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The Manuscript of *Sīrat ‘Antara* from the Library of the Wrocław University

Abstract

This paper is about the discovery of a manuscript from the eighteenth century, the fifth incomplete volume of the chivalrous romance, *Sīrat ‘Antara*, handwritten in the Arabic language by anonymous scribes. The manuscript is currently to be found in the Manuscript Department of the University Library in Wrocław. The first part of the article presents a brief description of the chivalrous epos and its genesis, as well as the history of *Sīrat ‘Antara* in the light of the present state of research carried out in Europe. The second part of the study is concerned with a comparison of the narrative of the above mentioned manuscript with the text of the epos, *Qiṣṣat ‘Antara Ibn Šaddād al-‘Absī*, published in Cairo in the year 1961 by Maktabat Muṣṭafa al-Bābi al-Ḥalabī.

Introduction

The manuscript from the eighteenth century, the fifth incomplete volume of the chivalrous romance *Sīrat ‘Antara*, handwritten in the Arabic language by anonymous scribes (there were undoubtedly several authors because the text comprises of different styles of handwriting) is currently in the Manuscripts Department belonging to the University Library¹ in Wrocław. In accordance with the Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts edited by Ananiasz Zajaczkowski², there is probably only one preserved manuscript in Poland which refers to the chivalrous epic about ‘Antara. The recovery of this volume,

¹ R. Kohnowa, *Rękopisy orientalne*, “Przegląd Orientalistyczny” 1956 no. 3 (11), p. 287.

² *Katalog rękopisów arabskich*, PWN, Warszawa 1964, t. V, vol. 1, p. 176.

I owe to Professor Joanna Sachse from Wrocław University, who encouraged me to look through the collection of Arabic writers at the University Library.

Many manuscripts of this kind – describing the life and heroic acts of ‘Antara – are in the possession of various libraries predominantly in Europe, Turkey, Egypt, India and the United States³. In the meanwhile, there is no answer to the question of where exactly the rest of the volumes can be found, or whether there are other versions of the epos. This would require a searching investigation in order to examine the available collections of manuscripts in libraries throughout the world. Furthermore, one would need to take into consideration that the remaining volumes may have been lost, or may be in the possession of private manuscripts’ collectors. An investigation of this kind would undoubtedly be a difficult task.

The Wrocławian manuscript deserves to be described in more detail because of its originality and uniqueness.

The first page of the manuscript is comprised of the catalogue designation: Mf.10406; Bu Ww; Mf s. Or. 1/64 and description of the volume in the Polish language: Arabic language, eighteenth century, dimensions of the paper: 21,5 x 14,5 cm, ff. 109 + ff.3 protective; cloth binding with a flack. Writing type ‘nashi’. Title: *Al-Ġuz ‘al-ḥāmis min Sīrat ‘Antara Ibn Šaddād*. Folk poem, the fifth part with incomplete ending. Remark: f. 89-105 – dimensions of cards: 20,5 x 14,5, paper more thick, writing very careless.

Provenance: The manuscript was bought in Constantinople in 1927.

Annotation in German: Staats – und U. – Bibl. Breslau.

Microfilm 35 mm, negative 1 + 1 scroll

On the second page of the manuscript there is an annotation in German:

Teil V der Sīrat, ‘Antar b. Šhaddād.

The third page of the manuscript comprises of its title written in the Arabic language:

Al-Ġuz ‘al-ḥāmis min Sīrat ‘Antara Ibn Šaddād;

From the fourth page, the exact text of the manuscript begins and it ends on the two hundred and twentieth pages.

The chivalrous epos and its genesis

One of the longest literary compositions of Arabic literature is Sīrat ‘Antara, the capacity of which took up several thousands of pages. With regards to the dimensions of the literary works, *ḥabar* (a short message, a piece of information) and a popular *sīrat* (epos) – these stand at opposite extremes of the spectrum. A short *ḥabar*, smoothed out and complete, achieved popularity in a period called *al-ġāhiliyya*. This is in contrast to the long, cyclic, integral and potentially incomplete *sīrat*, which was dated scarcely in the twelfth century.

³ P. Heath, *The Thirsty Sword*, The Salt Lake City, University of Utah, 1996, p. 232–238.

The rare and dispersed (in various periods within the compass of many centuries) transmissions of Ibn Qutayba (IX c.), Abū al-Faraǧ al-Iṣfāḥānī (X c.) and all early known sources do not refer to the existence of the prolix (lengthy) and fictitious superstructure of the epos that is set in a real life of 'Antara.

The first references to the epos *Sīrat 'Antara* appeared scarcely in the twelfth century, in the biographical dictionary '*Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*.

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a⁴ mentions that Abū al-Mu'ayyad Ibn Ṣāyig (XII c.), the physician and subordinate poet, assumed the nick-name of Al-'Antarī because in his youth he earned his living on the writings of (*yaktub*) and copied the stories (*aḥādīṭ*) about 'Antara al-'Abs.

Ibn Ṣāyig⁵ described him in his work as the Bagdadian physician and mathematician As-Samaw'al Ibn Yaḥyā al-Maǧribī (l. 1180), the Jew who converted to Islam and who in his writings about his conversion, recalls his boyhood in which he was infatuated with reading all kinds of stories – his favourite being the longest literary works (*ad-dāwawīn al-kibār*) such as stories about the Princess Dāt al-Himma, Alexander the Great and 'Antara.

The phenomenon of 'Antara and his spiritual presence, two centuries later in Egypt, caused that Cairian scholar Tāǧ ad-Dīn as-Subkī (l. 1370) to warn the scribes against copying books (manuscripts), from which God did not benefit – stories such as *Sīrat 'Antara* (*al-kutub allatī la yanfa' Allāh bihā ka-Sīrat 'Antar*).

The enigmatic character of the three above-mentioned references suggests that in the early period of the twelfth century, the fragmentary *ḥabar* relating to the life of 'Antara was lengthened to the unified structure of the story that was typical of the epos about 'Antara. This evidently enlarged its dimension and was presented in handwritten form in Mesopotamia-Syria and later also in Egypt. However, the character of these notes led to 'Antara being recognized in transmissions as a hero.

Sīrat 'Antara absorbed many *aḥbār* concerning the pre-Islamic Arabia and is in some part the transformation of *ḥabar*. However, it seems clear that the differences which divided these two literary forms actually act as evidence of the supposition that the rising of *sīrat* (in its ultimate form) was influenced by many other literary genres – indigenous as well as foreign genres.

Considering that there is a gap that exists (one that is depriving us of reliable information regarding *sīrat*) within the compass of several centuries, the question of what happened with the epos cit. between the eighth century (when the composition of this work began) and half of the twelfth century, when this romance (already at a very developed stage) gained great popularity should be asked.⁶

Here is a brief outline of the history of the popular literary evolution in the above-mentioned period of time, which will draw closer the process of transformation of the short literary forms into the more voluminous shape of the narrative literature.

⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ D. Madeyska, *Arabskie romanse rycerskie*, „Przegląd Orientalistyczny” 1979, nr 2(110), p. 104.

Besides the language, the most important contribution to the growth of Arabic popular literature was undoubtedly Islam. The stories of prophets and subsequently the hagiographies of Saints, which were spread by preachers and story-tellers in mosques and bazaars, became a very important constituent of the popular literature.

The proverbs and fairy-tales and, among other things, the Aesopian (Aesopic) fairy-tales ascribed to Lokman were widespread in pre-Islamic Arabia and remained popular in the early Muslim culture. However, from a literary point of view the most important role was played by the pre-Islamic and early Muslim tribal traditions which created the literary skeleton for the Arabian phenomenon that the Islam culture was soaked in and that the Arabs contributed directly to in the Muslim culture. After the passage of four centuries, from the time of pre-Islamic Arabia, knowledge of the tribal structure and tribal genealogy remained as the basic element of education for cultured (scholarly) men of those times.

The two pillars of early Islamic Arabic literature: *adab* literature and poetry grew on the ground of ancient Arabic tribal sources and patterns and came to hold a significant place in popular literature.

The tribal traditions, which had a significant influence on the formation of popular literature, should be divided into the three-overlapping sections: heroic, romantic and poetic.

The heroism of pre-Islamic stories was concentrated on the description of important events and the people who performed the heroic acts in tribal and intertribal history.

These stories and tales, anecdotic in their form, written in prose and interspersed by poetry, did not possess the fully developed narration such as those in the collection of stories: *Ayyām al-ʿArab*. Here, the narration was put through critical examination during the eighth and ninth centuries and hence it took its place in later historic and *adab* Arabic literature. However, these stories were still very popular even in this period, when there was the tendency for enlargement of narration dimensions and this cyclical development was distinctly perceived.

The stories of lovers are an example of traditional literary transmissions which came into the canon of the later popular literature. It was during the period of the first centuries that stories of Islam's romantic lovers arose. The stories of lovers like: *Ġamīl and Buṭayna*; *Qays and Lubnā*; *Maġnūn and Laylā* were very popular. The majority of these stories existed in anecdotic form, except for the story of *Maġnūn and Laylā*, which assumed the form of a long narration.

In the tradition of Arabic literature, the pre-Islamic poetry that arose in the first centuries was held in high esteem. Both the poems and details of their author's lives were deeply analyzed and then collected and disseminated.

The life history of the prophet Muḥammad and the stories of his deeds as well as the life stories of his successors (after his death) – who became famous for further Islamic conquests – constituted ripe material for the enrichment of the popular Arabic literature. Literary works like: *Ṣīrat an-Nabī* by Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq (second half of the eighth century) and the accounts, sounding in the spirit of the novel tone, which

were translated by the early-Islamic compiler *Sayf Ibn 'Umāra* (beginning of the ninth century) attest to the process of the creation of the literary fiction that in this period was *statu nascendi*.

The other basic source that contributed to the considerable degree of development in the early Islamic Arabic popular literature was the Iranian-origin literature, which (before the birth of Islam as well as after) developed, in an unusually broad way, the tradition of the popular heroic novel.

Considering the stories like: *Sīrat Fīrūz Šāh* and *Qiṣṣat Bahrām*, which came into being in the Arabic versions, it should be presumed that many *sīrat*, which emerged in the later period, constituted the syncretism of Arabic contents and Iranian form.

The most famous stories having an influence on the pre-Islamic Arabs belong to the Iranian collection of fairy-tales about animals: *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, which in the second half of the eighth century were translated from *pahlawi* into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa'.

It was the two voluminous works: *One Thousand Nights and Night* and *Sindbad Book*, both of the Iranian provenience, translated into Arabic in the tenth century that made the most notable contribution to the development of Arabic popular literature. It did this by conveying the idea that the composition of the literary work assumed the structure of the story in an unlimited context which was causal and consecutive.

The other source *in posse* (which did not play a direct role in the shaping of Arabic popular literature) was the output coming from the bizantic-hellenistic-greek cultural sphere, which flourished mainly through transmission of the folk knowledge of magic, astrology and wise aphorisms.

Similarly, the Indian influences had the most limited range; they were transmitted indirectly by the Iranian literature.

The most direct influence on the form of popular literature was from the evening story-tellers and reciters of the fantastic – they told strange stories which were called *al-musamirūn al-muḥarraḡūn* and were mentioned among others by Ibn an-Nadīm (tenth century) in *Al-Fihrist*. The orators enchanted the audience with their eloquence and artistic form and hence became the protagonists of the *makam* heros (the picaresque (roguish) stories).

The new literary genre – initiated by Al-Hamaḡānī – disseminated in the period between the tenth and twelfth centuries was characterised by a sophisticated and artistic form – that was brought to perfection by Al-Ḥarīrī.⁷

It is evident, that the writings as well as the oral versions of the epic poem still remain in a phase of growth.

The manifestation of the *Sīrat 'Antara* epos, in the form which is familiar to us nowadays, is dated the second half of the fifteenth century, when the most extensive manuscripts of this epos were created.

From the perspective of literary history, the revolutionary and innovative elements of the *sīrat* context, derived from *aḡbār*, were a new, enlarged and cyclic form of the literary

⁷ P. Heath, op. cit., p. 58.

epos genre – which was then transformed from the fragmentary substance consisting of *aḥbār*, into the long and integral story.

The earliest preserved manuscript of *Ṣīrat ʿAntara* is dated 1466.⁸

In a number of 980 folios, containing less than half of the whole *ṣīrat*, we find the text to be mature, full of expression and equal to the contemporarily printed versions.

The essence of maturity contained in this manuscript, is important proof of the widespread tradition of writing down the *Ṣīrat ʿAntara* (in that half of the fifteenth century). This supposition is confirmed by the existence of the ottoman-turkish translation of this literary work that was undertaken by Sultan Mehmet II (1451–1481).⁹

Early unsuccessful early efforts to translate this manuscript were what caused a new buyer – the sultan – to undertake the work concerning its fresh translation so that the tradition of the Arabic manuscript could become more complete and precise. The anonymous translator based his work on the comparison of three different Arabic versions.

The manuscript bought by Von Hammer-Purgstall in Egypt in the year 1801, which originated from the Imperial Ottoman Library of Sultan Mehmet II, proves that in those times *ṣīrat* was even more established in its fame and also commanded a certain respect.

The above-mentioned examples of the popularity of the *Ṣīrat ʿAntara* indicate that in the second half of the fifteenth century, the written tradition improved its achievements. However, during the next two centuries, the tradition of writing manuscript epos went through a crisis. No one manuscript was preserved from the period between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. The later transmissions about *Ṣīrat ʿAntara* have their sources in the form of manuscripts up until the end of the nineteenth century.

In spite of this creative crisis, the interest in manuscript writing about *ʿAntara* did not diminish. Only a few preserved manuscripts of the epos are the work of one author; most of them are compilations of miscellaneous volumes (with various dates and sizes) that have been copied by different writers. This process of fragmentary compilation indicates that in those times, the interest of the epos was a steady element of literary creation. These books were probably preserved until such time as their degradation forced the scribes to re-create them. The old and shabby manuscripts were simply thrown out.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century two editions of *Ṣīrat ʿAntara* appeared. One of them was published in Cairo in the years 1866–1869, and the other in Beirut in the period 1883–1885.¹¹

These do not reveal many differences, considering their size as well as the text's recurring use of metaphors of the past. Only through the style of the vocabulary used, can we notice the various and miscellaneous meanings.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cf. Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden E.J. Brill, 1968, s. 188.

¹¹ P. Heath, op. cit., p. 29.

The greatest difference, which separates both editions, is that the Cairo version begins with a one hundred page episode describing the history of Abraham, whilst the Beirut edition, begins by telling the story of ʿAntara. These above versions have been reprinted many times which confirms that the epos about ʿAntara still arouses an interest in contemporary readers.

For many editions of the epos *Sīrat ʿAntara* (like the completed Ḥiğāzī version and abridged Syrian and Iraqi versions) their provenience is completely fictional, in spite of using the proper terminology and symbols.¹² The acceptance of these names, concerning the epos, brings about disarray because there is a danger that in the light of future investigations over the manuscripts, it will be shown that different editions of the same version do exist. What would happen, if somebody were to discover two different editions of the epos identical to the Ḥiğāzī version?

The majority of the published editions of the epos versions *Sīrat ʿAntara* were of a standard of publishing which was connected with their lack of durability.

***Sīrat ʿAntara* in the light of a European state of investigations**

The uniqueness of ʿAntara as a knight and poet was very highly estimated in Europe and was found in the reflection and empiric investigation of his literary contribution and life.

The Vienna orientalist, Von Hammer-Purgstall, bought in Cairo¹³ the completed text of the epos – containing the six volumes and consisting of two different copied versions. The first three volumes were dated fifteenth century whilst the remainder of them originated in the period of the contemporary scholar. Yet in the year 1802, two years after buying the epos, Von Hammer published his discovery in *Fundgruben des Orients* (Vienna, 1802) acquainting the European readers with ʿAntara. He had no doubt that the first chivalrous epos *Sīrat ʿAntara* was written by ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Qurayb al-Aṣmaʿī (l.823), the famous Arabic philologist and compiler of pre-Islamic poetry.

In London, in the year 1819, the first volume of the complete translation of the abridged version of *Sīrat ʿAntara* (originated from Aleppo) by Terrick Hamilton was published.¹⁴ Next, the complete edition of the first four volumes (comprising approximately 1/3 of Arabic text of the abridged version of epos) of his translation appeared in 1820.

In an introduction to this translation, Hamilton agrees with the opinion of J.L. Burkhart, acknowledging that *Sīrat ʿAntara* is in every way superior to the book *One Thousand Nights and Night*.¹⁵ During several subsequent decades, *Sīrat ʿAntara*

¹² According to the opinion of B. Heller, *Sīrat ʿAntara*, Encyclopaedia of Islam², Leiden E.J. Brill, 1960, 1:520.

¹³ P. Heath, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁴ M.C. Lyons, *The Arabian Epic: Heroic and Oral Story-telling*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, esp. Vol. 3.

¹⁵ T. Hamilton, *Antar: A Bedouen Romance*, 4 vols. London: J. Murray, 1820.

became an object of scholarly interest as orientalist published several scrutinizing articles on the subject of the epos.

In 1833, A. Caussin de Perceval published – in the „Journal Asiatique” – the translation of the episode describing the death of ‘Antara, including a short note about the whole epos ascertaining to the chivalrous epos *Sīrat ‘Antara* which could be called *The Iliad of Arabs*.¹⁶

A. Caussin de Perceval agreed with the opinions of Von Hammer, Burkhardt, and Hamilton that *Sīrat ‘Antara* is a literary work much more valuable and supreme than the book *One Thousand Nights and Night*.¹⁷

In 1840, in columns of the „Journal Asiatique” (December 1840): 481–526, in the article *Lettre sur Antar*, A. Perron published the translation of the biographical annotation about ‘Antara – comprised in *Kitāb al-Aḡānī*. Then in 1868, H. Thorbecke brought out a study about the life of ‘Antara Ibn Šhaddād in the context of his historical figure¹⁸. Here, he provided a full analysis of the information occurring in *Kitāb al-Aḡānī* and in other early sources that referred to the life of the famous knight.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in the years 1864 and 1878, a few partial translations of *sīrat* in the French language (done by L. – Marcell Devic) appeared in print.

I. Goldziher in *Der arabische Held Antar in der geographischen Nomenclatur*, Globus, JG. Lxiv, 1893, No. 4; directly avails of the story about ‘Antara whilst omitting its narrative qualities in order to emphasize the picture of ideals and values existing in the world of pre-Islamic Arabia.

In 1916 Bernhard Heller edited a number of articles about *Sīrat ‘Antara*, the summaries of which summary are being published in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1:518-21; B. Heller was one of the first to undertake a comparative analysis of the *Sīrat ‘Antara* epos, along with the other European medieval chivalrous-court epos like *The Song about Roland*.

The newest study dedicated to the *Sīrat ‘Antara* epos is a work by British orientalist H.T. Norris under the title *Adventures of Antar*, which not only aims to acquaint the reader with the translation in the English language of some *sīrat* episodes referring to the ‘Antara war expedition to Yemen and to the heart of Africa, but also depicts (in the general outline) the history of the chivalrous epos together with a deep analysis of its various parts.

In Russia, I. Filshinski, a scholar of the classic Arabic literature, is the author of the *Sīrat ‘Antara* epos translated into the Russian language.¹⁹

¹⁶ C. de Perceval, *Notice extrait du Roman d’Antar*, „Journal Asiatique” (August 1833), p. 99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁸ H. Thorbecke, *Antarah: Des vorislamischen Dichters Leben*, Heidelberg 1868.

¹⁹ I. Filshinski, *Sīrat Antara*, Moscow 1975.

In Poland, prof. Danuta Madeyska in her work *Poetics of the Sirah*²⁰ undertook the comparison of chosen fragments of the *sīrat* texts of, among others, the *Sīrat ʿAntara* on a semantic-narrative level.

On the basis of the factographic sources and accomplished compilations of the *Sīrat ʿAntara* epos, it is clearly shown that only Von Hammer – Purgstall and Terrick Hamilton made translations directly from manuscripts – which proves to be a unique work that occupies a strong position in Arabic cultural output.

ʿAntara in Wrocław

The text of the *sīrat* (written in poetic prose *sağʿ* and sometimes with rhymes) is in spite of its stylistic differentiation and occasional consent of vulgarisms, a coherent and compact work (both in the external as well as the internal layer) saturated sometimes by lengthy and sometimes very shortened descriptions. The rhyme, limited to the vocabulary, consisted mainly of the names, different intervals and a repeated epithet borrowed from the vocabulary of poems comprised in *Dīwān ʿAntara Ibn Šaddād* which consolidates the stylistics of the epos. Although, it is evident that there have been attempts to imitate the poetic art of ʿAntara – its subject matter, symbolic representation, rhythm and structure are reflected in these attempts.

Considering the unusual length of the complete text (abounding in repetitions) it is certain that the monotony would be imminent in the epos. The existence of the regular interpolations from the real poems, in the various metrum, are occasionally strophic (*zağal* 21) causing unexpected turns of action which describe the process of hatching many plots and provide fascinating narrative support to the text. The narrative – libretto – accomplishes a dramatic effect with the use of the human voice (which adds diversity) while the expressive voice of a poet or bard (*šāʿir*) flares up an interest that could scarcely be captured in the written text.

The characters occurring on the pages of the manuscript are often the heroes of *Ayyām al-ʿArab* (*Days of Arabs*), who are mentioned in the famous Arabic genealogies.

Considering the kings and emperors mentioned in the manuscript, it is obvious that the bulk of this story refers to the period of rule of the Laḥmids' sovereign Al-Mundir Ibn Māʿ as-Samāʾ (approx. 505–554)²¹ (p. 47, 51, 62, 62, 182 of the manuscript).

Persian emperor Qawād (488–531) appointed Al-Mundir Ibn Māʿ as-Samāʾ²² the Arab ruler over the Persian territory. Al-Mundir bore the nickname two-horns (Dū al-Qarnayn)²³ because of his possession of two characteristic curled strands of hair. He was also the

²⁰ D. Madeyska, *Poetics of the Sirah*, Warsaw 1992.

²¹ M.M. Dziekan, *Historia Iraku*, Warsaw 2002, p. 208.

²² M.M. Dziekan, *ibid.*, p. 29.; R.G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, London 2001, s. 81; *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill, 2003 (vol. V:632 b).

²³ M.M. Dziekan, *op. cit.*, p. 29.;

sole owner of a rare species of camels' *al-'asāfir*.²⁴ In the year 554 he was defeated and killed by the Ḡassānids' king Ḥārīt II in the battle called "The Day of Ḥalīma".²⁵

Of the Laḥmids' rulers such as Al-Mundir V Ibn Qābūs (569–580)²⁶ (page 212 of the manuscript) and his sons: the king An-Nu'mān III Ibn al-Mundir called "Abū Qābūs" (approx. 580–602)²⁷ (p. 212, 218, 219 of the manuscript) and king Al-Aswad (page 216 of the manuscript)²⁸, we find a laconic mention on the last pages of the volume of this *sīrat* – instead of having the role of introducing the reader or the listener to the contents of narrative (being the subject of the next volume), it points out the time frames for the events that refer to the discussed fifth volume of the epos.

The capital of Laḥmids was Al-Ḥīra, founded in the second century on the west side of the contemporary Iraq, and in the south-east direction from the present-day city An-Nağaf. During the four centuries of its existence, the kingdom of Al-Ḥīra was more or less independent from Sassanid Emporium and was a kind of buffer state that defended the Emporium from the raids of Bedouin tribes who came from the heart of the Arabic Peninsula.

Al-Ḥīra was a centre of science where there were many scholars fluent in writing and calligraphy. There were also many famous poets like An-Nābiḡa Aḍ-Ḍubaynī, who was a court poet to Al-Ḥīra princes and especially to the king An-Nu'mān III Ibn al-Mundir.

In the pre-Islamic period, the kingdom of Al-Ḥīra was characterized by a multicultural life and an appreciable religious differentiation. The Jews, Christian nestorians, hanafits, zaratuštians and pagans living there created one community. The languages: aramian, Hebrew, pahlawi and Arabic, together with its various dialects, were in common use during that period. In the period of early Islam, Al-Ḥīra was a known centre for the learning of the Arabic language. Only after the battle near Al-Qādisiyya in the year 637 did the city Al-Ḥīra lose its significance, which was transferred to the new capital Al-Kūfa: the flourishing centre of science and knowledge.

In the manuscript, we also find mention of the king of Christians which is probably referring to the Ḡassānids sovereign, ruling in Aš-Šām – Damascus (p. 158, 182, 195 of the manuscript), Al-Ḥārīt Ibn Ḡabala (529–569) who introduced the Christian monophisitism and created the foundations for the birth of the Jacobean Syrian Church. Al-Ḥārīt supported the Byzantines against the Persian Sassanids, and in the year 529 he obtained the title of king (*patricius*), which was conferred on him by Justinian I (527–65)²⁹. The text of the manuscript also refers to the period of rule of the emperor of Persia Anūšīrwān

²⁴ The species of the rusty-red colour of hair.

²⁵ *Mały słownik kultury świata arabskiego*, Warszawa 1971, p. 194.

²⁶ M.M. Dziekan, op. cit., p. 208.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ According to the other sources among them *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* he was not the king and the brother of An-Numan but only his companion. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill, 2003 (vol. I:728 a).

²⁹ R.G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, London 2001, p. 56.

(Kisrā Anūšīrwān (531–579)³⁰ – the son of Qubād (Qawād) (488–531) (p. 182, 216 of the manuscript), who was the last great Sassanid king.

Kisrā Anūšīrwān (Khosrow), in the Persian language, is The Immortal (Everlasting) Soul. Called The Righteous, it became famous for the building of the magnificent and architecturally splendid palace in Al-Madā'in (Ktezyfon) nearby contemporary Baghdad. The Palace in Al-Madā'in called Īwān Kisra (Iwan Khosrow) in Arabic was visited by 'Antara.³¹ (p. 51, 182, 216 of the manuscript).

Also about Azūšīr, we find only a short mention on page 216 of the manuscript – it is certain that the author of the manuscript had Hurmizd IV (579–590)³² in his mind – the son and heir of Anūšīrwān.

The epos comprises of episodes referring to, among other things, the intensification of the rivalry between 'Antara and the Ziyād clan of the Banū 'Abs tribe (which was lead by Ar-Rabī' – the politic advisor of the king Zuhayr) as well as the terror of all the warriors to which 'Umāra – the stupid and dandyish brother of Ar-Rabī' also belonged. Both of these could pose a threat to Antara in his fight for the hand of the beautiful 'Abla, daughter of Mālik Ibn Qurād.³³

The Banū 'Abs was an ancient Bedouin tribe originated from Mecca and they belonged to the group of Ġaṭafān tribes. The Banū 'Abs descend from the Qays Ibn Aylān that came from 'Adnān (the Northern Arabic tribes) whose complete name sounds: Banū 'Abs Ibn Buḡayd Ibn Rayṭ Ibn Ġaṭafān Ibn Sa'ad Ibn Qays Ibn 'Aylān Ibn Muḍar Ibn Nizār Ibn Mu'ād Ibn 'Adnān.

The members of the Banū 'Abs were related to many tribes of Arabia; they had distant relatives in Banū Qurayš, Tamīm and Kināna and they still live in the Arabic Peninsula and in North Africa. The territory of their homes in Naḡd was limited by: Wādī Laḥbat in the north, Wādī al-'Ayn and Ad-Durayb in the south.

The strip of area, 25 miles in length, spreading out from the sea coast to the heart of the land and reaching the sea-shore mountain chain of Al-Hiḍāb also belonged to them.³⁴

The Banū 'Abs lived in the neighbourhood of such tribes like: The Banū Ḥasan in the north, The Banū Aslama in the east and The Banū Wazā'a of Muḡayd in the south.³⁵ The other valleys inhabited by the Banū 'Abs are: Ar-Rummat Akbar, Adbanḡid and As-Sukkay. The valley in the nearby An-Nabāḥ was where Ṭalaḥ was.³⁶

The Ḥurraṭ an-Nār also belonged to the 'Abs.³⁷

³⁰ R.G. Hoyland, *Ibid.*, p. 81; J. Danecki, *Kultura islamu – słownik*, Warszawa 1997, p. 172.

³¹ J. Danecki, *Ibid.*, p. 172.

³² *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill, 2003 (vol. IX:70 b).

³³ P. Heath, *The Thirsty Sword*, op. cit., p. 168.

³⁴ 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥālā, *Mu'ḡam qabā'il al-'Arab al-qadima wa-al-ḥadiṭa*, Damascus 1951; *Encyclopedie de l'Islam*, vol. 1, p. 223;

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

The territories inhabited by the Banū 'Abs were abundant with water springs like: As-Sulayy, Al-'Āqira, At-Tayala, Al-Mimhā which were in the mountains such as: Qātan, Al-Ḥubayt, Mudarraġ, Aš-Šarġ and in places situated high in Naġd like: Ġafr aš-Šaḥm, Baṭn ar-Ramma, Wabāl Al-Ġamriyya, Al-Lā', Miṭama, Ḥaġrā, Daylam, Zunqab and the springs of Naẓīra and 'Uṭāl. The travelers from Basra to Medina were able to profit from the use of both springs.³⁸ The 'Abs tribe is included among the tribes, which used to wage constant wars. Here are the most important of them:

The war of Dālīs and Ġabrā' (the Banū 'Abs fought against the Fazāra and the Dubyān tribes) which lasted 40 years (this war was caused by a fraud that was committed during the horse-races)³⁹.

The war of Al-Ġafr ('Abs against the Fazāra and the Dubyān)⁴⁰;

The war of Ġabala, between the 'Abs and the Dubyān⁴¹;

The war of 'Ar'ār (the 'Abs against the Kalb and the Dubyān)⁴²;

The war of As-Sūbān (between the 'Abs and the Banū Ḥanzala)⁴³;

The war 'Akrān (the 'Abs against the Tamīm).

The wars Al-Atl and Al-Artā (The Ġuṭam against the 'Abs).

The war *Al-Fārūq* (between the 'Abs and the Banū Sa'ad Ibn Zayd Manāt; the art of fortification helped the 'Abs to conquer over the enemies. *Al-Fārūq*: the mountain passage to Naġd beneath Haġar).

The war As-Salīl (between the 'Abs and the Asad).

The war between the 'Abs and the Ṭayy'. During this war 'Antara rescued the 'Abs against the inevitable defeat;

The war Al-Liwā' (between the 'Abs and the Ṭayy' tribe. 'Antara rescued his tribe killing 'Abd Allāh Ibn aš-Šimma and his people).

A comparison with the summary of the epos *Qiṣṣat 'Antara Ibn Šaddād al-'Absī* published in Cairo in the year 1961 by Maktabat Muṣṭafa al-Bābi al-Ḥalabī and consisting of 59 books enclosed in 8 volumes.

The text of the above mentioned manuscript is similar in form to the text of books from 3. p.271 to 9. p. 298 of the Cairo edition.⁴⁴

The narrative mentioned below of the manuscript corresponds almost wholly with the text comprised in the Cairo epos.

1) Ar-Rabī' convinces 'Urwa Ibn al-Ward, the famous vagabond and the poet-knight to lay an ambush for 'Antara. 'Urwa' was a nickname which meant a bush which did

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Jabala: a hill between ash-Sharif and ash-Sharaf, M.M. Dziekan, *Abū al-Faḍl an-Naysābūrī al-Maydānī, Nazwy Dni Arabów (Asma' Ayyām al-'Arab)*, „Studia Arabistyczne i Islamistyczne” 2002, vol. 10, 2002, p. 109.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The spring in the south-east from Laban, probably identical with contemporary Azaym. M.M. Dziekan, *Nazwy...*, op. cit., p. 121.

⁴⁴ P. Heath, op. cit., p. 168.

not wither even in a period of draught and served as food stuff, and originated from the time of hunger when the people were abandoning all the sick and weak. 'Urwa was the only one who gathered these people around himself and shared his property with them. He defended the weak and took the strong and resilient ones on raids – *ḡaẓw* with him. 'Urwa's generosity and nobility surpassed the generosity of his followers.⁴⁵

So, 'Urwa did everything that Ar-Rabī' ordered him to do, but unfortunately he was conquered by 'Antara and taken prisoner. Then, 'Antara rescued Ša's, (the son of the king Zuhayr), Ar-Rabī', and his uncle Mālik Ibn Qurād (the father of 'Abla and the brother of his father Šaddād) who were previously captured and taken prisoners by a group of assailants. (3. book of Cairo edition = p. 38–44 of the manuscript).

2) Mālik decides to send 'Antara on a mission, the fulfilment of which borders on miraculous. According to the suggestion of Ar-Rabī' Ibn Ziyād, Mālik asks 'Antara for one thousand camels '*asāfir* as a dowry for 'Abla. The owner of this rare genre of camels was Al-Mundir Ibn Mā' as-Samā', the king of Al-Ḥirā and "all Arabs".⁴⁶

'Antara and Šaybūb (the brother of 'Antara) find the camels and steal them.

An-Nu'mān, the son of the king Al-Mundir, sets off in pursuit of them. 'Antara is defeated by the manpower of his enemy's army and is taken prisoner. Šaybūb, upon seeing his brother disappear in the throws of the enemy, escapes back to the 'Abs convinced that 'Antara is no longer alive.

'Antara, captured and handcuffed, is then brought before the king Al-Mundir who tells him the story of his own life – which was full of adventures. Under the influence of 'Antara's story – where he revealed exceptional power, eloquence, courage and prowess – the king allowed 'Antara to live.

'Antara, in return for this, is keen to convince the king that he has made the right decision, and so kills the furious lion in full view of the king.

The king of Al-Ḥirā was at war with the Persian emperor Anūširwān. 'Antara won the friendship and gratitude of Al-Mundir for a consecutive time, by helping him to achieve the crushing defeat of the Persian army who was attacking Al-Ḥirā. One of 'Antara's exploits was the deadly defeat of the Persian commander, in a single combat. Hence, the skills of our hero were admired not only by the king, but also by his courtiers.

'Antara is given a royal welcome and is accepted in the Persian capital Al-Madā'in. The longing for an abode and his beloved 'Abla do not calm his mind. First, 'Antara abandons Al-Madā'in, and then Al-Ḥirā. Gifted by the one thousand camels '*asāfir*, assigned as a dowry for 'Abla, he heads towards his camp. (the book 4. and 5. of Cairo edition = p. 47, 51, 62 of the manuscript).

3) In the meantime, 'Umāra has kidnapped 'Abla. Soon, she is taken prisoner by Mufarriḡ Ibn Hammām of the Banū Ṭayy'. Mufarriḡ, enchanted by the beauty of 'Abla, attempts to force her to marry him by making her his slave – and to serve in his tents. During this time, Ar-Rabī' Ibn Ziyād inquires where his brother 'Umāra is; next, together

⁴⁵ J. Bielawski, *Klasyczna literatura arabska*, Warsaw 1995, p. 36.

⁴⁶ R. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, London 2001, p. 81; *Mały słownik kultury świata arabskiego*, op. cit., p. 175.

with 'Urwa Ibn al-Ward, he departs in order to rescue his brother. However, all of them are captured as prisoners by Mufarriġ. Šaybūb, at the request of 'Antara, finds 'Abla again. During this time, 'Antara kills Mufarriġ in fighting and liberates all the prisoners from the 'Abs tribe thereby demanding the gratitude of 'Antara's enemies (Ar-Rabī Ibn Ziyād, Mālik Ibn Qurād, 'Umāra, 'Urwa Ibn al-Ward) for saving their lives. (the book 5. and 6. of the cairo edition = p. 4–13 of the manuscript).

4) The deceitful Mālik (uncle of 'Antara and the father of 'Abla) is still reluctant to marry 'Abla and 'Antara and convinces the prince Ša's to forbid 'Antara to court 'Abla.

'Antara, feeling the animosity of his uncle against him, abandons the 'Abs and emigrates to Mecca. During this journey, 'Antara (with the help of Šaybūb) rescues the family of the Banū Kinda from raiders. (the book 6. = p. 49–50 of the manuscript). One day, the prince Ša's sets out for hunting and is taken prisoner by a group of raiders of the Banū al-Hārit. The family that was saved by 'Antara actually lived in this community.

This family, having recognized Ša's, helps him to escape. On his way back home, the king Ša's is once more taken prisoner – but this time by the Banū ar-Riyān. Once again, 'Antara together with Ša's, rescues the prince from misfortune. Ša's is grateful to 'Antara for rescuing him and apologizes to him for all the wrongs that he did to 'Antara, he then proposes a lifelong friendship with 'Antara (the book 6. = p. 72–89 of the manuscript). Rawḍa Ibn Ma'ānī, the knight and subsequent contender for the hand of 'Abla, still enchanted by her unusual beauty, is defeated in combat by her beloved 'Antara. Rawḍa, influenced by 'Antara's might and nobleness, gifts him a dowry for 'Abla and promises him his friendship. (the book 7. = p. 98–109 of the manuscript).

The anxiety rose by the absence of the prince Ša's in the court of the king Zuhayr meant that 'Antara was once more met with an approbation of the royal court and nearly became a member of the royal family – who celebrated the magnificent feast in his honour. After the feast was finished, 'Antara together with Šaybūb, vanished from the camp. (the book 7. = p. 110–115 of the manuscript).

5) When a daughter is born to the king Zuhayr, who was expecting male offspring, he hides this fact before his people and announces the birth of a son – who he calls Ġawdar. From childhood, Al-Ġayda (because this name was truly given to her) was raised like a boy. She was exercised in the art of knight's fighting and was taught to ride a horse. She took part in war campaigns and robbery raids during her adolescence. She also mastered the art of archery – and achieved excellence after such a short time that she became the most famous warrior in her neighbourhood. Ḥālid Ibn Muḥārib was an equally brave and courageous warrior; he was the son of the brother of the king Zuhayr. He decided to measure swords with Ġawdar – these swords were used to go to the battle field where all the warriors and knights gathered and took part in single combat and fighting so as to train in their military art. Ḥālid hired the tents for the coming guests. Ġawdar came to the camp and hired the tent from Ḥālid Ibn Muḥārib.

Soon they decided upon a time for combat fighting, as both of them were interested in their (knight's) chivalrous skills.

The duels between them lasting several days, but did not determine a winner. During one of the duels, Ḥālid guessed that he was dealing with a woman, not a man. He fell in love with her and decided to ask king Zāhir if he could marry her. The family of the king, like him, was not going to reveal a secret that was hidden for many years. After the meeting of the mothers of Ḥālid and Al-Ġayda, king Zāhir decided to disclose the truth about the birth of his daughter and announce the marriage of Al-Ġayda to Ḥālid Ibn Muḥārib. The wedding ceremony was full of splendour and wealth and was considered to be the most pompous in the whole of Arabia. During the marriage, in the front of wedding suite, the daughter of the king Muʿāwiya leads the camel of Al-Ġayda with a bridle. Being the wife of Ḥālid, Al-Ġayda still wore the warrior's dress and took part in many fights and duels. Ḥālid Ibn Muḥārib and Al-Ġayda, a royal pair, ruling over the Banū Zubayd became cause for a consecutive plot hatched by Ar-Rabīʿ Ibn Ziyād and Mālik Ibn Qurād who still demanded the death of ʿAntara.

Using ʿAbla, he persuaded ʿAntara to capture Al-Ġayda and lead the camel of ʿAbla with a bridle in front of their wedding suite – they sought to humble the daughter of the king Zāhir. (the book 7. = p. 117–120 of the manuscript).

The king Zuhayr, informed about the intentions of ʿAntara, gathered the ʿAbs' warriors and sent them to help ʿAntara. In the meantime, ʿAntara and Šaybūb arrive at the Banū Zubayd but do not find Ḥālid there – as he had set out for a robbery. Then, ʿAntara unexpectedly surprises Al-Ġayda (while hunting alone after heavy fighting) and takes her prisoner. (the book 7. = p. 148–152 of the manuscript).

After the plot is detected, Ar-Rabīʿ and Mālik remain in the camp, and in disgrace decide to emigrate from ʿAbs. Together with ʿUrwa, they take their families with them and abandon the camp. The king Ḥālid of the Banū Zubayd then captures them in the desert. (the book 7. = p. 159–172 of the manuscript).

Ḥālid, aware of the deeds of ʿAntara, sends a number of his warriors lead by the ominous Maʿdīkarib Ibn al-Ḥārīt to attack the camp of the Banū ʿAbs which is deprived of guard. Thereafter, Ḥālid (together with the rest of his people) sets out towards the camp of the Banū Zubayd and aims to rescue his wife. (the book 7. = p. 175 of the manuscript).

At last, the king Zuhayr finds ʿAntara. Soon Ḥālid joins his people in leading the captives. ʿAbla is among them. Both armies fight until dusk. (the book 7. = p. 182–184 of the manuscript).

The following day, Maʿdīkarib appears. He leads many of the prisoners of ʿAbs (their situation was critical after the disappearance of ʿAntara) who together with Ḥālid left that night to go scouting. Their meeting transformed into fighting which lasted the whole night and finished with the victory of ʿAntara. The victory of the fight with Ḥālid turned the tide of the battle to the side of the ʿAbs tribe. The warriors of the Banū Zubayd, upon seeing the head of their king pierced on the lance of ʿAntara, knew that they had been defeated. Hence, the ʿAbs freed their people and raked in great loot. When all of them

headed out towards their camp, 'Antara discovered that 'Abla, Mālik and 'Amr were not amongst them, this spoiled the general joy of the victory of the battle. (the book 8. = p. 191–195 of the manuscript).

6) The messenger arrives at the camp of the 'Abs with news about the death of Al-Munḍir – the king of Al-Ḥīra and an accession to the throne of his son, An-Nu'mān. The king Zuhayr pays liege to the new ruler. In the meantime, 'Antara sends Šaybūb to seek out Mālik, who abducted 'Abla. After 40 days, Šaybūb returns with news that Mālik found shelter at the king Qays Ibn Mas'ūd of the Banū Šaybān, and that the son of Qays (the brave knight called Biṣṭām) has fallen in love with 'Abla. (the book 8. = p. 212 of the manuscript).

Mālik (the father of 'Abla) agrees that Biṣṭām can marry 'Abla on condition that he bring the head of 'Antara as a dowry for 'Abla. On his way to the camp of the 'Abs, Biṣṭām meets 'Antara, who sets out towards the Šaybān. After a long and hard fought battle for 'Abla, 'Antara is victorious and takes Biṣṭām prisoner (the book 8. = p. 220 of the manuscript).

The manuscript described in the text (mentioned above) is undergoing detailed analysis; and there is also preparation underway for the manuscript's translation.