

# Obituaries in Service of the Rasūlid Sultanate in Yemen at the Turn of the 9th/15th Century

Daniel Mahoney\*

*Al-ʿUqūd al-luʿluʿiyya fī taʾrīkh al-dawla al-Rasūliyya*, a chronicle describing the events surrounding the lives of seven Rasūlid sultans as they strove for dominance over the inhabitants of South Arabia, was completed shortly after the death of the last of these rulers, al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl, by court historian Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Khazrajī. It aimed to depict the potency of the sultans' divinely guided rulership after a period of time during which the sultanate's territory and influence had decreased. As a result, it comprised idealised chronographical reports based on earlier works of Rasūlid historiography as well as end-of-year obituaries that depicted the lives of notable individuals who were part of the political community over which the sultan ruled. This article first looks at how the relationship between al-Khazrajī and al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl affected the production of *al-ʿUqūd* as well as how earlier biographical collections in Yemen laid the groundwork both in content and political perspective for the work's own unique presentation in chronicle format. Then it examines the formulaic content of many of the obituaries as they follow along similar modes of presentation according to frequently occurring types of individuals, such as religio-legal specialists or military administrators. Finally, it shows how the obituaries change during the chronicle's depiction of the reign of al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl, which ultimately reveal a more personal side of his rulership at the end of the 8th/14th century.

*Keywords: Rasūlid, Yemen, Islamic world, political history, historiography, biography*

He rose in the command of God after its signposts were effaced,  
and its stars had set.  
He strove to implement his plan of the sublime,  
pulling from its extremities while it pulled him.  
He made safe those who were afraid and drew near those who had grown distant.  
He dominated all of creation when his moustache had not yet grown.<sup>1</sup>

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\* **Correspondence details:** Department of Languages and Cultures, University of Ghent, Blandijnberg 2, B-9000, Belgium; daniel.mahoney@ugent.be.

This article is part of *Medieval Worlds* 15, special issue, *Medieval Biographical Collections: Perspectives from Buddhist, Christian and Islamic Worlds*, guest editors: Daniel Mahoney, Diarmuid Ó Riain and Giorgia Vocino. To read all related articles, please access: [dx.doi.org/10.1553/medievalworlds\\_no15si\\_2022](https://dx.doi.org/10.1553/medievalworlds_no15si_2022).

1 al-Khazrajī, *al-ʿUqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 847. This poem comes from the diwan of Ibn al-Muqri; al-Khazrajī, *al-ʿUqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 845. I provide the translation.

### Introduction

These verses come from an elegy mourning the death of Sultan al-Ashraf Ismā'īl in 803/1400 at the very end of *al-'Uqūd al-lu'lu'iyya fī ta'rikh al-dawla al-Rasūliyya* [The Pearl-Strings of the History of the Rasūlid Dynasty].<sup>2</sup> He was the seventh ruler of the Rasūlid dynasty in Yemen as well as the patron and possible co-author of this historiographical volume. In elegant summation, this poetry describes his role as sultan to be to take up the command of God, re-establish just rule in a divinely righteous alignment and gather those around him into a community under his protection. In short, he is cast as a messianic renewer of order and vigilant shepherd over those in his dominion. The exacting description of the endeavors and responsibilities of rulership found in this final poem serves as a fitting bookend for a volume that recounts the events surrounding the lives of the first seven Rasūlid sultans from the first half of the 7th/13th century until the end of the 8th/14th century; and here it also provides an initial indication of how the framing of this piece of historical writing aims to portray the potency of this dynasty and its rulers, even though the time of its production at the turn of the 9th/15th century followed decades of political infighting, rebellion and the loss of territory.<sup>3</sup>

The Rasūlid family first came to South Arabia as part of the Ayyūbid military at the end of the 6th/12th century, and in the following decades they were appointed as governors over different regions in the highlands and coastal plains. In 626/1229, the Ayyūbid ruler of Yemen left to take up a new post to the north, but a replacement was not sent from Egypt. Consequently, the Rasūlid military officer who had been left in charge decided to take power into his own hands and consolidate his own authority through military and diplomatic actions across Yemen. In 632/1234, he received the diploma of investiture from the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Mustanşir who recognised his independent rule, after which he took on the title of al-Manşūr. Over the next century, the Rasūlid sultans expanded their authority across South Arabia through violent conflicts and the apportionment of territory, from which they collected taxes, as well as through the patronage of religious elites, some of whom worked in the many mosques and madrasas that they had built.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the sultans also acquired great amounts of wealth and interregional influence through control of the important ports of Aden and al-Shihr for the Red Sea-Indian Ocean trade.<sup>5</sup> However, after there was a challenge for succession following the death of al-Mu'ayyad in 721/1321, the Rasūlid sultanate began to disintegrate over the course of the remaining century.<sup>6</sup> Losing control of Sanaa in 723/1323 and Dhamar in 739/1339, their territory shrank as tribal rebellions increased along the southern Red Sea coast and highlands, while the Zaydi imamate in the northern highlands expanded and became more aggressive in its incursions into the south.

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2 The edition of al-Ĥibshī is based primarily upon two manuscripts (al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ĥibshī, 22-23). The first, whose date is uncertain, comes from the library of Khadabkhush Bitna in India and served as the basis for the first edition of *al-'Uqūd* by Muḥammad Basyūni 'Asal. The second manuscript, which is evaluated as »old«, originates from the manuscript collection of the Sanaa Mosque (*al-maktaba al-gharbiyya*).

3 For reference, here is a list of the seven Rasūlid sultans in *al-'Uqūd* in chronological order: al-Manşūr 'Umar (d. 647/1250), al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf (d. 694/1295), al-Ashraf 'Umar (d. 696/1296), al-Mu'ayyad (d. 721/1321), al-Mujāhid 'Alī (d. 764/1363), al-Afdal al-'Abbās (d. 778/1377) and al-Ashraf Ismā'īl (d. 803/1400).

4 For further context, see, for example, Sadek, *Rasūlid Architecture*; Varisco, *Unity*; *idem*, *Reading Rasūlid Maps*.

5 For further context, see, for example, Kenney, *Treasuring Yemen*; Margariti, *Mercantile Networks*; Sadek, *Custodians*; Vallet, *L'Arabie Marchande*; *idem*, *Sultans*; *idem*, *Diplomatic Networks*.

6 For further context, see, for example, Varisco, *Trials*.

Despite this reduction in power in Yemen, the Rasūlid sultans remained engaged with disparate parts of the Islamic world and beyond during the latter half of the 8th/14th century, as demonstrated in part by the continued intellectual activities at their courts. For example, broad awareness of the social complexities to the north is evidenced by al-Afdāl's production of the so-called *Rasulid Hexaglot*: a glossary that matches Arabic vocabulary to terms in Persian, Turkic (in three dialects), a dialect of colloquial Byzantine Greek, a dialect of Western Armenian and a dialect of Mongol.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, *al-'Uqūd* contains numerous reports about the sultans' diplomatic receptions and exchanges, such as a copy of a letter from across the Indian Ocean in the year 795/1392, in which the qadi of Calicut requested permission from al-Ashraf Ismā'īl to recite the Friday prayer in his name.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, *al-'Uqūd* contains various reports recounting events from outside of Yemen which do not directly involve the sultans. For example, a report from 796/1393 provides a glimpse of their knowledge concerning the perception of the Timurid expansion out of Central Asia: an announcement describing the arrival of Timur's army at Baghdad and then continuance on to Syria contains a rumour that among its soldiers are some 30,000 cannibals who are corralled at night out of safety.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the reactions of the sultans to these reports from abroad are occasionally described, revealing further their personal worldviews. For example, when news arrived at the beginning of 802/late 1399 about the death of Egyptian Sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq, he was prayed for in the congregational mosque in Zabid on Friday Muharram 3/September 5, and al-Ashraf Ismā'īl ordered recitation of the Qur'ān in his name for seven days in Ta'izz, Zabid and Aden.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, the main thrust of the narratives in *al-'Uqūd* focuses on the internal politics of South Arabia and in particular the sultans' pursuit of dominance over it. Consequently, most of the reports focus on military expeditions against their opponents or punishment (and occasional clemency) for those who disrupt public order via rebellions, sedition or other crimes. Thus, these events reflect the sultan taking on his role of (re-)establishing the command of God and providing justice to the community over which he rules. This chronicle, however, also follows a pattern found in medieval Islamic historiography, in which at the end of each year, after the reports about events (*ḥawādith*), there are obituaries (*wafayāt*) for notable individuals who have died. Consequently, within the framework of *al-'Uqūd*, the utilisation of this format enables a type of world-building that constructs a much larger representation of this political community through narrating the lives of remarkable persons who comprise it. Some of these biographies explicitly include or reference the sultan and his court, while others more subtly demonstrate how the efforts of his divinely guided rulership has created a space in which they thrive in less connected ways. In both cases, this historiographic feature provides an implicit link back to and support for *al-'Uqūd*'s overall theme of bolstering the righteous power of the sultan and sultanate.

7 Golden (ed.), *King's Dictionary*.

8 al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 767-769.

9 al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 783.

10 al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 833. There is also a much earlier report that describes al-Mu'ayyad's celebration upon learning from an envoy about the Egyptian victory against the Ilkhānids in 702/1303 at Marj al-Ṣaffar outside Damascus (al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 403-404).

This article will first examine the authoriality of *al-Uqūd* and its relationship to earlier works of medieval South Arabian historiography. Then, it will look more closely at how the form and content of its obituaries creates a broader and more diverse vision of the political community of the Rasūlid sultanate beyond the main narratives of the sultan-centric event reports. Finally, it will focus on how the historical writing of *al-Uqūd* changes during its narration of the reign of al-Ashraf Ismā'īl, including new approaches to obituary construction that manifest in a more idiosyncratic and personal depiction of Rasūlid rulership and those under it.

### *The Authoriality and Formation of al-Uqūd*

While *al-Uqūd* was written during a period in which the sultan strove to maintain authority over a smaller region of South Arabia, limited to parts of the southern highlands and coastal plains, the Rasūlid court itself remained a place of extravagant ceremonies, cultural production and intellectual activity. In fact, the author attributed to *al-Uqūd*, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Wahnās al-Khazrajī, is said to have been involved in the decoration of the madrasa al-Afḍaliyya and Dār al-Dībāj palace in Tha'bat for the sultan.<sup>11</sup> Alongside his historical efforts, medieval biographers also describe him as a composer of genealogy and poetry, both of which incidentally feature in *al-Uqūd*.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, other information about his life and close connection to the Rasūlid court is found in the reports of *al-Uqūd*. At the end of the obituary for the mother of al-Ashraf Ismā'īl, it is stated that he was asked to undergo the hajj to Mecca on her behalf, for which in return he received 4,000 dirhams as well as a tax exemption on his land and date-palms in perpetuity.<sup>13</sup> In 791/1389, al-Ashraf Ismā'īl also arranged for him to serve as instructor of Qur'anic recitation at the Grand Mosque of al-Mimlāḥ, and he was so amazed by the preparations of the other teachers that he composed a poem about it.<sup>14</sup> Finally, in 794/1392 al-Khazrajī also cites his presence at the elaborate celebration for the circumcision of the sons of the sultan, during which he was deeply impressed by the performances of the poets in attendance.<sup>15</sup> Less is known about his education or family life. But another report from 801/1399 provides a hint by describing how he witnessed the completion of the recitation of al-Bukhari's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and afterwards received an *ijāza* certificate for himself, his children and grandchildren.<sup>16</sup>

11 al-Burayhī, *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 290-291. For more information on his background as a painter, see Sadek, Notes, 231-232.

12 al-Maqrizī, *Durar*, ed. al-Jalili, 2:551-552; Ibn Hajar, *al-Majma'*, ed. al-Ru'ashay, 3:181-182; Ibn Hajar, *Imbā'*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī, 2:441; al-Sakhawī, *al-Daw'*, 5:210.

13 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 690.

14 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 720-723.

15 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 758-760.

16 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 830.

In addition to *al-Uqūd*, two other related chronicles have been attributed to al-Khazrajī: *al-Kifāya wa-l-i'lām fī man waliya al-Yaman wa-sakana-hā fī al-Islām* and *al-'Asjad al-masbūk fī sirat/akhbār al-khulafā' wa-l-mulūk*.<sup>17</sup> Both of these include the reports about the Rasūlid dynasty found in *al-Uqūd* as well as reports about the preceding medieval rulers of Sanaa, Aden and Zabid, with the former organised by reign and the latter by year. However, shades of uncertainty regarding the authorship of these works have arisen because al-Khazrajī in his own biographical collection, and other medieval biographers, attribute *al-Uqūd* and *al-'Asjad* to al-Ashraf Ismā'īl.<sup>18</sup> Also another work of very similar content, which ends one year before his death (801/1399), has also been assigned to him.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, in his biographical entry, al-Khazrajī describes the method of the sultan for the production of his works: he lays out the idea and its limits, sends out someone to implement the research, and then upon receiving the results he edits them, removing and adding what he wants.<sup>20</sup> It remains uncertain the extent to which this working method applied to the creation of *al-Uqūd* as well as how much its description is exaggerated flattery of him because, in the end after the sultan's death, al-Khazrajī did change its authorship to himself.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, no matter the precise details, this intensely political context of the creation of *al-Uqūd* provides a clear base from which extends its deeply ideological message promoting Rasūlid rulership over South Arabia.

Even before narrating the reports of the reigns of the Rasūlid sultans, al-Khazrajī's portrayal of them as the political saviours of the inhabitants of South Arabia is established in a prologue, which connects them to the primordial rulers of South Arabia: Sabā', Kahlān and Ḥimyar. This section begins with the decipherment of an esoteric poem by a pre-Islamic soothsayer that foretells their arrival in the letterist-coded year of *kha'* and *lām*.<sup>22</sup> Then al-Khazrajī narrates an origin story which presents the ancestors of the Rasūlids as having been among the many tribes who left South Arabia after the fall of the Ma'rib dam, only to circumambulate back millennia later in the designated year to restore rightful rule in South Arabia. This story also includes a fabricated genealogy that ascribes South Arabian ancestry to the Rasūlids instead of their actual Turkmen roots.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in this initial presentation, they are

17 Sadek, Notes, 231; Sayyid, *Maṣādir*, 152-156; Vallet, *Historiographie Rasūlide*, 63-66.

18 al-Kharzajī, *al-'Iqd*, ed. al-'Abbādī *et al.*, 1:527; al-Maqrīzī, *Durar*, ed. al-Jalīlī, 1:404; al-Sakhawī, *al-Ḍaw'*, 2:299. They additionally credit the sultan with producing a history on the caliphs and kings as well as works of grammar and astronomy among others.

19 *Fakihat al-zaman fī akhbār man waliya min al-Yaman*; al-Ashraf Ismā'īl, *Fakihat*, ed. Mu'alyī

20 He also describes his education to include such disciplines as grammar, fiqh, history and mathematics.

21 Additionally, further evidence of this ambiguity is found at the beginning of the reign of al-Mujāhid, where this section is attributed to al-Ashraf Ismā'īl (*qāla al-Ashraf Abū al-'Abbās Ismā'īl ...*) in contrast to the other reigns, which are credited to al-Khazrajī; al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 507. Here, in a footnote, al-Ḥibshī tries to reconcile this by offering the following scenario: al-Khazrajī wrote *al-Uqūd* and *al-'Asjad* during the lifetime of al-Ashraf Ismā'īl and ascribed them to him, but after the death of the sultan he completed their writing and re-attributed them to himself. A similar explanation is also given in a footnote by the editors of *al-'Iqd*; al-Khazrajī, *al-'Iqd*, ed. al-'Abbādī *et al.*, 1:237.

22 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 35-39.

23 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 61-62. A late 7th/13th-century version of this genealogy was compiled by an earlier Rasūlid sultan, al-Ashraf 'Umar, in *Ṭurfat al-aṣḥāb fī ma'rifat al-ansāb* (ed. Zettersteen). For a more detailed examination of the genealogies found in these works, see Mahoney, Writing.

not only set up as guided by God in their leadership but also as reclaiming an ancestral right to rule over the tribal population. Afterwards, the remaining part of this prologue section describes their involvement in the Ayyūbid occupation of Yemen and sees al-Khazrajī begin to weave in information from a variety of earlier sources of South Arabian historiography. Here he creates a more idealised version of events for the sultans in a highly literary style which often eschews direct attestations of sources; this is a synthesising practice he continues for a great amount of the so-called ‘Grand Chronicle’ of the Rasūlids.<sup>24</sup>

Much of the knowledge of the events of the Rasūlid dynasty of the 7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries comes primarily from chronicles written by authors close to the court who helped administer political and military affairs for their sultans during periods of expansion and dominant political control over much of South Arabia: Ibn Ḥātim’s *Kitāb al-simt al-ghālī al-thaman fī akhbār al-mulūk min al-ghuzz bi-l-Yaman*,<sup>25</sup> Idrīs al-Ḥamzī’s *Kanz al-akhyār fī ma’rifat al-siyar wa-l-akhyār*,<sup>26</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Majīd’s *Bahjat al-zaman fī ta’rikh al-Yaman*<sup>27</sup> and al-Janadī’s *al-Sulūk fī ṭabaqāt al-‘ulamā’ wa-l-mulūk*, which comprises both a biographical collection and a shorter chronicle at its end.<sup>28</sup> Despite only occasionally citing them, these works are the building blocks from which al-Khazrajī constructed the narratives of his event reports in *al-Uqūd* until the last of them, *al-Sulūk*, ends in 730/1330.<sup>29</sup> After this point in time, the sources of the information al-Khazrajī uses in his writing are less clear beyond his own experiences and that of his near contemporaries.<sup>30</sup> Some indication may come from al-Khazrajī’s citation of first-hand reports, for example from his father or other scholars.<sup>31</sup> These, however, usually provide colour or commentary to the main narratives in the writing rather than drive them forward.

24 For a more in-depth analysis of the nuances in the narratives of events between *al-Uqūd* and other Rasūlid chronicles, see Mahoney, *Evolving Rasūlid Narratives*; Smith, *Ayyubids and Rasulids*; Vallet, *Historiographie Rasūlide*, 65-67.

25 Ibn Ḥātim, *al-Simt*, ed. Smith. Ibn Ḥātim came from a politically influential Isma’ili family that lived in Sanaa and became part of al-Muzaffar’s inner circle of elites. As a result, in the chronicle he regularly cites his first-hand experiences of court affairs, which include acting as a mediator for the Rasūlids with tribal and Zaydi groups (Smith, Ibn Ḥātim’s *Kitāb al-simt*).

26 Idrīs al-Ḥamzī was a member of a Zaydi tribal family as well as of the court of Sultan al-Mu’ayyad and refers to his military expeditions in his writing (Idrīs al-Ḥamzī, *Kanz*, ed. al-Mud’ij, 7-11).

27 Ibn ‘Abd al-Majīd, *Bahjat*, ed. al-Sanabani. Ibn ‘Abd al-Majīd worked in the chancellery of al-Mu’ayyad, but he wrote this chronicle for an opponent of al-Mujāhid in the fight for succession after the death of his father (Vallet, *Historiographie Rasūlide*, 46-48).

28 Al-Janadī was a legal scholar who served as a *muhtasib* in a few cities for the sultanate (al-Khazrajī, *al-Iqd*, ed. al-‘Abbādī *et al.*, 4:2097-2098). For further information on the life and work of al-Janadī, see the Heiss article in this volume.

29 In *al-Uqūd*, for example, Ibn Ḥātim is referred to as *ṣāhib ‘Iqd* or *Iqd al-thāmin* on pages: 97, 101, 131, 260, 261, 280, 325; Ibn al-Majīd: 131, 404, 508, 510; Idrīs al-Ḥamzī: 370, and al-Janadī: 131, 167, 511, 540, 544 (al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī). The final direct citations of al-Janadī in the event reports of *al-Uqūd* occur in the year 725/1325 (al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 540, 544). However, there are report corollaries to the chronicle section of *al-Sulūk* up until the end of 730/1330 (al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 564).

30 The birth year of al-Khazrajī (732/1331-1332) is revealed when he mentions sharing it with another individual, for whom he writes an entry in his biographical collection (al-Khazrajī, *al-Iqd*, ed. al-‘Abbādī *et al.*, 3:1362.). A similar issue arises with the younger al-Ashraf Ismā’il’s birth in 761/1360 (al-Sakhawī, *al-Dawī*, 2:299). Interestingly, although many births of the sons of sultans and amirs are reported in *al-Uqūd*, the birth of al-Ashraf Ismā’il is not.

31 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 535, 572, 747.

Regarding sources for the obituaries, he extensively utilised the biographies in al-Janadī's *al-Sulūk* as well as a collection formed later on in the 8th/14th century by the very academically prolific al-Afḍal: *al-'Aṭāyā al-saniyya wa-l-mawāhib al-haniyya fī manāqib al-yamaniyya*.<sup>32</sup> Beyond providing information about individuals from the past, both of these works clearly had enormous influence on al-Khazrajī's own work, as they portrayed their own visions of the community of the Rasūlid Sultanate by combining elements of the military-political sphere with that of the legal-religious sphere.<sup>33</sup> In fact, al-Khazrajī openly attests that the work of al-Janadī inspired and taught him how to approach his writing in his own biographical dictionary *al-'Iqd al-fākhir al-ḥasan fī ṭabaqāt akābir ahl al-Yaman*.<sup>34</sup> Al-Janadī's initial goal in *al-Sulūk* was to continue the work of a previous compiler, Ibn Samura, whose collection (*Ṭabaqat al-fuqahā' al-Yaman*) traced the spread Shafī'i legal scholars (*fuqahā'*) in Yemen during the 4th/10th and 5th/11th centuries. Consequently, the structure of al-Janadī's work was organised around the successive generations of these scholars as they emanated from specific geographical locations. However, alongside them he also goes on to record the lives of the political elite who served as administrators or rulers. Thus, while altogether this extensive and meticulous collection ends up presenting an edifying portrayal of the power of the sultanate through individuals associated with the pen and with the sword, it also comes with the important stipulation that the first presented are those who transmit the religious knowledge that underlies the legitimacy of those who use force. Al-Afḍal incorporated many of the individuals from *al-Sulūk* into his *al-'Aṭāyā*, in addition to adding more from his own time and entourage. But here, instead of focusing on the progression of generations that historically reconstruct the transmission of knowledge and power, he decided to put them in alphabetical order. Utility-wise, this organisation made it much easier to find a figure by name, but also from an ideological standpoint each of the individuals are at least initially presented on equal footing, although the length of some biographies in contrast to the brevity of others often reveal their overall significance even before delving into their contents.<sup>35</sup> Also alphabetically arranged, al-Khazrajī's *al-'Iqd* encompasses 1,500 figures from the entire range of Islamic history in Yemen, building on the content and message of both the earlier works. But al-Khazrajī also adds individuals, both from his own time as well as from earlier periods of Islamic South Arabian history, producing a more universal statement on the unified religio-political space of Yemen as it had developed over the centuries.

Returning to *al-'Uqūd* and comparing it to *al-'Iqd*, the biographies from the collection tend to be longer than those in the chronicle. Neither, however, contains all the entries of the other nor do the biographies for the same individual always precisely match. That is, although the collection seems to have been produced after the chronicle because there is no evidence of al-Ashraf Ismā'īl's involvement in or ownership over it, there does not appear to have been simple, direct copying between them during their production. Similarly, most

32 Al-Afḍal, *al-'Aṭāyā*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 5-42. For further discussion on the scholarly practices of al-Afḍal, see Vallet, *L'Historiographie Rasūlide*, 55-57.

33 Vallet, *Historiographie Rasūlide*, 49-53, 58-61.

34 al-Khazrajī, *al-'Iqd*, ed. al-'Abbādī *et al.*, 4: 2097. This collection also goes by the name *Ṭirāz al-lām al-zaman fī ṭabaqāt a'yān al-Yaman*.

35 Vallet also points out that, in another type of mirror-for-princes work of al-Afḍal, he reveals his belief in the importance of reading about the lives of the ancients to learn good practices and wisdom, perhaps intentionally imparting the motivation for creating his own biographical collection; Vallet, *Historiographie Rasūlide*, 60-61.

of the earlier biographies in *al-'Uqūd* appear to have come from *al-Sulūk* and *al-'Aṭāyā*, but their transfer was also a mindful practice in which al-Khazrajī sometimes explicitly comments on them. For example, in the midst of the obituary for Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. As'ad b. Muḥammad b. Musā al-'Amrānī from the chronicle year 695/1295-6, al-Khazrajī notes that he was the first in the Rasūlid Sultanate to hold both the offices of the *wazīr* (vizier) and the *qāḍī al-quḍā'* (chief judge) at the same time, and he follows this with a list of the few others who gained the same status through the course of subsequent reigns up until the year 802/1399-1400.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, this amendment to the obituary shows not only that al-Khazrajī was editing the original obituary to contextualise the importance of this accomplishment but also that he made this modification of a fairly early entry in the work at a very late date, revealing that there was an ongoing process of wholesale editing of the document and not just updates as time passed.

In the end what is at stake in the movement of the biographies of largely religio-legal specialists into a work organised around the lives of the sultans is its reframing of the appearance of this political community into an essentially top-down perspective of authority rather than one in which the legal scholars provide the basis for legitimacy for the establishment and continuity of the sultanate. As Vallet states, instead of a perception of power that is modelled on religious knowledge and letters, »the world of the 'ulama' merges into a framework dictated by the very constitution of the state of the sultan«.<sup>37</sup> Thus, what remains to be examined are the individuals that al-Khazrajī chose to comprise this political community under the sultans as well as how the depictions of their lives contribute to the ideological messaging of the chronographical part of *al-'Uqūd*, which presents the sultans as not just the leaders ruling over them but also the protectors who bring them together.

#### *The Obituaries of al-'Uqūd as a Representation of the Political Community under the Rasūlid Sultanate*

In the introduction to *al-'Uqūd*, al-Khazrajī clearly lays out its structure: »I have organised each reign [of the sultans] through the arrangement of the years which occurred in it. In each year, I report the obituaries of the elite (*a'yān*) as well as the foremost (*ṣudūr*) of the dignified (*jilla*) and the general public (*jumhūr*).«<sup>38</sup> Al-Khazrajī here is describing an organisation of event reports (*ḥawādith*) and obituaries (*wafayāt*) that initially emerged in the 6th/12th century under Ibn al-Jawzī, who as a Ḥanbalī preacher in Baghdad began to append the obituaries of religious scholars to his universal chronicle *Muntaẓam fī ta'rīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*.<sup>39</sup> Then his grandson Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī took up this format of events succeeded

36 al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 344.

37 Vallet, *Historiographie Rasūlide*, 67.

38 al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 33-34.

39 Irwin, *Mamluk History*, 160; De Somogyi, *Kitāb al-muntaẓam*, 62-64.



by obituaries for each year in his 7th/13th century chronicle *Mir'at al-zamān fī ta'rikh al-a'yan*, and was followed by many other historians across the Islamic world, where it became standard practice to incorporate all types of people.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the content of these obituaries often includes the same types of information as are found in entries to explicitly biographical dictionaries.<sup>41</sup>

Although the contents of the roughly 520 obituaries in *al-Uqūd* vary, they primarily begin with the phrase »in this year, passed away« (*fī hādhihi al-sanna tuwuffiya*) to establish the temporal framework and mortuary context of the report. Next, an initial descriptor for the individual is provided. For the most part, these include, from most to least frequent, *faqīh* (jurist), *qāḍī* (judge), *amīr* (military leader), *shaykh* (a Sufi, or occasionally, tribal, leader) and *ṭawāshī* (palace eunuch). This does not preclude the person from taking on multiple roles in his or her lifetime, as often, for example, a *faqīh* may take up a judgeship later in life or a *qāḍī* may provide teaching or engage in other intellectual activities. However, the rest of the contents of the biographies often take on a pattern that extend from these particular descriptors, demonstrating that they appear to function as familiarly coded, externally ascribed identifications for the individuals and were not intended to portray their more complex, multi-dimensional and over-lapping identities and lives. From here, after the full name is given, there is much more variation in the details provided for each individual. These may include, for example, his or her date and place of birth, tribal or geographical association, family including spouses and children, venerable qualities, career activities or accomplishments, movement within, into or out of South Arabia, notable colleagues or teachers as well as interactions with court officials including the sultans themselves, such as appointments to offices or sentencing to punishment. Finally, the obituary often then ends with the exact or approximate day and month of death and with the phrase: »May God almighty have mercy on him« (*rahimahu Allāh ta'ālā*). Overall, the obituaries can vary considerably in length due to the expansion of any of these parts or the addition of other elements, such as elegiac poems or anecdotes. Often the best examples of these supplementary elements come from the obituaries of the Rasūlid sultans themselves, which are found after the reports of their deaths at the end of their reigns. Some of these, partly in consequence of these additions, become the longest found in *al-Uqūd*. This is, however, to be expected considering these seven men are the central focus of the political community of the Rasūlid Sultanate.

Returning to other types of individuals found in these biographies, when gathered into categories according to their content, the most frequent in descending order include: religio-legalist (*faqīh-qāḍī*), military-administrator (*amīr-malik*), Sufi shaykh (*shaykh*), household eunuch (*ṭawāshī*) and female member of the Rasūlid family. Because these are the types of individuals al-Khazrajī most often chose to represent the members of the political community of the Rasūlid Sultanate, a summary of the general content of their entries will be provided to highlight the type of criteria employed to demonstrate their significance.

40 Guo, *Mamluk Historiographical Studies*, 31-32. Guo argues that this development was initially associated with the ›Syrian school‹ of Arabic historiography in the late medieval period and thus more affiliated with ›ulama‹ historians than with the military elite, as was mainly the case in Egypt.

41 For a review of the general contents and structures found in the Islamic tradition of biographical dictionaries, see, for example, Hafsi, *Recherches I*; *idem*, *Recherches II*; Khalidi, *Islamic Biographical Dictionaries*; al-Qāḍī, *Biographical Dictionaries*; Young, *Arabic Biographical Writing*. Recent studies on Arabic biographical collections of the late medieval period include, e.g., Gharaibeh, *Narrative Strategies*; Romanov, *Algorithmic Analysis*.

The most frequent type by far were the religio-legalists, primarily comprising jurists-prudents (*fuqahā*) and judges (*quḍā*). This category is focused especially on the intellectual chains between students and teachers, attributes of goodness and knowledge, the production or study of specific works and appointments to positions in mosques and madrasas as they moved throughout or beyond Yemen. For example, here is a typical but content-rich obituary:

[In this year], *al-faqīh al-ṣāliḥ al-fāḍil* ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Abī al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad b. As‘ad al-Khaṭṭābī passed away. He was a clever *faqīh*, and a contemporary of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥassan al-Aṣābī. He studied *fiqh* with Muḥammad b. Maḍmūn and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jadīl. He was appointed to judgeships in al-Suḥūl, al-Muṣhayraq, and Waḥāḍa. He lived in the village of al-Ja‘āmī, in which the imam Zayd al-Fā‘ishī was living. When he married his offspring, he then went to Hudāfa and he married into the progeny of al-Haytham of the people of al-Hudāfa, who have Arab origins, which are called: Banū Khaṭṭāb, living in Ḥāzat al-Qahma. He passed away in Hudāfa in the mentioned village.<sup>42</sup>

The next most frequent category of the obituaries is the military-administrator (*amīr, malik*). The obituaries of the individuals in this group are focused on the characteristic of strength in warfare and on their role in the collection of taxes, the construction of religious buildings or other acts of patronage or charity. They also occasionally contain anecdotes about interactions with the sultan or poetry that they have written. A representative example is:

In this year, *al-amīr al-kabīr* Shujā‘ al-Dīn ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Jalīl b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Taghlabī passed away. He was a senior *amīr*. His origin was his town Jabal Dhakhir. He was wealthy and high-ranking. Most of his wealth was from commerce. He was an *amīr* in the city of Zabīd. He acted as an *amīr* in Aden [...] If pilgrims who were coming on their way back from the hajj passed by a town he was in, he would clothe them and give them what enabled their return to their town. If they were from the town which he was in, he would give them what would assuage the hardship of travel. [Sometimes] people might dress up like pilgrims and come to him, and he would give to them what they needed.<sup>43</sup>

The main contents of obituaries for Sufi *shaykhs* usually consist of their positive attributes, the orders to which they belonged, persons they followed or associated with, travel itineraries, education or other career ambitions and sometimes poetry or anecdotes describing wonders or miracles they performed. Here is an example:

In this year, Shaykh Fāḍil Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasān al-Qudṣī passed away. His father was from a Damascus family and his mother was from Ashkelon. They met in Jerusalem and resided there. He married her and she bore for him this son in 604/1207-8, or it has been said in 606/1209-10. He moved to Umm Ubayda when he was twelve years old and became acquainted with Shaykh Najm al-Dīn, known as al-Akhḍar, who is from the offspring of the righteous Shaykh Aḥmad al-Rifā‘ī. He pledged allegiance and was educated by him. When he saw his maturity,

42 Al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 102.

43 Al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 197-198.

he ordered him to enter Mecca and make the pilgrimage, and then enter Yemen to expand the Rifa'iyya order there.<sup>44</sup> He informed him that he will meet there a man who will benefit him in his religion and mundane affairs. So, he did that. When he entered Yemen, he met *faqih* 'Umar b. Sa'īd al-'Uqaybi. He resided with him in Dhū 'Uqayb for some days in 649/1251-2. 'Umar made him famous and venerated him. Then he gave him a place to reside near him known as al-Mu'ar. Then he moved from there to many places and built many ribats in them for him until the final ribat where he lived was al-Dhuhūb below the city of Ibb. He continued until he passed away after the Rifa'iyya order was spread by him, especially in the area of al-Mikhlaḥ.<sup>45</sup> His death occurred on Friday night when eight days remained of the month of Rabi'/April-May from the mentioned year.<sup>46</sup>

The household eunuch (*ṭawāshī*) category is not very different from the military-administrator, because they often undertook similar tasks. They were frequently more intimately connected to the sultan and his family, however, especially the females.<sup>47</sup> Common parts of their obituaries include positive attributes, which often comprise their military prowess and generosity, relations with the sultanic household and sponsorship of religious building or other forms of charity. A sample obituary is:

In this year, *al-ṭawāshī* Amin al-Dīn Ahyaf al-Mujāhidī passed away. He was a servant who was prudent, strong of mind, recalcitrant, a shedder of blood, lethal, crude, coarse, prudent, resolved, clever, proud, great of prestige, and strong of self. He was courageous and brave in war and a counsellor for the sultan. He served four of the sultans. They are: al-Mu'ayyad, al-Mujāhid, al-Afḍal, and al-Ashraf. He honoured the ulama and respected them. He had noble characteristics and righteous faith. He served as the ruler of Zabid for 15 years, except for a few days. He did not covet the property of people, but rather was pious. He had complete purity. He did not know anything of hypocrisy. However, he was reckless with his sword, which killed many people, correctly and incorrectly. May God pass over [without punishing] him.<sup>48</sup>

The final main category among the obituaries were the women connected to the sultans' households as wives, daughters, sisters and mothers. The main aspects of their obituaries discuss their relationship to the sultans, positive attributes, patronage for the construction and staffing of religious mosques and madrasas with *waqf*, and often elegiac poetry.<sup>49</sup> Here is a brief example:

In this year, *al-ḥurra al-maṣūna* Maryam, daughter of *al-shaykh* al-Shams Ibn al-'Afif and the wife of Sultan al-Muẓaffar passed away. She was among the most knowledgeable of the women, chaste, wise, and intelligent. She [sponsored the construction of] many good structures. Among them is the madrasa in Zabīd, called al-Sābiqiyya. Many of the people call it the madrasa Maryam. It is among the best madrasas. She arranged for it: an imam, muezzin, caretaker, instructor, orphans to learn the Qu'rān, a teacher

44 It literally states: to spread the Rifa'iyya cloak.

45 This placename can also be read as a geographical term (*mikhlaḥ*), meaning the region or territory.

46 Al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 303. Which month of Rabi' is not specified in the text edition.

47 For more information on the relationship between Rasūlid women and eunuchs, see Moorthy-Kloss, *Eunuchs*.

48 Al-Khazrajī, *al-'Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 699-700.

49 For more information on the involvement of women in practices of patronage, see Sadek, *Rasūlid Women*.

for the *fiqh* of the *madhhab* of imam al-Shāfi‘, may God be pleased with him, a tutor, and students. She established a good waqf to support their maintenance. She built in Ta‘izz a madrasa in al-Maghriba in a neighborhood called al-Humayrā’. She established a good waqf for it. She has a madrasa in Dhū ‘Uqayb – it is the one she is buried in – and Dār Mudayf. Her passing away was in Jibla in Jumāda I in the mentioned year. May God almighty have mercy on her.<sup>50</sup>

Altogether, encompassing a broad swath of traits and activities, these different types of obituaries demonstrate the variety of ways a person may be distinguished and valued within the political community of the Rasūlid sultanate. Nonetheless, examination of the quantities of these types over time reveals a trend that involves the religio-legalist category of obituary being the most prevalent for the first six sultans but largely dropping off in proportion in favour of other types during the reign of al-Ashraf Ismā‘īl. This provokes the questions of how and why the obituaries from the years of this reign differ from what precedes them.

### *The Untethered Writing of al-Khazrajī on Life and Death*

After the reports of the chronicle section of al-Janadī’s *al-Sulūk* ended in 1330/730, al-Khazrajī no longer had any texts upon which to base his writing and so was free to construct and fill it of his own accord. Initially, for the rest of the reign of al-Mujāhid and that of the following al-Afḍal, much of the content and style of the event reports appear similar to what came before, although their length and quantity does lessen. Two notable exceptions are a report about the premature birth of a child with uncommon features and another about the disappearance of a corpse from a grave.<sup>51</sup> At the outset of the description of the reign of al-Ashraf Ismā‘īl, however, a new way of presenting the actions of the sultan emerges.

One of the first features that becomes noticeable in al-Khazrajī’s writing for this period is that the reports generally continue to get shorter and appear to follow something more akin to a cyclical itinerary of activities in which the sultan took part, evoking sometimes new or more intense aspects of his rulership: repeated visits to the palm-groves outside of Zabīd – sometimes for an inventory or tax collection – many more receptions of guests to the court from all over Yemen and beyond, increased reports of deliveries of tax revenues, gifts or horses to the sultan and precise descriptions of his travel routes. Also, there are often decrees regarding a reduction in the prices or taxes for the general population, which either reflect the more difficult economic reality of the period or are intended to highlight the generosity of the sultan.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, every year it is reported when the hajj leaves and arrives as well as in which city the sultan fasts during Ramadan. There is also a large increase in reports

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50 Al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 468.

51 Al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 587-88, 625-626.

52 Al-Khazrajī does not hesitate to compliment the sultan, e.g., on his clemency when releasing a prisoner from jail; al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 685-686.

about deadly natural disasters such as fires, floods, locusts and earthquakes along with other natural phenomena, often relating to the stars. Furthermore, he incorporates primary documents into his writing, such as the previously cited letter from India and another one from Mecca,<sup>53</sup> while also utilising new historiographical tropes, such as a report on the dreams of the sultan about visiting with Muḥammad, 'Umar, Abū Bakr and 'Alī for the apparent purpose of underscoring his antagonism towards the Zaydi imam.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, al-Khazrajī also presents reports about the visitation of unusual graves, perhaps reflecting a renewed interest of his, or the community in general, in funerary remains or the commemoration of the dead.<sup>55</sup> The first is reminiscent of stories from the earlier 4th/10th century work by the Yemeni polymath al-Hamdānī about the exploration of ancient tombs and their contents.<sup>56</sup> It describes a group examining the corpse of a man covered in extravagant clothing and with a body that appears completely preserved except for wounds exposing how he was killed. The region's inhabitants concluded this to be the grave of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, but al-Khazrajī comments that he believes the deceased had been an ancient scholar or Himyarite king. A second report describes the grave of a woman who had remained on hajj in Mecca for seven years and now the stone slab upon the grave sways back and forth, attracting crowds, which include not only al-Khazrajī but also local elites and the sultan himself.<sup>57</sup>

Along with these changes in the event reports, al-Khazrajī's approach to writing about the recently deceased alters as well.<sup>58</sup> While some obituaries continue to follow the formulaic content described in the previous section, others are now severely abbreviated, especially towards the end of the reign, even when longer entries are found in al-Khazrajī's biographical collection.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, in the most extreme scenario, the content of an obituary may solely comprise a few lines listing the admirable attributes or teachers of the deceased. Moreover, obituary reports also begin to appear in the chronological context of their occurrence rather than placed at the end.<sup>60</sup> As a result, they come more to resemble death reports among other occurrences in the year rather than a historiographical device designated for reporting on the lives of notable individuals. This placement even applies to longer obituaries, such as the extensive entry on the wife of al-Ashraf Ismā'īl.<sup>61</sup> But even here the report is interspersed with information about the mourning of the sultan rather than solely concentrating on aspects of her life. In fact, descriptions of the death or the funerary ceremony afterwards also become more frequent and the central focus of the reports, such as in an obituary for the son of the sultan.

53 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 749-750.

54 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 747-748. Here, again, al-Khazrajī compliments the sultan, whose dream of good-tidings would not occur to anyone else but him.

55 There is also a report on a sultanic decree that prohibits women from following funeral processions and wailing over the dead as well as declaring that their graves should not be covered with a textile; al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 838. This focus on stipulating funerary protocols, however, is not entirely new as the son of al-Mu'ayyad also gave specific instructions to his father for his burial, such as no horse sacrifices over his grave, although al-Mu'ayyad only followed some of them; al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 462-463.

56 For an analysis of these reports, see Mahoney, *Medieval Reports*.

57 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 827.

58 This pattern, however, also is present for some *amīr* obituaries during the reign of al-Afḍal, e.g., in the years 766/1364-1365 and 771/1369-1370; al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 647, 661.

59 For example, the two entries for Rāḍī al-Dīn Abū Bakr b. al-Haddād in *al-Uqūd* (al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 821) and *Ṭirāz* (ed. al-'Abbādi *et al.*, 2385).

60 For example, the year 795/1392-1393 contains biographies in the middle and at the end (al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 770-773).

61 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 774-777.

On Saturday, the 22nd of Rajab from this year, *mawlānā al-malik* al-Fā'iz, son of *mawlānā al-sultān al-malik* al-Ashraf passed away. He was the oldest of his children. He was intelligent, possessing patience and devout tranquility. May God almighty have mercy on him. He was buried beside his mother in the reported tomb. All of the people of Zabid of all kinds and the rest of the military attended his burial. A number of quadrupeds were sacrificed upon his grave. The recitation upon him was for seven days and was completed at the end of the month of Rajab.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, other obituaries are almost entirely devoid of the formulaic types of information and patterns of the earlier obituaries and instead describe other more personal aspects of their lives. Here are two obituaries of Sufis whose deaths occurred within a very short time of each other. For the most part they do not conform to the standard criteria of a capsule biography but rather appear as literary micro-stories.

On 16 Shawwāl 795/25 August 1393, *al-faqīh* Muḥammad b. Shāfi' passed away. He was a companion of *al-shaykh* al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl b. Ibrāhīm al-Jabartī. He attended on that day a listening session (*samā'*) for the poor. When the singer (*mughannī*) performed, he became impassioned. He rose from his spot and sat beside the singer for an hour. Then he threw himself upon the singer and embraced him for an hour until his strength abated and he fainted. They left him for an hour, only to then uncover his face and find him dead. He was a benevolent man, striving to fulfill the needs of the people. He loved bestowing happiness upon them. His house was a shelter for whoever wanted among the poor. He did not have a son or a wife. In his house, there were approximately 30 cats, both male and female. He would feed and look after them. May God almighty have mercy on him.<sup>63</sup>

On 21 Shawwāl 795/30 August 1393, Abū Bakr al-Silāsili passed away. He was a man among the people of Zabid. He lived the life of an ascetic. He accompanied the Sufi and exerted himself (*jāhada*). He would wander until he threw off his clothes and then walk in the city naked with nothing on, circulating through the streets and pathways like that. If someone were to put a robe or shirt on him, he would not keep it on for more than one day and discard it. He continued like that until the mentioned date. When it was the night of the 21st/30th of that month, he arrived at his sister's house in the city. He knocked on the door, and when they opened it, they found that he had thrown himself on the ground. So, they carried him into the house. He gestured for the bed, and they placed him on it. He spent the night with them there on that bed. When the morning came, he was dead. He was buried in the cemetery of Bāb al-Qartab, close to the gate. A large collection of people of Zabid attended his funeral. The ruler of Zabid and his leaders attended. He was not ill before that night. God knows best. May God have mercy on him.<sup>64</sup>

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62 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 784.

63 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 771.

64 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 771-772.

A change can also be perceived in those who are seen as important enough to be memorialised, a choice that al-Ashraf Ismā'īl himself would have had at least some influence over in the creation of this work. There is a clear trend away from the more religio-legal elements of the court and towards other individuals in or associated with it. These include not just the representatives that the sultan chose to serve him in the provinces (*amīr*, *malik*) or in his households (*tawāshī*).<sup>65</sup> Instead, it also comprised more unusual personal figures in his entourage beyond his family members,<sup>66</sup> such as a Jewish doctor who arrived accompanying a gift from Egypt.<sup>67</sup> But perhaps the most extraordinary notice is for a horse named Ṣa'ūd, whom al-Ashraf Ismā'īl mourned, shrouded and buried.<sup>68</sup> However, while these figures may reveal more intimate sides to the sultan and his persona, they appear to stray from the established criteria for the selection of exceptional individuals from within the political community of the sultanate. This provokes the more general question regarding the historical writing of this reign compared to that of the previous sultans. Because it was written during the same time-period in which the events actually occurred, enough distance may not yet have accumulated in order for the broader notions of a collective memory and a more idealised form of political community to develop. Nonetheless, these persons may still be conceived of as part of the community that is shepherded by the sultan as he concomitantly protects and unites them to maintain his ideal rulership.

### Conclusion

This case-study has examined the changes in the ways obituaries in *al-Uqūd* relate to the political agenda of the work's main narrative promoting Rasūlid rulership over South Arabia. Little is known about the reception of *al-Uqūd* beyond its mention in some biographies of al-Khazrajī or al-Ashraf Ismā'īl and evidence of its position within the Yemeni historiographical tradition of transmission via copying or paraphrasing. Al-Khazrajī used, in part, previously written biographies and chronographies by other authors in the compilation of his text; in turn, demonstrating its role as a historiographical work, information from some of *al-Uqūd*'s reports is found in later bibliographic compilations and chronicles, such as: the 9th/15th-century collections of *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ ahl al-sīdq wa-al-ikh̄lās*, *Ṭabaqāt ṣūlahā' al-Yaman*, and *Tuḥfat al-zaman fī tārikh al-Yaman*<sup>69</sup>; the 10th/16th-century

65 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 699-700, 738, 753.

66 Other than the sultan's wife and son, there are additional obituaries for his mother and younger son; al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 689-690, 820.

67 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 838.

68 al-Khazrajī, *al-Uqūd*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 820. This love of horses may extend, in part, from his grandfather, al-Mujāhid, who wrote a book about them; al-Mujāhid, *al-Aqwāl*, ed. Al-Jabbūri.

69 al-Sharjī, *al-Khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī; al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat*, ed. al-Ḥibshī; al-Burayhī, *Ṣūlahā'*, ed. al-Ḥibshī.

collection of *Ta'rikh thaghr 'Adan*<sup>70</sup>; the 9th/15th-century chronicle *al-Kitāb al-Zāhirī fī ta'rikh al-dawla al-rasūliyya fī al-yaman*<sup>71</sup>; the 10th/16th-century *Qurrat al-Uyūn bi-Akhhbār al-Yaman al-maymūn*.<sup>72</sup> Following along the same historiographic lines as other Arabic chronicles during this period, which lauded their rulers through a combination of chronography and biography, *al-'Uqūd* was very much of its time in providing statements of political strength to whichever domestic or foreign audience took them up.<sup>73</sup>

In *al-'Uqūd*, this mood is immediately established by an extensive prologue containing an origin story that portrays the Rasūlids to be carrying out the task of defending South Arabia, which was allotted to their ancestors by the region's primordial ruler Sabā', to whom they are connected via a false genealogy that depicts this Turkmen family as originally possessing roots in South Arabia. Further methods of promoting legitimacy at work in this text seek to establish the Rasūlid sultans as true Muslim rulers in both the chronicles and their obituaries: they are perceived to be legitimate because they possess the attributes of what was thought to make up good rulers, fulfilling both their religious and military obligations. The biographies of the other individuals within the sultanate's political community also contain this same sort of exhibition of the characteristics and actions that make, for example, a notable Sufi shaykh or household eunuch. Altogether, this writing about lives and deaths constitutes a political act whereby the obituaries collectively serve to construct a vision of the political community of the Rasūlid Sultanate, for which the sultan is focused on both establishing just rule in the command of God and uniting his people together in safety and purpose. From this perspective, *al-'Uqūd* becomes almost a playground for al-Khazrajī to work with different historiographical genres, including origin stories, genealogy, chronography, biography and even metaphorical burial uncovering texts. Through his manipulation of these various genres, he succeeds in producing a cohesive work of historiography that persuasively argues for the strength and righteousness of the Rasūlid sultans in their pursuit of divinely sanctioned dominance over South Arabia.

Furthermore, focusing on the framework and contents of the individual biographic entries themselves provides another layer of analysis beyond the pure teleology communicated in the overall text's ideology of rulership. Most of the obituaries follow a similar formula, but once there are no longer sources upon which to base his historical writing al-Khazrajī's authorial voice becomes clearer. The obituaries become shorter, more interspersed with the other reports and there is more of an emphasis on either the death or burial of the individual. Moreover, the types of lives described move beyond the standard categories of the previous dynasties and reveal a more private side of rulership, even if they do not appear to qualify as ideal representations of persons belonging to the political community of the sultanate. Thus, while this work served the highly ideological purpose of supporting the legitimacy of the Rasūlid dynasty, in the end it also became a nuanced personal project through which al-Ashraf Ismā'īl was able to communicate what was of special importance to him and his family.

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70 Bā Makhrama, *Ta'rikh*, ed. al-Hamīd.

71 al-Maṣrī, *al-Kitāb*, ed. al-Ḥibshī.

72 Ibn al-Dayba', *Qurrat*, ed. al-Akwa'.

73 There was an increase in elite and non-elite readership of Arabic documents in Egypt and Syria beginning in the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries; Hirschler, *Written Word*.



*Acknowledgements*

This article has been written within the context of the project »Visions of Community: Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (400-1600 CE)« with financial support from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): F42, as well as the project »The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate II: Historiography, Political Order and State Formation in Fifteenth-Century Egypt and Syria« (UGent, 2017-21), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Consolidator Grant agreement No 681510). I would like to thank the workshop participants, my project team members, and other readers who have made comments on previous versions of this paper.

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