نظرة الأفق في جزائر الوقواق

Naqrat al-Āfāq fi jazā‘ir al-Waqwāq

At the border of knowledge in classical Arabic literature

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1 Introduction

Wāqwāq, al-Wāq wāq, al-Wāq, wāq wāq, wāq al-Wāq, al-Waqwāq and waqwaq are all variations of the radicals وقق which is often attested in Arabic sources that does not always refer to the same thing. In some cases it can be an island or even more than one. Sometimes it is a piece of land, sometimes a tree, sometimes a group of people and sometimes a bird. In the dictionaries it is also described as the barking of a frightened dog or a person who talks a lot. A passage from the story collection of ألف ليلة وليلة (thousand and one nights) shows the varying nature of waqwāq:

"Thy wife is in the seventh island on the Islands of Wāk-Wāk, and the distance between us and it is a whole year's journey to the rider who travelleth with diligence. - - - On the bank of this river is another mountain, called the Mountain of wāq; and this name is the proper appellation of a tree whose branches resemble the heads of the sons of Adam; and when the sun riseth upon it; those heads all cry out, saying in their cry, Wāk! Wāk!, Exulted be the perfection of the King, the Excellent Creator! - So when we hear their cry, we know that the sun hath risen. In like manner also when the sun setteth, those heads cry out and say in their cry the same words, and we know thereupon that the sun has set. No man can reside with us, nor gain access to us, nor tread out land; and between us and the residence of the Queen who ruleth over this land is a journey of a month, from this shore. Also, all the subjects upon that shore are under the authority of that Queen; and under her authority likewise are the tribes of the Jann, Marids and Devils, and under her authority are enchanters, the number of whom none knoweth but He who created them!" (transl. Lane 1838:427)

This passage from ألف ليلة وليلة (thousand and one nights), although a work of fiction, is a good example of the many faces of wāqwāq, something we will see further in the present study.

Wāqwāq was first mentioned around 912 A.D. in Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik 'The Book of Routes and Kingdoms' by Ibn Ḥurdājibih, (Maqbul Ahmad 1995:361) as the أرض
ard 'land' of al-Wāqwāq, a place containing an abundance of gold, (ibn Ḥurdatīb, 1967:29). Soon wāqwāq appeared in different forms in the literature and the first time it was mentioned as more than one place was by ibn al-Faqīh, (Tibbetts & Toorawa 1999:“Wākwāk”). After that, wāqwāq started to appear as more than an island or a land.

There have been speculations that the word itself is onomatopoetic (Tibbetts & Toorawa 1999:“Wākwāk”), and that it refers to speakers of click languages in Africa. When reading al-Idrīsī this seems to be a logical explanation since al-Idrīsī places the land of a wāqwāq just beside the villages of Bnbn and Dgrabh (al-Idrīsī p. 79), which both could be interpreted as onomatopoetic.

In the Persian Ḥudūd al-ʿālam, wāqwāq is a province of China, and shares some of the features existing in the data of this study (see chapter 3.1 and onwards).

In its soil gold-mines are found. (Even) their dogs have gold collars. Their chiefs wear extremely precious necklaces of rhinoceros horn (surūl karg). The people are black and naked. (Wāq-Wāq) belongs to the hot zone and has no amenity (nīmat). Its capital is Māqs, which is a small town (where) merchants of various classes (gūnāğūn) stay. (transl. Minorsky p.84)

The sources speak of wāqwāq as being situated in the neighbourhood of China, near the land of سفالة, Sufa (on the African east coat) and at the end of the world, after which nothing more is known. There have also been speculations around the Philippines being wāqwāq because of the large number of islands and its dark skinned people which is an attribute that has been given by some contemporary authors to the islands and its inhabitants (Tibbetts & Toorawa 1999:“Wākwāk”).

Most of the work done on wāqwāq has focused on identifying the whereabouts of wāqwāq. Several scholars have been searching for the “real” wāqwāq and almost every island in the Indian Ocean has been suggested as the one. Some have suggested Madagascar as well as Sumatra or Zanzibar as a possible location, this even though the contemporary Arabic sources give names for all three2 (Tibbetts & Toorawa 1999:“Wākwāk”). But what if we put wāqwāq in the context of mythology and considers it as real to the people contemporary to the stories of wāqwāq. Let’s suppose that we could characterize the Arab geographical myth, what would it look like?

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1 For more on wāqwāq, see for example La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du 11e siècle by André Miquel, the article “Wakwak” by Tibbetts and Toorawa from the Encyclopaedia of Islam, Early Mapping of Southeast Asia by Thomas Sutrenz and A History of Arab-Islamic Geography (9th–16th Century A.D.) by Sayyid Masbūl Ahmad.
2 Madagascar was called القمر al-Qumr (moon), which is also the name for the Comoros islands. Sumatra was called زاباج rezab (Ferrand & Verin, 1999:ECID2, "Madagascar"). Zanzibar was called قالbal gānbal (Ricks, 1970:249). According to Miquel also قالبال gānbālū (Miquel, 2001:172).
1.1 Questions

1.1.1 Main Question

This thesis's main question is: What characterizes ṭāqwaq as an Arab geographical myth?

The aim is to find a preliminary set of characteristic traits for the Arab geographical myth through analyzing ṭāqwaq as a case study.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The primary aim of the present study is to develop a preliminary set of characteristic traits for the Arab geographical myth through a case study. This is conducted as a pilot study to prepare a more thorough study of the mythological geographical world of the Arabs.

Writing about ṭāqwaq is not new, it is only that previous works have been dealing with locating ṭāqwaq today, rather than its different characters.

Ṭāqwaq may be considered as mythological today by some, but have a physical placing on maps and in the texts which will be used in the present study. This is important because it gives us the knowledge of the world as is was perceived by the people contemporary to the stories of ṭāqwaq.

Such fantastic, visionary, and untrustworthy details have been on the one hand neglected as insignificant by the historians who treated the matter from a supposedly realistic standpoint, and on the other they have served to corroborate the opinion of modern scholars convinced of the ignorance, the credulity, and the bad faith of the conquerors [...] (Olschki 1941:377)

Also, as Karamustafa points out, Islamic geographical literature has been a generally neglected subject of study and cartography even more so [...] (Karamustafa 1992:8).

1.3 Method

To answer the main question, I have chosen ṭāqwaq as a case study, both because it is frequent in classical Arabic literature and because of its debated whereabouts (Maqbul Ahmad 1995:361). To include another example than ṭāqwaq would be beyond the scope of the present study and is an aim for future studies.

I have divided the different attestations of ṭāqwaq into six categories based on my reading of the texts to show its different traits; the localization of ṭāqwaq, ṭāqwaq as a people, the assets and features of ṭāqwaq, ṭāqwaq as a tree, ṭāqwaq as a bird and ṭāqwaq as something else. Each category is divided into several sub categories, as presented in chapter 3. I will present the traits of ṭāqwaq in chapter
3, and in chapter 4 show how they fit into the frame of Arabic, Geography and Mythology.

1.4 The Data

The data is collected from a variety of genres within the Arabic literature such as geographical, historical and dictionaries. The data stretches from the 9th to the 15th centuries.

To find every attestation of ṭāqṭāq in Arabic literature would be too time consuming for the present study, that is why I have selected the authors and texts through a search on the al-Warrāq webpage3 (www.alwaraq.net) for any texts containing the radicals ṭāqṭāq waqwat and its different varieties: ṭāqṭāq, waqwat, ṭāqṭāq al-Wāq, ṭāqṭāq waqwat, waqwat, ṭāqṭāq al-Wāq, ṭāqṭāq waqwat, ṭāqṭāq waqwat, and ṭāqṭāq Wāqwaq. There could be some attestations of ṭāqṭāq that do not appear in the al-Warrāq search, but the webpage gives a comprehensive view on the material. For simplicity, I will use waqwat as a denotation for all the attestations which I have included the search.


Two works by al-Masʿudi came through in the search, one of them being Abhār al-Zamān. I have excluded this work in this study since the manuscripts found of this work have not been attested to al-Masʿudi (Khalidi 1975:154; Pellat 1999:IECD2 “Masʿudi”).

A 43rd author, al-Murādī, also came through in the search. I have excluded his work Kitāb sīl al-Durar ḵt aʾyān al-Qarn al-tānī ʾašar written in 1883-4, since it is not written in a time contemporary to the stories of ṭāqṭāq, as the rest of the data of this study.

I was unable to find any information on the book Tafsir al-ablām by Mīḻ̱ (Miller?), which would have been a 44th author, and therefore I chose to exclude it in the present study.

I have chosen works that one would expect were received as non fiction by the

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3 Al-Warrāq is a text based data base containing a wide variety of Arabic literary genres such as historical and geographical works.
contemporary reader, such as historical and geographical works as well as dictionaries and others. Therefore I have excluded *Alf layla wa layla*, which also came through in the al-Warrāq search, since it is a work of fiction rather than representing something considered as real.

As far as it is possible I have tried to find a printed edition of the works I have used. Of 44 texts, 29 have been available to me and I have therefore used the texts from the al-Warrāq webpage in fourteen cases. *Tabgīh al-Luğā* by al-Azhari; *Kitāb al-Mahāsin wa al-Masāwī* by Al-Bihqī; *Ṣaḥab nāhī al-Balāgā* by al-Ḥadīd; *Kitāb al-Rawād al-Muʿtār fi ḫabar al-Aqtār* by al-Ḥimayrī; *Muḥaddarat al-ʿUdābāʾ* by Al-İṣfahānī; *Al-Munṭaḍam fi tārīḥ al-Mulūk wa al-ʿUmmām* by Ibn al-Jawzī; *Kitāb al-Mīḥāj* by ibn Jinni; *Tārīḥ dimaṣq* by Ibn Maṇḍūr; *Samaṭ al-Lāli* by al-Maymānī; *Kitāb al-Badʿ wa al-Tārīḥ* by Ibn al-Muṭadhar al-Maqdisī; *al-Juḡrafiyyā* by Ibn Saʿīd; *Nihāyat al-ʿArab fi funūn al-ʿAdab* by al-Nuwayrī; *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* by Ibn ɬṬufayl; *Kitāb masālik al-ʿAbṣār fi mamālīk al-ʿAmṣār* by al-ʿUmārī and *Manābīj al-Fikar wa mabāhīj al-Ṭhar* by al-Wāṭwāt.

This means that these texts on al-Warrāq can contain spelling mistakes, since they are not critical editions. For examples of mistakes and problems regarding the data, see 1.5.

1.5 Problems with the Data

It is interesting to examine if these texts represent the belief of the élite or the common man. Speaking about historiography, Robinson argues that these types of texts would represent the belief of the élite, rather than the common man.

> Like other forms of book learning, historiography was produced for an audience of readers and listeners who were well off and lived in cities and towns - in short, the social and political élite who could, if so inclined, dispose of both their money and time in consuming it. Accurate or representative numbers for these readers are impossible to come by for the medieval period [...], (Robinson 2004:105).

In many of the cases with the data of this study, it is difficult to determine when the books were written in relation to when the experiences were made, or to determine the sources used by the authors. The aspect of time is an important factor when depicting events and accounts after they have taken place, since they tend to become exaggerated with time (Bjarne Larsson 2002:148).

Some authors mention their aim in their introductory chapter, like al-Maqdisī in *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fi maʿrīfat al-aqālim*, where he says that the reason for writing the book is to ensure the survival of his own name. He also modestly points out that
“this is a work that travellers and merchants cannot do without” (al-Maqdisi 1906:2, transl. Collins).

I am aware of the dependence of some authors in relation to other authors, but I have not taken this into consideration since the time and scope of the study does not allow it.

I have been able to use critical editions of all 44 texts but fifteen as mentioned in 1.4. In these fifteen cases I have used the texts from al-Warrāq. This means I have to take into consideration that there can be mistakes such as spelling.


1.6 Transcription and Translation

The consonants and the vowels

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The feminine ending tāʾ marbūta is transcribed by an a when not in a construct state, when in construct state, it is transcribed as at.

ʿAlif madda and ʾalif maṣṣūra is transcribed as ā.

All Arabic names will be transcribed.

Transcription of places and people's names will be based on the transcription of Encyclopædia of Islam CD2 (EICD:2).
Transcription of authors and titles of books are according to the printed editions when found, otherwise based on the EICD:2.

When referring to a text from the al-Warrāq homepage I have written "W" as in Al-Ḥimayri W:555.

Translations are my own if not mentioned otherwise.
2 Definitions and theoretical Discussion

2.1 Arabic

In this study the word Arabic means anything written in Arabic. This definition does not point out if some of the authors of the data used in this study are for example of Persian origin, since the nationalities of the authors are not in focus. It is the literature written in Arabic that is this study's main interest.

2.2 Geography

By geographical, I mean a place which supposedly has a location on a map. Wäqwäq is a place you can point to when looking at a map. It can also have a geographical position described in words.

2.3 Mythology

When looking up the word “myth” in Encyclopædia Britannica, it is described as, "a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious beliefs". Using this definition would thus make the study of myth very rigid and neither Csapo nor Bascom stresses the importance of religion when studying myths. The focus should according to Csapo be on myth as a function, rather than trying to define it through its content and context.

There are several definitions for the term myth, and taking them all into consideration would be impossible here. I have therefore chosen Eric Csapo's Theories of Mythology (2005) as a starting-point for this study's discussion on mythology.

When discussing myth and mythology, one comes across several narrative genres similar to myth (Csapo 2005:5). Among them are folktale and legend. And by comparing them with myth, Csapo makes a broad definition:

If thought true, then myth or legend. If thought untrue, then folktale. If true and referring to a remote time when the world was unlike it is today, then myth, but if true and referring to a less remote time when the world was more or less as it is today, then legend, (Csapo 2005:3).

The anthropologist William Bascom, made an attempt to find a definition to myth through the study of the mythmakers themselves. By studying non literate traditional societies, he came up with some criteria for the definition of myth. One of them, that a myth had to be orally transmitted, is criticised by Csapo. Bascom also considered


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that a criterion for myth is that it has to be a prose narrative5 as well as a story that
takes place in the past and is received as true by the ones who tell it (Bascom
1965:4). Csapo criticise Bascom by pointing out that ancient cultures often
transmitted their mythology by writing them down, and gives examples like the Epic
of Gilgamesh and the Iliad (Csapo 2005:5). He also points out that Bascom, while
performing his study, chose non literate societies, and therefore a criterion had to be
that the myth was orally transmitted. A broad summary of Bascom’s theory is thus
that a myth is an orally transmitted story of something that happened in the past, also
believed as true by the users of it6. This is somewhat contrary to Csapo’s believes,
although he considers that Bascom’s study has introduced in among others one
important criterion, that it is the reception of the myth, not the content, that has to be
in focus.

To look at a standard definition of myth that represents the general idea of the nature
of myth limits the ways in which we can deal with them according to Csapo. A type
of definition could according to him be as simple as the one above, "If thought
true...". But he is careful to point out that this type of selectivity becomes a
weakness, and one should work with different criteria for the determination of
whether myth or not.

A definition of myth could also be “a narrative which is considered socially
important, and is told in such a way as to allow the entire social collective to share
a sense of this importance” (Csapo 2005:9). Further he suggests a focus on social
importance and says that the meaning of some stories to be received as true is what
makes the myth having this social importance (Csapo 2005:9).

For this study, myth is defined as (1) something received as true by the users of it and
(2) something referring to a remote time when the world was unlike today7. This
broad definition fits in to many different types of texts, but the phrasing received as
true implies that these texts were not received as fiction, and therefore reflects the
“real” world as it was perceived by the transmitters of the myth.

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5 Prose narratives could according to Csapo be both myth and legend as well as folklore, jokes and even
anecdotes (Csapo 2005:3), and Bascom himself excludes proverbs, riddles, ballads and other verbal skills
and relates myth, legend and folklore to each other in that they are narratives in prose, prose narratives
(Bascom 1965:3).

6 “Myth are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful
accounts of what happened in the remote past. [...] Their main characters are not usually human beings, but
they often have human attributes [...] Myths account for the origin of the world, of mankind, of death [...]."
(Bascom 1965:4)

7 “Remote time” is here considered from a contemporary perspective.
3 The different Characters of Wāqwāq

3.1 The Categories

The data of the present study talks about wāqwāq as a مَلَك ‘country’, مَلَك balad ‘country, town, city’, أَرْض ard ‘earth, land, country’, جَزِيرَة jazira ‘island’ and جَزِيرَات jazā’ir ‘islands’, and it contains a wide variety of descriptions of wāqwāq, which makes them difficult to categorize. I have divided the descriptions into six main categories based on my reading of the texts, each with several sub categories: The localization of wāqwāq, wāqwāq as a people, The assets and features of wāqwāq, wāqwāq as a tree, wāqwāq as a bird and wāqwāq as something else.

I this chapter will present each category and its contents. In the following, chapter 4, I will make some generalizations regarding the data and show how wāqwāq fits into the frame of being an Arab Geographical Myth.

3.1.1 The localization of Wāqwāq

3.1.1.1 As a Land near China

Wāqwāq is very commonly connected with بَلَاد الْشَّمْش‎ bilâd al-šin ‘China’, (al-Zabidi p.91; al-Ya‘qūt p.439; al-Iṣṭaḥri p.122), sometimes connected to it, sometimes described as a part of it, (ibn Ḥurdājībih p.29), and sometimes placed at the border of it.

One source tells هُي بَلَاد فُوق الْشَّمْش‎ hiya bilādun fawqa al-šin yajītu gikrubū fi al-ḥurafāt ‘it is a land above China which is mentioned in the fables’, (al-Ya‘qūt p.439).

3.1.1.2 As a Land in Africa

Wāqwāq is often connected with the land of سُفَالَة Sufāla (ibn Ḥaldūn p.57; ibn al-Wardī p.34; al-Ḥimayri W:554; al-Idrīsī p.79) and the land of الزَّنْج al-Zanj (al-Maṣūdī p.112; ibn Ḥaldūn p.45; al-Nuwayri W:64), and one source also talks about a land called سُفَالَة الزَّنْج Sufāla al-Zanj as a unit (al-Nuwayri W:64;), not consisting of two parts, then wāqwāq is located at the outermost part of this region.

One source tells that مدينة دوقة أخرى بَلَاد سُفَالَة madīnata dūqa’t āḥara bilâd sufāla the city of Dāqwaṭa is the end of the land of Sufāla1, (al-Idrīsī p.78), and that wāqwāq is connected to this land.

In one instance it is near the land of بَرْبَر barbar the Berbers1. Wāqwāq

8 Sufāla is a district and former town in Mocambique. Its port was the regional centre for gold trade between the 10th-17th centuries (Ferrand & Freeman-Greenville, 1999:1CD2, “Sofala”). The word itself means the lowest, or the lower part of a thing (Lane, 2003:1374).
9 Al-Zanj is a certain nation of black people, also found in relation to waqwaq on maps and in texts. Like Sufala it is situated on the east coast of Africa.
is also placed near the city of ‘balad Maqdišū ’Mugadishu’ (ibn Ḥaldūn p. 37).

3.1.1.3 As a Land near al-Hind and al-Sind

Wāqwāq is also placed at the border of the land of India (bilād al-Hind) and the land of the Sind (al-Sind), and to the land of Karmān, (al-Iṣṭaḥārī p. 122).

It is also placed in connection to the city of Maljāmān, a city in ‘al-Hind’ (India), (al-Ḥimayrī W:506) and the island of Ḥalūs, (al-Idrisī p. 79).

3.1.1.4 As a Land near the Equator

One source tells us that Wāqwāq is at the equator (al-Nuwayrī W:64), another that it lies below, and that it is to the north eastern part of the populated world (al-Yaqqūt p.34).

3.1.1.5 As an Island in the Indian Ocean

In one instance Wāqwāq is found in the sea of the Indian Ocean (al-Ḥimayrī W:93). In one case it is in the same region as the islands of China (al-Ḥimayrī W:6):

In one case it is placed in the sea of India (Bahār al-Hind) and as an island lying in this sea, (al-Nuwayrī W:64). It is also placed in the sea of the Sind (al-Ḥimayrī W:298) and the sea of Bahrain (Bahār Lārwā) (al-Yaqqūt p.182).

And the second sea [...] it is called Lārwā and it is a great sea,

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10 Al-Hind is the name of the Indian sub continent. (Jairazbhoy, 1999:EIICD2, “Hind”)
11 Al-Sind is the name for the region around and the lower course of the Indus river, (Ansari, 1999:EIICD2, “Sind”).
12 The Indian Ocean was given several different names by the Arab geographers. It was common to name the sea after the region that has this sea at its coast, therefore the Indian Ocean has several different names, (Maṣbūl Ḥamīd, 1995:296).
13 Bahār al-Hind is one name for the Indian Ocean, it is also sometimes called Bahār al-Zanj from the western shores. The term Bahār Fāris is sometimes used for the entire ocean. (Hartland & Dunlop, 1999:EIICD2, “Bahār al-Hind”)
14 Sanf is located as a place between Cambodia and the delta of the Son Coi in Vietnam. It is also used as a term for an island, a kingdom of the main land that has borders to the sea in the middle of the 8th century. (Lamant, 1999:EIICD2, “Sanf”)
15 Bahār Lārwā is the second of the “seven seas” described by al-Yaqqūt. It is wa ‘innamā yāṣāru fi hādā al-bahār bi al-nujum ‘one travels in this sea by the stars’, and it continues wa fīhi ‘ajārīb kun kāṭratun wa ‘umūrūn lā tūṣīfū ‘in it are many remarkable things and things that cannot be described’. 
and in it are the islands of wāqwāq and others of the Zanj'.

al-Ya'qūbi p.182

The quote above is unclear in that it is difficult to determine if the wāqwāq is a people or a couple of islands. Jazā'ir al-wāqwāq implies that it is islands, but the following wa ġayrubum min al-zanj could mean 'the people of al-Zanj', or that the islands of wāqwāq are a part of the islands of al-Zanj.

Sometimes wāqwāq is also placed in بحر فارس 'The Indian Ocean'. It is also placed next to the island of the القشير al-Qašmīr17 (ال- 'Umarī W:6), the island of the المجال al-Dajjal8 (al-'Umarī W:6) and the island of the الجوهر al-Jawāhir9 (al-'Umarī W:6), in بحر المحيط the encircling Ocean10 (al-'Umarī W:6) and east of the islands of the السيلان al-Saylān11 (ibn Ḥaldūn p.45; ).

3.1.1.6 As an Island in another Sea

In one text there is mention of بحر الواق واق bahb al-Wāq wāq 'the sea of wāqwāq', (ibn Sa'bīd W:6), which is the outermost sea of the tenth جزء juz' (region) of the first أقليم 'clime'. Another source mentions that the islands of wāqwāq are in this region (al-Idrīsī p.87).

The sea of wāqwāq is separated from بحر الهند 'the Indian Ocean' and بحر المحيط the encircling Ocean. It is said to have several islands, the first of them being the island of the السحاب al-Sabāb 'clouds', (al-Hīmayrī W:298; al-Idrīsī p.87).

In a chapter on بحر القلزم bahb al-Qulzum 'the Read Sea', a measure is taken with wāqwāq being one point, and that this sea is four thousand فرسوخ farsāb 'parasangs', (al-Hīmayrī W:435).

One source also mentions سواحل بلد الواق واق sawāhilu bilādī al-wāq wāq 'the coast of the land of wāqwāq', (al-Qalqašandī p.244).

When mentioned as an island, or several, the number of islands vary from one to a couple and a thousand up to one thousand seven

16 Bahb Fāris is the Indian Ocean, which sometimes also is called Baḥr al-Hind. Baḥb Fāris is also a name for the Arabian Gulf.
17 Qašmīr is a region in northern India.
18 Al-Dajjal means a liar, or one who conceives the truth. It is also the name of the "false Christ", the Antichrist (Lane 2003:853).
19 Al-Jawbar (pl. jawāhir) means jewels of any kind or pearls (Lane, 2003:475).
20 Bahb al-Muḥit is the encircling Ocean, i.e. the great sea, of which one part is the north-west part of the Atlantic and the other the east of the Pacific Ocean.
21 Al-Saylān is Ceylon (Sri Lanka).
22 Most Arab writers divided the inhabitable part of the world into horizontal bands known as climata or climates (aqālim) of which there were seven (Tibbetts, 1992:102).
23 A farsāb is a measurement. According to al-Idrīsī it is the equivalent of 3 Arabian mils (Maqbūl Aḥmad, 1992:160).
hundred (ibn al-Jawzi W:10) different islands all bearing the name wāqwāq (al-Qazwini p.33).

Wāqwāq is also placed as an island of the qumayr group of islands (al-Birūnī p.179).

3.1.1.7 At the End of the World

وأرض الواق وأمم آخر ليس بعدهم إلا القفار والخلاض

Wa ḍardu al-waq wāq wa ῥummamun ῥubaʿarun laysa baʿadabum ῥilla al-qifaru wa al-ḥalā'u

'Then, the land of wāqwāq, and by other nations beyond which there is nothing but waste and empty areas.'

ibn Ḫaldūn p. 37 (transl. Rosenthal p.51)

وجزائر الواق لا تعرف ما بعدها

Wa jazāʾiru al-waq wāqiqi, lā tuʿraṣtu ma baʿdubhā

'And the islands of wāqwāq, it is not known what is beyond them'

al-Ḥimayrī W:554 (Also in al-Idrisi p.92)

The statements above, or similar statements, are frequent in the data of this study, and it seems like wāqwāq is at the fringe of the known. One source talks about the islands being difficult to reach, and that one has to navigate by the stars in order to come to them (al-Qazwini p.33). (See also note 7 on Baḥr Lārwi above.) One source talks about the region in which the land of Wāq is situated as بناك حجز

hunāka ḥazzun 'here are isolation', (al-Nuwayrī W:64)

Wāqwāq is also described as an island which none enters of the neighbouring countries, (ibn Saʿīd W:6). Except ربما وصل أهل الصين إليها في الندرة rubbamā wasāla ῥablu al-ṣīnu ῥilayḥa fi al-nudra 'sometimes the people of China comes here occasionally', (al-Ḥimayrī W:554; al-Idrisi p.92).

3.1.1.8 The uninhabited Wāqwāq

In one text the islands are described as وه٢ جزائر عدة لا عامر بها wa biya jazāʾiru ῥiddatun laʾamiru biḥā 'they are many islands where no one dwells', (al-Ḥimayrī W:554).
3.1.1.9 Summary

The data of the present study gives us two main geographical placing of wāqwāq. One in connection to the city al-Ṣin (China), as a land or an island, and one in connection to the lands of Sufāla and al-Zanj, i.e. on the east coast of Africa. There is also mention of wāqwāq being situated at the end of the world. As we can see the different locations are confusing, making it hard to place wāqwāq on a map. But in the context of wāqwāq as being a symbol for something that could be considered mythological, the sometimes confusing locations of this place is not an issue. This will be discussed in chapter 4.

3.2.2 Wāqwāq as a People

3.2.2.1 Their physical Features

Some of the data of the present study contain different physical features of the people of wāqwāq. Some sources mention a 'aswad 'black', (ibn Saʿid W:6; al-Biruni p.169; al-Ḥimayri W:554), arqab 'greedy', (al-Biruni p. 169), naked people, (al-Ḥimayri W:554), with qibāḥu al-ṣawri 'ugly faces', (ibn Saʿid W:6; al-Ḥimayri W:554; al-Idrīsī p.79), and mawhūw al-khāliqa mušawwahū al-ḥalqīti 'disfigured', (ibn Saʿid W:6) and with kalamūn min al-ṣafīr 'a speech that is of the whistling type', (al-Ḥimayri W:554; al-Idrīsī p.79). Also takallamū maʿabum bikalamū min yuḥbamu minhum 'they spoke to each other with a language none of them understands', (al-Ḥimayri W:298). The people are also described as nisāʿūbun nakṣīn ruʿūsabunna wa yajʿalna fibā al-ʿamāvat al-muttaḥada tīn al-ʿajjī al-mukallalati bi al-ṣanafī 'their women show their heads [not covering them] and they put [on their heads] combs made of ivory, adorned with leaves', (al-Idrīsī, p.92), and the author continues in describing the combs as wa rubbāmā kāna fi raʿsī al-mārātī minhunna 'iṣrūna muṣṭan 'sometimes there are as many as twenty combs on the head of one of the women', (al-Ḥimayri W:298, al-Idrīsī p.92). There is one description of the men wearing on ruʿūsabun be šabbībe al-qalānis wa tusammā bi luğat al-Hind al-Brīrāda 'their heads something that look like al-Qalānis', and they call it al-brīrāda in the language of al-Hind', (al-Idrīsī p.92).

24 Al-Qalānis, 'bonnet haute en forme de pain de sucre [...] il était porté par les califes abbāsides', (Dozy p.409), 'tall headgear, tiara, cīdāris; hood, cowl, capuche; cap', (Wehr p.780).
3.2.2.2 Their Origin

Some of the data mentions wāqwāq as من نتاج ما بين بعض النبات و بعض الحيوان min nitāju mā bayna baʿdi al-nabāti wa baʿdi al-ḥayawāni 'that which come as an offspring between plants and animals', (al-Bihqī W:48; al-İşfahānī W:629; al-Damārī p.38). One text even refers to an island where people are born without a father or a mother, and continues to describe these 'people' as hanging from their hair from a tree (ibn Ṭufayl W:1), the wāqwāq tree (see chapter 3.2.4.2 below).

3.2.2.3 Their Religion

The people of wāqwāq are sometimes described as Majūs25 (ibn Ḥaldūn p.45; al-Ḥimayrī W:298; al-İdrīsī p.92), and referred to as ي يعرفون نينا ولا اتصلت بهم شريعة lā yaʿarifsūna dinan wa lā itṭasaʿalat bībim šariʿa they do not know any religion and they have no šariʿa26, (al-İdrīsī p.92).

3.2.2.4 Their Food

The people of wāqwāq are described as eating būt 'fish', (al-İdrīsī p.79), صدف 'oyster', (al-İdrīsī p.79) and لحوم السلاحف luḥūmu al-silāḥif 'meat from the turtle', (al-İdrīsī p.79). They are also said to have سمك علائم samakun 'aḏimun 'big fish', (al-Yaʿqūbī p.182). And one source even says that اللذين يظلمون الطريق على الناس و يأكلونهم Alladīna yaqtaʿūna al-tariqa 'alā al-nāsi wa yaʿkulūnahum 'These are those who ambush people and eat them', (ibn Saʿīd W:6).

3.2.2.5 Their Location

The people of wāqwāq are described as هوم متخصصون بجبالهم لا يصلون إلى أحد ولا يصلون بهم أحد wa hum mutahāṣṣīnūna bi jibālibim lā yāṣīlūna 'ilā ʿaḥādin wa lā yattaṣillu bībim 'aḥādu n 'they are fortified in their mountains, not going to anyone and no one is in contact with them', (al-İdrīsī p.92).

3.2.2.6 Their Cities

Wāqwāq is besides being described as uninhabited, described as having many, or only two, (al-Ḥimayrī W:554; al-İdrīsī p.79) ḥaqratānī 'miserable' cities, inhabited ones, (ibn al-WARDI p.34). One source gives us the name of the two cities, ددرغ د درغ ddrū and ddrūgh, (al-İdrīsī p.79).

25 "Originally an ancient Iranian priestly cast - - - but used in Arabic primarily for Zoroastrians" (Morony 1999:EICDZ, "Majūs")
26 Šariʿa the Islamic Law.
3.2.2.7 Wāqwāq as an 'Umma

Wāqwāq are described as a أمة 'umma 'people' in texts that describes the world in the shape of a bird, (al-Maqrizi p.85; ibn Tağıribirdî p.32). The former even mentions two different peoples, وَخَلَفَ الْعَرَاقَ أُمَّةً يَقُولُ لَهَا وَاق، وَخَلَفَ وَاق أُمَّةً يَقُولُ لَهَا وَاق وَاق wa ḫalṣa al-‘Irāq ‘ummātun yuqālu labā wāq, wa ḫalṣa wāq ‘ummātun yuqālu labā wāq wāq 'behind Iraq is a nation which is called wāq, and behind wāq is a nation called wāq wāq', (al-Maqrizi p.85).

In one instance it is mentioned that after the people of wāqwāq comes the أمة بحرية ‘Ummatun baḥriyatun 'the sea people', which are said to على شبه النسبة الحسان سبب الشعر نواهد الصدور ويقال لها بنات الماء: "الابن الصبية الأنساء al-hissān sabiṭu al-ṣu ‘ai̇ri nawābiḍ al-ṣudūri (They look like a beautiful woman, with straight hair and young breasts, are called the daughters of the sea), (al-Ḥimayri W:555).

3.2.2.8 The Rulers of Wāqwāq

وَحَكَى مُوسَى بْنِ الْمَبَارَكِ الْسِّبْرَافِي أنَّهِ دَخَلَ هذِهِ الْبَلَادَ وَقَدْ مَلَكَتَهَا امْرَأَةً وَأَنَّهُ رَأَاهَا عَلَى سَرْيَةٍ عَرَبِيَّةٍ وَعَلَى رَأسِهَا تَاجٌ وَعَنْدَهَا أَرْبَعَةٌ آلَفٌ وَسِيْفَةٌ عَرَةَ أَبِكَارًا

Wa ḫakā múṣa ibn al-Mubārak al-Ṣirāfī ḥannābu daḫala bāḏibī al-bilāda wa qad malikatubā ṣimrāʾatun wa ḥannābu rāhā al-ālā sārin al-ūrāyātān wa al-ālā rāṣibā tājun wa ḥindāba ṣarīʿatu ʿalāfū waṣīfatin urāṭan ʿabkāran.

‘Mūsa ibn al-Mubārak al-Sirafi told that he had come to this land, and that its ruler was a woman and that he saw her sitting naked on a bed. On her head was a crown, and with her where four thousand female servants, naked and virgins.’

al-Qazwini p.33

This mentioning of a female ruler appears in another place, with the same referens to this source Mūsa ibn al-Mubārak, (ibn al-Jawzi W:10).

The islands of wāqwāq are also described with وفيهم مolk متعددون wa fīḥim mulūkun muṭaʾaddidūn (in them are many kingdoms), (ibn Ḥaldūn p. 45).

وَيَقَالُ إِنَّ هَذِهِ الْجَزِيرَةَ كَانَتْ مَلْكَتَهَا امْرَأَةً، وَإِنَّ بَعْضَ السَّفَارِيَّنَ وَقَالَ إِلَيْهَا وَنَخِلَّتْ وَرَأَى هَذِهِ الْكَلَّةَ، وَهِيَ جَالِسَةَ عَلَى سَرْيَةٍ، وَعَلَى رَأْسِهَا تَاجٌ مِن ذِهبٍ وَحوَالها أَرْبعَةٌ وَسِيْفَةٌ

وصيفة كُلِّهمِ أَبِكَارٌ
Wa yuqālu 'inna bādībi al-jazīratā kānat malikatubā 'imra'atan, wa 'inna ba'da al-musāfirīn waṣala 'ilayhā wa daḥalābā wa ra'a bādībi al-malikata, wa biya jālisatun 'alā sarīrin, wa 'alā ra'sībā tājun min dāhabin wa ḥawlabā 'arb'amā'ta waṣīfatin kullibinna 'abkārun.

'It is said that this is the island where there the ruler is a woman. Sometimes travellers comes to [this island] and have seen this queen, and she is sitting naked on a bed, on her head is a crown of gold and around her is four hundred female slaves, all of them naked.'

al-'Ībīhi p.199

The description above is common in the data of the present study, although in different variations. Sometimes this female ruler is described as above, with a crown of gold on her head. She is commonly described as sitting naked on a bed surrounded by female slaves, sometimes as many as four thousands, all of them naked and sometimes virgins (ibn al-Jawzi W:10; al-Qazwīnī p.33). Sometimes the slaves are only four hundred (al-'Ībīhi p. 199).

3.2.2.9 Summary

The descriptions of wāqwaq as a people vary a lot, from descriptions of their physical features to their origin and their rulers. One of the most common attestations of wāqwaq is that of the female naked ruler, something that could be interpreted as a social distance, as well as the people of wāqwaq with their physical features, origin and religion.

The description of wāqwaq as a mixture of animals and plants is perhaps not best placed in this category, but the reference to ibn Ṭūfayl in 3.2.4.2 suggests that it is in fact a people rather than a plant or something else.

The physical features of the people of wāqwaq could easily be interpreted as negative, with descriptions of ugly and greedy. Positive portrayals are hard to find in this category, but in the following 3.2.3 we find more positive descriptions.
3.2.3 The Assets and Features of Wāqwāq

3.2.3.1 The Gold of Wāqwāq

One of the most frequent assets of wāqwāq is gold, katīrun min al-dhabab 'a lot of gold', (ibn Ḥurdaḏbih p.29; al-ʿĪshī p.199; al-Masʿūdi p.112; ibn Saʿīd W.6; ibn al-Wardi p.34).

While some sources simply mention that there is much gold here [in the land of wāqwāq], (al-Nuwayrī W:1661), others are more specific, (al-Ḥimayrī W:37; ibn Ḥurdaḏbih p.29; al-ʿĪshī p.199; al-Idrisī p.93; al-Qazwīnī p.33; ibn al-Wardi W:48), and emphasize the amount of gold as:

Wa biya [wāqwāq] katīratu al-dhabab ḥattā anna ʿablahā yattahḍīna salāsila kālibīm wa ʿatwāq qurūdībim min dhabbin wa yaṭīna bi al-qumūṣī al-mansūjati bi al-dhabab ʿlī al-bayʿī.

'It [wāqwāq] has so much gold that that its inhabitants make chains for their dogs, and collars for their monkeys of gold, they [also] produce shirts woven of gold to sell.'

ibn Ḥurdaḏbih p.29 (Also in al-Qazwīnī p.33; al-Idrisī p.93)

One source mentions that the people on this island feṣṣīmūn līnātī maʿn al-dhabab wa yahbūna bibi qusūrān ʿaw buyyūtan bi ʿīqānnin wa ʿīkāmin 'they make bricks of gold and they build castles and houses of them, making them firm and solid', (ibn al-Wardi W:48).

3.2.3.2 The Goods of Wāqwāq

Wāqwāq also have a lot of "goods", such as ōbnūs 'ebony', (al-Ḥimayrī W:555; ibn Ḥurdaḏbih pp.29 & 70; al-Idrisī p.93; ibn al-Jawzī W:10), sometimes the ebony is black, (al-Bīrūnī p.169), tamar 'dates', (al-Ḥimayrī W:555) and fawākib 'fruit', (al-Himayrī W:555). One source mentions that wāqwāq among other islands has ānwās al-ṣīb wa al-ʿafūwīb 'different sorts of perfume and aromatics', (ibn Ḥaldūn p.45).
3.2.3.3 The Climate of Wāqwāq

Wāqwāq is also described as حارة بَرَّة 'hot', (al-Maṣūdi p.112; al-Nuwayri W:1661), and خصبة بَسْط 'fertile', (al-Maṣūdi p.112; al-Nuwayri W:1661; ibn al-Wardi p.34). One source talks about the island of wāqwāq لا يوجد البرد عنهم استراح و ل المطر lā yājadu al-bardu ‘indahum 'aslan wa lā al-maṣṭar they have no cold at all, and no rain', (ibn al-Wardi p. 34).

3.2.3.4 The Animals of Wāqwāq

One source talks about the island of wāqwāq being inhabited only by فيلة fīyala 'elephants' and having a طير tāyr 'bird', (al-Idrīsī p.92). It also has no ships and no دواب dawāb 'beasts, cattle', (ibn al-Wardi p.34; al-Himayri W:554).

3.2.3.5 Other Assets and Features

It is also said about wāqwāq that وبهذة الجزائر من أحوال العربون عجائب ذكرها أهل الجغرافيا wa bi ḍāḥihi al-jazā‘irī min ’aḥwāl al-‘umrānī ‘aḍā‘ibu ḍakaraḥā ‘ablu al-juqraṭiyyā 'in these islands are remarkable cultural features mentioned by geographers', (ibn Ḥaldūn p.45).

ساكنها قليل لضيق عيشها و تكدر رزقها
Sākinhūbā qalīlun laḍīqu ‘aṭṣubā wa takaddūri rizqībā
'The inhabitants are few, due to a life of poverty'

al-Idrīsī p.79

Wāqwāq is also mentioned as a land with many عجائب ‘aḍā‘ib things (al-Maṣūdi p.112; al-Nuwayri W:1661; ibn al-Wardi p.34; al-Ya‘qūbī p.182). It is described as a واسعة wāsī‘a 'wide' land (ibn al-Wardi p.34), and the islands of wāqwāq as كبرة kabira 'big', (ibn al-Wardi W:48).

Also, تدخل إليهم المراكب من عمان tadhūlu ilayhim al-murākib min ‘umān 'Ships from Oman comes here', (ibn al-Wardi p.34).

3.2.3.6 Summary

This category is dominated by the description of wāqwāq having a lot of gold, perhaps the thing which, besides the human like fruit (see 3.2.4.3 below), is most commonly connected with wāqwāq, but there are also, as we have seen, other features that are associated with wāqwāq, such as ebony and fertility.
3.2.4 Wāqwāq as a Tree

The mention of the wāqwāq tree are plenty in the data of this study, (al-Jawhari p.563; al-Maqdisi p.397; ibn al-Muţahhar al-Maqdisi W:214; al-Zabidi p.91), and they are more or less the same. Some of the texts have some details added to them and some are shorter versions of longer ones.

3.2.4.1 The Type of the Tree

There is mention of a tree that is found in the district of al-Gāmdān, at an increase of Jāmi' al-yabūdiyyatī 'at the entrance of the mosque of al-Yahūdiyya' (transl. Collins p.324), which is said to look like the tree of wāqwāq, (al-Maqdisi p.397).

There is also another source which refers to al-Mašūḍī when mentioning the tree of wāqwāq. 

وَبِهَا شَجُرُ حُكْمِ السُّعُودِيَّةِ هُمَا أَسْوَرُونَ لا قَبِلَهُمَا 'in it [wāqwāq] is a tree which al-Mašūḍī tells something about', (al-Idrisi p.92).

3.2.4.2 The Name of the Tree

Some of the texts explains how the islands of wāqwāq has gotten their name. 

وَبِهَا الْإِبْتِطَاءُ وَمَا الْعَمْوَامَانِ 'This name which, differently from what the people believe, is from the tree whose fruits resembles the head of a crying human', (al-Birūnī p.169).

3.2.4.3 The Fruit of the Tree

The tree of wāqwāq is often described as having fruits resembling the head of sometimes a human in general (al-Ībšīhī p.199; ibn al-Muţahhar al-Maqdisi W:214) and sometimes a woman (al-Qazwīnī p.33).

In one text there is a mention of a remarkable island;

ذكر سفلنا المصالح، وَضَيْعَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ، أَنَّ جَزِيرَةً مِنْ جَزِيرَةِ الْهَندِ، الَّتِي تَحْتُ خطِّ الإسْتِوَاء، وَهِيَ الْجَزِيرَةُ الَّتِي يَتَوَلَّدُ بِهَا الإِنْسَانُ مِنْ غَيْرِ أَمَّ وَأَبِيهَا، وَبِهَا شَجُرُ يَثْرِرُ نَسَا، وَهِيَ الَّتِي ذَكَرَ السُّعُودِيَّةُ أَنَّهَا جَزِيرَةُ الْوَقَاقِلِ لِأَنَّ تَلْكَ الْجَزِيرَةَ أَوْلِدَتْ بَقَاعَ الأَرْضِ هِوَاهَا: أَتْمَمَهَا الْشَّرْقُ الْنُّورِ الْأَعْاليَ عَلَيْهَا اسْتَعْدَادُ، إِنْ كَانَ ذَلِكَ خَلَافُ مَا يَرَاهُ جَمِيعُ الفَلَاقِ وَكِبَارُ الْأَطْبَاءِ.
Dakara salafna al-salih, radha allahu 'anhum, 'anna jazirata min al-jazair al-Hindi allati tahta baht al-istawa', wa biya al-jaziratu allati yatawalladu biba al-insana min gayri ummin wa la 'abin, wa biba sajarun yujmiru nisa'an, wa biya allati dakara al-Mas'udi 'innabah jazirata al-waqwaqi li'anna tilka al-jazirata 'a'dalu biqa'i al-'ardi haw'a'an, 'atmamabha li shuruqi al-nuri al-'a'da 'alayba isti'dadun, wa in kana alikha hilafun ma yarabu jumburu al-falasifati wa kibaru al-'atibba'i.

'Our worthy predecessors (may God be pleased with them) have related that one of the islands of India that lies below the equator is the islands where humans are created without a father or mother and where trees bear women as fruit. This is the island that al-Mas'udi calls the Island of Waqwāq. For this island has the most temperate air of all the regions of the earth and is the most perfect because it is disposed to have the highest light shine upon it. This is contrary to what the majority of philosophers and most eminent physicians believe.'


3.2.4.4 The Sound of the Tree

The fruit of this tree makes the sound 'waqwāq' when it falls to the ground (Ibn Sa'id W:6).

Wa ummatu al-waqwak qi jamala sajarun 'id'amun mu'allaqatan bi su'uriha wa laba 'adadi wa furujun ka furuji al-nilasi' w la yuzulna yusihna waq waq wa 'idam qu'i'at min al-a'shari allati tabmiliba 'aqamat yawan wa ba'da yawmiin 'umma tabliku wa rubbama nakhabunna al-nasu fi 'atayabi rai'ihatun wa aladdi mabadi'a.

'The people of waqwāq gathers big fruits hanging by its hair, and it has breasts and openings like the openings of a woman, and a beautiful body. It doesnt stop crying out
wâqwâq. It is cut down from the trees which it hangs in, it stands straight for a day or more, then it becomes destroyed. Sometimes a human have intercourse with them'.

al-Ḥimayri W:555

وفي هذه الجزيرة من الجماجم شجر يشبه شجرة [..] أر الجو ويجعل حملا كبيرة الإنسان فإذا انتهى سمع له تصبحت يفهم منه واق واق ثم يسقط

Wa fi ḍāhiba al-jazirati min al-ʿajāʾib bi šajara al-yuṣībū šājara al-jawzī [...] wa yāḥmilu ḥamlan ka hay′atī al-ʿinsānī fa ʿīdā intabā sumīʾa labu taṣwītun yuṣhamu minbu wâq wâq tūmma yasqūtū.

'Among the extraordinary things on this island is the tree of wâqwâq which resembles the walnut tree [...] it carries fruits in the shape of the human, and when they are mature [litt. Done], one hear from them a sound which is wâq wâq, then they fall [to the ground]'

al-ʿĪbīshī p.199 (Also in al-Qazwīnī p.33)

3.2.4.5 Wâqwâq as an Evil Omen

One source talks about the fruit of wâqwâq falling down, considered as a sign of an evil omen by the natives of the island having this tree (al-Qazwīnī p.33). Wâqwâq as being something connected to an evil or bad omen is something we can see further in chapter 3.2.5 below, in respect to wâqwâq as being a type of bird.

3.2.4.6 Summary

Wâqwâq as a tree is just as wâqwâq having a lot of gold, very common in the data of this study. There seems to be some uncertainties about weather or not the fruit of this tree is a human or something else. The reference above in 3.2.4.4 suggests that humans even have intercourse with these human like fruits, while in 3.2.4.3 it is suggested that the fruits are actually humans, born without a father or a mother.

3.2.5 Wâqwâq as a Bird

This category is dominated by the dictionary entries which mentions several different birds as equal to the wâq bird. The birds are (1) al-Ṣurad (al-Marzūqi p.353; ibn Jinnī W:23; al-Jawhari p.563; al-Damiri W:739; al-Maymani W:295; ibn Qutayba p.212; ibn Durayd W:94; al-ʿAmadī p.128), (2) al-Ḥātim (al-Marzūqi p.353; ibn Jinnī W:23; al-Maymani W:295; al-ʿAmadī p.128), (3) al-Ṣaqrāq (al-Nuwayrī W:1117), (4) al-ʿAḥīl (al-Nuwayrī
The two birds al-Gurāb and al-Āḥtab are not described as an evil omen in the dictionaries, but there are cross references under al-Āḥtab to al-Ṣūrād, which is described with this attribute. The bird al-Gurāb is neither described as an evil omen nor has it any references to the other birds.

A certain bird above the size of the sparrow, having a large head, which preys upon sparrows: a certain bird, black and white, or party-coloured, with a white belly: a certain bird of the crow kind, also called the white. The Arabs used to regard its cry, and the bird itself, as of evil omen, and used to kill it; and they are forbidden to kill it, in order to dispel the idea of a thing's being of evil omen. (Lane 2003:1677)

A certain bird, regarded as of evil omen; less than the pigeon, the colour of which is green. (Lane 2003:1581)

A certain black bird, well known [of which there are several species (Lane 2003:2243)

A pigeon of the colour termed The [bird called] The bird called in Persian according to a marginal note in a copy of the $...$ or the bird called because it has a mixture of black and white. And the And a certain creepy thing ... of a green colour; longer than the locust, having six legs, [...]. (Lane 2003:763)

There is also mention of wāqwāq as the sound of a bird and also a dog. Wāqwāq sometimes denotes the sounds of a mixture of birds', (al-Zabidi p.91; ibn Durayd W:81).

This bird which makes the sound 'wāqwāq', is besides being described as a specific sort, described as of not a specific sort', (al-Suyūṭī p.106; ibn Durayd W:81; al-Zabidi p.91)

We also find that it is called so because of its sound', (al-Jawhari p.536; al-Dāmirī W:739; ibn Qutayba p.212).
3.2.5.1 The Features of the Bird

Sometimes the wāqwāq bird is described with its different features, such as it has ضخم الرأس (1) ُdaḥm al-qaṇār 'a big beak', (2) ُdaḥm al-ra's 'a big head' and ضخم البراثن (3) ُdaḥm al-qaṭīṣ'īn 'big claws', (4) and that it is نفور من الناس nunfūrun min al-nās 'shy with people' (al-Nuwayri W:1117; al-Qalqashandi p.83). It is also described as شرسة (5) ُšārib (greedy), شرسة (6) ُšārás 'malicious' and ُسَرِيَّة (7) ُsāriqa 'thieving', (al-Nuwayri W:1117).

3.2.5.2 Summary

Wāqwāq as a bird is not found with any geographical connection in the data of this study. This bird is mentioned with cross references to similar birds, or the same bird with different names. There are also references to wāqwāq being the sound of birds.

3.2.6 Wāqwāq as something else

There is mention of wāqwāq as والواقين الكثير الكلام ُwā-l-qaṇār qu al-kaṭīr al-kalām 'wāqwāq is [one who] speaks a lot', (al-Yaqūt p.439; al-²Azhari W:1295; al-Zabidi p.91).

Sometimes wāqwāq is نباح الكلب عند الفرق ُnubāḥu al-kalbi 'inda al-faraq 'the barking of a dog when it is frightened', (al-²Azhari W:1295; al-Zabidi p.91; al-Jawhari p.563; al-Yaqūt p.439).

There is one mention of wāq as a castle, over which a man ruled;

Malika Karmān wa Fāris wa Ịfūrastān wa qaṣr al-Wāq.

'He ruled over Karmān, Fāris, Ịfūrastān and the castle of al-Wāq' al-²Gazālī p.97
4 Wāqwāq as a geographical Myth

In chapter 3 I have described in relative detail the different characteristics of wāqwāq as they occur in our sources. We have seen wāqwāq as a geographical location, its assets and features, as a people, as a tree, as a bird and as something else.

Based on the data of my study as presented in chapter 3, I will in the present chapter draw some generalizations about Arab geographical myths through wāqwāq as a case study.

One could argue that Arab myths in general and geographical myths in particular, can be summarized in one word, ‘ajiba (sg.) ‘ajāʾib27 (pl.). This term, used by the authors themselves in for example al-ʾIbšiḥ, في هذه الجزيرة من العجائب شجر يشبه شجر الجوْذن fi bādibī al-jazīra min al-ʾajāʾib ʾażāra yuṣbibu ʾażāra al-jawz 'among the extraordinary things on this island is the tree of wāqwāq which resembles the walnut tree', (p.199), brings us back to the discussion on mythology in chapter 2.3 above. We find ‘ajāʾib as a contrast to ʾurāfā ʾ (sg.) ʾurāfāt28 (pl.), which is something fictitious, as pointed out by al-Yaʿqūb in Muʿajam al-buldān, هم بلاد فوق الصين يجيء ذكرها في الخرائط biya bilādun fawqa al-Ṣīn yajīʾu ʾikrubā fi al-ʾurāfāt 'it is a land above China which is mentioned in the fables', (p.439). This could show that ‘ajāʾib denotes something strange, yet true, whereas the ʾurāfā would be the opposite, the untrue/unreal.

To describe the Arab geographical myth in one word, the term ‘ajāʾib is suitable. It is the highest form of abstraction, and based on wāqwāq as a case study of a geographical myth, we can suggest the following generalizations concerning the Arab geographical myth - the Arab geographical ‘ajāʾib:

4.1 The ‘ajāʾib Distance

One could argue that the distance does not necessarily have to be a geographical distance, but also a mental distance. This generalization could therefore in one way be connected to the one in 4.2 below, the ‘ajāʾib social behavior. But with this generalization I mean the geographical distance, since the mental distance is illustrated below.

The ‘ajāʾib distance can be illustrated through phrases such as وجوهرات الواقع ولا تعرف ما عداها wa jazāʾiru al-wāq waqī lā tuʿrafu mā baʿduhā 'and the island of wāqwāq, it is not known what is beyond them'), (al-Ḥimayri, W:554 (also in al-Idrisi, p.92)).

27 ‘ajiba (sg.), ‘ajāʾib (pl.), "wondrous thing, unheard-of thing, prodigy, marvelous, miracle, wonder; pl. Remarkable things, curiosities, oddities" (Wehr, p.591), also "a wonderful thing; a thing at which one wonders" (Lane, p.1957).
28 ʾurāfā (sg.), ʾurāfāt (pl.), "superstition; fable, fairy tale", (Wehr, p.235), also "signifies a fictitious story that is deemed pretty", (Lane, p.726).
4.2 The 'ajā'ib social behaviour

The ‘ajā'ib social behaviour could, as presented above, be more of the sort of a mental distance, but I have chosen to generalize it as an ‘ajā'ib social behaviour. This shows what was accepted as true, yet strange, behaviour.

Much of the data of the present study speaks of a female ruler, a queen, sitting naked on a bed. As cited in 3.2.2.2, 'wa ḥakā mūsā ibn al-mubārak al-sirāfī ʿannabu daḫala hāḏībi al-bilād wa qad malikatāb ĭmraʿatun wa ʿannabu rābā ʿalā sarīrin ʿaryānatan wa ʿalā raʾsibā tājun wa ʿindābā ʿarbaʿatū ḍalīf waṣīfatan ʿurātan ʿabkāran, 'Mūsā ibn al-Mubārakī told that he had come to this land, and that its ruler was a woman and that she saw her sitting naked on a bed. On her head was a crown, and with her where four thousand female servants, naked and virgins', (al-Qazwīnī p.33).

Also, it is not impossible that there could be room for an additional generalization here, the ‘ajā'ib sexual behaviour. This is a question that could be answered through including more than one case study.

4.3 The ‘ajā'ib wealth/assets or lack of it, extremes

By extremes, one could expect several aspects of extremes. The most obvious in relation to the data of the present study is the ‘ajā'ib wealth, or the lack of it. Here, it is the gold that is in focus, and wāqwāq is commonly associated with an abundance of gold.

According to the data of this study, wāqwāq is more often attested with extreme wealth than extreme poverty, as wāqwāq having a lot of gold. ʿwa biya [al-wāq waq] kaṭīratu al-ḍābabi ḫattā ʿanna ʿalabāb yattaḥdiʿuna salāsila kilābībim wa ʿatwaqqa qurūdībim min ḍababin wa yaʿtāna bi al-ɡumūṣi al-mansūjati bi al-ḍababi li al-bay, 'It [wāqwāq] has so much gold that that its inhabitants make chains for their dogs, and collars for their monkeys of gold, they [also] produce shirts woven of gold to sell', (ibn Ḥuрудḏībīh p.29), as cited in 3.2.3.1. There is also in two instances a description of the heat (al-Maṣʿūdī p.112; al-Nuwayrī W:1661) that exists here, which could also be considered an extreme.

An example of the lack of wealth/assets is read in al-Idrīsī, ساكينها قليل لضيق عيشها وطكر درته Sākinhābā qalīlun li ḍiqī ʿayšibā wa takadduri rizqibā, 'The inhabitants are few, due to a life of poverty', (al-Idrīsī p.79).
4.4 The ‘ajā’ib Creatures/Plants (living things in their making)

Common in the data of the present study is the human like fruit which comes of the tree of wāqwāq. It is sometimes considered as just a human like fruit, but it is also considered as a real human in the following example:

َذَكَرَ سُلْفِنَا الصَّالِحِ، رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ، أَنَّ جَزِيرَةً مِنْ جِزَائِرِ الْهَنْدِ الَّتِي تَحْتُ خُطِّ الْإِسْتِمْسَاءِ، وَهِيَ الْجَزِيرَةُ الَّتِي يَقُولُ بَعْضُهَا إِنسَانُ مِنْ غَيْرِ أَمِّ وَلَدِهَا، وَبِهَا شَجَرٌ يَثْرُ نَسَاءٍ، وَهِيَ الَّتِي ذُكِرَ السُّلْفِيَّةُ أَنَّهَا جَزِيرَةُ الْوَقَفِ ثُلُثَ الْجَزِيرَةِ أَعْمَلْ بِقَاعِ الأَرْضِ هَوَاءً، إِنَّمَا لَشَرُّ النُّورُ الأُعْلَى عَلَيْهَا إِسْتِعْدَادٌ، وَإِنْ كَانَ ذَلِكَ خَلَفْ مَا يَرَى جَمِيعُ الْفِلاْسِفَ وَكُبَارُ الْأَطْبَاءِ.

ِdakara salafnā al-ṣāliḥ, raḍā allāhu ʿanhum, ṣaḥra jaziratā min al-jazāʾir al-Hindi allatī taḥta baṭṭi al-istawa, wa biya al-jaziratu allatī yatawaddadu biḥā al-insāna min ʿayri ṣaḥra wa lā ʿabīn, wa biḥā ṣajarun yuṭmirū nisāʾan, wa biya allatī dakara al-Masʿūdī ʿinnahā jaziratā al-waqwāqī liʿanna tilka al-jazirata ʿaḍal biqāʾi al-ʿarḍi bawāʾan, ʿ aimamahā li šurūq al-nūri al-ʿaʾlā ʿalayhā isitʿdādun, wa ʿin kāna dālika bilāsun mā yarābū ru al-falāṣifatī wa khibrū al-ʿaṭībbāʾi. ʿOur worthy predecessors (may God be pleased with them) have related that one of the islands of India that lies below the equator is the islands where humans are created without a father or mother and where trees bear women as fruit. This is the island that al-Masʿūdī calls the Island of Wāqwāq. For this island has the most temperate air of all the regions of the earth and is the most perfect because it is disposed to have the highest light shine upon it. This is contrary to what the majority of philosophers and most eminent physicians believe.ʿ, (Ibn Ṭufayl W:1, transl. Khalidi p.99), as cited in 3.2.4.3.

The example above, with the tree from where humans are born without a father or a mother, could be related to fertility, perhaps another generalization, although this is impossible to say with only wāqwāq as a case study.

5 Summary

So, what makes an Arab geographical myth an Arab geographical myth? Obviously, it has to be a geographical place, but it is a combination of that, and what is inside it that makes it a geographical myth. The wāqwāq tree is for example in itself not a geographical myth, but the combination of it being strongly connected to a geographical place as well as containing ʿajāʾib, it is. The ʿajāʾib, as we have seen above in the generalizations, have to be strange for the contemporary, yet possible.

By adding more ʿajāʾib to a geographical position, we get a stronger geographical myth.

According to the generalizations above, one could argue that wāqwāq could be considered as a strong geographical myth, it is written in Arabic/occurs in Arabic sources, it has a geographical position and it contains a lot of ʿajāʾib. But one has to be careful in making generalizations based upon just one case study. The generalizations above are only a suggestion, and more work needs to be done including more than one
case study.

One could say that the formula for the Arab geographical myth is:

Written in Arabic + a geographical position + some form of ‘ajā'īb
= An Arab geographical myth.

These ‘ajā'īb can be, as mentioned in chapter 4, the distance, the social behaviour, the wealth/lack of it and/or the creatures/plants (living things in their making).
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| 35 | Al-Suyūṭī  | Al-Mazāḥ fī ʿulūm al-Luğa wa awnāʿiḥā  |
| 36 | Ibn Ṭaḡribirdī | Al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī Aḥbār Miṣr wa al-Qābira  |
| 37 | Ibn Ṭūfayl | Ḥayy Ibn Yaqḍān  |
| 38 | Al-ʿUmarī   | Kitāb masālīk al-ʿAbsār fī mamālīk al-ʿAmšār  |
| 39 | Ibn al-Wardī | Kitāb ḫaridat al-ʿAjāʾib wa faridat al-Ǧarāʾib  |
| 40 | Al-Waṭṭawāṭ | Manābīj al-Fīkar wa mabābīj al-ʿIbar  |
| 41 | Al-Yaʿqūbī | Tārīḫ al-Yaʿqūbī  |
| 42 | Al-Zabīdī  | Tāj al-ʿArūs  |