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Origin Narratives and the Making of Dynastic History in al-Dīnawarī's *Akḥbār*

Born of Iranian or Kurdish origin,¹ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (d. 895) was a multifaceted Muslim scholar, but only a few scant facts of his life are known to us. He was a prolific writer in various scholarly areas, but he is remembered in early Islamic biographical dictionaries primarily for his writings in astrology, Arabic grammar, and philology.² Unfortunately, from the long list of works ascribed to al-Dīnawarī only two have survived: *Kitāb al-nabāt* (the Book of Plants), which reached us in fragmentary form, and *al-Akḥbār al-ṭiwāl* (Extended Narratives). Modern scholarship lacks a serious discussion of these two works,³ but this trend is more pronounced when it comes to his historical writing—the *Akḥbār*. Since this study revolves around the *Akḥbār*, an examination of the state of the field of this work is in order.

Early treatments of al-Dīnawarī's historical writing in modern scholarship are brief and appear in most cases as part of the overview examination of his scientific and

¹ M.R. Izady's assertion that al-Dīnawarī is of Kurdish origin is based primarily on the assumption that he was the author of *Ansāb al-kurd*. See "The 1100th Anniversary of Abu-Hanifa Dinawari," *Kurdish Life*, Number 17, winter 1996.

² Al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwā 'alā anbāh al-nuḥā*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Matba'at Dār al-Kutub wa Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya, 2005), i, 41-44; Al-Anbārī, *Nuzhat al-alibbā' fī tabaqāt al-udabā'*, ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr lil-Ṭibā'a wa al-Nashr, 1967), 240; al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wuā' fī tabaqāt al-lughawīyyīn wa al-nuḥā*, ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Sidon and Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Arabiyya, 1964), i, 306; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Y. Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 124-125; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, *irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifat al-adīb*, ed., Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), i, 258-261; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām, wa wafayāt al-mashāhir wa al-A'lām*, ed. 'U. 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1991), xviii, 57.

³ For studies on *Kitāb al-nabāt* see F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, iv (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 338-343; Th. Bauer, *Das Pflanzenbuch des Abū Ḥanīfa ad-Dīnawarī* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988), 29-41.

literary treatises.⁴ The studies of Mark van Damme, Hayrettin Yücesoy, and Parvaneh Pourshariati, however, enhance our understanding of certain aspects in al-Dīnawarī's historical writing.⁵ The article of Van Damme examines al-Dīnawarī's portrayal of 'Alī's caliphate and the first civil war (*fitna*), and particularly the *Akhbār*'s representation of the provincial features and ethno-religious structure of the parties involved during the *fitna*. Van Damme underscores the distinctiveness of al-Dīnawarī's account by viewing him as a pro-Alid historian. This biased report can be clearly seen, according to Van Damme, even at the expense of omissions and the application of certain narrative strategies.

Yücesoy focuses on the significance of the *Akhbār* as one of the earliest Islamic universal histories that draws on ancient Persian narratives of royal history. Emphasizing the distinctive features of the *Akhbār*, Yücesoy contends that this work represents an early trend in Islamic historical writing where *adab* and the genre of 'mirrors for princes' are used concurrently. He argues that al-Dīnawarī models his presentation of the Islamic caliphate on Persian royal traditions. Pourshariati's study investigates the significance of the *Akhbār* as a historical-geographical source for the history of Iran and Mesopotamia. She also provides a partial and non-critical translation of this work. Examining the social

⁴ C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, I (Leiden: Brill, 1943), 127; B. Lewin, "al-Dīnawarī," *EI*, II (1965), 300; Th. Bauer, *Das Pflanzenbuch des Abū Ḥanīfa ad-Dīnawarī*, 6-29; G. M. Bhat, "Abū Ḥanīfa ad-Dīnawarī," *Islamic Culture* 55, i (1981), 1-9; 'Ādil al-Shaykh Ḥusayn, *Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī shaykh al-nabāṭiyyīn: ḥayātuhu, ma'āthiruhu al-'ilmiyya, wa mu'allafātuhu* (Amman: Junayha lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2004), 16-23.

⁵ M. van Damme, "Het Kalifat van 'Ali Volgens Dīnawarī," *Orientalia Gandensia*, 1 (1964), 187-202; H. Yücesoy, "Ancient Imperial Heritage and Islamic Historiography: al-Dīnawarī's Secular Perspective," *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007); P. Pourshariati, "The *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl* of Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī: a *Shu'ūbī* Treatise on Late Antiquity Iran," in *Sources for the History of Sasanian and Post Sasanian Iran*, ed. R. Gyselen, *Res Orientales*, xix (2010), 201-280.

context of the *Akhhbār*, she considers it to be a *shu 'ūbī* treatise, claiming that *shu 'ūbī* sympathies are ubiquitous in this work.

Indeed, these studies render a great contribution to the understanding of al-Dīnawārī's historical writing. However, the specific themes and events discussed in these works are insufficient to fully capture al-Dīnawārī's motivation and objectives in writing the *Akhhbār*. Moreover, the analysis of the connection between the narrative structure of the *Akhhbār* and the background against which it was composed is addressed marginally in these studies.

The current study examines al-Dīnawārī's historical writing in terms of motivations and objectives through an analysis of his methodology, use of sources, and thematic arrangement of events. Thematically, this study revolves around the *Akhhbār*'s presentation of dynastic history and preconditions for effective rulership. The chronological framework of this investigation is based primarily on the textual analysis of the portrayal of early stages of human history. To better understand al-Dīnawārī's worldview and motives, it is instructive to begin with the examination of the narrative strategies of the *Akhhbār* and the rationale behind its thematic configuration.

1. *The Akhhbār's Thematic and Schematic Structure*

The dominant themes of the *Akhhbār* can be broken down into three large interdependent historical spheres, the first of which revolves around the genesis of human history. The second part of the book, which is quite substantial, is devoted to Iranian dynastic history with an emphasis on the Sasanian period. Within the scope of Iranian

history, al-Dīnawarī also incorporates pre-Islamic Arab (Yemenite) history. The *Akhbār*'s third theme deals with the Islamic caliphate where the Rāshidūn and the Umayyad periods take the lion's share. He concludes his work with the reign of al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-842), and particularly with the assassination of the general al-Afshīn.

In many respects the *Akhbār* represents a rupture from early Islamic traditional historical writing.⁶ This divergence is exemplified in the absence of chain of transmission (*isnād*),⁷ the way events are presented, the choice of sources, and the narrative arrangements that the author chooses to apply. With regard to the presentation of events, al-Dīnawarī treats certain episodes in detail, whereas he mentions others in passing. For example, he places an emphasis on Sasanian history and the first civil war (*fitna*) and its consequences (which occupies almost one-fifth of his book), yet his reference to the life of the Prophet is limited to a few lines. When it comes to sources, he pulls information together from a number of traditions that figure in other Islamic works, but what is unique about the *Akhbār* is the way its author weaves these materials into his reports. The particularity of al-Dīnawarī's historical writing is also manifested in being one of the earliest Muslim historians to situate Persian royal traditions into the mainstream of Islamic historiography and to consult original Persian sources.⁸

⁶ F. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: the Darwin Press, 1998), 139-40, no. 15.

⁷ T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 129.

⁸ A good example of al-Dīnawarī's consultation of the original version is Bahrām Chūbīn's romance, which is a lost work that thanks to Nöldeke we know about its existence. See *Geschichte des Perser und Araber zur Zeit de Sasaniden aus der Arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 474-78; M. Grignaschi, "La Nihāyatu-L-Arab fī Ahbāri-l-furs wa-l-'Arab," 140-141.

Al-Dīnawārī's atypical historical writing also manifests in his espousal of moderate stands when it comes to significant Islamic political and social issues.⁹ The same can be said about his unique treatment of the *shu'ūbiyya* controversy.¹⁰ It is insufficient, I believe, to merely classify the *Akhbār* as a *shu'ūbī* or *anti-shu'ūbī* treatise. Rather, al-Dīnawārī's presentation of the *shu'ūbiyya* is distinctive. Unlike other Muslim scholars who side with one of the two main ethnic contenders (Arabs and Persians), al-Dīnawārī uses his historical writing as a platform to remove the tension and show similar parallelism in their past. Indeed, he makes efforts, as we shall see, to demonstrate, whenever possible, that the history of Southern Arabs and the Persians was not contradictory or antagonistic, but rather conciliatory and intertwined.

These thematic constructs of the *Akhbār* indicate that al-Dīnawārī is interested in regal history that exemplifies narratives of the rise and fall of dynasties and prominent rulers. This conjecture is based on the manner in which he uses the term *dawla*, which has acquired throughout Islamic history different meanings, such as 'alternation,'

⁹ Such is the case with his portrayal of the legitimacy of 'Ali's caliphate that shows moderate Shi'ite and Sunni views. See E. L. Peterson, *'Ali and Mu'awiya in Early Arabic Tradition* (Copenhagen: Scandinavian University Books, 1964), 164-168 (especially, 168). For other examples see A. Noth and L. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Traditions, A Source-Critical Study*, trans. Michael Bonner (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994), 9.

¹⁰ I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, trans. by S. M. Stern and C. R. Barber (London: George Allen and Urwin, 1967-71), 176-198; R. Mottahedeh, "The Shu'ūbiyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran," *IJMES*, 7 (1976), 161-182; D. Agius, "The Shu'ūbiyya Movement and its Literary Manifestation," *Islamic Quarterly*, 24 (1980), 76-88; S. Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation: der arabische Schriftsteller Abū 'Uthmān al-Ġāhiz (gest. 868) über die Afrikaner, Perser und Araber in der islamische Gesellschaft* (Freiburg: K. Schwarz, 1979); H.A.R. Gibb, "The Social Significance of the Shu'ūbiyya," in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, eds. S. J. Shaw and W. R. Polk (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 62-73; H. T. Norris, "Shu'ūbiyyah in Arabic Literature," *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, 'Abbasid Belles-Letters*, ed. J. Ashtiany et al (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 31-47; S. Enderwitz, "Shu'ūbiyya," *EI*, IX (1997), 513-14.

‘success,’ ‘fortune,’ and ‘revolution.’¹¹ Applying the term *dawla*, Dīnawarī states that “leading figures are alike yet events are subject to turn of fortune (*al-rijāl ashbāh wa al-ayyām duwal*).”¹² He employs the term *dawla* again when he refers to the end of the Umayyad caliphate,¹³ and to the beginning of al-Amīn’s (r. 809-813) caliphate.¹⁴ What is behind the use of the phrase *al-rijāl ashbāh wa al-ayyām duwal*, therefore, is al-Dīnawarī’s interest in the examination of repeated patterns of rise and fall in dynastic histories. Thus, he draws on certain events from Iranian, pre-Islamic (Yemenite), and Islamic histories to test out these dynastic alterations. This thematic structure poses the question of what was the rationale behind the *Akhbār*’s objectives as well as the author’s motivations. Answering this question necessitates an examination of the background against which this work was composed.

2. *The Akhbār’s Socio-political Background*

Al-Dīnawarī composed the *Akhbār* at the time when the Abbasid caliphate underwent internal crises and political fragmentation. The civil war between al-Amīn and the Ma’mūn (r. 813-833) and the emergence of new petty states are good examples of this orientation. The introduction of the Turkish element¹⁵ into the Abbasid army, a process

¹¹ F. Rosenthal, “Dawla,” *EI*, ii, (1983), 177-178; J. S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 10-11; 281-283; J. Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered: Forged Identities, Competing Narratives, Contested Spaces* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2003), 60-89.

¹² Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 143.

¹³ *Inṣrām dawlat banī umayya* (the termination of rule of the Umayyads). Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 371.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 393.

¹⁵ The Term “Turks” is loosely used in Islamic sources. Some Muslim scholars (such as al-Ferdowsī) use the term “Turan” to refer to the Turks or their geographical location, whereas others identify them with

that started by al-Mu‘taṣim (r. 833-842), was another important factor that increased the political and social deterioration in the Abbasid society. Politically speaking, the rise of the Turkish generals reduced the Abbasid caliphs into a symbolic and ineffective rulership.¹⁶ The increasing influence of Turks also left its impression on Abbasid cultural life.¹⁷ Thus, the predominance of Arabs and Persians in the Abbasid administration and socio-political life, which lasted for many years, gradually declined after the rise of the Turks.

Al-Dīnawarī’s unfriendly attitudes toward the Turks echo in many places in the *Akhhbār* where they are associated in most cases with political instability, betrayal, and lack of security.¹⁸ These thematic considerations seem to account for the fact that the *Akhhbār* concludes with the reign of al-Mu‘taṣim. Instead of dealing with current events that could place him in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the Turks,¹⁹ al-Dīnawarī chose to discuss distant history. Specifically, he draws on examples from Persian and pre-Islamic

Hephthalites. See N. Frye and A. M. Sayili, “Turks in the Middle East Before the Saljuqs, in *The Turks in the Early Islamic World*, ed., C. E. Bosworth, (*The Formation of the Classical Islamic World*), ed., L. I. Conrad, ix (Aldershot: Ashgate, Variorum, 2007) 186-191.

¹⁶ References to the Turks are found even in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, but a clear knowledge about them appeared only in the 9th century. Turks were first brought as slaves (*ghulāms*) many of whom were trained as soldiers. It was al-Mu‘taṣim who relied heavily on the Turkish troops. The ongoing misconduct and violence of these troops against the populace of Baghdad led al-Mu‘taṣim to found a new capital – Sāmarrā- wherein he transferred them. See M. Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Community of Samarra, 200-275 AH / 815-889 CE* (Albany: SUNY University Press, 2001); C. E. Bosworth, “The Turks in the Islamic Lands up to the Mid-11 Century,” in *The Turks in the Early Islamic World*, 196-97; *Idem*, C. E. Bosworth, “Barbarian Incursions: the Coming of the Turks into the Islamic World,” in *The Turks in the Early Islamic World*, 213-228; and Peter B. Golden, “Khazar Turkic Ghulams in Caliphal Service,” in *The Turks in the Early Islamic World*, 133-165.

¹⁷ M. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, I, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961), 481-488.

¹⁸ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhhbār*, 56, 60, 68, 74, 79.

¹⁹ One cannot exclude the possibility that al-Dīnawarī’s avoidance of examination of current events was triggered by the bitter end that befell Ya‘qūb b. al-Sakkīt (d. 858), one of his important teachers, when he was killed by the Turkish guards at the behest of the caliph al-Mutawwakil (r. 847-861). See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-‘udabā’*, vi, 2840-41.

dynastic histories to reflect indirectly on the political and social crises that befell Islamic society.

These deleterious political and social transformations caused by the emergence of Turks in Abbasid society are best exemplified in a report that appears in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*. The protagonists of this story are the caliph al-Mu'taṣim and Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Muṣ'ab (d. 849-50), who served as the governor of Baghdad and Sāmarrā. Questioning his decision to rely on Turks, al-Mu'taṣim asked Ishāq as to why al-Ma'mūn's (Persian) aides were loyal and successful, whereas his [al-Mu'taṣim's] aides (all of whom were Turks) turned to be failures. Ishāq answered "Your brother considered the roots and made use of them, and their branches flourished exceedingly; whereas the Commander of the Faithful has utilized only branches, which have not flourished because they have lacked roots."²⁰ An emphasis on the contribution of Persians to Islam can be also found in Ibn al-Faqīh's *Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-buldān* where he underscores their significant role in the Abbasid revolution that put an end to the Umayyad caliphate.²¹ Comparing Persians to Turks, Ibn al-Faqīh states: "the people of Khurasān are like a paradise for Muslims with the exclusion of the Turks (*ahl khurasān janna lil-muslimīn dūna al-turk*)."²²

Accounting for political instability and social degeneration that the Abbasid caliphate underwent, al-Dīnawarī uses historical writing to show the correlation between successful dynastic rulership and a virtuous origin. The *Akhbār* is replete with references

²⁰ *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l mulūk) xxxiii Storm and Stress along the Northern Frontiers of the 'Abbasids Caliphate*, trans. C. E. Bosworth (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 215

²¹ Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadani, *Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-buldān*, Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, vi (Leiden: Brill, 1885), 315

²² *Ibid.* 316.

to the importance of royal and noble origin. A good examples of this orientation are the phrases “well-rooted nobility (*sharaf qadīm*)”²³ and “people of the high rank and the noble ones (*ahl al-buyūtāt wa al-ashrāf*).”²⁴ These phrases signify eugenics and seniority as being a precondition for successful leadership. The fact that these phrases appear in the *Akhbār* mostly in the context of Persian history shows the effect of Persian royal traditions, which are abundant with examples of social ranking of persons according to their ancestries.²⁵ To test out these historical viewpoints, al-Dīnawarī examines specific events from the histories of Persians and Arabs where he applies certain thematic arrangement and rhetorical strategies. Prior to the investigation of al-Dīnawarī’s presentation of these events from Persian and Arab (Yemenite) histories, it is instructive, first, to explore his sources and the manner in which they are employed in his historical presentation.

2. *The Akhbār’s Sources and the Nihāya’s Tradition*

Al-Dīnawarī’s narrative arrangement of pre-Islamic themes and events is primarily based on three main traditions: biblical, Persian, and Yemenite. Indeed, these traditions figure prominently in the writings of other Muslim scholars, but what is unique

²³ Al-Dīnawarī uses the phrase *Sharaf qadīm* when dealing with the reign of Qubādīh, who was worried whether his son’s (Anūshirwān) mother descended of a noble origin. He was very satisfied when he learned that her father was a descendant of the famous Persian king, Faridūn. *Akhbār*, 66.

²⁴ Al-Dīnawarī applies the phrase *Ahl al-buyūtāt wa al-ashrāf* when he refers to Wahraz whom Anūshirwān sent with an army to Yemen. *Akhbār*, 64.

²⁵ Ibn Qutayba, *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*, i, *kitāb al-su’dud* (Cairo: Maṭbū‘āt dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1925), 228; A. C. S. Peacock, *Medieval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy in Bal‘amī Tārīkhnāma* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 25-54; L. Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism In Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 67-90; S. Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation*, 178-184.

about the *Akhbār* is the manner in which al-Dīnawarī employs these sources to convey better his historical message. At the center of al-Dīnawarī's choice of sources and narrative strategies is his constant attempt to synchronize the histories of the Persians and the pre-Islamic Arabs (Yemenite). He consistently underlines parallel themes, commonalities, and intersections in their histories.

This orientation, however, seems to have begun before the *Akhbār*. This conjecture is based on the explicit resemblance, in terms of themes and narrative arrangement, and sources between the *Akhbār* and an earlier work entitled the *Nihāya al-arab fī akhbār al-furs wa al-'arab* (The Finest Compendium on the History of Persians and Arabs).²⁶ There is still a debate about the identity of the *Nihāya*'s author as well as the date of its composition.²⁷ Nevertheless, there is no doubt that *Nihāya* was composed before the *Akhbār*. This work focuses on the dynastic history of Persians and Southern Arabs. Like the *Akhbār*, the *Nihāya*'s themes and narrative arrangement point, as will be discussed later, to efforts to harmonize the histories of Persians and Arabs in order to emphasize their interconnected past and shared origin.²⁸ Al-Dīnawarī does not mention the *Nihāya*, but it is easy to notice the great similarities between these two works where

²⁶ An edition of this work was published by M. Taqī Dānīsh Pazhūh . Cited in Z. Rubin's, "Ibn al-Muqaffa' and the account of the Sasanian history in the Arabic codex Springer 30," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 30 (2005), 63 no. 52.

²⁷ Some scholars believe that the *Nihāya* was composed in 828 and ascribe it to Ayyūb b. al-Qirriya (d. 703) , 'Āmir al-Sha'bī (d. 721-2), or al-Aṣma'ī (d. 828). M. Grignaschi, "La Nihāyatu-L-Arab fī Ahbāri-l-furs wa-l-'Arab", *Bulletin d'études Orientales, Institut Français de Damas*, 22 (1969); 15-17; O. Klīma, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Mazdakismus* (Praha: Verlag der Tschechoslowakischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977), 25-27.

²⁸ M. Grignaschi, "La Nihayatu-L-Arab, 15-67; *Idem*, "La Nihayatu-l-Arab fi Ahbari-l-furs wa-l-'Arab et les Siyaru mulūki-l-'aḡam du Ps. Ibn al-Muqaffa'," *Bulletin d'études Orientales, Institut Français de Damas*, 26 (1973), 168-169; E. G. Brown, "Some Account of the Arabic Work entitled 'Nihāyatu' l-Irab fī akhbāri' l-Furs wa' l-'Arab," *JRAS* (1900), 195-259.

even certain phrases are presented verbatim.²⁹ In addition, both authors trace their portrayal of pre-Islamic history back to important authorities in Yemenite and Persian histories. Such is the case with ‘Abīd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī (reckoned to have died around 696),³⁰ Ayyūb b. al-Qirriya (d. 703), ‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī (d. 721-2), Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 728),³¹ ‘Abdallah b. al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 760),³² Ibn al-Kayyis al-Namarī,³³ and al-Aṣma‘ī (d. 828).³⁴

The *Nihāya* and the *Akhhbār*, which reflect earlier traditions that focus on the dynastic history of pre-Islamic Yemen, constitute an attempt to highlight the achievements of Yemenite Arabs in the pre-Islamic period. The manner in which Yemenite tradition is incorporated in these two works in conjunction with biblical and Persian sources is, as we shall see, distinctive. In what follows, therefore, we examine al-

²⁹ For example, al-Dīnawarī transmits many reports on the authority of Ibn al-Qirriyya and al-Sha‘bī, who figure prominently in the *Nihāya*, particularly under his treatment of the Umayyad period *Akhhbār*, 288-290; 317-323.

³⁰ ‘Abīd’s *Akhhbār al-yaman wa ash‘āruha wa ansābuha* was edited and partially translated by Elise Crosby. See *The History, Poetry, and Genealogy of Yemen* (Piscataway, NJ., Gorgias Press, 2007). Henceforth, I will rely on this edition of the ‘Abīd’s *Akhhbār*.

³¹ His famous book entitled *Kitāb al-tījān fī mulūk ḥimyar*. A. al-Duri, *Nash‘at ‘lm al-ta’rīkh ‘ind al-‘arab* (al-‘Aīn: Markaz Zāyid lil-Turāth wa al-Tarīkh, 2000), 115-126.

³² When it comes to the portrayal of pre-Islamic Persian history, the name of Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ is associated with the *Book of the Lords* (*Khawaydanamg*) tradition, which he translated from Pahlavi into Arabic. According to Nöldeke, this work was first composed under the order of Khusro Anūshirwān to be completed as a Persian royal epic during the reign of the last Sasanian king, Yazdgird III (632-651). See Z. Rubin, “The Reforms of Khusro Anūshirwān,” in *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East III States, Resources and Armies*, ed., A. Cameron (Princeton: the Darwin Press, 1995), 229-233; B. Radtke, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung im Mittelalterlichen Islam* (Beirut, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 11; Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber*, XV.

³³ Beyond the fact that Ibn al-Kayyis al-Namari was an authority on Yemenite genealogy, we know almost nothing about him. Al-Hamadānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl*, ed. M. al-Akwa‘ (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1963), i, 20 no. 1.

³⁴ The *Ta’rīkh mulūk al-‘arab al-awwalīn min banī hūd wa ghayrihim* is ascribed to al-Aṣma‘ī. This book is based on a version written by his student, Ya‘qūb b. al-Sakkīt, (d. 858). It was published under the title *Ta’rīkh al-‘Arab qabla al-islām*, ed. M. Ḥ. al-Yāsīn (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif, 1959).

Dīnawarī's presentation of ancient history and analyze the rhetorical strategies he applies to show the connection between virtuous descent and successful kingship.

3. *Geography and the Origin of Nations*

Arab genealogy,³⁵ biblical lineages,³⁶ and the *shu'ūbiyya* controversy³⁷ are the main factors that spurred Muslims' curiosity about the origin of nations. The presentations of origin narratives in early Islamic sources can be classified under two major frameworks: prophethood and ethnicity. Under the prophethood rubric, one finds reports that primarily delineate prophetic history from Adam to Muḥammad. Islamic reports that fall under the ethnicity model focus on Noah's three sons from whom all people descended.³⁸ Al-Dīnawarī's account on national origins falls, on the whole, under the ethnicity framework, but his employment of certain narrative strategies, such as geography and the syncretism of sources, makes, as we shall see, his presentation distinctive.

³⁵ W. Caskel, *Ġamharat an-nasab, das Genealogische Werk des Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), I, 21-30; I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, I, 166-172.

³⁶ Genesis, v, vii. Ibn Durayd (d. 933) and al-Balādhurī (d. 892) relate that once Arab genealogies moved beyond 'Adnān and Qaḥṭān, they were dependent on information derived from the "People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*)."

Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. M. Ḥamīdallah (Cairo: Ma'had al-Makḥṭūṭāt and Dār al-Ma'ārif bi-Miṣr, 1959) i, 12; Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb al-ishtiqāq*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Harūn (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1979), I, 4-5.

³⁷ I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, I, 176-190.

³⁸ Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, I, (Beirut: Dār Šādir and Dār Beirut, 1960), 54-55; Muḥammad b. Jarīr, al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi-Miṣr, 1960), I, 155 (de Goeje, I, 156); Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: Manshūrat al-Jāmi'a al-Lubnāniya, 1965) I, 36 (secs.45-46), 40 (sec. 56), 41 (sec. 58), 42 (sec. 60), 43 (sec. 63); Muṭaḥhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *al-Bad' wa al-ta'rīkh*, II, p. 150-154. See also Uri Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad," *Israel Oriental Studies*, 5 (1975), 62-119.

Al-Dīnawarī is among the early Muslim scholars who contend that geographical settings are a dominant factor in the course of the history of nations. He associates, therefore, the ranking of nations with geographical location and emphasizes that illustrious geographical settings are allocated for distinguished nations.³⁹ Two places figure prominently in the *Akhbār*: Babel (Iraq) and Yemen. Babel, which enjoys a superior status among other locations, is described as the best place on earth (*afdāl al-arḍ*)⁴⁰ and the genesis of history. As for Yemen, it enjoys a prestigious status in the *Akhbār*'s historical presentation where it is praised as the land of the Arabs and the place of true origin (*al-yaman arḍ al-'arab wa m'adan al-jawhar*).⁴¹ Al-Dīnawarī's presentation of pre-Islamic history is abundant with examples indicating thematic and geographical interconnections between Babel and Yemen. His motivation behind this construction is to emphasize overlaps and confluences in the past of Persians and Arabs. A similar presentation of the importance of Babel and Yemen in history can also be found in the *Nihāya*.⁴² In fact the author of the *Nihāya* relates a report on the authority of al-Sha'bī and Ibn al-Qirriyya stating that Arabs migrated from Babel to Yemen after the confounding of languages.⁴³

³⁹ An attestation to al-Dīnawarī's sound knowledge of geography can be found in al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj*. See *Murūj*, ii, 359 (1327).

⁴⁰ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 1. It is worth mentioning that the superiority of Babel (Iraq) is shared by other Muslim scholars, most of whom were influenced by Persian geographical traditions. See Ibn Khurrdāhabih, *al-Masālik*, Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum (BGA) 6. ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), vi, 5-10; Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtasar kitāb al-buldān*, , 6; al-Maqdisī, *al-Bad' wa al-ta'rīkh* (Beirut: Maktabat Khayyat, n.d), iv, 54; Ibn Rusta, *al-A'lāq al-naḥḥīya*, BGA, vii, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 103-103; al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm*, BGA, iii, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 32-33.

⁴¹ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 321.

⁴² *Nihāyat al-arab fī akhbār al-furs wa al-'arab*, ed. M. T. Dānīsh Pazhūh (Tehran, 1995), 19-27.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 21-22.

Emphasizing the centrality of Babel and Yemen is not unique to the *Akhbār* or the *Nihāya* as one can find references to this topic in other Islamic traditions.⁴⁴ References to the superiority of Yemen can be found in early Yemenite traditions, such as that of Ibn Munabbih,⁴⁵ and ‘Abīd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī.⁴⁶ For example, ‘Abīd praises Babel as the most important place on earth because it was the original geographical setting of Southern Arabs, but, unlike al-Dīnawarī, he does not include Persians.⁴⁷ The distinctiveness of the *Nihāya* and al-Dīnawarī’s presentation lies, therefore, in the use of Babel and Yemen as significant and parallel settings to demonstrate the important role these localities played concomitantly in shaping the origins and past of Persians and Yemenite Arabs.

Having established the geographical superiority of Babel and Yemen, al-Dīnawarī begins his portrayal of human history with Adam. However, unlike other Muslim scholars,⁴⁸ his description is very brief and does not include the creation story. He states that Adam is the progenitor of mankind (*abū al-bashr*), who was associated geographically with Mecca, and specifically the Sacred Precinct (*al-Ḥaram*).⁴⁹ The second important juncture in human history is affiliated, according to the *Akhbār*, with

⁴⁴ This view can be found in other Islamic writings, such as those of al-Ya‘qubī (d. 899) and al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 956). See al-Ya‘qubī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, BGA, vii, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 233-239; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma‘ādin al-Jawhar*, ed. Ch. Pellat (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi‘a al-Lubnāniya, 1965), ii, 83-84 (sec. 985); ii, 185-6 (sec. 988-989); *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, BGA, viii (Leiden: Brill, 1894) 35-42, 105.

⁴⁵ Muhammad b. Hishām, *Kitāb al-tījān fī mulūk ḥimyar* (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-‘Āmma li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfa, 1996), 40-43

⁴⁶ Ibn Sharya claims that Yemenites constitute the origins of all Arabs because they are the first to speak Arabic and are also the descendants of the prophet Hūd. *Akhbār*, (Crosby) 205-207.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 208.

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, i, 84-96 (de Goeje, i, 81-94); al-Maqdisī, *al-Bad’ wa al-ta’rīkh*, iii, 10. 96; al-Hamadānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl*, ed. M. al-Akwa‘ (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1963), i, 31-42.

⁴⁹ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 1.

Mahalalel, during whose time the number of Adam's descendants multiplied and strife increased between them. Mahalalel plays, according to *Akhbār*, a significant role in the dispersal of Adam's progeny into different lands in accordance with the four winds,⁵⁰ and he allocated the best of the earth—Iraq—to the progeny of Seth from whom descended Noah.⁵¹ References to the four winds as geographical locations seem to reflect Yemenite traditions.⁵² A similar narrative construction of this event appears in the *Nihāya*.⁵³ Having established the centrality of Iraq (Babel), al-Dīnawarī moves promptly to deal with Noah's story which embodies the narrative of the origin of nations.

The presentation of the Noah story in the *Akhbār*, which is greatly influenced by the biblical narrative,⁵⁴ focuses on Noah's three sons (Shem, Japheth, and Ham), who survived the Flood, and the geographical regions associated with them.⁵⁵ Two features are conspicuous in al-Dīnawarī's account: the association of Babel with Shem and his progeny and the identification of both Arabs and Persians as his descendants. To further understand the particularity of al-Dīnawarī's presentation of the Shem narrative, it is instructive to compare it with those of Muslim scholars.

⁵⁰ The division of the world into four parts that follow the four directions was espoused mainly by Iraqi geographers. For this group of scholars, Iraq was considered the center of the world and Baghdad was its greatest city. See S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Djuhrāfiya," *El*, II (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 579-8; I. Krachkovski, *Istoria Arabskoi Geograficheskoi Literatury*, Arabic translation *Ta'rīkh al-adab al-juhrāfi al-'arabi*, trans. by S. 'Uthmān Hāshim (Jāmi'at al-Duwal al-'Arabiyya) i, 155-170.

⁵¹ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 1.

⁵² 'Abīd b. Sharya mentions the four winds, which include North (*shamāl*), South (*janūb*), East (*al-ṣabā*), and West (*al-dabūr*), under his treatment of the confounding of languages. A similar reference to these four winds can be found in another Yemenite tradition attributed to Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 728). See *Akhbār*, 207; *Kitāb al-tījān*, 37.

⁵³ According to the *Nihāya*, Mehalalel divided nations into five groups. Four of them he scattered according to the direction of the four winds and one remained in Mecca. *Nihāya*, 8.

⁵⁴ Genesis, 7.

⁵⁵ Al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār*, 1.

Islamic traditions, which follow on the whole the biblical narrative, emphasize the superiority of Shem among his brothers for being the forefather of prophets and the best among nations.⁵⁶ Among the nations that descended from Shem, Muslim scholars refer to the Israelites and Arabs. Most of these scholars exclude Persians from Shem's progeny and trace them back to Japheth.⁵⁷ Ibn Qutayba even claims that it is hard to trace Persian genealogies because they cannot trace their lineage independently without relying on other traditions.⁵⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, who offers the most detailed account on Persians' origin, refers to a number of contradictory reports, but he tends to exclude Persians, particularly in the *Ta'riḫh*, from the list of people who descend from Shem.⁵⁹ Unlike other Muslim historians, al-Dīnawarī states unmistakably that Persians and Arabs are the descendants of Shem.⁶⁰ Two significant objectives emerge from this narrative arrangement: the legitimization of Persians' origin and positioning both Arabs and Persians under the same upright and honorable lineage.

Establishing the noble origin of Persians and Arabs and associating Babel with Shem's progeny, al-Dīnawarī moves on to describe major events that paved the way for the emergence of kingship in Babel. He relates that Shem became the leader of his family and ran their affairs in Babel after Noah died. Since Shem frequented the eastern bank of the Tigris as his main road, Persians called this place "Shem's road (*Sām rāh*)," but they

⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫh*, i, 191 (de Goeje, i, 199)

⁵⁷ Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif*, ed. T. 'Ukāsha (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1969) 27-28; *Faḍl al-'Arab wa al-tanbīh 'alā 'ulūmiha*. ed. K. W, Maḥmūd (Abū Zabī: Manshūrāt al-Majma' al-Thaqāfi, 1998), 50-51; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḫh*, i, 17, 159; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, i, 45 (sec. 68).

⁵⁸ Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, 652.

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫh*, i, 201-204 (de Goeje, i, 210-216); 209-210 (de Goeje, i 222-223); *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954), xxiii. 67-68.

⁶⁰ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 3. This view is shared by al-Maqdisī. See *Bad'*, iii, 26-27.

also named him Iran.⁶¹ Persians also named Shem, according to the *Akhbār*, Irānshahr because he selected Iraq (Babel) as his abode.⁶² An almost identical report, which is transmitted on the authority of al-Sha‘bī and Ibn al-Qirriya, can be found in the *Nihāya* where the title Irānshahr is associated with Arpachshad instead.⁶³ Al-Dīnawarī here employs certain narrative strategies aiming to achieve two principal objectives. First, he selects Babel (Iraq) as a noble geographical setting of his historical presentation; and, second, he synthesizes biblical and Persian materials to associate the genesis of Iranian regal tradition with its respectful progenitor – Shem.

The distinctiveness of the narrative arrangement in the *Akhbār* appears to be well-defined when we compare it to mainstream Islamic traditions. Such is the case with al-Ṭabarī who deals in his *Ta’rikh* with both Persian and biblical narratives. However, he treats them, on the whole, separately while emphasizing that Persian narratives of origins are controversial by using the phrases “according to Persian genealogists,” or “Persians claim.”⁶⁴ As for the geographical area that was allocated to Shem, al-Ṭabarī does not specify Babel as his abode. Rather, he identifies this area as the region stretching between Jerusalem, the Nile, and the Euphrates and Tigris.⁶⁵ Elsewhere, he even submits a report in which he describes Mecca as Shem’s abode.⁶⁶ The association of Shem with Mecca seems to reflect attempts by other Muslim scholars to Islamicize the Shem story.

⁶¹ The term “Iran (Ērān), which means the founder of Iran, was first given to Ardashīr I (r. 224–241), the founder of the Sasanian empire.

⁶² Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 2.

⁶³ *Nihāya*, 17.

⁶⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, i, 146-148, 168 (de Goeje, i, 147-149, 170-171).

⁶⁵ Ibid. 193 (de Goeje, i, 200).

⁶⁶ Ibid. 205 (de Goeje, i, 216).

4. *Genesis of Kingship*

Underscoring the centrality of Babel as the abode of noble people, al-Dīnawarī moves on to discuss the emergence of kingship therein. His treatment of this theme begins with Jamshīd (Jam), whom Persian sources credit, as we shall see, with being the first to establish kingship along with all of its full-fledged regal institutions. Al-Dīnawarī here synthesizes biblical with Persian narrative to demonstrate the historical juncture that Jamshīd's rulership brought about. He first underlines the noble origin of Jamshīd by combining together both biblical and Persian genealogies relating that Jam b. Warnajhān⁶⁷ b. Iran b. Arpachshad succeeded Shem in running the affairs of Noah's family. An emphasis, therefore, is placed here on Arpachshad, whose crucial role will be discussed later. By applying these rhetorical strategies, al-Dīnawarī seeks to legitimize Persian narratives and to demonstrate Persians' contributions to human history through the establishment of kingship.

Relying on Persian sources, al-Dīnawarī adds that Jamshīd consolidated the foundations of the kingship (*thabbata asās al-mulk*) and turned Nirūz (the New Year celebration) into a holiday.⁶⁸ An almost identical treatment, yet more detailed, of the Jamshīd story can be found in the *Nihāya*.⁶⁹ The similarities between the *Akhbār* and the

⁶⁷ On the origin of this name see P. Poursharriati, "The *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl* of Abū Hanīfa al-Dīnawarī," 253.

⁶⁸ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 1; Ferdowsī, *Shāhnāma*, I, 44, (vv. 48-55). See also Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, ed. Abū al-Qāsim Imāmī (Tihran : Dār Surūsh, 1987), I, 6-7; al-Tha'ālibī, *Ghurar akhbār mulūk al-furs wa siyarihīm*, ed. and trans. Z. Herman. *Histoire des Rois des Perses* (Amsterdam: Apa-Oriental Press, 1979), 13.

⁶⁹ We are told in the *Nihāya* that "Jam was the first to establish the foundations of kingship and built the different features of rulership (*fa kāna jam awwal man assasa manāzil al-mulk wa shayyada ma 'ālim al-ṣultān.*)" *Nihāya*, 17.

Nihāya are striking to the extent that certain phrases are presented verbatim. For example, the *Nihāya* offers a report on the authority of Ibn al-Qirriyya stating that “some ignorant Persians who have no knowledge about genealogies claim mistakenly and falsely that Jam was actually Solomon, however many periods of time separated Jam and Solomon.”⁷⁰ The same sentence appears in the *Akhbār*, but it is related on the authority of Ibn al-Muqaffa’.⁷¹ Whether al-Dīnawarī is directly influenced by the *Nihāya* is still difficult to establish here. However, this phrase points to attempts made by some Persian genealogists to legitimize their narratives of origin by weaving Persian reports into biblical narratives.⁷²

The particularity of the narrative arrangement of the origin of Jamshīd in the *Akhbār* and the *Nihāya* is more well-defined as we compare it with those of al-Ṭabarī⁷³ and Ferdowsī (d. 1020).⁷⁴ These two sources offer a more detailed presentation of the story than that of al-Dīnawarī. Starting with al-Ṭabarī’s account, he presents the Jamshīd story entirely within Persian narratives without making any connection with biblical stories. In fact, throughout his work he makes efforts to keep the portrayal of biblical and

⁷⁰ *Qāla ayyūb b. al-Qirriyya wa yaz‘um ba‘d juhhāl al-‘ajam wa man lā ‘ilm lahu bi-al-nasāb anna jam huwa sulaymān b. dāwūd takharraṣan wa kadhiban wa kāna bayna sulaymān wa jam zamān wa duhūr. Nihāya*, 18.

⁷¹ *wa yurwā anna Ibn al-muqaffā‘ kāna yaqūl; yaz‘um ba‘d juhhāl al-‘ajam wa man lā ‘ilm lahu anna jam huwa sulaymān b. dāwūd, wa hādhā ghalṭ, fa bayna sulaymān wa jam akthar min thalāth alāf sana. Akhbār*, 6.

⁷² It is worth noting that al-Mas‘ūdī relates that some Northern Arab poets and genealogists claimed that they share the same noble origins with Persians in order to show their superiority over Southern Arabs. *Murūj*, I, 280-81 (sec. 567-68).

⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, i 174-176 (de Goeje, i, 179-181); al-Tha‘ālibī, *Ghurar*, 11-15.

⁷⁴ Abu’l Qasem Ferdowsi, *The Shāhnāme* (Book of Kings), ed. D. Khaleghi-Motalagh (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), i, 41-52, 42, vv. 14-17; 42, vv. 19-26, 43, vv. 30-34; 43, vv. 35-38.

Persian histories independent.⁷⁵ The *Shāhnāma*'s portrayal of the Jamshīd story is even based entirely on Persian tradition. These conspicuous distinctions point to al-Dīnawarī's intention to combine together biblical and Persian narratives in order to place the origin of Jamshīd within an honorable and legitimized setting.

The presentation of Jamshīd's kingship in the *Akhhbār* is associated with another significant event: the confounding of languages.⁷⁶ The same narrative arrangement of this event can be found in the *Nihāya*. Anchored in the biblical setting,⁷⁷ this episode signifies a turning point in the *Akhhbār* because it resulted in the relocation of nations and the introduction of new languages after the period when humans spoke only Syriac. Al-Dīnawarī relates that "during the time of Jamshīd languages confounded in Babel... after all spoke Syriac, which was Noah's language."⁷⁸ As in the *Nihāya*, al-Dīnawarī relates that as the result of the confounding of the languages all nations left Babel, except for the descendants of Shem and their cousin Jamshīd.⁷⁹

References to the story of the confusion of languages can be found in other Islamic writings, whose presentations have two characteristics. First, following the biblical narrative, these accounts place this episode within the story of Nimrod b. Cush,

⁷⁵ A good example of al-Ṭabarī's decision to separate biblical stories from Persian regal narrative appears in his discussion of controversy among Persian scholars about the identification of Adam with Kayomart. *Ta'rīkh*, I, 146-148 (de Goeje, I, 147-149); al-Tha'ālibī, *Ghurar*, 1-4.

⁷⁶ A good discussion on the primordial language can be found in M. Rubin, "The Language of Creation or the Primordial Language: A case of Cultural Polemics in Antiquity," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 49, ii (1998), 306-333.

⁷⁷ Genesis 11: 1-9.

⁷⁸ *wa fī zamān jam tabalbalat al-al-alsun... wa kāna kalām al-jamī' al-siryāniyya wa hiya lughat nūh.* Almost the same wording can be found in the *Nihāya*: *wa fī awwal mulk jam tabalbalat al-alsun bi babil ... wa kana kalamuhum al-siryaniyya wa hiya lughat nūh.* al-Dīnawarī, *Akhhbār*, 2; *Nihāya*, 18.

⁷⁹ *Nihāya*, 18-19; al-Dīnawarī, *Akhhbār*, 2.

and, second, no association is made with Persian sources.⁸⁰ A comparison between the portrayal of the confounding of languages in the *Akḥbār* and in other Islamic sources shows, therefore, al-Dīnawārī's distinctive narrative arrangement by combining biblical materials with Persian sources. By following this arrangement, he seeks to achieve two main objectives. First, al-Dīnawārī intends to demonstrate the significance of this event because it sets the stage for the introduction of Arabic and the emergence of Arab kingship in Yemen. Second, he aims to create a thematic link between Yemen and Babel and places the history of Arabs and Persians within the same chronological framework.

5. The Establishment of Kingship in Yemen

Al-Dīnawārī's portrayal of the institution of kingship in Yemen is divided thematically into two accounts, each of which reflects contrasted viewpoints regarding dynastic rulership. Still, Babel and Yemen function as interconnected geographical settings for these two stories. The first narrative, which is combined with the story of al-Ḍaḥḥāq (al-Zaḥḥāq), relates the establishment of the first Arab kingship in Yemen by the people of 'Ād. The second narrative revolves around the institution of kingship in Yemen by Qaḥṭān, which is synchronized with the story of Nimrod. Behind this thematic dichotomy is al-Dīnawārī's desire to account for the reasons for the rise and fall of dynastic rulership. While the story of the people of 'Ād and al-Ḍaḥḥāq represents immoral and haughty rulership, the Qaḥṭān-Nimrod narrative describes a legitimate and honorable kingship. Again, al-Dīnawārī uses the theme of origin as his point of departure

⁸⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, 37; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 19-20; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 289 (de Goeje, I, 321-322); Al-Mas'ūdi, *Muruḥ*, I, p. 46 (sec. 70).

where he selects the biblical narrative as a setting for his discussion. We will begin with the discussion of the immoral and rebellious kingship of the people of ‘Ād and al-Ḍaḥḥāq.

6. *The People of ‘Ād and al-Ḍaḥḥāq*

Al-Dīnawarī begins his presentation of the story of the people of ‘Ād with Iram, whom he considers as their forefather. Iram was one of Shem’s five sons: Iram, Arpachshad, ‘Ālam, al-Yafār,⁸¹ and al-Aswar.⁸² Although he was the oldest son, he occupied a lesser status than that of Arpachshad. Iram is credited with being the first to speak Arabic and, hence, he is considered, according to the *Akḥbār*, the forefather of the Arabs. He begot seven sons: ‘Ād, Thamūd, Ṣuḥār, Ṭasm, Jadīs, Jāsīm, and Wabār. Their progeny dispersed in different parts of Arabia, but only the descendants of ‘Ād settled in Yemen.⁸³ The progeny of Iram’s sons constituted, according to the *Akḥbār*, the first Arabs (*al-‘arab al-‘ulā*), but none of them survived.⁸⁴ An identical version of the Iram

⁸¹ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akḥbār*, 3. It is likely that al-Dīnawarī refers here to Eliphaz, the son of Esau because he presents him as the Romans’ forefather. Islamic sources usually present Eliphaz as one of the Romans’ ancestors.

⁸² According to the book of Genesis, Shem had five sons: Elam, Ashur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. A similar list can be found in al-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rīkh* (Arpachshad, Ashūdḥ, Lāwūdḥ, ‘Iwīlam, and Iram). Hence, these differences between the *Akḥbār* and the biblical story are due to the nature of the diacritical marks that are often subject to distortion. See Genesis, 10:22; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, i, 203 (de Goeje, i, 213).

⁸³ The *Nihāya* offers a report on the authority of al-Sha‘bī and Ibn Qirriyya claiming that the story of Iram and his arrival in Arabic belong to Himyarite traditions. *Nihāya*, 21-22.

⁸⁴ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akḥbār*, 3.

story is found in the *Nihāya*⁸⁵ and this again enhances the plausibility of al-Dīnawarī's dependence on this source, or that both accounts are based on a shared tradition.

The people of 'Ād, who are remembered negatively in Islamic traditions, were the first to establish kingship in Yemen; their rulership is described in the *Akhbār* as an immoral and tyrannical leadership. Their first king was Shadīd b. 'Amlīq, who is portrayed as haughty and defiant.⁸⁶ It is worth noting that, as in the biblical narrative,⁸⁷ the name of 'Amlīq denotes in Islamic traditions tyranny and rebelliousness.⁸⁸ The kingship of 'Ād was doomed to fall, according to the *Akhbār*, due to its immoral and tyrannical nature. The issue of origin, however, plays a major role in the demise of their rulership. Specifically, al-Dīnawarī presents the people of 'Ād as having less favorable lineage, as one compares Iram, their eponymous father, with Arpachshad. Furthermore, he concludes his treatment of the kingship of 'Ād by placing it within the Qur'ānic narrative seemingly to emphasize the immorality of the people of 'Ād. According to this story, God sent the prophet Hūd as a messenger to them, but their defiance and

⁸⁵ The following examples clearly show the similarity in the presentation of the story in the *Akhbār* and the *Nihāya*. In the *Akhbār* we are told that "when they (*Iram*'s sons) left Babel, the rest of Noah's descendants also decided to leave Babel, (*wa lammā kharaj hā'ulā' taharrakat qulūb sā'ir walad nūh lil-khurūj min bābil*)." Whereas in the *Nihāya* we are told that "when Iram, son of Shem, departed from the land of Babel, the rest of the descendants of Shem, son of Noah, were encouraged to depart from the land of Babel (*fa lammā wallā Iram b. Sām min arḍ bābil taḥarrakat qulūb sā'ir walad sām b. nūh lil-khurūj min arḍ bābil*)." *Nihāya*, 21; al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 3.

⁸⁶ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 3-4.

⁸⁷ Exodus 17:6, 7, 8-16; 18:5; Deuteronomy 25:12-19. See also L. H. Feldman, "Remembered Amalik!": Vengeance, Zealotry, and Group Destruction in the Bible According to Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004), 7-26.

⁸⁸ G. Vajda, "'Amālīk,'" *EI*, I (1979), 429; al-Maqdisī, *Bad'*, iii, 27.

disobedience led eventually to their downfall.⁸⁹ Again, the same narrative construct of the story of ‘Ād can be found, yet with more details, in the *Nihāya*.⁹⁰

Al-Dīnawarī then connects the story of the people of ‘Ād with that of al-Ḍaḥḥāq, whom he portrays as an unjust and evil ruler. The *Akhbār* emphasizes the similarities between these two narratives as having the themes of injustice and immorality in common. He first points to the Persian origin of the al-Ḍaḥḥāq story by relating that Persians (*al-‘ajam*) call him Bivarasp.⁹¹ Combining together Persian with Yemenite sources, al-Dīnawarī then relates that al-Ḍaḥḥāq was the nephew of Shadīd b. ‘Amlīq. He was sent by Shadīd to Babel where he defeated Jamshīd the king and usurped the Iranian kingship.⁹² Thus, applying narrative arrangement, al-Dīnawarī synchronizes Yemenite and Persian traditions and links the history of Yemen with that of Babel. Again, the same narrative organization, albeit more detailed, appears in the *Nihāya*.⁹³

Examining the presentations of these stories in other Islamic writings, one can see the *Akhbār*'s distinctive arrangement. For example, dealing with al-Ḍaḥḥāq narrative, al-Ṭabarī offers two independent reports based on two different traditions: Yemenite and Persian. In the first report, which is on the authority of Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 819), al-Ṭabarī relates that al-Ḍaḥḥāq was of Yemenite origin, yet he does not associate him with the people of ‘Ād. In the second report, he relates that, according to Persian sources, al-

⁸⁹ Ibid. 5.

⁹⁰ *Nihāya*, 24-27.

⁹¹ The meaning of the name Bivarasp is, according to Ferdowsī, the master of 10 thousand horses. *Shāhnamā*, i, 47 (vv. 100-104). See also Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber*, 230, 284-5.

⁹² Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 5.

⁹³ *Nihāya*, 44-53.

Ḍaḥḥāq was a Persian named Bivarasp.⁹⁴ A reference to the Arab origin of al-Ḍaḥḥāq can be found in the *Shāhnāma* where we are told that al-Ḍaḥḥāq was the son of an Arab king named Mirdās, but it does not specify where he ruled in Arabia.⁹⁵ The *Shāhnāma* underlines al-Ḍaḥḥāq's evil and iniquitous character by relating that he killed his father, turned into an arrogant king, and followed the path of Satan. When Jamshīd became a corrupt king, the Persians invited al-Ḍaḥḥāq, according to the *Shāhnām*, to help them dethrone him.⁹⁶ At the center of the portrayal of al-Ḍaḥḥāq in the *Shāhnāma* is the image of an illegitimate ruler who usurped Iranian kingship.

A comparison between the descriptions of al-Ḍaḥḥāq's story in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta' rīkh*, the *Shāhnāma*, and the *Akḥbār* points to the influence of Persian traditions in these reports. Distinctions between the accounts clearly demonstrate, however, al-Dīnawarī's employment of certain narrative strategies to convey better his message. Accordingly, he seeks to emphasize the correlation between noble origin and legitimate kingship by drawing on examples from the histories of Babel and Yemen. In this manner, al-Dīnawarī harmonizes Persian and Arab pasts demonstrating that the regal leadership of 'Ād and al-Ḍaḥḥāq constitutes failed models of kingship because of their immorality and due to the lack of upright origin.

7. *Nimrod and Qaḥṭān*

⁹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta' rīkh*, i, 194-195 (de Goeje, i, 202-203).

⁹⁵ Ferdowsī, *Shāhnāmā*, i, 45-47 (vv. 75-104). It is worth noting that al-Tha'ālibī, whose narrative echoes on the whole the *Shāhnāmā*, relates that al-Ḍaḥḥāq's father was a king over Yemen. *Ghurār*, 18.

⁹⁶ Ferdowsī, *Shāhnāmā*, i, 51-52 (vv. 167-189)

The presentation of the stories of Nimrod and Qaḥṭān in the *Akhbār* exemplify, as previously mentioned, the themes of virtuous origin and legitimate rulership. These stories, therefore, constitute an antithesis to the narratives of al-Ḍaḥḥāq and the people of ‘Ad. Again, al-Dīnawarī’s portrayal of these narratives displays interconnection between Babel and Yemen and a confluence in history of Persians and Southern Arabs. To achieve these objectives, he synthesizes three main traditions: biblical, Persian, and Yemenite.

Al-Dīnawarī’s portrayal of the Qaḥṭān and Nimrod stories begins with emphasizing their upright and noble ancestry their lineage that he traces back to Arpachshad, Shem’s son.⁹⁷ The superior status that Arpachshad occupies, being the forefather of prophets, is not unique to the *Akhbār*. For example, al-Ṭabarī relates that all prophets, messengers, and virtuous people, which also includes all Arabs, are the progeny of Arpachshad. He excludes, however, Persians from Arpachshad’s descendants and, instead, he associates them in most reports with Japheth’s children.⁹⁸ Al-Dīnawarī unmistakably relates that Arabs, Persian kings, and the nobles among them in Iraq are Arpachshad’s descendants.⁹⁹

The distinctiveness of the narrative strategies applied in the *Akhbār* can be clearly discerned when we compare al-Dīnawarī’s portrayal of the Nimrod story with those of other Muslim scholars. Following the biblical story, Muslim scholars portray Nimrod as a model of a rebellious and defiant ruler and situate his story within the Abraham

⁹⁷ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 7; Genesis 10: 22; 11: 10.

⁹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, i, 205 (de Goeje, i, 216).

⁹⁹ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 7.

narrative.¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding the negative image of Nimrod in the Bible, al-Dīnawarī portrays Nimrod positively, emphasizing his respectable lineage that is based, as we shall see, on both biblical and Persian narratives. These discrepancies indicate al-Dīnawarī's intention to demonstrate the connection between noble origin and legitimate rulership and underline commonalities in the histories of Babel and Yemen.

Having established the noble descent of both Nimrod and Qaḥṭān, al-Dīnawarī dedicates his account to display the important role that these figures played in the dynastic histories of Babel and Yemen. Starting with Nimrod, he places his story within Persian narratives by identifying him with the Persian mythical king Farīdūn,¹⁰¹ whom he presents as Jamshīd's son.¹⁰² Nimrod managed, according to the *Akḥbār*, to defeat al-Ḍaḥḥāq, end his usurpation, and restore the legitimate kingship in Iran. At the same time, al-Dīnawarī also links the Nimrod story to Yemen by stating that Qaḥṭān and Nimrod were cousins.¹⁰³ As in the Nimrod story, he assigns Qaḥṭān an instrumental role in putting an end to the immoral rulership of the last king of 'Ād, Marthad b. Shaddād.¹⁰⁴ Behind the synthesis of these three traditions is al-Dīnawarī's effort to highlight Nimrod's noble line of descent and his vital role in restoring moral and legitimate kingship in both Babel and Yemen. Following this narrative arrangement, he seeks to

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, I, 37; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 242 (de Goeje, I, 253); al-Kisā'ī, *Bad' al-khalq wa qisas al-anbiyā'*, ed. al-Ṭāhir bin Salma (Tunis: Nuqūsh 'Arabiyya, 1998), 197-199; al-Tha'labī, *Qisas al-anbiyā' al-musammā 'arā'is al-majālis* (Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954), 72-73.

¹⁰¹ In his struggle against the tyranny of al-Ḍaḥḥāq, Farīdūn symbolizes the victory over dark forces and the restoration of legitimacy and justice. Ferdowsī, *Shāhnamā*, I, 84-86 (vv. 485-499); 89 (vv. 1-10).

¹⁰² "He [Nimrod] is the one that Persians call Farīdūn (*wa huwa al-ladhī yusammīhi al-'ajam farīdūn*). *Akḥbār*. 6.

¹⁰³ According to the biblical story, Nimrod was the son of Cush who was Canaan's brother. *Genesis*, 10: 8.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akḥbār*, 7.

show the connection between political stability and the rise of legitimate and just kingship.

Portraying the Qaḥṭān story, al-Dīnawarī applies the same narrative strategies that he follows in his treatment of the Nimrod narrative. He first establishes Qaḥṭān's honorable origin by placing it within a respectable biblical genealogy. Thus, he states that Qaḥṭān was the son of 'Ābir (Eber), who was Arpachshad's grandson.¹⁰⁵ Reference to the upright biblical descent of Qaḥṭān can be found in a number of Islamic works.¹⁰⁶ However, this orientation is more pronounced in Yemenite traditions where the Qaḥṭān story is also placed within the Qur'ānic narrative. Specifically, Yemenite authors present Qaḥṭān as Hud's son to further emphasize his esteemed line of descent.¹⁰⁷ One cannot, however, exclude the possibility that these discrepancies regarding the origin of Qaḥṭān are reflective of the genealogical contention between the Southern and the Northern Arabs during the Umayyads,¹⁰⁸ a topic that lies beyond the scope of this study.

Al-Dīnawarī assigns a fundamental role to Qaḥṭān in the genealogical history of Yemen and hence he was given the epithet the "ancestor of Yemen (*Abū al-Yaman*)."¹⁰⁹ Relying on Ibn Sharya and Ibn al-Kayyis al-Namari, he adds that Qaḥṭān was the

¹⁰⁵ Genesis 10: 24; al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i, 37; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, i, 210-211 (de Goeje, i, 224-225); al-Maqdisī, *Bad'*, iii, 31; Ibn Kathīr, *Qisas al-anbiyā'*, ed. M. M. Muḥammad (Cairo; Dār Ibn al-Haytham, 2002) 9.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Aṣma'ī, *Ta'rīkh*, 3; Ibn Hishām, *al-Tijān*, 37; Ibn Sharya, *Akhbār*, 208; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 4;

¹⁰⁸ Referring to the origins of the Arabs, Islamic traditions divide them into two main collective groups. The first group is referred to as the descendants of Qaḥṭān, or southern Arabs whereas the second group comprises the northern Arabs who descended from 'Adnān. W. Caskel, *Ġamharat an-nasab*, I, 19-21. A. Fischer, "Qaḥṭān," *EI*, IV, 1978, 447-449; P. Crone, "Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?" *Der Islam*, 71 no. 1 (1994), 1-57.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 6.

forefather of all Arabs, such as the Jurhumites and the Ma‘tamarites.¹¹⁰ The Qaḥṭān narrative is chronologically situated in the *Akḥbār* immediately after the death of Hūd and the destruction of the people of ‘Ād.¹¹¹ By doing so, al-Dīnawarī seeks to show the transition from the sinful and corrupt rule of ‘Ād to the moral and upright kingship of Qaḥṭān and his descendants. At the same time he synchronizes the history of Yemen with that of Babel, stating that Nimrod appointed Qaḥṭān as a king in Yemen.¹¹² The kingship of Qaḥṭān in Yemen continued through his oldest son Ya‘rub, who is presented as the first to speak Arabic.¹¹³ Qaḥṭān’s kingship represents, according to the *Akḥbār*, the formative period of kingship in Yemen that paved the way for the emergence of the Himyarite rulership, whose first king was Saba’ b. Yashjub.¹¹⁴ References to the importance of the Himyarites in the history of kingship in Yemen are echoed in many Islamic sources. A good example of this tendency is al-Ya‘qūbī’s claim that Saba’ b. Yashjub was the first to establish kingship in Yemen.¹¹⁵ The presentation of the Himyarite kingship in the *Akḥbār* constitutes a junction in the history of Yemen that coincided with Persian and Jewish dynastic histories.¹¹⁶ In this manner, al-Dīnawarī shows parallelism in Persian and Southern Arab histories and compares them to great

¹¹⁰ Ibid.7.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 6.

¹¹² Ibid. 7.

¹¹³ There is a debate in Islamic tradition as to who was the first to speak Arabic, but most Muslim scholars credit Ya‘rub with this. Ibn Sharyā, *Akḥbār*, 208-209; al-Aṣma‘ī, *Ta’rīkh*, 7-8; Ibn Hishām, *Tījān*, 43; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, i, 207 (de Goeje, i, 219)

¹¹⁴ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akḥbār*, 9; al-Aṣma‘ī, *Ta’rīkh*, 11-13.

¹¹⁵ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 195.

¹¹⁶ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akḥbār*, 9-17.

kingships. Similarly, the *Nihāya* provides the same narrative arrangement of the stories of Nimrod and Qaḥṭān, yet its presentation is more detailed.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *al-Akḥbār al-ṭiwāl* is a distinctive Islamic universal history that cannot be characterized merely as a chronological-political narrative, but rather as a didactic effort to better understand the subtle connotations of dynastic history with its ebbs and flows. Al-Dīnawarī's choice of themes, locations, and events, and the synthesis of incongruent traditions are among the rhetorical devices that he consistently applies to better reflect on the repercussions of repeated patterns of dynastic history. Clear resemblances between the thematic and structural arrangement of the *Akḥbār* and that of the *Nihāya* demonstrate that these narrative strategies and agenda appeared in Islamic historiography even before al-Dīnawarī.

The *Akḥbār*'s thematic and schematic structure as well as its methodology, therefore, yields an interesting portrait of a scholar whose historical writing was motivated by the political fragmentation and cultural degeneration that the Islamic caliphate experienced during the ninth century. Reacting to these issues, al-Dīnawarī examines themes of rise and fall of rulership embedded in pre-Islamic Persian and Arab histories to provide a better perception of the causes for the socio-political decline in the Abbasid caliphate.

¹¹⁷ *Nihāya*, 36-37.

At the center of al-Dīnawārī's argument is the interconnection between successful rulership and illustrious origin, which is based on both locality and ancestry. Hence, he highlights the superior geographical status of Babel (Iraq) and Yemen as historical settings to show similarities and interconnectedness in the pre-Islamic Persian and (Southern) Arab pasts. In this manner, he shows uncharacteristic treatment of the *shu'ūbiyya* controversy indicating that Arabs (particularly Southern Arabs) and the Persians share common origins and pasts; and, thus, their histories were not contradictory or antagonistic, but rather conciliatory and intertwined.

These themes and narrative organization, therefore, shed some light on al-Dīnawārī's choice of *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl* as the title of his work. What is behind this title, I believe, is the author's desire to focus on narratives of the rise and fall of dynasties and rulers that are worthy of a detailed and thorough examination. The focuses on these themes and events aim to serve as historical reminders for later generations at times of crisis and turmoil.