

TIES OF KINSHIP

AND THE EARLY ISLAMIC EMPIRE

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Abstracts

Hugh Kennedy (SOAS University of London) - Keynote

The history of the early Islamic Middle East is full of references to tribal rivalries, tribal warfare and so on. Tribal affiliations are worked out on a stupendous scale in Ibn al-Kalbi's *Jamharat al-nasab*. However, the idea of tribal identities as permanent, immutable and based on biological descent from a named ancestor, leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Why do some tribes prosper and expand while others diminish and disappear, how do the governments of settled areas influence the dynamics of relationships within tribes?

In this paper I shall discuss the ideas of William (and Fidelity) Lancaster in *The Rwala Bedouin Today* (Cambridge University Press, 1981) and particularly chapter 3 on the 'Generative Genealogy'. The Lancasters spent many years living with the Rwala and maintained close contacts thereafter. They describe how kinship, tribal relationships are the dominant discourse within which social, political and economic are explained. They contrast this an observed reality in which tenting groups and individual bedouin families create their own genealogies to reflect their needs and aspirations. This is where the Generative Genealogy comes in. "Must have been" kinship links are central to this, "we graze or flock together, we share the same watering places, so we must be related" even if the details of such a relationship are unknown.

This has important implicatons for the study of early Islamic history. If we see tribal identities as fluid, reflecting the assets and options of individuals and small groups, it goes a long way to explain, for example, the emergence of the hitherto insignificant tribe of 'Uqayl as a dominant force in the Jazira in the fourth/tenth century and the eclipse of other tribes like Kalb at the same time.

This is, I believe , an important example of how social anthropology can inform an enhance historical discussion.

Janina Safran (Penn State University)

“The Community of the Biographical Dictionary: Qadi Iyad’s Ghunya”

This paper approaches the theme of social cohesion in Islamic empires before 1500 by looking at Qadi Abu al-Fadl Iyad ibn Musa’s (d. 1149) Ghunya (Treasury) as a work of memory rather than as a resource for the delineation and analysis of social networks, suggesting a complementary approach to prosopographical literature.

Collective biographies of Muslim scholars contribute to their communal identity as scholars, typically of a specific legal tradition, commonly with a regional orientation. The paper begins with the proposition that every work of Islamic prosopography constitutes a community defined by its author’s understanding of membership, and implicitly or explicitly situates him in relation to peers and predecessors. Authors of *ṭabaqāt* (biographical works arranged by generations) and *ma`ājim* (alphabetically arranged biographical dictionaries) do not always insert themselves overtly into their compilations, but their selection of individuals and the scope of information they include express a personal orientation to their compositions. Al-Ghunya is a *fahrasa*, a form of biographical dictionary that inventories a scholar’s teachers, students, and the texts he copied and transmitted. I will discuss Iyad’s Ghunya as a work of personal memory and suggest how this genre of writing constitutes a “family” of scholars defined by personal contacts and common circumstances.

Karen Moukheiber (University of Balamand)

“Non-kin Relations, Gender, and Music: The Narratives of Jamila, Sallama al-Zarqa, and Shariya in the Kitab al-Aghani”

Musical performance was an integral part of cultural production in the Early Islamic Empire. Jamila, Sallama al-Zarqa, and Shariya were renowned professional women musical performers who straddled the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Jamila, a *mawla* (client) of the Banu Sulaym, gave public concerts in Medina where she founded her own music school. Sallama al-Zarqa, a *jariya* (enslaved woman) of Ibn Ramin, a prominent *muqqayin* (master of ‘singing girls’) in Kufa, performed in the ‘house’ of her master. Shariya, a *muwallada* (an enslaved woman born within the Islamic Empire to an allegedly free man and an enslaved woman), was bought by the Abbasid prince Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi and performed at the caliphal court in Baghdad. The social status and

musical performances of these women were shaped in many ways by non-kin relations of clientage or enslavement that tied them to their patrons or owners. These ties of dependency were ushered in part by the vast influx of wealth and war captives which followed the territorial expansion of the Early Islamic Empire. They also answered the needs of an emerging urban Arab elite under the Umayyads and a more cosmopolitan one under the Abbasids. Al-Isfahani's (d. 356/967) *Kitab al-Aghani* was described by Hilary Kilpatrick as a testimony to its author's vision of music as an integral part of Arab/Islamic history and culture. This paper approaches al-Aghani's biographical narratives of Jamila, Sallama, and Shariya as cultural and historical literary artifacts. It examines the discursive and formal ways in which these narratives reflect and reflect upon how non-kin relations of dependency shaped the contours of women's musical performances to answer the expectations of an increasingly male urban cosmopolitan imperial elite. It also explores the ways in which these ties of dependency enabled but also hampered the social mobility of women musicians.

Ahmad Khan (American University in Cairo)

"Seeing Relationships in the Archives: Khurasan and Egypt, Eighth-Tenth Centuries."

This paper will examine relationships as depicted in medieval archives from Khurasan and Egypt, eighth-tenth centuries. It proposes to read documents not as sources for positivistic data on economy, state, and society, but rather to examine how archives create and depict relationships and dependencies. Archives and documents do more than merely depict social, economic, and legal realities. They classify, organise, perpetuate, and maintain certain relationships. These documents will be read alongside legal texts from Khurasan and Egypt, with special attention given to family ties, households, and spouses. Using both documents and legal texts, this paper will explore how legal and archival language serve to establish social ties and dependencies.

Marie Legendre (Edinburgh University)

"Brother, father, son, nephew: 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān and al-Aṣḥab between regional leadership and claim to the caliphate"

The governorship of 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān in Egypt is a subject of disagreement among modern scholars, especially with reference to the ties of his province to the caliphal centre in Syria and to

‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s brother, the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. A competition for the caliphate is often ascribed to the two brothers in which their sons also played a role. The 10th century historian al-Ya‘qubī posits that the competition between ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz may have been solved by the latter being poisoned. This in turn also casts suspicion on the causes of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s son al-Asbagh’s death a few months prior. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān and al-Aṣḡagh were however not only members of the ruling family. Joshua Mabra has recently shed a lot of light on the enormous efforts ‘Abd al-‘Azīz made to build as power base in his province through marriage ties, appointment in his administration and building projects. This contribution will focus on previously unexplored aspects of the political life of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān and of the role of his son al-Aṣḡagh. The first aspect of their biography that will be reassessed is the nature of the connections between ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and ‘Abd al-Malik in the *longue durée*, i.e., the twenty years of ‘Abd al-Malik’s caliphate. The second part will be on ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s achievements in Egypt and al-Aṣḡagh’s role in his father’s province. This contribution will test the notion of kinship as a binding tie of the empire. It will look at how the relations between agnates shaped the early Marwanid polity as, in this case, competition does not result in disunity in the Umayyad empire. It will ask where ties of kinship fit in a context in which the definition of mechanisms of caliphal succession, post-fitna instability and tribal support appear to play a dominant role.

Sobhi Bouderbala (University of Tunis)

“The Umayyad Family in Fuṣṭāṭ: matrimonial alliances and socio-urban reconfigurations”

It is well known that Egypt was a powerful supporter of the Umayyad dynasty, especially in the Marwānid period. The political history gives part of the cooperation keys between Damascus and Fuṣṭāṭ (especially the powerful relation between ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ and Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān in the first civil war, and the early support of the Egyptian army to the Syrian one in the second civil war). However, the main reason of these strong ties is due to a complex strategy of marriage politics developed by members of the Umayyad family in Egypt. In this paper, I will investigate on the policy developed by early Umayyads regarding the leading families of the Egyptian *ḡund* (especially the Banū al-‘Āṣ, the Banū Muḡhallād, the Banū Abraha and the Banū Wa‘la), by marrying the widows of prominent Egyptian political leaders, and how this strategy has allowed the Umayyad family to establish itself in the social landscape of the Egyptian capital. Moreover, the

active urban policy of the Umayyad family in Fustat (by the foundation of a series of public buildings) has strengthened its imperial position at Fustāṭ. A particular narrative will be analyzed, relating to a supposed “imperial house” founded at Fustāṭ by Marwān b. al-Ḥakam during his conquest of Egypt in 65/685, which show the willingness of some pro-Umayyad scholars to link this imperial urban policy to the founder of the Marwānid branch.

Pia Maria Malik (University of Delhi)

“The Sufi who was a Sayyid: Muhammad Husaini Gisudaraz and the Chishtiyya fraternity”

In the context of contested succession within a *silsila* (lineage) of Sufis, this paper studies how Sayyid Muhammad Husaini Gisudaraz (d. 1422, Gulbarga) took recourse to both a spiritual and filial genealogy in order to claim the status of a *pīr* (spiritual master). Gisudaraz used his kinship with the Prophet as a Sayyid (a descendant of the Prophet through Husain) as a persuasive device to set himself apart from other Sufis in the Deccan, including those who professed ancestry from his own *pīr*, Nizam al-Din ‘Awliya. Building on the scholarship of Bernheimer and al-Azmeh, I examine how individual Sufi saints deployed the language of kinship, constructing innovative genealogies to connect as well as supersede the status afforded to them as part of the Chishtiyya fraternity. In particular, I will examine the *malfūzāt* (written records of assemblies) the *Jawāmi‘ al-Kalim* of Gisudaraz, which was produced as part of his missive, and as a proclamation of his skills as a spiritual guide and master in a context wherein he had to flee from Delhi and set up his *khānaqāh* (hospice) anew in Gulbarga. Anecdotes about the family of the Prophet were recounted as memories, and while Gisudaraz provided a source for many of his other stories, when it came to Hazrat ‘Ali, Fatima, and their sons, one is led to assume that he knew the tales from the oral narrations of his own family. The audience and readers of this text were learned people, already familiar with Islamic precepts, and so Gisudaraz employed this tactic to distinguish himself from the other disciples of his Shaikh and members of his fraternity. During the fourteenth century the identity of the Sayyid was gaining new traction, and these relational ties were evoked both within and outside the family as a means of establishing an identity as part of a community; in Gisudaraz’s case as a Chishti and also as a Sayyid. Kinship was the device by which Gisudaraz staked his claim to authority, and was also the mechanism by which he and his family cemented their hold on the Muslim community of Gulbarga

Josef Ženka (Charles University of Prague)

“One house and a big, ‘happy’ family: Kinship and property rights in 15th-century Granadan legal documents”

Family ties define 15th century Granada and its fall. The last Muslim realm in the Iberian Peninsula became legendary as its ruin resulted from clashes between various ruling families, which passed into the popular culture. Yet very little is known about the internal dynamics of these families, e.g., the categories studied at this conference, namely consanguinity, and property rights. How they created and renewed their group solidarity and how kinship glued (or divided) this group has not been studied yet due to the lack of sources. Through the scope of a completely unknown archival collection, I intend to use several 15th-century legal documents once belonging to these families to address the expressions of kinship and property transfers within and outside these families and their branches by their contemporaries. The Maliki *fiqh* of these documents is very specific in using various levels of family relationships as they played significant importance for many transactions, such as gifts, bequests, or guardianship of minors. The documents also reveal that well-studied *muṣāhara* is only one side of the coin, the other being *‘umūma* and *khu‘ūla* resulting from these connections across future generations creating opportunities and conflicting situations with rulers for decades to come.

Shounak Ghosh (Vanderbilt University)

“K̲h̲ān-i A‘ẓam’s Pilgrimage in Protest: A Case Study in Mughal Kinship and Imperial Politics, 1593–34”

This paper argues that although imperial sovereignty reigned supreme over all forms of kinship bonds at the Mughal court, the ethos of kinship relations permeated and pervaded political communication between kindreds. It does so by studying the dispute between the Mughal emperor Akbar and his foster brother Mirza Aziz Koka during the early 1590s based on a *farmān* and an *‘arz-dāsh*t and delineates how the trope of familial affinity were used by both to advocate their respective claims and positions. A close reading of the letters reveals the sharp, irreconcilable differences between Akbar and K̲h̲ān-i A‘ẓam about the nature and position of Islam within the empire and shows the latter’s opposition towards the emperor’s religious policies. Through a

textual analysis of the letters, this paper illustrates how court scribes expressed relational ties, primarily through the vocabulary of kinship, and produced vertical and horizontal relationships. Although both letters are infused with brotherly affection, the rhetoric of kinship is directed towards amplifying the antagonism and tension between them. It thus provides an alternative to the perspective that the usage of kinship terms informed a normative imperial hierarchy. Rather it argues that kinship provided an avenue to channelize dissent and mediated the limits of this hierarchized apparatus. Finally, the paper discusses how proceeding towards pilgrimage (ḥāj) for Mecca was an explicit act of protest against state policies and how it was regulated by sanctions determined by kinship networks within the royal household. It brings out the agency of prominent female figures who commanded tremendous power on such issues over the princes and rulers owing to their blood relations with them. The paper thus addresses how kinship continued to be both a disruptive force and a buttressing agent for political authority in Timurid empires that lacked stable laws on inheritance and distribution of power.

Shirin Naef (University of Zurich)

“Charity, property and kinship in the premodern Islamic Iran”

In this paper, I will explore how the language of kinship was used in the mobilization and organization of charitable giving and endowments in the premodern Islamic period in Iran (622–1500 CE). With the formalization of the Zoroastrian religion in the Sassanid Empire (224–650 CE) the administration of charitable activities and foundations are not only governed by religious laws and religious institutions but also by state laws and regulations. After the arrival of Islam in Iran in the 7th century and the fall of the Sassanid Empire, endowments and charitable institutions grew slowly and with the rise of various Persian Muslim dynasties became central to the organization of legal courts, educational centres and the economic and religious development of Iranian society (Lev 2005, 2007, Ahmadvand 2015). Iranian legal and religious authorities have played an important role in this development. For instance, the formation of the endowment court/office (diwan-e awqāf), which supervised the endowment property, was the result of such development that can be seen in the Samanid Empire (819-999 CE), the first native dynasty arose in Iran after the Muslim-Arab conquest. The objective of this paper is to show how writers and various religious and legal authorities used kinship terms and relations to address charitable activities and

endowments. Analysing such religious-legal documents (van Berkel, Buskens and Sijpesteijn 2017, Messick 1993) can provide a useful understanding of the commercial and legal challenges of everyday life as well as a better understanding of kinship relations and family law, inheritance practices and perceptions of property. On the theoretical level, the paper deal with the history of charity according to paradigms of ownership, giving, kinship, gender and capitalism. This paper is based on my current research project that investigates the history of charity in Iran and its role in Iranian society from the viewpoint of legal and social history.

Ana Echevarría Arsuaga (UNED Madrid)

“Redefining Kinship Bonds among Christian Communities in al-Andalus”

Family ties among Christian minorities were subject to a series of strains and processes of adaption as a result of the Islamic conquest of al-Andalus, which have been widely explored by a number of scholars (Coope, Safran, Aillet, Fernández Félix, Fierro...). The analysis of new sources, such as the Andalusí Arabic Canon Collection (*al-qānūn al- muqaddas*) and some Christian treatises (9th-11th c.), provide new insights into the protection mechanisms of a minority community and their efforts at preserving membership by means of the re-establishment of social ties adapted to recent conversions and the diminishing role of Christians in a then overwhelmingly Muslim society. Biological kinship and links of consanguinity were redefined in the *qānūn al- muqaddas* and Abbot Samson of Peñamelaria's *De gradibus consanguinitatis*. The control of women, and therefore of reproduction, was ensured through strict measures concerning not just mixed marriages, but interreligious concubinage, the prohibition of divorce and the praise of monogamy among a Christian population conditioned by Islamic family practices. The role of widows, half-way between the family group and the anachoretic world, was also considered. Forum shopping in the legal sphere contributed to the weakening of community boundaries, and therefore penalties needed to carefully balance the punishment of infraction and the need to keep the believers under ecclesiastical power, avoiding the interference of Islamic authorities where possible. Inheritance, especially the transfer of property from Christian to Muslim hands through children born to a Christian mother and a Muslim father, who were seen as illegitimate, had to be carefully regulated by the Church, while promoted by the Islamic power. Symbolical kinship, such as brotherhood and sorority in cenobitic contexts, was enhanced and promoted. This profound

reworking of family and spiritual kinships connected the community, while ensuring its survival for a couple more centuries, but also contributed to the discourses of the *ahl al-dhimma* vis-à-vis Islamic authorities.

Ekaterina Pukhovaia (Polonsky Academy in Jerusalem)

“Sayyids, Tribal kinship, and the Imamate in Zaydi Yemen”

Studies of Zaydism in Yemen tend to underline the divisions, rather than connections, between sayyids (descendants of the Prophet) and tribal groups. As a result, the political theory that framed the sayyid-led imamate in the region and its administrative practices appears to be uninfluenced by the majority of the Yemeni population.

In this paper, I will consider how family connections to tribes supported imamic rule in the Sharaf al-Dīn period (912-980/1506-72) by examining the marriage patterns of imam Yaḥyā Sharaf al-Dīn (d. 965/1558). I argue that the marriage decisions of the imam had a direct influence on his political rhetoric in which he sought to combine Zaydi and tribal concepts of authority. This innovative strategy was taken even further by his son Muṭaḥhar (d. 980/1572) who set aside claims to Zaydi legitimacy and was remembered in later sources as "king of the Arabs" (*malik al-‘arab*). I will discuss how family connections between tribes and sayyid clans were formed in Zaydi Yemen prior to the Sharaf al-Dīn period, why this imam defined his rule in new terms, what tensions this created with traditional notions of Zaydi legitimacy, and what long-term consequences this had for the rhetoric of legitimacy in the region. To analyze the intertwined history of sayyid-tribal kinship in Zaydi Yemen and its influence on language of power I will rely on biographies (*sīras*) of imam Yaḥyā Sharaf al-Dīn by al-‘Ulufī and al-Zurayqī that provide a detailed account of the operations of the Sharaf al-Dīn state and shifts in its representation, as well as materials, firstly, from the pre-Sharaf al-Dīn period (family histories, *sīras* of previous imams) and, secondly, from the period of Ottoman rule in Yemen (1538-1635) – chronicles and documents (*mūhimme* and *māliye* records).

Matthew Gordon (Miami University)

“The Pearl’s Lament: The Trials of the Tulunid Household”

The benefits and headaches of large medieval Egyptian households existed in equal measure: this

appears to have been true of the unwieldy house led by Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn (Egyptian governor, 868-884). If “household” typically designates immediate kin, historians also use the term for wider circles bound by relationships of mutual benefit and support. Political, social, economic and emotional interests either replaced or worked alongside blood and marriage. These were personal ties, each a spoke in a socio-political wheel with, in the case of Ibn Tulun, the amīr as its axis. And client relations mattered often as much as blood ties. This paper will consider three cases of internal rupture – Ibn Ṭūlūn’s falling out with, respectively, his brother (Mūsā), his eldest son (al-`Abbās), and, especially, his wayward client (Lu’lu’), to whose betrayal Ibn Ṭūlūn reacted with urgency. The paper will consider Ibn Ṭūlūn’s reaction – framed by one of the two earliest biographies of the governor in a letter ostensibly written to Lu’lu’ – in which he speaks to his client directly (in deeply familiar terms) but also addresses the “rules” of loyalty, trust, and patronage that governed relationships of this kind (and which Lu’lu’ had clearly violated). The paper, thus, speaks to the dynamics governing ties of kinship and clientage in this one imperial political culture. I will speak to what we know of Lu’lu’’s biography – which exists only in fragments – but focus on the act of betrayal and the governor’s response. The act of betrayal rebounded, finally, on the wayward client (who dies abandoned, his family sold to slavers), but on Ibn Ṭūlūn as well. The latter’s end goal, in governing Egypt in new-style fashion, was the legitimation of authority, a project that turned in part on an ability to adhere to those same dynamics. Lu’lu’’s conduct, in this sense, left him little option but to respond vigorously. To ignore it would have meant a serious slip in reputation.

Leone Pecorini Goodall (Edinburgh University)

“Ibn ‘Ā’isha: Matrilineal kinship in the accession and reign of Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik”

The adoption of patrilineal succession by Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān and the subsequent production of Abbasid texts after nearly two-hundred years of patrilineal legitimising rhetoric means that our sources are not invested in representing the role or importance of matrilineal kinship ties.

However, recent prosopographical work focused on kinship and genealogy in early Islam by Asad Q. Ahmed (2011) and Majied Robinson (2020), confirms the importance of the matrilineal line amongst the early Islamic elite visible in the *nasāb* tradition. The proposed paper shall build on this, demonstrating how these matrilineal kinship ties continued to serve as a means of

establishing dynastic rule and forging alliance in the Marwanid period by looking at the longest-serving Umayyad caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik. Hishām was born to ‘Ā’isha bt. Hishām al-Makhzūmī, a member of the Banū Makhzūm, a prominent Qurashī clan. What makes ‘Ā’isha significant, is that she is explicitly remembered as having named her son after her own father, an onomastic trend noticeable across the Marwanid caliphs, but seldom recognised. Furthermore, she is exalted in the poetry of both Jarīr b. ‘Aṭīyya (c.110-1/728-9) and al-Farazdaq (d.114/732), where her son is referred to as Ibn ‘Ā’isha, explicitly attesting to the importance of matrilineality. Al-Ṭabarī remembers ‘Abd al-Malik as having divorced ‘Ā’isha because she was *ḥamqa* (unintelligent), anecdotes around her fit well within the narratives of the *akhbār al-ḥamqa*, however, descriptions of her seem indicative of a very young woman, providing necessary insight into the gender dynamics of the early Islamic period. Finally, by assessing gubernatorial appointments we can see how Hishām, once he had reached the caliphate, began to favour his matrilineal Makhzūmī relatives. This paper shall make use of *nasāb* works, poetry and source-criticism to demonstrate that the matrilineal line was fundamental in securing succession and maintaining dynastic rule in the Umayyad empire.