This article proposes an alternate translation for two lines of «Hilālī» verse transmitted by the Arab historian Ibn Khaldūn in his celebrated Muqaddima and rendered into English by Franz Rosenthal.

The migration of the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym tribal confederations into North Africa and their wars of conquest began nine centuries ago. These events form the historical background for legendary tales known, in their various versions, throughout much of the Arabic-speaking world. In nearly every area where the Hilālis passed during their wanderings, their exploits were incorporated into local history. Elaborated by the natural process of oral tradition, the historical deeds were gradually transformed into legendary tales, and celebrated in both prose and poetic form. Latter-day versions of this folk heritage, widely known as «Taghrībat Bani Hilāl» («Westward Migration of the Banū Hilāl»), are still narrated.

Some traditional verse associated with Hilālī tradition was collected by the writer in the countryside of southern Tunisia during 1971-1973 for a doctoral research project. The poetry in the AB (Anita Baker) collection was recorded near the alleged site of the «great battle» of Jabal Ḥaydarān, in which about 30,000 Berbers led by the Zirid ruler Al-Mu’izz b. Bāḍīs were defeated by a much smaller force of invading Hilālis under Mūnis b. Yaḥyā as-Sinbari al-Mirdāṣī. The confrontation is supposed to have taken place between Gabes and Sfax in the general direction of Qayrawan in the spring of 1052 A.D. 1. Although it may not have been decisive in itself, the battle of Jabal Haydarān is significant in that it revealed the inherent weakness of Zirid military power in

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1 Local tradition situates the mandaba or «mourning ground», where the Hilālī women lamented their fallen cavaliers after the battle, on the plains of Al-Bū’a, near Bū Hidma. The shuffling of their feet is supposed to have left a circle of dry, packed earth on which no sprig of green will grow to this day. Traces of the Zanata Berbers are said to remain at Khangat as-Sāhila, near Maknassi, where a ruined stone house is known as «Qaṣr Khalīfā az-Zanāṭī» (see Figure 2).
central North Africa and the inability of that Berber regime to stem the inexorable westward advance of the Hilālī Arab nomads. The immediate region has remained to the present day one of the most thoroughly arabicized areas of North Africa\(^2\), and local storytellers generally perceive the Hilālī and Sulamī nomads as their own archetypal Arab ancestors\(^3\).

Five centuries ago in his *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn quoted eleven fragments of poetry said to be from the Banū Hilāl themselves, although he states elsewhere that such poetry had already been distorted and did not provide an historically authentic record of Hilālī exploits\(^5\). The text


\(^3\) AB narrator Naṭī Ḫūṣṭ Ṭurānī is one of the storytellers who insisted that the information he was transmitting had come down «from the mouths of the Hilālīs themselves» (Medenine, 14 October 1972, Tape 10).


\(^5\) Ibn Khaldūn, Wali ad-Dīn ʿAbd ar-Rahmān, *Kitāb al-ʾIbar wa Diwān al-Mubtada*