Peter Webb

The Hajj Before Muhammad: The Early Evidence in Poetry and Hadith

Abstract: Scholarly debate on the nature of the Hajj before Muhammad and radical questions of whether Mecca was a ritual site at all in pre-Islamic times are answerable from the large corpus of pre-Islamic poetry, which has been underutilised as a source for pre-Islamic history. This paper reveals the poetry to be both a reliable and valuable witness. It demonstrates that the Hajj was performed in the generation before Muhammad in substantially similar terms to subsequent Muslim practice. Some modifications and shifts are discernible, but ritual continuity emerges as a major theme. The poetry also underscores the restricted ambit of the pre-Islamic Hajj: we uncover a highly-localised ritual followed primarily by groups living near Mecca – the expansion of the Hajj into a pan-Arabian phenomenon with an intimate role in informing communal identity and political power are new in the Islamic period. This paper closes with comparison of the poetry and hadith on the Hajj, which reveals a major Muslim-era reinterpretation of the pilgrimage as an Abrahamic rite.

As the spirit of sceptical enquiry reshaped scholars's approach to early Islamic history, the Meccan Hajj became a significant target for reinterpretation. Whereas most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Orientalist scholars broadly followed the standard narrative in Muslim historiography to view Mecca as the preeminent, or at least a central site of pre-Islamic Arabian pilgrimage,[1] critical scholarship during the twentieth century began to harbour doubts. Enigmatic indicators in the Qur'an[2] alongside a dearth of reference to Mecca in pre-Islamic Syriac, Greek, Latin, and other non-Arabic historical records prompted scepticism about whether Mecca was actually a major pre-Islamic pilgrimage site at all, and over the past generation, an array of alternative theories for Hajj origins have been posited.[3]

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1 Snouck Hurgronje 1880; Wellhausen 1887: 79–81.

2 At the forefront, Qur'an 3:96 refers to pilgrimage at 'Bakka', not Mecca. Bakka resonates with Psalm 84.5–6, which inspired Regnier's 1939 radical theory that the Hajj initially was to Jerusalem.

3 Nevo & Koren 1990 propose a site in the Sinai; Holland 2012: 330–33 suggests the pre-Islamic Hajj was made to the ritual site of Mamre in Palestine; Gibson 2017: 172–79 argues that the qibla pointed to Petra in Jordan, and that it constitutes the original al-Masjid al-Ḥarām until the sacred stone was removed

Peter Webb, Leiden University, p.a.webb@hum.leidenuniv.nl

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The alternative theories, however, faced two primary difficulties. Firstly, early Muslim-era Arabic sources are in concord that Mecca was the focal point of a pre-Islamic pilgrimage, and those sources lack indicators of Mecca's transformation into a shrine in the Muslim period. Had Mecca been converted into the primary focus of pilgrimage after Muhammad's lifetime, some vestiges of that innovation might be expected to persist in the heterogeneous material of pre-modern Arabic historiography, but there are no patent signs. Secondly, if Mecca was not a pre-Islamic pilgrimage site, the alternative theories have the burden to explain how and why Mecca attained such status in early Islam, yet cogent explanations are not readily forthcoming either. As a consequence, most scholars today are reluctant to reject Mecca's status as a pre-Islamic shrine outright, but in order to furnish proof about pre-Islamic Mecca, much reliance has been placed on an enigmatic reference to a "Macoraba" which the Roman-era geographer Ptolemy (ca. 100 – 70) placed in Arabia.[4] Ptolemy is a very early source, and "Macoraba" does sound like the Arabic "Makkah", which would entail the toponym's considerable antiquity, but Ptolemy situates Macoraba in slightly the wrong place, and his laconic treatment of toponyms in general lacks the scope to elaborate upon its significance, let alone suggest its status as a pilgrimage centre. It is possible that Ptolemy's Macoraba does provide (albeit somewhat garbled) pre-Islamic evidence for the existence of Mecca, but it is problematic,[5] and the case for Mecca's pre-Islamic existence needs more copious, stronger, and more detailed testimony.

What is intriguing is that valuable testimony has been readily available during the length and breadth of scholars' debates over Mecca's historicity. Ptolemy's Macoraba is not the only pre-Islamic: since a healthy corpus of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry composed between ca. 540 – 620 expressly refers to Mecca and pilgrimage practice. The corpus has received surprisingly little attention,[6] and this paper gathers the broadest corpus of poetic material to analyse its insight into Meccan pilgrimage before Islam.

To augment analysis of the poetry, this paper also compares the pre-Islamic verses with two early hadith compilations about the Hajj. One of the very earliest surviving texts on hadith is a book specifically dedicated to the Hajj: (i) *Kitāb al-Manāsik* by Ibn Abī ʿArūbah (d. between 155 – 59/771 – 76), which preserves memories that predate the late eighth and ninth-century CE maturation of hadith collection, and (ii) *al-*

during the Second Fitnah (for a critique of Gibson, see King 2018 – 2019). See Gross 2017: 316, 319 – 20 for scholars who believe the Hajj originated in Balkh in modern Afghanistan. Another set of scholars extrapolate from the Judaic aspects of Muslim Hajj terminology to suggest it originated with Jewish communities outside of Arabia (see Crone 1987: 176 – 80, Hawting 1982).

4 Ptolemy *Geography* §6.7.32.

5 Crone 1987: 134 – 37 and Morris 2018 deny that Macoraba intended Mecca. Ptolemy (or his source) may have copied the name incorrectly, but 'Macoraba' may indeed intend a different place, and Morris demonstrates that modern efforts to explain the term Macoraba should be discounted.

6 I am aware of only two recent discussions of the Hajj in pre-Islamic poetry, a short section in Nathaniel Miller's PhD dissertation (Miller 2016: 103 – 5), and Sinai 2019: 52 – 54. Sinai cites earlier scholarship too – Ahlwardt 1870 and Geyer 1919 – though these only comment on single lines of pre-Islamic poetry each. A broad analytical survey of the corpus has not, to my knowledge, been undertaken.

Muṣannaf by Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/849), which contains some 3,400 hadiths on Meccan pilgrimage, including material that was marginalised in subsequent legal canonisation of the Hajj. The ways in which the early hadith handle the pre-Islamic origins of the Hajj proffer intriguing intersections with the poetic evidence and shine clearer light onto the genuine memories of the Hajj before Muhammad, the early Muslim-era process of negotiating the legacy of that past, and the impact of Muslim community-construction on the perception of Hajj history.

1 Poetry as a Source for the Pre-Islamic Hajj

Because all extant pre-Islamic Arabic poetry survives only in Muslim-era collections, scholars have raised broad-level questions as to whether any pre-Islamic poetry constitutes a true 'pre-Islamic' source. The suspicions were most sweepingly articulated in the early twentieth century by D. S. Margoliouth and Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn who both argued that the entire pre-Islamic poetry corpus was essentially inauthentic, a Muslim-era fabrication of verses falsely ascribed to pre-Islamic figures.[7] Such attacks on poetry's authenticity appeared incendiary at the time, but the earliest generations of Muslim-era poetry collectors in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries themselves had already warned about poetry fabrication and false ascription of verses composed in the Muslim-era to pre-Islamic poets.[8] The early collectors did endeavour to distinguish fakes from authentic verses, and the poems presented in the extant diwans of some individual poets and the well-known collections and commentaries, such as *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, *al-Aṣmaʿiyyāt*, the several *Ḥamāsah* anthologies, and *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ* of the poetry critic Ibn Sallām (d. 231/845 or 232/846) are the results of those early collectors' critical circumspection.

Margoliouth and Ḥusayn's suspicions about the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry in Muslim-era collections also stem from concerns about poetry's oral transmission. Traditionally, Western scholars worked under the impression that poetry was transmitted orally for 200–300 years before its recording in the third/ninth-century sources, and such a long period in a mutable transmission environment was assumed to have altered the material. However, from a survey of toponyms in al-Sukkarī's (d. 275/888) collection of the Hudhayl poetry, it becomes clear that much of that specialised collection was circulating in a written form considerably before al-Sukkarī: the nature of variations in the names of toponyms which he reports almost certainly arose from his forebears having read the poetry *without* hearing it. Such variations were circulating amongst second/eighth-century scholars, hence more poetry was recorded in writing

7 Margoliouth 1925; Ḥusyan 1926.

8 Al-Jumaḥī n.d. 1:7–13; Ibn Hishām n. d. 1:15.

and studied visually as opposed to orally at an earlier stage than usually imagined.[9] For many of the poems collected by poetry specialists, therefore, the period of fraught oral transmission appears shorter than previously thought.

Poetry experts today accordingly retreat from the blanket scepticism of Margoliouth and Ḥusayn, and they consider that most poems contained in the specialist collections are genuine voices from pre-Islam.[10] But while it is important for modern scholarship to dissociate from the sweeping claims of past scepticism, an abiding approval of the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry is nonetheless not sufficient of itself for specific historical questions such as those of the present paper, and further consideration of method is in order.

In the case of the Hajj, there is a wealth of purportedly pre-Islamic poetry that mentions the rituals and custodianship of Mecca's sanctum, but the corpus is heterogeneous, and some verses are clearly of problematic ascription. One major issue is that competing Muslim-era factions of the Quraysh cited their pre-Islamic ancestors to vaunt their lineages and assert their superiority. A case in point is the memory of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, ancestor of the Abbasid and also Shi'a lines. During the rise of the Abbasids, the heroic aspect of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib's memory was emphasised to assert Abbasid legitimacy over the Umayyads, and since the Abbasids placed particular emphasis on Hajj leadership as a procession to legitimise their authority, stories about ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib's discovery of the Zamzam Well and his clan's pre-Islamic privilege of providing water for pilgrims were selected as core tropes of Abbasid merit.[11] As a consequence, the copious poetry ascribed to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and others in Ibn Isḥāq's (d. ca. 150/767) biography of the Prophet and Ibn Ḥabīb's (d. 245/860) *al-Munammaq* collection of Quraysh history, which make claims about the pre-Islamic Hajj and its organisation, speak the language and tenor of Muslim-era polemic, not genuine memories transmitted from pre-Islam. Such poems are of the type which early Muslim-era poetry collectors deemed inauthentic,[12] and cannot be used for our purposes, as distilling authentic pre-Islamic sentiments from Muslim-era polemic is quite intractable.

Fortunately, sentiments about the pre-Islamic Hajj do also appear in scattered verses from the poetry collections compiled by early poetry specialists, and these differ from the politicised poetry both in the nature of their transmission and their descriptions of Meccan pilgrimage. In terms of transmission, these poems are disconnected

9 Through a study of toponyms, it appears that pre-Islamic poetry was actually set to writing a generation or two earlier than the earliest extant collections today, placing the recording of a number of pre-Islamic poems in the first/seventh century at the latest, and entailing that the gap between the pre-Islamic poets and the recording was not so long as usually stated (see Webb 2020b: 263–64).

10 A fair assessment of poetry's authenticity is outlined in Bauer 2009: 703–4. Early opposition to the Margoliouth-Ḥusayn critiques of pre-Islamic poetry is adduced by Arafat (1966), (1970); his opinions are augmented by Agha, who describes the retreat from earlier 'vigorous' doubts about authenticity (2011: 8).

11 Zadeh 2016; Webb 2023a: 130–33.

12 The spurious poetry ascribed to Ibn Isḥāq's narration of the Prophet's biography and its pre-Islamic Meccan historical narratives are specifically critiqued by al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* and Ibn Hishām *al-Sīra.*

from historical narrative sources shaped by ulterior motives regarding Mecca's status. These poems were instead presented by early poetry specialists as worthy examples of pre-Islamic verse and were transmitted as poetry, not as props for historical discourses. The poems themselves betray no connection to issues concerning Meccan politics either, they mention the Hajj only in passing and not in the context of deliberate efforts to praise pre-Islamic figures. The material thus circulated primarily (or indeed exclusively) amongst scholars of poetry. Furthermore, because Muslims did not debate Mecca's status as a pre-Islamic pilgrimage centre, there was no discursive impetus for Muslims to invent poetry to prove that pre-Islamic Arabians performed a pilgrimage to Mecca, and thus the poems scattered in specialist collections, largely without commentary or elaboration, have solid prospects of being genuine.

The next sections present the verses referencing Meccan pilgrimage preserved in specialist poetry collections compiled between the second/eighth and fourth/tenth centuries. While poetry specialists today generally accept such collections as genuine, for a historian's purposes, we shall nonetheless proceed cautiously and remain open to the possibility that any single given verse ascribed to a pre-Islamic poet could bear some probability of being a forgery. However, trends that emerge across an array of poems have increasingly higher probabilities of representing actual pre-Islamic phenomena, and since the verses below do speak with concord on salient points, the material deserves close scrutiny for all interested in reconstructing the Late Antique Hajj.

2 Poetry and Pilgrimage: the contours of the evidence

Pre-Islamic poetry contains two macro trends regarding the Hajj before Muhammad with important underlying details. Firstly, at the broadest level, terminology similar to the Qur'an's pilgrimage lexicon is present in pre-Islamic poetry. For example, poems contain the word *muʿtamir*, formed from the same root as the Muslim *ʿumrah*, to describe a pilgrim,[13] and several pre-Islamic poets invoke the word *ḥijaj* (lit. 'pilgrimages', a plural of *ḥijjah*) to express the concept of 'years', especially 'years gone by'.[14] *ʿUmrah*/*muʿtamir*, to my knowledge, do not appear as terms for reckoning time in poetry, whereas that metaphorical aspect attaches to *ḥijaj* alone, suggesting that *ḥajj* likely did connote an annually-occurring pilgrimage (while *ʿumrah* did not), and that a regular pattern of annual pilgrimages known as hajjes was sufficiently well-established to enable the term 'pilgrimage' to serve as a metaphor for the passage of time itself.[15] The term is, however, by no means ubiquitous nor even frequent in pre-

13 Al-Aṣmaʿī 2005: 100.

14 Al-Aʿshā 1974: 417; Imruʾ al-Qays 1990: 89; Labīd 1962. See also al-Marzūqī 1968: 3:1329.

15 It appears the term *ḥijjah* also could be used to connote a specific number of years too: Salāmah ibn Jandal says "two pilgrimages" to mean two years (al-Aṣmaʿī 2005: 154).

Islamic poetry: in contrast, usage of *ḥijaj* to connote 'years' becomes distinctly more widespread in Muslim-era poetry, perhaps helped by the influence of Qur'an 28:27 which uses the compound *thāmāniya ḥijaj* to express "eight years".[16] Nonetheless, the Quranic phrasing precisely mirrors what seems to be a genuine expression from earlier, pre-Islamic verse, and even while the *ḥijaj*-years metaphor is not common in pre-Islamic poetry, its presence in well-attested poems suggests that the metaphor's origins are pre-Islamic, arising amongst peoples who had internalised the notion of hajj as a signature annual event.

Non-Arabic Late Antique texts mention pilgrimage fairs on the fringes of Arabia and the Fertile Crescent,[17] so pilgrimage terminology in pre-Islamic poetry is not unexpected *per se*, and the appearance of the term *Aggathalbaieth* in a Greek text from fourth century CE connoting a month in which Saracens in the Transjordan performed a pilgrimage is a precise transliteration for the Arabic *ḥijjat al-bayt* (pilgrimage to the shrine), though the Greek writer does not intend pilgrimage to Mecca.[18] Further evidence for pilgrimage in pre-Islamic Arabia is set out in Dost's paper in this collection, revealing that the term *ḥajj* has precedent in the Biblical *ḥag* (a "festival", entailing a pilgrimage and "appearance before God") and in north Arabian inscriptions; and while Dost notes that south Arabians primarily used a different term to describe their pilgrimage, the ḤGG is also present.[19] There were accordingly a variety of shrines to which a *ḥajj* could refer, and to this point, the pre-Islamic Arabic poems in which the term *ḥijaj* appears as connoting 'years' do not expressly specify visitation to Mecca. Likewise, one case of *muʿtamir* in pre-Islamic poetry definitely refers to a different pilgrimage centre at Dhū al-Khalaṣah. On the other hand, the poet who most frequently invokes the *ḥijaj*-years metaphor in pre-Islam is Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā,[20] and he resided near Mecca in the generation before Islam. Hence, while the *ḥijaj*-years metaphor may not have exclusively referenced Meccan pilgrimage, there are good grounds to consider that some poets likely intended Mecca. Overall, the terminology identifies a presence of annual pilgrimage in Arabian societies at a sufficiently hallowed level to serve as a means of reckoning time in emotive contexts, but the *ḥijaj*-years metaphor

16 In al-Baṣrī's *al-Ḥamāsa*, all examples of *ḥijja* as "year" are in Muslim-era poetry (1:413, 2:601, 3:1218, 1463).

17 See Binggeli 2007.

18 The quotation from Epiphanius is discussed in Janif 2006–2007: 342. I thank Laila Nehme for this reference.

19 Consider also the Sabaic ḤGG, a term attested in pre-Islamic South Arabian inscriptions to mean 'pilgrimage' in general, and not to Mecca specifically (the Meccan toponym is not attested in South Arabian texts). The Sabaic references to ḤGG connote pilgrimage to the many local South Arabian shrines before Islam (Biella 2004: 165). For example inscriptions, see Arbach 3 (http://dasi.cnr.it/index.php?id=30&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=888360080&recId=8968&mark=08968%2C003%2C006); and A-20–850 (http://dasi.cnr.it/index.php?id=dasi_prj_obj&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=888360080&recId=385).

20 Zuhayr is the only pre-Islamic poet who repeats the metaphor in multiple poems, see Zuhayr 1992: 114.

in poetry exhibits such a manifest increase in the Muslim era, that it is also clear that the conceptual centrality of Hajj clearly expanded significantly *after* the dawn of Islam.

Flowing from the first observation, the second general feature sustained through all poetry collections is that only a very small number of pre-Islamic verses from the specialised anthologies furnish express mention of the Meccan Hajj. For examples, al-Buḥturī's (d. 284/897) *al-Ḥamāsah* includes no relevant pre-Islamic poems, Abū Tammām's (d. 231/845 or 232/846) *al-Ḥamāsah* has only two, and one of those, ascribed to an unknown poet, may actually date from the early Muslim-era.[21] The next section will engage detailed consideration of the individual poems, but in broad terms, and as a proportion of the whole of pre-Islamic poetry, verses about Mecca are few and far between. While the express poetic citations are crucial in offering positive testimony for the Hajj before Islam, their very number reveals that the ritual was not on the lips of a very wide cross-section of Arabian poets.

The paucity of reference assists resolution of the incongruence between Muslim-era texts that posit Mecca as the central shrine of Arabian belief, and critical modern scholarship cited at the outset of this paper that challenges Mecca's very existence as a pre-Islamic shrine. The fact that so few pre-Islamic poets mention the Meccan Hajj does confound the Muslim-era narratives about the Hajj as a *pan-Arabian* pre-Islamic pilgrimage site, since if the Hajj had truly been the most important ritual across Arabia, a much richer citation in poetry should be expected. As explored in the next section, those poets who do refer to the Hajj do so in emotive terms and in a variety of contexts, yet they are a small minority: the number of poets who felt that the Hajj was weighty enough for their intended rhetoric was demonstrably small and points to the Meccan pilgrimage as being significant for a limited community. In contrast, the ubiquity of Hajj references in Muslim-era poetry is ample testimony to the major expansion of the ritual's importance and significance in Arabian culture following the rise of Islam. But while the evidence of poetry tempers the traditional Muslim narrative, the fact that some pre-Islamic poets *do* mention the Hajj at all stands as key evidence for the existence of a pre-Islamic Hajj in a form with salient resemblances to the Muslim-era ritual.

3 Poetic Testimony: the particulars

Direct reference to the Hajj and Mecca appears in al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī's celebrated ode addressed to the Lakhmid king, al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir:[22]

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21 Al-Marzūqī 1968: 4:1635, 3:1296; the tenor of the romantic verse of the latter example suggests possible early Muslim-era composition. The *Ḥamāsah* has manifold Muslim-era poems that refer to Mecca and the Hajj.

22 Al-Nābighah 1990: 25; the poem is also narrated in al-Tibrīzī 2000: 1:528 – 29. This and the poetry quoted in this paper are translated by the author.

I swear by the life of He, whose Kaʿbah I have circled,[23]
and I swear by the thick blood poured upon the sacrifice stones,
by the Lord Preserver of the birds in His sanctum,
touched by the riders to Mecca, between the wells al-Ghayl and al-Saʿd.[24]

Alongside express reference to Mecca, al-Nābighah's verses also encapsulate four essences of the Meccan Hajj as it would later be practiced by Muslims: (i) the pilgrims' (long) journey to Mecca,[25] (ii) circumambulation (*tamsīḥ*) of Mecca's central shrine (the Kaʿbah), (iii) the invocation of a single/monotheistic God, and (iv) sacrifice. It is pertinent too that the verse mentions the shrine together with sacrifice, evidencing pre-Islamic connection of pilgrimage rituals both inside and outside of the central sanctum. The sacrifice vocabulary, *anṣāb*, refers to the sacrifice altar stones, attested in pre-Islamic epigraphy as noted in Dost's contribution to this collection. Rhetorically, al-Nābighah summons the ritual aspects of the Hajj and Hajj-specific geography in the form of an oath: his poem is not about pilgrimage, but rather is a statement of fact in a dispute, and the Hajj features as an emphatic device to express the solemnity of al-Nābighah's testimony. The context suggests the poet's awareness of Mecca's venerated status in pre-Islamic conceptions of the sacred.

Similar express references to Hajj in oaths appear in two poems by Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, including his most famous and widely-circulated poem, the *Muʿallaqah:*[26]

I swore by the House circumambulated by
its builders, Quraysh and Jurhum,
and by al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā whom they worship
at Mecca, at the noble inviolable House [*al-bayt al-ʿatīq al-mukarram*]

The latter half of the excerpt may be an example of Muslim-era addition, as it is only attested in outlying manuscripts – hence the reference to worship of the two pagan deities al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā is unreliable. However, the reference to the sacred House and the circumambulation by its resident tribes, Jurhum and Quraysh, is reported consistently in the poem's recensions and stands as a pre-Islamic indicator that the Quraysh were known before Muhammad as custodians of a sacred House, and, as in the case of

23 Another version of this line reads: "I swear by He whom I have visited on hajjes" (al-Nābighah 1990: 235).

24 There is debate over these toponyms: they appear to have been forgotten by the time Muslim collectors began commenting upon the poem in the late 8th century (see the commentary in al-Tibrīzī 2000: 1:529). The fact that these names were unknown to Muslims is, incidentally, a good argument that the verse was not composed in the Muslim era.

25 Al-Nābighah does not elaborate that the "riders" have come from very far, but the semantics of the imagery intend a journey of more than a trivial distance.

26 Zuhayr 1982: 23, compare with Ibn al-Anbārī 2005: 252–60.

al-Nābighah's poem above, the ritual was worthy of being the subject of an oath. In the second poem, Zuhayr makes another oath:[27]

> I swore solemnly by the campsites of Minā,
> and by the shaven forelocks and lice-laden hair.

Minā is the Hajj pilgrims' campground, and shaving hair remains one of the mandatory Hajj rituals for men; Zuhayr's poem provides pre-Islamic testimony for both, as well as their reputed sanctity in pre-Islam, inasmuch as he employs both in an oath.

Oaths articulated via pilgrimage rites (both inside and outside Mecca proper) also appear in verses ascribed to lesser poets preserved in the early specialist collections. For example, Abū Tammām's *al-Ḥamāsah* contains a poem by the pre-Islamic poetess Ḥabībah bint ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā:[28]

> I swear by the Lord of the prancing camels [*rabb al-rāqiṣāt*] towards Minā,
> around Mecca, leading sacrifice animals [...]

Ḥabībah's allusion to camels refers to the gathering of pilgrim travellers, she identifies the holy site by name, and she attests to the centrality of sacrifice for the Meccan ritual alongside the single nature of the worshiped deity. Her choice of terminology for the sacrifice animals does not invoke a form derived from the root *dh-b-ḥ* for "sacrifice", as appears in the pre-Islamic inscriptions noted by Dost; instead Ḥabībah calls them *hady* (an offering) which does precisely match the terms which the Qur'an uses to describe a sacrificial animal (Q2:196, 5:2, 5:95), and Ḥabībah's pairing of *hady* with *muqallid* in her poem is also reflected in Q5:2 and 5:97. It is intriguing that her vocabulary is ostensibly closer to the Qur'an than it is to pre-Islamic inscriptions, but she is closer in date to the Qur'an than most surviving inscriptions, and she may therefore stand as useful evidence for the origins of the Quranic concept of the sacrifice which accompanied Meccan pilgrimage.

From the perspective of vocabulary, Ḥabībah's oath formula of swearing "by Lord of the prancing camels" is also noteworthy, as it would become a very prominent convention in Muslim-era poetry.[29] As for poetry ascribed to other pre-Islamic poets, I can identify only one further example in the anthology of al-Aʿshā Maymūn ibn Qays,[30] but that verse is of uncertain ascription and will be detailed further below. Whether or not Ḥabībah's poem can be accepted as genuinely pre-Islamic thus lies in a balance. She is an obscure figure and her phrasing reflects a common Muslim-era oath formula, so it

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27 Zuhayr 1982: 85.

28 Al-Marzūqī 1968: 4:1635. Her lineage is unclear, according to al-Marzubānī, she may have been from the Taghlib, but it appears the poem was remembered without precise knowledge of the poetess.

29 Al-Ḥuṭayʾah 1987: 97; al-Marzūqī 1968: 3:1376; the phrase also appears in a speech ascribed to the Imam al-Sajjād, and examples of further Muslim-era poems are cited in Shiʾa commentary on the Imām's speech (al-Majlisī 35:125, 45:113; Ibn Abī Ḥadīd 1:192).

30 Al-Aʿshā 1974: 173.

could imply that a Muslim-era writer coined the verses in a style familiar to him and falsely ascribed them to Ḥabībah. On the other hand, there is no prima facie reason to claim the lines are forged, and the fact that the poem refers to a single deity in Mecca, in contrast to the Muslim-era discourse that Mecca had a plurality of idols, is a reason to accept its authenticity. Had a Muslim-era figure fabricated the verses with the intention of ascribing them to a pre-Islam poetess, the fabricator would likely have added reference to multiple deities, in keeping with Muslim-era impressions of Meccan polytheism before Islam.[31]

Whatever the precise status of Ḥabībah's poem, a very similar allusion in both form and content appears in a much more securely-ascribed pre-Islamic poem by ʿAwf ibn al-Aḥwaṣ transmitted in al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī's (d. between 164/781 and 170/786–87) *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt:*[32]

> I swear by Him to whose precincts the Quraysh
> make pilgrimage, and by the gatherings under Mount Ḥirāʾ,
> and by the holy month of Banū Umayyah
> and soaking blood of bound animal sacrifices [...]

ʿAwf's poem shares the solemn tenor of Ḥabībah's oath above, and the reference to sacrifice to a single deity and the express mentions of Meccan tribes and toponyms are similar too. Terminologically, ʿAwf does not use the old term *dh-b-ḥ* for "sacrifice" attested in ancient inscriptions either, and instead employs *hadāyā*, a plural related to the familiar Quranic sacrifice term *hady*,[33] and ʿAwf's poem makes it rather clear that the offering of a *hady* sacrifice was part of the Hajj pilgrimage itself, as he expresses Hajj by name. This would suggest that sacrifice was not only a ritual of the Umrah pilgrimage, and that the Quranic references in 2:196, 5:2, and 5:95 to the particular classification of sacrifice animal were already established as part of the pre-Islamic Hajj.

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31 The question of Abbasid-era impressions of pre-Islamic Arabian religion is complex, since a trend of thought intended to present the Arabs as an originally monotheistic people before Muhammad, and Abbasid-era cultural producers expended considerable efforts to construct pre-Muhammadan history in an overtly Muslim guise (see Webb 2016: 261–69). As such, it is not impossible that an Abbasid-era forger could have placed a monotheistic-sounding verse in the mouth of a pre-Islamic poetess, but a second important narrative in Abbasid-era writing focused on the putative proliferation of idols in the Meccan Sanctum during the years before Muhammad, which served as a justification for the rise of Muhammad's movement. On balance, therefore, I would suggest that a Muslim-era forger would have likely been influenced by desires to explore Mecca's polytheistic pantheon when fabricating verses about pre-Islamic ritual practice such as the Hajj (consider the verse referencing al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā fabricated in the poem of Zuhayr noted above). The fact that Ḥabībah's tenor is monotheistic suggests – though not conclusively – that it predates the Muslim-era. Its authenticity cannot be established on its own, but the case can be bolstered by its similarity to the next poem we consider here.

32 Al-Anbārī, 2003: 1:431.

33 The morphology of the term *hady*/*hadī* and its appropriate plurals were debated and different Quranic reading traditions treated the word differently (see Ibn Manẓūr 1997: 15:358–59), hence ʿAwf's terminology is squarely aligned with the Quranic lexicon.

ʿAwf's reference to the month of Banū Umayyah is intriguing: I have found no other poet referring to it, and its meaning also escaped Muslim-era commentators. One assumed it was the pre-Islamic Quraysh's name for the month Dhū al-Ḥijjah, given it is the month of Hajj,[34] another that it was an old name for the month of Rajab given the sanctity of that month in pre-Islamic times,[35] and another identifies it as an unspecified month revered by Quraysh.[36] While the month is thus a mystery, its name corresponds to the major clan of the Quraysh, evidencing both continuity and change in Muslim Hajj practice: the month's name and perhaps even the time of pilgrimage season shifted, but the main power-broking lineage group remained in place.

Al-Sukkarī's collection of the Hudhayl's poetry also articulates oaths formulated around the Hajj, such as that of Sāʿidah ibn Juʾayya:[37]

> I swear by my camel, and by every
> sacrificial animal, covered in dust,
> corralled at the narrows of Maʾzim
> and driven by al-Akhshab.

Maʾzim and al-Akhshab refer to tracks between ʿArafah and Muzdalifah and a mountain near al-Minā, respectively, and, once again, the poet emphasises the presence of journeying pilgrims via their mounts and the centrality of sacrifice in the Meccan ritual. Taken together, the above verses make a coherent point that the ritual spaces of the Hajj, pilgrimage, and sacrifice were objects of solemn veneration suitable for oaths in the pre-Islamic period.

While the majority of the Hajj-invoking oaths avoid express reference to the actual name of the Sanctum's deity and instead employ allusive language, three verses, each transmitted in reputable sources, cite "Allāh" directly in oaths sworn "by the Sanctum of God" (*bayt Allāh*). One appears in a poem dated to the pre-Islamic period by the Meccan poet Ibn al-Zibʿarā[38] who asserted:

> When I swear an oath – by God's Sanctum –
> it is no false oath.[39]

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34 Al-Anbārī 2003: 1:431. This seems just a guess based on the fact that Muslims perform the Hajj in Dhū al-Ḥijjah (the view is repeated in a modern study, ʿAlī 1968–73: 11:350). al-Marzūqī's *al-Azminah wa-l-amkinah* which lists alternative pre-Islamic names for the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah does not include reference to Banū Umayyah (2002: 1:251).

35 Al-Qurṭubī 2000: 6:210.

36 Al-Tibrīzī 1987: 805.

37 Al-Sukkarī 1963–65: 3:1101. A similar oath sworn by the sacrificing animals of the Hajj is at al-Sukkarī 1963–65: 3:1172.

38 Ibn al-Ziʾbirā was a contemporary of Muhammad, though he was an established poet before Muhammad's prophetic mission began, and the verse in question was part of a poem connected to events before Islam.

39 Al-Jumaḥī n.d.: 1:240.

Rāshid ibn Shihāb of the Yashkur employs the same formula to boast of his kin's fighting mettle and to challenge a rival:

> Don't think we are just a bunch of ʿAmrs –
> I swear by God's Sanctum (*bayt Allāh*), we're better than that.[40]

Khidāsh ibn Zuhayr of the ʿĀmir ibn Ṣaʿṣaʿa's oath also uses the express phrase "by God's Sanctum" (*bayt Allāh*).[41] Of the three, Ibn al-Zibʿarā must intend the Meccan Sanctum's dedication to Allah, since he lived there; Rāshid and Khidāsh lived further afield, and their poems make no further reference to Meccan Hajj rituals, so they could be referring to a different sanctum, though they may indeed have intended Mecca too.

Beyond the realm of oaths, al-Sukkarī's collection of the Hudhayl's poetry also marshals the animal sacrifice in invective: al-Muʿaṭṭāl al-Hudhalī chides one of his Quraysh opponents:[42]

> Your aunties are of Qamaʿī stock
> they do not sacrifice at al-Muʿarraf.

Al-Muʿarraf was a term to describe ʿArafah (and, probably Minā too).[43] Al-Muʿaṭṭal's intention via the verse was to disparage his rival by expressly excluding him from the wider community, to which al-Muʿaṭṭal's clan were members. The line seems to indicate that the Quraysh did not stop at ʿArafah for the sacrifice, whereas the Hudhayl and other participants did,[44] and the difference between their pilgrimage practices was invoked as a means to articulate the conceptual communal boundaries amongst Hajj participants in Mecca's hinterland. It is instructive that the poet selected matrilineal genealogy[45] together with non-participation in communal sacrifice ritual to assert his rival's outsider, inferior status. The instrumental use of the Hajj to demarcate the 'in-group' for the pre-Islamic Hudhayl is indicative that the pilgrimage already had a symbolic social function that extended beyond the religious rites: communion in the context of the Hajj served community building. That core aspect of demonstrating belonging to a socio-religious community was a pervasive and rhetorically powerful feature of the Hajj in the Umayyad period, where non-participation is treated by poets as

40 Al-Anbārī 2003: 2:162, al-Tibrīzī 1987: 1326.

41 Al-Qurashī 1967: 415.

42 Al-Sukkarī 1963–65: 2:638.

43 Yāqūt 1995: 5:155.

44 Sukkarī's explanation gives this impression, which is reasonable given the poem's meaning and the inter-tribal context of the poem's creation.

45 The emphasis on matrilineal genealogy is a genuine pre-Islamic relic, see Qaṭṭāṭ 2006; Webb 2016: 197–205.

evidence of communal exclusion, and it seems this feature had been established amongst the Hajj-goers in pre-Islam.[46]

A poem by Abū Dhuʾyab al-Hudhalī composed around Muhammad's lifetime makes even more explicit references in five verses to Meccan topography, the market at Dhū al-Majāz, pilgrim campsites at Jamʿ (Muzdalifa) and Minā, and the ritual cutting of hair, and there are further, similar poems in the Hudhalī oeuvre.[47]

Another noteworthy citation of the Hajj beyond the rhetoric of oath is a metaphorical reference to the toponym al-Muḥaṣṣab in a poem by Imruʾ al-Qays. Al-Muḥaṣṣab is a name for the location of the ritual Jamarah stoning site near Minā, performed at the end of the Hajj. In Imruʾ al-Qays' poem, the poet summons the name to describe the sudden departure of his beloved when her tribe decamped:[48]

> What a sight! To see them depart,
> more precipitous than departure from al-Muḥaṣṣab (*fīrāq al-Muḥaṣṣab*) –
> two groups: one to the plains of Nakhlah,
> the other upland to Mount Kabkab.

Imruʾ al-Qays does not intend that he and his beloved were physically at Mecca, rather, he invokes the image of pilgrims departing from Mecca figuratively to engender the sense of both (i) the sudden scattering of people and (ii) a long-lasting separation. The metaphor is effective since the Meccan pilgrimage gathers disparate people in close proximity for a time, but when the ritual ends, the different groups go in their separate directions and have nothing further to link them, entailing that the pair's meeting again is unlikely until, perchance, both return to perform the Hajj in some later years. In terms of rhetoric, al-Muḥaṣṣab is a bare toponym, nothing within the name itself invokes a tone of departure, and so the metaphor can only be understood if an audience can fill in the context via their understanding of what transpires at al-Muḥaṣṣab. People around Imruʾ al-Qays must have known something about the order of the Hajj rituals to interpret "separation" into that specific toponym. Imruʾ al-Qays' poetry otherwise makes no reference to Mecca and the Hajj (which is not entirely surprising since he lived most of his life far to the south of Mecca), and this poses a question of how the Hajj-related al-Muḥaṣṣab metaphor entered his repertoire. The line does occur in a securely-attributed poem, and premodern collectors do not indicate issues, hence there is no prima facie argument to suggest forgery.[49] Knowledge about the pilgrims' departure from Minā would therefore have spread amongst enough pre-Islamic Arabian groups to inspire a proverbial connection with sudden departure.

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46 Webb 2023b: 35–39; Webb 2023a: 118–20.

47 Al-Sukkarī 1963–65: 1:95. For the further references, see Al-Sukkarī 1963–65: 1:39, 144.

48 Imruʾ al-Qays 1990: 43.

49 To my knowledge, Imruʾ al-Qays' metaphor *fīrāq al-Muḥaṣṣab* is not part of the Mulim-era poetic repertoire, which bolsters the likelihood of this verse's authenticity.

Evidentially, the differences between some of the poetry's terminology and that of the Muslim Hajj are an encouraging sign when considering authenticity. Al-Muʿaṭṭal's toponym 'Muʿarraf' is an unusual term for the pilgrims gathering point at ʿArafah, ʿAwf ibn al-Aḥwaṣ' reference to gathering under Mount Ḥirāʾ does not reflect Muslim Hajj practice, and we noted that the sacred month of Banū Umayyah was not understood in Muslim times. Since Muslim commentators themselves barely grasped these geographical and temporal references, it is remote to suggest that they invented the lines: had they been in the business of falsely ascribing verses about the Hajj to pre-Islamic poets, we would expect them to use more familiar terminology.

4 Interpreting the Poetry

The above examples proffer unequivocal references to Hajj rites and Meccan pilgrimage locations in pre-Islamic contexts, but the numbers are small, dwarfed in fact by the masses of Hajj references in poetry from the early Muslim era.[50] The imbalance signals a momentous increase in awareness of the Meccan Hajj as a major ritual during early Islam, suggestive that Hajj became much more prominent throughout Arabia *after* the rise and spread of Islam, but there are enough pre-Islamic verses to give confidence to the view that a sanctum was operating as a cultic centre in Mecca during the years before Muhammad too. The coherence of tropes between the various disparate poems and the cluster of pilgrimage citations in oath formulae paints a picture of Hajj as a hallowed communal gathering across an area wide enough to require pilgrims to make journeys to perform sacrifices which took place at several ritual locations in and outside of Mecca in the name of a single deity.

The poetry challenges the traditional Muslim-era prose narratives describing a plurality of pagan idols and polytheistic Hajj rituals before Muhammad,[51] since pre-Islamic poets appear to have had only one god in mind when they conceptualised the Hajj, and it seems his name was Allāh. The sole pre-Islamic verse mentioning more than one deity is Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā's "al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā" reference, but as noted above, that line is absent in most recensions of his poem, and the fact that it closer resembles Muslim-era narratives about the plurality of gods in pre-Islamic Mecca than it does the rest of pre-Islamic poetry increases the likelihood of its Muslim-era forgery. Overall, the

50 The salient functions of Hajj in Umayyad-era poetry, and its common citation in reference to Muslim communal boundaries in terms of inclusion/exclusion are discussed in Webb 2023b: 35–39 and Webb 2023a: 118–20.

51 The foundational Muslim-era accounts of the rise of Meccan idolatry are Ibn al-Kalbī 1924: 6, 9–10; al-Azraqī 1983: 1:117–29. See also Ibn Ḥabīb 1942: 311–12 for further important interpretations of pre-Islamic Meccan idolatry.

consistency of reference to a single deity in the pre-Islamic verses offers a fresh angle on the nature of paganism in Mecca at the dawn of Islam.[52]

The single-god Meccan shrine does not conclusively entail that the pre-Islamic poets were all monotheists, however. They may have worshiped other deities elsewhere, and their poetry evidences certain practices which differ markedly from the Muslim-era Hajj too. For example, the "sacrifice stones" (*anṣāb*) in al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī's poem and the gory imagery of sacrifice by ʿAwf ibn al-Aḥwaṣ resonate with pagan practice of actual sacrifice and presentation before an altar, and I am unaware of Muslim-era poems using such terminology. Whilst the single deity of the pre-Islamic Hajj corresponds with Islamic monotheism, the sacrifice stones do not, and the spectre of the pre-Islamic Hajj sacrifice being something materially different, and perhaps with more ancient vestiges of pagan practice as compared to the reformed rituals condoned by Muslim jurists, remains a distinct possibility, though several pre-Islamic poets refer to the Hajj sacrifice animals in precisely the same term as the Qur'an's *hady*, which suggests more continuity than change.[53]

The evidence is also noteworthy from the perspective of geography since the pre-Islamic poets who invoke the Hajj are primarily those who resided near Mecca. As noted above, the collections across a pan-Arabian scope such as the *Ḥamāsah* of al-Buḥturī and Abū Tammām are almost devoid of pre-Islamic attestations of Hajj, whereas al-Sukkarī's collection of the poetry of the Hudhayl tribe, which lived in the mountains near Mecca, has the greatest density. Thus, when the Hudhalī poet Usāmah ibn al-Ḥārith begins a poem

> Oh Lord! Lord of the High Heavens,
> Lord of pilgrims (*rabb ḥujj*) who gather from the villages [...][54]

his reference to Hajj in terms that resemble the language of the Qur'an ought not be surprising: he was an early seventh-century poet whose home was near the location of the Qur'an's revelation. The poetry indicates a shared language of ritual in Mecca's hinterland. Similarly, the high prevalence of the *ḥijaj*-years metaphor in the poetry of Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulamā, and the fact that his poetry constitutes the richest source of

52 The Muslim-era construction of pre-Islamic idolatry is the thesis of Hawting 2000 who was first to articulate a sustained argument that the image of the pervasive paganism of all pre-Islamic Arabians is Muslim discourse, not a historical reality.

53 Dost's contribution in this collection notes the likely greater importance attached to hunting in ancient Arabian pilgrimage rites, which are clearly prohibited in the Muslim rulings on Mecca's sacrality. The evidence for hunting in Arabian shrines in the pre-Islamic period, however, is limited, and I have not found any poems suggesting a ritual hunt connected with pilgrimage. Given the very developed hunting tropes (*al-ṭardiyyah*) in Arabic poetry, the absence of hunting allusions in the context of Mecca is worthy of note. One may cautiously infer that hunting was already excluded from Meccan ritual before Muhammad.

54 Pseudo-al-Thaʿālibī 2006: 1:247.

oaths formed via terminology of Meccan pilgrimage, underlines the likelihood of the ritual having its greatest currency amongst poets who lived near Mecca.

Taking stock, the further the remove from Mecca, the more infrequent references to Hajj become. A poet from pre-Islamic Yathrib (Medina of the Muslim era) cites the Hajj,[55] as does al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī (quoted above), who hailed from the northern edge of al-Ḥijāz, somewhat further from Mecca, but nonetheless within the same sub-region of Arabia. Al-Nābighah addresses his poem to the Lakhmid ruler al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir in the Iraqi town of al-Ḥīrah, yet there are difficulties in deducing from this verse the currency of the Meccan Hajj so far from the Hijaz. Hajj does not otherwise appear in securely-ascribable poetry around the Lakhmid court, moreover, reference to Hajj is nearly non-existent in the collections of northeastern Arabian poets who resided in the desert between al-Ḥīrah and Mecca (see below), and it seems that at most only one other itinerant poet who visited al-Ḥīrah (al-Aʿshā, discussed below) mentions the Hajj. The stark absence of Hajj-related terminology in northern and eastern Arabia underscores the novelty of al-Nābighah's choice of Mecca for his oath, which I take as a choice motivated by his Hijazi identity. As a Hijazi, Meccan pilgrimage was relevant at the core of al-Nābighah's own sense of the sacred, and it follows that rulers such as al-Nuʿmān would know about rituals relevant to Hijazis, but this neither requires that they felt the need to attend Hajj, nor personally shared reverence for Meccan sacrality. Such a minimalist interpretation of Mecca's footprint outside of its own region moreover tallies with the empirical evidence of the essential absence of Hajj-references amongst non-Hijazi poets.

To the point of the pre-Islamic Hajj's minimal Arabian footprint, poets of the approaches to Yemen are nearly silent on the Hajj: there is no reference to Hajj participation, and outside of the al-Muḥaṣṣab spatial metaphor invoked by the Kindite Imruʾ al-Qays, there is no reference to Meccan toponyms at all. Moreover, Imruʾ al-Qays does not indicate reverence for the Meccan rites – the poem containing the al-Muḥaṣṣab metaphor does not summon the Hajj in an oath – rather his employment of Meccan topography actually secularises the ritual to use it for the theme of departing lovers. In order to understand the allusion, Imruʾ al-Qays' audience only needed possess knowledge of where pilgrims depart Mecca, they did not necessarily have to participate in Hajj rituals or revere its sacrality.

The Hajj likewise has a muted presence amongst Najd poets: only four appear to invoke the Hajj, and some of these examples are problematic. One quite secure example appears in the poetry of ʿAmr ibn Qamīʿa of the Qays ibn Thaʿlabah, who expressly describes how his people sacrifice (*nasakū*) and perform *ḥajj* to a single deity.[56] The second case is the line of Ḥabībah bint ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā quoted above, and while we considered potential issues with her poetry, it stands a reasonable chance of being genuine

55 The poet is Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm (Ibn Sallām n.d. 1:228).

56 The poem is discussed in Miller 2016: 104, where a cogent argument for the poem's authenticity is made.

too. More problematic is a line ascribed to al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥillizah of the Yashkur which describes the Hajj in unambiguous terms, naming the ritual site of al-Ṣafā and describing the Hajj as *mawsim* (the season).[57] The difficulty is that the verse lacks citation in early collections of poetry specialists and appears to have been preserved only in connection with battle narratives of the Basūs War. That source milieu was more mutable and subject to greater alteration than the poems we discuss herein, and it is unclear when al-Ḥārith's verse mentioning the Hajj was first recorded and in what source. The verse appears in a later manuscript of al-Ḥārith's poetry, but when the same poem is recorded in Abū al-Faraj al-Aṣbahānī's (d. 356/967) *al-Aghānī*, it lacks the particular verse referencing Hajj.[58] The line in question appears otherwise unattested and thus is of uncertain origin. The fourth case emerges in three poems by al-Aʿshā Maymūn ibn Qays: one contains an intriguing historicising reference to Hajj:

> I swear by my cloak, by the Monk at al-Lujj,
> and by the edifice of Quṣayy and al-Muḍāḍ ibn Jurhum.[59]

The "edifice" must intend the Kaʿbah, as al-Aʿshā refers to Quṣayy, the ancestor figure of the Quraysh whom Muslim-era texts associate with the introduction of idolatry in Mecca, and the Jurhum, the group which Muslim tradition ascribes construction and custodianship of the Sanctum before the Quraysh. While we lack a critical edition of al-Aʿshā's poetry to help determine the authenticity of individual verses and poems, this particular line presents an intriguing case. It is quoted in al-Bakrī's (d. 487/1094) *Muʿjam mā-istaʿjam* geographical lexicon, a reliable (if late) source by a poetry savant,[60] and it is also quoted in Abū Aḥmad al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī's (d. 382/993) *al-Taṣḥīf wa-l-taḥrīf*, a grammatical discussion on issues in poetry narration.[61] Al-ʿAskarī reports al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213/828) and his student Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī's (d. 255/869) critique of a Baghdadi recension of al-Aʿshā's verse – the Baghdadi version intoned that Quṣayy built the shrine "himself" (*waḥdahu*), which the poetry specialists argued was an "ignorant" (*jāhil*) reading. The specialists' verdict is logical as a matter of syntax, but their discussion reveals the verse's crossover with politics since the Baghdadi version was evidently circulating amongst groups who sought to marshal it in discussions about the credit for Mecca's founding, and one may detect a pro-Quraysh partisanship at play, raising some issues for authenticity. The fact that al-Aṣmaʿī intervened with his "correction" of the verse is, however, an argument in favour of a genuine pre-Islamic origin. The way in which the verse summons the allusion to the Kaʿbah in an oath is entirely in keeping with the style of Hajj-citation in pre-Islamic poetry, and this

57 Ibn Ḥilliza 1991: 58.
58 Al-Aṣbahānī 1992: 11:36
59 Al-Aʿshā 1974: 175. I thank the team members of Holger Zellentin's "The Qurʿan as a Source for Late Antiquity" project for bringing this important verse to my attention in their review of this paper.
60 Al-Bakrī 1947: 4:1150.
61 Al-ʿAskarī 1963: 198.

verse seems legitimate to count as a non-Hijazi mention of Mecca, and, via the reference to the Monk at the Monastery of al-Lujj, also connects to the Lakhmid court of al-Nuʿmān too. If genuine, this verse is the other reference to Mecca in the context of al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir's court, but again, its wording does not suggest that al-Nuʿmān himself necessarily attached a personal sense of the sacred to Mecca, though he indeed may have been aware of it.

The two other references to Hajj in al-Aʿshā's collection are likewise phrased in oaths:[62]

> By the life of He to whom the Quraysh make the Hajj [...]

The other presents several lines referencing Meccan toponyms and pilgrimage:[63]

> I swear by the Lord of the prancing camels towards Minā,
> crossing crag after mountain crag
> [...]
> You are not to be found at al-Ḥajūn nor al-Ṣafā (*ahl al-Ḥajūn wa-lā al-Ṣafā*)
> nor have right to drink from Zamzam!

The modern collection of al-Aʿshā's poetry does not clarify these verses' transmission history, however, and the two do not appear in the earlier sources which I have consulted, hence their authenticity is less certain. But what is clear is that even if all of the above verses are accepted as genuine, they only constitute a miniscule percentage of the entirety of the poetic output of Najd which is otherwise devoid of reference to Mecca and its rituals. In sum, Ḥijāzī poets, particularly those who lived in close proximity to Mecca, constitute the absolute majority of pre-Islamic voices for the pre-Islamic Hajj.

The quantitatively limited corpus of pre-Islamic verses mentioning the Hajj is also qualitatively mirrored by the scarce indicators of the Hajj ritual's significance in terms of communal and political identity. While the poets' oath formulae demonstrate that groups, primarily in the Hijaz, possessed a conviction of the hallowed sacrality of the Hajj and Meccan Sanctum, it is noteworthy that reference to the Hajj does not feature in poems about rulers or authority figures. Sponsorship of the Hajj, the provisioning of caravans, or other assistance to Hajj pilgrims are never mentioned – let alone rulers' participation in the ritual – as merits of powerful men or as markers of political legitimacy, despite the large number of pre-Islamic praise poems dedicated to men of power. The Hajj patently lacks a politicised dimension or a role in bolstering authority, again suggestive of its local significance and restriction to the activities of the Quraysh. Secondly, poets also refrain from attaching communal significance to the Hajj: they do not praise themselves or their own people for participating in the rituals, nor do they

62 Al-Aʿshā 1974: 241.
63 Al-Aʿshā 1974: 173.

chastise others for non-participation – the lone exception is al-Muʿaṭṭāl al-Hudhalī, and it is instructive that he was a poet from the Hudhayl, who resided adjacent to Mecca. Given that the pilgrimage is a ready device by which communities world-over articulate tangible shape to their boundaries whereby ritual participation distinguishes in-groups from out-groups, it is pertinent that the pre-Islamic Arabian case attaches no such significance to Mecca, except in the one case in the Meccan region itself. This stands in patent contrast to the Hajj's instrumental function in demonstrating membership to community in Umayyad-era poetry,[64] the absence of such indicators of community-building features in pre-Islamic poetry reveals the tremendous geographical expansion of the Hajj's communal symbolism after the rise of Islam.

Poetry engenders the impression, therefore, that during the years leading up to Muhammad, the Hajj pilgrimage, the House of Allāh, and sacrifice at Minā were part of the vocabulary of poets whom the sources describe as living near Mecca.[65] The Hajj emerges as a rite particular to its local population, attracting participants from al-Ḥijāz and, less commonly, from further afield. It was most relevant for the Quraysh, since they are identified by name not only as custodians but also the participants of the Hajj, and while other groups were present at times, and while some likely travelled to Mecca from more than a just day or two's journey away, it is rather unlikely that a large number of groups from a wide area felt particular obligation to attend. Had the Hajj been a sufficiently important festival in which even all residents of al-Ḥijāz felt a ritual obligation to participate, its footprint in pre-Islamic poetry would necessarily have been greater. The social community-building functions of the Hajj are only evidenced in the poetry of the Hudhayl, who resided in the mountains near Mecca, and beyond that, the Meccan shrine was a distinct minority trope of pre-Islamic poetic repertoire.

Thus is the status of the pre-Islamic Hajj that can be derived from the poetry contained in reliable collections. While reverence for the Hajj is evident from the fact that the poets summon it in the context of oaths, and while the poets' imagery paints a visceral scene of communal gathering and sacrifice, the poetry has sparse detail. To add depth to the nature of the rituals our inferences can be developed via comparison with the memory of the pre-Islamic Hajj preserved in the hadith corpus.

5 Pre-Islamic Hajj and the Early Hadith

As noted in the Introduction, we shall analyse two of the most significant early collections from the vast array of pilgrimage hadith: the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* of Ibn Abī ʿArūbah

64 See discussion of these poems in Webb 2023b.

65 Miller 2016: 105–7 comes to similar conclusions and extends his analysis to other topics in order to argue for a highly regional view of pre-Islamic poets from al-Ḥijāz; a view I consider to be apt and an important corrective to the former assumptions of pan-Arabian cultural uniformity and cohesive pre-Islamic 'Arab identity' (see also Webb 2016: 77–85).

and the *al-Manāsik* chapter of Ibn Abī Shaybah's *al-Muṣannaf*. The two collections contain over 3,500 hadiths which circulated amongst the early Muslim generations in Medina and Iraq; a considerable portion of them must date to the early second/eighth century at the latest, offering a wide window into how Muslims at the end of Islam's first century recalled the pre-Islamic Hajj and viewed it vis-à-vis their own Hajj rituals.

The most salient finding from both compilations is the patent paucity of reference to pre-Islamic pilgrimage. A huge range of the minutiae of pilgrimage ritual are discussed, virtually all derived from the practice of prominent early Muslims. Ibn Abī ʿArūbah quotes primarily from the pilgrimage practice of his teacher, Qatādah ibn Diʿāmah (d. ca. 117/735), who sometimes asserts the legitimacy of his opinions from the earlier generation. Another sizeable group of opinions are expressed as reflecting the Prophet Muhammad's pilgrimage practice, though the Prophet only constitutes 25 of Ibn Abī ʿArūbah's 165 hadiths. Ibn Abī Shaybah's compilation is similar, the largest group of opinions derives from jurists of the late seventh and early eighth century, some are ascribed to the Prophet himself, and many are quotations from the early Caliphs, particularly Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān, and also Ibn al-Zubayr, the rival of the Umayyads and controller of Mecca for a decade 61–72/681–92. The high frequency of Ibn al-Zubayr's name reveals that hadith scholars of the eighth century considered him an important source for legitimate rules regarding the Hajj, perhaps, in part because he was an opponent of the Umayyads, a group who do not emerge as pious Hajj-goers in *al-Muṣannaf*. While Muslims accept that the Hajj *is* a pre-Islamic ritual as a matter of doctrine,[66] these hadith collections evidence that Muslims of the hadith-collecting vein wished to understand their pilgrimage practice from the authority of respected early Muslim-era figures and not as a carry-over from pre-Islamic traditions. On the flipside, the non-emphasis on pre-Islamic Hajj also entails that Muslims did not actively seek to conceptualise their pilgrimage rituals as being deliberate opposites or "corrections" to pre-Islamic rites. From this feature, we can infer that the Prophet and subsequent generations did not hold up the pre-Islamic Hajj as a foil against which they based the legitimacy of their interpretation of the pilgrimage rites. The Muslim Hajj thus perpetuates a fundamental core of pre-Islamic precedent, and the similarities between Muslim Hajj rituals and the main Hajj tropes prevalent pre-Islamic poetry – circumambulation at the Meccan shrine, sacrifice, shaving of hair, camping at Minā – supports such interpretation.

The inattention to pre-Islamic pilgrimage in the hadith is not absolute, however. There are nine express mentions of the word *al-Jāhiliyya* between the two collections[67] – a miniscule percentage of the 3,500 hadiths, but pre-Islam is present nonetheless. A

66 The Qur'an states that Abraham built the Sanctum, and thus the ancient origins of Hajj pilgrimage emanate from an unimpeachable source. Whether or not Abraham made the first Hajj was a subject of debate amongst Muslim scholars, however, some later commentators traced the Hajj back to Adam. The debates are detailed in Webb 2013.

67 Ibn Abī ʿArūbah 2000: 71; Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: Hadith numbers 13392, 13538, 14924, 14349, 14925, 15416, 13613, 15573.

couple dozen other hadith can be interpreted as referring to Hajj practice before Muhammad in several guises without explicit use of the word *al-Jāhiliyya* too, so there is a small collection of scattered material permitting access to how the early jurists conceptualised the pilgrimage in past times. In some cases, these hadith augment our findings from poetry, whereas in other cases, the results are intriguing and insightful for their difference.

A particular point of emphasis amongst the historic-oriented hadith concerns the correct ritual by which a pilgrim must end the Hajj. The hadith uniformly instruct pilgrims to return from Minā and perform a final circumambulation of the Kaʿbah within the Meccan Sanctum, but they note what seems to have been a widespread impression amongst early pilgrims that the Hajj did not formerly require such a return into Mecca, and that pilgrims were used to the older tradition in which the Hajj ended outside of Mecca.[68] The impression is bolstered by the pre-Islamic poetry too: references to the departure from al-Muḥassab by Imruʾ al-Qays describe the Hajj's termination as event occurring outside of Mecca, and I have found no poems describing a final or 'farewell' circumambulation. Taken together, the poetry and hadith are in accord that the pre-Islamic Hajj included circumambulation in Mecca followed by final rituals outside of Mecca, and it seems that when Muslims incorporated the Hajj into their faith system, they made the tweak of adding a second circumambulation, perhaps in an effort to claim the Hajj as their own.

Similar to the apparent innovation of the 'farewell circumambulation', the hadith also place considerable attention on the question of fasting after the sacrifices. The hadith depict a situation whereby early Muslims fasted on the days following the Hajj, but then this was abolished. The precise antiquity of the fasting tradition is difficult to discern, however. There is no express reference to fasting as a habit of *al-Jāhiliyya*; one hadith refers to it as a past practice, but without specifying the era: "They used to not eat the sacrifices which had been rendered for God, but then they were permitted to eat the meat of any kind of the sacrifice animals."[69] References to the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah fasting after the Hajj as well as the jurist al-Aswad ibn Yazīd al-Nakhaʿī (d. 75/694–95)[70] indicate the practice had proponents in early Islam, and the date of the prohibition is unspecified. There is no poetry to assist analysis – I have yet to find any verses referencing fasting in connection with pre-Islamic pilgrimage. The post-Hajj fast may therefore be an extension of Muslim fasting practice applied to the Hajj, an innovation to the prior-established pilgrimage practice to distinguish the Muslim's Hajj from non-

68 Wellhausen 1887 and Hawting 2021 argue that the Hajj concerned rituals outside of Mecca, whereas the Umrah involved physical visit to the Sanctum itself; Dost reconsiders the view in his contribution in this Issue; the pre-Islamic poetry would suggest that pre-Islamic Hajj pilgrims *did* circumambulate the Kaʿbah; the difference in Islam appears to be the introduction of a return to the Kaʿbah after performance of the rituals outside of Mecca.

69 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:145 (13360). Another hadith 2010: 8:663 (15501) reads: "We used to fast on the Days of *Tashrīq*, but then we were prevented."

70 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:760 (15977).

Muslim groups, and which was subsequently deemed unnecessary, though the aversion to eating meat offered to a deity may also be a remnant of a pre-Islamic practice too.

Several other practices which are not expressly specified as pre-Islamic do appear old, and the hadith are reluctant to entirely condone them, suggesting that they were not core aspects of Muslim Hajj, but rather carry-overs of earlier times. For example, hadith describe circumambulation on a camel, some claiming that the Prophet himself did so, touching the corners of the Kaʿbah with a staff as he passed by.[71] Likewise, there is one reference to the permissibility of performing the run between al-Ṣafā and Marwah on an animal too.[72] Subsequent hadith collectors reported different hadith on this topic, specifying that riding was only permissible for an infirm pilgrim,[73] and another hadith reports that the Caliph Ibn al-Zubayr specifically forbade riding in the Sanctum,[74] which is suggestive that the practice pre-dates Islam and early Muslims began trying to prevent it. The poetry studied so far, however, does not enable resolution, as it refers to circumambulation but without specifying whether on foot or animal. The unusual prospect of camel-back *ṭawāf* does have a ring of antiquity about it, and it would only be practicable if the Kaʿbah was not teeming with pilgrims and/or when a significant social stratification was involved, allowing an elite group to parade on camel while the rest walked; both these situations are counter to the Muslim-era Hajj, which gathered people from a much larger area and which adhered to a greater equality amongst pilgrims. Hence there is logic in viewing the riding *ṭawāf* as a practice of pre-Islamic times when the Hajj did not regularly gather so many participants.

In a similar vein are hadith describing *ishʿār*, the ritual blood marking of animals selected for sacrifice by slashing their sides several days before the sacrifice. Some hadith report the Prophet himself marked sacrifice animals in this way, though later jurists were not entirely comfortable with the practice, and they would place considerable restrictions on how or whether *ishʿār* should be performed. There is no express reference to *al-Jāhiliyya* in the *ishʿār* hadith, but the fact that a technical term existed for the specific act suggests the practice was already established at the dawn of Islam, and the act of pre-wounding sacrifice animals to mark the dedication in the animals' own spilled blood seems an ancient rite which has little correspondence with Islamic-law regulations on animal husbandry. Poetry is a little more help here, since the graphic, visceral descriptions of the blood of sacrifice animals strikes the same tenor of the marking of animals in their own blood, and the Muslim juridical discomfort with the practice, along with the lack of the same blood-sacrifice imagery in Muslim-era poetry is indicative that once the Muslim polity assumed control over the Hajj, the emphasis on blood offering was made less visible and less central to the fulfilment of the pilgrimage rites.

71 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:130–31 (13300, 13301, 13302).
72 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:133 (13307).
73 Al-Bukhārī 1999: 128 (1626), al-Nasāʾī 1999: 2276 (2931).
74 Al-Bukhārī 1999: 127–28 (1619) (1633).

Another interesting facet of the hadith are indicators that Muslims did not repudiate all pre-Islamic Hajj rites on principle: three hadith argue for the permissibility of certain practices on the basis of *pre*-Islamic precedent. Concerning debates over the number of pebbles a pilgrim should cast at each of the three Jamarāt pillars, hadith state: "We threw seven pebbles in *al-Jāhiliyya*, and we threw seven pebbles in *al-Islām*,"[75] revealing the apparent continuity of the Jamarāt-stoning rite from pre-Islam and a juridical principle that pre-Islamic customs could still be held as valid at the level of small details within the ritual framework. Yet on the other hand, one hadith concerning the timing of the departure from ʿArafa phrases the Islamic law rule as a deliberate change from pre-Islam with emphasis placed on that point:

> The pre-Islamic idol-worshipers (*ahl al-jāhiliyyah wa-l-awthān*) used to set off before sunset on this day, just at the point when the mountains began to darken … but we head off after sunset in distinction to the idolatrous polytheists (*ahl al-shirk wa-l-awthān*).[76]

Given the nature of the ritual, there is little obvious reason to change the time, and this hadith interprets it as a deliberate effort to purify the Hajj from the practices of paganism. The language of the hadith is severe, however, and it is a unicum. Of the over 3,500 pilgrimage hadith I have studied, no others describe pilgrimage rites as such a deliberate negation of pre-Islamic practice – even the extended hadith on the Prophet's final Hajj, which expressly mentions the annulment of debts and blood-feuds of *al-Jāhiliyya*, does not describe any of the Prophet's Hajj practices as deliberate changes to pre-Islamic pilgrimage traditions.[77] The prevailing silence on pilgrimage in *al-Jāhiliyya* and the lack of other hadith citing the rationale for Muslim Hajj practice as results of a determined reversal or amendment of pre-Islamic pilgrimage indicates, on balance, that the Prophet did not espouse a discourse that the Hajj needed significant alteration to cleanse it from polytheism. We have seen that some alterations were made, such as the return to Mecca from Minā, though, pertinently, the rationale for that change is not expressed in terms of the pre-Islamic Hajj being faulty, rather it seems the Muslims were keen to add a rite to make the Hajj their own, while they left the bulk of the rest in place.

The vitriol against the "idolatrous polytheists" in the lone hadith in Ibn Abī Shaybah's collection might be better explained as a late-seventh- or early-eighth-century ju-

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75 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:204 (13613); see also 8:677 (15572), (15573).

76 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:642 (15416).

77 Forms of this long hadith about the Prophet's speech at his last Hajj is reported in all canonical sources; Ibn Abī Shaybah records a representative version, 2010: 8:520–24 (14925). The extent to which Muhammad deliberately sought to reorganise the Hajj is the subject of debate – see the discussion in Dost's paper in this collection. From the evidence of the hadith of Ibn Abī ʿArūbah and Ibn Abī Shaybah, the extent to which *difference* from pre-Islamic was a legitimating factor in ritual articulation appears very limited, which to me suggests that purging pre-Islam from the Hajj was not a major concern of the early Muslims. The broad continuities between pre-Islamic poetry and Muslim practice are further testament to this.

ridical discourse to guess a rationale for a rule which was otherwise unclear. Whereas Muhammad and the nascent Muslim Hajj-goers seemed little concerned to lambast pre-Islamic pilgrimage practice, the spectre of an idolatrous past embraced by later Muslim scholars formed a ready means to explain why things in Islam are different. Even so, excoriating *al-Jāhiliyya* was evidently not a primary recourse of Muslim jurists, given the rarity of this kind of discourse,[78] but it was a *possible* strategy. The same impulse can be discerned in hadith which gloss Quranic passages on the Hajj. The Qur'an does not give many details on how Muslims should perform the Hajj, but a few verses in Qur'an Surah *al-Baqarah* 2:158, 197–98 contain specific injunctions for pilgrims, such as the need to run between al-Ṣafā and Marwah, the permissibility of trading during Hajj, to take provisions on the Hajj, and an enigmatic reference to there being no *jidāl* on the Hajj (variably interpreted as improper speech or disagreements over the time for performing pilgrimage). Precisely why the Qur'an chooses to specify the details for these aspects of Hajj and not the many others is not readily explicable from the Quranic text alone, and Muslim exegetes and jurists seem to have been perplexed too. Herein they voiced a proposition that the rites mentioned in the Qur'an were aspects of Hajj practice leftover from pre-Islam, and a couple of the express hadith references to *al-Jāhilyya* occur in these contexts, *i. e.* the Qur'an permits buying and selling because "they did not use to transact any business at ʿArafah and Minā during *al-Jāhiliyya*,"[79] and the Qur'an is presumed to have specified the month for the Hajj since "the people of *al-Jāhiliyya* used to perform the Hajj in months other than Dhū al-Ḥijjah."[80] Such exegetical remarks are odd: the overwhelming bulk of hadith make no mention of the pre-Islamic Hajj, and Muslim jurists exhibit scant knowledge of what the pre-Islamic Hajj was – after all, they based their prescriptions primarily on the precedent of early-era Muslims, hence it seems legitimate to wonder how they knew when pre-Islamic Arabians performed Hajj (especially since the months could have different names in pre-Islam),[81] or how they knew that pre-Islamic Arabians definitely did not trade at the end of Hajj. This level of detail is beyond their usually-demonstrated grasp of pre-Islamic history, and a better explanation is rather that the jurists were pressed to answer why the Qur'an contains unexpectedly specific verses on these scattered points. The Muslim scholars responded with a default answer that the Qur'an sought to change how things used to be, an exegetical reflex to a hermeneutical position that Islam replaces what was before. Thinking critically, the argument is hollow: the jurists likely did not know the background to these verses, and their vague answer, while logically satisfactory, is entirely out of keeping with their otherwise scant knowledge of pre-Islamic Hajj practice. The wider point is that express references to *al-Jāhi-*

78 Considerations on the limited footprint of pre-Islam in the hadith corpus are outlined in Webb 2020a: 244–48.

79 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:187 (13538).

80 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:153–54 (13392), (13398).

81 Al-Marzūqī 2002: 1:245–52 enumerates various different names of the months attested in pre-Islamic texts.

liyya in the hadith might be quite unrelated to actual pre-Islamic Arabian custom and instead are juridical strawmen, erected in times of exegetical need where the actual truth of the matter was unclear or had been forgotten.

The unreliability of the hadith descriptions of *al-Jāhiliyya* comes into high relief in a hadith reported by Ibn Abī Shaybah in which Muhammad is said to have declared when he made his final Hajj: "After this year, no polytheist (*mushrik*) shall circumambulate the Sanctum (*al-bayt*) while naked."[82] Difficulties with the authenticity of the statement emerge both from its *isnād*,[83] and from the fact that the same statement is recorded in a different hadith, but not ascribed to the Prophet,[84] which signals that hadith collectors 'improved' the quality of the statement by promoting its authority to the level of the Prophet. While the prospect of naked polytheists in fervent worship about the Kaʿbah befits an image of an idolatrous pre-Islam, the image can be further critiqued when brought into conversation with pre-Islamic poetry. As we have noted, there are no credible pre-Islamic poems which suggest that more than one deity was worshiped at Mecca, and there are no references to naked pilgrims either. The poetry is, as noted too, visceral and graphic – we have imagery of lice-ridden shaven locks, blood spilling, and pilgrims on prancing camels – and given the aesthetics of pre-Islamic poetry and the poets' predilections for concrete visual imagery, had naked circumambulating bodies been present at the Hajj ritual, it is difficult to conceive that no poets would attempt to describe such a scene. Therefore, what the hadith posits as an unrestrained pagan practice probably never existed, or at least did not exist in the century before Muhammad when poets described the Hajj. The hadith is a case of a stereotyped *al-Jāhiliyya* which exceeds bounds of reality in ascribing idolatry and wantonness to pre-Islamic Arabians,[85] and the poetry is helpful here in bolstering an inference that such sentiments which indulge a wild side to describe pre-Islam owe more to the imagination of urban jurists and hadith scholars in Iraq than they do to actual pre-Islamic habits, practices, and customs in Arabia.

The final category of hadith on the pre-Islamic Hajj coalesces around statements expressly associated with the past, though without reference to *al-Jāhiliyya.* These hadith describe the Hajj as performed by past prophets,[86] Israelites and Jews,[87] and a large number mention Abraham, his construction of the Sanctum and his origination of certain Hajj rites. In some cases, Jewish precedent is cited as a contrast to Muslim: performing the Hajj barefoot "to exalt God" is deemed something Israelites used to do (and still did in the time of the Prophet, according to one hadith), but Muslims do not. This simply may be another contrived argument to compel Muslims to adopt less austere, self-mortifying pilgrimage practice, but the structuring of the discourse around

82 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:514 (14913).
83 See the editor's notes to Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:514 (14913).
84 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:518 (14917).
85 Again, we refer to the thesis of Hawting 2000, see note 52.
86 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:298, 630 (13987), (15366).
87 Ibn Abī Shaybah 2010: 8:296, 7620763 (13981), (15990), (15991).

Abrahamic-Jewish pilgrimage is instructive. This group of hadith echo the Qur'an and its inextricable association of the Hajj with Abraham,[88] and they build on the narrative that the Hajj was a prophet-founded monotheistic rite within the tradition of Abrahamic faith. The reference to Jewish participation in Ibn Abī Shaybah's hadith would not be a common feature in later writing, but the sense that many (if not all) prophets before Muhammad performed the Hajj was widely reported.[89] The empirical historicity of the material can be debated, but it is significant insofar as it contradicts the narratives of the Hajj in pre-Islamic poetry. The poetry neither references Abraham nor Ishmael, nor any Jewish connection with Hajj, and while the poetry refers to a single deity in the Meccan Sanctum, the poets give no indication of the deity being Abrahamic.[90]

The lack of Abrahamic aspect within descriptions of the Hajj in the pre-Islamic poetry of the specialist collections is significant for it highlights the innovative discourse of the Qur'an to reveal the Hajj's Abrahamic origins. The pre-Islamic poets do not give any hint that such a historical model was on their minds: for them the Hajj was sacred of itself, it was proprietary to the Quraysh, and its sacrality was not reliant on association with an Abrahamic rite. The point at which Arabians began conceptualising their origins as Abrahamic descendants from Ishmael is debated,[91] but the spectre that Muhammad significantly increased the importance of the discourse is reflected in the contrast between the non-Abrahamic pre-Islamic poetry and the definitively-Abrahamic Quranic and hadith texts. For early Muslim Arabs, participation in the Hajj became pitched as a fulfilment of their Abrahamic faith, following in the footsteps of Abraham was important to them as they were imagining themselves to be descendants of Ishmael, and thus the Hajj was projected as their proprietary rite initiated by their key ancestor figures. Pre-Islamic poets, on the other hand, do not evidence this discourse, and their Hajj does not reflect the same communal origin narrative.

Taking stock, the absence of Abrahamic references in pre-Islamic poetry, coupled with the lack of narratives about pre-Islamic Hajj practice *other than* Abrahamic references in the hadith are evidence of key and new community-building efforts in early Islam. The hadith largely forget the pre-Islamic Hajj and replace its memory with Abraham: we uncover the creation of a new heritage for the pilgrimage, an overwriting what was there before, rather than an antiquarian interest in what actually transpired on the Hajj before Muhammad. The new Abrahamic communal significance meant that

88 The Abrahamic origins have been long discussed (Dozy 1864), for recent views see Hawting 1982 and Webb 2023b; the pre-modern debates on Hajj's origins between Abraham or Adam are discussed in Webb 2013: 7–9.

89 Al-Azraqī 1983: 1:73, al-Ṭabarī 1999: 1:760.

90 The poem of al-Aʿshā noted above which mentions the builders of the Sanctum as Quṣayy and al-Muḍāḍ ibn Jurhum is the only pre-Islamic verse to invoke a sense of the Hajj history, and it mentions local figures, without any trace of Abraham or Biblical precedent, even though the same line mentions a Christian monastic figure, entailing that Abrahamic traditions were not entirely alien to the poet.

91 The absence of Ishmaelite sentiments before Islam are discussed in Webb 2016: 211–22. For an alternate argument, see Gudarzi 2019.

the actual pre-Islamic Hajj could be dispensed with, and this is perhaps the prime reason why the hadith corpus, while acknowledging the Hajj's pre-Islamic origins, is effectively silent on the pre-Islamic Hajj beyond stories of its Abrahamic origins.

6 Conclusions

The Hajj depictions in pre-Islamic poetry and the sacrality ascribed to them as evidenced by the heavy proportion of pilgrimage references in the rhetorical context of oaths allows us to confirm the historical existence of a sacred pilgrimage to Mecca before Islam. The volume of pre-Islamic Hajj-related poetry is, however, noticeably small and is clustered primarily amongst poets who lived in the Hijaz region near Mecca. This points to the Meccan Hajj as a regional-specific rite and not a central pilgrimage which a broad cross-section of Arabians felt the obligation to attend. The dramatic increase in Hajj references in Muslim-era poetry, such that they become truly ubiquitous, is therefore a major and demonstrable shift that uncovers the ascendance of Mecca as the Caliphate was consolidating its power and authority across Arabia and beyond. From the perspective of pre-Islam, the general paucity of Hajj-references and the virtual absence of allusion to Mecca amongst poets from outside of the Hijaz pose a significant challenge to the Muslim-era narrative representation of Mecca as a pan-Arabian shrine. Such a putative scope is a manifest exaggeration that is not supported in evidence dating to pre-Islamic times. Mecca does not appear to have brought widely diffuse, disparate groups together before Islam, but the pre-Islamic Hajj nonetheless does emerge from the pre-Islamic poetry as a ritual resembling the Muslim-era pilgrimage in the general sense of its rites and locations. There was a central shrine dedicated to a single deity named Allāh, pilgrims circumambulated that shrine, and then performed a number of rites at ritual sites outside of Mecca, notably camping at Minā and offering sacrifices. Most of those pilgrims, however, were likely locals.

The role of the pre-Islamic Hajj in shaping communal boundaries also seems limited: the Quraysh are the main group mentioned in poetry, suggestive that it was primarily their ritual, and the only non-Quraysh pre-Islamic poet to cite the Hajj instrumentally, associating Hajj-participation with communal belonging, was from the Hudhayl, who resided very close to Mecca. Poets from further afield do not cite the Hajj in terms of communal boundary articulation, whereas this rhetoric becomes a central feature in Umayyad-era poetry on a broad scale. Again, the poetry underlines the ascendance of Mecca in the Muslim-era: in terms of both the volume of Hajj citation in Arabic voices, and the communal significance which they attached to it, the divide between pre-Islam and Islam is clear, demarcating manifest religious and communal change that occurred consequent to the rise of Islam.

The extent of the ritual changes and the question of whether Muhammad sought to expunge the Hajj of its pre-Islamic traditions can be profitably assessed from cautious consideration of the pre-Islamic poetry. The poetry's language and symbols of Hajj more closely resemble the Quranic and Muslim-era lexicon than they do the terminol-

ogy from the more ancient inscriptions found elsewhere in Arabia. It would seem therefore that the Meccan rites in the generation before Muhammad were already substantially different from the rituals associated with the more ancient shrines testified in inscriptions, and the order and nature of the pre-Islamic rituals survived quite well into Muslim practice. Muslim jurists give scant credit to the pre-Islamic Hajj, but the poetry's terminology shows the same key institutions in place. The pilgrimage, known as *ḥajj*, was focused on a visitation to the Kaʿbah, the "House of God" (*bayt Allāh*) as well as rituals outside of the Sanctum, and it was accompanied by sacrifice of animals known as *hady* which were *muqallad* (marked on the neck), like the *qalāʾid* of Qur'an 5:2 and 5:97. Though the poetry is allusive, the concrete indications of its lexicon show continuity, and we seem to be witness to the same practices both before and after Muhammad.

There are differences: the reference to *anṣāb* (sacrifice stones) by al-Nābighah would not appear in Islam, but the poetry otherwise describes relatively little ritual which contradicts the Muslim Hajj. There are no references to radically different ritual spaces or rites, and there is no poetic mention of hunting: Mecca seems just as ritually inviolable in pre-Islam as it would be in Islam (this is likely the basis for why the poets summon its name in an oath). Al-Nābighah's reference to circumambulation as *massaḥa* would not be current in the Muslim era, but does this mean the nature of circumambulation was very different? Certain toponyms, such as Muʿarraf and al-Muḥaṣṣab are also archaic names, as is the reference to the month of pilgrimage, *Shahr Banī Umayyah* – herein we witness the spectre of a new branding of the Hajj in early Islam, a widening of its participatory ambit, and a change in names as new people and new significance was introduced. But the survival of the Umayyads reveals an underlying current of continuity, and the poetry's broad equivalence with the ways in which Muslims describe the Hajj testifies further to the overall continuation of a pre-Islamic rite with but cosmetic changes and tweaks by Muhammad and his successors.

The hadith add only fleeting glimpses into the pre-Islamic Hajj. Some pre-Islamic pilgrims may have performed their circumambulation on camelback, the pre-Islamic sacrifices may have been a gorier affair, and the pre-Islamic Hajj rituals seem to have ended outside Mecca. While these are largely superficial differences, what is more significant is the hadith's contrasting discourses about the pre-Islamic Hajj's history. Hadith transmitters seemed to have known little about the actual particulars of the Hajj before Muhammad, their references to *al-Jāhiliyya* in general concentrate on issues not evident in pre-Islamic poetry, and their concept of the pre-Muhammadan past was coloured more by their own imaginations about an idolatrous Arabia than it was by empirical history. Their abiding lack of interest in the pre-Islamic Hajj and their unequivocal emphasis on the ritual's Abrahamic roots appear to be related phenomena: Muslims were rewriting the past in order for their memories to correspond to the new narratives about their communal identity. The nascent Arab community of the Umayyads and their genealogical narratives of Ishmaelite origins needed a different image of the pre-Islamic Hajj than that perceived in pre-Islam. A small-scale region-

al pilgrimage relevant primarily to a fragmented cross-section of communities on a local scale in the Hijaz ran contrary to the Muslim-era conception that a cohesive Arab community with a shared ritual framework spanned Arabia. Muslims needed to imagine an Abrahamic ritual that included all Arabians, and memories of the pre-Islamic Hajj without Abraham and without pan-Arabian participation would be unsuitable. Narrative expansion in the Muslim prose sources thus created a pre-Islamic Hajj in a new guise, and, given the manifest contrast between those anachronistic prose sources and the pre-Islamic poetry itself, there is now a strong call for circumspection when interpreting prose allusions to Mecca's pan-regional pre-Islamic pull.

In broad outlines, however, the Muslim Hajj is nonetheless likely quite similar to ritual performed by the Quraysh in the sixth century CE. The ritual spaces and main rites are all attested in pre-Islamic poetry. While Muslims would reformat pre-Islamic poets into polytheists, the poets' own focus on the Hajj's sacrifice and its single deity whose sanctuary was in Mecca actually fit with what Muhammad would preach. The Late Antique Hajj therefore existed in a form which the Qur'an's monotheistic Abrahamic discourse could easily adopt and then co-opt for itself.

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