



HISTORIOGRAPHY III. EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD

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Introduction. It might well be questioned whether there is, strictly speaking, any “historiography of Persia in the early Islamic period” at all, since it is by no means clear that there was an Islamic “Persia” prior to the rise of the Safavids. As lamented in the Middle Persian apocalyptic literature (which could be regarded as an esoteric form of historiography that projects past events into the future; on this aspect of Islamic historiography, see now D. Cook; M. Cook), Persian history had effectively ended when “the nation of Iran” had fallen to its Arab enemies and “Anērān and Ērān will be [i.e., were] confounded so that the Iranian will not be distinguished from the foreigner” (*Jāmāsp nāmag*, 1.2-3; see Hoyland, pp. 321-30). Indeed, from the time of the Arab conquest of the Sasanian empire to that of the Mongol invasions, the geographical area usually implied by the term “Persia” or “Iran” (i.e., most of the territory once ruled by the Sasanians) had no distinct political existence: Either it was unified only as part of some larger entity, or it was fragmented into regional principalities, whose borders might well include areas not often regarded as part of Persia. Only sporadically, and even then only in a regional context, was any of this area under the rule of ethnically Persian dynasties, and the culture, like the demography, involved a mix of Arabic, Persian, and,



later, Turkish elements. The tendency in both contemporary sources and modern histories is thus to treat the history of Persia during this period as part of some larger field (e.g., the history of the caliphate) or to focus on individual cities, regions, or dynasties. Texts important for the former purpose typically contain much material not relevant to Persia *per se*, while those dealing with the latter rarely relate provincial and regional material to the larger context of all Persia.

Ideally, a survey article would deal with both the historiography *of* a period and the historiography *about* a period, but that is not practical in this case. One would not only have to discuss virtually the entire vast corpus of medieval Islamic historical literature, but a wide range of non-Muslim sources and the growing body of modern historical studies on medieval Persian and Islamic history as well. Even dealing just with the historiography of the period is problematic, since, given the nature of the field as described above, there are no obvious political, geographical, or philological parameters which would serve to delimit the material to be studied, nor is it even all that clear what constitutes a work of “history” in this context. Information about the history of pre-Mongol Persia also turns up in many unexpected places that one would hardly classify as part of the “historiography of Persia” in any meaningful sense—e.g., a discussion of the caliph al-Mahdi’s Khurasan policy in a literary compendium by an Andalusian author (Ebn ‘Abd Rabbēh [d. 328/940], *al-‘Eqd al-farīd*, ed. Moḥammad Sa‘īd ‘Eryān, 8 vols, Cairo, 1953, I, pp. 191-212), a list of the *qāzis* of Marv in the fragmentary history of the early Syrian author Abu Zor’a (d. 281/891; *Ta’rikò*, ed. Šokr-Allāh Qujāni, 2 vols, Damascus, 1980, I, pp. 206-7), or the text of Hārūn al-Rašīd’s arrangements for the administration of the Persian provinces in the history of Mecca by Azraqī (d. 222/837; *Ketāb aḵbār Makka*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld as *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka* I, Leipzig, 1858, pp. 161-68). Moreover, many works essential to reconstructing the history of the period date from post-Mongol times; to give but one example of many, the chronicle of Ebn al-Atīr (q.v.) is absolutely essential for the study of pre-Mongol Persia but was completed after 628/1231 and should be considered as part of the *historiography* of the Mongol period. Conversely, there are cases of works which were written during the pre-Mongol period and within the Persian world but which do not deal at all with Persia or with the period itself (e.g., the anonymous *Qeşaş al-anbiā’* on the history of the prophets); although devoid of any significant value for the contemporary history of Persia, they were nonetheless technically part of its historiography. Finally, historical information, sometimes in very substantial and significant



quantity, is preserved in a variety of works, ranging from poetry and literary anthologies to collections of historical anecdotes and curious information to biographical dictionaries to geographies to hagiographies and heresiographies. For example, the famous biographical dictionary of the companions of the Prophet and their followers, the *Ketāb al-ṭabaqāt* by Ebn Saʿd (d. 230/844), would seem to have little to do with either the genre of history or the history of Persia but is in fact rather important for both, since it preserves much incidental information about Arabs in the areas of Persia where they settled, especially Khorasan. Moreover, many modern scholars argue that there is little real distinction between history and literature during this (or any) period; thus one authority readily includes epic poetry (Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*), didactical essays (Neẓām-al-Molk's *Siāsat-nāma*), and prosopography (Bayhaqi's *Tārik-e Bayhaq*) as part of "Persian historiography" (Meisami, 1999; cf. idem, 2000, p. 15; Malti-Douglas; El-Hibri, 1999a). How then does one go about even defining "historiography"?

There is no entirely satisfactory solution to these epistemological problems, and this article will simply confine itself arbitrarily to consideration of works which mostly fall within the boundaries of the traditional genres of *ta'rikò* and *aḵbār* (limited though this may be to conventional political and narrative history), were written in Arabic or Persian between 650 and 1220 C.E., and are either of importance in defining the nature of the historiography or have something significant to say about the history of the Persian-speaking lands during this chronological period. (For detailed descriptions of individual authors or works, readers should refer to the appropriate entry elsewhere in the *EIr*.)

THE FORMATIVE PERIOD

The historiography, like the history, of the first two centuries of the Islamic era is extremely difficult to assess because of both its obscurity and its contentiousness. Indeed, the first century A.H., despite the momentous events which occurred at that time, is virtually a historiographical void in terms of extant texts (except for some significant non-Muslim works; see Hoyland). When Islamic historical composition appeared, it was a mixed literary and oral historical tradition, and very little of it has survived except in the way of quotations or recensions by later authors that may or may not be all that faithful to the original sources. Beyond that, this historiography is rife with problems in terms of understanding its origins, methods of composition, motivations, purposes, credibility, interpretation, and usefulness. While recent



decades have seen notable efforts by various scholars to come to grip with these problems, the results to date have been somewhat inconclusive and often contradictory (for general discussions of early Islamic historiography, see in particular Duri, 1983; Humphreys, 1991; Crone, 1980; Noth, 1994; Donner, 1998; Robinson, 2003).

From the lists of authors and titles preserved by contemporary bibliographers, notably Ebn al-Nadim (q.v.), it is at least possible to determine the identity and concerns of the most important figures among the earliest generation of Muslim historians (a list of authors and titles of works written prior to 200 A.H. has been compiled in Donner, 1998, pp. 299-306). These historians can mostly be described as Arabists interested in topics such as Arabian antiquities, comparative chronology, interpreting historical allusions in the Qurʾān, the life of the Prophet Moḥammad (*sira*) and his military excursions (*maḡāzi*), and the genealogy of Arab tribes and stories of their heroic deeds—lines of investigation which reached their classical expression in the works of Moḥammad Ebn Eshāq (d. 151/768) on the life of Moḥammad; Heṣām b. Moḥammad Ebn Kalbi (d. 204/819 or 206/821), Hayṭam b. ʿAdi (d. 206/821?), and Abu ʿObayda Maʿmar b. Moʿtannā (q.v.; d. 209/824) on ancient Arabia; and Moḥammad b. ʿOmar Wāqedi (d. 207/823) on the *maḡāzi*. Although much of this lore became incorporated into the subsequent mainstream of Islamic historiography, it is obvious that it had little or nothing to do with Persia or Persian affairs except in tangential ways, such as when the history of pre-Islamic Arabia intersected with Persian history in the Yemen and at Hira or in accounts of the Arab conquests. Ebn Kalbi, for example, was primarily an expert on Arab genealogy and Arabian paganism, but he is frequently cited by later historians as an authority on Sasanian history (e.g., Ṭabari, I, pp. 814, 821, 834, 846-47, 853, 872, 888, 899, 950, 984, 988, 991, 1009, 1016, 1038, 1041, 1044). Abu ʿObayda was likewise used as an authority on the Battle of ʿDu Qār (q.v.), the history of the Sasanians, and the Arab conquest of Persia (e.g., ʿAlī b. ʿAbī Ḥayyāṭ, pp. 50, 79, 93, 125, etc.). Some works were no doubt devoted specifically to the history of Khurasan and other parts of Persia, but these have either been lost or are of dubious authenticity (e.g., pseudo-Wāqedi, *Ketāb fotuḥ al-eslām fi belād al-ʿajam wa ʾKorāsān*, ed. ʿAziz Afandi Zand, Cairo 1309/1891).

This early historiography also had something of a Persian dimension to it in that a number of the authors involved were of Persian ancestry or came from Arab families that had spent some time in Persia. For example, Ḥammād



Rāwia (d. 156/772-73), a celebrated authority on Arabian antiquities, was the son of a Persian captive from Deylam, Abu Laylā Sābur; ‘Awāna b. Ḥakam Kalbi (d. 147/764 or 153/770), a leading authority on the history of the early Omayyad caliphate, came from a military family which had served in Khurasan and Sind; and a certain Abu Mojāhed ‘Ali b. Mojāhed b. Moslem Rāzi b. Kāboli (d. 182/798), who was born in Rayy but worked in Baghdad, reportedly wrote on the *maḡāzi* (Sezgin, *GAS* I, p. 312). Probably the most important writer in this regard was Wahb b. Monabbih (d. 110/728 or 114/732), an expert on Yemenite and Arabian antiquities as well as the *esrā’iliāt* (Biblical lore) and *qeṣaṣ al-anbiā’* (stories of the prophets). His family was reportedly of Persian or Persian-Jewish origin and had probably settled in Yemen during the time it was under Persian domination (see *ABNĀ*). Wahb’s works, though now mostly lost (but see Khoury), were well known to later historians and regarded highly by many Persian writers.

The interest of early Muslim historians in Jewish and Arabian antiquities and comparative chronology, which is already quite apparent in material attributed to Wahb or Ebn Kalbi, inevitably led to more direct consideration of ancient Persian history, either to integrate it into the Islamic narrative or as the source of object lessons in statecraft. This tendency was present even early in the Omayyad period, as it is reported by Ebn al-Nadim (tr. Dodge, I, p. 194) that the caliph Mo‘āwia consulted ‘Obayd (or ‘Abid) b. Šarya (d. before 86/705), who had written a book on “the kings and traditions of the peoples of the past,” about the history of the pre-Islamic Arab and Persian kings. This interest accelerated following the ‘Abbasid revolution and the consequent eastward shift in the politics and culture of the caliphate. The key figure in this regard was undoubtedly ‘Abd-Allāh Rōzbeh Ebn al-Moqaffa’ (q.v.; d. 139/757), the ill-fated secretary of the caliph al-Manšur, who is credited with translating several Middle Persian “historical” works into Arabic, including the “book of kings” (*Xwadāy-nāmag/Kodāy-nāma*), a work on Mazdak, and a *Ketāb al-tāj* (about Anušervān). Although some of his essays have been preserved (and are important as historical sources), these works, unfortunately, have all been lost save for fragments cited by other authors (notably Ebn Qotayba, q.v.). Similarly, Abān Lāḥeqi (q.v.; fl. late 2nd/8th century), primarily another representative of Arabic belles lettres, supposedly wrote on Mazdak, Ardašir, and Anušervān. It should be noted, however, that the “historical” nature of these works, as well as the Persian prototypes on which they were based, is uncertain and cannot be determined in the absence of extant texts; they may have been only legendary epics and didactic literature (see Spuler, 1962).



During the early 'Abbasid period, Islamic historiography matured into a fully literary genre and took on its classical forms. Its interests also expanded from antiquarianism to the events and controversies which had shaped the Muslim polity: the wars of expansion, the settlement of Arab tribes in the conquered territories, and above all the civil wars and religio-political disputes over the caliphate. The first generation of these historians were essentially selective compilers of oral traditions, and most—such as Abu Meḳnaf (d. 157/774), Sayf b. 'Omar (d. after 170/786?), or Naṣr b. Mozāhem (d. 212/827)—were and are suspected of having had highly tendentious and hidden political agendas in their work. Their works are now largely lost, but they provided the raw material for subsequent histories, where they are quoted extensively and from which it is possible to reconstruct and study, albeit rather inconclusively, their historiographical significance (see survey in Humphreys, 1991, pp. 69-103; Landau-Tasseron; Duri, 1983).

Persia, of course, figures heavily in all this historiography since so many of the key events took place in the former territories of the Sasanian Empire, which became moreover the main arena for the warring tribes and factions of the early Islamic era and the home of the revolution which brought the 'Abbasids to power, and Persians played a critical role in shaping 'Abbasid politics and culture. All the historians of this period are thus of some significance to the historiography of Persia, but the single most important was probably 'Ali b. Moḥammad Madā'eni (d. 228/843?). He was reputedly the author of more than two hundred books, only two of which have survived (apart from copious quotations and excerpts in other authors). They included histories of all the caliphs down to al-Mo'taṣem; important political figures such as Moḡira b. Šo'ba, Ḥajjāj b. Yusoḡ, Ebn Hobayra, and 'Abd-al-Jabbār Azdi; and the wars of expansion. In the judgment of Aḥmad b. Ḥāreṡ Kaẓẓāz (apud Ebn al-Nadīm, tr. Dodge, p. 202), he excelled all his contemporaries in his knowledge of Persia and Khorasan, and the list of his monographs includes numerous works on the wars in Fārs, western Persia, Kordestān, Armenia, Rayy, Ṭabarestān, Kermān, Sistān, and Kābol and Zabolestān; the invasion and conquest of Khorasan; and the careers of Qotayba b. Moslem, Asad b. 'Abd-Allāh, Naṣr b. Sayyār, and Rāfe' b. Layṡ (ibid., pp. 224-25). Madā'eni was also notable for the method he brought to his historiography, which was much admired by many later Islamic historians: a straightforward account of events, without obvious bias, and going back to eyewitnesses as verified by a chain of transmitters (*esnād*).

Other historians of this period who may have had some tenuous connection to



Persia, but whose work is lost and about whom little is known, included Abu Yazid Waṭima b. Musā Fāresi Waššā' (d. 237/851), who was born in Fasā, traveled extensively, and wrote on the *redda* wars (Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 315-16; cf. Brockelmann, *GAL*, SII, p. 217, which gives the name of his son); Moḥammad b. Hayṭam Marwazi (d. 250/864), who wrote a *Ketāb al-dawla* and is cited by Mas'udi as a source (Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 316); 'Abbād b. Ya'qub Bokāri (d. 250/864), a Shi'ite author sometimes cited in the *maqātel* literature (on the deaths of various 'Alids); Moḥammad b. Šāleḥ b. Mehrān Ebn al-Naṭṭāḥ (d. 252/866), who has been suggested as a possible author of the anonymous, but very important, text known as the *Aḵbār al-'Abbās*, the most detailed account of the Abbasid revolution in Khorasan (see Duri, 1957; cf. Sharon, pp. xxxix-xli; Daniel, 1982, p. 423); and Ebrāhim b. Moḥammad Taqafi (d. 283/896 in Isfahan), another Shi'ite historian (Brockelmann, *GAL*, SI, p. 215)

THE HIGH CALIPHATE

Many examples of Islamic historiography written from the mid-3rd/late 9th century onwards have come down to us, so it is possible to get a much more reliable picture of its character and its relevance to Persia. For purposes of discussion, but at the risk of some over-simplification, this historiography can be divided into three basic sub-genres, each of which was written for fairly discrete audiences and tied to a rather characteristic worldview. One emphasized genealogy (*nasab*) or military exploits (*fotuhá*) as its organizing principle; such works were reminiscent of the older tradition of Arabian antiquarianism and probably were intended to glorify various Arab leaders and tribes and, beyond that (presumably in response to the pro-Persian views of the Šo'ubis), the ideal of Arabism as the driving force in the golden age of pristine Islam. A second used strict chronology (*ta'riḵh* proper) in the form of year by year annals and the *esnād* methodology; such works were closely associated with the needs and interests of the Islamic religious establishment. A third relied on coherent narratives, usually arranged in accordance with a system of dynastic cycles, and tended to reflect the attitudes of the cosmopolitan, cultured bureaucracy of the Abbasid court. All of these works contain much information essential to the history of Islamic Persia, but it is the third variety which could probably be regarded as most essentially part of the "historiography of Persia" in its nature and outlook.

The greatest and most important of the *fotuhá* historians was Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā Balāḍori (q.v.; d. 279/892), author of the voluminous *Ansāb al-ašrāf* and the *Fotuḥ al-boldān*. Not much is known about his life (summarized in Yāqut,



Eršād, II, pp. 127-32) other than that he lived in Baghdad, traveled in Syria and Egypt, and frequented the 'Abbasid court in the days of al-Motawwakel and al-Mosta'in; he is said to have studied with such illustrious historical scholars as Madā'eni and Ebn Sa'd. According to Ebn al-Nadim (tr. Dodge, I, p. 248), Balāḍori participated in the project of translating Middle Persian literature and produced a versification of the *'Ahd Ardašir*. There is, however, little reason to believe that he was thus of Persian ancestry, and his works, despite the wealth of information about Islamic Persia that they contain, are not those of someone with Persianist sympathies: To the contrary, written at a time when the 'Abbasid caliphate was beginning its precipitous decline, they are redolent of nostalgia for the old days of Arab greatness and often exhibit a strong anti-Persian sentiment and resentment of the influence of non-Arabs in general. The *Ansāb al-ašrāf*, exactly as its title suggests, was an effort to delineate a purely Arab military and political aristocracy and to record the accomplishments of its great tribal lineages (a kind of secularized version of the aristocracy of piety immortalized in his teacher Ebn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt*). The sharp divisions over the merits of 'Alids, Omayyads, and 'Abbasids that typify so much of the rest of early Islamic historiography (see, e.g., Petersen, 1964) virtually disappear in this framework; all the Qorayš are celebrated family by family, along with other tribes (Balāḍori apparently died before getting to the Rabi'a and Yaman, however). Insofar as Persia figures into this, it is simply as an arena for the display of Arab prowess. That is equally apparent in Balāḍori's *Fotuḥ al-boldān*, which records not only the triumph of Arab military power but the settlement of Arab population and the ascendancy of Arab culture in the conquered lands as well. Perhaps written with an eye on the practical and legal needs of the administrative class, it frequently discusses economic and social aspects of the early Islamic history of Persia not dealt with in other texts and is thus of great value to modern historians in that regard.

The other important work of this type, though much less appreciated than Balāḍori's, is the *Ketāb al-fotuḥ* of Ebn A'tam Kufi (d. 314/926). Long thought to have been lost, and published in its entirety relatively recently (Haydarabad, Deccan, 1968-75), this work has been neglected to a remarkable degree in modern scholarship (note the dismissive comments of Morony, p. 566; but cf. Togan, 1949; idem, 1970). This may be attributable partly to negative opinions of the text formed on the basis of the partial Persian translation made of it by one Moḥammad Mostawfi Haravi in 596/1199 (litho. ed., Bombay, 1305/1887-88; new ed. by Ġolāmreżā Ṭabāṭabā'i Majd, Tehran, 1993) and partly



because it presents a version of the conquests quite different from the now established mainstream tradition deduced from Balāḍori and other works. There is also a conspicuous Shi'ite tenor to both the Persian translation (which concludes with a chapter on *šahādat-e Emām Ḥosayn*) and the Arabic original (see the comments of Crone, 1980, p. 107, n. 60). Nonetheless, the text is an extremely important source of information on events from the early conquests in Persia to the revolt of Bābak. It is particularly knowledgeable about Khorasan and Transoxiana; in the view of one recent historian, “as regards the Persian provinces, Ibn A'tham can be regarded as superior to Tabari” (Hasan, p. 20).

The earliest known example of a Muslim annalistic chronicle which has survived more or less intact (albeit in a later *rāwīa*, or “transmission,” which may well have been substantially abridged, considering the difference between the extant text and excerpts preserved in other works) is the *Ta'rik* of Ḳalifa b. Ḳayyāṭ 'Oṣforī (d. 240/854; ed. Akram Ḍiā' 'Omari, Baghdad, 1977). Ḳalifa had no interest in anything but Islamic history; his chronicle begins with the birth of Moḥammad and goes down to 232/846-47. He even explicitly described *ta'rik*, in its literal sense of records of lunations (the *ahella* of Qur'ān 2.189), as simply a way of keeping track of the pilgrimage, the fast, and other religious obligations (Ḳalifa, p. 49). The entries in his chronicle typically describe each year's main events, appointments to office (including who led the *hajj*), and deaths of important personalities, mostly religious scholars. The entries for the Umayyad period are relatively detailed and naturally contain some information pertinent to the history of Persia during that time, but those for the Abbasid period are so terse as to be of little use. The main significance of this work is that it anticipates the style and method that would be followed by later annalists such as Ṭabari.

Another early and somewhat similar work is the *Ketāb al-ma'refa wa'l-ta'rik* by Ya'qub b. Sofyān Fasawī (d. 277/890; ed. Akram Ḍiā' 'Omari, 3 vols., Baghdad, n.d.), which has come down in the recension of Ebn Dorostawayh (q.v.; d. 346/957). Although Ya'qub b. Sofyān's *nesba* (Fasawī, not Nasawī as given by J.-C. Vadet in *ET2* III, p. 758) indicates some connection with Fasā in Fārs, he apparently spent most of his life in Syria and Egypt and died in Basra. His work begins with very brief summaries of events year by year from 135/752 (any earlier portion of the chronicle has been lost) to 241/855-56 (I, pp. 115-212, the terminus apparently being used because it marked the death of Aḥmad b. Hanbal. This short chronographical section is of little significance for any



topic, and virtually none at all for Persia. The real focus of the book is on obituary notices for *moḥaddethun*, which are grouped together after the chronographical section, completely dwarfing it in size, rather than listing them under the year of death.

Some other examples of early Arabic *ta'rikòs* have recently come to light, but they are either so fragmentary or in such highly condensed recensions as to be of little use, especially for Persian history (e.g., the *Ta'rikò* of Hārūn b. Ḥātem [d. 249/863-64]; see Šehābi). The *Ta'rikò al-Kolafā'* of Moḥammad b. Yazid Ebn Māja Qazvini (d. 273/887) is of some interest because of the author's Persian background, but it, too, is little more than a list of caliphs and their dates (ed., Cairo, 2000; see also Moti' al-Ḥāfez).

The greatest of the annalists was unquestionably Abu Ja'far Moḥammad b. Jarir Ṭabari (d. 310/923), author of the famous *Ta'rik al-rosol wa'l-moluk* (on the author and his work, see the comprehensive study by Rosenthal, 1989; Kennedy, ed., forthcoming). Although Ṭabari came from a propertied family in Āmol, it is not certain whether he was of Persian ancestry or descended from Arab colonists there; he spent most of his life in Baghdad, with trips to study in other cities in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. His historical work, no less than his celebrated commentary on the Qur'ān, was thoroughly religious in conception and method. It begins with the story of the creation of the world and the ancient prophets and kings. Beginning with the *ḥejra*, the arrangement of material switches to a strict year by year chronology (down to 302/915 in the edited version of the extant text); entries for a typical year include multiple accounts of important events, each buttressed by a list of the authorities who transmitted a particular version, lists of appointees to office, and obituary notices. The dramatic change in historiographical style from narrative to annal reinforces the notion (comparable to that in Christian historiography) of the linearity of history, centered on one unique and never to be repeated event, as it proceeds to its inevitable (and, it seems in Ṭabari's view, perhaps imminent) conclusion.

Owing to the wealth of information it contains, Ṭabari's chronicle is the single most important source for the first three centuries of Islamic history, certainly insofar as it involves Persia. Historiographically, however, it is disappointing in many respects. The manuscript tradition is quite weak (probably because of the difficulty and expense of making copies of such a voluminous work), and it is likely that the received text, pieced together from scattered manuscripts, is a rather imperfect copy of the original. Although many modern scholars regard



Ṭabari's work as more "reliable" or "authoritative" than that of other historians because of his frequent citation of sources, it is an open question as to how accurately he has quoted those sources (see, e.g., Osman; Cameron) as well as what biases of his own shaped his narrative. His choice of sources is also at times highly questionable—he relies almost completely, for example, on the controversial Sayf b. 'Omar for his account of the conquest of Persia. Beyond that, the text is hardly the "universal" history it has sometimes been called; in reality, Ṭabari was quite parochial in his worldview, being interested almost exclusively in subjects necessary to understanding the background of Islam and the story of the Muslim community (he devotes, for example, only three pages [I, pp. 741-43] to the "kings of Rome" and that simply because they were rulers over Palestine and Jerusalem). There is also nothing particularly "Persian" about his chronicle: If he dealt at some length with pre-Islamic Persian history, it was because he saw it as pertinent to the Middle Eastern matrix of the Islamic tradition; if he also had much more interest in Iraq and Persia than in North Africa or Egypt or even Syria, it was because of the relatively greater importance of events that took place there. Ironically, the very qualities that make Ṭabari's history so important as a source of information—its precise chronology, explicit citation of multiple sources, and wealth of detail—undercut its appeal as historical literature. The annalistic arrangement fragments the accounts of many important events and leads to much repetition; the maze of conflicting accounts and detailed *esnāds* blurs whatever historical vision or interpretation the author may have had. Indeed, with its drastic variations in literary style (suggesting direct copying from various sources), Ṭabari's text gives the distinct impression of being simply the transcription of an undigested mass of notes that was never shaped into anything resembling a text with a coherent point of view (although some recent critics think the author's subtle perspective can be detected through the "studied ambiguity" of at least some episodes: Humphreys, 1989; idem, 1991; El-Hibri, 1999).

The path to a very different type of historical writing, and one with a stronger claim to being part of a "historiography of Persia" than any discussed thus far, was followed by the two Dinavaris, Ebn Qotayba (q.v.; d. 276/889) and Abu Ḥanifa (see [DĪNAVARĪ](#); d. 281/894 or 290/903). Both were of Persian ancestry; neither was known primarily as a historian proper (Ebn Qotayba was a philologist and Abu Ḥanifa Dinavari a polymath with interests ranging from botany to mathematics), but their most important surviving works have a definite if unexpected historical dimension.



In the case of Ebn Qotayba, these include the *ʿOyun al-aḳbār* (ed. Aḥmad Zaki ʿAdawi, 4 vols., Cairo, 1925-30) and the *Ketāb al-maʿāref* (ed. Ṭarwat ʿOkāša, Cairo, 1960). (Another interesting example of historiography, the *Ketāb al-emāma waʾl-siāsa*, is now thought to have been wrongly attributed to Ebn Qotayba; see Margoliouth, p. 120.) The *ʿOyun* was a kind of literary anthology, but one which drew deeply on historical anecdotes to provide refined models of behavior (*adab*) “as a reminder to religious scholars, as a tutor to rulers and ruled, as a relaxation for kings” (see Khalidi, 1994, pp. 108-11). Somewhat surprisingly—considering that he was known as a staunch Hanbalite and anti-Šoʿubi thinker—Ebn Qotayba made extensive use for this purpose of the “books of the Persians,” i.e., the Arabic translations of Middle Persian texts such as those made by Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ (whom he frequently quotes and clearly admired). The *Maʿāref* is best described as a concise historical encyclopedia, arranged in loose topical and chronological fashion, of the basic historical information a well-educated member of the secretarial class (the *kottāb*) should be expected to know. Such manuals for instructing aspiring bureaucrats, or simply enlivening the conversation, would remain very popular in Persia and the Muslim world; later examples in Arabic include the *Laṭāʿef al-maʿāref* of Abu Maṣṣur Ṭaʿālebi (d. 429/1038) and in Persian the lengthy and unfortunately still largely unpublished, *Jawāmeʿ al-ḥekāyat* of Moḥammad ʿAwfi (d. 630/1232?). As with Ebn Qotayba’s works, they are of considerable importance in that they preserve passages and information from many otherwise lost historical texts.

The only extant work by Abu Ḥanifa Dinavari is the *Aḳbār al-ṭewāl*, a general history beginning with Adam and ending with the death of al-Moʿtaṣem in 227/842. Throughout, it eschews the annalistic style and the *esnād* method in favor of a structure that emphasizes fluency and readability, and it is more firmly in the genre of conventional narrative history than the works of Ebn Qotayba. Some modern scholars regard the *Aḳbār al-ṭewāl* as a history “written from a Persian point of view” (e.g., Pellat, in *EIr.* VII, p. 417); its perspective is certainly an unusual one, and its treatment of history highly selective and far from critical. It might better be described as a book whose chief theme is the inter-connectedness of Arab and Persian history: In its pre-Islamic section, the author is particularly concerned with the ethnogenesis of these peoples and juxtaposes stories about their various kings and prophets along with accounts of their relations with each other. The life of Moḥammad is barely mentioned, and controversial events such as the accession and murder of ʿOṭmān are glossed over, but the conquest of Persia is discussed



at length and in an almost celebratory manner (ed. 'Āmer and Šayyāl, pp. 113-40). The struggle of 'Alī and Mo'āwīa is treated in epic fashion (ed. 'Āmer and Šayyāl, pp. 140-214), and the history of the Omayyad period, though given at length (pp. 202-369), concentrates on the story of 'Alid, Iraqi, and Persian opposition culminating in the 'Abbasid revolution. The history contains much original and interesting information, but it is hard to evaluate from where it was taken or how reliable it might be; Dinavari does, however, mention a number of his authorities, chiefly Hayṭam b. 'Adī but also Ebnal-Moqaffa', Kalbi, and Ša'bi.

The *Ta'rikò* of Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qub Ya'qubi (d. 284/897) is of great interest for both the general development of early Islamic historiography and the contemporary history of Persia. Ya'qubi noted in his geographic work, the *Ketāb al-boldān* (p. 1), that he had traveled widely and had always been interested in collecting information about distant countries. Unlike the parochial works discussed so far, Ya'qubi's history showed a broad knowledge of not only non-Muslim cultures but the history of regions as distant as Byzantium, India, Tibet, and China; it has rightly been called "the earliest surviving world history in the Arabic historical tradition" (Khalidi, 1994, p. 113). Moreover, Ya'qubi had a well-developed critical spirit, dismissing in particular as historical material the Persian legends of things like a king "with snakes growing out of his shoulders and feeding on human brains" (*Ta'rikò*, ed. Beirut, I, p. 158): There was no truth to them, he says, and learned Persians, even the princes and *dehqāns*, found them ridiculous. It also appears that Ya'qubi spent some time in Armenia and in the employ of the Taherids in Khorasan, and his history is particularly rich in information about those areas.

THE ERA OF THE REGIONAL DYNASTIES

The occupation of Baghdad in 334/945 by the Buyid *amir-al-omarā'* Mo'ezz-al-Dawla made all too apparent the eroded authority of the Abbasid caliphate, the supremacy of warlords over courtly bureaucrats, and the shifting of political, economic, and cultural life from the center to the periphery of the Islamic world. It should not be surprising that these changes would have important consequences for the writing of history; what is remarkable is the extent to which they actually expanded, enriched, and enlivened an increasingly sophisticated historiography. It is during this period that one can point more frequently to works which are genuine histories of at least part of Persia and, significantly, the beginning of a historiographical tradition in the Persian language.



Despite the collapse of caliphal power and the political fragmentation of the Muslim world, comprehensive, “universal” or general, histories and chronicles continued to be written, especially under Buyid patronage, but not so much in the Baghdad-centric and parochial-minded style of Ṭabari. Rather, the broader approach followed by Ya‘qubi flourished and reached its culmination in the works of historians such as Abu’l-Ḥasan ‘Ali b. Ḥosayn Mas‘udi (d. 345/956), and Abu ‘Ali Meskawayh (d. 421/1030?).

Mas‘udi’s much studied (see especially Shboul; Khalidi, 1975) and widely appreciated *Moruj al-dahab* was virtually a historical encyclopedia, dealing with geography and culture as well as events, dynasties, and chronology. Its emphasis on the philosophical and ethical aspects of the study of history, coupled with concern for the literary quality of its presentation, anticipated trends that would be of increasing importance in the development of Islamic historiography. At the outset of his work, Mas‘udi gave a detailed list of the historical works known to him, the bulk of which are no longer extant, singling out their good or bad qualities (I, pp. 10-24). For Persian history, he praised in particular the history of Ebn Korradaḡbeh and an *Akbār al-fors wa ghayrehā* by Dāwud b. Jarrāh (uncle of the vizier ‘Ali b. ‘Isā); presumably some of the material from these lost works has been preserved in Mas‘udi’s text. As for Persia itself, Mas‘udi was one of the Muslim scholars who held that humanity was subdivided into major cultural groups on the basis of physical characteristics, laws, and languages, and each nation had its own special skill. The excellence of the Persians lay in statecraft, and therefore the study of their rulers, social structure, and administrative techniques was of particular importance (Khalidi, 1975, pp. 90-92).

The Buyid Period. At first glance, the chronicle of Abu ‘Ali Aḥmad b. Moḥammad Meskawayh (d. 421/1030), a Persian and according to Yāqut (*Eršād*, II, p. 89) a recent convert to Islam, appears to be an appropriation and continuation of Ṭabari’s. It imitated Ṭabari in form, with year by year accounts of events down to 369/979-80, and relied heavily on it for material on the early Islamic period. For the original sections (covering in the edited text the years 295-369/907-80), however, it could not have been more different from Ṭabari’s in both style and substance. First of all, Meskawayh’s work is much more readable than Ṭabari’s in terms of prose composition, but it is not yet subject to the notion that rhetorical skill is a greater asset for historical writing than clarity and accuracy. Religion virtually disappears from his work; he dismisses legends (*asmār wa korāfāt*), the stories of the prophets, and accounts of events



before the Flood as unfit for historical discourse. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of understanding the rise and fall of dynasties, methods of government, and the examples of earlier rulers for good or bad. Whereas Ṭabari was an independent scholar, Meskawayh was very much a man of the world, actively involved for most of his long life in the Buyid bureaucracy and personally acquainted with its administrative and intellectual elite. He was able to inform his work not only from experience (frequently referring to events he himself had witnessed) but by his access to the library of the famous vizier Ebn al-ʿAmid (q.v.). The title of his work, *Ketāb tajāreb al-omam wa taʾāqeb al-hemam* (Experiences of the nations and the outcomes of endeavors), was as aptly chosen as Ṭabari's own and made clear the author's very different view of Islamic history and indeed history in general—it was no longer the story of the prophets and kings of one community but the competing polities of a commonwealth of nations, and its grand theme was not the struggle for piety and religio-political legitimacy while waiting for the end of the world but that of philosophy teaching by example (to borrow Bolingbroke's famous phrase). Despite the annalistic form, it was not a linear history, but a cyclical one whose events, as Miskawayh explicitly noted, could be expected to recur, and thus one could profit from knowing which policies, stratagems, ruses, plots, and acts would yield a desired result—a surprisingly pragmatic, if not outright Machiavellian, attitude in a writer who was otherwise so interested in ethical philosophy. The history has been much admired by many modern scholars, who see it as an expression of the “humanism” of the “renaissance” that took place under Buyid auspices (Margoliouth, pp. 128-37; Rosenthal, 1968, pp. 141-42; Kraemer), but at least one (Khalidi, 1994, p. 176) has called it a “strange historical anthology” and pointed out the moral ambiguity of its approach.

Although Miskawayh's chronicle is the most interesting and important surviving example of Buyid historiography, it may well have been rivaled by the no longer extant works of writers like Ṭābet b. Senān Ṣābi (d. 365/976?), a Buyid court physician who also took on the task of writing a continuation to Ṭabari's chronicle, or the great vizier Ṣāheb b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/995), who wrote at least four historical works (see Pellat, pp. 104-5). We also hear of now lost works such as the *Ketāb al-ʿabbāsi* by Aḥmad b. Esmaʿil b. Samaka, one of the teachers of Ebn al-ʿAmid, which was supposed to be a history of the caliphs in some ten thousand pages (Ṭusi, p. 55). The case of Ṭābet's nephew, Abu Eshāq Ebrāhim b. Helāl Ṣābi (d. 384/994), gives some idea of what might have been lost, as well as how seriously historical writing was taken in Buyid circles.



Imprisoned after falling into disfavor with ‘Azod-al-Dawla, Abu Eshāq was compelled to write a history of the Buyids, the *Ketāb al-tāji fī aḳbār al-dawla al-daylamiya*, as a condition for his release. ‘Azod-al-Dawla is supposed to have checked and edited it section by section as it was composed, and then to have had the final text read out to him over the course of a week. Long thought to have been lost, a fragment of the manuscript was discovered in a library in Yemen and proved to contain a rich and interesting account of the country and people of Deylam, the activities of the ‘Alids there, and the conversion of the area to Islam (ed. Moḥammad Ḥosayn Zobaydi, Baghdad, 1977; ed. and tr. Muhammad Sabir Khan, Karachi, 1995; on the author and text, see Madelung, 1967). The Ṣābi family, incidentally, continued to produce distinguished historians: Ebrāhim’s grandson, Helāl b. Moḥassen Ṣābi (d. 448/1056), authored a continuation of Ṭābet’s work, of which a small fragment covering the years 389-93/998-1003 survives (ed. H. F. Amedroz in *The Historical Remains of Hilāl al-Ṣābi*, Beirut and Leiden, 1904). Moḥammad b. Helāl (d. 480/1088), known as Ġars al-Ne‘ma, wrote a *Dayl* carrying on the account to his own time; it has been lost but was used extensively by Ṣebṭ b. al-Jawzi (d. 654/1256) in his *Mer’āt al-zamān*.

It is debatable whether the works of Abu’l-Faraj Eṣfahāni (d. 356/969)—the *Maqātel al-Ṭālebiyin*, a martyrology of the ‘Alids, and the *Ketāb al-aḡāni*, an immense literary anthology and cultural history—should be included as historiography or not, but they are at least reflective of the historical tastes and interests of Buyid circles (on this work, see Günther). His contemporary, Ḥamza b. Ḥasan Eṣfahāni (d. 360/970), who had studied with Ṭabari and was undoubtedly a serious scholar, produced an unusual specimen of historiography known as the *Tawāriḳ seni moluk al-arḻ wa’l-anbiā’*. It might best be described as a comparative calendrical history of various nations; it scarcely has a narrative, being mostly strung-together lists of rulers, dates, and odd events. However, the author’s interest in Persian history and antiquities is abundantly clear: He professes to have read the Avesta, to have consulted eight books on the history of the Persian kings (which he lists, ed. Beirut, p. 14), and to have seen a book containing portraits of all the Sasanian rulers. He divides the sedentary (or civilized?) world (*al-maskun men rob’ al-arḻ*) into seven great nations—China, India, the Sudan, the Berbers, the “Romans,” the Turks, and the Aryans, with the Aryans being the central nation (and the Arabs conspicuously missing)—and distinguishes between peoples with solar and those with lunar calendars. Although he lists rulers of the Persians, Romans, Greeks, Copts, Israelites, Lakhmids, Ghassanids, Himyarites, Kinda,



and Qorayš, the “Arab kings of Islam,” the Persian kings are given a disproportionate amount of space. In the Islamic section, too, much attention is devoted to topics of interest to Persia, such as a long list of the equivalent dates for Now Ruz in the Islamic lunar calendar and accounts of the governors of Khorasan and Ṭabarestān. This slant to his history probably explains the author’s later reputation as a fiercely partisan supporter of Persian culture over that of the Arabs.

Ḥamza is also supposed to have written a history of the city of Isfahan, which is unfortunately now lost. It served as the model for the work of Ḥasan b. Moḥammad Qomi (d. 406/1015), who also wanted to preserve the historical traditions of his home city, Qom, before they were lost. He was first encouraged in this endeavor by Ebn al-‘Amid during his tenure as governor of Qom and then patronized by Šāḥeb b. ‘Abbād, to whom he dedicated his book (Lambton, 1948, p. 586; idem, 1990, p. 322). This Arabic *Ta’riḳ Qom* is no longer known to exist, but it must have been available as late as the 9th/15th century, at which time a certain Ḥasan b. ‘Alī Qomi made a Persian recension of it (Storey, II, pp. 348-49; ed. Jalāl-al-Din Tehrāni, 1313 Š/1935). Only five out of twenty chapters of the Persian *Tāriḳ-e Qom* are extant, and it is impossible to judge how closely they have followed the Arabic original. Nonetheless, the text is full of interesting, highly original, and presumably authentic information about such matters as taxation, irrigation, and Arab colonization that are rarely mentioned in other historical sources of the period.

Samanid and Ghaznavid Period. Historiography was also a highly developed discipline in eastern Persia and Central Asia under the patronage of the Samanids, Ghaznavids, and other local dynasties. Some of this historical writing was in Arabic, with interests that closely paralleled those of the Buyid historians. This historiographical tradition was unique, however, in also sponsoring and developing the writing of history, as well as other types of scholarly prose, in the Persian language (something the Buyids, despite their Persianizing tendencies, never did). Moreover, a number of these works, in both Arabic and Persian, went well beyond the Buyid example in the breadth of their historical vision, taking an exceptional interest in the cultural, geographical, and material dimensions of history as well as affairs of non-Muslim peoples. This is doubtless due in part to the strategic location of the eastern dynasties at the hub of a regional network in contact with the Slavs, Turks, Indians, Tibetans, and Chinese as well as the Islamic lands. It is also tempting to see this trend as the result of the development of a true “school” of



historiography, closely associated with the Samanid chancery and probably going back to the influence of the geographer-scholar Abu Zayd Balki (q.v.; d. 322/934). There was certainly systematic and philosophical thinking about the nature of history going on during this period; this attitude was evident in the place assigned to history in the *Mafātiḥ al-ʿolum* of Moḥammad b. Aḥmad K̲w̲ārazmi, a work dedicated to the Samanid vizier Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Otbi. It was even more fully expressed in the *Jawāme' al-ʿolum*, written about the same time or a little earlier by Ebn Farīḡun for a Muhtajid amir (see [ĀL-E FARĪĠŪN](#); text in Rosenthal, 1968, pp. 539-40). Ebn Farīḡun, reportedly a student of Abu Zayd, emphasized that secretaries (*kottāb*) must be familiar with the chronologies of the “three nations” (Persians, Byzantines, and Muslims *pace* Rosenthal, 1968, p. 52), the books of the Persians on *siar* (biography) and *ādāb* (conduct) such as the *Ahd Ardašir* and *Rasā'el Anušervān*, and the *siar* of the caliphs and the “kings” who followed them. He described history as a type of “wisdom” (*ḥekma*) derived from the study of famous and unusual events (including natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, or plague), chronologies of dynasties of the various climes, cosmology and eschatology, certain aspects of the biography of Moḥammad (his birth and matters related to politics and warfare), the history of the caliphs (their conquests, affairs, and rebellions against them), the pre-Islamic history of the Arabs and Persians, reports about famous rulers, and biographies of notable personalities (religious scholars, secretaries, poets, and other exemplary individuals).

Unfortunately, a good many of the histories known to have been written in Arabic in eastern Persia during this period are no longer extant. These included several urban and regional histories, of which the most important was the *Ta'riḫ K̲or̲āsān* or *Ta'riḫ wolāt K̲or̲āsān* (it is not entirely clear whether these were separate works or alternative titles for the same work) by Abu 'Ali Ḥosayn Sallāmi (d. 350/961). Some vague impression of its character may be gleaned from its use by later historians, notably Gardizi and Ebn al-Aṭir (see Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 10-11). At roughly the same time Sallāmi was producing his history, Abu Bakr Moḥammad b. Ja'far Naršaḳi (d. 348/959) wrote a history of Bokhara in Arabic for the Samanid amir Nuḥ b. Naṣr. Although the Arabic text has been lost, it was abridged and translated into Persian by Abu Naṣr Aḥmad Qobāwi in 522/1128, with some added material to extend the chronological coverage. The Persian text itself then went through at least two further redactions (see Frye, p. xii; Smirnova). If the received Persian text is any indication of the Arabic original, it was a remarkable work that preserved a wealth of fascinating information about the development of



Bokhara from pre-Islamic to Samanid times.

Among the extant historical works in Arabic of this period, the *Ketāb al-bad' wa'l-ta'rikò* is a very unusual book, perhaps a manual for religious disputation, which represents a conscious effort to integrate history, philosophy, theology, cosmology, and eschatology. Clement Huart, the modern editor and translator of the text, at first attributed it to Abu Zayd Bal'ki (the name given on the manuscript), but he later recognized it as the work of Moṭahhar b. Ṭāher Maqdesi (cited in Ṭa'ālebi, *Ġorar*, p. 501 as an authority on Manicheism). Nothing is otherwise known about this author, although he apparently lived in Bōst and wrote the book in 355/966 (Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 337) for an unnamed Samanid official (which certainly fits with the pattern of texts being patronized by the Samanids during this period). It begins with an outline of its epistemology and then proceeds to describe arguments for the existence of God, His names and attributes, the necessity of prophecy, creation, natural phenomena from rainbows to earthquakes, portents which precede Judgment Day, stories of the prophets and the kings of Persia, the ideas of numerous non-Muslim religions (including those of China, the Turks, the Kōrramiya, and others), and the climes of the world. The last volumes provide a more conventional historical narrative, with sections of the life of Moḥammad and the history of the Rašidun, Omayyad, and 'Abbasid caliphs down to al-Moti'. The most striking feature of the text is its strong interest in what today would be called the comparative history of culture and religion, a characteristic it shares, along with its philosophical and scientific interests, with the slightly later and much better known works of Abu Rayḥān Biruni (q.v.; d. after 442/1050), most notably the *Āṭār al-bāqia 'an al-qorun al-kālia* and the *Taḥqiq mā le'l-Hend* (see [BĪRŪNĪ](#) vi-viii).

The celebrated poet and philologist Abu Maṣsur 'Abd-al-Malek b. Moḥammad Ṭa'ālebi (d. 429/1038) also authored some historical works during this period. Some of his works straddle the boundary between *adab* and history proper. His *Yatimat al-dahr*, like its Buyid counterpart the *Aḡāni*, is strictly speaking an anthology of the Arabic poetry of its era (including examples from the poets of Syria, Iraq, and western Persia as well as the Samanid and Ghaznavid east), but one interspersed with a fair amount of significant historical information related to the production, court patronage, and explication of the poetry. The brief *Laṭā'ef al-ma'āref* is a compilation of historical anecdotes and miscellaneous information ranging from a list of firsts to nicknames of notables, celebrated secretaries, characteristics and products of various lands,



and unusual happenings. As noted earlier, works such as this were probably intended to serve as cribs for courtiers wishing to enliven their conversation. This same Ṭa'ālebi is now also understood to be the author of the important narrative history known as the *Ġorar al-siar*. Various manuscripts give the name of the author as Abu Maṣṣur Ḥosayn b. Moḥammad Marḡani (the *nesba* has also been read as Mar'aṣi or Marāḡi) Ṭa'ālebi, and Carl Brockelmann (*GAL*, SI, p. 581) considered him to be the actual author, even though Hermann Zotenberg, the modern editor and translator of the text, had rejected this attribution and argued it was also the work of 'Abd-al-Malek Ṭa'ālebi. Zotenberg's assessment was confirmed by Franz Rosenthal (1950), who noted the use of the same unusual Arabic phrases in the *Ġorar* and other works by 'Abd-al-Malek Ṭa'ālebi. Rosenthal's instinct was certainly correct, although he missed two equally compelling arguments in favor of this attribution contained in the Oxford manuscript of the *Ġorar* (noted by its recent editor, Sohayl Zakkār, who was nonetheless oblivious to the debate over the authorship of this work and continued to attribute it to Ḥosayn Marḡani): the author's unusual interest in 'Abd-al-Malek's home city, Nišāpur (e.g., preserving details about Abu Moslem's activities there; ed. Zakkār, pp. 154-55), and his statement that he was planning to write a book on unusual honorific titles (*alqāb*) with the patronage of "the Šāḥeb" (ed. Zakkār, pp. 54-55). The *Laṭā'ef* is also dedicated to "the Šāḥeb Abu'l-Qāsem," i.e., Aḥmad b. Ḥasan Maymandi, which makes it virtually certain that the same person was the author of all these works. The title and subject of this history have also been subject to some confusion. The published text, based on the manuscripts known to Zotenberg, dealt only with the history of pre-Islamic Persia from Kayumarṭ to the death of Yazdegerd in 31/651-52 and was often known under the title *Ġorar aḡbār moluk al-fors wa siarehem*. It closely follows the version of the Persian "national history" used by Ṭa'ālebi's contemporary Ferdowsi (*Ġorar*, pp. xviii-xix; Yarshater in *Camb. Hist. Iran*, p. 362), citing as a source a *Šāh-nāma*, probably one of the prose *šāh-nāmas* then extant. As an independent work, this would indeed be out of character with the other works written by the clearly Arabophile Ṭa'ālebi. The author's introduction, however, makes clear that it was (or was intended to be) part of a much larger work which dealt also with the pre-Islamic Near East, the kings of "Rome, India, the Turks, and China," and Islamic history down to the reign of Seboktekin. The Oxford manuscript entitled *Ġorar al-siar*, which was edited only recently and has been almost totally ignored by modern historians, deals with the history of the caliphs from 'Abd-al-Malek b. Marwān to al-Manṣur (preserving much significant and original material about the Persian provinces) and must be



regarded as another surviving fragment of this work.

Among the last of the major historical works to be written in Arabic during this period was the *Ta'riḫ al-yamini* by Abu Naṣr Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Jabbār 'Otbi (d. between 413/1022 and 431/1039-40). It is a source of fundamental importance not only for early Ghaznavid history, but for its information about the fall of the Samanids, the last Saffarids of Sistān, the early Ziyarids, the Kara-Khanids, the Simjurids, and other petty dynasts of the period. Unfortunately, it has never received a modern edition and must still be consulted in the version printed on the margins of a 19th-century commentary (Aḥmad Manini, *al-Fath al-wahbi*, 2 vols., Cairo, 1869). As a specimen of historiography, it can be faulted in two respects. First, the author largely abandoned any pretense of objectivity and set out, inspired by the example of Ṣābi's *al-Tāji*, to write a panegyric of the Ghaznavids in order to win the favor of Sultan Maḥmud and to serve as pro-Ghaznavid propaganda in Iraq. In this regard, it is difficult to accept Barthold's view (*Turkestan*, p. 19) that 'Otbi "does not conceal the dark sides of this brilliant reign, and the misery of the people ruined by taxes which it was beyond their power to pay" (see the more realistic interpretation by Treadwell, pp. 10-12). To the extent that this is true, it is surely unintentional since 'Otbi does not bother to hide his disdain for the common people and goes out of his way to legitimize the usurpation of power by the Ghaznavids as well as their aggressive policies. He is equally suspect when it comes to the lavish praise he heaps on his own ancestors who served as government ministers. Second, 'Otbi subordinated historical substance to rhetorical style, sometimes writing in verse or rhymed prose and constantly making use of metaphor and hyperbole more appropriate to poetry than historical prose. Although often admired by Arab critics (e.g., Jorji Zaydān), the resulting text is not only excruciatingly difficult to read but short on historical detail and precision. It has, however, also been suggested by some readers, including the commentator Sheikh Aḥmad Manini, that this excessive language, which certainly sounds ridiculous enough to modern ears, was sometimes used as a subtle ploy intended "to undermine what it appears to assert" (Meisami, 1999, p. 137 n. 9). A Persian translation of the *Yamini* was made by Abu'l-Šaraf Nāṣeḥ b. Ẓafar Jarbaḍāqāni (ca. 602/1205-6). In general, it is more faithful to the Arabic original—even, unfortunately, in its fondness for literary extravagance—than is usually the case with such Arabic to Persian translations, but Jarbaḍāqāni did make some emendations to the text (see Meisami, 1999, pp. 256-63).



The practice of writing history in the Persian language began, as far as we know, with the decision of the Samanid Amir Maṣṣur b. Nuḥ in 352/963 to commission a translation by Abu ‘Ali Bal‘ami (see [AMĪRAK BAL‘AMĪ](#)) of Ṭabari’s *Ta’rikò*. Bal‘ami did not take this mandate literally and actually recast Ṭabari’s history in a very different form, dropping the citation of *esnāds* and abandoning the annalistic arrangement in favor of a fluid narrative which freely abridged, added, rearranged, or corrected material. This Persian version of Ṭabari became extremely popular in the Persian-speaking world, as attested by its complicated manuscript tradition and the various recensions through which it passed (see Giaznevich and Boldyrev; Daniel, 1990). It also set the model which would be followed by many subsequent Persian translations of Arabic histories and for Persian historiographical style in general, at least until the emphasis on rhetorical embellishment began to replace the remarkably clear and simple use of language preferred by Bal‘ami.

Despite the precedent set by Bal‘ami, it was still almost a century before original and independent examples of historiography in Persian began to appear. The earliest of these that is now extant (or known of) is the *Zayn al-akbār* by ‘Abd-al-Ḥayy Gardizi (q.v.). About all that can be said concerning the author and the background of his work is that the text bears a dedication to the ninth Ghaznavid sultan, ‘Abd-al-Rašid b. Maḥmud (q.v.; r. 440-43/1049-52?). It begins with a brief survey of the five “groups” (*ṭabaqa*) of pre-Islamic rulers of Persia; proceeds to three “chapters” (*bāb*) on Islamic rulers (a short account of Moḥammad, the caliphs, and the “amirs” of Khorasan), accompanied by chronological tables; and concludes with a longish section of twelve chapters on the comparative chronologies, holidays, and cultures of numerous foreign and non-Muslim peoples (obviously based on the work of Biruni, one of Gardizi’s contemporaries), with particularly significant accounts of Tibet, various Turkish tribes, the Slavs, etc. In terms of historical content, the most interesting section, undoubtedly drawing from the lost history by Sallāmi (see Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 21), is that on the “amirs” of Khorasan, treating them as an unbroken line extending from the Arab conqueror ‘Abd-Allāh b. ‘Āmer to the Ghaznavid sultan Mawdud b. Maṣ‘ud. Throughout the work, one finds subjects treated in ways that depart, sometimes dramatically, from the mainstream Islamic historical tradition—e.g., the emphasis on the destructive aspects of Alexander’s conquest, the distinction drawn between the *moluk-e Sāsāniān* and the *akāsera*, or the particularly dramatic account of the murder of Abu Moslem, emphasizing the treacherous and repellant behavior of the caliph al-Manṣur. The author also alludes to the age-old struggle of Īrān and



Turān “that persists even today” (p. 11), in which context he seems to have been quite disturbed by the defeats inflicted on the Ghaznavids by the Saljuqs. As noted in a recent study by Julie Meisami, “several major concerns run through the work and link its otherwise often disjointed accounts” (1999, p. 69). Among other things, Gardizi makes the historical experience of what the author calls Irānšahr the center of his narrative, sees history as a cyclical process in which dynasties rise or decline according to the virtues or defects of individual rulers, and posits a view of the ideal ruler as one who is just, is valiant in warfare, rewards the loyalty of his retainers, defends religious orthodoxy, and encourages the acquisition of knowledge—all themes which resonate with those of what Ehsan Yarshater has called the “Iranian national history.” This remarkable work is thus not only the first general history in the Persian language to stand on its own, without the pretense of being a “translation” of an Arabic text, it is also one of the best examples of a work that can be regarded as “Persian historiography” in the sense of history written from a thoroughly Persocentric (or at least east Persian) point of view.

Abu'l-Faḡl Moḥammad b. Ḥosayn Bayhaqī (q.v.; d. 470/1077), a former head of the Ghaznavid secretariat, composed a monumental history in some thirty volumes on the reigns of the early Ghaznavid sultans (the original title is uncertain but was perhaps *Tāriḡ-e nāṣeri*, *Tāriḡ-e āl-e Seboktakin*, or *Tāriḡ-e āl-e Maḥmud*; it is now generally referred to as either *Tāriḡ-e Bayhaqī* or *Tāriḡ-e mas'udi*). Only one volume and some fragments, covering the years 421-32/1030-41, survive today. Even in this sadly truncated state, however, it is clear this work is one of the true masterpieces of the world's historical literature (for various appreciations of it, see in particular the essays in Matini, ed.). Bayhaqī set forth the philosophical principles underlying his work in a short “discourse” (*koṭba*) on the purpose and methods of history. It is not found, as one might expect, in a prologue (*dibāḡa*) to the book (which has unfortunately been lost) but rather near the beginning of volume ten (ed. Fayyāz, pp. 903-6), appropriately enough in a section dealing with the history of K̲w̲ārazm taken from the now lost work on that subject by Abu Rayḡān Biruni, whose thought had obviously influenced Bayhaqī profoundly (as well as many of the other historians discussed here). In Bayhaqī's view, history is the means by which humans satisfy their natural curiosity about the past and, in the process, increase their intellectual capacity to distinguish truly between good and bad, joy and sorrow. Such knowledge is useful, but it cannot be regarded as predictive since the future is known only to God. It is also commemorative, in that it keeps alive the story of past notables and



remembrance of the historian himself. Historical knowledge can be acquired only by rigorous effort through traveling and making inquiries (exactly the meaning of the Greek *historía*) in order to obtain either oral reports from trustworthy informants or to consult appropriate written sources; in all cases, the historian must insist on the rationality and credibility of what is reported and reject the fabulous and foolish. In his own case, Bayhaqi emphasizes that everything he reports is based on either his own eyewitness knowledge or material taken from sources of impeccable reliability. As a high-ranking member of the Ghaznavid bureaucracy, Bayhaqi was of course well placed to have access to such information, and this is one of the qualities that makes his work so important. He apparently kept a kind of diary or journal of his experiences as well as copies of archival material and later used these as the raw material for his history, shaped by the reflections and perspectives he could bring to them with the advantage of hindsight. For subjects beyond this, such as the historical anecdotes he often cites as contextual information or as parallels to events he is discussing, and also in the case of topics of which he has little direct knowledge, he turns to sources he considers the best and most authoritative (as with Biruni's history of K̲w̲ārazm); these sources are frequently named and their reliability assessed. It should also be noted that Bayhaqi constructed his prose with meticulous care and precision; he is remarkably effective at recreating the settings and sharply delineating the character of the personalities involved in the events he describes. His subtle and deceptively plain language suggests much more than it says explicitly, although the variety of interpretations given his accounts by modern scholars (cf. Luther, 1971; Poliakova; Waldman; Humphreys, 1991, pp. 141-45; Meisami, 1999, pp. 79-108) suggests that we are still far from knowing exactly how it should be read. In sum, the *Tārīḳ-e Bayhaqi*, with its combination of authoritativeness, richness of detail, literary polish, and methodological sophistication, has no peer among the works discussed here and precious few in any other historiographical tradition.

The late islamic period

The semblance of unity imposed on Persia by the Saljuq defeat of the Ghaznavids at Dandanqān in 1040 and their subsequent ouster of the Buyids from Baghdad in 1055 was illusory: The political structure of Persia in the late Islamic period was really that of "a loose confederation of semi-independent kingdoms over which the sultan exercised nominal authority" (Lambton, *CHI* V, p. 218), with numerous *maleks*, amirs, and *atābaks* in control of various,



mostly petty, territorial holdings. The awareness of the new Turkish warlords of their status in the eyes of the subject population as ethnic interlopers and political upstarts also accelerated the tendency to seek legitimacy by claiming to support *šari'a*-based government and by co-opting members of the local '*olemā*'. These trends are clearly reflected in the historiography of the period, which was often produced either to curry favor with the new warlords or in the hope of persuading them to govern well. If historical writing did not as a result decline in quantity from that of earlier periods (an impression which may result purely from the fact that a greater percentage of it has survived), it was more constricted in both scope and quality.

General histories certainly continued to be written, but they have either been lost (most regrettably the later sections of Helāl b. Šābi's chronicle, the work of Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Malek Hamaḍāni, and the *Mašāreb al-tajāreb* of Ṣāḥir-al-Din Bayhaqi; see Cahen, pp. 60-66), or are of rather inferior quality, or are connected with the "historiography of Persia" of this period in only the most tangential ways if at all. For example, Ṣāḥir-al-Din Ruḍravari (d. 488/1095), who came from a town in western Persia and served as a vizier to the Abbasid caliphs until forced from office by Malek-Šāh, wrote a continuation to Meskawayh's chronicle, but the extant portion covers only a small part of the Buyid period (368-89/979-999). The anonymous *Ketāb al-'oyun wa'l-ḥadā'eq fī akbār al-ḥaqā'eq* also probably dates from this period; the surviving portion goes down to 350/961 (ed., Omar Saīdi, 2 vols, Damascus, 1972-73). While it is an impressive work in many ways, it is written from an Egyptian or North African perspective and is rarely interested in events east of Iraq. The celebrated Ḥanbali scholar Ebn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1200) wrote a chronicle, *al-Montazam fī'l-ta'rik*, the published volumes of which cover the years 257-574/870-1179. His work imitated Ṭabari's in its annalistic form but rarely deals with events outside Baghdad and consists of little more than masses of yearly obituary notices for members of the '*olemā*'. A concise history of the caliphs, *al-Enbā' fī ta'rik al-kolafā'* was written ca. 560/1164-65 by Moḥammad b. 'Alī 'Emrāni, who may have belonged to a family from Sarakṣ or K̲wārazm (ed. Qasim al-Samarrai, Leiden, 1973, p. 7). Perhaps the most interesting general history produced during this period, at least in terms of relevance for the history of Persia, was written (revealingly enough) in Egypt by an Egyptian author, Ebn Ṣāfer Azdi (d. 613/1216 or 623/1226). His *Ketāb al-dowal al-monqaṭe'a* was apparently intended to be, as its title suggests, a comprehensive history of the numerous dynasties which had sprung up around the Muslim world. As a result, it contains a good deal of unique information about Persia,



from the Caucasian dynasties to the Samanids (Treadwell, 2000). Other meritorious works, such as the chronicles of Ebn al-Aṭir (q.v.; d. 630/1233) and Šebṭ b. al-Jawzi (d. 654/1256), fundamental to the study of the history of the period and drawing on now lost earlier works, straddle the late Islamic and Mongol periods and are outside the scope of this article.

One important general history was written in Persian during this period, the anonymous *Mojmal al-tawāriḵ wa'l-qeṣasá*. Some information about the author can be deduced from internal evidence in the text, where it is indicated that he was a grandson of a certain Mohallab b. Moḥammad b. Šādi (on this family, see Meisami, 1999, p. 207) and that he spent some time in Asadābād, where he got the idea of writing such a history in Persian from a conversation at a drinking party with one of its grandees (*mehtari az jomla-ye mašāhir va bozorgān*, p. 8). The author also indicates that he began writing the book in 520/1126 and was a contemporary of Sanjar and Maḥmud [b. Moḥammad] b. Malek-Šāh; his rather obvious partiality towards the latter, as well as his special interest in Hamadān and Isfahan, suggests that he may have been attached to Maḥmud's court in some way. The author drew on a broad range of Persian and Arabic sources, which he had apparently found in his grandfather's library (list in Bahār, ed., pp. lṭ-hb and 2-3), and records much interesting information from them that would not otherwise be known. He also covers a surprising range of topics, from Graeco-Roman and Byzantine rulers to the titulature of various kings to architectural monuments. He was not, however, very discriminating in his historical method, and the reliability of much of what he says is open to question: he accepts many clearly fabulous stories and is often imprecise and inconsistent in calculating dates. Some of the more thoughtful sections of his text, such as his critique of Sasanian chronology and description of the portraits of Sasanian kings, have merely been lifted from earlier texts, notably Ḥamza Eṣfahāni. Where he might be expected to have made a significant original contribution, e.g., on the history of the Saljuqs, he actually has little to say. For the most part, the text is written in an informal and chatty style, with frequent digressions and personal observations about whatever strikes the author's fancy.

The dynastic histories of the Saljuqs present one problem after another in terms of authorship, textual transmission, reliability, and interpretation (the survey by Cahen in Lewis and Holt is still fundamental to the study of this historiography). Abu'l-'Alā' b. Ḥawl, vizier of Toğrel Beg, is supposed to have written a *Resāla fī tafzīl al-atrāk* (GAL SI, p. 553), but it is lost and may or may



not have been an attempt at producing a dynastic history of the Saljuqs. It is not until much later that such works definitely began to appear, with the first apparently being the *Fotur zamān al-šodur wa zamān al-fotur*, written in Persian by the vizier Anušervān b. Kāled Kāšāni (q.v.; d. 533/1138-39). This, too, is lost, but it was used by ‘Emād-al-Din Kāteb Ešfahāni (q.v.; d. 597/1201), a secretary in the service of the Zangids and later the Ayyubids (well known for his history of Saladin), as the basis for his history of the Saljuqs, *Nošrat al-fatra wa ‘ošrat al-feṭra* (still available only in a unique manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris). This Arabic version of the text is noted mostly for its florid style, which may exceed even that of ‘Oṭbi in its nebulous pomposity and pedantry. ‘Emād-al-Din’s work was in turn redacted by Faḡr-al-Din Faṭḥ b. ‘Ali Bondāri Ešfahāni (fl. 623/1226) in the *Zobdat al-nošra*, written for the Ayyubid prince al-Malek al-Mo‘aẓẓam ‘Īsā. Since Bondāri’s work has been edited and published, it is the one most often cited in modern works. How much this third-hand history may resemble Anušervān’s original work is debatable; in any case, it deals mostly with the Saljuqs of Iraq and is of peripheral importance for the historiography of Persia. A manuscript entitled *Zobdat al-tawāriḡ aḡbār al-omarā’ wa’l-moluk al-saljuqiya* [sic] bears an attribution to Šadr-al-Din Abu’l-Ḥasan b. ‘Ali b. Nāšer Ḥosayni and was edited by Moḡammad Eḡbāl as such (*Aḡbār al-dawla al-saljuqiya*, Lahore, 1933). Although this Ḥosayni may have assembled the basic text ca. 560/1164, the extant version is clearly a composite and redacted work which includes material from both earlier sources, such as a lost *Malek-nāma*, and later additions and emendations (see Cahen in Lewis and Holt, pp. 69-72). Apart from the lost history of Anušervān b. Kāled, all the histories of the Great Saljuqs written in Persian basically derive from a *Saljuq-nāma* by Ẓahir-al-Din Nišāpuri (d. 580/1184?), tutor of the sultans Mas‘ud b. Moḡammad and Arslan b. Ṭoḡrel. Esmā‘il Khan Afšār published what he purported to be the text of this work (Tehran, 1332 Š./1953), but it was really just a reworking of the original by the Ilkhanid historian Abu’l-Qāsem Kāšāni (q.v.) that was incorporated into that author’s *Zobdat al-tavāriḡ*. Allin Luther (2001, pp. 18-19), following Ahmed Ateş, thought that another version, incorporated into Rašid-al-Din’s *Jāme‘ al-tavāriḡ*, was closer to the original and used it as the basis for his English translation. More recently, it has been suggested that neither of these represents Ẓahir-al-Din’s original text, which may be preserved in a hitherto neglected manuscript (London, Royal Asiatic Society, MS Persian 22b; see Luther, tr., 2001, p. ix). In any event, this ur-text and the glowing, thoroughly uncritical, depiction it apparently gave of the virtues of Saljuq rule also formed the basis for the *Rāḡat al-šodur wa āyat al-sorur* by



Moḥammad b. ‘Ali Ravandi. Ravandi began writing the *Rāḥat al-ṣodur* in 599/1202; faced with the collapse of the Persian Saljuqs and the rise of the Khwārazm-šāhs, he moved to Konya, revised his panegyrics in favor of the Rum Saljuqs, and dedicated the work to Sultan Kay-Ḳosrow b. Qelej-Arslān. Except for events relating to the last years of Saljuq rule in Persia, the historical value of Ravandi’s work is very slight. The bulk of the text follows closely the version of Ṣāḥir-al-Dīn as found in the Ilkhanid historians, except for adding various rhetorical embellishments (they can hardly be called improvements), copious quotations of poetry, and a good deal of sermonizing.

A large number of works from this period fall into a category most often called “local history,” i. e., books devoted to individual regions or cities (a special issue of *Iranian Studies* 33 [2000] has been devoted to this topic). As a descriptive term, however, this rubric is both inadequate and misleading: Such works may be “local” in subject but not necessarily in perspective. Moreover, “local history” is not a uniform genre, and it includes many titles which properly should not be regarded as history at all. It should also be emphasized that such works are not unique to either this period or to the historiography of Persia.

In the case of provincial history, this had previously been focused on important areas of the caliphate such as Khorasan. With the rise of the eastern dynasties, Khorasan had become in effect the arena of mainstream history; now, areas peripheral to it became the subject of provincial history. The earliest extant example is the anonymous *Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, the main part of which was written ca. 448/1062 (with continuations down to 726/1326). It is unquestionably local in its point of view (the main author could almost be described as a Sistāni nationalist or patriot), but it is also quite interesting and far from unsophisticated as a specimen of historiography. The work begins with a foundation myth (crediting Garšāsp, q.v., with the founding of Sistān); describes the many “superiorities” (*faẓā’el*) of Sistān as well as its boundaries, districts, and resources; and gives an account of the life of Moḥammad which can definitely be described as unusual (apparently incorporating popular local legends). The bulk of the narrative is then given over to a history of Sistān after the Islamic conquest, notable for the attention it gives to the Kharijites in Sistān and its admiring treatment of the Saffarids as Sistāni heroes of epic proportions (this is the real centerpiece of the text). The coming of “the Turks,” first the Ghaznavids and then Ṭoḡrel “the accursed” (*mal’un*), is seen as an unparalleled calamity for Sistān.



The *Fārs-nāma* of Ebn al-Balkī (q.v.; fl. ca. 510/1116) is equally affectionate in its regard for its province but far more accepting of Turkish rule there. This is probably due to the fact that its author (whose family was not native to Fārs) was an accountant in the administration of the Atabaks and wrote his book at the request of Sultan Moḥammad b. Malek-Šāh, while the author of the *Tāriḳ-e Sistān* was apparently writing for a popular audience. Over half of the *Fārs-nāma* is given over to a fairly conventional account of the pre-Islamic Persian kings, with a few unique details (especially in connection with the history of Mazdak). The rest of the book is a *mélange* of geographical, historical, and ethnographical information, which is most interesting for what it has to say about the *qāzis* of Shiraz, the last phases of Buyid rule in Fārs, the advent of the Saljuqs, and the affairs of Amir Faḏluya and the Šabānkāra'i Kurds.

Afzal-al-Din Kermāni (q.v.; fl. 584/1188) wrote two works on the Kermān branch of the Saljuqids: a general history, the *Badā'i al-azmān fī waqā'i Kermān* or *Tāriḳ-e Afzal* (now lost) and the *'Eqd al-'olā*, in part a history of the conquest of Kermān by the Ġozz chieftain Malek Dinār in 581/1185 (ed. M. E. Bāstāni-Pārizi as *Saljuqiān wa Ġozz dar Kermān*, Tehran 1343 Š./1964). Like several other works of this period, the *'Eqd al-'olā*, written in what Julie Meisami (1999, p. 234) considers “an outstanding example of the ornate chancery style,” was also intended to praise and win the favor of the ruler (in this case Malek Dinār) and to give ethical instruction about how to govern; as such it is rather on the margins of what can be considered historiography *per se*.

Towards the very end of the period under consideration, around 606/1210, Bahā'-al-Din Ebn Esfandiār began working on a *Tāriḳ-e Ṭabarestān*, for which he carried out research in the libraries of Baghdad and K̲w̲ārazm. Rather like the author of the *Mojmal al-tavārikò*, he had been inspired to take on this task after being queried about the ancient history of Ṭabarestān by a Bavandid ruler. As Charles Melville has noted, his work is difficult to assess since it seems never to have been properly finished and has also probably been garbled in the complicated process of manuscript transmission ([EBN ESFANDIĀR](#); Melville, 2000b). The received text is certainly a composite one, with only sections one (ed. Eqbāl, I, pp. 1-302; on foundation myths, settlements and revenues, biographies of famous people of Ṭabarestān, and the history of the province down to the Buyid and Ziyarid period) and three (ed. Eqbāl, II, pp. 32-173; mostly on the Bavandids) attributable to Ebn Esfandiār himself (Melville, 2000b, pp. 56-58). The author, a native of the province and a Shi'ite, was keenly aware of the special character of Ṭabarestān



as an area with a strong and separate sense of identity, but he was neither as chauvinistic as the author of the *Tāriḳ-e Sistān* nor as parochial as Ebn al-Balkī or Afzal-al-Din: He goes to great length to put the history of the province in the context of larger affairs, and he draws on a variety of non-local written sources and documents as well as local traditions. In some respects, the book could be read as a meditation on the nature of just rule, a theme set at the outset by its inclusion of a translation of the *Tansar-nāma* (the best known feature of the text).

Urban history can be regarded as one of the oldest genres of Islamic historiography, with extant examples going all the way back to *Aḳbār Makka*, the first redaction of which was made by Aḥmad b. Moḥammad Azraqī (d. 222/837). Histories of individual Persian cities were written at least as early as the mid-3rd/9th century as evidenced by the (now lost) *Ta'riḳ Marw* of Aḥmad b. Sayyar Marwazī (d. 268/881; Sezgin, GAS, I, p. 351). Works of this type proliferated in the late Islamic period; examples from Persian cities include books on Astarābād, Samarqand, Nasaf, Bokhara, Nišāpur, Balk, Jorjān, Esfahan, and Qazvin (see Paul, 2000a; idem, 2000b; lists in Brockelmann, GAL, SI, pp. 209-11, 571; Sezgin, GAS, I, pp. 351-54). They often have very complicated problems of textual transmission (see, e.g., Paul, 1993). Most also turn out to be not works of historiography at all, but primarily of prosopography, usually just of members of the 'olamā' (for examples, the so-called *Ta'riḳ Samarqand* of Abu Sa'd Edrisi [d. 405/1015]; the *Ta'riḳ Naysābur* of Abu 'Abd-Allāh b. al-Bayyē [q.v.; d. 405/1015-16]; the *Dekr aḳbār Esfahān* by Abu No'aym Esfahānī [q.v.; d. 430/1038]; or the *Ta'riḳ Jorjān* by Abu'l-Qāsem Ḥamza b. Yusuf Sahmi Jorjānī [d. 427/1036]). Sahmi's *Ta'riḳ Jorjān* is typical of the genre in form and in meagerness of historical information: It gives a short report on the Arab conquest of Jorjān (pp. 44-46); a list of the Companions of the Prophet and the *tābe'un* who settled there (pp. 46-51); some comments on the Mohallabid family (pp. 51-54); the governors, the building of the congregational mosque, and famous visitors (pp. 54-57); and finally biographical notices for more than a thousand of the city's noted religious scholars (pp. 59-509). It thus does not provide anything like an extended narrative history of a city in the manner of Naršaḳī's *Ta'riḳ Bokārā* discussed above (although the original Arabic text of that work may also have had a large prosopographical section; see Smirnova). Even as prosopography, these city histories appear pathetically small in size or sadly limited in variety of contents when compared to the great biographical compendia of the metropolitan cities of the Arab lands such as Kaṭīb Baḡdādī's *Ta'riḳ Baḡdād* (in



14 vols., with biographies of almost eight thousand scholars and over a hundred pages just on the topography of the city) or Ebn ‘Asāker’s *Ta’riḳ Demašq* (in 70 vols., with biographies of every notable known to have lived in or visited the city). That is not to say the Persian city “histories” are without historical value (they do contain varying amounts of incidental historical information) or that they cannot be put to use as sources for the history of the period (as has been demonstrated by Richard Bulliet); they are simply highly problematic as specimens of historical literature.

An exception to these comments might be made for the *Maḥāsen Eṣfahān* by Mofaẓẓal b. Sa‘d Māfarraḳi (fl. 465/1072; see Paul, 2000b), which does give a kind of historical portrait of the city, its people, and its culture, and particularly in the case of the *Tāriḳ-e Bayhaq* by Ṣāḥir-al-Din Bayhaqi (q.v.), also known as Ebn Fondoq (d. 565/1169). Ebn Fondoq was a prolific author who was both a historian (author of a now lost continuation of ‘Oṭbi, the *Mašāreb al-tajāreb*) and a biographer (who wrote the *Ta’riḳ ḥokamā’ al-eslām*); his *Tāriḳ-e Bayhaq* combines both disciplines. It departs somewhat from the typical model of the city histories in several respects: It contains a longish discourse on the nature of history and the benefits of studying it (pp. 4-15); it describes in some detail the many sources on which the work was based (pp. 19-21); and it gives a fairly extensive survey of the history of the city and the dynasties which ruled there (pp. 25-73). The prosopographical section does not deal only with individuals, but also with the great families of the city (pp. 73-137); the number of individual biographies is relatively small as the author does not aim to be comprehensive but chooses his entries selectively. Moreover, the biographies deal with a broad spectrum of the social elite of Bayhaq, not just the ‘*olamā*’, and are often serve to provide information about events in the history of the city (see Pourshariati, pp. 156-64). On the other hand, the author is quite suspect as a critical historian; he makes much use of folklore and legend, boasts about his own abilities and virtues, and gives free reign to his prejudices (as in his contemptuous appraisal of the state of the sciences in his time and his frequent expressions of disdain for the “rabble” [*ḡawḡā*] of the city).

Conclusion. In many cultures around the world, the production of historical literature is often closely linked to the phenomenon of ethnogenesis or the formation of a sense of social solidarity. For Muslims, too, as Claude Cahen perceptively noted, historiography was “one of the principal forms by means of which not only small regional or confessional groups, but even the



Community, itself, acquired consciousness of identity as a whole” (Cahen, 1990, p. 191). If there is a theme linking the historiography of Persia in the Islamic period, it is the story of the shifting and conflicting allegiances involved in this process: triumphalist expressions of a conquering elite, melancholy reflections on a shattered past, awareness of being part of a great imperial civilization, or feelings of membership in a commonwealth of regional states. In that sense, the most striking feature of the historiography of Persia during the late Islamic era is the extent to which it reveals the fragmented and shrinking political horizon as well as the deep social cleavages of the time. That, coupled with its generally mediocre quality, hardly prepares one for the impressive creative outburst of historical writing that was about to take place in Mongol Persia.

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