

Identity in Hadhrami Society

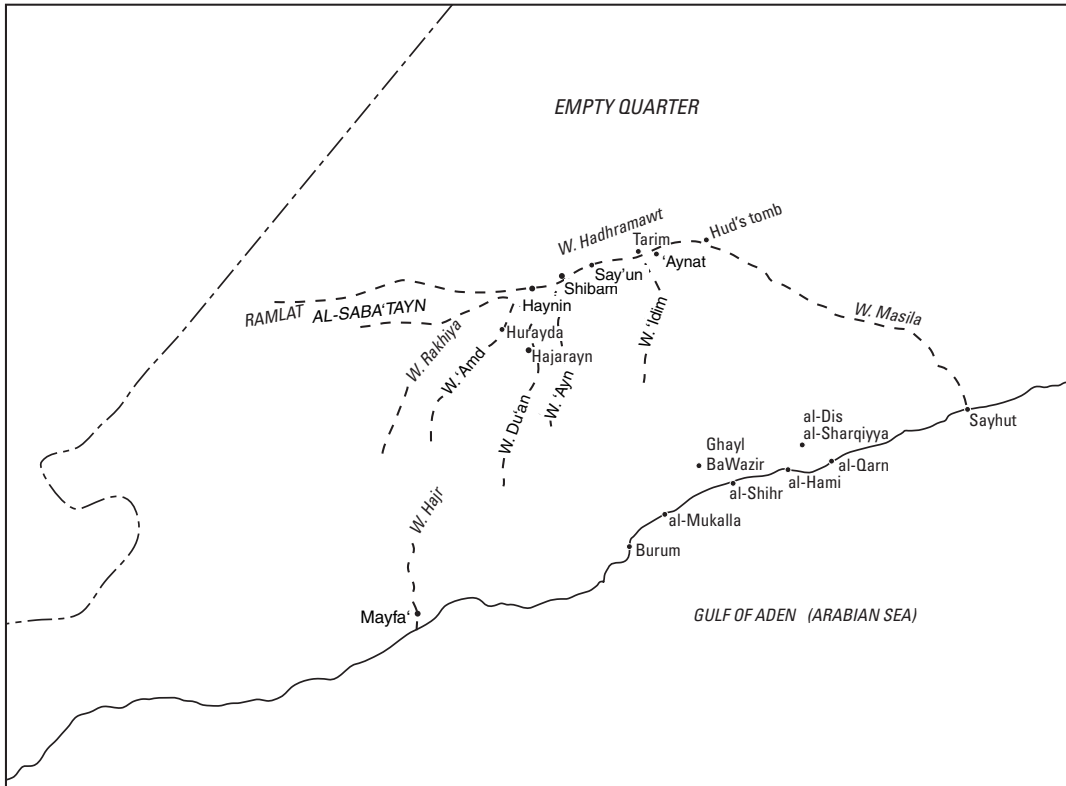
Communities and Identities

Shared elements of heritage contribute to the notion of a community as envisioned by its members, thereby shaping individual identities. In the words of Benedict Anderson, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.”¹ Membership in an “imagined community,” or in a number of overlapping concentric communities, forms a meaningful background to an individual’s experience. At the same time, identity encompasses multiple levels and tiers, with different aspects predominating in different contexts. It is constantly sustained by comparisons, and the aspects relevant to comparison vary according to geographical and social settings.²

People from different parts of Hadhramawt shared an attachment to a land and a heritage, while they also identified with smaller units—territory, town, quarter, neighborhood—associated with specific local cultural attributes and histories. A further aspect of Hadhrami identity was membership in one of the social groups into which the larger society was divided; this membership was acquired at birth. Social group membership affected a person’s prospects in terms of marriage, education, occupation, and role in religious, economic, and political life. While different social groups comprised different types of subgroups, all were composed of families, and membership in a family was another important aspect of individual identity. Another aspect of identity, gender, transected the others. Gender determined important elements of a person’s role in family and society and affected an individual’s participation in education and in economic life; the boundaries of possibility varied among the different social groups.

Hadhramawt: The Land and Its People

The people of Hadhramawt shared a deep sense of attachment to a homeland with an ancient and honorable heritage. The term Hadhramawt, as used in this study, refers to the territory of the interior and coast of southern Arabia, which by the beginning of the twentieth century comprised the Qu‘ayti and Kathiri sultanates. This territory included: its core, Wadi Hadhramawt, an enormous wadi or canyon lying south of the vast desert of the Empty Quarter of Arabia; smaller tributary



Map 1.1 Main towns and wadis of Hadhramawt

wadis running south from the main wadi; and the coast of the Gulf of Aden parallel to the main wadi, extending from Barum in the west to Masila in the east. The deep wadis or canyons cut through a barren high plateau, known as the *jawl*, which rose from the lowlands of the coast. While the towns and hamlets of the main wadi, smaller wadis, and coastal region all bore marks of geographic, cultural, and historical specificity, their inhabitants shared a strong sense of identification with an ancient land and participated in similar social institutions. Towns like Hurayda and 'Aynat, as autonomous city-states lay outside the boundaries of the two sultanates, although they too shared aspects of Hadhrami identity and social institutions.

The ports and agricultural communities of the coastal region were connected to the interior through several caravan routes that crossed the windswept *jawl* and then passed through the smaller wadis into Wadi Hadhramawt proper. The long and difficult caravan route westward to Sana'a', capital of Yemen, passed through the tongue of desert sands called Ramlat al-Sab'atayn before ascending the steep escarpments of the Yemeni highlands. Overland travel north and east of Wadi Hadhramawt led only to the most barren of deserts, while the overland route to Aden was obstructed by impassable mountains and rocky wastelands. The main connection between Hadhramawt and the rest of the world was through the ports of the Arabian Sea coast, which were linked by long-established sea trade routes to the ports of the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf. Hadhramawt had long-standing trade and cultural connections with the Red Sea and Swahili coasts and outlying islands of Africa, the east and west coasts of India, Ceylon, the East Indies, Singapore, and Malaya.

Wadi Hadhramawt, its tributaries, and the spring-watered oases of the coastal region contained fertile agricultural land remarkable in their surroundings of barren plateaus and harsh deserts. In the main wadi, permanently flowing water was found only in one part, the southeastern reach known as Wadi Masila. The western tributary of Wadi Hajr, known at its mouth as Wadi Mayfa', was watered by the only river in the Arabian peninsula flowing year round from source to mouth, making that wadi some of the most fertile land in the peninsula. Water flowed periodically through the other tributary wadis, including Wadi Sa'r, north of the main wadi, and Wadi 'Amd, Wadi Du'an, Wadi al-'Ayn, and Wadi 'Idim, south of the main wadi, particularly after summer rainfall in the mountains caused by the south-west monsoon. Wherever and whenever water flowed, Hadhrami agriculturalists employed spate irrigation techniques. Ground water was abundantly available throughout the wadi system, at shallower levels in the east. Both flood waters and ground water were used to irrigate date palms and fields of grain, fodder, and vegetables. In the coastal region, hot springs provided water for human consumption and for irrigation.

In the main wadi and its tributaries, most towns were built at the base of the almost vertical canyon walls, the tall mud-brick houses rising on the steep screeslopes at their base. The towns of Tarim and Say'un in the main wadi exem-

plified this pattern of siting, which offered the towns protection from the occasional flooding of the wadi and reserved the fertile silt of the wadi bottom for farming. There were a few exceptions to the pattern of towns lying at the base of the canyon walls. The towns of Wadi Hajr by necessity lay high on the steep walls of the wadi, since its permanently flowing river was swelled by the periodic floods that inundated the wadi bottom. Another exception to the general pattern was the remarkable city of Shibam in the main wadi. This walled city, an entrepôt of the Arabian caravan routes dating back to the frankincense trade of ancient times, stood on a tell in the middle of the wadi.

On the coastal plain, inland towns such as Ghayl BaWazir and al-Dis al-Sharqiyya were located near springs which provided water for the needs of the town and irrigation. Most of the port towns were located where natural harbors provided shelter for fishing boats and the sailing vessels of the Indian Ocean trade, although the historically important port town of al-Shihr faced the open sea from its site on an open plain. In the nineteenth century, al-Mukalla superseded al-Shihr in importance, probably because of its protected harbor and more defensible site: a narrow strip of land lying between the sea and the towering basalt mountains inland. The port of al-Shihr and the newer al-Mukalla were commonly referred to as *al-bandarayn*, an Arabized Persian word meaning “the two ports.” Smaller ports included: Burum, lying west of al-Mukalla at the base of protective hills on a cape known as Ra’s Burum, which provided the best anchorage along the entire coast during the southwest monsoon; al-Hami, east of al-Shihr, famous as the home of seafarers; and farther east, al-Qarn, a small port serving the inland town of al-Dis al-Sharqiyya.³

In the early 1880s, the population of the main wadi, tributaries, and coastal region was probably less than 150,000. By the mid-1930s, it may have been somewhat larger, perhaps as much as 170,000.⁴ Most of the population was settled in the towns and agricultural hamlets of the wadi system, the ports, and the spring-fed agricultural towns of the coastal region, while a sparse population of tribal nomadic pastoralists was widely dispersed in the deserts and on barren plateau lands.

The inhabitants of the different parts of Hadhramawt shared the notion that the history of their homeland extended far back into the depths of time—a notion confirmed by legend, by scripture, and by ancient relics and ruins. They considered their land the home of the ancient people of ‘Ad, who rejected the message of monotheism brought by the Prophet Hud a few generations after Noah’s people had rejected monotheism. Like people in Noah’s time, the people of ‘Ad were destroyed by God for their arrogance and polytheism. The story of Hud and the people of ‘Ad was recounted in the Qur’an, like the stories of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and Jesus, as previous manifestations of the monotheistic message revealed to Muhammad. Medieval Islamic scholars located the land of the ancient people of ‘Ad and the Prophet Hud in eastern Hadhramawt, consonant with local lore, which deemed an ancient sacred site there as the site of Hud’s tomb and which attributed ancient remains throughout Hadhramawt to the time of ‘Ad. People

from all over Hadhramawt visited the tomb of Prophet Hud, in a ritual that confirmed their sharing of this ancient heritage.⁵

The legendary history of Hadhramawt reflected its past as the seat of an ancient civilization. It had been one of the southern Arabian kingdoms of the critical overland trade routes over which frankincense, spices, and luxury goods were transported by camel caravan in the centuries preceding the birth of Christ. At that time, Shibam was an entrepôt for frankincense and myrrh, the valuable resin gums produced in southern Arabia and used in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean world for religious rites, medicines, and mummification. The camel caravans also carried goods brought by sea from the east, including spices, silk, and precious stones and goods imported from Africa through the port of Aden, including ivory, gold, and exotic animal products.⁶

At the height of the incense trade in the centuries before the birth of Christ, dams and irrigation systems were maintained and a civilization based on trade and agriculture flourished in the interior of Hadhramawt. The coast of Hadhramawt was a link between the Indian Ocean sea trade and the Arabian overland caravans. An extensive trading system had existed in this region long before it was described in the Roman navigation guide, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written in 50 to 60 C.E. Previously, the Indian Ocean sailing routes and the timing of the monsoon winds were known only to Arab and Indian seamen and traders, who also kept secret the places of origin of the precious luxury products in which they traded.

During the third century C.E., the trade diminished as the replacement of earlier religious practices by those of Christianity greatly lessened the demand for myrrh and frankincense at a time when the demand for other luxury goods was shrinking along with the Mediterranean economy as a whole. In addition, Roman shippers had begun to deal directly with India via the Red Sea, bypassing the Arabian caravan routes. Between the third and sixth centuries C.E., the irrigation systems fell into disrepair and the ancient civilizations of southern Arabia went into decline. After the dams and monumental architecture of the ancient civilization fell into ruins, the ample ground water of Hadhramawt continued to support a simple agricultural and pastoral economy. The people continued to participate in the trading systems of the Indian Ocean region, linked to the sea trade through the ports of the Hadhramawt coast.⁷

Another aspect of the heritage shared by Hadhramis was a history of participation in the Islamic community almost from its inception. The chronicles of early Islam record that in 630/631 C.E., known in Islamic historiography as the Year of the Delegations (*sanat al-wufud*), Wa'il b. Hajr led a delegation of the Hadhramawt tribes to the Hijaz. These tribal leaders proclaimed their belief in Islam and pledged the allegiance of their tribes to the Islamic community under Muhammad's leadership, as did similar delegations from Oman and Yemen. When some of the Arabs throughout the peninsula withdrew their allegiance from the Muslim community after the death of Muhammad, loyal Muslims from Hadhramawt helped put down the rebellions. Hadhramis were proud of their historic role



Figure 1.1 Shibam

in the establishment and spread of the early Islamic community throughout the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.⁸

Thus, people from Hadhramawt's main wadi, tributaries, and the associated coast shared aspects of identity and heritage. They were Arabs whose ancestors had participated in the establishment, success, and spread of Islam. According to both scripture and local lore, their homeland had been visited by prophets of the one true God, not long after the beginning of time. They were descendants of an ancient southern Arabian civilization that had left only traces of its former splendor. Since those ancient times, their ancestors had been connected to the trading networks of the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Gulf. While the different wadis and different towns of this land were each marked by particular local characteristics, they had at the same time many social, economic, and legal institutions in common. These common notions of homeland and heritage and shared "ways" shaped the identity of people from the different parts of this region.

Identity Groups in Hadhramawt

While people from disparate parts of Hadhramawt shared a common identity and heritage in many respects, the society was not at all homogeneous. Hadhrami society consisted of a number of different groups of people who largely married among themselves, shared a common array of occupational statuses, and bore tangible and intangible markers of group identification. Group identity, which affected an individual's possibilities in private and public life, was symbolically manifested in recognized signs, including: clothing, other body adornments, and weapons; the use of honorific titles; and physical positioning and movement, especially in ritual situations. This reflects the common tendency of identity to become embodied in symbolic expressions, "crystallizing" around recognized symbols and cues and sustaining itself by comparisons.⁹

Different groups varied in the prestige in which they were held within the society as a whole and at the same time standards of prestige and honor varied among groups. Because of the rather inflexible social boundaries and the variation in prestige among the different groups, Hadhramawt is often characterized as a highly stratified society. The important work on the social structure of Hadhramawt, *The Politics of Stratification* by Abdalla Bujra, emphasizes the hierarchical ordering of the different social groups by prestige. The Hadhrami scholar 'Abd al-Qadir Muhammad al-Sabban utilized a similar approach in his 'Adat wa taqalid bil-Ahqaf, employing both the traditional term for social group, *tabaqa*, denoting "layer" or "stratum," and the more modern sociological terminology, "*al-silm al-tarkibi lil-mujtama'*," literally, "the structural ladder of the society."¹⁰ To order the layers by prestige ranking, al-Sabban relied primarily on the local practice of *kafa'a* (literally, "equality"), the standard by which women were prevented from marrying "down" into lower status social groups.¹¹

While benefiting from the contributions of Bujra and al-Sabban, I approach the social groups from a slightly different angle, taking into account the notion of prestige, but at the same time emphasizing both the complexity within particular groups and the intricate pattern of relations among groups. As anthropologist Sylvaine Camelin notes, there is no single “correct view” of this society: different communities have somewhat differing systems of values by which they define prestige; relations within particular groups can be quite complex; and groups are linked to each other in a variety of ways.¹² The relations, linkages, and cleavages are so complex that I try to consider the social system as a matrix or web rather than a hierarchy or “layer cake.” This approach makes it easier to recognize the dynamics within groups and the interactions between them, as well as to acknowledge the more mutable groups that represent shared political, economic, and religious interests crossing the boundaries of the social groups.

Because of the lack of an alternate terminology, I employ the rather generic terms “social groups” and, interchangeably, “identity groups,” for the entities that have often been referred to as “strata” or “levels.” While the British Colonial official Harold Ingrams used the term “classes” for the groups in his category system (refining his usage by adding, “almost castes”), that term is not applicable because of the imperfect correspondence of the social groups to economic classes in this society.¹³ It would be inappropriate to redefine class as a purely social entity without any economic implication, since the areas of disjuncture between social group and economic class drive some of the critical events and profound conflicts in the history of this region. The term “kinship group” is too general; “occupational group” is inaccurate; “tribe” is used for one particular category and cannot be applied to the others. So for lack of a better term, I use “social group” and “identity group.”

Sada
 Mashayikh
 Tribes, including:
 { Hadhrami tribes
 { Yafi'i, including:
 { ghurba'
 { tulud
 Townspeople, including:
 { Qarwan
 { Masakin, including
 al-huwik
 Dhu'afa' (farmers, fishermen, builders)
 'Abid (slaves)
 Subiyan (found in particular areas)

Figure 1.2 Social System in Hadhramawt

It is important not to consider these groups as immutable, existing “since time out of mind.”¹⁴ The following analysis of the social system of Hadhramawt depends largely on sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in order to construct an outline of the system existing during that time. While this system displayed stability over the fifty-year period of this study, the meanings and importance of group identity would have varied somewhat from place to place and over time. These group categories existed before the 1880s, and have persisted—albeit in much attenuated form—until today, despite efforts in the socialist and postsocialist eras to officially eradicate the distinctions between social groups.

It is also important to remember that these social groups are merely components of a categorization system. They describe an idealized notional system shared among members of Hadhrami society, rather than a set of corporate entities. It may be useful to bear in mind the theoretical approach to social structures proposed by Anthony Giddens. According to his theory, people, in the context of their everyday lives, are social actors, acting in settings imbued with meanings that have been routinized and reproduced in time and space. In other words, groups are not historical actors, individuals are, at the same time that their actions are shaped by their group identity and group interests. Social structures are not determinants of individual action, but provide parameters in which a person finds meaning, makes choices, and takes action, and also provide parameters within which his or her actions are perceived.¹⁵

The ‘Alawi Sada: Descendants of the Prophet

The *sada* (sing. *sayyid*) of Hadhramawt claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad through the Prophet’s daughter Fatima and her husband, the Prophet’s cousin, ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, which afforded them a particular religious prestige and a high degree of influence within this society. While their origins thus lay in the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, they traced the advent of their lineage in Hadhramawt to the arrival of their ancestor, Sayyid Ahmad b. ‘Isa, known as “al-Muhajir,” “the Emigrant.” This ancestor and a band of compatriots had been living in southern Iraq, from which they traveled to Hadhramawt by way of Mecca and Medina in 929/930 C.E. (318 h). The Hadhrami *sada*, differentiating themselves from other descendants of the Prophet elsewhere, referred to themselves as the ‘Alawi *sada* or the ‘Alawiyyin (colloquial plural of ‘Alawi), in reference to their ancestor Sayyid ‘Alawi b. ‘Abdallah b. Ahmad b. Isa, the grandson of al-Muhajir.¹⁶

Most of the *sada* did not carry arms, having given up the practice in the thirteenth century C.E. at the instigation of Sayyid Muhammad b. ‘Ali b. Muhammad Sahib Mirbat, known as “al-Faqih al-Muqaddam.” A few anomalous families of *sada* remained arms-bearers, including the family descended from al-Shaykh Abu Bakr Ibn Salim which was also anomalous in bearing the honorific Shaykh rather than Sayyid. The family of al-Shaykh Abu Bakr b. Salim included the prominent bayt (branch, literally “house”) of al-Mihdhar, members of which served as pri-

mary political advisors and military commanders for the Qu‘ayti sultans for generations.

Because of the significance of their belonging to the Prophet’s lineage, the *sada* valued the keeping of genealogical records, to a degree notable even in a society generally quite conscious of lineage. Of all social groups, they were most adamant about maintaining *kafa’a*. Women from the *sada* did not marry men from outside the *sada*, although men from the *sada* sometimes married women from other groups, usually from the *mashayikh* (the religiously prestigious group not descended from the Prophet) and less often from the *qaba’il*, (the tribes). For the *sada*, the maintenance of *kafa’a* was more than a matter of family honor, it redounded to the eternal honor of *ahl al-bayt*, the Prophet’s household and its descendants.

The *sada* avoided any sort of craft or manufacturing. Some avoided commerce to the point of not even setting foot in the local markets, although this group also included some of the wealthiest families of Hadhramawt with extensive business interests in the *mahjar* (the lands to which Hadhramis had emigrated), such as the al-Kaf and Bin Yahya families. Many of the *sada* followed religious professions, acting as *imams* (prayer leaders) of mosques, judges, juriconsults, and religious teachers. They served as the administrators of *waqf* (pious endowment) properties. The descendants of individuals particularly renowned for their piety administered estates consisting of donations and bequests to their ancestor. The *sada* prided themselves on piety and the acquisition of religious education, even though many did not live up to the devout and scholarly image that was idealized among this group. Because of their religious prestige, they dominated the educational system, to which access was quite limited until the twentieth century. Many women from the *sada* also were recognized for their personal piety and religious knowledge, although women carried out their studies at home with family members rather than attending the schools and religious institutes.¹⁷

Certain families in this group held the hereditary position of *munsib*, or spiritual authority, a position which carried certain responsibilities, such as leading religious processions for holidays and ceremonial events, witnessing marriage contracts, and praying and reciting the Qur’an for the dead of the wider community. The *munsib* also received individuals who came seeking settlement of disputes or advice about personal problems. The families who served as spiritual authorities for the tribes also played important roles in mediation and negotiation for them. Bearing the standard of office, a *munsib* was able to move about among warring or feuding tribes without danger and his presence among them guaranteed a cease-fire.¹⁸

Sada were symbolically distinguished from other groups in a number of ways. They were the only people in Hadhramawt who merited being addressed by the honorifics “Sayyid” (literally, “Master”) or “Habib” (literally “Beloved,” signifying “Beloved of God”) for men and “Sharifa,” “Habiba,” or less commonly “Sayyida” for women. They received gestures of respect from the rest of the population in recognition of their descent from the Prophet. These gestures included

the method of greeting, in which their hands were kissed, a practice known as *taq-bil*. This hand kissing was performed even when the recipient was a child or a person without any special distinction in terms of religious knowledge or piety, in recognition of the nobility of the bloodline rather than the merits of the particular individual.¹⁹

Convention dictated that when any person entered a roomful of people, he or she ascertained whether there were *sada* present, and greeted them first. If unsure, the individual might ask if there was a *sayyid* or a *sharifa* present in order to greet them first, kissing or “sniffing” the hand (the equivalent to a kiss of greeting) of the *sayyid* or *sharifa*. After greeting the *sada*, the entrant then greeted the others present, shaking the hand, kissing the hand, sniffing the hand, or sniffing the head of each one, depending on his or her relationship with them.

Ceremonial protocols also manifested the inherited spiritual prestige of the *sada*. In some mosques, particularly in Tarim, the *sada* comprised the front rows of worshippers. In religious processions, they led. In collective celebrations, the *sada* made the first entrances. In recitation of the names of the dead on behalf of whose spirits prayers were addressed, the names of the *sada* were recited first. After the death of respected spiritual leaders, their graves were marked with tombs that became the site of visits by people seeking to feel closer to God in the presence of the pious departed one. Among the burial sites of highly respected *sada* of earlier times that received visits during the time period of this study were those of al-Faqih al-Muqaddam in Tarim, and Sayyid Ahmad b. Zayn al-Hibshi in Hawtat al-Hibshi, east of Shibam.²⁰

Men from the *sada* were distinguishable by their dress, although women of the *sada* wore loose dresses similar to those worn by most women, knee length in front and trailing on the ground in back. *Sada* men wore a belted *futa*, saronglike garment, like men of other groups did, but theirs were longer, approaching ankle length. They wore tucked-in shirts, which they covered with long, cream-colored cloth coats open at the front. On their heads they wore stiff cylindrical cloth caps decorated with embroidery with a head cloth (*imama*) wrapped around. Over one shoulder, they loosely draped a long brightly colored woolen shawl. No member of another group might wear these particular clothing items.²¹

The *sada* justified their differentiation from others and the systematized paying of respect to them, employing accounts that the Prophet had promised to intervene on Judgment Day on behalf of four kinds of people: those who were generous to his descendants; those who provided his descendants with their needs; those who helped them; and those who were well disposed to them in spirit and in word. Thus the common folk were to be persuaded that preferential treatment of the *sada* was encouraged by their religion, correct behavior according to the *sunna* (the model of the Prophet’s life) that would lead to rewards in the afterlife.²²

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some members of the *sada* continued to put forth justifications for their special treatment. In a well-known collection of *fatawa* (legal opinions), the prominent jurist ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Muham-



Figure 1.3 The tomb of Ahmed b. 'Isa, ancestor of the Hadhrami *sada*

mad al-Mashhur addressed the matter of the special status of the *sada* in Hadhramawt. He asserted that “the descendants of the Prophet were the most favored of people, and the descendants of ‘Alawi the most favored of them all” because of their religious learning and practice, their high moral standing, their blessedness, and their piety. In response to a question as to the correctness of the practice of kissing the hands of *sada*, he asserted that it was correct according to Shafi‘i authorities. He argued that since the performance of *taqbil* was carried out by members of other social groups even if the *sayyid* was a child or an ignorant person, it was clear that the gesture was directed not toward the individual but toward the Prophet’s bloodline and the grace associated with this earthly link to the sacred.²³

In the early twentieth century, Sayyid ‘Alawi b. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mashhur wrote a *risala* (treatise) entitled “al-Burhan wa al-dalil wa idhah al-sabil li-man yunkar al-taqbil” or “Proof and evidence and clarification of the way for those that deny [the legitimacy of] *taqbil*.” While the treatise was not dated, the author mentioned that the practice of *taqbil* was contested in 1911 by members of the Kathiri and Yafi‘i tribes, giving no further particulars. He pointed out that legal authorities approved the kissing of the black stone at the Ka‘aba, kissing the face of a returned traveler, and kissing the face of a deceased person. In addition, he gave examples from the *sunna*: Muhammad kissed his daughter and his grandsons; the delegations of Arab tribes which met with Muhammad kissed him in greeting; and other examples of kissing within the early Muslim community. In another work, an explication of a poem he had written justifying *taqbil*, al-Mashhur included accounts from the life of the Prophet in which Muhammad urged believers to treat his descendants with special respect and benevolence.²⁴

The Hadhrami *sada* also called on external authorities to assist them in justifying their position. In 1932, Imam Yahya of Yemen affixed his seal and certification to a genealogical tree illustrating the descent of the ‘Alawiyyin from the Prophet’s family. While the Imam held no political authority over Hadhramawt, he too was a descendant of the Prophet, like a number of other leaders in the Arabian peninsula, including Sharif Husayn of Mecca, and the rulers of Mar‘ib, Bayhan, and the ‘Asir.²⁵

Although many Hadhramis held the *sada* in special respect because of their heritage and their access to religious power and position, the continual production of works justifying their position of social and religious prestige suggests concern about opposition to their special position in their homeland. Differing stances were held with respect to the ‘Alawi *sada* in other parts of the Arabian peninsula. ‘Alawi *sada* of Hadhrami origin were respected as Islamic scholars and jurists in the holy cities of the Hijaz.²⁶ At the same time in the nearby Najd, the Wahhabi movement was ideologically opposed to the notion of the *sada* enjoying a particular status. The Wahhabis also objected to the combination of mystical practices, use of esoteric symbols, veneration of pious ancestors, and the centering of popular worship practices around a revered pious figure that characterized the religious belief and practice of the ‘Alawi *sada*.²⁷

Finally, it must be emphasized that while *sada* enjoyed social prestige and had access to religious occupations not available to all, their prestige did not necessarily equate to wealth. Some *sada* families controlled extensive estates that had been donated and bequeathed in the name of ancestors revered for their piety. In addition, certain families had acquired great wealth through trading and real estate interests in the East Indies. Still, many of the *sada* were not wealthy, as was illustrated in the will of one wealthy *sayyid*, who included among his charitable bequests a large sum for needy *sada* as well as another sum for needy members of other groups.²⁸

The Mashayikh: Local Families of Religious Renown

The *mashayikh* were another unarmed group holding religious prestige. This group was respected by the public, but on the whole were considered second in prestige to the *sada* as a result of that group's special connection with the Prophet's lineage. This group predated the *sada* as religious authorities in Hadhramawt, and some of the *mashayikh* claimed that *taqbil* and the honorific "Habib" had been their due before the arrival of the *sada* in Hadhramawt. Men from this group were addressed with the honorific "Shaykh" and women were addressed as "Shaykha," in a usage distinct from the use of the term *shaykh* for a tribal leader or religious teacher.

The *mashayikh* families included among their ancestors individuals who had been renowned during their lifetimes for their piety and spiritual authority. In some cases, tombs of *mashayikh* pious ancestors received ritual visits.²⁹ These included an annual visit to the Ba'Abbad tombs in Shibam and both annual and informal visits to the tomb of the renowned pious woman, al-Shaykha Sultana al-Zubaydi.³⁰ The Ba'Abbad family served as the guardians of the important *ziyara* or ritual visit to the tomb of the Prophet Hud, an ancient practice of great importance to the inhabitants of Hadhramawt and Mahra.³¹

Mashayikh had a long and proud history in religious activity, in the Sufi tradition as practiced in Hadhramawt and in scholarship and jurisprudence. Several Hadhrami *mashayikh* appeared in the fifteenth-century biographical collection of prominent Yemeni Sufis, including members of the 'Amudi, Ba'Wazir, and Ba'Abbad families. Many prominent jurists throughout Hadhrami history had been from the *mashayikh*.³²

At times spiritual authorities from the *sada* appeared to have competed with authorities from *mashayikh* for the loyalty of the populace. Although the *sada* had an advantage because of the respect granted their descent, they did not automatically supersede the *mashayikh*. Sometimes spiritual leaders from the *sada* eclipsed the authority of earlier leaders from the *mashayikh*, while at times they co-opted *mashayikh* authority, so that popular rituals and popular loyalties incorporated both *sada* and *mashayikh*. An example of this "competition" was when the eighteenth-century Sufi leader Sayyid 'Abdallah b. 'Alawi al-Haddad sent two of his students from the *sada* as "missionaries" to Shibam and environs to revitalize religion and

they superseded the local authority of the Ba‘Abbad. In Shibam the authority of the Ba‘Abbad was incorporated into that of the authority of the Bin Sumayt family of *sada*, while in the countryside a new settlement was founded in which spiritual authority was held entirely by a branch of the al-Hibshi family of *sada*.³³

Despite the *sada* claim to superior authority, *mashayikh* maintained their status as religious specialists. Women as well as men of this group received a religious education, although women carried out their studies at home with male family members rather than attending the schools and religious institutes. While some members of this group were landowners and businessmen, most made their living through the employment of their learning. They taught jurisprudence and served as spiritual guides in the mystical tradition practiced in Hadhramawt. They worked as administrators for *waqf* properties and as jurists. They also professionally provided services of a spiritual nature such as reciting the Qur’an on behalf of the spirits of the dead. As specialists in religious occupations, they worked closely alongside the *sada* and in certain respects formed a common interest group.³⁴ When social and religious reform became subjects of contention in the twentieth century, *mashayikh* participated on both sides of the debate, with some advocating reform and even adoption of Islamic modernist ideals, while others took the more conservative stance of advocating preservation of Hadhramawt’s particular traditions.³⁵

Like particular families of *sada*, certain *mashayikh* families served as spiritual authorities to the tribes. Some tribes looked both to a *munsib* from the *sada* and to a *mashayikh* family for spiritual authority and political intermediation. Some tribe members, particularly *badu* (roaming pastoralists), preferred to turn to *mashayikh* as their spiritual mentors, legal authorities, and political intermediaries. They expressed this preference with the saying, “A *shaykh* is a *shaykh*, but a *sayyid*—what sort is that?” (*al-shaykh shaykh, wa al-sayyid, ish min tabisha?*) Some authorities among the *mashayikh* had specialized knowledge of *‘urf* (customary tribal law) as well as of *shari‘a* (Islamic law), which enhanced their appeal among the tribes, who in many cases favored their customary tribal practices over the *shari‘a*.³⁶

Tribes (Qaba’il): Settled Tribes and Badu

The tribes of Hadhramawt traced their descent from a distant ancestor known as Qahtan, the ancestor of the tribes of southern Arabia, differentiating themselves from the northern Arabian tribes that traced their descent from ‘Adnan. (The *sada* derived from ‘Adnan, as descendants of the Prophet, who was from the northern Arabian Quraysh tribe.) The tribes, whose men bore arms, defined themselves by the right to their tribal name and by authority over their tribal land, the latter being the primary cause of disputes within this group and between tribes and the governments of the sultanates. Tribal identity and affiliations were described in terms of lineage, and blood linkages were expected to provide solidarity and mutual support, although reality frequently differed from that ideal. As in other tribal areas, genealogical links often reflected political alliances as much as

blood relationship.³⁷ In addition to the manipulation of genealogy, relations among tribes were governed by negotiated written agreements, which included: the *hilf* or alliance for mutual security and benefit; the *sulh* or temporary peace agreement during which conflicts might be resolved; and the *hudna* or cease-fire, in the case of active warfare. These were negotiated, authorized, and witnessed by those spiritual authorities from the *sada* or *mashayikh* recognized by the participating tribes. Through alliances and agreements the tribes were able to extend both their networks of support and the physical territories accessible to them. Travel through tribal territories was restricted, with individuals or caravans passing through having to be accompanied by a *siyar* or tribal guide who guaranteed their security. A *siyar* could guarantee security within his own tribal territory and that of tribes with which his was associated through a *hilf*.

Honor (*sharaf*), highly important among this group, was associated with the role of arms bearer and the ability to defend one's self, family, and cohort, and to protect those in a dependent position. When a tribesman said to another person "*inta fi wajhi*" meaning "you are in my face," or indicated the same by simply touching his face and pulling his index finger down his cheek, he was responsible for that person's safety even to the point of giving up his own life in defense of the other. The primacy of honor also resulted in blood feuds. When a tribesman was killed, a relative of the deceased was obligated to kill a family member of the killer in order to maintain the family honor. If the revenge was not carried out, the responsibility was inherited.³⁸

The armed status of members of this group was immediately apparent. Boys began bearing daggers at the age of two and rifles when they reached "the age of reason" at seven to twelve years of age. Adults wore white, indigo-dyed, or striped *futas* belted with decorated scabbards holding a curved dagger, sometimes with a straight knife tucked behind. Those who carried muzzle loaders wore leather pouches or horns for powder on their belts; those with modern rifles wore cartridge belts.³⁹ Women did not bear arms. They were protected by their position in their families, so except in times of conflict they were safe in their tribal territory. Their protected position allowed them to move about rather freely for extended periods, alone or in groups of two or three women as they herded their goats and sheep.⁴⁰

Even though the women and men of most tribes raised livestock, the majority were not seasonal nomads. Most were settled, their members living in small settlements of homes found outside the towns and villages, in the agricultural areas and rangelands within their territories. A few farmed their tribal lands or had it farmed by tenant farmers or dependent "client" tribes. Poorer families from this group lived in tiny rough huts of branches and thatch. More prosperous ones lived in mud-brick houses that ranged from simple one-roomed houses without windows to huge, multistoried, mud-brick homes with windows, rooftop terraces, and turrets. These imposing and highly defensible houses called *husun* (literally "forts," sing. *husn*) were popular with tribal families who had prospered as over-

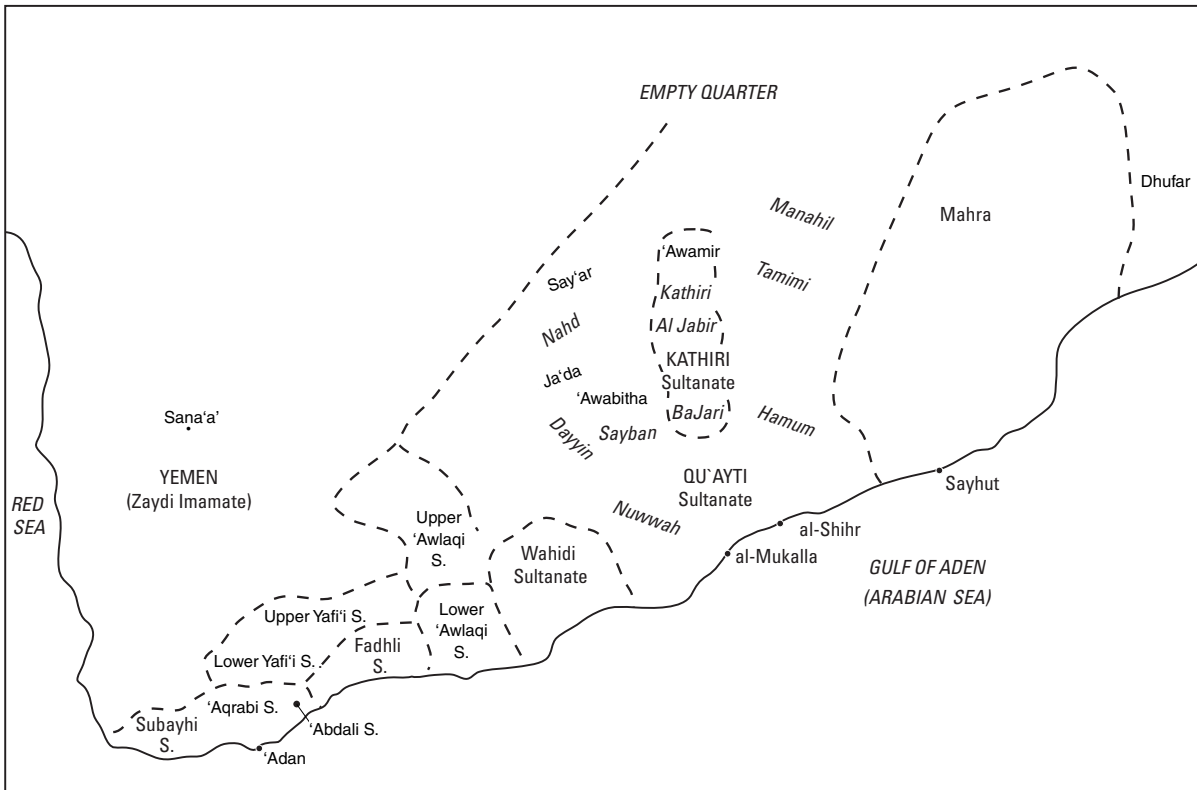
seas emigrants. As particular families and clans flourished, they began to identify their interests more with the towns and their elites while maintaining their tribal identity.⁴¹

Although some settled tribes farmed their own lands, most avoided agriculture as well as any sort of manufacturing, preferring to make their living through their capacity as arms bearers. Neither men nor women of this group participated in religious education beyond learning the fundamentals of belief and practice. At the same time, they respected and depended on the spiritual authority of the particular leaders from the *sada* or *mashayikh* recognized by their tribe. Prosperous men and women from the settled tribes showed their piety and compensated for their lack of formal religious training by bequeathing money for charity and for acts of piety such as Qur'anic recitation.⁴²

Some tribes and subtribes, known as *badu*, were primarily pastoralists living in remote areas, spending most of their time outdoors. Some *badu* moved seasonally from place to place in search of water and food for their animals. Others lived in simple isolated kin-based communities deep within their tribal territory and far from the cities, towns, and agricultural villages that formed the cores of the Kathiri and Qu'ayri sultanates. They gained their livelihood by raising livestock, conducting the camel caravan trade between cities, and collecting tolls from caravans that passed through their territory in exchange for right of passage and pasturage. They also levied duties on production by settled populations within the territory they considered under their authority. These included: portions of grain and dates from the harvests; duties on the boats harboring in small ports; and measures of fresh or dried fish. They considered these duties to be their right in exchange for providing security, protecting the property from theft. Their insistence on the collection of these duties eventually brought them into conflict with state authorities.⁴³

The *badu*, considered uncivilized, were deplored and shunned by settled folk of other groups. Their participation in trade and dealings with towns were mediated by specialized individuals such as the *dallal al-suq* (market brokers, sing. *dil-lal*) in order that they be kept separate from ordinary town life. At the same time, within the category of *qaba'il*, the boundary between settled and *badu* was somewhat permeable. Settled tribes all considered themselves to have derived from *badu* ancestry. The process of "settling" was an ongoing one, with *badu* moving closer to towns and cities or taking up agriculture and settling into villages. Still, the process was not irreversible; times of hardship could cause recently settled tribesmen to return to the *badu* lifestyle.

One reason for the disparagement of the *badu* as uncivilized was their utilization of *'urf*, their particular tribal standards and practices, rather than adherence to the standards embodied in the *shari'a*. Since land was collectively held, the *badu* followed different standards for inheritance of the right to use land or the right to "protect" territory rather than the system of inheritance prescribed in the Qur'an. *Badu* women did not follow the same standards of modesty as settled women. Heavily adorned, they traveled about freely with their flocks, which was



Map 1.2 Sultanates and Shaykdoms of Southern Arabia and Hadhrami tribes, c. 1930s

deemed unseemly behavior for women of other groups. It was understood that *badu* had different standards for the behavior of unmarried women.⁴⁴

Badu men and women both were distinguishable by their appearance, which was noted by Western travellers in the 1890s and the 1930s. *Badu* men covered their skin with indigo mixed with oil, for protection from sun, wind, and cold. This coating, burnished by the constant sun and wind, gave their skin a dark plum-colored gloss. They lined their eyes with kohl. They wore their hair long, with a band of cloth tied around their head. Their clothes were of sturdy indigo-dyed cloth, a fringed piece wrapped around their waist like a short sarong and another twisted around their waist as a belt or draped across their chest for protection from the cold. They wore belts with daggers and carried muskets or rifles. They wore silver armbands just above the elbow, silver rings and amulets with garnet stones, and bands of wool tied around their legs just below the knees.

Badu women wore the same style of dress that townswomen and settled tribeswomen wore, except that those of the *badu* women were made of special sturdy indigo-dyed cloth that had been pounded to a high luster. They wore a cloth of lighter weight and texture to cover their head and hair. In some areas, they went bare faced, in others they wore stiff indigo-dyed masks with narrow eye slits.⁴⁵

Badu women wore more decorations than others, even apart from festive occasions. They wore large amounts of jewelry, including: silver rings and pendants set with carnelian, garnet, and agate, and pieces of animal horn; heavy silver belts; bracelets; and anklets that tinkled and clanked as they walked. Those who could not afford silver wore jewelry of brass and iron. Like women of other groups, they wore numerous massive earrings arrayed around their earlobes, but only *badu* women wore rings in their left nostril as well. Each tribe had specific styles of jewelry items that men were required to furnish their brides. The amount of jewelry these women received at the time of their marriage recognized the substantial property in the form of personal flocks that they took into the marriage.

The women did not use indigo like the men, but stained their skin yellow with *wars*, a powdered herb similar to turmeric. Unlike settled women, who applied *wars* for the forty days after a childbirth or miscarriage, they used it all the time for protection from the elements. They decorated their faces with contrasting patterns of blue, black, green, or red. They shaved their eyebrows, painting a solid contrasting line across, as well as lining their eyes with kohl. For *badu* women, reducing the amount and splendor of their ornaments and decorations was an important part of the process of "settling."⁴⁶

All the tribes, settled and *badu*, identified themselves with land they considered under their authority (*sulta*). The territory controlled by the Shanafir association, which included the Al Kathiri, Al Jabir, and Al 'Awamir tribes and the smaller Bajari tribe, corresponded to the territory of the Kathiri sultanate. The Shanafir was not a confederation (*zay*), since the tribes within it were affiliated but not united under the authority of a paramount *shaykh*. While the Kathiri sultan ruled his domains with the support of the Shanafir, he was not paramount leader

of a tribal confederation.⁴⁷ The territory of the Qu'ayti sultanate comprised the following tribal groups: the Bani Zuna, including the powerful Al Tamim tribe; the Sayban; the Nahid; the 'Awabitha; the Say'ar; the Dayyin of Wadi Du'an; the Nuwwah of Wadi Hajr; and the Hamum, a large confederation whose tribes were almost entirely *badu*.⁴⁸

The Kathiri and Qu'ayti sultans made two types of political agreements with the tribes: one in which the tribe agreed to support the Sultan and respond to his call at any time; the other in which the tribe agreed to cooperate in matters of mutual interest. The sultans paid a subsidy to the tribal leader in both types of agreement. When there was any question of loyalty, the governments held hostages from the tribe. The sultanates reimbursed the tribe for the hostages, paid monthly maintenance for them, and made arrangements for exchanges of hostages.⁴⁹

The Yafi'i comprised a discrete subgroup of the Hadhrami tribes, with an identity distinct from all other tribes, settled or *badu*. In some areas, the Yafi'i were referred to generically as *'asakir*, soldiers, reflecting their historical role serving as military forces and leaders. They had originated in the mountainous Yaf' region just east of the lands controlled by tribes loyal to the Zaydi Imam of Yemen. Large numbers of Yafi'is emigrated as a result of periodic drought and famine in their rugged and marginally productive homeland, which also suffered from continual incursions by the powerful Zaydi tribes to their west. There were two categories of Yafi'i in Hadhramawt; the *tulud* (sing. *tild*) and the *ghurba'* (sing. *ghurab*). The *tulud* were of Yafi'i ancestry, but born in Hadhramawt. Some of the *tulud* had been connected with Hadhramawt since the sixteenth century when the most powerful ruler of the first Kathiri dynasty, Sultan Badr "Abu Tuwayriq" al-Kathiri had brought in Yafi'i tribesmen to serve as his military forces, granting estates to the tribal leaders. The Yafi'i provided security over the countryside, with different tribes and subtribes holding responsibility for particular areas. As the power of later generations of the first Kathiri dynasty diminished, the Yafi'i consolidated their power over the localities they controlled, becoming semiautonomous local strongmen. Those Yafi'i stayed, joined periodically by new emigrants from their homeland.⁵⁰ The *ghurba'* were newcomers to Hadhramawt who came to serve in the armed forces of the Qu'ayti state either as regular soldiers or as irregular forces settled in different locations around the sultanate. Some of the *ghurba'* came to Hadhramawt directly from Yaf' and others via service in the armed forces of the Nizam of Hyderabad led by the Qu'ayti *jama'dar* (commanding officer). Some of these soldiers stayed in Hadhramawt, marrying a woman of the *tulud* and fathering children who within a generation or two were considered *tulud*.⁵¹

While the Yafi'i formed a distinct identity group, they were not a single tribe. They were divided into three tribal groups, called *makatib* (sing. *maktab*), al-Zubi, al-Mawsata, and Bani Qasid, each of which comprised several tribes. All the Yafi'i tribes looked to Al Shaykh Abu Bakr b. Salim, an armed branch of the *sada*, as their spiritual authority. Although several players in the nineteenth-century struggles for power over Hadhramawt were of Yafi'i origin, all the Yafi'i tribes ultimately ended