CULTURAL HERITAGE AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL SOUTH ARABIA[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Walter Dostal had an enduring commitment to the documentation of the cultural heritage of Arabia. This important part of his work developed out of a concern for its loss due to the rapid socio-economic developments in the regions of Ras al-Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates and Asir in Saudi Arabia (Dostal 1979, 1983, 1984, 2002). In order to promote the appreciation and further development of traditional culture across the peninsula, he aimed to create an ethnographic atlas that would map out various types of cultural phenomena such as domestic architecture, agricultural practices, and folk astronomy. These efforts demonstrate his strong belief in the importance and celebration of all types of heritage, and secure his contribution to the current movements dedicated to its preservation in Arabia today.

The safeguarding of cultural heritage has also been a prevalent activity within Yemen. Since the 1970s various international teams have sought to conserve the architecture of many cities, leading to the inscription of three cultural properties in Ṣanʿāʾ, Shibām, and Zabīd onto the UNESCO World Heritage List as well as countless other preservation projects for domestic, public, and religious structures. Traditional construction practices also continue to be undertaken and cultivated for new building projects in revival styles, although those often have been criticized as superficial imitations (Lamprakos 2005, 2008). Additionally, the inventorying and conservation of manuscripts has been another major mission dedicated to cultural heritage in Yemen. Most recently, digitization of many of these documents has become a further important task for both ensuring the preservation of their contents and enabling them to be made available to a wider readership (Schmidtke & Thiele 2011).

Although these undertakings may be based on the intrinsic value of the cultural heritage itself, it is important to recognize and be aware of whose heritage is being celebrated. While UNESCO sites or Arabic manuscripts have been deemed to be of universal value for humankind, they also are linked to communities with strong national and local identities. For example, in the foreword of the edited volume *Yemen: 3000 Years of Art and Civilization in Arabia Felix* (Daum 1987), which accompanied an exhibition at the State Museum of Ethnology in Munich, Ali Abdallah Saleh, the president of the Yemen Arab Republic at the time, explicitly commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the revolution from the Imamate. He views the cultural heritage celebrated in the volume and exhibition, ranging from ancient archaeological remains to contemporary popular songs, as an expression of Yemeni national identity. Furthermore, he acknowledges that both their pre-Islamic and Islamic past has shaped their current self-understanding, which enabled them to thrive throughout their struggle for independence. Thus, in this perspective, heritage becomes less about the inherent value of the sites, objects, or activities themselves, and more about how they aid in the formation and maintenance of political identities.

This approach to cultural heritage may be viewed in different ways. As a social process, the past is engaged through strategic acts of remembering in order for individuals and groups to understand and politically maneuver in the present (Harrison 2008; Smith 2006). In this way, places, objects, and practices, which are

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deemed to be of cultural value, are used to construct and maintain a range of identities, both personal and collective, for the legitimization of power. Through this process heritage aids in the production of feelings of belonging and community, but also because the past is remembered differently by various groups, it additionally may become a tool of governance or subversion to the established political order. Hence, commemoration is a socially constructed and politicized act that occurs continuously and diversely as the meaning of the past changes with the needs of the present. At the same time, cultural heritage may also be seen as a social action that a community undertakes in order to maintain its own cohesion through its connection to a particular place (Appadurai 2001; Byrne 2008). With local material remains and practices, a community is better able to assert and sustain its identity through the 'production of a locality,' especially in environments of increasing interaction and mobility. These physical and visible signatures provide durable and credible stakes for the community's sense of belonging to a place, and help create its collective memories. Thus, cultural heritage is also intimately linked to the anchoring and spatialization of identity politics. Although these concepts of heritage are commonly applied to the modern contexts of nationalism and globalization (Boynter, Swartz Dodd & Parker 2010; Goode 2007; Kohl & Fawcett 1995; Labadi & Long 2010; Meskell 1998), they also are a key component of a tenth century document from South Arabia.

SOUTH ARABIAN IDENTITY IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD

After their participation in the Islamic conquests of Mesopotamia, the Levant, and Egypt in the seventh century, many Yemenis settled with their families in the new garrison towns to the north. This emigration engendered an uncertain political situation in South Arabia, in which the local tribes undertook further consolidation of their territories and the emergent Islamic caliphate asserted its authority to varying degrees of success in the cities of Ṣanʿāʾ and al-Janad as well as in the Ḥaḍramawt region. Over the next few centuries the governors sent to South Arabia by the Rashidun Caliphate, the Umayyads, and the Abbasids faced increasing resistance to their rule, while representatives of minority religious groups, including the Kharijites, Isma'ilis, and Zaydis, entered the region and developed their own political bases (al-Mad'aj 1988). Concurrently during this period, a rivalry developed in the wider peninsula between the tribes of the northern Arabs and the tribes of the southern Arabs as both claimed legitimacy for political leadership of the Islamic community as whole (Crone 1994; Shaban 1971).

This competition between the Arabs of the north and south was reflected in various types of historiographic literature including the creation of ideologically driven genealogies. For example, *Jamharat al-nasab* (*Compendium of Genealogy*) (Caskel 1966), compiled by Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 204/819) of al-Kūfa, extensively documents the northern tribes beginning with the Quraysh, but offers less information about the southern tribes. The identity and pride of the northern Arabs was further established and expressed through the collection, transmission, and production of different genres of poetry as well as tales about pre-Islamic heroism and generosity known as the *ayyām al-ʿarab* (Agha & Khalidi 2002-3; Drory 1996). The southern Arabs, however, bolstered themselves by emphasizing reports of the glorious deeds and achievements of the pre-Islamic Himyarite kings, later termed the 'Qaḥṭān Saga[2]' (Pitrovsky 1986).

Early proponents of these South Arabian stories include ʿAbīd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī (d. 60/679), who wrote *Akhbār alƔaman wa-ashʿārihā wa-ansābihā* (*Reports of the Yemen and its Poetry and Genealogy*) (Crosby 1985), and Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110/728), who wrote *Kitāb al-mulūk al-mutawwaja min Ḥimyar wa-akhbārihim wa-qiṣaṣihim wa-qubūrihim wa-ashʿarihim* (*The Crowned Kings of Himyar, their Narratives, Stories, Tombs and Poems*)[3]. A later version is found in *al-Qaṣīda al-Ḥimyariyya* (*The Himyarite Qasida*) by Nashwān b. Saʿīd al-Ḥimyarī (d. ca. 573/1178) (Kremer 1865; Larcher 2003). These various manifestations of the Qaḥṭān Saga form a picture of the southern Arabs as superior in their monotheism, warfare, and language. But the historical value of their contents has been questioned and speculated to be little more than thinly

[2] Qaḥṭān was considered the genealogical forefather of South Arabia in contradistinction to ʿAdnan of North Arabia.

[3] This lost work is probably the basis for a later volume entitled *Kitāb al-tījān fī mulūk Ḥimyar wa-lƔaman* (The Books of Crowns, concerning the Kings of Himyar and Yaman), which was transmitted by ʿAbd al-Malik b. Hishām and ascribed to Wahb b. Munnabih (Krenkow 1928). An edition of ʿAbīd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī's *Akhbār alƔaman wa-ashʿārihā wa-ansābihā* is also included in Krenkow's book.

veiled folkloric propaganda with a minimal basis in actual events (Donner 1995: 196-197, 224; Duri 1983: 130-135). This skeptical assessment of these works is further buoyed by biographical evidence that the authors themselves were involved in politics in different ways. Although details on ʿAbīd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī's life are scarce, leading some modern scholars to believe him to be a fictitious figure, he is said to have been summoned to be the history tutor of the Umayyad Caliph al-Muʿāwiya (Crosby 1985: 3). Wahb b. Munnabih had been appointed as a judge in Ṣanʿāʾ, but later was put in jail and eventually flogged to death at the discretion of the Umayyad governor of Yemen (Khoury 2013). Finally, Nashwān b. Saʿīd al-Ḥimyarī attempted to be elected as the leader of the Zaydi community in Yemen with a platform that openly criticized the Quraysh, but did not gather enough support to win (al-Akwaʿ 1987: 216-228).

This type of politically engaged scholar is perhaps best epitomized in South Arabia by the most celebrated advocate of the Qaḥṭān Saga in the early medieval period. Nicknamed *Lisān alɎaman* ("The Tongue of Yemen"), the polymath Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. Yaʿqūb b. Yūsuf al-Hamdānī (d. 334/945) belonged to the Bakīl section of the Hamdān confederation in the northern highlands (Löfgren 2013; Toll 2008). Born in Ṣanʿāʾ at the end of the ninth century to a family of traders and camel dealers, he journeyed extensively across the Arabian Peninsula to places such as Makka and al-Kūfa. These travels inspired him to write the geographic text *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿarab* (*The Description of the Peninsula of the Arabs*) (Müller 1884-91; al-Akwaʿ 1974) as well as other books on agriculture, astronomy, medicine, and metallurgy. In addition to this scientific writing, he also composed passionate political poetry supporting the South Arabian tribes and antagonizing those of the north including the Zaydi religious sect, whom he saw as interfering with local tribal affairs while he was living in the northern city of Ṣaʿda for twenty years (Gochenour 1984: 259-261; Hamdani 1986: 160-162; Heiss 1998: 18). These verbal attacks seemingly escalated to the extent that he was imprisoned in Ṣanʿāʾ for three years. Upon his release, he remained in the highland town of Rayda for the remainder of his life under the protection of a local shaykh where he wrote his most ambitious work, *al-Iklīl* (*The Crown)*.

Although *al-Iklīl* is commonly considered a historical text, this classification may be inadequate due to its diverse content and clear political intent. Comprising ten volumes, it includes genealogies of the South Arabian tribes, an affirmation of their merits, a refutation of false statements and legends about them, records of their antiquities and ancient inscriptions, and finally an extended narrative covering the pre-Islamic history of South Arabia. Beyond a merely academic compendium of information compiled by al-Hamdānī about his pre-Islamic ancestors, altogether it represents a well-rounded celebratory work that establishes the identity and superiority of the South Arabian tribes in diverse ways. Not all tribesmen, however, seemed to have agreed with this presentation, and al-Qiftī reports that some had succeeded in destroying at least parts of it (1950: 283). As a result, only four of its volumes are known to have survived.

Three of the surviving volumes (1, 2, and 10) are the genealogical records of the beginning of humankind and the major South Arabian tribal confederations. In his first volume, al-Hamdānī openly criticizes the genealogies produced in the north and accuses their compilers to have minimized the presence of the tribes of South Arabia in order to demonstrate greater antiquity of the North Arabian tribes (Duri 1983: 17). In response, he compiled these volumes based on local written and oral sources including the records (*sijill*) of the Khawlān tribe in Ṣaʿda[4] and tribal experts such as Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ib.ʿAbdallāh b. Saʿīd al-Yaharī, Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Awsānī, and Muḥammad b. Yūnis al-Abrahī, as well as the works of ʿAbīd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī and Wahb b. Munabbih (Heiss 1998: 24-26). Thus, through the use of this common historiographic genre, al-Hamdānī not only clearly delineates the internal cohesion and exclusionary boundaries of the South Arabian tribal community, but he also emphasizes their connections to the Arabs of antiquity and the biblical Old Testament. For the final surviving volume of *al-Iklīl* (8), however, he undertakes a less common approach to South Arabian identity explicitly focused on cultural heritage.

[4] The term *sijill* is first found in Arabic in the Quran (sura 21, verse 104) in reference to written documents or letters. But it may relate to the Byzantine Greek term *sigillion* or Roman term *sigillum*, whose meanings took on a more bureaucratic sense associated with imperial edicts, treaties, or the seals placed on them. For al-Hamdānī, *sijill* refers to written records of primarily genealogical content, but also contain information about historical events. They presumably originated in the pre-Islamic period, although some of them may have been fabricated at a later date (Heiss 1998: 48-56).

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE EIGHTH VOLUME OF *AL-IKLĪL*

The eighth volume of *al-Iklīl* contains three main sections including descriptions of monuments, reports on the uncovering of burials, and long elegiac poems, as well as two shorter entries on treasures and the Himyarite script. The volume has been fully edited three times (al-Akwaʿ 1979 [2004[5]]; al-Karmalī 1931; Faris 1940), partially translated into English (Faris 1938), and partially edited and translated into German (Müller 1879, 1880)[6]. Due to its unparalleled bounty of colorful information about early medieval South Arabia, many historians, philologists, and archaeologists often have mined this text for comparative place-names or graphic accounts of sites and structures found during their fieldwork (e.g., Müller 1986; Wade 1986). Nevertheless, this book has only been discussed or analyzed as an overall work when it is briefly cited together with the rest of the volumes of *al-Iklīl* as an example of political legitimation for the tribes of South Arabia. Subsequently, with a focus on the monuments section of the volume, the rest of this chapter examines more closely how al-Hamdānī undertakes this ideological task through the analytical lens of the modern conception of cultural heritage, although he does not use this terminology himself[7]. In this way, the eighth volume may be understood as a formulation and expression of the cultural and political identity of the South Arabian tribes not based on their genealogical ties, language, or origin story, but rather the landscape of monuments that surround them.

As a whole the structure of this volume appears disjointed, unorganized, and cobbled-together. Its usually brief entries, which are focused on a particular location with one or more monuments, do not seem to have clear continuity or connections among themselves. The phrase, "al-Hamdānī states," appears several times throughout the text in an irregular manner, emphasizing its compilatory nature and probably indicating its later editing. The recensions of this text come down through Nashwān b. Saʿīd al-Ḥimyarī whose influence on the text remains ambiguous albeit extant (Löfgren 2013; Heiss 1998: 25-26; Vida 1940: 162-164). The individual entries usually do not have a clear chain of transmission with the transmitters only haphazardly mentioned in the text itself. The main source al-Hamdānī seems to use for volume eight was the previously mentioned al-Yaharī, but the other sources utilized for the genealogical volumes were also likely consulted in addition to another work, entitled *Mafākhir Hamdān* (*The Glories of Hamdan)*, by Ibn ʿAbbās al-Murhibī (Vida 1940: 164). Similarly, most entries do not follow a patterned structure, but rather veer off describing a monument in diverse ways for multiple periods from different perspectives with various types of evidence. Hence, this volume is not a historical document that reformulates the Qaḥṭān Saga in a direct narrative manner as presumably would have been found in volumes four through six, but rather it is a documentation of cultural heritage that uses scientific descriptions, historical reports, poetry, Quranic verses, astrological observations, and fantastical stories to support his larger political goal.

Despite this lack of an over-arching narrative structure and multiplicity of supporting evidence, a certain inner consistency does emerge in the eighth volume when approached as a work of historical geography[8]. As demonstrated by his travels and other geographic work, al-Hamdānī clearly had a broad knowledge of the diverse landscapes of Yemen, and specifically states his personal familiarity with its monuments in this volume[9]. Subsequently, it is not unexpected that he would choose to organize a text through a spatial lens.

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[5] For consistency and clarity the page numbers cited from *al-Iklīl* in this chapter come from the al-Akwaʿ edition reprint (2004).

[6] These various editions are based on different manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts, but have sequentially built on one another for interpretation of unclear characters and words (Faris 1938: 4-6; Heiss 1998: 28-29; Löfgren 1939, 1942, 1943).

[7] Despite the common practice by some Muslims of condemning or destroying antiquities from the pre-Islamic period or *al-Jahiliyya* (time of ignorance), there are also texts from the medieval period that discuss and celebrate them. These documents, including some early "excavation reports," describe the material record from Arabia, Iran, and Egypt (El Daly 2005; Khalidi 1994: 66; Milwright 2011: 1-2).

[8] His use of evidence from the Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy to give the latitude and longitude coordinates for the cities of Zafār, Māʾrib, and Ṣanʿāʾ shows direct influence from this scientific genre (al-Hamdānī 2004: 61).

[9] Al-Hamdānī directly states in *Iklīl 8*: "I have seen all the ruins and the palaces of al-Yaman, except Ghumdān of which only a portion of the lower part of a wall is left" (al-Hamdānī 2004: 63). Near the end of the monuments section, however, he undercuts this statement by writing: "This was all we knew of the castles and public building of al-Yaman save a few of them which we could not locate" (al-Hamdānī 2004: 139). While the monuments he reports on in the volume are naturally not as comprehensive of a record as the archaeological remains known from modern research, they are distributed across a large part of what is now the Republic of Yemen. This distribution includes the Ḥaḍramawt region, but most of them are concentrated in the northern highlands and eastern desert.

Furthermore, the identity of the sedentary tribes of South Arabia was based on territory in addition to genealogy[10]. Various geographers over the course of the medieval period including al-Hamdānī documented these remarkably stable micro-regional divisions (Matsumoto 2003: 71-78). Hence, his approach to formulating a wider South Arabian identity through a precise sense of place based on its cultural heritage closely adhered to the already extant tribal world-view for group identity based on territory[11].

This writing strategy is seemingly in opposition to North Arabian nostalgia poetry, in which identity was expressed through a yearning for a (partly illusionary) homeland in the desert. While hundreds of place-names describing specific geographic localities were mentioned in the verses of this poetry, later on these names became more symbolic and in aggregate portrayed a more ambiguous or interchangeable sense of place that eventually came to be known simply as *Najd* (Agha & Khalidi 2002-3: 104-105). On the contrary, *al-Iklīl*'s monument descriptions *en masse* form a distinct spatialization of South Arabia that does not blend together into a more vague feeling of nostalgia. While much poetry is quoted in the descriptions, it is frequently juxtaposed with other types of evidence that contextualize it. Consequently, through this process of drawing on connections between the past and the present of specific places in order to define strategic collective memories, al-Hamdānī creates distinct localities for its inhabitants that anchor their overall regional identity. The remainder of this chapter gives a brief overview of the types of monuments that al-Hamdānī commemorates in this volume in order to express and produce feelings of community and pride in the southern Arabs. Additionally, it highlights the ways he connects these structures to various aspects of South Arabian identity including its architectural expertise, religious history, and agricultural practices.

SOUTH ARABIAN MONUMENTS AND THE FORMATION OF A REGIONAL POLITICAL IDENTITY

Palaces and other fortified architecture

Behold the great Ghumdān high and lofty
Pouring balsam on the aching heart;
Twenty stories, see it climbing
Up into heaven's utmost part;
A turban of clouds its head encircles
Its mantle is of marble made,
An alabaster girdle around it buckles,
And onyx stone, the brocade.
Made of copper on the roof you see
Flying eagles on diagonal corners standing,
Even so on the remaining two
Roaring lions the palace attending[12].
(al-Hamdānī 2004: 38)

The first and most often described type of monuments in the eighth volume of al-Iklīl are palaces (*quṣūr*, s. *qaṣr*), but in a similar style of architecture there are also forts (*ḥuṣūn*, s. *ḥiṣn*) and towers (*maḥāfid*, s. *maḥfid*[13]). Organized by place-name, al-Hamdānī usually begins these entries with a technical appraisal of the structures. Although many of the monuments are described to be at least partially destroyed, the great-

[10] This concept of tribal identity in South Arabia has been examined in medieval and modern contexts (Brandt 2012; Dresch 1991; Wilson 1989).

[11] Political unity of South Arabia as a whole, however, did not occur until briefly in the seventeenth century under the Qasimi dynasty (Klaric 2008), and then in 1990 with the formation of the Republic of Yemen.

[12] This translation comes from Faris (1938: 15).

[13] This translation of the term *maḥfid* comes from al-Selwi's specialized dictionary of words found in the works of al-Hamdani and Nashwan b. Sa'id al-Himyari (1987: 71). But reviewing the way it is used throughout this volume in different contexts, it also may be interpreted more broadly as 'monument' or 'stronghold.'

ness of their unique technological construction is commonly expounded upon in both prose and poetry. Some examples include the giant square towers of Nāʿit that are climbed using inset iron nails in order to signal a warning to the surrounding mountains by burning wax (al-Hamdānī 2004: 64), and the marble slab floor in a palace of Ḍahr on which the king would beat victims with a wooden rod (al-Hamdānī 2004: 96). But the most celebrated structure is the twenty story Ghumdān palace of Ṣanʿāʾ, which has been argued to be the inspiration for the architectural style of the Dome of the Rock built by the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik in the seventh century in al-Quds/Jerusalem (Khoury 1993). As specified in the panegyric verses above, beyond its exceptional height, it was significant for the various precious materials used in its construction such as alabaster, onyx stone, and marble[14]. Nonetheless, its penthouse, topped with a transparent marble ceiling and surrounded by four copper lion statues that would roar when the wind blew, was its most impressive feature with descriptions cited from both Wahb b. Munabbih and ʿAbīd b. Sharyah al-Jurhumī (al-Hamdānī 2004: 44-45).

In addition to the exceptional quality of the palaces' construction, the identity of their builders is another major topic repeatedly addressed throughout the volume. Answers put forward range from more fantastical speculation based on religious texts to specific historical figures based on documentary evidence. From a religious perspective, *jinn* sent by Solomon are attributed to have helped Bilqīs, queen of Sabāʾ, build several palaces across the region, including the Ghumdān in Ṣanʿāʾ and Salhīn in Māʾrib (al-Hamdānī 2004: 51-52, 79-81). But al-Hamdānī aggressively denies this claim, and points out that the probable reason for the continuation of this story is based on the Quranic verse that describes the *jinn*'s servitude for Solomon[15]. Thus, al-Hamdānī's decision to include this perspective in the volume, despite doubts in its veracity, reveals his desire to exploit its still potent ideological power. While it may undercut the achievements of the actual local builders, it also profitably connects South Arabia to important historical and religious figures of the pre-Islamic period. Moreover, for many other structures, al-Hamdānī counteractively references inscriptions of the names of the original Himyarite builders, which are found on stone blocks at the sites themselves such as at Shiḥrār (al-Hamdānī 2004: 84) or Ḥadaqān (al-Hamdānī 2004: 117). Some palaces, such as one at Rawthān (al-Hamdānī 2004: 123-124), are stated to have been passed down to its contemporary occupants indicating a stable continuity between the past and present. At other sites, such as Bayt Maḥfid (al-Hamdānī 2004: 87), the tribal groups currently living there do not have a direct relationship to the original builders. Nonetheless, the memory of the ones who laid the first foundations persists as a reminder of the exceptional accomplishments of the Himyarite past and by implication their political glory.

Beyond these descriptions of the architecture and records of their first builders, al-Hamdānī also cites events from the deep and recent past that occurred at these sites in order to further anchor their locality in collective memory and evoke feelings of community. Many of these events emphasize the political struggle of the southern Arabs through description of the, at least, partial destruction of these structures by enemies from outside South Arabia. For example, the Aksumite invasion of the region is commemorated through a reference of their destruction of the Dāmigh palaces[16] (al-Hamdānī 2004: 91), and the Fatimid military campaigns are remembered through an account of the burning down of the palace of Bayt Ḥanbaṣ by Barāʾ b. Abī al-Mulāḥif and the subsequent fleeing of its owner Abū Naṣr to Ṣaʿḍa in 295 A.H./907 A.D. (al-Hamdānī 2004: 83). Other entries contain legendary stories from the pre-Islamic period that connect a site to the wider historical processes of South Arabia. For example, at the end of the entry for the palace of Ghaymān, there is a long anecdote about the local royal families' difficulties with succession and problems with rulership due to the intense and bloody political competition of the time (al-Hamdānī 2004: 104-107). While al-Hamdānī ties this story to a particular ruler in order to establish it as an actual historical event, it may also be interpreted more generally as an allegory for the nature of political survival during the pre-Islamic period and the gradual decline of the Himyarite kingdom. Thus, these events from all periods induce collective memories

[14] There is a different short entry in the volume that focused on the various sources for precious minerals in South Arabia (al-Hamdani 2004: 58-59).

[15] Sura 34, verse 13: They made for him what he willed of elevated chambers, statues, bowls like reservoirs, and stationary kettles.

[16] In reaction to the massacre of the Christian community at Najrān by the last Himyarite king Yūsuf Asʿar Yathʿar, commonly known as Dhū-Nuwās, the Aksumites invaded and controlled South Arabia from 525 A.D. until the arrival of the Persians in 570 A.D. under the command of Wahriz in response to a Yemeni plea for help to the Sassanid court.

of not only the struggles, but also, by implication, the recovery and continuing perseverance of the southern Arabs throughout their history.

This approach to non-sequential historical writing that layers multiple periods and emphasizes geography for the sake of utilizing its cultural heritage to produce feelings of pride, solidarity, and endurance is best exemplified in al-Hamdānī's long entry on the city of Ṣanʿāʾ and its palace of Ghumdān. Intertwined in this description he switches between ancient history, modern history, and contemporary events, but here I will put the different periods back into chronological order to more easily demonstrate how they relate to each other. The first period of distant antiquity instills the Ghumdān with importance through its connection to the Arabs' eponymous ancestor Sām (Shem), son of Nūh (Noah). Al-Hamdānī states that he surveyed this location, measured its foundations, and dug its well (al-Hamdānī 2004: 27-28). The second period refers to the powerful Himyarite empire focusing on the construction of the Ghumdān by the possibly mythical Ilā Sharaḥ Yaḥḍib (al-Hamdānī 2004: 45). The third period al-Hamdānī chooses to commemorate is the very emergence of Islam. Yet, instead of a religious story of the acceptance of Islam by the local inhabitants, he unequivocally emphasizes the non-subservience of South Arabia to the newly empowered northern Arabs. First, he quotes a Quranic verse implying the questionable nature of the Ghumdān palace[17], before then giving a brief account of Muḥammad's command to Farwa b. Musayk to undertake an ultimately unsuccessful mission to destroy it (al-Hamdānī 2004: 48). Elsewhere, however, al-Hamdānī quickly reveals in passing that the palace was demolished in the time of Muḥammad's successor ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (al-Hamdānī 2004: 40). Finally, the fourth period of remembrance for Ṣanʿāʾ belongs to the tumultuous period of history during al-Hamdānī's childhood and adolescence, in which the local dynasty of the Yuʿfirids were in continual conflict with both the Zaydis and Fatimids for political dominance of the northern highlands. A reference to the effects of the Zaydi occupation of Ṣanʿāʾ briefly appears in the middle of a section of astrological analysis of the planets correlations to events in the city[18]. Presumably assuming the contemporary readers' knowledge of what would have been regarded as a current event, he does not focus on or even mention the Zaydi invaders in the text. Instead, al-Hamdānī explicitly concentrates on the consequences of their presence in the region for the local population by describing a massacre on a Friday in 288 A.H./901 A.D., in which five hundred people of Ṣanʿāʾ were killed at the nearby village of Bayt Baws[19] (2004: 34). Remembrance of the Fatimid occupation of Ṣanʿāʾ, however, is more explicit as their destruction of the city a few years later is alluded to twice in the text. The first reference to this event appears in a short statement noting the almost complete restoration of the city after its demolition a few years after 290 A.H./903 A.D. (al-Hamdānī 2004: 28-29). The second more informative description of this event appears in a passage mentioning the houses near the ruins of Ghumdān. Al-Hamdānī notes that one of them was utilized by the Fatimid leader "Ibn Faḍl al-Qarmatī" on the day he besieged Ṣanʿāʾ, stormed its congregational mosque, and subjugated its ruler and his people[20] (al-Hamdānī 2004: 37). Overall, although these events are spaced out throughout the entry in non-sequential order, they are contextualized to make a political statement rather than simply narrate a chronological history. Through the layering of these multiple periods, he parallels the prophetic, ancient, historical, and recent importance of the city of Ṣanʿāʾ, and promotes the consolidation of a South Arabian identity in the face of contemporary intruding political forces.

[17] Sura 9, verse 110: The building which they built will not cease to be a misgiving in their hearts.

[18] Imam al-Ḥādī ilā al-Ḥaqq, the leader of the Zaydis, first took control of Ṣanᶜāʾ in 22 Muḥarram 288 A.H./16 January 901 A.D., but continued to battle with the Yuᶜfirids until evacuating the city in Jumādā II 289/June 902 (al-Ḥusayn 1968: 176-187).

[19] The specific event does not seem to be directly recounted in the biography of al-Ḥādī, but during the second half of that year the village of Bayt Baws, located just south of Sanaa, is named several times as a main military station for the local groups that were fighting against him (al-ᶜAlawī 1971: 227-229).

[20] Ibn al-Faḍl arrived to Yemen in 268 A.H./881 A.D. with his colleague Abū al-Qāsim in order to establish a base for the Fatimids. After taking control of southern Yemen, Ibn al-Faḍl made his way northward and conquered Ṣanᶜāʾ in 293 A.H./905 A.D. (al-Ḥusayn 1968: 196-198).

PRE-ISLAMIC AND ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

> There are columns in the mosque of Madar that were taken from these palaces. There are nothing like them in *al-Masjid al-Haram*. The columns at Madar are longer, thicker, and better hewn as if they were cast in a mold (al-Hamdānī 2004: 128-129).

Religious monuments make up the second major type of structure described in the eighth volume of *al-Iklīl*. The fact that al-Hamdānī chose to discuss pre-Islamic and Islamic buildings insinuates the significance of both periods for the history and identity of the inhabitants of South Arabia, as well as reveals a more relaxed attitude toward the pre-Islamic period than is found in the polemics of many other Muslim scholars. This perspective is similar to that expressed by former President Saleh in the previously mentioned museum exhibition volume. As the remains of the Himyarite fortified architecture were still ubiquitous in the landscape of al-Hamdānī's Yemen, so were their earlier temples. Instead of ignoring them or sharply criticizing their previous purpose, al-Hamdānī addresses them succinctly in mainly a single entry entitled, "Riʾām and the source of fire in al-Yaman" (al-Hamdānī 2004: 99-101). In this passage, he describes in a mostly objective manner a place of pilgrimage where an ascetic hermit lived on a mountain summit in the territory of the Hamdān tribal confederation. Additionally, he mentions a nearby palace where a former king of Riʾām would perform a ritual genuflection outside its gate in front of a wall containing a stone carved with the pictures of a sun and crescent moon. These icons are the only direct, albeit ambiguous, indications and acknowledgement of the polytheism of their past. Nevertheless, after referencing a few other places of pilgrimage in South Arabia, al-Hamdānī finishes the entry by mentioning the destruction of the site of Ghaṭfān by the Yemeni Zuhayr b. Junāb during the pre-Islamic period, thereby emphasizing not only South Arabia's transition to monotheism but also their denigration of un-Islamic practices even before the time of the prophet Muḥammad.

The main entry on Islamic religious monuments entitled, "The Holy Mosques of al-Yaman," is located, probably not unintentionally, directly next in the volume (al-Hamdānī 2004: 102-103). This section, however, is even shorter than the previous, and consists of little more than a list of mosques. This brevity may be due to the lack of interest or futility in using Islamic architecture as a basis for demonstrating superiority over the northern Arabs, although an attempt at this type of claim is described below. Nonetheless, the most important of the mosques, designated by him specifically as the "Islamic mosques," were those of Ṣanʿāʾ, al-Janad, and Ṣaʿḍa. At these cities al-Hamdānī metaphorically states the Prophet's she-camel knelt down. By utilizing this manner of description that mimics the way the prophet's mosque was chosen in al-Madīna, he possibly insinuates them to be the first locations of Islam in Yemen. Normally, however, only the first two are identified in the historical record as the places where the first Muslim missionaries established their bases with a third one set up at an unidentified site in the Ḥaḍramawt region.

A final important detail about the interface between pre-Islamic and Islamic buildings as reflective of attitudes toward the past is found in the entry on the monuments of Madar[21] (al-Hamdānī 2004: 128-129). As quoted above, the columns of the mosque of Madar were extracted from the ruins of its former Himyarite palaces, demonstrating there was no problem or shame for the southern Arabs to use pre-Islamic architecture to create their sacred buildings. This practice was common for the construction of mosques in Yemen with art historical research indicating that many of their decorated columns and capitals were taken from pre-Islamic secular or religious buildings (Finster 1992). Fieldwork at the site of Madar, however, indicates its current mosque does not reflect al-Hamdānī's description (al-Akwaʿ 1995-1996: 1995). Nevertheless, by emphasizing the better aesthetics of the ancient columns over those used to construct the Sacred Mosque of Makka (*al-Masjid al-Harām*), al-Hamdānī points out once again the predominance of the technical proficiency of the inhabitants of South Arabia over even those that constructed the sacred area around the Kaʿba.

[21] At the end of this entry, al-Hamdānī also gives a description of a stone across from the palace bearing a picture of a sun and crescent moon that the king faces whenever he leaves the palace. This statement is very similar to that found in the Riʾām chapter, indicating either misplaced editing or another rare description of the pre-Islamic temples, albeit the same type of one.

Dams and other water management structures

All hopes of succor from distress are gone,
The Māʾrib Dam by the flood was burst;
Of marble stone Ḥimyar this dam had built
To store the water for the time of thirst.
Thence to every field and every vineyard,
At fixed hours, the water they disperst[22].
(al-Hamdānī 2004: 146)

Dams and other water management structures are the third major type of monument written about by al-Hamdānī in *al-Iklīl*. As the tribes of South Arabia were mostly sedentary, structures for the collection and distribution of water were necessary for maintaining the cultivation of crops. Dams, terraces, cisterns, and wells are mentioned numerous times throughout the eighth volume, demonstrating the large role irrigation played in the everyday lives of the southern Arabs[23]and its subsequent importance for their cultural heritage. In his entry on Ḍahr, al-Hamdānī describes the wide variety of fruits found in its gardens, and precisely details the irrigation practices used to maintain them (2004: 92-93). In a similar manner, he also boasts of the Himyarite well of Tulfum built into what he claims is the spring with the best quality water in all of South Arabia (al-Hamdānī 2004: 129). Finally, as they are the most prominent monuments dedicated to water management, al-Hamdānī dedicates an entry specifically to list the Himyarite dams across the entire region (2004: 146-149).

By far the most famous and celebrated structure discussed by al-Hamdānī is the Māʾrib dam (al-Hamdānī 2004: 72-76). Like other architectural entries he marvels at its construction including the quality of its massive masonry and its current preservation, as well as provides various options for whom the original builders may be. But the main framing of the entry hangs on the dam's story from the Quran. Al-Hamdānī begins the entry with a verse describing the fecundity of the two gardens provisioned by God on both sides of the dam[24], and then a few lines down he follows with a second verse describing the great flood sent by God that broke the dam and left the gardens bearing only bitter fruit[25]. After these verses, instead of dwelling on the meaning of this divine act of retribution, he moves on to speculate on the tree from which the bitter fruit comes. Hence, he seems to reference this story only to acknowledge the supreme significance of the dam in ancient Arab history, but does not want to dwell on its later destruction and the subsequent socio-political repercussions, e.g. the supposed mass emigration of many South Arabian tribes to the north. In this way, the passage's limitations suggest al-Hamdānī 's desire to celebrate it mainly as an exceptional feat of pre-Islamic architecture, and mostly ignore its deeper and more complicated significance for early Islamic history at a point when the dominance of South Arabia in the wider peninsula is perceived to have declined.

CONCLUSION

In the eighth volume of *al-Iklīl*, al-Hamdānī succeeds in promoting and legitimizing the cultural, regional, and political identity of the inhabitants of South Arabia by intertwining its different aspects with various types of monuments distributed throughout their landscape. It most explicitly inspires pride and feelings of superiority over northern Arabs through the continual enumeration of exceptional secular and religious structures distributed across the region, directly harkening back to the prosperity of the pre-Islamic Himyarite kingdom. It is most powerful, however, when it connects certain monuments to specific events or periods in their collective memory that resulted in negative consequences for the local population. The reason

[22] This translation comes from Faris (1938: 68).

[23] Water management and irrigation structures from as early as the third millennium B.C. have been well-documented by archaeologists all over Yemen (Wilkinson 2006).

[24] Sura 34, verse 15: There was for Sabāʾ in their dwelling place a sign: two gardens on the right and on the left. Eat from the provisions of your Lord and be grateful to Him. A good land and a forgiving lord.

[25] Sura 34, verse 16: But they turned away, so We sent upon them the flood of the dam, and We replaced their two gardens with gardens of bitter fruit, tamarisks, and something of sparse lote trees.

al-Hamdānī chose to commemorate these darker aspects of their past seems to be an attempt to engender specific motivation for the contemporary population of his time to act against their current invaders in the form of the Zaydis and Fatimids.

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