   Nor a butcher by his slaughter board
Then he said:
The night seated a strong fearless man on her [the she-camel].
   Keeps going in and out of the deep-sounding desert
a muhājir who is not a Bedouin.
And he said:
It [the war] rolled up its sleeves, so you become firm;
   And the war became serious with you, so you too become serious.
And the bow has a strong string
   Like the leg of a young camel or even stronger.
There is no escape whence there is no escape.

B.4 I, by God, oh people of Iraq, the rattling sound of old water-skins shall not frighten me [as it frightens camels], and my sides shall not be squeezed like figs [to be tested]. For I have already been made to show my teeth [i.e. examined like a horse] to show my intelligence and inspected for experience. The commander of the believers—may God prolong his life—laid his quiver open and bit on the shafts of his arrows to test them. He found me as the most bitter of them, the hardest to break, and so he shot me at you. For you often rushed to sedition and lay in beds of error.

B.5 By God, I will wrap you as I would wrap a salama tree [a coniferous tree]. I will beat you as camels gone astray [are beaten], for you are like the people of the town “enjoying security and quiet, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place: yet was it ungrateful for the favours of God: so God made it taste of hunger and terror [in extremes] [closing in on it] like a garment [from every side], because of the [evil] which [its people] wrought.” (Q 16:112). Truly, I do not promise without keeping my word, I do not intend something without following through. I do not measure without cutting.

B.6 The commander of the believers commanded me to give you your stipends and to direct you to fight your enemy with al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra. And I swear to God that if I find in three days anyone who has taken his stipend, lagging behind, I shall behead him.

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4 Whenever I quote the Qur’ān it is based on Yusuf Ali’s translation, with the exception that I substitute God for his “Allah.”
A1.1.3. Speech 3: Takbîr at the market

Al-Jâḥiz, Bayân, 2:137-138:

Al-Haytham said: Ibn ʿAyyāsh narrated to me on the authority of his father:
One day, al-Ḥajjâj came out of his palace in Kufa, when he heard a takbîr [i.e. someone uttering God is great, Allâh akbar] in the market. This alarmed him, so he ascended the pulpit, praised God (ḥamida Allāh wa-athnā ʿalayh), prayed for the Prophet, and then said:

People of Iraq, people of dissention and hypocrisy (yā ahl al-shiqāq wa-al-nifāq), people of wicked morals (wa-masāwiʿ al-akhlāq), wicked folk (banī al-lakīʿa), slaves of the rod [i.e. slaves to anyone who rules you], sons of slave girls (awlād al-imāʾ), and of those who allow others to walk all over them as if they were mushrooms in the plain (wa-al-faqʿ bi-al-qarqar); I heard someone saying that God is great while he meant Satan. ʿAmr b. Barrah al-Hamdānī said about those like you and me:

When they raided me, I would raid them.
Am I to blame for that, Hamdān?
When you gather pure and firm heart
And zealous pride, acts of injustice avoid you.

By God, the moment that a rod strikes another rod, I will make it a matter of the past (lā taqraʿ ʿaṣan ʿaṣan ilā jaʿaltuhā ka-ams al-dābir) [i.e. the moment you start fighting among each other I will obliterate you].

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A1.1.4. SPEECH 4: MEDICINE IN BASRA

He made a speech when he arrived in Baṣra, threatening and menacing the people of Iraq:

People, if any among you suffers from a disease, I have a medicine for him. If someone’s appointed time has become too long, I shall expedite it. Whoever’s head has become too heavy for him, I shall lift his burden. If someone’s past has become too distant for him, I shall cut the rest of his life short. While Satan has his temptation,⁷ the sultan has his sword. For him whom whose secret thoughts have become sick, al-Ḥajjāj’s punishment shall be the cure. And he whom sin has laid down, al-Ḥajjāj’s firmness shall set upright. He who does not have enough vigor, destruction shall not turn away from him. He whose mouth spoke too quickly (man sabaqathu bādiratu fəmmihi), the blood of his body shall quickly be spilt.

I admonish but then I do not wait. I warn but then I do not excuse myself. I menace but then I do not forgive. The dimness in the eyes of your leaders spoiled you. One a man’s heart once relents, his conduct (adab) turns bad. My determination and decisiveness have taken away the whip from my hands and substituted it with a sword. The sword is in my hand and the swordbelt behind my neck. Its edge will be the necklace for anyone who rebels against me. By God, if I order people


⁷ Ṭayf would usually mean ghost but here it is in connection with shayṭān which invokes a Qur’ānic verse in which the meaning is closer to temptation/whispering of evil thoughts. Though the verse uses ṭāʾ if, some variant readings of it use ṭaʾif: “Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil (ṭaʾif) from satan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance, when lo! they see (aright)!" (Q 7:201)
to enter [the mosque] through a certain gate, and they take a different one, I will cut their head off.

Mālik b. Dīnār said: “Many a time I heard al-Hajjāj mention how he treated the Iraqis and how they treated him, and I almost believed that they wronged him due to his eloquence and his ability to seamlessly connect arguments.”

**A1.1.5. SPEECH 5: AFTER DAYR AL-JAMĀJIM**

Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 2:138-140:

> يا أهل العراق، إن الشيطان قد استبطنكم فخالَت الل حمَ والد م، والعصَّب والمسام عَ، والأطراف والأعضاء، والش َّغاف، ثم أفضى إلِي الأمخاخ والأصماخ، ثم ارتفع فعضٌش، ثم يَاشَاكِرُنَا لفاقة وشفاقاً، وأشعركم خلافاً، والتذمموه ديلًا تُبُعونه، وقائياً تطيعونه، ومؤامراً تتشيرون، فكيف تنفعكم تفعة، أو تطيعكم وقعة، أو يُحِجُّكم إسلامً، أو يُعْقِبكم بيان؟

> وأما أصحابي بالأهواز، حيث رُمتُم الَمكر، وسعيتم بالغَدر، واستجمعتم للكفر، وظنتم أن الله يهدَّئ ديبه وخلافته، وأن أرِمكم بطربي، وأنتم ستسلون لذا، وتنهرمون سراً، ثم يوم الزاوية وما يوم زاوية، وبه كان شكلكم وتارةكم وتذاكركم، وبِراوة الله منكم، ونوكوس وليكم عنكم، إذ وتَزِيِّمُونَكَ السُّورة إلى أوطانها، البَبْلَا إلى أطمانها، لا يسأل المرء عن أخي ولا يَرَوُّكَ السِّحْب على بنيه، حين عَضَّكم السلا، وَقَصَتكم الرمَاح، ثم يوم دَير الجماجم، وما يوم دير الجماجم؟! به كانت المعارك والملاحم، بَيْضَر يَلِه الهمَّة عن مقبيلة، وَيَذَهَّب الخيل عن خليفة.

> يا أهل العراق، إن أهم الالجروت، بعد الفجرات، والغَدَارات بعد الجُيِّرات، والثُّوَّة بعد الخُترات، والثَّوَّة بعد الْفَجَرات، أو تَعَوَّمَكم إلَى مَغْرَث، وَخْنَتم وإن أنتِ أرجُنكم وإن خفتكم ناقفِتُما، لا تُذِكِرَون حسنُها، ولا تنشرون نعمة، هل استفخَّتمَ ناَكًتُما، أو استفتَّكمَ غالٍ، أو استفخَّتمُ خاَسًّا، أو أستفخَّتمُ ظاَامٍ، واستفخَّتمِ خالٍ إلَّا تيعَمَّوه ولأَوِّمَوه وتعجُّمُوه. يا أهل العراق، هل شَغَب شَاغِبٌ، أو نَعَب ناعب، أو رَفَر رافر، إلا كنت أتباعه وأنصاره، يا أهل العراق، لم تَنْبِإكم المواعظ؟ أَلَمْ تُزُجِّكم الواقع؟

> ثم التفتَ إلى أهل الشام فقال:

> يا أهل الشام إِنْمَا أنا لِكُم كَتْفُ الْحَجَّة مُعِيَّنًا، عن فرائه، ينفي عنها المذر، ويُيا د عنها الجحش، ويَهْبُها من المطر، ويجبها من الضباب، ويسِربها من الدِّناب، يا أهل الشام، جَنَّةُ الْرَّداء، العَدْدُ والجَذلَاء.

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8 This report about Mālik also appears in al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1:394. He has takhallus instead of takhlîs.

A. O People of Iraq! The devil penetrated you, and entered your flesh, blood, nerves, ears, limbs, organs and heart. Then he reached the brain and the ears and then he went up and nested, hatched eggs, filled you with hypocrisy and dissension, and sowed discord among you. You took him as your guide whom you follow; you took him as your leader whom you obey; you took him as your counselor from whom you seek advice. How will experience be of any use to you? Will a battle teach you a lesson? Will Islam hold you back? Will bayān be of any use to you?

B. Are you not those whom I met [in battle] at al-Ahwāz, where you employed trickery and attempted perfidy and came together to perform unbelief (kufār). You thought that God would abandon his religion and caliphate (khilāfa). I caught sight of you as you were looking for refuge amongst each other, quickly being defeated. Then the battle of al-Zāwiya, what a battle it was! You found a failure in it, disputed among each other, and withdrew, God abandoned you, and your master withdrew too. You turned back to your home like stray camels, like camels longing for their homelands and all the while no one was inquiring about his brother, the old man did not wait for his sons, when arms stung you and lances broke you. Then came the battle of Dayr al-Jamājim, and what a battle it was! It contained many clashes and great combats, in which heads were swept from their necks and friend forgotten by friend.

C. O People of Iraq! People with whom disbelief and immorality, deceit and disloyalty, and whims [appear in recurring cycles]. If I send you to the frontiers (thughūr) you take from the spoil and betray me. If I make you feel safe, you start spreading false rumors. And if you are afraid, you become hypocrites. You do not remember a good deed and are not thankful for a benefaction. Whenever a perfidious person carried you away, a seducer misled you, a rebel incited you, an oppressor asked you for support, a debaucher asked you for help—did you not follow him and offer him refuge? Did you not support him and honor him? People of Iraq! Whenever a troublemaker made troubles, a raven croaked, an ass brayed, did you not become his followers and supporters? People of Iraq! Did religious exhortations (mawā‘iz) not hold you back, or great events not restrain you?

D. Then he turned to the people of Syria and said: O People of Syria! I am to you as an ostrich, protecting his chicks, cleaning them of mud, removing stones from them, and sheltering them from rain, protecting them from fog, guarding them from wolves. O People of Syria! You are our protection and garment, you are our military equipment and boots.

Then he turned to the people of Syria as they were gathered under the pulpit and said:

E. O People of Syria! I am to you as an ostrich, protecting his chicks, cleaning them of mud, removing stones from them, and sheltering them from rain, protecting them from flies, guarding them from wolves. O People of Syria! You are the protection and the garment, you are the military equipment and the boots.
A1.1.6. Speech 6: Kufans vs. Syrians

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha, 1:346:

People of Kufa, dissent (fitna) buds in secret conversations and it results in doubt, which is harvested by the sword. By God, if you hate me, you will do no harm to me. If you love me, I will have no benefit from that. So, I am neither afraid of your hatred nor pleased with your love.

You claimed that I am a magician. God the Sublime said: “the magician thrives not” (Q 20:69). But I did thrive. You claimed that I know the Greatest Name (al-ism al-akbar). So why do you fight the one who knows while you are ignorant?

Then he turned to the People of Syria and said:

Your wives are sweeter than musk, your sons are closer to my heart that my own son. You are precisely as a man from Banū Ḏubyān said:

If you attempt to harm the tribe of Asad, then I will not know you, for they are the armor and shield that I wore to the battle of al-Nasār while they were protecting me.

Then he said:

Nay, you, people of Syria, are as when God be praised said: “Already has Our Word been passed

before (this) to Our Servants sent (by Us). That they would certainly be assisted. And that Our forces— they surely must conquer.” (Q 37:171-173)

A1.1.7. SPEECH 7: OBEDIENCE

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, ‘Iqd, 4:206:11

اتقوا الله ما استطعتم، فهذم لئ وفيا مثوبه. ثم قال: واسمعوا وأطيعوا. فهذم لعبد الله وخليفة الله وحبيب الله عبد الملك بن مروان، والله لو أمرت الناس أن يأخذوا في باب واحد وأخذوا في باب غيره، كانت دماؤهم لي حلالا من الله، ولو قتل ربيعة وحضر لكان لي حلالا.

عذيري من هذه الحمرا، يرمي أحدهم بالحجر إلى السماء ويقول: يكون إلى أن يقع هذا خير. والله لأجعلهم كأمس الدابر;

عذيري من عبد هذيل، إنه زعم أنه آمن عند الله، يقرأ القرآن كأنه رجزُ الأعراب؛ والله لو أدركتُه لقتلتُه.

Al-Masʿūdī, Murūj, 3:143:

غذيري من سليمان بن داود، يقول لربه رَبُ إغْفِرْ لي وَهَبْ لِي مُلْكاً لا يَنْبِغ ي لَأَحَدٍ مِنْ بَعْدِي كَان ولله فيما علمت عبدًا حسوداً مِثْلًا.

“Fear God as much as you can.” (Q 64:16) 12 This [saying] is by God, and there is reward in it. “And listen and obey!” (Q 64:16) And the one [who is meant by this āya] is the worshipper of God, God’s caliph, God’s beloved, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. By God, if I order people to take a certain gate, and they take a different one, I will then consider their blood permitted by God (ḥalāl) for me to shed; even if all the tribes of Rabīʿa and Muḍar [he means here all Arabs] were killed it would be permitted for me to shed their blood.

Woe onto the red-cheeked ones (ahl hādhihi al-ḥamrāʾ) for one of them is throwing a stone towards the heavens saying: “Before the stone falls back down, something good will happen.” By God I will turn you into yesterday that has passed.

Woe onto the slave of Hudhayl—he claimed that he was safe with God!—who reads the Qurʾān as if it were rajaz of Bedouins. For, if I were to catch him, I would surely cut his head off.

[Al-Masʿūdī’s added line:]

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12 The whole āya reads: “So fear God as much as ye can; listen and obey; and spend in charity for the benefit of your own souls: And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls— they are the ones that achieve prosperity.” (Q 64:16)
Woe onto Solomon, son of David, who said to his Lord: “O my Lord! Forgive me, and grant me a Kingdom which (it may be), suits not another after me.” (Q 38:35)

And, indeed, he [al-Ḥajjāj] was—as far as I know—an envious, stingy man

A1.1.8. Speech 8: Decadence in Basra


He praised God (ḥamida allāha wa-athnā ‘alayhī) and then he said:

God protected us from the burdens of this life and ordered us to seek the afterlife. If only he saved us from the burdens of the otherworld and ordered us to seek this world. For I see the learned among you (ʿulamāʾakum) disappear, the ignorant not learn, the evil among you not repent. I see you hold onto what you were given and lose what you were ordered to do.

Knowledge (ʿilm) is on the verge of departing, and this departure means also the disappearance of the learned (wa-rafʿuh dhahāb al-ʿulamāʾ). Surely, I know about the evil ones among you more than a veterinarian knows about a horse; about those who read the Qurʾān only to abandon its commandment (illā hajran),14 and perform the prayer only at the last moment (illā duburan).

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14 Ittakhadhū hādīhā al-Qurʾān mahjūran, or they abandoned the Qurʾān.
This world is present and perishable (al-dunya 'araḍ ḥādir), and from it both the pious and the sinner (fājir) eat. The otherworld [by contrast] is at the appointed time in the future; in it [the otherworld] a mighty angel will reign, so act in caution of God and know that you shall meet him and “He rewards those who do evil, according to their deeds, and He rewards those who do good, with what is best.” (Q 53:31)

Good in its entirety shall be found in Paradise; Evil, in its entirety, in Hell. Both, he who does a seed of good and he who does a seed of evil, shall find it in the afterlife. I ask God’s forgiveness for me and for you.

A1.1.9. SPEECH 9: HATRED FOR IRAQIS

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, ‘Iqd, 4:207:

خطب الحجاج أهل العراق فقال: يأهل العراق إني لم أجد لكم دواء أدوى لدائكم من هذه المجازات والبعثات، لولا طيب ليلة الإياب ؛ فإنها تعقب راحته وإبني لا أريد أن أرى الفرح عندكم ولا الراحة بكم، وما أركم إلا كارهين للملائكة، وأنا والله لرؤيكم أكره، ولولا ما أريد من تنفيذ طاعة أمير المؤمنين فيكم ما حملت نفسي مفاساتكم والصبر على النظر إليكم، والله أسأل حسن العون عليكم! ثم نزل.

He addressed the people of Iraq:

People of Iraq! I have found no better medicine for your disease than raids and expeditions (al-maghāzī wa-al-buʿūth). Its only fault is the sweetness of the night when you come back, the happiness of return, which is followed by comfort, for I want to see neither happiness nor comfort from you. For I only see you detesting my words, and, by God, do I loathe seeing your faces. Were it not for my desire to carry out the orders of the Commander of the Believers would I have exposed myself to the sufferings you cause me? I ask God for patience to look at you and for assistance with you.

Then he descended from the pulpit.

A1.1.10. SPEECH 10: RĀSHIDŪN CALIPHS

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, ‘Iqd, 5:304-305:

15 The Qurʾān says “you covet the perishable goods of this life” (tabtoghān ʿaraḍa al-hayāṭi al-dunya). (Q 4:94)


He addressed the people of Iraq and said:

People of Iraq, I heard that you recount of your prophet that he said: “He who rules [as little as] ten Muslims, shall come to the Day of Judgment with his hands shackled to his neck, until his justice will set him free or his injustice will ruin him.” By God, I prefer to stand [at the Day of Judgment] shackled with Abū Bakr and ‘Umar than to stand free amongst you.


Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, Ḥaqq, 4: 209-210:

People, God the Blessed and Sublime, announced the death of your Prophet, peace be upon him, to Himself and then He said: “Truly thou wilt die (one day), and truly they (too) will die (one day).” (Q 39:30) He also said: “Muḥammad is no more than a Messenger: many were the Messengers that passed away before Him. If he died or was slain, will ye then turn back on your heels?” (Q 3:144) The Messenger of God died, Peace be upon Him, and the Rightly Guided [rāshidūn wa-muhtadūn] caliphs died. There was Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, the wronged martyr, then followed Mu‘āwiya, then your wālī who is experienced like a nine-year old male camel (walīkum al-bāzil al-dhakar) whom events have tested and whom experience has

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made strong, possessing religious knowledge (*fiqh*) and the reading of the Qur’ān, and who is gentle towards people of the Truth, and violent against the people of Deviation. He was the fourth of the Rightly Guided caliphs. God chose Heaven for him and added him to them.

Then God entrusted [the caliphate] to a man similar to him in reason, bravery (*murū’a*), decisiveness, endurance (*jalad*), and the ability to carry out the matter of God and the responsibilities of his *khilāfa*. So listen to him and obey him.

People! Beware of deviation, for deviation only falls back on its people [i.e. people of deviation]. You saw the way I treat you (*sīratī fīkum*), and I became familiar with your discord and your good sides (*ʿariftu khilāfakum wa-ṭayyibakum*). Despite my familiarity with you, if I knew that there was someone who would have a tighter rein on you, or who would know you better, I would not be doing so myself. Beware of me and beware you, for whoever speaks, we shall kill him and whoever keeps quiet, shall die of his own disease, out of grief.

A1.1.12. SPEECH 12: ḤAJJ

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Iqd*, 4: 207:¹⁹

People of Iraq, I am headed to the ḥajj and I left behind my son Muhammad to rule you— even though you did not treat him as one of your own (*mā kuntum lahu bi-ahl*). I commanded him with regard to you the opposite to what the Prophet prescribed [his companions] with regard to the Anṣār. For he commanded that the deeds of the good among them be accepted and that the deeds of the wicked among them be tolerated. On the contrary, I commanded him that he not accept the deeds of the good among you nor that he tolerate the deeds of the wicked among you. Certainly, you will say after I leave words that only your fear of me prevents you from openly saying now. You will say: “May God not give him pleasant companions [in this ḥajj].” I’ll expedite the answer: “May God not make the appointment [of my son] (*khilāfa*) pleasant you.”

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A1.1.13. SPEECH 13: TWO MUḤAMMADS

Ibn ʿĀbd Rabīḥ, ʿIqd, 4:210-211:

أيها الناس، محمدان في يوم واحد! أما والله لقد كنت أحب أنهما معًا في الدنيا مع ما أرجوهما من ثواب الله في الآخرة؛ وأتي الله ليُوسَكُنَّ الباقين متي ومنتمك أن يعذب، والجديد متي ومنتمك أن يجلب، والحي متي ومنتمك أن يموت، وأن تدل الأرض متي

كما أدرانا منها، فتأكل كل من لحمهما، وتشرب من دمائهما، كما معيتما على ظهرها، وآكلان من ثمارها، وشربانا من مائها، ثم يكون كما قال الله: وَنُفَخُ فِي الصُّبُورِ فَإِذَا هُمْ مِنَ الْأَجْداثِ إِلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَنْسَلُونَ.

ثم تمثل بهذين البيتين:

عزائي نبي الله من كل ميت، وحسبي ثواب الله من كل حي

إذا ما وقعت الله عني راضيًا، فإن سرعون النفس فيما هثالك.

People, two Muhammads in one day! By God, I wished that they were with me in this world (al-dunyā) despite the fact that I wish for them God’s eternal reward in the afterlife. I swear by God (aym Allāh) when the remains of you and me are about to perish, and the new one about to decay, and the living from you and from me about to die, the earth shall defeat us as we have defeated it; it shall eat from our flesh and drink from our blood, as we walked on its surface, ate from its fruits, and drank from its waters. Then we shall be as God the Almighty said: “The trumpet shall be sounded, when behold! from the sepulchers (men) will rush forth to their Lord!” (Q 36:51).

Then he cited two verses as a testimonial (tamathalla bi-hādhayn al-baytayn):

My consolation regarding any dead person is God’s Prophet

My compensation regarding any perished man is God’s reward

If I were to find God satisfied with me

Therein I would find the happiness of my soul.

A1.1.14. SPEECH 14: RUMORS

Ibn Qutayba, ʿUyūn al-akhbār, 2:244-245:

إن طائفة من أهل العراق، أهل الشقاق والتفاق، نزع الشيطان بينهم، فقالوا: مات الحجاج ومات الحجاج! فقالوا: مات الحجاج ومات الحجاج! فمه! وهل يرجو الحجاج الخير إلا بعد الموت! والل  ه ما يسُرني ألا أموت وأن لبني الدنيا وما فيها! وما رأيت الل  ه رضي بالتخليد إلا لأهوه خلقه عليه إلیس. ولفقد دعا الل  ه العبد الصالح فقال: رَبِّ اغفِرْ لي وَهَبْ لِي مُلْكًا لَا يَنْبَغِي لَأحَدٍ مِنْ بعْدِي، فأعطاه ذلك إلا البقاء.

فما عسى أن يكون أيها الرجل! وكلم ذلك الرجل! كأني والله بكل حي منكم ميَّا، وبكل رطب يابس، ونقف في ثياب أكفهمه إلى ثلاث أذرع طولا في ذراع عرضًا، وأكلت الأرض خمه ومضت صديده، وانصرف الحبيب من ولده يقسم الخبيث من ماله؛ إن الذين يعقلون يعلمون ما أقول، ثم نزل.

A group of the people of Iraq, people of dissension and hypocrisy (ahl al-shiqāq wa-al-nifāq), among whom the devil spread his insinuations, said: “Al-Ḥajjāj has died. Al-Ḥajjāj has died.” “So what? Al-Ḥajjāj cares for good only after he dies [and not in this world].” By God, only death would please me. I have the dunyā and what it contains. I have not seen that God would be content with immortalizing his creatures with the exception of the one lowest to Him among them—the Satan (iblīs). He said: “Give me respite till the day they are raised up.” God said: “Be thou amongst those who have respite.” (Q 7:14-15)

When the good man (al-ʿabd al-ṣāliḥ) [Solomon] asked God: “He said ‘O my Lord! Forgive me, and grant me a Kingdom which (it may be), suits not another after me: for Thou art the Grantor of Bounties (without measure).’” (Q 38:35), He gave it to him everything but eternal life (al-baqāʾ).

What can we possibly expect? I am addressing each of you! I see every living person among you dying and every moist thing drying out. A cloth more than three arms long and one arm wide was used for a man’s shroud but the earth ate his flesh and sucked the liquids of his body. And his loved ones began dividing even the smallest parts of his possessions. Those who are reasonable know what I am talking about.

Then he descended from the pulpit.

A1.2. Khūṭab wa ʿzīya

A1.2.1. Speech 15: Ubi sunt

أيما الناس، قد أصبحهم في أجل متفوق، عمل مخفوظ،
People, you found yourselves in a diminished time, and all your deeds are recorded. How many a man persists in hard work but loses in the end. And how many a man who toils for the sake of another (sāʿin l-ghayrih) [i.e. inheritor]. And death is behind your necks, Hell in front of you, and Paradise in front of you. Take from yourselves for yourselves, from your [present] wealth for your [future] poverty, from what is in your hands [now] for what is waiting for you [in the future].

[It is] as if what has passed from this world had never existed. As if the dead had never been alive; all that you see is merely passing. This is the sun of Ād and Thamūd, and many centuries divide us from their time; this is the sun that rose above the Yemeni and Persian kings, above their treasuries, slipping through their fingers, above their lofty palaces, and then it rose above their tombs. Where are the ancient kings? Where are the haughty tyrants? God is the [ultimate] Reckoner, the path is erected, and the Gehenna groans and burns, while the people of Paradise live in comfort, are happy in a garden. God created us and beware of “Those who, when they are admonished with the Signs of their Lord, droop not down at them as if they were deaf or blind.”

(Q 25:73)

And al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, may God have mercy on him, used to say: “Do you not wonder about this sinner? He climbs the steps of the minbar and speaks like the prophets. Then he descends and kills like tyrants. He is in harmony with God in his speech and at variance with Him in his deed.”

A1.2.2. SPEECH 16: GREAT MAN

Al-Jāḥiz, Bayān, 2:173:23

[A great man is] a man who finds his actions trifling, who thinks about what he reads in the record of his deeds, and what he sees in his balance [of good and evil deeds]. [A great man is] a man who restrains himself from what is merely a matter of pleasure and remembers what is a matter of great significance; who holds the reins of his heart as a man holds his camel with a halter; whose heart, when it leads him to the obedience of God, follows it, but when it leads him to a rebellion against God, renounces it.

A1.2.3. Speech 17: Endurance

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, 2:102.24

One day, Al-Ḥajjāj delivered a speech and said: People, restrain these souls. For they are the most demanding when they are given things and are the most frugal when things are demanded of them. May God have mercy on a man who makes a halter and a rein for his soul and leads it with the halter to the obedience of God, and turns it away with the rein from rebellion against God. I have seen that endurance concerning things forbidden by God (mahārim Allāh) is easier than enduring God’s torture (‘adhāb Allāh).

A1.2.4. Speech 18: Error

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, Ḩaqd, 2:204:25

Al-Ḥajjāj delivered an address and said: God, show me error (ghayy) and I will shun it. And show me the right path (hudā) and I will follow it. Do not entrust me with my soul, lest I go

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astray, far from the right path. By God, I wouldn’t like to buy all that has passed of my life for this turban. Indeed, what remains of it resembles what has passed of it more than water resembles water. [i.e. Al-Ḥajjāj claims that his life has been good and he has nothing to regret.]

A1.2.5. Speech 19: Hour

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, 2:102.26

A man, who has spent one hour of his life without thinking about his Lord, without asking for his Lord’s forgiveness for his sins, without contemplating the hereafter, deserves his sorrow to be prolonged and his grief multiplied. God the Sublime has prescribed perishing (fanāʾ) for this life and eternity (baqāʾ) for the afterlife. And there is no eternity for what had been destined to perish; there is no perishing for what has been destined for eternity. Surely, the visible presence of this life (shāḥid al-dunyā) shall not blind you from the what is hidden in the afterlife (ghāʾ ib al-ākhira).

Suppress the length of hopes [for material goods] with the shortness of the appointed time. [i.e.: To have much hopes for matters of this life should be curbed by constant reminding oneself that death is imminent]

APPENDIX II

ORAL COMPOSITION AND TRANSMISSION IN FOUR SPEECHES OF AL-ḤAJJĀJ

This appendix provides supporting evidence to Chapter 5 of the study. Chapter 5 analyzed the different variants of the Inaugural speech at Kufa, al-Ḥajjāj most famous speech and one that has been preserved in the highest number of variant versions. This appendix tests the findings of Chapter 5 on other four speeches of him: “After Dayr al-Jamājim,” “Funeral Speech for ʿAbd al-Malik,” “Ḥajj,” and “Great Man.” These speeches were chosen to represent both political speeches and sermons (ḥuṭṭab and ḥuṭṭab waʿzīya). All of them exist in more than one early version, though none reaches the number of variants of the Inaugural speech. The appendix thus also offers a method to deal with speeches that have been preserved only in a few versions. Overall, it shows that in the case where we have added elements, enough variants and long enough speech—i.e. in “After Dayr al-Jamājim,” we can clearly observe the same features as in the case of the Inaugural speech that point to oral composition and emphasis on memorization. In comparison to the narratives around it, “After Dayr al-Jamājim,” is much more stable, proving its statues as an ‘action speech,’ which drives the narrative. The short sermon “Ḥajj” is an exception among the speeches in that it evinces sings of paraphrasing and unrhythmic reformulations. Interestingly, the isnāds of “Ḥajj” end in the 3rd/9th century while the narrators of “Great Man,” a similarly short sermon with more signs of orality, go to mid-2nd/8th century. Most speeches and their variants, however, lack the added elements and isnāds.

The appendix, in general, follows the structure of Chapter 5, beginning with the signs of oral composition, as identified by Walter Ong, and then moving to the results of the comparison between the variants of the speeches. At the beginning of each section, I provide a general
summary of the findings. I also provide—for each of the speeches discussed—the Arabic text of
the version on which I base the comparison and its English translation.

**A2.1. SIGNS OF ORAL COMPOSITION IN “AFTER DAYR AL-JAMĀJIM”**

The speech “After Dayr al-Jamājim” evinces Ong’s signs of oral composition throughout. Below
I first point to a few examples from the whole speech and then discuss two segments of the speech
in detail, A and C. In A, I point to some of Ong’s criteria of orality, in C, I transcribe the section
to bring out more clearly its parallel structures and rhythmic sound. The presence of these oral
features in the text should be understood both for their performative dimension and for their
mnemonic functions. Firstly, they bring in the immediate audience. Metaphors with concrete
imagery, for instance, are more effective than abstract descriptions. Or, repeating the same idea in
parallel structures strengthens the message. Secondly, they enhance the communicative process
for both the speaker and the audience. The same parallel structures give the speaker an opportunity
to prepare for the next step and the audience an opportunity to hear the same idea multiple times,
if they miss it once. They also divide the speech into differently rhyming sections, making it more
memorable.

The examination below reveals especially the presence of the parallel structures both on
the semantic and grammatical level. The only elements that are not part of these in the section C
are the exclamatory phrases (yā ahla al-ʿirāq! / “People of Iraq!”) and some grammatical particles
that unite two parallels structures (“ilā” “hal” /“unless,” interrogative particle). The repetition of
a certain structure varies between two to five instances.
يارب، إن الشيطان قد استبطنك مخالَطَ الل حمَ والدم، والعصَب والمسام عَ، والأطراف والأعضاء، الخلايا، وأتخذه ديلة تبوعه، وقائدًا تطيعه، ومؤامِرًا تستشيرون، فكيف تتفنن مجريه، أو تطوع وفعة، أو يحجزكم إسلام، أو يتفنن بيان؟

أ. People of Iraq, the devil penetrated you, and entered your flesh, blood, nerves, ears, limbs, organs and heart. Then he reached the brain and the ears and then he went up and nested, hatched eggs, filled you with hypocrisy and dissension, and sowed discord among you. You took him as your guide whom you follow; you took him as your leader whom you obey; you took him as your counselor from whom you seek advice. How will experience be of any use to you? Will a battle teach you a lesson? Will Islam hold you back? Will bayān be of any use to you?

B. Are you not those whom I met [in battle] at al-Ahwāz, where you employed trickery and attempted perfidy and came together to perform unbelief (kufr). You thought that God would abandon his religion and caliphate (khilāfa). I threw an eye on you and you were looking for refuge amongst each other, quickly being defeated. Then the battle of al-Zāwiya, what a battle it was! You found a failure in it, disputed among each other, and withdrew, God’s abandonment, and your master’s withdrawal. You turned back to your home like stray camels, like camels longing for their homelands, all the while no one was inquiring about his brother, the old man did not wait for his sons, when arms stung you and lances broke you. Then the battle of Dayr al-Jamājim, and what a battle it was! It contained many clashes and great combats, in which heads were swept from their necks and friend forgotten by friend.

English translation
C. People of Iraq, people with whom disbelief and immorality, deceit and disloyalty, and whims [appear in recurring cycles], if I send you to the frontiers (\textit{thughūr}) you take from the spoil and betray me. If I make you feel safe, you start spreading false rumors. And if you are afraid, you become hypocrites. You do not remember a good deed and are not thankful for a benefaction. Whenever a perfidious person carried you away, a seducer misled you, a rebel incited you, an oppressor asked you for support, a debaucher asked you for help—did you not follow him and offer him refuge? Did you not support him and honor him? People of Iraq, whenever a troublemaker made troubles, a raven called, an ass groaned, did you not become his followers and supporter? People of Iraq, did religious exhortations (\textit{mawā'īţ}) not hold you back, or great events not restrain you?

D. Then he turned to the people of Syria and said: People of Syria, I am to you as an ostrich, protecting his chicks, cleaning them of mud, removing stones from them, and sheltering them from rain, protecting them from fog, guarding them from wolves. People of Shām, you are our protection and the garment, you are our military equipment and the boots.

\textit{Examples of signs of oral composition from the whole speech.} The abundance of `and’ s confirms the additive nature of the text. The participatory feature can be seen in the constant addressing the audience “People of Iraq!” “People of Sham” and further rhetorical questions “Are you not those whom I met [in fight] at al-Ahwāz?” “What a battle was the battle of Zāwiya!” “What a battle was the battle of Dayr al-Jamājim!” (B) In al-Masʿūdī’s version we see one more added to the beginning of C: “What do I expect from you, People of Iraq?!” This speech is an excellent example of the agonism of oral literature (focus on external struggle, antagonism, or its opposite—praise) as it is dedicated to condemning the treacherous acts and natures of the Iraqis only to contrast it to the virtues of the Syrians (D). The text also shows many occasions of the situational nature of oral speech such as “arms stung you” instead of the more abstract “arms hurt you”. Perhaps the most moving being the line “no one was inquiring about his brother, the old man did not wait on his sons,” used to express the more abstract image of panicked flight. But it is the aggregative feature that is the most salient one (use of parallel phrases). The text is basically composed as a set of parallels both at the level of larger segments and at the level of words.

\textit{Evidence from section A.}
- **additive**: ْفا-كحالة ْلاحم(ا) ود-دام(ا) و-اشراب(ا) و-المسامي(ا) و-التراف(ا) و-الداد(ا)، وش-شغاف(ا)

- **aggregative (parallel structures) & redundant**
  - verb+pronominal object+رفع biihi: ْحشاككم ْنفرقا(n) وشقيقا(n).
  - ْرفع اراككم خلافا(n):
  - maf’ūl biihi + جمع وصف: (يتكدحتمو) دليل(n) للتذبيح ْعنها، قاتدة(n) تفع أنتها، ملام(n) تفتشيرانها(u)
  - verb+pronominal object+فِى: (فَا-كتفا) تانفا ْعنكم تجربا(tun), اذ تبعكم
  - ْرفع لما(tun), اذ يجذروكم الإسلام(و)، اذ يانفبا ْعنكم بيانا(tun)

- **participatory**: rhetorical questions, direct address

فكيف تنفعكم تجربةٌ، أو تع ظُكم وقعة، أو يحجركم الإسلام، أو ينفعكم بيان؟ “How will experience be of any use to you? Will a battle teach you a lesson? Will Islam hold you back? Will bayān be of any use to you?”

Evidence from section C.

1. ْيَا أهل ْالْيراق(!) {الكافرهاتي بَدا لفجارات(i) وَلِغداراتi بَدا ل*khatarat(i) وَن nazwati بَدا نnazwات(i).}

“People of Iraq, people with whom disbelief and immorality, deceit and disloyalty, and whims appear in recurring cycles.”

[5x fem. pl. noun]

2. {إن بِيثتم ايل ثغوريكتم غلالتم وَخَنثتم / وَان أميتتم أراجتم / وَان خفتتم نفاَقتتم}

“if I send you to the frontiers you take from the spoil and betray me. If I make you feel safe, you start spreading false rumors. And if you are afraid, you become hypocrites.”

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[2x conditional clause: in + perf. verb, perf. verb]

3. {lā tadhkurūna ġasana(tan) / wa-lā tashkurūna niʿma(tan)}

“You do not remember a good deed and are not thankful for a benefaction.”

[2x negative clause: neg. part + imperf. verb + mafʿūl bihi]

4.a hali {stakhaffakum nākith(un) / awi staghwākum ghāw(in) / awi stafazzakum ʿāṣ(in) / awi stansarakum zālim(un) / wa-staʿdanakum khāliʿ(un) / 4.b illā {tabiʿ tumūhu / wa-āwaytumūh(u) / wa-naṣartumūh(u) / wa-rajjatumūh(u)}

“Whenever a perfidious person carried you away, a seducer misled you, a rebel incited you, an oppressor asked you for support, a debaucher asked you for help—did you not follow him and offer him refuge? Did you not support him and honored him?”

[5x perf. verb + pronominal object + ism fāʿil] // [4x perf.verb+pronominal object]

5.a yā ahla l-ʿirāq(ī)! hal {shaghaba shāghib(un) / aw naʿaba nāʿib(un) / aw zafara zāfīr(un)} // 5.b illā kuntum {atbāʿaḥū / wa anṣārah(ū)}

“People of Iraq, whenever a troublemaker made troubles, a raven cried out (?) an ass groaned, did you not become his followers and supporter?”

[3x perf. verb+ ism fāʿil] // [2x broken plural of the same pattern]

6. yā ahla l-ʿirāqī!{a-lam tunhikumu l-mawāʾiẓ(ū) a-lam tazjurkumu l-waqāʾī(u)ū?}

“People of Iraq, did religious exhortations (mawāʾiẓ) not hold you back, or great events not restrain you?”

[interrog. particle+ neg. particle+mafʿūl bihi]

Following the method developed in Chapter 5, this section discusses al-Ḥajjāj’s speeches “After Dayr al-Jamājim,” “Funeral Speech for ‘Abd al-Malik,” “Ḥajj,” and “Great Man” one after the other, noting their patterns of transmission. In Chapter 5, we observed three main patterns of transmission that show memorization of the text—quoting, adding/removing, and reshuffling. Paraphrasing or reformulations, on the other hand, point to a transmission by meaning, which may be either the result of oral transmission or the result of scribal interventions. We will witness some of these patterns in the four speeches as well. I first present the overall results and the evidence itself follows.

“After Dayr al-Jamājim” is the longest of the four speeches and the fullest in terms of their versions. It also appears as part of a narrative. The narratives that surround it are completely different and the speech is thus much more stable than them. Like the Inaugural Speech it shows variants that reveal its oral transmission with an emphasis on memorization. I have examined closer the same segments of the speech—A and C—as in the previous section.

A noteworthy result of a transmission is the ending of the speech. In two variants the speech ends with verses by Nābigha al-Ja’dī, the Umayyad poet famous for his invectives. However, in the two cases the verses are different. What is striking is that the verses—though different—follow the same rhyme (qāfiya: bā’) and meter (mutaqārib). We can thus imagine a situation in which the oral transmitter is aware that the speech is followed by verses of al-Nābigha al-Ja’dī, has their rhythm in his memory, but the actual verses slipped his mind and thus he substitutes them with other that fit the same rhyme and meter.
The “Funeral Speech for ʿAbd al-Malik” provides an example of an important speech that has not been preserved in different variants. The only variant I found other than the main one in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s Iqd is merely a stub of the speech in al-Yaʾqūbī, Tārīkh, where the author merely references the speech. Al-Ḥajjāj delivered it, according to al-Yaʾqūbī when he learned about the death of ʿAbd al-Malik and praised in it the new caliph, al-Walīd. Al-Yaʾqūbī’s treatment of the speech also shows that he regarded it as an important political act, as I explain below.

What is important with regard to transmission is that although al-Yaʾqūbī included only a reference to the speech, he did not summarize it but quoted a piece of it. This is similar to his treatment of the Inaugural speech. We have observed earlier that this method is similar to the cases when a compiler does not include a whole poem but only a couple of its verses. This short version of the speech in al-Yaʾqūbī is thus another clear hint at memorization of oratory and its likeness, in this regard, to poetry.

“Ḥajj” is a sermon (khūṭba waʿẓīya) that al-Ḥajjāj reportedly gave before he left for ḥajj. In it, he announces that his son Muḥammad will replace him temporarily in office, and that he had advised him to be harsh on the Iraqis. The speech is short and has been preserved in four versions. The text is stable with minor variations, which however do not show almost any signs of orality both in composition or in transmission. It has no added narratives and only very brief isnāds which do not go very far in the past. One points to the akhbārī historian al-Madāʾinī (d. between 215/830 and 228/843) and another to Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAtabī (d. 223/844), a poet and a linguist from Basra of Umayyad origin. This, this speech displays little orality characteristics and late narrators.

“Great Man” is a sermon, in which al-Ḥajjāj describes the virtues of an ideal man. Like other speeches it is highly stable with minor variations (in words, word order, and case). It shows
signs of orality both in composition and transmission. All three versions give as their sources the famous ascetic Mālik b. Dīnār (d. between 127/744 and 131/748). Al-Jāhiṣ adds a narrator who narrated it from Mālik, Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān al-Ḍubʿī (d. 153/770), who is also an ascetic but of Shiite identity. This speech thus, unlike “Ḥajj”, evinces characteristics of orality and is ascribed to early narrators. Correspondences such as these would deserve further investigation.

A2.2.1. “AFTER DAYR AL-JAMĀJIM”

2. Al-Balādhurī (d.279/892), Ansāb al-ashrāf, 7: 344-345.

(For the text of the speech see above.)

A2.2.1.1. Added elements

Al-Jāhiṣ’s version of the speech stands alone. Al-Balādhurī places the speech after his account of killing of Bisṭām, one of the Muslim heroes who joined Ibn al-Ashʿath’s rebellion. He however does not provide much information about the circumstances of the speech as such. Having described the end of the war and the departure of armies from Syria and Jazīra, he simply says that al-Ḥajjāj returned to Kufa, ascended the pulpit and delivered the speech. Al-Masʿūdī narrates that during the long battle of Dayr al-Jamājim approximately 80 individual clashes took place and that when al-Ḥajjāj won, he caught Ibn al-Ashʿath and cut his head off. After that al-Ḥajjāj went to Kufa, ascended the pulpit, “praised God and prayed for His Prophet,” (usual formula that precedes a speech: hamīda ʿIlāha wa-athnā ʿalayhi wa-ṣallā ʿalā rasūlihi) and delivered the speech. To the end of the speech, in al-Balādhurī’s and al-Masʿūdī’s versions, a short piece of poetry by al-
Nābigha Jaʿdī is added. The two versions include different verses which however share rhyme (qāfiya) and meter (bahr). The qāfiya is bāʾ (bi) and the meter is mutaqārib.

Al-Masʿūdī:

وإن تداعيهم حظهم ... ولم ترزقوه ولم تكذب
كقول اليهود قتلنا المسيح ... ولم يقتلوه ولم يصلب

Al-Balādhurī:

تشين المنايا بأيديكم ومن يك ذا أمل يكذب

A2.2.1.2. Speech itself

While the speech appears in four sources, it has only three variants because Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih copied it almost word for word from al-Jāḥīẓ, so we can disregard his version. As for the remaining three, al-Jāḥīẓ’s and al-Balādhurī’s are closer to each other while al-Masʿūdī’s shows more differences. It however keeps closer to al-Balādhurī. While it may be the case that al-Masʿūdī remodeled earlier material from al-Balādhurī, al-Musʿūdī’s version also shows a few elements that appear only al-Jāḥīẓ’s version. Therefore, it is more probably that he either combined the two or that he, more probably, replied on a another version, different from the other two.

Evidence from section A. A few explanations of my markings are in order. In the excerpt of al-Balādhurī, I have left unmarked passages where he agrees with al-Jāḥīẓ and marked words in which he agrees with al-Masʿūdī (M) as well as those where he shows a departure from the other two (B). In al-Masʿūdī’s excerpt, I marked a word which is exclusive to it (M) and two words which are clearly taken from a version similar to al-Jāḥīẓ’s version (sim to J):

Al-Jāḥīẓ:
يا أهل العراق، إن الشيطان قد استبطنكم فخالَتَ اللحم والدم، والعصب والمسام، والأطراف والأعضاء، والشغاف، ثم أفضى إلى الأعناق والأذن، ثم ارتفع عَفَّشَ، ثم باشر وفَرَّ، فَحَاكَما نفاذاً ونفاقاً، وأشعركم خلافا، واتخذتموه دليلا تتابعونه، وقائدًا تطعمنه، فأخرجوا فقهاء ووزراءكم، وغيرهم من نوابكم، فأخرجوا رؤساءكم، وشرعوا فيهم، واتخذتموه دليلا تتابعونه، وقائدًا تطعمنه، ومُؤمِّرًا تستأمرونه. فكيف تنفعكم تجربة، أو تظُكم وقعة، أو يحجُّكم إسلام، أو ينفعُكم بيان؟

Al-Balādhurī:

يا أهل العراق، إن الشيطان قد استبطنكم فخالَتَ اللحم منكم العظام والأطراف والأعضاء، وجرى منكم مجرى الدم، وأفضى إلى الأذن والأذان، فَحَاكَما شباقًا ونفاقًا،explode(F) فيهم وفَرَّ، وباستخراجهم دليلا تتابعونه، وقائدًا تطعمنه، ولم يجعلكم إسلام ولا ينفعكم بيان.

Al-Masʿūdī:

يا أهل العراق، إن الشيطان استبطنكم، فخالَتَ اللحم منكم العظام والأطراف والأعضاء، وجرى منكم مجرى الدم، وأفضى إلى الأذن والأذان، فَحَاكَما شباقًا ونفاقًا، وبرأى فيه عَفَّشَ، وباشر وفَرَّ، وباستخراجهم دليلا تتابعونه، وقائدًا تطعمنه، ولم يجعلكم إسلام ولا ينفعكم بيان.

The comparison of the three versions indicates a not-so-straightforward process of copying of one version (as in the case of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s borrowing of al-Jāḥiẓ’ version). Almost all words in the three versions overlap, and if they are not attested in the three versions, they usually appear at least in two. It also shows that the later speech, in al-Masʿūdī, is most probably not a collation of the earlier two but that it must be taken from different versions, and we should thus see these as three independent versions. The comparison also attests to the stability of the speech.

Oral transmission can be detected from the nature of the differences between the versions, i.e. patterns of transmission. Note especially the pattern of reshuffling, i.e. texts appearing in different order—see especially al-Masʿūdī’s version compared to the other two and also al-Balādhurī’s in one case compared to al-Jāḥiẓ’s. We can also see that words replaced by others that sound similar (like tattabiʿūnahu/tutābiʿūnahu). The comparison of the rest of the speech support
what the comparison of the first excerpt already hinted. It provides more evidence that these three surviving versions of the speech stand for three early versions and not scribal collations.\(^1\)

Furthermore, the comparison of this short excerpt also reveals instances which may point to written transmission in the case of al-Masʿūdī’s version. While al-Masʿūdī’s version is closer to al-Balādhurī’s, there are two words that resemble words that only appear in al-Jāḥiz’s version. However the transformation of both suggest misreading of a written text rather than misremembering or mishearing because these words show similar shapes rather than similar phonology: مؤمرونًا تستشيرونه and مؤمرونًا تستشيرونه أربع / ارفع. The last difference that I will highlight here it is the change in the last line from a rhetorical question in al-Jāḥiz’s version to an indicative sentence in al-Balādhurī’s version. The sentence retains the same wording but is transformed into the answer that is implied in the rhetorical question: فلن ينفعكم مَعَهُ تجربةً، ولا تعَظَّم وَقَةً ولا يُجَزِّكم إِسْلَامًا. “Experience shall not be of any use to you with it, a battle shall not teach you a lesson,

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\(^1\) More evidence for three different versions of the text can be traced for example in comparing Section B. Compare the following three phrases as they appear in the three versions.

Al-Jāḥiz’s: وأَنْتُمْ تَسْلَلُونَ لَوْأَذَا وَتَنْهَمُونَ سِرَائِعًا

Al-Balādhurī: وإنكم تسللون مختلفين

Al-Masʿūdī: وأَنْتُمْ تَسْلَلُونَ لَوْأَذَا مَنْزِمِينَ سِرَائِعًا مَفَتَرِقِينَ

From this comparison it may seem that al-Masʿūdī, the later compiler, collated the previous two accounts, with some changes of his own. However, if we look at a different instance the image of transmission gets more complicated. It shows that al-Jāḥiz’s version does not contain this phrase at all and that al-Balādhurī’s includes one that is fuller. Had al-Masʿūdī used these two for collation, he would have probably chose either not to include it at all, or he would have copied al-Balādhurī’s version in full. Instances like these suggest that he was working from a version that is different than these two.

Al-Jāḥiz’s: --

Al-Balādhurī: كل امرئِه مكْتِمَ ناكِس رَأْسَهِ عَلَى عَنْقِه حِذَارِ السَّفِيف رُعْباً وَجِبَانًا وَذَلَا مَكْنَهُ اللهُ فِي قَلْبِكُمِ

Al-Masʿūdī: كل امرئِه مكْتِمَ عَنْقِه السَّفِيف رُعْباً وَجِبَانًا
Islam shall not hold you back.” We are thus witnessing an interpretation of the same line, which may be a sign of both an oral transmission or a scribal intervention.

Evidence from section C. In the first section of the appendix, we have seen the transcription of this section. Because its orality remains important to our discussion here, I transcribe it for the parallel structures and rhyming patterns to come out. Al-Jāḥiz’s versions serves as the basis for comparison, while the two other versions are compared against it and against each other. In both al-Balādhurī’s and al-Mas‘ūdī’s version—in square brackets—I add short comments on the similarities and divergencies and translations of the modified words and sections. Yellow color stands for a more substantial variation of the text such as an addition/omission of larger segments or changes in structure; blue color stands for a minor change such as different word choice. A more comprehensive analysis follows the excerpts.

I. al-Jāḥiz = J

1. yā ahlā al-‘irāq(i)! {al-kafārātī ba’da l-fājarāt(i) wa-l-ghadarātī ba’da l-khatārāt(i) wa-n-nazwātī ba’da al-nazwāt(ī)} [a series of nouns; doesn’t appear in B, appears shorter in M

2. {in buʾiṭḥum ilā thughūriḵum ghalaltum wa-khunṭum / wa-in amantum arjaftum / wa-in ḥiṭṭum nāfaqṭum}

3. {lā tadhkurūna hasana(tan) / wa-lā tashkurūna ni ma(tan)}

4.a hali {stakhaffakum nākith(un) / awi staghwākum ghāw(in) / awi stafazzakum ‘āš(i)n) / awi stansarakum zālim(un) / wa-staḍanakum khāli (i’n) // 4.b illā {taḥī ṭumūh / wa-āwaytumūḥ(u)/ wa-naṣartumūḥu / wa-rajjabtumūḥ(u)}

5. yā ahlā al-‘irāq(i)! hal {shaghaba shāghīb(un)/ aw na’aba nā ib(un) / aw zafrā zaḥīr(un)) // 5.b illā kunṭum {atbāʾ ah / wa anṣārah}

6. yā ahlā al-’irāq(i){a-lam tunhikumu l-mawāʾīz(u)? a-lam tazjurkumu l-waqāʾi (u)?

I. al-Balādhurī = B

1. fa-ma l-ladāḥī adhkuru minkum yā ahlā l-’irāq(i)? ma l-ladāḥī āṭawaqqa‘ wa-mā l-ladāḥī astabqīkum / lahū? (sim. to M)

   [the entire line added, transl: “What is it that I remember of you, people of Iraq? What is it that I expect, and for what reason do I spare you?” similar to M.]

   2. {in baʾaṭḥukum ilā al-thughūri ḥiṭṭum / wa-in amantum raṣaʾtum / wa-in ḥiṭṭum nāfaqṭum}
[different word choice: “you behave cowardly” instead of “you take from the spoil and betray me”; “you turn against me (?)” instead of “you spread rumors”; same structure]

3. {lā tajżūna bi-ḥasana(tin) / wa-lā tashkurūna ni´matan} 
[different word choice “you do not repay” instead of “you do not remember,” rhythm slightly breaks]

4. hali {stanbāḥakum nābīh(un) / wa-staghwākum ghāw(in) / wa-stakhafjākum nākīth(un) / wa-stafazzakum ʿās(in) / wa-ṣanṣarākum zālim(un) / wa-ṣta´danakum khālī (un)} // 4.b ilā {bāya tumūhu /wa-tāba tumūhu / wa-ḥayfaotumūhus} wa-ajlabtum ḥawlah(u).
[Different word choice: all “or” for “and”, “dog made you bark” added, “a perfidious man carried you away” moved to third position, “an oppressor asked you for support, a debaucer asked you for help” omitted. Structure remains the same. // Different word choice in all three elements of the parallel structure—original verbs substituted for “you pledged allegiance to him”, “you followed him”, “you conformed to him”; same structure except for the last added element.]

5. hal {shaghaba shāghib(un) / wa-na´aba nā tib(un) / wa zahara kādhib(un)} // 5.b illā kuntum {āshyā ahū / wa-ansārahū} 
[different word choice: “or/and”, “a liar won” instead of “an ass groaned”; same structure // different word choice: “partisans” instead of “followers”]

6. yā ahlal ʿirāq(i)! {lam tanfā ukum al-tajāribu wa-tulhikumuka} al-mawāʿiz(u) / an sūmā {ataytum wa-jīnaytum}, wa-lā ntafā´um bi-ibarin ʿi`{-waqā i (i)} wa lā waṣaʿatkukum {mawāridu l-tumūr wa-maṣādiruha}
[a loser variation with two memory hangers: “religious exhortations and battles/ al-mawāʿiz and al-waqāʾ i’””; the opening of this sentence has the same structure as al-Jāhiẓ; transl: “Experiences did not help you and religious exhortations did not fortify you against the evil that you brought and committed. You didn’t make use of the deterring lessons of battles. And the sources and origins of matters did not restrain you.”(?)]

Al-Mas‘ūdī = M

1. fāmā l-ladhī arjīhu minkum yā ahlal ʿirāq(i)? am ṭawaqqa it(u)? wa-limādha stābgikum? wa-li-ayyi shay in uddakhirikum? // {al-fajārī ba da l-ʿadawāt(i); ami n-nazwati ba da al-nazawāt(i) (J) / ma l-ladhī urāqibu bi-kum? wa ma l-ladhī antaziru fi-kum?}
[loser variation: first part similar to B; second part to J; third part to B.; in all cases different word choices, similar structure]

2. {in bu´ithum ilā thughūrikum jābantum (B) / wa-in amantum aw khiftum nāfaqīm} 
[word choice sim. to B., a section omitted; same structure]

3. {lā tajzīna bi-ḥasana(ti) (B) / wa-lā tashkurūna ni´ma(tan)} 
[different word choice sim. to B.; same structure]

4.a yā ahl al-ʿirāq(i)! hali {stanbāḥakum nābīh(un) (B) / awi staslākum ghāw(in) / istakha[fjākum nākīth(un) / awi stafazzakum ʿās(in) // 4.b illā {tābhā tumūh (B switched) / wa-bāya tumūh (B switched) / wa-āwaytumūh (J) / wa-kafaytumūh (B).}
[added exclamation “People of Iraq”; different word choice similar to B except for “called to be rescued” substituted “led you astray”; same structure// different word choice similar to B but switched; close sounding words: kayyaftumūh/kafaytumūh; same structure]

5.a yā ahla l-ʾirāq(i)! hal {shaghaba shāghib(un)/ aw-naʿaba nāʿib(un) / aw dabā (only M) kādhīb(un) (B) // 5.b illā kuntum {ashyāʾahu (B)/ wa anṣārah(u)}
[different word choice: sim. to B but “won” substituted for “walked”; same structure]

6. yā ahl al-ʾirāq(i)! {lam tanfaʿ ukum al-tajāribu wa-tahfazukum [al-mawāʾiz(u)] wa taʾizukum [al-waqāʾi(u)] } (B) ḥal yagaʿu fi ṣudūrikum mà awqaʿa ʾilāḥu bi-kum ḫinda masādiri l-umūr wa-mawāridihā (B)
[loser variation but sim. to B; first part retains the same structure as J and B, the second part has an addition of 8 words and ends with the same words as B though in a different order; the only words that remain of J are “exhortations” and “battles”]

The first thing to note is the stability in wording and meaning. The main four ideas that this section expresses are:

- Iraqis fail under every circumstance, be it war or peace. (line 2)
- Iraqis are ungrateful. (line 3)
- Iraqis follow any insurgent. (lines 4&5)
- Iraqis learn no lesson. (line 6)

Most divergences between the three versions occur on the level or word choice (marked in blue) while the structures remain the same. It is especially the retaining of the structures that points to an oral transmission: While an individual word may slip from the transmitter’s mind, the parallel structures and the rhythm and rhyme they carry are a mnemonic device and thus are the most stable element of the text as is seen from the three excerpts. Oral transmitters can invent a word on the spot that fits the structure both semantically and rhythmically but they would not change the structure because it holds the text together. By structure I do not mean only larger grammatical entities such as two conditional sentences but also internal structures of individual words. For instance, in 5.a the word difference consists in atbāʿah/“followers” (J) and ashyāʾah/“partisans”
(B, M)0—two words which are synonyms and form the same pattern of broken plurals. These patterns can be observed in other sections of the speech, as in segment D where the main changes in an ostrich metaphor consist in the shuffling and substitution of rhyming words.\footnote{The variation of phrase that in al-Jāḥiz’s version reads: [I am to you as an ostrich] “protecting his chicks, cleaning them of mud, removing stones from them, and sheltering them from rain”
J: yanfī ʿanha l-madar(a) wa-yubāʿ idu ʿanḥā al-ḥajar(a) wa-yukinnuhā ʿani l-maṭar(i).
B: yanfī ʿanhuwāna l-qadhar(a) wa-yubāʿ idu l-madar(a) wa-yaknufuhunna ʿinda l-maṭar(i).
M: yanfī ʿanhuwāna l-qadḥā ʿawayknuḥunna ʿinā l-maṭar(i).
Here we can see even different levels of oral transmission; while the order switches and substitutions of rhyming words between al-Jāḥiz’s and al-Balādhurī’s version (except for prepositions) point to oral transmission, the transformation of al-qadhā (قذار) and al-qadhar (قذر) points to a scribal misreading.}
The stability of the structure of the text, with occasional word choice alterations, is precisely what we can observe here.

Even the more serious departures between the three versions (in yellow) confirm the general oral transmission of the text. Firstly, they do not undermine the stability of the text because instead of intervening into the sentences that carry the four main themes, they manifest themselves as verbal improvisations on the same theme or as a shortening thereof that occur outside of the lines that carry the main themes. They appear in what was labeled as the participatory section of the text, whose function is to draw the audience in. Line 1 is the most salient example. In it, al-Jāḥiz’s version achieves this effect through a long list of the Iraqis’ misdeeds while al-Balādhurī’s and al-Masʿūdī’s use rhetorical questions. Al-Balādhurī’s version still retains a parallel structure (through a repletion of mā al-ladhī) but does not rhyme. Al-Masʿūdī’s version for the most part loses the parallel structure, does not rhyme (a sign of a scribal intervention) but includes some components also found in al-Jāḥiz and al-Balādhurī. Participatory elements in other lines, namely the instances of addressing the audience “People of Iraq!”, also show less stability. This is the case in other parts of the speech, too. In segment B, for example, an exclamatory phrase “I swear by God” / fa-aqsimu bi-llāh shows similar instability (J-no, B-yes, M-yes).
Finally, a more serious alteration appears in the last line (6). Yet even this one shows patterns of oral transmission. While larger parts of the line and its structure are partly lost when comparing the three versions, a few words—the memory hangers—remain in the three. This line illustrates that searching for the ‘original text’ is fruitless because it shows three versions all of which to a certain extent overlap. However, we cannot know whether the short version (J) is the summary of the longer ones (B&M) or whether the longer ones are extensions of the shorter one. As other features of the text showed these three versions most probably do not belong to one transmission line. Bringing in the orality element helps us understand that different versions circulated among people and none of these three versions can be thus considered more ‘original’ whether or not it shows the shortest or the longest version of a particular line.

Many details in the level of individual words in the text indicate oral transmission. Still in this excerpt we can note, that in line 4.b the two verbs tābā‘tumūh and bāya‘tumūh are switched when we compare al-Balādhurī’s and al-Mas‘ūdī’s version. A scribe has no reason to switch two words while an oral transmitter has no reason not to. Another type of traces of oral transmission is alternate words that sound similar and we can thus ascribe them to mishearing. An example in this except would be the pair kafaytumūh “you protected him” (M) and kayyaftumūh/ “you conformed to him” (B). Examples from other parts of the speech would be the pair dhubāb /ذباب/ “flies” (B) and ḏabāb /“fog”/ضباب (J); words which have different meaning, different shapes but sound similar.
A2.2.2. “Funeral Speech for ʿAbd al-Malik”

A2.2.2.1. Added elements

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih presents the speech outside of a narrative framework and without any added elements. Al-Yaʿqūbī’s account that includes the speech lets us in on the political importance the historian ascribes to oratory. He mentions Al-Ḥajjāj’s funeral speech close to the beginning of his chapter on al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik. Having open the chapter, as it is his custom, by describing the constellation of stars of the event he describes, in this case ʿAbd al-Malik’s death, al-Yaʿqūbī states that the first thing that the new caliph al-Walīd did was the make a speech. In it he announced the death of his father and ordered people to obey him and to adhere to the unity (luzūm al-jamāʿa). The second thing was that he sent his brother Maslama to fight the Byzantines and Mardaites3 and the third thing was he sent a letter to al-Ḥajjāj to announce the death of his father. When al-Ḥajjāj received the letter the first thing he did was, again, to deliver the speech.

With regard to transmission, one element in al-Walīd’s speech as referenced by al-Jaʿqūbī is noteworthy. Al-Walīd says that “whoever reveals him true self, [he] will strike his head [lit. the place of his eyes], and whoever keeps quiet, shall die of his own disease.”4 By disease, al-Walīd is invoking the hatred that his subjects carry towards him. The caliph tells them with a good dose of malice that this hatred will kill them whether they express it or hide it: either he will kill them, and or the hatred will poison them. Al-Ḥajjāj’s “Funeral Speech for ʿAbd al-Malik” ends with precisely the same threat, though the wording somewhat differs. (See below) This can be explained in two

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3 Mardaites, in Arabic الجرائمة, in Syriac جرائمة, were Christians of unclear origin who inhabited some of the mountainous regions of the Levant. Many modern Maronites claim that they are of Mardaite ancestry but this claim us uncertain.

ways: Either this threat is forms part of usual Umayyad rhetoric towards the Iraqis or the two speeches have been mixed in the memory or a later transmitter.

A2.2.2.2. Speech itself

A2.2.2.2.1. Signs of memorization: Quoting

At first sight, we cannot say much about the transmission of this speech because we have only one full version of it in Ibn ‘Abd Rabih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*. But as already noted in al-Ya’qūbī’s reference to the speech provides a valuable testimony about the speech’s transmission despite its brevity. Like in the case of the short versions of the Inaugural Speech, al-Ya’qūbī does not summarize the speech and does not paraphrase but quotes, almost word by word a passage from it. This suggests that this speech was famous and memorized by people.

This is the full version of the speech, as recorded in Ibn ‘Abd Rabih, *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*, 4:209-210. Blue color indicates the part that is quoted in al-Ya’qūbī’s version below.

"أيها الناس، إن الله تبارك وتعالى نعى نبيه صلى الله عليه وسلم إلى نفسه فقال: إنك ميت وأنت ميتون؟ وقال: وما محمد إلا رسول قد خلت من قبله الرسول فإن مات أو قتل انقلعب علي أعقابكم؟ فأت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، ومات الخلفاء الراشدون المهديون، منهم أبو بكر، ثم عمر، ثم عثمان الشهيد المظالم، ثم تبعهم معاوية، ثم ولي وبُراز الذكر الذي جربته الأمور، وأحكمته التجارب مع الفقه وقراءة القرآن، والمرودة الظاهرة، واللبن لأهل الحق، والوطأ لأهل الزيغ، فكان رابعًا من الولاة المهديين الراشدين، فاختار الله له ما عنته، وألحقه بهم، ووعد إلى شبه في العقل والمروءة وال החיים والجهاد والقيام بأمر الله وخلافته، فأسماعوا له وأطيعوه

أيها الناس؛ إياكم والزيغ؛ فإن الزيغ لا يَحيِق إلا بأهله، ورأين سيري فيكم، وعرفت خلافكم، وقبلتكم عل معرفتي بكم، وله طلبُ أن أحد أقوى عليكم مني، أو أعرف بكم، ما وليتكم، فإياكم، فإياكم، من تكلم قتله، ومن سكت مات بدائه غما!"
People, God the Blessed and Sublime, announced the death of your Prophet, peace be upon him, to himself and then he said: “Truly thou wilt die (one day), and truly they (too) will die (one day).” (Q 39:30) He also said: “Muḥammad is no more than a Messenger: many were the Messengers that passed away before Him. If he died or was slain, will ye then turn back on your heels?” (Q 3:144) The Messenger of God died, Peace be upon Him, and the Rightly Guided [rāshidūn wa-muhtadūn] caliphs died. There was Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, the wronged martyr, then followed Mu‘āwiya, then your wālī who is experienced like a nine-year old male camel whom events have tested and experience made strong, possessing religious knowledge (fiqh) and the reading of the Qur’ān, and who is soft towards people of the Truth, and violent against the people of Deviation. He was the fourth of the Rightly Guided caliphs. God chose Heaven for him and added him to them. Then God entrusted [the caliphate] to a man similar to him in reason, valor (murū‘a), decisiveness, endurance (jalad), and the ability to carry out the matter of God and the responsibilities of his khilāfa. So listen to him and obey him.

People! Beware of deviation, for deviation only falls back on its people [i.e. people of deviation]. You saw the way I treat you (sīratī fīkum), and I became familiar with your discord and your goods (ʿariṭu khilāfakum wa-ṭayyibakum). Despite my familiarity with you, if I knew that there was someone who would have a tighter rein on you, or who would know you better, I would not be doing so myself. Beware of me and beware you, whoever may speak, we shall kill him and whoever is quiet, shall die from his disease, out of grief.

This is the short version as recorded in al-Yaʿqūbī, Tārīkh, 2:339. Green color indicates where this quote differs from Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s version. The divergence the existence of another version of the speech.

A2.2.3. “Hadj”

This short speech does not have any added elements and only very limited isnāds. It is an exception to the speech examined in this study because it shows only a few signs of orality and this is only
in a section which quotes an earlier hadīth. It also does not show almost any signs of oral transmission but rather a number of reformulations that do not rhyme.

Variants:

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, al-ʾIqd al-Farīd, 4:207 (IAR)
Ibn Qutayba, ‘Uyūn al-khbār, 2:245 (IQ)
al-Jāḥiẓ, Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, 1: 387 (J)
   Narrator: Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Madāʿīnī] (d. between 215/830 and 228/843)
al-Masʿūdī, Murūj, 3: 146 (M)
   Narrators: isnād al-Minqarī > Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAtabī (d. 223/844) > his father

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s version:

People of Iraq, I am headed to ḥajj and I left behind my son Muhammad to rule you— even though you did not behave to him as to your own (mā kuntum lahu bi-ahl). I commanded him with regard to you the opposite to what the Prophet prescribed [his companions] with regard to the Anṣār. For he commanded that the deeds of the good among them be accepted and that the deeds of the wicked among them be tolerated. On the contrary, I commanded him that he not accept the deeds of the good among you nor that he tolerate the deeds of the wicked among you. Certainly, you will say after I leave words that only your fear of me prevents you from openly saying now. You will say: “May God not make the appointment [of my son] (khilāfa) pleasant you.”

يا أهل العراق، إني أردت الحج، وقررت أن أترك ابنى محمديتمليك، وما كنت له به إلا تلك ما أوصي به رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في الأنصار، فإنه أوصى أن يقبل من محسومهم، ويتجاوز عن مسيئهم، وإنما أوصي أنه لا يقبل من محسوم ولا يتجاوز عن مسيئ، وإنما قالوا بعده مسألة لا يمنعون من إظهارها إلا خوفي، قالوا بعدهم: لا أحسن الله عليه إلا أصحابه، وإنما أجلت لكم الإجابة، لا أحسن الله عليك الخلافة. ثم نزل.

In general, the text does not have much rhythm. The lines where we do see some are based on a ḥadīth quote: awṣā an yuqba la min muḥsinihim wa-an yutajāwaza ʿan musīʾihim. As for the differences between its variants, these are listed below. Only a few of these (signaled with *) can be considered a result of oral transmission.

5 The ḥadīth is narrated by Anas. See for example, Ibn Saʿd, al-Ṭabaqāt, nr. 2092.
A2.2.4. “Great Man”

This sermon is, like the previous one, very short and appears in three variants. Unlike the previous one, the whole text of the sermon is highly rhythmic and the few variations it shows also point to oral transmission.

Variants:
Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, al-ʿIQd al-Farīd, 4:206
Narrator: Mālik b. Dīnār
Ibn Qutayba, ʿUyūn al-akhbār, 2:273-274
Narrator: Mālik b. Dīnār
Al-Jāḥiz, Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, 2:173.
Narrators: Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān al-Ḍubʿī > Mālik b. Dīnār

al-Jāḥiz’s version:

[A great man is] a man who finds his actions trifling, who thinks about what he reads in the record of his deeds, and what he sees in his balance [of good and evil deeds]. [A great man is] a man who restrains what is merely a matter of pleasure and remembers what is a matter of great significance; who holds the reins of his heart as a man holding his camel with a halter; whose heart, when it leads him to the obedience of God, follows it, but when it leads him to a rebellion against God, renounces it.
Signs of oral composition:
- repeating of the word amrʾ in the accusative case.
- imraʾan kānaʾ ʿinda qalbiḥī zajira(n) waʿinda hadmiḥī dhākirā(n)
- imraʾan akhadha bi-ʿināni qalbiḥ(i)/ kamā yaʾkhuddu ṭ-rājulu bi-khiṭāmi jamaliḥ(i)
- fa-in qādahu ilā ʿati ʿllāhi tabiʿah(u)/wa-in qādahu ilā maʿṣiyati ʿllāh kaffah(u)

Signs of oral transmission:
This short speech shows indications oral transmission.

Comparison of Ibn Qutayba’s version with that of al-Jāḥīz:
The two versions are very close to each other. Ibn Qutayba’s version substitutes:
- hawāhu (his inclination) for qalbahu (his heart) [same meaning, different sound and rhythm, i.e., memorization through meaning]
- āmiran (commanding) a for dhākiran (remembering) [same sound, different meaning, i.e., memorization through sound]

Comparison of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s version with that of al-Jāḥīz:
Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s version diverges more from al-Jāḥīz’s than Ibn Qutayba’s. The main differences consist in reordering sentences and additions. The parallelism is however maintained:
- imruʾun ḥāsaba nafsah(u), imruʾun rāqaba rabbah(u), imruʾun zawwara ʿamalah(u).

While these features points decidedly point to a memorization factor in the transmission, the evidence is too short to argue for an independent oral transmission of the speech. We can well imagine a scribe who combines writing with memorization. Furthermore, the change from the manṣūb to the marfūʿ in imruʾun/an might have resulted from a scribal error in writing the hamza, which is common in medieval manuscripts. It is worth noting that they all point to one riwāya of Mālik b. Dīnār.
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