

Ezd (Beni Ezd) (051204)

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A

al-Azd

Al-Azd was one of the largest lineage groups in pre-modern Arabia. It was counted amongst the Yamāniyya (southern Arab tribes) and genealogists traced its sub-tribes to Oman and to the 'Asīr and Hījāz regions of southwest Arabia. Given the vast geographical spread of al-Azd's constituent groups, some argue it was a creation of the early Islamic state: a military (not genealogical) designation assigned to disparate groups after they settled in the Muslim garrison towns (*amṣār*; Crone, 30–1; Blankinship, 44). Epigraphic evidence suggests that the name "al-Azd" did exist in pre-Islamic Arabia, but its precise subdivisions and the extent of its cohesion before Islam are unclear. Akin to many lineage groups, al-Azd's boundaries were fluid and the social changes following the rise of Islam likely re-shaped its identity, with the group admitting new members and extensively reorganising genealogical trees.

In Arabic literature, al-Azd is commonly divided into eastern and western branches. The eastern was called the Azd 'Umān, while the western was in turn

divided into two: the Azd Shanū'a and Azd al-Sarāt. The lineage models articulated by Muslim-era genealogists to unify these branches and their sub-groups into the overarching al-Azd "family tree" are highly convoluted, and the sub-groups of each branch are split across multiple lines of descent [Illustration 1]. The disjointed genealogies suggest that an array of distinct corporate entities in the early Islamic period had their distant ancestry rationalised to fit them within one Azdī identity; Arab narrators also elaborated migration narratives to explain the shared Azdī roots of such geographically disparate groups (Ulrich, *The Azd migrations*). Important pre-Islamic political groups such as the Medinan al-Aws and al-Khazraj (who together formed the Anṣār companions of the Prophet) and the Syrian Ghassānids were also claimed to be Azdī, constituting a putative fourth branch, the Azd Ghassān (Kaḥḥāla, 1:15–16). The Ghassān lineages were intertwined with the Khuzā'a and some sub-groups of the Azd Shanū'a, further demonstrating the complexities in, and perhaps political motivations behind, reconstructions of al-Azd's genealogy.

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