The role of folkloric pre-Islamic *anwā'* in Islamic Arabia

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This qualitative study attempts to document and re-assess how personal cosmological beliefs of contemporary Arabs shape their perception, understanding and interaction with *anwā'*, an endangered pre-Islamic stellar folklore immortalised for centuries through poetry and rhymed prose. Through the use of ethnographic in-depth interviews, this paper investigates and compares the significance of *anwā'* in the lives of two groups of contemporary Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula; literate urbanised self-taught *anwā'* 'practitioners' from different parts of Saudi Arabia, and Kuwaiti Bedouins who spontaneously 'inherited' this lore through generations of word of mouth. An absence of pagan elements in the folklore of *anwā'* in its present form was noticed, which seems to have stemmed from a major cosmological transformation that mirrored a theological transformation. The Islamic principle of *tawhīd*, or strict monotheism, clearly underlies the cosmological views of all participants, not merely surpassing pre-Islamic beliefs, but totally negating them.

Introduction

Daniel Martin Varisco explored how Arabs, through their linguistic eloquence, made use of 'folklore, poetry and rhymed prose' to immortalise stellar beliefs known as *anwā'*, passing them from one generation to another.[1] However, Varisco suggested that whatever had survived of this pre-Islamic oral tradition had undergone a historical selective process, for as he opined, what we have is 'what compilers have chosen to preserve.'[2] Moreover, anthropological studies by both Varisco and Clinton Bailey revealed that this indigenous folklore is rapidly diminishing.[3] The aforementioned hence

[1] Daniel Martin Varisco, 'The Origin of the anwā' in Arab Tradition,' *Studia Islamica*, no.74 (1991), [hereafter Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition']: pp.5-6

[2] Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition', p.25

[3] Clinton Bailey, 'Bedouin Star-Lore in Sinai and the Negev', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 37, No.3 (1974), p.594; Daniel Varisco, 'Stars and Texts in Arabia', Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy News, 16 (June Solstice, 1995),

necessitates an ethnographic qualitative study to re-evaluate the role played by the pre-Islamic cosmological folklore of *anwā'* in the lives of two groups of contemporary Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula. This paper investigates the significance of *anwā'* to literate urbanised Arab 'practitioners'; how they perceive it, interpret it, and how it reflects their cosmological views. Through the use of ethnographic in-depth interviews, this paper also attempts to gain a direct experience of this oral tradition of stellar lore from Bedouins who 'inherited' it through generations of word of mouth, exploring the meanings and beliefs they attach to its metaphoric rhymed prose. Additionally, this paper will serve in documenting the remnants of what Varisco believed to be an inadequately studied and endangered folklore.[4]

Literature review

Anwā' as a cosmology provided Arabs with a seasonal framework necessary for their survival in the harsh climate of the Arabian deserts. Nevertheless, Freya Mathews argues that cosmological beliefs are also shaped by multiple social factors.[5] Nicholas Campion agrees, writing that cosmological beliefs mirror fundamental religious worldviews.[6] According to *Sahīh* Muslim (821-875 CE), one of the most trusted compilations of prophetic sayings, Prophet Muḥammad said, 'Among my people there are four characteristics belonging to paganism which they do not abandon; boasting of high rank, reviling other peoples' genealogies, seeking rain by stars, and wailing.'[7] Furthermore, historian Mahmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī (1856-1924) wrote that this belief in *anwa'* was a trait of pre-Islamic Arabic Sabaean tribes who did not 'travel or inhabit a land without looking at the heliacal setting of stars.'[8] Hence

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<http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~tlaloc/archastro/ae16.html> [accessed 7 April 2015], [hereafter Varisco, 'Stars and Texts in Arabia']

[4] Varsico, 'Stars and Texts in Arabia'

[5] Freya Mathews, *The Ecological Self* (London: Routledge, 2006), [hereafter Mathews]: p.13

[6] Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), [hereafter Campion]: p.10

[7] Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj Abū al-Ḥasan al-Qushaīrī al-Naīsābūrī, *Sahīh Muslim*, Mohammad Fo'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī ed., vol.2, book 11 *of Funerals* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-Arabī, 1955), hadith no. 934.

[8] Mahmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī, *The Fulfillment of Desire on Knowledge of the Affairs of Pagan Arabs,* ed. by Muhammad Bahgat al-Atharī, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīya,

one may assume that the study of *anwā'* may outline pre-Islamic cultural contexts and beliefs that co-existed with this folklore. However, these pre-Islamic beliefs may have been overshadowed, if not negated, by an Islamic cosmology that Seyyed Hossein Nasr described as firmly based on strict monotheism that reflects the concept of 'Unity of the Divine' or *tawhīd* which underlies all cosmological Islamic speculations.[9] The dominant Ash'arite school of theology, Nasr elaborated, expressed their understanding of *tawhīd* through the attribution of absolute omnipotence to God; the direct cause of all effects.[10]

Studying the literary significance of *anwā'*, Abdulla bin Salim al-Rashid suggests that the rhetoric eloquence of Arabs, articulated as rhymed prose, was crucial for regulating the lives of the illiterate nomadic tribes of Arabia.[11] Yet the true value of this oral tradition, al-Rashid opines, lies in its capacity to artistically portray the social and ecological context of the nomadic life.[12] Likewise, al-Bīrūnī (973-1048 CE) noted in his *Chronology*:

> The Arabs had, moreover, one advantage in which others did not share; this is the perpetuation of what they know or believed, right or wrong, praise or blame, by means of their poetry (Ḳaṣīdas), by Rajaz poems, and by compositions in rhymed prose. These things one generation inherited from the other, so as to remain among them and after them.[13]

Anwā' was hence studied by medieval linguists and philologists such as ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī (828-885 CE) and ibn al-Ajdābī (d. 1077 CE).[14]

1992), [hereafter al-Alūsī, *The Fulfillment of Desire on Knowledge of the Affairs of Pagan Arabs*]: p.223.

[9] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Bath: Thames and Hudson, 1978), [hereafter Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*]: p.4

[10] Seyyed Hossain Nasr, *Islamic Studies: Various Papers on Legislation, Society, Oriental Sciences, Philosophy and Sūfism within the Islamic Context* (Beirut: al-Dār al-Mutaḥidah lil'Nashr, 1975), [hereafter Nasr, *Islamic Studies*]: pp.56-57; Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp.9-10

[11] Abdulla bin Saleem al-Rashid, 'Poetizing Life: A Study of some of the Societal Rhymed Prose of Arabs', *The Jordan Academy of Arabic*, 77 (2009), [hereafter al-Rashid]: p.364

[12] al-Rashid, p.372

[13] Abū Rayhān Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *The Chronology*, (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1879), p.227

[14] Abū Mohammad 'Abdulla ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba Al-Dīnawarī, *al-Anwā' Fi Mawāsim Al-'Arab Or Astro-Meteorology of the Arabs* (Baghdad: Dar al-Sho'oun al-

Nonetheless, Varsico suggested that whatever had been compiled is 'fragmentary' and not a true representation of the indigenous *anwā'*, owing to the lack of objective methodology by early Muslim compilers.[15] Absence of pagan ideas in the medieval textual sources, Varsico argued, shows that *anwā'* as a tradition was deliberately 'Islamicised'.[16] These views were vehemently challenged by the Saudi anthropologist Saad A. Sowayan who suggested that religion is *'ḥadharī,'* or belongs to the urbanised, for the harshness of the desert does not allow for any metaphysical contemplations.[17] Similarly, Gustave E. von Grunebaum noticed that the classical pre-Islamic poet of Arabia responded faster to the threatening aspects of the desert than to 'the charm of the idyllic.'[18] Grunebaum also observed that previously held beliefs cannot be easily concealed from oral traditions, as these 'continue, sometimes in a ghost like manner, and are resumed or restated time and again.'[19] This paper will attempt to reassess the value of *anwā'* in modern day Arabia through a qualitative study, paying particular attention to the relevant cosmological and linguistic contexts. Such 'contexualism,'as Alan Bryman wrote, provides a holistic framework that allows phenomena to be 'explicated and understood in their entirety.'[20]

Thaqafia al-'Amah, 1988), [hereafter ibn Qutayba]; abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn Ismā`īl ibn al-Ajdābī, *Al-Azmina W'al-Anwā' Or Book of Seasons and Anwā'*, ed. by Izzat Hasan (al-Ribat: Dār Abī Riqrāq lil'Ṭibā'ah wa'l-Nashr, 2006)

[15] Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā* in Arab Tradition', pp.25-28

[16] Daniel Martin Varisco, 'The Agricultural Marker Stars in Yemeni Folklore', *Asian Folklore Studies,* 52, No.1 (1993), [hereafter Varisco, 'The Agricultural Marker Stars']: p.120; Daniel Martin Varisco, 'The Rain Periods in Pre-Islamic Arabia', *Arabica,* T.34, Fasc.2 (1987), [hereafter Varisco, 'The Rain Periods in Pre-Islamic Arabia']: pp.265-266; Varisco, 'Stars and Texts in Arabia'; Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition', p.28

[17] Saad Abdullah Sowayan, *The Arabian Desert: Its Poetry and Culture Across the Ages, an Anthropological Approach* (Riyadh: King Saud University, 2010), [hereafter Sowayan]: pp.47-49

[18] Gustave E. Von Grunebaum, 'The Response to Nature in Arabic Poetry', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* 4 (1945), [hereafter Grunebaum]: p.140

[19] Grunebaum, p.142

[20] Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), [hereafter Bryman]: p.64

Methodology

In studies that investigate culturally shaped worldviews of a particular community, Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Baily recommended ethnography as the most suitable approach.[21] Bryman also wrote that an interpretive paradigm enables one to 'penetrate the frames of meaning' that participants attach to their worldviews.[22] Hence, in order to document and explore the folklore of *anwā'*, an ethnographic qualitative interpretive study was conducted with participants living in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia was chosen because of its vast area stretching over most of the Arabian Peninsula, and subsequently its potentiality to provide this study with a reasonably holistic picture of how *anwā'* was practiced by different tribes and localities in Arabia. The participants were deliberately chosen from different localities in Saudi Arabia; Tabūk in the north, Jeddah in the west overlooking the Red Sea, al-Qaṭīf (near Ad Dammām) in the east overlooking the Persian Gulf and Najd in the central region (FIG. 1.). One of the two Jeddah participants was of Yemeni origins, specifically from Ḥaḍramaut. In contrast, Kuwait was chosen on account of its high Bedouin population, known locally as *badū*, and which according to Anh Nga Longva was estimated to have been around 60% in 2006.[23] These *badū*, Longva explained, are mostly immigrants from Saudi Arabia who still 'stubbornly hold on to their tribal ways.'[24] All of the Kuwaiti participants live in the governorate of al-Jahra; described by Longva as an 'outlying area' mostly occupied by *badū*.[25] In accordance to the recommendation of Hennink et al., in-depth guided interviews were prepared in advance for the Saudi participants in order to yield adequate information on the topics explored.[26] The open questions of the interviews were supplemented with topical probes to elicit adequate responses and 'ensure that detailed information is collected on all issues of interest,' as Hennink et al. suggested.[27]

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[21] Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Baily, *Qualitative Research Methods*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2011), [hereafter Hennink et al.], p.46.
[22] Bryman, p.61
[23] Anh Nga Longva, 'Nationalism in Pre-Modern Guise: The Discourse on Hadhar and Badū in Kuwait', *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 38, no.2 (May, 2006), [hereafter Longva]: p.174.
[24] Longva, p.172
[25] Longva, p.175
[26] Hennink et al., p.110.
[27] Hennink et. al., pp.118-119

FIG. 1. Physical map of Saudi Arabia

Conversely, the interviews with the Kuwaiti *badū* were brief and unstructured, allowing the *badū* participants to freely elaborate on the topic of *anwā'*, and at times digress, without interruption. The aim was to gain a phenomenological understanding of the folklore of *anwā'* from the Bedouin perspective; a process that entails the construction of a 'rich detailed description of a central phenomenon' as John Creswell explained.[28] Yet due to the limited scope of this study, and subsequently the lack of prolonged personal interaction with the

[28] John W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (California: Sage Publications Inc, 2003), p.133.

participants, the interviews allowed me to only briefly touch the surface of the participants' *anwā'* beliefs.

The Saudi participants consisted of five middle-aged *anwā'* practitioners, some of which have high academic credentials, published articles, books, websites, blogs and Twitter accounts. All of the participants in this group have learned *anwā'* through independent research coupled with interaction with elders, farmers or seamen. Alternatively, the Kuwaiti group consisted of four illiterate *badū* men, all above the age of sixty-five. Two of these *badū* men belong to al-'Ajmī tribe; a well-known Bedouin tribe with a 'whole population' as Longva pointed out.[29] The *badū* men's knowledge of *anwā'* is more spontaneous and reflective of their lifestyles, having 'inherited' this folklore from their predecessors. Although the Saudi group was more connected to technology and the internet, initial contact with them was a challenging process, mostly due to their busy schedules and their need to 'prepare in advance' for the interview. Conversely, access to the *badū* group was more natural and effortless requiring no prior appointments or preparation. The interviews were conducted over the telephone with the Saudis and over Skype with the Kuwaitis through the assistance of a third party. After a brief introduction of the purpose of my research, as advised by Hennink et al., written consents were sought from the Saudi group, while verbal consents were regarded as adequate in the case of the illiterate Kuwaiti group.[30] In order to limit what Bryman termed as the 'problem of interpretation,' copies of the transcribed interviews were sent to the Saudi participants for their validation.[31] Six out of nine of the participants permitted me to use their names. Pseudonyms are assigned for the three who wished to remain anonymous. It is important to point out that although I am a Muslim Arab conversing in a similar dialect, I regard myself as an outsider for I have not been exposed to the practice of *anwā'*. Therefore, in order to attain a reasonable degree of *verstehen,* I sought to understand this folklore through the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Following K. Haynes advice, I constantly reflected on how my presuppositions and personal interpretations are influencing and shaping the data collected.[32]

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[29] Longva, p.178

[30] Hennink et al., p.71

[31] Bryman, p.78

[32] K. Haynes, "Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," in *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research: A Practical Guide*, edited by Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon (London: Sage Publications, 1994), p.74.

As aforementioned, the Saudi group consisted of participants from different regions of the country; Hassan Basurrah and Abdulrazaq al-Baloushi from Jeddah, Salman Ramadan from al-Qaṭīf, Nazeeh al-Haizan from Tabūk, and Aḥmad, who chose to remain anonymous, from the central province of Saudi Arabia. Basurrah holds a PhD in Astronomy, al-Baloushi is a member of several astronomical unions and is a regular speaker at the local planetarium, Ramadan was the head of al-Qatīf Astronomy Society, al-Haizan is an independent researcher who published a book on *anwā'* recently, whilst Aḥmad holds a high academic degree not directly related to astronomy or *anwā'*. On the other hand, The Kuwaiti Bedouin group consisted of Ḥamad and Manṣūr from al-'Ajmī tribe and two other men who wished to remain anonymous. The first chose to be called Abū Mish'al, which translates to the father of Mish'al, whereas the other wished to use his nickname 'al-Malik' which literally translates to 'the King.'

A Relationship with the Sky

While knowledge of *anwā'* was natural and spontaneous in the case of the Kuwaiti Bedouins, the Saudi participants had different stories to tell about their involvement with *anwā'*. Observing the sky from his family's west-facing shop in al-Taīf instigated Basurrah's interest in astronomy, 'I used to see a shining star in the western horizon, its altitude increasing day after day, and then it disappears. It was Venus.' Basurrah's curiosity in what he calls 'historical' astronomy was stimulated by two manuscripts from his land of origin Ḥaḍramaut in Yemen. This triggered 'a never-ending cycle of research in historical astronomy,' Basurrah added. Things were not as clearly set for al-Baloushi who thought that *anwā'* was connected to 'mathematical astronomy' before realising that it 'was connected to rainfall more than anything else.' Describing the retired seamen of Jeddah who helped him learn about *anwā'*, al Baloushi said, 'they possessed an amazingly large amount of information on meteorological changes, connecting these to the risings of certain stars.' A similar interaction with elderly farmers in the agricultural governorate al-Qaṭīf introduced Ramadan to the folklore of *anwā'*. Yet Ramadan was not interested in farming methods, 'I wanted to learn about the names of the stars, I wanted to see the stars,' he remarked. In the case of al-Haizan, it was a profound visual experience that triggered the process, 'I used to contemplate the sky with its illuminating lanterns, the sky that God Almighty described saying, "And We

adorned the lower heaven with lights."'[33] Likewise, sunsets, sunrises and stellar configurations were what attracted Aḥmad who had 'a very strong connection to the sky' to the folklore of *anwā'*.

Clearly, both Basurrah and al-Baloushi distinguished between what David A. King termed as 'mathematic' and 'folkloric' astronomy; the latter including the calendrical works on *anwā'*.[34] Yet their simultaneous interest in both traditions contradicts King's claim of the lack of interaction between the two genres.[35] Instead, they express a fluidity in motion between 'higher' and 'lower' forms of astronomy, thus validating Patrick Curry's theory as cited by Nicholas Campion.[36] Curry's 'higher' and 'lower' classes of astronomy correspond to King's 'mathematic' and 'folkloric' astronomy.[37] Yet unlike King, Curry believed that the threshold that separates the aforementioned classes is not solidly defined, but allows for effortless motion between the genres.[38] In contrast, al-Haizan's perspective reveals an Islamic cosmology that views natural phenomena as 'signs of God to be contemplated by the believers,' as noted by Nasr.[39] Moreover, an urge to 'comingle' with the sky in order to understand it, as discussed by Tim Ingold, was experienced by al-Haizan, Ramadan and Aḥmad.[40]

Geography and the Definition of anwā'

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to define some astronomical terms connected to *naw'*; the singular form of *anwā'*. According to Bernadette Brady, a heliacally rising star is a star that rises at sunrise after a period of invisibility.[41] A morning setting star on the other hand, Brady continued, is a

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[33] *The Holy Qur'ān*, trans. by Abdulla Yusuf Ali (Ware: Wordsworth Collection, 2001), [hereafter *The Holy Qur'ān*]: 41:12

[34] David A. King, *Astronomy for Landlubbers and Navigators: The Case of the Islamic Middle Ages*, Vol. 164UC (Coimbra: Biblioteca Geral 1, 1984), [hereafter King]: pp.212-214

[35] King, pp.215-218

[36] Nicholas Campion, *History of Western Astrology: The Medieval and Modern Worlds*, Vol. 2 (New York: Continuum Intl Pub Group, 2008), [hereafter Campion, *History of Western Astrology*]: pp.179-180.

[37] Campion, *History of Western Astrology*, pp.179-180

[38] Campion, *History of Western Astrology*, p.180

[39] Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p.6

[40] Tim Ingold, 'Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13 (2007), p.S29

[41] Bernadette Brady, 'Star Phases: The Naked-Eye Astronomy of the Old Kingdom Pyramid Utterances', in *Skyscapes: The Role and Importance of the Sky in Archaeology*, ed.

star that sets at sunrise but was visible during the night.[42] Although medieval philologists agreed that the *naw'* was a stellar phenomenon observed at sunrise, proposing a unanimous definition was a challenging task. Analysing the etymology of the word, ibn Qutayba favoured the opinion that said that the word meant to 'heavily incline' as opposed to 'heavily ascend.'[43] Hence, the *naw'*, ibn Qutayba concluded, is the morning setting of a star the moment another star heliacally rises at the eastern horizon, the latter known as its *raqīb*, or polar opposite, he added. [44] The problematic definition of *naw'* stems from a misunderstanding of actual stellar observation, al-Baloushi clarified, for in order to identify the *naw'* you had to observe its *raqīb*. On many occasions, he continued, the elevation of the land, or the proximity of the setting star to the horizon, makes it visually hard to perceive the morning setting star. Therefore, 'you need to memorise which star precedes the setting star and which star would be transiting the midheaven, for these two are easily visible to us,' he explained. Clearly, *naw'* identification, as perceived by al-Baloushi, involves an integrated sky seen as a whole unit.

Agreeing with al-Baloushi, Ramadan's observation of the *naw'* entails a simultaneous observation of its *raqīb*. However, Ramadan proposed a geographical explanation to the definition problem of *anwā'*, stating that the correlation of *naw'* to morning setting stars originates from Shābān in Yemen. Basurrah opined likewise, adding that the definition is 'reversed' in the central and northern regions of the Peninsula, where the term *naw'* became associated with the heliacal rising of stars. Truly, both Aḥmad and al-Haizan, who inhabit the central and northern regions respectively, believed that *naw'* referred to the heliacal rising of stars after a period of invisibility. Tribal practices of recent centuries, Aḥmad noted, indicate that the term was used to denote the heliacal rising of stars. Furthermore, the anticipation of the rising of Canopus by local tribes, al-Haizan explained, seems to support the heliacal rising definition. Indeed, the sayings of the tribesmen according to Varisco refered to heliacal risings.[45] In their proverbs, the *badū* of Kuwait repeatedly used the word *tala'* which according to the lexicographer ibn Manẓūr (1233-1312 CE) indicates the

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by F. Silva and N. Campion (Oxford: Oxbow (forthcoming), 2013), [hereafter Brady]: pp.6-7

[42] Brady, pp.6-7

[43] ibn Qutayba, pp.11-13

[44] ibn Qutayba, p.14

[45] Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition', p.14

rising of the 'sun, moon and the stars.'[46] Talking about Pleiades, Canopus and Sirius respectively, Ḥamad pointed out, '*al-Thurrayā*, *Suhaīl* and *al-Mirzam tetla'* (rise) in the summer.' Moreover, both Ḥamad and Abū Mish'al specified that Canopus now rises on the 24th of August of the gregorian year. Obviously, Kuwait falls in the northern region of the Arabian Peninsula, and therefore their definition may be reflective of their goegraphical location.

Exploring Significant Celestial Elements in anwā'

Varisco noted that medieval Islamic textual sources unanimously identified *anwā'* with lunar mansions or *manāzil*, and so did all of the Saudi participants.[47] Al-Baloushi and al-Haizan opined that Pleiades in particular was the most prominent of all of the *manāzil.* Describing the special calendrical use of Pleiades al-Baloushi said, 'observing the conjunction of the Moon with Pleiades on a particular day of the *hijrī* (lunar) month helps in inferring seasonal changes.' Demonstrating the system in rhymed prose, al-Baloushi added, 'they say; "a fifth day conjunction is the climax of spring."' Conversely, al-Haizan explained how the 'traingular' shape of Pleiades helped Bedouins in identifying different directions, for 'the tip of the traingle points towards the west and the other side points towards the east.' Both of these functions of Pleiades; calendrical and directional; had been mentioned by ibn Qutayba.[48] Saudi 'practitioners' hence demonastrate what Varisco termed as a textually based reconstruction of an oral tradition which he warned against.[49] By imposing an 'imported model of lunar stations,' Varisco argued, one loses the authenticity of *anwā'*.[50] Also, ethnographic studies reveal that the Arabic year commences with the autumnal rains, Varisco elaborated, not with the first lunar mansion.[51]

Nevertheless, the Saudi participants did exhibit direct practical knowledge of the system of *anwā'* not solely based on textual sources. Stressing the significance of the heliacal rising of Canopus as a marker of the beginning of the Arabic pastoral cycle, al-Haizan pointed out that the star appears on

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[46] Abū al-Fadl Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol.8 (Beirut: Dār Sāder, 1994), p.235

[47] Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'*', p.6

[48] ibn Qutayba, p.29; pp.90-92.

[49] Varisco, 'The Rain Periods in Pre-Islamic Arabia', p.265; Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition', p.25

[50] Varisco, 'The Rain Periods in Pre-Islamic Arabia', pp.253-254; Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition', pp.16-17

[51] Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition', p.17-18

different dates of the gregorian calendar at different localities; 24th of August in Yemen, 20th of September in the central region of the Peninsula, and 27th of September in the north. These dates clearly differ than those found in the works of ibn Qutayba and al-Ajdābi.[52] Similarly, Ramadan demonstrated a specialised knowledge of a nautical Canopus calendar used in the south-eastern region of the Peninsula commonly known as the 'Indian *Suhaīl'*. This calendar was mainly used by seamen, pearl-divers and merchants who frequently travelled to India, Ramadan clarified. Starting from the first appearance of Canopus, Ramadan explained, the year is divided into thirty-six periods called *durr,* each consisting of ten days. The *durr* periods correlated to the everyday life of a coastal community, Ramdan elaborated, for 'it told them when to avoid swimming in the sea and when to dive for pearls.' Similarly, mention of the 'Indian *Suhaīl'* calendar is found nowhere in medieval texts or contemporary anthropological studies.

Both Pleiades and Canopus were repeatedly mentioned by all of the *badū.* Trying to remember all the *anwā'* he knew, the King commented assuredly, '*Suhaīl*, indeed, it is the first of all of the stars,' followed by the rhymed prose, 'when *Suhaīl* rises, beware of water torrents.' Reminiscing about their nomadic days, the King narrated, 'we used to settle near water during the summer, but once *Suhaīl* rose we had to resettle somewhere else because flooding usually follows.' Ḥamad mentioned a similar story connected to Canopus, 'Glorious is God! When *Suhaīl* rose the water levels increased in wells, we used it as drinking water for ourselves and our animals.' Supporting his story by the rhymed prose, 'When *Suhaīl* rises, the summer bursts like a carrion,' Ḥamad depicted how 'the summer and its scorching heat ends after reaching its climax, it bursts, like the rotting carcass of a camel when *Suhaīl* rises.' To Abū Mish'al, the appearance of Canopus signals the commencement of autumn and the end of the cultivating season, for 'When *Suhaīl* appears at night, the summer is separated from winter.' Remembering Pleiades, Manṣūr described how 'the whole land, all the way to the horizon, became green with pasture, for when *al-Thurrayā* sets *al-wasm* season begins.' The autumnal rainfall which coincides with the *naw'* of *al-Thurrayā*, ibn Qutayba wrote, is called *al-wasmī* because it marks (*yasimu*) the land with vegetation.[53] Varisco added that this rain is also

[52] ibn Qutayba, pp.21-89; ibn al-Ajdābī, pp.122-149.

[53] ibn Qutayba, p.119

known as *wasm al-Thurrayā* by the 'Arabs of Kuwait.'[54] Indeed, the rhymed prose of the *badū* express an oral response to the harshness of the desert life as Grunebaum noted.[55] This oral tradition also vividly depicts the ecological contexts that regulated the nomadic lives of the *badū* as al-Rashid opined.[56]

Islamic Cosmology and anwā'

It seems that all of the Saudi participants' perception of *anwā'* was shaped by their personal cosmologies, and not the reverse. Al-Haizan asserted that *'anwā'* has no influence whatsoever on anything in the universe, for everything is ordained by God the Glorified and Exalted. The appearance of stars simply coincides with periods of rainfall.' Ramadan agreed adding that attributing influential power to *anwā'* 'is forbidden as in the Prophetic *ḥadīth*. When talking about *anwā'* you should say that it rained *in* the specific naw' *not because of* the specific *naw'*.' Elaborating on the cosmological significance of *anwā'*, Aḥmad said:

When one contemplates the heavenly bodies, it surely increases one's faith and enhances the principle of *tawhīd;* the faith in God's unity and oneness. God, the Glorified and Exalted, said; 'Say: "Behold all that is in the heavens and on earth"' and '[they] contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (With the thought): "Our Lord! not for naught Hast Thou created (all) this! Glory to Thee! Give us salvation from the penalty of the Fire"' and 'The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed.'[57]

Evidently, the views of the urbanised group, particularly al-Haizan, Ramadan and Aḥmad reflect a cosmology that stems from Islamic theological principles and confirm Sowayan's view of the urbanised nature of religion.[58] Ramadan's view clearly mirrors ibn Qutayba's opposition to the 'blasphemous' attribution of influence and power to *anwā'*.[59] What Nasr termed as the 'Unity of Divine Principle' or *tawḥīd,* that outlines and underlies Islamic cosmology is explicitly expressed in Aḥmad's response.[60] Indeed, to Aḥmad, the stars of *anwā'* are 'signs of God to be contemplated by the believers,' as Nasr noted.[61] The

[54] Varisco, 'The Rain Periods in Pre-Islamic Arabia', p.262
[55] Grunebaum, p.140
[56] al-Rashid, p.372
[57] *The Holy Qur'ān*, 10:101; 3:191; 55:5
[58] Saad Abdullah Sowayan, pp.47-49
[59] ibn Qutayba, pp.17-19
[60] Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp.4-5
[61] Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p.6

responses of al-Haizan and Ramadan reveal the influence of an Ash'arite theology which disjoints causes and effects, as clarified by Nasr, attributing all effects to God.[62] Asserting God's omnipotence, the noted Ash'arite philosopher al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE) wrote:

In our view, the connection between what is usually believed to be a cause and what is believed to be an effect is not necessary so… For instance, quenching of thirst does not imply drinking, nor satiety eating, nor burning contact with fire… The connection is based on a prior ordainment by God the Glorious.[63]

In contrast, the simplicity of the *badū*'s faith is evident in their natural and frequent recital of the phrase, 'Glorious is God,' after the mention of every rhymed prose and narration of every story. When asked about the role of *anwā'* in his community, Abū Mish'al casually replied, 'it is normal to talk about the stars, they are even mentioned in the Qur'ān. They are created by our God the Great and Mighty. Our people and their predecessors recited poems about them and found their ways through them.' In addition of being reflective of the principle of *tawḥīd* characteristic of Islam, Abu Mish'al's view echoes Mathews 'good cosmology'; bright and self-affirming.[64] Additionally, the *badū*'s cosmology recognises that their 'feelings, families, communities, towns and cities are part of the cosmos,' as Campion wrote.[65]

Conclusion

Due to the limited scope of this study, it is important to clarify that the findings discussed here are not representative of the overall situation as it pertains to the folklore of *anwā'* nor could it rule out alternative explanations. Regarding the etymological problem of defining *anwā'*, the interviews have shown that such a definition is geography-dependant; a point not addressed by previous literature. While the southern regions of the Arabian Peninsula seem to prefer the morning setting star definition, the northern and central regions seem to favour the heliacal rising star definition. Yet in actual practice, a precise definition is irrelevant, for as Ramadan pointed out, 'when I am not able to

[62] Nasr, *Islamic Studies*, 56-57

[63] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah Or the Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ed. by Sulayman Dunya (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1972), p.239

[64] Mathews, p.13

[65] Campion, p.5

locate *al-Ḍirā'* the position of Sirius helps me find it, for what we are observing is an interconnected network of stars.'

Both the semi-structured interviews with the Saudi 'practitioners' and the unstructured interviews with the Kuwaiti *badū* confirmed the absence of pagan elements in the folklore of *anwā'* in its present form, hence supporting Varisco's observation.[66] However, the interviews showed that these are not resultant from a deliberate 'Islamicization' process by the medieval compliers of the *anwā'* genre, as Varisco opined.[67] Instead, this seems to have stemmed from a major cosmological transformation that mirrored a theological transformation; for as Campion wrote cosmologies are reflective of religious beliefs.[68] What Nasr termed as the 'Unity of the Divine Principle,' known as *tawḥīd,* clearly underlies the cosmological views of all participants, not merely surpassing pre-Islamic beliefs, but totally negating them.[69] Conversely, elements of the Greco-Islamic cosmology that was once widespread, as pointed out by Campion, seem to have no impact whatsoever on the participants' worldviews.[70]

Although the Saudi participants were able to enumerate the twenty-eight lunar mansions, none of them were able to recall with ease the rhymed prose of *anwā'*; which they thought to be 'out-dated' and inapplicable. In contrast, all of the *badū* instinctively connected every proverb to its 'star,' yet all confessed that they have forgotten many other stars. Unfortunately, the folklore of *anwā'* in its authentic form is dependent of the 'faltering memories' of the *badū*, as Varisco pointed out.[71] The urbanisation of the Kuwaiti *badū* that started in the 1960s, as stated by Longva, has without doubt disconnected them from natural cycles and cosmological patterns.[72] When *Suhaīl* and *al-Thurrayā* lost their significance to the Bedouin, proverbs and sayings became 'divorced from reality,' as Varisco wrote.[73]

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[66] Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition', pp.25-28
[67] Varisco, 'The Origin of the *anwā'* in Arab Tradition', p.28
[68] Campion, p.10
[69] Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p.4
[70] Campion, p.180
[71] Varisco, 'The Agricultural Marker Stars', p.132
[72] Longva, pp.175-176
[73] Varisco, 'The Agricultural Marker Stars', p.132

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