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Ka'b al-Aḥbār

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## WAS KAʿB AL-AḤBĀR A PROPHET IN SYRIA?

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**Abstract** Kaʿb al-Aḥbār’s many apocalyptic prophecies as recorded in the early Syrian collection of Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, and mainly focused around the middle Syrian city of Ḥimş raise the question: on what authority did he issue these prophecies? This article examines some of these prophecies, and comes to the conclusion that Kaʿb was most likely viewed as a prophet or at least with prophetic capabilities.

**Keywords** Prophecy, Syria, early Islam, apocalypticism, judgement

### Introduction

The figure of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār is one of the many enigmatic ones from the early Islamic period. Associated very closely with central Syria, most specifically with the cities of Ḥimş and Damascus, he provides a funnel for pre-Islamic knowledge to pass into Islam.<sup>1</sup> While it is true that much of Kaʿb’s materials were ultimately rejected in Islam, and deemed to be “Israʾīliyyāt”, one cannot deny his prominence in those few early Syrian Muslim sources that came down to us.<sup>2</sup>

These sources include Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī’s (d. 228/844) *Kitāb al-ḥimā* (*The Book of Tribulations*),<sup>3</sup> some city-histories of Jerusalem,

<sup>1</sup> In general, see M. Schmitz, “Kaʿb al-Aḥbār,” *Et*, s.v. ; and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾriḫ madīnat*, vol. 50, pp. 151-176; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Isāba fi tamyiz al-ṣaḥāba*, vol. 5, pp. 481-484 (no. 7511); al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fi asmāʾ al-rjāl*, vol. 6, pp. 169-171 (no. 5569); and al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, vol. 3, pp. 489-494.

<sup>2</sup> Note the recent defense of Kaʿb, Yūsuf Rashād, *Kaʿb al-Aḥbār al-muftarā ʿalayhi*.

<sup>3</sup> See my translation, *The Book of Tribulations: the Syrian Muslim apocalyptic tradition*, which is keyed to Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-ḥimā*, cited below as Nuʿaym.