# From the sublime to the ridiculous: Yemeni Arab identity in Abbasid Iraq

Webb, P.A.; Pohl, W.; Kramer, R.

# EMPIRES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE POST-ROMAN AND ISLAMIC WORLD, C. 400–1000 CE

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Edited by
Walter Pohl and Rutger Kramer

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# Preface

This volume is the result of a memorable collaborative effort. The authors of the chapters met in Vienna four times to discuss topics, presentations, and drafts of papers, in order to arrive at a more differentiated picture of the relationship between late antique and early medieval empires and particular communities within their range of control. Specialists in the late antique/early medieval West, Byzantium, and the early Islamic period contributed their different perspectives on the Roman Empires in East and West and the Umayyad/Abbasid caliphates. Rather than using a strict common grid of questions and criteria, we worked with the different angles that emerged from a divergent source base and disciplinary state of the art, and we explored differences and commonalities resulting from the various case studies. It was an intellectually stimulating venture, and we hope that readers will be able to share some of this experience.

This collaboration was made possible by a large interdisciplinary project funded by the Austrian Research Council, Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung in Österreich (FWF): Visions of Community: Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (400–1600 CE) (VISCOM) F 42–G 18, a Spezialforschungsbereich (SFB) that was active from 2011 to 2019 and involved medieval history, social anthropology, Islamic studies, and Buddhist studies. It was based both at the University of Vienna and at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The working group was hosted by the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy. The editors are grateful to all institutions involved, and especially to Nicola Edelmann for her tireless efforts helping to bring this volume to fruition.

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# *From the Sublime to the Ridiculous*

## Yemeni Arab Identity in Abbasid Iraq

Peter Webb

The study of identity hinges upon nuances of meaning. Communities are labeled with names, but those names are words, and words have their own histories of changing meanings that can connote different concepts and perhaps even different peoples from time to time. When we invoke names of communal identities—"Roman," "Arab," "Frank," "Muslim," "Melkite"—there is a risk of privileging one definition of a name's meaning and imposing it upon past communities, anachronistically reorganizing peoples of the past and forcing them to become part of a historical narrative of our own making. In order to avoid the pitfalls of sorting generations of past peoples into "containers" of enduring nationalities under monolithic labels,[1] we are advised to sift the changing functions and significations of names as they passed through different historical periods and geographical locales. This chapter examines the meaning of being "Yemeni" expressed in poetry of early-Abbasid-era Iraq; it reveals the changing contours of Yemeni-ness as historical memories and Abbasid contemporary concerns passed through poems of nostalgia and boast, and it evaluates the potentials and limits of Abbasid-era poetry to provide answers to our questions about historical identities.

Yemeni identity navigates a complex array of possible meanings that have accrued over time. "Yemen" is a modern nation-state, "Yemen" is a division of Arab genealogy, "Yemen" is a cardinal direction, "Yemen" was a political faction in the early caliphate, and in the Abbasid period, "Yemen" was an identity embraced by disparate communities between Central Asia and the Atlantic. Any two individuals who both call themselves "Yemenis" could intend membership in very separate communities by virtue of *their* choice of what "Yemen" signifies. Jest and irony also hover between the lines of text: one reference to "Yemen" may have meant a solemn veneration of homeland, whereas a second might intend simply a joke, one writer's satirical play on

another's serious identity.

Into this thicket of meaning, early-Abbasid-era "Yemeni-ness" articulated an identity of high status in the caliphate's Iraqi heartland, yet the meaning of such "Yemeni" community has eluded sustained scrutiny. Studies hitherto tended to assume that Yemenis were all members of a group of "Southern Arab" tribes, classifying them as essentially monolithic blocs of "Arabs" whose communal history is presumed to originate in pre-Islamic South Arabian kingdoms. The kingdoms fell shortly before Muḥammad's lifetime, but their tribal divisions are believed to have endured into the Islamic period when they migrated en masse into the Fertile Crescent, where they purportedly expressed their communal solidarity via a faction known as *al-Yamāniya*, an alliance of groups descended from a common ancestor, Qaḥṭān.[2] The memory of these pre- and early-Islamic-era Yemenis is rehearsed today in the Yemeni nation-state, where claims that the ancient South Arabians were the original Arabs and masters of powerful kingdoms are central foundations in Yemeni nationalist narratives.[3]

While the above account of Yemeni identity appears straightforward, it obscures key questions. Did all Abbasid-era Yemenis descend from South Arabian migrants? Did they all use the term "Yemen" to connote a political faction? Did Iraqi-domiciled "Yemenis" imagine solidarity with populations in South Arabia? And more fundamentally, did pre-Islamic South Arabians ever call themselves "Yemenis" and imagine a shared community that crossed over into the Muslim era? Or were Muslims the inventors of a new concept of "Yemen" that emerged from the wide-scale sociopolitical reorganizations of Muslim conquest? When critically evaluating these questions, the Yemeni ethnic story begins to fracture.

For example, the putative progenitor of all Yemenis and the iconic identifier of their community, Qaḥṭān, is not cited as an ancestral figure in pre-Islamic South Arabian records. The name "Qaḥṭān" is only attested in two inscriptions signifying a minor regional group connected with the southwestern Arabian kingdom of Kinda in the third century CE,[4] and it seems that Muslim-era populations alighted on memories of this name and forged a new meaning to invent a genealogy unifying a much larger collective identity than had ever existed before. The earliest layers of Arabic literature (written in the first centuries of Islam) about pre-Islamic South Arabia reveal very little accurate memory of the past beyond the names of kingdoms and broad outlines of political change; the frankincense trading, terraced farming, and polyglot communities that shaped pre-Islamic South Arabia are absent in the "Yemen" of Arabic historiography.[5] Moreover, populations in Muslim-era South Arabia

likewise demonstrate remarkably little ability to read pre-Islamic South Arabian scripts[6] or to recall South Arabia's pre-Islamic history.[7] The results of population movement and new political organization in South Arabia during the caliphate changed the meaning of Yemen on a broad scale: memories were disrupted, and new joiners in new forms of "Yemeni" community brought new stories to create new traditions. And beyond the disruption between the ideas of pre-Islamic and Muslim-era Yemen, even the supposed cohesion of the Muslim *Yamāniya* faction is debated, since the solidarity expected in a political bloc was not always operative.[8] And, as will be considered presently, pre-Islamic South Arabian kingdoms never called themselves "Yemen"; the very name of the community appears to be a Muslim-era creation, too. It is accordingly inaccurate to treat Muslim-era Yemenis as members of a predefined community; rather, they were creating that community as they marched through history, and we ought to listen to their voices with care to determine what sort of community they believed they represented and how they interacted with Arabs, the political structure, and the wider society of Abbasid Iraq.

Few extant books date to the first generations of Abbasid rule (750–830 CE), but a significant quantity of poetry survives expressing varied examples of boast and invective marshaled by self-identified "Yemenis" to assert their honor in Abbasid Iraq. The poetry was intended as a public performance, and it circulated in courts and social circles of the caliphate's Arabic-speaking elites, hence analysis of poetic references to Yemen and investigation into the functions of the poems themselves can proffer clues about the meaning of being "Yemeni" at the height of Abbasid power.[9]

## Yemen: A Direction, a Homeland, or Kinship?

Since identities build on preexisting traditions and take their raw materials from memories of history that precedes them, some consideration of Yemeni-ness before the Abbasids will set the background from which Abbasid-era poetry flowed. Critical analysis ought to begin with the very word "Yemen" itself. The Arabic *al-yaman* appears to originate as a designator for the cardinal direction of "south," and in pre-Islamic usage, its connotation was necessarily vague, since any land to the south of a given speaker's reference could be called *yaman*.[10] More research on the word's early history is needed, but what seems clear is (i) peoples who lived in the country now known as Yemen did not call their homeland "Yemen" before Islam,[11] and (ii) populations in central Arabia marshaled the word *al-Yaman* in a binary relationship with *al-Shām*/*al-Shaʾm*

("north"), imagining the world on a north-south axis with the Hijaz as the center; all land south of their territory was *al-Yaman*, and all land to a distant north was *al-Shām*.[12] Today, *al-Yaman* and *al-Shām*, respectively, connote defined *place*: (i) the nation-state of Yemen and (ii) greater Syria, including the national borders of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine. But in pre-Islam, the terms articulated uncertain and unfamiliar *space*: worlds beyond the southern and northern edges of central Arabian geographical imagination.

As for pre-Islamic communal identities, the pre-Islamic Ḥimyar kingdom, which controlled much of today's Yemeni nation-state[13] between the fourth and mid-sixth centuries CE, never called itself "Yemen";[14] only central Arabians applied the "Yemeni" term as a broad concept connoting outsider "Southerner" peoples. In reverse, the pre-Islamic Himyarites saw central Arabians as "outsiders," and there is no indication that any sense of ethnic or other communal bond united southern and central Arabians.[15] In pre-Islam, South Arabians did not consider themselves the ancestors of central and northern Arabian peoples, and the word "Yemen" was a flexible pointer of direction, not the proprietary name of a specific people, empire, or homeland.

After the Ḥimyar kingdom's collapse, some of its remnants alongside other South Arabian populations, both agriculturalist and pastoralist, joined the ranks of the early caliphate's soldiers in the 630s CE,[16] inaugurating a process of seminal sociopolitical change. The caliphate's central Arabian elite called these new joiners "Southerners" (*al-yamāniya*), and the South Arabians accepted the term, using the adjective *Yamānī* to describe an identity and the term "Yemen" (*al-Yaman*) to connote a place for the first time to express their *own* identity and homeland. Conceptual separation between central and southern Arabia initially remained in early Islam, as Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī (d. 281/895) reports an Umayyad-era memory that "[The Prophet] left for the Hajj in year 10; by this time the Arabian Peninsula (*al-Jazīrat al-ʿarabiyya*) had converted to Islam, as well as those people of Yemen whom God wished to convert."[17] From today's perspective, such a separation of Yemen from "Arabia" is extraordinary, but such anecdotes stand as key indicators that early Muslims' sense of Arabia's cohesion took some time to develop as the fragmented zones of the pre-Islamic peninsula were amalgamated in subsequent Muslim thought.

Southerner and Northerner integration evidently took time to merge "Yemen" with the rest of Arabia, and this likely coincides with profound changes at the end of the first/seventh century, when Muslim elites started to call themselves "Arabs" as a strategy of distinction to articulate their community's difference from the indigenous populations they had conquered and thereby maintain

exclusive status as the caliphate's sociopolitical elite.[18] The descendants of the central Arabians and those "Southerners" who participated in the mid-first-/seventh-century conquests together adopted a collective name "Arab," thereby asserting an ethnic boundary between themselves and the conquered and, in so doing, marked the first time in history when peoples hailing from different parts of Arabia began to experiment with terminology that enabled them all to integrate into *one* imagined community.[19] From this point onward, the formerly distinct "Yemenis"/"Southerners" became part of a wider "Arab" collective identity, and the process by which they turned themselves into "Arabs" and merged their identity with the formerly distinct central Arabian peoples rewrote notions of ethnicity and communal boundaries across the Middle East.

The emergence of the Yemeni-cum-Arab identity in the later-Umayyad-era Syrian, Iraqi, and Iranian political circles engendered an unstable situation: the Yemeni-Arabs simultaneously sought to maintain distinct vis-à-vis both (i) the conquered peoples by integrating within Arab lineage and (ii) other Arabs by asserting the distinctiveness of Yemeni identity. In the sources about early Islam, the tension is associated with factional terminology: the Yemenis identified themselves as ʿ*Arab* but specifically as "Southerners"/"Southern Arabs" (labeled *al-Yamāniya*, *al-Yaman*, or Qaḥṭān), as distinct from "Northerners"/"Northern Arabs," who identified their collective via ancestral names, ʿAdnān, Maʿadd, Nizār, and Muḍar, each with broadly similar connotations.[20] For the *Yamāniya* Southerners, "Yemen" connoted both their collective lineage group and the entirely of South Arabian geography.

Groups of the *Yamāniya* in eastern Iran and Iraq supported the Abbasid movement against the Umayyads, and with the eventual success of the Abbasids in 132/750, the *Yamāniya*'s political fortunes were promising. Membership in the "Yemeni" community was imbued with status during the period this chapter explores, but it is pertinent to note that the main poet-"spokesmen" of Yemeni identity examined here, Abū Nuwās (139–195/756–814) and Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī (148–246/765–860) never visited South Arabia itself. The poets projected themselves as "Yemeni" without residence in Yemen, and herein a key conceptual distinction is required. Abū Nuwās, Diʿbil, and their community can be called *genealogical* Yemenis, since they claimed "Yemeni" identity by virtue of lineages traced several generations backward to the South Arabians who joined the Muslim conquest armies. The Iraqi genealogical Yemenis were essentially detached by more than a century from the land of South Arabia, which itself was reorganized by the caliphate into one province called *al-Yaman*, marking the beginning of the use of the name "Yemen" as the label for a fixed

geographical-political entity corresponding to South Arabia. The province's inhabitants can be distinguished as *geographical* Yemenis.

By the second/eighth century, the genealogical and geographical Yemeni communities were evolving along separate lines. A number of groups who lived in Northern Arabia and even in Syria at the dawn of Islam joined the ranks of the genealogical *al-Yamāniya* faction in Syria and Iraq for reasons of political expediency, thereby asserting a "Southerner" genealogical identity without having historical, cultural, or lineage roots to South Arabia.[21] While a vast amount of Arabic literature emerged in third-/ninth-century Iraq to construct "Yemeni" identity from the perspective of the genealogical community, the geographical Yemenis seem to have been aware of this fabricated Yemeni-ness articulated in Iraq, and South Arabia's most celebrated writer of early Islam, al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (d. c. 334/945 or 360/971), rebuked Iraqi genealogical Yemenis for narrating Yemeni history in incorrect ways and with insufficient knowledge about South Arabia.[22] His work nonetheless closely resembles the narratives of genealogical Yemeni historiography, indicating the power of the imaginative Iraqi discourse to fundamentally reshape how South Arabian–domiciled people could imagine their own identity in medieval Islam, but this is a topic for a different forum.

In the third/ninth century, the name "Yemen" (*al-Yaman*) could be invoked by members of the genealogical and geographical Yemens with potentially variant connotations, and historians thus confront two separate but intertwined identities. Our focus here is Iraqi cultural production and identity articulation among genealogical Yemenis.

## Poetry and Yemeni Partisanship

### *Abū Nuwās*

Abū Nuwās is most famed today for libertine wine poetry, but his near contemporaries also knew him as "extremely partisan to Qaḥṭān over ʿAdnān," *i.e.* a champion of the Southerners over Northerner Arabs,[23] and his connection to Yemeni community manifests in several guises. Abū Nuwās reportedly chose his sobriquet "Nuwās" as homage to the pre-Islamic South Arabian king Dhū Nuwās,[24] Ibn Qutayba's biography of Abū Nuwās begins with discussion of the poet's connection to the Yemeni tribes Ḥā and Ḥakam (as a client),[25] and upon Abū Nuwās's death, a young companion (*ghulām*) from the Yemeni al-Azd eulogized him in stark Yemeni-partisan terms:[26]

The creative one is dead, it's the end of cleverness,
Death's wrapped true poetry in a shroud.
. . .
Who now will carry the glory
From the might of Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan?
Who now will parry the evil of Nizār?
Who will defend merry Yemen?

The Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan whom the poet invokes was a heroic pre-Islamic South Arabian king, extolled in Arabic literature for "liberating" South Arabia from Ethiopian domination shortly before Muḥammad's lifetime. Nizār signifies the "Northern Arabs," and the reference to their "evil" antagonizes them as factional foes of the Yemeni "Southerners." Thus, the final word on Abū Nuwās has him carrying the torch of pre-Islamic Yemeni kingship, defending Yemeni honor in Abbasid Iraq.

Abū Nuwās's "defense" of the Yemenis materializes in his "Poem Rhyming in B" (see appendix, poem 1). Its systematic praise of Yemeni identity and glory, contrasted by its thorough lampooning of every major Northern Arab tribe, lays bare a chasm of cultural and political achievement that Abū Nuwās intones separated "his" lofty Southerners from the base Northerners. The poem became famous: Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 297/908) presents it as the first poem in his biography of Abū Nuwās,[27] al-Mubarrad (d. 287/898) comments on the widespread reaction it caused among Northern Arabs who tried (and mostly failed) to compose rebuttals,[28] and al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/946–947) reports that the verses prompted the caliph al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809) to imprison Abū Nuwās.[29]

The poem's ways of praising Southerners and lampooning Northerner Arabs afford us opportunity to appraise how Southerner identity was articulating itself in early-Abbasid Iraq. Abū Nuwās begins with traditional *nasīb* description of abandoned desert camps (lines 1–6), but swiftly rejects the nomadic nostalgia by quick transition into vigorous praise of pre-Islamic South Arabian castles, Nāʿiṭ and Ghumdān (lines 7–8). Lines 9–36 intertwine Yemeni identity and kingship, citing examples of pre-Islamic Yemeni kings who engaged in wide conquests and those who defended themselves against, or triumphed over, Persian and Byzantine kings, and lines 37–54 list the prominent lineage groups of the *Yamāniya*, along with epitomes of their glories. The remainder of the poem turns to lampooning Northerners, beginning with the Quraysh and the caliphal family. Abū Nuwās does concede the Quraysh's merit in counting the Prophet as their ancestor (lines 55–56), but this is the extent of his charity, and he directs an array of satirical and crude insults against the Quraysh and each Northerner group.

This boast of Yemen's superiority over the caliphal family was reportedly the trigger of Abū Nuwās's imprisonment.[30] Similar themes repeat in other poems, too (see appendix, poems 2, 3), where Abū Nuwās contrasts glorious pre-Islamic Southerner kingship with ridicule of Northern Arabs, particularly the Tamīm, for their lack of generosity and their rudimentary desert lifestyle.

Taken together, salient parameters of Abū Nuwās's Yemeni-ness converge around a triad of settlement, kingship, and conquest in an oppositional relationship to the ignoble, nomadic, and impotent Northern Arabs. Whereas the Northerners are depicted as people of crude desert camps, the Southerners boast of castles. Southerners:

> . . . we are the lords of Nāʿiṭ,
> The castle of Ghumdān, of sweetly perfumed balconies. (lines 7–8)

Versus Northerners:

> . . . the Taghlib mourn lost campsites,
> Instead of avenging their dead. (lines 83–84)

Whereas pre-Islamic Northerners lived impoverished in the desert, Southerners are praised as greater than other pre-Islamic kingdoms, particularly the Sasanians. Southerners:

> We beat the Romans at Sātīdamā,
> Death descending on their battalions.
> Peroz took refuge in us that day,
> When battle raged its worst.
> The Qabīṣa came to his defense
> With their spears and razor swords. (lines 19–24)

Versus Northerners:

> The Asad found no harm in dog meat,
> Those pathetic donkey-riding slaves. (lines 79–80)

And whereas Northerners are shown boasting of insignificant Bedouin feats, Southerners are accorded wide conquests. Southerners:

> . . . our lords subjugated the land,
> For merit and for adventure.
> When the Persians deposed Bahrām
> We compelled their lords to restore him. (lines 11–14)

Versus Northerners:

> The long and short of [Tamīm's] glory
> Is that single merit of Ḥājib's bow.
> A bow! Mere clippings from a Shawḥaṭ tree,
> A miserable thing for a nobleman to boast. (lines 73–74)

Abū Nuwās's choice of material and imagery is striking. All praises of Yemen cite pre-Islamic history, yet the way in which Abū Nuwās portrays the pre-Islamic Yemenis corresponds precisely with urban Muslim-era Abbasid values.[31] He presents pre-Islamic Yemenis as settled, sovereign empire builders, thereby projecting his community's pre-Islamic ancestors as essentially like the caliphal elites of Abū Nuwās's own day, whereas Northerner identity is encapsulated in austere desertscapes, entirely unlike the urban world of the Abbasid caliphate.

Since the basic building blocks of ethnic identity include a proprietary name, unique kinship, distinct homeland, origin tales, and communal history,[32] Abū Nuwās's poetry casts Yemeni-ness in decidedly ethnic terms. He stops short of cleaving Yemenis from Arab community altogether, but in delineating Yemeni-ness with claims of their proprietary kinship and ancestry, and in constructing Yemeni past/origins as separate from the Northerners, Abū Nuwās's language insinuates an ethnic separateness distinguishing Yemenis from other Muslims. Inasmuch as Abū Nuwās's Yemeni-partisan poems do not marshal Arabness as a marker of distinction between Northerner and Southerner, the poems aspire to a balance by which Yemenis share Arab identity yet simultaneously possess autonomous lineage, culture, and heritage that set them apart and indeed prove their superiority over Northerner Arabs.[33]

The poems also reveal a crucial plasticity in the way Abbasid-era genealogical Yemeni identity was crafted. Pre-Islamic South Arabians lived in terraced farming communities and established frankincense-trading kingdoms, but such historical details are absent in Abū Nuwās's poetry.[34] Abū Nuwās fundamentally forgets pre-Islamic South Arabian history and makes a new pre-Islamic "Yemeni" identity that parallels his own cultural milieu: his world was populated by militarized elite groups of self-identified Arabs who held a monopoly of kingship over an empire, with substantial cultural borrowings from pre-Islamic Sasanian court culture, and his pre-Islamic Yemenis resemble those urban Iraqis more than they do pre-Islamic South Arabians. Likewise, the poems substantially obfuscate historical Sasanian relations with pre-Islamic South Arabia. The Sasanians conquered much of the region shortly before Muḥammad, and although their conquests are remembered in early Arabic literature,[35] Abū

Nuwās stresses an opposite, more flattering (and fanciful) narrative of Yemeni military domination over the Sasanians (e.g., references to Qābūs, Bahrām, and Peroz, lines 13–28).

There is accordingly scant "real" South Arabian history in the boastful poem, and this seems an essential aspect of "genealogical Yemeni" identity. Iraqi Yemenis were far removed from the land, the relics, and the communities of South Arabia, and instead, they cultivated an imagined identity that reconstructed pre-Islamic South Arabia in the image of urban Abbasid Iraq. Abū Nuwās imports real pre-Islamic names, such as Ḥimyar, Ghumdān, and Nāʿiṭ, but these are merely names transplanted into a new cultural universe. Abū Nuwās lauded "Yemeni" victories over the Sasanians, not because of real memories of pre-Islamic South Arabian wars with Sasanians but because it was Sasanian cultural capital that underpinned Abbasid Iraqi urban values. While praise of Yemen therefore focuses on pre-Islamic merits in name, in substance, the narrative is not antiquarian nationalism; there is no nostalgic urge to return to an "authentic" Yemeni way—rather, Yemen's heritage is reimagined to become a likeness of the poet's Abbasid present.

The Abbasid guise of Abū Nuwās's Yemeni identity also erects boundaries between "inside" and "outside" to entrench Southerner status. The similarities drawn between pre-Islamic Southerners and Abbasid-era Iraqi culture establish both that the Southerners are on the Abbasid cultural inside and that they possessed such culture since time immemorial. Conversely, Northern Arab identity is narrowed into Bedouin stereotypes. This is revealing, since second-/eighth-century urban Muslims articulated a firm normative divide between settled people and Bedouins, whereby Muslim military elites called themselves *ʿarab* and distinguished themselves from Beduoin *aʿrāb*, whom they counted as outsiders with lower status, fewer rights, and a separate identity from the urban elite "Arabs."[36] By bundling the traits of the Northerners into Bedouinism, Abū Nuwās therefore banishes Northerner heritage from urban Abbasid Iraqi norms of nobility and status. Northerners did constitute much of Iraq's urban elite, but Abū Nuwās's stress that their pre-Islamic ancestors were *aʿrāb* renders Northerners historically outside urbanized culture. Northerners become nouveau riche, a group of Bedouins whose enjoyment of the trappings of nobility in Abū Nuwās's day is projected as something acquired, not innate. Conversely, nobility, kingship, and settled luxury are proclaimed as integral to Southerner cultural identity, and Southerners are thus more authentically Abbasid; or, phrased the other way, Abbasid culture emerges as an extension of Yemeni pre-Islamic lifestyle, leaving the Northerners as mere invitees to the party of civilization that had been going on for quite some time without them.

While the poems neatly fuse Yemeni heritage into the Abbasid cultural status quo, difficult theological hurdles remained, since the Abbasids were Muslim, whereas Abū Nuwās's Yemeni heroes were pre-Islamic and therefore prima facie outsiders to the caliphate's Muslim order. To overcome this challenge, Abū Nuwās claims that the caliphal lineage is just as "Southern" as it is "Northern," by virtue of one Yemeni noblewoman who married into the Abbasid line (lines 57–60).[37] The argument is somewhat anemic, since Muḥammad and the Quraysh are thoroughly part of the Northerners' world, but Abū Nuwās pushes the argument with more success by drawing parallels between Abbasid caliphal *imperium* and pre-Islamic Yemeni "precedent." For example, the references to the Sasanian kings Bahrām and Qābūs in the "B Poem" (lines 13–14, 25–26) depict the Yemenis as dictating terms and imposing tribute over the Sasanians, a foreshadowing of the elimination of Sasanian sovereignty in the Muslim conquests. Hence the contemporary Muslim mastery over Persia is ascribed a Yemeni pedigree.[38] And the fact that the Abbasid caliphate based its glory on wide conquest is also anticipated in the line about Southerners (appendix, poem 3, lines 7–8):

> We conquered the earth—east and west,
> While your old man was just a fetus.

Just as late-eighth-century Abbasid Muslims enjoyed near-global domination, Abū Nuwās asserts that the pre-Islamic Yemenis did, too, whereas the pre-Islamic Northerners had nothing. Again, Abbasid-Muslim achievement is prefigured within Southerner history, expressly leaving Northerners on the outside, as late joiners to the history of empire. Essential features of what was valued in Abbasid *imperium* are thereby aligned with Southerner heritage, somewhat compensating for the community's otherwise limited Islamic credentials.

Abū Nuwās also makes a further, direct attempt to claim Muslim pedigree for his ancient Southerner forebears by linking the kings of Ḥimyar to a figure named "Tubbaʿ" (appendix, poem 1, lines 53–54). Tubbaʿ was not a name for Ḥimyaritic kings; rather, it appears to have originated as an Ethiopic word for "strongman," which perhaps designated the Ethiopic rulers who toppled the kingdom of Ḥimyar in the sixth century CE.[39] Historically, therefore, Tubbaʿ was not indigenous to South Arabia, but two enigmatic and unelaborated Qur'ānic verses summon the word (Qur'ān 44:37, 50:14), and while the Qur'ān does not explain who its "Tubbaʿ" was, Muslim exegetes guessed, and most concluded that Tubbaʿ must have been a Muslim believer in times before

Muḥammad.[40] The term's obscurity, coupled with Muslim exegetical reasoning that Tubbaʿ was an ancient believer, evidently offered Southerner partisans, such as Abū Nuwās, opportunity to appropriate the name, forget its Ethiopic origins, and apply it to a fanciful reconstruction of pre-Islamic Yemen, in which they presented all kings of Ḥimyar as Muslim rulers with the title Tubbaʿ (pl. Tabābiʿa), and who conquered a Yemeni-Muslim world empire long before Muḥammad's followers launched their conquests.[41] The Ethiopic background of Tubbaʿ may already have been forgotten or was very obscurely known by the time of the Qur'ān, and hence its "Tubbaʿ" presented an empty shell that genealogical Yemenis filled with new meaning. Once again, pre-Islamic history was a casualty of Abbasid-era efforts to project South Arabia as the precursor to Abbasid Iraq. Sherds of memories from pre-Islam were reprocessed with Abbasid ingredients that grafted trappings of Muslim identity and created an appropriately "global-imperial" communal identity for Yemenis in a fashion specifically tailored to speak to the values of second-/eighth-century Iraqis, intoning that Abbasid Islamic *imperium* was a replication of an earlier Yemeni tradition.

Abū Nuwās's bombast thus represents an urban Abbasid manipulation of history to construct a distinct Southerner identity deserving to sit atop contemporary social structure, while simultaneously demarcating a second community, the Northerners, as separate from them and as undeserving of the same privileged status. Such emphasis on Southerner versus Northerner lineage and their different respective communal histories as markers of separation intriguingly corresponds to discourses we could label "ethnic," and although the Southerner/Northerner divide did not express itself violently in Abū Nuwās's context, he was only one generation removed from a period when the two groups were clashing in Iraq, and during Abū Nuwās's lifetime, Southerner and Northerner groups continued violent conflicts in the caliphate's provinces.[42] In Abū Nuwās's Iraq, the affluence flowing from the caliphal capital meant that all Arab groups shared a seat atop the contemporary social order, thus dissuading them from violence, but a sense of real rivalry seems to have remained, which was deescalated to a cultural tussle in which poetry was a means to negotiate relative bragging rights. I venture this impression via the reported attempts by Northerners to rebut Abū Nuwās's message.[43] One response survives (appendix, poem 4), and its choice of material is instructive.

The response poem ignores Abū Nuwās's slights against Northerner *aʿrāb* roots and rehabilitates Northerner merit instead via focus on ancient Northerner kingship, with express emphasis striking where the Southerners were weakest:

Islamic credentials. The rebuttal begins with Northerner boasts of their sacred honor as custodians of Mecca (lines 3–6) and as kinsmen of the caliphs (lines 7–10). Northerners (cited here by the name "Maʿadd") possessed much stronger claims to these cornerstones of Muslim identity, because the Quraysh, the tribe of Muḥammad and the caliphs, was Northerner. The Northerner poet also marshals the Qur'ān against the Yemenis, noting the Southerner queen of Sheba's submission to Solomon (lines 34–42), herein engaging in sacred lineage manipulation of his own, claiming Solomon as a relative of Maʿadd (line 41). The assertion alludes to the biblical pair of Isaac and Ishmael, sons of Abraham, and the Northerner claim of genealogical descent of their progenitor Maʿadd from Ishmael.[44] The Maʿadd-Ishmaelite lineage model makes Northerners "brothers" of Isaac's line of Hebrew prophets, and by arguing for a Northerner share in Solomonic *prophetic* kingship, the poet trumps Abū Nuwās's claims of Southerner *worldly* kingship. Again rewriting history to reflect contemporary power relations, the submission of the biblical/Qur'ānic Sheba to Solomon and her conversion to his monotheism are self-evidently a metaphorical precursor to the South Arabians' submission to Muḥammad and their "late" conversion to Islam. The express mention of Maʿadd as the "brother" of the queen of Sheba's "lord" (line 42) makes this explicit, since Solomon lived many generations before Muslim genealogists postulated Maʿadd's birth,[45] and the poet's collapsing of chronology in order to link Solomon and Maʿadd in the same breath transforms biblical history into a narrative of deep-rooted Northerner dominance over the Southerners.

The Northerner poem's conclusion, where the Yemenis are depicted selling their precious pearl to a Ma'addite king who fixes it to his racehorse's ornament, categorically refutes Southerner pretensions to both wealth and sovereignty over pre-Islamic Northerners and also alludes to a related contemporary discourse that linked Arabian horses to prophetic origins. In the late second/eighth century, Arab horses were believed to have been bred in either the stables of Solomon or by Ishmael;[46] both options facilitating further intertwining of Northerner identity as imperial cavalrymen with prophetic lineage. Though merely a fanciful historiographical conjecture, its value in embedding prophetic credentials for the elite of the post-conquest society is manifest.[47]

Abū Nuwās's "B Poem" and the Northerner rebuttal point toward identity construction between competing elites as strategies within a race toward integration. The identity of the caliphate's elite was under construction, as the caliphate itself constituted a novel form of political organization. Arab identity as a social asset and form of self-identification was born of these elite attempts

to forge ethnic boundaries to maintain their status atop the caliphate's social structure, and the scion of the original conquerors consequently shared mutual interest in embracing an Arab-qua-elite identity for themselves, but Arab identity was in a formative state, and different factions within the caliphate enjoyed considerable conceptual room to experiment and mold the parameters of Arabness to their own advantage. Southerners and Northerners thus articulated competing identities which each sought to monopolize, thereby asserting the most authentic share in elite Arabness.[48]

In the matrix of power and cultural capital in early-Abbasid-era Iraq, the caliphal court and its claims to religious authority, imperial kingship, and material luxury set the standard for the identity desired amongst Iraq's elite. The poetry considered so far affords a glimpse into how different Arab elite groups articulated their status claims: each group claimed deep-rooted connection to Islam, kingship, and wealth, and each group focused in particular on the pre-Islamic past to "prove" that their ancestors were more Muslim, more sovereign, and richer than the pre-Islamic ancestors of their rivals. The intriguing emphasis on pre-Islam seems to have arisen from the relative parity between Northerner and Southerner elites in early-Abbasid Iraq; their joint power-sharing meant that little could be gained by vaunting contemporary heroes, whereas the hazier and more malleable memories of pre-Islam offered better material for identity construction and competition. Memory of the existence of a historic pre-Islamic kingdom of Ḥimyar served as a beacon for genealogical Yemeni imagination of their imperial past, yet this Abbasid-era Yemeni imaginary elided the actual history of Ḥimyar, essentially emptying its significations and turning its name into a receptacle into which a new "pre-Islamic" Yemeni identity was formatted in an Abbasid-looking guise. Abū Nuwās's genealogical Yemeni-ness is accordingly not a nostalgic wish to recreate the pre-Islamic Southerner past; rather, it was articulated to better integrate into the Abbasid present, and it therefore is disconnected from any form of community that could have been imagined in pre-Islamic South Arabia. Abū Nuwās's Yemen is entirely part and parcel of Abbasid-era Iraqi elite identity.

### *Diʿbil*

Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī was less than ten years Abū Nuwās's junior, but he appears to have composed very little poetry until middle age,[49] and the bulk of his surviving oeuvre commences from al-Maʾmūn's caliphate (r. 197–218/813–833), hence Diʿbil's Yemeni-partisan verse primarily addressed the generation following Abū Nuwās. This was a period of seismic sociopolitical change,

beginning in 186/802, when the caliph al-Rashīd divided the caliphate between his two sons, al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn. Immediately following al-Rashīd's death, the brothers' mutual distrust flared into the Fourth Fitna War (193–211/809–820), bringing combat to Iraq for the first time since the fall of the Umayyads, and al-Maʾmūn's eventual victory was only secured following a siege and sack of Baghdad and devastation in the Iraqi countryside. Iraqi elites, Northerner and Southerner alike, were shaken by the fall of al-Amīn, and new forms of courtly power based around the circles of al-Maʾmūn and his eastern Iranian supporters began to marginalize the old status groups.[50]

In this troubled environment, Diʿbil repeats discourses encountered in Abū Nuwās's Southerner-partisan poetry, alongside new and bolder claims (see appendix, poems 5–8). Poem 6 lampoons Tamīm Northerners, invoking the familiar chiding of their Bedouin roots and contrasting their miserable existence with the Southerner boast to be "kings and sons of kings," but Diʿbil adds the palpably more aggressive assertion of express Southerner domination over Tamīm (poem 6, lines 14–23). Whereas the earlier Abū Nuwās eschewed overt statements of Yemeni rule over specific Northerner tribes and made do instead with counterpoising general praise of Southerners against lampoons of Northerner groups for their own shortcomings,[51] Diʿbil exaggerates an antagonistic declaration of Northerner submission to Yemen. The shift complements Diʿbil's profession of pride in militant Yemeni-ness:

> To my people I donate
> All the life given to me.
> I am the son of rulers and lords,
> The line of handsome nobles.
> We strike necks
> With sharp Indian steel.
> We nobles have no better recourse
> Than to steadfastness and the sword.[52]

Diʿbil also escalates the antagonism in his treatment of Arabness. While Abū Nuwās chastised Northerners for their *aʿrāb* heritage, I have not found poems in which he outright denies the Arab identity of Northerner elites,[53] whereas Diʿbil regularly engages in racialist invective. He uses a triad of words connoting non-Arabness: *ʿajam* (non-Arab lineage), *nabaṭ* (Iraqi indigenous agriculturalists), and *ʿilj* (originally, "rough wild donkey,"[54] thence "boorish oaf," and thence "non-Arab non-Believer"),[55] and Diʿbil marshals variations of these words in invective formulas denying the Arab identity of his foes and casting them into a repudiated conceptual category of non-Arab otherness,[56] such as the people of

Qom:

> Crosses between Arab-feigning oafs
> Or Arabs aspiring to be louts.[57]

The terminology enhances the poetry's aggressive voice, transcending simple boast of Southerners' superiority over Northerners by wielding ethnicity as a weapon to relegate Northerners into an underclass.

In a comparable play on Arab/non-Arab identity, Diʿbil twists the familiar Northerner claim to prophetic heritage via the Abrahamic/Ishmaelite descent model into an admission of Northerner non-Arabness. He castigates Northerners who celebrate Abrahamic lineage as being "Jews," laying bare the tautology of Northerner claims to Islamic pedigree via descent from Abraham, since the Northerner genealogical model ultimately traces its lineage to the non-Arab Hebrew prophetic line (appendix, poem 8, lines 1–4). Having made this triumphant observation, Diʿbil can associate the Northerners with Jews who were reportedly turned into pigs and monkeys by an act of God's wrath,[58] and he extends the invective to the caliphal Quraysh whom he astoundingly describes as indistinguishable from *nabaṭī* Iraqi peasants (poem 8, lines 26–27). This latter observation underlines a strikingly binary sense of ethnicity between Arabs and *all* others, with Diʿbil's assertion that only Southerners can truly claim Arabness, leaving the rest, even the caliphal family, in a servile state.

The lampoon of the caliphal family deepens into threatening statements, too, as two poems by Diʿbil relish the memory of caliphs killed by Yemenis.[59] Historically, Diʿbil is accurate, inasmuch as four regicides were committed by members of *Yamāniya* groups during the First, Third, and Fourth Fitnas,[60] but Diʿbil conflates these isolated acts into a presumptive penchant of Yemenis to kill caliphs generally, and he lampoons each successive caliph from al-Maʾmūn to al-Mutawakkil, with foreboding reminders that Diʿbil's "people" had murdered previous caliphs:

> Don't consider my passion like my father's equanimity:
> The cool-headed elders are most unlike wild youth.
> I am from a people whose swords
> Killed your brother, and bequeathed you the throne.
> . . .
> So many nobles past, and caliphs too,
> Their blood a delicious goal for us.[61]

His scorn for caliphs reaches an incredible height in a poem directed against al-

Muʿtaṣim (r. 218–227/833–842):

> The books count the Abbasid house at seven,
> Nothing is said of the eighth.
> So it was in the Seven Sleepers Den
> Seven virtuous men, and the eighth, a dog.[62]

The line invokes the Qur'ānic account of the Seven Sleepers, the eighth of whom was "their dog" (Qur'ān 22:18). Al-Muʿtaṣim was the eighth Abbasid caliph. Ostensibly, Diʿbil's Southerner partisanship thus boasts of perceived impunity toward the new authority figures of the third-/ninth-century court.

Diʿbil's bombastic partisanship also amplifies the Southerners' share of Islamic merit. We saw Abū Nuwās's poetry skip uneasily over the underlying reality that South Arabians were not related to Muḥammad's kin, but for Diʿbil, this was no obstacle. He points to the people of Medina (appendix, poem 8, lines 15–20), central Arabians whom Muslim genealogists counted as Southerner Arabs and the first community to welcome Muḥammad, sheltering him when he was persecuted by his own (Northerner) Quraysh. Undercutting the standard Northerner claim for superior Islamic pedigree via kinship with Muhammad, Diʿbil asserts that Muḥammad's "true descendants" are those who "truly believe," and memory of the Medinese converts thereby tips the scales of Islamic hierarchy to place Southerners in the pole position:

> If you say that the Prophet is yours,
> Know that Muḥammad is for all believers.[63]
> Nizār[64] knows that my people
> Were the first to defend prophecy.
> From our nobles are born purified men,
> This purity is for those who love God.[65]

On the theme of pre-Islamic Southerner *imperium*, too, Diʿbil expands from Abū Nuwās with more detailed claims about pre-Islamic Southerner conquests. For instance, he is explicit that they reached the very extremities of the world: from the farthest Maghreb in the west, where they erected a statue at the entrance to the "sand sea of no return," to the gates of Merv, Samarqand, and China in the east (appendix, poem 5, lines 7–8). The eastern locations are expressive: Merv was the capital of al-Maʾmūn, Samarqand lay at the maximum extent of the Abbasid realm, and China was a step beyond Abbasid imperial dreams. Diʿbil accordingly lays claim over the status locations of al-Maʾmūn and the new eastern Iranian elite and strongly implies that pre-Islamic Southerner imperium bettered the Abbasids. Diʿbil's repeated stress that the pre-Islamic Yemeni

conquerors “inscribed on the gates” of the captured cities (poem 5, line 5; poem 8, lines 7–8) further alludes to Abbasid practice of displaying caliphal control via inscriptions, and again Diʿbil’s assertions associate his contemporary cultural capital with pre-Islamic Southerners.

As a body of work, Diʿbil presents a more chauvinistic Yemeni-ness than Abū Nuwās. Diʿbil’s boasts portray the Southerners as uniquely Arab, preeminently Muslim, imperial, and sovereign since ancient pre-Islam and up to his present day. His vituperative non-Arab slurs and cavalier approach to caliphs and other urban notables are suggestive also that Yemeni identity had evolved since Abū Nuwās’s generation into a more competitive and perhaps more self-conscious community, which, following the Fourth Fitna, was no longer content to spar culturally with Northerners but instead sought to displace them. To further evaluate such impressions, the poetry’s context and function now need specific consideration.

## Yemenis and Arabness in Third-/Ninth-Century Literature

Despite the differences in tone and volume of aggressiveness, a central commonality of both Abū Nuwās’s and Diʿbil’s Southerner-partisan verse is the summoning of a South Arabian past that is almost entirely unlike South Arabian history recoverable from actual pre-Islamic archaeological, epigraphic, and literary indicators. Genealogical Yemeni identity was consequently a mostly imagined communal past constructed in the guise of the community’s Abbasid present, and new legends to fill their imagined origins flowed fast and fanciful to build a suitable heritage for Abbasid-era Iraqi ears. The inaccuracies were noticed, as the historian Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. 350/961) chided: “there is nothing in all of history more corrupted and erroneous than the history of the governors and kings of Ḥimyar, for its dynasty lasted such a long time and so few of their kings are mentioned.”[66] Given the disjoint between believable history and the Southerners’ narratives about their past, we wonder why genealogical Yemenis ventured such constructions and became so chauvinistic, and herein evaluation of contemporary circumstances is revealing.

From Diʿbil’s perspective in post–Fourth Fitna Iraq, the social standing of self-identified “Arabs” was in flux. During the first fifty Abbasid years, they enjoyed prestige and wealth in the caliphate’s heartland, but following the victory of al-Maʾmūn in the Fourth Fitna, the Iraqi economy declined,[67] and political and military power shifted from Arab tribal groups to smaller cliques

personally connected to the caliph and newcomer Turkic and Eastern soldiery. The displacement of Arabs by Easterners is noted in Pohl's, Kennedy's, and Sijpesteijn's contributions in this volume (chapters 2, 3, 4, and 12), and for our purposes of the Arab elite perspective, such sociopolitical changes evidently entailed a decline of Arabness as a social asset of elite status. Diʿbil might then be a spokesman expressing the anxieties of the Arab old guard.

Diʿbil's use of Arabness to lambaste opponents does suggest the relevance of ethnicity in the conflict between the established Arabs and the Turkic/Eastern newcomers, wherein it is logical to expect Arabs to emphasize ethnos in order to maintain their status, since ethnicity was in their favor. The faith, language, and sense of origins and history of the caliphate were expressed in Arabic terms, and those groups professing Arab kinship were inexorably linked to the genesis of Islam, Muḥammad, the first conquerors, and the caliphal family. If Arabs could sustain ties between Arabness and legitimate political power, they could monopolize prestige alone and subordinate the Turkic and other non-Arab Easterner newcomers whose lineage was external to the cultural capital of Islam. Such was the value of Arab ethnicity in theory, but in practice, the military structure of the third-/ninth-century caliphate was skewed in favor of the Turkic and Easterner elites who rapidly monopolized access to power and economic resources.

We might then speak of an "ethnic predicament" in early-third-/ninth-century Iraq whereby the old Arab tribal elite enjoyed a prestigious ethnic identity, whereas the ethnically inferior Turks and other Easterners possessed de facto military and political power. In a Muslim-dominated system, the trappings of the newcomers' ethnicities could not compete with the established primacy of Arabness, and they would accordingly have been wise to downplay the scope for ethnos to legitimize status in general. As a case of "if you don't have it, discredit it," this is what appears to have transpired, as Kennedy's contribution in this volume (chapter 2) reveals the shifts away from the relevance of ethnic identity in state formation from the third/ninth century. Arabness transitioned out of political relevance, "de-ethnical" states rose across the caliphate, and Diʿbil's belligerent Arabness accordingly may represent the voice of the last layers of Iraqi Arab-kin elites who sought to counteract the new trend by rallying around Arabness, since ethnos was one of the few social assets with which they still had an upper hand to stem the advancing power of the Easterner newcomers.

Diʿbil's habit of denying his enemies' Arab lineage and lampooning them as *ʿilj ʿajamī* ("non-Arab slob") could therefore indicate that the threatened Arab elites were growing more bigoted as they embraced a "reactionary Arabness" and rearticulated their identity in aggressively self-defensive forms. Diʿbil does

specifically critique the favors al-Muʿtaṣim bestowed on Turkish military commanders:

> The people are lost when their leaders
> Are Waṣīfs and Ashnāses[68]—what ruin!
> . . .
> The caliph cares for the Turks to a fault.
> He is their mother and their father.[69]

The fact that the military leaders of the new caliphal order of the third/ninth century ethnically lacked a prestige identity from the perspective of established Muslim cultural capital also would explain why expressions of Persian-ness and Turkic-ness did not simply catch on as the new strongmen assumed power. It better suited the new rulers to develop alternative forms of elite identity that obviated matters of ethnos altogether. But lest we conclude that a heightening binary struggle of "Arabs" versus "Turks"/"Easterners" underwrote Diʿbil's sense of identity, we need also to stress that most of Diʿbil's surviving invectives are directed against Northerners, not Turks, and his vehement bluster is at its fiercest when assaulting Northerner identity and asserting specifically Southerner virtue. While there was a real shift of power away from self-identified Arab groups, Diʿbil's poetry indicates that the old inter-Arab feuding was somehow more relevant for his attention.

Diʿbil was not unique: a broad sweep of early-third/ninth-century writing also debates the definition of "Arab" and Arab identity in antagonistic Southerner/Northerner terms. For example, there was debate about whether "Arabs" were those who speak Arabic as their mother tongue or those born into Arabian lineages,[70] and from the testimony of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), the Northerner Nizār faction endeavored to define the Arab as one who speaks Arabic,[71] an argument to Northerner advantage since South Arabians did not speak Arabic in pre-Islam,[72] and Northerners could rest their case of being "original" Arabs on the basis that Arabic had been "their" language since time immemorial. Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933) reports a rebuttal of Himyarite Southerners who defined "Arabic" as an umbrella term connoting many dialects, not a single language,[73] thereby facilitating Southerners to retroactively include South Arabians in the Arabic linguistic family and deny the Nizārī attempt to monopolize Arabness. Competitive genealogy was also marshaled in debate. Northerners appear to have backed the assertion that the first Arab was Ishmael, and they attached their genealogy to him to intertwine their identity with both original Arabness and prophecy. But Southerners advanced different claims,

attempting at first to attach Southerner lineages to Ishmael, and when this failed,[74] they elaborated a bolder two-pronged assertion (i) that they descended from Qaḥṭān, who they claimed was *the* original Arab, and (ii) that Ishmael (and, by extension, all the Northerners) only "became Arab" by virtue of marriage into Qaḥṭān's lineages.[75] They assigned Qaḥṭān a son, Yaʿrub (lit., "He who is Arab"), positing him as the first Arabic speaker,[76] and claimed for themselves the prophets Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, who are mentioned in the Qur'ān but without express connection to Arabness or South Arabia. This model undercut all Northerner claims for precedence, and poetry was forged to "prove" the Southerners' new Arab communal history, as in the following lines placed on the tongue of the Prophet's poet Ḥassān ibn Thābit:

> You learned your Arabic from old Yaʿrub,
> Our father: you're the lot who've become Arabs.
> Of old you only had non-Arabic tongues
> Talking like stupid beasts in the wild.[77]

The poem is almost certainly anachronistic: poetry specialists comment on Ḥassān ibn Thābit being a favored target of forgeries since he was a Medinan poet who composed invective against the Quraysh in Muḥammad's lifetime and thus engaged with topics later Yemeni partisans could rehash with their own embellishments added on.[78]

Southerner historical inventions met with resistance: the Northerner Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 231/845–846) discredited such poems ascribed to Ḥassān and argued that pre-Islamic Southerners did not speak "our Arabic."[79] But the volume of Southerner-partisan works expanded in the early third/ninth century with the emergence of narrative histories projecting the entire sweep of Southerner communal history before Muḥammad as a procession of Muslim-led, world-spanning empires. Four such texts survive: Wahb ibn Munnabih's *al-Tījān*; ʿAmr (or ʿUmar) ibn Sharya's *Akhbār al-Yaman*; *Tārīkh al-ʿArab qabla al-Islām*, attributed to al-Aṣmaʿī;[80] and *Waṣāyā al-mulūk*, attributed to Diʿbil himself (or perhaps his son).[81] While their manuscript traditions are questionable, their historical narratives mirror Diʿbil's more grandiloquent celebrations of Yemeni achievements as compared to the poems of Abū Nuwās. The contrast suggests that exaggerated Southerner pre-Muḥammadic Muslim *imperium* narratives coalesced too late to be available to Abū Nuwās but were current with Diʿbil in post–Fourth Fitna Iraq, thereby pointing to a maturation of Southerner boast by the early-to-mid-third/ninth century.[82]

In sum, Iraqi cultural production in Diʿbil's day reveals remarkable plasticity

and disagreement over the core components of Arab identity, and the rival camps appear to have enjoyed considerable conceptual space to develop their own narratives about who qualified as a "true Arab." Such uneven Arabness underlines that Arab identity was still a rather novel form of ethnic community, and even two centuries into the Islamic era, a hegemonic discourse about Arabic lineage, language, and pre-Islamic communal history had not been established.[83] This may help explain the deft rise to power of Turkic groups, as there was evidently no unified "Arab" bloc with a self-assured identity to oppose them; instead, the early third/ninth century witnessed a sinking ship of Arabness as a social asset, upon which Southerners were busy rearranging deck chairs—that is, by making increasingly bold claims to increase their share in the imagined origins of the community.

The texts considered so far, and Diʿbil's poetry in particular, ultimately leave us in a curious position. Why would Southerner/Northerner rhetoric have intensified against the backdrop of Turkic ascendance and the marginalization of Arab groups from Iraqi centers of power? Diʿbil seems a veritable "national poet" of the Southerners, and his heartfelt profession of Southerner identity (appendix, poem 7) seems to run to the core of his soul, but did the caliphal court care for any of this rhetoric? It thus remains to engage a final hurdle facing historiographical use of poetry: were the poets serious, or did they merely intend their rhetoric to entertain? Such questions fundamentally affect our ability to extract conceptions of identity from poetry, and the chapter's last section shall interrogate the poems' reception and possible functions.

## Ritual Clowning or Ethnic Identity?

Though his poetry acts avowedly Southerner, Abū Nuwās was not born into Southerner lineage. His precise origins are unknown, in part because he made various claims about his background, but his pro-Southern poems were reportedly composed to curry favor with Southerner elites in al-Baṣra from whom he hoped for payment.[84] Abū Nuwās's questionable lineage does not necessarily mean his poetry is meaningless—if it was intended to please the Southerners, then it assuredly spoke in terms aligned with their identity, and the poems circulated and were commended,[85] but there are nonetheless discrepancies over the details, for example, whether or not Abū Nuwās was imprisoned for the antagonistic "B Poem." Al-Ṣūlī affirms Abū Nuwās was punished for it, but others narrate that Abū Nuwās was instead imprisoned for his inveterate drunkenness and libertine attitudes that overstepped lines of

decorum, and hence the true extent to which the “B Poem” was politicized remains an open question.

There are also doubts about Diʿbil’s lineage;[86] he likely was a Southerner from the Khuzāʿa, but his persona as a poet and his relationship to Southerner political circles are intricate. Diʿbil arrived late into the literary limelight; almost nothing is reported of his life before his forties, and nearly all his surviving poetry emanates from his later years, too. There is one report of Diʿbil’s noble lineage,[87] but it is unsubstantiated, and there are no indications that he engaged in politicized activity before or after he became a court poet. The later writer al-Masʿūdī (d. 332/943–944) cites Diʿbil as a spokesman of Southerner historiography,[88] but Diʿbil’s biographers are silent on his political connections and refer to him instead as a “lampoon artist of filthy invective” (*qabīḥ al-hijāʾ khabīth al-lisān*).[89] The earliest biographical entry on Diʿbil, composed by a contemporary, Ibn Qutayba (who claims to have met the poet),[90] mentions no Southerner bias, and intriguingly, Ibn al-Muʿtazz, who is explicit about Abū Nuwās’s Southerner partisanship (*taʿaṣṣub*), makes no comparable comment regarding Diʿbil.[91]

Diʿbil’s purported involvement in another politically-charged context during the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil exhibits similar difficulties for interpreting the intentions of his poetry. The caliph desecrated the tomb of the Shi’ite Imam al-Ḥusayn, and, according to the later litterateur Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), “Diʿbil and other poets” lampooned al-Mutawakkil.[92] Diʿbil did compose poetry championing Shi’ite leanings, but once again, there is little evidence from sources closer to Diʿbil’s lifetime to suggest that this poetic penchant crossed over into actual politicking between Shi’ite Imams and the caliphal order. The modern edition of Diʿbil’s *Dīwān* does contain a poem alluding to a “donkey” which prevents the devout from visiting al-Ḥusayn’s tomb[93]: the donkey is presumably al-Mutawakkil, but the poem is of questionable authenticity. The *Dīwān*’s editor notes that the poem is of a category of poetry narrated solely in Shi’ite sources, and this particular poem appears only once in a Shi’ite “martyrology” of al-Ḥuysan compiled three centuries after Diʿbil by Akhṭab Khwārazm (d. 568/1172-3). Diʿbil’s memory as a pro-Shi’ite enabled subsequent Shi’ites to falsely attribute later fabricated impassioned poetry to Diʿbil, and al-Ṣafadī, also at several centuries’ remove from Diʿbil, accepted their narratives, but ascribing Diʿbil himself an operative role in sectarian politics is difficult to substantiate.

While Diʿbil’s activities after the Fourth Fitna connected him with influential figures in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and while these figures were embroiled in

political and sectarian conflict, Diʿbil's own role at court might better be read as simply business: he peddled poems for cash and turned to vicious lampoon when his patrons stopped paying.[94] When Diʿbil claimed that Mālik ibn Ṭawq and Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn were "Peasants/non-Arabs/scum,"[95] he therefore may have been articulating the truth, or reflecting ingrained Southerner hatred of others, or just exaggerating for the purpose of lampoon. And likewise, pro-Shi'ite poems ascribed to Diʿbil may have been composed to actively lampoon anti-Shi'ite figures, or they were merely composed to curry favor with influential patrons of Shi'ite persuasion, or they may not actually have been composed by Diʿbil at all, and only became ascribed to him in the succeeding centuries.

Our interpretations are further complicated by the possibility that both Abū Nuwās and Diʿbil deliberately played to ritual clown personae. Hamori's work on Abū Nuwās amply demonstrates the poet's role as a professional fool permitted to make statements impossible for others,[96] and Abū Nuwās's attempt to join the ranks of the Yemenis may have been another act of clowning. His claim to have been born a client of the Ḥā and Ḥakam lineage seems serious enough today, but to a second-/eighth-century ear, it may actually have been an obvious jest, since the Ḥā and Ḥakam were weak lineages in al-Baṣra, and moreover, there was apparently "not a single member of [the Ḥā and Ḥakam] in all of al-Ahwāz [Abū Nuwās's birthplace],"[97] thus making Abū Nuwās's claim an outright impossibility. Likewise, when Abū Nuwās had earlier pretended to be a Northerner, he claimed lineage in the clan of one ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād of the Taym Allāh, but it was pointed out to him that ʿUbayd Allāh suffered from semi-paralysis (*fulij*) and had no children to ever start a clan.[98] Abū Nuwās's lineage choices were thus all patently wrong, and although he would settle on the Yemeni claim, the stories of his misguided searches for kin seem rather analogous to Charlie Chaplin bumbling from one absurd situation to another.

It is difficult to adduce more certain conclusions for Abū Nuwās, since we are reliant on biographies written in the centuries after his death. While the "real" Abū Nuwās may be speaking to us through some of his extant verse, later biographers, particularly al-Iṣfahānī, may have had an interest in reshaping history to produce entertaining stories of clowns, covering up more serious political issues that, by al-Iṣfahānī's time, had ceased to be relevant. Moreover, Abū Nuwās may have acted seriously on some occasions and as a clown on others, meaning the interpretation of his Yemeni partisan poetry hinges on its placement along the spectrum of his oeuvre. Regrettably, his biographies remain insufficiently studied, entailing a degree of imprecision when we try to discern what ethnic identity may have meant to him.[99]

Diʿbil's biography is very little studied,[100] but stories about him and his poetry also bear marks of the ritual fool. The extant tales of his first forty years reduce to three unflattering stories of a youth spent as a thief, a thug, or even a murderer, building a characterization of a disreputable and pugnacious man of little social worth.[101] The stories of his later escapades are little better; he had no career beyond using poetry as a source of income, and while this is typical of Abbasid-era panegyrists, Diʿbil is distinguished by his penchant for swiftly turning against his patrons with sharp lampoons that are the source of most of his ethnic slurs noted above. Although *al-Aghānī* begins its biography of Diʿbil by noting his extreme partisanship to the Southerners,[102] Diʿbil had no active role in politicized movements, and the main reported effect of his poetry was its ability to arouse the laughter of caliphs and other notables.[103] Given that context, the content of Diʿbil's lampoons could have been designed as theatrical misanthropy to parody the traditional poet-patron relationship, and their seriousness bears questioning.

Diʿbil's boasts, which sometimes verge on the ridiculous, likewise may have been intended frivolously. For example, he was past fifty when he composed a poem threatening the caliph with his "hot-tempered youth" and "bloodthirsty swords,"[104] and Diʿbil moreover had no prior military experience.[105] The line may thus be more productively read as a deliberate parody of earlier Arabic warrior poetry stock themes,[106] instead of showing any real capacity to wield a sword and challenge the caliphate. The contrast between the elderly court poet Diʿbil and his exaggerated self-image as a warrior was perhaps the crux of the fool persona that enabled him to compose such poems without fear of reprisal. The poems' content would in turn be dictated by the expectations of parody of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic poet-hero exemplar, and since Diʿbil was a Southerner, and since Southerners had boasted about their merits in verse, Diʿbil would follow suit, but the meaning and significance of his boasts shift from serious pride to overwrought bluster. In other words, Yemeni-ness may not have been so bold in practice as it masqueraded in verse, and cultured audiences would have appreciated Diʿbil's poems as exaggerated parodies on what had been more serious issues.

The search for meaning in Diʿbil's exaggerations leads us to an aphorism recorded by the medieval poetry critique Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar (d. c. 337/948–949) about the superiority of "lying poetry": *aḥsan al-shiʿr akdhabuh*, "poetry is at its best when it is furthest from the truth."[107] By this, Qudāma did not mean fantasy or outright falsehood but instead explained that hyperbolic description is preferable to concision and that the best poets (including, according to Qudāma,

Abū Nuwās) are those who can extend descriptive metaphors to extreme limits of logic.[108] For Qudāma, the merits of exaggeration are applicable to flowery descriptions invoked in poetry of praise and dispraise, which is somewhat distinguished from the more informal-sounding self-boasts of Diʿbil, but in a context where audiences appreciated poetry that stretched metaphors in exaggerated directions, Diʿbil's misappropriation of poetic hyperbole appropriate to a register of formal praise poetry for his own absurd self-praise parodies expectations of the "good poet" and thus results in the enhancement of Diʿbil's ritual clown persona.

As for the effects of Diʿbil's poetry, almost all accounts agree that al-Maʾmūn pardoned the rash and violent invectives. Later biographies report several possible explanations for the clemency,[109] though Geert Jan van Gelder has insightfully suggested that the pardon was a show of the caliph's laudable trait of equanimity (*ḥilm*), deemed a key trait of true manliness.[110] If this were true, we could couple the observation with the indications of Diʿbil's entertainer/ritual clown persona and propose that the entire act of Diʿbil's threatening poem and the caliph's mercy was an orchestrated and public contrast of *jahl* versus *ḥilm* (passion versus equanimity), poet fool versus caliph statesman. The triumph of equanimous *ḥilm* over imprudent *jahl* lay at the heart of third-/ninth-century literary norms of virtue, and in this context, the extreme contrast between Diʿbil's rash boasts and caliphal clemency bears reading as a courtly show to demonstrate the caliph's wisdom and legitimacy, not a sincere take on Southerner communal autonomy.[111]

The possibility of Diʿbil's poetry being part of a staged act of military impotence is paralleled in verses and stories depicting his sexual impotence.[112] Diʿbil appears in several ill-judged circumstances attempting to woo younger girls with bluster and lusty poetry, but, like his empty martial invectives, his amorous verse was never consummated, either. The comic intent of his role as a failed lover fits well with a poem in which he claims to dislike girls older than twenty, with a preference for those closer to ten.[113] Here, the spectacle of an elderly man with a large cyst on his neck[114] lustily expressing desire for youthful girls plays out a traditional pantomime. Pointedly, when Diʿbil does mention sexual triumphs, it is with skinny girls (the essence of unattractiveness, given the Abbasid taste for corpulent women), and he lampoons them for their bony bodies, but he, as their sexual partner, comes out hardly any more heroic.[115] A deliberate pandering for laughs may then be the inspiration for stories featuring Diʿbil's failure in love, one of which entered the repertoire of the *Thousand and*

*One Nights*.[116]

Diʿbil's lack of serious resolve also colors his invective poetry. It is reported that Diʿbil expressly denied composing the audacious comparison of the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim to a dog,[117] and in an expanded anecdote, we read that one of Diʿbil's court-poet rivals, ʿAlī ibn Shakla, admitted to composing the poem and falsely attributing it to Diʿbil. According to the report, ʿAlī's reason was not to land Diʿbil in trouble; rather, it was part of an orchestrated prank. When the poem was recited and Diʿbil was summoned to court for execution, his rival interceded at the last moment with the news that he was the true author and explained that he had faked the line only so that he could have the satisfaction of saving Diʿbil's life, forcing Diʿbil to be indebted to him.[118] Once again, Diʿbil is reduced to an impotent fool, his very life subordinated to a sarcastic prank of his rival.

In a similar manner, another anecdote depicts Diʿbil as the victim of a crude and poorly articulated lampoon composed by a nameless amateur versifier from Qom. Instead of responding with a verse of his own, Diʿbil attempted to bribe his satirizer with one thousand dirhams, surprising his companions, who supposed the sub-poet would have been happy with just five dirhams, but Diʿbil protested that the verses could pass among the common folk and ruin his reputation, such that he would have gladly paid fifty thousand to silence the poet. But true to the form of a fool, Diʿbil's bribe was impotent: the poem spread, "the masses of low-lives and slaves mocked him," and Diʿbil could never enter Qom again for shame.[119] The story may be fabricated—only one source reports it—but the humor in beholding the Abbasid era's most famous satirist out-lampooned by an amateur is self-evident, and the tale further envelops Diʿbil in the clown's persona.

It is also material to question why Diʿbil avoided punishment despite his many threats against authority figures. While anecdotes record that he was forced to flee al-Muʿtaṣim's court following the "Dog lampoon,"[120] another states that he had to flee from al-Maʾmūn,[121] a third claims he was executed by al-Muʿtaṣim,[122] and yet others relate that he was poisoned by Mālik ibn Ṭawq instead.[123] The conflicting stories obscure the overarching point that Diʿbil survived several reigns, he composed innumerable invective poems without clear evidence of official censure, and he died in his mid-nineties. Perhaps the confusion over the punishment anecdotes results from later writers' conviction that Diʿbil's poetry was so audacious that it *must* have been disciplined, and so they inserted punishment stories to fit the expectation, whereas the real Diʿbil, protected by his clown persona, actually died of old age and not as a victim of

his tongue.

In keeping with the reports of Diʿbil's continued escape from what should have been inevitable punishment, almost all biographies report an opinion that "Diʿbil has carried his cross for years, searching for someone to crucify him on it, but he never found the man to do it."[124] The consistent repetition is expressive that Diʿbil was considered the paradigmatic and inveterate lampoon artist whose work was not intended for serious consumption, as he trotted out verses against caliphs, Northerner elites, and non-Arabs at court. He is even ascribed lampoons of his own Southerner tribe, his brother, his wife, and his own daughter.[125] Whether all are authentic is difficult to judge (perhaps the latter were fabricated to exaggerate Diʿbil's persona as an incorrigible lampooner), but in sum, Diʿbil emerges as a professional satirizer (*hajjāʾ*), at whose work audiences were expected to laugh, not necessarily take offense, and his blustery boast was accordingly an integral part of an act that kept him in coin. He is even reported to have celebrated the fact that poets are praised for lying,[126] and in this context, we may better understand what Diʿbil, in his old age, meant when he informed the poetry collector Ibn Qutayba that his best poetry was "the old stuff"—Bacchic poetry composed with Abū Nuwās and Ibn Abī Shīṣ (both Southerners) before the Fourth Fitna.[127] Toward the end of his life, Diʿbil had perhaps developed a distaste for the repetitive, contrived, and aggressive Southerner-partisan verse that had become his profession in the changing society of third-/ninth-century Iraq.

In addition to what appears a deliberately intended comic effect, Diʿbil is moreover inconsistent in his Southerner partisanship. Two recorded victims of his lampoons, al-Muṭṭalib ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mālik al-Khuzāʿī and the people of Qom were genealogical Yemenis themselves, yet Diʿbil's invective against them unleashed coarse satire against the former and denied the Arabness of the latter.[128] If Southerner solidarity was a social asset upon which Diʿbil relied, such invective would be ill advised, and perhaps these poems underline that the ultimate sources of Diʿbil's wages were nonpartisan courtly circles amused by buffoons. Anecdotally, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ibn Ṭayfūr's *Kitāb Baghdād*, a uniquely valuable source about Iraq's elite circles during al-Maʾmūn's caliphate, provides explicit reference to Diʿbil's invectives against Abū ʿAbbād al-Rāzī, one of al-Maʾmūn's state secretaries (*kātib*), and Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ibn Ṭayfūr expressly describes how al-Maʾmūn laughed whenever he saw his secretary and recalled Diʿbil's verse that portrayed Abū ʿAbbād as a lunatic from the fabled asylum of Dayr Hizqal.[129] Diʿbil's poetry and the caliph's amusement were evidently closely related, and such a context may be similarly applicable to Diʿbil's lusty

and flamboyant Southerner-partisan invective.

If Diʿbil was a ritual clown, then we might best interpret his Southerner-themed boasts as repertoire satire and a facet of the de-ethnicizing process already well under way in the early third/ninth century. As ethnic identity receded from political significance, memories of ethnic slurs from earlier times could shift to the realms of carnival. The songs of Yemeni bravery on the lips of a foolish old man would enliven courts of the post–Fourth Fitna caliphate where Turks and Easterner elites cared less for the merits of Arabness and found such references to the antique ways amusing. The parody on what was once a serious issue would moreover serve the interests of the new elites: if Arabness could be converted into a topic of jest, the Turkic and Easterner usurpers of Abbasid power would escape potential embarrassment stemming from their non-Arab lineage.

Our interpretation of jocular poetry thus ends at a serious point: Southerner identity was tied to the changing fortunes of Arabness, and it transformed from a source of power to a sense of humor. In the de-ethnicizing polities of the third-/ninth-century Middle East, ethnic play looks to have become an aspect of courtly entertainment. Might we then speak of the later Abbasids as "post-ethnic"?

## Conclusions: Ethnos and Jest?

Kennedy's and Pohl's contributions in this volume (chapters 2, 3, and 4) detail the decline of ethnos as an operative identity in the Middle East's political structures, and this chapter pursued the phenomenon by scrutinizing the trajectory of Arabness. Arab identity had evident utility as a social asset in the second/eighth century: the late-Umayyad and early-Abbasid caliphates marked the first time in history when people called themselves "Arabs" in order to assert elite status, and it was also the first time when Arabic became the language of prestige across the Middle East.[130] The vitality of Arab ethnic identity is also attested in the conflicts between Arab groups who considered themselves the major stakeholders on the political scene and articulated their sociopolitical communities as competing factions under an umbrella of the Arab ethnos. The second/eighth century was a point of high Arabness, and groups close to power (or those with aspirations to it) sought inclusion.

Our Iraqi literary indicators for the salience of Arabness in the second/eighth century mirror the increased presence of "Arabs" in Egyptian papyri from the same period, as analyzed in Sijpesteijn's chapter 12 in this volume. Varied

sources thereby suggest that indigenous populations of the Middle East migrated to the Muslims' new towns and sought assimilation into the Arab linguistic, religious, and cultural systems in order to participate in the region's new order.[131] Thus, as Muslims were beginning to call themselves Arabs, immigrants into the Muslim towns were simultaneously maneuvering into the Arab cultural sphere, and therein a familiar story of aspirational assimilation and counter-reaction unfolded. "Real" Arabs (i.e., the scions of the original conquerors) felt a need to defend themselves from the onslaught of the former underclass who adopted the Arabness "cultural stuff"[132] as they moved into the Muslim-established cities, but overall, the phenomenon of urban assimilation blurred the markers of social difference.

The Iraqi situation finds echo in the mid-twentieth-century British middle classes, who, as British *imperium* was collapsing as a political hegemon, celebrated their suburban land tenures and started speaking more "U" than their previous "non-U" in an intriguing middle-class adoption of what was then a declining upper-class lifestyle. In Britain, the interplay of upper- and middle-class cultural markers also fluctuated between serious social change and jest, especially as expressed through accent and language, exemplified in the essays of Nancy Mitford and Richard Buckle.[133] And Evelyn Waugh's remark that Mitford was "someone who only just managed to be upper class" echoes the Abbasid Arabness predicament rather well. As Iraqi Arab elites urbanized and began losing their monopoly over power to Easterners, we find examples of early Abbasid Persians visiting the desert and returning to the Iraqi towns with duly gruff Bedouin accents and ways, adamant that they were new arrivals from Arabia.[134] Literature parodies the assimilators, but behind the joke, real processes of social climbing and assimilation multiplied the meanings of Arab identity. Arabness was (i) a serious mark of pride for military elites, (ii) a goal to be obtained by indigenous civilian Iraqis, and (iii) an absurdity when it materialized in crass attempts to feign Bedouin identity.

By the end of the second/eighth century, distinguishing actual Arabs from more recent joiners seems to have been difficult, and while the label *ʿarabī* connoted status, in contrast to the contemptible *nabaṭī*, there was ambiguity about whom should be labeled with what. Anecdotes of Iraqis masquerading under pretended Arab lineages come to light,[135] pretended "Arabs" were labeled *daʿī*,[136] and invective poetry against "fake" Arabs circulated. For example, Abū Saʿd al-Makhzūmī ridiculed Diʿbil with the language of Northerner chauvinism:

Without Nizār the world would be in trouble

And bereft of stronghold or fort.
The world would throw up its burdens,
And Diʿbil will be stuffed up his mother's arse.[137]

But despite Abū Saʿd's protestations to be Northerner, reports about him attest that his lineage was mixed and uncertain,[138] and his ethnic pretense was itself the target of Southerner rejoinders by Ibn Abī Shīṣ:

Abū Saʿd: swear by the five prayers and your ritual fast:
Are you true about your lineage, or just dreaming in your sleep?[139]

Diʿbil also lampooned Abū Saʿd:

Ah! Abū Saʿd the young poet,
He's known by his nickname, not his father.
He's looking for a father from the Maʿadd;
The seeker and the sought are all lost![140]

By the third/ninth century, many Iraqis—even the caliphs themselves—were progeny of mixed social relations, and ʿ*arabī-nabaṭī* divides would be hard to police, again giving way to humorous interpretation. For example, the Iraqi poet of Soghdian origin Abū Yaʿqūb al-Khuraymī (d. 214/829–830) was called an "Arab" in the presence of Maʾmūn in a joke against another courtier, ʿAlī ibn al-Haytham, who was known for falsely claiming Arabness and "sitting with the Arabs" at court.[141] From the story, it appears no serious insults were intended, and thus, when we read of Diʿbil hurling his similarly intoned variants of *nabaṭī* and ʿ*ajam* in the very same court, they also perhaps intended comparable jest. Moreover, Diʿbil's anti-Arab slurs directed against individuals of clear Arab stock, such as Mālik ibn Ṭawq, seem examples of Arabness as humor and not social commentary.

Likewise, the preeminent poet of al-Muʿtaṣim's court, Abū Tammām (d. 231/845 or 232/846), advertised himself as an Arab from the tribe of Ṭayyiʾ, whereas he was—as everyone seemed to have known—a non-Arab Syrian of Greek Christian origin. Diʿbil sparred with Abū Tammām, lampooning him for his fake Arab lineage:

Look to him and his wit,
See how his Ṭayyiʾ-ing is playing.[142]
Be damned! Who tempted you with this lineage?
A claim you dread in your heart.
If the Ṭayyiʾ are mentioned within a country mile
The light in your eyes grows dim.[143]

Despite the genealogical rhetoric, perhaps it was not the false ethnicity that riled Diʿbil. Diʿbil and Abū Tammām were poetic rivals, and Diʿbil is cited as one of the chief critics of Abū Tammām's poetry.[144] The two accused each other of stealing lines from earlier poets, and the ethnic slurs may have emanated from a public display of competition for the benefit of courtly circles. Accordingly, their apparent ethnic vituperation seems, at least in part, an orchestrated quarrel akin to those of professional wrestlers today. Overall, Abū Tammām's status does not appear to have been affected by his ethnic play, as evidenced in al-Ṣūlī's biography of the mid-third-/ninth-century poet where polarized opinions about Abū Tammām abound, but none marshals ethnos as a means to chide him.

In some other cases, however, serious matters between Arabs and others were still at stake. Old Arab families retained some authority; for example, members of the clan of Abū Dulaf were expressly praised for their Arabness even at the end of the third/ninth century,[145] and it would be hasty to posit the Fourth Fitna as the *end* of Arabness as a political and social asset. Whether Diʿbil himself participated in "serious" comment on Arabness is unclear. He does challenge Aḥmad ibn Abī Duwād's claim to be an Arab of the Iyād, and Aḥmad was a powerful courtier under al-Muʿtaṣim and al-Wāthiq who promoted Turkish military elites above Arab tribal leaders.[146] This may be a case of Diʿbil defending the Arab status quo, but given Diʿbil's general disposition, it may be another jest, though one based upon an underlying reality. Further research on Arabness in the third-/ninth-century courts is needed, but one suspects that while individual self-professed Arab elites were attempting to maintain the dignity of their identity, the court was simultaneously pushing a different agenda to envelop Arabness in jest as new elite cadres formed.

At this juncture, the evidence paints the third/ninth century as a pivot point in Iraq. In the previous century, genealogical Yemenis had developed narratives and lineage systems to embed their community within an Arab identity. Their Arabness debates point to an ethnic moment in early Islam when Muslim elites marshaled Arabness as a strategy of distinction to protect their status. But while ethnicity became an important ingredient of power, the ambit of Arab identity was broader than the contemporaneous ethnicities of the post-Roman kingdoms in Europe explored in this volume. Unlike the multiethnic Carolingians with their regional divisions and even legal codes classified in ethnic terms, each powerful stakeholder group in the early Abbasid caliphate sought membership in one single Arab community. While the Northerners and Southerners competed, the trajectories of both pointed toward ethnic unification, since both shared complementary interests in preserving the status quo which they, as the original

conquerors and original Muslim populations, had created.

During the generations of the second/eighth century of high Arabness, assimilation also made indigenous Iraqis in urban centers nearly as "Arab" as Northerners and Southerners, and with the changes in military power, the old Northerner-Southerner blocs lost practical function. Abū Nuwās may thus have presented his "B Poem" to a politicized Yemeni faction intent upon establishing its status in the mid-second-/eighth-century Abbasid order, but a century later, the "B Poem" had become part of nightly entertainment, where, after rounds of drinking, educated guests brought out "Northerner" versus "Southerner" poetry in a ribald environment.[147] Diʿbil's boasts and lampoons occupy the chronological midpoint between those two poles, and deciding whether he was serious or joking depends on how we choose to interpret the poems and surrounding anecdotes.

What seems prudent to conclude is that the meaning of being genealogically Yemeni was intimately tied to aspirations of being Arab and that both Southerner-ness and Arabness lived with multiple significations. Some were sublime when they colored the identity of proud military factions; others were ridiculous parody. The fact that the names of Southerner tribes and pre-Islamic Southerner heroes were invoked in poetry implies their practical importance, but from the readings adduced here, the carnivalesque of Diʿbil suggests that he intended more of a shared joke than political competition. Like all satirists, Diʿbil necessarily based his allusions on real matters, so his language suggests the existence of a self-aware and proud Southerner community, but it seems remote to consider Diʿbil one of its spokesmen or to believe that the audience of his poetry at the caliphal court cared for the political ramifications as courtly tastes changed and ethnic identity was losing its former significance.

Early Arabic poetry is thus replete with references to community and identity, but its audiences were polyvalent, as the meaning of membership in communities was in flux. Isolating ethnonyms and guessing the contours of ethnic identity can thus furnish misleading inferences. We would like to know what each utterance of communal labels actually meant, and given the current state of knowledge, premodern Arabic literature still withholds from our gaze the full significance of the anecdotes upon which we rely to conceptualize Abbasid society. Arabness had serious and lighthearted meanings, and perhaps the greatest irony of the lampoon satires is their legacy. Later historians took the literary fragments of the Abbasid age at face value and saw fit to use both earnest and flippant expressions together as raw material to imagine Yemeni identity and Yemeni national history.[148] The task for scholars today is to revisit

the narratives with questions of meaning in mind to better determine how early Islamic identities were lived and negotiated between what appear to be rather blurry and evolving lines of entertaining jest and serious difference.

## Appendix

### Abū Nuwās

#### *Poem 1*

(Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, pp. 1–11)

Campsites effaced by the wind and the rain
Are not for me.
Nor do I sob over traces of lost abodes:
They’re for hairy hyenas and stripy old mountain goats.
Nor will I weep for distant, departed travelers,
When you cry over their absence.
No sir! For we are the lords of Nāʿiṭ,
The castle of Ghumdān, of sweetly perfumed balconies.
Al-Ḍaḥḥāk was one of us too—
He who tamed the wild beasts and the Jinn.
And our lords subjugated the land,
For the wants of the needy and the fearful.
When the Persians deposed Bahrām
We compelled their lords to restore him
By our swift advancing cavalry,
Trotting to battle as a pack of wolves.
Led by lords from Ḥimyar,
Proud, of lofty descent
We beat the Romans at Sātīdamā,
Death descending on their battalions.
Peroz took refuge in us that day,
When battle raged its worst.
The Qabīṣa came to his defense
With their spears and razor swords:
We presented to him a realm
Of countless multitudes.
King Qābūs died in our chains
For his seven years of withholding tithe.
Truly, we preserved their nobles’ girls
From the grasp of abductors,
When a captive girl stumbled, she cried
“Rise up!”—Down with her captor!
Down with those who imperil their women
On the day terror sweeps away her friends,

And with those who flee, fearful of thrusting stabs,
Dreading the death-dealing warrior.
Boast of Qaḥṭān unashamed!
For Ḥātim the generous is among their glories.
You will find no horsemen like theirs
On days when heads roll from shoulders:
ʿAmr, Qays, the two Ashtars, Zayd of the Horses:
All of them lions in their contests.
You must seek the proud lions of the Ashāʿitha,
The noble lords of the Muhallab.
And remember the ancient al-Ḥārith,
Who ascended heights words cannot describe.
The Kalb, the Yaḥṣub,
The Umlūk and Alhān of Ḥimyar—all exalted nobles,
And the bright-faced Yazan,
From whose clans Death launches slaughter.
And the tribe of Ghassān
And those who cloaked in sovereignty, swords in hand.
And Ḥimyar: God's Qur'ān
Tells of their virtue and rank.
You can love Quraysh for their most noble one,
And acknowledge their great merit,
But in their genealogy
We have our share:
The Hashemite al-Mahdī's mother,
The good Umm Mūsā: she's ours, so let's boast!
Should they vie with us in bragging,
They can vaunt but merchants,
Their celebrated deeds are
The profits of traders' peddling.
Let's revile Nizār; cut off their rot,
Pull back the curtain and see their flaws.
Do their women even clean out
What al-Azd's men left in them?
As for the Tamīm: they never rinsed out
What the slave dribbled into their drink.
The long and short of their glory
Is that single merit of Ḥājib's bow.
A bow! Mere clippings from a Shawḥaṭ tree,
A miserable thing for a nobleman to boast.
For the Qays ʿAylān, I will not mention
Any more than the disgrace of the Muḥārib.
Penis eating is their humiliation,
A smear on every decrier's lips.
The Asad found no harm in dog meat,
Those pathetic slaves' camels ride like donkeys.[149]
The Bakr have no defender,
Save their idiot and the liar.
While the Taghlib mourn lost campsites,

Instead of avenging their dead.
Their girl virginity bought dirt cheap,
Daddy never did put her suitor in his place.
The al-Nimr's mustaches are flowing,
But you see dust on their eyebrows,
The beards of every wretched one of them
Like an old maid's pubic hair.
Vile soul patches on their faces,
Right in the sight of all who slap them.
All that the Qāsiṭ and their cousins can milk
Are farts they store in their pails.

### *Poem 2*

(Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, p. 12)

What a group I had to endure!
Men with no lordship, no nobility.
The Quraysh—I tried them out,
And they're less generous than they claim.
Their money is only for their own,
Handed among themselves—they band together.
And the Tamīm are a crowd
Who regret as soon as they give anything away.
I cannot absolve the Qays ʿAylān
Of their kin's faults: defective.
The Wāʾils, I tried them too,
Ignoble men: they disown their guarantees.
The whole lot of ʿAdnān are rotten,
Ruined since the days of Adam.
This is all I can say for all of them,
Let them feign ignorance—they understand.

### *Poem 3*

(Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, pp. 13–20)

The following excerpts lines 6–10 from Abū Nuwās' lengthy poem, which lambastes the Tamīm and Asad and praises the Southerners in formulas similar to poem 1 above.

When you Tamīmīs come boasting against us:
We change the topic: we'll ask how you eat your lizards.
You foolishly boast against the sons of kings,
While your pee runs down your leg to the ankle.
When it's time for great deeds—grab a stick,
And call your goats, you son of a fence maker.
We conquered the earth—east and west,

While your old man was just a fetus.
If you insist on extolling your Ḥājib,
I'll crack your front teeth with Shʿib Jabala.[150]

## *Poem 4: A Man from the Rabīʿa*

(Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 5, pp. 495–496)

Leave off the praise of the abode from which
A slave of Maʿadd collected tithes.
For we are the lords of Holy Mecca,
The sacred: we drink from its waters!
We are the custodians of its blessed house,
The land is ours, as are all those in its uplands.
And ours too are the caliphs—true praise
Is for those who obtain this rank.
These are the Quraysh, lords of ruby-floored mosques
And pearled palaces.
Tamīm has great might: if she angers
The quarters of the world quake
In fear; and when Tamīm unsheathes her swords
It's Death you hear talking in their thrusts.
The praiser of Qays ʿAylān
Can't cover a tenth of their glory.
Even the craggy mountains fear
When the claws of these hawks descend.
This awesome tribe blinds onlookers
In the flashes of their swords.
So praise Maʿadd, and boast of its merit
High above all others.
And fear not to tear the curtain
From Yemen, the sons of Qaḥṭān.
Maʿadd was given virtue
From times of yore 'til today,
The nobles of Qaḥṭān serve the train of
Slaves and servants of Maʿadd.
If Maʿadd says "Bow down!" they cower in fear.
If Maʿadd says "Be strong!" they flee to their corner.
Their only boast is aiding us
In an ancient time faraway.
They can boast of no victories,
Save the Queen of Sheba when
Our Hudhud brought her humiliation
And her unwilling submission to Solomon.
She became his subject, and learned
That there is no kingship like his.
To him man and the jinn were made to serve
And the birds and beasts in the river beds.
This is kingship: and it is for

The brother of Maʿadd, her companion.
Qaḥṭān's kingship is simply
Fine garments they weave in the wasteland.
Tell Qaḥṭān if they crow
Not to forget their flaws.
The sum of their merit
Is diving for pearls from their ships:
They may chance upon a shiny one
Like the sun outblazing the stars,
But there will be no buyers from Qaḥṭān,
They'll be distressed in their inability,
Until they come peddling to one of our kings
For whom money is a trifle, and he gives.
He will buy their precious pearl,
A purchase: not forced tribute.
And he'll fix it to a necklace
To adorn one of his racing steeds.

## Diʿbil

### *Poem 5*

(Diʿbil, Dīwān, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 128–129)

The sites of the tribe are Ghumdān and al-Naḍad,
Maʾrib, the Ẓafār kingdom and al-Janad.
The lands of the Tubbaʾs, the Lords of Yemen,
Men of stallions, helmets and armor.
They inscribed their names upon their conquests,
Neither effaced, nor eroded.[151]
In Qayrawān they wrote, on the gates of China too,
And at Merv, India and also Soghdiana.

### *Poem 6*

(Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 5, pp. 497–498)

The following excerpt translates lines ascribed to Diʿbil by Ibn Durayd about Southerner boasting over the Northerner Tamīm.

How miserable are the wasteland abodes I crossed
In the Baṭn al-Sarḥ, al-Yansūʿ and al-Naḍad.
Abandoned campsites of the Tamīm,
A refuge for waste,[152] misery and misfortune.
Eaters of lizards, jerboas and the sour colocynth,
They sleep their nights on piled sacks.
[ . . . ]

Who would vie with them over their bleak homeland,
Who would compete with their life of suffering?
Each morning you see a crowd of them
Scraping together dregs of water into pails,
And then you'll meet them, parched again,
Burning with thirst, licking residue beads of water.
Qaṭarī fled from our claws,
Like an ass from a ferocious lion.
Tamīm's maidens wish for Muhallab
Wishing it was his sons they bore.
He defended their virtue and their bodies,
While Aḥnaf lazed with wretched Tamīm.
We are the kings, the sons of kings,
Mighty protectors, not tyrants.
We ruled Tamīm in the way of our forefathers,
The disobedient executed, the rest we led.

### *Poem 7*

(Diʿbil, Dīwān, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 89–95)

The following translates the poem's opening fifteen lines, where Diʿbil affirms his Southerner allegiance and boasts of Southerner glory.

When we raid, we invade Ankara.
The people are of Mt. Sulmā, to the coast at Jurut,[153]
What a difference between these places,
I have traveled far, and weep so much.
Settled in a faraway parcel of land,
Where even the wind cannot reach.
There the thirsty cannot reach water,
Except by urging their camels, and tugging at the rings in their noses.
I love my people, I have never forsaken them.
They say you are too partisan—what lies!
I defend their honor and shoot in their contests,
And I give them rest when their legs tire.
They have my praise, I honor them,
Yes! With all my heart can give.
Let me be with my people: try to cut me off,
But one always reunites with one's nearest kin.
If not for my tribes, I'd be bereft of succor
And my blood could never be avenged.
Defend your closest kin group—
They are dearer than your wives and women.
My kin are the Ḥimyar and the al-Azd,
The Kindites and the tribes of ʿUla
Ever equanimous, but when their anger is piqued
They draw their swords and smite all wrongdoers.
They stand the most steadfast when ambushed,

When very few would hold their ground.
How often have they cheered those in distress,
And how many hardships they endure, emerging victorious.

### *Poem 8*

(Diʿbil, Dīwān, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 253–259)

The following poem is Diʿbil's rebuttal to the pro-Northerner poem by an Umayyad-era poet, al-Kumayt ibn Zayd (d. 126/743–744), who was famed for his dislike of Southerners. Although al-Kumayt died before Diʿbil's birth, his poem became renowned as an established repertoire piece of anti-Southerner lampoon.

Diʿbil's rebuttal is twenty-eight verses; the following translates his pro-Southerner claims that proceed from verse 11 to the end.

If you count the Jews as yours,
Then your boast is about non-Arabs.
Don't forget the pigs that were
Transmuted with the vile monkeys
At Ayla and the Gulf
Where their relics stand, uneffaced.
Southerners wrote on the gates of Merv,
And on the China's gates they wrote too.
Samarqand is named for their Shimr,
And they populated Tibet.
And they set the brass monument in the West
At the gate of the sea of sands.
Al-Kumayt has no claim to blood money,
Rather we are lampooned for the assistance we gave!
Nizār knows that my people
Were the first to come to the Prophet's aid.
The best of our men were purified,
The love of God is for the pure.
And the verse revealed that those who fight them
Will be punished variously at our hands.
They will be humiliated: we will have victory over them,
And the hearts of the believers will be cured.[154]
And if you claim that the Prophet of God is yours,
Know that Muḥammad is for all Muslims.
From whichever mountain pass Quryash happen to spill out,
Know that they're a Nabaṭī folk.
For the Qasrī brave we killed
Their Walid, Commander of the Faithful
And their Marwān we killed for our Yazīd
This is how we deal with criminals.
And with our Ibn al-Simṭ we killed
Their Muḥammad ibn Hārūn, al-Amīn.

We killed al-Ḥārith al-Qasrī by force,
He was a true brave, Abū Layla was.
Those who kill peasants, know
That our religion is killing caliphs!

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1. For critique from the perspective of memory studies of gathering history into national "containers," see Welsch, "Transculturality"; see also Rosenfeld, "Looming Crash"; Erll, "Travelling Memory."
2. References in Arabic literature to Qaḥṭān and "Southern Arab" *al-Yamāniya* as a means to explain political alignments and social groups are ubiquitous.
3. For the reuse of pre-modern stories of Qaḥṭān in Yemeni nationalist historiography, see Sharaf al-Dīn, *al-Yaman ʿabra al-tārīkh*; Bāfaqīh, *Tārīkh al-Yaman al-qadīm*; Dīb, *al-Yaman hiya al-aṣl*, pp. 55–61.
4. Inscriptions Ja635 and DAI Barʾān 2000–2001.
5. Elsewhere, I refer to the effects of Muslim-era discourses on reshaping pre-Islamic history as the "Bedouinization of Memory," which presents all pre-Islamic Arabia in an Arab-Bedouin mold (Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 337–340). A subsequent study on one specific "Yemeni" community, al-Azd, concurs that the same Muslim-era process of forgetting of the group's pre-Islamic agriculturalist past in favor of constructing a new Arab-Bedouin heritage occurred (Ulrich, *Arabs*, pp. 11–56).
6. Traditionally, the latest dated Sabaic-language, Musnad-script inscription was dated to 669 of the Ḥimyaritic calendar (c. 555 CE). Cahen, "History," pp. 212–213, states that Muslim-era Yemenis lost the ability to read Musnad. More recently, and based on closer linguistic analysis, Stein, " 'Ḥimyaritic' Language," suggests survival of Ḥimyaritic as a spoken language in central Yemen, and a bilingual Arabic-Sabaic inscription was found near Najrān, dating to the third/ninth century (al-Said, "Early South Arabian-Islamic Bilingual Inscription," p. 87). Thus, some Muslim-era South Arabians preserved pre-Islamic writing traditions, but the practice was not widespread and had little influence on Muslim-era histories of pre-Islamic South Arabia, those written in both the central Islamic lands and South Arabia itself.
7. Smith, "Problems."
8. Crone, "Were the Qays?" rejected Shaban's thesis of *al-Yamāniya* as a political party (Shaban, *Islamic History*), but the absence of seamless political cohesion does not necessary entail that *al-Yamāniya* was not an idea around which populations could be mobilized for political ends. By the late Umayyad era, *al-Yamāniya* was a recognizable entity (even if its membership was fluid), but dating the beginning of Southerner solidarity remains unclear. See Amabe, *Emergence*.
9. Rina Drory proposed that poetry did not enjoy status as a serious form of discourse and that poets considered their role as one of "misrepresenting" reality. Drory, unfinished paper, detailed in Kennedy, "Preface," pp. xvii–xxi; see also Drory, "Three Attempts." This theory resonates with the medieval Arabic critical refrain, "poetry is at its best when it lies the most" (*aḥsan al-shiʿr akdhabuhu*). Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar, *Naqd al-shiʿr*, ed. Bonebakker, p. 26. Prima facie, Drory's study challenges efforts to use poetry in historical analysis, but her work focused primarily on *tashbīb* love poetry, and her belief that *all* Arabic poetry followed the same rubric is a generalization. This is not the forum to enumerate the truthful and politicized aspects of early-Muslim-era verse, but we will return to the possibilities of jest and misrepresentation at the end of the chapter. Moreover, since satire necessarily flows from a perception of reality, references to "Yemen" in verse, even if phrased as jest, will illuminate parameters around which more serious adherents to Yemeni identity were articulating their community.
10. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 13, pp. 462–464. There are numerous examples in early Arabic literature where *yaman* is cited to mean "south" and not a defined region; for example, the wādī of

Nakhla, to the east of Mecca, is divided into *Shāmī* and *Yamānī*, not because one is on the road to Syria and the other to Yemen but rather because one is at the northern/left side of the wādī, the other at its southern/right (Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, vol. 5, p. 277). In early geographical imagination, Arabians counted three great world seas, two of which were the Sea of *Shām* and the Sea of *Yaman*—the "Northern" and "Southern" seas, respectively (Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *al-Fitan*, p. 199). A report in al-Wāqidī's *al-Maghāzī* depicts Muhammad marking a space and pointing "here is *Shām* and there is *Yaman*," using the indefinite form of both words in a directional sense (al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. Jones, vol. 3, p. 1021). Rain and constellations were also labeled as *yaman*/"south" and *shām/shaʾm*/"north"; see Ibn Qutayba, *al-Anwāʾ fī mawāsim al-ʿArab*, pp. 52, 68 n. 5, 163–165.

11. "Ymnt" is attested in Sabaic writing but not as a name for homeland; rather, it meant "south." Biella, *Dictionary*, p. 232; Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary*, p. 168. A region was called Ymnt in Sabaic inscriptions from the third to sixth centuries CE (e.g., Ir 28, YMN 13, Ry 510), but it is not contiguous with today's "Yemen"; it refers to a southern region within South Arabia. Robin, "À propos de Ymnt," considers this in detail.
12. See Webb, "Pre-Islamic *al-Shām*," pp. 143–146, for discussion of north/south spatial narratives.
13. Robin, "Ḥimyar," notes that effective Ḥimyaritic control was variable, as provinces enjoyed considerable local autonomy.
14. Hoyland, *Arabia*, pp. 5, 8, 48.
15. Robin, "Les Arabes"; Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 33–36.
16. Madʿaj, *Yemen*; Smith, "Problems," p. 134.
17. Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī, *Tārīkh Abī Zurʿa al-Dimashqī*, ed. al-Manṣūr, p. 30.
18. The thesis of the Muslim-era emergence of Arab identity as a social asset was first proposed in Müller, "Arabia." Donner, *Muhammad*, pp. 217–220, and Millar, *Religion*, pp. 154–158, renewed the suggestion. The process by which Muslims identified themselves as Arabs is detailed in Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 60–176.
19. For the development of "Arab" as a communal identity of Muslims, see Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 85–88, 141–156.
20. In Muslim-era genealogies, Muḍar was a son of Nizār, who was son of Maʿadd, who was son of ʿAdnān. Hence all four ancestors connote the top of the Northerner family tree, but Maʿadd, Nizār, and Muḍar appear to have had different connotations in pre-Islam, and ʿAdnān may have been a Muslim-era invention (see al-Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol. 1, p. 11). By the third/ninth century, genealogy was standardizing, and the terms became largely synonymous with "Northerner," although Muḍar was distinguished from a smaller sub-branch of Northerners, the Rabīʿa.
21. The case of the Syrian Quḍāʿa's transformation into Southerners is thoroughly discussed. See Kister, "Kuḍāʿa"; Crone, "Were the Qays?" Ulrich, "Azd Migrations," notes a process of mythopoesis that connected central Arabian al-Azd groups to Southerner lineage.
22. Al-Hamdānī, *al-Iklīl*, ed. al-Akwaʿ, vol. 1, pp. 60–61, 66–68.
23. The quotation refers to the Southerners and Northerners via their putative ancestors. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, p. 195.
24. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 25, p. 29.
25. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol. 2, p. 784.
26. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 25, p. 306.
27. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, pp. 195–200. Ibn al-Muʿtazz cites commentary on the poem by al-Mubarrad and then cites lines of another poem as one of "many" examples of Abū Nuwās's "extreme partisanship to Qaḥṭān" (p. 200).
28. Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 5, p. 493.
29. Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, p. 1.
30. Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, p. 6.

31. The “B Poem” lists only two Muslim-era glories of the Yemen: the marriage into the Abbasid caliphal family (lines 55–56) and the Umayyad-era Muhallabid military leaders of al-Baṣra (line 42).
32. A helpful matrix of the elements by which groups articulate their unique ethnic identities is enumerated in Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, pp. 6–7.
33. The ambivalent Arabness of early Abbasid Yemenis suggests that the basic building blocks of Arab identity itself were fluid and allowed various formerly distinct peoples to imagine themselves as Arabs, notwithstanding their otherwise incompatible origins, languages, and cultures. The gradual forging of unified Arabness from diverse Arabian groups is the subject of Webb, *Imagining*.
34. The pre-Islamic kingdom of Ḥimyar did have imperial interests, including conquests in Arabia during the fourth and fifth centuries CE (see Robin, “Ḥimyar,” pp. 137–145). To read the historical Ḥimyaritic imperial expansion as the basis of the Muslim-era myths of world conquest, however, misconstrues the Arabic narratives. Muslim-era stories are not concerned with Ḥimyaritic Arabian empire but instead stress global dominion. More critical historiography is needed; from present research it seems that the memory of an empire of Ḥimyar survived, but its actual details were either lost or unimportant for Muslims who completely recreated a new imperial history for Ḥimyar that mirrored Abbasid-era conceptions of statecraft and geography.
35. The Sasanian conquest of Yemen is reported widely, including in the Prophet’s biography. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, ed. al-Saqqā, al-Abyārī, and al-Ḥafīẓ Shalabī, vol. 1, pp. 62–70.
36. The second-class status of *aʿrāb* in early Muslim society is discussed in Steppat, “ ‘Those Who Believe’ ”; Athamina, “A’rāb”; Binay, *Figur*; for the distinction between *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* identities, see Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 121–125, 179–180, 319–321.
37. She was named Umm Mūsā Bint al-Manṣūr al-Ḥimyarī.
38. The Muslim reconstruction of pre-Islamic historical events into anachronistic foreshadowings of the Muslim conquest of the Sasanians is also visible in Muslim reinterpretation of the pre-Islamic Battle of Dhū Qār as a “Northerner”/“Arab” victory over “Persians” (see Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 88–95).
39. The word “tbʿ” appears in three pre-Islamic South Arabian inscriptions, none indicating kingly status (Ag 5, Fa 3, and CIH 343). Jeffrey, *Foreign Vocabulary*, p. 89, is equivocal about the Ethiopian link; Rippen, *Blackwell Companion*, p. 135, is more sanguine on Ethiopian origins but without elaboration. The process by which the word entered the Qur’ān is debated: Kropp, “ ‘People,’ ” argues that Qur’ānic Tubbaʿ refers to a community with no South Arabian connection intended; Shitomi, “Une hypothèse,” argues for a specific interpretation of Tubbaʿ as a kind of Yemeni king with special relations with Ethiopia.
40. See the convoluted exegesis to present Tubbaʿ as a believer and “Muslim” in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, vol. 25, pp. 165–166; vol. 26, pp. 199–200.
41. See below for further discussion of the Yemeni-partisan histories, Wahb ibn Munabbih, *al-Tījān fī mulūk Ḥimyar*; ʿUbayd ibn Sharya, *Akhbār ʿUbayd ibn Sharya*; Pseudo-al-Aṣmaʿī, *Tārīkh al-ʿArab qabla al-Islam*, ed. Yāsīn.
42. Orthmann, *Stamm*, pp. 79–136, and Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 240–249, evaluate tribal factionalism in the early Abbasid caliphate.
43. As reported by al-Mubarrad in Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 5, p. 495.
44. The genealogical construction site is detailed in Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 209–213.
45. In traditions that attempted to reconcile Arabian with Mesopotamian pre-Islamic history, Maʿadd was judged as contemporary with Nebuchadnezzar. Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, ed. Lichtenstädter, pp. 6–7; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 1, pp. 557–560.
46. Ibn al-Kalbī; see discussion in Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 262–263.
47. It is intriguing that Northerner poets did not attempt to reverse the Southerners’ insults about the Northerners’ Bedouin origins which insinuated that Northerners were an underclass given the inferiority of Bedouin *aʿrāb* to the settled *ʿarab*. Perhaps the Southerners had so thoroughly marketed their past as pre-Islamic urbanites that they had created a “truth” which Northerners could not cogently critique. Actual pre-Islamic history may also have helped, since many South Arabian

groups were settled agriculturalists before Islam, but a number of groups labeled as "Southerners" in the caliphate were originally Bedouins, and it is probable that the vociferous Southerner boasts of their pre-Islamic imperial heritage comprehensively rebranded their identity and shaped the discursive plane, leaving Northerners little room to lampoon the Southerners as Bedouins.

48. The process of imagining Arab community and the challenges that confronted early Muslims to articulate a cohesive sense of Arabness are the subject of Webb, *Imagining*.
49. Diʿbil was reportedly discovered by the caliph al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/785–809) (Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī, vol. 17, p. 260). Diʿbil's detailed biography in al-Iṣfahānī's *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 20, pp. 131–201, likewise contains scant information predating al-Rashīd, and the editor of Diʿbil's *Dīwān* dates very few poems prior to al-Rashīd. Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar.
50. For a study of the expressions of protest and lament over the upset social order as expressed in poetry about the fall of Baghdad to al-Maʾmūn's forces, see Kennedy, "Pity," pp. 155–162.
51. See appendix, poem 3, and Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, pp. 12–20.
52. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 154.
53. Abū Nuwās roundly curses Basran Arabs (*Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, pp. 30–34) without denying their Arabness; he did chide a non-Arab for feigning Bedouin identity (*Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, pp. 102–103).
54. Al-Farāhīdī, *al-ʿAyn*, ed. al-Makhzūmī and al-Sāmarrāʾī, vol. 1, p. 228.
55. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 2, p. 326. Sijpesteijn, chapter 12 in this volume, encounters some of this terminology in Egyptian papyri cotemporary with Diʿbil.
56. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 74–75, 114–115, 130–131, 232–233, 255, 394.
57. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 104. "Arab-feigning" (*taʿarraba*); "aspiring to be louts" (*mustaʿlij*).
58. The story derives from exegesis of Qur'ān 7:163–166 about the disbelieving people of *ḥādirat al-baḥr* (likely modern Ayla, though also identified in exegesis contemporary with Diʿbil as Tiberias in Palestine; see Ibn Wahb, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muryani, vol. 2, p. 15. The Qur'ān does not express their identity and only mentions their transformation into monkeys; the connection with Jews and the addition of pigs first appears in early exegesis; see Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, ed. Shiḥāta, vol. 2, p. 70.
59. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 122–124, 258–259.
60. The caliphs are ʿUthmān (First Fitna), al-Walīd ibn Yazīd and Marwān ibn Muḥammad (Third Fitna), and al-Amīn (Fourth Fitna).
61. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 123.
62. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 49.
63. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 257.
64. Nizār symbolized Northerners; see note 20 above.
65. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 257.
66. Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Tārīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-l-anbiyāʾ*, p. 106. The later Ibn Khaldūn was even more scathing: *al-ʿIbar wa dīwān al-mubtadaʾ wa-l-khabar fī ayyām al-ʿArab wa-l-ʿAjam wa-l-Barbar*, vol. 1, pp. 16–21.
67. For the economic ramifications of the Fourth Fitna, see Waines, "Third Century Internal Crisis," pp. 285–288; Kennedy, "Decline," pp. 13–16; Mårtensson, " 'It's the Economy.' "
68. Waṣīf and Ashnās were two of the leading Turkic generals of al-Muʿtaṣim.
69. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 50–51.
70. Al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lugha*, ed. Mukhaymir, vol. 2, p. 166. The evolving definition of the word "Arab" in Muslim-era writing is traced in Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 178–187.
71. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. Hārūn, vol. 3, pp. 290–291.
72. References to "Ḥimyāri script" (*musnad* or *al-khaṭṭ al-Ḥimyarī*) abound in the sources, indicating awareness of differences between Arabic and the pre-Islamic language of South Arabia, and specific differences were reported by philologists, e.g., al-Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol.

1, p. 11; Ibn Fāris, *al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha*, ed. al-Ṭabbāʿ, pp. 53–54.

73. Ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-lugha*, ed. Baʿalbaki, vol. 1, p. 319.
74. For early statements of Yemenis as "sons of Qaḥṭān," see Ibn Wahb, *Jāmiʿ*, ed. David-Weill, vol. 1, pp. 5, 6; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, ed. al-Saqqā, al-Abyārī, and al-Ḥafīẓ Shalabī, vol. 1, p. 7.
75. The complex debates about the "first Arab" are traced in Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 209–222.
76. See al-Khuzāʿī, *Waṣāyā al-mulūk*, ed. Abāẓa, p. 27; Pseudo-al-Aṣmaʿī, *Tārīkh al-ʿArab qabla al-Islam*, ed. Yāsīn, p. 34.
77. Al-Khuzāʿī, *Waṣāyā al-mulūk*, ed. Abāẓa, p. 27.
78. Al-Jumaḥī explains that for Muslim-era political reasons, "more poetry has been falsely ascribed to Ḥassān than any other poet." *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol. 1, p. 215. The poem above appears to be one such forgery; it is not included in Ḥassān's *Dīwān*, ed. Walīd ʿArafāt.
79. Al-Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol. 1, pp. 10–11.
80. The manuscript claims to have been transmitted by Ibn al-Sikkīt (d. 244/858), but the text reflects neither al-Aṣmaʿī's nor Ibn al-Sikkīt's style, hence we ascribe it to Pseudo-al-Aṣmaʿī.
81. The editor of the modern edition of *Waṣāyā al-mulūk* considers it more accurately ascribed to Diʿbil's son: al-Khuzāʿī, *Waṣāyā al-mulūk*, ed. Abāẓa, pp. 12–13.
82. Comparison of Yemeni partisan poetry and the prose histories can assist in more precise dating of the latter. For example, the histories unanimously enumerate Hūd and Ṣāliḥ as Southerner Arab prophets; Pseudo-al-Aṣmaʿī posits Hūd as Qaḥṭān's father, no less (*Tārīkh al-ʿArab qabla al-Islam*, ed. Yāsīn, p. 30). But Diʿbil's extant poetry makes no such claim, and given Diʿbil's penchant for unrestrained glorification of the Southerners, his silence suggests the narratives were yet not mainstream in his lifetime; see Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 216–224. Also, the prose texts' consistent emphasis on Southerner conquests in Armenia and Azerbaijan (see, e.g., Wahb, *al-Tījān fī mulūk Ḥimyar*, pp. 74, 89, 90, 109, 112, 140) seem rather minuscule triumphs; however, the region was of particular consequence for Iraqi audiences of the 230s and 240s AH, when it was the stronghold of Bābak and rebellious groups against caliphal authority which proved extremely difficult to defeat. The narratives' avowals of Southerner domination in that region thus not so subtly claim that the Southerners' ancestors had greater might than the third/ninth century caliphate. Though it extends beyond the chronological scope of this chapter, it is noteworthy that the critiques of the exaggerated pro-Southerner claims abated by the fourth/tenth century, such that the Southerner version of Arabness became widely accepted. See, e.g. al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-l-maʿdin al-jawhar*, ed. Pellat, §§ 390, 1005, 1029, 1086–1089; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 1, pp. 204, 216, 666–667, 612–613, 631; vol. 2, pp. 96–97, 105–109.
83. I detail in Webb, *Imagining*, how pre-Islamic Arabian populations did not imagine themselves as all members of one "Arab" community, and the indicators of poetry in this chapter seem another form of corroboration that the early Muslims did not come together with a set conception of Arab community —otherwise, we should expect greater stability around the fundamental parameters of Arabness.
84. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 25, p. 29.
85. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, p. 195; al-Ṣūlī, reported in Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, p. 1); al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 25, p. 25.
86. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī, vol. 17, p. 258; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyāt al-aʿyān*, ed. ʿAbbās, vol. 2, p. 270.
87. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī, vol. 17, pp. 259–260.
88. Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-l-maʿdin al-jawhar*, ed. Pellat, §§ 389, 1086, 2271.
89. Al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, ed. Maʿrūf, vol. 9, p. 360; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafāyāt*, ed. Ritter et al., vol. 14, p. 13. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyāt al-aʿyān*, ed. ʿAbbās, vol. 2, p. 267, notes his penchant for lampooning caliphs.
90. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol. 2, p. 839.
91. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, p. 195.
92. Al-Ṣafadī, *Tamām al-mutūn*, ed. Ibrāhīm, p. 248.

93. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 337.
94. The relationship between poets, patrons, poetry, and gifts was delicately orchestrated, and the literary remembrances thereof were also liable to embellishment and reworking to fit literary tropes, as detailed in Gruendler, "Verse."
95. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 58, 117, 232–233.
96. Hamori, *On the Art*, pp. 44–90; see also Gelder, *Bad*.
97. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 25, p. 13.
98. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 25, p. 25.
99. Al-Iṣfahānī's massive *al-Aghānī* has only received one detailed study (Kilpatrick, *Making*), and questions of ethnicity in early and medieval Islam are only beginning to be asked of the sources.
100. Limited studies include Zolondek, *Diʿbil b. ʿAlī*; Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar; al-Khabbāz, "*al-Nuzʿa al-hijāʾiyya ʿind Diʿbil al-Khuzāʿī*"; al-Karīm, "Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī." These tend to take reported anecdotes as accurate reflections of Diʿbil's history and character.
101. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 20, pp. 136–137, 145, 149.
102. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 20, p. 131.
103. See, e.g., the interaction of Diʿbil with al-Maʾmūn: al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 20, pp. 133, 154, 166–167; see also p. 161.
104. See appendix, poem 8, line 36.
105. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 20, pp. 180–181, records a humorous exchange between Diʿbil and the warrior poet al-Makhzūmī, where Diʿbil's lack of military credentials is the core of lampoons against him.
106. Warrior poet themes (*al-Ḥamāsa*) were a popular form of poetry collected by Diʿbil's contemporaries.
107. Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar, *Naqd al-shiʿr*, ed. Bonebakker, p. 26.
108. Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar, *Naqd al-shiʿr*, ed. Bonebakker, pp. 25–27.
109. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī, vol. 17, p. 262; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafāyāt*, ed. Ritter et al., vol. 14, p. 15.
110. Gelder, *Bad*, pp. 31–32.
111. Expressions of al-Maʾmūn's public refusal to punish Diʿbil are elaborated in al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 20, pp. 154, 167, 192.
112. See, e.g., Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 404, where he laments being unable, as an old man, to penetrate a virgin slave girl given to him and expresses his embarrassment at being unable to properly thank his patron for the gift.
113. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 432.
114. The *silʿa* (cyst) features as a salient aspect of Diʿbil's physical appearance in the biographical literature. See al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, ed. Maʿrūf, vol. 9, p. 361; Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, ed. al-Arnāʿūt, vol. 3, p. 213.
115. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 381, 396, 404.
116. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī, vol. 17, pp. 253–254. *Al-Aghānī* narrates the same story, though its clown protagonist is Diʿbil's contemporary, Muslim ibn al-Walīd. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 14, pp. 47–48. Both memories merged into a story of Muslim outwitting Diʿbil and winning a pretty girl in the *Thousand and One Nights*, Night 407.
117. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol. 2, p. 839; see note 65 above.
118. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī, vol. 17, p. 258.
119. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, pp. 268–269.
120. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol. 2, p. 839; al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, ed. Maʿrūf, vol. 9, p. 360; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī, vol. 17, p. 248.
121. Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafāyāt*, ed. Ritter et al., vol. 14, p. 13.
122. Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafāyāt*, ed. Ritter et al., vol. 14, p. 14.

123. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī, vol. 17, p. 277; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī*, ed. Ritter et al., vol. 14, p. 14.
124. The text is consistently reported, though it is placed in the mouths of different characters, including Diʿbil himself. For variants, see Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, p. 265; al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 20, p. 192; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyāt al-aʿyān*, ed. ʿAbbās, vol. 2, p. 267; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafāyāt*, ed. Ritter et al., vol. 14, p. 15.
125. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 148, 149–150, 191, 430–431.
126. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyāt al-aʿyān*, ed. ʿAbbās, vol. 2, p. 268. The echo with Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar's aphorism (see note 107 above) is instructive here.
127. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Shākir, vol. 2, p. 839.
128. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 71–73, 209, 238 (al-Muṭṭalib), 104 (Qom).
129. Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdād*, ed. al-Thāmirī, pp. 204–205. The monastery of Dayr Hizqal features in various anecdotes as an asylum for colorful characters.
130. The rising association of Arabness and Muslim elite is discussed in Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 128–152.
131. Rates of assimilation appear to have varied in different regions. I consider the Iraqi case in Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 240–249; Sijpesteijn, chapter 12 in this volume, indicates a discernibly slower process in the Egyptian countryside, but the *miṣr* of Fusṭāṭ (the early Muslim urban settlement in Egypt) perhaps tracked the Iraqi towns.
132. A term coined by anthropologist Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups*, p. 15, for the visible trappings of an ethnic identity.
133. Mitford, *Noblesse Oblige*; Buckle, *U and Non-U Revisited*.
134. Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, pp. 102–103; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. Hārūn, vol. 1, pp. 160–163.
135. See anecdotes in Szombathy, "Genealogy"; for parameters of uncertain Arabness, see Webb, *Imagining*, pp. 188–194.
136. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 25, p. 23 (about Abū Nuwās); Ibn al-Muʿtazz about Abū Saʿd al-Makhzūmī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, p. 297. Al-Ṣūlī reports a poem of Muslim ibn al-Walīd (d. 208/823) in which he claims al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Aḥnaf is a *daʿī*. The terms *daʿī* and *diʿwa* are defined in al-Farāhīdī, *al-ʿAyn*, eds. al-Makhzūmī and al-Sāmarrāʾī, vol. 2, p. 221; al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lugha*, ed. Mukhaymir, vol. 2, p. 326.
137. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. Hārūn, vol. 3, p. 250. The verse alludes to Qur'ān 99:2, where the earth throws up its burdens on Judgment Day. The effect asserts that Nizār maintains cosmic order.
138. Ibn al-Muʿtazz relates three opinions, each of which denies his Arabness. *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, pp. 295–297.
139. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. Muhannā and Jābir, vol. 18, pp. 50–54.
140. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 130–131. Diʿbil also composed a coarser lampoon of Abū Saʿd, *Dīwān*, p. 162.
141. Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-ʾUdabāʾ*, ed. ʿAbbās, vol. 5, p. 2006. For al-Khuraymī's biography, see al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, ed. Maʿrūf, vol. 7, pp. 335–336. Ibn al-Muʿtazz identifies him as a Turk (*Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Farrāj, p. 292); in any event, sources agree on his Eastern origins.
142. Diʿbil mocks Abū Tammām's claimed Ṭayyiʾ descent by inventing a verb *taṭāyā* (Ṭayyiʾ-ing) and puns it with the word *manshūr* (to be spread out), since Ṭayyiʾ is related to Arabic words for "folded": lit., "He folds-up (*taṭāyā*) but really is spread (*manshūr*)."
143. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, p. 388.
144. Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār Abī Tammām*, ed. Gruendler, pp. 68, 70, 208, 230, 278. Al-Ṣūlī professes a positive opinion of Abū Tammām, and he compiled the biography to defend Abū Tammām's memory against detractors. Hence his reports displaying Diʿbil's vitriol and cantankerous character may be targeted to show the absurdity of Abū Tammām's antagonists. To this end, al-Ṣūlī never

records Abū Tammām's anger at Diʿbil, insinuating that the insults only flowed one way, which may not be wholly accurate.

145. See the poetry reported in al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 10, pp. 48, 127.
146. Diʿbil, *Dīwān*, ed. al-Ashtar, pp. 75–76.
147. Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 5, pp. 497–499.
148. Fourth-/tenth-century historians who accepted the exaggerated Southerner narratives are cited in note 82 above; for modern works endorsing this history, see note 3 above.
149. This line bears varied interpretation; see an alternative proposed by al-Ṣūlī: Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Wagner, vol. 2, pp. 8–9.
150. Ḥājib is Ibn Zurāra, a pre-Islamic leader and warrior hero of the Tamīm; Shʿib Jabala was a pre-Islamic battle in which Ḥājib's clan was routed.
151. The permanence of the Yemeni king's writing here seems drawn as a contrast to a common motif in Northerner poetry, where traces of old desert campsites are compared to streaks of effaced writing.
152. *Khanā* usually refers to prostitution or fornication, which may be intended here, but. I select "waste" from the expression *akhnā al-dahr*, "for time to lay waste."
153. Sulmā and Ajaʾ were mountains of the Ṭayyiʾ in al-Ḥijāz near Fadak; Jurut is a town near Sana'a.
154. Diʿbil inserts a quotation from Qur'ān 7:14 into these lines 19–22.