Dear Muʿāwiya:
An "Epistolary" Poem on a Major Muslim Military Defeat during the Mediterranean Campaigns of AH 28–35/649–56 CE*

Nathaniel A. Miller

New York University Abu Dhabi

(nam10023@nyu.edu)

Abstract

Based on the Armenian chronicle attributed to Sebēos, some scholars have argued for a large, failed Muslim expedition against Constantinople in or around 654 CE during ʿUthmān's caliphate and Muʿāwiya's governorship of Syria. Others seem to ignore the possibility, especially since there is no reference to such a siege in Arabic-language sources beyond perhaps one sentence in the history of Khalīfa b. al-Khayyāṭ. The poet Abū al-ʿIyāl al-Hudhalī, active in Egypt during the reigns of ʿUmar and ʿUthmān, provides a third possible source for this event in his description of a major Muslim military defeat against the Byzantines. Julius Wellhausen, in an overlooked article, noticed the historical significance of the poem but misdated it to the 660s. This essay redates the poem to the early to mid-650s and suggests that it refers to an early failed assault on Constantinople. It further argues that although the event is virtually ignored by the Arabic-language sources, it can help explain the Egyptian military's hostility to ʿUthmān, which culminated in his assassination.

Introduction

In the course of their wars with the Byzantines, the Umayyads undertook two multiyear sieges of Constantinople, one starting around 48/668 and led by Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya, and the other beginning in 98/717, led by Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik.[1] The Arabic and non-Arabic accounts of both are complex and ambiguous. The first of the two sieges is often considered

the first Islamic siege conducted against the Byzantine capital; this is the stance, for example, of Marek Jankowiak, who has argued, on the basis of a comprehensive survey of the sources, for the 48/668 date.[2] However, some scholars, drawing on the seventh-century Armenian chronicle attributed (on no evidence) to the bishop Sebēos (hereafter pseudo-Sebēos), have proposed that an earlier large-scale assault took place around 33–34/654.[3] Although it is now widely recognized that the study of Islamic history requires the simultaneous use of Arabic and non-Arabic sources, for disciplinary reasons Arabic poetry, once widely used by scholars, has become an underutilized source. Evidence for a major military failure in the eastern Mediterranean around the time of the 33–34/654 assault described by pseudo-Sebēos—and quite possibly the very same failed attack on Constantinople—can be found in a handful of poems by Abū al-ʿIyāl al-Hudhalī, a member of the Hudhayl tribe[4] who served in the Islamic army based in Egypt during the conquest period. His poetry is preserved in the recension of the Baghdadi philologist Abū Saʿīd al-Sukkarī (d. 275/888), *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*, the only surviving example of a collection of a particular tribe's poetry (*dīwān*). Three sets of Abū al-ʿIyāl's poetic texts support the claim of an early first assault in 33–34/654: an exchange of poems with a fellow tribesman, which sheds light on social life in early Islamic Egypt; an elegy mourning another kinsman, who apparently died fighting at Constantinople; and, most importantly, an epistle in verse addressed to Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), along with two successive governors of Egypt, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 43/664) and ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ (d. 36 or 37/656–58).

The specific issue of an early attack on Constantinople is representative of a larger difficulty in making sense of our sources' perspectives. For Islamic sources dealing with the conquests, military victories were teleologically expressive of divine purpose, while defeats were minimized. The seeming inevitability of the Islamic conquests seeps into historical analysis, despite conscious scholarly awareness of the issue.[5] Poetry represents a vital source for dealing with this blind spot, not because it is any less ideological—and its generic conventions and language are in many ways more difficult to untangle than the language of chronicles is—but simply because poets gave voice to multiple, varied interests that were very different from those of the Iraqi religious scholarly elite that mostly produced the great Abbasid chronicles. The first Islamic thrust to conquer Constantinople constitutes a key singularity in this teleological narrative: if an assault in fact took place before the civil

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2. Marek Jankowiak, "The First Arab Siege of Constantinople," in *Constructing the Seventh Century*, ed. Constantin Zuckerman, 237–320 (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2013).

3. Primarily, Shaun O'Sullivan, "Sebeos' Account of an Arab Attack on Constantinople in 654," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 28, no. 1 (2004): 67–88. O'Sullivan draws on the arguments of James Howard-Johnston, and other scholars appear to have accepted their conclusions, as discussed below.

4. Following the same morphological principle by which the *nisba* of Quraysh is Qurashī, not Qurayshī, and Sulaym's is Sulamī, the *nisba* of Hudhayl is always Hudhalī.

5. See, for example, Petra M. Sijpesteijn, "The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Beginning of Muslim Rule," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall, 437–59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), at 441, n. 21: "In the Muslim sources, however, these military setbacks have mostly been suppressed, leaving us with a picture of the conquest as a series of valiant battles and sieges."

war that began in 35/656, it was likely an extremely large-scale affair, yet it left very little impression in the sources. According to Abū al-ʿIyāl's poetry, discussed below, the poet and his kinsmen were directly involved in some large-scale military defeat, and concerns of tribal status along with an ethics of (in this case unrequited) retribution overrode any religio-ideological imperative to soften his criticisms of the Islamic leadership. Indeed, as will also be discussed below, there is very little religio-ideological sentiment, Islamic or otherwise, in early Hudhalī poetry, and what there is is probably more representative of pre-Islamic Arabic mores than it is of a nascent Islamic identity.

In part as a result of these source-critical issues, the possibility of an early attack on Constantinople has been curiously elided from current discussions. Abū al-ʿIyāl's poems, although long known, have also fallen by the wayside for more contingent reasons. After summarizing this historiographical context, I discuss the portions of his texts—first the exchange with his fellow tribesman, which sheds light on social conditions in Egypt, and then his elegy for his cousin who died at Constantinople—that are relevant for understanding the third and most important text, his epistle poem to Muʿāwiya, which I translate in full and which I redate to 28–35/649–56; the poem has previously been thought to postdate the civil war that ended in 41/661. Evidence internal to the poems supports placing the epistle to Muʿāwiya near the latter end of this range, quite probably in relation to Muʿāwiya's eastern Mediterranean campaigns aimed at Constantinople during this period. Abū al-ʿIyāl expresses the same dissatisfaction with ʿUthmān's foster brother (*akh fī al-raḍāʿa*) Ibn Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ, the governor of Egypt, that led to the murder of the caliph at the hands of the Egyptian army. The epistle poem is also probably linked to the failed expedition against Constantinople, and the unstated justification of Hudhayl's participation in the assassination provides the most likely context for the poem's origin.

Historiographical Context and Sources

The historiography around the possible early assault on Constantinople faces a number of linguistic and source-critical challenges. As a result, there has been very little direct discussion of it in secondary scholarship—or rather, the event has received only the attention its apparent footprint in the sources seems to merit, which is little. At issue is a short passage in pseudo-Sebēos, which describes a large battle but is also highly rhetorical. Although several careful siftings of the Arabic prose sources have been undertaken, Abū al-ʿIyāl's poems about a military defeat, whose historical significance was noticed long ago by Julius Wellhausen, have been largely overlooked. Like pseudo-Sebēos's account, they are difficult to interpret because of their rhetorical characteristics. They do, however, provide a valuable view of a major defeat from within the Islamic military, and they almost certainly have a connection to Constantinople or, at least, to the broader context of Muʿāwiya's eastern Mediterranean military activity as governor of Syria in the run-up to the civil war.

If the Islamic conquests followed a bumpier course than the Islamic sources' teleological sensibility would imply, there is a logic to supposing that by the early 30s/650s the Muslims' strategy would have come to focus on Constantinople. In the two years following the battles of Yarmūk and Qādisiyya in 15/636, the Muslims conquered Damascus and then

Jerusalem.[6] Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sasanian empire, fell in (probably) 16/637. In 20/641 the Byzantines agreed to the staged capitulation of Alexandria, withdrawing the following year.[7] By this time Mesopotamia had fallen and Syria was being administratively consolidated under Muʿāwiya. None of this was inevitable. Rome retained the ability to fight back, for example by briefly retaking Alexandria in 25/646.[8] Likewise, Muslim armies in Nubia were initially beaten back, and some Sasanians struggled on under Yazdgird III from Rayy and then from Iṣfahān and Iṣṭakhr until the emperor's death in 31/651.[9] After a very successful Muslim incursion into Armenia in 21/642, Theodoros Ṛshtuni was able to inflict a decisive defeat the following year, and Armenia recognized Roman rule for several years thereafter.[10] After the final defeat of the Sasanians, the Romans and their allies posed the greatest danger to the newly conquered territories, and it is logical that the Muslims in general and Muʿāwiya in particular would have taken aim at Constantinople in the late 20s/640s or early 30s/650s.[11]

Despite the awareness that the conquests were not inevitable, there is an unwillingness to resolve the problem of whether Muʿāwiya attempted, as one would expect, an assault on Constantinople while he was governor of Syria (from after 18/639 to 41/661).[12] In Lawrence Conrad's view, Muʿāwiya was at this time engaged in "a long naval campaign that step by step brought [him] closer to his ultimate objective—Constantinople."[13] Reconstructing this campaign entails heavy reliance on non-Muslim sources. This source problem obtains for the entire naval campaign, but Conrad singles out what was perhaps the campaign's first major step, the attempt to take the strategically important island of Arwād off the coast of Tartous in 28–29/649–50, for which the key source is ultimately the account of Theophilus

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6. Walter Emil Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 1st paperback ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 112–49.

7. Frank R. Trombley, "Fiscal Documents from the Muslim Conquest of Egypt: Military Supplies and Administrative Dislocation, ca. 639–644," *Revue des études byzantines* 71, no. 1 (2013): 5–38, at 21.

8. Sijpesteijn, "Arab Conquest of Egypt," 441, n. 20.

9. Robert G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 76–77, esp. n. 11.

10. Marius Canard, "Armīniya 2. Armenia under Arab Domination," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.; pseudo-Sebēos, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 111, 258–59. Theodoros (or Tʿēodoros) played both sides against each other, and the historiographical image of him typically emphasizes his alliance with the Arabs against the Romans.

11. This was, in fact, how the Armenian historians saw things; synthesizing two statements of pseudo-Sebēos, the tenth-century Stepʿanos succinctly writes that "when the king of Ismael saw that the kingdom of Persia had been extinguished, he gave an order to all his forces to undertake war with the kingdom of the Romans so that they might seize Constantinople and destroy that kingdom as well": Tim Greenwood, *The Universal History of Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 185.

12. For the question of the dates of Muʿāwiya's governorship of Syria, Damascus, and/or Homs, see Martin Hinds, "Muʿāwiya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

13. Lawrence I. Conrad, "The Conquest of Arwād: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, ed. Averil Cameron, Lawrence I. Conrad, and G. R. D. King, 317–401 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1992), at 322, esp. n. 15.

of Edessa (d. 785), as transmitted most usefully in the Syriac *Chronicle of 1234*.[14] Although there are accounts of the Arwād campaign also in Arabic sources, such as the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* of Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī (wr. first half of the fourth/tenth century), they are contradictory and often implausible.[15] After Arwād, Arab historians' accounts of Muʿāwiya's invasion of Cyprus in 28/649 and of Rhodes around 32–33/653 are confused and folkloric, but inscriptions seem to confirm major activity there as well.[16]

The questions seem to emerge around a possible Muslim attack on Constantinople around the year 34/654–55. Although it is widely accepted that around this time the Muslims achieved a naval victory against the Byzantines in an engagement known as the Battle of the Masts (Dhāt al-Ṣawārī) near present-day Finike (Phoenix in Lycia), it is difficult to draw conclusions about its context from al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) notice (*khabar*) on the event.[17] It was apparently a massive battle—al-Ṭabarī reports that the Byzantines had five hundred ships and that "the waves washed the shores with blood and tossed up corpses of men in piles."[18] According to Theophanes, the Byzantines were seeking to thwart a planned large-scale assault on Constantinople.[19] It is only through pseudo-Sebēos's chronicle, dating to the 660s or shortly thereafter, that we can connect the battle at Phoenix to an actual attempted (and failed) full-scale Muslim assault on Constantinople.[20] According to pseudo-Sebēos:

> All the troops who were in the east assembled: from Persia, Khuzhastan, from the region of India,[21] Aruastan, and from the region of Egypt [they came] to Muawiya, the prince of the army who resided in Damascus. They prepared warships in Alexandria and in all the coastal cities. They filled the ships with arms and artillery—300 great ships with a thousand elite cavalry for each ship. He ordered 5,000 light ships to be built, and he

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14. Ibid., 322ff.

15. Ibn Aʿtham is often placed in the early third/ninth century, but this dating has recently been plausibly revised by Ilkka Lindstedt in "Al-Madāʾinī's Kitāb al-Dawla and the Death of Ibrāhīm al-Imām," in *Case Studies in Transmission*, ed. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Raija Mattila, and Robert Rollinger, 103–30 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), at 118–23.

16. Conrad, "Conquest of Arwād," 377; Richard Stephen Humphreys, *Muʿawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan: From Arabia to Empire* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 53–57; Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, A.D. 284–813*, trans. Cyril A. Mango, Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 479, esp. n. 1, and 481; O'Sullivan, "Sebeos' Account," 68–70.

17. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk = Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1879), 1:2865–72. See also Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain Known as the Futūḥ Miṣr*, ed. Charles Cutler Torrey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1922), 189–91; Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿUmarī (Najaf: Maṭbaʿat al-Ādāb, 1967), 145 (under AH 34).

18. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:2868.

19. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 482.

20. On pseudo-Sebēos's authorship, motivations, and style, see Tim Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations: A Re-evaluation of the Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos," *Le Muséon* 115, no. 3–4 (2002): 323–97.

21. Meaning some area near the Red Sea: pseudo-Sebēos, *History*, 133, n. 826; Philip Mayerson, "A Confusion of Indias: Asian India and African India in the Byzantine Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 2 (1993): 169–74.

put in them [only] a few men for the sake of speed, 100 men for each ship, so that they might rapidly dart to and fro over the waves of the sea around the very large ships.[22]

Neither the numbers nor the demographics of the force can be taken literally; the description relies on common tropes in Armenian historiography to signify a very large army.[23] According to pseudo-Sebēos, Muʿāwiya simultaneously prepared a land army in Syria, and "he himself took the troops with him and marched to Chalcedon. When he penetrated the whole land, all the inhabitants of the country submitted to him."[24]

Linking up with the land army at Chalcedon, ships equipped with siege engines were about to make an assault on Constantinople's sea walls, but "when they were about two stades' distance from dry land, then one could see the awesome power of the Lord. For the Lord looked down from heaven with the violence of a fierce wind. . . . The towers collapsed, the machines were destroyed, the ships broke up, and the host of soldiers were drowned in the sea."[25] This took place in the thirteenth year of emperor Constans II (r. 641–68), so in 32–33/653–54.[26]

Did this failed attempt on Constantinople happen? In 1912 Leone Caetani noted that al-Ṭabarī, citing al-Wāqidī, mentions a "raid" (*ghazwa*) by Muʿāwiya against the "straits" of Constantinople in the Hijrī year 32 (652–53 CE), and that this corresponded with pseudo-Sebēos's account.[27] Caetani's observation has not been widely cited.[28] More recently, Shaun O'Sullivan, drawing on James Howard-Johnston's commentary on the English translation of pseudo-Sebēos's *Armenian History*, has argued for the historicity of the assault.[29] O'Sullivan dates it to 33–34/summer 654 and sees the battle of Phoenix/the Masts as the Muslim thwarting of a Byzantine counterattack in the following year, 34–35/655.[30] In addition to

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22. Pseudo-Sebēos, *History*, 144.

23. More problematically, Greenwood, in "Sasanian Echoes," 369–71, argues that the passage in pseudo-Sebēos is an "elaborate reconstruction pieced together by the compiler," using primarily biblical allusions to recapitulate the 626 Sasanian attack on Constantinople, the description of which by pseudo-Sebēos shares many resemblances with the later attempt. Greenwood nevertheless concedes that the compiler may have been "aware of a failed assault on Constantinople in 654" (371). One might ask why it is not rather the account of the earlier Sasanian attack that represents a reconstruction of the 654 attack. Be that as it may, for the purpose of this essay it is enough that pseudo-Sebēos at least confirms a failed naval attack in 654.

24. Pseudo-Sebēos, *History*, 144.

25. Ibid., 144–45.

26. Ibid., 145, n. 885.

27. Leone Caetani, *Annali dell'Islām*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1912), 338; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:2888–89.

28. Salvatore Cosentino, "Constans II and the Byzantine Navy," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100, no. 2 (2007): 577–603, at 591.

29. O'Sullivan, "Sebeos' Account"; pseudo-Sebēos, *History*, 274–76.

30. O'Sullivan, "Sebeos' Account," 73–74. Constantin Zuckerman does not accept this argument, and both he and Cosentino see the Battle of the Masts and the attack on Constantinople as part of the same campaign: Constantin Zuckerman, "Learning from the Enemy and More: Studies in 'Dark Centuries' Byzantium," *Millennium* 2 (2005): 79–135, at 115; Cosentino, "Constans II," 592. Reconstructing the exact sequence is fraught, but Cosentino's argument that Muʿāwiya defeated Constans at Phoenix and continued on to Constantinople,

al-Ṭabarī, Khalīfa b. al-Khayyāṭ (d. 240/854), in his chronicle, also laconically mentions that "Muʿāwiya led an expedition to the straits of Constantinople" (*ghazā Muʿāwiya al-maḍīq min Qusṭanṭīna*) in the year 32/652–53.[31] On the face of it, this is chronologically very close to pseudo-Sebēos's account, although the assigning of dates in this period is liable to any number of errors, and it is likewise difficult to distinguish between plundering raids and large-scale, conquest-oriented expeditions.[32]

This apparently major event has, evidently without much discussion, been alternately ignored or readily accepted in recent narratives of the early Islamic conquests. Neither Stephen Humphreys nor Hugh Kennedy include the battle in their accounts of the military activities of Muʿāwiya (as governor of Syria) and the caliph ʿUthmān.[33] Marek Jankowiak, in a long consideration of the better-known Muslim siege of Constantinople (which he dates to 47–48/early 668) led by Yazīd I during the caliphal reign of his father Muʿāwiya, does not refer to the 33–34/654 attack described by pseudo-Sebēos, although he is aware of O'Sullivan's article.[34] On the other hand, Petra Sijpesteijn, Heather Keaney, Robert Hoyland, and Clive Foss all refer to the siege of 654 matter-of-factly in their accounts of the early Islamic period.[35] In none of these cases am I aware of any explicit arguments made for or against Howard-Johnston's and O'Sullivan's pseudo-Sebēos-based case for an assault around this time. The Byzantinists Constantin Zuckerman and Salvatore Cosentino have both followed and expanded on Howard-Johnston and O'Sullivan in their discussions of the

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where he was then defeated by pseudo-Sebēos's storm, seems straightforward and plausible.

31. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh*, 143. Neither Howard-Johnston nor O'Sullivan cite Khalīfa. Hoyland does: *In God's Path*, 105, n. 4. Two other citations of Khalīfa place the raid in AH 30 (my thanks to Mehdy Shaddel for pointing these out to me): Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Salāma al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī, *Kitāb ʿUyūn al-maʿārif wa-funūn akhbār al-khalāʾif*, ed. Jamīl ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Miṣrī (Mecca: Umm al-Qura University, 1995), 304; idem, *Kitāb al-Inbāʾ bi-anbāʾ al-anbiyāʾ wa-tawārīkh al-khulafāʾ al-maʿrūf bi-Taʾrīkh al-Quḍāʿī*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 1998), 185.

32. There is also another notice in pseudo-Sebēos of a naval attack on Constantinople by Muʿāwiya, which Howard-Johnston dates to 649: pseudo-Sebēos, *History*, 111. In his commentary, Howard-Johnston conveniently summarizes these reports from pseudo-Sebēos with other accounts of naval battles in Dionysius of Tel-Mahre and Theophanes: ibid., 259–62.

33. Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis, 2016); Humphreys, *Muʿawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan*, 58–63. Humphreys views Muʿāwiya's activities at this time as somewhat defensive, aimed at avoiding the repetition of earlier Byzantine sea raids against the Syrian coast (54–55).

34. Jankowiak, "First Arab Siege," 302, n. 294. It should be noted that the information on this 668 siege is also largely derived from one non-Muslim source, the *Chronographia* of Theophanes Confessor, but for his part, Howard-Johnston refers to the entire account as a "myth": J. D. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 304.

35. Sijpesteijn, "Arab Conquest of Egypt," 448; Petra M. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 76; Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 105–8; Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997), 125; Clive Foss, "Egypt under Muʿāwiya Part II: Middle Egypt, Fusṭāṭ and Alexandria," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72, no. 2 (2009): 259–78, at 276; Heather Keaney, *ʿUthman Ibn ʿAffan: Legend or Liability?* (London: Oneworld, 2021), 83–84.

Byzantine empire during this period.[36] The present essay will offer some further evidence from Arabic poetry in favor of the historicity of the 33–34/654 assault. I have already noted the positive testimony of Khalīfa, which does not seem to play any major role in most discussions, but there is a third Arabic source that has attracted no attention in this context.

This source consists of a set of eleven poems by two poets of the Hudhayl tribe, Abū al-ʿIyāl and Badr b. ʿĀmir, who lived in Egypt shortly after the conquest and participated in the war with Byzantium. As is usually the case with poets, almost nothing credible is known about them outside of their texts, but I will argue below that one poem (incipit: "Min Abī al-ʿIyāli akhī Hudhaylin") can be dated on internal evidence to the period 28–35/649–656, when Muʿāwiya's first Mediterranean campaign against the Byzantines took place. Abū al-ʿIyāl's and Badr's poems, which are part of a collection compiled by Abū Saʿīd al-Sukkarī and now published in full as *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*, were first edited in part by Johann Gottfried Ludwig Kosegarten in 1854 as *Carmina Hudsailitarum*. Julius Wellhausen noticed the potential historical significance of "Min Abī al-ʿIyāl," which he refers to as number 56 in Kosegarten's edition, and published a German translation and commentary of it in 1912. However, his article has been overlooked in recent discussions of the possible siege of Constantinople, no doubt due in no small part to its now singularly obscure title, "*Carmina Hudsailitarum* ed. Kosegarten Nr. 56 und 75." But there are good reasons to reconsider this and several other poems by Badr and Abū al-ʿIyāl. Aside from Abū al-ʿIyāl's participation in the ultimately failed Mediterranean naval campaign, he also shares a profile with the Egyptian military contingent most heavily involved in the murder of the caliph ʿUthmān in the year 35/656, buttressing the likely significant link between the two events.[37]

"Min Abī al-ʿIyāl" is a poetic complaint in the form of an epistle addressed to Muʿāwiya and two other leaders, ʿAmr and Ibn Saʿd, composed by a Hudhalī who, according to al-Sukkarī's comment, was reportedly taken prisoner by the Byzantines. There is no direct evidence in the poem to corroborate the author's imprisonment or to connect the text to the 33–34/654 attack on Constantinople, but Abū al-ʿIyāl also composed an elegy for a cousin who died fighting on Byzantine territory, probably at Constantinople. A competitive exchange of poems in matching rhyme and meter (*muʿāraḍa*) between Abū al-ʿIyāl and Badr establishes an Egyptian connection and refers to siege engines in passing. In view of the addressees' identities, dates, and known whereabouts, discussed below, the most plausible event motivating "Min Abī al-ʿIyāl" is the failed 654 combined land and sea assault on Constantinople described by pseudo-Sebēos.

The primary concern in this essay is to redate "Min Abī al-ʿIyāl"—which Wellhausen erroneously dated to the early 40s/660s (after the first civil war)—to the period 28–35/649–56. The identities of the addressees, Muʿāwiya, ʿAmr, and Ibn Saʿd, help date the poem, as do its references to the post (*barīd*) system, Islamic months, and religious language. First,

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36. Cosentino, "Constans II," 590; Zuckerman, "Learning from the Enemy," 114–15. Cosentino, at 591, gives details on a neglected reference, apparently to a combined land and sea assault, in the Greek Apocalypse of Daniel.

37. Keaney, *ʿUthman Ibn ʿAffan*, 83–84.

however, I will show that the *muʿāraḍa* between Abū al-ʿIyāl and Badr establishes the geographical setting as Egypt, while Abū al-ʿIyāl's elegy for his cousin indicates that his tribe or military unit was almost certainly involved in an assault on a Byzantine city.

Abū al-ʿIyāl and Badr b. ʿĀmir in Egypt

Of the three sets of texts relevant to the Egypt-based Hudhayl tribe's potential involvement in a Constantinople campaign (the *muʿāraḍa* between Abū al-ʿIyāl and Badr, Abū al-ʿIyāl's elegy for his cousin, and the epistle poem to Muʿāwiya), this section deals with the first two. The epistle poem is of more direct historical relevance, but the *muʿāraḍa* and the elegy provide valuable indirect information on the tribe's social life, presence in Egypt, and religious culture. The *muʿāraḍa*, in particular, is of more literary than historical interest, and even within that realm it is not, in truth, all that interesting. Methodologically, however, it needs to be carefully situated intertextually, as medieval editors' glosses cannot be taken at face value.

Abū al-ʿIyāl has a short biography (*tarjama*) in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/967).[38] The information given by Abū al-Faraj on his subjects is sometimes picaresque, but in this case some of the details he provides are corroborated by the texts of the poems. If Abū al-ʿIyāl had a given name besides his unusual agnomen (which means "the children's father"), it is not recorded. His father's name is given as Ibn Abī Ghuthayr, Ibn Abī ʿUtayr, Ibn Abī ʿAntara, or Ibn Abī ʿAnbar, all of which are orthographic variants, indicating multiple written transmissions of the material.[39] Abū al-ʿIyāl converted along with the rest of Hudhayl after the conquest of Mecca and moved to Egypt during the reign of ʿUmar (thus between 18/639 and 24/644).[40] Some members of his family, at least, were involved in combat against the Byzantines. The poetic exchange between Badr and Abū al-ʿIyāl was supposedly motivated by the death of the latter's nephew, who was a bystander during a fight; in the aftermath of the death, Abū al-ʿIyāl suspected that Badr would oppose his interests, presumably in seeking vengeance or negotiating bloodwite.[41]

Prose lore (*akhbār*) such as this anecdote and the accompanying poetic citations were clearly often transmitted separately and then reassembled by compilers.[42] As such, a prose

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38. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2008), 24:106–10. A few more references can be found in Régis Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe des origines à la fin du XVᵉ siècle de J.-C.* (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1952), 2:280.

39. The first two variants are found in Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sukkarī, *Sharḥ Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-ʿUrūba, 1963), 407; al-Sukkarī cites al-Aṣmaʿī for "ʿUtayr." The latter two are given by al-Iṣfahānī in *Aghānī*, 24:107.

40. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 24:108. Al-Sukkarī also states in his introductory comment to Badr's and Abū al-ʿIyāl's poems that they settled in Egypt (*Ashʿār*, 407). Abū al-Faraj cites Abū ʿAmr al-Shaybānī (ca. 93–210/712–825) as the lone source (*khāṣṣatan*) asserting that Abū al-ʿIyāl himself fought in the Byzantine expeditions that were led by Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya and in which ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Zurāra al-Kilābī (d. ca. 50/670) died. Abū ʿAmr thus places the events Abū al-ʿIyāl refers to in the context of the later siege of Constantinople in 48/668 (or thereabouts).

41. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 24:108–9.

42. Wellhausen noticed this about the Hudhalī battle lore (*ayyām*) material: Julius Wellhausen, *Skizzen und*

account (*khabar*) and its poem can often be considered independent sources, and the details of the *khabar* have little historical value unless confirmed by the poetic texts.[43] Al-Sukkarī comments that Badr and Abū al-ʿIyāl lived in Egypt, but the only poetic evidence for this claim is a line in their *muʿāraḍa* in which Abū al-ʿIyāl describes the two of them as "two brothers from two branches of Hudhayl that have come west (*gharrabā*), like a lofty mountain whose roots stretched far below the ground."[44] It is difficult to interpret the westward movement denoted by *gharrabā* as indicating anything other than settlement in Egypt. Furthermore, other evidence from *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn* points to Egypt as Hudhayl's primary area of activity during the conquests and the Umayyad period. Another Hudhalī poet from Khunāʿa, Abū al-ʿIyāl's clan, complains of having been left behind in Arabia while his family has gone to Egypt (*Miṣr*).[45] Still another Hudhalī, Abū Ṣakhr, declares that some kin "have left Tihāma, our land, and for Mecca have exchanged Babylon (Bāb al-Yūn)," referring to the Byzantine name for the Egyptian fortress adjacent to which the Muslim garrison of Fusṭāṭ was established.[46] These poetic references to Hudhayl in Egypt are corroborated by Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871), the chronicler of the Egyptian conquests, who mentions the location of Hudhayl's quarter in early Fusṭāṭ.[47]

The texts of the *muʿāraḍa* between Badr and Abū al-ʿIyāl make absolutely no reference to the narrative of a slain nephew, so there is no reason to accept the latter as the poems' subject. About Badr b. ʿĀmir nothing is recorded beyond his interaction with Abū al-ʿIyāl. If we examine the eight poems exchanged between them on their own merits, they consist of an amicable introductory overture by Badr, six poems whose course of alternating boasts and deprecation is largely dictated by rhetorical play on a set of shared images, and, finally, a threat of violence by Abū al-ʿIyāl: "You will taste the edge of a sheathed sword, stowed away [until now]."[48] It is impossible, of course, to know how seriously to take this conclusion.

It is in the first poem, Badr's overture, that we find a reference to siege warfare. The bipartite *qaṣīda* is introduced with an eight-line amatory prelude (*nasīb*) addressed to Fuṭayma; most of this is occupied by the speaker's boast about the many pathless deserts he has crossed. Lines 9–15 then conclude with praise of Abū al-ʿIyāl as a fortress and then a lion (I omit the latter segment from my translation):

Vorarbeiten, vol. 1, *Lieder der Hudhailiten, Arabisch und Deutsch* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1884), 107ff. and passim. Werner Caskel observed the same thing, describing some lines of poetry as "yanked in by the hair" in the service of prose anecodotes: Werner Caskel, *Ǧamharat an-nasab: Das genealogische Werk des Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 60–61.

43. Julius Wellhausen, "*Carmina Hudsailitarum* ed. Kosegarten Nr. 56 und 75," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 26 (1912): 287–94, at 288.

44. Al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 411.

45. Ibid., 758.

46. Ibid., 971.

47. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 117, 120, 141.

48. Al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 423.

[al-kāmil]

٩   وَأَبُو ٱلْعِيالِ أَخِي وَمَنْ يَعْرِضْ لَهُ   مِنْكُمْ بِسُوءٍ يُؤْذِنِي وَيَسُونِي

9.   Abū al-ʿIyāl is my brother, so whoever among you does ill
        to him injures and harms me—

١٠   إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ أَبَا ٱلْعِيالِ وَرَهْطَهُ   كَٱلْحِصْنِ شِيدَ بِآجُرٍ مَوْضُونِ

10.   I have found Abū al-ʿIyāl and his clan
        to be like a fortress, built with well-laid baked brick[49]

١١   أَعْيَا ٱلْمَجانِيقَ ٱلدَّواهِيَ دُونَهُ   فَتَرَكْنَهُ وَأَبَرَّ بِٱلتَّحْصِينِ

11.   before which calamitous mangonels fail,
        so that they depart, and with its fortifications it prevails—[50]

Abū al-ʿIyāl rejects the overture in the following poem, comparing Badr to a losing horse, the expectations for which fail to match reality. He also accuses Badr of collaborating with unnamed adversaries.[51] Badr responds by describing his initial praise poem as a priceless gift that has been requited with an unproductive milch-camel. He reiterates another offer of a poem, which he compares to a fine pair of sandals, but he expects to be repaid with a similar poem.[52] Abū al-ʿIyāl takes up the camel and sandal imagery to heap scorn on Badr's poems, accusing him of disingenuousness.[53] Badr rejects this charge and offers reconciliation, blaming Abū al-ʿIyāl for their disharmony.[54] In this same round of the exchange, Badr also reveals a possible cause for the dispute, namely, that he has received some sort of advancement to the detriment of Abū al-ʿIyāl: "I would have loved for you, when I faltered and could not obtain lofty honor and its virtue, to have abetted me."[55] Abū al-ʿIyāl responds by demanding that Badr cease to participate in the exchange rather than continue to feign innocence.[56] Badr attempts to conclude by depicting Abū al-ʿIyāl as unduly affected by powerful rhetoric, before boasting of his own poetic abilities.[57] Abū al-ʿIyāl takes this assertion of rhetorical prowess as, again, an opportunity to blame Badr for an obsession with superficial meaning and thus for hypocrisy, before concluding with the threat mentioned above.

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49. Var. "rock," *jandal.*

50. Al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 409. I have also consulted the manuscript on which al-Farrāj's edition of al-Sukkarī's commentary is based, MS Leiden, Or. 549, fol. 50r.

51. Al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 410–12.

52. Ibid., 413–14.

53. Ibid., 414–16.

54. Ibid., 417.

55. Ibid., 417: *fa-wadadtu annaka idh wanaytu wa-lam anal | sharafa l-ʿalāʾi wa-faḍlahū takfīnī.*

56. Ibid., 418.

57. Ibid., 419–21.

It is difficult to know what to make of this exchange without knowing its context. Abū al-Faraj himself finds it overly lengthy (*yaṭūlu dikhruhā*) and unattractive (*laysat la-hā ṭulāwa*); he reports recording it only because of its usefulness as a specimen of Arabic (*al-faṣāḥa*) and because he could find nothing else attributed to Abū al-ʿIyāl.[58] It does, however, contain some allusions to biblical imagery and Levantine flora that should be noted in discussions of early Islamic culture. According to Joseph Hell, commenting on the conversion of the Hudhayl tribe, Badr and Abū al-ʿIyāl are examples of the first generation of converts, whose poetry makes no reference to the new religion; an Islamic sensibility (indicated by the appearance of technical terms such as *masjid* and *ṣalāḥ*) appears only in the following generation, which flourished between 29/650 and 81/700.[59] However, although Hell is correct that neither of the two poets seems very religious, the content of Abū al-ʿIyāl's poems, together with his reference to *al-kitāb al-munzal* (the revealed scripture, discussed below), perhaps points toward the henotheistic but pre-Islamic Arabian religious culture that the earliest Muslims manifested.[60] In accusing Badr of hypocrisy, Abū al-ʿIyāl compares him to a hungry, sallow-faced man who smears his face with oil to appear healthy. This allusion, an inversion of Matthew 6:16–18, would not be so conspicuous if in the next line he did not refer to a proverbially small mustard-seed (*mithqāl ḥabbati khardal*), which appears in both the Quran and the New Testament.[61] Badr, like the scriptures to which he alludes, invokes olive trees along with his vast range of vocabulary derived from the ethos and lifeways of Arabian camel nomadism.[62]

Such references to flora, religious doctrine, and mangonels (and the incorporation of the non-Arabic word for them, *majānīq*), provide a small glimpse into the social history of

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58. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 24:111.

59. Joseph Hell, "Der Islam und die Huḏailitendichtungen," in *Festschrift Georg Jacob zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Theodor Menzel, 80–93 (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1932), at 88.

60. Patricia Crone refers to the pre-Islamic henotheists as "pagan monotheists" in a nuanced discussion in "The Religion of the Qurʾānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica* 57, no. 2 (2010): 151–200. By "henotheism," I do not mean that Abū al-ʿIyāl recognized lesser deities, but rather that whatever doctrinal distinctiveness his monotheism had was not yet very carefully defined as specifically Islamic. There was, as will be seen, a sense of a bounded and exclusive community defined by a revealed scripture, but he does not express any particular theological content that would have been constitutive of that community. He thus seems to represent a younger version of Nicolai Sinai's "quranic pagans"; see Nicolai Sinai, *Rain-Giver, Bone-Breaker, Score-Settler: Allāh in Pre-Quranic Poetry* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2019), esp. 57–63. Sinai concludes that there is significant overlap between the Quran's pagan opponents and pre-Islamic poets with regard to their respective conceptions of the personality of Allāh, albeit with significant exceptions explicable in part by their differing contexts—predominantly sedentary in the former and nomadic in the latter case. Another salient index of such background sensibilities (i.e., the reference to quasi-biblical proverbs) is Umayya b. Abī al-Ṣalt, on whom see Nicolai Sinai, "Religious Poetry from the Quranic Milieu: Umayya b. Abī l-Ṣalt on the Fate of the Thamūd," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74, no. 3 (2011): 397–416.

61. Al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 422, ll. 2–3; see Quran 21:47 and 31:16, as well as Matthew 13:31–32, 17:20; Mark 4:30–32; and Luke 13:18–19.

62. Al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 421, l. 6. On such agricultural imagery in the Quran, see Patricia Crone, "How Did the Quranic Pagans Make a Living?," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68, no. 3 (2005): 387–99. It is not actually immediately clear to me that olive trees could not be grown in the Hijaz, but they are never alluded to in Hudhayl's pre-Islamic poetry.

the period. Even if Badr and Abū al-ʿIyāl belonged to the convert generation, they fail to express much Islamic doctrine in their poetry, but they do demonstrate some conversance with sedentary culture—religious idioms, agriculture, and military affairs. All this illustrates a point that many scholars have now made: that the early adherents of what became Islam, nomadic pastoralists though many of them were, were probably already fairly well integrated into late antique Mediterranean culture, with all that it entailed. This, in turn, enabled the rapid assimilation of many elements of that culture during the conquest period.[63]

That Badr's passing reference to mangonels means these poets actually participated in frontier warfare with the Byzantines is confirmed by Abū al-ʿIyāl's elegy for his paternal cousin (*ibn ʿamm*) ʿAbd b. Zahra. Abū al-Faraj does not appear to have known of this text, although it is found in *Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*, and both Ibn Qutayba and al-Jāḥiẓ seem to consider it Abū al-ʿIyāl's best-known work.[64] The poem is fifty-three lines long and composed in the uncommon meter of *majzūʾ al-wāfir*, a truncated form of the much more common *wāfir* form. This may be interpreted as an accommodation of a traditional early meter to some new circumstance; in other settings, shorter meters were used for music.

Lines 1–9 describe first ʿAbd's bravery in battle and oratorical ability and then the speaker's emotional response using imagery of sickness, bereaved camel mares, and leaking waterskins that emblematize tears. Abū al-ʿIyāl then returns to praise of ʿAbd, who possessed a sound lineage, fed orphans, and participated in the war against Constantinople (ll. 11–20). The remainder of the poem focuses on ʿAbd's martial qualities: his lineage is manifest in his steadfast courage in battle (ll. 21–28); he fights well both ahorse (ll. 29–31) and afoot in heavy armor (ll. 32–33); his spear and sword are described (ll. 34–41); and ʿAbd is depicted mounted on horseback and rallying his men against the enemy before the final line: "[His loss is] a great affliction to his tribe (*qawmihī*); they have neither given nor taken any price (*thaman*) for it," meaning they have not received a bloodwite nor "given" vengeance (ll. 42–53).

The lines translated here contain what little detail the poem offers about its occasion:

[*wāfir*]

<div dir="rtl">

أَقامَ لَدَى مَدينَةِ آلِ قُسْطَنْطِينَ وَٱنْقَلَبوا   ١٤

</div>

14. He stood firm at the city of Constantine's
    people when others retreated—

<div dir="rtl">

أَلا لِلّهِ دَرُّكَ مِنْ فَتَى قَوْمٍ إذا رَهِبوا   ١٥

</div>

15. ah, by God, what a fighter for the tribe
    you are, when they took fright,

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63. For a summary of such scholars' views insofar as they relate to poetry, in particular, see Sinai's notes in *Rain-Giver*, 61–62.

64. Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, 2:280.

وَقالوا مَنْ فَتىً لِلثَغْرِ يَرْقُبْنا وَيَرْتَقِبُ ١٦

16. asking "who will venture forth
     at the front line to guard us and be on guard?"

فَلَمْ يُوجَدْ لِشُرْطَتِهِمْ فَتىً فِيهِمْ وَقَدْ نُدِبُوا ١٧

17. They'd been entrusted with the vanguard's banner
     but found no one to carry it.

فَكُنْتَ فَتاهُمُ فيها إذا تُدْعَى لَها تَثِبُ ١٨

18. But you were their man for it!
     When you were summoned, you leapt to it.[65]

These lines appear to describe an act of heroism during an attack on Constantinople, although the circumlocution "the city of Constantine's people" (*madīnat āl Qusṭanṭīn*) is unusual. Likewise, the agent of the verb *inqalabū*, "they retreated," is ambiguous and could be either the enemy or the Muslims. Evidently, at a critical moment in battle, when the Muslims' fortunes were waning, ʿAbd played a decisive role, leading the vanguard (*shurṭa*). Within the context of the poem, however, this description amounts to a set piece that showcases the bravery of the deceased, and the primary value of the poem for present purposes lies in connecting a relative of Abū al-ʿIyāl to a military expedition against Constantinople. It is also noteworthy that the values of militaristic virility extolled in this poem are largely tribal; the two sides in the battle are not represented in religio-ideological terms (with terms such as *kuffār*, for example).

According to their internal evidence, then, Abū al-ʿIyāl's poetic texts are representative of a member of the Islamic military in Egypt during the conquest period. From the perspective of social history, his *muʿāraḍa* with Badr sheds some light on the (limited) development of a doctrinally distinct monotheistic Islamic identity in this period. The *muʿāraḍa* is also perhaps indicative of social tensions, and, based on the elegy, Abū al-ʿIyāl's tribal-military unit was likely directly involved in efforts against Constantinople.

Abū al-ʿIyāl's Epistle to Muʿāwiya, ʿAmr, and Ibn Saʿd

However, the richest of Abū al-ʿIyāl's texts for confirming Hudhayl's involvement in the 33–34/654 defeat that pseudo-Sebēos describes is his epistle in verse to Muʿāwiya, which establishes the date and location of his activities more firmly. This poem contains a description of military disaster that appears to square well with pseudo-Sebēos's

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65. Al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 426; German translation by Rudolf Abicht, *Aśʿâru-l-Huḏalijjîna: Die Lieder der Dichter vom Stamme Hudail* (Namslau: O. Opitz, 1879), 39–41; MS Leiden, Or. 549 fol. 55r. Both the manuscript and the print edition represent the lines without a caesura, as I have. Although there is a metrical caesura, it is not very rigidly observed because of the short line (i.e., Arabic words are divided by the caesura), and its representation would have produced a text that is visually more difficult to read.

account of the Muslims' Anatolian land army's defeat following the failed naval assault on Constantinople. The addressees of the poem help date it. In particular, the reference to ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ, the governor of Egypt in the period leading up to the civil war and the primary naval commander at the Battle of the Masts, dates the poem to before 35/656. The epistle poem also expresses resentment toward Ibn Saʿd over the division of spoils, a grievance Abū al-ʿIyāl evidently shared with the Egyptian military delegation to Medina that was involved in ʿUthmān's assassination. These circumstantial connections suggest that the poem may have been generated in an attempt to justify Hudhayl's involvement in the assassination following a catastrophe at Constantinople.

The complete Arabic text of the poem, with translation, is given below.

Meter: *al-kāmil*
Rhyme: *-lū*
Source: al-Sukkarī, *Sharḥ Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*, 433–35 (= MS Leiden, Or. 549, fols. 57v–58r); al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 24:107–8 (with different line ordering)[66]

[Al-Sukkarī's gloss:] Abū al-ʿIyāl—he and some of his companions having been imprisoned in the land of the Romans in the time of Muʿāwiya—wrote an epistle (*kitāb*) to Muʿāwiya and read it out loud to the people. He said:

قَوْلِي وَلا تَتَجَمْجَموا ما أُرْسِلُ   مِن أَبي ٱلْعِيالِ أَبي هُذَيْلٍ فَٱسْمَعُوا   ١

1. From Abū al-ʿIyāl of Hudhayl: Listen [O messenger] to
   me speak and don't misspeak [the message] I send.[67]

يَهْوِي إِلَيْهِ بِها ٱلْبَرِيدُ الأَعْجَلُ   أَبْلِغْ مُعاوِيَةَ بْنَ صَخْرٍ آيَةً   ٢

2. Bring Muʿāwiya b. Ṣakhr a sign
   that the swiftest courier will fly to him with,

مِنّي يَلُوحُ بِها كِتابٌ مُنْمَلُ   وَٱلْمَرْءَ عَمْراً فَأْتِهِ بِصَحِيفَةٍ   ٣

3. and the lord ʿAmr, bring him a page
   from me, on which a finely penned script is visible,

أَزْرَى بِنا في قَسْمِهِ إِذْ يَعْدِلُ   وَإِلى ٱبْنِ سَعْدٍ إِنْ أُوَخِّرْهُ فَقَدْ   ٤

4. and to Ibn Saʿd—if I put him last
   it is because his dividing wronged us when he

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66. The references to Wellhausen's German translation in the notes that follow refer to Wellhausen, "*Carmina Hudsailitarum*," 287–88.

67. According to Abū al-Faraj, *lā tatajamjamū* means "don't suppress" (*lā taktumū*).

إِكْرَامَهُ وَلَقَدْ أَرَى ما يُفْعَلُ   في ٱلْقَسْمِ يَوْمَ ٱلْقَسْمِ ثُمَّ تَرَكْتُهُ   ٥

5.   divided unevenly on distribution day, but I let him go on
        and deferred to his dignity,[68] though I saw what he did—

حَيْثُ ٱلْبَقِيَّةُ وَٱلْكِتابُ ٱلْمُنْزَلُ   وَإِلى أُوْلِي ٱلْأَحْلامِ حَيْثُ لَقِيتَهُمْ   ٦

6.   and to whatever reasonable men you come to,
        the upright [among whom] the Scripture was revealed:[69]

مِن جانِبِ ٱلْأَمْراجِ يَوْماً يُسْأَلُ   أَنا لَقِينا بَعْدَكُمْ بِدِيارِنا   ٧

7.   after you [departed], we fought in our camp
        near the fields on a day that will be asked about,[70]

مُهَجُ ٱلنُّفُوسِ وَلَيْسَ عَنْهُ مَعْدِلُ   أَمْراً تَضِيقُ بِهِ ٱلصُّدُورُ وَدونَهُ   ٨

8.   an inescapable, chest-oppressing affair
        in which souls' blood [was shed]—

يَهْوِي كَعَزْلاءِ ٱلْمَزادَةِ تُزْغِلُ   في كُلِّ مُعْتَرَكٍ تَرَى مِنّا فَتَّى   ٩

9.   throughout the battle you see strong young fighters of ours
        falling and spurting like a waterskin's spout

أَوْ جانِحاً في صَدْرِ رُمْحٍ يَسْعُلُ   أَوْ سَيِّداً كَهْلاً يَمُورُ دِماغُهُ   ١٠

10.   and older sayyids spilling their brains
        while others are bent double, coughing [up blood] onto
        spear-shafts.

وَجُمادَيانِ وَجاءَ شَهْرٌ مُقْبِلُ   حَتَّى إِذا رَجَبٌ تَخَلَّى وَٱنْقَضَى   ١١

11.   And now Rajab has come and gone,
        and the two Jumādās, and the month of Shaʿbān

تِسْعاً نَعُدُّ لَها ٱلْوَفاءُ فَتَكْمُلُ   شَعْبانُ قَدَّرْنا لِوَقْتِ رَحِيلِهِمْ   ١٢

12.   has come, and we thought for nine full [nights]
        that we counted that their army had left.

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68. *Taraktuhū ikrāmahū.* Wellhausen: "ehre ich ihn nicht mehr." Al-Sukkarī: *yaqūl: akramtuhū fa-lam ashkuhū wa-lam ahjuh.*

69. Wellhausen: "die guten Alten und Korankenner." He thus reads the line as referring to two authoritative groups, usually referred to as *al-ashrāf* and *al-qurrāʾ* in other sources. Although this reading is eminently plausible, on the evidence of the text alone the speaker seems to be referring metonymically to Muslims as an exclusive group.

70. Wellhausen reads *diyār* as "Lager." It is possible that al-Amrāj is a toponym, but it is not found in the usual references and Wellhausen has no suggestion. I am tempted to read it as *amwāj* (the waves) in order to provide a coastal location.

١٣ وَتَجَرَّدَتْ حَرْبٌ يَكونُ جِلاؤُها عَلَقاً وَيَمْرِيها ٱلْغَوِيُّ ٱلْمُبْطِلُ

13. [But suddenly] a battle broke out that milked blood,
       at the hands of a false and deceitful [enemy]—[71]

١٤ فَٱسْتَقْبَلوا طَرَفَ ٱلصَّعيدِ إِقامَةً طَوْراً وَطَوْراً رِحْلَةٌ فَتَنَقَّلوا

14. [then] they headed [back] to the edge of the open area, halting
       at times and at times moving on, until they departed.

١٥ فَتَرى ٱلنِّبالَ تَعيرُ في أَقْطارِنا شُمُساً كَأَنَّ نِصالَهُنَّ ٱلسُّنْبُلُ

15. The arrows were whizzing around us,
       their heads like wheat spikes, leaping,

١٦ وَتَرى ٱلرِّماحَ كَأَنَّما هِيَ بَيْنَنا أَشْطانُ بِئْرٍ يُوغِلونَ وَنُوغِلُ

16. and the spears were like [taut] well-ropes
       as they stabbed at us and we stabbed back.

Unlike in his elegy for ʿAbd, here Abū al-ʿIyāl appears to be speaking quite biographically and historically—the poem is what Alfred Bloch called a *Botschaftsgedicht*, a reusable structure employing message formulae such as *abligh . . . āyatan*.[72] The names employed and the sequence of months given encourage a reading of the message structure either as authentic in a documentary sense or, more probably, as an authentic record of a genuine Hudhalī tribal objection preserved in the wake of a real historical event. There is no indication within the text that the speaker is imprisoned, as al-Sukkarī's note indicates, although it remains plausible. Most significantly, though, the abject and violent defeat at the hands of the Christians that is described in the poem is unembellished, a very infrequent occurrence in comparison with stereotyped poetic boasts about similar events, lending significant credibility to the piece.[73] Also, as in the elegy for ʿAbd, the enemy is not described in religious terms.

The reference to the postal routes (*al-barīd al-aʿjal*) is potentially historically significant, although not positively valuable in terms of dating. The term *barīd* has often been said to have its roots in the Latin *veredus* or Greek *beredos*, meaning "post horse," and the system is thought to have been inherited from the Byzantines.[74] The truth is more diffuse. By the

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71. *Wa-yamrīhā l-ghawiyyu l-mubṭilū.* Wellhausen: "und Melker des Kampfes waren verzweifelt heldenhafte Männer." Typically, neither *ghawī* nor *mubṭil* have positive connotations, so I take this as referring rather to the enemy, who seem to have surprised the Muslims.

72. Alfred Bloch, "Qaṣīda," *Asiatische Studien* 2 (1948): 106–32. For a summary and comments on the possible role of this genre in the development and social role of early Arabic poetry, see Ewald Wagner, *Grundzüge der klassischen arabischen Dichtung: Die altarabische Dichtung*, vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1987), 68, 122.

73. Wellhausen, too, notes the stylistic discrepancy between this piece and the triumphalist one for ʿAbd (Wellhausen, "*Carmina Hudsailitarum*," 288).

74. D. Sourdel, "Barīd," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

Byzantine period, the imperial Roman system had largely given way to the militarized, horse-based system, the *Cursus Velox* (the "swift route," so called because it was faster than the *Cursus Publicus*), which was not so dependent on wheeled vehicles and a well-maintained road system.[75] Both this system and Persian ones were well known in Arabia by the time of Islam's emergence. As Adam Silverstein has demonstrated, the word *barīd* meaning post routes is attested in sixth-century CE Sabaic inscriptions as well as pre-Islamic poetry.[76] Thus, despite the fact that the later Islamic historiographical tradition assigns the *barīd*'s creation to the caliph Muʿāwiya, it evidently predates him.[77] The earliest papyrus evidence, from 49/669, does show Muʿāwiya reforming the postal system, and this reform may have begun in Egypt as early as 38/658 during his rule there.[78] More interestingly still, the term used here, *al-barīd al-aʿjal*, resembles nothing so much as a calque of the Latin *Cursus Velox*—used in the context of military conflict with the Roman army.[79] If these are all coincidences, they are striking ones.

Wellhausen takes "Min Abī al-ʿIyāl" to refer to one of the expeditions to southeast Asia Minor that began after the first civil war, under now-caliph Muʿāwiya, in 42 or 43/662 or 663, citing Theophanes and al-Ṭabarī.[80] He understands the poem's addressees as Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān, whose father Ṣakhr (Abū Sufyān) is named directly in the text; the famous conquest-era military leader ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ; and ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ, the governor of Egypt under ʿUthmān (r. 23–35/644–56).[81] These identifications are compelling, but Wellhausen takes ʿAmr's death in 43/664 as the poem's *terminus ante quem*. The poem cannot, however, have been composed during the early part of Muʿāwiya's caliphate in the early 40s/660s, because Ibn Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ's death in the late 30s/650s, probably in 36/656–57, provides an earlier *terminus ante quem*. This will be discussed further below, but the episode must refer to Muʿāwiya's campaigns against the Byzantines while he and Ibn Saʿd were governors of Syria and Egypt, respectively, under ʿUthmān in the early to mid-30s/650s.

According to the military narrative recounted in the poem, the speaker and his fellow soldiers were part of a Muslim contingent left behind in Byzantine territory after the withdrawal of a larger force; this perhaps took place at the end of a summer campaign. If the dates are correct, and if we assume a Hijrī date of 34 (654–55 CE), the months named in the poem (Rajab, Jumādā I and II, and Shaʿbān) correspond to the period from mid-November

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75. Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-modern Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 31, 35.

76. On the term's pre-Islamic attestations, especially the Marib dam inscription, see Adam J. Silverstein, "A New Source on the Early History of the Barīd," *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–3): 121–34. On the poetry, see idem, "A Neglected Chapter in the History of Caliphal State-Building," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30 (2005): 293–317.

77. So says al-ʿUmarī (d. 1349), quoted in Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, 53–54.

78. Jelle Bruning, "Developments in Egypt's Early Islamic Postal System (with an Edition of *P.Khalili* II 5)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 81, no. 1 (2018): 25–40, at 29.

79. Ibid., 56, n. 11.

80. Wellhausen, "*Carmina Hudsailitarum*," 289.

81. Ibid.

654 to mid-March 655. The speaker and his contingent were left surrounded by the enemy and were thus unable to withdraw. They suffered serious losses at this time. At a certain point, they thought that the enemy had withdrawn, only to suffer further losses in a surprise attack.[82]

Pseudo-Sebēos describes the Roman defeat of the Muslim land forces sent along with the naval expedition against Constantinople in 34/654 thus: "The other army, which was quartered in Cappadocia, attacked the Greek army. But the Greeks defeated [that Muslim force], and it fled to Aruastan pillaging Fourth Armenia. After the autumn had passed and winter was approaching, the army of Ismael came and took up quarters in Divin."[83] Pseudo-Sebēos's information is particularly compelling, because it involves interaction with Armenia, about which he was better informed than he was about Constantinopolitan affairs. Here, too, we have a Roman defeat of an army led by Muʿāwiya and some sort of botched retreat taking place during the autumn and early winter. All this maps very closely onto Abū al-ʿIyāl's poem. Abū al-ʿIyāl appears, like pseudo-Sebēos, to be describing a group isolated and pinned down by the Romans somewhere in Anatolia.

Of the poem's three addressees, the identity of Muʿāwiya is fairly self-evident, but it is worth observing that no caliphal title is used for him. As this is a poetic text, it is possible that it is elided for metrical reasons, but given the expanded insult against Ibn Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ and the space devoted to the description of the *barīd*, the composer of the text should have had no difficulty including a title, if he had been so disposed. On the face of it, then, this reference to Muʿāwiya would indicate that the poem was composed before he began to use the caliphal title *amīr al-muʾminīn* around 40–41/660–61 and thus before 35/656, when ʿUthmān was assassinated and raids against Byzantium paused.[84]

That "ʿAmr" refers to ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ is perhaps the least obvious.[85] He is addressed as *al-marʾ*, which, if taken to mean "the man," the typical dictionary definition of the word, appears dismissive. However, the root m-r-ʾ is also a metathesis of ʾ-m-r, and cognates in Hatran Aramaic, Syriac, and Sabaic all attest to meanings similar to *amīr*, namely, "lord, suzerain, social superior," a meaning that seems to be attested with some frequency in early Arabic as well.[86] There is thus no need to transfer the clearly hostile sentiment expressed

82. Ibid.

83. Pseudo-Sebēos, *History*, 146; the bracketed addition is mine.

84. Andrew Marsham surveys sources that give a range of dates from 37 to 41/658 to 661 and plausibly suggests that Muʿāwiya was recognized as caliph locally in Syria in 658 before his widely recognized accession in 661; Andrew Marsham, "The Architecture of Allegiance in Early Islamic Late Antiquity: The Accession of Muʿāwiya in Jerusalem, ca. 661 CE," in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, and Maria G. Parani, 87–112 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), esp. 90–97. Khaled Keshk believes Muʿāwiya began asserting his claim to the caliphate from 36/656: Khaled Keshk, "When Did Muʿāwiya Become Caliph?," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 69, no. 1 (2010): 31–42.

85. Al-Sukkarī notes in his commentary, "I believe (*aẓunnu*) this is ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ": al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 433.

86. See, for example, A. F. L. Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary/Dictionnaire Sabéen* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters; Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982), s.v. MRʾ; Greg Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 34, 42, 55.

toward Ibn Saʿd onto ʿAmr. ʿAmr had no known public role from 28/648–49 (at the latest), when he was removed from the governorship of Egypt by ʿUthmān, until he joined Muʿāwiya early on in the civil war and famously participated in the battle of Ṣiffīn in 37/657.[87] He probably spent most of the intervening years (between 648 and 657) in Palestine, where he had an estate called ʿAjlān near Ascalon.[88] In 38/658, he was reappointed to the governorship of Egypt by Muʿāwiya during the civil war, and he remained in this post until his death in 43/664.[89] Although he is not known to have held a leadership role at the time of the events to which Abū al-ʿIyāl's poem refers, this does not mean he had none.[90] After all, the Muslim sources do not record a 33–34/654 assault on Constantinople either. In the poem, ʿAmr is identified only by his first name, which is also how he is referred to by the seventh-century chronicler John of Nikiu (d. ca. 693) and by conquest-era papyri.[91] Given the association of Abū al-ʿIyāl with Egypt, as established above, the identification of ʿAmr as ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ is highly plausible.

Ibn Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ's identity is the most crucial for our purposes, since his death around 36/656–57 provides the earliest possible *terminus ante quem* for the poem.[92] Ibn Saʿd and ʿAmr were both Qurashī contemporaries of the Prophet and had a close relationship with each other at least from the time of the conquest of Egypt (which took place primarily between 18/639 and 21/642), if not earlier. Ibn Saʿd was in charge of the right wing (*al-maymana*) of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ's army; when Fusṭāṭ was apportioned out to the first conquerors (*ahl al-rāya*), Ibn Saʿd had a palace among them; and the families of ʿAmr and Ibn Saʿd pastured their flocks together.[93] Following the conquests, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb appointed Ibn Saʿd over the Ṣaʿīd, by which is meant Fayoum specifically, not the modern sense of "upper Egypt"; this region included cities such as Aswān that were still under Nubian control at the time.[94] ʿUmar was assassinated in 23/644, and the subsequent

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87. For the dates of his removal from office, see Michael Lecker, "The Estates of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ in Palestine: Notes on a New Negev Arabic Inscription," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 52, no. 1 (1989): 24–37, at 29.

88. Jeffrey A. Blakely, "Ajlan: Locating the Estate of Amr b. al-As," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 73, no. 4 (2010): 210–22; Lecker, "Estates of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ."

89. Lecker, "Estates of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ," 29. For ʿAmr and Muʿāwiya's agreement to cooperate at the beginning of the civil war, see Andrew Marsham, "The Pact (*Amāna*) between Muʿāwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān and ʿAmr Ibn al-ʿĀṣ (656 or 658): 'Documents' and the Islamic Historical Tradition," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 58, no. 1 (2012): 69–96.

90. According to a report in al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh* that appears highly anecdotal (1:2932), ʿAmr was involved in a session of governors and other leaders, also including Muʿāwiya and Ibn Saʿd, that ʿUthmān convened in Medina to discuss rebel demands in the year 34 AH.

91. Trombley, "Fiscal Documents," 6; Petra M. Sijpesteijn, "Amr," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall et al., 383–84 (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2012); L. S. B. MacCoull, "BM 1079, *CPR* IX 44, and the *Chrysargyron*," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 100 (1994): 139–43.

92. The commentary is obscure on his identity, stating only that he was a Meccan and a Qurashī: al-Sukkarī, *Ashʿār*, 434.

93. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 58, 93, 110–11, 141. If I read him correctly, he also states that Ibn Saʿd was part of ʿAmr's *shurṭa* at one point (233).

94. ʿUmar appointed him over "Ṣaʿīd Fayyūm": ibid., 173–74. Al-Kindī simply mentions the "Ṣaʿīd" and places Ibn Saʿd's death "at end of the reign of ʿUmar," thus around 23/644: Abū ʿUmar Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Kindī,

sequence of events in Egypt is confused. ʿUthmān may have appointed Ibn Saʿd over all of Egypt at this point before recalling ʿAmr briefly to deal with the Byzantine-supported revolt in Alexandria in 24–25/645–46.[95] At any rate, early in ʿUthmān's reign, some time between 25/646 and 28/649, Ibn Saʿd was given full control over Egypt.

The historical memory of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ and Ibn Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ in Egypt affected reports about their relationship. In secondary literature it is often portrayed as negative, but there is in fact little evidence for this. One anecdote, in particular, has been cited frequently as evidence of their mutual disdain.[96] Following ʿAmr's restoration of Alexandria to Muslim control, ʿUthmān proposed that ʿAmr retain authority over military affairs while Ibn Saʿd is put in charge of taxation. ʿAmr complained that this would be like holding onto the horns of a cow while another milked it.[97] Ibn Saʿd was then given the governorship over all Egypt. In the context of this transition, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, writing in the third/ninth century (or perhaps his source Layth b. Saʿd, writing in the 120s/740s), refers to an account preserved in his day by the descendants (*āl*) of Ibn Saʿd. According to the story, Ibn Saʿd, addressing ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ, magnanimously (or sarcastically?) offered to divide Egypt between ʿAmr and ʿAmr's son, appointing ʿAmr over the Delta and ʿAbd Allāh over Upper Egypt, without, he pointedly adds, "envying" them as they had him.[98] The role of ʿAmr's son in the anecdote and that of Ibn Saʿd's descendants in transmitting it point to later contentions between the two families. These contentions left their mark in the historiographical record as tendentious tropes about dividing up Egypt similar to the cow anecdote. The assumption that the cow anecdote conveys any real information about the relationship between ʿAmr and Ibn Saʿd should thus probably be discarded.[99]

Ibn Saʿd's tenure as governor was marked by numerous military accomplishments. Around 27/647–48 (with perhaps a second campaign in 33/653–54) he continued the push west to Ifrīqiyā initiated by ʿAmr, killing the patrician Gregory, the (rebel) leader of

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The Governors and Judges of Egypt or Kitâb el-'umarâ' (el-wulâh) wa Kitâb el-Qudâh of el-Kindî, ed. Rhuvon Guest (Leiden: Brill; London: Luzac, 1912), 10.

95. This is the impression one gets from both al-Balādhurī and al-Kindī: Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-buldān = Liber expugnationis regionum auctore Imámo Ahmed ibn Jahja ibn Djábir al-Beládsorí*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 223; al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāh wa-l-quḍāh*, 10.

96. See, for example, Alfred J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 489; Martin Hinds, "The Murder of the Caliph ʿUthmân," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, no. 4 (1972): 453, n. 6; Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 61; Keaney, *ʿUthman Ibn ʿAffan*, 68.

97. One version of the quotation is found in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 178; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 223.

98. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 174. On Layth b. Saʿd, see Edward Zychowicz-Coghill, *The First Arabic Annals: Fragments of Umayyad History* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021).

99. Al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh* (1:2818–19) also contains a description of their mutual disdain, but with a different funny anecdote. In it, an enraged ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ, having been removed from office, goes to see ʿUthmān, wearing a cotton-stuffed cloak (*jubba*). ʿUthmān asks, "What is your cloak stuffed with?" ʿAmr answers, "ʿAmr." ʿUthmān replies, "I knew it was stuffed with ʿAmr; I didn't mean that. I was asking whether it was stuffed with cotton or something else?"

Byzantine Africa;[100] in 31/651–52 he pushed into Nubia as far as Dongola (in present-day northern Sudan), agreed to a truce, and inaugurated what would prove a long-lasting diplomatic status quo;[101] and he participated in Muʿāwiya's naval expeditions in the Mediterranean against Cyprus in 28/649 and later as the naval commander at the Battle of the Masts in 34/654–55.[102]

Two aspects of all this activity are relevant. First, it shows that Ibn Saʿd was heavily involved in the naval activity coordinated by Muʿāwiya in the early 30s/650s while the latter was governor of Syria, beginning with Arwād, continuing through Cyprus and Rhodes, and culminating, as I am arguing here, in a planned siege of Constantinople. As Abū al-ʿIyāl was based in Egypt but addressed the governors of both Syria and Egypt in his poem, the eastern Mediterranean naval campaign of 28–34/649–55 is the most plausible context for the battle he describes. Egypt supported the expedition with its tax revenues, maritime expertise, and shipbuilding facilities. Pseudo-Sebēos reports that the Muslims "prepared warships in Alexandria and all the coastal cities" for the 33–34/654 attack on Constantinople, and papyri amply document Egypt playing an identical naval staging role later, in the 40s/660s.[103]

Second, during the Ifrīqiyā campaign or campaigns, the spoils were apparently divided according to some centrally imposed policy, provoking the ire of the Egyptian military in an anticipation of the eventual murder of ʿUthmān. Two historiographical tendencies are discernible in descriptions of Ibn Saʿd's fiscal measures. In the chronicle tradition, al-Ṭabarī gives voice to an oppositional or critical tendency while Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam represents a more favorable one. Martin Hinds has analyzed the critical tendency as the expression of the "early-comers" or longtimers in the Muslim military, under the initial leadership of ʿAmr, whose status and privileges deteriorated in the face of the influx of new Muslim military contingents and increasing central control over taxation and salaries.[104] Alfred Butler observed long ago that the negative attitudes recorded toward Ibn Saʿd derived from his enforcement of ʿUthmān's more rigorous taxation policies, a point noted by Severus b. al-Muqaffaʿ, a later Coptic Christian source, as well.[105]

At issue in the disagreement over the Ifrīqiyā spoils was a directive from ʿUthmān that,

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100. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:2813–19; al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāh wa-l-quḍāh*, 12; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 183–85; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 226–28. It is noteworthy that al-Balādhurī connects (probably apocryphally) the famous Hudhalī poet Abū Dhuʾayb to Ibn Saʿd's campaign against Roman Africa. For some reason al-Balādhurī includes a fabulous number of prominent *tābiʿūn* in his account, including but not limited to Maʿbad b. ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭallib, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ.

101. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāh wa-l-quḍāh*, 12; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 237; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 188–89.

102. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:2826; al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāh wa-l-quḍāh*, 13; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 189–91.

103. Pseudo-Sebēos, *History*, 144; Clive Foss, "Egypt under Muʿāwiya Part I: Flavius Papas and Upper Egypt," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72, no. 1 (2009): 1–24; Foss, "Egypt under Muʿāwiya Part II."

104. Hinds, "Murder of the Caliph ʿUthmân."

105. Butler, *Arab Conquests of Egypt*, 459, 466–67, esp. 489, n. 1; B. Evetts, ed. and trans., *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria II: Peter I to Benjamin (661)*, (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1904), 501.

according to al-Ṭabarī, allowed Ibn Saʿd to personally retain a fifth of the caliph's fifth. His men rejected this arrangement, and Ibn Saʿd eventually reversed his stance.[106] However, this question of the division of spoils is one of several points that were remembered in two opposing ways in the historiographical record. Whereas al-Ṭabarī records the critical version, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam merely lists those who benefited from Ibn Saʿd's generosity on the Ifrīqiyā campaign.[107] The same is true of descriptions of another grievance—that Ibn Saʿd forced converted Muslims (*al-mawālī*) to pay the *jizya*: this was evidently held against him as an offence to piety by al-Ṭabarī's sources, whereas Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam reports that Ibn Saʿd himself had his own *mawālī* pay (only) the *kharāj*.[108] In point of fact, the term *kharāj* is absent from documentary sources from the Umayyad period, so Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam's anachronism here is of value primarily as a positive representation of Ibn Saʿd's memory.[109] In general, the Iraqi historiographical tradition, represented by al-Ṭabarī, views Ibn Saʿd as a participant in ʿUthmān's "nepotism"; according to al-Ṭabarī, ʿUthmān's murderers listed Ibn Saʿd as one of the members of ʿUthmān's entourage (*biṭāna*) who benefited from the latter's "favoritism" (*al-takhayyur*).[110]

Abū al-ʿIyāl shares the critical view of Ibn Saʿd, and we thus see him (ll. 4–5) deliberately place Ibn Saʿd last in his list of addressees and accuse him of injustice in dividing spoils (*al-qasm*). Although the poem need not necessarily reference the Ifrīqiyā campaign, in particular, Abū al-ʿIyāl is clearly tapping into the same vein of moral indignation about centralized fiscal rigor described by Butler and Hinds and embodied in the complaints recorded by al-Ṭabarī and Severus. Abū al-ʿIyāl, as a Hudhalī, seems to fit squarely into the demographic of the Egyptian military whose hostility to Ibn Saʿd and ʿUthmān culminated in the latter's assassination. According to Abū al-Faraj, Abū al-ʿIyāl emigrated to Egypt under ʿUmar. Even if Hudhayl were not members of ʿAmr's initial force drawn from different tribes, the "Ahl al-Rāya," the tribe had areas (*khiṭaṭ*) apportioned to it in Fusṭāṭ near the Rāya.[111] The Hudhalīs were thus part of Hinds' "old guard" of "Egyptian early-comers."[112] These early-comers suffered under Ibn Saʿd, as ever more contingents were allocated space in Fusṭāṭ and new conquests leading to settlement expansion failed to materialize.[113]

The death of Ibn Saʿd is interesting for two reasons: its date limits the window of Abū al-ʿIyāl's Mediterranean misadventures to the period directly preceding the civil war, and its location (Ascalon) seems to imply a closer connection with ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ than is

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106. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:2814.

107. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 184–85.

108. Ibid., 146. On this complaint against Ibn Saʿd, see Hinds, "Murder of the Caliph ʿUthmân," 457.

109. Marie Legendre, "Caliphal Estates and State Policy over Landholding: Theory and Practice between Literary and Documentary Evidence from Early Islamic Egypt," in *Authority and Control in the Countryside: From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6th–10th Century)*, ed. Alain Delattre, Petra M. Sijpesteijn, and Marie Legendre, 392–419 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), at 405, 409.

110. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:2981.

111. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 118.

112. Hinds, "Murder of the Caliph ʿUthmân," 452, 456.

113. Ibid., 460.

depicted in the chronicles, particularly al-Ṭabarī's. The accounts of Ibn Saʿd's activities as he attempted to alternately intervene with the angry Egyptians and warn his foster brother ʿUthmān of the danger he was in, shuttling between Medina and Egypt, are in some cases quite anecdotal.[114] But the upshot is that on one of these trips, Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥudhayfa, who had seized power in Egypt in his absence, prevented Ibn Saʿd from returning there. On hearing that ʿUthmān had been killed, Ibn Saʿd then headed to Ascalon, according to both the Egyptian historian Abū ʿUmar al-Kindī (d. 350/961) and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam.[115] Fascinatingly, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ's primary estates, as noted above, were at ʿAjlān, which is probably around present-day Khirbet Ajlan near Tell el-Hesi, 20 km southeast of Ascalon.[116] There were presumably some other sights to see in Ascalon, but the fact that Abū al-ʿIyāl names ʿAmr and Ibn Saʿd in one breath and that shortly thereafter we find Ibn Saʿd seeking refuge from a world-shattering crisis within an easy day's ride of ʿAjlān probably indicates that Ibn Saʿd had maintained close contact with ʿAmr.[117] ʿAmr was thus most likely playing some political role after his dismissal from the governorship of Egypt in 28/648–49; the enmity between him and Ibn Saʿd is an historiographical chimera; and it makes perfect sense that they would be named together by Abū al-ʿIyāl.

It is ultimately only in the date of Ibn Saʿd's death where Wellhausen's analysis of Abū al-ʿIyāl's poem must be decisively revised. He believed al-Ṭabarī's claim that Ibn Saʿd had been at Ṣiffīn in 37/657 and lived beyond it.[118] More recent scholars, particularly C. H. Becker and Gerald Hawting, have rejected this theory.[119] Indeed, every other primary source has Ibn Saʿd dying in Ascalon shortly after the assassination of ʿUthmān. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam gives the year 36/656–57, noting that he died before "the people collectively agreed upon Muʿāwiya" (*ijtimāʿ al-nās ʿalā Muʿāwiya*), meaning 40/660 or 41/661, when Sufyānid victory in the war cemented the family's hold on the caliphate.[120] Al-Kindī gives the same place

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114. According to al-Kindī (*Kitāb al-Wulāh wa-l-quḍāh*, 14), in Rajab 35 (January 656) he went personally to Medina to deal with the discontent with ʿUthmān, but on the way back to Egypt he was refused entry (16). He then went to Ascalon and died there shortly after ʿUthmān's assassination on 12 Dhū al-Ḥijja 35 (1 June 656). As noted above (n. 90), al-Ṭabarī depicts him conferring with ʿUthmān alongside other governors and leaders over how to deal with the rebels. This meeting takes place in Medina. Al-Ṭabarī (*Taʾrīkh*, 1:2999) also has him attempt and fail to enter Egypt before heading to Palestine.

115. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāh wa-l-quḍāh*, 17; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 263.

116. This is according to Blakely, "Ajlan." Lecker, in "Estates of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ," proposes al-Sabʿ in Bayt Jibrīn/Beit Guvrin, 31 km east-southeast of Ascalon.

117. According to al-Ṭabarī (*Taʾrīkh*, 1:3235), he fled to Muʿāwiya in Damascus after hearing about ʿUthmān's death.

118. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:3269.

119. C. H. Becker, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.: "Shortly before the latter's march to Ṣiffīn, he died in Askalon or Ramla (in 36 or 37/656–8). His supposed participation in the battle of Ṣiffīn and his late death in the year 57/676–7 belong to the numberless myths connected with the battle of Ṣiffīn." Hawting cites this comment in his translation of al-Ṭabarī and states that "it is generally accepted that [Ibn Saʿd] died before Ṣiffīn and was not present there": Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The First Civil War: From the Battle of Ṣiffīn to the Death of ʿAlī*, trans. G. R. Hawting, vol. 17 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 15, n. 64.

120. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 263.

and date for Ibn Saʿd's death.[121] Al-Balādhurī, in *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, states that he died shortly after ʿUthmān's murder, and certainly before the caliphate of ʿAlī had come to an end.[122] Moreover, beyond a couple of references in al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Saʿd plays no role in Egyptian or Syrian politics after 37/656, corroborating the earlier date of death.[123]

To recapitulate, Abū al-ʿIyāl evidently lived in Egypt during the reigns of ʿAmr and Ibn Saʿd, while Muʿāwiya was governor of Syria. This in itself strongly supports Wellhausen's identification of these individuals in Abū al-ʿIyāl's poem. Two additional factors increase the certainty that the Ibn Saʿd in the poem is ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ. Both Abū al-ʿIyāl and the historiographical tradition link Ibn Saʿd to controversy over the division of spoils and a strict fiscal policy. And Ibn Saʿd (like Abū al-ʿIyāl himself, as we know from his elegy for his cousin ʿAbd) was heavily involved in Muʿāwiya's Mediterranean naval campaigns. By using ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ's latest death date of 37/658 and the chronology of Muslim military activity under Muʿāwiya as governor of Syria, the poem can be dated to the period between 28/649 and 35/656. The only question that remains is in which battle did Abū al-ʿIyāl and his comrades suffer so horrifically.

Conclusion

Abū al-ʿIyāl's epistle, then, is a complaint directed at Muʿāwiya as well as ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ and ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ, whose death date of ca. 37/658 provides the initial *terminus ante quem* for the poem; this can be further moved two years earlier to 35/656, when Muslim military activity against Byzantium paused with the onset of the first civil war. Abū al-ʿIyāl's exchange with Badr shows that his unit was based in Egypt. Since Abū al-ʿIyāl also elegizes a cousin who died in the campaign against the Byzantines, the epistle to Muʿāwiya probably, though not certainly, refers to the same engagement. It cannot be said with certainty that Abū al-ʿIyāl is referring in both cases to the land army Muʿāwiya personally led that withdrew from Chalcedon following the naval defeat outside Constantinople as reported by pseudo-Sebēos, but it would make a great deal of sense.

A few caveats are in order. I have dated Abū al-ʿIyāl's epistle to between 649 and 656 in conjunction with the argument that ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ was still politically active after his dismissal from the governorship of Egypt around 28/648–49. I have used 28/649, the apparent date of the attack on Cyprus, which involved both Ibn Saʿd and Muʿāwiya, as a starting point. However, it is conceivable that the poem was in fact written significantly earlier, before 28 AH, when ʿAmr was still governor. There is, moreover, nothing to prevent its being dated as early as the invasion of Egypt itself, in which case Muʿāwiya's assumption

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121. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāh wa-l-quḍāh*, 16.

122. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Jumal min Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ Ziriklī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), 3:161.

123. Discussions of Egypt and Syria in the immediate aftermath of ʿUthmān's assassination include Charles Pellat, "Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.; Giorgio Levi della Vida et al., "Il califfato di ʿAlī secondo il Kitāb al-Ašrāf di al-Balādhurī," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 6, no. 2 (1913): 471–77; Rudolf Veselý, "Die Ansar im ersten Bürgerkriege (36–40 d. H.)," *Archiv Orientální* 26 (1958): 36–58; Marsham, "Pact between Muʿāwiya and ʿAmr."

of the governorship of Syria in 18/639 might be a relevant *terminus post quem*. However, none of these possibilities explains why these three individuals, in particular, are named in the epistle. If, for example, the epistle was composed in direct response to Ibn Saʿd's spoils distribution controversy in Ifrīqiyā it is difficult to see why it would also address ʿAmr and Muʿāwiya. As for a possible later date, although modification in transmission is certainly likely, I cannot see what would have motivated the composition of an epistle poem to these three figures after the civil war. And since Ibn Saʿd died at the start of the civil war, it cannot be from the civil war period, either.

Indeed, the context that best explains the motivation behind Abū al-ʿIyāl's epistle is a failed siege of Constantinople followed by the murder of ʿUthmān, in which some Egyptian forces took part. Such an act clearly required a strong motivation, and Heather Keaney has recently speculated on the connection between military defeats and ʿUthmān's eventual assassination.[124] The vitriol of the Egypt-based Abū al-ʿIyāl's poem dovetails with such a narrative.

According to al-Ṭabarī, at the battle of Phoenix Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥudhayfa, who was soon to usurp Ibn Saʿd as governor, was already denouncing Ibn Saʿd as a reprobate who had been condemned by the Prophet during the latter's lifetime. Ibn Saʿd subsequently put Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa on a ship crewed entirely by non-Muslims.[125] This could be read as an early manifestation of dissatisfaction with the caliph ʿUthmān, Ibn Saʿd's foster brother. Or it could be read as an insertion aimed at associating an ultimately unsuccessful campaign with ʿUthmān and Ibn Saʿd's impiety.

The Egyptian military contingent was more involved than other units were in the siege of ʿUthmān's residence and his eventual murder. As Hinds has pointed out, these men were distinguished from other provincial military groups by a few factors. Many of the Egyptian agitators in Medina were "early-comers" whose pay, local influence, and control over land in and near Fusṭāṭ were being eroded both by the increasing settlement of new Arabian arrivals and by the centralizing reforms being undertaken by Ibn Saʿd. However, in this, they in many ways resembled the Kūfan provincial army. The crucial difference, according to Hinds, was that demographic pressures in Egypt were not eased by any settlement possibilities opened up by Ibn Saʿd's victories in Ifrīqiyā, Nubia, or the Mediterranean, where apparently some of Muʿāwiya's Syrians began settling Cyprus.[126] We know nothing of Abū al-ʿIyāl after around 33–34/654, but according to al-Balādhurī, his tribe, Hudhayl, was involved in ʿUthmān's assassination.[127] If the epistle was not produced in 654 or 655, the next most likely possibility is that it was produced early in the civil war in order to justify Hudhayl's role in ʿUthmān's murder in 35/656.

A few more points ought to be mentioned in favor both of a Muslim defeat at Constantinople in 33–34/654 and of its connection to ʿUthmān's death. The later Umayyad

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124. Keaney, *ʿUthman Ibn ʿAffan*, 61–86, esp. 82.

125. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:2870–71. As almost all of the crews were non-Arabian (see Zuckerman, "Learning from the Enemy," 108), these must have been non-Muslim fighters.

126. Hinds, "Murder of the Caliph ʿUthmân," 460.

127. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 11:259–60.

attempt to take Constantinople in 98–100/717–18 under Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik was associated with apocalyptic expectations, and its failure was traumatic.[128] On a material level, the failed push against Constantinople in 654 proposed by O'Sullivan and Howard-Johnston would have terminated Egyptian hopes for settlement opportunities after years of intense campaigning under Ibn Saʿd decisively enough to motivate the rebellion that in fact took place. Finally (although this is circumstantial, as we know nothing of ʿAmr's life during this period), if ʿAmr was in fact involved in the 654 attempt on Constantinople and this military failure precipitated the revolt leading to ʿUthmān's assassination, this would make sense of Ibn Saʿd's journey to Ascalon near ʿAmr's estates at ʿAjlān in the aftermath of ʿUthmān's assassination. Ibn Saʿd could have intended to consolidate his position there in conjunction with the other leaders of the assault, as Muʿāwiya and ʿAmr in fact went on to do as civil war brewed, but instead, around the thirty-sixth Hijrī year, death came for him in or near Ascalon.

As a historical phenomenon, the success of the Islamic conquests was not inevitable. Although we might consciously accept this and attempt to incorporate non-Arabic sources, the sheer volume of Islamic Arabic material, which of course tends to view the conquests teleologically as divinely ordained, can have an unconscious effect on us. The many smaller setbacks the Muslims experienced, which I highlighted in the introduction, are often elided from Islamic chronicles. It is possible that Abū al-ʿIyāl's poetry refers to some such setback that we simply cannot identify with our extant sources, but on the available evidence it very probably refers to Muʿāwiya's land army's withdrawal from Chalcedon following the massive and confidence-sapping defeat at Constantinople that pseudo-Sebēos describes.

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128. Antoine Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–809)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 231–59. A perhaps unrelated but intriguing apocalyptic *ḥadīth* attributed to ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ's son ʿAbd Allāh in Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād's (d. 227/841–42) *Kitāb al-Fitan* states, "You will invade Constantinople three times. In the first you will face affliction and hardship." Quoted in Suliman Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 1, no. 1 (1991): 173–207, at 177. My thanks to Mehdy Shaddel for pointing this source out to me.

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