Translating Race in the Islamic Studies Classroom*

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Abstract

This article offers a set of race-conscious approaches to teaching premodern Arabic texts in translation, tailored to courses in Islamic studies and related subject areas. Throughout, I address the productive tension generated by the fact that many contemporary translations do not consistently signpost moments of racial thinking as such despite the increase in scholarship on medieval race and racism as well as in the call, on the part of students, to grapple with racialization in our course materials. On the one hand, I argue that such translations can perpetuate what Kimberlé Crenshaw dubs "perspectivelessness" by discursively disengaging from race in various ways, but on the other, I contend that this opens opportunities for critical reading of translation practices as well as of the historical source texts themselves. I offer guided readings of nine Arabic texts in translation from two major press series—Penguin Classics and the Library of Arabic Literature—that lend themselves to classroom use, in which I demonstrate how to foster reading with race in mind. In doing so, I offer an extended meditation on racialization as a comparative and historicizable hermeneutic for understanding premodern Islamic histories and literatures.

Introduction

> To write the history of racism thus necessarily involves a study of the work done by comparative thinking. Might such a history also allow us to turn comparison on its Eurocentric head and reveal the global connections that have shaped racial histories in different parts of the world? Or would it be like trying to use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house or to curse in the colonizer's tongue?—Ania Loomba[1]

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> In the push and pull of meaning, translation can certainly dominate, domesticate, or displace; but when done with a certain measure of transparency, facing difference can also create the possibility of seeing in intimate terms the aspirations, values, and basic humanity of others. —Travis Zadeh[2]

While still in graduate school in the fall of 2018, I had the opportunity to teach the first leg of the University of Chicago's survey of Islamic Thought and Literature, one of two year-long sequences that forked off of the pathbreaking "civilizational" studies courses curated by Marshall Hodgson and recently historicized by Kevin van Bladel.[3] For the unit on the rise of Arabic prose, I assigned Tarif Khalidi's translation of al-Jāḥiẓ's epistolary satire, *Fakhr al-sūdān ʿalā al-bīḍān* ("The Boasts of the Blacks Over the Whites"). Throughout, al-Jāḥiẓ anthologizes poetry and anecdotes by and about authors raced, in his milieu, as Black (*aswad*, *zanjī*) connecting them with a tissue of remarks from an imagined group of Black interlocutors.[4] In class, I briefly introduced the terms *sūdān* and *zanj*, the trans-Saharan slave trade in the early Abbasid period, and the interrelated histories of Africa and Arabia that linked al-Jāḥiẓ's experiences, moving between Basra and Baghdad, with the personas he conjures into his text. Then we launched into discussion. Almost immediately, students raised the fact that a number of the stereotypes in the text—that Black people are preternaturally musical, sexual, strong—were familiar in uncomfortable ways. Most, however, did not describe these stereotypes as "racist," and did not identify al-Jāḥiẓ's "Blacks" or "whites" as racial formations. Like the translation itself, in which the word "racism" does not occur, and "race," incongruously, but once,[5] we danced around the meat of our comparison between al-Jāḥiẓ's episteme and our own.

A *mea culpa* is warranted here as well: it was my job to make space for a discussion that could try to "turn comparison on its Eurocentric head" by naming evidence of others' racial histories as such, as Ania Loomba suggests in the above quote. I could have begun with the fact that blackness and whiteness are always already essentializing markers, though to

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1. Ania Loomba, "Race and the Possibilities of Comparative Critique," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): 501–22, at 501–2.

2. Travis Zadeh, "On Reading the Library of Arabic Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 47, no. 3 (2016): 307–35, at 311.

3. Kevin van Bladel, "A Brief History of Islamic Civilization from Its Genesis in the Late Nineteenth Century to Its Institutional Entrenchment," *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 28 (2020): 150–73, at 163–66.

4. Al-Jāḥiẓ, "The Boasts of the Blacks Over the Whites," trans. Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1981): 3–51.

5. Khalidi translates *ajnās* as "races" in a discussion of the Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq having sex with all varieties of women. Al-Jāḥiẓ, "The Boasts of the Blacks," 21.

whom they are applied and within which paradigms of social control has fluctuated across time and space. We may have thence wended our way through the biopolitics of al-Jāḥiẓ's sexualization of Black women, his implicit juxtaposition of the "curse of Ham" (*in Allāh lam yakhluqnā sūdān tashwīhan*[6]) with climatology (and perhaps the thorniness this raises around yet another tangle of ostensible anachronisms in the form of religion[7] and science[8]), and the question of who actually speaks for and from a position of Black self-identification—if anyone—in his text. Like many theorists of the topic, we may not have all agreed on whether to call what we were seeing "race" (though I would personally do so). Nevertheless, we would have grappled with our struggle to talk about this text *without* recourse to the idea of race and the body of theory and language its critical analysis has generated, even in the word's lexical, historical absence in the text at hand.[9]

Of course, we read with race in mind all the time where the word itself is absent. One example (plucked from my bookshelf) is Celeste Ng's 2014 novel, *Everything I Never Told You*, centered on a Chinese-American family in the late 1970s, in which the word "race," in the sense of the social construction of human kinds, never occurs.[10] The constellation of reviews and blurbs that comprise the book's frontmatter nonetheless repeatedly mentions the prominence of the novel's racial themes. Why is al-Jāḥiẓ different? Partly, it is the anxieties of temporal and cultural remove—can our vocabularies describe this world so far

6. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1979), 1:219.

7. Against the trend in religious studies towards periodizing "religion" as a modern, European invention, reified through Protestant—and subsequently, secular—ideas of a personal religious life separate from epistemologies of the social, Rushain Abbasi has recently written a profound rebuttal. He argues for the translatability of *dīn* as religion as well as for the pioneering of its reification as a discrete sphere of life and action in premodern Islamic thought. See Rushain Abbasi, "Islam and the Invention of Religion: A Study of Medieval Muslim Discourses on *Dīn*," *Studia Islamica* 116, no. 1 (2021): 1–106.

8. On the "historical contingency" attending use of the term "science" to describe pre- and early-modern intellectual activity in Islamic societies, see Justin K. Stearns, *Revealed Sciences: Natural Sciences in Islam in Seventeenth-Century Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 5–7.

9. Authors have developed a variety of jargon to balance the fact that earlier texts are rendered newly intelligible through critical race theories and methods with their concerns about speaking of race and racial discrimination *avant la lettre*. Perhaps the most well-known is Benjamin Isaac's phrasing, "proto-racism." Cord Whitaker likewise would have us differentiate between premodern "race-thinking" and modern "racism." In prior work, I have borrowed the term "racialism" to invoke ethnocentrist and race-naturalist thinking about fellow humans while avoiding the term "racism," which via modern sciences has entailed systemic denials of belonging within or identicality across the human species, but I no longer find this nominal separation useful. Instead, alongside other recent scholarship, I contend against marking a difference between modern and premodern race-concepts and racism at the level of vocabulary, preferring the flexibility and nuance of holding the two apart or drawing them together through analysis. See Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Rachel Schine, "Conceiving the Pre-Modern Black-Arab Hero: On the Gendered Production of Racial Difference in *Sīrat al-amīrah dhāt al-himmah*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 48, no. 3 (2017): 298–326.

10. Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015). The adjectival form "racial" occurs twice in the novel, and in both instances amidst other linguistic cues, like "mongrel," "mixed," "mismatched," that show race's tenacity in vocabularies that far exceed the word itself and further race's conceptual work.

away, or only inscribe anachronism? Partly, it is students' and faculty's own comfort or lack thereof in initiating conversations about race. And I propose it is also a byproduct of the trust we all place in the translator to be the one who, in effect, reviews and explicates the source text—who signposts another language's lexica of racialization, or does not.

Two of these elements, namely, how our various personal experiences with race affect our approaches to source material and how trends and training in American race talk shape our classroom conversations around that material, are both taken up by critical race theorist and law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in her brief 1988 essay, "Toward a Race-Conscious Pedagogy in Legal Education." There, Crenshaw critiques the dominant myth of "perspectivelessness" in the legal classroom, in which instructors treat their sources and teachings of them as objective rather than normative and universal rather than by-and-for people in majoritized gendered, raced, and classed positions. This, Crenshaw states, exerts a chilling effect not only on minoritized students voicing opposing views, but also on the majoritized students' abilities to recognize the sociohistorical contingencies underpinning what now appear to be the discursive rules of the field.[11] In other words, Crenshaw asserts that race-conscious pedagogy looks in multiple directions, considering the text of one's sources, the pre-text of one's own subjectivity, and the context of who is in the room, in order to foster more significant readings. To this, I add that in the undergraduate Islamic studies classroom and adjacent spaces we must also consider the translators' choices that entrench forms of perspectivelessness.

Because we are compelled to teach with translations, our pedagogies are inevitably premised on what translations have made available. Perspectivelessness as defined and critiqued by Crenshaw has several notable resonances with the contested concept of "transparency" in translation studies, towards which many translators nonetheless strive. Writing in 1921, Walter Benjamin claims that transparency is what "true translation" offers.[12] Its ultimate object is approaching the phenomenon of "pure language," or the underlying truths that impel us to create linguistic systems of signification in the first place, and that all literature seeks in its own ways to represent. For Benjamin, pure language can ironically be best revealed[13] through the hybridizing and supplemental potentials of translation, or using other languages to "[break] through the rotten barriers" of one's own.[14] Many have questioned whether "true translation" so defined is possible or ethical. In his 2008 translator's introduction to Abdelfattah Kilito's *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language* (*Lan tatakalama lughatī*), Waïl S. Hassan writes that Benjamin's vision of a pure language approached through interlinguistic symbiosis is figmentary—power, competition, and

11. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Toward a Race-Conscious Pedagogy in Legal Education," *National Black Law Journal* 11, no. 1 (1988): 1–14.

12. Walter Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," trans. Steven Rendall, *TTR: traduction, terminologie, redaction* 10, no. 2 (1997): 151–65, at 161.

13. I use this word to indicate that Benjamin speaks of language (particularly poetry) and its transmission in sacred terms, consonant with both aspects of the "German academic discourse" of his era and his attunement to Kabbalistic writings. See Paul de Man, "'Conclusions' Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator' Messenger Lecture, Cornell University, March 4, 1983," *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985): 25–46, at 31 and 42–43.

14. Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 163.

conquest inhere in interlinguistic exchange, such that when unchecked, "In the extreme, translation becomes a species of cannibalism whereby the translator consumes the original text, at once eliminating it and absorbing its power."[15] Disturbing modes of consumption are also at issue in Lawrence Venuti's 1995 volume, *The Translator's Invisibility*, in which he argues that transparency has come to mean that a translation reads with such domesticated fluency that the translator is herself invisible. Venuti claims that this is due largely to Anglo-American capitalist enterprise: translation must be marketable, and to be so it must feel streamlined, comfortable, and authentic to a "narcissistic" and "ethnocentrist" clientele, whose presumed whiteness, we might note, is likewise rendered invisible through references instead to language (English) and geography (the Anglo-American sphere).[16]

In the epigraph above, Travis Zadeh commends "a measure of transparency" in Arabic-English translation practices, enacted by presenting translations and originals on equal, co-present footing, as in the Library of Arabic Literature's bilingual editions. However, his is not a transparency of the kind that, for Benjamin, is a means to arriving at semiotic essences (though Zadeh invokes Benjamin's praise for interlinear translation), or that for Hassan sparks concerns about translators' self-delusions, and for Venuti about their profit-driven annihilations of self and other. Instead, Zadeh suggests that insofar as it showcases an array of differences, transparency is an end in itself. It "expos[es] the inner workings of the process," by presenting the choices that translators make *as* choices, and the reader is left to do with this knowledge what they wish.[17] Like Venuti and Hassan, Zadeh insightfully speaks of the "unevenness" of power dynamics between different languages and cultures. Nonetheless, his reading of Benjamin presents us with a definition of transparency that treats intra-linguistic choices made by translators and audiences as individuated. Via Crenshaw, I examine how these individual choices of interpretation in what is nominally one target culture are also part of systemic hierarchies, and how despite lexical transparency we are still being given a normative range of "correct" possibilities of representation.

This article conducts close readings of a number of contemporary translations and their critical apparatuses in order to model race-conscious approaches. I elucidate a productive tension around race in the contemporary Islamic studies classroom: as calls from students to consider race and racialization in our syllabi have multiplied, translators are increasingly translating in ways that minimize or remediate racial thinking.[18] I am concerned with the specific politics of translating and teaching premodern sources, which simultaneously constitute the ideal media for historicizing the concept of race and the terrain where the

15. See Waïl S. Hassan's "Translator's Introduction" in Abdelfattah Kilito, *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, trans. Waïl S. Hassan (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), xiii.

16. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 1995), esp. 15–20.

17. Zadeh, "The Library of Arabic Literature," 313.

18. To be sure, this tendency is not new: Ghenwa Hayek traces selective translation practices in her hallmark study on the 1986 translation of Hanan al-Shaykh's novel, *The Story of Zahra*, a "metropolitan teaching text" that was "stripped of some of its racial nuances in the process of translating it into English," itself a political, marketing-minded maneuver. Ghenwa Hayek, "Whitewashing Arabic for Global Consumption: Translating Race in *The Story of Zahra*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017): 91–104, at 93.

anxieties of anachronism, vectors of comparison, and translatability most fiercely collide. Much as I have tried to avoid psychologizing translators' intent below, I have felt recurrently in my readings of new translations of premodern Arabic literature that the translation or critical demarcation of racializing language and the language of "race" was often under-theorized and internally inconsistent. Moreover, a dialogue was not discernible between and among the translation projects at hand, even when under the same editorial auspices, funding bodies, and political conditions. At the same time, I do not advise any particular praxis toward translating and teaching through translation with race in mind beyond one of care, but rather that we *have* such praxis to begin with. By locating the engine of praxis' formulation in the classroom rather than in the marketplace of translation, I attempt to respond to student initiatives that have already elicited new reading practices around race and to acknowledge the overlapping agencies that pedagogues, learners, and colleagues—customers—have in making translation happen.

Much has been written on formulating pedagogies and reading practices in the Islamic studies classroom in ways that query our own field's historical and political commitments to modern race sciences. A less studied question is that of how to teach regional histories of constructing racial difference. Scholars such as Eve Troutt Powell and Chouki El Hamel describe the complications of pursuing this endeavor, resulting from transnational historiographical and archival silences; Ehud Toledano offers the related concept of an "attitude hurdle" in talking about enslavement and the African diasporic presences it produced across once-Ottoman territories.[19] Parisa Vaziri turns the problem back on historians, noting that in assuming the fragmentariness, suppression, or destruction of Indian Ocean slavery's archive, and even its "live referent[s]," scholars compound racialized erasures.[20] Meanwhile, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst has demonstrated that our discipline's very access to archives and societies, through the training and hiring of certain scholars and funding of their projects, is always already overdetermined by the racialization of the study of religion in our academic institutions.[21] Islamic studies in the West is not alone in endeavoring to reckon with its various trajectories of epistemic violence by first redressing its racial positionality and then historicizing that of its subjects; European medieval studies, similarly, continues to tumultuously undergo a process of centering the analytic of racialization that began with visibilizing and critiquing the whitewashed, hermetic fictions of Europe's past selves that medievalists have long sustained.[22]

19. Eve Troutt Powell, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 3; Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6–7; Ehud Toledano, *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 15–17.

20. Parisa Vaziri, "False Differends: Racialized Slavery and the Genocidal Example," *Philosophy Today* (2022): https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday2022120437.

21. Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, "Job Ads Don't Add Up: Arabic + Middle East + Texts ≠ Islam," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 4 (2020): 915–46.

22. This is not to say that Islamic studies must "catch up" with or imitate other disciplines. If anything, because of the field's situation in always already international and often diasporic contexts and its own prior experiences of reckoning, addressing topics of race and racialization is a discursive feature that we may further

In Islamic studies, the fictions are different. Orientalist translations of Islamic texts were initially suffused with and motivated by theories of race. Often, they strategically advanced visions of a profoundly "mixed" Orient or a "blackened" Barbary that territorialized Islam in places that at once were marked by the profane (contemporary) cross-pollinations and the pristine (biblical) origins of all the world's races.[23] Europeans were uniquely entitled to excavate and interpret the latter because of the degenerative effects of the former. The obsession with racially taxonomizing West Asia and North Africa's peoples dictated not only the method but the matter of what was translated, circulated, and canonized. Ramzi Rouighi, for example, notes that the Francophone discourse on indigenous North Africans was reified through "Khaldunization," in which translations of Ibn Khaldūn's *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* became the timeless prooftext for the region's underlying Berber essence.[24] As Elise Burton has recently shown, via translation both into and out of languages such as Arabic, Turkish, Hebrew, and Persian, colonial racial mappings were vernacularized and retrofitted onto the deep past to lend regional twentieth-century nationalisms ethnological credence.[25] These racial-national projections were concurrently extended by agendas of genetic-scientific corroboration. New racial histories were also applied to litigate hierarchies of belonging in various colonies and to underwrite the ethnogenetic narratives that best served colonial powers' interests.[26]

In postcolonial contexts, translations of race concepts from Muslim societies, and in particular of expressions of antiblack racism, have at times been used to propitiate the interests of certain communities in the West by selectively remembering Eastern pasts. Ali Mazrui, for example, has identified the phenomenon of "black Orientalism," also phrased by Hisham Aïdi as a form of "anti-Arab black nationalism," which represents Islam and its predominantly Arab or Arabizing disseminators as deleterious to the African continent in ways that have permeated academic discourse as well as political theater.[27] Though Aïdi identifies this most recently as an epiphenomenon of mid- to late-twentieth-century Zionist attempts to cultivate Black allyship by suggesting Arabs were their common oppressors, Orientalist representations of Black Africa's Islamic history obtain even in some of the

take up and innovate in our present moment, as Justin Stearns' recent critique of Geraldine Heng's *Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* suggests: see Stearns, "Race in the Islamicate Middle East: Reflections after Heng," *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* (2022): 114–21, at 119.

23. On hypotheses of racial "admixture" in Middle Eastern genetics, see Elise Burton, *Genetic Crossroads: The Middle East and the Science of Human Heredity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), *passim*. On the role of blackness in Orientalist depictions of North African ethnicity, see Amy Aisen Elouafi, "The Colour of Orientalism: Race and Narratives of Discovery in Tunisia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 2 (2010): 253–71.

24. Ramzi Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers: History and Ideology in the Maghrib* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), *passim*, esp. 135–44.

25. Burton, *Genetic Crossroads*, 14–16.

26. Bruce Hall discusses this in relation to how various groups and their local ethnogenetic narratives were used and refashioned by French colonizers in the Niger Bend. See Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 105–73.

27. Ali A. Mazrui, "Black Orientalism? Further Reflections on 'Wonders of the African World,'" *The Black Scholar* 30, no. 1 (2000), 15–18; Hisham Aïdi, "Slavery, Genocide, and the Politics of Outrage: Understanding the New Racial Olympics," *Middle East Report* 234 (2005): 40–56, at 45.

earliest and most groundbreaking writings on the topic. W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, poetically references a "cloud of Semitic Mohammedanism" that "veiled" Africa from European contact for a millennium, and hence from European historiography.[28] Du Bois identifies the Islamic conquests as the first instance of anchoring a transregional slave trade in Africa, where it drew from an enduring non-Muslim populace, but nonetheless ascribes this to "religious and political rather than [...] racial reasons."[29]

Indeed, contra the concerns of Mazrui and Aïdi, a number of recent academic works assert that Muslim societies were not nearly as racialized as their medieval and early-modern Christian counterparts; to use one scholar's phrasing, these societies prized "black excellence," and were equal opportunity in both taking enslaved people from around their peripheries and in processing them into manumitted and upwardly mobile Muslims.[30] In order to make these arguments, though, authors overwhelmingly center Arab-Muslim voices.[31] Of course, despite pretentions to fixity, what it has meant to speak as an "Arab" in different spaces is itself mutable and contested.[32] Nonetheless, Rudolph Ware has written

28. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro* (1915; repr., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 17.

29. Ibid., 27.

30. Haroon Bashir goes so far as to claim the Western academy has elided Arab authors' investment in "black excellence" in order to perpetuate Orientalist prejudices and exonerate Western racisms. Jonathan A. C. Brown employs a similarly whataboutist line of rhetoric in his recent book, *Slavery & Islam*, in which Brown recurrently notes the multiple origins and situations of enslaved people in Muslim society in contrast to Atlantic world slavery as a means of decoupling *riqq* with modern, scholarly definitions of slavery and unfreedom. It should go without saying that thinking about categories such as race, class, and unfreedom transregionally and even comparatively does not excuse the violence of Euro-American racism and racial slavery. Extreme prejudice in one community does not imply the absence of prejudices elsewhere. Nor does this disparity render us unable to discuss concepts of race and slavery that are prior or elsewhere in our vernaculars, with care and attention to difference as much as to similarity. Indeed, to silence dialogue in shared, modern languages of oppression flies in the face of significant activist pushes across the Middle East and Africa to recognize deep regional histories of race and racism and enact restorative justice. See Haroon Bashir, "Black Excellence and the Curse of Ham: Debating Race and Slavery in the Islamic Tradition," *ReOrient* 5, no. 1 (2019): 92–116; Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Slavery & Islam* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2019). On racial justice movements and the articulation of histories of "race" in the Middle East and Africa, see Bruce S. Hall, "Reading Race in Africa and the Middle East," *Anthropologia* 7, no. 1 (2020): 33–44.

31. "Arab" is a signifier that incorporates a vast range of people, including those who are raced in various contexts as Black; the Arab-Muslim voices I mention here as used in modern apologetics for racisms in the premodern Islamic world are authors predominantly from the Middle East, North Africa, and Northern Mediterranean and are identified as nonblack. On the role of Arab ancestry in identity construction in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, see Xavier Luffin, "'Nos ancêtres les Arabes ...' Généalogies d'Afrique musulmane," *Civilisations* 53, no. 2 (2006): 177–209.

32. Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 8–9. The idea of Arabness, moreover, continuously undergoes reckoning and reconfiguration. Recent work to theorize Afro-Arabness and related modes of designation is particularly instructive. See Hisham Aïdi, "National Identity in the Afro-Arab Periphery: Ethnicity, Indigeneity and (anti)Racism in Morocco," *POMEPS* 40 (2021): https://pomeps.org/national-identity-in-the-afro-arab-periphery-ethnicity-indigeneity-and-antiracism-in-morocco. See also Momtaza Mehri, "The Consensus of Seasons," *Shubbak* (2021): https://www.shubbak.co.uk/the-consensus-of-seasons/, which is taken also up extensively in Zavier Wingham's meditation on the past and future contours of the African diaspora within Ottoman studies. Zavier Wingham, "*Arap Bacı'nın Ara Muhaveresi*: Under the Shadow of the Ottoman Empire and Its Study," *YILLIK: Annual of*

compellingly about the ways in which the common belief that Islam was a product of "Arab genius," and therefore an ill-fitting African import, have historically affected how Muslims produce race and how this reverberates in the field of Islamic studies, to the exclusion especially of West African Muslims.[33] Hannah Barker has written similarly of the trend driven by credulous readings of isolated Arabic sources to favor discourses that have minimized both the Muslimness and the humanity of peoples dwelling near the Black Sea. This has led researchers to unreflectively reproduce strategic essentialisms about, for example, Tatars selling their own children into enslavement in the Middle Ages.[34]

These assorted Orientalist techniques of and premises for reading and translating inherently obscure the ethnogenetic beliefs, applications of categories, and contests of identity that already feature in the primary sources we might wish to teach. In other words, many of our sources themselves contain racial contents and logics, but often in different ways and for different ends than those discussed above. In the recent past, a number of translations have offered an unspoken corrective to prior practice: rather than their content being strategically appropriated into contemporary racial epistemologies, many translators have elected to leave "race" and related concepts out of their lexica almost entirely. There is ample cause for doing this. As I discuss further below, in classical Arabic there is no single word that one necessarily might translate as "race," and as I mention above, there is much debate about whether and how racialization obtains across time and space. However, there is also an undeniable cost to translating without race—or translating with race inconsistently—insofar as it could help us better understand other periods and places.

As Zadeh notes in the epigraph, translation has the power to create intimacy and foster the recognition of others' humanity, but what of translations' capacity to point to where others have failed to recognize humanity and to feel such intimacies themselves? The generational differences between faculty and students mean that many faculty are acquainted with reading against the grain of explicitly racist translations or seeking out new translations that aspire to Zadeh's ideals, but are less versed in the racial metatexts latent in these latest efforts. This is also due to the fact that much of the precolonial but post-Orientalist history of racialization in and among Arabic-speaking Muslim societies—that is, those that which showcases these societies "emerging as a series of historical positions, *including those that enunciate essentialisms*"—is still in the process of being written.[35]

Denise Ferreira da Silva describes the impulse to avoid speaking in terms of race as a project of erasure that provides "moral relief" but fails to have explanatory power because

Istanbul Studies 3 (2021): 177–83.

33. Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qurʾan: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 23.

34. Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 125–130.

35. I borrow this explication of postorientalism from Gyan Prakash. See Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (1990): 383–408, at 384.

racial thinking systemically configures our lives.[36] Many of the translators explored in this essay often acknowledge this fact themselves, obliquely, in front matter that expatiates the social dynamics of their texts in racial terms even as the actual translations hold the language of race at arm's length; in doing so, they at once acknowledge race's existence in the past and either suspend its mention from that past's literature or render the literature as incoherent on race. This approach selectively paints a picture of premoderns as "pre-political," while at the same time many translations and their critical apparatuses resist this canard with dynamic approaches to gender, sexuality, freedom, class, and so on.[37] Because of this, the sorts of contemporary primary source translations that one might use in an Islamic studies classroom contain a problem for the instructor: in endeavoring to reject pernicious translation practices, many translators have taken racialization from being an object of comparison and history—a facet of human experience that bridges language—and left an uncanny haunting in its place. In certain moments, like when my class encountered stereotypes in al-Jāḥiẓ that they had seen countless times before, this haunting is especially loud and insistent that we help resolve its unfinished business. How, then, can we help students to read contemporary translations with race in mind?

Educational Missions between Press and Text: Penguin Classics and the Library of Arabic Literature

In this study, I present a number of guided readings. I have restricted my analysis to contemporary (post-2000) translations from Arabic to English produced by two prolific series that both market themselves heavily for classroom use: Penguin Classics, a subsidiary of Penguin Random House, and the Library of Arabic Literature, a subsidiary of New York University Press. While recognizing the problems inherent in using exclusively Arabic sources to address Islamic studies pedagogies, it is also critical to point to the ways in which these sources sit at the normative core of Muslim identity as articulated by the Arabic-language authors I discuss below as well as in current institutional essentializations of religious and historical studies—in the words of Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, for many in higher education, "Islam = Arabic + Middle East + Texts."[38] This equation constructs a set of hegemonies that "Islamic studies scholars dedicate their careers to dismantling"

36. Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xxxvii.

37. Geraldine Heng writes of the problems of figuring premodern (European) people as "pre-political," which is to say, as politically naïve and thus incapable of organizing systematic social projects, across her body of work. I believe this idea finds its best expression in the following passage: "The fantasy of the medieval past itself, constructed and reinforced by postmedieval periods, delivers material effects: The fantasy of a pre-political, pre-racial, pre-nationalist, and pre-imperial time that is the Middle Ages—a zone of freedom evacuated of the dispositions bedeviling modernity and capital—has enabled the production of the very identities we know as modern, but at a distinct cost, and with material consequences for our understanding of race today" (Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2003], 15).

38. Morgenstein Fuerst, "Job Ads Don't Add Up," *passim*.

and contours student demand, the future of tenure lines, and more.[39] Presses, too, are institutions with certain preconceived ideas of relationality between their authors, subjects, and audiences. Both Penguin Classics and the Library of Arabic Literature have shaped the present pool of works available in English translation, and both emphasize the accessibility of their translations—expressed by Penguin as "appealing" and the Library of Arabic Literature as "lucid."[40] Nonetheless, these two outlets' stated visions for fostering engagement with literature in translation are somewhat different. Therefore, a word is in order about how these presses construe their respective missions in their promotional materials.

Penguin Classics, as the older of the two outlets, has undergone a series of ideological and structural transformations that led to the series' eventual creation in 1986.[41] The press itself traces the beginning of its interest in "what were regarded as classics" to the 1930s, which resulted in the proliferation of a number of small series coordinated by both its British and American offices, all of which were later brought together under one umbrella. Though Penguin does not define what we might regard as classics, a split meaning is indicated in their prose. On the one hand, the press notes that "classical education" is on the wane, which justifies their sustained interest in a "core" of Greco-Roman works. On the other, they are adding ever more titles in both vernacular English (especially "women's writing") and other languages in order to embrace a "much broader sense of literary tradition." The stakes of its projects of retention and growth are, ultimately, to shed light on humanity's divisions, or "essential differences," and unities, or "universal truths," the respective immutability of which is implied.

In straddling its role as a conservator of classical heritage, conventionally understood to be foundational to Western modernity, and as a cosmopolitan vanguard fashioning works by those underrepresented in Western modernity into what we might call modern classics, Penguin's language indicates some constraints under which they still labor. As early as 1937, we are told, what was to become Penguin Classics already featured a number of translations "from Russian, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, German and a growing number of Middle and Far Eastern languages," and yet even now, "the vast non-Western canon remains a challenge that can only be met gradually." This is a significant acknowledgment of enduring biases of scholarship and readership. Yet the non-specificity in its references to Asian and African languages, described through geographically relativistic euphemisms, as well as the assumption of a single canon, however large, that cuts across them flattens three quarters of the world's literature and articulates its value using narrow terms of prestige that Penguin Classics complicates elsewhere.

Europe, in contrast, is alive with internal diversity, and the press' promise to address earlier lacunae in European literary regard—leaving out women authors, for instance—

39. Ibid., 916.

40. "About Penguin Classics," Penguin.com, Penguin Group USA LLC, https://www.penguin.com/penguin-classics-overview/; Philip F. Kennedy, "About the Library of Arabic Literature," libraryofarabicliterature.org, New York University Press, https://www.libraryofarabicliterature.org/about-the-series/.

41. This information and each of the subsequent quotations in this and the following paragraph are taken from "About Penguin Classics."

upholds narratives of historical and moral progressivism by giving the lie to the concept of canonicity. At the same time, Penguin Classics' ambivalent designation of a "non-Western canon" has little to do with perceptions of exemplary literature in the cultures it aspires to spotlight; several of the Arabic works published by Penguin that I discuss below are works of popular literature in middle or mixed Arabics authored outside of the scholarly and bureaucratic establishment. They were explicitly positioned against and beneath *adab*, the refining and refined textual projects of the social elite. Penguin's offerings from Arabic also overwhelmingly, temporally, fall within the pale of centuries when this distinction was most operable and thus span the third/ninth to ninth/fifteenth centuries. As such, Penguin's output invites us to probe prescriptions of literariness in the premodern Arabic-speaking world, as well as the classed, gendered, and raced dynamics they reify.

The Library of Arabic Literature offers a similarly multi-register repertoire of translations from both classical Arabic and vernacular, poetry and prose, and elite and popular genres, with the stated objective of creating a "corpus, not a canon."[42] Though this corpus is diffuse, it is time-bound; the Library of Arabic Literature has not admitted texts that postdate the thirteenth/nineteenth century. Instead of emphasizing the canonicity of those works it elects to feature, it underscores the traditional credentialing and eminence of its translators, all of whom are "internationally recognized scholars."[43] Though headquartered at New York University's Abu Dhabi campus, its current editorial board heavily favors scholars working in the United States and the UK, with a handful of individuals from its home institution and two members from the American University of Beirut being the outliers. The series itself is young, as is the campus out of which it is run, and so it does not carry the weight of its history as Penguin Classics does. However, in its short life, the series has garnered reviews from taste-making outlets like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *L.A. Review of Books*, as well as academic journals; its translators have been decorated with prizes and nominations.

Whereas Penguin began as a press for the epicurean consumer of classics and evolved into a trusted source for the classroom, the Library of Arabic Literature has moved in a reverse trajectory. This is partly because one of the most unique features of the series is its commitment to bilingualism and, concomitantly, to the production of editions of the Arabic texts that it translates. These are usually based on extensive manuscript research. Each volume from the Library of Arabic literature is published in at least two versions: one with Arabic and English facing, and another, cheaper softcover English-only version. Occasionally, the English-only versions feature additional frontmatter; where the bilingual copies of Muḥammad al-Tūnisī's travelogue *In Darfur: An Account of the Sultanate and Its People* feature an in-depth historical introduction by British Africanist R. S. O'Fahey, the English-only copy adds a two-page foreword by the British-Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah, some of whose most notable works are on race, identity, and morality.[44] A single text from the

42. Shawkat M. Toorawa, "A Corpus, Not a Canon (Nor an Anthology): Creating a 'Library of Arabic Literature,'" *Journal of World Literature* 2, no. 3 (2017): 356–76.

43. Kennedy, "About the Library of Arabic Literature."

44. Muḥammad al-Tūnisī, *In Darfur: An Account of the Sultanate and Its People*, trans. Humphrey Davies (New York: New York University Press, 2020), ix–x.

Library of Arabic Literature therefore, in fact, connotes a plurality of units that elicit different ways of reading, some of which explicitly relate to questions of racialization of and within the source works and the differential, contemporary stakes for its audiences.

The Concept of Race in Arabophone Premodernity: Historiographical Overview

What might racialization mean for the premodern, Arabic-speaking world? In his essay, "Race, Ethnicity, and Technologies of Belonging," Peter Wade argues that concepts of race have two main indicators. First, human differences are organized according to understandings of one's "dynamic relation to the environment, social and natural."[45] This subsumes a host of beliefs about the situation of different human and nonhuman types in the ordered cosmos, heredity and kinship, and humoral-pathological reasoning about the broad effects of what Hippocrates famously dubbed "airs, waters, and places." Race is therefore a covert construction, one made by society but expressed in the idiom of supra-human laws, divine and scientific.[46] It is at once reductive—flattening differences between many, often mutually distinguishing groups—and expansive—aggregating all these groups together based on perceived biobehavioral sameness.

Wade's second indicator for whether one is looking at race is whether these distinctions are marshalled towards a "colonial world order" that assumes a changing map for some and a static one for others.[47] In Wade's view, this order articulates naturally different human kinds as endemic to specific geographies and as ever increasingly subject to imperial domination and knowledge production. In other words, racialization presumes and aims to reify the categorical difference of subject populations from powerholders: it endeavors not only to make sense of where humans fit within one's own world order, but also to universalize that order while constraining who controls and shapes its narrative. Silva refers to those who monopolize this ability to classify self and other as "transparent subjects"; Sara Ahmed refers to them as the "absent center."[48] They are those who move through their societies with the greatest ease, anonymity, and presumed independence from or agency in structures of power—or who figure tacitly as the embodiments of putatively transcendent concepts like intellect and morality, as Zahra Ayubi has recently shown in her work on Islamic virtue ethics.[49]

The violence of imperial growth and maintenance is very real and embodied, and this is not to minimize that fact. However, scholars note that racecraft is also accomplished

45. Peter Wade, "Race, Ethnicity, and Technologies of Belonging," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 39, no. 4 (2014): 587–96, at 590.

46. I borrow the phrase "covert construction" from Ron Mallon. See Mallon, "Performance, Self-Explanation, and Agency," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 172, no. 10 (2014): 2777–98, at 2785.

47. Wade, "Race, Ethnicity, and Technologies of Belonging," 591.

48. Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*, *passim*; Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–68, at 157.

49. Zahra Ayubi, *Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), esp. 220–22.

through the epistemic violence of the idiom of empire, even in empire's infrastructural absence or when taken up by subject populations within imperial formations. As such, Denise Kimber Buell writes that early Christian authors worked against fragmentation, subjugation, and non-peoplehood by "borrow[ing] from hegemonic groups such as the Romans by claiming both to be the superior descendants of a degenerate, once glorious people and to be a people potentially open to all."[50] In so doing, they laid the foundations for their own simultaneously racialized and universalized hegemony and supplied a "past" for their aspirational world order, the ultimate violence of which is well known. In her discussion of "magical Arabs"—figures troped as having ancient or occult knowledge best harnessed by Jews of learning—Sara Ronis also notes that rabbis featured in the Babylonian Talmud took up the idiom of empire in order to formulate themselves as superseding these others:

> The rabbis are not the dominant power in Sasanian Babylonia; they have no ongoing or even imagined project of colonization, yet their discourse imagines a world in which true power is held by God and God's authorized interpreters, the rabbis themselves. This imagined rabbinic empire serves to recenter the rabbis within a fundamentally unstable world. For the rabbis, the tayyaʿa'[51] reinforces the claim that rabbinic laws are universal laws; rabbinic history is world history.[52]

And so, a caveat to Wade's argument is that in setting forth world orders, colonialism also sets up what it means to imagine world order. Minority actors and those outside of the political formations against which they define themselves thus nonetheless frequently take up the terms of conquest and hierarchy, and author their own lineal primordiality or supersession as paradigmatic of meaningful group identities. Empire, in other words, was a thing to think with when making race; people like Buell's Christians and Ronis' rabbis toyed in the abstract with being the centers of empire, encountering and incorporating global others, and establishing the dominion of their truths and ways of being.

Wade has a white, European referent in mind, and moreover has in mind the specific manifestation of European colonialism in the early-modern period as the moment when race-making begins. However, in combination with this caveat, the expansionist epistemology that Wade outlines according to which specific parts of the world are cognized as the

50. Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 64.

51. Ronis follows others in translating this term as "Arabs," noting its synonymy in rabbinic writings with *ʿaravayīm*, and she makes a compelling argument throughout for the term's racialization. In her recent dissertation, Jessica Sylvan Mutter advises translating this exonymic refashioning of the name of the tribe of Ṭayy—which saw increased and shifting use as Syriac authors sought to describe the movement begun by Muḥammad and his followers in the first/seventh century—instead as "Arabians," in acknowledgment that the people falling under the term may not have had an ethnic collective consciousness. See Jessica Sylvan Mutter, "By the Book: Conversion and Religious Identity in Early Islamic Bilād al-Shām and al-Jazīra" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2018), 49–83.

52. Sara Ronis, "Imagining the Other: The Magical Arab in Rabbinic Literature," *Prooftexts* 39, no. 1 (2021): 1–28, at 12.

"natural home of particular kinds of people, who have, or are coming to have, a particular place in the emerging colonial world order that is being constructed and dominated by European power," is useful for describing the medieval Arab-Muslim world as well.[53] This is conspicuous in the vocabularies that were increasingly generalized by medieval Arabic-speaking authors as a means to divide humanity, which feature a "complex of closely associated terms that linked both behavior and appearance to nature and production."[54] Among these, one finds words bearing overlapping connotations of one's "root" (primarily *ʿirq*, *aṣl*), one's stock (primarily *jins*, *ʿunṣur*), and one's lineal heritage (*nasab*), all of which articulate individuals' biocultural inheritance in essentialized and metaphorical terms that suggest its traceability to a primordial place or people of origin. They construe one's group identity as a product of deeply historical, spatially situated, natural processes.

In contrast with the connotations of terms like *raza* in Spanish, which Ana M. Gómez-Bravo shows was initially used to mean a defect in an object's purity, as with an alloyed metal or stained gemstone, to have *nasab*, *ʿirq*, or *ʿunṣur* in early Arabic literature is to have strength of social standing: *nasab* is typically found paired with *ḥasab*, or inherited merit, and one who is said to have these two qualities is typically a person with known lineal bona fides.[55] According to Louise Marlow, in the early Islamic period this usage spurs an apologetic counter-narrative, in which people claim that their *ḥasab* is their *dīn* (religious fidelity) and that their *nasab* is their Islam, effectively saying that individual righteousness can outweigh lineage while also reinforcing lineage's rhetorical importance.[56] In this sense, the field of biobehavioral terms found in early Arabic literature is more analogous to what Charles de Miramon has noted of the first appearances of the word *race* in medieval French texts, in which—akin to people possessing *ḥasab* and *nasab*—it became linked with ideas about heritable nobility within dynasties. According to de Miramon, ideas of biologically transferred merit became "related to the self-consciousness of European nobles but are peripheral and even against the ideological core of nobility, which insists on individual virtue."[57] Likewise in Arabic-speaking domains racialized descriptors were but few of several factors that were used to render individuals socially comprehensible; their use was both sustained and militated against in various forms of Islamic discourse. This is a point of contrast with the later European epistemes in which Wade claims race originates, but this does not validate his periodization. Indeed,

53. Wade, "Race, Ethnicity, and Technologies of Belonging," 591.

54. David Nirenberg, "Was there Race before Modernity? The Example of 'Jewish' Blood in Late Medieval Spain," in *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today*, 232–64 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 248.

55. Ana M. Gómez-Bravo, "The Origins of 'Raza:' Racializing Difference in Early Spanish," *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures* 7 (2020): 64–114, at 80.

56. Louise Marlow, "Ḥasab o Nasab," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed., ed. Ehsan Yarshater, updated March 20, 2012, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hasab-o-nasab; see also "Ḥasab wa-Nasab," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill Online).

57. Charles de Miramon, "Noble Dogs, Noble Blood: The Invention of the Concept of Race in the Late Middle Ages," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, 200–16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 215.

David Nirenberg recognizes a contradiction at the heart of the project of assigning race's origins to a specific era at all:

> We can embrace the view that the pre-modern work of differencemaking can fruitfully be compared to modern concepts of race and still be concerned that claiming to locate the origins of race risks producing partial and provincial histories that replicate the genealogical errors they claim to criticize.[58]

We might nonetheless conceive of there being periodizable differences in the human scales and costs of forms of racialization. Modern, racialized technologies of information gathering and processing, killing, policing, border-construction, and so on can now do local and global violence to people in ways that polities identified as premodern "racial states"[59] could not.[60] Silva likewise subscribes to Wade's periodization even as she inverts its causality, saying that constructions of race reify ideas of time and place. She further claims that the very ways in which we now cognize the human are through an intellectual architecture that she dubs the "analytics of raciality," the fashioning of which co-constituted many supposed signature features of modernity such as science, globalism, and subjectivity. But to view the premodern world as being preracial by comparison appears to confuse degree with kind. And as I discuss below, the progression to the racial present is neither uniform nor linear.

Much as in modernity, the explanatory framework of race is ideational and ideal-typical; it does not always do the work it is supposed to do. In the medieval Arab-Islamic context, the significance of the observability of one's putative origins is thrown into sharp relief in critical moments where their unintelligibility could cast one's social standing into doubt. One common Arabic euphemism sometimes used to point redemptively to the occurrence of atavism—first articulated by Aristotle as traits such as skin color from several generations back making a sudden resurgence in one's offspring—was *nazaʿa ilā iʿrāqihi* ("he took after his ancestral qualities").[61] The Prophet Muḥammad uses a similar phrase in a pronouncement on the paternity of children who do not bear the same complexion as their parents: "there is no grounds for condemnation if a man does not identify with his child's

58. David Nirenberg, "Race and Religion," in *A Cultural History of Race in the Middle Ages (800–1350)*, ed. Thomas Hahn, 67–80 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 69.

59. Perhaps the most prominent recent uptake of this term is Geraldine Heng's description of seventh/thirteenth century England, which she has referred to as the "first racial state in the West." Adam Hochman has applied David Theo Goldberg's characterization of the "racial state" in interpreting Heng's characterization of the medieval English church as statist, although, as he notes, Goldberg uses this definition to restrict race to the modern and to correlate its instantiation with the nation state. See Geraldine Heng, *England and the Jews: How Religion and Violence Created the First Racial State in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Adam Hochman, "Is 'Race' Modern? Disambiguating the Question," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* (2020): 1–19, at 12.

60. The model of sovereignty that extends these mechanisms of racialized violence has been termed "necropolitics" by Achille Mbembe. See Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Mientjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

61. On Aristotle's opinions regarding inheritance, see Devin Henry, "Aristotle on the Mechanism of Inheritance," *Journal of the History of Biology* 39, no. 3 (2006): 425–55.

color, for it is simply a root toward which [the child] has inclined (*huwa ʿirq nazaʿahu*)."[62] Notably these cases usually involve accusations of women's adultery with non-Arab racialized people.

In the pre- and early-Islamic period, those with mixed paternal Arabian and maternal non-Arabian lineage were dubbed *hajīn*s, a pejorative term sometimes translated as "mongrel." However, after the rise of Islam, legal *nasab*s gradually came to exclusively emphasize patrilineal descent, in a move that Elizabeth Urban describes in part as a plea for the enduring legitimacy of the leadership classes by "redefin[ing] concubines' children as full 'Arabs' and thus fully deserving of the caliphate."[63] Mixed identities ensuing from relationships between various historic Arabian families and non-Arabian women were legally elided despite still having everyday social impacts, which came to pose new trials for children who were raced differently than their Arab fathers in literature and in life.[64] Legal structures such as *umm walad* ("mother of a child") supported patrilineal pathways to assimilation into Arabness as well by ensuring that children born to an enslaved mother—who, as a matter of course, was typically ethnically as well as religiously different from her owner[65]—would assume their father's family name and social rank. The patriarchal underpinning of this structure is a double-edged sword. The practice of denying paternity of mainly female children born to enslaved concubines and rendering them *muwalladāt* ("born" into slavery) endured in the early Islamic period.[66]

Gendered treatment of the transmission of ethnic status ramified elsewhere, too. There is some evidence that the terminologies, and assuredly the stigmas, relating to being born to a non-Arab father and Arab mother persisted into the Islamic period, and that this vocabulary was mapped onto understandings of enslaveability. Such people were designated as *muqrif*, which literally indicates something adulterated or, in husbandry, "a horse or some other creature of lower pedigree whose mother is Arabian and whose father is not," and, like *hajīn*, was said in the *jāhiliyya* and early centuries of Islam to have designated heritable low social rank or bastardy.[67] The sixth-century poet Hind bt. al-Nuʿmān used the term *iqrāf* (mixed offspring) to vaunt her own family by claiming that her having ignoble children

62. Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. al-Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1955), 4395; Ibn Ḥajar and al-Bukhārī, "Bāb Idhā ʿaraḍ bi-nafī al-walad," in *Fatḥ al-bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Bāz (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1959), 9:442.

63. Elizabeth Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam: Non-Arabs, Slaves, and the Sons of Slave Mothers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 119.

64. I have discussed this in brief in the following as well: Rachel Schine, "Race and Blackness in Premodern Arabic Literature," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 2021, https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-1298.

65. On the evolution of the phenomenon of ethnically differentiated, non-Arabian enslavement, see Ramon Harvey, "Slavery, Indenture, and Freedom: Exegesis of the 'Mukātaba Verse' (Q. 24:33) in Early Islam," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2019): 68–107, at 72.

66. Elizabeth Urban, "Race, Gender and Slavery in Early Islamicate History," *History Compass* 20, no. 5 (2022): 1–11, at 7.

67. Ibn al-Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), 3600–3601.

was proof that her lovers had been lesser than (*wa-in yaku*[68] *iqrāfan fa-mā anjaba al-faḥl*); a line attributed to Bashshār b. Burd shows him satirizing the decadence of the times by stating that *muqrif*s had become society's chiefs, and those metaphoric stallions with parents of pure lineage (*ṭirf*) kept the company of saddled-up donkeys (*al-ḥimār al-mūkaf*).[69] Constructions of mixed identities, like those of race broadly, are social and not biological.[70] In testament to this, the conception of people as *muqrif* has a longer legal life than *hajīn* in human applications. In one fourth/tenth-century bill of sale, *muqrif* is ostensibly used to designate a woman born to a man who had an enslaved father and free mother (*muwalladat al-muqrif*),[71] indicating the term's continued currency for and conflation with heritable, racialized unfreedom. Free, Arab women were discouraged from mixed relationships by such prospects, and indeed their insulation from legal harm (*ḍarar*) through them was enshrined by various Islamic legal schools through the concept of *kafāʾa*, which emphasized parity of ability, *nasab*, and degree of freedom between spouses.[72] At the same time that the definitive flow of *nasab* was taking these gendered turns in Islam's first centuries, it was also transforming from a local aspect of Arabian social capital into a heuristic for describing all of humanity.

The advent of the Abbasids and their secretariat brought with it an interest in and capabilities for mapping the span of their empire and modeling knowledge of the world, visually and in prose. The third/ninth-century caliph al-Maʾmūn, legendary for his thirst for knowledge, is said to have commissioned a no-longer extant map of the known world, inspired by the work of Ptolemy.[73] Chancery functionaries, historians, scientists, and anthologists synthesized information conveyed through *isrāʾīliyyāt* and translations from myriad other Late Antique sources in a plastic set of mapping traditions whose focuses

68. Here, read *yakun*, the final letter of which is apocopated for the sake of meter.

69. Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī, *Kitāb al-Majmuʿ*, ed. Muḥammad Najīb al-Muṭīʿī (Jeddah: Maktabat al-Irshād, 1992), 18:59; Kimberley Carole McNeil, "A Critical Translation of the Article on the Horse from al-Damiri's 'Hayat al-Hayawan al-Kubra'" (MA diss., University of Arizona, 1983), 13. Al-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Baṣāʾir wa-l-dhakhāʾir*, ed. Muḥammad al-Sayyid ʿUthmān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2014), 128.

70. I here paraphrase conclusions made by Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste in his comparative study of mixedness in North Africa. See Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, "Are there '*Mestizos*' in the Arab World? A Comparative Survey of Classification Categories and Kinship Systems," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 1 (2012): 125–38.

71. See Naïm Vanthieghem, "Quelques contrats de vente d'esclaves de la collection Aziz Atiyya," *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 44 (2014): 163-87, at 179-90. Though used here to simply mean "born to," *muwallad(a)* is a term that also evokes mixing, culturally or according to biological epistemologies, and in various times and places has indicated someone of non-Arab heritage who Arabizes through their milieu, or someone of part-Arab heritage. In Iberia, for example, as being a *mawlā* by clientage rather than manumission receded as a practice, the term *muwallad* encoded those who may previously have fallen under the institution while also distancing new Iberian converts to Islam and Arabizers from old, prestigious families of *mawālī* to the Umayyads. On classing *muwalladūn* vis-à-vis *mawālī* in Umayyad al-Andalus, see Janina Safran, *Defining Boundaries in al-Andalus: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Islamic Iberia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 56–61.

72. Y. Linant de Bellefonds, "Kafāʾa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill Online).

73. Michael Cooperson, *al-Ma'mun* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 103.

tended to vary in accordance with their authors' own locales.[74] Through their diffuse efforts, *nasab* came to encompass and account for all the people about whom knowledge was increasingly being generated via Noahic genealogy, an analytic already in use in the early stages of the Arabian conquests and their chroniclers who initially drew up classifications for the peoples to whom they and their peers were exposed and of whom they were aware. They traced all of humanity to one of Noah's three sons—Sam, Yafet, and Ham. Each of the sons was said to have populated a different region of the globe. Sam's progeny were thought to occupy the world's idealized central latitudes, Yafet's the world's north, and Ham's the south. The points farthest north and farthest south were regarded as least habitable for any form of humanity, and the people that live there were therefore often linked with eschatological imagery in addition to this primordial prophetic history: the fires of hell char the skin and inscribe sinfulness in a similar fashion to the world's far southern reaches, the frigidity of the north breeds stout bodies and fierceness and foments the irrational irreligiosity of peoples like Gog and Magog.[75]

As this geographic logic attests, in Abbasid-era writings the habituations and temperaments of the brothers' offspring became grafted onto Greek schemes of the "climes," or bands of similar climate that produced similar effects in the body's humors, and in flora and fauna, across large swaths of the world. Those residing in temperate climes, like Sam's children, were said to have more normative dispositions and physical features than those in non-temperate zones. The environs of Ham's children, known as the *bilād al-sūdān* ("lands of the Blacks"), where the extreme heat and dryness blackened the skin and curled the hair and swelled the lips and caused intellectual lassitude and pleasure-seeking, deviate from the norm in one direction. In contrast, the lands of Yafet's progeny, known by a handful of regional monikers rather than one, color-coded term, had cold and damp climates that lightened one's features and straightened one's hair and made one more militant and less rational. Sometimes the Persians are descendants of Yafet, sometimes of Sam. As Zoltán Szombathy states, the configurations of these groupings in Arabic works are not wholly separate from local uses of lineage among and across Arabian cultures, but have a common thread:

> The common element, if any, in what is called *nasab* in various societies—Arab or non-Arab, sedentary or nomadic—may well be found in the fact that *nasab* is always and invariably a *symbol*, and more specifically a symbol of *power and rights*.[76]

We might further say that in imperially motivated and rigorously established Arabic-language epistemologies of racial difference, the terms listed above act not just as symbols

74. I borrow the term "mapping traditions" from Zayde Antrim. See Antrim, *Mapping the Middle East* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).

75. Aziz al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies* 134 (1992): 3–18, at 10, 15.

76. Zoltán Szombathy, "Genealogy in Medieval Muslim Societies," *Studia Islamica* 95 (2002): 5–35, at 35. Emphasis in the original.

but as "floating signifiers" whose symbolism is subject to change and contestation.[77] Rigor and malleability are not mutually exclusive, per what Wade notes above about racialization's principal importance for including and excluding members, probing frontiers, and consolidating power within a colonial world order. Ann Laura Stoler similarly reminds us that concepts are flexible implements to which we have ascribed and given false stability; otherwise, they would not require "repeated and assertive performance."[78] It therefore follows that the exact number and boundaries of the climes is not fixed across sources even as patterns emerge—sometimes southern Arabia is in the same clime as the "lands of the Blacks," other times not, and sometimes their geographic closeness was not mapped onto human appearance.[79] Some thinkers put great determinative stake in connections with pre-Islamic Arabs, others the earliest Muslim community, and still others see the two as nearly indistinct, effectively essentializing Islam as Arab. In each case, writers configured humanity in ways that staked claims of historical kinship, wedding these with contemporary articulations of power. This persists across genres, though in different permutations. As such, I have divided the translations I address below into the three broad categories of travel literature, mannered literature, and popular literature, in order to point out the connections within and between these forms, the racial narratives they employ, and how translators have navigated their rendering.

Travel Literature: Ibn Faḍlān, Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī, and Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Tūnisī

In much the way that expanding imperial horizons caused geographic and travel writing to proliferate and wax in importance in the Abbasid era, modern readerships prize these writings on "others' others" as a tool for broadening their perspectives on heterogeneity at home. Julia Schleck notes that travel narratives that feature encounters between "nonwhite individuals and white Europeans" present students with counternarratives to whitewashed national histories and are therefore instrumental "sites for antiracist work."[80] They also captivate and educate in myriad other ways, as attested in the fact that both Penguin Classics and the Library of Arabic Literature have given travel writings significant billing

77. This phrase was originally coined by Stuart Hall in: Sut Jhally and Stuart Hall, *Race: The Floating Signifier* (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 1996).

78. Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 17–18.

79. Though the clime schemes were typically longitudinal, al-Idrīsī, for example, places the "lands of the Blacks" primarily in the west of the first clime but acknowledges the existence of Black people in cities farther north and east, lying in the second clime on the west coast of the Red Sea in places like ʿAydhāb. Locations that are longitudinally parallel and on Red Sea coast's east, like Jeddah, are not said to have Black residents. He also divides those located in the first clime but situated in South and East Asian locales, including parts of India and China and those who "encircle the sea" (*kullu man yaḥtaḍinu al-baḥr*), as "brown" (*sumr*) and restricts being Black (*sūd*) to those in African locales (including coastal ones, as with the lands of the *zanj*), distinguished by their peoples' desert dwelling (*ahl al-ṣaḥārā*). See al-Idrīsī, *Kitāb Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2002), 1:134, 98.

80. Julia Schleck, "Stranger than Fiction: Early Modern Travel Narratives and the Antiracist Classroom," in *Teaching Medieval and Early Modern Cross-Cultural Encounters*, ed. Karina F. Attar and Lynn Shutters, 87–101 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 88.

amid their offerings. In one instance they even overlap, with both presses producing their own versions of Aḥmad b. Faḍlān's fourth/tenth-century epistle about his travels as an Abbasid envoy, referred to in Arabic simply as his *Risāla*.

The Penguin Classics translators of the *Risāla* of Ibn Faḍlān, Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, echo Schleck's bid for normalizing a multiethnic portrait of premodernity by remarking on the surprising mundanity of an Arab dignitary's run-in with Vikings, saying the encounter "was not [...] as unexpected as might at first appear."[81] They then explain the routes of trade—primarily in furs—that networked Volga River traders with numerous, more southerly Muslim cosmopolises. Throughout their introduction to the text, and indeed in the title under which they chose to publish it—*Ibn Faḍlān and the Land of Darkness*—Lunde and Stone center the encounter between the Baghdadi envoy and these people who have traveled downriver from a "mysterious" region.[82] Their reasons for this are clear: the Vikings' presence in the territories of the Bulghār king to whom our author was sent was an accident of timing, but the resulting descriptions have far overshadowed the journey's original intents in contemporary receptions. Lunde and Stone magnify this further by regaling us with the Land of Darkness (*diyār al-ẓulumāt*), an Arabic moniker for the northernmost reaches of the known world, where dwell the epitomes of difference between the children of Sam and the children of Yafet, such as the peoples of Gog and Magog, who figure in the eschaton across a number of traditions. In so doing, the translators emphasize a meeting not only between south and north, but East and West, in that the Viking Rusʾ, hailing originally from Sweden, are now aligned with Schleck's "white Europeans," and Arabs with "nonwhite individuals." What might appear to be a reference to Conrad on the cover for the uninitiated is quickly reversed when they explain that Ibn Faḍlān would have been "very much aware" that Baghdad typified "sophisticated civilization"—the lifestyles of the northerners less so.[83]

In contrast to Lunde and Stone's tactic of simultaneously centering and subverting Europeanness, the Library of Arabic Literature's translator of the same text, James Montgomery, achieves what we might call a provincialization of Europe by focusing primarily on the journey's stated target, a religiously edifying entente between the newly Islamized Turkic Bulghārs, referred to in the text as *ṣaqāliba*, and the Abbasid caliph. In a West that has long failed to appreciate the distinctions between Arabs and Turks, and between the Muslims and non-Muslims among them, with conflating exonyms like "Saracen" still disturbingly common even in academic medieval studies, Montgomery renders this rendezvous strange rather than mundane.[84] He asks rhetorically, "Why would someone make such a journey in the early fourth/tenth century, from the luxurious splendor of

81. Ibn Faḍlān, *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travelers in the Far North*, trans. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), xiii.

82. Ibid., xvii.

83. Ibid., xxi.

84. On the contemporary scholarly use of the term Saracen and its problems, see Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, "The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure," *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9–10 (2019): 1–8.

caliphal Baghdad to a billet in a yurt among the Bulghārs, a semi-nomadic Turkic tribe?"[85] The answer lies in the title Montgomery gives to his own rendering of the text, *Mission to the Volga*: "mission" is a double entendre that indicates the Abbasid's "mutually inclusive" designs of religio-political expansion through missionizing and the daring, dangerous adventure with which Ibn Faḍlān and his comrades are tasked.[86]

Through this choice of focus, Montgomery also urges readers to dispense with cynical readings that construe the text's proselytism as a convenient cover for purely economic motives. And yet, as Lunde and Stone raise, certain economic valences are unmistakable when read against other Arabic sources about the lands Ibn Faḍlān traversed.[87] Most prominent among these other works are a host of references to the trade in *ṣaqāliba*—sometimes rendered as "Slavs" but, as shown in these uses, indicating an extensive identity formation comprising various peoples of the northern steppes. *Ṣaqāliba* is not an entirely exonymic usage, but rather is an Arabic rendering, likely via Greek, of the term Slovenes, and though authors note that while some who came under the moniker in Arabic would certainly have self-designated as Slovenes, many also would not. Henry and Renée Kahane argue that because of transformations to the term in Greek, it had been an indicator of unfreedom rather than a mere ethnonym when it was taken up in Arabic.[88] The multivalence of *ṣaqāliba* often results in qualified glosses, such that Marek Jankowiak defines it as "a term that in medieval Arabic literature denoted the Slavic populations of central and eastern Europe (and possibly some of their neighbors)."[89] People who fell under the term also did so because of how they arrived in different Muslim-ruled lands, in the west via markets in Prague or in the east, of course, via the Volga.[90]

Those enslaved from these regions were commonly used in central Islamic lands as concubines, soldiers, and eunuch guards, and they could only legally come under this condition if they were non-Muslim. One third/ninth-century author relates that the *ṣaqāliba*, who are often counterposed with the *zanj* in a white-black polarity, are said to be improved by castration, which "makes one smarter, sharpens his acuity, and strengthens his nature and energies"; before castration, *ṣaqāliba* are notoriously brutish.[91] The paternalist logic here is self-evident; this brief passage both writes the *ṣaqāliba* as depraved and finds a key to their remediation in a violent, self-serving mechanism that brings the *ṣaqāliba* under implicitly Muslim control. So synonymous did the two become that in certain instances, the term *ṣaqāliba* is used to simply mean "eunuchs." Both the resonances of *ṣaqāliba* as light-

85. Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, ed. and trans. James Montgomery, in *Two Arabic Travel Books*, ed. and trans. Tim Mackintosh Smith and James E. Montgomery (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 167.

86. Ibid., 178.

87. Ibn Faḍlān, *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness*, xxx.

88. Henry Kahane and Renée Kahane, "Notes on the Linguistic History of *Sclavus*," in *Studi in onore di Ettore Lo Gatto e Giovanni Maver*, 345–60 (Florence, 1962), 360.

89. Marek Jankowiak, "What Does the Slave Trade in Saqaliba Tell Us about Early Islamic Slavery?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 1 (2017): 169–72, at 169.

90. Ibid.

91. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1965), 1:116.

skinned enslaved people vis-à-vis the *zanj* or *sūdān* and the resonance of them as eunuchs diffused into other parts of the Mediterranean, with cognates in Spanish that indicate gelding, and with the Old French *Chanson de Roland* making use of a cognate to indicate parts of the "Saracen" militia distinct from those that are "dark" (*brun*).[92]

Just as the raciality of the term renders who precisely is meant by the nominal ethnonym *zanj* in various instances unclear—what is sometimes a particular term for a variety of African ethnicities from the continent's southeast elsewhere means anyone with dark skin, with particular unfree and/or subordinated statuses, and so on—the term *ṣaqāliba* thus invites slippage in Abbasid-era sources. Those dubbed *ṣaqāliba* discursively meld with various denizens of the northern and western peripheries of the Islamic world. When the poet Jarīr once acerbically declared "[The tribes of] Taym and Ismāʿīl are as much kin to each other as the Blacks (*zanj*) are to the Byzantines (*rūm*)," a listener replied, "the *ṣaqāliba* are more distant [from the *zanj*]," indicating that they would have offered a more apt comparison, and was met with the response "Jarīr doesn't differentiate between Byzantines and *ṣaqāliba*."[93] Happily, Lunde and Stone include a variety of other, later sources about the far north with which to compare Ibn Faḍlān's writings on the *ṣaqāliba* and others. Tellingly, it is only with these later sources that the two translate using the term "race." Is Ibn Faḍlān then pre-racial?

In his own exonymic slippage, Ibn Faḍlān refers to his host not as the leader of the Bulghārs, or even of a group of Turks, but as *malik al-ṣaqāliba*, "King of the Slavs," though when the king orders his own title proclaimed in Friday sermons, it is *malik bulghār*.[94] Where Lunde and Stone's translation contains no mention of the Bulghār ethnicity outside of their few self-designating moments, Montgomery has added several mentions of the Bulghār territories and people to the text where genericisms (e.g., *baladuhum*) are used, seemingly to signpost and clarify who is being discussed. We might wonder how Ibn Faḍlān's own views of the Bulghārs-qua-*ṣaqāliba* were prefigured by the fact that the caliph al-Muqtadir, by whom he was dispatched, was said to have conspicuously consumed the services of 11,000 eunuchs, including "7,000 blacks and 4,000 white slavs (*ṣaqāliba bayḍa*)," who "formed a prominent element in the court's audiences and parades."[95]

Per the foregoing, *ṣaqāliba* may already have been synonymous with whiteness for Ibn Faḍlān in his era, and as such he does not discuss their color. However, he is struck by the particular "perfection" of the tall bodies and pale (*shuqr*) tending toward ruddy (*ḥumr*) visages of the new-to-him Rūs (*fa-lam ar atamm abdān minhum*).[96] By contrast, the invisible or presumed whiteness of the *ṣaqāliba* for Ibn Faḍlān serves as a reminder that many Arab authors in central Abbasid lands by Ibn Faḍlān's time themselves also identified as white (*abyaḍ*). This is an identity that al-Jāḥiẓ, writing a few decades before Ibn Faḍlān, queries through his Black narrators in

92. Kahane and Kahane, "Notes on the Linguistic History of *Sclavus*," 359.

93. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, 7:236

94. Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, 218–19.

95. Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, "Eunuchs at the Court of al-Muqtadir," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2 (2005): 234–52, at 236; Hilāl b. al-Muḥsin al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa*, ed. Mikhāʾīl ʿAwwād (Beirut: Dār al-Rāʾid al-ʿArab, 1986), 8.

96. Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, 240.

Fakhr al-sūdān ʿalā al-bīḍān, saying "the Arabs are of us, not of the whites, because of their closeness in color to us. Indians (*al-hind*) are brighter (*asfar*) in color than the Arabs, yet are [said to be] among the Blacks."[97] The crystallization of the presumption of Arab whiteness later led the eighth/fourteenth-century author Ibn Khaldūn to remark of northern people that they "are not called by their color, because the people who established the conventional meaning of words were themselves white," and as such there was no deviation from the norm that elicited marking (*fa-lam yusammū bi-iʿtibār alwānihim li-ann al-bayāḍ kāna lawnan li-ahl tilka al-lugha wa-l-wāḍaʿa li-l-asmāʾ fa-lam yakun fihi gharāba taḥmalu ʿalā iʿtibārihi*).[98]

True to this, throughout the aforementioned sources, *ṣaqlabī* whiteness is indicated most frequently when in contradistinction with enslaved people who are raced as Black. That their whiteness is particularly visibilized in sources where their unfreedom is also emphasized is illustrative both of relative *ṣaqlabī* proximity to and precarity within whiteness as a hegemonic mode of being; their whiteness is most insisted upon when it poses the least likelihood of category confusion because it is forming part of a classed opposition that did not signify vis-à-vis Arabness. Similarly, writing of depictions of enslavement in Arab-Muslim painting, Lamia Balafrej notes that, "Images of black workers thus fulfilled a double role: as the nonidentical twin of the white slave, and as the reversed image of the free Arab." She detects dichotomies between Black and white slaves and between unfree Black and free Arab actors in artworks, but identifies multiple common elements that forge iconographic similarity between enslaved white people and free Arabs, such that the impression of complete reversal does not obtain. Instead, in her view, this implies that unfree white figures are given representational "respite or possibility of change" in their subject positions.[99] At the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers, straddling modern Europe and Asia, and encountering a variety of "white," loosely related children of Yafet whom we now regard as Turkic, Slavic, and Nordic, Ibn Faḍlān's travels therefore prompt us not just to subvert or provincialize Europe's gaze, but to go a step further by redressing Europe's notional monopoly on the discourses of whiteness. The text and its translations instead enable us to query the racialization of whiteness in transregional premodern consciousness.

When reading the text with race in mind in this fashion, agreements emerge between Ibn Faḍlān's observations and the generally accepted portrait of the peoples of the north sketched above. The ways that the bitter cold of the north is described link it ineluctably with paganism and related practices while also heightening the apparent bravery of our narrator; encamping on the frozen Amu Darya, Ibn Faḍlān tells us the land is like *zamharīr*, or the harsh cold of hell that, like its harsh heat, is said to be a "form of punishment" (*lawn al-ʿadhāb*) unparalleled on earth (*ashadd mā tajidūna min al-bard min zamharīr*

97. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Rasāʾil al-siyāsiyya* (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 2002), 552.

98. Translation as quoted in Paul Hardy, "Medieval Muslim Philosophers on Race," in *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, ed. Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Scott, 38–62 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 51; Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Darwīsh (Damascus: Dār Yaʿrib, 2004), 192.

99. Lamia Balafrej, "Domestic Slavery, Skin Color, and Image Dialectic in Thirteenth-Century Arabic Manuscripts," *Art History* 44, no. 4 (2021): 1012–36, at 1031, 1024.

jahannam).[100] Much of our intrepid envoy's party cannot continue farther because of it.

Pressing onward, though, Ibn Faḍlān comes across evidence that the climate breeds difficulties in conveying religious truth, with its attendant norms of physical and intellectual comportment, and so on: one Turk jokes that if God is punishing them with this cold, they'll just give Him whatever He wants. Elsewhere, various northern pagans are flattened together by a common vocabulary of difference-making: both the Ghuzzīya (the "filthiest of the Turks") and the Rūs—the description of whose poor hygiene is infamous—are straying asses (*ḥamīr ḍālla*), which resonates multiply with representations of unbelievers in the Qurʾān as astray (*ḍāllīn*) and as asses who turn away from warnings of the Day of Judgment (*ḥamīr mustanfira*) or who are immodest in other ways (Q 31:19).[101] That this phrase punctuates Ibn Faḍlān's comments on these peoples' physical filth calls us to consider the implied relationship between external and internal attributes. It also recalls Paul Hardy's statement that those in temperate zones were the "*human* paradigm [...] all human beings are admitted to the conversation of justice, indeed, to the conversation of philosophy itself but only if they conform to this paradigm."[102] Ibn Faḍlān essentializes several groups in intemperate zones in nonhuman terms that other authors extend much further.

As both Montgomery and Lunde and Stone note, Ibn Faḍlān's writings predate a genre of diaristic travel narrative. This genre would also become heavily blended with written sources on geography that taxonomically stitched together the climate and its humoral effects with race, rationality, and belief. Ibn Faḍlān ultimately does not make these connections explicit. However, there are other moments that suggest his awareness of the sciences of bodily scrutiny that were marshalled in these later literatures. Where Ibn Faḍlān extols the ruddiness (*ḥumr*) of the Rūs, he claims that he did not see any *ṣaqāliba* who shared a similar undertone to their skin (*iḥmirār*), the phrasing of which closely matches the English idea of being in the "pink of health." Along with this lack of a red cast, the *ṣaqāliba* are colicky, many of them dying from the condition (*qūlanj*), which in medical understandings was linked with coldness and dryness of the humors and an excess of black bile.[103] This reference to general distemper evokes physiognomic and medical discourses that further deepen the impression of the *ṣaqāliba* as unidealized and not-quite-white in their racialization, even as they dwell at the earth's famously pale extreme.[104]

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100. Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, 196; al-Nisāʾī, *Tafsīr al-Nisāʾī*, ed. Ṣabrī b. ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Shāfiʿī and Sayyid b. ʿAbbās al-Jalīsī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1990), 2:660.

101. Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, 200–201, 242–43 n. 18.

102. Hardy, "Medieval Muslim Philosophers on Race," 50.

103. Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, 238.

104. Though she does not employ the lens of conditional whiteness to the texts themselves, Claire Weeda traces the learned use of physiognomic and climatological writing—and flytings—in Western European academies that had heterogenous memberships as prefiguring a range of virulent ethnonationalisms that structure hierarchies within whiteness in analogous fashion to Ibn Faḍlān's comparisons. Weeda refers to these claims as establishing preferential distinctions between "shades of whiteness," because their authors expressed them in terms of their direct observability. The language of conditional whiteness, meanwhile, centers these distinctions' social work as well as their mediation through elite institutions. Weeda further notes the major role played by Latin translations of Islamic scientific texts in supporting these claims. See Claire Weeda, *Ethnicity in*

Ibn Faḍlān's use of ruddiness as an indicator of health is likely based on more than mere intuition; by his era, translations of the iconic physiognomic treatise of Polemon circulated in central Islamic lands and its knowledges became embedded in everyday learned discourse.[105] Even before then, the use of professional physiognomists was common in the Prophet Muḥammad's lifetime, and a branch of prophetic medicine also consolidated their ways of seeing the body.[106] A combination of these knowledges was instrumental to, among other things, the purchase of slaves. Manuals for purchase were a genre dominated by physicians who instructed would-be purchasers in discerning the health of each of the different types of people they might own, particularly because indicators of greater than normal humoral imbalance in those with black skin were different than those with white, and because slavers had varying, respective techniques for hiding their infirmity.[107] Ibn Faḍlān's ability, therefore, to detect and differentiate between the temporary, accidental indicators of health and the essential natures of those he encounters in the north offers an occasion to discuss the diverse roles of natural sciences in supporting different forms of social hierarchy based on health, physical ability, and race. On the one hand, physiognomy could be used to evaluate the individuated and ephemeral. On the other, it was also taken up to reify collective and immutable identities. Parsing the former from the latter throws racialization's selective essentialisms into relief. The *Risāla* is a stepping-stone through which to begin interrogating these notions, but it does not explicitly catalogue them.

Indeed, Ibn Faḍlān's lack of direct reliance on systematic knowledges and the air of authorial uniqueness that results earns comment in both translations' introductions. Montgomery, for his part, reads Ibn Faḍlān as particularly "honest" in his "humanity."[108] He writes things earnestly and as he sees them, he frequently "entertain[s] contradictions," but when he fails to understand his surroundings, he occasionally has recourse to indulging the ugly human quality of "superiority."[109] What Montgomery identifies as humanity, Lunde and Stone name "objectivity," saying that those cultural elements Ibn Faḍlān makes an honest effort to understand, like "food, drink, dress, manners, beliefs, customs, laws, taxes, and burial rites," are the same ones a "modern anthropologist" might examine, though these categories of analysis have always been strategically and subjectively chosen.[110] Each translator in their own way problematically inscribes Ibn Faḍlān as perspectiveless in their frontmatter—his experience is universally human or aloofly social-scientific, yet also divorced from intellectual streams of sources and traditions, to say nothing of his own racialized positionality. In so doing, though, they put their fingers on the pulse of something

Medieval Europe 950–1250: Medicine, Power, and Religion (York: York Medieval Press, 2021), 104–5 and *passim*.

105. Robert Hoyland, "Physiognomy in Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 30 (2005): 361–402, 361.

106. Ibid., 362–65.

107. See, e.g., Ibn Buṭlān, *Risālat Jāmiʿat al-funūn al-nāfiʿa fī shirāʾ al-raqīq wa-taqlīb al-ʿabīd*, in *Nawādir al-makhṭūṭāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī, 1973), 2:379; Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise*, 99–100.

108. Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, 171.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibn Faḍlān, *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness*, xxv.

in the author's own voice. Moreover, they gift us the opportunity to inspect prior forms of whiteness and perspectivelessness alongside our own.

It is perhaps ironic that a much clearer perspective appears in a piece of travel literature that, unlike Ibn Faḍlān's, is not single-authored. Where Penguin anthologizes Ibn Faḍlān alongside other authors writing about the far north in Arabic, the Library of Arabic Literature pairs it with a text that addresses wholly different parts of the world, Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī's *Accounts of China and India* (*Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa-l-Hind*). Despite its attribution, al-Sīrāfī's dependency on other sources, written and oral, is clear. Indeed, the term *akhbār*, "reportage" or "accounts," already connoted an established literary type by the time of this travel book's third/ninth-century appearance, predicated on the ethic of trustworthily recording eyewitness depictions. It was not until al-Sīrāfī, though, that the form was put to work in expounding the Islamic world's eastern neighbors, an endeavor that also required soliciting the *akhbār* of those not always thought of as authoritative witnesses in other media: merchants, travelers, pilgrims, sailors, and factotums. The first book (*kitāb*) that al-Sīrāfī synthesizes into his collection is in fact more properly ascribed to an otherwise unidentified merchant, Sulaymān, along with other nameless reporters.[111] The lines between al-Sīrāfī as editor and his anecdote-supplying colleagues are blurred, lending many of the text's value judgments an air of consensus and compelling us to recall that much of the work of naturalizing race, per Wade's criteria above, lies in occluding the individual and all too human voices behind race's social construction. Where in Ibn Faḍlān this occurs at the level of language, for al-Sīrāfī it also occurs at the level of source selection; both inscribe a normative balance between the said and unsaid.

Like Ibn Faḍlān, al-Sīrāfī does not explicitly taxonomize the climes. He does, however, echo the late antique conception that those at the known globe's farthest reaches are the least normative, speaking of islands where men go naked and practice cannibalism in the southern Indian Ocean, as opposed to the urbane precincts of China and India. These differences are paired with physiognomic indicators that are ascribed aesthetic value. And so, the island-dwelling cannibals are "black and have frizzy hair, hideous faces, and long feet," whereas China, which is described as yet healthier terrain than India, is populated by the "pale-skinned" and "good looking"; its people are the most similar to Arabs.[112] This perception of China's relative healthfulness may have roots in antiquity as, in addition to latitudinal climate divisions, some authors held that longitudinally those Easterners closest to the sun when it rose were at a humoral advantage compared to those farther west.[113]

The translator, Tim Mackintosh-Smith, appears in one instance to register this disparity as well as that between the reporters and their subjects as a racial one. Where their respective non-Muslimness is discussed, he translates the two groups—Indians and Chinese people—as "either race" (*ṣanafayn*). However in a context in which the term "race"

111. Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī, *Accounts of China and India*, trans. Tim Mackintosh-Smith, in Mackintosh-Smith and Montgomery, *Two Arabic Travel Books*, 5.

112. Ibid., 27, 43.

113. Joshua T. Olsson, "The World in Arab Eyes: A Reassessment of the Climes in Medieval Islamic Scholarship," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77, no. 3 (2014): 487–508, at 497–99.

otherwise does not occur and which has not primed us to consider geography's role in racecraft in its frontmatter, this choice feels alienated from discussions of what it has meant, throughout history, to construct the human "kinds" that *aṣnāf* stands in for.[114] Such discussions might be more fruitfully staged through the ways that the text hierarchizes the subjects under study; despite their religious difference, there is greater respect implicit in descriptions of China. This also maps onto perceived dominion, with even the Indians and Chinese averring that China's ruler ranks just below the rulers of Arabia and above Byzantium, while India's king is fourth in prominence.[115] One could use this text in the classroom to talk about how race is used to consolidate and code relations of power that define self, allies, and others. From his perches at two great Abbasid entrepots, the port cities of Sīrāf and Basra, our author performs knowledge of the world's peoples in ways that are at once encyclopedic and targeted, ultimately sorting people into those with whom a Muslim can have meaningful exchange and those with whom he cannot.

In the words of Abdul JanMohamed, the "simple machinery of the manichean allegory," or binary oppositions that authors use to represent self and other, belies the seeming diversity of "natives" represented in colonial ethnography, all of whom are ultimately commodified through various strategies of symbolism, while the author is the commodifier.[116] Similarly, though al-Sīrāfī's encyclopedic approach presents us with seemingly diametrically opposed ugly, dark-skinned cannibals and pale-faced, beautiful civilizational helpmates, he also garners all this knowledge through, and places it at the disposal of, the endeavors of travel, trade, and exploration that collectively enriched the Abbasid empire. The breadth of interaction with the goods and people into which al-Sīrāfī gives insight became instrumental to the Abbasids' cosmopolitan reputation both in its understanding in the medieval period and today.[117] The Abbasid caliphate took an active interest in sustaining the dynamics that al-Sīrāfī represents, with the first known state interventions to promote Indian Ocean trade through the abolition of import tariffs taking place under al-Wāthiq in the mid-third/ninth century.[118] The reverberations of these cultivated interactions across imperial boundaries led at times to strife abroad: the bustling trade that the merchant Sulaymān, via al-Sīrāfī, describes that linked Basra with the Chinese city of Guangzhou, to which "Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian" foreign merchants were granted privileged access through Chinese governmental protection, led to a late-third/ninth-

114. Al-Sīrāfī, *Accounts of China and India*, 63.

115. Ibid., 39.

116. Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 59–87, at 64.

117. On the fraught application of the term cosmopolitanism due to its erasure of inequality, particularly in the Abbasid world as recalled by Arabic popular tales, see Arafat Razzaque and Rachel Schine, "Teaching the Worlds of the *1001 Nights*," *Approaches to Teaching the Global Middle Ages*, ed. Geraldine Heng, 66–84 (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2022). On the question of "cosmopolitanism" as a term of use for Islamic history, see Mana Kia, "Space, Sociality, and Sources of Pleasure: A Response to Sanjay Subrahmanyam," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61 (2018): 256–76.

118. Timothy Power, "The Abbasid Indian Ocean Trade," in *The World in the Viking Age*, ed. Søren Sindbaek and Athena Trakadas, 46–49 (Roskilde: The Viking Ship Museum, 2014), 49.

century revolt targeting nonlocal traders.[119] We may thus use al-Sīrāfī to discuss Abbasid imperial and inter-imperial trajectories. These were marked in this period, according to Peter von Sivers, by a trend away from militancy and the "fiscal gains of conquest," and toward commercial development not just in the Indian Ocean but also on their western frontiers, in part because of the Byzantine consumption of Indian Ocean goods transported along the Euphrates and then overland through Syria.[120]

As one of the first Arabic texts to chronicle the Indian Ocean world, al-Sīrāfī is often linked with the legendary travels of Sindbad, whose abortive attempts at mercantile life whisk him away to a number of Indian Ocean islands where he encounters giant cannibals, black apelike humans or humanlike apes, people with a custom of burying widows and widowers alive, and untold riches, from Roc eggs to jewels large enough to hew into tableware.[121] This perfect storm of otherness in Sindbad and its analogues, in the estimation of Maurice Pomerantz, at times tilts from the wondrousness of *ʿajāʾib* into horror.[122] Their stories bring about an intimate and pious meditation on one's own soul not dissimilar to Enlightenment philosophers allegorizing the sublime using threatening, raced bodies and the fear they inspire.[123] In construct with al-Sīrāfī's *Accounts*, Sindbad's journeys can be used to query which parts of the known world were figured as more remote, and more inherently open to dramatization and fantasy, than others, as well as to ask which forms of racialization and which racialized others became subject in narrative to hybridization with animals, monsters, or *jinn*. Such comparison throws into sharp relief the relationship between the contours of empire and the parameters of thinkable difference, even in storytellers' imaginative romps.

Given the standard historiography of race, it is perhaps unexpected that many of the radical forms of difference in evidence in the above travel literature are absent in the Library of Arabic Literature's most modern offering in this area, the twelfth/eighteenth-century traveler Muḥammad al-Tūnisī's *In Darfur* (*Tashḥīdh al-adhhān bi-sīrat bilād al-ʿarab wa-l-sūdān*), translated by Humphrey Davies. As al-Tūnisī's Arabic title indicates, Darfur was not simply represented by the author as a regional entity with a unified character, but rather as a patchwork characterized by lines between, across, and through Arabness and Blackness. By this time, these identities are historicized for al-Tūnisī as a function of traceability or a lack thereof to Arabia, and particularly with the illustrious families of scholars (*sayyid*s) and descendants of the Prophet (*sharīf*s) who resided there.[124] Though predicated on a

119. Tayeb El-Hibri, *The Abbasid Caliphate: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 95.

120. Peter von Sivers, "Taxes and Trade on the 'Abbasid Thughūr, 75–962/133–351," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 25, no. 1 (1982): 71–99, at 73.

121. On the connection between al-Sīrāfī and Sindbad, see Maria Kowalska, "From Facts to Literary Fiction: Medieval Arabic Travel Literature," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5–6 (1987–88): 397–403.

122. Maurice Pomerantz, "Tales from the Crypt: On Some Uncharted Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor Introduction," *Narrative Culture* 2, no. 2 (2015): 250–69, at 262.

123. Meg Armstrong, "'The Effects of Blackness': Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 3 (1996): 213–36, at 218–21.

124. Muḥammad al-Tūnisī, *In Darfur: An Account of the Sultanate and Its People*, ed. and trans. Humphrey Davies (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 1:xxiii.

particular place of origin, these networks are no longer so localized; the sultan of Morocco is a *sharīf*, the instructors of Egypt's al-Azhar are *sayyid*s, and so on. In the yet deeper past, their ties are all still bound to one of Noah's sons. These category formations were to transform under British colonialism, though, and become territorially entrenched in Sudan as an "Arab" north and a "Black" south.[125] It may be for this reason that R. S. O'Fahey opines in his introduction that in the twentieth century, "there was now introduced a racial, 'Arab' versus 'African,' dimension into the complex tribal politics of Darfur."[126] It is precisely this racial dimension—globalized through the international coverage of the turn-of-the-century conflict in Darfur and cathected through primarily African American experiences of racial oppression—that Hisham Aïdi references as stoking anti-Arab hate abroad and further ossifying the categories of Black and Arab as separate, though he notes that marking racial difference in Sudan well preceded British colonialism.[127]

In contrast to this contemporary narrative, we quickly find that al-Tūnisī lives the entanglements between the two categories named in his title, his grandfather having remarried an Ethiopian woman and abandoned his Cairene family, and his father having followed suit; al-Tūnisī nonetheless speaks admiringly of his family and its learning, which, as Davies points out, afforded them the mobility that echoes throughout pre- and early-modern narratives of *ṭalab al-ʿilm*—quests for Islamic learning that also involved the professional exercise of one's education to sustain the journey—and that led to their resettlement in the *bilād al-sūdān* in the first place. Their multigenerational itineracy leads al-Tūnisī to have several uncanny encounters with extended family *en route*. In contrast with these thick connections to which the author devotes the first chapters of his log, al-Tūnisī's personal travel narrative (*riḥla*) begins with rupture. As his team embarks from Fusṭāṭ, he recalls the "travails" (*matāʿab*) of travel, compounded by realizing that he is surrounded by those who are, in Davies' English, "not of my own race" (*ghayri abnāʾ jinsī*), and who are instead children of Ham (*abnāʾ Ḥām*).[128] This is the only time that Davies employs the word race in the first book of his two-volume translation of the text. In her own translation of this vignette in her book, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan*, Eve Troutt Powell renders *jins* not as race but as tribe, likely because of the relationship al-Tūnisī establishes between his *jins* and the lineage of Sam, in contrast to the denizens of Darfur descended from Ham.[129] Here, al-Tūnisī's inheritance of premodern, lineage-essentialist categories of human kinds is on ample display, as is the relationship of concepts of race to those of biobehavioral heredity, articulated primarily as a matter of ancestry and only secondarily as one of geography

125. On the role of racialization in this division, see Amir Idris, "Rethinking Identity, Citizenship, and Violence in Sudan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 2 (2012): 324–26.

126. Muḥammad al-Tūnisī, *In Darfur*, 1:xxi.

127. Aïdi, "Slavery, Genocide, and the Politics of Outrage," 46.

128. Muḥammad al-Tūnisī, *In Darfur*, 1:64–65.

129. Eve Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 34.

given al-Tūnisī's destination, and this is apparent in either of the two renderings.[130]

Gesturing towards the determinacy of his categories, al-Tūnisī speaks of an abiding animosity (*ʿadāwa*) between the children of Sam and Ham, despite spending the foregoing chapters discussing his other ancestors' pacific lives among them.[131] But al-Tūnisī seems to undermine this polarizing picture in the same breath in other ways. He quickly pivots to poetry extolling the virtue- and friendship-building benefits of travel in foreign lands, which stands in stark contrast to the original, mournful verses he declaims upon realizing he is surrounded by difference: "your body, your clothes, and your countenance are black upon black upon black (*fa-jismuka maʿa thiyābika wa-l-muḥiyyan sawād fī sawād fī sawād*)."[132] At first, this poem seems self-referential, with al-Tūnisī speaking to himself in the second person, but Troutt Powell reads the countenance mentioned here not as belonging to al-Tūnisī, but to the other in whose midst he finds himself.[133] This ambivalence—sitting between metaphor and actuality, self and other, and Black and Arab—reflects the tone that al-Tūnisī takes in much of the remainder of his writing, which amounts ultimately to a densely observed account of the practices, politics, and potentates of the Fūr sultanate that only periodically relies on the traditional racial knowledges discussed above.

As both Troutt Powell and the Library of Arabic Literature's choice of foreword author for the paperback, Kwame Anthony Appiah, note, al-Tūnisī's most egregious failures are in his representations of gender. "If race is one marker of cultural difference and boundaries, then women are the signposts of civilization," states Troutt Powell.[134] Appiah finds that in al-Tūnisī's "moral and intellectual universe," enslaved eunuchs and their castration are unremarkable, and that his views of local women—made especially libidinous by the clime's heat and designated the "root of every disaster"—make for difficult reading.[135] Al-Tūnisī's treatment of gender is not merely that, though, but rather marries the most traditionist elements of his racial education with ideas about the meaning of respectability for women and men with varying degrees of legal freedom, culminating in unreflective misogynoir toward the free women of Darfur and complacency with the castration of its unfree men.[136]

Troutt Powell reminds us that the Darfur of al-Tūnisī was on the precipice of becoming an Egyptian colonial holding but was not yet so. In her words, his "racial distinctions are not based on a hatred of blacks," and in a sense they can't yet be.[137] Nonetheless we see that, despite al-Tūnisī's lack of animus, his work entails and gives occasion to discussions of

130. I borrow the phrase lineage-essentialism from Ron Mallon. See Mallon, *The Construction of Human Kinds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), *passim*, esp. 34.

131. Muḥammad al-Tūnisī, *In Darfur*, 1:64.

132. Ibid., 64–65.

133. Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade*, 34.

134. Al-Tūnisī, *In Darfur* (2020), ix–x.

135. Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade*, 37.

136. The term misogynoir was coined and elaborated by Moya Bailey and Trudy aka @thetrudz, who are often uncredited for doing so. See Moya Bailey and Trudy, "On Misogynoir: Citation, Erasure, and Plagiarism," *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 762–68.

137. Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade*, 38.

racialization, alongside class and gender. It also elicits a rethinking of how we periodize the aforementioned human scales and costs of racial work. Suzanne Conklin Akbari advocates teaching medieval literature from single languages, traditions, or nations in ways that showcase non-teleological histories of communication between and among cultures, drawing on what Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell call "periods of intensification" and "abatement."[138] This disrupts reductionist narratives of, for example, antisemitic and Islamophobic paroxysms in various parts of Western Europe. It also disrupts ideas of progress and periods themselves; not everyone's Middle Ages follow the same patterns. Arguably, they do not occur at the same time. Teaching medieval and early modern Arabic literature in translation with race in mind does similar disruptive work: at the very time that we might expect to see emergent racist constructions in a narrative whose era is everywhere characterized by colonialism and chattel slavery, we find the forms race takes in al-Tūnisī's writing instead rely on a set of much older and even attenuated tropes. Al-Tūnisī's abated framework is unlike al-Sīrāfī's intensified gaze under the Abbasids in a major trading city, but it is also visibly informed by traditions of geography, physiognomy, and so on that are rooted in this prior time and space. Moreover, al-Tūnisī's gendered and classed representations of race suggest who reaps the narrative and social benefits of rapprochement in moments of abatement, and whom it is enduringly politic to epistemically diminish.

Mannered Literature: Ibn Qutayba and al-Nuwayrī

Writing in the early fourth/tenth century, Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī and Ibn Faḍlān were pioneering a polyvalent, as yet unformed genre of travel and geographic writing, but both the anthological practices employed by al-Sīrāfī and the chancery etiquettes evinced by Ibn Faḍlān were already well established products of the Abbasid world and its *adab*, or refined forms of writing and social comportment. The contours of *adab* grew not only out of the migration of oral to written modes with the acquisition of paper and efflorescence of book arts, nor only out of the development of a centralized caliphal court culture. Rather, *adab* was parametrized by the particularities of where and with whose collaboration these other elements emerged. The significance of a large Persian upper class in shaping Abbasid high culture is well rehearsed, but its formative role in structuring how tastemakers and statesmen alike defined Arabness and racialized Muslimness is less so.

Recent work by Peter Webb shows that as dust settled from the Abbasid revolution in second/eighth-century Iraq, Arab-identifying littérateurs increasingly concretized what this identity meant for them through scriptural interpretation, creative writing, and historiography. Authors wrote Arabness as a combination of putatively traceable indicators of Arabian autochthony and its shared narrative that amounted to more than the sum of its parts. They did this in construct with the large Persian presence in their midst in ways that were both inclusive and exclusive:

138. Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "Modeling Medieval World Literature," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, no. 1–2 (2017): 2–17, at 4.

> The paradigm of original Arab monotheism, a brief slip into paganism, and then a return to Islam appears to operate across genres, and it was not a fringe fancy of Arab partisans: it was shared by a variety of writers and appears as a logical construct to project Arabian-Arabness as monotheistic, noble, and relatively accommodating with Persians—just as Iraqi society was Muslim, powerful, and cosmopolitan.[139]

Persians, meanwhile, underwent a related process that Sarah Bowen Savant refers to as a balance of practices of remembering and forgetting.[140] They remembered themselves not as Arabs, but as Muslims who had a deeply historicized claim on monotheistic propensities as well. The claims they staked, similarly to those of their Arab-identifying peers, were often genealogical, tracing their identities to figures that would render them cousins of Ishmael and inheritors of the prophets. Persian authors' articulations of belonging in the *umma* bear a striking resemblance to the early locutions used by the Syrian *mahjar* in the United States to argue for legal whiteness, and therefore eligibility for citizenship, while upholding their own particularity. Many such arguments were staked on their Christianity and the Levant's status as the birthplace of Jesus and numerous saints. Sarah Gualtieri refers to this conditioned bid for majoritization as the "emergence of ethnicity" rather than the "triumph of assimilation."[141]

In moments of partisanship in the medieval context, though, some thinkers essentialized Islam as perfectible only by those with certain inherited, biobehavioral bona fides. This is the position that the littérateur and jurist Ibn Qutayba appears to take in his fourth/tenth-century treatise, *The Excellence of the Arabs* (*Faḍl al-ʿarab wa-tanbīh ʿalā ʿulūmihā*), in which he opines:

> God subsequently brought Islam, and from the Arabs elevated the Prophet (God bless and cherish him), chief of all prophets [...] God caused the Arabs to multiply, put an end to dissension among them, supported them with His angels, and strengthened them with His power. He established them in the land and enabled them to tread upon other nations' necks. He endowed them with the caliphate, with succession to prophethood, and then with the imamate [...] It was then, when there were no Easterners present, that God addressed the Arabs, saying: "You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for mankind." Other communities acqire excellence after the Arabs (*wa-l-umam ṭurran dākhila ʿalayhā fīhi*).[142]

Here, the Arabs are characterized as uniquely primed to receive and promote Islam. This uniqueness is constituted in two primary ways, the first being Ibn Qutayba's patterning of Arab ascendance on prior narratives of national chosenness that harken to other

139. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 269.

140. Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14–25.

141. Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 156.

142. Ibn Qutayba, *The Excellence of the Arabs*, trans. Sarah Bowen Savant and Peter Webb (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 69.

communities who have received revelation. Ilana Pardes notes, linking several passages, that the massiveness and fecundity of the children of Israel, who are described in the Hebrew Bible as "countless as the dust (per Abraham's memorable vision)," leads them to "'dwell apart, not reckoned by the nations,'' and this "is seen as a proof of [their nation's] cultural strength."[143] Ibn Qutayba's setting apart of the Arabs is not merely retrospective, he also anticipates Islam's future when he states that God designated the community to whom the Qurʾān was first revealed as the best at a time when no "Easterners" (which is how the translation glosses *ʿajam*, an ambiguous term meaning both non-Arabs, Persians, and in Ibn Qutayba's case, non-Arab and non-Khorasanian Persians) had yet mixed with it. His statement that other groups acquire excellence after the Arabs can alternatively be read as stating that they are included within excellence at the Arabs' bidding; it is not merely posterior, but also causal. Despite myriad traditions to the contrary in which Muḥammad's early company of believers and close companions hail from the many neighboring empires in Arabia's midst—strategically figured as such in traditional Islamic historiographies that also showcase leaders like the *najāshī* of Axum, the *qayṣar* of Byzantium, and the *kisrā* of Persia acknowledging Islam's religiopolitical legitimacy, and hence positive relationality with other religiopolitical formations[144]—Ibn Qutayba pursues an alternative strategy commensurate with his purist aims. He casts the original Muslim *umma* as entirely Arab and the preservation of unadulterated Arab posterity as the force that will sustain Islam through the authority of caliphs, imams, and descendants of Muḥammad.

It is perhaps with this essentialism in mind that the concept of race arises in the translators' introduction to the Library of Arabic Literature version of *The Excellence of the Arabs*. Ostensibly, Ibn Qutayba is committing this claim to writing in the face of competing declarations of racialized prestige, particularly from Persianate "Bigots," or *shuʿūbī*s, those Persian elites who were labeled as partisan to their own people and indices of aristocracy.[145] These contestations were coming increasingly to the fore at the very time when, in Ibn Qutayba's view, Arab superiority could not be more patently divinely consecrated by the success of the conquests and efflorescence of the Abbasids. However, per Sarah Bowen Savant, "why—modern interpreters should ask more seriously—have historians turned up virtually no self-professed Shuʿūbīs, only their opponents?"[146] In other words, Ibn Qutayba draws on an external designation for an alternative cultural chauvinism that was hardly prevalent in his era, representing it as an existential threat to Arab moral and social pride of place for his audience. The falsification of *shuʿūbī* cultural dominance by Ibn Qutayba and his peers has only been inflated, according to Savant, by Western historiography.[147]

143. Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 134.

144. Nadia Maria El Cheikh notes that the rulers of pre-Islamic powers also became parts of Umayyad "imaginary ancestry" and their self-positioning within universal history, sustaining their importance in caliphal strategies of legitimation as "traditional rulers on earth." See Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 85.

145. Ibn Qutayba, *Excellence of the Arabs*, 5.

146. Savant, *New Muslims*, 28.

147. Sarah Bowen Savant, "Naming Shuʻūbīs," in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy: A*

True to this, Webb and Savant note that at the time that Ibn Qutayba was writing, he was writing not only against the rising stars of Persians in his midst, but also against decreased identification of the people of Iraq with membership in "an Arab race (expressed in terms of Arab *umma*, *jīl*, or *nasab* [Arab "people" or "kin"])," and increased identification with provincial identities that even led some of them to see themselves as Persian because of their locales and norms.[148] Webb and Savant ascribe this shift to the ethnic mixedness of Iraqi cosmopolises, which "made it difficult to maintain pure tribal/racial lineages for long," though the notion of pure lineage is typically upheld less by the maintenance of endogamy than by the selective elision of intercommunal differences.[149] As people's understandings of self and social membership change, their techniques of racialization do as well. Webb's own work shows this in accounting for how people in the Arabian Peninsula began to conceive of themselves as an "Arab" unit rather than as distinct regional and tribal groups. It is therefore worth considering which transformations of identity and its expression Ibn Qutayba is happy enough to overlook in crafting his authentic Arab ideal, and which aspects he regards as "irreducible and unsublatable because [they are] an effect of the laws of nature that produce the existing variety of bodily and social configurations."[150] Despite Ibn Qutayba's—and most premodern Muslim thinkers'—"monogenetic" understanding of humankind, which some have described as foreclosing on racemaking because it does not allow for the delineation of different human species, Ibn Qutayba ably formulates and advises on the maintenance of fixed human categories by arguing for the preservation of primordial, if not original, lineages.[151]

Ibn Qutayba's vision of continuous Arab descent, and hence distinctness as a social group, hinges on two relatively recent discursive developments: an emphasis on patriliny and credence in sciences of genealogy that were first formalized in the Abbasid age. In making his case against the "Bigots," he probes global genealogies and rebuffs the Persians' polemical claim to descend from Isaac and their assertion that this makes them superior to the Arabs, descended from Ishmael and his enslaved mother.[152] Ibn Qutayba avers, instead, that Hagar was purified by God and so valued by the Egyptians that she was given to Sarah

Festschrift in Celebration and Honor of Professor Ahmad Mahdavi Damghani's 90th Birthday, ed. K. A. Thackston, W. M. Mottahedeh, and W. Granara, 166–84 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

148. Ibn Qutayba, *Excellence of the Arabs*, xiii.

149. Ibid., xiii.

150. Silva, *Toward a Global Idea*, 127.

151. Robert Bartlett's well-known article on the question of premodern "race" vs. "ethnicity" adduces belief in monogenesis as a key differentiating element between premodern and modern projects of differentiating human identities. In his recent book, *The Smell of Slavery*, Andrew Kettler nuances this by saying that the emergence of theories of polygenesis characterize the rise of scientific racism, but not of racecraft and racism itself, and that monogenesis was a prevalent hypothesis well into the modern history of the Atlantic world. Thinkers who subscribed to mono- and polygenetic theories often shared much more in common in their racial epistemologies than marking this out as a defining difference would suggest. See Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 39–56, at 45; Andrew Kettler, *The Smell of Slavery: Olfactory Racism and the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 25.

152. Ibn Qutayba, *Excellence of the Arabs*, 21.

as a gift. Overall, proximity to Abraham takes priority, and Ibn Qutayba elevates descent through elite foreign concubinage—also a norm among Arab potentates of his day, as he notes—by arguing for its divine favorability. As noted above, Elizabeth Urban argues that this is a maneuver that late-Umayyad and early-Abbasid authorities themselves made as well; because caliphs, imams, and their heirs were increasingly born from relationships between a father of prominent, Arabian *nasab* and a mother of foreign origin, the elites authored the patriliny of *nasab* and therefore their own full Arabness.[153] They did so against the backdrop of *jāhiliyya* mores, in which mothers could also pass on *nasab* and its social networks to their children, and children born of "mixed" relationships were regarded as half-Arabs, rather than as directly assuming their father's pedigree. To suggest their own chosenness, figures claiming divine authority adduced the examples of Hagar and of Muḥammad's Coptic concubine, Māriya, and suggested that having a "slave ancestress does not dilute [one's] Arab lineage."[154] While Ibn Qutayba superficially critiques the "Bigots'" derision of Hagar and of concubines' uncleanliness, he also is taking their investment in matriliny to task. God has clearly favored those with prominent fathers.

Though his defense of enslaved women would seem to reach across class lines, Ibn Qutayba is in fact heavily concerned with preserving a system in which such women underwrite the legacies of upper-crust Arabs rather than complicate them. Similarly, he elevates the people of Khorasan as a second-tier elite, or what we today might call a "model minority," because they, too, have propped up their Arab stewards and helped the Abbasids secure power. He emphatically exempts Khorasanians from his discussion, noting that they had only briefly and latterly come under the power of "Easterners" (*lam yazālū fī akthar mulk al-ʿajam liqāḥan*), which the translation glosses as a reference to the Sasanians, but that Khorasanians had frequently been a check on Persian might both in the pre-Islamic era and in their role during the Abbasid revolution.[155] In this, they are not unlike the Arabs who had only momentarily lapsed into polytheism but also preserved many elements of the "original monotheism" (*al-ḥanafiyya*).[156] In effect, Ibn Qutayba posits an ethnic separation reified through the performance of political loyalties that renders the Khorasanians as a population once subject to but not of the *ʿajam*. Though this may relate to his own Khorasanian roots, Ibn Qutayba is also writing here in a tradition of praise by members of the Abbasid court for the Khorasanians' loyalty. In his *Risāla fī al-ṣaḥāba*, which is concerned in large measure with preserving the Khorasanian army's complacency with Abbasid rule, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. ca. 141 AH/759 AD) writes:

> The army of the people of Khorasan is one to which none in [the realms of] Islam can compare, and they have a vigor (*manʿa*) through which they may, God willing, fulfill

153. On the role of paternalizing *nasab* in the authority of the imamate, as well as the role played by the mothers of imams in their racialization, see Amina Inloes, "Racial 'Othering' in Shiʿi Sacred History: Jawn ibn Huwayy the 'African Slave', and the Ethnicities of the Twelve Imams," *Journal of Shiʿa Islamic Studies* 7, no. 4 (2014): 411–39.

154. Urban, *Conquered Populations*, 129.

155. Ibn Qutayba, *Excellence of the Arabs*, 72–73.

156. Ibid., 67.

> their excellence (*yutammu faḍlahum*). Indeed, they are a people versed in obedience [of authority] (*baṣar bi-l-ṭāʿa*), favored among men (*faḍl ʿinda al-nās*), restrained in their emotional and physical desires, opposed to corruption, and obsequious under governors. We do not know of this bearing (*ḥāl*) manifesting in anyone outside their ranks.[157]

Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ discusses these virtues as essentially latent in Khorasanians and as yet unactualized rather than as ephemeral qualities that will disappear under mismanagement. Their abilities are to be disciplined (*taʾdīb*, *taqwīm*) to Abbasid ends through management by the Commander of the Faithful or squandered on some other less worthy cause. Ibn Qutayba similarly uses Khorasanian identity to tie respectability both to one's birth station and to subscribing, by dint of innate upper-class decorum (*sharaf*), to a system in which one is obligated to Arab rulers who are inevitably yet more advantaged.[158] In contrast to this inborn loyalty, some "lower-class Easterners" have tried to fabricate prestige out of jealousy of the Arabs by claiming descent from "[the Easterners'] kings and cavalry," which they can do because their "genealogical system is extensive and unmonitored."[159]

Ibn Qutayba draws on a common trope: even in the first formal works of Arab prosopography, anxiety arises about the charlatanism of some genealogists. Muḥammad is said to have called out genealogists who lied about the number of generations between Ishmael and Maʿaḍḍ, for example.[160] The forgery of *nasab* in order to garner authority became a topic of study that shared some methods with *ʿilm al-rijāl*, or *ḥadīth* criticism, and was based on normative ideas of who was trustworthy and who not.[161] On two fronts, Ibn Qutayba claims that the Easterners' heredity lacks probative rigor, in that they both take seriously the position of female ancestors and fail to have a hard science of tracking lineages. In the face of their claims that the Arabs come from tarnished stock, Ibn Qutayba essentially accuses them of being the real liars and adulterators, who have fabricated their superiority and infiltrated God's "best community." Ibn Qutayba thus enables us to talk with students about how racial logic works, circularly, to reify a fragile status quo by demonizing any counterclaim as scientifically weak or in defiance of the God-given natural order, even when both the science and the social order are relatively new.

The belief that Arabs alone had perfected the study of genealogy also appears in the significantly later work of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī, the eighth/fourteenth-century author of *The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition* (*Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*), an outstanding exemplar of the Mamlūk "age of encyclopedias" that has been abridged and

157. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Athār Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1989), 311.

158. Ibn Qutayba, *Excellence of the Arabs*, 4.

159. Ibid., 7.

160. Hishām b. al-Kalbī, *Jamharat al-nasab*, ed. ʿAbd al-Sattār Farrāj (Kuwait: Wizārat al-Iʿlām, 1983), 1:65.

161. On the science and falsification of genealogy, see Zoltán Szombathy, "Motives and Techniques of Genealogical Forgery in Pre-modern Muslim Societies," in *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past*, ed. Sarah Bowen Savant and Helena de Felipe, 24–37 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

translated by Elias Muhanna for Penguin Classics.[162] As the title indicates, al-Nuwayrī has tasked himself with anthologizing the epitomes of *adab*, or the necessary bits of self-refining know-how for the discerning individual. In a sense, al-Nuwayrī's entire project is genealogical, or in Muhanna's words, "hierarchical," in that it is premised on the ordering, classification, and appraisal of viable knowledge.[163] More explicitly, al-Nuwayrī includes a specific section "on genealogy" (*fī al-ansāb*) in his book on humans, which he opens—like many professional genealogies—with the thirteenth verse of *Sūrat al-Ḥujarāt*, translated by Muhanna as "O mankind, we have created you male and female, and appointed you races [*shuʿūb*] and tribes [*qabāʾil*], that you may know one another."[164] Al-Nuwayrī reminds readers that the Arabs "boasted against the non-Arabs" over their use of genealogy, rendering their knowledge of one another as unmatched.[165]

In translating *shuʿūb* as "races," Muhanna follows a number of Qurʾānic translators, including A. J. Arberry, for whom the concept of "race" when he published his *The Koran Interpreted* in 1955—but five years after UNESCO's famous paper, *The Race Question*, which both upheld the jargon of racial anthropology and condemned racism—likely still consisted in category formations like Mongoloid and Caucasoid.[166] More recent translators, too, like M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, have made use of the word "race" to convey this passage's egalitarianism.[167] Several others translate the term instead as "peoples" or "nations."[168] Further along, al-Nuwayrī himself defines *shuʿūb* as being like the head of a body, with finer-grain kinship formations below.[169] The figurative rendering of a biosocial superstructure as the head of a body is emblematic of a trend throughout the selected material: racial logic becomes a medium and means for comparison coextensive with the taxonomic logic and aesthetics of the encyclopedia.

Because the enterprise of assembling an encyclopedia is fundamentally a conservative one, al-Nuwayrī's anthology rehearses much of what has been discussed above: he explains the effects of the climes on humors, flora, and fauna in his assaying of different nations'

162. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī, *The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition: A Compendium of Knowledge from the Classical Islamic World*, trans. Elias Muhanna (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), xvii.

163. Al-Nuwayrī, *The Ultimate Ambition*, xix.

164. To the best of my knowledge, a trend of opening a genealogies with this verse originates with Ibn Ḥazm's *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab*, in which Ibn Ḥazm glosses the verse's citation of "mutual knowledge" (*taʿāruf*) as a justification for genealogical sciences, saying, "Thus the mutual knowledge (*taʿāruf*) of people by means of their *nasab* is an objective that the Almighty had in creating us peoples and tribes, hence it must be the case that the science of *nasab* is a science of high regard (*jalīl rafīʿ*), for with it comes mutual knowledge (*taʿāruf*)"; see Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1948), 1–2. This trend continues for several centuries. For a modern example, see Abū al-Fawaz Muḥammad Amīn al-Baghdādī al-Suwaydī, *Sabāʾik al-dhahab fī maʿrifat qabāʾil al-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1986), 7.

165. Ibid., 71.

166. A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 232; "The Race Question" (Paris: UNESCO, 1950).

167. *The Qurʾan*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 339.

168. E.g., *The Qurʾan*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 424.

169. Al-Nuwayrī, *The Ultimate Ambition*, 73.

merits and introduces the sciences of scrutinizing and grouping bodies of all kinds, animal, human, and celestial. As discussed above, *nasab* became generalized during the Abbasid era, transmuting from a local way of articulating kinship ties into a means of describing the "universal genealogical chart" accounting for all of Noah's offspring, which is to say, all of humankind.[170] Coterminous with its earliest uses for humans, though, it was also used for animals, and this continued to be the case as the implications of lineage changed in anthropocentric contexts. Scrutiny of animal pedigrees, using the tools of *ʿilm al-ansāb*, could explain everything from the makeup of one's own camel herd to the exotic appearances of rare creatures at the world's far edges—erudite trivia that is *adab*'s bread and butter.

It is unsurprising, then, that another section in which genealogy looms large in al-Nuwayrī's encyclopedia is that on zoology. We are told, for example, that the elephant "derives from the buffalo and the pig," and the cheetah from a "lion and pantheress."[171] The giraffe is most superficially legible as the composite of a camel, panther, gazelle, cow, and deer, but this tangled lineage, which would have required superfecundation through the mixing of the different males' seminal fluids in the female, is unsupported by the fact that giraffe parents have been seen giving birth to giraffe offspring.[172] More hauntingly, al-Nuwayrī includes the opinion that the monkey is a "cross between a human being and a beast."[173] Longstanding philosophical trends that considered the consequences of hybridity and interbreeding are vividly on display, as is the idea that bodies externally divulge their histories. In the in-betweenness of primates lies fruitful comparability with the many chroniclers, from al-Idrīsī to John Mandeville, who wrote in the Herodotan tradition and whose Indian Ocean world was replete with Blemmyes and cynocephalae. In the somaticization of heritage, one finds a reminder that just as both humans and animals had observable pedigrees for al-Nuwayrī and his ilk, beliefs about race-making in a variety of European contexts were given empirical legitimation and techniques of experimentation through practices of animal husbandry. In the Atlantic world, these methods were weaponized to sustain chattel slavery.

Though al-Nuwayrī's animals are especially titillating for their hybridity, human kinds are often put to their highest use in his literary excerpts as pure archetypes, particularly in the copious descriptive (*waṣf*) poetry that dots the book's entries. In one poem, the dawn chases away the night as if it were "an African damsel [*zanjiyya*] fleeing a Greek [*harabat quddām rūmī*]."[174] Reading further, in another set of verses, a peach is the fly-stung cheek of an implicitly light-skinned beloved, while figs are either the small breasts of Abyssinian women (*thudayy sighār banāt al-ḥabash*) or the "wounded head of an African" (*hāmat*

170. Zombathy, "Genealogy in Medieval Muslim Societies," 19.

171. Al-Nuwayrī, *The Ultimate Ambition*, 147, 137.

172. Ibid., 149.

173. Ibid., 151.

174. Ibid., 25; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-ʿarab fī funūn al-adab*, ed. Mufīd Qamīḥa (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004), 1:136.

zinjī ʿalayhā jirāḥ).[175] Ripe mulberries likewise are like the "bloody wounds of the sons of Ham" (*yaḥkī jirāḥan damuhā sāʾil laday jusūm min banī Ḥām*), which we might note in the original are yet more gorily depicted as streaming blood from their bodies.[176] The repetition of this motif is possibly because this was simply a well-worn cliché, but also likely related to the fact that in epigrammatic exchanges it was common for multiple poets to riff using the same closing image and similar subject matter.[177] These poems' treatment of bodies also redounds to a broader catalogue of imagery visible in the verse about night and day. They showcase recurrent literary tropes that attended black-white polarities, indicating which types are loveable, which conquerable and consumable, and which the receivers of aestheticized and therefore distanced violence. The motifs are sexualized such that both white and black bodies are compared lustfully with fruits,[178] but the masculine day rapaciously chases the feminine night. In addition, they are mapped. Across these verses we find a seeming geography—lands of the Abyssinians, the Zanj, the children of Ham—that is in fact a racial and affective *topos* born out of diaspora, in which these references become implicitly interchangeable elements in the poetics of color, not unlike Jarīr's Byzantines and *ṣaqāliba*. This racialization of space ironically produces figures who are "ungeographic-yet-Black," in the words of Zavier Wingham, who writes of Black characters in Ottoman shadow plays that were alternatively referred to as *arap*, *zenci*, and so on.[179] The poetics at hand is not immediately apparent from the translation, though. We might thus pause with students at the rendering of *zanjiyya* as "African" and consider what this conjures, particularly in light of the clear non-identification of the natively Egyptian—which is to say, African—al-Nuwayrī with these figures.

The term *zanj* by this time was typically identified with Black people from various parts of Africa, to be sure, but not with a continental Africa, which was not yet an imagined geographical whole. The geographical entity that would come to be known around the world as Africa, meanwhile, housed countless varieties of people, not all of whom were raced in the same ways.[180] The persistent rendering of *zanj* as African in translation tends to make "Africans" where there were none.[181] And because of the verses' imagery that

175. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-ʿarab*, 11:105.

176. Al-Nuwayrī, *The Ultimate Ambition*, 203; idem, *Nihāyat al-ʿarab*, 11:107.

177. Adam Talib, *How Do You Say "Epigram" in Arabic? Literary History at the Limits of Comparison* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 20.

178. Though the poems comparing Abyssinian women's breasts with figs clearly discuss people who are gendered female, the line on the peach more ambiguously references a grammatically masculine *ḥabīb*, which may or may not refer to a male lover.

179. Zavier Wingham, "*Arap Bacı'nın Ara Muhaveresi*," 177–83, at 178 and 183.

180. There is evidence that in addition to so-called Berbers, Nubians and Ethiopians, as well as native Egyptians, or *aqbāṭ* (Copts), were constructed as qualitatively different from the rest of the peoples of the *bilād al-sūdān* in various instances, on grounds of perceived religious proximity, genealogical proximity, or both. See al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq*, 1:61; Hussein A. H. Omar, "'The Crinkly-Haired People of the Black Earth:' Examining Egyptian Identities in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥākim's *Futūḥ*," in *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*, ed. Philip Wood, 149–67 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

181. I borrow this clever phrasing from Peter Webb, who is similarly concerned with translating medieval

impels us to read *zanjiyya* as indicating a Black woman, it renders all of Africa as "Black Africa." We might also meditate on the whitewashing in Arabic parlance of Byzantium (al-Rūm) and its denizens, such that *rūmī* here essentially means white though Byzantium similarly incorporated multifarious heritages, including numerous people identified in Byzantine literatures as "Ethiopian," as shown in recent work by Roland Betancourt.[182] The translation of *zanjiyya* as "African" and of *rūmī* as "Byzantine," ironically, renders Africa as a Black category formation and Byzantium as a white one even as it tries to escape these essentialisms through geographic "accuracy," and indeed the poem's subject matter leads us ultimately to infer a black-white juxtaposition in any case. Here we therefore can problematize the racialization of geographies and ethnicities through pedagogy, just as we might with Ibn Qutayba's sweeping depictions of the *ʿajam*, or "Easterners." Thinking across these two authors, we can also help students unpack the normative work done by texts created in order to consolidate knowledge that *adab* helped produce and reify, such as anthologies and encyclopedias.

Popular Literature: The *101 Nights*, *Tales of the Marvellous*, *The Tale of Princess Fatima*, and *War Songs*

Popular literature—those works that stood outside of *adab* because of their modes of production and circulation—has long garnered negative reviews for its triteness, lack of educational merit, and the virulent prejudices it seems to wear on its sleeves. In premodern contexts, these judgments were largely dispensed from members of the *udabāʾ* who coveted a monopoly on the esteemed written word, and by members of the *ʿulamāʾ* who were concerned to curate the contents and contexts of mass consumption in ways that edified more than entertained.[183] Mamlūk Cairo witnessed restrictions on the sale and promotion of popular epics (*siyar shaʿbiyya*; sing. *sīra*) in the form of *fatwā*s and market guidelines; tales from pre-Islamic Persian lore, many of which were epicized, earned the reputation of being *lahw*, or diverting in a way that distracted from more erudite enterprises.[184] The *1,001 Nights*, meanwhile, were *khurāfāt*, tall tales that were generally overlooked by the elite because they, at least, shored up existing political hierarchies and were sanctioned in the eyes of some by an ambiguous collection of *ḥadīth*.[185] These criticisms and ambivalences are a testament to Arabic popular literature's success as a form; even those who did not participate in its cultures of reading, listening, and performance had their own opinions. James Monroe and Mark Pettigrew demonstrate that in times of imperial decentralization

texts in ways that create "Arabs where there were none." See Rachel Schine and Peter Webb, "Skin and Blood? Blackness and Arabness in Middle Eastern Perspectives" (online, Princeton University, December 14, 2021).

182. Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), esp. 161–205.

183. Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 185–86, 193.

184. Ibid., 169; Savant, *New Muslims*, 175–76.

185. Rina Drory, "Three Attempts to Legitimize Fiction in Classical Arabic Literature," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 18 (1994): 146–64.

and the dissolution of courtly patronage structures, the lettered elite dabbled in popular registers for financial and creative reasons.[186] Literary enterprises undertaken outside of government institutions were far from apolitical, though, and the largely anonymous collectivism through which popular works were composed and traveled invites salient discussions about systemic racial thinking that resonate today.

This discussion is already taking place among popular audiences, though noticeably less so in scholarly literature; Robert Irwin has distressingly referred to racism in the premodern Islamic world as "a crime without a history."[187] The *1,001 Nights* remains the primary work of Arabic popular literature that has attracted modern visibility and, on its heels, critique for its racial politics. It has been taken as an exemplar of "racist prejudices not only regarding blacks, but also with respect to Jews, Persians and Europeans," as well as of gendered abuse. Fedwa Malti-Douglas reads this last set of prejudices as vital to the text's objective of disciplining male patterns of desire.[188] In general, it often appears that the purpose of othered presences in the text—whether they are receiving good treatment or ill—is to serve its core male, majoritized audience. The recent re-adaptation of Aladdin as a live action film for Disney spawned censure of, on the one hand, the new version's sustained Orientalist failings and, on the other, the racial dynamics endemic to the original story as narrated to the French author Antoine Galland by his Syrian interlocutor, Ḥannā Diyāb. Recalling the "African" origins of the evil sorcerer in Galland's tale as well as the story's anti-Jewish representations, Stefan Weidner writes in Qantara:

> We must therefore concede that there is racism in the Aladdin story, but also that this is not a particularity of Western culture [...] After all, Arab and Islamic history exhibits enough racist misgivings and stereotypes relating to Africans and Jews, such as can also be found in those tales from *The Thousand and One Nights* that clearly have Arab origins.[189]

It is remarkable, then, that in the frontmatter of both the Penguin Classics 2008 edition of the *Arabian Nights* (*Alf layla wa-layla*) and the Library of Arabic Literature's 2016 edition of the *101 Nights* (*Miʾat layla wa-layla*), which shares significant overlaps with the notoriously racialized frame tale and several other stories featured in its larger yet younger sibling (to paraphrase its foreword writer, Robert Irwin), questions of race are absent.[190] As above,

186. James T. Monroe and Mark F. Pettigrew, "The Decline of Courtly Patronage and the Appearance of New Genres in Arabic Literature: The Case of the *Zajal*, the *Maqāma*, and the Shadow Play," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 34, no. 1–2 (2003): 138–77.

187. Robert Irwin, "The Dark Side of 'The Arabian Nights,'" *Critical Muslim* 13 (2015), https://www.criticalmuslim.io/the-dark-side-of-the-arabian-nights/.

188. Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 15.

189. Stefan Weidner, "The Aladdin Controversy," trans. Ayca Turkoglu, *Qantara* (2019), https://en.qantara.de/content/hollywood%CA%B9s-flirtation-with-1001-nights-the-aladdin-controversy?nopaging=1&qt-nodes_popularity=1.

190. The single exception to this appears to be in Robert Irwin's introduction to the second volume of Malcolm Lyons' translation for Penguin, on the theme of provenance and other *Nights* translations, in which

this absence becomes double-edged when one is confronted by the patent hierarchies in the text's first pages because it simultaneously implies pre-raciality on the part of the source material and the expectation of post-raciality in the modern reader.

The *101 Nights*' translator, Bruce Fudge, does go into meticulous detail explaining the likely Buddhist and Sanskrit-via-Chinese origins of the frame tale in which a gifted female storyteller arrives to a king's court after he and his brother (in *Alf layla*) or comrade (in *Miʾat layla*), both cuckolded by slaves, one or both of whom are said explicitly to be Black depending on the edition, ultimately come to renounce the manipulations of women.[191] However, in extant revisions of the Buddhist version, though physiognomy looms large in other ways, the two cuckolded men find their wives with a stranger and a horse groomer of indeterminate appearance.[192] The translation of the tale into a new milieu's matrix of race and class deserves our attention, and even was mentioned by the originator of the Buddhist forerunner hypothesis, the early-twentieth-century French scholar Emmanuel Cosquin, despite not being mentioned in Fudge's introduction where Cosquin is cited.[193] Such a discussion in the classroom could pair productively with Don J. Wyatt's *The Blacks of Premodern China*, allowing us to ask where race and class intersect in the history and narrative of cultures that were in at least indirect communication and where these links are either absent or obviated.[194]

More noteworthy than the elision of questions of race in the corpus of *Nights* literature in translation, though, is their evolution in other related translations. Six years after issuing his *Nights* translation with Penguin, Malcolm Lyons published his rendering of *Tales of the Marvellous and News of the Strange* (*al-Ḥikāyāt al-ʿajība wa-l-akhbār al-gharība*). The text itself embodies the mysteries its title promises; only one manuscript of the *Ḥikāyāt* is known to us and, like most popular works, it is undated and anonymous.[195] Robert Irwin features as the author of the introduction, which is divided into a series of thematic sections. Following two on gender, titled "Misogyny and Rape" and "Deceitful Women," Irwin offers a section called "Racism."[196] The section is primarily concerned with antiblack racism, and Irwin draws a connection between associations of blackness with ugliness and ugliness with villainy to explain some of the text's choices of antagonist. This, he adds, is a trend hardly exclusive to Arabic literature, and he names the novelists Sax Rohmer, Dennis Wheatley, and Ian Fleming as examples, all of whom are white, British, modern men who wrote for popular audiences and likewise used the slippage between ugliness, foreignness,

he states that Burton heightens both the eroticism and racism of the original. *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, vol. 2, trans. Malcolm C. Lyons (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), xiii.

191. *A Hundred and One Nights*, ed. and trans. Bruce Fudge (New York: New York University Press, 2016), xix.

192. Emmanuel Cosquin, "Le prologue-cadre des *Mille et une nuits*, les légendes perses et le livre d'Esther," *Revue Biblique* 6, no. 1 (1909): 7–49, at 13–14.

193. Ibid., 30.

194. Don J. Wyatt, *The Blacks of Premodern China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

195. *Tales of the Marvellous and News of the Strange*, trans. Malcolm Lyons (London: Penguin Books, 2014), xii.

196. Ibid., xxii–xxv.

and criminality to concoct radically alien images of evil.[197] In discussing racism rather than race, Irwin avoids reifying race as a category while still explicating some of the narrative impacts of its assumed existence. The range of these impacts is limited, though, by the fact that racism is most material to Irwin's analysis when its directions and implications are most visible to us, that is, when it is antiblack and connected with extremes of moral difference and depravity.

What might it look like to read these tales with the assumed existence of race in mind for all their subjects? A glimpse of this can be gained through looking in this way at the "Tale of Julnar of the Sea," a tale that also appears in the *1,001 Nights* corpus. In the *Ḥikāyāt*, the king Shahriyar, whose harem is massive and contains women from all corners of the earth, but who has yet to have a son, is given a nonspeaking enslaved woman procured for 1,000 dinars. Her beauty has "no match on the face of the earth."[198] After a year of silence, when she is with child, the woman speaks, saying that she is a princess from the sea, which explains her peerless otherworldliness. Her people dwell there with a greater diversity of creatures than those on the earth, sustaining their aquatic lives using amulets. She summons her family to her using an exotic drug, and they appear with "moonlike" faces—a classic indicator of beauty in Arabic literature—and green hair—far less typical.[199] When Julnar, as the woman is named, goes into labor, her family employs medicine and techniques that are unknown to Shahriyar, indicating their distinct physiology, level of civilizational advancement, or both. Julnar gives birth to a boy named Badr, and her family takes him under the water and reemerges, with the child now bearing jewels of untold rarity; Badr is of two natures and can transcend land and sea, reaping the unique benefits of each.[200]

Here we may recall our working understanding of racial differences as those that construct disparate essential, natural constitutions and relationships to nature among human groups and that are given meaning through notional and real projects of expansion into and empowerment over their differentiated realms. In this light, Julnar's water-dwelling family arriving to King Shahriyar's consciousness may be read as a moment of racial construction. Shahriyar comes to know Julnar's kin through his worldwide search for a panoply of women who might give him heirs, a search which he conducts at incredible expense, and which is afforded by his subjects' global knowledges and networks. When presented with a seemingly unique specimen, Shahriyar at first only registers his bride's preciousness. Later, though, he discovers that she is from a people whose difference is elemental and in whose vast realm he now has a stake. When the two have a son, we are assured that his mix of royal stocks is a strength. At the same time, his in-betweenness causes perturbation and danger: his father is distressed by his long disappearances underwater, and the sea princess with whom he

197. Ibid., xxv.

198. Ibid., 115.

199. Ibid., 118.

200. This salutary hybridity may be an inversion of the liminal status of people who, like Badr, lived between these two worlds through the occupation of pearl-diving, direct reference to which occurs elsewhere in the *Nights* corpus in the fifth voyage of Sindbad. I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for this observation.

falls in love judges his interloping in the sea "inauspicious" and uses water magic to bewitch him.[201] When he eventually weds the princess after becoming king of a faraway, glittering city-state, he gives her sea-dwelling father half of his territory to oversee. In Badr's story one finds a rich historical intertext concerned with the periodically tenuous blending of different peoples under Islamic administrations, brokered through kinship structures that are most salutary when they support the aims of effective dominion.

The 2021 abridgment and translation by Melanie Magidow of *The Tale of Princess Fatima, Warrior Woman* (*Sīrat al-Amīra Dhāt al-Himma*) for Penguin features a similarly strategic use of hybridity in narrativizing the crossing and mastery of frontiers, as Magidow notes obliquely in her introduction. There, Magidow focuses on the son of the text's eponymous heroine, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, saying, "Princess Fatima's sole child, 'Abdelwahhab, is Black, although she and the child's father are not."[202] Magidow adds that his unique color vis-à-vis his parents and tribe causes conflict, but not exclusion; the central characters in the text and adoring audiences of listeners alike are spurred on by the hero's exploits. However, Magidow also mentions that this inclusion is conditioned on a certain enclavism, with ʿAbd al-Wahhāb "commanding and having deeper relationships with people of color" in the military, true to the segregated nature of Muslim armies throughout history.[203] Magidow characterizes these divisions as "racial and colorist," that is, as entailing prejudices about biologized differences of social kind that also redound to hegemonic standards of beauty and hierarchies of resemblance across kinds; under white supremacy, lighter-skinned people raced as Black benefit socially, with implications for class mobility, marriageability, and more.[204] Colorism is thus typically defined as a form of intra-racial discrimination and stratification that privileges people who are more visibly proximal to other groups that are more advantageously raced. Robert L. Reece goes beyond analytical frameworks that reduce colorism to a matter of individual "preference," instead exploring the ways in which it is structural. He adduces the systemic persistence of colorism in the United States to query whether, after the instantiation of the "one-drop rule," the United States "ever truly moved past its triracial system" in which the category of "mulatto" was officially reified.[205] For Reece, colorism is therefore in part an artefact of prior racial categorizations in which mixed persons were enshrined in law as an intermediary social stratum.

Magidow does not explicitly discuss the construction of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's difference as produced through racial categorization, colorist categorization, or both. This is perhaps because in the Arabic text, there is significant ambiguity as to which factor is most operative in which moments: ʿAbd al-Wahhāb is said in several instances to have Arab facial features but be dark-skinned, and elsewhere this is contravened by analogizing him with non-Arab peoples from places like Nubia and assigning him features that are stereotyped as Black,

201. Ibid., 123–24.

202. *The Tale of the Princess Fatima, Warrior Woman: The Arabic Epic of Dhat al-Himma*, trans. Melanie Magidow (New York: Penguin Books, 2021), xvi.

203. Ibid., xvii.

204. Ibid., xvii.

205. Robert L. Reece, "Color Crit: Critical Race Theory and the History and Future of Colorism in the United States," *Journal of Black Studies* 50, no. 1 (2019): 3–25, at 21.

like a flat "cow-like" nose (*furṭūsuhu ka-furṭūs al-ʿijl*).[206] When Fāṭima's father first sees the child, he remarks not that he is dark, but that he is "of the Black kind" (*aswad al-jins*), whom another tribesman remarks are "not lineally exchangeable with" and "completely unlike" white people (*nasl al-bīḍ mā yabdulu bi-sūd*, *wa-laysa al-bīḍ ḥaqqan mithla sūd*).[207] This split perception overlaps strongly with the divide between the heroes and villains and their supporters and detractors in the text, such that the pious Arab-Muslim figures with whom ʿAbd al-Wahhāb is most aligned acknowledge his group membership and likeness to them while their Christianized detractors do not, focusing instead on his stereotyped blackness.

Other heroes in the *sīra* corpus evidence similar ambiguities and simultaneously sharpen our understanding of the ways in which blackness signifies a difference of kind in these works: across various written and recited traditions of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, the hero Abū Zayd who, like ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, is born to Arab parents but is consistently raced as Black, is sometimes said to "have the same features as a white child."[208] Elsewhere, he incorporates an uncanny mixture of black and white, in unmixed patches on his body.[209] The re-racing implications of blackness in the worlds of the *sīra*s is thrown into especially sharp relief in a third *sīra* that incorporates a Black hero, *Sīrat ʿAntar*. When one of ʿAntar's uncles, Shās, is kidnapped by a tribal rival, he is aided in his escape by an elderly woman who possesses magical powers:

> In haste, [the old woman] rose and grabbed one of her large cauldrons, filled it with water, put it over the fire, and threw some grasses in there that none but the great sages (*al-ḥukamāʾ al-kibār*) know [the properties] of [...] then she took Shās over to the cauldron and sat him before her, with him following her every deed without question. The old woman removed his clothing and began pouring the medicament from the cauldron over him [...] she had him rub the substance in himself, as before, and he became like a slave (*sāra ka-annahu ʿabd*), like the son of a Black slave woman (*ama zanjiyya*), black-colored like the deep night. She waited a bit until he had air-dried and then applied oil, so that his skin shone like expensive ebony,[210] then garbed him in the clothing of enslaved shepherds and gave him a staff.[211]

206. *Sīrat al-Amīra Dhāt al-Himma*, ed. ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Maqānibī (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Shaʿbiyya, 1980), 1:598.

207. Ibid., 600, 611.

208. Caroline Stone, "The Great Migration of the Bani Hilal," *AramcoWorld* (2016), 14–19, at 16, https://www.aramcoworld.com/Articles/November-2016/The-Great-Migration-of-the-Bani-Hilal.

209. Cathryn Anita Baker, "The Hilālī Saga in the Tunisian South" (PhD diss., University of Indiana, 1978), 67–68, 652.

210. This passage's reference to both body oiling and commodification echoes a reference in Ibn Buṭlān's epistle on slave purchasing, in which he writes that buyers must be wary of sellers' attempts to make dark (*samrāʾ*) skin appear healthier or more appealing than it is by giving it a golden (*dhahabiyya*) glow through the application of a caraway tincture (*wuḍiʿat fī abzan fīhi māʾ al-karāwiyā*)—this allows them to "swindle" (*yudallisūna*) buyers by inflating enslaved people's value. See Ibn Buṭlān, *Risālat Jāmiʿat al-funūn*, 379.

211. *Sīrat ʿAntara b. Shaddād* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Jumhuriyya al-ʿArabiyya, 1980), 1:365.

Shās then absconds from the camp in the guise of an enslaved Black man. Despite having all the same features as before, he does not register for others as a darker Arab or an Arab man wearing makeup, but instead passes himself off as Black through the combination of his blackness and his humble clothing. The category of an Arab with visible proximity to blackness is in effect absent from the racial imaginary at hand.[212]

The seeming impossibility of being a Black Arab also emerges for ʿAbd al-Wahhāb when, as in Abū Zayd's situation, his fellow tribesmen assume that he is different not because he is simply darker, but because his mother has committed adultery with a slave of non-Arab heritage and is thus himself not lineally a fellow member of the tribe. When this proves not to be true, he nonetheless remains raced throughout the text as "the Black of the Banū Kilāb." And indeed, a difference of nature is at work in his origin story. As I have argued elsewhere, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's narrative of conception, birth, and paternity dispute posits numerous explanations for his unexpected appearance that rely on mutually inclusive theories both of science and divine intervention.[213] He is said ultimately to be Black because he was conceived at the time of his mother's menses, and the "black" menstrual blood mixed with her partner's *nuṭfa*, or sperm drop, and dyed ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's skin, not unlike the old woman's concoction dyed Shās'.[214] However unlike in the case of Shās, for ʿAbd al-Wahhāb these changes are neither ephemeral nor skin deep. Not only does his blackness structure his entire life experience, but it also is embedded across various manuscripts of his *sīra* with a host of other, more internal modalities of alterity, including disease, mental illness, and physical disability; one exemplary manuscript notes that "[I]f a man has intercourse with his wife while she is menstruating, the child will be either black (*aswad*) or defective (*nāqiṣ*) or insane (*maʿtūh*) because of the corruption of the menstrual blood."[215] There are also long traditions in various Near Eastern literatures of associating children conceived during one's menses with leprosy and other types of contagion.[216]

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212. Disability periodically intervenes in this dichotomy. In *Sīrat Dhāt al-himma* and *Sīrat ʿAntar* alike, Black characters frequently pass themselves off as disabled in ruses to gain access to various spaces and are received in kinship when they do so. When ʿAntar's sibling, Shaybūb, feigns palsy and partial blindness and pretends to be a beggar to enter an encampment, he is greeted with, "to which Arabs [i.e., tribes] do you belong and where have you come from?" Such treatment may indicate etiquettes of euphemism that applied both to disability and blackness. See *Sīrat ʿAntara*, 2:331; A. Fischer, "Arab baṣīr 'scharfsichtig' per antiphrasin = 'blind,'" *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 61 no. 2 (1907): 425–34, on 429.

213. Rachel Schine, "Conceiving the Pre-modern Black-Arab Hero," *passim*.

214. Ibid., 321–22; *cf. The Tale of Princess Fatima*, 101.

215. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS arabe 3855, fol. 173.

216. Nādir Kāẓim notes that the conditions of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's conception should have resulted in him being leprous if in accordance with numerous Islamic traditions, which have a significant Jewish counterpart in the medieval commentarial text *Leviticus Rabbah*, as has been discussed by Haggai Mazuz. Shai Secunda notes, though, that the demonic and world-polluting ontogenesis for menstruation in Zoroastrian creation stories may have begun to influence associations between menstruation and disease much earlier, generating significant differences in this regard between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud; these combined and extended repercussions for interacting with menstruants arguably circulated in Islamic popular traditions as well, as evidenced by the aforementioned manuscript's list. I address the co-constitution of techniques of racialization and understandings of disease and pollution at length in forthcoming work using these and other sources.

The vignette in which ʿAbd al-Wahhāb is born appears as the chapter "Trials of Motherhood" in Magidow's translation, in which she details the full account of Fāṭima's rape during her menses.[217] Gesturing toward the racialization of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Magidow capitalizes "Black," while elsewhere the translation seems to suggest that at hand is a difference of complexion within a preconceived spectrum and not of social category, as when one man queries "'Have you ever seen two light-skinned parents have a child that dark?'" (*araʾitum mawlūd ummuhu bayḍāʾ tasṭaʿu wa-abūhu ashqar abqaʿ yaʾtī lawnuhu aswad azlaʿ*).[218] In Arabic, this passage has a resonance in which ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's father's whiteness is called into question rather than shored up by association with Fāṭima's brilliant whiteness. He is described as "pale yet mottled" (*ashqar abqaʿ*) with *abqaʿ* explicated in Ibn al-Manẓūr's seventh/thirteenth-century lexicon, *Lisān al-ʿarab* as "something whose whiteness is mixed with another color (*al-abqaʿ mā khālaṭa bayāḍuhu lawn ākhar*)." He continues:

> It is said that [some] are called *buqʿān* because of their differences of color and their descent from two kinds (*li-ikhtilāf alwānihim wa-tanāsulihim min jinsayn*). Qutaybī said: *al-buqʿān* are those who have whiteness and blackness in them, thus you would not call someone who is entirely white and not mixed with black *abqaʿ*, so how could the Byzantines (*al-rūm*) be deemed *buqʿān* when they are purely whites (*wa-hum bīḍ khullaṣ*)?[219]

When it is proven that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb is Black not due to obscured ancestry but instead through an interaction of different-hued bodily fluids, this in turn proves the whiteness of both his parents. Through his change in nature, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb becomes an agent of assimilation in the story because his free, elite Arab *nasab* and blackness allow him to simultaneously make inroads with and bolster the largely enslaved Black community in his midst, many of whom he converts and manumits himself. Two of his recurring sidekicks and loyal servants, Abū al-Hazāhiz and Maymūn, are both described in the Arabic text as Black and as hulking warriors. In the original, Abū al-Hazāhiz fights nearly naked and can use whole trees in lieu of spears;[220] Magidow translates the vignette in which Maymūn is first gifted to ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, at which point we are told he has been given a nickname because he is "like a water buffalo" (*jammās*, or "Jamas" in the translation) due to his strength and size. He is gifted alongside nineteen other enslaved Black men, of whom the only other named figure is Nafiʿ, whose name, "Benefit," Magidow does not gloss for us as she does Jamas, but which gestures to his subservient and commodified role as an asset to

See Nādir Kāẓim, *Tamthīlāt al-ākhar: ṣūrat al-sūd fī-l-mutakhayyal al-ʿarabī al-wasīṭ* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2007), 343–44; Haggai Mazuz, "Midrashic Influence on Islamic Folklore: The Case of Menstruation," *Studia Islamica* 108 (2013): 189–201; Shai Secunda, "The Fractious Eye: On the Evil Eye of Menstruants in Zoroastrian Tradition," *Numen* 61 (2014): 83–108.

217. *The Tale of Princess Fatima*, 75–103.

218. *The Tale of Princess Fatima*, 85; *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma*, 1:599.

219. Ibn al-Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (1955), 326.

220. *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma*, 1:884–97.

his namers.[221] In the Arabic, it becomes clear that these men are used to recruit yet more geoculturally remote Black others; after a stint in Abyssinia, Maymūn assumes leadership over an especially potent and profoundly foreign group of Black warriors who return with the Arabs, from the mythologized African ethnicity *damādim*. They "crop one another's ears when they are afflicted with sadness or have a change in leadership (*idhā ḥazanū aw nābathum nāʾiba*)."[222] This reference naturalizes a practice supposedly common in branding and stigmatizing enslaved people in pre-Islamic Arabia and proscribed in Islam as endemic in enslavable peoples' cultural practices, and therefore renders the practice as foreign, ignorant, and regressive.[223]

These details suggest the logic within the text of cultivating pathways to effectively gathering, refining, and incorporating men of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's ilk into the Muslims' ranks, which ʿAbd al-Wahhāb does with great efficacy. In this smaller of heroic triumphs, he sketches the shape of a formidable Muslim community that puts each of its components' strengths to fitting use. Magidow's strategy of abridgement and choice to center her telling on the life of Fāṭima means that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's activities are focalized primarily in relation to her and not to the band of men from the *bilād al-sūdān* whom he and his slaves command, or his adventures therein. However, in the relationships between him, his enslaved Black charges, and his clientalized companion Abū al-Hazāhiz, the relational nature of racialization is on ample display. The "facts of blackness" in the *sīra*, such as its entanglements with bastardy, unfreedom, commodification, and ultimately the mechanics of Islamic expansion itself, through which Black figures maximize on these associations to earn heroes' laurels, are also made manifest in Magidow's volume. After all, per the translation, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb recognizes that "God made me Black for a reason. He knows best."[224]

ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's heroic role in the *The Tale of Princess Fatima* allows for conversations about the conditions of inclusion: what makes one an ideal "diverse" actor in an Arab-Muslim environment, which institutions (military, marital, agnatic) are accessible to such figures, and on what terms? It occasions a discussion of the unique work ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's hybridity does in the text in contrast with figures with more legibly foreign origins as well as with those who are socially recognized as full Arabs. And, finally, it prompts a more fundamental question: with ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's Arab parentage and his upbringing between

221. *The Tale of Princess Fatima*, 105.

222. *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma*, 5:552.

223. On the significance of exoticizing depictions of people from the Damdam (*alt.* Lamlam), see Michael A. Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 45. On the appearance of cutting and piercing the body of an enslaved person as a form of stigma and discipline in Islamic prophetology, see Elizabeth Urban, "Hagar and Mariya: Early Islamic Models of Slave Motherhood," in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, eds. Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain, 225–43 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), 226. On the relationship between offshoots of ear cropping—in which an enslaved person wishing to change owners would crop the ear of his or her intended owner's livestock and thus be given as compensation to the new owner—and their possible relationship to *jāhilī* practices, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 202–3.

224. *The Tale of Princess Fatima*, 88.

Arab and African groups, why is it that we only ever see him referred to in the translated text as Black? This is especially striking because of how the Arabic text frequently troubles ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's standing within a discrete racial category from his parents, something that Magidow does at times emphasize through the language of colorism. Indeed, that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb is labeled Black (in both Arabic and English versions) despite all this destabilization is partly because a similar process to that described by Reece occurred within early the Islamic world. Where previously those like ʿAbd al-Wahhāb—a figure of radically altered nature but, uncannily, also of pure Arab heritage—were rendered socially intelligible through various classifications of mixedness, now they may be conferred certain unofficial benefits of proximity to Arabness but are knowable only as either Arab or Black. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's everyday experiences and affinities mark him continually as the latter. His simultaneous blackness and pure Arab *nasab* carries the category crises latent in the elision of mixed identities to a form of logical extreme.

The tensions between newer and older racial epistemologies in crafting literary legacies can also be fruitfully addressed by looking across to another translation of a text that, at first blush, more properly belongs in the ranks of mannered literature than in those of popular texts: the Library of Arabic Literature's edition of the anthology (*dīwān*) of the pre-Islamic poet turned posthumous epic hero, ʿAntara b. Shaddād, translated by James Montgomery under the title *War Songs*. In his edition of the *dīwān*, Montgomery includes not only the works that we can say with greater certitude originated with the half-Abyssinian warrior poet of the tribe of ʿAbs, but also a series of poems from the *sīra shaʿbiyya* of which a euhemerized ʿAntara is a protagonist; these he divides by section. In so doing, Montgomery provides a window on a telling contrast, namely, that despite Montgomery following many Abbasid-era anthologists in referring to ʿAntara as one of a handful of "black warrior-poets born to black women," in his earliest extant poetry—stress-tested through comparison across a number of collectors' arrangements—ʿAntara does not once refer to himself as Black.[225] The earliest redaction of his poetry is that of al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 212–213 AH/828 AD), which is reproduced and referenced by a number of later authors, and to whom ʿAntara's *sīra* is also fictively attributed; the later anthologies that Montgomery uses are from the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries, and unlike with epicists' flexible and locally tailored craft, learned anthologists and their copyists practiced fidelity to the letter, written or heard, of prior texts.[226]

Across multiple poems, ʿAntara mentions his mother's distinct origins as a descendant of Ham. He also discusses her blackness, describing her "black brow" as like the Kaʿba's cornerstone (*ḥajar al-maqām*) that held significance as a relic even before the structure was restored to monotheistic worship by Muḥammad.[227] In the same breath he often mentions his father, as a member of his tribe, and once as the "finest of the clan (*min khayr ʿabs*)," but not as a son of Sam or even as an Arab.[228] Montgomery writes in the introduction that this

225. ʿAntara b. Shaddād, *War Songs*, trans. James Montgomery (New York: New York University Press, 2018), xx.

226. Ibid., lvii.

227. Ibid., 154–55.

228. Ibid., 30–31.

provincialism is to be expected, as, per Webb and others, the concept of Arab ethnicity was not yet a fixture in the imagination of pre-Islamic Arabians.[229] In some of the comparisons of his father as the cream of his people with his mother as one of a diffuse population of the primordial Ham's descendants who is more readily likened to an Arabian structure rather than any reference point from her homeland, there is already a latent disparity of autobiographical recordkeeping. In a few lines at the end of one poem, ʿAntara seems to give the two sides even more unequal weight, saying *min āl ʿabs manṣibī wa-faʿālī minhum abī ḥaqqan fa-hum lī wālid wa-l-umm min Ḥām fa-hum akhwālī*, which Montgomery nimbly renders as "I yield my fame to my father's clan—my mother descends from the sons of Ham."[230] Much more clunkily, these lines could be read as saying, "my rank and deeds derive from the people of ʿAbs, my father, truly, is from them and as such they are my progenitor, while my mother is from Ham and so they [=Ham's people] are my maternal uncles." Here, ʿAntara is not simply acknowledging his hybridity, he is making a rhetorical ploy for greater belonging with the men with whom he was raised. Elsewhere, ʿAntara can be seen more defiantly invoking his mixedness by using the typically derogatory term *hajīn*, which Montgomery translates as "half-blood."[231] There again, ʿAntara uses the word "black," as well as a word translated by Montgomery as "white" (*aḥmar*), in keeping with the fact that *aswad* and *aḥmar* co-occur as opposites in some early texts, but which is also interpretable as ruddy; he places himself in neither of the two categories.

Similarly to the use of *abqaʿ* above, there are indications that in the pre- and early-Islamic period, people who were *hajīn*s were expected to occupy an intermediary space in terms not only of their social position. Moreover, sources suggest that it was believed their mixedness would be physically self-evident, though in one story this notional observability again proves a fickle metric for racial construction because of the possibility of atavism. An anecdote narrated by the Prophet's Companion Abū ʿUbayda and collected by the early fourth/tenth-century lexicographer Ibn Durayd tells of a man from the tribe of ʿĀmar wedding a woman from his own clan (*qawmuhu*), only to have a child who is, to his eye, *aḥmar* like a *ḥajīn*, though he expected the child to be dark like himself (*khālif alwān banī al-jawn*). He is about to retaliate against his spouse when she proclaims that she has white yet upstanding ancestry (*in lahu min qibalī ajdād bīḍ al-wujūh karaman anjādan*) and that they earn their honor in battle despite not being black (*a-lā yakūnu lawnuhum sawādan*).[232] In this narration, we see that some pre- and early-Islamic Arabian groups are said to have identified as dark, recalling the above discussion of whiteness' rhetoricity and evolution as a hegemonic construct. Ibn Durayd elsewhere offers corroborating details, as when he comments on the Arab saying, "this is clear to the black and white (*mā yakhfā dhālika ʿalā al-sawdāʾ wa-l-ḥamrāʾ wa-ʿalā al-aswad wa-l-aḥmar*)," that *aswad* indicates the Arabs, because "darkness (*udma*) is the common color in most Arabs, while ruddiness and pallor

229. Ibid., xxvi.

230. Ibid., 136–37.

231. Ibid., 216–17.

232. I am indebted to Nathaniel Miller for pointing me to this anecdote. See al-Marzubānī, *Ashʿār al-nisāʾ*, ed. Sāmī Makkī al-ʿĀnī and Hilāl Nājī (Baghdad: Dār al-Risāla, 1976), 82.

(*al-ḥumra wa-l-shuqra*) is the common color in most *ʿajam*."[233] Moreover, the terms *aswad*, *aḥmar*, and *abyaḍ* appear to form a spectrum, much as they do in the Qurʾān (Q 35:27), with *aḥmar* occupying a range of middle, brown positions between white and black.[234] And yet, per ʿAntara's poem in which *aḥmar* and *aswad* are counterposed, we see that color is portrayed in relative and relational modes; it is not only the case that ʿAntara does not physically describe himself, he may not have had a single, fixed way of doing so. In view of this, we can see the figure of ʿAntara change before our eyes.

It is not until the poetry taken from ʿAntara's epic—the earliest mention of which, as with *The Tale of Princess Fatima*, dates to the sixth/twelfth century, and the first extensive extant manuscripts to the mid-ninth/fifteenth century[235]—that one finds in Montgomery's edition an ʿAntara with a more familiar face, describing himself as Black and vaunting himself over Arabs, in one instance declaring himself superior to the "ʿAmrs and Zayds" that surround him.[236] In the prose of his *sīra*, ʿAntara's features are exaggeratedly Black as well. When he is born, he is described as gigantic and "black and swarthy (*adgham*) like an elephant, flat-nosed and broad-shouldered, with wide eyes. The creation of the Glorious King (*ṣinaʿat al-malik al-jalīl*) was frown-faced, coily-haired, large-mouthed [...] with big ears and pupils that emitted sparks of fire."[237] In the hands of skilled socially- and self-conscious epicists similar to those who fashioned the *Tale of Princess Fatima*, ʿAntara's identity as a *hajīn* has given way to two competing claims, the first his self-proclaimed sense of Arab belonging and, the second, his peers perceiving only racial Blackness, at times with mocking derision (*yaʿibūna lawnī aswadan*).[238] Where above, with Ibn Qutayba, the paternalization of *nasab* and the decline of *hajīn* identities worked to apologetic effect by strengthening the Arabness of the Abbasid caliphs, the epical ʿAntara shows that the decline of *hajīn* identity in narratives about people who became raced as Black under a monoethnic episteme encodes the reverse: though ʿAntara's father is rendered in his epic as an Arab who extends a paternity claim to the child (*ilhāq*) because of his exceptional heroism, and thus entitles him to his *nasab*, ʿAntara continues throughout the text to contend with society labelling him not as a member of ʿAbs, but as a "black slave" (*ʿabd aswad*).[239]

The Abbasid-era biographers whose entries on ʿAntara Montgomery translates in a few appendices note that in pre-Islamic Arabia, children born to enslaved mothers were born into slavery yet could gain recognition as Arab and claim their fathers' *nasab*s through feats of gallantry in adulthood. However their full assimilation is not implicit in this—ʿAntara is,

233. Ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-lugha*, ed. Ramzī Munīr Baʿalbakī (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malayīn), 1:523.

234. I discuss this color spectrum in depth elsewhere. See Rachel Schine, "On Blackness in Arabic Popular Literature: The Black Heroes of the *Siyar Shaʿbiyya*, Their Conceptions, Contests, and Contexts" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2019), 51–57.

235. Peter Heath, *The Thirsty Sword: Sīrat ʾAntar and the Arabic Popular Epic* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1996), 28.

236. ʿAntara b. Shaddād, *War Songs*, 249.

237. *Sīrat ʿAntara*, 1:74.

238. ʿAntara b. Shaddād, *War Songs*, 248.

239. *Sīrat ʿAntara*, *passim*; M. S. Sujimon, "Istilḥāq and Its Role in Islamic Law," *Arab Law Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (2003): 117–43.

after all, ultimately remembered for his difference, and he describes his maternal heritage recurrently in his poetry. His non-Arab origins likely followed him throughout his life in other intangible and unknowable ways despite his successful bid for a change in legal claim on lineage; later portrayals articulate this experience as Black racialization, but we have little evidence from ʿAntara's own words that this is the precise form his alterity took. Like ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, ʿAntara continuously vies for inclusion in his *sīra* and compensates for his difference through feats of heroism long after formal recognition, but these deeds are simultaneously enlarged and frustrated because of distance from this pre-Islamic past, the structural displacement of mixed identities, and the concomitant impossibility of Black Arabness within the world of the text. There is a marked disconnect between ʿAntara's and ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's literary treatment, with the shifts in histories of racialization that they evoke, and that of Ibn Qutayba's constellation of Arabized potentates who profited from these selfsame changes. This gulf ultimately demands a discussion of passing and privilege as transhistorical phenomena, as well as of the particularities and politics of historical forms of mixedness. It shows us that the tools of legitimation, the burdens of proof, and the benefits of belief, have long been designed to serve some more readily than others.

Conclusion

This article has argued that grappling with racialization and critical theories thereof is vital simultaneously to comparing and deeply historicizing individual texts, events, and phenomena from Islamic premodernity. It is moreover vital to pedagogies centered on what students will themselves identify, compare, and seek to historicize. To that end, I have offered a set of detailed, guided readings of nine Arabic texts in translation focused on discussing race in the classroom, particularly in premodern, comparative contexts. I have used these readings to trouble the twin myths of what Kimberlé Crenshaw has called perspectivelessness, or treating the normative as the objective in a field of study and sphere of human action. On the one hand, perspectivelessness is propounded by the ways in which both translators and instructors treat dominant modern narratives of race as unique to the post-Enlightenment West, thereby marking out texts from premodernity or the non-West as pre-racial and divesting ourselves of a responsibility to bring race into the Islamic studies classroom. On the other hand, perspectivelessness is latent in premodern and non-Western texts themselves, in the unspoken discursive norms enshrined on the part of the authors discussed above, teased apart beautifully in several of the translators' commentaries. By reading with race in mind, from identifying the role of whiteness in Ibn Faḍlān to that of hybridity in the *dīwān* of ʿAntara, we historicize these norms and analyze their functions as tools of social positioning at local, imperial, and inter-imperial levels. In thinking through the processes of racialization in these texts with our students, we also help them see these processes at work in their own lives and therefore create a denser trail of touchstones between ourselves and history, including histories that are not our own. Far from discussions of race driving a wedge—so often, lately, the accusation levied against race-conscious instruction—they support the ideal of better approaching our "basic humanity."

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