Origin Narratives and the Making of Dynastic History in al-Dīnawarī’s Akhbār

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Origin Narratives and the Making of Dynastic History in al-Dīnawarī’s Akhbār

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-Akhbār 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 Akhbār. Since this study revolves around the Akhbār, 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

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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.


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

context of the Akhbār, she considers it to be a shuʿūbī treatise, claiming that shuʿūbī sympathies are ubiquitous in this work.

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

The current study examines al-Dīnawarī’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 Akhbār’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-Dīnawarī’s worldview and motives, it is instructive to begin with the examination of the narrative strategies of the Akhbār and the rationale behind its thematic configuration.

1. The Akhbār’s Thematic and Schematic Structure

The dominant themes of the Akhbār 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’taşim (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. This divergence is exemplified in the absence of chain of transmission (isnād), 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.  

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 Chūbī’s romance, which is a lost work that thanks to Nöeldeke 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 fi Aḥbārī-l-furs wa-l-‘Arab,” 140-141.
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Al-Dīnawarī’s atypical historical writing also manifests in his espousal of moderate stands when it comes to significant Islamic political and social issues. The same can be said about his unique treatment of the *shuʿubiyya* controversy. It is insufficient, I believe, to merely classify the *Akhbār* as a *shuʿubī* or anti-*shuʿubī* treatise. Rather, al-Dīnawarī’s presentation of the *shuʿubiyya* is distinctive. Unlike other Muslim scholars who side with one of the two main ethnic contenders (Arabs and Persians), al-Dīnawarī 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-Dīnawarī 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,’

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‘success,’ ‘fortune,’ and ‘revolution.’ 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*).” He employs the term *dawla* again when he refers to the end of the Umayyad caliphate, and to the beginning of al-Amīn’s (r. 809-813) caliphate. 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 element into the Abbasid army, a process

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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'taṣīm (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. The increasing influence of Turks also left its impression on Abbasid cultural life. 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 Akhbār where they are associated in most cases with political instability, betrayal, and lack of security. These thematic considerations seem to account for the fact that the Akhbār concludes with the reign of al-Mu'taṣīm. Instead of dealing with current events that could place him in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the Turks, 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'taṣīm who relied heavily on the Turkish troops. The ongoing misconduct and violence of these troops against the populace of Baghdad led al-Mu'taṣīm 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.


18 Al-Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 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 Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī, Mu‘jam al-‘udabā’, vi, 2840-41.
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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 Taʿrīkh. The protagonists of this story are the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim and Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Muṣʿab (d. 849-50), who served as the governor of Baghdad and Sāmarrā. Questioning his decision to rely on Turks, al-Muʿtaṣim asked Ishāq as to why al-Maʿmūn’s (Persian) aides were loyal and successful, whereas his [al-Muʿtaṣim’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.” 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. 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).”

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

21 Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhani, Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-buldān, Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, vi (Leiden: Brill, 1885), 315
22 Ibid. 316.
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to the importance of royal and noble origin. A good examples of this orientation are the phrases “well-rooted nobility (sharaf qadîm)”23 and “people of the high rank and the noble ones (ahl al-buâyūtāt 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 qadîm when dealing with the reign of Qubād, who was worried whether his son’s (Anūshirwân) mother descended of a noble origin. He was very satisfied when he learned that her father was a descendant of the famous Persian king, Faridûn. Akhbār, 66.
24 Al-Dīnawarī applies the phrase Aḥl al-buâyūtāt wa al-ashrāf when he refers to Wahraz whom Anūshirwân sent with an army to Yemen. Akhbār, 64.
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-ʿarab* (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

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even certain phrases are presented verbatim. 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), Ayyūb b. al-Qirriya (d. 703), Āmir al-Sha‘bī (d. 721-2), Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 728), `Abdallah b. al-Muqqafa’(d. 760), Ibn al-Kayyis al-Namarī, and al-Âṣma‘ī (d. 828).

The Nihāya and the Akhbār, 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-

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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 Akhbār, 288-290; 317-323.
30 `Abīd’s Akhbār al-yaman wa ash‘aruha 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 Akhbār.
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 (Khawaydānaym) tradition, which he translated from Pahlavi into Arabic. According to Nöldeke, this work was first composed under the order of Khusro Anūshirvān to be completed as a Persian royal epic during the reign of the last Sasanian king, Yazdgird III (632-651). See Z. Rubin, “The Reform of Khusro Anūshirvān,” 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-Muhammadīyya, 1963), i, 20 no. 1.
34 The Ta‘rikh mulāk al-‘arab al-awwalin min banī ḥād wa ghayrihim is ascribed to al-Âṣma‘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‘rikh 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, biblical lineages, and the shu‘ubiyya controversy 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. Al-Dīnawarī’s account on nation 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.

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-kitab).” Al-Balādhurī, Ansāb al-ashrāf, ed. M. Ḥanīdallāh (Cairo: Ma’had al-Maḥāt and Dār al-Maḥārif bi-Miṣr, 1959) i, 12; Ibn Durayd, Kitāb al-ishtiqāq, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Harūn (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muḥannā, 1979), I, 4-5.
37 I. Goldziher, Muslim Studies, I, 176-190.
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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. 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 (afḍal al-ard) 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). 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. 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.

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).
41 Al-Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 321.
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. References to the superiority of Yemen can be found in early Yemenite traditions, such as that of Ibn Munabbih, and ‘Abīd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī. 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. 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, 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). The second important juncture in human history is affiliated, according to the Akhbār, with

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44 This view can be found in other Islamic writings, such as those of al-Ya‘qubi (d. 899) and al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 956). See al-Ya‘qubi, Kitāb al-buldān, BGA, vii, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 233-239; al-Mas‘ūdī, Murūj al-dhabah wa ma‘ādīn 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-Tanbih wa-l-ishrāf, ed. M. J. de Goeje, BGA, vii (Leiden: Brill, 1894) 35-42, 105.


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, and he allocated the best of the earth—Iraq—to the progeny of Seth from whom descended Noah. References to the four winds as geographical locations seem to reflect Yemenite traditions. A similar narrative construction of this event appears in the Nihāya. 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, focuses on Noah’s three sons (Shem, Japheth, and Ham), who survived the Flood, and the geographical regions associated with them. 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.

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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, “Djughrāfiya,” EI, II (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 579-8; I. Kruchkovski, *Istoria Arabskoi Geograficheskoi Literatury*, Arabic translation Ta’rikh al-adab al-jughrâfî al-arabî, trans. by S. ‘Uthmān Hāshim (Jāmi’at al-Duwal al-‘Arabiyya) i, 155-170.
52 ‘Abīd b. Sharya mentions the four winds, which include North (*shamāl*), South (*janūb*), East (*al-ṣabā*), and West (*al-dabār*), 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-tājān*, 37.
53 According to the Nihāya, Mahalalel 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.
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. Among the nations that descended from Shem, Muslim scholars refer to the Israelites and Arabs. Most of these scholars exclude Persians form Shem’s progeny and trace them back to Japheth. Ibn Qutayba even claims that it is hard to trace Persian genealogies because they cannot trace their lineage independently without relying on other traditions. 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’rīkh, from the list of people who descend from Shem. Unlike other Muslim historians, al-Dīnawarī states unmistakably that Persians and Arabs are the descendants of Shem. 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 rāḥ),” but they

56 Al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, i, 191 (de Goeje, i, 199)
58 Ibn Qutayba, al-Ma‘ārif, 652.
59 Al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, i, 201-204 (de Goeje, i, 210-216); 209-210 (de Goeje, i, 222-223); Jāmi‘ al-bayān’an Ta’wil āy al-Qur’ān (Cairo: Maṣba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954), xxiii. 67-68.
60 Al-Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 3. This view is shared by al-Maqqāṣī. See Bad’, iii, 26-27.
also named him Iran.  

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.

Persians also named Shem, according to the Akhbār, Irānshahr because he selected Iraq (Babel) as his abode.  

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.  

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.”

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.  

Elsewhere, he even submits a report in which he describes Mecca as Shem’s abode. 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 Jamshīd’s 

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

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 manāẓīl al-mulk wa shayyada maʿālim 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.”\(^\text{70}\) The same sentence appears in the Akhbār, but it is related on the authority of Ibn al-Muqaffa’.\(^\text{71}\) 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.\(^\text{72}\)

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-Ṭabarī\(^\text{73}\) and Ferdowsī (d. 1020).\(^\text{74}\) 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 juhḥāl al-’ajam wa man lā ‘ilm lahu bi-al-nasāb anna jam huwa sulaymān b. dāwūd takharrūsan wa kadhiban wa kāna bayna sulaymān wa jam zamān wa dūhūr. Nihāya, 18.  
\(^{71}\) wa yurwā anna Ibn al-muqaffa’ kāna yaqūl; yaz`um ba’d juhḥāl al-’ajam wa man lā ‘ilm lahu anna jam huwa sulaymān b. dāwūd, wa hādhā gḥalt, fa bayna sulaymān wa jam akthar min thalāṭth 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‘alībī, Ghurar, 11-15.  
Persian histories independent. 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 Akhbār is associated with another significant event: the confounding of languages. The same narrative arrangement of this event can be found in the Nihāya. Anchored in the biblical setting, this episode signifies a turning point in the Akhbār 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.” 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.

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,

References

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’rikh, I, 146-148 (de Goeje, I, 147-149); al-Thaʿālibī, Ghurar, 1-4.
78 wa fī zamān jam tabalbalat al-al-alsun… wa kāna kalām al-jamī al-siryāniyya wa hiya lughat nūḥ. Almost the same wording can be found in the Nihāya: wa fī awwal mulk jam tabalbalat al-alsun bi babīl ... wa kāna kalamuhum al-siryāniyya wa hiya lughat nūḥ. al-Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 2; Nihāya, 18.
79 Nihāya, 18-19; al-Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 2.
and, second, no association is made with Persian sources. A comparison between the portrayal of the confounding of languages in the Akhbār and in other Islamic sources shows, therefore, al-Dīnawarī’s distinctive narrative arrangement by combining biblical materials with Persian sources. By following this arrangement, he seeks to achieve two main objectives. First, al-Dīnawarī 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-Dīnawarī’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-Ḍahḥāq (al-Zahhāq), 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-Dīnawarī’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-Ḍahḥāq represents immoral and haughty rulership, the Qaḥṭān-Nimrod narrative describes a legitimate and honorable kingship. Again, al-Dīnawarī uses the theme of origin as his point of departure.

80 Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, I, 37; al-Ya’qūbī, Ta’rīkh, I, 19-20; al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, I, 289 (de Goeje, I, 321-322); Al-Mas’udi, Muruj, 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-Ḍāḥṭāq.

6. The People of ‘Ād and al-Ḍāḥṭāq

Al-Dīnawārī 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, and al-Aswar. 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 Akhbār, the forefather of the Arabs. He begot seven sons: ‘Ād, Thamūd, Ṣuhār, Ṭasm, Jadīs, Jāsim, and Wabār. Their progeny dispersed in different parts of Arabia, but only the descendants of ‘Ād settled in Yemen. The progeny of Iram’s sons constituted, according to the Akhbār, the first Arabs (al-‘arab al-‘ulā), but none of them survived. An identical version of the Iram

81 Al-Dīnawārī, Akhbār, 3. It is likely that al-Dīnawārī 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 Taʾrīkh (Arpachshad, Ashūrd, Lāwūdh, ‘Iwīlam, and Iram). Hence, these differences between the Akhbār 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, Taʾrīkh, i, 203 (de Goeje, i, 213).

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

84 Al-Dīnawārī, Akhbār, 3.
story is found in the *Nihāya* 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 ʿĀd, 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. It is worth noting that, as in the biblical narrative,
the name of ‘Amlīq denotes in Islamic traditions tyranny and rebelliousness. The
kingship of ʿĀd 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 ʿĀd as having less favorable
lineage, as one compares Iram, their eponymous father, with Arpachshad. Furthermore,
he concludes his treatment of the kingship of ʿĀd by placing it within the Qurʿānic
narrative seemingly to emphasize the immorality of the people of ʿĀd. 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 sāʾir walad nāḥ lil-kurūj 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 taharrakat qulūb sāʾir walad sāʾim b. nāḥ lil-kurūj min arḍ bābil).” *Nihāya*, 21; al-Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 3.
disobedience led eventually to their downfall.\textsuperscript{89} Again, the same narrative construct of
the story of ‘Ād can be found, yet with more details, in the \textit{Nihāya}.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 (\textit{al-`ajam}) call him Bivarasp.\textsuperscript{91} Combining together Persian with Yemenite
sources, al-Dīnawarī then relates that al-Ḍaḥḥāq was the nephew of Shādīd b. ‘Amlīq. He
was sent by Shādīd to Babel where he defeated Jamshīd the king and usurped the Iranian
kingship.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Nihāya}.\textsuperscript{93}

Examining the presentations of these stories in other Islamic writings, one can see
the \textit{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-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[89] Ibid. 5.
\item[90] \textit{Nihāya}, 24-27.
\item[91] The meaning of the name Bivarasp is, according to Ferdowsī, the master of 10 thousand horses.
\item[92] Al-Dīnawarī, \textit{Akhbār}, 5.
\item[93] \textit{Nihāya}, 44-53.
\end{footnotes}
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Ḍahḥāq was a Persian named Bivarasp.⁹⁴ A reference to the Arab origin of al-Ḍahḥāq can be found in the *Shāhnāma* where we are told that al-Ḍahḥāq was the son of an Arab king named Mirdās, but it does not specify where he ruled in Arabia.⁹⁵ The *Shāhnāma* underlines al-Ḍahḥāq’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-Ḍahḥāq, according to the *Shāhnāma*, to help them dethrone him.⁹⁶ At the center of the portrayal of al-Ḍahḥāq in the *Shāhnāma* is the image of an illegitimate ruler who usurped Iranian kingship.

A comparison between the descriptions of al-Ḍahḥāq’s story in al-Ṭabarī’s *Taʾrīkh*, the *Shāhnāma*, and the *Akhbār* 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-Ḍahḥāq constitutes failed models of kingship because of their immorality and due to the lack of upright origin.

**7. Nimrod and Qaḥṭān**

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⁹⁵ Ferdowsī, *Shāhnamā*, i, 45-47 (vv. 75-104). It is worth noting that al-Thaʿālibī, whose narrative echoes on the whole the *Shāhnamā*, relates that al-Ḍahḥāq’s father was a king over Yemen. *Ghurar*, 18.
⁹⁶ Ferdowsī, *Shāhnamā*, i, 51-52 (vv. 167-189)
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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. 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, whom he presents as Jamshīd’s son. Nimrod managed, according to the Akhār, to defeat al-Ḍāḥḥāq, 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. 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. 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

101 In his struggle against the tyranny of al-Ḍāḥḥāq, Farīdūn symbolizes the victory over dark forces and the restoration of legitimacy and justice. Ferdowsī, Shāhnāma, I, 84-86 (vv. 485-499); 89 (vv. 1-10).
102 “He [Nimrod] is the one that Persians call Farīdūn (wa huwa al-ladhi yusammihī al-‘ajam farīdūn).” Akhbār, 6.
103 According to the biblical story, Nimrod was the son of Cush who was Canaan’s brother. Genesis, 10: 8.
104 Al-Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 7.
show the connection between political stability and the rise of legitimate and just kingship.

Portraying the Qaṭṭān story, al-Dīnawarī applies the same narrative strategies that he follows in his treatment of the Nimrod narrative. He first establishes Qaṭṭān’s honorable origin by placing it within a respectable biblical genealogy. Thus, he states that Qaṭṭān was the son of ‘Ābir (Eber), who was Arpachshad’s grandson. Reference to the upright biblical descent of Qaṭṭān can be found in a number of Islamic works.

However, this orientation is more pronounced in Yemenite traditions where the Qaṭṭān story is also placed within the Qur’ānic narrative. Specifically, Yemenite authors present Qaṭṭān as Hud’s son to further emphasize his esteemed line of descent. One cannot, however, exclude the possibility that these discrepancies regarding the origin of Qaṭṭān are reflective of the genealogical contention between the Southern and the Northern Arabs during the Umayyads, a topic that lies beyond the scope of this study.

Al-Dīnawarī assigns a fundamental role to Qaṭṭān in the genealogical history of Yemen and hence he was given the epithet the “ancestor of Yemen (Abū al-Yaman).”

Relying on Ibn Sharya and Ibn al-Kayyis al-Namari, he adds that Qaṭṭān was the

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105 Genesis 10: 24; al-Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 5.
106 Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, i, 37; al-Ṭabarī, Taʾriḵ, i, 210-211 (de Goeje, i, 224-225); al-Maqqiṣī, Baḥr, iii, 31; Ibn Kathīr, Qisas al-anbiyāʾ, ed. M. M. Muḥammad (Cairo; Dār Ibn al-Haytham, 2002) 9.
107 Al-Asmaʿī, Taʾriḵ, 3; Ibn Hishām, al-Tījān, 37; Ibn Sharya, Akhbār, 208; al-Baladhurī, Ansāb al-Ashraf, 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 Qaṭṭān, or southern Arabs whereas the second group comprises the northern Arabs who descended from ‘Adnān. W. Caskel, Gamharat an-nasab, i, 19-21. A. Fischer, “Kaṭṭān,” 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. The Qaḥṭān narrative is chronologically situated in the Akhbār immediately after the death of Hūd and the destruction of the people of ‘Ād. 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. The kingship of Qaḥṭān in Yemen continued through his oldest son Ya‘rub, who is presented as the first to speak Arabic. Qaḥṭān’s kingship represents, according to the Akhbār, 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. 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. The presentation of the Himyarite kingship in the Akhbār constitutes a junction in the history of Yemen that coincided with Persian and Jewish dynastic histories. 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 Sharya, Akhbār, 208-209; al-Aṣma‘ī, Ta‘rīkh, 7-8; Ibn Hishām, Tījān, 43; al-Ṭabarī, Ta‘rīkh, i, 207 (de Goeje, i, 219)
115 Al-Ya‘qūbī, Ta‘rīkh, i, 195.
116 Al-Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 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-Akhbār al-ṭiwaḥ 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 Akhbār and that of the Nihāya demonstrate that these narrative strategies and agenda appeared in Islamic historiography even before al-Dīnawarī.

The Akhbār’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-Dīnawarī’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 *shuʿubiyya* 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-Dīnawarī’s choice of *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwal* 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.