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THE POPULAR PREACHERS AND STORYTELLERS (*QUṢṢĀṢ*) – THE EARLIEST HISTORIANS, EXEGETES, AND LEGAL SPECIALISTS IN ISLAM

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Abstract. Popular preachers and storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*; sg. *qāṣṣ*) appeared towards the middle of the first/seventh century and quickly became the earliest informal historians and exegetes in Islam. Before long, the Umayyad caliphs recognized the political impact of their sermons and institutionalized preaching and storytelling (*qaṣaṣ*) as a state office. Notwithstanding this fact, informal *qaṣaṣ* did not vanish altogether, sometimes giving voice to pious discontent with the ruling dynasty. In the present study, I demonstrate that during the Marwānid period *qaṣaṣ* was combined with judgeship and other official positions. A comparison with documentary sources suggests that during the same period the term *qāḍī* (judge) was not yet used, and it may have been retroactively grafted onto the Umayyad past by early ‘Abbāsīd historical literature. Literary sources also imply the existence of regional hierarchies of *quṣṣāṣ*. During the second/eighth century, *qaṣaṣ* lost its significance to the professional collection and transmission of traditions (*ḥadīth*) for the needs of Islamic jurisprudence and exegesis. *Ḥadīth* transmitters and critics eventually came to dismiss the *quṣṣāṣ* with contempt and derision.

Keywords: *qāṣṣ*; *quṣṣāṣ*; storyteller; preacher; *qāḍī*; judge; *ḥadīth*; exegesis

The foundation and rapid geographic expansion of the Islamic community (*umma*) made it part of global political events in the first/seventh century¹, stimulating historical self-reflection. The *umma*’s involvement with the past found an initial expression in the narratives of the popular preachers and storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*, sg. *qāṣṣ*),² who collected and retold, in a homiletic context, prophetic legends and historical reports about early Islam. Thus, the *quṣṣāṣ* became the first informal historians in Islam. Biographical reports about first/seventh-century *quṣṣāṣ* should be treated with caution, but even if replete with imaginary details, they appear to include a glimpse of the earliest dissemination of Muslim traditions about the Prophet Muḥammad and the glorious era of the first conquests (the *sīra-maghāzī* epic).

Scholars disagree on whether preaching and storytelling (*qaṣaṣ*) originated with the Prophet and the first caliphs³. Precarious evidence for the presence of *qaṣaṣ*

during that period is found in the report according to which Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb (d. ca. 32/653), who led the Meccan opposition to Muḥammad in the 620s, served as an army *qāṣṣ* in the battle of Yarmūk (15/636) (al-Ṭabarī 1979 – 1987, 3:397). Apart from assuming an institutionalization of *qaṣaṣ*, which cannot have occurred at so early a date, the tradition, as noted by ‘Athamina, is politically slanted. Abū Sufyān is the father of the first Umayyad caliph, Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (r. 41 – 60/661 – 680), and his participation in the conquests portrays him as a virtuous Muslim, thereby concealing his unholy past (‘Athamina 1992, p. 57).

Muslim biographical dictionaries point to the Prophet’s Companion Tamīm al-Dārī (d. 40/660) as the first *qāṣṣ* in Islam (al-Maqrīzī 1998, 4:18). A former Christian, Tamīm purportedly converted to Islam in 9/630. During the reign of the second caliph, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13 – 23/634 – 644), he is said to have taught and commented on the Qur’ān, as well as transmitted traditions (*ḥadīth*) about the Prophet (‘Athamina 1992, 55, 60; Juynboll 2007, 625). These biographical reports notwithstanding, attempts to reconstruct and date Tamīm’s traditions have met with unsurmountable difficulties. Juynboll’s investigation of the chain of transmission (*isnād*; pl. *asānīd*) of one of these traditions alerts us to the daunting challenges that one encounters when working with such early material (Juynboll 2007, pp. 625, 627). The tradition cannot be associated with a valid common transmitter, such as Tamīm al-Dārī. It surfaces for the first time in Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī’s (Basra; d. 203 – 204/819 – 820) *Musnad*, which suggests the second half of the second/eighth century—that is, an entire century after Tamīm’s death—as the earliest period of its circulation. But the uncertainty surrounding Tamīm is not limited to the tradition examined by Juynboll. Armstrong (2017, 202 and *passim*) has demonstrated that reports about Tamīm being the first *qāṣṣ* are conflicting and polemically charged. Rather than referring to events during al-Tamīm’s lifetime, they seem to have taken shape in response to intellectual and political concerns that arose after his death. As noted by Charles Pellat, Tamīm is a “legendary figure,” and the reports that describe him as the first *qāṣṣ* should be taken with a grain of salt (Pellat 1997, p. 734).

Al-Aswad b. Sarī‘ (Basra; d. 36 or 42/657 or 663) would seem to have practiced *qaṣaṣ* around the same time as Tamīm al-Dārī. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) described al-Aswad as the first *qāṣṣ* in Basra. Al-Aswad preached in the back part of the mosque (Ibn Sa’d 2001, 9: 41). His claim that he took part in four raids (*ghazawāt*) of the Prophet (Ibn Ḥanbal 1996 – 2001, 24:356 – 357, no. 15589) suggests that he retold tales from the *maghāzī* epic. This statement, however, is problematic as it appears at the beginning of a tradition dealing with predestination (*qadar*), an issue that attracted theological attention towards the end of the first/seventh century (Van Ess 1975, p. 181), that is, at least four decades after al-Aswad’s death date. Al-Aswad’s participation in the Prophet’s raids functions only as a historicizing introduction to the theological material, which is otherwise

linked with Abū Hurayra (Van Ess 1975, p. 105), making it difficult to establish that the tradition absorbed a genuine historical memory of al-Aswad.

‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr (d. 68/687) ranks among the first/seventh century’s most renowned *quṣṣās*. His sermons in the Prophet’s mosque in Mecca, which began after morning prayer, were so impassioned that ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (Medina; d. 73/693) wept in response (al-Fākihī 1994, 2:339; Ibn Sa’d 2001, 4:151). However, not everyone was as prone to shedding tears as the second caliph’s son. The *qāṣṣ*’ incessant homilies might irritate the audience; for this reason, ‘Ā’isha, the Prophet’s widow, admonished ‘Ubayd, “Preach one day and pass over the next. Do not pester the people!” (al-Fākihī 1994, 2:339). In 64/683, after the Umayyad forces had battered Mecca with catapults crippling the Ka’ba, ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr delivered scathing sermons against them. Dismayed by his anathemas, Syrian soldiers urged ‘Ubayd to “stop reproaching God’s deputy on earth, for he commands more respect than the temple” (*lā tanaqqas khalīfat^a l-lāhⁱ fī arḍⁱ-hi fa-inna-hu a ‘zam^u ḥurmat^{an} min al-bayt*) (al-Balādhurī 1996, 5:364). The Syrians’ belief that the caliph reigns by divine right is noteworthy, but equally more so is their attitude towards the temple, which will strike any adherent of the later orthodoxy as contemptuous. The surprising Syrian preference of the caliph to the Ka’ba bears witness to the report’s antiquity and accuracy.

Juynboll and Schoeler have shown that ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr put into circulation the earliest reports about the Prophet’s first revelation (Juynboll 1994, p. 162; Schoeler 1996, 108f). Juynboll has also noted the virtual absence of *isnāds* on the authority of ‘Ubayd in the second/eighth-century biographies of the Prophet, which is odd given that ‘Ubayd is reckoned among the founders of that literary genre. Juynboll (1994, p. 162) attributed this anomaly to two interrelated factors: the *quṣṣās*’ declining reputation and the chronology of the *isnād*’s introduction as a tool for authenticating traditions. To be sure, the *isnād* came into being shortly after ‘Ubayd’s death and gained currency during the second/eighth century (Pavlovitch 2018). Hence, ‘Ubayd’s stories would have lacked *isnāds*, but the same holds true for his contemporaries’ reports that made their way into the second/eighth-century biographies of the Prophet. It is reasonable to believe that ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr transmitted only a few traditions.

The first/seventh-century *quṣṣās*’ activities had obvious political ramifications: The sermons delivered by the *quṣṣās* in the mosque might reinforce the authority of the rulers while undermining the position of their foes. Not surprisingly, a tradition in Ibn Abī Shayba’s (Kūfa; d. 235/849) early *Muṣannaf* attributes to ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb the statement that *qāṣṣ* came into being during the first civil war (35 – 40/656 – 661) (Ibn Abī Shayba 1989, 5:290; for more, see al-Najm 1967, 168). Although not documenting the names of the first *quṣṣās*, the tradition allows us to think that their stories were crafted to support the main antagonists in the war, the fourth caliph, ‘Alī (r. 35 – 40/656 – 661), and his Syrian adversary,

Mu‘āwiya (on which see al-Maqrīzī 1998, 4:18). Ibn ‘Umar’s claim receives a factual underpinning in a report that Mu‘āwiya placed *qaṣaṣ* under official control shortly before the beginning of his reign, when he appointed Sulaym b. ‘Itr (d. 75/694 – 695) as both the judge (*qāḍī*; pl. *quḍāt*) and *qāṣṣ* of Egypt in 40/660 – 661 (Ibn Yūnus 2001, 1:218f, no. 586). Incidentally, official appointment did not always imply blind loyalty. If we are to trust a report markedly hostile to the notorious Umayyad governor of Iraq and the East, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714), by the beginning of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān’s caliphate (65 – 86/685 – 705), Sulaym b. ‘Itr and other *quṣṣāṣ* were recounting the biographies of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar in a manner that al-Ḥajjāj found so detrimental to the Umayyad caliph’s authority that he volunteered to kill Sulaym and “his ilk” (Ibn ‘Asākir 1995 – 2001, 72:273).

Mu‘āwiya’s successors followed his example. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān once boastfully declared before Ghudayth b. al-Hārith (Homs; d. 65/685) that he had persuaded the people to accept two innovations: the preacher raising his hands from the pulpit during the Friday prayer, and *qaṣaṣ* being delivered after early and late afternoon prayers (Ibn Ḥanbal 1996 – 2001, 28:172, no. 16 970). It is unclear whether the *qaṣaṣ* mentioned by ‘Abd al-Malik took place daily or only on Friday, but, in any case, the caliph insisted on its regularity. Insofar as ‘Abd al-Malik’s interlocutor, Ghudayth b. al-Hārith, died shortly after this caliph’s accession, one may reasonably conclude that *qaṣaṣ* was institutionalized by one of ‘Abd al-Malik’s predecessors, most likely, Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān.

In another instance of institutionalization, the Umayyad governor of Egypt, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān (r. 64 – 85/684 – 704), appointed ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Ḥujayra al-Khawlānī (d. 83/702) as *qāḍī*, *qāṣṣ*, and treasurer, and paid him 200 dinars for each office (Ibn Yūnus 2001, 1:299f, no. 811). Ibn Ḥujayra read his sermons from a special scroll, which was produced in 76/695 – 696 on the governor’s orders. The scroll was kept in the governor’s residence, taken to the mosque each Friday for Ibn Ḥujayra’s sermon, and returned to its repository thereafter (al-Maqrīzī 1998, 4:19). When Ibn Ḥujayra’s father learned of his son’s appointment as a *qāṣṣ*, he thanked God with the words, “Praise be to God, my son preaches and exhorts.” By contrast, the news that Ibn Ḥujayra had become a *qāḍī* drove the father to lament his son’s fate: “My son has perished and causes [others] to perish!” (al-Kindī 1908, p. 315). The negative perception of judgeship as an office whose holder is exposed to the rulers’ whims is commonplace in the biographies of scholars (for more examples regarding *quṣṣāṣ*, see Armstrong 2017, 128ff). On the other hand, the positive attitude towards the *qāṣṣ* is striking, especially when compared with the numerous disparaging reports that will be circulated in the second/eighth century and afterward. Unlike the *quṣṣāṣ* of the later centuries, who came to be derided as flashy vulgarizers, their first/seventh-century predecessors were praised for transmitting narratives about the Prophet in an exhortatory and exegetical framework.

Following Ibn Ḥujayra's death in Muḥarram 83/February 702, 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān appointed as *the qāṣṣ* and *qāḍī* of Egypt another member of the tribe Khawlān, Mālik b. Sharāḥīl b. 'Amr (d. ?), a companion of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who took part in the conquest of Egypt (Ibn Yūnus 2001, 1:424). Mālik lost his position only a year later (al-Kindī 1908, 322), most likely for failing to meet the governor's expectations. *Qaṣaṣ* and judgeship were still combined in Egypt at the beginning of the second/eighth century. In 115/733 – 734, they were entrusted to Tawba b. Namir al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 120/737) (Ibn Yūnus 2001, 1:77). As a Qur'ān reciter and *qāṣṣ*, Tawba received three dinars a month from the stable's funds (al-Maqrīzī 1998, 4:19). When Tawba died, the offices were given to Khayr b. Nu'aym (d. 137/754 – 755), who held them until 127/745. He was deposed upon the accession of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān al-Ḥimār (r. 127 – 132/744 – 750) (al-Kindī 1908, 348, 352). In the following year, Egypt's new governor, Ḥawthara b. Suhayl, appointed 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sālim al-Jayshānī (d. 143/760 – 761) as *qāṣṣ* and *qāḍī* (Ibn Yūnus 2001, 1:302).

Illuminating details about the *qāṣṣ*' office are included in the report about 'Uqba b. Muslim's (d. ca. 120/737) dismissal as the *qāṣṣ* in the mosque of Fustāt. Our sources do not date the incident, but taking 'Uqba's death date as a point of departure, one may reasonably place his tenure in the first two decades of the second century H. Upon learning that he was dismissed, 'Uqba complained that he had only been a *qāṣṣ* who led the people's prayer. If he made it longer while they wanted it shorter, he would shorten it, and if he made it shorter while they wanted it longer, he would lengthen it (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 243). 'Uqba's statement indicates that, while he led the prayer in the mosque, no judiciary functions were assigned to him. Interestingly, 'Uqba is described as being in charge of the *quṣṣāṣ* (Lecker 2003, 71; cf. Armstrong 2107, 127). During the tenure of 'Uqba's successor in Fustāt, 'Abdallāh b. 'Ayyāsh (d. 170/786 – 787), Khayr b. Nu'aym held the offices of the *qāḍī* and *qāṣṣ* of Egypt. The foregoing reports attest to the existence of a network of *quṣṣāṣ* headed by the *qāṣṣ* of Egypt.

Quṣṣāṣ were officially appointed in Damascus as early as 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān's caliphate. Abū Zur'a al-Dimashqī reports that this caliph removed from the office of *qaṣaṣ* Abū Idrīs al-Khawlānī (Damascus; d. 80/699 – 700), because he disobeyed the caliph's order to raise his hands while preaching (Abū Zur'a al-Dimashqī 1980, 2:604, no. 1713). From another report, we learn that the order in question enjoined the *quṣṣāṣ* to preach against the caliph's enemies while raising their hands in a dramatic gesture (al-Maqrīzī 1998, 4:19). What triggered the storytellers' opposition to the caliphal command is a matter of guess. Ignaz Goldziher (1906, 321f) suggested that they may have resented a gesture that reminded them of heathen apotropaic ritual. Apart from this, they may have feared that raising one's hands towards heaven implies a theologically troubling, perhaps anthropomorphic, conception of divinity.⁴

Like other early *quṣṣāṣ*, Abū Idrīs al-Khawlānī related reports about the Prophet's battles (Lecker 2003, 69), but his biography includes another important detail. He is said

to have stressed on the *qāṣṣ*’ knowledge of jurisprudence (*faqīh*) (‘Athamina 1992, 63; cf. Juynboll 2007, 715). This requirement shows that during ‘Abd al-Malik’s caliphate the *quṣṣāṣ* became the first legal specialists in Islam, in addition to being preachers and retellers of epic lore. This conclusion finds support in the report according to which Abū Idrīs al-Khawḷānī—similarly to his Egyptian colleagues—officiated as both *qāṣṣ* and judge (Abū Zur‘a al-Dimashqī 1980, 1:200, no. 147). There is little reason to doubt that when ‘Abd al-Malik sacked Abū Idrīs, the caliph’s decision applied to both of his positions, which were viewed as the two sides of the same coin.

During ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr’s lifetime, *qaṣaṣ* in Mecca was related by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim b. Ḥasan (al-Fākihī 1994, 2:308, 338). At the beginning of the 120s, the office was held by ‘Abdallāh b. Kathīr al-Dārī (d. > 122/740). Of Persian extraction, ‘Abdallāh was a *mawlā* (client) of ‘Amr b. ‘Alqama al-Kinānī, and he made a livelihood as a perfume seller (*aṭṭār*) (Ibn Khallikān 1977, 3:41). The Meccan traditionist Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna (d. 198/814) recalls hearing ‘Abdallāh’s sermons in 122/740 and describes him as *qāṣṣ al-jamā‘a* (the community’s *qāṣṣ*) (al-Bukhārī n.d., 5:181), which bears witness to the institutionalization of Meccan *qaṣaṣ* similar to that seen in the other regions of the caliphate. ‘Abdallāh b. Kathīr learned Qur’ānic recitation from Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 101 – 104/718 – 722), the earliest historically attestable commentator of the Qur’ān (al-Balādhurī 1996, 13:52f), and later founded one of the seven authoritative readings of the Qur’ān. Thanks to his apprenticeship with Mujāhid, ‘Abdallāh became an exegete as well. His career exemplifies the shift from homiletic sermons, loosely related to Qur’ānic verses, to systematic exegesis. Most likely, it consisted of paraphrastic comments,⁵ although ‘Abdallāh may have digressed to legal issues at times.

In Medina, Muslim b. Jundab al-Hudhalī (d. ca. 105/724) is remembered as the *qāṣṣ* of the Prophet’s mosque. In addition to this, he led the prayer, recited the Qur’ān, and served as a judge (al-Balādhurī 1996, 11:257). Muslim b. Jundab was not paid when he assumed judgeship. Later on, ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99 – 101/717 – 720) began to pay him two dinars (Ibn Sa’d 2001, 7:422), perhaps monthly. According to al-Balādhurī, “he received an allowance together with the Qur’ān reciters, the jurisprudents, the poets, and the mosque attendants” (al-Balādhurī 1996, 11:257), which suggests that Muslim was paid separately for his various positions. We do not know whether Muslim was remunerated for his *qaṣaṣ* from the onset. If not, one would assume that during his tenure, *qaṣaṣ* and judgeship transformed from voluntary services for the public weal into paid offices. Be that as it may, informal *qaṣaṣ* persisted; to that effect, we may cite the report on the authority of Nāfi‘, the *mawlā* of Ibn ‘Umar (Medina; d. ca. 117/735 – 736), that Ibn ‘Umar did not attend the sessions of *quṣṣāṣ* other than the community’s *qāṣṣ* (‘Abd al-Razzāq 2016, 3:496, no. 5558).

Whereas ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar respected only the community’s *qāṣṣ*, his son, Sālīm (d. 106/725), shunned *quṣṣāṣ* altogether (Ibn Sa’d 2001, 7:198). Sālīm’s

attitude is indicative of the transition in the course of which first/seventh-century *quṣṣās* lost their significance for the preservation and transmission of knowledge. They were eclipsed by the rising star of *ḥadīth* transmitters (*muḥaddithūn*), who, instead of moral instruction and epic narratives about the past, turned their attention to the legal precedent of forebears enshrined in *ḥadīth* and eagerly demanded that each tradition be supplied with an *isnād* linking its transmitter with the earliest source. Some storytellers' resistance to embracing the recently introduced scholarly paradigm cast a pall of doubt on their dependability and value for the developing Islamic jurisprudence. Others were more receptive to the ongoing change: Many traditionists who flourished at the end of the first/seventh century were also known as *quṣṣās* (for examples, see Armstrong 2017, 117ff).

The beginning of the second/eighth century witnessed a changing attitude to Qur'ānic text. The *quṣṣās*' impassioned sermons, which enjoined piety and warned the audience of impending Apocalypse, at the expense of scholarly exactitude, now gave way to systematic efforts to derive legal norms from the Qur'ān's frequently cryptic language. The paradigm shift is implicated in a statement attributed to 'Alī. The fourth caliph asks an unnamed *qāṣṣ* if he can differentiate the abrogating from the abrogated verses in the Qur'ān. As the man answers in the negative, 'Alī exclaims, "You have perished, and you cause [others] to perish!" (Ibn Abī Shayba 1989, 5:290, no. 26 192). Key to understanding this passage is its reference to the theory of abrogation (*naskh*), according to which, in cases of normative contradiction, the later verses in the Qur'ān abrogate the earlier ones. 'Alī's rebuke, which is undoubtedly anachronistic with respect to the fourth caliph's lifetime, exposes the *qāṣṣ*' exegetical incompetence. It breaks from the first/seventh-century usage of the Qur'ān for solely liturgical and homiletic purposes and endorses the newly introduced canonical understanding of the Qur'ān as a source for legal and theological norms.

Many *quṣṣās* operated under political patronage, which undermined their authority. From a voluntary preacher and popular storyteller who foreboded Judgment Day and exhorted fellow Muslims in the mosque, many a *qāṣṣ* became a paid state official. Political conflicts throughout the Marwānīd period eroded the rulers' reputation among pious Muslims and, by extension, discredited their appointed representatives. Recall Sulaym b. 'Itr's comparison between the early Marwānīds, on the one hand, and Abū Bakr and 'Umar, on the other, which was not in the formers' favor.

Along with the emergence of professional *muḥaddithūn*, these circumstances changed the scholarly and communal conception of the sources of Islamic law and those qualified to use them for the articulation of norms. If the *quṣṣās* who officiated as *qāḍīs* dispensed justice in line with the precedent of the caliphs and their local representatives, since the beginning of the second/eighth century these sources were gradually superseded by the Qur'ān and prophetic precedent. The

muhaddithūn were responsible for the collection of traditions about the Prophet's normative words and deeds. From their midst grew a new generation of jurists, who ousted the earlier *quṣṣāṣ*.

During the first half of the third/ninth century, *qaṣaṣ* homilies that vividly describe the torment of the grave, the Prophet's intercession in the hereafter, the scales on which each human being's actions will be measured on Judgment Day, and the narrow bridge that the resurrected will cross either to reach salvation in Paradise or to slip down into the abyss became instrumental in the construction of traditionalist theology. In the guise of Prophetic traditions, many of these stories were admitted into the Sunni *ḥadīth* collections and weaponized by traditionalist theologians in their fight against rationalist interpretation of dogma.

Conclusion

Muslim jurists were not the original promoters and users of Tradition. *Ḥadīth* came to be understood as legal precedent at a secondary stage of development; its earliest specimens were put into circulation by the Doomsday heralds – the *quṣṣāṣ*, who first appeared on the historical scene in the middle of the first/seventh century. Their sermons in the mosque summoned from the misty past memories about the Prophet's days and portrayed the ongoing conquests as an epic prelude to the impending eschatological drama. These homilies eventually gave rise to the *sīra* and *maghāzī* genre, laying the foundation for the second/eighth-century historical narratives. The early popular preachers and storytellers apparently held their sessions on a daily basis, sometimes annoying the audience with their pious litany. With the institutionalization of the *qāṣṣ*' craft, his sermons became sparser and likely limited to the Friday prayer ritual.

Qur'ānic verses provided the textual basis on which the *quṣṣāṣ* wove their narratives about the Prophet's life and Last Day tribulations. The initial exegetical exercises may be thought of as straightforward paraphrases of specific words and expressions. Sometimes, the *quṣṣāṣ* would digress to what Wansbrough described as "haggadic exegesis"; in our case, tales about the Arabs and the advent of their prophet, such as 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr's account of the Prophet's first revelation, which builds on Q. 96: 1 – 5 (Juynboll 1994, p. 167). Cosmogonic myths and pre-Islamic prophets also figured in their repertoire (Armstrong 2017, p. 110). Apart from this, the first *quṣṣāṣ* circulated edifying stories that subsequently formed the backbone of the extensive body of exhortatory and dissuasive homiletics (*targhīb wa-tarhīb*) (Juynboll 1983, 11f).

The *qāṣṣ*' profession underwent a profound transformation in the second half of the first/seventh century. It was institutionalized under the first Umayyad caliph, Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, and his immediate successors. Informal *qaṣaṣ* continued to be practiced, but from that point on, many *quṣṣāṣ* became paid state officials responsible for promoting the caliph's agenda among his subjects attending the

prayers in the mosque. Reports about *quṣṣās* in Arabia, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq also indicate that *qaṣaṣ* was frequently combined with judgeship, and sometimes with other offices, including those of the Qur'ān reciter and the treasurer. The majority of the related reports come from Egypt, which may be explained with the composition from early on of catalogs with the names of Egyptian governors and judges. Be that as it may, the *quṣṣās* became the first legal specialists in Islam and a hierarchy of *quṣṣās* presided by the *qāṣṣ* and judge of Egypt evolved over time.

The emergence of classical *ḥadīth* in the second/eighth century spelled doom for the earlier *qaṣaṣ*. Unlike the *muḥaddithūn*, who based their traditions on chains of authoritative transmitters, the *qāṣṣ* could hardly identify the source and genealogy of his edifying tales. This rendered his material unverifiable, while his eloquent admonitions came to be viewed with methodological suspicion. From the perspective of *muḥaddithūn*, the *quṣṣās* may have been wholesome to the community's piety, but their stories lacked the essentials of authenticity. The new critical approach to traditions, which gained systematic underpinning during the third/ninth century, reduced the *quṣṣās* to insignificance and banished them from the ranks of reputable scholars.

The present survey is based on Islamic literary sources none of which dates back to the Umayyad period. Recent research into documentary sources, specifically papyri from Umayyad Egypt, has shown that the term *qāḍī* does not appear therein; judiciary functions were dispensed by the heads of rural districts and the governors of Fuṣṭāṭ (Tillier 2017, pp. 41 – 45). Although limited in breadth, the documentary evidence mirrors, as noted by Mathieu Tillier (2017, p. 41), a “different reality” compared with the literary accounts. This discrepancy does not necessarily imply that the institution of *qāḍā'* came into being under the early 'Abbāsids, but it strongly suggests that a later designation was retroactively attached to an earlier institution. If the term *qāḍī* only became widespread in Muslim legal parlance in the second/eighth century, the frequent pairing of *qāṣṣ* and *qāḍī* in the description of Umayyad legal officials in Egypt would indicate that the term *qāṣṣ* was the original designation of the Umayyad judges. As the role and perception of the *qāṣṣ* changed over the second/eighth century, 'Abbāsīd historians began to pair it with their familiar *qāḍī* by way of clarification and disambiguation.

NOTES

1. In the present article, I apply a dual dating according to the Hijri lunar calendar and the Julian solar calendar.
2. The description of the *qāṣṣ* as a preacher and storyteller is an approximation intended for the non-specialist reader. On the semantic challenges facing the translation of the term *qāṣṣ*, see Armstrong 2017, pp. 6 – 9.

3. On the pre-Islamic roots of *qashaṣ*, see al-Najm 1967, 166f, Evstatiev 2003, p. 327; Juynboll 1982, p. 165. The pre-Islamic beginnings of *qashaṣ* are also implied in Armstrong's monograph, which, however, lacks a systematic source-critical underpinning.
4. Upon seeing a woman raise her forefingers during prayer, the Prophet's widow 'Ā'isha forbade her from repeating the gesture with the words, "He is God the only One" ('Abd al-Razzāq 2016, 2:531, no. 3351). Using similar words, Ibn 'Umar upbraided a certain man who was pointing with two of his fingers (ibid., 2:531, no. 3349). In a report that directly bears on our topic, an unnamed man is said to have raised his hands during a *qāṣṣ*' sermon, but Ibn 'Umar beckoned him to stop (ibid., 2:530f, no. 3348). For a comprehensive though inconclusive discussion of the issue of hands raising, see Armstrong 2017, pp. 181 – 185.
5. Thus, 'Abdallāh b. Kathīr paraphrased *āyat al-layl* (the sign of the night) in Q. 17:12 as *ḡulmat al-layl* (the darkness of the night) (al-Ṭabarī 1979 – 1987, 1:77).

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