The special importance of the Kitāb al-ansāb (The book of genealogies) from al-ʿAwtabī – an Omani historian who lived in the 11th century – is that it is the first historiographic source related to Oman. Therefore, al-ʿAwtabī presents the history of Oman from the descendants of Noah to the fall of the Umayyads (750). At this point, the narration ends abruptly.

But the present study concerns the pages devoted to the age that preceded the diffusion of Islam, particularly the period when Arab tribes began to arrive in Oman. Because of the disaster of the Maʾrib dam the majority of inhabitants are forced to leave the town looking for a new home. Regarding migration, according to Arabian tradition, the Azd tribe seem to have separated into different groups of which one, guided by Mālik b. Fahm, arrived in Oman. So, with his actions and words, the brave chief of the Azd determined the first arabization of Oman. The story narrated by al-ʿAwtabī, following a temporal order of facts, is full of suggestions and includes particularly interesting aesthetic and literary points of view. It is mainly a ‘fictional’ reconstruction of the events. This narration suggests that al-ʿAwtabī assembled the written Arabic sources with oral Omani traditions. It is a story whose function was to recount the arrival of the Azd in Oman and to highlight the origins of this territory and its inhabitants.

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6 - A. Feltre, Arabia Antica. La regione tra levante e sud-occidente dell’Arabia. La geografia e le culture del mondo istanbullita e persiano, 2014, pp. 469.
7 - M. Moysès e D. Schottmann, Da deserto alla città. La formazione del mondo istanbullita e persiano, 2014, pp. 318.


Daniela Amaldi

THE ORIGINS OF THE HISTORY OF OMAN

The Kitāb al-ansāb by al-ʿAwtabī

«L’ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER
Amaldi Daniela,
The origins of the history of Oman. The *Kitāb al-ansāb* by al-ʿAwtabī
- Roma : «L’ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER, 2017. - 266 p.; 22 cm. - (Arabia Antica ; 13) (Philological Studies)


CDD: 953.2
1. Epigrafia
... mas a história assim o deixou registado como facto incontrovertido e documentado, avalizado pelos historiadores e confirmado pelo romancista, a quem haverá que perdoar certas liberdades em nome, não só do seu direito a inventar, mas também da necessidade de preencher os vazios para que não viesse a perder-se de todo a sagrada coerência do relato. No fundo, há que reconhecer que a história não é apenas selectiva, é também discriminatória, só colhe da vida o que lhe interessa como material socialmente tido por histórico e despreza todo o resto, precisamente onde talvez pudesse ser encontrada a verdadeira explicação dos factos, das coisas, da puta realidade.

José Saramago *Viagem do elefante*, Lisboa, Caminho 2008: 226-227

Borne out by the historians and confirmed by the novelist, who must be excused certain liberties in the name not only of the right to invent but also of the need to fill the gaps, so that the all-holy coherence of the tale may not be entirely lost. Ultimately, it must be recognised that history is not only selective but also discriminatory; it picks out from life only that which interests it as material socially held to be historical, and despises all the rest.

José Saramago, *The Elephant's Journey*
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Preface

In 1995 Alessandra Avanzini organised a journey of ‘exploration’ in Oman. This journey became the basis for the mission that began the following year,¹ on her initiative and under her direction. Over the years this activity has contributed to a broadening of our knowledge of the realities of pre-Islamic Oman in its manifold aspects; including facts about various different regions of the country.²

My involvement in that journey, as in the journeys made in southern Arabia both before³ and since, was an upshot of a 30-year-long stretch of teaching at the University of Pisa. At that time, as far back as 1977, Edda Bresciani put me in charge of Arabic Language and Literature. As a consequence I became involved in relations with Alessandra, which rapidly bloomed into friendship. In fact, in what was then the Institute for Ancient History Studies – a rather odd setting for the teaching of Arabic language and literature – I found myself rubbing shoulders with colleagues whose interests revolved around periods and subjects somewhat remote from those my subject is mainly associated with in the Italian universities. So it was

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¹ The University of Pisa Mission to Dhofar began in February 1996.
² Alongside the Khor Rori mission, the year 2004 saw a further mission in the plane traversed by the Wadi Bahla and the Wadi Sayfam, dominated by the remains of the settlement, the qaṣr of Salūt, which lies at about two kilometres north of the city of Bisya. (Coordinates: N 22° 46' 19.58 E 57° 12' 32.54).
³ The first, in 1985, was to Yemen, together with Alessandra Avanzini and Stefania Mazzoni: so many places, so many discussions and exchanges of ideas ranging over varied fields of study, but also no lack of good humour and warm friendship.
that, also on the strength of the courses held by Francesco Gabrieli at the Scuola Orientale, I decided to abandon the study of contemporary Arabic literature and turned to pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry. I realised that my study interests had begun to take on a different path than I had expected.

It was in fact on one of my journeys to Oman that I became acquainted with the Kitāb al-ansāb by Salama b. Muslim al-ʿAwtabī al-Ṣuḥarī (11th century c.), the earliest text that has come down to us offering an account of Oman in its origins.

It is thanks to Alessandra Avanzini and her suggestions together with her constant encouragement that I have completed this work. I also owe thanks to Claudio Lo Jacono and Daniele Mascitelli for a stimulating exchange of ideas on subjects we hold dear. I have a debt of gratitude to Ada Barbaro, Ersilia Francesca, Alessandra Lombardi, Raoudha Mediouni, Valentina Sagaria Rossi and Roberto Tottoli, too; through their various fields of interest, they have helped me on my way. Finally, my gratitude goes to Elena Cubellis who, as a volcanologist and indeed a friend, has helped me towards a better understanding of the volcanic phenomena in Arabia, and in particular at Barahūt.

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4 On this occasion I had access to a copy in the Library of Salala, where the extremely helpful staff photocopied for me some chapters from the two volumes first printed in 1967 and indexed no. 969.
Chapter 1
AL-‘AWTABĪ AND THE KITĀB AL-ANSĀB

Salama b. Muslim b. Ibrāhīm al-‘Awtabī al-Ṣuḥārī of the Banū Azd, and in particular the Banū Ṭāḥiyya, received the nisba by which he is known from ‘Awtab,¹ situated to the east of Ṣuḥar, where he spent much of his life and engaged in his activities as scholar and teacher.

The attribution of our Kitāb al-ansāb to this author is quite certain; what we cannot be certain about, however, is whether he was also the author of the Ḍiyāʾ fī l-fiqh wa-l-ṣarʿīyya² and other minor works, or whether they were by an ancestor of his.

The author of the Ḍiyāʾ, a compendious work setting out the basic principles of the Ibadi movement, was an illustrious figure in the Ibadi maḏhab of Rustāq.³ Born around 440/1048, he must have died at the beginning of the 12th century since his text contains reference to the siege of Nizwā by the imām Muḥammad b. Abū Ġassān, which «probably dates to the first decade of the 6th/12th century». Moreover, he appears to have been «a quasi-contemporary of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kindī (d. 508/1115) whose Bayān al-Ṣarʿ ‘quotes both the Ḍiyāʾ and ‘Awtabī’s teacher».⁴

On the other hand, the Kitāb al-ansāb takes an entirely different ap-

¹ Known in the past as ‘Awtab al-ḥiyām, see shamela.ws/index.php/author/459 (I last seen on 9 September 2015) which he took up from Kindī (d. 1165) Musannaf. The latter appears to have been a disciple of al-‘Awtabī.
² ‘AWTABĪ Ẓiyā’.
⁴ Wilkinson 2010: 390.
The origins of the history of Oman

The origins of the history of Oman

proach; as we will see, this historical text is based on the genealogical system and contains no reference to Ibadi doctrine.

It is precisely this difference between the Ḍiyā’ and the Ansāb that prompted the hypothesis that the author of the latter work was an ancestor of the author of the Ḍiyā’ living in the middle of the 10th century. The idea of two different authors was first aired in the Kašf al-ġumma, a work attributed to al-Izkawī, and was subsequently taken up by various writers including Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥumayyid b. Sullūm al-Sālimī (1869-1914), an important figure in Ibadi culture and author of twenty-two works who played a leading role in the history of the imams of Oman. In more recent times we find the idea proposed anew in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sālimī, and Hasan M. al-Naboodah, who, on rather slender grounds, attribute the Kitāb al-ansāb to al-ʿAwtabī Abū al-Munḏir and the Ḍiyā’ to al-ʿAwtabī Abū Ibrāhīm, although I find no evidence of the kunya in other sources. The idea was rejected by Martin Hinds and, more recently, Isam al-Rawas, Sulṭān b. Mūbārak al-Šaybānī and Sulaymān b. Ḥalaf b. Muḥammad al-Ḥarūṣī, as indeed by the Omanis in general. These scholars hold al-ʿAwtabī to be the one author of both works, and indeed of others, since lost.

5  Izkawī (1650-1737) Kašf 1980, Kašf 1874. For details on this author, and indeed on others cited here, see Custers 2006; Custers’ three-volume study is fundamental reference for primary and secondary sources on the Ibadis.

6  Sālimī drew extensively on the Ansāb in the first part of his Tuḥfa; in particular, the episodes we will be discussing are to be found in pages 19-37, 46-47; in his Lūm ‘a: 78 and 84 he attributes the Ansāb to al-ʿAwtabī Abū al-Munḍir, and the Ḍiyā’ to al-ʿAwtabī Abu al-Ibrāhīm. On al-Sālimī see Custers 2006, i: 360-377 and Coppola 2014: 67-70.

7  According to Wilkinson (Wilkinson 2010: 391), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Salimī, a scholar specialised mainly in siyār, expressed much the same opinion in an article published in the Omani journal Nīzwā, no. 21: 250-253.

8  Nābūda/Naboodah 2006.

9  Information also to be found in shamela.ws/index.php/author/459.


14  For a list of the works and relevant bibliography, see Custers 2006, i: 404-408.
Moreover, the difference in the subjects dealt with in the two texts does not suffice to demonstrate different authorship, more probably being attributable to different periods in the life of al-ʿAwtabī, the Kitāb al-ansāb being an early work, the Diyāʾ fruit of his maturity. In conclusion, we may suppose that both the Ansāb and the Diyāʾ were written by Salāma b. Muslim b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAwtabī al-Ṣuḥārī, taking on one or the other kunya at different times. Thus, as Wilkinson put it after a well researched examination of the issue, «I remain fairly convinced they are one and the same person, but am not prepared to be categorical. If indeed the Ansāb author is different, then I too would tend to place him in the mid-4th/10th century».15

The Ibadi current, which emerged after the battle of Ṣiffīn (657) and the clash between ‘Alī and Muʿawiya, gained ground in Oman, where its adherents had settled after the failure of the revolt of the ‘southern’ tribes including the Kinda and the Banū Azd. Driven away from Baṣra, the followers of Ibadi left in successive waves bound for the eastern coast of the Peninsula, and in particular for Oman.

As a key region for domination over the Arabian Gulf, however, Oman remained an object of the designs of the caliphal powers, ever intent on maintaining control over the coastal regions. Nevertheless, thanks to the complex organisation of the Caliphate, whose territory was in practice held by the local sovereigns, as from the ninth century, the Ibadi imams were able to settle in the region to the south-east of Oman and could again enjoy a certain power. During the 11th century, in the relative security of a region having a certain autonomy and thanks to the power the imams were able to retain,16 a lively ferment developed at the doctrinal level. The foundations were thus laid for a new, Ibadi school (maḏhab). Within it, the different positions adopted led to political and spiritual contention amongst the tribes

16 The history of this period is complex, also because it is full of gaps; see Wilkinson 2010. For this period we have records of the names of only five imams elected, in accordance with the practice, before the Banū Nabhān came to prevail in the mid-12th: Rāṣid b. al-Wafīd (c. 939-953), Ḥalil b. Șādzān (c. 1017-1034), during the Imamate of which Nizwā saw the formation of a further school of thought thanks to qāḍī Abū ʿAlī, the poet imam Rāṣid b. Saʿīd al-Yahmadī (1034-1053) and his son HAfb b. Rāṣid b. Saʿīd, concluding with Rāṣid b. ʿAlī (d. 1055). See Ibn Ruzayk 1871: 30-35; Oman 1995: 254-255, 262.
of the central regions of Oman and those of the coastal area, to the extent that a moderate Ibadi current developed with Nizwā at its centre, while the school of Rustāq grew more ideologically rigid. This contrast, together with the political situation of the region, led to the collapse of the Imamate at the end of the 12th century, to re-arise only in the 15th century: «within the remaining Ibadi oecumene the Imamate simply fragmented, first scinding between the rival centre of Rustaq and Nizwā on either side of the mountain core of the Jabal al-Akhdar, and then between rival Imamates and muluk (local dynasts)».17

While these centuries saw in depth study and investigation at the theological level, the same cannot be said of historiography, for the period has nothing to offer in this field except for some biographies, siyār.18 Of course, we cannot tell whether it is simply that no history was written, or whether some texts were in fact produced though subsequently lost through the ravages of time.

Given this historiographical gap, the Kitāb al-ansāb takes on particular importance within Omani society as the first historiographic source regarding Oman; such importance, indeed, as to have become a mine of reference for authors dealing directly or indirectly with Oman from the 18th century to the present day. Thus we find entire passages quoted, albeit without mention of the source, in the Kašf al-ġumma written by al-Izkawī in the first half of the 18th century, in the Ibn Razīq written around 1860, although it may have been lifted from the Kašf itself, and again in the Tuḥfa al-aʿyān by al-Sālimī.19 The latter, as a serious scholar, was the first to make a point of citing al-ʿAwtabi when he quoted verbatim some pages of his, establishing him as a fundamental source also for subsequent Omani historiography.20 Thus the pages of the Ansāb, that interest us here, are drawn from Abū Hilāl al-Siyābī (1908-1993) in his four-volume work dedicated to the history of Oman21 in which he also addresses the issue of the arrival in Oman of a series of migratory waves, including the one led by Mālik b. Fahm, which

17 Wilkinson 1987: 11.
19 Izkawī Kašf 1874; Ibn Ruzayk 1871; Sālimī Tuḥfa.
20 Rawās 2000 has some very similar remarks to make on these points.
Chapter 1 - al-ʿAwtabī and the ‘Kitāb al-ansāb’

appears to have been the first to reach that land.\textsuperscript{22} The relevance of our \textit{Kitāb al-ansāb} to the history of Oman is also recognised by Muḥammad Iḥsān al-Naṣṣ, a professor at the University of Damascus; in his \textit{Kitāb al-qabāʾ il al-ʿarabiyya ansābi-hā wa-aʿlāmihā} he points out that he drew upon the work of al-ʿAwtabī for details about personages who lived in Oman, who are not to be found in other authors of the \textit{Ansāb}.\textsuperscript{23}

The title of the work places the \textit{Kitāb al-ansāb} not so much in the field of historiography as, in fact, in that of the \textit{ansāb}, dwelling on individual and tribal genealogies – a genre that came into its own in the early times of Islam.

While the message of the Koran had rendered all believers equal, as early as the times of the Caliph ʿUmar the genealogies, and thus the links with the various tribes, had been recorded for ‘pension’ purposes. Indeed, we have evidence of a great many works in the early days of Islam, since lost, whose titles included the term \textit{nasab/ansāb}, the \textit{Ǧamhara al-nasab} by Hišām Ibn al-Kalbī (737-d. between 819 and 821) being the outstanding example.

Genealogical connections have always constituted an identifying feature of family- and tribal-based systems while at the same time also serving to vindicate the origin of tribes that were not associated with a territory but with a memorable past. Recognition of a common line of descent which, in the course of time, has given rise to various, closely interrelated levels of aggregation – the family, the clan, and so forth – constitutes a strong cohesive bond, a key element thanks to which the importance of the tribe is asserted while at the same time avoiding oblivion and ensuring that it will be remembered.

The partly artificial reconstruction, with no apparent correspondence to real ancestral relations or actual descent from one forefather, is therefore based on a series of accounts put into circulation, most probably, in the \textit{ḡāhiliyya}, i.e. the centuries preceding Islam. These accounts were often contradictory and ambiguous, which entailed the need to impose some coherence on them when it came to producing the written records in response, as we have seen, to the events and requirements of the Umayyad period. In this perspective, following a practice frequent in Arab historiography,\textsuperscript{24} the

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Siyyābī} 2001, i: 71.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Naṣṣ} 2000: 7-8.
\textsuperscript{24} On this see for example \textit{Cheddadī} 2004.
initial exposition by al-ʿAwtabī of the *nasab* of Mālik presented a pattern of the political relations and social bonds which, in a time of change marked by migrations, was also to account for the new relations and new situations marking Arab history.

Ibn al-Kalbī, set on representing the tribal system in a systematic way and highlighting the connection between the Arabs even in the peripheral areas of the caliphate and the history of southern Arabia, established a sort of catalogue of the tribes. In this way, in part by stretching the facts, he established that complex tribal structure that became fundamental for an Islamic view of history based on the division between the Arabs of the North and those of the South. As Wilkinson aptly sums it up, this also seems to be attested by the epigraphic sources, «so both the epigraphic and literary evidence clearly point to major conflict between the Maʿadd and their associated (Nizārī/northern) tribes and the southern tribes […] the Sabaeo-Ḥimyaritic domain was almost entirely associated with Yamani tribes».26

Thanks to the genealogical relations, even non-Arabic populations found unification and, at the same time, a temporal positioning in which relations – whatever they might actually have been in historical reality – were reduced to the essential lines of the father-son relationship. Often it was a matter of spurious recognition of kinship, made *a posteriori* and coming into play in a system in which the complexity of relations between persons and groups were schematically represented as simple relations of kinship. Arab genealogy simplified a complex situation, creating a global picture of the history of the known world at a time when the universal vision of Islam was making great headway. In this way the memory of the past of even quite diversified parts of the Peninsula and the Near East finds in the genealogies a framework within which to place historical events in succession. In the course of time biographies and traditions wove into the schematic framework to such an extent as to generate historiographical texts from the ninth century, with the first great work of this genre, the *Kitāb ansāb al-ašrāf* by al-Balāḏūrī (b. 892).28

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25 For a more recent view on the issue of the division between northern and southern tribes, addressed notably by Robin, see Wilkinson 2010: 11 ff., where both epigraphic sources and the text by al-ʿAwtabī are examined.

26 Wilkinson 2010: 16.


28 On this work, see Goitein 1936: 14-24.
From the 10th century, however, as the power of the caliphate declined and power was taken over by the local dynasties, the interest in genealogies dwindled, while the historians of *Dār al-Islām* abandoned the comprehensive viewpoint that had characterised the universal histories of the previous centuries. Their attention now turned to biographies and local histories concerning dynasties, communities, cities and famous personages, as well as more extensive historiographical works.

In Oman, in a society dominated by the Ibadi movement which, in opposition to the central power of the caliphs and their approach to Islam, continued to keep the tribal structure alive over the centuries,29 al-ʿAwtabī traced out the history of his country taking the *ansāb* as a model. In a period that saw the Omani imamate going through crisis, also internally, al-ʿAwtabī, as a child of his times, wrote his *Kitāb* to conserve the memory of the past, bringing together accounts and traditions in a form that placed particular emphasis on the genealogical aspect, fundamental for a tribally based society like that of Oman.

The *Kitāb al-ansāb* by al-ʿAwtabī begins, as was the practice, with the Creation, to continue in roughly chronological order with Nūh, i.e. Noah, up to Ismāʿīl and then on to the Arab tribes in populations of the *gāhiliyya*, with the Prophet Muhammad and the history of early Islam, only to break off quite abruptly, unfortunately, at the time of the fall of the Umayyads. Setting about writing the history of the society he belonged to, the author concentrated in particular on the facts relevant to Oman in the pre-Islamic period and in the early centuries of the Hegira, dedicating a great deal of space to the Azd and their leader, Mālik b. Fahm.

«Mālik b. Fahm al-Azdī was the first of the Azd to arrive in Oman, subsequent to the departure of a great many Azd who, together with ʿAmr b. ʿĀmir, abandoned the land of Maʿrib when the dam overflowed, scattering them and destroying the two gardens. We will recount this history after our account of the episode of the two gardens, the situation, the destruction and migration (*intiqāl*) of the Azd, if Allāh wills».30

The Azd were, in fact, an important group31 in the ‘southern’ component

29 On this aspect, see Wilkinson 2010: chapter 1 and 2.
30 ʿAwtabī Ansāb, i: 181; ms. f. 244a.
31 Let us recall that Šanfara (6th-7th century), too, the pre-Islamic poet-brigand, belonged to the Azd, being affiliated to this tribe.
of early Islam Arab society in opposition to the ‘northern’ tribes from Ḥiğāz in a clash occurring in the caliphal period, fortune favouring now one side, now the other, in the Syrian-Iraqi territories. Thus the Azd ʿUmān appear to have represented a link with the other southern Arab tribes and so with pre-Islamic history, the ǧāhiliyya, of the Arabian Peninsula through to the great states of southern Arabia.32

The Azd, who had already found mention in the inscription of Namāra of 328 AD,33 are seen as the forefathers of a great many tribes and groups that left their mark in pre-Islamic history and early Islam, not only in the Peninsula but also in the Syrian-Iraqi area and who, albeit scattered over areas separated by considerable distances, have for centuries taken pride in their origins. In fact, among the descendants of al-Azd, according to Ibn al-Kalbī, was Naṣr, progenitor of a numerous lineage including Mālik b. Fahm and Māzin. From the latter, in turn, descended—among others—ʿAmr b. ʿĀmir. All these figures are central to the account we will be analysing in the following chapters.34

The precise position of the Banū Azd and their connections with the Tanūḥ, and thus with the various events in the region of Iraq are, of course, complex issues to which much research has been dedicated.35 Without dwelling on the presence of Mālik and «his son» Ġaḏīma in the history of the Iraq area, we will concentrate on the account given by al-ʿAwtabī of the departure of the Azd from Maʾrib under the leadership of ʿAmr b. ʿĀmir. The first mention we have of Mālik b. Fahm, too, arose from this episode, and we shall be following him as the first to arrive in Oman on his journey towards the eastern part of the Peninsula where, having defeated the Persians, his decision to settle there led to the Arabisation of the area.

The Azd played a fundamental part in the Omani history of the Islamic

32 Thanks to epigraphic finds, we have sufficient evidence of the connection of the Arabs with Sabaʾ and Ḥimyar see Wilkinson 2010: 6.
33 On the issues involved, see Mascitelli 2006a: 151-164. The Banū Azd are also recorded in the inscriptions Ja 635/37 and RES 2959/4 has cited by Beeston 1981: 183: «in these cases the reference is certainly to Azd al-Sarāt; but RES 4916 is Hadramitic and its ʾs/dn perhaps refers to the branch which was later to become the Azd ʿUmān». For the position of the Azd in early Islamic history see Madʿaj 1988.
34 For the genealogy of the Azd see also Ibn al-Kalbī/Caskel Ǧamhara, i: 176.
35 In particular, we may mention Retso 2003: 474 ff. and the interesting article by Ulrich 2008.
period, acquiring such great and lasting prestige that various dynasties that governed the country were held to have descended from them. In fact, they contributed to both the rise of the Ibadite movement and the Imamate, and to the inclusion of Oman in the chronicles of the caliphate, and thus in the Arab world, thanks to certain history-making figures. Of these, pride of place goes to al-Muhallab b. Abū Ṣufra al-Azdī (632-702 c.), the powerful general who saved Baṣra from the Kharijites and then became governor of Khorasan. In fact, the pages our author dedicates to the Muhallabids, the powerful family that played an active part in the history of the early centuries of Islam and were considered to belong to the Azd by much of Arab historiography of the origins, were translated by Martin Hinds as being «the most important section of the text [Kitāb al-ansāb]» in a book that came out posthumously in 1991, although he had sent it in for publication in 1988.

For my part, however, on account of both my particular interest in the ǧāhiliyya and my participation in the Pisa mission to Oman, I have concentrated on the part of the Kitāb al-ansāb that al-ʿAwtabī dedicates to the earliest days of Oman with its anticipations of future developments. Obviously, this cannot be considered a direct source, nor a historiographical source in the modern sense of the term. Rather, it is a literary-anecdotal narrative in which I have sought to highlight references to and echoes of the historical and social realities which these episodes evidently reflect. These are episodes that have played an important role in the history of the Arabian Peninsula, and my aim is to bring them to a non-specialist readership in endeavour to shed some light on the Arab narrative tradition in general, and on the Sultanate of Oman in particular.

In this perspective, in the second chapter I will be looking into the history of Oman in the pre-Islamic period starting from the earliest times, from the ‘Ād to the ‘Amālīq, to continue in the third chapter with the collapse of the dam of Maʿrib, which was the direct cause of the iftirāq, the dispers...