NOMADEN UND SESSHAFTE

Sonderschungsbereich Differenz und Integration
Wechselwirkungen zwischen nomadischen und sesshaften Lebensformen
in Zivilisationen der Alten Welt

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von Stefan Leder und Bernhard Streck

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Shifts and Drifts
in Nomad-Sedentary Relations

Ed. by Stefan Leder and Bernhard Streck

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Arab Nomads and the Seljūq Military

Stefan Heidemann

1. Introduction

The medieval state was basically a military state. The present study investigates nomadic tribes and their political organisation as a reflection of the political conditions as well as the economic development of sedentary states. What is the setting?

- The region: I will focus on northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia (al-Jazīrah).

- The period: I will cover the breakdown of the early 'Abbāsid Empire and its transition from the 4th/10th century to the Mongol invasion in the 7th/13th century.

- The Arab nomads: A second wave of nomads – after the early Islamic conquest – immigrated from the Arab Peninsula during the 4th/10th century. A third wave arrived later during the Ayyūbid period about 600/1200.

- Which sedentary military states are concerned: There is first the pre-Seljūq period, when Buyids from Iraq, Byzantines from Anatolia, and the Fātimids from Egypt each tried to thwart the regional supremacy of the others. The second phase is the period of the conquering Seljūqs proper; while in the third we find the successor states of the Seljūq Empire, the Zangīds and Ayyūbids.

Back to the main thesis: The organisation and strength of a nomadic tribe reflects the level of organisation and strength of the sedentary military power that confronts it. This hypothesis will be tested in three instances: first, Bedouin political and military domination in the region; second, neutralisation of the nomads and finally a kind of integration of the nomads into the fabric of a sedentary state. In every section I will pose the following questions:

- First: What was the general political context?

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1 I would like to express my gratitude to Katrin Gutberlet, Berlin, and Rudi Matthee, Newark/Delaware, for the thorough reading of the English manuscript. I am very grateful to Ricardo Eichmann, German Archaeological Institute, for the kind permission to use the map prepared by Rosemarie Mendler.
Second: What kinds of revenues were at hand for the sedentary powers to spend on their military? This question concerns economic development.

And third, the outcome of the answers to the two preceding questions: How are nomads integrated into or excluded from the sedentary military machine?

2. The Bedouin Domination

2.1 The Political Context

The first period concerns the Arab nomad domination from the late 4th/10th to the 5th/11th century. After its political and financial collapse, the 'Abbasid administration left northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia to the powerful clan of the Hamdānids. The latter served for the 'Abbāsids as a buffer against the hostile Egyptian governor-dynasty of the Ikhshīds in the south and the pressing Byzantines in the north. The Hamdānids from the Banū Taghlib belonged to old Arab stock and formed a kind of nobility. At this point however, the Banū Taghlib were quite well adapted to the sedentary structure of the 'Abbāsid Empire, but still kept their ties to the nomads in the pasture.

The Hamdānids faced a new wave of Arab nomad immigration. These tribes were the Banū Kilāb, the Banū 'Uqail and the Banū Numair. The Banū Kilāb acquired pasture lands in northern Syria, roaming as far as Ḍal’ah. The Banū 'Uqail were centred in the region of northern Iraq and the Diyār Rabil'ah. The tribe of the Numair roamed between the region of Harrān and the middle Euphrates area.

Between 380/990–1 and 401/1010–1 the Hamdānids lost control over the tribes. These in turn got sway over the cities to various degrees. The Bedouin amīr himself usually remained most of his time in the billah, the Bedouin camp, while letting a military representative in the city extract tax monies on his behalf. The military power of the tribes – as reflected in the literary sources – consisted only of the tribe itself. These nomad principalities succeeded the Hamdānids. Although they were almost autonomous, the great regional powers, the Fāṭimids, the Būyids and the Byzantines, used the tribes as buffers between each other. And the nomads, in turn, were able to engage the great powers for their own purposes.

Each of these powers formally integrated some tribes into its hierarchy of state. Some Mirdāsid and Numairid amīrs as well as the Marwānids even received Byz-

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2 Most of the references and source work for this contribution can be found in Die Renaissance der Städte in Nordsyrien und Nordmesopotamien by the author. In addition some of the basic research literature is cited here for further reading.
Antine titles like *patrikios, magistros, vestarches* and *dux.* Lead seals of Byzantine style are known for some of the Arab *amirs,* with a saint on one side, the protocol of Byzan
tine titles in Greek or Arabic on the other. In the year 422/1031 Mirdasids, Numairids as well as Kurdish Marwânis
took part in a kind of conference of all Islamic allies in Constantinople. All the *amirs* of the tribes involved, however,
derived their Islamic legitimation to rule formally from either the Fâtîmid or the 'Abbâsîd caliph. This is evident from the coin
dependence of the nomad *amirs.* They always acknowledged one of the two caliphs, although some of the *amirs* were prac
tically vassals of the Byzantines receiving titles and honours from them.

### 2.2 The Financial Situation

Like the 'Abbâsids, the Ḥamûdânis were permanently short of cash. They ex-
pected their territory for short term benefit with unprecedented measures. For
every example they stripped the Diyâr Muḍâr of all available iron, including the famous
iron gates of al-Raqqah, in order to repay the Qârmaṭâns in southern Iraq. In
particular, the contemporary geographer Ibn Hauqal accused the Ḥamûdâni *amîr*
Saîf al-Daulah (d. 356/967) for ruining the formerly rich region of the Diyâr Muḍâr. Due to the shortage of money the armies of the Ḥamûdânis consisted mostly of recruited nomads and a few military slaves (pl. *ghîlmân*).

These newly, only superficially Islamised tribes constituted a perpetual threat to
settled life, agriculture, and the roads used for long distance trade. Agricultural
lands decreased and pasture lands grew.

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4 For the Arab principalities, see: Ḥamûdânîs (Bikhazi, *Ḥamûdânî Dynasty*), the Banû Kilâb (Zakkar, *Emirate*), the Banû Numair (Rice, "Harran"; Heidemann, *Renaissance*), the *Ūqail* (Kennedy, "*Uqailids*"; Degener, *Banû *Ūqail*), the Marwânis (Ripper, *Marwânîden*). For the surrounding sedentary powers: Byzantium (Felix, *Byzanz*; Cappel, "Response"), Buṭyids (Busse, *Chalîf*), Fâtîmids (Bianquis, *Damas*). For the lead seals, see Heidemann/Söde, "Metallsiegel". For the nomadic-sedentary relation the works of Rowton, "Autonomy"; id., "Urban Auton-
omy"; id., "Enclosed Nomadism", as well as Lindner, "Nomadic Tribe", were most influential.
5 Bikhazi, *Ḥamûdânî Dynasty*, 899–902.
7 For the Ḥamûdânî military, see Bikhazi, *Ḥamûdânî Dynasty*, and McGeer, *Dragon's Teeth*.
2.3 The Integration of the Nomads

How were nomads integrated into the military machinery? This is point one must consider the incentives for the Bedouins to join an expedition of an *amir* who did not belong to their own tribe. The economic advantage of using nomads as warriors lies in the low cost involved. Bedouin armies do not need regular payments. Their incentive to take part in wars is mainly booty or a kind of tribute by the employing *amir*. Their loyalty was thus limited to this flow of income and was based on the ability of the *amir* to guarantee victory, booty or tribute. This economic logic lies behind the frequent complaints about nomadic unreliability in the field. The Banū Kilāb, Numair and 'Uqail were mentioned in various changing coalitions with military expeditions and raids of the sedentary powers. The strength of each tribe as well as their ability and will to form a nomadic-sedentary state was

- firstly, a function of the particular interest which one of the three great sedentary powers put on them and,
- secondly, a function of the wealth of urban resources the Bedouin rulers could draw on.

The Mirdāsids in northern Syria were generally protected by the Byzantine garrison in Antioch. They had the trade city of Aleppo as a source of cash revenues. This resulted in a form of state that Michael Rowton has called "dimorphic": a nomadic state where the ruler tried to present himself as urban, while having his military power in the pasture.9

The 'Uqailids were protected by the Būyids in Iraq and had a source of revenue in the trade city of Mosul and a couple of minor cities in the neighbouring region. When the Seljuqs began to extend their power into the West, they at first strongly supported the 'Uqailid *amir* Muslim ibn Quraish (d. 478/1085), so that he was able to extend the 'Uqailid emirate over much of the former Hamdānid territory, namely northern Syria, the Diyār Mūqar and the Diyār Rabī‘ah.

The Numairids are the best proof of the afore-mentioned principle, since they enjoyed the advantage of being protégés of one of the great powers only during two brief periods. Living in the pasture of the Diyār Mūqar, they had no major city to exploit except decaying mid-size towns such as al-Raqqa and Harrān. Both were only temporarily under their control. The Numairids rose to regional importance for the first time after the afore-mentioned treaty with Byzantium in 422/1031. Their importance and their sway over both cities lasted probably not longer than to the death of their tribe leader Shabib ibn Waththāb in 431/1039-40. The second time the Numairids gained prestige and power happened during the pro-Fātimid rebellion of the former Būyid-general Arslān al-Basāṣīrī in Iraq between 447/1055 and 452/1060. The Fātimids took a vital interest in the security of the middle Eu-

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9 Rowton, "Urban Autonomy".
phrates region as a deployment zone and lifeline of the rebellion. They therefore supported the Numairids against the Mirdâsids. In those years the amir of the Banû Numair Mani' ibn Shabîb (d. 454/1062) represented himself as ruler of a "dimorphic state", as it is most visible in the Numairid gate of the citadel in Harrân. It is the first known representative building in the region in decades.\footnote{For the Numairid gate in Harran, see Rice, "Harran", for a further suggested representative building activity of Manî in al-Raqqâh, see Heidemann, "Schatzfund".}

### 3. Arab Nomads and the Seljûqs

#### 3.1 The Political Context

At the end of the 5th/11th century, the Seljûq conquest reversed the general situation. The Seljûq state was a military state. The Seljûqs started their conquests early in the 5th/11th century in the east of the Islamic world, in Central Asia, as nomadic Turkomans. But when they arrived in Syria, the character of the state had fundamentally changed. Now the main body of the army was a well-trained core of professional horsemen backed by an administration in the Persian tradition of the Sâmânis and Ghaznawids. Nizâm al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the famous vizier of the Sultan Malikshâh (d. 485/1092), explains the ideal structure of the Seljûq military state in his Sîyâsat-nâmeh.

In 479/1086 the Seljûq Sultan Malikshâh completed the conquest of the Jazîrah and Syria with the seizure of Aleppo. For the first time since the collapse of the 'Abbasid state, northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia were reintegrated into a greater empire. The Seljûq rule was definitely regarded as foreign, in language, culture and in some sense also in religious belief. As a professional military minority, the Seljûqs and their successors based their rule on fortifications and fortified cities.

The Seljûqs enforced imperial order against nomadic domination. Before the conquest and in the very early days of their rule, the Seljûqs supported some of the influential local and regional tribal leaders, above all the 'Uqailid amir Muslim ibn Quraish, in order to hold sway over the region at low cost. The clan of Malikshâh married into the Bedouin, namely the 'Uqailid, nobility. Malikshâh's aunt ('ammâb), Šâfiyâ Khâtûn, was married to Muslim ibn Quraish and later to his brother Ibrâhîm ibn Quraish.\footnote{Ibn al-Athîr, Kâmil, X, 150; Degener, Banû 'Uqail, 93f.} Malikshâh's foster-sister (ukhtûbû min al-radâ') Zâlikhâ was given to Muslim ibn Quraish's son.\footnote{Sîbî ibn al-Jauzî, Mîrāzî, ed. Sevim, 238; Dhahâbî, Târikh, 471–480, 32f.}

The spread of Seljûq rule over northern Iraq, northern Mesopotamia and northern Syria followed a definite model. First, they tried to secure their rule over the great
fortified cities, Mosul, al-Ruha', Aleppo and Antioch, thus leaving mid-size towns like Harrān, al-Raqqah, Naṣībin and smaller locations to be governed by local amīrs mainly of nomadic background. Arab nomads served as auxiliaries within the armies of various Seljuq commanders. However, their loyalty extended only as far as their own interest was concerned.

In the second phase, after the death of Malikshāh in 485/1092, Seljuq rule extended from the great to the mid-size cities and to the countryside, and thus came at the expense of the Arab nomads. The following twenty years saw the ousting and extinction of the Arab nomad groups. The indigenous Kilāb, Numair and 'Uqail-Bedouins perished within the power struggle of the various pretenders to the sultanate. One by one they were expelled from the rule over the mid-size towns and fortresses. The peak of this development was the massacre of some ten to thirteen thousand 'Uqailid nomads at Dārā/al-Mudayyā in the Khābūr area in the year 486/1093. Thousands of the Banū 'Uqail were killed and their cattle – their livelihood – were driven away. The final stage was the seizing of their last cities Naṣībin and Mosul, which they governed as iqtā' by the high-ranking Seljuq amīr Karbugha (d. 495/1192) in 489/1096. Whether or not this policy was deliberate cannot be said. None of these events and massacres was reported as taking place in the context of war against the Arab nomads; the sources just mention them as episodes in the internal Seljuq power struggle.13

3.2 Financing the Army

The Seljuq army consisted of professional horsemen, most of whom were only seasonally available. The centrepiece for their financial support was the iqtā', the Islamic fief. Although this institution had been previously known, it now became the major concept for payments. In a simplified model the land-taxes of 'ushr and kharaj, the agricultural surplus, were now sent directly to the respective army unit and not re-distributed by the sultan's administration.

The level of the cash-based fiscal-system and economy shrunk dramatically in the west from the 4th/10th century onward. Money as medium for the fiscal redistribution became scarce. Under Niẓām al-Mulk the iqtā' became the rule. The amīr would receive a certain agricultural region for fiscal exploitation so as to be able to pay and feed his troops. This might have been cash or more likely natural products for the consumption of the military. Theoretically, according to Niẓām al-Mulk fiscal exploitation and political rule should have been in different hands. This was only feasible in the better developed eastern part of the empire, where the cash-based economy and tax-system continued to operate at a much higher level than in

13 About the Seljūq conquest of Syria, see Bianquis, Damascus, 1, 639-652; El-Azhari, Seljuqs, and Heidemann, Renaissance, 145–174.
the west. As a consequence of the decreased cash budget economy in the west fiscal
and military rule became there synonymous. In order to forestall the centrifugal
powers inherent in this kind of system Niẓām al-Mulk advised the ruler to build
up centrally paid elite troops.

The Seljūq army was in need of agricultural land. The old nomad elite and the Sel-
jūqs competed in the use of land. One of the first orders given after the conquest of
an area was to reorganise all financial matters within a city and to distribute the
districts available as iqtāʾ to the Seljūq officers. The Arab nobility had little mili-
tary value and were soon ousted from their iqtāʾs. They were regarded as a threat
to the agricultural base of sedentary society, and thus to the financial resources of
the Seljūq military.

The outcome of Seljūq iqtāʾ in the economically weak west was different from that
of the iqtāʾ in the Būyid times, when its effect had been devastating. The Seljūq
amīr and eventually his heirs had to rely on their iqtāʾ as their only permanent fi-
nancial resource. This became even more so in the process of fragmentation of the
western Seljūq Empire. The amīr could increase his income and his military power
only through land cultivation. As a consequence, military personal became sea-
sonal warriors. During the autumn and winter they had to go home for the super-
vision of the harvest.

Not only agriculture was important for the support of the Seljūq army. Cash
money was also needed in order to purchase and to pay elite slave troops. There-
fore the long distance trade—which always operated with cash—was burdened
with special tolls, excise taxes, called mukūs. The autonomous Seljūq amīrs did
everything to establish peace in the land in order to make the roads safe for this
purpose. An awareness of the link between security and revenue can be found in
the contemporary sources as well.

3.3 Nomads and the Seljūq Military

Turkoman nomads played only a minor role in the Seljūq army during the con-
quest of Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Arab nomads—except for the ‘Uqailid
“dimorphic state” under Muslim ibn Quraish—were only temporary allies, chang-
ing sides whenever it suited them. The structure and way of payment of the Seljūq

14 Also the derivatives of money the ḥawālah and the ṣafājāh can be regarded here as cash, in
opposition to barter exchange.

15 About the destructive consequences of the Būyid iqtāʾ cp. for example Bosworth, “Military
Organisation”, 159–166; Sātū, State, 20f. About the ideal structure of the Seljūq iqtāʾ-based sys-
tem and a cash-based army as counterweight, see Niẓām al-Mulk, Siyāṣat-nāme, esp. ed. Darke,
131, 299; trans. Schabinger, 306, 499. About the positive results of the Seljūq iqtāʾ cp. Becker,
“Steuerpacht”, 243. About the relation of peace in the land and the increase of tax monies in
contemporary sources, cp. for example Ibn al-ʿAdim, Zubdah, II, 164, 179, 181.
army affected the nomads in substantial ways. Arab nomads and the Seljuq military were competitors in land use. After the extinction and ousting of the great tribal groups, the remnants disintegrated further, sometimes changing names or merging with other tribes. The Arab nomads perished or were marginalized, and no longer played a significant role in the Seljuq army. Ibn al-'Adim spoke of this period as the “zawāl mulk al-'arab”, the disappearance of the Arab-Bedouin reign. Later in the Seljuq period, nomads were mentioned occasionally, and then – with some exceptions under particular political conditions – only in the badiyah, pasture lands, south of the Euphrates at Siffin, the Jabal al-Bishr or in the region of Palmyra. As a consequence nomads almost disappear from the literary sources.

### 3.4 The Role of the 'Uqailids of Qal'at Ja'bar

Although the tribes disappeared as an important factor in military and political life, some of the Arab amirs with tribal backgrounds adapted themselves fully to the Seljuq style of government. They survived as rulers of autonomous principalities within the heterogeneous patchwork of Seljuq rule in the western part of the western Seljuq Empire. These included the 'Uqailids of Qal'at Ja'bar, but also the Munqidhids of Shaizar and to a lesser extent the Banu Mula'ib of Afamiyah. Let us take a closer look at the "dimorphic state" of the 'Uqailids.

Qal'at Ja'bar and al-Raqqah remained under the rule of Arab 'Uqailid amirs. They were not mentioned in the reports about the ousting and extinction of the nomads. The sources hardly mention that these 'Uqailid amirs had tribal 'Uqailid followers. The extent of the tribal following must therefore have been rather limited. It should also be noted that the middle Euphrates region did not belong to the traditional roaming region of the Banu 'Uqail.

The power of the latter probably lay in their fortresses, in addition to their diplomacy, which led them to establish marriage ties to the neighbouring Arab tribes, the Numairids, the Munqidhids, the Mazyadids in Iraq and probably to the other tribes and Turkomans as well. The military weakness of the 'Uqailids is most visible during a rebellion of a tribal Numairid group against the 'Uqailid governor of al-Raqqah in the year 501-2/1108. No tribal 'Uqailids were mentioned in this conflict. The indigenous 'Uqailid amir of Qal'at Ja'bar was compelled to call the Seljuq governor of Mosul for help – an unprecedented incident.

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16 For this phenomenon cp. Lindner, "Nomadic Tribe".
17 Ibn al-'Adim, Zubdah, II, 58, cites a letter by Sabiq ibn Mahmūd, the Kilābi-Mirdāsid amir of Aleppo (dated 471/1078-9).
18 Heidemann, Renaissance, 272f.
The 'Uqailids of Qal'at Ja'bar controlled an important crossing of the Euphrates between Syria and Iraq. The sources never mention any conflict with any of the rival Seljūq armies frequently passing through their territory. The 'Uqailids and the Munqidhids took a neutral role in all the inner-Seljūq power struggles and later also in the wars between the Seljūqs and the Crusaders. In some instances they served as mediators – or they sheltered high-ranking refugees from Seljūq areas. All of this shows how far they had become assimilated to the Seljūq state. At this point the 'Uqailid emirate hardly qualifies as nomadic any more.

It seems that the 'Uqailids, with their various ties to the pasture, served the Seljūqs by controlling the remaining Arab and Turkoman nomads in the region and by securing the crossing of the Euphrates – something that the “sedentary” Seljūqs may not have been able to achieve by themselves.

4. The Nomads in the Ayyūbid Period

4.1 The Political Situation

The period of the Ayyūbids saw the formal integration of the Arab nomads into a basically Seljūq state. In the course of the first half of the 6th/12th century, the western Seljūq Empire disintegrated into a number of autonomous principalities. Most of these became hereditary. Most prominent among them was the governor dynasty of the Zangīs. From 521/1127 onwards Zangī ibn Aqsunqur (d. 541/1146), later his son Nūr al-Dīn Mahmūd (d. 569/1174) and finally Saladin (d. 589/1193) formed a viable powerful autonomous province, almost a state of its own. Put simply, the Jazīrah had to provide land-based seasonal warriors and a supply of cereals; Egypt served the Ayyūbids as a source of cash revenue, soldiers and cereals as well. Those were needed for the Syrian and Palestinian battlefields.

Zangī and Nūr al-Dīn did everything to support agriculture in the region. Settlement surveys and archaeological finds corroborate this impression. The Zangīs and the Ayyūbids enforced public peace on the roads to foster long distance trade with the ultimate aim of generating tax monies through custom tolls, the mukūs. But over time Nūr al-Dīn and his successors gradually began to remove tolls on long distance trade within their territories in favour of intra-urban market taxes (i.e. ḥaqq al-bai`, the fiscal claim on sales), perhaps now regarding custom tolls as impediments to trade. This development has much to do with the agricultural

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19 Köhler, Allianzen, 146–148.
20 Heidemann, Renaissance, 260–289.
growth and overall positive economic developments following the Seljūq con­quest. The Zangid state became even more powerful when Saladin and the Ayyūbids took over. Trade and agriculture flour­ished. The monetary economy grew enormously as compared with the period of the Bedouin domination and the early Seljūq rule. The autonomous remnants of the Arab principalities like the ‘Uqailids of Qal‘at Ja‘bar were removed and the territory came firmly under Ayyūbid sway.

4.2 The Payment of the Army

The principles of financing the military underwent little change from the Seljūq period. Economic growth enabled the establishment and maintenance of a much stronger army than before. However the problem of the seasonal availability of warriors from the Jazīrah who had their base in the agricultural lands continued to be felt, most visibly during the yearlong siege of Acre from 584/1188 to 588/1191. The Jazīran troops of Saladin went home for harvest every autumn, but the siege and war with the Crusaders continued. This accounts mainly for Saladin’s capitulation. Hence the later Ayyūbid ruler al-Sāliḥ Ayyūb (d. 647/1249) decided to rely mainly on a cash-based garrisoned elite-army consisting of Turkish and Circassian slaves (mamlūks) who served as professional full-time soldiers. For example in 647–648/1249–1250 they were the decisive factor in the victorious battle of al­Manṣūrah against an equally professional Crusader army. Cash-based Mamluk elite-corps had been a centrepiece of the military concept since the early Seljūq armies, but under the Ayyūbids they gradually became the predominant force.

4.3 The Relation Between the Nomads and the Zangīd-Ayyūbid State

Under the Zangīds and Ayyūbids, nomads did not constitute any major military challenge and were gradually integrated into the fabric of state. Abū Shāmah, for instance, tells us that during the reign of Nūr al-Dīn, about 552/1157, nomadic

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23 See in detail Heidemann, Renaissance, 297–353.
24 Cp. Tabba, Patronage.
25 See Möhring, Saladin; Gibb, “Armies”, 75.
26 Thorau, Baibars, 43–54; Gibb, “Armies”, 77. About the professionalisation of the European knights and their organisation into orders, see Thorau, “Ritterorden”. Cp. about the strength and deficiencies of Crusader armies Smail, Crusading Warfare, 97–100.
27 Ayalon, “From Ayyubids”. 
tribes had to pay a tax called ‘idād. For the Ayyūbīd period we have more information on this ‘idād, which was counted in money and livestock."

Under the early Ayyūbīds, a decade after the death of Saladin at about 600/1200, a third wave of immigration of tribal groups reached northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Groups of the ‘Tāyy’ confederation extended their roaming region from the Arab Peninsula into Syria and northern Mesopotamia. In northern Syria and the Diyār Muḍar we find the ‘Al Fadli, a subgroup of the ‘Tāyy’. Their region lay between Ḥimṣ, in northern Syria, up to Qal‘at Ja‘bar and al-Raḥbah. In the east the Khafajah, a branch of the ‘Uqailids, grew in importance, with their main roaming region situated between al-Kufah and Hit up to al-Raḥbah. This new expansion occurred not without conflicts with the Ayyūbīd principalities.

The Ayyūbīd states, which were much dependent on the security of the overland routes, tried to integrate the nomads by offering them a legitimate place within the hierarchy of state. The brother of Saladin, al-Malik al-‘Ādil Abū Bakr (d. 615/1218) and his nephew al-Zahir Ghazi (d. 613/616) reacted to this new wave of Bedouins by the formalisation of the īmārat al-‘arab, the Bedouin emirate. The āmir al-‘arab, the prince of the Bedouins, was an institution already known before in Syria and the Jazīrah but independent from the urban-based states. The āmir al-‘arab was probably the most powerful or most dignified chief among the tribal leaders in the pasture and therefore served as their representative to the sedentary powers. The invention now lay in the appointment of the āmir al-‘arab by representatives of sedentary powers themselves. Al-Zahir Ghāzī took the leadership in the northern Syrian pasture from a member of the old Banū Kilāb and bestowed this title officially on a member of the Banū ‘Tāyy and especially on one of the groups of the Al Fa‘l. They received an iqṭā‘ or khubz. Salamyah near Ḥimṣ was usually the iqṭā‘ of the āmir al-‘arab in Syria. In exchange for these benefits they had to bring their tribal following in line with the Ayyūbīd state. Although we have no information about it, the āmir al-‘arab might be considered as an important agent for the collection of ‘idād, the nomad tribute, which is mentioned in

28 Abū Shāmah, Randāstān, ed. Kairo, I, 16; ed. Muhammad Ahmad, I/1, 38–40 (552 h.). ‘Idād is the plural form fi‘il of ‘adād or estimation; cp. for the general meaning of “estimation” de Goeje, Indices, 296, and Eddé, Procapitale, 333, 498. Isfahānī, al-Barg al-shamī, cited in Hiyari, “Origins”, 514, mentions ‘idād in a diploma for the new governor of Damascus in 578/1182. The plural ‘idād can be found several times with the meaning of tax-estimations or better payments of nomads during the Ayyūbīd period in the tax lists provided by Ibn Shaddād in his A‘lāq, I/1, 152 (Aleppo: ‘idād al-turkmān in Aleppo 150.000 dirham and sheep 30.000 heads with a value of 600.000 dirham’); I/2, 396 (Balis: ‘al-‘idād 20.000 dirham’); III, 66 (Harrān: al-‘idād 50.000 dirham), 99f. (al-Ruhā: ‘idād al-ghanam [of the sheep] 60.000 dirham). Cp. to a parallel financial right over Bedouins in the Crusader states Smail, Crusading Warfare, 59.

29 ‘Āzīmī, Tārikh, ed. Za‘ūr, 376, reports in 520/1126–7 about an āmir ‘arab al-Jazīrah. In Iraq there is an earlier example for the appointment of an āmir ‘arab by the caliph in 396/1005–6; Heidemann, Renaissance, 271.
Ayyūbid tax lists of some cities in the region. The institutionalised leadership in the pasture probably served both sides.30

5. Summary

Let me summarise the changing relation between the successive military states and the Arab nomads. It is my contention that the strength and political organisation of the tribal groups were direct reflections of the military and economic strength of the sedentary powers.

The first period is characterised by a new wave of tribal immigration and their domination of the region, which is linked to the surrounding political situation. They grew in power and developed a kind of “dimorphic state” — a Bedouin ruler who presented himself as urban but had his men in the pasture — whenever they were under special support of one of the surrounding sedentary powers.

In the second phase, the Seljūq period, the tribes competed in land use with the Seljūqs. The Seljūqs needed land in order to distribute it to the army and to develop it as ṣaqta'. The power struggles of the various Seljūq pretenders which began in this period ended with the tribal groups being ousted or exterminated as further result. Only some amīrs with tribal backgrounds survived this situation owing to their neutral political position and the possession of fortified locations.

The third phase witnessed the formal integration of newly arrived nomadic groups into the framework of the Zangīd–Ayyūbid state. Operating at a much higher economic and military level, the Zangīds were able to tax the nomads, while the Ayyūbids were in a position to nominate the amīr al-ʿarab, the chief of the Bedouins.

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6. Bibliography

6.1 Sources


6.2 Research Literature


Fig. 1: With permission of Ricardo Eichmann, German Archaeological Institute, map prepared by Rosemarie Mendler.