

PART 3

Genealogies as Means for Constructing Communities



The Political Construction of a Tribal Genealogy from Early Medieval South Arabia*

Daniel Mahoney

Introduction

Genealogy was a key concept and practice for the wider tribal community of Arabia in the early medieval period. Its diverse manifestations offered a distinct view of the deep past through constellations that structured the relationships among the various nomadic and sedentary groups who resided in the broad expanse of the peninsula. At the same time, these genealogies also represented contemporary political concerns and viewpoints as framed through their specific selected content and organization, which brought some tribes more closely together while delineating clear divisions among others.¹ This paper investigates the historiographic context and socio-political implications of a 3rd/10th century² genealogy from South Arabia, which at the time, in addition to being on the periphery of the Abbasid Caliphate, had also come under attack from various Islamic minority groups from the north. To begin, I outline a very brief overview of the early development of genealogies from the Arabian Peninsula and two basic structural paradigms around which they were organized, culminating in the description of an enormous genealogical compilation created in 2nd/9th century Iraq. Then I offer an alternative view from the south of these same genealogical paradigms as they manifest differently in a second large compilation due to the region's contrasting past historical experience and current political situation. Finally, I focus on an example of the specific tribal group of Madhhij, as it appears in both major genealogies, in order to further highlight the specific political perspectives and social milieu of their respective architects.

* The research for this article was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): F42 Visions of Community.

- 1 These historical genealogies seem to represent the products of similar practices undertaken by modern tribal groups of Arabia as observed by ethnographers and historians alike (e.g., Brandt, "Remarks"; Donner, "Bakr B. Wā'il Tribes", 5–38; Kennedy, "Oral tradition", 531–44; Shryock, *Nationalism*).
- 2 Centuries and dates are given in both the *hijrī* (AH) and *milādī* (AD) calendars.

The Early Development of Genealogy in Arabia

In Arabia, the use of genealogy has provided a fundamental tool for tribal groups to document, organize, and understand their past, as well as to structure their contemporaneous social relationships in the present. It has been generally associated with the term *nasab* in Arabic, although there has been speculation over the semantic evolution of this term through the course of the early Islamic period, and instead it may be more directly linked to the specific concept of “descent”.³ Records of the patrilineal line of descent in rock inscriptions, in the form of a “personal name, son of personal name” (“*fulān b. fulān*”) sequence, have been located in various regions of the peninsula dating back millennia in proto-Arabic languages.⁴ These personal and intra-tribal lineages continued to be memorized and recited in the present day to varying numbers of generations depending on the tribesperson. Documented in both the historical and ethnographic record, there are also genealogical specialists (*nussāb*, s. *nassāba*), who were specifically designated to preserve this knowledge for individual tribal groups. In the early medieval period, however, an academic tradition of genealogy (*‘ilm al-nasab*) emerged that began to focus more often on the relationships among the tribes, dividing and clustering them into specific formations that represented past and present socio-political relations.⁵

The beginning of this change can be traced back to the emergence of Islam and the effects of the subsequent conquests, migration, and settlement of many tribes in other areas of the Near East and beyond. An aim of the Prophet Muḥammad was to encourage his fellow tribesmen to look past and forget their kinship-based social ties and unify in submission to one god. While this goal was not fully accomplished, as was most clearly evidenced almost immediately by the outbreak of the Ridda wars upon the death of Muḥammad, it did set a foundation upon which Arabs began to view themselves as a more

3 Szombathy, *Roots*, 62–66.

4 These have been primarily documented in the deserts of northern Arabia, although some texts are also found on the edge of the Ramlat al-Sabatayn in Yemen (Macdonald, “Literacy”, 49–118). Beyond these texts, it is assumed, based on knowledge of the practices in the present and historical periods, that these personal lineages would have primarily been preserved through oral recitation and memorization.

5 Szombathy provides an extensive critical overview of the emergence of this discipline (*Roots*, 105–71). Nonetheless, an important exception to the focus on inter-tribal relationships is the understandable attention given to the lineage of the Muhammad and his tribe of Quraysh, which has received ample scrutiny by numerous medieval and modern scholars (e.g., Varisco, “Metaphors”, 139–56).

cohesive and connected community.⁶ The larger influence on this transformation of genealogy to focus more on groups, however, came about as a result of the Islamic conquests and the consequent migration and settlement of tribes across the peninsula. During the Islamic conquests, while tribesmen generally fought in battle together with their own specific tribes, the increased intermingling and interaction simultaneously caused new connections to begin to form among them. Furthermore, the additional influence of leaving their homelands to develop new social networks and ways of life within new surroundings engendered similar effects. Although the tribes set up their own separate living quarters in the military camps, these new settlements began to form into cities in which contact and intermixing among them and with other locals was inevitable. At the same time, their tribal affiliation and date of conversion became the basis for the amount and sequence that they were paid for their military service. An office (*diwan*) was set up by Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb for the equitable distribution of war booty. In order for the caliphate to determine this information, the extensive tribal genealogies were written down in a register (*daftar*).⁷ Thus, as the tribes in this context were now becoming new types of political-economic units and integrating in new ways, the genealogical connections among them were beginning to be more systematically documented.

One result of this documentation was the start of the development of a common, albeit by no means standard, terminology used to record and analyse the different vertical and horizontal levels in the extensive genealogical webs. Over time the human body, extending from head to toe, became a common metaphor to describe these segmentary intertribal relationships that comprised their overall macro-structure.⁸ In this hierarchical organization, at the

6 As Islam spread and non-Arabs wanted to convert into the religious community for various reasons, new genealogical connections and constructs were created to incorporate other ethnic groups as a whole, such as the Persians, into this ideological web of social relations (Savant, *New Muslims*, 31–60).

7 There is speculation that this story may be apocryphal, but it nonetheless emphasizes the point that the genealogies began to be written down, in at least a more comprehensive manner, during this period (Kennedy, “Oral tradition”, 540).

8 Descriptions of these human skeletal expressions of genealogy can be found, for example, in the works of al-Nuwayrī, al-Zamaksharī, and al-Qalaqashandī (Varisco, “Metaphors”, 141–44). Conversely, although the idiom of a tree was occasionally mentioned in texts, it has been argued that it did not become a popular form of representation in Islamic historiography until much later on, when it emerged from Persia and South Asia after the Mongol conquest in the 7th/13th century (Binbas, “Structure”, 465–544). One possible reason Binbas offers for this late appearance is that the trees become easy-to-understand depictions of genealogies for uneducated people who could not read the narratives of the universalist histories where

top level was the *shaʿb*, meaning an entire people or ethnic group such as the Arabs, or a more generically defined major group.⁹ Represented as the midline suture at the top of the skull, it was the source from which the rest of the genealogy emerged. The next level, represented by the skull bones, was the *qabīla*, roughly denoting “tribe” or more literally “those who meet face-to-face”.¹⁰ The third level, represented by the neck or chest, was the *ʿimāra*, meaning a large tribal segment that is self-sufficient. The fourth level, represented respectively by either the stomach or the thigh, was the *baṭn* or *fakhidh*, signifying a group that interacts on an everyday basis. The final level, represented by the lower leg, foot, or toe joint, was the *fāṣīla*, denoting the extended family household. There are many other terms which may be inserted into this hierarchy of segmentation coming from different regions of Arabia, but this concise summary broadly demonstrates how genealogical specialists were characterizing these connections through a more workable vocabulary and paradigmatic lens in order to organize, teach, and ultimately transmit the intricate relationships among the tribal groups in their past and present.

A second paradigm through which genealogists organized tribes focused on the early (pre-)history of the high-level macro-groupings and their resulting political relationships. Because the newly Islamized Arabs traced their roots back to the Prophet Adam as the first man, genealogists connected their Arab forefathers to patriarchs which the Islamic community shared with the other monotheistic belief systems in the Near East. This model of genealogical reasoning resulted in a tripartite world-view of their ancestry and ancient history.¹¹ First, the most ancient Arabs, known as the “perished Arabs” (*al-ʿarab*

most of these pictorial trees are found. But he instead favours the idea that the new Mongol rulers of Baghdad used the branches depicted in the trees, including lines connecting them to Muhammad and Chingis Khan, in order to legitimize their authority over the newly subjugated population. Furthermore, he parallels this ideological use of genealogical trees to similar developments occurring at the same time in the elite families of late medieval Europe, who also connected themselves to popular historical figures.

9 In contrast, in the ancient South Arabian language *ʿshaʿb* denotes a more low-level unit of social organization (e.g., sometimes translated as “tribe” or the even more problematic concept of “chiefdom”), demonstrating the malleability and non-fixed nature of the meanings of these terms for different regions (Beeston, “Shaʿb”); (Korotayev, “Chiefdom”, 242–56).

10 Chelhod, “Qabīla”.

11 This perspective on the ancestral history of the Arabs appears to have matured as propaganda for the Umayyads during the early 8th century. But, over the course of the medieval period, Islamic scholars differed in opinion on the composition of and relationships among these groups (Retsö, *Arabs*, 30–40).

al-bā'ida), were those tribes who were admonished by previous prophets about their wicked ways, but who had all died because they did not change their behaviour.¹² As a result, the peninsula was repopulated by two different groups of Arabs. On the one hand, there are the “pure Arabs” (*al-'arab al-āriba*), descendants of Joktan (Qaḥṭān) the great-great-grandson of Noah (Nūḥ) through Shem (Sām), who settled in the southern region of Arabia. On the other hand, there are the “Arabized Arabs” (*al-'arab al-musta'riba*), descendants of Abraham (Ibrāhīm) through Ishmael (Ismā'il), who journeyed into the northern region of Arabia and married into the local tribe of Jurhum. His eponymous descendent is 'Adnān, from which the northern Arabs including the lineage of Muḥammad document themselves. Stories describing battles between groups on either side of this dichotomy (*akhbār al-ayyām*) were bandied about in the early medieval period and attributed to the pre-Islamic period. They frequently became incorporated into the texts of the early medieval genealogies themselves in order to explicate or embellish certain personalities or groups, causing this literary-historiographic genre to become a complementary source of evidence that fleshes out the genealogical skeletons and bringing to life this seemingly primordial conflict between them. Unfortunately, however, the dating and historicity of most of these stories cannot be confirmed without separate supporting evidence, and their historical value has been criticized as being merely folkloric propaganda with a limited foundation in actual events.¹³ Hence they are now thought to reveal less about the tribal tensions in pre-Islamic Arabia than the politics of the early medieval period, during which a rivalry developed between 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.¹⁴ Overall, these two framing paradigms for Arabian genealogy and their underlying politics reached an apex in the early Abbasid period in a large genealogical compilation created by Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī.

Al-Kalbī was born and grew up in al-Kūfa during the decline of the Umayyad caliphate, and subsequently developed relationships with the Abbasid caliphs, although the exact extent of these ties is not entirely clear.¹⁵ While he was interested in and a prolific writer of many branches of knowledge, including a

12 Tales about the unheeded warning and subsequent vanquishing of these groups are located in the Quran, such as the Thamūd (7:73) and the 'Ād (11:50–57).

13 El-Sakkout, “Arab”, 40–67.

14 Crone, “Qays”, 1–57.

15 Caliph al-Ma'mūn mourned Ibn al-Kalbī's death in 819/821, and Caliph al-Mahdī utilized his knowledge in the conflict with the remaining Umayyads in Spain (Atallah, “al-Kalbī”).

specialization in pre-Islamic Arabia, he is most well-known for his work in the science of genealogy, following the path of his father, from whom he learned much of his information on the subject.¹⁶ The crowning achievement of al-Kalbī, *Jamharat al-nasab* (*The Multitude of Genealogy*), is an unparalleled compilation of Arab genealogies encompassing over 35,000 names and based on a panoply of oral and written sources to varying degrees, including specialists of Biblical, Pahlavi, and Palmyrean texts, Arabian antiquities, and the archives of the Christian communities of al-Ḥira. While most previous genealogies followed only certain tribes or lineages, this one combined them all into an intricate masterpiece displaying precisely how each fitted into the multi-level constellation of groups from ancient history until the time of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn. While appearing to be a work of reference in an encyclopaedic sense, it is also clearly laden with choices reflecting the political milieu of the time. Interspersed within the genealogical chains are brief biographical descriptions of select personalities, ranging from pagan poets and war heroes to Islamic religious figures and military officers. Moreover, its organization reveals a distinct and immensely detailed perspective on the political divisions in the Islamic community from the late Umayyad period, including its division of all of the tribes into two macro-conglomerates, reflecting the northern Arabs and the southern Arabs, respectively descending from the two eponymous figures of 'Adnān and Qaḥṭān.

A Short History of the North–South Tribal Interface in South Arabia and its Impact on South Arabian Genealogy

While there was a limited textual record in North Arabia during the pre-Islamic period, in the first millennium BC South Arabia developed a script that chronicled events in different textual genres and mediums, mainly focusing on the building accomplishments and conquests of military leaders of the early caravan kingdoms. One of the historical narratives to come out of the modern scholarly reconstruction of these events is the gradual infiltration of nomads from North Arabia beginning in early centuries of the Christian era.¹⁷ Although the raiding of the northern Arabs initially led to confrontations with the inhabitants of South Arabia, some also began to be incorporated as auxiliaries into the militaries of the South Arabian kingdoms. As this interaction increased

16 The extent of his father's influence and data that went into Ibn al-Kalbī's work is not clear, although he is clearly indebted to him (Caskel, *Ġamharat*, 72–81).

17 Robin, "Pénétration", 71–88.

and the conquests of the South Arabian militaries moved further into the peninsula, the incorporation of whole tribes became prevalent and an emergent symbiosis developed between the groups, peaking with the dominance of Ḥimyar over much of Arabia from the 3rd century until the beginning of the 6th century AD. Over the next few centuries, during the decline of the Himyarite empire and the emergence of Islam, unfortunately there is a limited historical record from which to try to understand this transitional period. By the 3rd/10th century, however, texts show that an entirely new demographic distribution had developed in South Arabia, in which much of its eastern and central regions were now occupied by the northern Arab groups that were formerly only located along the northern desert periphery. Hence, instead of viewing the socio-political transformation of Arabia in the early medieval period with the more commonly referenced emphasis on the migration of South Arabian tribes to the north through their participation in the Islamic conquests, alternatively the reverse, more long-term movement of pastoral-nomadic tribes from the central peninsula into the south and their incorporation into its social fabric is also important.

This social transformation seems to have affected the ways that the tribal community of South Arabia both organized itself and expressed its connections to others. While the tribes remained as sedentary territorial units for the most part, the terminology used to describe them changed from *shaʿb* to *qabila*, and the idiom of kinship became an important mode for expressing relationships among them. Previously, genealogy was apparently only a shallow record, but now it effectively became a much more extensive method for documenting the past and present ties both within the South Arabian tribal community and into North Arabia.¹⁸ Moreover, while the increased interest in genealogy may have come from the population movement to the south, it is also important to keep in mind the effects of the Islamic conversion of most of the South Arabian tribes and the gradually increasing imperial footprint emplaced on the region since the time of Muḥammad. During this period, governors were sent to South Arabia by the Rashidun caliphs, the Umayyads, and the Abbasids, and at the same time representatives of minority religious groups from the

18 Beeston supports this observation by citing Old South Arabian genealogies to consist mainly of a personal name and social group along with the possibility of the addition of the father's names as well ("Kingship", 257–58). Korotayev further explicates this transmission of "genealogical culture" ("Chieftdom", 249–51). However, it has also been shown that more extensive blood ties were recorded at least in the desert lowlands of pre-Islamic South Arabia, whereas the names of communities in the highlands are associated with their particular land or city (Robin, "Esquisse", 18–22; Schiettecatte, "Population", 35–51).

north, including the Kharijites, Isma'ilis, and Zaydis, also entered the region and developed their own political bases. This political dynamic of invasion and attempted subversion is the context in which the major genealogical compilation of South Arabia in the early medieval period was produced by a local tribesman named Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. Ya'qūb al-Hamdānī.

Nicknamed Lisān al-Yaman ("the tongue of Yemen") and Ibn al-Ḥā'ik ("son of the weaver"), the polymath al-Hamdānī (d. 334/945) belonged to the Bakīl section of the Hamdān tribal confederation in the northern highlands.¹⁹ Born into a merchant family in Ṣan'ā' at the end of the 2nd/9th century, he wrote about scientific topics such as geography, agriculture, and metallurgy. But his interest in both pan-peninsular regional politics and Yemeni local politics, specifically the threat of the external invading groups of the Zaydis and Isma'ilis, took over his focus.²⁰ Accordingly, he created a ten-volume compendium, called *al-Iklīl* (*The Crown*), which celebrated the history and heritage of some of the inhabitants of South Arabia. Not all southern tribesmen, however, seem to have agreed with this presentation, and the biographer al-Qiftī reports that some had succeeded in destroying at least parts of it.²¹ Currently, only four of its volumes are known to have survived. Three of these volumes (1, 2, and 10) are genealogical compilations comprising much (but not all) of the South Arabian tribal community.

In his introduction to the first volume, al-Hamdānī openly criticizes the genealogies produced in the north, specifically calling out the work of Hishām al-Kalbī and his father. He accuses them of purposely contracting the genealogies of the tribes of South Arabia and making limited attempts to travel to South Arabia in order to improve their knowledge of them.²² In response, through the compilation of these genealogical volumes based on local written and oral sources,²³ he emphasizes their closer connections to the Arabs and

19 Löfgren, "al-Hamdānī".

20 Gochenour, "Penetration", 259–61; Hamdani, "Al-Hamdānī", 159–67.

21 Al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, 1:283.

22 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 1:60–61. Duri, *Rise*, 17 interprets this section of *al-Iklīl* as indicating the relationship between the partisan tension among the southern and northern Arabs at this time and its manifestation in the contemporary genealogical compilations. More precisely, the northern genealogists were shortening the genealogies of the southern tribes in order not to accept that they were of greater antiquity than the northern tribes.

23 These include tribal experts such as Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'īd al-Yaharī, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Awsānī, and Muḥammad b. Yūnis al-Abrahī, the texts of previous South Arabian historians such as 'Abīd b. Sharyā al-Jurhumī and Wahb b. Munabbih, and the written records (*sijill*) of the Khawlān tribe in Ṣa'da. The term *sijill* is first found in Arabic in the Quran (21:104) in reference to written documents or letters. It may relate to the Byzantine Greek term *sigillion* or Roman term *sigillum*, whose meanings took on a

patriarchs of antiquity, bolstering their claim to the leadership of the Islamic political community as a whole. These volumes thus represent al-Hamdānī's vision of the internal cohesion and exclusionary boundaries of the South Arabian tribal community that reflect his political interests and motivations. In volume one, he first concentrates on the higher levels of the Qaḥṭān lineage, then gives the contested genealogy of the politically important Quḍā'a confederation,²⁴ and finishes by describing the genealogy and events associated with the tribal group of Khawlān which had been neglected in previous genealogical compilations. In volume two, he focuses on the genealogy of Ḥimyar b. al-Humaysa' in order to give the full segmentation of this once dominant group of the region. Finally, in volume ten, he reviews the Kahlān side of the South Arabian genealogy, but mostly concentrates on his own tribal confederation of Hamdān. As a result, he does not give much information on its other groups, including the Madhḥij, which were among those northern Arab tribes that had migrated into South Arabia over the previous millennium.

The Madhḥij Tribal Confederation in Early Medieval Genealogical Compilations of Arabia

During the 3rd century AD, the Madhḥij tribal confederation is mentioned in Old South Arabian inscriptions as "mḥjm" among the auxiliary armies that accompanied the Himyarite forces in their expansion into the peninsula and continued in this role for centuries. With the emergence of Islam, one of its leaders, Mālik b. Murāra of the Ruhā', became the intermediary between Muḥammad and the tribes of South Arabia, and many others took on leadership roles in the military during Islamic conquests to the north.²⁵ By the

more bureaucratic sense associated with imperial edicts, treaties, or the seals placed on them. For al-Hamdānī, *siḥill* refers to written records that primarily consists of 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, "Tribale Selbstorganisation", 48–56).

24 In the late Umayyad period this tribal group changed their genealogical affiliation from 'Adnān to Qaḥṭān in order to remain powerful (Crone, *Slaves*, 35). Kister provides further details into how this genealogical malleability was worked out by various scholars through narrations which personify these groups ("Quḍā'a"). For example, one tradition trying to reconcile how this transformation occurred states that Quḍā'a was born the son of Ma'add (son of 'Adnān), but later his mother married Mālik b. 'Amr al-Ḥimyarī, who also adopted the Quḍā'a, and thus he was then called Quḍā'a al-Ḥimyarī.

25 Smith, "Madhḥij".

3rd/10th century, parts of this major confederation seem to have broken apart into disunited segments scattered across South Arabia, most prominently in the central highlands and eastern desert region, occupying much of the former lands of the Ḥimyar tribes.²⁶ Al-Hamdānī's geographical description of the Arabian Peninsula (*Ṣifat Jazīrat al-'Arab*) provides the most spatially precise information regarding its presence in South Arabia. In this text he describes an area called Sarū Madhḥij where the tribes of Madhḥij were predominant. But he prefaces this description with an emphatic statement that they had only recently settled in this region, and previously it was the lands of the Ḥimyar group of Dhī Ru'ayn, containing its markets, royal graves, fortresses, and archaeological remains.²⁷ Beyond this section, al-Hamdānī then goes on to describe many other adjacent areas to the west, north, and south, which they were then cohabiting with other tribal groups.²⁸

The nature of Madhḥij's infiltration into these new regions remains unclear, and it cannot be assumed that it was entirely or necessarily an antagonistic process. There are stories (in the vein of the previously mentioned *akhbār al-ayyām* literature) found in both the *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-'Arab* and *al-Iklīl* that describe pre-Islamic and early Islamic period battles between the Madhḥij confederation and other South Arabian groups. A commonly cited confrontation is the Yaum al-Razm in which the Hamdān confederation defeated Madhḥij in 2/622.²⁹ But its war with Ḥimyar, which extended across various sections of South Arabia, is more commonly cited in these works. Succinct reports state that the population of the city of Shabwa in the Hadramawt region was forced to evacuate during one of these battles,³⁰ that Ḥimyar tribesman Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd b. Sālim al-Aṣbahī led the conflict against Madhḥij in al-Sarū,³¹ and that another conflict took place in the Jazīrat al-Sakāsik.³²

26 Some of the remaining tribes in South Arabia include the Janb, Murād, Zubayd, Ḥakam b. Sa'd al-Ashīra, and 'Ans (Gochenour, "Penetration", 330–33).

27 Al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 175–80.

28 For example, the *mikhālīf* of central South Arabia from the highlands descending to the eastern desert are recorded as containing tribes of both the Madhḥij and Ḥimyar, including Dhamār (al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 208), Banī 'Āmir (al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 181), and Radā' wa-Thāt (al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 203).

29 Al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 216. This conflict has been also interpreted in a wider sense by contemporary historians as a clash between the sedentary tribes and nomadic tribes of Yemen (al-Mad'aj, *Yemen*, 8; Dresch, "Tribes of Ḥāshid wa-Bakīl", 12).

30 Al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 171.

31 Al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 177.

32 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 2:66. This report directly states that this war took place during the pre-Islamic period (*al-Jāhilīyya*), but it cannot be confirmed that this periodization applies to all of its conflicts.

Additionally, they also cite specific individuals from Ḥimyar who were either killed in this war,³³ or who made a truce between the parties during it.³⁴ Finally, there is also indication that Madhḥij clashed with the Quḏā'a under the leadership of Abū Ra'tha al-Akbar.³⁵ But in addition to these reports of conflict, there is also other evidence that may hint at a less violent integration process, during which previous Ḥimyar or Hamdān tribes switched their allegiance to Madhḥij as well as the name of their confederation.³⁶ For example, Kawmān, a tribe in central Yemen, is described as transforming into Madhḥij (*yatamadhḥajūn*) from their Himyarite roots,³⁷ and the Ḥimyar tribes of Radmān³⁸ and Dhī Juzb³⁹ are stated to have entered into (*dakhalū fi*) the Madhḥij tribe of Murād. In these cases, however, it is not clear if their motivations for these realignments were more coerced or voluntary. Nonetheless, with this brief narrative sketch of Madhḥij in mind, which included some migrating north during the Islamic conquests and others migrating south into Yemen, how then was this confederation represented in the major genealogical compilations of the early medieval period?

Looking first at Madhḥij's location within al-Kalbī's *Jamharat al-nasab*, what immediately becomes noteworthy is the placement of this tribal group

33 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 2:104.

34 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 2:115.

35 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 1:215. There is also another battle described in the second volume of *al-Iklīl*, which begins as a confrontation of Madhḥij in an alliance with Khawlān and Nahd against the tribe of Khawāzin, which then seems to escalate into a full-fledged war between Quḏā'a and the tribes of Qays (*ibid.*, 2:178).

36 In the *Ṣifat*, al-Hamdānī directly indicates his awareness of the fluidity of the practice of Bedouin tribes taking on the names of other more famous tribes than them to the point that they are on the verge of establishing genealogical connections with them (175). Heiss provides a fuller discussion of these dynamics between changes in tribal names and their affiliations with specific examples cited from the medieval and modern periods ("Tribale Selbstorganisation", 96–99). One possible result of this re-naming process in South Arabia would be that tribes could stay in the same location and "become Madhḥij" with only minimal groups of "actual" Madhḥij immigrating into the region. This process, however, runs counter to the popular concept of a fixed territorialization of tribes in South Arabia, which is based largely on contemporary ethnography as well as the general observation that many current tribes in Yemen seem to be located in the same place as they were in the medieval period. In this perspective, it is the immigrants that change their affiliation instead of the extant population (Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History*, 320–329; Wilson, "Al-Hamdānī's"; 95–104).

37 Al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 180.

38 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 2:50–51. Interestingly, al-Hamdānī cites Hishām al-Kalbī as a reference to support this story.

39 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 2:123.

within the Qaḥṭān macro-conglomerate.⁴⁰ Despite its apparent closer original connections to tribes of North Arabia, pastoral-nomadic economic livelihood, and aggressive history against the inhabitants of South Arabia in the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, al-Kalbī chose to group it with the tribes of the South, perhaps in order to emphasize the more symbiotic relationship that they had developed by the 2nd/9th century. A second observation clearly emerges from Caskel's genealogical table based on al-Kalbī's *Jamharat al-nasab* (Figure 7.1).⁴¹ The extensive detailing of its individual groups extends down to the perhaps apparent historical personalities or groups of contemporary times. This expansive record may be credited to al-Kalbī's diverse source base for his research as well as his desire to be as comprehensive as possible, as reflected in his compilation overall.

Looking next at the genealogical documentation for Madhḥij in *al-Iklil*, al-Hamdānī likewise accepts this group into the southern fold and outlines its genealogy in the tenth volume (Figure 7.2).⁴² In contrast to the *Jamharat al-nasab*, however, Madhḥij receives only a brief mention at the beginning of this volume, when he describes it as Mālik among the descendants of Udad alongside Murra, Nabt (al-Ash'ar), and Julhuma (Ṭayī').⁴³ But he does not subsequently list any further progeny for it. Instead he abruptly moves on to delineate somewhat haphazardly the genealogical lines of other groups of Kahlān before commencing with the extensive documentation of the Hamdān confederation—the clear main subject of this volume overall. This apparent neglect of the genealogy of the Madhḥij confederation may be the result of three scenarios.

One potential reason for the absence of the genealogical description of Madhḥij is that al-Hamdānī was ignorant of this confederation or only had minimal information with which to write it. This scenario seems unlikely. The

40 Caskel, *Ķamharat*, Table 176. Its genealogical line is recorded as Malik (Madhḥij) b. Udad. b. Zayd b. Yashjub b. 'Arīb b. Zayd b. Kahlān b. 'Āmir (Sabā') b. Yashjub b. Mu'raf (Ya'rub) b. Qaḥṭān.

41 Caskel, *Ķamharat*, Table 258.

42 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklil*, 10:22.

43 These "siblings" of Madhḥij are the same as found in *Jamharat al-nasab*, but there are some discrepancies in the full genealogical line. These include the absence of Mu'raf and Yashjub between Qaḥṭān and Sabā', and the substitution of 'Amr for the other Yashjub. Furthermore, the "sons" of Madhḥij listed in *Jamharat al-nasab* are found in abbreviated or non-genealogical contexts of other sections of *al-Iklil*, such as Murād, 'Ans, and Sa'd al-'Ashīra. But the two other "sons" listed, Lamīs and Jald, are not, and may instead possibly be recognized as two other well-known tribes of Madhḥij, respectively Zubayd and Janb.

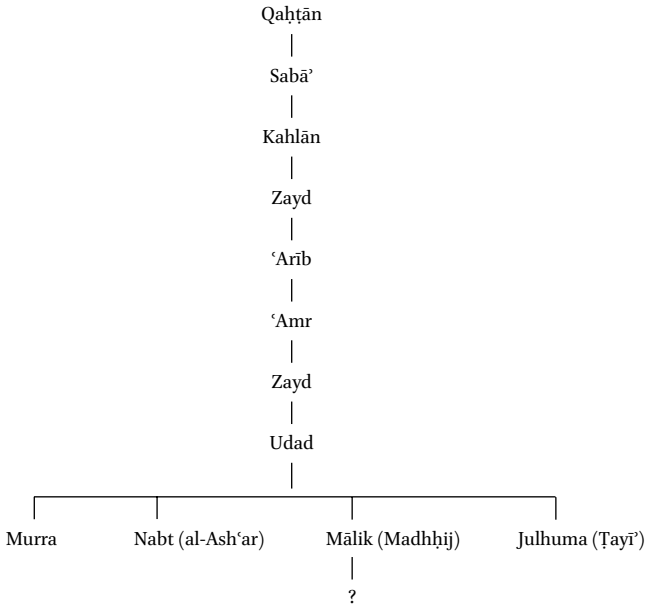


FIGURE 7.2 *al-Hamdānī's genealogy of Madhḥij* (al-Iklīl 10:22)

lacuna is al-Hamdānī's lack of interest in Madhḥij or the fact that he found them irrelevant or unimportant to South Arabia. If this were the case, however, he would not have given them extensive coverage in the other sections of this work. Nor would he have cited the Prophet Muḥammad's mention of them as a tribe of South Arabia in the first volume of *al-Iklīl*.⁴⁴ In a story describing the genealogical context of Sabā', Muḥammad states that he was a man among the Arabs from whom ten tribes (pl. *abṭun*, s. *baṭn*) descended.⁴⁵ Madhḥij is listed here among those who were related or belonged to South Arabia (*tayāmanū*), including Kinda, al-Ash'arūn, Ḥimyar, Anmār, and al-Asad.⁴⁶ Hence, the gravity

44 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 1:131.

45 In a list from the *Ṣifat* which describes binary oppositional groups in different regions of South Arabia, however, Sabā' is placed in confrontation with Madhḥij in region of Mā'rib, potentially portraying these two tribal groups as being on the same genealogical level instead of "father" and "son". This seeming contradiction clearly demonstrates the inconsistency, flexibility, or general confusion surrounding the genealogical levels for these groups (al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat*, 237). In this list, Madhḥij is also described as being in opposition to Hamdān in the region of al-Jawf in the north-east of South Arabia.

46 Those descendants of Sabā' listed as relating or belonging to North Arabia (*tashā'mū*) are Judhām, Lakhm, 'Āmila, and Ghassān.

associated with quoting Muḥammad demonstrates al-Hamdānī's understanding of the importance of this group to South Arabia.

In spite of this awareness, however, a third scenario for not listing the genealogical descendants of Madhḥij may be that al-Hamdānī specifically intended to make an implicit political statement that Madhḥij is not truly a South Arabian tribe but rather a foreign intruder from North Arabia. That is, he only minimally wanted to accept this group into his own southern genealogy due to his personal bias against contemporary northern foreigners, such as the Zaydis and Isma'īlis, who during the time of his writing *al-Iklīl* were infiltrating and attempting to take over South Arabia. Al-Hamdānī was not ignorant of Madhḥij's own violent interactions with South Arabian groups as cited through numerous examples throughout the text. In addition to the more generalized clashes mentioned with the confederations of Ḥimyar, Quḍā'a, and Hamdān, in volume ten of *al-Iklīl* he also describes more personalized incidents involving specific members of Hamdān. One individual is stated to have died during Yaum al-Razm,⁴⁷ and another was killed in the battle of Yaum Jaysh al-'Akār.⁴⁸ Moreover, one of the most colourful and detailed narratives of conflict in *al-Iklīl* is between the Murād tribe of Madhḥij and a group of Hamdān, in which there are back-and-forth raids between the two parties.⁴⁹ Even if these battles were interpreted as probable fictional accounts, as many conflicts of the *akhbār al-ayyām* literature have been, their ideological content still stress the antagonism of Madhḥij in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic history of South Arabia. In this way al-Hamdānī may have wanted to use the collective memory of this group to mirror the contemporary politics that he himself was engaged in. By often presenting the Madhḥij confederation as a predatory group from outside South Arabia who fought and occupied the land of its previous inhabitants, some of whom were shown to have switched their alliances to them, he seems to have not wanted to perceive them as genuine southern Arabs and hence did not devote space to describing their genealogy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with its own particular political viewpoint, the genealogical compilation of al-Hamdānī's *al-Iklīl* fits well into the overall historiographic tradition of early medieval Arabia. It uses fairly similar terminology for the

47 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 10:77–78.

48 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 10:57–58.

49 Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, 10:59–60.

different levels of its hierarchical organization, and is directly structured as a response to the northern genealogists in order to provide its own representation of the macro-confederation of Qaḥṭān in contradistinction to other genealogies that focus more on the tribes of ‘Adnān. Like other texts of the medieval period devoted to promoting the identity and role of the South Arabian tribal community in the history and current affairs of the larger Islamic community, this particular vision was constructed to include what its author believed were the important ancestors and major tribal groups while at the same time excluding or minimizing others. One of these latter tribal groups seems to have been the Madhḥij confederation. Due to the scant presentation of their genealogy and the repeated narratives of their battles with South Arabian tribal groups in *al-Iklīl*, he seems to have perceived them as foreign intruders, somewhat on a par with other contemporary northern invaders, such as the Zaydis and Isma‘ilis, and therefore not part of the proud heritage of the more established confederations such as the Hamdān and Ḥimyar.

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