

Article

Doomed Power and Eternal Wisdom in Late Antiquity: Intertwining Representations of Luqmān in Light of the Qur'ānic Tradition

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Abstract

This article explores the underlying ideas conveyed by the literary representations associated with Luqmān b. 'Ād and Luqmān the Sage in classical Arabic sources. It avoids conflating them or collapsing all portrayals of Luqmān b. 'Ād into a single composite figure. At the same time, it resists imposing a rigid dichotomy between these representations, instead examining possible mutual influences and conceptual continuities. To assess the range of divergent Luqmān images in light of the Qur'ānic tradition, the article treats them as manifestations of diverse local and regional narrative currents, woven together within a broader pan-Arabic reservoir of motifs.

Keywords: Classical Arabic Poetry; Qur'ān; Luqmān b. 'Ād; Luqmān al-Ḥakīm

God said to him, “Because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or for the life of your enemies but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed, I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you, and no one like you shall arise after you”.

1 Kgs 3:11–12 (NRSVUE)



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1. Introduction

The prolific Basran littérateur and rational theologian al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), in his major work *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (“The Book of Elucidation and Exposition”), comments on a remarkable elegy. The verses are attributed to the daughter of the poet Wathīma b. 'Uthmān, who was active in the first half of the seventh century CE and belonged to the tribe of Duhmān b. Naṣr in western Central Arabia. She is said to have composed the poem upon her father's death. Adhering to the conventions of a tribal Arab elegy (*rithā'*), she praises the deceased as a man who never withheld his wealth in times of hardship, who offered refuge to widows and orphans, and who prevailed in disputes through his wisdom and eloquence. The superlative degree of the latter two virtues is rendered as “the eloquence of Luqmān b. 'Ād and the articulateness of his wise speech” (*bi-lisān Luqmān b. 'Ād wa-faṣl khuṭbatihī al-ḥakīma*).¹ Al-Jāḥiẓ explains this simile by noting that the Arabs regarded Luqmān b. 'Ād as a paragon of cleverness (*nabāha*), high standing (*qadr*), sound discernment (*ḥukm*), eloquence (*lisān*), and prudence (*ḥilm*). At the same time, he cautions against confusing Luqmān b. 'Ād with “Luqmān the Sage (*al-Ḥakīm*) mentioned in the Qur'ān (31:12–19)” (al-Jāḥiẓ 1998, vol. 1, pp. 183–84).

The extent to which Luqmān b. ʿĀd and Luqmān the Sage can be identified with one another invites scholarly speculation, though it cannot be established with certainty. What is truly significant is that, despite notable parallels, the multiple portrayals associated with these two names constitute distinct—albeit mutually influential—literary representations, each grounded in its own tradition. This article examines the range of divergent images encompassed by these representations and the underlying ideas they convey, with particular attention to those found in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry.

The bewildering variety of Luqmān figures, which we shall attempt to systematize, arises from several complexities inherent in the traditions that transmitted them. First, it is worth noting that several distinct representations, all eventually subsumed under the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd, entered the Islamic literary-historical tradition from pre-Islamic narrative, poetic, mythical, and gnomic lore. Figures bearing this name are developed in markedly different ways, depending on whether they are portrayed as protagonists of (1) tribal—particularly Bedouin—proverbs, anecdotes, and tales; (2) Islamic adaptations of ancient South Arabian narratives; or (3) pre-Islamic legends concerning the people of ʿĀd (Q 41:15–16; 69:6–8; 89:6–8) and a man of extraordinary longevity. In the form in which these legends are transmitted by Muslim authors, it is no longer possible to determine with certainty whether they stem from central Arabian tribal lore or from South Arabian narratives, for elements from various traditions had already been tightly interwoven.

Second, the portrayals of Luqmān b. ʿĀd vary across these domains. In tribal proverbs and anecdotes, for instance, one encounters a generous and noble Luqmān playing *maysir* (a pre-Islamic practice of divination and gambling using marked arrows); a miserly Luqmān stealing camels; and a quarrelsome Luqmān who incites tribal conflict. As for the legend of the destruction of the people of ʿĀd, Islamic adaptations disagree on whether Luqmān accepted the prophecy of Hūd.

Pre-Islamic poetry, meanwhile, alludes to portrayals drawn from multiple domains. References to Luqmān's fellow gamblers (*aysār*) evoke his manifestation as a noble and generous Bedouin. Allusions to Luqmān as the owner of seven birds of prey (*nusūr*, sg. *nasr*, i.e., eagles or vultures) recall the legend of a man who attained extraordinary longevity. When Luqmān is numbered among the glorious leaders of the past whose worldly fame ultimately proved transient, poets draw on the legend of the vanished people of ʿĀd. And when poets liken a person's wisdom and eloquence to that of Luqmān b. ʿĀd, they invoke yet another distinct portrayal. To avoid confusion, it is necessary to introduce conventional designations for several personae known as Luqmān b. ʿĀd (symbolic meaning is given in brackets where relevant):

- (1) Paragon of wisdom and eloquence;
- (2) *Maysir*-gambler (paragon of nobility and generosity);
- (3) Greedy camel thief (an anecdotal figure);
- (4) Instigator of tribal conflict (a symbolic embodiment of the ruinous force of tribal wars);
- (5) Ḥimyarite king (a symbol of the grandeur of the vanished South Arabian civilizations);
- (6) Chieftain of the doomed people of ʿĀd (a symbol of fleeting earthly fame, embodied by the perished people of ʿĀd and, by extension, other vanished peoples and their leaders, and thus of the transience of earthly glory in general);
- (7) Figure of the birds-of-prey legend (a symbol of the transience of earthly longevity).

These designations are not intended to impose a rigid dichotomy between the personae. Such an approach would be misguided, for even the pre-Islamic poets do not seek to differentiate them from one another. For some of them, at least part of these figures might be combined within a single persona. We therefore propose to distinguish these personae provisionally, on the basis of the original motifs and ideas underlying each of them. Ultimately, our aim is to prevent the conflation of these traditional motifs, or of

the original ideas, rather than of fictional characters and literary representations that once merged in the collective imagination.

Third, through the interplay of local and regional traditions, certain characteristics were transmitted from one portrayal to another. The image of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a paragon of wisdom and eloquence (No. 1 above) may have shaped the transmission of South Arabian legends, for in their Islamic adaptations his name ultimately came to be associated with a wise Ḥimyarite king (No. 5). This same image also influenced Bedouin lore: here, the greedy camel thief (No. 3) is not portrayed as intelligent, yet, by virtue of being identified with Luqmān b. ʿĀd, he is nonetheless endowed with a reputation for wisdom. Finally, affiliation with the mythical people of ʿĀd is explicitly attributed not only to the Luqmān figure associated with the major legend of the destruction of the people of ʿĀd (No. 6), nor solely to Luqmān as the protagonist of the birds-of-prey legend (No. 7). It is likewise attributed to Luqmān the Ḥimyarite king (No. 5), in which case ʿĀd is interpreted as one of the Ḥimyarite tribes, and to Luqmān the instigator of tribal conflict (No. 4). In the latter instance, ʿĀd is understood as “the last of the people of ʿĀd” (*ʿĀd al-ākhirā*), a group of tribes descending from the surviving remnant of the original ʿĀd, and the quarrelsome Luqmān b. ʿĀd leads one of these tribes.

Even more challenging than mapping this complex Luqmān-b.-ʿĀd picture is relating it to the traditions concerning Luqmān the Sage, to whom wise sayings and proverbs are attributed. Moral aphorisms ascribed to Luqmān were collected by Muslim scholars together with those attributed to figures such as Socrates, Solon, Hermes, and Pythagoras. These compilations were among the first texts to be translated from Greek into Arabic—often via Syriac—under Caliph al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833), alongside major Greek scientific and medical works (Günther 2022, p. 496). Yet for Muslim authors, Luqmān the Sage is, above all, the Qurʾānic Luqmān. The accounts transmitted by early Muslim traditionalists concerning his origins attempt to identify the man whom Allah had blessed with wisdom and who instructed his son not to associate anything with Allah in worship (Q 31:12–13). Since the tradition of attributing wise sayings to Luqmān the Sage—together with certain conceptions of his figure—has pre-Islamic origins, it is only natural that the question arises of how this representation and that of Luqmān b. ʿĀd were related to one another in pre-Islamic lore.

The question of whether Muḥammad’s contemporaries distinguished between the figure of Luqmān b. ʿĀd renowned for intelligence and eloquence (No. 1 above) and Luqmān the Sage, famous for wise pronouncements and proverbs, is ultimately unanswerable. The fact that the paragon of wisdom in pre-Qurʾānic poetry is at times referred to as Luqmān b. ʿĀd (al-Jāhiz 1998, vol. 1, pp. 183–84; vol. 3, p. 304; 1965, vol. 3, p. 447) may suggest that the pre-Islamic poetic tradition assimilated the figure of Luqmān the Sage as yet another embodiment of Luqmān b. ʿĀd.

What differentiates representations invoking the name of Luqmān b. ʿĀd from those associated with Luqmān the Sage is not merely that the former draw upon Arabian legends of vanished peoples while the latter incorporate biblical motifs. Rather, as I argue in this study, within the traditions associated, respectively, with Luqmān b. ʿĀd and Luqmān the Sage, we find two distinct modes of engagement with a shared ontological question: what a human being should strive for in earthly life, given its inherently transient nature. While the precise degree to which the personae of Luqmān b. ʿĀd and Luqmān the Sage can be identified with one another remains uncertain, these two modes of engagement nonetheless offer a useful lens for considering their relationship across different narrative corpora.

To assess the range of distinct Luqmān images in light of the Qurʾānic tradition, the article treats them as manifestations of diverse local and regional narrative currents, woven

together within a broader pan-Arabic reservoir of motifs. It is this perspective that will guide the discussion that follows.

2. The State of the Field: Toward the Proper Approach

2.1. Distinguishing and Conflating Luqmān Figures

The parallels between Luqmān the Sage, Aḥiqar, and the Greek fabulist Aesop—attributable to the influence of narratives concerning the latter two on the Luqmān traditions—were examined by Theodor Nöldeke (1913). Recently, Ute Pietruschka (2023, pp. 685–702) has correlated the details about Luqmān the Sage found in the principal sources transmitting the traditions about him and has undertaken a thorough investigation of the connections between Luqmān-related and Aesop-related narrative material. In an article scheduled for publication in 2026 (see Cottrell forthcoming), Emily Cottrell provides a survey of the traditions concerning Luqmān the Wise in the *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* literature, as well as of the portrayal of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a Ḥimyarite king in traditions attributed to the Yemenite historian Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110/728 or 114/732) and the genealogist ʿUbayd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī (d. 66/686). Nevertheless, the relationship between the representations of Luqmān the Sage and Luqmān b. ʿĀd—and still more the interrelations among the various portrayals associated with the latter designation—has thus far attracted only sporadic scholarly attention. In what follows, we shall critically review existing discussions of the Luqmān traditions and propose an appropriate framework for approaching the diversity of representations associated with the two names.

2.1.1. Horovitz

Josef Horovitz (1926, pp. 133–35) draws attention, on the one hand, to examples from pre-Qurʾānic poetry in which the capacity for wise speech is conveyed through comparison with Luqmān, at times referred to as Luqmān b. ʿĀd (cf. No. 1 in our classification above). On the other hand, he notes that Luqmān—consistently identified as Luqmān b. ʿĀd—is mentioned by pre-Islamic poets among the powerful figures whose fame ultimately proved transient (cf. No. 6 above). Finally, he observes that Luqmān appears in pre-Islamic poetic accounts associated with the legend of the longevity of seven birds of prey (cf. No. 7 above). In this context, Horovitz refrains from either affirming or denying that pre-Islamic poets, as later Islamic authors did, associated Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend with Luqmān b. ʿĀd, the chieftain of the vanished people of ʿĀd. At the same time, he maintains that if, in the poets' understanding, the former and the latter were identical, then Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend was likewise identical with Luqmān b. ʿĀd mentioned by poets such as Labīd and Imruʾ al-Qays (*in welchem Falle er also mit dem von Labīd und Imruʾ al-Qays genannten Luqmān b. ʿĀd identisch wäre*).

A critical review of this discussion requires us to note that the diversity of representations designated as Luqmān or Luqmān b. ʿĀd in pre-Islamic poetry does not imply that all were known to every poet or understood as a single, unified figure. First, the relationship between distinct representations of Luqmān b. ʿĀd should be assessed not on the basis of their co-existence across pre-Islamic poetry as a whole, but rather within the *dīwān* of a particular poet. Even this, however, is possible only on the assumption that all the relevant verses in fact originate from a single author, whoever that may have been. Second, in each case, what matters is not whether Luqmān is referred to as Ibn ʿĀd, but the specific representation evoked under that name. Let us reconsider Horovitz's interpretation of Labīd's (d. 661 CE) and Imruʾ al-Qays's (d. 544 CE) references to Luqmān b. ʿĀd from this perspective.

The specific reference to Luqmān b. ʿĀd that Horovitz has in mind is to the chieftain of the doomed people of ʿĀd (cf. No. 6 above), namely the figure symbolizing the transient

glory of vanished peoples (Labīd 1962, p. 338). A reference to Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend (No. 7), however, is likewise found in Labīd (1962, p. 275) *dīwān*. Josef Horovitz (1926, p. 135) is aware of this passage, yet he does not regard it as convincing evidence for the identity of the two portrayals, since he finds no instance in pre-Islamic poetry in which Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend is explicitly named as the son of ‘Ād (*An keiner dieser Stellen wird Luqmān ausdrücklich als Sohn des ‘Ād bezeichnet*). Horovitz, however, seems to overlook that Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend is, in fact, sometimes referred to in pre-Islamic poetry as Luqmān b. ‘Ād (see, e.g., Tarafa 2002, p. 11). In light of this, we suggest that the co-existence in Labīd’s *dīwān* of Luqmān b. ‘Ād from the destruction-of-‘Ād legend and Luqmān from the birds-of-prey legend lends support to the view that, if both relevant verses genuinely belong to the same poet, he may indeed have regarded these portrayals as identical.

Imru’ al-Qays’s (2004, p. 90) reference to Luqmān b. ‘Ād is to a noble and generous *maysir*-gambler (cf. No. 2 above). Thus, Horovitz’s claim regarding pre-Islamic poetic references to Luqmān b. ‘Ād cannot be applied equally to the references in Imru’ al-Qays and Labīd. If Labīd appears to associate Luqmān b. ‘Ād from the destruction-of-‘Ād legend and Luqmān from the birds-of-prey legend (Nos. 6 and 7 above), this does not necessarily imply that Luqmān b. ‘Ād the *maysir*-gambler mentioned in Imru’ al-Qays’s *dīwān* was generally regarded by pre-Islamic poets as identical with these two representations. Nevertheless, we suggest that some poets may have conflated Luqmān b. ‘Ād (sic!) from the birds-of-prey legend with the noble *maysir*-gambler Luqmān, given that the two figures coexist in Tarafa’s (d. 569 CE) *dīwān* (Tarafa 2002, pp. 11, 45).

The approach required here suggests that, even when certain Luqmān figures are conflated in the *dīwāns* of particular pre-Islamic poets, this should not lead to a conflation of the traditional motifs underlying them. Thus, for example, the noble and generous *maysir*-gambler (cf. No. 2 above) clearly reflects a motif of Bedouin lore. By contrast, the tale of a man who is granted the longevity of the seven successive lives of birds of prey (No. 7)—as will be discussed below—may have a South Arabian origin. Even in the Islamic transmission of both portrayals, nothing links them apart from the name Luqmān b. ‘Ād. Other portrayals to which this name has been attached likewise appear, apart from a few borrowed details, to be conceptually unrelated to each other. Finally, it should also be noted that not all Luqmān figures listed above are conflated.

Our approach requires that we assess all distinct literary representations for possible mutual influences and conceptual continuities. Horovitz, for example, recognizes the impossibility of determining whether Arab poets identified Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend with Luqmān the Sage (*ob dieser Luqmān mit Luqmān al-ḥakīm identisch ist*), as though the former represented some sort of universal alternative to the traditions about the latter. Yet the very fact that Horovitz is uncertain to what extent pre-Islamic poets associated Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend with Luqmān b. ‘Ād of the destruction-of-‘Ād legend indicates that no single, unified Luqmān [b. ‘Ād] constitutes an alternative to Luqmān the Sage. It is therefore prudent not to conflate distinct literary representations but rather to compare those between which parallels or borrowings can reasonably be discerned. In the case of Luqmān the Sage, the most interesting “alternative” Luqmān for comparison is the paragon of wisdom and eloquence (cf. No. 1 above) invoked in pre-Islamic poetry. Since this figure is at times referred to as Luqmān b. ‘Ād, it is also worth comparing it with other representations bearing the same name and confirming that wisdom and eloquence are generally not attributed to the latter.

2.1.2. Rosenthal and Zahniser

The idea that the various portrayals of Luqmān can be distinguished according to the origins of their underlying motifs is essentially presupposed by [Franz Rosenthal](#) ([1975] 2014, pp. 372, 403), even though he does not devote special attention to this topic. In his study of gambling in Islam, for instance, he notes that Luqmān the *maysir*-gambler clearly belongs to an Arabian context, whereas the story of Luqmān the slave (one of the portrayals of Luqmān the Sage) who saved his master after a severe loss at nard is to be attributed to the region north of Arabia. This attribution is not determined by the game of nard itself, which may not have formed part of the story's original version and may have been introduced later through the general association of dice games with nard. Rather, it is suggested by the narrative motifs of the clever slave and of the impossible task circumvented by cunning, which Rosenthal situates in the region north of Arabia.

While Rosenthal refrains from determining the extent to which the avid *maysir* player and the clever slave may ever have been understood by the Arabs as the same Luqmān, his observation that the various narratives employing this name evidently stem from distinct Middle Eastern traditions remains pertinent. Like Horovitz, however, Rosenthal correlates Luqmān the Sage with only one specific portrayal among those referred to in the sources as Luqmān b. 'Ād. It is clear that Luqmān the noble *maysir*-gambler is not a single, unified Luqmān b. 'Ād that would constitute an alternative to Luqmān the Sage. The latter should not be compared with any figure bearing the name Luqmān, but rather with the paragon of wisdom and eloquence invoked in pre-Islamic poetry—a figure linked to Luqmān the Sage not merely by name but also by features of representation. The various portrayals referred to in the sources as Luqmān b. 'Ād can, in turn, be compared with each other for possible borrowings that occurred in the process of their conflation.

The scholar who juxtaposed Luqmān the Sage specifically with Luqmān b. 'Ād as the paragon of wisdom and eloquence was Mathias Zahniser. Yet he, like Horovitz and Rosenthal, set Luqmān the Sage in contrast to this figure, as though the paragon of wisdom and eloquence encompassed all portrayals known under the name Luqmān b. 'Ād. It was [Zahniser](#) (2003, p. 242) himself who suggested: “At the time of Muḥammad, the Arabs may have known two Luqmāns: one, the son of 'Ād, renowned for intelligence, leadership, knowledge, eloquence and subtlety; the other, Luqmān the Sage (*al-Ḥakīm*), famous for his wise pronouncements and proverbs”. This hypothesis gives the impression that the paragon of wisdom and eloquence invoked in pre-Islamic poetry was known to *all* Arabs of Muḥammad's time, together with all other representations that would later appear in Muslim sources under the name Luqmān b. 'Ād, and that these were understood by the Prophet's contemporaries as manifestations of a *single figure* distinct only from Luqmān the Sage.

From the perspective required for the study of literary representation, we should first of all avoid assuming that the Arabs of Muḥammad's time distinguished between two discrete figures named Luqmān. Rather, they seem to have preserved a broad spectrum of representations associated with that name, which Muslim scholarship later organized under two conventional designations: Luqmān b. 'Ād and Luqmān the Sage. Secondly, there is no reason to suppose that, in Muḥammad's time, storytellers consistently distinguished between the various figures called Luqmān in the way that Muslim scholars would later do. It is therefore doubtful that the intelligent and eloquent Luqmān b. 'Ād and Luqmān the Sage, known for his wise sayings, were as readily distinguishable to Muḥammad's contemporaries as they were to al-Jāhiz. As we argue in this article, these two representations were in fact conflated even during the Islamic period, and even by scholars themselves.

2.1.3. Heller, Retsö, and al-Azmeh

The potential for moving in this direction is outlined by Bernát Heller. He acknowledges that pre-Islamic poets referred to Luqmān as a paragon of proverbial wisdom and further suggests that “because of his proverbial wisdom, Luqmān was credited with being the architect, or one of the architects, of the famous Ma’rib dam” in Yemen (Heller and Stillman 1986, p. 811). This important hypothesis requires our refinement and further development. The construction of the dam is traditionally ascribed to Ḥimyarite kings (al-Suhaylī 2021, vol. 1, p. 258). In the version of the legend cited by al-Mas’ūdī (2005, vol. 2, p. 139), its construction is attributed to Luqmān b. ‘Ād precisely because, in this case, the name refers to a legendary Ḥimyarite king. By contrast, the Luqmān who appears in pre-Islamic poetry as a paragon of wisdom is better understood as a wise tribesman from Bedouin lore. These two literary representations should therefore be clearly distinguished. Taking this distinction into account, we may admit that Central Arabian portrayals of Luqmān b. ‘Ād as a knowledgeable and eloquent leader influenced his later incorporation into the legends of the Ḥimyarite kings. His name thus came to represent a wise and powerful Yemeni ruler, once these South Arabian traditions became part of the broader pan-Arab narrative corpus. Whether the image of Luqmān b. ‘Ād as an intelligent and eloquent leader, in turn, emerged in Bedouin lore under the influence of the traditions about Luqmān the Sage, or at the very least owes to them the name of its protagonist, remains an open question.

Another important observation by Heller concerning the conflation of traditions relates to Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend and Luqmān of the destruction-of-‘Ād legend. Heller himself does not distinguish between these figures, following the Muslim tradition in which the two legends are merged into a single narrative. For our purposes, however, it is significant that the scholar highlights the eclectic origins of the legend (Heller and Stillman 1986, p. 811). This implies heterogeneous narrative motives within the tradition, and thus diverse origins for its merged Luqmān protagonist. In the Muslim accounts, the story of ‘Ād’s destruction includes the episode of a delegation sent to the sacred precinct of Mecca (*al-ḥaram*) to pray for rain, with Luqmān b. ‘Ād among its leaders. Heller submits that this episode most likely derives from pagan Meccan lore. As for Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend, Heller observes that the motif of tending to such birds in order to secure a lifespan equal to seven generations of vultures is likewise pre-Islamic, though ultimately adopted from outside Arabia. With regard to its very early extra-Arabian dissemination, he points to a parallel already identified by René Basset—namely, the Roman legend in which Romulus observes twelve vultures, signifying that Rome would endure for twelve centuries.

Other authors have refined the argument for the pre-Islamic origin of the birds-of-prey legend. Jan Retsö (2003, p. 594) entertains the possibility that the story of Luqmān attaining an exceptionally long life through association with seven eagles hatched on a high mountain, may be rooted in mantic practices of pre-Islamic Arabia. Aziz al-Azmeh (2014, p. 173), in his turn, observes that among the Ḥimyarites, *nasr*—the very bird to which Luqmān b. ‘Ād is said to have bound his own longevity—appears in poetic evidence as a deity by whom oaths were sworn. This deity received sacrifices on elevated sites and appears to have functioned, in both singular and plural forms, as a designation for Fortune or as a protective divinity in South Arabia.

Apparently following the conflation of figures characteristic of certain Muslim traditions, Jan Retsö (2003, p. 594) refers to Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend as “the wise Luqmān” and further identifies him with the Qur’ānic Luqmān, whom he regards as “seen in the Qur’ān as a true prophet”. We argue, however, that in the birds-of-prey legend Luqmān is not portrayed as wise, and that in poetry his figure is invoked to convey the idea that even the most exceptional longevity is ultimately transient. Luqmān b. ‘Ād as a

paragon of wisdom constitutes a distinct literary representation, invoked in poetry to denote exceptional cleverness, sound judgment, and eloquence. The connection of this figure with Luqmān the Sage—let alone that of the Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend—cannot be established with certainty.

Finally, Aziz al-Azmeh (2014, pp. 145–46) draws attention to the fact that, already in the pre-Islamic period, the legends of perished peoples were known both to the poets of central and northern Arabia and within the traditions of South Arabia. According to him, this reflects the operation of a variety of agencies and processes over the two centuries preceding Muḥammad that facilitated the intertwining of local and regional traditions into a shared reservoir of literary representation. In this particular context, Al-Azmeh does not discuss Luqmān specifically but rather considers the ways in which pan-Arab mythical, tribal, and poetic lore circulated widely across Arabia, diffusing through key nodes of transmission such as seasonal markets and royal courts. Nevertheless, this perspective appears to offer the most appropriate framework for approaching the Luqmān traditions. It helps to avoid several potential pitfalls in their study: namely, conflating all references to Luqmān b. ʿĀd into a single composite figure; merging the traditions surrounding Luqmān b. ʿĀd and Luqmān the Sage into one unified character; or, conversely, imposing a rigid dichotomy between them.

2.2. The Approach: Distinguishing Without Dichotomizing

From the outlined perspective, all representations of Luqmān derive from a shared reservoir of literary motifs and figures that, in the centuries preceding Islam, circulated within a diverse array of local and regional traditions of different origins and characteristics. These motifs include the Luqmān figures introduced above: (1) a paragon of wisdom and eloquence; (2) a noble and generous *maysir*-gambler; (3) a greedy camel thief; (4) an instigator of tribal conflict; (5) a Ḥimyarite king; (6) a figure of the destruction-of-ʿĀd legend (a symbol of the transient glory of vanished peoples); (7) a figure of the birds-of-prey legend. Mutual entanglement of varying intensity occurred among these elements of pan-Arab mythical and tribal lore during their transmission in Late Antiquity, resulting in the Luqmān traditions preserved in pre-Islamic poetry and early Islamic sources available to us today. Reflecting distinct narrative lineages, they are brought together in our analytical focus by the very fact that all of them eventually assign the name Luqmān (at times—Luqmān b. ʿĀd) to their respective protagonists.

The Qurʾānic tradition offers a compelling example of how elements of pan-Arab mythical and tribal lore could interact within a shared narrative framework. On the one hand, Luqmān appears in Sūra 31 as a widely recognized authority, delivering as his very first admonition to his son the central tenet of Qurʾānic doctrine: the prohibition against associating anything with God (Q 31:13). On the other hand, to support this same doctrinal foundation, the Qurʾān invokes the story of the prophet Hūd (Q 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 26:123–40) and the destruction of ʿĀd (Q 41:15–16; 69:6–8; 89:6–8)—a narrative in which Luqmān b. ʿĀd features prominently in the versions preserved by later Muslim authors. The figure of Luqmān b. ʿĀd symbolizing the transience of the perished people of ʿĀd was known to pre-Islamic poets; yet Luqmān b. ʿĀd also appears in pre-Islamic poetry as a paragon of wisdom. It remains unclear to what extent Muḥammad’s contemporaries associated either of these figures with Luqmān the Sage, renowned for his admonitions and distinguished in the Qurʾānic text. What is significant, however, is that the Qurʾānic tradition, in service of a single doctrine, drew together diverse strands of lore circulating across Arabia, each in some way invoking a figure named Luqmān. In the case of the destruction-of-ʿĀd legend, despite its repeated references in the Qurʾān, the Luqmān figure ultimately proved incidental. One may suppose that, even outside the Qurʾānic tradition,

pre-Islamic elements of pan-Arab mythical and tribal lore could have interacted in a similar manner: certain components of the original motifs were preserved and reinterpreted to serve particular agendas, while others were relegated to the background. The multiplicity of representations associated with the name Luqmān points to the diversity of strands of lore that eventually converged in the Luqmān traditions available to us today.

A distinction between the literary representations bearing the name Luqmān allows us to resolve discrepancies such as the one noted by Nicolai Sinai (2019, p. 35): an elegy from the *diwān* of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (d. 609 CE) lists Luqmān and Dhū l-Qarnayn (lit. “The Owner of Two Horns,” traditionally identified by Muslim scholars as Alexander the Great) among the powerful individuals destroyed (*ahlaka*) by Allāh. By contrast, the Qur’ān presents both Luqmān and Dhū l-Qarnayn as emphatically positive figures, who would therefore hardly seem to merit divine obliteration (see Q 31:12–13 and 18:83–99).

In the case of Dhū l-Qarnayn, we find no inherent ambivalence in the character himself and would resolve the dichotomy based on the differing purposes for which this image of a powerful ruler is employed in poetry and in the Qur’ān. Dhū l-Qarnayn is equally suited to the elegiac mode, as a figure symbolizing the transience of all earthly power, and to the Qur’ānic narrative, where he is portrayed as a righteous ruler who undertakes long journeys across the earth and establishes justice (Q 18:83–101). In the case of Luqmān, the dichotomy may be resolved by noting that Zuhayr explicitly refers to Luqmān b. ‘Ād (Zuhayr 1988, p. 141) as a symbol of the transience of earthly fame and power. By contrast, the Qur’ān refers to Luqmān the Sage, renowned for his wise sayings and proverbs.

Regardless of the specific designations, the issue at hand concerns fundamentally incompatible representations that could not meaningfully be conflated. Within the elegiac mode, Luqmān the leader of ‘Ād—positioned alongside Dhū l-Qarnayn and other kings whose superpower proved transient—symbolizes the ephemerality of worldly fame. Judging by the accounts preserved in the Islamic tradition, this Luqmān was not renowned for wise sayings and proverbs. By contrast, Luqmān the Sage would not have served as a symbol of the transience of worldly power and fame. Unlike Luqmān of the destruction-of-‘Ād legend, who embodies transient worldly fame, Luqmān the Sage appears to possess an enduring fame and authority grounded in the lasting wisdom of his admonitions.

An approach that suggests itself, based on the foregoing discussion of Luqmān b. ‘Ād and Luqmān the Sage, is one that avoids both conflating and dichotomizing literary representations behind these names. It implies setting aside the question of whether pre-Islamic poets, contemporaries of Muḥammad, and later Muslim scholars envisioned one or multiple figures named Luqmān. It is sufficient to acknowledge the coexistence of multiple literary representations behind the shared name, and to attend both to their distinct origins and characteristics and to the common features that reflect the intertwining of local and regional traditions.

2.3. The Task, the Use of Poetry and the Analytical Framework

Our task moving forward is to examine all the distinct literary representations associated with the name Luqmān, taking into account their possible mutual influences and discerning the underlying ideas that inform them. Wherever possible, we will focus in particular on how these representations appear in poetry. This focus is especially valuable in the case of poetry transmitted as pre-Qur’ānic, since it offers the possibility of accessing a perspective much closer to the origins of the images in question than that available in narratives already reshaped by Muslim authors. Admittedly, poetic texts too may have undergone revisions and editorial interventions, not to mention possible forgeries. Yet in poetry, the Luqmānic figures and the associated underlying ideas that concern us are not embedded within a narrative structure open to reinterpretation. Rather they appear

as elements tied to the conventional intended meaning (*qaṣd*) conveyed by a given poetic line. Unlike the wording itself, the standard and conventional *qaṣd*-s of pre-Islamic poetry constitute an object of study largely unaffected by distortions of oral transmission, editorial interventions by Muslim scholars, or fabrications by skilled versifiers operating within pre-Islamic poetic norms.

The distinction between narrative and poetry in this case can be illustrated by the example of Luqmān b. ʿĀd in the birds-of-prey legend. When this figure is embedded within a narrative, we are dependent on the Muslim reinterpretation, according to which Luqmān's longevity is granted by God as a reward for his righteousness, setting him apart from the unrighteous ʿĀdites, who were consequently destroyed. The underlying idea behind this literary representation is therefore righteousness—an element that was certainly not central to the pre-Islamic legend. By contrast, when the birds-of-prey legend is alluded to in pre-Qur'ānic poetry, the underlying idea conveyed through the image of Luqmān is the human inability to outwit the all-consuming transience of time and the precariousness of all earthly longevity. This idea is so frequently articulated by pre-Islamic poets—even without any reference to Luqmān—that it is scarcely plausible to argue that it was artificially attributed to them by fabricators of the early ʿAbbāsīd period. Accordingly, this conventional intended meaning may be regarded as authentic for the Luqmān-verses alluding to the birds-of-prey legend, and it would appear that this underlying idea was in fact central to the pre-Islamic legend itself.

3. Representations Named Luqmān b. ʿĀd

3.1. Paragon of Wisdom and Eloquence

3.1.1. Links with Luqmān the Sage: Possible Poetic Evidences

In the previously quoted eulogy for the deceased poet Wathīma b. ʿUthmān, Luqmān b. ʿĀd is referenced as the highest standard of eloquence and wise speech. Al-Jāhīz further attributes to this image cleverness (*nabāha*) and prudence (*ḥilm*) (al-Jāhīz 1998, vol. 1, pp. 183–84). The functioning of such a literary representation as a standard of wisdom in poetry demonstrates the existence of a corresponding Luqmān portrayal in pre-Islamic Arabia. The fact that this character is at times identified specifically as Luqmān b. ʿĀd—and that Muslim scholars caution against conflating him with Luqmān the Sage—does not preclude the possibility that the former may have been shaped, at least in part, by traditions associated with the latter. This inference is supported by the absence of a narrative foundation for the poetic paragon of wisdom Luqmān b. ʿĀd, in contrast with the solid narrative basis attached to Luqmān the Sage.

Evidence that the pre-Islamic poetic tradition assimilated the figure who would later become known as Luqmān the Sage as yet another embodiment of Luqmān b. ʿĀd may be sought in poetry. In *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (al-Jāhīz 1998, vol. 3, p. 304) and in *al-Ḥayawān* (al-Jāhīz 1965, vol. 3, p. 447), al-Jāhīz cites verses by the pre-Islamic poet Zabbān b. Sayyār, in which he mocks his friend, the poet al-Nābigha, for refusing to accompany him on a raid after interpreting a locust that had landed on him as a bad omen. Upon returning from the raid unscathed and enriched, Zabbān ridicules al-Nābigha (Ziyād) for having consulted his omen (*takhabbara ḥīrahu*) without any real knowledge of omens (*wa-mā fihā khabīr*). He then adds that his friend “remained in his place, as though Luqmān b. ʿĀd had beckoned to him with his wisdom as a beckoner” (*aqāma ka-anna Luqmāna bna ʿĀdin / / ashāra lahu bi-ḥikmatihī mushīr*).

Commenting on this passage, Dimitri Gutas (1981, p. 51) draws attention to the fact that Luqmān b. ʿĀd's wisdom (*ḥikma*) is here juxtaposed with knowledge and expertise in interpreting omens. This leads him to suggest that the wisdom of this Luqmān b. ʿĀd denotes a kind of distilled experience—a maxim or admonition derived from accumulated

life knowledge. Accordingly, Gutas proposes translating the verse as: “He stayed [behind], as if Luqmān b. ‘Ād had been someone beckoning to him with his maxims”. Luqmān beckoning with maxims is clearly Luqmān the Sage, and the scholar therefore seems to assume that by the late sixth century CE Arab poets were already familiar with this figure, who is the one referenced by Zabbān. Since Luqmān the Sage appears in the Qur’ān, he must evidently have been known to Muḥammad’s contemporaries, and it is therefore plausible that late sixth-century Arab poets could also employ his image. It should be noted, however, that if Zabbān does indeed refer to Luqmān the Sage as “Luqmān b. ‘Ād”, this suggests that by the late sixth century poets may have labeled as “Luqmān b. ‘Ād” any literary representation with which the name Luqmān had become associated.

For his part, [Saqib Hussain \(2022, pp. 238, 256–57\)](#) observes that the verses attributed to Zabbān suggest that in the pre-Islamic poetic tradition Luqmān’s wisdom—like that found in the broader Near Eastern wisdom tradition—was rooted in empirical observation of the natural world and accumulated experience, rather than in divine revelation. Also linking the Luqmān b. ‘Ād mentioned by Zabbān to the Qur’ānic Luqmān, Hussain takes the poet’s words as confirmation that the Arabs did not regard Luqmān the Sage as a prophet in the biblical sense. Within this interpretive framework, the theological principles articulated by Luqmān in Q 31:13—namely, the oneness of God, the imperative of gratitude to Him, and the prohibition against associating others with Him—are understood to have been inferred through wisdom grounded in natural observation, and thus to have encompassed what might be termed “natural beliefs,” including theological insights.

Some pre-Islamic poetic references to the eloquent and wise Luqmān do not identify him explicitly as Ibn ‘Ād, yet they seem to invoke the same representation as the examples cited above. As in those cases, however, it is possible to discern in them the influence of traditions that would eventually give rise to the Luqmān al-Ḥakīm of the Qur’ān and, subsequently, of the Muslim literary sources. This may be illustrated by a poem traditionally attributed either to the pre-Islamic poet al-A ‘shā (Maymūn b. Qays), in praise of Qays b. Ma ‘dīkarib, the celebrated chieftain of the Kinda tribe ([al-Baghdādī 1997](#), vol. 3, p. 238 and n. 3), or, alternatively, to al-A ‘shā’s maternal uncle, the poet al-Musayyab b. ‘Alas, in praise of a different figure ([al-Jāhīz 1998](#), vol. 1, p. 189). The subject of praise is described as follows: “When he speaks, his speech is clearer (in another version, wiser) than that of Luqmān, who would not have been able to find the right words in the same circumstances” (*wa-la-anta abyānu [or aḥkamu] ḥīna tanṭiqu min // Luqmāna lammā ‘ayya bi-l-amri*). In this same poem, the standards of courage in battle are a lion and a tiger (*ka-l-usd wa-l-numr*), while the standard of generosity is a rain-laden cloud (*al-rayyān*). Thus, the reference is not to some generalized Luqmān embodying a composite of various tribal virtues, but specifically to a paragon of wisdom and eloquence. By contrast, the generous Luqmān—who will be discussed later—constitutes a different literary representation to which the name Luqmān likewise became affixed. It is worth noting that with respect to this example as well, [Dimitri Gutas \(1981, p. 51\)](#) seems to assume that the referent is Luqmān the Sage, famous for maxims. He therefore proposes translating *abyānu/aḥkamu ḥīna tanṭiqu min Luqmān* as: “When you speak, you pronounce better maxims than Luqmān”.

Another example of the use of the image of the paragon of wisdom named Luqmān in pre-Islamic poetry is provided by Ibn al-Nabbāsh b. Zurāra of the Tamīm tribe, and in this case, too, the influence of traditions concerning Luqmān the Sage is highly likely. Ibn al-Nabbāsh is reported to praise the Qurayshite leader Nubayh b. al-Ḥajjāj as “intelligent (or proficient) like Luqmān, just in his rulings; and a sword—drawn when he rises among his people” (*thaqfun ka-Luqmāna ‘adlun fī ḥukūmatihī // sayfun idhā qāma waṣṭa l-qawmi maslūl*) ([al-Iṣfahānī 2008](#), vol. 17, p. 202). As we shall see below, justice in rulings is a quality

for which Muslim poets compared leaders specifically to Luqmān the Sage, a figure who, according to various traditions, served as a judge over Israel.

As we have already noted above, drawing on examples from the *ḍiḥwāns* of Labīd and Ṭarafa, there is fairly compelling evidence that, in the understanding of certain pre-Islamic poets, images originating in different narrative strands had already merged under the name of Luqmān. In particular, Ṭarafa may have conflated, under the designation of Luqmān b. ʿĀd, the protagonist of the Arabian version of the birds-of-prey legend with the noble *maysir*-gambler of Bedouin folklore (Ṭarafa 2002, pp. 11, 45). If so, it is also conceivable that some poets understood as Luqmān b. ʿĀd the sage known for his maxims, who was later established in Muslim sources as Luqmān al-Ḥakīm. The idea that the latter must be distinguished from Luqmān b. ʿĀd is expressed not only by al-Jāhīz (1998, vol. 1, p. 184), but also by several other medieval Muslim authors (e.g., Ibn al-ʿArabī 2003, vol. 3, p. 528; al-Suhaylī 2021, vol. 4, p. 57; al-Baghdādī 1997, vol. 4, p. 8; al-Rabghūzī 2015, p. 62). This indirectly indicates that the two portrayals were frequently conflated already in the Islamic period—an impression further confirmed by concrete cases of conflation in Muslim scholarship.

3.1.2. Conflation in Muslim Scholarship

A particularly telling example appears in the account attributed to the Yemeni historian Wahb b. Munabbih (1979, pp. 78–79), reporting that both Luqmān and Dhū l-Qarnayn were regarded by some traditionalists as non-commissioned prophets (*nabī ghayr mursal*). Given that Muslim traditionalists conferred prophetic status on the basis of the positive portrayals of Luqmān and Dhū l-Qarnayn in the Qurʾān, one might expect Luqmān the Sage to appear in such a context. Yet strikingly, it is Luqmān b. ʿĀd who features in Wahb’s tradition. Moreover, in the accounts attributed to Wahb, this Luqmān b. ʿĀd appears as a Ḥimyarite king, further illustrating the extent to which the distinct sets of representations associated with the name Luqmān had become blurred and intertwined.

Another excellent illustration of the conflation between the intelligent Luqmān b. ʿĀd and Luqmān the Sage appears in al-Zamakhsharī’s (d. 538/1144) dictionary of proverbs (al-Zamakhsharī 1977, vol. 1, p. 70). While explaining the expression *aḥkam min Luqmān* (“wiser than Luqmān”—that is, extraordinarily sagacious), al-Zamakhsharī admits uncertainty as to whether the reference is to Luqmān b. ʿĀd or to Luqmān the Sage, since both were traditionally regarded as wise men. Likewise, Ibn al-ʿArabī (2003, vol. 3, p. 528) (d. 543/1148) notes that not only Luqmān the Sage mentioned in the Qurʾān, but also Luqmān b. ʿĀd of ancient Arab legend was considered a sage (*wa-kāna Luqmān hādhā alladhī tadhkuruḥu al-ʿarab ḥakīman*).

Particularly noteworthy is that Luqmān b. ʿĀd—who, in this context, clearly represents Luqmān the intelligent—is referred to by al-Zamakhsharī as *Luqmān al-nusūr al-ʿĀdī* (“Luqmān of the birds of prey from the people of ʿĀd”). Thereby, Luqmān b. ʿĀd the intelligent, who is already difficult to distinguish from Luqmān the Sage, is conflated with Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend—a figure who, in fact, does not appear particularly intelligent or wise. In the case of al-Zamakhsharī, such a conflation is hardly surprising, given that, as discussed above, different representations under the name Luqmān coexist within the *ḍiḥwāns* of pre-Islamic poets.

3.1.3. The Paragon of Wisdom Conflated with Other Luqmān Figures in Poetry

For the theme of Luqmān as a paragon of wisdom, it is significant that this literary representation coexists in the *ḍiḥwān* of Labīd (1962, p. 56) with representations of Luqmān b. ʿĀd of the legend of the destruction of ʿĀd and of Luqmān of the legend of the birds of prey (Labīd 1962, pp. 275, 338). When invoking the image of Luqmān as a paragon

of wisdom and eloquence, Labīd refers to him without a patronymic, yet it is specifically Luqmān b. ʿĀd who is meant. This is evident from the fact that, in the relevant line of verse, the paragon of wisdom is conflated with Luqmān b. ʿĀd of the destruction-of-ʿĀd legend. The subsequent line is intended to evoke the impression of the calamities wrought by Time (*banāt al-dahr*), against which even the greatest talents and powers prove futile. By these calamities, death is meant above all. Labīd (1962, p. 56) observes that, upon their arrival, these calamities “did not permit Quss [b. Sāʿida, the paragon of rhetorical mastery, to deploy his] ‘would I’ and ‘if only I’. And [before them] sound discernment proved powerless to aid Luqmān” (*wa-akhlafna Qussan laytanī wa-law annanī // wa-aʿyā ʿalā Luqmāna hukmu l-tadabburi*). In the case of Luqmān as a symbol of helplessness in the face of the transience of time and the calamities it brings, the reference is to the hero of the destruction-of-ʿĀd legend. At the same time, this character—who, in the destruction-of-ʿĀd legend, is not distinguished by any particular sound discernment—is, in this verse, attributed precisely this quality. This aligns him with Luqmān b. ʿĀd, the paragon of wisdom in the verse cited above by the daughter of Wathīma b. ʿUthmān.

Finally, pre-Islamic poetry reflects conceptions of Luqmān b. ʿĀd’s unusual physical features. In addition to traditions emphasizing the extraordinary physical strength of a figure bearing this name—traits associated not with the paragon of wisdom but with other literary representations—it is worth illustrating the notion of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a man with an unusually large head. The pre-Islamic warrior-poet Yazīd b. al-Ṣaʿīq of the Central Arabian tribe Banū Kilāb is credited with verses in which he depicts insatiable greed as one’s “roaming the horizons in his craving, ready to devour the head of Luqmān b. ʿĀd” (*tarāhu yaṭūfu bi-l-āfāqi ḥirṣan // li-yaʿkula raʿsa Luqmāna bni ʿĀdin*) (al-Jāhiz 1965, vol. 3, p. 67 and n. 3). It is not entirely clear whether the image of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a man with an unusually large head—or with unusual physical features more generally—derives from the same traditions that portray a man of the same name as possessing extraordinary strength. Whereas exceptional physical strength is associated with literary representations of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a mighty Ḥimyarite leader (Wahb b. Munabbih 1979, p. 78) and as a greedy camel thief (al-Mufaḍḍal 1983, p. 153), the motif of the gigantic head may instead reflect traditions concerning Luqmān the Sage. In the latter case, the point may be that any extraordinary intellectual endowment must be outwardly marked by a physical sign. As will be seen below, narrative traditions about Luqmān the Sage likewise ascribe to him distinctive physical characteristics.

3.2. Maysir-Gambler (Paragon of Nobility and Generosity)

Pre-Islamic Bedouin lore associates the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd with a noble character defined by generosity and disregard for material possessions. These are standard virtues related to the manliness (*muruwwa*) of a tribal hero. In tribal tradition, this Luqmān b. ʿĀd embodies such virtues in much the same way that the pre-Islamic poet al-Samawʿal b. ʿĀdiyā came to symbolize loyalty, and the poet Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾī hospitality. At the most popular level, the embodiment of virtues by heroic figures found expression in proverbial sayings. Thus, an exceptionally generous person was not merely described as “as generous as”, but rather “more generous than Ḥātim” (*ajwad min Ḥātim*) (al-ʿAskarī 1988, vol. 1, p. 272; al-Maydānī 1947, vol. 1, p. 191). Similarly, the poet al-Samawʿal, who, according to tradition, allowed his enemies to kill his son but upheld the promise he had given to his ally, the poet Imruʿ al-Qays, became a symbol of absolute loyalty. The expression *awfā min al-Samawʿal* (“more loyal than al-Samawʿal”) thus came to denote a person of exceptional loyalty (al-ʿAskarī 1988, vol. 2, p. 271; al-Maydānī 1947, vol. 2, pp. 336–37). Similarly, a proverb that draws on the Luqmān-associated representation of a generous Bedouin is “More of a *maysir*-player than Luqmān” (*aysar min Luqmān*). The proverb links

Luqmān to his eight noble and regular fellow gamblers (*aysār*), with whom he is imagined as consistently engaging in *maysir* (al-Zamakhsharī 1977, vol. 1, p. 449; al-‘Askarī 1988, vol. 2, p. 339).

As the most active *maysir*-gambler, Luqmān’s carefree attitude towards wealth was likely perceived not only in his willingness to lose she-camels to his companions through gambling, but also in his readiness to treat everyone present by serving the meat of any she-camel, regardless of its value or fatness. As evidenced in the *mu‘allaqa* of Labīd, noble Bedouin heroes would select she-camels for such occasions using *maysir* arrows (Labīd 1962, p. 318). Since a significant portion of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is built upon the articulation of tribal virtues, it is unsurprising to find allusions to the image of the noble and generous *maysir*-gamblers of Luqmān’s circle. The personified ideals of generosity and nobility constitute the underlying concept behind these allusions. The expression “the fellow gamblers of Luqmān” (*aysār Luqmān*) became a fixed idiom denoting “generous and noble people”.

To understand the conventional intended meaning (*qaṣd*) for which this idiom is employed, it is important to bear in mind that extraordinary generosity in pre-Islamic poetry is often depicted against the background of harsh natural conditions—during an inhospitable and difficult season, when such generosity was especially meaningful. For instance, the poet Labīd (d. 661), in praising his relatives, notes that they “crown [platters with heaps of meat]” (*wa-yukallilūna*) precisely “when the winter winds howl” (*idhā l-riyāḥu tanāwahaṭ*) (Labīd 1962, p. 319). Similarly, al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza (d. 570 CE), in praising the king of Kinda, describes him as a generous spring (*rabī‘*) who reveals himself “when a dry and dusty year calls for offering assistance [to the needy]” (*in shammarat ghabrā‘*) (al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza 1991, p. 34). Such descriptions of difficult conditions likewise typically accompany references to individuals described as “the fellow gamblers of Luqmān” (*aysār Luqmān*). It follows, therefore, that applying this expression to someone implies that they embody extreme generosity and nobility.

Thus, the fellow tribesmen of the poet Ṭarafa reveal themselves as “the fellow gamblers of Luqmān” when winter renders slaughter-camels especially costly (*idhā aghlat al-shitwa abdā‘ al-juzur*) (Ṭarafa 2002, p. 45). In a poem from the *Dīwān* of Imru‘ al-Qays, the praised members of the tribe of Banū Sadūs appear as “the fellow gamblers of Luqmān b. ‘Ād (!)” when such extreme cold sets in that icy water freezes (*idhā mā ujmada al-mā‘ al-qarīs*) (Imru‘ al-Qays’s 2004, p. 90). In a poem attributed to Faḍāla b. Sharīk, who lived at the turn of the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras, those who are truly generous and noble reveal themselves as “the fellow gamblers of Luqmān” precisely when the stars bring no rain (*idhā amḥalū*)—a time of drought. Under such harsh conditions, they serve as a source of protection for all who arrive as supplicants (*‘izz li-man jā‘ ahum mustajīran*) (al-Isfahānī 2008, vol. 12, p. 51).

Even when hardship is not explicitly invoked, the context still implies generous camel-slaughter for sustenance. Thus, in a poem by Aws b. Ḥajar (d. before the Hijra), the praised figures reveal themselves as “the fellow gamblers of Luqmān b. ‘Ād (!)” through their noble kindness and generosity (*samāḥatan wa-jūdan*), when barren she-camels whose milk has dried up (i.e., particularly well-fattened she-camels) are selected for slaughter (*idhā mā l-shawl amsat jarā‘ir*) (Aws b. Ḥajar 1979, p. 33).

Pre-Islamic tribal poetry also features less elaborate instances of invoking the figure of Luqmān as a paragon of generosity. Consider, for example, a line attributed to the poet known by the epithet Abū l-Liḥām of the Taghlib tribe. In praising a tribal leader, the poet ascribes to him the expected virtues, declaring: “In giving support, you are [as generous as] Luqmān [b. ‘Ād]; in speech, [as eloquent as] Quss [b. Sā‘ida of the tribe of Iyād]; and in assault, you are bolder than a lion” (*Luqmānu muntaṣiran wa-Qussu nāṭiqan / / wa-la-anta ajra‘u ṣūlatan min bayhasa*) (al-Mufaḍḍal 1983, p. 112). As we can see, the

literary representation of Luqmān here involves neither bravery nor eloquence (for which other exemplars are invoked), but solely noble generosity towards those in need during difficult times.

Notably, neither the latter example nor those portraying Luqmān as an avid *maysir*-gambler imply intelligence, let alone wisdom. Equally significant is the fact that none of the examples conveying the ideals of generosity and nobility simultaneously transmit any of the other themes with which a literary representation bearing the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd might be associated in pre-Islamic poetry—such as the transience of worldly glory, the impossibility of eternal life, or the notion of just and wise leadership.

3.3. Greedy Camel Thief (An Anecdotal Envious Strongman, Misogynist, and Incestuous Figure)

A reader of the Bedouin anecdotes collected by the Arabic philologist al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d. 170/786) for his lexicon on the origins of Arabic proverbs would encounter Luqmān b. ʿĀd not as a figure of generosity, but rather as a greedy, envious, and comical strongman—a camel thief and even an incestuous figure. A few examples will suffice.

According to one account, Luqmān b. ʿĀd begrudged camel meat and refused to slaughter his she-camels for food, even for his own family. When he discovered that his wife—a woman from another tribe within the ʿĀd confederation—had fed him meat from his own camels without his knowledge, he launched a raid against her relatives in order to seize camels from them. In another anecdote, Luqmān appears naïve enough to be intoxicated by his wife, thereby allowing his own sister to seduce him so that she might conceive a strong son.

In a third story, Luqaym—the child born of this union—once returned home with his share of raided camels before his father. When Luqmān arrived later with his own share—believing himself to be the first—and his daughter Ṣuḥr served him a dish prepared from one of Luqaym’s camels, he realized that he had lost the race. As a “reward” for the meal, Luqmān slapped his daughter with such force that, depending on the version, he either killed her or knocked out her teeth (al-Mufaḍḍal 1983, pp. 151–53).

In the narratives transmitted in *al-Ḥayawān* by al-Jāḥiẓ (1965, vol. 1, p. 21), Ṣuḥr fares even worse and is killed by her father without cause. Enraged by several of his wives—each of whom had deceived him in one way or another (*kulluhunna khunnahu fī anfusiḥinna*)—the misogynist Luqmān b. ʿĀd kills them one by one. After killing the last of them somewhere in the mountains and descending, the first person he encounters is Ṣuḥr, whom he kills as well.

This representation of Luqmān b. ʿĀd constitutes just as integral a part of pre-Islamic Bedouin lore as that of a member of the circle of noble men who embody absolute generosity and a disregard for the value of she-camels during times of famine. It is difficult to discern any underlying idea behind this image beyond anecdotal humor, especially given that, in al-Mufaḍḍal’s collection, the anecdotes in question appear to have originated and circulated primarily as explanations for pre-existing Arabic proverbs. Even the figure of Luqaym b. Luqmān conveys no moral message related to the prohibition of incest, and, at least at the stage when the story was transmitted by al-Mufaḍḍal’s informants, it seems to have functioned as little more than a curiosity.

Although the protagonist of the anecdotes about the greedy camel rustler bears the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd, the traditions concerning him clearly belong to a different stream of Bedouin lore from those portraying the most avid *maysir*-gambler and the paragon of noble generosity. At the same time, both of these streams are readily distinguishable from the one that gave rise to the literary representation of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as the paragon of wisdom. While the comical figure of the greedy camel rustler and misogynist eventually came to bear the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd and to be situated within the mythical people of ʿĀd, the

anecdotes contain no hint of his status as a tribal leader or of the imminent destruction of the ʿĀd confederation.

The anecdotes about Luqmān and Luqaym—specifically the episode concerning Luqaym’s incestuous origin—also found their way into poetry. The surviving example is attributed to the poet al-Namir b. Tawlab (a contemporary of Muḥammad, known to have embraced Islam). This instance primarily demonstrates that, possibly as early as the Prophet’s lifetime, elements of pre-Islamic lore later associated with the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd had already become conflated. Alternatively, one may posit that such conflation took place in the second century AH, should the poem attributed to al-Namir not be entirely authentic, with certain lines perhaps added at a later stage. The final three verses of the poem, which allude to the anecdote about the camel rustler who impregnated his own sister, may have been inserted precisely because the protagonist of that anecdote bore the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd. This interpretation seems the more plausible.

The first of the three allusive lines states that “Luqaym, son of Luqmān, was born of his [own] sister, and thus was both his nephew and his son” (*Luqaymu bnu Luqmāna min ukhtihi // wa-kāna bna ukhtin lahu wa-bnamā*). This is followed by two additional lines referring to the episode in which Luqmān, having been intoxicated to the point of incoherence (*ḥummiqa*) and deceived (*ghurra*), impregnated the deceiver: “a cognisant man made her pregnant, and she bore a vigorous man” (*fa-aḥbalahā rajulun nābihun // fa-jāʿat bihi rajulan muḥkiman*) (al-Namir b. Tawlab 2000, pp. 120–21). Alternatively, as al-Jāḥiẓ (1998, vol. 1, p. 184; 1965, vol. 1, p. 22) quotes, “a strong man was deceived by her, and she bore another strong man” (*fa-ghurra bihā rajulun muḥkimun // fa-jāʿat bihi rajulan muḥkiman*).

Most likely referencing Luqaym b. Luqmān (known as the Younger Luqmān) rather than Luqmān b. ʿĀd himself, al-Jāḥiẓ (1998, vol. 1, p. 184) describes these three lines—a clear allusion to the anecdote of the camel rustler who committed an inadvertent incest—as having been composed “in view of his elevated status and great prestige” (*wa-li-rtifāʿ qadrihi wa-ʿiẓam shaʿnihi*). Al-Jāḥiẓ clearly understands Luqmān from these lines to refer to the very paragon of wisdom invoked in the eulogy for the poet Wathīma b. ʿUthmān, on which he comments. Thus, in quoting al-Namir b. Tawlab, the scholar conflates the wise and eloquent Luqmān b. ʿĀd with Luqmān b. ʿĀd the anecdotal miser and camel thief.

A separate question is that the poem itself—at least in the form in which it entered the *ḍiḥwān* of al-Namir b. Tawlab (2000, pp. 114–21)—conflates Luqmān the camel thief with Luqmān of the destruction-of-ʿĀd legend. The three concluding lines reflecting on the anecdote of inadvertent incest committed by the camel rustler (lines 22–24) are added to the poem immediately after verse 21, which mentions kings and peoples whose power and fame were ultimately transient in the face of the all-consuming passage of time (*dahr*). Among those named are the Yemeni king bearing the title Tubbaʿ— a designation that may refer to a succession of South Arabian rulers or to the entirety of the perished people of Tubbaʿ (alluded to in Q 44:37 and Q 50:14) and the Ethiopian king Abraha. In pre-Islamic poetry, there is indeed a tradition of including Luqmān b. ʿĀd within such lists (cf. Zuhayr 1988, p. 141; Labīd 1962, p. 338).

Thus, in the extant version of the poem attributed to al-Namir b. Tawlab, under the same name Luqmān b. ʿĀd, a figure embodying the transience of earthly power and fame is conflated with the anecdotal protagonist who kills women and steals camels from his wife’s kin after she had cooked an animal from their family herd. These two images could plausibly coexist within a shared reservoir of literary representations and may have been conflated within a single *qaṣīda*, if we assume its textual integrity. Nevertheless, from the perspective of distinct streams of mythical and tribal lore, the former representation can scarcely be regarded as identical to the latter. Moreover, from this perspective, neither image corresponds to Luqmān as the paragon of wisdom, nor to the noble *maysir*-gambler.

From the same perspective, however, it is hardly surprising that, owing to the intertwining of local and regional traditions into a shared reservoir of literary representations, details were transferred from one figure to another. The anecdotal image of the greedy, envious strongman was no exception. The anecdotes cited by al-Mufaḍḍal do not depict Luqmān b. ʿĀd engaging in wise actions or delivering sagacious pronouncements. Nevertheless, the tradition does ascribe intelligence to him. In the anecdote involving Luqmān's intoxication, his sister seeks to conceive a child by him so that the boy might inherit her brother's refinement (*adab*) and cunning (*dahā*). Ultimately, Luqaym grows up to become an equally unmatched camel raider, like his father, and—like him—one of the most judicious (*ahzam*) men (al-Mufaḍḍal 1983, p. 152). These references to Luqmān's intelligence may be interpreted as evidence of the influence exerted by the literary representation of the paragon of wisdom, eloquence, and sound judgment upon that of the greedy strongman who seizes camels from in-laws and kills women.

3.4. Quarrelsome Instigator of Tribal Conflicts

In the account of “the last of the people of ʿĀd” (*ʿĀd al-ākhirā*) transmitted on the authority of the traditionalist ʿUbayd b. Sharyā al-Jurhumī (d. 66/686), Luqmān b. ʿĀd appears as a quarrelsome instigator of internal conflict within the ʿĀd, ultimately responsible for the destruction of the confederation. It is possible that this Muslim tradition does not refer to the original people of ʿĀd, who were destroyed by God for their unbelief, but rather to a later group descended from the surviving remnant of the original ʿĀd. The last of the ʿĀd, too, ultimately perished—like their predecessors—due to the shortsightedness of their leadership, which again included a figure named Luqmān b. ʿĀd.

Even if this Luqmān may be regarded as a strong tribesman of high social standing, the narrative portrays him as neither wise nor intelligent. A member of the tribe of ʿAmr b. Luqaym, this Luqmān marries the sister of Sālim b. Huzayma, the chief of the tribe of ʿUfayr b. Luqaym, which by the end of the ʿĀd's history was regarded as the leading sub-tribe among them (*sādat ʿĀd al-ākhirā*). After a long period of cohabitation, Luqmān begins to quarrel with his wife, and his resentment toward her grows so intense that he begins to insult, beat, and treat her with cruelty (*tanāwalahā fa-darrahā wa-asāʾa ilayhā*). When the woman flees to her native tribe, and its men—led by her brother, the tribal chief Sālim—confront Luqmān, he insults them as well. This escalates into war, during which Luqmān b. ʿĀd and his followers massacre the members of the tribe of ʿUfayr b. Luqaym, as well as all other sections of the ʿĀd who had joined them (Wahb b. Munabbih 1979, pp. 381–82).

Like the two previously discussed literary representations bearing the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd, this one appears to originate from tribal Bedouin lore. Unlike Luqmān the envious strongman, however, Luqmān the instigator of tribal conflict clearly holds the status of a leader, commands a coalition of tribes in warfare, and is linked to the narrative of what appears to be a second destruction of the people of ʿĀd. Moreover, there is a notable difference in narrative character. In the case of Luqmān the greedy camel rustler, the material consists of Bedouin anecdotes told for amusement and, incidentally, to explain the origins of pre-existing Arabic proverbs. By contrast, the narrative of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as the instigator of tribal warfare bears strong resemblance to the traditions found in *Ayyām al-ʿArab*. If, in its current form, the story did not describe the destruction of a mythical tribe but rather a conflict within a tribal confederation that plausibly existed in the sixth century CE, it could easily be incorporated into the well-known corpus of accounts explaining the history of central and northern Arabia in the one hundred and fifty years preceding the advent of Islam. The tale of how a quarrel between Luqmān b. ʿĀd, his wife, and his brothers-in-law triggered a war within the ʿĀd confederation appears no more legendary

or romanticized than the traditions recounting how, in the sixth century CE, the Basūs War erupted between the related tribes of Taghlib and Bakr, or the Dāḥis War between Dhubyān and ʿAbs within the Ghaṭafān confederation.

The figure of Luqmān b. ʿĀd in the anecdotes portraying him as a greedy and envious camel rustler does not appear to convey any serious underlying ideas beyond the wit embedded in the proverbs these anecdotes were intended to explain. By contrast, the image of Luqmān b. ʿĀd in the narrative concerning the destruction of the last of the ʿĀd in a tribal war reflects the same underlying ideas found in the *Ayyām al-ʿArab*: the possibility that a war devastating kin-related tribes might erupt at any moment due to a domestic quarrel, and the inability of tribal leaders to prevent the escalation of bloodshed. At the same time, the motif of quarreling with one's wife, displaying aggression toward her, and engaging in armed conflict with her tribe is what links the representation of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a prominent leader of the ʿĀdites with the Luqmān b. ʿĀd featured in the camel-raider anecdotes. As will be shown below, this motif even comes to influence the portrayal of Luqmān as the Ḥimyarite king.

Akin to the traditions of *Ayyām al-ʿArab*, the account of the war among the last descendants of ʿĀd contains poetic elements recited by the characters themselves in the course of the unfolding events. Serving as instruments of action, these pieces of verse do not contribute to the creation of the literary representation of Luqmān b. ʿĀd, which is shaped primarily by the narrative itself.

3.5. Ḥimyarite King

A reasonable starting point for examining the image of Luqmān as a Ḥimyarite king is the assumption—outlined above—that in pre-Islamic tribal lore, a representation of a paragon of wisdom known as Luqmān preceded the narrative of a king bearing the same name. Later, during the incorporation of South Arabian motifs into the cultural repertoire of central and northern Arabia, this earlier representation likely inspired the attribution of the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd to a Ḥimyarite ruler. In the resulting narrative—preserved in its Islamic redactions—Luqmān b. ʿĀd appears as a virtuous and pious lawgiver, credited with helping to lay the foundations of South Arabian civilization, or even of a broader pan-Arab cultural identity. Reports attributed to Wahb b. Munabbih conflate this literary representation with other portrayals bearing the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd, such as the anecdotal strongman and the owner of the seven birds of prey. According to these accounts, Luqmān possessed the strength of one hundred men (*ḥāssat mīʾ at rajul*). The same Luqmān is said to have petitioned God for unprecedented longevity and—as Wahb notes—was regarded by some traditionalists as a non-commissioned prophet (*nabī ghayr mursal*) (Wahb b. Munabbih 1979, pp. 78–79).

In Wahb's account depicting the treachery, deceit, and betrayal embodied by the tribe of Karkar—part of the ʿĀd confederation—Luqmān demonstrates rational guidance (*rushd*), sound judgment (*sadād*), and righteous governance of the people (*ṣalāḥ lil-ʿibād*). He settles the impious tribe within his domain, instructs them in proper belief, and subsequently administers just punishment to those among them who betray or relapse—including his own wife, taken from among their number, who proves unfaithful. To establish proof of marital infidelity, Luqmān compels the woman to spit at the ceiling from various positions to demonstrate that the spittle on the ceiling came from her lover. He is then the first to carry out stoning as a legal punishment for illicit sexual relations—as a means of preventing such transgressions within the community (*rajama fī l-ḥadd, ḥadd al-zinā*). He is also said to have been the first to issue a legal ruling mandating amputation for theft (*al-qatʿ fī l-sariqa*) (Wahb b. Munabbih 1979, pp. 80–84).

Thus, alongside the name Luqmān b. ʿĀd, the representation of a Ḥimyarite king inherited not only aspects of wisdom from the narrative strand associated with the wise Luqmān b. ʿĀd, but also extraordinary physical strength and the motif of misfortune involving an unfaithful woman. These last two elements link the Ḥimyarite king with the character featured in the anecdotes about the greedy camel rustler. Since the figure in the “Ḥimyarite” context is emphatically portrayed in a positive light—later further shaped by Muslim authors into a model of righteousness—unlike the camel thief, the Ḥimyarite king does not engage in unjust killings of women or in-laws.

Al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) identifies Luqmān b. ʿĀd as the very king who constructed the famed dam of Maʿrib in Yemen (*sadd Maʿrib*) (al-Masʿūdī 2005, vol. 2, p. 139). This marvel of ancient engineering collected seasonal rains from as many as seventy *wādīs* and channeled the water into an intricate network of irrigation canals that nourished a fertile valley. The dam’s eventual destruction by the flood of al-ʿArim (*sayl al-ʿArim*) was a cataclysmic event, to which the Qurʾān alludes (Q 34:16). This attribution underscores the immense power attributed to Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a king of Ḥimyar. It suffices to mention that, according to an alternative account reported by the Andalusian scholar Abū l-Qāsim al-Suhaylī (d. 581/1185), the project was initiated by the South Arabian patriarch Sabaʾ b. Yashjuʾ b. Yaʿrub b. Qaḥṭān (cf. the biblical Sheba, one of the great-grandsons of Ham; Gen. 10:7), while its construction and completion were carried out by successive generations of Ḥimyarite kings (al-Suhaylī 2021, vol. 1, p. 258).

Apparently, the literary representation of a Ḥimyarite ruler named Luqmān b. ʿĀd—incorporating elements from various pre-Islamic strands—results from a fusion of motifs that occurred within the Islamic tradition, specifically within its narrative rather than its poetic framework. Consequently, there are no references to this representation of Luqmān b. ʿĀd in either pre-Islamic or early Islamic poetry. Within the Islamic narrative tradition, however—particularly in the post-Qurʾānic integration of South Arabian cultural symbolism into the broader Muslim historical imagination—the emergence of Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a righteous ruler and just lawgiver appears fully consistent with the evolving image of Ḥimyarite kings, who came to be associated with power, legal authority, and the grandeur of a lost civilization. This was part of a broader campaign by Arabians of Yemeni origin, for whom reminding others of the past glories of the South Arabian kingdoms took the form of collecting accounts emphasizing their heritage of pre-Islamic greatness—a process that Fred Donner (1998, p. 196) regards as a historiographical variant of genealogical legitimation.

3.6. Chieftain of the Doomed People of ʿĀd

Allusions to legends illustrating the transience of once-glorious peoples, including the people of ʿĀd and its chieftain named Luqmān, are attested in the verses of several pre-Qurʾānic master-poets, including al-Namir b. Tawlab, Zuhayr, Labīd, and al-Aʿshā. If at least some of these verses are genuinely pre-Islamic, the alluded legends must have been known in central and northern Arabia as early as the sixth century CE. On the other hand, Aziz al-Azmeh (2014, pp. 145–46) argues that the detailed account of the destruction of ʿĀd provided by the late seventh–early eighth-century Yemeni historian Wahb b. Munabbih (1979, p. 51 ff.) indicates that the legend was also current in pre-Islamic South Arabia.

Counted among the perished peoples of Arabia, ʿĀd were, at a certain point, classified by medieval Muslim authors as belonging to the “Extinct Arabs” (*al-ʿarab al-bāʿida*), said to have inhabited the Peninsula centuries before the advent of Islam (Jan Retsö 2003, pp. 37–38; Aziz al-Azmeh 2014, pp. 145–46; Webb 2016, pp. 116, 208–13). In the legend of the destruction of ʿĀd, as interpreted by Muslim authors in light of the Qurʾānic tradition, Luqmān b. ʿĀd is portrayed neither as a virtuous man nor as a figure of great physical

strength. The core of the narrative to which the Qurʾān alludes (Q 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 26:123–40) is that, suffering from drought and having received the prophetic warning of Hūd—who urged them to abandon idolatry and embrace true faith—the people of ʿĀd rejected the message. Consequently, they were destroyed for their failure to follow the righteous path. According to various Muslim authors, in an effort to obtain relief from the drought, the tribal confederation sent a delegation of seventy nobles to the sacred precinct in Mecca (*al-ḥaram*) to pray for rain on behalf of the people. The delegation was led by four distinguished men of ʿĀd, including Luqmān b. ʿĀd, though the leader among them was Qayl b. ʿAnz.

In order to explain that Allah granted Luqmān longevity as a reward for his piety, the Islamic tradition seeks to portray Luqmān b. ʿĀd as a righteous man who believed in the prophethood of Hūd. Nevertheless, in the Muslim accounts, Luqmān is neither particularly wise nor notably righteous. Only a few traditions, including a Turkic one transmitted by al-Rabghūzī (14th century CE), explicitly state that Luqmān b. ʿĀd accepted Hūd’s message and, together with Marthad b. Saʿd—another prominent member of ʿĀd’s delegation—was counted among the believers (al-Rabghūzī 2015, p. 62; al-Baghdādī 1997, vol. 4, p. 8). The majority of traditions, however, make no mention of Luqmān acknowledging Hūd’s prophethood and instead identify Marthad as the sole believer (see, e.g., Wahb b. Munabbih 1979, pp. 340–49; al-Ṭabarī 2001, vol. 10, p. 270; al-Baghawī 1989–1991, vol. 3, p. 245; Ibn al-Jawzī 1995, vol. 1, pp. 252–54).

According to these traditions, Marthad b. Saʿd—described as “a believer” or even “a Muslim”—warned the others that their pagan prayers would go unheard. As a consequence, he was excluded from the delegation. Nothing is said, however, about Luqmān either supporting Marthad or joining him. Nor is there any suggestion that Luqmān distanced himself from the other delegates when they spent an entire month in Mecca, near the sacred precinct, indulging in wine and the singing of girls rather than hastening to offer their prayers—despite their kinsmen in the land of ʿĀd suffering from severe drought. Moreover, when the delegation finally performed their prayers, Marthad prayed for piety and devoutness (*birr wa-taqwā*), whereas Luqmān is said to have prayed solely for his own life, asking that it might be longer than anyone else’s. Qayl b. ʿAnz was then given a choice between three clouds. The black one he selected proved to be the very wind that raged for seven nights and eight days without pause, utterly annihilating the people of ʿĀd.

In pre-Islamic poetic references to this legend, there is no indication that the people of ʿĀd perished as a punishment for their sins. Rather, there is simply the recognition that the greatness of Luqmān and his people, the ʿĀd, proved just as transient as the glory of other celebrated rulers and their nations, for such is the common human lot. A well-known example—briefly mentioned above—is the elegy preserved in the *dīwān* of Zuhayr (1988, p. 141), in which Luqmān b. ʿĀd appears together with his people, the ʿĀd, alongside Dhū l-Qarnayn (i.e., Alexander the Great), Tubbaʿ (referring either to the rulers of Yemen or to their people), the Pharaohs of Egypt, the kings of Ethiopia (*al-Najāshī*), and the Naṣrid (Lakhmid) king of al-Ḥīra, al-Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir, who symbolizes the end of his illustrious dynasty. Expressing a similar idea, Labīd (1962, p. 338) lists Luqmān b. ʿĀd together with the people of ʿĀd (*qawm Luqmān b. ʿĀd*), Iram (a land associated with vanished peoples, particularly the ʿĀd; cf. Q 89:7), and, in accordance with established tradition, Tubbaʿ. The poem by al-Namir b. Tawlab (2000, p. 121), already referenced, likewise mentions Luqmān in conjunction with Tubbaʿ and the Ethiopian king Abraha, who once ruled the Yemeni kingdom of Ḥimyar.

al-Aʿshā (1950, pp. 281–83), reflecting on the inevitability of death (*al-manāyā*) and the inexorable passage of time (*dahr*), alludes to pre-Islamic conceptions of the vanished peoples of ʿĀd, Iram, Ṭasm, Jadīs, and the inhabitants of the palace of Ghumdān in Yemen,

associated with the local king or kings known as Tubba'. In the same context, he recounts details from the legend of a delegation sent by the people of 'Ād to the sacred precinct in Mecca to pray for rain—details that correspond closely to those later found in Muslim historiographical accounts (see, e.g., [al-Ṭabarī 2001](#), vol. 10, p. 270). Notably, the poem names the leaders of this delegation, in particular Luqmān [b. 'Ād], Qayl [b. 'Anz], and Luqaym [b. Hazzāl]. This indicates that the Islamic narrative tradition incorporated a substantial portion of the legend of the destruction of 'Ād as it was already known as early as the first century before the Hijra.

While the motif of the people of 'Ād perishing from drought and sending a delegation to pray for rain is most probably pre-Islamic, poetic references to it indicate only that the legend conveyed the idea of the inevitable doom of once-great peoples, not that their destruction was understood as a punishment for their way of life. In this sense, for the pre-Islamic poets, Luqmān and the people of 'Ād are no different from the Yemeni Tubba', the Ethiopian Abraha, and their respective peoples.

The representation of Luqmān b. 'Ād as the embodiment of the transient fame of the vanished people of 'Ād is invoked not only in the context of general reflections on the fleetingness of earthly glory, but also more specifically as a symbol of the inevitability of death. Thus, the pre-Islamic poet al-Rabī' b. Ḍabū' of the Fazāra tribe alludes to Luqmān and the legends surrounding the destruction of the peoples of 'Ād and Tubba' precisely to express this idea: "What befell the man, Tubba', will befall me, and what killed the kin of Luqmān will kill me" (*sa-yudrikunī mā adraka l-mar'a Tubba'an // wa-yaghtālunī mā iḡtāla usrata Luqmāni*) ([al-Buḥturī 2007](#), p. 401).

For the sake of fairness, it should be noted that Luqmān of the destruction-of-'Ād legend appears in poetry not only as a symbol of the transience of earthly glory, but also as a paradigm of glory and power in its own right. The pre-Islamic poet Ufnūn al-Taghlibī (second half of the sixth century CE), lamenting the failure of his allies to ransom him from captivity, attributes their indifference to the low social standing of his tribe. In reproaching them, he declares that, had he belonged to a renowned, powerful, and high-status tribe, they would have acted differently. As a model of power, nobility, and renown, he invokes the vanished tribe of 'Ād from the land of Iram and its leaders: "If I had been of the race of 'Ād and of Iram, brought up among them, and of Luqmān and [Dhū] Jadan" (*law annanī kuntu min 'Ādin wa-min Iramin // rubbītu fīhim wa-Luqmānin wa-min Jadani*) ([al-Mufaḍḍal 1964](#), p. 262; [Lyll 1921–1924](#), vol. 2, p. 203).

Thus, the literary representation of Luqmān b. 'Ād in the destruction-of-'Ād legend—particularly when invoked in poetry—carries no connotations of wisdom or other moral virtues. Rather, the image is employed solely to signify elevated social status, together with the reminder that even such exalted status offers no protection from mortality and decline.

3.7. Luqmān of the Birds-of-Prey Legend

Scholars regard the birds-of-prey legend as having pre-Islamic roots and as containing motifs attested outside Arabia ([Heller and Stillman 1986](#), p. 811), as reflecting a wider cultic presence of a deity symbolized by an eagle ([Jan Retsö 2003](#), p. 594), and as possibly incorporating South Arabian elements ([Aziz al-Azmeh 2014](#), p. 173). There is no evidence to suggest that the legend of a man receiving the lifespans of seven birds of prey was originally part of the destruction-of-'Ād legend, all the more so since the latter—at least in the version involving the delegation to the sacred precinct—appears to have a Meccan provenance. At the same time, it cannot be excluded that, already before Islam, the protagonist of the birds-of-prey legend was associated with Luqmān of the destruction-of-'Ād legend—hence their coexistence in the *ḍiḥwān* of [Labīd \(1962, pp. 275, 338\)](#). If so, then already in pre-Islamic tradition the two narrative cycles may have begun to merge into a single story.

It is beyond doubt that, in the post-Qur'ānic narrative tradition, the legend of the long-lived man who received the lifespans of seven birds of prey is regarded as a continuation of the legend of the destruction of 'Ād. In the Muslim tradition, the two narratives are linked by the idea that Luqmān was rewarded with exceptional longevity, whereas his unbelieving people were destroyed. The very existence of certain discrepancies between the two stories suggests that such a process of conflation took place. As already noted, in the legend of the destruction of 'Ād, Luqmān b. 'Ād does not, strictly speaking, appear as a righteous man—and neither does he in the fused version of the two legends. Thus, in the account transmitted by the historian al-Mas'ūdī (d. 346/957) in *Akhbār al-zamān* ("The History of Time"), a disembodied voice informs the leaders of 'Ād's delegation to the sacred precinct in Mecca of the destruction of their people and offers each of them a choice concerning their fate. In this version too, the only believer is Mazīd (a name which, when written without diacritics, is orthographically identical to Marthad), who chooses righteousness and truth (*birr wa-ṣidq*). Luqmān, by contrast, opts for the extraordinary lifespan of seven birds of prey (al-Mas'ūdī 1996, p. 106).

In the pre-Qur'ānic version, the transcendent agent who bestowed this gift was not necessarily Allah, but, over the course of the legend's development, came to be identified with God. Thus, in the accounts transmitted on the authority of 'Ubayd b. Sharyā al-Jurhumī, Luqmān hears an invisible caller (*samī'a munādiyan lā yurā shakhṣuhu*) (Wahb b. Munabbih 1979, p. 370). By contrast, in the version attributed to Wahb b. Munabbih, the one to whom Luqmān directs his plea—and who responds—is explicitly identified as Allah. In Wahb's account, in which Luqmān b. 'Ād, the possessor of seven birds of prey, is presented as a Ḥimyarite king, the combined lifespan of the seven birds of prey he acquired is said to have amounted to approximately 2400 years (Wahb b. Munabbih 1979, p. 79). More "modest" estimates are also found, based on the assumption that the lifespan of a single vulture is roughly eighty years (al-Jāhiz 1965, vol. 3, p. 423, n. 5). According to Heller and Stillman (1986, p. 811), other versions of the legend mention lifespans of 500, 1000, 3000, or even 3500 years. Luqmān himself died alongside the seventh bird, which he had named Lubad—a name connoting an unending lifespan. According to the prolific Sunnī scholar Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), this occurred during the reign of al-Ḥārith al-Rā'ish (Ibn Qutayba 1969, p. 626), the legendary founder of royal authority in the kingdom of Ḥimyar in South Arabia—that is, in a remote and primordial antiquity.

The portrayal of the protagonist of the legend of the seven vultures (or eagles) as a Ḥimyarite king should most probably be dated to the same period in early Islam when the figure of a just Ḥimyarite ruler named Luqmān was first introduced. Within the Islamic narrative tradition, however, casting the protagonist in the role of a Ḥimyarite king sits uneasily with the integration of the birds-of-prey legend into the legend of the destruction of the people of 'Ād. In all extant versions of the latter, Luqmān b. 'Ād is, at most, one of the leaders of his people—certainly not a king, and not even the head of the delegation sent to Mecca.

The tradition attributed to 'Ubayd b. Sharyā al-Jurhumī (d. 66/686), which recounts how Luqmān b. 'Ād, following the destruction of 'Ād, lived out the lifespans of seven birds of prey, does not depict him as a wandering sage. Rather, Luqmān is preoccupied solely with his vultures, lamenting the death of each one in turn. When a voice addresses him in the mountains—as though he were a prophet—it discloses no profound truths but merely directs him to the location of the next seven birds (Wahb b. Munabbih 1979, pp. 370–80).

Such a representation of the figure in the birds-of-prey legend corresponds well to the image that emerges in pre-Islamic poetry, where Luqmān, as the possessor of birds of prey, carries no connotations of wisdom. Whereas Luqmān of the destruction-of-'Ād legend typically serves as a symbol of fleeting earthly fame, Luqmān of the birds-of-prey

legend symbolizes the transience of earthly longevity. Tarafa (2002, p. 11), reflecting on the impossibility of resisting the inexorable passage of time, invokes the futility of Luqmān's efforts to attain immortality: "Have you not seen how all the vultures of Luqmān b. 'Ād perished, after which his stars were extinguished?" (*a-lam tara Luqmāna bna 'Ādin tatāba 'at // 'alayhi l-nusūru thumma ghābat kawākibuhu*). Similarly, Labīd (1962, pp. 274–75), in order to convey the idea that all earthly longevity is transient and that "the misfortune of Time" (*rayb al-zamān*) is inevitable, recounts the death of Lubad, the last of the seven vultures. He then turns to the figure of Luqmān at the moment of dreadful realization: "Luqmān, beneath him (i.e., beneath the dead Lubad), longed for him to rise, but Luqmān perceived that his own death would not be delayed" (*min taḥṭihi Luqmānu yarjū nahḍahu // wa-la-qad ra'ā Luqmānu an lā ya'talī*).

Although in the pre-Islamic poetic tradition Luqmān is invoked in connection with both the destruction-of-'Ād legend and the birds-of-prey legend, the two are never conflated within a single allusion. What links pre-Islamic references to both narrative strands is that each primarily conveys the underlying idea of the transience of all worldly things—whether of earthly glory and power, or of earthly longevity. It is possible that this common thematic emphasis contributed to the eventual fusion of the two legends into a single narrative.

Finally, it is worth noting that Luqmān b. 'Ād, in receiving the lifespan of seven birds of prey, stands as an antithesis to the biblical Solomon. The latter asked God to grant him the ability to discern what is right. As the Bible emphasizes, because he requested this—and not long life—he was rewarded with unprecedented and unparalleled wisdom (1 Kgs 3:11–12). His request may be likened to that of Mazīd (or Marthad) in the destruction-of-'Ād legend. By contrast, Luqmān b. 'Ād explicitly seeks the longest earthly life—not wisdom or truth. Formally, his request is granted; yet it can scarcely be called a reward, for his entire existence becomes consumed by the care of a succession of seven birds of prey, to whose lifespans his own is bound. Luqmān thus emerges as a figure emblematic of the ultimate transience of even the most extraordinary earthly longevity. He embodies the human aspiration for eternal life as a fundamentally illusory and ultimately doomed pursuit.

It is precisely through this idea that the representation of Luqmān attaining the longevity of seven birds of prey becomes a meditation on an ontological question: What should a human being truly strive for in earthly life? In engaging with this question, the literary portrayal raises the problem of the impossibility of eternal life and the powerlessness of any earthly force in the face of all-encompassing transience. Even if we set aside the Islamic motif of receiving thousands of years of life as a *reward for righteousness*, engagement with the same ontological question is evident in the Muslim versions of the legend. As an example of such engagement, the depiction of Luqmān attaining the longevity of seven birds of prey offers no definitive answer—or, at the very least, suggests that a lifespan of thousands of years is not a prize worth seeking in earthly life.

4. Representations Named Luqmān al-Ḥakīm

4.1. In the Qur'ān and Post-Qur'ānic Narrative Tradition

As the source of wise pronouncements, Luqmān the Sage appears in the Scripture as a widely recognized authority who delivers, as his very first admonition to his son, the core principle of Qur'ānic doctrine: not to associate anything with God (Q 31:13). The Qur'ān (31:12–13) emphasizes that Luqmān's exceptional wisdom was a gift from Allah (*ātaynā Luqmāna l-ḥikmata*). Blessed with this unique endowment, he responded with gratitude to the Almighty and exhorted that none be worshiped except Him. The reception of unsurpassed wisdom within the framework of a special relationship with God aligns Luqmān al-Ḥakīm with the biblical Solomon (1 Kgs 3:11–12).

Like Solomon and the Assyrian sage Aḥiqar, Luqmān the Sage is regarded as a personification of exceptional wisdom, and numerous wise sayings are attributed to him to enhance their authority. The fables (*amthāl*) ascribed to him, along with his role as the protagonist in sage-centered anecdotes, further establish him as the Arabic counterpart to Aesop. Several classical Muslim authors incorporated collections of admonitions and fables attributed to Luqmān the Wise into their works, alongside various anecdotes about him (‘Umāra b. Wathīma 1978, pp. 181–222; al-Tha‘labī 1954, pp. 349–52; Ḥunayn b. Ishāq 1975, pp. 129–32; al-Mubashshir b. Fātik 1980, pp. 260–79).

That the Qur’ān (31:12–13) refers specifically to Luqmān the Wise—rather than to Luqmān b. ‘Ād—is evident, even though Luqmān b. ‘Ād, at least in one of his manifestations, is also associated with wisdom. Verses 13–19 of Sūrat Luqmān (Q 31) present a series of wise admonitions addressed by Luqmān to his son, a feature characteristic of the gnomic sayings attributed to Luqmān the Sage (cf. ‘Umāra b. Wathīma 1978, pp. 194–222; al-Tha‘labī 1954, p. 350; Ḥunayn b. Ishāq 1975, pp. 130–31). In addition to prohibiting the association of anything with God and calling for gratitude toward the Creator, the Qur’ān depicts Luqmān the Sage exhorting people to be grateful to their parents, to follow not the ways of the polytheists but the path of those devoted to the One God, to remember that nothing is hidden from God, to refrain from arrogance and boastfulness, and to be moderate in both movement and the volume of one’s voice.

4.1.1. A Wise Slave

According to one group of traditions—attributed in particular to the early Meccan scholar Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722)—Luqmān al-Ḥakīm was a slave. In these accounts, his commonly mentioned patronymic is Ibn Thārān (Ibn Qutayba 1969, p. 55; Ibn Kathīr 1997–2003, vol. 3, p. 6). There is, however, a tradition that identifies the sage as Luqmān b. ‘Anqā b. Surūn, and notes that Thārān is the name of the very son to whom Luqmān addresses his wise admonitions (al-Suhaylī 2021, vol. 4, p. 57).

The Cairene polymath al-Mubashshir b. Fātik (d. ca. 473/1080) describes Luqmān as a man with thick lips and flat feet (*ghalīz al-shafatayn, muṣaffaḥ al-qadamayn*) (al-Mubashshir b. Fātik 1980, p. 260). The Egyptian historian ‘Umāra b. Wathīma (d. 289/902), referencing Mujāhid, attributes to Luqmān lips of a size comparable to those of a camel (*dhū mashāfir*) and a severed nose (*mujadda’, maqtū’ al-anf*) (‘Umāra b. Wathīma 1978, pp. 180). The early *ḥadīth* transmitter Jābir b. ‘Abdallāh (d. 78/697), reportedly, described Luqmān as being of short stature and flat-nosed (*qaṣīr aḥṣ*) (Ibn Kathīr 1997–2003, vol. 3, p. 6). Luqmān’s origin is given as either Ethiopian or Nubian. His initial profession is described by various traditionalists as that of a carpenter (*najjār*), a tailor (*khayyāt*), or a shepherd (*rā’ī*) (al-Zajjāj 1988, vol. 4, p. 195; al-Zamakhsharī 2009, p. 835–36).

Luqmān the Sage is said to have lived during the reign of King David—that is, between the 10th and 9th centuries BCE. He was bought for thirty *mithqāls* of gold by a wealthy Israelite who, recognizing Luqmān’s wisdom, eventually granted him his freedom and endowed him with great wealth. As a freedman, Luqmān the Wise served as a judge over Israel (‘Umāra b. Wathīma 1978, p. 181; Ibn Qutayba 1969, p. 55; al-Ṭabarī 2001, vol. 18, p. 547; al-Mubashshir b. Fātik 1980, p. 260; Ibn Kathīr 1997–2003, vol. 3, pp. 6–10; Abū Ḥayyān 2010, vol. 7, p. 181; al-Baghdādī 1997, vol. 4, p. 9).

Al-Mubashshir b. Fātik presents an alternative account of the African origins of Luqmān. Specifically, he identifies Luqmān as Nubian in origin yet integrated into Arabian history: he is said to have belonged to the *mawālī* (clients) of the earliest Arabic-speaking groups (*al-‘āriba al-ūlā*) settled in Greater Syria (*al-Shām*). According to this version, Luqmān was raised and educated in the region and, after his death, was buried in

al-Ramla. These events are nevertheless said to have taken place during the reign of King David (al-Mubashshir b. Fātik 1980, p. 260).

Contributing to this version, al-Mas'ūdī (2005, vol. 1, p. 45) reports that Luqmān b. 'Anqā' b. Mirbad was a client of the tribe Banū al-Qayn b. Jasn and resided in Aila, in the region of biblical Midian, on the Gulf of Aqaba. The historian, however, extends Luqmān's lifespan to the time of the prophet Yūnus b. Mattā (the biblical Jonah, son of Amittai, 8th century BCE), who was sent to the people of Nineveh in the region of Mosul. He makes no mention of Luqmān's role as a judge in Israel but instead portrays his life as one exemplifying wisdom and asceticism in relation to the material world (*muzhiran lil-ḥikma wa-l-zuhd fī hādhā l-'ālam*).

Just as in the case of Luqmān b. 'Ād, some early traditionalists regarded Luqmān the Wise as a prophet. The Persian Sunni scholar al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1036) mentions 'Ikrima (d. 105/723) in this context (al-Tha'labī 1954, p. 349). However, notable early Muslim scholars such as Qatāda b. Di'āma (d. 117/735) and Mujāhid explicitly denied Luqmān prophetic status (al-Ṭabarī 2001, vol. 18, pp. 546, 549). According to a tradition attributed to Qatāda, God offered Luqmān the Sage a choice between prophethood and wisdom. He chose wisdom, after which Gabriel cast—or sprinkled—wisdom upon him while he slept (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 6, p. 335). al-Tha'labī (1954, p. 349) also recounts a dialog between Luqmān and the angels, in which the former impresses the latter with his eloquence (*ḥusn manṭiq*).

4.1.2. A Descendant of Biblical Patriarchs

A group of traditions holds that Luqmān the Wise was born free and descended from the biblical patriarchs. According to reports, Wahb b. Munabbih regarded Luqmān the Wise as the son of the sister of the biblical Job, while the theologian Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) identified him as the son of Job's maternal uncle (al-Tha'labī 1954, pp. 348–49). On the basis of a report attributed to the early Muslim historian Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/769), Luqmān was the son of Bā'ūrā' (Beor, the father of Balaam), the grandson of Nākhūr (Nahor, the son of Terah), and the great-grandson of Tārakh (Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor). Since the latter is referred to in the Qur'ān (6:74) as Āzar, Luqmān's origin is sometimes defined as “from the descendants of Āzar” (*kāna min awlād Āzar*) (al-Qurṭubī 1964, vol. 14, p. 59).

According to al-Zamakhsharī (1977, p. 835), Luqmān, as a descendant of Āzar, lived for one thousand years, encountered King David, learned from him, and served as a judge over Israel. Thus, both the biblical and the African traditions share the motif of Luqmān's contemporaneity with King David and his role as a wise judge under this illustrious ruler. However, the historian al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823) maintains that Luqmān the Wise, a judge over the Israelites, lived already after the time of Jesus (Abū Ḥayyān 2010, vol. 7, p. 181).

If the biblical lineage constructed for Luqmān in the tradition of Ibn Ishāq were accurate, then Balaam the son of Beor would have been the grandson of Nahor and the great-grandson of Terah. However, the biblical text does not support the notion that Beor the father of Balaam (Num. 22:5) was a son of Nahor, who is identified as Abraham's brother and the son of Terah (Gen. 11:26–27). According to the biblical genealogies, it is not Balaam but rather Laban the Aramean, the son of Bethuel (Gen. 22:20–23; 24:24, 29), who is described as the grandson of Nahor and the great-grandson of Terah. Those who claimed that the Qur'ānic Luqmān was both the son of Beor and the grandson of Nahor were evidently influenced by the Palestinian rabbinic tradition, reflected in the Aramaic Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Numbers 22:5, which explicitly identifies Balaam (the son of Beor) and Laban (the grandson of Nahor) as the same individual (Aramaic Bible 1995, vol. 4, p. 252). Moreover, the same Aramaic tradition, referring to “the son of Beor” (*bar*

Ba'ōr), emphasizes “the abundance of his wisdom” (*sōgā'ē ḥokmātēh*), which may also have contributed to the selection of Beor as Luqmān's biblical father. Also of interest is the rabbinic tradition preserved in the Babylonian Talmud (Bava Batra 15b), which lists Balaam, his father Beor, and Job as the first three among seven non-Israelite prophets who prophesied to the nations of the world (*Koren Talmud Bavli* 2012–2020, vol. 27, p. 83). Given the view that attributed prophetic status to Luqmān al-Ḥakīm, this tradition may help explain why certain genealogical constructions associated him either with Beor or with Job.

Even in narratives that portray Luqmān b. 'Ād as a Ḥimyarite king—his most exalted incarnation—he is not characterized by gnomic sayings or eloquence. Instead, his wisdom is conveyed anecdotally, as in the aforementioned story involving spitting at the ceiling. In contrast, Luqmān al-Ḥakīm is consistently depicted as a genuine sage, offering “Solomonic solutions” and continually producing eloquent maxims. As an illustrative example, consider the version of the story involving a slave: Luqmān the Wise saves his master, who has lost a game of nard and, according to the terms of the wager, must either ransom himself by surrendering his eyes or drink all the water in the river flowing past his house. On Luqmān's advice, the loser agrees to drink the water but asks whether he is required to drink the water between the banks or the current flowing through (*al-madd alladhī yajrī*). When the winner, as expected, chooses the former, the loser, again following Luqmān's counsel, responds that in that case, the victor must restrain the current (*iḥbis 'annī l-madd*). As a result, the demand on the loser becomes unenforceable (*'Umāra b. Wathīma* 1978, pp. 181–82).

4.2. Poetic Representations

If the figure of Luqmān al-Ḥakīm appears at all in pre-Islamic poetry, it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish such references from more diffuse and unspecific representations of Luqmān as a paragon of wisdom and eloquence—at times explicitly identified as Luqmān b. 'Ād. As demonstrated above in the case of Zabbān b. Sayyār, even if a pre-Islamic poet had in mind the Luqmān revered for his maxims, this can only be hypothesized, as Gutas does, rather than firmly substantiated. The same example from Zabbān shows that, even where it may be tempting to assume that the poet refers to Luqmān the Sage renowned for his maxims, he may nonetheless designate him as Luqmān b. 'Ād, since in pre-Islamic poetry the patronymic “son of 'Ād” was commonly affixed to any figure bearing the name Luqmān. In this corpus, therefore, it is exceedingly difficult—if not altogether impossible—to identify a direct reference to Luqmān al-Ḥakīm. This designation emerges specifically within the Muslim narrative tradition and refers to Luqmān the Sage, who, by virtue of Sura 31, is primarily recognized as “the Luqmān mentioned in the Qur'ān” (*Luqmān al-madhkur fī l-Qur'ān*) (e.g., *al-Jāḥiẓ* 1998, vol. 1, p. 184; *Ibn al-'Arabī* 2003, vol. 3, p. 528; *al-Baghdādī* 1997, vol. 4, p. 8).

4.2.1. Luqmān as an Emblem of Wisdom for High-Ranking Officials

The figure employed as an emblem of wisdom attributed to high-ranking officials is typically an unspecified Luqmān, serving merely as a paragon of wisdom. These references contribute little to the more developed image of Luqmān the Sage as found in the narrative tradition. From the poetic context, one can only infer that the poets allude—often loosely—to the narrative of Luqmān al-Ḥakīm as a just and wise judge. This representation of Luqmān would have proven especially useful in the context of Abbasid poetry, given that its principal genre was the panegyric, frequently composed in praise of high-ranking officials, including judges and governors. Thus, Bashshār b. Burd (d. 167/784), praising Rawḥ b. Ḥātim, a high-ranking Abbasid official who notably governed al-'Abbāsiyya in North Africa (see *Sears* 2021, p. 265), attributes to him “the sound discernment (*ḥukm*) of

Luqmān” (Bashshār b. Burd 2007, vol. 1, p. 361). When Abū Tammām (d. 231 or 232/845 or 846) wishes to convey that the judge of Baghdad, Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Šālīḥ al-Hāshimī, excels both in silence and in speech, he says: “[Even when still] silent, he embodied the wisdom of Luqmān; and when he [then] spoke, we gathered coral from his speeches” (*Luqmānu šamtan wa-ḥikmatan wa-idhā // qāla laqaṭnā l-murjāna min khuṭabihi*) (Abū Tammām 1900, p. 53).

A noteworthy aspect here is that the figure of Luqmān functions as a standard emblem of wisdom, while other virtues remain outside the scope of his image. The cited verse by Abū Tammām does not literally imply that, in displaying eloquence, the judge Abū al-Ḥasan is also likened to Luqmān. A similar tendency appears in the case of Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 283/896), who attributes both wisdom and eloquence to the high-ranking Abbasid official and vizier Ismā‘īl b. Bulbul. The poet associates wisdom specifically with the figure of Luqmān, while eloquence is embodied in the pre-Islamic hero Saḥbān Wā’il, renowned for his legendary rhetorical skill: “He possesses wisdom and eloquence, both of which are of great stature, // for in him, Luqmān is joined with Saḥbān” (*dū ḥikmatin wa-bayānin jalla qadruhumā // fa-fīhi Luqmānu majmū‘un wa-Saḥbānu*) (Ibn al-Rūmī 2002, vol. 3, p. 376). Thus, it appears that the poets draw on the narrative of Luqmān as a just and wise judge (e.g., ‘Umāra b. Wathīma 1978, p. 181; Ibn Qutayba 1969, p. 55; al-Ṭabarī 2001, vol. 18, p. 547; al-Mubashshir b. Fātik 1980, p. 260; Ibn Kathīr 1997–2003, vol. 3, pp. 6–10), but not on the tradition that attributes to Luqmān the Sage eloquence that impressed the angels (al-Tha‘labī 1954, p. 349).

This narrowing of scope distinguishes Luqmān the Sage in the Abbasid poetic tradition from Luqmān as the paragon of wisdom in the pre-Islamic poetic tradition. Insofar as the pre-Islamic representation of the wise Luqmān [b. ‘Ād] can be judged from the examples cited above—namely those of Wathīma b. ‘Uthmān (al-Jāḥiẓ 1998, vol. 1, pp. 183–84) and al-A‘shā (al-Baghdādī 1997, vol. 3, p. 238)—it is Luqmān himself who embodied a legendary capacity for speech, combining both wisdom and eloquence. On the other hand, if the example from Labīd (1962, p. 56) is indeed pre-Islamic, this suggests that already in the pre-Islamic period poets could attribute to the intelligent Luqmān solely sound discernment, while employing a different standard of reference for rhetorical mastery, such as Quss b. Sā‘ida.

For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that the wise judgment of Luqmān in Abbasid poetry was not exclusively attributed to high-ranking officials; it could also be bestowed upon a beloved. A particularly interesting example appears in a poem by the Damascene al-Wa‘wā’ (d. c. 385/995), which illustrates both this phenomenon and the notion that Luqmān as a just judge is a representation grounded in the biblical tradition. The poet attributes to his beloved “the sound discernment of Luqmān, the face of Joseph, the voice of David, and the virtue of Maryam” (*la-hā ḥukmu Luqmānin wa-ṣūratu Yūsufin // wa-naghmatu Dāwūdīn wa-‘iffatu Maryami*) (al-Wa‘wā’ 1993, p. 276).

4.2.2. Luqmān al-Ḥakīm, a Paragon of Cold Rationality

A noteworthy feature of the early Muslim use of the figure of Luqmān the Sage in poetry—both Umayyad and Abbasid—is the tendency to construe his wisdom not as innate insight, grounded in observation of the natural world and distilled into maxims through lived experience, but rather as a dry, passionless mode of scholastic erudition, detached from emotion and joy. In these cases, Luqmān is consistently specified as Luqmān al-Ḥakīm. Thus, the Umayyad poet Dhū l-Rumma (d. 117/735) contrasts the wisdom of Luqmān the Sage with his own passionate irrationality. The poet laments that his friend reproaches him for having lost his mind over a certain Mayy (*yalūmu ‘alā Mayy khalīlī*) and suggests that “even if Luqmān the Sage were confronted by Mayy’s unveiled face, he would lose his

mind” (*wa-law anna Luqmāna l-Ḥakīma ta‘arradat // li-‘aynayhi Mayyun sāfiran kāda yabraqu*) (Dhū l-Rumma 1995, p. 180). In other words, the poet does not associate Luqmān’s wisdom with distilled experience or with maxims reflecting an understanding of life’s true values, but rather with a kind of cold rationality.

In a similar manner—though in the service of a different underlying idea—the figure of Luqmān is employed in a poem attributed to Imām al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820). The author draws on the literary representation of Luqmān the Sage to argue that the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom requires a stable economic foundation, and that poverty undermines intellectual attainment. “If Luqmān the Sage, to whom caravans once journeyed for his excellence (*alladhī sārat bihi al-rukbān bi-l-faql*), were afflicted with poverty and dependents (*buliya bi-faqr wa-‘iyāl*), he would not distinguish between straw and greens (*la-mā farraqa bayna al-tīn wa-l-baql*)”, the Imām declares (al-Shāfi‘ī n.d., p. 97). Here, the resulting representation aligns neither with the narrative tradition of the wise slave nor with the concept of *ḥikmat Luqmān* as innate wisdom rooted in empirical observation and accumulated life experience. On the contrary, in the referenced verses, Luqmān’s wisdom is framed as knowledge acquired through a well-structured, and funded, systematic process of study and scientific inquiry.

Finally, Abū Nuwās (d. ca. 198/813) contrasts the wisdom of Luqmān the Sage, understood here as a set of dry moral prescriptions, with the selfish pursuit of earthly pleasures, which he presents as a means of forgetting worldly sorrows. In articulating a kind of counter-admonition, he emphasizes that—in defiance of Luqmān the Wise (*bi-khilāf Luqmān al-Ḥakīm*)—he urges his drinking companion (*nadīm*): “Do not weep for the one who has perished, nor show compassion for the orphan” (*lā tabkiyanna li-hālikin // lā taḥnuwannā ‘alā yatīmin*) (‘Abd al-Muta‘ālī, p. 103).

5. Conclusions

In this article, we have sought to analyze the distinct literary representations associated with the name Luqmān in Late Antiquity: first, as they emerged in the pre-Islamic period, when diverse local and regional narrative strands became interwoven within a broader pan-Arabic reservoir of motifs; and later, as they continued to evolve in the early Islamic period, increasingly shaped by the interpretive horizon of the Qur’ānic tradition. In attempting to discern the underlying motifs and ideas that informed these representations, we have aimed neither to conflate the various portrayals into a single unified figure, nor to impose a rigid dichotomy upon them, but rather to explore the possible mutual influences and conceptual continuities between them.

In contemporary Islamic studies—particularly in encyclopedic entries (Heller and Stillman 1986, p. 811; Zahniser 2003, p. 242)—a stereotypical distinction, probably shaped by classical Muslim authors (see, e.g., Wahn b. Munabbih 1979, pp. 78–79; al-Jāhiz 1998, vol. 1, p. 184; Ibn al-‘Arabī 2003, vol. 3, p. 528; al-Zamakhsharī 1977, vol. 1, p. 70), has become prevalent. According to this distinction, on the one hand, at the advent of Islam there existed a notion of Luqmān b. ‘Ād, renowned for his intelligence, leadership, knowledge, eloquence, and subtlety, who was also associated with the destruction of the people of ‘Ād and was said to have lived as long as seven birds of prey. On the other hand, there were portrayals of Luqmān the Sage (al-Ḥakīm), celebrated for his maxims and admonitions. This paper has sought to demonstrate that the reality is far more complex.

To summarize what we have attempted to demonstrate: a number of distinct figures from various local and regional traditions became intertwined within the pan-Arab reservoir of motifs. As a result, several entirely different literary representations made their way into the Islamic literary-historical tradition from pre-Islamic narrative, poetic, mythical, and gnostic lore. They came to share the common name Luqmān, often specifically Luqmān b.

‘Ād, and began to exchange characteristics. Consequently, the refinement and judiciousness associated with the image of the intelligent Luqmān b. ‘Ād came to be attributed to the anecdotal brute and camel-rustler, also named Luqmān b. ‘Ād, who displays no refinement and judiciousness in the narratives about him. As another result, the legendary Ḥimyarite king—emblematic of the grandeur of the vanished South Arabian civilizations—came to be identified with the wise and intelligent Luqmān. Yet this Yemeni ruler acquires not only the positive attributes of his intellectual namesake, but also the physical strength and romantic misfortunes of his brutish counterpart. Through his function as a symbol of a lost, majestic civilization—and, of course, through the shared name—the Ḥimyarite king Luqmān b. ‘Ād became conflated with Luqmān b. ‘Ād imagined as the chieftain of a vanished people. Finally, it is this shared name that led to the conflation of such disparate protagonists as the combative strongman and the hapless seeker of eternal life.

The question of how pre-Islamic poetic references to a wise and eloquent Luqmān relate to the narratives about the Arabian sage renowned for his distilled wisdom and maxims remains among the most intriguing—despite the fact that it ultimately resists a definitive answer. We have attempted to show that the various representations associated with the name Luqmān b. ‘Ād—rooted in distinct pre-Islamic motifs and preserved in narrative traditions—do not, in fact, display qualities of intelligence or eloquence. The traditions attaching the name Luqmān b. ‘Ād to a literary representation of a wise, formidable, yet just Ḥimyarite king do not constitute an exception to this pattern, as they lack an independent narrative foundation in pre-Islamic motifs—a fact further supported by the absence of such a representation in pre-Qur’ānic poetry. In this case, the name Luqmān b. ‘Ād was affixed in Muslim sources to one of the archetypes of powerful and just Yemeni king, promoted by traditionalists who were discursively constructing a heritage of pre-Islamic South Arabian greatness. On the other hand, the representation of wise Luqmān b. ‘Ād found in pre-Qur’ānic poetry does not constitute an exception to this pattern either, as it is not accompanied by narrative traditions recounting his life and sayings—akin to Muslim accounts of Luqmān the Sage. In this case, it is likely that poetic allusions to Luqmān as a paragon of wisdom and eloquence reflect the development, already in the pre-Islamic period, of a character destined to become the Arabian counterpart of Aḥīqār and Aesop. Once the name Luqmān became associated with this figure, poets could refer to him as Luqmān b. ‘Ād—as they referred to any other representation of Luqmān.

In the Abbasid poetic tradition, the representation of Luqmān the Sage is employed as a conventional symbol denoting the capacity for demanded leadership and judgment—particularly useful in panegyrics addressed to high-ranking officials. Alternatively, quite undeservedly from the standpoint of both the pre-Islamic image of the natural sage and the narratives about the wise slave, the representation of Luqmān the Sage is also employed as a model of cold, scholarly intellect.

In light of the Qur’ānic tradition, the representation of Luqmān the Sage in Muslim narratives correlates with pre-Islamic strands of lore associated with Luqmān b. ‘Ād not only through the image of the wise and eloquent Luqmān found in pre-Qur’ānic poetic allusions, but—more intriguingly—through the protagonist of the birds-of-prey legend. What links these representations is their shared engagement with the ontological question of what a human being ought to truly seek in earthly life.

In nearly all Muslim narrative traditions about his origins, Luqmān the Sage is associated with the Biblical tradition and the time of King David. As a figure embodying absolute, God-given wisdom, he evokes strong parallels with the Biblical Solomon—particularly relevant in relation to the image of Luqmān b. ‘Ād asking God for extraordinary longevity. According to the Bible, Solomon was found pleasing in the eyes of God and was blessed with great wisdom precisely because he did not ask for long life, but rather for an under-

standing heart to discern what is right (1 Kgs 3:11–12). The Bible is explicit in rewarding Solomon for not requesting exceptional longevity, which is listed among other possible alternatives that, from the biblical perspective on what a human being ought to seek in earthly life, would have been misguided choices. In light of this biblical narrative, the Arabian protagonist (eventually named, or associated with, Luqmān b. ‘Ād) who pleads with God for nothing but unimaginably long life emerges as a kind of Arabian anti-Solomon.

A protagonist bearing the same name, yet lacking both wisdom and righteousness, appears in the narrative of a delegation of pilgrims sent by a people perishing from drought to Mecca. The Islamic tradition, which links—through the figure of Luqmān b. ‘Ād—the legend of the destruction of ‘Ād with the tale of the man granted extraordinary longevity, seeks to cast this figure as righteous in order to explain how he escaped the fate of his doomed people. However, this attempt, unsupported by details inherited from the pre-Islamic lore that underpins the legends, does little to obscure the underlying idea of the birds-of-prey legend. Engaging with the ontological question of what a human being ought to truly seek in earthly life, the legend and its protagonist embody a recognition of the impossibility of eternal life and the futility of striving for a thousand-year lifespan. The conventional intended meaning (*qaṣd*) behind the pre-Islamic poetic use of the figure of Luqmān from the birds-of-prey legend (transience of all earthly longevity) serves to further affirm this interpretation.

This suggests the idea that, as an Arabian counterpart to Solomon—who is likewise associated with wise maxims as well as just and discerning judgment—Luqmān the Sage can similarly be seen as engaging with the ontological question of what a human being should truly strive for in earthly life. In this capacity, he stands in contrast to Luqmān of the birds-of-prey legend, the Arabian anti-Solomon. In contrast to the longevity of a thousand years granted to this Luqmān—which ultimately embodies the transience of any earthly lifespan—the divine wisdom bestowed upon Luqmān the Sage is enduring. In light of the Qur’ānic tradition, this receives recognition through the very fact that the Scripture, emphasizing the sagacity of Luqmān as Allah’s blessing, includes several admonitions attributed to him directly within its text.

The Qur’ānic answer to the ontological question of what constitutes true value in earthly life lies not only in Luqmān the Sage’s pursuit of wisdom—as the ultimate aspiration that aligns him with Solomon—but also in the related pursuits transmitted in Scripture through his voice. These are gratitude to God (Q 31:12), the path of monotheism (31:12), reverence for one’s parents (31:14), moral conduct (31:17), the avoidance of arrogance (31:18), and a dignified and moderate bearing (31:19). Considering the question of what human beings should strive for in their earthly existence, the quest for enduring divine truths and wisdom emerges as a clear antithesis to Luqmān b. ‘Ād’s pursuit of eternal life.

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Note

- ¹ Here and in what follows, we render individual Arabic words and expressions without case endings, but in the transcription of complete poetic verses we retain them in order to convey the rhythm of the verse.

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