Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy
Balʿamī’s Tārīkhnāma

A.C.S. Peacock
Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy

Balʻamī’s Tārīkhnāma is the earliest work of Persian prose and one of the most influential works of Islamic historical writing, subsequently being translated into Arabic and Turkish and remaining in circulation for a thousand years. Although it purports to be a Persian translation of al-Tabari’s famous Arabic universal history, in fact it is an independent work, presenting the history of the world from Creation down to Islamic times.

A.C.S. Peacock’s new book, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Balʻamī’s Tārīkhnāma* is the first research monograph on this major historical work and shows how its composition and reception were influenced by political circumstances. Commissioned by the ruler of one of the largest and most powerful Muslim states of the tenth century, the Samanid dynasty of Central Asia, and composed by his vizier, the Tārīkhnāma tells us much about the politics and ideology of the Samanid state, which remains comparatively unstudied despite its importance in Islamic history. Future generations continued to adapt the text in accordance with their own political concerns, meaning its manuscripts vary immensely from one another.

Using newly discovered manuscripts, this study sheds much new light, not just on mediaeval Islamic history and the development of Islamic historiography, but also on problems in manuscripts and the transmission of their texts.

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Bal'ami's Tarihknama
A.C.S.Peacock
To my parents
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Preface

Historical writing and prose literature in New Persian\(^1\) both begin with the *History* (Tārīkhnāma) of Abu ʿAlī Balʿamī,\(^2\) composed in Central Asia in the fourth/tenth century. Before the Arab conquest of Iran in the first/seventh century, the Persians of the Sāsānian Empire had a historiographical tradition of their own, written in Pahlavī or Middle Persian, a language similar to New Persian in grammar and syntax, but different in script and lacking the many Arabic works the Persians adopted into their language on conversion to Islam. However, much of this tradition is lost to us, surviving mainly in later New Persian works such as the great early poet Firdawsī’s monumental verse *Shāhnāma* (‘Book of Kings’). In contrast, Balʿamī’s Tārīkhnāma marks the beginning of a long and influential historiographical tradition in Persian based on Arabic, Islamic models rather than Sāsānian ones.

The Tārīkhnāma is a large work, occupying five substantial volumes in the most recent edition, and covers history from Creation down to Muslim times. It became extremely popular—indeed, it was by far the most widely read work of Persian historiography, and was translated into other Islamic languages such as Arabic, Ottoman and Chaghatay Turkish, and Urdu. Manuscripts of it continued to be copied, and later printed, until the beginning of the twentieth century. No other historical work in Persian, and few in Arabic, approaches the scale or the longevity of the Tārīkhnāma’s popularity. The mere fact that it was the principal source of knowledge about the past in the eastern Islamic world for nearly a thousand years makes it worthy of attention. The great influence it had over countless Muslims is reflected in the vast number of manuscripts of it that survive and its frequent citation in other works. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate in the course of this book, the Tārīkhnāma is of much interest in its own right.

The Tārīkhnāma is also significant because it seems to have possessed great political importance at the time it was composed. It was commissioned by the amir Manṣūr b. Nūh, who was ruler of much of Central Asia and parts of Iran. The dynasty to which Manṣūr belonged, the Sāmānids, are today best known for their role in reviving the Persian literary language after its eclipse by Arabic in the wake of the Muslim conquests. Their court in Bukhārā became famous as a cultural centre where both

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1 New Persian is written in the Arabic script and developed in the centuries after the Arab conquests. Except where confusion with other varieties of Persian, such as Middle Persian/ Pahlavī, is likely, I shall refer to it simply as Persian.

2 Balʿamī’s work is referred to by different names in the manuscripts, usually as the *Tārīkh-i ʿTabarī*, the *Tārjuma-i Tārīkh-i ʿTabarī* or the *Tārīkhnāma-i ʿTabarī*. In this book, I shall call it the Tārīkhnāma to avoid confusion with the numerous other Arabic and Persian works that have the title Tārīkh.
Arabic and Persian literature flourished. However, from the perspective of the fourth/tenth century, the Sāmānids’ fame was based less on their patronage of literature than on their role as rulers of one of the largest and most powerful states in the Islamic world. Yet it seems that the production of this historical work was a matter of great importance to the Sāmānids, for its composition was entrusted to none other than the state’s wazīr or chief minister, Abū‘Alī Ba‘lamī. Thus the study of the Tārikhnāma offers the opportunity of deepening our understanding not just of the fourth/tenth century renaissance of Persian literature and the birth of Persian historiography, but also the political preoccupations of the Sāmānids. Despite this dynasty’s great political and cultural importance, many elements of their history remain obscure.

The reasons for studying Ba‘lamī’s Tārikhnāma are, as I have outlined, varied, and its interest is considerable from the points of view of both cultural and political history. However, it has attracted very little scholarly attention to date. In part, this is because the numerous surviving manuscripts of the Tārikhnāma present formidable textual problems that need to be resolved before the work can be studied adequately. However, the most important reason for this neglect is unquestionably the traditional identification of the Tārikhnāma as a translation of a famous Arabic book, the Ta‘rikh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk or ‘History of Prophets and Kings’ composed in Baghdad earlier in the fourth/tenth century by the famed scholar and jurist Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). Ba‘lamī himself claims that his intention was to provide an abridged Persian translation of this work, but in fact his version differs to such a degree from the Arabic original that it must be considered an independent work, worthy of study in its own right. Nonetheless, it is still necessary to compare and contrast it with Ṭabarī’s work to understand how and why Ba‘lamī altered the Arabic text in his Persian version, and indeed why he sought to represent the Tārikhnāma as a translation.

Ba‘lamī’s Tārikhnāma thus poses an array of questions, ranging from the origins of Persian literature and the relationship of Arabic and Persian historiography to textual criticism. A single book cannot hope to discuss them all in as much detail as they deserve, but rather to lay a foundation upon which future research can build. The sheer size of the Tārikhnāma and Ṭabarī’s even larger History preclude a detailed study of all aspects of the texts and their relationship to one another. For these reasons, this book is very much a preliminary study, and its main aims are threefold: to understand why the Tārikhnāma was written; why its text came to have its current forms; and why it remained influential for so long. It is hoped that, by highlighting the Tārikhnāma’s complexity and importance, other scholars will be encouraged to research aspects that have been ignored or treated only cursorily here.
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My debt to other scholars is evident throughout my work. Special thanks are due to Charles Melville who first suggested that I study *Baḥṣamī* and supervised the original thesis, as well as reading subsequent drafts; he has been generous with his advice throughout. Elton Daniel laid the foundations for the serious study of the *Tārīkhnāma*, and although our conclusions sometimes differ, this book could not have been undertaken without his research. He has also been most kind in making available to me his unpublished work. James Montgomery, Christine van Ruymbeke, Teresa Fitzherbert and Luke Treadwell kindly gave of their time to read my work at various stages, and the latter two were generous in supplying me with their own unpublished work. All of them saved me from many mistakes, although needless to say I am responsible for the numerous ones that doubtless remain. I am also most grateful to Professor Carole Hillenbrand for her interest in my work and agreeing to include this book in ‘Studies on the History of Iran and Turkey’, and Routledge for their professionalism in producing it.

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Abbreviations

Add 836 Cambridge University Library, MS Add 836.
Beruniy Abu Rayhan Beruniy Oriental Institute, Tashkent
BNF Bibliothèque Nationale de France
BSOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
CHI The Cambridge History of Iran
EI2 Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd edition)
EIr Encyclopedia Iranica
Fatih 4281 Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, MS Fatih 4281
Fatih 4285 Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, MS Fatih 4285
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JSAI Jerusalem Studies on Arabic and Islam
Q. Qur’ān, standard Egyptian edition
RAS Royal Asiatic Society
ZDMG Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft
Introduction

Islamic historiography: the state of research

Although Arabic, Persian and Turkish possess rich and sophisticated traditions of historical writing, the study of the pre-modern historiography of the Middle East has scarcely begun. Numerous works languish unedited in manuscripts scattered around the libraries of the world, while many of those that have been published exist only in very defective editions.\(^1\) Only a comparatively small number of scholarly studies—and very few monographs—have been devoted to individual works. As a result, in spite of a number of valuable general studies of Islamic historiography,\(^2\) even the outlines of its development and characteristics remain hazy, let alone the details. Moreover, there is little comprehension of how the historiographical traditions of the three classical languages of the Islamic Middle East, Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish, relate to one another and to what extent and how they differ.

This deficiency in modern scholarship appears particularly acute when compared to the situation for mediaeval Europe, where most chronicles have not only been edited and often translated, but also studied in detail from a variety of philological and literary perspectives. As a result, we have a much clearer idea why such works were composed, for whom, and what literary devices they used to impress their audiences. For the composition of historiography in both the East and West was not a simple process of recording facts and dates.\(^3\) Rather, much of the interest in the study of these works derives from the fact that, just as for audiences in the Greek and Roman worlds, historical events possessed a meaning not so much in themselves as through the ethical lessons they could impart. For pre-modern historians, facts could be entirely subservient to their ethical meaning, and the task of the historian was less to record them precisely than to decide ‘what, and how much, to make of them to suit his own purpose’.\(^4\) The general mediaeval perception of history differed rather from popular modern ones: whilst people today might—and often do—draw attention to the lessons that may be learned from the past, they usually have in mind an idea that ‘history repeats itself’, rather than that it has an ethical meaning \textit{per se}. Thus mediaeval historical writing was rarely if ever the search for the facts about the past ‘as it really was’, as the nineteenth-century German historian von Ranke expressed it in a famous phrase.

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1 This problem is not limited to historiography, but is true of other areas of Islamic studies too.
3 For examples from the West, see Y.Hen and M.Innes (eds), \textit{The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages}. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
Mediaeval Islamic historiography was also closely bound up with religion and politics. Arabic historiography seems to have originated as tales about the exploits of the Prophet and his Companions. At an early date there also started to circulate stories of pre-Islamic prophets (Isrā‘iyyāt), which aimed to legitimize Muhammad’s position by showing that he was the last in a series of prophets stretching back through Abraham and Moses to Adam. Muslims believed that, like earlier communities, they had been offered a covenant with God that subsequently had been broken, and it was the task of historical writing to understand how this situation had arisen, and how the community (umma) could be redeemed. From the beginning, then, historiography was associated with legitimacy, whether that of Muhammad as a prophet or of the umma more generally. Political legitimacy was thus a major concern for Muslims, and every Muslim state felt the need to demonstrate its right to rule to at least some of its populace by the imagery adopted on its coins, art and architecture.

Literature was another means of expressing this legitimacy, and historiography was often extensively patronized by dynasties (or, frequently, their ministers) to promote a certain vision of the origins of the ruling house, its right to hold power, and its place in Islamic history. It could also be used to encourage dynasties to act and represent themselves in a certain way. For instance, the Niẓām al-Tawārīkh of Bayḍāwī, written in Persian in 674/1275, seems to have been composed as part of a programme which aimed to encourage the pagan Mongol ruler of Iran, Abaqa, towards Islam and to legitimize Mongol rule by placing it in the context of Iranian history. This political programme was designed by two of the leading officials in the Mongol state in Iran, the brothers Shams al-Dīn and Aṭā‘ Malik Juvaynī.

On the other hand, sometimes it was the historians themselves who took the initiative in composing such legitimatory histories, in the hope of gaining the favour, or at least the attention, of the ruler or his officials.

Until very recently little attention has been paid to such political preoccupations of historians themselves and their patrons. Rather, scholars were interested in extracting the bare record of events in the region’s past to compose their own histories of the region. Of course, this cannot be dismissed as a fruitless endeavour, for we are often indebted to these same scholars for much of our understanding of Middle Eastern history, and, to an extent, there is no way of avoiding such an approach in order to establish any details about the numerous dynasties that ruled the Islamic world. For, at least until Ottoman

5 R.S.Humphreys, ‘Ṭārīkh. II. Historical Writing’ in EI2, X, pp. 271–2.
times, we generally lack the alternative sources of information at the disposal of historians of the mediaeval West, such as legal, fiscal and parliamentary archives. Equally, our knowledge of the archaeology of the mediaeval Middle East is patchy at best, and often non-existent, although this is at least a situation it might in theory be possible to remedy partially. Numismatics and epigraphy can be of much use to historians but they are rarely entirely satisfactory alone. So, in general, there is no way the historian of the Islamic world can avoid reliance on its historiographical tradition, making it all the more important to develop our understanding of its nature and genesis.

Not all Islamic historiography has been equally neglected. Turkish has probably suffered the worst, and Arabic fared the best, although there are notable exceptions to these generalizations on both sides. The student of Persian historiography is comparatively fortunate in that a relatively large proportion of texts has been published, even if often inadequately. Yet only with the research of Kenneth Luther and Marilyn Waldman in the late twentieth century have these works been studied as more than mines of information. The publication of Julie Scott Meisami’s *Persian Historiography* presented the first (and to date, only) general study of Persian historical writing that attempts to understand the genre’s literary features, and as such marks a milestone in scholarship. Yet Meisami had to contend with a lack of basic research on many of the texts she discussed, and there is likely to be little progress in our understanding until this deficiency starts to be rectified. This book has been written in the hope that, whatever its own inadequacies, it may serve as a contribution towards filling this void, through a detailed study of the earliest and most popular work of Persian historical writing, *Bāl’amī’s Tārīkhnāma*.

**Problems in the study of the Tārīkhnāma**

No other Persian historical work is preserved as many manuscripts as the *Tārīkhnāma*, with at least 160 extant copies. Its nearest competitor is Mustawfī’s eighth/fourteenth century *Tārīkh-i Guzīda*, of which nearly 100 manuscripts are known to survive. There are even more extant copies of it than any Arabic historical work with the exception of Maqrīzī’s *Kitābal-Khiṭat*, of which 170 manuscripts exist. Yet despite its antiquity


11 See the figures given in Melville, ‘From Adam to Abaqa’, p. 73, Table 1. All numbers of extant manuscripts must be regarded as approximate, as additional copies may survive in uncatalogued collections.
and popularity, few scholars have devoted much attention to the Ĥarīkhnāma. In the
nineteenth century, the complete text of Bal'āmī’s original was thought to have been lost,
so some interest was shown in Bal’āmī’s Ĥarīkhnāma as a way of recovering the
contents of the Arabic. Two French translations of Bal’āmī resulted,13 but few further
studies were produced after the publication in Leiden of the Arabic text of the
Ta’rikh al-Rusul wa’l-Mulūk (1879–1901), reconstructed from manuscripts
scattered around the world by a team of editors led by the renowned Dutch Arabist de
Goeje. Yet, as Elton Daniel has said, calling Bal’āmī’s work a translation was ‘one of
the most unfortunate titles ever to be given to a book’.14 For in fact Bal’āmī’s work
differs greatly from Ĥabarī’s in both form and contents, as the translator himself makes
clear in his preface to the work:

God Exalted made the Amir al-Sayyid al-Malik
al-Muzaffar Abū Ṣāliḥ Manṣūr b. Nūḥ . . . examine this book and
he persisted in studying it until he had acquired the paradigms [of
behaviour] gathered in it. His exalted command went out and it did not
remain [long] on the tongue of his confidant and counselor
Fā’iq al-Khāṣṣa who, in the year 352, ordered the translation of this
book by Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ĥabarī, the author of the Ta’sīr, known
as the book of history comprising information about the ancients and
reports about them. [He ordered] the text of the reports (akhbār) to be
abbreviated, omitting the lists of authorities (isnāds), and pruning the
repetitions and long-winded recounting of stories of every prophet and
king and the detail of every report in the correct form. So I translated it
into Darī Persian that the intellects (‘ilm) of the populace and the
authorities might share in reading it and knowledge of it and that it might
be easy for anyone who examines it. For God (great and glorious is He)
has said, ‘ We have not sent a prophet save with the tongue of his people’
(Q. 14.4) and he has given every people prophets with their [own] tongue
and language.15

12 A.F.Sayyid, ‘Early methods of book composition: al-Maqrīzī’s draft of the Kitāb al-Khīta’t’ in
Y.Dutton (ed.), The Codicology of Islamic Manuscripts: proceedings of the second conference of
Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 4–5 December 1993, London: al-Furqān Heritage
Foundation, 1995, p. 95.
13 [Bal’āmī], Chronique d’Abou Djafar Mohammed Tabari (tr. L.Dubeux), Paris: Oriental
Translation Fund, 1836 (first volume only published); ibid, Chronique de Abou Djafar Mohammed
14 E.Daniel, ‘Manuscripts and editions of Bal’āmī’s Tarjaman-i Ta’rikh-i Ĥabarī’, JRAS 3rd
15 Ta’rikhnāma-i Ĥabarī gardānīda-i munsāb bi-Bal’āmī. M.Rawshan (ed.), Tehran: Sorush,
Balʿâmī’s preface mentions several important points that will be explored in detail in this book. The translation of Ṭabarî was a matter of singular importance for the Sâmânid state, one of the most powerful and extensive Muslim states of the fourth/tenth century. It was commissioned by the ruler himself, and the two most important political figures in the realm were involved: Fâʿîq, the military strongman who held great political power, and Balʿâmî, the Sâmânid vizier. It also makes it clear that Balʿâmî’s version was never intended to be an exact, word-for-word translation of Ṭabarî, but rather an abridgement and adaptation. Indeed, it seems that at the time Balʿâmî was writing, the term tarjuma, usually understood to mean ‘translation’, in fact implied commenting on a work rather than simply conveying the meaning from one language to another. Furthermore, the justification for this ‘translation’ was not merely the need to provide an accessible Persian version of Ṭabarî’s history, but is bolstered by the citation of the Qur’ānic verse: the implication is that the translation is in fact a religious obligation. However, Balʿâmî’s preface also glosses over certain important characteristics of his book. Accounts mentioned in Ṭabarî are missing in Balʿâmî, while the translator often appears to have added material from elsewhere to supplement Ṭabarî’s accounts. In other words, it is not so much a translation as a new, independent work which drew on the prestige of Ṭabarî’s name to assert its own authoritative nature, or, as Daniel puts it, ‘the Tabari translations hijacked Tabari’s name and reputation in order to put them at the service of an agenda all their own’.17

However, modern scholars have tended—understandably—to take Balʿâmî at his word and assume his work is nothing more than an abridged Persian version of the much more reliable and interesting Arabic original. This dismissal of the Tārīkhnāma as a mere translation is the main reason it has received little attention. Another, however, perhaps lies in the work itself. Like many works of Islamic literature, the textual tradition of the Tārīkhnāma is immensely complicated, with wide differences between the texts of the various manuscripts. A passage in one manuscript often is radically different in another, or sometimes entirely absent. No manuscripts from Balʿâmî’s own time exist, and it is clear that many of these variants are due to the activities of later copyists who would adapt the text to suit the tastes and interests of their own day. Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify exactly where and how the text has been altered. In other words, reconstructing the original text that Balʿâmî wrote is fraught with difficulties, and we will probably never succeed in doing so entirely. This problem has doubtless discouraged the study of the work. With the notable exception of Elton Daniel, scholars who have used the Tārīkhnāma for one reason or another—usually to extract historical information

not found in other sources—have tended to ignore these textual problems. However, without understanding how and why the text has come to exist in its current forms, it is difficult to come to any conclusions about its contents.

Inevitably, then, much of this book is preoccupied the processes by which the Tārikhnāma has been transmitted. This is necessary not just for our understanding of Bal'amī’s work, but of Islamic historiography and indeed literature more generally. Numerous texts exhibit similar problems to the Tārikhnāma. To name just two examples from historiography, in Persian, Baydawi’s Nizām al-Tawārikh, mentioned above, exists in numerous manuscripts which cannot easily be related to one another; in Arabic, the famous biography of the Prophet by Ibn Isḥāq exists in several versions which appear to have very little in common indeed. Only rarely have scholars paid much attention to the textual problems of these works. Published editions often only reflect the text of one or a few manuscripts chosen almost arbitrarily by their editors. The recent edition of the Tārikhnāma by Muḥammad Rawshan itself is a case in point. It is based on an early eighth/fourteenth century manuscript (London, RAS, Persian 22) which shows clear signs of sectarian tampering: pro-Shī'ite passages are added, and Sunnī ones doctored or omitted. Rawshan was aware that RAS, Persian 22 suffered from some deficiencies, and so he added missing passages from other manuscripts. The result is an ahistorical text that never existed until the late twentieth century in Rawshan’s own edition, exhibiting an odd mixture of Shī'ite and Sunnī biases.

I do not pretend that all the problems presented by the textual tradition of such works are soluble easily or even at all. Where the present book differs from many others is that instead of wishing away these problems, it highlights them, in the belief that acknowledging the textual difficulties of such works is at least as important as studying them from the point of view of literary or intellectual history. To seek to ‘mine’ a text for information without seeking to understand it in the context of the cultural, literary and political currents that shaped it is doubtless foolhardy, as Meisami suggests. Yet it is equally dangerous to study a text while ignoring the various phenomena that account for the form or forms it currently possesses. This book is based on an examination of some 30 Persian manuscripts of the Tārikhnāma, in addition to a good many more of its various Arabic and Turkish versions. While by no means comprehensive—the number of manuscripts is too great to allow this—this manuscript-based approach to the text does, I hope, shed light on many obscure areas both of the Tārikhnāma and of processes of textual transmission in general. We are also fortunate that an early Arabic translation of the Tārikhnāma exists, which appears to preserve a much older and more conservative version of the text than the Persian manuscripts do, against which they can be checked.

Whilst this does not allow us to reconstruct Bal'amī’s original word-for-word, it does provide a considerably better basis for understanding the genesis of the text than has been hitherto available.

18 Melville, ‘From Adam to Abaqa’, p. 69.
19 Meisami, Persian Historiography, pp. 3–5, 11–12.
Inevitably, scholars are dependent on the current state of research on the transmission of the vast majority of texts they consult. For instance, in this book I cite numerous editions of Arabic and Persian works which doubtless often present very simplistic versions of their texts. To check the manuscript tradition of each would have been an enormous task, which probably would have yielded only fairly scant results, as material from such editions only accounts for a relatively small part of the argument of this book. Furthermore, while many works have very unstable textual traditions, by no means all do. An urgent requirement for scholarship is a study of which texts were more susceptible to variation than others and why this was the case.

The discussion of the reception of the Tārīkhnāma in Chapter 5 suggests some ways in which this problem can be studied, at least with regard to this text.

As well as analysing the textual history of the Tārīkhnāma, its form and contents, and examining Balʿamī’s aims in writing it, I consider the reception of the work by subsequent generations. Ample evidence for this exists, both in the Persian manuscripts themselves and in the numerous translations of the Tārīkhnāma into other languages, most notably Turkish. In order to understand the work’s textual history, it is necessary to appreciate how later Muslims saw the Tārīkhnāma and what meaning it had for them. In part, it was precisely because the work was so popular and so readily adaptable to the interests of numerous different groups as disparate as Şūfīs and kings that its text was often altered so radically. Balʿamī’s Tārīkhnāma, it seems, had something to offer everyone, and everyone saw fit to adapt to it to suit their own circumstances.

Before proceeding to consider the Tārīkhnāma we must say a few words about Ṭabarī himself and his original Arabic Taʿrīkh al-Rusul wa-ʾl-Mulūk. Balʿamī’s Tārīkhnāma may in reality be an independent work, but its inspiration was clearly Ṭabarī’s History. We must therefore consider why the reputation of Ṭabarī and his History was so great that Balʿamī wished to ‘hijack’ them, in Daniel’s phrase, and the tradition of historical writing from which the Arabic History emerged.

20 For example, Morton’s recent edition of Nīshāpūrī’s Saljūqīnāma presents a text which existed in two different yet closely related redactions, yet appears to have been preserved comparatively conservatively. As a result Morton has been able to produce a convincing reconstruction of the text through using a stemmatic approach. See Zahr al-Dīn Nīshāpūrī, The Saljūqīnāma: a critical edition making use of the unique manuscript in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society, A.H.Morton (ed.), np: Gibb Memorial Series, 2004, Introduction, pp. 37–44.
21 The codicology of Islamic manuscripts as sources for works’ reception has attracted little scholarly attention. For a recent example from the West of how productive this approach may be, see R.McKitterick, History and Memory in the Carolingian World, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
22 The literature is extensive. For a convenient introduction, see Robinson, Islamic Historiography, pp. 18–30.
The origins and early development of historical writing in Arabic has been more thoroughly researched than any other problem in Islamic historiography. Yet, despite the scholarly attention it has attracted, it remains a controversial and poorly understood subject. It seems that its origins are closely connected to those of ُهَدِيث, although distinct. ُهَدِيث came into circulation out of a feeling among Muslims that the life of the Prophet offered a model to be emulated, while historical reports (اَكْبَر) sought to explain the origins of the ُعَمَّة and its early disputes. As a result, early Arabic historiography has much in common with ُهَدِيث, although historical reports came to be called ُهَدِيث (sing, ُكَهَابَر). In both ُهَدِيث and ُهَدِيث, each account is given an ُعِسْنَاد, a list of authorities for the report stretching back to the original source, usually a witness to the event or a participant in it. Although historiography never developed the elaborate systems of categorizing the reliability of reports and their transmitters that ُهَدِيث did, it was still normal practice to cite multiple reports if there were variations in the text or ُعِسْنَاد. Akhārīs (transmitters of ُهَدِيث) and ُهَدِيثīs (transmitters of ُهَدِيث and ُهَدِيث, respectively) usually came from the same background, being pious scholars, not part of the administrative and literary elite. Nonetheless, early historians were regarded with some suspicion by ُهَدِيثīs as their application of ُعِسْنَاد techniques such as ُعِسْنَادات tended to be much less rigorous than in ُهَدِيث itself.

In the early ُعَبَّاسِيَة period, the state started to take an interest in historical writing, and the Caliph ُمَانْشُر (d. 158/775) commissioned works such as Ibn ُيِشَاّق’s universal history, of which only the parts dealing with the Prophet’s life (ُسُيْر) survive. The ُعَبَّاسِيَة had come to power in 132/750 in a revolution that wiped out the Umayyad dynasty, but the new rulers faced severe doubts as to their credibility among important sections of society. As Chase Robinson puts it, ‘[p]atronizing history…held out to the ُعَبَّاسِيَة the prospect of establishing their cultural credentials and legitimizing the violence that brought them to power’. Ibn ُيِشَاّق’s work marks the start of a growing trend of composing universal histories which subsumed earlier monographs on individual themes in Islamic history such as, say, the Prophet’s ُمَغْهَازَي (wars on unbelievers). Despite the state’s patronage of historiography, there remained among the traditionalists who were its authors an abiding suspicion of the caliphs and the state.

23 On the ُعَبَّاسِيَة’s legitimacy problem, see Crone, Medieval Islamic Political Thought, pp. 89–94.
Arabic historiography did not become an unambiguous tool of state propaganda until the fourth/tenth century, when Ṣābi’ was obliged to compose a history in praise of the Būyid dynasty, the Kitāb al-Taṣī. Although according to legend it was famously described by its author as ‘falsehoods’, it seems to have inspired ‘Uthbī’s Ta’rikh al-Yanūnī, a fifth/eleventh century work which was held up as a model for much subsequent Arabic and Persian literature.26

During the third/ninth century, history and hadith began to part company, and writers like Dīnawarī and Ya’qūbī dropped the apparatus of isnāds and variant accounts, creating a smooth and coherent narratives. In the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries well-known historians, in particular Masūdī in his Murāj al-Dhahab and Miskawayh in the Tajārib al-Umam, sought to break away completely from akhbār-based history. Both of these stress the importance of reason for the study of history, but this was to prove a blind alley, for they had few imitators. Subsequent historians tended to omit isnāds and variant accounts, but their inspiration was the greatest and last of the akhbār-based compilations, Tabarī’s History of Prophets and Kings, from which they often copied large passages and which others would often cite as a source even if they had not used any material from it, so great did its fame become.

Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī was born in 224 or 225/839 in the town of Āmul on the Caspian Sea in the province of Ṭabaristān, from which his name derives.27 He was of Iranian stock, and Persian (or the local dialect of it) was his first language. His family owned property from which they derived sufficient income to allow Ṭabarī to pursue scholarly interests. He soon left Ṭabaristān for the intellectual centres of the Muslim world, studying in Rayy, Kūfa, Başra, Egypt and Syria, although he eventually settled in Baghdad. His studies were those typical of a mediaeval Muslim scholar, concentrating in particular on hadith and fiqh, jurisprudence. His travels were mainly inspired by the desire to study these subjects with the most reputable authorities, wherever they may be. Such a course was followed by the numerous scholars who took to heart the Prophet’s injunction to ‘seek knowledge, though it be in China’.

Ṭabarī’s great learning won him a substantial following in Baghdad, where a law school (madhhab), the Jarīriyya, took its name from him. Baghdād in this period was riven with disputes between various Shi’ite and Sunni groups which the declining ‘Abdāsid Caliphate was unable to control. Inevitably, Ṭabarī was a controversial figure to some. Although he is usually associated with Sunnism, he was accused of Shi’ism.

almost certainly without good cause.\textsuperscript{28} He also aroused the ire of the \textsuperscript{Hanbalīs}, populist Sunnī traditionalists who asserted that law and religious doctrine should be derived from the \textit{Qur‘ān} and \textit{ḥadīth} alone. Despite their allegations against him, he unquestionably regarded not just \textsuperscript{Hanbalīsm}, but also the various forms of \textsuperscript{Shī‘ism} with intense suspicion. Indeed, on a return visit to \textit{Ṭabaristān}, he is said to have been nearly killed by his compatriots as result of his defence of the first two Caliphs from \textsuperscript{Shī‘ī} attacks. So concerned was he about the rise of heterodoxy, especially Khārijism and \textsuperscript{Mutazilīsm}, in his native land, that he wrote an essay to try to counter it. He died in Baghdad in 310/923.

\textit{Ṭabarī} wrote numerous works on a variety of areas of the religious sciences, although the exact number and their titles remains unclear. However, his fame, immense even during his lifetime, rests on two enormous works, his \textit{Tafsīr} or Commentary on the \textit{Qur‘ān}, and the \textit{Ta‘rikh}, his great chronicle. In the \textit{Tafsīr}, \texti{Ṭabarī} provides a detailed analysis of \textit{Qur‘ānic} verses, supporting his arguments with \textit{ḥadīth}, the views of other scholars, and analogy. While numerous different interpretations are discussed, \textit{Ṭabarī} always specifically rejects erroneous ones, and much of the work forms a polemic against them. The reader is always told exactly what to think, although \textit{Ṭabarī}'s views were often controversial.\textsuperscript{29}

The \textit{History} at first appears very different. The work is built up of reports, \textit{akhbār}, of historical events, and as in the \textit{Tafsīr}, each of these is provided with an \textit{isnāḍ}. However, the reader is rarely told \textit{Ṭabarī}'s view on the accuracy of each report. Rather, readers were expected to judge the reliability of a report from the \textit{isnāḍ}, so if an event was reported solely by a transmitter or authority known for his unreliability, it would be regarded with scepticism. Yet in practice \textit{Ṭabarī} seems to have arranged the reports carefully, giving some more prominence than others, to promote a certain version of history.\textsuperscript{30} Regrettably, few detailed analyses of the \textit{History} have been produced hitherto, so it is difficult to draw general conclusions as to the exact nature of \textit{Ṭabarī}'s agenda. However, it is clear that, as one would expect, it was strongly pro-Sunnī and hostile to \textsuperscript{Shī‘ism}.

\textsuperscript{29} T.Khalidi, \textit{Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 75.
The scope of the *History of Prophets and Kings* is vast. Covering history from Creation down to the author’s own times, it remains to this day an essential source for Middle Eastern history, for topics as diverse as the Sasanian Empire in Iran (224–651), the life of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 11/632), the early Islamic conquests, and the first great Muslim Empires, the Umayyads (41/661–132/750) and the ‘Abbāsids (132/750–656/1258). Although the *History* is often referred to as a work of universal history, a caveat is in order. Tabari was not interested in writing a general history of the world, and this is reflected in some of the omissions from his work. For instance, he discusses the pre-Islamic history of Iran and Yemen in detail, while virtually ignoring that of Greece and Rome. In the Islamic period, his treatment of events in Iraq and Transoxiana is generally detailed, while those in Egypt and Syria are dismissed relatively briefly, even though he was personally acquainted with both these important areas of the Islamic world and had almost certainly never been to Central Asia. Issues of concern to many modern historians are neglected by him, such as taxation, commerce, settlement or agriculture. As Donner argues, the ‘master narrative’ underlying Tabari’s chronicle aimed to explain how the umma had reached its contemporary situation and to affirm that it was ‘the community of the true faith’.31

Tabari used a variety of sources, some oral, some written. Traditionally in Islamic culture orally transmitted materials were regarded as more reliable, but Tabari unquestionably incorporated into the *History* the written works of earlier Muslim historians. These works have rarely survived in their original form, and are often attested only in the *History*. However, in the rare instances where the original source has been preserved intact and we can compare it with Tabari’s version, it is clear that he does not quote it verbatim. In particular, he had a tendency to divide long narratives into shorter passages prefaced by isnāds, indicating his readiness to re-mould his sources to suit not just his historical outlook but also historical methodology. Both outlook and methodology demanded a hadith-centred narrative, in keeping with what Robinson describes as his ‘emphatically traditionalist’ approach.32

So Tabari’s *History* is by no means all it appears. It is less comprehensive and its citation of authorities is less reliable than it seems at first, and it indubitably reflects some of Tabari’s own biases. Yet it succeeds in its intention to provide what Donner describes as an organic historical explanation for the identity and role of the Muslim community in the third and fourth centuries AH. It explains how the community can see itself as the result of the application of God’s guidance in human affairs. It shows how earlier communities, led by prophets with the same message as that revealed to Muhammad, went astray, making the Muslims unique in their adherence to the true law, even though the earlier prophets and their communities can be seen as forerunners of

32 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 36.
Muḥammad and the Islamic community. At the same time, this recounting of predecessors who went astray serves (as it does in the Qurʾān) as a tacit warning to Muslims to be mindful of their own behavior, lest they too stray as a community from the true path.33

The History is, then, very far from being a simple narrative of historical facts—as discussed above, few pre-modern histories were. Rather, it is an intensely religious work with a clear moral purpose. This is why it can possess so many apparent deficiencies: ultimately they are irrelevant to Ṭabarī’s intention in writing the work. Yet the History was nonetheless highly valued as a historical source, as is attested by its frequent citation by later authors. It does seem to have been seen as providing a moderate interpretation of the community’s past, in line with the consensus of mainstream opinion, avoiding the extremes of Shiʿism or its more radical opponents.34 This does not mean that it was free of biases, or was seen as such. On the contrary, Ṭabarī often suppresses reports of which he disapproves, such as pro-Shīʿite ones.35 However, the numerous contradictory reports which make up the History usually ensure that the appearance although not the reality of impartiality is maintained, an effect which doubtless appealed to a Sunnī readership.

This apparently even-handed approach helped ensure the History’s popularity and, indeed, its translation into Persian. Although it was by no means the first universal history in Arabic,36 it was unquestionably the most influential, finding later imitators in the major historians Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1234) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), who often quote long passages from Ṭabarī’s History virtually without amendment.37 Nor was Ṭabarī’s work seen only as a source of dry facts for historians, but also as a fount of moral precepts, as is illustrated by an anecdote recounted by Ibn al-Athīr. Maḥmūd of Ghazna (d. 421/1030), ruler of the Ghaznavid Empire which stretched over much of Afghanistan, Central Asia and Northern India, once chastised Majd al-Dawla, the Būyid ruler of Rayy, just after he had captured the city:

‘Have you not read the Shāhnāma, which is the history of the Persians, and the History of Ṭabarī, which is the history of the Muslims?’ said Maḥmūd.

‘Yes,’ replied Majd al-Dawla.

‘Your conduct is not that of one who has.’38

33 Donner, Narratives of Islamic Origins, p. 130.
34 Ibid, p. 128, and Robinson, Islamic Historiography, p. 36.
36 The earliest surviving is the ʿAbbasid Taʾrīkh Khāṭif b. Khayyāl (d. c. 240/854).
Even by the early fourth/tenth century, the *History* had acquired a tremendous reputation and was widely praised by contemporaries. It seems that a vast number of manuscripts of it were made—one report, doubtless exaggerated, claims that the Fatimid palace library contained 1,200 copies of it. The great length of the *History* soon gave rise to demand for a shorter version, and as early as the fourth/tenth century, an Arabic abridgement was produced by a group headed by Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Ḥāshimi. Yet despite the *History’s* fame in the mediaeval Islamic world, no single complete copy has survived intact, probably due to its great length, which made it expensive to copy and reduced its general appeal. The standard modern edition of the work in 16 volumes is thus based on manuscripts of different sections of the work scattered across the world, from Fez to Oxford, Leiden to Istanbul. Miraculously, the nineteenth century editors managed to reconstruct virtually the entirety of the text. It is unknown when the Arabic original fell out of circulation; judging by the extant dated manuscripts, most of which date to the seventh/thirteenth century or before, it may well have started to decline in popularity around the time of the Mongol invasions. Although a handful manuscripts of manuscripts of Buʾami’s *Tārīkhnāma* date to the seventh/thirteenth century or earlier, we only find substantial numbers of them from the eighth/fourteenth century onwards. Henceforth, Tabari’s famous *History* would be better known in the Islamic world in Buʾami’s version of it than in the original. Translations into other Islamic languages, such as Ottoman and Chaghatai Turkish, were made from the Persian rather than from the Arabic original. Above all, the vast number of manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* copied everywhere between Istanbul and India for nearly a thousand years is a testament to the huge popularity of Buʾami’s version of Tabari.

42 Thirteen of the dated manuscripts of Tabari’s *History* listed by F.Sezgin (*Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, p. 326) are seventh/thirteenth century; in comparison only two are eighth/fourteenth century.
Politics, religion and culture in the late Sāmānid state

The first great flowering of Persian literature in the fourth/tenth century that produced the Tārīkhnāma has usually been associated with a growth in patriotic feelings amongst the Iranian population that had been subjugated since the early Islamic conquests,¹ and it did coincide with the rise of rulers of Iranian origin. It was an age when the Caliphate, beset by internal disputes in Iraq, was increasingly obliged to devolve power to local dynasties. In the mashriq, as the eastern Islamic lands of Khurāsān and Transoxiana were known, these dynasties were usually ethnically Iranian, most notably the Tāhirids, the Ṣaffārīds and the Sāmānids themselves.

Yet the renaissance of Persian language and literature in this period cannot be explained purely by reference to the ethnic origins of these rulers. Neither the Tāhirīds nor the Ṣaffārīds, for very different reasons, promoted Persian literature seriously, with the exception of a few fragments of verse composed as experiments at their courts. Indeed, the Tāhirīds subsequently had a reputation for active hostility to Persian literature, while the illiterate early Ṣaffārīds played only a small part in the Persian renaissance.² Only under the Sāmānids in Central Asia was Persian reborn after its virtual disappearance as a literary language with the Arab conquest of Iran.

Yet Sāmānid Transoxiana was not the most obvious home for this renaissance. Much Sāmānid territory, including Transoxiana, had never formed part of the pre-Islamic Iranian Sāsānian state. Traditionally, the predominant ethnic group in Transoxiana was the Soghdians, who spoke an Iranian language related to yet distinct from Persian. Soghdian was dying out by the fourth/tenth century, at least in urban areas, for the Sāmānid realm was populated by Arab settlers (who had soon lost their language) and Turks in addition to the Soghdians and other ethnically Iranian peoples. The great majority of the Sāmānid population—probably around 80 per cent—was Muslim.³ Thus

Transoxiana was far from being a traditional centre of Persian culture, and indeed, it was not there but in western Iran, especially the province of Fars, that Zoroastrian books in Pahlavi continued to be copied for the dwindling bands of believers. The territories of the minor Iranian rulers of the fourth/tenth century who did espouse pre-Islamic, Sasanian tradition, mainly in the remote mountains of the Caspian region, were scarcely touched by the Persian literary renaissance in Central Asia.

Modern scholarship has not yet satisfactorily explained the circumstances of the rebirth of Persian literature. This chapter will examine the Sāmānid milieu in which the Tārīkhnāma was produced, arguing that the predominant cultural atmosphere was one of religious conservatism rather than Iranian national sentiment and that it is against this background that the Persian renaissance must be interpreted. We will also examine the religious and political environment of the times, for Bal'ami’s translation of Ṭabarī is commonly seen as having originated as a political project as much as a literary one, and ‘almost certainly constituted an effort to propagate a state-sanctioned, “official” ideology of Islamic history and dogma, presumably in defence of the Sāmānid regime’. 4

The Sāmānids: an overview

The Sāmānid dynasty had long been established in Central Asia. According to some sources, including Bal'ami, they traced their ancestry back to pre-Islamic times, claiming descent from the sixth-century Iranian general Bahrām Chūbīn. 5 They seem to have been local gentry, known as dihqāns, who sympathized with the Arab conquerors who brought Islam to Transoxiana in the first half of the second/eighth century. 6 Sāmān, the founder of the dynasty, is said to have been converted by the Arab governor of Khurāsān between 105–9/723–7, Asad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Qushayrī, after whom he named his son Asad. 7 The Sāmānids then vanish from the historical record for a century, reappearing around 204/819, when, as a reward for their support of the ‘Abbāsid Caliph Ma'mūn against a rebel, the four sons of Asad were each granted rule of a major Transoxianan city: Samarqand, Farghāna, Shāsh and Herāt.

The early Sāmānids acted as deputies of the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate’s hereditary governors of Khurāsān, the Tāhirids. In the second half of the third/ninth century, Tāhirid authority collapsed before the expansion of the Ṣaffārīds, a dynasty from the

remote province of Sīstān newly arisen from humble origins. Thwarting Ṣaffārid ambitions over Transoxiana, the Sāmānid governor of Samarqand, Naṣr b. Ahmad b. Asad, sent his brother Ismāʿīl to take control of Bukhārā in 260/874. The Sāmānids’ position was recognized the following year by the Caliph, who officially invested them with the governorship of all Transoxiana. In 287/900, the crushing defeat of the Ṣaffārids by Ismāʿīl, by now ruler in his own right since Naṣr’s death, brought him caliphal investiture as amir of all Khurāsān. With a few exceptions, the Sāmānids used this title of amir (commander, governor) until the dynasty was extinguished at the end of the fourth/tenth century. In reality, they were independent rulers whose rule was legitimized by the Baghdad Caliphate but not constrained by it.

Contemporary outside observers found much to admire in the Sāmānid lands, as the enthusiastic reports of geographers such as Iṣṭakhrī, Muqaddasī and Ibn Hawqal indicate. Admittedly, they seem to have been less impressed by the Sāmānid capital, Bukhārā, which was regularly described as filthy and overcrowded. However, this did not detract from the esteem in which the dynasty was held by contemporaries and posterity which often held them up as model rulers. For example, the famous Saljūq vizier Nizām al-Mulk described Sāmānid administrative practice as a model for the Saljūqs to emulate. The Sāmānids’ great prestige—which they retain to this day in Central Asia—rested on their reputation for piety, learning and support for the ulema, the religious leaders.

Prestige alone was not enough prevent political instability. Like most rulers of the time, the Sāmānids faced rebellious vassals and succession disputes, and they occupied an increasingly precarious position as the last major Sunni power in the central lands of the caliphate. The fourth/tenth century has often been called ‘the Shi’ite century’ as it witnessed the crystallization of Shi‘ism into a recognizable form with its distinctive doctrines and hadīth collections. It was a golden age for Shi‘ism politically too, and Shi‘ite rulers seized power in much of the Islamic world. To the west of the Sāmānid state, the Shi‘ite Būyids, also of Iranian origin, controlled much of Iran and Iraq, holding

8 On them see Bosworth, History of the Saffarids of Sistan, esp. pp. 108–134 for their defeat of the Tāhirids.
12 For example, the main square of the Tajik capital Dushanbe contains a large statue of Ismāʿīl the Sāmānid.
13 See, for example, Muqaddasī, Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm, p. 339.
captive the Caliph. Their moderate co-religionists, the Hamdānids, occupied Syria, while the Fāṭimids, adherents to a radical branch of Shi‘ism, Ismā‘īlism, used their bases in first North Africa, then Egypt, to promote missionary activity among non-Ismā‘īlī Muslims (the da‘wa), aiming to convert the rest of the Muslim world.

To the north and east of Transoxiana were the pagan Turkish tribes of the steppe, although many of them had converted to Islam by the second half of the fourth/tenth century, thanks in part to the activities of missionaries supported by the Sāmānids. The state’s eastern border with the Turks proved an irresistible attraction for the ghāzīs or holy warriors who flocked to Transoxiana to do battle with the infidel in the first half of the fourth/ tenth century. Among them were many Śūfīs, for early Śūfism was militant and committed to holy war (ghazw). This doubtless accounts for the swift spread of Śūfism in the mashriq and among the newly Muslim Turks. Among these converted Turks were the Qarakhānids, the dynasty that would eventually overthrow the Sāmānids and divide their lands with the Ghaznavids, another Turkish dynasty based at Ghazna in modern Afghanistan. Religious zeal was not the sole reason for the Sāmānids’ promotion of ghazw, for it also provided a valuable source of the Turkish slaves that comprised much of their army. Trade between the Sāmānids and the steppe also doubtless played a large part in the conversion of the Turks.

The Sāmānids, for instance, allowed the Muḥtājids dynasty to rule as their vassals in Chaghāniyān, while in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, the governorship of Khurāsān was usually controlled by the Sīmjūrid family of Turkish slave origin. In theory, the Sāmānids ruler retained the right to remove a vassal should the need arise; in reality the vassals were equally capable of removing the ruler and replacing him with another member of his family—among whom there was never a shortage of willing candidates. The Sāmānīd amir was thus by no means an all-powerful autocrat. His power was limited not just by distant, overpotent vassals, but by his court retinue itself.

14 At least until the crushing defeats inflicted on them by the Byzantines under Nicephorus in the late 960s.
15 The terms Qarmāṭī and Bāṭīnī are often used in the primary sources as general terms for Ḥaḍratīlic, although properly they should refer to Ḥaḍratīlī or Qarmāṭī groups. The terms have been preserved in passages directly translated here, but otherwise Ḥaḍratīlī is used throughout.
19 The amir was killed 301/914, and among the officials were the vizier Ahmad b. Ismā‘īl (d. 330/941) and the governor of Khurāsān Bakr b. Mālik (d. 345/956–7).
One ruler and several officials met their ends at the hands of the slave soldiers (ghilmān) who constituted much of the Sāmānid army. One text describes the Turkish retinue at the Sāmānid court in the early fourth/tenth century as ‘the lords of the kingdom’ (arbāb al-mamlaka).

The second half of the fourth/tenth century saw the Sāmānids’ power diminishing. During the reign of Bā‘amī’s master, Mānṣūr b. Nūh (350/961–365/976), the amir’s power declined further at the expense of the military chiefs. External pressures also damaged the state. The Sāmānids were obliged to intervene in Sīstān to attempt to resolve a dispute between their nominal vassal Khalaf b. ʿĀḥmad, the ʿṢaffārid, and his treacherous relative Ṭāhīr, who had seized power in 354/965 during Khalaf’s absence. The dispute was to drag on into the reign of Mānṣūr’s successor Nūh. As the fifth/eleventh century historian ʿUṭbī commented, ‘this was the first of the weaknesses which afflicted this [the Sāmānid] state’. The Sāmānids’ Ilyāsid vassals also lost control of Kirmān to the Būyids in 357/967–8, and the year 354/965 also saw an Ismāʿīlī rising in Herat. Further south, Alptegīn and Sebüktegīn set up the state in Ghazna that was eventually to assist in the overthrow of the Sāmānids.

However, there are few reports of disturbances in Transoxiana itself, and there were no campaigns against recently converted steppe Turks. Most power was now in the hands of the mamlūk Fāʿīq al-Khāṣṣa, who held the governorships of Samarqand, Shāsh and Bukhārā. Meanwhile, Khurāsān was ruled from Nīshāpūr by the ʿṢimjūrids. The mamlūks of Transoxiana and Khurāsān competed with each other for power, appointing and dismissing viziers at will. For most of Mānṣūr’s reign, Abū ʿAlī Bā‘amī and Abū Jaʿfar ʿUṭbī held the office.

Although the Sāmānid state’s periphery was unquestionably weak at this period, the vital lands of Khurāsān and Transoxiana appear to have been relatively calm, at least in comparison with the situation in earlier periods. For example, Naṣr II b. ʿĀḥmad (301/914–331/943), ruler during what was widely remembered as the Sāmānid Golden Age, had faced several revolts from members of the Sāmānid family, losing control of his capital Bukhārā at one point. Naṣr’s son and successor, Nūḥ, confronted similar

22 Treadwell, ‘Political History’, p. 232. There was, however, some success for the Sāmānids against their rivals in 361/971–2 in reinstating an earlier treaty from ʿAbd al-Malik’s reign which stipulated the payment of tribute by the Būyids to the Sāmānids: see ibid, pp. 229–30.
25 Ibid, p. 237. The numismatic evidence Treadwell presents suggests that he may have held at least some of these at the same time rather than successively.
26 Treadwell, ‘Political History’, p. 144.
problems with the rebellion of his uncle Ibrāhīm b. Ahmad in 335/946–7. Ibrāhīm’s allies held out for three years and imposed a truce on Nūḥ in the end. 27 Compared with this, the reign of Manṣūr seems to have been fairly peaceful, despite the amir’s loss of power to the military elite. 28

Less powerful than the military strongmen, but nonetheless important, were the civilian bureaucrats (kuttāb, sing, kātib). A handful of families held the same positions in the bureaucracy from generation to generation, alternating with other members of the same tiny elite. The Jayhānī, ‘Utbi and Bal‘amī families between them held control of the vizierate for much of the fourth/tenth century. Although this bureaucratic elite had lost much of its earlier power by the later part of the century, it remained culturally significant. Many members of it did not just patronize literature, but were authors in their own right. On a local level, power was often held by the ulema. The dihqāns, the landed gentry left over from pre-Islamic times, saw their power diminish under the Sāmānids, ironically in view the dynasty’s origins. Agriculture was neglected as cities, especially Bukhārā, expanded, destroying the basis of the dihqāns’ power. In the cities themselves, fierce, frequently violent, struggles for power took place between rival groups. This factionalism was known as ʿāṣabiyya. These groups frequently legitimized their existence by claiming to represent Islamic legal schools (madhhabs), in particular Ḥanafī and Shāfī‘ī, the two madhhabs of the mashriq. 29

Society in Sāmānid Transoxiana, at least by the middle of the fourth/tenth century, thus had more in common with that elsewhere in the Islamic world, in eastern Iran, Iraq or Syria, than it did with any pre-Islamic or ancient Iranian traditions. Of course, some local features did exist: a few Manichaeans could still be found in Samarqand and in several areas Sapūd-Jāmagān, a rather mysterious heretical group, still survived. 30 There were also some Nestorian Christian communities. Yet the most distinctive characteristic of Transoxiana compared to the Islamic lands to its west was its fervent adherence to Sunnism.

Islam in the mashriq

After the Arab conquests, Khurāsān and Transoxiana embraced Islam far more swiftly and enthusiastically than other parts of Iran, although the process differed somewhat between the two regions. In Khurāsān, conversion was assisted by the large-scale Arab

27 Ibid, p. 212.
28 That is, if we can argue on the basis of the sources’ silence.
30 Huda‘ al-ʿĀlam min al-Mashriq ila al-Maghrib, M. Sutūda (ed.). Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1340, pp. 107 and 114. The Sapūd Jāmagān or ‘Wearers of White’ were the followers of ‘the veiled Prophet’, Muqama, who resisted Islam. For details see Narshakhī, History, pp. 75 and 147, n. 264.
colonization of the region, which was underway as early as 47/667. \textsuperscript{31} Intermarriage encouraged the assimilation of Iranians and Arabs, and the latter soon adopted Persian as their spoken language. Although there were regularly frequent revolts by non-Muslims into the \textit{'Abbāsid} times, much of the population cooperated with Arab rule, \textsuperscript{32} and by the mid-second/eighth century even the \textit{diḥqāns} of Khurāsān, initially the class most hostile to Muslim rule, had converted to Islam en masse.\textsuperscript{33}

The conquest of Transoxiana was not completed until the middle of the second/eighth century. Despite the protracted nature of the conquest, Islam was soon firmly established in the region.\textsuperscript{34} This was partly due to the immigration of Arabs from Khurāsān to Transoxiana, and half of Bukhārā was given over to Arab settlers.\textsuperscript{35} The indigenous population also converted to Islam in large numbers, although the pace may have varied from place to place. As in Khurāsān local elites assisted the invaders, and the Arab campaigns in Transoxiana may even have been financed by the wealthy Soghdian merchants of Marv.\textsuperscript{36}

The Umayyad government, fearful of a decrease in tax revenue, refused to recognize the converts, and continued to collect from them the non-Muslims' poll-tax, the \textit{jizya}. The cause of the \textit{mashriqī} converts was taken up by the Murji'ī\textsuperscript{a}, a group that sought Muslim unity, arguing, contrary to the claims of the both the \textit{proto-Shī'ī} and their opponents, that judgement on the Caliphs 'Alī and 'Uthmān should be deferred before God. Known as the \textit{Ahl al-'Adl wa'-l-Sunna} (the supporters of justice and prophetic tradition), arguing that every Muslim should speak out against injustice, it was only natural that they should assist the new Muslims of Transoxiana.\textsuperscript{37} Murji'ī\textsuperscript{ite} influence lingered on in the region long after the dispute over status of the converts had been resolved, and elements of it survived into Sāmānid times. The religious tract \textit{al-Sawrād al-Aʿzam}, composed in Arabic at the command of the great amir Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlīmad, and later translated into Persian, certainly reflects some Murji'ī\textsuperscript{ite} beliefs.\textsuperscript{38} Thus Murji'ī\textsuperscript{ism} seems to have been a decisive factor in shaping the Sunnī,

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, p. 191.
\textsuperscript{35} See Pourshariati, ‘Local histories’, pp. 57–61 for a discussion of Narshakhī’s account of the settlement and Islamization of Bukhārā by the Arabs.
\textsuperscript{37} Madelung, \textit{Religious Trends}, loc.cit.
\textsuperscript{38} Madelung, ‘The early Murji’ī\textsuperscript{a} in Khurāsān and Transoxiana and the spread of \textit{Hanalīsm},’ \textit{Der Islam} 59(1982), p. 39.
traditionalist character of Transoxiana. One of the leading was Abū Ḥanīfa, founder of the Ḥanafite law school; doubtless the prevalence of Ḥanafism in the mashriq can be explained partly by this connection.39

The insistence on the importance of the sunna was by no means unique to them—indeed, virtually every political or religious group in early Islamic society called for a return to the Prophetic sunna. The great importance that Muslims accorded the behaviour of the Prophet as a model for their lives and law meant that much effort was devoted to collecting traditions about this sunna. The traditionist (in the sense of being interested in traditions) culture of the Islamic world also led to it having a traditionalist outlook, in other words one that revered the lifetime of the Prophet and the early Caliphs as the golden age of the Islamic community.40 Ḥadīth and a traditionalist perspective were the foundations of Islamic society, at least Sunnī Islamic society, and nowhere more so than in the mashriq.

Over the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, both Khurāsān and Transoxiana developed as the major centres of traditionism and traditionalism in the Islamic world, although in rather different ways. In Khurāsān, the impetus for this was not the status of converts, but rather the position of the ābāt—the Arab settlers who had colonized the region in such great numbers and had provided the backbone of the forces that overthrew the Umayyads, bringing the ʿAbbāsidsto power (132/750).41 The status of the ābāt had been eroded by the third/ninth century, and they embraced the populist traditionalism of the Baghdadi preacher Ahmad b. Ḥanbal.42 The vital importance of the mashriq for traditionism is reflected by the fact that five of the six canonical collections of Sunnī hadith were compiled by easterners: Bukhārī (d. near Samarqand 256/869–70); Muslim b. Ḥajjāj al-Nayshābūrī (d. Nishāpūr 261/874); Abū Daʿūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/888); al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892); al-Nisāʾī (d. 303/915).43

Scholars from the rest of the Islamic world flocked to the mashriq to gather Ḥadīth. Likewise, easterners would regularly travel west not just to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, but also to seek out Ḥadīth transmitters. Balʿamī himself may have travelled for just this purpose, and one famous easterner who certainly did was the Saffārid ruler of Sīstān, Khalaf b. Ahmad (r. 352/963–393/1003), who before his accession to the throne studied Ḥadīth in Khurāsān and then in the central Islamic lands.44 Interest in

39 Madelung, Religious Trends, p. 17.
41 Madelung (Religious Trends, p. 24) notes that the ābāt did not sympathize with the ʿAbbāsid revolution’s Shiʿite principles.
hadith was widespread in the fourth/tenth century, and not restricted to a particular learned class comparable to modern academics. Indeed, some early Sāmānid amirs were known as muhaddithus, as was Abū 'Ali Bal'ami's father, Abū 'l-Fadl. The ulema were not a narrowly defined group, for anyone who transmitted hadith might be considered, up to a point, one of them. Some people studied only for a limited proportion of their time, while others devoted much of their attention to it. As a result, as Mottahedeh has pointed out, some people might be considered ulema for some purposes, but not for others, and some might be recognized as ulema by some people but not by others. Thus ulema often had another occupation as well as teaching hadith, and many were what Mottahedeh describes as ‘semi-professional’ scholars. For reasons of prestige, they usually identified themselves primarily as ulema. The esteem in which they were held meant that they could often act as the spokesmen of communities. It was the ulema who had invited the Sāmānids to take control of Bukhārā in 260/874, and their withdrawal of support for the dynasty in 389/999 allowed the Qarakhānid Turks to seize the city.

The Sāmānid mashriq was thus a devout society in which men of religion wielded much power. There were, of course, exceptions to the prevailing Sunnī orthodoxy: one of the Jayhānīs had a reputation as a freethinker, and may have been a Manichaean, and there were certainly Twelver Shi‘ite communities too, although as a small minority their relations with the Sunnīs seem to have been unproblematic. Shi‘ism in fourth/tenth century Transoxiana was propagated by a Sunnī convert, Muḥammad b. Maṣ‘ūd al-Ayyāşī, who taught both Sunnī and Shi‘ite hadith in Samarqand. The increasing number of Shi‘ite names such as

49 Paul has argued (The State and the Military, pp. 21–2) that the Sāmānids and the ulema were on bad terms after the reign of Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad. His evidence for this is that the amirs no longer attended the funerals of ulema and read prayers over their graves as they had done in earlier times. However, it is much more likely that this was due to the Sāmānids’ desire to create an atmosphere of dignity (haybat) befitting the new status their caliphal investiture gave them, as Narshakhi indicates (History, pp. 82, 87, and see also Paul, The State and the Military, p. 11, n. 11). Tha‘ālibī says that Nāb b. Nasr had studied hadith and religion (P. Crone and L. Treadwell, ‘A new text on Ismailism at the Samanid court’ in C. F. Robinson (ed.), Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic studies in honour of D. S. Richards, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 39), and we know that Abū ‘Ali Bal‘ami carried the coffin of one eminent scholar (Sam‘ānī, Kitāb al-Ansāb, V, p. 163), which he presumably would not have done as vizier if there had been bad relations between the ulema and the government. The ulema’s cooperation over the translations of Tabari’s tafsīr and al-Suwaid al-A‘ẓam discussed below, indicates that their relations with the Sāmānid dynasty remained healthy until the end.
50 Madelung, Religious Trends, pp. 84–5.
'Ali, Hasan and Husayn, found in non-Shi‘ite families in the period suggests there was a widespread sympathy for the family of 'Ali, which did not convert into acceptance of Shi‘ism.\(^{51}\) Indeed, the overwhelming impression from the sources is that in the late fourth/tenth century Sunnī conservativism was becoming, if anything, more prevalent.\(^{52}\)

‘Amirī, a philosopher who tried to reconcile rationalism and traditionalism, seems to have been harassed for his views, and according to one contemporary, was forced to live the life of a fugitive because of them. He complained of the ‘hatred for wisdom and fanaticism against the people of insight [philosophers] which pervades the hearts of the populace’.\(^{53}\) Even the dihqāns, usually considered the guardians of Iranian tradition, now appear in the sources as muhaddiths.\(^{54}\) Especially in Khurāsān, a pietistic, ascetic group known as the Karrāmiyya that subsequently won the support of the ultra-conservative Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna was becoming increasingly popular among the poor.

There is one exception of great importance to this trend towards Sunnī conservativism: the infiltration of Sāmānī court itself by the Ismā‘īlis—widely considered in Sunnī circles as the most dangerous heretics of the age. The sources indicate that this infiltration occurred twice, during the reign of Naṣr II b. Aḥmad and again under Maḥṣūr b. Nūh. Our sole source for the latter occasion alleges that Abū ‘Alī Ba‘lamī himself played a key role in trying to thwart the Ismā‘īlis—and it has been argued that the composition of his Tārīkhnāma was motivated by the need to combat the threat of Ismā‘īli heresy to the Sāmānī state.\(^{55}\) For these reasons, we shall examine Ismā‘īlism in the Sāmānī period at some length.

**Manṣūr b. Nūh, Ba‘lamī and the Ismā‘īlis**

Ismā‘īlism is an offshoot of Shi‘ism that holds that the rightful successor to the imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) was his son Ismā‘īl, who predeceased his father, while the Twelver Shi‘a recognize Mūsā al-Kāẓim as the seventh imām. Its early history is shrouded in obscurity, and it first appeared as a political force in the late third/ninth

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century, based first around Kūfa and later in Syria. It was soon split by the claims of one of its da’īs (missionaries), ’Ubaydallāh, who claimed to be a descendant of Ḥamdān Qarmat, and the true imām himself. ’Ubaydallāh was able to establish himself in North Africa with Berber aid, founding the Fatimid dynasty, while his opponents led by Ismā’īlīs took control of much of the east coast of Arabia. These were the regions where Ismā’īlīs held political power, but they were present throughout the Islamic world from the Maghreb to the mashriq.

The importance of Ismā’īlism went far beyond that of a heretical religious movement. It held an allure of mystery as its doctrines were only explained to initiates who had sworn an oath not to reveal them, and was also of great political importance. The da’wa was backed by the powerful Fatimids, who devoted substantial resources to promoting Ismā’īlism in unconverted lands, be they Sunnī or moderate Shī‘ite. Transoxiana, despite its reputation as a bastion of orthodoxy, attracted the attention of the da’wa no less than elsewhere, and it met with some success there. Many of those attracted to Ismā’īlism were members of the élite56 and two of the da’īs in Transoxiana, Muḥammad al-Nasafi and Abū Ya’qūb al-Sijistānī, were major intellectual figures. By the mid-fourth/tenth century, Ismā’īlīs managed to convert much of the Sāmānid court, including the amir Naṣr IIb. Aḥmad.57

The confused and contradictory nature of the sources does not allow us to judge exactly what the reaction to Naṣr’s conversion was during his lifetime. It seems that at the end of his reign, around the time he converted, he was faced with a rebellion by his son Nūh, which may have been connected to his Ismā’īlism; on the other hand it may have nothing to do with it.58 What is certain is that on Nūh’s accession to throne in 331/943, an anti-Ismā’īlī reaction set in. Nūh appointed the Ḫanafī scholar and Qāḍī of Bokhara, Sulamī, as his vizier. It was an unprecedented appointment, and Sulamī turned out to be a disastrous administrator. However, as Treadwell suggests, the main reason for appointing him had been to publicly dissociate Nūh from the heretical activities of his father.59 Nasafi himself, the da’ī who had converted Naṣr, was executed along with his accomplice Sabbagh in 333/944,60 and the vizier Muṣḥabī, widely thought to be an Ismā’īlī, was also killed. It is unclear whether or not there was a complete purge of all Ismā’īlīs: the philosopher Avicenna’s father was an Ismā’īli, yet

57 For the most recent analysis of the Ismā’īlī episode during the reign of Naṣr see Crone and Treadwell, ‘A new text on Ismailism’, passim.
58 Ibid, pp. 45–7
60 Crone and Treadwell, ‘A new text on Ismailism’, p. 44; see below.
was employed as an official at the court of Nūh ʿIl b. Mansūr (r. 365/976–387/997).\(^6\)

Such Ismāʿīlīs very probably kept their beliefs private, for as Treadwell says, after the conversion of Naṣr, fear of Ismāʿīlism permeated the state and accusations of even if unfounded, could affect even the most powerful members of the court.\(^6\) Nonetheless, one source reports that Ismāʿīlī influence returned during the reign of Mansūr b. Nūh. According to Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), writing in his Siyāsatnāma or book of advice for princes, there was a major Ismāʿīlī conspiracy 15 years into Mansūr’s reign. In his account,\(^6\) the ḍā’ī masterminded a coup strongly reminiscent of that in Naṣr b. Ahmad’s reign. Again the target was the court, and some of the most senior figures of the Sāmānid state converted, such as the ḥājjī (chamberlain) Mansūr b. Bāyarqa, Abū ʿAbdallāh Jayhānī and Abū Mansūr b. ʿAbb al-Razzāq, the governor of the important Khurāsānī town of Tūs. The ḍā’ī were Abū ʿĪl-Fāḍl Rangriz Bardījī\(^6\) ‘and another man, one eyed, called ʿAtīq.’ Niẓām al-Mulk continues: ‘This group was made up of those people who were connected to the work of the court and the dīwān, and running the kingdom was in their hands, but they gave succour to their fellow religionists in secret.’

The Ismāʿīlīs of the court then conspired to rebel with the Sapūd Jāmāgān of Farghāna, Khujand and Kāshān. Furthermore, they persuaded Mansūr to imprison his vizier Abū ʿAbbāl-Balʿāmī and Bektūzūn, the commander of the ghilmān. When Alptegīn, the sipāhšālār (military commander) of Khurāsān, heard of this and realized that most of the court had converted to Ismāʿīlism, he rushed to Bukhārā to attempt to try to repair the damage and persuade Mansūr that he had been duped. Ibn ʿAbb al-Razzāq blocked his way, and sent a letter to Mansūr b. Bāyarqa warning him that Alptegīn had come ‘to ruin your work’. The Ismāʿīlīs at the court therefore told the amir that Alptegīn had rebelled against him. Mansūr responded by ordering Alptegīn’s passage to be blocked by the removal of the ferry-boats on the Oxus which he had to cross to reach Bukhārā.

Alptegīn then wrote to Mansūr warning him of the Ismāʿīlī takeover, and assuring him of his loyalty. He added that he would withdraw to Balkh. He also wrote a letter to

63 Niẓām al-Mulk, Siyāsat al-Mulūk, pp. 299–305.
64 As is clear from the textual apparatus of Darke’s edition (p. 299), there is no consensus among the manuscripts for the correct spelling of this name, and Crone and Treadwell transcribe it as Zangurzbarījī. I follow the spelling of Shīʿrī’s edition as this seems to fit best, as will be discussed below. See Niẓām al-Mulk, Siyāsatnāma, J. Shīʿrī (ed.), Tehran: Intishārāt-i ʿIlm va Farhang, 1348, p. 268 (references, however, are to Darke’s edition).
65 Niẓām al-Mulk, Siyāsat al-Mulūk, p. 299.
the chief Qādi of Bukhārā and to the ulema. Abū Ahmad Marghāzī, the chief Qādi, went to see Mansūr, and finally persuaded him of the truth, telling him he had been taken in by Ismā’īlī lies as a result of his failure to spend enough time listening to the ulema, in contrast to his father, Nūh b. Naṣr. The next day, news of the rebellion of the Sapīd Jāmāgān of Farghāna arrived, followed by news of an Ismā’īlī rebellion in Tāliqān. In gratitude for the warning, Mansūr offered Abū Ahmad the vizierate, but he turned it down. Balʿamī and Bektūzūn were reinstated, and a public disputation at court was devised as method of discrediting the Ismā’īlīs. The Ismā’īlīs’ arguments were found to be contrary to sharīʿa and ‘Aṭīq was sentenced to a hundred lashes and exile in Khwārazm, while Abū ʿl-Fadl Rangriz escaped rather less lightly with a hundred lashes and death by drowning in the Oxus. Armies were then sent against Tāliqān and Farghāna, and the ruling élite of Mansūr, Bektūzūn, Balʿamī and Abū Ahmad devised ways to cleanse Khurāsān, Iraq and Transoxiana of Ismā’īlīs. They also decided that Alptegin’s absence in Ghaznā was the cause of Ibn ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s excessive power, and sent Vushmgīr, one of the Sāmānids’ Caspian vassals, against the latter. This passage is extremely problematic, as Crone and Treadwell have observed.66 It is unique to the Siyāsatnāmā, and contains serious discrepancies with the facts as presented in virtually every other source. Firstly, it presents several major chronological difficulties as both Abū Mansūr b. ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Alptegin died shortly after Mansūr’s accession, and AbūʿAbdallāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Jayhānī was vizier, rather than Balʿamī, in the last year of his reign.67 Balʿamī may have died in 365/974,68 again before the alleged revolt. As Daniel, Crone and Treadwell have argued, the only way of reconciling these differences is by dating the episode to the first year of Mansūr b. Nūh’s reign.69 Crone and Treadwell have presented some strong arguments for dismissing Nizām al-Mulk’s account entirely, pointing out its close similarities in detail to the story of the Ismā’īlī conversion of Naṣr, in the Siyāsatnāmā and various other inconsistencies. I agree with them that Nizām al-Mulk’s account is not credible, and wish here to suggest some additional reasons why it should be dismissed.

68 Gardizī, Zayn al-Akhbār, p. 163. This is however contradicted by ʿUṯūb Manṣūrī, Sharḥ al-Yumānī, p. 170.
In addition to the severe chronological problems posed by Nizām al-Mulk’s account, it is incredible that an event which resulted in substantial armies being dispatched over the Sāmānid domains and is clearly of such importance could be ignored by every single other source. It is harder still to imagine that these events could unfold without the participation of Fā’iq—the most important political figure in the Sāmānid state, yet Nizām al-Mulk’s account mentions him nowhere. The story even contradicts other passages in the Siyāsatnāma, such as the statement that Alptegīn left for Ghazna six years into Mansūr’s reign.70 However, in evaluating Nizām al-Mulk’s account, one must bear in mind that although the Siyāsatnāma contains historical information, it is not a historical work.

Nizām al-Mulk was deeply concerned by the malign effects of Islāmīlism—rightly, given that he himself died by an Islāmīlī assassin’s knife—and the Siyāsatnāma was intended to provide the author’s master, the Saljuq ruler Malikshāh, with useful advice and warnings. The story of the Islāmīlīs of Mansūr’s reign fits into a book full of examples of their dangerous infiltration, such as that which occurred in Naṣr b. Ahmad’s reign. The depiction of Bal’ amī and Bektūzūn as the two last good Muslims at the court, imprisoned by the Islāmīlīs’ wiles, is clearly intended to warn of the consequences of listening to bad advice: the ruler ends up isolated without his loyal advisers. Abū Ahmad’s speech to Mansūr reiterates some of the author’s favourite points, such as that the ruler must spend time with the ulema;71 it is implied that the crisis is due to Mansūr’s failure to do this. It is more likely that the question of how Iraq should be cleansed of heretics would have been raised at the Saljuq court than the Sāmānīd one, for the Sāmānīds never even claimed to control Iraq. It also seems highly unlikely that Kāshān would have been in Sāmānīd hands at this point.72 The mention of Abū ‘Abdallāh Jayhānī, if Abū ‘Abdallāh Ahmad b. Muḥammad Jayhānī is meant, is curious indeed, for he was also employed as vizier by Nūḥ b. Mansūr, whose hostility to heterodoxy is commemorated by the translation of the anti-heretical tract al-Sarā’il al-Azām he commissioned. Furthermore, Nizām al-Mulk had every reason to stress the dangers posed to the ruler by these heretics, for it seems that his master Malikshāh may too have dallied with Islāmīlism.73

70 Nizām al-Mulk, Siyar al-Mulāk, p. 146, where a very different account of Alptegīn’s relations with Mansūr is given.

71 See, for example, Nizām al-Mulk, Siyar al-Mulāk, p. 79.

72 According to Darābī, Mi‘rāj-i Qadsī yā Türke-i Kāshān, I.Afshār (ed.), Tehran: Mu‘assasāt-i Intishārāt-i Amir Kābir, 2536, p. 404, Kāshān always came under the governorate of or Qumm, both of which were in Būyid hands at this date. See J.Sourdel-Thomine, ‘Isfahān’ in EI2, IV, pp. 97–107.

Nizām al-Mulk also had to resolve a contradiction in his work, in that he frequently cited both the Sāmānids and the Ghaznavids as model dynasties, yet the latter had overthrown the former. By presenting Alptegīn as the ever-obedient servant of Mansūr, whose exile to Balkh then Ghazna was imposed on himself by his refusal to compromise with heretics and by his loyalty to the Sāmānīd state, Nizām al-Mulk manages to shield the Ghaznavids from too many questions as to how and why they seized power. By implication, the blame both for the end of the Sāmānids and for Alptegin’s actions is shifted onto the Ismā‘īlīs. In the words of one scholar, this passage in the Siyāsatnāma demonstrates ‘how the historical facts were deliberately manipulated to align with the narrator’s didactic message and legitimizing agenda’.74

It is, however, unlikely that Nizām al-Mulk entirely invented this episode. We know that there was an Ismā‘īlī rebellion in Herāt in 354/965,75 and Ismā‘īlī sentiment remained strong for long enough in Tāliqān for Alptegin’s successor in Ghazna, Sebūktekīn, to have been obliged to send an expedition against the town.76 A clue as to the origin of the story is provided by a passage in Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī’s (d. 537/1142–3) encyclopaedia of Samarqandī ulama, which mentions the execution of two Ismā‘īlī leaders in 333/944–5. They are named as Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. Ḥamdūya al-Bazdawī and his accomplice Muḥammad b. Saʿīd b. Muʿādh al-Manādīl al-Bukhārī, known as al-Ṣabbāgh.77 The names of the dā’īs are different from both those in Nizām al-Mulk’s account and their punishment is different too.78 Yet ʿṢabbāgh means the same as Rangriz, ‘dyer’, the nickname of Nizām al-Mulk’s dā’ī, and Bazdawī could easily be a copyist’s error for Bardījī, which would look very similar in Arabic script. While the evidence is too little and too confused to permit any firm conclusions to be drawn, it is quite possible that this is the incident to which Nizām al-Mulk refers. It is true that he does give a separate account of the Ismā‘īlī uprising in Naṣr’s reign79 to which Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī’s account clearly refers, but it is not impossible that he took it upon himself to distort further facts which had already become confused by the passage

75 See n. 23.
76 This was during the reign of Nūḥ b. Mansūr. See Jūjzānī, Tuhuqāt-i Nāṣīrī, ‘A. Ḥabībī (ed.), Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1363, I, p. 213.
79 He also names the dā’ī correctly as Muḥammad Nakhsḥābī (i.e. Nasafī).
of a century to highlight his message of the dangers of Ismāʿīlism. A dating to 333/944–5 would fit better with the presence of Abū ʿAbdallāh Jayhānī, if we assume that Niẓām al-Mulk meant Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAḥmad Jayhānī. Muḥammad b. ʿAḥmad, grandfather of the aforementioned ʿAḥmad b. Muḥammad, had served as vizier to Naṣr b. ʿAḥmad until his dismissal on charges of zandaqa (freethinking). He is therefore a much more likely candidate for involvement with heretical movements. However, if we accept this earlier date, the involvement of Bektūzūn, Ibn ʿAbd al-Razzāq, and Alptegīn becomes problematic, for none of them were significant figures at the time.

There is no evidence in any other source for the conversion of the court except during the reign of Naṣr b. ʿAḥmad. Other Ismāʿīlī uprisings are recorded by other sources, while this much more significant event is ignored. This supports Treadwell and Crone’s view that Niẓām al-Mulk’s account must be rejected, although Ismāʿīlism may have retained some importance in the Sāmānid domains after Naṣr b. ʿAḥmad’s death with rebellions in Mansūr’s reign and beyond. For instance, Jūzjānī—a rather late source—records the execution of two senior officials in ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign on suspicion of Ismāʿīlī sympathies. Yet it is doubtful that Ismāʿīlism was a significant force in the later Sāmānid period. As Walker notes, while the chief dāʿī of Naṣr’s reign, Nasaft, was well known to contemporary Ismāʿīlī and non-Ismāʿīlī sources alike, his successor Abū Yaʿqūb Sijistānī (whose dates are unknown but who was certainly active during Mansūr b. Nūh’s reign) is mentioned only rarely and fleetingly, despite Sijistānī’s senior rank in the daʿwa. This suggests that if Ismāʿīlism had not been totally destroyed as Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī records, it was certainly a much less prominent force in the mashriq.

Balʿamī’s life and career

With the exception of Niẓām al-Mulk’s discredited account, we possess relatively little information about Balʿamī. His family, originally from the Arab tribe of Tamīm (or possibly their Persian clients), had migrated eastwards from the town of Balʿamī in Anatolia, and his father, Abū ʿl-Faḍī Balʿamī, had served as vizier to ʿAḥmad b. Muḥammad.

82 Yāqūt, Muʾjam al-Buldān, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1995, I, p. 485, s.v. ‘Balʿamī; Samʿānī, Kitāb al-Ansāb, I, p. 410 also suggests the nisba may derive from Balʿamān, a town near Marv, but no other source appears to concur.

The fact that both father and son served as vizier and that both seem to have had literary interests has inevitably led to the occasional confusion of the pair in the sources. *Samānī* (d. 562/1166–7) states that members of the family were still living in Bukhārā in his day.

It is unfortunate for our purposes that the sources are rather more interested in Abū 'l-Faḍl than his son. He was known as a *muḥaddith* and author, and his *Rescripts* (*Tavqīrāt*) was one of the classic works that *Nizāmī Arūdī* recommends to scribes if they wish to become proficient in their profession.\footnote{On Naṣr, he translated *Kalīla wa-Dīmna* from Arabic into Persian for Rūdakī to versify.}

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The later scholar Mizīżī records that one of Abū 'l-Faḍl's friends had been personally acquainted with the great *hadīth* scholar Bukhārī,\footnote{The later scholar Mizīżī records that one of Abū 'l-Faḍl's friends had been personally acquainted with the great *hadīth* scholar Bukhārī, and doubtless the family had many such links, both direct and indirect, with the religious elite of Transoxiana.}

When Abū 'Ālī was born is unknown. His father is generally reported to have died in 329/940–1, although 325/936–7 is also cited. Some evidence indicates Abū 'Ālī had travelled abroad, presumably in his youth. A reference in some versions of the *Tārīḵnāma* suggests he had been in Baghdād,\footnote{When Abū 'Ālī was born is unknown. His father is generally reported to have died in 329/940–1, although 325/936–7 is also cited. Some evidence indicates Abū 'Ālī had travelled abroad, presumably in his youth. A reference in some versions of the *Tārīḵnāma* suggests he had been in Baghdād, and some manuscripts mention a visit to Syria. A verse by Khwārazmī indicates that he visited Herat as vizier.} and some manuscripts mention a visit to Syria.\footnote{A verse by Khwārazmī indicates that he visited Herat as vizier.} 89 I am not aware of any further evidence for his early life, but it is clear that he acquired an excellent knowledge of Arabic. This accomplishment was relatively common among the Bukhārān bureaucratic elite at this period, as the Transoxianan Arabic works anthologized by *Tha'ālibī* in the *Yatīmat al-Dahr* attest. It is likely that his travels to the central Islamic lands were for educational purposes, perhaps in particular to hear *hadīth* from prominent authorities, just as other easterners like Khalaf b. Aḥmad went westwards for similar reasons. Such a journey would be particularly appropriate for a young man whose father himself was a noted *muḥaddith*.}

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87 *Tārīḵnāma*, III, p. 87: ‘I saw a group of *shī’ites in Baghdad.’ *Tahārī*, does not include this passage.


We do not know when Abū 'Ali’s political career started, although with his family background and education he would have been an obvious candidate for the state bureaucracy. He was serving as a vizier under 'Abd al-Malik when the succession dispute of 350/961 occurred, and continued in office under Mansūr. Gardżī and Jūzjānī have rather hostile accounts of Bal'amī’s role in Mansūr’s accession. They claim that on 'Abd al-Malik’s death in Shawwal 350, Bal'amī—in his capacity as vizier and stooge in Bukhārā of Alptegin, the Turkish sipahsālār (military commander) of Khurāsān, wrote to Alptegin in Nīshāpūr asking him whether the late amir’s son or brother should succeed. Alptegin replied that it should be the son, but 'Abd al-Malik’s brother Mansūr was enthroned by the palace retinue in Bukhārā before his reply could arrive. The Turk tried to approach Bukhārā to pledge his loyalty to the new ruler, who refused to received him. Alptegin then fled to Ghazna and Abū Mansūr b. 'Abd al-Razzāq was appointed over Khurāsān in his place. Thus Gardżī’s account of Bal'amī’s role in the succession to 'Abd al-Malik portrays him as ineptly subservient to Alptegin and out-manoeuvred by the palace retinue who made their own minds up about the succession without waiting for the views of either the sipahsālār or the vizier.

Despite ending up on the wrong side in the dispute over 'Abd al-Malik’s successor, Bal'amī remained in office as vizier at the start of Mansūr b. Nūh’s reign. It is doubtful how much real power he had, as politics was dominated by the mamlūk Fā’īq and Abū 'Ali’s name does not feature very prominently in historical accounts of the period. 'Utbī says he briefly served as vizier under Nūh b. Mansūr in 382/992 on the latter’s recapture of Bukhārā from the Turkish occupier, the Qarakhānid Bughrākhān, but was unable to deal with the state’s problems, specifically a lack of cash and a large number of refugees due to the fighting. He was therefore replaced by 'Abdallāh b. 'Uzayr, recalled to serve his second term as vizier. Only Niẓām al-Mulk has a high opinion of Abū 'Ali—praising him for his orthodoxy, but, as I have discussed, this passage is not reliable.

We know too that Bal'amī was a patron of literature, particularly Arabic literature, and there are several references to him in Thā‘alībī’s Yatīmat al-Dahr. The best known recipient of the vizier’s largesse was Abū Bakr al-Khwārazmī, a relationship which eventually went sour. In addition to a few verses of panegyric on Bal'amī—fragments of some rather unflattering poems by Khwārazmī on the subject of his erstwhile patron survive, presumably composed after his flight from the Sāmānid court. There are also a

few extant letters from the littérateur to Balʿamī. Sadly, none of these reveals anything but Khwārazmī’s skill at rhyming prose. Khwārazmī appears to have left Bukhārā by 353/964 in disgust at his treatment there, and took refuge in Nīshāpūr where a local notable, Abū Naṣr b. ʿAlī al-Mikālī, became his patron. Presumably the reason for his discontent in Bukhārā was that he felt insufficiently rewarded for his work, a common complaint amongst poets. Nor would Khwārazmī have been alone in feeling slighted by Balʿamī’s stinginess, for Thaʿālibī records several bitter verses on the subject by the poet Abū Manṣūr al-Būshanjī. Particularly fraught were the vizier’s relations with the satirist Lahḥām, who wrote,

Balʿamī’s vizierate is a complete mess/

He is like a lock attached to a pile of ruins.

He respects neither saints/

Nor notables or scribes….

He is the most deserving man of the disaster/

Of having his head on the gallows.

Balʿamī was certainly not the only target of Lahḥām, who does not seem to have been a particularly sympathetic individual—Thaʿālibī calls him ‘a human devil’. However, his invective against Balʿamī appears to have been one of his most famous works, and Thaʿālibī says ‘it will last forever’. As a result of complaints against the poet, the amir ordered him to be punished, and Lahḥām fled Bukhārā. Balʿamī swiftly regretted having let him live, for he realized that he would make for Nīshāpūr, where he could continue his activities. Doubtless Balʿamī had learned his lesson from his dealings with Khwārazmī. Despite Abū ʿAlī’s efforts to catch him, Lahḥām escaped, but died shortly afterwards in Nīshāpūr.

93 The details of Khwārazmī’s relationship with Balʿamī are taken from Sīdqī, Dīwān al-Khwārazmī, pp. 30–31, where the extant fragments may also be found.
95 Ibid, IV, p. 123.
97 Ibid, IV, p. 131.
Bal’amī was not so unfortunate with all poets, and fragments of panegyric qasīdas survive by, among others, Abū Muḥammad al-Maṭrānī. 99 It is clear that Bal’amī was the major patron of Arabic poetry in this period. Tha’ālibī only cites one poem dedicated to Fā’iq and one to Mansūr b. Nūh, whereas Bal’amī is mentioned by six poets. 100 It is unclear to what extent Bal’amī patronized Persian poetry, for no early anthologies in Persian such as that of Tha’ālibī in Arabic have survived, and the extant Persian poetry is very fragmentary. It is highly unlikely that he did not have some interest in it, given both his own Persian work and that his father was a patron of Rūdakī. Several Persian poets mention a Bal’amī or the Bal’amīs, although they usually refer to Abū ‘l-Fadlī rather than Abū ‘Alī. 101 A couple of verses attributed to ‘Bal’amī’ survive but it is unclear whether they are by Abū ‘Alī or his father. 102 Abū ‘Alī is said to have died in Jumādā II February–March 363/974 by Garđīzī, but if we are to believe Utbi’s account that he served as vizier for Nūh b. Mansūr in 382/992, retiring the same year, his death must be placed between 382/992 and 387/997. 103

Our picture of Abū ‘Alī is thus one of a well-travelled, educated patron of literature. As for his political performance, his near-contemporaries, Utbi and Garđīzī, are in a better position to judge than ourselves, although admittedly Utbi’s view may have been coloured by his own family’s role in late Sāmānīd politics. While they do have a distinctly low opinion of Abū ‘Alī, he was serving at a time of great difficulties for the Sāmānīd state. We lack sufficient information as to what extent he was responsible for such disastrous policies as the Sāmānīd entanglement in Sīstān. However, the sources do indicate that he lacked his father’s abilities, and the best that can be said is that he failed to avert political collapse.

The literary culture of the Sāmānīd mashriq

Bal’amī’s interest in Arabic literature as well as Persian was typical of his times. Sāmānīd Transoxiana was a multilingual society, the main languages current being Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Soghdian. Turkish had no literary status at this point, although it was probably widely spoken by both the Turks already settled in the region and the Turkish ghilmān that dominated the army. Soghdian was in severe decline, at least in urban areas, although Ibn Hawqal reports hearing it spoken in Bukhāra. 104

99 Ibid, IV, p. 133.
100 See ibid, IV, previous references and pp. 148, 181 and 335.
101 See Tārīkhnāma, I, Pishguftār, pp. 36–8 for references.
Soghdian culture probably merged into Persian in Transoxiana, just as it did into Turkish in the Turkish-dominated east. Although the language may have survived until the seventh/thirteenth century, it played no cultural role of any importance.105

The predominant spoken language of Transoxiana was Persian. The prevalence of Persian in the region was intimately linked to its Islamization. The Arab settlers who had colonized Khurāsān had swiftly lost their language as a result of intermarriage with the indigenous population. When they moved eastwards, accompanied by the Khurāsānī converts, to conquer and settle Transoxiana, they took with them their new language, an early form of New Persian, lexically a mixture of Pahlavī and Arabic. The part played by the Arabs in the Persianization of Central Asia is recalled by the word Tājīk, derived from the Persian word for Arab, tāzī, a term synonymous with Muslim.106

Arabic and Persian were the principal written languages of Transoxiana. Like the Tārīkhnāma, numerous Persian texts of the period state that they were composed in Persian as Arabic was not widely understood.107 Nonetheless, Arabic was frequently used, if only in limited circles. The Sāmānid court attracted poets from the Arab lands further to the west, and naturally these composed their works in Arabic. Plenty of native Transoxianans preferred Arabic too.108 A philosopher like ʿĀmirī of Balkh, who will be discussed below, would inevitably write in Arabic. This was the language traditionally used for such subjects, and anyway there was no Persian vocabulary to express philosophical concepts adequately. Transoxianans also sometimes used Arabic for poetry and historical prose, even though others of their contemporaries preferred Persian for these genres. A number of poets were considered to be dhū lisānayn (‘possessed of two tongues’), writing in both Arabic and Persian—sometimes even in alternate lines in the same poem. A skilled littérateur like the famous Arabic author Bādīʾ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī could turn Persian verse into Arabic verse on the spot.109 The audience for these bilingual games was probably restricted to the well-educated bureaucrats of the court who were at home in both languages—men like the various members of the Jayhānī, Bālʿamī and ʿUtbi families. However, the widespread use of Arabic in epigraphy indicates that a much wider section of the population had at least some passive knowledge of the language.110

The everyday language of the court was probably Persian, just as it had been under the Ṭāhrids. It is difficult to know exactly what to make of the statement in the Persian translation of the Tafsīr of Ṣabā’ī Manṣūr b. Nūh that he ordered it to be translated ‘because he found reading it difficult’ in Arabic (dushkhvār āmad bar vay khvāndan-i in kitāb va ‘ibārat kardan-i an dar zabān-i tāzī), as it is immediately preceded by a preface entirely in Arabic which presumably the work’s patron was intended to understand. The preface to the Tārīkhnāma also indicates that Manṣūr had read the work in Arabic before commissioning the Persian translation. However, even if the Sāmānid amirs could understand Arabic, they may have been more at home in Persian, although only one, Manṣūr II b. Nūh (r. 387/997–389/999), composed anything in that language—a handful verses attributed to him survive. The state bureaucracy seems to have used both Persian and Arabic, although the circumstances under which each language was used is unclear. In the early fourth/tenth century, documents addressed to a local audience that did not know Arabic may have been written in Persian, or at least read out in it, as Frye suggests, while Arabic was maintained for diplomacy. Muqaddasī indicates that by the late fourth/tenth century Persian was the normal language of the bureaucracy as ‘it is the language in which the letters of the ruler are written, and in which reports are submitted to him’. Nonetheless, there was always some opposition to the use of Persian, as is demonstrated by the great resistance from the bureaucrats to the Ghaznavid vizier Isfārā’īn’s attempt to change the chancery language from Arabic to Persian. It has been argued by Bulliet (on the basis of the somewhat tenuous evidence of the pottery remains of Nīshāpūr) that while the elite preferred Arabic and Islamic culture, Persian culture based on Iranian tradition appealed to the broader populace. Our discussion of Sāmānid literature aims to assess to what extent this is true.

113 Tārīkhnāma, I, p. 2.
115 Frye, Bukhara, p. 51.
The court and Sāmānid poetry

Sāmānid poetry in Arabic and Persian only survives due to its inclusion in mediaeval literary anthologies or its citation in other works; no poet has left us an intact dīwān, at least that has been discovered so far. However, there is enough to give us an impression of its character. Although the court sponsored works in both Arabic and Persian, they are very different in character and are not at all, as Frye argued, ‘one literature in two languages’. Persian and Arabic poetry use the same metres (if not in the same way), and Persian poetry was technically heavily influenced by Arabic poetry. The differences between the two literatures are in content and audience.

The Arabic poetry of Transoxiana is preserved in the anthology by Tha‘alibī(d. 429/1038) known as the Yatīmat al-Dahr. Much of it was written by immigrants to Transoxiana, and it concentrates on the genres of madhī (praise) and hijā’ (satire). There is little exceptional (either in literary quality or technique) about these works. Occasionally poets translated Persian proverbs or wrote on the Iranian New Year’s festival, Nawrūz, but otherwise the main local influence seems to be a deep dislike of Transoxiana and especially Bukhārā that permeates much of the Arabic poetry. This was produced almost entirely by and for the Sāmānid bureaucrats, or aspitant bureaucrats: a number of the émigré poets had come to the Sāmānid court specifically hoping to be rewarded with a lucrative appointment, as did, for example, Abū Muḥammad al-Wāthiqī. Likewise, many of the poets were already established in the bureaucracy. The father of Abū Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr al-Kātib had also been a kātib and then a vizier, and Abū Aḥmad saw himself as more deserving of the vizierate than Jayhānī or Bal’ami.

Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Damghānī, another poet, himself served as vizier several times.

The most striking feature of the Arabic poetry in Yatīma is that virtually none of it is dedicated to members of the Sāmānid family. We have poems either lampooning or praising almost every Sāmānid vizier, among them Muṣ‘abī, Jayhānī, Abū Ja‘far ʿUtbī, Abū Ḭasan ʿUtbī, Sulamī, Abū ʿI- Faḍl Bal’ami, Abū ʿAlī Bal’ami and Ibn ʿUzayr, and a few addressed to other Sāmānid strongmen such as Bakr b. Mālik, Mansūr b. Bāyqara, or the Muḥtājīd Abū ʿAlī Ṣaghānī. In contrast, in the approximately 150 pages in the

119 Frye, Bukhara, p. 60.
120 Tha‘alibī, Yatīmat al-Dahr, IV, pp. 67–222.
121 Ibid, IV, p. 80.
122 Ibid, IV, p. 220.
printed edition of the *Yatīma* devoted to the Arabic poetry of Transoxiana, only two fragments are dedicated to Sāmānid amirs: some extemore verses addressed to Naṣr II b. Ṭahmāsīb and a fragment of a *qaṣīda* lamenting the death of ‘Abd al-Malik and congratulating Mansūr b. Nūh on his succession.\(^{127}\) Indeed, some poets were actively hostile to the dynasty. Abū ’l-Ṭayyib al-Ṭahriṇī, for instance, was a member of the ‘Ṭāhirid family living in Bukhārā: ‘He served the Sāmānids in public, but secretly he lampooned them, harbouring a deep hatred for them, hoping for an end to their rule and state because of their possession of his ancestors’ lands.’\(^{128}\) Wāthiqī, disappointed in his ambitions for an appointment, went over to the Qarakhānids and, according to Thaʿalibī, played an instrumental role in the destruction of the Sāmānid state.\(^{129}\)

Panegyric and lampoon were also popular in Persian poetry, although epic and didactic poetry were also written from an early date. The first Persian poems (with the exception of a handful of even earlier fragments) were composed for the *Ṣaffārīd* in the second half of the third/ninth century. However, the composition of poetry under the Sāmānids started not much later than this, and in contrast to the Arabic poetry, much of it was dedicated directly to the amirs. The first major Sāmānid poet was Shahīd of Balkh, who wrote a Persian *qaṣīda* for Naṣr I b. Ṭahmāsīb (250/864–279/892) of which only a couple of verses are extant.\(^{130}\) Unfortunately, very little survives of the work of any early poet but Rūdakī (d. 329/940), but we also have tiny fragments of panegyrics to Naṣr II b. Ṭahmāsīb,\(^{131}\) his successor Nūḥ,\(^{132}\) ‘Abd al-Malik b. Nūḥ,\(^{133}\) Mansūr b. Nūḥ\(^{134}\) and Nūḥ b. Mansūr.\(^{135}\)

Although some bureaucrats too showed an interest in Persian literature, few Persian poets were involved in the administration. Nonetheless, some fragments in Persian by the vizier Muṣʿabī have survived,\(^{136}\) who was also the subject of a panegyric by Rūdakī.\(^{137}\) Among Rūdakī’s didactic works was a verse *Kalīla wa Dimna*, versified from a prose version that Naṣr had commissioned Balʿamī ṭere to translate from the Arabic.\(^{138}\) These poems would have been performed in the *majlis*, the palace soirée where poets would declaim before their patrons. A descriptions of a *majlis* is preserved in one of Rūdakī’s few

126 Ibid, IV, pp. 86, 93, 145.
128 Ibid, IV, p. 79.
129 Ibid, IV, pp. 220–221.
131 Ibid, I, p. 85, II, p. 64, l. 1.
complete extant qasīdas, the famous Mādar-i may. In the presence of ‘the king of kings of the world, the amir of Khurāsān’, Naṣr b. Aḥmad, were seated his military commanders, Baḥram, and dihāns, while ‘thousands of Turks’ (the ghilmān) stood before him, as wine was poured by a beautiful noble Turkish youth.139

Sāmānid Persian poetry draws heavily on both Iranian and Islamic imagery. In the Mādar-i may, the Șaffārīd ruler of Sīstān, Aḥmar b. Muḥammad-a Sāmānid vassal, is apostrophized in terms comparing him to the Iranian heroes of pre-Islamic times. He is ‘made from the sun of the Sāsānian lineage’ and, referring to one of the most famous of the legendary heroes, Rūdakī writes, ‘Although the name of Rustam is very great, the name of Rustam-i Dāstān lives on in him.’140 At the same time, Aḥmar is a praised in emphatically Muslim terms: ‘If you are a faqīh and incline to the behold in him Shāfi‘ī, Aḥmar b. Nūh, and Suffān [al-Thawrī]’ … ‘there does not exist in the world his like as a Muslim and in nobility’.141 Such Iranian allusions do not occur in the surviving Arabic poetry of the period. The contrast is illustrated by two fragments addressed to Mansūr b. Nūh. While Ḍaqīqī (d. c. 370/980), writing in Persian, addresses him as ‘that king who recalls the House of Darius’,142 in the extant 15 lines of Ibn Huzaym’s Arabic qaṣīda on accession, there are no such Iranian references. Rather, it is his qualities as a protector of Islam that are emphasized.143

The use of these extravagant epithets comparing rulers to the Sāsānian kings or Iranian heroes does not mean that they were intended to be taken seriously as a political manifesto. Rather, they were just forms of poetic hyperbole more readily available to a poet writing in Persian than Arabic. Aḥmar is also compared to Solomon in the Mādar-i may, and the very fact that both the Sāmānid and Șaffārīd rulers are said to be reminiscent of the Sāsānians suggests that this was just a stock epithet rather than a serious claim to be reviving the legacy of pre-Islamic Iran. Nonetheless, there does seem to have been a degree of interest in the Iranian past, although to what extent the court patronized it is unclear. A certain Masʿūdī of Marv is said to have written a Shāhnāma that seems to have dealt with the mythical Iranian kings Kayūmarth, Țahmūrath, and Bahman, as well as the hero Rustam.144 Too little remains to be sure of its contents, but it probably covered similar ground to Firdawsī’s Shāhnāma. Aḥmar Ɂ-Mu’ayyad of Balkh is also said to have composed a lost Shāhnāma about which almost nothing is known. More famous is Ḍaqīqī’s attempt at an epic, some of which was incorporated by Firdawsī into his Shāhnāma. Yet it does not seem that either Ḍaqīqī or Firdawsī were working to a

139 Nafīsī, Muhīt, p. 506, 11. 381–91. There are unfortunately some textual problems with the poem at this point, but the general meaning is clear enough.
142 Lazard, Premiers Poètes, I, p. 150; II, p. 159, 1. 159.
143 Tha‘alibī, Yaṭima, IV, p. 148.
144 Lazard, Premiers Poètes, I, p. 22.
royal commission.\textsuperscript{145} Indeed, Firdawsī indicates that he hoped for the Sāmānids’ patronage after Daqīqī’s death, but they were not in interested in his work: ‘I set my face towards the throne of the king of the world…but there was no purchaser for my exertions.’\textsuperscript{146} Only the patron of a prose \textit{Shāhnāma} is known to us.\textit{Abū Manṣūr b. ‘Abd al-Razzāq}, the Sāmānid military commander of Khurāsān, who sought out old books from the \textit{dīhqāns} from which the \textit{Shāhnāma} could be compiled. Even so, there is no suggestion that this lost prose \textit{Shāhnāma} was commissioned for nationalistic reasons, but rather ‘so that men of knowledge may look into it and find in it all about the wisdom of the kings, noblemen and sages, the royal arrangements, nature and behaviour, good institutions, justice and judicial norms…’\textsuperscript{147} In other words, it was compiled for the same ethical purposes as most historiography. Thus while there was an evident interest in tales of the Iranian past among some individuals, there is no evidence to suggest these were seen as serving any political or legitimatory purpose.\textsuperscript{148}

\section*{Sāmānid prose literature}

Although \textit{Abū Manṣūr’s Shāhnāma} is lost, much more is preserved of Sāmānid prose literature than poetry, in both Arabic and Persian. Theology, history, geography and philosophy are the principal topics of the surviving works. Most of their authors were either bureaucrats or theologians. Writers started writing prose in Persian rather later than poetry—the earliest Sāmānid prose, the preface to \textit{Abū Manṣūr’s Shāhnāma}, is at least half a century later than the earliest poetry.\textsuperscript{149} Prose literature in both Arabic and Persian...
was dedicated to the Sāmānid amirs and their vassals and, unlike the poetry, there does not seem to be such a clear division between the tastes of the amirs and the bureaucracy or between the types of works written in each language. For instance, in the historical writing of the period, alongside the Persian Tārīkhnāma and Abū Mansūr’s Shāhnāma, the Arabic Kitāb al-Bad’wa ’l-Ta’rīkh survives and we know that Narshakhī’s History of Bukhārā, extant only in a heavily revised Persian translation, was originally composed in Arabic for Nuḥ b. Naṣr.150

Theology is represented by the Arabic works of Māturīdī and his fellow theologians in Samarqand, produced without any state encouragement, although some elements of Māturīdī theology were adopted by the state. Their circulation was restricted to a limited number of highly educated scholars in the mashriq.151 Much more significant for our purposes is the al-Sawād al-A’zum, a tract commissioned by the amir Ismā’īl b. Aḥmad to counter heresy in his domains, and subsequently translated into Persian, discussed below.

The Arabic literature of the bureaucrats is represented by three principal works, the Mafāṭīḥ al-ʿUlam of Khwārazmī, the Jawāmī al-ʿUlam of Ibn Farīghān and the Kitāb al-Bad’ wa-ʾl-Ta’rīkh of Maqdisī. Khwārazmī, writing around 387/977, was almost certainly employed in the Sāmānid bureaucracy. The Mafāṭīḥ al-ʿUlam, dedicated to the Sāmānid vizier Abū ’l-Ḥasan ʿUtbi, and is addressed to the secretaries of the bureaucracy, being an encyclopaedia of technical terms they might need.152 The Jawāmī al-ʿUlam still awaits proper study, but seems to have been composed for the same purpose as Khwārazmī’s work, although it was dedicated to a Sāmānid vassal, the Muḥtājīd Abū ‘Ali Ṣaghānī. Maqdisī’s work, written in 355/966, has been the subject of a detailed study by Mahmoud Tahmi,153 so only a few words need be said about it here. It is commonly described as a history, but although it does contain historical parts (covering history from creation to the ‘Abbāsid period), it is also concerned with epistemology, theology and philosophy. Although it was long thought to have been dedicated to an unnamed Sāmānid vizier, Tahmi argues that in fact it was probably written for the Ṣaffārid Khalaf b. Aḥmad,154 Maqdisī was interested in philosophy, being strongly influenced by Muʿtazilism, but he was firmly committed to

150 Narshakhi, History, p. 3.
tradition, frequently citing hadith. Maqdisī tells us he composed the work to correct ‘those who have gone astray from the path’, misled by those who deceive the weak, corrupt stupid people’s beliefs, confuse intelligent people and so on. ‘That is the worst of their plots for religion and the most coarse, due to their excellence in contradicting the monotheists (al-muwahhidūn)… they are a blot on the ordinary people of the community (‘awwām al-‘umma).’

The growing hostility to philosophy as an alien, unislamic system of thought in the late fourth/tenth century mashriq probably explains why Maqdisī’s work never gained any widespread popularity, and the author is unknown from any other source. ‘Amīrī, a philosopher from Balkh active in the same period, certainly did not find the mashriq a sympathetic environment for his views. His best known work is al-Amad ‘alā ‘l-Abad on the immortality of the soul, written in Bukhārā in 375/985. ‘Amīrī’s work was addressed to the pious public, hadith scholars, jurists and mutakallimūn and aimed to persuade them that philosophy was not only an acceptable means of examining such problems, but could even support Islamic dogma. Despite ‘Amīrī’s attempts to convince his sceptical audience by citing hadith, his bitter complaints about the conservatism of the mashriqūl populace indicate that he met with little success.

The Persian prose literature of the period was clearly intended to have a broader appeal than the somewhat rarified Arabic works. Only one entirely original Persian work survives, a geography entitled the Hudūd al-ʿĀlam composed c. 372/982–3 for Abu ʿl-Ḥārīth Muḥammad the Farghūnīd, a vassal of the Sāmānīds who ruled Jūzjān in the north of modern Afghanistan. It seems that the author of the Jawāmiʿ al-ʿUlūm was also a member of this family. While the Hudūd al-ʿĀlam exhibits some interesting peculiarities of its own, it was solidly based on the works of earlier Arab geographers.

The other surviving Persian prose works are translations from the Arabic. Although a limited amount of Arabic poetry was translated under the Sāmānīds—the poets Ibn al-Rūmī and Farazdaq—this does not seem to have had much influence. In contrast, the translation of Arabic works into Persian became a vogue that continued throughout the mediaeval period, fundamentally influencing Persian literature. Some of the most popular

154 Ibid, pp. 18–9.
156 Rowson, A Muslim Philosopher, p. 3.
works in Persian prose, judging by the large numbers of manuscripts of them to survive, were actually translations from the Arabic; among historical works, for instance, Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī’s Kitāb al-Futūh is attested by dozens of manuscripts in its Persian version, and Jurbādghānī’s translation and adaptation of ‘Utbī’s famous al-Ta‘rikh al-Yamīnī survives in at least 35. Apart from Abū Mansūr b. ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s activities in seeking out books from the dihqāns, there seem to have been few translations made from Pahlavī into Persian. Even when Pahlavī works were translated, this does not necessarily seem to have been inspired by patriotic motives. For instance, the Sindbādnāma, of which a Persian translation was commissioned by Nūḥ b. Mansūr in 339/950, is a mirror for princes set in India, so hardly a nationalist epic.

Persian often seems to have been adopted for practical more than patriotic reasons. As the translators of the anti-heretical tract al-Sawād al-Aʿzam put it, the book was translated ‘so that that which the upper classes had the ordinary people (‘āmm) might have too and it might benefit them’. The general ignorance of Arabic is reflected in a poem on medicine composed between 367/978 and 370/980 for the Sīmjūrid governor of Khurāsān. The author, Maysarī, remarks that he made the unusual choice of writing in Persian on this technical subject because ‘our country is Iran, and the majority of its people know Persian’. Even more radical than the choice of Persian for a technical subject was its use in religious works where previously Arabic had held sway. The three surviving Sāmānid prose translations are all of works of religious significance: Tabarī’s famous History, his Qur’ānic commentary, and the anti-heretic tract al-Sawād al-Aʿzam. I shall discuss the latter two here, reserving comment on Bal’amī’s translation of the History for subsequent chapters.

The Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Tabarī

A detailed study of the Persian translation of Tabarī’s Qur’ānic commentary (Tafsīr) is beyond the scope of this work. However, the numerous similarities between the Tafsīr translation and the Tārīkhnāma render a brief examination of it obligatory. They were commissioned by the same patron, Mansūr b. Nūḥ, and both treat their

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159 Ibid, pp. 734, 1461. I deal with this topic more fully in my article ‘The translation of historical works in the Islamic Middle Ages’, in preparation.
162 Lazard, Premiers Poètes, II, p. 182, 1. 83.
Arabic originals in a similar way. The translators of both works were part of the Sāmānid state élite. While the History was put into Persian by the vizier Abū ʿAli Baʿrāmī, the translation of the Tafsīr was authorized by leading religious scholars of Transoxiana, who selected the translators from among themselves.163

An explanation of the circumstances of the translation of the Tafsīr survives in its Persian preface:

this work…was brought to the Amir Sayyid Muṣaffar Abū Ṣāliḥ Manṣūr b. Nūḥ… He found reading this book difficult and its expression in Arabic, so he desired it to be translated into Persian. Then he gathered the ulema of Transoxiana and got a fatwā from them as to whether it was permissible to translate it into Persian. They said it is permissible to read and write the tafsīr of the Qurān in Persian for someone who does not know Arabic, for as God Exalted has said, ‘We have not sent a prophet but with the tongue of his people’. Another [reason] is that people have known Persian of old, from the time of Adam to that of the Prophet Iṣmāʿīl, all the prophets and kings of the earth spoke Persian. The first to speak Arabic was the Prophet Iṣmāʿīl, and our Prophet came from the Arabs and the Qurān was sent to him in the Arabic language, but here in this region the language is Persian and its kings are Persian kings.164

It is instructive to compare this with the Arabic preface of the Persian Tārīkhnāma, which is probably the original one. Both works explain the translation in virtually identical terms: Manṣūr, after reading the Arabic Taʾrīkh and realizing it was useful, commanded it to be translated into Persian, so that everyone, both the authorities and the people, could profit from it. Even the same Qurʾānic verse is quoted to justify the translation. Indeed, Baʿrāmī specifically states that ‘I compared it [the History] with the great Tafsīr.’165

The exact relationship between the texts of the Persian Tafsīr and the Tārīkhnāma is unclear due to the lack of early manuscripts of either work. Certainly, one would anticipate that Baʿrāmī and the Tafsīr translators, working on such similar, state-sponsored projects, would have been aware of each other’s work, but although texts are often very similar they are rarely identical. For instance, the Ḥadīth al-Ifk—the false

164 Ibid, I, p. 5.
165 Tārīkhnāma, I, p. 2.
166 See Tārīkhnāma, III, p. 212 (and compare Cambridge University Library, MS Add 836 (discussed in Chapter 2), f. 107a) and Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Tābūrī,p. 1124. The latter goes into more detail about the process by which lots were drawn to decide which of the Prophet’s wives would accompany him on campaign and describes ʿĀʾisha’s hawdaj (litter) in more detail than does Add 836.
accusation of adultery against Muhammad’s wife 'A'ishah has the same structure and similar content in both Tabari translations, but the Tafsir goes into rather more detail.\textsuperscript{166}

Other passages where the Tarihnama seems to refer to the Tafsir may well be later interpolations.\textsuperscript{167} Further research is needed to elucidate the relationship between the two works.

At any rate, it is clear that, like the Tarihnama, the Tafsir was not intended to be a literal translation of the Arabic original. Tabari’s original commentary was entitled Jami’ al-Bayan ‘an Ta’wil Ay al-Qur’an and is a huge work running to 30 printed volumes. The commentary on a single verse can run into tens of pages. Each verse is paraphrased, contrasting views about philological points are quoted and discussed, and traditions from the Prophet, his companions about its significance are cited. Tabari usually concludes by stating his own views or by indicating which report he considers more trustworthy, and often polemicizes against views with which he disagrees. Ibn Nadim, writing at the end of the fourth/tenth century, describes it as ‘an unsurpassed work’, but adds that an abridgement had already been made by his own time.\textsuperscript{168}

Virtually all of the commentary, in particular the philological parts, is jettisoned in the Persian translation. The manuscripts consist of the Arabic text of the Qur’an with an interlinear Persian translation. In some sūras, such as al-Ra’d, there is no commentary at all, just the translation. In others, the commentary does exist, but it functions in a very different way to that in the Arabic. After a number of verses, an anecdote or historical story, usually but not always obviously relevant to the preceding verses, is inserted, then the translation of verses continues.

The Tafsir covers much the same topics as the Tarihnama, with a similar interest in history or pseudo-history, although the latest historical event mentioned in the Tafsir is the death of Husayn, while the Tarihnama probably continued at least up to the end of the Umayyad dynasty. The Tafsir concentrates on the pre-Islamic prophets, the life of Muhammad and his campaigns, and the caliphate after his death. Thus most but not all of the accounts of pre-Islamic kings of Iran and Yemen found in the Tarihnama are absent here, but other than that the contents of the works are different mainly in the way in which the subjects are arranged, order being dictated by chronology in the History and by the content of the Qur’an in the Tafsir.

It is not entirely surprising that the translators of the Tafsir felt obliged to omit much of the philological discussion of the Arabic. Tabari, after all, insisted on the necessity of knowing Arabic for studying the Qur’an—a point which would have rather undermined the utility of the translation. The omission of ismâds may well be seen to be an attempt to popularize and abbreviate a work which was seen as overlong even in the fourth/tenth

\textsuperscript{167} See Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{169} Samarqandī, Tarjan-i al-Sawad al-A‘zan, pp. 18–19.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid, p. 17.
century. However, the Persian Tafsīr’s interest is in history rather than theology or exegesis proper. Although history was sometimes necessary to explain the Qurān, it would seem that the Persian Tafsīr was intended rather to promote a certain vision of the past, and that the use of a famous Qurānic commentary to do this was intended to support and legitimize this vision as being divinely ordained.

The Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-A‘ẓam

After the translations of the Tafsīr and the History, the next oldest work of New Persian prose is the Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-A‘ẓam. The Arabic original was commissioned by the Sāmānid ruler Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad, who, we are told

ordered ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Ja‘far and the other faqīhs to make clear correct belief and the path of sunna and ji‘matu which our fathers followed. Then the imāms and he said to Abū ‘l-Qāsim Samarqandī, ja‘matu which the Prophet followed’, and he ordered him to compose this book in Arabic. He brought it to the amīr of Khurāsān [Ismā‘īl] and everyone praised it, saying, ‘This the correct path of sunna ja‘matu.’

The work was needed ‘because misguided people, innovators and heretics (bīrāhān va muhtadī‘ānva havādārān) had become many in Samarqand, Bukhārā and Transoxiana’. Seventy years later under Mansūr b. Nūḥ’s successor, it was anonymously translated into Persian ‘because the amīr of Khurāsān Nūḥ b. Mansūr [366/976–387/997] desired it after he had gathered the ulema of all Transoxiana, that the correct path and the way of life of the Prophets, the Companions and the Rightly-guided Caliphs might become clear to them’. The translation is reminiscent of the Persian Tārīkhnāma and Tafsīr. As in both of these works, the language used is extremely simple and unadorned, while all isnāds are omitted. The text of the Persian al-Sawād al-A‘ẓam also differs substantially from its Arabic original, which was probably intended largely as an anti-Karrāmī text.

It has been argued that the work takes its name from the Māturīdi idea that Māturīdīsm represented the ‘great mass’ (al-sawād al-a‘ẓam) of righteous believers. The school of kalām of Māturīdī (d. c. 333/944), while virtually unknown west of Khurāsān, was the dominant school of Transoxiana. Māturīdī developed Ḥanafī teaching, attacking Mu’tazilism, the Karrāmīyya, Shi‘ism and Ismā‘īlīsm. According to Ḥajjī

171 Ibid, p. 22.
172 I am indebted to Luke Treadwell for drawing my attention to this point.
173 W. Madelung, ‘Māturīdiyya’ in EI2, VI, p. 847.
Khalīfa, Abū ʿl-Qāsim al- Samarqandi (d. 342/953–4) had been a colleague of Māturīdī himself. Scholarly opinion is divided on the question of whether al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam reflects traditional Hanafism or Māturīdī’s development of it, and the most recent research argues that it is actually much closer to the former than the latter. However, the tract was not written so much as with a view to disputing the niceties of kalām but as an easily comprehensible textbook for the Muslims of the mashriq.

The Persian al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam is characterized by the defence of orthodoxy, as seen from a point of view: 61 theological questions (masʿāla) are addressed. Each masʿāla starts with a brief statement of the orthodox position which is usually supported by the citation of hadiths. Those who dissent from this position are condemned. Topics covered range from those with which most Muslims would not disagree, such as the necessity of prayer, to more controversial ones such as the uncreated nature of the Qurʾān. The targets are generally the groups outlined above, and al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam takes a fairly hard-line stance, condemning, for example, the Muʿtazīlis in the createdness of the Qurʾān as unbelief. Indeed, ‘Muʿtazīlī’ is occasionally used as a synonym for heretic. Only occasionally is the work overtly political, as when disobedience to the ruler is condemned, but this was a commonplace amongst mediaeval Sunni thinkers.

Yet it is difficult to use al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam to support the contention that Ismāʿīlimism was a pressing threat to the state and the orthodox; rather, it demonstrates the opposite. For sure, ʿBaḥīrīs do get a few mentions, but they are only one of Samarqandi’s many targets. Far more attention is given to other groups such as the Muʿtazīlīs, the Rāfīḍītes and the Karrāmiyya. This confirms the evidence cited above that Ismāʿīlimism was not a major concern for the Sāmānid state in the second half of the fourth/tenth century. Rather, al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam illustrates the conservative, piety-minded mentality of fourth/tenth century Transoxiana, with its emphasis on the path of Sunnī traditionalism.


176 For a discussion of al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam in general see Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī, pp. 106–131, and on these debates in particular, pp. 111–113.

177 Ibid, p. 118.

178 Ḥajī Khalīfa says it was 62 questions (Lexicon, III, p. 629), which presumably refers to the Arabic original, which I have been unable to examine.

179 Samarqandi, Tarjuma-ʿl-Sawād al-Aʿẓam, p. 33.

180 Ibid, p. 36.

181 Ibid, loc cit.

182 E.g. ibid, pp. 73–4 on the necessity of reading the Qurʾān: har kih munkir shavad, havādār va muʿtazilī bāshad.

Persian prose seems to have emerged from the state’s desire to propagate conservative Islamic values amongst the pious Transoxianan public. It is very different from Sāmānid Persian poetry that drew freely on pre-Islamic, Iranian imagery and was written by and for the court. Bulliet’s hypothesis of Iranian traditions appealing mainly to the social orders is thus untenable. The coexistence of these contrasting cultural orientations is illustrated by a medallion that Mansūr b. Nūḥ had struck in 358/968–9 to underline his own claims to kingship in the face of his Būyid rival’s assumption of the ancient Iranian title shāhānshāh. The Sāmānid medallion is inscribed in Pahlavī as well as Arabic, and the title shāhānshāh is used. To an extent, therefore, the Sāmānids were prepared to use the Iranian past as a legitimizing device, although it is intriguing to note that the royal bust is derived from an eastern Iranian, but not Sāsānian, source. As Luke Treadwell has noted, this donative medallion was intended solely for a court audience, probably for distribution at Nawrūz. Such images are never found on the Sāmānids’ coinage destined for general distribution, which always refer to the amirs in traditional Islamic terms. The Sāmānids’ Iranian connections were stressed only in the limited context of the court. For the purposes of the outside world, the Sāmānids were first and foremost Islamic, not Iranian, rulers. The religious, piety-minded emphasis of state-sponsored early Persian prose literature is symptomatic of the thoroughly Islamic character of the Sāmānid state.

The transmission of the Tārīkhnāma’s text

Pre-modern Muslims thought about books and texts very differently from the way we do today. One of the most distinctive characteristics of Islamic civilization is the importance given to orality, which was considered a more reliable and desirable method of transmitting texts than writing, although both existed side by side. Even after paper became widely available in the third/ninth century, allowing the cheaper copying of books, oral transmission retained its prestige and it was never entirely abandoned. For instance, the historian Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) tells us that Tabari's History had been transmitted to him both orally and in writing. Oral transmission was so esteemed that authors would sometimes indicate that a work had been transmitted to them orally whereas in reality they had been working from a manuscript. The primacy of orality in transmitting texts had varying results in different literary fields. In hadith, where precision was important, and a reputable scholar would not wish to alter deliberately what had been transmitted to him, there was a strong emphasis on memorization, and subsequently, when manuscript editions became widespread (if always regarded with suspicion), on collating the text of various manuscripts.

In the transmission of other forms of literature the exact reproduction of the original text was not valued so highly. Rather, what was important was to preserve the artistic quality of the work, if necessary by altering and improving it. This ‘free transmission’ of texts was considered both normal and desirable. Above all, texts were meant to provide their readers with benefits.

5 Schoeler, Écrire et transmettre, p. 36.
Bālʿamī notes in his introduction to the *Ṭārīkhnama* that Maḥṣūr b. Naḥ studied Tābarī’s work ‘until he had acquired the paradigms [of behaviour] (manāhi) gathered in it’.7 As Michael Chamberlain writes of mediaeval Damascus, ‘authors of books, copyists, booksellers, owners, and readers experienced their ties to one another in part as altruistic bonds’.8 The entire concept of authorship was perceived rather differently from today: ‘[t]he idea that books are singular products of individual wills, belonging to their authors as unmistakably as their personalities, is a modern one that would not have been understood in Damascus.’9 As a result, mediaeval readers, writers and copyists had little compunction about altering the contents of books to make them more ‘beneficial’ for readers.10

This did not apply equally to all texts. Canonical *ḥadīth* collections were more or less exempted from such alterations, and there was also a luxury market in literary classics which, up to a point, may have been less susceptible to amendment on such a large scale.11 Nonetheless, as Grégoire Schoeler argues, the Islamic concept of free textual transmission is incompatible with the idea of the existence of a definitive recension of individual texts.12 Yet traditional Western textual criticism, originally developed for editing Classical texts, is based on the principle that, by using a stemmatic approach, the archetype of the original text can be reconstructed. The application of such a theory to processes of textual transmission lacking such fixed archetypes is clearly flawed.

It might be imagined that the textual critic is on relatively safe ground when dealing with texts of which the author’s autograph copy, or copies directly descended from it, exist. However, authors frequently revised their texts radically. Ibn al-Aṭīr (d. 630/1232) may have spent up to ten years revising his monumental universal chronicle, *al-Kāmil fī Ḥ-Tāʾrīkh*, and the extant first draft of the historian Maqrīzī’s (d. 845/1442) *Khiṭal* differs substantially from the final product.13 On occasion, more than one recension of the same work by the author’s own hand came into circulation. Such seems to have been the case with the *Saljūqnāma* of Nishapūrī, a late sixth/twelfth century Persian history, although the difference between the two recensions does not seem to have been very extensive in this instance.14 Very rarely, several autograph manuscripts are extant, as is the case with *Ibn al-ʿArabī*’s *Sal-Tanazzulāt*

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8 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice*, p. 142.
9 Ibid, p. 141.
11 Ibid, p. 143.
In this text, even manuscripts in the author’s own hand contain nonsensical readings.\(^{15}\)

The problems besetting the study of Islamic texts are illustrated exceptionally clearly by the case of the \textit{Tārikhnāma}. As Elton Daniel has noted, ‘Even when the manuscripts of Bal'amī’s history are reduced to the dozen or so earliest examples (dating to 850/1446 or before), the variant readings found in them far exceed in quantity and nature those that one would expect to find as the result of simple scribal errors, missing folios, and the like.’\(^{16}\) Furthermore, not a single manuscript has survived from the Sāmānid era, with the earliest dating from several generations after Bal'amī’s death. The state of the Persian manuscripts veils from us Bal'amī’s original text and intentions. It is likely that they do in places retain Bal'amī’s words in some form or other, but it is rarely possible to identify such passages with certainty. Nor does the edition of Muhammad Rawshan offer a secure foundation for studying Bal'amī, for it merely reproduces the faults of the manuscripts.

Any study of the \textit{Tārikhnāma} must therefore focus on its highly complex textual tradition, as one cannot discuss Bal'amī’s work without considering the extent to which the manuscripts represent the text he wrote as opposed to the interpolations and adaptations of later copyists. In this chapter we will examine previous scholars’ investigations of the manuscripts, which have usually attempted to categorize manuscripts of the \textit{Tārikhnāma} according to ‘redaction’. I will suggest that in the case of the \textit{Tārikhnāma} the concept of redaction is not especially useful for understanding the genesis of the text. I will argue that in fact the \textit{Tārikhnāma} presents a case of ‘horizontal transmission’ where the text has been contaminated by readings from several different sources, including Ṭabarī’s Arabic original. In fact, an early Arabic translation of Bal'amī appears to present a more conservative text than the existing Persian manuscripts do.\(^{17}\) The discovery of this Arabic translation offers a better basis on which to study Bal'amī than has been available hitherto. Obviously, it is still an imperfect tool: not only is the work a translation, and thus cannot preserve Bal'amī’s exact words, but it is also a copy at several removes from the lost original. However, by using it in

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16 E. Daniel, ‘Manuscripts and editions of Bal'amī’s \textit{Tarjamah-i Tārikh-i Ṭabarī}’, \textit{JRAS} 3\(^{rd}\) series, 2(1990), pp. 288–9. This important article outlines in more detail than space here allows the problems of the manuscript tradition and of the various published editions. This chapter will therefore concentrate on points not discussed by Daniel. Appendix III presents amendments to the ‘Annotated Inventory of Bal'amī Manuscripts’ appended to his article. I have also discussed the \textit{Tārikhnāma}’s text more briefly in ‘The medieval manuscript tradition of Bal'amī’s version of \textit{al-Ṭabarī’s History}’ in J. Pfeiffer and M. Kropp (eds), \textit{Theoretical Approaches to the Edition and Transmission of Oriental Manuscripts}, Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, forthcoming.

17 Given the vast number of surviving manuscripts, it has not been possible to examine them all. This discussion is thus illustrated mainly by examples drawn from the early phase of the manuscript tradition, that is, down to the ninth/fifteenth century. Every effort has been made to survey the most important early manuscripts, but some have been omitted as they were inaccessible.
conjunction with the older Persian manuscripts, one can start to make credible hypotheses as to the contents of the fourth/tenth century text of the Tārīkhnāma.18

The manuscript problem of the Tārīkhnāma: an outline

The exact number of extant manuscripts of the Tārīkhnāma is unknown. One hundred and sixty are listed by Daniel in his inventory of manuscripts,19 so the total number is doubtless somewhat greater, if impossible to estimate. Many library collections, especially, although by no means exclusively, in the Middle East, are uncatalogued or inadequately catalogued and there are also many inaccessible private collections. The manuscript tradition of the Tārīkhnāma is reminiscent of that of another early Persian work, Firdawsī’s celebrated Shāhnāma. In neither case, despite the great number of extant manuscripts, do we have any copies made fewer than 200 years after the works’ composition.20

A handful of Tārīkhnāma manuscripts survive from the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, mainly in very fragmentary form.21 At least 11 manuscripts dating to the eighth/fourteenth century have survived more or less intact,22 probably as a consequence of interest in the work in the Ilkhānate for political reasons (see Chapter 5). The standard published edition by Muhammad Rawshan is based on a manuscript of the early eighth/fourteenth century, RAS, Persian 22, in some ways an unfortunate choice

18 For reasons of space, I do not examine here or in Chapter 5 the process in which some copyists would update the vocabulary of the Tārīkhnāma by substituting Arabic words for the more archaic Persian ones, as (perhaps surprisingly) there does not appear to be a correlation between this and more large-scale alterations to the text. For an example of this updating see A.J. Arberry, Classical Persian Literature, London: Allen and Unwin, 1958, pp. 39–40, and on the Tārīkhnāma’s language, G. Lazard, La langue des plus anciens monuments de la prose persane, Paris: C. Klinksieck, 1963, pp. 38–41 and A. Azarnouche, ‘La formation du persan sous l’influence de la langue arabe au iv−xe siècle’ in M. Szuppe (ed.), Iran: Questions et Connaissances, II, pp. 11–19.
20 The Shāhnāma was completed around the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, and the earliest surviving manuscript is the Florence manuscript dating to 614/1217.
21 The oldest dated manuscript is the Mashhad manuscript of 586/1190, although British Library, Or 7324 is probably of a similar date or possibly slightly older. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ancien fonds persan 63 and Edirne, Halk Kütüphanesi, Selimiye 1036 are probably seventh/thirteenth century; Bodleian, Laud Or 323 is an important manuscript of either the seventh/thirteenth or eighth/fourteenth century. Daniel’s reference to ‘Bursa, Genel Kütüphane 1612 (F)’ as an early Ba’andi manuscript is erroneous; he also lists two more seventh/thirteenth century manuscripts I have been unable to examine, in Dushanbe and Tehran (Bahār 186). An examination of both of these would be worthwhile, but is unlikely to give us great new insights into the Tārīkhnāma. See Appendix III for further details on the manuscripts.
22 Daniel (‘Manuscripts and editions’, p. 288) lists ten manuscripts dating to the eighth/fourteenth century, to which should be added MS Or 171 in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Venice). A fragment of two folios from an Ilkhānid Tārīkhnāma also survives in the Library of Congress.
due to the obvious Shíte interpolations it contains. Interestingly, one of only three known illustrated Bal'amī manuscripts comes from this period. As the earliest extant manuscripts were copied at least 200 years after the Tārīkhnāma, it is hardly surprising that they appear to be extremely corrupt. Variations of vocabulary and grammar abound, but more seriously, the contents of the text differ substantially from one manuscript to another. For example, RAS, Persian 22 has a very long account of Gayūmarth, the first Persian king, which does not appear in manuscripts of a similar date such as Sūleymaniye, Fatih 4285 or Oxford, Bodleian, Laud Or 323. Even the introduction to the Tārīkhnāma survives in two versions, one Arabic, the other Persian, with rather different contents. Although Bal'amī was instructed ‘to excise whatever repetitions there are in the [Arabic] book’, manuscripts from time to time do repeat narratives. Perplexingly, we frequently find comments in the manuscripts stating that a given passage was not to be found in Tabari’s version, so the copyist had taken it from another source for completeness; yet the very same passage may often be found in published editions of Tabari. Furthermore, all manuscripts of the Tārīkhnāma contain numerous quotations in Arabic, not just from the Qur’ān but also from poets. These are by no means always accompanied by a Persian translation, even though Bal'amī indicates in his preface that the Tārīkhnāma was composed for the benefit of those who did not know Arabic.

The state of the manuscript tradition means it is often impossible to ascertain the relationship between manuscripts, as will be discussed in detail below. In some cases manuscripts do have an easily recognizable relationship to one another. For example, the contents of Sūleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050 and Aya Sofya 3051, both early eighth/fourteenth century, appear to be virtually identical as their copyists were brothers.

23 Rawshan’s edition is essentially a printed version of RAS, Persian 22, with the addition of a few missing passages from other manuscripts. Fortunately, these additions are marked. For ease of reference, I shall therefore cite RAS, Persian 22 by the page numbering in Rawshan rather than by folio number. The interpolations will be discussed further below.

24 This is the Freer manuscript, probably written for a Christian governor of Mosul, which has been extensively investigated from an art historical perspective by Teresa Fitzherbert. See T. Fitzherbert, “Bal'amī’s Tabari: an illustrated manuscript of Bal'amī’s Tarjama-yi Tārīkh-i Tabari in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington (F59.16, 47.19, 30.21)”, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh 2001 (publication forthcoming as Prophets, Kings and Caliphs: an Ilkhanid illustrated copy of Bal'amī’s History in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, New Series, Smithsonian Institution). The other known illustrated manuscripts are the Chester Beatty manuscript (Persian 144) in Dublin, dating to the ninth/fifteenth century, and containing considerably fewer illustrations, and an undated, late Timūrid manuscript. The latter is currently held in a private collection and is said to be inaccessible to scholars at the moment. Drouot Richlieu, Art Ottoman provenant des Collections de SAI Ottomane le Prince X: petit fils du Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1909); Art d’Orient vente aux enchères publiques, Lundi-Mardi 6–7 Avril 1998, Lot 306, Paris 1998, pp. 73–9, cited in Fitzherbert, “Bal'amī’s Tabari”, I, p. 2, n. 6.


26 Tārīkhnāma, I, p. 2.
and worked from the same original manuscript. Yet the relationship between these manuscripts does not allow one to trace the history of the text any further back than the original current in the eighth/fourteenth century from which they are descended. Conventional wisdom states that earlier rather than later manuscripts should be used to establish the text, yet in the case of the Tārikhnāma even the earliest manuscripts contain major interpolations. Indeed, early manuscripts such as the Mashhad manuscript or Bodleian, Laud Or 323 tend to present eclectic texts which are especially difficult to relate to other manuscripts.

Previous scholarship on the text of the Tārikhnāma

The earliest attempt to analyse and resolve the Tārikhnāma’s textual problems was by Hermann Zotenberg, the French translator of Balʿamī who completed Dubeux’s unfinished work. Zotenberg based his translation on ten manuscripts which he considered to form two basic groups. These he described as ‘la rédaction primitive’ and ‘la nouvelle rédaction corrigée’. Zotenberg described the ‘new corrected’ redaction as being more ‘developed’ than the ‘primitive’ one, by which he presumably meant longer or more detailed. Zotenberg’s analysis was rather simplistic, and he admitted that even of the ten manuscripts he was using some did not conform to his theory. He based his translation on Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (henceforth, BNF), MS ancien fonds persans 63 (‘A’ in his terminology). Other manuscripts were used to supplement and correct it, for he described A as ‘très-incorrect’ with numerous minor lacunae, and a representative of the ‘primitive’ redaction. It is a somewhat eclectic manuscript, for it lacks both beginning and end, and some chapters are out of place. It was presumably its antiquity—Blochet dates it to the early seventh/thirteenth century—which persuaded Zotenberg to rely on it so extensively. Its text is indeed sometimes less extensive than that found in other manuscripts: only five lines are devoted to the reign of Gayūmarth, as opposed to three folios in Zotenberg’s E, a representative of his ‘new corrected redaction’ (RAS, Persian 22). However, the evidence of some manuscripts suggests that the ‘primitive’ redaction is not always characterized by a more concise text than the ‘new corrected’ redaction. Appendix I (A) presents a comparison of a passage in the two different redactions: in this instance, the text of the ‘primitive’ redaction is actually considerably more extensive than that of his ‘new corrected’ redaction, indicating that Zotenberg’s classification of the manuscripts is unreliable.

The publication of de Goeje’s edition of the Arabic History, completed in 1901, lessened the interest in Balʿamī which had mainly been prompted by a desire to reconstruct the contents of Tabari’s work, long believed lost in its entirety. However, in

1958 two Soviet scholars, Griaznevich and Boldyrev, produced a study of the Tārīkhnāma’s prefaces, arguing that manuscripts could be classified into redactions according to whether they had an Arabic or Persian preface. They argued, probably correctly, that the Arabic preface is older, although there is no evidence that the contents of the manuscripts in which it occurs are more reliable or authentic. In fact the evidence does not support Griaznevich and Boldyrev’s hypothesis, for there is no consistent correlation between the contents of manuscripts and the language of the preface. For example, both Oxford, Bodleian, Laud Or 323 and RAS, Persian 22 have an Arabic preface but the former manuscript contains rather more detailed accounts for much of the Islamic section. In fact, RAS, Persian 22 is seems to be closer to some manuscripts with Persian prefaces. For instance, both RAS Persian 22 and Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281, which has a Persian preface, have detailed accounts of Gayūmarth and Bahrām Chūbīn. Yet it is also clear that none of these manuscripts is directly related.

The research of Elton Daniel significantly modified Griaznevich and Boldyrev’s conclusions, and has done much to advance our understanding of the Tārīkhnāma’s text. Daniel groups the manuscripts into three different redactions: a late redaction, a full redaction, and an abbreviated redaction. The ‘late redaction’ is said to be distinguished by having a Persian doxology and preface, an overall abbreviation of the text, an omission of Arabic poetry found elsewhere, and the replacement of Arabic vocabulary with Persian equivalents. The ‘full redaction’ supposedly has more detailed accounts of Islamic, especially ‘Abbāsid history. The ‘abbreviated redaction’ resembles the late redaction in its abridgement of the text, although its accounts, particularly of later ‘Abbāsid history, are rather more detailed than those in the latter version.

However, if different criteria are used to classify the texts, they do not necessarily support Daniel’s theory. The contents of manuscripts from different redactions may not diverge as much as one would assume, while any two manuscripts from a given redaction may vary more from each other than from ones supposedly belonging to the other redactions. Appendix I (B) presents a comparison of a passage on the ancestry of the Prophet from two different manuscripts, British Library, IO Isl 2669 and British Library, IO Isl 1983, both identified by Daniel as being representatives of the late redaction. The second of these extracts covers the same events as the first three lines of the first one, and devotes several more folios to events described by IO Isl 2669 in a few lines. Equally, manuscripts of the abbreviated redaction may be more detailed than the full redaction, while the late redaction frequently offers the most abbreviated accounts. An example of
this is the account of the career of Bahrām Chūbīn: in RAS, Persian 22 (abbreviated redaction) and Bodleian, Ouseley 359 (full redaction) the account is the same, fairly extensive and detailed, but in Bodleian, Elliot 377 (late redaction), the episode is greatly shortened.\(^{33}\) The account of the caliphate and murder of 'Uthmān, on the other hand, is fairly similar in all of these.\(^{34}\)

In some unpublished research, Daniel has drawn up a table comparing the section headings of fifteen early manuscripts,\(^{35}\) which illustrates that later manuscripts do tend to have more extensive texts than earlier ones—or at least more additional chapters. However, section headings are by no means a completely reliable method of classifying the text. A manuscript may have a section heading identical to that found in other manuscripts, yet

\(^{33}\) The principal difference between Bodleian, Elliot 377 and the other manuscripts mentioned here is that the former text gives the bare details of Bahrām Chūbīn’s career and regency, omitting, for example, the account of his encounter with a fairy and some of the prophecies of his future greatness which precede the account of his rise to power elsewhere. This it shares with Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285, supposedly a representative of the abbreviated redaction according to Daniel’s database discussed below. (See Fitzherbert, ‘‘Bal`amī’s Tabari’’ I, p. 251.) However, like Tabari but unlike the other manuscripts it makes Hurmuz the king’s son Parvīz complicit in his murder (Elliot 377, f. 139b, and Tabari, Ta`rikh al-Rusūd wa-l-Mulūk.M.de Goeje (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1879, I, p. 998). Elliot 377 (f. 140b) also states that an angel rescued Parvīz from Bahrām Chūbīn, something specifically denied by RAS, Persian 22 (Tārikhnama, II, pp. 797–8). In general, however, there are few direct factual contradictions between the manuscripts. Interestingly, the account of Bahrām Chūbīn’s career is omitted entirely from Bodleian, Laud Or 323 and Tashkent, Beruniy, 2816, a much later manuscript.

\(^{34}\) The most substantial difference is that RAS, Persian 22 is clearly more hostile to ‘Uthmān than the other manuscripts. For example, most other manuscripts include, after the account of his murder, a chapter on the lineage, wives, and number of children of the caliph. (These are also omitted in Tehran, Kitābkhāna-i Majlis, 5575.) Yet while this may appear to indicate that RAS, Persian 22 is indeed the abbreviated redaction, the manuscript also contains details not usually to be found elsewhere, such as the story that the father of Wālid b. ‘Uqba, ‘Uthmān’s governor in Kuφa, had spat in the face of the Prophet, who had ordered him to be killed on the day of Badr. (Tārikhnama, III, p. 576; this is omitted in Kitābkhāna-i Majlis, 5575.) Furthermore, like Kitābkhāna-i Majlis, 5575, a manuscript to which it is probably related, it includes considerably longer and more detailed accounts of Gayūmarth and Bahrām Chūbīn than those which may be found elsewhere, as for example in Süleymaniye, Fath 4285 and BNF, anciens fonds persans 63. It scarcely need be stressed how damaging to ‘Uthmān are the allegations about his governor’s ancestry. Given that all the other manuscripts I have examined are considerably less obviously hostile to ‘Uthmān than this, the aforementioned omissions in RAS, Persian 22 may be attributed to sectarian hostility on the copyist’s part rather than to a difference in the manuscript tradition. Interestingly, Bodleian, Laud Or 323, which, if Boldyrev and Griaznevich’s theory was correct in dividing manuscripts into redactions based on whether the preface was in Arabic or Persian, should be considered related to RAS, Persian 22, has much more detail in this section of the text than any of the manuscripts under discussion in this instance. It gives extremely detailed accounts of Wālid b. ‘Uqba’s governorship and how he was dismissed after being caught drinking, and of the death of the last Sāsānian Emperor, Yazdagird b. Shahriyār. In this it resembles Tashkent, Beruniy 2073, another eighth/fourteenth century manuscript (although one which lacks both the beginning and end, rendering it impossible to classify according to preface).

\(^{35}\) See Fitzherbert, ‘‘Bal`amī’s Tabari’’ I, pp. 251–2.
the actual text may be very different indeed. Conversely, a manuscript may omit section headings yet the text may well be similar to or the same as that found in a manuscript where the section heading is present.

Muḥammad Rawshan, the most recent editor of the Tārīkhnāma, supported Griaznevich and Boldyrev’s theory of two redactions. To explain the sixth/twelfth century Mashhad manuscript, which differs considerably from most other early manuscripts, Rawshan suggested it was the sole extant example of an otherwise lost third redaction. He also offered a new thesis as to why there were so many differences between the manuscripts. He suggested that Baḥ’amī was not the author of the Tārīkhnāma, but rather had employed scribes to write the work for which he subsequently took the credit. Rawshan compared this to the case of the Ilkhānid Jāmī al-Tawārīkh, which the historian Qāshānī claimed was largely his work rather than Rashīd al-Dīn’s—a claim that most scholars dismiss, although it is probably true that Rashīd al-Dīn did employ a team of scribes to assist him. The composition of the Tārīkhnāma by a group of scribes rather than a single author led to the presence of so many variants.

However, there are serious objections to Rawshan’s theory. Even if Baḥ’amī had entrusted the work’s composition to a scriptorium, it is not evident why this would have produced such divergent texts, for presumably each scribe would have been told to work on a separate part of the text. To accept Rawshan’s theory, one must believe that Baḥ’amī would have set different scribes to translate the same passage in direct competition with one another. It is by no means obvious why anyone would do this. Furthermore, to argue that a group of scribes was responsible directly contradicts the evidence of

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36 Thus for example the account of Yazdagird’s death differs substantially in Bodleian, Laud Or 323; Bodleian, Elliot 377; RAS, Persian 22, and Edirne, İl Halk Kütüphanesi, Selimiye 1036, although all give it roughly similar headings.

37 Tehran, Kītābkhāna-i Majlis, 2291 for instance lacks many section headings. Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 recounts under the appropriate chapter headings the conversion of Abū Bakr (f. 176a) and ʿUmar (f. 176b) but does not have another heading until f. 182b, dealing with the Prophet’s journey to ʿAqīqa after Abū Taḥlib’s death. In other manuscripts such as Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3051, the intervening events, which are nonetheless included in Fatih 4281, are given separate headings: Khubār-i Āshkārā Kardan-i Daʿvat and Hijrat Kardan-i Yūrān-i Paygāmbar ʿAlāyih al-Salām bi-Ḥabashu. See Tārīkhnāma, V, p. 1332 for details of some other manuscripts. Likewise, British Library, Add 23,496 (f. 21a) includes the account of Gayūmarth under Ḥadīth Ibrāhīm ʿAlāyih al-Salām, rather than giving it a separate title. Meanwhile, British Library, Or 5344, unusually, divides the account of Gayūmarth under two section headings: Fausūl dar Ḥikr-i Mulk-i Gayūmarth and Ḥikr-i Muṣnāl-yl Vugāʾī-i Zunān-i Mukhlis-i Gayūmarth va Kustal Shukurūn Biḍir-yi Aftād-i ʿAbdur Raḥim-i Shuṣṭārī (f. 19b), although admittedly these accounts are rather different from those found elsewhere.

38 Tārīkhnāma, I, Muqaddima, p. 42.

39 Ibid, I, Muqaddima, p. 47.


both the Arabic and Persian introductions to the work. The author of the Arabic introduction, probably the original one as Griaznevich and Boldyrev argued, repeatedly uses the first person singular to describe how he set about making the translation: ‘I translated it… I asked God for help in composing it, compiling it and finishing it.’ 42 The Persian preface quotes Bal'amī as saying, ‘I exerted myself and strove and translated it into Persian by the power of God.’ 43 Thus previous scholars’ conclusions about the textual history of the Tārikhnāma are unsatisfactory, and I offer here a new explanation of the problem.

The transmission of the Tārikhnāma’s text

It is possible that Bal'amī composed and circulated more than one version of his work, which might account for some of the differences in the text. However, one would expect the Tārikhnāma to have been published in a final form during his lifetime: as it was a state-sponsored project, Bal'amī’s pattern of work is less likely to have been subject to his own whims than is the case with a private scholar such as Ibn al-Athīr, and there was plenty of time for the translation to be completed before the vizier’s death. Bal'amī may have presented a draft version to his patron for approval, as Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī claims to have done with his fourth/tenth century Risāla, 44 but even if it was subsequently revised, there is no reason why he or the state would have wanted unauthorized, sometimes contradictory, variants to circulate either before or after his death. Nonetheless, Baydāwī’s Nizām al-Tawārikh, another history composed to meet a political agenda, circulated in at least two different versions during its author’s lifetime, 45 so we cannot exclude the possibility that this happened with the Tārikhnāma too.

Even if we do accept that variant drafts may have been circulated in the Sāmānid period, this is unquestionably not the whole story, for even a cursory examination reveals obvious interpolations in the manuscripts for which Bal'amī could not have been responsible. For instance, the terminus of the manuscripts varies considerably, and many continue up to the reigns of caliphs who acceded long after Bal'amī’s death such as Mustarshid (d. 529/1135). 46 Such interpolations are the work of mediaeval scribes who were anxious to improve the text in accordance with the tastes and interests of their day. This was most frequently done by comparing the Tārikhnāma with other texts and adding missing passages from them in a process analogous to collation.

42 Tārikhnāma, I, pp. 2–3: ‘anā utarjimuhu… wa-su‘ālu allâh utâlâ al-tawâfaq fi tu‘lîshî...’
45 See C.Melville, ‘From Adam to Abaqa: Qādi Baydawī’s rearrangement of history. Part II’, Studia Iranica forthcoming. I am very grateful to Charles Melville for allowing me a preview of this article.
46 Among the many examples of such manuscripts are RAS Persian 22 (Mustarshid); Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 (Muqtadī, d. 487/1094), Aya Sofya 3054 (Mustāzhīr, d. 512/1118).
Mediaeval Muslim scribes commonly sought to ensure the accuracy of their texts by collating different manuscripts. Occasionally they left evidence for this in statements in colophons or margins, and sometimes scribal markings indicate the number of manuscripts used in collating the text. The practice was obligatory for hadith—the religious and legal importance of which required the most reliable texts possible, but its use seems to have spread through the great translation movement of Greek and Syriac works, mainly philosophical, into Arabic (second/eighth to fourth/tenth centuries). The translators had swiftly realized that their work was impossible without accurate editions of the originals, and were often obliged to establish the texts themselves. For instance, Hunayn b. Ishāq, the movement’s most famous figure, states that he collated Greek manuscripts for his translation of Galen.

In the case of the Bal‘amī manuscripts, collation took on a far more radical form. Some scribes did not stop at collating other Bal‘amī manuscripts, but used the original Arabic of Tabari as well. In an analogous step, scribes started to supplement their text with passages from other works such as the Arabic history of Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī, Iranian national histories such as the Kitāb-i  Akhbār-i Ajam (mentioned as the source for the Bahram Chūbīn accounts in RAS, Persian 22 and others), and Zoroastrian accounts. By using such works, scribes hoped to fill in gaps they found in the work in accordance with their patrons’ interests. Sometimes the Tārikhnāma’s text will be followed by an appendix, such as a geographical or chronological treatise, providing a historical update to the scribe’s own day. This reaches its most extreme form in Bodleian, Elliot 377, in which the Tārikhnāma occupies only about half the manuscript, the remainder being an extract from Rashīd al-Dīn’s Jāmi‘ al-Tawārikh. This editorial activity resulted in the hybrid and sometimes confused text (or texts) we have today. The scribes had a precedent for this procedure, for Bal‘amī himself states in his Arabic preface (if it is authentic, as seems likely) that he compared his work with Tabari’s

49 This is also comparable to Hunayn’s procedure in translating Galen’s Peri haireseon tois eisagomenois, for which he used both the Greek and Syriac versions to produce the Arabic: ‘A number of Greek manuscripts had accumulated in my possession. I collated these manuscripts and produced a single correct copy. Next, I collated the Syriac text with it and corrected it. I am in the habit of doing this with everything I translate.’ Cited in F. Rosenthal, The Classical Heritage in Islam (tr. E. & J. Marmorstein), London: Routledge, 1975, p. 20.
50 See Chapter 3.
51 Tārikhnāma, II, p. 764.
52 Ibid, I, p. 93.
Tafsīr (uqāhīluhu bi-‘l-Tafsīr al-Kabīr). Later copyists too seem to have used the Tafsīr as a source: passages in some manuscripts of the Tārikhnama were evidently lifted directly from the Tafsīr. For instance, in RAS, Persian 22’s account of the raid on Tabūk, which is extremely close to the version given by the Persian Tafsīr, a verse from al-Tawba (Q. 9.42) is quoted in Arabic and translated into Persian, after which is found the comment that ‘most of this sūra, al-Tawba, was sent down concerning this raid’. Yet there is no other discussion of the sūra, which makes the comment seem rather disconnected from the narrative. An identical phrase is found in the Tafsīr in the commentary on al-Tawba where it fits in appropriately. Similarly, in the section on the answers given by the Prophet to the Jews’ questions about the Torah, which is remarkably similar in both the Tafsīr and the Tārikhnama, both quote the Qur’ānic verses Quī huwa Allāh aḥad, Allāhal-šamad (Q. 112.1–2.) The Tārikhnama adds, ‘much has been said on the tafsīr of this, but this is a history book’. Sure enough, the Tafsīr contains a few additional paragraphs on this verse, but then the text of both works is virtually the same. These passages are not to be found in probably the oldest extant text, the fifth/eleventh century Arabic translation of the Tārikhnama preserved in Cambridge University Library, Add 836 (discussed below), and the lack of integration of the references to the Tafsīr does suggest that interpolation is responsible for their presence. Thus later scribes felt no incongruity in continuing to use the Tafsīr as a source from which to supplement or amend Bāl‘amī’s text.

This aspect of the transmission of the Tārikhnama has not been considered previously, which is why other explanations of the state of the manuscripts are unsatisfactory. Traditional explanations assume that the manuscripts of a given redaction are descended from a single parent and their texts share similar omissions and interpolations—a process known as Vertical transmission. Thus manuscripts can be grouped into redactions on the basis of their common textual features. However, in fact the Tārikhnama seems to present a case of horizontal transmission. Copyists would consult not one but a number of manuscripts from which they would collate their text, which is why it is often impossible to identify enough consistent common features in manuscripts to classify them convincingly into redactions. For instance, in RAS, Persian 22, Farīdūn’s son’s name is written as both Tōj and Tür within the space of a couple of lines. Such inconsistencies can only be explained as a result of the scribe’s eye wandering between two or more manuscripts in front of him. Even more extreme is the case of Tashkent, Beruniy, 4226,

56 Tārikhnama, I, p. 17.
57 Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī, I, p. 30.
58 I have adapted this idea of horizontal transmission from Reynolds and Wilson, Scribes and Scholars, p. 214ff.
where the scribe has two different accounts of the reign of Jamshīd. The first, entitled *Dhikr-i Pādīshāhī-yi Jamshīd*\(^{60}\) resembles closely the account in RAS Persian 22. The second, entitled *Guftār dar Dhikr-i Pādīshāhī-yi Jam*,\(^{61}\) differs slightly, but it is clear that the scribe is unaware that both accounts are dealing with one and the same individual. Thinking the different accounts he found in different manuscripts were about separate kings and confused by the variant of the name, he included both in his text. Scribes occasionally give direct evidence of the practice of collation. Just before the colophon of a manuscript from the Bodleian (Ouseley 206–8), the scribe mentions that he has seen alternative versions of the text of the chapters dealing with ‘Abbāsid history. He notes that in some manuscripts there is no account of the rebellion of the Qarāmīta, while some finish with the Caliphate of Muʿtasim (d. 227/842).\(^{62}\)

It should be noted that there does not appear to be any consistency in the application of collation to either the *Shāhnāma*, another text with a complex manuscript tradition,\(^ {63}\) or *Balʿami*s *Tārikh nāma*. The problem with the *Shāhnāma* is complicated by the obtrusion of versions from oral sources, and it is possible that at least some passages in the *Balʿami* manuscripts came into existence in a similar way, although this is rarely possible to prove. Some passages were clearly omitted or included according to the political or religious allegiances of the copyist or his patron. For example, most manuscripts have a section on ʿUthmān*s* lineage, wives, and number of children, following the account of his murder. However, the scribe of RAS, Persian 22, who was clearly very hostile to the Caliph and interpolates negative comments about him, entirely omits this section. Yet his hostility did not prevent him from occasional inconsistencies, and occasionally the laudatory formula *radiya Allāh* ʿanhus slips in after ʿUthmān*s* name, copied automatically from whatever manuscript he was using. In other cases it is harder to establish such an obvious cause for the presence, absence or form of certain episodes, but we may surmise that the political circumstances under which the manuscript was written may frequently have been influential. As relatively few manuscripts give us precise details of their date and place of copying, let alone of the patron who commissioned them, establishing the nature of such circumstances is extremely difficult.

\(^{60}\) Tashkent, Beruniy, 4226, f. 18b.

\(^{61}\) Ibid, f. 19b. The second account includes far more details about Jamshīd’s inventions, but omits the story of his temptation by Iblīs generally found elsewhere. The same chapter heading also covers the prophethood of Noah in this manuscript. There is no acknowledgement on the scribe’s part that he is providing two different accounts, and indeed he dates ‘Jam’ and ‘Jamshīd’ to different periods. According to him Jamshīd succeeds Gayūmarth, and then come Bīvarsap, *Tāhmūrāth* and Jam.

\(^{62}\) Oxford, Bodleian, Ouseley 208, f. 552a.

iven the lack of early manuscript evidence, it is impossible to be certain when interpolations started to enter the Persian manuscript tradition. Boldyrev and Griaznevič attributed many of the alterations to the text to an editor working in Bukhārā at the end of the fourth/tenth century, but there is no evidence for the existence of this individual. The sixth/twelfth century Mashhad manuscript already shows evidence of interpolation.65 There appears to be much less interpolation in the probably fifth/eleventh century text of the Tārīḵnāma’s Arabic translation, but we know nothing about the Persian manuscript from which the translation was made which could have dated from either the fourth/tenth or fifth/eleventh centuries. At any rate, it is clear that the processes of alteration and interpolation started at an early date.

Horizontal transmission is thus the reason that even the vague groupings of manuscripts proposed by previous scholars do not stand up to detailed scrutiny, and establishing anything resembling a conventional stemma is impossible.66 Unfortunately, identifying which passages are original and which interpolated is rarely possible. In RAS, Persian 22’s account of a clear example occurs, in the form of a passage with little connection to the one before it or after it which interrupts the narrative. The author is describing the circumstances of Kāva’s rebellion against the tyrant Dahhāk who had ordered two men to be killed each day to make a salve for his ulcers from their brains, and writes,

In the land of Isfahān lived a farmer in a village who had two grown-up sons. Dahhāk’s governor in Isfahān seized the sons and sent them to him, and he ordered them to be killed. Their father’s name was Kāva, and when he heard the news, his patience was exhausted and he entered the town, crying out and shouting. He tied an ironmonger’s apron around a stick to make a flag and cried out. The people were oppressed by Dahhāk, who had a cook who did as follows, for his heart was sore for them and because of the great slaughter. Every day of the two men [he was meant to kill] he took one and killed him and mixed sheep’s brain with him and used it. The other he hid underground, and when he had got ten or fifteen he released them by night, and told them not to live in towns but in deserts and mountains, so that no one could recapture them. They say the Kurds and Hashm are descended from them. When the oppression

64 Griaznevich and Boldyrev, ‘O dvukh redaktsiakh “Ta’risk-i Ṭabarī” Bal’ami’, p. 58.
65 See n. 68 below.
66 The difficulty of establishing stemmata in Middle Eastern texts represented by numerous extant manuscripts has often been noted. See for example, J.J.Witkam’s comments on Ibn al-Akfānī’s Irshād al-Qāsidī in his ‘Establishing the stemma: fact or fiction?’, Manuscripts of the Middle East 3(1988), p. 95: ‘I have collated significant passages, but was not, in the event, able to establish a stemma on the basis of the material available to me. Only on a few occasions could I prove the direct relationship between two manuscripts, whereby the more recent one could be eliminated.’ This is exactly the same problem as with Bal’ami.
became great and Kāva’s sons were seized, he cried out, saying, ‘How long shall we stand this oppression? Who is there who will help me to save this people from oppression and cruelty?’ They gathered round him and many people agreed to help.67

It is obvious that the text in italics interrupts the narrative, and indeed it is omitted from the more conservative text of Add 836. Interpolations are, however, not usually so evident, although there are occasional clues. Scribes sometimes even consulted Ṭabarī’s original Arabic text as a source for variant accounts. In one instance, the Mashhad manuscript explicitly contrasts Ṭabarī’s and Bal’ami’s accounts, indicating that the copyist had access to both texts in some form.68 Arabic text continued to be consulted even after the eighth/fourteenth century, when the low number of manuscripts that have survived in contrast to earlier centuries suggest its popularity was waning. For example, the incipit of British Library Or 5343 uses a slightly abridged version of Ṭabarī’s exordium rather than that usually found in the Tārikhnāma.69 This was probably introduced in the tenth/sixteenth or eleventh/seventeenth century when the original eighth/fourteenth century manuscript was repaired; presumably the later scribe was aware of the difference between the Arabic and Persian texts and decided to ‘correct’ the latter. This constant process of correction and adaptation of Bal’ami’s text resulted in its chaotic state.

One of the most difficult problems remains: the passages which the manuscript falsely states are not to be found in Ṭabarī.70 The implications of such statements are serious, for they suggest either that Bal’ami is lying (for no immediately obvious reason) or that the text of Ṭabarī at his disposal was radically different from its current form, either because the latter is corrupt or because Bal’ami’s manuscripts of Ṭabarī were unreliable. It seems highly unlikely that he would have been working from defective manuscripts, given that he was vizier of one of the most powerful and cultured Muslim states of the day, working on the translation project by order of the ruler.71 It is doubtful

67 Tārikhnāma, I, p. 103.
68 Bal’ami, Tarjuma-i Tārikh-i Ṭabarī, p. 388.
69 In contrast to the other Tārikhnāma manuscripts with an Arabic preface, which start al-humād lilāh at-‘ali al-dārā al-wawal qabī kutt uwwat. Daniel (‘Manuscripts and editions’, p. 298, n. 50) lists two other manuscripts with this beginning, Leningrad, Dorn 266 and Hyderabad, Sālār Jang 149, which I have not inspected.
70 For a discussion of this problem with examples, see E. Daniel, ‘Bal’ami’s account of early Islamic history’ in F. Daftary and J. Meri (eds), Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: essays in honour of Wilferd Madelung, London: I.B. Tauris, 2003, pp. 166–8. For instance some manuscripts claim that Ṭabarī omitted any account of the Battle of Badr, whereas in fact the version in the Leiden edition of Ṭabarī is more extensive than that found in the Persian manuscripts.
that the text of Tabari would have become particularly corrupt a mere forty years after the author’s death, especially given that Musabbihi, who died just over 100 years after Tabari, apparently managed to gain access to an autograph copy of the History. 72

Admittedly, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of the surviving text of Tabari, as it does not survive in any single complete manuscript and de Goeje’s edition is based on a number of manuscripts, originating in very different places, of individual parts of the work. However, the Cairo edition by Muhammad Ibrahim, which is based on a few additional manuscripts, has not served to change our impression of the text substantially. Moreover, for many parts of the text of the History, multiple manuscripts exist, and the critical apparatuses presented by Ibrahim and de Goeje do not indicate that the text was ever subjected to the widespread alteration that the Tarikhnama was. The internal evidence of the Persian and Arabic texts also provides good reason to believe the text of the History that Bal’ami used was reasonably close to that available today. Passages quoted in Arabic in the Tarikhnama that can be compared to the text given by Tabari, such as the saj exchanges between Musaylima and Sajah73 and some of the poetry, demonstrate that the text at Bal’ami’s disposal was extremely close to that reconstructed by de Goeje et al. and Ibrahim. It therefore seems justifiable to treat Tabari’s text as reasonably accurate—or at least free of problems on the scale of those affecting Bal’ami.

We must therefore conclude that these comments in the Tarikhnama are somewhat disingenuous. In fact, they may frequently refer to defects in the Persian manuscripts from which the scribes were copying. Scribes would therefore correct this fault from other manuscripts at their disposal, or even the Arabic original. It may appear perplexing that these manuscripts blame Tabari rather than—Bal’ami or careless scribes—for omissions, but copyists did not make a strict distinction between the Arabic and Persian texts, as their use of Tabari for collation indicates. Indeed, many manuscripts with the Arabic preface start with ‘Muhammad b. Jarir [Tabari] said in the khuṭba of his book…’ and proceed to praise God in phraseology completely different from that in Tabari, followed by a preface written by Bal’ami in the first person.

Thus some of these complaints of Tabari’s text being incomplete are doubtless the work of later copyists. Yet Bal’ami himself evidently also found the Arabic History inadequate in places, and there are several prominent passages where he openly contradicts Tabari. In the following two chapters we shall examine how Bal’ami adapted Tabari’s text and why his version differs so substantially from the Arabic original. Firstly, however, we must examine our earliest evidence for Bal’ami’s text, the Arabic translation, which will be used as one of the tools for studying the Tarikhnama in this book.

72 Robinson, Islamic Historiography, p. 110.
73 These are discussed in Chapter 4.
The anonymous Arabic translation of the *Tārikhnāma*

The anonymous Arabic translation of the *Tārikhnāma* is preserved in three manuscripts. These are: an extremely late (c.1800) fragment in Berlin that contains the Islamic part of the text (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Orientabteilung, Sprenger 45); 74 Leiden University Library, Or 3103, a manuscript which is no later than the ninth/fifteenth century and may be eighth/fourteenth century; 75 and, most importantly, Cambridge University Library, Add 836. The date of completion of the latter manuscript is recorded as Tuesday, 26 Jumādā‘l-‘Ākhira, 876/10 December 1471, but according to the colophon it is a copy of a manuscript dated 627/1230, itself a copy of one dated 442/1050. If true, this means Add 836 is a direct descendant of a manuscript copied only 90 years after Balʿamī was writing, and thus offers a much older text than the extant Persian manuscripts. The differences between the text of the Berlin, Leiden and Cambridge manuscripts are minimal, being limited to small copying errors. There is no evidence of widescale alteration or interpolation as in the Persian manuscripts.

The significance of this Arabic translation of Balʿamī is not just its antiquity. In many respects it seems to offer a much more conservative, and thus more reliable, text than the Persian manuscripts do. The repetitions and variant accounts that may be found in the Persian manuscripts are absent here, and while it does include Arabic poetry, this is rather less common than in other version of the text. Explicit criticisms of *Tabarī* are also somewhat rarer than in other manuscripts. I shall base my discussion on Add 836 as this is the only manuscript for which we have information about the circumstances of its copying and which can be traced back to a fifth/eleventh century original. The details of the text (except for the colophon) are generally the same in the other two manuscripts. The beginning of the text is missing in all three manuscripts, although the original table of contents is preserved in Leiden University Library, Or 3103.

The date and circumstances of copying of Add 836

Unfortunately, the provenance and date of Add 836 are somewhat problematic. The manuscript measures 27.8 by 17 cm, has 27 lines per page and 238 folios, is written on low-quality unwatermarked oriental paper, and its script is an inelegant nastāʿīlīq. The unornamented, somewhat battered, black leather binding is possibly a result of later

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75 This is the view of Dr. J.J. Witkam of Leiden, who kindly examined the manuscript and suggested this date (personal communication, March 2003). I am very grateful to Dr. Witkam for his opinion. The manuscript lacks a proper colophon, so there is no date given.
repair work. It is evident that the manuscript was not destined for a wealthy patron, but was prepared for a provincial audience. The name of the scribe is given as Bāyazid b. Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Khiḍr Khaṭīb. The last, damaged folio contains after the colophon a reference to some naqībs of Kūfa in Iraq, the leaders of the Shi‘ite community there. It is likely that the copyist had Shi‘ite sympathies, at least, and was in some way connected with the family of naqībs. The latter are mentioned in Ibn ‘Inaba’ is Umdat al-Tālib fī Ansāb ‘Aṭī b. Abī Tālib down to the father of the first member of the family listed in Add 836, Muḥammad b. Abī ʾl-Ḥasan ʿAlī. It does not seem that this family was responsible for commissioning the copy of the manuscript, for another individual whose name is illegible is mentioned as its owner (ṣāḥibuḥu wa-mālikuḥu). It seems likely that these naqībs were significant to the copyist because he himself was a Shi‘ite resident of Kūfa, as was his patron. By the ninth/fifteenth century, Kūfa had declined into being a half-ruined, insignificant town, which helps to explain the low-quality, provincial characteristics of Add 836.

More information about Bāyazid b. Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Khiḍr’s background is hinted at in some remarks made just after the colophon, although unfortunately the manuscript is severely damaged at this point. Firstly, the scribe recounts a ḥadīth attributed to the prophet which discusses the status of the ulema and the utility of knowledge. This is intriguing because it mentions twice a village called Afrankad, which was near Samarqand. Although the manuscript is too damaged to allow an exact understanding of the significance of this reference, it suggests that the copyist had a connection with Transoxiana as well as Iraq. This is confirmed by a second anecdote which recounts how, after the Muslim conquest, the people of Bukhārā, Samarqand and Turkistan were willing to curse the ʿAlīds, and only the people of

76 I have not been able to trace any of these individuals.
Figure 2.1 The colophon of Cambridge University Library, MS Add 836
Khwārazm refused, for which they suffered greatly. As its mention alongside the other great cities of Transoxiana indicates, the Turkistan referred to here is not the territory of Central Asia as a whole, but the town of Turkistan in the south of modern Kazakhstan where there is a great shrine to the Ḥußainī Saint Ahmād Yāsāvī. Until the ninth/fifteenth century, it was known as Yāsī, but as the shrine developed into a major pilgrimage centre with the encouragement of the Tūmūrid dynasty, its name changed to the one used here. 80

The attribution of Shīʿism to the Khwārazmians is surprising, for Khwārazm has always been considered a strongly Sunnī region. The folio concludes with some remarks condemning the useless acquisition of knowledge for knowledge’s sake.

It seems likely that Bāyāzīd b. Ṣadr al-Dīn was a Shīʿī Central Asian. This is suggested by the anecdote and hadīth that indicate that the copyist had detailed local knowledge of Central Asia—Afrankad, for instance, does not seem to have been a place of any note, and extensive research has failed to uncover any references to it other than that cited above. Bāyāzīd is a name more typical of a Central Asian Turk than a Kūfī Arab. It remains, then, to suggest a hypothesis for the manuscript’s Iraqi connection. Central Asia in the ninth/fifteenth century, as in earlier times, was strongly Sunnī, so it would have been natural for a Shīʿī to leave for the more sympathetic environment of Iraq, perhaps to make a pilgrimage to great Shīʿī shrines there. The scribe’s remarks on the Shīʿism of the Khwārazmians may have been designed to convince his Kūfī audience of the piety of at least some of his compatriots.

However, two facts require caution before firmly attributing the provenance of the manuscript to ninth/fifteenth century Kūfā. Firstly, the great Orientalist E.G. Browne suggested that the manuscript was of a later date than that mentioned in its colophon. 81 Secondly, a note in English on the manuscript’s flyleaf states that it is ‘An Indian MS retranslated from the Persian’, although it does not elucidate this statement any further. Firstly, we shall consider the question of the manuscript’s date, then that of provenance.

Unfortunately, but understandably, almost all research into Arabic palaeography and paper-making has concentrated on examples of especially antiquity, quality or interest. The production of low-quality manuscripts for provincial audiences has as yet not proved to be an attractive research topic. Our knowledge of the development of Arabic palaeography is thus still limited. 82 Nastaʿlīq, popular in the eastern Islamic world, was formed out of a merging of the naskh and ṭūfīq styles in the eighth/fourteenth century, becoming widespread during the ninth/fifteenth, and already everyday naskh handwriting had begun to take on the characteristics of Nastaʿlīq. 83 This does not tell us anything we did not know: that the manuscript is not older than the ninth/fifteenth century and that the copyist was a native of the Islamic east. The script used in Add 836 has some features of

Indian *nasta‘lig*, but which are also attested much further west where it originated.\(^{84}\) The technique of making cheap paper remained the same for hundreds of years, and continued into the nineteenth century in India and Central Asia, although elsewhere in the Islamic world European paper had become prevalent.\(^{85}\) It is thus difficult to come to a definite conclusion as to the date and provenance of the manuscript on purely technical grounds, and while these do not preclude a ninth/fifteenth century Iraqi provenance, they also leave open plenty of other possibilities as to place and date of copying. The paper is unlikely to be Indian, for paper in Muslim India was generally made out of sunn hemp rather than linen rags as in the rest of the Islamic world.\(^{86}\) In addition, whatever the nature of the script and paper, both copyists and paper could travel, and Central Asia, India and Iran were closely linked by trade and culture.\(^{87}\)

Several features of the manuscript do, however, indicate a ninth/fifteenth century Kūfan provenance. Arabic colloquialisms are occasionally employed in the text,\(^{88}\) indicating an origin within the Arab world, and the very nature of the text, an obscure abridgement of *Ṭabari*, an author not widely known in India,\(^{89}\) suggest it is more likely to have originated outside the subcontinent. The fact that *Ibn ‘Inaba* (d. 828/1424) also mentions *Muḥammad b. Abī ‘l-Ḥasan*, who presumably was alive during the former’s lifetime, gives credence to the ninth/fifteenth century dating, for there is no obvious reason why someone in a later period wanting to produce a forgery would use an obscure dynasty of *naqib* to bolster the authenticity of the text. Moreover, if, as Browne suggests, the manuscript is later in date than it purports to be, we are faced with the difficulty of explaining why the scribe would falsify the date. Scribes commonly did seek to increase the value of manuscripts by introducing spurious antique dates into their colophons.\(^{90}\) Among *Balʿamī* manuscripts, for example, Tashkent, Beruniy, 2816 and 4226 purport to be sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries respectively, while they

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\(^{88}\) E.g. f. 39a, David asks the angel Gabriel, ‘*Aysh tājən bi-ʻUriyyā yawm al-qiyāma?’* using the colloquial form *aysh* to mean ‘what’ rather than the classical *mā* or *mādḥā*. Add 836 often uses such colloquialisms in dialogue, but rarely elsewhere.

\(^{89}\) Sezgin notes only three *Ṭabari* manuscripts from the entire subcontinent, a fraction of the number to be found in Istanbul alone. See ibid, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, I, p. 326.

clearly both date from the eleventh/seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries. Yet it was never common practice to forge the date of copying of a manuscript and then to assert that this was two further removes from the original copy, as would be the case here. Indeed it would be hard to comprehend the motive for such a claim. A scribe might well pretend to have copied a manuscript directly from a fifth/eleventh century original, but there could be no pecuniary advantage in claiming to have copied a later copy of an earlier original. It is equally unlikely that a scribe would have copied a later version and then ascribed a false, but late, date to his own copy.

The margins of the manuscript contain one further comment which is of use in dating the manuscript. A marginal note, in Arabic, in a later hand on f. 66a, beside the account of Muhammad’s youth, states that the Meccans had continued the practice of sending their children out to wet-nurses up to the year 1039/1629–30. Such a date is likely to refer to an event that had occurred during the lifetime of the current owner of the manuscript, and probably it was something he himself had noticed, perhaps while on the hajj. This means that even if we adopt Browne’s scepticism as to the veracity of the colophon, the manuscript must have been produced before the early eleventh/seventeenth century.

It seems likely, on balance, that Browne was mistaken. As he himself admits in the introduction to his Handlist, he lacked enthusiasm for the monumental and tedious task of cataloguing all the Islamic manuscripts in Cambridge University Library single-handedly, and doubtless did not examine every manuscript in detail. He was possibly misled by some later folios attached to the beginning of the manuscript containing an index to the work which clearly date to the nineteenth century. The references to Turkistan and to the naqibs of Kufa both accord with a ninth/fifteenth century date, and as argued above, there is no reason why these would have interested anyone but the immediate audience for whom the manuscript was copied. Even if we incline to attributing it to a later date, the fact that these references have been preserved intact supports the accuracy of the copy. At any rate, the existence of Leiden Or 3103 indicates that the Arabic translation of Bal’ami was in circulation in this period.

We must now examine the question of the manuscript’s Indian connection. It is impossible to trace the provenance of Add 836 exactly. The first definite record of it comes with its acquisition by Cambridge University Library from the collection of the Rev. Prof. H.G. Williams, Sir Thomas Adams’s Professor of Arabic and Fellow of Emmanuel College, after his death in 1870. It seems unlikely, if not impossible, from the limited information available about Williams, that he ever visited the East himself. It is therefore probable that he acquired the manuscript from a British official, recently returned from a colonial posting in the East, or from a sale of manuscripts at auction. It is thus very likely that the manuscript did indeed come from India to Cambridge. In many places, marginal comments or glosses in Persian (e.g. ff. 14a, 37b, 47a, 75b, 112a, 113a among others) have been added to Add 836. Persian was always more widespread in

91 Browne, Handlist, pp. vii–viii.
92 The plotted biographies of Williams in Alumni Cantabrigienses, Boase, and Crockford’s all indicate that he spent a quiet career as a clergyman and academic, becoming deacon of Ely in 1842, rector of Preston from 1854, and Professor of Arabic from 1854 until his death in 1870.
India than Arabic, and it is entirely credible that these notes were added there. Indeed, that Add 836 should have passed through India is less surprising than it may appear at first.

There are two possible routes by which the manuscript may have reached the subcontinent. The best-known route for the penetration of Islamic influences is through Central Asia, which may have been the original home of the scribe of Add 836. Assuming that Bāyazīd b. Ṣadr al-Dīn’s patron was indeed Kūfan, this does not provide an explanation of how it got from Kūfa back to Central Asia and then to India. A more tempting suggestion is that it was taken directly from Iraq to India, probably to the Deccan. India had extensive links to the Arab world alongside its better-known connections with Central Asia and Persia. Arab émigrés had always been employed by the Sultanate of Delhi, at the Mughal court and especially in the Deccani Sultanates, so much so that the eleventh/seventeenth century Deccan has been described as ‘the greatest centre of Arabic learning and literary composition outside the Levant’. Some Arab migrant may have brought the manuscript to India, quite possibly the Deccan which was under Shi‘ite rule from the tenth/sixteenth century, making it a tempting place for an Iraqi co-religionist to settle. Indeed, the Qutb-Shāhī dynasty of the Deccan was in fact descended from the Qaraquyunlu dynasty that ruled in Iran and Iraq until a couple of years before the copying of Add 836. Thus explaining the Iraqi-Indian connections of the manuscript does not pose a great problem.

The evidence cited above suggests that, whatever its scribe’s origins, Add 836 was written in ninth/fifteenth century Kūfa, as indicated by the colophon. Yet even more important than the provenance of Add 836 are the questions of how closely its text reproduces that of its fifth/eleventh century original, and of how accurate a translation of Bāl’amī’s Tārīkh nāma this was. Unfortunately, these questions are extremely difficult to answer, but we shall examine them in the next section.

The contents of Add 836 and its reliability

As we lack the original manuscript the Arabic translator of Bāl’amī used, it is impossible to assess with certainty the accuracy of his translation. However, we can get some idea of it by comparing the text of Add 836 with parts of the text of the Persian manuscripts that seem to be preserved with relatively little variation in other manuscripts. While this is by no means an entirely satisfactory tool, it is the best one available. Appendix II presents the text and translation of two passages in their Arabic and Persian


94 The most famous of these dynasties was the Qutb-Shāhīs. For details of the role of Arabic language and literature in the Deccan in this period see H.K. Sherwani, *History of the Qutb-Shāhī Dynasty*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974, p. 535ff.

versions with a commentary on their differences. In the first passage, the Arabic conveys the meaning of the Persian without embellishment and is generally quite close to the Persian text. Some of the differences are clearly due to problems in the Persian manuscript tradition, for the Arabic text contains a few details lost in the Persian version. In the second passage, the Arabic translation is considerably shorter than the Persian text. It is unknown whether this because the Arabic translator decided to abridge the text, or, more likely, that some of the Persian text is interpolated. However, it seems that where manuscript tradition allows us to make a fair comparison between the texts, as in the first instance, it supports the contention that Add 836 represents an unembellished translation of the Persian, following reasonably closely the text of the lost manuscript from which it was translated.

None of the manuscripts of the Arabic translation of the Tārikhnāma explicitly mention the Persian version or Bal'amī, as all lack the initial folios of the work. This proximity of the Arabic and Persian texts confirms that Add 836 was indeed a translation from Persian into Arabic, not an abridgement of Tabarī made directly from the original. However, at several points the manuscript contains the phrase qāla 'l-mutarjim, the translator said’. It is clear that these are references to Bal'amī, not to the translator of the text into Arabic, for they occur in passages where the Persian manuscripts also contain interventions by Bal'amī.96

The question of the accuracy of the ninth/fifteenth century copy is rather more difficult to prove conclusively given the lack of the original. There are errors in the transcription of certain Persian names, so Parvīz usually becomes Barwīn, and problems typical of manuscripts such as the repetition of a line owing to failure of the scribe’s concentration also occur. It is a rare manuscript that is wholly free of such faults, and they are relatively minor matters compared with the grand scale of interpolation in the Persian manuscripts. It is interesting to note that a concerted effort seems to have been made to use the oldest manuscripts available in copying during the Tīmūrid and Šafavīd periods. The Iranian scholar Bahār cites the Shāhnāma of Baysunqur and some Sa'dī manuscripts as examples of this tendency.97 It was during this period that made his copy of the Arabic Bal'amī, so it is possible that the cultural environment of his time encouraged him to seek out an antique manuscript to copy.

96 See for instance Add 836, f. 47b, where the phrase introduces an account of Alexander the Great’s career based on the Qur’an but absent from Tabarī.
97 M.T.Bahār, ‘Tarjama-i Tārīkh-i Tabarī’ in M.Qāsimzāda (ed.), Yādnāma-i Tabarī, Tehran: Markazi Tahqiqāt-i ‘Ālt-yi Kishvar, 1369, p. 539. However, this attention to textual reliability was not an innovation introduced in this period. We may see from the example of the eighth/fourteenth century author Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī’s Zafarnāma, in which he also presented an edition of Firdawsī’s Shāhnāma, that the former author went to great lengths to produce an accurate version of the great epic, collating manuscripts for six years. As he put it, ‘I took in hand many copies of the Shāhnāma to know pearl from shell [i.e. correct from corrupt text]. I selected one of them, of which the words were pleasant and fluent.’ See N.Rastegar, Ḥamdullāh Mustawfīs historisches Epos Zafarnāma, Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 79(1989), p. 187.
Surprisingly (and encouragingly from the point of view of the accuracy and antiquity of the translation) the Arabic text apart from the colophon is wholly free of Shi‘ite influences, in contrast to some of the Persian manuscripts, most notably RAS, Persian 22. Rather, episodes in Add 836 which one might expect to be doctored for sectarian reasons, such as the account of the Farewell Pilgrimage or the reign of ‘Uthmān, remain conventionally Sunnī in tone and content. The reason for these Kūfan Shi‘ites’ interest in the translation was probably because it provided an abridged, accessible version of Ṭabarī’s famous work.

One passage does provide a significant exception to this rule, which is Add 836’s treatment of the killing of Ḥusayn, an event of tremendous importance for the Shi‘a. Add 836’s version of events is more sympathetic to the Shi‘ite point of view than most other Persian manuscripts of the Tārikhānāma, as is discussed at length in Chapter 4.98 However, while the details of this passage in Add 836 differ from those in most later manuscripts, they in fact usually agree with those in our oldest dated extant version of the text, the late sixth/twelfth century Mashhad manuscript.99 The latter was produced in the strongly Sunnī atmosphere of Erzincan in Anatolia for the local ruler, and so it seems that this passage was not necessarily interpreted as implying a political allegiance to Shi‘ism. The fact that these two older manuscripts—which are clearly not closely related, as they do differ elsewhere—agree against the testimony of later manuscripts suggests that, at least in places, they provide a more conservative text that was subsequently altered in most extant manuscripts. Unfortunately, the Mashhad manuscript is too fragmentary to be of much use in a general survey of the Tārikhānāma such as this, although it must clearly be accorded greater significance in future studies. Nonetheless, it does confirm the importance of Add 836 and the other manuscripts of the Arabic translation as preserving a text of great antiquity.

Thus while it is not possible to assess the Arabic translation’s accuracy conclusively, it does seem to offer an older text than the Persian manuscripts generally do. Moreover, it presents a coherent, consistent narrative in simple language, just what Bal‘amī set out to do, yet which the Persian manuscripts fail to represent. So while the text of Add 836 may not represent an exact word-for-word translation of every line of Bal‘amī, it presents a more convincing and reliable text than the Persian manuscripts do with their frequently confused and interpolated accounts. For this reason we shall use Add 836 as our main textual witness in examining the Tārikhānāma, although the evidence of a selection of older Persian manuscript witnesses will also be cited to allow for comparison between the various versions of the text.

98 However, virtually all manuscripts (except Bodleian, Laud Or 323, which omits the episode entirely) show some sympathy for Ḥusayn and this need not be equated with Shi‘ite tendencies. This is confirmed by Add 836’s treatment of other episodes key to the Shi‘ite view of the past, such as the saqīfa meeting and the shūrā after ‘Umar’s death, where the text remains conventionally Sunnī in tone.
99 See Chapter 4.
Bal‘amî’s reshaping of ʿTabarî’s History

Despite the textual differences between the various Persian manuscripts, certain features stand out as characteristic of the Tārīkhnāma. The most striking of these is the excision of the isnāds and variant akhbār of the original and the consolidation of ʿTabarî’s dense and repetitive text into a smooth narrative. In addition, Bal‘amî often implicitly or explicitly contradicts ʿTabarî, and in some places clearly draws on different sources, some of which are cited in Arabic without a Persian translation. Furthermore, the relative emphasis given to certain topics varies immensely between the Arabic and Persian texts, and the Tārīkhnāma and ʿTabarî’s Arabic original probably even concluded at totally different points. This chapter will study how Bal‘amî adapted the History, demonstrating that Bal‘amî’s method of writing history differed substantially from ʿTabarî’s. As well as doing away with the apparatus of akhbār, isnāds and strict annalistic chronology upon which the Arabic History was based, Bal‘amî shows considerably more interest in tales of pre-Islamic prophets than does ʿTabarî, and bases much of his narrative on the Qurʾān, which is cited extensively in Arabic. Bal‘amî’s frequent use of Arabic and the Qurʾān and his emphasis on prophecy strongly suggest that his ‘translation’ was prompted more by religious than patriotic motives and was probably aimed at an educated audience that was at least passively acquainted with Arabic.

Bal‘amî’s alterations to the History may be divided into two main types: alterations of form, in other words the differences between ʿTabarî’s and Bal‘amî’s narrative methods; and alterations of content, such as Bal‘amî’s contradictions of ʿTabarî and his use of other sources to supplement the History. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of the following manuscripts: Add 836; RAS, Persian 22; Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285 and Aya Sofya 3050. These manuscripts have been selected as they offer some of the earliest complete versions of the text, the Persian ones all dating to the early eighth/fourteenth century, and Add 836 offering a text apparently as old as the fifth/eleventh century. Older manuscripts, such as Bodleian, Laud Or 323 or the Edirne and Mashhad manuscripts, have generally been excluded from consideration as they are incomplete. The aim is not to describe in a comprehensive manner the variants of the textual tradition—a task far beyond the scope of this book—but rather to give the reader some impression of its problems. However, many of the issues under consideration in this chapter apply to all the Persian manuscripts and the Arabic translation, and in some instances, such as the excision of isnāds, are specifically mentioned in the introduction to the Tārīkhnāma. Thus we may be confident that such alterations characterized the Sāmānid text.
1. Alterations of Form

The excision of isnāds and akhbār

Ṭabarī’s historiographical project has often been commended by modern scholars for his attitude towards his sources, seemingly quoting previous authors intact.¹ Rather than presenting the reader with a single authoritative account, Ṭabarī records different accounts (akhbār, sing, khabar) of the same event transmitted to him by his sources, some of which are repetitions varying only in minor details, others of which are entirely contradictory. Each khabar is provided with an isnād, a list of authorities who transmitted the report to the author, stretching back to the original source. Ostensibly, this allows the audience to judge to reliability of the report and its transmitters. Readers may select as their preferred version of an event any of a number of options presented by Ṭabarī, who appears merely to have collected and arranged the various alternative reports about it. Indeed, Ṭabarī absolves himself of responsibility for the contents of the History, claiming that he has merely recorded all the reports that have reached him. If the reader finds anything objectionable in them, then that is the fault of the transmitters, not of Ṭabarī.² The isnād is thus essential to Ṭabarī’s project, for it is only through this list of authorities that he can disclaim responsibility for the contents of the reports and present himself as the unbiased compiler.

As Stefan Leder has argued, the function of akhbār is primarily literary. They create an impression of reality and objectivity in the narrative. The narrator is distanced from the khabar by the isnād and rarely intervenes in the account. Characters’ motives and thoughts are often conveyed by direct speech rather than by comments from the narrator. Leder shows that the existence of irreconcilable accounts of the same event, sometimes transmitted on the authority of the same witnesses, indicate that the akhbār are fabricated, and are in fact a literary device that contributes to ‘the illusion of reality’.³

The removal of the isnāds and variant akhbār is superficially the most obvious difference between the Tārikhāma and Ṭabarī’s original. Indeed, Bal’ami specifically claims in his preface that one of his main purposes is to remove these repetitions. He does not at any point select information from just one report given by Ṭabarī, but his accounts contain a mixture of information taken from all Ṭabarī’s akhbār.⁴ While some

¹ For example, see C.E.Bosworth, ‘al-Ṭabarī’, in EI2, X, p. 13.
⁴ See Chapter 4.
scholars suggest that Tabari’s reports were arranged to favour a particular viewpoint, as far as Bal’ami was concerned, all were suitable for inclusion in his own reworking of the History, regardless of the strength of their isnāds or their positioning in Tabari’s narrative. The impression of objectivity and realism that modern scholars identify in Tabari is abandoned seemingly without any qualms by Bal’ami. The reader is now entirely in the hands of the narrator, who has selected, edited and re-presented all the information contained in the History.

Yet while Bal’ami’s method of writing history seems superficially to be entirely contrary to—Tabari’s and that of historiography based on akhbār in general—in fact they share more similarities than are initially apparent. As Boaz Shoshan has noted, Tabari in fact sometimes explicitly admits to excluding unsuitable reports from his History. For instance, with regard to the murder of the Caliph ‘Uthman, Tabari tells the reader that he has suppressed certain things reported by the transmitter Wāqidī ‘because I find them offensive’. It is also clear that Tabari did not treat his sources with quite the respect he claims. Since the discovery of an early manuscript of Sayf b. ‘Umar’s Kitāb al-Maghāzī it has become clear that Tabari does not simply copy his authorities’ reports. In fact, he alters whole sequences of events, dividing up single accounts in the original into multiple ones in his version. Conversely, there is evidence that sometimes he collapses different authorities’ account into one with a single isnād. This has been attributed by Ghada Osman to a failure of memory as Tabari had learned the account aurally. This cannot be ruled out, but given Tabari’s willingness to suppress certain accounts and rewrite others, it is reasonable to suspect it is sometimes a result of a deliberate policy. Wāqidī, who was one of Tabari’s sources, combined isnāds in the interests of concision, although he met with some criticism for this practice. Thus when Bal’ami ignores some of Tabari’s information and welds several of his accounts into one, he is in fact imitating not just exactly what Tabari himself had done with his sources, but probably what these sources had done themselves with the accounts they transmitted.

6 Shoshan, Poetics of Islamic Historiography, pp. 142–3, 147–8, 208.
7 Tabari, Ta’rikh, p. 2965.
It seems possible that a mediaeval readership found Ṭabarī’s pretensions to impartiality and objectivity rather less convincing than modern scholars have done. By the fourth/tenth century, the whole apparatus of isnāds and ḥabars in historical writing had become largely a literary device, one at least in part devised to give a realistic effect to historiography, as well as, in theory, asserting the reliability of the work. The very fact that Balʿamī could so easily remove this apparatus in the conservative environment of Transoxiana, the mainstay of traditionism, suggests that it was not seen even by the ulema as much more, at least when it came to historiography. Indeed, none of Balʿamī’s contemporaries used isnāds: Maqdisī, ‘Āmīrī and the translators of the Tafsīr and al-Suwād al-Aʿẓam all cite ḥadīths, but without any chains of authorities.

Chronology and the annalistic treatment of history

Ṭabarī’s narrative of Islamic history is defined by its division according to the hijrī year. In this respect, there is a marked stylistic break with the pre-Islamic sections of the History in which of course the possibility of using such a rigid chronology did not exist as this system of dating had not yet been invented. Where the hijrī chronology is used, the narrative is dominated by it. If an event occurs over more than one year, it will be recorded under the relevant years, the various relevant ḥabars being separated by perhaps tens of pages of material relating to other, unconnected events that occurred at these dates. Shoshan argues that this structure is adopted as part of Ṭabarī’s (or his authorities’) aspiration to ‘mimic reality’ by following the exact sequence of events in the real world.\(^{10}\) In contrast, Balʿamī jettisons this annalistic treatment of events in favour of a smooth linear narrative to which chronology is entirely subordinate. In Ṭabarī, chapters are headed by a title such as ‘Account of what happened in year x’, while in Balʿamī, the year in which events occurred is much less important, and is often not mentioned at all. Chapter titles relate to the events recorded rather than the chronology. Daniel argues that Ṭabarī’s and Balʿamī’s conceptions not just of chronology but also of history itself as well as cosmology are fundamentally different.\(^{11}\) He contends that Ṭabarī’s view of chronology was extremely contentious in the fourth/tenth century as some of the ḥabars he cited, in particular those from the transmitter Wahb b. Munabbih, indicated that the world was due to end soon. ‘[T]he shift from a cyclical and dynastic conception of pre-Islamic history to a linear model of Islamic history, with its year by year approach, seemed to mark a countdown to the imminent end of the world, a notion

10 Shoshan, Poetics of Islamic Historiography, p. 61. As Shoshan discusses at length (ibid, pp. 61–84), there are of course some exceptions to this, when the narrative moves backwards or forwards outside of the exact chronological order to create a certain literary effect. Nonetheless, it is broadly true that Ṭabarī’s narrative is subordinate to chronology.

which Bâl’âmî, and perhaps others at the Sâmânid court, felt compelled to refute repeatedly, at length and in detail. Daniel suggests that the Ismâ‘îlî implications of this, in particular the possibility that a new prophet was due to appear at the end of time, were particularly disturbing for Bâl’âmî, and may have been one of the reasons why Bâl’âmî insists that the duration of the world cannot be known by anyone.

However, a close examination of Tabâri’s and Bâl’âmî’s views of chronology and the duration of the world does not reveal great differences in approach. Tabâri piles up account after account which show the numerous differing views on the subject, concluding that God alone knows, while Bâl’âmî cites various authorities—among them Ibn ‘Abbâs and Wahb b. Munabbih—to make exactly the same point, that the duration of the world is unknowable. The same theme is accorded great importance by Maqdîsî in the Kitâb al-Bad’ wa-l-Târîkh, in which the author insists that the only accurate eschatological information is that recorded by the Qur’ân and tradition, and cannot be acquired through the intellect. Tradition, of course, holds varied and contradictory reports on the matter, so the upshot is the same as in Bâl’âmî and Tabâri: the duration of the world cannot be known.

Similar concerns are found in many other mediaeval Islamic works. The famous theologian Ghazâlî (d. 505/1111) devotes the first two chapters of his Tahâfut al-Falâṡîfa to condemning various views on the duration of the world, most of which he attributes to Greek philosophers. The objection to alternative views about the duration of the world is, as Maqdîsî and Ghazâlî indicate, that they are based on intellectual speculation, which is an unsound basis for understanding these matters. This tradition-based approach to eschatology is also reflected in the work of the Transoxianan philosopher ‘Âmirî, who, it will be recalled, wished to make philosophy acceptable to the religiously conservative. Rather than attempting to defend the views of the Greek philosophers, he briefly mentions a couple of different hadîths on the duration of the world, and concludes, citing the Qur’ân (33.63), that the day of judgement might be near. If the issue of the imminence of the day of judgement really had been a taboo in late fourth/tenth-century

12 Ibid, p. 182.
14 Tabâri, Târîkh, I, p. 15. Admittedly, Tabâri does express a preference for a report that suggests that there would be 500 years between the lifetime of the Prophet and the end of the world, but by the time the Târîkhnâma was commissioned this would still mean that 150 years were left until the day of judgement, which is not particularly imminent compared to most apocalyptic claims. For instance, when Abu ‘Abdallah b. ‘Amr wrongly predicted the date of the day of judgement, he said that the umma had been given a delay of 130 years enough to ensure he was not wrong twice. See S.Bashear, ‘Muslim apocalypses and the hour: a case study in traditional interpretation’, Israel Oriental Studies 13(1993), pp. 88–9, and pp. 95–6 for a discussion of this passage in Tabâri.
Bukhārā, ʿĀmirī would scarcely have risked outraging the very audience to whom he wished to appeal by mentioning it in such a casual way. Rather, ʿĀmirī, like Maqdisī and ʿBalʿamī, acknowledges the rectitude of the traditionalist view that the Qurʾān and ḥadīth are the only legitimate sources upon which to base discussion of the matter.

Even if, contrary to the evidence presented in Chapter 1, ʾIsmāʿīlīsm had remained a genuine threat in the mashriq during the reign of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Ṣāliḥ, it is quite incredible that he would have commissioned a translation of Ṭabarī if there was the slightest suspicion it could be interpreted in an ʾIsmāʿīlī manner. As stressed in my discussion in Chapter 1, this was an epoch of near hysteria regarding ʾIsmāʿīlīsm and the Sāmānī state would not have wished to be associated with anything even remotely connected with it. Moreover, one would expect to find some reference in contemporary sources to the existence of such an interpretation of Ṭabarī’s famous History but none appears to exist.

There is little basic difference between Ṭabarī’s and ʿBalʿamī’s view of chronology and cosmology. Therefore, we do not need to look for political or theological reasons to explain why ʿBalʿamī dropped the annalistic structure of the History. Rather, it is a literary phenomenon introduced for much the same reasons and to a similar effect as the excision of the Ḯādīlās and ṣaḥāḥār. It creates a much more easily readable text, for no longer does the record of other events obtrude into the account due to the demands of chronology. As with the removal of the Ḯādīlās, this is necessarily at the expense of some of the realistic effect Shoshan detects in the original. Nor can readers of the Tārikhnāma rest under the illusion that they are reading a dispassionate record of information brought together by the editor from various sources and arranged rigidly but logically by year as the audience of Ṭabarī’s original might. The reader of the Tārikhnāma is entirely in the hands of the omniscient narrator, ʿBalʿamī himself. However, as I have argued above, it is probably that mediaeval audiences found this less concerning than modern ones would, for they were always reliant on omniscient narrators, be they Ṭabarī, Sayf or Wāqidī.

**ʿBalʿamī’s use of Qurʾānic and Arabic quotations**

One of the most curious features of the Tārikhnāma is the presence of numerous quotations in Arabic, many of which seem to have been left untranslanted. Often these quotations are from the Qurʾān, and the manuscript tradition is inconclusive on whether ʿBalʿamī provided translations of these passages—in some manuscripts they are followed by a Persian version, in some they are left as they are in Arabic. ¹⁸ Non-Qurʾānic passages in Arabic are rarely translated.

18 For example in Fatih 4285, a Persian translation is not supplied, whereas one is in Aya Sofya 3050.
I. Qur'ānic quotations

The majority of Arabic quotations in the Tārikhnāma are Qur'ānic, and curiously, Bal'amī uses these Qur'ānic references more often than Tabarī himself. This is clear from the example of Bal'amī’s account of the fighting at the Battle of Badr, in which much of the Tārikhnāma’s narrative is structured around verses from the Sūrat al-Anfāl, a sūra traditionally interpreted as being devoted in part to Badr. Tabarī cites al-Anfāl only twice in the entirety of his account, including all variants,19 while Bal'amī cites verses from it at least seven times in an account which is distinctly shorter.20 This use of the Qur'ān allows Bal'amī to expand on Tabarī’s account by enlarging on events to which reference is made in al-Anfāl but which are ignored or merely alluded to in the Arabic History.

Bal'amī first cites al-Anfāl when he recounts Muḥammad’s dream on the night before the battle, a dream of the Qurashī army drowning, which was ‘the first dream of the defeat of Quraysh. Then God Exalted revealed, “When God showed thee them in a dream as few; and had he shown them as many, you would have lost heart and disputed about the matter; but God saved; He knows the thoughts in the breasts’’ (Q. 8. 44).21 The action then moves to the next day, when the Meccans advance to the edge of Badr and see Muḥammad is nearer the water at Badr than they. ‘God Exalted said, “When you were on the nearer bank and they were on the farther bank (Q. 8. 42) that is, you were nearer to the water of Badr and they were further…. ‘’22 As the Qurashīs advance one by one they ridicule Muḥammad’s followers, but again Muḥammad is told by God, ‘When God showed you them in your eyes as few,23 when you encountered, and made you few in their eyes, that God might settle a matter that was done; and unto God all matters are returned’ (Q. 8. 44).24

After this section, which is structured around these scriptural references, there is no reference to the Qur'ān while the next events are covered. These are the start of the fighting with Ḥamza’s killing of a Makhzūmī tribesman trying to obtain water, thereby polluting the well. Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām then attempts to persuade the other Qurashīs to

19 Tabarī. Ta’rikh, I, pp. 1288 (‘Urwa’s letter) and 1320 ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb on the angelic assistance (discussed below)).
20 Add 836, ff. 87a–90b; RAS 22 in Tārikhnāma-i Tabarī gardānīda-i mansūb bi-Bal'amī. M.Rawshan (ed.), Tehran: Soroush, 1378/1999, III, pp. 107–146; Fatih 4285, ff. 175b–185a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 186b-189b. Aya Sofya 3050 presents us with severe problems at this juncture, because it contains a much shortened account of Badr lacking the majority of the Qur’ānic quotations from al-Anfāl, although including some not present in the other manuscripts.
21 Add 836, f. 87b; Tārikhnāma, III, p. 121; Fatih 4285, f. 178b. The same events are recorded without the Qur’ānic quotations in Aya Sofya 3050.
22 Add 836, f. 87b; Tārikhnāma, III, p. 121; Fatih 4285, f. 178b.
23 Add 836: three hundred. This is a copying error. Leiden University Library, Or 3103, f. 180b, contains the correct version.
24 Add 836, f. 88a; Tārikhnāma, III, p. 122; Fatih 4285, f. 179b.
give up the fight and retreat.\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Bal'ами} follows the debate in the Meccan camp as \textit{Abū Jahl} furiously refuses to give up. The absence of \textit{Qur'ānic} quotations is probably due to the concentration of this section on the unbelieving Quraysh, rendering their introduction inappropriate.\textsuperscript{26}

The narrative returns to the Muslims, who now lack water due to the pollution of the well. God comes to their aid: ‘[He sent] down on you water from heaven, to purify you thereby, and to put away from you the defilement of Satan, and to strengthen your hearts, and to confirm your feet’ (Q. 8. 11). At dawn, God reveals, ‘If victory you are seeking, victory has already come upon you’ (Q. 8. 19).\textsuperscript{27} While skirmishes between Quraysh and the Muslims commence, \textit{Mūhammad} takes \textit{Abū Bakr} to his improvised quarters and tells him that the angels, headed by Gabriel, have come to help. During the fighting, God tells the angels to stand in line with the Muslims while He inspires them with hatred of the unbelievers, and as He commands the wind to blow dust into the infidels’ faces, the angels and the believers attack. When the believers stretch their swords against the enemy, the angels often get there first and cut off the Qurashī soldiers’ heads. Due to the angelic intervention the Muslims are victorious.\textsuperscript{28}

This story of the angelic intervention appears in such detail only in \textit{Bal'ами}. It is alluded to by \textit{Tabarī}, who records it as a dream:

\begin{quote}
The Messenger of God slept a light sleep in the shelter for a while; then he awoke and said, ‘\textit{Abū Bakr}, God’s aid has come to you. Here is Gabriel, taking hold of the reins of his horse and leading it, and there is dust on its front teeth.’\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

At the end of \textit{Tabarī}'s account of the fighting, there are three more brief allusions to angelic intervention in accounts according to various authorities, and one direct mention in a \textit{khabar} the \textit{Isnād} of which is traced through \textit{Ibn Iṣḥāq} to \textit{Ibn 'Abbās}:

\begin{quote}
The sign of the angels on the day of Badr was white turbans which trailed down their backs, and on the day of Ḥunayn it was red turbans. The angels did not fight on any day except the day of Badr; on the other days they were assistants and helpers, but they struck no blows.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} Add 836, f. 88a; \textit{Tārīkhūma}, III, p. 123; Fatih 4285, f. 179b.
\textsuperscript{26} Aya Sofya 3050 (f. 187b) recounts the Makhzūmī’s killing, but makes no mention of the debates among the Qurashī tribesmen or of \textit{Ḥakīm b. Hizām}.
\textsuperscript{27} Add 836, f. 88a; \textit{Tārīkhūma}, III, p. 124; Fatih 4285, f. 179b.
\textsuperscript{28} Aya Sofya 3050 has the same story (f. 188a) but places it after the quotation of Q. 8.9 which comes later in the narrative in other manuscripts.
Ibn Hishām and Wāqidī also contain brief references to this event,31 but no author appears to give it the prominence that Bālaml does. In the latter, the angelic intervention is the decisive factor in assuring the Muslim victory, while in the other authors it appears more as a footnote than an essential part of the narrative. The origin of the story is in the sūras Āl ‘Imrān and al-Anfāl: ‘When you were calling upon your Lord for succour, and He answered you, “I shall reinforce you with a thousand angels riding behind you”’ (Q. 8. 9). The remainder of Bālaml’s narrative is relatively close to Ṭabarī’s account, which relies largely on the traditionist Ibn Hishām, and the closest parallel for the story of the angelic intervention at Badr is not in Ṭabarī but in the Sāmānid Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī. The detail of the narrative is not identical, but it does form the climax of the Persian Tafsīr’s account of Badr, which cites a long passage from Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān at its conclusion:

The infidel...started fighting fiercely. At the same time God sent the Prophet help from the heavens in the form of angels. The Prophet took one handful of dust and threw it in the infidels’ faces saying, ‘Their faces are deformed.’ The infidels became blind and all the Meccan notables who were there were killed.... God Exalted gave the Prophet victory over them by sending five thousand angels to help. This is what God said, God most surely helped you at Badr, when you were utterly abject. So fear God and haply you will be thankful. When thou saidst to the believers, ‘Is it not enough for you that your Lord should reinforce you with three thousand angels sent down upon you? Yea; if you are patient and godfearing, and the foe come against you instantly, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand swooping angels’ (Q. 3. 123–125).32

A second mention is included in the rather brief commentary on al-Anfāl, where the story, closing with Q. 8. 9, again forms the conclusion of the text:

Leaving the shelter the Prophet saw Gabriel coming with a thousand angels with spears. He told the army, ‘Hasten and attack.’ The Muslim army attacked and the angels went before the men and killed. The sign of those whom the angels killed is that no blood was shed, but from those whom men killed blood flowed like a river.33

33 Ibid, III, p. 596. The translators add the comment, This story [of Badr] has been related in full under Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān, apart from this, which is related here.’
There are evident discrepancies between the versions in the Persian Tafsīr and Tārikhāma: the Tafsīr, for instance, holds Muḥammad responsible for throwing dust in the infidels’ faces, while Bal’amī attributes it to divine intervention. However, it is only the two Sāmānid texts that give such prominence to the tale of angelic intervention, suggesting that both texts share a common interpretation of the past which is distinct from that of their source.

Other examples of such similarities between the Tārikhāma and the Tafsīr occur relatively frequently. In their accounts of the death of Pharaoh by drowning under the waters of the Red Sea, both quote Q. 10.90, 10.91 and 40.84. These Qur’ānic quotes, as in the case of the story of the fighting at Badr, are actually part of the narrative itself in both cases and not a commentary on it. Yet while the citation of the Qur’ān so often in a Tafsīr is unsurprising, it is more remarkable in the Tārikhāma. Bal’amī’s extensive use of the Qur’ān suggests that, even more than Ṭabarî, he saw his task as to write sacred history, and the numerous Qur’ānic citations reinforce the significance of God’s constant role in the affairs of the umma.

II. Non-Qur’ānic quotations

Apart from Qur’ānic verses, the Tārikhāma contains many other passages in Arabic, some of which appear to be taken from Ṭabarî’s text, some from elsewhere. The latter will be discussed in due course. Most of these quotations are lines of poetry, but some prose passages exist as well. One of the most significant occurs in the Tārikhāma’s account of two false prophets who arose in Arabia after the Prophet’s death, Musaylima and Sajāh, where it comprises the dialogue between the two, and in Musaylima’s prophecies and rulings. In both cases, the quotations are in saj’, the rhyming prose that was favoured by pre-Islamic kuhhān (soothsayers) and which doubtless influenced the style of the Qur’ān. The Arabic, which is often somewhat obscure, has been preserved accurately in both Persian manuscripts and Add 836.

The literary effect of these quotations relies on them being in Arabic saj’. Musaylima’s references to the revelation of sūras to him, and the similarity yet inferiority of his saj’ to that of the Qur’ān, highlight the falsehood of his prophetic pretensions. Had they been translated into Persian, they would have lost much of this effect. Nonetheless, it is curious that there do not appear to be many manuscripts in which they are provided with a Persian translation following the Arabic original, unlike some of the Qur’ānic passages.

Significantly, these quotations presume a good understanding of Arabic on the part of the audience. It is possible that the Qur’ān was sufficiently well known that to quote it in
a Persian work would not necessarily have presumed an audience’s sound knowledge of Arabic, but rather merely a recollection of the meaning of memorized material. It is, however, highly unlikely that the audience could have had any prior familiarity with the words of Musaylima and Sajah unless indeed they had read Tabari, our main source for this story. This indicates that Bal’ami’s intended audience must have been educated, and that his preface—itself in Arabic—is somewhat disingenuous when it states that that Manṣūr b. Nūḥ ordered the History to be translated so that ordinary people could understand it. This impression is reinforced when one examines the Tarjuma-i Tafsīr, itself also provided with an Arabic preface. This work provides translations of all the Qur’anic sūras, but in the parts of the Tafsīr translation which are devoted to exegesis, no translation of Qur’anic verses is given, even if the verses quoted are from a totally different sūra. Thus it appears that both translations were aimed at an audience that was at least to some extent competent in Arabic.

Accentuating disagreement: Bal’ami as narrator

One of the most perplexing features of the Persian Tārikhnāma is Bal’ami’s tendency to disagree explicitly with Tabari, dismissing the version of events he has given. Firstly, it is unclear why Bal’ami should want to undermine Tabari’s reputation for being authoritative, which would, one might imagine, be detrimental to whatever purpose Bal’ami was seeking to attach his name to his work. Secondly, these interventions by Bal’ami often concern matters that appear to be unimportant, and sometimes downright trivial. Thirdly, sometimes the Persian Tārikhnāma includes statements about the Arabic original that are demonstrably untrue, for instance stating that a passage is not present in Tabari, which does actually exist there.36 It is true that the Arabic translation preserved in Add 836 includes fewer of these references to deficiencies in Tabari’s text than the Persian manuscripts, although this might be due to a tendency to abridge the Persian slightly. Nonetheless, they do exist, and I examine two instances below where the Arabic and Persian manuscripts of the Tārikhnāma concur in disagreeing with Tabari. This suggests that the comments may be traced back to Bal’ami himself.

Our first example occurs during the well-known story of how Moses received the Tablets with the Commandments from God.37 Bal’ami records Moses’ ascent of Mt Sinai, accompanied by 70 good men. Bal’ami then interjects:

36 Daniel, Bal’ami’s account of early Islamic history’, pp. 166, 170.
37 Add 836, f. 29a–b; Tārikhnāma, I, p. 316ff.
\(\text{Tabari}\) stated that Moses went alone, not with seventy [men]. When he had finished praying, he found many of his people had worshipped the calf, so he killed many of them. Then God forgave them, and he went with those seventy to pray to God, and to ask for the Torah for the Tribe of Israel. This is not correct.\(^38\)

\(\text{Bal'am}\) explains that the 70 went with Moses and said they would not believe him unless they could actually see God, for which they are rewarded with a thunderbolt. He argues that Moses said, ‘My Lord, hadst Thou willed

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\text{Thou wouldst have destroyed them before, and me. Wilt Thou destroy us for what the foolish ones of us have done? (Q. 7.155), and therefore must have been after the incident with the calf, as God then accepted the people’s repentance.}\text{ }\text{\(\text{Tabari}\)’s account is based on the respected Companion of the Prophet Ibn ‘Abbās, cited by \(\text{Bal'am}\) on occasion,}\(^39\) and is transmitted by Ibn Ishāq, whom \(\text{Bal'am}\) quotes elsewhere. It is hard to imagine that this minor difference with \(\text{Tabari}\) can have been one of the burning issues that made \(\text{Mansūr b. Nūh}\) require a new adaptation of the History. Indeed, the innocuous nature of the passage is confirmed by the Persian translation of \(\text{Tabari}\)’s \(\text{Tafsīr}\), which records the same account as \(\text{Bal'am}\) does, but draws no attention to it and does not even mention any difference with \(\text{Tabari}\).\(^40\)

A second example occurs in one of the most prominent places in the \(\text{Tārikhāmā}\). Both \(\text{Bal'am}\) and \(\text{Tabari}\) separate their discussions of pre-Islamic and Islamic history by a discussion of the duration between creation and \(\text{Muḥammad}\)’s birth, known as the \(\text{Rūzgār-i ‘Ālam}\) in Persian.\(^41\) However, while the birth of the Prophet is dealt with in the pre-Islamic section, \(\text{Muḥammad}\)’s genealogy introduces the Islamic portions of both \(\text{Tabari}\)’s and \(\text{Bal'am}\)’s histories, followed by accounts of his early life down to the \(\text{hijra}\). The genealogy traces \(\text{Muḥammad}\)’s ancestry back to Ishmael, Abraham and ultimately Adam. \(\text{Bal'am}\) chooses this prominent point to stress again his disagreement

\(^38\) Text of Add 836; RAS, Persian 22 and Aya Sofya 3050 add, ‘And this does not accord with the account in the \(\text{Qur'ān}\), and anything that disagrees with the \(\text{Qur'ān}\) is wrong. In the \(\text{Qur'ān}\), it is stated that…’. The source for this is given as the \(\text{Tafsīr. Tārikhāmā}, I, p. 319; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 71a; Fatih 4285, f. 64b, where the text differs slightly, does not attribute this view to \(\text{Tabari}\) but to a group of people’.

\(^39\) Add 836, f. 2a; \(\text{Tārikhāmā}, p. 6; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 7a.

\(^40\) \(\text{Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Tabari}, I, p. 67.

\(^41\) In some Persian manuscripts, this account is moved to the start of the work where it immediately follows the doxology.
with Tabari. The very first sentence of the Islamic portion of the text states in the Arabic translation of Balami, ‘The translator said that Tabari mentioned different accounts of [Muhammad’s] lineage from Ma’add b. ‘Adnān back to Ishmael b. Abraham. In some of them he recorded that there were thirteen ancestors, in some nineteen. We have no need of [discussing] this difference.”42 Similar comments are found in many of the Persian manuscripts.43 In fact, Tabari gives several different versions from various authorities, but in none of them is the number of ancestors recorded as 13 or 19.44 Furthermore, the discussion of these variants is accorded much less prominence in Tabari’s text, where it is relegated to the end of the discussion of the Prophet’s ancestry.

Elton Daniel has given further examples of these interventions by Balami.45 He attributes some of them to the possibility that the Arabic text of Tabari available in the fourth/tenth century differs from today’s, and others to a need to respond to the political circumstances in which the Sāmānid state found itself. However, the evidence cited in the previous chapter suggests that Tabari’s text has been comparatively well preserved, while the discussion above demonstrates the insignificant nature of some of the issues about which Balami disagrees with Tabari. Conversely, many of Balami’s alterations to Tabari’s work are not emphasized, no matter how important. Entire chapters, for example the story of the King Shaddād b. ‘Imliq,46 are introduced without any comment to make the reader aware they are not to be found in Tabari’s original.

Thus Balami’s interventions do not reflect the importance of the issues at stake. Rather than being disagreements about historical facts, they must be seen as a literary device that in fact aims to bolster the authoritative nature of the Persian translation. Precisely by picking on insignificant issues about which to disagree with Tabari, Balami wished to give the impression of being better informed and more authoritative than the original whilst avoiding an open dispute with him on truly contentious matters. In this respect, Balami’s interventions may be compared with the detailed, realistic descriptions that decorate many of the akhbār of the Arabic History, as Shoshan has

42 Add 836, f. 71b.
43 The different accounts of the number of Muḥammad’s ancestors seems to be responsible for some instability in the Persian manuscript tradition at this point, although disagreement with Tabari is frequently expressed. RAS Persian 22 claims to take its account from a Kitāb al-Ansāb (Tārikhnāma, III, pp. 2–3), but cites alternative rivāyats in which the number of ancestors between Ma’add and Ishmael is given variously as five, six or ten. Despite the different numbers given, like Add 836, the manuscript concludes that ‘we have no need of this difference’. The text of Fatih 4285 (f. 151b) is very close to RAS Persian 22 at this point, giving the number of ancestors as three, five or ten, and also citing the Kitāb al-Ansāb. Aya Sofya 3050, f. 172b, contains no mention of any disagreement over the issue. See Chapter 2 for another example of the instability of the Persian texts at this point.
44 Tabari, Ta’rikh, I, pp. 1113–23.
46 Add 836, ff. 10a–11a; Tārikhnāma, I, pp. 120–3; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 27b–28b.
the intention of these is to create an impression of historical reality, while the aim of Bal'ami’s comments is to emphasize the accuracy of his own version of history and its superiority even to that of the renowned Tabari.

Admittedly, as Elton Daniel remarks, Bal’ami doubtless detected a number of axes being ground by Tabari, whose work is by no means the model of unbiased objectivity it purports to be. By contradicting Tabari, Bal’ami may have sought to distance himself from some of his prejudices, but more importantly he staked his own claim to be an independent historian. Tabari’s History famously preserves the disagreements of the author’s sources. As Robinson comments, ‘preserving disagreement—indeed even accentuating it—is an important feature of traditionist historiography… While Tabari, the historian, preserves and presents disagreement after disagreement in his History, al-Tabari, the exegete and jurist, almost always tells us exactly what to make of points of Qur’anic interpretation and law.’

Bal’ami of course had removed all these disagreements, the variant accounts which make up Tabari’s History, and created a coherent, flowing but superficially bland narrative. It is by stressing his differences with Tabari, often over seemingly irrelevant or trivial points, that Bal’ami alerts the reader to the fact that his work is more than a translation and that he himself must be considered a true historian, preserving and accentuating differences.

2. Alterations of content

Additional sources used in the Tārikhnāma

As well as incorporating some Arabic passages of the History into his Persian adaptation, Bal’ami also explicitly mentions at several points that he has taken information from other sources to supplement Tabari. As ever, the problems with the manuscript tradition make it extremely difficult to identify which passages were added by Bal’ami and which by later redactors. Sources alluded to in some Persian manuscripts are often not mentioned at all in the Arabic retranslation of Bal’ami. This could mean that they are later interpolations, but it could also be another consequence of the Arabic Tārikhnāma’s occasional tendency to concision. Yet even when there are passages common to both the Persian versions of the Tārikhnāma and its Arabic retranslation, it is not possible to reach any categorical conclusions as to whether these are interpolated, for we are entirely ignorant about the first century of the work’s transmission. Indeed, even if the references to books and authors that are found in the Tāzikhnāma are the work of Bal’ami himself,

47 Shoshan, Poetics of Islamic Historiography, pp. 8–24.
48 Daniel, Bal’ami’s account of early Islamic history’, p. 181.
49 Robinson, Islamic Historiography, p. 79.
that does not necessarily mean that these books were actually consulted by him. Pre-modern authors frequently cited famous works merely to impress their audiences; likewise Ṭabarist himself would be mentioned by numerous authors whose works bore no relation to his in order to make their scholarship seem more impressive. So when, for instance, the Tārikhnama contains a reference to the Shāhnāma of Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, it is difficult to judge the significance of this.

However, it seems likely that Bal'amī drew on additional sources. For instance, the story of Bahrām Chūbīn, from whom the Sāmānīd dynasty claimed descent, is treated very differently in Ṭabarist and Bal'amī. According to some manuscripts, the Akhbar-i ʿAjam (‘History of Iran’), an unidentified text, served as a source for this episode in the Tārikhnama. In this section, I shall attempt to identify and discuss some of the most important Arabic sources, although for the reasons mentioned above this must remain somewhat hypothetical. Given that no New Persian sources older than Bal'amī survive (if they were ever written), it would be futile to attempt to identify them.

The most readily identifiable borrowings are the lines of Arabic poetry quoted by Bal'amī, not all of which originate in Ṭabarist (at least as far as we can judge from the available text of the History). While Bal'amī quotes Arabic verse rarely compared to Ṭabarist, important episodes often have at least one such quotation. For instance, most texts of the Tārikhnama contain several poetic citations in the section concerning the death of Ḥusayn. As in Ṭabarist’s narrative, the poetry serves as ‘a commentary or a retrospective reflection on the events that unfold’. The sources of those verses which are absent from Ṭabarist’s Arabic are various. Sometimes these quotations are transposed from elsewhere in Ṭabarist’s text, but frequently they originate in a different context in other works. Discussing Khālid b. al-Walīd’s extravagant marriage to Mujā‘a’s daughter, Bal'amī says,

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50 Add 836 and other manuscripts of the Arabic retranslation: text missing; Tārikhnama, I, p. 5; Fatih 5285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 2a mentions it just as the Shāhnāma-i Būzurg without attributing an author to it.
51 Add 836, n/a; Tārikhnama, II, p. 764; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a.
52 Five separate quotations in Add 836 (ff. 195b-197b); seven in RAS Persian 22 (Tārikhnama, IV, pp. 703–715); five in Fatih 4285, ff. 288a-291a; four in Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 303b-306a.
53 Shoshan, Poetics of Islamic Historiography, p. 82.
54 Thus for instance a line of verse declaimed by Yazīd on seeing Ḥusayn’s head (Add 836, f. 197b) is adapted from a completely different context later in the Tārikh (III, p. 566) where, however, it is nonetheless attributed to Yazād. This line is not to be found in RAS, Persian 22, Fatih 4285, or Aya Sofya 3050.
A poet named Ziyād b. ʿUmayr al-Laythi, a friend of ʿUmar, composed [this poem] and sent it to ʿUmar for him to show to Abū Bakr:

Tell the Commander of the Faithful/
from a well-wisher who does not wish treachery,
The girl’s value is one million in all/
while the chiefs of the army spend the night hungry.55

The lines are not to be found in the Arabic History, but are recorded by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), according to whom they were composed on a completely different occasion. He says they were written by Ibn Abī Anas (Ibn Hammām), and sent to ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr on the occasion of his brother Muṣṭāb’s marriage.56 Balʿamī may have taken the lines from some earlier source such as Ibn Qutayba and deliberately changed the poet’s name and the context; or he may have consulted an independent Arabic source that has not been traced yet. I cautiously favour the second option, as it is not obvious why Balʿamī would need to change the poet’s name. Fortunately, the sources of other Arabic quotations may be more readily identified and these we shall now investigate.

*Ibn Ishāq’s Sīra*

One of the most interesting passages for our investigation may be traced back to the work of Ibn Ishāq, an early Arab historian (before 159/767). It is a line of poetry attributed in the Tārikhnāma to the uncle of Muḥammad, Abū Ṭalib, defending his nephew from his Meccan enemies, and it is cited thus:

55 Add 836, f. 132b; A third verse is added in Tārikhnāma, III, p. 401; Fatih 4285, f. 245b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 242a.
Fa-wallāhi lā wasalā ilayka bi-jam‘īhimī
ḥattā ughayyibu fī ‘l-turābī dafīnān
Fa-mdi li-mrika mā ‘alayka ghaddādatunī
fa-bshir wa-qarr bi-dhālika ‘uyīnān
Fa-laqad da’wotawa-qulta annaka nāsilunī
wa-laqad da‘īkaqabla dhālika amīnān
Law lā ‘l-malāmata aw ḥadhārī masabbatinī
la-wajadtanī sāmīnī li-dhālika
makīnan

‘By God, they shall not entirely come to you/until I am buried in earth, So
go about your business without stain/announce the news and bring joy
You proclaimed and said you are an adviser/they called you “trustworthy”
[previously. Were it not for blame and insults/you would find me truly
committed.’

The version preserved in one of the several extant recensions of Ibn runs as follows:

Wallāhi lan yāsilā ilayhi bi-jam‘īhimī
ḥattā uwassidu fī ‘l-turābī dafīnān
Indī li-mrika mā ‘alayka ghaddādatunī
wa-bshir wa-qarr bi-dhālika minka
‘uyīnān
Du‘ā‘i tānī wa-‘ullunta annaka nāsilunī
wa-laqad sādqa‘wa-kunta qidman amīnān
Wa-‘aradātī dīnān qād ‘arafta annahul
khayr adyānī ‘l-barrīyyati dīnān
Law lā ‘l-malāmata aw ḥadhārī subbatinī
la-wajadtanī sāmīnī li-dhālika mubīnān

57 MS: sāḥīb.
58 Add 836, f. 76b; RAS Persian 22, n/a; Fatih 4285, f. 162a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 180a.
line in this quotation, absent in Bal’ami-means, ‘You showed a religion which you knew was the
best religion of mankind.’
The differences between the texts are small, especially given that Ibn Ishāq’s text was already 200 years old by the time Bal’amī was writing. It seems likely that was one of the sources used by Bal’amī.

It is difficult to assess Daniel has suggested that the preference for accounts from a work called al-Maghāzī expressed occasionally in the Tārikhnāma is a reference to Wāqidī’s work of the same name. However, Ibn Ishāq also wrote a work named al-Maghāzī, although it has not come down to us, and it is possible that this was a source for the Tārikhnāma. Yet it is extremely difficult to trace such influence directly as the text of Ibn Ishāq is if anything in an even worse state than that of Bal‘amī. Our main source for Ibn Ishāq’s text is a later redaction of the parts dealing with the biography of the prophet, the Sīra, made by Ibn Hishām (d. 208/834). At first glance it appears to preserve the original quite well, with some editorial comments added by the redactor and the omission of some of the poetry. This is, however, an entirely false impression. The publication by Hamīdallah in 1976 of a manuscript preserved in the Qarawiyyīn Library in Fez obliged scholars to revise their view of Ibn Hishām’s edition, for it presented the Sīra in a hitherto unknown recension, that of Yūnus b. Bukayr. Ibn Bukayr both omits much of the information present in Ibn Hishām’s edition and includes a good deal of additional material, and in some ways seems to offer an older text. The verses cited above are to be found only in Ibn Bukayr, not in Ibn Hishām.

The matter is complicated further by the fact that Ibn Bukayr also wrote a work called Ziyādat al-Maghāzī the text of which is present in the same manuscript. Muranyi estimates that from the second part of Ibn Bukayr’s text to the end there are 18 passages which have authorities other than Ibn Ishāq. Even passages which are common to both Ibn Hishām and Ibn Bukayr are not identical. Moreover, there are fragments of Ibn Ishāq preserved in various recensions in other works. Tābārī, for example, frequently cites the recension of Salama b. Faḍl al-Abrash. Sellheim has examined some of these, and has found five different accounts of Muḥammad’s first revelation attributed to Ibn Ishāq in various sources. It is impossible to reconstruct Ibn Ishāq’s original, and it is equally hard to ascertain which recension Bal‘amī was using: while the lines above come from Ibn Bukayr, there are also similarities to his

63 Ibid, p. 234.
al-Anfal, just as Bal'ami's text is, although the texts themselves do differ significantly.65 treatment of Badr in another recension of Ibn Ishaq—a fragment preserved in the Zahiriyah library in Damascus. The narrative in this manuscript is structured around quotations from

So while a recension of Ibn Ishaq was probably used in the composition of the Tarihnama, the state of the text of the former precludes an investigation into the extent of this. Only the occasional evidence of poetry such as that cited above can indicate the origins of Bal'amī material, and even this is not conclusive as it is possible that Bal'amī took it from another, unidentified source that quoted them. Furthermore, as so often, the manuscript tradition of the Tarihnama does not allow us to attribute this material to Bal'amī with absolute certainty; although it is present in the conservative text of Add 836 and some Persian manuscripts, it is omitted in others. Whatever the precise influence of Ibn Ishaq on the structure and content of the Tarihnama, it is clear that Bal'amī treated Tabari in much the same way as his own later editors and copyists would approach him, by discarding and dismissing much of the original and using other, unacknowledged sources to supplement it.

Ibn A'ītum al-Kūfī's Kitāb al-Futūh

It has long been recognized that the Kitāb al-Futūh (‘Book of Conquests’) by Ibn A'ītum al-Kūfī (third/ninth century?)66 is the source of material in some versions of the Tarihnama.67 For example, some manuscripts of the Tarihnama preserve a Persian version of the text of the agreement between Qutayba b. Muslim, the Arab conqueror of Central Asia, and the ruler of Samarqand on the surrender of the city to the Muslim in 93/712, which is recorded by the Kitāb al-Futūh.68 Admittedly, the text is slightly abbreviated in the Tarihnama, but it is easily recognizable as the same document translated into Persian.69 Elsewhere, the Tarihnama may preserve passages of the original Arabic text of the Kitāb al-Futūh (Ibn A'ītum al-Kūfī used very little poetry in his book, so it cannot have been one of the sources of the verse in the Tarihnama). An example of this is the will of the Caliph Abū

68 Tarihnama, IV, p. 845.
69 See O.I. Smirnova, ‘K istorii Samarkanskogo dogovora 712 g.’, Kratkie Soobshchenii Instituta Vostokovedeniia 38(1960), pp. 68–79.
Bakr, not recorded by Ṭabarī. The versions in the 70 Tārikhnāma and the Kitāb al-Futūḥ 71 are close: 71

I. Tārikhnāma


II. Kitāb al-Futūḥ


The version in the Kitāb al-Futūḥ is admittedly somewhat shorter than that in the Tārikhnāma despite being the earlier text. It may be that the rather late extant manuscripts of the former have abridged the text, or alternatively merely that the material was derived from an unknown source common to Ibn Aṭham al-Kūfī and the Tārikhnāma. It is interesting to note that neither the passages relating to Central Asia nor the will of Abu Bakr exist in Add 836. The latter manuscript does record Abu Bakr’s appointment of ʿUmar as his successor, but not in these precise terms. At the very least, this suggests that the passage was probably not excised for sectarian reasons in the Shīʿite environment in which the manuscript was copied. Moreover, there would be no obvious reason to delete material on the presumably innocuous topic of the Muslim conquest of Central Asia.

These facts indicate that the interpolation of passages either directly derived from or common to Ibn Aṭham al-Kūfī dates to some point after the mid-fifth/eleventh century when the Arabic translation of Balʿamī was

70 Tārikhnāma, III, p. 422.

composed. There also exists a Persian translation of Ibn Aṭham, made around 596/1199 by Haravī, which, just like Balʿamī’s Tārikhnāma, swiftly eclipsed its Arabic
original in popularity. This, however, is not the Tārkhnāma’s source for documents such as Abu Bakr’s will are given there in Persian translation and not in Arabic at all. It seems likely that the passages from Ibn A’tham were added at some point between the eleventh and the end of the twelfth centuries, after which point one would expect Haravī’s Persian version to have been used.

One of the clear indications that these passages were interpolated after Bal’amī’s time is the especial instability of the text at these points. Although many Persian manuscripts include these passages (e.g. RAS, Persian 22 and Fatih 4285), by no means all do. For example, the discussion of Qutayba’s campaigns in Central Asia in Fatih 4281 is much shorter than in most manuscripts, and the conquest of Samarqand is scarcely mentioned at all, and certainly not the peace treaty. Instead, the manuscript gives a long description of the Muslim capture of the town of Baykand, material which it claims to have taken from a Kitāb Abū ’l-Futūh, doubtless a reference to Ibn A’tham’s book.72 Similarly, while it does contain the Arabic text of Abu Bakr’s will, its account of the circumstances concerning his death is reduced to a few lines.73 To take another example, Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8 mentions the conquest of Samarqand but does not give the text of the peace treaty,74 and has no record of Abu Bakr’s will.75 Similarly, Laud Or 323, an early manuscript, does not record either text, although it is quite detailed on Qutayba’s campaigns.76 Meanwhile, Aya Sofya 3050 does contain the Arabic text of Abu Bakr’s will, but its account of the capture of Samarqand is very different to that found elsewhere, with no text of the peace treaty and instead numerous quotations of verse.77 The existence of so many variants indicates that this material did not exist in Bal’amī’s original text and so subsequent copyists supplied it from various other sources. It thus offers further evidence that the conservative text of Add 836, which omits this material, has been subject to less alteration than the Persian manuscripts.

The incorporation of material from the Kitāb al-Futūh is intriguing, as the low number of extant manuscripts does not suggest it was particularly popular—an impression which is, admittedly, counteracted by the existence of Haravī’s Persian translation.78 Its citation in the Tārkhnāma offers further evidence that it was better known in the Middle Ages than one might imagine. In style it contains many similarities to the Tārkhnāma, dispensing with isnāds and akhbār to create a popular, readable narrative. This is doubtless, at least in part, the reason why it was chosen as a source of additional material for the Tārkhnāma, according to the evidence cited above probably by later copyists rather than Bal’amī himself.

72 Fatih 4281, f. 325b.
73 Fatih 4281, f. 257b.
74 Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8, f. 401a.
75 Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8, ff. 292b-293a.
76 Bodleian, Laud 323, f. 144a.
77 Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 254a, 327b-328b.
New themes in the *Tārīkhnāma*

The emphasis given by Balʿamī and Ṭabarī to certain topics varies immensely, yet as ever the complex textual situation makes it difficult to judge to what extent this is due to the activities of later copyists or genuine differences of approach between the two. Contrary to what one might expect, there is no evidence that the *Tārīkhnāma* puts more emphasis on tales of the Iranian past than Ṭabarī. If anything, the reverse is true, for the *Tārīkhnāma* actually tends to show more interest in pre-Islamic history, especially tales of prophets, than Ṭabarī. For example, to use a blunt but simple tool to measure this, we may observe that pre-Islamic material comprises only one and a half volumes out of ten in Ibrāhīm’s edition of Ṭabarī, but two volumes out of five in Rawshan’s edition of the *Tārīkhnāma*.79 The table below records proportions of the text devoted to pre-Islamic themes in selected early manuscripts. To allow a more accurate impression of the range of variation among the Persian manuscripts, I have recorded statistics for three additional manuscripts: the eighth/fourteenth century British Library, Add 7622 and Süleymaniye 4281, and the ninth/fifteenth century Bodleian Ouseley 206–8.

Lest it be thought that these figures are arrived at by an increase in Iranian material in the same manuscripts, let us also consider the approximate proportions of text devoted to pre-Islamic Iranian history (the remaining material is *Isrāʾīliyyāt* or concerned with creation, with a negligible amount of space devoted to pre-Islamic kings of Yemen):

*Table 3.1 Proportions of text devoted to pre-Islamic history in selected manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma*.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ṭabarī</th>
<th>15%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add 836</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAS Persian 22</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Library, Add 7622</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

79 Ibrāhīm’s edition is more readily comparable with Rawshan’s than is de Goeje’s as the pages are of a similar size.
Table 3.2 Proportion of text of the pre-Islamic sections of the Tārīkhnāma devoted to Iranian history (up to the Genealogy of Muhammad).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṭabarī</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add 836</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAS Persian 22</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Library, Add 7622</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the above statistics that Balʿamī was much more interested in pre-Islamic history than Ṭabarī was. Nor does the greater attention he paid to pre-Islamic history seem to be due to any particular interest in the Iranian past: only Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 sustains this interpretation, the statistical difference between RAS, Persian 22 and Ṭabarī being insignificant. The consensus of all manuscripts suggests that Balʿamī omitted material of obvious contemporary relevance. Topics which one might have thought would have been important to Balʿamī and the Sāmānids, such as the rise of the dynasty, found no place in the Tārīkhnāma. Far from emphasizing either recent or Iranian history, Balʿamī’s interests were above all in pre-Islamic prophets.

Prophecy and its importance in the fourth/tenth century

Prophecy and prophethood were topics of crucial importance in the Islamic Middle Ages. Muhammad’s status as the khātam al-nabiyyīn (Q. 33.40), ‘the seal of the prophets’, is one of the cornerstones of Islam, and it is natural that prophecy became a central theme in Islamic historiography. The Muslims’ interest in Biblical and Arabian prophets was precipitated by the need to explain and expand the frequently cursory and allusive references to them in the Qurʾān, and to affirm that Muhammad was both part of and the seal of this tradition of prophecy. Muslim historians from the time Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/761) onwards, notably Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897) and Dīnawarī (d. 282/895) had

devoted some space to Muhammad’s predecessors among the prophets, but this practice found its fullest mediaeval expression in Ṭabarῑ’s History. While most Muslims, including many regarded as unorthodox such as the Ismā’īlim, affirmed the prophethood of Muhammad as an integral part of their faith, the intellectual ferment of the fourth/tenth century had provided an opportunity for alternative views to appear, in particular amongst the radicals known as the freethinkers, or zanādia. The freethinkers attempted to discredit the concept of prophecy by showing that throughout history prophets had been frauds and imposters. One of the most notable of those who challenged the concept of prophethood was Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925 or 323/935), who wrote the Kitāb Makhārīq al-Anbiyāʾ or ‘Book on the Prophets’ Fraudulent Tricks’. Rāzī’s views may have rendered him a rather marginal figure, at least from a theological viewpoint, but they were nonetheless worthy of having a refutation written of them, the Kitāb A‘lāmul-Nubuwwabī wa-l-‘Imām Abū Ḥālim al-Rāzī, and other writers such as Bīrūnī and ‘Amīrī (himself patronized by the Sāmānid court at one point) explicitly disassociated themselves from him. All Muslim opinion, Sunnī, Shī‘ite or Ismā’īli, found Rāzī’s assault on the very basis of their religion distasteful. Yet, as Stroumsa stresses, that does not mean he was unimportant, for he introduced freethinking into both Ismā’īli and Sunnī circles that were interested in philosophy. As a result, by the middle of the fourth/tenth century orthodox theologians had to devote substantial efforts to combating the heresy of freethinking.

However, the freethinkers were by no means the only group that was especially concerned with prophecy. It is not a coincidence that an Ismā’īli wrote a refutation of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī’s views on prophets, for the question of prophecy lay at the heart of Ismā’īlī cosmology. Ismā’īlīs believed that the lifespan of the world was divided into seven eras, in each of which a prophet (nāṭiq) would appear with a message, the sixth of whom was Muhammad. Each nāṭiq was followed by an imām, who would subsequently become a nāṭiq. The seventh and final nāṭiq would be the seventh imām Muhammad b. Ismā’īl, the Mahdī who would bring a reign of justice to earth at the end of time.

81 R. Tottoli, Biblical Prophets in the Qur’ān and Muslim Literature, Richmond: Curzon, 2002, pp. 129–134. Later there developed a type of literature known as gīvas al-anbiyāʾ devoted entirely to recounting the lives and deeds of prophets.
83 For details, see ibid, p. 93 ff.
84 Ibid, pp. 87–120.
85 Ibid, p. 120.
Among Twelver Shiites too, there was a particular interest in tales of the early Israelite prophets. Shiites held that authority was delegated (mawṣūla) not just from the Israelite prophets to Muhammad, but from Muhammad to `Ali and then on to the Shiites, the imams. The imams were considered to be ‘legatees’ (wasiyya) of the prophets. `Ali’s own position was thus considered to be parallel to those of the prophets, as were the imams, their direct heirs. One major fourth/tenth century Shiite theologian explained:

Our belief concerning their number is that in all there have been one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets and a like number of naḇī (prophet) had a wasīʿīya to whom he gave instructions by the command of Allāh… And verily, the leaders of the prophets are five in number round whom the heavens revolve, and they are the masters of the religious paths (aṣḥāḥu ʿsh-sharaʿīḥ), namely, ‘the ones endued with firmness’—Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad, on all of whom be peace. Muḥammad is their leader and the most excellent of them.

Such views had found their way into the historiographical tradition at an early date. Rubin argues that the main point of Ibn Iṣḥāq’s traditions about the Israelite prophets was to show this transmission of wasīyya, although the state of the text of Ibn Iṣḥāq’s works must make any such conclusion tentative.

Nonetheless, the mere fact that a historian had Shiite tendencies did not necessarily lead to a reflection of this in his treatment of prophecy. A good example of this is the Shiite historian and philosopher Miskawayh, a near contemporary of Balʿamī’s, writing for the Šāmānids’ Būyid rivals in Arabic. In his great Tajārib al-Umam (‘Experiences of Nations’) he entirely omits any account of the pre-Islamic prophets, saying there is no place for tales of miracles in his work, ‘as the people of our age cannot profit from their experiences’. Miskawayh was trying to write a very different kind of X

89 Rubin, ‘Prophets and progenitors’, p. 57.

Thus for Tabari and Balʿamī, prophecy was not merely a fundamental tenant of 86 U. Rubin, ‘Prophets and progenitors in the early Shi’ite tradition’ JSAI 1(1979), pp. 41–65, esp. p. 51.
history to that of Balʿamī and Tabarī. He had no interest in their tradition-based approach, but rather was concerned with what could be verified by reason. Ultimately, he too wished to provide his audience with moral lessons, but believed this could best be done through presenting detailed accounts of men’s behaviour rather than the sort of romantic narratives transmitted by Wahb b. Munabbih that finds such a prominent place in Tabarī’s and Balʿamī’s works. It must be said that Miskawayh’s approach to historiography found few imitators.

Islam and a vital part of Muslim and pre-Islamic history, but a dogma which had come under attack (from the freethinkers) or been distorted (by the Shiʿites and Ismāʿīlīs). This may be one reason why they devote more attention to it than earlier historians.91 Freethinkers had existed at the Sāmānid court in earlier times, most notably Naṣr b. Ahmad’s vizier Abū Ṭālūs’s Abū ʿAbdallāh Jayhānī. Yet the simple style and accessible form of the Persian Tārīkhnāma do not suggest it was specifically aimed at the salons of the rationalists and freethinkers.

Freethinking and Shiʿism were not the sole concerns which made prophecy relevant in Balʿamī’s time. An interesting parallel between the Tārīkhnāma and the Sīra of the Prophet by Ibn Ishāq may be observed. Just as Balʿamī’s translation was commissioned by royal command, the Sīra was written by order of the ʿAbbāsid Caliph Mansūr (d. 158/775). Ibn Ishāq’s work in its original form comprised traditions concerning creation, pre-Islamic prophets, the life of the Prophet, and the Prophet’s maghāzī (military expeditions). Only the section on the life of the Prophet survives, but it is clear that Ibn Ishāq’s work in its original form had much in common with Tabarī’s treatment of world history, influencing both the conception and form of the History.92 Tottoli argues that political concerns were one of the foremost reasons for Mansūr’s commissioning of the Sīra:

In a period of ongoing political development, with the Umayyad dynasty just defeated, stabilizing and isolating the experiences of Muḥammad in a sacred history that began with the origins of the world may have served to remove any religious emphasis from movements of that time that could contest the legitimacy of the ʿAbbāsid power.93

91 The printed edition of Dīnawarī, for example, has fewer than 10 of the first 74 pages (i.e. up to the coming of Islam) devoted to prophets. See Dīnawarī, al-Akhlāṣ al-Tawālī. A. ʿAmīr & J. al-Shayyāl (eds), Cairo: ʿĪsā Bāb al-Halābī, 1960. Likewise, Yaʿqūbī allots around the first 90 pages of his Tārīkh, less than a third of the pre-Islamic section of 313 pages, to material relating to Israʿīliyyāt. See Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī, M. Houtsma (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1883, I.
92 Tottoli, Biblical Prophets, p. 130.
93 Ibid, p. 130.
There are parallels with the Sāmānids’ situation: much of the chaos of the age had been caused by the ‘Abbāsids’ decline as an effective political force, and the Sāmānids remained the only substantial power loyal to the Baghdad caliphate and committed to upholding Sunnism. Meanwhile, the Muslim world as a whole abounded in religious movements or, worse still, states which relied for their credibility and legitimacy on challenging the ‘Abbāsids’ orthodoxy, and their Sāmānid supporters. So the Sāmānids, just like the earlier ‘Abbāsids, may have wished to remove the ‘religious emphasis’ from such movements by promoting their own, orthodox, version of history.

Such changes in the political environment may be one reason why Tabari gives proportionally much less space to pre-Islamic history and prophets than Bal’ami does. While the ‘Abbāsids state was doubtless in severe trouble, if not crisis, by the time of his death in 310/923, it had not yet suffered the humiliations that marked its ultimate failure, such as the Caliph’s abandonment of claims to secular power with the appointment of Ibn Rā’iq as amir al-umara in 324/936 and the Būyid occupation of Baghdad in 334/945. Nor had the Fāṭimids yet become anything more than a local power in distant North Africa, and the scandal of the Qarmats’ sack of the Ka’ba was yet to come (in 317/930). Shi’ism had always had some hold on the people of Iraq, but it was only later during the fourth/tenth century—after the completion of the Arabic History—that it started to become such a clearly defined movement. In these circumstances, it is understandable that Tabari should have been more concerned than Tabari to emphasize the historical antecedents from which the umma drew its legitimacy, in particular the Sunni view of prophecy.

However, it would be simplistic to consider Bal’ami’s preoccupation with prophecy solely as a consequence of the heterodox movements prevalent in the Islamic world at the time, still less as a direct response to them. Other motives may have underlain it. Daniel has suggested that the conversion of the Turks of Central Asia to Islam in large numbers at this period may necessitated the composition of such a work with its emphasis on the orthodox Muslim perception of the past. In view of the numerous Arabic quotations in the Tārikhnāma it seems unlikely the text was intended as a purely pedagogical tool for such an audience, to whom much of the text would have been incomprehensible (indeed, this is probably true even if all the Arabic in the Tārikhnāma had been translated into Persian). Rather, Bal’ami’s interest in prophecy is probably a direct consequence of his traditionalist approach to history, which aimed to appeal to a religiously conservative audience. Maqdisī, probably writing for the similarly conservative Saffārids, evinces a similar interest in prophecy, for the chapter on prophets is the longest in the

94 While the early part of the Caliph Muqtadir’s reign (295/908–320/932) had been ‘comparatively successful’, by around this date old problems re-emerged, in particular the depredations of the desert Qaramita. See H.Kennedy, The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the sixth to the eleventh century. London: Longman 1986, p. 193ff.
96 Tahmi, L’Encyclopédisme musulman, p. 240.
the Transoxianan philosopher who vainly sought to appeal to the ulema of the mashriq, even tried to associate Greek philosophers such as Empedocles and Pythagoras with the prophetic tradition. Quite simply, conservative Transoxianan society probably valued stories of prophets more highly than accounts of contemporary history, let alone Greek philosophers. This attitude towards the past was doubtless also the reason why Bal'amī devotes so little attention to more recent events.

The problem of the terminus of the Tārikhnāma

The final sections of the Tārikhnāma demonstrate particular textual instability, and the terminus of manuscripts varies greatly. Add 836 has as its terminus the death of the Umayyad Marwān III in battle with the ‘Abbāsid in 132/750. Although most of the Persian manuscripts continue to later dates, the quantity and quality of information that they provide tends to become increasingly slight the more recent the date. Often there are little more than brief notices for events after the civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma’mūn (193/809–198/813), and many of these were clearly added by later copyists to update the work. Ṭabarī, on the other hand, continued the chronicle up to his own day, ending it in 302/914–5. Admittedly, his style changes somewhat, with a much less frequent use of isnāds: authorities are often not cited at all, with accounts being introduced by terse phrases such as dhukira, ‘it was mentioned’. This is doubtless at least in part because the author himself or his associates had been eyewitnesses to these events, and because it was less necessary to strive so hard to prove the veracity of reports of events within the living memory of the work’s audience. The detail varies greatly from year to year from the beginning of the third/ninth century onwards, with some years, particularly towards the end of the Tārikh, dismissed in two or three pages under a title such as Dhikr al-khabar ‘ammā kāna fīhū min al-ahdāth, Account of What Happened in the Year. This lack of interest in contemporary history is reflected in the Persian manuscript tradition, as the table below indicates.

97 Rowson, A Muslim Philosopher, pp. 206–8
Table 3.3 Proportion of the total text of selected manuscripts of the *Tārikhnāma* devoted to events occurring after the death of Marwān in 132/750.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṭabarī</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add 836</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAS Persian 22</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Library, Add 7622</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the manuscripts examined indicate that the *Tārikhnāma* devotes considerably less attention to ‘Abbāsid history than Ṭabarī did, although the exact point at which it ended is unclear. Some evidence suggests that 132/750 was the actual terminus of the *Tārikhnāma*. All the manuscripts of the anonymous Arabic translation concur on this date (although Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Sprenger 45 ends slightly earlier in the year than the others, almost certainly due to its fragmentary nature).

The unanimity of the Arabic manuscripts of the *Tārikhnāma* indicates that the work’s original terminus may have been 132/750. Further evidence that this was the true terminus comes from Bodleian, Laud Or 323, another early if highly eclectic manuscript. At the start of the account of the *after their seizure of power, the manuscript contains the statement, ‘Muḥammad b. Jarīr [Ṭabarī] relates ‘Abbāsid history (akhlāṣ Banī ’l-ʿAbbās) patchily, and it should be recounted in full if it is to be recounted properly. God willing, I shall relate it in full and state which events happened in which years.’99 Unlike most other Persian manuscripts, this one does indeed continue in a broadly annalistic fashion.100 The statistics cited in Table 3.3 suggest that Balḥamī’s text is more likely than Ṭabarī’s to curtail discussion of the ‘Abbāsid and as demonstrated in Chapter 2, references in the *Tārikhnāma* to Ṭabarī often refer to manuscripts of the *Tārikhnāma* itself. The fact that Laud Or 323 henceforth adopts a narrative structure different from that found elsewhere suggests that ‘Abbāsid history was indeed omitted from the original text, obliging the scribe to use another source for his account of this period.

99 Bodleian, Laud Or 323, f. 239a.
100 E.g. note the mentions of the years at the start of each chapter on ff. 246a, 247a, 256b, 259b, 260a etc.
Moreover, 132/750 would have been a convenient point to conclude, with the death of Marwân ushering in a new era of ‘Abbāsid domination. There is no reason why Bal‘amī should necessarily have been interested in recent history. Although Tabarî had continued his History up to his own day, the volume of information he provides lessens and his emphasis is on earlier periods. Likewise, Ya‘qūbî and Dīnawarî had ended their chronicles a good half-century before their deaths. Robinson has well summarized the attitude of the mediaeval Islamic chronographer:

Traditionism’s reverence for its own past, combined with a corresponding indifference towards the present, seems to have conditioned the historiographic project. Chronography is a case in point. The very occasional exception aside, throughout the early period, the akhbârîs usually sacrificed contemporary history in their devotion to the early, foundational moments of Islamic history…. Tabarî only reluctantly says much about his own day: no more than 10 per cent of his monumental Ta’rîkh is concerned with contemporary history. Meanwhile, many historians said nothing at all, concentrating upon the Glorious (such as Prophetic history and the great conquests of the seventh century), the Tragic (especially the Civil War of the 650s) or the Curious…. 101

So there was no need for Bal‘amī to continue his Târîkhnâma into recent times, his interests being above all in the Glorious and the Tragic, to adopt Robinson’s terminology, the topics which concern Tabarî too above all. Indeed, Tabarî’s treatment of the ‘Abbâsid caliphs is by no means unambiguously enthusiastic,102 and this may be one reason that Bal‘amī, working for a dynasty the legitimacy of which was closely linked to their links to the ‘Abbâsids, decided to omit this section. For his interest was not recent history, but the careers of the prophets, culminating with Muhammad, and the torturous adolescence of the umma.

101 Robinson, Islamic Historiography, p. 94.
The contents and purpose of Balʿamī’s alterations to Ṭabarī’s History

Balʿamī’s alterations to Ṭabarī’s History were not limited to matters of methodology and emphasis. Often Balʿamī’s versions of events differ substantially in detail and in tone from Ṭabarī’s. Such differences have been attributed to Balʿamī’s allegedly distinctively Persian perspective,1 or, alternatively, to attempts to convince members of non-Muslim communities of the mashriq ‘of the truth of Islam as mediated by the Sāmānids, legitimate Persian-Islamic rulers of the east’ by including Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian traditions absent in Ṭabarī.2 This so-called ‘Persian perspective’ in the Tārīkhnāma is also seen as part of an attempt to encourage the ‘Persianization of frontier areas and the acculturation of the new Turkish military elite’.3 The need to combat Ismāʿīlism has also been cited as a reason for the composition of the Persian Tārīkhnāma and Tafsīr and their reshaping of their originals.4

This chapter aims to test by these theories through a detailed comparison of key passages from the original Arabic History and its adaptation by Balʿamī. It must be stressed that this analysis is offered only tentatively, for the textual tradition of the Tārīkhnāma places severe obstacles in the way of a more detailed study, as it is always difficult to be certain what, exactly, Balʿamī did write. Nonetheless, even if only on a hypothetical basis, it seems worthwhile trying to understand how and why Balʿamī altered Ṭabarī’s text. As in the previous chapter, conclusions about the contents of the Tārīkhnāma are based on Add 836 and three of the oldest complete Persian manuscripts, with all major variants recorded in the notes. Despite sometimes substantial differences, a generally consistent picture of Balʿamī’s treatment of Ṭabarī emerges.

The passages studied below deal with themes likely to have been of special relevance in fourth/tenth century Transoxiana. For instance, we will examine Balʿamī’s and Ṭabarī’s treatments of the Ridda wars, the fight against apostasy led by the Caliph Abu Bakr after Muḥammad’s death. If, as Daniel and Meisami suggest, one of the motivations for the composition of the Tārīkhnāma was the fight against heresy, such a

2 Ibid, p. 35.
4 Ibid, [pp. 11–12].
topic would have been highly relevant and one would expect to find this reflected in \Ba'l\'ami\'s treatment of it. Other passages examined focus on episodes in Islamic history that were in any event controversial for sectarian reasons, such as the murder of the Sh\'ite hero Husayn, grandson of \Ali. Differences between \Ba'l\'ami\'s and \Tabari\'s accounts of this issue may shed light on their respective sectarian allegiances. However, not every passage under consideration was of potentially controversial character. The story of the prophet Abraham, for instance, is discussed in order to show how \Tabari\'s text might be adapted even when it dealt with a topic that was an accepted part of mainstream Muslim tradition. Other episodes, such as those of Bahram Chubin and Alexander the Great, were recorded not just by \Tabari but also by Firdaws\’i in his \Sh\’ahn\’ama, allowing us to compare \Ba'l\'ami\'s treatment of them with two very different models, \Tabari\'s tradition-based history of the umma and Firdaws\’i’s epic devoted to preserving the memory of the Iranian past.

The results of this study contradict previous scholarship, for there is no evidence in the text to support the contention that \Ba'l\'ami wrote his history from a specifically Persian perspective. Recording the career of Alexander, a major figure in both Iranian and Islamic tradition, \Ba'l\'ami\ shows no interest in the Iranian accounts recorded by Firdaws\’i and \Hamza al-I\'fah\’ani which transmit pro-Sasanian and Zoroastrian traditions. Rather, his narrative is thoroughly Islamic in character, drawing on the Qur\’an as his main source. The few references, if genuine, to non-Muslim sources do not counteract the impression that the \Tarikhn\’ama was aimed above all at a pious Muslim audience that revered tradition. At points where one would anticipate that the Iranian past would have been of particular interest to \Ba'l\'ami, such as the role of the Persians in suppressing the Ridda, he avoids putting any emphasis on it. Even his treatment of the S\’am\’n\’ids’ putative ancestor, Bahram Chubin, is curiously muted. \Ba'l\'ami\’s concern was Islamic, not Iranian, history, and to see the \Tarikhn\’ama as a product of state-sponsored Persian nationalism is erroneous.

Likewise, a close study of the text does not offer any evidence to suggest it was composed to combat heresy. At no point is there any direct polemic against views that \Ba'l\'ami\ found disagreeable, and there are no allusions to Ism\’a\’li, Sh\’ite or other doctrines that were influential in the fourth/tenth century Muslim world. Of course, to a certain extent just by presenting a view of history contrary to these, \Ba'l\'ami\ rebuts them, but it seems unlikely that his work was calculated to win over anyone already influenced by Sh\’ite or freethinking alternatives. Yet at the same time, his treatment of the martyrdom of Husayn indicates that he sought to moderate or at least alter some of the anti-Sh\’ite biases underlying \Tabari\’s original. The sheer scale of the success of the \Tarikhn\’ama among later generations of both Sh\’ites and Sunnis indicates that \Ba'l\'ami was largely successful in presenting a moderate version of Islamic history that had widespread appeal.
Abraham, the Friend of God

The concept of prophecy, as discussed in Chapter 3, was of crucial importance to Muslim religious thought in the fourth/tenth century. It has been suggested that the debates triggered by the dogmatic positions of the freethinkers, the Ismāʿīlīs and the Shiʿites may be one reason why Balʿamīdevotes so much attention to the Israelite prophets. Space prevents a lengthy discussion of each one, so the analysis offered here is restricted to Balʿamī’s narrative of the life of Abraham, one of the most important of the pre-Islamic prophets, who is named as one of the five ‘leaders of the prophets’ by the Shiʿite theologian Ibn Bābūya. Many of the themes found in Balʿamī’s account of Abraham’s life are repeated in his treatment of other prophets.

Abraham’s importance is underlined in the Qurʿān, where there are several references to millat Ibrahīm, the faith of Abraham (16.123, 6.161, 3.95). These are usually accompanied by exhortations to follow this faith, thus giving Qurʿānic sanction to the view of Islam as a direct descendant of, or indeed the same thing as, millat Ibrahīm. As Tottoli puts it, ‘The Qurʿānic message is not therefore something new but coincides perfectly with the faith of Abraham, who is defined father of the believers and, as a consequence, a kind of first Muslim to whom Muḥammad’s teaching is linked.’

The Qurʿān, however, contains only brief mentions of Abraham, and it was left to the exegetes to fill in the gaps, presumably drawing in particular on Jewish sources such as the muḥaddith Ḵaḍr al-ʿAbdār. Balʿamī’s account has therefore a long tradition behind it, and there would have been innumerable sources other than Tabarī to which he could resort for alternative accounts or details.

The first chapter in the Tārīikhnāma on Abraham discusses his birth and early life. The king of Babel, Nimrod, having received warnings from the astrologers that a child would be born who would overthrow him, orders all new born children to be killed. When Abraham’s mother gives birth, she and her husband Azar, the treasurer of the temples, hide the child, thus ensuring his survival. Abraham’s first sight of the natural world inspires in him belief in God. On growing up, he destroys his father’s idols, and so incurs Nimrod’s wrath which is visited upon him after his father’s death. A pyre is built for him, and Abraham is hurled in by a mangonel. The earth, skies and angels complain

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5 See Chapter 3.
8 The Persian manuscripts consulted have an explanatory story clarifying that Abraham did not think the stars themselves were God. (Tārīikhnāma, I, pp. 131–2; Fatih 4285, f. 20a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 20a.)
of Abraham’s treatment, so God sends the angel Gabriel to his rescue, yet Abraham rejects his assistance, and the angels ‘wondered at the strength of his certainty in God’. God orders the fire to be cold and adopts Abraham as his khalīl, his friend, hence Abraham’s sobriquet khalīl Allāh, the Friend of God. Even Nimrod wonders at the miracle, saying ‘Abraham, how great is your God’, but God rejects his sacrifices.

This section reflects themes typical of the Tārikhnāma’s stories of prophethood, and which are common in mediaeval Islamic accounts of prophets in general. There is a clash with temporal authority even before the prophet’s birth, which means he has to be hidden, a motif repeated at the birth of Jesus, when God warns Mary of Herod’s plan to kill her child, forcing her to flee to the oasis of Damascus [sic]. Like Muḥammad, Abraham spends his early life outside the city, and likewise, he does not come to God through theological debate but through knowledge of God’s creation (cf. the Qur’anic Sūrat al-Rahmān, which enumerates the beauties of creation as reasons for belief). Most prophets endure trials similar to Abraham’s, as Moses discovers with Pharaoh and Joseph with Pharaoh, although the figure of the king may be replaced by Iblīs (Satan), as in the case of Job. These trials are often a chance for the prophets to show the certainty of their belief in God, which itself may be so strong as almost to be an āya or sign of prophethood, as it is here and with Job.

The next chapter is entitled the Account of Abraham’s Flight (Hijra), in which Abraham and his family flee Nimrod. The very first line of text takes the opportunity to draw a parallel with Muḥammad:-Then God Exalted tested Abraham with flight (hijra) from his town and his house so he died in exile, just as he tested our Prophet, peace be upon him.’ Some people had believed in Abraham, but kept this secret from Nimrod. After Azar’s death, Abraham loses his protector, and Nimrod expels him for ‘causing corruption in the kingdom’. Abraham goes into exile with the believers, mainly his relatives, among them his nephew Lot and his wife Sarah, his cousin. Initially they go

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9 The Persian manuscripts record the story in this way as well, but some subsequently add that Ṭabarī claimed that Abraham was supported by an angel. This account is rejected (Tārikhnāma, I, pp. 139–140; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 22a. This comment is not found in Fatih 4285).
10 Add 836, f. 50a; According to Aya Sofya 3050, f. 116a-b: they flee from Jerusalem to Egypt, but an alternative account is given (f. 116b) that the village was in Syria and that the villages there resemble those of Soghdiana. Fatih 4285, f. 97a and RAS, Persian 22 (Tārikhnāma, I, p. 521) have a virtually identical text, adding that the information comes from the Kitāb al-Masālik wa’il-Mamālik.
11 Add 836, f. 27a; Tārikhnāma, I, pp. 291–306; Fatih 4285, ff. 45a–49a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 64b–68a.
13 Add 836, ff. 22b–23b; Tārikhnāma, I, pp. 238–244; Fatih 4285, ff. 39b–41b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 53a–54b.
14 Add 836, f. 12b; Tārikhnāma, I, pp. 141–146; Fatih 4285, ff. 21b–22b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 32a–b.
to Harrān, where Sarah’s father was king, then to Egypt, from which the king expels them, and eventually they settle in Syria. As with Muḥammad, the protector is a pagan relative, Azar playing the part of Abū Ṭalib, with whose death the situation becomes intolerable, forcing the believers to hijra. At this point the narrative is interrupted by an account of the destruction of Nimrod, a predictably nasty affair. We then reach the Account of the Prophet Ishmael, a brief account of the birth of Abraham’s son Ishmael by his slave-girl Hagar and of Sarah’s jealousy, the main purpose of which seems to be to justify circumcision as a device to control female desires.

The following chapter is the Account of Abraham’s Settling of Ishmael in the Sanctuary, and is particularly important as it demonstrates fully the centrality of Abraham to Islam. Sarah regrets her jealousy of Hagar and asks Abraham to take the slave-girl and Ishmael away, which he does. Gabriel comes to tell him to leave them in the Sanctuary (Haram) at Mecca. Abraham sees no buildings, plants or people, yet leaves Hagar and Ishmael by the Ka‘ba, Hagar asking, ‘Abraham, how can you leave a weak woman and a child here?’ Abraham replies, ‘God ordered me to do thus’, and Hagar says, ‘Then that is enough for me’. Yet despite her faith, water runs out and she is unable to find any more. However, the baby Ishmael bursts into tears and hits the ground with his foot, and the spring of Zamzam bursts forth. Birds and crows gather round, rousing the curiosity of the tribe of Jurhum who are encamped a day’s travel away. They enquire of Hagar who brought her there, and she replies ‘God’. Hagar and Ishmael take up residence with the Jurhum. When Ishmael is three years old, Abraham asks Sarah permission to visit him. Sarah fears God too much to refuse, but makes the visit conditional on Abraham not dismounting from his horse or staying the night. As Mecca is 50 stages away, God sends Abraham the miraculous horse Burāq, and he is able to make the journey in half a day. When Ishmael is five, Sarah gives birth to Isaac, and Hagar dies when Ishmael is 15.

Thus Abraham is shown to be the ultimate founder of Mecca as a settlement, through God’s instructions to him transmitted by the angel Gabriel. The origins of Mecca’s importance and Muslim worship there are implicitly traced back to Abraham. God’s favour to Abraham and an explicit parallel with Muḥammad are noted by the story of the loan of Burāq, which was a horse also used by Muḥammad on his miraculous

15 A detail mentioned in RAS Persian 22 and Aya Sofya 3050 only with the comment that this was not a universally accepted story. It is given as an alternative account in Fatih 4285, f. 31b. See n. 23 below.
16 Add 836, f. 14a–b; Ṭārīkhnāma, I, pp. 151–152; Fatih 4285, f. 23a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 34a–b.
17 The Persian manuscripts add a hadith, giving further justification (Ṭārīkhnāma, I, p. 152; Fatih 4285, f. 23b; Aya Sofya, f. 34b).
18 Add 836, ff. 14b–15b; Ṭārīkhnāma, I, pp. 152–155, where it is not given a separate chapter heading, although it is in Aya Sofya 3050, f. 24b, and Fatih 4285, f. 23b.
19 Ṭārīkhnāma, I, p. 153; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 25a: ‘Whatever God wants is pleasing to us’.
20 Ṭārīkhnāma, I, p. 154; Fatih 4285, f. 23b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 25a: five days. Probably a misreading of khamsīn for khamsa in Add 836.
ascent to heaven, the ْمِرَابِ. This underlines the links between the two prophets. Other elements in the passage serve to make moral points: the tale of Hagar and the water demonstrates that faith will be rewarded and that God takes care of his servants.

The Account of Abraham’s Sacrifice of his Son 21 contains the lessons one would expect about obedience to God’s commands and resisting the temptations of the Devil. For instance, Satan at one point comes to the boy’s mother disguised as an old man and tells her that Abraham has taken her son to sacrifice. She tells him that that he is like the devil and says that God’s prophet would not do something like that. He tells her that God ordered it, and the mother says that if God has commanded her son’s sacrifice she is happy. The son is of course rescued, rewarding the woman’s faith.

The passage is also marked by the use of Muslim phraseology. When Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, God sends Gabriel with a white ram in his place and turns his knife away, at which Gabriel cries out, ‘Allāh akbar’, Abraham replying with, ‘La ilāh illā Allāh wa-llāh akbar.’ The son adds, ‘Allāh akbar wa-li-llāh al-ḥamd.’ 22 For the audience, these phrases would implicitly remind them of the links between Abraham and Islam, indeed, effectively implying that Abraham was a Muslim.

Bal‘amī avoids giving an opinion on whether it was Isaac or Ishmael who was sacrificed until the end, 23 where he comments,

The ulema differ on the ِتَفْسِير of this. It is said that he [the victim] was Isaac and that is the view of all the non-Arabs (‘Ajam), because they are his descendants. They argue on the basis of the divine word ‘therefore We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and, after Isaac, of Jacob’ (Q.11.74), that the structure of the ِقُرْآن indicates that the sacrificial victim was the one ‘he was blessed with’. All the Arabs say he was Ishmael because they are his descendants.

Bal‘amī quotes the ِقُرْآنic verses used by the Arabs in support of their claim (Q.37.101–2), and then gives his own view. He says the correct version is that it was Ishmael, but supports this contention not with the verses he has just cited but by a ِحديث. 24 So Bal‘amī not merely misses a chance at promoting the Persians, although it

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21 Add 836, ff. 16a–17a; ِتَارِیکْنَامَ, I, pp. 166–175. The Persian manuscripts contain a significant addition to the text in Add 836 (ِتَارِیکْنَامَ, I, pp. 166–169; Fatih 4285, f. 32b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 27a). This is comprised of a detailed discussion of the nature of prophecy, mainly relating to ِمُحَامَد.

22 Given in Arabic in the Persian manuscripts too: ِتَارِیکْنَامَ, I, p. 174; Fatih 4285, f. 26b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 40a.

23 In the Persian manuscripts, this precedes the narrative of events, and the ِحديث mentioned below is quoted before the ِقُرْآنic verses. The argument remains the same. ِتَارِیکْنَامَ, I, pp. 169–171; Fatih 4285, f. 26a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 38b–39a.
was an ideal chance to associate Islam and Iran, but even promotes the opposite view in its place. However, both the Arabic Add 836 and the Persian manuscripts concur on this interpretation, so it seems likely to be authentic.

Account of Abraham and Ishmael’s Building of God’s Sacred Abode,\(^25\) recounts the rebuilding of the Ka’ba, which God had moved to a mountain top for safety at the time of the flood. When it is complete, Abraham hands it over to Ishmael, saying, ‘This is your place and the place of your descendants until the Day of Resurrection.’ Abraham goes to Mt. Thabīr overlooking Mecca and sees barren mountains, and then looks towards Syria and recalls its verdure and the ease of life there, and is concerned for Ishmael and his descendants. He prays to God, ‘Lord, make this land secure...’ (Q.14.39), and God answers his prayer. God tells Abraham to call people to the hajj, and they are taught to cry labayka Allahum labayka lā sharīka laka,\(^26\) the very words used by Muslims today. The seal is therefore set on Abraham’s role as a progenitor of Islam. Not only does he rebuild the shrine, but he teaches people the hajj and they learn the traditional pilgrims’ cry.

Apart from the stylistic change from a narrative based on akhbār and isnāds, there are relatively few differences of actual facts in Bal‘ami’s and Tabari’s versions, although some do exist.\(^27\) The main difference between them lies in Bal‘ami’s emphasis on Abraham as an early Muslim, a feature which characterizes his treatment of prophets elsewhere. This aspect is stressed through the parallels—sometimes, as in this instance, explicitly noted—between the prophets’ lives and Muḥammad’s, such as hijra; in the

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24 The hadith is a report from the Prophet saying that he was ʿibn al-Dhabihayn, ‘Son of two sacrificial victims’, one being Ishmael, the other his father ʿAbdallāh, whom ʿAbū al-Muṭṭalib had promised to sacrifice to God in return for restoring water to Zamzam. ʿAbdallāh is rescued by his mother, from the Banū Makhzūm, the rulers of Mecca, who asks the people for help, reminding them that a ram was sacrificed in place of Ishmael. An animal sacrifice was settled on his place. (RAS, Persian 22 and Fatih 4285 say his mother was from the Banū Zuhra; Aya Sofya 3050 keeps Banū Makhzūm.) This hadith is also present in Tabari, Taʾrikh al-Rusul waʾl-Mulāk. Leiden: Brill, 1879, I, p. 291 but in rather abbreviated form (although with the isnād which is naturally missing here), and without the explicit parallel drawn between ʿAbdallāh and Ishmael. Bal‘ami’s treatment underlines the close connection between the Abrahamic and Islamic eras.

25 Add 836, f. 17a; Taʾrikhānā, I, pp. 176–180; Fatih 4285, ff. 26b–27b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 40b–41b.

26 Given simply as labayka in RAS Persian 22 (Taʾrikhānā, I, p. 180), but in full in Fatih 4285, f. 27b and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 41a–b.

27 Examples of details which Bal‘ami adds to Tabari, regarding the story of Abraham are: he gives the name of Sarah’s father as Tabwīk, and says he was also Abraham’s uncle (Add 836, f. 12b; in Taʾrikhānā, I, p. 179 and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 41b given as Tabwīl and transposed from earlier; Fatih 4285, f. 31b); he states that after the Pharaoh expelled Sarah and Abraham from Egypt, they traveled to the town of Šabā in Palestine where they settled briefly (Add 836, f. 13a; Taʾrikhānā, I, p. 144; Fatih 4285, f. 22a; Aya Sofya, f. 33a); he claims that Isaac married a woman named ʿUrfaqā bt. Tabwīk (Add 836, f. 17b; Taʾrikhānā, I, p. 182 (ʿUrfaqā bt. Tabwīl); Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 41b).
introduction of prophetic hadiths into the narrative, again reminding the audience of the links to Islam; in the constant use of the Qur'ānic quotations; in the use of Islamic terms such as muslim, shari'a and tawhid, which whether or not used with their Islamic meanings, still carry Islamic connotations; and in the attribution of Muslim practices to pre-Islamic figures.

Bal'am's adaptation of the material is not especially original, for many of these devices may be found in Tabari to varying degrees. He too sometimes attributes Muslim practices to the Israelite prophets, for example in references to Abraham being taught the hajj rituals, as 'the basic duties of Islam are looked upon as the duties of “natural religion (fitra)”'. However, Tabari does not stress these practices to the extent that Bal'am does. Bal'am frequently uses the term masjid (mosque, in some manuscripts given in its archaic Persian form mazgaṭ) to mean a place of worship in general—for instance, it is sometimes used for the Temple of Jerusalem. There is no equivalent in Tabari to Bal'am's use of Islamic months, as in the accounts of the Exodus and Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai, both of which are dated according to the months of the hijrī calendar. Indeed, sometimes the term muslim is explicitly used for those who follow the prophets. For example, Alexander and Solomon are referred to as the two pre-Islamic muslim kings. In one instance, a hadith makes explicit this link between the Israelite prophets and Muḥammad: 'The Prophet (Muḥammad) said, “May God have mercy on my brother Moses. If he had been patient, he would have seen wondrous things. He was a sign (āya) which speaks to us.”' This hadith is absent in Tabari, and again links Muḥammad to his predecessor, his ‘brother Moses’. Bal'am's stress on the links between the Hebrew prophets and Islam underlines the antiquity of Islam and legitimizes

28 Moses learns shari'a and tawhid when God makes him a prophet: Add 836, f. 26a–b; Tāriḵnāma, I, pp. 284, 289; Fatih 4285, f. 53a, Aya Sofya 3050, f. 62a.
29 Tāriḵnāma, I, p. 312.
30 Tāriḵnāma, I, p. 319.
31 Add 836, f. 45b; Tāriḵnāma, I, p. 502; Fatih 4285, f. 93a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 112a.
32 10 Muharram/‘Ašhūrā’ commemorates the crossing of the Red Sea: Add 836, ff. 27b–29a; Tāriḵnāma, I, p. 309; Fatih 4285, f. 58a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 69a, 70b; Moses' ascent of Mt Sinai to receive the tablets of the sacred law dated to Dhū 'I-Ḡa'da': Add 836, f. 29a–b; Tāriḵnāma, I, p. 319; Fatih 4285, f. 60a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 66b.
33 The term, doubtless deliberately, has some ambiguity, meaning either ‘one who submits to God’ or ‘a Muslim’. The word is used thus in the Qur'ān to describe Abraham. While the spelling used here will vary from muslim to Muslim depending on context, it should be borne in mind that often both implications are present.
34 Add 836, f. 11b; Tāriḵnāma, I, p. 130; Fatih 4285, f. 29b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 30a.
35 Add 836, f. 32b; Fatih 4285, f. 64a (in Arabic); Tāriḵnāma, I, p. 349 and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 79b, (in Persian): ‘May God have mercy on my brother Moses. God tried my brother Moses; if he had had patience with Khidr, he would have seen wonders greater than these.’
it through its roots in the past. He wishes to emphasize that although Muhammad may have perfected religion, Islam arrived long before he did, and is the natural state of the God-fearing man. However, Bal'ami makes no attempt to address directly contemporary debates on prophethood. There is no condemnation of the Sh'ite concepts of nass and wasiyya, nor is there any direct challenge to the ideas of the freethinkers and the Isma'ili. This is true of all Bal'ami's narratives of prophets. Of course, such ideas are implicitly condemned by the fact that they are ignored, but there is no suggestion of polemic in the Tārikhnāma's treatment of them. This suggests that while Bal'ami must have been aware of the debates about prophecy of the fourth/tenth century, the Tārikhnāma was not intended specifically to counter heretical ideas, for in that case one would expect to find more direct references to them.

Alexander, Dhū 'l-Qarnayn

The emphasis in the pre-Islamic sections is on tales of prophets, but Bal'ami does also devote some space to kings. Among these is Alexander the Great, who features prominently in both Iranian and Islamic tradition. Alexander’s campaigns against the Persian emperor Darius are mentioned only briefly, Bal'ami's focus being on the Qur'anic tales of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, traditionally identified with Alexander.36 The building of Herat, Marv and Samarqand is attributed to Alexander, and after conquering Tibet and China, he is reported to enter a land of darkness in search of the Spring of Life. Having failed to find it, he leaves and on his return dies in the town of Shahrazūr37 near Ḥulwān. Thus far the account follows Tabari in all but a few particulars,38 although Tabari is much more detailed on the defeat of Darius, which is passed over in a few lines by Bal'ami. However, Bal'ami then introduces his own story. He states39 that Tabari only mentioned what was recorded in the Qur'ān about Alexander, and notes the hadith describing how the Meccans, unsure whether to believe Muhammad sent Abū Jahl to the Jews of Khaybar to learn some questions from the Torah the Prophet could be asked to test him. Among their suggestions was a question about Alexander, and

36 Add 836, ff. 47b–48b; Tārikhnāma, I, pp. 491–495; Fatih 4285, ff. 90b–91b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 107b–108b.
37 Add 836 merely reads r-w-r for this name; correct version in Tabari and Persian manuscripts.
38 Tabari has no reference to the building of these Transoxianan cities, and there is no reference to Ḥulwān. On the other hand, he gives more details about the size of Alexander’s army.
39 In Add 836, these remarks are introduced by the phrase qāla 'l-mutarjim, ‘the translator said’. Unlike Fatih 4285 and Aya Sofya 3050, RAS Persian 22 contains a rather abbreviated account of this hadith and gives no indication that the material is not to be found in Tabari. Otherwise, their accounts of Alexander are identical.
the angel Gabriel, stepping in at the crucial moment as so often, teaches Muhammad the correct answer in the form of the Qur’anic verses 18.83–98 which Bal’amī cites and explains at length. He discusses Alexander’s wanderings and states that Alexander stayed in the west for a year ‘calling people to Islam’. He further cites two traditions, one of which argues Alexander was both a king and a prophet, the other of which argues he was not a prophet. He does not state a preference for either, but resumes his narrative of Alexander’s travels which have now directed themselves eastwards. In the extreme east Alexander finds a Muslim people, living between two mountains, who, although they do not know Greek, welcome him warmly. Alexander goes on beyond the two mountains and finds Gog and Magog.

Gog and Magog were descendants of Japheth son of Noah. After the flood they settled in the extreme east behind the two mountains and bred. They have human faces and are two cubits high, while their ears drag on the ground. They wear no clothes…. They would attack the Muslims from behind these mountains, spread corruption among them, kill them.

The Muslims offer Alexander a reward (kharāj) if he will help them against this threat. He replies, ‘Protection of Muslims against enmity is a duty for kings, and money should not be taken for it’, and builds a dam between the two mountains to keep Gog and Magog out until the resurrection when they will break through.

Bal’amī concludes his account by quoting two hadiths. The first, on the authority of ‘Ali b. Abī Tālib and Ibn ‘Abbās, affirms that the release of Gog and Magog will be one of the last signs of the resurrection, and they will cause a famine by eating all the crops and drinking all the waters of the Oxus and Tigris so it will be as if no water had ever been in them. The second, on the authority of ‘Ali, says that every day 100,000 of the tribe of Gog and Magog will come to the dam and chip away at it until only a crust an egg-shell thick is left by the evening, when they will go home saying, ‘Tomorrow we shall penetrate it.’ Yet the next day it is invariably strong again. When it is time for the resurrection, there will be a Muslim boy who will tell them to start work by saying bism allāh and to look forward to its completion with in shā’ allāh, and thus will they succeed.

Gog and Magog, living beyond the easternmost borders of Islam, cannot have failed to remind Bal’amī’s audience of the still unconverted Turkic tribes beyond the Sāmānid frontier. They shared the same ancestry as the Turks, as the reference to their distant progenitor Japheth, son of Noah, recalls. Bal’amī had remarked, ‘The Turks, the Slavs, Gog and Magog, and whoever has no good in him, are descended from Japheth.’
depiction of Gog and Magog as primitive brutes was very probably the popular view in Bukhārā of the Turks. The reference to Gog and Magog drinking the Oxus and Tigris dry is possibly an expression of concern at the consequences of the large numbers of Turks coming to live at the heart of the Sāmānid and 'Abbāsid realms. More pointed still is the ḥadīth attributed to 'Alī which effectively states that when this people converts (or pretends to convert) to Islam, they will destroy the world.

This is one of very few instances when it seems possible to read a reference to contemporary affairs in the Tārikhnāma. If the interpretation suggested above is correct, it is intriguing that the text should be so hostile to the Turks, who had by this stage become a powerful force in every level of the Sāmānid state, as has been discussed in Chapter 1. Even more surprising is the implied hostility to the Turkish conversion to Islam, and the suggestion this will end in disaster. It is certainly contradictory to Daniel’s argument that the work may have been written to educate converted Turks, unless the hope was that they would so entirely assimilate and Persianize themselves that they would forget their Turkish origins—a vain hope. Furthermore, in such a context the passage implies that the end of the world is nigh, while Daniel has argued that the Tārikhnāma was composed precisely to counter such views.45

It is natural that concern about the Turks should have been at the forefront of Bal'amī’s mind. The disparate pagan Turks of the steppes may have caused annoyance from time to time, but the true threat to the dynasty came from the converted Turks. Some years later Bal'amī, doing a second and apparently rather ineffectual stint as vizier, had to try to clear up the disastrous mess left when the Qarakhānīd Turk Bughrākhān, a recent convert, expelled Nūḥ b. Manṣūr from his own capital. In the end it was indeed the Muslim Turks, the Ghaznavids and Qarakhānīds, who destroyed the Sāmānid state. Bal'amī did not have to be a prophet himself to foresee the consequences of the Turkish infiltration of the state: Turkish amirs had wreaked chaos in Iraq for decades by his time, and he must have been able to observe the growing power of converted Turks in the Sāmānid domains.

Bal'amī’s treatment of Alexander also reveals the deep differences between his interpretation of the past and the traditional Iranian one. Bal'amī presents Alexander above all as a religious figure, a prophet-like figure who would save the Muslim world at the end of time. His inspiration for this interpretation was of course the Qurʾān, quotations from which figure prominently in his narrative. Islamic elements do feature in Firdawsī’s treatment of Alexander but they represent only a fairly minor part of the narrative. Thus while Firdawsī mentions the building of the wall against Gog and Magog, the episode occupies only 54 lines46 out of nearly two thousand devoted to Alexander.47 Much of the rest of Firdawsī’s narrative is made up of material derived from a Sāsānian

version of the Alexander romance. This had been Persianized, and presented Alexander as a legitimate Iranian king, a relative of the last Achaemenids. For instance, the Shāhnāma has Darius request Alexander marry his daughter in order to produce a son who will preserve the Avesta and the Zoroastrian religion. The aim of this rewriting of history was to ensure that the continuity of Iranian kingship, and thus the legitimacy of the Sāsānian dynasty, was upheld.

Zoroastrians, however, generally had a much more negative view of Alexander, and classed him as one of the great enemies of Iran. The historian ʿHamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 350/961), who tells us he had access to many Iranian sources such as the Khwādāy Nāmag, the Pahlavī Book of Kings, records only Alexander’s destruction of the cities of Iran and his killing of the Persian nobility. Although ʿHamza was a Muslim, there is no reference to the Qurʾānic legends of Alexander. Balʿamī thus ignores both possible Iranian perspectives on Alexander, the hostile Zoroastrian one and the positive Sāsānian one transmitted by Firdawsī. Effectively, he rejects both, for his inspiration is the Qurʾān, not the Khwādāy Nāmag, and his perspective is Islamic, not Iranian. As we shall see, this applies not just to the Alexander episode, but throughout the Tāʾrīḵhnāma.

Bahrām Chūbīn, ancestor of the Sāmānids

The Persian general Bahrām Chūbīn, from whom the Sāmānids claimed descent, overthrew the Sāsānian emperor Hurmuz IV in 590 AD, making him a highly controversial figure in Iranian history. On the one hand he saved Iran from the Turkish khāqān’s invasions, but on the other he was a usurper who overthrew his king. His brief rule was ended when Hurmuz’s son and heir, Khusraw II Parvīz, returned from exile with Byzantine support and successfully reclaimed the throne.

The Persian dynasties (and sometimes the Turkish ones too) that arose in the wake of the ʿAbbāsid collapse often claimed Sāsānian ancestry. The legitimacy of the Būyids and the Tāḥirids, and others was partly dependent on their ability to find some putative royal forefather. For instance, the Būyids, in reality descended from a Caspian fisherman, sought to bolster their status among the older established Iranian

50 Hanaway, ‘Persian Popular Romances’, p. 94.
noble families into whom they married by forging a genealogy that linked them to the Sāsianians. As Treadwell argues, ‘The political function of these genealogies, which were no doubt seen by perceptive observers to be legitimatory charters rather than statements of physical descent, was to provide the necessary credentials for rulers who operated in an Iranian cultural environment.’ It is surprising that the Sāmānids should have sought to legitimize themselves by claiming descent from a usurper rather than a true Persian emperor as their contemporaries and rivals did. Treadwell suggests that this may have been in part connected with the dynasty’s desire to portray themselves as ghāzī defenders of the umma, and descent from the great anti-Turkish champion would have resonated on the borders of Dār al-Islām where warfare against Turkish infidel was a continuing theme. He also argues the Sāmānids’ reluctance to claim imperial descent is reflected in their linking of themselves to a non-royal figure, for ‘they chose a figure who was a march-lord, a prince who occupied the same subordinate position vis-a-vis his monarch as the Sāmānids did in relation to the caliph’. Yet it is hard to imagine that the Sāmānids, generally loyal to the ‘Abbāsid caliph from whose investiture of the dynasty as rulers of Transoxiana and Khurāsān they also drew their legitimacy, would have wished for the obvious parallel with a subordinate who overthrew his monarch to be drawn.

Bal’amī’s discussion of Bahrām Chūbīn’s career is (with the possible exception of Firdawsī’s Šāhnāma) the sole treatment of Bahrām’s career surviving from Sāmānid times. It should therefore offer a unique view of how the Sāmānids wished their controversial ancestor to be perceived. The account survives in two distinct versions, one longer and one shorter. The longer recension is based on the shorter text, but is much more detailed. Rarely does the additional material affect the outline of the narrative, although it does contain some episodes that are not to be found in the shorter version, such as the account of Bahrām Chūbīn’s encounter with a fairy. Presumably the source for this was the book of Akhībār-i ‘Ajām, which is mentioned in the longer but not the shorter version.

55 Ibid, p. 285, n. 66. See here also for references to those authors who record the Sāmānid claim to descent from Bahrām Chūbīn, among them Gardīzī, Ibn al-Athīr, Sam’ānī, and Ibn Hawqal.
56 The Sāmānids nonetheless did have the occasional dispute with the Baghdad caliphate, most notably refusing to recognize al-Appī and al-Qādir, substituting their names with those of their predecessors on Sāmānid coinage. See ibid, pp. 288–9.
57 Add 836, ff. 67b–70a (long version, with some abridgements); Tārikhānāma, II, pp. 764–805 (long); Fatih 4285, ff. 140b–143a (short); Aya Sofya 3050 ff. 167a–170b (short).
59 Ibid, II, p. 764. It is not, however, mentioned in Add 836.
Hurmuz, on the advice of his court, sends his general Bahrām Chūbīn to confront the Turkish khāqān who is invading Iran. Bahrām wins a decisive victory over the Turks and remits the plunder to court, but Hurmuz’s vizier Yazdān Bakhshish60 tells the king that this is only a part of the total gained, suggesting Bahrām is keeping the rest for himself. Hurmuz, furious, insults Bahrām for his ingratitude by sending him a spindle, thread and fetters, implying his fickleness is like a woman’s. Bahrām’s army, angered by this slight, advances on the capital and Hurmuz is removed from power as a result of his treatment of Bahrām. His son Parvīz accedes, but Bahrām persuades the imperial army confronting him outside the city to support him instead and manages to seize power.61

Meanwhile Parvīz flees to safety in Byzantium. He is saved from starvation on his journey by a Bedu named lyās b. Qabīsa who feeds him.62 Later he is helped by a Christian monk who predicts that he will marry the Byzantine emperor’s daughter and will return to power with Byzantine aid. He states that he knows from reading ‘the books of the prophet Daniel’ that Parvīz will be succeeded by his son, and then by his daughter for a few days, then by his grandson, and ‘then kingship of the Persians will pass from his hand to the descendants of the prophet Ḥusayn[the Arabs] and will remain with them until the day of resurrection.’ Ba’amī concludes by recounting Parvīz’s marriage to the emperor’s daughter and his triumphant return to Iran which removes Bahrām, forcing him to take exile with the Turks, where he dies.

A comparison of this text with Ṭabarī’s versions of the same narrative reveals the scale and purpose of Ba’amī’salterations to the original. Ṭabarī presents us with a picture of Bahrām as usurper, and Khusraw Parvīz as the legitimate claimant to the throne. He gives two separate accounts, although the thrust of both is similar.63 The first states that the Turks under Shāba invaded Hurmuz’s territories, as did the Byzantines, Khazars and Arabs. Hurmuz decides to move against Shāba first, and ‘sent against him a man of the people of Rayy called Bahram’.64 Bahrām advances on the Turkish forces beyond Herāt and Bādhghīs and defeats them, killing Shāba. The latter’s son marches against Bahrām, but is forced to surrender. Bahrām then sends Hurmuz plunder from the Turkish camps.

60 The name is slightly corrupt in Add 836 and has therefore been corrected in accordance with the reading of most of the Persian manuscripts.
61 According to the long version, he adopts the Arabic title al-qayyīm bi-‘l-mulk (‘Upholder of the Kingdom’), maintaining he is acting as regent for Parvīz’s infant son Shahriyār. Add 836, f. 68a; Ṭārīkhnāma, II, p. 790.
62 Long redaction: lyās states that when Parvīz returns to power he will come and demand repayment (Add 836, f. 68a; Ṭārīkhnāma, II, p. 792). lyās b. Qabīsa is mentioned in Ṭabarī (Ṭa’rīkh, I, pp. 1029, 1038 and ibid, History, V, p. 372, n. 911), not in the account of Bahrām Chūbīn, but rather in a couple of passing mentions to his time as governor of Ḥira for the Sāsānians between 602 and 610 AD, over a decade after the events described here.
63 Ṭabarī, Ṭa’rīkh, I, p. 991 ff.
64 Ibid, I, p. 992.
At this point, however, Bahrām rebels. No reason is given except that ‘Bahrām was afraid of Hurmuz’ violence, as were the troops who were with him.’65 Bahrām advances on Ctesiphon and proclaims Parvīz king. Parvīz flees to Azerbaijan in fear of his father, and those at court either join him in exile or assist in the deposition of Hurmuz. Having gathered support, Hurmuz returns to Ctesiphon and his army confronts Bahrām’s after the general rejects Parvīz’s conciliatory offers of promotion. After various battles, Parvīz is obliged to take refuge in Byzantium as his father advises him. From Antioch he writes to Maurice to request help, and the Byzantine emperor gives him his daughter in marriage. At this point the first account concludes by mentioning the length of Hurmuz’s reign and stating that Parvīz then ‘assumed the royal power’.

This account is somewhat confused and not especially detailed. While at no point is it made clear that Bahrām seized the throne for himself, implying instead that Parvīz inherited the throne directly from Hurmuz, it is undoubtedly hostile to him. Problems of oral transmission amongst Tabari’s sources (for whom there is no isnād here) may be responsible for some of this lack of clarity, but one cannot escape the conclusion that there is a deliberate attempt to ignore the reasons for Bahrām’s rebellion, namely, his shameful treatment by Hurmuz.

The second account is considerably fuller. A description of Parvīz as ‘one of the most outstanding kings of that dynasty in regard to bravery, one of them with the most incisive judgment, and one with the most farsighted perceptions’.66 prepares the reader for an account sympathetic to the Sāsānians. The narrative then switches to Parvīz’s exile in Azerbaijan, where he receives a letter informing him that the nobles have resolved to depose his father and that Bahrām Chūbīn will occupy Ctesiphon if he does not get there first. Parvīz therefore advances on the capital where the ‘leading figures and notables rallied to him, full of joy at his arrival’67 and assumes the throne. He then goes to Hurmuz, assuring him of his own innocence in his treatment. His father forgives him, but demands that those responsible for his downfall be punished.

On hearing of Parvīz’s coronation, Bahrām advances on Ctesiphon. The new emperor, accompanied by nobles, comes out to meet him with great pomp. When Bahrām sees all this splendour, ‘he became downcast’.68 Parvīz offers to promote him to Ispahbād of all Persia, but Bahrām responds with threats and abuse so violent that his own sister rebukes him. Battle commences, and Parvīz is obliged to retreat, fleeing to Byzantium on his father’s advice. The courtiers Bistām and Bindūya therefore strangle Hurmuz with Parvīz’s tacit consent to prevent him being used as a puppet ruler by Bahrām, and then accompany Parvīz into exile, a stratagem of Bindūya’s saving the emperor from capture by Bahrām’s forces.

Meanwhile, Bahrām seizes the throne despite general hostility, ruling by fear.69 Bahrām b. Siyāvush, formerly one of Bahrām Chūbīn’s generals, conspires to overthrow

66 Tabari, History, V, p. 305.
68 Ibid, V, p. 308.
69 Ibid, V, p. 311.
the usurper, but the plan fails. Parvīz, however, has managed to reach Antioch and contact Maurice for aid. The Byzantine emperor sends him his daughter in marriage and his brother Theodosius with an army sixty thousand strong. They advance to Azerbaijan where they join Bindūya, who has escaped to there, while ‘people from Fārs, Ḵᵛārān, and Khurāsān rushed to Parvīz’s standard’.70 Bahrām advances towards his rival, but according to the Zoroastrians, Parvīz escapes him by the aid of a supernatural power. He then meets Bahrām in single combat and defeats him so that the rebel is obliged to retreat to the Turks, who received him with honour. Parvīz eventually succeeds in having him murdered in exile.

While Ṭabarī’s first account is not favourable to Bahrām, this second does not attempt to disguise its utter hostility. Again, no proper explanation is offered of Bahrām’s rebellion. Rather, the general is seen as essentially a violent thug, responding to the rightful emperor’s offers of promotion and favour with abuse, and ruling through fear alone. Even Bahrām’s erstwhile supporters such as Bahrām b. Siyūsh reject his rule in disgust, and when he is finally removed, the people of Iran rejoice at the restoration of their true sovereign.

A different approach to Bahrām Chūbīn is found in Firdawsī’s Shāhnāma. Firdawsī treats his rebellion at length,71 and uses it to explore the relationship between rulers and their subjects and the legitimacy of these rulers.72 Firdawsī is sympathetic towards Bahrām, who is depicted as a hero driven to rebellion by the emperor’s ill-treatment of him. Parvīz, on the other hand, is portrayed as a weak and ineffective monarch who can only regain his throne with foreign aid. Thus Firdawsī’s treatment of Bahrām has more in common with Balʿamī’s than either do with Ṭabarī’s account. However, Balʿamī’s account does not reflect Firdawsī’s preoccupation with the question of dynastic legitimacy. In the Shāhnāma, Bahrām Chūbīn argues that he has the right to the throne on the basis of his ability, and mocks the Sāsānians’ own descent, as Sāsān himself had been a shepherd.73 The long version of this episode in the Tārīkhnāma makes it clear that Bahrām only ever intended to be regent, while the short version is silent on the question of whether Parvīz or Bahrām is more deserving of the throne. Writing for a ruler who claimed descent from Bahrām Chūbīn, it is unsurprising that Balʿamī sought to avoid portraying Mansūr’s ancestor as a usurper.

Thus it is clear that Balʿamī could not have translated Ṭabarī’s version as it stands even if he had wanted to. The highly negative portrayal of Bahrām Chūbīn in the History would have been unacceptable to the Sāmānids. Yet while Balʿamī does offer some excuse for Bahrām’s rebellion in his emphasis on his mistreatment by Hurmuz, and his treatment of the subject is far less openly hostile than Ṭabarī’s, Bahrām’s career is not especially romanticized. Although Bahrām Chūbīn is listed among Mansūr’s ancestors

70 Ibid, V, p. 313.
in the introduction to the *Tārīkhnāma*, Bal'āmī makes no reference to his connection with the Sāmānid dynasty in this passage, and there is no trace of any attempt to legitimize the dynasty through its links to him. This is quite the contrary of what one would expect of a history composed at the behest of the Sāmānid ruler.

The most credible explanation for Bal'āmī's treatment of this subject is that he was not writing for an audience to whom the Sāmānids wished to appeal through their links with the Iranian past. As discussed in Chapter 1, the use of Iranian imagery seems to have been restricted to court circles, so it is unsurprising that the *Tārīkhnāma* should play down links between the Sāmānids and the Iranian past if it was addressed to a wider audience beyond the court, as its preface suggests. Although the Būyids may have needed to stress the Sāsānian heritage to legitimize themselves, they operated in a very different environment from the Sāmānids. Western Iran and the Caspian, where the Būyids were based, remained centres of Iranian culture and Zoroastrianism up to the fourth/tenth century, whereas Transoxiana was part of a very different cultural area where Islam was the dominant element in almost every aspect of life. Furthermore, the Sāmānids were by no means unique in their claim to descent from Bahrām Chūbīn. According to the preface to *Abū Mansūr b. ʿAbd al-Razzāq*’s *Shāh-nāma*, both Ibn ʿAbd al-Razzāq himself and his secretary *Abū Mansūr Maʿmār* could trace their lineage back to Bahrām Chūbīn.74 There is no record that either of these were either related to one another or to the Sāmānids. Thus it seems unlikely that such genealogies would have been taken particularly seriously by anyone in the fourth/tenth century *mashriq*. Probably, they represent the same Iranianizing tendency among the elite that *Mansūr b. Nūḥ*’s Pahlavī-inscribed medallion does—one that was restricted to the court and upper classes, and not destined for public consumption. Interestingly, just as Bahrām Chūbīn himself traced his lineage back to the Arsacids and rejected the legitimacy of the Sāsānians,75 so does *Mansūr*’s medallion use distinctively east Iranian imagery which does not draw on Sāsānian antecedents. This suggests that in so far as the Sāmānids and their vassals did legitimize themselves by reference to the Iranian past, this was not done through the Sāsānians, but through other, local, connections. However, the fact that Bal'āmī ignores the Sāmānids’ descent from Bahrām Chūbīn in this passage reflects the fairly limited appeal of this tendency and underlines that while Bal'āmī wrote in Persian, he was not necessarily pursuing any obvious patriotic agenda.

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74 V.Minorsky, ‘The older preface to the *Shāh-nāma*’ in Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida, Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1956, II, pp. 176–8. *Abū Mansūr b. ʿAbd al-Razzāq* is said to be descended from Bahrām ‘who at the time of Khusraw Parvīz was ispabad’, who must be identical with Bahrām Chūbīn. *Abū Mansūr Maʿmār*’s genealogy is traced back to the Kanārang (lord of an eastern march), ‘son of Parvīz’s sarhang’. Here the Kanārang has become confused with his father, but it is clear from the account of his battles against the Turkish king Shāba makes it clear that the reference is indeed to Bahrām Chūbīn.

The Ridda: apostasy and the early Islamic state

Even during the lifetime of the Prophet, Islam had started to expand across the Arabian peninsula. Through a combination of raids, treaties and peaceful submission many of the disparate tribes of Arabia had been obliged to set aside their feuding and unite under the banner of Islam. Yet this victory for Muhammad’s inchoate state was not purely religious, for the newly converted tribes had to remit tribute and tax to Medina, marking their political subjugation to the new hegemony of Quraysh, the Prophet’s tribe. On Muhammad’s death every tribe but Quraysh rebelled. Some sought to assert their independence by discontinuing payments though still adhering to the new faith, while others, incited by the false prophets who, if the chronicles are to be believed, were rife in Arabia at this point, rejected Islam entirely. Muslim historians named these movements, of whichever variety, the Ridda or ‘Apostasy’. It was a crucial moment for the young Medinan state: had Abū Bakr, the first Caliph, failed to suppress the Ridda it is likely that name would now be no more famous than that of Musaylima, the anti-prophet of al-Yamāma, if indeed Islam had succeeded in surviving to record its own history. Although Muslim historians viewed Islam’s ultimate victory as inevitable, the story of Abū Bakr’s uncompromising reaction and the defeat of the apostate Arabian tribes by his commanders, most prominently the famous Khālid b. al-Walīd, occupies a prominent place in Ṭabarī, who based his narrative predominantly on accounts transmitted by Sayf b. ‘Umar, a somewhat controversial akhbārī. The theme of Ridda derived its importance for Islamic historiography from the fact that it was, like the related theme futūh (the conquest of new lands), ‘seen retrospectively as a sign of God’s favour for the new Islamic faith’. A ʿami’s treatment of the Ridda is of particular interest to us. If the Tārīkhnāma was inspired partly by a need to respond to heretical movements, especially to the Ismāʿili propaganda which sought to convert the Sunnis of Transoxiana, we may well expect to find this reflected here. As numerous tracts of the mediaeval period make clear, conversion to Ismāʿilīsm was often seen as no better than apostasy itself. Indeed, there was a tendency among some mediaeval Muslims to condemn virtually any theological position with which one did not agree, as is witnessed by the al-Sawād al-ʿAʿzāmi’s branding of Muʿtazilism as kufr (unbelief). The failure of the mass apostasy of the 630s should therefore offer excellent parallels for a writer determined to combat heresy in the admittedly different atmosphere of the fourth/tenth century, whether of an Ismāʿili or any other variety. As Lewis has noted, the Ridda ‘provided the model or paradigm for the treatment of rulers or entities seen as apostate’. The extent to which the text may in fact be seen as reflecting such concerns will be assessed in the following discussion.

77 Ṭabarī, History, X, p. xiii.
78 Samarqandi, Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-ʿAʿzāmi (ʿA. Ḥabībi), Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Iran, 1348, p. 36. This tendency was, however, condemned by many theologians.
The rebellion of Aswad the Liar

Balʿamī’s first chapter devoted to the Ridda is entitled the Account of Aswad the Liar and his Killing in Yemen. Only part of the chapter in Add 836 is concerned with Aswad and his rebellion, with the latter half treating Abū Bakr’s efforts to defend Medina and gain the upper hand over the apostate tribes, a matter given a separate chapter heading in the Persian manuscripts consulted. In between the two sections is a very brief notice of the death of Fatima the Prophet’s daughter. In this arrangement Balʿamī emulates Tabari. In the discussion I will focus on Aswad’s revolt.

Aswad, of the tribe of Ansā, and also known to Tabari as Ayha or Abhala, raised the standard of revolt in Yemen at the end of Muḥammad’s life or just after his death. While Balʿamī alludes to his claim to prophethood, we are given virtually no detail on this. Tabari does not go any further than calling him a kāhin (soothsayer), who is in league with supernatural powers, as is illustrated when Satan warns him of the Muslim conspiracy to murder him. Both Balʿamī and Tabari concentrate their accounts on how the loyal Muslims of Yemen unite against the usurper who had killed Muḥammad’s appointee, and how Islam is successfully restored to the country.

The most obvious differences between Balʿamī’s and Tabari’s accounts are in structure rather than fact, for there is no evidence that Balʿamī relied on any external sources in his treatment of Aswad. Tabari’s narrative is given in three principle versions, all transmitted through Sayf, and all purporting to be first-hand accounts. As so often with Sayf, the accounts are exceedingly confusing with unexpected changes of grammatical persons rendering even more severe the difficulties presented by Sayf’s (or his informants’) unorthodox grammar and vocabulary. Balʿamī smoothed over these difficulties, combining elements of the various accounts, and essentially created a new narrative based on Tabari. While Balʿamī does not explicitly contradict Tabari to any great extent in his treatment of Aswad’s rebellion, his account does omit some facts stressed by Tabari. Most intriguingly, Tabari’s emphasis on the role of Persians in

80 Add 836, ff. 126a–127b; Tārīkhnāma, III, pp. 352–357; Fatih 4285, ff. 225b-226b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 230b–231b. The text of the Ridda narratives in all these manuscripts is extremely stable, with very few variants, and no differences of any significance.
81 This material is covered by Tabari, Tārīkh-I, pp. 1851–81, in which the account of events in Yemen concludes on p. 1868. See also, Tārīkhnāma, III, p. 357; Fatih 4285, f. 226b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 231b.
82 Add 836, f. 126a; Tārīkhnāma, III, p. 352; Fatih 4285, f. 225b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 230b.
83 Tabari, Tārīkh-I, p. 1864.
85 A discussion of this characteristic of the Tārīkhnāma is found in below in Ḥusayn b. ʿAlt’s ‘The politics of tragedy’. See also Chapter 3.
opposing Aswād is greatly reduced by Ba‘l'amī. In both works, Persians play a prominent and positive role, but their ethnicity is highlighted only by Tabari. As both historians record, Muḥammad had appointed the Persian Bādhān governor of all Yemen on his conversion to Islam. After Bādhān’s death, his son Shahr had been appointed over Ṣan‘ā’, while the rest of the country was divided up between Muslim Arab chieftains. After Aswād’s victory and the consequent death of Shahr b. Bādhān, two more Persians, Ibn Bādhān’s cousins Fayrūz and Zādūya, come to prominence. Initially Aswād had appointed them as commanders of the Persians in Yemen, but Mu‘ādh b. Jabal (who appears to have been a missionary sent by the Prophet to Yemen) swiftly persuades them to join forces with him to overthrow the pretender. Fayrūz and Zādūya seek the assistance of Aswād’s wife (formerly Shahr’s wife, and a Persian herself, whose name is given by Tabarī as the Persian Āzād). Hating her new husband who, she says, is ‘an infidel who does not pray…nor does he avoid what is forbidden’, she readily agrees to help, and through her Fayrūz is able to penetrate into Aswād’s house and kill him. Fayrūz presents the head to his fellow conspirators, who the next day show it to the people in the main mosque of Ṣan‘ā’, and Islam is restored to Yemen.

One might imagine that this episode would present a superb opportunity for Ba‘l'amī, writing at the behest of a dynasty known both for its sponsorship of Persian culture and for its religious orthodoxy, especially if a principal motive for the Tārikhnāma’s composition was indeed the desire to combat heresy. The episode of Aswād shows some of the earliest Persian Muslims overthrowing a pagan usurper in order to restore the true faith, a theme which, if developed, could have had tremendous resonance in the fourth/tenth century. The similarities between the Sāmānids’ and Fayrūz and Zādūya’s struggle against false belief are obvious. Yet this aspect is entirely ignored by Ba‘l'amī. Scarcely any reference is made by Ba‘l'amī to the Persians’ ethnicity, although admittedly it would have been as obvious from their names to his audience as it is to us. No crude parallels with any contemporary situation are drawn, and indeed, Ba‘l'amī’s use of Tabarī’s accounts occasionally suggests that he was deliberately avoiding any such comparisons.

86 Persians had long been resident in Yemen owing to that land’s subjugation to the Sāsānian Empire. See R. Hoyland, Arabia and the Arabs from the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam, London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 56–7 on this relationship between Yemen and Iran in Late Antiquity. 87 Add 836, f. 126a; Tārikhnāma, III, p. 353; Fatih 4285, f. 225b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 230b; Tabari, Tārikhnāma, I, p. 1851. Note that Ba‘l'amī (in Add 836 and the Persian manuscripts) uses the correct Persian form of the name Bādhān, whereas Tabarī has Bādhām. 88 Given in RAS Persian 22 and Fatih 2485 as Shahr-i Firūz, but in Aya Sofya 3050, as Pīrūz/ Fīrūz. 89 Add 836, f. 126b; Tārikhnāma, III, pp. 353–354; Fatih 4285, f. 226a; Aya Sofya 3050, 231a.
In Tabari’s second account Fāryūz is credited with giving the first call to prayer after Aswād’s murder, a fact which obviously heightens the Persian’s religious role. Yet Bal’amī chooses an account to which Tabari gives very little prominence, stating that the Arab Mū’ādh b. Jābal gave the first call to prayer. Tabari also occasionally refers to the Persians’ ethnic origin, such as by giving Zādūya the epithet ‘al-Fārīsī’ (‘the Persian’). This is avoided by Bal’amī. He also entirely ignores one particularly laudatory comment on Fāryūz, given in an isnād traced back through Sayf to Ibn ‘Umar:

The news [of the Muslims’ victory] reached the Prophet from heaven on the night in which [Aswād] al-‘Ansī was killed, that he might bring us the good tidings, so he said, Al-‘Ansī was killed last night, a blessed man of a blessed family killed him.’ He was asked, ‘And who [is this]?’ He replied, ‘Fāryūz gained the victory, Fāryūz.’

This reduction of the Persians’ importance is reflected in the Persian manuscripts too, so it cannot be suggested that it is the result of an anti-Persian bias in the Arabic Add 836. It is of course true that Bal’amī’s account is much shorter than Tabari’s and thus is obliged to jettison some material in the Arabic original. It is quite possible that Bal’amī did not have a deliberate policy of playing down the Persians’ role, but rather that he did not find their Persian ethnicity nearly as interesting as one might have anticipated. This is in itself significant, and together with the evidence I have presented earlier, such as Bal’amī’s discussion of Ishmael, suggests that it is unlikely that Bal’amī was attempting to promote a Perso-centric, nationalistic agenda as previous scholars have suggested.

90 Tabari, Ta’rikh, I, p. 1862. Here the narrator is unclear due to the changes in personal pronouns but it must be either Fāryūz or Zādūya. It cannot be Qays, mentioned as the third conspirator, as the narrator indicates he has close kinship with Azād and therefore must be Persian. The context indicates Fāryūz is more likely.

91 Ibid, I, p. 1863. Cf. Add 836, f. 126a; Tārikhnāma, III, p. 357; Fatih 4285, f. 226a-b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 231b. Tabari does not even state unambiguously that Mū’ādh took the first call to prayer; indeed as he records that Mū’ādh had to be summoned to come to Sāmā‘ after Aswād’s defeat, it is highly unlikely that he could have done so. Bal’amī has thus taken some liberties with the text to produce the curious result we observe. Strangely, he ignores Tabari’s third account which states that the Prophet’s envoy Wābr b. Yuhannās performed the first adhān, which would have allowed him to avoid attributing it to Fāryūz, if this was his aim. See Tabari, Ta’rikh, I, p. 1867.


Sajāh, the Prophetess and the Apostasy of Tamīm

Balʿamī seems to have been descended from the tribe of Tamīm, at least if we can trust the testimony of the mediaeval biographers and historians, which there seems no reason not to do in this instance, it being unanimous on the subject. Tamīm, Ṭabarī, and other historians of the Ridda such as Diyārbakrī and Balansī indicate, were significant players in the Ridda period and are one of the most prominent apostate tribes they discuss. Ṭabarī devotes a considerable part of his narrative to Tamīm’s entanglement with the false prophetess Sajāh from which the tribe does not emerge in a very positive light. The author of the Arabic History, being of Āmulī Persian descent, obvious has no axe to grind in his discussion of the individual Arab tribes other than the predictable general dislike of apostasy. The same is not necessarily true of Balʿamī, who proves many times elsewhere more than capable of ignoring or rewriting events, however well known, that do not suit his purposes, whatever they may be. Nothing would be more natural than that Balʿamī should obfuscate his Tamīm ancestors’ part in events, especially if his motive was indeed to combat heresy and apostasy in Sāmānid Transoxiana.

Tamīm’s apostasy started, according to Ṭabarī, with the reluctance of some of the ʿummāl (sing. ʿamīl) or tax collectors appointed by Muḥammad himself to remit to Mecca the ʿadwa, then a compulsory tax. Each clan had its own ʿāmil and while some remained loyal, others returned the ʿadwa to their tribes, most famously Mālik b. Nuwayra of Banū Yarbūʾ whose activities earned him the nickname ‘al-Jafūl (the Refunder). This appears to have led to fierce dissent among the clans of Tamīm, although there is no suggestion as yet that they had abandoned Islam itself. However, the prophetess Sajāh7 of the Mesopotamian tribe of Taghlib took advantage of Tamīm’s infighting to intervene, and formed an alliance with Mālik b. Nuwayra against his Tamīmī opponents. After a battle between Mālik, his Tamīmī allies such as Wakr of the Banū Mālik, and Sajāh’s Taghibid forces on one side and on the other Tamīmī clans led by the Banū ’l-Ribāb, Sajāh proceeds to the province of al-Yamāmā, the domain of the false prophet Musaylima with whom she allies herself and even marries. Eventually, inevitably, the great Muslim general Khālid b. al-Walīd brings

94 However, the ḥisba ‘Tamīmī’ that the sources give Abū ʿAli and his father could indicate he was linked to Tamīm through ties of clientage rather than descent. The difference is not particularly significant for our discussion: the main point is that he was closely linked to Tamīm.
95 Ṭabarī, Ṭāʾrīkh, I, pp. 1908–10.
96 See Ṭabarī, Ḥistory, X, p. 90, n. 595.
97 Add 836 occasionally records her name as Sajāḥa.
98 Ṭabarī, Ṭāʾrīkh, I, pp. 1911–19.
99 Add 836, ff. 128b–129a. In Ṭāʾrīkhnāma, III, p. 376; Fatih 4285, f. 230a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 235b: ‘She was a Christian, and an eloquent woman, and gave very fine speeches in ṣajī, and told people, “I am a prophet and inspiration comes to me from God.”’
about the downfall of both, and Islam prevails. {Tabarî} does not mention the substance of Sajâh’s beliefs, and Bal'amì merely states that ‘she was a Christian who claimed to be a prophetess.’

{Tabarî}’s account is reliant on Sayf and is thus often hard to interpret. Quite apart from the linguistic difficulties, the audience requires a sound knowledge of tribal politics, as the text is replete with a confusing mêlée of the names of various Tamîmî clans or allied tribes. Bal'amì clearly did not anticipate that his audience would have such skills, and his account is considerably clearer than Sayf’s. This clarity does not, however, redound to the credit of his ancestors’ tribe, for where {Tabari/Sayf} list obscure clan names while scarcely referring to Tamîm itself, Bal’amî’s simplification highlights the tribe’s complicity in the apostasy. Indeed Bal’amî often seems to strive to redress Sayf’s well-known bias towards Tamîm, which was the traditionist’s tribe also. As Donner notes on comparing {Tabari’s} account of this episode to that of Balansî, another early authority for the Ridda, ‘al- {Tabari’s} narratives, derived from Sayf b. ‘Umar, read like an effort to divert the reader’s attention away from the questionable behavior of Mâlik b. Nuwayra’, and this may be partly a result of Sayf’s aim to exculpate Tamîm. Thus in his efforts to correct this bias, when Mâlik and his brother agree to an alliance with Bal’amî Sajâh notes that they are chiefs of Tamîm and friends of ‘Umar b. al-Khattâb, facts ignored by {Tabari} which serve only to magnify their crime. After the rebel forces’ victory over the Banû ‘l-Bal’amî Ribâb, writes that ‘all the clans of Tamîm believed in her {Sajâh}, something {Tabari} does not record. Furthermore, Bal’amî devotes considerable attention to Sajâh’s encounter with Musaylima, with its atmosphere of debauchery and hypocrisy. Musaylima’s and Sajâh’s sayy utterances (discussed previously in Chapter 3) are quoted by {Tabari} without comment, whereas in the Târikhnama the false prophets usually preface them with the phrase such as ‘God sent down to me a sûra on this, which is…’. By drawing the attention to their efforts to emulate Muhammad’s genuinely inspired utterances, Bal’amî underlines the gravity of their heresy.

There is therefore no evidence to suggest Bal’amî felt the slightest concern about his ancestors’ association with this apostate tribe. Compared to {Tabari/Sayf}, Bal’amî actually highlights Tamîm’s involvement, demonstrating of what little concern this was to him. It also suggests that the desire to combat heresy may not have been at the forefront of his mind, for an author with that intention would surely not emphasize his

100 Tabari, History, X, p. xv.
101 Add 836, f. 129a; Târikhnama, III, p. 373; Fatih 4285, f. 230a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 235b.
102 Add 836, f. 129a. The Persian text lists the clans: Târikhnama, III, p. 378; Fatih 4285, f. 230b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 236a.
103 Add 836, f. 129a-b; Târikhnama, III, pp. 380–383; Fatih 4285; f. 231a-b Aya Sofya 3050, f. 237a-b.
104 Add 836, f. 129b; Târikhnama, III, p. 381; Fatih 4285, f. 231a-b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 236b237a.
own ancestors’ apostasy. In Bal‘amī, Tamīm are shown as wholly lacking any good grace even on their final conversion back to Islam: the Tamīmī chiefs Zibriqān b. Badr and Aqrā’ b. Ḥābis, the very ones who had accompanied Sajāh to al-Yamāma, on realizing they have made a major miscalculation, approach Abū Bakr demanding the kharāj of Bahrayn in return for guaranteeing the future orthodoxy of their tribe.105 Mālik meanwhile dies at the hands of one of Khālid’s soldiers, although it was debated as to whether he had converted or not.106 Of course, the entire account is hostile to the apostates, as is underlined by the sordid nature of Musaylima and Sajāh’s relationship, and Musaylima’s invention of ‘sūras’ to justify fulfilling his desires.

Yet this does not imply that the account was meant to have any particular obvious contemporary relevance, for virtually any author of any dogmatic allegiance would have condemned apostasy and represented it in the worst possible light. The intriguing question is why Bal‘amī seeks to correct Sayf’s pro-Tamīmī bias which Tabarī reflects when it may have been potentially embarrassing to do so. Even granted that the misdeeds of Bal‘amī’s Tamimi forefathers may not have been a source of any embarrassment in the environment of fourth/tenth century Transoxiana, Bal‘amī nonetheless, without any apparent necessity, rejected the cover-up of their activities that the text conveniently presented him and deliberately emphasized them.

###  Husayn b. ‘Ali: the politics of tragedy

The opposition which so frequently confronted the Umayyad state often took on a religious character. Sometimes, as with Abū Muslim’s revolt which propelled the ‘Abbāsidsto power, religious concerns were at least to some extent a mask for economic and social grievances. Yet the attempt to trace the roots of all opposition to the Umayyads in such complaints is mistaken, for Muslim opinion appears to have been genuinely shocked by many of their actions. Two courses of action were open to those who opposed the Umayyad state and its frequently drunken, irreligious caliphs. Safest was to emulate the many piety-minded individuals such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ḥasan b. ‘Ali, who withdrew entirely from political life, accepting the status quo without approving of it. The alternative was open revolt. Of such rebellions, the most successful was based in Mecca, under the anti-caliph ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr. The latter had refused to recognize the succession of Mu‘āwiya’s son Yazīd in 60/680 and during a time of great Umayyad weakness succeeded in securing the allegiance of most of the lands of the caliphate except

105 Add 836, f. 130a; Tārīkhnāma, III, pp. 383–4; Fatih 4285, f. 232a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 237b; Tabarī, Ta’rīkh, I, p. 1920. Their demand was rejected.

106 Add 836, f. 130a–b; Tārīkhnāma, III, pp. 385–389; Fatih 4285, ff. 232a-233b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 238a-b; Tabarī, Ta’rīkh, I, pp. 1924–5.
parts of Syria. Yet while the inspiration for Ibn al-Zubayr’s transient caliphate seems to have originated mainly in the widespread disgust at the Umayyads, for he bore no closer relationship to Muḥammad than they, most revolts were either Khārijite or Shī‘ite in character, and attracted wildly fluctuating levels of popular support. Syria, the Umayyad power-base since Mu‘āwiya’s governorship, generally remained loyal, while Iraq was a centre of dissent.

The most significant of these rebellions was also the most pathetic. In 61/ 680 the grandson of the Prophet, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, marched on Iraq accompanied by his family and a handful of followers. His cousin Muslim b. ‘Aqil had already gone to Kūfa, whence he had written to Husayn inviting him to join him there, as he had been told there was substantial support for him in preference to Yazīd. By the time Husayn arrived, the Shī‘ite movement in Kūfa had been crushed by the Umayyads’ ruthless governor ‘Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād who now prepared to kill the Prophet’s own grandson. Hunted down by the Umayyad troops under ‘Umar b. Sa‘d to Karbalā’ on the Euphrates, Husayn and his followers were massacred and his womenfolk taken captive. ‘Ubaydallāh then sent Husayn’s head along with the prisoners to Yazīd in Damascus.

The tragedy of Husayn has been engraved on the Muslim consciousness ever since. It became a defining event for the Shī‘ites who mark the anniversary of the massacre, 10 Muharram or ‘Āshūrā’, to this day.10 Sympathy for Husayn was by no means limited to those who identified with the ‘Alid cause, and in mediaeval times Sunnīs too sometimes seem to have commemorated ‘Āshūrā’.10 Although the basic facts are undisputed among Muslims, the interpretations of them vary to an extraordinary degree.

For instance, some accounts claim that the deaths were caused by exceeding his orders and that Yazīd genuinely regretted them. Others state that Yazīd rejoiced in the death of his rival. Ṭabarī, as ever appears to offer ‘a definitive account of the event where all the evidence has been collated and presented’,109 based mainly on the second/eighth century accounts of Abū Mikhnāf and the briefer ones attributed to the Fifth Shī‘ite Imām Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad al-Bāqir. However, as Howard argues, Ṭabarī edits the accounts with extreme care, and his version is not all it initially seems.110 For example, information which would weaken Yazīd’s claim to caliphate is omitted and responsibility for the appointment of ‘Ubaydallāh is removed from Yazīd. Ṭabarī does not so much distort facts as select them with a specific agenda in mind.

107 The distinction between the Sunnīs and the Shī‘a was of course by no means as clear in the first/seventh century as it was to become by the fourth/tenth.
His general attitude appears to be what one would expect of a Sunnī of his times: while appalled by the murder of the Prophet’s grandson, he is prepared to exculpate Yazīd to at least some extent. This would seem to be an attractive presentation for Ba‘lâmī to adopt, yet his treatment of the episode in fact raises serious problems.

Ba‘lâmī selects and combines the accounts of Tabarî’s various authorities. As we have noted in our discussions of other parts of the Tārīkhnāma, this is his standard practice. Information is woven together from disparate authorities regardless of their alleged political or sectarian prejudices, so it is not surprising to find the same technique employed here. Yet there is one perplexing discrepancy in his treatment of the tragedy of Ḥusayn: Ba‘lâmī exhibits a decided preference for information from Shi‘ite authorities, despite the fact they only represent a fraction of Tabarî’s text.

A further and most serious problem is that of the state of the text, which is in places extremely unstable. A particularly interesting and problematic feature is that while much of the text of the Ilkhānid manuscripts considered here—RAS, Persian 22, Fatih 4285 and Aya Sofya 3050—shows relatively little variation between each other until the sections dealing with the aftermath of Ḥusayn’s death, they often disagree with Add 836 to a much greater extent than usual. However, the readings of Add 836 are often supported by a somewhat unexpected source, the sixth/twelfth century Mengücekid manuscript from Erzincan, now held in Mashhad as Astān-i Quds 129, a fragmentary but ancient manuscript. The agreement of Add 836 and the Mashhad manuscript against the Ilkhānid manuscripts is extremely significant. Firstly, the antiquity of the Mashhad manuscript helps confirm that Add 836 preserves a text rather older than that of other manuscripts; it also indicates that the text they share, with its evident ‘Alid sympathies, was later modified and made less controversial, probably for a Mongol audience.

Let us examine firstly Ba‘lâmī’s account of Ḥusayn’s cousin Muslim’s abortive revolt at Kūfa.111 All the sources concur that the Kūfans wrote to Ḥusayn inviting him to come to them, and he sent Muslim b. ‘Aqīl to sound out the situation. Ba‘lâmī states that Muslim encouraged him to come, assuring him that 12,000 Shi‘ites had already promised their allegiance,112 while another 100,000 could be counted on upon his arrival in person.113 These figures are absent from Tabarî, who starts his account with the brief version of Muḥammad al-Ībāqīr as transmitted by ‘Amr b. al-Duhnī, a well-known Shi‘ite traditionist.114 This is followed by various versions on the authority

112 Tārīkhnāma, IV, p. 699; Fatih 4285, f. 287a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 202b.
113 This figure of 100,000 is found only in Add 836 and the Mashhad manuscript.
of Abū Mikhnāf who, in Ṭabarī’s words, ‘gives a fuller and more complete account’.\(^{115}\) Abū Mikhnāf had a variety of informants, so a few of his isnāds are also traced back to Shi‘ite sources. Thus his second khabar is reported from Muḥammad b. Bishr al-Hamdānī, another Kūfī Shī‘ite.\(^{116}\) Ṭabarī also inserts into Abū Mikhnāf’s account some reports transmitted by ‘Umar b. Shabba, another allegedly pro-Shī‘ite historian.\(^{117}\) However, as Howard indicates, it is Muḥammad al-Bāqir’s account which is presented as the authentic Shī‘ite viewpoint.\(^{118}\)

At first glance, Bal‘amī’s account resembles most closely that of Muḥammad al-Bāqir. This is in part a result of their similar style of presentation, for while Abū Mikhnāf constantly cites different authorities, the Fifth Imām’s version is smooth and fluent in the same way that Bal‘amī’s is. However, the similarity is more than superficial, for Bal‘amī often prefers Muḥammad al-Bāqir’s account to the other sources. There is no substantial issue connected with the rising at Kūfa about which Bal‘amī differs with Muḥammad al-Bāqir, although he often uses the other authorities to complement the Imām’s rather bare account. Thus the latter states of ‘Ubaydallāh’s appointment as governor of Baṣra that Yazīd ‘gave him authority over Kūfa together with Baṣra. He also wrote to him to hunt for Muslim b. ‘Aqīl and kill him if he found him.’\(^{119}\) Abū Mikhnāf, however, gives a much fuller account of his appointment and the situation in Baṣra, from which Bal‘amī takes the detail that ‘Ubaydallāh executed Husayn’s messenger who was seeking the allegiance of the Baṣranš who explains that the governor had left his retinue at Qādisiyya.\(^{121}\)

In Bal‘amī’s account of Muslim’s rising, of the major pieces of information which cannot be attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir, we find that Abū Mikhnāf is the sole authority for only one. ‘Umar b. Shabba meanwhile is the sole

115 Ṭabarī, History, XIX, p. 22.
116 See ibid, p. 23, esp. n. 104.
117 Ibid, p. 35, n. 163.
118 Ibid, p. xi.
119 Ibid, p. 18.
120 Add 836, f. 191b; in Mashhad, RAS Persian 22, Fatih 4285, f. 287b and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303a, no mention of mosque; Ṭabarī, Ta’rikh-I, p. 241.
121 Add 836, f. 192a; Fatih 4285, f. 287b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303a; Ta’rikh, Ṭabarī-I, p. 243.
authority for three major pieces of information.\textsuperscript{122} In addition, there is some other material, such as the number of allegiances promised to \textit{Husayn}, which does not appear to have any authority other than \textit{Bal'ami}\.\textsuperscript{123} Yet whether or not the source for these could be identified, it is clear that \textit{Bal'ami}'s account is overwhelmingly reliant on \textit{Muhammad al-Baqir} and \textit{`Umar b. Shabba}, both \textit{Shi`ites}. It is also entirely clear that he does not use them innocently to provide information absent elsewhere, for he ignores most of the additional material supplied by Abū Mikhnāf.\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, \textit{Muhammad al-Baqir}'s account is by far the least detailed, and \textit{`Umar}'s traditions account for a very limited amount of text as well. If \textit{Bal'ami} had wanted simply to create a comprehensive, authoritative account, this would have been a strange place from which to start.

It is extremely hard to judge from this episode exactly what \textit{Bal'ami}'s intention in using these \textit{Shi`ite} sources is. A very similar pattern exists for his account of \textit{Husayn}'s actual defeat at \textit{Karbalā'}, \textit{Muhammad al-Baqir}'s account of which is again exceptionally cursory,\textsuperscript{125} obliging \textit{Bal'ami} to resort to \textit{Tabari}'s other authorities. Again, his selection is somewhat surprising: \textit{Humayd b. Muslim al-Azdi} is used extensively, although he was reportedly a \textit{Shi`ite} who supported those who demanded vengeance for \textit{Husayn}.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{122} The other two pieces of information, in addition to that already cited, are: that on \textit{`Ubaydallah}'s arrival, the previous governor \textit{Nu'man b. Bashir} thought he was \textit{Husayn} and pleaded with him to withdraw in peace (Add 836, f. 192a; \textit{Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari}, p. 254; \textit{Tārīkhnāma}, IV, p. 701; Fatih 4285, f. 287b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303b; \textit{Tabari, Tārīkh-II}, p. 243); and that when \textit{`Ubaydallah} addressed \textit{Hāni}, the shelterer of Muslim, he reminded him how under his father Ziyād b. Abihi all the other \textit{Shi`a} of Kūfā had been killed (Add 836, loc. cit; \textit{Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari}, p. 255; RAS Persian 22, n/a; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a; \textit{Tabari, Tārīkh-II}, p. 246).

\textsuperscript{123} Aya Sofya 3050, f. 202b. Among the examples of other important pieces of information unique to \textit{Bal'ami} is his statement that after the arrest of \textit{Hāni} and Muslim, 10,000 \textit{Shi`ites} came onto the streets in protest (Add 836, f. 192b; \textit{Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari}, p. 257; other Persian manuscripts: fifty thousand: \textit{Tārīkhnāma}, IV, p. 702; Fatih 4285, f. 287b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303b).

\textsuperscript{124} Thus, for instance, Abū Mikhnāf’s account of \textit{`Ubaydallah}'s assault on \textit{Hāni}, \textit{Tārīkh}, II, pp. 252–3) is ignored by \textit{Bal'ami}.


\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Tabari, History}, XIX, p. 107, n. 369. \textit{Bal'ami} refers to \textit{Humayd} at the following points: when \textit{`Ubaydallah} orders that \textit{Husayn} should be made to die of thirst (Add 836, f. 194a, which is the only manuscript considered here to state that this was deliberately to emulate \textit{Uthmān}'s death by thirst; in \textit{Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari}, p. 262; \textit{Tārīkhnāma}, IV, p. 705; Fatih 4285, f. 288b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 204b, no mention; \textit{`Uthmān}; \textit{Tabari, Tārīkh-II}, pp. 311–2); the account of \textit{Qāsim b. Hasan}'s death at the hands of \textit{`Amr b. Sa`id al-Azdi} (Add 836, f. 196a; in \textit{Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari}, the latter's name given as \textit{`Amr b. (?) Nufayl al-Azdi}; \textit{Tārīkhnāma}, IV, pp. 709–710 name of \textit{Ali} son given as \textit{Qāsim b.}
Bal'ami also inserts several passages which have no direct parallels in Tabari, among them some poetry which will be discussed below, and a speech delivered by Husayn just before the battle in which he blames the Kūfan s for having betrayed him, and compares himself to Moses confronted by Pharaoh, the archetypical tyrant of Islamic literature.127

The passages covering the aftermath of Husayn’s death are particularly unstable in the texts, although all agree that Husayn’s head was sent to ‘Ubaydallāh who forwarded it to Yazīd in Damascus. In Add 836, Yazīd’s reaction is recounted as follows, in an account based on Tabari’s Sunnī informant Ibn Rawḥān:

Yazīd, may God curse him, was delighted by news of the victory, but said on account of the people, ‘Who ordered you to kill Husayn? I ordered you to take the oath of allegiance from him or to send him to me. If you did this out of obedience to me, I would have been content with your obedience without killing al-Husayn. May God’s curse be upon Ibn Sumayya [‘Ubaydallāh].128 If I had won the victory over al-Husayn I would not have killed him, nor would I have taken his children captive.129

Yazīd continues to pretend to abuse ‘Ubaydallāh, and after his speech Bal’ami adds, ‘The ulema said there has never been a debauchee more shameless than Yazīd in all the world.’130 Yazīd’s actions contrast with his words, for

Muhammad, ‘Amīr not named; Fatih 4285, name given as Qāsim b. ‘Ali; ‘Amīr not named; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 305a; Qāsim b. Husayn; ‘Amīr not named; Tarjuma-i Tārikh-II, pp. 358–9); Husayn’s death by Sinān b. Anas’ spear (Add 836, loc. cit.; Tarjuma-i Tārikh-i Taburī, p. 267; however, in Tārikhnāma, IV, p. 711, Fatih 4285, f. 289b and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 305b: at hands of Zayd b. Arqam’s criticism of ‘Ubaydallāh (Add 836, f. 197a; Tarjuma-i Tārikh-i Taburī, p. 273; RAS Persian 22, n/a; Fatih 4285, f. 288b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 304b.

128 ‘Ubaydallāh is occasionally referred to in a derogatory way as Ibn Sumayya or Ibn Marjāna, a reference to his father Ziyād’s descent from a prostitute.

129 Add 836, f. 197a-b; Tarjuma-i Tārikh-i Taburī, p. 273; RAS Persian 22, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a; in Fatih 4285, f. 290b similar words (in Arabic) are addressed to Zaynab and her children: ‘May God curse Ibn Marjāna [‘Ubaydallāh]. If there had been a relationship or blood-link between him and you, he would not have done this to you and would not have sent you in this state.’

130 Add 836, f. 197b; the text differs only slightly in the Mashhad manuscript: ‘it must be known that there has never been anyone more shameless and less merciful than Yazīd in the world’ (Tarjuma-i Tārikh-i Taburī, p. 273); RAS Persian 22, n/a; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a.
he summons the notables of Damascus to his majlis to inspect Ḥusayn’s head and the prisoners.

The texts given in the Persian manuscripts under consideration vary, although their treatment remains broadly similar. In Fatih 4285 and RAS Persian 22, Yazīd addresses similar criticism of ‘Ubaydallāh to Ḥusayn’s family who have been brought to him. Again, Yazīd’s seemingly sympathetic attitude is undermined by the text, for in these manuscripts his speech to them is preceded by some verses which he recites, which explain the killing of Ḥusayn as revenge for Muhammad’s defeat of his relatives at the Battle of Badr.¹³¹ These lines are tantamount to describing Yazīd himself as a pagan, and find no parallel in Ṭabarī’s text. A similar reference is found later in Add 836 and the Mashhad manuscript, alluding directly to Yazīd’s kufr.

These lines are omitted in Aya Sofya 3050, which does however share with the other two Persian manuscripts another justification for Yazīd’s behaviour, one which the Caliph himself puts to Ḥusayn’s son ‘Alī: Ḥusayn had broken the bond of kinship between himself and Yazīd by his rebellion and attempt to seize power from the Caliph.¹³² However, this justification must be read in the context of some verses cited earlier, which are also to be found in Add 836:

 Does the community (umma) that killed al-Ḥusayn hope for/ the intercession of his grandfather on the day of judgement?¹³³

This line is followed by:

 O men who have rashly killed Ḥusayn,/ do expect torture and chastisement. You have been cursed by the tongue of the son of David,/ and of Moses, and of the bringer of the Gospels.

These quotations make it clear that there is no justification for Ḥusayn’s death. Thus despite the differences in detail between the texts of the Tārikhna at this point, they concur in placing responsibility onto Yazīd. In this they differ significantly from Ṭabarī’s treatment of the episode.

Ṭabarī offers seven different accounts of Yazīd’s reaction to the news of Ḥusayn’s defeat and his reception of his head and the prisoners.¹³⁴ These are summarized below with a note of the most significant transmitters of the isnād of each:

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¹³¹ Tārikhna, IV, p. 715; Fatih 4285, f. 290b.
¹³² Add 836, f. 197b; Tarjuma-i Tārikh-i Ṭabarī, p. 274; Tārikhna, IV, p. 714; Fatih 4285, f. 290b, Aya Sofya 3050, f. 306a.
¹³³ Tārikhna, IV, p. 711; Fatih 4285, f. 289b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 305b.
¹³⁴ Ṭabarī, Te’rıkhl, II, pp. 374–383.
1 Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī – Yazīd b. Rawḥ (whose grandfather was a Syrian appointed governor of Medina by the loyal Umayyad servant Muslim b. ‘Uqba, and who supported Marwān’s claim to the caliphate)—al-Ghāz of Himyar (otherwise unknown): Zahr b. Qays, ‘Ubaydallāh’s messenger, reports the news to Yazīd, ‘whose eyes filled with tears’. Yazīd repeats the speech cited by Baḥram above, and refuses to reward the messenger.

2 Abū Mikhnāf—al-Qāsim b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān (a mawlah of Yazīd who gave reports about the Syrians at the Battle of Ṣifṭ): Yazīd on seeing the head ‘recited:

[Swords] split the skulls of men who are dear to us; but they were more disobedient and oppressive.

[Then he added.] ‘Yet, by God, Husayn, if I had been to fight you, I would not have killed you.’

3 Abū Mikhnāf—otherwise unknown informants: The prisoners are presented to Yazīd, who criticizes Rebellion to his surviving son ‘Ali. However, Yazīd also criticizes ‘Ubaydallāh (‘Ibn Marjānā’) severely for his action.

4 Abū Mikhnāf—Fatimah, daughter of ‘Ali: The account starts, ‘When we were made to sit before Yazīd he showed pity to us, ordered things for us and was kind to us.’ Yazīd’s womenfolk join Husayn’s womenfolk in weeping for him. The Caliph tells ‘Ali, ‘God curse Ibn Marjānā, if I had been with your father, he would never have asked a favour without it being granted to him; I would have protected him from death with all my power, even through the destruction of some of my own children.’

5 Harith b. Ka‘b – Fatimah: Fatimah is again reported to praise Yazīd’s kindness.

6 Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī – ‘Awāna b. al-Ḥakam al-Kalbī: This report is slightly more critical of Yazīd, who calls Husayn ‘a disloyal relative and a wrongdoer’. He tells Fatimah, ‘I never saw a man who did not believe in God who was better than Husayn’s daughter, praises Yazīd with the distinctly backhanded compliment that ‘I

7 Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī – Abū Mikhnāf – Abū Ḥanṣa al-Thumālī (a traditionist of Shī‘ite leanings): The most critical report, which states that Yazīd was poking Husayn’s mouth with a cane until one of the Companions, Abū Barza al-Aslamī, shouted at him to stop

135 Tabari, History, XIX, p. 170.
136 Ibid, p. 171.
138 Ibid, p. 175.
for ‘how often have I seen the Apostle of God kiss it.’ This part of the report is adopted by Ba'ami who ignores Yazid’s instruction to his wife, also mentioned here, that she mourn for Husayn and his curse on ‘Ubaydalläh.

A few more reports about the aftermath of Husayn’s death follow, dealing, for instance with its reception in Medina. The passage concludes with some lines cited elsewhere by Ba'ami:

O men who have rashly killed Husayn,
do expect torture and chastisement.
[All the people of heaven,
prophets, angels and tribes prosecute you.] You have been cursed by the tongue of the son of David, and of Moses, and of the bringer of the Gospels.

In the context of the preceding reports where the blame for the death has been shifted comprehensively onto ‘Ubaydalläh, the lines form an appropriate conclusion, redoubling the indictment of the Umayyad governor. For in none of Tabari’s accounts is Yazid depicted as he is in Ba'ami—cynically feigning horror at Husayn’s death for the sake of public opinion, while privately delighted. Tabari’s first two reports come from pro-Umayyad informants, so it is hardly surprising that they try to exculpate Yazid. Extraordinary, however, is the use of Husayn’s own family, in the form of Fatima, to present a picture a regretful, generous Yazid, utterly the reverse of his popular image. Admittedly, as we have noted, Tabari’s other Shi‘ite source, Thumâlî, does not present such a positive image of the Caliph. Yet even here Yazid is represented more as an oaf than anything else, and there is certainly no suggestion that Yazid was actually responsible for Husayn’s death. Ba’ami’s use of the sources is as peculiar as before. Central to his account is Yazid’s speech, which he cites in the version given by Yazid b. Rawh, indubitably a pro-Umayyad source. Yet Ba’ami uses the speech to produce exactly the opposite effect it has in Ibn Rawh’s account, where it is clearly intended to convince one of the sincerity of the Caliph’s regret for the killing. In Ba’ami it reinforces Yazid’s hypocrisy and duplicity.

139 Ibid, p. 176.
140 Add 836, f. 197b.
141 Add 836, f. 196b, just after Husayn has actually been killed; Tarihnama, IV, p. 712; Fatih 4285, f. 289b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 306a.
142 Line omitted in the manuscripts cited in n. 141.
143 Tabari, History, XIX, p. 179.
Yet Balʿamī does not content himself with merely subverting Tabari’s narrative, but even adds an entire new episode, according to the texts of Add 836 and the Mashhad manuscript. This is an account the authority for which on this occasion Balʿamī cites: ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn—the martyr’s surviving son. ‘Alī recounts144 how Yazīd would have his father’s head brought into his majlis while he was getting drunk, and on one occasion shows it to the Byzantine ambassador. The ambassador however, embarrasses him by saying, ‘If Jesus had left a young donkey to the Christians, they would have fed it crushed sesame, [and honoured it] and not have killed it.’145 His words replicate almost exactly those of Ḥusayn himself before the battle of Karbalā’.146 Yazīd has the ambassador executed, but he converts to Islam before his death. ‘Alī concludes his account by reporting Yazīd’s recital of verses claiming that by his murder of Ḥusayn he had ‘set right the Battle of Badr’.147 Balʿamī adds, ‘If this story is true there is no doubt in his [Yazīd’s] kufr…the Prophet will fight him on the Day of Resurrection.’148

This story of the Byzantine ambassador and his conversion, which I have not been able to trace to any other early source, is most curious. It is highly Shiʿite in tone. Indeed, the figure of the Frank who converts in such circumstances is present in the ṭaʿzīyya or passion-play which Shiʿites perform in Muharram in commemoration of the murder. However, this figure was not introduced into the ṭaʿzīyya until the nineteenth century, where he serves to confer a ‘dimension of universality’ to the play,149 much as he does here. Furthermore, the suggestion that Yazīd was a guilty of kufr is again Shiʿite in tone.

Balʿamī’s narrative of Ḥusayn’s death is perhaps the most perplexing in the entire Tārīkhnāma. He undermines Tabari’s account throughout, using his few Shiʿite sources or subverting his Sunnī ones. Yet would his audience have been remotely aware that this is what he was doing? With the exception of ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn’s report about Yazīd just cited, at no point does he mention any of the authorities by name. It is only a close examination of Tabari’s work and its translation which reveals Balʿamī’s treatment. It is probably safe to assume that Balʿamī’s intended audience did not have the opportunity or inclination to do this. Thus they were presented with a narrative from an impeccably Sunnī authority which tended much more towards the Shiʿite view than they could have imagined. Yet for all Balʿamī’s subversion of Tabari’s accounts, there is little in most of them which is of itself obviously Shiʿite, with the exception of Balʿamī’s own addition of the story

144 Add 836, ff. 197b-198a; Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari, pp. 274–6.
145 Add 836, f. 197b; Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari, pp. 274–5.
146 Add 836, ff. 194b–195a; Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari, p. 264; Tārīkhnāma, p. 707; Fatih 4285, f. 288b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 304b.
147 Add 836, f. 197b; Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Tabari, p. 275.
of the ambassador. This is perhaps because accounts are so anodyne and often seem calculated to support non-Shīite views, as with the reports transmitted from Fāṭima—Howard has noted this phenomenon with regard to some of Tabari’s accounts which purport to be transmitted from the Fifth Imām, where in fact Muhammad al-Bāqir ends up endorsing ‘the attitude which does not agree with the views of the Shī‘ah.’

It is clear that Tabari’s account is almost amazingly biased at this point. Perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that the ‘subverting’ is done by Tabari rather than Bā‘amī, for this seems the best description of the former’s use of the Shī‘ite authorities. Tabari had to include their reports to make his work look credible, but selected them carefully to support a particular view. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss why Tabari should have been so rabidly pro-Umayyad, but in this context Bā‘amī’s treatment of the Arabic original looks more like a much needed readjustment than anything else. Yet why would Bā‘amī be concerned to moderate Tabari’s pro-Umayyad tendencies? It would be easy to suggest that Tabari’s account could simply not be taken seriously at this point and therefore had to be amended. Yet if this were true, Bā‘amī seems to verge towards the opposite extreme by basing his accounts on Muhammad al-Bāqir and by introducing ‘Alī b. Husayn’s account of Yazīd’s majlis. There is no easy explanation available for Bā‘amī’s treatment of this episode. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, sympathy for the ‘Alids was widespread among Sunnis in the fourth/tenth century as is illustrated by the popularity in Khurāsān of names such as Husayn. This feeling doubtless influenced Bā‘amī’s adaptation of Tabari in this instance, for Tabari’s bias in favour of Yazīd would not have been acceptable to an audience with ‘Alid sympathies. At this date both Sunnis and Shī‘ites were able to share in grief at the massacre of the ‘Alids. In later centuries, when divisions between Sunnī and Shī‘ī had become more firmly entrenched, this was no longer the case, and the passage was omitted in later manuscripts.

150 Tabari, History, XIX, p. xiv.
The *Tārīkhnāma* proved to be overwhelmingly popular, far more so than Ṭabarī’s Arabic original. For nearly a thousand years it was the main historical source for Muslims wherever the Persian language held sway, from India to Central Asia, from Istanbul to Iran. Not only was the Persian itself endlessly copied and recopied but it was also translated into the three other main languages of Islamic civilization, Arabic, Ottoman and Chaghatay Turkish, as well as Urdu. As late as the twentieth century, the last chief qādī of the Khanate of Bukhārā, Ṣadr-i Ḍiyāʾ, had a copy of the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* in his library, where it was apparently one of the most valuable manuscripts.¹ In the neighbouring Khanate of Khivā the poet and historian Bayānī had just translated the work into Chaghatay in the final years of the nineteenth century, the third translation into that language to be made. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries an Ottoman Turkish version of the work was printed at least six times in Istanbul and Cairo.

Some of the attraction of the *Tārīkhnāma* was doubtless that being much shorter than Ṭabarī’s Arabic, it was also much quicker and cheaper to copy.² However, much of its popularity derived in part from the fact it served many different purposes. It could be used to teach the basics of Islamic history, to illustrate moral points, to legitimize the regime, to attack heresy and as an historical source in its own right. Alternatively, it could also be a polished work of literature suitable for the entertainment of highly cultured courts, while it also appealed to Ṣūfīs. The sheer variety of uses of the text is one reason why the manuscripts exhibit such great differences: in order to transmit the most ‘benefits’ to their audience, copyists felt free to alter it to stress the elements most apposite to their circumstances.

### Reflections of contemporary concerns in the Persian text of the *Tārīkhnāma* after Balʿamī

It was suggested in Chapter 2 that an important cause of the discrepancies between the Persian manuscripts was the political or sectarian affiliations of scribes or their patrons. To assess the history of the *Tārīkhnāma*’s text a study of some specific examples of how the intellectual climate and political milieu affected the scribes’ work would therefore be

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xdesirable. However, as ever with the *Tārīkhnāma*, the situation is more complex than it at first appears. Such a study is dependent on the availability of information on the date and place of the manuscripts’ copying. Many manuscripts contain the scribe’s name and the date of copying, but comparatively few mention the place of copying and even fewer the patron for whom the manuscript was made. The sole significant manuscript which tells us the patron’s name is Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281, which purports to have been written for the Īlkhānid ruler of Iran, Ghāzān, in 725/1324–5. As Ghāzān Khān had long since died (in 704/1304–5), we must discount the information given by the manuscript. It was probably inserted to increase the book’s market value.\(^3\)

Many copyists do include their own names, which usually have *nisbas* indicating a town or region with which the copyist had a connection. RAS, Persian 22, for instance, was copied by Muḥammadshāh b. ‘Alī b. Maḥmūd b. Shādbakht al-Ḥāfīz al-Īsfahānī, and completed on Saturday, 18 Shawwal 701/15 June 1302. However, it does not follow that the scribe necessarily lived in Isfahān. People were also given the *nisbas* of a city in which they had resided for a certain period, even if they currently lived somewhere else, or even because they had traded in the products of a given place.\(^4\) *Nisbas* do not, therefore, allow us to judge with any accuracy where a manuscript was written, and without this information we cannot surmise what circumstances may have influenced its text. Furthermore, even where we do have the necessary details, they do not always aid our understanding of the text’s contents, as the following two examples show.

The Mashhad manuscript published by Mīnūvī was written in Erzincan by Isḥāq b. Muḥammad b. ‘Umar b. Muḥammad al-Shirvānī in the middle of Muḥarram 586/February 1190.\(^5\) This in itself shows how misleading *nisbas* can be, for Erzincan in Eastern Anatolia is hundreds of miles away from the province of Shirvān which is located in the current Republic of Azerbaijan. At this date Erzincan was the capital of the Mengücekids, one of the many relatively obscure Turkish dynasties which came to dominate Anatolia after the defeat of the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071.\(^6\) The Mengücekids were enthusiastic promoters of culture, patrons of the poet Nizâmî of Ganja, so it is unsurprising that a manuscript of the *Tārīkhnāma* was copied under their rule. It appears to have been a royal commission, for a note at the start of the

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\(^3\) For an example of a false dedication added to another manuscript for this reason, see A. Soudavar, ‘The concepts of “al-aqdam *usāḥh*” and “yaqin-e sābeq” and the problem of semi-fakes’, *Studia Iranica* 28(1999), pp. 264–6.


manuscript states that it belonged to the library of the Mengücekid ruler Bahramshāh b. Dāʿūd (r. 560/1165–622/1225). Yet the main peculiarities of the manuscript’s text cannot be explained satisfactorily by our knowledge of the cultural environment in which it was composed. For instance, the Mashhad manuscript contains an extremely detailed section on the death of Yazdagird b. Shahriyār, the last Sāsānian ruler, giving a number of different accounts of his murder. It is by no means obvious why this should have been of especial interest to anyone living in sixth/twelfth century Erzincan, for the majority of Muslims there would have been Turks. Indeed, the sole mention of the Turks in the passage relates that Māhūya, the marzubān (march lord) of Marv, who by some accounts was responsible for Yazdagird’s murder, was assisted mainly by Turks as well as Persians in hunting the fleeing shāhānshāh. While it would be an exaggeration to suggest that Yazdagird’s murder is presented as a great tragedy, it certainly is portrayed as the cruel murder of a somewhat pitiful but pious individual.

There does not appear to be a positive interpretation which can be attached easily to the Turks’ involvement, which is perhaps somewhat surprising given the Turkic milieu in which the manuscript was copied.

A further example from the same manuscript can be found in the discussion of Husayn b. ‘Alī’s death. The text of the manuscript is very similar to that of Add 836 analysed in Chapter 4, where it was argued that it is strongly pro-‘Alid, ‘Alid sympathies are not of course necessarily synonymous with Shiʿism, but it is highly unlikely that this passage would have been introduced into the textual tradition in the strongly Sunnī atmosphere of Mengücekid Erzincan. It was almost certainly already there, and was simply preserved in copying from an earlier manuscript.

A manuscript from the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Elliot 377, provides a further illustration of the problems of interpreting the text. Elliot 377 was copied in Tabrīz in 944/1537–8. Tabrīz was under the control of the strongly Shiʿite Šafavids at this date, although the Ottomans had occupied it briefly after their victory over Šah Ismāʿīl at the Battle of Çaldırān in 920/1514. Ismāʿīl had imposed Shiʿism on Iran by the sword, and we might expect to find some reflection of this in the text of Elliot 377. However, in fact it is extremely conservative: there is no omission of the chapters on

8 Balʿamī. Tarjuma-i Tārīḵ-i Ṭabarī, pp. 94–101. The text is similar to that given in Bodleian, Laud Or 323, f. 191ff.
9 Ibid, p. 94. When Yazdagird asked Māhūya for help, the latter ‘brought down the army of the Turks on him’.
10 One of the accounts cited by the manuscript indicates that Yazdagird gave away his disguise as an army officer by his refusal to eat without certain Zoroastrian rites being performed. Given that the text was presumably written for a Muslim audience who may not have been entirely sympathetic to Zoroastrian piety, this incident is of course susceptible to an alternative interpretation, that Yazdagird’s death was the result of his adherence to a false religion. Nevertheless, I believe that the generally negative account of his death supports the interpretation I suggest above.
lineage (as in RAS, Persian 22); the formula *radiya Allāh ūnahu*—may God be pleased with him—is retained after the names of the first three caliphs whose legitimacy is rejected by Shi‘ite Islam; and the account of the reign of ‘Ali contains no exceptional departures from most other manuscripts. The text’s contents thus appear to be wholly unaffected by the political atmosphere of the milieu and period in which it was copied.

The cases of Bodleian, Elliot 377 and the Mashhad manuscript illustrate that even when we do have relevant information about when and where a work was copied, it is not always helpful in allowing us to interpret interpolations or variants in the text. Scribes were (if they wished) quite capable of copying works exactly, so a late manuscript may well contain a much earlier text. This is one of the reasons why establishing the Persian text is so difficult—it is often impossible to tell why, where and when changes in the text were made. Nonetheless, as the Shi‘ite orientated RAS, Persian 22 shows, such changes were indeed made, but even here it is impossible to tell if this was done when the manuscript was copied at the beginning of the eighth/ fourteenth century. The manuscript’s Shi‘ite sympathies may indeed reflect the rather fluid religious atmosphere of the Ilkhānid period, but it is equally possible that the scribe just copied it directly from an older manuscript which already contained its rather problematic text.¹¹

Thus it is in general impossible to judge exactly how political and religious circumstances affected the text of the *Tārikhnāma*. However, some light can be shed on this problem by examining Bal‘ami’s work from an art historical perspective. Teresa Fitzherbert has produced a detailed and valuable study of the illustrated manuscript of Bal‘ami held in the Freer Gallery. Illustrated manuscripts of Bal‘ami are extremely rare, so the Freer manuscript cannot be considered entirely representative, but it worth pausing to consider her conclusions for the light they shed on the treatment of the *Tārikhnāma* after Bal‘ami’s death.

According to Fitzherbert, the Freer manuscript was probably copied and illustrated in the Jazira around 1300AD, perhaps for the Ilkhānid governor of Mosul, Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIsā.¹² She argues that the themes of the illustrations, which are rather different from those found in other Ilkhānid manuscripts such as the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārikh*, indicate that such subjects were chosen for depiction because of their particular relevance to the circumstances of the Ilkhānate after the conversion of the Ilkhān Ghāzān to Islam shortly before his accession to the throne in 694/1295. The devastating consequences of the Mongol conquests and the Ilkhānids’ oppressive taxation policies precipitated a severe economic crisis during the last two decades of the thirteenth century. The need to find a way out of this crisis encouraged Ghāzān to improve his relationship with the Muslim, Iranian bureaucratic and religious elite, which was achieved by his own conversion to

¹¹ As will be recalled from Chapter 2, RAS, Persian 22 is problematic not just for its Shi‘ite tendencies but also for the evidence of collation it provides.

Islam and his adoption of it as the official religion, in addition to some other reforms such as modifications to the taxation system. Nonetheless, much of the Mongol élite retained a somewhat shaky understanding of Islam. Certainly, conversion did not dampen Ghāzān’s enthusiasm for prosecuting war against his fellow Muslims, the Mamlūk sultanate of Egypt and Syria.

It was against this background that the Freer Balʿamī seems to have been commissioned, and it reflects many pertinent issues, as may be seen in a good number of the illustrations Fitzherbert discusses in her comprehensive study of the manuscript’s imagery. First and foremost among these is the frontispiece, which depicts the ruler enthroned, surrounded by his supporters, headed by a Qur’ānic quotation and footed by a scene of execution, symbolizing the khān’s power of life and death. As Fitzherbert argues, the imagery serves to emphasize the Īlkhān’s legitimacy as a traditional Islamic ruler as well as shedding light on the significance of the text to its contemporary audience:

> In the Balʿamī image, the archetypal image of the enthroned ruler has been adapted to the ruler as judge, and the recipient of God’s injunction to Dawud [David] to ‘judge aright between mankind’. [The words of the Qur’ānic quotation heading the frontispiece: Q. 38. 26.] The Mongol ruler is therefore cast in indirect succession to Dawud—the founder of God’s Kingdom on Earth for the People of the Book—and associates the portentous title of ‘khalīfa’ with Ilkhanid rule…. The combination of inscription and image in the Balʿamī frontispiece may therefore be seen as expressing the justification of Ilkhanid rule, for which, in time-honoured fashion, the Balʿamī-Tabari text of the Tārīkh al-rusul waʿl-mulūk would be used as a source of political, legal and moral precedent.15

Fitzherbert’s study of the other illustrations in the text suggests they can be grouped according to five principal themes, as follows: i) conversion to monotheism; ii) transfer of power; iii) military affairs and tactics; iv) state administration and diplomacy, including judicial affairs; v) rites of passage from youth to adulthood. Thus the agenda of the illustrations reflects contemporary political and religious concerns. One of the most important of these was the question of apostasy, which may well have been a serious problem among recently converted Mongols in the aftermath of Ghāzān’s embrace of Islam. Indeed, even Ghāzān himself is said to have considered apostasy at one point.17

15 Fitzherbert, “‘Balʿamī’s Tabari’”, I, p. 53.
Naturally, the Mamlûks did not hesitate to take advantage of the propaganda possibilities offered by the Īlkhânate’s less than wholehearted conversion. Both Ibn Kathîr and Ibn Taymiyya attacked the Mongols’ charade of Islamization.18

Not every illustration conveys a political message, for many clearly had a didactic purpose, reinforcing the lessons of the text. However, let us examine some instances where the imagery does indeed seem to reflect the circumstances of the early eighth/fourteenth century Īlkhânate. Fitzherbert suggests that the illustration showing the Abyssinian convert, Waḥshî, slaying the false prophet Musaylima during the Ridda wars may have been composed in response to Ibn Taymiyya’s anti-Mongol polemic which insinuated that even an Abyssinian slave was better than an infidel ruler. ‘In the light of Mamluk jibes, it may have been useful for recent Mongol converts to be acquainted with the story of Waḥshî.’19 Alternatively, the illustration may have been intended to underline the Īlkhânate’s legitimacy to its Muslim subjects. The narrative emphasizes that the Muslim general Khâlid b. al-Walîd praised Waḥshî’s military prowess both before and after his conversion. This indicates that the moral of the story is actually that Waḥshî’s innate good qualities which led to him overcoming Musaylima had always been present in him. For a reader in the eighth/fourteenth century, an inescapable parallel would have been with the extirpation of the Ismā‘īlis. That heretical sect had been destroyed by Hûlagû, the pagan Mongol conqueror of Iran, and their demise was one of the principal ways in which the Īlkhânate’s Muslim servants managed to justify their masters’ rule in the Dâr al-Islâm.20 The Freer Bal‘ami illustration probably serves a similar legitimatory purpose.

Religious concerns are also raised by the depiction of Nimrod, the idolatrous king, casting Abraham into flames which do not injure him. Nimrod then ascends to heaven to challenge God, as discussed in Chapter 3.21 Perhaps the illustration may be seen as an attack on Ghâzân’s father, the Īlkhân Arghûn, a Buddhist (i.e. idolater) who reduced the status of Muslims (analogous to Nimrod’s hostility to Abraham). At any rate, the demise of the idolater would have a theme of particular relevance in the period after Ghâzân’s conversion.

Similar contemporary issues are reflected in the illustration of Alexander the Great receiving the coffin of Darius, the defeated Achaemenid emperor.22 The analogy of the transition from Persian to foreign rule in Mongol times would not have been lost a contemporary audience.23 Alexander’s rule, a synthesis of Persian and foreign elements, could be seen as a paradigm for the Īlkhânate, and rulers such as Ghâzân would doubtless have wished for their behaviour to be compared to that of the famously just and

19 Ibid, I, p. 204, and see also pp. 201–4.
23 Ibid, I, p. 129.
honourable Alexander. Indeed, Fitzherbert quotes the Mongol apologist Ibn Ṭiqqaqā’s justification of Hūlagū’s conquest by that ruler’s commitment to justice.24 Thus the illustration underlines and supports the Qur’ānic exhortation to just rule found in the frontispiece.

The illustrations indicate that the Mongols saw the Tārikhnāma as a means of legitimizing their rule that could teach lessons relevant to their circumstances. In Fitzherbert’s words, ‘the lessons appear particularly apposite to the period associated with state consolidation following Ghazan’s conversion and accession in 694/1295’.25 although she argues that the illustrations generally serve to draw attention to aspects of conversion, not idolatry, heresy or sectarian divisions within Islam. It was, in her view, a pragmatic approach to what she sees as Balʿamī’s ‘bland’ text, which aimed to appeal to a Hanafi audience that was also sympathetic to ‘Ali.26 Fitzherbert argues that one of main reasons for the Tārikhnāma’s continuing relevance is that the political circumstances during the early Muslim Īlkhānate were similar to those when Balʿamī was commissioned to translate the work. In both cases, the states had to cope with an influx of recent converts who presumably needed teaching the basic tenets of Islam as well as loyalty to their rulers in turbulent times. The Freer manuscript, Fitzherbert argues, was not intended to be read by the governor Fakhr al-Dīn Ḥūsan himself, but rather was aimed at instructing members of his household:

The size and design of the manuscript would have lent itself to small-group teaching for, say, half a dozen pupils at a time, and also at several levels of tuition. For example, the illustrations could be used to introduce the stories to the very young or illiterate; at level two, the positioning of the paintings at carefully selected points in the text would identify a practical and coherent cycle of anecdotal moral tales in the manner of a simple mirror for princes; at a more advanced level, the ruled headings would expand upon the themes already identified by the paintings and act as signposts through a further series of historically important or contentious issues with a bias towards matters associated with conversion, bureaucracy and military affairs.27

As Fitzherbert rightly notes, a ‘clutch’ of Balʿamī manuscripts survive from Ghāzān’s reign, and her suggestion that this may have been a result of a general teaching initiative current in government circles at the time is credible if impossible to prove.28 The remaining, unillustrated, manuscripts could have been used for paedagogical purposes as well. As a cheaper alternative to paintings, teachers could easily provide a verbal exegesis of the text, pointing out morals and contemporary parallels.

As these explanations were oral, they have not survived. However, a passage in Leiden University Library, Or 1612 illustrates very clearly the sort of uses to which Ba‘ami’s text could be put. The manuscript contains the usual extensive accounts of Moses’ life and prophethood, and towards the end of the chapter entitled Khabar-i Raftan-i Mūsā bi-Munājāt29 discusses different traditions about Moses’ request to see God. ‘Some people say he sought the cause (‘illat) of Tawḥīd (God’s unity), but Tawḥīd has no cause and thus seeking its cause is considered an error in law (shari‘at).’ There follows criticism of the attempts to do exactly that, after which a new chapter heading announces the main body of the interpolation: Dhikr-i Madhhab-i Bātinīān, which proves to be an attack on various aspects of Ismā‘īlī belief. The chapter starts with an attack on Ismā‘īlī desires ‘to destroy… the hātin’ and in particular on their attribution of hidden meanings to words such as the profession of faith, lā ilāh illā Allāh.30 ‘When common people (‘awām) hear this, they despair and think that there is something to it, whereas there is not,’31 The remainder of the passage attacks various flaws in Ismā‘īl thought: ‘Another [thing] I say to them [the Ismā‘īlīs] is, if the hātin must be hidden, how can you prove it to anyone else?’32 The polemic continues for a few lines, and then the scribe comments, ‘now let us return to the main narrative, for this discussion is not present in this book and probably Muḥammad b. Jarīr [Tabarī] would not approve.’

Like the Freer manuscript, Leiden University Library, Or 1612 was probably written in the reign of Ghāzān, as is indicated by an appendix to the Tārīkhnāma which brings the history up to date with brief sections on dynasties such as the Sāmānids and the Ghūrids, and a rather more detailed discussion of the Mongols, both Great Khāns and Ilkhanūns.33 Arghūn is the last of the latter whose reign is recorded, and it is therefore reasonable to suggest that the lost colophon would have confirmed that the manuscript was written during the reign of his son Ghāzān. Moreover, the same appendix confirms the scribe’s interest in Ismā‘īlism, for it contains a brief account of Hūlagū’s destruction of the great stronghold, Alamūt. This chapter is entitled Dhikr-i Siparī Shudan-i Ayyām-i Dawlat-i Malāḥīda, Account of the End of the Days of the Heretics’ State.34 This is followed by a reasonably well-informed history of Ismā‘īlism from its foundation to the Mongol period, which gives particular detail on the split between Nizārī and Musta‘līān Ismā‘īlīsm and on Ismā‘īlism under the Saljūqs, particularly the assassination of Nizām al-Mulk.35 In this context, it is unsurprising that the scribe should have used passages in the Tārīkhnāma to illustrate points about an issue which

29 Leiden University Library, Or 1612, ff. 60a–61b.
30 Ibid, f. 61b.
32 Ibid, loc. cit.
33 Ibid, f. 353b ff.
34 Ibid, f. 392b.
oncerned him, the Ismāʿīlī heresy. It is also very probable that he would have drawn similar parallels between the actions of kings and prophets of old and his own Mongol masters, just as the Freer scribe did. However, only the one passage discussed has survived in the text. It may not enhance our knowledge of Ismāʿīlism, but it does illustrate graphically one of the multitude of purposes to which episodes from Balʿamī could be put.

Another reason for the Tārīḵhnama’s relevance in the Mongol period was probably its presentation of the orthodox Muslim view of prophecy. A few years before Ghāzān came to power this had been radically challenged by the chief minister of the pagan Īlkhān Arghūn (r. 683/1284–690/1291), the Jew Saʿd al-Dawla. In an attempt to ingratiate himself with the Īlkhān, Saʿd al-Dawla declared that Genghis Khan was a prophet, and that as prophethood was hereditary, Arghūn should imitate Muḥammad in founding a new universal umma and turn the Kaʿba into a pagoda. 36 After Ghāzān’s conversion to Islam, it was doubtless in his interests to reassure Muslims that such discreditable ideas had been done away with under his regime in order to allay suspicions that the newly Muslim Īlkhānate might be prepared to pervert Muslim dogma in this way. The Īlkhānate’s patronage of the Tārīḵhnama may well have been intended as a public statement of its orthodoxy.

Thus the Tārīḵhnama provided not just a comprehensive yet readable introduction to Islamic history, ideal for recent converts and the young, but also served as a source of analogies with the contemporary political situation. It could be adapted both to legitimate Mongol rule and to teach the rudiments of Islam. However, while this explains Balʿamī’s relevance in Ghāzān’s reign, it leaves many questions unanswered. Did the Tārīḵhnama enjoy a sudden upsurge in popularity as a result of its suitability for the circumstances of the newly islamized Īlkhānate, or rather are the sudden plethora of manuscripts surviving from this period due to the destruction of earlier ones in the Mongol conquests? If indeed the Tārīḵhnama became so popular under the Mongols due to its relevance for a newly converted society, how can we explain its enduring relevance in such very different circumstances as the thoroughly Islamized societies of Timūrid Herat, Suleyman the Magnificent’s empire, or nineteenth-century Khīvā? Ghāzān’s interest in the deeds of Alexander shows that Balʿamī’s work potentially continued to appeal to the ruling élite too, as is testified by the interest in the Tārīḵhnama evinced by later monarchs. How can we explain the popularity of the work with educated élites as much as with recent converts? It is to some of these problems that I now turn.

The Tārīḵhnama as an historical source for the Persophone world

Most extant Persian histories of the Ghaznavid and Saljūq period appear to be uninfluenced by Balʿamī or .Tabarī, at least in terms of structure. Thus while Gardīzī’s

Zayn al-Akhbār, another Ghaznavid work, also treats in passing pre-Islamic and early Islamic history, it does so in a very different way from the Tārīkhnāma: rather than the intermingling of stories of prophets and kings as in Balʿamī and Ṭabarī, chronological order according to dynasty predominates. Thus all kings belonging to the legendary Iranian Pishdādian dynasty are grouped together, followed by the Kayānids, and so on. This was to become a popular paradigm for later universal histories such as the ninth/fifteenth century Rawdat al-Ṣafā of Mīrkhwān.

The first independent evidence for Balʿamī’s work may come from the early sixth/twelfth century, when it was quoted extensively in the Persian History of the Prophets attributed to Ghazālī. Much of the text of the latter work is almost identical to that of some of the Persian manuscripts of Balʿamī, as was first noted by Sprenger in 1848.37 Indeed, despite the title of the book, it also includes accounts of pre-Islamic kings just as the Tārīkhnāma does. The author’s apparent failure to acknowledge his predecessor’s work was of course entirely typical of pre-modern Islamic writers and should not be considered plagiarism.

The first direct external reference to Balʿamī occurs in the anonymous Mujmal al-Tawārīkh wa-ʿl-Qiṣas composed around or slightly after 520/1126. The work is a general history which includes a brief account of the Saljūqs and was probably composed by a scholar from Asadābād in the Jībāl for a Saljūq prince.38 At the start of the section on the history of the Prophet, the author records how Ṭabarī’s History, one of his main sources, came to be translated into Persian: the work was undertaken by Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Balʿamī by order of Manṣūr b. Nūḥ, which was conveyed to him by Fā’iq al-Khāṣṣa in 352AH. The History contained concise accounts of the genealogies and lives of prophets, and thus should be made available to a wider audience.39 The wording is extremely close to that of the Arabic prefaces of the Tārīkhnāma from which this information is unquestionably derived. It is interesting that the author of the Mujmal should stress the utility of Ṭabarī as a source of prophets’ biographies. Earlier, he had specifically noted the lack of information on Iranian kings in Ṭabarī:

Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī has explained all historical reports (akhbār), but he did not recount much of the biographies of the kings of Persia (ʿAjam) who lived in the Fourth Clime, the greatest kings of the world. He related only briefly in his History the subject of their kingship,

and although accounts of our kings, emperors (akāsira va shāhān) and
great men are well known outside of [Ibn] Jarīr’s History…. I wanted to
collect the history of the kings of Persia, their genealogies, conduct and
lifestyle in this book in a concise manner.40

The author goes on to list the sources to which he has had recourse to make up for this
lacuna in Ṭabarī—Firdawṣī’s Shāhnāma, Ibn al-Muqaffa’, Ḥamza al-İṣfahānī, and
so on. The Mujma’s treatment of Persian kings certainly owes little to Balʿāmī or
Ṭabarī. Like the Zayn al-Akbār, it divides the pre-Islamic Iranian kings into four
tabāqas: the Pīshdādids, the Kayānids, the Ashkānids and the Sāsānids.41 Thus
Balʿāmī’s appeal for this author, at least, had nothing to do with his presentation of
Iranian material, but rather was due to his comprehensive treatment of prophets and early
Islamic history, for it is in these sections of the Mujma that the debt to the Tārikhnāma is
clearer, and is indeed acknowledged.

The decline of interest in universal history throughout the Persophone world between
the fourth/tenth century and the Mongol period is a principal reason why Ṭabarī and
Balʿāmī are cited so infrequently by other sources. Historians preferred to write histories
of their towns or provinces, such as Ibn Funduq’s Tārikh-i Bayhaq, or else of specific
dynasties, as the popularity of the translation of ‘Utbi’s Taʿrīkh al-Yamīnī by
Jurbādhqānī attests. Even those works which do show some interest in the more remote
past, such as Ibn al-Balkhī’s Fārsnāma and the Mujma al-Tawārīkh wa-ʿl-Qisas
itself, tend to have a markedly regional character. It is impossible to ascertain whether the
decline marks a genuine shift in tastes, or whether the old universal histories continued to
be so widely popular that no one saw any need to produce new ones. Certainly, the author
of the Mujma writes as if Balʿāmī and Ṭabarī were his basic source, and there is almost a
hint of surprise in his tone on remarking that he had to supplement their deficiencies from
other works. Yet his book is in fact predominantly based on other sources.

There is little evidence as to whether Ṭabarī’s work was more commonly read in its
Arabic or Persian versions in this period. The Mujma’s quotation of the Tārikhnāma
indicates that at least in this instance Balʿāmī’s version was used. The Saljuqs promoted
Persian as the language of their bureaucracy (in contrast to their predecessors the Būyids,
for example) and the case of Jurbādhqānī illustrates the demand for Persian versions of
Arabic classics, however much they might diverge from the original. Cahen argues that
from the mid-sixth/twelfth century onwards ‘there are two families of histories, each
ignorant of the other, separated by a cleavage of language’.42 It was doubtless the

40 Ibid, p. 2.
41 Ibid, pp. 24–38.
42 C.Cahen, ‘The historiography of the Seljukid period’ in Bernard Lewis and P.M.Holt,
Historians of the Middle East, London: SOAS, 1962, p. 75.
growing ignorance of Arabic which led to Bal'āmi’s translation supplanting Ṭabarī’s original in the mashriq, as well as the relative economy of copying the shorter work.

It is therefore entirely possible that the Tārikhnāma already had the status of a classic by the time of the Mongol invasions whose legacy of destruction must inevitably leave this question shrouded in obscurity. However, Mongol rule confirmed and strengthened the work’s popularity. Not only was Bal’āmi an invaluable tool for political, religious and moral teaching, as has been discussed above, but Mongol rule also promoted a resurgence of writing of universal history, for which a basic source was ‘Ṭabarī’, which probably generally means Bal’āmi.\footnote{43} Admittedly, universal historiography changed dramatically, being much more genuinely universal with interests outside the relative narrow confines of the contemporary Islamic world and a few adjoining territories to which earlier chroniclers such as Dīnawarī, Ya‘qūbī, Ṭabarī and Bal’āmi himself had restricted their investigations. The great Īlkhānid historian Rashīd al-Dīn concentrates, of course, on the origins and conquests of the Mongols, but such recondite themes as the history of the Franks find a place in his Jāmi‘ al-Tawārikh. Nonetheless, the old Muslim chronicles retained their importance as a source for the history of Islam and its prophets which remained a crucial element of universal historiography.

It must be admitted that there is no direct evidence that Rashīd al-Dīn himself consulted Ṭabarī in either Arabic or Persian; he makes no reference to him, and like most composers of universal chronicles, he treats the histories of prophets and kings in separate sections, preferring a chronological dynastic arrangement of the kings. Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī in his Tārikh-i Guzīda (composed 730/1330) follows a similar scheme, although he does specifically acknowledge ‘Ṭabarī’ as a source.\footnote{44} The most interesting point of similarity between the two works is not in their treatment of historical events as such (for Mustawfī seems to owe little directly to Ṭabarī/Bal’āmi) but rather in the prominence both give to debates on the duration of the world. Although all the manuscripts of fifth/eleventh century Arabic translation of Bal’āmi lack the first few folios,\footnote{45} the table of contents of Leiden University Library, Or 3103 indicates the second chapter of the Tārikhnāma was entitled Bāb fī Kam Miqdār Ḥādhīhi al-Dunyā, Chapter on the Duration of this World. Most Persian manuscripts include such a chapter (the ‘rūzgār’ section), although in some it has been transposed to the very end of the pre-Islamic section.

\footnote{43} However, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 2, Ṭabarī’s original text, or at least parts of it, continued to be available to some scribes. Nonetheless, the survival of at least Bal’āmi manuscripts from the Mongol period as opposed to three volumes of Ṭabarī (not one a complete copy) of similar date does suggest it was Bal’āmi’s work which was more widely known.


\footnote{45} Add 836; Leiden University Library, Or 3103; Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 45.
It is this passage in the *Tārīkhnāma* that Elton Daniel has argued was written to counter *Ismā’īlī* prophecies of the end of the world. However, very similar concerns preoccupy Mustawfī, who also starts his book with a discussion of chronological problems. Indeed, such prefaces were a common element of early historical writing in Persian, where they were often quite stylized, as has been demonstrated for a later period by Quinn. Let us examine how Mustawfī deals with the same issues as *Balʿamī*. ‘Historians differ greatly over how much time has passed since the beginning of the world and creation of Adam’, he says, and goes on to explain the different dating systems adopted by different peoples. ‘The Greeks and the Romans start from the epoch of Alexander, the Yemenis from the Ethiopians’ arrival in Yemen, the Copts from the reign and conquests of Nebuchanezzar, and Quraysh from the Battle of the Elephant.’ This has led to much confusion. Meanwhile, philosophers (jamāʿat-i hukamā) deny the world has a beginning or end, while religious scholars (ahl-i shur‘) say it has both, but do not specify its duration. The learned of the East and the Franks (*‘ulamā’-i Hind va Khīṭā va Khuttan va Chīn va Māchīn [va] bakhshīān va Fīrangān*) say that Adam lived a million years ago, and that there were several Adams, each speaking his own language. On the other hand, ‘some of the *‘ulamā’* of Iran (mutasharīrān-i ahl-i Iran) say that from Adam’s arrival on earth to the appearance of our Prophet Muḥammads summons [to Islam] was 6,000 years, some say more, some less.’ Astrologers again use a different dating system.48

Mustawfī thus aims at exactly the same effect as *Balʿamī* (from whom at least some of the above information is probably derived49), that of indicating the impossibility of ascertaining the duration of the world and of showing the great divergence of opinions about it. Yet Mustawfī was living in an age where the issues Daniel raises no longer had relevance. *Ismā’īlimism* had disappeared as a political force since Hūlāgū’s assault on its mountain strongholds, and even if some of its adherents survived, they hardly presented a threat. Even if to some the Mongol conquests had seemed like the end of the world, by the time Mustawfī was writing the *Īlkhānite* had enjoyed more than 30 years of Islamic governance. Mustawfī hints that the real significance of this passage is to excuse any errors in his own work: ‘this slave [I] records the length of each nation’s rule just as I have found it in historical works and as most historians concur’.50 Of course, it is quite probable that Mustawfī included the introduction in this form because it was conventional


49 E.g. both texts mention the belief that six thousand years passed between creation and Muḥammads (c.f. *Ṭarīkhnāma*, I, p. 11) and mention the views of astrologers on the subject (ibid, I, p. 4).

50 Ibid, pp. 8–9.
historiographical practice to do so. The similarities to Bal'ami's preface may be due to the influence of the Tārīkhnāma as the oldest and most prestigious of Persian histories, and Bal'ami's preface may have had an immediate political relevance in the fourth/tenth century which it had lost it for later imitators.

Nevertheless, the example of Mustawfī's preface does show that the information provided by Bal'ami was susceptible to very different interpretations than Daniel's. Given that, as argued in Chapter 1, evidence for the threat of Transoxianan Ismā'īlism in the 350s/960s is weak, nor is there any unambiguous indication in the text that Bal'ami was seeking to counter a suggestion of the imminent end of the world, we should be cautious about accepting Daniel's explanation of the preface. It is therefore quite possible that like Mustawfī, Bal'ami's real intention in this passage was to defuse any accusations of chronological inaccuracy on his own part and to establish his credentials as a historian.

Historians continued to cite ʿTabari as a source even when their works were little influenced by the Tārīkhnāma, let alone the original. The two great Timūrid historians, Ḥāfiz-i Abru and Mīrkhvānd, both do so51 and the habit was to continue up to the nineteenth century, when Mu'nis (d. 1244/1829), author of the Chaghatai history of the rulers of Khīva entitled the Firdaws al-Iqbāl, also named Ṭabarī's History as one of his authorities despite the fact that Ṭabarī/Bal'ami include scarcely any information that could have been of relevance to him.52 Indeed, it seems to have become a topos of the prefaces to Persian historical works to acknowledge Bal'ami/Ṭabarī among the author's sources—many of which were equally spurious—whether or not the author had ever read the Tārīkhnāma. This reflects the fame and prestige of the latter as a historical work. On the other hand, Khvāndamīr used Bal'ami without acknowledgement, updating his simple and archaic language to suit the tastes of his own day.53 The vocabulary and grammar of manuscripts of the Tārīkhnāma itself would often be 'corrected' in this way, which was one of the reasons why the work maintained its appeal for so long.

The prestige of the Persian Tārīkhnāma is confirmed by Ḥāfiz-i Abru in the introduction to another of his works, the Majmūʿa, which is, just as its title indicates, a collection of three histories, the Tārīkhnāma, part of the Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh and the Zafarnāma. Ḥāfiz-i Abru contributes solely some brief passages linking these different works. He tells us that the Sultan Shāhrukh Bahādur (d. 850/1447) ordered him to write a majmūʿa which

53 See, for example, Khvāndamīr, Ḥabib al-Ṣīr, M. Dabīr-sīyāṣī (ed.), Tehran: Markaz-i Khayyām, 1380, I, p. 246, where the account of Bahrām Chūbīn and the Turks is very close in content to Bal'ami's treatment.
included all the elements of this art [of history]; the most famous book of history which is current in this age is the translation of the History of Muhammad b. Jarir Tabari, most of the stories of which are taken from Tafsîrs and bear witness to the wonders of God’s word (âyât-i kalâm Allâh). This rare mention of the translation indicates that it was in fact Bal‘ami’s work, not Tabari’s, which continued in widespread circulation; it also confirms that the reason for its popularity was its religious content.

Bal‘ami’s work continued to be recopied, rewritten and adapted in the Persian-speaking world until the nineteenth century. However, its influence spread beyond these boundaries, for it found an even wider audience through its translations into various other oriental languages, Arabic, Ottoman, Chaghatay and Urdu. Space prevents a full analysis of all these, although it is to be hoped that future research will give them the detailed attention they deserve. The Urdu translation is probably the least important of these, apparently existing only in a unique manuscript. The Chaghatay translation I discuss only briefly, as I have not been able to consult at first hand any of the manuscripts. The discussion therefore centres around the various Ottoman translations, where the aim is not to produce a detailed analysis of the texts, but rather to answer briefly the hitherto confused questions of how many translations were made, who they were made for and when, and how they relate to the Persian. First, however, I turn to the second Arabic version.

Āmidî’s Arabic translation of the Târikhnâma

Between the years 935/1528–9 and 937/1530–1, a second Arabic translation of Bal‘ami’s work was undertaken by a certain Khîdr b. Khîdr al-Āmidî. This survives in an autograph manuscript (Leiden University Library, Or 140) and consists of the second part of the Târikhnâma, covering the events between Muhammad’s prophethood and the death of Husayn and Yazîd’s deportation of the remaining ‘Alids to Medina. It is unclear whether Āmidî

54 Hañiz-ı Abû, Mapña’u-Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Damâd İbrahim 919, f. 3b (virtually identical to the passage from the Zubdat al-Tawârîk cited above).
55 For instance, an unpublished work which draws heavily on Bal‘ami is the Aṣâfih al-Tawârîk of Muhammad b. al-amîr al-kabîr Fu’dl Allâh (Oxford, Bodleian, Elliot 2). One of the latest examples of this continued influence is in Bodleian, Fraser 165, a nameless history by Khusraw Muhammad b. Amir Dost Muhammad (his father ruler of Afghanistan 1819–39, 1842–63), the pre-Islamic sections of which follow Bal‘ami’s arrangement and from which (‘az mukhtasari’-yi ‘Tabari’  f. 3b) he appears to have drawn much information.
56 Cambridge University Library, MS Add 570–571.
ever translated any of the remaining parts of Bal'ami. While he does refer to his work as ‘the translation of the second part (juz’) of Tabari’s History’, the volume starts with an elaborate exordium in praise of God and the Prophet. Āmidī then inserts a ‘rūżgār’ section discussing the length of time passed from Adam to the Prophet. It is only after this that we find the genealogy of Muḥammad, which is the conventional start of the Islamic sections of the Ṭārīkhnāma. While the second volumes of other manuscripts of the work do occasionally contain their own exordia and colopha, this is a fairly uncommon practice, and when it does occur the exordium is rarely as extensive as in Leiden University Library, Or 140. There is no indication any other volume was intended to complete the work. It is therefore probable that the manuscript represents Āmidī’s complete work.

In the absence of any other evidence about Āmidī, a certain amount of information may be derived from the manuscript itself. Every one of his five ancestors mentioned in his full name in the colophon is given the title al-hājī indicating they had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. The second, unpaginated folio provides further evidence for his religious background where beneath the statement mālikhu wa-yāḥibuhuldarwīsh kātibuhu is a sketch drawing of a figure in Ṣūfī robes containing the words murshid/sanat 937. This is the year in which Āmidī finished the translation, and it is reasonable to assume these marks refer to himself. However, if he was a Ṣūfī he was not a well educated one, for the text abounds in errors, above all orthographic. Frequently, final tā is replaced by tū marbūta, even in verbs: thus not مات مات Alif maqsūrā becomes alif mamdūda, so ʕ is found in place of ʕ. Some errors suggest Āmidī may not have been a native speaker of Arabic for he occasionally confuses emphatic and non-emphatic consonants, writing šawf for sawf and fi wustīḥa for fi wustīḥā. However, these errors may also have been caused by the influence of a colloquial dialect (as, for example, modern colloquial Egyptian has sofūt for the classical sufra).

There is little exceptional in the text itself, which appears to have been translated without elaboration from a Persian manuscript current in the tenth/sixteenth century. The discussion of Muḥammad’s ancestry, for instance, follows closely the text given in British Library, IO Isl. 1983 (cited in Chapter 2), as does the account of Ḥusayn’s death. Āmidī includes laudatory formulae after the names of all the Rāshidūn Caliphs, and curses after the names of Yazīd and Muʿāwiya. The chapter on the nāṣab ‘Uthmān’s omitted, but there is none of RAS, Persian 22’s obvious hostility to that Caliph. In all, it is, to adopt Fitzherbert’s term, a ‘bland’ version of Islamic history, probably translated for its comprehensive and accessible treatment of the early traumas of the umma.

The importance of Āmidī’s translation rests in the fact that it provides a further impression of the far-reaching influence of Bal’ami’s work. It was most probably translated for use in a Ṣūfī khāngāh over which Āmidī presided. Pace my previous

58 Leiden University Library, Or 140, p. 1.
comments on the relationship between nisbas and place of origin, it is very likely that Āmīdī was indeed from the region of Amid (Diyarbakır). A later ownership mark shows that in the eleventh/ seventeenth century the work found its way into the hands of an Aleppan Ḥanāfī (al-Ḥanāfī madhhabanī al-Ḥakābī maskanan), and the relative proximity of Aleppo to Āmīdī supports the manuscript’s south-eastern Anatolian provenance.60 Furthermore, Arabic would have been widely spoken as a first language in this region, as it still is in towns such as Harran and Mardin, which explains the need for a translation from Persian. Perhaps the manuscript was used to train the murīds of Ṣūfī aspirants who had gathered around their murshid, Āmīdī himself, although one would not usually expect to find such interest in history in Ṣūfī circles. Āmīdī’s translation had no further currency in the Arab world, doubtless due in part to its stylistic infelicities. Nonetheless, it does indicate further the multiplicity of places and ways in which Balʿamī’s work could be used.

The Ottoman translations of the Tārīkhnāma

The fame of Ṭabarī’s work ensured that the Tārīkhnāma was translated into Ottoman Turkish at a relatively early date. The enduring popularity of Balʿamī in the Ottoman world is attested by the large number extant manuscripts. Undoubtedly many more exist than is recognized, but remain unknown due to the poor state of library cataloguing in Turkey.61 In the nineteenth century, five printed editions were published (Istanbul 1260/1844, 1288/1872, 1290/1873, 1292/1875 and Būlāq 1275/1858–9).62 It was also printed at least once in the early twentieth century.63 With the exception of a limited amount of work by the Turkish scholar Yurdaydın,64 no research has been done on the Ottoman versions of Ṭabarī, and much confusion

60 The Garret manuscript was purchased in Beirut, which confirms that it was in the Levant that Āmīdī’s translation was being circulated.
61 It is thus impossible to begin to estimate the number of manuscripts. F. Babinger, Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke, Leipzig: Harrassowitz 1927, pp. 66–7, n. 2, lists 32 manuscripts, and there are a further 13 in the Topkapı Sarayı alone, with another four in Bursa, İnebey Yazma ve Eski Baska Eserler Kütüphanesi. See also H. Yurdaydın, Matrakçı Nasuh’un hayatı ve eserleri ile ilgili yeni bilgiler’ Belleten, 29, no 114 (1965), p. 340, n. 22. This is just the tip of the iceberg. I am, for example, aware of another 12 manuscripts of the work in the Milli Kütüphane in Ankara, and if a comprehensive survey could be undertaken, the number of Turkish manuscripts would probably be found to equal and possibly to exceed the number of Persian manuscripts.
64 In addition to the references given here, for a detailed English summary of Yurdaydın’s research, see H. Yurdaydın (ed.), Tarih-i Menâzîl-i Sefer-i İräkey-i Sultân Süleymân Hân, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1976, pp. 121–5, 139–140.
remains about them. Hajjî Khalîfâ, for instance, does not indicate that more than one translation was ever undertaken, while Babinger lists a translation by Nasuh Matrakçî, one by Hüseyin b. Sultan Ahmed, and one made for Ahmed Paşa. Karatay, on the other hand, lists the following versions in his catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts in the Topkapî Palace Library (which contains 13 manuscripts of Turkish versions of Tabari): the translation for Ahmed Paşa, the version by Hüseyin b. Sultan Ahmed, and a version by Hüsameddin Çelebi written in 710/1310. Below, I discuss in outline the various versions I have examined.

The Ahmed Paşa translation

The text of the great majority of manuscripts belongs to this translation, upon which the printed editions are also based. Textual variants do exist, as one would expect, but are relatively minor. At the start, is stated that Ahmed Paşa, ‘the great emir’, ordered the translation to be made so that ‘it would be easy for those who are ignorant of Persian, and that they can profit from its advice and admonitions’. The translator expresses a particular hope that the work would be of use to ministers. The name of the translator is unknown, and the date of the translation is not stated.

Not all manuscripts preserve the reference to Ahmed Paşa, which is also omitted in the printed editions. Much is mysterious about this translation. Frähn claimed it was composed at the very beginning of the Ottoman period (c. 700/1300), but Dubeux argued that the language reflected the dialect of Istanbul, and so must be later. At any rate, as Yurdaydın points out, a manuscript of this translation dating to 851/1447 exists, so it is certainly one of the earliest extant works of Ottoman historiography, the first original surviving example of which is Aşikpaşazade’s history of the Ottoman dynasty completed in 887/1482. Kazim-Beg, who used the Turkish Tabari in preparing his edition and English translation of the Derbend-name, a work of Daghhestani local history, suggested the Ahmed Paşa translation was prepared for the Ramazanoğulları, a minor dynasty that ruled Adana on the Mediterranean coast of Anatolia in the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries. Kazim-Beg does not explain the basis for this assertion, but it
is true that one of the Ramazanoğulları was called Ahmed Bey (d. 819/1416); from the point of view of chronology if nothing else, it is possible that he was the dedicatee.\textsuperscript{71}

Hājī Khalīfa, writing in the eleventh/seventeenth century, mentions a popular Turkish translation, and it is probably this version, so well attested in the manuscript tradition, to which he refers.\textsuperscript{72} Mordtmann, on the basis of the Istanbul edition of 1260/1844, describes the text thus:

\begin{quote}
The translation must be very old and was certainly not done in Constantinople. Parts of the language are still very rough and uneducated, and parts are not at all comprehensible in this regard. A close study of the language leads to the assumption that the translation was done in Iraq or Syria around 400 years ago.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

As Quatremère states, the Ahmed Paşa translation ‘reproduit avec une grande fidélité le modèle que l’auteur avait sous les yeux’.\textsuperscript{74} However, he also notes correctly that the Turkish version also adds some information to the Persian text: ‘Quelques parties sont traitées avec plus de détails que la traduction persane. Ainsi l’histoire du premier roi de la Perse, Kaïoumars, et de son successeur Housheng, se présente ici avec les développements que la traduction persane est bien loin de reproduire.’\textsuperscript{75} In fact the specific passages that Quatremère mentions may be found in as detailed a form in some Persian manuscripts, RAS, Persian 22’s treatment of Gayūmarth being at least as detailed as that of the Turkish version. Elsewhere, however, the anonymous translator tells us at the start of his lengthy discussion of Alexander’s career that he based his account on Hākim ‘Umar Niżāmī’s version.\textsuperscript{76} There is also a tendency to suppress Bal’ami’s disagreements with Tabarī, replacing them with a phrase such as ‘şöyle rivayettir, this is the story’.\textsuperscript{77} The text contains numerous Arabic poetical and Qur’ānic quotations, which are invariably accompanied by a Turkish translation.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{72} Mustafa ben Abdallah Katib Jelebi, Lexicon Bibliographicum et Encyclopaedium (\textit{Kashf al-\r{Z}unūn 'an Asānī al-Kutub wa'-\r{l}-Fīmīn}). G.Flugel (ed.), Leipzig: Oriental Translation Fund, 1845, IV, p. 130: ‘wa-huwa mutadāwal bayna ‘aurwīnāl-Rūm: it is current among the ordinary people of the Ottoman Empire’. Yurdaydın believed that the reference in Hājī Khalīfa was in fact to the translation of Hüseyn b. Sultan Ahmed, discussed below. However, the Hüseyn b. Sultan Ahmed version is only preserved in a handful of manuscripts, so it is more likely Hājī Khalīfa means the popular Ahmed Paşa version. See Yurdaydın, \textit{Matrakçı Nasûh}, Ankara 1963, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{73} A.D.Mordtmann, ‘Nachrichten über Taberistan aus dem Geschichtswerke Taberi’s’, \textit{ZDMG} 2(1848), p. 286.
\end{flushright}
The translation by Hüseyin b.Sultan Ahmed

This translation is represented by far fewer manuscripts than the Ahmed Paşa version. Although Karatay lists Topkapı Sarayı, Revan köşkü 1366\(^7\) and 1368 as representatives of it, the text of the latter appears actually to be much the same as that of the Ahmed Paşa translation. The only other manuscripts known to me are Selim Ağa-766, mentioned by Babinger but which I have not examined,\(^7\) and Süleymaniye, Fatih 4279.\(^8\) It is of course possible that other manuscripts survive, but have been miscatalogued or not catalogued at all. At any rate, it was clearly much less well known than the Ahmed Paşa translation. The translator writes,

> At first this book was in Persian, and Turkish people could not benefit from it. I, the poor, the contemptible, the dust of the feet of the wretched, Hüseyin b.Sultan Ahmed (may God forgive his sins and his errors) translated this book into Turkish… May this book, the most famous of all histories, be a remembrance of me. I began it in 881 AH, on the third of the blessed month of Dhū ‘l-Ḥijja (19 March 1477).\(^8\)

The utility of the book derives, according to the translator, from the examples (ibret) of justice and injustice, of rule and governance (sultanat ve emaret ve hukûmet), and of heroes that it provides. Like the Ahmed Paşa translation, it is written in a simple style, and is replete with Qur’anic quotations and poetry, and indeed the text of the two works is often quite similar, indicating they may have been translated from the same or closely related Persian manuscripts.

The translation attributed to Hüsameddin Çelebi

Karatay notes the existence of two manuscripts of the translation of the Tārikhnāma by Hüsameddin Çelebi, presumably meaning the disciple of the great Persian poet and Şüfi Jalâl al-Dîn Rûmî. One of these, Topkapı Sarayı, Emânet Hazinesi 1391, is in

75 Ibid, p. 522.
77 E.g. ibid, III, p. 120, where Baḥā’ī’s disagreement with Tabari over the Prophet’s genealogy is reduced thus.
78 Revan köşkü 1366 is incomplete, ending at conversion. Karatay indicates that Hüseyin’s father was the ruler of Iraq (d. 813/1409). I have seen no further evidence to confirm this.
79 Babinger, Geschichtsschreiber, p. 67.
80 Like Revan köşkü 1366, Süleymaniye, Fatih 4279 ends with the conversion of Hamza. Copied 1106/1694.
fact a copy of the Ahmed Paşa translation, but one which, like so many others, lacks a reference to Ahmed Paşa. Therefore the sole manuscript which may be identified as Hüsameddin Çelebi’s translation is Topkapı Sarayi, Ahmed III 3108. This manuscript is undated, but is probably tenth/sixteenth century, and contains no reference to the translator. Karatay gives no source for his attribution of the work to Hüsameddin Çelebi, but it seems to derive ultimately from a marginal note in a Berlin manuscript of Katib Çelebi’s Kashi al-zunun, which states that Tabarî’s history was translated by Hüsameddin Çelebi in 710/1310. However, in addition to the silence of the manuscript itself, there is no record in Şüfi hagiographies such as Afkâr’s famous Munâqib al-‘Arifîn of Hüsameddin having undertaken any such work. In addition, the date seems suspiciously early for such a work to have been composed in Anatolian Turkish, which was only started to emerge as a literary language at this point, mainly as a vehicle for popular religious poetry. It seems likely that the attribution to Hüsameddin is false, and was invented subsequently to bolster the authoritative nature of the work. Like the other Turkish versions, it contains many Qur’anic and poetic quotations in Arabic with Turkish translations. Apart from its preface, it differs little in style or content from the other two translations.

The translations by Nasuh Matrakçı

Very different from the three other translations, the contents and style of which are quite similar, is the translation of Tabarî by Nasuh Matrakçı (d. 971/1564) bearing the title Meema’ül-Tevarih, composed in 926/1520 for Süleyman the Magnificent. Matrakçı was a prominent author and artist, and was the author in his own right of two other historical works, the Fethname-i Kara Boğdan and the Tuhfat ül-Ghuzaat. No single complete manuscript of the Meema’ survives, and it is likely that much of the work is lost. The Meema’ is quite distinct from the other translations. Matrakçı claims to have

83 Babinger, Geschichteschreiber, pp. 66–7.
84 On the basis of an error in Rieu’s catalogue, Babinger states that the British Museum (i.e. Library) also possesses a copy, Add 7862. However, in fact this is a representative of the Ahmed Paşa translation. See Yurdaydın, Matrakçı Nasuh, pp. 27–48 for a detailed if sometimes misleading discussion of the manuscripts of the Meema’; his most serious error is considering Süleymaniye, Fatih 4278, to be a manuscript of a missing part of the Meema’; an error doubtless induced by reliance on Babinger who makes the same mistake. In fact, Fatih 4278 is a late manuscript of the Ahmed Paşa translation covering the period from the birth of the Prophet (i.e. the final sections of the pre-Islamic portions of the text) onwards. Its only peculiarity (and not a particularly exceptional one at that) is that it includes short verse chronograms giving the death dates of the later ‘Abbâsid Caliphs, which is followed by brief sections on Ghaznavid and Saljuq history, concluding with the appearance of the Ottomans’ ancestor Ertuğrul. It differs entirely in style from the Vienna and Paris manuscripts which preserve earlier parts of the text, and probably has no connection with the Meema’ whatsoever.
made the translation from the Arabic rather than the Persian, although it is unknown whether or not this is true. In any event, the *Mecma* is so different that it can scarcely be described as a translation of either *Tabari* or *Bal'ami*—although it does follow the same structure of interweaving stories of prophets and kings. The text is decorated throughout with poetry, not, as in the other manuscripts, in Arabic, but in Turkish. The verses are clearly of Matrakçı’s own composition, and rather than illustrating a point or a moral as they usually do in other versions, they are actually part of the narrative which they serve to advance. Matrakçı also supplements the narrative with information from other, usually unnamed sources. Like the other Turkish translators (except for pseudo-Hüsameddin Çelebi) he includes an extensive section on Alexander. Of immediate relevance to his audience would have been a passage where he recounts the founding of Constantinople, which he attributes to Constantine after his lands had been devastated by the Iraqi king *Khidr*. Like *Bal'ami* himself, Matrakçı clearly saw himself as far more than a translator, and the *Mecma* must be considered an independent work.

In 975/1550 Matrakçı produced a second translation of *Tabari* under the title *Cami`ül-Tevarih* at the behest of Süleyman’s vizier Rüstem Paşa. This is partially preserved in a unique manuscript, British Library, Or 12, 879. All that survives today is the section from the creation to Bahram Chubin, but according to Matrakçı’s preface, originally it continued through Islamic times down to the year of its composition, 975/1550, with sections devoted to the history of the various Turko-Mongol empires. It must have been a vast work, for the extant portions alone take up 430 folios. According to Yurdaydın, the *Cami`ül-Tevarih* is an abridged and simplified version of Matrakçı’s earlier *Mecma*. However, the differences between the works are more substantial than this would indicate. The surviving parts of the *Cami`ül-Tevarih* are completely plain in style, and no verse is used. In fact, it appears to be a completely new version, composed very much along the same lines as the other Turkish translations. On this occasion there can be no doubt that the Persian version was the basis of Matrakçı’s work, for at one point he specifically mentions *Bal'ami*: *ravi el-ahbar Abu Ali el-Bal'ami söyle rivayat eder….* (the transmitter of reports *Abu ʻAli Bal 'amī* relates…) .

86 Paris, BNF, ms anciens fonds turcs 50, ff. 41a–56a.
87 Ibid, ff. 59b–60b.
88 British Library, Or 12, 879, f. 4a–b.
90 British Library, Or 12, 879, f. 255b.
The Tarikhnama in Chaghatay

Three different translations into classical Eastern Turkish, Chaghatay, are said to exist, although I have been unable to examine any of them in person. The earliest was made during the reign of the Shaybānid ruler Kūjkundī-Khān (r. 918/1512–937/1530), and was finished in 928/1521–2. The translator was the court librarian Vāhidī Balkhī, who tells us that ‘I have translated this chronicle into Chaghatay for the use of his majesty…’ Abd al-Laṭīf Sultan, son of Kūjkundī Khān’. Simnānī mentions a translation made ‘in the name of ‘Ubaydallāh Khān Üzbag Shaybānī which has many omissions and is an abridgement of the Persian. Presumably this is the same as Vāhidī Balkhī’s version.

No manuscripts are securely attested of the second translation, apparently composed before 1182/1768–9 by Muḥammad Ṣādiq Kāshghāri, who wrote for Yūnus tāghī Bey b. Iskandar who ruled Kashgar on behalf of the Chinese empire. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Kāshghāri also translated the history of the Mongols in Central Asia by Ḥaydar Dughlāt into Chaghatay for the same patron, as well as producing various other literary works.

The last translation of Tābarī was made by the Khīvan poet and historian Bayānī (c. 1275/1858–1923) in 1300/1882–3 or 1311/1893–4. The cultural efflorescence of nineteenth-century Khīvā saw several works translated from Persian into Chaghatay, including Mīrkhvānd’s Rawdat al-Ṣafā. This Chaghatay translation of Tābarī was apparently commissioned by Bayānī’s patron, the Khān of Khiva Muḥammad Rāḥīm II Firūz (r. 1281/1864–1328/1910), and contained appendices discussing the foundation of the four Sunnī legal schools.

Detailed research on the Turkish Tābarī beyond the scope of this book is needed before one can properly assess why the translations were composed, who did so and for whom, and how they relate to the Persian texts. Above, I have merely attempted to indicate which translations exist and outline some of their salient characteristics. Nonetheless, some facts are clear. The Turkish Tābarī was immensely popular in the Ottoman world, as is attested by the comments of and the large number of extant manuscripts dating from at least the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. By far the

92 Chronique de Tābarī (tr. Dubeux), p. xv.
93 Oxford, Bodleian, Elliot 374, f. 2a.
94 On the possible manuscripts of Kāshghāri’s Chaghatay Tābarī see Hoffman, Turkish Literature, VI, pp. 25–6, and on Muḥammad Ṣādiq Kāshghāri and his patron, ibid, IV, pp. 20–23.
97 On Bayānī, see further Hoffman, Turkish Literature, II, pp. 240–243.
best-known translation was that made at the behest of Ahmed Paşa. ʿTabarī’s work also appealed to a wide range of Turkish-speaking audiences. The Turkish version was almost certainly used for educating the young. At the end of Topkapı Sarayı, Emânet Hazinesi 1391 are Arabic prayers in a scrawled and childish hand, and the large number of manuscripts in this particular library also strongly suggests that it may have been used for teaching the non-Muslim recruits gathered by the devşirme who would have started their education under the auspices of the palace, and would have been taught Turkish before some of them moved on to study Persian. Even if Hüsameddin Çelebi did not himself produce a translation, the mere fact that it was attributed to him confirms the evidence of Āmidī’s translation that the Tārīkhnāma could also appeal to an audience interested in Ṣūfīsm.

The Turkish versions of ʿTabarī were not composed in isolation. As late as the eighth/fourteenth century, many Anatolian Muslims ‘were largely illiterate and ignorant of all but the rudiments of their faith. What they knew they seem to have acquired from their forebears’ contact with Persian speaking Muslims in Iran and Seljuk Anatolia’. To integrate themselves into the Islamic world, eighth/fourteenth century rulers commissioned Turkish translations of basic Muslim texts, Persian and Arabic, and these translations were aimed at a ‘relatively uneducated audience’. Doubtless the early Turkish translation of the Tārīkhnāma was inspired by similar motives. Likewise, Matrakçı’s Meema‘ was just one of a large number of translations made in Süleyman’s reign, with works of both literature and scholarship being rendered into Turkish. The Tafsīr of Kāshīfī (d. 910/1504), Ghazzālī’s (d. 505/1111) Kimiyā-yi Saʿādat, a version of Kalīla wa Dimna and works of fiqh are just a few examples of the other books translated. According to Çelebioğlu, the impetus for this translation movement came from the Sultan himself, who personally ordered the Turkish versions to be made. The highly literary nature of Matrakçı’s Meema‘l-Tevarih suggests that, unlike the other Turkish ʿTabarī translations, it was not intended for educational purposes. Rather, it was destined for the sultan and his court, for whom it provided an elegant account of history loosely based on a classic source.

100 For details see A. Çelebioğlu, Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Devri Türk Edebiyatı, Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1994, pp. 117–120.
6 General conclusions

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that Balʾamiʾs Tārīkhnāma is a complex and rich work in its own right, and is far more than an abridged translation of Ṣabāʾi’s Arabic History. By way of conclusion, I shall attempt to answer three of the most important questions relating to the work which are essential to understanding it. They concern the reasons why the Tārīkhnāma was commissioned, why it differs so much from Ṣabāʾi’s History and why its manuscript tradition is so complex. Of course, given the state of the Tārīkhnāma’s text, absolute certainty about Balʾamiʾs intentions is impossible, and the conclusions below are thus offered as working hypotheses.

Why were the translations of Ṣabāʾi commissioned?

There is no evidence to support the contention that the History or the Tafsīr were translated as part of a campaign against heresy. By the 350s/960s, Ismāʿīlim was probably quiescent in the Sāmānid heartland of Transoxiana, even if it remained a force elsewhere. Nizām al-Mulk’s account of an Ismāʿīlim takeover during Manṣūr b. Nūḥ’s reign is not credible. While some other heterodox groups did exist, most, such as the Manichaens and Sapīd-Jāmagān, were too few in number to pose a challenge to the state even if they had wished to. Muʿtazilism, one of the targets of al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam, was occasionally patronized by high Sāmānid officials, and anyway only ever appealed to the educated élite. If both Ṣabāʾi and Balʾamiʾs works do articulate a broadly ‘mainstream’ Muslim perspective (despite their occasional differences), at no point does the Tārīkhnāma or the Tarjuma-i Tafsīr appear to be a response to specific heretical views. Indeed, while Ṣabāʾi had frequently attacked views with which he disagreed in the Arabic Tafsīr, this polemic is omitted in the Persian Tafsīr. It would rather defeat the point of commissioning a translation of a work in order to counter heresy if the translation did not then highlight the original’s anti-heretical stance rather than ignoring it. Thus while there can be little question about the orthodoxy of the two Persian translations, it seems unlikely that they were intended as an anti-heretical polemic.

It has also been suggested that the translations were commissioned in response to the conversion to Islam of large numbers of Turks, many of whom lived within the Sāmānid domains where they frequently held positions of power and influence. Thus the translators, as well as providing ‘standardized, officially approved and carefully designed versions of prestigious religious texts which could be used to instruct unsophisticated
readers in a uniform way’, aimed to promote ‘the further Persianization of frontier areas and the acculturation of the new Turkish military élite’. It is certainly true that the translations, particularly the Tārikhnāma, were used in this way in later times, under the Mongols and the Ottomans, for example. Yet there is much to indicate that this was not the case in the fourth/tenth century. The translators are distinctly disingenuous in their claim that the Persian versions were made for the benefit of those who did not know Arabic. Both the Persian Tafsīr and the Tārikhnāma are equipped with Arabic prefaces and contain numerous untranslated quotations in that language. It is hard to believe that these ‘unsophisticated readers’, let alone steppe Turks who might anyway have only a limited knowledge of Persian, would have understood the Qur’ānic passages, the poetic quotations or rhymed prose that can be found throughout the Tārikhnāma.

Furthermore, it is quite clear that ‘Persianization’ was far from the translators’ minds. As early as the sixth/twelfth century, the author of the Mujmal al-Tawārikh wa-l-Qīṣaṣ had noted that the Iranian past is where the Tārikhnāma is at its least detailed. If Baḥamī supplemented Ṭabarī from other works, these were not Zoroastrian or Pahlavī sources, but Islamic ones, probably written in Arabic, such as Ibn ʿIshāq. Indeed, Baḥamī gives no emphasis to the role of Persians in history. Far from being a narrative in which Iran is central, the Tārikhnāma’s focus is in fact on Islam. In this sense it is faithful to Ṭabarī’s original which provides ‘an organic historical explanation for the identity and role of the Muslim community’. Thus if the Tārikhnāma was ever intended to encourage ‘acculturation’, it was acculturation to an Islamic world view, not a Persian one.

The reasons for Manṣūr b. Nūh’s patronage of the Persian versions of Ṭabarī must be considered in comparison with other such translation movements in the mediaeval Islamic world. It is true that some, as in mediaeval Anatolia, commissioned translations purely for linguistic reasons. Yet the situation in fourth/tenth century Transoxiana was very different: the Sāmānids were not a dynasty of recent converts with a hazy understanding of Islam, and their élite would have known Arabic well. The audience of the Tārikhnāma and the Tarjuma-i Tafsīr would have had to have known some Arabic to understand much of either work.

An interesting example of the political and propagandistic uses of translation is evident in a much more famous translation movement, that of the early Abbāsid period, lasting from the second/eighth to the fourth/tenth centuries. Arabic translations of a vast range of Greek, Syriac and Pahlavī works were made, with only history and literature excluded. While some of these translations did have an obvious practical use, such as the works of Galen for physicians, this was not the reason why the movement received official support. As Dimitri Gutas has shown in his study of the social and political

context of the translation movement, the Caliph Mansūr (d. 158/775) and his successors promoted the translation movement out of political expediency. The 'Abbāsid caliphs had come to power as a result of a civil war in which they had been supported by many Persians, and needed both to strengthen their own legitimacy and to reconcile the interests of the various groups that had supported them.

The way in which the early 'Abbāsid caliphs tried to legitimize the rule of their dynasty was by expanding their imperial ideology to include the concerns of the ‘Persian’ contingent. This was done by promulgating the view that the 'Abbāsid dynasty, in addition to being the descendants of the Prophet and hence satisfying the demands of both Sunnī and Shī‘ī Muslims, was at the same time the successor of the ancient imperial dynasties of 'Irāq and Iran…. In this way they were able to incorporate Sasanian culture…into mainstream 'Abbāsid culture.³

Zoroastrian imperial ideology, for example, formed one of the cornerstones of the 'Abbāsid own dynastic ideology. As Gutas argues, Zoroastrian ideology depends on the notion that translation not only exists, but is a cultural good, for otherwise

the ideological claim of the Avesta as the source and origin of all science and philosophy for all nations cannot be reconciled with the historical facts of, first, the incontrovertible supremacy of Greek letters in the post-Hellenic world in the Near East and, second, translations actually made from Greek (and Sanskrit) into Pahlavī during the Sasanian empire…. In order to be effective, the Zoroastrian ideology thus rests completely on translation.⁴

Some of various Persian groups—ranging from separatist movements to the dihqāns to Zoroastrian revivalists—whom Mansūr hoped to co-opt into supporting the 'Abbāsid regime may have been more at home in Arabic than in Pahlavī at this date. Gutas suggests that ‘[t]ranslations of traditional Zoroastrian material into Arabic was an important propaganda tool to convince those Arabized Persians who would not have known Pahlavī of the inevitability of the Umayyad downfall and of the validity of the Zoroastrian tradition whose revival was envisaged’.⁵ This translation movement was, then, a legitimatory exercise. The process of translating Pahlavī works, rendered inevitable by Zoroastrianism’s emphasis on translation, both symbolized and effected the transfer of Sāsānian ideology and legitimacy to the 'Abbāsid.

The translation movement of the Sāmānīd period was motivated by similar considerations, the need to legitimize the ruling dynasty through the actual and symbolic

⁴ Ibid, p. 45.
⁵ Ibid, p. 48.
transfer of knowledge. It is impossible to judge exactly how many Zoroastrians survived in Central Asia at this date, but they were probably a small minority and it is unlikely that the Zoroastrian imperative for translation would have directly influenced the movement. Certainly the Sāmānids and their court were thoroughly islamized, although they modeled their administration on that of the Abbāsids, itself ultimately heavily influenced by Sāsānian precedents. The culture which needed to be appropriated to bolster the Sāmānids’ legitimacy was not Iranian, but Islamic. In an age when Shi‘ite states dominated the Islamic world and the Caliphate itself had fallen under Shi‘ite control, the Sāmānids ordered the translations of two of the most prestigious and famous Sunnī works, Ţabarī’s History and Tafsīr. This asserted their commitment to defend Sunnism, effectively taking over the mantle of the Caliphate in this respect.

It was from the assumption of this role that the Sāmānids’ legitimacy derived. At a time when their power was declining and territories were being lost either to rebellious vassals like Alptegin or to the Shi‘ite Būyids, the need to reassert their credentials as upholders of orthodoxy must have been more pressing than ever. Thus Mansūr b. Nuh attached such importance to the translations because his legitimacy as ruler depended on being accepted as the defender of Sunnism. He was right. When the Sāmānīd state fell, it fell not because of heretical movements, or even Būyid Shi‘ism or Ismā‘īlism, but because the ulema no longer accepted that it was the Sāmānids and the Sāmānids alone who would uphold their faith. As now respectable Muslims, the Turkish Qarakhānids, pagan half a century before, were welcomed into Bukhārā without resistance. The Ghaznavids, who inherited much of the Sāmānīd Empire, likewise sought legitimacy as defenders of Sunnī orthodoxy against Shi‘ism. It was the conversion of these Turks to Islam shortly before Mansūr ascended the throne which ensured the Sāmānids’ demise, for it meant there were now other political entities which were capable of assuming the Sāmānids’ role as defenders of Sunnism. When the Sāmānids’ weakness rendered them unable to perform this role, the Turks easily obtained the support of the ulema to replace them. Thus the Ĭabarī translations are indeed legitimatory and connected with the rise of Shi‘ism but not in the ways previous scholars suggested. Ba‘amī’s neglect of Persian history is quite understandable: it really had very little relevance to what the Sāmānids were trying to achieve by the translations.

It is likely that the main audience for the Tārīkhnāma, and the translation of the Tafsīr and al-Savād al-A‘zam, was above all the ‘semi-professional’ ulema who were the basis of pious Transoxianan society. These would presumably have been more at home in Persian than Arabic, which was probably only widely used among the bureaucratic and religious élites. Nonetheless, they would have had some knowledge of Arabic, as was necessary to understand religious texts. However, the Sāmānīd translation movement was not purely concerned with making religious classics more widely accessible to piety-minded individuals with a shaky grasp of Arabic. The involvement of the most senior

figures in the Sāmānid state—the amir himself, Fā'iq, the military strong man, and the vizier Bal'ami—underlines the deep political importance that the translation project had. For most of their subjects, the Sāmānids’ commitment to orthodox Islam was the basis of their right to rule, not any spurious genealogies linking them to Sāsānian heroes. The translation of Taḥbārī was a public demonstration of the Sāmānids’ credentials as pious Sunnīs in a world in which they were ever more isolated, caught between Shi‘ism in the west and the converted steppe Turks in the east.

Why are there so many differences between the Persian translation and Taḥbārī’s original?

I have suggested above that Bal'ami’s conception of the past is in many ways similar to Taḥbārī’s, even if the ultimate purpose of the two works is different. This poses the question of why Bal'ami adapted Taḥbārī’s text so radically, making the Tārikhnāma far more than just a translation. Several factors were at work here. The first is that while Taḥbārī’s History may in general have represented the consensus of mainstream Muslim opinion, it was by no means free of its author’s biases. Some of these did not suit Bal'ami’s purposes. This is best illustrated by Taḥbārī’s treatment of Ḥusayn’s death, where Shi‘ite authorities are used to detract the blame from Yazīd. Bal'ami, while by no means a Shi‘ite, doubtless sought the assent of as many readers as possible for his version of history, and modified Taḥbārī’s account to appeal to moderate ‘Alīd opinion. Likewise, the bias of Sayf’s account of the apostasy of Tamīm was all too apparent, and needed to be corrected to produce a more widely acceptable version of the past. Bal'ami needed to appeal to as many as possible of the educated, piety-minded classes to whom his translation was addressed if his legitimatory project was to succeed.

Secondly, Taḥbārī’s History is structured around the promotion of certain reports of certain transmitters above others. Famous transmitters were well known for proto-Shi‘ism, or Sunnism, for interest in legendary matters, or for unreliability. While Taḥbārī may promote one account over another, the reader still has a choice. Bal'ami moulds these dissenting voices into one. He never chooses the facts given in one report by one transmitter to translate, as would have been perfectly possible and doubtless considerably easier. Rather, he takes something from each account and combines them to produce a new narrative. This obfuscates questions of the relative merits of various transmitters, and while the resulting narrative may be more readable than Taḥbārī’s seeming jumble of akhbār, it deprives the reader of any chance to exercise his own judgement of its reliability. Bal'ami thus becomes the architect of the ‘master narrative’ in Donner’s phrase, creating an authoritative and indisputable vision of the past.

Finally, in keeping with his role as this authoritative narrator, Bal'ami did not see himself as a mere translator. By explicitly disagreeing with Taḥbārī, he not only distances himself from some of the former’s well known biases, but stresses that he is an independent historian in his own right, whose work is modelled on Taḥbārī’s but not
solely dependent on it. Baḥāʾī’s audience were after all never intended to read the Tārikhnāma as a literal translation of Ṭabarī, but as an expression of the Šāmānids’ political will to defend the sort of Islam that Ṭabarī had promoted.

Why is the manuscript tradition of the Tārikhnāma so complex?

A simple explanation for the complex and confused state of the text of the Tārikhnāma lies in the work’s popularity. Because it could be used for a wide variety of purposes, from legitimizing the ruler to teaching recent converts the fundamentals of Islam, from providing moral lessons to attacking heresy, the Tārikhnāma was naturally adapted according to the particular interests of its audience. It seems, for instance, that Turkish readers had greater interest than Persian ones in Alexander the Great, possibly because Mehmed the Conqueror regarded him as a model, although this was also true of the Īlkhān Ghāzān. Another factor was the duration of the Tārikhnāma’s popularity. Over course of nearly a millennium, the language was constantly updated to suit contemporary tastes.

Above all, one must remember that manuscripts are very different from printed books, and scribes were not merely a less effective means of mechanically reproducing text. The idea of transmitting ‘benefits’ was crucial in allowing scribes to add to, delete from or emend the text they were copying: if it would benefit his audience, this would ensure the scribe enjoyed a reward in the hereafter and could only be advantageous to all. The boundaries between author, translator and scribe were extremely flexible, and there was not perceived to be nearly so great a distinction between them as there is today.

At the same time, some scribes did take measures to copy the texts before them as accurately as possibly, using the oldest manuscripts at their disposal. As the false colophons of MSS Tashkent, Beruniy, 2816 and 4226 demonstrate, a premium was put on old manuscripts. Such manuscripts were probably aimed at a wealthier market that could afford to pay more, the same people who would commission copies of the great ‘Abbāsid classics, for instance. Yet this interest in antique manuscripts, whether genuine or false, came too late and was too limited to allow the accurate reconstruction of Baḥāʾī’s Persian text.

In addition, as Chamberlain stresses, ‘the boundaries between written and oral reproduction of were not fixed. Shaykhs reproduced texts from memory at public performances’. Islamic culture had always emphasized the importance of memorizing texts, considering it a more reliable means of transmission than writing. It is likely that oral reproduction is also responsible for some of the shape of the Tārikhnāma, whether through the fallibility of memory, or the deliberate interpolation of passages as explanatory asides which were then integrated into the text. The clearest example of this is the interpolation on the Ḥusainī in MS Leiden University Library, Or 1612.

The complexity of the textual tradition of the Tārīkhnāma is by no means unique. It is unusual solely in the number of manuscripts that have survived, which allows an exceptionally clear view of the various processes of transmission they underwent. The fact that manuscripts were transmitted in this way suggests that editors’ attempts to establish texts on the basis of stemmata may be fundamentally flawed in some cases, for such neat divisions of manuscripts into families of redactions are not always possible.

The Tārīkhnāma of Balʿamī raises numerous complex questions. This study has been limited to a few salient aspects of the work, in an attempt to resolve the most obvious problems, and as stated in the Preface, it is not intended to be a comprehensive survey. There is much room for further research. More detailed studies of other parts of the text accompanied by a comparison with Tābarī’s original would be highly desirable. The Turkish translations also offer a rich field for future research, and the vast number of manuscripts of the Persian text are a virtually inexhaustible subject.

It is clear that Balʿamī’s Tārīkhnāma must be considered an independent work from Tābarī, commissioned to legitimize the Sāmānid regime as defenders of Sunnism. Its appeal is based on the fact that it reflects broadly mainstream Muslim opinion, and this made it one of the most popular historical works of the entire Islamic world. However, although the number of extant manuscripts of the Tārīkhnāma is exceptional, in many other ways it is entirely representative of the problems of Persian and Islamic historiography. Literature intersected and interacted in the mediaeval Islamic world. A study of historiography can improve our understanding of the preoccupations of works’ patrons even when, as is the case with the Tārīkhnāma, the historical works themselves contain no information about a given dynasty.

Historiography, if treated in the right way, can thus offer us a much more nuanced view of the past than we have at present, as long as works are not dismissed for failing to live up to our expectations but are assessed on their own terms. Furthermore, problems of how texts have been transmitted to us and to what extent we can rely on published editions need to be taken much more seriously if our knowledge of Islamic historiography is to advance significantly. Historical works are required to allow us to understand the development of Islamic historiography and the relationships between texts. If the endeavour of studying their history is to be worthwhile, then it must be based on a proper comprehension of how Muslims themselves saw their past, how they portrayed it and what it meant to them. Perhaps the most apposite conclusion, however, may be left to Bāyazīd b. Sādr al-Dīn, the scribe responsible for preserving probably the oldest text of Balʿamī, who wrote in the colophon to MS Cambridge University Library, Add 836 (f. 238a),

\[
yalāhu ‘l-khāṭṭu fī ‘l-qirāṭa ḍahran/ \]
\[
wa-kāṭibuhu ramīmun fī ‘l-turābī
\]

Writing shines forth on paper forever/ While its writer is rotting in the earth.
Appendix I
Comparison of postulated redactions of the Tārīkhnāma

A) Comparison of Zotenberg’s postulated redactions

Zotenberg argued that his postulated ‘primitive’ redaction was distinguished from the ‘new corrected redaction’ by generally being more concise. A comparison of the following extracts from each postulated redaction demonstrate this was not always the case.

i) Zotenberg’s ‘primitive’ redaction

According to Abū ‘Ubaydah ‘Abdallāh b. Sallām in his book Gharīb al-Hadīth, Muhammad said, ‘Of all the people to whom I presented Islam, there is not one who did not make difficulties (kabwa) save Abū Bakr, who did not hesitate for a moment (tulā‘athāma). The expression tulā‘athāma is used of someone who is about to say something, and his tongue will not consent to say it, so he hesitates, which is kabwa. This word is derived from that for a fire-lighter in Arabic. When one strikes a stone on metal and a fire is produced, it is said to be affected by warā, but when one strikes it a lot and no fire is produced, it is said to be affected by kūba. So the meaning of the report is that everyone suppressed his tongue except Abū Bakr, who, the moment the call [to Islam] entered his heart, the light of Islam appeared on the tip of his tongue.

Muḥammad b. Jarīr [Tabārī] says in this book that Zayd b. Ḥārītha, the mawlā of the Prophet, converted before Abū Bakr, and said that 50 people had become Muslim when Abū Bakr converted. This report has no basis, and all the akhbārīs and Muslims disagree with it.

ii) Zotenberg’s ‘new corrected redaction’

Abū ‘Ubaydah in his book Gharīb al-Hadīth reports of the Prophet, peace be upon him, that he said, ‘I did not present Islam to anyone without them having thought about it save Abū Bakr. He became a Muslim not by thought but by desire, and did not delay in saying the word of Truth.’ They say that Zayd b. Ḥārītha was the next to convert.

1 For Persian text, see Tārīkhnāma, V, p. 1331. French translation, Chronique de Tabari (tr. Zotenberg), II, pp. 399–400, based on his mss F and G which he identifies as ‘primitive’. The French translation contains a couple of inaccuracies, doubtless derived from the manuscripts used by Zotenberg, which obscure the play on kabwa and kūba.
B) Comparison of two manuscripts of Daniel’s postulated ‘late redaction’

The substantial differences between the text of the passages given below illustrate the difficulty of trying to classify manuscripts according to redaction.

i) British Library, MS IO Isl 2669, f. 155b

This Muḍar was one of the ancestors of the Prophet. Lordship of Mecca was initially in the hands of Ghālib. It then passed to Luʿayy, then to Kaʿb, then to Murra. These were all ancestors of the Prophet and were chiefs of the Arabs and Mecca until the time of Kilāb when Qūṣayy b. Kilāb seized the siqāya. Then the Banū Khuzāʿa gathered together to make war on Qūṣayy and summoned his relatives, and gathered Banū Fihr, Banū Ghālib, Mudrik, Ilyās—12 tribes in all. Khuzāʿa were stronger and defeated them, and fled to the chief of the tribe, Durājji, who was his brother. He asked him for help, and he came with all Banū Qudāʿa. They made war and defeated the Khuzāʿa and Qūṣayy was victorious and seized the hijāba and siqāya, and the lordship of Mecca and control over the Kaʿba. He gathered all his kin and named them ‘Quraysh’ so that people would know they were the best in war. The original meaning of Quraysh in Arabic was ‘gathering’: taqarrasha ḫ-dhā ḱ-tumūʿ. Some say it is the name of a horse which overcomes everything in the sea, and Qūṣayy compared them to that horse. ‘Abdallāh b. ʿAbbās (may God be pleased with them both) relates the following poetry:

A Quraysh is what dwells in the sea/ Quraysh are called ‘Quraysh’ after it. It eats the lean and the fat, and does not leave any feathers on a winged creature.

Thus in the Book does the tribe of Quraysh/ eat up the land At the end of time, they will encounter a tribe who will multiply/ killing and wounds among them.

ii) British Library MS IO Isl. 1983 (Ethé 9), f. 313a-b

Chiefdom of all the offspring of Nizār and Āl Maʿadd b. ʿAdnān came to Muḍar, who was the ancestor of our Prophet. The children of Nizār were many, and the descendants of ʿAdnān likewise, and Maʿadd’s dependents were so many that their number was unknown. Muḍar was the chief of all the tribes of the Arabs, and he had a son he named Ilyās who inherited the chiefdom. He had two sons one called Mudrika, the

2 RAS, Persian 22, f.166b; Tārīkhnāmah, III, p. 39.
other Ṭābikha. Mudrika was one of the ancestors of the Prophet. Both these two’s names were nicknames: Mudrika’s [real] name was ‘Amr, and Ṭābikha’s was ‘Āmir. When they grew up, one day they were with their father by the camels, cooking a cock. The camels escaped, and Ilyās said to ‘Amr, ‘Get up and gather the camels’. To ‘Āmir he said, ‘Cook the cock’. That day he named ‘Amr Mudrika, and ‘Āmir Ṭābikha, and these nicknames remained with them. Ilyās seized the chiefdom of all the sons of Rabi‘a, Muṣṣar, and Ābd, and was chief over every tribe of Nizār. Sometimes they lived in the desert, sometimes in Mecca, but they did not hold lordship over Mecca, because it was in the hands of the Banū Khuza‘a. Mudrika was descended from Ma‘add and ‘Adnān, and the descendants of Ḩaṣm were in Mecca, and were a large part of the population. The day that Ibrāhīm brought Ḩaṣm to Mecca, there was one tribe [already] there, part of the Banū Jurhum. When the tribe of Khuza‘a arrived, they defeated Jurhum and settled there, and many people are descended from them. Khuza‘a is an Arab tribe, and they were drowned and destroyed. Some of their descendants are scattered around the world, as God said, ‘We have scattered them, each one’. Arabs fall into two groups, one the descendants of Ma‘add, one of Qahtān. The army and people of Yemen are Qahtānids, and the Arabs of the desert are Ma‘addids. The history of Jurhum has been recounted in the story of Ḩaṣm. Ḩaṣm married a woman from Jurhum and had children by her, who dispersed in the desert. Ma‘add and ‘Adnān in particular settled in the desert and had children, and Nizār, Muṣṣar, and Ilyās did likewise. Then they came to Mecca and stayed there, and when they were numerous one group settled there permanently and one group settled in the mountains. But lordship of Mecca belonged to the Khuza‘a, and consisted of two things, hijāba and siqāya. Some of Ḩaṣm’s sons lived in the desert, and some in Mecca. When Ilyās died, lordship of the Arabs came to Mudrika, and after him to his son Khuzyama, and from him to his son Kinnān and from him to his son Naḍr. This Naḍr made Mecca his seat. They called him Naḍr, because his face was very handsome. He wanted to take the lordship of Mecca and to seize the hijāba and siqāya from Banū Khuza‘a, but he was unable to because Khuza‘a were many. His kin and clan were descended from Kinnān, Khuzyama and Mudrika, and along with Muṣṣar’s children they were scattered in the desert and mountains. Naḍr could not defeat Khuza‘a, hijāba, so he said to them, ‘Give me this siqāya and the keys of the Ka‘ba and the lordship of Mecca will remain yours’. They gave him the siqāya. Then the chiefdom passed from him to his son Mālik, and from him to his son Murra, then to Kilāb, those whose names we have related who were ancestors of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Until the time of Qusayy b. Kilāb, the chiefdom of the Arabs remained in the family and tribe of Nizār.

When Kilāb died, his son Qusayy was small and still breastfeeding, so the lordship and siqāya reverted to the Khuza‘a, [etc…the text continues for several folios before reaching the verses about Quraysh cited above.]
Appendix II
Comparison of the Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* and the Persian text

The question of the accuracy of the Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* preserved in Add 836 is difficult to resolve, as we lack the text of the original Persian manuscript from which it was translated. Given the variants in the Persian manuscript tradition, one cannot rely on a simple comparison of the published text of the *Tārīkhnāma*—or any other manuscript of it—for the text the translator of Add 836 used may well have been very different. Bearing this caveat in mind, two passages from Add 836 are compared with RAS, Persian 22. They illustrate two different extremes typical of the contents of Add 836: in the first instance the text of both the Persian and Arabic versions is very close, in the second they are very different.

Passage One: The raid on Khaybar (extract)

*Appendix II*

**Comparison of the Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* and the Persian text**

The question of the accuracy of the Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* preserved in Add 836 is difficult to resolve, as we lack the text of the original Persian manuscript from which it was translated. Given the variants in the Persian manuscript tradition, one cannot rely on a simple comparison of the published text of the *Tārīkhnāma*—or any other manuscript of it—for the text the translator of Add 836 used may well have been very different. Bearing this caveat in mind, two passages from Add 836 are compared with RAS, Persian 22. They illustrate two different extremes typical of the contents of Add 836: in the first instance the text of both the Persian and Arabic versions is very close, in the second they are very different.

**Passage One: The raid on Khaybar (extract)**

A) *Arabic text of Add 836, f. 112a–b*

فَضَرَتُ خُبَرَى وَكَانَتْ كَيْبَةً كَلَا في ارْدِي الْهُوَدُ وَلَمْ يَكُن حَصَارُ قَطْ حَصْرُ منْهَا وَكَانَتْ سَيْطَةٌ حَصْرُ بَنَاسٍ فِي

بعض حَوْلِهَا نَخْلٌ وَبَذْوَابَا عَلَى مِصْرَةٍ فِرْسَخِينَ قَبْيلَةٌ عَطْفَانٍ فِي الْحَرَبِ فَكَتَوْا عَدَوًا لَهُمْ فَخَرَجَ قَنْبِي عَلَى

الْحَصَارَ وَالْسُلْطَانِ وَالْمُدَهْدَورَ وَالدَّخْرَاءَ وَهُمْ سَخَافُ عَلَى الْمُتَفَصَّلَةَ سَبْعَانَا عَرْقِيَةٌ مِنْ بَيْنِ عَطْفَانِ فَكَانَ كَلٌّ

حَصَارَ رَبِّي وَكَانَتْ الْحَصَارُ بَيْنَ هَذَهُ تَأْمِلَ وَفِي هَذِهِ تَأْمِلَ قَرْنُوهُ فَرْتُوسَةُ قَانَوْنُ قَايَدةٌ دُنْيَا وَالْحَيَةَ الْكَبِيرَةُ

فِرْتُوسَةُ البَصِيبَ بِمَعْدَانِ الْمَدَنَةِ وَالْخَاصِرَةِ النَّفَّذَةَ وَالْمُفَرَّضُ الْمَتَّى وَالْحَسَنُ الْوَطْيَحُ الْوَالَدُ الْعَلَى حَمْسَرُهُ عَلَى الْحَبِّ

عليه السلام وَالسُلْطَانُ خَمْساً مَسْرُوحاً فَجَاءَ بِهِ عَطْفَانٍ لَمْ يَنْتَجُوْهُمْ ثُمَّ خَافُوا الْأَنْعَمُ ثُمَّ خَافُوا الْأَنْعَمُ ثُمَّ خَافُوا الْأَنْعَمُ

جَمَّانِي بَيْنَ بَيْنِهِمْ فَرَجُوا الْفَيْلُ سُلْطَانُ عَلَى الْحَسَانِ الْوَطْيَحُ وَالْمُفَرَّضُ الْمَتَّى وَالْمُفَرَّضُ الْمَتَّى وَالْمُفَرَّضُ الْمَتَّى

يَخْرُجُ الْمَلِئُ تَلْثُمُ ثَلَاثَةَ مَسَا وَأَرْبَعَةَ وَأَفْرَدُ وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً فِي الْخَيْرَةِ فَقَدْ أَثَامَ فَأَثَامٌ عَلَى الْخَيْرَةِ

اِبْنَاءُ الْمَلِئُ تَلْثُمُ ثَلَاثَةَ مَسَا وَأَرْبَعَةَ وَأَفْرَدُ وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً فِي الْخَيْرَةِ

رَجَاءُ الْمَاشِيَةُ قَلْتُ لِفَدْرَرَةَ الْإِسْلَامِ فَأَتَاهُ الْمَلِئُ تَلْثُمُ ثَلَاثَةَ مَسَا وَأَرْبَعَةَ وَأَفْرَدُ وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً فِي الْخَيْرَةِ

عَمْرُقُرَمْرَةُ بِالْحَرَبِ فَرَجُعُ مَسَا وَأَتَاهُ الْمَلِئُ تَلْثُمُ ثَلَاثَةَ مَسَا وَأَرْبَعَةَ وَأَفْرَدُ وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً وَحَذِيفَةً فِي الْخَيْرَةِ

Comments

The Persian and Arabic texts are remarkably similar, and there is no significant divergence. Normal scribal errors account for the confusion in both manuscripts in the account of the names of the castles of Khaybar, although it is interesting to note that Add 836 contains a slightly fuller account of this. It is clear that the text from which Add 836 was translated was very close to RAS, Persian 22 at this point, and the Arabic translation was quite literal.
Passage Two: the conquest of Hamadān

A) Arabic text of Add 836, f. 150a

B) Persian text of RAS Persian 22, f. 253b
**Comments**

In this instance, the differences between the Arabic and Persian texts are much more considerable, the Arabic omitting any mention of Khīsh’s role in opposing the Arab conquest of Hamadān. However, the account of the Caliph ʿUmar’s reception of the three messengers bringing news of the victory at Hamadān is very similar in both Arabic and Persian, with the Arabic lacking the Persian’s description of ʿUmar’s happiness on hearing the news, but relating the conversation in identical terms. The substantial differences between the two texts are probably to be accounted for by the manuscript tradition rather than a deliberate policy of the Arabic translation to abbreviate the Persian. This is suggested by the evidence of the Mashhad manuscript which does not contain this passage at all. In an instance such as this, it is impossible to ascertain for sure which text (if any) is more faithful to Baʿran’s intentions. However, the final sentences of the Persian which are common to Add 836 indicate that where the text is shared by both, Add 836 offers an unembellished, although possibly slightly abbreviated, translation of the Persian.

**Conclusion**

The evidence of the passages discussed indicates that where the text of the Persian manuscripts is also that (or related to that) of Add 836, the Arabic translation of the Tārīkhnāma offers an adequate translation of the Persian with very little alteration beyond that required by idiom. Where there are substantial differences between Add 836 and a given Persian manuscript, these can be explained by the processes of textual transmission discussed in Chapter 2 which give rise to so many variants in the Persian textual tradition. Thus it is reasonable to treat Add 836 as credible textual witness for the lost Persian manuscript from which it was translated in the eleventh century.
Appendix III  
Addenda and corrigenda to Daniel’s ‘An Annotated Inventory of Balʿamī Manu
scripts’

+ indicates the manuscript should be added to Daniel’s list.
− indicates the manuscript should be removed from Daniel’s list.
* corrections or additions to Daniel’s description of the manuscript.

* Baku. Academy 1.
This manuscript (classmark D 282/6512), held in the Füzuli Institute of Manuscripts, apparently dates to 1244/1828. It was unavailable for inspection on my visit.

− Baku. Academy 2.
This manuscript (classmark B 657/2275) is not a Persian, but a Turkish manuscript of Balʿamī, a representative of the Ahmed Paşa translation, and is of only the first volume of the work. A late ms (nineteenth century) of 457 folios. The last chapter is entitled Ḥadīth-i hijrat-i nakhustīn musulmān (f. 454a). No colophon. Currently held in the Füzuli Institute of Manuscripts, Baku.

− Bursa. Genel Kütüphane 1612 (F).
Daniel is referring to Bursa, İnebey Yazma ve Eski Baska Eserler Kütüphanesi, Ms. Genel 1612. This is, however, not a manuscript of Tārikhnāma but of the Sāmānid Tarjuma-i Tafsīr. For comments see Tarjumai Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī, H. Yaghmāʾ (ed.), 1, Introduction, p. 9. The library’s card catalogue lists no Persian translations of the Tārikhnāma, but it does contain Turkish ones with the following classmarks: Orhan 969; Kursunlu 146; Genel 1582/7, the latter being described as ‘selections from al-Ṭabarī’s History and the Tevarīh-i Al-i Osman’.

+ Cambridge University Library. Or 2147.
A twelfth/eighteenth century manuscript. Incipit: Sipās va afrīn mar khudā-yi kāmkār va kāmrān va afrīnandah-yi zamīn va āsmān-rā. Continues down to death of the Prophet. 380 folios.

* Edirne. Selimiye 1036.
This ms is currently held in the İl Halk Kütüphanesi in Edirne as Selimiye 1036. The ms, of 248 folios, is incomplete, covering the period from the lifetime of the Prophet to the reign of ʿUmar. It is a table of con-tents which indicates that the volume ended with the Khabar-i firistādan-i Muʿāviyyah amīrān bi-aṭrāf-i Hijāz va-ʿIrāq, but no

such chapter has survived. Incipit f. 2b: *Khabar-i firistādani Payghambar ‘alayhī al-salām rasūl-rā bi-mulūk-i zamīn.* Last chapter (ff. 246b-248b) entitled *Hadīth-i al-‘Alī b. al-Ḥadrānī.* Numerous folios misplaced, e.g. f. 190b: account of arbitration between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya f. 193a: murder of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr. f. 218a: the Ridda. No colophon. Probably seventh/thirteenth century. Judging from the surviving fragments, the text is similar to that of London, RAS, Persian 22, the basis of Muḥammad Rawshanī’s published edition, although without the obvious Shi‘ite tendencies of that manuscript.

* Istanbul. Evkaf Müzesi 2171.*

The manuscript is held in the Türk-İslam Eserler Müzesi in Istanbul as ms 2171. The date given by Daniel, 735/1334–5, is correct. The copyist’s name is Abu ʿl-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Anṣi al-Jirānī (?). Due to its poor state of preservation, I was only able to inspect the first and last folios of this manuscript. It has the Persian introduction, incipit: sipās va afrīn khudāy va kāmrān va afrīdgār-i zamīn u asmān-rā. Continues up to the reign of al-Mustāẓhir. A large manuscript of approximately 480 folios.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050.*

Daniel’s statement that ‘like the Mashhad manuscript, it is very detailed and resembles a translation of Ṭabarī, more than most manuscripts’ seems without foundation. Aya Sofya 3050 no more resembles a translation of al-Ṭabarī than any other manuscript does, and has little obvious in common with the Mashhad manuscript. Few of the passages which are exceptionally detailed in the latter manuscript, such as the death of Yazdagird b. Shahriyar, are present here. Daniel suggests that the manuscript is of East Anatolian origin. He does not explain this attribution, although his probable reasons are the mention of Ustādar al-Khilāfī (f.1b) (from Akhlāt, near Lake Van) and the manuscript’s supposed similarities to the Mashhad manuscript which was copied in Erzincan. However, the note makes it clear that the manuscript was merely sold to al-Khilāfī in Muḥarram 749/1348; the original owner was Fatḥ Allāḥ b. Nizām al-Dīn al-Shirvānī. The attribution of the East Anatolian origin is therefore insecure.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3051.*

The manuscript is both more carefully written and in better condition than Aya Sofya 3050.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Damad ʿĪbrahim 919.*

Daniel describes the manuscript as ‘part of an album containing Bal’amī’s work with a continuation by Ḥāfiz-i Abrū’. The whole work consists of the Tāriḵhnāma, Rashīd al-Dīn’s Jāmiʿ al-Tawāriḵkh and the Zafarānāma with linking passages and an introduction by Ḥāfiz-i Abrū, and is entitled Majmāʿ-ū Ḥāfiz-ī Abru. Abru.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281.*

As noted in Chapter 5, the Nizām-ī Iran, Rukn al-Dunyā va-l-Dīn, Ghawth al-Ḏuʿāfā wa-l-Masākīn, Amīr Ghāzān’ for whom the manuscript purports to have
been written, cannot be identified with the Ilkhanid Sultan Ghazan, as he had died long before the work was copied. Nonetheless, an old and fine copy.

* Istanbul. Suleymaniye, Fatih 4285.

Pace Daniel, this manuscript is not virtually identical to the Royal Asiatic Society [Persian] manuscript. Although both do contain an Arabic preface, Fatih 4285 contains greatly abbreviated accounts of Kayamarth and Bahram Chubin, in contrast to the extended versions presented by RAS, Persian 22. Unlike the latter manuscript, it contains a chapter on the sīrat va nasab va awlād-i Uthman, and omits the mention of the Greek authorities for the doxology. The name of the copyist, Ahmad b. Najm al-Din al-Khattat al-Akhlaqi, does suggest an Eastern Anatolian origin may be possible for this manuscript.


This manuscript was unavailable on my visit due to its poor state of preservation.


An interesting early manuscript, dated 754/1353–4. As discussed in Chapter 5, it contains an appendix with accounts of various mediaeval dynasties such as the Sahnids, Saffarids and Buysids, covering events down to the Mongol period. As the contents of the appendix and interpolations in the manuscript indicate, the scribe had a particular interest in polemicizing against Isma’ilism.


Pace Daniel, the contents of this manuscript are not particularly exceptional. It is certainly not as eclectic as the Mashhad manuscript or Oxford, Bodleian, Laud Or 323. Some scribal errors, e.g. f. 54a, Amul is consistently spelt A MK.


This eighth/fourteenth century manuscript is important as it demonstrates the use of al-Tabari’s original Arabic text for collation. Ff. 1–31 are much later in date, and the exordium is given in two versions, both Arabic and Persian, the former taken from al-Tabari’s original. See comments in Chapter 2. In general, quite close to British Library, Add 7622.


Daniel describes the manuscript as a Qisas-i Anbiya composed of passages taken from al-Tabari via Balami, and thus as an unimportant manuscript. In fact it is one of our earliest Balami manuscripts, although very fragmentary. It is dated by Minuvi in a note on the inner cover to the sixth/twelfth century (except for ff. 1–17 which are much later). It contains parts of the pre-Islamic section up to the prophet al-Yasa. Unfortunately, some folios appear to be out of place. As in Cambridge University Library, Add 836, most chapters are entitled Hadith... and the letter dal is generally dotted, indicating its antiquity.


See Chapter 2 for detailed comments on this manuscript. While it does derive some importance from its antiquity, its utility is somewhat marred by the scribe’s Shite tendencies. From internal evidence (e.g. confused spellings), it was collated with a number of manuscripts.
An early (probably eighth/fourteenth century) manuscript with later repairs (e.g. ff. 1–12, 130, 165 and 315–353 are later replacements for the presumably damaged original folios).

This is a nineteenth-century re-edition of *Bal'amī* by Abū 'l-Qāsim b. Muḥammad Ḥaṭimī Alī al-Simnānī. However, the contents appear unaffected by Simnānī’s activities, which were restricted to updating the language. Concludes with the death of Marwān in 132 AH. Simnānī was aware of the work’s textual problems and also the existence of a Chaghatay translation (see f. 2a). In many ways the text of Simnānī’s edition is closer to Add 836 than other Persian manuscripts.

The *Tārikhnāma* represents only the first half of this manuscript. The second half is part of Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Jāmi‘al-Tawārīkh*.

An extremely interesting and early manuscript, probably before eighth/fourteenth century. In places the text is much more detailed than other manuscripts, as in the description of the punishment of al-Walīd b. 'Uqba, governor of Kūfah, for drinking wine. However, it also entirely omits numerous passages such as the account of Bahār Chūbīn. Numerous folios have been misplaced, and a few at the end are clearly missing. Some blank folios and spaces for chapter headings: unfinished. No colophon. Purchased in Constantinople in 1638 by John Greaves, Fellow of Merton College, for the collection of Archbishop Laud. Probably the oldest manuscript to have survived reasonably intact.

The scribe was aware of textual variants (Ouseley 208, f. 552a).

The manuscript, while seventeenth-century, purports to date from 583/1188. Probably of Bukhāran origin. Chapters on later Iranian kings and Bahār Chūbīn entirely omitted, while extended section on Jesus included.
A manuscript of 443 folios, purporting to date from 674/1275–6, but probably eleventh/seventeenth or twelfth/eighteenth century. Introductory verses (f. 1b) as well as the colophon stress this false date. Interesting for its two different accounts of Jamshīd, attesting collation.


* Tehran. Majlis 2291.

The manuscript is not ‘very unusual’ and it certainly does not use a chronological arrangement of material to any greater extent than other Balʿamī manuscripts. It is, however, quite detailed. The confusion is probably due to the manuscript’s omission of chapter headings. Probably nineteenth rather than seventeenth century.

* Tehran. Majlis 5575.

Persian preface, but contents generally quite similar to RAS, Persian 22: extensive sections on Kayūmarth and Bahrām Chūbīn, but entirely omits nasab ʿUthmān. Also like RAS, Persian 22, preserves archaisms such as mazgat for masjid.


Not a Balʿamī manuscript at all, but a copy of the Dīvān-i ʿUrfī-yi Shīrāzī.

+ Venice. Bibliotheca Marciana.

As noted by Daniel in his article ‘The Samanid “Translations” of Tabari’, Ms Or 171 is an eighth/fourteenth century manuscript.


Fitzherbert’s thesis ‘Balʿam’s Tabārī’ is devoted to this manuscript, to which refer for details.


Classmark 1–85–154.69 R. This is a fragment of two folios from the beginning of an Īlkhānid manuscript of the Tārikhnāma with the Arabic preface. 2


See under Washington, Freer Gallery of Art.

2 I am most grateful to Dr Christiane Gruber for drawing my attention to this fragment and kindly sending me an image of it.
Bibliography

A. Manuscript sources

Manuscripts of the Tārīkhnāma are listed according to alphabetical order of the city in which they are held. This list covers only those manuscripts directly cited in the main text; see Appendix III for comments on other manuscripts.

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