

Migrations and Federations: The Origins of the Tribal Federation of Khawlān According to al-Hamdānī

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This contribution focuses on the beginnings of the tribal federation called Khawlān in the north of what today is Yemen. Al-Hamdānī, the Yemeni philosopher, genealogist and astronomer writes about these beginnings in two of his works; a passage from Nashwān's 'Shams al-'ulūm' will complete the picture. At first, a son of Khawlān migrates from Ma'rib to Širwāḥ, in the territory of another group called Khawlān. From there, a grandson of the first migrant goes on to the region of Ṣa'da, where he forms a federation with another tribal group. Both settle in the plain of Ṣa'da or in the mountainous region west of it. To accomplish that, they have to wage war against Hamdān who are the original settlers there.

These are the basic facts deducible from the texts. Khawlān really comes into view when the tribal groups wage war. The groups of the original migrants and their allies are not related. Religion plays no part in the occurrences put forward in the texts. As far as possible, these narrations are interpreted and brought into relation to the tribal situation of Yemen at the time.

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Introduction: Tribes and Trees

It may seem absurd to ask about the origin of a ‘tribe’ in southern Arabia, at least if one starts with the corresponding word in the German language, ‘Stamm’, and not with the original notion of *tribus*. A ‘Stamm’ in its basic meaning is the trunk of a tree. As a metaphor it conveys the image of a tree with offshoots branching out more and more. The ‘Stamm’ of a tree corresponds with the ‘Stammvater’, the progenitor of his offspring who constitutes the metaphorical branches of the tree. Consequently, what in the English language is a pedigree in German would be a ‘Stammbaum’, a combination of ‘trunk’ and ‘tree’. In Medieval Latin, an *arbor consanguinitatis* (a ‘tree of consanguinity’) showed different degrees of consanguinity. In many cases, these *arbores* illustrate prohibitions of marriage in Christianity. In that case *ego* would be in the centre of the *arbor*, not at the end of one of the twigs of a tree as with a pedigree or a ‘Stammbaum’. The ‘Stamm’ as a metaphor in the German language is described by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in their *Deutsches Wörterbuch* as follows: It designates ‘originally [...] the relation of a single man to his children as that of a trunk to its branches’,¹ and describing a ‘Stamm’ the brothers Grimm write: ‘like the family traces itself to a progenitor as ancestor [Stammvater], also a people or part of a people, imagined as descending from a man, is called a tribe [Stamm], like especially the twelve tribes of the children of Israel [...]’.² If one would take this idea of a tree and its branches verbally, the origin of a tribe is quite clear, because it is the common ancestor.

In the Arabic language the same metaphor has been used for centuries, when one calls a pedigree *mushajjara*, which is derived from the substantive *šajara* or ‘tree’. Al-Hamdānī (see below) in *al-Iklīl* 2 cites his most important teacher Abū Naṣr al-Ḥanbaṣī who speaks of the five *shajarāt* (verbally ‘trees’) of Saba’ the Younger and in the same context mentions the *tashajjur* of Saba’s genealogies, a substantive that possibly

¹ ‘Ursprünglich [...] das verhältnis eines einzelnen mannes zu seinen kindern als das des stammes zu seinen zweigen [...], see Grimm and Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 17: 639.

² ‘Wie die familie sich von einem urahn als dem stammvater herleitet, wird auch ein volk oder der theil eines volkes, von einem manne abstammend gedacht, als ein stamm bezeichnet, so besonders die zwölf stämme der kinder Israel [...]’, see Grimm and Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 17: 643.

denotes something like ‘branching out’.³ Obviously the metaphorical use of a tree and its branches in the genealogical context in the Yemen of the tenth century was quite comparable to the use of the same metaphor in Medieval and Modern Europe. Just one example taken out of a text of al-Hamdānī may suffice here. In the second book of *al-Iklīl*,⁴ he writes:

This is what we learned from Abū Naṣr [al-Hamdānī's most important teacher] about the branch [far'] of the genealogy [nasab] of dhī Sahr, and on him we rely. Of his [sc. dhī Sahr's] roots [uṣūl] [taken] from the mushajjara are Sharaḥ, dhū Marāthid [...].

With the metaphorical use of the words *far'* ‘branch’, *uṣūl* ‘roots’ and *mushajjara*, al-Hamdānī remains in the imaginative realm of a tree. Possibly he even had a painted genealogy before him which he commented upon.

In contrast to the German language, the Arabic word for tribe leads away from the tree metaphor into very different semantic fields. In Arabic, a tribe is called *qabīla* (pl. *qabā'il*), a word that became increasingly known in Europe since the *Descripción general de África, sus guerras y vicisitudes, desde la fundación del mahometismo hasta el año 1571* of the Spaniard Luys del Marmol Caravajal (ca 1520/24–1600). The three volumes of his book appeared between 1573 (vols. 1 and 2) and 1599. Marmol was taken captive and lived and travelled for 8 years mainly in North Africa. Thus he came to know the circumstances there quite well. He renders the Arabic word *qabīla* in Spanish as ‘Cobeyla’. Thus, he writes, ‘[...] y estas tales estan poblados de grandes pueblos y Cobeylas, o Tribus, de Beréberes Affricanos’,⁵ but he also speaks of *Cobeylas* of the Arabs or Alarabes, as he calls them, thereby including the article. The Yemeni author al-Hamdānī explains the word *qabīla* by using the sixth form of its root, which means ‘they faced, or confronted, one

³ Al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-juz' al-tāmin*: 113; *mushajjara* is also used in a genealogical sense by al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīla' al-juz' al-awwal*: 292, 304, 305, 348, he speaks of *mushajjarāt nasabawlād al-Hamaysa' b. Ḥimyar*, ‘a genealogical tree of the offspring of al-Hamaysa’, the son of Ḥimyar’.

⁴ Al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-juz' al-tāmin*: 292:

هذا ما أخذناه عن أبي نصر في الفرع من نسب ذي سحر وعليه معولنا وفي أصوله من المشجرة شرح و ذو مراثد.

⁵ Del Marmol Caravajal, *Descripción general*, vol. 1: f. 6v b.

another⁶ or ‘to meet face to face’. If one takes this meaning to describe the idea behind *qabīla*, a ‘tribe’ or ‘Stamm’ would consist of groups or individuals facing and/or confronting another. There is no notion of kinship behind the word *qabīla* per se but rather one of single groups meeting or talking and, possibly, cooperating with each other. Seen from this angle with its potential lack of kinship relations, the question about the origin of a tribe makes perfect sense.

However, by many, not only European specialists, tribes were seen as consisting of people who are related to each other. Two examples may suffice for this basic hypothesis. The first one comes from the two French orientalist Janine and Dominique Sourdel. For them, tribes (*tribus*) are

*groupements fondés sur des liens familiaux et tantôt divisés en sous-groupes ou clans, tantôt réunis en vastes confédérations, qui constituèrent l’ossature de la société arabe primitive et des autres sociétés nomades aux quelles l’islam ne cessa d’être confronté tout au long de son histoire.*⁷

By the way, the use of ‘primitive’ is conspicuous. For a very long time, ‘tribal’ society was (or sometimes still is) seen as and treated as something primordial and primitive. The second attempt at a definition of tribal society was formulated by Robert H. Winthrop: A tribe is ‘a culturally homogenous, nonstratified society possessing a common territory, without centralized political or legal institutions, whose members are linked by extended kinship ties, ritual obligations, and mutual responsibility for the resolution of disputes’.⁸

In the following part I would like to discuss the origin of the tribal federation of Khawlān in the fragmentary way that can be taken out of al-Hamdānī’s works, to a major part out of the books of *al-Iklīl*. How could al-Hamdānī, who himself, as his name shows, was a member of the tribal federation of Hamdān, write about the origins of the Khawlān-federation?

Al-Hamdānī

Al-Hamdānī was born possibly in 893 and died, according to his medieval biographers, in the year 945 or 949. Throughout his life, he lived in the

⁶ Lane, *Madd al-qāmūs*, vol. 8: Suppl. 2983c.

⁷ Sourdel and Sourdel, *Dictionnaire Historique de l’Islam*: 815.

⁸ Winthrop, *Dictionary of Concepts*: 307.

capital Sanaa, where he was born, in Ṣa‘da, in the northernmost province of today’s Yemen, and in Rayda, around 70 kilometres north of Sanaa, where he died.

The main works of al-Hamdānī are his *al-Iklīl* (the crown), originally in 10 books, of which book one (the common Old Testament genealogy of all mankind and the genealogy of Khawlān), book two (the genealogy of Ḥimyar), book eight (buildings of South Arabia and stories of burials) and book 10 (the genealogy of Hamdān) are extant now. With the exception of the eighth book of *al-Iklīl*, only the genealogical parts are preserved. A further important book by al-Hamdānī is the description of the Arab peninsula (*Ṣifat jazīrat al-‘Arab*), commonly treated as a geographical book, but it comprises also a lot of information pertaining to other fields of knowledge like genealogy and tribal relations. Al-Hamdānī was well acquainted with the genealogical narratives of all three tribal federations, which he describes as existing in South Arabia in his times. His most important teachers were from the Himyar federation. He himself was from Hamdān, as his last name or nisba shows, and he lived in Ṣa‘da for 20 years, as he tells us in *al-Iklīl*, which was the centre of Khawlān.⁹ Some of his confidants and sources came from this federation. In his genealogical works, al-Hamdānī did not intend to write the complete South Arabian genealogies. He endeavoured to shorten genealogies, to exclude names, and to select part of the variants, as he himself states.¹⁰

Al-Hamdānī’s Sources

Al-Hamdānī’s reports on the origin of Khawlān are scattered throughout his works mainly in contexts concerning the area around Ṣa‘da in the north of Yemen. From these reports it is possible to compose a fragmented history of the genesis of the tribal federation of Khawlān which follows the ideas of al-Hamdānī and his sources.

When he lived in Ṣa‘da, al-Hamdānī’s best friends were high-ranking (as he presents them) members of the Ukayl, a group of townspeople who are presented by him as being loyal to the Abbasid caliphs. This means that they took a position on the Sunnī side of Islam, whereas their opponents had invited the first Zaydī *imām*, who introduced Zaydism

⁹ Al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-juz’ al-tāmin*: 75.

¹⁰ Cf. al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-juz’ al-tāmin*: 344–45.

(a form of Shiism) in the region and as *imām* and *amīr al-mu'minīn* (a commander of the faithful) was an opponent of the caliphs. This led to a conflict between two groups of inhabitants of the town of Ṣa'da, between supporters of the *imām* on the one side and supporters of the Sunni caliphs on the other. The dividing line between the groups in conflict could be expressed and sharpened by turning the conflict into and by describing it as a conflict between South Arabians (with their glorious past) and North Arabians (with Prophet Muhammad and his offspring to whom the *imāms* belonged). Al-Hamdānī took his stance on the South Arabian side, opposing the *imāms* and thus manoeuvring himself into a dangerous position. No wonder that he is said by his biographers to have spent some time in prison because of his oppositions to the Zaydī *imāms*. At the same time, the fact that he advocated the cause of the South Arabians was among the important motivations for writing some of his works, at least the *al-Iklīl*. The Ukayl were politically and religiously on the same side as al-Hamdānī; for the Ukayl, as especially for al-Hamdānī, it was consistent with their political-religious aims to point at the often idealised glorious past of the South Arabians and at the same time at least implicate that the North Arabians lacked a past like that. One indication of that glorious past is the starting point of the tribal genesis of the Khawlān, which was triggered by the destruction of the famous dam of Ma'rib that is mentioned in the Qurān (34:15–17).

For those doing research on Khawlān and their genealogies like al-Hamdānī, the difficulty arose that there were two groups in Yemen with the name Khawlān, the Khawlān in the north, now called Khawlān al-Shām or Khawlān b. 'Āmir, and the Khawlān al-'Āliya or today Khawlān al-Ṭiyāl east of the capital Sanaa. At first, only the northern Khawlān make a direct appearance. Nevertheless, in the background remains the undecided question whether the Khawlān were originally one group with a common part of the genealogy or rather two different groups with far distant genealogies.

Four of the passages I selected are scattered over three of al-Hamdānī's books, and one comes from the lexicon 'Shams al-'ulūm' (sun of the sciences) of Nashwān b. Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī (died 573/1178). The passages taken together give a fragmentary picture. Al-Hamdānī may have dealt with the narratives leading to the beginnings of Khawlān in a volume of *al-Iklīl* which is now lost or in other books: He tells us that he found opportunity to expand on many of the historical relations in books which

did not come down to us, like the *Kitāb al-ayyām* which will be mentioned shortly. However if one considers all the books of the author which are preserved, the fragmentary character of these narrative passages is typical for most of the historical annotations the author incorporated. He seems to be very certain that every one of his readers knows the whole story he mentions that he tells us only in a fragmentary way.

The usual vision of a tribal community, as already pointed out, starts with a common ancestor who often lends his name to the totality of the tribe and his sons, the sons of his sons and so on. Thus the symbol of unity for an imagined tribal community usually is the common and often eponymous ancestor. His name provides an abbreviation for a description of belonging and of drawing borders in a genealogical construction but sometimes at the same time giving hints at local belonging. Thus the names of the ancestors are not only to be understood as names of single persons but also of the whole group whose members are seen as their offspring (i.e., they can be understood as singular and plural) and sometimes for the villages and regions where these groups live. However, with the beginnings of Khawlān everything seems to be slightly different.

The Texts

1

‘Khawlān say: When Sa’d b. Khawlān went away from Ma’rib, he took possession of it [sc. Ṣirwāḥ]; their [sc. of Khawlān] poets mention it [sc. Ṣirwāḥ]’.¹¹

From the first text we learn that a son of Khawlān named Sa’d (s. illustr. 1, generation 11) left Ma’rib and went around 40 km west to Ṣirwāḥ. It is quite clear that this migration is connected with the break of the dam of Ma’rib mentioned in the Qurān (24:16). The final break of the dam is the starting point for different stories of migrations, this being just one of them. Sa’d is here named a son of Khawlān, the ancestral symbol of unity. Other parts of Khawlān, the brothers of Sa’d, after all six, seven or 12 according to al-Hamdānī’s variants, do not figure. Therefore, Khawlān could easily be introduced ex-post as Sa’d’s father and at that stage as the quasi unemployed symbol of unity. However, Khawlān could well be

¹¹ Al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-juz’ al-tāmin*: 140:

وخولان تقول ان سعد بن خولان لما خرج من مأرب تملك بها وقد ذكرها شعر اؤهم

meant as Khawlān al-‘Āliya/aṭ-Ṭiyāl because Ṣirwāḥ was/is part of their region. The mention of Khawlān as a symbol of unity here could easily be a variant of a genealogy unifying the two Khawlān. Al-Hamdānī and possibly his informants in Ṣa‘da did not support this view. Consequently, only Sa‘d is moving from Ma‘rib to Ṣirwāḥ, and all other (later) sons of Khawlān are not mentioned.

2

‘It was Ḥujr b. Rabī‘ a who united with Shihāb b. al-‘Āqil of Kinda in a confederacy on the day when Ḥujr went away from Ṣirwāḥ; then they came to rest together in the *ḥaql* of Ṣa‘da or, it is also said, in the *qadd* [mountainous margin] of it, because the *ḥaql* in those days belonged to Hamdān. Ibrāhīm b. Kanif al-Shihābī says about that:

For the confederacy with Ḥujr my people ran quickly for the *ḥaql*,
We pierced another with much thrusting spears’.¹²

The original emigrant from Ma‘rib, Sa‘d, got lost somewhere on the way or in Ṣirwāḥ (being absorbed into Khawlān al-‘Āliya/aṭ-Ṭiyāl), and the (later) Khawlān of the north are further reduced to a great-grandson of the eponymous ancestor, Ḥujr (s. illustr. 1, Generation 13). On the day of his emigration he found an ally in Shihāb b. al-‘Āqil, who suddenly surfaces without any background here. Here he is said to come from Kinda, but there exists a genealogy relating him to Khawlān also (s. illustr. 3). They went to the region of Ṣa‘da and settled there. Two variants of the area where they settled are named: either they settled in the plain (*ḥaql*) where Ṣa‘da was situated or they settled on the eastern mountainous borderland (*qadd*) of this plain. Al-Hamdānī leaves this open but notes that the plain belonged to Hamdān at that time when Ḥujr and Shihāb arrived. Thus he possibly conveys the view that Hamdān, his own group, were an autochthonous people. That could be an ‘official’ Hamdān version, according to which Khawlān and their allies settled first in the mountains west of Ṣa‘da, where parts of them still live until today. The second version is confirmed by a

¹² Ibid.: 83–84,

حجر بن ربيعة وهو الذي حالف شهاب بن العاقل من كندة يوم خرج حجر من صرواح فسكننا جميعا بحقل صعدة ويقال في قدها لأن الحقل يومئذ لهمدان وفي ذلك يقول إبراهيم بن كنف الشهابي
على جلف حُجْرٍ جاذب الحقل معشرى * نُطاعن عنه بالرماح الخواطر

verse written by a poet of Banū Shihāb, the allies of Ḥujr, a poet known only from al-Hamdānī.

The absence of al-Rabīʿa who in the genealogy is situated between Saʿd and Ḥujr is a riddle for me: al-Rabīʿa is the eponym of the tribal group to which al-Hamdānī's friends belong. Why is it not he who appears but his son?

3

‘Concerning the *ḥaql* [plain] of Ṣaʿda: it is cut off from the land of Hamdān, and concerning that there is a report in the *Kitāb al-ayyām* [book of battle-days]’.¹³

When in the course of his description of the Arab peninsula al-Hamdānī writes about Ṣaʿda, he starts with this sentence where he again maintains that the plain of Ṣaʿda was formerly the land of Hamdān but was ‘cut off’ from it. This caused a war: The author refers the reader to his (now lost) book on the battle days, which was already mentioned, where he wrote on the battle mentioned here.

4

Al-Hamdānī says: A group of learned men of Khawlān gave me an account of their ancestors. As informants they [the group of learned men] referred to Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā b. al-Mustanīr al-Zubaydī and to Zayd b. Maslama of Banū Ḥayy—both of them were learned men of the land Najd [the highland]: Ḥujr b. Rabīʿa b. Saʿd b. Khawlān left Ṣirwāḥ for fear of a ruler of the Ḥimyar to get to al-Shām. He passed by the *ḥaql* of Ṣaʿda which was sparsely populated. So he took the ground there for himself, and he and those with him took a part. Then Banū Shihāb brought a debt on him and Banū Nabīh who had returned from Ḍarriyya to the Yemen to live with al-ʿAbdallāh dhū l-Afrās b. Saksak. They [sc. Banū Shihāb] asked him [sc. Ḥujr] for a pact and mutual help, because the *ḥaql* of Ṣaʿda pleased them. He complied with them and made them partners in the pasture and the horses.¹⁴ From that day on they inhabited Ṣaʿda until our time.

¹³ Al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿArab*: 248:

أما حقل صعدة فإنه مختزل من بلد همدان ولذلك خبر في كتاب الأيام

¹⁴ Sabūq, ‘Horses that outstrip’, cf. Lane, *Madd al-qāmūs*, vol. 8: Suppl. 1300b. Translation tentative.

Hamdān maintains that the ḥaql belonged to them, and that Ḥujr b. al-Rabī'a did not take a ground there for himself, but rather inhabited the mountainous region [*al-qadd*]. Banū Shihāb inhabited Ḥaydān, which is their home. When Hamdān and Khawlān were engaged in war because of dhū l-Furs al-Khaywānī, Hamdān went away into the innermost of their land, because the ḥaql faced the *qadd* where the groups [*jumū'*] of Khawlān were. It was a fringe of their [Hamdān's] land where Khawlān settled down.¹⁵

Al-Hamdānī writes about his informants from Khawlān and gives a short *isnad* or chain of authorities leading to two genealogical specialists (who are otherwise unknown).

We are told again that Ḥujr left Sirwah, and we are informed that that happened because he had difficulties with a king of Himyar or a pre-Islamic ruler. He wanted to go north. He passed by the Ṣa'da plain, and since he found that it was sparsely populated, he and the Banū Shihāb accompanying him took a part of it for themselves. No second version is mentioned here with the mountainous region to the west as their region of settlement. Only from then on Banū Shihāb settled there, together with the otherwise unknown Banū Nabīh or Nubayh who obviously came from the north. Banū Shihāb now asked Ḥujr for an alliance, which means they wanted to stay there. At this point, for the first time, the author refers to the other or Hamdān version of the tale, according to which Ḥujr settled in the region west of the Ṣa'da plain. Banū Shihāb settled to the south of those mountains, in Ḥaydān, where they are mentioned in other works elsewhere as well. Then, al-Hamdānī mentions a war between Hamdān and groups of Khawlān: suddenly the name of the whole federation is mentioned in the course

¹⁵ Al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-juz' al-tāmin*: 149,

قال الهمداني: حدثني نفر من علماء خولان عن أسلافهم عن محمد بن عيسى المستنير الزبيدي وعن زيد بن مسلمة أخی بنی حى وكانا من علماء أرض نجد ان حجر بن ربيعة بن سعد بن خولان خرج من صرواح متافاة لبعض ملوك حمير ليصير الى الشام فمر بحقل صعدة وهو قليل السكن فاختلط فيه واقتطع هو ومن معه ثم نزل عليه بنو شهاب دينا وبنو بنيه عاندين من ضرية الى اليمن ليسكنوا مع آل عبد الله ذى الأفراس بن سكسك فسألوه الحلف والمظافرة لما أعجبهم حقل صعدة فأجابهم الى ذلك وأشركهم فى الحمى والسبورق فسكنوا صعدة من يومئذ الى وقتنا هذا وهمدان تقول ان الحقل كان لها وان حجر بن ربيعة لم يختطه وإنما سكن بالقد وسكنت بنو شهاب بحيران وهو وطنها فلما احتربت همدان وخولان فى سبب ذى الفرس الحيوانى تكفت همدان الى صميم بلادها لأجل مقابلة الحقل للقد وفيه جموع خولان وكان ذلك طرفا من بلدها نزلته خولان

of a war, a typical procedure: the naming of greater units. Al-Hamdānī wrote about that war in his *Kitāb al-ayyām*.

5

Khawlān al-‘Āliya are a tribe [*hayy*] from the Yemen of Quḏā‘a, of the progeny of Khawlān b. ‘Amr b. al-Hāf b. Quḏā‘a, but they are called Khawlān al-‘Āliya [upper Khawlān], because Khawlān altogether had stayed in Ma‘rib, in Širwāh, which is a palace belonging to them. Then a part of them went up into the mountains east of San‘ā’, and were called Khawlān al-‘Āliya. The commonly known ones of them stayed in Ma‘rib, until they went away after that in the direction of Ṣa‘da. A poet of Khawlān al-‘Āliya says:

Whoever asks about our descent [*ansāb*]: We are Khawlān b. ‘Amr b. Quḏā‘a, we are from Ḥimyar, from their most noble ones, for us is the spring-rain among them and the well-being.

In the *ḥadīth* the prophet—peace be upon him!—prayed for al-Sakāsik and al-Sakūn and for Khawlān, [namely] Khawlān al-‘Āliya, and for al-Amlūk, [namely] Amlūk Radmān; from Khawlān al-‘Āliya is Abū Muslim al-Khawlānī, whose name was ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mishkam. He was among the best of the generation of the followers [*tābi‘ūn*].

It is maintained that Khawlān al-‘Āliya is Khawlān b. ‘Amr b. Mālik b. al-Hārith b. Murra b. Udad b. Zayd b. ‘Amr b. ‘Arīb b. Zayd b. Kahlān, because if they would be from Khawlān Quḏā‘a, they would not be called Khawlān al-‘Āliya. This is because of the distinction between them through their descent.

This account is not at all correct, because it is in conflict with the account of the specialists of genealogy [*ansāb*], and because Khawlān al-‘Āliya admit that they are from Quḏā‘a, and because the name Khawlān al-‘Āliya is rather used because of the distinction between their [residential] area, not because of the distinction between their genealogy [*nasab*]. Similarly the Arabs say Ṭayyi’ al-Sha‘m [of the north] und Ṭayyi’ al-Jabal [of the mountains], Azd Shunū‘a [of Shunū‘a] and Azd ‘Umān [of Oman], Hamdān al-Bawn [of the plain called al-Bawn] and Hamdān al-Ḥijāz [of the Hejaz]; Zubayd Najrān [of Najrān] and Zubayd al-Yaman [of the south]; ‘Udhar Maṭira and ‘Udhar Sha‘b and similar [names]. This occurs [so] often, [that] it cannot be counted, so who let Ṣa‘da be of Khawlān say for those who live on the mountains of the lowlands Khawlān al-Maghrib [of the west], and to those who are in the regions of Ṣa‘da Khawlān al-Mashriq [of the east], and to those of them who stay in the farthest Yemen

[the farthest south] Khawlān al-Yaman, and to those who are in the regions of Ṣa'da Khawlān al-Shām [of the north].¹⁶

Nashwān b. Sa'īd (died 573/1178), the author of these lines, a very interesting figure in many respects, was an opponent of the imams coming from the family of the Prophet and a partisan for the South Arabian cause. Possibly his political persuasions were the cause for his (in the ears of the Zaydī *imams*) rather heretical opinion that every believer could become *imām*, not only persons from the (North Arabian) family of Prophet Muḥammad. Also because of his political persuasions he knew the works of al-Hamdānī very well. In his big lexicon 'sun of sciences' (*Shams al-'ulūm*) he writes about the problem that there were (and still are) two federations called Khawlān, one to the east of the capital Sanaa and the other up in the north. At first, Nashwān maintains that they have the same genealogy (which is not that clear for al-Hamdānī). All of Khawlān originally stayed in Marib (Ṣirwāḥ at that location in the sentence makes little sense grammatically) and migrated, as it seems, to different localities. Nashwān cites an alternative genealogy for Khawlān al-'Āliya (or aṭ-Ṭiyāl, as they are called today) but declares it wrong. Interestingly it leads in the genealogical vicinity of Kinda, where Banū Shihāb belong, the confederates of Ḥujr in the region of Ṣa'da, according to one version of their genealogy. (They have—small wonder—a Khawlān genealogy too). For Nashwān the adjective al-'Āliya

¹⁶ Nashwān b. Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī, *Shams al-'ulūm*, lemma ولع (t. 7, 4723–4725):

وخولان العالية حى من اليمن من قضاة من ولد خولان بن عمرو بن الحاف بن قضاة وإنما سما خولان العالية لأن خولان جميعا كانوا بمأرب بصرواح وهو قصر لهم فارتفع بعضهم الى جبال شرقى صنعاء فسموا خولان العالية ويقى ساثرهم بمأرب حتى خرجوا بعد ذلك الى ناحية صعدة
قال شاعر خولان العالية

أيها السائل عن أنسابنا * نحن خولان بن عمرو بن قضاة

نحن من حمير فى ذريتها * ولنا المربع فيها والرابع

وفى الحديث صلى النبي عليه السلام على السكاسك والسكون وعلي خولان خولان العالية وعلى الأموك أموك ردمان ومن خولان العالية أبو مسلم الخولاني واسمه عبد الرحمن بن مشكم وكان من خيار التابعين

وقيل: ان خولان العالية هو خولان بن عمرو بن مالك بن الحارث بن مرة بن أدد بن زيد بن عمرو بن عريب بن زيد بن كهلان لأنهم لو كانوا من خولان قضاة لما قيل لهم خولان العالية فهذا للفرق بينهم فى النسب وهذا القول ليس بشيء لأنه خلاف قول العلماء بالأنساب ولأن خولان العالية معترفون بأنهم من قضاة ولأن اسم خولان العالية إنما أتى للفرق بين البلاد لا للفرق بين النسب كما تقول العرب: طيء السعل وطىء الجبل وأزد شنوءة وأزد عمان وهدمان البون وهدمان الحجاز وزبيد نجران وزبيد اليمن وعذر مطرة وعذر شعب ونحو ذلك وهذا كثير لا يحصى حتى ان من يجعل صعدة من خولان يقولون لمن بجبال الغور خولان المغرب ولمن بناوحى صعدة خولان المشرق ولمن أقام منهم باليمن الأقصى خولان اليمن ولمن بناوحى صعدة خولان الشام

(the upper) is not related to any genealogical difference (it could mean something like ‘older’), but only to differences in location, and he offers many comparable examples for that.

Conclusion

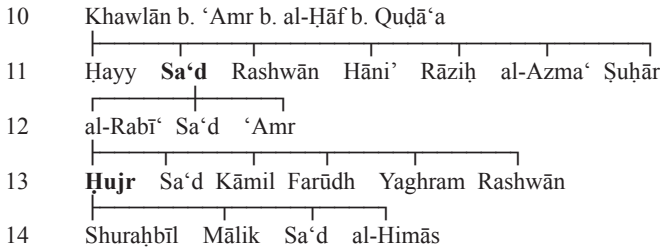
The story of the genesis of the northern Khawlān federation in Yemen starts with a small group which later belongs to that federation, be they Sa‘d (who went away from Marib) or—even further away from Khawlān genealogically—Hujr, his grandchild, who went away from Sirwah to Ṣa‘da. Banū Shihāb are mentioned as migrating confederates of Hujr. Both settle in the plain of Ṣa‘da or on its fringe. Only when the war with Hamdān, who lived around Ṣa‘da, is mentioned, the name Khawlān, and Khawlān as an entity or federation, appears, obviously in response to the federation of Hamdān which takes the other side in this war. This is a very common procedure at al-Hamdānī’s time and even today: in particular in cases of wars the conflicting parties tend to be called by the names of their—genealogically seen—bigger units and thus tend to include—at least nominally—other groups who are potentially but not actually part of the conflict. On the basis of the fragmentary data provided by al-Hamdānī and Nashwān, one could draft a scenario where different groups not related with each other cooperated at a settlement in a region where people already lived. In the subsequent wars they formed a tribal federation where genealogies were constructed at least for some of the groups. However one must not forget that al-Hamdānī himself was a member of the federation forming the original population against whom the Khawlān had to fight. The idea of a higher valued genealogy reaching further back than the genealogy of the migrants, who in their beginnings had no or only a very unclear common genealogy, could come to play here.

It is obvious that religion plays only a small part in this narrative, which starts in the nebulous pre-Islamic time when the dam of Ma‘rib broke. The break of the dam of Marib as a starting point is a very convenient date not only for the migration of Khawlān or rather Sa‘d but for others too. At the same time the reference to Marib could be used as a reference to the old glory of the southern Arabs, something the northern Arabs could not lay claim to, and it is mentioned in the Qurān and thus sanctified.

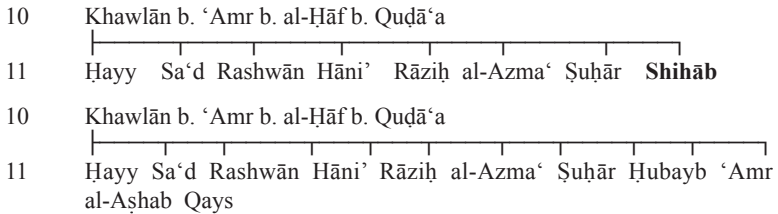
Read as such, the story of the migrating, uniting and fighting communities serves quite well for al-Hamdānī’s purpose to draw and to maintain clear borders between northern and southern Arabs and at the same time attach value judgements to the differences thus created.

Genealogical Tables

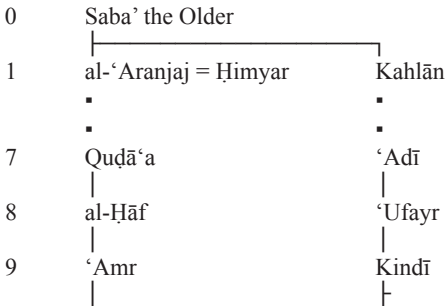
Ill. 1: Sa’d and Ḥujr in their genealogy according to al-Hamdānī.



Ill. 2: Variants at the beginning of Khawlān’s genealogy, the first with Shihāb included.



Ill. 3 The two genealogies of BanūShihāb (shortened): One relates to Khawlān, but differently from Ill. 2, and places Shihāb in the same generation as Ḥujr and the other leads to Kinda. In both cases they keep their father.



10	Khawlān		Mu'āwiya
11	Sa'd	al-Azma'	Murti'
12	Rabī'a	al-'Āqil	Tawr = Kinda
13	Hujr	Shihāb	Mu'āwiya
14	al-Hārith		the Older
15			Wahb
16			Rabī'a
17			al-'Āqil
18			Shihāb

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