

**“Ethnonyms in 9th and 10th Century CE Yemen from a Historical
Anthropological Perspective:
A Survey on the Basis of al-Hamdānī’s Main Work”**

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*“Ethnonyms by comparison: An interdisciplinary survey in medieval Western Europe and South
Arabia”*

Abstract

From a historical, anthropological perspective, South Arabia in the Middle Ages offers an exceptionally wide range of primary source material, which has been intensively studied in Research Centers worldwide one of them being Vienna. al-Hamdānī’s work is one of the most important and highly valued source materials by a medieval Yemeni scholar from that time, which in this endeavor should be analyzed and interpreted with an innovative perspective on ethnicity. On the basis of primarily ethnonyms mentioned in al-Hamdānī’s texts, the contextualization happens through ethnographic knowledge and in reference to secondary literature. Furthermore, in a theoretical approach the conceptual framework of ethnicity, its scope and scale, as well as its applicability to pre-modern and pre-national regional settings, and its comparability across dimensions of time and space are being discussed and revised. Strong external interconnectedness and a heterogeneous society are main characteristics of 9th and 10th century CE Yemen, though little information exists on how diversity and ethnicity were constituted. To survey these previously neglected phenomena, particular attention will be directed to different patterns of social interaction. As a result, this project aims to study correlations between diverse, collective identities in ethnic relations as well as the reciprocity with social status. Methodologically, the regional context will be approached in accordance to Historical Anthropology through source criticism, linguistic analysis, interpretation and comparison. Questions on ethnicity, its nexus to other forms of collective identities, and its interrelatedness with social status will be raised on a terminological level of meaning, also considering tribal structures and ideologies, descent, territory, religion, profession, and political authority; on the level of social interaction, referring to time, space, agency, gender, language, context, and distance; and on the level of ethnic groups, defining intersections of collective identities, social status and hierarchical ranking, integration or separation strategies, and alliance. On a theoretical and conceptional level, abstractions will be undertaken in several directions: Contemporary concepts of ethnicity will be abstracted from its modern context to meet local historical contexts and vice versa and local historical phenomena will be abstracted to temporally and spatially open cultural macro-contexts. This is intended to broaden the phenomena and categories under review, which also serve as tools for analysis and, subsequently allow for comparison, where they are being analyzed locally, ethnographically, trans-regionally as well as globally macro-culturally and across time and space. Hereby, new insights into relations of ethnicity, and processes of status negotiations between ethnic groups in medieval South Arabia, as well as scope and scale of anthropological concepts of ethnicity on a theoretical level should be gained. Wider contexts of comparison are provided through this venture’s reference to the SFB Visions of Community (VISCOM) project of the FWF. This project is thus part of a smaller unit trans-disciplinary doctoral team project, working on a shared problem of ethnonyms and ethnicity, consisting of a historian working on early medieval Europe and a Middle Eastern Studies researcher also working on South Arabia but from the 12th to the 15th century CE.