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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Narrative and Iranian Identity in the New Persian Renaissance and the Later Perso-Islamicate World

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in History

by

Conrad Justin Harter

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Touraj Daryaee, Chair
Professor Mark Andrew LeVine
Professor Emeritus James Buchanan Given

2016

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DEDICATION

To

my friends and family,

and most importantly,

my wife Pamela

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Narrative and Iranian Identity in the New Persian Renaissance and the Later Perso-Islamicate World

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Touraj Daryaee, Chair

In tenth century Khurasan and Transoxania, at the frontier of the Iranian cultural world, mythical and historical narratives such as the *Shahnama* helped to shape and maintain a sense of group Iranian identity for the Samanids and other Iranian Islamic dynasties. The *Shahnama* can be considered what narrative theorist Margaret Somers terms an "ontological narrative." These narratives helped Islamic dynasties such as the Samanids understand what it meant to be Iranian, and also became sources of identity for their Arab and Turkic neighbors. The term "Iran," or "Iranshahr" as the empire of the Sasanians was known (224-651 CE), refers to a political unity which did not exist in the domains of the Samanids. How did such a concept, removed from its original geography, inform cultural identities? To what extent was the idea of "Iran" tied to a pre-Islamic geographical, political, and Zoroastrian religious concept, and how was it reinterpreted in a post-Abbasid world?

If the *Shahnama* tells the stories of a formerly unified Iran, how was this concept reinterpreted in a geographically fractured and religiously changing world? When delving into

the history of Khurasan and Transoxania, there are certain unanswered questions about language, history, and literature during the New Persian Renaissance that one must keep in mind as guiding questions:

- Why was the time ripe for a resurgence of Persian language and literature?
- Why were the lands of Khurasan and Transoxania the seeming location of this linguistic and literary movement?
- To what extent was language tied to individual, group, or cultural "identity"?

Shahnama and prose histories such as those of Bal'ami, Gardizi, and Beyhaqi helped lay the foundation for identities that have persisted until present day. This is not to say that there is a static Iranian identity that has existed since some "medieval" creation. Instead, ontological narrativity allows for a fluid and dynamic sense of identity. It is the interplay between narrative and lived experience that creates a sense of who one and one's society are, and it was the *Shahnama* that was the preeminent such narrative for the Eastern Islamic world after the New Persian Renaissance.

INTRODUCTION

By the ninth through eleventh centuries CE, the political power of the Abbasid Islamic Caliphate, based in Baghdad, had already begun to fracture. Provincial hereditary dynasties on the frontiers of the Islamic world began to rule locally, usually while still acknowledging the religious legitimacy of the Abbasids. These dynasties also continued the Islamic project of conquest and conversion. Dynasties such as the Tahirids, Saffarids, Buyids, and Samanids reigned over the lands of the Eastern Caliphate, including Khurasan and Transoxania, extending the reach of Islam beyond the traditionally Iranian, Zoroastrian world, and into Turkish areas of Central Asia. The *ghazis,* religious or frontier warriors, of the Samanid dynasty fought to conquer and convert, as well as often enslave, the peoples on the extreme edge of the Muslim world.[1] It was in this time and place, Samanid Khurasan, that the poet Ferdowsi began to compose his *Shahnama*, or "Book of Kings," a work often considered to be the Iranian national epic. Its verses record the history of the Iranian peoples from a mythical creation of the world through the end of the Sasanian Empire in the seventh century CE.[2] As well as its import as a singular creation, the *Shahnama* exemplifies the poetic aspects of a greater linguistic and cultural movement, which some scholars have termed the "New Persian Renaissance." Formally supported by Samanid and later Ghaznavid patronage, this "renaissance" was an attempt to record older aspects of Iranian culture, and to make this culture applicable and acceptable in a newly Islamic world. As the term implies, it was also notable for the language in which these works were written, which are some of our earliest examples of New Persian. The breakdown of central political authority allowed the Samanids, who belonged to an ancient Iranian class of minor nobility, known as *dehqans*, to retain their Iranian cultural identity along with their Muslim religious identity. It also allowed them to rule in what

1 Tor D.G, "The Islamization of Central Asia in the Sāmānid Era and the Reshaping of the Muslim World," *Bull. Sch. Orient. Afr. Stud. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72, no. 2 (2009): 280.

2 As Ferdowsi states within his work, his *Shahnama* is not a completely original work, and is only the most famous of an entire genre of *Shahnamas*. These works may also be traced back to the genre of Sasanian royal chronicles, or *Khwaday-namag*.

they considered to be an appropriately Iranian manner. The Samanid rulers considered themselves to be the descendants of the Iranian Sasanians, specifically the royal usurper Bahram Chobin. Despite this somewhat ignominious lineage, they apparently also considered themselves to be upholders of Iranian identity as displayed by the Sasanians. This is where the *Shahnama* plays a role in allowing them to both retain that identity and square it with their Islamic faith.

The *Shahnama* is an epic poem containing the deeds and putative words of kings and heroes. Who a culture chooses to idolize, to valorize, says very much about what values and traits it considers most important, regardless of the relative antiquity or even the actual existence of such heroes and kings. In the case of the *Shahnama*, saving these specific stories of heroes and kings was a very deliberate project, one conducted from the area surrounding the city of Tus in Khurasan. There exists a prose preface (the so-called "Older Preface") to a forerunner to Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* that details some of the motivations behind the compilation and composition of such works.

In tenth century Khurasan and Transoxania, at the frontier of the Iranian cultural world, where speakers of various Iranian languages and dialects interacted on a daily basis with nomadic and settled Turks and transplanted Arabs, these mythical and historical narratives helped to shape and maintain a sense of group Iranian identity for the Samanids and their vassals, despite the change of religion to Islam. The *Shahnama* can be considered what narrative theorist Margaret Somers terms an "ontological narrative." As she writes,

> Ontological narratives affect activities, consciousness, and beliefs and are, in turn, affected by them . . . so basic to agency is ontological narrativity that if we want to explain—that is, to know, to make sense of, to account for, perhaps even to predict, anything about the practices of social and historical actors, their collective actions, their modes and meanings of institution-building and group-formations, and their apparent incoherencies—we must first recognize the place of ontological narratives in social life.[3]

[3] Margaret R Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theor Soc*

These narratives helped tell Iranian Islamic dynasties such as the Samanids what it meant to be Iranian. Obviously, the very term "Iran," or "Iranshahr" as the empire of the Sasanians was known (224-651 CE), refers to a political unity which did not exist in the domains of the Samanids. How did such a concept, removed from its original geography, inform a cultural identity? To what extent was the very idea of "Iran" tied to a pre-Islamic geographical, political, and Zoroastrian religious concept, and how was it reinterpreted in a post-Abbasid world?[4] If the *Shahnama* tells the history and stories of a formerly unified Iran, how was this concept reinterpreted in a geographically fractured and religiously changing world? When delving into the history of Khurasan and Transoxania, there are certain unanswered questions about the trends and developments in language, history, and literature during the New Persian Renaissance that one must keep in mind as guiding questions:

- Why was the time ripe for a resurgence of Persian language and literature?
- Why were the lands of Khurasan and Transoxania the seeming location of this linguistic and literary movement?
- To what extent was language tied to individual, group, or cultural "identity"?

Under the later Umayyads and into the 'Abbasid era, the whole of the Islamic Caliphate

Theory and Society : Renewal and Critique in Social Theory 23, no. 5 (1994): 618. A special note should be made here about the influence of Thomas Sizgorich, both in personal conversations and in his own use of Margaret R. Somers' work in his *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), which inspired this approach to *Shahnama*. Ontological narratives differ from "origin stories" in that they are constantly reformulated by one's own experience and necessity, and while they contain historical information they are not static depictions of a world long past.

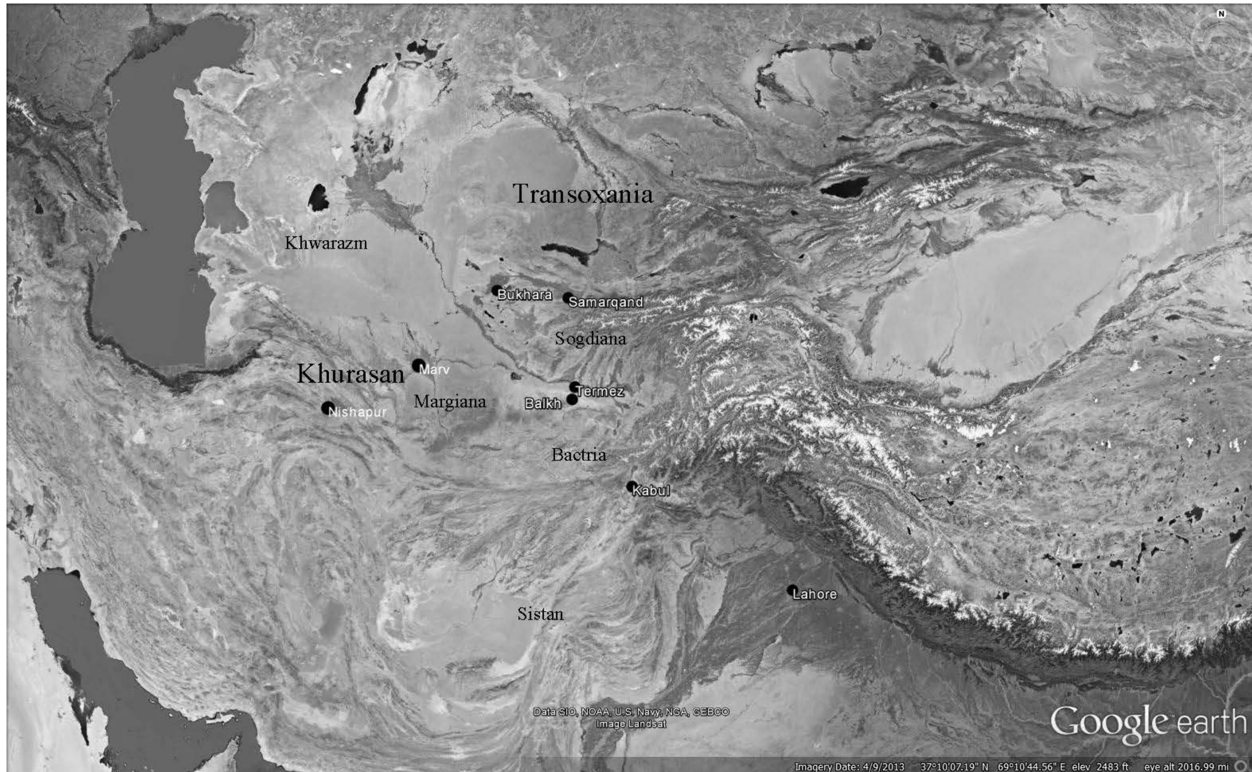
4 Both Richard N. Frye and Touraj Daryaee have written on the concept of Iran and Iranshahr and its relation to identity. See Richard N Frye, "Iranian Identity in Ancient Times," *Iranian Studies Iranian Studies* 26, no. 1–2 (1993): 143–46m and Touraj Daryaee, "The Idea of Eranshahr: Jewish, Christian and Manichaean Views in Late Antiquity," in *Iranian Identity in the Course of History: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Rome, 21-24 September 2005*, ed. Carlo G Cereti (Roma: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2010), 91–108. The change from Middle Persian to Arabic was not done all at once. As Bosworth writes, "until the *naql al-dīwān* decreed by 'Abd al-Malik in c. 697 CE, records of governmental transactions in Iraq and western Iran continued to be written in Persian language, and in the eastern provinces like Khorasan the change to Arabic was not made until 742 CE." C. Edmund. Bosworth, "The Persistent Older Heritage in the Medieval Iranian Lands," in *The Rise of Islam*, vol. IV of *The Idea of Iran,* ed. C. Edmund Bosworth, London Middle East Institute, and British Museum, "The Persistent Older Heritage in the Medieval Iranian Lands," in *The Rise of Islam*, ed. Curtis, Vesta Sarkhosh and Stewart, Sarah (London; New York; New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the London Middle East Institute at SOAS and the British Museum ; Distributed in the U.S. by Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 31.

used Arabic as the official language of state.[5] By the time the Samanids were promoted from a local position of power to regional governors near the end of the ninth century CE, Arabic had been both the language of government, and also of high culture, for at least a century and a half. Although other ethnically or culturally Iranian dynasties had arisen before the Samanids, it was under this dynasty that the linguistic and literary movement of the New Persian Renaissance took full flower. Although simplistic explanations abound for the rise of the movement, none of them can truly take into account all of the factors involved. The scholar A.C.S. Peacock has stated that "the renaissance of Persian language and literature in this period cannot be explained purely by reference to the ethnic origins of these rulers [the Samanids]. Neither the Tahirids nor the Saffarids, for very different reasons, promoted Persian literature seriously."[6] Although "ethnic" identity and mother tongue must have come into play, the rise of written New Persian, as opposed to the earlier written Middle Persian, and the literature written in it came about under what was very much an Islamic milieu.

[5] A. Afsahzod, "Persian Literature," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia. Volume IV, Part Two, Volume IV, Part Two,* ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Muhamed Sajfitdinovič Asimov (Paris: UNESCO publ., 2000), 369. The language of state business was changed from Middle Persian to Arabic at different times in the western and eastern domains of the caliphate, with the language of administration only switching to Arabic in Khurasan and Central Asia in 742 CE. See Michael G Morony, "Iran in the Early Islamic Period," in *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, ed. Touraj Daryaee (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 222. In the west, the change to Arabic took place some 40 years earlier, Gilbert Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," in *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye, vol. 4, The Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 602, http://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=http://histories.cambridge.org/book?id=chol9780521200936%5FCHOL9780521200936.

[6] A. C. S. Peacock, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Bal'ami's Tarikhnamah* (Routledge, 2007), 15.

Figure 1. Map of Central Asia



Sogdiana, Bactria, and Margiana are ancient political units that existed before Islam came to Central Asia. Khurasan and Transoxania are larger-scale Muslim-era geographical and political units.

The Samanids were a Muslim dynasty, fighting both infidels and heretics on the borders of the Islamic world. Their rise to power depended upon the support of both the *ulema* and the caliphate, and with their continued defense of orthodox Sunnism against Shi'ism and particularly Ismā'īlism.[7] Yet, despite this thoroughly Islamic context, a movement arose in Samanid lands away from Arabic, the language of Islamic holy texts. The Persian language spoken at the Samanid court began to be written in the Arabic script, signaling the genesis of what is

[7] By the time the Samanids became governors of Transoxania, the power of the Kharijites in the east, primarily in the more southernly region of Sistan, had already been broken by the Saffarids. Ismā'īlism in the east may have been the biggest worry of the caliphs and the *ulama*, and thus the Samanids as well, as "other forms of Shii'ism were, compared to Ismaa'iilism, ideologically benign." Even the Zaydi form of Shi'ism, which the Buyids may have originally epsoused, was "in most respects similar to Sunni Islam," Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 24.

considered to be "modern" or "New" Persian.[8] Examples of both poetry and prose written in New Persian abound from the Samanid era. In poetry, specifically, one can see the Persian character of not only the language but some of the imagery and ideals.

This is not to overemphasize the Iranian "character" of the poetry. It was all composed in a very much Islamic context, as one could imagine at the court of the staunch Sunni, specifically Hanafi, Samanids, who, according to Richard N. Frye, "readily accepted the Islamic values of state and society, only tolerating and then patronizing a revival of Iranian ideals in literature, almost as a side issue."[9] Even the poetry of the period is notable for its successful blending of Iranian and Islamic motifs, as N.N. Negmatov states that "the Tajik-Persian poets and people of culture extolled the history and culture of their own people without rejecting the cultural achievements of the Arabs."[10] As mentioned above, the Samanids were a dynasty of *dehqans*, a petty aristocracy, and as such were very much still connected with older Iranian ideals of culture. As Frye again states, "in Central Asia . . . at the small courts of the princelings the feudal, chivalric society continued to exist, if not to flourish, as it had in the past. Eastern Iran was then

8 Most scholars claim that this is the beginning of the rightfully lauded "classical Persian," while others choose to differentiate between this very early New Persian and the full classical flowering later. Afsahzod, for example, refers to the tenth century CE as the beginning of the classical period ("Persian Literature," 371), as does J.T.P. de Bruijn in a chapter in the first volume of the very recent *A History of Persian Literature.* See "Classical Persian Literature as a Tradition," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn, *A History of Persian Literature*, v. 1 (London ; New York : New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2. Gernot Windfuhr and John R. Perry, alternately, citing Ludwig Paul, choose to see "Classical Persian' as truly beginning in the early 14th century CE. See "Persian and Tajik," in *The Iranian Languages*, ed. Gernot Windfuhr (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 533. See Paul, "A Linguist's Fresh View on 'Classical Persian,'" in *Iran. Questions et Connaissances. Actes Du IVe Congrès Européen Des Études Iraniennes, Organisé Par La Societas Iranologica Europaea, Paris, 6-10 Septembre 1999 ī. Périodes Médiévale et Moderne*, ed. M. Szuppe (Paris: Peeters, 2002).

9 Richard N. Frye, "The New Persian Renaissance in Western Iran," in *Islamic Iran and Central Asia (7th-12th Centuries)* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), 229.

10 NN Negmatov, "The Samanid State," in *The Age of Achievement: AD 750 to the End of the Fifteenth Century, I: The Historical, Social and Economic Setting*, ed. Muhamed Sajfitdinovič Asimov and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, vol. 1, History of Civilizations of Central Asia 4 (Paris: UNESCO publ., 2000), 88.

the refuge of the old traditions which provided the background for Ferdosi and his *Shahnama.*"[11] Although Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* provides the exemplar and culmination for the revival of Iranian cultural history in poetry, he was far from the first poet to use this older imagery in his work. He was also not the first writer or poet to compose *Shahnama*, a name which was given to an entire genre of literature. Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* was neither the first or last *Shahnama*, but far and away the most beloved and remembered.

Poets such as Rudaki and Daqiqi were court poets of the Samanid domains who predated Ferdowsi.[12] In fact, Daqiqi is said to have composed a small section of Ferdowsi's *Shahnama.* Unlike Rudaki and Daqiqi, Ferdowsi was not an official court poet in the Samanid domains. Instead, he composed his *Shahnama* independently over several decades, apparently with the hope of later recompense. He started his work during the time of the Samanids, although his final version was not completed until after the Samanid dynasty had fallen and Mahmūd of Ghazna had taken over their domains in the early eleventh century CE. Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* is truly epic in scope. In sheer length, the work is longer than both Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* put together.[13] One can easily imagine that the work took half a lifetime to compose, as we are told.

11 Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1963), 235.

12 The birthplace of Rudaki is a matter of some dispute, with Tajik academics generally claiming a birthplace near Panjikent, in medieval Transoxania and modern Tajikistan, while others believe he was born near Balkh, in modern Afghanistan. Regardless, we know that Rudaki was a court poet of the Samanids, whose main capital was in Bukhara (which, although located in modern Uzbekistan, is one of the crown jewels of medieval Tajik/Iranian civilization). Daqiqi, on the other hand, although originally patronized by the Mohtājid rulers of Chaghāniyān. See J Meisami, "Genres of Court Literature," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn, A History of Persian Literature, v. 1 (London ; New York : New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 239.Daqiqi was then invited to the Samanid court by Nuh ī b. Mansur. See Richard N Frye, "The Samanids," in *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Frye, Richard N, vol. 4, The Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 154.

13 Although the length of various manuscript texts of the *Shahnama* varies, due possibly to later additions to the poem that were added by later copyists, the commonly accepted text of the work is approximately 60,000 distiches in length. Each distich consists of two lines (*beyti*), of a specific number of syllables, which rhyme. Persian meter is generally accepted to be based on the number of syllables per line, rather than the number of stresses.

***Older Preface to the* Shahnama**

The so-called Older Preface to the *Shahnama* did not originally belong to that work as we now know it. Although now attached to Ferdowsi's poetic version of the history of Iran, it was likely the preface to a pre-existing prose work of the same name.[14] Tradition states that this prose *Shahnama* was then versified by Ferdowsi, but the prose has since been lost. As such, the Older Preface may be the oldest remaining work of prose in modern Persian. In it, the author or authors of the prose *Shahnama* outlined its history and patrons, as well as their motivations. It details why persons would choose to compile and record stories of ancient times and people, forming a fundamental or an "ontological narrative" of the Iranian peoples, as Somers defines it.

As the preface states, "because people in this world become greater and richer through knowledge and because they realize that nothing will remain permanent, they will strive so that their name will remain and their lineage will not be broken."[15] The idea of an "unbroken lineage" here is perhaps most important. It is not simply genealogy, the names of one's ancestors, but their deeds and purported words that were recorded in both the prose and poetic *Shahnama*. The Samanid dynasty, as well as many of the lords who ruled beneath them as their vassals, explicitly

[14] There is still some scholarly disagreement over the origins of the stories that are contained within the *Shahnama*. Scholars such as Mahmoud Omidsalar in his "Unburdening Ferdowsi" argue that the traditional story of the origins of these materials, as stated in the Older Preface to the work, are likely true. The preface states that Ferdowsi versified a pre-existing prose version of the *Shahnama*, which had been gathered together by Abu Mansur Ma'mari, under the orders of Abu Mansur Abd al-Razzaq. See Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky, *The Older Preface to the "Shāh-Nāma" [of Firdausī]. Estratto Da Studi Orientalistici in Onore Di Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Etc. [With a Translation of the Text.].* (Institute per l'Oriente: Roma, 1956), 167–169. Other scholars such as Olga Davidson, in her *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ Pr, 1994). *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), and Dick Davis in his "The Problem of Ferdowsi's Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society.* 116, no. 1 (1996): 48–57. argue instead for earlier oral poetry as the basis of the material. Regardless of which origin one believes, many of the literate elite *dehqans* were likely familiar with at least some of the stories of the *Shahnama* before Ferdowsi composed or compiled his epic.

[15] Muhammad Qazvini, *Bist Maqala-I Qazvini* (Tehran: Tihrān Intišārāt-i Anğuman-i Zartuštiyān-i Īrānī-i Bumbai, 1950), 30–31. I would like to include a special thanks and credit here to Dr. Touraj Daryaee, Mehmet Alici, and Alexander Jabbari for the months we spent reading and attempting to translate this Persian work into English. All English translations here are the result of our reading, rather than Vladimir Minorsky's translation.

stated an Iranian noble or royal lineage.[16] As aforementioned, the Samanid dynasty traced their lineage (whether real or falsified), back to a Sasanian noble (and royal usurper) named Bahram Chubin, and Abu Mansur abd ar-Razzaq, the lord of Tus in Khurasan (near modern Mashhad in Iran), chose to portray his lineage as tracing all the way back to Gayomart, the very first man in Zoroastrian mythology.[17] The Preface goes on to detail some of the men and methods behind the compilation of the work, how messengers were sent out from the court of Tus to "bring books from the landed gentry, wise men, and worldly men."[18] A group of scholars from the cities of Khurasan were brought to Tus by his wazir, Abu Mansur Mo'amari, who "sat them down to bring forth the books of the kings and their deeds, and the lives of each one; of justice and injustice, of peace and war, and the customs of the first kings who were in this world, who brought forth human customs and made humanity distinct from the animals."[19] These recorded deeds and customs help tell us what aspects of pre-Islamic Iranian identity and culture these men considered to be worth saving, and why.

The Preface also states that these actions took place in 957 CE, firmly within the reign of the Samanids, although far from the main court at Bukhara, and before Ferdowsi was to have

[16] Interestingly enough, in his recent disseration, Robert Joseph Haug claims that although all Iranian dynasties flaunted (or fabricated) their Persian genealogies, they did not do this for the purposes of political power. Haug states that "The independent eastern dynasties all attempted to connect themselves to a notable pre-Islamic lineage, but they only succeeded in gaining power by connecting themselves to notable figures of Islamic history," "The Gate of Iron: The Making of the Eastern Frontier." 2010, 312, http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/78928.. He clarifies his point, writing "while a genealogy which connected the Tahirids or the Samanids to the heroes and kings of pre-Islamic Iran helped to *solidify* their positions of power over the regions they ruled, these were not necessarily the means by which they achieved their positions of power" (Ibid., 313,added emphasis mine). We will see several examples of these genealogies in the coming chapters.

[17] Qazvini, *Bist Maqala-i Qazvini*, 67–68.

[18] Ibid., 34.
ابومنصور المعمری را بفرموذ تا خداوندان کتب را از دهقانان و فرزانگان و جهاندیذگان از شهرها بیاوردند

[19] Ibid., 35.
بنشاند بفراز آوردن این نامه های شاهان و کارنامه هاشان و زنگانی هر یکی از داذ و بیداذ و آشوب و جنگ و آیین از کی نخستین که اندر جهان او بوذ که آیین مردی آورد و مردمان از جنوران پدیذ آورد

begun his own work.[20] The compilers "named this *Shahnama*, so that wise lords may look in it and can find all of the following in the book: the culture of kings and grandees and the learned, kingly affairs and acts, their affairs and the nature of their behavior, of good manners and justice and judgement, the decisions and execution of the affairs of office."[21] In this sense, the stories of the *Shahnama* can be considered as didactic literature as well as epic poetry.[22] As the preface also shows, Iranian elites in Central Asia were not above a little onomastic legerdemain in order to reconcile their Iranian culture and heritage with their new Islamic faith. Even though the Lord of Tus chose to begin his genealogy with Gayomart, the first Zoroastrian man, the Preface also states that "some people call Adam Gayomart,"[23] therefore making such a noble Iranian (Zoroastrian) lineage also Islamically acceptable.[24] Before we delve deeper into the intellectual and cultural context of the *Shahnama*, this introductory chapter will set the scene in Iranian Central Asia before the time of the New Persian Renaissance.

Physical geography

Central Asia is an area of geographic and topographic complexity and diversity. A region of the Eurasian continental mass where numerous extremes of physical geography collide and blend, over the last several millennia the region has led the lands of Khurasan and Transoxania, sometimes referred to as "Inner" and "Outer" Khurasan, or simply together as "Greater Khurasan," to be divided into a bewildering mix of different political and cultural geographies,

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[20] The city and region of Tus were historically ruled by a family carrying the hereditary title of "Kanarang," who were likely descended from earlier Bactrian or Tocharian stock. Cite this.

[21] Qazvini, *Bist Maqala-i Qazvini*, 36–37.
این را نام شاهنامه نهاذند تا خداوندان دانش اندرین نگاه کنند و فرهنگ شاهان و آیین هاش نیکو و داذ و داوری و رای و راندن کار [و]
سپاه آواستن
و [رزم کردن و شهر گشاذن و کین خواستن و شبیخون کردن و آزرم داشتن] و خواستاری کردن این همه را بذین نامه اندر بیابند

[22] As we shall see later, in Chapter 3, none of the people involved in the project would likely have even attempted to distinguish between these two genres of literature. To them, all literature was likely didactic in nature.

[23] Qazvini, *Bist Maqala-i Qazvini*, 37–38.

[24] More on this in chapter 4.

where different languages, religions, and styles of life have met and intermixed in productive (and sometimes destructive) fashions. Sogdia, Bactria, Tocharistan, Khwarazm, Margiana, and Sistan are just some of the many names that have been applied to parts of Greater Khurasan. Fertile river valleys and deltas rub shoulders with inhospitable deserts, rugged mountains, and grassy steppelands, just as empires, amirates, and principalities of sedentary agricultural and urban civilization have existed next to nomadic confederations of tribes. The Amu Darya (also known as the Oxus, or Jayhun, River) and the Syr Darya (Jaxartes, Sayhun) and their many tributaries run as threads of fertile and irrigable land near the Karakum and Kyzlkum deserts, which with their oases have never proved to be imporous barriers to trade and to the intermixing of civilizations. The lands which the Samanid amirs ruled over during their peak in the tenth century CE, which included most of Khurasan and Transoxania (in Arabic, *ma wara nahr*), as well as Sistan to the south, butted in the north against the traditional realm of pastoral, horse-riding nomads of one stripe or another, the great Eurasian steppes which stretch from the Crimea and modern Hungary in the west to Manchuria and Siberia in the north and east.[25] Towards the south, in sections of what now form the modern post-Soviet Republic of Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan, rugged mountain ranges are added to the mix.

Unlike the great unbroken geography of the steppelands, the south and east of Transoxania is dominated by the great knot of the Pamirs, a region of arid plateaus and mountains from which stretch forth many of Eurasia's greatest mountain ranges, among them the Hindu Kush, Tien Shan, and perhaps even the Himalayas.[26] This rugged topography and difficulty of travel has lent itself over the centuries to the formation at times of smaller,

[25] Haug, “The Gate of Iron,” 13–14.
[26] There appears to be no firm scholarly consensus on this last point.

autonomous or even independent political units, as well as a refuge for persons and peoples escaping the reach of the greater empires.[27] In what is now the western section of Tajikistan, the smaller range of the Hissar ("fortress") mountain range likely provided a natural border between Sogdia (or Sogdiana) to the north and Bactria (Bactriana, later also known as Tukharistan) to the south, two ancient political, linguistic, and cultural units that were to form the heartland of the Samanid domains.[28] It is with these two somewhat amorphous entities of antiquity which we will begin an examination of the political geography of Khurasan and Transoxania in the millennia of human history prior to Samanid rule.

Pre-Islamic Central Asia

Political geography

First, one should be wary about transposing the modern notion of "borders" to political and cultural units of such great antiquity. The idea of borders as "lines on a map," patrolled and guarded by soldiers and police, simply does not describe well the way that political authority operated before the modern era. Instead, at least for more sedentary and settled civilizations, political authority tended to radiate outwards from capitals and major cities, diminishing with the distance from these residences of kings and amirs. Even what we think of as "natural" borders and frontiers, such as large mountain ranges or mighty rivers, may not have served as

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[27] Muriel Atkin, "Religious, National, and Other Identities in Central Asia," in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Gross, Jo-Ann (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 48. To a perhaps somewhat lesser extent, one could also say the same about the topography of Iran proper, a fact that probably helped lead to the development of separate Western and Eastern Iranian languages, and the cultural differences between various groups of Iranians. As Kamyar Abdi writes, "unlike Mesopotamia or Egypt, where indigenous cultures evolved in a more or less sequential fashion in compact river valleys, Iran's broken topography poses major obstacles to uniform sociocultural development. High mountain ridges and large expanses of inhospitable deserts divide Iran into several largely distinct environmental zones, each with its own local cultural configuration and social trajectory, changing over time in different modes and tempos," Kamyar Abdi, "The Iranian Plateau from Paleolithic Times to the Rise of the Achaemenid Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, ed. Touraj Daryaee (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12.

[28] Grégoire Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia.* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 54.

delineations as concretely as we may like to think.[29] Transoxania, the "land beyond the river Oxus,"[30] and sometimes treated as though it were a land between two rivers (Amu Darya and Syr Darya), a kind of Central Asian Mesopotamia, often in reality extended in practice beyond the Syr Darya, and into the steppe. In the tenth century CE, the bounds of this region were more likely considered to be religious and cultural rather than political, describing how far Islam and Islamicate culture penetrated into the Eurasian steppe.[31] Transoxania may even at times have been considered to extend all the way to Kashgar and the edge of the Chinese cultural world.[32] Even the awesome Hindu Kush, named for its ability to kill the denizens of the South Asian subcontinent who dared to attempt to cross it, was rarely or never an effective political border.[33] Correspondingly, the historical borders of regions such as Sogdia and Bactria are perhaps not as clear as we would like them to be, waxing and waning with the political and human reality of the day.

Transoxania, in the simplest and least specific terms, occupies a large section of Central Asia generally north of the Hissar range, centered around its historically major city (and often capital) of Samarkand. The city of Samarkand is located along the Zerafshan (formerly Sughd) river in what is today the nation of Uzbekistan. In ancient times, the Zerafshan was a tributary of the Amu Darya, although it no longer reaches that far before trickling away to nothingness. Sogdia's political and cultural authority usually included the valley along the Kashka Darya river

29 We will examine roughly contemporaraneous ideas of geography in greater detail in Chapter 3.

30 The Arabic name, ماوراء النهر , also simply means 'what lies beyond the river.' See Bosworth, C.E., "MĀ WARĀʾ AL-NAHR," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, n.d., http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mawara-al-nahr.

31 Haug, "The Gate of Iron," 61.

32 Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 11 Kindle edition.

33 Arnold Toynbee, *Between Oxus and Jumna* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), vi. One can see this easily simply by reading of the exploits of Mahumud of Ghazna, with his near-annual raids from Ghazna over the mountains into the subcontinent.

as well, with its cities of Kisha and Nakhshab.[34] The Kashka Darya is another river which runs roughly parallel to the Zarafshan in Transoxania. To be more specific, the Sogdian region along the Zarafshan River extended from its eastern center of Samarqand to its western center in Bukhara, a distance of nearly 750 km (or more than 450 miles).[35] Studies of Sogdian currency and numismatics show that, at least during the fourth to seventh centuries, political authority of Sogdia may have included these regions and reached as far northeast as the Chach kingdom centered around modern Tashkent.[36] Sogdia extended south to the Hissar range, and perhaps even beyond to the city of Tirmiz on the Amu Darya, which at one point was considered the boundary between Sogdia and Bactria.[37] Opinions vary, however, although this may simply be a case of the "border" shifting during many centuries.

As Gregoire Frumkin has stated, "in the opinion of Soviet archaeologists, ancient Bactria extended northwards beyond the Oxus (Amu-Darya), and consequently included territories of the present Uzbekistan and of Western Tadzhikistan as far as the Hissar range."[38] Regardless of the exact boundary of the political and cultural authority of these two regions, a convenient natural

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[34] Marshak, BI and Raspopova, VI, "Research of Sogdian Civilization in Penjikent͡, Tajikistan," in *New Archaeological Discoveries in Asiatic Russia and Central Asia*͡, ed. A. G͡ Kozintsev and V. M Masson͡ (Sankt-Peters͡burg͡ [sic]: Institut istorī material'noĭ kul'tury (Rossiĭskai͡a akademīa nauk) and Mezhdunarodnai͡a assotsiatsīa "Vsemirnyĭ arkheologicheskiĭ kongress.," 1994), 79.

[35] And as Luke Treadwell points out, the Zarafshan valley and the heart of Sogdia itself was under constant threat of raid and invasion from the nomadic tribes of the steppe beyond. See "The Samanids: The First Islamic Dynasty of Central Asia," in *Early Islamic Iran*, ed. Edmund Herzig and Sarah Stewart, vol. 5, The Idea of Iran (London; New York; New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the London Middle East Institute at SOAS and the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford ; Distributed in the United States and Canada exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4–5.

[36] Joe Cribb, "Money as a Arker of Cultural Continuity and Change in Central Asia," in *After Alexander: Central Asia before Islam*, ed. Joe Cribb and Georgina Herrmann (Oxford; New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2007), 371.

[37] Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 96. In the early Islamic era, after the destruction of the Eastern Turkish qaghanate in approximately 630 CE, "the fortification at the Iron Gate of Derbent was functioning and meant to protect not Sogdiana from Tukharistan, but Turkahristan from Sogdiana, and it belonged to the kingdom of Chaganian," Frantz Grenet, "The Self-Image of the Sogdians," in *Les sogdiens en Chine*, ed. Eric Trombert and Étienne de La Vaissière (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2005), 131–132.

[38] Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia.*, 55.

landmark does appear to have lain between them, that of the so-called “Iron Gates.” This pass through the Baisun-tau Mountains, which form part of the western extremities of the Hissar range, again and again has shown up as an important waypoint throughout history for traders and raiders alike.[39] Soviet archaeological exploration claims to have pinpointed these “gates” approximately 3km west of the modern Uzbek village of Darband, in the Shurobsoy Valley.[40] As well as its probable import as a pathway for Sogdian traders along one of the so-called “Silk Roads,” early tenth century CE Islamic sources detail its use as a pathway for nomadic raiding into the heartland of the Samanid territories. Robert Joseph Haug, in his University of Michigan dissertation “Gates of Iron: The Making of the Eastern Frontier,” details its mention in geographic works of the time.[41]

Although perhaps known most widely for their role as peripatetic merchants throughout Central Asia, the Sogdians' role as city founders and as developers of settled agriculture in their domain cannot be ignored, especially as by the time of the Samanids these cities had come to form a bulwark of Perso-Islamicate culture and civilization along the long frontier with Turkish nomads. The antiquity of the Sogdian capital, Samarqand, is undeniable, although its great age has led to its exact founding and origins being lost in the sands of time. Several different stories of its founding, of varying degrees of probability, are known. All, however, speak to its antiquity. As Frumkin again relates, one major Soviet-era opinion declared that the oldest part of

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[39] Zavyalov, VA, “Zar-Tepe: A Kushanian Town in Southern Uzbekistan,” in *New Archaeological Discoveries in Asiatic Russia and Central Asia*, ed. A. G Kozint͡sev and V. M Masson (Sankt-Petersburg [sic]: [publisher not identified], 1994), 67.

[40] Rakhmanov, SA, Institut istorī material′noĭ kul′tury (Rossiĭskai͡a akademī͡a nauk), and Mezhdunarodnai͡a assot͡siat͡sī͡a “Vsemirnyĭ arkheologicheskiĭ kongress.,” “The Wall between Bactria and Sogd: The Study on the Iron Gates, Uzbekistan,” in *New Archaeological Discoveries in Asiatic Russia and Central Asia*, ed. A. G Kozint͡sev and V. M Masson (Sankt-Petersburg [sic]: [publisher not identified], 1994), 75. The Derbent in Surkhandarya Province, Uzbekistan, is not to be confused with that in Dagestan, Russia.

[41] Haug, “The Gate of Iron,” 16–18.

Samarqand (known in modern times as “Afrasiab,” after a Turanian ruler who makes an appearance as a major villain in Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*) may date from the sixth or fifth century BCE, and was damaged by the invading armies of Alexander the Macedonian in 329 BCE.[42] VV Barthold, in his *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasions*, relates a local legend that claims a much greater age for the site. This tradition, recorded in the thirteenth century CE, claims that by the time of the Arab invasions under Qutayba ibn Muslim in the early eighth century CE the city was already 2,250 years old.[43] Regardless of the actual age of Samarqand, and whether it was founded by the Sogdians or by an earlier group, its import throughout our recorded history is clear. The agricultural hinterlands of Samarqand, with their “elaborate systems of irrigation without which the oases of the arid Oxus basin could not have supported an extensive civilization,” are just as important for allowing the city to remain, and usually flourish, throughout the centuries of recorded history.[44] By the time of the Samanid reign, the actual physical form and defenses of Samarqand and the other major cities of their territories reflected local recognition of this importance.

As Haug, in his in-depth examination of the physical layout of cities and fortifications of the Samanid frontier details how cities such as Samarqand and Balkh, the main city of Bactria, consisted of large concentric walls that were designed not just to defend the city center but regions of agricultural land in the surrounding regions. Samarqand, in particular, was particularly well defended in this way by at least three concentric walls. The largest, outer wall surrounded

42 Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia.*, 123.

43 V. V Bartol'd, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion, with an Additional Chapter, Hitherto Unpublished in English*, ed. Bosworth, CE, trans. Minorsky, T, Third (London: For EJW Gibb Memorial by Luzac and Co., 1968), 84. This particular legend, as Barthold points out, has some issues with temporal continuity, claiming that in those nearly 2,300 years only thirteen kings had ruled, in an uninterrupted fashion. He also mentions a separate legend stating that Alexander of Macedon himself may have founded the city

44 John R Perry and Rachel Lehr, “Introduction,” in *The Sands of Oxus: Boyhood Reminiscences of Sadriddin Aini*, by Sadriddin Aĭnī, trans. John R Perry and Rachel Lehr (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1998), 8.

not only the city center but irrigated agricultural lands and suburbs as well, some 6,000 plots in all. Twelve gates with defensive towers ringed the perimeter. An inner wall surrounded the city center and the suburbs, consisting of an inner 5,000 plots of land. The innermost wall protected the city center and the sultan's (or amir's) personal residence, which was placed in the ancient *quhandiz*.[45] The quhandiz was a particular type of fortification which was common throughout pre-Islamic Central Asia, a citadel which seemed to be part of a network of small fortresses spread throughout the region to help protect the sedentary population and wealth from nomadic raids.[46] Other cities, such as Balkh and Marv in Khurasan, seemed to have similar styles of fortifications. Marv's *quhandiz* had similar local stories about its antiquity, and certain histories claimed to trace its founding all the way back to the mythical dynasties of ancient Iran.[47]

The city of Balkh, known by the Greeks in antiquity as Bactra and somewhat later as Tocharistan, the capital city of the region of Bactria, was known to have massive walls surrounding it and protecting it from invaders. The remains of these walls were still evident in the mid-twentieth century CE, and sections are likely still extant today. During his travels throughout the region in the 1960's, the British world historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee waxed poetic about the "titanic remains of its mud walls . . . Balkh has been one of the greatest cities in the World for about eighty-five per cent of the time that has passed since such a thing as civilization first came into existence some 5000 years ago. It is only within the last 750 years that

45 Haug, "The Gate of Iron," 118. Despite the impressive size of Samarqand's walls, they are no longer standing, having been razed by the Mongols in approximately 1220, along with those of Bukhara and other cities, George E. Lane, "The Mongols in Iran," in *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, ed. Touraj Daryaee (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 247.

46 Perhaps the most impressive fact about the city of Afrasiyab and its walls is that everything appears to have built at once. Citing Russian scholars Shiskhina, Suleimanov, and Koshelenko, W.J. Vogelsang believes that Afrasiyab "seems to have been built *ex novo* sometime around the mid-first millennium BC," W. J Vogelsang, *The Rise and Organisation of the Achaemenid Empire: The Eastern Iranian Evidence* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1992), 288.

47 Haug, "The Gate of Iron," 106.

Balkh has fallen on evil days," centuries after it was one of the prized cities of the Samanid domains. The walls had protected the city and its agricultural hinterland for millennia, and it was only the depredations of post-Samanid Turco-Mongolian warlords such as Tamerlane and Genghiz Khan himself that started to reduce its importance. Toynbee again writes that "the two war-lords could wreck Balkh's irrigation-system and massacre the city's inhabitants. Yet, after each of these first two catastrophes, the survivors would repair the canals, patch up the breaches in the walls, and set Balkh going again, at however greatly reduced a level of vitality. It had not yet occurred to anyone that the oasis watered by the Balkh River could have any other capital city than Balkh itself," and that it was only the growing importance of Mazar-e Sharif that had knocked this city from among the crown jewels of Central Asian urban life.[48] Just as Samarqand had been the center of Sogdia and its civilization, Balkh had been the center of Bactrian life, as Marv had also been the center of Margiana in Khurasan.[49] Moving westward towards the modern Iranian world from Transoxania, it is now to Khurasan proper to which we turn our geographic attention.

Although "Khurasan" is still the name used for the northeastern province of modern Iran,[50] even the smaller "Inner Khurasan" of antiquity was larger than this modern province. As Patricia Crone writes in her latest work on Iranian religion and revolt in the early Islamic era, "in the narrow sense, Khurasan was the region between Nishapur and the river Oxus (Jayhun, Amu

[48] Toynbee, *Between Oxus and Jumna*, 95.

[49] As we will see in Chapter 3, for medieval Islamic geographers the province and its central city were very much one and the same, as they had a tendency to conflate the metropole and its entire hinterland by using the same name for both.

[50] As Frederick Starr points out in his recent work, the name itself denotes its status as the eastern extent of Iran, as Khurasan actually means "land of the [rising] sun," S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane*, 2013, 6, http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1275333, (*x*^{w}*arr-* "sun" + *-ostān* "land, province of" = *Khurasan*)

Darya) which had its capital in Marw, plus the northwestern part of what is now Afghanistan."[51] Today much of this region is within the bounds of the modern nation of Turkmenistan. Even when defined narrowly, however, Khurasan was often necessarily linked to its frontier zone of Transoxania, likely because of the agricultural production of that land between rivers. When political or military conditions inhibited trade between "Inner" and "Outer" Khurasan, as it sometimes did in this perpetually tumultuous region, famine would oft result in Khurasan and even in more western regions of Iran, as in 733 CE or perhaps in 816-17 CE as well.[52] As alluded to before, it was perhaps this trade from and through the region of Transoxania that was its most lasting import on the Eurasian world, both before and after the times of Samanid rule.

Silk Road and Commerce

As has been laid out by Khodadad Rezakhani in his work on the so-called "Silk Road," there probably never existed a single great road[53] leading through the Eurasian landmass along which trade passed on its way between its western ends in Europe, and what may have been its easternmost terminus in Nara, the old capital of Japan.[54] Instead, there were several well-worn routes that may have been used by traders. In Central Asia, the caravans carrying silk, ideas, and other precious commodities both material and intangible bifurcated, bypassing the Tarim River basin between the Tien Shan and Kunlun mountains. As Rene Grousset elucidated in his history

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51 Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 11.

52 Bartolʹd, *Turkestan*, 210.

53 K Rezakhani, "The Road That Never Was: The Silk Road and Trans-Eurasian Exchange," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2011): 420–33. As Rezakhani states, "I am suggesting not only that the concept of a continuous, purpose-driven road or even 'routes' is counterproductive in the study of world history but also that it has no basis in historical reality or records" (Ibid., 420).

54 Baipakov, KM, "The Great Silk Way: Studies in Kazakhstan," in *New Archaeological Discoveries in Asiatic Russia and Central Asia*, ed. A. G Kozint͡sev and V. M Masson (Sankt-Petersburg [sic]: Institut istorī materialʹnoĭ kulʹtury (Rossiĭskai͡a akademī͡a nauk) and Mezhdunarodnai͡a assotsiat͡sī͡a "Vsemirnyĭ arkheologicheskiĭ kongress.," 1994), 87–93.

of Central Asia, "the northern route ran through Tunhwang, Hami, Turfan, Kara Shahr, Kucha, Kashgar, the Fergana basin, and Transoxania; the southern, by way of Tunhwang, Khotan, Yarkand, the Pamir valleys, and Bactria."[55] From these westward endpoints, the trade caravans may have been able to pass from Bactria through Tarmita, or Old Termez, through our old friend the Iron Gate and northward into the Kashka Darya valley of Sogdia.[56] As Sogdians were even more renowned than Bactrians as traders, and travel along the northern steppe regions may have been easier than the southerly route, the northern fork may have been the most well-traveled.[57] It was, in fact, the Sogdians who appear to have been the primary traders on the Central Asian section of the Silk Roads,[58] and this seems to be apparent from their effects on the written languages of the region, even before the New Persian Renaissance was birthed in what had been the heartland of their domains.

A Brief Note on Linguistics

As is Khwarazmian, Bactrian, and even modern Pashto[59] and Baluch, Sogdian was an Eastern Iranian language, from the same geographic language family that may have earlier spawned Old and Young Avestan.[60] In this way, it differed in origin from the Western Iranian

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55 René Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes; a History of Central Asia.* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970), xxī.

56 Zavyalov, VA, "Zar-Tepe: A Kushanian Town in Southern Uzbekistan," 67.

57 Baipakov, KM, "The Great Silk Way: Studies in Kazakhstan," 92.

58 See Étienne de La Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History*, trans. Ward, James (Brill, 2005). As de La Vaissiére writes, prior to the 6th century CE, we have a "long protohistory whose examination enables us to give an account of the Sogdian commercial monopoly among the Türks" (Ibid., 199.), and by the 6th and 7th centuries CE we can see how even Tukharistan and Bactria had entered the Sogdian economic orbit (Ibid., 181.

59 Although there is complete consensus on Pashto's Eastern Iranian character, its origins are are uncertain. As Sergei Andreyev writes, "It seems impossible to establish exact dates for the beginning of Pashto literature. According to local tradition the oldest available poem in Pashto dates back to the eighth century CE. It is included in a compendium of Pashto popular poetry and anecdotes" that claimed to be compiled in the 18th century, but is now widely accepted to be a forgery from the 1940s. See "Pashto Literature: The Classical Period," in *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages: Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik : Companion Volume II to A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Philip G Kreyenbroek and Ulrich Marzolph, vol. 18 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 91.

60 Interestingly, Eastern Iranian languages can be found as far west as the Caucasus, as the modern Ossetic spoken

Middle Persian of the Sasanian Empire, although it likely had a significant effect on the development of Modern Persian from its Middle Persian origins. However, like Middle Persian Pahlavi, Sogdian, too, was written in an alphabet derived from Aramaic, at least by the fourth century CE.[61] As alluded to earlier, ideas as well as goods traveled along the Silk Roads with their merchants. The Aramaic script is just one of these many ideas, which throughout history has also included religions as diverse as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism, and finally Islam.[62] Eastern Iranian peoples traded, conversed, cooperated and came to blows with Turks, Chinese, Tibetans, and later Arabs. As Crone again writes, "Sogdian was the *lingua franca* of the roads in Central Asia, just as Persian was the *lingua franca* of the southern seas. The Sogdians also served as political advisers and soldiers to the Turks, on whom their influence was enormous."[63] The Aramaic or Syriac-based script in which Sogdian was then written may have passed from Pahlavi to various languages in much of the Central and even South Asian world.[64]

in parts of Georgia and its breakaway provinces are descended from the Eastern Iranian language spoken by the Alan tribes in antiquity, which was itself closely related to Sogdian. See Thordarson, Fridrik et al., "Ossetic Literature," in *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages: Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik : Companion Volume II to A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Philip G Kreyenbroek and Ulrich Marzolph, vol. 18 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 199.

61 The Sogdian alphabet, a "reduced" version of Aramaic, was then later transmitted to the Uyghurs, and likely other Turkish peoples as well. SeeGyörgy Kara, "Aramaic Scripts for Altaic Languages," in *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. Peter T Daniels and William Bright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 539. In fact, not only the Sogdians, but other Northern Iranians as well "transmitted different forms [such as the Middle Persian Pahlavi, Syriac, or Manichaean variants] of the Aramaic alphabet to the ancient Turks" and others, with a non-cursive version of Sogdian script even inspiring the ancient Turkish runiform alphabet (Ibid., 536). The Sogdian language itself also had influences upon Turkish, as "many Turkish words are of Sogdian origin, most of them belonging to the field of religion," Gerhard Doerfer, "The Influence of Persian Language and Literature among the Turks," in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, ed. Richard G Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 238.

62 See Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) for an overview of the transmission of religious ideas along the Silk Roads. Jerry Bentley's *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) is another important and useful work on the subject.

63 Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 100.

64 Although there is a considerable amount of debate on the topic, an Aramaic or other early Semitic script may have had a significant influence on the development of the Brahmi script in South Asia, which in turn influenced

As we can see above, commercial and intellectual contacts between western Iran and the Eastern Iranian Central Asian world were many. However, how closely were these two parts of the greater Iranian cultural world linked in a cultural, social, or even political sense? Off and on through the centuries, we know that areas such as Bactria were politically linked to the rest of Iran, as we know Bactria was an Achaemenid satrapy, as was Sogdia, although this was far from a stable situation.[65] Culturally, rather than being simply an eastern outpost of "Persian" identity, scholars such as Richard Frye seem to think that by Achaemenid times the area known as Sogdia was, in fact, Sogdian. Frye seemed to believe that an Eastern Iranian "identity" may predate a western one. He wrote that "by the time of Darius at the end of the 6th century BC, the eastern Iranians probably had fully absorbed the native populations, such that all the inhabitants between the Oxus or Amu Darya and the Jaxartes or Syr Darya could be considered Sogdians, whereas in western Iran, in Persis and in Media the process of assimilation was not completed."[66] We know that throughout the Achaemenid period the eastern satrapies and the fringe of Transoxania remained contentious. At the end of the Achaemenid period, with the conquests of Alexander of Macedonia, a period of Greek settlement and a certain amount of cultural Hellenization began. Although details are somewhat unclear, it appears likely that Alexander and his men likely founded or radically changed the faces of at least some of the towns and cities. According to Soviet-era archaeologists, the town of Khojand (Khodzhent, formerly Leninabad, on the Syr

scripts as far afield as Burmese, Thai, Lao, Khmer. See Richard G Salomon, "Brahmi and Kharoshthi," in *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. Peter T Daniels and William Bright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 373-378. Aramaic may also have influenced South Asian Devanagari. See William Bright, "The Devanagari Scrip," in *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. Peter T Daniels and William Bright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 384.

[65] Yoshida, Yutaka, "Sogdian," in *The Iranian Languages*, ed. Gernot Windfuhr (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 279.

[66] Frye, "Iranian Identity in Ancient Times," 145.

Darya in northern Tajikistan) may have originally have been known as Alexandria Eschate, or "furthest Alexandria."[67] However, Khojand is not the only city to claim this distinction, so this is still a matter of some dispute. Regardless, further south we see the founding of what are sometimes known as the "Greco-Bactrian kingdoms." One should not be too hasty in assigning too much weight and importance to the Greek aspects of these domains, but at the very least we see the influence of the Greek alphabet, as it would be used for centuries to write the Bactrian and later Kushan languages.[68] It is now to a brief overview of these Graeco-Bactrians and Kushans that we will now turn.

Kushans and Kushano-Sasanians

As stated earlier, it seems likely that there was a continual process of nomadic migration from the Eurasian steppelands to south of the Oxus, who either continued with their pastoral nomadism or sometimes settled into sedentary agriculture (a trend which has had obvious ramifications in world history). During the Parthian period, we see a people often known as the Yuechi (Yueji, and oftentimes identified as the Tocharians) do so as well.[69] Some scholars believe that there may have been five different groups who composed the Yuechi, each led by its own

67 Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia.*, 54.

68 Unfortunately, although it appears clear that the Bactrians were likely an Iranian people, as can be deduced from the Aśoka inscription, we have no written evidence of their language prior to their adoption of Greek script (P. N. Ḫānlarī and N. H Ansari, *A history of the Persian language Vol. 1 Vol. 1* (New Delhi u.a: Sterling Publ. u.a., 1979), 149. See also
Gikyo Ito, "On the Iranism Underlying the Aramaic Inscription of Aśoka," in *Yádnáme-Ye Jan Rypka: Collection of Articles on Persian and Tajik Literature : (On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday by His Friends and Pupils)* (Prague: Academia. The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1967), 21–28.). Later, in the same region, we also have a paucity of records for the languages spoken by the Kushans and the later Hephthalites. See Otakar Klima, "Avesta. Ancient Persian Inscriptions. Middle Persian Literature," in *History of Iranian Literature*, by Jan Rypka, ed. Karl Jahn (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), 29.
The origin and identity of the Hephthalites, partially because of this lack of linguistic evidence, is also tremendously unclear. Two main hypotheses are that they were mountaineers from the Badakshan region, or that they were nomads from Xinjiang. See Richard N Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (München: C.H. Beck, 1984), 347.

69 Fereshteh Davaran, *Continuity in Iranian Identity: Resilience of a Cultural Heritage* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 36.

chief or "Jagbu," and that "one of these tribal divisions had the name of Kushan (or Guei-Shuang as it is called by the Chinese)."[70] Regardless, it seems likely that these Kushans were an Iranian rather than Turco-Mongolian group of nomads. The coins they minted make that rather clear, as "the names and titles used on these Kushan coins show moreover that these Kushan monarchs spoke an Indo-European and probably an Iranian language, although this language differed radically from classical Persian. Whereas the Saka and Parthian languages show strong traces of similarity, the Kushans, though belonging to the same linguistic group, evidently spoke a very aberrant dialect."[71] We see that, in its heyday, this Central Asian empire of the Kushans was considered a major Eurasian power, ranking among the Parthians, Chinese, and the Romans due to their control of a large swath of Central Asia.[72]

However, as with most empires, the Kushans rather rapidly fell from glory. Again, coins help to tell the story of the decline of the Kushans in the Sasanian era. As Joe Cribb writes,

> Kushan coinage continued to be issued in Central Asia until the third century AD when the rise of the Sasanian Empire in Iran gradually drove the Kushan Empire out of its territories north of the Hindu Kush (c. AD 233), then south of the Hindu Kush (c. AD 260), until the Kushans were no longer ruling west of the Indus (c. AD 280). After their defeat Kushan coinage in Central Asia was replaced by imitations and adaptations of it made by the advancing Sasanians. After the loss of territory to the Sasanians, Kushan coinage gradually abandoned the use of Bactrian inscriptions as Brahmi inscriptions were introduced onto the coins.[73]

It was at this time that Bactria again became a part of the Iranian political world, under the Kushano-Sasanians. As well as the development of Kushano-Sasanian political entities in what had been Graeco-Bactria, we also see the development of a hybrid culture, as is so often the case on the frontiers and borderlands of human history. As Grousset writes, "a Sassano-Buddhic

[70] William Montgomery McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia: A Study of the Scythians and the Huns and the Part They Played in World History, with Special Reference to the Chinese Sources* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 249.

[71] Ibid., 252. Again, due to the age of this piece of secondary scholarship, please ignore the rather judgmental use of the word "aberrant."

[72] Toynbee, *Between Oxus and Jumna*, vi.

[73] Cribb, "Money as a Arker of Cultural Continuity and Change in Central Asia," 367.

civilization and a Sassano-Buddhic art were born on these Indo-Iranian borders [of Kushan Afghanistan], as is illustrated by the great frescoes of Bamian and Kakrak, produced at the end of the third century and during the fourth. In these—in the types and costumes portrayed and in the treatment of the figures—the Sassanian influence is striking."[74] Also throughout the Kushano-Sasanian domain, we have ceramic evidence of the Sasanians upon their Kushan vassals. The use of zoomorphous supports is apparently a clear feature of Iranian ceramic work, and the appearance of such supports during the Kushano-Sasanian era points to much more than just political contacts between the Sasanians and their eastern frontier.[75] Apparently, even the conquest of Central Asia by the Ephthalites did not end this hybrid culture. In the late sixth century CE, we have clear archaeological evidence of this continued culture, at least in Sasanian Bactria, contained within the frescoes of the Kizil caves. This culture appears to, at the very least, have had major influences on the martial aspects of Bactrian culture. Rene Grousset writes that "the military scenes at Kizil—as, for example, in that of 'The Sharing of the Relics'—show a Kuchean 'chivalry' in plate armor, conical helmets, and coats of mail, carrying long lances and reminiscent both of Sassanian cavalry and the Sarmatian horsemen of Kerch (Panticapaeum) in the Crimea."[76] Apparently these paintings can be dated to two separate periods, and "belong either to what Hackin calls the first Kizil style (ca. 450-650) or to the second (ca. 650-750). There is also the peculiarly Sassanian character of the Buddhic paintings on wooden panels at Dandan-Uilik, east of Khotan (ca. 650)."[77]It was during the time of this first Kizil style, most specifically during the time of the Sasanian king Khosrow II (who defeated Bahram Chubin to

[74] Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes; a History of Central Asia.*, 50–51.
[75] Zavyalov, VA, "Zar-Tepe: A Kushanian Town in Southern Uzbekistan," 69–70.
[76] Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes; a History of Central Asia.*, 52.
[77] Ibid., 96.

retake the Sasanian throne), that we also see additional archaeological evidence in the Fundukistan stuccos, located west of Kabul.[78] The timing of this "peculiarily Sassanian" character of second period Kizil is rather interesting, dating to approximately the fall of the Sasanian empire to the Arabs, and the flight of the last monarch Yazdgerd III and his family eastwards, *ca*. 651 CE. Although Yazdgerd III himself was murdered along the Murghab River[79] (or at least one of the two rivers of the same name, both in Tajikistan and Afghanistan), we know that his son Peroz "settled among the Turks, took a local wife, and received troops from the king of Tukharistan (ancient Bactria); and in 661 he established himself with Chinese help as king of Po-szu (Persia) in a place which the Chinese called Jiling (Chi-ling) and which is assumed to be Zaranj in Sistan."[80] Perhaps this fresh infusion of Sasanian character into Irano-Buddhic art was due to this fresh infusion of Sasanian blood.

As we can see, post-Kushan and pre-Islamic Sogdia was likely not a single political entity, but more a collection of small principalities bonded together by a somewhat shared culture. Politically, they were at this point under the umbrella of the Turgesh confederation, a politically and militarily allied group of Turkic tribes. Many of these cities were likely dependent upon the mercantile activities along one of the "Silk Roads." An example of one of these towns, and perhaps the one that was most closely examined archaeologically in the Soviet era, was the town of Panjikent in western Tajikistan (and perhaps not coincidentally, later to be one of the reputed birthplaces of the celebrated Tajik-Persian poet Rudaki). As the Soviet archaeologists Marshak and Raspopova wrote, in the fifth to eighth century CE "Sogdia was a confederation of cities-states with a developing urban culture, best known in Penjikent . . . [which was] Sogdian

[78] Ibid., 51.
[79] Haug, "The Gate of Iron," 213.
[80] Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 4.

town was founded in the 5th century AD and ultimately abandoned in the 770s."[81] Although the town would later be reoccupied, or perhaps simply refounded nearby, this period of abandonment provides an archaeological glimpse into Sogdian life. Frumkin is another Soviet-era archaeologist who wrote about Panjikent, where, "in addition to the architecture itself, the major features of the site are great quantities of splendid wall-paintings, sculptures and ornaments in clay or stucco, as well as remarkable wooden sculptures and carvings, all dating from the 7th-8th century AD."[82] In fact, more than a third of the houses excavated in Panjikent from this period contain such wall paintings, or frescoes.[83] Most interestingly for a study of *Shahnama* and Iranian identity in Central Asia, many of the scenes portrayed in these eighth century wall paintings seem to be familiar to us. Specifically, certain frescoes appear to illustrate the deeds of the Iranian heroes Rustam and Siyavush.[84] Marshak and Raspopova believe that these frescoes, rather than just illustrating epic stories, may actually have played a part in the recitation of such stories. The paintings may have derived from illustrated scrolls carried by storytellers. They state that "a linear arrangement of wall paintings illustrating the epic, with a cinema-like segmentation of the frieze into separate episodes undivided by vertical boundaries, a feature that had apparently been derived from scroll illustrations, suddenly appeared in Penjikent art in the 7th and 8th century AD."[85]

However, just as earlier in the Achaemenid period, the exact nature of political activities on the Central Asian frontier is never terribly clear (this is probably partially due to the nature of a frontier or borderland in general). When trying to trace the extents of this Late Antique Iranian

[81] Marshak, BI and Raspopova, VI, "Research of Sogdian Civilization in Penjikent, Tajikistan," 79.
[82] Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia.*, 72.
[83] Marshak, BI and Raspopova, VI, "Research of Sogdian Civilization in Penjikent, Tajikistan," 79.
[84] Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia.*, 79.
[85] Marshak, BI and Raspopova, VI, "Research of Sogdian Civilization in Penjikent, Tajikistan," 79.

Empire, we run into several issues. Touraj Daryaee has written extensively on the subject of "Iranshahr," or the notion of the lands of the Iranians during the Sasanian period. He writes that "when dealing with boundaries and limits of the Sasanian Persian Empire we tend to find a confusing picture. This is because the Classical sources tend to supply one set of notions about Persian borders which is different from royal inscriptions and Middle Persian texts."[86] Likely, the uncertain control over buffer states or vassal kingdoms is partially responsible for some of this confusion, but a certain ideology of control of the world, and Zoroastrian cosmogonic mythology, may also play a role. Daryaee's translation and analysis of the only extant Middle Persian geographical work, the *Shahrestaniha i Eranshahr*, sheds some light on this. As Daryaee again states, "this book supplies a curious view of the Persian image of the world where Ēran is allotted an amazing boundary and where in fact Ēran/Ēranshahr is equated with the whole of Xwanirah," or the inhabitable middle "clime" of Zoroastrian religious geography.[87] With these caveats about the confusing and uncertain nature of Sasanian geography, and thus uncertainty about the location of the Central Asian frontier, it seems likely that Inner Khurasan lay completely within the borders of the Sasanian Empire. We know that "the limits of Khorasan in the Sasanian period: the south-east corner of the Caspian Sea, the valley of the Atrek. . . '. The distinction between Gorgan and Dehistan (as part of Khorasan) provides evidence that at the beginning of the Sasanian period, Hyrcania was probably reduced politically to the plain of Gorgan."[88] Of course, as usual, there is still some uncertainty about the rest of "Outer Khurasan." However, we do know that south of Transoxania, in Bactria and the Kushano-Sasanian domain,

[86] Daryaee, "The Idea of Eranshahr," 97.
[87] Ibid, 102.
[88] Olivier LeComte, "Gorgān and Dehistan: The North-East Frontier of the Iranian Empire," in *After Alexander: Central Asia before Islam*, ed. Joe Cribb and Georgina Herrmann (Oxford; New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2007), 300.

"under the Sasanids, according to Muslim accounts, Balkh was the residence of one of the four Marzubans of Khurasan; at the beginning of the eighth century, the native ruler bore the higher title of Ispahbadh."[89] Although this is foreshadowing a bit the Islamic era, it provides an opportunity for a note on Sasanian titulature. Marzuban (more usually *marzban*), is a title often translated into English as *margrave*, or "warden of the marches," and seems obviously a military commander responsible for helping protect the frontier. *Ispabadh* (Middle Persian *spāhbed*[90]) is a title that seems to date from the time of the great reforms of Khosrow I, who divided his empire militarily into four quarters, each of was under the command of an *ispahbadh*, the leader of an army (or more particularly, the cavalry, from the Middle Persian *aswar*[91]). As has been usual throughout history, this cavalry stationed on the frontier was there to protect the Iranian empire against nomadic incursion. However, in the Sasanian era, the exact nature of these foes is even more unclear than usual.

As Farhad Atai writes, "the collapse of the ancient Central Asian empires in the fourth and fifth centuries and the successive waves of migration of the nomads from the north ushered in the establishment of a new social and political system in the region. Lack of political unity between various tribes paved the way for the conquest of Central Asia by the Arabs in the seventh and eighth centuries."[92] What Atai does not mention here, and which I think bears emphasis, is that this appears to be the first time that we see non-Iranian nomads ascending to power in Central Asia. However, despite the temporary alliance of Sasanian and Turk which defeated the Ephthalites, the age-old confrontation between empire and nomads would continue.

[89] Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 77.
[90] D. N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 75.
[91] It is from this same root and route that we likely derive both the Ottoman Turkish *sipahi* and the Mughal *sepoy*.
[92] Farhad Atai, "Soviet Cultural Legacy in Tajikistan," *Iranian Studies* 45, no. 1 (2012): 82.

We will more clearly cover some of these late sixth century skirmishes later while discussing the life of Bahram Chubin, and his escape eastwards to the Turks at the end of his life, as this would also be a similar tactic to that taken by Yazdgerd III in 651, after the fall of the Sasanian Empire. It is towards the very same Arab invasions that would destroy the Sasanian empire that we will now turn. Having given a brief overview of pre-Islamic Iranian Central Asia above, we will now lay out the religious, political, and cultural context of the early Islamic era.

Iranian Central Asia in the Early Islamic Period

Religious Diversity within Islam

As mentioned many times above, Central Asia has long been a frontier and a zone of trading, a meeting point and melting pot for languages, cultures, and religions. In the time before Islam, we see adherents in Central Asia of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Nestorian Christianity, and Manichaeism, as well as practitioners of more shamanistic Turkic faiths. In the Islamic era, the lands of the eastern 'Abbasid Caliphate were also rife with what were considered "heterodox" forms of Islam itself, a fact which would play into the later political history of the region. We see adherents of Khariji, Shi'i, and more specifically Ismā'īli sects on the frontier of the Muslim world. Of these, it was probably the Kharijites who caused the greatest headache for the 'Abbasids and later the ethnically Iranian provincial dynasties. As C.E, Bosworth writes, "during the course of the 2nd/8th century, the savagery of the Azariqa (who were one of the most extreme of the Kharijite sub-sects) moderated somewhat, although it by no means wholly died down. In the eastern Islamic world, it was only in Sistan, Kuhistan, and Badghis (the region around Herat) that Kharijism retained its vitality."[93] This is not to say that Khurasan was completely untouched

[93] C. E. Bosworth, "The Tahirids and the Saffarids," in *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N Frye, vol. 4, The Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 108,

by these struggles however, as Bosworth also mentions that Nishapur, Baihaq, and other Khurasanian towns were also affected at times.[94]As we will see later, Ismā'īlism (sometimes called "Sevener" Shi'ism, still a large minority faith today in the Gorno-Badakhshan region of eastern Tajikistan) would also play a role in the medieval history of Transoxania, although perhaps not as large a part as Zaydi ("Fiver") and Ithna Ashari ("Twelver") Shi'ism in Dailam.

Small principalities

Although many of the cities of Sogdia, and Tukharistan, were rather commercially oriented, there is another, rather elite level of society which would prove to be perhaps most important in perpetuating Iranian culture: that of the *dehqans*. If the Sasanians and the Kucheans (or Kushans) shared a similar martial culture, as seems obvious at least in arms and armament from the Kizil frecoes, perhaps this is also true north of Bactria, in Sogdia. As Richard Frye writes, "in Central Asia, however, at the small courts of the princelings the feudal, chivalric society continued to exist, if not to flourish, as it had in the past. Eastern Iran was then the refuge of the old traditions which provided the background for Firdosi and his *Shahname.*"[95] According to Barthold, "the same warlike spirit prevailed there as in the other districts of Transoxania. The Soghdian custom mentioned by Tabari is especially characteristic of the manners of the country. Each year at Samarqand a table was set with food and a pitcher of wine for the bravest knight of Soghd. If any other touched the food he thereby challenged the claimant to combat, and whoever killed his antagonist was acknowledged the bravest hero in the land until the advent of the next aspirant."[96] Cultured the dehqans may have been, but weak they were not. This, however, should

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http://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=http://histories.cambridge.org/book?id=chol9780521200936%5FCHOL9780521200936.

[94] Ibid., 97.

[95] Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.*, 235.

[96] Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 181–182.

not be surprising for a class of society that supplied the vast majority of Sasanian heavy cavalry, at least after the reforms of Khosrow I. This same "martial spirit" which pervaded dehqan table manners also seems to have informed their very homes, which were often rather fortresslike. Many, if not all, of these fortifications appear to predate the Arab invasions. Haug writes that "citadels, known as *quhandiz*, are a widespread part of the defensive infrastructure of cities along the eastern frontier. . . . These structures appear to be found only in cities with a pre-Islamic foundation and take on a number of different roles in urban life after the conquests."[97] Here, however, we may see that the warlike spirit of the rural dehqans may not have been entirely divorced from the lives of the Sogdian merchants of Transoxania's cities. Haug argues that the very purpose of the dehqan's quhandiz fortresses may have been to protect the roads connecting Khurasan's and Transoxania's major cities, along which the commercial lifeblood would have flown.[98] These quhandiz may have been built to protect commerce and cities from nomadic depredations, protecting the vital trade of Sogdian merchants along the Silk Roads. It was in this fractured political and military climate of the Eastern Iranian world that larger regional dynasties began to form in the 9th century CE. In the aftermath of the 'Abbasid civil war between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun, the sons of Harun al-Rashid, regional governors in the east began to form hereditary dynasties which would further decentralize the political power of the Islamic world. We will briefly introduce some of these important characters, as it is in this growing regional political, and cultural, independence that is the context for the New Persian Renaissance.

[97] Haug, "The Gate of Iron," 99.
[98] Ibid., 126.

Tahirids

The Tahirids are often considered the first ethnically Iranian provincial dynasty of the Islamic era. However, other scholars are quick to point out that, although there were indeed four different generations of Tahirids who governed Khurasan, they cannot be considered a "dynasty" in a normal royal sense. Regardless, the Tahirids did exercise considerable political and military power in Khurasan and elsewhere for quite some time. One of the earliest Tahirids mentioned was in the eighth century, where Mus'ab was the governor of Pushang and Herat under the Caliph Mahdi in 160/776-777. This date was recorded because Mus'ab was actually defeated by the Kharijite rebel Yusuf b. Ibrahim al-Barm al-Thaqafi and forced to flee Pushang.[99] As we have seen earlier, the Kharijite phenomenon lasted longer in Khurasan, Sistan, and the other eastern lands of the 'Abbasid caliphate than it did elsewhere, a fact that will continue to shape the history of the Islamic East.

We next see the Tahirids make an appearance in one of the most important events of Islamic history after the 'Abbasid Revolution, the aforementioned civil war between al-Ma'mun and al-Amin. Just like in the events of the 'Abbasid Revolution, we see the military and social power of Khurasan effecting changes in the more central Islamic lands. When al-Ma'mun, ruling from Marw in Khurasan, decided to form an army to attack his brother in Baghdad he recruited soldiers and commanders from among the local nobility of the region. Tahir was one of these local leaders who followed al-Ma'mun sometime around 807 CE. Immediately after al-Ma'mun's victory against his brother, the loyal Tahir was appointed governor of the western 'Abbasid provinces of al-Jazira and Syria, far from his native Khurasan, in order to suppress primarily

[99] Bosworth, "The Tahirids and the Saffarids."

Arab al-Amin loyalists.[100] It was not until 821 CE that Tahir was finally appointed viceroy of the East, ruling Khurasan, Transoxania, and what appeared to be most of the Islamic world east of Baghdad for the short period before his death in 822 CE.[101] Tahir's son Talha ruled for the next six years, during which time Ahmad b. Abi Khalid commanded the caliphal armies in the east, assisting the local Samanid governors in Transoxania, specifically Ahmad b. Asad in Farghana.[102] After Talha, the next Tahirid governor of Khurasan was 'Abd-Allah, the most storied of the dynasty. After his death, the Tahirids slowly lost control of most of their eastern lands due to the rise of the Saffarids. However, the Tahirid family still controlled certain offices and occasionally territories near the 'Abbasid heartland of Mesopotamia, and held on to most of these until the early tenth century.[103] The rise of the Saffarids was yet another major turning point in the political history of the Islamic east.

Saffarids

The Saffarids were the next ethnically Iranian dynasty to rule in the east, and came from much more humble origins than the aristocratic Tahirids, although like most dynasties they eventually claimed a glorious lineage for themselves.[104] The Saffarids are a family whose religious and "nationalist" leanings have been of considerable debate in scholarship over the last century or more. Barthold, in his early twentieth century view, claims that "the more extreme democratic aspirations, hostile to the established order, were embodied in the Shi'ite and Kharijite sects and the class of the 'warriors for the faith.' The dynasty of the Saffarids (867-903)

[100] Ibid., 94.
[101] Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 117.
[102] Bosworth, "The Tahirids and the Saffarids," 96.
[103] Ibid., 94.
[104] See S. M Stern, "Ya'qub the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment," in *History and Culture in the Medieval Muslim World* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 543, for a discussion of his genealogy beginning with the mythical Jamshid.

rose to power by unifying these various democratic elements,"[105] or at the very least by incorporating his vanquished Kharijite foes into his own armies.[106] The Saffarids, first under Ya'qub ibn Laith, rose to military power in the mid-ninth century, at the head of a band of '*ayyars*. As Bosworth writes, these vigilantes (or perhaps brigands) "are sometimes called in the suources *muttawwi'a* 'volunteer fighters for the faith,' but more often by the rather opprobious term of *'ayyarun*, 'ruffians, marauders,' for the *'ayyars* were often as much of a scourge to the orthodox and law-abiding as to the Kharijites." After some amount of time fighting the Kharijites under the leadership of Salih b. al-Nadr, and then Dirhim b. Nasr. b. Salih, Ya'qub in 861 CE eventually overthrew Dirhim and named himself amir of Sistan.[107] This was but the beginning of his military and political aspirations, as Ya'qub and later his brother 'Amr would go on to conquer and hold a vast swath of the eastern lands of the Islamic caliphate, from northern Afghanistan all the way to Isfahan and Fars. This, rather understandably, did not endear Ya'qub and 'Amr to the 'Abbasid caliph, who would take every opportunity over several decades to support any opposition to the Saffarids for the governorships of the eastern provinces. However, this caliphal support was far too late to save the reign of the Tahirids, whose control of Khurasan was bested by the Saffarids.[108] In the next chapter, we will see some of the differing versions of these events recorded in our primary sources. The Saffarids' territorial ambitions would prove to be their downfall, as their attempt to extend their control to Khwarazm would put them in direct conflict with the Samanids. 'Amr "received the homage of one Muhammad b. 'Amr al-Khwarazmi [at the

[105] Bartol'd, *Turkestan*, xxx.
[106] The *Tarikh-i Sistan* is an anonymous local history, and one which focuses so closely on the Saffarid reign as to be nearly a dynastic history. The work existed in a unique manuscript which had been discovered in Mashhad in 1925 (Haug, 8).
[107] Bosworth, "The Tahirids and the Saffarids," 109.
[108] Ibid., 107.

former Tahirid Khurasanian capital of Nishapur], and sent him back to Khwarazm with military support as a Saffarid protege. This was a provocation of the Samanids of Transoxania, who claimed to exercise suzerainty over the Afrighid Khwarazm-Shahs." This perceived slight of Samanid suzerainty eventually led to the defeat of Saffarid forces by the Samanid amir Ismā'īl b. Amad, in a battle near Balkh.[109] The Samanids' somewhat aristocratic origins would serve them well in this initial battle against the Saffarids, as "from the expressions of Tabir it is evident that 'the wealthy and the dehqans,' whatever may have been their relations with Ismā'īl, proved faithful adherents to him in his struggle with Amr."[110] Of course, as we will see below, Ismā'īl had often depended upon the support of the dehqans, as well as the 'ulama, to shore up his reign. Although we will later delve much deeper into the history of the Samanids, we will now just give a brief overview of their origins and fall.

Samanids

The exact origins of the Samanid family is not clear, although the story of Samankhuda being lord of a village near Balkh may be the case.[111] According to some sources, the namesake of the dynasty first converted to Islam around the close of the fourth quarter of the eighth century. However, the importance of the family only starts to really become apparent in 819 CE, when Saman's grandsons, via his son Asad, were appointed governors of various cities in Transoxania. Nuh was given Samarqand, Ahmad Farghana, Yahya Shash, and Ilyas Herat.[112] It

109 Ibid., 121.
110 Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 226.
111 There are other variants of the Samanid origin story, however, with some modern secondary scholarship choosing to believe the Balkh story, and others supporting a Samarqand-centric version (for instance, 'Abbas Iqbal in the *Tarikh-e Iran pas az Islam* gives their origin as a village near Samarqand, <<سامانیان منسوبند به سامان که نام قریه‌ای بوده‌است از آبادیهای نزدیک سمرقند>> عباس، اقبال and باقر، عاقلي, *Tarikh-e Iran pas az Islam: az Sadr-e Islam ta Enqaraz-e Qajarie* (Tihrān: Nashr-i Nāmak, 1999), 195.
112 Frye, "The Samanids," 136.

was Ahmad who would prove to be the most successful, as it was his sons who would rise to prominence. According to one source, the 'ulama of Bokhara requested that Nasr ibn Ahmad, then ruling Samarqand, send them a governor of their own. He sent his brother Ismā'īl around 874 CE, who would later rise to fame as the most famous amir of the dynasty.[113] As seems so often the case in history, a conflict eventually developed between the brothers. According to Barthold, as befits his legend as the wisest of rulers, Ismā'īl did his best to treat his brother well after besting Nasr in this internecine conflict. Barthold states that “the conflict ended in the autumn of 888 with the capture of Nasr. Here again Ismā'īl maintained his habitual wise moderation; there was an interview between the brothers, in which Ismā'īl spoke, not as a conqueror to his prisoner, but as a subject to his sovereign . . . Nasr returned to Samarqand and remained the nominal head of the dynasty until his death, which occurred on Aug. 21, 892.”[114] Ismā'īl chose to remain in his city of Bukhara, ruling the whole of Transoxania from there, even though Samarqand was likely the larger and more commercially important of the two cities.[115]

In the ninth century Transoxania was still a patchwork of different small principalities rather than a single large political entity. Ismā'īl started to change that by expanding his political control, but not through outright conquest. He seems to have preferred to leave small local dynasties intact where he could, binding them to him as vassals. We know this, because at the end of the Samanid reign many of these local dynasties were still intact: the Abu Dawudids of Balkh, the Farighunids in Guzgan, and others in Khorezmia, Isfijab, Saghaniyan, Khuttal, Rasht, Gharjistan, and elsewhere. Ismā'īl even allowed the defeated Saffarids to rule their native Sistan

[113] Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far Narshakhī, *The History of Bukhara*, trans. Richard N. Frye, 2007, 104–105.

[114] Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 223. Of course, this may very well be a case of the intervening centuries making a successful ruler into the wisest of men. For all we really know, Ismā'īl may have been just as ruthless as any other amir, simply more politically savvy.

[115] Ibid., 83.

under his aegis. Of these, Khwarazm, Isfijab, and Saghaniyan were the most politically powerful.[116] Ismāʿīl may have chosen to avoid outright bloodshed between himself and his mostly Iranian underlords in order to present a more united front to their common Turkic enemy.

Early Samanid history records many instances of raids on the Turkish tribes of the steppe. These raids may have been intended to Islamize these nomads, or to pacify them, although as we will see later they were also opportunities to capture warriors to sell on the lucrative slave market. Our sources show that in 893 CE Ismāʿīl captured the city of Talas from the ruling Qarluq khan.[117] We know, however, of only one major raid into Transoxania by the Turks; in 904 CE, while Ismāʿīl still reigned, the Turks invaded, and only with volunteer soldiers from all over the Islamic world were they beaten back.[118] These volunteers likely thought of themselves as *ghazis*, or warriors for the faith. Even though the Turks rarely penetrated into Muslim lands of Transoxania in any major force, we do see reports that this was not the case in Khurasan.[119] The slave trade, lucrative though it was, was only one aspect of the commerce which the Samanids, like their Sogdian predecessors, seemed to encourage and perpetuate.

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[116] Ibid., 233.

[117] Treadwell, Luke et al., "The Samanids: The First Islamic Dynasty of Central Asia," 8.

[118] Bartolʹd, *Turkestan*, 256.

[119] Haug, "The Gate of Iron," 95. Of course, we also hear of the frequency of Khorezmian slaving raids against the Turks. See Haug, 286–287. The same may likely have been the case in Khurasan. Frontier violence often runs both ways. In his recent work on this period, Richard W. Bulliet claims that the slightly later Turkish incursions into Khurasan may have been motivated by climate changes, rather than simple raiding. As he writes,

> "Exactly why the Turkomans were allowed to enter Khurasan is unclear, but Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna, who authorized their relocation, probably assumed that they would fit reasonably well into the economy as producers of valuable livestock. On the Oghuz side, the cooling of the climate must have enhanced their desire to relocated, if it was not the sole rationale, because their one-humped camels had a hard time surviving cold winters. As it turned out, these first Turkoman immigrants turned to pillaging, and some were driven away by the Ghaznavid army. Continuing livestock problems may well have contributed to this, because, instead of returning to Central Asia or moving back north to Khwarazm, many made their marauding way deeper into Iran. Ultimately, they found their way to Anatolia,"

Richard W. Bulliet, *Cotton, Climate, and Camels in Early Islamic Iran: A Moment in World History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 135.

It is in this Transoxanian, Samanid milieu that we first start to see the writing of prose in New Persian. Poetry, because of its often-oral nature, is more hard to pin down concretely. It seems fairly certain that Persian (likely in an early New Persian form) had been the common spoken language for some time in areas such as Balkh. It was just not written down. There was likely no major discontinuity in Persian speech, even during and after the Arab invasions of early Islam. When discussing the resurgence of Persian literature in the "New Persian Renaissance," or even simply using the term, one must be careful to avoid the concept of "two centuries of silence," which lent its name to a book by the Iranian scholar Abdolhussein Zarrinkoub.[120] For many current scholars, this idea no longer holds serious traction.[121] As Lazard writes about the period of the New Persian Renaissance, "the Iranians did not sink into barbarism, nor even into silence, for three centuries, but shared in the intensive efforts which produced the new civilization of the Islamic East and were among the most energetic contributors to this burst of activity, infusing into it a large part of their ancient culture."[122] While there were many lacunae in the historical record that led Zarrinkub to his hypothesis, there are perhaps a few possible factors that may be of import here. First, the scarcity of the sources. We know that, at best, our evidence for the Persian language between the fall of the Sassanian dynasty and the ninth century CE is scanty. Second, the change(s) of script between the Middle Persian Pahlavi writing system and what would come to be the conventionalized variant of the Arabic script used for most modern

[120] See Daryaee's review of Parvaneh Pourshariati in *Journal of Persianate* study for a more in-depth look at this phenomenon, and its recent supplantation by other ideas, in "Review Essays: The Fall of the Sasanian Empire to the Arab Muslims: From Two Centuries of Silence to Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Partho-Sasanian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 3 (2010): 239–54.

[121] A counterexample appears to be Hamid Dabashi, who writes that "Subjected to a colonial conquest and imperial occupation by a military might that was aided by a solid religious triumphalism, a period of massive and forced acculturation commenced in the former Sassanid realm—a period that later historians would dub 'two centuries of silence,'" *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 45, http://site.ebrary.com/lib/berkeley/Doc?id=10623432.

[122] Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 611.

Persian writing. Third, the shift by the ninth century CE of the center of Iranian culture from Western Iran to the Central Asian frontier may have complicated issues of information and cultural transmission. If we assume, as Meisami does, that "the so-called 'Persian renaissance' was by no means a revival of a dead or dormant language, but the continuation of a language the literary expression of which is only preserved in fragments, but which was clearly still vibrant,"[123] then what had changed by the ninth century CE that allows us to see a fully realized New Persian?

Perhaps the most obvious answer is that sources from the ninth century CE may simply have been more durable than those that came before. We know that Samarqand, perhaps *the* major city of the Central Asian frontier, was known for its production of high quality paper.[124] We know that most of our early New Persian poets came from Sistan, Khurasan, and Transoxania, as we can tell from their employment or from their *nisbas*. By the time of the Buyids, the new variety of Persian written in Arabic script had permeated into Western Iran as well.[125] As well as a language of literature, it had also by this point become an important language of state. One can imagine that this could only be the case after multiple amirates had adopted the language in Arabic script, as diplomatic dispatches generally require both a sender and a recipient.[126] By the last quarter of the 10th century CE, under the Ziyarids of Gurgan and the

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[123] Julie Scott Meisami, "History as Literature," in *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville, A History of Persian Literature (London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), 7.

[124] Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 14.

[125] Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. Karl Jahn (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), 72. Rypka also believes that New Persian literature came into being no earlier than the founding of the Tahirid amirate in 822 CE. 'Awfi does name some poets who were active during Tahirid times. See Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 595.

[126] It should be noted that there were various other, mostly smaller, Iranian regional dynasties who ruled circa the 10th and 11th century CE, such as the Bawandids of Azerbaijan, the Mosaferids (916-1090) in Daylam and Azerbaijan, the Rawwadids (ca. 900-1071) in Azerbaijan, and Shaddadids (951-1174) in Arran and eastern Armenia. See Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 72. However, unfortunately, it is somewhat more difficult to date the adoption of New Persian by these courts with any great precision.

Buyids, Persian poetry began to see encouragement by the court within Iran proper. We know Qabus b. Vushmgir (366-403/976-1012 CE), who would achieve greatest lasting fame because of his *Qabusnama*, and the Buyid Majd al-Daula of Ray, the Buyid prince of Ray, to have been instrumental in this movement.[127] By the next century, likely due mainly to the westward conquests of the Ghaznavids and their Seljuq successors, the New Persian literature had penetrated all the way to Iraq and its surrounding environs.[128]

As alluded to above, when trying to trace the beginnings of New Persian literature, one must be careful to specify the variant in *Arabic* script, as it is generally assumed that the earliest written examples of New Persian are actually in Hebrew script (Judaeo-Persian).[129] Two of our earliest examples of New Persian are written in such a fashion; first, the inscriptions in Tang-i Azao, Afghanistan, often dated to AD 752-753, and second, a fragment of personal correspondence found at Dandan-Uiliq near Khotan. This has also been dated by some scholars to the 8th century CE.[130] One can not label these early texts as an example of a nascent "literature," however, as they are not necessarily representative of any school of artistic or intellectual thought,[131] or of any group of people other than Jewish merchants active in the

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[127] In the Buyid case, the impetus may have come more from the vizier, Sahib Ismā'īl b. 'Abbad (367-85/977-95), and perhaps less from the amir himself. See Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 619.

[128] Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 113.

[129] Although the use of vastly different scripts for the same language may seem odd from a modern perspective, digraphia such is this is actually a very common phenomenon throughout history. See Florian Coulmas, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems* (Oxford, OX, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 129. Even today, see the use of the Perso-Arabic script for Persian in Iran and Afghanistan, while Tajikistan uses the Cyrillic alphabet originlly developed for Russian.

[130] Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 607. For more information on these early Judaeo-Persian inscriptions, see W. B Henning, "The Inscriptions of Tang-I Azao," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 20, no. 1–3 (1957): 335–42.and Eugen Ludwig Rapp, "The Date of the Judaeo-Persian Inscriptions of Tang-I Azao in Central Afghanistan," *East and West* 17, no. 1/2 (1967): 51–58.. We also have several fragments of New Persian in the Manichaean script, although these likely date from the 10th century CE. The recent discovery of the so-called "Afghan Geniza" in some Afghan caves may provide us in the coming years with some additional early examples of Central Asian Judeo-Persian, but there has yet to be significant published scholarly work done on these sources.

[131] Lazard (p. 606)sees the development of New Persian literature as a whole as a series of logical steps: from

region. Our earliest examples in Arabic script may not appear for another century after these documents, although the limited survival of any original sources does complicate the dating process.

Many scholars believe that the first works of New Persian prose still extant are translations of Tabari's work: of his Quranic exegesis, and the translation of his history by Bal'ami.[132] Samarqandi's work on Hanafi Islam may also be one of the earliest surviving work of New Persian prose.[133] Along with these and the Older Preface to the *Shahnama* is a work on botany by Abu Mansur Movafaq ibn Ali al-Heravi, *Al-Abniah 'an Hagha'iq al-Adwiah* (Principles of the Attributes of Plants). The work on botany and the Tabari translations were all commissioned by the Samanid amir Mansur ibn Nuh.[134] The outlier here the work on botany. The other works deal with subjects more important to issues of identity, such as religion and history. Persian would not become a common language science for several centuries yet. Perhaps Mansur just liked botany, or more likely the interest in plants was more medicinal in nature. According to Gardizi, another possible other, even much earlier, work of prose was the *Kitāb-i Qunī*, 'Book Concerning Irrigation Channels' written to explicate the law on irrigation in Khurasan. Judging by the explicit *ezafe* "-*i*" in the title, this seems as though this work was written in Persian. This

popular to court poetry, and then into prose genres of a more technical or diplomatic nature. An early original work of a religious nature is likely *Risāla-i ahkām-i fiqh-i hanafī*, 'On the Hanafī doctrine of Law,' by Abu'l-Qāsim Ishāq b. Muh. Samarqandi (d. 342/953), which may have been composed around 932 CE. See Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 149.

[132] According to some of our sources, the translation was carried out by Abu 'Ali Bal'ami, the son of the Samanid vizier Abu '-Fadl al-Bal'ami. See Joel L Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 92.

[133] Shāhrukh Miskūb, *Iranian Nationality and the Persian Language*, ed. John R Perry, trans. Michael C Hillman (Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1992), 61.

[134] Ibid., 59–60.

book was sponsored by Abdallah b. Tahir, who died in about 844-5 CE. Gardizi states that the laws contained within this work were still followed in his own time, nearly wo centuries later.[135]

Although this dissertation is primarily concerned with works of a less overtly-religious nature, such as poetry and historiography, it should be noted that some of the earliest examples of New Persian documents actually appear to be Qur'anic translations and exegesis, although these are notoriously difficult to date with any precision.[136] Our sources when it comes to poetry and "secular" prose are scarcely better, but "fragmentary utterances in Persian, and even brief narratives, are recorded here and there in the pages of early Arabic writers, and these at least serve to show us that the Persian of late Sasanian and early Muhammadan times was essentially the same as that with which we meet in the earliest monuments of Modern Persian literature."[137] Some of our early sources, in New Persian or Arabic, even go so far as to claim that the earliest poetry in "Persian" (which term, of course, does not specify which variant) was composed as early as the fifth century CE. For instance, Klima writes how "New Persian writers traced the origin of artistic poetry back to the Sasanian king, Bahram V Gor ('the onager,' a kind of wild ass, because hunting this animal was a favorite pastime of the king, 420-438). According to Arab and Persian scholars it was in fact he who composed the first Persian verses."[138] 'Aufi is one of

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[135] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories: A History of the Eastern Islamic Lands AD 650-1041: The Persian Text of Abu Sa'id 'Abd Al-Hayy Gardizi*, trans. Edmund Bosworth (I.B.Tauris, 2011), 45, http://www.myilibrary.com?id=316910.

[136] Zadeh's entire work on the *Vernacular* Qur'an examines the rise of this phenomenon. A noteworthy example of an early interlinear translation in Persian, and one for which the dating is a matter of some dispute, is MS 2309 in shrine of Mashhad, often known as *Qur'an-i Quds* (267). As Zadeh writes, "Based on the archaic character of the language, 'Ali Rawaqi claimed that the translation was produced at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. He also proposed Sistan" because of similarities to modern Baluchi. Lazard suggested 11th or 12th c. See Travis E Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford; London: Oxford University Press ; The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012), 267. This is, unfortunately, not an unusual spread of dates for even a single document.

[137] Edward Granville Browne and Mahmoud Saba, *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times Until Ferdowsi*, vol. I (London: T.F. Unwin, 1919), 11, http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/196704975.html.

[138] Klima, "Avesta. Ancient Persian Inscriptions. Middle Persian Literature," 50.

these sources in which we can read this story, but Arberry notes that “'Aufi was in fact not the originator of the legend; he drew his information about the poetic outburst of 'that great Hunter' of Sāsānian times from Tha'ālibī the Arabic-writing but Persian-born polymath who died in 1038, and Tha'ālibī himself acknowledges his debt to the ninth-century geographer Ibn Khurdādhbih.”[139] Even if we discount the veracity of these reports, there is still no scholarly consensus, in either our near-contemporary or modern sources, as to the author of the earliest new Persian poetry. Handhala of Badghis likely lived under Tahirid patronage, and is thus earlier than most of our Saffarid- or Samanid-era poets.[140] Muhammad 'Aufi himself, who compiled our earliest extant *tadhkira* in 1221-2, even seems to be somewhat unsure, as he states in his *Lubāb al-albāb* that the first Persian poem was a *qasida* “composed in 193/809 by a certain 'Abbas or Abu'l-'Abbas of Marv on the occasion of the entry into that city of the future caliph Ma'mun.”[141] Arberry distrusts 'Aufi's assertion, stating instead that “a single verse quoted in the name of Abū Hafs Sughdī is much more antique [than 'Abbas in 809 when al-Ma'mun came to Marv], and while some writers allege that he lived in the seventh century, others date him two hundred years later.”[142] Muhammad Qazvini seems to also believe that the earliest New Persian poetry was composed well over a century before the caliph al-Ma'mun, and was in fact considerably more humble in origin.[143][144] Our earliest *written* New Persian poetic documents appear to be two

[139] A. J Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1958), 30.

[140] Browne and Saba, *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times Until Ferdowsi*, I:346.

[141] Browne and Saba, *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times Until Ferdowsi*, I:15. Ma'mun was, of course, the son of Harun al-Rashid, who would end up embroiling the entire Abbasid Caliphate in civil war while battling his brother al-Amin over the throne.

[142] Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 31.

[143] “The earliest Persian poems, Qazvini proposes, are in fact much earlier than 808, and what the few lines that have survived reveal is that the origin of Persian poetry is not in any royal court but in fact, (and quite naturally so) in common and folkloric songs sung in the streets and alleys of the newly conquered lands,” Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 64.

[144] Unsurprisingly, given the consistently Marxist viewpoint of mid-20th century Soviet scholarship, this “humble origin” theory of New Persian poetry found its adherents in the USSR, including IS Braginskiy, “who holds that it was not at the court of the Samanids with its *razm u bazm*, 'battles and banquets,' but rather in the simple oral

poems discussed by Henning in his "Persian Poetical Manuscripts from the Time of Rūdakī" (published in a Taqīzadeh festschrift, *A Locust's Leg*) and are both written in the Manichaean script.[145] As Utas states, "There is, as far as I know, no manuscript in New Persian written with Arabic alphabet preserved from such an early date," which Henning said was the late ninth or early tenth century CE.[146] The script choice for these poems may complicate scholarly interpretation of them. As Utas again writes, about the poem *Bilauhar u Būdīsaf,*

> Thus the metrical structure of the poem is completely hidden by its written form. Does this mean that it was composed by ear and then put into the kind of archaizing writing of New Persian that Manicheans in Sinkiang started using some time in the 8th or 9th centuries? Or does it rather mean, as Henning suggests in his first presentation of this fragment at the Congress of Orientalists in Munich in 1957, that the original poem was written in Arabic script (in Samarkand or Bukhara?) and then taken over by Manicheans and transcribed in to their writing.[147]

This possibility is suggestive, and calls into question what exactly the writing system used by Central Asian Manichaeans really was. The spelling and likely pronunciation of certain words in the Manichaean writing system, which eschews the use of "arameograms" like in Middle Persian Pahlavi, is often touted as one of the main pieces of evidence for pronouncing such Middle Persian words very differently from their Semitic spelling. Is all of our "Manichaean" writing really archaizing New Persian, or is some of it really equivalent, chronologically, to Middle Persian? The difficulties inherent in script changes, especially with a script as problematic as Middle Persian, are manifold, and the adoption of Arabic script for the Persian language was not an overnight process. Although the Arabic script has similar Semitic roots to the earlier Pahlavi

literature of the masses that the written poetry of the feudal period was born" (Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 88.).

145 The Manichaean script, while like Pahlavi derived from Aramaic, contained considerably more letters than the Pahlavi subset (23 versus 12 or 13). The script was used for both Middle Persian, and an "east Turkic language of Central Asia where the Manichaeans settled after their expulsion from Persia," Coulmas, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems*, 324.

146 Bo Utas, "Arabic and Iranian Elements in New Persian Prosody," in *Manuscript, Text and Literature: Collected Essays on Middle and New Persian Texts*, ed. Carina Jahani and Dāriyūsh Kārgar (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2008), 155.

147 Ibid., 156.

writing system for Middle Persian, a considerable amount of adaptation was necessary to “fit” Arabic script to New Persian. As Hans Wellisch points out, there is a difference between “script” and “writing system.” As he writes

> A writing system is always linked to a particular language, so that a writing system for language *A* cannot be used for language *B*. This is so because a writing system is intended to represent the morphemes of a language, and these are, by definition, different in different languages. There may be some or many similarities between the writing systems of language *A* and *B*, foremost among them the script used, but as systems they are essentially independent of script, which is only one of their elements”[148]

As one can see by various different spellings of Persian words in early New Persian works, the process of finalizing this New Persian writing system took centuries.[149] During this time and even later, Iran and Iranian Central Asia were multilingual societies, with some variant of Persian likely a widely-spoken language in many places. Written Arabic taking over as a language of religion, literature, and administration in the Islamic lands may actually have helped the development of New Persian in Khurasan and Transoxania. While in Fars and western Iran Zoroastrian communities were still writing in Pahlavi (most of our Middle Persian works seem to date from around the ninth century, although the surviving manuscripts are often five centuries more recent), in eastern Iran spoken and written Persian seem to have been almost completely uncoupled for centuries. The linguist Florian Coulmas writes that “Because established writing systems have a strong tendency to resist change, the spoken and written forms of a language usually progress in an asynchronous manner, which, in the long run, adds to the complexity of the mapping relations between both.”[150] If anything, this is even more true of Pahlavi, with its

[148] Hans H Wellisch, *The Conversion of Scripts, Its Nature, History, and Utilization* (New York: Wiley, 1978), 14.

[149] N. Chalisova, in a work on Persian literary style and early style manuals, writes how “in Rāduyāni's time not all Persian consonants were graphically represented,” meaning that the addition of Persian-specific letters to the Arabic script)پ، ژ گ،چ, etc.) took time, and was not completed until sometime after 1114 CE, See “Persian Rhetoric: Elm-E Badi’ and Elm-E Bayān,” in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn, A History of Persian Literature, v. 1 (London ; New York : New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 148.

[150] *The Writing Systems of the World* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1989), 34–35.

archaizing tendencies, than with most writing systems. In the east, with less history of a Zoroastrian state religious structure, spoken New Persian was more free to evolve in a useful, perhaps even logical, fashion. Then, when the Perso-Arabic script did begin to be used on a wide basis, it would have helped unify the various spoken dialects of Persian. This new script, and the act of writing in general, made it "possible to create or codify a standard which becomes independent of an individual or group of speakers."[151] And it was in this "new," and easily mutually intelligible written language, that we begin to see literature in the tenth century CE.

[151] Florian Coulmas, *Language Adaptation* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

CHAPTER 2: Persian Histories in the 9th-11th Centuries CE and Shortly Afterward

During the tenth century CE, near the beginning of prose writing in New Persian, one can see several trends in historiography among our extant sources. Firstly, of course, is the beginning of historical writing in New Persian rather than Arabic, although as we will see there was no wholesale replacement of Arabic with Persian amongst historians, or at least not for several centuries. Secondly, one can see a change in style, generally from the more annalistic to the more narrative. Thirdly, one can see a growth in local and dynastic histories, although there was no period at which historians seemed to be uninterested in the more universal, or perhaps simply more pan-Islamic, histories. The growth in Persian language histories is, of course, the most salient and obvious trend when discussing this time period, although obviously not the most easily explainable. In this chapter, we will start with a discussion of the second trend, a trend towards narrative history, and how this may be less a simple change in "style" than it might seem. Then we will examine some of our extant local and dynastic histories, and what they may be able to tell us both about the events they purport to record, and perhaps about their authors and their intellectual and cultural milieu.

Chronicle to Narrative

Many modern scholars see a major shift in the style of histories at the same time that New Persian seemed to become a language of high culture. In many of the earlier Arabic histories, one can see a tendency toward a somewhat dry recounting of events, often organized by the rule of various political leaders. Beginning in the ninth century CE, however, "there is rather little of this annalistic treatment [that one sees in medieval European chronicles] in the Persian case, and even when a chronicle is structured wholly or in part on an annalistic basis, a

strong narrative element predominates (one feature that distinguishes Persian historical writing from most Arabic works)."[152] Tabari is a good example of the more annalistic style of history, although as many scholars have argued, even Tabari was far more particular about his choice and order of accounts than may be immediately obvious. A similar style was later used by both Ibn al-Athir and Abu'l-Fida.[153] Also in the mid-tenth century, circa 961 CE, Hamza Isfahani composed his "'Annals' (*Sini muluk al-ard wa'l-anbiya'*)."[154] It should be noted that all of these scholars composed their works in Arabic.

As several scholars have analyzed, one can clearly see the shift from annal to narrative in Bal'ami's adaptation of Tabari.[155] Perhaps the most evident change is Bal'ami's eschewal of *isnāds*, or chains of transmission of information. Without these almost constant discussions of intellectual and historical genealogy, Bal'ami could structure his work into a more straightforward narrative.[156] According to Philip Hitti, Bal'ami may have not included the *isnād*s of Tabari for more reasons than simply space, or smoothness of flow, writing that "the system, however, has its drawbacks in that it crystallized the record of events and rendered deviation from the trodden path sacrilegious. Aside from the use of judgement in the choice of *isnād*—the series of authorities—the Arabian authors exercised very little power of analysis, criticism, comparison or inference, their golden rule being 'what has been once well said need not be told

[152] Charles Melville, "Introduction," in *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville, A History of Persian Literature (London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), xxvī.
[153] Abū-l 'Abbâs Aḥmad ibn-Jabir al- Balâdhuri and Philip Khuri Hitti, "Introduction," in *The Origins of the Islamic State: Being a Translation from the Arabic, Accompanied with Annotations, Geographic and Historic Notes of the Kitâb Futûḥ Al-Buldân of Abū-L 'Abbâs Aḥmad Ibn-Jabir Al-Balâdhuri* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 6.
[154] Ehsan Yarshater, "Iranian National History," in *The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 3(1), Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 362, http://proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521200929.
[155] A.C.S. Peacock's recent work is a prime example.
[156] Meisami, "History as Literature," 10.

again.'"[157] Whether the Iranian authors, writing their somewhat more narrative works in either Persian or Arabic, managed to better analyze the events of the past is still up for debate. Straightforward comparison of Tabari's and Bal'ami's histories is also made somewhat more difficult by the extant versions of each. As Elton Daniel notes, "the fragment of the narrative found in the oldest known manuscript [of Bal'ami] contains a version of the text that is quite dissimilar to that in any other manuscript and has been ignored in all editions of the work."[158] This makes analysis of the chain of intellectual transmission from Tabari to Bal'ami rather difficult, if not impossible.

Although Bal'ami's change in style from the annalistic to the narrative in adapting Tabari's history may have been done for numerous reasons, most obviously brevity and readability, there may also have been more far-reaching consequences. As Bosworth notes, however, Bal'ami was not the first author to use a more narrative, perhaps even literary, style whe writing history, but he was almost certainly the first to do it in the New Persian language. Abū Hanīfa al-Dīnawarī, who died near the end of the 9th century CE, was an Iranian author whose *Kitāb al-Akhbār al-tiwāl*, 'Book of the Long Historical Narratives,' told the history of the world up to the end of Caliph al-Mu'tasim's reign (227/842 CE), and also used a distinctly narrative style in his writing. I have chosen to focus here on Bal'ami, however, as it was his work that was completed at behest of the Samanids, and at the Samanid court itself, no less, and that the comparison with Tabari's Arabic history seems most illustrative of the trends I am trying to

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[157] Balâdhuri and Hitti, "Introduction," 3.

[158] Elton L Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," in *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville, A History of Persian Literature (London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), 104. For more information on the various extant manuscripts of Bal'ami, see Daniel's earlier article "Manuscripts and Editions of Bal'amī's 'Tarjamah-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī,'" (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1990): 282–321).

outline.[159] The impact of narrative upon both the writing and the reading of history has been a matter of some substantial debate amongst theorists over the last 50 years. Scholars such as Geoffrey Roberts, M.C. Lemon, David Carr, Maurice Mandelbaum, Arthur Danto, and Hayden White have written many articles and books examining not only the extent to which the writing of intelligible history itself depends upon narrative, but also how the style of narrative affects our very understanding of history. In the volume *The Narrative and History Reader*, Roberts has collected many of these works, outlining the debate, and writing an introduction summarizing it from 1960-2000. Rather than arguing over a simple choice of style, Roberts writes, these theorists have been debating "the extent to which the discipline of history is essentially a narrative mode of knowing, understanding, explaining and reconstructing the past."[160] Choosing to tell history as a "story" affects more than simply the readability of a history. As Lemon writes, when comparing the structure of a narrative to a more annalistic account,

> The case is different with a mere chronicle of events, for a chronicle is a kind of calendar. It lists events (or other data) in the order of their dates . . . Insofar as their succession in time is the sole principle underlying their manner of presentation, it would appear continuity is the essence of the matter in the construction of a chronicle – and if so, then the chronicle is the narrative in its starkest, hence purest, form. But of course this is not the case. A chronicle's 'continuity' is merely abstract, superimposed by the purely formal rationale of the numerical ordering of dates; it is a meaningless continuity . . . In the narrative form, the 'then' has a peculiar distinctive sign which transforms a succession of events into a meaningful sequence.[161]

By changing from annal to narrative, Bal'ami and other historians in the tenth century and after began telling *stories*, rather than recording mere events, and as such imposed *meaning* onto the flow of events. Rather than simply recording events for posterity, the use of narrative is a means

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[159] C.E. Bosworth, "The Persian Contribution to Islamic Historiography in the Pre-Mongol Period," in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, ed. Richard G Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 224.

[160] Geoffrey Roberts, "Introduction: The History and Narrative Debate, 1960-2000," in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Roberts, Geoffrey (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 1.

[161] MC Lemon, "The Structure of Narrative," in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Roberts, Geoffrey (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 108.

to *understand* the events, to answer the questions of "why?" and "how?" certain events came to transpire. Narrative takes many disparate historical events and actors and weaves them together into a coherent whole. As such, it is itself an act of creation, and of creativity. As Carr writes, "if the role of narrative is to introduce something new into the world, and what it introduces is the synthesis of the heterogeneous, then presumably it attaches to the events of the world a form they do not otherwise have. A story *re*describes the world; in other words, it describes it *as if* it were what presumably, in fact, it is not."[162] Rather than a collection of seemingly unconnected events, in a narrative one can begin to see the past as a continuous flow of time, from the beginning of a story to the present, and thence forward to the future. Lemon defines continuity as not just "the static persistence of a state of affairs, but something persisting through changing states of affairs."[163] The use of narrative style emphasized the continuity in the events of the past, which in the case of Bal'ami meant a continuity in the entire history of the Perso-Islamicate world. A story must have characters, as well as an author (Bal'ami) and an audience (his Samanid patrons and his literati and *dehqan* contemporaries). In a sense, the very telling of the narrative helped *create* a Perso-Islamicate world in the way that Tabari's history did not, by making it the main character in a story. As Lemon again writes,

> Let us recall the salutary fact that narrative has to be narrated. It is not so much, then, a question of 'what narrative can achieve,' as of 'what do narrators achieve by narrating a sequence of occurrences?' Insofar as they are narrating we know they are not chronicling occurrences but linking them up into an order which makes sense. And this is not a difficult thing to do; indeed, both the perceiving and the constructing of intelligible sequences of occurrences is a universal, instinctive human characteristic. By comparison, the production of some kind of chronicle is a painstaking, deliberate, artificial contrivance with far less immediate and obvious point to it.[164]

[162] David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Roberts, Geoffrey (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 145.
[163] Lemon, "The Structure of Narrative," 112.
[164] Ibid., 122.

Tabari's "painstaking, deliberate, artificial contrivance" of chronicle, and of dividing his history into geographic sections, allowed the world of the Arabs and the world of Iran to remain separate entities in the minds of his readers.[165] Bal'ami's narrative style would have had the exact opposite impact. Although his adaptation of Tabari's history was still divided geographically, his narrative style weaved the events of the past into a coherent whole in the minds of his readers, who as human beings are hard-wired to see their own lives and the world around them in such a way: as a continuous progression from start, to middle, to end; from past, to present, to future. Carr writes about how human beings view the passage of time, about how human beings *live* narrative:

> Here we would do well to recall what some philosophers have shown about our experience of the passage of time. According to Husserl even the most passive experience involves not only the retention of the just past but also the tacit anticipation, or what he calls protention, of the future. His point is not simply that we have the psychological capacity to project and to remember. His claim is the conceptual one that we cannot even experience anything as happening, as present, except against the background of what it succeeds and what we anticipate will succeed it. Our very capacity to experience, to be aware of what *is* – "reality as it presents itself to experience,' in Hayden White's words – spans future and past.[166]

Whether Bal'ami intended his narrative to demonstrate the continuity in his world, the world of the Samanid court, the world of the *dehqans* on the frontier between Iran and Turan, between Islam and non-Islam, the fact remains that he *did*. As we saw in the introduction, the idea of a narrative can be a powerful thing, with its impact upon individual and group identity, and how it can affect the very way one views the world. Judging by the proliferation of narrative histories during the New Persian Renaissance, Bal'ami's choice of narrative style may have influenced many of his historiographical successors as well.

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[165] Bosworth sees this use of annalistic arrangement by certain Arabic language writers, such as Tabari, as an earlier innovation itself, and one that was likely influenced by Byzantine tradition. See "The Persian Contribution to Islamic Historiography in the Pre-Mongol Period," 223.

[166] Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," 146.

When later Iranian writers did choose to use something more approaching a chronicle style in their historical compositions, it often served as more of a superstructure overlaid upon the narratives. For instance, the history of Beyhaqi, written *c.* 1058 CE. As both Daniel and Melville has noted, although Beyhaqi's somewhat more "journalistic" work in fact "can be found to be arranged in annals . . . these are so long that the subdivisions by episodes in practice becomes the dominant way the text is structured. True annals are perhaps found only in discrete sections of the *Tarikh-e Beyhaq* of Ebn-Fondoq and the *Tarikh-e Sistan*, recording notable events that had occurred in the region."[167] Writing before Beyhaqi, and perhaps even serving as model for Beyhaqi, was Ibn Miskwayh, who like Beyhaqi was employed as a bureaucrat at a royal court, in his case the Buyids. His works, however, were written in Arabic. His style has been described as "narrative interpersed with anecdotal and moralizing reflections and exhortations, [and] is not dissmilar to Beyhaqi's general procedures in the *History.*"[168] Beyhaqi's works tends toward almost gossipy day-to-day events at the Ghaznavid court, with the occasional comment upon a certain amount of divine predestination inherent in the events of human history. These sort of constant asides about the pervasiveness of God's will in human history are very much to be expected. As Shahrokh Meskoob writes, especially in this relatively early era,

> Koranic narratives are a model for historical writing. In such a situation, the aim of historical writing is the exposition of divine will, the explanation of peoples' destiny and fate so that they might learn from those who have gone before. And heeding lessons means perceiving the wisdom of God's actions to the best of one's own ability and good fortune and consequently becoming compatible and in step with divine will (in other words, faith and works).[169]

167 Melville, "Introduction," 2012, xlv.

168 Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Abul̓-Fażl al- Baihaqī, "Introduction," in *The History of Beyhaqi: (the History of Sultan Mas'ud of Ghazna, 1030 - 1041) Vol. 1*, trans. C. E. Bosworth and Mohsen Ashtiany (Boston, Mass: Ilex Foundation, 2011), 67.

169 Miskūb, *Iranian Nationality and the Persian Language*, 75.

In this way, history is didactic literature that is religious in scope and context. Even though the thrust of human history must have been preordained, this idea both leaves room for, and requires, a certain amount of human agency. The larger part of that agency, however, should involve the conscious decision to meld one's own will with that of the divine, and to view all the events of the past as God's instructions in appropriate behavior to future generations of believers. As Melville writes, “Muslim history is, like its medieval Christian counterpart, primarily a history of the evolution of God's community” rather than of the affairs of men.[170] Beyhaqi explains his own thoughts upon the value of history, and how the study of the past should involve a considerable amount of probing into the divine subtext of all events. For Beyhaqi, the study of history is an almost gnostic experience, and would fit very well with some of the more mystic and Sufi movements that were just then in their infancy. In his words,

> Thus one must know that, in the Almighty God's Decree, in removing the robe of royal power from one group and cladding another group in it, there lies a divine wisdom and general concern for the welfare of all creatures on the face of the earth which is beyond human understanding, and no-one [F 115] can fathom this and give a reason for it, let alone being able to express this outwardly and in their discourse. Although this rule is correct and true, and one must inescapably be content with the Almighty God's decree, wise men, if they focus their minds on this veiled procedure, and explore and probe deeply until they acquire illumination by means of this proof, will become firmly assured that the Exalted Creator has knowledge of hidden things and prescience of things still to come.[171]

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[170] Charles Melville, “The Mongol and Timurid Periods, 1250-1500,” in *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville, A History of Persian Literature (London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012), 168.

[171] Abul̓-Fażl al- Baihaqī, The History of Beyhaqi: (the History of Sultan Mas‘ud of Ghazna, 1030 - 1041) Vol. 1, trans. Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Mohsen Ashtiany (Boston, Mass: Ilex Foundation, 2011), 181. I have used Bosworth's very recent and authoritative translation for this section, rather than my own, because of the intellectual complexities inherent in these ideas. Abū al-Faẕl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-E Bayhaqi*, ed. Fayyaz, Ali Akbar (Tehran: Ilm, 1384), 114–115., gives

پس بباید دانست که بر کشیدنِ بقدیر ایزد عزَّ ذکره پیراهنِ مُلک از گرهنهی و پوشانیدن در گروهِ دیگر اندران حکمتی است ایردی و مصلحتی عام مر خلقِ رویِ زمین را که درک مردمان از دریفتن آن عاجز مانده است، و کس را نرسد که اندیشه کند که این چراست تا بگفرتار [چه] رسد.
و هرجند این قاعده درست و راست است و ناچار است راضی بودن بقضایِ خدای عزَّوجل، جردمندان اگر اندیشه را برین کارِ پوشیده گمارند و استنباط و استخراج کنند با برین دلیلی روشن یابند، ایشان را مقرر گردد که آفریدگار جلَّ جالأُه عالِم اسرار است که کارهای نروده را بداند، و در علمِ غیب او برفته استکه در جهان در فلان بقعت مردی پیدا خواهد شد که ازان مرد بندگان او را راحت خواهد بود و ایمنی و آن زمید را برکت و آبادانی، و قاعده‌های استوار می‌نهد چنانکه چون ازان تخم بدان مرد رسد چنان گشته تاشد که مردم روزگارِ وی وضیع و شریف او را گردن نهند و مطیع و منقاد باشند و دران طاعت هیچ خجلت را بخویشتن را ندهند.

This idea of “removing the robe of royal power from one group” would quite possibly have resonated with men who grew up hearing stories of Iranian kings, and how inappropriate behavior caused monarchs (such as Jamshid, eventually) to lose the *farr*, or the symbol of kingship and God's will.

This being said, for the most part Beyhaqi seems to be more than willing to allow his readers to bear the brunt of the task of searching for these divine plans in the flow of time. Unlike Beyhaqi, Miskwayh and writers such as Maqdisi and Mas'udi seemed to be more explicit in their searching for such meanings. In so doing, they tended to look at events from a more distant perspective, examining larger swaths of time. We know that Mas'udī, for instance, was better traveled, and perhaps more "worldly" than a provincial historian such as Beyhaqi. Although originally from Iraq, during the tenth century Mas'udī also lived and worked in Egypt, and journeyed extensively elsewhere.[172] These three scholars, sometimes generally categorized as members of an "Iraqi school of historiography," were more "concerned with the broader theoretical implications of their field of study and may be said to have in part prepared the way for Ibn Khaldun."[173] Beyhaqi, on the other hand, is fairly explicit about his somewhat less theoretical goals, stating that "And my design is not to bring Sultan Mas'ud into view for the people of this epoch, for they have seen him, his greatness and daring, and his uniqueness in all aspects of politics and philanthropy. But my design is thus: that I write a foundation of history, and I will create a great undertaking, such that its recitation will remain until the end of days."[174] As for language, the scholar A.J. Arberry saw stylistic similarities between Bayhaqi and his contemporary Gardizi, writing that their "style was not corrupted by the tortuous phraseology so popular in government

[172] Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), xī.

[173] Ibid., xīi. Interestingly, both Elton Daniel and Louise Marlow appear to disagree with Khalidi as to which school of historiography, the Iraqi or an eastern Khurasani, was most concerned with these more abstract ideas of the nature of history. See Marlow, "Advice Literature in Tenth and Early Eleventh-Century Iran and Early Persian Prose Writing," in *Early Islamic Iran*, ed. Edmund Herzig and Sarah Stewart, vol. 5, The Idea of Iran (London; New York; New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the London Middle East Institute at SOAS and the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford ; Distributed in the United States and Canada exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 79.

[174] Fayyaz (pg. 112) reads
و غرض من نه آن است که مردم این عصر را باز نمایم حالِ سلطان مسعود انارَالله بُرهانَهُ، که او را دیده‌اند و از بزرگی و شهامت و تفردِ وی در همه ادوات سیاست ولقف گشتند. اما غرضِ من آن است که تاریخ پایه‌یی بنویسم و بنائی بزرگ افراشته گردام چنانکه ذکر آن تا آخر روزگار باقی ماند.

offices," but was instead surprisingly simple.[175] In his categorization of eras of New Persian prose, the famed scholar Muhammad Taqī Bahār placed both of these works in the first era of New Persian prose, before ever-more Arabic vocabulary and stylistic flourishes were added.[176] Bal'ami had more Arabic vocabulary than Beyhaqi, perhaps as a consequence of translating and adapting Tabari's Arabic original. As an example, the somewhat later *Siyasatnameh* of Nizam al-Mulk was somewhere these two works in style and Arabic content, in the opinions of both Bahār and Arberry.[177] As stated above, Beyhaqi, when discussing the day to day reign of Sultan Mas'ud, had the distinct advantage of his time in the royal chancellery and having personally witnessed many of the events he writes about.[178] Such insider information was certainly not confined to Beyhaqi only, as many of our earliest New Persian prose authors were either in the royal employ, or close relatives of high officials, even in certain cases the grand vizier. As one can see by the events of Beyhaqi's life, perhaps certain royal officials thought he had *too* much inside knowledge of the workings of the court. At one point in his life, Beyhaqi fell out of royal favor and had his assets and personal effects impounded. As Bosworth states in the introduction to his very recent English translation of Beyhaqi, "what Beyhaqi mourned, in regard to this period of

175 Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 62.

176 Before the transition from *dari* to *farsi*, as it were. As scholars such as Perry and Frye have noted, based on statements recorded in sources such as Ebn al-Moqaffa' and Moqaddasi, it is likely that the most common spoken language in Balkh even before the Arab invasions was a variant of Persian, *dari*, so named because it was spoken at the Sasanian court in Ctespiphon. No later than the 10th century CE, this term was used to differentiate the spoken language, likely an early form of New Persian, from written Middle Persian or *pahlavi* See J Perry, "The Origin and Development of Literary Persian," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn, A History of Persian Literature, v. 1 (London ; New York : New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 49–51.
As Frye notes, it was particularly in the Qarakhanid period in the 11th century and later that this more 'pure' *dari* Persian became more mixed with Arabic terminology and vocabulary, and this new style became known simply as *farsi.* See Richard N. Frye, "Development of Persian Literature under the Samanids and Qarakhanids," in *Islamic Iran and Central Asia (7th-12th Centuries)* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), 72–74.

177 Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 74.

178 Of course, one can be *too* close to the events one is recording, as Beyhaqi himself was caught up in some of the palace intrigues he wrote about, and suffered for them. See Soheila Amirsoleimani, *Truths and Lies Irony and Intrigue in Tārīkh-i Bayhaqī.*, 1995, http://books.google.com/books?id=h5UeAQAAMAAJ.

his life, was not so much the seizure of his personal property (which he probably regained subsequently) as the loss of his personal copies of official documents and his notes on various events."[179]As well as Gardizi and Beyhaqi, another useful source for information on the early Ghaznavids is the *Kitab al-Yamini* of Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Jabbar 'Utbi, who was born in Rayy in 961 CE. As with many of our other authors, he was employed in the royal bureaucracy, in his case serving under both Sebuktegin and Mahmūd. His recounting of the early Ghaznavids was completed while Mahmūd was still alive and in power, probably around the year 1020 CE. The title of his work is a reference to a *laqab* of Mahmūd, "Yamin al-Dawla," or the "Right [hand] of the state."[180]

Local Historiography

Some of the main sources and documentation of events in Khurasan and Transoxania through the eleventh century CE are various local histories written during, or shortly after, this period. Many events from the ninth through the eleventh centuries are mentioned in a single source and cannot be corroborated by any other means.[181] The reasons for this dearth of information are not entirely clear, but may very well be due to the later series of invasions from Central Asia and the wholesale destruction they sometimes wrought, particularly in the case of the Mongols. An interesting note on the timing of many of our sources, as Elton Daniel points out, is that "the main historical works we have mostly come from the time of a dynasty's descent rather than its zenith—such is the case with Bal'ami, Gardizi, and Beyhaqi."[182] This adds an

179 Bosworth and Baihaqī, "Introduction," 36.
180 Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, C. Central Asia in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, 14. Al-'Utbi: The Alliance of the Ghaznavids and Qarakhanids, Introduction," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, Kindle (Indiana University Press, 2009).
181 Melville, "Introduction," 2012, xxxī.
182 Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 149.

additional level of difficulty for historians attempting to use these texts: the presence of a sort of nostalgia for golden years past, remembering when the dynasty was strong and in the ascension, and a concomitant tendency to idealize the actions of those early rulers. This section will begin with a brief overview of some of the most pertinent texts, and then progress to some specific comparisons between the views of certain events in these texts and a discussion about possible motivations for differing views.

Sistan

One of the most well-known, and perhaps most useful, of the so-called local histories of the time is the *Tarikh-i Sistan*. Most modern scholars agree that the text is the work of at least two, or perhaps even three authors, none of whose names have come down to us.[183] The bulk of the work appears to be due to the earliest author, having begun his writing during the reign of the Saljuq amir Toghrel, as he follows the name of Toghrel with the 'May God perpetuate his rule'.[184] As Ehsan Yarshater states in his foreword to Milton Gold's translation of the text, still the most current published in the English language, the *Tarikh-i Sistan* is not just useful as a history of the locality, or for its rather detailed (if understandably biased) information on the Saffarids, but because it is itself “a major literary document. Not only is the text itself a fine specimen of the unadorned, concise prose style employed in early Persian historiography, with interesting philological traits, but it is also a major source of Persian literary history. It provides unique information on the beginning of formal Persian poetry in Islamic Persia, furnishes a list of

[183] Ibid., 140–141.

[184] Milton Gold, introduction to *Tārikh-e Sistān*, trans. Milton Gold, vol. 48 of *Literary and Historical Texts from Iran*. ed. G. Tucci and E. Yarshater (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1976), xxv. Toghrel died *c*. 1062 CE, meaning the earliest sections of this work were likely composed in the mid-11th century CE See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 117.

Saffarid poets, and quotes a number of important early Persian poems."[185] As with essentially every history of the period, despite its local nature, the author chooses to begin his work with the mythic beginnings of the region. Here we can see the clearly Iranian foundations of the province and the worldview of many of its inhabitants, at least among its literate classes. Our unknown author states that "the founding of Sistan, it was by the hand of Garshāsb ibn Asrat ibn Shahr ibn Kurang ibn Bidasb ibn Tur ibn King Jamshid ibn Nuanjhān ibn Injad ibn Ushhang ibn Farāvak ibn Siyāmak ibn Musā ibn Kayumars, and Kayumars was Adam (Peace be upon him!)."[186] Garshāsb's genealogy here gives nods to both mythical Iranian (in this case, specifically, *Turanian*) and Islamic personages, tracing his ancestry back to the very first man on earth, Kayumars/Adam. What is more, in the discussion of the life of Garshāsb, our author references a story which would still be familiar to any Iranian who had heard stories from Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*: that of Zahhāk, Kaveh, and Faridun. Furthermore, he makes the case for the Turanian nature of Sistan being preferable to an Iranian character, because his land never came under the rule of the evil Zahhāk. As the history states, "Zahhāk, in his days, had no control [over] Sistan, and all of Zabol and Kabul and Khurasan that Zahhāk possessed had been returned to Garshasp, and Afridun's countries grew in number."[187] As with many authors of histories and geographies during this period, our unknown author shows an interest in the etymology of place names, and

[185] Ehsan Yarshater, foreword to *Tārikh-e Sistān*, trans. Milton Gold, vol. 48 of *Literary and Historical Texts from Iran*. ed. G. Tucci and E. Yarshater (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1976), xvīi.

[186] Translation mine. Mohammad Taqī Bahār, ed., *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-I 445-725* (Tehran: Zuvvar, 1314), 2., reads
اما بنا کردن سیستان، بر دست گرشاست بن اثرت بن شهر بن کورنگ بن بید اسب بن تور بن جمشید الملك بن نونجهان بن اینجد بن اوشهنگ بن فراوك بن سیامك بن موسی بن کیومرث بود، و کیومرث آدم علیه السّلام بود.
See Milton Gold, *The Tārikh-e Sistān* (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1976), 1., for a more nuanced English translation.

[187] Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-I 445-725*, 6., reads
و ضحاك را بروزگار او بسیستان هیچ حکم نبود، و همه زابل و کابل و خراسان را که ضحاك داشت بگرشاسب باز داشته بود، افریون بر ولایتش زیادت کرد.

attempts to explain why the region of Sistān is also alternately known as Zāvol, Zarang, and Nimruz. For example, "the names of Sistan: Sistan and Zabul and Zarang and Nimruz . . . and they called manly men "siv" in those days – and they say Sistan always had masculine men, and so that there it [the name Sivestan or "Sistan"] came to pass."[188] He also gives similar stories for the other names of Sistan.

In his brief discussion of world geography, however, we see a somewhat different take on the partition of the world than we may be used to from the *Shahnama* story of Salm, Iraj, and Tur, one unsurprisingly centered on the Eastern Iranian world. Instead of a world divided between Iran, the western domains of the Romans, and the eastern domains (including China), we see that "this all they had separated into four: Khurasan and Iran (Khwaran) and Nimruz and Bactria; everything of the boundary that was north they call Bactria, and everything of the southern border they call Nimruz, and the middle in between they divide in two, everything of the eastern boundary they call Khurasan and everything that is west [is] Iranshahr."[189] Interestingly, this puts Sistān/Nimruz outside the borders of Iran proper, although obviously still within the greater Iranian cultural world, as the genealogy of Garshāsb showed. Although Ferdowsi had already composed his *Shahnama* at this time, the unknown author of the *Tarikh-i Sistān* obviously drew on other traditions for geographic information. As Daniel again points out, our unknown author also relied upon more local Sistani works, such as a *Ketāb-e Garshāsb*, Helāl b. Yusof Uqi's *Ketāb Fazā'el Sejestān*, and an otherwise unknown *Akhbār Sistān,* as well as

[188] Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan* (pgs. 21-22) reads
نامهاءِ سیستان: سیستان و زاول و زرنگ و نیمروز . . .و سیو مردِ مرد را گفتندی بدان روزگاز ـ و یسستان بدان گویند که همیشه آنجا مردان مرد باشند، و مردی مرد باید تا آنجا بگذرد.

[189] Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-i 445-725*, 23–24., reads
و این جمله را بچهار قسمت کرده‌اند: خراسان و ایران (خاوران) و نیمروز و باختر؛ هرچه حدّ شمالست باختر گویند و هرچه حد جنوبست نیمروز گویند و میانه اندر بدو قسمت شود هر چه حدّ شرقست خراسان گویند و هر چه مغربست ایران شهر.

Qodāme b. Ja'far's *Ketāb-al-kharāj* and even the Zoroastrian *Bundahishn*.[190]

In addition to the place of primacy given to Sistān, we can see a bit of rivalry with Khurasān in the geographical portion of the work, and a refusal to defer at all to this neighboring region. It must be remembered that the Samanids, and then the Ghaznavids and others had taken over control of Sistāni areas more than a century and a half previously. When the author enumerates the urban districts of Sistān, he includes many areas which might seem to belong to regions such as Bactria and Khorasān. These include Balkh, Bokhārā, Samarqand, Shāsh, Farghāna, Soghd, Khojand, Tus, and even Khwārezm itself. The text states that "and concerning the obfuscation of Khurasan and its constituents in this book: we [could] fill this book with our own land, so that all of it that is read becomes famous. It had been that Sistan was always separated from middle of the world, and its own perpetual essence was not placed with the contiguous place, but many cities were founded and connected to it."[191] The evident Sistani bias continues in the history itself. For example, in the recounting of one episode, the text states that

> And Saleh was originally from Sistan, but had grown up in Bost – they said "who was this, who until now himself received himself thousands upon thousands of dirhams from the pillaging of the greats of Sistan, and now he will again pillage anew! What danger are he and Bost? He is without a country, if he takes from here this money." And they revolted, and everything the people had set up, and at Dar-e Anjare they encamped the army, and [later] disembarked, and with Saleh was everything that was from Bost.[192]

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[190] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 144.

[191] Bahār, *Tarikh-I Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-I 445-725*, 27–28., reads
و سبب یاد کردن کُوَرِ خراسان و مجموع آن اندرین فصل آن بود که ما را غرض اندرین کتاب فضل شهر خویشست تا هر که این بخواند معلوم گردد او را که سیستن همیشه از میان عالم مفروز بودست و بذات خویش قائم و آنرا بجای پیوسته نگردند الّا بسیار شهرها کردند و بدان اندر پیوستند.

Gold, *The Tārikh-e Sistān*, 19–20, reads "we have mentioned the urban districts of Khorāsān and included them in this section because it is our aim in this book to point out the superiority of our own city [land?] so that whoever reads this book would know that Sistān has always been independent, and has always stood on its own two feet. It was not subordinate to any other place; on the contrary, many other cities were bounded and formed a part of it."

[192] Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-i 445-725*, 198–199, reads
و صالح را اصل از سیستان بود اما به بست بزرگ شده بود ـ ایشان گفتند که او که باشد که تا اکنون دو بار هزار هزار درم از غارت بزرگان سیستان بدو رسید و اکنون باز نو غارت خواهد کرد! بست را واو را خود چه خطر باشد؟ بی حمیتی باشد اگر وی این مالها از اینجا ببرد، [و] خلاف آوردند، و هر چه مردم سکزی بود بر نشستند و بدر عنجره لشگر (sic) گاه کردند و فرود آمدند، و هر چه از بست بود با صالح ببودند.

Of course, whether such words were actually spoken or not, the local Sistani pride may well have been a factor in this historical episode, and may not have been an invention of a historical author.

One can easily see how local pride may have been strong in Sistan, and not just with our unknown author. The author's views, of course, were likely in many ways a reflection of his own cultural and intellectual milieu. The evident pride that the author or authors show in detailing the glories of the Saffarid era certainly point to this. Sistāni pride seems to have been an inescapable fact, one that is also demonstrated in Sistāni events narrated in other works. For example, it is in Gardizi's *Zeyn al-Akhbar* that we can [first?] read the now-classic story of Ya'qub ibn Leyth's "investiture patent" during his antagonistic dealings with the neighboring Tahirids. The text reads how "Muhammad b. Tāhir sent Ibrāhīm b. Sālih al-Marwazi to Ya'qūb with a message, saying, 'If you have come on the Commander of the Faithful's instructions, show me your investiture diploma and patent and I'll hand over the governorship to you; if not, go back home!' When the envoy got back to Ya'qūb and delivered the message, Ya'qūb drew out his sword from beneath his prayer rug [N 13] and said, 'This is my document of appointment and standard!'"[193] Of course, our unknown authors of the *Tarikh-e Sistān* did not necessarily share completely similar views with Gardizi on all aspects of the history of Sistān. Whereas Gardizi was actually writing a

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Gold, *The Tārikh-E Sistān*, 157–158, reads

> "Sāleh was Sistāni in origin but had been brought up in Bost. They went on: 'Who is he to have acquired two million dirhams in plunder from the notables of Sistān? And now he would make fresh depredations! After all, what is so great about Bost or him? It would be dishonorable for us to permit him to take property away from Sistān.' So mutiny broke out, and whoever was of Sistāni origin, rode off and established an army camp at the *Dar-e 'Anjara* and stayed there; whereas those who were of Bost remained with Sāleh."

[193] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, trans. Bosworth, *The Ornament of Histories*, 47. Qazvini's1948 edition (ʿAbd al-Ḥayy ibn Ẓaḥḥāk Gardīzī, *Tārīkh-i Gardīzī, Ya, Zayn Al-Akhbār* (s.l: s.n, 1327), 7.(P. 7) reads:
محمد بن طاهر مرابراهیم بن صالح المروزی را برسالت نزدیک یعقوب فرستاد گفت، اگر بفرمان امیرالمؤمنین آمدی عهد و منشورعرض کن تا ولایت بتو سپارم وا گر نه باز گرد چون رسول بنزدیک یهقوب رسید و پیغام بگزارد ۳ یعقوب شمشیر از زیر مصلی بیرون آورد و گفت عهد و نوای من این است.

history of the Ghaznavids that also included some local history of Sistan as part of an interest in a Greater Khurasan, the *Tarikh-e Sistan* is much less positive toward Ghaznavid rule. According to Daniel's interpretation, in the *Tarikh-e Sistan* "the subsequent diffusion of Saffarid autonomy and the advent of Turkish rule under the Ghaznavids and Saljuqs is depicted as an affliction (*mehnat*) and the first great calamity (*asib*) to befall Sistan."[194] It should also be noted that local histories of Sistān did not stop with the *Tarikh-e Sistān*, or even with Gardizi. For example, another later local history was the *Ihya' al-muluk* (Revivification of the Kings) by Malik Shah Husayn.[195]

Khurasan

As we have already seen, Khurasan is a region with a long history of urban, sedentary civilization, and as one could expect there were at one point many local regional/city histories written about its constituent areas. Ibn Funduq, or Abu'l-Hasan Ali b. Zeyd Beyhaqi, wrote a *Tarikh-e Beyhaq* (not to be confused with Beyhaqi's *Tarikh-e Mas'ud*) in approximately 1167 CE, shortly before his death in 1169. Part history, and part biographical dictionary of local notables,[196] this text is the only one of his more than seventy works to have survived in full.[197] Ibn Funduq himself also enumerated fifteen other local histories from Khurasan, only two of which still exist today.[198] It should be noted that, although at this point in time New Persian was fairly well established as a language of literature, many of these local histories were still written

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[194] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 143.

[195] Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "Arabic, Persian and Turkish Historiography in the Eastern Iranian World," in *The Age of Achievement: AD 750 to the End of the Fifteenth Century, ī: The Achievements*, ed. Muhamed Sajfitdinovič Asimov and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, vol. 2, History of Civilizations of Central Asia 4 (Paris: UNESCO publ., 2000), 151.

[196] Meisami, "History as Literature," 20.

[197] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 145.

[198] Richard W Bulliet, "Local Politics in Eastern Iran under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks," *Iranstudies Iranian Studies* 11, no. 1/4 (1978): 37.

in Arabic. The reason for this is not clear. An important source for Gardizi, and Ibn al-Athir, was Abu'l Husain 'Ali ibn Ahmad al-Baihaqi al-Nishapuri al-Sallami's *History of the Governors of Khurasan*, whose very name seems to establish his pan-Khurasanian credentials.[199]

As aforementioned, Gardizi's *Zeyn al-Akhbar* is in many ways a political history of greater Khurasan. At least within the later Ghaznavid era, the author may have been well placed to report on this political history. He is believed to have been a relative of Abu Mursil b. Mansur b. Aflah Gardizi, who was involved in the delivery to Mahmūd's son Mas'ud of the investiture patent sent by the caliph al-Qadir.[200] We know that Gardizi the author was connected to some intellectual circles of the day, as he claims to have been personally acquainted with the famed Khwarazmian polymath Abu 'l-Rayhan al-Biruni.[201] We can see certain aspects of local pride in Gardizi's work, and of a careful distinction between Persians, Arabs, and other ethnic groups that participated both in his present, and in the history of Islamization of Khurasan. For example, when Gardizi writes about campaigns against the Hepthalites (*Haytalān*) in the time of the governor 'Abdallah b. 'Amir b. Kurayz, he specifically mentions that the forces under his commander Hātīm b. Al-Nu'mān al-Bāhilī consisted of some 4,000 Arabs and an additional 1,000 Persians, rather than simply "5,000 Muslims" or soldiers for the faith.[202] This is a trend that we will later see is a common thread running throughout histories of the period, despite the great mixing between Arab and Iranian that we see in the campaigns of the east. Unlike in Fars and Mesopotamia, where entire garrison cities such as Kufa and Basra were founded to house Arab

[199] Muḥammad b. Ǧaʿfar al- Narša_kī and Richard N Frye, "Introduction," in *The History of Bukhara* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1954), xi.

[200] Bosworth, Clifford Edmund and Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, "Introduction," in *The Ornament of Histories: A History of the Eastern Islamic Lands AD 650-1041: The Persian Text of Abu Sa'id 'Abd Al-Hayy Gardizi*, trans. Bosworth, Clifford Edmund (I.B.Tauris, 2011), 1, http://www.myilibrary.com?id=316910.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 14. Bahār's 1948 edition does not include Section I on the Arab governors.

troops and settlers, in Khurasan we see greater cohabitation. For instance, Gardizi states that the governor Umayr b. Ahmar al-Yashkuri "sent Ma'mūr b. Sufyān al-Yashkurī to perform the Muslim worship in the citadel of Merv. He remained governor of Khurasan for some time. He established a policy of commandeering people's houses for his troops and made it a customary practice."[203] On the subject of Gardizi's eastern pride, it is of course difficult to determine whether Gardizi is simply reporting on a possible truth, or if he is purposely aggrandizing Khurasan and Khurasanians. For instance, when speaking of the religious rebel Ustādsīs, he mentions that "some people assert that Marājil, the mother of Ma'mūn [son of Harun al-Rashid and himself an 'Abbasid caliph], was Ustādsīs's daughter, and that Ghālib, Ma'mūn's maternal uncle, was Ustādsīs's son; it was Ghālib who assassinated Fadl b. Sahl in the baths at Sarakhs on Ma'mūn's orders."[204] As our author himself states, this lineage was far from an established fact. However, whether he believed this to be true or not, he does mention it. Why? Was he proud of the Khurasanian heritage of the late caliph? A recipient of the patronage of the Ghaznavids, would he not have been an ardent supporter of what remained of 'Abbasid central authority? Was this a way to disparage 'Abbasid heritage by linking them by blood to the heterodoxy of Ustādsīs? Or was he simply reporting on a possible interesting historical connection? Unfortunately, there are simply far too many possible motivations for even an offhand comment such as this. Regardless, Daniel and other scholars have managed to parse at least two underlying themes in Gardizi's work. As Daniel states in his very recent work on Persian historiography,

> The two threads that really tie together the seemingly disparate parts of the *Zeyn-al-akbar* are the author's interest in a very particular geographical region and his attachment to the Ghaznavid dynasty.

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[203] Ibid., 15.

[204] Ibid., 33. Ustādsīs was one of the late 8th century CE religious rebels in the Iranian lands, most of whom claimed to have been inhabited by the sole of the assassinated Abu Muslim. See Patricia Crone's latest monograph for more information on these rebels.

> Gardizi refers over forty times to what he calls *Iran* or *Iranshahr*. He does not precisely define what he means by these terms, but it certainly constituted for him a real geographical and cultural entity that could be distinguished from the lands of the Greeks (*Rum*) or Turks (for him, *Turan*). In fact, Gardizi's own interests are unabashedly in the history of Khorasan as the heart of Iran.[205]

Like most writers in Persian at the time, Gardizi seems to have little difficulties distinguishing between the Ghaznavids, a dynasty descended quite recently from Turkish *ghulams*, or slave soldiers, and other "Turks." Perhaps, in Gardizi's mind, the Ghaznavids had been so thoroughly Islamized over the preceding three generations as to be more Iranian than Turk, or perhaps by "Turk" what was meant was more the Turkoman tribes of the region. Of course, Gardizi's work is not simply a political history, and in many sections shades into works of human geography. Scholars have been able to trace certain pieces of information in his work to slightly earlier well-known works. For example, in a chapter on the Turks, Gardizi based his own work on those such as Ibn Khurdadhbih, al-Jayhani, and Ibn al-Muqaffa'.[206] This dependence on earlier sources is, of course, part of any scholarly writing style, whether medieval or modern.

Transoxania

As the *Tarikh-i Sistan* is a good primary source for ascertaining the way later generations viewed the Saffarids, the *Tarikh-e Bokhara* is one of the major contemporary sources for Samanid history. As with many local histories in Khurasan and Transoxania, the text was originally written in Arabic, although that original version is no longer extant. The author gives his name as Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Zakariya ibn Khattab ibn Sharik al-Narshakhi, and states that the work was written *ca.* 943-944 CE and presented to the Samanid amir Nuh ibn Nasr. From the introduction, it is not clear if the work was written at the amir's behest, or simply

[205] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 124.

[206] Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, A. Turkic Peoples of the Steppe, 9. Gardizi: The Turks in Early Muslim Traditions, Introduction," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Indiana University Press, 2009). Kindle edition.

presented to him with the hopes of generous royal recompense.[207] The original translation into Persian was completed by one Abu-Nasr Ahmad b. Mohammad Qobavi in approximately 1128 CE.[208] Later abridgement and editing was completed fifty years later, in 574/1178-79 by Muhammad ibn Zufar ibn 'Umar, who included additional sections from other works available to him at the time, such as the *Khaza'in al-ulum* of Abu'l Hasan 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Nishapuri. Interestingly, this edited volume was presented not to a political or royal authority of the time, but to the chief of the Hanafite jurists in Bukhara.[209] Unfortunately, this chain of translation, transmission, and adaptation makes it nearly impossible to distinguish between what may have been written in the tenth century CE original and what was a later twelfth century CE amendment. Regardless, the work does include interesting information on the founding of the city, and the on the history of Samanid rule. It also refers to remnants of early Iranian, or perhaps even specifically Zoroastrian, cultural practices still current sometime within that time span. For example, we know that certain songs were still sung within Bokhara at least as late as the tenth century CE, such as "The Magi's Lament" and the "Revenge for Siyavosh," that point to the continued remembrance of pre-Islamic history or mythology.[210]

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[207] Narša_kī and Frye, "Introduction," xī.

[208] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 114.

[209] Narša_kī and Frye, "Introduction," xī.

[210] Firuza Abdullaeva, "The 'Shahnama' in Persian Literary History," in *Epic of the Perian Kings: The Art of Ferdowsi's Shahnama*, ed. Barbara Brend and Charles Melville (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 18. Abdullaeva has written elsewhere about the story of Siyavash, including its similarities to the Islamicate story of Yusuf and Zulayka. See Firuza Abdullaeva, "The Legend of Siyāvosh or the Legend of Yusof?," in *Ferdowsi's Shāhnāma: Millennial Perspectives*, ed. Olga M. Davidson and Marianna Shreve Simpson, Ilex Foundation Series 13, 2013, 28–57. Abdullaeva also mentions the connection of the story of Siyavosh to the "archetypal myth about the life-death-rebirth deities and semi-deities that is connected with the rituals of annually reviving nature" in many cultures, ranging as far afield from Bokhara as Greece and Egypt (31). Manya Saadi-Nejad explains this connection further, writing that

> "Anāhitā and Siyāvaš are thus both connected with two of the central characters in Mesopotamian mythology: Anāhitā with Inana-Ištar, and Siyāvaš with the beautiful young man, son or lover of Inana-Ištar, known under Dumuzi and other names, who dies, or is killed, and reborn each year, symbolizing the annual regeneration of plant life so important in this agricultural society. One of the main components of the annual ritual cycle connected with this myth was mourning and lamentations over

Later Transoxanian histories were also written, under the auspices of the Qarakhanids, Ghaznavids, or Seljuqs. Some of these works were written in Persian, although it is also notable that under the Qarakhanids, who were a more recent Turkic dynasty of eastern origins, we start to see official patronage of Turkic literature as well.[211] The Qarakhanids, also known as the Ilek or Ilig Khans, unlike the earlier Ghaznavids were not descendants of slave soldiers but were instead a wholly Turkic dynasty with their own traditions and separate history.[212] Perhaps this was a major motivation for elevating Turkic languages to that of a language of high literature. They still did patronize works in Persian as well, however,, such as our sole surviving historical work from Qarakhanid Transoxania, the "Examples of Diplomacy in the Aims of Government" of Muhammad b. Ali al-Katib as-Samarqandi, who also authored the "Great Book of Sindbad" in Persian verse. His history here was composed for the latter twelfth-century Qarakhanid ruler Qilich-Tamghach-Khan Mas'ud b. Ali, who reigned in the second half of the twelfth century.[213]

Khwarazm

In the ancient region of Khwarazm, there are surprisingly few extant written records, and nearly no written examples of the Khwarazmian Eastern Iranic language,[214] possibly from a confluence of several factors. The Soviet-era archaeologist Gregoire Frumkin thought that it

the death of this divine son, who was considered to have died the death of a martyr," Manya Saadi-nejad, "Iranian Goddesses," in *Religions of Iran: From Prehistory to the Present*, by Richard Foltz (London, England: Oneworld, 2013), 68.

The "Revenge of Siyavosh" song mentioned in the *Tarikh-e Bokhara* may then have been one of these lamentations connected with the ritual, and perhaps thus with a pre-Islamic form of Mazdaism or Anahita-worship native to Bokhara and Transoxania.

211 Levi and Sela, "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, C. Central Asia in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, 14. Al-'Utbi: The Alliance of the Ghaznavids and Qarakhanids, Introduction." Unfortunately, as this is a slightly older Kindle edition, the electronic copy of this book includes no page numbers.

212 Ibid.

213 Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 18.

214 Most of what does exist is late Khwarazmian, written in Arabic script, although there are a few earlier coins and inscriptions in a variant of the Aramaic script. See Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, "Khwarezmian," in *The Iranian Languages*, ed. Gernot Windfuhr (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 336.

possible that there were very few written sources to begin with in Khwarazm. Pre-Islamic documents may not have existed in the first place, and succeeding waves of invaders may have destroyed what little there was. As Frumkin writes, "some dissenting scholars are inclined to believe—probably rightly—that with the possible exception of their hostility towards Zoroastrianism, the Arab invaders were not so destructive as has often been alleged; after all, pre-Islamic civilization in Khorezm may not have consisted essentially of written records."[215] While from a Eurocentric Western perspective, this may either seem odd, or even a sign of the "barbarian" nature of Khwarazmian civilization, one must approach such a statement from a more Iranian perspective. We know, in fact, that ancient and late antique Iranian civilizations seemed to place a premium on the spoken word, and may have even had a 'distaste' for writing. As Michael Axworthy states in his recent work, "the fact that the scribes in the Achaemenid system wrote their accounts and official records in other languages suggested that the literature was not there, either. There was no Persian history of the Achaemenid Empire because the Persian ruling classes either (the Magi) regarded writing as wicked or [the kings and nobles] associated writing with inferior peoples—or both."[216] That our only written record of the Avesta is from very late – quite likely *at least* a millennium after it was "composed," could speak to the reliance of Iranian civilizations upon the spoken word. In the Avestan case, the writing down of the Zoroastrian holy books, as far as we can tell from our extant sources, waited until the invention of an Avestan alphabet, essentially a superset of the Aramaic alphabet, so that the nuances of all the vowels and pronunciation could be perfectly captured. Perhaps Iranian priests, bureaucrats, and nobles felt similarly about the pronunciation of their everyday language as well.

[215] Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia.*, 83.
[216] Michael Axworthy, *A History of Iran: Empire of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 22.

The second factor that could contribute to a lack of Khwarazmian sources mentioning pre-Islamic Iranian elements could be the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century CE. As is well known, the ruling Khwarazmshahs seemed to have committed an extreme diplomatic and military faux pas by executing the Mongol envoys sent to their court. In retaliation, the Mongol invasion and scourging of Khwarazm was likely considerably more bloody and destructive than in most of the rest of Eurasia. Any early sources that may have survived the Arab invasions of the seventh and eighth centuries CE, whether in their original form or in translation and anthology, may very well have been wiped off the earth some five hundred years later.

Other Regions

Another region with a long history of local histories is that of the provinces near the Caspian Sea, known variously as Gilan, Mazandaran, and Tabarestan, depending upon the period referenced and the individual author. The Buyid dynasty which captured Baghdad in the tenth century were originally Daylamite mountaineers from these regions. Because of their Zaydi Shi'ite leanings, some of these records and histories migrated far from their place of origin, and ended up with their co-religionists in Yemen. As Wilferd Madelung writes, many scholarly works left Iran this way, and that "some of these works, dealing with the lives of the Caspian Zaydi imams and pretenders, are of major interest for the political history of these regions."[217] Sources of a less-religious nature tended not to travel as far, but are also useful examples of the tradition of local histories, such as Baha'-al-Din Mohammad b. Hasan Ebn-Esfandiyār's *Tārikh-e Tabarestān*, composed circa 1210-1216 CE,[218] Owliyā-Allāh āmoli's *Tārikh-e Ruyān* of 1362,

[217] Wilferd Madelung, "Abu Ishaq Al-Sabi on the Alids of Tabaristan and Gilan," in *Religious and Ethnic Movements in Medieval Islam* (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Variorum ; Ashgate Pub. Co., 1992), 17.

[218] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 146–147.

CE, and Zahir-al-Din Mar'ashi's histories of Gilan and Mazandaran from the latter 15th century CE.[219] Ibn Esfandiayar's work is particularly useful for preserving, in New Persian translation, the famed Middle Persian "Letter of Tansar."[220] According to Elton Daniel, Ebn-Esfandiyar likely started composing his history sometime around 1206 CE, in response to a question asked of him by his Bavandid patron, Hosam-al-Dowle Ardashir (reg. 1171-1206), concerning an ancient ruler of Tabarestan.[221] Perhaps in the hope of receiving remuneration for his work, or simply to satisfy his own curiosity or that of his employer, Ebn-Esfandiyar wrote his entire book in response.

Differences Among Historical Accounts

With so many different local or dynastic histories written from the tenth century CE onward, we would expect to see a large amount of repetition of important events. Depending on their perspective, the different authors may have very different opinions about the events that transpired. As well as the regional and dynastic biases that we have seen above, sectarian or religious legal differences could also play a part. In his classic article on local politics in Khurasan, Richard Bulliet lays out the various law schools or non-Sunni sects that had adherents in the region. First, there were the Kharijites who were such a force for chaos in Sistan, and apparently Karukh and Astarbiyan near Herat. According to Bulliet, the Mu'tazilis still held a certain cachet in Nishapur, but the majority of Khurasan was Hanafi, though with the Shafi'i jurists exercising a majority in Shash, Ilaq, Tus, Nisa, Abivard, Taraz, Sanghaj, Sinj, Dandanqan, Isfar'in, Juyan, and the rural areas near Bukhara.[222] This multiplicity of various religious legal

[219] Melville, "The Mongol and Timurid Periods, 1250-1500," 182.
[220] Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 363.
[221] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 147.
[222] Bulliet, "Local Politics in Eastern Iran under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks," 39.

traditions, along with the minority sects in rural areas, became much more complicated with the arrival to power of the Buyids, who conquered the heart of the 'Abbasid Caliphate, Baghdad, in 955 CE. As Daniel states, "the fiction that the Buyids were somehow vassals of the Samanids was no longer tenable. The Hanafi and Shafi'i Islam favored by the Samanid elite was challenged on one side by Karrami fundamentalism and on the other by Ismaili heterodoxy and other forms of Shi'i esotericism."[223] Travis Zadeh, in his *Vernacular Qur'an*, expounds at length upon the interplay between the Samanid dynasty and bureaucracy, the promulgation of Hanafi jurisprudence, and the rise of the Persian language, stating that "as the dominant mercantile and military Muslim force in Greater Iran and Central Asia, the Samanid dynasty, with its allegiance to Hanafi law, partook in the promotion of Hanafi praxis."[224] As he covers in the work, the Hanafis were the first of the four major Sunni legal schools to allow widespread use of Persian in Islamic religious practice, not only with interlinear translations of the Qur'an, and the use of religious explanations in mosque and madrasa, but also the use of Persian for prayers themselves. This relation between Hanafi jurisprudence and New Persian in the Samanid domains is not entirely clear, however. Did the resurgence of Persian as a language of high culture take place in Samanid domains because they were Hanafis, and Persian usage was more Islamically appropriate for Hanafis? Or did the Samanids support, whether explicitly or not, Hanafi jurists because the Samanids preferred the use of the Persian language? Or are we seeing causality here where there is simply correlation?

Regardless, we know that the Samanids (except for the brief flirtation with Ismā'īlism of Amir Nasr I) were solidly Sunni, and more specifically Hanafi. After the fall of the Samanid

[223] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 108.
[224] Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an*, 258.

dynasty at the end of the tenth century CE, the Ghaznavids under Mahmūd continued in official staunch Sunnism, perhaps even more strongly so than had the Samanids. We can see a number of examples of this in Gardizi, of which we will briefly examine two. Unlike many of our authors, Gardizi claims firsthand knowledge of many events in his history, although not necessarily these two particular incidents. Gardizi claims that

> "But this report had been so: we had seen with our own eyes that Amir Mahmūd, thanks be to God, in Hindustan has done things, and has subjugated castles in Nimruz and Khurasan and Iraq in such a manner, and has passed such a collection of deserts and mountains and rivers, and has made war in such a way, and has forced great kings in such a way, that a person who has not seen that and heard that, will think that such such war and tricks are not the work of men."[225]

Perhaps we can be somewhat less suspicious of Gardizi than many of our other primary sources on the Ghaznavids. However, a few things must be taken in mind. Eyewitness accounts are not necessarily any more reliable than any other type of account. Matters of perspective, both physical and psychological, can influence the "accuracy" of such accounts. Despite the at-times journalistic style of Gardizi's work, one cannot hold the veracity of his account to anything approaching modern, unattainable "von Rankean" ideals of the objectivity of history. Regardless, Gardizi writes that

> And also in that year [1013 CE], a messenger of peace came from Egypt. He was called Tahaarti. When he arrived in Khurasan, the jurists and people of knowledge said that "this Egyptian messenger has come, and he is of the religion of the Batinis. When Mahmūd heard this news, he would not let the messenger before him, and ordered that he be entrusted to Hasan b. Taaher b. Muslim al-Alawi. Hasan beheaded him by his own hand in the city of Bost.[226]

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[225] Bahār (p. 48) reads:
اما این اخبار را بیدشتر از وی آن بودست که برای العین خویش بدیدیم که میر محمود وحمةالله اندر هندوستان چه کردست و به نیمروز و بخراسان و بعراق چگجونه قلعها کشاده است و بر چه جمله بیابانها و کوهها و راهها مخوق گذاشته است و حرب آن چگونه کرده است و پادشاهان بزرگ را چگونه قهر کرده است که کسی آن ندیده است و بشنوده که چنین حرب و حیله نه کار آدمیان باشد.

[226] Bahār's edition of Gardizi (pg. 56) reads:
و هم اندرین سال رسول عزیز مصر آمد که او را تهارتی گفتندی و چون نزدیك خراسان رسید فقها و اهل علم گفتند که این رسول بدعوة عزیز مصر همی آید و بز مذهب باطنیانست چون محمود این خبر بشنید نیر مر آن رسول را پیش خویش نگذاشت و بفرمود تا او را بحسن بن طاهر بن مسلم العلوی سپردند و حسن تهارتی را بدست خویش گردن بزد بشهر بست.

We can see that Mahmūd would not even officially receive an envoy of the Fatimid ruler of Egypt, possibly for fear of legitimizing such a doctrine by even entertaining an adherent at court. A curious note is the name of Tāhartī's executioner, and his *nisba* of "al-'Alawī." Was this person an adherent of a different Shi'i sect? Should we see this as an example of Mahmūd's support of 'Abbasid Sunnism, or of intra-Shi'a violence? Was this a way for Mahmūd to test the loyalty and allegiance of a Shi'i leader? Or does al-'Alawī mean something completely different in this context?

The above example was certainly not the only recorded instance of Mahmūd executing those who may have been too closely tied to the Fatimid regime, or perhaps those who may have had Ismā'īli leanings. Again, Gardizi writes that

> And that very Hasan ibn Mohammed al-Mikali had been imprisoned. He ordered that they confiscate him, and his property was collected from him. Then he ordered that he be confined at the court in the city of Balkh. Concerning that, in that time Amir Hasanak requested permission from Amir Mahmūd, and went on the Hajj. When he came back from Hajj, he took the Syrian route from there. The desert was distraught, and he went from Syria to Egypt. He received a robe of honor from the powerful [ruler] of Egypt. He was accused of having an affinity with the ruler of Egypt, and this accusation required stoning. Then Amir Mas'ud ordered that upon his head be placed [something] and he was imprisoned, and rocks fell down upon him. Then they had his head, and sent it to Qadr in Baghdad.[227]

In this instance, the executed was not even a member of the Fatimid bureaucracy, or even obviously Ismā'īli, but merely a pilgrim who had met the Fatimid ruler on friendly terms. If we are to read nothing further into this incident, then it appears as though anyone with suspected Ismā'īli leanings was in danger of death, in this case in a reasonably horrific fashion. The posthumous gift of Hasanak's head to the Caliph does make it seem as though this execution was motivated by Mahmūd reasserting his loyalty to the 'Abbasid cause, whether in a religious or in a

[227] Bahār's edition of Gardizi (pg. 77) reads
و مر حسن بن محمد المیکالی را باز داشته بود بفرمود تا او را مصادره کردند و مالی ازوی بحاصل آمد پس بفرمود تا او را بشهر بلخ بردار کردند، و سبب آن بود که اندر آن وقت که امیر حسنك از امیر محمود دستوری خواست و بحج رفت و چون از حج باز آمد براه شام از آنچه راه بادیه شوریده بود و از شام بمصر رفت و از عزیز مصر خلعت ستد، او را متهم کردند که او بعزیز مصر میل کرد و بدین تهمت رجم بروی لازم شد پس امیر مسعود بفرمود تا بر سر او ناهدند و اد را بردار کردند و سنگ ریز کردندش و پس سر او داشتند و ببغداد نزدیك قادر فرستادند.

political sense. Of course, for all we know, there could have been more complicated and subtle political intrigues involved in this execution. However, Gardizi also shows that Mahmūd was more than willing to kill followers of non-Sunni sects on a larger scale, such as the time he had stoned to death large numbers of Bātiniyya and Carmathians in the region surrounding Rayy. Other adherents he even had brought back to Khurasan, where instead they died in captivity in his fortresses.[228] As almost always, though, there is a certain amount of suspicion that should be laid upon anything most local or dynastic historians state about religious matters, particularly when it comes to sectarian differences and violence. One must be aware of the loyalties of any such authors. Bulliet argues that "the different clientele posited for this independent historical tradition is the 'patrician class,' a restricted upper class, found in every Iranian city, made up of a small number of wealthy, interrelated families sharing an education in and concern for the further development of the Islamic religious sciences."[229] Although Bulliett is the only scholar who appears to use the word "patrician" when discussing some of the educated classes in Islamic Central Asia, he does make clear here that the 'ulama and the local historians had major shared interests and concerns, even if they were not actually the same people.

Ends of Dynasties

One of the historical situations that seems most apt to receive differing accounts in local histories are those events that lead to the end of dynasties. For example, the end of the Tahirid dynasty receives vastly different accounts in some of our local histories. Beyhaqi simply claims "That in the history of Ya'qub Leyth I have read such, that he intended in Nishapur to overwhelm Muhammad b. Taher b. Abdallah b. Taher, the Amir of Khurasan."[230] He declines to give his

[228] Ibid., 100.
[229] Bulliet, "Local Politics in Eastern Iran under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks," 36.
[230] Abū al-Fażl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-E Bayhaqi*, 112., reads

readers much more information about Ya'qub's motivations for this seizure, leaving one to suspect that it was simply a matter of conquest as usual. Gardizi gives a more detailed account of the interaction, claiming that Ya'qub was actually chasing some fugitive brothers, men who had insulted and provoked a fight with Ya'qub before fleeing into the Tahirid domains. In this case, Muhammad b. Tahir brought upon himself his own arrest, which occurred on 2 Shawwāl 259 (1 August 873) according to the text, by refusing the extradition of the brothers. Ya'qub eventually crucified the brothers for their actions. In this case, Gardizi's account leads the reader to conclude that Ya'qub was acting justly, and that Mohammad b. Tahir brought about his own downfall. After disposing of the fugitive brothers, Ya'qub then "picked up the wealth of the Tahirids and returned to Sistan."[231] Although one may think that Ya'qub here may have overreacted to the slight of Mohammad b. Tahir, Gardizi still shows him to be in the right.

The *Tarikh-i Sistan*, by counterexample, gives a completely different account of the events, and one may suspect a much more fanciful one. Unsurprisingly, this version portrays Ya'qub ibn Layth in an incredibly favorable light, and in addition shows us the importance that was attached to poetry. The *Tarikh-i Sistan* tells a story of Ya'qub and his secretary walking in Bost. They came across a poem in Arabic written upon a wall, which the secretary translated and explained for Ya'qub. The poem said that

> Destiny roared against the Barmak clan in such a way that they fell prostrate upon the ground.
> [Yet] another roar of destiny will be heard among the Tāheriyān.
> But that roar will be the wrath of God, which shall overtake them.

که در اخبارِ یعقوبِ لیث چنان خواندم که وی قصدِ نشابور کرد تا محمّد بن طاهر بن عبدالله بن طاهر امیر خواسان را فرو گیرد.

[231] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 47–48. Bahār's edition (pgs. 8).
مال طاهریان برداشت و سوی سیستان باز گشت.

The secretary explained about the fall of the Barmakids, and Ya'qub told him to write down the poem, as it was essentially a divine mandate for Ya'qub's destruction of the Tahirids.[232]This brief vignette, regardless of its unlikely veracity, provides us much information about how later natives of Sistan likely viewed their native son Ya'qub, and about their views on the importance of history, poetry, and language. First, because of the necessity of the secretary both reading and translating the poem to him, it is obvious that the author of the history had no difficulties acknowledging both Ya'qub's illiteracy and his ignorance of Arabic. These were not considered defects at the time, or at the very least were not considered defects in a warrior leader such as Ya'qub. Second, the anecdote also shows the importance that was attached to poetry, and in its ability to motivate such men of action as Ya'qub. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is an important trope in these histories. Likely, it also had a certain amount of basis in fact as well, although one can easily imagine that this poem was not actually found by Ya'qub but was instead a later interpolation, either by Saffarid court literati or by later Sistanis attempting to shift any blame away from Ya'qub. Third, the poem's reference to the fall of the Barmakids shows a certain belief in the repeated nature of history. What has happened to one noble or powerful house can and will certainly happen to others. It also shows the well-read and educated nature of Ya'qub's secretary, who could read such an allusion in a poem and recall the historical events well enough to explain them to his master. Fourth, this event provides an opportunity for Ya'qub to demonstrate his piety, by declaring that all of his actions, despite their seeming violence or aggression, are simply him bowing to the will of God and carrying out a divine plan.

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[232] Gold, *The Tārikh-e Sistān*, 174–175. Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-i 445-725*, 220–221,
صاحَ الزَمانُ بِآلِ بَرْمَكَ صَيْحَةً   خَرُّ و الِصَيْحَتِهِم عَلَى الأذَقانِ
وَ بِآلِ طاهِر سَوْفَ يُسْمَعُ صَيْحَةُ   غَضَباً يَحِلُّ بِهِمْ مِن اَلرَّحمان

Unsurprisingly, this episode is not the only time that the *Tarikh-e Sistān* claimed the piety of Ya'qub and his successors. Later, the unknown author claims that Ya'qub "never, upon any of the people who praise God did he intentionally draw his sword. Before beginning to attack, he would argue fully, with God as his witness, and he would not attack the Abode of the Infidel until Islam was released [offered] to them, and then if they accepted Islam their property and children were not taken."[233]. This seems like apologia for his conquests of much of the Muslim world, including his ill-fated attempt to conquer Baghdad and to put his chosen candidate on the caliphal throne.

As with the Tahirids, our various local histories also give differing accounts of the fall of the Saffarids, although not to quite the same imaginative extent. Another of our main sources for the fall of the Saffarids is Gardizi. After Ya'qub died, his brother 'Amr b. al-Layth took over the armies and lands of the Saffarid domains. After defeating Rāfi the Kharrijite, 'Amr almost immediately continued the Saffarid rivalry with the Samanids, both by military and by diplomatic means. As his brother Ya'qub had been unable to defeat the Samanids militarily, according to Gardizi 'Amr tried to use the goodwill of the Caliph, garnered from Amr's defeat of Rāfi, to his advantage. Gardizi states that in the year 897 CE, 'Amr sent Rāfi's head to the caliph Mu'tadid, and "sought from the caliph an investiture diploma for Transoxania such as Tāhir b. 'Abdallāh had had . . . The investiture diploma for Transoxania was written out immediately and conveyed to 'Amr by hand of Nasr al-Mukhtārī, the ghulām of Abū Sāj."[234] The way Gardizi portrays 'Amr's reception of this document is somewhat curious. According to Gardizi, when the

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[233] Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-I 445-725*, 267, reads
و دیگر هر گز بر هیچکس از اهل تهلیل که قصد او نکرد شمشیر نکشید و پیش تا حرب آغاز کردی حجّتها بسیار بر گرفتی و خدایر تعالی گواه گرفتی، و بدارالکفر حرب نگردی تا اسلام بر یشان عرضه کردی، و چون کسی اسلام آوردی مال و فرزند او نگرفتی

[234] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 50.

envoy reached 'Amr, “then, the diploma for Transoxania was placed before him. 'Amr said “What will I do with this, as this state cannot be torn from the grasp of Ismā'īl b. Ahmad by the 100,000 [swords] that have been drawn. Ja'far said “this you wanted, now this you know better [what to do?].”[235] Perhaps 'Amr was unhappy because he had assumed that the investiture patent would come with some sort of caliphal military assistance to aid in enforcing it, but that does not appear to have been the case. It certainly appears as though the caliph was playing the Saffarids and Samanids against each other, either as part of a “divide and conquer” strategy to maintain as much centralized power as possible, or as part of some “survival of the fittest” strategy to ensure that he had the most able commanders guarding the eastern frontier of the Islamic world. Regardless, Gardizi relates that 'Amr b. al-Layth, heading from Nishapur to the Samanid realm, began battle with the forces of Ismā'īl b. Ahmad at Balkh, and was soon captured, on March 19-20, 900 CE. 'Amr was then sent to be held captive in Samarqand. According to Gardizi, Mu'tadid was in fact “happy” about this turn of events, and in 901 CE added the whole of Khurasan to the lands under Samanaid dominion, as well as sending gifts to Ismā'īl that included a standard, a crown, and the usual robes of honor.[236] Although there was really no way for Gardizi to have known the caliph's actual reaction and state of mind after learning of the Saffarid defeat, perhaps our historian assumed that Mu'tadid would not have wanted the brother of the troublesome Ya'qub b. al-Layth to gain any more power. Ya'qub, after all, had died shortly after attempting to install his own chosen successor upon the caliphal throne. All sources that we have about the

[235] Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-I 445-725*, 11–12, reads:
پس عهد ماوراءالنهر پیش او بنهاد. عمرو گفت این را چه خواهم کرد که این ولایت از دست اسمعیل بن احمد بیرون نتوان کرد مگر بصدهزار کشیده. جعفر گفت این تو خواستی اکنون تو بهتر دانی.

Ibid., 51, reads that the envoy
“laid the investiture diploma for Transoxania before him. 'Amr said, “what am I to do with this, since this province can't be wrested from Ismā'īl b. Ahmad except by a hundred thousand drawn swords? Ja'far replied, 'You requested this; you will now know how best to achieve it.”

[236] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 51.

Samanids seem to show that, in general, they would have been far less worrisome to the 'Abbasids than many of the other local dynasties.

Unlike with the demise of the main Saffarid power, the demise of the house of Saman seems to have been far more complicated, with a combination of both external and internal power struggles contributing to the collapse of the amirate.[237] According to Jurgen Paul, the Iranian *dehqans* (occasionally pluralized in Arabic fashion as *dahaqin*) who were the main sources of political support for the Samanids had started to lose faith in the leadership of the Saman family near the end of the tenth century CE. It was local aristocrats, the petty gentry who controlled agricultural lands as well as defensive fortifications throughout Transoxania and Khurasan, who in fact *invited* the Qarakhanid Turks to come conquer the Samanid territory, almost certainly under the impression that the Qarakhanids would then leave the *dehqans* in charge of local control.[238] Our primary sources, such as Gardizi, Narshakhi, and al-'Utbi, show what a confused mess the political situation was, with the splintering of the Samanid house, the interference of the local *dehqans*, and both the Qarakhanids and Ghaznavids playing roles in the power struggles. Gardizi writes how the Ilig, or Qarakhanid Khan, "entrusted the realm to 'Abd al-Azīz b. Nūh b. Nasr, to whom a splendid robe of honor was awarded; the Khān said to him, we have deprived Nūh of his realm and have entrusted it to you."[239] Even this seemingly declarative statement shows how unclear our sources are on the events of the late tenth century CE. Did the Khan mean Bukhara specifically, or did he think that he had the military and political cachet to control the succession of the entirety of the Samanid realm? One can see how

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237 Bosworth, Clifford Edmund and Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, "Introduction," 4.

238 Jürgen Paul, *The State and the Military: The Samanid Case* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1994), 12.

239 Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 74.

the Turks, in this case the Qarakhanids, were beginning to interfere in Transoxanian politics and Samanid disputes fairly early (probably around 992, as that is when the Ilig camped outside Bukhara). The situation only became more complicated, according to our sources, with the Qarakhanids and Samanids seemingly using Samanid proxies to wage their war for control of Khurasan and Transoxania, much the same way that Timur Lang would do with Mongol figureheads some four centuries later.

An interesting event that we can compare between two sources is that of the death of Ahmad b. Ismā'īl, some 14 years after the defeat of the Saffarids. The *Tārikh-e Sistān* mentions the incident almost in passing, and seems much more concerned with the issues of succession that followed the death (and somewhat understandably so). Our unknown author writes that "Ahmad b. Ismā'īl was killed by two of his slaves on the bank of the Jayhun (Oxus River) by the instruction of Abu Bakr the scribe, with 8 days remaining in Jomada 301 . . . and the army and peoples swore fealty to his son Nasr b. Ahmad, who was 9 years old, and Abdallah Jayhani continued to control acts [of state]," but also mentions that there was internal strife between commanders.[240] Our unknown author does not seem to care to elaborate any further on the identity of said Abu Bakr, nor give any particular mention of his motivations. Perhaps palace intrigue was so common that there was no need for our author to concern himself any further with speculation as to who was giving orders, or perhaps the killing was more of a personal matter rather than a political assassination. If one compares the incident's coverage in the *Tārikh-i Sistan* versus that in Gardizi, one can see some differences. Gardizi writes that

> And it was, that Ahmad b. Ismā'īl every night had a lion at his door, so that no one could come round.

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[240] Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-i 445-725*, 301–302., reads
احمد بن اسمعیل را دو غلام از آنِ وی بلب جیحون بکشتند، بتعلیم بو بکر دبیر هشت روز باقی از جمادی الآخرسنهٔ احدی و ثلثمایه . . . و سپاه و مردمان بیعت کردند پسر او را نصر بن احمد، و او نُه ساله بود و کار عبدالله جیهانی همی راند.

> That night they did not bring the lion, and other persons also did not sleep at the door, so then in the night a number of his ghulams came inside and slit his throat, and this situation was on Thursday, the 21st of Jomada 301. He was carried from there to Bukhara and they buried him and a tribe [posse?] was sent after those ghulams. Some of them were grabbed and killed. And Abu al-Hasan Nasr b. Ishaq al-Katib was accused of conforming to [conspiring with] the ghulams in the killing of the Martyred Amir, he was grabbed and guarded [imprisoned] and Ahmad ibn Ismā'īl was given the *laqab* of 'the Martyred Amir.'[241]

The name of the secretary here is recorded, although without a more thorough knowledge of the identities of the amir's personal scribes, we may never know if this name actually would have been familiar to contemporary readers. The mention of the Amir's leonine night sentry may have been inserted by Gardizi in order to demonstrate the nobility and grandeur of the amir, and perhaps also to emphasize how badly his enemies wanted him dead. It should be noted that, unlike the history of the late Samanids and early Ghaznavids, this incident is one that Gardizi could not have had any personal knowledge of (occurring over a century before he composed the history). If Ahmad b. Ismā'īl did not actually have a lion who guarded his tent after nightfall (which, while it sounds fantastic, is probably not outside the realm of possibility), then that part of the story could have been added anywhere in that intervening century. Perhaps the story was added to the legend of Ahmad by his successors, or by later scribes or literati attempting to flatter their patrons by aggrandizing their patrons' ancestors. It would seem, though, that if the matter of the lion was well known and recorded in the beginning, than one would think that the unknown author of the *Tārikh-i Sistān* would have mentioned it. It does, after all, add an additional bit of interest to the tale. The only reason one could think that the author would

[241] Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-i 445-725*, 18., reads
و شیری بود هر شب بر در احمد بن اسماعیل بودی تا هیچکس گرد نیارستی گشتی، آن شب آن شیر را نیاوردند و دیگر کسان از اصحاب بر در نیز نخفتند، پس اندر شب چندی ازین غلامان او اندر آمدند و گلوی او ببریدند و اینحال روز پنجشنبه بود بیست و یکم جمادی الاخر سنۀ احدی و ثلثمأیه. اورا از آنجا ببخارا بردند و دفن کردند و قومی را از پس آن غلامان فرستادند، بعضی را ازیشان بگرفتند و بکشتند. و ابو الحسن نصر بن اسحاق الکاتب را تهمت کردند که با غلامان مطابق بود بکشتن امیر شهید، او را بگرفتند و بر دار کردند و مر احمد بن اسمعیل را امیر شهید لقب کردند.

decline to mention the lion is, by so doing, to intentionally shrink the legend of the Samanids, the sworn enemies of the Sistani Saffarids. The lack of reference to Ahmad as "the Martyred Amir" could lend some credence to this possibility.

After the former Samanid vassals, the Ghaznavids, came to rule the lands of both Khurasan and Transoxania, Gardizi shows yet again a lack of willingness to criticize his patron Mahmūd. As Gardizi states, "and it happened thusly, that this lord of the world great Sultan 'Izz al-Dawla wa-Zayn al-Milla, Sayf Allāh, Mu'izz Dīn Allāh Abū Mansūr 'Abd al-Rashīd b. Yamīn al-Dawla wa-Amīn al-Milla Abi 'l-Qāsim Mahmūd b. Nāsir al-Din wa 'l-Dawla, may God prolong the survival of his Sultanship and rule and humble his enemies, without doing anything the crowning of kingship arrived to his hand."[242] By "without any effort," as Bosworth translates it, it appears as though Gardizi would like us to read "without any wrongdoing on his part."

Another incident, like his takeover of the Samanid domains, that shows Gardizi's favoritism to Mahmūd Ghaznavi is Mahmūd's conquest of Khwarazm. Gardizi relates how the Khwarazmian commander Khumārtāsh rebelled and killed Mahmūd's son-in-law, so Mahmūd reacted by sending troops into Khwarazm. Gardizi writes how Mahmud's troops decimated that of Khumārtāsh, later doing the same thing to the Khwarazmians at Hazārasp before seizing the Khwarazmian capital, Kāth.[243] Instead of an incident of aggressive conquest on the part of Mahmūd, the incident instead becomes almost a case of divine retribution against Khumārtāsh.

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[242] Bahār's edition (pg. 48) reads
و بخاصه این چنین اتفاقی که مرین خداوند عالم سلطان معظم عز الدولؤ و زین الملة سیف الله معز رین الله ابو منصور عبد الرشید بن یمین الدولة و امین الملة آبی القاسم محمود آن ناصر الدین و الدولة اطال الله بقاؤه و ادام سلطانه و ثبت ملکه و کب اعداه را اوفتاده که بی هیچ تکلفی پادشاهی بدست او آید.

[243] Ibid., 88. Pg. 57-58.
از غلامان سرای را بفرستاد بر اثر خمارتاش برفتند و آن همه لشکر او را تار و ماو کردند و خمارتاش را دستگیر کردند و بیاوردند و کشته و خسته را قیاس نرود و چون بهزار اسپ رسیدند لشکر خوارزم با تعبیهٔ هر چه تمامتر همه با سلامهای تمام آراسته و ساخته پیش لشکر یمین الدولة آمدند و صفها بکشیدند و میمنه و میسره و قلب و جناح راست کردند و حرب به پیوستند و پس روزگاری نشد گه لشکر خوارزمیان هزیمت شدند و الپتگین بخاری که سپهسالار خوارزمیان بود دستگیر شد و سپاه یمین الدولة روی بخوارزم نهادند و شهر خوارزم را بگرفتند.

Even though his Khwarazmian army was "in perfect battle order," it still could not stand against the might of the Ghaznavids. Although (perhaps somewhat unusually for a historian of this era) Gardizi does not specifically mention that the outcome of this battle was preordained by God, one can almost read that into the subtext: that because of his perfidy Khumārtāsh's troops deserved to be routed by the avenging army of Mahmūd. Of course, in the words of Gardizi Mahmūd is NEVER the aggressor, just as in the accounts of *Tarikh-i Sistan* Ya'qub was never the aggressor. Local bias, or bias towards one patron, was almost always the case displayed in our various histories.

Genealogies

Another topic which often seems to be treated differently in various histories is that of genealogies. Because of the importance of lineage, particularly noble lineage, in both Iranian and Arab cultures, this topic tends to receive much attention from our authors. As an example, at one point Gardizi mentions the Samanid general Ahmad b. Sahl, who "stemmed from one of the noble families of the Persians. He was a descendant of Yazdajird, son of Shahriyār, and came from one of the landholding families (*dehqan*) of Jīranj, one of the large villages of Merv."[244] In Gardizi and in our other sources, even relatively unimportant persons mentioned have important pedigrees. This fits well with what we can see in *Karnamag*, where even the "common" soldiers, including all of those who attacked the fortress of the Worm, had to be mentioned to be of noble blood.[245] This is also the case in the *Tārikh-i Sistan,* where, as an example, the author writes about a certain "Mohmmad ibn Hamdun [who] was the descendant of the *marzbāns*, whose

[244] Ibid., 58.

[245] Sanjana's translation of *Karnamag-i Ardaxšir-i Pabagan* reads "(7) Ardashir (now) dispatched a person with an order that 400 skillful and zealous men of noble blood should hide themselves among mountain cliffs . . ." (Karnamag, trans. Sanjana, Ch8:7) Notice that the text does NOT read the 400 most skillful men, but only the most skillful men of noble blood.

progenitor was Rostam the son of Dastān, to whom Sistān had been subject during the pre-Islamic era," and further claiming that Mohammad was an amazing horseman.[246] This is nearly the entirety of the reference to Mohammad ibn Hamdun. His insertion into the narrative appears to serve one of three purposes. One, his appearance and skill aggrandize the entire region of Sistan and all its fighting men. Two, this is yet another example of the connection between nobility and martial skill, although in this case Mohammad ibn Hamdun's blood was not merely noble but in fact heroic. In this case, the purpose may be less to emphasize the necessity of nobility for prowess in manly arts, but more to further emphasize the skills of Rostam himself. Three, perhaps the author of the *Tārikh-i Sistan* legitimately found a reference to this horseman, and simply found it interesting enough to include in his history.

When it comes to the more important persons mentioned, such as the members or ancestors of dynasties, our histories tend to get even more hyperbolic. For instance, Gardizi, after mentioning the namesake of the Samanids, Sāmān Khudā b. Hām.tān, and his Magian religious status[247], details his genealogy all the way back through Bahram Chubin, Iraj, and Afrīdūn, to Kayūmarth, the "first ruler on earth."[248] As we can see from other sources, such as the Older

[246] Gold, *The Tārikh-e Sistān*, 269.

[247] If Saamaan Khudaa was indeed originally from Balkh, then his status as a "Magian" or Mazdayasnian of some sort is curious. For while we do know that there were Mazda-worshipping practices in Balkh at some point, it does appear that by the 8th century CE Buddhism was the predominant religion in the area. Also, one cannot necessarily speak of "Zoroastrianism" in Central Asia, at least not in the same "canonical" way that one can in Sasanian Iran. As an example, "some widely popular ossuary funeral practices in Central Asia during the Sassanian period do not follow the orthodox and canonical Zoroastrian rites of burial of the time," and perhaps never had. See Kazim Abdullaev, "Sacred Plants and the Cultic Beverage Haoma," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010): 331. Frank L. Holt, when discussing the Macedonian conquests in Central Asia, gives a fascinating vignette of the methods of exposure then popular in Balkh. See *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2012), 25.

[248] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 53. Bahār's edition (pg. 13) gives Sāmān Khudā's full genealogy as:

نسب او سامان خداه بن خامتا بن نوش بن طمغاسب بن شادل بن بهرام چوبین بن بحرام حسیس بن کوزك بن اثفیان بی کردار بن دیرکار بن جم بن جیر بن بستار بن حداد بن رنجهان بن فیر بن فراول بن سیم بن بهرام بن شاسب بن کوزك بن جرداد بن سفرسب بن گرگین بن میلاد بن مرّس بو مروان بن مهران بن فاذان بن کشراد بن سادساد بن بشداد بن اخشین بن فردین بن ومام بن ارسطین بن دوسر {بن؟} منوچهر بن کوزك بن

Preface of the *Shahnama*, claims to be descended from Kayūmarth are not at all rare, but they would certainly lend one a significant amount of nobility, or perhaps even royal grandeur. The story of Samān Khudā's Islamic religious genealogy, rather than familial lineage, is also a matter of interest to several of our authors. For instance, Chapter XXIV of the *Tarikh-i Bukhara*, entitled "An Account of the House of Saman and their Lineage," details the conversion story of Sāmān Khudā, stating "and when Saman Khudat, who was his ancestor, fled from Balkh, and came near him, to Marv, who honored him, and protected him, and broke off relations with his enemy. Balkh was again given to him, and he brought faith to Saman Khuda."[249] This chapter contains a few interesting pieces of information. First, the fact that the author refers to Bahram Chubin using the title of a rightful ruler, considering that according to most canonical sources Bahram Chubin was a nobleman from Rayy who in fact *usurped* the Sasanian throne. In general, this

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ایرج بن افریدون بن اثفیانسك منسك بن سورکاو بو اخشین کاداین رسد کاو بن دیرکاو بو ریمنکاو بن بیفروش بون جمشید بن ویونکمان این اسکهد بن هوشنگ بو فرواك منشی بن کیومرث پادشاه یخستین که بر سمین بود.

[249] Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ja'far Narshakhī, *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā*, Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān 144 (Tihrān: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1351), 71., reads

و چون سامان خدات که جدّ ایشان بود از بلخ بگریخت، و به نزدیك (وی) آمد، به مرو، ورا اکرامی کرد، و حمایت کرد، و دشمنان او را قهر کرد، و بلخ را باز به وی داد، سامان خدات به دست وی ایمان آورد. . . .

Muḥammad b. Ğaʿfar al- Narša_kī and Richard N Frye, *The History of Bukhara* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1954), 59, translates this section as

> When Saman Khudah, who was the ancestor (of the Samanids), fled from Balkh and came to him in Merv, the amir [Asad ibn 'Abdallah al-Qushairi (sic, al-Qasri)] showed him honor and respect. He (the amir) subdued his foes and gave Balkh back to him. Saman accepted Islam from him . . . When a son was born to Saman Khudah, out of friendship for the (governor), he named him Asad. This Asad was the grandfather of the late amir Ismā'īl Samani, (i.e.-) Ismā'īl (ibn Ahmad) ibn Asad ibn Saman Khudah. Saman Khudah was one of the children of King Bahram Chubin.

Compare this story of Sāmān Khudāh's conversion to that shown in Gardizi, where it is claimed that "During that period when Muhammad al-Amīn was caliph at Baghdad and [N 20] Ma'mūn was at Merv, the latter was governor of Khurasan. This Sāmān Khudāh came and joined Ma'mūn's entourage and became a Muslim at his instigation," Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 53. Bahār's edition (pgs. 13-14) reads:

و اندر آن وقت که محمد الامین ببغداد خلیفه بود و مأمون بمرو بود خراسان برسم او بود. این سامان خداه بنزدیك مأمون آمد و بر دست او مسلمان شد.

"And in that time Mohammad al-Amin was the Caliph in Baghdad, and Ma'mun was in Marv. Khurasan was under his rule. This Saman Khuda came to Ma'mun, and accepted Islam from his hands."

Asad and al-Ma'mun were separate people: Encyclopaedia Iranica gives al-Ma'mun's full name as Abū al-'Abbās 'Abd Allāh al-Ma'mūn (Bosworth, C Edmund, "Ma'mun," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2009, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mamun-abul-abbas-abd-allah.).

would certainly not make him a king, but at best a pretender to the throne. Considering the nature of royal legitimacy in Sasanian Zoroastrianism, in fact, his usurpation could in fact make him nearly evil. However, as Meisami points out, at some point the collective memory of Bahram Chubin had changed dramatically, and the "official Sasanian view of Bahram as usurper had given way to his portrayal as eschatological hero, often identified with the "King from the East" whose appearance would restore justice to the earth, as well as Persian religion and Persian rule, and would herald the advent of the End of Days."[250] Unfortunately, we have no way to track exactly when this major shift in the memory of Bahram Chubin occurred, but perhaps the lost *Bahram Chubin-name* that Bal'ami had access to may have already demonstrated this change. Seen in this light, claiming descent from Bahram Chubin would certainly be less problematic.

In his footnotes to his translation of the *Zeyn al-Akhbar*, C.E. Bosworth cites Francois De Blois about Samān Khudāh's genealogy, writing that "Mr. De Blois has observed to me that none of the unintelligible names in Gardīzī's genealogy here has any obvious connection with Bactrian or Sogdian onomastic."[251] Considering Samān Khudāh's putative place of origin, in the region surrounding Balkh, this is a curious fact. If Samān Khudāh's family had deep roots in the region, then one would expect to see Bactrian (Balkh being the main city of the region, referred to by the ancient Greeks as Bactra) names in his genealogy.[252] It is possible that Samān Khudāh was of pure Persian settler stock, as the region had been at least sporadically under Sasanian,

[250] J. S. Meisami, "Rulers and the Writing of History," in *Writers and Rulers: Perspectives on Their Relationship from Abbasid to Safavid Times*, ed. Louise Marlow and Beatrice Gruendler (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004), 77.

[251] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 130.

[252] In his very recent work, Luke Treadwell has laid out evidence for his assertion that Saman Khuda may have in fact been of Hephthalite descent. Treadwell explains about a special medallion produced by the Samanid amir Mansur b. Nuh, and the resemblance of the portrait on the coin to those of Hephthalite rulers of Bactria in the 6th and 7th centuries CE. Treadwell sees this as far more than mere resemblance, and instead as an assertion by Mansur of his Hephthalite heritage. See Treadwell et al., "The Samanids: The First Islamic Dynasty of Central Asia," 6.

specifically Kushano-Sasanian, control over the preceding several centuries. Even were this the case, however, one would be surprised then to see so many names unintelligible to as eminent a modern scholar of the region as De Blois. Where then would the names have come from? Were they purely Kushanian, or Hephthalite, Chionite, or even Chinese names rendered unintelligible by an uncommon transliteration scheme? Regardless, there seems to a certain amount of consensus among our primary sources as to the ancestry of Samān Khudāh. Ibn al-Athir claims that Bahram Jashnash, or Gushnasp, the marzban of Azarbaijan under Chosroes Anushirvan, was an ancestor of the Samanids. Tabari and Bal'ami claim that Bahram Gushnasp, or simply Gushnasp, was the father of Bahram Chubin.[253] Bal'ami, who translated and adapted Tabari's work in the mid-tenth century CE, dramatically expanded Tabari's section on Bahram Chubin. Daniel writes that "His [Bal'ami's] much more extensive material on Bahram Chubin probably comes from some lost *Bahram Chubin-name* (or conceivably again from the oral traditions of the dehqans) and might be explained by the fact that the Samanids claimed Bahram Chubin as their ancestor."[254] Again, flattery of one's patron is rarely a bad idea. Unfortunately, references to this *Bahram Chubin-name* are few and far between, but in the late nineteenth century Noldeke tried to reconstruct some semblance of the work, publishing it as the *Book of the Gests and Adventures of Bahram Chubin* in 1879.[255]

Not to be outdone by his Samanid/Bukhari rival, the writer of the *Tārikh-i Sistan* gives perhaps an even more impressive genealogy for Ya'qub b. al-Lays, who was acknowledged to be the son of a coppersmith. In the section "*The* Great Malek al-Donyā *and* Sāheb al-Qerān*, Abu*

253 Richard N. Frye, "The Samanids: A Little-Known Dynasty," *The Muslim World* 34, no. 1 (1944): 40.
254 Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 111.
255 See Browne and Saba, *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times Until Ferdowsi*, I:109. for a discussion of Noldeke's sources.

Yusof Ya'qub Ibn al-Lays His Genealogy and the Recounting of His Greatness," our unknown author(s) gives Ya'qub's genealogy as:

> Ya'qub ibn al-Lays ibn al-Mo'addal ibn Hātem ibn Māhān ibn Kay Khosrow ibn Ardashir ibn Qobād ibn Khosrow Aparviz ibn Hormozed ibn Khosrow Anushervān ibn Qobād ibn Firuz ibn Yazdajerd ibn Bahrām-e Jur ibn Bardahur ibn Shāpur ibn Shāpur Zi'l-Aktāf ibn Hormoz ibn Narsi ibn Bahrām ibn Bahrām ibn Hormoz al-Batal ibn Shāpur ibn Ardashir ibn Bābak ibn Sāsān ibn Bābak ibn Sāsan ibn King Bahman ibn Esfandiyār al-Shadid ibn King Yostāsf ibn Lohrāsp (the uncle of Kay Khosrow ibn Siyāvosh) ibn Lohrāsb ibn Ahujank ibn Kay Qobād ibn Kay Fashin ibn Kay Abika ibn Kay Manush ibn Nowzar ibn Manush ibn Manushrud ibn Manushjehr ibn Nirusanj ibn Iraj ibn Afridun ibn Abtiyān ibn King Jamshid ibn Vivanjhān ibn Injehr ibn Ushhanj ibn Farāvak ibn Siyāmak ibn Mishia ibn Kayumars[256]

Besides referring to Ya'qub as *Sāheb al-Qerān* ["Lord of the Happy Conjunction" [of heavenly bodies], from footnote 3], this genealogy includes essentially every important name in the entirety of pre-Islamic Iran. Almost every name of note, from the Pishdadian, Kayanid, and Sasnian dynasties is included here, all the way back to the very first royal. Unlike the Samanids, with their usurper progenitor Bahram Chubin, the Saffarids claimed to be descended from Hormozd and Khosrow Parvez, the very royals whose succession Bahram Chubin interrupted. In many ways, such an illustrious pedigree for a simple son of a smith is highly reminiscent of the trope of the noble-born being raised in more humble surroundings. For instance, the story recounted in the *Karnamag* of Babak the shepherd, descendant of Darab, or the story of Cyrus the Great's childhood.[257] In such stories, it is almost always the young man's ineffable qualities of charisma or martial prowess that eventually mark him to be of royal rather than of peasant stock.

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[256] Gold, *The Tārikh-e Sistān*, 159–160. Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-I 445-725*, 200–202.gives
اما نسبت او: يعقوب بن الليث آن المعدل بن حاتم [بن] ماهان بن كيخسرو بن اردشير بن قباد بن خسرو اپرويز بن هرمزد بن خسروان بن انوشروان
بن قباد بن فيروز بن يزدجرد بن بهرام جور بن بردحور بن شاپور بن شاپور ذیالاكتاف بن هرمز بو نرسی بن بهرام بن بهرام بن هرمز البطل
بن شاپور بن اردشير بن بابك بن ساسان بن بابك بن ساسان بن بهمن الملك بن اسفنديار الشديد بن يستاسف الملك بن لهراسب – عم كيخسرو بن
سياوش – بن لهراسب بن آهوجنك بن كيقباد بن كی فشين بن كی ابيكه بن كی منوش بن نوذر بن منوش بن منوشرود بن منوشجهر بن نروسنج
بن ايرج بن افريدون بن ابتيان بن جمشد الملك بن بحوجهان بن اسجهر بن اوشهنج بن فراوك بن سيامك بن موسی ابن كيمرث

[257] See Christopher I Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2–12, for his discussion of what he calls the "First Story," and its common elements in the various versions throughout the Central Eurasian Culture Complex.

Unsurprisingly, this trend of inflated genealogies did not end with the era of the Saffarids and Samanids. For instance, Ibn 'Arabshah mentions in the itinerary of Timur that “He set out for these regions by way of Derbend, which was under the sway of Shaykh Ibrahim, Sultan of the Kingdom of Shirvan, whose family goes back to King Khosrow Anushirvan.”[258] Almost every person of note claimed an important lineage, unlikely or fantastic as it might seem. Most of these persons and dynasties claimed Iranian forebears, but some also claimed descent from Turanian or Arab exemplars. Some even, such as the Ghurids, claimed descent from one of the great villains of the Iranian mythos, Zahhāk.[259] It would seem that to claim such a genealogy for oneself would be even more ignominious than descent from a usurper, but perhaps the Ghurids did not see any other [semi-]logical option. As Bosworth states, by the second half of the twelfth century CE, “actually to trace a blood connection between a family from this remote corner of Afghanistan and the Arabians in their homeland was beyond the capabilities of the Ghurids' most skillful panegyrist and court historian. . . he had to trace the dynasty back to the tyrant of Iranian mythology, Azhd Zahak, whose descendants were said to have entrenched themselves in Ghur when Zahak's thousand-year-old dominion was overthrown by Faridun.”[260] Despite the problems of Zahhāk's brain-eating proclivities, apparently in the minds of the Ghurids a corrupted noble lineage was better than no noble lineage at all. Of course, it may be that the name “Zahhāk,” for

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258 Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., “Part 4. Timur and the Timurids, A. Timur’s Rise and Rule, 28. Ibn ’Arabshah: Timur and His Steppe Campaigns, Introduction,” in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Indiana University Press, 2009). Note that this Derbend is NOT that of the eastern Iron Gates, and is instead located in the Caucasus, possibly in Russian Dagestan (considering that *darband* simply means “gate,” this is likely not an uncommon name for a city near a mountain pass).

259 Vladimir Minorsky, “Commentary on the Hudud Al-’Alam,” in *Ḥudūd Al-ʻĀlam =: “The Regions of the World”: A Persiangeography 372 [A.]H.-982 A.D.: Translated and Explained by V. Minorsky, with the Preface by V.V. Barthold*, ed. V. V. Bartolʹd and Fuat Sezgin, Islamic Geography, v. 101 (Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1993), 174. This is a reprint of the London edition from 1937.

260 Clifford E Bosworth, “The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran and the Search for Dynastic Connection with the Past.,” in *The Medieval History of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, 1977, 54.

whatever reason, was not an uncommon one in Central Asia. For instance, the full name of our historian Gardizi was Abu-Sa'id Abd-al-Hayy b. al-Zahhāk b. Mahmūd Gardizi.[261] Interestingly, although it appears as though Gardizi was at least a third generation Muslim (his grandfather being named Mahmūd), his *father* was in fact al-Zahhāk. This appears to be a *laqab*, rather than his given name (the Arabic definite article seems to lend credence to this idea), but it is still a very curious example of onomastics.

Thus far, we have seen some of the common themes present in many of the historical works from the New Persian Renaissance and beyond, and how some of the differences in these histories and geographies can likely be explained by either local or dynastic bias. A matter of choice in sources and focus, however, can also simply be a matter of the personal choice of an author, either because of their own preferences or those of their patron. We cannot expect a historian to quote from and cite every previous history or piece of literature that they may have read, but an interesting omission, and one that seems to be often commented on, are some of the lacunae in Bayhaqi's history. As Bosworth states in the introduction to his recent translation, "Samanid poets like Rudaki and Daqiqi were favorites of Beyhaqi. But it is strange that there are no quotations [in what we have of Beyhaqi] . . . from Ferdowsi's *Shah-nama* 'Book of kings' or from other writers in the Iranian epic tradition; this absence seems to be an aspect of Beyhaqi's lack of interest in Iranian legendary history and the pre-Islamic past."[262] It is not uncommon for Beyhaqi to quote the poetry of Rudaki,[263] or even from Daqiqi, including where the poet mentions personages from Iran's past, as "where is Kesra, Kesra of the kings, Anushervan, or

261 Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 120. The author's name is actually contained within the text itself.
262 Bosworth and Baihaqī, "Introduction," I: 58–59.
263 For example, Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, ī: 288.

where, from the days before him, is Shabur?"[264] However, on the whole, "Beyhaqi, although himself a Persian, shows virtually no interest in the pre-Islamic past of Persia, and the anecdotes and stories which he inserts in his narrative are, with the partial exception just mentioned [a story about Anushirvan's wazir Bozorjmehr], exclusively Islamic; if anything, he shows himself distinctly hostile to what might be called Persian currents and influences into Islamic life and culture."[265] About Bozorjmehr, Beyhaqi writes that "I have read that when the sage Bozorjmehr abandoned the religion of the Zoroastrians (*din-e gabragan*), since it was a faith full of defects, and embraced the religion of the Prophet Jesus, the blessings of God be upon him, he composed a testament (*vasiyyat*) for his co-religionists in the following terms."[266] Perhaps Bozorjmehr's conversion to Christianity explains why Beyhaqi would mention him in his history, but would neglect all other figures from the Sasanian era. Beyhaqi himself even seems to explain his dislike of works such as the *Shahnama*, writing that "The mass of common people, however, are so constituted that they prefer impossible absurdities, such as stories of demons and fairies and evil spirits inhabiting the deserts, mountains and seas, as when some fool kicks up a commotion and a throng of likeminded people gathers round him . . . The wise—and they are very few in number —are those who test a statement for its veracity before they give credence to it; they welcome

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[264] Ibid., ī: 20. Abū al-Faẕl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-e Bayhaqi*, 471., reads:
اینَ کِسری کِسری الملوکِ انوشروان ام أینَ قبلَه سابورُ.
This king, king of kings Anushirvan . . .

[265] Bosworth and Baihaqī, "Introduction," I: 61. An additional possibility for the omission of references to Ferdowsi may have been one of status; both Rudaki and Daqiqi were employed as court poets at the Samanid court, whereas Ferdowsi was instead patronized by a mere provincial *dehqan* in Tus.

[266] Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, I: 444. Abū al-Faẕl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-E Bayhaqi*, 425., reads
چنان خواندم که چون بزرجمهرِ حکیم از دینِ گبرکان دست بداشت که دینِ با خلل بوده است و دینِ عیسی پیغمبر صلواتالله علیه گرفت، برادران را وصیَّت کرد.
It is said that when Bozorjmehr the Wise, converted from the religion of the Zoroastrians, that religion which was damaged [imperfect, wrong], and had received the religion of Jesus, praise be upon him, his brothers he commanded in his writings.

the truth in all its beauty and discard unseemly falsehoods."[267] If this was a common attitude among those at the Ghaznavid court, and some of their similarly-Turkic successors, perhaps this explains why we have no copies of the *Shahnama* before the late thirteenth century CE, despite the fact that Beyhaqi may very well have read books of a similar oeuvre. For instance, in a section on Khwarazm, he discusses some of his sources, but at the same time demonstrates his disdain for the Iranian past. He writes that "it is so in the book of the Sayyar-e Moluk-e Ajam Moshbat, that their kinship with that Bahram Gur brought them to that land, and that they were of the rightful kings of Iran, and their state should become predominant. This saying is not correct. When the government of the Arabs, may it live forever, the rule of the Iranians was false, and was raised to the descendants of Mohammad Mustafa, the first and last, peace be upon him, it was likewise that Khwarazm was separate, and its history is continuous."[268] Interestingly, Beyhaqi here refers to the "rule of the Arabs," rather than a more general reference to Muslims. Perhaps we cannot read too much into this particular statement, and instead should take the statement to refer more to the invasions led by the newly Islamized Arabs, but it does raise an interesting question. Did Beyhaqi consider the 'Abbasids to be of purely Arab stock? And did he not consider the governments of the local dynasties, many of whom were obviously not Arabs, to not be "rule"? Regardless, even when discussing some of the positive aspects of the acts of prior Iranian kings, Beyhaqi seems careful to insert the religious caveat that all good things were,

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[267]Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, II: 371.
Abū al-Faẕl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-e Bayhaqi*, 905, reads
و بیشترِ مردم عامَّه آنند که باطل ممتنع را دوستتر دارند چون اخبر دیو و پری و غول بیابان و کوه و دریا که اجنقی هنگامه سازد و گروهه همچنو گرد آیند . . . و آن کسان که سخن راست خواهند تا باور دارند ایشان را از دانایان شمرند، و سخت اندک است عددِ ایشان، و ایشان نیکو فراستادند و سخن زشت را بیندازند و اگر بست است.

[268] Abū al-Faẕl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-e Bayhaqi*, 902–903, reads
چنانکه در کتاب سیَرِ ملوک عجم مشبت است که خویشاوندی از آنِ بهرام گور بدان زمین آمد که سزاوار ملکِ عجم بود و برآن ولایت مستولی گشت، و این حدیث راست ندارند. چون دولتِ عرب که همیشه باد رسوم عجم باطل کرد و بالا گرفت بسیِّدِ اولین و آخرین محمَّدِ مصطفی علیه‌السَّلَام همچنین خوارزم جدا بود چنانکه در تواریخ پیداست.

indeed, due mostly to the actions of a benevolent God. For instance, Beyhaqi writes that “But Ardashir Pabagan: according to tradition he did greater things, that he brought again the government of the Iranians, and traditions of justice among the royal institutions. After his death the group continued upon that path. And this was a great life, but God Almighty had brought the period of the Party Kings to a foundation, so that these deeds went easily to Ardashir.”[269] Even when acknowledging the glories of Iran's past rulers, Beyhaqi seems to require qualifying such statements with a rather backhanded compliment.

Although Beyhaqi does not appear to have had a particularly high opinion of most Persian rulers, he does make an exception for Ardashir, and also for Alexander the Macedonian. He writes that “I say such, that of the more accomplished kings of the past, there is a group that was greater. And of that group, the names of two persons are brought to us: one is Iskandar the Greek and the other is Ardashir the Persian. Because it is known that our lords and kings have surpassed these two in all things, it must be that our kings have been the greater/greatest in the land.”[270] We can see that, like Ferdowsi, Beyhaqi seems to have looked upon the rule of Alexander favorably. However, as Bayhaqi seems to have little respect for the work of Ferdowsi, which had been completed some two decades previously, one wonders in which shared sources would Bayhaqi have read about Alexander? In what form had the so-called “Alexander Romance” penetrated to Transoxania by the late tenth and early early century CE? The above is not Bayhaqi's only reference to Anushirvan, for in discussing the Ghaznavid ruler after the death

[269] Abū al-Fażl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-e Bayhaqi*, 114, reads
و اما اردشیر باباکان: بزرگـتر چیزی که از وی روایت کنند آنست که وی دولتِ شدهٔ عجم را بازآورد و سنتّی از عدل میان ملوک نهاد و پس از مرگِ وی گروهی برآن رفتند. و عمری این بزرگ بود ولیکن ایزد عزّوجل مدتِ ملوک طوائف بپایان آورده بود تا اردشیر را آن کار بدان آسانی برفت.

[270] Abū al-Fażl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-e Bayhaqi*, 112, reads
چنان گویم که فاضل ترِ ملوک گذشته گروهن اند که بزرگـتر بودند. و از آن گروه دو تن را نام بردهاند یکی اسکندرِ یونانی و دیگر اردشیرِ پارسی. چون خداوندان و پادشاهانِ ما از این دو بگذشته‌اند بهمه چیزها باید دانست بضرورت که ملوکِ ما بزرگترِ روی زمین بوده‌اند.

of Mas'ud, Abu'l-Mozaffar, Beyhaqi writes “May he be shielded for ever from malevolent fortune, for he is a second Nushirvan!”[271] Despite Beyhaqi's disdain for Persian kingly and political traditions, it appears as though other members of the Ghaznavid court were quite familiar with historical rulers of Iran, and cited them as precedent to help determine the proper resolution of legal disputes.

For example, in discussing the succession of his patron Mas'ud, who wanted to collect from his nobles money that his brother had distributed upon becoming amir before him, his vizier said “Nothing has come down to us about this from the era of the ancient kings of [F 338] Persia, and as for after the advent of Islam, one has not read anywhere of the caliphs or the rulers of Khorasan and Western Persia demanding the return of money riven as accession payments, but today, such arguments will be utterly ineffective.”[272] Although we have no idea how common such a situation may have been, we can determine that at least some viziers really did read histories in order to better inform their own actions. Of course, if “such arguments will be utterly ineffective,” we can surmise that rulers such as Mas'ud (or perhaps *only* the headstrong Mas'ud) did not necessarily have the same respect for the lessons of the past. According to Beyhaqi, however, and likely many of the Iranian bureaucrats and literati at court, this purpose was in fact the very reason to study and write history in the first place, as “the value of books, stories and accounts of people's conduct in the past, lies in the fact that people read through them gradually

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[271] Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, ī: 23. Abū al-Faẕl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-E Bayhaqi*, 484, reads

چشم بد دور که نوشیروانی دیگر اشت،

or simply “keep the evil eye far.”

[272] Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, I: 364. Abū al-Faẕl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-E Bayhaqi*, 337–338, reads

از ملوکِ عجم که از ما دورتر است خبری نداریم، باری در اسلام خوانده نیامده است که خلفا و امیران خراسان و عراق مالِ صلاتِ بیعتی بازخواستند، اما امروز چنین گفتارها بهیچ حال سود نخواهد داشت.

and select what is fitting and applicable. *God is the vouchsafer of fortune and favor!*"[273] Often, there is a very fine line between history and didactic literature, and the two genres blended into each other in many ways.

We can see in Beyhaqi, though, that Mahmūd at least was not completely ignorant of the stories of Iran's past rulers. When discussing a hunting expedition of Amir Mas'ud, Beyhaqi remarks that "I had seen the same sort of thing done by Amir Mahmūd when he was also [F 660] here at Bost. A wild ass had been captured on the way and secured [Gh 505] by cords around its legs. He then ordered it to be branded with the name 'Mahmūd' and then released, since storytellers had recited and recounted in his presence that Bahram Gur used so to do."[274] Of course, despite the historical subject matter that was the fodder for such storytellers, these storytellers may have focused solely on the more entertaining aspects of such histories. We know from what we can read in *Shahnama* that the stories of Bahram Gur can be particularly entertaining, as well as educational for such rulers. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine where such *naqqali* storytellers may have received their own source materials. Were such stories about Bahram Gur solely oral tales, passed on from generation generation of *naqqalis*, or did storytellers in the Ghaznavid era also have access to written works such as the *Shahnama*s of Ferdowsi or Daqiqi?

As we have seen in this chapter, beginning in the ninth century there was a plethora of local or dynastic histories composed in the New Persian-speaking and -writing lands of the

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[273] Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, I: 117. Abū al-Fażl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-e Bayhaqi*, 39, reads
و فائدۀ کتاب‌ها و حکایات و سیَرِ گذشته این است که آن را بتدریخ بر خوانند و آنجه بباید و بکار آید بردادند، والله ولی التوفیق.

[274] Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, ɪ: 172. Abū al-Fażl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-e Bayhaqi*, 659–660.Fayyaz (pg. 659-660) reads
و همچنین دیده بودم که امیر محمود رحمةالله علیه کرد وقتی هم آینجا به دست، و گورخری در راه بگرفتند و بداشتند با شکالها پس فرمود تا داغ بر نهادند بنامِ محمود و بگذشتند، که محدِّثان پیشِ وی خوانده بودند که بهرام گور چنین کردی.

Islamic East. As centralized 'Abbasid power devolved to the hands of regional dynasts, these local rulers and their attendant literati became more interested in recording and celebrating the greatness of both their regions and their patrons. During the same time, along with the increasing use of New Persian as the language of these works, one can also see a change in style from chronicle to narrative in many of these histories. Far from being merely a change designed to enhance their readability, the use of narrative style could have had far more significant impacts on readers or listeners, allowing the audience to more easily place themselves in story, allowing for both greater empathy with the history as well as connecting it more easily with their own present day. By remembering the past, and remembering it in a way that would be easier for their audience to understand, such histories contributed greatly to a continuation, if not a rebuilding, of Iranian identity in the New Persian Renaissance. Of course, in these more local histories, one can also see the continued importance of regional pride and identity, perhaps most clearly in the case of Sistān. Beginning in the next chapter, we will also see how similar trends occurred in geography, in more universal histories, and also in poetry, and how these works helped contribute even more to not just *Iranian* identity, but helped inform the *Islamic* identities of all the peoples in the Eastern Islamic World.

CHAPTER 3: Universal History, Geography, and Literature

As we have seen in the last chapter, the New Persian Renaissance in the Islamic East was a time of major production of local and dynastic histories. Even a cursory examination shows many of these works to be rife with regional biases and differing interpretations of historical events. Even from brief references to historical figures we can see the importance of pre-Islamic Iranian history and traditions for these authors, perhaps even when they explicitly declaim their dislike of such stories. In this chapter, we will examine some other, more universal works of history and geography from the period, as well as touch upon the resurgence of poetry under the Saffarids, Samanids, and Ghaznavids, its form, and most specifically its connection to history through the genre of epic poetry. In so doing, we will see how geography, later universal or pan-Islamic histories, and epic poetry all provided yet further ways for all the Islamic peoples of Khurasan and Transoxania to emplot themselves, in time and space, within the greater narrative flow of the world. Like some of the earlier histories examined in the last chapter, these somewhat later works helped Central Asian Iranians reshape, or perhaps even recreate, their own cultural identity in a different religious environment. In this chapter, we will see how this cultural and geographic identity began to be expanded to the other Islamic peoples of the region, and the importance of poetry in reinforcing such identities. Because many of our earliest references to poetry are actually contained *within* histories, these seemingly disparate elements are not so unconnected as they might appear on the surface.

From an intellectual and artistic standpoint, the Samanid and early Ghaznavid era periods are perhaps most famous for Ferdowsi's composition of his *Shahnama*, but the *Shahnama* is

certainly not the only record we have from that era.[275] As mentioned before, the Iranian literati attached to the Samanid or other *dehqan* courts were involved in a reinvention of their Iranian cultural heritage within an Islamic framework. In a sense, these writers were creating the idea of Iran as a nation, and in fact recreating the Sasanian-era concept of "Iranshahr," although not as what we would think of as a modern "nation state." Many scholars in the 20th and 21st centuries have examined the role of the intellectual in the creation and maintenance of nationalism, although usually within the modern era. However, certain aspects of this work may be applicable to the case of the Samanids, although the "nationalism" would likely have been confined to the court and *dehqans*. As Kennedy and Suny write in the introduction to their volume on *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, "more suggestive has been the work of those scholars who have seen intellectuals, not merely as reflective of what exists, but as constitutive of the nation itself, active agents providing new visions and languages that project a new set of social, cultural, and political possibilities. Intellectuals here are the creators, not only of nationalisms, but of the more universal discourse of the nation, of the very language and universe of meaning in which nations become possible."[276] In fact, there were likely at least three separate but at times interrelated intellectual projects being undertaken on the frontiers of Central Asia in the tenth century CE: that of the Iranian culturalists allied to the petty gentry, that of an emerging Sufism, and that of the Ismā'īlis. As Farhad Daftary writes, "a distinctive intellectual tradition, designated as philosophical Ismā'īlism by Paul Walker, was elaborated by the da'is of the Iranian lands . . . Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Nasafi (d. 332/943) . . . Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 322/934) . . .

[275] However, as Meisami has pointed out, we do have a surprising lack of information about poetry between the time of Rudaki, who lived in the first half of the 10th century CE, and the Ghaznavid court poets of some half century later. See Meisami, "Genres of Court Literature," 239.

[276] Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D Kennedy, "Introduction," in *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D Kennedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 3.

their successors, who starting with al-Sijistani preached the da'wa in the name of the Fatimid caliph-imams, amalgamated in a highly original manner their Ismā'īli theology with a form of Neoplatonic philosophy then current in Persia and Transoxania."[277] The history of either Sufi or Ismā'īli thought is not the subject of this dissertation. We are here much more interested in the geographies, literature, and histories which were involved in the Iranian cultural project. In that vein, we will necessarily make brief reference to some of the Middle Persian literature still extant. As is well known, much of this Middle Persian literature actually dates from the same time period as the "New Persian Renaissance," but in many cases likely descended from works in the Sasanian period. However, our main focus is on the works in New Persian or Arabic, written in the Arabic script but betraying clear influence from pre-Islamic Iranian ideas or ideals.

Geographies

In addition to the works of history that allowed Iranians such as the Samanids to connect to their pre-Islamic past, there were also numerous geographies written in Arabic, and increasingly New Persian, during the ninth through eleventh centuries CE. Unfortunately, most of the work of our earliest geographers is lost, although sections of them are preserved in later works and anthologies. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE seem to have been a fruitful time for such collections, or at least it appears so in our surviving sources. Unsurprisingly, the line between history and geography can be rather blurry, even shading quite easily into didactic literature. Some of our earliest Islamic Iranian geographers were Istakhri (mid-10th century CE), Ibn Khurdadhbih (*c.*846 CE), , al-Muqaddasi (mid- to late-10th century CE), and Ibn Balkhi (late 9th and early 10th century CE), although many of their works we do not have in their original

[277] Farhad Daftary, "Introduction," in *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4.

form. One of the later geographies which scholars believe to contain copies of such information is that of Hamd-Allah al-Mustawfi.[278]

According to the information we have, Ibn Khurdadhbih was not just a geographer, but a man of letters as well, and was “a Magian who received Islam at the hands of the Barmecides. He became postmaster and intelligence officer to these Abbasid viziers in the mountain areas of Persian Iraq, but he was in addition a man of varied attainments who, as well as being the author of a book of routes and provinces, wrote on music, on the genealogies of the Persian kings, on cookery, games, and wine.”[279] The British scholar Guy Le Strange in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries translated many of these works of geography. According to Le Strange, “Hamd-Allah, who is our earliest systematic geographer writing in Persian, collected his materials from the works of the earlier Arab geographers, and from various Persian monographs which had been written each to describe a single province of the Moslem Empire; and it is found that the texts of some of these monographs, thereto adding somewhat of his own knowledge, after much curtailment and a rearrangement of the order in the articles, he has transcribed almost verbatim, to form the various chapters of the *Nuzhat.*”[280] Unfortunately, there is no way to be completely certain which sections of al-Mustawfi's corpus were these “verbatim” transcriptions from the earliest geographies and which were al-Mustawfi's own later additions.

As stated earlier, in many early New Persian works, as well as in their Arabic or Turkic contemporaries, there is a very fine line between history and geography. A good example of this

[278] The name “al-Mustawfi” appears to be a title given to audit officials in the Ilkhanid era (Lane, “The Mongols in Iran,” 261. As such, our geographer Hamd-Allah has had the misfortune to be labeled for all of history with a name as ignominious as “the IRS agent.”

[279] Reuben Levy, *An Introduction to Persian Literature.* (New York,: Columbia University Press, 1969), 45. The Barmakids themselves were also famously converts to Islam, in their case from Buddhism.

[280] Ibn Balkhī and G. Le Strange, *Description of the Province of Fars in Persia at the Beginning of the Fourteenth Century A.D., from the Ms. of Ibn Al-Balkhi in the British Museum*, trans. G. Le Strange (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1912), 1–2.

genre-blurring is Ibn Balkhi's *Fars-name*, which is sometimes labeled one or the other by later scholars. Although obviously a work on southwestern Iran, and far from our focus of Khurasan and Transoxania, the author's name clearly announces his Khurasanian descent, and thus his work merits a certain amount of examination. The *Fars-name*, commissioned by the Saljuq Sultan Mohhamad Ibn Malekshah (r. 1104-1117 CE),[281] is believed to have been written in 1111 CE. This work includes not just local Persian history, but importantly for our purposes begins with a more general and traditional view of the history of southwestern Iran, which Yarshater believes to have been based mainly on the works of Hamza and Tabari.[282] According to Daniel's count, the majority of the work actually focuses on the history of pre-Islamic local rulers. Perhaps this focus on early Iranian kings is due to personal interest on the part of the writer or his patron, but perhaps even more likely because it is a history of Fars, the seat of the Sasanian dynasty, as well as of course the much earlier Achaemenids.[283] However, at this point, it should be clear that the Sasanians were likely the only native empire remembered by Iranians with any sort of historical accuracy.

The only surviving parts we have from Ibn Balkhi's work are wholly contained in that of the later Mostowfi, his *Nozhat-al-qolub*, who unfortunately did not compose his own work until the early fourteenth century. Mostowfi's given reason for his work, mostly that of anthologer and translator, is a common one. According to Charles Melville, in his chapter on the Mongols and Timurids in *Persian Historiography*, Mostowfi put together his work because "almost all previous literature about the Creation in general and Iran in particular was contained in works written in Arabic (e.g. by Abu-Zeyd Balkhi and Ibn Khordadbeh). 'His friends' urged him to put

[281] Meisami, "History as Literature," 20.
[282] Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 363.
[283] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 145.

together all the information he had acquired in Persian (*be zaban-e farsi*).”[284] As we have seen before, the *Tarikh-i Bokhara* was translated into Persian for similar reasons. Although Arabic was still the language of religion in the Iranian lands, and literati with a solid religious education would have been able to read histories written in it, by the twelfth century it appears as though works in Persian were preferred by many in the Eastern Islamic lands. Besides Ibn Balkhi, Mostowfi's sources included Naser-al-Din Monshi Kermani's *Semt-al-olā*, and Hāfez Abd-al-Rahmān's *Tarikh-e Esfahān*.[285]

It is reasonably obvious from Ibn Balkhi that even by the twelfth century CE local Persian historical memory was already conflating and confusing everything before the Sasanian era. For instance, the identities of the plethora of carved images in the cliff faces above Fars were already being misinterpreted. As Ibn Balkhi states,

> in Istakhr everywhere and about may be seen the sculptured portrait of Jamshīd, [and he is represented] as a powerful man with a well-grown beard, a handsome face, and curly hair. In many places his likeness has been so set that he faces [south to] the sun. In one hand he holds a staff, and in the other a censer, in which incense is burning, and he is worshiping the sun. In other places he is represented with his left hand grasping the neck of a lion, or else seizing a wild ass by the head, or again he is taking a unicorn [or rhinoceros] by the horn, while in his right hand he holds a hunting-knife, which he has plunged into the belly of the lion or unicorn aforesaid.[286]

From this description, it appears as though Ibn Balkhi and his contemporaries had attributed all local carved images, which represented a number of Sasanian dynasts, mobads, and perhaps even Ahura Mazda himself, to the mythical King Jamshid.[287] One can still see the continued reverberations throughout history of this confusion, as the remains of Persepolis are often referred to in the Persian language today as “*Takht-e Jamshīd*,” rather than attributing them more

[284] Melville, “The Mongol and Timurid Periods, 1250-1500,” 165.
[285] Ibid., 166.
[286] Ibn Balkhī and Le Strange, *Farsname*, 27.
[287] A mobad is a type of Zoroastrian priest.

properly to the Achaemenids. Another example of the flexibility of historical memory is the attribution of most early sites to the most familiar names of Iranian mythology and history. For example, the Ardashir Khurah district: “This district takes its name of Ardashīr Khūrah—“the Glory of King Ardashīr”—from Ardashīr the son of Bābak [founder of the Sassanian dynasty]; and he began his reign by building the city of Fīrūzābād, as has been already mentioned [in the historical portion of our work]”[288] This also appears to be true for the cities of many regions of the Iranian world, not just in Fars.

An anonymous geographical text which details the lands of the Eastern Iranian world in latter Samanid times, and which has proven to be a useful primary source for scholars, is the *Hudud al-'Alam*, which is “known through a unique manuscript copied in 656/1258, was compiled in 372/982-983 and dedicated to the ruler of the Farighunid dynasty of Juzjanan[289] Amir Abul-Harith Muhammad b. Ahmad.”[290] Before discussing the world region by region, the *Hudud* helpfully outlines how its anonymous geographer viewed the world, both its physical and its human geography, although he actually conflates the two in his listing of the attributes of countries. The *Hudud* states:

> Discussion of countries:
>
> A country from a country differs in four faces (aspects): first, with respect to water and air and land and heat and cold. And second, with respect to religions and religious laws and creeds, and third with respect to words and different languages, and fourth with respect to kings. And the limits of countries

[288] Ibid., 315–316. Is Ardashir Khurah (Xwarrah) here the Ardashir Gadman mentioned in the *Karnamag*, as Gadman is a Middle Persian word for Xwarrah?

[289] The Farighunids at this time were, at least nominally, vassals of the Samanids. See Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., “Part 1. Central Asia in the Early Islamic Period, Seventh to Tenth Centuries, B. Central Asia under the Samanids, 4. Hudud Al-’Alam: The Frontiers of the Muslim World in the Tenth Century, Introduction,” in Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources (Indiana University Press, 2009). Kindle edition..

[290] Haug, “The Gate of Iron,” 254. See Haug's recent dissertation for an in-depth discussion of the landscape of the Samanid world. Helpfully, the single manuscript we have includes a colophon, including even the name of the copyist, Abul-Mu'ayyad 'Abd al-Qayyūm ibn al-Husayn ibn 'Alī al-Fārisī,” Vladimir Minorsky and V. V Bartolʹd, “Translator Preface,” in *Hudud Al’alam: The Regions of the World : A Persian Geography, 327 A.H.-982 A.D.* (London: Luzac, 1970), vī..

> differ from other countries in three things: one, between two countries may be a mountain big or small. And second, a river big or small. And third, a desert big or small.[291]

By conflating fixed geographic attributes with political and demographic distinctions, this theory of countries essentializes those very demographic distinctions, as though they existed in his contemporary form from time immemorial. Although at points the author does mention change (e.g., one country had been infidel, but was now primarily Muslim), if the creation of the world, and the division of it into human regions are both mythical, one cannot see a real difference between *natural* and *human* history.The majority of the work is organized into sections on the major regions. This includes information on the extents of each region, usually the major resources or products of the region, and helpfully also notes about demographics or even the rulers. For instance,

> 23. Discourse on the Country of Khorāsān and its Towns. It is a country east of which is Hindistān [sic]; south of it, some of its (own) Marches (*hudūd*) and some parts of the desert of Kargas-kūh; west of it, the districts of Gurgān and the limits of the Ghūz; north of it, the river Jayhūn. This is a vast country with much wealth and abundant amenities (*bā . . . ni'matī farākh*). It is situated near the centre of the Inhabited Lands of the world. In it gold-mines and silver-mines are found as well as precious things (*gauhar*) such as are (extracted) from mountains. This country produces horses and its people are warlike. It is the gate of Turkistān. It produces numerous textiles (*jāma*), gold, silver, turquoises, and drugs (*dārū*). It is a country with a salubrious (*durust*) climate and with men strongly built and healthy. The king [or kingdom] of Khorāsān (*padshāy-i Kh.*) in the days of old was distinct from the king of Transoxania but now they are one. The *mīr* of Khorāsān resides at Bukhārā (*B. nishīnadh*); he is from the Sāmān family (*āl-i Sāmān*) and from Bahrām Chūbīn's descendants. These (princes) are called Maliks of the East and have lieutenants (*ummāl*) in all Khorāsān, while on the frontiers (*hadd-hā*) of Khorāsān there are kings (*pādhshāhān*) called 'margraves' (*mulūk-i atrāf*)[292]

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[291] Manūchihr Sutūdah, ed., *Ḥudūd-i al-ʻālam Min Al-Mashriq Ilā Al-Maghrib, Kih Bisāl-I 372 Hijrī Qamarī Ta'līf Shudih Ast, Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān 727* (Tihrān: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1340), 57, reads
٨ ـ سخن اندر ناحیتها
١ـ ناحیتی از ناحیتی بچهار روی جدا گردد: یکی با ختلاف آب و هوا و زمین و گرما و سرما. و دوم با ختلاف دینها و شریعتها و کیشها و سیم با ختلاف لغات و زتانهاء مختلف و چهارم با ختلاف پادشائیها. و حد ناحیتی از حد ناحیتی دیگر بسه چیز جدا شود: یکی بکوهی خرد یا بزرگ کی میان دو ناحیتی بگذرد. و دوم برودی خرد یا بزرگ کی میان دو ناحیتی برود. و سیم بیابانی خرد یا بزرگ کی میان دو ناحیتی اندر باشد.

[292] Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud al'alam*, 102. Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-i al-ʻālam*, 77–78, reads
٢٣ ـ سخن اندر ناحیت خراسان و شهراخی وی
ناحیت مشرق وی هندوستان اشست و جنوب وی بعضی ار حدود خراسانست و بعضی بیابان کر گس کوه و مغرب وی نواحی گر گانست و حدود غور. و شمال وی رود جیحون است. و این ناحیتیست بزرگ با خواستهٔ بسیار و نعمتی فراح. و نزديك میانهٔ آبادانی جهانست و اندر وی معدنهاء زرست و سیم و گوهرهای کی از کوه خیزد. و ازین ناحیت اسب خیزد و مردمان جنگی. و دَرِ ترکستانست. و ازو جامهٔ بسیار خیزد و زر و سیم و پیروزه و داروها. و این ناحیتیست با هوای درست و مردمان با ترشیبِ قوی و تنِ درست. و پادشای خراسان اندر قدیم جدا بودی و پادشای ماوراءالنهر جدا و اکنون هر دو یکیست. و میر خراسان ببخارا نشیند و زآل سامان است و از فرزندان بهرام چوبین اند و

A few interesting things to note here. The *Hudud* claims that Khorasan is "situated near the center of the Inhabited Lands of the World." From a more western Islamic perspective, centered in Abbasid Baghdad or Mecca, or even a similar Persian perspective (not to mention a Eurocentric view), the lands of Khurasan may seem to be a borderland or frontier.[293] From a Khurasanian, or Eastern Islamic perspective, Central Asia may be seen to reclaim its rightful place as very near the center of the world.[294] Also, Khorasan is referred to here as a "kingdom" proper (*padshāy*), implicitly raising the rulers of such a region above the status of mere "governor." The acknowledgement of Samanid descent from Bahram Chūbīn once again lends weight to that assertion. Of course, being a work dedicated to Samanid vassals, this section makes sure to raise the status of such vassals to "kings" themselves, although it does not then refer to the Samanid ruler as "king of kings" (*shāhan shāh*, or a similar title). Interestingly, the assertion that "its people are warlike" is far from unique in the work, with many of the regions of Central Asia receiving such a descriptor.

The section on Guzganan, naturally, shows how "important" our unknown author's patron was, stating that "and the ruler of this area is of the margraves, and in Khurasan they call him the King of Guzganan, and he is of the sons [descendants] of Afrasiyab, and each of the nobles of the borders of Ghorchistan and the borders of Ghur are all are under his orders. He is the greatest of the margraves, high in rulership, almighty, full of dignity and generosity and who loves

ایشانرا ملك مشرق خوانند و اندر همهٔ خراسان عمّال او باشند. و اندرا حدهاء خراسان پادشاهانند و ایشان را ملوك اطراف خوانند.

[293] I am often guilty of this as well, referring to Khurasan and Transoxania as the eastern extents of the Islamic world.

[294] We saw in the last chapter how a similar view was held by Gardizi, and also by the anonymous author of the *Tarikh-e Sistan*.

knowledge."[295] The author's patron's descent from a notable of Iranian history and mythology, in this case Faridun, is almost a given by this point. In the mind of our anonymous author, and quite possibly any of his Iranian compatriots in Central Asia, any person of nobility or royalty *must* be a descendant of a famous Iranian king. For instance, even under the section on "Chinistan," the *Hudud* states that "Its king is called Faghfūr-i Chīn and is said to be a descendant of Farīdhūn."[296] Whether this was believed so because of the tripartite division of the world by Faridun or not, it certainly shows the connection between the nobility of old, and the nobility of the present, in the mind of our anonymous author. Here is one of the places where our author does specifically note the changing of time, however. The *Hudud* mentions several regions whose kings "formerly belonged to the class of margraves" (*mulūk-i vay . . . az mulūk-i atrāf būdandī),* such as Farghāna and Chāch, but does specifically state why they no longer deserve this title.[297] Perhaps, with the frontiers of the Islamic world currently pushed further east into Transoxania, these regions were no longer considered "marches," and thus their rulers were no longer wardens of such.

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[295] Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-i al-ʻālam*, 95, reads

و پادشای این ناحیت از ملوك اطراف است و اندر خراسان او را ملك گوزگانان خوانند، و از اولاد افریدونست، و هر مهتری کی اندر حدود غرچستانست و حدود غور است همه اندر فرمان او انداز همه ملوك اطراف او بزرگـتر است پادشاهی و عز و مرتبت و سیاست و سخاوت و دوست داری دانش.

Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud Al'alam*, 106, reads

the sovereign (*pādhshāy*) of this province is one of the margraves (*mulūk-i atrāf* [or quite literally "kings of the edges"]). In Khorāsān he is called 'malik of Gūzgānān.' He is a descendant of Afrīdhūn. All the chiefs within the limits of Gharchistān and Ghūr are under his orders (*andar farmān*). He is the greatest of all the margraves in authority, greatness (*'izz*), rank, policy (*siyāsat*), liberality and love (*dūstdārī*) of knowledge.

[296] Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud al'alam*, 84. Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-i al-ʻālam*, 60, reads

مَلِك او را فغفور چین خوانند و گویند کی از فرزندان فریدون است.

Its king is called the Faghfur of Chin, and they say that he is of the children of Faridun.

[297] Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud al'alam*, 118. The work also states that the rulers of Farghāna were *dehqans*, firmly emplacing them within the Iranian cultural world. Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-i al-ʻālam*, 112, reads

ملوك فرغانه اندر قدیم از ملوك اطراف بودند، و ایشان را دهقان خواندندی

"The king of Farghana in antiquity was among the margraves, and they say he is a dehqan"
and Ibid., 116, says about Chach (modern Tashkent) that

ملوك وی اندر قدیم از ملوك اطراف بودندی.

"Its king in antiquity was among the margraves."

As mentioned, many regions of Central Asia are noted in the *Hudud al-Alam* for their "warlike" people. Many also are referred to as "active fighters for the faith." For instance, Transoxania,[298] Chach,[299] and Kāth, the capital of Khwārazm.[300] Contrast this positive view of the Islamic inhabitants of Central Asia with its views of India. The *Hūdūd al-'ālam* states that Hindustan "is the largest county | [sic] in the northern oecumene. All through Hindūstān wine (*nabīdh*) is held to be unlawful and adultery (*zinā*) to be licit. All the inhabitants are idolaters."[301] Although the Samanids and their vassals were not known for incursions or raids into India, within mere decades Mahmūd of Ghazna certainly would have been. If this was the prevailing view of northern India, one could see how Mahmūd could easily justify his raids.

The *Hudud al-'Alam* is also concerned with the lands of the Turks. This certainly makes sense, it being named the "boundaries [extents?]" of the (Islamic) world, which at the time would have been somewhere in the Turkish steppe. The work writes of the Toghuzghuz Country[302], and how "The kings of the whole of Turkistān in the days of old were from the Toghuzghuz. They are warlike people (*mardumānī jangī*) possessing great numbers of arms. . . The wealthiest (of the

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[298] Anonymous, "Part 1. Central Asia in the Early Islamic Period, Seventh to Tenth Centuries, B. Central Asia under the Samanids, 4. Hudud Al-'Alam: The Frontiers of the Muslim World in the Tenth Century," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela (Indiana University Press, 2009).

[299] Ibid.

[300] Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud al'alam*, 121. Additionally, the city is noted as "the Gate of the Ghūz Turkistān (*T.-i Ghūz*). It is the emporium of the Turks, Turkistān, Transoxania, and the Khazar." Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-I Al-'ālam*, 122, reads

دَرِ ترکستان عوزست(sic) و برگاه ترکان و ترکستان و ماوراءالنهر ست و خزارانست

"It is the gate of the Ghuz (text reads 'uz) Turkestan, and the entrepot of the Turks, Turkestan, Transoxania and the Khazars."

[301] Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud al'alam*, 86. Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-i al-'ālam*, 64, reads

اندر همه هندوستان، نبیند حرام دارند و زنامباح دارند و همه بت پرستند.

[302] For some reason Arab geographers, and the later Persian geographers, called the Uyghurs Toghuzghuz: "Kāshgharī, who personally knew the region, quietly substitutes *Uyghur* for the antiquated *Toghuzghuz* and the latter term occurs no more in the literature of Mongol times. How, then, did it happen that the T'ien-shan Uyghurs were surnamed *Toquz-Oghuz* ('Nine Oghuz")?" Minorksy's possible answer to this question is very confusing. See Minorsky, "Commentary on the Hudud Al-'Alam," 265.

Toghuzghuz?) are the Turks (*Turkān*). The Tātār too are a race (*jinsī*) of the Toghuzghuz."[303] One can see here some of the confusion of human geography in this period; the Turks are only one of the "tribes" making up a group of people inhabiting Turkestan. In the mid-to-late eleventh century CE, al-Kashgari (his *nisba* marking him as originally being from a major city of Turkestan), attempts to more carefully explain the various tribes of the Turks. He states that "in order [from West] to East, both pagan and Muslim, beginning with those closest to Rum. First is: Bachanak (Pecheneg), then: Qifchaq (Qïpchaq), then: Oghuz, then: Yemak (Kimek), then: Bashghirt (Bashkir), then: Basmil, then: Qay, then; Yabaqu, then; Tatar."[304] Several places in the *Hudud* are referred to as the "Gate of Turkistan," including Farghana and Gurganj. Farghana in particular seems to have been an important entrepot for the slave trade in Turks, as "Great numbers of Turkish slaves are brought (*uftadh*)" there.[305] In contradistinction to the places of the Islamic world where people were known to be "warlike," the *Hudud* mentions that some places were known for their "clerks and literati" (*dabīrān va adībān*), among them Jibāl, the region of Rāy and modern Tehran, and Kāshān.[306] Kāshān is also noted for its large population of Arabs.

Perhaps the most important information, from our perspective, is the historical or mythical information contained within geographies such as the *Hudud*, showing what the authors and other Iranians could remember of their past, and how they chose to use that information to

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[303] Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud al'alam*, 94. Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-i al-'ālam*, 76, reads
ملوك همه ترکستان اندر قدیم از تغزغز بودندی . . . و بی عدد و توانگرترین ترکانند. و تاتار هم جنسی از تغزغزاند.
"The kings of all ancient Turkestan was of the Toghuz Ghuzz, and without number and is/was the most able of the Turks. And the Tatars are also a kind of the Toghuz Ghuzz."

[304] al-Kashgari, "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, A. Qarakhanids: The First Muslim State in Central Asia, 11. Al-Kashgari: On the Linguistic Distribution of the Turks," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, trans. Robert Dankoff and James Kelly (Indiana University Press, 2009).

[305] Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud al'alam*, 115. Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-i al-'ālam*, 112, reads simply
آنجا بردهٔ بسیار افتد ترك.

[306] Minorsky and Bartol′d, *Hudud al'alam*, 131–133. About Kāshān Sutūdah, *Ḥudūd-i al-'ālam*, 143, reads
وی بازیان‌اند بسیار ازنجا دبیران و ادبیان بسیار خیزند.

understand their present. Including such information was a way for the geographers to map [almost literally] the world around them onto the stories of their past. For instance, the *Farsname* mentions that in Shapur Khurah district is a city called Kāzirūn, and that it was founded by Tahmūrath.[307] As mentioned earlier, the founding of many cities, particularly but not exclusively those in Fars, is attributed to Kayumarth, Tahmurath, Ardashir, or Shahpur. When discussing Merv, the *Hudud* states that it is a "pleasant and flourishing place with a citadel built by Tahmurath; in it there are numerous castles. It was the abode of the (Sasanian) kings."[308] When discussing the Istakhr district, the *Farsname* states that "The name of this district is from [the capital, Persepolis] Istakhr, which same was the first city to be built in Fārs, and it was founded by [the mythical king] Kayūmarth."[309] Unlike works such as the Older Preface to the *Shahnama*, as well as many others, Ibn Balkhi doesn't choose to claim that Kayūmarth was actually Adam. Regardless, these stories of city founding were likely to have come from some sort of local mythological knowledge.

Universal, pan-Iranian, or pan-Islamic histories

As we have seen from Tabari and Bal'ami's adaptation, although most histories written from the ninth century CE through the Timurid era were local or dynastic in scope, there were also a number of more "universal" histories produced during this period. Many of these were attempts to detail a more pan-Iranian perspective, or a wider pan-Islamic point of view, or even attempts at true universal histories. Perhaps our earliest Islamic historian to try to recount the history of Iran was Ya'qubi, in the latter half of the ninth century CE. As Yarshater writes of

307 Ibn Balkhī and Le Strange, *Farsname*, 335.
308 "Part 1. Central Asia in the Early Islamic Period, Seventh to Tenth Centuries, B. Central Asia under the Samanids, 4. Hudud Al-'Alam: The Frontiers of the Muslim World in the Tenth Century."
309 Ibn Balkhī and Le Strange, *Farsname*, 19.

Ya'qubi, he was “a sober historian of concise diction, in his work he almost wholly ignores pre-Sasanian history, which he deems rather implausible.”[310] Likely, one of his major sources was the Arabic translation of the *Xwaday-namag* made by Ibn Muqaffa' a century or so earlier, as we know of no other likely sources for a narrative of Sasanian or earlier Iran. Tabari's history is, of course, the best example we have of an early universal, or at least pan-Islamic, history. As we saw in the last chapter, Bal'ami translated and adapted this work into the nascent New Persian literary language. Like many of our authors, Bal'ami was intimately connected with the court culture of his ruling dynasty. His father was the senior vizier of Nasr b. Ahmad the Samanid.[311]Unlike Bayhaqi, Bal'ami's adaptation was one of the few examples from the Samanid era where a larger scope was attempted. According to Bosworth, who apparently did not actually consider Bal'ami to be a historian in his own right, “we know of only one historian of stature from the Samanid period, Abu 'Ali Husayn al-Sallami, who was possibly in the service of the local amirs of Chaghaniyan on the upper Oxus and who wrote for a wider stage than the local historians of the region.”[312] Near the bitter end of the Samanid period, although not written within the Samanid domains, we have Maqdisi's 'Book of the Beginnings and History' (*Kitab al-bad' wa'l-ta'rikh*, 996 CE), which is considered by some to be a “thematic and almost encyclopaedic work which includes some interesting observations on the beliefs and customs of pre-Islamic Persia.”[313] After the fall of the Samanids, at least one of our main sources for Ghaznavid dynastic history was originally a much larger work than it exists as no. As Gardizi states,“Abū Sa'īd 'Abd al-Hayy b. al-Dahhāk b. Mahmūd Gardīzī, relates: Since we have finished

[310] Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” 361.
[311] Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, I: 190. This information is given in footnote 423.
[312] Bosworth, “Arabic, Persian and Turkish Historiography in the Eastern Iranian World,” 143.
[313] Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” 362.

with the stories and historical narratives of the prophets, the kings of the Chaldaeans, the kings of the Persians, the Islamic caliphs and the governors of Khurasan, we have set about relating the exploits of Yamīn al-Dawla, may God's mercy be upon him, in a summary and condensed fashion."[314] Yamin al-Dawla is, of course, Mahmūd of Ghazna. Unfortunately for us, the earlier, more universal parts of Gardizi's history were not considered worthy of copying or saving by later scribes and librarians. Likely, they were considered to be superfluous, or perhaps redundant, when one took into account other similar works that may have been held in collections.

As we begin to move forward through time from our primary focus on the ninth through eleventh centuries CE, we begin to encounter a larger number universal histories. An example is the anonymous "'Digest of Chronicles and Narratives' (*Mujmil at-Tawarikh wa'l-Qisas*) . . . [which] was written in 520/1126, and is preserved only in a single manuscript in the Bibliotheque Nationale at Paris."[315] This is actually our only example of such a work from this general time period.[316] Although we are unaware of the name of the author, the text does contain some information as to his background and the context of the text's composition. As Meisami writes, the *Mojmal al-tavarikh*, "was written at the behest of an acquaintance (or patron?) of the author, with whom the latter became acquainted from salons (*majāles*) held in his home town of Asadābād, near Hamadan."[317] Unfortunately, because the entirety of our knowledge of this history is based upon a single manuscript, we have no ability to track its popularity or transmission through later periods.

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[314] Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 81. Bahār's edition (pg. 48) reads
چنین گوید گرد آوردهٔ این کتاب ابو سعید عبدالحی بن الضحاك بن محمود گردیزی که چون از اخبار و تواریخ ادبیا و ملوك و کلانیان و ملوك عخم و خلفاء اسلام و امرای خراسان بپرداختیم آغاز کردیم بگفتن اخبار یمین الدولة وحمة الله علیه بر طریق ایجاز و اخنصار

[315] Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 26.

[316] Daniel, "The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography," 136.

[317] Meisami, "History as Literature," 20.

Another universal history, or at least pan-Islamic history, is that of Juzjani. Escaping the early Mongol conquests, Juzjani left his homeland in the Ghurid polity of central Asia, eventually settling in the lands of the Delhi Sultanate in 1226. It was there that he wrote his *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*.[318]It is here, in the Mongol period, that we begin once again to see a number of these more "universal" histories. Perhaps, with the conquests and expansion of Mongol lands under an "oceanic conqueror," [Genghis Khan] and the imposition of the so-called *pax Mongolica*, the idea of a universal history made more sense to the authors.[319] Some of these works were even quite Iranian in character. One such work is the *Zafar-nama* of Mostowfi (not to be confused with the later *Zafar-nama* of Yazdi, or with any of several other works of the same name). In Melville's opinion, Mostowfi's "*Zafar-name* was conceived as a continuation of the *Shahnama*, beginning with Islamic history from the Arab conquests, rather than a dynastic history of the Mongols."[320] The *Zafar-nama* attempts to insert the Mongol Ilkhanid dynasty into the longer narrative of Iranian history, in much the same way that one could say the *Shahnama* inserts Alexander into the narrative flow of Iran, and essentially denying any break in Iranian sovereignty. Whether this was due to a desire on Mostowfi's part to legitimate the Ilkhanids in the eyes of the Iranian nobles and greater populace, or a desire to demonstrate the strength and resiliency of the Iranian character and its political institutions is anyone's guess.[321]

[318] Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., "Part 3. The Mongol Empire, A. Temujin and the Rise of the Mongol Empire, 23. Juzjani: Chaghatay the Accursed!, Introduction," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, Kindle (Indiana University Press, 2009).

[319] As Karl Jahn writes, in his opinion it is in the Mongol period when we begin to see the very first true "world histories," and that "Prior to Rashiid al-Diin many nations had written the histories of their own world within the framework of their religious and cultural thinking, beginning with the ancient Egyptians and ending with the peoples of medieval Europe. However, all merit for undertaking to write with scientific objectivity the history and describe the culture of various great nations of the Euro-Asiatic continent for the first time is due to our author." See "Rashīd Al-Dīn as World Historian," in *Yádnáme-Ye Jan Rypka: Collection of Articles on Persian and Tajik Literature : (On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday by His Friends and Pupils)* (Prague: Academia. The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1967), 79.

[320] Melville, "The Mongol and Timurid Periods, 1250-1500," 194.

[321] According to Melville (Ibid., 164), Qazi Beyzavi's *Nezām-al-tavārikh* (ca. 1275), does a very similar job of

As Melville points out, just like with the early parts of Gardizi's *Zeyn al-Akhbar*, the earlier and more general sections of many of the Mongol era "universal" histories have been lost in transmission, or in some cases simply remain unpublished or even merely untranslated. Melville's enumeration of this list includes sections of Rashid ad-Din's Book 2, early sections of Hāfez-e Abru's *Majmu'e* and *Majma'-al-tavārikh*, Āqsarā'i's *Mosāmerat-al-akhbār*, Shabānkāre'i's *Majma'-al-ansāb*, and Mo'in-al-Din Natanzi's *Montakhab-al-tavārikh.*"[322] This is truly unfortunate for us, as Rashid al-Din was obviously very interested in a comparison of the Ilkhan rulers with some of the luminaries of Iranian mythos and history (at least so far as to demonstrate his patron's good qualities), as he begins his work by referencing Dārā, Ardāshīr, Faridun, and Anushirvan.[323] Regardless of whether or not Rashid ad-Din was primarily interested in the aggrandizement of his patron Ghazan, his view of Iranian history from the perspective of the Ilkhanid court would have been illuminating about his own intellectual and cultural context.

Like many other of his contemporaries, the work of Juvaini also seeks to insert his Mongol masters into the chain of Islamic and Iranian history, by any means necessary. Juvaini began work on his *Tarikh-i Jahan Gusha* in 1252-1253 CE while on a visit to Mongolia.[324] In this work, Juvaini details the events of the Mongol siege and conquest of the famed Alamut Castle, stronghold of Ismā'īlism and the so-called "Assassains." In it, he somewhat anachronistically gives the Mongol motivations for the siege. He writes that "today, thanks to the glorious fortune of the World-Illuminating King, if an assassin still lingers in a corner he plies a woman's trade;

inserting the Ilkhanids into the flow of Iranian political history.

322 Ibid., 198. Melville specifies elsewhere (Ibid., 157) that the sections of Rashid ad-Din and Hafez-e Abru are in fact no longer extant, rather than unpublished.

323 Melville, "The Mongol and Timurid Periods, 1250-1500," 188.

324 Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., "Part 3. The Mongol Empire, B. Islamic Central Asia under Mongol Rule, 25. Juvaini: The Il-Khan Hülegü Captures the Castles of the Heretics, Introduction," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, Kindle (Indiana University Press, 2009).

wherever there is a *da'i* there is an announcer of death; and every *rafiq* has become a thrall. The propagators of Isma'ilism have fallen victims to the swordsmen of Islam."[325] One can characterize this description of Mongol motivation as somewhat misleading, or at the very least hopeful from his perspective, because in 1256 CE one could not claim that Mongol warriors were at all "swordsmen of Islam." Although we obviously do not have any specific information on conversion of the Mongol rank-and-file to Islam, we know that their leaders (in particular, Ghazan) did not convert until nearly 40 years later. Although there may have been many Eastern Iranian, and thus likely Muslim, warriors in the armies of the Mongols as they swept westward into Iran proper from Central Asia, this is still an interesting comment for Juvaini to make. It was only a brief two years later that the Mongols conquered Baghdad and ended once and for all the 'Abbasid dynasty, making a description of the horde as "swordsmen of Islam" hard to fathom.

In all these varied histories of the ninth through fifteenth centuries CE, we begin to see an obvious theme emerge: the reconciliation and incorporation of Zoroastrianism and pre-Islamic Iranian culture with Islam, and later the incorporation of the Turks into both Islam and this Perso-Islamicate political and cultural tradition. As we have seen, as evidenced by all these works of both history and literature, the "Islamic conquest of Iran . . . put an end to the official Zoroastrianism of the Sasanian empire but not to antiquarian preoccupation with the native tradition."[326] In many ways, it seemed to have the opposite effect. Many early Muslim Iranian historians and literati dug deep into the history and mythology of Iran, seemingly with the

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[325] Juvaini, "Part 3. The Mongol Empire, B. Islamic Central Asia under Mongol Rule, 25. Juvaini: The Il-Khan Hülegü Captures the Castles of the Heretics," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, Kindle (Indiana University Press, 2009). A *da'i* is missionary or propagandist, usually Ismā'īli. *Rafiq* simply means companion or comrade, and may here be used as a synonym for Ismā'īli here, although this is somewhat unclear.

[326] Jān Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 117.

specific aim of connecting their past with their new Islamic faith. For example, as Yarshater states about Dinawari, “the equation of early Iranian kings with Biblical figures – a common aberration of Muslim historiographers – is presented by him as established fact. With his taste for the dramatic, he draws also on fictional sources, notably for the stories of Alexander, Bahram Chobin and Shiroe.”[327] Tabari, as well as the anonymous author of the aforementioned *Mojmal al-tavarikh va'l-qesas* (1126 CE), also very much falls into this pattern. As Shahrokh Meskoob writes, “These two histories, which Iranians wrote in Arabic and Persian respectively, both exhibit this harmony and reconciliation of mythologies.”[328] With the rise of the Ghaznavid and Seljuq kingdoms, if not before, this tendency was extended to the various Turkish tribes that lived in Central Asia and who were at that time beginning their great migrations westward. We know that the Turks had always played a part in the politics and military actions of Transoxania, even before they began converting en masse and becoming an even more powerful group within the eastern Islamic world. As early as the eighth century CE, during the campaigns against Muqanna', “The fortress of Sanām, which is in the rural district of Kish, had been got ready and had been provided with defenses against a siege. The 'Wearers of White' in Bukhara and Sogdia came out into the open and provided reinforcements for Muqanna', and he also summoned help from the infidel Turks. They were busy plundering the Muslims' wealth and possessions. Most of their activities manifested themselves in Sogdia.”[329] Likely, this sort of situation was not uncommon even before this incident, with the various actors engaged in power struggles within

[327] Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” 361. Perhaps some of these sources included the aforementioned *Bahram Chobin-name* that Bal'ami may have consulted, and at least one version of the so-called *Alexander Romance* which later helped inform works such as Nizami Ganjavi's *Iskander-name*.
[328] Miskūb, *Iranian Nationality and the Persian Language*, 30.
[329] Gardizi, Abu Sa’id ’Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 34. Bahār's Persian edition does not include any sections prior to the Tahirids. The “Wearers of White” are generally taken to be the followers of Muqanna.

Iranian Central Asia attempting to harness the military might of Turkic nomadic tribes for their own purposes. We also know of the import of the trade in (primarily Turkic, and primarily military) slaves within the Samanid domains, and its importance to the 'Abbasids in Baghdad. By the time of the Ghaznavids, former Turkic *ghulāms* were in fact the dynasts themselves. The various nomadic tribes (often referred to as Turkmens, although the difference between Turk and Turkmen in this period seems somewhat unclear) were still involved in the power struggles of the provincial dynasties, now as Muslims and thus co-religionists, rather than as completely "barbarian" mercenaries or allies.[330] Writing about the Seljuqs, Nizam al-Mulk states that the "Turkmens . . .numerous, still they have a longstanding claim upon this dynasty, because at its inception they served well and suffered much, and also they are attached by ties of kinship."[331] It was perhaps this very access to some of the more "positive" aspects of Perso-Islamicate culture that inspired conversion. Yardumian and Schurr, agreeing with Ira Lapidus in his monumental *A History of Islamic Societies*, write that "Islam, at least among the Turkic steppe peoples, was not so much imposed on them by force as it was made attractive by the allure of a more materially and spiritually wealthy civilization linked to it. In the southern steppe, this phenomenon arrived via Persian and Central Asian Iranian culture."[332] As has often been discussed, perhaps most eloquently demonstrated by Marshall Hodgson via his neologism of "Perso-Islamicate civilization," in this eastward spread of Islam into Central Asia we can see how Iranian political traditions modified and shaped the evolution of the early Islamic empires.[333] In his recent book,

[330] See Beckwith's recent work (*Empires of the Silk Road*, xxī–xxī.p. xxī-xxīi) on Central Asia, and its discussion of these stereotypes of Turks as barbarians, as well as nomadic warriors.

[331] Nizam al-Mulk, "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, C. Central Asia in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, 16. Nizam Al-Mulk: A Mirror for Princes," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, Kindle (Indiana University Press, 2009).

[332] Aram Yardumian and Theodore G Schurr, "Who Are the Anatolian Turks?: A Reappraisal of the Anthropological Genetic Evidence.," *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 50, no. 1 (2011): 116.

[333] Beckwith, for his part, sees the influence trending the opposite direction: he sees the specifically Central

Travis Zadeh more specifically analyzes how the interactions of the Persian and Arabic languages, within religious contexts, were a part of this syncretism. He states that, along with the obvious absorption of Arabic religious vocabulary into the New Persian language, "the grafting of ancient Persian mythology within the larger arc of Islamic salvation history is another example, naturalizing pre-Islamic Persian memory within the fabric of Islam. The formation of a Persian Islamic idiom inflected by Arabic religious vocabulary meant that translating the Qur'an into Persian often became a question of accounting for syntax and grammar, as much of the religious vocabulary was shared between the two languages."[334] Taking into accounts Zadeh's discussion of the plethora of Persian interlinear translations of the *Qur'an* that we have from as early as the ninth century CE, this statement raises several questions. Are the somewhat syncretic written works that are extant actually just a reflection of something that had already happened orally, with the spoken version of New Persian already having adapted many Arabic words for its purposes? Perhaps this was a process that had already taken place culturally, or even just psychologically, for these new Muslim converts? Some modern scholars see this syncretic process as somewhat more culturally defensive. Hamid Dabashi, in his recent work, writes that "what remains most significant in the midst of all crosscurrents of historical memory is the fact that the gradual retrieval of ancient, pre-Islamic history was a matter of constructing a unified and pre-existing world *against* [italics mine] the emerging Islamic world of the Arab conquerors."[335] It should be noted that the majority of Dabashi's argument shows that this process of collective historical memory was not fundamentally anti-Islamic in nature, but instead he

Eurasian influence upon the development of Perso-Islamicate civilization. If one considers Khurasan as part of Central Eurasia, if not necessarily part of Central Asia, then these two statements are easily reconcilable.

334 Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an*, 39.

335 Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 55.

claims that it was more antithetical to an impulse of scholasticism that he claims was then sweeping the entire Abrahamic world. Already by the time of the *Tarikh-i Bokhara*, we see an attempt to more explicitly find the place of Transoxania and Central Asia in the narrative flow of Perso-Islamicate history. In a section detailing some of the geography of the region, Narshakhi writes that

> Ramitin has a large citadel, and is a stable village. It is older than Bukhara . . . and Afrasiyab founded it. Every time Afrasiyab came to that state, he did not stay in any other place. And this is in the books of the Parsis: that he lived for two thousand years, he was a sorcerer, and he was of the children of King Noah. And we know he killed his son-in-law Siyavash. And Siyavash was the the son of Kud Kay Khosrow, he came to this state demanding the blood of his father, with a great army . . . and Kay Khosrow after two thousand years came and killed him. And the tomb of Afrasiyab is upon/near the gate of the city of Bukhara . . . and the people of Bukhara have hymns of the killing of Siyavash, and the singers of those songs say they are of Siyavash.[336]

This connection to Noah shows some of the Perso-Islamicate, or at least Perso-Abrahamic, syncretism that seems to have been taking place by the middle of the tenth century CE.[337] Interestingly, even though a part of the old city of Samarqand is referred to by local inhabitants as "Afrasiyab," and has been for centuries, this passage instead connects the evil sorcerer Afrasiyab to the city of Bukhara. It was only in the Samanid era that Bukhara became the capital of Transoxania, although Samarqand remained the "leading city." Here, we see how Narshakhi references both "the books of the Parsis," likely Zoroastrian texts or possibly even the *Xwaday-namag* or *Shahnama* genres, and Abrahamic tradition by calling Afrasibyab a child of King Noah. Although it is possible that this identification of Afrasibyab with the children of Noah dates to earlier than the Islamic era, as Nestorian Christianity was a popular religion in the area,

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[336] Narshakhī, *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā*, 23–24, reads:
رامیتن کندزی بزرگ دارد، و دیهی استوار است. و از شهر بخارا قدیمتر است. . . و افراسیاب بنا کرده (است این دیاه را. و افراسیاب) هر گاهی که بدین ولایت آمده جز بدین دیهه به جای دیگر نباشیده است. و اندر کتاب‌ها پارسیان چنان است که وی دو هزار سال زندگانی یافته است. و وی مردی جادو بوده است. و از فرزندان نوح ملك بوده است. و وی داماد خویش را بکشت که سیاوش نام داشت. و سیاوش را پسری کود کیخسرو نام، وی به طلب خون پدر بدین ولایت آمد با لشکری عظیم . . . و کیخسرو بعد دو سال افراسیلب را بگرفت و بکشت. و گور افراسیاب بر در شهر بخارا است. . . و اهل بخارا را بر کشتن سیاوش سرودهای عجت است و مطربان آن سرودها را کین سیاوش گویند.

[337] Unfortunately, there is no way to be certain that this passage is not due instead to one of our twelfth century CE translators and editors.

and Jewish traders probably plied their wares along the trade routes of the area, we can only be certain that this concept existed in the Islamic era.

This blending of Iranian and Islamic elements was soon joined by the integration of the Turks into this collective Islamic "salvation history." Often, they were fit into the Biblical tradition by similar means to Narshakhi's claims about Afrasiyab. Authors stated their descent from Yaphith (Japheth), one of the three sons of Noah.[338] According to Gardizi,

> Nuh (Noah), upon whom be peace, came out from the ark, the world had become devoid of people. He had three sons, Sam (Shem), Ham, and Yafith (Japheth), and he divided the earth among his sons. The Land of the Blacks, such as Zanj, Abyssinia, Nubia, Barbary, and Fazz, and the maritime and southern region of Persia he gave to Ham; Iraq, Khurasan, Hijaz, Yemen, Syria, and the Iranian Realm became the portion of Sam; while the lands of the Turks, the Saqlabs, and Gog and Magog as far as China fell to Yafith.[339]

Although somewhat similar to the story in the *Shahnama* of Faridun dividing the world amongst his three sons, there does not appear to be any identification here with that tale. Crucial differences include the lack of mention of the lands of Rum, which Salm (the similarity in name to Sam/Shem is almost certainly coincidence) was accorded in the Iranian tripartite division of the world. As we see in Gardizi, the identification of the Turks as the sons of Japheth seems to have begun as early as the Samanid or early Ghaznavid era. According to somewhat later sources, the Qarakhanids may have been one of the first Turkic groups to claim this Abrahamic relationship, although by the thirteenth century CE there may have already occurred a certain amount of historical revisionism. Regardless, Qarshi writes that

> Satuq Bughra Khan al-Mujahid ʻAbd al-Karim ibn Bazir Arslan Khan ibn Bilge Bahur Qadr Khan of the people of Afrasiyab ibn Pushang ibn ʻAli ibn Risiman of the noble origin of Turä ibn Afridun ibn

338 Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, Introduction," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Indiana University Press, 2009).

339 Gardizi, "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, A. Turkic Peoples of the Steppe, 9. Gardizi: The Turks in Early Muslim Traditions," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela (Indiana University Press, 2009). Bosworth does not appear to have translated this particular section in his recent English translation.

> Anuyan ibn Zarasaf ibn Jam ibn Fars ibn Buri ibn Karkin ibn Yafith ibn the Prophet Nuh, peace be upon him. He was the first among the Turkic khaqans who took Islam in the area of Kashghar and Farghana during the reign of Caliph al-Muti'llah [r. 946–74], the commander of the faithful, in the state of the rightly guided Amir 'Abd al-Malik ibn Nuh al-Samani [r. 951–54].[340]

In Bughhra Khan's *kunya* here, one can observe an obvious mixture of Iranian/Turanian, Abrahamic, and Turkic references. The Qarakhanid ruler, or at the very least somewhat later Turkic historians writing about him, claimed descent from Jam and Afridun, their descent from Yaphith and Nuh, and also his place among the "people of Afrasibyab." Although it is possible that what was meant here by Afrasiyab was a geographic location, very close to the city of Samarqand, this may not be the most likely interpretation. As is mentioned, Bughra Khan was among the very first Islamicized Turkic rulers, and his region of authority near Kashgar had long had historical ties with Transoxania. As Islam spread even further over the next few centuries into Central and Inner Asia, it fell to other historians to continue this integration of Islamicate ideas. According to Levi and Sela, "Kutadgu Bilig is the first attempt to fit the Islamic-Iranian concept into its Inner Asian Turkic context."[341] But, again, this was somewhat later, with the eastward spread of Perso-Islamicate concepts beyond the frontiers of the greater Iranian cultural world. By the fifteenth century CE, one of the earliest known historians in the Chaghatay Turkic language, Nava'i, was able to speak of the Turkic descent from Japheth as an obvious piece of information, an assertion which was at that point beyond reproach. However, his version of the division of the world seems somewhat different, and perhaps more appropriate for his South Asian-adjacent location. He agrees that "Nuh (upon whom be peace!) sent to the land of Khata

[340] Qarshi, Jamal, "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, A. Qarakhanids: The First Muslim State in Central Asia, 12. Jamal Qarshi: The Conversion to Islam of Satuq Bughra Khan," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, trans. Ron Sela (Indiana University Press, 2009).

[341] Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, A. Qarakhanids: The First Muslim State in Central Asia, 13. Yusuf Hass Hajib: Advice to the Qarakhanid Rulers, Introduction," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Indiana University Press, 2009).

[i.e., Khitai or Cathay] his son Yafith, whom historians call the father of the Turks," and that of Yafith, "historians all agree that he wore the crown" as the leader of the Turks.[342] However, unlike the earlier Gardizi, he may disagree with the lands accorded Ham, stating that "[Nuh] made Sam, whom they call the Father of the Persians, the ruler of the lands of Iran and Turan, and he sent Ham, who is called the Father of the Hindus, to Hindustan."[343] The identification here of Sam as the father of the Persians, rather than of the "Semites" as one may instead expect because of modern linguistics, is somewhat curious. Perhaps this was because the various Iranians, by this point almost Persian speakers all, were much closer geographically to him than was the world of the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant. Ham as the father of the Hindus, rather than being the progenitor of Africans, makes sense for the same reason. Nava'i, with his interest in promoting the composition of literature in Turkish, rather than Persian, takes this historical division of the world one step further and uses this information to discuss the origins of languages, stating that "Turkish, Persian, and Hindi, the origins of which go back to Yafith, Sam, and Ham, the three sons of the Prophet Nuh."[344] This religious and cultural syncretism of Abrahamic, Iranian, and Turkic elements did not suddenly stop with the Timurid era, however, and continued to influence the later Islamic world, particularly through the spread of Sufism, perhaps even until today. In his recent work *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakhshiya between Medieval and Modern Islam*, Shahzad Bashir writes that

[342] Nava'i, "Part 4. Timur and the Timurids, B. Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century, 32. Nava'i: A Comparison between Persian and Turkic," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, trans. Robert Devereux, Kindle (Indiana University Press, 2009).

[343] Ibid.

[344] Ibid. It is interesting to note the tremendous similarity of this division to that of contemporary linguistics, which despite its "modern" character is just as rooted in Biblical ideas of descent, with the very linguistic family names of "Semitic" and "Hamitic" showing the Christian theological leanings of Sir William Jones, his European contemporaries, and their immediate successors.

> Abu Muslim was adopted as a hero by the early Ghulat, and a continuous tradition can be traced between the remnants of the Kaysaniya active in southern Iraq in the eighth century and the propaganda of the militarized Safavid order in Iran and Anatolia in the fifteenth. Although not a mahdi in the strict sense, Abu Muslim, as a legendary 'helping' figure, is significant for the Islamic messianic tradition since he could be adopted into revolutionary causes associated with 'heterodox' Shi'i movements such as the Qizilbash Turkoman tribesman who brought the Safavid dynasty to power in Iran in the sixteenth century.[345]

This displays another connection, culturally, that some Turks at one point had seen between Iranian history and themselves. As was briefly touched upon in the introductory chapter, the martyred Abu Muslim was a figurehead for many religious rebellions in the decades after his death, and apparently much later as well.

Epic and other poetry

As we have seen thus far in this chapter, the patronage and writing of histories and geographies were some fairly obvious ways that Central Asian Iranians and Turks helped to construct their Perso-Islamicate identities from the ninth century CE onward. Matter-of-fact statements in prose, however, were likely not the most effective means of doing so. The more visceral and emotional power of poetry, especially for a largely illiterate population, helps the reader or listener connect much more concretely to their cultural past. Poetry, particularly epic poetry, has been often analyzed for how it informs nationalism and culture. Again, some of the insights gained by scholars of other epics may be analogous to the case of the *Shahnama* and the Samanid era. For example, in an article on a Middle High German Epic, the *Nibelungenliea*, Albrecht Classen writes that "if we take a hard look at some of the classics, but also at some so far neglected or marginalized texts, we easily recognize that fictional texts offer deep insights into, and reflections of, processes of identity formation, self-perceptions of a community or

[345] Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 16–17.

country, gender relations, attitudes toward old people and children, the obscure realms of fear and other emotions, and the relationship between humans and environment at specific times and locations."[346] This is probably even more true in the case of *Shahnama*, which was certainly not considered fictitious by its patrons and readers. John Miles Foley, a scholar of Slavic epics, agrees with Classen, stating that "oral epic provides a vehicle for collective negotiation of historical context, a tool for living. Within this historical mode tradition-bearers and -owners express longstanding beliefs and points of view in their own culture's terms and for their own culture's purposes."[347] We can certainly view Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* through this type of lens. Regardless of whether one sees *Shahnama*'s forebears as oral epic or prose history, in the burgeoning Perso-Islamicate culture in Khurasan and Transoxania *Shahnama* and similar works were expressions of the ruling *dehqan* class. Perhaps they can help us understand how *dehqans* viewed the changing world around them, as "dominant social groups typically seek to euphemize their own power and make claims to exercise that power in the interests of society as a whole. In doing so they establish certain principles and standards for their rule which they cannot be seen to contradict too routinely without being seen to contradict their own claims."[348] In many ways, that can be one of the main missions of court intellectuals, and most specifically court poets; to aggrandize their patrons, and to apologize to the victims of their regime. This seems particularly true of forms such as the *qasida*, with its often panegyric aim. The *Shahnama*, however, and likely other works of epic, would conform much more closely to Foley's ideas about epic. The

[346] Albrecht Classen and Kurt A Rāflaub, "The Nibelungenlied – Myth and History: A Middle High German Epic Poem at the Crossroads of Past and Present, Despair and Hope," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 262.

[347] Foley, John Miles, "Traditional History in South Slavic Oral Epic," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A Rāflaub (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 355–356.

[348] Chik Collins, *Language, Ideology and Social Consciousness: Developing a Sociohistorical Approach* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1999), 10.

dehqans, particularly those in Central Asia, were very much considered the "tradition-bearers" by later generations of Iranians, and the compilation of a prose *Shahnama*, and even the recitation of stories of ancient Iran in public settings, are activities that fit well into that mold. Before delving in the next chapter directly into Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, in this section we will review some of these forms of poetry in the early New Persian Renaissance, their users, and their aims. A certain overview of form as well as content is necessary, as even the structure of classical Persian poetry can betray the interests of its practitioners.

Mathnavi

As several scholars have commented, the Arabs did not seem particularly enamored of the epic, and apparently any of the longer forms of poetic composition.[349] From the earliest days of New Persian poetry, the *mathnavī*, or rhyming couplet at its most basic, was used with various meters, although usually different from the meters used in *ghazal* or *ruba'i*,[350] and for works ranging from the heroic or romantic to the didactic.[351] Rudaki, one of our earliest known poets in modern Persian, and still a favorite of Central Asian Tajiks,[352] was a prolific user of the form, in many different meters.[353] Rudaki's *Sindbād-nāma* was perhaps the most famous of his works, and appears to have been transmitted from an Indian language to Middle Persian, then to Arabic, and finally to New Persian.[354] This transmission pattern is not dissimilar to that which the Older

349 Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 98.

350 Levy, *An Introduction to Persian Literature.*, 43. As Yarshater mentions, the *mathnavi* is particularly appropriate for any poem with a narrative theme. See "The Development of Iranian Literatures," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 3, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies ([Albany, N.Y.]: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 20. A *ghazal* is a particular type of lyric poem.

351 Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 13–14. Levy claims that works as diverse as those on ethics, history, "religious doctrine, medicine, and even cookery" were composed in *mathnavi* form (42).

352 Cite this. Kosimov was a huge fan, and thought he was more important than Ferdowsi.

353 Lazard writes that "extant fragments show that Rudaki employed the same meters which were to occur most frequently in mathnavi throughout the whole of Persian literature—*mutaqarib*, *hazaj*, *khafif*, *ramal*" See "Rise of the New Persian Language," 623. The *mutaqarib* meter was, of course, also used by Ferdowsi for his *Shahnama*.

354 Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 145.

Preface claims for *Kalila wa Dimna* and the sources of the prose *Shahnama*. Although, according to the Older Preface, those works may not have passed through Arabic translation, we know that other works from the *Xwaday-namag* genre certainly did. The translations of Ibn Muvaffaq, and their use as a source by Tabari, is an obvious example. Abu Shukur of Balkh, born approximately 915 CE,[355] also composed several *mathnavīs*, including those of didactic aim, "in particular, an *Afarin-nama* (written in 333-6/944-8), a poem of moral import in which the ideas were probably illustrated by anecdotes . . . many of the sentences which he put into verse are to be found in the Middle Persian books of *andarz.*"[356] Works of an even more explicitly didactic nature began to appear more regularly within the next century, such as the *Qabusnama* and *Siyastatnama*, and will be covered in slightly more detail later.

Earliest examples of poetry in New Persian

There is much debate over what may be the earliest example of New Persian poetry still extant. As we saw in Chapter 1, the case with prose is somewhat more clear, but because most of our references to poetry are contained within other works the case is considerably more muddied.

[355] Ibid., 144.

[356] Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 623. *Andarz* was a genre of advice literature. What fragments remain of this work are also composed in *mutaqrib* meter (Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 144.). Although scholars such as Lazard are prepared to connect the didactic nature of works such as the *Afarin-nama* directly to Middle Persian forebears, and a specifically Iranian culture, others seem to disagree and admit an Arabic influence as well. Arberry, for example, writes that "Abu 'l-'Atāhiya (d. 805), harking back to the sententious asides of some of the old Bedouin poets, wrote almost exclusively on philosophical and didactic themes, thus preparing the way for Persian moralists like Nāsir-i Khusrau." See *Classical Persian Literature*, 12. Contrast this with Lazard, who sees "another respect in which Persian poetry is connected with the ancient Iranian culture, by ties which are less apparent though very strong, is through ethical thought, expresssed not only in many passages of the 'Book of Kings' but also in specific works like those of Abu Shukur (4th/10th century) and even in many verses of the lyrical poets," "Rise of the New Persian Language," 615. Perhaps because of the rightfully high reputation of Ferdiowsi's *Shahnama* itself, other scholars seem to discount the influence of earlier works such as those of Abu Shukur, and assign the place of primacy solely to the *Shahnama.* For instance, Abdullaeva writes that the *Shahnama* contained "the embryo of other literary genres that developed later, like romantic, ethical and didactic literature (Mirrors for Princes)." See "The 'Shahnama' in Persian Literary History," 22. Perhaps the bilingual nature of Abu Shukur's corpus is partially to blame for this oversight. See Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 144.

Some scholars believe that “the earliest document that can be dated with certainty” was the work of Yazīd b. Mufarrigh al-Himyarī (d. 688).[357] Among other sources, this poem and its context are recorded in the anonymous *Tarikh-e Sistan*. According to this work, Ibn Mofarregh was accompanying the generals 'Abbād and Ziyād on conquests into Central Asia. Shortly after the conquest of Kandahar, Ibn Mofarregh composed an insulting poem (in Arabic) about their mother. Then, 'Abbād chose to punish the poet. Eventually, Ibn Mofarregh ended up drunk in public and sick with dysentery, where

> Small boys continued to observe him. Owing to the great blackness which his dysentery produced in him, they exclaimed over and over in Persian: 'It is night, it is night, it is night!' He replied to them, also in Persian:
> [Whether] It is water and wine and pressed raisin juice,
> And the plump tail and the suet;
> And Somayya is [still] a whore!
> Somayya was the name of Ziyād's mother. Whereupon 'Abbād gave him some money, and sent him back toward Iraq, saying: 'I have had enough of you.'[358]

Qasida and Court Poetry

The epic was not the only form of Persian poetry to appear in the era surrounding the tenth century CE. Most court poetry, in fact, was almost certainly composed in a shorter format, often the *qasida*, an example of what is sometimes referred to by Western scholars as “lyric

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[357] Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 134.

[358] Gold, *The Tārikh-E Sistān*, 76–77. Bahār, *Tarikh-I Sistan. Ta’lif Dar Hudud-I 445-725*, 96., reads

کودکان نگاه هنی کردند، از بس سیاهی که آن اسهال او بود و منادی میکردند بزبان پارسی که: شبست این شبست این شبست، او جواب کرد ایشانرا هم بپارسی که:

آبست و نبیذست　　　وعصارات زبیب است

ودنبهٔ فربه وپی اَست　　　و سُمَّیت هم روسبی اَست

سمیّه نام مادر ریاد بود. پس عباد او را مالی داد و به سوی عرب باز گردانید، گفتا مرا از توبس.

Here, what Gold translates as “toward Iraq” the original Persian reads “in the direction of the Arabs.” Dabashi certainly sees this story of early Persian poetry as plausible, stating that “If the origin of Persian prose has been detected in the Samanid court and at the service of dynastic and empire building, the first evidence of Persian poetry is in fact found in the streets and alleys and in satirical defiance of power, uttered by Persian-speaking and non-Persian-speaking children and poets poking fun at the power of those ruling over them,” *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 66.

poetry" or the "ode."[359] In our earliest periods of New Persian poetry, the more rigid categories of poetic type were far from set,[360] and we cannot necessarily see the divisions between poetic type that developed later. Certain poets were known to work in both forms, epic and "lyric," such as Daqiqi. In addition to his work on a *Shahnama*, which was then used by Ferdowsi, Daqiqi was also known to have been talented in this other poetic form.[361] This is almost to be expected for a court poet, as the *qasida* had considerable utility in that vein. As Levy writes, "for its theme, the qasida in the ordinary course had some eulogistic, often grossly flattering, things to say about a patron, who would be expected to pay for the service rendered. It was when Persian princes made themselves independent of the Baghdad caliphate and set up courts for themselves that the qasida became a common form and Persian poets began to reap rewards for composing verse in their own tongue."[362] Perhaps the best example of this type of court poet was the case of Unsuri. We know that in the Ghaznavid era, and likely in the preceding Samanid era, such court poets were in constant competition for the favor and patronage of their masters. One of the acknowledged masters among court poets was Abu'l-Qasim Unsuri, born *ca.* 968 CE in Balkh.[363]

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359 Rypka describes the *qasida* as consisting of at least fifteen distiches, although occasionally shorter, and often with "panegyric, elgeiac, satirical, didactic, or religious content. They usually have a purely lyrical introduction, commonly called *nasīb*, but, when tinged with eroticism, *tashbīb* or *taghazzul*." See *History of Iranian Literature*, 94. The *ghazzal* both Levy and Arberry see as a later development of the "eroticism" of some *qasidas*, stating that "out of the erotic prelude of the qasida they [Iranians] fashioned the *ghazal* (a word derived from an Arabic original meaning 'lovers' exchanges'), a separate lyric form having something of the character of the European sonnet." See (Levy, *An Introduction to Persian Literature.*, 33. 'Umar ibn Abī Raī'a of Mecca (d. about 715) "took the dramatic step of detaching from the ode [*qasida*] its amatory prelude which he developed into a love-poem in its own right, thus supplying the other main constituent of the Persian *ghazal* . . .[and that] it was left to the Persians to recognize this kind of writing as belonging to a separate genre and to call it *ghazal*." See Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 12–13.

360 As Utas writes, "Obviously the terms 'epic' and 'lyric' can only be used in this context as a loose characteristic and *faute de mieux*. A precise delimitation of epic and lyric metrical patterns seems impossible from the time when we start to have more substantial specimens of Persian verse (the middle of the 10th century AD)." See "Arabic and Iranian Elements in New Persian Prosody," 161.

361 Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 619.

362 Levy, *An Introduction to Persian Literature.*, 28.

363 S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), location 444.

A favorite of Mahmūd of Ghazna, he was the first court poet to bear the title of *Maliku'sh-shu'arā'*, or “King of Poets,” an office which would have inspired considerable jealousies amongst Unsuri's contemporaries.[364] When discussing the role of a court poet, and the competition between such persons, Beyhaqi mentions Unsuri first among others as an archetype of such a panegyrist. He writes

> if some king should bolster his poetic talent by royal benevolence, in the same manner as the masters of preceding ages like 'Onsori, 'Asjadi, Zeynabi and Farrokhi found patronage in their time, he will be able to parade his (hair-splitting) ingenuity and discrimination in the choice of words and make his rivals appear lowly by contrast, “*For indeed, gifts unlock the tongue*,” and he may perhaps find it, since he is still a young man *and that is not difficult for God*.[365]

As an example of the dearth of extant works, even for such a well-regarded and famous poetic master as 'Unsuri,[366] very few of his works have survived. We have perhaps only 2,500 out of the 30,000 verses he supposedly wrote in his lifetime.[367] One can imagine that, if only such a small sample of the corpus of one of Mahmūd's favorites survived, that for any poet without such powerful patronage we are lucky to have any example of their work. Perhaps we should consider ourselves lucky for Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* to have survived the centuries as well as it has.

However, despite Levy's statement, it should not be assumed that the *qasida* was a purely Persian form, as the Arabic work of al-Mutanabbī (d. 965) can attest, although it was true that he also wrote at the court of the nascent provincial dynasties.[368] Perhaps this royal or aristocratic

[364] Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 173.

[365] Baihaqī, *The History of Beyhaqi*, I: 392–393. Abū al-Faẕl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tarikh-E Bayhaqi*, 372, reads

و اگر این فاضل از روزگار ستمکار داد یابد و پادشاهی طبعِ او قشا به نیکوکاری مدد دهد چنانکه یافتند استادانِ عصرها چون عنصری و عسجدی و زینبی و فرخی رحمةالله علیهم أجعمین در سخن موی بَدو نیم شکافد و دستِ بسیار کس در خان مالد، فانَّ اللَّهی تفتَح اللَّها، و مگر بیابد، که هنوز جوان است، و ماذلِک علیالله بعزیزٍ.

I am uncertain as to Beyhaqi's meaning in the last sentence. To Beyhaqi's list of famous panegyrists, Rypka adds a few others, including Rūdakī, Mu'izzī, Anvarī, Khāqānī, 'Urfī, and Qā'ānī. See *History of Iranian Literature*, 94.

[366] Arberry, (54) gives his full name as Abu'l-Qāsim Hasan ibn Ahmad, and his year of death as 1050. Other scholars give dates as early as 1039, but regardless, he appears to have lived a long and full life for his time.

[367] Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 175.

[368] Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 11.

element was important, however, in the development of the *qasida*. In tracing the development of the *qasida*, Rypka writes that “with the rise of the towns the Persian element intervenes. A compromise takes place, partly by an artificial rendering of the naturalistic nomadic themes and partly by the introduction of new subjects that appeal to the urban upper classes, aristocrats, and rulers. The poet is no longer the herald of his tribe, as was the case with the pre-Islamic Bedouins, but becomes now the spokesman of the privileged classes.”[369] The panegyric often appears to be almost sycophantic in nature, with the poet flattering his patron in often fantastic ways, seemingly in the hopes of remuneration. Rypka, however, sees a different motivation, stating that panegyric can also be seen as didactic in nature, expressing the “desire of the poet to present an ideal model to the person addressed.”[370] If this is indeed the case, then perhaps the aims of many *qasidas* and epic poetry were not necessarily as far apart as can be assumed. Rather than simple flattery, others see the prime rationale for poetry such as the courtly *qasida*, and perhaps all poetry, as immortality.[371] Nizami Arudi writes that “the richest portion and most excellent part of poetry is immortal fame, and until it be thus recorded and recited this idea will not be realized. And if poetry does not rise to this level, its influence is ineffectual, for it will die before its author. So, being impotent for the immortalizing of its own name, how can it confer

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369 Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 141. Lazard takes this statement even further when discussing the origins of the *qasida* and Persian poetry, stating that “since Persian poetry originated in courts for the glorification of Iranian princes, lyrical poetry was the first genre to appear. Its *raison d'etre* was the panegyric and its form the qasida.” See Lazard, “Rise of the New Persian Language,” 617. Oddly, Rypka seems to be conflicted upon this “urban” character of the *qasida*, because when discussing poetry under the Mongols he states that we should “consider the development of the towns under the Mongols, for to the urban population the panegyric *qasīda* had now lots its significance. The *ghazal* and the *mathnavī* were the forms that could give expression to urban interests,” *History of Iranian Literature*, 248.

370 Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 94.

371 Not all *qasidas* were necessarily courtly in nature; Nāsir-i Khusrau and his Sufi qasidas are an important counterexample, as “the great bulk of his verse is cast in the form of lengthy odes; but whereas his predecessors had employed this instrument to play elaborate paeans to kings and princes, his panegyric was directed towards very different themes—the unity and majest of God, the religious life, the pursuit of virtue, the praise of good learning and good doing.” See Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 66.

immortality on the name of another?"[372] Obviously, in this sense, the intrinsic quality of the poetry is more important than how much it flatters its patron, and it seems as though Nizami Arudi would state that a court poet would do a disservice to his patron if he does not compose his works with an eye first to posterity, and only secondly to monetary compensation or royal favor.

The *Tarikh-e Sistan* concerns itself quite often with matters literary as well. As before, the same caveats apply when attempting to use this anonymous work as a primary source for intellectual and literary history of the eastern Iranian world. Although we cannot be certain that any anecdotes contained within it are true in a historical sense, they may allow us some insight into what slightly later Sistanis *thought* was true about the origins of Persian poetry, or perhaps what they would like *others* to think was true. In this work is contained the famous story about the origin of Persian court poetry under the Saffarids. As the *Tarikh-e Sistan* writes, after Ya'qub returned to Sistan,

> He killed those Kharijites who had remained [in opposition] and seized their property. Then the poets composed a poem in his honor in Arabic:
>
> > 'God has honored the people of the city and the district by the rule of Ya'qub, a man of resources and many virtues.
> > The people have enjoyed his magnanimity and his solicitude.
> > Thus by God's grace Ya'qub became a source of safety for the far-away cities and districts.'
> >
> > When this poem was recited, Ya'qub, who was not a learned man, did not understand it. Mohammad ibn Vasif, his correspondence secretary, who was a man of letters, was in the audience. At that time Persian letters did not exist. Ya'qub asked: 'Why should a poem be composed which I could not understand?' Mohammad ibn Vasif then began to compose poems in Persian. He was the first person to compose poetry in Persian since the days of the Persians, when poetry was composed to be sung to the accompaniment of a *rud*, according to the manner of the court. Once the Persians were conquered by the Arabs, poetry was composed in Arabic, and everybody had the knowledge and understood Arabic poetry. Previous to Ya'qub no ruler of such greatness had appeared from among the Persians in whose honor poetry was composed, except Hamza ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Shāri, who was a learned man and knew Arabic, and for whom his poets composed in Arabic; and his army was mostly Arab, of Arabian origin.[373]

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[372] Niẓāmī 'Arūẓ̱ī, *The Chahár Maqála ("Four Discourses") of Nidhámí-I-'Arúḍí-I-Samarqandí*, trans. Edward Granville Browne (London: Published by the Trustees of the "E. J.W. Gibb memorial" and dist. by Luzac, 1921), 31–32, http://books.google.com/books?id=bNgsAQāMāJ.

[373] Gold, *The Tārikh-e Sistān*, 166–167. Bahār, *Tarikh-i Sistan. Ta'lif Dar Hudud-i 445-725*, 209–210., reads
بعضی از خوارج که ماندهبودند ایشانرا بکشت و مالهاء ایشان بر گرفت، پس شعرا اورا شعر گفتندی بتازی:
شعر

According to the work, after Mohammad ibn Vasif began composing in Persian, other poets quickly followed suit. The *Tarikh-e Sistan* gives the name of some of these poets, such as Bassam Kord and Mohammad ibn Mohallad.[374] Quickly, it seems, the practice spread to the Samanid and other realms.

***The Origin of the* ruba'i**

On the opposite end of the scale from epic, at least in length, is the equally Iranian form of the *ruba'i*, or quatrain, perhaps made most famous in the west by the works of Omar Khayyam (who was actually an astronomer and mathematician by trade, and only a poet by disposition). Our sources are somewhat contradictory on when the *ruba'i* became popular in the New Persian language. Some later biographers attribute its popularity to the work of the aforementioned Abu Shukur of Balkh in the tenth century CE, and some to the later Sufi Abu Sa'id. Regardless, many modern scholars see in the form reflections of earlier Persian poetic practice.[375] The "advent" of

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قَدْ اَکْدَمَ اللهُ الهْلَ الْمِصْرِ وَ الْبَلَدِ   بِمُلْكِ يعَقُبِ ذِی اِلْفَضالِ وَ الْعُدَدِ
قَدْ آمَنَ النّاسِ نخواه و غرِته   سَتْرٌ مِنَ اللهِ فِی الْا مْصارِ وَ البَلَدِ
چون این شعر بر خواندند او عالم نبود در نیافت، محمد بن وصیف حاضر بود و دبیر رسایل او بود و ادب نیکو دانست و بدان روزگار نامۀ پارسی نبود، پس یعقوب گفت: چیزی که من اندر نیایم چرا باید گفت؟ مجمد وصیف پس شعر پارسی گفتن گرفت. و اول شعر پارسی اندر عجم او گفت، و پیش ازو کسی نگفته‌بود که تا پارسیان بودند سخن پیش ایشان برُود باز گفتندی بر طریق خسروانی، و چون عجم بر کنده شدند و عرب آمدند شعر میان ایشان بتازی بود و همگنانرا علم و معرفت شعر تازی بود، و اندر عجم کسی بر نیامد که او را بزرگیِ آن بود پیش از یعقوب که اندر و شعر گفتندی، مگر جمزة بن عبدالله الشاری و او عالم بود و تازی دانست، شعراء او تازی گفتند، و سپاه او بیشتر هخه از عرب بودند و تازیان بودند.

Bahār's version reads that Ya'qub killed only "some of the Kharajites who had remained," whereas Gold's translation does not include this qualification. The *Tarikh-e Sistan* also contains other examples of poetry which was supposedly composed by Mohammad ibn Vasif. "The late S.M. Stern accepted as probable Muhammad b. Wasif's catalytic role as the encourager of vernacular Persian poetry amongst the Saffarids, but was cautious over his pioneering position as a poet in New Persian in the eastern Iranian lands in general, pointing out that the author of the *Tarikh-i Sistan* was only aware of his restricted, local scene, so that the claims of Muhammad b. Wasif's primacy as New Persian poet may have related to Sistan only." See Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz: (247/861 to 949/1542-3)* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers in association with Bibliotheca Persica, 1994), 177.

374 Gold, *The Tārikh-e Sistān*, 168. Bahār's edition gives this information on pages 211-212.

375 Despite its seeming appearance in the New Persian Renaissance, Levy states that "since something very like it has been identified in the *Gathas*, or Zoroastrian hymns, the probability is that it is at least as early as the beginning of the Sasanian period." See *An Introduction to Persian Literature.*, 36.

the quatrain[376] in the ninth or tenth century CE is of interest here, because some later writers, perhaps simply to give the form a greater pedigree, attribute the first New Persian *ruba'i* to the son of Ya'qub ibn Laith. Dawlatshah is one of these writers who in his *tadhkira* give the credit to Ya'qub's son. This would seem to suggest that, at least by the time of Dawlatshah, the Iranian cultural world acknowledged a debt to the Saffarids in the resurgence of poetry in New Persian, or as Browne states it, “a general conviction that to the Saffarids Persia owed in no small measure the recovery of her national life.”[377] In an alternate story of invention, but one that lends an air of literary and intellectual importance to the *ruba'i*, Shams-i Qais attributes the first quatrain to a child who was witnessed by Rudaki.[378] Either way, the attribution of the first quatrain to a child seems somewhat curious, in a sense infantilizing the genre as a whole, and possibly demeaning its importance. As the common element in these stories is the juvenile nature of our putative poet, perhaps this part of the story was taken as a given, and the addition of either Rudaki or Ya'qub ibn Layth was simply to allow the *ruba'i* to regain some dignity.

We know from references in our extant works that the Samanid era was not lacking in poets, and likely no era ever has been in the Iranian world. As Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Furūghī famously wrote in a letter to Edward Granville Browne, upon the millennial celebration of Ferdowsi's birth, “One might say that in the Persian view, speech without rhythm and rhyme is not worthy of attention.”[379] Likely, this was perhaps even more true in an era of massive

[376] The *ruba'i* (quatrain),or very similar poetic forms, are known by many other names in Iranian or Tajik Central Asia: *falakī*, *kurtasurkhak*, *kurtasafedak*, *bayt*, or *chor-bayt,* among others. Oddly, in Bukhara it called *mukhammas* (lit. 'quintet'). See Ravshan Rahmoni, “The Popular Literature of the Tajiks,” in *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages: Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik : Companion Volume ī to A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Philip G Kreyenbroek and Ulrich Marzolph, vol. 18 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 285.

[377] Browne and Saba, *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times Until Ferdowsi*, I:347.

[378] Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 72.

[379] Ibid., 47.

illiteracy, when not just entertainment but education relied more heavily upon information in verse, as the rhythm and rhyme served as not just elements of beauty to be admired but also as important mnemonic devices. Of course, the issue when examining most pre-modern history and literature is the lack of original manuscript and sources. Even the fragments of poems that we do have from the Samanid era were often written down centuries later. As Bo Utas writes,"the rather numerous verses that are ascribed to Persian poets of the 9th and 10th centuries are known only from later manuscripts, generally not older than the 13th century, and they have obviously been normalized and 'polished' by generations of scribes and compilers before reaching us."[380] This can lead to many issues for scholars attempting to trace the development of classical Persian poetry, and its conventions of not only meter but also the canon of poetic imagery shared by such poetry.[381] As Rypka writes, "to write a real *shi'r*, 'poem,' the poet of classical times was obliged to submit unquestioningly to all the prescribed rules. It is not at all a question of writing only according to one's emotions. To be a Persian poet was at the same time to be a scholar, in fact even more so."[382] Before even writing so much as a single *bayt*, a poet was expected to have familiarized him or herself with the entire corpus of Persian, and perhaps Arabic, poetry that had come before. This, especially during the foundational period of the Saffarids and Samanids, is an important point. We know that many poets were bilingual in both Arabic and Persian, and that there was a large amount of cross-fertilization between poetry in the two languages. Arabic had been, after all, *the* language of high culture in the Islamic world for well over a century before

380 Utas, "Arabic and Iranian Elements in New Persian Prosody," 155.

381 For a full and recent discussion of the development of poetic imagery in the early Islamic era, see R. Zipoli, "Poetic Imagery," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn, A History of Persian Literature, v. 1 (London ; New York : New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 172–232.

382 Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 101.

the Saffarids began their rule. It is around the time of the Saffarid ascent that "we find professional men-of-letters who begin to compose poetry in Persian, and since they were brought up on Arabic poetry and wrote it themselves, the Persian poetry written by them follows Arabic prosody and is also in its contents deeply influenced by Arabic poetry."[383] Many scholars seem to hew to a consensus that, although poetry did exist in Middle Persian, it may have followed a less strict quantitative system of meter than did Arabic poetry. In that aspect, the nascent New Persian poetic system did lean heavily on Arabic prosody, but was not a simple clone of it. As Lazard writes, "On the one hand certain classes of poems, such as the *mathnavi* and the *ruba'i*, are widely used in Persian but not in Arabic, which suggests an Iranian origin."[384] Also, one should not assume that, at least at first, poetry in Persian immediately supplanted Arabic poetry, even in Khurasan and Transoxania. Instead, it supplemented it. The Samanids, like the Saffarids, were prodigious patrons of Persian poetry, but also read and listened to poetry in Arabic at their court.[385] Arabic prose also continued to be composed, as we have seen by the example of Narshakhi's *Tarikh-e Bokhara*.

Shahnama *and epic*

As mentioned in Chapter 1, it is likely the very epic and foundational nature of *Shahnama* that has contributed to its survival. Not only in its content, but in certain respects even in its form, Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* may have been a continuation of pre-Islamic Iranian archetypes. Although many scholars have claimed to be able to trace many of the poetic forms and meters of classical Persian to Arabic forebears, this appears to be decidely not the case when

[383] Stern, "Ya'qub the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment," 546. Bosworth agrees with the assertion that Ya'qub was probably the first ruler to have New Persian poetry composed in his honor. See *Saffarids of Sistan*, 176.

[384] Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 612.

[385] Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 9.

it comes to epic poetry. As Arberry writes, “the epic, though not entirely unknown in Arabic—Abān ibn 'Abd al-Hamīd al-Lāhiqī for instance, who died about 815, wrote *muzdawij* (couplet) versions of the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and the *Bilauhar wa-Būdāsāf* as well as the adventures of Sindbād and Mazdak and the romances of Ardashīr and Anūshīrwān, but these were never popular and have not survived—attracted few Arab poets.”[386] Although these works of al-Lāhiqī may have been composed in Arabic, these are all Persian or Indo-Aryan subjects in his works, which could have influenced his choice of form. Perhaps the very subject matter, or the forms in which he familiarized himself with the subject matter, dictated the epic nature of his compositions. According to a chapter by Reynolds on the Arabic poetic tradition, some centuries later poets did begin to compose longer works in Arabic, although seemingly not before the eleventh century CE, and we have no surviving works before the thirteenth century CE.[387] Here, the very timing of our earliest references is suggestive; such Arabic-language works were very likely composed after Ferdowsi had finished his work, possibly reinforcing the notion that the popularity, and within Perso-Islamicate civilization, even the very concept of “epic” was more purely Iranian rather than Arab. New Persian epic likely had Zoroastrian and Middle Persian ancestors. Klima sees such extended works of history tracing all the way back to Old Persian, and perhaps Avestan, roots. Although he unfortunately does not support his assertion with any citations, he states that “It is known with certainty that the ancient Persians possessed national songs, namely heroic sagas, myths, and similar works. It may be that some elements of them appear in an altered form in works of the poets who later elaborated the Old Iranian Kings'

[386] Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 13.
[387] Dwight F. Reynolds, “Epic and History in the Arabic Tradition,” in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A Rāflaub (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 396.

Saga."[388] The Parthians likely also had their share of epic poetry, some of which may have made it into the *Shahnama* via a geographical transposition to Zabulistan, but there are of course few sources for Parthian.[389] The sources for Sasanian-era Middle Persian epic are slightly better, but again were likely mutated through their transmission over the centuries. For instance, even though the Middle Persian epic *Ayatkār-i Zariran* survives in prose form, some scholars believe that it may have originally been poetry. Utas, for instance, in his examination of the work outlines several key reasons why he believes *AZ* may have started as verse. He writes that,

> The main criteria for reading this passage (and others) in *AZ* as verse are: short sentences, often repeating the same structure over and over again; often irregular word order . . . rhythmically recurring repetitions of words and phrases; use of standing epithets . . . general rhythmical qualities, very often allowing the text to be scanned in series of three stresses between pauses. In many of these respects, among others the word order, the text is closely related to *Shāh-nāmah*. With this it shall not be claimed that the text arranged as lines of poetry above (and below) necessarily appears in the shape it had in the original epic. Many of the lines are probably close to the original, while others must have suffered considerable corruption during some 7-800 years of oral and written textual history (Codex MK being dated 1322 AD).[390]

Unfortunately, Utas does not supply a concrete reason for what he sees as the transformation of a metrical *AZ* into a prose *AZ*. Perhaps the difficulties of the Middle Persian writing system are partially to blame, or a lack of familiarity by later scribes with Middle Persian poetic forms.

Romantic Epic

As mentioned above, certain scholars see a decline in "feudal" or "chivalric" epics, such as the *Shahnama*, in the transition from Iranian to Turkish rule, along with a concomitant rise in

388 Klima, "Avesta. Ancient Persian Inscriptions. Middle Persian Literature," 23.

389 The Parthian or Arsacid connection with Armenia may have provided us with one of the sole pieces of evidence to back up such an assertion. As Klima again writes, "there was no lack of heroic poetry, but unfortunately nothing authentic has been preserved. Nevertheless, it had an influence on Armenian epic poetry, a fragment of which is preserved in a part of the hymn to Vaghan, an ancient Armenian heathen idol (=Iran. Vrthraghna)," Ibid., 26.

390 Bo Utas, "On the Composition of the Ayyātkār Ī Zarērān," in *Manuscript, Text and Literature: Collected Essays on Middle and New Persian Texts*, ed. Carina Jahani and Dāriyūsh Kārgar (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2008), 11.

the popularity of “romantic” epic.[391] Rypka sees the earliest earliest “romantic” epic as *Varqa u Gul'shāh* by 'Ayyūqī, who was contemporaneous with Mahmūd of Ghazna. Although primarily composed in the native Iranian *mutaqarib* meter, Rypka states that “the use of this verse-meter was not confined to heroic subjects, and had “been employed from olden times in romantic and other epics or long poems. It is well worth noticing that the monotony of the coupled rhymes is broken here and there by love songs in the form of *ghazals.*”[392] This was certainly not the only romantic epic in the eleventh century CE. *Vis u Ramin* is perhaps an even more famous work, written by Fakhr ad-Din As'ad Gurgani for a Seljuq governor in western Iran,[393] although quite likely it is based on an earlier Middle Persian version. The work uses the *hazaj* rather than *mutaqarib* meter,[394] and was composed circa 1054 CE.[395] Unlike works such as the *Shahnama*, which treat subjects of Zoroastrianism in a way to make them Islamically appropriate, *Vis u Ramin* appears to be of a very different stripe, as its subject matter “is an insult to Islamic morality and in fact to every other religion.”[396] Perhaps the master of the romantic epic is Nizami Ganjavi, whose *Khamsa* is important for many reasons.[397] These five poems included his

391 Bosworth certainly sees this as the case. Interestingly, Grabar writes that “the prestige and the practice of epic texts seems to have been greater among Turkic rulers than more fully Iranian ones like the Samanids and their successors and almost no evidence seems to exist of such interests in whatever we know of the culture of western and southern Iran. It is, in other words, difficult to identify a milieu other than that of expatriate Soghdians in Buddhist lands that could have favored epic traditions and more specifically the *Shahnama* before the end of the thirteenth century.” See Oleg Grabar, “Why Was the Shahnama Illustrated ?,” *Iranian Studies* 43 (2010): 94. In a sense, I think that Grabar is here conflating linguistically “Persian” and ethnically or culturally “Iranian” here. I'm not sure what else to think of this statement.

392 Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 177.

393 Although governor of Isfahan, the name of this Seljuq official, 'Amīd Abu'l-fath Muzaffar b. Husayn Nīshāpūrī, very much shows his Khurasanian roots.

394 C. E Bosworth, “The Titulature of the Early Ghaznavids,” in *The Medieval History of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1962), 210–33.

395 Utas, in a chapter in the new *A History of Persian Literature*, writes that the very popularity of *Vis u Ramin* may have started a trend of romantic epics utilizing *hazaj* rather than *motaqqareb* meter. See “Prosody: Meter and Rhyme,” in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn, A History of Persian Literature, v. 1 (London ; New York : New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 122.

396 Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 177.

397 Levy, *An Introduction to Persian Literature*, 81.

Iskandarnama and *Haft Paykar*, both of which are notable for their "historical" nature.[398] However, despite this turn toward the past in subject matter, Rypka sees Nizami's use of language as much more forward-looking, writing that

> great credit is due to Nizāmī for having introduced the living language into the epic – the same vocabulary that had long before penetrated into the court lyric. By so doing he delivered a decisive blow to the ancient epical tradition, particularly because it was no long sufficiently comprehensive as a result of its negative attitude towards arabising trends . . . The production of epics of chivalry had fallen off, not only in consequence of changes in the social strata and lack of interest on the part of the masses, but because this form of poetry was as it were incapable of shaking off the lingual purism that was symptomatic of it.[399]

Rypka seems to be attributing to Nizami the final nail in the coffin of *dari* rather than *farsi* Persian, at least within epic itself. Of course, poetry was not, and is not, solely the domain of the court or professional poets. Especially with the shorter forms, poetry is certain to have permeated the entire society of the greater Iranian cultural world in these centuries.

The Power of Poetry

Like the anecdote from *Tarikh-e Sistan* recounted in the last chapter, other stories abound in Persian and Arabic histories and literature about the power of poetry affecting the course of political and dynastic history. Dabashi in his work on *Persian Literary Humanism* relates an anecdote about Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, who was the governor of Kufa and Basra circa 680 CE. In the story, Ubayd interacted with the poet Yazid ibn Mifraq asking him "to promise that he would write to Ubayd if his brother ignored him and before he started satirizing him. Yazid the poet agreed. What is already remarkable here is that fear of a ruthless warlord for a poet and the power that these poets had over their patrons."[400] Another story of the power of poetry (although

398 The *Iskandarnama* is, obviously, a version of the so-called "Alexander Romance," and the *Haft Paykar* is a collection of often-didactic tales involving the Sasanian Bahram V Gur. As such, it at times restates and adapts stories about the monarch that appeared earlier in the *Shahnama*.

399 Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 212.

400 Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 65.

one that is more likely to be spurious) is that of Ahmad Khujistani, who was supposedly so inspired by only two verses of Persian poetry (recited by Handhala of Badghis) that he started a campaign of conquest.[401] Both the later anthologies of 'Aufi and Nizami Arudi mention this story. Arudi gives the poem as

> Mehtari gar ba-kām-e šir dar ast,
> Šow ḵaṭar kon ze kām-e šir bejuy.
> Yā bozorgi o ʿezz o neʿmat o jāh,
> Yā čo mardān-t marg ruyāruy.[402]

Ahmad Khujistani is mentioned in several early historical sources in connection with Ya'qub in Layth, notably in the *Tārikh-e Sistan* and the *Zayn al-Akhbar*. The *Tārikh-e Sistān* states that "Whereupon Ya'qub said: 'I have left Sistān without an army and have come here with only these few pages in order to assure Mohammad ibn Vāsel that I did so to seek his friendship and good wishes, so that he might ally with me; for he is the most important person in Iranshahr and Khorāsān. And whatever I do shall be in accordance with his orders. He should know that Ahmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Khojestāni was with me and has since turned against me."[403] Note the use by our anonymous author, and possibly by Ya'qub, of the term "Iranshahr." Gardizi's account of Khujistani's rebellion is somewhat more involved, writing how Khujistani, after the death of Ya'qub, had established himself in Nishapur. From there, in 880 CE he traveled to Herat to battle 'Amr al-Layth, and when repulsed attacked Sistan instead.[404] Despite Khujistani's mention in these earlier sources, the story of Khujistani's reaction to the poetry does not show up before

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401 Browne and Saba, *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times Until Ferdowsi*, I:355, mentions the anecdote in *Chahār Maqala*.

402 "If dominion appears between the jaws of a lion, take a risk and seek it even in the jaws of a lion. Either grandeur and glory and wealth and rank, or else look death face to face like a man!" See François de Blois, "Hanzala Badgisi," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, n.d., http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hanzala-badgisi.

403 Gold, *The Tārikh-E Sistān*, 179.

404 Gardizi, Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Hayy, *The Ornament of Histories*, 49. Bahār's edition relates this episode on page 9.

Nizami Arudi in the twelfth century CE, putting its authenticity seriously into question. What it does show, however, is how Nizami Arudi, and likely other Iranian literati of his general era, viewed the effect of poetry on human emotion and action. Nizami Arudi is, after all, the source of the classic anecdote about the Samanid Nasr ibn Ahmad and the poetry of Rudaki. Numbered XIII in Browne's edition, Nizami Arudi states how Nasr was so taken with the area of Herat and Badghis, enjoying its natural beauty, that he neglected to return to his capital for some four years. It was not until Rudaki recited to Nasr a verse about the "sands of Oxus" that Nasr was so motivated to return home to Bukhara that he jumped on his horse without even donning the proper riding attire.[405] Whether we believe or not that Nasr ibn Ahmad was *that* strongly motivated by the poetry of Rudaki, we do know that in Ghaznavid, and likely earlier Samanid times, listening to the recital of poetry was a common as well as aristocratic pursuit, and was not always for eulogistic or panegyric purposes. The Persian tradition of *naqqali* or storytelling seems to have been well-established by this time.[406] In the next chapter, we will turn more

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[405] Nizami Arudi states that

"Nasr ibn Ahmad . . . In winter he used to reside at his capital, Bukhara, while in summer he used to go to Samarqand or some other of the cities of Khurasan. Now one year it was the turn of Herat. He spent the spring season at Badghis, where are the most charming pasture-grounds of Khurasan and Iraq . . . When the beasts had well enjoyed their spring feed, and had regained their strength and condition, and were fit for warfare or to take the field, Nasr ibn Ahmad turned his face towards Herat, but halted outside the city at Margh-i-Sapid and there pitched his camp . . . Mihrgan was protracted, for the cold did not wax severe, and the grapes ripened with exceptional sweetness . . . from season to season he continued to procrastinate, until four years had passed in this way . . . When Rudagi reached this verse [about the Sands of Oxus], the Amir was so much affected that he descended from his throne, all unbooted bestrode the horse which was on sentry-duty, and set off for Bukhara so precipitately that they carried his leggings and riding-boots after him for two parasangs."

Niẓāmī ʻArūẕī, *The Chahár Maqála ("Four Discourses") of Nidhámí-I-ʻArúḍí-I-Samarqandí*, 33–36. The very phrase "Sands of Oxus," and its connection with Rudaki, appears to have retained a similar poetic meaning all the way to the present, as the early 20th century Tajik nationalist Sadriddin Ayni named his autobiography the same thing.

[406] See Yamamoto, Kumiko et al., "Naqqāli: Professional Iranian Storytelling," in *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages: Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik : Companion Volume ī to A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Philip G Kreyenbroek and Ulrich Marzolph, vol. 18 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 243.

specifically to Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, and attempt to examine this masterwork of Persian epic from several different perspectives.

CHAPTER 4: Political: Ideological Aims and Regime Legitimation

In this chapter, we will examine possible illocutionary intents and ideological aims of the *Shahnama* itself, without addressing the views of its later readership. Quentin Skinner defines "illocutionary force" as "equivalent to understanding what the writer may have meant by writing in that particular way. It is equivalently to be able, that is, to say that he must have meant the work as an attack on or a defense of, as a criticism of or a contribution to, some particular attitude or line or argument, and so on."[407] The *Shahnama* is the best-known example of Iranian epic, although far from the only one. Many other epics, usually dealing with other historical or mythical personages, have been composed since the *Shahnama*, but Ferdowsi's epic has often been treated as the archetype of the genre.[408] Lazard explains that "Persian[409] epic, which is completely unique in type, consists of the recital in verse of the whole of the history, factual or imaginary, of Iran from the creation of the world to the end of the Sasanian dynasty."[410] The *Shahnama* treats this long history of Iran as "a continuous succession of kings."[411] Although these dynasties varied by time, by their exact location within Iran or elsewhere, and in their ethnic background, the work held a fascination for much of the Islamic world and its neighbors. Part of Ferdowsi's illocutionary intent, taking into account the historical context of his patron

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407 Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions, and the Interpretation of Texts.," *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 3 (1972): 404.

408 Some of these other epics include the *Garshapnama*, *Barzunnama*, *Bahmannama*, and *Zafarnama*.

409 The terms Persian and Iranian are often used synonymously. The term Persian, which entered Western usage from the ancient Greeks, more properly refers to persons or cultures from Fars/Pars, a province in the southwest of modern Iran. This was the historical home of the Achaemenid Empire, from whom the Greeks got the name. Iranian refers to the entirety of the Iranian Plateau, and is the name of the language family to which modern Farsi (usually referred to by scholars as Persian) belongs. The language will be referred to as Persian, the people and cultures as Iranian.

410 Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 624.

411 Olga M Davidson, "Persian/Iranian Epic," in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley (John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 264.

Mahmūd of Ghazna, may have been to defend the ideals of Iranian culture and kingship in the face of foreign invasion and rule, and assert their importance for all monarchs regardless of their individual heritage.

Besides the exemplary nature of its poetry, certain ideologies are expressed within its verses that spoke to these sovereigns. Some of the "main ideas that are propagated in the poem are the legitimacy of royal power, strict social hierarchy and subordination of vassals to their suzerains, and the responsibility of each class for its duties."[412] These particular ideas would have been important to any monarchy ruling greater Iran, as well as to the native Iranian bureaucratic, landowning, and literate classes. This "ideology which is found in the work and unifies the poem belongs to Sasanian Iran," the last native dynasty to rule the entirety of Iran before the Arab invasions of the seventh century CE, and also includes "the eternal struggle of good and evil reflected in the war between Iran and Turan."[413] The *Shahnama* is not only a book of kings, but is also a book of heroes, most of which were engaged in this epic struggle. This struggle against the forces of Turan, the land beyond the Amu Darya or Oxus River and the homeland of the Turks, may have had a special significance as well for Iranian literati serving under Turkic dynasties.

We have seen in Chapter 1 the historical context of the Samanid dynasty and early written New Persian. With the reascendance of the *dehqans* in the region under the Samanids, displacing the Saffarid *ghazi* or *ayyar* administration, came a conscious revival of Iranian tradition and Persian language. However, this linguistic revival should not be construed anachronistically as being an expression of *modern* nationalism as "linguistic nationalism is a modern invention and

[412] F. I Abdullaeva and C. P Melville, *The Persian Book of Kings: Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2008), 23.
[413] Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 627–628.

did not exist in those days."[414] Many members of the ruling classes were proficient in both Arabic as well as their native Persian. The "revival" of Persian language to literary and dynastic prominence was a confluence of many factors, and entailed the creation of a systematized, written New Persian, in contrast to the Middle Persian of the Sasanian Empire. It was in this period of Samanid rule, with conscious dynastic patronage of Iranian ideas and literary traditions, that the *Shahnama* was composed by Ferdowsi.[415] This historical moment is important to understanding the ideas in the *Shahnama*. As Lazard states, the *Shahnama*, "ancient in content, modern in form . . . was the product of a unique moment of equilibrium when the memories of the past still lived on in the Iranian mind . . . and when the new literary language was already sufficiently well developed to allow the composition of a masterpiece."[416] It should be noted that this idea of the epic's revival of the Persian language has remained a popular theme throughout history. In the mid-twentieth century under the Pahlavi dynasty, although likely earlier as well, the work was credited with this ideological aim. Mirza Ghaffar Khan Djalal, the Iranian Minister to the U.S., gave a speech at a New York event in 1934 celebrating the thousandth anniversary of Ferdowsi's birth. He stated that the poet's "importance to the Iranian nation is, above all, in the great service he rendered in the restoration of unity among the Iranian race, by reminding it in a most romantic and inspiring poem, of its glorious past and civilization, as well as reviving its national language."[417] The first actions were likely intentional on the part of Ferdowsi, and will

[414] Ibid., 603.

[415] Julie Scott Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 18. However, one should remember that even though Ferdowsi began his work during the time of Samanid rule, he lived and worked far from the court at Bukhara, and was instead from Tus.

[416] Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 628.

[417] David Eugene Smith and Isāc Mendelsohn, *Firdausī Celebration 935-1935. Addresses Delivered at the Celebration of the Thousandth Anniversary of the Birth of the National Poet of Iran Held at Columbia University and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the City of New York. A Bibliography of the Principal Manuscripts and Printed Editions of the Shāh-Nāmah in Certain Leading Public Libraries of the World. Edited by D.E. Smith. [The Bibliography Compiled by Isāc Mendelsohn. With Plates.].* (McFarlane, Warde, McFarlane:

be discussed to a greater extent later. The "revival" of Persian, in and of itself, may not have been entirely intentional on the part of Ferdowsi. Although the Persian language he used was "much less arabicized, and instead was full of archaic Iranian words" than the language spoken contemporaneously, the "particular characteristics of the language of epic were most likely the result of the influence of Middle Persian sources and perhaps also of the influence of the oral tradition."[418] Ferdowsi used a more "pure" form of Persian, the aforementioned *dari*, in his epic because he was to some extent versifying an already existing work, and possibly to some extent recording an oral version of the poem.

The Samanid dynasty did not survive to see the completion of Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*. After a struggle between the Ghaznavids and Qarakhanids, Mahmūd of Ghazna came to rule over the entirety of the Khurasan region.[419] It was under this new rule that Ferdowsi completed his epic.

The Epic

The *Shahnama* is truly epic in scope. In sheer length, the work is longer than both Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* put together.[420] One can easily imagine that the work took half a

New York, 1936), 7. The Pahlavi dynasty's attachment of itself to the *Shahnama* may have contributed to any present ill will of the epic. Dick Davis states that, because of the Pahlavi's "fairly successful appropriation of the work," "it is not uncommon to meet Persian intellectuals" who view *Shahnama* "largely as a work of royalist propaganda, something 'feudal,' 'reactionary,' contemptuous of the mass of Persian beyond the courtly pale, and probably racist." See *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi's Shāhnāmeh* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992), xiv. Although some of these accusations may be true, I am concerned with the context and aims of the *Shahnama* in the monarchical historical context in which it was written, and attempt to avoid present political concerns.

[418] Lazard, "Rise of the New Persian Language," 626–627. Many works have been written that treat the oral traditions of the *Shahnama*. These include the works of Olga Davidson and Kumiko Yamamoto's *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003). Mary Boyce is often quoted as well.

[419] Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran, 994 : 1040* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1963), 28.

[420] Although the length of various manuscript texts of the *Shahnama* varies, due possibly to later additions to the poem that were added by later copyists, the commonly accepted text of the work is approximately 60,000 distiches in length. Each distich consists of two lines (*beyti*), of a specific number of syllables, which rhyme. Persian meter is generally accepted to be based on the number of syllables per line, rather than the number of

lifetime to compose. As aforementioned, the *Shahnama* was composed in *mutaqarib* meter, which many scholars see as a native Iranian prosodic scheme. The choice of meter could reflect many different things. It could be due purely to taste, in that this native Iranian meter appealed to the Persian-speaking *dehqan* class to which most literati belonged. It could also be favored by the lords and warriors whose patronage Ferdowsi wished to attract. Scholars of Persian poetry have considered the *mutaqarib* meter to be particularly suited to the telling of heroic tales because of its dramatic qualities. The final, and likely most important reason for the choice of meter, is due to the oral origins of the *Shahnama*. Ferdowsi and his compatriots may simply have been used to hearing such stories in the *mutarqrib* meter, and so continued to use it.

Ferdowsi's Biography

In addition to understanding the historical, political context of the *Shahnama*, we must also examine the personal context of the author himself. This is somewhat difficult, as "Firdausi's life is surrounded by a brilliant collection of legends, which sometimes contradict one another."[421] Although the poet included references to himself within the text of the work,[422] much of his biography still must come from external sources. An examination of many of these sources and their specifics about Ferdowsi's life would alone take more space than allowed in this paper.[423] Some of the more general aspects of the poet's life are clear however. It is known that he was "born near Tus in Khurasan of yeoman (*dehqan*) stock of good standing."[424] The

stresses. As mentioned in the last chapter, Jan Rypka and Bo Utas have covered the prosody of classical Persian in great length, Rypka in particular basing his work heavily on the writings of Bahār. Gilbert Lazard also discusses New Persian prosody in his "The Rise of New Persian Language" in the *Cambridge History of Iran*.

421 Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama*, 13.

422 Such as his lament for the death of his son, which is inserted into the section of *Shahnama* covering the rule of Khosrow Parviz and his struggles against Bahram Chubin.

423 It would probably take at least a book length work to do the subject justice, and many books have been written on the subject. Some of the early *tadhkira*s such as that of Dawlatshah contain anecdotes about the life of Ferdowsi.

424 B. W Robinson, Eleanor Sims, and Manijeh Bayani, *The Windsor Shahnama of 1648* (London; [Seattle, WA]:

point of his *dehqan* status is particularly important in understanding Ferdowsi's aims in composing the *Shahnama*. It was precisely this class[425] which under the Samanids rose again to administrative prominence after having been supplanted under the Saffarids. Because of the literacy and education traditionally afforded to the *dehqan* elite, the group as a whole remained a major repository of information about Iran's past and about traditional Iranian identity. Because of Ferdowsi's knowledge of this past, he "was inspired by the patriotic idea of dedicating his life to bringing together and preserving Iran's ancient myths and legends, kept alive both orally and in writing by *dehqans*."[426] After the blow in status dealt to the *dehqans* under the previous Saffarid dynasty, which was ruled by brothers of low-born status, ―Ferdowsi and other landowning elites in Khurasan may have been particularly keen to reassert their place in society. By putting forth in epic form both the legitimacy of Iranian rule, which included a large role for the *dehqans* in the bureaucracy and in the administration of the land, and declaring the importance of Iranian identity and culture of which they were partially responsible for preserving, Ferdowsi could have been asserting his place in society. Other notables in Ferdowsi's home region around Tus supposedly helped support his endeavor. Some of the legends of Ferdowsi claim that "an enlightened local official in Tus supported Firdausi's work and remitted

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Azimuth Editions for the Roxburghe Club ; Distributed in the United States and Canada by University of Washington Press, 2007), 13.

[425] I use this term with some reluctance, but it does carry much of what appears to be the appropriate meaning. Marilyn Robinson Waldman cautions against such use of anachronistic terminology when writing Islamicate history. She states that "it is acceptable to consider an author's social position relevant to understanding the significance of his views on wealth. . . as long as one does not cast one's conclusions in terms of a social class structure or a theory of social class inapplicable to that author's time" See *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980), 8. Although I do mean to imply that the *dehqans* represented a landowning elite, supplying the majority of the bureaucracy of many dynasties and thus being part of a "ruling class" of sorts, I attempt to refrain from implying the existence of an anachronistic class structure. Instead, the *dehqans* seem to represent a literate and educated traditional aristocracy of sorts.

[426] Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama*, 16.

the poet's taxes."[427] Although Ferdowsi was of the landowning class, this financial support may have been necessary to allow Ferdowsi to finish the poem.

An issue of Ferdowsi's biography of particular importance in regards to Mahmūd of Ghazna's patronage is possible sectarian differences. Mahmūd is widely acknowledged to have been a zealous Sunni Muslim, while there are major indications that Ferdowsi may have been Shi'i.[428] An epic poem that Ferdowsi began under an Iranian dynasty, extolling the virtues of Iranian heritage, culture, and kingship, was eventually dedicated to a Turkic ruler who adhered to a different sect of Islam than the poet. Mahmūd was reputed to, in his campaigns in India, have been waging "an ideological war proclaimed against idolaters and heretics."[429] Mahmūd may even have considered Shi'i Muslims heretical as well.

The situation of the dedication to Mahmūd begs many questions. As Firuza Abdullaeva and Charles Melville point out, one has to "wonder how Firdausi could at first even have dreamt of dedicating his poem – pro-Iranian, anti-Arab, anti-Turk, and in its later version, pro-Shi'i – to Mahmūd of Ghazna, descended from the Samanids' Turkish slave solder, Aptegin."[430] Even if there may have been an "opposition – or at least indifference – on the part of Ferdowsi toward the patronage of Mahmūd," Ferdowsi may still have considered the Turkic rule as legitimate.[431] Sultan Mahmūd spoke Persian, and "following all Iranian traditions, had unified the whole of

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427 Ibid., 17.

428 'A. Shāpūr Shahbāzī, *Ferdowsī: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.; Costa Mesa, Calif., U.S.A.: Harvard University, Center for Middle Eastern Studies ; Distributed exclusively by Mazda Publishers, 1991), 3.

429 Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama*, 18. Although stories appeared only several centuries after Ferdowsi's death, telling of how Mahmūd snubbed Ferdowsi's dedication of the *Shahnama* to him and how Ferdowsi squandered the money he was given, there is a relative consensus among modern scholars that these are mere apocrypha. As Ghazzal Dabiri writes, "The stories that deal with the Sultan and his cool reception of the *Shahnama* are replete with literary mechanisms that reveal their fictive natures and the intentions of their authors—to reconcile their admiration for the epic with its initial rejection." See "The Shahnama: Between the Samanids and the Ghaznavids," *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 13.

430 Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama*, 17.

431 Davidson, "Persian/Iranian Epic," 267.

Iran and appeared to be heading for a revival of the Sasanian culture and empire."[432] Mahmūd is not the first example of a non-Iranian monarch idealizing, or being portrayed as idealizing, the traditions of Iranian kingship. There is precedent, stated in the *Shahnama* itself, for such rule to be considered legitimate. As mentioned earlier, the story of Alexander the Macedonian is the best example. A Macedonian monarch who conquered Greece, and proceeded to invade a great deal of the known world, Alexander destroyed the Iranian Achaemenid Empire and burned their capital in the province of Fars. This would seem a clear example of Iranian defeat, a dark period in history. However, even though "the historical Alexander in fact posed a threat to the very fabric of Iranian society by overthrowing the authority of its kings . . . he is nevertheless treated with sympathy in the *Shahnama.*"[433] A genealogy is concocted for Alexander, making him the half-brother of the Iranian King Darius, essentially turning a foreign invasion and defeat into an internal succession struggle. These events are a "clear example where epic mythmaking reshapes history to serve its own purposes."[434] Although Ferdowsi does not attempt to create a similar situation for Mahmūd, which would have been difficult as his epic ends with the fall of the Sasanian dynasty over 350 years earlier, it is possible that Ferdowsi could have seen a strong monarch in Khurasan as a ruler worth supporting, regardless of said ruler's ethnic heritage.

Literary Context and Sources

As mentioned earlier, some of the likely roots of the *Shahnama* exist in oral poetry, and the work itself was known to have often been performed orally. However, according to Ferdowsi

[432] Shahbāzī, *Ferdowsī*, 83.
[433] Davidson, "Persian/Iranian Epic," 266.
[434] Ibid.Later Iranian authors, most famously Nizami of Ganja, also composed poetry about the deeds of Alexander. Many of these deeds were likely later imports from the tradition often referred to as the *Alexander Romance*. For more on this, see Josef Wiesehöfer, "The 'Accursed' and the 'Adventurer'" Alexander the Great in Iranian Tradition," in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 113–32.

and to the original preface, his main source of historical material came from the prose version of the *Shahnama* from which the Older Preface was supposedly taken. The preface states that a local court official, Abu Mansur al-Moa'mari, commissioned a copy of this work for the governor of Tus, sometime around 957 CE. As Vladimir Minorsky states in his English translation of the Preface, "This was to be translated and edited from the original Pahlavi sources by a team of four Zoroastrian scholars (their names are all given: all are pure Persian with not a single Muslim name among them."[435] These original Pahlavi sources collected by Abu Mansur al-Mo'amari probably consisted of examples from the earlier genre known as X^w*aday-Namag*, which also translates as Book of Kings. This was "an official historiography, patronized by the Sasanians," who "were the first to promote a literary account of Iranian history."[436] The prose *Shahnama* was not the first work to make use of this pre-Islamic historiography. As Parvaneh Pourshariati explained in her recent *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, it has "long been recognized that the X^w*aday-Namag* traditions were incorporated into the classical Arabic histories which were composed in the ninth and tenth centuries."[437] The Sasanian histories

[435] Robinson, Sims, and Bayani, *The Windsor Shahnama of 1648*, 15. The translators names as given are:
<<شاج پسر خراسانی از هزهری و چون یزدانداز پسر شاپور از سیستان و چون ماهوی خورشید پسر بهران از نشابور و چون شاذان پسر برزین از طوس>>

See Qazvini, *Bist Maqala-i Qazvini*, 35.

[436] Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 9. Recently, Philip G. Kreyenbroek has written on the creation of *Xwaday-namag* in the Sasanian era, and what he sees as their purposeful erasure of the Parthians from history, "not just from the official archives but even from the popular tradition." He writes how the Sasanians "had managed to make the Iranian people accept as 'history' a version of events that was not based on fact, but had been constructed for this very purpose. It is difficult to see how this could have been done without the help of popular storytellers" See "Storytelling, History and Communal Memory in Pre-Islamic Iran," in *Remembering the Past in Iranian Societies*, ed. Christine Allison and Philip G. Kreyenbroek, 2013, 29. If true, this would explain the lacuna of the Parthians in the *Shahnama*, regardless of its sources.

[437] Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, 13. It is usually claimed that much of this translation from Pahlavi was performed by one Ibn Muqaffa', a converted Mazdayasnian believed to have been a member of the *shu'ubiyyah* movement, and executed in 756 or 757 CE. See Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 47. Perhaps because of his *shu'ubiyyah* leanings, or perhaps because of some other perceived apostasy, Ibn al-Muqaffa' had been labeled a *zindiq.* See Klima, "Avesta. Ancient Persian Inscriptions. Middle Persian Literature," 40. This charge likely led to his death. Ibn Moqaffa' is also thought to have translated into Arabic a collection of epic tales, the *Hazaar afsaan*, which most early scholars believed to be the basis of the

existed long before even the end of the Sasanian Empire. In fact, “already by the time of Bahram V Gur (420-438), we have evidence of the *Book of Kings*.”[438] In addition, there may have been other works of prose and poetry that were used in writing the supposed prose *Shahnama*. This “immense collection of narratives constituted the national memorial of the Iranian people and was a valuable treasure, rich in information, which it was essential to preserve.”[439] Part of that preservation would have been by incorporating it into a single prose narrative.

Ferdowsi’s *Shahnama* may also not have been the first work of that name, and perhaps not even the first in poetry. Minorsky lists four other *Shahnamas*, by: 1) Marvazi (in the *hazaj* meter), 2) Abu Ali b. Ahmad Balkhi (which may or may not have been in verse), 3) Abu l-Mu’ayyad Balkhi (in prose), and 4) Daqiqi.[440] Ferdowsi himself claims that he used at least one prose version of the work in his composition. Whichever exact prose version of Iranian history and mythology he used, modern scholarship has argued that he took little literary license when versifying the contents. Many scholars, such “as Omidsalar, Khaleqi Motlaq, and others have warned us, Ferdowsi in fact slavishly followed the sources which had been entrusted to him in order to compile his opus on Iranian national history.”[441] If Ferdowsi did so closely follow the older *Shahnama* in his composition, then many of the qualities of the prose version should also be present in his epic.

famed *The Thousand and One Nights.* See Marzolph, Ulrich et al., “The Good, the Bad and the Beautiful: The Survival of Ancient Iranian Ethical Concepts in Persian Popular Narratives of the Islamic Period,” in *Early Islamic Iran*, ed. Edmund Herzig and Sarah Stewart, vol. 5, The Idea of Iran (London; New York; New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the London Middle East Institute at SOAS and the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford ; Distributed in the United States and Canada exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 19, as well as the “Letter of Tansar” contained in Persian translation in the later Ebn-Esfandyar. See Daniel, “The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography,” 157. The Older Preface also gives Ibn Muqaffa' credit for the translation from Pahlavi to Arabic of *Kalila wa Dimna.* See Qazvini, *Bist Maqala-i Qazvini*, 31–33).

[438] Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, 34.

[439] Lazard, “Rise of the New Persian Language,” 625.

[440] Vladimir Minorsky, *Iranica; Twenty Articles.* ([Hertford, Eng.]: [Printed by S. Austin], 1964), 160.

[441] Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, 14–15.

Older Preface

The original preface of the *Shahnama*, often referred to in modern scholarship as the Older Preface, may be a work predating Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* itself. There have been other prefaces attached to the epic over the centuries, most notably the preface from the Baysonghori rescension in the fifteenth century. According to some scholars, the so-called Older Preface may have originally belonged to the prose *Shahnama* that Ferdowsi used as a source, and as such was not written by him. However, as stated above, if Ferdowsi did follow the prose epic as closely as some scholars claim, then general information in the preface should also pertain to his epic. The prose *Shahnama*, and Ferdowsi's epic version, could also be considered as examples of "universal" histories commissioned and patronized by dynastic rulers, some of which were mentioned in Chapter 2.[442] The Older Preface tries to outline the ideological aims of any work like the *Shahnama*. Minorsky's translation, dating from the 1950's, states

> it behoves them [authors of works such as the *Shahnama*] to achieve seven things with regard to it.
> 1 – the groundwork
> 2 – its blissfulness (*farr*)
> 3 – its cleverness
> 4 – the (mention of the) name of the Lord of the book
> 5 – the due proportion of the matter and the amount of words
> 6 – setting example of wisdom of (to?) the person for whom the book has been written
> 7 – attention to all the issues of the subject[443]

Before examining these aims set out in the preface, a few words of caution are necessary. Quentin Skinner warns that "the critic should not attempt to pay any attention to a writer's motives and intentions in the attempt to establish the meaning of his works."[444] The work would

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[442] Examples of these histories, which were written in either Arabic or Persian, are those written or commissioned by al-Tabari, al-Talabi, Rashid al-Din, Bayhaqi, Gardizi, and Mas'udi. The genre is considerably more extensive than this. Due to space constraints of this paper, these histories will not be examined.

[443] Minorsky, *Older Preface*, 2: 170–171. Qazvini's edition reads:
<< پس دانیاد که نامه خواهند ایذون سزد که هفت جهز بجای آورند مر نامه‌را یکی بنیاذ نامه یکی فر نامه سدیگر هنر نامه چهارم نام خداوند نامه پنجم مایه و اندازهٔ سخن پیوستن ششم نشانداند از دانش آنکس که نامه از بهر اوست هفبم درهای هر سخن>>
(Qazvini, *Bist Maqala-i Qazvini*, 38–39).

[444] Skinner, "Motives, Intentions, and the Interpretation of Texts.," 396.

have meant different things to every different person that read or commissioned a copy. In this section, however, the goal is to examine the aims and intent as outlined, and hopefully as the original work was intended. We cannot be certain that we are not reading our own issues into the text, but it is at least worth attempting. Issues of reception will be mentioned in the next chapter's brief historical survey of later manuscripts. What an individual took to be the *Shahnama*'s meaning is external to this particular analysis, but its import should not be denied. Even examining the explicit intentions or aims could lead to fallacy, however. As Marilyn Robinson Waldman cautions about Islamicate historiography, "in a historical work the deliberate intention of an author can be in fact misread or inaccessible without reference to his intellectual, social, and psychological conditions."[445] Hopefully this is not the case here. The historical context of Ferdowsi's class status, as a *dehqan*, and of the unstable dynastic situation in Khurasan help to reinforce rather than contradict many of the claims outlined in the preface. For the purposes of this chapter, we will examine these aims as primarily truthful statements, with some attempt at further explication.

The first aim, the groundwork, could mean one, or both, of two things. The groundwork could be the history of the book, or it could refer to the sources of the work. As the *Shahnama* is a work purporting to tell the history of Iranian empire, as well as a work of literature, part of this groundwork could also be explaining these historical sources.

The second aim is more complicated. Minorsky here translates the word *farr* as "blissfulness."[446] Usually, *farr* is explained as the divine right of Iranian kingship, and often as

[445] Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, 7.

[446] The Older Preface in Persian reads simply فر نا مه or the "*farr* of the book" without any additional explanation (Qazvini, 39). Steingass translates *farr* with a multitude of meanings, including "Beauty, comeliness, ornament, elegance, decoration," which may be more similar to Minorsky's translation as "blissfulness" See Francis Joseph Steingass, "A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met

“glory.” In the *Karnamag*, for instance, it is also shown as an eagle. Just and legitimate rulers of Iranian empire possess this quality. It is a necessary quality, a mark of divine approval even, but one that can be lost through misrule. Although Iranian history was envisioned as a continuous succession of kings, the “relationship between the rise and fall of states and the moral qualities of their rulers is an important theme.” [447] This is how the *Shahnama* reconciles the “continuous succession” with the somewhat broken dynastic history of Iran. The concept of *farr* predates Islam, being of Zoroastrian origin. Abduallaeva and Melville claim that the “main ideological message of the poem is that only an Iranian of royal origin can provide legitimate rule and, if he acts justly, he will be blessed by divine charisma.”[448] This may be one of the more obvious examples of attempting to reconcile Zoroastrian concepts with Islamic ideals. Julie Scott Meisami claims that the Samanids in particular attempted to do so, partially by patronizing both Iranian and Islamic “authoritative historical narratives.”[449] She reasons that part of their motivation to do so was the existence of the both the large *dehqan* constituency, and the large number of Arab descendants of conquerors and Iranian converts to Islam.[450]

The cleverness of the *Shahnama* is usually assumed. Ferdowsi is regarded by most critics as a master of the epic form (with E.G. Browne being the disapproving exception).[451] It has often

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with in Persian Literature,” Dictionary, (1892), http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/steingass/. Wheeler M. Thackston translates *farr* more simply as “splendor, aura of greatness.” See *A Millennium of Classical Persian Poetry: A Guide to the Reading & Understanding of Persian Poetry from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Bethesda, Md.: Iranbooks, 1994), 158. Any of these English words would seem to be better than “blissfulness” when speaking of a book.

[447] J. S Meisami, “The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia,” *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 253.

[448] Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan’s Shahnama*, 17.

[449] Meisami, “The Past in Service of the Present,” 250.

[450] Ibid., 250–251.

[451] Browne states that “In their high estimate of the literary value of this gigantic poem Eastern and Western critics are almost unanimous, and I therefore feel great diffidence in confessing that I have never been able entirely to share this enthusiasm.” See *A Literary History of Persia: From Ferdowsi to Sa’di*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 142, http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/196704975.html.

been claimed that subsequent authors of Iranian epics dared not cover the same ground as Ferdowsi, as their poetry could not help but be considered inferior to that of this acknowledged literary great. It has also been claimed that the sources for the *Shahnama*, with the exception of certain Arab histories that Ferdowsi may have used, fell into disfavor because they paled in comparison with Ferdowsi's own work. Ferdowsi claimed to have included in his work some thousand couplets written by an earlier poet, Daqiqi.[452] These couplets are said to be of inferior quality to those written by Ferdowsi himself. There are several possible reasons for the inclusion of this poetry in the *Shahnama*, one of which was to be a foil for Ferdowsi, to show the "cleverness" or perfection of his own poetic skills in direct comparison with those of Daqiqi. Other reasons for the inclusion of Daqiqi's verses will be covered in greater detail later.

The fourth aim, the mention of the name of the Lord of the book, is a key aim of any work of princely patronage. The local Samanid lords of Tus were no exception. Elsewhere in the preface, Ma'mun son of Harun ar-Rashid is said to have stated that "So long as a man is in this world and possesses power, he must strive for his memory (to survive) and for his name to be alive after his death."[453] Besides the normal human desire to leave a legacy after one's death, by achieving literary immortality the original patrons of the *Shahnama* would have inserted themselves into the continuity of Iranian empire. Also, by the inclusion of their name in a work asserting the legitimacy and royal glory of ancient Iran, a ruler may have hoped to achieve legitimacy and glory for themselves. This would have been particularly important in the unstable dynastic times of Ferdowsi's life. The Samanids were a relatively young dynasty, having ruled the majority of Khurasan for less than a century when Ferdowsi began his task. There was also

[452] Ibid., 2:18.
[453] Minorsky, *Older Preface*, 2:167.

no guarantee that the dynasty would last, and in fact Ferdowsi did not finish his composition until after their fall. The Samanid rulers, and their local vassals in Tus, may have realized that, if not for the inclusion of their names in works of literature, they may not have been remembered at all.

For the author of the epic himself, Ferdowsi, the inclusion of the name of his lord would have had a completely different intent. For a poet, royal patronage was an economic need. Although Ferdowsi belonged to the landowning class, there is no indication that he was a rich man. In fact, much of the biographical information on Ferdowsi contains stories about the travails of his attempts to gain financial patronage.

The "due proportion and the amount of words" would mean placing appropriate emphases on certain events and aspects of Iranian history. As we will saw in Chapter 2, and will see again shortly, different works may cover the same historical events in dramatically different detail, and at wildly different length. Some of the events covered at greatest length in the *Shahnama* may have been particularly glorious or entertaining episodes, or events that Ferdowsi may have thought to be of particular didactic value. If Ferdowsi was in fact "slavishly following" an earlier prose *Shahnama*, perhaps they were also covered in great extent there. The *Shahanama*, although it does glorify the Iranian traditional ideal of kingship, does not include only the best examples of such kingship in its verses. The darker periods of Iranian history, including the misdeeds of some rulers, were included because it was thought that readers could learn much from those as well.[454] Ferdowsi, and the earlier authors of the prose *Shahnamas*, wanted both "epochs of justice or injustice" accounted for.[455] This would help the work to

[454] Ibid., 170.
[455] Ibid., 169.

achieve its sixth aim, to set an example of wisdom that can be learned from the past.

The wisdom of the *Shahnama*, as stated in the introduction, would not have been only for the eyes and ears of rulers. If one of the work's ideological aims was to outline the places in society for all people, and to thus reduce intrasocietal conflict, then "people read this book of the affairs (*kār-nāme*) of kings for two purposes: the one is because when they learn the actions, the conduct and the ceremonial of the kings, they will be able to get on with anyone in administration; the other is that the book contains stories both pleasant to (their) ears and suitable to (their) strivings."[456] By revealing both the actions of rulers, and hopefully to explain some of the reasons behind them, the work would explain the proper form and function of Iranian society. Explaining the necessity of rulership would also be an important aim, as the preface claims that "because the Earth was very empty of men, and when people are deficient, kingship is of no use, for the great exist by the lesser; but where there are people, there is no means of doing without the great."[457] Explaining the necessity of their rule, and thus partially protecting it from dissent, would have appealed to these monarchs.

An important aim of the *Shahnama*, as with many other early historical works in New Persian, was to reconcile the Zoroastrian and Islamic aspects of Iranian identity. The prose Older Preface, and later prefaces such as the Baysonghori preface, make this clear. The prefaces "go out of their way to explain the Zoroastrian background of the *Shahnama*, in terms of both patronage and reception. And they do so while all along enfolding this background with a foreground of Islamic worldviews."[458] The Zoroastrian background of Iranian society and kingship was a key differentiating point between Iranian and either Arab or Turkic culture. By

[456] Ibid., 171.
[457] Ibid., 174.
[458] Davidson, "Persian/Iranian Epic," 268.

emphasizing this background, the *Shahnama* stated the difference or superiority of Iranian culture and identity over those of its neighbors. This could have lead to conflict with contemporary Islamic ideologies. The work was composed within the Islamic era. Ferdowsi himself, as well as the various dynasties who either patronized his work or commissioned their own copies, were Muslim. The Zoroastrian elements which characterized divine Iranian kingship had to be reconciled with an Islamic context to remain both applicable and acceptable. In addition to legitimating the rule of Iranian dynasties both contemporary and historical, the *Shahnama* had to legitimate these Zoroastrian concepts.[459] As Davidson stated, this "pattern of legitimation works not only forwards but also backwards in time, reaching into the traditions of pre-Islamic Iran"[460] Within the text of the epic itself, Ferdowsi used the borrowed couplets of Daqiqi to explain Zoroastrian elements, the history of the prophet Zarathustra himself and his religion. Although it was necessary to explain these events, as the *Shahnama* aimed to tell the entire history of a Zoroastrian empire, there would have been dangers involved to the poet himself in handling these concepts. Because of the consequences of real or perceived Islamic apostasty, it may have been more prudent for Ferdowsi to present the orthodox Zoroastrian doctrine from the mouth of Daqiqi. By supposedly quoting Daqiqi on the overall narrative of the coming of Zororaster, Ferdowsi achieves a critical distance, being thus one step removed from his own Muslim context and thereby not personally responsible for anything that might be

[459] As mentioned earlier, Ferdowsi was far from our only Iranian author attempting to reconcile Islamic and Iran. Tha'aalebi, as yet another example, also "tries to Islamicize ancient Iranian history. References to the single monotheist God abound and there are few hints of any of the fire temples in which Hamza was so interested." See A.C.S. Peacock, "Early Persian Historians and the Heritage of Pre-Islamic Iran," in *Early Islamic Iran*, ed. Edmund Herzig and Sarah Stewart, vol. 5, The Idea of Iran (London; New York; New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the London Middle East Institute at SOAS and the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford ; Distributed in the United States and Canada exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 67. However, unlike Tha'aalebi, Ferdowsi did not have the same leeway to completely ignore uncomfortable aspects of Iranian history, and thus the utility of Daqiqi.

[460] Davidson, "Persian/Iranian Epic," 267.

offensive to Muslim sensibilities.[461] Daqiqi was already dead,[462] so by allowing the deceased poet to explain the more religiously and ideologically dangerous concepts Ferdowsi could attempt to reconcile the Zoroastrian and Islamic contexts of the work with less danger to himself.

Ferdowsi and his patrons meant the *Shahnama* to be entertaining as well as educational and ideological. The work is part literature and part history, telling tales of heroes and kings that were sometimes based in myth, sometimes in fact, and quite often in both. Although the name *Shahnama* itself translates literally to "King-book" (or King-letter), there are numerous cycles in the work in which the protagonist is not a king but instead an epic hero, or *pahlavan*. Of these, the best known are Rostam, and his forebears Zal (his father) and Sam (grandfather). Olga Davidson has stated that these two different types of stories in the *Shahnama*, the "'epic of heroes' and the 'book of Kings' represent two distinct aspects of poetic tradition."[463] The interplay between these two types of narrative, which show different "rhythms" between the reigns of the kings and the longlived heroes of Rostam's family, help to highlight the ideological aspects of the work.[464]

By showcasing the interactions between a legitimate heir or ruler, and the hero who helps the ruler to maintain his political and military might, the *Shahnama* promulgates the ideas of royal legitimacy and proper social duty. Rostam was supposed to have been from the Iranian region of Sistan (in the southeast of the plateau), which literally means "land of the Saka."[465] The Saka were another Iranian or Indo-Aryan people. Rostam was a hero of the court of the Iranian empire, as well as a lesser king in his own right, ruling in his own homeland of Zabul. The

[461] Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings*, 25.
[462] Supposedly, murdered somewhat ignominiously by his own Turkish slave and lover.
[463] Davidson, "Persian/Iranian Epic," 273.
[464] Ibid.
[465] Ibid.

legitimacy of this relation of lord and vassal lays in the *farr*, the divine essence of Zoroastrian Iranian kingship. Only kings and princes of the main ruling house of the empire could or did possess this divine charisma. Heroes like Rostam and other "kingmakers" are "socially inferior to the others who are more kingly than they are."[466] As such, the ideology contained within the *Shahnama* requires that these heroes show the proper obeisance to their monarchs, no matter how much that monarch depends upon their strength to rule successfully. Although Rostam was considered to be the guardian of the *farr*, he did not and could not possess it himself.[467] When Rostam finally broke this rule of subordination, and slayed the royal heir Esfandiyar, this was "conceived by the *Shahnama* of Ferdowsi as a fundamentally unnatural act. This deed seals Rostam's own fate: he is to die prematurely and in the end he is murdered by his half-brother."[468] By this example of what would happen to even a mighty and beloved hero such as Rostam when he disobeyed his societal role, the epic asserts the idea of maintaining social boundaries and duties.

As we have just seen, the Older Preface to the *Shahnama* lays out some of the aims that such a work of Iranian history may have intended in the early New Persian Renaissance. Although the early prose *Shahnama* it was attached to was actually a product of local notables of Tus, rather than that of their Samanid overlords in Bukhara, many of these aims would have applied to the Samanids as well. Of all the dynasties at the provincial level, such as the Saffarids and Tahirids, the Samanids were perhaps the most successful in asserting this Iranian identity within the confines of their Muslim worldview. In so doing, Samanids were themselves attempting to create a distinction between temporal and divine authority. Although they

[466] Ibid., 275.
[467] Ibid., 276.
[468] Ibid., 266.

originally received their mandate for governorship from the caliphs, they derived their *royal* authority and legitimacy from their Iranian heritage, and from their military might. They legitimized their rule as kings, not as governors, by asserting their place within a long line of Iranian monarchs, and by asserting their Iranian cultural identity, the Samanids claimed for themselves royal authority and political autonomy while still acknowledging the religious authority of the 'Abbasid Caliphate. Literary works such as Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* included stories of ancient Zoroastrian Iran while not emphasizing that religion, and works of Samanid royal patronage such as Bal'ami's translation of Tabari's Arabic history also tried to show a compatibility between the political authority of Iranian kingship and Muslim piety. Such Samanid-patronized works can be seen as means of political, cultural, and religious legitimation of that regime.

Regime Legitimation

As we have seen above, the Samanids originated as rulers of individual cities in Transoxania, a region which had never before been Persian-speaking. Historically and mythically, the Oxus River was the boundary between the lands of Iran and Turan, or the lands of the Iranians and the lands of the Turks. Cities such as Bukhara and Samarqand were outposts of a fairly recently developed Perso-Islamicate culture in a land of initially non-Muslim Turks. Khurasan and Transoxania under Samanid rule were a culturally diverse area, with Arab and Iranian settlers, and the native Turkish tribes and peoples of Central Asia. As part of their creation of a consciously Islamic Iranian identity, to differentiate themselves from their non-Muslim Turkish “adversaries,” and also from their Arabo-Islamic 'Abbasid nominal overlords, the Samanids drew together aspects of several historical concepts. The social anthropologist

Frederik Barth in the introduction to his edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* posited a different view of ethnic differences than has usually been assumed. He argued that "one has tended to think in terms of different peoples, with different histories and cultures, coming together and accommodating themselves to each other, generally in a colonial setting. To visualize the basic requirements for the coexistence of ethnic diversity, I would suggest that we rather ask ourselves what is needed to make ethnic distinctions *emerge* in an area."[469] Although Barth was writing about a much more modern period, because of the ongoing Islamic conquest of Central Asia under the Samanids one may be able to think of their reign as "colonial" in certain respects. Their attempts to extend and defend the borders of the Islamic world through conquest and conversion were not entirely dissimilar to the early modern and modern European imperialist project. As Muslim *ghazi* frontier warriors, as well as *dehqans*, the Samanids already differentiated themselves from the initially "pagan" Turks.[470] What the Samanids needed was a rationale to support their carving out an autonomous state in Central Asia, looking to the 'Abbasid Islamic Caliphate for religious guidance but maintaining their political and military independence. As the heirs Iranian cultural and Persian linguistic heritage, they differentiated themselves from the western portions of the Islamic caliphate and

[469] Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Barth, Fredrik (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), 17. A note on terminology: as Craig Prentiss writes, "the use of the term 'ethnicity' itself sprung from discomfort with the term 'race' . . . The term 'ethnicity' was first used in a 1941 sociological study undertaken by two scholars, W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt. 'Ethnicity' served Warner and Lunt as an alternative to 'race' in their attempt to describe social groups that came from different national backgrounds but share cultural similarities," and as such "is defined as s social grouping or form of peoplehood that is marked by traits that are perceived to be culturally inherited," as opposed to biologically inherited like race. See "Introduction," in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, ed. Craig R Prentiss (New York: New York University, 2003), 6–7. Seen in this way, linguistic identity would be considered part of ethnic identity, although not completely synonymous.

[470] As Abbas Amanat writes, "Historically Iranians became conscious of themselves in the face of the mythical Turanids and later the historic people they came into contact with: the Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and others." See "Introduction: Iranian Identity Boundaries: A Historical Overview," in *Iran Facing Others*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–38, http://www.myilibrary.com?id=361437. Kindle edition.

asserted their right to rule.

However, it should be noted that the Samanids were not necessarily trying to differentiate themselves from the Arabs, or Arab descendants, in their own midst. Linguistically, the descendants of Arab garrisons in Central Asia had already been Persianized, at least in their vernacular. As Richard Frye has previously asserted, “under the late Sasanians a Middle Persian *koine* had not only spread all over the empire, but also had become popular outside the boundaries of the empire in Central Asia and Afghanistan,” and that “the Arab conquerors in dealing with all of their Iranian subjects in Persia and in Central Asia used this *koine* as the medium of communication, together with Arabic.”[471] The 'Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad had already been “Persianized” to a great extent, although Arabic remained the language of literature and high culture in Baghdad. The same was even more true in Islamic Central Asia. As Peter Golden stated in an article on the Samanids, “the Iranian peoples of the region, united now in the Islamic Commonwealth, were Persianized, rather than Arabized. The vernacular of the Sassanid court, Dari, became the *lingua franca* of the Muslim East, expanding with the borders of Islam. As a consequence, it was in its Irano-Islamic garb that Muslim culture penetrated the Turkish steppes.”[472] Although this process may have reached one of its peaks with the Samanid reign, it was in earlier Iranian dynasties such as the Buyids, Tahirids, and Saffarids that it had begun.

Samanid Political Legitimacy

The most well-known and celebrated of the Samanid amirs, and under whose authority the cities of Transoxania were first unified, is surely Ismā'īl. Like his ancestor Saman Khudah, Ismā'īl was also given authority by the caliph, this time directly. After conquering the territories

[471] Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.*, 232–233.
[472] Peter B. Golden, “The Karakhanids and Early Islam,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 346.

held by his brothers, “Ismā'īl received a diploma of investiture from the caliph, confirming him in possession of the lands across the Oxus. At the same time al-Mu'tadid recognized 'Amr ibn Layth [Saffarid] as governor of Khurasan, and the latter considered Transoxania a mere appendage to his domain.”[473] As we shall see below, this state of affairs was soon to change.

Like their Saffarid counterparts, the early Samanids were known for their military might, and also for their pious *ghazi* outlook.[474] In their Transoxanian position on the edge of the Islamic world, they were constantly involved in low-level warfare with religious separatists and Turkic nomads alike. As Richard Frye states, “the frontier of Islam was extended considerably under the Samanids. In the year 349/960 Turks of 20,000 tents accepted Islam.”[475] However, the very success of the Samanids' campaigns may have been their undoing, for “the success of Islam robbed the *ghazis*, or frontier warriors, of their *raison d'etre*, so they left Transoxania for more fruitful areas of action.”[476] As the next several centuries of Iranian and Near Eastern history shows, many of these *ghazis* headed westward toward Byzantium as part of the Turkic migrations out of Central Asia. With their warriors of the faith leaving their territory, the Samanids were forced to turn to other sources of martial manpower. The Samanids, “like their nominal overlords in Baghdad, had come to rely increasingly on *ghulam* [Turkish slave] armies with predictable results. Samanid raids into the steppes were as much for slaves as for conquest. The human booty thus obtained was then groomed and trained in special schools for military and

473 Frye, “A Little-Known Dynasty,” 42.See Chapter 2 for more information on this situation, where our local and dynastic histories make it appear as though the caliph may in fact have been playing the Saffarid and Samanid amirs off each other for his own gain.

474 Luke Treadwell, “Shahanshah and Al-Malik Al-Mu’ayyad: The Legitimation of Power in Samanid and Buyid Iran,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung*, ed. Wilferd Madelung, Farhad Daftary, and Josef Meri (I.B.Tauris, 2003), 330.

475 Frye, “A Little-Known Dynasty,” 44.

476 Ibid.

administrative posts."[477] Eventually, descendants of these Turkish warriors, such as Mahmūd of Ghazna, would completely supplant the Samanids.

Unlike the Saffarids, Buyids, and others, "it was generally accepted amongst the Samanids' contemporaries that the family was of aristocratic, if not royal, Iranian origin."[478] These aristocrats (*dehqans)*, "had been influential in the Sasanid empire as military commanders, provincial governors, and so on, and which had on occasion married into the royal house."[479] At the time of the Arab invasions, and likely until the greater centralization of the Samanid state, "real power lay with the members of the traditional landed aristocracy (the *dehqans*), who had fortified castles and small private armies at their disposal. In times of trouble, princes had literally to grovel for help from their supposed vassals."[480] These long-standing holders of power were also the keepers of ancient customs. In this regard, the Samanids were no different than their fellow nobles. They were reputed to have "held to the customs of the *dehqans* with their interest in epic tales sung by minstrels and in the art of pre-Islamic times."[481] Unsurprisingly, when the Samanids did attempt to gather more power into a centralized state, this did not sit well with their fellow *dehqans*, as even "their modest attempts at centralization put them at odds with their feudatories."[482] Regardless, the *dehqan*'s role as keepers of pre-Islamic lore and knowledge, and likely language, did not change with the coming of Islam, although many of these

[477] Golden, "The Karakhanids and Early Islam," 258.
[478] Bosworth, "Heritage of Rulership," 58.
[479] Ibid., 55.As Luke Treadwell, on page 70 of his *Political History of the Samanid State*, states, *dehqan* was a "'loose term' in this period, and could mean anything from a member of the landed gentry to the ruler of a province."
[480] Kirill Nourzhanov, "The Politics of History in Tajikistan: Reinventing the Samanids," in *Walls and Frontiers in Inner-Asian History: Proceedings from the Fourth Conference of the Australasian Society for Inner Asian Studies (A.S.I.A.S) : Macquarie University, November 18-19, 2000*, ed. Craig Benjamin and Samuel N. C Lieu (Turnhout; N.S.W., Australia: Brepols ; Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 2002), 162.
[481] Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.*, 243.
[482] Vladimir Minorsky, "Persia: Religion and History," in *Iranica; Twenty Articles.* ([Hertford, Eng.]: [Printed by S. Austin], 1964), 244.

landholders did accept Islam within relatively short order. The Muslim custom of collecting the *jizya*, or poll tax, from non-Muslim *dhimmi* may have been a major factor in inspiring conversions among the wealthy. As Vladimir Minorsky stated, “it was this economic disparity which had become the chief incentive for the Iranian nobles to change religion,” rather than any more religious explanation.”[483]

Samanid Religious Legitimacy

Regardless of the original reason for conversion, the Samanids quickly became known as stalwart Sunni defenders of the faith, with a few exceptions as we have already seen. Given that the heartland of the Caliphate itself from the mid-tenth century on was ruled by Shi'i Buyid overlords, and that Kharijites and other schismatic sects plagued the borders of Khurasan under their Saffarid predecessors, “the Samanids of Bukhara re-established the prestige of Sunnite orthodoxy.”[484] Travis Zadeh in his book has examined the heavily Hanafi Sunni presence in the Samanid realm. Because of their constant battles against groups who did not recognize the religious authority of the Caliph, the Samanids may have felt forced to develop such a staunch Sunni “orthodox” stance to counteract these forces of dissension. Doing so would have helped to maintain the political support of the *ulema* in their urban centers.

The Samanids had depended upon the support of the *ulema* from their very initial entry into their capital city of Bukhara. The political situation in Khurasan and Transoxania at the time was even more complicated than usual, with a struggle for power between Saffarid, Tahirid, and other forces. Husain ibn Tahir was defeated, and “there was no amir in Khurasan, for Ya'qub ibn Laith [Saffarid] had seized Khurasan by force and Rafi' ibn Harthama was fighting against

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[483] Ibid., 242.
[484] Ibid., 244.

him. . . then Abu 'Abdallah [a prominent jurist], son of Khwaja Abu Hafs, wrote a letter to Samarqand to Nasr ibn Ahmad ibn Asad al-Samani, who was the amir of Samarqand and Ferghana, and requested an amir for Bukhara from him. He sent his brother Ismā'īl ibn Ahmad, to Bukhara."[485] When Ismā'īl Samani first arrived at Bukhara to take control he was uncertain of the support of the local population. However, "he knew that whatever Abu 'Abdallah did the people of the city would not go against him"[486] Abu 'Abdallah chose to support Ismā'īl's taking of power, creating a relationship between the Samanids and the urban *ulema* that would continue throughout their reign.

The Samanids' position at the edge of the Islamic world contributed to this. As Frye again states, "in Central Asia, on the frontier of the caliphate, not only could heretics survive, but Christians and Manichaeans could pursue missionary activities further into the far reaches of Central Asia."[487] The Samanids *ghazi* ethos required both a military, and ideological, defense against these forces of noncomformity, as "Shi'ites were active in Tabaristan and Seistan [*sic*], and even extended their prosletyzing endeavors to Transoxania."[488] Many religious movements and rebellions had taken place in the outlying areas of Khurasan and Transoxania long before even the Samanids had risen to power; recall that the 'Abbasids themselves managed to topple their predecessors only with the help of 'Alid-leaning armies from Khurasan under the command of Abu Muslim. Various histories bring to us reports of rebellions throughout the eighth century and after: those of Bihafaridh (750), Sunbadh the Magian (756), Ustadh-Sis (765), al-Muqanna, 'the Veiled Prophet of Khurasan' (780), and Babak.[489]

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485 Narshakhī, *The History of Bukhara*, 104–105.
486 Ibid., 105.
487 Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.*, 225.
488 Frye, "A Little-Known Dynasty," 43.
489 Minorsky, "Persia: Religion and History," 243.

When the Shi'i Buyids did rise to power to conquer the heartland of the caliphate, they did so from the outlying region of Dailam, another region where the central power of the "Sunni" caliphate could not necessarily reach.[490] As Richard Frye has stated, "the point of interest is that all of these religious uprisings occurred in Khurasan or Transoxania, while we hear of none in Fars or elsewhere in western Persia. The conclusion one might draw would be that eastern Iran and Central Asia were prone to dissatisfaction and heresy to a much greater extent than western Persia; that is, the former Hephthalite and Sogdian domains had not had the same religious unity as the state church of Sasanian Persia."[491] Whether the domain of the Samanids was inherently more prone to religious dissent than the Caliphate's heartland of Iraq and Iran seems immaterial. What is important is that because of these constant threats to religious (and political) authority, the Samanids may have felt required to establish a much more "hard-line" defense of Islam than was the case under the Buyids.

Even among the Samanids, staunch partners of the caliphate that they were, there was a "brief interlude of flirtation by Nasr, grandson of Ismā'īl, with Ismā'īli missionaries."[492] Nasr was also one of the Samanid amirs most interested in Persian cultural matters. Julie Scott Meisami has stated that "Nasr's particular interest in Persian traditions was undoubtedly linked to his conversion, and that of many important members of his court, to Ismā'īlism. More broadly, this interest was closely tied to the issue of legitimation of rule, a major concern of both patrons and writers of history seen in both Persian and Arabic works of the period."[493] If the ruling elite had

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[490] It should be noted that the distinction between "Sunni" and "Shi'i" did not truly take place until after the assumption of power by the 'Abbasids.

[491] Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.*, 238.

[492] Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Central Asia: From Antiquity to the Turkish Expansion* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996), 230.

[493] Meisami, "Rulers and the Writing of History," 75.

chosen to abandon a more "orthodox" Sunni Islam for Ismā'īlism, then they would have lost the legitimacy conferred upon their rule by their relationships with both the urban *ulema* and the Caliph. As such, they may have been forced by necessity to turn to other, older ideas of legitimacy to keep their reign. Of course, the Ismā'īli situation was soon resolved at court with the accession of a new amir. After this "brief flirtation" with Ismā'īlsm by Nasr, the Samanids may even felt the need to redouble their efforts to protect Sunni Islam. It was also shortly after the Samanid return to the Caliphate's official form of Islam that they turned to yet more symbolic means to proclaim their legitimacy as rulers. For instance, their assumption of traditional titles of royalty on their coins. Some of this numismatic evidence is "the earliest appearance of the term *malik* (King), during the reign of Nuh b. Nasr (331-343/943-954), and its subsequent employment by Nuh's successors; and the occurrence of the title *shahanshah* (King of Kings) on a medallion cast in Bukhara during the reign of Nuh's son, Mansur (350-365/961-976)."[494] With the assumption of the Iranian royal title of *shahanshah*, the Samanids were claiming sources of legitimacy far beyond simple governorship bestowed upon them by caliphal authority.

As with all the other Iranian dynasties, the Samanids also claimed a long and illustrious lineage. The difference with the Samanid case, however, is that theirs was believed. The historian al-Biruni, "followed by subsequent sources such as Ibn al-Athir, says that there is a 'universal agreement' that the Samanids descended from Bahram Chubin."[495] Despite his somewhat

[494] Treadwell, "Shahanshah and Al-Malik Al-Mu'ayyad: The Legitimation of Power in Samanid and Buyid Iran," 318. This is likely the same medallion with the very Hephthalite-looking portrait that Treadwell has discussed elsewhere.

[495] Bosworth, "Heritage of Rulership," 58. Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ja'far Narshakhī, *Tarikh-e Bokhara* (Tehran: Iran Tarikh, 1996), 93, claims this lineage, stating

سامان خداه از فرزندان بهرام چوبین ملک بوده است

"Saman Khudah has been from the children of Bahram Chubin the king." I am unsure as to why the Persian uses the verb "to be" in the present perfect here, so I have left it in the English translation. It is interesting to note that, despite Bahram Chubin's well-known status as a Sasanian usurper, the *Tarikh-e Bokhara* chooses to refer to Bahram as king. Of course, being descended from a king rather than a usurping general would certainly add to

inglorious record as a usurper, Bahram Chubin "has occupied an important place in Persian folklore and later even in messianic eschatology."[496] Official Samanid historical sources would promote the connection between the Samanids and this Sasanian general.

After replacing the Samanids as rulers of Khurasan and Transoxania, the Ghaznavids continued the New Persian literary project begun under the Samanids, as well as many other aspects of Samanid rule. As Bosworth states, "since the Ghaznavid empire depended so much on the Samanid inheritance for its political structure, it is not surprising that literary, cultural and artistic trends under Mahmūd also followed the patterns established in the eastern Iranian world by the Samanids. It was the court of Bukhara which gave material backing for the literary florescence of New Persian, whilst at the same time remaining a great centre for the traditional Arabic theological, legal and philological sciences."[497] The Ghaznavids, perhaps even more so than the Samanids, were also seen as staunch supporters of Sunni "orthodoxy." The downfall of the Samanids was likely contributed to by their loss of support among the urban *ulema*, as "the Sunnite clergy, suspicious of certain Samanids (who, wanting to widen the basis of their power, tried to rely upon Shi'ite extremism and the urban classes), showed a complete lack of national ideas and sacrificed the Samanids to the Turkish outsiders."[498] The Samanids, having entered into their rulership with the explicit support of the urban *ulema* of Bukhara, lost their authority with the removal of the same.

the royal legitimacy of the Samanids.

[496] Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.*, 229.

[497] C. E Bosworth, "The Development of Persian Culture under the Early Ghaznavids," *Iran* 6 (1968): 37.

[498] Minorsky, "Persia: Religion and History," 244.Again, the "nationalist" character of this statement should not be overemphasized, as Minorsky was writing in the mid-twentieth century.

Samanid Cultural Legitimation

During their reign, the Samanids officially sponsored the translation of Tabari's works into Persian. One of the first possible motivations for, or at least reasons behind, the New Persian Renaissance was the remembrance of pre-Islamic, Sasanian Iranian culture. In the mid-twentieth century, this was often viewed in secondary scholarship in a somewhat anachronistic nationalistic sense, but could still have some validity in a more general, cultural sense. This could perhaps be seen as some sort of nostalgia for the Sasanian past. A.C.S Peacock stated that the "first great flowering of Persian literature in the fourth/tenth century that produced the *Tarikhnama* [of Bal'ami] has usually been associated with a growth in patriotic feelings amongst the Iranian population that had been subjugated since the early Islamic conquests, and it did coincide with the rise of rulers of Iranian origin."[499] Instead of a more general "patriotic" sense of Iranianness, I am arguing that this literary flowering under the Samanid dynasty was an elite project intended to justify the separation of their own political and military power in Khurasan and Transoxania from central 'Abbasid rule.

Before turning to specific examples in our sources, we need to reiterate one of the most curious aspects of the emergence of New Persian as a literary language under the Samanid reign: Transoxania was not originally a Persian speaking region.

New Persian

As one might suspect, one of the primary languages spoken in the lands of the various ancient Iranian empires was Persian. Under the last of these ancient empires, the Sasanians, the primary written language was Middle Persian, or Pahlavi. The process of evolution from Middle Persian to New Persian, despite the chronology inherent in the names, is not as simple as might

[499] Peacock, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy*, 15.

be assumed. Ahmad Tafazzoli, an Iranian philologist, states that “New Persian, also called Dari Persian (*parsi-/farsi-yi dari*) in classical Persian sources, is the continuation of Pahlavi or, rather, of one of its variants, as can be proved by a comparison of the phonologies, morphologies and basic vocabularies of the two languages.”[500] The rise of New Persian under the Samanids was not as simple as an evolution from a preexisting tongue spoken in the region. Additionally, we have the aforementioned distinction between *Dari* and *Farsi*. As Richard Frye states, “some scholars have gone so far as to claim that Dari was really a different language, perhaps a descendant of Parthian or Sogdian. It seems, however, that *Dari*, presumably the “court” language, was really a simple style of New Persian free from Arabic words, whereas the term *Farsi* in this period was a designation of the style of the New Persian language which was greatly mixed with Arabic words and was ornate rather than simple.”[501] Depending on the scholar, the terms *Dari* and *Farsi* may almost be used interchangeably, complicating issues when examining the secondary sources.

By “court” in the above citation, Frye is not referring to the Samanid capital at Bukhara, but instead to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon, located in Mesopotamia. Tafazzoli states that “besides Pahlavi, one of its variants was already in use as the spoken language in the capital Mada'in (Ctesiphon) in the late Sasanian period. As the everyday language of the court or capital (*darbār*), it was named *dari*.”[502] This geographic disparity, between Mesopotamia and Central Asia, is also very much of note, as it further complicates the origins of New Persian, for Khurasan and Transoxania were not within the lands historically considered to be held by the

500 Aḥmad Tafaẕẕulī, “Iranian Languages,” in *The Age of Achievement: AD 750 to the End of the Fifteenth Century, I: The Historical, Social and Economic Setting*, ed. Muhamed Sajfitdinovič Asimov and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, vol. 1, History of Civilizations of Central Asia 4 (Paris: UNESCO publ., 2000), 328.
501 Frye, “Development of Persian Literature under the Samanids and Qarakhanids,” 71.
502 Tafaẕẕulī, “Iranian Languages,” 328–329.

Sasanian kings.[503] Specifically, "Samanid Transoxania was not the most obvious home for this renaissance. Much Samanid territory, including Transoxania, had never formed part of the pre-Islamic Iranian Sasanian state. Traditionally, the predominant ethnic group in Transoxania was the Soghdians, who spoke an Iranian language related to yet distinct from Persian."[504] In Sogdia, Bactria, and other smaller regions within the greater areas of Khurasan and Transoxania, "Persian" as such was not, nor necessarily had ever been, the primary tongue of the inhabitants, with the possible exception of a few major cities. Thus, when New Persian arose in the Samanid context, these regional, although Iranic, languages also contributed much to its development. As Tafazzoli again states, "in Khurasan, it [dari] was enriched with Parthian elements, and in Transoxania it became enmingled with Sogdian and other eastern dialects. As the administrative, religious and scientific language, Arabic exerted a greater influence on New Persian, above all, in its vocabulary."[505] Although Arabic may no longer have been the sole language of high culture in Central Asia, it certainly left its mark on its successor of sorts, in the New Persian language. Frye certainly does not understate what he feels was the importance of Arabic in the New Persian literature. He states that it was the "enriching of the Persian language by Arabic words, and the change from the simple syllabic poetry of Middle Iranian to the elaborate formal poetry based on the Arabic system of long and short syllables, [that] gave New Persian a tremendous catalyst for the creation of literature."[506] Like much of the literature written in this "new" literary language, it

[503] However, perhaps crucially, the city of Balkh *was* often part of the Sasanian empire, and as Perry states, "Balkh, strategically sited at the junction of routes between Persia, India, and Central Asia, was one of the three capital cities of the Sasanid Empire. It is therefore quite credible that four centuries of Sasanid rule had secured the city, like many an other, as a Persian island in the linguistic ocean of greater Persia." See "The Origin and Development of Literary Persian," 52. As we have seen earlier, if the Samanid family really did descend from a local ruler near Balkh, then the ruling family of the Samanid domains might very well have been native Persian speakers.

[504] Peacock, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy*, 15.

[505] Tafaẓẓ ulī, "Iranian Languages," 329.

[506] Frye, "Development of Persian Literature under the Samanids and Qarakhanids," 71.

was neither Iranian nor Arab elements, but the synergistic combination of the two that gave New Persian its richness and power.

How was it that the Persian tongue, of whatever state of development or dialect, had so completely penetrated Central Asia as to become the birthplace of what eventually became New Persian? Again, the Arabs likely played a major role. The Islamic conquest of Central Asia took centuries longer than that of Iran proper (and as stated above, was still taking place under the Samanids), and with it came the long-term settlement of large numbers of troops. As Frye states, "in the armies of Qutaiba ibn Muslim, the great Arab general (died 715), were many Persian clients who were garrisoned with the Arabs in Bukhara, Samarkand and other cities . . . [and] provided a large Persian-speaking element in the towns where Sogdian dialects in the course of two centuries were replaced by Persian as the language of intercourse."[507] In addition, Iranians fleeing the destruction of the Sasanian empire also settled in the region, further shifting the linguistic balance in favor of some variant of Persian.[508] It was the Islamic conquest of Central Asia that truly "Persianized" this region.

As Behrooz Mahmood-Bakhtiari has stated in his article on Samanid language planning, "it should be noted also that the Samanids were not the first authorities, that recognised the importance of Persian, but they were definitely those who strengthened and maintained it."[509] The reason for this may have been tied to the centralization of authority in Khurasan and Transoxania by the Samanid regime. The use of a single language in their domain, rather than regional languages such as Soghdian, Bactrian, and others, would certainly have been an advantage. Also, if the Samanid family had originally been from Balkh, and thus Bactrian-speaking, Persian

[507] Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.*, 235.
[508] Frye, *Heritage of Central Asia*, 217.
[509] "Planning the Persian Language in the Samanid Period," *Iran and the Caucasus* 7, no. 1 (2003): 254.

would have been a sensible choice for a language of "interethnic communication" between the dynasts and their Sogdian-speaking vassals. New Persian's similarity to both languages would have been an advantage over Arabic. The promulgation of New Persian would also have been a way to differentiate Samanid royal, political authority from the religious authority implied by the use of Arabic. By leaving Arabic as the language of religion and the Caliphate, the Samanids' support of New Persian as an official language of government and a language of literature would have distinguished the basis of their political authority from Islam. Instead, it would have been yet another way to connect their regime to the Iranian, Sasanian past. In the language of Barth, it would have been a way to make their Iranian "ethnic distinction[s] *emerge*," and their royal authority based upon that ethnic distinction.

As described above, the "New Persian Renaissance" is only partly defined by the development of the language itself; it is the literature that was written in that language that may have had the most impact. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, examples of both poetry and prose written in New Persian abound from the Samanid era. In poetry, specifically, one can see the Persian character of not only the language but some of the imagery and ideals. This is not to overemphasize the Iranian "character" of the poetry; it was all composed in a very much Islamic milieu, as one could imagine at the court of the staunch Sunni Samanids. Even the poetry of the period is notable for its successful blending of Iranian and Islamic motifs, for although "anti-caliphal and even anti-Islamic motives were still discernible in the Shu'ubiyya of the tenth century . . . the Tajik-Persian poets and people of culture extolled the history and culture of their own people without rejecting the cultural achievements of the Arabs."[510] As mentioned above, the Samanids were a dynasty of *dehqans*, and as such were very much still

[510] Negmatov, "The Samanid State," 88.

connected with older Iranian ideals of culture, because "in Central Asia . . . at the small courts of the princelings the feudal, chivalric society continued to exist, if not to flourish, as it had in the past. Eastern Iran was then the refuge of the old traditions which provided the background for Ferdowsi and his *Shahnama.*"[511] Although Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* almost certainly provides the exemplar and culmination for the revival of Iranian cultural history in poetry, he was far from the first poet to use this older imagery in his work. [512]Of course, it was not just pre-Islamic "imagery" which found its way into the New Persian poetry in the tenth century, but also "exhortations, including instruction in good manners, the advocation of justice and humanity, the exaltation of art, science and knowledge, the glorification of wisdom and the hymning of friendship,"[513] any and all of which may have also been shared as virtues in the pre-Islamic Sasanian times.

These virtues as espoused in the poetry would have helped the Samanids set the bounds on what they considered to be appropriate Iranian royal behavior. Publicly stating these codes of conduct, and adhering to them, would have demonstrated their fitness to rule as Iranian monarchs. If the Samanids and other *dehqans*, having arisen out of a "feudal," culturally Iranian context, still identified themselves with that past, then their literature could very well be a reflection of how they chose to view themselves and their actions. As mentioned in the introduction, Margaret Somers has examined what she terms the "ontological dimension" of narratives and its effect on "social action and social agency that is at once temporal, relational,

511 Frye, *The Heritage of Persia.*, 235.

512 As Kobidze writes, "names from the Persian heroic epic occur in the writings of Rudaki, predecessor of Firdawsi (Sam, Rustam, Isfandiyar, etc.), with the same epithets as used in the *Shahnama.*" See "On the Antecedents of Vis-U-Ramin," in *Yádnáme-Ye Jan Rypka: Collection of Articles on Persian and Tajik Literature : (On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday by His Friends and Pupils)* (Prague: Academia. The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1967), 93.

513 Afsahzod, "Persian Literature," 383.

and cultural, as well as institutional, material, and macro-structural."[514] The Samanids and their fellow *dehqans* that made up the local political power of their state may have viewed their own royal role through the lens of older Iranian history and myth, such as the stories that eventually ended up being versified by Ferdowsi in the *Shahnama*. Somers explains what she feels the role of such narratives to be, writing that recently

> scholars are postulating something much more substantive about narrative: namely, that social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life. Their research is showing us that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that 'experience' is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives.[515]

Although the stories of the *Shahnama* and other poems in New Persian that were composed in the Samanid era by both court and independent *dehqan* poets told the history of the Iranian world as opposed to their present, their very composition seems to imply that the Samanids identified themselves with their Iranian forebears.[516] The genealogies of all the Iranian dynasties linking themselves to this mythic past illustrate that they obviously did. They may have modeled some of their actions, at least in seizing royal authority, on these stories of old, if we are to believe as Somers states that "people are guided to act in certain way" by what they read in or hear from these "social, public, and cultural narratives." By acting within the bounds of behavior established by these ancient tales, the Samanids would have been basing part of their royal

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[514] Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity," 607.
[515] Ibid., 613–614.
[516] Christine Allison, in her introduction to a volume on *Remembering the Past*, puts it similarly, in that "within 'popular memory' we should include not only narratives about historical events but also mythologized versions of history. Folktales, proverbs and even fables have their place; whilst not historical, they bear a variety of meanings and emotions linked to views of the past. Their narration and performance play an important role in engendering feelings of belonging." See "Introduction: Remembering the Past in the Iranian Cultural Space," in *Remembering the Past in Iranian Societies*, ed. Christine Allison and Philip G Kreyenbroek, 2013, 12.

legitimacy on the basis of what had already been shown to be proper behavior for rulers. Many of the older stories that eventually were versified in the *Shahnama* were native to the regions ruled by the Samanids. As Russian scholar N.N. Negmatov writes, "the Rustam epic of the Sogdian texts, the Sogdian tales of Siywush, Faridun and the blacksmith Kawa, and . . . paintings at Panjikent and Bunjikat, undeniably indicate the Central Asian provenance of many of the themes of the *Shah-nama.*"[517] Not only did these stories show the Samanids how an Iranian ruler should reign, they specifically showed how an Iranian ruler should reign *in Central Asia*.[518] With these cultural narratives as a basis for their action, all that was necessary for the Samanids was to situate these ancient Iranian tales and history within an Islamic context.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, one of the most important early poets to start composing in the nascent New Persian was Rudaki, who is "considered to be the father of Persian poetry because he was the first major poet to write in New Persian," and it has oft been argued that "Rudaki holds a central position in the re-emergence of Persian identity following almost three centuries of Arab domination."[519] Rudaki and his poetry are still widely revered in the greater Iranian cultural world, particularly in the nation of Tajikistan, who claim the poet as a

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[517] Negmatov, "The Samanid State," 92.

[518] On an interesting but likely unimportant note, the story of Kawa the blacksmith is actually a tale of local Iranians overthrowing an evil foreign ruler who is often portrayed to be Arab, and reestablishing a proper Iranian dynasty. It is unlikely that the Samanids considered themselves to be following in the footsteps of Kawa, as they did not ever attempt to deny what they considered to be the religious legitimacy of the caliphs in Baghdad, but it is an amusing parallel. The story has also maintained its popularity with Kurdish populations in Iran up until the present day, as we have seen in Chapter 3.

[519] Rūdakī and Sassan Tabatabai, "Rudaki, the Father of Persian Poetry: A Critical Translation, along with Commentary and Historical Background of the Poetry of the Tenth Century Persian Poet, Abu-Abdullah Ja'afar-Ibn Mohammad Rudaki" 2000, vi. It is not simply the early nature of Rudaki's poetry that makes him of such import to New Persian poetry. As Heshmat Moayyad writes, "The tenth-century writer Rudaki is far more than a mere lyricist and court poet. In his surviving poems—which include bits of epic verse and elegies, with didactic, contemplative, and also Bacchic themes—there is often a melancholy complaint about the transitory character of life, a sense of resignation to the helplessness and mortality of human beings," which may have helped his work speak to so many people in many diverse times. See "Lyric Poetry," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 3, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies (Albany, N.Y.: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 123.

native son. Rudaki was likely born in a small village near the city of Panjikent in Tajikistan, from where “he found his way to the palace of the Samanids at Bukhara, where he became especially famous as a court poet during the rule of Nasr I b. Ahmad (914-42).[520] In what was apparently a conscious effort to return to a more linguistically “pure” Persian, the poetry of Rudaki himself is also notable for the distinct lack of Arabic loanwords, more so than perhaps any other poet, where perhaps only ten percent of his poetic vocabulary originated in Arabic.[521] Even Ferdowsi, lauded by many as the “savior” of the Persian tongue, used more Arabic vocabulary. Rudaki's poetry may be one of the best examples of *dari* rather than *farsi* poetry, before more Arabic loanwords were added (or added back) into the vocabulary.

Bahram Chubin

As mentioned earlier, it was widely believed that the Samanids were descended from the Sasanian general and usurper Bahram Chubin. As we know, Bal'ami's *Tarjome-ye Tabari* was one of the first prose works written in New Persian, and one that had strong ties to the Samanid court. We know, as A.C.S. Peacock and others have shown, that Bal'ami's rendition was far from just a simple translation from Arabic to Persian, and was instead a considerable adaptation. In certain sections, like that of Bahram Chubin, there does appear to be considerably more information provided by Bal'ami than by Tabari. In Ferdowsi's epic, there is yet more information provided about Bahram Chubin than by either prose history. Each author also treats the character of Bahram Chubin, and his entrance into the narrative, in somewhat different ways. Julie Scott Meisami asserts that “Bal'ami . . . presents Bahram Chubin as a man of honor who was compelled by his troops to rebel against his sovereign (in contrast to Firdawsi's less sympathetic

[520] Afsahzod, “Persian Literature,” 371.
[521] Nourzhanov, “The Politics of History in Tajikistan: Reinventing the Samanids,” 163.

version in the *Shahnama*). His account seems designed to validate Samanid claims to rule of the East, and in particular of Khurasan and Rayy: their descent from Bahram Chubin establishes them as authentic Persian rulers."[522] Bal'ami states that "and the origin of Bahram was from Rayy, from the issue of kings [and the ispahbads of Rayy] and in that land there was no person who was more manly than him."[523] Perhaps it was because of this masculine character that Bahram was chosen to lead the expedition against the Turks who threatened to invade eastern Iran. Tabari glosses over this choice, stating only that "So Hurmuz sent against him [the king of the Turks, Saveh Shah] a man from the people of al-Rayy called Bahrām, son of Bahrām Jushnas, known as Jūbin, with twelve thousand men whom Bahrām had personally selected—mature and experienced men, not youngsters."[524] Bal'ami provides little more information about how Bahram was named the leader in the east, stating only that he was the unanimous choice of the grandees at the royal court in Ctesiphon.[525]

Ferdowsi, perhaps unsurprisingly, goes into considerably more romantic detail about life of Bahram Chubin. In the epic, Hurmuz seeks the advice of an old man, Mehran-Shetād, on what to do about a Turkish war in the east. Mehran-Shetād tells Hurmuz a story about Hurmuz's own mother, a Turkish or Chinese princess, and about how Mehran-Shetād was involved in bringing her to Iran. According to the old man, astrologers at the Chinese court, before even the marriage

[522] Meisami, "Rulers and the Writing of History," 77.

[523] Ṭabarī and Bal'ami, *Tarjumah-i Tarikh-i Tabari.* (Teheran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1967), 1077. The original Persian states

و اصل بهرام از ری بود، از ملك زادگان [و اسپهبدان ری] بود و اندران زمان هیچ کس ازو مرد تر نبود.

[524] Tabari, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī V: The Sasanids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, trans. C.E. Bosworth, vol. 5, SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 5:301.

[525] Ṭabarī and Bal'ami, *Tarjumah-i Tarikh-i Tabari.*, 1076–1077.The original Persian states

پس چون همه مهتران را گفت بگویید تا حرب ترك که را باشد و که را شاید. همه گفتند بهرام چوبین شاید.

"Then when all the grandees said that there was a war with the Turks, and that there should be. They all said that perhaps [the leader] should be Bahram Chubin."

of Hurmuz's father Khosrow I Anushirvan to his mother, had predicted the arrival of Bahram Chubin and Hurmuz's troubles with him. The astrologers predicted that “he will become a pain to the Shah of Iran, who will become afraid of him because of his victorious, great fortune. He will be a minor noble from far afield, [but] as a horseman he will be full of greatness. His *laqab* will be Chubine, and his lineage will also be from among your heroes, because this menial man, and his small army, will come from someplace to the king's court, those very Turks will finally break. All of his army will destroy them.”[526] In Ferdowsi's narrative, the rebellion of Bahram Chubin becomes a foregone conclusion, and in a way almost absolves Bahram himself for personal responsibility for his own actions; he was simply acting out his part in a vast divine plan. Tabari, on the other hand, says very little about the personal motivations of Bahram Chubin for his defiance. After Bahram Chubin had defeated the Turks, he sent an immense amount of booty back to Iran, for which Hurmuz thanked him. In Tabari's narrative, immediately thereafter “Bahram was afraid of Hurmuz's violence, as were the troops who were with him, so he threw off allegiance to Hurmuz, advanced toward al-Mada'in, showed vexation at Hurmuz's behavior, and proclaimed that Hurmuz's son Abarwiz was more fitted for the royal power than he.”[527] Only when one takes into account the beginning of Tabari's account of Hurmuz's reign does Bahram's apprehension begin to make sense. Tabari shows Hurmuz as a champion of the poor, and a ruler

[526] Firdawsī and Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shāhnāmah*, Majmū‘ah-’i Mutūn-I Fārsī, silsilah-’i nū, shumārah-’i 1 (Niyū Yūrk: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987), 8:494–497.The poetry states

بپرسید هرمز ز مهران شتاد   کزین ترکِ جنگی چه داری به یاد؟

. . .

ازو شاهِ ایران شود دردمند   بترسد ز پیروز بختِ بلند!
یکی کهتری باشدش درودست   سُواری سرافراز مهتر پر است،

. . .

جهانجوی چوبینه دارد لقب   هم از پهلوانانش باشد نسب،
چن این مردِ چاکر به اندک سپاه   ز جایی بیاید به درگاهِ شاه،
مرین ترک را ناگهان بشکند   همه لشکرش را به هم برزند!

[527] Tabari, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, 5:303.

with a contentious relationship with his own aristocracy. As Tabari writes,"this Hurmuz, son of Kisrā, was well educated and full of good intentions of benevolence toward the weak and destitute, but he attacked the power of the nobles, so that they showed themselves hostile and hated him, exactly as he in turn hated them,"[528] and "he removed the nobles [from his court and entourage] and killed 13,600 men from the religious classes and from those of good family and noble birth. His sole aim was to win over the lower classes and to make them favorably disposed towards him."[529] Seen in the light of these events, Bahram Chubin's fear of royal reprisal seems less like irrational paranoia, and more like considered self-interest. Ferdowsi, on the other hand, goes into great detail on the same subject, although his depiction of Bahram Chubin seems to emphasize the hotheaded aspects of the general's personality. In his face to face confrontations with Khosrow Parviz, even Ferdowsi seems to show the lack of respect and proper manners on the part of Bahram. Khosrow says to Bahram that "when a guest comes to your house from afar, you call him bad names at the time of feasting. This is not a kingly manner, nor is this the manner of heroic horsemen. Neither an Arab nor a Persian has done this in 3,000 years."[530] Considering the respect with which the Samanids and later Iranian monarchs held royal precedent, as we have seen in earlier chapters, this would have been a telling insult indeed.

As cannot be overemphasized, the Samanids were interested in asserting their Iranian heritage and fitness to rule while not rejecting either the religious authority of the caliphs or the importance of Islam itself. These examples from the story of Bahram Chubin, as described in

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[528] Ibid., 5:295.
[529] Ibid., 5:297.
[530] Firdawsī and Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shāhnāmah*, 8:17. The poetry states

جو مهمان به خان و آند ز دور   تو دکنام سازی به هَنگام سور،
نه آیین شاهان بود زین نشان   نه آن سُوارانِ گردنکشان،
نه تازی چُنین کرد و نه پارسی   اگر بشمری سال صدبار سی!

Tabari and Bal'ami, show how the Samanids wished to view their twin Iranian and Islamic heritages as reconcilable. As Elton Daniel argues in his article “Bal'ami's Account of Early Islamic History,” Bal'ami “emphasizes strongly the idea that events in Arabia and Sasanian Persia were already interconnected before the rise of Islam; they are part of the same history.”[531] After Bahram Chubin and his army approach the Sasanian capital, Hurmuz's son Khosrow Parviz (Abarwiz) flees to Byzantium to beg the Caesar for troops and assistance to retake his own throne. Tabari briefly states at one point that “it is mentioned that the astrologers agreed that Abarwiz would reign for forty-eight years.”[532] In Bal'ami's account, however, this mention of the foretelling of Khosrow Parviz's reign is much more involved. On his way to Byzantium, Khosrow Parviz and his men stop for the night at a monastery, where he engages in a conversation with a monk about his future. Bal'ami's history writes that “Parviz asked: When will I return to kingship? The monk said: seventeen months. Parviz asked: How long will I be king? [The monk] said 38 years. Parviz asked, from where do you know this? [The monk] said, from the book of the prophet Daniel, peace be upon him. He has (ordered, judged, foretold?) the reigns of all Iranian kings.”[533] Here, Bal'ami is explicitly connecting the history of Sasanian Iran with the Abrahamic religious tradition, via the Book of Daniel. One could even view this section as absolving Bahram Chubin of any ill action in his usurpation of power; like Khosrow Parviz's reign, Bahram Chubin's assumption of royal power for that 17 month period was also foretold by the authority of the Abrahamic tradition, as well as by Chinese astrologers. It also shows that, if

[531] Elton L. Daniel, “Bal’ami’s Account of Early Islamic History,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung*, ed. Wilferd Madelung, Farhad Daftary, and Josef Meri (I.B.Tauris, 2003), 168.

[532] Tabari, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, 5:314.

[533] Ṭabarī and Bal’ami, *Tarjumah-i Tarikh-i Tabari.*, 1073.
پرویز گفت کی باشد که من به ملک باز رسم؟ راهب گفت تا هفتاد ماه، پرویس گفت چند باشد پادشاهی من؟ گفت سی و هشت سال، پرویز گفت تو از کجا دانی؟ گفت: از کتاب دانیل پیغمبر علیه السلام و او همه ملک عجم را حاکم کرده است.

the reigns of all Iranian kings were foretold by the Abrahamic tradition, perhaps the legitimacy of Iranian kingship is also supported by Abrahamic, and thus Islamic, scripture. The beginning of the end of Bahram's rebellion against Khosrow Parviz even adds yet another wrinkle to this tale. When attempting to escape from Bahram Chubin, Khosrow flees up a mountain and becomes trapped in a cave or defile. According to Tabari, "the Zoroastrians (*al-Majūs*) assert that Abarwīz got trapped in a defile and Bahrām pursued him thither, but when Bahrām was sure that he had Abarwīz in his power, something that could not be comprehended (i.e., some supernatural power) took the latter up to the top of the mountain."[534] Ferdowsi goes into considerably more detail, likely having read some of those Zoroastrian or Iranian sources mentioned by Tabari. In Ferdowsi's version, Khosrow Parviz encounters the Zoroastrian angel Sorush atop that mountain, and the encounter is witnessed by Bahram Chubin as well.[535] Sorush confirms to Khosrow Parviz that he will reign for 38 years, and Bahram begins to despair of fighting a war against not just men, but against the very divine.[536]

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[534] Tabari, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, 5:313–314.

[535] This incident is one of the very few times in *Shahnamah* where we see explicitly Zoroastrian religious aspects in the non-Daqiqi section. Although this does appear to be an odd element of the story, as the Parsi scholar Sir J.C. Coyajee wrote in the mid-20th century,"even in the Islamic period, Iran could not forget an angel to whom it had manifested such devoted for untold ages" and Sa'di mentioned Sorush as well (J. C. Coyajee, "Theology and Philosophy in Firdausi," in *Studies in Shāhnāmeh,* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons, 1939), 22.Coyajee, "Theology and Philosophy in Firdausi," *Studies in Shahnama*, 22)

[536] Firdawsī and Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shāhnāmah*, 8:144–145. Some lines read

به پیش اندرآمد یکی غار تنگ   سه جنگی پس اندر بسان پلنگ
بُن غار هم بسته آمد ز کوه   بماند آن جهاندار دور از گروه
. . .
چو نزدیک شد دست خسرو گرفت   ز یزدان پاک این نباشد شگفت!
. . .
بدو گفت خسرو که نام بو چیست؟ ـهمی‌گف   ت چندی و چندی گریست!ـ
فرشته بدو گفت: نامم سروش   چو ایمن شدی، دور باش از خروش!
کزین پس شوی بر جهان پادشا   نباید که باشی جز از پارسا!
بدین زودی اندر به شاهی رسی   بدین سالیان بگذارد هشت‌وسی!
. . .
چو آن دید بهرام، خیره بماند   خهان‌آفرین را فراوان بخواند!
همی‌گفت: تا جنگ مردم بود   مبادا که مرای ز من گم بود!
بر آنم که جنگم کنون با پریست   برین بخت تیره بباند گریست!

"And he came upon a narrow defile, followed by three warriors like panthers. The bottom of the defile was closed

As with most literature patronized by official sources in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries CE, Frye writes that "it is clear that history became ever more important as a vehicle for justifying the rise to power of a new dynasty or simply to flatter a patron."[537] The *Tarikih-e Bokhara* is no exception to this rule. The language used to describe Ismāʿīl, one of the most famous of the Samanid amirs, is flattering in the extreme, stating that "he was really a worthy ruler, meritorious, intelligent, just, kind, and a man of vision and foresight."[538] With the breakdown of the centralized political authority of the 'Abbasid caliphate, however, under the Saffarid, Tahirid, and Samanid dynasties, asserting the fitness of local rulers because of their piety, social justice, or military might was an important element in legitimizing their reigns. After centuries of direct political rule by caliphs, both Umayyad and 'Abbasid, with their legitimacy supported by a purported divine mandate, more secular Persian dynasties required explicit reasons and defenses for their mandate to rule. Kirill Nourzhanov, a scholar of contemporary Central Asia, writes in an article entitled "The Politics of History in Tajikistan: Reinventing the Samanids" about the treatment of the Samanids by the modern Tajik government, although many of his statements could ring true about the Samanids themselves, as long as one avoids thinking of it in terms of modern nationalism. Nourzhanov states that "all governments use historical symbols and historiography to cultivate patriotism, explain and justify policies, and secure the acquiescence and cooperation of the people in times of crises. Symbolic encapsulation of the

off from the mountain. Here he remained, the world-holder, far from his group . . . When he [the as-yet unnamed apparition] came near Khosrow and took his hand. From the pure God, one should not be surprised by this. . . To him, Khosrow asked "What is your name?" (he asked again and again?). The angel said to him "My name is Sorush, when you become safe, far from the tumult [of battle]. After this, you will become king of the world, not just of the Persians! Soon you will come to the kingship, and then 38 years will pass . . . When Bahram saw that, he remained stubborn. The great will call this [me?] the world of creation![. . . |.

537 R.N. Frye, "Arabic, Persian and Turkish Historiography in Central Asia," in *The Age of Achievement: AD 750 to the End of the Fifteenth Century, ī: The Achievements*, ed. Muhamed Sajfitdinovič Asimov and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, vol. 2, History of Civilizations of Central Asia 4 (Paris: UNESCO publ., 2000), 160.

538 Narshakhī, *The History of Bukhara*, 103.

themes of regime legitimacy, common identity and cultural revival through historical references is particularly crucial for emerging nations."[539] Although the Samanids certainly do not qualify as an "emerging nation" in any sort of modern sense, they were a relatively young dynasty in a turbulent time. They were attempting to strengthen and support a Persian linguistic, and an Iranian ethnic, identity to separate themselves from both the Arabs and Turks in their midst and on their borders. Because of the constant frontier skirmishes, primarily against the not-yet-Islamized Turks, and against Muslims who did not adhere to the specific brand of Islam espoused by the caliphs, much of the Samanid reign could be considered as a "time of crisis." As essentially all secondary scholars seem to agree, the "Samanids. . . *were* committed to the 'Arab-Islamic' culture by virtue of adherence to its Sunni religious, political and social aspects. Under them this culture became stronger, even though it was not so well-entrenched (at least culturally) as in western Iran."[540] The rise of the Samanids was very much connected to Islam, with the support of the *ulema* and the caliphate, and with the defense of "orthodox" Sunnism against Shi'i and particularly Ismā'īli sects. Yet, despite this thoroughly Islamic context and support, a movement arose in Samanid lands away from Arabic, the language of Islamic holy texts. Support of this movement allowed the Samanids to distinguish their own royal, political authority from the religious authority of the caliphs. They patronized the collection and composition of stories about ancient Iran, asserted their fitness to rule as Iranian monarchs, and "emplotted" their own political authority within these ontological narratives, in the language of Margaret Somers. They emphasized the connections between Iran and Islam through texts such as Bal'ami, while trying to demonstrate a distinction between religious and political authority. The values of this Perso-

539 Nourzhanov, "The Politics of History in Tajikistan: Reinventing the Samanids," 160.
540 Frye, "The New Persian Renaissance in Western Iran," 229–230.

Islamicate kingship, as opposed to simply Iranian or Persian, helped them to rationalize their creation of a Central Asian state autonomous from the 'Abbasid Caliphate, but still looking to the caliphs and the *ulema* for religious authority to justify their *ghazi* military actions. In doing so, the Samanids created for themselves for a complex identity, both Iranian and Islamic, that outlived their own dynasty, and in works such as Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* it has continued to affect both Iran and Central Asia to this very day.

The *Shahnama* was an important vehicle of transmission for ancient ideologies concerning Iranian empire, the legitimacy of rulers, and the glory of Iranian kingship. It may also have served as a teaching tool for rulers. While not containing any historical events in the text beyond the fall of the Sasanian Empire, the work was written in the Islamic period in the tenth and eleventh centuries and there are wide indications that it was read, copied, and enjoyed throughout its history. Its successful reconciliation of the Zoroastrian origins of Iranian idealized kingship has reinforced its validity again and again in an Islamic context. As we have seen, it is possible to extract some information from the Older Preface of the *Shahnama* on its illocutionary intent and ideological aims. Reconciling the Iranian Zoroastrian past with the Islamic present, asserting the legitimacy and glory of Iranian kingship, and preserving Iranian cultural heritage were all aims of the original work. Some of these aims are explicitly stated in the Preface itself, although one has to be careful with an explicit reading as it “may be possible to discount a writer's own statements about his (illocutionary) intentions.”[541] Issues of dynastic patronage, and the accompanying desire to please a local ruler, may lead to an author modifying or falsifying his own statements of intention. However, many of these aims and intents would have been shared by those rulers. Preserving history and heritage are the aims of most epics, which are “likely to

[541] Skinner, “Motives, Intentions, and the Interpretation of Texts.,” 405.

embody the history, the ideals, and the values of a people," and are "often a cohesive force in ethnic or national consciousness."[542] It is that cohesive force, as well as the artistic beauty of the poetry, that has maintained the popularity of the *Shahnama* and helped the work to remain valid for later generations of Iranians. Epics and the historical narratives contained within are meant to be universal, to tell tales of the past, and in doing so to explain the present. As Meisami states, historical narratives "both validate the present and, by doing so, confirm the universality of history's recurrent patterns."[543] The *Shahnama*, by explaining the origins of some aspects of Iranian culture, validates the present (whenever that present might be). The theme of the rise and fall of states and dynasties also has universal cachet in any age, explaining the cyclical nature of revolutions and changes in government. This was particularly true of Khurasan in Ferdowsi's time, but can be extrapolated by an individual reader and used to examine his or her own particular situation. Epics such as the *Shahnama* provide a bedrock of past consciousness to be relied upon in uncertain times, preserving the cultural ideals and history of a glorious past.

[542] William L. Hanaway, "Epic Poetry," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 3, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies ([Albany, N.Y.]: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 96.

[543] Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present," 253.

CHAPTER 5: Historical: Uses of *Shahnama* Throughout Time and Space

Fersowsi's *Shahnama* has remained a popular work throughout much of history. Manuscripts of the epic were often commissioned by various princes and kings, not only in the Iranian world but as far afield in space and time as Fatimid Egypt, Georgia,[544] and Mongol and Timurid dynasties. Although in linguistically and ethnically Iranian dynasties this could have been partially an expectation, that to patronize literature and in particular to personally commission a copy of the *Shahnama* was considered a royal act, the meaning of the epic to these other groups is not as clear. The meaning of the text to the individual reader would not have stayed constant throughout such a long period of time. Although we cannot precisely ascertain from the text what ideological, political, or other aims an individual ruler may have had in commissioning a manuscript, an examination of the historical contexts of the dynasties and personages involved could be enlightening.[545] In this chapter, I will conduct a brief survey of some of the more famous manuscripts of the work up until the 15th century CE, ranging from the Great Mongol *Shahnama* to manuscripts commissioned by Timurid princes in Shiraz and Herat. Secondary scholarship abounds on specific manuscripts, and much of the information in this section will be taken from those sources. Some influential scholars in this field over the last 40 years are Oleg Grabar, Marianna Shreve Simpson, Charles Melville, and Firuza Abdullaeva.

[544] As Donald Rayfield writes, Ferdowsi's work likely even helped inspire or otherwise influence one of the most important Georgian epics, Leonti Mroveli's *Life of Kings: The Life of Georgian Kings and of their First Ancestors and Relatives*, written some 60 years after Ferdowsi finished his own work. See *The Literature of Georgia: A History* (London: Garnett Press, 2010), 69, 90.

[545] Although the exact text did not remain constant throughout the centuries and there were sometimes additional prefaces added, such as the Baysonghori Preface, in general the text cannot provide exact information about the way rulers read the work. This is one of the reasons that *Shahnama* scholarship tends to focus on the miniatures that illustrate the manuscripts. The choices of scenes to portray varied more than the text, and many works of secondary scholarship have focused on the artwork of individual manuscripts. A good anthology of articles on the topic is Robert Hillenbrand and Edinburgh Visual Arts Research Institute, eds., *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

The Shahnama *after Ferdowsi*

When examining the history of Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* in the centuries after its composition, we first must come to terms with our lack of manuscripts predating the thirteenth century CE. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing how many copies of the work were actually made in the intervening centuries and simply have not survived until the present day. Considering the number of so-called "imitative epics" that were allegedly composed from the eleventh century CE onwards, it is likely that Ferdowsi's epic, and perhaps others in the *Shahnama* genre, held a certain fascination for Iranian literati in the first centuries after its composition (although there is some non-trivial doubt as to this assumption). This lacuna in the historical record could quite simply be due to the tumultuous political history of Iran, including the successive Turkic invasions that started in the tenth century and continued onward. As Richard Bulliett states, "the eleventh and twelfth centuries are customarily presented as a period in Iranian history when relatively uncivilized Turks from Central Asia conquered Iran and were, in turn, seduced and conquered by the great Iranian imperial tradition in its Islamic form."[546] As we shall see, this appears, at least from our perspective, to be especially true of the Ghaznavids and Seljuks.

As has been shown in the previous chapters, during Ferdowsi's composition of the *Shahnama* near the city of Tus in Khurasan, the reigning Samanid regime fell to invading Qarakhanid nomads in approximately 999 CE. However, the Qarakhanids themselves were quickly brought to heel by the Ghaznavids, a dynasty descended from Turkish *ghulam* slave-soldiers of the Samanids. Having inherited most of the Samanid domains in Khurasan and Transoxania, Sultan Mahmūd continued to expand his territories westward, and perhaps most

[546] Bulliet, "Local Politics in Eastern Iran under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks," 36.

famously continually raided deep into the Indian subcontinent, bringing home to his capital in modern-day Afghanistan considerable riches.

For 40 years after the fall of the Samanids, Mahmūd's Ghaznavid empire, followed by his son Mas'ud, formed one of the easternmost frontiers of the Islamic world. As such, even though of Turkic descent themselves, the Ghaznavids in most ways continued the cultural project and system of government of the Samanids. As we shall see was quite common in the primarily Persian-speaking and ethnically Iranian professional bureaucracies of these eastern empires, even after the fall of a dynasty the chancery and other personnel often did not change. The Ghaznavids, who had never been actively hostile to the Samanids (quite the opposite in fact, for in the last few decades of the tenth century CE the two regimes not only coexisted, but several times came to each others' aid militarily), modeled their administration upon that of the Samanid amirs.[547] As Mahmūd continued to press westward past Khurasan and into Buyid lands, a similar phenomenon occurred. Scribes and other employees of the Buyid bureaucracy would have continued to serve under the new regime, likely without a considerable interruption of business. Sometimes they would be transferred to a different part of the new empire. For example, we are aware that "Qadi Abu l-Hasan 'Ali Shirazi, head of the civil administration in northern India during the reign of Mas'ud b. Mahmūd, came originally from Buyid circles."[548] We also know that under the Ghaznavids, New Persian continued to be, if not the only official language of the chancellery, at least one of the main languages. Bayhaqi's history, for example, written during the time of the rule of Mas'ud, is a prime example of a work in New Persian from this period. Many other works of both poetry and prose in New Persian were composed during this period,

547 Bosworth, "The Development of Persian Culture under the Early Ghaznavids," 36.
548 Ibid., 37.

although the favored style of poetry may have changed, reflecting the different preferences of Turkic rather than Iranian audiences. As CE Bosworth states of the Turkic Ghaznavids,

> most of them must have been eager for literature and poetry to suit their own tastes. Their attitudes and requirements may well have affected the nature of his epic and romantic literature in Persian. Within this literature, two streams of development may be discerned. One follows directly on from Firdausi, but with a romantic element injected into the epic, pushing the heroic element further and further into the background; the other stream is that of purely romantic and lyrical idylls in verse. But a stimulus to both was, it is suggested, a contribution of the early Ghaznavid period to Persian literature.[549]

As we shall see slightly later on, however, with some of the epics continuing the so-called "Sistan cycle" of heroes in the *Shahnama*, in later centuries the more heroic epic of Ferdowsi would once again predominate in popularity over that of the "romantic."

One of the most famous examples of quality personnel continuing under the new regime is the case of Nizam al-Mulk.[550] Having started out serving the Ghaznavid regime, sometime after the Ghaznavid defeat of Dandanqan in 1040[551] at the hands of the Seljuqs, Nizam al-Mulk transferred his allegiance to the new rulers of most of Iran proper, and in fact may have been the governor of the province of Khurasan by approximately 1059 CE. Nizam al-Mulk is perhaps most famed for his *Siyasatnama*, considered to be a prime example of a *Furstenspiegel*, or "Mirror for Princes."[552] The traditional reasoning given for the composition of this work was that Nizam al-Mulk and his contemporaries wrote such didactic literature as a way to "civilize," or certainly "Iranize," their new masters. As Rene Grousset stated in his 1970 work, "Nizam al-

549 Ibid., 40.

550 Like Ferdowsi himself, Nizam al-Mulk was a native of Tus, having been born in one of its suburbs, Raadkaan, in 1017 Cej. See S. Rizwan Ali Rizvi, *Nizam Al-Mulk Tusi: His Contribution to Statecraft, Political Theory, and the Art of Government* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1978), 1.

551 Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes; a History of Central Asia.*, 147.

552 Although Nizam al-Mulk served the Ghaznavids and then Saljuq for many decades, he wrote this work only very shortly before he was assassinated. According to Ibn Khallikan, Nizam al-Mulk was stabbed in the heart and died shortly thereafter, in an act almost certainly ordered by one of his political rivals. See Ibn Khallikan, "Part 2. Encounter with the Turks, C. Central Asia in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, 15. Ibn Khallikan: Biography of the Vizier Nizam Al-Mulk," in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, trans. Bn MacGuckin de Slane, Kindle (Indiana University Press, 2009.

Mulk and Persian bureaucracy strove to reduce the role of the Turkoman bands to that formerly played by the Turkish guard, the Mamelukes of the tenth century under the old caliphs and Buyid emirs, but it was often a most delicate task to impose obedience on these turbulent compatriots of the new sultan and to tether such inveterate nomads to the soil."[553] As we shall see slightly later during a discussion of the "Iranization" of the Mongols, such blatantly sedentarist thinking may be in need of updating. Regardless, the Ghaznavids and the Seljuks did rather quickly adopt many of the trappings of sedentary Iranian culture and bureaucracy. Many of the Seljuks even adopted traditional Iranian royal names, ones that would still be immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with the *Shahnama* or pre-Islamic Iranian history, such as Kai-Khosrau and Kai-Qobad.[554] During the time of Nizam al-Mulk's service and afterward, the Seljuks would continue to carve out a large swath of territory both in Iran proper and in Central Asia by subjugating local rulers. Often, these local rulers by this time were themselves of Turkic extraction. From 1089 onward, the Seljuks would expand their area of reign eastward over Transoxania, although the major cities such as Samarqand and Bukara would remain under Qarakhanid local governors.[555] During this time, as stated above, even though we have no extant manuscripts of the Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, it does appear as though there was a certain level of familiarity with its verses, or at least with verses on similar subject matter. Glazed tiles from the twelfth and thirteenth century have been known to be decorated with Ferdowsi's verses, or with what could be "variations on Firdausi's verses composed by calligraphers."[556] Of course, another possibility for the origins of

[553] Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes; a History of Central Asia*, 153.
[554] Ibid., 157.
[555] Ibid., 147.
[556] Adel T. Adamova, "The St. Petersburg Illustrated Shahnama of 733 Hijra (1333 AD) and the Injuid School of Painting," in *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 61. The scholar L. Giuzal'ian, writing in Russian, is among those who have studied these objects. While *Shahnama* seems to have been a popular source for such decorative poetry, it was certainly not the only one. As Yury Karev writes in an article on recently discovered 12th century

the verses could be the remnants of an oral epic tradition, with multiple versions of such poems floating about in the cultural ether, rather than simply poor variations on the work of Ferdowsi.

Imitative epics

It is well-known that in the centuries after Ferdowsi composed his *Shahnama*, many "imitative" epics were also composed. Of course, one should not necessarily think that the authors of such later epics were in someway trying to replace Ferdowsi's work, but were simply adding to it. As Firuza Abduallaeva explains, "such a process of 'improvement' to the composition is called *naziraftazmin* (Arabic: 'emulation'), or *javab* (Persian: 'answer'), when each author gives his own interpretation of a well-known story, trying to surpass his predecessor."[557] Many of these later epics would even be added as interpolations to Ferdowsi's own text, or bundled together with the *Shahnama* in the same manuscript. Some of these secondary epics reputed to have been written in the first two centuries after Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* are: *Garshasp-nama*, *Barzu-nama*, *Shahriyar-nama, Bahman-nama, Faramurz-nama*s and the *Kush-nama*.[558] Most of these secondary epics have received little scholarly attention in the west, so information about them, as well as any published manuscripts or critical editions, can be hard to find. The *Barzunama* is one of the epics that is often found interpolated into the *Shahnama* itself.[559] Like the *Shahnama* itself, there are no early manuscripts for this work. A recent scholarly treatment of this text, by Gabrielle van den Berg, states that "it is assumed that

wall paintings at Samarqand, which seem to include some Persian poetry on glazed tiles, "Since the eleventh century, the language [Persian] had been used frequently in Qarakhanid foundation inscriptions on monumental architecture; it appears, for example, on the 1079 portal of the Rabat-i Malik near Karmina, between Samarqand and Bukhara." See "Qarakhanid Wall Paintings in the Citadel of Samarqand: First Report and Preliminary Observations," *Muqarnas Online* 22, no. 1 (2005): 69.

557 Abdullaeva, "The 'Shahnama' in Persian Literary History," 22.

558 Bosworth, "The Development of Persian Culture under the Early Ghaznavids," 42.

559 Charles Melville, "Introduction," in *Shahnama Studies. 1*, ed. C. P Melville (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 2006), xxiii.

the *Barzunama* dates from the 11th century. The author of this work was long thought to be Abu 'l-'Ala 'Ata' b. Ya'qub al-Katib, known as Nakuk, a secretary of the Ghaznavid Ibrahim, son of Mas'ud (1059-99). This attribution, however, was based on a misreading of one of the lines in the *Barzunama*, and it is therefore not clear how old the *Barzunama* really is. The earliest witnesses of the *Barzunama* are around 1425."[560] This is more than two centuries after the earliest extant *Shahnama* manuscript, and nearly four centuries since the *Barzunama* was supposedly written.

A secondary epic for which we actually have more concrete information is the *Garshashp-nama*, which expands upon the life of another "Sistanian" hero. A supposed ancestor of Zal and Rustam, Garshasp is given short shrift in Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, but interestingly was one of the major dragon slayers and heroes of Avestan and Pahlavi literature.[561] The *Garshapnama* is believed to have been composed by ʻAli b. Ahmad Asadi Tusi (d. c. 1080 CE), who was quite obviously also connected to Ferdowsi's Khurasanian hometown of Tus. Asadi Tusi, as well as being a poet, also compiled the *Lughat-i Furs*, our earliest extant New Persian vocabulary. He is supposed to have composed his *Garshaspnama* in 1064-66 CE for the Amir of Nakchevan, in the Caucases.[562] In addition to the works above, there were many *Zafar-name*s composed in the centuries after Ferdowsi.

Thirteenth century

As mentioned above, there are very few extant *Shahnama* manuscripts from the thirteenth century CE. In fact, there are only three manuscripts in Persian from the entire century. The

[560] Gabrielle van den Berg, "The Barzunama in the Berlin Shahnama Manuscripts," in *Shahnama Studies. 1*, ed. C. P Melville (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 2006), 97.

[561] Dale Bishop has even referred to Keresāspa (Garshāsp) as "the Avestan counterpart to Rostam," and it may be that with the introduction of Rostam into the Iranian national mythos Garshāsp was let with a consequently reduced role. See "Literary Aspects of the Avesta," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 3, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies ([Albany, N.Y.]: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 47–48.

[562] Bosworth, "The Development of Persian Culture under the Early Ghaznavids," 43.

British Library has a copy dated to 1276, a copy from 1217 is held in Florence, and an undated copy is held in Beirut.[563] All are unillustrated, and at least the 1217 copy is incomplete. We know that an Arabic translation was made of the work in 1227. We do have significant indications, however, that the work was popular and was being read or recited, at least among certain segments of the population. The famed Ilkhanid historian and vizier ‘Ala al-Din Ata-Malek Juvayni, in his *Ta'rikh-i Jahan-gusha*, or *History of the World Conqueror*, quotes more than fifty of Ferdowsi's verses.[564] As Marianna Shreve Simpson has pointed out, there would have been no use quoting a work such as the *Shahnama* if his audience was not already familiar with it. She states that "it seems safe to assume that among these colleagues and companions a knowledge of classical Persian literature, including the *Shahnama*, was considered *de rigeur*. In fact, it is only such an erudite audience that could have been expected to recognize Firausi's verses, to identify their location in the epic, and to understand their meaning in the context of Juvaini's *History*."[565] Men of Juvaini's position in the Ilkhanid bureaucracy would also have been familiar with other works of classical Persian, and we do have manuscripts of those works dating from around the end of the thirteenth century CE. For example, a copy of Bal'ami's Persian adaptation of Tabari is held in the Freer Library, and is believed to date from around this time. Teresa Fitzherbert believes that this manuscript was "produced in the Jazira *c*. 1300, and possibly for a Christian governor of Mosul. . . the abbreviated redaction of the text and subject matter chosen for illustration strongly suggest it was designed for teaching the young, or recent converts to Islam,

[563] Charles Melville, "The 'Shahnama' in Historical Context," in *Epic of the Persian Kings: The Art of Ferdowsi's Shahnama*, ed. Barbara Brend and Charles Melville (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 11.
[564] Marianna Shreve Simpson, *The Illustration of an Epic: The Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts* (New York: Garland Pub., 1979), 313.
[565] Ibid., 38.

destined for high government or millitary office under the Ilkhans."[566] As we shall see slightly later, this fits in well with the traditional idea of the importance, perhaps even resurgence, of didactic literature during the Ilkhanid era. Like the copies of the *Shahnama* which began to be produced around the same time, this copy of Bal'ami had an illustrated frontispiece. Illustrations such as this are an important tool for art historians in dating manuscripts without an explicit colophon.

Frontispieces, illuminated and illustrated

Although we have at least two dated unillustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama* from the thirteenth century CE, many other early manuscripts are unfortunately undated. Without a colophon stating where and when the manuscript was copied, it is difficult to positively identify its origins. This is made more difficult by the incomplete nature of most manuscripts. Luckily, most early manuscripts of the *Shahnama* are illustrated, and Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* is almost certainly the most frequently illustrated text that we find in New Persian from the period.[567] There are in fact hundreds of illustrated *Shahnama*s from before the modern period, and it is to the illustrations, illuminations, and various frontispieces that scholars are often forced to turn to attempt to determine the origins of a particular manuscript.

Throughout the twentieth century CE, scholars and art historians have been consolidating information about the non-textual aspects of *Shahnama* and other illustrated Persian and Arabic manuscripts, and developing techniques to utilize such information. With the growing catalog of information about artistic styles and subjects over the decades, there has been more and more agreement on the origins of what appear to be some of the earliest manuscripts, although there is

566 Fitzherbert, Teresa, "Religious Diversity under Ilkhanid Rule c.1300 as Reflected in the Freer Bal'ami," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 390.
567 Grabar, "Why Was the Shahnama Illustrated ?," 91.

still a certain amount of debate over specific conclusions. In the 1970s and since, scholars such as Oleg Grabar, Sheila Blair, Marianna Shreve Simpson and others focused on certain of the most famous apparently fourteenth century CE manuscripts of the *Shahnama,* and came to some widely accepted conclusions as to the origins of these early manuscripts. Here, we will briefly outline some of the types of information that art historians have used in their attempts to date manuscripts.

As stated above, the frontispiece to the manuscript can prove to be a useful piece of information. Although almost no manuscripts from the time period are textually complete, most manuscripts still have their frontispieces attached. As Simpson stated in a recent article, "eleven early Persian manuscripts, or roughly a third of the known illustrated Ilkhanid and Injuid manuscripts, contain pictorial frontispieces."[568] As the frontispiece would be the first illustration that a reader of a manuscript saw when opening the cover, it in many ways serves as an invitation to read the work. The style of the frontispiece, and the subject of its illustration or illustrations, can tell us much about who the patron of the manuscript may have been, or, if it appears to be a commercially produced work,[569] what sorts of pictorial subjects the scriptorium would have felt would attract a possible reader.

Robert Hillenbrand recently wrote an article focusing on double frontispieces of the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth centuries CE, detailing what he saw to be a pronounced shift in the subjects of the illustrations. As we know, the city of Baghdad, seat of the 'Abbasid

[568] Marianna Shreve Simpson, "In the Beginning: Frontispieces and Front Matter in Ilkhanid and Injuid Manuscripts," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 215.

[569] Elaine Wright has recently argued that, at least under the Injuid governors of Shiraz, scriptoria or ateliers were not dedicated solely to the production of manuscripts for royal consumption, but also created works for commercial sale. These works, whether they be copies of the *Shahnama* or multi-volume copies of the Qur'an, could have been created with either nonspecific frontispieces, or blank pages that could then have a frontispiece created for the purchaser, See "Patronage of the Arts of the Book Under the Injuids of Shiraz," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 258.

caliphs, was considerably damaged both by natural disasters immediately preceding the Mongol invasions and by the sack of the city itself around 1258 CE. Artistic production in this famed city did not permanently cease, although there likely was an interruption. Hillenbrand sees the thirteenth century CE, despite its political disruption and social chaos, as a great era of frontispiece and other painting. He even sees in these works the existence of a so-called "Arabic" or "Mesopotamian" school of book painting. Oleg Grabar has recently touched on some points of these Arabic paintings. Regarding the thirteenth century CE, Grabar states that "this was the century of Arabic scientific and literary manuscripts acquiring illustrations. In this scheme the Iranian illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama* would belong to the same set of artistic creativity as the illustrations of the *Maqamat*, *Kalila wa Dimna* or Dioscorides, rather than to a world of princely images created in courts and inspired by Central Asian and Chinese models."[570] Hillenbrand would seem to agree, and tracks a noted change in the artistic subjects of corresponding frontispieces around the turn of the fourteenth century CE. Hillenbrand states that "the intellect rather than political power is exalted in the frontispieces of the thirteenth century. For the most part they proclaim that the pen is mightier than the sword. But the balance was to shift decisively—and for good—in the opposite direction in the fourteenth century and thereafter. This contrast between Arab veneration of learning and Persian veneration of power is, to say the least, instructive. But that is certainly the message of the frontispieces."[571] Leaving aside for the moment Hillenbrand's ideas about "Persian veneration of power," if such a drastic change in frontispieces did occur at a datable time, then it would be of considerable use to historians of Perso-Islamicate art in dating manuscripts.

[570] Grabar, "Why Was the Shahnama Illustrated ?," 96.
[571] Robert Hillenbrand, "Erudition Exalted: The Double Frontispiece to the Epistles of the Sincere Brethren," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 189.

As mentioned above, many works from the late thirteenth century onwards are introduced by illustrated frontispieces. Before we begin to see illustrated *Shahnama*s, there are several other works which have helped art historians begin a timeline of frontispiece styles. One of the earliest is a double frontispiece to an early 'Abbasid work, often known as the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa*, which has been positively dated to November 1287, and which was created in Baghdad.[572] The aforementioned copy of Bal'ami in the Freer Library has a somewhat unusual frontispiece, packed with information that modern scholars have seen as a declaration of Mongol legitimacy. To quote Fitzherbert yet again,

> the enthronement scene in the Bal'ami is headed by a quotation from the Qur'an and footed, not by musicians, dancers, and servants of the commisariat, but by a scene of execution . . . The frontispiece thus declares that the Biblical-Qur'anic Creator has invested the Ilkhanid ruler as the rightful successor to King David, state-founder *par excellence* for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, with the ultimate sanction over life and death under the Divine mandate . . . Together with the inscription, the depiction of Muslim, Turkic, and anachronistic Sasanian figures suggests a configuration intended to show a Mongol ruler in a religious and dynastic sequence, thus presenting a complex religious and political situation in simple and positive terms.[573]

Interestingly, the Mongol Ilkhanids may have been so successful in declaring their legitimate right to rule Iran that the native Injuid dynasty in Shiraz chose to emulate the Ilkhanid model of kingship. Simpson sees certain similarities in Injuid claims to dynastic legitimacy, and of course the important role of *Shahnama* patronage in such claims. She even sees the *Shahnama* as the "impetus" for the shift from "Arab" to "Persian" style frontispiece.[574] Such pictorial frontispieces can also provide some other interesting information, especially if the frontispiece introduces a

[572] Ibid., 183.

[573] Fitzherbert, Teresa, "Freer Bal'ami," 39–393.

[574] Simpson states that "given the Ilkhanid and Injuid preoccupation with their legitimacy and their need to proclaim their right to rule Iran in whole or, like the Injus, in part, and given also their evident attraction to and patronage of the Book of Kings and the concomitant rise of the illustrated *Shahnama* around 1300 (with its pictorial program dominated by enthronements, hunts, and other princely activities), it is perhaps not too far-fetched to imagine that Firdawsi's epic poem was also the impetus for the typological shift from 'author portrait' to royal representation that took place in frontispiece imagery about the same time." See "In the Beginning: Frontispieces and Front Matter in Ilkhanid and Injuid Manuscripts," 241.

royally patronized manuscript. Although Hillenbrand's so-called "Arab frontispiece" did not have a long-lasting impact on Perso-Islamicate art and books, the later "Persian frontispiece" certainly did.[575] The same type of frontispiece appeared to be popular more than a century later, during the Timurid era of rule in Iran and Afghanistan. As Firuza Abudullaeva and Charles Melville state in the introduction to their volume on the *Shahnama* of Ibrahim Sultan, the same "traditional" courtly pursuits of Persian nobility and royalty make their appearance in the frontispiece to this work, what they have referred to as "the manly world of the *Shahnama* . . . one of feasting, fighting and hunting—noble pastimes, which are indulged in to excess. All three aspects of kingly behavior are depicted in the frontispieces." It also seems as though royal artisans were not above appealing to the vanity of their masters, as such images, "which emphasize the archetypal code of courtly chivalry and honor . . . are probably portraits of Ibrahim Sultan himself."[576] This use of the ruling prince or patron as a physical model for heroes or important figures in illustrations is not at all unusual. Hillenbrand states that "this use of the prince as an examplar [of form and face] is of a piece with the teaching function which has been proposed for several fourteenth-century Persian manuscripts."[577]

Many manuscripts of the *Shahnama*, and of other works, were not only introduced by a pictorial frontispiece and often lavishly illustrated throughout, but were also highly illuminated. While these non-pictographic visual adornments and decorations cannot be as readily mined for information on royal patronage and intent, they can also help to date manuscripts. Other important information can come from technical details such as paper type, paint type, and other

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[575] Hillenbrand, "Erudition Exalted: The Double Frontispiece to the Epistles of the Sincere Brethren," 185.
[576] Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama*, 22.
[577] Robert Hillenbrand, "Exploring a Neglected Masterpiece: The Gulistan Shahnama of Baysunghur," *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 104.

elements. The decorations can also give some amount of information on the intended recipient of the work, for "illuminations serve not only the pragmatic function of guiding one's reading of a text through the marking of formal divisions within it, but also they often serve as image-builders, proclaiming the wealth and hence implied glory of the person for whom the manuscript was made."[578] Put simply, the more lavish the illuminations, the richer the patron or intended purchaser. The particular style of illuminations, like all visual arts, also follow certain "trends" that can help track the date of creation.

Fourteenth century Shahnamas

As can be seen by the database of the *Shahnama Project* of Cambridge University,[579] the fourteenth century CE is the first century for which we have a large number of extant manuscripts. Some of the more famous of these manuscripts are undated, but they include the so-called "small *Shahnama*s" and the Great Mongol *Shahnama,* as well as some other manuscripts which can be ascribed with reasonable certainly to the Injuid period in Shiraz. Marianna Shreve Simpson, in her Harvard Ph.D. dissertation in the late 1970s, wrote what is still considered the definitive scholarship on the small *Shahnama*s. [580]

Small Shahnamas

These small *Shahnama*s, so referred to because of their relatively diminutive size when compared to behemoth manuscripts such as the Great Mongol *Shahnama*, comprise three or four manuscripts that share certain similar aspects. Unfortunately, as with many early *Shahnama* manuscripts, they are no longer textually complete, and many illustrated folios have been

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578 Elaine Wright, "Firdausi and More: A Timurid Anthology of Epic Tales," in *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 66.

579 See http://Shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/page/about-data.html.

580 Simpson, *Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts*.

separated and are held in museums and private collections around the world. Shreve Simpson referred to these works in her dissertation as *Shahnama*s 1 and 2, the "Freer" *Shahnama* (because of its location in the Freer Gallery of Art), and the "Schulz" *Shahnama*, named after a former owner. Shreve Simpson did not include the Schulz manuscript in most of her work because it had been disassembled and sold off piece by piece, but focused instead on the other three.[581] Unfortunately, the *Shahanama Project* database now labels the Schulz manuscript as "destroyed."

None of these so-called small *Shahnama*s contain a colophon stating their time and place of origin, and do not contain information, such as a very specific frontispiece, that would allow their patron to be identified.[582] Nonetheless, Shreve Simpson believes that she has narrowed down their origins to the city of Baghdad, and the time of their creation to very near the turn of the fourteenth century. While perhaps not their specific royal patron, the ruling Ilkhan at the time was Ghazan (*r.* 1295-1304), a man known for his scholarly interests and linguistic knowledge, as well as for having been the first Ilkhan to convert to Islam.[583] Although the main Ilkhan capital was Tabriz in northwestern Iran, the rulers still used the old 'Abbasid capital of Baghdad during the cold, snowy winter months. As Shreve Simpson states, "Ghazan's interests ranged from natural history to astronomy to carpentry. He is also reputed to have been something of a linguist with at least a working knowledge of several languages including Arabic, Persian, Hindi,

[581] Ibid., 4.
[582] Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama*, 35.
[583] Raya Y. Shani does states that Ghazan likely was the patron of at least the Freer manuscript, writing that "as a new convert and a king, Ghazan became interested in history, genealogy and divinely ordained legitimacy, three issues dominating the *Shahnama* text. By and large, therefore, this *Shahnama* volume may be considered as an attempt by the probable patron, Ghazan, to merge his non-Iranian origins into the Islamic historical context in Iran." See "Illustrations of the Parable of the Ship of Faith in Firdausi's Prologue to the Shahnama," in *Shahnama Studies. 1*, ed. C. P Melville (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 2006), 12.

Kashmiri, Tibetan and Chinese, in addition to his native Mongol."[584] With these interests in mind, combined with a more typical Mongol interest in genealogy and history, one can easily see that a work such as Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* would appeal to a man such as Ghazan, as well as to any of his more sycophantic courtiers.

Shreve Simpson, as well as likely dating the origins of the small *Shahnama*s, also makes a much more ambitious claim in her dissertation. Although we have few extant manuscripts from the thirteenth century CE, making it difficult to either prove or disprove such a conclusion, Shreve Simpson believes that "considering the probable fact that neither the texts, nor the illustrative series, nor, with a few exceptions, the individual miniatures were based on any fixed exemplars, we may conclude that the three codices are not just the earliest extant illustrated *Shahnama*s, but the first such books ever produced."[585] If this is indeed the case, then the creation of the small *Shahnama*s in the early fourteenth century CE was a watershed moment in *Shahnama* production, for a large percentage of our later *Shahnama* manuscripts were illustrated to some extent. If the small *Shahnama*s were indeed the first illustrated manuscripts of the work, and so many manuscripts immediately thereafter were also illustrated, then one immediately must ask the question of "why?" Why did illustration of the *Shahnama* take off so quickly in popularity in the fourteenth century CE? Oleg Grabar has recently written an article asking this very question.

There have been many partial hypotheses put forth over the decades, perhaps centuries, to answer this very question. A common, very Iranocentric idea is that the Persian bureaucracy in

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[584] Simpson, *Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts*, 322. Ann K.S. Lambton adds to this list "Frankish," likely either French or Latin. See *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia: Aspects of Administrative, Economic, and Social History, 11th-14th Century* (Albany, N.Y.: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 253–254.

[585] Simpson, *Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts*, 324.

Ilkhanid territories, many of whom served earlier under the Seljuqs, created “picture books” in order to teach their new, semi-illiterate Mongol overlords how to rule Iran. If this was the case, why were no earlier *Shahnama*s created to teach Turks, such as the Ghaznavids, Qarakhanids, and Seljuqs? Was the astonishing rapidity with which the Mongols expanded their empire to blame for this? Had the earlier Turkic rulers already been suitably, linguistically “Persified” by the time they came to rule Iran? Recently, some scholars have attempted to approach the idea from a less Iranocentric perspective, and one which is also somewhat less insulting to the Mongols who so quickly overran Iran.[586]

Although we have seen above that some other important works of Iranian poetry, such as *Kalila wa Dimnah*, had been illustrated as early as the thirteenth century CE, others that we would expect to receive the same treatment had not been. Grabar puts forth the example that *Vis u Ramin*, “an epic of love written more or less at the same time as the *Shahnama*, which also lends itself to visual translations and commentaries, has not been illustrated to this day.”[587] What made the *Shahnama* special in this regard? Was it the work’s focus on “heroic,” rather than “romantic,” epic which made it so appealing to the Mongols? Is the more traditional theory in fact correct, that the illustrations made it a more useful “teaching tool”? Was it instead a greater “native” Iranian interest that led to the illustration of the *Shahnama*? As Grabar summarizes about some possibilities, “the premise can be proposed and the hypothesis argued that the *Shahnama* illustrations were part of a process of Iranization by the new Turkic and Mongol

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586 As David Morgan states, “The notion of the Mongols as a people who concerned themselves exclusively with hunting, herding, warfare and the other traditional activities of the steppe peoples, while leaving the business of government, and especially tax collection, to their Persian or Chinese bureaucrats, has perhaps had its day.” See “Reflections on Mongol Communications in the Ilkhanate,” in *The Sultan’s Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture*, ed. Hillenbrand, Carole, vol. 2, Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 375.

587 Grabar, “Why Was the Shahnama Illustrated ?,” 93.

rulers of the land, who sought either to integrate the heroic myths of Iran as their own or to show the local population the Mongol acceptance of their past . . . alternately, [one could also] argue that these illustrations did not originate with or for the Turkic and Mongol ruling classes, and with the urban elites of Iranian cities and perhaps even the native landowners."[588] In this case, these elites may have been hoping that the Mongol and Turkic rulers would then read themselves into the text and thus behave more "appropriately," at least as far as the Iranians would have considered it. As we have seen earlier, the "native landowners," mostly rural *dehqan*s in Eastern Iran and Central Asia, had been instrumental in helping to preserve the stories and histories which would go on to serve as the textual content or basis for Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*. We also know that illustrations of heroic feats must have held a certain amount of popularity in the greater Iranian cultural world throughout the centuries, as we can see from the seventh or eighth century frescoes at Panjikent. Why was it, however, that it may only have been in the fourteenth century, or perhaps slightly earlier, that the text and illustrations of it came to be integrated so fully into a complete "art of the book?" Before delving deeply into the Ilkhanid case, perhaps we should look at the case of Shiraz, a city which surrendered to the Mongols before any wholesale destruction took place, and its native dynasty of governors under the Ilkhans, the Injuids.

Injuids and Shiraz

There are at least four illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama* which date from the Injuid period, namely 1330, 1333, 1341, and approximately 1352.[589] We are fortunate enough that the 1341 copy has a specific dedication, in this case to Hajji Qiwam al-Dawla w al-Din

[588] Ibid., 96.

[589] Eleanor Sims, "Thoughts of a Shahnama Legacy of the Fourteenth Century: Four Inju Manuscripts and the Great Mongol Shahnama," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 269.

Hasan, an Injuid vizier in Shiraz.[590] The 1330 copy, currently held in Topkapi Library in Istanbul, also contains a specific date of origin.[591] The last copy, also known as the "Stephens" *Shahnama*, unfortunately does not contain such useful information, but is likely from the 1340s or early 1350s. As Elaine Wright states, the "Stephens *Shahnama*, which exhibits the same Ilkhanid traits as the Fars Malik and Yahya Qur'ans, can be placed firmly in Shiraz on the basis of its illustration style."[592] This would put it in what is often termed the "later" Injuid period.

As stated above, Shiraz was not destroyed or damaged like Baghdad. Its artistic traditions were able to continue uninterrupted. Because of this, scholars have looked to Injuid Shiraz in the second quarter of the fourteenth century CE in an attempt to study pre-existing Iranian art traditions and the ways in which they were incorporated into the Ilkhanid and later Timurid traditions. The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg, Russia, possesses a particularly fine example from 1333, and Russian scholars such as Adamova have had the chance to examine it fully. In Adamova's words, "examination of the miniatures' iconography revealed numerous details drawn from the ancient art of Iran, and identified as the principal feature of all the miniatures the survival (or conscious revival) of the artistic traditions of the pre-Mongol art of Iran. We have shown that at a time when Persian painting was open to influences from the Far East, the country's ancient tradition was being preserved and re-interpreted in the ateliers of Shiraz."[593] Unfortunately, the Injuid period of manuscript production of the *Shahnama* was rather short, and is also often separated further into an earlier and later period, when it would seem that a more "native" tradition of miniature painting started to integrate features from other areas. As

590 Wright, "Arts of the Book," 248.
591 Simpson, *Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts*, 8.
592 Wright, "Arts of the Book," 254–256.
593 Adamova, "Illustrated Shahnama of 1333 AD," 51.

Elaine Wright states, “unlike illuminations of the early period, those of the later Injuid period, from 1340 onwards, are stylistically diverse. In fact, the single unifying feature of illuminations of the later period is their obvious incorporation, in varying degrees, of traits borrowed from Ilkhanid illuminations.”[594] This is quite possibly due to the rapid ending of Ilkhanid rule in the 1340s, and the scattering of artisans and scribes from their imperial capital of Tabriz to other cities in Iran, including Shiraz. Unfortunately for us, the house of the Injuids soon followed the fall of their Mongol overlords and was no more, leaving only a few short decades of artistic output. The extent to which the Injuid school was a continuance of an earlier, pre-Mongol style of Iranian painting, or perhaps instead is a unique and bounded case of a style, is still a matter of quite unresolved scholarly debate. As Adamova again summarizes about the 1333 CE Injuid *Shahnama*,

> almost every work on Persian painting notes that the duration of the Injuid style was short . . . that it had no direct predecessors and that it vanished without trace. The illustrations of the 707/1307-8 *Kalila and Dimna*, acquired by the British Library in 1975, with easily recognizable features of the Injuid school, refute this judgement . . . This manuscript also suggests that in the early fourteenth century a well-developed school of miniature painting existed at Shiraz, which was different in many respects from the styles adopted by the artists of Tabriz . . and Baghdad . . . The latter two schools reveal the strong influence of Chinese art.[595]

It is also around this time, the 1330s or 1340s, that we see one of the first “critical editions” of the *Shahnama*. The aforementioned scholar Hamd-Allah Mustaufi, who died in the mid-1340s, produced an edition, as well as writing one of many *Zafarnama*s, or “Book of Victory,” which in his case was a prose continuation of the history of Iran up until the year 1334.[596] After the period of Injuid rule ended, the governorship of Shiraz passed on to the Muzaffarids, whose workshops were not nearly as prolific as those of their predecessors. We

594 Wright, “Arts of the Book,” 251.

595 Adamova, “Illustrated Shahnama of 1333 AD,” 59.

596 Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan’s Shahnama*, 34.I have yet to determine where this was written, whether in Shiraz or elsewhere.

have only two illustrated *Shahnama*s from this period, from 1371 and 1393-94, with approximately 12 and 67 illustrations, respectively.[597] It should be noted that this second example actually dates from immediately after the destruction of the Muzaffarid dynasty by Timur and his troops.

Mongols and the arts

After Chinghiz Khan and his descendants conquered a large swath of Eurasia in the thirteenth century CE, the Mongol empire split into four "hordes," of which the Ilkhans in Iran were merely one. The Mongols that remained closest to their Inner Asian home founded the Yuan dynasty in China and the Chaghatay Khanate in Central Asia, while the Iranian Ilkhans and the Golden Horde in the steppes of Southern Russia were the farthest afield. Three out of four hordes eventually converted to Islam. The Golden Horde, even though they ruled Christian Russia, "assimilated Islamic cultural and political structures rather than Russian ones."[598] The most likely cause is that the Mongols, as nomads themselves, had more in common with the Turkic Kipchack and Pecheneg nomads of the steppe than they did with the sedentary Russian Orthodox Christians. This means that in the Caucusus, and also in Central Asia, Ilkhanid Mongols had diplomacy to conduct, and at times even borders to defend, from coreligionists who were ostensibly also their brethren. Perhaps a certain amount of conscious differentiation between themselves as "Iranian" Mongols and Chaghatays and Golden Horde as the "Other" could help to explain Ilkhan embrace of Iranian art, including the *Shahnama*. In other ways, the interaction between sedentary Iranian culture and the Mongols may have been more similar to Chinese/Mongol Yuan relations. As Charles Halperin again states about the Golden Horde,

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[597] Ibid., 36.

[598] Charles J Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 7.

“Persian and Chinese intellectuals had the philosophical means to explain and legitimate nomadic conquest; their Russian counterparts did not. In China any change of dynasty, whether it involved alien invaders or not, could be explained by the fickle Mandate of Heaven. In Persia the cyclical theory of empires reassured the Muslim populace that the time of the Mongols would pass.”[599] This “cyclical theory of empires,” in the specifically Iranian case, is best exemplified by Ferdowsi’s *Shahnama*.

As mentioned above, intra-Mongol interactions were probably of major import to the Ilkhans and the other hordes. The Ilkhans had interactions with the Mamelukes of Egypt as well, but as for the Golden Horde, their “foreign policy was directed south toward the rich pastures and profitable trade routes of Azerbaidjan, held by the Mongol Ilkhanids of Persia.”[600] Being that the Ilkhans spent much of their time in their capital of Tabriz, near Azerbaijan, one would think that their Golden Horde neighbors would have been often on their mind. Proclaiming their adopted “Iranianness” could have definitely allowed them to differentiate themselves from their northern cousins, and thus even legitimate and help to perpetuate their regime.

A similar situation could have been the case on the Ilkhans’ northeastern border in Central Asia. Although the Chaghatay Khanate ruled territories in formerly Samanid Transoxania, by the time of the Chaghatay Khanate, Transoxanian culture may have temporarily lost much of its Iranian character, including its tradition of patronage of arts and sciences. The Chaghaty Khanate covered steppelands formerly ruled by the Qara-Khitai, and also Kashgaria and Transoxania, all the way to the Uighur domains. As Rene Grousset points out, however, and this may have been a significant factor on the non-Iranian culture of the Khanate, cities such as

599 Ibid., 8.
600 Ibid., 27.

Samarqand and Bukhara were “directly administered by the functionaries of the grand khan.”[601] Perhaps the lack of direct contact with these sedentary populations stunted any possible process of “Iranization” amongst the Mongols in Central Asia. As V.V. Barthold states, “political disturbances among the descendants of Jaghatay did not favour the development of science and literature; besides, Persian culture did not attain complete supremacy there. The Uighur alphabet was widely used as well as the Arabic; we find Uighur writers even at the court of the Timurids, down to and including the last representatives of that dynasty.”[602] This means, of course, that the intra-Mongol differentiation was a two-way street, not one practiced simply by the Iranized Ilkhans. We see that by the end of the fourteenth century, the term “Chaghatay” was used “in a way that suggests self-identification and pride, and that differentiates the Chaghatay from other Turko-Mongolian people.”[603] Perhaps there was an analagous situation with the term “Ilkhan” and the patronage of Iranian culture amongst the Ilkhanids.

Great Mongol Shahnama

Perhaps the most famous single manuscripts of the *Shahnama* in the pre-Safavid period is the so-called “Great Mongol *Shahnama*.” The work is called “Great” not simply because of the high artistic level of its illuminations and illustrations, but also because of its sheer physical size. This gargantuan work was, as stated above, much larger than the “small *Shahnama*s” that preceded it and the Injuid *Shahnama*s which were its rough contemporaries, with each page

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601 Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes; a History of Central Asia.*, 254–255.

602 Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 51. It is amusing to note here that the “Uighur alphabet” was in fact a variant of the same Aramaic as the older Persian Pahlavi, which was likely introduced to the Uighurs by Iranian-speaking Soghdian traders, but the Uighurs and Chaghatays did not “upgrade” to New Persian in the Arabic script.

603 Beatrice Forbes Manz, “The Development and Meaning of Chaghatay Identity,” in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Jo-Ann Gross (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 36.This information comes from the Timurid *Zafarnama* of Nizam al-Din Shami, only one of several works of the same name that were written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE.

containing a full six columns across and 31 lines vertically.[604]

The Ilkhans had a particular interest in the past, both their own Mongol history and the history of Iran. This interest may have begun with Ghazan himself, although Oljeitu and even Hülegü were known to have similar interests. Supposedly, Ghazan was the impetus for the writing of the *Jami-ut-Tavarikh* of Rashid ad-Din. Ghazan himself may even have been a source for some of the information on the Mongols contained within the work.[605] Grabar and Blair in the 1970s put forth the hypothesis that the specific patron for the Great Mongol Shahnama was, however, "Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad, son of the great vizier and scholar Rashid al-Din, who himself succeeded to the vizierate in 1328 and remained an influential force until his death in 1336."[606] The Ilkhans patronized not only copies of the *Shahnama*, but also historical compositions, such as those of Juvaini and those of the famed vizier Rashid al-Din, which works evinced the Ilkhans' "definite fascination with genealogy and history, both the recorded history of their own time and that of the more distant past even before the Islamic conquest of Iran."[607] Manuscripts were copied in many scriptoria, certainly in Baghdad and Tabriz, but also in other cities of Ilkhanid Iran. Before establishing Tabriz as their main capital, the Ilkhans instead based their administration in the northwestern Iranian city of Maragha, the scriptoria of which continued to be an important source of manuscripts, both of literature and of more scientific works.[608]

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[604] Sheila S. Blair, "Rewriting the History of the Great Mongol Shahnama," in *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 35.

[605] Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes; a History of Central Asia.*, 381.

[606] Simpson, *Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts*, 6.

[607] Ibid.

[608] Sheila S. Blair, "Calligraphers, Illuminators, and Painters in the Ilkhanid Scriptorium," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 169.

As with many other manuscript copies of the *Shahnama*, the Great Mongol *Shahnama* seems to have originally consisted of two separate volumes, although the work has now been so dissected and distributed by European art collectors as to make this fact not immediately apparent. This was also the case with the earlier "small *Shahnama*s," likely because of the sheer size of Ferdowsi's epic.[609] It was common for the second volume to begin with the accession of Luhrasp to the throne, after the abdication of Kay Khosrow, at which point Zoroastrianism was supposedly officially adopted by the royal house of Iran.[610] Ehsan Yarshater has referred to this change of rulership as the beginning of the second Kayanian period in the *Shahnama*, stating that "it has a complexion wholly different from that of the previous phase, even though the *Khwaday-namag* made Luhrasp a direct successor of Kai Khusrau."[611] It is of interest to note that this "division" of the text at the accession of Luhrasp seemed to become popular, perhaps customary, even in works that were actually in a single-volume format. In the Stephens *Shahnama*, a product of the ateliers of Shiraz in the early 1350s, a large illumination signaled the accession of Luhrasp.[612] Whether this practice of separating the earliest, mythical and legendary, sections of the *Shahnama* from the later, somewhat more "historical" sections was seen as such by the manuscript creators and readers is impossible to determine. Likely, although in a certain sense the widespread adoption of Zoroastrianism, and the introduction of Luhrasp's son Gushtasp (the Avestan Wishtasp, who may have been an actual historical person) may have seemed like a logical break in the minds of the manuscript creators, any attempt to divide the text into earlier "mythical" and later "historical" portions is an anachronistic reading of our own

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[609] Blair, "Rewriting the History of the Great Mongol Shahnama," 39.
[610] Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama*, 20.
[611] Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 465.
[612] Wright, "A Timurid Anthology," 70.

Western ideas of history back onto a text that did not view epic and history as separate entities. Any idea of "history as it really happened" was hundreds of years and thousands of miles from being elucidated, and "the difference between history and legend was as little known to the Mongols as to other primitive peoples. In all probability even the teachers of the Mongols, the Uighurs, had no real historical treatises; at any rate, Juwayni and Rashid ad-Din quote from their books only fantastic legends on the origin of their nation."[613] One can certainly argue that at this point in history, the entire human race consisted of relatively more "primitive peoples," and thus one should not necessarily see Barthold's comment as it was intended, which was likely as a slight against nomads.

Shahnama *and Iranization from the Mongol perspective*

It should be mentioned that historical annals or chronicles, such as those of Juvayni and Rashid al-Din, serve different functions than those of historical epics like the *Shahnama*. As Reynolds writes, "written history narrates the rise and fall of dynasties, the epic the rise and fall of individual heroes."[614] Before the expansion and conquests of the Mongols under Chinggiz Khan and his successors, unlike more sedentary civilizations like Iran, the Mongols did not have a tradition of dynastic history, or royal dynasties at all analogous to the Iranian case. However, modern scholars have begun to interrupt the traditional narrative of "uncivilized" Mongols being conquered culturally upon their military and political conquest of Iran.

Bert Fragner in a recent article has tried to subvert this traditional narrative of the "Iranization" of the Ilkhans by making the Mongols more active participants and agents in the process. As he writes, "Mongols and other transhumant groups and individuals belonging to the

[613] Bartol′d, *Turkestan*, 42.
[614] Reynolds, "Epic and History in the Arabic Tradition," 408.

Eurasian steppe cultures . . . certainly did not conceive of themselves as ‘new’ cultural elements within their world—including the territories inhabited by their sedentary neighbors. There is good reason to assume that they perceived of themselves as representatives of a fairly ‘old’ and traditional way of life preserved within their cultural and natural environment since ancient times.”[615] Removing the sedentarist bias of traditional historiographies, one can begin to view the Mongol conquests, and the foundation of Ilkhanid Iran, as a more negotiated process that had benefits for both sides. As Fragner points out, by the time of the Mongol conquests in the thirteenth century CE, the idea of “Iran” as a unified polity had not existed for quite some time, certainly after the political fragmentation of the post-’Abbasid period, and perhaps since the end of the Sasanian dynasty in the seventh century CE. Fragner notes that “the Ilkhans had to reinvent and reconstruct something [Iran, as they claimed to be *padishah*s of Iran] that had only survived in the collective consciousness, but not as a political reality, almost throughout the preceding seven hundred years!”[616] Again, the reconstruction of the idea of Iran could have helped the Ilkhanids legitimate themselves not only to the bulk of their own populace, but also in their relations with their Mongol brethren in the steppes and in Central Asia. In so doing, the Ilkhanids helped to further the use of the New Persian language even more so than most preceding dynasties, the Samanids perhaps excepted. As Fragner again writes, “the Ilkhans’ chancelleries tended to use Persian more as a language of administration than was the case during 'Abbasid times. There had been already a trend to intensify the use of Persian in bureaucratic affairs under the Samanids and the Ghaznavids, but in Mongol times Persian was

[615] Bert G. Fragner, “Ilkhanid Rule and Its Contributions to Iranian Political Culture,” in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 68.

[616] Ibid., 72. Melville agrees, noting that “One of the many consequences that flowed from the establishment of Mongol rule in Persia was the revival of the concept of the land of Iran ('Iranzamin,' known before the advent of Islam as 'Iranshahr').” See “The Mongols in Iran,” 43.

treated as the main linguistic means of communication for Muslims between Iran and China."[617] Seen in this light, although the concept of a unified Iran still existed, surviving as an idea of Iranian cultural and perhaps "national" identity, it served the Ilkhans' own purposes to amplify such claims and to make them once again a political reality.

Other scholars see the more widespread use of New Persian from the eleventh century onwards as a function of an Iranian diaspora motivated by the destruction of repeated nomadic invasions. Richard Bulliet writes that

> what supported the spread of New Persian from the Seljuq era onward was not just the military success of Turkoman warriors in Anatolia and Afghan tribesmen in northern India, but the migration out of Iran of literate scholars and litterateurs relocating themselves in response to deteriorating conditions in their homeland. To be sure, the Mongol invasion in the early 13th/7th century put a capstone on Iran's decline and forced many people to flee the destruction of their cities and notjust the freezing of their crops. But there is ample evidence that the Iranian diaspora was well under way before the Mongols arrived.[618]

Perhaps the Mongols chose to use Persian as one of their main diplomatic languages because it was already a widespread tongue. Also, one cannot discount the possibility that literati migrated from their homeland because of their possession of famed Iranian bureaucratic skill. Perhaps the chancelleries of surrounding dynasties were willing to pay handsomely for these scribes to relocate.

Fifteenth century

Less than half a century after the fall of effective Ilkhanid rule, Iran and Central Asia were once again rocked by a new set of nomadic conquests: those of Timur and of his successors. As had the Ilkhans before them, the Turco-Mongol Timurids would become royal patrons of the arts and continue the interest in the Iranian heritage of their conquered lands, as exemplified by Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*. Timurid rulers of cities in Iran and Afghanistan would commission some

617 Fragner, "Ilkhanid Rule," 79.
618 Bulliet, *Cotton, Climate, and Camels in Early Islamic Iran*, 142.

of the most well-known manuscripts of the *Shahnama* of the fifteenth century CE, such as those of Baysonghor, Ibrahim Sultan, and their brother Muhammad Juki. This Timurid interest in history dated from the very beginnings of the dynasty, however, as "Timur had the history of his campaigns written both in Persian and in Turkish; unfortunately only the Persian histories remain, and indeed we have almost nothing in Turkic from his period."[619] We are aware, however, that some of the major centers of Chaghatay language literature production were Samarkand, Herat, and Shiraz. As we have seen earlier, these cities had for centuries been centers of literature production in other languages as well.[620] These were some of the traditional sites of "civilized culture" from long before the Islamic era, and in many ways these and other major cities in Khurasan and Transoxania continued to exert a local character and autonomy perhaps up to the Timurid era. As Bulliett states, "such things as the astonishing preference for debased local coins over good silver caliphal coins in the Transoxanian cities strongly suggest that the sense of local autonomy and patriotic identification with a locale did not disappear from this area after the Arab conquest but continued for several centuries."[621] After the destruction and reconstruction of much of Eurasia in the Mongol period, many of the Timurids may have seen their local rule as a way of returning to "business as usual." One of most famed of the Timurids rulers, Shahrukh of Herat, may serve as an exemplar of this tendency.

The reign of Shahrukh was a time of great artistic and cultural production, and also of a reassertion of Islamic principles of rulership. After several centuries of the spread of Sufism and other, less "bookish" variants of Islam, Shahrukh chose to crack down on some of the leaders of local religious movements within his domain. The Pakistani scholar Shahzad Bashir writes that

[619] Manz, "The Development and Meaning of Chaghatay Identity," 41.
[620] Ibid.
[621] Bulliet, "Local Politics in Eastern Iran under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks," 41.

> Shahrukh's persecution of Nurbakhsh may have been a part of his effort to bolster the specifically 'Islamic' aspects of his political legitimacy. The reestablishment of a 'true Islam' after Mongol rule over Islamic populations was a dominant religiopolitical theme during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Shahrukh consciously tried to disassociate himself from Timur's legacy by discontinuing the use of Mongol royal titles and eliminating the practice of maintaining a Chingizid puppet as the nominal monarch of the empire. He therefore saw himself as a patron of true religion, which made religious pretenders such as Nurbakhsh ideologically intolerable.[622]

Between such religious proclivities and Shahrukh's patronage of literature in several different languages, one can see his respect for the written word and perhaps a conservative slant to his attitudes. One should not assume, however, that the persecution of Nurbaksh was necessarily completely representative of the reign of Shahrukh. According to other sources, he was instead

> the most remarkable of the Timurids. This son of the terrible Tamerlane was a good leader and a brave soldier, though of a peaceful disposition; he was humane, moderate, a lover of Persian letters, a great builder, a protector of poets and artists, and one of the best rulers Asia ever had. The evolution followed the same pattern as that from Jenghiz Khan to Kublai. His long reign from 1407 to 1447 was decisive for what in the cultural sphere has been called the Timurid renaissance, the golden age of Persian literature and art. Herat, which he made his capital, and Samarkand, the residence of his Olugh-beg (whom he had made governor of Transoxania), became the most brilliant centers of this renaissance. By one of the paradoxes that occur so often in history, the sons of the butcher who had ruined Ispahan and Shiraz were to become the most active protectors of Iranian culture.[623]

Shahrukh was not the only son of Tamerlane to be interested in literature. Mustaufi's *Zafarnama* tells us otherwise, as a dated manuscipt from Shiraz in 1405 "confirms that the Timurid princes played a large part in the preservation of such rare works, written earlier in the Mongol period, and sustained an interest in the verse epics of Iran."[624] And as we shall see, it was the grandsons of Tamerlane who would do even more to protect and to further Iranian literary culture. At least three of the sons of Shahrukh are known to us for their *Shahnamas*, and in fact may have been trying to outdo each other in this area.

[622] Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 65.
[623] Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes; a History of Central Asia.*, 457.
[624] Abdullaeva and Melville, *Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama*, 34.

The sons of Shahrukh

We know that, although Ibrahim Sultan was born in 1394, probably during a campaign of his father's in Asia Minor, he spent much of his younger years in the famed city of Samarqand, which long after the Samanid era was still amongst the "first cities" of Central Asia and was the imperial capital of Timur himself.[625] Perhaps it was due to the long literary heritage of Samarqand, or his father's love of the written word, or the lasting legacy of the Injuids in the Shiraz which would become his domain, or a combination of all three, but we know that Ibrahim Sultan chose to commission a copy of the *Shahnama*. Currently held in the Bodleian library (MS. Ouseley Add. 176), this *Shahnama* dates to Ibrahim Sultan's reign of 1414 to 1435. During approximately the same time frame, Ibrahim Sultan's younger brothers commissioned their own copies of the work.[626] Although perhaps the least studied of the manuscripts commissioned by the three brothers, the *Shahnama* of Mohammad Juki is made perhaps more interesting by its travels. The manuscript worked its way east, ending up in the collections of the Mughals of India, where the Persian language and culture was also highly appreciated.[627]

Literarily, by far the most important of the three *Shahnama* manuscripts is that of the third brother, Baysonghor. His manuscript is often termed a "rescension," and was not simply a copy of the work, but a mild adaptation that attempted to "modernize" its language. We know that by the time of the Timurids, "some *Shahnama* manuscripts started to be accompanied by

[625] Ibid., 25. The city must have been extensively rebuilt after the Mongols razed it while destroying the Khwarazmshah dnynasty.
[626] Ibid., 9.
[627] Melville, "The 'Shahnama' in Historical Context," 15. Interestingly, however, it appears as though few copies of the *Shahnama* were produced locally under royal patronage, as "there was an evident lack of imperial attention to [making copies of] Firdawsī's work during the early Mughal age, while the same period witnessed a proliferation of so-called sub-imperial or popular copies of the epic." See Sunil Sharma, "The Production of Mughal Shāhnāmas: Imperial, Sub-Imperial, and Provincial Manuscripts," in *Ferdowsi's Shāhnāma: Millennial Perspectives*, ed. Davidson, Olga M and Simpson, Marianna Shreve, Ilex Foundation Series 13, 2013, 87.

special glossaries of difficult words and idioms met in the text, which had become hardly comprehensible for the next generations."[628] Baysonghor's scholars also gathered more couplets from various other manuscripts of Ferdowsi's work, leading to it being somewhat longer in length than the average copy of the time. Baysonghor's copy was produced in the city of Herat, which was ruled by his father. Unlike many other cities of Eurasia, Herat was destroyed by neither the Mongols nor the Timurid conquests, and instead was "valued" and "adorned" by the family of Shahrukh and Baysonghor.[629] Perhaps this complete lack of destruction and disruption in the city helped contribute to the magnificence of its workshops, and partially explains its fame as a center of miniature production, as well as its production of the Baysonghori *Shahnama*.

The Baysonghori *Shahnama* is known for perhaps two of its major attributes. One, the beauty, but at the same time the paucity, of its illustrations. Robert Hillenbrand terms it one of the "three iconic illustrated versions of Firdausi's poem in Persian painting."[630] Although this manuscript may feature many fewer illustrations than its compatriots of a century before, each work may have had much more effort and detail devoted to it. As Hillenbrand notes, the first artist signature in Persian book painting dates from 1430, about the time of the Baysonghori *Shahnama*. Before this time, the paintings were done by nameless workers in royal or commercial atteliers. In the Ilkhanid era, for example, "these crafts were not particularly high-status jobs, for calligraphy (*khattat*), painting (*naqqashi*), and gilding *(zargari*), along with farming and conduit-digging, were among the trades assigned to the 220 slaves in the complex."[631] The artist signature proves that this lower class status may have begun to change.

[628] Abdullaeva, "The 'Shahnama' in Persian Literary History," 17.
[629] Toynbee, *Between Oxus and Jumna*, 73.
[630] Hillenbrand, "Exploring a Neglected Masterpiece," 87–98.
[631] Blair, "Ilkhanid Scriptorium," 178.

The other, and perhaps most famous attribute of the Baysonghori *Shahnama* was its new preface. By the time of the *Shahnama*s of Baysonghor's brothers, "a rich and articulate version of Ferdowsi's *vita* was placed at the beginning of the *Shahnama,*" and Baysonghor's version took this a step further with its "moving version of the romantically amplified *vita* as a preface to the text, which has since captured the imagination of many Iranians – laymen and scholars alike."[632] In many manuscripts after that of Baysonghor, this new preface either supplemented or completely supplanted the so-called "Older Preface." Although the exact author of the preface is uncertain, according to Abdullaeva and Melville "the historical information it contains has a reasonable chance of being accurate,"[633] and it can may be able to shed some light for us on contemporary opinions of Ferdowsi's work in the mid-fifteenth century CE.

As Olga M. Davidson writes in her latest work on the preface, "the narrative of the Bāysonghori Preface can be viewed as the multiform story of this reception and transmission—what I now propose to call an *ætiology.*"[634] Within this preface is told the story of the Baysonghor (also called the Gulistan) rescension itself. By the fifteenth century CE, there were many copies of Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* in the royal library of Herat, and the prince and his scholars wanted to combine all of them into one single volume. As the preface states,

> Although the multiple Shahnamas in the imperial library were many in number, because of his subtle nature and fine tastes, none of them were approved of by the prince. In the time of that imperial government, may it last until the day of judgement, when the previously limited state of art had achieved higher levels, and the production of literature had become ever more widespread, the drought-stricken sapling of talent, with the help of the falling rain of the his [the Prince's] education, was day in and day out refreshed. The garden of ideal, and its legacy, has moment by moment become more irrigated by the spring of his generosity. If, before this, the people of art and creativity were complaining of the era [in which they lived], thanks be to God that in the time of this eternal

[632] Shahbāzī, *Ferdowsī*, 4–6.

[633] Firuza Abdullaeva and Charles Melville, "Guest Editors' Introduction. Shahnama: The Millennium of an Epic Masterpiece.," *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 9.

[634] "Interweavings of Book and Performance in the Making of the Shaahnaama of Ferdowsi: Extrapolations from the Narrative of the So-Called Baaysonghori Preface," in *Ferdowsi's Shāhnāma: Millennial Perspectives*, ed. Davidson, Olga M and Simpson, Marianna Shreve, Ilex Foundation Series 13, 2013, 3.

> government each is being rewarded according to his own worthiness. The worth of each person of art will become apparent, when the works have fallen to those who know how to do them [i.e., the professionals]. The imperial suggestion was put into effect that of the several books, one should be made edited and complete.[635]

As Perso-Islamicate culture and Iranian scholars spread throughout the bulk of the Eastern Islamic world and beyond, Ferdowsi's work travelled with them. Although it is difficult to trace the influence of *Shahnama* on literatures in languages other than Persian, we can see that some manuscripts ended up in places far afield from Iran. The Baysonghori preface itself outlines this travel of the work, stating that "in a country where they speak little Persian language, like Egypt and the Levant and Rome and Turkistan, many books of *Shahnama* can be found. And in Khorasan and Fars and Iraq and Hindustan, there is not a village where there are not many copies of the *Shahnama*. And at this time that, 400 years passed in its history, they still write [copy] it."[636] Although we can speak somewhat less to the Levant and Rome, we know that the Isma'ili Fatimid dynasty in Egypt was roughly contemporaneous with the Samanids of

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[635] Apparently the literary style then current in Timurid Herat involved a considerable amount of embellishment and poetic imagery, making it difficult to translate into readable English. The variant of Persian used also seemed to contain a considerable amount of Arabic vocabulary, which seems to match what Rypka saw as the generally increasing infiltration of Persian by Arabic words through the centuries. He writes that "this permeation, which with increasing pomposity turns into a pronouncedly morbid growth at the end of the Mongol period (actually nothing other than an international Arabic transposed into the unimpaired system of the Persian language) continues unchanged under the Timurids and even survives the Safavids." See *History of Iranian Literature*, 73. I am indebted to Khodadad Rezakhani for his assistance in attempting to decipher and translate this text. Any problems with this translation are, of course, my fault alone. The original text reads:

هرچند شهنامه‌های متعدد در کتبخانهٔ معدّ بود، امّا چنانکه مزاج نازك و طبع لطیف شه و شهزاده آن پسندیدی نبود. و چون در روزگار دولت همایون، که با انقضای امان توأمان باد، کار فروبستهٔ هنر بالاگرفبه است، و نقد موزون سخن رواجی هرچه بمامتر یافته، نهال خشکسال فضل و دانش به‌امداد رشحات باران تربیتش یومافیو ما تارەترست، و گلزار آمال و امانی از منهل جود و سخاوتش لحظة فلحظة سیرابـتر، اگر پیش ازین اهل هنر استعداد از زمانه متشکی بودند، اگر پیش ازین اهل هنر استعداد از زمانه متشکی بودند، بحمدالله که درین دولت ابد پیوند هریك به موجب استحقاق جود می‌گردند. بیت

قدر اهل هنر پدید آید   کارها چون به کاردان افتد

اشارت همایون نافذ گشت که از چند کتاب یکی را مصحّح ساخته مکمّل گردانند

See Ghiyath al-Din Baysonghor, "Matn Moghaddemeh-Ye Baysonghori," in *Sarcheshmeha-ye Ferdowsi-Shenasi*, by M. A. Riyahi (Tehran: Institute of Cultural Studies and Research, 1372), 368. A special thanks to Dr. Mahmoud Omidsalar for scanning and emailing this preface to me, from a book in his own personal collection.

[636] Baysonghor, "Matn Moghaddemeh-Ye Baysonghori," 417–418. reads

حتّی در بلادی که زبان پارسی کم می گویند مثل مصر و شام و روم و ترکستان کتاب کهنامه بسیار می توان یافت. و در خواسان و فارس و عراقین و هندوستان خود هیچ قصبه نباشد که آنجا کتاب شهنامه متعدّد نبود. و این زمان که چهار صد سال از آن تاریخ گذاشته است هنوز می نویسند.

Khurasan and Transoxania, and that many Iranian Isma'ilis were either in contact with scholars at the Fatimid court or moved there themselves (perhaps to avoid any persecution by the Sunni Samanids). We have records of Isma'ili scholars at the Fatimid court with Iranian *nisba*s or classically Iranian names, such as Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi, and Nasir-i Khusraw.[637] Iranian and "eastern" Isma'ilis were known as the *Nizariyya*, and their own state in Alamut continued after the fall of the Fatimids. In the Iranian tradition of the *Shahnama* and dynastic history, they "commissioned the compilation of official chronicles, recording the events of their state in Persia according to the reigns of the successive lords of Alamut." Unfortunately, the majority of these histories did not survive the onslaught of the Mongols and the Ilkhanid reign after.[638]

As mentioned earlier, the Mughals in India were great lovers of Persian culture and tradition. According to some sources, the Mughals did not even refer to themselves as ultimate rulers, but were instead "proud to wear the title, not of kings, but of viceroys to the kings of Persia."[639] As we have seen, one of our earliest extant *Shahnama*s was actually an Arabic translation in 1227. We also know that several ethnically Turkish dynasties, such as the Ghaznavids and Seljuks, were cultural heirs to earlier Iranian civilization. Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that under the Ottomans, the work was also translated into Ottoman Turkish, although also appreciated in the original Persian.[640] We know that "the Ottomans not only produced their own translations and imitations of the *Shahnama*, but also constituted a ready market for illustrated manuscripts, stimulating the commercial production of handsome

[637] Daftary, "Introduction," 4.
[638] Ibid., 4–7.
[639] Tom Holland, *Persian Fire: The First World Empire and the Battle for the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), xix.
[640] Melville, "The 'Shahnama' in Historical Context," 4.

copies especially from Shiraz, throughout the sixteenth century."[641] Even though this dissertation does not attempt to cover any material from beyond the Timurid era, the Safavids of Iran from the sixteenth century CE onwards continued to produce beautifully illuminated and illustrated copies of Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, both for their own enjoyment and as gifts to other powers. One well-known copy, that of Shah Tahmasp, was "sent as a diplomatic gift . . . to the new Ottoman Soltan Selim II."[642]

The Survival of Epic

We have seen that in the centuries after its composition, Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* had either continued to maintain relevance or undergone a resurgence in popularity. Why is that the case? Stripped from the historical context of its composition, how had it managed to maintain cultural currency? Why has it, as Charles Melville writes, "been called the Iranians' identity card (*shenas-nameh*)"?[643] What is it about the *Shahnama*, and to some extent epics in general, that lead them to maintain relevancy long after many other texts have fallen by the wayside? What do epics tell us about their subjects, about their composers, about their later readers, and about ourselves?

Obviously, many different cultures have produced their own epic poetry over the millennia. Scholars have devoted entire anthologies and volumes, if not libraries, to the attempt to answer these questions. Comparing other famous epics with Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, it appears that the aims of legitimation and self-promotion are not at all confined to the Iranian case. A scholar of Slavic epic, Susana Torres Prietto, has recently written that "these texts have survived, whether or not they were originally created in written form, as independent units and self-

[641] Ibid., 14.
[642] Ibid.
[643] Ibid., 3.

contained compositions. The relation of this type of epic to history should thus be clear: history provides an argument that literature embellishes for the glorification of present or past rulers, always in the service of a propagandistic aim."[644] However, does this fully explain the cross-cultural popularity of a text such as Fersowsi's *Shahnama*?

The spread of *Shahnama* could partially be because of its embedment in an eastern, or as Marshall Hodgson describes, "Perso-Islamicate," culture that spread into Central Asia and beyond with the Samanids and their successors. Although many of the stories contained within *Shahnama* were originally created within a pre-Islamic Zoroastrian context, what Ferdowsi managed to do was to successfully meld those older stories, ideas and values with his contemporary Islamic context. As such, they could become part of the canon of Islamicate literature. They also may have given other peoples who accepted Islam a roadmap of how to maintain their own traditions within their new religious framework. Although historical epics like *Shahnama* contain information about the past of a people, they are not slaves to any "modern" ideas of history, and anachronisms are not only acceptable but almost expected. They help peoples place themselves and their own history within a larger framework, in this case within that of divinely revealed Islamic history. As Jan Puhvel writes, "the matter of historicity never bothered the practitioners of the art of epic poetry. For them the question of myth versus history was still blissfully neutralized."[645] By melding their own myths and histories with the framework of Islam (or any other religion or worldview), epics help people to proclaim that they are *not* to be relegated to some sort of second-class status by their coreligionists, or by anyone else for that matter. Although Ferdowsi and his *Shahnama* were not connected to the earlier

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[644] Susana Torres Prietto, "Slavic Epic: Past Tales and Present Myths," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Rāflaub (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 230.

[645] Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 118.

shu'ubiyya movement, Iranian epic could have helped Iranians, Turks, and others to make similar arguments against any sort of Arab-first ethnocentrism in early Islam.

Epics also, as we have seen, have the potential to make excellent didactic literature. They can teach on topics not only historical and political, but also moral and ethical. This was obvious long before Ferdowsi's composition of his *Shahnama* (although perhaps not before the composition of some of its earliest forebears). Perhaps the seemingly cyclical nature of *Shahnama* popularity is due partially to how well these moral and ethical lessons were being received by the ruling classes. Raymond D. Marks, in his examination of Silius's *Punica*, examined the place of historical epics in ancient Rome. Many of Marks's observations also ring true when examining *Shahnama*. According to Marks, when writing about Silius, "the care with which he defends his choice of historical epic on the basis of its superior moral and civic value [as compared to mythological epic] also suggests . . . that the historical epic was suffering precisely because of its inability to teach and instruct readers within that moral climate."[646] As we have seen with *Shahnama*, however, many times the moral and political "climate" was more than willing to allow Ferdowsi's epic to teach people the lessons of Iran's history. Perhaps that, as well as the evident entertainment value and historical edification, is why Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* has so often been commissioned, read, and enjoyed by so many different peoples in diverse places and times.

Along with the widespread popularity of Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* across cultural, ethnic, and national boundaries, its import for Iranian and Perso-Islamicate identity cannot be understated. *Shahnama* and works of prose history such as those of Bal'ami, Gardizi, Beyhaqi

[646] Raymond D. Marks, "The Song and the Sword: Silius's Punica and the Crisis of Early Imperial Epic," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Rāflaub (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 194.

and others during the so-called "New Persian Renaissance" helped lay down the foundation for cultural identities that have persisted until the present day. This is not to say that there exists some sort of static, and stagnant, Iranian identity that has existed since some type of "medieval" creation. Instead, as Somers points out, ontological narrativity allows for a very fluid and dynamic sense of identity. It is the interplay between narrative and lived experience that creates a sense of who one and one's society are. In his recent work on the Achaemenids, and more broadly on the ideas of empire, Bruce Lincoln writes that "I hope to get past the familiar debate on whether ideals and beliefs or material interests constitute the *real* motive force in history. As most serious observers have long since realized, productive discussion begins with the recognition that consciousness and material circumstances are dialectically related and mutually sustaining."[647] It is these material circumstances, not just in a Marxian sense of economics but instead comprehensive of all aspects of the world around oneself, that keep stagnation from occurring. An enduring and historically rooted sense of collective cultural identity does not erase all room for human agency. Instead, it helps inform a person and a society as to *how* one should exercise that agency.

In many ways, when one looks aat contemporary geopolitics, one can see the interaction of these historically rooted identities, on all sides of diplomatic or military conflicts. This is as much true in the American case as it is in the Iranian, or the Iraqi, or any other. Just as the stories from Iranian history and mythology, whether from *Shahnama* or not, help to inform modern Iranian identities and politics, the modern American collective psyche and guiding consciousness of diplomacy is just as rooted in the past. Instead of Rostam, Anushirvan and Khosrow the Great,

[647] *Religion, Empire, and Torture: The Case of Achaemenian Persia, with a Postscript on Abu Ghraib* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xi.

however, some of the constituent elements of American identity are de Toqueville's idea of "American exceptionalism," ideas of "rugged individuality," and perhaps even more specifically the Western American mythos of manifest destiny. Childhood American games of "cowboys and Indians," for example, with their tremendous effect of "othering" an unknown, turning the unfamiliar into the enemy, probably have at least as much effect on the world around us as do Iranian childrens' books of *Shahnama* tales. In the last updated preface to his 1978 classic *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 that "without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like 'us' and didn't appreciate 'our' values—the very core of traditional Orientalist dogma as I describe its creation and circulation in this book—there would have been no war."[648] In a very real way, the entire idea of "American exceptionalism" is a type of Orientalism that juxtaposes the US against the entirety of the rest of the world. As one can see in the runup to the 2016 US presidential elections, even the older idea of the US as a "nation of immigrants" seems to be changing. If the stump speeches of the current crop of GOP presidential candidates are any indication, the idea of America as the land of opportunity has morphed into a barely recognizable, xenophobic reflection of its former self.

Luckily for us, the Iranian identity founded upon *Shahnama* and similar works is actually a much more inclusive and welcoming concept. As we saw in works such as the *Tarikh-e Sistan* and *Tarikh-e Bokhara*, there were multiple regional Iranian identities promulgated during the New Persian Renaissance, but never at the expense of greater unity. The entire unifying force of the New Persian language, with the newly codified language acting as an umbrella over regions that previously spoke other Iranian tongues, and the way that *Shahnama* helped to include Arabs, Iranians, Turks and others in the greater thrust of Islamic history, speak to the inclusiveness and

[648] *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), xx.

welcoming nature of such identities. However, the cyclical nature of Iranian history as written in *Shahnama*, with the successive invasions of greater Iran by the foreign, causing the fall of a dynasty and the founding of a new state, cannot help but lead to a certain amount of paranoia about the idea of being conquered by others.[649] When one views the last 12 years of American military operations through this lens, and through Iranian eyes, the world seems very different than it might from an American perspective. With both their eastern and western neighbors being occupied by a foreign power, and a power whose leaders often seem to embody the very concept of "Islamophobia," one cannot help but understand a certain amount of Iranian reluctance to promise to not develop nuclear weapons. With the diplomatic negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, and the letter written to the Islamic Republic by members of the American House of Representatives, what we are seeing is the interaction and opposition of Iranian and American cultural identities in contemporary geopolitics. Attempting to study Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, and other seminal works of the New Persian Renaissance, is far from an esoteric project, just as with all the disciplines of the humanities. Doing so is the attempt to understand not only ourselves, but others, and perhaps most importantly, the Others that we designate as such. When talking about philology and its relationship to humanism, Lincoln writes that "rather than alienation and hostility to another time and another different culture, philology as applied to *Weltliteratur* involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign Other."[650] In this dissertation, I have attempted to keep in mind such an attitude and mindset, much as one would

[649] Houchang Chehabi's excellent article explores this subject in great and nuanced depth. See "The Paranoid Style in Iranian Historiography," in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London; New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation, 2009), 155–76.

[650] *Religion, Empire, and Torture*, xxv.

wish that our world leaders would attempt to do. In studying the genesis of an Iranian and Central Asian Perso-Islamicate cultural identity, I have tried to avoid “essentializing” Iranian identity by situating it in some primordial past. Instead, I chose to view the New Persian Renaissance beginning in the ninth century CE as a “starting point” of a kind for the development of modern Iranian identity, although it is certainly not the only era in which I could have chosen to begin this study. My study here has been my attempt to follow in the footsteps of the best of older humanist “Orientalists,” rather than those of whom Said warns us. In his words, “what I do argue also is that there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency, and outright war.”[651] I do not think it an exaggeration to label this sort of “campaign” a perversion of the best impulses of the humanities, and of the study of the Nile-to-Jaxartes region more specifically. Twelve years later, Said's last preface seems ironic in a truly unfortunate sense. When talking about US actions in the invasion of Iraq, he refers to the “looting, pillaging, and destruction of Iraq's libraries and museums. What our leaders and their intellectual lackeys seem incapable of understanding is that history cannot be swept clean like a blackboard, clean so that 'we' might inscribe our own future there and impose our own forms of life for these lesser people to follow.”[652] Read from the perspective of 2015, this sort of campaign seems even more reminiscent of the recent actions of the so-called “Islamic State” than it does American attitudes. In a contemporary world in which some of the greatest treasures of human civilization are rapidly disappearing, whether the victims of vandalism by foreign soldiers

[651] Said, *Orientalism*, xix.
[652] Ibid., xviii.

or by misguided native sons such as Daesh, the study of the humanities seems more important than ever. Only by understanding where we have been can we truly understand who we are, where we will choose to go in the future, and most importantly, *why*. Hopefully this brief study of the connection of Iranian identities to Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* and other works of the New Persian Renaissance helps to provide some sort of guide to the above issues, although instead it may have asked more questions that it has answered. Perhaps, though, it is this very interrogation of one's motivations that is at the root of cultural identities as dynamic as those of the greater Iranian world in the last millennium, and is thus a more fitting tribute to the soldiers, bureaucrats, rulers and literati of the Nile-to-Jaxartes region than would have been any single answer more convenient and concrete.

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