

Marek M. Dziekan

**Searching for the origins of things.  
On the 'ilm al-awā'il in the culture of the Arabic Middle Ages.**

**1. Idea of the science on the origins of things  
in the classical Arabic literature**

“Each society has some rites that differ from others in their general homogeneity. It seems that such a clear consistence can be explained only by their common origins. So it was imagined that each such a group of similar rites was established by one common ancestor who revealed it to the entire tribe”.<sup>1</sup> This statement of É. Durkheim corresponds exactly with the tendencies that most probably influenced the emergence in the Arabic culture of the quasi- studies of “pioneers” (Ar. *awā'il*/sing. *awwal*).<sup>2</sup>

Similar kind of knowledge was also known in other cultures, such as the Hellenic world and medieval Europe. However, the highest stage of development it achieved in China. As J. Needham puts it, “no classical literature of any ancient civilization paid more attention than the Chinese to record and honour inventors and innovators; no culture, either, went so far in their deification. Texts that could be called technical-historical dictionaries or registers of inventions and discoveries constitute a separate genre. The oldest book of this kind is *Shi Pen* (“Book of the Beginnings”).<sup>3</sup> Beginnings of the *awā'il* genre in the Arabic literature should be connected, I presume, with the IX century, when chapters devoted to the “pioneers” appeared in historical works of Ibn Qutayba (*Kitāb al-ma'ārif* [“The Book of Knowledge”]) and adab literature of Al-Bayhaqī. At the same time it should be remembered,

<sup>1</sup> É. Durkheim, *Elementarne formy życia religijnego* [Polish translation of *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*], Warszawa 1990, p.274.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. F. Rosenthal, *Awā'il*, in: *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second edition, I, pp.758-759.

<sup>3</sup> J. Needham, *Wielkie miareczkowanie. Nauka i społeczeństwo w Chinach i na Zachodzie* [Polish translation of *The Grand Titration. Science and Society in East and West*], Warszawa 1984, pp.299-300; also: EI, *ibidem*.

however, that before it began to designate studies on the “pioneers”, the term had also been used in other different meanings, even in titles of various theological and historical works. For example, Ḥağğī Ḥalīfa mentions *Awā'il al-adilla fi uşūl ad-dīn*, a theological work by Abū ʾl-Qāsim al-Balḥī.<sup>4</sup>

It can be said with high probability that the first Arab writer to devote separate work to this subject was Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d.1005). The above-mentioned Ḥağğī Ḥalīfa also maintains so, but, unfortunately, one can not be completely sure about it, since similarly titled earlier works have not been preserved to our times. Works of this kind were also written in later years by Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsqalānī, Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Allāh aš-Šiblī, Ğalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī and others. Some of them appended in their books information on *awāhir* or “the lasts”.<sup>5</sup>

It is not certain, either, if knowledge of the origins was treated, in Arabic culture, as a separate branch of knowledge or as an element of history or adab literature. Works as *Kitāb al-awā'il* by Al-ʿAskarī or *Al-Wasā'il ilā ma'rifat al-awā'il* by Aṭ-Ta'labī (X-XI centuries) can, on the one hand, be considered a proof of some independence of *ma'rifat al-awā'il* in the Arabic literature; on the other hand, the sections on the “pioneers” most frequently appeared in historical context, which is the case of *Kitāb al-ma'ārif* by Ibn Qutayba; later on, similarly Al-Qalqaşandī took a similar route, which will be discussed further on.

*Awā'il* were also treated as an element of adab understood as culture.<sup>6</sup> It probably appeared in such a function for the first time in *Kitāb al-maḥāsin wa-ʾl-masāwi'* by Al-Bayhaqī. It seems, however, that this knowledge was usually considered a part of history. In his well known work *Şubḥ al-a'şā fi ma'rifat al-inşā'*, Al-Qalqaşandī places *awā'il* in following context:

Article One: What knowledge is necessary for a scribe (*kātib*)

Part One: What knowledge is necessary for a scribe

Chapter Two: What knowledge about the chancellery (*inşā'*) is necessary for a scribe

Paragraph Sixteen: A glance at the knowledge about history

Point One: Historical information that a scribe has to know

Passage One: *Al-Awā'il*.

<sup>4</sup> EI, *ibid.*; Ḥağğī Ḥalīfa, *Kaşf az-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-ʾl-funūn*, Istanbul 1941, I.

<sup>5</sup> Ḥağğī Ḥalīfa, *op.cit.*, p.200; Introduction in: Al-ʿAskarī, *Kitāb al-awā'il*, ed. M. al-Miṣrī, W. Qaşşāb, Damascus 1975 p.14.

<sup>6</sup> J. Danecki, *Literatura i kultura w imperium kalifów. Studium twórczości adabowej Al-Mubarrada*, Warszawa 1983, p. 86 ff.

The author of the work characterizes the knowledge of the pioneers as “the knowledge about the origins of important things”<sup>7</sup>. Simultaneously, Al-Qalqašandī points out that many people he knows were interested in the beginnings; in the introduction to *Kitāb al-awā’il*, Al-‘Askarī gives similar reasons for writing his work.

Medieval and later medieval authorities, did not then consider *awā’il* as a separate branch of knowledge; the first to define it as a separate “science” with affinities to history and adab was, according to F. Rosenthal, Ḥağğī Ḥalīfa (Katib Çelebi)<sup>8</sup>, a seventeenth century Turkish intellectual and the author of a large biographical dictionary written in Arabic, *Kašf az-żunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wa-āl-funūn*, known under its abridged title, *Kašf az-żunūn*. We read in this dictionary: “*Al-Awā’il* is a science that indicates the origin of things and events according to places of their emergence and provenience. Its subject and aim are clear. The science is a branch of history (*tawārīh*) and adab (*muḥāḍarāt*); it is not mentioned in books of subjects (*kutub al-mawḍū‘āt*).<sup>9</sup>

I am not convinced that it was Ḥağğī Ḥalīfa who first defined *awā’il*, since in my conviction the above quoted description is not more precise than, for instance, Al-Qalqašandī’s definition, and a close examination of the *awā’il*’s place in *Ṣubḥ al-a‘šā* surely gives a much better idea about the subject than Çelebi’s brief definition.

Chinese literature on the origins tried to give the knowledge on the beginnings of inventions and discoveries in arranged and systematic way. It is much the same in the Arabic culture. At the same time the way of systematization is not homogeneous. Sometimes information is given in a non-arranged way, as is the case with the chapter of *Al-A‘lāq an-naḥīsa* by Ibn Rusta (d.903)<sup>10</sup> titled *Ḍikr al-awā’il al-laḍīna aḥḍatū al-ašyā’ al-laḍīna uqtuḍiya bi-him fiḥā* or “A Notice about those who invented [various] things and who were imitated in that”.

In the above-mentioned work of Al-‘Askarī, chronologically the first book dealing with this subject, we find information on the “pioneers” clearly divided on the grounds of a historical-personal criterion. The author divided his book into ten chapters. Combination of matters relating to the tribe of Prophet Muḥammad on the one hand and of those whose beginnings go back to the ġāhiliyya or pre-Islamic period. A few centuries later Al-Qalqašandī introduced in his work a quite different criterion of division. The Egyptian

<sup>7</sup> Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘šā fī ma‘rifat al-inšā’*, Cairo n.d., I, p. 420.

<sup>8</sup> EI, op.cit., pp.760-762; on this author see, e.g., S. Płaskowicka-Rymkiewicz, M. Borzęcka, M. Łabecka-Koeher, *Historia literatury tureckiej. Zarys*, Wrocław 1971, pp. 150-151.

<sup>9</sup> H. Ḥalīfa, op.cit., I, p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Rusta, *Al-A‘lāq an-naḥīsa*, Beirut 1988, pp. 172-180.

encyclopedist's system seems to be more practical and it can be basically described as rational (with some exceptions in the first and last paragraph).

## 2. Ġāhiliyya and Islam in the context of the "science of the origins"

In order to analyze the knowledge about *awā'il* and to characterize its scope I will present the contents of the works of Al-'Askarī, Al-Qalqašandī and Ibn Rusta as related to events attributed to the ġāhiliyya; this will show the most typical features of the way in which the events were presented. I have divided the things attributed to ġāhiliyya into five groups: everyday culture, religion, literature, war/fight, and varia.

### A. Everyday culture

1. The first one to say *marḥaban*: Sayf Ibn Dī Yazan (Al-'Askarī [later on: 'Ask], p. 17; Al-Qalqašandī [later on: Qalq], p. 433).
2. The first one to break bread while receiving guests during a famine: Hāšim Ibn 'Abd Manāf (Qalq., p. 431; Qusayy Ibn Kilāb ('Ask., p. 17).
3. First famous Arab king: Ġađīma al-Abraš (Qalq., p. 416; 'Ask., p. 98).
4. The first Arab to wear sandals: Ġađīma al-Abraš (Qalq., p. 428; Ibn Rusta [later on: Rust.], p. 174; 'Ask., p. 98).
5. The first Arab to ride in the saddle: Ḥazm Ibn Zabbān al-Ḥimyarī (Qalq., p. 427; 'Ask., p. 112).
6. The first to ride a horse while men were walking by his side: Al-Aš'at Ibn Qays (Rust., p. 172).
7. The first Arab king to sit on the throne: Ġađīma al-Abraš (Qalq., p. 416).
8. The first from among the Qurayš to dye his skin with indigo: 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Qalq., p. 436; 'Ask., p. 27; Rust., s.173).
9. The first Arab to wear a necklace: 'Amr Ibn Abī Ibn Našr Ibn Rabī'a ('Ask., p. 113).
10. First Arab king to wear a necklace: Ġađīma al-Abraš (Qalq., p. 416).

### B. Religion

11. The first to make a key for the House [Al-Ka'ba]: As'ad al-Himyarī i.e. Tubba' Abū Karib ('Ask., p. 67).
12. The first to cover Al-Ka'ba with the veil (*kiswa*): Tubba' As'ad Abū Karib (Qalq., p. 427; 'Ask., pp. 66-67).
13. The first in Mecca to believe in One God before the onset of Islam: Quss Ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī (Qalq., p. 436; 'Ask., s.84).

14. The first to offer up a sacrifice in the House: Ilyās Ibn Muḍar (Qalq., p. 436).

15. The first to light fire in Al-Muzdalifa: Qusayy Ibn Kilāb (Qalq., p. 436; 'Ask., p. 34).

16. The first in ḡāhiliyya to take off his sandals while entering Al-Ka'ba: Al-Walīd Ibn al-Muḡīra (Qalq., p. 428; 'Ask., p. 57; Rust., p. 57).

17. The First to dig *siqāya* for the pilgrims: Qusayy Ibn Kilāb ('Ask., p. 17).

18. The first to introduce worship of idols (*aṣnām*): 'Amr Ibn Luḡayy ('Ask., p. 75).

### C. Law and Morality

19. The first in the ḡāhiliyya to forbid the arrow game of chance (*maysir*): Al-Akra' Ibn Ḥābis at-Tamīmī (Qalq., p. 435; 'Ask., p. 118).

20. The first to stone for debauchery: Rabī' Ibn Haddan (Qalq., p. 435); Rabī' Ibn Huzar al-Asadī ('Ask., p. 90) [Both names mean probably the same person; it is hard to say, however, which of the two names is spelled properly]

21. The first to pass judgment on a hermaphrodite: 'Āmir Ibn az-Zarīb al-'Adwānī ('Ask., p. 89)

22. The first to cut [hand] for theft: Al-Walīd Ibn al-Muḡīra (Qalq., p. 435; 'Ask., p. 64; Rust., 173).

23. The first in ḡāhiliyya to forbid drinking of spirits: Al-Walīd Ibn al-Muḡīra or Qays Ibn 'Āṣim (Qalq., p. 435; Rust., p. 173).

24. The first to say that a child belongs to the bed: Akṭam Ibn Ṣayfi (Qalq., p. 435; 'Ask., p. 95).

25. The first to put diya (blood money) at 100 camels: 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Qalq., p. 435; 'Ask., p. 22; Rust., p. 173); Abū Sayyāra al-'Adwānī ('Ask., p. 25; Rust., p. 173); An-Naḍr Ibn Kināna ('Ask., p. 24).

### D. Literature

26. The first to write a *qaṣīda*: Al-Muhalhil (Qalq., p. 433).

27. The first to sign letters with words *fulān ibn fulān* (so-and-so, son of so-and-so): Abū Ibn Ka'b (Qalq., p. 422).

28. The first to write in Arabic: Murāmīr Ibn Murra of Al-Anbār ('Ask., p. 115; Rust., p. 173).

29. The first to lean on a stick during the sermon (*ḥuṭba*): Quss Ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī (Qalq., p. 421; 'Ask., p. 84).

30. The first to make a speech from a she-camel's back: Quss Ibn Sā'ida

al-Iyādī (Qalq., p. 421; 'Ask., p. 84).

31. The first to say *ammā ba'd*: Quss Ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī (Qalq., p. 433; 'Ask., p. 85); Ka'b Ibn Lu'ayy (Qalq., vol.vi, p. 231).

32. The first to write *min fulan ila fulan*: Quss Ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī (Qalq., p. 422; 'Ask., p. 88).

33. The first to start a letter with words *bi-ismika Allāhumma*: Umayya Ibn Abi aṣ-Ṣalt (Qalq., p. 422).

#### E. War/Fight

34. The first Arab to use catapult (*manğānīq*): Ğaḍīma al-Abraš (Qalq., p. 429; 'Ask., p. 98; Rust., p. 174).

35. The first to use a whip: Al-Asbaḥ Ibn Malik, the king of Yemen (Qalq., p. 428; 'Ask., p. 111).

36. The first Arab to be killed by strangulation: Adī Ibn Zayd ('Ask., p. 127).

37. The first one for whom the swords were prepared: Sa'd Ibn Sayd ('Ask., p. 138).

38. The first to use iron [for making a sword]: Sayf Ibn Dī Yazan (Qalq., p. 429; 'Ask., p. 118).

#### F. Varia

39. The first for whom a candle was lit: Ğaḍīma al-Abraš ('Ask., p. 98).

40. The first to weave canvas: 'Amr Ibn Luḥayy (Qalq., p. 436).

41. The first to sell on credit: 'Amr Ibn Luḥayy (Qalq., p. 436); Ḥuḍayfa Ibn 'Abd Ibn Fukayn ('Ask., p. 68).

42. The first to build a window in Mecca: Budayl Ibn Warqā' al-Ḥuzā'ī ('Ask., p. 70).

43. The first to build a square house in Mecca: Budayl Ibn Warqā' al-Ḥuzā'ī ('Ask., p. 70).

44. The first to set up a roof in Mecca: Qusayy Ibn Kilāb (Qalq., p. 426; 'Ask., p. 70).

45. The first to build a door in Mecca: Ḥaṭīb Ibn Abī Balta (the Companion of the Prophet) (Qalq., p. 426; 'Ask., p. 69).

46. The first to name Friday *ġum'a*: Ka'b Ibn Lu'ī ('Ask., p. 47).

47. The first to receive *ilāf* for the Qurayšis: Hāšim Ibn 'Abd Manāf ('Ask., p. 18).

48. The first king to set by night on a journey: Ğaḍīma Ibn Malik al-Abraš (Rust., p. 174).

49. The first performer of *ḥudā'*: one Muḍari man ('Ask., p. 21).

50. First to lead the Iyād tribe out of Tihāma ('Ask., p. 13).

Analysis of the pre-Islamic *awā'il* has showed that significant part of them are activities of important cultural value. They had been of great significance to pre-Islamic Arabs and later on were adopted by Islam.<sup>11</sup> Of the group of records marked with letter A these are: 1, 2, 4, 5; of group B: 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; of C: 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25; of D: 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32; of F: 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 51.

The list of activities and principles adopted in later centuries is therefore quite long. However, now I would like to point out these which from the emergence of Islam have been a part of either the Islamic doctrine or the Muslim law (*šarī'a*); these are records: 11-17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 51. The activities could be arranged into two groups: – cult activities connected with Al-Ka'ba (*kiswa*, *nār al-Muzdalifa*<sup>12</sup>, *siqāya*, taking off the shoes before entering the Meccan shrine /which was later to expand to all the mosques/) – prohibitions and dictates relating to law and morality (ban on drinking spirits, ban on hazardous games, punishment for debauchery, punishment for theft, introduction of some principles and legal institutions).

It can be said without exaggeration then that Muslim customs of pre-Islamic provenience belong to those generally received as the most characteristic for Islam as religion.<sup>13</sup> Some of these activities can doubtlessly be qualified as originating from *ḡāhiliyya*: for instance, institution of *siqāya* [together with all the pilgrimage to Mecca!], or lighting of fire in Al-Muzdalifa, the fire which is also called the fire of Quzaḥ (the old Arabian god of the sun, rainbow and lightning). However, some others, such as prohibition of drinking spirits and prohibition of gambling did not, constitute a rule in the pre-Islamic period. Maybe such records were created by way of the reverse projection, possibly to “clear” the own past, pagan but heroic<sup>14</sup>, in view of the endeavors by some (over)zealous Muslims to completely reject the pre-Islamic achievements because of their “unpure” and “satanic” character<sup>15</sup>. Maybe also it is to legitimize certain attitudes in Islam that some reports refer to the pre-Islamic monotheists<sup>16</sup> (e.g. Quss Ibn Sā'ida, to whom

<sup>11</sup> I disregard here the undeniable fact that appropriate anecdotes were ascribed to many of these activities on the grounds of the reverse projection; this will be discussed later.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. M. M. Dziekan, *Arabia magica. Wiedza tajemna u Arabów przed islamem*, Warszawa 1993, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> The total disapproval of the pre-Islamic period of the Arab history that some fundamentalist Muslim (e.g. Abul A'la al-Maududi; cf. his *Towards understanding Islam*, Tripoli, pp. 33-34) theologians propagate seems curious and – which I regret to say – false in this context.

<sup>14</sup> The *ḡāhiliyya* is called “The Heroic Age” by, e.g., H.A.R. Gibb in *Arabic Literature. An Introduction*, Oxford 1966.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. note 14.

<sup>16</sup> On this see, e.g., H. Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale avant l'Hégire*, Beirut 1928, pp. 33-34.

the next part of this article will be devoted).

A lot of "inventions" of different value were attributed to members of the Qurayš tribe, which surely is a result of apologetic tendencies in relation to Prophet Muḥammad. This aim is clearly shown in the work of Al-‘Askarī who, as I have already mentioned, devotes the first, special chapter of his book about the "pioneers" to the tribe of the Prophet of Islam.

Those of the *awā'il* which are ascribed to the *ǧāhiliyya* refer, almost without exception, to particular persons - sometimes obviously historical, sometimes semi-legendary and sometimes those living in the legends only. One way or another, such personal understanding of the historical process clearly manifests itself here.

It is worth pointing here at the clear anachronism of reports on the *awā'il*. One of such examples comes from the circle of the Prophet. According to what Ibn Rusta relates, it was the Prophet Muḥammad's wife, Zaynab Bint Ḡaḥš, for whom the bier (Ar. *na'š*) was first built (p. 174). On the other hand it is known that *na'š* was used long before the rise of Islam.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. *Awā'il* of Quss Ibn Sā'ida

It will be interesting to study how do the *awā'il* work in the case of one specific (mythical) Old-Arabian biography; Quss Ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī, an alleged bishop of Naǧrān, will be an example here.<sup>18</sup> The list of his *awā'il* looks quite impressive as for a rather unknown Christian monk of the *ǧāhiliyya*. It consists of the following elements:

I. The first to believe in the Only God in Mecca before the coming of Islam; the first to believe in Resurrection (*ba't*).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> M. M. Dziekan, *Śmierć w arabskiej poezji przedmuzulmańskiej*, unpubl. Ph. D. dissertation, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Oriental Institute, University of Warszawa, Warszawa 1992, pp. 95-96; further bibliography therein.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. M.M. Dziekan, *Quss Ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī. Legenda życia i twórczości*, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Zakład Arabistyki i Islamistyki, Warszawa 1996.

<sup>19</sup> As-Siǧistānī, *Das Kitāb al-Mu'ammārīn des Abū Ḥātim al-Siǧistānī*, w: I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur Arabischen Philologie*, II Teil, Leiden 1899, p. 76; Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-bayān wa-āt-tabyīn*, Cairo 1926, I, p. 56; Al-Qalqašandī, op. cit., I, p. 436; Ibn Kaḥīr, *Al-Bidāya wa-ān-nihāya*, Beirut 1989, II, p. 216; Ibn Ḥaǧar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-Iṣābafī tamyīz aṣ-ṣaḥāba*, Baghdad, n.d., III, p. 279; Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Muḥāḍarat al-abrār wa-musāmarat al-ahyār fī āl-adabiyāt wa-ān-nawādir wa-āl-ahbār*, Beirut, n.d., II, 85; Ibn Sayyid an-Nās, *‘Uyūn al-aṭar fī funūn al-maǧāzī wa-āš-šamā'il wa-āš-siyar*, Beirut 1974, I, p. 69; As-Suyūṭī, *Al-wasā'il ilā ma'rifat al-awā'il*, p. 187; Al-Maǧlisī aṭ-Ṭānī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, ed. Ġ. ‘Alawī, M. al-Aḥwandī, Teheran, b.r.w., XV, p. 186; An-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, Cairo, n.d., II, 119; Al-‘Askarī, op. cit., p. 84; Al-Baǧdādī, *Hiẓānat al-adab wa-lubb lubāb lisān al-‘Arab*, ed. ‘A. S. M. al-Hārūn, Cairo 1967, II, p. 90; Al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-maḥāsin wa-āl-masāwi'*, Beirut 1960, p. 397; As-Suyūṭī, *Al-Muẓhir fī ‘ulūm al-*



In his *Kitāb al-awā'il* Al-'Askarī (d.1010) cites various statements relating to the priority in this area. In addition to Quss, Waraqa Ibn Nawfal and Zayd Ibn 'Amr Ibn Nufayl are mentioned. As-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) repeats much more later these versions in his work on *awā'il*. Aš-Šahrastānī (d. 1153)<sup>20</sup> also mentions Quss and Zayd among the first Arab monotheists, but Quss is not listed among "those who ejected a belief in idols" in *Al-Muḥabbir* by Ibn Ḥabīb.<sup>21</sup>

Al-'Askarī adds: "Even if Quss was not the first, his standing is risen by the fact that he was mentioned by the Prophet – let the God save Him - and this is sufficient glory for him".<sup>22</sup>

Quss and Waraqa are also mentioned among "the people of the interval" (*ahl al-fatra*) who were also Christians or generally monotheists.

## II. The first to lean on a staff (*aṣā*) during the sermon (*ḥuṭba*).<sup>23</sup>

Basically the term *aṣā* was used by the Arabs to designate a stick used by nomad herdsmen in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>24</sup> The function and symbolism of the staff found their confirmation in the Arabic tradition as well, mostly through the Moses's staff (Ar. *Mūsā*). In Arabic legends its story begins with Adam who transferred it to Set; after that, it was inherited in succession by: Idris, Noah, Šālīḥ, Abraham, Šu'ayb and finally Moses.<sup>25</sup> Besides, Moses's staff was not the sheep-hook only: "It is my staff; upon it I lean and with it I beat down the leaves for my flock. It has other uses besides" (The Qur'ān, 20:18); it was kind of a magic wand, as the Koranic legend has it further on.

*luḡa wa-anwā'ihā*, [Cairo], n.d., I, 503; Al-Maydānī, *Maḡma' amṭāl al-'Arab*, Beirut 1988, I, p. 155; Al-Bāqillānī, *I'ğāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. As-Sayyid A. Šaqr, Cairo 1963, p. 153; Al-Anbārī, *Az-Zāhir fī ma'ānī kalimāt an-nās*, ed. Ḥ. Š. Aḍ-Ḍāmin, Baghdad 1979, II, p. 363.

<sup>20</sup> Aš-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa-ān-niḥal*, Cairo, n.d., II, pp. 250-251.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb, *Al-Muḥabbir*, ed. I. Lichtenstaedter, Beirut n.d., pp. 171-172.

<sup>22</sup> Al-'Askarī, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> As-Siğistānī, op. cit., p. 76; Al-Qalqašandī, op. cit., I, p. 436; Ibn Ḥaḡar, op. cit., III, p. 279; As-Suyūṭī, *Al-Wasa'il*..., p. 187; Al-Maḡlisī, op. cit., XV, p. 186; Al-'Askarī, op. cit., p. 84; Al-Bāqillānī, op. cit., p. 153; Al-Anbārī, op. cit., II, p. 363; Aš-Šarīši, *Šarḥ maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī al-Bašrī*, Cairo, b.r.w., IV, p. 64; Aš-Šafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-āl-wafayāt*, ed. M. 'A. al-Baḥīt, M. al-Ḥiyārī, Beirut 1993, XXIV, p. 241; Al-Ḥalabī, 'A., *Insān al-'uyūn fī sirat al-Amīn wa-āl-Ma'mūn al-ma'rūfa bi-ās-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya*, Cairo, n.d., I, p. 229; Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, [Būlāq] b.r.w., XIV, p. 41; Al-Baṭṭayūsī in: Al-Ma'arrī, Abū al-'Alā', *Šurūḥ siqt az-zand*, ed. Ṭ. Ḥusayn, Cairo 1946, II, p. 537; Al-Ḥuwārizmī in *ibid.*, p. 537; Az-Zamahšarī, *Al-Mustaḡṣā fī amṭāl al-'Arab*, Haydarabad 1962, I, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. EI, I, p. 680; Aṭ-Ta'ālībī, *Fiḡh al-luḡa*, Libia-Tunis 1981, p. 250.

<sup>25</sup> EI; Al-Ġāḥiẓ, op. cit., III, pp. 17-18,67; The Koran:2, 60; 7, 107, 117, 160; 20, 18....; cf. *Al-Mu'ğam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, ed. by M.F. 'Abd al-Bāqī, Beirut, p. 463.

In the stories of the Old Testament the staff plays an important role in the case of prophet Eliseus: it had a healing power (2 Kings 4, 29).

It is the gospel legend, beside the Koranic and the Old Testament tradition, which in the case of Quss may have some significance, too. In the New Testament the stick was an attribute of St. Peter's and Good Shepherd's<sup>26</sup>, and also of St. John the Baptist, to mention the most characteristic examples only. John the Baptist deserves our special attention here, as he shares some more attributes with Quss.

In the context of religious (not only genuinely Arab) tradition then, the stick is, above all, an element which makes Quss Ibn Sa'ida resemble prophets and saints with whom, undoubtedly, he has much in common.<sup>27</sup>

Among the Arabs the stick was, from the pre-Islamic times, a symbol of authority and an attribute of judges and orator. That is why, considering tradition which surrounds this object it is hard to believe in the record saying it was Quss to be the first orator to lean upon the stick. It is just one of many elements in the process of mythologization of his person. Considered to be the most outstanding orator of the pre-Islamic Arabs, Quss Ibn Sā'ida was vested with this additional honour.

A few specific works were in Arabic culture devoted to the function of the stick, mostly by classical authors. The most famous of them is chapter titled *Kitāb al-'aṣā* (Book of the Stick) in *Kitāb al-bayān wa-āt-tabyīn* by Al-Ġāḥiẓ. Similarly titled work was written by Usāma Ibn Munqid̄ (d.1188), and separate sections on the subject can be also found in subject dictionaries, e.g. *Al-Muḥaṣṣaṣ* by Ibn Sīda (d.1066), or *Fiqh al-luġa* by At-Ta'ālibī (d.1038).

III. The first to make a speech from the she-camel's back.<sup>28</sup>

IV. The first to make a speech on the hill (*šaraf*).<sup>29</sup>

Making a speech from the she-camel's back or from the hill (the latter is mentioned only by Al-Iṣfahānī) belong, along with the leaning upon the stick or the shepherd's staff, to customs typical for hatibs during oration. Similarly, Prophet Muḥammad spoke from female camel's back during the so called "farewell pilgrimage" (the year 632). On the other hand, speeches

<sup>26</sup> D. Forstner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej* [Polish translation of *Die Welt der christlichen Symbole*], Warszawa 1990, pp. 417, 321.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1991, p. 192; J.C. Cooper, *Lexicon alter Symbole*, Leipzig 1986, p. 181; on the 'anaza function of a staff in the Arab rite see, e.g., EI, I, p. 482.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Qalqaṣandī, op. cit., p. 421; Ibn Kaṭīr, op. cit., II, p. 216; As-Suyūṭī, *Al-Wasā'il...*, p. 38; Al-'Askarī, op. cit., I, p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Iṣfahānī, op. cit., XIV, p. 41.

from the hill were made, in *ğāhiliyya* times, during the rain-making ceremonies.<sup>30</sup> As Muslim prophet stories have it, this was also a custom of John the Baptist (Ar. Yūḥannā)<sup>31</sup>; the author analogically uses here word *šaraf* to designate a hill.

It may be that the Muslim custom of making the *ḥuṭba*-oration from the pulpit (*minbar*) is the echo of this custom.<sup>32</sup>

#### V. The first to say *ammā ba'd*.<sup>33</sup>

The Arabic tradition disagrees on the priority in this area. The names most frequently mentioned in this context are those of Quss Ibn Sā'ida's, Ka'b Ibn Lu'ī's, Prophet Muḥammad's ancestor,<sup>34</sup> and of Prophet Dāwūd's<sup>35</sup>. Still further possibilities are quoted, in the form of mnemotechnic verse, by Muḥammad Baḥğat al-Aṭarī, the editor of Aṣ-Şūlī's work (cf., p. 37, n.1).

In the Arabic rethorics, the *ammā ba'd* phrase was used mostly in *ḥuṭbas*, *waṣiyyas*-testaments and *risālas*-letters. The expression is quite difficult to translate (lit. "and next"), and in the old Arabian orations appeared most frequently at the beginning of an issue, whereas in the Islamic texts it appeared either after the *ḥamdala* or another relevant formula, or after the phrase *min fulān ilā fulān* (cf. hereafter).<sup>36</sup>

According to Al-'Askarī, the first text in the Arabic literature to begin with this formula is a *waṣiyya* by Quss Ibn Sā'ida.

The fact that the priority in this area is ascribed, along with Quss, to Dāwūd and the Prophet's grandfather, indicates a really high position of

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Al-Qalqaşandī, op. cit., I, p. 409; MM. Dziekan, *Arabia Magica*, p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ibn Kaṭīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. 'A. Q. A. 'Aṭā, Beirut 1982, II, p. 343.

<sup>32</sup> On the other customs of the ḥaṭībs see A. Ar-Rubay'ī, *Quss Ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī. Ḥayātuhu. Ḥuṭubuhu. Şi'ruhu*, Baghdad 1974, 89-93, which includes further bibliography.

<sup>33</sup> As-Siğistānī, op. cit., p. 76; Al-Qalqaşandī, op. cit., I, p. 433; Ibn Ḥağar, op. cit., III, p. 279; As-Suyūṭī, *Al-Wasā'il...*, p. 39 and *Al-Muzhir...*, I, 503; Al-Mağlisī, op. cit., XV, p. 186; Al-'Askarī, op. cit., p. 85; Al-Bāqillānī, op. cit., p. 153; Al-Anbārī, op. cit., II, p. 363; Aş-Şarīşī, op. cit., IV, p. 64; Aş-Şafadī, op. cit., XXIV, p. 241; Al-Ḥalabī, op. cit., I, p. 229; Al-Işfahānī, op. cit. XIV, p. 41 [XV, p. 246]; Al-Baṭlayūsī in: Al-Ma'arrī, op. cit., II, p. 537; At-Tibrīzī in ibid., p. 534; Al-Ḥuwārizmī in ibid., p. 537; Az-Zamaḥşarī, op. cit., I, p. 29; Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḥ ar-rusul wa-āl-mulūk*, Cairo 1977, VI, p. 179; Naşwān Ibn Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī, *Al-Ḥūr al-'in*, ed. K. Muşṭafā, Cairo 1972, p. 117; Al-Ğaḥşiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā' wa-āl-kuttāb*, Cairo 1938, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Qalqaşandī, op. cit., VI, p. 231; Aş-Şūlī, *Adab al-kuttāb*, wyd. M. B. al-Aṭarī, Cairo 1341 H., p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; Al-'Askarī, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>36</sup> Aş-Şūlī, op. cit., p. 87.; Al-'Askarī, *Kitāb aş-şinā' atayn al-kitāba wa-āş-şī'r*, ed. 'A. M. al-Bağāwī, M. A. F. Ibrāhīm, Cairo 1971 p. 165; on the grammatical structure of the expression see Al-Qalqaşandī, *Şubḥ...*, VI, p. 231.

Quss among medieval Muslim scholars.

According to many Muslim authors, the formula was very frequently used by the Prophet and his Companions. Although the expression had already been criticized in the middle ages, it was still in use in the XIX century – for instance, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī opens his work *Umm al-Qurā*<sup>37</sup> with those words. Sporadically the expression is still used nowadays.

#### VI. The first to write *min fulān ilā fulān*.<sup>38</sup>

The *min fulān ilā fulān* formula constitutes the most popular way of opening letters in the Arab-Muslim epistolary art.<sup>39</sup> According to a tradition conveyed by Al-‘Askarī in his *Kitāb al-awā’il*, it was Quss Ibn Sā’ida who first used this formula in a letter written to an unknown addressee (as the record has it: *min Quss Ibn Sā’ida ilā fulān ibn fulān*). The formula, simple and comfortable, had already been used in the antiquity and was also very popular in more modern times in the European culture. Its actual spread in the Arabic language opens with the rise of Islam, which is connected with the spread of the written language and the custom (or necessity) of correspondence. Along with *ammā ba’d* formula which followed it and an introduction in the form of *basmala* (or any other expression of Islamic character) preceding it, the *min fulān ilā fulān* phrase was used by famous personalities of the Islamic history. This tradition was sanctified by Prophet Muḥammad’s example; Al-Bāqillānī (d.1012) in his *I’ğāz al-Qur’ān* quotes other cases, i.e. the Prophet’s letters to Khusrau (Ar. Kisrā) and Negus (Ar. An-Nağāšī) in which, however, the Prophet restricts himself to formula *min Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh ilā Kisrā ‘aẓīm Fārisa*, etc.<sup>40</sup>

VII. The first to say: “the plaintiff should introduce the evidence, and the oath is required from the defendant” (*al-bīna ‘alā āl-mudda’i wa-āl-yamīn ‘alā āl-mudda’i ‘alayhi*).<sup>41</sup>

The priority in shaping this legal principle is ascribed to Quss Ibn Sā’ida and prophet Dāwūd, as is the case with the *ammā ba’d* formula, and also to

<sup>37</sup>A.Ş. Ad-Dağğānī, *Fawātiḥ al-kutub fī turāṭīnā*, “Al-Akādīmiyya. Mağallat Akādīmiyya al-Mamlaka al-Mağribiyya” 1991, No. 8, p. 134.

<sup>38</sup>As-Siğistānī, op. cit., p. 76; Al-Qalqaşandī, op. cit., I, p. 422; Ibn Ḥağar, op. cit., III, p. 279; As-Suyūṭī, *Al-Wasā’il*..., p. 169; Al-‘Askarī, op. cit., p. 88; Al-Anbārī, op. cit., II, p. 363; Aş-Şarīşī, op. cit., IV, p. 64; Al-Baṭlayūsī in: Al-Ma‘arrī, op. cit., II, p. 536; Al-Ḥuwārizmī in ibid., p. 537; Az-Zamaḥşarī, op. cit., I, p. 29; An-Nuwayrī, op. cit., II, p. 119; Al-Maydānī, op. cit., I, p. 155; Al-Bayhaqī, op. cit., p. 397.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Al-Qalqaşandī, op. cit., VI, p. 344 and passim.

<sup>40</sup>Al-Bāqillānī, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>41</sup>Al-Ḥalabī, op. cit., I, p. 129; As-Suyūṭī, *Al-Wasā’il*..., p. 145; An-Nuwayrī, op. cit., II, 119; Al-Bayhaqī, op. cit., p. 397; Al-Maydānī, op. cit., I, p. 155.

‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib.<sup>42</sup> Analogically, it is connected with the Sura 38, 19(20) of the Qur’ān. The Koranic *faṣlu ʾal-ḥiṭābi* is explained in various ways. Traditionalists, among others, believe that *faṣlu ʾal-ḥiṭābi* is *al-qaḍā*<sup>43</sup>, or giving just judgments which are based on principle that the plaintiff has to introduce the evidence, and the oath is required from the defendant. The principle is quoted in various versions by Aṭ-Ṭabarī: *aš-šāhidāni ‘alā ʾal-mudda ‘ī wa-ʾal-yamīn ‘alā ʾal-munkir* (the plaintiff must introduce two witnesses, and the oath is required from the defendant who pleads not guilty), and: *al-bīna ‘alā ʾaṭ-ṭālibin wa-ʾal-yamīn ‘alā ʾal-maṭlūb* (the plaintiff introduces the evidence, and the defendant the oath).<sup>44</sup>

This principle, which seems to originate in the customary law (*‘āda*), has been taken over by the Islamic law. This assertion is testified to both the fact that it is ascribed to ‘Alī<sup>45</sup> and that it exists among the other valid legal principles mentioned in *risāla fī ʾal-qaḍā* written by ‘Umar Ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb to Mūsā al-Aš‘arī, and quoted later by Al-Ġāhiz in his *Kitāb al-bayān wa-ʾat-tabyīn*.

In his commentary to this principle, ‘Umar explains: “Do not acknowledge the right of the plaintiff unless he introduces the evidence in the time [you have] fixed. If he introduces it, you decide in his favour, and if he does not, you judge him [accordingly]”.<sup>46</sup>

The list of the *awā’il* of Quss Ibn Sā’ida is in practice the same in various records that convey it. As-Siġistānī’s record contained in his *Kitāb al-mu‘ammarīn* is the widest and the earliest of the kind - the author was the first to mention the standardization of the rules of behavior during the sermon (*ḥuṭba*) (activities III, V) and the shaping of the formula typical for the Arabic epistolography (IV). Al-Ġāhiz adds the monotheism (I) to this list, as well as the custom of making speeches from the she-camel’s back (VI), though Quss is not regarded here as the first. It is Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī (X/XI century) who first quotes this act among the *awā’il* of Quss; a mention of the shaping of the legal rule by Quss (II) which was first mentioned in *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn wa-ʾal-masāwī* by Al-Bayhaqī (X century) was probably the latest to appear on records.

<sup>42</sup> An-Naysābūrī, *Tafsīr ġarā’ib al-Qur’ān wa-raġā’ib al-furqān*, on margins of Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurān*, Būlāq, 1329 H., XXIII, p. 90.

<sup>43</sup> Aṭ-Ṭabarī, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Vol. II, 50; cf. also Al-Bāqillānī, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Ġāhiz, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the case of the Arabic stories on *awā'il*, we deal with a clear fusion of history and legend. It is also the case of Quss Ibn Sā'ida, who is traditionally perceived as a demi-god, or a culture hero and creator of certain important rules of life (mostly literary, but in this case also religious) as well as the author of a legal rule accepted also by the Islamic jurisprudence.

Hamilton A. R. Gibb noticed here a clear tendency: "the history of the Islamic Community is essentially the contribution of individual men and women to the building up and transmission of its specific culture; that is these persons (rather than the political governors) who represent or reflect the active forces in Muslim society in their respective spheres; and their individual contributions are worthy of being recorded for future generations."<sup>47</sup> Gibb's commentary relates to the biographical literature, but I think that it also fits perfectly the "pioneer" literature.

On the other hand, the will to justify certain Muslim rites with their historicity is connected, in my opinion, with the rule presented by E. Shills, who says that these are particular ties with those, who preserved given traditions in the past<sup>48</sup> that constitute a condition necessary for adopting and accepting a tradition as one's own norm. This is not, however, the only explanation of this striking phenomenon. It may be that it is a Muslim version of a phenomenon noticed by Peter Gray in relation to the historiography of the European middle ages, directed at the central myth: the Incarnation of Christ.<sup>49</sup> In the case of the cultural circle with which we are dealing here, the rise of Islam itself and descent of the Koran – the holy Word of God – may be considered to be the central myth.

Referring to definite persons, authors, or the first executors of some certain acts, may still have another explanation in the Arabic culture. The transfer of information happened in this culture almost exclusively through personal contacts, as proved by the chains of authorities (*isnād*) that precede records on historical, religious and literary events, typical for the Sunna and the Arab-Islamic historiography. This kind of transmission is characteristic for the "oral" cultures - and the Arabic culture preserved the signs of its oral character well into the later middle ages.

The *awā'il* phenomenon can be interpreted according to M. Eliade's methodology of the sacred time. In the context of sacrum the acts, gestures

<sup>47</sup> H.A.R. Gibb, *Islamic Biographical Literature*, in: B.Lewis and P. M. Holt (eds.), *Historians of the Middle East*, London 1962, p. 54.

<sup>48</sup> E. Shills, *Tradycja* [Polish translation of *Tradition*, "Comparative Studies in Society and History", Vol. 13, No. 2, 1971] in: *Tradycja i nowoczesność*, Warszawa 1984, p. 44; also cf. A.Gurevič, *Edda i saga*, Moscow 1979, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> P. Gray, *Historia historii*, "Dialogue USA" 1973, No 1, p. 54.

and sayings, authored by ancestors more or less distant in time, become acts and gestures of archetypic character which place man in the sacred time. At the same moment, this time is creative time in the sense of the *in illo tempore*, when the world and the whole universe were set in order.<sup>50</sup> In the case of the Arabic *awā'il* stories we deal with a clear fusion of history and legend. The materials which I have analyzed in the present article may not have indicated the historical personalities clearly enough, but an examination of the entire body of available material confirms this assertion sufficiently [cf., for example, the above-quoted table of contents of Al-'Askari's work].

The concept of *awā'il* would thus constitute the realization of non-periodical repeating and the Muslim thought's inclination to ward the full hierophanization of time. This way the sacred time is not only a period of cyclically and regularly repeated religious rites, but also of non-cyclic activities of [seemingly] secular character. As M. Eliade puts it, one can always go fishing, hunting, etc., and imitate a mythical hero, personify him, reproduce mythical time, go out of the secular persistence, and repeat a mythical story. Every time can become a sacred time, of any moment the duration can be transformed into infinity.<sup>51</sup> Thus the pagan time of *ḡāhiliyya* becomes a time of culture heroes, a time of demiurges who had shaped the way that was to be taken by the later Arabic culture, already marked with a stamp of its religion - Islam. So *ḡāhiliyya* could not be a time without the religion which, after all, does not necessarily imply a belief in God, gods or ghosts, but relates to the experience of *sacrum* and thus is connected with ideas of the existence, the meaning and the truth.<sup>52</sup> All this confirms Eliade's opinion that no religion is completely new, no religious message ruins the past completely; it is rather about reshaping, renewal, revalorization, integration of elements - these most important ones! - of the eternal religious tradition.<sup>53</sup>

Georges Khoury seems to be right then, when he calls for the reevaluation of our knowledge concerning the pre-Islamic period in the history of the Arabs and for looking at it from another perspective, using the latest accomplishments of the humanities treated as a whole. This will surely let to a wider understanding of certain phenomena, seemingly purely Islamic, which however, are naturally marked with the pagan *sacrum* of the *ḡāhiliyya*.

<sup>50</sup> M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii* [Polish translation of *Traité d'histoire des religions*] Łódź 1993, pp. 378-381; cf. also *Archetypy i powtarzanie* by the same author in: *Sacrum, mit, historia*, Warszawa 1993, p. 48-50.

<sup>51</sup> M. Eliade, *Traktat...*, p. 382.

<sup>52</sup> M. Eliade, *Szamanizm i archaiczne techniki ekstazy* [Polish translation of *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*], Warszawa 1994, Introduction, p. xiii.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.