

1. Defining the ‘*Ayyārs*

Indeed, without [the] aid [of historical cross-examination], every time the historian turned his attention to the generations gone by, he would become the inevitable prey of the same prejudices, false inhibitions, and myopias which had plagued the vision of those same generations ... Even those texts ... which seem the clearest and the most accommodating will speak only when they are properly questioned ...

– Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*

The ‘*ayyārs*, one of the most prominent paramilitary groups of the medieval Eastern Islamic world, affected the larger course of Islamic history to a far greater extent than has hitherto been acknowledged by modern scholars. Yet, despite the central role the ‘*ayyārs* played in some of the major developments of classical Islamic civilization, they have been not only thoroughly neglected historiographically but, worse, misunderstood. Traditionally, the ‘*ayyārūn*¹ are generally familiar to scholars from two contexts: as warriors on the side of the Caliph al-Amīn in the Fourth Fitna (811-813), the civil war between the sons of Hārūn al-Rashid;² and as the founders of a dynasty (the Ṣaffārid) ruling over a vast realm stretching from the Hindu Kush to the borders of Iraq.³ Although the phenomenon of an ‘*ayyār* kingdom soon passed, the ‘*ayyār* bands themselves continued to play a pivotal role in the politics of the time, across the entire eastern Islamic world, over the course of the ninth through the eleventh centuries. In fact, ‘*ayyārī*/‘*iyāra* was one of the most characteristic social phenomena of the classical Islamic world.

Thus, for generations scholars have encountered in their sources various people and groups to whom the term “‘*ayyār*” is applied, and have not known quite what to make of them. They were only too glad to follow without much question in the footsteps of the earliest nineteenth century scholars who first dealt with the problem, so that they could then get on with what they considered to be the more important research that the ‘*ayyārs*, in typical fashion, had so rudely and unexpectedly interrupted.

¹ The Persian and Arabic plural forms of the word will be used in accordance with the primary source context in which the ‘*ayyārs* appear; that is, ‘*ayyārūn* will be employed when the primary source is in Arabic and ‘*ayyārān* when the source is in Persian.

² Contrary to popular belief, this was not their first historical appearance, which occurred, rather, in Sīstān; *vide infra*, Chapter Two.

³ On the ‘*ayyār* origins of the Ṣaffārids see Anon., *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī Bahār, Tehran, 1935, pp. 193, 194-195. See also C. E. Bosworth, *The History of the Ṣaffārids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz*, Costa Mesa, CA, 1994, p. 72.

In essence, Theodor Nöldeke's brief "sketch" of Ya'qūb b. al-Layth, the first Ṣaffārid ruler and most famous historical *ʿayyār*, has defined the nature of *ʿayyārī* for all subsequent generations of Islamologists until the present.⁴ In his article Nöldeke, having embraced Ibn Khallikān's vehemently negative view of Ya'qūb b. al-Layth, assumed that the word *ʿayyār* must be some sort of derogatory epithet. In addition, since contemporary nineteenth-century linguistic usage of the term in Arabic and Persian did indeed connote "brigand" or "outlaw," Nöldeke may also simply have anachronistically applied the modern meaning to Ya'qūb's time.

There are several problems, however, with letting Nöldeke and his followers remain the last word on the subject, not the least of them being that Nöldeke's definition was more a makeshift attempt to get past the unknown word, *ʿayyār*, than a considered and researched definition. More importantly, a word does not necessarily retain the same denotation over the span of a thousand years. The gravest problem with Nöldeke's *ʿayyār*-as-bandit paradigm, though, is that his source base was extremely limited; not only had many works not yet been discovered, but Nöldeke also did not read Persian, nor did he attempt to broaden his source base in order to try to find a greater diversity of literary contexts (for instance, belles-lettres or repentance literature) when attempting to derive a contextual definition of the word *ʿayyār*.

As a result of Nöldeke's article, the role of the *ʿayyārs* has traditionally been viewed by scholars as a negative one. Bosworth, for instance, writes of *ʿayyārān* in the 1030s as "brigands who were carrying on a guerilla warfare against the representatives of Ghaznavid authority."⁵ Even more forcefully, he refers to *ʿiyāra* as "turbulent mob behaviour, lawlessness and banditry,"⁶ and to the *ʿayyārs* as a "lawless and anti-social element."⁷ Lapidus states that "The *ʿayyārūn* of Iraq and Iran were often gangs of criminals who sometimes served as strong-arm men for local notables, quarters and religious sects, sometimes acting as criminal predators ...,"⁸ while Lambton asserts that "The general tendency was for the *ʿayyārs*

⁴ Theodor Nöldeke, "Yakub the Coppersmith and His Dynasty," *Sketches from Eastern History*, tr. John Sutherland Black, Beirut, 1963, pp. 176-206. His mistaken evaluation of Ya'qūb seems to have been based on his interpretation of only two lone sources – Ibn al-Athīr's chronicle and Ibn Khallikān's fiercely anti-Ṣaffārid sketch, in his biographical dictionary, of the dynasty's founder; yet Nöldeke's rather impromptu explanation of the term set the definitional framework for all subsequent writings touching on the subject. Nöldeke's view of *ʿayyārs*, however, was more nuanced than those of some of his successors and followers; he, for example, realized that they had originally formed as "volunteer bands ... for defence against the Kharijites." (p. 177)

⁵ C. E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran 994-1040*, Beirut, 1973, p. 90.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 167.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 168.

⁸ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 178.

to degenerate into bands of robbers ... By Saljūq times the *‘ayyār* were mostly undisciplined mobs who took up arms, robbed and murdered the population, and spread terror among them when the opportunity offered.”⁹ In short, the general tendency has been to view the *‘ayyārs* as the medieval Islamic equivalent of some sort of gang-like organization.

Given their extraordinary importance and ubiquity in the literature of the pre-Mongol period, it is also remarkable that so little research has been undertaken on the subject. The scattered attempts to define the *‘ayyārs* have come about somewhat fortuitously; researchers whose aim lay elsewhere were forced to deal, however briefly, with this important phenomenon because it persistently kept cropping up in their sources. In fact, until very recently Claude Cahen and Simha Sabari were virtually the only scholars whose focus and primary research interest lay in *‘ayyārs* – and even in their case, *‘ayyārs* interested them not *per se* but rather as one of a number of manifestations of what they axiomatically took to be “popular movements” or “urban phenomena.”

What has been specifically lacking is a thorough examination of the *‘ayyār* phenomenon in and of itself, separate from other phenomena designated by other terms that researchers have hitherto groundlessly assumed are equivalent to the term *‘ayyār*.¹⁰ A thorough examination, moreover, should study the specific phenomenon represented by the term *‘ayyār* across the chronological and geographical spans of its occurrence in order to ascertain what the phenomenon actually meant; whether that meaning changed over time (i. e. did the word possess the same meaning in the ninth century that it did in the eleventh); and whether the word *‘ayyār* signified something different in different regions of the Islamic empire. This examination should also involve a source-critical analysis to see if different kinds of sources contain different portrayals of *‘ayyārs* (e. g. if there are differences between Persian and Arabic accounts; chronicles and more popular literature; *‘ulamā’*-generated writings and those composed in courtly or other circles, and so forth).

Until now, virtually all scholarly inquiry into the subject has been based wholly on Arabic annals, dating largely from a specific time and place and generated by a specific milieu: namely, the Baghdadi religious clerics (*‘ulamā’*) of the late-eleventh through fourteenth centuries.¹¹ This is despite, as von Grunebaum

⁹ A. K. S. Lambton, “The Internal Structure of the Saljuq Empire,” *The Cambridge History of Iran. Vol 5: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J. A. Boyle, Cambridge, 1968, p. 274.

¹⁰ M. R. Najjār, *Ḥikāyāt al-shuṭṭār wa’l-‘ayyārīn fī’l-turāth al-‘Arabī*, Kuwait, 1989, is a particularly egregious example of the unsupported conflation of terms.

¹¹ The only earlier (i. e. pre-late tenth century) sources which appear to have been consulted are the highly enigmatic accounts of Ṭabarī and Mas‘ūdī treating what is traditionally viewed as the first recorded appearance of the *‘ayyārīn* of Baghdad during the fourth fitna. Mohsen Zakeri’s work (which we shall be discussing presently) constitutes an exception to this rule.

has already pointed out, the inherently antagonistic posture of these clerics toward the *‘ayyārs*.¹² After uncritically adopting the definition derived from the censorious epithets of these later clerical sources, researchers projected this theoretical definition of *‘ayyārs* forwards and backwards in time to any other *‘āyyār* manifestation they subsequently encountered.

This is one explanation of why Nöldeke’s negative conception of the *‘ayyārs* has proven tenacious, despite the perceptions of some of the scholars who have encountered *‘ayyārs* in the course of their research that there must have been a deeper dimension to the whole phenomenon. Lambton and Mottahedeh, for example, view the phenomenon as an expression of *‘asabiyya* or corporate feeling.¹³ Sabari, whose work constitutes the lengthiest treatment before Zakeri’s, states that the *‘ayyār* movement began over religious questions in the ninth and tenth centuries. However, Sabari holds that the phenomenon became in the tenth century a sort of paradigmatic Marxist “people’s liberation movement” whose main objective was to operate against the twin oppressive forces of landowners and merchants on the one hand and state functionaries and the military on the other.¹⁴

[*‘Iyāra*] represented, in its motivations and its activities, one of the manifestations of the antagonism among urban classes, and served as an expression of the spirit of revolt on the part of the poor layer of the city’s population, deprived of goods and rights ... *‘Iyāra* therefore was the revolt of the urban poor against the existing order, a revolt ... that was expressed in action and not in doctrine.¹⁵

Yet this theory – and particularly her insistence that the *‘ayyārūn* were a solely lower class phenomenon – sits uneasily with some of the facts Sabari herself has pointed out. As Sabari notes,

¹² Von Grunebaum cautions, in this context, of “the spiteful unreliability of the historical accounts.” (G. Von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History 600-1258*, tr. Katherine Watson, New York, 1996, p. 104.)

¹³ Lambton, *op. cit.* , p. 273; Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, revised ed. , London, 2001, pp. 157-158.

¹⁴ Thus, she writes of *‘iyāra* and *‘ayyār* activities as part of supposed “general protests” over “the iniquities of the existing order ... This fundamental characteristic of the popular struggle was the inevitable result of the tyrannical and military character of the regime.” (Simha Sabari, *Mouvements populaires à Bagdad à l’époque ‘Abbasside IXe-XIe siècles*, Paris, 1981, p. 72) She returns to this idea again: “ ... From its beginnings, this movement was conspicuous above all for its combative nature and popular solidarity for the defense of Baghdad and the Caliphate; from the beginning ... of the tenth century, it is the socio-political element that dominates. It appears that it was during this period that the movement crystallised. From that point onwards, through al-Burjūmī in the eleventh century until Ibn Bakran in the twelfth century, there were no marked changes in the tendencies of [*‘ayyār*] activity, although one can establish a certain evolution.” (p. 97) Sabari is one of the few scholars to have given any consideration to the developmental aspect.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

There were likewise *ashraf* among the *‘ayyārūn*, descendants of the family of the Prophet – that is, if we suppose that the terms “Abbāsīd” and “Alīd” designate familial origin. This could explain the existence of a certain pride among the *‘ayyārūn*.¹⁶

Sabari also wonders about the demonstrated ties between *‘ayyārūn* and high-ranking people; she attempts to explain this by hypothesizing that perhaps officialdom received a cut of the *‘ayyār* loot.¹⁷ Perhaps her surmise is correct; but certain texts we shall be examining below, in conjunction with her own evidence, suggest, rather, that the *‘ayyārūn* comprised more than lowborn rabble. Indeed, this idea of their base social origin (which was originally Massignon’s) has been seriously challenged by Cahen. He points out that the *‘ayyār* bands could not have been composed entirely of the disinherited; there are too many cases, even in Baghdad, where we know them to have been middle class professionals or even notables.¹⁸

The second problem with Sabari’s work is her assumption that “the *‘ayyār* movement was not coloured by any particular politico-religious ideology.”¹⁹ She notes, however, that whenever the *‘ayyārūn* were Sunni, they appeared to have been “under the political and religious inspiration of Ḥanbalism.”²⁰ The difficulty here arises, first, from the fact that every *‘ayyār* appearance in Baghdad she herself subsequently mentions is apparently related to religion, involving either Sunni-Shi‘ite *fitnas*; a defense of the ‘Abbāsids against perceived menaces of one form or another (e. g. in 251/865 to defend the beleaguered caliph from his Turkish army²¹ and in 334/945 to fight the heterodox Daylamites²²); or a mobilization for the Jihād against the Byzantines.²³

Furthermore, the few cases she adduces of what she maintains to be Shi‘ite *‘ayyārūn* are highly problematic. In one instance she interprets “*‘ayyārūn* ‘Alides” to mean Shi‘ite *‘ayyārs*; but why would Shi‘ite *‘ayyārs* want to pillage the Barāthā mosque, which was a notoriously Shi‘ite shrine (‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was said to have prayed at the site on his way to the battle of Nahrawān)?²⁴ It is far more

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 88.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Cahen, *Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l’Asie musulmane du moyen âge*, Leiden, 1959, p. 53.

¹⁹ Sabari, *op. cit.* p. 90.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 124.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 79.

²² *Ibid.* p. 68.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 80.

²⁴ G. Le Strange, *Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate*, London, 1924, p. 154; Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages*, Detroit, 1970, p. 97. In fact, it was so notorious as a center of Shi‘ite activity that the Caliph al-Muqtadir actually had it razed at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. Although its rebuilding was permitted in 328/940, the mosque continued to be a hotbed of Shi‘ite agitation well into the eleventh century; see, for example, the incident found in ‘Izz al-Dīn Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī’l-ta’rīkh*, ed. Tornberg, Beirut, 1399/1979, vol. 9, pp. 393-394; Abū’l Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam fī ta’rīkh al-mulūk wa’l-*

likely that “Alid” is being employed in this context in its normal sense of “descendants of the Prophet” – who in this case were Sunni ‘*ayyārs*. Moreover, all of the ‘*ayyār* raids in the ongoing Baghdadi internecine civil warfare between Sunnis and Shi‘ites, the *fitnas*, appear to afflict Shi‘ite neighborhoods such as al-Karkh; where the perpetrators are given a specific neighborhood affiliation, it is invariably to outstandingly Sunni neighborhoods such as Bāb al-Baṣra.²⁵ In short, this writer has yet to see convincing evidence that there really was a Shi‘ite ‘*ayyār* phenomenon.

The strong religious element inherent in the ‘*ayyār* phenomenon has been noted by other writers as well, even when they remained committed to the paradigm of the ‘*ayyār*-as-ruffian. Occasionally, these scholars have simply discounted this religious element, as in the case where Barthold holds that Gardīzī’s having employed the term ‘*ayyār* in a particular instance where Muqaddasī is inveighing against certain *mutaṭṭawwi‘a* (volunteer warriors for Islam) is due not to any general equivalence between the two terms, but solely to the unruly nature of the activities in which those particular *mutaṭṭawwi‘a* were engaging.²⁶ That is, Barthold asserts that despite appearances to the contrary, there was not really any equivalence between *ghāzīs*/*mutaṭṭawwi‘a* and ‘*ayyārs*; Gardīzī just applies the term as a derogatory epithet when the *ghāzīs* are behaving badly. In Barthold’s words: “It is not without reason that Gardīzī replaces the terms quoted above by the word ‘*ayyār* (‘scoundrel’).”

Mottahedeh discusses the ‘*ayyārūn* only within the context of factionalism generally; while he mentions the religious elements of many of the *fitnas* he dismisses the religious motivation as insufficient explanation for factionalism, stating that:

The *ahdāth* and ‘*ayyārūn* ... played an important role in the local factionalism that was nearly universal ... Factions often had a religious identification. In Baghdad, for example, the two great factions were the Shi‘ites and the Sunnis; in many places they were based on schools of religious law. Nevertheless, there are enough places with non-religious factions to indicate that the law school or sect was not the true basis of faction, even if it provided a convenient focus for factional loyalties ...²⁷

umam, ed. M. ‘A. ‘Aṭā *et alii*, Beirut, 1412/1992, vol. 15, p. 198; and Ismā‘il b. ‘Umar b. Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa’l-nihāya*, Aleppo, no date, vol. 12, p. 30. There is another, even clearer incident where Sunnis plunder Barāthā during Sunni-Shi‘ite riots (Ibn al-Jawzī, *loc. cit.* pp. 330-331). This is discussed at greater length *infra*, Chapter Eight, including Shi‘ite *faḍā‘il* of the mosque.

²⁵ Sabari, *op. cit.* p. 80; see also *infra*, Chapter Eight; and D. Tor, *The Status of the Shi‘a in Iraq in the Late Buyyid Period*, Jerusalem, Unpublished M. A. Thesis submitted to The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996.

²⁶ V. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, tr. T. Minorsky, ed. C. E. Bosworth, Taipei, 1968, p. 215.

²⁷ Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, pp. 158-159. It would be interesting to see if the ‘*ayyārūn* were as significant a force in towns in which factional warfare was non-religiously based. The issue of factionalism is more extensively treated by him in his review of Rich-

Cahen himself details numerous incidents where there is obviously a religious element to ‘*ayyār*’ activities. He quotes Muqaddasī as saying that in the Iranian town Nasā, “All is ‘*ayyār*, such that ‘*asabiyya* [between Sunnis on the one hand and Shi‘ites on the other] has ruined it.”²⁸ Elsewhere he notes the difficulty in drawing “a very firm line of demarcation among ‘*ayyārūn*, *ghāzīs*, and *mutṭawwi‘a*.”²⁹ One of the most striking cases Cahen mentions is of certain ninth century individuals – Nūḥ of Nishapur the ‘*ayyār* and Aḥmad b. Khidrawayh the Sufi [d. 240/855].³⁰ This particular reference is important not only because it brings into relief the close ties between ‘*ayyārān* and sufis, and by implication the religious affiliations of ‘*ayyār* groups; but also because one of the people Cahen mentions in this context is a great merchant – another unlikely candidate for a lower-class brigand.³¹

C. E. Bosworth is another scholar who has perceived that there must have been some kind of religious component or motivation to the ‘*ayyārān*. For instance, even at the time when he was influenced by Cahen’s earlier writings, Bosworth nevertheless noted that ‘*ayyārān* functioned as *ghāzīs* and *mutaṭawwi‘a*, volunteer fighters for the faith, both in Sistān against the Khawārīj and on the borders against non-Muslims.³² Among the many different statements he has made about the ‘*ayyārs* (not all of which suggest the same view, since his conception of this phenomenon developed over time), he defines the ‘*ayyārān* as a group which basically professed one thing (the ideal of religious warfare) but actually – and seemingly invariably – spent its time engaged in an entirely different fashion: “... the ‘*ayyārs* and their leaders the *sarhangs*, active in the towns of Sistān as ostensible upholders of the Sunni cause ... often behav[ed] more like brigands.”³³

In his later writing, Bosworth became more convinced of the *ghāzī* element of the ‘*ayyārān*, although he still tried to reconcile this with the bandit image:

The aetiology of ‘*ayyārī* is perhaps clearer for Sistān and Bust than for other parts of the Islamic world. There, the ‘*ayyārs* were in origin anti-Khārijite vigilantes, ostensibly having the maintenance of the Sunna as their watchword. But since such corporate groupings as ‘*ayyār* bands had no legal or social role assigned to them as such in traditional Is-

ard Bulliet’s *Patricians of Nishapur* (*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 [1975], pp. 491-495).

²⁸ Cahen, *Mouvements populaires*, p. 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 48.

³⁰ This incident is taken from Abū’l Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Hujviri al-Ghaznavi’s *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, ed. V. Zhukovskii, Tehran, 1380. For more on the incident and these figures *vide infra*, Chapter Seven.

³¹ Cahen, *Mouvements populaires*, p. 35. In his *futawwa* article in EI² Cahen says of the ‘*ayyārūn* that they were “clearly humble people, but more exalted people mixed readily with them.”

³² C. E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, pp. 167-168.

³³ Bosworth, *Sistān Under the Arabs: From the Islamic Conquest to the Rise of the Ṣaffārids* (30-250/651-864), Rome, 1968, p. 90.

lamic society, their membership was ill-defined by socio-legal norms and consequently attracted to itself irresponsible and even anti-social characters; hence ‘*ayyār* groups were a turbulent element in the life of such towns as Zarang and Bust and were at times little distinguishable from brigands ... [This] must lie behind the ambivalent attitudes shown towards the ‘*ayyārs* in later Persian literature.³⁴

For much of his career, however, Bosworth appears to have been foremost a disciple of Bāstānī Pārīzī’s view of the ‘*ayyārān* in the East as a sort of local patriotic resistance to outside rulers.³⁵ According to Bosworth, this accounts for the positive characteristics attributed to the ‘*ayyārān* by certain Persian sources. Thus he writes that “... the ‘*ayyārs* were the core of local resistance. As a result, to the author of the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, ‘*ayyārī* is a term of praise, to be equated with *murawwa*.”³⁶ In his more recent writing, though, Bosworth, in light of Cahen’s later ruminations, modified his definition to include “‘strong, resolute man’ ... ‘generous, chivalrous person,’ the equivalent of Arabic *fatā* and Persian *javānmard*.”³⁷

Interestingly enough, the German scholars have not perceived any religious element in the ‘*ayyār* phenomenon. Bertold Spuler, for example, barely mentions *mutaṭawwi’a*, and never mentions ‘*ayyārs*. He, in fact, refers to the former quite fleetingly when discussing the Ṣaffārids and the rise of Ya‘qūb b. al-Layth, writing of:

In Seistan gelang es seit 851/52 von der Burg Qarni(n) bei Zarang aus dem Ja‘qub ibn Laiṭ ... Truppen und freiwillige Glaubenskämpfer (*Mutaṭawwi’a*), die zu Kämpfen gegen die zur Landplage gewordenen Ḥariḡiten und Šurāt (deren Extremisten) dort stationiert waren und die bisher teils Ṭāhir II. , teils aber einem gewissen Šālīḥ (ibn Našīr) al-Mutaṭawwi‘ī und seinem Nachfolger Dirham ibn (Našīr) al-Ḥusain unterstanden hatten, an sich zu ketten.³⁸

Nowhere does Spuler state that *mutaṭawwi’a* and ‘*ayyārūn* are related terms; in fact, he ignores the latter epithet entirely. Again, when writing about military groups, he states the following:

Daneben [die Palast-Wache] bestand ein besonderes ‘Gefolge’ aus Berittenen, die, über die ‘Militär-Bezirke’ des Staates verteilt, in Garnison lagen. Ihr Kommandant hieß *Sipāhsālār* ... Dazu kamen die . (Wächter)-Truppen (vielleicht Festungsbesatzungen?) und religiöse, freiwillige Grenzkämpfer (*Mutaṭawwi’a*, später *Gāzī*’s).³⁹

³⁴ Bosworth, *History of the Ṣaffārids*, *op. cit.* , p. 69. He cites Hanaway’s *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entry as his source of reference.

³⁵ Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Ya‘qūb-e Lays*, Tehran 1344/1965-6, pp. 42-3.

³⁶ Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, *loc. cit.*

³⁷ Bosworth, *Ṣaffārids of Sistan*, *loc. cit.*

³⁸ Bertold Spuler, *Iran in Früh-Islamischer Zeit: Politik, Kultur, Verwaltung und öffentliches Leben zwischen der Arabischen und der Seldschukischen Eroberung 633 bis 1055*, Wiesbaden, 1952, pp. 69-70.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 490. Note that his footnote here merely refers back to Taeschner’s “Islamisches Ordensrittertum zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge,” *Welt als Geschichte* 5, 1938, pp. 382-408.

Another important German scholar who does not see a religious element in the *‘ayyār* phenomenon (although he has noted the chivalric aspect in passing) is Jürgen Paul, who specifically and clearly differentiates between *mutaṭawwi‘a* and *‘ayyārān*. Nowhere does he connect “volunteers” and “religiously motivated groups” with *‘ayyārān*, even when he cites the example of Ya‘qūb al-Šaffār, where the identification would be most apparent. While he is aware of the strong connection between the Sāmānids and religiously motivated volunteer fighters, he does not seem to posit such an ongoing and persistent connection in the Šaffārid case; Paul therefore treats incidents such as the support of the *mutaṭawwi‘a* and *fuqabā’* of Nishapur for ‘Amr b. al-Layth al-Šaffār as mere isolated cases due to reasons other than the identification of the Šaffārid state as *ghāzī/mutaṭawwi‘ī/‘ayyār*.⁴⁰

This non-identification between *mutaṭawwi‘* and *‘ayyār* becomes even clearer in his section on *‘ayyārs*, who are placed in the category of “nicht legitimierte Gewalt: *‘Ayyār-Wesen*.”

‘Ayyār groups appear for the most part as such: they are cognates of robbers, that is, armed groups which were not controlled by any ruler [lit. , lordship=Herrschaft]. “Usurpers” were so named; men who, even if for the most part only for a short time, controlled an area, without having been appointed by an overlord ... Also under them there is a broad spectrum, from “robber-knight” to “social-brigand.”

The “robber-knight” type is perhaps best epitomized in ‘Alī Quhandizī. He had a fortress in the area of Balkh, from which he undertook [his] robberies, attacking villages and caravans. Hardships overtook him [at the hands of] Mas‘ūd the Ghaznavid, who fulfilled his duties as sultan by smoking out the nest ([in the] year 429).⁴¹

Paul did not, however, rest content with the unmodified bandit definition. He realized that, to a certain extent, the *‘ayyārān* must have had, at least occasionally, some kind of respectable state connection; and, second, that the authors of certain sources may have been subject to particular biases in writing about these groups:

There are indications, and that is really the most interesting, that groups described as *‘ayyār* were a military potential above all in rural regions, whose various pretenders could [employ the *‘ayyārān* to] serve themselves, if suitable arrangements were arrived at. It was possibly for this reason, therefore, that these armed villagers were portrayed in the sources as “robbers,” because the authors had both a state-oriented [staatstragende]

⁴⁰ Jürgen Paul, *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler: Ostiran und Transoxanien in vormongolischer Zeit. Beurter Texte und Studien*, Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Band 59, Beirut, 1996, pp. 113-117. See also p. 136, where he clearly demarcates the various groups: “Aus diesem Reservoir [of armed rustics] konnten für verschiedene Zwecke Kämpfer rekrutiert werden. Es steht zu vermuten, daß die soziale Herkunft sowohl vieler gazi – Kämpfer als auch des ‘Massenaufgebots’ (*rağğāla* oder *hašar*), der ‘Freiwilligen’ (*mutṭawwi‘a*) und der ‘jungen Männer’ (*aḥdāt*), aber auch der *‘ayyār*, der ‘Räuber’ unter anderer bewaffnete Haufen, doch recht ähnlich war ...”

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 127.

as well as an urban outlook on things. Occasionally one also encounters state militias in situations in which they [i. e. the militias], even if they did not have to rely on the support of the ‘*ayyār*’ groups, did though call upon [or: enlist] them. At the same time, whether one should therefore go so far as to see in these groups a proper militia is another question.⁴²

On the other hand, Paul does not see any regular connection between *javānmar-dān* and ‘*ayyārān*’.⁴³ Note as well that in contrast to Cahen and others, who have always defined the ‘*ayyārān*’ as an urban element, Paul defines the ‘*ayyārān*’ as a rural peasant element (ein ländliches bewaffnetes Element).⁴⁴ To a large extent, this is due to the difference in source material upon which these scholars based themselves: while Cahen and Sabari were examining Baghdadi Arabic chronicles from primarily the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Paul was basing himself upon the local Persian histories such as *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā*, and so forth.⁴⁵

Again, while holding to his mainly negative image of the phenomenon, Paul, too, realizes that there must also have been an element of chivalry to these bands, at least occasionally:

The image of the ‘*ayyār*’ is in any case not so bad, that they could always be only robbers. They are regarded as brave lads [kühne Burschen]; they have their own code of honour, which approached that of the “knightly” ideal of *javānmardī*; even people who think them miscreants [Missetäter], admire their steadfastness [Standhaftigkeit]. Not only usurpers and figures such as Ya‘qūb are ‘*ayyārs*’, but also rather more legitimate men went through a phase of “errant knighthood,” such as the progenitor of the Sāmānids.⁴⁶

He emphasizes, however, that this does not exclude the possibility of their having been robbers as well: “[Even] if they were so, it should not be ruled out that others – or even the same – groups of the described kind also were frequently robbers as well. As such were the ‘*ayyārs*’ often enough and explicitly described ... It belonged to the tasks of a *shihna*, to do away with them.”⁴⁷

Paul ends on a somewhat ambivalent note; he places all the various “non-legitimized” movements together and then says of them all (*aḥdāth*, *mutaṭawwī‘a*, *du‘ār* and so forth) as one undifferentiated group:

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 128.

⁴³ *Ibid.* There he writes: “Weiter oben begegnete schon der Anführer der ‘jungen Männer’ von Samarkand, der auch als ‘Haupt der ‘*ayyār*’ bezeichnet wird. Das könnte ein Fall sein, wo es doch eine besondere Organisation der ‘*ayyār*’ gegeben hat, unterschieden von einem ‘Massenaufgebot.’”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 130.

⁴⁵ Paul himself, it should be noted, attributes these differences to regional divergence in the phenomenon itself. (*Ibid.* p. 131)

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 129-130.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 130.

Einmal werden natürlich die entsprechenden Gruppen als 'Räuber' und 'Rebellen' bekämpft. Aber das scheint nicht immer die hauptsächliche Form der staatlichen Beschäftigung mit ihnen gewesen zu sein. Es gab eine Reihe von Formen, in denen dies militärische Potential für staatliche Belange eingesetzt werden konnte: etwa für Polizeiaufgaben, im Massenaufgebot, bei der Verteidigung von Städten, als Freiwillige bei Feldzügen, die gegen Nicht-Muslime gerichtet waren oder als gegen Nicht-Muslime gerichtet dargestellt werden konnten.⁴⁸

In short, Paul realizes that these groups, at least sometimes, must have been viewed as legitimate; but he holds that to be the case by exceptional force of circumstance, rather than the inherent nature of these associations, which, in the end, are somewhat fuzzily differentiated from one another.⁴⁹ In summation, although many eminent researchers have been aware that there was more to the *ʿayyār* phenomenon than has yet been explored in the scholarly literature, they, paradoxically, have never challenged the underlying, Nöldeke-inspired assumption of *ʿayyārān* as fundamentally some kind of criminal element.

This brings us to another aspect of the *ʿayyārs* that has – as we have just seen – given pause to even the most ardent proponents of the bandit idea. *ʿAyyārī*, at least from the tenth century onwards, obviously included some ideological element of chivalry, *futuwwa/javānmardī*. While Taeschner was the first to point out this connection,⁵⁰ several other scholars have also noted it. Cahen in particular has grappled repeatedly with this element of the *ʿayyār* phenomenon, in the end reaching the conclusion that these terms were largely fungible. In Cahen's words:

The texts ... make it clear beyond question that many of the *fityān* ... called themselves or were called *ʿayyārūn* ... while many of the *ʿayyārūn* on the other hand called themselves *fityān* or followers of the *futuwwa*. An at least partial equivalency is therefore indisputable, and the only question is to know if this is or is not absolute and, insofar as it is confirmed, to understand its significance.⁵¹

Von Grunebaum, too, writes that "In a manner not yet made clear in detail, the *fityān* and the *ʿayyārān* amalgamated in the ninth century ..."⁵² In fact, he even combines this element with the religious Sunni and holy-warrior aspects:

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 137.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.* pp. 138-139.

⁵⁰ Franz Taeschner, s. v. *ʿAyyār*, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (EI²), where he defines the word to mean, "Literally 'rascal, tramp, vagabond' ... From the ninth to the twelfth century it was the name for certain warriors who were grouped together under the *futuwwa* ... Occasionally, the term is used to mean the same as *fityān*."

⁵¹ S. v. "*Futuwwa*," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. He stated this conclusion elsewhere as well: "Entre paisibles *fityān* ... et les violents *ʿayyārūn* ... on peut se demander quel rapport il y a. Cependant ... des textes non équivoques attestent **que les deux termes sont peut-être toujours et en tous cas souvent employés comme équivalents.**" [Emphasis added] (*Mouvements populaires*, *op. cit.*, p. 251)

⁵² Von Grunebaum, *op. cit.* p. 105.

Futuwwa [chivalry] made contact with Sufism ... one of the most important points of contact was the organized holy war at the frontiers of the *dār al-islām*, and also at the 'inner' frontiers; in Damascus, for instance ... a *futuwwa* organization combated the terror of the Assassins with a counter-terror.⁵³

He admits himself, however, stymied by the "names suggestive of the mob or rabble", such as *ʿayyārs*, which they were given.⁵⁴ One solution, of course, is that there is nothing pejorative in the term *ʿayyār* in the pre-Mongol period – but we shall return to this point presently.⁵⁵

Yet another blow to the brigand theory was dealt by Claude Cahen offhandedly when discussing the question of the *ʿayyārs*' imposition of protection money upon the merchants. He pointedly refers to the *khifāra* and *ḥimāya* "which, following the example of certain great men, they extended over the markets for the sake of the spoils that fell to them." [emphasis added]⁵⁶ This statement is significant because it places our understanding of the more dubious pecuniary activities of the *ʿayyārs* within their specific social milieu. Such an understanding is, of course, crucial for interpreting the significance and meaning of any given social conduct; in one time and place, for instance, eating with one's hands may be *de rigueur*, while in a different culture, it would be considered boorish and ill-bred, and probably indicative of a marginal social standing.

Western medievalists have long perceived the importance of historical context in understanding and interpreting occurrences or actions that are apprehended rather differently by the modern sensibility. Georges Duby, for example, discusses certain behavior which is strikingly evocative of *ʿayyār* activity, but which involves, rather, one of the premier representatives of Western chivalry: William Marshal (c. 1145-1219), the man whom the Archbishop of Canterbury called "the greatest knight that ever lived." We are told that William Marshal robs a monk and the woman with whom he is eloping after William learns that the two are planning to lend their money out at interest in order to earn a livelihood:

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 196. Mohsen Zakeri combines these aspects as well; he writes of *futuwwa*: "The concept came to summarize the moral ideal and standard rule of conduct of, among others ... Muslim 'chivalry' ... urban militias (*ʿayyārān-fityān*), warriors for the faith (*ghāziyīn-mujāhidūn-murābitūn*) ... and even certain brigands." (Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society – The Origins of ʿAyyārān and Futuwwa*, Wiesbaden, 1995, p. 1)

⁵⁴ Particularly in view of the fact that in the twelfth century the *fityān* in Baghdad included the governor as well as members of viziers' and sultans' families!

⁵⁵ Hartmann at least partially recognized this nearly a hundred years ago, when he wrote of Qushayrī's description of an "*ʿayyār shāṭir*" that "both words can be employed with a positive or a negative connotation." (R. Hartmann, "Futuwwa und Malāma," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 72, 1918, p. 195.) The present author intends to show that there was, at least during the period under examination, no dichotomous meaning, but rather one meaning viewed rather differently by two social groups with diverse interests and outlooks: the courtly circle and the clerics.

⁵⁶ Cahen, "Futuwwa," *loc. cit.*

William therefore loots the monk with a clear conscience ... Taking anything more would be 'brigandage.' But this particular restraint seems honourable to him, as to those who for his glory propagated the memory of his good actions. As for the woman, he has not touched her either. He has treated this wicked creature according to the laws of chivalry.⁵⁷

What Duby is suggesting is that we must study the texts and accounts of a specific period and place in order to arrive at their definition of such concepts as "chivalry," "honor" and "brigandage," which may differ sharply from modern notions of these same concepts. In fact, one may even discover, as in Duby's examination of William Marshal, that different social milieux belonging to the very same time and place entertained radically divergent notions of the same concepts. This would seem to be a fairly obvious historiographical point, yet it has been singularly absent from much of the scholarly literature on 'ayyārs until now. To state the case simply: in a medieval society, not everybody who distrains by force is a brigand – on the contrary, apart from brigands, it was, paradoxically, only very elite people who engaged in such activities.

Furthermore, there has been virtually no attention paid to the question of how these definitions changed or developed over time. For, as at least one philologist has pointed out, the form of a word can remain the same over the years or centuries, yet the meaning can alter radically:

... At any moment without any change in phonetics 'the meaning' of a 'word' may change. Quite suddenly (as far as the evidence goes) *yelp*, which meant 'to speak proudly', and was especially used of proud vows (such as a knight vowing to do some dangerous deed), stopped meaning that and became used of the noise of foxes or dogs!⁵⁸

For another brief illustration of the importance of this point, one need look no further than the dramatic changes in meaning undergone within a mere half-century by the word "inverted," which in 1920s English meant "homosexual," and a scant fifty years later conveyed not even a hint of such a meaning. Unfortunately, many of the authors discussed here neglected to examine their evidence chronologically in order to ascertain whether or not the meaning of the word – or the manifestation of the phenomenon – changed over the centuries.

⁵⁷ George Duby, *William Marshal: The Flower of Chivalry*, tr. Richard Howard, New York, 1985, pp. 44-46. There is a very strong parallel with what Cahen noted of the behaviour of Islamic chivalry, the *fityān*: "In fact they freely professed the legitimacy of theft, provided that it was executed with chivalry ..." Cahen, "Tribes, Cities and Social Organization," *The Cambridge History of Iran. Volume IV: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. R. N. Frye, Cambridge, 1975, p. 320. The present author disagrees with Cahen's subsequent characterization of what precisely chivalry would entail in this context; *vide infra* Chapters Seven and Eight.

⁵⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter, Boston, 2000, p. 268. G. Halsall remarks in an historical context that "Especially over long periods, the same words ... need not necessarily have had the same meanings." (G. Halsall, "Violence and society in the early medieval west: an introductory survey," in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. G. Halsall, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1998, p. 6).

This is most glaringly apparent in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entry under ‘*ayyār*. The first part of the article, written by Cahen, skips from the early ninth to the late eleventh century, without so much as a hint that development may have taken place during that period of time. The author of the second part of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entry, W. L. Hanaway, also espouses a monochronic view, and is therefore forced to conclude that there were three, sometimes mutually contradictory, concurrent definitions of the term ‘*ayyār*:

In a neutral or negative sense ... ‘*ayyār* can mean irregular fighter, rogue, highwayman, robber, troublemaker. (2) In a sense ranging from somewhat negative to somewhat positive ... it can mean strong, fast or rough; a night-prowler, a deceiver or a coquette. (3) In a wholly positive sense it can mean a noble-minded highwayman, or a generous, clever, brave, modest, chaste, hospitable, generally upright person.⁵⁹

Hanaway accounts for these antithetical definitions he has deduced by attributing them to the different social perspectives of various elements in the populace. While this may well be true, it could also be only one component of a simpler explanation: the word changed subtly in meaning as the phenomenon changed over the course of the centuries, even as different social milieux viewed the phenomenon quite differently. The possibility that there was a historical development of the phenomenon and a corresponding shift in the meaning of the term should at least be examined.

Another time-related question involves the issue of ‘*ayyār* origins. Specifically, is it an Islamic or pre-Islamic phenomenon? Here, too, Cahen evinces a change of heart, evident in his *futurwa* entry, in his refutation of the idea that the ‘*ayyārs* and *futurwa* were Sasanian holdovers. Whereas in his earlier writings Cahen appears to have been influenced by certain peculiar “*arische männerbund*” theories⁶⁰ (thus stating, for instance, that in Sasanian cities there were young men called *javānmardān* living together communally),⁶¹ he later repudiates Wikander’s ideas specifically, stating that the ‘*ayyārs* could not have been a hold-over from Sasanian times because they were too important not to have been mentioned by the sources for hundreds of years.⁶²

⁵⁹ S. v. “‘*Ayyār*,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, London, 1982, vol. 1, p. 161.

⁶⁰ These were formulated in the 1930s under the obvious influence of certain German racial and cultural theories by Stig Wikander, *Der Arische Männerbund: Studien zur Indo-Iranischen Sprach- und Religionsgeschichte*, Lund, 1938.

⁶¹ Cahen, “Tribes, Cities and Social Organization,” p. 320. In the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Cahen writes that “On the one hand, there can be little doubt as to their pre-Islamic origin, not only because in later times they were said to have distinctively Iranian customs, but above all because in the Islamic period up to the Mongol invasion they were only to be found in territories which had once belonged to the Sasanian empire. On the other hand, our scanty documentation on that empire does not appear to contain anything about them.”

⁶² Cahen, *Mouvements populaires*, p. 72. He restates this in his *EP*² entry s. v. “*Futurwa*.”

In part, Cahen originally found Wikander's theories attractive because they provided an easy explanation for what he considered to be the fact that groups termed *ʿayyārūn* are found only in the former Sasanian lands. However, their apparent origin in the Eastern lands could be just as easily attributed to the special social and other conditions prevailing in that area a century and a half after the coming of Islam and the Arab Conquest, rather than to any institutional continuity with a hypothetical Sasanian institution. Moreover, the phenomenon of *ʿayyārī* actually does appear occasionally in the West under that name,⁶³ but probably even more frequently occurs under a different name in those geographical areas (first *fityān* and, later, *ahḍāth*).⁶⁴

This idea of the *futuwwa*/*ʿayyārān* as a Sasanian holdover has recently been revived by Mohsen Zakeri. In his work he maintains that

The socio-economic institution known as *futuwwa* has been subject [*sic*] of many inquiries since the mid-nineteenth century. These inquiries have confirmed on the one hand the importance of the adherents of *futuwwa* for the development of several medieval Muslim corporations, on the other the fact that it has been heavily influenced by the legacy of ancient Persia. However, if someone asks for details regarding the origin of this institution and the processes whereby the Persian influence exercised itself, he would find no answers.⁶⁵

His evidence for pre-Islamic origins is rather shaky, however. First he cites Taeschner and Cahen.⁶⁶ Cahen, as we have already seen, adduced no evidence in the earlier writings in which he hazarded this conjecture; moreover, he himself later abandoned this position. Taeschner, in his most famous article on *futuwwa*, does indeed hold that there were certain pre-Islamic roots to the *futuwwa* – but those roots, for him, lie in the common Hellenistic legacy of classical antiquity, not in mystical Iranian brotherhoods.⁶⁷ Zakeri then makes an unfortunate comparison between his own methodology and Massignon's now discredited tracing of “artisan guilds” to the alleged *futuwwa* of the Sasanian period.⁶⁸

In his search for pre-Islamic Iranian roots to the *ʿayyārān* Zakeri relies on three fatally flawed elements: the myth of “Arian brotherhoods” propagated by Stig

⁶³ *Vide infra*, Chapter Eight, for accounts of *ʿayyārs* in Syria.

⁶⁴ See both Taeschner, *s. v.* “*ʿAyyār*,” *EP*²; and Cahen, *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Mohsen Zakeri, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 6-7.

⁶⁷ Franz Taeschner, “Das *Futuwwa*-Rittertum des Islamischen Mittelalters,” *Beiträge zur Arabistik, Semitistik und Islamwissenschaft*, ed. R. Hartmann and Helmuth Scheel, Leipzig, 1944, pp. 340-341.

⁶⁸ For the refutation of Massignon see S. D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leiden, 1968, pp. 267-271; S. M. Stern, “The Constitution of the Islamic City,” *The Islamic City: A Colloquium*, ed. A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern, Oxford, 1970, pp. 36-47; also Cahen, “Y a-t-il eu des corporations professionnelles dans le monde musulmane classique?” *ibid.*, pp. 51-64.

Wikander and followed by Widengren;⁶⁹ Pahlavi etymologies; and an untenable reading of the Arabic texts. The Arabic prop of Zakeri's theories has already been demolished by Patricia Crone;⁷⁰ let us therefore turn to examine the first two.

His etymological argument rests on Widengren's fanciful tracing of linguistic developments from the Pahlavi to the Persian.⁷¹ While this author is not qualified to comment on their accuracy, the experts who were consulted on this issue⁷² (both of whom Zakeri cites at certain points) did not feel that Zakeri's (or, more correctly, Widengren's) conjectures were tenable. Additionally, what Zakeri – and the Iranian scholars whom he cites – do not seem to have asked themselves is whether, even if a word had Pahlavi roots – indeed, even if it had actually existed in that precise form during Sasanian times (which it did not, by Zakeri's own admission) – it was nevertheless being used to describe a completely new thing.

A classic example of this continuity in usage but discontinuity in meaning (also regarding a socio-military phenomenon) is the unbroken use of the word *miles* in Western Europe from antiquity through the Middle Ages. The word is identical, but the Roman *miles* and the High Medieval *miles* signify and connote very different things. In other words, even if one were to prove that the linguistic derivation of the word is from Pahlavi (for neither Zakeri nor any of his sources claim that the word itself existed in Sasanian times in its Islamic-era form), there is no indication that the phenomenon of *ʿayyārī* as it appears in Islamic times was not something entirely new.⁷³

Even more damaging to Zakeri's argument is Mary Boyce's article refuting Widengren and his model Stig Wikander.⁷⁴ She notes that Wikander's specula-

⁶⁹ Geo Widengren, *Der Feudalismus im alten Iran*, Köln, 1969. It is largely from Widengren (and Soviet scholars from the most politically rigid times) that Zakeri has borrowed his untenable theories about and definition of feudalism. Zakeri's knowledge of Western feudalism seems to be somewhat limited (for example, he never once mentions the *bannum*). For Western feudalism, see Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, vol. I, trans. L. A. Manyon, Chicago, 1961; F. L. Ganshof, *Feudalism*, trans. Philip Grierson, Toronto, 1996; Georges Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*, trans. Howard B. Clarke, Ithaca, 1974; *idem*, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, forward by Thomas N. Bisson, Chicago, 1978; Pierre Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-Western Europe*, trans. Jean Birrell, Cambridge, 1991, particularly chs. 1, 5, and 9. Frye has also rejected the idea of Iranian "feudalism" (R. Frye, "Feudalism in Sasanian and Early Islamic Iran," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 [1987], pp. 13-18).

⁷⁰ Patricia Crone, "Abbasid *Abnā'* and Sassanid Cavalrymen," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd series, 8 (1998), pp. 1-20.

⁷¹ Cited in Zakeri, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-91.

⁷² The author wishes to thank P. Oktor Skjaervo for personally sharing his expertise on the subject, and Michael Zand for having consulted with Shaul Shaked on the author's behalf.

⁷³ The Persian literary expert Moḥammad Reżā Shafī'ī Kadkani has concurred on this point in several conversations held with the author.

⁷⁴ Mary Boyce, "Priests, cattle and men," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50:3 (1987), pp. 508-526.

tions about “socio-religious male societies, set apart by special initiation ceremonies and possessing their own particular worship and religious rites” are themselves based on the equally unsound work of earlier scholars who have already been severely criticized. Above all, she accuses Wikander of having no supporting evidence for his conjectures.⁷⁵ Among the more creative aspects of Wikander’s theories are his positing of special houses for young men, where sexual license and promiscuity reigned, and his outright peculiar theory that initiated members “acquired the capacity to become a werewolf (What he in fact held this to mean he does not explain).”⁷⁶ Boyce concludes:

... In arguing ... the earlier existence of cultic male societies, with special rites and freedoms, Wikander was superimposing alien usages on known Indo-Iranian ones, presumably not willfully, but because the pattern of the “Männerbund” was so vivid in his thought that it came between him and the data ... In general Wikander’s theory of the existence of the proto-Indo-Iranian ‘Männerbund’ remains wholly unsubstantiated, since it rests not on acceptable evidence but on analogical and ill-based assumptions.⁷⁷

In short it remains, at best, unproven that the ‘*ayyārān*’ were a form of proto-Iranian social organization. So what were they?

In the beginning of this introduction we noted the problems inherent in relying solely upon the mostly later, Arabic, clerically-authored chronicles. And, in fact, even a cursory look at other types of primary-source literature suggests that a revision of our definition of ‘*ayyārān*’ is in order. The most obvious place to begin looking in order to discover how the medieval Muslims defined what ‘*ayyārs*’ were is the Arabic lexicons, which predate the Persian ones by several centuries.

*Etymology*⁷⁸

The Arabic lexicons, a highly informative type of source traditionally underutilized by historians, enable us to ascertain what the contemporaries of the ‘*ayyārūn*’ had to say about them; always, of course, bearing in mind that the dictionaries were not supposed to reflect the living language around them but rather the theoretically ideal and pure state of *Jāhili* and early Islamic Arabic – or at least, what the men of a later day imagined that to have been. Particularly in-

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 513.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 515. One cannot help being reminded here of John Allegro (*The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity Within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East*, London, 1970) and his bizarre fantasies of orgiastic fertility cults which supposedly revolved around the ingestion of a sacred psychedelic mushroom (which, incidentally, never grew in Judea or ancient Israel), for which “Jesus” was a code word rather than an actual person.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ The author wishes to thank Wolfhart Heinrichs for his suggestions and comments on this section.

structive is the fact that this form of the root ‘*ayn-yā’-rā’* does not appear at all in any of the lexicons we possess prior to the fourth Hijri century.⁷⁹

This suggests two possibilities: either the lexicographers did not include the word, even though it was already in popular usage, due to their knowledge that it was not an ancient *Jābīlī* word; or else the term itself (at least during the earlier part of this period) did not yet exist in Arabic.⁸⁰ We cannot decide between these two alternatives, due to the peculiar conceit of the Arabic etymologists that they were merely reflecting classical usage; as we shall see presently, when a word lacked the proper pre – or early-Islamic origin, a suitable pedigree was simply manufactured. Thus, the absence of the word from pre-fourth/eleventh century dictionaries may mean at any point simply that the word was not yet sufficiently antiquated to convincingly allow the “discovery” of its actual existence in *Jābīlī* sources. In any case, its omission from the earliest dictionaries is a good indication that the word was *muwallad*, and did not originate in early Islamic times.

The first dictionary in which the form ‘*ayyār*’ appears is the *Kitāb jamharat al-lughā* of Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933): “A man [who is an] ‘*ayyār*’ does much coming and going, and sometimes the lion is called “‘*ayyār*’” because of his frequent comings and goings in search of his prey.” [*wa rajul^{um} ‘ayyār^{um}: kathbīr^u’l-majī’ wa’l-dhabab wa – rubbamā summiya al-asad “‘ayyār^{um}” li-taraddudibi fī ṭalabi ṣaydibi*]⁸¹ Note that there are, above all, no bandits in this definition.

The next lexicon, in chronological order, is al-Fārābī’s *Dirwān al-adab*.⁸² Here the epithet “‘*ayyār*” is limited to horses: “*wa-faras^{um} ‘ayyār^{um} bi-awṣāl^{um}* [a horse (that is) an ‘*ayyār* in limb]: that is to say: [it] wanders hither and thither from liveliness.” On the succeeding page, under the word ‘*ayyāl*, we find, however, the following:

Wa-faras^{um} ‘ayyāl^{um} bi-awṣāl^{um} [a horse having a proud gait in his limbs]: that is, he walks in a stately gait due to his noble nature, and [Aws b. Ḥajar] said in describing a lion: ‘A lion upon whom are particles of papyrus reeds/ As the broad-shouldered one [*ka-*

⁷⁹ For example Khalil b. Aḥmad’s *Kitāb al-‘ayn*, Baghdad, 1980-1985, which was written quite early (al-Khalil lived from 718-786) and is full and detailed, does not know of this form of the root (Vol. II, pp. 235-240). In fact, even so late an author as Abū’l-Qāsim Ismā‘īl b. ‘Abbād (*al-Muḥīṭ fī’l-lughā*, Beirut, 1414/1994, vol. II pp. 143-144), who lived between 936 and 995, does not include this form despite the fact that it certainly existed already (presumably he omitted it because he knew it was a *muwallad* – i. e. post-classical – word). Interestingly enough, he does have the form ‘*iyār*’ for the actions of a wandering horse or dog. It should be noted that there is an eighth-century use of the form ‘*ayyār*’ in Abū ‘Amr Ishāq b. Mirār al-Shaybānī’s *Kitāb al-jīm* Cairo, 1395/1975, vol. II, p. 242. It is, however, so opaque, and seems so completely unrelated to the ‘*ayyār*’ phenomenon with which we are dealing, that it has been omitted.

⁸⁰ The word itself does not seem to appear in any Arabic source before the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*.

⁸¹ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb jamharat al-lughā*, Cairo, 1993, vol. II, p. 391.

⁸² Abū Ibrāhīm Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Fārābī (d. 350/c. 961), *Dirwān al-adab*, ed. A. M. ‘Umar, Cairo, 1396/1976, vol. III, p. 358.

mazbarānī],⁸³ having a proud gait in his limbs. [*‘ayyāl^m bi-awṣāl^m*]⁸⁴ And it is also recited: *‘ayyār^m*.

Al-Fārābī has here cited the poem (at least in its crucial aspect) correctly. For when we check the sixth-century Aws b. Ḥajar’s poem, we find that there are no *‘ayyārs* in it; only the word *‘ayyāl*. Rudolf Geyer laboriously compiled Aws b. Ḥajar’s works from a wide range of sources, many of them quite early; al-Fārābī’s *Diwān* seems to introduce the first appearance of the variant with *‘ayyār*.⁸⁵

Note that the variant is, however, clearly indicated by al-Fārābī to be the less preferred form, almost an afterthought – and no earlier source knew of this version. In other words, someone – from whom al-Fārābī learned this variant – was at work trying to find an ancient and respectable *Jābīlī* pedigree for the word *‘ayyār*. As we shall see below, by the fifth/eleventh century the variant form had become the primary form; the reversal can probably be attributed to the lexicographical urge to find “pure” origins for *muwallad* words such as *‘ayyār* which had crept into dictionaries.⁸⁶ This mutation of the poem, with the consequent insistence on the *Jābīlī* origin of our word, may in turn have been one of the elements which misled certain scholars into looking for earlier roots for the *‘ayyār* phenomenon than is actually warranted.

Al-Fārābī’s lexicon is nearly contemporaneous with Al-Azharī’s *Tabḍīb al-luḡha*. In that work al-Azharī cites Ibn ‘Abbās as transmitted by Ibn al-A‘rabī:

He said: The Arabs [use the term] *‘ayyār* both to praise and to blame. It is said: So and so is an *‘ayyār*: [he is] energetic in acts of disobedience [enthusiastic in rebellions]; and an *‘ayyār* youth [*ghulām^m ‘ayyār^m*]: energetic in the obedience of Allah [*nashī^m fi ṭā‘atiⁱ llāhi*]; and *faras^m ‘ayyār^m wa-‘ayyāl^m* [having a proud gait]: active.⁸⁷

He also gives the meaning of “one who goes back and forth much in his comings and goings.” One interesting point to be considered is what the author meant

⁸³ Lane notes that *al-mazbarānī*, “the broad-shouldered one,” is an epithet of the lion. The “as” would, however, appear to be somewhat superfluous if it were being used in that sense. Geyer (see *infra*) solves this problem by reading, with al-Aṣma‘ī, “*ka’l-marzubānī*” – “like a satrap.” If this alternate reading is correct, and does indeed mean “satrap,” it would also provide internal evidence for the correctness of the reading *‘ayyāl^m* and not *‘ayyār^m*, in view of the rest of the verse. Satraps in particular would not necessarily be “sprightly in [their] limbs;” they would logically, however, be “proud in their gait.”

⁸⁴ Lane translates *‘ayyāl^m bi-awṣāl^m* as “A horse that goes away hither and thither, by reason of his sprightliness” or a lion “that goes away with the joints, or whole bones, of men to his thicket.”

⁸⁵ Aus b. Ḥajar, *Gedichte und Fragmente des Aus Ibn Hajar*, edited and translated by R. Geyer, Sitzungsberichte der Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Bd. 126, Abh. 13, Vienna, 1892, p. 23. The German translation, p. 84, reads in English as follows: “A lion upon whom (as a result of his sojourning in the bushes) little bits of cotton stick [die Baumwollflocken anhaften], (who) like a Satrap prides himself in his swaying joints [Gelenken wiegend].”

⁸⁶ The author is indebted to Wolfhart Heinrichs for suggesting this possibility.

⁸⁷ Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Azharī (d. 370/c. 980) *Tabḍīb al-luḡha*, Cairo, 1967, vol. III, p. 164.

here by “youth.” One of the words, of course, explicitly connected to ‘*ayyār*’ is *javānmard* (Arabic *fatā*) – “youth.” This term, intriguingly, bears strong terminological resemblance to that employed in western Europe – “*juvenes*” – for bands of errant knights who led a vagabond life in search of noble adventure.⁸⁸

Al-Azhari returns to the form ‘*ayyār*’ later in the entry in relation to both horses and locusts, saying: “A horse is [called] ‘*ayyār*’ if he wanders, or ... if he is lively.” He then cites an obscure passage of poetry:

Surely you have seen horsemen of our kindred/ they grieved you greatly [in the same manner as] *jarādat al-‘ayyār*.

Al-Azhari gives two differing interpretations regarding what *jarādat al-‘ayyār* actually means: “It is said: he wished for *jarādat al-‘ayyār*: a locust which he placed in his mouth, but it escaped from his mouth. And it is said: *jarādat al-‘ayyār* is the name of a horse and ‘*al-‘ayyār*’ is the name of a man [i. e. a personal name], this is what Ibn al-A‘rabī said.”⁸⁹

Ibn Fāris, (d. 395/c. 1004) al-Azhari’s near contemporary, cites al-Farrā’: “A man is an ‘*ayyār*’ if he [engages in] much movement, much cunning going back and forth [*kathīra’l-taṭwāf dhakiyya*]^{an} ... and ‘*al-‘ayyār*’: the name of a man. And ‘*al-‘ayyār*’: the lion.”⁹⁰ Here we have left the locusts and horses, returned to lions, and, above all, added “cunning/sharp-witted” to our definition.

Another lexicographer working during the latter part of the fourth/eleventh century was Al-Jawhari⁹¹ (d. 398/c. 1007). He, too, cites al-Farrā’ (and his definition is, at least in part, very close to Ibn Fāris’s): “A man is an ‘*ayyār*’ if he engages much in sharp-witted wandering and roaming [*rajuḷ^{lm} ‘ayyār^{am} idhā kāna kathīra’l-taṭwāf wa’l – ḥaraka dhakiyya*]^{an}.” The section on ‘*ayyār*’ ends here, but it is possible that the next section relates to it as well: “And it is said: “the man wandered [‘*āra*] among the people smiting them; like ‘*athā* [which means: to act mischievously or cause havoc].” [‘*āra al-rajuḷ fi’l-qawm yaḍribubum, mithl ‘athā*] If this description did relate to the preceding entry, it would be our first hint of arbitrary oppression. It is not at all clear, though, that this is meant to relate to the actual form ‘*ayyār*’ which came before. One should also note that other lexicographical works of that time, although they do indeed contain the root ‘*ayn-yā-rā*’, still do not contain the form ‘*ayyār*’.⁹²

⁸⁸ See Georges Duby, “Youth in Aristocratic Society,” *The Chivalrous Society*, Tr. Cynthia Postan, Berkeley, 1977, pp. 112-123; this point is examined at greater length *infra*, Chapter Eight.

⁸⁹ Al-Azhari, *Tabdhīb*, vol. 3., p. 168. This idea of escape is intriguing to anyone who has ever encountered *Samak-i ‘ayyār*’s endless Houdini-like exploits.

⁹⁰ Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Fāris al-Qazwīnī, *Mujmal al-lughā*, Kuwait, 1405/1985, vol. III, p. 428.

⁹¹ Ismā‘īl b. Ḥammād al-Jawhari, *Tāj al-lughā wa siḥāḥ al-‘arabiyya*, Beirut, 1399/1979, vol. II, p. 764.

⁹² E. g. Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Qazzāz’s (d. 412) *Kitāb al-‘asḥarāt fi’l-lughā*, Amman, 1984, pp. 215-216.

The Spaniard Ibn Sīda (d. 458/1066) gives the following definition:

An *‘ayyār* [*raju^{lun} ‘ayyar^{un}*]: [one who engages in] much coming and going and sometimes the lion is called this on account of his frequent peregrinations in search of his prey.⁹³

He goes on to repeat the Aws b. Ḥajar poem, but with a twist:

A lion upon whom are particles of papyrus reeds/ As the broad-shouldered one [*al-mazbarānī*], sprightly in his limbs. [*‘ayyār^{un} bi-awṣāl^{un}*] That is to say, he goes with them and he comes. And it is related: “*‘ayyāl^{un}* [having a proud gait],” but its explication will come in its [proper] chapter.

As mentioned above, we see here that by Ibn Sīda’s time, at least among the grammarians, *‘ayyāl^{un}* had definitely been replaced by *‘ayyār^{un}*. In other words, the transformation is complete: our lexicographers have finally covered over the *arriviste* origins of the word *‘ayyār*, and managed – with just a little stretching – to find “proof” of its authentic ancient lineage.

The definitions then repeat one another⁹⁴ until we come to al-Muṭarrizī (d. 610/c. 1213).⁹⁵ He first quotes Ibn Durayd, then supposedly from Ibn al-Anbarī: “The *‘ayyār* is of those men who gives free reign to his soul’s desire [*yukhalli naf-sahu wa – harwāhā*], not restraining it and not checking it. ’ And in the *Ajnās* of al-Nāṭifi: ‘one who goes to and fro without work’ [*bilā ‘amal*] and this is taken from their saying: ‘a horse that goes to and fro in a lively manner’ ...” This is certainly a more negative definition; note, however, that this is a different negative definition from al-Jawharī’s of 200 years previously. In other words, the main, neutral definitions we have encountered are the same; only the negative ones have differed. It is curious that none of the earlier writers with the neutral definitions seems to have heard of these other, darker definitions, particularly if they were found in well-known early works.

We then have a brief and original definition in al-Saghānī’s *al-Takmila wa’l-dhayl wa’l-šila*:⁹⁶ “*al-‘ayyār*: the name of the horse of Khālīd b. al-Walīd, may God be pleased with him. And *al-‘ayyār*: a proper name of people.” Khālīd b. al-Walīd is obviously a new element. It is hard to believe that, some six hundred years after the event, al-Saghānī has discovered a new fact about Khālīd b. al-Walīd that was unknown to his predecessors (despite the title of his work, he was, it should be remembered, working off the same sources as earlier lexicographers). Appar-

⁹³ ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl b. Sīda, *al-Muḥkam wa’l-muḥīt al-a‘zam fi’l-lughā*, Cairo, 1377/1958, vol. II, p. 169.

⁹⁴ E. g. Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. Barrī (d. 582/1186) *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, Cairo, 1980, vol. II, p. 175.

⁹⁵ Abū’l-Faṭḥ Nāṣir al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Sayyid al-Muṭarrizī, *al-Mughrib fi tartīb al-mu‘rib*, Aleppo, 1979, vol. 2, p. 92.

⁹⁶ Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Saghānī (d. 650/1252), *al-Takmila wa’l-dhayl wa’l-šila li-kitāb tāj al-lughā wa-siḥaḥ al-‘arabiyya*, Cairo, 1973, vol. III, p. 133.

ently, though, al-Saghānī was using the *kutub al-khayl* literature; at least one of those works – though by no means all of them – does indeed list Ibn al-Walid’s horse as having been named ‘Ayyār.⁹⁷ Even if this is a piece of third/ninth-century classicization rather than an accurate reflection of the actual seventh-century horse’s name, it is still informative; for it corroborates what we saw in the earliest dictionary definitions: namely, that ‘*ayyār*’ meant errant, and was an epithet applied to brave, noble creatures such as lions or the steed of the greatest of the Muslim conquerors.

Our next author, Ibn Manẓūr,⁹⁸ (d. 711/1311) cites al-Azharī, but not precisely: “A horse is called ‘*ayyār*’ when he behaves mischievously [*idbā ‘ātha*], and he is the one who is bolting, running off and away.” This is important, first, because it is a classic illustration of how many of our authors claim a prior authority for what they write, when the original author actually said nothing of the kind.⁹⁹ Second, the author may possibly have been transferring thoughts he may have had about people who are ‘*ayyārs*’ to animals (i. e. causing havoc, traveling far and wide), although this is admittedly conjectural on our part. Ibn Manẓūr then covers virtually all of the previous definitions we have seen: his following sentence is something of an amalgamation of Ibn Sida and al-Azharī: *faras^m ‘ayyār^m bi-awṣāl^m*; after which we have sprightly horses; the horse/locust poem we saw in al-Azharī;¹⁰⁰ the reputed poem of Aws b. Ḥajar, and so forth.

We are once again back to neutral definitions when we come to al-Firūzābādī (d. 814/c. 1411):¹⁰¹

The ‘*ayyār*’: one who [engages in] much coming and going, and the cunning one who does much going to and fro, and the lion, and the horse of Khālīd b. Walīd.

On the next page the dictionary repeats the passage we have already encountered: “A man who is an ‘*ayyār*’ does much coming and going, and sometimes the lion is called ‘*ayyār*’ because of his coming and going in search of his prey ...”

⁹⁷ Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Munammaq fī akhbār Quraysh*, Beirut, n. d. , p. 54. The author is indebted to Shady Hekmat Nasser for this reference. Note that this piece of information is not contained in other early works of this kind by Abū ‘Ubayda (Abū ‘Ubayda Mu‘amar b. al-Muthannā al-Taymī, *Kitāb al-khayl*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad. Cairo, 1986), Ibn al-Kalbī (Abū’l-Mundhir Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Kalbī, *Ansāb al-khayl fī al-Jābilyah wa’l-Islām wa-akhbārūhā*, ed. Aḥmad Zākī, Cairo, 1965), and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Kitāb asmā’ khayl al-‘Arab wa-fursānibā*, in G. Levi della Vida, ed. , *Les “Livres des Chevaux” de Hišām Ibn al-Kalbī et Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī*, Leiden, 1928.

⁹⁸ Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Cairo, 1981, pp. 3185-3189.

⁹⁹ For what al-Azharī actually wrote, *vide supra*.

¹⁰⁰ Now that he finally cites something verbatim from al-Azharī he gives credit solely to Ibn al-A‘rabī.

¹⁰¹ Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Firūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīt*, Beirut, 1415/1995, vol. II, p. 98.

Finally, we have the very late (fourteenth/eighteenth century) work *Tāj al-ʿarūs*,¹⁰² which is truly a composite definition of everything that came previously – errants, eager holy warriors and rebels, and so forth – and adds nothing new.

These definitions reveal much. First, that the word ʿ*ayyār* was *murwallad*. It did not appear in the earliest sources, and we have absolutely no record from before the ninth century in any type of literature that the word existed. There is one possible exception we must note here, however, regarding the antiquity of the word in Arabic: some Islamic-era biographical dictionaries do maintain that “ʿ*ayyār*” was used as a personal name in olden times. Thus Ibn Mākūlā, for instance, names a certain al-ʿAyyār b. Mihraz [?] b. Khālīd, “one of the proud men of the Arabs [*Aḥad shayāṭīn al-aʿrāb*], and their poets” and some others, whose time period would appear to be *Jāhili*.¹⁰³ Ibn Mākūlā was, however, writing in the fifth/eleventh century, and it is therefore unclear whether or not there is any historical basis for maintaining that the word ʿ*ayyār* was used as a proper name in *Jāhili* or early Islamic times, particularly in light of the fact that such a usage does not appear in the earlier dictionaries.

Second, it is not until the fourth century that the word was old enough to be safely spirited into the lexicons as a good “classical” word. Together with this, there has been a retrospective projection of the word back into pre – and early Islamic times in order to give it what a medieval Arabic lexicographer would consider a respectable pedigree; the meaning obviously changes over time. Third, the early meanings of “ʿ*ayyār*” are virtually all neutral or positive. We see both from the ninth-century dictionary definitions and the lone *kitāb al-khayl* literature reference to Ibn Walīd’s horse that the word meant “errant,” and was applied to creatures, such as lions and war stallions, considered by Muslims to be strong, virile, and noble. Fourth, it is not until the end of the fourth century (i. e. the later Buwayhid period), from which time we begin having accounts in the chronicles of ʿ*ayyār* involvement in Baghdādī *fitnas* and other violent activities, that one finds anything at all negative. In other words, so far, the best definition we could give the word for pre-fourth/eleventh century times is “errant.”

A similar survey of the Persian lexicons is unfortunately not very helpful in this context, for several reasons. First, even the earliest of the surviving Persian lexicons (Asadī Ṭūsī’s late eleventh-century *Lughat-i Furs*) is actually later than the quite elaborate and precise definitions found in passages in Persian literature which describe the phenomenon; and all the other lexicons date from the post-Mongol period – nearly half a millenium after the phenomenon first appears in

¹⁰² Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs min jawābir al-qāmūs*, Kuwait, 1394/1974, vol. XIII, pp. 172-181.

¹⁰³ al-Amīr al-Hāfiẓ Abū Naṣr ʿAlī b. Hibat Allāh b. Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl fī rafʿiʿl-irtiyāb ʿan al-muʿtaliḥ waʿl-mukhtaliḥ min al-asmāʾ waʿl-kunā waʿl-ansāb*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Yaḥyā Muʿallimī, Hyderabad, 1967, vol. 6, pp. 286-287.

our historical and literary texts.¹⁰⁴ Second, these lexicons treat only a very few words, and *‘ayyār* is not among them.¹⁰⁵

In summation, we have thus far seen the theoretical – and surprisingly neutral – meaning of the word. The dictionary definitions we have seen, though, do not begin to capture the role the *‘ayyārs* played in society, and the actual picture that the word must have evoked in the minds of contemporaries. For a greater understanding of the actual historical part played by the *‘ayyārs*, and of what was really meant when someone was called or defined himself as an *‘ayyār*, we must turn to the literary and historical sources and try to extrapolate a definition from the critical analysis of these texts.

Methodologically, therefore, this work proposes to examine the range of written sources, in both Persian and Arabic, in chronological order, for the purpose of arriving at a definition. Chronology in this case involves two separate but related aspects. The first, of course, is the chronology of the people and events our sources are discussing. Equally important, however, is the chronology of our sources themselves. All too often, historians have given equal weight to works written, say, one hundred and eight hundred years respectively after the event they are describing – but in the case of a word whose meaning changes and develops over time, this can be highly problematic. We shall pay special attention to the chronological, geographic and linguistic provenance of our historical sources, as well as to the milieux in which they originate, and the particular biases of the author, both individually and as part of a larger social group. The reader will see all of these issues discussed more closely throughout the work.

The main conclusions that arise from this study are as follows:

1. The meaning of the word *‘ayyār* when it first appears in the very early ninth Christian/late second Hijri century is clearly that of *ghāzī* or, more specifically, *mutaṭawwi‘*; that is, a volunteer Sunni (or proto-Sunni) warrior for the faith.
2. The *‘ayyārs*’ emergence upon the historical stage was part of a larger phenomenon of what one could call the formation of a militant Sunni *mutaṭawwi‘* trend, founded in the late eighth century by the most famous *mutaṭawwi‘* of all, ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak. In fact, as we shall see, the most renowned and successful of all ninth-century *‘ayyārs*, Ya‘qūb b. al-Layth al-Ṣaffār, had very close ties with figures whose connections can be traced di-

¹⁰⁴ For the relevant passages, *vide infra*, Chapter Seven. For a review of the medieval Persian lexicons, see C. A. Storey’s *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, Leiden, 1984, vol. 3, part 1, pp. 3–20.

¹⁰⁵ E. g. Abū Maṣṣūr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Asadī Tūsī, *Lughat-i Furs*, ed. Paul Horn and Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī, Tehran, 1957; the published fourth part of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Fakhri Ṣfahānī’s *Mi‘yār-i jamālī*, ed. C. Salemann, St. Petersburg, 1887; and Hindū Shāh b. Sanjar al-Ṣāhibī al-Nakḥjuvānī’s *Ṣaḥāḥ al-‘Ajām*, ed. Ghulām Ḥusayn Baygdili, Tehran, 1361/1083.

rectly back to ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak, and to the circles around Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. The *mutaṭṭawwiʿa*, moreover, constituted an independent source of military power, loyal to their own ideals and interests rather than to those of the political authorities.

3. During the ninth century another meaning accrued to the word ‘*ayyār*, one which would by the eleventh century become the primary meaning of the word, while never completely eclipsing the Sunni volunteer holy warrior one: chivalric person, *fatā/javānmard*, one possessing *courtoisie*. At this time we also see the ‘*ayyārs* intimately connected with the Sufis through their common practice of certain ideals of *futuwwa*.
4. The connections among ‘*ayyārān*, *fityān*, and Sufis began in the ninth century – much earlier than the eleventh century date that Cahen regarded as marking the fusion of these elements.
5. Even the Arabic clerical authors of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries, whose chronicles have been so heavily relied upon in modern attempts to define the ‘*ayyār* phenomenon, were aware of these holy warrior and chivalric meanings of the word.
6. Wherever our sources enable us to discern the social and political context of the ‘*ayyārs*, the ‘*ayyārs* appear as a well-connected elite paramilitary force, forming an integral part of society, with close connections, both of friendship and rivalry, to other segments of the military elite.
7. Once the term ‘*ayyār* comes in the eleventh-century to signify a predominantly chivalric meaning, the opposition of the religious clerics to the phenomenon strongly parallels the identical clerical antipathy towards the courtly which can be found in Western Europe in the High Middle Ages. Much of this antipathy stemmed from the clash between the clerics’ love of internal social order and the military elite’s violent pursuit of its own goals, even when the goals themselves must have appeared laudable (i. e. the suppression of Shi‘ites and other non-Sunni religious groups).

Structurally, this work is arranged as follows: Chapter Two is devoted to tracing the rise of the Sunni *mutaṭṭawwiʿ* phenomenon, its founders, their vision and practices. Personages are important because as we follow the history of the ‘*ayyārs* – and, in particular, of history’s only ‘*ayyār* dynasty, the Ṣaffārids – we shall see that many of the Ṣaffārid supporters from among the religious class were students of the *mutaṭṭawwiʿ* founders. The end of the chapter discusses the first historical appearances of the ‘*ayyārs* at the turn of the ninth century, fighting infidels and heretics in eastern Iran, in Sistan.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five deal with the controversial career of Ya‘qūb b. al-Layth, the first Ṣaffārid ruler, who, along with his brother ‘Amr, is inarguably history’s most famous and most thoroughly documented ‘*ayyār*. Moreover, much of the confusion regarding the meaning of the term has sprung from a mistaken nineteenth-century understanding of the Ṣaffārids, which then deter-

mined how the *‘ayyār* phenomenon as a whole was subsequently viewed. Ya‘qūb and ‘Amr are crucial to our understanding of the earliest manifestations of the *‘ayyār* phenomenon because the interrelations among various groups – *‘ayyārān*, Hanbalites, *fityān* and Sufis – are documented only in relation to the Ṣaffārīds. The primary texts treating the Ṣaffārīds provide, in other words, not only our fullest evidence, but also in many respects our key evidence, precisely because of the relative abundance of the documentation

Chapter Six begins with a treatment of the reign of ‘Amr. It discusses at length ‘Amr’s connections with the *abl al-ḥadīth* and with the early Sufis, and examines ‘Amr’s fall and his successors, focusing on what the sources reveal about the nature of the support for the Ṣaffārīd *‘ayyārs*.

Chapter Seven documents the close *‘ayyār*-Sufi connection, particularly around the common cultivation by both of *futuwwa/jawānmardī*, that first clearly comes to light in ‘Amr’s reign but continues long after that reign ended. It discusses the chivalric meaning of *‘ayyārī* which began to become prominent in the tenth century, analyzing the meaning of chivalry (*futuwwa/jawānmardī*) for both the Sufis and the *‘ayyārs*, by means of both literary definitions and specific examples scattered throughout the literary corpus.

Chapter Eight examines the connection between chivalry and violence, drawing parallels between the medieval European experience of violent chivalry and the Islamic experience. The chapter also documents the close working relationship between the *‘ayyārs* and the ruling elites, and the extremely frequent connection between *‘ayyār* violence and sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shi‘ites in Baghdad.

This work does not attempt a complete chronicling of every *‘ayyār* manifestation occurring during the years 800-1055; the labor and the length of such a task would render its product irremediably tedious for both reader and author. The author’s methodology has been, therefore, to chronicle the most important and revealing instances of *‘ayyār* activity, particularly those individual cases and whole genres (i. e. *‘ayyārs* in Sufi literature) which hitherto have been neglected by other writers on the subject.

In contrast to previous studies, the present work is deliberately limited to only those people specifically referred to as *‘ayyārs*, on the grounds that we cannot simply assume that terms are fungible without a great deal of explicit evidence indicating that this is the case. This study is also limited to one geographical area, albeit a large one: namely, those parts of the Islamic empire that belonged to the old Iranian world, stretching from Iraq to the borders of India, and which constituted the cultural heartland of the ‘Abbāsīd polity. The author has also made sure to include many of the examples of *‘ayyār* activity that have been used by others in support of what the present writer views as an inaccurate interpretation of the *‘ayyār* phenomenon, in order to show that there is a better, more contextual understanding that can help illuminate those very episodes.

Above all, in order to comprehend any historical phenomenon, one must first understand the more important aspects of its historical context. To fully place the word *‘ayyār* in its ninth century context of volunteer warfare for emergent Sunni Islam, therefore, we must understand the evolution of the *ghāzī/mutaṭṭawwi‘* tradition at that time. Let us, then, proceed to investigate the evidence regarding *mutaṭṭawwi‘a* and *ghāzīs* in the eighth century.

