

Subversive Philology? Prosopography as a Relational and Corpus-Based Approach to Early Islamic History

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Abstract

This contribution suggests prosopographic engagement with the formative period of Islam as a systematic and corpus-based approach that enables the 'falsifiable' development of interpretative frameworks on a relational basis.¹ This systematization of engagement with early Islamic history is crucial to overcome the influence of substantializing and frequently colonialist and (self-)orientalizing paradigms in academic research. At the same time, the importance of early Islamic history as the communal memory and 'resonating body' grounding the negotiation of Islamic normativities and public perceptions of Islam until today imbues this field of Islamic history with additional importance.

This contribution sets out with an introduction to early Islamic history as a contested cultural memory and a review of prosopographical engagements with this period, suggesting prosopography or 'the study of an internally linked group of individuals' as an emic epistemological category in Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions. I then suggest some pragmatic 'lessons learned' while engaging in a prosopographic case-study centered on individuals and groups affiliated to the Arab 'tribe' (*qabīla*) of Kinda.

Subsequently, I present two examples of how the systematized engagement with early Islamic history through the prosopographical database of Kinda suggests innovative interpretations of the 'factual' history of events, as well as of the narrative dynamics that shaped the extant reports during the process of transmission.

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¹ The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and colleagues who have contributed to shaping this methodological reflection on deploying prosopography to early and classical Arabic-Islamic compilations. Where not otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

Keywords

Early Islamic history, Islamic historiography, Arab tribes, Kinda, Prosopographical methodology

Introduction: Early Islam as a Prosopographical Problem?

The vast corpus of early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography narrating the history of the first three generations of Islam makes this period one of the most-documented periods of pre-modern human culture. In large parts of this corpus, the 'atomist' mode of Arabic-Islamic scholarly discourses deploys multiple individual narrations or *akhbār* paratactically, frequently together with their respective chain of transmission or *isnād*.² The eponymous compilers of the extant collections, however, only very rarely offer explicit commentary or validation on the frequently contradictory information given in the narrations.³ Therefore, few information concerning the genesis of Islam and the Muslim continuity is uncontested in this corpus.

As the formative period of Islam continues to be deployed as the most important cultural memory of Muslim societies,⁴ this multiplicity of contradictory information should be interpreted as reflecting a multitude of competing normativities that intersect in the corpus of early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography.⁵ As will be shown below, this

² For the 'aural' culture of Muslim scholarly traditions as the foundation of this structure see the collected studies of Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (London et al.: Routledge, 2006).

³ See the programmatic suggestion of al-Ṭabarī of "transmitting what has been transmitted" as "only the eye-witness may know which information is true", al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, edd. Muṣṭafā al-Sayyid and Ṭāriq Sālim (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, no date given), 1, 11. The inherent multiplicity of Muslim cultures has been underlined as an integral part of Islam in recent years, see Thomas Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011), and Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton et al.: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁴ The concept of cultural memories was pioneered by Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1994) and *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre sainte* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008). Subsequently, it was most influentially developed by Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de Mémoire I: La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), and Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1992). For a nuanced and up-to-date discussion of more recent developments in memory studies see also Aaltje Hidding, *The Era of the Martyrs: Remembering the Great Persecution in Late Antique Egypt* (Berlin et al.: De Gruyter, 2020).

⁵ See for the constructivist criticism of substantialized narratives of memory and tradition as frequently counterfactual constructs rooted in specific social and institutional configurations the magisterial work of Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870 - 1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976) and the provocative deconstruction of Scottish 'national' traditions by Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland," in *The Invention of Tradition*, edd. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1983). See for subsequent

contestedness of early Islamic memory is not restricted to the emblematic episodes of political succession that are particularly contested between the 'master narratives' of contemporary and historical Islamic traditions.⁶ Instead, the internal contradictions attesting to the contestedness of early Islamic memory constitute a pervasive feature in early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography.

The multiplicity of Muslim cultural memories of the formative period of Islam is especially significant due to the frequently over-confident and substantializing engagement with this literature conducted both in nationalist / Islamist and colonialist / orientalist epistemological frameworks.⁷ This substantializing and unsystematic engagement with early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography was critiqued by John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and others since the 1970s CE.⁸ Nonetheless, the alternative frameworks proposed by these authors are frequently not based on less controversial methodologies than those interpretations they critique.⁹ The methodical 'step outside' in engaging with the formative period of Islam proposed so compellingly by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook therefore remains more of a

influential elaborations of this criticism Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London et al.: Verso, 2006) and Louis Althusser, *Sur la reproduction* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011).

⁶ See for the most coherent reconstruction of a 'factionalist-*shīʿī*' master-narrative of the first three generations of Islam Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Significantly, Madelung concludes his reconstruction of this particular perspective on the formative period of Islam with the Giordano Bruno's proverbial *dictum* "se non è vero, è ben trovato", which can be translated as "even if it is not true, it's well invented" (Madelung, *Succession*, 355). See for an overview over the competing master-narratives also the overview given by Gernot Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der Zweite Bürgerkrieg, 680-692* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982).

⁷ The critique of orientalist scholarship as rooted in frequently colonialist configurations of exploitation was pioneered by Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge et al., 1978). A comprehensive overview over the fascinating interplay of multiple intellectual traditions engaging with early Islamic history from within the epistemological and institutional frameworks of Islam and the political Geography of the Islamic World during the long 20th Century CE remains to be written.

⁸ See for the initial impetus of 'revisionist' engagements with Muslim cultural memories John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁹ The methodological discussion on engaging with early Islamic history was recently continued by Robert G. Hoyland, *In God's Path. The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), which should be read together with the reviews by Fred M. Donner, *al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 23 (2015): 134-140, and Jens J. Scheiner, *Bustan* 7, 1 (2016): 19-32, as well as the ensuing response to the reviews by Robert G. Hoyland, "Reflections on the Identity of the Arabian Conquerors of the Seventh-Century Middle East," *Al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 25 (2017): 113-140. See also the evaluation of the debate in the review by Georg Leube, *Plekos* 20 (2018): 327-334.

desideratum than an accepted standard.¹⁰ Nonetheless, I believe a scholarly consensus could be postulated concerning the following three methodological challenges that should be met by engagements with early Islamic history and cultural memory that aim to contribute to the deconstruction of substantializing narratives:

1) The description of early Muslim and Islamicate societies should proceed within a relational framework that grounds analytical categories in the sources pertaining to this period.¹¹

2) Scholarly engagement with Muslim social history should aim to be precise in the localization and description of agency. Specifically, agency should be localized exclusively in individual actors acting from within specific configurations.¹²

3) In order to preclude the *a priori* determination of results by an unsystematic (and thereby unfalsifiable selection) of data, scholarly engagement with early Islamic history should proceed from the systematical analysis of clearly circumscribed bodies of sources. In addition to the discourses of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions that constitute the resonating body and cultural memory of Muslim societies, these sources should also include the plentiful

¹⁰ See for the suggestion of a methodological 'step outside' Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3, as well as Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 15.

¹¹ Influential reconceptualizations of Islam in relational categories frequently depart from the description of Islam as a discursive tradition suggested by Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986) and the adaptation of Pierre Bourdieu's theories on habitus and capital proposed by Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory* 21, 2 (2003): 150-174. See for two recent contributions that apply this theoretical background to Islamic intellectual landscapes Paula Schrode, "The Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Uyghur Religious Practice," *Die Welt des Islams* 48 (2008): 394-433, and Rüdiger Seesemann, "Epistemology or Ideology? Toward a Relational Perspective on Islamic Knowledge in Africa," *Journal of African Religions* 6, 2 (2018): 232-268.

¹² The importance of localizing agency within specific actors for interpretations of early Islamic history will be discussed in one of the two case-studies below. The suggestion that agency should be localized exclusively within specific actors as opposed to within institutions or other supra-personal entities was systematically proposed as an axiom of 'methodological individualism' by Joseph Schumpeter, *Das Wesen und der Hauptinhalt der theoretischen Nationalökonomie* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1970), 88-98. For the field of Islamic social history, the paramount importance of interpersonal ties of loyalty and patronage was demonstrated by Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an early Islamic Society* (London et al.: I. B. Tauris, 2001), as well as by Jürgen Paul, *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler: Ostiran und Transoxanien in vormongolischer Zeit* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996).

For a theory of a 'derived' agency exerted by material artefacts see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). For the sake of clarity, I will in this contribution implicitly treat non-material artefacts such as traditions and memories as imbued with a 'derived' agency similar to that proposed by Gell for material artefacts.

administrative and epigraphic documentation that continues to become available, as well as the narrative traditions of non-Muslim traditions.¹³

The present contribution proposes that prosopography, or *the systematical study of a group of individuals sharing a common identifiable marker*, is a method that is particularly suited to be applied in accordance with these three methodological challenges. Prosopography constitutes a well-established method that has been fruitfully deployed to various areas of pre-modern history.¹⁴ One of the areas that has profitted most from prosopographic research is the history of the Western Greek world during the so-called 'middle Byzantine' period. In his methodological reflection on prosopographical approaches to this field, Paul Magdalino suggested the following principles as constitutive for prosopographic research:

that every piece of historical data should, as far as possible, be related to an identifiable person, that multiple identities should not be confused, single identities should not be multiplied and collective identities should always be defined in terms of connections between individuals.¹⁵

As will be shown below, these principles resonate closely with the emic epistemological structures of pre-modern Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions.¹⁶ In addition, prosopographical approaches specifically answer specifically to the methodological challenges raised above as follows:

- 1) Prosopography as the study of "the connections between individuals in a group"¹⁷ develops analytical concepts and categories inductively from the sources within a relational framework.
- 2) Prosopography departs from a clearly demarcated group of individuals to analyze their respective agency within its specific context.

¹³ Possible guidelines for the establishment of a systematically compiled corpus of sources will be suggested below.

¹⁴ See in addition to the eponymous journal *Medieval Prosopography* (Western Michigan University), which published in its 35th issue in 2020, and scholarly series such as *Prosopographica et Genealogica* (Oxford) in particular the methodological reflections contained in Averil Cameron, ed., *Fifty Years of Prosopography: The Later Roman Empire, Byzantium and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Paul Magdalino, "Prosopography and Byzantine Identity," in *Fifty Years of Prosopography*, ed. Cameron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56.

¹⁶ See below.

¹⁷ Magdalino, "Prosopography," 43.

3) Prosopography constitutes a method that is exceptionally well suited for the integration of 'atomist' evidence, such as the multitude of narrations in Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions and the frequently fragmentary administrative and epigraphic sources.

Nonetheless, the application of prosopography to the multiple narrative paradigms of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions also constitutes some degree of a change in direction compared to prosopographic approaches that have been established for other contexts. In the contribution cited above, Magdalino suggested that

prosopography is most useful in the study of societies where the number of recorded individuals is relatively modest, and where the records do not lend themselves to the construction of major biographies, or yield enough new information to make the rewriting of biographies a major imperative.¹⁸

Following this rationale, Vera von Falkenhausen has scrutinized the highly complex and fragmentary documentary and narrative sources on pre-modern Southern Italy and Sicily to establish a prosopographical database of functionaries mentioned in Greek along Arabic and Latin sources that allows the nuanced reconstruction of a cultural history of the administrative practices in these regions from Byzantine to Angevine rule.¹⁹ In contrast, I suggest the deployment of prosopographical approaches to early Islamic history not as a response to a dearth of sources or a lack of 'master narratives'. Instead, I argue that prosopography establishes a methodologically sound foundation for a systematic (and to some degree falsifiable) quest for specificity. This quest for specificity is especially important to a field such as early Islamic history, which is, as argued above, described in a vast corpus of internally contradictory narrative and administrative-epigraphic sources. Prosopographical engagement with the first three generations of Islamic history thereby presents an alternative to the frequently orientalist and alterizing frameworks based on selective and unsystematic engagements with the internally contested cultural memories of Muslim societies that continue to structure the academic field of early Islamic history.

¹⁸ Magdalino, "Prosopography," 42.

¹⁹ See the culmination of almost fifty years of prosopographical research presented by Vera von Falkenhausen, "I funzionari greci nel regno normanno," in *Giorgio di Antiochia: L'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l'Islam*, edd. Maria Re and Cristina Rognoni (Palermo: Istituto Siciliano di studi Bizantini e Neoellenici "Bruno Lavagnini", 2009, 165-202.

Literature

Due to the pragmatic (if potentially deceptive) straightforwardness of prosopography as a method, I will not offer an abstract discussion of prosopography from a methodological perspective. Instead, I will ground this section of my contribution in three dimensions: 1) prosopography as an emic epistemological paradigm in Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions, 2) prosopographical approaches to early Islamic history in modern scholarship, and 3) some very pragmatic lessons learned during a prosopographical study of the Arab 'tribe' (*qabīla*) of Kinda during the first three generations of Islamic history.

1) Prosopography as an Emic Epistemological Paradigm in Arabic-Islamic Scholarly Traditions

It is difficult to overstate the importance of prosopography in the sense of "a means of profiling any group of recorded persons linked by any common factor"²⁰ as one of the dominant epistemological paradigms of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions.²¹ Apart from the genre of biographies dedicated to specific functional groups within the early Islamic empire,²² this epistemological paradigm attained its most elaborate refinement in the study of transmitters of *ḥadīth* or *muḥaddithūn*, which was crucial to the critical study of Muslim traditions. The scope of information that had to be established for each individual who was alleged to have participated in the transmission of *ḥadīth* is succinctly indicated in the *Muqaddima* of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643 / 1245 CE), arguably the most influential hand-book of *ḥadīth* studies.

All of the leading scholars of *ḥadīth* and Islamic normative traditions (*a'imat al-ḥadīth wa-l-fiqh*) agree that anybody who is quoted as a transmitter must be

²⁰ Magdalino, "Prosopography," 44.

²¹ See the pathbreaking reflection on the epistemology that subsequently gave rise to the genre of biographical dictionaries, Wadad al-Qadi, "Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars' Alternative History of the Muslim Community," in *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*, ed. Gerhard Endress (Leiden et al.: Brill, 2006), 23-75.

²² See for instance the collection of biographies of governors and judges of Egypt compiled by al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa-l-Qudāt*, ed. Rhuvon Guest (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, no date given), or the biographies of ministers and secretaries in al-Jaḥshiyārī, *Kitāb al-Wuzarā' wa-l-Kuttāb*, facsimile ed. Hans von Mżik (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1926). The influence of this genre is also visible within Arabic-Islamic historiography, see for instance the lists of encumbent functionaries given in particular detail by Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Ta' rīkh*, edd. Muṣṭafā Najīb Fawwāz and Ḥikmat Kashlī Fawwāz (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995).

honest and precise in his narration. In particular, he²³ must be a Muslim adult of sound mind, free of any type of vice or blemish on his virtue (*murū'a*), alert and not simple-minded, of excellent memory, if he transmits from memory, and precise in his writing, if he transmits from writing.²⁴

Specific categories of biographical data necessary for this critical assessment of transmitters of any given *ḥadīth* include the intricate science of multi-component Arabic-Islamic names,²⁵ the lifespan of the transmitters,²⁶ as well as the countries of origin and residence of the transmitters²⁷ and such specific information as transmitters whose memory deteriorated during the end of their life.²⁸ This wide range of information crucial for the critical evaluation of the soundness of Islamic tradition is reflected in the flourishing genre of biographical dictionaries or *Ṭabaqāt*, which arranged brief biographical sketches of thousands of individuals according to generation, place of residence, and genealogical affiliation.²⁹ The geographical-genealogical framework that structured the genre of *Ṭabaqāt* also manifested itself in the central and provincial administration of the *dīwān* or army registers,³⁰ which supposedly regulated the interpersonal networks of patronage and military mobilization in early Muslim society. This epistemic paradigm also gave rise to the impressive synthetic scholarly productions of *Ansāb* or genealogical compilations structured according to descent,³¹ as well as dictate the regular inclusion of the *nasab* or patrilineal line of descent and a *nisba* or 'tribal' affiliation as two of the standard components of names recorded for individuals during the

²³ The male gender of the transmitter follows the Arabic, which reflects the greater credibility attributed to male witnesses in Islamic normative discourses.

²⁴ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, ed. Ismā'īl Zarmān (Damascus: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2013), 68.

²⁵ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 195-231.

²⁶ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 232-235.

²⁷ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 245-247.

²⁸ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 238-240.

²⁹ The most influential early exponent of this genre is the biographical dictionary of Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abdalqādir 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2012). See also the more succinct early biographical dictionary of Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993).

³⁰ See the classical study by Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, *Der Dīwān von 'Umar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb. Ein Beitrag zur frühislamischen Verwaltungsgeschichte* (Bonn: Dissertationsschrift, 1970).

³¹ Likely the most influential synthetic formulation of the genealogies of the Arabs is the monumental *Jamharat al-Nasab* of Ibn al-Kalbī, which is conveniently accessible in Werner Caskel and Gert Strenziok, *Ġamharat al-Nasab: Das genealogische Werk des Hišām Ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī* (Leiden: Brill, 1966). See also the even more comprehensive, if unfinished, presentation of (Islamic) history according to a genealogical framework al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-'Arab*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Tāmīr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2011).

early Islamic period.³² Due to the pervasive influence of these traditional and genealogical frameworks across a multitude of literary genres, prosopography should be understood as one of the dominant epistemological paradigms within Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions.

2) A Brief Survey of Prosopographical Approaches to Early Islamic History in Modern Scholarship

Due to the importance of emic prosopographical epistemological frameworks in Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions, some sort of prosopographic or group-related categories arguably can be found in most modern scholarly approaches to early Islamic (social) history. Accordingly, I will focus this survey around a limited number of contributions that exemplify some of the most influential modes in which prosopographical approaches have been deployed in the reconstruction and interpretation of the formative period of Islam.

As the first mode of prosopographical engagement with early Islamic history prominently represented in modern scholarship, the synthetic analysis of the involvement of different 'tribally' formulated interpersonal networks in the early Islamic conquests,³³ as well as in the post-conquest Arab settlement in specific regions should be noted.³⁴ Although most of these studies are focussed on a regional basis, Fred M. Donner in particular suggested a 'global' reconstruction of the early Islamic conquests by means of prosopographic study of the different regional scenes.³⁵ The second mode of prosopographical engagement with early Islamic history is represented in the exemplary study of individual 'tribal' networks (*qabīla*) within early Arabic-Islamic society. Likely the most ambitious project within this mode is represented by Michael Lecker's work on the Banū Sulaym.³⁶ A methodologically somewhat less rigorous reconstruction of the interpersonal networks of Azd across a longer historical

³² The importance of the *nisbas* affiliated to the tribal framework of the Arab 'tribe' of Kinda for the prosopographical examples presented in this article will be discussed below. The best introduction to the structure and realization of Islamic onomastics is Annemarie Schimmel, *Islamic Names* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989).

³³ This line of research was pioneered by Fred M. Donner, *The Arab Tribes in the Muslim Conquest of Iraq* (Ann Arbor: Unpublished dissertation, 1975).

³⁴ See for Egypt the study of 'Abdallah Khurshīd al-Barrī, *al-Qabā'il al-'Arabiyya fī Miṣr fī l-Qurūn al-Thalātha al-Ūlā li-l-Hijra* (Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1992) and for the post-conquest settlement in Northern Syria Claus-Peter Haase, *Untersuchungen zur Landschaftsgeschichte Nordsyriens in der Umayyadenzeit* (Hamburg: Dissertationsschrift, 1972).

³⁵ Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). It should be noted that this global reconstruction is methodologically less ambitious compared to his earlier work on the Muslim conquest of Iraq.

³⁶ Michael Lecker, *The Banū Sulaym: A Contribution to the Study of Early Islam* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1989). See also his subsequent work on various networks and individuals situated within the genealogically formulated structure of early Islamic society.

period has recently been put forward by Brian Ulrich.³⁷ The study by the present author that will be discussed in greater detail below also represents a contribution to this mode of prosopographical work.³⁸

The two other modes of prosopographical engagement with early Islamic history in modern scholarship are somewhat less rigorous in their geographic or 'tribal' focus. First is the study of early Muslim society within a social framework revolving around 'classes' in a loosely Marxist sense. A prosopographical underpinning to the study of the 'ruling classes' was pioneered by Patricia Crone, who suggested the social category of *ashrāf* or notables as a functional emic counterpart.³⁹ A number of studies have taken up this approach to focus more closely on individual lineages that were transgenerationally influential during the formative period of Islam.⁴⁰ Finally, prosopographical approaches have also been deployed to reconstruct the mechanisms of social dependency and administration in the early Islamic empire, as exemplified in the magisterial study of Eva Orthmann.⁴¹

3) Some Pragmatic 'Lessons Learned'

Before proceeding with the discussion of two examples of how methodologically grounded prosopography can contribute to the development of alternative frameworks for early Islamic history, I now list a number of 'lessons learned' while systematically reading some 20 000 pages of early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography and noting every individual and group affiliated to the Arab 'tribe' (*qabīla*) of Kinda. This prosopographical database was then supplemented by the review of the remaining Arabic-Islamic historiographical and history-related literature pertaining to events of the first three generations of Islamic history, including all sources composed by eponymous scholars who died earlier than around the year

³⁷ Brian Ulrich, *Arabs in the Early Islamic Empire: Exploring al-Azd Tribal Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019). See the review of this work by Georg Leube, *Der Islam* 97, 1 (2019), 292-296.

³⁸ Georg Leube, *Kinda in der frühislamischen Geschichte: Eine prosopographische Studie auf Basis der frühen und klassischen arabisch-islamischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Baden-Baden: Ergon, 2017).

³⁹ See in particular the monumental appendices in Crone, *Slaves*, 93-200.

⁴⁰ To quote but some recent examples of this important line of research see Asad Q. Ahmed, *The Religious Elite of the Early Islamic Hijāz: Five Prosopographical Case Studies* (Oxford: Prosopographica et Genealogica, 2011), Teresa Bernheimer, *The 'Alids: The First Family of Islam, 750 – 1200* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), as well as Harry Munt, "Caliphal imperialism and Hījāzī elites in the second/eighth century," *al-Masāq* 28 (2016): 6-21.

⁴¹ Eva Orthmann, *Stamm und Macht: Die arabischen Stämme im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert der Hiğra* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002). See also the careful reconstruction of social mechanisms of dependency and administration within the province of Egypt by Kosei Morimoto, "The Dīwāns as Registers of the Arab Stipendiaries in Early Islamic Egypt," in *Itinéraires d'Orient: Hommages à Claude Cahen*, edd. R. Curiel and R. Gyselen (Bures-sur-Yvette: Peeters, 1994), 353-365.

350 AH. While the format of succinct 'lessons learned' may be somewhat uncommon,⁴² I hope the following suggestions will facilitate prosopographical work by future scholars.

A: Establishing a Corpus of Sources

The delimitation and establishment of a corpus of sources that is systematically reviewed has a significant influence on the result of prosopographical engagement with early Islamic history. Therefore, the definition of the corpus from which examples are systematically drawn should be transparent and unambiguous.

A.1: To establish a corpus of Arabic narrative sources, Carl Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*,⁴³ Fuat Sezgin's *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*,⁴⁴ and Georg Graf's *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*⁴⁵ present a suitable overview over extant works sorted according to their respective authors or compilers.

A.2: The information contained in later compilations may differ substantially from the content of early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography.⁴⁶ Accordingly, the corpora chosen for prosopographical research should include multiple sources compiled during any given period to allow for a meaningful contextualization of reports within their contemporary intertextual context.

A.3: A cursory presentation of non-Arabic narrative sources on early Islamic history is presented by Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the omission of detail (including the majority of names) in Hoyland's paraphrasis means that the originals must always be consulted.

⁴² But see the influential and – at least to the present author – extremely helpful 'practical' guidelines for scholarly engagement with Islamic history suggested by R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (London et al.: I. B. Tauris, 1995).

⁴³ Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* (Leiden: Brill, 1937-1949).

⁴⁴ Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1967-2015).

⁴⁵ Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947-1966).

⁴⁶ See for instance the presentation of al-Ash'ath b. Qays in the 12th century CE compilation of Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh Madīnat Dimashq*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū Sa'īd 'Umar b. Gharāma al-'Amrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 9, 116-145. The occasions when particular Qur'ānic verses were revealed (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) that constitute one of the main topics of Ibn 'Asākir's compilation of biographical information for al-Ash'ath b. Qays in particular do not (to the best of my knowledge) have a parallel in early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography whose eponymous compilers died before 350 AH.

⁴⁷ Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it* (Princeton, The Darwin Press, 1997).

A.4: The most accessible corpus of diplomatic sources is the Arabic Papyrology Online Database at LMU, Munich.⁴⁸ A comprehensive introduction to this material is given by Lennart Sundelin.⁴⁹

A.5: An evolving online database of Islamic epigraphy is the Thesaurus d'Epigraphie Islamique of the Fondation Max van Berchem.⁵⁰ Numerous additional *graffitti* and *dipinti*, particularly from the Arabian Peninsula, are currently being edited by scholars such as Ilkka Lindstedt.

A.6: The numismatic evidence most conducive to prosopographic analysis is represented by Arabic and Pahlawī legends on so-called Arabo-Sasanian coinage. Although this material continues to be debated, a readily accessible overview is given by Heinz Gaube.⁵¹

B: Identifying Names and Variants

As prosopography commonly departs from the names of individuals and groups, an awareness of (a typology of) variants both in editions and manuscripts is crucial.

B.1: The affiliation to an Arabic 'tribe' (*qabīla*) expressed in the onomastic element indicating 'tribal' affiliation or *nisba* constitutes a relatively stable and unambiguous criterium for the systematic establishment of a prosopographic database.⁵²

B.2: The diacritical dots (*nuqaṭ*) tend to be more susceptible to variation compared to the undotted shapes of the letters (*rasm*).⁵³

B.3: Uncommon *nisbas* are frequently misread.⁵⁴

B.4: Depending on the positionality of the author / compiler, the *nisbas* used to identify individuals and groups may pertain to more inclusive or more specific levels of 'tribal' affiliation.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ <http://www.apd.gwi.uni-muenchen.de:8080/apd/project.jsp>. I am indebted to Dr. Daniel Potthast for bringing this database to my attention.

⁴⁹ Lennart Sundelin, "Introduction: Papyrology and the Study of Early Islamic Egypt," in *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt*, edd. Petra M. Sijpesteijn and Lennart Sundelin (Leiden, Brill, 2004), 1-19.

⁵⁰ <http://www.epigraphie-islamique.uliege.be/thesaurus/>.

⁵¹ Heinz Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik* (Braunschweig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1973).

⁵² See Leube, *Kinda*, 177-189, and the succinct review of the topic in Leube, "Freiheitsgrade," 49-51.

⁵³ Cf. the consistent spelling of Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj as Mu'āwiya b. Khudayj in al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, ed. Muḥfid Muḥammad Qamīḥa (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1985) e.g. 2, 454, as well as in al-Kindī *Kitāb al-Quḍāt*, ed. Richard J. H. Gottheil (Paris: Geuthner, 1908), e.g. 21.

⁵⁴ Cf. the consistent (mis)rendering of the (not so uncommon) *nisba* al-Ḥasanī for the descendants of Shuraḥbīl b. Ḥasana as al-Ḥusaynī in al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, ed. Gottheil, e.g. 23.

B.5: Idiosyncratic or uncommon forms are frequently normalized.⁵⁶

B.6: The widespread editorial practice of collating the manuscripts with quotations of the text contained in other works may normalize the names of individuals given in the resulting edition.⁵⁷

C: Interpreting Data

C.1: Notwithstanding the pervasive influence of particular genealogical systematizations and paradigms, alternative genealogical frameworks may be attested.⁵⁸

C.2: Due to the encyclopedic learning of Arabic-Islamic scholars, the fullest versions of information quoted more elliptically in historiographical works may frequently be found in compilations pertaining to other literary genres.⁵⁹

C.3: Within extended families, the affiliation to the most prominent 'genealogical point of reference' is more important than the exact degree of kinship.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Cf. the recurring identification of individuals commonly affiliated to the overarching level of Kinda by the *nisba* al-Kindī in historiographical compilations of 'global' Islamic history as compared to their more specific affiliation to the Kindī 'sub-tribe' of Tujīb with the *nisba* al-Tujībī, for instance in the compilation of the Egyptian scholar Ibn 'Abdalḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-l-Maghrib*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2004). This likely reflects the prominence of Tujīb in early Islamic Egypt, cf. the general discussion of this phenomenon of greater or lesser specificity of *nisbas* in Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge et al.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 12.

⁵⁶ Cf. the 'normalized' spelling of the toponym *Dūmat al-Jandal* in the edited text of al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abdalqādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), 2, 405, *pace* the indication of Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abdarrahmān al-Mar'ashlī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2008), 3/4, 325, that al-Wāqidī had transmitted *Dūmā' al-Jandal* as the correct form.

⁵⁷ Cf. the naming of a traitor affiliated to Kinda in Abū Mikhnaf, *Maqatal al-Imām al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī*, ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Jabūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Majalla al-Bayḍā', 2000), 73, compared to the omission of the name in the translation based on a manuscript, Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Der Tod des Ḥusein ben 'Alī und die Rache* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1883), 38-40. The likely source in this case is the quotation attributed to Abū Mikhnaf in al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, no year given), 103-105, cf. the programmatic argument for editorial collation made by the editor in his preface, Abū Mikhnaf, *Maqatal*, ed. al-Jabūrī, 35.

⁵⁸ See for instance the incompatibility of the genealogical framing of the offspring of a pre-Islamic Meccan *ḥalīf* or client of Quraysh known collectively as the Banū l-Ḥaḍramī suggested in al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-Iklīl*, ed. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Akwa' al-Ḥawālī (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Madīna, 1986), 2, 54-61, as compared to the dominant genealogical paradigm upheld by the 'mainstream' tradition clustered around Ibn al-Kalbī, see Leube, *Kinda*, 38.

⁵⁹ See for instance the most extensive version of the different paradigms of *Herrschaftswissen* cited by Ibn al-Ash'ath, which is contained in the zoographical anthology al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsil 'Uyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2011), 5/6, 108.

⁶⁰ See the alternating affiliation of 'Ufayyif as an uncle or cousin to the prominent Kindī notable and 'genealogical point of reference' al-Ash'ath b. Qays, Leube, *Kinda*, 37-38. Cf. the perceptive remarks on the epistemological function of the eponymous founder of dynastic dispensations, John E. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1999), 20-23.

C.4: Outside of prominent genealogical lineages, the affiliation of individuals to multiple genealogically formulated networks may be disputed. This is particularly true for those framed as 'villains' within the cultural memory of Muslim societies.⁶¹ Pragmatically, it may be advisable to include doubtful cases in prosopographical analysis.

C.5: Similarly, the inclusion of larger genealogically formulated entities as 'sub-tribes' in one of the overarching 'tribal' formations may be disputed.⁶² For these cases, a consistent and pragmatic in- or exclusion should be maintained in establishing prosopographical databases.

D: Cutting a Corner

D.1: A useful and accessible prosopographical database firmly rooted within Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions is presented in the alphabetically organised second volume of the monumental reshuffling of Ibn al-Kalbī's *Jamharat al-Nasab* by Werner Caskel and Gert Strenziok.⁶³

Discussion

In this section of the present article, I will illustrate the possible impact of systematic prosopographical inquiry to overarching questions concerning the history and memory of the formative period of Islam with two examples. As the impact of the sources outside the narrative texts of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions within the prosopographical database of Kinda during the first three generations of Islam is limited,⁶⁴ both examples use prosopography to propose innovative interpretations of the corpus of Arabic-Islamic narrative sources. Arguably, the primary impact of systematic analysis of the entire corpus of references to a specific 'tribal' entity such as Kinda lies in the the relational reconstruction of

⁶¹ See the detailed reconstruction of the multiple affiliations proposed for those killers of the caliphs 'Uthmān and 'Alī whose proposed affiliation includes some suggestion of having been affiliated to Kinda, Georg Leube, "Insult the Caliph, Marry al-Ḥasan, and Redeem Your Kingdom: Freiheitsgrade of Kindī Elites During the 7th to 9th Century," in *Transregional and Regional Elites – Connecting the Early Islamic Empire: The Early Islamic Empire at Work Volume 1*, edd. Hannah-Lena Hagemann and Stefan Heidemann (Berlin et al.: De Gruyter, 2020), 49-51, cf. Leube, *Kinda*, 180-185.

⁶² See for instance the debated inclusion of al-Ṣadif within Kinda, Leube, *Kinda*, 186-189.

⁶³ Caskel and Strenziok, *Ġamharat*, vol. 2.

⁶⁴ The notable exception is the independent corroboration of the apocalyptic iconography of the revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath, e.g. in al-Maḡdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-Ta'rīkh*, no editor given (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, no date given), 2, 183-184, and 5, 35; as well as in al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh*, ed. Michael J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1894), 314, in the numismatic legends on coins minted during his revolt. See Gaube, *Numismatik*, 32, 36, and 52, cf. Leube, *Kinda*, 211-220.

the structure and function of this type of social affiliation.⁶⁵ This enables the systematic revision of the positivist suggestions of Arabic-Islamic scholars concerning Arab 'tribes', as well as the concepts used in modern scholarship, which are commonly based on a combination of contemporary anthropology with the emic views of 'tribal' affiliation in Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions.

Nonetheless, the two examples chosen for this article transcend the question of reconstructing the shape and function of an Arab 'tribe' in early Islamic history. Instead, I follow the adaptation of the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur to early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography proposed by Matthias Vogt to present one prosopographically grounded case-study that analyzes historiography in its 'referential' function of describing the history of events during the formative period of Islam.⁶⁶ In this example, I critically review the degree of centralization during the early Islamic conquests based on the systematically established prosopographical database of Kinda. My second example demonstrates the possible impact of prosopographically grounded inquiry on the reconstruction and conceptualization of the 'narrative' (or, in Vogt's terminology, 'fictional') dimension of history as a *mise en intrigue* of communal memory. Thereby, I argue that systematic prosopographical inquiry suggests an alternative model for the processes of transmission that shaped the extant (narrative) sources, highlighting discursive practices that may have involved multiple groups within Muslim society that are systematically marginalized by the normativities underpinning the established modeling of the process of transmission as *isnād-cum-matn*. I conclude both examples with a brief reflection on the function and impact of prosopographical method on the respective case-study from an epistemological perspective.

Kinda and the Centralization of the Early Islamic Conquests

It is difficult to overstate the significance of the degree of central leadership and authority during the initial conquests to the general framing of Islam. For the sake of brevity, I focus the following argument around an influential article by Fred M. Donner, which includes a succinct review over the debate.⁶⁷ Building on this review of the scholarly literature, Donner

⁶⁵ The results of this systematic review of the prosopography of Kinda are presented in Leube, *Kinda*, 177-196.

⁶⁶ See Matthias Vogt, *Figures de califes entre histoire et fiction: al-Walīd b. Yazīd et al-Amīn dans la représentation de l'historiographie arabe de l'époque abbaside* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2006), 30.

⁶⁷ Fred M. Donner, "Centralized Authority and Military Autonomy in the Early Islamic Conquests," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East III: States, Resources and Armies*, ed. Averil Cameron (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 340-346. The importance of this article is underlined by its inclusion in Donner's own

posits an exemplary typology of possible degrees of centralization, which ranges from "I. No centralization is found on the conceptual, strategic, or tactical levels," to "IV. Centralization is found on all levels – conceptual, strategic, and tactical."⁶⁸ Within this spectrum, one of the possible interpretations would see the conquests motivated by Islam and centrally coordinated by a Ḥijāzī Muslim elite personally bound to Muḥammad.⁶⁹ The personal talent and internal loyalty of this Ḥijāzī Muslim elite was in this view decisive in facilitating the political expansion of the Islamic realms. This interpretation also resonates well with the 'salvational' interpretation of the early Islamic conquests in Muslim cultural memory, which sees the success of the military campaigns as a preordained divine miracle attesting to the truth of Islam.⁷⁰

The extreme formulation of an opposing position would by contrast suggest that the weakness of the Byzantine and Sassanian empires enabled autonomous takings of power by Arab groups in various regions. These were then consolidated over the course of the seventh century CE by Islam as an ideology of Arab-ness whose origin was counterfactually retrojected to a period preceding the expansion of the sphere of Arab dominance.⁷¹ This interpretation accordingly limits the significance of Islam as a 'centralizing' force during the conquests. Building on a discussion of what he terms "Problems of Strategic and Operational Centralization",⁷² Donner concludes his article with the suggestion that "the traditional view that the conquests displayed both conceptual and strategic-operational centralization or unity retains an explanatory power superior to revisionist alternatives".⁷³

Approaching Donner's argument from a prosopographical perspective, one should firstly note the suggestion that 'the conquests' in their entirety were more or less centrally directed as

selection of canonical contributions engaging with the history of the early Islamic conquests, Fred M. Donner (ed.), *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State* (Aldershot et al.: Ashgate Variorum, 2008), 263-286.

⁶⁸ Donner, "Centralized Authority," 340. Note Donner's *caveat* that these typologies should be seen as designating different points on a continuous "broad spectrum of degrees of centralization", Donner, "Centralized Authority," 338.

⁶⁹ Donner, "Centralized Authority," 358-359. Note that much of the highly influential work of Fred M. Donner ultimately turns on similar arguments, see for instance Donner, *Tribes, passim*, and Donner, *Conquests, passim*.

⁷⁰ See for instance the succinct prophecy attributed to Muḥammad during the Battle of the Trench (*waq'at al-khandaq*), which predicted the expansion of the Islamic realms across much of the Near and Middle East, for instance in al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1, 385-386. A similar prophecy to the delegation of Kinda to Muḥammad is mentioned by al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 1, 66.

⁷¹ Donner, "Centralized Authority," 344-345. See the provocative exploration of this line of interpretation by Moshe Sharon, "The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land," in *The Holy Land in History and Thought*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden et al.: Brill, 1988), 225-235.

⁷² Donner, "Centralized Authority," 346-359.

⁷³ Donner, "Centralized Authority," 359.

problematic. If we follow the methodological suggestion made in the introduction to this article that agency should be localized exclusively in individual actors acting from within specific configurations, we should proceed from a framework that allows for the intersecting agency of multiple individual actors who may have been motivated by differing degrees of loyalty to the early Islamic center of Medina. Before following this conceptual critique of the interpretative framework of the conquests suggested by Donner, however, we will firstly check his argument as it is presented against the prosopographical database of Kinda.

In his discussion of the 'centralizing bias' in Arabic-Islamic cultural memory of the conquests, Donner underlines the importance of the singularity of the independent agency defying caliphal authority attributed in some reports to ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ during the conquest of Egypt as follows:

Is it not misleading to generalize from this one example of military autonomy – assuming that it is an example? For we find reports of such independence or defiance of Caliphal authority for no other commander of the early conquest period on any other front – and there were many of them.⁷⁴

Contrary to Donner's suggestion that ʿAmr represents a singular case, however, a parallel example is indeed contained in the prosopographical database that systematically compiles all mentions of individuals and groups affiliated to Kinda during the first three generations of Islamic history. This is the case of al-ʿAlāʾ b. al-Ḥaḍramī, the son of a pre-Islamic South-Arabian client of Quraysh,⁷⁵ who is described as having defied ʿUmar's orders in embarking upon independent military expeditions.

[The first caliph] Abū Bakr had appointed him [al-ʿAlāʾ b. al-Ḥaḍramī], authorizing him to fight the apostates (*ahl al-ridḍa*). [The second caliph] ʿUmar also appointed him, but forbade him from engagin in any naval expeditions (*nahāhu mina l-baḥr*). [... Nonetheless, al-ʿAlāʾ mobilized troops to raid the region of Fāris⁷⁶ in southern Iran]. Thus, he [al-ʿAlāʾ] sent them out over sea to Fāris without ʿUmar's permission, as ʿUmar had never allowed anybody to raid over sea. For ʿUmar disliked the risk to his army [posed by embarking on ships],

⁷⁴ Donner, "Centralized Authority," 348.

⁷⁵ See the discussion of the different genealogical affiliations proposed for this family in Leube, *Kinda*, 182-183.

⁷⁶ I vocalize according to Yāqūb, *Muʿjam*, 5/6, 407, *pace* the current vocalization as Fārs in modern Persian.

following the example of the prophet, God bless him and grant him peace!, and Abū Bakr. For neither the prophet, God bless him and grant him peace!, nor Abū Bakr had raided over sea. [The naval expedition ends in disaster and causes ‘Umar to relieve al-‘Alā’ from his post.]⁷⁷

As a first result of this deployment of the prosopographical database of Kinda to check the validity of Donner's argument, one should accordingly resume the systematic evaluation of the extensive corpus of early and classical Arabic-Islamic scholarly compilations to search for further instances where explicit orders of the caliph(s) are claimed to have been disobeyed.⁷⁸

On a more fundamental level, however, the systematically compiled prosopographical database of Kinda enables the exemplary review of the different positionalities and 'degrees of centralization' exhibited by the (limited) group of notables affiliated to Kinda. This in turn allows the suggestion of an exemplary typology of how different individual (Kindī) actors involved in the early Islamic conquests may have related to the Islamic 'center' of Medina.

When evaluated systematically, the prosopographical database of individuals and groups affiliated to Kinda suggests a consistent correlation between an 'Islamic' legitimation of individual notables (early conversion to Islam and close ties to Muḥammad and the Ḥijāzī elites) and leadership over troops that are not mobilized according to interpersonal networks formulated in a terminology of shared 'tribal' descent (*i.e.* troops presumably mobilized along a shared affiliation to Islam and the Islamic center). This first type of Kinda-affiliated leaders during the early Islamic conquests legitimated predominantly due to their supra-'tribal' affiliation to the Islamic center includes the descendants of pre-Islamic clients of Quraysh, such as the already mentioned al-‘Alā’ b. al-Ḥaḍramī, Shuraḥbīl b. Ḥasana, or al-Miqdād b. ‘Amr / al-Aswad.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2, 581. Al-‘Alā’'s engagement in raiding over sea is also mentioned in al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, ed. Ayman Muḥammad ‘Arafa (Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, no date given), 428, and Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4, 267. It should be noted, however, that ‘Umar's explicit interdiction is not mentioned in either of these compilations. By contrast, the disastrous end of al-‘Alā’'s naval expedition is referenced in other context by al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2, 605, 638, and 691.

⁷⁸ A comparable example may be constituted by the naval raiding on Cyprus ascribed to the future caliph Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, however I have not systematically noted all mentions of this expedition in the sources due to the systematic focus of my prosopographical work around individuals and groups affiliated to Kinda.

⁷⁹ See for al-‘Alā’ b. al-Ḥaḍramī and his relatives Leube, *Kinda*, 38-40, for Shuraḥbīl b. Ḥasana Leube, *Kinda*, 40-41, and for al-Miqdād Leube, *Kinda*, 182-183.

By contrast, a second type of Kindī mobilizers during the early Islamic conquests is not described as being particularly close to Muḥammad (some were even prominently involved in the anti-Islamic wars of the *ridḍa*).⁸⁰ By contrast, these individuals are usually described as leading troops that are presented as having been mobilized predominantly due to a shared 'Kindī' affiliation. This type of Kindī notables includes figures such as al-Ash'ath b. Qays and Ḥujr b. 'Adī during the conquest of 'Irāq, Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj during the conquest of Egypt, and al-Simṭ b. al-Aswad during the conquest of Syria. The extent of independent agency displayed by these 'less centrally legitimated' mobilizers is exemplified in one of the accounts of post-conquest settlement in the Syrian town of Ḥimṣ / Emesa transmitted by al-Balādhurī.

Some traditionaries suggest that al-Simṭ b. al-Aswad al-Kindī granted a treaty to the inhabitants of Ḥimṣ. When [the 'centrally' appointed leader of the conquests in Syria] Abū 'Ubayda arrived, he affirmed this treaty. They further suggest that al-Simṭ distributed the quarters of Ḥimṣ between the Muslims, so they might settle there. He settled them in every abandoned house, whose inhabitants had fled, as well as in empty lots.⁸¹

Significantly, al-Simṭ b. al-Aswad is not mentioned to have derived his authority from an appointment by one of the Muslim caliphs or another member of the 'centrally legitimated' Ḥijāzī elites. Within the systematically evaluated corpus of sources, there also exists no indication that al-Simṭ's presence in Syria was influenced by any type of 'central' strategic coordination of the conquests. Although this certainly represents an *argumentum ex negativo*, the parallel cases of Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj and Ḥujr b. 'Adī, who similarly show up in Egypt and 'Irāq respectively without any suggestion of having been sent there by central Islamic authorities, suggest the existence a second and 'less centrally motivated' type of Kindī mobilizers that were involved in the early Islamic conquests. As exemplified by the trajectories of the families of Shuraḥbīl b. Ḥasana and Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj in Egypt, this typological opposition converged in subsequent generations.⁸²

⁸⁰ See for the narrative-dogmatic repercussions of the prominent involvement of al-Ash'ath b. Qays in the *ridḍa* Georg Leube, "Obliterating Leadership: The Case for an Historiographical Excommunication of al-Ash'ath b. Qays," forthcoming in a special volume of *al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* designated to "Acts of Excommunication in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Middle East," ed. Ed Hayes.

⁸¹ al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 170. Cf. the parallel account al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 177.

⁸² See Leube, "Freiheitsgrade," 54-58.

Building on the suggestion of localizing agency exclusively in individual actors rooted in specific configurations, the systematically compiled prosopographical database of Kinda accordingly suggests that Donner's modelling of the early Islamic conquests should be nuanced by the inclusion of at least two different types of mobilizers. The first type drew on an 'Islamic' legitimacy to lead troops not primarily mobilized due to an affiliation to Kinda shared by the troops and their leader. This group of Kindī notables presumably would have been integrated more closely with the Ḥijāzī elites focussed on the early Islamic political center of Medina during the strategic-operational centralization of the conquests postulated by Donner. By contrast, the second type of Kindī notables were not remembered as having been particularly close to Muḥammad (or, for that matter, as particularly exemplary Muslims)⁸³ and mobilized significant bodies of troops that are described as affiliated to Kinda. The degree to which this second group was integrated in a centrally coordinated direction of the conquests would by contrast have to be discussed for each case individually.⁸⁴

This second result derived from checking Donner's evaluation of the centralization of the early Islamic conquests against the prosopographical database of Kinda suggests a conceptual elaboration of Donner's model. As in the preceding case of al-ʿAlā's alleged disobedience of caliphal orders, this hypothesis is grounded in the systematic review of all individuals and groups affiliated to Kinda during the early Islamic conquests in early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography and accordingly will in turn have to be discussed for other systematically established sets of (prosopographical) data.

Recurring Patterns in the Narrative Depiction of Kinda

In the preceding passage, we have systematically evaluated the systematically compiled prosopographical database of Kinda for examples of disobedience to explicit caliphal orders and suggested that a typology of mobilizers during the early Islamic conquests may allow for individuals affiliated more or less closely to the Islamic 'center' of Medina. In both cases, we have approached the sources of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions as referential texts describing purported events. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the impact of systematical,

⁸³ See for instance the allegation that horses and camels were sacrificed during the burial of al-Ashʿath b. Qays, al-Thaʿalibī, *Laṭāʾif al-Maʿārif*, edd. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī and Ḥasan Kāmil al-Ṣayrafī (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1960), 17.

⁸⁴ See for the dynamic processes of negotiation structuring the integration of transregionally mobile groups in centrally directed Islamic state-formations in later periods the study by Kurt Franz, *Vom Beutezug zur Territorialherrschaft: Das lange Jahrhundert des Aufstiegs von Nomaden zur Vormacht in Syrien und Mesopotamien 286 bis 420 / 889 bis 1029* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2007).

corpus-based prosopographical research on the 'narrativity' of early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography of the formative period of Islam may be even greater than its impact on the reconstruction of a history of events.

As indicated above, the prosopographical database of individuals and groups affiliated to Kinda systematically compiles all mentions pertaining to the first three generations of Islamic history, which is roughly equivalent to the 7th century CE. Within this timeframe, the prosopographical database contains reports pertaining to a variety of different episodes and topics of Muslim cultural memory due to the involvement of at least one individual affiliated to Kinda in the episode in question. Accordingly, the systematically established prosopographical database of individuals and groups affiliated to Kinda represents a data sample that stretches the geographical and chronological scope of the first three generations of Islam, systematically involving the width of compilations and the multiple strands of Arabic-Islamic tradition. Therefore, this data sample enables the systematic analysis of narrative dynamics and their impact on the shape and content of the reports transmitted in Arabic-Islamic scholarly discourses. This systematic assessment of the influence of narrative dynamics on the reports during the process of transmission builds on theoretical approaches developed in the study of medieval German and Latin philology that questions the paradigmatic stability of the 'original' version (*Urtext*) of a text. Instead, texts are seen as fundamentally fluid (*unfest*) and open to variation and adaptation by individual scribes, while the stability of some texts is taken as an indication of specific normative prestige imbued in its unchanged form.⁸⁵ Due to the importance of 'aurality'⁸⁶ in Arabic-Islamic discursive traditions and the normative significance of the formative period of Islam that involved numerous individuals and groups in its negotiation and debate, this approach is particularly suited for an

⁸⁵ See for this theoretical background Joachim Bumke, *Die vier Fassungen der 'Nibelungenklage': Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und Textkritik der höfischen Epik im 13. Jahrhundert* (Berlin et al.: De Gruyter, 1996), 3-88; Joachim Bumke, "Der Unfeste Text: Überlegungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und Textkritik der höfischen Epik im 13. Jahrhundert," in *'Aufführung' und 'Schrift' in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller (Stuttgart et al.: Metzler, 1996), 118-129; Rüdiger Schnell, "Konstanz und Metamorphosen eines Textes: Eine überlieferungs- und geschlechtergeschichtliche Studie zur volkssprachlichen Rezeption von Jacobus' de Voragine Ehepredigten," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 33, 1 (1999): 319-395, and Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989). Similar suggestions concerning the interferences between text and society during the process of transmission have been made independently for Syriac manuscripts by Michael Philip Penn, "Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims: Syriac Textual Changes in Reaction to the Rise of Islam," *Hugoye* 12, 2 (2009): 235-257, see also Philip Bockholt, *Weltgeschichtsschreibung zwischen Schia und Sunna: Ḥvāndamīrs Ḥabīb as-siyar im Handschriftenzeitalter* (Leiden et al.: Brill, 2021).

⁸⁶ See Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written*, passim.

engagement with the great compilations of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions. Indeed, the fluidity of a text during the process of transmission appears to have been recognized in early and classical Arabic-Islamic scholarly discourses as demonstrated by the famous saying attributed to one of the founders of an emic tradition of Arabic grammar and lexicography, al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, "When a book has been copied three times without being compared to another copy, it turns into Persian."⁸⁷ From this perspective, the prosopographical database of Kinda serves not only as the systematic (and falsifiable) criterium for the selection of individual narrations, but also as an implicit 'common denominator' that may have influenced the depiction of Kindī actors and groups over the course of narrative transmission and debate.

As demonstrated by a close-reading of the narrative depiction of Kindīs across the timeframe under study, the 'image' of Kinda is shaped by pervasive narrative patterns that intertextually link multiple contexts and sources.⁸⁸ The close-reading of three emblematic episodes of early Islamic salvation history that involve Kindī protagonists demonstrates that the different versions are intertextually linked in a contested debate turning on the 'moral' assessment of the Kindī and non-Kindī actors involved.⁸⁹ Significantly, this intertextuality also connects individual narrations (*akhbār*) that do not feature common traditionaries in their respective chain of transmission (*isnād*). This intertextual connectedness of different versions of emblematic episodes involving Kindī actors also informs the depiction of Kindī individuals and groups in general, indicating that the 'general image' of Kinda influenced the material transmitted during the process of transmission.⁹⁰ Thereby, the common revilement of Kindīs as 'weavers' is intertextually linked to the frequent depiction of Kindīs wearing costly garments, and the general trend of blaming villains affiliated to Kinda for 'negative' episodes

⁸⁷ *idhā nusikha l-kitābu thalātha marrātin wa-lam yu'araḍ taḥawwala bi-l-fārisiyya*, quoted after al-Sakhāwī, *Faḥḥ al-Mughūth bi-Sharḥ Alfīyyat al-Ḥadīth*, edd. 'Abdalkarīm b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abdalaḥmān al-Khuḍayr and Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Fahyad Āl Fahyad (al-Riyād: Maktabat Dār al-Minhāj, 1426 / 2005 – 2006), 3, 55. This saying was first brought to my attention by the editor Salmān al-Jabūrī in his preface to Abū Mikhnaḥ, *Maqṭal*, ed. al-Jabūrī, 35. Cf. for another instance of al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad as a *locus adscriptionis* by Manfred Ullmann, *Zur Geschichte des Wortes barīd "Post"* (München: Beck, 1997), 10-11.

⁸⁸ A similar point concerning the imprint left by narrative dynamics on Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions is made by Robert G. Hoyland, "History, fiction and authorship in the first centuries of Islam," in *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam: Muslim horizons*, ed. Julia Bray (London et al.: Routledge, 2006), 32: "The most noticeable products of this process are [...] the recurrence of motifs [...] and [...] characterization."

⁸⁹ See Leube, *Kinda*, 52-75.

⁹⁰ Leube, *Kinda*, 75-134.

of early Islamic history may have contributed to the 'polarizing sanctification' of Kindī 'heroes' such as Ḥujr b. 'Adī.⁹¹

The influence of this type of narrative dynamics on the content of early and classical Arabic-Islamic scholarly discourses has commonly been discounted as 'counterfactual *topoi*', which should be 'weeded out' to arrive at a 'reliable' corpus of information.⁹² By contrast, a production-oriented interpretation of recurring narrative patterns or *topoi* as a link between the expectations of the audience and the productive agency of the author or transmitter has been suggested for byzantine hagiography.⁹³ The importance of recurring narrative patterns in the depiction of the early Islamic conquests as the cultural memory of Muslim societies was also convincingly argued in a recent contribution by Boaz Shoshan.⁹⁴

Nonetheless, these pervasive intertextual dynamics shaping the material of Arabic-Islamic scholarly discourses during the process of transmission sharply contradict the prevailing scholarly approach of *isnād-cum-matn*. This approach applies the method of textual criticism to multiple reports or *akhbār* describing to the same episode, aiming for the establishment of a *stemma* of variants. This *stemma* of variants in the reports is then compared to the chains of transmission or *isnāds*, which are similarly arranged in a *stemma*. Wherever both *stemma* match, the proponents of *isnād-cum-matn* suggest that the report should be seen as 'authentic' in the sense of having indeed been transmitted along the chains of transmission indicated in the *isnāds*.⁹⁵

The fundamental problem with this application of textual criticism to the wealth of individual reports transmitted in Arabic-Islamic scholarly compilations lies in its neglect to consider the

⁹¹ Leube, *Kinda*, 123-131.

⁹² See the pioneering work of Albrecht Noth, "Iṣfahān – Nihāwand: Eine quellenkritische Studie zur frühislamischen Historiographie," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 118 (1968): 274-296, Albrecht Noth, "Der Charakter der ersten großen Sammlungen von Nachrichten zur frühen Kalifenzeit," *Der Islam* 47 (1971): 168-199, and the monograph Albrecht Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung* (Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1973).

⁹³ Thomas Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos: Griechische Heiligenviten in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit* (Berlin et al.: De Gruyter, 2005).

⁹⁴ Boaz Shoshan, *The Arabic Historical Tradition and the Early Islamic Conquests. Folklore, Tribal Lore, Holy War* (London et al.: Routledge, 2016). The somewhat unsystematic methodology of this nonetheless very important contribution is discussed in the review article by Georg Leube, *Plekos* 19 (2017): 449-463.

⁹⁵ See the comprehensive review article by A. Kevin Reinhart, "Juynbolliana, Gradualism, the Big Bang, and Hadith Study in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, 3 (2010): 413-444, as well as the exemplary deployment of *isnād-cum-matn* to the Arabic-Islamic historiography of the conquest of Damascus, Jens J. Scheiner, *Die Eroberung von Damaskus: Quellenkritische Untersuchung zur Historiographie in klassisch-islamischer Zeit* (Leiden et al.: Brill, 2010).

question of intertextuality or, in philological terms, contamination. As Paul Maas suggested in his magisterial *Textkritik*:

When texts are frequently read, however, contamination regularly takes place. In the context of contamination, the systematic establishment of a *stemma* must fail (*versagt die strenge Stemmantik*). [...] The *stemma* determines the mutual interdependency (*Abhängigkeitsverhältnis*) of the textual witnesses for every passage of the text, just as a chemical formula determines the arrangement of the atoms of every molecule of a compound. However, this is true only where the transmission is indeed entirely free from intertextual interpolation. Nothing helps against contamination (*Gegen die Kontamination ist kein Kraut gewachsen*).⁹⁶

As demonstrated by the density of intertextual references and debates that structure the narrative depiction of even such a comparatively marginal subject as Kinda, the process of transmission shaping the material contained in the extant compilations can impossibly be modelled as a separate transmission of individual reports by the traditionaries mentioned in the *isnād*. This in turn undermines the application of textual criticism to early and classical Arabic-Islamic historiography according to the method of *isnād-cum-matn*, as it is impossible to apply textual criticism to material shaped by pervasive intertextuality.⁹⁷

By contrast, engagement with Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions describing the formative period of Islam should depart from an interpretation of the *isnāds* not as *chains of transmission*, but as *chains of authorization* established *ex post*. Contrary to the predominance of transgenerational ties explicitly mentioned in the *isnāds*,⁹⁸ the pervasive intertextuality structuring the transmitted material attests to dynamic intertextual debates that are not indicated in the *isnāds*.⁹⁹ These debates must have been motivated by the importance of early

⁹⁶ Paul Maas, *Textkritik* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1957), 31.

⁹⁷ In characteristic honesty, this problem is indicated in the monumental study by Scheiner, *Damaskus*, 389, where Scheiner admits that "the *isnāds* do not indicate the actual way of transmission." Nonetheless, Scheiner does not build on this observation to question the epistemological assumptions of *isnād-cum-matn* in general.

⁹⁸ See the pioneering article by Richard W. Bulliet, "The Age Structure of Medieval Islamic Education," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 105-117, as well as the sociological study by Recep Senturk (Şentürk), *Narrative Social Structure: Anatomy of the Hadith Transmission Network, 610 – 1505* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁹⁹ Pace Senturk, *Narrative Social Structure*, 39: "[The companions of Muḥammad] occupied themselves primarily with teaching hadith to the younger generations, called Successors (layers 2-4). Among themselves, however, there was very little narrative exchange."

Islamic history as the formative period and salvation history of Muslim communities, which continues to be debated and contested until today.

The following two axioms encapsulate this reinterpretation necessary to explain the pervasive intertextuality structuring the corpus of Arabic-Islamic historical memory:

- a) Every transmitter was aware of more reports, than she is cited with in the *isnāds*.
- b) Every report was known to more transmitters, than are mentioned in its *isnād*.

This reinterpretation in turn enables the re-inscription of individuals belonging to groups that are marginalized in the *isnāds* into the Muslim narrative and discursive community. While the *isnāds* predominantly indicate long-living, free, male Muslims who are seen as trustworthy according to the normative paradigms of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions, the pervasive intertextuality indicated by a close-reading of the systematically established prosopographical database of Kinda likely is the result of much more inclusive debates. Although the search for specific female or prematurely deceased participants in Arabic-Islamic discursive traditions is frequently impossible,¹⁰⁰ modelling the process of transmission on a more inclusive and less personalized basis represents an important step towards recognizing the importance of individuals 'read' as pertaining to marginalized groups for Muslim cultural memory.

Conclusion

This contribution argues that systematical and corpus-based prosopographical research may be decisive in challenging and elaborating essentializing models and assumptions that continue to structure the academic field of early Islamic history. In systematically establishing a prosopographical database of individuals and groups affiliated to the Arab 'tribe' of Kinda, I followed the suggestion of molecular biology that the multiple and dynamic processes within a cell are best followed by 'marking' individual molecules and using them to 'trace' their involvement in wider processes. Similarly, I attempted a reconstruction of the wider historical and narrative processes shaping the Arabic-Islamic scholarly discourses on the first three generations of Islam by 'tracing' the systematically established prosopography of Kinda across multiple contexts and episodes.

¹⁰⁰ See for instance the tantalizing reference to two female scholars in *isnāds* cited by the travelling scholar Ibn Battūta, *Rihla*, ed. Darwīsh al-Juwaydī (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2010), 1, 191 and 201.

As suggested above, this prosopographical case-study suggested on a 'referential' dimension of historiography that interpretation of the early Islamic conquests should depart from an interpretative framework that differentiates between different levels of 'central' affiliation for different individual actors. This in turn allows the development of an actor-based framework for the history of the formative period of Islam that reestablishes the intersecting positionalities and agencies of multiple actors in the processes leading to the political formation of the Marwānid caliphate.

On the 'narrative' dimension of historiography, the same case-study indicated a pervasive intertextuality shaping the depiction of Kindī individuals and groups both within particular episodes and across the entire corpus of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions. As this pervasive intertextuality is impossible to reconcile with the dominant paradigm of *isnād-cum-matn*, I have suggested that the application of the method of textual criticism by *isnād-cum-matn* depends on a misinterpretation of the process of transmission. Instead of interpreting the *isnāds* of individual reports as chains of transmission describing the factual ways in which individual reports were transmitted, I suggest that the *isnāds* should be seen as chains of authorization that serve to legitimize material that was transmitted and negotiated in a much broader process of transmission that involved large parts of Muslim society. Accordingly, this alternative modelling of the process of transmission allows for the re-inscription of individuals 'read' as belonging to groups marginalized by the normative paradigms of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions into the communal history of Islamic memory.

Provocative as these suggestions may be, however, the primary importance of the prosopographical case-study of Kinda during the first three generations of Islamic history lies in its methodical and thereby falsifiable selection of individual reports for interpretation. Overcoming frequently colonialist and orientalist assumptions and frameworks of interpretation is predicated on the methodologically reflected systematization of the selection of individual reports from the vast corpus of Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions. I sincerely hope the prosopographical case-study of Kinda presented in this article will encourage further innovative engagements along these lines.

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