

Naḍrat al-Āfāq fī jazāʾir al-Waḳwāq

*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 وقوق *wqwq* 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 و ليلة *Alf layla wa layla* (thousand and one nights) shows the varying nature of wāqwāq:

قالت: بلغني أيها الملك السعيد أن العجوز قالت لهن إن زوجتك في جزيرة السابعة من جزائر واق الواق، ومسافة ما بيننا وبينها سنة كاملة للراكب الجدد في السير، وعلى شاطئ هذا النهر جبل آخر يسمى جبل واق وهذا الاسم علم على شجرة أغصانها تشبه رؤوس بني آدم فإذا طلعت الشمس عليها تصبح تلك الرؤوس جميعاً وتقول في صيلحها واق واق سبحان لخالق، فإذا سمعنا صيلحها نعلم أن الشمس قد طلعت، وكذلك إذا غربت الشمس تصبح تلك الرؤوس وتقول في صيلحها واق واق سبحان الملك لخالق فنعلم أن الشمس غربت، ولا يقدر أحد من الرجال أن يقيم عندنا ولا يصل إلينا ولا يطأ أرضنا وبيننا وبين الملكة التي تحكم على هذه الأرض مسافة شهر من هذا البر وجميع الرعية التي في ذلك البر تحت يد تلك الملكة تحت يدها أيضاً قبائل لجان المردة والشيلطين وتحت يدها من السحرة ما لا يعلم عددهم إلا الذي خلقهم.

Alf Layla wa layla W:761

'Thy wife is in the seventh island on the Islands of Wāḳ-Wāḳ, and the distance between us and it is a | whole year's journey to the rider who travellet with dilligence - - - 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, Wāḳ! Wāḳ!, Extolled 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 و ليلة *Alf layla wa layla* (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 Ḥurdādhbih, (Maqbūl Aḥmad 1995:361) as the أرض

*ard* 'land' of al-Wāqwāq, a place containing an abundance of gold, (ibn Ḥurdādbih, 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:“Wāḵwāḵ”). After that, wāqwāq started to appear as more than an island or a land.

There have been speculations that the word itself is onomatopoeic (Tibbetts & Toorawa 1999:“Wāḵwāḵ”), 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 *Dgrgb* (al-Idrīsī p. 79), which both could be interpreted as onomatopoeic.

In the Persian *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam*, 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 (surū-i karg). The people are black and naked. (Wāq-Wāq) belongs to the hot zone and has no amenity (ni‘mat). Its capital is M.qys, which is a small town (where) merchants of various classes (gūnāgūn) stay.* (transl. Minorsky p.84)

The sources speak of wāqwāq as being situated in the neighbourhood of China, near the land of سفالة, *Sufāla* (on the African east coast) 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:“Wāḵwāḵ”)<sup>1</sup>.

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 three<sup>2</sup> (Tibbetts & Toorawa 1999:“Wāḵwāḵ”). 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?

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 “Wāḵwāḵ” by Tibbetts and Toorawa from the *Encyclopædia of Islam, Early Mapping of Southeast Asia* by Thomas Suárez and *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography (9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)* by Sayyid Maqbūl Aḥmad.

2 Madagascar was called القمر *al-Qumr* (moon), which is also the name for the Comore islands. Sumatra was called زبج *zabaj*. (Ferrand & Verin, 1999:EICD2, “Madagascar”). Zanzibar was called قنبل *qanbal* (Ricks, 1970:349). According to Miquel also قنبلو *qanbalū* (Miquel, 2001:172).

## **1.1. Questions**

### **1.1.1 Main Question**

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

The aim is to find a preliminary set of characteristic traits for the Arab geographical myth through analyzing wāqwāq 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 wāqwāq is not new, it is only that previous works have been dealing with locating wāqwāq today, rather than its different characters.

Wāqwāq 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 it was perceived by the people contemporary to the stories of wāqwāq.

*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 wāqwāq as a case study, both because it is frequent in classical Arabic literature and because of its debated whereabouts (Maqbūl Aḥmad 1995:361). To include another example than wāqwāq would be beyond the scope of the present study and is an aim for future studies.

I have divided the different attestations of wāqwāq into six categories based on my reading of the texts to show its different traits; *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*. Each category is divided into several sub categories, as presented in chapter 3. I will present the traits of wāqwāq 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 wāqwāq 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 webpage<sup>3</sup> (www.alwaraq.net) for any texts containing the radicals وقوق *wqwwq* and its different variaties; الوق الوق *al-wāq wāq*, الوق *al-Wāq*, وق الوق *wāq wāq*, الوق الوق *wāq al-Wāq*, وقوق *waqwāq*, الوقوق *al-Waqwāq*, وقوق *waqwaq* and وقوق *Wāqwāq*. There could be some attestations of wāqwāq that do not appear in the al-Warrāq search, but the webpage gives a comprehensive view on the material. For simplicity, I will use *wāqwāq* as a denotation for all the attestations which I have included the search.

The search in al-Warrāq has resulted in a total of 42 authors and 44 books: al-Āmadī, ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Azharī, al-Bihqī, al-Birūnī, al-Damirī, ibn Durayd, al-Ġazālī, ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, ibn Ḥaldūn, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, al-Ḥimayrī, ibn Ḥurdādbih, al-Ibšihī, al-Idrisī, al-Iṣfahānī, al-Iṣṭahrī, al-Jāḥiḍ, al-Jawharī, ibn al-Jawzī, ibn Jinnī, ibn Maḡdūr, al-Maqdisī (also al-Muqaddasī), al-Maqrīzī, al-Marzūqī, al-Masʿūdī, ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī, al-Maymanī, al-Nuwayrī, al-Qalqaṣandī, al-Qazwīnī, ibn Qutayba, al-Rāzī, ibn Saʿīd, al-Suyūṭī, ibn Taḡribirdī, ibn Ṭufayl, al-ʿUmārī, ibn al-Wardī, al-Waṭwaṭ, al-Yaʿqūbī and al-Zabīdī (for the books, see Appendix and bibliography).

Two works by al-Masʿūdī came through in the search, one of them being *Aḥbār al-Zamān*. I have excluded this work in this study since the manuscripts found of this work have not been attested to al-Masʿūdī (Khalidi 1975:154; Pellat 1999:EICD2 “Masʿūdī”).

A 43<sup>rd</sup> author, al-Murādī, also came through in the search. I have excluded his work *Kitāb silk al-Durar fī aʿyān al-Qarn al-tānī ʿaṣar* written in 1883-4, since it is not written in a time contemporary to the stories of wāqwāq, as the rest of the data of this study.

I was unable to find any information on the book *Tafsīr al-aḥlām* by ميلر Mīlir (Miller?), which would have been a 44<sup>th</sup> 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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<sup>3</sup> 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. *Tabḍīb al-Luġa* by al-Azhari; *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin wa al-Masāwī* by Al-Bihqī; *Šarāḥ nahj al-Balāġa* by al-Ḥadīd; *Kitāb al-Rawḍ al-Muṭṭār fī ḥabar al-Aqtār* by al-Ḥimayrī; *Muḥāḍarāt al-ʿUdabāʾ* by Al-Iṣfahānī; *Al-Muntaḍam fī tāriḥ al-Mulūk wa al-ʿUmam* by Ibn al-Jawzī; *Kitāb al-Mibḥaj* by ibn Jinnī; *Tāriḥ dimašq* by Ibn Maḍḍūr; *Samaṭ al-Lālī* by al-Maymanī; *Kitāb al-Badʿ wa al-Tāriḥ* by Ibn al-Muṭaḥhar al-Maqdisī; *al-Juġrāfiyā* by Ibn Saʿīd; *Nihāyat al-ʿArab fī funūn al-ʿAdab* by al-Nuwayrī; *Ḥayy Ibn Yaḡḍān* by Ibn Ṭufayl; *Kitāb masālik al-ʿAbṣār fī mamālik al-ʿAmṣār* by al-ʿUmarī and *Manābih al-Fikar wa mabāhij al-ʿIbar* by al-Waṭwāt.

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 fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, 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-Maḡdisī 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.

For example, in the text of Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makiyya*, there is a spelling mistake on page 2494. Instead of *minhā kawkaban hiya al-Jawārī*, it says, *minhā kawkaban ʿayī al-Jawārī*. In *Kitāb al-Juḡrāfiya* by Ibn Saʿīd on page 6 of the al-Warrāq homepage says *wa jawīrat al-Wāqwāq* instead of *wa jazīrat al-Wāqwāq*. Further in *Tārīḥ ibn Ḥaldūn* on page 45, al-Warrāq has *al-Samlān* instead of *al-Saylān*.

## 1.6 Transcription and Translation

The consonants and the vowels

ا	...	ʾ			
إ	...	a			
ب	...	b			
ت	...	t	ط	...	ṭ
ث	...	ṭ	ظ	...	ḏ
ج	...	j	ع	...	ʿ
ح	...	ḥ	غ	...	ġ
خ	...	ḫ	ف	...	f
د	...	d	ق	...	q
ذ	...	ḏ	ك	...	k
ر	...	r	ل	...	l
ز	...	z	م	...	m
س	...	s	ن	...	n
ش	...	š	ه	...	h
ص	...	ṣ	و	...	w
ض	...	ḍ	ي	...	y
			َ	...	a
			ُ	...	u
			ِ	...	i
			ْ	...	ā
			ُو	...	ū
			ِي	...	ī

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*.

ʾAlif madda and ʾalif maqṣūra 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-Ḥimayrī 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. Wāqwāq 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*"<sup>4</sup>. 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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<sup>4</sup> "myth." Encyclopædia Britannica Online. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9108748> February 12, 2006

that a criterion for myth is that it has to be a prose narrative<sup>5</sup> 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 it<sup>6</sup>. This is somewhat contrary to Csapo's beliefs, 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 today*<sup>7</sup>. 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 folktale, jokes and even anecdotes (Csapo 2005:3), and Bascom himself excludes proverbs, riddles, ballads and other verbal skills and relates myth, legend and folktale 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 بلاد *bilād* 'country', بلد *balad* 'country, town, city', أرض *arḍ* 'earth, land, country', جزيرة *jazīra* 'island' and جزائر *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*.

In this chapter I 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 بلاد الصين *bilād al-Šīn* 'China', (al-Zabīdī p.91; al-Ya'qūt p.439; al-Iṣṭaḥrī p.122), sometimes connected to it, sometimes described as a part of it, (ibn Ḥurdādbih p.29), and sometimes placed at the border of it.

One source tells هي بلاد فوق الصين يجيء ذكرها في الخرافات *hiya bilādun fawqa al-Šīn yajī'u dīkruhā fī al-ḥurāfāt* '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 سفالة *Sufāla*<sup>8</sup> (ibn Ḥaldūn p.37; ibn al-Wardī p.34; al-Ḥimayrī W:554; al-Idrīsī p.79) and the land of الزنج *al-Zanj*<sup>9</sup> (al-Mas'ūdī p.112; ibn Ḥaldūn p.45; al-Nuwayrī W:64), and one source also talks about a land called سفالة الزنج *Sufāla al-Zanj* as a unit (al-Nuwayrī W:64;), not consisting of two parts, then wāqwāq is located at the outermost part of this region.

One source tells that مدينة دغوة آخر بلاد سفالة *madīnatu dġwṭat 'āḥaru bilādi sufāla* 'the city of Daġwaṭa is the end of the land of Sufāla', (al-Idrīsī p.78), and that wāqwāq is connected to this land.

In one instance it is near the land of بربر *barbar* 'the Berbers'. Wāqwāq

<sup>8</sup> *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:EICD2, "Sofāla"). The word itself means the lowest, or the lower part of a thing (Lane, 2003:1374).

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Zanj* is a certain nation of black people, also found in relation to wāqwāq on maps and in texts. Like Sufāla it is situated on the east coast of Africa.

is also placed near بلد مقدشو *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 بلاد الهند *bilād al-Hind* 'India'<sup>10</sup> (al-Iṣṭaḥrī p.122), and to the land of السند *al-Sind*<sup>11</sup>, (al-Iṣṭaḥrī p.122), and the land of كرمان *Karmān*, (al-Iṣṭaḥrī p.122).

It is also placed in connection to ملجمان *maljamān*, a city in الهند *al-Hind* 'India', (al-Ḥimayrī W:506) and جزيرة جالوس *jazīrat jālūs* 'island of Jālūs', (al-Idrīsī 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-Yaqūt p.34).

### 3.1.1.5 As an Island in the Indian Ocean

In one instance wāqwāq is found in the بحر الصين *baḥr al-Ṣīn* 'The Indian Ocean'<sup>12</sup>, (al-Ḥimayrī W:93). In one case it is in the same region as جزائر الصين *jazāʿir al-Ṣīn* 'the islands of China', (al-ʿUmarī W:6).

In one case it is placed in بحر الهند *Baḥr al-Hind* 'the Indian Ocean'<sup>13</sup>, and as an island lying in this sea, (al-Nuwayrī W:64). It is also placed in بحر الصنف *Baḥr al-Ṣanf*<sup>14</sup> (al-Ḥimayrī W:298) and بحر لاروى *Baḥr Lārwā*<sup>15</sup> (al-Yaʿqūbī p.182).

و البحر الثاني --- يقال له لاروى وهو بحر عظيم وفيه جزائر الوقواق وغيرهم من الزنج

*wa al-baḥr al-tānī [...] yuqālu labu lārwā wa huwa baḥrun ʿaḍīmun wa fihi jazāʿiru al-waqwāq wa ḡayrubum min al-zanj.*

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

10 *Al-Hind* is the name of the Indian sub continent. (Jairazbhoy, 1999:EICD2, "Hind")

11 *Al-Sind* is the name for the region around and the lower course of the Indus river, (Ansari, 1999:EICD2, "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, (Maqbūl Aḥmad, 1995:296).

13 *Baḥr al-Hind* is one name for the Indian Ocean, it is also sometimes called *Baḥr al-Zanj* from the western shores. The term *Baḥr Fāris* is sometimes used for the entire ocean. (Hartman & Dunlop, 1999:EICD2, "Baḥr al-Hind").

14 *Ṣanf* 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:EICD2, "Ṣanf")

15 *Baḥr Lārwā* is the second of the "seven seas" described by al-Yaʿqūbī, وإِنَّمَا يَسَارُ فِي هَذَا الْبَحْرِ بِالنُّجُومِ, *wa ʿinnamā yasāru fī hādā al-baḥr bi al-nujūm* 'one travels in this sea by the stars', and it continues وفيه عجائب كثيرة *wa fihi ʿajāʾibun kaṭīratun wa ʿumūrun lā tūṣifu* 'in it are many remarkable things and things that can not be described'.

and in it are the islands of wāqwāq and others of the Zanj'.

al-Ya'qūbī 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-waqwāq* 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 *Baḥr Fāris* 'The Indian Ocean'<sup>16</sup>. It is also placed next to the island of القشمر *al-Qašmīr*<sup>17</sup> (al-ʿUmarī W:6), the island of الدجال *al-Dajjāl*<sup>18</sup> (al-ʿUmarī W:6) and the island of الجواهر *al-Jawābir*<sup>19</sup> (al-ʿUmarī W:6), in المحيط *baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* 'the Encircling Ocean'<sup>20</sup> (al-ʿUmarī W:6) and east of the islands of السيلان *al-Saylān*<sup>21</sup> (ibn Ḥaldūn p.45; ).

### 3.1.1.6 As an Island in another Sea

In one text there is mention of بحر الواق *baḥr al-Wāq wāq* 'the sea of wāqwāq', (ibn Saʿīd W:6), which is the outermost sea of the tenth جزء *juzʿ* (region) of the first أقاليم *ʿaqālīm* 'clime'<sup>22</sup>. 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 *baḥr al-Hind* 'the Indian Ocean' and المحيط *baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (the Encircling Ocean). It is said to have several islands, the first of them being the island of السحاب *al-Saḥāb* 'clouds', (al-Ḥimayrī W:298; al-Idrīsī p.87).

In a chapter on بحر القلزم *baḥr al-Qulzum* 'the Read Sea', a measure is taken with wāqwāq being one point, and that this sea is four thousand فرسخ *farsakh* 'parasangs'<sup>23</sup>, (al-Ḥimayrī W:435).

One source also mentions سواحل بلاد الواق *sawāḥilu bilādi 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 *Baḥr Fāris* is the Indian Ocean, which sometimes also is called *Baḥr al-Hind*. *Baḥr Fāris* is also a name for the Arabian Gulf.

17 *Qašmīr* is a region in northern India.

18 *Al-Dajjāl* 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. *jawābir*) means jewels of any kind or pearls (Lane, 2003:475).

20 *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* 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* (*ʿaqālīm*) of which there were seven (Tibbetts, 1992:102).

23 A *farsakh* is a measurement. According to al-Idrīsī it is the equivalent of 3 Arabian mīls (Maqbūl Aḥmad, 1992:160).

hundred (ibn al-Jawzī W:10) different islands all bearing the name wāqwāq (al-Qazwīnī p.33).

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

### 3.1.1.7 At the End of the World

وأرض الواق واق وأمم آخر ليس بعدهم إلا القفار و الخلاء

*Wa ʿarḍu al-wāq wāq wa ʿummamun ʿuḥarun laysa baʿadabum ʿillā al-qifāru wa al-ḥalāʿu*

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

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

وجزائر الواق واق لا تعرف ما بعدها

*Wa jazāʾiru al-wāq wāqi, lā tuʿrafu mā baʿdubā*

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

al-Ḥimayrī W:554 (Also in al-Idrīsī 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-Qazwīnī p.33). (See also note 7 on Baḥr Lārwi above.) One source talks about the region in where the land of Wāq is situated as هناك حجز *hunāka ḥajzun* '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 *rubbamā waṣala ʿahlu al-ṣīni ʿilayhā fī al-nudra* 'sometimes the people of China comes here occasionally', (al-Ḥimayrī W:554; al-Idrīsī p.92).

### 3.1.1.8 The uninhabited Wāqwāq

In one text the islands are described as وهي جزائر عدة لا عامر بها *wa hiya jazāʾirun ʿiddatun lā ʿamiru bibā* '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 الصين *al-Šīn* (China), as a land or an island, and one in connection to the lands of سفالة *Sufāla* and الزنج *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 أسود *ʿaswad* 'black', (ibn Saʿīd W:6; al-Bīrūnī p.169; al-Ḥimayrī W:554), أرغب *arḡab* 'greedy', (al-Bīrūnī p. 169), naked people, (al-Ḥimayrī W:554), with قباح الصور *qibāḥu al-ṣawri* 'ugly faces', (ibn Saʿīd W:6; al-Ḥimayrī W:554; al-Idrīsī p.79;), and مشوهو الخلقة *mušawwabū al-ḥalqti* 'disfigured', (ibn Saʿīd W:6) and with كلامهم نوع من الصفير *kalāmuhum nawʿun min al-ṣafiri* 'a speech that is of the whistling type', (al-Ḥimayrī W:554; al-Idrīsī p.79). Also تكلموا معهم بكلام لا يفهم منهم *takallamū maʿabum bikalāmin lā yufhamu minhum* 'they spoke to each other with a language none of them understands', (al-Ḥimayrī W:298).

The people are also described as نساؤهم يكشفن رؤوسهن ويجعلن فيها الأمشاط المتخذة من العاج المكلفة بالصنف *nisāʾuhum yakšifna ruʾūsahunna wa yajʿalna fibā al-ʿamšāṭ al-muttaḥadatu min al-ʿāji al-mukallalati bi al-ṣanaḥi* 'their women show their heads [not covering them] and they put [on their heads] combs made of ivory, adorned with leafs', (al-Idrīsī, p.92), and the author continues in describing the combs as ويما كان في رأس المرأة *wa rubbamā kāna fī raʾsi al-marʾati minhunna ʿiṣrūna mušṭan* 'sometimes there are as many as twenty combs on the head of one of the women', (al-Ḥimayrī W:298, al-Idrīsī p.92). There is one description of the men wearing on رؤوسهم بشبه القلانس وتسمى بلغة الهند *ruʾusubum bi šabbibi al-qalānis wa tusammā bi lūḡat al-Hind al-Biʿārā* 'their heads something that look like al-Qalānis<sup>24</sup>, and they call it al-biʿārā in the language of al-Hind', (al-Idrīsī p.92).

<sup>24</sup> *Al-Qalānis*, 'bonnet haute en forme de pain de sucre [...] il était porté par les califes abbāsides', (Dozy p.409), 'tall headgear, tiara, cidaris; hood, cowl, capuche; cap', (Wehr p.788).

### 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-Iṣfahānī W:629; al-Damīrī 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 Majūs<sup>25</sup> (ibn Ḥaldūn p.45; al-Ḥimayrī W:298; al-Idrīsī p.92), and referred to as لا يعرفون ديننا ولا اتصلت بهم شريعة *lā yaʿarifūna dīnan wa lā ittaṣalat bihim šarīʿa* they do not know any religion and they have no šarīʿa<sup>26</sup>, (al-Idrīsī p.92).

### 3.2.2.4 Their Food

The people of wāqwāq are described as eating *حوت ḥūt* 'fish', (al-Idrīsī p.79), *صدف ṣadaḥ* 'oyster', (al-Idrīsī p.79) and *لحوم السلاحف luḥūmu al-silāḥif* 'meat from the turtle', (al-Idrīsī p.79). They are also said to have *سمك عظيم samakun ʿaḍīmun* 'big fish', (al-Yaʿqūbī p.182). And one source even says that *الذين يقطعون الطريق على الناس و يأكلونهم* *Alladīna yaqṭaʿūna al-ṭarīqa ʿalā 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 *وهم متحصنون بجبالهم لا يصلون إلى أحد ولا يتصل بهم أحد* *wa hum mutaḥaṣṣinūna bi jibālibim lā yaṣilūna ʿilā ʾaḥadin wa lā yattaṣilu bihim ʾaḥadun* 'they are fortified in their mountains, not going to anyone and no one is in contact with them', (al-Idrīsī 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-Idrīsī p.79) *حقيرتان ḥaqīratāni* 'miserable' cities, inhabited ones, (ibn al-Wardī p.34). One source gives us the name of the two cities, *ددا ddw*<sup>27</sup> and *دغرغه dgrgh*, (al-Idrīsī p.79).

<sup>25</sup> "Originally an ancient Iranian priestly cast - - - but used in Arabic primarily for Zoroastrians" (Morony 1999:EICD2, "Majūs")

<sup>26</sup> *Šarīʿa* the Islamic Law.

### 3.2.2.7 Wāqwāq as an ʿUmma

Wāqwāq are described as a أمة ʿumma 'people' in texts that describes the world in the shape of a bird, (al-Maqrīzī p.85; ibn Taḡrībī p.32). The former even mentions two different peoples, وخلف العراق أمة يقال لها واq, وخلف واq أمة يقال لها واq واq, *wa ḥalfa al-ʿIrāq ʿummatun yuqālu lahā wāq, wa ḥalfa wāq ʿummatun yuqālu lahā wāq wāq* 'behind Iraq is a nation which is called wāq, and behind wāq is a nation called wāq wāq', (al-Maqrīzī p.85).

In one instance it is mentioned that after the people of wāqwāq comes the امة بحرية ʿUmmatun bahriyatun 'the sea people', which are said to على شبه النساء الحسان سبط الشعور نواهد الصدور ويقال لها بنات الماء *alā šabihi al-nisāʾ al-ḥissān sabīṭu al-šūʿuri nawāhid al-ṣudūri* (They look like a beautiful woman, with straight hair and young breasts, they are called the daughters of the sea), (al-Ḥimayrī W:555).

### 3.2.2.8 The Rulers of Wāqwāq

وحكى موسى بن المبارك السيرافي أنه دخل هذه البلاد وقد ملكتها امرأة و أنه رآها على سرير عريانة وعلي رأسها تاج وعندها أربعة آلاف وصيفة عراة أبكارا

*Wa ḥakā mūsā ibn al-Mubārakī al-Sirāfi ʿannahu daḥala ḥaḍiḥi al-bilāda wa qad malikatuhā ʿimraʾatun wa ʿannahu rābā ʿalā sarīrin ʿuryānatan wa ʿalā raʾsibā tājun wa ʿindabā ʿarbaʿatu ālāfu waṣīfatin ʿurātan ʿabkāran.*

'Mūsā ibn al-Mubārakī al-Sirāfi 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-Qazwīnī p.33

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

The islands of wāqwāq are also described with وفيهم ملوك متعددون *wa fihim mulūkun mutaʿaddidūn* (in them are many kingdoms), (ibn Ḥaldūn p. 45).

و يقال إن هذه الجزيرة كانت ملكتها امرأة، و إن بعض المسافرين وصل إليها ودخلها ورأى هذه الملكة، وهي جالسة على سرير، وعلى رأسها تاج من ذهب وحولها أربعمائة وصيفة كلهن أبكار

*Wa yuqālu ʿinna hādīhi al-jazīrata kānat malikatuhā ʿimraʿatan, wa ʿinna baʿda al-musāfirīn waṣala ʿilayhā wa daḥalahā wa raʿā hādīhi al-malikata, wa hiya jālisatun ʿalā sarīrin, wa ʿalā raʿsibā tājun min ḍahabin wa ḥawlahā ʿarbʿamāʿta waṣifatin kullihinna ʿabkārūn.*

'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-ʿIbšīhi 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-Jawzī W:10; al-Qazwīnī p.33). Sometimes the slaves are only four hundred (al-ʿIbšīhi p. 199).

### 3.2.2.9 Summary

The descriptions of wāqwāq 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 wāqwāq is that of the female naked ruler, something that could be interpreted as a social distance, as well as the people of wāqwāq with their physical features, origin and religion.

The description of wāqwāq as a mixture of animals and plants is perhaps not best placed in this category, but the reference to ibn Ṭufayl 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 wāqwāq 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, كثير من الذهب *kaṭīrun min al-ḍahabi* 'a lot of gold', (ibn Ḥurdādbih p.29; al-ʿIbšihī p.199; al-Masʿūdī p.112; ibn Saʿīd W:6; ibn al-Wardī 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 Ḥurdādbih p.29; al-ʿIbšihī p.199; al-Idrīsī p.93; al-Qazwīnī p.33; ibn al-Wardī W:48), and emphasize the amount of gold as:

وهي إواق واق كثيرة الذهب حتى ان لاهلها يتخذون سلاسل كلابهم و اطواق قروهم من ذهب  
ويأتون بالقمص المنسوجة بالذهب للبيع

*Wa hiya [wāqwāq] kaṭīratu al-ḍahabi ḥattā ʿanna ʿablahā yattaḥidūna salāsila kilābihim wa ʿaṭwāqa qurūdihim min ḍahabin wa yaʿtūna bi al-qumuṣi al-mansūjati bi al-ḍahabi li al-bayʿi.*

'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 Ḥurdādbih p.29 (Also in al-Qazwīnī p.33; al-Idrīsī p.93)

One source mentions that the people on this island فيصنعون لبناً من الذهب *fayaṣṣna ʿūna libnan min al-ḍahab wa yabnūna bibi quṣūran ʿaw buyūtan bi ʿitqānin wa ʿiḥkāmin* 'they make bricks of gold and they build castles and houses of them, making them firm and solid', (ibn al-Wardī W:48).

#### 3.2.3.2 The Goods of Wāqwāq

Wāqwāq also have a lot of “goods”, such as أبنوس *ʿabnūs* 'ebony', (al-Ḥimayrī W:555; ibn Ḥurdādbih pp.29 & 70; al-Idrīsī p.93; ibn al-Jawzī W:10), sometimes the ebony is black, (al-Bīrūnī p.169), تمر *tamr* 'dates', (al-Ḥimayrī W:555) and فواكه *fawākib* 'fruit', (al-Ḥimayrī W:555). One source mentions that wāqwāq among other islands has أنواع الطيب والأفاويه *ʿanwāʿ al-ṭib wa al ʿafāwīb* 'different sorts of perfume and aromatics', (ibn Ḥaldūn p.45).

### 3.2.3.3 The Climate of Wāqwāq

Wāqwāq is also described as حارة *ḥarra* 'hot', (al-Mas'ūdī p.112; al-Nuwayrī W:1661), and خصبة *ḥaṣba* 'fertile', (al-Mas'ūdī p.112; al-Nuwayrī W:1661; ibn al-Wardī p.34). One source talks about the island of wāqwāq المطر لا يوجد البرد عندهم أصلاً ولا المطر *lā yūjadu al-bardu 'indabum 'aṣlan wa lā al-maṭar* 'they have no cold at all, and no rain', (ibn al-Wardī 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 طير *ṭayr* 'bird', (al-Idrīsī p.92). It also has no ships and no دواب *dawāb* 'beasts, cattle', (ibn al-Wardī p.34; al-Himayrī W:554).

### 3.2.3.5 Other Assets and Features

It is also said about wāqwāq that وبهذه الجزائر من أحوال العمران عجائب ذكرها أهل الجغرافيا *wa bi ḥādīhi al-jazā'iri min 'aḥwālī al-'umrāni 'ajā'ibu ḍakarabā 'ablu al-juḡrāfiyā* 'in these islands are remarkable cultural features mentioned by geographers', (ibn Ḥaldūn p.45).

ساكنها قليل لضيق عيشها وتكرر رزقها

*Sākinhubā qalilun laḍīqu 'ayṣubā wa takadduri rizqihā*

'The inhabitants are few, due to a life of poverty'

al-Idrīsī p.79

Wāqwāq is also mentioned as a land with many عجائب *'ajā'ib* things (al-Mas'ūdī p.112; al-Nuwayrī W:1661; ibn al-Wardī p.34; al-Ya'qūbī p.182). It is described as a واسعة *wāsi'a* 'wide' land (ibn al-Wardī p.34), and the islands of wāqwāq as كبيرة *kabīra* 'big', (ibn al-Wardī W:48).

Also, تدخل إليهم المراكب من عمان *tadhulu ilayhim al-murākibu min 'umān* 'Ships from Oman comes here', (ibn al-Wardī 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-Jawharī p.563; al-Maḡdīsī p.397; ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Maḡdīsī W:214; al-Zabīdī 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 الغامدان *al-Gāmdān*, at بزيادة جامع اليهودية *bi ziyādati jāmi'i al-yahūdiyyati* 'at the entrance of the mosque of al-Yahūdiyya' (transl. Collins p.324), which is said to look like the tree of wāqwāq, (al-Maḡdīsī p.397).

There is also another source which refers to al-Mas'ūdī when mentioning the tree of wāqwāq. وبها شجر حكى المسعودي عنها أمورا لا تقبلها *wa bihā šajarun ḥakā al-Mas'ūdī 'anhā 'umūran lā taqabbalahā al-'uqūlu min jibati al-'aḥbāri 'anhā* 'In it [wāqwāq] is a tree which al-Mas'ūdī tells something about', (al-Idrīsī 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. وهو اسم لا كما تظنه العوام من شجرة حملها كرؤوس الناس تصيح *wa huwa 'ismun lā kamā taḍunnubu al-'awāmu min šajaratīn ḥimlūhā karu'ūsi al-nās taṣīḥu* 'This name which, differently from what the people believe, is from the tree whose fruits resembles the head of a crying human', (al-Bīrūnī 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-'Ibšihī p.199; ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Maḡdīsī W:214) and sometimes a woman (al-Qazwīnī p.33).

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

ذكر سلفنا الصالح، رضى الله عنهم، أن جزيرة من جزائر الهند التي تحت خط  
الإستواء، وهي الجزيرة التي يتولد بها الإنسان من غير أم ولا أب، وبها شجر يثمر  
نساء، وهي التي ذكر المسعودي أنها جزيرة الوقواق لأن تلك الجزيرة اعدل بقاع الأرض  
هواء؛ أتممها لشروق النور الأعلى عليها استعداد، وإن كان ذلك خلاف ما يراه جمهور  
الفلاسفة وكبار الأطباء

*Dakara salafnā al-ṣāliḥ, radā allāḥu ʿanhum, ʿanna jazīrata min al-jazāʾir al-Hindi allatī taḥta ḥaṭṭi al-istawāʾ, wa biya al-jazīratu allatī yatawalladu bibā al-ʿinsāna min ḡayri ʿummin wa lā ʿabin, wa bibā šajarun yuṭmiru nisāʾan, wa biya allatī dakara al-Masʿūdī ʿinnahā jazīrata al-waqwāqi liʿanna tilka al-jazīrata ʿaḍalu biqāʿi al-ʿarḍi hawāʾan, ʿatmamahā li šurūqi al-nūri al-ʿalā ʿalayhā istiḍādun, wa ʿin kāna dālika ḥilāfun mā yarāhu jumbūru al-falāsifati wa kibāru al-ʿaṭibbāʾi.*

'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-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.'

ibn Ṭufayl W:1, (transl. Khalidi p.99)

#### 3.2.4.4 The Sound of the Tree

The fruit of this tree makes the sound 'wāqwāq' when it falls to the ground (ibn Saʿīd W:6).

وأمة الواق واق جمل شجر عظام معلقة بشعورها ولها ثدي وفروج كفروج النساء وأبدان حسان ولا يزلن يصحن واق واق وإذا قطعت من الأشجار التي تحملها أقامت يوماً وبعض يوم ثم تهلك وربما نكهن الناس في أطيب رائحة وألذ مباضعة

*Wa ummatu al-wāqwāqi jamala šajarun ʿiḍāmun muʿallaqatun bi šuʿūribā wa lahā tadī wa furūjun ka furūji al-nisāʾi wa ʿabdānun ḥusānun, wa lā yazulna yuṣiḥna wāq wāq wa ʿiḍā quṭiʿat min al-ʿašjāri allatī tuḥmiluhā ʿaqāmat yawman wa baʿda yawmin tumma tubliku wa rubbamā nakaḥahunna al-nāsu fī ʿaṭyabi rāʾiḥatin wa ʿaladdi mabāḍiʿa.*

'The people of wāqwāq gathers big fruits hanging by its hair, and it has breasts and openings like the openings of a woman, and a beautiful body. It doesn't stop crying out



wāqwāq. It 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-Ḥimayrī W:555

وفي هذه الجزيرة من العجائب شجر يشبه شجر [...] إلّ الجوز ويحمل حملا كهيئة الإنسان فإذا انتهى سمع له تصويت يفهم منه واق واق ثم يسقط

*Wa fī bādībi al-jazīrati min al-ʿajāʿibi šajarun yuṣbibu šajara al-jawzī [...] wa yaḥmilu ḥamlan ka bayʿati al-ʿinsāni fa ʿidā intabā sumiʿa labu taṣwītun yufḥamu minbu wāq wāq tumma yasquṭu.*

'Among the extraordinary things on this island is the tree of wāqwāq 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 wāq wāq, then they fall [to the ground]'

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

#### 3.2.4.5 Wāqwāq as an Evil Omen

One source talks about the fruit of wāqwāq falling down, considered as a sign of an evil omen by the natives of the island having this tree (al-Qazwīnī p.33). Wāqwāq 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 wāqwāq as being a type of bird.

#### 3.2.4.6 Summary

Wāqwāq as a tree is just as wāqwāq 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 Wāqwāq as a Bird

This category is dominated by the dictionary entries which mentions several different birds as equal to the wāq bird. The birds are (1) الصرد al-Ṣurad (al-Marzūqī p.353; ibn Jinnī W:23; al-Jawharī p.563; al-Damīrī W:739; al-Maymanī W:295; ibn Qutayba p.212; ibn Durayd W:94; al-Āmadī p.128), (2) الحاتم al-Ḥātim (al-Marzūqī p.353; ibn Jinnī W:23; al-Maymanī W:295; al-Āmadī p.128), (3) الشقراق al-Šaqirāq (al-Nuwayrī W:1117), (4) الاخيل al-ʿAḥīl (al-Nuwayrī

W:1117;), (5) الغراب *al-Ġurāb* (*al-Marzūqī* p. 353; *ibn Jinnī* W:23; *al-Maymanī* W:295; *al-Āmadī* p.128) and (6) الاخطب *al-ʿAḥṭab* (*al-Nuwayrī* W:1117), of which the first four are connected with some sort of evil omen according to the Lane dictionary. This information about it being an evil omen is besides the dictionary entries only mentioned once in the data of this study in *al-Qazwīnī* (see chapter 3.2.4.5 above).

The two birds *al-Ġurāb* and *al-ʿAḥṭab* are not described as an evil omen in the dictionaries, but there are cross references under *al-ʿAḥṭab* to *al-Ṣurad*, which is described with this attribute. The bird *al-Ġurāb* is neither described as an evil omen nor has it any references to the other birds.

صُرْدٌ 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 الواقى. 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).

لِحَاتِمٍ [...] signifies the غُرَاب [a name applied to any species of crow: and here, app., particularly to the raven] [...] that which is fond of plucking out its feathers, and which is held to be of evil omen. [...] also signifies unlucky [...]. (Lane 2003:511)

شَقْرَاق (also: šiqrāq, šaqrāq), The green wood-pecker, *picus viridis*; [...] a certain bird, well known among the Arabs called لُخَيْل regarded by the Arabs as an evil omen; less than the pigeon, the colour of which is green, and the beak black, and having blackness in the extremities and exterior of its wings. (Lane 2003:1581).

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

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

أُخْطَبٌ [...] A pigeon of the colour termed خُطْبَةٌ [...] The [bird called] شَقْرَاق called in Persian according to a marginal note in a copy of the Ṣ. [...] or the bird called صُرْدٌ because it has a mixture of black and white. And the صَقْر [or hawk] 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 أصوات الطيور *aṣwāt al-ṭuyūr* 'the sounds of a mixture of birds', (*al-Zabīdī* p.91; *ibn Durayd* W:81).

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

We also find that سمى بذلك لحكاية صوته *summā bi ḍālika li ḥikāyati ṣawtibī* 'it is called so because of its sound', (*al-Jawharī* p.536; *al-Damīrī* 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 (1) ضخم المنقار *ḍaḥm al-minqār* 'a big beak', (2) ضخم الرأس *ḍaḥm al-ra's* 'a big head' and (3) ضخم البراثن *ḍaḥm al-barāṭin* 'big claws', (4) and that it is نفور من الناس *nufūrun min al-nās* 'shy with people' (al-Nuwayrī W:1117; al-Qalqaṣandī p.83). It is also described as (5) شره *šarih* (greedy), (6) شراسة *šarāsa* 'malicious' and (7) سرقة *sariqa* 'thieving', (al-Nuwayrī 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 والواق الكثير الكلام *wa al-wāqwāqu al-kaṭīru al-kalām* 'wāqwāq is [one who] speaks a lot', (al-Yaqūt p.439; al-ʿAzharī W:1295; al-Zabīdī p.91).

Sometimes wāqwāq is نباح الكلب عند الفرق *nubāḥu al-kalbi ʿinda al-faraq* 'the barking of a dog when its frightened', (al-ʿAzharī W:1295; al-Zabīdī p.91; al-Jawharī p.563; al-Yaqūt p.439).

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

ملك كرمان وفارس وخورستان وقصر الواق

*Malika Karmān wa Fāris wa Ḥūrastān wa qaṣr al-Wāq.*

'He ruled over Karmān, Fāris, Ḥūrastān and the castle of al-Wāq'

al-Ġazālī 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, *ʿajība* (sg.) *ʿajāʾib*<sup>27</sup> (pl.). This term, used by the authors themselves in for example al-ʿIbšihī, *هذه الجزيرة من العجائب شجر يشبه شجر الجوز في بلاد فوق الصين يجيء ذكرها في الخرافات* *hāḍihī al-jazīra min al-ʿajāʾib šajara yušbihu šajara 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 *ʿajāʾib* as a contrast to *ḥurāfa* (sg.) *ḥurāfāt*<sup>28</sup> (pl.), which is something fictitious, as pointed out by al-Yaʿqūt in Muʿajam al-buldān, *هي بلاد فوق الصين يجيء ذكرها في الخرافات* *hiya bilādun fawqa al-ṣīn yajīʾu dīkrubā fī al-ḥurāfāt* 'it is a land above China which is mentioned in the fables', (p.439). This could show that *ʿajāʾib* denotes something strange, yet *true*, whereas the *ḥurāfa* would be the opposite, the untrue/unreal.

To describe the Arab geographical myth in one word, the term *ʿajāʾib* 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 *ʿajāʾib*:

##### 4.1 The *ʿajāʾib* 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 *ʿajāʾib* social behavior. But with this generalization I mean the geographical distance, since the mental distance is illustrated below.

The *ʿajāʾib* distance can be illustrated through phrases such as *وجزائر الواقع لا تعرف ما بعدها* *wa jazāʾiru al-wāq wāqi lā tuʿrafu mā baʿḍuhā* 'and the island of wāqwāq, it is not known what is beyond them', (al-Ḥimayri W:554 (also in al-Idrīsī p.92)).

27 *ʿajība* (sg.), *ʿajāʾib* (pl.), "wondrous thing, unheard-of thing, prodigy, marvel, miracle, wonder; pl. Remarkable things, curiosities, oddities" (Wehr, p.591), also "a wonderful thing; a thing at which one wonders" (Lane, p.1957).

28 *Ḥurāfa* (sg.), *ḥurāfāt* (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 3.2.2.8 وحكى موسى بن المبارك السيرافي أنه دخل هذه البلاد وقد ملكتها wa ḥakā mūsā ibn al-mubārak al-sirāfi 'annahu daḥala hādihī al-bilād wa qad malikathā imra'atun wa 'annahu rābā 'alā sarīrin 'arḡānatan wa 'alā ra'sihā tājun wa 'indahā 'arba'atu ālāfi waṣīfatan 'urātan 'abkāran, 'Mūsā ibn al-Mubārakī 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-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. وهي لواق واق كثيرة الذهب حتى wa hiya [al-wāq wāq] kaṭīratu al-dahabi ḥattā 'anna 'ablahā yattaḥidūna salāsila kilābihim wa 'aṭwāqa qurūdihim min dahabin wa ya'tūna bi al-qumuṣi al-mansūjati bi al-dahabi 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 Ḥurdādbih p.29), as cited in 3.2.3.1. There is also in two instances a description of the heat (al-Mas'ūdī 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, ساكنها قليل لضيق عيشها وتكرر Sākinhubā qalilun li ḍiqi 'ayšihā wa takadduri rizqihā, '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: ذكر سلفنا الصالح، رضى الله عنهم، أن جزيرة من جزائر الهند التي تحت خط الإستواء، وهي الجزيرة التي يتولد بها الإنسان من غير أم ولا أب، وبها شجر يثمر نساء، وهي التي ذكر المسعودي أنها جزيرة الوقواق لأن تلك الجزيرة اعدل بقاع الأرض هواء؛ أتممها *ḍakara* لشروق النور الأعلى عليها استعداد، وإن كان ذلك خلاف ما يراه جمهور الفلاسف وكبار الأطباء *salafnā al-ṣāliḥ, raḍā allāhu 'anhum, 'anna jazīrata min al-jazā'ir al-Hindi allatī taḥta ḥaṭṭi al-istawā', wa biya al-jazīratu allatī yatawalladu bibā al-'insāna min ḡayri 'ummin wa lā 'abin, wa bibā šajarun yuṭmiru nisā'an, wa biya allatī ḍakara al-Mas'ūdī 'innabā jazīrata al-waqwāqi li'anna tilka al-jazīrata 'aḍalu biqā'i al-'arḍi hawā'an, 'atmamabā li šurūqi al-nūri al-'alā 'alayhā istiḍādun, wa 'in kāna ḍalika ḥilāfun mā yarābu jumbūru al-falāsifati wa kibāru al-'aṭibbā'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'ūdī 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.', (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 'ajā'ib, it is. The 'ajā'ib, as we have seen above in the generalizations, have to be strange for the contemporary, yet possible.

By adding more 'ajā'ib 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 'ajā'ib. 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'ib*  
*= An Arab geographical myth.*

These 'ajā'ib 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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## Appendix

1 Al-Āmadī	<i>Kitāb al-Muʿtalif wa al-Muḥtalig fī asmāʾ al-Šuʿrāʾ</i>
2 Ibn al-ʿArabī	<i>Al-Futuḥāt al-Makiyya</i>
3 Al-Azharī	<i>Tabḍīb al-Luġa</i>
4 Al-Bihqī	<i>Al-Muḥāsīn wa al-Masāwī</i>
5 Al-Birūnī	<i>Fī taḥqīq mā li al-Hind</i>
6 Al-Damīrī	<i>Kitāb ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrā</i>
7 Ibn Durayd	<i>Kitāb Jumbura al-Luġa</i>
8 Al-Ġazālī	<i>Al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī naṣīḥāt al-Mulūk</i>
9 Al-Ḥadīd	<i>Šarah nahj al-Bilāġa</i>
10 Ibn Ḥaldūn	<i>Tārīḥ Ibn Ḥaldūn/Muqaddima</i>
11 Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī	<i>Muʿajam al-Buldān</i>
12 Al-Ḥimayrī	<i>Kitāb al-Rawḍ al-Muʿaṭār fī ḥabar al-Aqṭār</i>
13 Ibn Ḥurdādbih	<i>Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik</i>
14 Al-Ibšihī	<i>Al-muṣṭatrif fī kull fann muṣṭaḍrif</i>
15 Al-Idrīsī	<i>Kitāb Nushat al-Muštāq fī Aḥtirāq al-Āfāq</i>
16 Al-Iṣfahānī	<i>Muḥādirāt al-ʿUdabāʾ</i>
17 Al-Iṣṭaḥrī	<i>Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik</i>
18 Al-Jāḥiḍ	(1) <i>Kitāb al-Ḥayawān</i> (2) <i>Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiḍ</i>
19 Al-Jawharī	<i>Kitāb al-Siḥāḥ</i>
20 Ibn al-Jawzī	<i>Al-Muntaḍam fī tārīḥ al-Mulūk wa al-ʿUmam</i>
21 Ibn Jinnī	<i>Kitāb al-Mibḥaj</i>
22 Ibn Mandūḥ	(1) <i>Lisān al-ʿArab</i> (2) <i>Tārīḥ dimašq</i>
23 Al-Maqdisī	<i>Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī maʿarifāt al-Aqālīm</i>
24 Al-Maqrīzī	<i>Al-Mawāʿiḍ wa al-Iʿtibār bi Dīkr al-Ḥiṭaṭ wa al-Ātār</i>
25 Al-Marzūqī	<i>Kitāb al-Asminah wa al-Amkinah</i>
26 Al-Masʿūdī	<i>Murūj al-Ḍabab</i>
27 Ibn al-Muṭaḥḥar al-Maqdisī	<i>Kitāb al-Baḍʾ wa al-Tārīḥ</i>
28 Al-Maymanī	<i>Samāʾ al-Lālī</i>
29 Al-Nuwayrī	<i>Nihāyat al-ʿArab fī funūn al-ʿAdab</i>
30 Al-Qalqašandī	<i>Kitāb Šubḥ al-ʿAšā</i>
31 Al-Qazwīnī	<i>Ātār al-Bilād wa Aḥbār al-ʿIbād</i>
32 Ibn Qutayba	<i>ʿAdab al-Kitāb</i>
33 Al-Rāzī	<i>Kitāb muḥtalif al-Šiḥāḥ</i>
34 Ibn Saʿīd	<i>Al-Juġrāfiyā</i>
35 Al-Suyūṭī	<i>Al-Mazḥar fī ʿulūm al-Luġa wa anwāʿihā</i>
36 Ibn Taġribirdī	<i>Al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī Aḥbār Mišr wa al-Qāhira</i>
37 Ibn Ṭufayl	<i>Ḥayy Ibn Yaqḍān</i>
38 Al-ʿUmarī	<i>Kitāb masālik al-ʿAḥsār fī mamālik al-ʿAmṣār</i>
39 Ibn al-Wardī	<i>Kitāb ḥarīdat al-ʿAjāʾib wa farīdat al-Ġarāʾib</i>
40 Al-Waṭwaṭ	<i>Manābij al-Fikar wa mabābij al-ʿIbar</i>
41 Al-Yaʿqūbī	<i>Tārīḥ al-Yaʿqūbī</i>
42 Al-Zabīdī	<i>Tāj al-ʿArūs</i>