

2. COLLECTING AND EDITING OF THE NARRATIVE

After the rise of the modern Saudi state and the unification of the country under the leadership of the late king Abdulaziz ibn Saud, all regional and tribal hostilities ceased, including that between Šammar and ʿAnazah. The past, however, is not so easily forgotten. Bitter memories were awakened by occasional flare-ups over land ownership. Hostile feelings were rekindled by poetic lampoons from both sides. Such a flare-up took place some years back between two neighboring factions of as-Swēd from Šammar and the Wild Slēmān from ʿAnazah. Poets on both sides were incited by this incident to compose vitriolic poems of epic proportion, each boasting of his own tribe and its history and satirizing the opponent's poets and their tribe. This poetic battle continued to rage long after the legal dispute over the land had been settled. Government authorities were compelled to imprison poets from both tribes in order to silence them.

These poetic exchanges bear a striking resemblance to the classical *naqāʾid* of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq. The poet gives essentially a catalogue of all the prominent chiefs and heroes of his tribe, all the battles fought and won by it, and all the men who fell in battle from the other tribe. Such poems are gold mines of information on tribal history, ethnography and genealogy. The best preparation for anthropological field-work among the two tribes of Šammar and ʿAnazah is to listen to a collection of these poems before going into the field. The episodes in the narrative text presented here constitute some of the most enduring themes of the antagonist poets from Šammar and ʿAnazah.

The Šammari poets are especially proud of having killed ʿGāb (the very mention of whose name strikes fear in the desert) which they repeat in their poems *ad nauseam*. Šammari poets also keep reminding the poets of ʿAnazah about the dishonorable execution of Hidlūl while he was held in captivity by ʿGāb after he had been

given safe conduct by ibn Nōbān, °Gāb's kinsman. In the eyes of the Šammari poets, Ḍbēb, a cousin of °Gāb, committed another treachery when, in a moment of rage after hearing of the killing of °Gāb, he killed Šammari captives who were being fed and lodged in his tent. Such episodes, frequently alluded to in the poetic exchanges between Šammar and °Anazah, are fully related in the narrative text presented here. The Šammari poets are especially eager to make their views heard on the episodes related in this narrative because in 1968 the late Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad as-Sudayri published a popular book, *abṭāl min aṣ-ṣaḥrā*^o, the first chapter of which relates the life story of Si°dūn al-°Wāji and his two sons, °Gāb and Ḥjāb, and their wars against Šammar (6). According to Šammari poets, as-Sudayri clearly took the side of °Anazah.

The versions which made up the narrative text presented here were collected in the field from Šammari informants during the height of the poetic battle between Šammar and °Anazah. Some of the best informants were poets who were actively involved in this battle. Of the nearly two hundred hours of poetic testimony, genealogical accounts and historical narratives collected in the field from Šammari informants over the last few years, none is more frequently told and widely circulated than the saga of Hiḍlūl aš-Šwēhri (or, as they call it, *dabḥat Hiḍlūl aš-Šwēhri*, "the slaying of Hiḍlūl aš-Šwēhri") and how he was avenged by Hāyis al-°Gēṭ. The imagination of narrators and audience was captured by the heroic spirit and poetic quality of the saga. Aside from that, each of the three principal heroes in the story belongs to one of the principal divisions of Šammar: Hiḍlūl aš-Šwēhri is from Sinjāriḥ, Hāyis al-°Gēṭ from al-Xriṣih, and Mfīz ibn Habdān from °Abdiḥ. Thus, the story involves three of the four principal divisions of Šammar. Poets and narrators in all these three divisions are equally eager to tell this tale, each for his own and his tribe's aggrandizement.

The composite narrative text presented here is the amalgam of eleven different versions recorded in the field from the lips of eleven different informants of the Šammar tribe. The versions

differ widely with regard to style, length, compactness, historical reliability and completeness of poetic testimony. The length of the versions varies from seven minutes to seventy minutes. Some are told in a polished style, others are less artistic but rich in factual details. One informant may omit a certain item altogether while another elaborates on it at great length. In other words, each one of the eleven versions has its own merits from the linguistic, literary, historical, or ethnographic point of view. Yet none of them is complete and sufficient by itself. To present only one version here would mean ignoring the poetic quality, as well as the historical and ethnographic value, of the other versions. At the same time, it would not be feasible to give all eleven versions in succession. Therefore, it was decided to proceed by first dissecting all the versions, then recombining them by interweaving them into a full, flowing text. Here, it must be emphasized that in doing so not one word was introduced in the final text other than that of the informants. Every word in the text is taken from an informant's lips. Furthermore, in this analytical section and in the footnotes to the text I make ample reference to the *rāwis* and evaluate the role of each and try as much as necessary to specify his contribution to the text. The versions were edited and refitted to form this complete, composite narrative, a text that comprises the best in each version and eliminates gaps existing in some. I resort to this bold editorial procedure in order to make this oral material more manageable on the written page and also to simplify matters for the reader to whom this narrative might be the first introduction to bedouin literature.

According to the criteria of length, literary quality, richness of details, and historical reliability, the eleven versions may be grouped into three categories:

I. Basic Versions. These are the longest, most complete and best told versions. The first three of the basic versions were told by poets who led the poetic assault against the poets of ^CAnazah. One basic version by Ḥmūd ibn ^CUmrān is included in the composite narrative text nearly in its entirety. The basic versions complement each other in that a passage, a line, a poem or a

certain incident might be found in one, but not in the others. Thus, all details are included and all gaps are bridged. In places where the versions agree and say the same thing, I chose the most poetic, the richer in ethnographic content and the most accurate from the historical point of view. Actually, this procedure is followed in all versions, not only in the basic ones. Historical accuracy is determined by context and frequency of occurrence as well as by the genealogical, temporal and regional distance of the narrator to the incident told, or the character involved, consideration always being made of pertinent, external evidence. By external evidence, I mean the testimonies of other informants who were asked about specific points in the narrative. For example, most of the recorded versions say that ĀnĀn was the brother of Hāyis al-GĀt. When Ḥsēn al-GĀt was questioned on this specific point, he asserted that ĀnĀn was the nephew, not the brother of Hāyis. He was the son of Hāyis' brother, Ābbas. This was further confirmed by Ḥsēn al-al-Ḥadab, the chief of the āl-Ṭābit section of Sinjārih. This testimony overrules that given in the recorded versions because of the close genealogical relationship of Ḥsēn al-GĀt to Hāyis and ĀnĀn, and because of the regional and temporal closeness of Ḥsēn al-al-Ḥadab, an old man whose word is the word of a chief, not that of a commoner. His very age allows temporal closeness to Hāyis and ĀnĀn, while his regional closeness is established due to the fact that āl-Ṭābit, although from Sinjārih, have always been close associates of al-Xriṣih, the tribe of al-GĀt, and were the first to migrate with them to al-Jizīrih.

The following are the basic versions:

1. **Ḥmūd ibn ʿUmrān**/70 minutes/15.3.1403. This version, narrated by Ḥmūd ibn ʿUmrān, takes seventy minutes to tell. It was recorded in Riyadh on 15 *Rabīʿ Awwal* 1403 A.H. This is the supreme version, surpassing all others in length, literary excellence and richness of details. This, and the versions by Rūmi ibn Zēd al-Hirbīd and Sāʿir ibn Ġaṭīṭ al-Ḥamzi, are of special importance because these three informants are from as-Swēd, thus kinsmen of Hidlūl aš-Šwēhri and his lieutenant Ḥsēn aḍ-Ḍnēb. The story was

passed on to them through generations from men who were contemporaries of Hiḍlūl and Ḥsēn and who knew them personally and actually witnessed some of the events related in the story. The genealogical relationship of Ḥmūd ibn ʿUmrān, Rūmi al-Hirbīd and Sācīr al-Ḥamzi to Hiḍlūl aš-Šwēhri, Ḥsēn aḍ-Dnēb and the other characters from as-Swēd who are mentioned in the narrative should be apparent from the genealogical charts appended at the end.

2. **Xfēj ibn Badhān**/50 minutes/Riyadh/26.3.1403. Xfēj is from ar-Rmāl section of al-Ġfēlih branch of Sinjāriḥ division of Šammar. As it has already been pointed out, Sinjāriḥ is divided into āl-Ṭābit, az-Zmēl, al-Ġfēlih and as-Swēd. Of these four sections, the last two are considered the closest to each other. In genealogical terms, this brings Xfēj close to Hiḍlūl aš-Šwēhri, Ḥsēn aḍ-Dnēb and other members of as-Swēd tribe mentioned in the narrative. It should also be pointed out that it is specified in the narrative that ibn Rmāl is the maternal uncle of Hāyis al-Ġcēṭ. This (plus the fact that he was the first to sound the trumpet against the ʿAnazah poets and has been carrying the banner of attack against them ever since) explains the interest of Xfēj in the story of Hiḍlūl. Aside from all this, Xfēj is an outstanding *rāwi* with an exceptional memory. He was able to recite from memory more than thirty hours of narratives and poetic recitations, memorial reconstructions mostly relating to the history of the Šammar.

3. **Rūmi ibn Zēd al-Hirbīd**/25 minutes/al-Xibbiḥ/1.12.1403. This is a short version, relatively speaking, but it is well told. It gives excellent renditions of some of the poems. This version was helpful in ascertaining the exact identities of some of the minor characters in the narrative such as Dbās al-ʿMēm <79,146> and ʿAwaḍ ibn Farrāj ibn Xliwi <176>.

4. **Riḍa ibn Ṭārif**/40 minutes/Riyadh/3.12.1402. The version by Riḍa was very helpful in pinpointing the exact identities of the three youths from ʿAbdiḥ who attached themselves to Hāyis al-Ġcēṭ in his attack against ʿĠāb. Two of the youths, Mišāri aš-Šaggāg and Mfīz ibn Habdān, are from al-Mfaḍḍal section of ʿAbdiḥ, the very lineage to which Riḍa belongs. Mfīz ibn Habdān

was the one who slew ʿGāb al-ʿWāji. This makes Riḍa, the narrator, very proud and as a result more anxious to spread the tale. The details of how Xalaf aš-Šaggāg escaped captivity after falling into the hands of the ʿAnazah <565ff> is also provided by Riḍa. Riḍa is an excellent *rāwi*. Although he does not have the prodigious memory of Xfēj, he surpasses him in the quality of his voice, the beauty of his language and excellence of his delivery.

5. **Sācīr ibn Ġaṭīṭ al-Ḥamzi.** Of the eleven versions this is the only one which was not collected directly from an informant in the field. The cassette tape on which this version is recorded is one of the many tapes circulating among poets, *rāwis* and interested persons of the Šammar tribe on which tales and poems related to the Šammar are recorded. Poetic exchanges between the ʿAnazah and the Šammar are also circulated in this manner. Such tapes are highly prized and considered by connoisseurs as prime items for serious listening and entertainment, especially while making long drives on the modern highways that now cut through the desert. The recording quality of the tape by Sācīr is not as good as the tapes recorded in the field. Also, the place and date of recording are not mentioned. In spite of this, and the fact that it takes only fifteen minutes to tell, this is still a good version and well told. It provides information missing in the other versions, especially geographical information about the location of watering holes, places of rest and hostile encounters. Sācīr and the person to whom he is addressing his words in the tape are from al-Ḥamzi lineage of as-Swēd. Therefore, he emphasizes the role of Siʿdūn ibn Bassām al-Ḥamzi and his courageous act of going into the well to draw water for Hidlūl's party in spite of the fact that they were being closely followed by the people of al-ʿWāji <263ff>.

II Minor Versions. These are truncated versions that are of linguistic and literary merits. They carry historical and ethnographic weight because they are told by informants who are direct descendants, or close relatives, of the main characters or poets mentioned in the narrative. Furthermore, all the men from whom these versions were recorded are old men who witnessed traces of a vanishing age of Arabia. The minor versions are:

6. **Firtāj ibn Ḥsēn aḍ-Dnēb**/ 30 minutes /Jubbih/ 19.11.1403. Firtāj is the great grandson of Ḥsēn aḍ-Dnēb, the lieutenant of Hidlūl. He gave a good rendition of the poems by his great grandfather, and it is from him that we learn about the discord between Ḥsēn and Hidlūl <248ff>, a fact not mentioned by other informants. Firtāj, over seventy years of age, has a good repertory of narratives and poems, but he is not a good *raconteur*. His narration is disjointed and haphazard. It lacks even flow and order.

7. **Mlāhid ibn Ṭōḥān**/al-Xibbih/1.12.1403. This seventy year old informant gave only the poem of his great grand-uncle, which is cited with three other poems at the end of the narrative. He gave his full name as Mlāhid ibn Rāšid ibn Miḡjil ibn Hidlūl (not to be confused with Hidlūl aš-Šwēhri) ibn Ṭōḥān. The poet Ršēd is the brother of Miḡjil ibn Hidlūl.

8. **Hdēsān at-Tbēnāwi**/20 minutes/Gna/13.11.1403. This informant is from ḤAbdih and he provided renditions of the two poems by his ancient relative, Mbērīḥ at-Tbēnāwi. Aside from these two poems, his version of the story is confused and he is not a good *raconteur*.

III. **Supplementary Versions.** These are poorly told versions with an almost negligible historical value. But a few beautiful expressions and striking linguistic features are lifted from these versions and interpolated in their proper places in the composite text. Also, these versions are helpful in determining the spread and frequency of certain episodes and the fixity of certain utterances and lines in the narrative and associated poems. The supplementary versions are:

9. **Mrīf ibn Ġāzi an-Nmāši**/20 minutes/al-Aḍāriḥ/2.6.1404. The narrator is an old man and a good *rāwi*, but of all the eleven informants he is the most removed, genealogically and regionally, from the characters of the story and the arena of its events. He is from az-Zmēl section of Sinjāriḥ. Therefore, his version is less accurate and his poetic renditions are somewhat mangled.

10. **Mahdi at-Tbēnāwi**/15 minutes/Ḥāyil/29.11.1403. Like Hdēsān, Mahdi is a relative of the poet Mbērīḥ at-Tbēnāwi, but he is a young man and an inexperienced *raconteur*. He is of the present

generation that has lost the spontaneous vernacular eloquence and good memory of the older generation of *rāwis*, and has not yet acquired a facility in using the current literary idiom.

11. **Nazzāl abu Ṣagīr** / 20 minutes / Ḥāyil / 25.11.1403. A relatively young *rāwi* (over fifty years of age) from al-Ġfēlih. Nazzāl grew up in the city of Ḥāyil, but spent part of his adult life in Kuwait, then worked for a while with the Arabian American Oil Company in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Nazzāl is an excellent guide, very cooperative and has a good repertory of narratives, poems, and genealogical information.

Although our eleven informants are all from Ṣammar, they come from different social and regional backgrounds. All have become settled folk by now, but most of them spent the greater part of their lives as nomads or on the fringes of the desert. The younger ones were born and raised in, or around, the city of Ḥāyil. Most of them are well-traveled. Riḍa ibn Ṭārif has spent his life traveling back and forth between the deserts of Mesopotamia and North Arabia. Although some of them have a small knowledge of reading and writing, none is functionally literate.

The informants, strictly speaking, do not constitute a truly homogeneous, linguistic community. There are slight inconsistencies in pronunciation as well as some linguistic variations from one informant to the other. Also, during the interviews, some narrators modified their pronunciation to accommodate the interviewer. Furthermore, the dialect of Ṣammar, as is the case with all the dialects in Arabia, is undergoing revolutionary changes due to the rise of a central government that has been exceptionally active in spreading education, channels of communications, public media, modern highways and other modernizations that are beginning to transform Saudi Arabia into a developed state and unify its diverse groups into one nation. The dialectic features of various tribes and various regions are being gradually replaced by a unified language. In spite of all this, the narrative text at hand remains a distinctly Ṣammari text which can easily be distinguished from, and compared to, Classical Arabic on the one hand, and with the various, current dialects of the Arabian Peninsula on the other.