العصور الوسطى

AL-ʿUṢŪR AL-WUSṬĀ 25 (2017)

THE JOURNAL OF

MIDDLE EAST MEDIEVALISTS

About

Middle East Medievalists (MEM) is an international professional non-profit association of scholars interested in the study of the Islamic lands of the Middle East during the medieval period (defined roughly as 500-1500 C.E.). MEM officially came into existence on 15 November 1989 at its first annual meeting, held in Toronto. It is a non-profit organization incorporated in the state of Illinois. MEM has two primary goals: to increase the representation of medieval scholarship at scholarly meetings in North America and elsewhere by co-sponsoring panels; and to foster communication among individuals and organizations with an interest in the study of the medieval Middle East. As part of its effort to promote scholarship and facilitate communication among its members, MEM publishes al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā (The Journal of Middle East Medievalists).

ISSN 1068-1051

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Website of the Middle East Medievalists: http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/
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Letter from the Editors

This is our third issue of *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* (*UW*) in its new (online, peer-reviewed, and open-access) format. To begin, our deepest thanks to Christiane-Marie Abu Sarah, our indispensable managing editor.

We have been fortunate, once again, in attracting contributions of decidedly high caliber; we are forever grateful to our colleagues for their response to our invitations to submit current scholarship, produce reviews of new books and other pertinent items, and participate on the editorial board. It is gratifying to see a spectrum of topic areas represented by the articles themselves and in the books under review. These bespeak a flourishing in the adjoining fields of early and medieval Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern studies.

UW stands as a platform from which to bring out significant new scholarship. But our aim, from the onset, has been to rethink the format and role of the academic journal. We are committed, first of all, to publishing submissions in as expeditious a manner as possible (without, of course, sacrificing editorial care). As most of us know first hand, it is frustrating to devote considerable effort to a written piece only to have it linger, even for years, before publication. We are committed, as well, to producing substantial scholarly articles and book reviews. The current roster of articles, book reviews and conference reports speaks, we believe, to these aims. Finally, we are also determined to promote non-Anglophone scholarship. We anticipate publishing our first article in French in the near future, and we strongly encourage our readers in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere to submit their work to us. We should add that we are committed to the goal of reviewing non-Anglophone scholarship, in all European and Middle Eastern languages.

As is our practice, we open with a solicited comment by the previous year's recipient of the Middle East Medievalists (MEM) Lifetime Achievement Award. Professor Fred Donner, the 2017 recipient, is a previous president of MEM and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA),

(Photo of Antoine Borrut by Juliette Fradin Photography)

and long-time editor of *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* (in its previous format). He has for decades set a standard for quality scholarship, mentoring, and collegiality in our related fields. It seems wholly unnecessary to introduce his work here. His comment speaks, in part, to clear writing: we are delighted, as editors, to offer our unqualified endorsement.

Our new issue contains five article-length studies. Digital humanities offers significant promise to our fields, but has not enjoyed the exposure that it deserves. For this reason, we are pleased to include a discussion, by Benjamin Kiessling, Matthew Miller, Maxim Romanov and Sarah Savant, of their ambitious and potentially far-reaching project, the Open Islamicate Texts Initiative. Luke Treadwell's close discussion of Tulunid mints underscores the value of numismatic evidence, and joins a growing body of scholarship on the Tulunid period per se and 'post-imperial' Islamic political history more generally. In a thoughtful and engaging discussion, altogether typical of his scholarship, Michael Cooperson traces the genealogy of the hoary notion of the Abbasid 'golden age.' Alison Vacca, in a compelling study of Abbasid-era social history, argues for a closer examination of communal identity and loyalty in the third/ninth century Caucasus. Identity, in this case as it relates to Arab society and history in the Islamic conquest period, is the focus of Robert Hoyland's detailed discussion.

We are no less pleased to produce eight book reviews. Our intent remains unchanged: to produce extended reviews that serve their proper purpose, that is, to provide our readers with informed and engaged discussions of new work. We would again note the wealth of scholarship on display in the publications discussed therein. The value of book reviews needs no explanation: we urge our colleagues to keep us posted regarding forthcoming and newly published works, and submit their reviews to us here. In addition, we have two extended reports of conferences held in 2015-2017, and remembrances of Anna Arkadievna Iskoz-Dolinina, a prominent Russian and Soviet Arabist, and Günter Lüling, a German scholar of the Qurʾān and early Islamic history. We are grateful to our colleagues for agreeing to produce shorter submissions of this kind.

We close on two familiar notes. First, we rely on your financial support. Our journal is online, open access, and peer-reviewed, but it is certainly not free. Please keep your membership in Middle East Medievalists up to date: it goes a long way to helping us cover our costs. For information on membership and the fund, please proceed to the MEM home page at http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/ and click on "MEMbership." Second, as we noted in our previous issue (*UW* 24 [2016]), the full run of the journal is available online. Our deepest thanks to Professor Fred Donner for his assistance in this regard. The full archive can be accessed on our website:

http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/volume-index/

Sincerely,

Antoine Borrut and Matthew S. Gordon

MEM Awards

Remarks by the Recipient of the 2016 MEM Lifetime Achievement Award Given at the Annual Meeting of Middle East Medievalists (Boston, 17 November 2016)

The Maturing of Medieval Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies*

Fred M. Donner
University of Chicago

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Let me begin by expressing my profound gratitude to the officers of Middle East Medievalists for honoring me with MEM's Lifetime Achievement Award. It is indeed a great honor to be so recognized by my esteemed colleagues—even though such an honor is a kind of double-edged sword. On the one hand, the recognition is a source of deep satisfaction; on the other, it reaffirms the sobering reality that one is nearing the end of one's game. But, since turning the award down would not change the reality of age attained, I am most pleased and honored to accept it. Thank you all very much.

I would like now to spend a few minutes reminiscing on how our "field" of investigation has changed since I first began to study it seriously—which was about a half-century ago, inasmuch as I enrolled in my first Arabic course in the summer of 1965. Thinking back on the 1960s and 1970s, it is surprising even for me to realize how astonishingly undeveloped the study of medieval Islam and early or medieval Near Eastern history was, compared to the situation today; and those of you who began your studies considerably later, say in the 1990s or after, or who indeed are still engaged in graduate study now, may be interested to learn just how rudimentary things were when I began my formal studies of the Near East, or even when I completed them and took up my first teaching position in Yale's Department of History in the fall of 1975.

First of all, there were far fewer universities than today that offered any instruction in Middle Eastern languages or in the region's history and cultures. Some of the relatively few programs that did exist taught only Arabic, not

* This essay is based loosely on my notes for remarks made at the MEM Members' Meeting held during the MESA conference in Boston, MA, in November 2016.

Persian or Turkish as well, and what was offered sometimes did not lead to a very advanced level of mastery. Enrollments in Near Eastern language courses and courses dealing with Islamic history were generally fairly low in those days, and persuading university administrations to commit resources to what were then generally considered "obscure" languages was not easy. There were summer intensive language courses for American students, but almost all were located in the U.S. In the 1960s there existed east and west coast summer intensive language programs sponsored by consortia of the few universities that had Middle East programs, but there did not yet exist the dozens of summer language programs one sees today. Study abroad programs for Middle Eastern languages did not get underway, really, until the 1970s. I was fortunate enough to participate in the late 1960s in what was perhaps the first such program for Arabic, a year-long program in Lebanon at the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS). This was an institution operated by the British Foreign Office in order to train diplomats and army personnel destined for service in England's many Middle Eastern protectorates—which included, in those days, Sudan, Aden, and the "Trucial States" of the Persian Gulf. This American study-abroad program for Arabic (NUPOSA—the National Undergraduate Program for Overseas Study of Arabic) ran for about ten years with funding from the Carnegie Foundation; it was explicitly designed as a kind of experiment or pilot program, limited to about eight students per year, to see if such a venture might be desirable over the longer term. Eventually, the NUPOSA program's success led the U.S. government to establish the CASA program at the American University in Cairo—which in the 1970s became the main study-abroad program for Arabic; and in the past twenty years, many more study-abroad programs for Arabic were established, although today a number of these have been forced to close down because of political instability (notably programs in Yemen and Syria). Language study in Iran has been difficult for American students since 1979 for obvious reasons. I would say that programs for language study in Turkey, which have until recently been quite robust, must be put on our watch list as political developments play out in that country.

All of this shows that the number of people being produced annually with competence in Arabic before and during the 1970s was very small, and often their training was not very deep; and the same was true generally speaking for students of Persian and Turkish. The number of students entering graduate training in Middle Eastern studies was still minuscule, and more importantly, very few of them brought much area background to their graduate studies. Often entering PhD students in the 1960s and 1970s would have to enroll in Elementary Arabic in their first year, because they had had no way to begin the language in their undergraduate institution, and the dearth of study-abroad and intensive summer programs meant that not a few of them in the 1960s and into the 1970s, completed their doctoral studies with only about four years of Arabic training under their belts, barely sufficient to do research in Arabic sources, and often with virtually no active command of spoken Arabic. This is in no way meant as a criticism of these earlier generations of scholars: most were

intelligent, dedicated, and did the best they could with the training they received, but the state of the field before the 1970s was such that they simply could not get really deep training. The robust training available today, with dozens of intensive and summer programs here and abroad, means that, in this respect, we live in a different—and much better—world.

Beyond language training, Middle Eastern studies were underdeveloped in other ways too. There were fewer programs, and the programs were smaller, with fewer faculty in each than is the norm today. There were many dedicated scholars, but when I was studying in the 1960s it was basically the case that important "fields" within Middle Eastern studies were virtually the 'property' of one established specialist, whose knowledge of that "field" was considered definitive—if a subject that is the province of only one practitioner can really be called a "field." So, for example, if you wished to know about Islamic law, you consulted Josef Schacht at Columbia; for anything dealing with the Mamluks, you had to talk to David Ayalon. Similarly, Islamic Art "was" Richard Ettinghausen, succeeded by Oleg Grabar; the life of Muhammad "was" W. Montgomery Watt; numismatics "was" George Miles; the Fatimids—well, hardly anybody studied the Fatimids in those days. But such a situation is clearly unsatisfactory, because one needs the give and take of different contending voices within a specific field to make it vital and, indeed, viable. The absence of sufficient critical scholarly debate meant that many "fields" remained quite static and conservative over generations; one consulted the reigning "expert" and got the information one wanted. In short, in the 1960s and even the 1970s, our field was much smaller than it is today.

Change came sometimes by a gradual increase in the number of students attracted to a subfield, but more often through the impact of a single book, or the determined efforts of a small group of scholars. The current burgeoning of interest in the Mamluks, for example, began slowly but was really jump-started in the 1980s when Professor Carl Petry of Northwestern and Bruce Craig, the Middle East bibliographer at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library, realized their shared enthusiasm and decided to combine forces. Petry's shoeboxes of bibliography index cards became the basis for the online Mamluk bibliography that has been maintained and expanded ever since by Regenstein's Middle East collection—and which was then followed by the creation of a new journal, *Mamluk Studies Review*, which is still published (although now only electronically, no longer in a printed version). Both of these institutions have greatly stimulated the vigor of Mamluk Studies.

Similarly, my own subfield of early Islamic history received a double shot in the arm—one just as I was entering graduate school with the publication of Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), another several years later with the publication of Cook and Crone's *Hagarism* (1977). Brown's book virtually created the field of "Late Antiquity Studies," by synthesizing work in what had hitherto been three distinct (and rather sleepy) subfields—late Roman (i.e. Byzantine) history, Eastern church history, and early Islamic history. One can see this impact immediately by considering the titles of books: before 1971, the phrase "late

antiquity" is hardly found in book titles, except for a few in art history (German art historians had first coined the term "Spätantike" around 1900); after 1971, however, one finds a proliferation of book titles referring to aspects of Late Antiquity. And a crucial aspect of Brown's vision, which broke down old barriers and challenged old paradigms, was his inclusion of the Umayyads and early Islam within the Late Antique world.

The publication of *Hagarism* represented a bracing challenge of a rather different sort, a blunt rejection of traditional views of early Islam and a bold call to study it in a different—and more properly historical—manner. It provoked, at first, both a lot of curiosity and no small measure of rage, but it cleared the way for many new hypotheses about Islam's origins, and in doing so it revivified what had been a moribund subfield, and the energy created by it continues unabated even today, forty years later.

As a result of these developments in the 1970s, there has been a veritable explosion of new and innovative scholarship on many aspects of Islam's origins, so much so that what had once been a rather small and inactive field is now being articulated into a number of well-developed (and still rapidly growing) subfields. Critical Qurʾanic studies, after more than a half-century of hibernation, is once again a lively arena of discussion, partly sparked by the seminal, if frustratingly opaque, studies of John Wansbrough as well as by *Hagarism*; but Qurʾanic studies was also spurred on by the fortuitous discovery of early Qurʾan manuscripts in Ṣanʿāʾ, Yemen, in 1972, and by the return to the public eye in the 1990s of an archive of thousands of photographs of early Qurʾan manuscripts made by Gotthelf Bergsträsser in the 1930s, which the Munich Arabist, Anton Spitaler, inexplicably concealed (claiming that it had been destroyed) until the last years of his life. The study of actual documents for the seventh century, in particular Arabic papyri and the coins of the early Islamic period, has burgeoned in recent years. The archaeology of the Byzantine and early Islamic periods in the Near East, particularly in the Levant, has received a great deal of attention and has brought important insights. Studies of literary sources for early Islam have increased markedly, including Arabic historical writing, collections of sayings attributed to the prophet Muḥammad (*aḥādīth*), and studies of Syriac literature datable to the seventh century CE/first century AH.

I see this increased depth and energy and specialization in medieval Islamic studies reflected also in the creation of several new scholarly associations. In the 1960s and 1970s, we all belonged to the broad "umbrella" organizations, the American Oriental Society and (after its foundation in 1966) MESA, and most of us still do, but we now also have the School of Abbasid Studies first established at St. Andrews University (1979), the International Society for Arabic Papyrology (ISAP, 2002), and the International Qurʾanic Studies Association (IQSA, 2012), and it seems only a matter of time before we shall also see the creation of associations focused on the study of the Umayyads, the Fatimids, Islamic archaeology, Islamic numismatics, etc. There are already several active working groups devoted to all these topics, if not yet formal scholarly associations.

In sum, our field—or fields—have matured remarkably since I began my studies. There is now lively debate among

different scholars on a wide range of issues, and studies of medieval Islamic history show much greater methodological awareness and disciplinary rigor than was true a half-century ago.

Other changes in our field of study reflect the changing world of technology in which we live. Online dictionaries allow us to consult multiple glossaries and prepare texts with hitherto unknown ease—no longer must we struggle to balance three or four ponderous tomes at once in our lap as we explore the meaning of a word. This is a tremendous convenience. Far more revolutionary, and with as yet unforeseen impact, is the creation of large databases of medieval texts, such as al-Maktaba al-Shamila (http://shamela.ws/). This should finally help us to overcome what has long been a severe obstacle to our collective research, the lack of a truly historical dictionary of Arabic from which one might learn about the historical evolution of a particular word—its changing meaning over time; for now, we can have before us the raw material on which a historical dictionary is based, the instances in which a particular word is used in a large selection of texts, and can perceive the way its meaning may have evolved over time.

Such databases, however, also carry an unintended peril. In the "old days," one simply had to read through complete texts, or long passages of texts, in the search for a particular kind of information or a particular word. Now, with the ability quickly to search thousands of texts for a desired word or phrase, we confront the temptation to read only those sentences in which the target word or phrase occurs, rather than taking the time to read the larger context in which they are found. This shortcut leads us to a quicker answer to our immediate question about a word or phrase or concept, perhaps, but if we fail to read broadly we will also miss a great deal. We will miss not only those totally unrelated, but nevertheless interesting, bits of information that we might have noted for a different project, but also much information relevant to the project on which we are embarked, information that might temper our view of what the word or phrase we have ferreted out via the database actually meant. We miss the chance to acquire a sense for the overall "shape" of a complete text, and the outlook of its author or complier, and we will not encounter repeatedly those peculiar items that seen once or twice appear to be negligible details, but which through repeated occurrence cause us to realize that they are the key to an issue or problem the significance of which we, and others, had overlooked.

A much greater danger for those of us who work on Islamic history and the academic study of Islam and Islamic culture is the dwindling support among the general public, and from our governments and universities, for the humanities in general, including the kind of deep foreign language study that is such a crucial component of our own training. As those of you who heard my Presidential Address at the 2012 MESA conference[1] in Denver will know, I believe that one of the causes for this marked decline in public support for the humanities is the infatuation of

1. The published version of the presidential address, entitled "MESA and the American University" appeared in the *Review of Middle East Studies* 47/1 (Summer 2013), 4-18 and can be consulted online: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41970032

some scholars since the 1970s, in literature especially, with theoretical approaches that sought to dismember structural and formal regularities of texts as a kind of exercise, without offering any constructive alternative for deeper understanding of those texts. Even more serious was their cultivation of a style of writing that was almost willfully opaque, as if clarity of expression was somehow a flaw. Obscurity, however, is not the same as profundity (although many tried to convince us otherwise). Intentional obscurity in writing is more likely to be a tactic to conceal the fact that the author lacks any really new ideas, than an indicator of the 'complexity' of the subject. The average reader, even a well-educated one, could make little sense of the ramblings of most deconstructionists and postmodernists, which they found incomprehensible and, therefore, uninteresting. They could see no benefit in it; it did not help them understand literature or art, unlike some earlier critical approaches, so eventually they decided that the champions of 'critical theory' were basically engaged in a confidence game, retailing at high price ideas that were worthless. Several decades of such work, mimicked sometimes by academicians in disciplines other than literary studies such as anthropology, took a terrible toll, persuading much of the general public that humanistic study was little more than academic obscurantism, and causing them to favor the study of things in which the human benefits were obvious: medicine, engineering, IT, the natural sciences economics, and industry.

The utility of the study of STEM, medicine, and such fields is undeniable, but when we consider what are the most pressing problems faced by humankind in the 21st century, we realize that they cannot be resolved by technology, or at least by technology alone. Global warming threatens the whole planet, but dealing with it requires above all acceptance of our collective responsibility—a question of ethics—and the moral commitment to do something about it. Countering the destabilizing effects of gross economic inequality, both within and between countries, demands the altruism that comes from an awareness of our common humanity, and empathy for others who are different from ourselves. Battling corruption and exploitation of others requires determination to realize ideals of fairness, acceptance of the other, and the conviction that life is not a zero-sum game, that we all do better when benefits are shared. In other words, the key factors in solving our most pressing problems will be those rooted in ethics and empathy, which are values cultivated in the humanities; in abstract terms through the study of philosophy and religion, and in more practical terms through the study of cultures and languages different from our own. Battling Islamophobia in our own societies can best be undertaken if we can call on a robust, and historically grounded, understanding of Islam's diversity to counter the simplistic negative stereotypes retailed by most Islamophobes. Empathy for refugees is enhanced when we understand the historical and political circumstances that lead people to flee their home societies, rather than simply seeing them as "spongers" wishing to take advantages of the benefits of Western societies. The effort to help shattered Middle Eastern societies or political systems rebuild themselves—assuming our help is wanted—can best be pursued by

those who have a deep knowledge of their history and cultures. All of these concerns point to the importance of having a large cadre of our own citizens—from whatever country we hail—with deep training in the languages, history, and cultures of the region.

As scholars, therefore, we need to be active in defending the humanities, whenever we have the opportunity to explain—to our students and colleagues, to our administrations, to our political representatives, to our neighbors—why they are vital. But another way we can make the case for the humanities is to write up the results of our own original research in a manner that makes absolutely clear what we have discovered and why it is important. We must free our writing of theoretical or other obscurantism, and show unequivocally how the analytical distinctions we make shed important light on the subject we are studying. But above all, it comes down to writing clearly. If we do not express ourselves clearly, readers will continue to lose interest in what we do—and with good reason.

It is a very good time to be a practitioner of Islamic history or Near Eastern studies. Our fields of study are robust, intellectually aware, and thriving as never before. There is a widespread recognition, today, that the Middle East is an important part of the world and that we need to pay attention to it. We have a lot to contribute as scholars and a lot to say that relates to national and international debates on many topics. Let us say it clearly.

Important New Developments in Arabographic Optical Character Recognition (OCR)

Benjamin Kiessling, Matthew Thomas Miller, Maxim G. Romanov, & Sarah Bowen Savant

1.1 Summary of Results

The **Open Islamicate Texts Initiative (OpenITI)** team[1]—building on the foundational open-source OCR work of the Leipzig University (LU) Alexander von Humboldt Chair for Digital Humanities—has achieved Optical Character Recognition (OCR) accuracy rates for printed classical Arabic-script texts in the high nineties. These numbers are based on our tests of seven different Arabic-script texts of varying quality and typefaces, totaling over 7,000 lines (~400 pages, 87,000 words; see **Table 1** for full details). These accuracy rates not only represent a distinct improvement over the *actual*[2] accuracy rates of the various proprietary OCR options for printed classical Arabic-script texts, but, equally important, they are produced using an open-source OCR software called *Kraken* (developed by Benjamin Kiessling, LU),

1. The co-PIs of the Open Islamicate Texts Initiative (OpenITI) are Sarah Bowen Savant (Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, London; sarah.savant@aku.edu), Maxim G. Romanov (Leipzig University through June 2017; now University of Vienna; maxim.romanov@univie.ac.at), and Matthew Thomas Miller (Roshan Institute for Persian Studies, University of Maryland, College Park; mtmiller@umd.edu). Benjamin Kiessling can be contacted at mittagessen@l.unchti.me.

2. Proprietary OCR programs for Persian and Arabic (e.g., Sakhr's Automatic Reader, ABBYY Finereader, Readiris) overpromise the level of accuracy they deliver in practice when used on classical texts (in particular, highly vocalized texts). These companies claim that they provide accuracy rates in the high 90 percentages (e.g., Sakhr claims 99.8% accuracy for high-quality documents). This may be the case for texts with simplified typesets and no short vowels; however, our tests of ABBYY Finereader and Readiris on high-quality scans of classical texts turned out accuracy rates of between 65% and 75%. Sakhr software was not available to us, as the developers offer no trial versions and it is the most expensive commercial OCR solution for Arabic. Moreover, since these programs are not open-source and offer only limited trainability (and created training data cannot be reused), their costs are prohibitive for most students and scholars and they cannot be modified according to the interests and needs of the academic community or the public at large. Most importantly, they have no web interfaces that would enable the production of wider, user-generated collections.

Table 1: Description of Data

	Book*	Quality	Type	Size of data samples: Pages	Lines	Words	Chars
0	Ibn al-Faqīh. *al-Buldān*	*high***	*training*	79	1,466	16,909	92,730
1	Ibn al-Athīr. *al-Kāmil*	*high***	*testing*	40	794	12,818	58,481
2	Ibn Qutayba. *Adab al-kātib*	*high***	*testing*	55	794	7,848	42,230
3	al-Jāḥiẓ. *al-Ḥayawān*	*high***	*testing*	65	992	11,870	59,191
4	al-Yaʿqūbī. *al-Taʾrīkh*	*high***	*testing*	68	1,050	13,487	66,341
5	al-Dhahabī. *Taʾrīkh al-islām*	*low****	*testing*	50	1,110	11,045	55,047
6	Ibn al-Jawzī. *al-Muntaẓam*	*low****	*testing*	50	938	13,156	62,574
			Total:	407	7,144	87,133	436,594

***** *For details on the editions, see bibliography*

****** *300 dpi, grayscale; scanned specifically for the purpose of testing, with ideal parameters*

******* *200 dpi, black-and-white, pre-binarized; both downloaded from www.archive.org (via http://waqfeya.org)*

thus enabling us to make this Arabic-script OCR technology freely available to the broader Islamicate, Persian, and Arabic Studies communities in the near future. In the process we also generated over 7,000 lines of "gold standard" (double-checked) training data that can be used by others for Arabic-script OCR training and testing purposes.[3]

1.2 OCR and its Importance for Islamicate Studies Fields

Although there is a wealth of digital Persian and Arabic texts currently available in various open-access online repositories,[4] these collections are not representative of the textual traditions in their chronological, geographical, and generic spread. The existing Persian collections, for example, are significantly smaller than the Arabic collections and lack prose chronicles and philosophical, mystical, and scientific treatises. The Arabic collections would more fully represent the Arabic literary tradition if they had more scientific and philosophical texts and texts written by representatives of smaller Arabic-speaking religious communities. Moreover, the selection of texts for both Persian and Arabic digital collections reflects the contemporary ideological, aesthetic, and communal commitments of their creators and funders. While these shortcomings of the existing Persian and Arabic digital collections are well known, the production of larger and more representative digital Islamicate corpora has been stymied for decades by the lack of accurate and affordable OCR software.[5]

3. This gold standard data is available at: https://github.com/OpenITI/OCR_GS_Data.

4. Collecting and rendering these texts useful for computational textual analysis (through, for example, adding scholarly metadata and making them machine-actionable) is a somewhat separate but deeply interrelated project that the OpenITI is currently working on as well.

5. See footnote 2 for more details.

OCR programs, in the simplest terms, take an image of a text, such as a scan of a printed book, and extract the text, converting the image of the text into a digital text that then can be edited, searched, computationally analyzed, etc. OCR's automation of the process of transforming a printed book into a digital text exponentially reduces the effort, cost, and time necessary for the production of digital corpora (as compared to the alternative option for producing high-quality digital texts: i.e., paying multiple individuals to transcribe, or "double key," entire volumes of printed texts). OCR, in short, is essential for the digitization of large collections of printed texts—a project that to date has remained unrealized in Persian, Arabic, and other Islamicate languages.

Figure 1: Kraken ibn Ocropus[6]

The specific type of OCR software that we employed in our tests is an open-source OCR program called *Kraken* (more specifically, *Kraken ibn Ocropus*, see **Figure 1**), which was developed by Benjamin Kiessling at Leipzig University's Alexander von Humboldt Chair for Digital Humanities. Unlike more traditional OCR approaches, *Kraken* relies on a neural network—which mimics the way we learn—to recognize letters in the images of entire lines of text without attempting first to segment lines into words and then words into letters. This segmentation step—a mainstream OCR approach that persistently performs poorly on connected scripts—is thus completely removed from the process, making *Kraken* uniquely powerful for dealing with the diverse variety of ligatures in connected Arabic script (see section 4.1 for more technical details).

2.1 Initial OCR Tests

We began our experiments by using *Kraken* to train a model[7] on high-quality[8] scans of 1,466 lines of Ibn al-Faqīh's *Kitāb al-Buldān* (work **#0**). We first generated training data (line transcriptions) for all of these lines, double checked them (creating so-called "gold standard" data), trained the model, and, finally, tested its ability to accurately recognize and extract the

6. *Kraken*'s logo, *Kraken ibn Ocropus*, is based on a depiction of an octopus from a manuscript of *Kitāb al-ḥashāʾish fī hāyūlā al-ʿilāj al-ṭibbī* (Leiden, UB : Or. 289); special thanks to Emily Selove for help with finding an octopus in the depths of the Islamicate manuscript traditions.

7. "Training a model" is a general term used in machine learning for training a program to recognize certain patterns in data. In the context of OCR work, it refers to teaching the OCR software to recognize a particular script or typeface—a process that only requires time and computing power. In our case, this process required 1 computer core and approximately 24 hours per model.

8. "High quality" here means 300 dpi color or grayscale images. Before the actual process of OCR, these images must be binarized—i.e. converted into black-and-white images. If binarization is not performed properly, a lot of information is lost from the image, negatively affecting the accuracy of the OCR output. For this reason, for best results, one should avoid using pre-binarized images (i.e., images that were already converted to black and white during the scanning process, usually for size reduction, which results in some degradation of quality and the loss of information).

Table 2: Accuracy Rates in Tests of our Custom Model

	Book*	Quality	Type	Size 100	Ar**	Size 200	Ar**
0	Ibn al-Faqīh. *al-Buldān*	*high***	*training*	95.88	99.68	97.56	99.68
1	Ibn al-Athīr. *al-Kāmil*	*high****	*testing*	85.78	90.90	87.18	90.56
2	Ibn Qutayba. *Adab al-kātib*	*high****	*testing*	75.28	87.67	74.03	87.90
3	al-Jāḥiẓ. *al-Ḥayawān*	*high****	*testing*	69.03	72.78	68.32	71.87
4	al-Yaʿqūbī. *al-Taʾrīkh*	*high****	*testing*	78.78	83.42	78.28	81.85
5	al-Dhahabī. *Taʾrīkh al-islām*	*low*****	*testing*	92.19	97.54	94.42	97.61
6	Ibn al-Jawzī. *al-Muntaẓam*	*low*****	*testing*	90.40	97.39	92.26	97.80

* *For details on the editions, see bibliography*

** *Performance on Arabic only (excluding punctuation and spaces)*

*** *300 dpi, grayscale; scanned specifically for the purpose of testing, with ideal parameters*

**** *200 dpi, black-and-white, pre-binarized; both downloaded from www.archive.org (via http://waqfeya.org)*

text. The results were impressive, reaching 97.56% accuracy for the entire text and an even more impressive 99.68% accuracy rate on the Arabic script alone (i.e., when errors related to punctuation and spaces were removed from consideration; such non-script errors are easy to fix in the post-correction phase and, in many cases, this correction process for non-script errors can be automated). See **Table 2**, *row #0* for full details.[9]

These numbers were so impressive that we decided to expand our study and use the model built on the text of Ibn al-Faqīh's *Kitāb al-Buldān* (work **#0**) to OCR six other texts. We deliberately selected texts that were different from Ibn al-Faqīh's original text in terms of both their Arabic typeface, editorial orthographic conventions, and image quality. These texts represent at least two different typefaces (within which there are noticeable variations of font, spacing, and ligature styles), and four of the texts were high-quality scans while the other two were low-quality scans downloaded from www.archive.org (via http://waqfeya.com/).[10]

When looking at the results in **Table 2**, it is important that the reader notes that works **#1-6** are "testing" data. That is, these accuracy results were achieved by utilizing a model built on the text of work **#0** to perform OCR on these other texts. For this reason, it is not surprising

9. We have also experimented with the internal configuration of our models: more extensive models, containing 200 nodes in the hidden middle layer, showed slightly higher accuracy in most cases (works #3-4 were an exception to this pattern), but it took twice as long to train the model and the OCR process using the larger model also takes more time.

10. "Low-quality" here means 200 dpi, black and white, pre-binarized images. In short, the standard quality of most scans available on the internet, which are the product of scanners that prioritize smaller size and speed of scanning for online sharing (i.e., in contrast to high-quality scans that are produced for long-term preservation).

Table 3: Ligature Variations in Typefaces

(The table highlights only a few striking differences and is not meant to be comprehensive; examples similar to those of the main text are "greyed out")

Book								
[#0] Ibn al-Faqīh (d. 365/975). *al-Buldān*	لهم	بها	الملا	نجد	لم	إلىٰ	فيها	نم
[#1] Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232). *al-Kāmil fī al-taʾrīkh*	لهم	بها	الملا	نجد	لم	إلى	فيها	نم
[#2] Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889). *Adab al-kātib*	لهم	بها	*Not Present in Text*	نجد	لم	إلى	فيها	نم
[#3] al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868). *al-Ḥayawān*	لهم	بها	الملا	نجد	لم	إلى	فيها	نم
[#4] al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 292/904). *al-Taʾrīkh*	لهم	بها	الملا	نجد	لم	إلى	فيها	نم
[#5] al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347). *Taʾrīkh al-islām*	لهم	بها	*Not Present in Text*	نجد	لم	إلى	فيها	نم
[#6] Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). *al-Muntaẓam*	لهم	بها	*Not Present in Text*	نجد	لم	إلى	فيها	نم

that the accuracy rates for works **#1-4** are not as high as the accuracy rates for the training text, work **#0.** The point that is surprising is that the use of the work **#0**-based model on the low quality scans of works **#5-6** achieved a substantially higher accuracy rate (97.61% and 97.8% respectively on their Arabic script alone) than on the high-quality scans of works **#1-4.** While these higher accuracy rates for works **#5-6** are the result of a closer affinity between their typefaces and that of work **#0**, it also indicates that the distinction between high- and low-quality images is not as important for achieving high accuracy rates with *Kraken* as we initially believed. In the future, this will help reduce substantially both the total length of time it takes to OCR a work and the barriers to entry for researchers wanting to OCR the low-quality scans they already possess.

The decreased accuracy results for works **#1-4** are explainable by a few factors:

1) The typeface of works **#3-4** is different than work **#0** and it utilizes a number of ligatures that are not present in the typeface of work **#0** (for examples, see **Table 3**).

2) The typefaces of works **#1-2** are very similar to that of **#0**, but they both have features that interfere with the **#0**-based model. **#1** actually uses two different fonts, and the length of connections—*kashīda*s—between letters vary dramatically (visually, one can say that these connections vary within the range of 0.3 *kashīda* to 2 *kashīda*s), which is not the case with **#0**, where letter spacing is very consistent.

3) The text of work **#2** is highly vocalized—it has more *ḥarakāt* than any other text in the sample (and especially in comparison with the model work **#0**).

4) The text of work **#2** also has very complex and excessive punctuation with highly inconsistent spacing.

Our **#0**-based model could not completely handle these novel features in the texts of works **#1-4** because it was not trained to do so. However, as the results in **Table 4** of the following section show, new models can be trained to handle these issues successfully.

Table 4: Accuracy Rates in Text-Specific Models

				Model accuracy level	
	Book*	**Quality**	**Type**	**Size 100**	**Ar****
1	Ibn al-Athīr. *al-Kāmil*	*high****	*training*	**93.79**	**97.71**
2	Ibn Qutayba. *Adab al-kātib*	*high****	*training*	**89.30**	**98.47**
3	al-Jāḥiẓ. *al-Ḥayawān*	*high****	*training*	**94.86**	**97.59**
4	al-Yaʿqūbī. *al-Taʾrīkh*	*high****	*training*	**96.81**	**99.18**

* *For details on the editions, see bibliography*

** *Performance on Arabic only (excluding punctuation and spaces)*

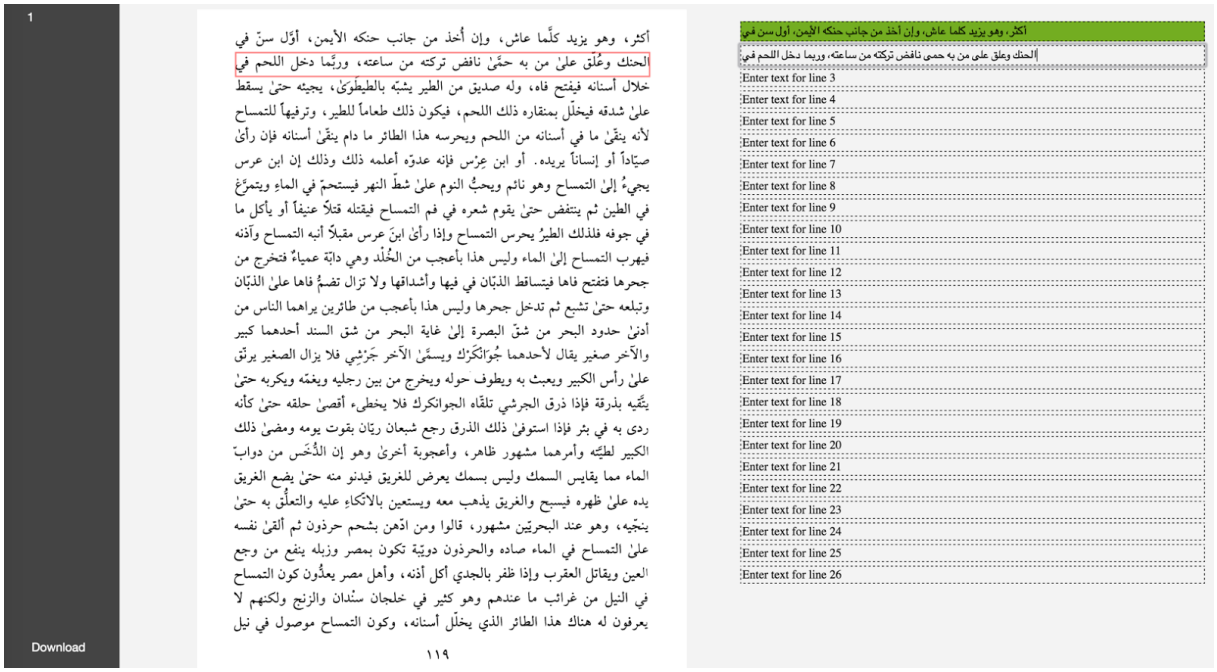
*** *300 dpi, grayscale; scanned specifically for the purpose of testing, with ideal parameters*

2.2 Round #2 Tests: Training New Models

The most important advantage of *Kraken* is that its workflow allows one to train new models relatively easily, including text-specific ones. In a nutshell, the training process requires a transcription of approximately 1,000 lines (the number will vary depending on the complexity of the typeface) aligned with images of these lines as they appear in the printed edition. The training itself takes 12-24 hours. It is performed by a machine without human involvement and multiple models can be trained simultaneously. *Kraken* includes tools for the production of transcription forms (see **Figure 2** above) and the data supplied through these forms is then used to train a new model. Since there are a great number of Arabic-script texts that have already been converted into digital texts, one can use these to fill in the forms quickly by copying and pasting from them into the forms (rather than transcribing directly from the printed texts) and then double-checking the forms for accuracy. This was what we did, and it saved us a lot of time.[11]

11. We are also currently working on an even more user-friendly interface for training data generation. Please see section 3.1 for more information.

Figure 2: Kraken's Transcription Interface



The importance of Kraken's ability to quickly train new models is illustrated clearly by its performance on works **#1–4**. When using the model built on work **#0** in our initial round of testing, we were only able to achieve accuracy rates ranging from the low seventies to low nineties on these texts (see **Table 2**). However, when we trained models on works **#1–4** specifically in our second round of testing, the accuracy rates for these texts substantially improved, reaching into the high nineties (see full results in **Table 4** above). The accuracy results for work **#4**, for example, improved from 83.42% on Arabic script alone in our first work **#0**-based model tests to 99.18% accuracy when we trained a mode on this text. The accuracy rates for works **#1–3** similarly improved, increasing from 90.90% to 97.71%, 87.90% to 98.47%, and 72.78% to 97.59% respectively. (See **Appendix** for the accuracy rates of these new models on all other texts as well.) These accuracy rates for Arabic-script recognition are already impressively high, but we actually believe that they can be improved further with larger training data sets.

Although the process of training a new model for a new text/typeface does require some effort, the only time-consuming component is the generation of the ~1,000 lines of gold standard training data. As we develop the OpenITI OCR project we will address the issue of the need for multiple models[12] through a two-pronged strategy. First, we will try to train generalized models for each script, periodically adding new features that the model has not "seen" before. Secondly, we will train individual models for distinct typefaces and editorial styles (which sometimes vary in their use of vocalization, fonts, spacing, and punctuation),

12. Generalized models achieve acceptable accuracy across a wide range of fonts by incorporating features of a variety of typefaces during training, allowing them to be used for most texts with common typefaces.

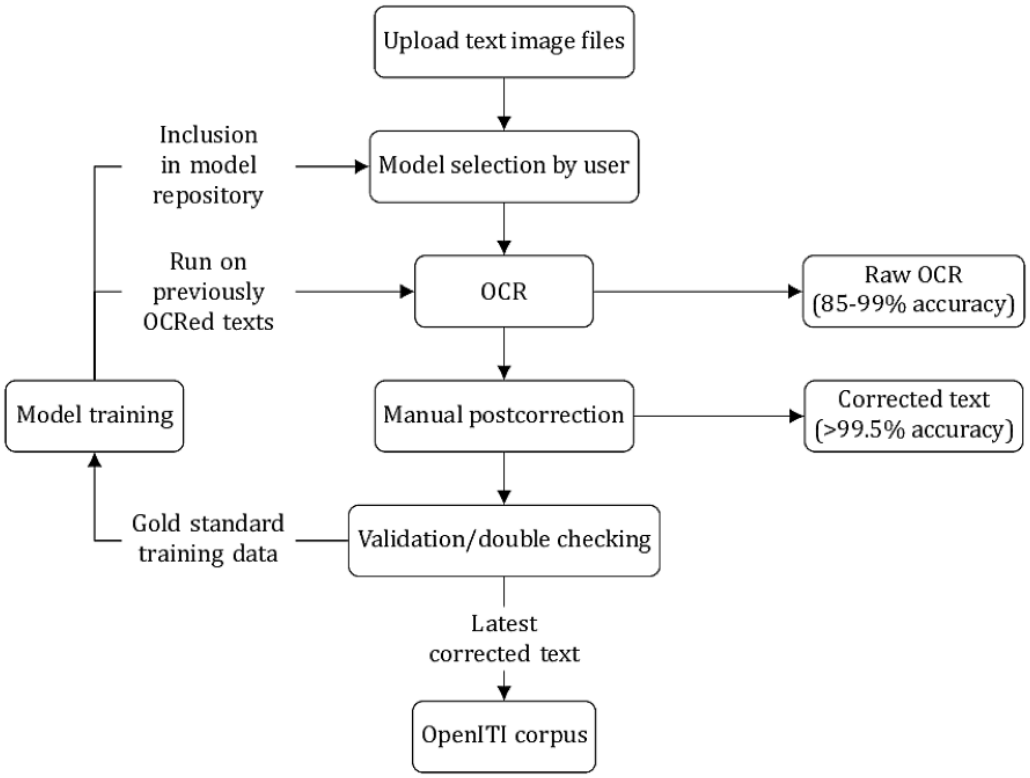
producing a library of OCR models that gradually will cover all major typefaces and editorial styles used in modern Arabic-script printing. There certainly are numerous Arabic-script typefaces and editorial styles that have been used throughout the last century and a half of Arabic-script printing, but ultimately the number is finite and definitely not so numerous as to make it impossible to create models for each over the long term.

3.1 Conclusions and Next Steps for the OpenITI OCR Project

The two rounds of testing presented here indicate that with a fairly modest amount of gold standard training data (~800–1,000 lines), *Kraken* is consistently able to produce OCR results for Arabic-script documents that achieve accuracy rates in the high nineties. In some cases, such as works **#5-6**, achieving OCR accuracy rates of up to 97.5% does not even require training a new model on that text. However, in other cases, such as works **#1-4**, achieving high levels of OCR accuracy does require training a model specific to that typeface, and, in some select cases of texts with similar typefaces but different styles of vocalization, font variations, and punctuation patterns (e.g., works **#1-2**), training a model for the peculiarities of a particular edition.

In the near future we are planning to release a new web-interface powered by the micro-task platform Pybossa that will enable more user-friendly generation of training data and the post-correction of the OCR output (See, **Figure 3** below and the OCR section of the OpenITI

Figure 3: Web-based OCR Pipeline Flowchart



website). New data supplied by users will allow us to train additional typeface-specific models and improve the overall accuracy of *Kraken* on other typefaces through the development of generalized language models. (It should be stressed, however, that training edition-specific models is quite valuable, as there are a number of multivolume books—often with over a dozen volumes per text—that need to be converted into proper digital editions). Furthermore, in collaboration with several colleagues, we are also currently testing *Kraken* on various Persian, Hebrew, and Syriac typefaces (results forthcoming spring 2018) and Persian and Arabic manuscripts (results forthcoming summer 2018). We plan to also train models for other Islamicate languages (in particular, Ottoman Turkish and Urdu) as soon as we can find experts in these languages who are willing to collaborate with us in training data generation.[13]

In the long term, our hope is that an easy-to-use and effective OCR pipeline will give us the tools we, as a field, collectively need to significantly enrich our collection of digital Persian and Arabic texts and thereby enable us to understand better the cultural heritage of the Middle East as reflected in its literary traditions. OCR, though, should not be interpreted as a magic bullet. We must also cultivate a community of users and secure long-term funding in order to make this project sustainable and develop these collections of digital texts into a representative Islamicate corpus—a laborious process which involves the expert selection of new works and the creation and curation of scholarly metadata. However, at the same time, the possibilities that an effective open-source Arabic-script OCR program will open up for Islamicate Studies are difficult to overstate. In addition to rendering hundreds, even thousands, of new texts full-text searchable, scholars will be able to employ computational modes of text analysis (e.g., text re-use, topic modeling, stylometric analysis) on a body of material much more representative of the historical tradition than what we have at this moment. The full impact of these new analytical possibilities and the new levels of scale and specificity in textual analysis that they make possible are difficult to estimate at such an early stage, but the early results are promising.

4.1 The Technical Details: *Kraken* and its OCR Method

Kraken is the open-source OCR software that we used in our tests. Developed by Benjamin Kiessling at LU's Alexander von Humboldt Chair for Digital Humanities, *Kraken* is a "fork"[14] of the unmaintained *ocropus package*[15] combined with the CLSTM neural network library.[16] *Kraken* represents a substantial improvement over the *ocropus package*: its performance is dramatically better, it supports right-to-left scripts and combined LTR/RTL (BiDi) texts, and it includes a rudimentary transcription interface for offline use.

13. Please contact us for more details if you are interested in generating 1,000 lines of training data for any Ottoman Turkish or Urdu typefaces or a specific Arabic or Persian typeface for which we do not already have a model trained.

14. "Fork" is a computer-science term for a new "branch" of independent development that builds on an existing software.

15. For details, see: https://github.com/tmbdev/ocropy and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OCRopus

16. See: https://github.com/tmbdev/clstm

The OCR method that powers *Kraken* is based on a long short-term memory (Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, 1997) recurrent neural network utilizing the Connectionist Temporal Classification objective function.[17] In contrast to other systems requiring character-level segmentation before classification, it is uniquely suited for the recognition of connected Arabographic scripts because the objective function used during training is geared towards assigning labels—i.e., characters/glyphs—to regions of unsegmented input data.

The system works on unsegmented data both during training and recognition—its base unit is a text line (line recognizer). For training, a number of printed lines have to be transcribed using a simple HTML transcription interface (see **Figure 2** above). The total amount of training data (i.e., line image-text pairs) required may vary depending on the complexity of the typeface and number of glyphs used by the script. Acquisition of training data can be optimized by line-wise alignment of existing digital editions with printed lines, although even wholesale transcription is a faster and relatively unskilled task in comparison to training data creation for other systems such as *tesseract*.[18]

Our current models were trained on ~1,000 pairs each, corresponding to ~50-60 pages of printed text. Models are fairly typographically specific, the most important factor being fonts and spacing, although some mismatch does not degrade recognition accuracy substantially (2-5%).[19] Thus new training data for an unknown typeface can be produced by correcting the output from a model for a similar font—in other words, generating training data for every subsequent model will require less and less time. Last but not least, it is also possible to train multi-typeface (so-called, "generalized") models by simply combining training data, albeit some parameter tuning is required to account for the richer typographic morphology that the neural network must learn.

5.1 Acknowledgements

We would never have been able to complete this work without the help of our team members at Leipzig University, University of Maryland (College Park), and Aga Khan University, London. We would also like to thank Elijah Cooke (Roshan Institute, UMD) for helping us to process the data, Samar Ata (Roshan Institute, UMD) for generating several sets of high-quality scans for us, and Layal Mohammad (AKU, ISMC), Mohammad Meqdad (AKU, ISMC), and Fatemeh Shams (AKU, ISMC) for helping us to generate and double check the training data. Lastly, we would like to express our gratitude to Gregory Crane (Alexander von Humboldt Chair for Digital Humanities, LU), Fatemeh Keshavarz (Roshan Institute for Persian Studies, UMD), and David Taylor (AKU, ISMC) for their guidance and support of our work.

17. Graves et al., 2006, as elaborated in Breuel et al., 2013.

18. See: https://github.com/tesseract-ocr and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tesseract_(software)

19. For example, if a glyph is in a slightly different font than the one that the model was trained on, it may sometimes be misrecognized as another one (or not at all), thus leading the overall accuracy rate to be slightly lower despite the fact that most of the other text is recognized correctly.

Bibliography and Links

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Breuel, Thomas M., et al. "High-Performance OCR for Printed English and Fraktur Using LSTM Networks," *12th International Conference on Document Analysis and Recognition*. IEEE, 2013.

CLSTM Neural Network Library: https://github.com/tmbdev/clstm

Links to Open Source Software:

Nidaba: https://openphilology.github.io/nidaba/

Kraken: https://github.com/mittagessen/kraken

OCR-Evaluation tools: https://github.com/ryanfb/ancientgreekocr-ocr-evaluation-tools

OpenITI Gold-Standard Data for Arabic OCR:

Link: https://github.com/OpenArabic/OCR_GS_Data

Editions of Printed Texts (when two dates are given, the second one is CE)

[#0] Ibn al-Faqīh (fl. late 3rd/9th century). *Kitāb al-Buldān*. Ed. Yūsuf al-Hādī. Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1996 CE.

[#1] Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233). *Al-Kāmil fī al-taʾrīkh*. Ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qāḍī. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1415/1994.

[#2] Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889). *Kitāb Adab al-kātib*. Ed. Muḥammad al-Dālī. Muʾassasat al-Risāla, n.d.

[#3] al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-9). *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1424/2003.

[#4] al-Yaʿqūbī (fl. second half of the 3rd/9th century). *Al-Taʾrīkh*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.

[#5] al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347). *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfīqiyya, n.d.

[#6] Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200). *Al-Muntaẓam*. Ed. Muḥammad al-Qādir ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafá al-Qādir ʿAṭā. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1412/1992.

Appendix: Performance of Text-Specific Models

Table A: Performance of #1-Based Model on Other Texts

	Book*	Quality	Type	*Model accuracy level* Size 100	Ar**	Size 200	Ar**
1	Ibn al-Athīr. *al-Kāmil*	*high****	***training***	93.79	97.71	93.58	97.59
2	Ibn Qutayba. *Adab al-kātib*	*high****	*testing*	82.68	95.72	80.92	94.88
3	al-Jāḥiẓ. *al-Ḥayawān*	*high****	*testing*	71.78	75.16	70.85	74.27
4	al-Yaʿqūbī. *al-Taʾrīkh*	*high****	*testing*	79.67	84.40	78.12	82.21
5	al-Dhahabī. *Taʾrīkh al-islām*	*low*****	*testing*	90.68	95.95	90.37	95.78
6	Ibn al-Jawzī. *al-Muntaẓam*	*low*****	*testing*	93.33	98.51	92.96	98.22

* *For details on the editions, see bibliography*
** *Performance on Arabic only (excluding punctuation and spaces)*
*** *300 dpi, grayscale; scanned specifically for the purpose of testing, with ideal parameters*
**** *200 dpi, black-and-white, pre-binarized; both downloaded from www.archive.org (via http://waqfeya.org)*

Table B: Performance of #2-Based Model on Other Texts

	Book*	Quality	Type	*Model accuracy level* Size 100	Ar**	Size 200	Ar**
1	Ibn al-Athīr. *al-Kāmil*	*high****	*testing*	83.52	88.56	83.55	88.56
2	Ibn Qutayba. *Adab al-kātib*	*high****	***training***	89.30	98.47	89.42	98.44
3	al-Jāḥiẓ. *al-Ḥayawān*	*high****	*testing*	74.82	76.51	74.87	76.65
4	al-Yaʿqūbī. *al-Taʾrīkh*	*high****	*testing*	81.50	84.05	79.81	83.67
5	al-Dhahabī. *Taʾrīkh al-islām*	*low*****	*testing*	84.89	93.19	83.08	92.53
6	Ibn al-Jawzī. *al-Muntaẓam*	*low*****	*testing*	87.56	94.21	86.34	93.57

* *For details on the editions, see bibliography*
** *Performance on Arabic only (excluding punctuation and spaces)*
*** *300 dpi, grayscale; scanned specifically for the purpose of testing, with ideal parameters*
**** *200 dpi, black-and-white, pre-binarized; both downloaded from www.archive.org (via http://waqfeya.org)*

Appendix: Performance of Text-Specific Models

Table C: Performance of #3-Based Model on Other Texts

				Model accuracy level			
	Book*	**Quality**	**Type**	**Size 100**	**Ar****	**Size 200**	**Ar****
1	Ibn al-Athīr. *al-Kāmil*	*high****	*testing*	80.23	86.27	82.46	87.48
2	Ibn Qutayba. *Adab al-kātib*	*high****	*testing*	80.90	91.54	82.61	93.24
3	al-Jāḥiẓ. *al-Ḥayawān*	*high****	***training***	94.86	97.59	94.82	97.41
4	al-Yaʿqūbī. *al-Taʾrīkh*	*high****	*testing*	90.91	95.13	91.28	94.71
5	al-Dhahabī. *Taʾrīkh al-islām*	*low*****	*testing*	81.93	91.23	83.03	92.22
6	Ibn al-Jawzī. *al-Muntaẓam*	*low*****	*testing*	84.07	93.58	86.26	94.20

* *For details on the editions, see bibliography*
** *Performance on Arabic only (excluding punctuation and spaces)*
*** *300 dpi, grayscale; scanned specifically for the purpose of testing, with ideal parameters*
**** *200 dpi, black-and-white, pre-binarized; both downloaded from www.archive.org (via http://waqfeya.org)*

Table D: Performance of #4-Based Model on Other Texts

				Model accuracy level			
	Book*	**Quality**	**Type**	**Size 100**	**Ar****	**Size 200**	**Ar****
1	Ibn al-Athīr. *al-Kāmil*	*high****	*testing*	79.80	86.35	*na*	*na*
2	Ibn Qutayba. *Adab al-kātib*	*high****	*testing*	72.99	82.84	*na*	*na*
3	al-Jāḥiẓ. *al-Ḥayawān*	*high****	*testing*	83.38	87.65	*na*	*na*
4	al-Yaʿqūbī. *al-Taʾrīkh*	*high****	***training***	96.81	99.18	*na*	*na*
5	al-Dhahabī. *Taʾrīkh al-islām*	*low*****	*testing*	82.76	90.65	*na*	*na*
6	Ibn al-Jawzī. *al-Muntaẓam*	*low*****	*testing*	87.71	96.00	*na*	*na*

* *For details on the editions, see bibliography*
** *Performance on Arabic only (excluding punctuation and spaces)*
*** *300 dpi, grayscale; scanned specifically for the purpose of testing, with ideal parameters*
**** *200 dpi, black-and-white, pre-binarized; both downloaded from www.archive.org (via http://waqfeya.org)*

The Numismatic Evidence for the Reign of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (254–270/868-883)

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Abstract

This paper re-examines the reign of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (254–270/868-883), taking account of the currently available numismatic evidence. It argues for a reappraisal of the crucial triangular relationship between Ibn Ṭūlūn, the caliph al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh (256–279/869-892) and the latter's brother Abū Aḥmad (known as al-Muwaffaq billāh from 261/874). The rise of the Tulunids is situated within the context of the weakening of the Abbasid unitary state in the middle of the third century AH/ninth century CE, and the emergence of powerful provincial governors whose rise to power anticipated the eclipse of the caliphal state in the fourth/tenth century. The value of the numismatic evidence lies mainly in the names and titles that occur on the coins. These allow the historian to control the sometimes contradictory narrative of the textual sources and also raise questions about the nature and extent of Tulunid autonomy.

Tulunid history (254–292/868-904) has enjoyed a revival in recent years. Careful analyses of the Tulunid dynasty in Egypt, particularly the life and works of the first ruler, Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, have brought the subject into the mainstream and have begun the process of updating and correcting the narrative of Zaky Mohamed Hassan's *Les Tulunides* (1933), the only monograph-length history of the dynasty in a European language.[1] In an attempt to provide a context for the emergence and consolidation of Tulunid power, this article reviews the relationship between Ibn Ṭūlūn and the Abbasid family during his governorship of Egypt, by bringing the coinage evidence to bear and re-examining certain key passages in the textual sources in light of that evidence. A central aim of the article is to argue the case for a reappraisal of the crucial triangular relationship between Ibn Ṭūlūn, the caliph al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh (256–279/869-892) and the latter's brother Abū Aḥmad (known as al-Muwaffaq billāh from 261/874).

1. In addition to Hassan 1933, see in particular Becker (1902–1903) for Ibn Ṭūlūn's life and career; Bonner 2010a; Gordon 2014; and Gordon 2015. Gordon's biography of Ibn Ṭūlūn will appear in the series *Makers of Islamic Civilization* (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies), I.B. Tauris, London.

This reassessment places the significant collaboration between Ibn Ṭūlūn and the caliph centre stage and suggests that Hassan exaggerated the extent of al-Muwaffaq's dominance of the state from 257–261/870-874, due to his heavy reliance on the *Sīrat Ibn Ṭūlūn* of the Egyptian historian Ibn al-Dāya (d.c. 330–340/941-951). Hassan accepted the latter's sequence of events uncritically, while ignoring al-Ṭabarī's chronicle and such numismatic evidence as was available to him. Consequently he mistakenly assumed that al-Muwaffaq became the dominant power in the state in 257/870 and immediately took action to remove Ibn Ṭūlūn from the governorship of Egypt.[2] Hassan's book is now more than eighty years old and is no longer much cited by contemporary scholars of the Tulunids. However, in the absence of a replacement for his study, we will begin with a critical analysis of Hassan's chapter on Ibn Ṭūlūn's conflict with al-Muwaffaq.

2. Z. M. Hassan on Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq

As we will see below (Section 4), al-Ṭabarī's chronicle dates the succession arrangements implemented by al-Muʿtamid to the year 261/874. He tells us that al-Muʿtamid gave his brother the title al-Muwaffaq billāh and elevated him to the position of second in line to the throne, after his own son, Jaʿfar. Al-Ṭabarī's evidence fits perfectly with the changes in numismatic titulature that emerge in the following year, 262/875, when the first coins bearing al-Muwaffaq's newly-acquired title were issued. In Chapter Four of *Les Tulunides,* however, Hassan claims that al-Muwaffaq acquired his title in 257/870, before setting off to fight the Zanj. As soon as he engaged the Zanj, he demanded that Ibn Ṭūlūn send him the revenues of Egypt to help fund his campaign. Having received less than he expected from Egypt, he turned against Ibn Ṭūlūn and attempted to force his dismissal from the governorship. In response, Ibn Ṭūlūn began to fortify his capital city and managed to face down Mūsā b. Bughā, al-Muwaffaq's right-hand man, who had taken charge of the campaign to replace him as governor of Egypt. Ibn Ṭūlūn's actions bore fruit very quickly: by 259/872, Hassan tells us, Mūsā was dead, Egypt was secure, and Ibn Ṭūlūn was enjoying a period of unprecedented economic and military success.

Hassan's chronology is patently wrong.[3] Among other indications, the two following points are crucial: al-Muwaffaq could not have begun his campaign against Ibn Ṭūlūn before 262/875 (or late 261/874) because the correspondence between them could only have been written after the succession arrangements had been concluded in 261/874 (see below, Section 8); and Mūsā b. Bughā died in 264/877, as Ibn al-Dāya himself notes, not 259/872.[4]

2. Hassan (1933, p. 41) quotes *Fakhrī* (written in 701/1302) in summary of his own view: "A Mutamid appartenait le Khutba (prône), le droit de battre la monnaie et le droit de porter le titre d'Emir des Croyants; à son frère Talha, le droit d'ordonner et de défendre, la conduite des troupes, l'exercice des hostilités contre les ennemis, la garde des frontières, l'installation des vizirs et des émirs." Hassan continues (p. 42) in his own words: "Ibn Ṭūlūn aura presque toujours à lutter contre Muwaffak et non contre le calife legitime."

3. Hassan's chronology was accepted by Randa (see Randa 1990, p. 156, note 2).

4. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 83.

How did Hassan arrive at this erroneous version of events? The answer lies partly in his dependence upon a source that was written a few decades after the events described, namely Ibn al-Dāya's *Sīrat Ibn Ṭūlūn,* which survives in the later work of the Andalusian writer Ibn Saʿīd (d. 685/1286), known as *al-Mughrib fī ḥulā al-Maghrib.* Ibn al-Dāya's account describes the events of 258/871, when Ibn Ṭūlūn assumed control of the *kharāj* of Egypt, accurately enough.[5] But it is followed by his account of an earlier series of events which begin with al-Muwaffaq's recall from exile in 257/870, and al-Muʿtamid's immediate announcement of the succession arrangements (i.e. in 257–258/870-871). Ibn al-Dāya's text then describes the course of the conflict between Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq over the revenues of Egypt, which, the reader is led to understand, blew up soon afterwards (i.e. in the late 250s).[6] These accounts and the sequence in which they were presented were adopted almost verbatim by al-Balawī (writing in the 4th c. AH/10th c. CE), who copied and extended Ibn al-Dāya's narrative in his *Sīrat āl Ṭūlūn*, although he provided a different ending to the story of the conflict.[7] Thus the two main Egyptian sources for the life and career of Ibn Ṭūlūn (henceforth referred to collectively as the Egyptian *sīra* tradition)

5. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 84. See below, Section 6, for a detailed treatment of the events of the year 258 AH. Hassan cited Vollers' edition of Ibn al–Dāya: *idem*., *Sīrat Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn*, in *Fragmente aus dem Mugrib des Ibn Saʿīd*, ed. K. Vollers, Berlin, 1894

6. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, pp. 84–91 (for a detailed analysis of the conflict between Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq see below, Section 8). The sequence of accounts in Ibn al-Dāya's text is as follows: events of 258 (the date given is given in the text) (p. 84); the story of Ibn Ṭūlūn's rejection of the advice of ʿAbdallāh b. Dashūma regarding his plans for reducing the tax burden on his Egyptian subjects (pp. 85–86); within the account relating to Ibn Dashūma, Ibn al-Dāya places a short reference to the treasures found in the Egyptian desert that Ibn Ṭūlūn used to fund construction of his new mosque and hospital (*māristān*); next he recounts Abū Aḥmad's return from exile and the succession arrangements (pp. 86–87) ; this is followed by his remarks on the beginning of the conflict between Abū Aḥmad and Ibn Ṭūlūn, which includes a misplaced reference to al-Muwaffaq's plot to replace Ibn Ṭūlūn as governor of Egypt with Amājūr (pp. 87–88); then he presents the full text of Ibn Ṭūlūn's letter to al-Muwaffaq (pp. 89–91); finally, he describes how al-Muwaffaq reacted to Ibn Ṭūlūn's angry letter by persuading al-Muʿtamid that Ibn Ṭūlūn should not be allowed to send a representative to take control of the Syrian *thughūr* (pp. 91–92). But here Ibn al-Dāya's text is confused. As al-Balawī's account correctly points out, after receiving Ibn Ṭūlūn's long letter, al-Muwaffaq did not complain to the caliph about Ibn Ṭūlūn and question his right to be involved in the *thughūr,* but instead opted for unilateral action; he ordered Mūsā b. Bughā to take charge of the campaign to remove Ibn Ṭūlūn from office and replace him with Amājūr (see next footnote).

7. Al-Balawī 1939. Al-Balawī adopts Ibn al-Dāya's narrative and interpolates a couple of anecdotes into it, but makes no substantial modifications to it, until the final episode. His narrative runs as follows: the events of 258/871 (pp. 73–74); Ibn Ṭūlūn's rejection of the advice of ʿAbdallāh b. Dashūma and the story of the treasures (pp. 74–77); then follows his account of the succession arrangements—in this passage he explicitly mentions that al-Muʿtamid appointed al-Muwaffaq to the succession when he first arrived in Samarra (*fa-lamma waṣala ilayhi ʿaqada al-ahd baʿdahu li-ibnihi al-Mufawwaḍ wa lahu min baʿdahu*) (p. 77). At this point al-Balawī introduces a couple of anecdotes: the first concerns al-Muʿtamid's addiction to pleasurable pursuits, while the second draws a parallel between al-Muʿtamid and the caliph al-Maʾmūn in respect of their succession arrangements (pp. 78–79). Al-Balawī picks up the thread again with his description of al-Muwaffaq's conflict with Ibn Ṭūlūn (p. 79–81); this is followed by the text of Ibn Ṭūlūn's letter (p. 82–85). In the final episode, al-Balawī deviates from Ibn al-Dāya's narrative, stating that al-Muwaffaq ordered Mūsā b. Bughā to lead the ill-fated campaign to remove him as governor of Egypt (pp. 85–80).

present misleading accounts of Ibn Ṭūlūn's relations with the Abbasids between the years 257–262/870-875.[8]

One wonders how Ibn al-Dāya, a near-contemporary observer of Ibn Ṭūlūn's career, could have made such glaring errors. It seems that the fault may not have lain with Ibn al-Dāya himself. His account is preserved only as an abbreviated text (a *mukhtaṣar*) which was incorporated in Ibn Saʿīd's *Mughrib*. The *Sīra* as we have it in Ibn Saʿīd's recension appears as a collection of stories focused on the Tulunid rulers, which are mostly arranged in roughly chronological order, interspersed with digressions on interesting characters and observations on caliphal history. But the chronological sequence of the narrative is occasionally disturbed, as we have noted above; and, moreover, the text gives very few dates for individual events, which makes it difficult to keep track of the chronology. Although we have no idea of the form of the original text written by Ibn al-Dāya, it is reasonable to assume that some of the disruptions in the present text may have arisen during the process of abridgement.

The section of Ibn al-Dāya's narrative which misled Hassan begins with the passage in which al-Muʿtamid asked his brother to return to Samarra from his exile in Mecca. Here the text reads: "[...] (in 257/870) al-Muʿtamid sent a messenger to bring al-Muwaffaq from Mecca, where he had been exiled by al-Muhtadī, to the capital and settled the succession upon al-Mufawwaḍ, then (as second in line) upon Abū Aḥmad and gave him the title al-Muwaffaq [...] and divided the state between them...".[9] Hassan follows Ibn al-Dāya's text in dating the succession arrangements to 257/870, but adopts a far more condensed chronology than his source for subsequent events. His narrative collapses Ibn Ṭūlūn's rise to power into half a decade of frenzied activity, during which he successfully resisted al-Muwaffaq's challenge to his authority and saw off all his enemies. Hassan concludes that only *five* years after he became governor of Egypt (i.e. in 259/872), Ibn Ṭūlūn effectively achieved his independence.[10] As we will see below, Ibn Ṭūlūn's rise to power in Egypt followed a slower and more circuitous path than this.

Having noted the problems with Hassan's chronology, we will now try to reconstruct a more accurate view of early Tulunid history on the basis of a wider range of sources, some of which, notably the abundant numismatic sources, were unavailable to Hassan.

3. The Importance of the Numismatic Evidence

Numismatic evidence has not yet played a very big part in Tulunid historiography. Grabar's publication of the coinage of the Tulunids was thoughtful and trenchant but lacked the

8. For a succinct general introduction to the historiography of the early Tulunid period, see Bonner 2010a, pp. 578–580.

9. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 86: *fa-anfadha al-Muʿtamid rasūlan fī ḥaml al-Muwaffaq min Makka ilā al-ḥaḍra wa kāna al-Muhtadī nafāhu ilayhā fa-ʿaqada al-Muʿtamid al-ʿahd baʿdahu li al-Mufawwaḍ thumma li abī Aḥmad wa laqabahu al-Muwaffaq...wa qasama al-mamlaka baynahumā.*

10. Hassan 1933, p. 63. Hassan's next chapter (Chapter Five), on Ibn Ṭūlūn's Syrian campaign of 264/877, fails to account for the five-year gap between 259–264/872-877.

more plentiful evidence available today.[11] By contrast, the historiography of the succeeding Ikhshidid dynasty (323–358/934-968), has been re-examined by Bacharach, paying particular attention to the value of coins as a historical source.[12]

Central to our understanding of the political significance of the coinage is the caliph's enduring control over the production of Abbasid precious metal coins (silver dirhams and gold dinars) in the third century AH/ninth century CE. The commonly accepted meaning of the caliphal right of *sikka* takes the word in its figurative sense to mean the ruler's right to place his name on the coinage, thus making *sikka,* alongside the *khuṭba* (the ruler's right to have his name pronounced in the Friday address), one of the two essential components of his authority.[13] In the second half of the third/ninth century, the caliph exercised direct control over coinage production in many mints in the central Islamic lands through his monopoly over the production of coin dies, which were produced in a centralised die manufactory in the caliphal capital. This allowed the caliph's administrators to determine both what was written on the dies and the quantity of dies produced every year for each mint.[14] In light of the considerable power which the caliph exercised by this means, it may be worth considering whether the term *sikka* was, at least in this period, understood not only in a figurative, but also in a literal, sense, as the right to produce, or at least closely monitor, the production of the dies (*sikak*) from which the coinage was struck.

The *Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya,* the well-known work on the theory of state written by the Abbasid wazir, al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) was written almost a century and a half after the Tulunid period, but is nevertheless relevant to our discussion. It offers the following definition of legal coinage:[15]

> So long as the gold and silver (bullion) is free of corruption (i.e. adulteration), it (the bullion) is worthy to (be struck into) legal coin and to be impressed with the sultan's dies and trusted due to its impression (with these dies) to be free from substitution or fraud. This is indeed valid (coinage).

Here the emphasis lies clearly on the caliph's (*sulṭān*'s) control of the coin-making process through the application of the "sulṭān's dies" to the bullion. The question where the dies used in the Miṣr mint were manufactured—whether in Samarra or Fusṭāṭ—recurs more than once in the course of this article.

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11. Grabar 1957.

12. See Bacharach 2015. See Chapter 1, for an introduction to the use of coinage as a historical source up to and including the Ikhshīdid period.

13. Darley-Doran 2012.

14. The caliphal monopoly over die production was enforced intermittently in the early Islamic period, but was upheld, albeit within a limited geographical scope, during the second half of the third/ninth century—for the ground-breaking article which first brought this topic to light was, see Ilisch 1979. For further details, see Treadwell 2011, Chapter 2.

15. [...] *wa idhā khalaṣa al-ʿayn wa al-waraq min ghishsh kāna huwa al-muʿtabar fī al-nuqūd al-mustaḥiqqa wa al-maṭbūʿ minhā bi al-sikka al-sulṭāniyya al-mawthūq bi-salāmati ṭabʿihi min tabdīlihi wa talbīsihi huwa al-mustaḥiqq...* (al-Māwardī 1327, p. 139).

The coins struck in Egypt and Syria in the Tulunid period are easy to read, but they do not yield their secrets lightly. They bear titles that sometimes appear difficult to match with the texts, and tantalising evidence of big shifts of power between the centre (Samarra/Baghdad) and the periphery (Miṣr), which need to be given contextualised meaning. We are hampered in our attempts to address these questions by our uncertainty about who issued the dies or commissioned the inscriptions. We do not know a great deal about the contemporary numismatic context in other regions of the Abbasid world, which, taken as a whole, is one of the most complex and intriguing of the early Islamic period. Vasmer made an important start with his study of Saffarid numismatics, but there is still some way to go with Saffarid coinage.[16] The picture for the Khurāsānī mints is clearer than for the mints of Iraq and Fars, especially in the case of the mint of Nishapur, where self-appointed rulers of the city began to strike their own coins from the mid third/ninth century onwards.[17] The wider numismatic context, although still not fully understood, provides an indispensable background for the Tulunid coinage record.

4. Abbasid Politics in the Mid-Third/Ninth Century

How was the caliphal state configured in 254/868, the year of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn's appointment as governor of Egypt? And what can his sixteen years as governor of Egypt tell us about the breakdown of the unitary caliphal state, a process that began in the years prior to Ibn Ṭūlūn's arrival in Egypt, with the deposition and murder of the caliphs in Samarra by their own courtiers and soldiers? The Abbasid *dawla* was plunged into a state of crisis by the events of the 250s/860s. Once the caliphs began to be deposed and murdered with impunity, the nature of the political process changed. The caliphs lost their position at the centre of the patronage network that had controlled the state. The extreme fluidity of personal and group alliances that characterised the hyper-volatile politics of the period meant that no political actor had much to gain from remaining loyal indefinitely to a single master or peer group. The turmoil at the centre made available sources of wealth and power to all who wielded a modicum of military force.[18]

At the same time, the Abbasid state entered a period of steep economic decline as the caliphal tax-collection system faltered and peripheral provinces ceased remitting revenues to the centre.[19] The political trajectories traced by the conflicts that arose from the competition for resources among the Turkish amirs from the 240s/850s onwards seem to have been mainly centripetal. Most successful amirs returned when they could to the capital in their anxiety to keep an eye on events. No long-term power bases were established elsewhere. To take the pre-Tulunid governorship of Egypt as a case in point: in this province, Turkish officers with

16. See Vasmer 1930: and Tor 2002 for a recent summary of the Saffarid numismatic evidence.

17. See Ramadan 2012.

18. For a good general description of the political situation in the mid-third/ninth century, see Bonner 2010b.

19. For the causes and consequences of economic decline, see Kennedy 1986, pp. 200–211; Kennedy 2004; Gordon 2001, pp. 90-91 and 118-119; and Gordon 2015, pp. 229–230.

Samarran backgrounds had held senior positions for many years before Ibn Ṭūlūn's arrival, yet none of them managed to establish an enduring regional presence.[20] It seems that it was in no-one's interest to permit the emergence of a hegemon, either at the centre of power or in the regions. Even the most powerful generals were reluctant to commit their forces to all-out contests of strength for fear that deserters might change the course of a battle in the flash of an eye. In spite of the undoubted turmoil of these years, there is a curious sense of restraint on the part of the amirs: now that there were few rules in the game of power, even those who were best placed to seize it, hedged their bets for fear of failure.

From the mid-250s/860s, when the Abbasid state began a temporary recovery, under al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh (256–270/869-883) and his brother, Abū Aḥmad Ṭalḥa (later al-Muwaffaq billāh), the caliph's scope for effective action was limited to the central Islamic lands which still lay within his grasp. The shockwaves of the anarchy in Samarra contributed to the rapid weakening of caliphal authority in the Mashriq, where Tahirid rule was abruptly brought to an end in 260/873 by the Saffarid ruler Yaʿqūb b. Layth, who proceeded to press very hard against caliphal interests in Fars and Khuzistan.[21] In the 260s/870s, central and northern Iraq remained under direct caliphal control and the caliph's horizon of action had narrowed to the defence of southern Iraq against the Saffarid raiders and the Zanj rebels and the consolidation of the northern border with Byzantium. Egypt, the traditional provider of abundant revenues to the caliph's exchequer, was a key resource for the Abbasids.

While the caliphs had undoubtedly lost personal credibility, the institution they served remained ideologically valid, and the state apparatus largely intact. Although circumscribed in the range of demands he was able to make, the caliph continued to levy taxes and moreover, never relinquished control of the levers of moral power. Al-Muʿtamid is certainly portrayed in some sources as weak and ineffectual, by comparison with his dynamic brother Abū Aḥmad (al-Muwaffaq), who had extensive military experience and enjoyed good relations with many of the most influential Turkish commanders.[22] But, as this article will argue, in the first decade of his reign, there is evidence to suggest that al-Muʿtamid managed to restrain his more active brother quite effectively.

Al-Ṭabarī is our most reliable source for the first contacts between al-Muʿtamid and his brother.[23] When he became caliph, al-Muʿtamid summoned Abū Aḥmad from Mecca, where he

20. For Yazīd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Turkī, Ibn Ṭūlūn's predecessor as governor of Egypt, see al-Kindī n.d., pp. 228–234.

21. See Tor 2007 (Chapter 5) who argues, on the contrary, that the Saffarid Yaʿqūb was a supporter of the Abbasid state, who wanted to revive the Abbasid state by replacing al-Muʿtamid with a more dynamic caliph.

22. See al-Masʿūdī 1966, vol. 4, pp. 111–142 for an account of al-Muʿtamid's reign which mentions his addiction to pleasurable pursuits and his love of wine. Al-Maqrīzī (n.d., vol. 2, p. 178, line 14 from the bottom of the page) characterizes the caliph as a man devoted to the indulgence of personal pleasures, which included hunting, game playing and secluding himself with his slave girls. Al-Maqrīzī did not copy this characterization of the caliph from Ibn al-Dāya: the latter's account lacks any adverse comments on the caliph's character.

23. As a resident of Baghdad with a keen eye for the day-to-day political scene, al-Ṭabarī was meticulous in his recording of state appointments and court ceremonies in this period. He tells us that he personally witnessed Abū Aḥmad's departure from Samarra to fight the Zanj in 258/871 (al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 3, p. 1862).

had been exiled by al-Muhtadī (255–256/868-869). In Safar 257/869 he assigned him territories in S. Iraq, the Hijaz and the Yemen and in Ramadan of the same year he added Baghdad, the Sawad, the Tigris districts, Wasit, al-Basra, al-Ahwaz and Fars, appointing governors to Baghdad and al-Basra on Abū Aḥmad's behalf.[24] In the following year he assigned him several more territories on Iraq's northern flank, no doubt with the aim of deploying his military skills to strengthen the frontier with Byzantium, which had become vulnerable during the period of anarchy in Samarra. These territories included the *ʿawāṣim,* Qinnasrīn and Diyār Muḍar.[25] In the same year, he appointed him to lead the military campaign against the rebellious Zanj in S. Iraq.[26] In the course of these two years, therefore, al-Muʿtamid appointed his brother over many of the core territories of the Abbasid state, and put him in charge of the army, while he himself retained control of the capital Samarra, as well as the caliphal chancery and mint.

Furthermore, the caliph did not immediately appoint his powerful brother as his successor, even though he did not have a son of a suitable age to fill the role. When al-Muʿtamid did address the question of the succession in 261/874, he bestowed on his infant son Jaʿfar the title al-Mufawwaḍ ilā Allāh, and appointed him heir apparent, even though as a minor he was not eligible for the role. He appointed him governor of the 'Maghrib', a region which for these purposes was defined as including Ifrīqiya, Egypt, Syria, the Jazira, as well as the Khurāsān road up to Ḥulwān.[27] Yet the caliph also conceded an important, though undefinable, role in the management of the western territories to none other than Mūsā b. Bughā, a close ally of al-Muwaffaq. Al-Ṭabarī tells us that al-Muʿtamid "attached" Mūsā b. Bughā to him.[28] The sense conveyed here is that Mūsā was appointed as executive officer on behalf of the heir apparent, perhaps with responsibility to ensure the payment of revenues due to the caliph's son from his territories, though Mūsā never seems to have exercised this responsibility in Tulunid Egypt.[29] As we will see, only a few years after these arrangements were put in place, al-Muwaffaq ordered Mūsā to attack Ibn Ṭūlūn in Egypt. Although formally attached to al-Mufawwaḍ by the terms of the arrangements made in 261/874, there is no doubt that Mūsā remained a loyal ally of al-Muwaffaq.

As for his brother, al-Muʿtamid confirmed Abū Aḥmad's *de facto* control of the eastern regions by appointing him governor of the Mashriq, and brought him into the line of

24. Al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 3, pp. 1841–1842 (appointments of 257/870).

25. Al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 3, pp. 1859–60 (appointments of 258/871).

26. For an overview of his career, see Kennedy 2012.

27. The Aghlabids (184–290/800-902) were still governors of Ifrīqiya in this year. The term Maghrib ("Western lands") had never before this date included any lands to the east of Egypt. As for the Khurāsān road, al-Yaʿqubī notes that the caliph's stud was located in the meadows at the foot of the Ḥulwān pass, while Ibn Ḥawqal mentions the fertility of the region (Le Strange 1930, p. 192).

28. Al-Balawī (1939) uses the phrase *ḍammahu ilayhi.* Al-Maqrīzī (n.d., vol. 2, p. 178) says that al-Muʿtamid appointed Mūsā b. Bughā as deputy (*istakhlafahu*) over al-Mufawwaḍ's territories and that Mūsā in turn appointed ʿUbaydallāh b. Sulaymān b. Wahb as his secretary.

29. Mūsā did possess property in Egypt, in the form of several private estates (al-Balawī 1939, pp. 88–89).

succession after his son, conferring on him the title al-Muwaffaq billāh.[30] In a document which he ordered to be displayed within the Kaʿba in Mecca, no doubt as a conscious attempt to bring to mind Harūn al-Rashīd's succession arrangements, the caliph decreed that each of his heirs was only entitled to draw revenues from *his* half of the empire. The document also stipulated that the son was first in line to the succession, while his uncle was second in line, though the uncle would succeed should the son die before he reached the age of majority. In the normal course of events, no heir apparent could be appointed before he reached his majority, so it appears that al-Muʿtamid was bending the rules somewhat, in order to enable him to divide the empire's resources between his two heirs and to frustrate his brother's claim to the succession. The deal was made in 261/874, and from 262/875, the son and the uncle's titles appeared on coins struck in their respective halves of the empire.[31]

5. Establishment of Ibn Ṭūlūn's Authority (254-258/868-871): The Emergence of a New Relationship between Miṣr and the Caliphal Capital

Ibn Ṭūlūn's early career has been covered in some detail in the secondary literature and there is no need to dwell on the few facts that appear to be reliable.[32] Ibn al-Dāya and al-Balawī tell us that he was an able Turk who aspired to a life of orthodox piety and looked down on his fellow Turks as uncouth and corrupt. A spell in the frontier zone (*al-thughūr*) early in his adult life implanted a love of the ascetic pioneering way of life in him as well as an enduring fondness for the physical surroundings of the northern Syrian borderlands. Ibn Ṭūlūn spent most of his early career among the Turkish elite in Iraq and managed to keep in with the most powerful men in the state. In 254/868 his patron, the Turk Bāyakbāk, was appointed governor of Egypt and sent his young protégé off as governor of Fusṭāṭ.

Although we know nothing about the army that Ibn Ṭūlūn led to Egypt, it is a reasonable guess that he commanded a sizeable force and that it was for his military skills as much as his political acumen that Bāyakbāk had chosen him for the job. At the time of his arrival in Fusṭāṭ, Ibn al-Mudabbir was the long-serving financial officer (*sāḥib al-kharāj*) in the province, with responsibility for ensuring the prompt dispatch of tax revenue to the Abbasid capital. Ibn

30. Al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 3, p. 1890. Two erroneous references to the succession arrangements should be noted here. Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630) states that Abū Aḥmad received the full title *al-nāṣir li-dīn Allāh/al-Muwaffaq billāh* in 261/874 (Ibn al-Athīr 1998, vol. 6, p. 252). However, the first element of this title only appears on the coinage from 271/884, having presumably been awarded to al-Muwaffaq in recognition of his victory over the Zanj in the previous year. For an early dirham with the title *Abū Aḥmad al-nāṣir li-dīn Allāh* see Isbahan 271 (American Numismatic Society collection of Islamic coins 1971.316.173). Second, al-Yaʿqūbī (1960, vol. 2, p. 510) mistakenly claims that al-Muwaffaq's son, Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad, the future caliph al-Muʿtaḍid billāh (278–289/891-901), also received his title and secured a place in the succession before the end of the 250s/860s (first noted in Becker 1902–1903, pp. 162–163). However, there is no numismatic evidence to support the appearance of his title until 278/891, the year he succeeded his uncle as caliph. See e.g. dirham of 278/891 of Jannaba (Vasmer 1930, p. 42).

31. But see below for the exceptional use of of Jaʿfar's *ism* on the dinars struck in Miṣr in 263/876.

32. See Gordon 2015, and Gordon 2017a for a good summary of Ibn Ṭūlūn's career.

al-Mudabbir's task had been made difficult in recent years by a series of revolts triggered by anti-tax protests, which were probably stimulated by the widespread recognition that the caliph's authority had been much weakened by events in Samarra.

Ibn Ṭūlūn's first actions speak of his determination to bolster his personal power and authority at the expense of the *ṣāḥib al-kharāj*. We are told that Ibn al-Mudabbir sent him a gift of 10,000 dinars, which was surely intended to buy his acquiescence to the *status quo*. But the new governor refused the money and demanded instead that Ibn al-Mudabbir give him his personal bodyguard of one hundred Ghurid soldiers. The bodyguard's transfer to Tulunid service must have sent an unambiguous message to all Egyptians that henceforth supreme power lay in the hands of the governor.[33]

His first year as governor of Egypt has left a small memorial in the form of a glass weight dated 254/868, which bears the words *amara bihi al-amīr (...?) Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn*. Fahmy suggests that the weight demonstrates that Ibn Ṭūlūn controlled the finances of Egypt from this year, but this is an over-interpretation of the inscription.[34] Egyptian governors had issued glass weights throughout the first half of the third/ninth century with the same formulae as we find on Ibn Ṭūlūn's piece.[35] While the weight bears testimony to the new governor's intention to support the provincial administration's efforts to maintain good working practices in the markets of Fusṭāṭ, it tells us nothing about who controlled the country's finances. Indeed, the evidence to hand suggests that Ibn al-Mudabbir continued to be in charge of the country's financial affairs until he left the country in 258/871.

Ibn Ṭūlūn's early achievements impressed his Iraqi backers, most importantly Yārjūkh, the successor of his first patron Bāyakbāk.[36] Within two years, he had been assigned the governorship of the whole province of Egypt and had appointed his own governors to Alexandria and Barqa. In 256/869, he responded to a request from the caliph to march northwards to hunt down ʿĪsā b. Shaykh, a maverick amir who had seized a large consignment of several hundred thousand dinars that had been dispatched by Ibn Mudabbir towards the caliphal treasury. The caliphal command gave him the opportunity to recruit large numbers of soldiers (Greeks, Africans and others), but in the event he did not mobilise his forces, because al-Muʿtamid sent another amir, Amājūr, against ʿĪsā, possibly for fear that Ibn Ṭūlūn might capitalise on his success by incorporating Syria into the territories under his control. Reports sent back to Samarra by Amājūr and others warned the caliph that Ibn Ṭūlūn had assembled a huge army in preparation for this campaign. When invited to return to Iraq and take up the post of Commander-in-Chief, Ibn Ṭūlūn wisely declined the caliph's offer and sent his agent al-Wāsiṭī to the capital with sufficient funds to grease the palms of the amirs whose support he required. Al-Wāsiṭī's

33. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 78.

34. Fahmy 1957, p. 5.

35. See Balog 1976.

36. Gordon 2015, p. 248.

mission was successful: he gave the caliph's wazir such a valuable present that Ibn Ṭūlūn was excused his absence.[37]

The huge investment which Ibn Ṭūlūn made in the system of spies and go-betweens to secure support in the caliphal capital shows that he regarded the distribution of favours in Iraq as being of vital importance to his success in Egypt. Meanwhile in Fusṭāṭ, he began the construction of al-Qaṭā'iᶜ, a new administrative quarter with public buildings designed to accommodate his growing secretariat and army. At the same time, he kept up the pressure on Ibn al-Mudabbir and tried to implement reforms in the economic and tax regimes to increase the amount of revenue available to him locally and help him forge good relations with his new subjects, both rich and poor. At least this is impression given by the Egyptian *Sīra* tradition, which acknowledges his enormous energy and praises his determination to implement economic initiatives (e.g. the cultivation of flax and the promotion of the linen industry) and eradicate occasional taxes that held back development and exchange. [38]

Ibn al-Mudabbir finally conceded that Ibn Ṭūlūn's standing in Samarra was unassailable and that his position had become exposed as a result.[39] With the help of his brother in Iraq, he secured a transfer northwards to take up the post of *ṣāḥib al-kharāj* in Syria and Palestine, handing over his Egyptian properties to Ibn Ṭūlūn so as to guarantee safe passage out of Egypt. Ibn Ṭūlūn provided an escort to accompany him up to the border, perhaps mindful of the impression that his measured actions would have in Samarra as well as Fusṭāṭ.[40]

The record of the precious metal coinage (mostly gold) of the mint of Fusṭāṭ between 254–258/868-871 gives us another useful perspective on Ibn Ṭūlūn's first period as governor. In these early years the mint of Miṣr struck only small quantities of dinars, as well as some dirhams.[41] Bates discusses the extraordinary fact that the many specimens of Miṣr dinars dated 255/868 appear to have had the name of the caliph al-Muᶜtazz (252–255/866-868) and that of his son ᶜAbdallāh gouged out of the die before the coins were struck. Two blank raised areas (with no lettering) are visible above the titles of the caliph and his son (*amīr al-muʾminīn* and *ibn amīr al-muʾminīn* respectively).[42]

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37. See Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 84 and al-Balawī 1939, pp. 57–58, for the primary reference and Becker (1902–1903, p. 161) for the analysis. The story recounts the wazir's delight in the gift and his subsequent favour to Ibn Ṭūlūn. No doubt al-Wāsiṭī's successful mission also served to remind al-Muᶜtamid that Ibn Ṭūlūn had the means to provide substantial funds for the caliphal exchequer.

38. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, pp. 85–86 (Ibn Ṭūlūn's remission of taxes).

39. Ibn al-Mudabbir may also have found it difficult to remit the annual tribute to the caliphal court at a time when there was little coin being struck in Fusṭāṭ (see below).

40. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 84.

41. Bates n.d. stated that, at the time of writing his paper, he knew of only five dinars of Miṣr struck in the period from the accession of al-Muhtadī to the end of 257/870. No dinars are known to have been struck in 256/869. For the Tulunid copper coins of Miṣr issued between 257–259/870-872 and those of the *thughūr* issued in the 260s/870s, see below (Section 11).

42. For a specimen of these dinars on which the names and titles of the caliph and his son have been erased on the die, see Morton and Eden sale 27.4.17, lot 342 (https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=sale&sid=1937&cid=&pg=4&so=1&search=&s=1).

Bates suggests that Ibn Ṭūlūn refused to name the new caliph al-Muhtadī when he came to the throne in 255/868 because of religious differences, and chose instead to erase the names of Muʿtazz and his son from the dies that were already in use in the mint and to continue using these altered dies to strike coins.[43] However, rulers did not usually allow their religious scruples to dictate their fiscal policies and furthermore, a small number of Miṣr dinars and dirhams bearing al-Muhtadī's name are known to have been struck, so we can be sure that at least a small quantity of such dies was manufactured.[44]

The question is where these dies were manufactured and why so few of them were made available to the mint that the master of the mint decided to reuse existing dies. The more likely explanation for the continuing use of obsolete dies is simply that there were no new dinar dies available for use in the mint. The very small quantity of coinage struck by the mint of Miṣr in this period could have been a result of interruptions in the supply of dies from Samarra, rather than Ibn Ṭūlūn's reluctance to produce coinage.[45]

Could there have been other reasons for the lack of dies supplied to the mint of Miṣr? Perhaps the caliphs were so alarmed by ʿIsā b. Shaykh's seizure of a huge consignment of Egyptian dinars en route to Iraq that they did not commission the striking of large amounts of cash in Fusṭāṭ for fear of losing more shipments of coin. In Fusṭāṭ itself, Ibn Ṭūlūn may have hoarded those tax revenues in cash and kind which did arrive in his treasury, in order to meet the expenses required by his growing army and his ambitious building programme on the new settlement of al-Qaṭāʾiʿ—but we have no idea of the means by which he paid for his ambitious plans.[46] In 258/871, al-Muʿtamid agreed that he would not seek to recoup outstanding amounts of revenue owed from Egypt (see Section 6), suggesting that revenue flows to Iraq had not been fully maintained in the preceding years.

6. 258/871-872: The Conclusion of the Financial Agreement between Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn and the Caliph al-Muʿtamid

With Ibn al-Mudabbir out of the way, Ibn Ṭūlūn took full control of the financial affairs of Egypt. The account becomes a little opaque at this juncture, but the story (as told by Ibn al-Dāya)[47] seems to have unfolded as follows. In 258/871, al-Muʿtamid sent a certain Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ukht al-Wazīr as Ibn al-Mudabbir's successor. He relayed the caliphal command that Ibn Ṭūlūn should continue payments to Samarra, presumably in order to reassure the caliph that Ibn al-Mudabbir's departure would not entail a cessation of payments. However Ibn Ṭūlūn managed to negotiate a private agreement with the caliph that guaranteed the resumption of regular annual payments to Iraq *and* ensured his right to a portion of the

43. Bates n.d., pp. 3–4.

44. Bates n.d., note 5.

45. See fn. 14 (above) for the distribution of dies from the caliphal capital in the third/ninth century.

46. See above, Section 2, for the stories about the fortuitous discovery of treasures that Ibn Ṭūlūn used to pay for his building projects.

47. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, pp. 84 ff.

revenue of Egypt.[48] Furthermore, he persuaded al-Muʿtamid that he could only conceal the full amount of the annual payment he would make to the caliph's private treasury from the caliph's *awliyāʾ* (the military elite) if he himself took direct responsibility for the *kharāj*.[49]

The caliph accepted his proposal and added the responsibility for the *maʿūna*[50] of Egypt as well as the *kharāj* of the Syrian *thughūr* to Ibn Ṭūlūn's portfolio, perhaps in order to increase the amount of revenue which would be secretly dispatched to his own treasury.[51] As a further concession to Ibn Ṭūlūn, al-Muʿtamid agreed to waive his demand for the sums which Ibn Ṭūlūn owed to Samarra (from the first four years of his governorship), so long as he promised to resume payments to Samarra on the same scale as they had been "in the past", i.e. in pre-Tulunid times.

The caliph dispatched two trusted agents in the delegation which he sent to negotiate these special terms secretly with Ibn Ṭūlūn. Here, it must be said, we enter a particularly tangled and complex episode of early Tulunid history, in which the prosopography of the principal actors is difficult to ascertain. Ibn al-Dāya tells us that the caliph sent two high-level clients (*khādim*s, probably therefore both eunuchs) of his, named Nafīs and Nasīm, to oversee the process.[52] However, another source identifies a third *khādim* who also played a role in these events. The *Book of Gifts and Rarities,* an anonymous fifth/eleventh-century compilation of brief accounts of rare and precious objects, tells us that a certain Niḥrīr, who is described as the *khādim* of al-Muʿtamid, took charge of the sum of 1.2 million dinars that Ibn Ṭūlūn sent to the caliph in Iraq, as well as a consignment of slaves, horses, weapons and luxuries.[53] The date of Niḥrīr's mission is only vaguely alluded to in the text, but the

48. Although no source explicitly states that Ibn Ṭūlūn received a guaranteed portion of the annual revenues as part of this deal, it is very likely that he did so. He must have been receiving a part of the annual revenues from 254/868 onwards, otherwise he would not have been able to fund the recruitment of his large army and the beginning of his ambitious building program. But by taking control of the *kharāj* himself and making a secret deal with the caliph, he was able to regularize the previous *ad hoc* arrangements and put them on a stable basis.

49. The reference to the *awliyāʾ* must have been to the senior Turkish officers at the caliphal court and perhaps also hinted at the supporters of the caliph's brother, Abū Aḥmad.

50. We should understand *maʿūna* in this context as 'special payments,' which were made to the governor that were not included in the annual taxation assessment (see Crone 2012).

51. Bonner (2010a, pp. 583-584) dates Ibn Ṭūlūn's assumption of financial control over Egypt to 262/875, but this is four years too late.

52. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 84; al-Balawī, (1939, p. 73) mentions only Nafīs. Bonner notes that Nafīs subsequently took up a post in the Tulunid *diwān al-kharāj* and became a trusted confidant of governor (Bonner 2010a, p. 583). The implication of the story seems to be that the client played the role of the guarantor of the clandestine agreement between caliph and governor, earning the confidence of the governor, while still able to reassure his caliphal master that the Tulunids were carrying out their part of the bargain.

53. See Hamidallah 1959 for the Arabic text: and al-Qaddūmi 1996 for an English translation and important revisions to the questions of authorship and title of the book. The account in question can be found in al-Qaddūmī 1996, passage no. 43. Bates (n.d.) notes that variant vowellings of this *khādim*'s *ism* are found in different sources.

numismatic evidence allows for precision. Many of the Miṣr dinars dated 258/871 AH bear Niḥrīr's name below the reverse field.[54]

The Miṣr dinars of 258/871 display a similar style of engraving to contemporary dinars of other caliphal mints and may well have been struck from dies which had been engraved in al-Muʿtamid's die manufactories in Samarra. If these were indeed of Iraqi manufacture, one might imagine that, having sent the two *khādim*s to supervise the conclusion of the deal with Ibn Ṭūlūn, al-Muʿtamid dispatched Niḥrīr with several pairs of dies to the mint of Miṣr, where the gold bullion was waiting to be struck into coin. Those bearing the name *Niḥrīr* were struck up and returned to the caliph's personal treasury in Nīḥrīr's charge, while the other half were presumably used to strike dinars that were destined for the payment of Ibn Ṭūlūn's officials and troops—though the sources say nothing about the fate of these coins.

Ibn al-Dāya gives us no explanation of the caliph's decision to accept Ibn Ṭūlūn's demands. Did al-Muʿtamid act out of self-interest, calculating that the surest way of maintaining a share of Egypt's declining revenues was to align himself with the Tulunid governor? It seems that the caliph realised that he had to sustain the flow of revenue from Egypt to Samarra in order to strengthen his hand against his brother. The deal enabled Ibn Ṭūlūn to recruit a huge army that the caliph allowed him to pay from local revenues and to acquire large reserves of funding which gave him the opportunity to retain the favour of key players in the Abbasid regime.

7. The History of the Syrian *Thughūr* (258–263/871-876)

One of the murkiest topics of early Tulunid history concerns the administration of the Syrian *thughūr* during the years 258–263/871-876.[55] As noted above (in Section 4), al-Ṭabarī tells us that caliph appointed his brother Abū Aḥmad governor of the *ʿawāṣim* and Diyār Muḍar in 258/871, thus making him the *de facto* powerbroker of the northern frontier. It may be for this reason that, according to Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Ṭūlūn appealed to Abū Aḥmad, rather than the caliph, to appoint him governor of Tarsus in the same year.[56] His request was turned down. Ibn al-Dāya provides a brief synopsis of the careers of the three governors whom Abū Aḥmad appointed to take charge of the *thughūr,* one after the other, beginning in the late 250s/860s, probably soon after he had turned down Ibn Ṭūlūn's request to govern Tarsus.[57] Before appointing the first of these governors, Abū Aḥmad complained to the caliph that Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn would only appoint a governor to

54. The date at which Niḥrīr performed this duty is said to have been the period in which the 'ʿAlawī of Baṣra rose (in rebellion)'. The reference must be to the Ṣāḥib al-Zanj, whose rebellion lasted from 255/868 to the early 270s/880s. The full text of the reverse field of the dinars of 258/871 is *lillāh/Muḥammad/rasūl/Allāh/al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh/Niḥrīr.* For a specimen of this dinar type see Morton and Eden, 27/6/2006, no. 61 (http://www.mortonandeden.com/pdfcats/20web.pdf). Bates n.d., pp. 4–5, estimates that roughly half the known dinar dies of that year bear the name of Niḥrīr below the reverse inscription.

55. As Bonner (2010a, p. 583) states: "[...] the events and chronology are especially confusing."

56. Ibn al-Athīr 1998, vol. 6, p. 272 (*anno* 263 AH).

57. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, 91–92. The third of these governors, who is named Arjwān b. Ūlugh Ṭarkhān al–Turkī in his text, was appointed in 260/873 and ended his career in the *thughūr* in 263/876.

the *thughūr* who would not carry out his responsibilities there.[58] This cryptic remark is clarified by al-Balawī, who explains that Abū Aḥmad believed that Ibn Ṭūlūn's appointee would not seek to take independent action as governor and would not fulfil the duty of leading the local population in *ghazawāt* against their Byzantine enemy.[59]

Although the Egyptian *sīra* tradition gives no explanation for Abū Aḥmad's remark, a clue to its context may lie in the details of the financial deal that Ibn Ṭūlūn concluded with the caliph in the same year, 258/871 (see above, section 6).[60] In addition to awarding him full responsibility for the collection and disbursement of the Egyptian *kharāj,* the caliph also placed responsibility for the *kharāj* of the *thughūr* in Ibn Ṭūlūn's hands.[61] Could this appointment have prompted Abū Aḥmad's remark? Was Abū Aḥmad saying that he understood that Tulunid financial administrators would be appointed to the *thughūr,* but that as they would not be tasked with military responsibilities, the region still needed a governor who would lead the *jihād* against the Byzantines? Since it was Abū Aḥmad who subsequently took the initiative to appoint the three governors, we must assume either that the caliph permitted him to take charge of these appointments or that Abū Aḥmad acted unilaterally: the sources do not allow us to come to a definite conclusion on this matter.[62]

Abū Aḥmad's governors proved to be unfortunate choices. The first died before arriving in the region; the second was murdered by the people of Tarsus and the third disgraced himself in 263/876 by stealing public funds donated for the relief of the garrison of an important fortress (Luʾluʾa) which was under threat from the enemy. The *thughūr* descended into chaos at this point and Ibn Ṭūlūn was asked to regain control of the region.[63] His appointee, Ṭukhshī b. Balīn (b. Balzad in al-Balawī's text) managed to pacify the region. In the following year, Ibn Ṭūlūn marched into Syria and in 265/878 he came to the *thughūr* in person.[64]

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58. Ibn al-Dāya (1953, pp. 91-92) states: *aʿlama (al-Muwaffaq) al-Muʿtamid anna [...] Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn innamā yabʿathu ilayhā man lā yashtaghilu* (= *yastaqillu*? see next footnote) *bihā...*

59. Al-Balawī (1939, p. 89) states: *kataba al-Muwaffaq ilā al-Muʿtamid inna al-thughūr al-shāmiyya ḍāʾiʿa wa innahā taḥtāju ilā man yuqīmu fīhā wa yaghzū bi-ahlihā wa inna Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn muhmilun li-amrihā wa innamā yabʿathu ilayhā man lā yastaqillu bihā...*

60. Bonner (2010a, pp. 583-584) believes that Ibn Ṭūlūn was not assigned responsibility for the *kharāj* of the *thughūr* until 262/875.

61. The implication here is that Muʿtamid gave Ibn Ṭūlūn the responsibility for collecting and disbursing the revenues of the *thughūr* but did not appoint him as governor of the region. In other words, Muʿtamid did not grant Ibn Ṭūlūn the *wilāya* of the *thughūr.*

62. Gordon (2017b, p. 7) has suggested that Muʿtamid and his brother each made their own appointments to the *thughūr,* implying that the two governors had overlapping responsibilities. But it seems that Ibn Ṭūlūn's representatives were limited to the management of financial matters before 263/876, while Abū Aḥmad's held the *wilāya*: the two posts were complementary.

63. Ibn al-Dāya (1953, p. 92) does not make it clear who involved Ibn Ṭūlūn in this matter, although the context suggests that it was Abū Aḥmad (by now titled al-Muwaffaq) rather than the caliph.

64. For the history of Ibn Ṭūlūn's less than successful interventions in the region, see Bonner 2010a and Gordon 2017b.

8. Breakdown in Relations between Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq (c. 262/875)

As already noted, soon after al-Muwaffaq's appointment as an heir to the throne in 261, a violent quarrel erupted between him and Ibn Ṭūlūn over the apportionment of Egyptian revenues. Although no source mentions the date on which this conflict broke out, it must have postdated 261/874, the year in which al-Muwaffaq acquired his title.[65] We may assume that the quarrel most likely broke out in the following year, 262/875, although it is possible that the seeds of the conflict had already been planted earlier, given the rising tension between the two amirs over the management of the *thughūr* and al-Muwaffaq's brittle relationship with the caliph.[66]

The story is recounted in detail by al-Maqrīzī, who based his account on the same passage in Ibn al-Dāya, that led Hassan to miscalculate the chronology of the early Tulunid period (see Sections 1 and 2).[67] The trouble began when al-Muwaffaq wrote to Ibn Ṭūlūn, seeking funds for the prosecution of the war against the Zanj. In the letter he acknowledged that Egypt belonged to the Maghrib region and was thus within the territories of al-Mufawwaḍ, but pleaded his case on the grounds that revenues from the Mashriq were much reduced, as a result of the disruption caused by the Zanj.

Egypt was the richest territory in the Maghrib and the most accessible from Iraq.[68] Al-Muwaffaq appears to have discovered that Muʿtamid had been secretly sequestrating the annual revenues from Egypt (or at least a part of them) since 258/871, according to the terms of the deal he had concluded Ibn Ṭūlūn in that year (see Section 6).[69] This knowledge allowed him to maintain a degree of leverage over his brother, who for four years had benefitted from a private financial agreement that was probably never legally ratified. Al-Balawī states that al-Muwaffaq was compelled to seek the revenues of Egypt because of unavoidable financial expenses incurred in the war against the Zanj.[70] In fact al-Muwaffaq was looking for more than monetary gain alone in Egypt. It is clear that he intended from the outset to bring down Ibn Ṭūlūn by subverting the loyalty of his generals and replacing him as governor. With Ibn Ṭūlūn gone, al-Muwaffaq knew that his brother's privileged access to Egyptian funds would cease and that he himself would be able to tap into the province's wealth.

As for the detailed narrative of these events: al-Maqrīzī begins by telling us that al-Muwaffaq dispatched a certain Niḥrīr, whom he describes as Mutawakkil's *khādim,* to

65. As noted above (Section 2), Ibn al-Dāya's account implicitly dates the conclusion of the succession arrangements to the year 257/870, when Abū Aḥmad returned from Mecca to the Hijaz.

66. Indeed it is possible that al-Muwaffaq began pondering how he could get his hands on the revenues of Egypt as soon as he returned to Samarra from exile in the Hijaz. But he first took action on the issue only after he had been placed in the line of succession to the throne in 261/874.

67. Al-Maqrīzī n.d., vol. 2, pp. 178–179: Ibn al-Dāya 1953, pp. 89–91.

68. Although more remote from Iraq than Egypt, Ifrīqiya was also a rich province. But there is no evidence that the Aghlabids (184–290/800-904) paid *kharāj* to the Abbasids on an annual basis.

69. Ibn al-Dāya (1953, p. 87) notes that when al-Muwaffaq complained of his urgent need for funds, the "revenues of Egypt were delayed (i.e. had not arrived in the Abbasid treasury) because they were secretly carried to al-Muʿtamid." The implication is that al-Muwaffaq himself already knew that his brother was siphoning off Egyptian funds into his private treasury.

70. *Fa-daʿat Abā Aḥmad al-ḍarūra ilā an kataba ilā Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn…* (p 79).

collect the funds he had requested from Ibn Ṭūlūn.[71] At first glance, it would seem that al-Maqrīzī's source, Ibn al-Dāya, has misnamed al-Muwaffaq's envoy, confusing him with the *khādim* of al-Muʿtamid who was took charge of the financial arrangements in 258/871 and whose *ism* appears on the Egyptian coins of the same year. On further investigation, however, it appears that Niḥrīr did make a second journey to Egypt, this time on behalf of al-Muwaffaq, in c. 262/875.

Al-Muwaffaq evidently managed to coerce Niḥrīr, the caliph's *khādim* and a senior financial official in the Abbasid financial system, into helping him to oust Ibn Ṭūlūn.[72] Why did al-Muwaffaq make the risky choice of the caliph's *khādim* to lead the embassy to Miṣr? One reason may have been that Niḥrīr's presence conveyed the impression that the caliph sanctioned al-Muwaffaq's appropriation of Egyptian wealth. Niḥrīr was also the bearer of seditious letters to Ibn Ṭūlūn's generals. The reader of al-Maqrīzī would assume that al-Muwaffaq himself was the signatory of these letters: and so he may have been. But it is also possible that Muʿtamid had been coerced by his brother into signing the letters. If this were the case, Niḥrīr would have been a good choice as the messenger, because he could reassure the generals that his master the caliph was acting in their best interests. Forewarned of his arrival by al-Muʿtamid, Ibn Ṭūlūn arrested the envoy in Egypt and confined him to his quarters, to prevent him from making contact with the generals. Ibn Ṭūlūn then took possession of the letters that Niḥrīr was carrying and punished those who were implicated in the plot against him.

But Ibn Ṭūlūn could not solve his main dilemma. He found himself caught between the competing demands of the caliph, to whom he had existing financial obligations, and the new demands made by his powerful brother. The caliph had reminded Ibn Ṭūlūn of his obligation to send the customary annual tribute of cash and other goods including *ṭirāz,* slaves, horses and wax (*shamʿ*) to the caliphal treasury. But the Tulunid decided to honour al-Muwaffaq's demands instead[73] and sent him the province's annual tribute (or at least a portion of it), amounting to the sum of between 1.2–2.2 million dinars, as well as other

71. Al-Maqrīzī (n.d., p. 179) has 'Taḥrīr', but this must be a scribal error for Niḥrīr, which is the spelling given in Ibn al-Dāya's text (Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 87).

72. As a major player in the events of 258 and a close associate of the caliph, Niḥrīr must have been fully aware of, and was probably complicit in, the caliph's financial subterfuge. Niḥrīr remained loyal to Muʿtamid throughout this period, as proved by his presence at Muʿtamid's side in 269–270/882-883, during the caliph's attempted flight to Egypt—he also witnessed his tearful reaction to the news of Ibn Ṭūlūn's death in 270/883 (see al-Balawī 1939, pp. 291 and 357 respectively).

73. Gordon (2015 pp. 230–231) says that al-Balawī (1939, pp. 80–81) notes that Ibn Ṭūlūn sent 1.2 million dinars to the imperial treasures in 262/875. But al-Balawī's text states that this was the sum that Ibn Ṭūlūn consigned to Niḥrīr when he escorted him to the Egyptian border, before formally handing it over to Amājūr, governor of Syria. The next appearance Niḥrīr made in the story was when he delivered the 1.2 million dinars to al-Muwaffaq. It seems that Ibn Ṭūlūn diverted the sum which was annually sent to Muʿtamid (*mā jarā al-rasm bi-ḥamlihi*—al-Balawī 1953, p. 81) to al-Muwaffaq, taking great care to have witnesses record the full amount before handing Niḥrīr and the revenue over into Amājūr's care. Amājūr's task was to ensure the safe passage of the envoy and his consignment through Syria en route to al-Muwaffaq's court.

commodities that were customarily included in the annual remittances from Egypt.[74] By giving in to al-Muwaffaq's demands, Ibn Ṭūlūn broke the terms of his standing agreement with al-Muʿtamid.[75]

But when Niḥrīr delivered the *kharāj* to al-Muwaffaq, the latter declared himself dissatisfied with the Tulunid's contribution.[76] He wrote again to Ibn Ṭūlūn, this time in intemperate terms, complaining that he had received only a fraction of the amount he was due.[77] Ibn Ṭūlūn was no doubt desperately disappointed by the failure of his attempt to mollify al-Muwaffaq by sending him funds. He adopted a tone of righteous indignation in his response to al-Muwaffaq, querying the claim that there was an outstanding account that needed to be settled and drawing attention to the great contribution he had made to the defence of the *dawla* and the trouble he had taken to recruit the bravest soldiers to his army and to feed and equip them. He claimed that all who showed loyalty to such a degree were deserving of recognition and promotion. Yet he, by contrast, had been subjected to demands in unnecessarily harsh terms. He reminded al-Muwaffaq that those who made demands on their inferiors, were expected to accompany their requests with gifts and promises of favours. In raising this complaint, Ibn Ṭūlūn was in effect accusing al-Muwaffaq of failing to show the gratitude expected of a master whose servant had excelled himself in his service. The charge of *kufrān al-niʿma* (ingratitude for benefits delivered) was a powerful one, which could be launched by a complainant against both social superiors and social inferiors.

In the same letter, Ibn Ṭūlūn reminded al-Muwaffaq that he had broken the terms of the succession agreement of 261/874 and that for this reason, the Muslim community was no longer obliged to render allegiance to him.[78] He said that his senior amirs (*awliyāʾ*) had begged him to remove his name from the *khuṭba* but claimed that he had chosen not to give in to their pleas. Ibn Ṭūlūn also accused al-Muwaffaq of seeking to replace him as governor of Egypt, a charge that both he and al-Muwaffaq knew to be true. Finally he reminded him that he commanded a powerful army that would prevail against all opponents in battle. The general tone of the letter is one of outrage for wrongs done to him: but one also suspects that the high emotion of Ibn Ṭūlūn's language was fuelled by anxiety—his gamble had failed and he now found himself in dispute with both al-Muwaffaq and al-Muʿtamid.

74. Al-Maqrīzī (n.d., p. 179) gives the amount as 1.2 million dinars while Ibn Khaldūn (1284, p. 299) states that the amount was 2.2 million. The question of the exact amount sent to al-Muwaffaq remains unresolved. The total annual yield from Egypt was estimated at 4.3 million dinars by Bianquis (1998, p. 95), but without references. It is impossible to calculate the average amount of the annual tribute from Egypt accurately, due to the inconsistency of different reports: moreover, the amount of revenue may have changed from year to year, depending on the success of the harvests.

75. Al-Maqrīzī n.d., p. 179.

76. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 89: "he (al-Muwaffaq) said that the total sum amounted to many times the sum that (Ibn Ṭūlūn) conveyed to him in the care of Niḥrīr." It seems likely that al-Muwaffaq had specified the sum he wanted in his first message, but that Ibn Ṭūlūn had not remitted it in full.

77. The phrase is *yaqūlu inna al-ḥisāb yujābu aḍʿafa ma ḥumilat* (al-Maqrīzī n.d., p. 178).

78. Here Ibn Ṭūlūn first articulated the grievance against al-Muwaffaq that subsequently drove him to convene the 'Damascus Assembly' in 269/882 (see below).

To summarise the conclusions drawn so far about the events of 262/875—the evidence strongly suggests that al-Muwaffaq intended to get rid of Ibn Ṭūlūn from the outset. Although the intense rivalry between two must have kicked off in the late 250s, they did not come into direct conflict with one another until this year. By 262/875, al-Muwaffaq was already an experienced field general with many campaigns under his belt. He knew that Ibn Ṭūlūn commanded a mighty army and that his capital was well defended. He realised that a military assault against Egypt would probably not succeed and that the best way to unseat Ibn Ṭūlūn was to turn his own men against him. But once Ibn Ṭūlūn had frustrated the attempt to subvert his generals, al-Muwaffaq was forced to challenge him directly.

When al-Muwaffaq received Ibn Ṭūlūn's dismissive response, he ordered Mūsā b. Bughā to drive the Tulunid out of Egypt and appoint Amājūr, the governor of Syria, in his place. Amājūr refused to accept the appointment, realising that his army was no match for Ibn Ṭūlūn's forces. Mūsā then marched against Egypt, reaching al-Rāfiqa, and Ibn Ṭūlūn began to construct fortifications in his capital to resist the new threat. But, in 264/877, Mūsā withdrew from Syria, due to lack of adequate funds for the payment of his soldiers and Amājūr died in the same year.

Ibn Ṭūlūn's next step was novel. In a tactical move that must have been intended to frustrate any future threat from Syria, he took advantage of Amājūr's death and Mūsā's withdrawal to fill the Syrian power vacuum himself. He marched northwards, rapidly taking over Amājūr's territories and appointing his own governors to Syrian cities and created a buffer zone between his core lands in Egypt and those of his enemies in Iraq. By the time he was forced to return to Egypt from Tarsus in 265/878 to deal with his son's rebellion, he had consolidated Tulunid authority over Syria.

9. Dinars of 265/878 bearing Ibn Ṭūlūn's name

At this point we come to another numismatic crux. In 265/878, gold coins were struck in Miṣr and al-Rāfiqa bearing the name *Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn* below that of the caliph al-Muʿtamid on the reverse field, with al-Mufawwaḍ's title placed below the obverse field. Such coins were struck in these and other mints for the remainder of Ibn Ṭūlūn's life.[79] Why did his name appear on these dinars and what did it signify? To address this question, we begin by reviewing the precious metal coinage struck in the region from 259–265/872-878, in order to establish a context for the new inscription.[80]

From 259–260/872-873, the mint of Miṣr produced a small supply of precious metal coins, but no Miṣr dinars are known dated to 261–262/874-875.[81] This raises the question of how Ibn Ṭūlūn remitted the revenue due to the caliph in those two years. Miṣr dinars are known

79. For the dinars of 265 see Kazan 1983, p. 288, no. 401 (al-Rāfiqa); and Ibrāhīm 2005 (Miṣr). The Miṣr dinar is held in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL, item no. 49711 (see http://petriecat.museums.ucl.ac.uk/detail.aspx). Both mints struck dinars every year from 265–270 (see Grabar 1957 and Nicol 2007). In addition, a dinar is known from Ḥims dated 266 (Nicol 2007, 'Ṭūlūnids', no. 1) as well as dinars and dirhams from Dimashq.

80. For a review of precious metal coinage from the region struck before 259, see above, Section 5.

81. Bates n.d., p. 8.

for the year 263/876, but these coins bear Jaʿfar's *ism*, rather than his title (al-Mufawwaḍ), which appeared on all Abbasid precious metal coinage struck in the Maghrib from 262/875 onwards. The exceptional occurrence of Jaʿfar's *ism* in the inscriptions of the Miṣr coins of 263/876 requires an explanation.

Bates has suggested that Ibn Ṭūlūn may have refused to make the *bayʿa* to Jaʿfar b. al-Muʿtamid as heir apparent in 261/874, because he was displeased by al-Muwaffaq's simultaneous appointment as second in line to the throne. Yet our sources provide no evidence that Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq were in dispute with each other before the succession arrangements were made.[82] On the other hand, Ibn Ṭūlūn did divert the annual caliphal tribute to al-Muwaffaq's treasury in the following year, 262/875. Al-Muʿtamid tried to prevent the diversion of Egyptian funds away from Samarra and must have been deeply aggrieved by Ibn Ṭūlūn's decision to send funds to al-Muwaffaq. It is quite likely that the positive relationship they had enjoyed hitherto was soured by these events. In these circumstances, it is conceivable that Ibn Ṭūlūn commissioned dies to be made for the mint of Miṣr without Jaʿfar's new title as a sign of his displeasure with the caliph. Whatever the truth of the matter, the dies for the dinars of 263/876 must have been made in Miṣr, rather than Samarra, suggesting that the days when the caliph supplied dies for the Miṣr mint had come to an end. However the quarrel with the caliph, if such it was, did not last long. Miṣr dinars with standard inscriptions, including Jaʿfar's title al-Mufawwaḍ, were struck in small quantities in 264/877 and early 265/878.[83]

Why did Ibn Ṭūlūn issue dinars that bore his own *ism* and patronymic in 265/878? These were not the first Tulunid coins struck in Syria. A copper *fals* struck in Damascus in 264/877, shortly after the Tulunid occupation of the Syrian capital, bears Ibn Ṭūlūn's *ism* Aḥmad.[84] Since no coppers had been struck in the city during Amājūr's governorship, we may assume that one reason for the named Tulunid issue of 264/877 was to mark the inauguration of the new regime. The inclusion of the caliph's name on the dinars of the following year suggests that the Ibn Ṭūlūn did not strike these coins as a declaration of his independence from the Abbasid regime. Although there is no evidence to support the idea that Ibn Ṭūlūn considered himself a rebel against the Abbasids,[85] however, the new inscription did coincide with his occupation of Syria and must have been intended to publicise the significant expansion of the Tulunid state. Ibn Ṭūlūn's initiative was prefigured by rapid changes that occurred in the naming practices of other Abbasid mints in this period. The Saffarid Yaʿqūb b. Layth had

82. It is hard to understand why Ibn Ṭūlūn would have refused to acknowledge the appointment of Muʿtamid's son, if he was disturbed by al-Muwaffaq's appointment as second in line to the throne. Moreover, as we know from Ibn Ṭūlūn's letter, al-Muwaffaq's title was included in the Egyptian *khuṭba* (see Section 8).

83. Bates n.d., p. 9.

84. See Nicol 2007, 'Ṭūlūnids', no. 3. The defective specimen described by Nicol lacks the decade, but has been assigned, presumably on the evidence of style and historical context, to the year 264/877.

85. Ibn al-ʿAdim claims that Ibn Ṭūlūn cut the route to Baghdad and ceased sending revenue to al-Muʿtamid at this time, but he is probably confusing events in 265–266/878-879 with those of 269/882, when the Tulunid was once again in dispute with al-Muwaffaq (see Ibn al-ʿAdīm 1988–1989, p. 826). Bonner (2010b, p. 320) notes that Ibn Ṭūlūn assumed the prestigious title *mawlā amīr al-muʾminīn* "after 265/878," which suggests that relations with Muʿtamid continued to be amicable after this year.

already begun to put his own name on his coins from the late 250s/860s and the various amirs who governed Nishapur, like ʿAbdallāh al-Khujustānī and Rāfiʿ b. Harthama, followed suit in the 260s/870s: this is a process that is not yet well understood and deserves further study.[86]

10. The Events of 268–269/881-883

After Ibn Ṭūlūn was forced to return to Egypt in 265/878, al-Muwaffaq's efforts to undermine Ibn Ṭūlūn's authority in Syria began to bear fruit. Luʾluʾ, Ibn Ṭūlūn's *mawlā* and his governor of al-Rāfiqa, renounced his allegiance to the Tulunids and fled to al-Muwaffaq with his army. As an intriguing aside to this major event, it should be noted that the coins of al-Rāfiqa dated to the year 268/881 bear the name Luʾluʾ below that of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn on the reverse.[87] There is little to guide our understanding of the background to this new inscription. Did Luʾluʾ's name appear on the coins to indicate that he was responsible for collecting the caliphal tax revenues due from al-Rāfiqa (as in the case of Niḥrīr's name which appeared on the Miṣr coins of 258/871)? Should the coins be seen as an attempt at political self-assertion, immediately prior to Luʾluʾ's defection? If so, it is strange that Luʾluʾ took care to include Ibn Ṭūlūn's name and patronymic. As in the case of Ibn Ṭūlūn's named coins of 265/878, it is impossible to answer this question with certainty. Perhaps Luʾluʾ's coin should be taken as a sign of the extent to which powerful local rulers, even those who were city governors rather than regional governors, were becoming aware of the value of the coinage as a means of asserting their presence in the regions they governed.

Luʾluʾ's defection caused a further deterioration in relations between Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq. After al-Muwaffaq's allies had arrested al-Muʿtamid in 269/882, preventing him from fleeing to Ibn Ṭūlūn, the latter declared al-Muwaffaq unfit for his office and convened a group of *ʿulamāʾ* in Damascus to ratify his declaration, with mixed results.[88] A year after the meeting in Damascus, Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn was dead.

11. Conclusions

Although the coinage inscriptions offer insights into relations between the Abbasids and Ibn Ṭūlūn, many issues surrounding the production and use of Egyptian coinage and the raising and distribution of Egyptian revenue in the Tulunid period remain obscure. For example, we do not always know in which form the 'money' owed to the Abbasids was paid: whether in gold coin or in bullion or in coinage of other denominations. Given the imprecision and sparseness of the textual source material, we cannot be sure that the amounts recorded in dinars were always remitted in Islamic gold coins. The sums of dinars quoted in some of our sources may have been cited as a money of account, rather than quantities of individual

86. Yaʿqūb the Saffarid began striking coins bearing his own *ism* in the mid-250s/860s (for a dirham of Fars dated 256/869, see Nicol 2012, no. 714)—a dirham of the same mint dated 255/870 which also bears his *ism* is reported to be in a private collection. It is reasonably safe to conclude that these early Saffarid issues from Fars were struck from Yaʿqūb's own dies, given the parlous state of his relations with the Abbasids.

87. See Nicol 2007, nos. 8–9.

88. See Bonner (2010a) for an in-depth discussion of the so-called Damascus Assembly.

coins. This means that it is difficult to correlate the estimated output of the mint of Miṣr (which seems to have been low in the first years of Ibn Ṭūlūn's governorship, judging by the numbers of surviving specimens) with the amount of Egyptian revenue received by the caliph and his brother.

Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn played an important role in the history of the Abbasid caliphate as the first Turkish amir to leave the Iraqi centre and construct a stable polity in a major imperial province. His career reflects the conditions of a new phase in the evolution of the caliphal state, which began with the murder of al-Mutawakkil. Abbasid authority became progressively diminished as local rulers began to encroach upon caliphal lands and eventually, with the Buyid capture of Baghdad in 334/945, the temporal power of the caliphate was completely eclipsed. The Tulunid interval represents an intermediate stage in the transition from a strong unitary state to the political fragmentation of the fourth/tenth century. In the second half of the third/ninth century, the Abbasids retained enough authority to keep a grip on the central Islamic lands, but they did so at the expense of having to negotiate working relationships with regional actors like Ibn Ṭūlūn.[89]

Ibn Ṭūlūn was the first Turkish amir in Abbasid service to establish a measure of autonomous agency within a province of the Abbasid state. This article has attempted to sort out the political history of Ibn Ṭūlūn's career with a particular focus on his relations with the caliph al-Muʿtamid and his brother al-Muwaffaq. Some aspects of this triangular relationship have remained obscure until now, in spite of the best efforts of several scholars, largely due to two factors: the failure to utilize the available numismatic evidence;[90] and a reluctance to explore the complex historiography of the written record for the Tulunids, in particular the work of Ibn al-Dāya and al-Balawī. Tulunid historiography is a wearisome but not overwhelmingly challenging subject: a comprehensive comparative survey of the common patterns within, and intertextual links between, the main sources outside the *sīra* tradition (among them al-Kindī, al-Yaʿqūbī, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn al-ʿAdīm and al-Maqrīzī) is much needed.[91]

Finally, a few thoughts on one of the fundamental questions governing Ibn Ṭūlūn's rise to power—how did he legitimize his rule in Egypt (and later in Syria), given the recent precipitous decline of caliphal power and his status as a member of the Samarran Turkish community? When he arrived in Egypt in 254/868, Ibn Ṭūlūn suffered from a chronic deficit of political

89. See Bonner 2010b for the notion of the 'intermediate stage' in the decline of the unitary state.

90. The Islamic historian's disinclination to make full use of the evidence of the coinage is understandable. For the non-numismatist, the numismatic literature is difficult to master, especially now that so much material is available online. Even when one has a grasp of the relevant material, there is little reliable guidance as to its proper use.

91. It is puzzling that little serious work has been done on the historiography of the Tulunids since Becker addressed the issue at the beginning of the 20th century. Current academic fashion is one factor. The compulsion to publish accessible scholarship that engages with live macrohistorical issues, such as, in this case, the modalities of the disintegration of the unitary Abbasid state, is strong in today's academic environment. A worthy historiographical study of a tradition that is partial, fragmented, and, for the most part, much later than the events it describes, would be unlikely to win much recognition for its author.

capital.[92] As the son of a deracinated Turkish lord who had been sold into slavery and given as a gift to the caliph al-Maʾmūn at the beginning of the third/ninth century, he had no access to (and probably little conception of) any tradition of regnal authority that might have helped him establish and sustain his authority. Unlike the Samanids of Transoxania, for example, who had already spent half a century consolidating their grip over western Central Asia when Ibn Ṭūlun entered Fusṭāṭ, he was not a local nobleman with a genealogy that he could exploit to his own political ends. Nor did he have access to the longstanding tradition of Persian kingship to which the Samanids and their Buyid contemporaries, in their different ways, both claimed to be heirs.[93] Ibn Ṭūlūn's only recourse was to a tradition of pious Islamic authoritarianism which would allow him to refashion himself in the image of an ideal Muslim sovereign, who practiced just rule, in close collaboration with pious Muslim scholars.[94] Close alignment with the world of the pious scholar also helped him to maintain the illusion that he was a faithful servant of the Abbasid caliph, rather than a powerful regional ruler who commanded substantial military and economic resources. The Egyptian *sīra* tradition, whatever its shortcomings as a source for annalistic history, provides persuasive testimony for Ibn Ṭūlūn's efforts to cast himself in this mold.

Did Ibn Ṭūlūn also seek to present himself as a *ghāzī* warrior, the defender of the northern frontier against the Byzantine enemy, as a boost to his image as a righteous Muslim ruler? According to the *sīra* he had spent time in his early youth taking part in *ghazawāt* against the Byzantines and was deeply attracted to the *ghāzī* ideal. Ibn al-Athīr tells us that soon after he arrived in Egypt he asked to be appointed governor of Tarsus, which indicates that he had not lost his enthusiasm for the frontier by the late 250s/860s (see Section 7). Whether he had the opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to *jihād* effectively in later years is doubtful. His interventions in the *thughūr* were not particularly successful and he never personally led a campaign against the Christian enemy.[95] But it is true that he used the language of the *ghāzī* quite freely, calling for *jihād* against no less powerful a figure than al-Muwaffaq towards the end of his life. We should also bear in mind that after 258/871, the *thughūr* represented for Ibn Ṭūlūn not only a spiritual ideal, but also a source of revenue. Al-Muwaffaq appears to have tried to frustrate Ibn Ṭūlūn's attempts to fulfill his role as the *ṣāḥib al-kharāj* of the frontier region by appointing his own governors to the region. Ibn Ṭūlūn's interest in the region must have been sharpened by his financial interests as well as a desire to counter al-Muwaffaq's persistent interference.

92. The phrase is Gordon's: see Gordon 2015 (pp. 240–252) for an excellent discussion of Ibn Ṭūlūn's strategies of self-legitimization.

93. See, among other useful studies, Bosworth 1978.

94. Gordon, 2015, points to Ibn Ṭūlūn's efforts to create his credentials as a pious Muslim ruler, including dispensation of justice through the *maẓālim* courts, good works (such as the hospital [*māristān*] and his enormous new mosque), and the cultivation of good relations with the most important community leaders, like the chief *qāḍī*.

95. See Bonner 2010a and Gordon 2017b for mildly divergent views on Ibn Ṭūlūn's '*jihād*'.

Figure 1: *Fals* of Miṣr 258 AH
(Zeno no. 71755)

Figure 2: *Fals* of al-Thughūr
al-shāmiyya 2(6?)4 AH (Zeno no. 134791)

Did Ibn Ṭūlūn intend to create a dynasty that would rule Egypt and Syria after his death? He did appoint his son as his heir apparent, which shows that he anticipated continuity of rule among his descendants. But there is nothing to indicate that he invested heavily in the notion of dynastic identity, in the way that his Iranian contemporaries did.

However, one intriguing piece of numismatic evidence suggests that he went some way towards creating an emblem of his family's collective identity. A series of copper coins struck on his authority in Miṣr between 257–259/870-873 bear no names: neither the title of the caliph, nor the *ism* of Ibn Ṭūlūn himself (see figure 1).[96] But they do contain an enigmatic graphic sign at the bottom of the obverse consisting of a rhombus lying on its longer axis, which is flanked by a number of vertical lines to either side. The sign may have been modeled on the *tamgha*s employed on some copper issues struck by the early Abbasid governors of Transoxania.[97] The same sign recurs on coppers bearing Aḥmad's name, which were struck in the region of the *thughūr* in the 260s/870s (see figure 2).[98] A Central Asian *tamgha* of a different design was also employed on the copper coinage struck by Muḥammad b. Tughj (323–334/934-945), the founder of the regime of the Ikhshidids, the next ruling family to govern Egypt after the demise of the Tulunids. Like Ibn Ṭūlūn, Ibn Tughj was a Turk, though of Farghanan rather than inner Asian, origin.[99] Both *tamgha*s seem to have belonged to an 'invented tradition', sourced from the coinage imagery of second/eighth-century Central Asia, which was appropriated by these amirs to provide themselves with an originary foothold in the Central Asian region. Both the intention behind such collective symbols of identity and their effectiveness are difficult to gauge in the absence of any other objects bearing these symbols. The choice of Central Asian *tamgha*s, or approximations to them, hints that both Tulunids and Ikhshidids recognized that these symbols resonated with some aspects of the identity they had created for themselves as servants of the Abbasid state.

96. See Grabar 1957, p. 10, no. 17.

97. See the mintless issue of Abū Muslim (Nastich 2012, fig. 4b) and the issue of al-Ṣāghāniyān dated 146/763 (Nastich 2012, fig. 13). Both these coppers have horizontal lozenges with palmettes to either side.

98. See Miles 1956, no. 20. A recent specimen of this type offered for sale in the Bruno Peus auction of 7–9 November 2012, identifies the date of issue as 2(6)4/877 and the mint as *al-thughūr al-shāmiyya* (Peus 2012, no. 1471).

99. Bacharach 2015, pp. 34–36.

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The Abbasid "Golden Age": An Excavation[1]

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Abstract

The application of a Hegelian rise-and-fall narrative to the history of Arabic literature has been erroneously attributed to Ibn Khaldūn and his successors, though it can more probably be traced back to Hammer-Purgstall's Literaturgeschichte der Araber *(1850). Although this paradigm has long been out of favor, its disappearance leaves us without a ready answer to the question of what (if anything) was distinctive about what is still sometimes called the early Abbasid golden age. The prominence of this era in later memory is here traced to the adoption of paper, which supported, on the one hand, the simplification and vulgarization of Arab language, lore, and religion; and on the other, the appearance of the first reliably contemporary eyewitness accounts in Arabic literature. These productions made the period the first Islamic space to be imaginable in almost granular detail, as well as the source of much of what we know about antecedent "Arab" and "Islamic" history. These features gave the period an outsized place even in the pre-modern Arabic tradition. They also made it available for popularization by Jurjī Zaydān, whose* Taʾrīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī *(1902-1906) proved formative of later attitudes in Arabic-language scholarship.*

I. In 1956, a well-attended conference on "classicism and cultural decline in Islamic history" could be held in Bordeaux in full confidence that those things existed.[2] But the

1. I am grateful to Matthew Gordon for his kind invitation to submit this essay; to Antoine Borrut and the three anonymous reviewers for their many helpful suggestions; and to Ahmed El Shamsy and John Nawas for commenting on an early draft.

2. R. Brunschvig and G. E. von Grunebaum, eds., *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l'histoire de l'Islam* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1957; repr. 1977). Among the many notable contributors were Regis Blachère, Claude Cahen, Francesco Gabrieli, Charles Pellat, and Joseph Schacht. Most seem to agree that "the Muslim peoples" had been in decline since the end of the Middle Ages (29). Pellat argues specifically that the decline of "Arab culture" was a multi-stage affair that began in the third Islamic (ninth Gregorian) century (81-91). Though in its own way perhaps equally essentialist, Henri Massé's discussion of whether Persian literature represents a "renewal" of Islamic culture (339-43) at least has the virtue of not conflating "Arab" and "Islamic." For an English-language example of this sort of inquiry see J. J. Saunders, "The Problem of Islamic Decadence," *Journal of World History*, 7 (1963): 701-20.

paradigm's days were numbered. As Albert Hourani pointed out, there was nothing innocent in the choice of "Islamic civilization"as the unit of analysis.[3] And as Roger Owen was quick to add, there was no good reason to assume that "Islamic civilization"—or even a better-defined entity like Ottoman society after 1600—was in decline, at least not until "decline" could be defined in terms not entirely dependent on comparisons with the West.[4] Today no serious historian speaks of "Islamic decadence" any more. But if one narrows the field a bit, the situation seems less clear-cut. In the study of Arabic literature, which will be my focus here, it was long considered axiomatic that the Mongol, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods constituted one long age of decline.[5] Today one finds vigorous arguments against this position,[6] but no generally accepted counter-narrative,[7] and some pushback from colleagues, who sense that some modern scholars, in their eagerness to disavow the old paradigm, "overcompensate by denying any reality" to nineteenth-century Arab accounts of the preceding two hundred years, "as a period of decline in Arabic letters and the institutions that sustained them."[8] There is also the awkward fact that the Orientalist paradigm, though the "Orientalists" themselves have largely abandoned it, remains the default position in Arabic-language literary histories and mass-culture references to the Arab and Islamic past, even if it has had, and continues to have, its critics.[9]

If we drop the notion of a "golden age," which entails dropping "decline" and "renaissance" too, what, if anything, remains distinctive about early Abbasid culture? To answer this

3. Albert Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History," *Middle Eastern Studies* 3:3 (1967): 206-68.

4. Roger Owen, "Studying Islamic History," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4:2 (1973) 287-98; idem., "The Middle East in the Eighteenth Century—An Islamic Society in Decline?" *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 3:2 (1976): 110-17.

5. See, e.g., Reynold Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (New York: Scribners, 1907), 442-43.

6. Thomas Bauer, "In Search of 'Post-Classical Literature': A Review Article," *Mamluk Studies Review* 11:2 (2007): 137-67.

7. One ostensibly non-Whiggish approach is to use the terms Early, Middle, and Late Period, as Konrad Hirschler does in *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh UP, 2012). For new takes on periodization see Antoine Borrut, "Vanishing Syria: Periodization and Power in Early Islam," *Der Islam* 2014 91(1): 37-68 (in a special issue, edited by Hirschler and Sarah Bowen Savant, devoted to periodization), and Shahzad Bashir, "On Islamic time: Rethinking chronology in the historiography of Muslim societies," *History and Theory* 53 (December 2014): 519-544, both of which propose the adoption of multiple temporalities instead of a single timeline. In thinking about the periodization of literary history in particular, I am indebted to Panagiotis A. Agapitos, "Contesting Conceptual Boundaries: Byzantine Literature and its History," *Interfaces* 1 (2015): 62-91.

8. Ahmed El Shamsy, personal communication.

9. For early criticism of the paradigm as espoused by Jurjī Zaydān, see note 40 below. On later Arabic-language histories see Werner Ende, *Arabische Nation und islamische Geschichte* (Beirut: Steiner, 1977), who reads arguments for and against particular dynasties as extensions of Arab-nationalist, regional, and sectarian quarrels. Partiality to the Abbasids, for example, was often a concomitant of Iraqi Shiite identity (Ende, *Arabische Nation*, 233-60). For current Arabic-language criticism of the rise-and-fall model, see Ghāzī al-Tawbah, "Qirāʾah fī maqūlatay 'ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ' wa ʿaṣr al-nahḍah,'" *al-Jazīrah*, 24 December 2009; Aḥmad Kāmil Ghunaym, "Āliyyat taqsīm al-adab al-ʿarabī ilā ʿuṣūr adabiyyah," *Alūkah al-Thaqāfiyyah*, 3 March 2015 (I thank Mohamed Elsawy for this reference); Mūrīs Abū Nāḍir, "Mā jadwā iʿādat taʾrīkh al-adab al-ʿarabī bi-manhaj taqlīdī?," *al-Ḥayāt*, 21 August 2015.

question, it will be helpful to ask how the label "golden age" and its equivalents came to be applied to it in the first place.[10] Few readers will be surprised to learn that much of the work was carried out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But, as we will see, the early Abbasid period was *available* to be used for this purpose, though not—or not only—for the reasons usually adduced. In the end, I will propose an alternative explanation for the persistence of the early Abbasids in historical memory, one that takes into account its distinctive or formative characteristics while resisting the slide into "golden age" rhetoric.

II. Pre-modern Arabic scholarship had much to say about why polities decline. It is important to consider at least one strand of this thought, not only as a corrective to the assumption that notions of decline were entirely a European imposition, but also because the Euro-Arab nineteenth century[11] conflated this particular strand with the rather different early-modern European idea of *civilizational* decline, creating a particularly powerful and long-lived narrative of Oriental decadence. The easiest way to show this is by looking at the reception of Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406).[12]

Ibn Khaldūn's famous "theory of civilization" deals with human communities at several orders of magnitude. The largest order is that of *ʿimrān*, "organized habitation" or "human aggregation" (as Aziz Al-Azmeh translates it[13]), of which one manifestation is *ḥaḍārah*, "the culture centered around life in cities" (as Muhsin Mahdi renders it[14]). These entities are subject to change of various kinds. But the entity that can most easily be seen moving in real time, so to speak, is the *dawlah* or polity. Regardless of the religion or ethnicity of the people involved, polities (*duwal*) rise and fall for the same reasons, even if certain adventitious

10. In its original, ancient Greek use, the Golden Age was a paradise on earth, like Schlaraffenland or the Land of Cockaigne. Aware of this meaning, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn speaks dismissively of purported *ʿuṣūr dhahabiyyah* in both and Greek and Arabic literary history: see *Fī al-adab al-jāhilī*, 15th edition (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 178. Like Marwa El-Shakry, "Between Enlightenment and Evolution: Arabic and the Arab Golden Ages of Jurji Zaydan," *Jurji Zaydan: Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature*, ed. George C. Zaidan and Thomas Philipp (Washington, DC: Zaidan Foundation, 2013), 123-44, which studies Zaydān's argument that there were several Arab golden ages, my concern here is with the idealization of a particular period and not with the term as such. Here I address only the purported Abbasid golden age. Another major contender for the title, namely "Muslim Spain," presents a strikingly different case. One important difference is that the idealization of al-Andalus has been grounded, from the beginning and recurrently, in visits by Arab men of letters to the monuments in Cordoba, Granada, and Seville. See Peter Wien, *Arab Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2017), 48-79.

11. By this I mean the community of Orientalists (for lack of a better term) working in Europe and the Levant from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Although the differences between, say, Alfred von Kremer and Jurjī Zaydān are many and significant, there are also good reasons to read them together, at least for the purposes of this study.

12. My comments here are necessarily very selective. For broader treatments see Gabriel Martinez-Gros, *Ibn Khaldûn et les sept vies de l'Islam* (Arles: Sindbad, 2006); Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times* (Edinburgh, 2010); Mohammad Salama, *Islam, Orientalism, and Intellectual History* (New York: Tauris, 2011), esp. Chs 2 and 3; and Nabil Matar, "Confronting Decline in Early Modern Arabic Thought," *Journal of Early Modern History*, 9:1-2 (2005): 51-78, at 56-59 (I thank John Nawas for this reference).

13. See his *Ibn Khaldūn: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 48 and 62.

14. See his *Ibn Khaldûn's Philosophy of History* (London: Unwin and Allen, 1957), 201.

circumstances may accelerate or retard the process of change.[15] Already, then, it is clear that *ʿimrān, ḥaḍārah*, and *dawlah* are each quite distinct from what G. W. F. Hegel (d. 1831) was to call a civilization, that is, the life and spirit of a particular people as manifested in history.[16] Ibn Khaldūn *does* know a concept roughly comparable to "a (single) civilization," namely *ummah*, that is, the global and transhistorical community of Muslims.[17] By his time, though, that *ummah* had long since ceased to exist as a unit. Rather, it was divided into multiple polities, each of which behaved like any other *dawlah*. And it was the *dawlah*, not the *ummah*, whose behavior Ibn Khaldūn was trying to explain.

When dynastic cyclism was taken up by Ottoman theorists of decline, they retained the *dawlah* as the unit of analysis.[18] Since my concern here is with literary history, I will take an illustration from the short history of Islamic scholarship prefixed to Ḥajjī Khalīfah's (d. 1657) bibliographic encyclopedia *Kashf al-ẓunūn*. The great nations (*umam*), he says, all practiced *ʿilm*, the search for knowledge. The Arabs had knowledge revealed to them by the Qurʾān, which, being a scripture for all peoples, provided a basis for an Islamic community (*millat al-islām*). The reduction of this knowledge to writing was an achievement of the Umayyad period. Then, under the early Abbasid caliphs, foreign sciences such as philosophy were adopted and adapted. But as the Abbasid polity unraveled, learning suffered.[19] What happened next is not entirely clear, but there is no doubt that Muslims eventually went back to seeking knowledge and writing books, including the many Persian and Ottoman books that the *Kashf* describes.

Even from this cursory survey it is evident that Ḥājjī Khalīfah was familiar with the idea of national or racial communities—that is, with something roughly comparable to Hegel's

15. In his study of the *ʿIbar* (the history to which the *Muqaddimah* is a preface), Martinez-Gros notes that Ibn Khaldūn treats each of the ancient peoples (e.g., the Hebrews, the Persians, the Greeks) with due regard for its particular circumstances. Even so the individual case studies amount to a "double application des regles déjà posées: les peuples épuisent leur souveraineté et leur existence de branche (*jîl*) en branche; et la conquète reprend souvent le flambeau tombé des mains de son conquérant" (Martinez-Gros, *Ibn Khaldûn*, 132-33).

16. For Hegel's original formulations see *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts,* in *Werke*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Nicolai, 1821; reprinted Frankfurt a. M. 1979, online here); and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* tr. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), paragraphs 341-60 (in both German and English).

17. This is also Ibn Khaldūn's term for what we might call ethnic groups, such as the Hebrews, Greeks, Persians, and so on, and as such a source of possible confusion. I would argue that the Muslim *ummah*, being a faith community, is conceptually distinct from the others, but that his broad use of the term is justified in that all *umam*, however constituted and defined, are subject to the same historical processes.

18. How much of the theory came directly from Ibn Khaldūn has been taken up, with largely negative conclusions, by Cornell Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and 'Ibn Khaldūnism' in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* XVIII 3-4 (1983), 198-220 (I thank Mohammad Salama for this reference). For a recent and more Ibn-Khaldūn-friendly survey of the question see Nurullah Ardıç, "Genealogy or *Asabiyya*? Ibn Khaldun between Arab Nationalism and the Ottoman Caliphate," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 71:2 (October 2012), 315-24, at 317-18.

19. Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kasf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa l-funūn,* ed. Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn Yaltqāyā (Istanbul, 1941; reprinted Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 1:26-35 (these numerals refer to the numbered columns, of which there are two per page).

"civilization." The Muslim community was one such community, even if it was defined by religion, not ethnicity. Again, though, this *ummah* or *millah* does not rise, flourish, and collapse as a whole. Rather, only particular polities within it—the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and so on—follow the Ibn-Khaldūnian trajectory. From another source (a fiscal report he was commissioned to write) we happen to know that Ḥājjī Khalīfah believed that he himself was living through an age of crisis—in this case, a crisis of his own *dawlah*, the Ottoman state.[20] But if this was a decline, it was a decline with respect to the reign of Sultan Suleiman (r. 1520-66), *not* the fall of Baghdad.[21] Evidently, then, Ḥājjī Khalīfah believed that cultural production does not thrive once and then collapse forever, in a *longue-durée* arc. Rather, it rises and falls in dynastic epicycles.

Remarkably, this focus on the *dawlah* persisted even when Ḥājjī Khalīfah's work was taken up (or perhaps more accurately, plagiarized) by Barthelmy d'Herbelot (d. 1695), who used it as the basis of his *Bibliothèque orientale*, the first European encyclopedia of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literature.[22] As Nicholas Dew has shown, the *Bibliothèque* does not lend itself to a telelogical vision of its subject, for the simple reason that the entries appear in alphabetical rather than chronological order.[23] At one place, admittedly, d'Herbelot refers to the Abbasids as "[la] race la plus féconde en grands Personnages de toutes celles qui ont regné parmi les Musulmans."[24] But he is quoting the Persian historian Khwānd Mīr (d. 1535?),[25] and in any case the reader will not encounter this claim unless he or she happens to consult the entry on the Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmūn. Where we do find some broader historical claims is in Antoine Galland's introduction to the work. The Umayyads, says Galland, never declined:[26] they were simply overthrown. The Abbasids, on the other hand, *did* decline, but they were succeeded

20. Bernard Lewis, "Ottoman observers of Ottoman decline," in *Islamic Studies* 1:1 (1962), 71-87, at 79-81; cf. Douglas A. Howard, "Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline' of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Asian History* 22:1 (1988): 52-77.

21. See Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali* (Princeton 1986): 243-45, 257-68 (I thank Dana Sajdi for this reference). Even so, Suleiman's reign was not immune to criticism: see Cemal Kafadar, "The Myth of the Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the post Süleymânic Era," in *Süleymân the Second and his Time*, ed. Halil İnalcık and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul: Isis, 1993), 37-48.

22. D'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale, ou Dictionnaire universel contenant generalement tout ce qui fait connoître les peuples de l'Orient* (Paris: Compaignie des Libraires, 1697); on its sources see Henry Laurens, *La* Bibliothèque orientale *de Barthélemi d'Herbelot : aux sources de l'orientalisme* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1978).

23. Nicholas Dew, "The Order of Oriental Knowledge: The Making of D'Herbelot's Bibliothèque Orientale," in *Debating World Literature*, edited by Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), 233-252, at 248-9 and 250-52.

24. In the entry on al-Maʾmūn: d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque*, 546.

25. D'Herbelot is citing the *Khulāṣat al-akhbār*, which remains unedited and unpublished. I have not found the claim in Khvānd Mīr's *Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Humāʾī (Tehran: Khayyām, 1954). I thank Theodore S. Beers for sharing with the editors his information on Khvānd Mīr.

26. "...ne recevra point d'atteinte, & ne tombera pas en décadence": Antoine Galland, "Discours pour servir de préface," in d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque*, sixth page (the preface is unpaginated in the first edition).

by new dynasties, some of them quite powerful. Strikingly, this process was still churning along, even if

> ... all these great dynasties, and others less powerful...are reduced, in our time, to the Emperors of India, or the Great Mongol; the Uzbeks, masters of Turkestan, Transoxania, and Khurasan; the Sufis [Safavids] of Persia; the Ottoman emperors of Constantinople; and the kings of Fez and Morocco [= Marrakesh]".[27]

This is still the world of Ibn Khaldūn: what rises and falls are dynasties, not something called "Islamic civilization."

It is with the next major European history of Arabic literature[28] that the Hegelian rise-and-fall becomes the framing device. The work in question is Alfred von Hammer-Purgstall's enormous *Literaturgeschichte der Araber*.[29] In his preface, a fascinating document that deserves more attention than I can give it here, von Hammer-Purgstall (d. 1856) explains that what determines a period of literary history is the interaction of the literary and the political—an interaction that is visible only in retrospect. Although literary production does not always require centralized political authority in order to flourish, it is nevertheless the rise and fall of dynasties (he says) that mark off the great periods of Arabic literature.[30] On this basis, he divides the literary history of the Arabs in half: one great period from Muhammad to the fall of Baghdad, and another from Baghdad to Napoleon. He adds that each half can itself be halved, giving four periods as follows: the rise, from Muhammad to about 925; the flowering, from 925 to 1258; the fall-off, from 1258 to 1517; and the decadence, from 1517 to 1789.[31] The work itself is organized according to this plan, which makes it, as far as I know, the first chronological history of Arabic literature. In any case, what matters for us is that the *Literaturgeschichte* replaces the little cycles of Ibn Khaldūn's *duwal* with one great rise and one great fall.[32]

With schemes like this in place, it became possible for subsequent writers to isolate and explore the golden age as a topic in itself. A notable example of this approach is

27. Ibid., seventh page.

28. All the works discussed so far included Persian and Turkish; von Hammer-Purgstall's *Literaturgeschichte* surveys Arabic only.

29. Hammer-Purgstall, *Literaturgeschichte der Araber von ihrem Beginne bis zu Ende des zwölften Jahrhunderts der Hidschret* (Vienna: K. K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1850).

30. Von Hammer-Purgstall, *Literaturgeschichte*, 1: xxvi and lvi.

31. "Jeder der zwei grossen Zeiträume, in welche der Sturz der Chalifats die arabische Geschichte zerschneidet, zerfällt wieder in zwei fast gleiche Hälften, und also nach dem Jahrhunderte des Beginns vor Mohammed die ganze Geschichte arabischer Literatur in vier grosse Perioden, jede von beiläufig dreihundert Jahren, wovon die zwei ersten die der Aufnahme und den höchsten Flores, die zwei letzten die der Abnahme und des Verfalls" (von Hammer-Purgstall, *Literaturgeschichte*, 1: xxvii).

32. Von Hammer-Purgstall was of course not the first to claim that "Islamic civilization," or the Orient, or the Semites, had declined. Ernest Renan, for example, had made the claim in no uncertain terms only a few years earlier: see, for example, his 1859 study of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, in *Essais de morale et de critique* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1859), 287-382. I thank Maurice Pomeranz for this reference. My point here is that with von Hammer-Purgstall, the rise-and-fall scheme becomes the basis for writing histories of Arabic literature.

Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen (1875-77), by the Austrian diplomat and scholar Alfred von Kremer (d. 1889). In his preface, von Kremer tells the reader not to be misled by the sad spectacle of the present-day Orient. Islam, he says, was once a great civilization, distinguished by "a surprisingly humane spirit" (*ein überraschend humaner Geist*). The scholars of Baghdad, receptive as they were to the ancient Greek heritage, led the world in the exact sciences. In philosophy, law, and political theory, medieval Islam outstripped Europe. The jurists of Baghdad espoused many humanistic principles, arguing, for example, that the life of a non-Muslim or a slave was equal to that of a Muslim. The institutions of the early caliphal period, including the tax system, the courier routes, and the provisions for public welfare, attest (he says) to a high level of culture. Later, however, these institutions were exploited by despotic rulers, and collapsed.[33]

One of the notable things about von Kremer's approach is its determination to look at everything—law, literature, and so forth—as manifestations of the particular spirit of the civilization being studied. This is the approach called *Kulturgeschichte* (cultural history), and we find it practiced in other European treatments of the "golden age," including Adam Mez's *Renaissance of Islam* and Gustav von Gruenbaum's *Medieval Islam*.[34] It also served as the structuring principle of major works in Arabic, including Jurjī Zaydān's *Tārīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī*, Aḥmad Amīn's *Fajr*, *Dūḥā*, and *ʿAṣr al-Islām*, and Shawqī Ḍayf's *Tārīkh al-adab al-ʿarabī*. In a moment we will have occasion to look more closely at Zaydān in particular. First, though, I want to close this section with a glance backward at Ibn Khaldūn.

According to von Kremer, it was Ibn Khaldūn who first conceived of *Kulturgeschichte*. In an essay published in 1879, the Austrian declared that his North African predecessor was the first to regard history, "not as a description of events or of the succession of dynasties but rather of the intellectual and material development of peoples."[35] In effect, von Kremer is crediting an Arab Muslim theorist with inventing the method by which the decline of his civilization might be diagnosed. But von Kremer is committing a category mistake: that of replacing Ibn Khaldūn's *dawlah* with "Islamic" or "Oriental" or "Arab" civilization. According to classical Orientalism and some strains of modern Arab thought, "Arab-Islamic civilization," rather than some particular *dawlah*, is the thing that is supposed to have risen, fallen, and risen again. Ibn Khaldūn, as I read him, offers no basis for thinking so.

III. In this section I want to take a closer look at Arabic-language *Kulturgeschichte* in order to explain why the early Abbasid period came to serve as the golden age of nationalist historiography. A key moment, I believe, is the publication of Jurjī Zaydān's *Taʾrīkh*

33. Alfred von Kremer, *Culturgeschichte des Orients under den Chalifen* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1875), 1: iv-x.

34. For general background see Josef van Ess, "From Wellhausen to Becker: The Emergence of *Kulturgeschichte* in Islamic Studies," in Malcolm H. Kerr, ed., *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and its Problems* (Malibu: Undena, 1979), 27-51.

35. Von Kremer, "Ibn Chaldun und seine Culturgeschichte der Islamischen Reiche," *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Classe*, 93: 581-640, at 584-85. Von Kremer finds it remarkable that such an original thinker should have come along at a time when the decline of "the Arab people" had already begun (581).

al-tamaddun al-islāmī. When Zaydān (d. 1914) set out to write a history of Islamic civilization, he justified the endeavor by arguing that previous histories written in Arabic had dwelt on the wrong topics. "The true history of a nation (*ummah*) is the history of its civilization (*tamaddun*) and its settled life (*ḥaḍārah*), not the history of its battles and conquests."[36] But how was one to write this new kind of history? One did so by providing a lively account of social life and material culture. In his preface to the final volume of his history, Zaydan explains that his aim has been to write so vividly that whatever he is talking about "appears to the reader as if it were physically there before him."[37]

Even for modern historians, cultural history is hard to write because—among other things—there is no conventional way to impose order on one's material. Zaydān's *History* is not well organized, by any standard. But it does have a method. As a novelist, Zaydān knew that the only way to conjure the past into seemingly physical existence was to choose a *particular* past and fill it out with as much local color as he could find. In Volume 1, he explains which past he chose to focus on and why. After zipping through the political history of the Umayyads, Abbasids, Spanish Umayyads, and Fatimids, Zaydan declares that it would take too long to go through all the other Islamic dynasties that have existed in the world. So he lists them in tabular form, giving their capitals, how many kings each had, the year each was founded, and the year each came to an end. The table takes up four pages. He then continues:

> To sum up, from the earliest days of Islam until now, over a hundred Islamic dynasties have come into existence, with some 1200 leaders, among them caliphs, sultans, kings, emirs, atabegs, ikhshīds, khedives, sherifs, beys, deys, and more; by origin Arabs, Persians, Turks, Circassians, Kurds, Indians, Tatars, Mongols, Afghans, and others; and ruled from Medina, Kufa, Damascus, Baghdad, Egypt, Cairawan, Cordova, Istanbul, Sanaa, Oman, Delhi, and elsewhere... But inasmuch as the Abbasid dynasty is the most famous of them all, and the first to attain civilization (*tamaddun*), we shall base our description of *tamaddun* for the most part on the Abbasids.[38]

Here Zaydān does not quite say that the early Abbasid period was the golden age. But his decision to use it as the exemplar of Arab-Islamic civilization certainly implies a certain

36. Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī*, 4th ed (Cairo: al-Hilāl, 1935; originally published 1902-06), 1:3. Cf. von Hammer-Purgstall: "Erst im verflossenen Jahrhunderte haben europäische Geschichtschreiber einzushehen begonnen, das die Geschichte eines Volkes nicht nur seine Thaten im Kriege, sondern auch in die im Frieden, die seiner Künste und Wissenschaften, seiner geistigen und sittlichen Bildung umfassen müsse..." (*Literaturgeschichte*, 1: xv). Zaydān goes on to argue that histories written in Western languages are inadequate for different reasons.

37. *Li-anna wijhatanā al-ūlā fī kitābatinā innamā hiya basṭu al-ʿibārati wa-īḍāḥu al-mawḍūʿi ḥattā yanjalī lil-qāriʾi kaʾannahu mujassam*: Zaydan, *Tamaddun*, 5:3. A worthy successor of Zaydān in this regard is Guy Le Strange's *Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate* (Oxford, 1900), which, despite the tenuousness of its reconstructions, delivers a powerful reality effect, describing, as it does, some parts of Baghdad almost street by street.

38. Zaydān, *Tamaddun*, 1:81-86.

privilege over the many other times and places he might have written about.[39] This approach, and the decline-and-fall paradigm it implied, was criticized even by some of Zaydān's contemporaries, who reproached him for adopting an Orientalist model.[40] Yet it has served as the basis for the literary histories found in schoolbooks and dictionaries even today.[41] For example, the literary-history chart in the *Munjid* encyclopedic dictionary, a standard reference work, until recently labeled the entire period from 750 to 1258 "the Abbasid age," and the period from 1258 to 1789 "the age of decline."[42] Admittedly, this arrangement has its advantages: the alternative would have been to create a new section for each of Zaydān's hundred-odd dynasties, or to come up with some new principle of classification. In the end the *Munjid* editors took the easy way out: following Zaydān, they declare the Abbasids to have been the most important Islamic dynasty, and then herd every writer between 750 and 1258 into the Abbasid tent.

This way of looking at literary history may seem natural to many Arabic speakers today, but it hardly follows in any obvious way from historical reality—not even the reality known to Zaydān. Rather, the construction of an Abbasid golden age follows in part from the choices Zaydān made in order to write a specifically cultural history. Most fatefully, he decided to focus on the Abbasids because the sources on them would give him more of what he thought of as the raw material of *Kulturgeschichte*—social life, material culture, and so on. For that purpose, his choice made sense. But, as he himself was aware, there were plenty of other dynasties out there: in fact, he lists them in his chart. Their subsequent disappearance is doubtless the result of a streamlining intended to produce a curriculum for a secular Arab-nationalist history. Fortunately, the many criticisms of this scheme finally appear to have had an effect: the most recent edition of the *Munjid* has a new chart. In this one, the unfortunate "Abbasid" label for 750-1258 is retained, but the period from 1258 to 1798 is called the Mamluk and Ottoman period, not the age of decline.

39. For another early example see Ḥasan Tawfīq al-ʿAdl, *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah* (Cairo: al-Funūn, 1906), which divides the field into "pre-Islamic, Umayyad, Abbasid, Andalusian, and after." He appears to have derived this scheme from Carl Brockelmann, making it a descendant of Hammer-Purgstall's. See Konrad Hirschler and Sarah Bowen Savant, "Introduction: What is A Period?" *Der Islam* 91:1 (2014): 6-19, at 14, citing Jan Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 327-30. Note that although al-ʿAdl's work precedes Zaydan's *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah* (Cairo: al-Hilāl, 1911-13) it postdates the *Tamaddun* (1902-1906).

40. On Luwīs Shaykhū's criticism of Zaydān's dependence on Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, see Anne-Laure Dupont, "How Should the History of the Arabs be Written? The Impact of European Orientalism on Jurjī Zaydān's Work," in Zaidan and Philipp, eds., *Jurji Zaidan*, 85-121, at 104-7. Another early critique is that of Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfiʿī (d. 1937), *Taʾrīkh ādāb al-ʿarab*, originally published 1911, reissued and edited by ʿAbd Allāh al-Minshāwī and Mahdī al-Baḥqīrī (Cairo: al-Īmān, undated reprint of 1911 edition), 1:13-19. The gist of his objection is that literary history is neither progressive nor cumulative; indeed, its finest hour came near the beginning, with the revelation of the Qurʾan. Moreover, it is independent from events in other spheres, including religion, politics, and science. I thank Ahmed El Shamsy for this reference.

41. A prominent example in the schoolbook category is [Shaykhū, Luwīs,] *al-Majānī al-ḥadīthah ʿan majānī al-Ab Shaykhū*, edited by Fuʾād Afrām al-Bustānī et al (Beirut: al-Kāthulīkiyyah, 1960-61). I thank John Nawas for drawing this example to my attention.

42. "Tārīkh al-ādāb wa l-ʿulūm al-ʿarabiyyah," in *al-Munjid fī l-lughah wa l-aʿlām*, 27th ed. (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1984), pp. 462-69. I thank Bilal Orfali and John Nawas for sending me photos of these pages.

IV. On the basis of the preceding survey one might be tempted to conclude that the elevation of the early Abbasid period is entirely the result of back-projection. But there is plenty of evidence that Abbasid glory was a topos in Arabic literature *even before* the modern process of mythification got started. Having now excavated and put aside the modern rise-and-fall paradigm that *requires* a golden age, we can proceed to examine the pre-modern topos in more detail.

In what now seems an amateurish essay published two decades ago, I offered a selective history of the trope of Baghdad as a city of vanished glory.[43] Century after century, one finds the claim that the city had only recently stopped being a glorious center of political power, prosperity, scholarship, and so on. Whatever the weaknesses of my essay, it still seems true that the trope was persistent and ubiquitous, and that its persistence and ubiquity make it impossible to treat the glorification of the early Abbasid period (for which Baghdad is the most convenient synecdoche) as a purely modern phenomenon.[44]

A recent essay by Suzanne Stetkevych seems to address the problem with its argument that the golden age is the creation of Abbasid court poets.[45] But Stetkevych takes it as axiomatic that Abū Tammām (d. 845 or 846), al-Buḥturī (d. 897), and the rest had something to celebrate, namely, "the astounding and unprecedented might and dominion of the rulers of the Arab-Islamic state" and "the moral, military, scientific, and cultural achievements of Abbasid rule" (3). Or at least, she takes it as axiomatic until she doesn't: a few pages later she says that "the Abbasid Golden age was a literary construct, not a historical reality," adding that it is "an image created and promulgated by the court panegyrists and not an objective historical assessment of the period" (7). Apart from the circularity of the argument, I am not convinced by the poems she analyzes that the panegyrists believed that theirs was a golden age, or, if they did, that this belief would have mattered very much. The problem is one of genre: *madīḥ*, by definition, insists that *tout va pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes*. Since this is what praise-poets always say, no matter where or when they live, their having said it during the early Abbasid period would seem to lack probative value. On the other hand, Stetkevych's further argument that nineteenth- and twentieth-century neo-classical poets invoked Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturī, et al., to construct the image of a lost Arab-Islamic utopia is fully convincing.[46] What remains to be determined why the poets of *this* particular period should have been chosen to play this role.

A convenient way to re-open the problem is to ask what different users of the trope thought the early Abbasid period was like. In the *Thousand and One Nights*, the stories that feature al-Rashīd, Zubaydah, al-Amīn, Jaʿfar al-Barmakī, Abū Nuwās, Masrūr, and Isḥāq

43. Michael Cooperson, "Baghdad in Rhetoric and Narrative," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 99-113.

44. For a more recent study of this trope, see Zayde Antrim, "Connectivity and creativity: representations of Baghdad's centrality, 5th-11th centuries," in *İslam Medeniyetinde Bağdat (Medînetü's-Selam) Uluslarası Sempozyum*, ed. Ismail Saa Üstün (Istanbul: Marmara University, 2011), 55-74.

45. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Abbasid Panegyric: Badīʿ Poetry and the Invention of the Arab Golden Age," in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, published online 04 May 2016.

46. On the notion of "Arab-Muslim utopia" see Wien, *Arab Nationalism*, 48-79.

al-Mawṣilī draw on associations with vast wealth and spectacular self-indulgence.[47] In the French travelogue of Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī, on the other hand, the early Abbasid period is notable not for its prosperity and glamor but for its promotion of culture and learning.[48] These two attributes—wealth and learning—have become so naturalized as attributes of the early Abbasids that it becomes tempting to argue that the golden-age trope came about because the caliphs were, as a matter of historical fact, wealthier or more supportive of science than other pre-modern Muslim rulers. But that claim is hard to prove. Baghdad may have been a very wealthy town, but how much wealthier can it have been than (for example) Umayyad Damascus or Fatimid Cairo? More importantly, how would any pre-modern observer really know? What needs to be explained—in a study of cultural history, anyway—is the *reputation* for wealth, or more broadly, why Abbasid materiality should have left such a vivid afterglow in cultural memory.

The matter of scientific learning is also less straightforward than it may appear. At some point in history, instrumental rationality became thinkable, and was felt to be a good thing. Historians who found something analogous to it in past societies declared those societies prescient or precocious, especially when their discoveries and inventions—algebra, say, or movable type—anticipated their counterparts in Western Europe or, better yet, led to them. As a premise for historical study, the problem with this idea is that it leads modern observers to assume that people like al-Khwārizmī (who systematized algebra) shared our modern ideas about the nature and purpose of scientific inquiry. This assumption, in turn, forecloses questions about why someone in ninth-century Baghdad would trouble to systematize algebra or why someone else would pay him to do it. Especially in the case of Islamic societies, the march-of-progress trope also tends to support the claim that science was a marginal endeavor that flourished in a few obscure corners before being snuffed out by the dark forces of orthodoxy.[49]

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47. It would be tedious to list every reference to these figures in the *Nights*. The best-known example is the appearance of al-Rashīd and Jaʿfar in the middle of the story of the porter and the three ladies of Baghdad: see [Shahrzād,] *Kitāb alf laylah wa-laylah min uṣūlihi al-ʿarabiyyah al-ūlā*, ed. Muḥsin Mahdī (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 138 = L32). Jean-Claude Garcin has identified distinct stages in the representation of these figures: see his *Pour une lecture historique des Mille et Une Nuits* (Arles: Sindbad, 2013), 62-77. As Garcin notes, antecedents for these characters may be found in the literature generated more proximately by the early Abbasid period itself. For our purposes, however, the question is why these particular figures came to assume such a prominent place in popular memory.

48. Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīs al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīs* (Cairo: Kalimāt, 2011), 17, 25, 309. This trope has been tirelessly repeated since al-Ṭahṭāwī, and still appears regularly when Arabic media has reason to refer to the Abbasids. See, e.g., Muḥammad Majdī, "Baghdād madīnat al-thaqāfah al-ʿarabiyyah bayna izdihār al-māḍī wa-ʿālam al-wāqiʿ" (*Veto*, March 4, 2016).

49. This is the assumption behind Richard Dawkins's notorious tweet: "All the world's Muslims have fewer Nobel Prizes than Trinity College, Cambridge. They did great things in the Middle Ages, though" (Richard Dawkins, August 8, 2013). For studies that complicate this bit of received wisdom, see George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Boston: MIT, 2007); Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History* (Yale, 2010); Justin Stearns, "Writing the History of the Natural Sciences in the Pre-Modern Muslim World: Historiography, Religion, and the Importance of the Pre-Modern Period," *History Compass* 9/12 (2011): 923-51.

The reality, as it turns out, is more complex. Some early Muslim scientists did believe that the study of nature was progressive and cumulative. But their actual investigations often had more in common with neo-Platonic magical thinking than with anything we might recognize as science. Similarly, their patrons were motivated by desires that may seem odd to us: using translation to establish a philosophical pedigree that bypassed the Byzantine empire,[50] for example, or constructing an epistemology that could serve as an alternative to Imami Shiism on the one hand and scriptural nominalism on the other.[51] Understandably, opponents of these endeavors took a dim view of Abbasid science: Arabic historians' references to al-Maʾmūn's scholarly interests, for example, are often derogatory.[52] Moreover, scientific activity, however defined, continued long after the end of the so-called golden age, and in many places all over the world defined by Islam. For all these reasons, saying that the Abbasid-period scholars were good scientists, and were acknowledged and appreciated as such, cannot serve as a complete explanation for all the love that al-Ṭahṭāwī and his successors have thrown at them.

V. So why an Abbasid golden age? Let's begin with a contingency: the appearance of paper. Paper came to the attention of Muslims in the eighth century.[53] Compared to parchment and papyrus, it was simple to produce, cheap, and easy to work with. Thanks to paper, the west Asians of the early Abbasid era were able to produce a good deal more writing than their predecessors. The result has been described as "an efflorescence of books and written culture incomparably more brilliant than was known anywhere in Europe until the invention of printing with movable type in the fifteenth century."[54] For our purposes, the point is that only after 750 was it possible for Muslims and their west Asian neighbors to record their thoughts and share them with others so efficiently. It doesn't matter whether those thoughts were brilliant or not: whatever they were, they were saved—or at least, more of them were saved than had ever been possible before.

Thanks to paper, then, Abbasid writing was plentiful and easy to reproduce. But there's more to it than that. As several modern studies have argued, Abbasid-era compilers did not simply record the tradition: they *constructed* it, in accordance with their own preoccupations and concerns.[55] In that sense, our image of pre- and early Islam is the Abbasid image of pre-

50. Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbasid Society (2nd-4th/5th-10th c.)* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

51. Michael Cooperson, *Al Maʾmun* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005).

52. Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography* (Cambridge, 2000), 65-66.

53. This was probably not—as tradition has it—because Muslims captured Chinese papermakers at the battle of Talas in 751, but through contact with Central Asian craftsmen. See Jonathan M. Bloom, *Paper Before Print* (Yale, 2001), 42-45 (citations at 44-45).

54. Bloom, *Paper*, 91.

55. See Rina Drory, "The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making," *Studia Islamica* 1996/1 (February): 38-49, which argues that early Abbasid *mawālī* "constructed Arab identity" by "collecting and organizing knowledge belonging to 'the Arab (and Islamic) sciences'" (42); Borrut, "Vanishing Syria," which shows that our periodization of early Islam is an Abbasid-era creation; and Peter Webb, *Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh 2016), esp. 255-69, which makes a similar argument about Arab identity—not merely its content, *à la* Drory, but its very existence.

and early Islam, and seeing through it or around it requires an enormous amount of effort. To this insight I would add that when Abbasid-period compliers set about their work, they were doing something else that had not been done before: they were setting out to make Arab lore and Islamic tradition *readable* to people raised in other traditions, as well as to the people who had came to think of themselves as Arabs. When a *rāwī* performed a pre-Islamic ode at the Umayyad court of Damascus, or when Jarīr, al-Farazdaq, and al-Akhṭal took turns savaging each other at the great poetry slam that was Basra, no one bothered to ask whether Greek captives or Persian converts could understand what was being said or why they should care. Under unusual circumstances, some freedmen and converts did acquire a native or near-native command of Arabic, but those fortunate few seem to have been content to make a fortune and then pull the ladder up behind them.[56] Only in the early Abbasid period do we find authors intent on making Arab lore and Islamic tradition accessible to outsiders.[57] This was not done kindly: it often involved name-calling, mockery, and threats, along with complaints about how culture was going to the dogs.[58] But the result was fortunate: a dumbing-down of everything that had been thought and said in Arabic up to that point.[59] This dumbing-down made the tradition accessible not only to the *mawālī* but also to Arabs who had lost touch with their roots[60] (or, perhaps more exactly, were now being told for the

56. Michael Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians': The Uses of Ethnicity in the Early Abbasid Period," *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts. Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 364-387.

57. The intention may have been, as Gérard Lecomte says of Ibn Qutaybah, to create "un système intellectuel et moral composite, mais homogène, qui deviendra le dénominateur commun de la Communauté." *Ibn Qutayba (m. 276/889): L'homme, son oeuvre, ses idées* (Damascus: Ifpo, 1965), 421. Yet the presentation of this system by Ibn Qutaybah at least comes off as snarky rather than high-minded. In any event, I agree entirely with Lecomte that Ibn Qutaybah's notion of *adab* was neither secular (as religion is unmistakably a part of it) nor humanist (because the term is simply anachronistic; Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba*, 424ff.) On this last point see Alexander Key, "The Applicability of the Term 'Humanism' to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī," *Studia Islamica* 100/101 (2005): 71-112.

58. See. e.g., Ibn Qutaybah, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, undated reprint of 1925 edition), where incompetence is everywhere (*shumūl al-naqṣ*) and learning extinct (*durūs al-ʿilm;* 1: *ṭā'*), and where the author has made his work as complete as possible because the reader, if left to his own devices, is too lazy to seek learning on his own (1: *yā'*). See also, by the same author, *Adab al-kātib*, ed. Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Dār al-Saʿādah, 1963), where scribes who scorn the Arab and Islamic sciences are likened to beasts (6) and the reader is given several examples of bureaucrats who embarrassed themselves by their ignorance of Arabic expressions and lack of general knowledge (7-8).

59. In offering his readers a "menu" of possibly useful information to choose from, Ibn Qutaybah, whom I take as a representative example of the vulgarizer, "is apparently bowing to values of the semi or self-educated, and by designing a manual of short cuts for them, freeing them from the need to acquire real intellectual discipline." Julia Bray, "Lists and Memory: Ibn Qutayba and Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb," in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Josef W. Meri (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 210-31, at 221.

60. Among his prospective readers Ibn Qutaybah lists not only "sons of Persian kings who know nothing of their father and his times" but also "tribespeople of Quraysh who cannot explain their relationship to the Prophet and his companions." Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Maʿārif*, ed. Tharwat ʿUkkāshah, 4th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), 2.

first time that they had specifically Arab roots to be proud of). In the long run, it also made the tradition accessible to later generations of readers, including us.

Let me flesh out this claim with some examples. Today it is entirely commonplace to hear Muslims say that a believer should know Arabic. As it turns out, though, someone actually had to argue this position. The first such someone I know of is the famous jurist al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820). In his foundational treatise on law, he declares that believers are required to understand what the Qurʾān says. Since the Book is entirely in Arabic, it is "incumbent on every Muslim to learn as much of the Arabs' language as his efforts allow."[61] Moreover, anyone who acquires Arabic from Arabs "becomes one of the speakers of their language." Al-Shāfiʿī concedes that the learner's language will be imperfect, but he insists that this is no excuse for not trying: native speakers don't know Arabic perfectly either (¶54-57).

Given the state of the relationship between Arabs and *mawālī* at the time, al-Shāfiʿī's position was anything but obvious, as is evident, too, from the careful way he lays it out. Yet, despite flying in the face of many commonplace assumptions about language, ethnicity, and the hierarchy of peoples, his argument won the day. For modern Muslims who care about such matters, it now seems beyond dispute that Arabic can and should be acquired. It also seems obvious that native proficiency in a language offers no free ride when it comes to content: that is, being a native speaker does not guarantee *fiqh* (understanding). For our purposes, the important point is that these positions were articulated in the early Abbasid period, not at any other time, as part of what I am calling the great dumbing-down of Arab lore and Islamic learning: that is, the process by which the language and culture of the Arabs, like their religion, were simplified for consumption by non-natives as well as "Arabs."[62]

To show what the dumbing-down looked like in practice, there is no better example than Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889). Most of his books amount to lists of "things you need to know" about Arabs: their food, drinks, games, poems, stories, and so on, with his books on Qurʾan and Hadith arguably being extensions of the same impulse. In the *Faḍl al-ʿarab wa t-tanbīh ilā ʿulūmihā*, for example, he begins by admonishing the presumptuous non-Arab reader that he has no basis to feel superior to Arabs.[63] Then he lists the kinds of lore (*ʿilm*) that the Arabs were experts in, including astronomy, divination, and horsemanship, clinching his case by citing poems that would be incomprehensible to any but an expert in those fields. In one passage, for example, he quotes the following verses about a horse:

... a smooth-cheeked,
Broad-breasted, full-chested steed,
With imposing "five longs," compact "four shorts,"

61. Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, ed. and trans. Joseph E. Lowry (New York University, 2013), ¶65. (I cite this and other Library of Arabic Literature volumes by paragraph numbers, which are the same across the Arabic and English pages.)

62. For practical purposes, this "simplification for consumption" is probably indistinguishable (from our perspective, anyway) from constructing the relevant notions of language, culture, and religion. See Drory, "Abbasid Construction," 44; Bray, "Lists and Memory," at 225; and more generally Webb, *Arab Identity*.

63. Ibn Qutaybah, *The Excellence of the Arabs*, ed. James E. Mongomery and Peter Webb, tr. Sarah Bowen Savant and Peter Webb (New York: New York University, 2017), 1.1.1ff.

> And ample "six-broads": towering legs, solid and firm.
> Its "sevens" chiselled and "nines" stripped...[64]

Having made his point—that "Arab lore" can easily stump a layman—Ibn Qutaybah does not even explain the jargon words. Rather, he advises the reader to look them up in his book on horses. Peter Webb, the translator of these verses, has done so, and explains the terms as follows:

> The "five longs" refers to... the neck, the ears, the forelegs, the haunches, and forelock; "four shorts" refers to the pastern, the dock, the back and the flanks... The "six broads", the forehead, chest, the haunches, the thighs, the cannons of the hind legs, and the place between the ear-roots; the "sevens" are the ears, eyes, the shoulder, the barrel, the hamstrings of the hind legs, the bones meeting the fetlock, and the bones meeting the shoulder; and the "nines" are the bones under the eyes, the bones under the tear-ducts, the cheeks, the forehead, the place between the ear-roots, the fetlocks, the veins in its forelegs and the hind legs...[65]

This may not look like a dumbed-down version to us, but it is easier to understand than the poem, and would doubtless have been straightforward enough to an audience at home with horses. A near equivalent in our own world might be something like this, from a BBC site that attempts to explain American football to audiences more familiar with British games:

> **Touchdown (six points)**
> A touchdown is scored when a team crosses the opposition's goal line with the ball, or catches or collects the ball in the end zone.
>
> **Field goal (three points)**
> These are usually attempted on fourth down if the kicker is close enough to the end zone to kick the ball through the posts, or **uprights**.
>
> **Extra point (one or two points)**
> A point is earned by kicking the ball through the uprights after a touchdown (similar to a rugby conversion). Two points are earned by taking the ball into the end zone again...[66]

It is with the early Abbasids, then, that everything before them becomes *readable* for the first time. This does not mean that Abbasid-period glosses and commentaries on, say, the Qurʾān or the *muʿallaqāt* were necessarily the ones used in later periods.[67] But the format and

64. Ibn Qutaybah, *Excellence of the Arabs*, 2.2.10.

65. Ibn Qutaybah, *Excellence*, notes 172 and 173.

66. BBC Sport, American Football, "NFL in a nutshell," http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/other_sports/american_football/3192002.stm.

67. In fact they usually weren't: Ahmed El Shamsy, "Islamic Book Culture through the Lens of Two Private Libraries, 1850-1940," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 4 (2016): 61-81, shows that "the late manuscript

substance of many later commentaries—and more importantly the idea that one should need a commentary in the first place—go back to the early Abbasid period.[68] As a result, the names of late-eighth- to mid-tenth-century authorities were baked into the exegetical tradition at its source, and have echoed down the centuries long after most of their works ceased to be consulted and were eventually lost. At some point, citing an Abbasid-period source became a trope even in popular literature, where, for example, we find the massive, sprawling, wildly unhistorical *Epic of Antar* attributed to al-Aṣmaʿī.

This growing backwards of *isnād*s (to borrow a term from Islamic legal history) does not mean that sources cited informally or for effect were always from the early Abbasid period itself. But when other sources are cited, they consist of figures canonized by the early Abbasid *tadwīn*, as Ḥājjī Khalīfah calls it (1:33). For example, in al-Ḥarīrī's fortieth *maqāmah* (usually called 'of Tabrīz'), Abū Zayd and his wife have a slanging match in which they refer to two dozen figures from pre- and early Islamic history, of whom the latest is al-Aṣmaʿī (there called Ibn Qurayb, d. 828).[69] Al-Ḥarīrī died in 1122, meaning that there was *three centuries' worth* of poets, scholars, and other luminaries he might have cited in this episode. Instead, though, he limits himself to figures of the early Abbasid period and before.

The last point to be made about the explosion of writing in the eighth and ninth centuries is that it made the Abbasids themselves more readable as well. Though much of what they wrote was about the past, they wrote about themselves too, and enough of this has survived—though again not always in its original form—to convey the sense of a dense, layered world. To exemplify, Ibn al-Jawzī's life of Ibn Ḥanbal provides a rich store of detail on how life was lived in the poor-to-middling neighborhoods of ninth-century Baghdad. From it we learn, for example, that a month's rent might be three dirhams (¶42.1) while live chickens, cuppings, and circumcisions cost one dirham (¶49.18, 63.4, 38.9); that landlords kept registers of tenants and how much rent they owed (¶42.1); that roofs had drainpipes that might empty into the street (¶49.28); that rooms were heated using clay pans full of embers (¶45.10) and might be closed off by curtains instead of doors (¶45.7-8); that grocers sold thorns for kindling (¶47.1, 52.3) and wrapped their butter in leaves of chard (¶49.24); that the penniless might pawn items like sandals and pails in exchange for food (¶41.3, 49.7); and that children were given almonds, sugar, and raisins as treats (¶38.11, 44.10).[70]

Strikingly, Ibn al-Jawzī died in 597/1201, that is, three and a half centuries after the death of his subject (241/855). Yet enough had already been written about Ibn Ḥanbal to provide his biographer with enough material to fill some 230 folios of manuscript. Because the realia (unlike, say, the creeds ascribed to the imam) are there by accident, they seem believable;

tradition was overwhelmingly focused on a small number of curriculum texts and extensive commentaries on them, while ignoring most of the works that we today consider the classics of those fields" (61).

68. In the field of *tafsīr*, for example, the works Andrew Rippin classes as "formative" include those ascribed to Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822), ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanʿānī (d. 211/827), and al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830), with the caveat that attributions are made to earlier figures, and the dating of all these works remains uncertain (Rippin, "Tafsīr," in *EI²*).

69. *Les séances de Hariri*, ed. Silvestre de Sacy (Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1822), I:443-58, at 453.

70. Ibn al-Jawzī, *The Virtues of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. and trans. by Michael Cooperson (New York University, 2013 and 2015). Chapters 1-50 are in vol. 1 and Chapters 51-100 are in vol. 2.

and the overall effect is so dense that the few obvious fabrications (for example, the story where Ibn Hanbal is shipwrecked on a desert island, ¶4.22) stand out like a sore thumb.[71] To fully appreciate the reality effect (as Roland Barthes would call it) of this material, we might compare it to what is known about an earlier celebrity, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728). Although he is often cited as an authority in piety and theology, his life story is much thinner than Ibn Ḥanbal's, and many of the statements and actions attributed to him appear to be spurious.[72] In this respect, the main difference between him and Ibn Ḥanbal is that the latter lived in the full light of history—that is, at the beginning of the period when, as the sharp-eyed Mamluk-era biographer al-Dhahabī (d. 1348) put it, Muslims began making an effort to keep track of biographical information.[73] With writing itself made easier, Ibn Ḥanbal's family, friends, and colleagues could record their memories of him, or have them written down. This kind of record-keeping was evidently a novelty to him, and he did not like it (see Chapter 29).

To this argument one might object that later periods have their vivid personalities and densely layered stories too. Indeed they do. But my argument here is merely that there was plentiful Abbasid (and pseudo-Abbasid) material standing ready to be activated once the initial choice had been made to declare the mid-eighth to mid-tenth centuries the golden age. Had the choice fallen upon, say, the late Mamluk period, the rich material characteristic of that era would no doubt have been pressed into service in the same way. Conversely, had the early Abbasids been chosen on purely formal grounds, as almost seems to be the case in von Hammer-Purgstall's four-part schema, but then failed to supply the raw material for a *Kulturgeschichte*, it seems unlikely that their elevation would have succeeded as well as it has. This is what Zaydān means when he says that the history of *tamaddun* and *ḥadārah* can best be told when the sources are sufficiently dense to let the physical reality of a past society "appear to the reader as if it were physically there before him."

VI. At a recent conference in Doha, Qatar, I heard a speaker at a panel on the history of translation speak at length on the Abbasid *bayt al-ḥikmah*, describing it as an unprecedented, large-scale initiative to translate the literatures of the world into Arabic. During the question

71. This is a significant difference, I think, between the biography of Ibn Ḥanbal and that of earlier celebrities such as (for example) the first caliphs. Any given *khabar* about, say, ʿUmar, might be (a) entirely made up but (b) indistinguishable from an authentic one, simply because so many different kinds of things are said about ʿUmar that there is no obviously authentic core to compare it to. Reports about Ibn Ḥanbal, on the other hand, almost all seem to be about the same person. This is doubtless because most of them go back to a relatively limited number of eyewitnesses, most of whom, furthermore, were committed to, and trained in, the practice of exact transmission. Of course, anyone interested in glorifying a particular era might draw on dubious reports as well as more reliable ones. But an account based on reliable reports would, it seems to me, be more persuasive, precisely because of its reality effect.

72. Suleiman Ali Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History: al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

73. "The ancients did not record death dates as they should have, relying instead on their memories. As a result, the death dates of many Companions and Successors nearly down to the time of Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shāfiʿī [d. 204/820], were lost... Then latter-day [authorities] began to make careful note of when learned persons and so forth died." Al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1990), 1:26.

period, a member of the audience (and a Moroccan, like the speaker) correctly pointed out that recent research has called into question the size, importance, and even the function of the *bayt al-ḥikmah*. The speaker dismissively replied that matters were as he had described them, adding that anyone who doubted his account probably had "ideological motives" for doing so.

This incident serves as a reminder that any questioning of the traditional golden-age story may be perceived as an attack on an already embattled culture. But getting past inherited notions of "decadence" and "decline" means putting aside equally facile notions of "golden ages" and "renaissances." In excavating the myth of the early Abbasid golden age, my purpose here has not been to write off what one colleague calls "the 'fact' of an enormously creative period."[74] Rather, I have tried to see what happens if we approach it without neo-Hegelian baggage. What happens, in my view, is that we can tell a story not about a golden age but about a convergence of contingencies. After the mid-eighth century, paper made it possible to create an archive. Because it came into being at the time it did, that archive preserves the first systematic efforts to make the language, lore, and religion of the Arabs readable to outsiders—or more likely, to help bring those things into being, at least in the form we know them today. Paper also made it possible to preserve memories almost immediately. Accordingly, the Abbasid archive contains what are almost the first fully reliable accounts of contemporary experience in Arabic. As a result of these developments, the early Abbasid period became, simultaneously, the first Islamic space to be imaginable in almost granular detail, *and* the source of much of what we know about everything that had gone before.

Describing the period this way is not to deny or belittle its achievements, however one chooses to define them. The point, rather, is to clear a space for studying them as the products of contingency rather than as points placed along a trajectory of glory and decline. The work of ninth- or tenth-century writers, for example, need not represent the pinnacle of literary achievement in Arabic. Instead, it can be understood as the distinctive product of a particular conjuncture. As such, we may as well admit, it is often not so much glorious as maddeningly local and opaque—a fact that should remind us how much we owe to the vulgarizers. In different ways, previous scholarship has circled around this idea of a dumbing-down: we have, for example, Gregor Schoeler's eighth- and ninth-century "*taṣnif* movement",[75] Shawkat M. Toorawa's ninth-century "readerly culture,"[76] and Garth Fowden's ninth- to tenth-century Baghdadi "exegetical culture."[77] Where my approach differs is in its insistence that our own present position as readers give these postulated "movements" and "cultures" some of the transparency and coherence they seem to possess. The idea of a golden age, or indeed of any age at all, results from the encounter between the archive and our expectations. It has been my argument throughout that the early Abbasid period produced an archive some parts of

74. Matthew Gordon, personal communication.

75. Gregor Schoeler, *The genesis of literature in Islam: From the aural to the read*. Revised edition, in collaboration with and translated by Shawkat M. Toorawa (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), esp. ch. 5.

76. Shawkat M. Toorawa, *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-Century Bookman in Baghdad* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005).

77. Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muḥammad: The First Millenium Refocused* (Princeton, 2014).

which happen to be easily readable to us. This readability, finally, is doubtless one reason for the fascination that the period exerts. I would call this fascination an affect, in the sense of a feeling that can be studied historically. Von Kremer, Zaydān, and others among our *mashāyikh* felt it, and passed it on to others, who in due course passed it down to us. I am not sure I want to give it up, but I hope now to have understood it better, at least.

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Conflict and Community in the Medieval Caucasus*

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Abstract

In the 230s/850s, the caliph al-Mutawakkil sent his general, Bughā al-Kabīr, to assert control over the wayward northern frontier of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate. This campaign typically appears in modern scholarship as a moment that pitted Armenian Christians against tačiks (Arab Muslims). This paper complicates this binary by (1) placing Tʿovma Arcruni's History of the Arcruni House *in dialog with Arabic accounts of the campaign and (2) locating the campaign in the broader context of fragmented political power in the Caucasus as a whole. It reviews Bughā's main allies and adversaries in the conflict with close attention to the descriptors (or lack thereof) of their identities in medieval texts. From there, it challenges the oversimplification of the campaign in ethnoreligious absolutes as Arab v. Armenian or Muslim v. Christian as a product of Tʿovma's own agenda. This article posits the narrative use of ethnic and religious signifiers, despite the apparent flexibility of communal identities in the medieval period, and focuses specifically on the experience of women in the campaign to signal the close relations between groups of different ethnicities and religions.*

In 238/852-3,[1] Abū Mūsā Bughā al-Kabīr, a celebrated general in al-Mutawakkil's army, sent two of his lieutenants, Zīrak and the son of Abū al-ʿAbbās, against an opponent named Abū Mūsā in the town of Kithīsh/Kʿtʿiš.[2] The battles that followed constituted

* I would like to thank Antoine Borrut, Manuela Ceballos, Matthew Gordon, Sergio La Porta, Michael Morony, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on various drafts of this article. Of course, all mistakes in narration or errors in interpretation are solely of my own making.

1. In an effort to speak consistently across disciplines, the dates will appear first in *hijrī* (238), then according to the Common Era (852-3). Similarly, the toponyms appear here first in Arabic (Kithīsh), then in Armenian (Kʿtʿiš) or, if relevant, in Georgian.

2. Abū Mūsā Bughā al-Kabīr was a Turkish slave soldier who started his career in the army of the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim. Over the course of his exceptionally long life, he participated in some of the more famous ʿAbbāsid campaigns of the early ninth century. He helped quell Bābak's Khurramī rebellion and sack ʿAmmūriyya; see Matthew Gordon, "Bughā al-Kabīr," in *EI*[3]. Bughā built a reputation of piety, military skill, and devotion to the ʿAbbāsid family. For example, al-Masʿūdī reports that Bughā survived his battles unscathed despite the fact that

the final legs of a long and arduous campaign that pitted the caliphal army against many *amīr*s and armies of the South Caucasus.[3] Historians today rely heavily on the main primary source for this campaign, the tenth-century *History of the Arcruni House* by T‘ovma Arcruni, which deplores the circumstances of Armenian Christians under *tačik* (understood as either Arab or Muslim) rule.[4] Yet this particular moment in Kithīsh/K‘t‘iš—and many others like it through the course of the campaign—illustrates a messier reality. None of these leaders were Arabs. Bughā and Zīrak were Turks, Abū al-ʿAbbās was Armenian, and Abū Mūsā was Caucasian Albanian. The battle lines were not drawn by religion: Bughā and Zīrak were Muslims while the son of Abū al-ʿAbbās, Abū Mūsā, and their soldiers were Christians. Despite T‘ovma’s claims about the bonds and brotherhood of the Christian community, a common faith did not always draw up armies. Rather, Christians and Muslims fought together on both sides.[5] Our Christian protagonists in this episode even sport Arabic *kunya*s, hinting that T‘ovma’s construction of a distinct ethno-religious community was important specifically because of the blurred borders between Arab, Armenian, and Albanian that existed in the ʿAbbāsid period.

Al-Mutawakkil ordered Bughā to the Caucasus in response to the murder of a caliphal governor, Yūsuf b. Muḥammad al-Marwazī. The resulting campaign spanned over a number of years and stretched over territory now part of the modern Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. As local leaders decided whether to fight or to join the caliphal forces, they negotiated alliances that served their own needs and concerns. In the process, they built bonds

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he wore no armor because the Prophet Muḥammad himself had appeared in a dream and promised him longevity for helping a Muslim avoid punishment for a crime; for a translation of the full passage, see Ali Anooshahr, *The Ghazi Sultans and the Frontiers of Islam: a Comparative Study of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 81-2. The Armenian tradition, though, preserves an alternative reading of Bughā’s life. He appears in Armenian as Bułay (or Buxay or Buhay), “a sly and faithless man”; Kirakos Ganjakec‘i, *Patmut‘iwn Hayoc‘* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakč‘ut‘yun, 1961), 78. A few pages later (82), Bughā appears alongside Afshīn, Abū Saʿīd, and Yūsuf in a list of ոստիկանք չարք և անմարդիք արձակեալք լինէին յաշխարհս մեր. He is enshrined in the Armenian national epic as the villain Bat‘mana Buła, where Bat‘mana renders the Persian *bad nām*, i.e., infamous; C. J. F. Dowsett, “Versification in the Armenian epic,” in *David of Sasun: Critical Studies on the Armenian Epic*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian and Barlow DerMugrdechian (Fresno: Press at California State University, 2013), 128.

3. The “South Caucasus” refers to Armenia, Albania, and Georgia. On the problematic use of the term *Caucasus* in reference to the early ʿAbbāsid period, see Alison Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces under Early Islam: Islamic Rule and Iranian Legitimacy in Armenia and Caucasian Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), xv. Sources in Arabic, Syriac, Armenian, and Georgian instead refer to the South Caucasus as “the North.”

4. T‘ovma Arcruni’s *History of the Arcruni House* cuts off in 904CE. We do not have firm birth or death dates for the author, but he claims to have recorded the accounts of the combatants themselves: “And I myself with my own eyes saw that man who struck him [Yūsuf b. Muḥammad al-Marwazī, the caliphal governor whose murder sparked Bughā’s campaigns], and from him I learned the truth about it”; T‘ovma Arcruni, *History of the House of the Artsrunik‘: Translation and Commentary*, trans. Robert Thomson (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1985), 187, see also 18; *Patmut‘iwn Tann Arcruneac‘* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakč‘ut‘yun, 1985), 190.

5. Mixed armies had a long history in the Near East and can be identified through the entire period of caliphal rule in Armenia and Albania. See Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*, 190 (for Armenia) and 203 (for Albania); Wadād Al-Qāḍī, “Non-Muslims in the Muslim Conquest Army in Early Islam,” in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Fred Donner (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2016); Khalil ʿAthamina, “Non-Arab Regiments and Private Militias during the Umayyad Period,” *Arabica* 45, no. 3 (1998).

between communities with mixed religious and ethnic ties, solidified through intermarriage. This article examines the descriptions of the protagonists and circumstances of Bughā's campaign in order to investigate how our authors represent communal identity and loyalty in the Caucasus for their own purposes.

Bughā's Campaign as a Case Study into Local Identities and Loyalties

Bughā's Caucasian campaign has never been the object of close scholarly interest, perhaps because it drags the scholar out of the centers of the Caliphate but more likely because it demands the exploration of both Armenian and Arabic texts. As a result, the campaign typically appears as an episode of Armenian history, rather than in broader studies of the Caliphate.[6]

In an early study of ʿAbbāsid Armenia, M. Ghazarian explains Bughā's campaign in religious terms. "Mutawakkil sandte nun den Befehlshaber Bughā al-Kabīr mit dem Auftrage, das muslimische Blut an dem unbotmässigen Land zu rächen und dessen Grossen gänzlich auszurotten."[7] This assumes a certain type of identity construction: Bughā campaigned in the Caucasus to avenge "muslimische Blut," which is implicitly different from Christian blood. This makes little sense given that Bughā killed and imprisoned Muslim *amīr*s and soldiers in the course of the campaign and, accordingly, modern studies have moved away from the religiously charged interpretation. More recently, Z. Pogossian noted that "[a]lliances were formed and discarded startlingly fast and the religion of parties involved was by no means an obstacle or the most determining factor in creating partnerships or betraying a onetime ally."[8]

Most modern introductions to medieval Armenia focus instead on ethnic identifiers. They mention the campaign with brief references to the annihilation of the Armenian nobles (*naxarar*s), the devastation of the Armenian heartlands, and the expansion of Arab landholding to the detriment of the Armenian nobility. A. Ter-Łevondyan, the foremost modern expert on medieval Arab-Armenian relations, set the tone for how scholars discuss Bughā's campaign in his *Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia* (1965 in Armenian; translated into English in 1976), which remains today one of the best sources on ʿAbbāsid-era Armenia. He approaches Bughā's campaign for what it can tell us about the Arabization of Armenia in the ʿAbbāsid period and explains that

> Bugha left Armenia in A.D. 855. All the leading *naχarar*s had been taken prisoners [sic] and the time had apparently come for the Arab settlers to make the most of the situation.

6. I discuss the problematic tendency to separate Armenian from early ʿAbbāsid history in Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*.

7. Mkrtitsch Ghazarian, "Armenien unter der arabischen Herrschaft bis zur Entstehung des Bagratidenreiches nach arabischen und armenischen Quellen bearbeitet," *Zeitschrift für armenische Philologie* 2 (1904): 191.

8. Zaroui Pogossian, "Locating Religion, Controlling Territory: Conquest and Legitimation in Late Ninth Century Vaspurakan and its Interreligious Context," (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 177. I would like to thank Zara for sharing this article before its publication.

> The local Arabs had contributed in every way to the advance of Bugha's army, and gradually increased their own holdings.[9]

Here Ter-Łevondyan is echoing (and citing explicitly) T'ovma Arcruni's famous statement that the caliphal army was "accompanied by the *tačik*s of Armenia who dwelt in various regions of the land and guided Bugha on his way in and out of the country."[10] Yet T'ovma's history also clarifies that some of the Armenian élite were in fact not imprisoned and that some of the local Muslims refused to help Bughā. Despite this, Ter-Łevondyan borrows from T'ovma to imagine the battle lines drawn around ethnicity, effectively polarizing Armenians and Arabs.

In *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam* (1919, but rewritten and republished in 1980), Laurent and Canard offer another perspective on the Armenian responses to Bughā's campaign: "Toutes les familles arméniennes ont fourni des hommes qui, dans cette crise, se sont conduits en égoïstes, en véritables traîtres contre leurs compatriotes, bien que les historiens arméniens ne les aient pas jugés aussi durement."[11] Laurent and Canard here account for what Ter-Łevondyan's analysis cannot, namely that many Armenians joined Bughā's forces, rendering problematic the facile division between Armenian v. Arab. Yet Laurent and Canard's reading also presumes the existence of a cohesive and recognizable ethnic identity in the medieval period. As their discussion stands, they invite the reader to subscribe to the idea that Armenians were united, such that any Armenian who collaborated with Bughā was perforce a selfish traitor. The very fact that medieval historians do not lambast such collaborators as traitors (although T'ovma certainly did, albeit very selectively) hints that perhaps modern concepts of national identity have dictated our reading of medieval social organization.

Yet even with the recognition that some Armenians in fact aided Bughā's advance, modern scholars have generally persisted with the organization of Bughā's campaign around recognizable ethno-religious groups. For example, N. Garsoïan summarizes the campaign briefly, including T'ovma's quote about how the *tačik*s helped Bughā. She explains that Bughā deported

> a multitude of captive *naxarars,* among them the *sparapet* [general] Smbat whose neutrality or continuous loyalty to the Muslim authorities had not saved him from sharing the fate of the other Armenian magnates. The condition of Armenia after the devastating expeditions of Bugha was once more tragic. The Arab emirs profited from the captivity of the Armenian princes to expand their own possessions.[12]

9. Aram Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, trans. Nina Garsoïan (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, 1976), 44. This is Garsoïan's English translation, but the original *Arabakan amirayut'yunnerə Bagratunyac' Hayastanum* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakč'ut'yun, 1965), 84 does indeed employ աɫաɫ here, not *tačik*.

10. Arcruni, *History*, 198, though Thomson translates *tačik*s as "Muslims"; *Patmut'iwn*, 206; Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 43.

11. Joseph Laurent and Marius Canard, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la conquête arabe jusqu'en 886* (Lisbon: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1980), 149.

12. Nina Garsoïan, "The Arab Invasions and the Rise of the Bagratuni (640-884)," in *Armenian People from*

This summary sets the story into a comfortable framework of Arab empire v. Armenian rebel. Armenians, regardless of their loyalties, were imprisoned while Arabs profited. This is an entirely valid reading of T'ovma's account of Bughā's campaign. Yet this does not allow for the Armenian and Albanian patricians who did not end up in Samarrā', nor does it mention the Zurārids, who were also deported to Samarrā' despite the fact that they were Muslims. Nor can this explain why "Arab emirs profited" and yet Bughā "defeated and killed the local Muslim emir [Isḥāq b. Ismā'īl] and burned the [Muslim] city of Tiflis."[13]

In response to the reliance on T'ovma's account prevalent in modern discussions of the ninth-century conflict, this article suggests two methodological interventions to the way that we read Bughā's campaign. The first is that we need to balance Arabic and Armenian sources despite the fact that T'ovma's *History* offers significantly more detail than any extant Arabic source. T'ovma is crafting a lesson that speaks to his *Armenian* (frequently, even a specifically Arcruni) audience and employs the story for a reason, namely to construct conceptual borders between Christian Armenians and *tačik*s. This explains why T'ovma relies heavily on pre-Islamic narratives of Armenian battles and persecution. He calques large portions of Ełišē's history of the Armenian-Persian wars of 451 into an 'Abbāsid setting by changing the Sasanian emperor Yazdegerd and his vizier Mihrnerseh to the caliph al-Mutawakkil and his general Bughā. T'ovma's purpose is not to tell the story of Bughā's campaign but to emplot this moment of Armenian history into a metanarrative of Christian minorities under imperial persecution, tapping into a storyline that was well known to an Armenian audience but completely absent in Arabic accounts. Reading T'ovma against al-Ṭabarī (or any other Arabic source) is a useful reminder to disentangle T'ovma's interpretation of the campaign from the details that he offers about the main protagonists.[14]

The second methodological intervention proposed here is related to the first: we need to situate the campaign in the ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of the Caucasus as a whole. Bughā's campaign crops up most regularly in studies of Armenian history that are interested primarily in situating *Armenian* experience during the conflict. This article instead places the campaign into the far more religiously- and ethnically-diverse setting of the Caucasus. This complicates the Armenian v. Arab narrative and instead presents Armenians as some of the many peoples confronting and colluding with Bughā. By examining Bughā's campaign as a moment in Caucasian instead of Armenian history, we can take a step back to reconsider the usefulness of broad identity markers such as Armenian, Muslim, Albanian, Christian, or Arab. T'ovma saw Christianness as the main determinant not just of communal identity, but also of communal loyalties. Why, then, are the many varied Christian leaders of the Caucasus, like Abū al-'Abbās and Abū Mūsā, fighting on opposite sides? How are these identities performed, if at all, in moments charged by violence and threats of annihilation?

Ancient to Modern Times, ed. Richard Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 141.

13. Garsoïan, "The Arab Invasions," 141.

14. The question of how and why Armenian families and provinces appear in Arabic sources is another avenue for future research in 'Abbāsid historiography; see, for example, Alison Vacca, "Al-Basfurrağān and Banū al-Dayrānī: Vaspurakan and the Arcrunik' in Arabic Sources" (forthcoming). The focus on T'ovma in this article reflects both the centrality of his account to our understanding of Bughā's campaigns and the placement of Bughā's campaigns at the heart of the *History of the Acruni House*.

By looking at Bughā's campaign as a case study into the roles and representations of ethnicity, religion, and gender in the expression of medieval Caucasian identities, this article offers an alternative reading to the traditional interpretation: Caucasian communities were pluralist, fluid, and built on pragmatic, local concerns instead of around any grand sense of ethno-religious solidarity. To explore this campaign as a moment that pitted Christians v. Muslims or Armenians v. Arabs buys into medieval "identity-talk"[15] and reduces the complexity of medieval social organization into nationalist discourse more familiar to modern readers than to the protagonists of this story. As R. Suny points out in his study of the construction of identities in the modern Caucasus, "[r]ather than appearing coherent and uniform as it might look from afar, ethnicity at closer range looks fragmented, its cultural content contested and conflicted."[16]

In exploring how this played out in a medieval context, modern studies on identity have been particularly useful, including insightful studies of Arabness published by P. Crone,[17] M.C.A. MacDonald,[18] J. Retsö,[19] and P. Webb;[20] of Persianness and Iranianness by S. Savant,[21] M. Cooperson,[22] and R. Payne;[23] of Kurdishness by B. James;[24] and of Armenianness by B. Martin-Hisard, N. Garsoïan[25] and A. Redgate,[26] as well as broader theoretical approaches

15. Ronald Grigor Suny, "Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *Quarterly Journal: International Security* 24, no. 3 (1999): 144. "When people talk about identity, however, their language is almost always about unity and internal harmony and tends to naturalize wholeness. It defaults to an earlier understanding of identity as the stable core...But even as ordinary usage tends to homogenize and essentialize identities, theorists of identity insistently claim that as difficult as it is to accept, the apparent and desired wholeness and unity is made up, imagined, to create a provisional stability in a changing world." He refers to the discourse of wholeness as "identity-talk."

16. Suny, "Provisional Stabilities," 139.

17. Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

18. Michael C. A. MacDonald, "Arabs, Arabias, and Arabic before Late Antiquity," *Topoi* 16, no. 1 (2009).

19. Jan Retsö, "The Earliest Arabs," *Orientalia Suecana* 38-39 (1990).

20. Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

21. Sarah Savant, "'Persians' in early Islam," *Annales islamologiques* 42 (2008).

22. Michael Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians': the Uses of Ethnicity in the early Abbasid Period," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts*, ed. Asad Q. Ahmed, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

23. Richard Payne, "Avoiding Ethnicity: Uses of the Ancient Past in Late Sasanian Northern Mesopotamia," in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100*, ed. Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, and Richard Payne (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012).

24. Boris James, "Arab Ethnonyms (ʿAjam, ʿArab, Badū and Turk): the Kurdish Case as a Paradigm for Thinking about Differences in the Middle Ages," *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2014); "Le 'territoire tribal des Kurdes' et l'aire iraqienne (X^{e}-XIII^{e} siècles): Esquisse des recompositions spatiales," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 117-118 (2007).

25. Nina Garsoïan and Bernadette Martin-Hisard, "Unity and Diversity in Medieval Caucasia, 4th–11th centuries," in *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Georgian*, ed. Stephen Rapp and Paul Crego (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012).

26. A. E. Redgate, "Myth and Reality: Armenian Identity in the early Middle Ages," *National Identities* 9, no. 4 (2007).

to identity construction. D. Nirenberg's *Communities of Violence* (1996) and T. Sizgorich's *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity* (2009) serve as models for the way that both authors situate the expression of religious identity broadly, but also specifically in the context of medieval conflict. Sizgorich, for example, expounds on a seeming paradox: in order to study identity, "one frequently must look past the explanations ancient peoples provide (or seem to provide) for their own behavior, especially insofar as those explanations are contingent upon appeals to what is frequently represented as the 'essential nature' of their own identity group."[27] In order to understand the role of religion and ethnicity in the particular context of Bughā's campaign, we have to reassess the layer of interpretation offered in T'ovma's account as his own attempt to supply borders for Armenian Christian identity.

With a close reading of the alliances and communities involved in Bughā's campaign, it becomes clear that there was no coherent or unifying concept of Armenianness, Albanianness, Georgianness, or Arabness in the Caucasus, let alone Muslimness or Christianness. Ethnicity and religion were significant markers of identity, but they were multiform and did not necessarily inform loyalties and allegiances. Communities did not emerge from monolithic and universal categories of ethnicity or religion, but from shared concerns localized in specific places and moments in time. Communal identity was historically contingent, defined according to the needs and challenges facing small, inchoate, heterogeneous familial groups. The inhabitants of one village would easily ally themselves with the people of a neighboring town even if they did not share a common religion, language, heritage, or ethnicity.[28] After all, these markers of identity were malleable: people in the medieval Caucasus rewrote their histories and genealogies, learned new languages, and converted to other religions. Perhaps more importantly, even when certain markers of identity remain stable, medieval authors frequently do not apply descriptions of ethnicity and religion consistently if these do not advance their narrative agendas.

Bughā's campaign serves to illuminate both the localized nature of communal identity and medieval "identity talk," i.e., the construction of the metanarrative around ethnicity and religion. Examining the role of women in the accounts of Bughā's Caucasian campaign is one efficient way to reveal localized concepts of communal identity that supersede ethno-religious affiliations. Women, we will see, navigate between and participate in a multiplicity of groups that might otherwise appear as ethnically or religiously uniform. Modern studies on the role of gender in medieval identity construction such as S. Barton's *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines* (2015) and N. el-Cheikh's *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity* (2015) have "investigated the multiple and complex ways in which interfaith sexuality, power, and group identity intersected."[29] El-Cheikh, for example, clarifies that "depictions of women, gender relations, and sexuality are at the heart of the cultural construction of identity and

27. Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 22.

28. This fits with Mottahedeh's "acquired loyalties" in Būyid Iran, namely in that they were contractual "deliberately acquired obligations"; Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 40.

29. Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 144.

collectivity."[30] Approaching the study of identity from a gendered perspective by focusing on the women who forged ties across communities in the ninth-century Caucasus reveals the dissonance between imagined and lived communities, thereby offering a more nuanced alternative to the traditional reading of Bughā's campaign in T'ovma's ethno-religious absolutes.

Summary of Bughā's Campaign

With these concepts and concerns in mind, the goal here is not merely to describe the skirmishes, sieges, and battlegrounds of the various armies involved in Bughā's campaign, but to prepare the subsequent discussion about how medieval authors describe identity in the ʿAbbāsid-era Caucasus. As such, the following narrative focuses closely on how the extant sources elaborate or obfuscate markers of identity of the main protagonists of this campaign and their communities. For the moment, it also bypasses the lengthy descriptions of martyrdom and refutations of apostasy in T'ovma's account.

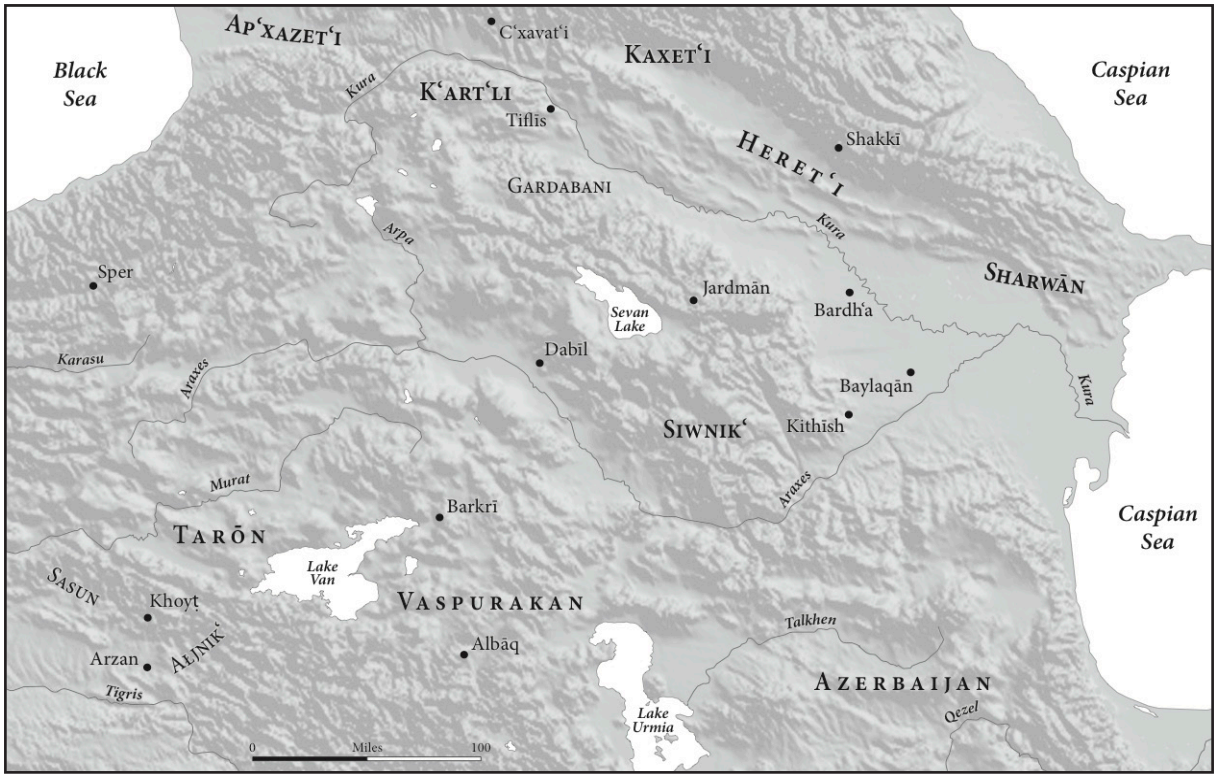

Fig. 1: Map of the South Caucasus in the Third/Ninth Century.

30. Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8.

The Rationale for Bughā's Campaign

In either 234/848-9 or 235/849, al-Mutawakkil posted Abū Saʿīd Muḥammad b. Yūsuf as governor over Armenia. The two most powerful Armenian noble houses at the time, the Bagratunis (known as banū Sinbāṭ in Arabic) of Ṭārūn/Tarōn and the Arcrunis (banū al-Dayrānī) of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan, refused to allow Abū Saʿīd into their territories. Abū Saʿīd returned to Samarrāʾ with the tax revenues from Armenia and with letters of complaint against the Armenian nobility penned by local *tačik*s. Al-Mutawakkil assigned troops to force the North to accept his governor, but Abū Saʿīd died on his return trip. The army passed to Abū Saʿīd's son Yūsuf, who was able to negotiate with the Bagratunis and the Arcrunis and sent both patricians back to Samarrāʾ to ensure the terms of their agreements. Yūsuf's subsequent death at the hands of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' on the edge of the Bagratuni territory of Ṭārūn/Tarōn and Zurārid-held Aɫjnik' precipitated the caliphal campaign. The traditional narrative of Bughā's campaign suggests that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' were infuriated by the captivity of the Bagratuni patrician and so killed Yūsuf in revenge. Al-Mutawakkil dispatched Bughā to avenge Yūsuf and wreak havoc on the Armenian noble houses.[31]

It is, however, not entirely clear whether the authors of our medieval sources recognize al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' as Armenians, let alone as kinsmen of the Bagratuni family. Their name is a derivative of the toponym Khoyṭ/Xoyt', a mountain on the periphery of Armenian territory. Al-Balādhurī explains that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' "are barbarians (*ʿulūj*) who go by the name al-Arṭān."[32] While this Arabic identifier could feasibly refer to the Armenian town Ardahan in Gugark', it is rather more likely a calque on the Syriac. Minorsky includes "the Xoθᾱίται [= al-Khuwaythiyya] in the canton of Khoyt of Sāsūn, the Orṭāyē [= al-Arṭān] in the bend of the Euphrates)" among the groups haphazardly bundled under the designation Kurds (*akrād*) in Arabic.[33] The relationship to Kurdish populations is uncertain, though, as the Syriac indicates that they are the inhabitants of Urartu. In other words, we should assume that al-Balādhurī's الارطان, *al-arṭān*, in fact clarifies that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' are ܐܪܛܝܐ, i.e., Aramean *urṭāyē*.[34] The Armenianness of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' was thus not apparent

31. Arcruni, *History*, 186; *Patmut'iwn*, 190. See also Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia*, trans. Krikor Maksoudian (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 119; *Hayoc' Patmut'iwn* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakč'ut'yun, 1996), 120. Note that Drasxanakertc'i here conflates Abū Saʿīd and his son Yūsuf. Later accounts place some blame on the Byzantines, as well: Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abû'l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus: Being the First Part of His Political History of the World*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003), 142.

32. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 211.

33. David Neil MacKenzie, Vladimir Minorsky, and Thomas Bois, "Kurds, Kurdistān," in *EI²*. On the multiple definitions of *akrād* in the medieval period, see James, "Arab Ethnonyms," especially 712.

34. Margoliouth defines ܐܪܛܝܐ as the people, Urartians, not the place, Urartu. "This people is supposed to have been a remnant of Aramean autochthones, and to have inhabited the district of Anzitene in Armenia"; Jessie Payne Margoliouth, *Supplement to the Thesaurus syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 10. Nöldeke first identified al-Balādhurī's الارطان with the Syriac: "Der Name könnte immerhin mit dem der ܐܪܛܝܐ identisch sein; wir müssten den annehmen, dass Theile desselben Volkes sich in verschiedenen Gegenden des südarmenischen Gebirgslandes angesiedelt hätten. Wie wir oben sahen, sind ja solche Spaltungen bei kurdischen Stämmen nichts seltenes; für Kurden werden wir aber ein von den Armeniern wie von den Syrern unterschiedenes Volk in dieser noch jezt [sic] hauptsächlich von Kurden bewohnten Gegend doch am ersten

Snapshot of the ʿAbbāsid Caucasian Campaign

The identity markers supplied here refer to how these protagonists typically appear in medieval sources.

Bughā's Allies

Communal or Family Name	Main Actors	Traditional Identity Markers	Geographical Association
Albanians	Qiṭrīj	Albanian Christian	Jardmān/Gardman
Arcrunis	"traitor" elements, such as Vasak	Armenian Christian	Al-Basfurrajān/ Vaspurakan
Bagratunis	Smbat Aplabas, Mušeł	Armenian Christian	Ṭārūn/Tarōn
ʿUthmānids		Arab Muslim	Barkrī/Berkri

Bughā's Opponents

Communal or Family Name	Main Actors	Traditional Identity Markers	Geographical Association
Abkhazians	T'ewdosi	Abkhazian Christian	Abkhāz/Ap'xazet'i
Albanians	Abū Mūsā ʿĪsā	Albanian Christian	Kithīsh/K't'iš
Amīrs of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi	Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl and his wife	Mawālī Muslim [with an Avar Christian wife]	Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi
Arcrunis	"hero" elements, such as Ašot, Gurgēn, Hṙip'simē, and Gurgēn the son of Apupelč	Armenian Christian	Al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan
Gardabanians		Christian	Gugark'
Al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut'	Yovhan	Armenian (Syrian?) Christian	Khoyṭ/Xoyt'
Mt'iuls		Christian	Mt'iulet'i
Al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark'		(Arab? Chechen?) Christian	Khākhiṭ/Kaxet'i
Zurārids	Mūsā b. Zurāra	Arab (Armenian? Syrian?) Muslim [with an Armenian Christian wife]	Arzan/Arcn

to historians writing in Arabic. This suggests that the people on the edges of Armenia and Mesopotamia were perceived as different from the central Armenian houses.

T‘ovma offers an extended description of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ and, interestingly, his discussion also presents several challenges to their Armenianness. First, he is clear that they are incomprehensible: “their mutual speech is a patchwork of borrowed words.” He even offers a false etymology for their name, as *xut‘* in Armenian means “obstacle,” which T‘ovma associates with their “obscure and inscrutable speech.” Second, he dismisses them as “savage in their habits” and “drinkers of blood,” presumably othering them from his own Arcruni society. Third, he traces their lineage back to Syria, labeling them as “peasants of Syria.” He further claims that, “they know the psalms in the old translation of the Armenian teachers.” This, as R. Thomson points out, likely refers to Armenian reliance on Christian texts in Syriac before the invention of the Armenian alphabet.[35] The only thing that identifies al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ as Armenians in T‘ovma’s text is their loyalty to “their princes,” which modern scholars read as the Bagratuni patricians.

Modern scholars have elaborated on the relationship between the Bagratunis and al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ by glossing a corrupted passage of an Arabic text. Al-Yaʿqūbī presents the name of the person responsible for Yūsuf’s death, but the text is illegible. Houtsma offers **سوان بن البف** with the note “Ita cod. Veram lectionem ignoro,”[36] which Ghazarian corrects to **يونان** to render T‘ovma’s Յովսան, a native of Khoyṭ/Xoyt‘ who “had inflicted severe losses on the royal army” and was later martyred for arguing with al-Mutawakkil.[37] In fact, during his audience with the caliph, Yovnan reportedly boasted about his involvement in Yūsuf’s assassination: “[i]n my disdain for you I put your general and his troops to the sword.”[38] Markwart goes further by identifying Yovnan’s father as T‘oṙnik, a Bagratuni soldier who fought against Bughā on the command of Bagarat Bagratuni, clarifying that al-Yaʿqūbī’s name should read **نيق < تُرْ < يونان بن**.[39] If this reconstruction is correct—and there is no evidence to either substantiate or disprove it—we see a clear connection between al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ and the Bagratunis by providing a Bagratuni father to Yūsuf’s Khuwaythī murderer.

Al-Ṭabarī claims that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ “constituted the majority of the inhabitants of Armenia.” It seems plausible that he might be conflating al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ with the

halten. Sicher ist das freilich alles durchaus nicht”; Theodor Nöldeke, “Zwei Völker Vorderasiens,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 33, no. 1 (1879): 165. See also Josef Markwart, *Südarmenien und die Tigrisquellen nach griechischen und arabischen Geographen* (Vienna: Mechitharisten-Buchdruckerei, 1930), 222 n. 3.

35. Arcruni, *History*, 187-8 and n. 3; *Patmut‘iwn*, 190-92.

36. Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb b. Jaʿfar b. Wahb b. Wādiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* (Leiden: Brill, 1883), 598; the more modern edition of the text (Beirut, 2002) offers **بنوان بن البف** .

37. Re: the identity of Yovnan, see Ghazarian, “Armenien,” 191 n. 2: “Für die Lesung des Namens **البف** habe ich keinen Anhaltspunkt”; Arcruni, *History*, 253 n. 3 seems reticent to ascribe to Markwart’s hypothesis: “This Yovnan is not attested elsewhere.”

38. Arcruni, *History*, 253; *Patmut‘iwn*, 294.

39. Markwart, *Südarmenien* 298 n. 1; Aram Ter-Łevondyan, “‘Hayoc‘ išxanə’ arabakan tirapetut‘yun žamanakašrǰanum,” *Patma-banasirakan Handes* 2 (1964): 130. We are assuming that the T‘oṙnik mentioned in Arcruni, *History*, 176; *Patmut‘iwn*, 174 is in fact the same T‘oṙnik, father of Yovnan.

Bagratunis here. But al-Balādhurī offers another possible interpretation. He suggests that in murdering Yūsuf, al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ were acting on behalf of the Armenian people *in toto*. Yūsuf, he explains, had sent another caliphal representative named al-ʿAlāʾ into al-Sīsajān/Siwnik‘, where he looted a monastery named Dayr al-Aqdāḥ, which enraged the Armenian patricians, lesser nobility, and chiefs.[40] The Armenians, spurred on by the looting of the monastery and the imprisonment of Bagarat (here: Baqrāṭ b. Ashūṭ), sent emissaries to convince al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ to rebel and provided them with arms: "they roused them against him because he had carried Baqrāṭ off."[41] In this way, the murder of Yūsuf becomes a collective pan-Armenian effort, including even the region of al-Sīsajān/Siwnik‘ with its variable relation to Armenia; perhaps al-Ṭabarī's "majority" may accordingly refer to the perceived support that other Armenians offered al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘.

Bugha's Campaign against Vaspurakan

While al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ appear as the main rebels in the Arabic texts about Bughā's campaign, T‘ovma instead boasts of the blame of the Arcruni family and thereby shifts away from both al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ and the Bagratunis. He explains that Abū Saʿīd's lieutenant, al-ʿAlāʾ, had faced off against Ašot Arcruni when Abū Saʿīd first attempted to collect the taxes from Armenia. Ašot's forces subsequently defeated and massacred so many local Muslims that the widows of Arzan/Arcn travelled to deliver the news of the conflict to al-Mutawakkil "with unveiled faces, bareheaded, and having discarded the natural apparel of women, as is their custom especially for the *tačik* nations" (տաճկական ազանց). They lamented in the audience of the caliph himself, claiming that Ašot alone had wrought the devastation and the rebellion against caliphal power.[42]

After Yūsuf's death, al-Mutawakkil's advisors suggested that the caliph gather a great army to imprison Ašot Arcruni, the patrician of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan, after which "all others will easily submit."[43] Given that T‘ovma dedicated his book to the son and grandson of this Ašot, his interest in establishing the significance of his house is clear. He states unequivocally that Ašot "was more glorious and famous than those before him who had been princes of all Armenia, those in the East and the North, and especially those in the land of Vaspurakan who had been princes in positions of authority."[44] T‘ovma has al-Mutawakkil himself rally troops to move against Armenia with the exclamation that no one since the rise of Islam had "inflicted such embarrassing reverses on us, our nation and army and our generals as has Ashot prince of Vaspurakan."[45]

40. This is not reported in Armenian literature with the possible exception of Ps.-Šapuh Bagratuni, see Šapuh Bagratuni, "The Anonymous Storyteller (also known as Šapuh Bagratuni)," trans. Robert Thomson, *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 21 (1989): 213. He mentions that the *tačik*s set fire to churches after the death of Abū Saʿīd.

41. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* 211.

42. Arcruni, *History*, 180 except that he renders *tačkakan* as Muslim; *Patmut‘iwn*, 180.

43. Arcruni, *History*, 190; *Patmut‘iwn*, 196.

44. Arcruni, *History*, 174; *Patmut‘iwn*, 170.

45. Arcruni, *History*, 192; *Patmut‘iwn*, 198.

With descriptions brimming with textual borrowing pulled directly from Ełišē's fifth-century history of the Sasanian attack on the Caucasus, T'ovma painstakingly tracks Bughā and his lieutenant Zīrak through al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan. Ašot Arcruni, accompanied by nobles of the secondary houses of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan, rallied in the castle Nkan. While under siege, some nobles of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan turned against Ašot and approached Bughā, "destroying the unity of harmonious concord between brothers."[46] These lesser nobles offered Ašot to Bughā in exchange for clemency, that they should be allowed to remain on their own land. They also warned Bughā about Gurgēn Arcruni, Ašot's brother, who had left al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan but retained the ability to rally Arcruni troops against caliphal forces. Ašot, recognizing his men's perfidy, handed himself over to Bughā, who sent him to Samarrāʾ.

Al-Yaʿqūbī notes that Ašot, who appears in Arabic as Ashūṭ b. Ḥamza al-Armanī, was decapitated in Samarrāʾ, but this is undoubtedly merely transferring the fate of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, al-Yaʿqūbī's next person of interest, to the Arcruni nobleman. Armenian sources allow for Ašot's survival and return to Armenia. Al-Ṭabarī, for his part, preserves a story that clarifies that Ašot survived Bughā's campaigns and his subsequent imprisonment:

> Al-Mutawakkil saw Ashūṭ b. Ḥamza al-Armanī a few days before he [Mutawakkil] was killed [247/861]. The caliph grumbled about having an audience with Ashūṭ and ordered that he be evicted. When asked whether he was satisfied with Ashūṭ's service, he replied, "Yes, indeed, but I dreamt a few nights ago that I had been riding him, when he turned to me, his head becoming like that of a mule, and said to me, 'How much longer [do you suppose] you will molest us? Only a few days remain until the end of your appointed time of fifteen years.'" Salamah said: It tallied with the number of days [remaining] of his caliphate.[47]

This reveals that Ashūṭ (Ašot Arcruni) was at the court in Samarrāʾ years after his imprisonment, presumably with his head and body intact, and in the service of al-Mutawakkil, who was apparently well pleased with Ašūṭ's service.

Bughā's campaign against Ašot Arcruni in al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan thus reveals the disunity even within the noble houses in Armenia. Ašot, reportedly the greatest threat that the Caliphate had ever faced, was not even able to rally the other nobles of his own province around a banner of Armenianness.

Bughā followed the warning offered by the nobles of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan and turned against Gurgēn Arcruni, Ašot's brother. Gurgēn gathered his troops and sent his mother, Hṙipʻsimē, to negotiate Ašot's release with Bughā, who was camped on the banks of the river Zāb/Zav. While Hṙipʻsimē was treated with respect, she was not able to stem the next assault. Aided by an angel of God as he prayed and recited Psalms, at least as T'ovma recounts the battle, Gurgēn annihilated Bughā's troops at a place aptly called the Lake of Blood. Gurgēn

46. Arcruni, *History*, 201; *Patmutʻiwn*, 210.

47. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume 34: Incipient Decline: The Caliphates of al-Wathiq, al-Mutawakkil, and al-Muntasir A.D. 841-863/A.H. 227-248*, trans. Joel Kraemer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 183; *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (Leiden: Brill, 1893), III 1463-4.

was subsequently, and rather incredulously, invited to Bughā's camp where he was named and fêted as the prince of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan in his brother's stead. This appears as part of a broader plot to reduce the Arcruni patrician through artifice when military means proved ineffectual. After three days, Bughā forged a letter from al-Mutawakkil and claimed that the caliph had demanded the capture of Gurgēn. Bughā duplicitously imprisoned Gurgēn and sent him to Samarrāʾ while Gurgēn's soldiers scattered ineffectually throughout al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan.

Bughā's Campaign against Arzan/Arcn and Khoyṭ/Xoyt'

T'ovma's narrative of the ʿAbbāsid campaign therefore sends Bughā after the Arcrunis to retaliate for the murder of Yūsuf b. Muḥammad, despite the recognition of the guilt of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' for this crime. The Arcruni patrician did not even hold the title Prince of Armenia, a position that entailed responsibility of keeping locals such as al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' in line with caliphal concerns. T'ovma accordingly devotes significant space to the heroic actions of his patrons' (and his own) noble house, and yet he never places caliphal troops against the very people whom Bughā was sent to chastise. This does not align with Arabic accounts of Bughā's Caucasian campaign, which retain interest in al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut'. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, only mentions the Arcrunis after Bughā neutralized his first target, a local Muslim ally of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut'.

Mūsā b. Zurāra, known as Abū al-Ḥurr (literally: "the father of the freeman"),[48] ruled Ałjnik' from Arzan/Arcn. In Armenian sources, Mūsā appears as "Musē, son of a Hagarite Zōrahay."[49] The use of Hagarene here is unusual in T'ovma's text and he does not use *tačik* to refer to the Zurārids, perhaps subtly implying distance between Mūsā and the rest of Bughā's forces. Despite the fact that modern scholars uniformly assume that Mūsā was Arab, neither the Arabic nor the Armenian sources explicitly identify him as such and he has no known tribal *nisba*. Laurent, Canard, and Ter-Łevondyan suggest that he might have been from the Bakr tribe, like the nearby Shaybānī *amīr*s, because Mūsā's son was in close contact with ʿĪsā b. Shaykh, the leader of Diyār Bakr.[50] There is nothing to support this suggestion, though, and the Zurārids claimed close ties to a number of non-Arab and/or non-Muslim groups in the North, as well. It is rather more likely that the Zurārids were either Armenian or Syrian converts to Islam. M. Canard notes that "Mûsâ b. Zurâra fit cause commune avec les princes arméniens, se comportant plus comme un prince arménien que comme un émir arabe."[51] As such, modern scholars are confronted not only with the blurry nature of ethnic groups due to the lack of ethnic identifiers in the medieval texts, but also with the modern assumptions that there is an identifiable difference between Armenian and Arab comportment.

48. The word "freeman" in an Iranian context refers to the nobility: *ḥurr* (more commonly in plural as *aḥrār*) in Arabic is rendered as *azat* in Armenian and as *āzād* in Persian. In Syriac this appears as ܚܪ , but is usually rendered as "the son of the freemen" (ܒܪ ܚ) instead of "the father of the freemen."

49. Arcruni, *History*, 175; *Patmut'iwn*, 172.

50. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 42; Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 391-92.

51. Marius Canard, "Les principautés arabes en Arménie," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 11 (1976): 198.

The Zurārids allied with the Bagratuni family against Bughā. Al-Ṭabarī explains that: "When Yūsuf deported Buqrāṭ b. Ashūṭ [Bagarat Bagratuni the son of Ašot Msaker], the Patrikioi (*al-baṭāriqa*)[52] took an oath to kill Yūsuf and vowed to shed his blood. Mūsā b. Zurāra went along with them in this. He was responsible for the daughter of Buqrāṭ."[53] Mūsā b. Zurāra was married to the daughter of Bagarat Bagratuni and so allied with al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' when they moved against Yūsuf b. Muḥammad. This verifies that local alliances informed Zurārid responses to Bughā's campaign.

Al-Ṭabarī also maps out an itinerary that avoids Arcruni territory entirely. Bughā "headed for Armenia from the direction of the Jazīrah. He began in Arzan [by attacking] Mūsā b. Zurārah—he is Abū al-Ḥurr—and he had sisters and brothers, [namely] Ismāʿīl, Sulaymān, Aḥmad, ʿĪsā, Muḥammad, and Hārūn. Bughā deported Mūsā b. Zurārah to the gate of the caliph"[54] and Bughā reportedly killed 30,000 Zurārid allies in this leg of the campaign. T'ovma's perceived battle pitting Christian Armenians against the ethno-religious "other" and his desire to vaunt his sponsors' deeds blind him to moments that counter these narratives. Accordingly, T'ovma does not record Mūsā's alliance with the Bagratunis or his fate, but instead deploys a caliphal general against an Armenian noble because someone else killed a caliphal representative.

Al-Ṭabarī's version, much more believably, has the added benefit of sending Bughā against al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut', while Zurārid Aɬjnik' stood *en route* between al-Jazīra and Khoyṭ/Xoyt'. After the deportation of the Zurārid family to Samarrāʾ, Bughā turned against al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' themselves. Al-Ṭabarī clarifies that Bughā "proceeded to lay siege in the mountain of al-Khuwaythiyya. They constituted the majority of the inhabitants of Armenia and were the killers of Yūsuf b. Muḥammad."[55] During this campaign, Bughā's forces reportedly killed 30,000 of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' and imprisoned still more. It is only after the subjugation of Khoyṭ/Xoyt' that al-Ṭabarī sends Bughā against the Arcruni capital at Albāq (here: Aghbagh)/Ałbak.

Bughā's Campaign against Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi

After the destructive campaign in Khoyṭ/Xoyt', al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' next appear further north as allies of the *amīr* of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi, Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl b. Shuʿayb, who appears as Sahak the son of Ismayēl in Armenian. This brings the narrative of Bughā's campaign back into

52. On the appearance of the title *patrician* and its use in Greek (πατρίκιος), Armenian (պատրիկ), and Arabic (**بطريق**), see Ter-Łevondyan, "Hayoc' išxanə"; Karen Yuzbašyan, "Les titres byzantins en Arménie," in *L'Arménie et Byzance: Histoire et Culture*, ed. Nina Garsoïan (Paris: Sorbonne, 1996).

53. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 114; *Taʾrīkh*, III 1409.

54. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 115; *Taʾrīkh*, III 1409. See also ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī-l-Taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādr, 1995), VII 59; ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn, *Taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, [1391] 1971), IV 276; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam wa-taʿāqub al-himam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya, [1424] 2003), IV 123. Note the prevalence of Judeo-Christian names in the Zurārid family. While these names are certainly not unusual among Muslim Arabs, this might potentially suggest that they were converts who maintained a connection to Biblical stories.

55. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 115 and n. 373; *Taʾrīkh*, III, 1409; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam* IV, 123.

dialogue with T‘ovma’s version, who does not mention al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut‘ but does send Bughā north against Tiflīs/Tp‘ilisi after wintering in Dabīl/Duin.

Tiflīs/Tp‘ilisi had been functionally independent for decades by the time of Bughā’s campaign. Ibn Khurradādhbih recognizes Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl as the Lord of Armenia (صاحب ارمينية) and perhaps this vaunted status encouraged him to ignore Bughā’s summons.[56] He “was a stocky old man and had a large head. He was tattooed with blue (indigo) markings, and was ruddy, bald, and cross-eyed.”[57] Isḥāq’s ancestry remains uncertain. Al-Masʿūdī explains: “I think that he was a Qurayshite of Banū Umayya, or their client”[58]; he appears most frequently in Arabic sources as Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl *mawlā banī Umayya*.[59] This *mawlā* status is at least a generation off, as either Isḥāq’s father Ismāʿīl or his grandfather Shuʿayb was a *mawlā* of the last Umayyad caliph Marwān b. Muḥammad,[60] who was the governor of Armenia before becoming caliph. Modern scholars have assumed that Isḥāq was part of “a line of Arab amīrs” and conclude that “the amīrate [at Tiflīs/Tp‘ilisi] had long been a focus of Arab power in the Caucasus.”[61] While later *amīr*s were Arabs, extant sources do not corroborate the claim that Isḥāq was. The repeated reference to his family’s *mawlā* status in lieu of a tribal *nisba* instead suggests that Isḥāq was not perceived as Arab.

Al-Yaʿqūbī claims that Isḥāq offered money and a pledge of allegiance to the caliph, but refused Bughā’s summon to appear before the army personally by claiming that “he did not deviate from obedience [to the caliph].”[62] In 238/852-3, Bughā set his army against Tiflīs/Tp‘ilisi while Zīrak moved across the Kura River into Ṣughdabīl/Sagodebeli. Most Arabic accounts of this siege note the catastrophic use of naphtha against the city made of wood and the high death toll of 50,000. In this leg of the campaign, according to al-Ṭabarī, “Bughā also sent Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Wārithī al-Naṣrānī against the inhabitants of Armenia, Arab and non-Arab alike” (عربها وعجمها).[63] Bughā sat above the town and watched Zīrak and Abū al-ʿAbbās burn the city and capture Isḥāq and his son ʿAmr. We find in this explicit confirmation that Bughā’s campaign was against “Arab and non-Arab alike”; we also find confirmation that Armenian troops outside of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan were helping Bughā. Al-Ṭabarī identifies Abū al-ʿAbbās as a prince (*al-wārithī* is a translation of the Armenian *sepuh*)[64] and a Christian (*al-naṣrānī*) and later clarifies that this refers to none other than Sinbāṭ b. Ashūṭ, the Arabization of Smbat Aplabas Bagratuni, the brother of the deported Prince of Armenia

56. Abū al-Qāsim ʿUbayd Allāh Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik* (Leiden: Brill, 1889), 163.

57. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 123; *Taʾrīkh*, III 1415; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VII 67.

58. Vladimir Minorsky, *A history of Sharvān and Darband in the 10th–11th centuries* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1958), 161.

59. Ibn Khaldūn, *Taʾrīkh*, IV 276; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, IV 124; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VII 67.

60. Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Vladimir Minorsky, “Al-Kurdj,” in *EI²*.

61. Clifford Edmund Bosworth and David Neil MacKenzie, “Al-Ḳabḳ,” ibid; Vladimir Minorsky, “Transcaucasica,” *Journal Asiatique* 217 (1930), 60 calls him “l’amīr arabe (ḳuraišite)”.

62. Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, II 598.

63. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416.See also Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VII 67; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam,* IV 124. Ibn Miskawayh confuses Abū al-ʿAbbās and Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl. Minorsky, “Transcaucasica,” 61.

64. Laurent and Canard, *L’Arménie* 406; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416 changes this to *wāthī*.

Bagarat Bagratuni, the son of Ašot Msaker, and the *sparapet* of Armenia.[65] In other words, Bughā rallied Turks, Arabs, and Armenians against a non-Arab *amīr* in Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi with Muslims and Christians are on both sides of the battle lines.

When Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl was captured, his wife interceded with Bughā on his behalf. Extant sources do not specify her religion or ethnicity, but do identify her as the daughter of the King of the Throne (**صاحب السرير**), whom Arabic geographical texts identify as Christian.[66] Modern scholars at times recognize the term al-Sarīr as an ethnonym,[67] though it does not consistently function as such in medieval texts. Historians and geographers work instead to explain the name based on connections to the Sasanian past with the explanation that either Anūshirwān or Yazdegerd supplied the eponymous throne (*al-sarīr*).[68] Ibn Rusta identifies the name of the king as Avar (**وملكهم يسمّى اوار**), a detail corroborated by al-Gardīzī (except as *āvāz*: **وملك ايشانرا آواز خوانند**).[69] T'ovma Arcruni refers to al-Sarīr as *awrhazk'* (աւրհազք), a claim that Minorsky parses: *-k'* denotes the nominative plural case, *-hr-* shifted to *-rh-* through metathesis, and the *–z* constitutes an Iranian suffix along the model of Lakz and Gurz. As such, he recovers **Auhar* from T'ovma's *awrhazk'*, signaling the Avarness of al-Sarīr to confirm Ibn Rustah and al-Gardīzī's somewhat oblique comments.[70]

Minorsky suggests, though, that al-Sarīr might in fact refer to a sixth-century group whom Theophylactos Simocatta identified as "pseudo-Avars" (Ψευδάβαροι) who coopted a foreign identity that allowed them unearned prestige.[71] Again, the study of ethnonyms rests

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65. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416.

66. On the Christianity of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of the Throne, see Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Iṣṭakhrī, *Kitāb al-masālik wa al-mamālik* (Leiden: Brill, 1927), 223; Josef Markwart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge: ethnologische und historisch-topographische Studien zur Geschichte des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts (ca. 840-940)* (Leipzig: Weicher, 1903), 423. Ibn Rusta explains that the fortress population is Christian, but the rest are not. He also tells of the ruler of Ḥaydān who prays with the Muslims on Fridays, the Jews on Saturdays, and the Christians on Sundays just to cover his bases; Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad b. ʿUmar Ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-aʿlāq al-nafīsa* (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 147-8.

67. David Testen, "An Early Reference to the Avars Reconsidered," *The Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia* 6-7 (1994-6), 3.

68. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī, *Les prairies d'or: Texte et traduction [Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawāhir]* (Paris: L'Imprimerie impériale, 1861-1877), 4-5; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, II 382; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ,* 196.

69. Ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, 147. Minorsky notes elsewhere that "this name does not cover the local population," remarking that this is meant to refer to the king of al-Sarīr alone; Minorsky, *Sharvān* 168 n. 7. Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Ḥayy b. Ḍaḥḥāk b. Maḥmūd al-Gardīzī, *Zayn al-Akhbār [Taʾrīkh Gardīzī]* (Tihrān: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1363 [1984]), 594. A more convoluted thread in the discussion of the Avarness of al-Sarīr is al-Balādhurī's title alternatively rendered as **وهرازنشاه** , **وهرراوارنشاه** , or **وهرارانشاه** ; for a detailed treatment of this problem, see Testen, "Early Reference."

70. *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam, The Regions of the World, a Persian Geography, 372AH-982AD*, trans. Vladimir Minorsky (Cambridge: EJW Gibb Memorial, 1982), 447-8 and note 2; Markwart, *Streifzüge*, 496. Thomson renders this as *Apkhaz* with the note: "The text of Patkanean reads *Awṙhazk'*. Brosset renders 'Awars,' Patkanean suggests 'perhaps Apkhaz,' and Vardanyan renders 'Abkhaz.' A corruption *wṙ* from *p'* in Armenian is not implausible"; Arcruni, *History*, 240 and note 6.

71. Minorsky is referring to the Avar attack on Constantinople in Theophylact Simocatta, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, trans. Mary Whitby and Michael Whitby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 23;

on shaky ground and, as Minorsky concludes, "[i]t must be remembered that the evidence for the distinction of the true Avars and Pseudo-Avars [...] is rather frail" but that al-Sarīr "could have usurped a name which did not strictly belong to them."[72] We might take this a step further to recognize that medieval Caucasian Avarness as a whole is a somewhat tenuous concept. This case demonstrates the contested nature of ethnic identity, a reminder that the distinction between "true" and "pseudo" Avars is a product of both medieval claims and modern concern about fitting peoples into recognizable boxes.

During the siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi, the potentially Avar, presumably Christian wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl was fortified in Ṣughdabīl/Sagodebeli and protected by al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut'.[73] According to T'ovma, she came unveiled and distraught before Bughā to beg for Isḥāq's life, but Bughā ordered Isḥāq to be crucified near the Kura River and sent his head on to Samarrāʾ so that he could be free to marry his widow.[74] Isḥāq's wife announced that she would take her complaints to al-Mutawakkil: "For my sake, you killed my lord. I am not content to be your wife but the great caliph's [wife]."[75] Bughā did eventually send her on to the caliph, who married her and heard her complaints. This, T'ovma explains, was the eventual cause for Bughā's death. Al-Mutawakkil was jealous of Bughā's relationship with his wife, but Bughā was too popular and successful to kill outright. Al-Mutawakkil instead arranged his death by dispatching him on an impossible mission in Khurāsān with the expectation that Bughā would not survive.[76] In this way, T'ovma stresses the significance of the Caucasian campaign by constructing a link between Bughā's deeds and his death and, accordingly, rendering the campaign fatal.

The siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi also introduces a paradox to the story of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut'. The traditional rendition of the story has al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' kill Yūsuf b. Muḥammad out of vengeance for Bagarat Bagratuni's imprisonment. The idea that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' would guard the wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, then, is particularly odd in the face of Smbat Bagratuni's involvement in the siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi. If al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' did indeed kill Yūsuf in

Historiarum libri octo (Bonn: Impensis ed. Weberi, 1834), 38. Simocatta describes these Avars (τοὺς Ἀβάρους) as Huns (Οὖννοι) and refers to their leader as the "Chagan of the Huns" (τοῖς Οὔννοις Χαγᾶνος). He does indeed accuse these Huns of misappropriating Avarness: "These named themselves Avars and glorified their leader with the appellation of Chagan [...] for among the Scythian nations that of the Avars is said to be the most adept tribe. In point of fact even up to our present times the Pseudo-Avars (for it is more correct to refer to them thus) are divided in their ancestry..." (189-90 in English; 284 in Greek).

72. *Regions of the World*, 448.

73. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416.

74. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1415; Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 25; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, II 598; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), II 10. These recount the arrival of Isḥāq's head in Samarrāʾ. Al-Ṭabarī says that he was crucified on the Gate of Thorns, but on the page before this statement, al-Ṭabarī lists the gates of Tiflīs and does not include a Gate of Thorns. Minorsky claims that he was hung on the gate of Ṣughd, so this might be Ṣughdabīl gate; see Minorsky, "Transcaucasica," 62 n. 2 on **باب الحسك** . On the veil in Christian societies of the North, see the Georgian martyrology of Šušanik in David Marshall Lane, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956).

75. Arcruni, *History*, 239; *Patmut'iwn*, 272.

76. Placed in a Christian context, T'ovma may here be drawing on 2 Samuel, comparing al-Mutawakkil to King David, Bughā to Uriah, and the wife of Isḥāq, Bathsheba.

response to Bagarat Bagratuni's imprisonment, their presence on the battlefield arrayed *against* Smbat Bagratuni demands additional explanation. If we set aside the interpretation offered for their murder of Yūsuf and look at their actions and alliances, another picture of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' emerges. They murdered a caliphal representative and then allied with a local Muslim *amīr* to battle a caliphal army even though it arrayed them against the Bagratunis. Despite the rhetoric of both Arabic and Armenian sources about the unity of the Armenians, al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' appear to be more interested in fighting caliphal forces than remaining loyal to the Bagratunis.

Bughā's Campaign against the North Caucasus

After the siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi, Bughā's campaign faltered against the fragmented political landscape of the northern Caucasus. Most Arabic and Armenian sources skip straight from Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi to Albania with the exception of the Arabic translation of the *Darband-nāmeh*, which states that "Muhammad [b. Khālid] had returned to al-Bāb, whereas Bughā spent the winter in the town of Dabīl and then fought the Georgians and Abkhazians in a number of battles. Each time he was victorious, slew many of them and carried away many prisoners and much booty. Then he fought (*ghazā*) the Alān and the Khazar (*Khazrān*) and was victorious over them and took poll-tax (*jizya*) from them all."[77]

The Georgian *Book of K'art'li* adds significantly more detail here. After Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi burned, T'ewdosi, the king of the Abkhāz/Ap'xaz, challenged Bughā's army. Bughā subsequently sent Zīrak and Bagrat, son of Ašot *curopalates* (Bagarat Bagratuni the son of Ašot Msaker, who was already in Samarrā' according to all other accounts) against the Abkhāz/Ap'xaz while he himself moved against the Mt'iuls, men from the mountains of what is now northern Georgia. The Abkhazian king T'ewdosi fell to Bughā's troops under the direction of Bughā's lieutenants.

> On their way back they were opposed at Juaris-Guerdi by the Gardabanians, who inflicted severe losses on their army. When Buğa learnt of this, he moved from there and went to Čart'alet'i, where he stopped. He took hostages from the Mt'iulni, 300 men. He was intending to attack Ossetia, so he advanced to C'xavat'i. But Abulabaz, the *erist'avi* of Armenia, and Guaram, son of Ašot, sent a message to the Mt'iulni that they should not let them pass. So they sacrificed their hostages. God helped them, because snow fell. They offered resistance and engaged battle. God gave them the victory, and a numberless host of Saracens was slain. Their horses fed on azaleas, and many died. But the loss was not apparent from the multitude of the army, because their number was about 120,000.[78]

With the neutralization of Abkhazian forces through the efforts of the caliphal and Bagratuni troops, Bughā aimed at Ossetia and advanced to C'xavat'i, northwest of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi. The

77. Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 25 (in English) and 3 (in Arabic).

78. *Book of K'art'li* in Robert Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: the Medieval Armenian Adaptations of the Georgian Chronicles: the Original Georgian Texts and the Armenian Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 261.

Gardabanians here probably refer to the people of the region Gardabani, Gugark‘ in Armenian.

If we can move past the image of horses munching on azaleas, the interesting part of this passage is that it demonstrates that “Georgian” responses to Bughā’s campaign were no more unified than Armenian. There was no concept of Georgia as modern observers would recognize it,[79] even if the blanket term appears in Armenian and Arabic sources. We are still centuries away from unification under the Bagratuni family. Georgianness did not rally armies to challenge Bughā, but rather the Abkhāz/Ap‘xaz, Gardabanians, and Mt‘iuls fought him independently. Further, the author of the *Book of K‘art‘li* does not offer any suggestion that religious differences informed these skirmishes. Abulabaz, “the *erist‘avi* of Armenia,” is al-Ṭabarī’s Abū al-ʿAbbās, the same Smbat Aplabas Bagratuni who allied with Bughā and fought alongside Zīrak against Tiflīs/Tp‘ilisi.

Here Smbat appears instead to undermine Bughā’s projected attack on Ossetia by convincing the Mt‘iuls to resist the caliphal army, even if that meant consigning hundreds of captives to their deaths. There are a few possible, if conjectural, interpretations of this. First, perhaps the author of the *Book of K‘art‘li* is confused about the loyalties involved and makes assumptions about Bagratuni allegiances during the campaign. This might explain why the Armenian rendition of this text omits this passage. Alternatively, we might hypothesize that Bagratuni allegiance to Bughā was not absolute, indicating that Smbat Bagratuni’s support occasionally faltered. We would then have to explain why Smbat Bagratuni supported Bughā’s campaigns against other peoples of the Caucasus, but not against the Mt‘iuls. Finally, and perhaps most believably, this might mark a narrative attempt to supply distance between the caliph and Bughā. As we will see later, the *Book of K‘art‘li* is the only source to identify Bughā as a Khazar. It is also the only source that inserts al-Mutawakkil into the campaign north of Tiflīs/Tp‘ilisi: “when the *amir-mumin* became aware that he [Bughā] was negotiating with the Khazars, his clansmen, he sent word to Bughā that he should leave K‘art‘li to Humed, son of Xalil [Muḥammad b. Khālid].”[80] With this rendering, Smbat’s undermining of Bughā’s plan in fact augments his pro-ʿAbbāsid agenda, since Bughā sought to expand his personal power via collaboration with his Khazar kinsmen. Accordingly, Smbat is proving his loyalty to the caliph by thwarting Bughā’s grab for power.

Aborting the campaign against Ossetia, Bughā turned back towards Albania. He faced al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark‘ (Σαναραῖοι of classical texts), who presented the greatest challenge to the campaign. Al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark‘ were remarkably effective against Bughā’s troops, defeating them multiple times in short succession. There is no modern consensus on the territory and origins of al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark‘, but Khākhiṭ/Kaxet‘i in Georgia and Shakkī/Šak‘ē in Albania appear regularly.[81] Al-Masʿūdī places them between Tiflīs/Tp‘ilisi and Bāb al-Lān and identifies them as Christians; while T‘ovma confirms their Christian affiliation, he does not locate them exactly. Al-Masʿūdī also writes that they “claim to be descended from

79. For an overview of the appearance and definition of Sak‘art‘velo (Georgia) in Georgian literature, see Stephen Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

80. *Book of K‘art‘li* in Thomson, *Rewriting*, 261-62.

81. Laurent and Canard, *L’Arménie* 62 n. 68 and 63 n. 70; Vladimir Minorsky, “Caucasica IV,” *Bulletin of SOAS* 15, no. 3 (1953): 506; Ghazarian, “Armenien,” 220.

the Arabs, namely from Nizār b. Maʿadd b. Muḍar, and a branch (*fakhdh*) of ʿUqayl, settled there since olden times." Minorsky dismisses this out of hand ("The original Ts'anar may have been of Chechen origin. They certainly had nothing to do with Arab tribes"),[82] but we have no way to corroborate or invalidate these claims. The *Darband-nāmeh* merely explains that they lived in Georgia (Jurzān, which usually refers to K'art'li).[83]

Bughā fought al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark' either sixteen or nineteen times in only nine days and his repeated losses were humiliating.[84] While T'ovma does not refer to any outside help, al-Yaʿqūbī explains that al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark' turned to Byzantium, the Khazars, and the Saqāliba (Slavs) for support against Bughā's attacks. Faced with this army, Bughā wrote to al-Mutawakkil, who sent Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Shaybānī as governor over the North. This appeased al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark' enough to sue for peace.[85] Laurent and Canard note that their main goal was to maintain the Kura River as a territorial divide, claiming that "ils ont à cet effet accepté tous les alliés, musulmans ou chrétiens, que l'intérêt du moment leur donnait."[86] Laurent and Canard's subsequent list of the allies of al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark' indicates that they were involved in power struggles between various groups of Arabs in the North, while al-Yaʿqūbī verifies that they were well-connected to other non-Georgian, both Christian and non-Christian, familial groups of the Caucasus and beyond.

Bughā's Campaign against Caucasian Albania

The repeated victories of al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark' in the North pushed Bughā back south into Caucasian Albania. We have comparatively little information on Albanian responses to Bughā's campaign because the Albanians left no written record of their own unless we count Movsēs Dasxuranc'i's tenth-century compilation, the *History of the Albanians,* which was written in Armenian. Dasxuranc'i, though, notes Bughā's campaigns only briefly: "In the fulfillment of the 300th year of the Armenian era [28.4.851 – 26.4.852] the Christian princes of Armenia and Albania paid the price for their sins, for in this year they were taken prisoner, cast into irons by the *tačik*s, exiled from their homes, and sent against their will to Baghdad."[87]

After his defeat at the hands of al-Ṣanāriyya/Canark', Bughā entered Bardhʿa/Partaw and subsequently attacked the stronghold Kithīsh/K't'iš (or: "the fortress of Kīsh in the district of al-Baylaqān"),[88] where he encountered an Albanian patrician named Abū Mūsā ʿĪsā b. Yūsuf b. [ukht?][89] Iṣṭifānūs, whom Ibn al-Athīr instead identifies as ʿĪsā b. Mūsā. He appears in

82. Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 162; Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 47 for possible Chechen origin.

83. Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 23 (in English) and 2 (in Arabic).

84. Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 19; Arcruni, *History*, 241; *Patmut'iwn*, 274.

85. Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, II 598; Markwart, *Südarmenien,* 200; Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 110 n. 2.

86. Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 48.

87. Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, trans. C. J. F. Dowsett (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218, except that he supplies "Arabs" for *tačik*s; *Patmut'iwn Ałuanic' ašxarhi* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakč'ut'yun, 1983), 332.

88. Ibn Khaldūn, *Taʾrīkh*, IV 276. Al-Ṭabarī explains that Kithīsh/K't'iš is 10 *farsakh*s from al-Baylaqān/P'aytakaran and 15 *farsakh*s from Bardhʿa/Partaw. See Minorsky, "Caucasica IV," 513.

89. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam,* IV 124 add the *ukht*.

Armenian as Esayi Apumusē, who was "noted as a reader and was known as 'son of a priest'," [90] a detail confirmed in the Georgian *Book of K'art'li*, which discusses "a certain priest's son who had become *mt'avari*." [91]

Declaring it "[an act of] great piety to slay the enemies of God," [92] Esayi Apumusē promised his men martyrdom should they die facing Bughā's army. As we will see in more detail below, the Armenian Christians on the battlefield invoked the Second Coming and placed the battle into the broader story of the End of Time. Yet the Armenian forces were there to support Bughā and fight *against* the Albanian forces who rallied under the banner of Esayi Apumusē. Mušeł Bagratuni the son of Smbat Aplabas, whom T'ovma later acknowledges as one of the *naxarar*s who was not deported to Samarrāʾ, led the Armenians. Esayi Apumusē, then, fought Bagratuni troops as part of Bughā's army, facing off twenty-eight times over the course of an entire year. They desisted when Bughā presented Esayi Apumusē with a letter from al-Mutawakkil. Apumusē and his father were subsequently sent to Samarrāʾ. [93]

From Arabic sources alone, it seems that Bughā's campaign was even more destructive in the eastern lands (as Albania appears in Armenian sources) than in Armenia itself. Yet not all Albanian patricians fought Bughā's advance. Qiṭrīj, whose name is an Arabization of Ktrič or Ktričen (this also appears as Karič if the Armenian ւն is mistaken for an ա), was the patrician of the Albanian stronghold at Jardmān/Gardman. This prince was "beguiled by the devil" and so collaborated with Bughā by turning over Vasak, the prince of al-Sīsajān/Siwnik', "calculating that Bugha might favor him for this." [94] His efforts were evidently in vain, as Zīrak later conquered Jardmān/Gardman and took him prisoner. [95]

Again, as in Armenia and Georgia, there is no sense of ethnic solidarity that might have joined Abū Mūsā and Qiṭrīj into an Albanian alliance to preserve "Albania," because power was organized regionally in terms of principalities instead of provincially. Nor were the battles drawn by religious affiliation, even though Abū Mūsā evoked martyrdom and apocalyptic rhetoric to galvanize his troops.

Bughā's Second Campaign against Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan

As Bughā campaigned in Albania, Gurgēn Arcruni, the son of Apupelč [Abū Balj], a kinsman of the other Gurgēn Arcruni who had already been deported to Samarrāʾ, occupied the power vacuum in Armenia. T'ovma establishes his credentials as "a scion of Senek'erim and of the Mamikoneans from Chen," [96] meaning that he claimed descent from two of the most revered

90. Arcruni, *History*, 241-42; *Patmut'iwn*, 276.

91. *Book of K'art'li* in Thomson, *Rewriting*, 261.

92. Arcruni, *History*, 243; *Patmut'iwn*, 278.

93. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416; *History, Vol. 34*, 124 n. 408; Minorsky, "Caucasica IV," 512-14; Vardan Arewelc'i, *La domination arabe en Arménie: extrait de L'Histoire universelle de Vardan traduit de l'arménien et annoté* (Louvain: Imprimerie J.-B. Istas, 1927), 63.

94. Drasxanakertc'i, *History*, 123; *Patmut'iwn*, 128.

95. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416; Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 149; Arewelc'i, *La domination arabe*, 63 mentions his imprisonment, but under Bughā himself without mention of Zīrak.

96. Arcruni, *History*, 256; *Patmut'iwn*, 300.

Armenian noble lines, the Arcrunis on his father's side and the Mamikoneans through his mother.

Gurgēn "acted wisely in not opposing the evil one" (Bughā), but instead fled to Bagratuni-held Sper (modern: İspir). While in the west, he defeated Byzantine forces and the emperor Michael III personally invited him to cross into Byzantine territory, hoping to turn him into an ally of Constantinople. Gurgēn instead fought Byzantine forces, for which Bughā himself reportedly offered his "profound thanks." That said, T'ovma mentions that Bughā's campaign pitted the caliphal army against Byzantine towns: "[Some] *tačik* soldiers from Bugha's army had come to attack the Greek forces in the castles. Gurgēn opposed them numerous times, inflicting no small loses on the *tačik* army."[97] At this point, then, three mutually belligerent armies occupied Bagratuni territory at close proximity to each other: the Byzantines, Bughā's troops (not including Bughā himself), and the Arcrunis. Smbat Aplabas, Bughā's Bagratuni ally, spoke on Gurgēn's behalf and convinced Bughā to see Gurgēn as an ally because of his success against the Byzantines, but this did not last.

To contend with Gurgēn, Bughā sent a lieutenant named Budayl in Arabic, Butel in Armenian, along with the ʿUthmānids of Barkrī/Berkri, known in Armenian as the Ut'maniks. T'ovma again presents this in ethno-religious terms: "Valiantly distinguishing themselves, the Armenian troops battled the foreigners (ընդ այլազգիս) for many drawn-out hours, inflicting great losses on their army."[98] But, yet again, the battle lines were not so clearly drawn. When Gurgēn had been off fighting the Byzantines and the *tačik*s, rivals from his own house arose in al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan. Accompanying Bughā's forces were other members of the Arcruni family who did not embrace Gurgēn's claim to power and so hoped to profit from the disruption by winning al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan. In defeating Bughā's army, Gurgēn was also establishing his own rule over "numerous members of his own family, faithless relatives false to their pacts and oaths."[99] Gurgēn's defeat of caliphal forces was also a victory over "numerous members" of Arcrunis and the ʿUthmānids. And, again, there were Armenian Christians on both sides of this conflict. Bughā subsequently acknowledged Gurgēn's claim over al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan.

After Bughā's departure from Armenia, Gurgēn had to protect his position against Ašot Arcruni when he returned from Samarrāʾ. With this, he had the help of Mūsā b. Zurāra's son, again demonstrating the interrelations between Muslim and Christian forces of the Caucasus. Ter-Łevondyan, though, adopts T'ovma's description of ethno-religious boundaries in his description of Muslim-Christian relations by offering the ʿUthmānids as a counterpoint: "In the second half of the ninth century, however, the Zurārids formed an exception insofar as they supported the Armenian *naχarar*s. The ʿUthmānids of Berkri, for example, in addition to their support for Bughā's expedition, also began to nourish designs against the Armenian *naχarar*s."[100] This overlooks the fact that the ʿUthmānids, precisely through "their support

97. Arcruni, *History*, 259 except that Thomson renders *tačkac'* as Muslims; *Patmut'iwn*, 302; Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 148.

98. Arcruni, *History*, 261 except that Thomson renders foreigners as Muslims; *Patmut'iwn*, 306.

99. Arcruni, *History*, 261; *Patmut'iwn*, 308.

100. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 56.

for Bugha's expedition," had previously fought alongside Arcruni forces as allies arrayed against Gurgēn. Mixed armies were the norm, such that the close relationship between the Zurārids and the Arcruni and Bagratuni houses cannot be construed as an anomaly. Given the power struggles within the Arcruni house itself, close relations between some Arcruni factions and the neighboring *amīr*s seems to have been central to bolstering rival claims to power.

The Immediate Aftermath of Bughā's Campaign

T'ovma, in his exuberance to extol Gurgēn Arcruni, subsequently fails to record significant details about Bughā's departure from the Caucasus. Despite the immense upheaval over the course of three years, Bughā's campaign came to an abrupt halt when T'ovma switches gears to recount the return of the captives from Samarrā'.

T'ovma claims that Bughā's goal was "the removal of the Armenian magnates from the country."[101] By this standard, the campaign was a resounding success. Even Smbat Aplabas, Bughā's closest Armenian ally, ended up in Samarrā' even if his sons did not. Yet Bughā's goals must have been much broader, as he also succeeded in removing the Albanian patricians from their territories, as well as the Muslim *amīr*s from Arzan/Arcn and Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi. The campaign cannot therefore be simplified as anti-Armenian or anti-Christian, despite the interpretations offered by T'ovma. Given the bewildering array of alliances and traitors alike in this dramatic struggle, T'ovma's explanation is soothingly and deceptively simple.

The goal for the remainder of this paper is to explicate those details that do not make sense in the framework of ethno-religious divisions by proposing that such a perspective merely reflects T'ovma's ideal community in lieu of a much more complicated reality. While religion and ethnicity certainly served as markers of communal identity, they did not always inform allegiances, which were forged locally. A closer look at ethnicity, religion, and gender in the construction of communities reveals a certain pragmatism whereby local concerns informed alliances aimed at protecting local power. In the face of external threats, these alliances served to efface differences within multiconfessional and multiethnic groups.

Ethnicity and Communal Identity in the Medieval Caucasus

As we saw above, A. Ter-Łevondyan claims that "the local Arabs had contributed in every way to the advance of Bugha's army."[102] Compounded by the concern for the Armenian nobility and the integrity of Armenian land, such a statement draws stark battle lines along ethnic identifiers. Ter-Łevondyan's view fairly reflects the descriptions of the campaign as found in T'ovma Arcruni's *History* should we render *tačik* as Arab. Yet despite this, T'ovma and other historians passing along information about the ninth-century Caucasus confirm

101. Arcruni, *History*, 254; *Patmut'iwn*, 296.

102. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 44. He refers here to the Jaḥḥāfids, a group of Qaysī Arabs who settled in Aršarunik' and Sirāj/Širak after marrying into the Armenian Mamikonean family in the eighth century. Al-Ṭabarī has Sawāda b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Jaḥḥāfī advise Yūsuf b. Muḥammad of Bagratuni duplicity, but this is the only reference to the Jaḥḥāfids in relation to Bughā's campaigns, making this conclusion suspect. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1409 .

that the communities involved in Bughā's campaigns do not organize around Arabness or Armenianness.

By employing terms that are deliberately vague or avoiding the ethnic identifiers, medieval authors actually minimize the role of ethnicity in order to account for multiethnic communities. In fact, ethnic identifiers frequently emerge specifically to laud cooperation within multiethnic gatherings, rather than to inscribe differences between various social groups. Where ethnonyms are employed as markers of social difference, as with the use of "*tačik*" to refer to an Arab or "Elamite" for a Turk, these also have religious connotations that fit neatly in the narrative agenda of the medieval authors.

The Many Meanings of the Ethnonym Tačik

Modern scholars have struggled to conceptualize ethnonyms in reference to ʿAbbāsid-era communities. P. Crone, for example, clarifies that "'Arab' was a word with many meanings. One meaning certainly had to do with descent: a genuine Arab (*aṣīl, min anfusihim*) was a person who descended from an Arab tribesman on his or her father's side. But the word was rarely used to indicate descent alone." Instead, the term could also refer to an Umayyad sympathizer, to a "rigid, legalistic scholar," or even to any convert to Islam with passing knowledge of Arabic.[103] Given the changing definition and subjective guidelines for Arabness, then, we should be wary of relying on ethnicity as a way to understand the alliances around Bughā's campaign. While families or individuals may well have identified with Arabness in the Caucasus, we are left with sources that present significant barriers to conceptualizing what that meant.

This is particularly important because the word "Arab" almost never appears in Armenian sources on the campaign. Instead, medieval Armenian authors typically employ the ambiguous term *tačik*, whether for some local Muslims or for Bughā's troops. The Armenian word *tačik* comes from the Middle Persian. While harkening back to the Arabic طيء , the Middle Persian *tāčīk* and the Parthian *tāžīk* refer to Arabs (not just those of the Ṭāʾī tribe) before the rise of Islam and so typically appear in English translation as Arab. Several modern translations of Armenian texts similarly render *tačik* as "Arab" and the term was indeed used as such in pre-Islamic Armenian literature such as Agat'angełos's *History of the Armenians.*[104]

Pre-Islamic variants of the word *tačik* also appear in other languages such as Georgian, Sogdian, Sanskrit, and Syriac.[105] From approximately the fourth century, authors writing in Syriac did not necessarily use ܛܝܝܐ (*ṭayyāyē*) to denote ethnicity (*ʿarabāyē* appears to render Arab), but rather lifestyle. Some scholars suggest, albeit initiating significant debate, that a

103. Crone, *Nativist Prophets*; Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians,'" 365.

104. Heinrich Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1908), 86-87.

105. John Perry, "Tajik (i) the ethnonym," in *EIr.* On the Sogdian, see Werner Sundermann, "An Early Attestation of the Name of the Tajiks," in *Medioiranica: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 21st to the 23rd of May 1990*, ed. Wojciech Skalmowski and Alois van Tongerloo (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 163. On alternatives to the relationship between the Ṭāʾī tribe and *tačik*, see Hans Heinrich Schaeder, "Türkische Namen der Iranier," in *Festschrift Friedrich Giese*, ed. Gotthard Jäschke (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowwitz, 1941), 19-20.

ṭayyāyē might be understood as a nomad.[106] After the rise of Islam, the term was applied to Muslims, although not clearly relating to their ethnicity or religious affiliation. M. Penn has recently suggested that the term was deliberately vague to allow readers to efface markers of difference between the conquered and the conquerors. Discussing the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* between a notable and a Christian from the 720s, Penn notes that "[t]he text called the notable a *ṭayyāyē,* a Son of Hagar, or a Son of Ishmael—all terms that Syriac authors could also apply to Christians. The text avoided *Hagarene*, which was reserved only for Muslims."[107] In Syriac, then, the word *ṭayyāyē* is not necessarily an ethnonym, but rather plastic enough to read difference into social groupings according to the specific circumstances.

As a counterpoint, the variant **täžik* also entered Turkish via the Sogdian *tāžīk* in the eighth century to refer to the Muslims involved in the conquest of Central Asia, who were both Arabs and Persians. It was typically used to denote Muslims irrespective of ethnicity. While many of the *täžiks* in contact with the Turks were likely Persians, it is not until the eleventh century with the rise of New Persian literature that the term reverts back to an ethnonym, this time to refer to Persians.[108] Again, the word may have also had social implications, separating nomadic and sedentary lifestyles.[109] "The distinction between Turk and Tajik became stereotyped to express the symbiosis and rivalry of the (ideally) nomadic military executive and the urban civil bureaucracy."[110] Here the meaning of *täžik* has shifted, such that its use in Syriac designated nomadic lifestyle while its use in Turkish a few centuries later provided the exact opposite meaning.

Given the contextually-dependent definition of the word *tačik,* then, we cannot in good faith organize the analysis of Bughā's campaign around its translation as Arab even if earlier Armenian authors such as Agat'angełos used it as such. To do so would assume that the meaning remained stagnant in Armenian when it was fluid in every other language. In fact, most of the relevant Armenian sources employ the term in a more generic sense to mean Muslim, not Arab.[111] T'ovma, for example, refers to one of the martyrs from Bughā's campaign as a Christian convert who was "a *tačik* and a Persian by race" (տաճիկ և ազգաւ պարսիկ), i.e., he was a Persian Muslim.[112] Later, he also generalizes about "all the races of the *tačik*s" (ամենայն ազգքն Տաճկաց).[113] This suggests that by the tenth century the Armenian word

106. Judah Benzion Segal, "Arabs in Syriac Literature before the Rise of Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984): 100. Cf: the use of the ethnonyms "Kurd" or "Arab" to refer to nomads, refuted in James, "Arab Ethnonyms," 686; Retsö, "Earliest Arabs," 132-3; MacDonald, "Arabs," 290-1 and 94-7.

107. Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (2015), 73.

108. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "Tādjīk," in *EI²*.

109. Schaeder, "Türkische Namen," 3.

110. Perry, "Tajik"; Schaeder, "Türkische Namen," 25 also discusses the use of "Turk and Tajik" as a phrase like *al-ʿarab wa-l-ʿajam* to refer to "alle Menschen."

111. Thomson typically translates *tačik* as such.

112. Arcruni, *History*, 207, see also 64 n. 6; *Patmut'iwn*, 222.

113. Arcruni, *History*, 218 n. 7. Thomson glosses this: "here Thomas has especially in mind Arab settlement," citing Ter-Łevondyan and Laurent/Canard. Given the difficulties in pinning down the Arabness of local *amīr*s and the multiplicity of ethnicities T'ovma includes in the caliphal forces, this interpretation should be revisited.

tačik implied a religious connotation although by comparison to the Syriac we might also wonder if the definition of the term is dependent largely on context.

The Fluidity and Narrative Function of Ethnonyms

Even without the fluid definition of the Armenian term *tačik*, it would be difficult to read the alliances and loyalties of the main protagonists of this story as ethnically proscribed. Our main sources on Bughā's campaign exhibit little interest in defining ethnicity and do not elaborate on ethnic differences. We already saw above that extant sources offer no clear evidence that the *amīr* of Arzan/Arcn Mūsā b. Zurāra or the *amīr* of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl were in fact Arabs. There are other local Muslim patricians who formed "Arab emirates" in Armenia who similarly do not consistently appear as Arabs in medieval sources. For example, al-Yaʿqūbī identifies the Jaḥḥāfids as Sulamī (hence, Arab), but Drasxanakertc'i claims that they were Persians, while modern scholars wonder if they might have been Kurds.[114] The unclaimed and contested claims of ancestry reveal the process of continual rewriting of identity in the medieval period, where our authors apply or withhold ethnonyms depending on circumstances.

This inconsistent assignment of ethnonyms demonstrates the flexibility of medieval identity construction, but more importantly, it also served a narrative function. Bughā himself serves as an interesting case. Almost all medieval sources identify him as a Turk, likely from the eastern frontiers of the Islamic world. Yet while some Caucasian sources identify Bughā as a Turk, two do not. First, a passage in the Georgian *Book of K'art'li*, omitted from the Armenian redaction, suggests that he may instead have been Khazar.[115] Second, an Armenian source with a decidedly controversial date of composition instead claims that Bughā was "the son of a priest" from a town called Mut'van in the region of Albāq/Ałbak, the capital of Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan.[116] On the one hand, these could reveal misinformation, disagreements, or simple ignorance in the same way that authors reveal uncertainty about how to group Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl or al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut'. But Bughā's alternative identities—Khazar and Armenian—locate him for a Caucasian audience, making him local as he allied and battled with other Caucasian powers. As we saw above, this may potentially supply distance between Bughā and the source of his power (the caliph), which functionally allowed Caucasian populations to declare themselves loyal to al-Mutawakkil while at the same time battling his general.

T'ovma offers two clearer examples of how ethnonyms can serve a narrative function. First, he recognizes Bughā as "a Turk by race" (ազգաւ թուրք),[117] but he does not employ the term Turk consistently. Instead, he also frequently refers to the participants in the

114. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 34.

115. *Book of K'art'li* in Thomson, *Rewriting*, 261-62. "But when the *amir-mumin* [al-Mutawakkil] became aware that he was negotiating with the Xazars, his clansmen, he sent word to Buğa that he should leave K'art'li to Humed, son of Xalil [Muḥammad b. Khālid]." *Rewriting*, 262 n. 14: "his clansmen: The author equates Xazars and Turks."

116. Bagratuni, "The Anonymous Storyteller," 214.

117. Arcruni, *History*, 193; *Patmut'iwn*, 194.

campaign as Elamites, a term that, like *tačik*, claims a number of meanings and so refuses easy categorization. R. Thomson explains that later Armenian historians employ Elamite to refer to Turks, but "Thomas himself generally uses the expression in a vaguer sense, in combination with other regions of Asia." He clarifies, though, that T'ovma is probably informed here by biblical precedents such as Isaiah 22:6 and 21:2, the later referring in fact to Persians instead of Turks.[118] In choosing to use Elamite instead of Turk, T'ovma supplies a gloss to connect his story to the Biblical framework, a project that speaks more to his goals than to concern about the ethnic "other." This places Bughā's campaign in a biblical context for Armenian readers, but leaves ethnic identification uncertain because of the difficulty in applying the term Elamite to contemporary society.

T'ovma also uses ethnonyms to advance his narrative in his description of the caliphal army. He recognizes the diversity of the caliphal army by placing the explicit suggestion into the mouths of caliphal advisors, who opined that al-Mutawakkil should send forces "from all the nations that are under your [caliphal] control."[119] He follows up with a list of participants from "Syria and Babylonia, Turkastan and Khuzhastan, Media and Ela, Egypt and as far as inner Tachkastan near the borders of Sakastan,"[120] including "the archers and stalwart bowmen of the Elamites and Arabians."[121] Later, T'ovma also claims that "Bugha despatched soldiers from all nations, from among all magnates and all governors, Persians, Elamites, Babylonians, and Arabs, who had come with him to wage war at the command of the caliph and the great general, more than 15,000 men."[122]

T'ovma's insistence that the caliphal army was pulled from all corners of the Caliphate has several possible explanations. It might reflect how diverse the caliphal army actually was, such that the Armenian authors cannot summarily identify the troops. Arabic sources corroborate that the higher ranks of soldiers were Turkish slaves and the infantry under Bughā's command were *maghāriba,* or North African troops in the service of the ʿAbbāsids.[123] They appear as *małripikk'* in Armenian.[124] This could suggest the involvement of Berbers or East Africans, but most likely refers to Qaysī or Yamanī Arabs from the Ḥawf (lit: "edge"), the Egyptian district to the east of the Nile delta.[125]

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118. Arcruni, *History*, 193 n. 1.

119. Arcruni, *History*, 190; *Patmut'iwn*, 196. This same idea is repeated in a letter from al-Mutawakkil to Bughā: *History*, 217; *Patmut'iwn*, 236.

120. Arcruni, *History*, 191; *Patmut'iwn*, 198.

121. Arcruni, *History*, 192-93; *Patmut'iwn*, 200 (զկապարճաւորս և զկորովիս աղեղնաւորացն Ելեմացւոց և Արաբացւոց).

122. Arcruni, *History*, 209; *Patmut'iwn*, 224.

123. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VII 67 speaking of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl.

124. Bagratuni, "The Anonymous Storyteller," 214; *Patmut'iwn ananun zruc'agri karcec'eal Šapuh Bagratuni* (Erevan: Haykakan SSH Gitut'yunneru Akademiayi Hratarakč'ut'yun, 1971), 147.

125. Matthew Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: a History of the Turkish Military of Samarra (A.H. 200-275/815-889 C.E.)* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 38. Here he is relying on al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, VII 118; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VI 452. The term *maghāriba* is frequently placed in contrast to the *mashāriqa,* "Easterners," which frequently referred to Turks. It literally means "Westerners." Some were freemen, but others were prisoners from al-Muʿtaṣim's campaign in Egypt in 214. See Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the*

Yet T'ovma's list of ethnonyms ("Persians, Elamites, Babylonians, and Arabs") was not meant to cast the campaign as an ethnic conflict, but rather served as an embellishment to vaunt the significance of Armenia, i.e., that this matter was so pressing to the caliph that he mustered armies from the entire Islamic world, or to suggest the military valor of the Armenians, i.e., that it would take the entire Caliphate to check the military threat posed by the Armenians.

The complete absence of ethnonyms (e.g., the Zurārids), the variability of ethnic identifiers (e.g., Bughā), and the use of ethnonyms as a tool to further the narrative agenda (e.g., Elamites) corroborate the conclusions above about the flexibility of the term *tačik*, namely that our authors allow for malleable constructions of ethnic identity. The "indeterminacy of identity," as M. Cooperson calls it, acts "to destabilize any rigid definition of such ethnonyms such as 'Arab' and 'Iranian' and 'Persian.'"[126] Given the contextual value of ethnonyms of some of the main protagonists examined here, the indeterminacy of identity in the sources about Bughā's campaign constitutes a deliberate attempt at vagueness specifically to avoid the reduction of communities to ethnic monoliths. This cannot imply that ethnicity was either important or unimportant to individuals; rather, there were ways that medieval authors could rewrite or completely ignore ethnic divides in the formation of communities or alliances between communities in the face of conflict. Ethnonyms appear and disappear to allow for the creation of communities that fit the narrative agenda of our authors.

Religion and Communal Identity in the Medieval Caucasus

Many scholars of Late Antique and early Islamic history have honed in on religion in lieu of ethnicity as the primary category of social differentiation. While allowing for the persistence of ethnic identifiers in early Islamic Iraq, M. Morony claims that the societal shifts after the arrival of Islam "meant the replacement of other means of identification based on language, occupation, or geographical location by a primary identity based on membership in a religious community."[127] Others follow suit, such as Sizgorich's assertion that

Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State (London: Routledge, 2005), 125-6; Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: the Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 260 n. 622. The identification of *maghāriba* as Berber troops seems to refer to a later period. See Mohamed Talbi, "Maghāriba," in *EI²*; Paul Walker, "Kutāma, Kalbids and Other Westerners: The Maghāriba in Cairo," *Alifbâ: Studi arabo-islamici e mediterranei* 22 (2008): 48, identifies the *maghāriba* in Fāṭimid Cairo as "Arabs as well as Berbers, true Maghribīs from Ifrīqiya [Tunisia] along with the Ṣiqillīs [Silicians] (and possible Andalusīs)—that is, anyone from west of Egypt."

126. Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians,'" 382. Comparable to the "indeterminacy of identity," R. Payne has addressed the avoidance of ethnicity in pre-Islamic Mesopotamia, also for a narrative reason (for Christians "to articulate their social status in terms of their cities and noble lineages"); Payne, "Avoiding Ethnicity," 207, see also 20.

127. Michael Morony, "Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17, no. 2 (1974): 8. While he is primarily concerned with Jewish and Christian communities in Iraq, he extends this to Muslims, as well: "Although the social realities of Muslim Arabs in this period have more to do with tribalism, Islam contained within itself the concept of a community that replaced the bonds of kinship with a bond of faith. The working out of this concept among Muslims in Iraq where they forged the bonds of a religious community after the fashion of the people around them lies at the

"in the premodern Mediterranean and Near East, every community was, first and foremost, a religious institution."[128]

A glance at T'ovma's *History* suggests that these conclusions about the centrality of religious affiliations to identity construction might indeed be transferable to the Caucasus. As T'ovma discusses the conversion of an Arcruni patrician to Islam as a result of Bughā's campaign, he notes that the stories of apostates no longer belong in his history: "lest I expatiate too long on his shameful error—wicked, selfish, unrepentant, and without scruple—let us eject him from the annals of the princes."[129] T'ovma's story, then, revolves specifically around Arcruni Christians, so we should assume that T'ovma defined communities around religious conviction instead of ethnicity or even closer familial ties. This is usual for medieval Armenian sources; as N. Garsoïan points out "they stress the unity of the Armenian Church, even where this leads them into contradictions."[130]

T'ovma's account of Bughā's campaign is a study in such contradictions. For all of his rhetoric, we consistently face difficulties in organizing communities around religious convictions. Religion was significant to communities of the Caucasus, so T'ovma is not alone in suggesting that religion defined communities. Yet T'ovma's projection of a Christian community working in tandem against the religious "other" cannot withstand scrutiny. Throughout Bughā's campaign, Christian communities splinter, while Christian and Muslim communities stand side-by-side.

T'ovma's descriptions of two moments of the campaign stand out as particularly enlightening due to the religious overtones present in T'ovma's descriptions: Bughā's siege of the Arcruni patricians in Nkan and the Bagratuni battle against Abū Mūsā, the patrician of Kithīsh/K't'iš. These demonstrate that the agendas of local patricians did not align with T'ovma's religiously-charged expectations. Instead, these moments reveal the metanarrative of Christianness that T'ovma used to supply meaning to Bughā's campaign. Through his liberal use of Eł̇išē's fifth-century *History of Vardan and the Armenian Wars,* T'ovma emplots Bughā's campaign onto the history of Late Antique Christian persecution, offering a charged interpretation of the campaign rather than its description.

Fissures within Christianness

T'ovma claims that the Arcrunis were united before the arrival of Bughā. Yet the purported unity of the Arcrunis, let alone the Armenian forces *writ large*, falls apart on numerous occasions. The conveniently-named Vasak[131] "came to the caliph bearing letters full of

heart of the emergence of an Islamic society" (130).

128. Sizgorich, *Violence and belief*, 155.

129. Arcruni, *History*, 224; *Patmut'iwn*, 248.

130. Nina Garsoïan, "Armenia in the Fourth Century: an Attempt to Redefine the Concepts 'Armenia' and 'Loyalty,'" *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 8 (1971): 342.

131. Vasak Siwni was the traitor *par excellence* in Armenian literature, lambasted for siding with the Persians at the Battle of Avarayr in the fifth century. T'ovma's audience, who would have been familiar with Eł̇išē and Łazar, would have noted the significance of the name Vasak here. This is one of the many ways in which T'ovma's descriptions of Bughā's campaign serve as a sequel to Eł̇išē.

charges against the nobles living in Armenia and piling [blame for] much damage to affairs of state on Prince Ashot. By their capricious terms these stirred up the caliph in hostile fashion against the prince."[132] Bughā would later supply the crown of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan to Vasak Arcruni as a consolation prize on his way to Samarrāʾ, where he converted to Islam.[133]

This Vasak is not alone in his plots against Ašot. "Although Ašot, the great prince of the Arcruni house, had taken measures to resist the violent Bugha with his warriors, yet, his *naxarar*s were not of the same mind with him in this matter."[134] According to T'ovma, many of the patricians of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan failed to uphold the noble intentions of his hero by "feigning friendship" yet approaching Bughā for right of safe passage. "They loved turbulence more than peace, destroying the unity of harmonious concord between brothers, relatives, and friends wherever they found it to exist. So they went out like the traitor of the Incarnate Saviour."[135] T'ovma is here lambasting scions of lesser-known families in al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan, the Vahevunis and Trunis, for collaborating with Bughā instead of following Ašot Arcruni, yet again breaking down the reductive Armenian v. Arab narrative. Specifically, this treachery is described in religious overtones as an act against Jesus himself, but unlike the example of Vasak there is nothing to suggest that the Vahevunis or Trunis converted to Islam. T'ovma presents the patricians of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan as enemies to the Christian cause because they did not fight Bughā despite the fact that they were Christians.

This same fracturing of the Christian families is found elsewhere in T'ovma's descriptions of Arcruni responses to Bughā's campaign. When Gurgēn son of Apupelč faced Bughā's forces, "Even the priests among the multitude of fugitives took part in the battle, for it was a spiritual battle and not a physical one; they were fighting for the holy churches and the people of God."[136] Gurgēn prayed and recited psalms, and his army was even accompanied by angels: "But not only the valiant Armenian heroes fought in that great battle; there were also incorporeal, heavenly hosts fighting with the Armenian army."[137] There are two points to keep in mind about this encounter, though. First, we saw above that Bughā's forces were supplemented with both the ʿUthmānids and rival factions of the Arcruni family. So some of the enemies arrayed against Gurgēn that day were Arcruni Armenian Christians. Mixed Muslim-Christian armies were in fact the norm in this campaign. Second, this description is dependent on earlier models of Armenian literature (Ełišē also has priests fighting for the "Armenian Christian" cause) that T'ovma manipulates in order to build borders for Armenian Christian identity.

132. Arcruni, *History*, 180; *Patmutʻiwn*, 180.

133. Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie,* 148. On Ašot's imprisonment, see al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1410. On Vasak's conversion, see Arcruni, *History*, 224; *Patmutʻiwn*, 248.

134. Drasxanakertcʻi, *History*, 119; *Patmutʻiwn*, 122.

135. Arcruni, *History*, 201; *Patmutʻiwn*, 210-12.

136. Arcruni, *History*, 214; *Patmutʻiwn*, 232.

137. Arcruni, *History*, 214; *Patmutʻiwn*, 232.

Interconfessional Cooperation

There are plenty of other moments during the campaign, including descriptions of Abū Mūsā, that confirm the problematic assumptions about Christianness as a bond in T‘ovma’s history. As with the example of Gurgēn Arcruni, T‘ovma has the Albanian patrician Abū Mūsā appeal to religious solidarity: “Only let us with united hearts take refuge in God’s help. If it happens that anyone is killed, it will be considered a glorious thing for himself and his clan, and he will receive a martyr’s crown from Christ. For it will not be a death of a common sort, but one on behalf of the holy church and God’s people.”[138]

At the subsequent battle, Mušeł the son of Smbat Aplabas “was stationed in the open on a hill, and stood there watching in fearful and tremendous amazement,”[139] contemplating the power of the Cross and ruminating on the Second Coming:

> He raised his mind to the future coming of Christ and the awesome thunderings and crashings that will then occur: the bolts of fire and fearsome consternation on earth, and how the bands of angels will press forward one after the other, and how the Lord’s cross will shine forth with awesome rays, and whatever accompanies these at the future coming of Christ on the last day.[140]

T‘ovma’s descriptions of Bagratuni veneration of the Cross and Mušeł’s encouragement of his coreligionists’ battle in defense of Christianity obscure the fact that Mušeł was actually present at the battle to fight for Bughā, not as succor for the Christian Albanian forces under the command of Abū Mūsā. The Bagratunis, despite their apparent admiration for the devotion of the Christian Albanians who were fighting the caliphal army, were still putting their swords at Bughā’s disposal. At the end of his description of captives in Samarrā᾽, T‘ovma specifies that the Bagratunis, including Mušeł explicitly, were the only nobles left in the North because they had cooperated and heeded Bughā’s commands.

In fact, these accounts demonstrate repeatedly that multiconfessional armies were the norm throughout the course of Bughā’s campaign. The problem, then, lies in reconciling T‘ovma’s construction of communities around religious conviction against the examples he himself provides of Christians aiding Muslim armies against their Christian coreligionists. The crux of this endeavor lies in T‘ovma’s extensive reliance on an earlier Armenian history in order to construct Armenianness and Christianness.

Eł̇išē and the Metanarrative of Persecution

T‘ovma’s descriptions of Bughā’s campaign are undoubtedly charged with religious expectations. The leaders recite psalms and pray as they battle. They rely on the aid of angels when victorious and are crowned with martyrdom when defeated. Yet this focus on religious difference is understandably absent in Arabic accounts of the campaign. Additionally,

138. Arcruni, *History*, 242; *Patmut‘iwn*, 276.

139. Arcruni, *History*, 247; *Patmut‘iwn*, 284.

140. Arcruni, *History*, 247; *Patmut‘iwn*, 284.

T‘ovma—and other Armenian and Arabic sources—preserve details to add nuance to this neat narrative of Christianness in the Caucasus.

The borders that T‘ovma constructs between Christian and non-Christian or Armenian and non-Armenian are his own. As D. Nirenburg reminds us,

> The choice of language [of persecution] was an active one, made in order to achieve something, made within contexts of conflict and structures of domination, and often contested. Thus when medieval people made statements about the consequences of religious difference, they were making claims, not expressing accomplished reality, and these claims were subject to barter and negotiation before they could achieve force in any given situation.[141]

T‘ovma is making his own claims when he presents the campaign as a confrontation between Christians and Muslims despite the fact that the protagonists of this campaign did not always find allies among their coreligionists and demonstrated no qualms working across confessional lines. In the process, he borrowed a framework of persecution from Eł̇išē, whose fifth-century Armenian *History* described the Sasanian attacks on Armenia, Georgia, and Albania as religiously charged.

J. Muyldermans was the first modern scholar to notice that T‘ovma repurposed large sections of Eł̇išē’s *History* to describe al-Mutawakkil’s reign,[142] but R. Thomson has expanded his brief remarks substantially, meticulously marking where T‘ovma borrows and blends discrete phrases or entire passages from Eł̇išē into his account of Bugha’s campaign. So, for example, Eł̇išē expounds at great length about the unity of the Armenians and their common devotion to the Christian cause. While Eł̇išē claims that “up to this point I have not at all hesitated to describe the afflictions of our nation which were cruelly inflicted upon us by the foreign enemies of the truth,” so T‘ovma writing five centuries later could opine that “up to this point we have not hesitated to relate the dangers and tribulations which befell us from the enemies of the truth.”[143] T‘ovma’s reliance on Eł̇išē rests mainly on a few main topics: political leaders (al-Mutawakkil is fashioned on the model of Yazdegerd and Bughā on Mihrnerseh), ruminations on the unity of the Armenian people and their faith, and stories of persecution and martyrdom.[144]

This depiction of Bughā’s campaign as persecution of Christians is a way to lend meaning to the story by linking it to one of the foundation narratives of the Armenian people, viz., the defeat at Avarayr and simultaneously tapping into a universal theme of persecution in early Christian literature. By invoking a metanarrative of persecution, individuals no longer

141. David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 6. For a similar discussion in an Armenian setting, see Garsoïan, “Armenia,” 342, which separates claims of Movsēs Xorenac‘i re: “a single, unified Armenia” and “the unity of the Armenian Church” from the evidence offered to the contrary.

142. Joseph Muyldermans, “Un procédé hagiographique,” *Handēs Amsōreay* 40 (1926).

143. Arcruni, *History*, 49 and 189; *Patmut‘iwn*, 194; Eł̇išē, *The History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, trans. Robert Thomson (Delmar: Caravan Books), 141; *Vardani ev Hayoc‘ paterazmi masin* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakč‘ut‘yun, 1989).

144. Robert Thomson has expounded on the relationship between T‘ovma and Eł̇išē in the introduction and notations of the former.

represent their own transitory interests or local concerns, but rather become transformed into representatives of their faith at large.

> Understood in this way, moments of conflict with other communities became legible as new episodes in an ancient cycle of persecution, in which the survival of the one true community of God upon earth depended upon the capacity of true Christians for intransigence and, increasingly, active or even violent resistance.[145]

Conflict thus lends an opportunity for interpretation, a chance to delineate and enforce communal boundaries despite the popular tendency to overlook differences in ethnically and religiously diverse milieux.

Gender and Communal Identity in the Medieval Caucasus

While our medieval authors not only divided the world along ethnic and religious borders into their world, they also chronicled the deeds of people who crossed these lines. We have, then, an opportunity to look past the metanarrative and to chip away at the suggestion that ethno-religious solidarity informed medieval loyalties. Rather than following T'ovma's lead here, we might examine the individuals who do not perform Christianity in any recognizable way. In Bughā's campaign, women frequently reveal the dissonance between communal identity as it played out and the imagined ethno-religious solidarity. Here we shift from ethnicity and religion—which operate in our texts based on their ability to further our authors' narratives—to the women who defy these agendas.

Women as Negotiators in Bughā's Campaign

The political exchanges related to Bughā's campaign demonstrate that individuals, in many cases women, navigated between different ethnic and religious groups, promoting the creation of a local identity not defined in strict sense in either ethnic or religious terms. For example, the Bagratunis were related through marriage to the Arcrunis, as Ašot Msaker Bagratuni's daughter Hṙip'simē, sister to both Bagarat and Smbat Bagratuni, was the mother of Ašot Arcruni. "A woman wise in words and deeds, very intelligent and also pious," she appeared before Yūsuf b. Muḥammad and convinced him to make peace with the Arcrunis.[146] In other words, a Christian Bagratuni noblewoman approached a Muslim Khurāsānī *mawlā* governor on behalf of her Arcruni husband's family to broker terms. She later came before Bughā to beg clemency for her son Gurgēn and subsequently followed her sons to captivity in Samarrā'.[147] Hṙip'simē demonstrates that women had *political* clout in the medieval Caucasus, while other women in this story not only negotiate terms, but also serve as symbols of the alliances that draw together familial groups of different ethnicities and religions. As such, these women reveal the *social* power wielded by women as cultural mediators in the medieval Caucasus.

145. Sizgorich, *Violence and belief*, 274.

146. Arcruni, *History*, 184; *Patmut'iwn*, 186.

147. Arcruni, *History*, 210; *Patmut'iwn*, 22.

Mūsā b. Zurāra married an Armenian Christian woman, the sister or daughter of Bagarat Bagratuni. T'ovma explains how she, like Hṙip'simē, served as an intermediary between Muslim and Christian armies. Before Bughā's arrival in Armenia, the Bagratunis and the Zurārids clashed, which led to the interference of Mūsā's wife to beg her kinsmen to spare the lives of her husband's men.[148] This episode establishes her as a mediator in her own right, walking with immunity between two hostile armies in a way that, presumably, most men could not. She was not only safe, but also an effective negotiator because she belonged, effectively, to both communities. Mūsā's marriage into the Bagratuni family therefore offered him immediate gains in local disputes, but it also created lasting ties between an Armenian Christian and a (Syrian? Armenian?) Muslim family, in practice redrawing the borders of local communities by forging alliances that allowed them to respond as one in defense of local interests despite differences in ethnicity and religion. This dramatically changes local responses to Bughā's campaign.

Mūsā backed al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' in their murder of Yūsuf, making him complicit in fomenting rebellion against the caliph. Al-Ṭabarī's history suggests that he defected because his marital ties to the Bagratunis weighed heavier on him than his connection to the caliphal administrators: "When Yūsuf deported Buqrāṭ b. Ashūṭ [Bagarat Bagratuni the son of Ašot Masker], the Patrikioi took an oath to kill Yūsuf and vowed to shed his blood. Mūsā b. Zurāra went along with them in this. He was responsible for the daughter of Buqrāṭ."[149] The fate of the Zurārid family rested on Mūsā's decision to ally with the Bagratunis instead of bow to caliphal authority. Mūsā's wife is not acting of out of her interests, but rather serves as a textual marker for local loyalties because she is the most visible symbol of the Zurārid-Bagratuni alliance.

While there are several other mentions of women intervening in political discussions in the course of Bughā's campaign, both Arabic and Armenian sources offer the most information about the wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, the *amīr* of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi. As the daughter of the King of the Throne, she similarly served as an intermediary between different kinship groups. In this example, though, the marriage does not (to our knowledge) prompt any demonstrable change in the response to Bughā's campaign. We hear nothing of the King of the Throne or his response to Bughā's siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi. Yet we do find a woman claiming a prominent place in both Arabic and Armenian accounts of a military siege, negotiating, albeit unsuccessfully, with the religious and ethnic "other" on behalf her husband. She also serves as a reminder of the multiconfessional and multiethnic communities that solidified around local interests. Backed by the Christian al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut', a (Christian? Avar?) woman faced a combined force of Muslim Turks and Christian Bagratunis in an effort to save her Muslim husband.

These three women illustrate the close relationship between different ethnic and religious communities by producing a traceable thread to tie together diverse kinship groups in the Caucasus. Through their marriages, they are able to navigate across religious and/or ethnic boundaries and so serve as the connection between diverse groups looking to ally in defense of local concerns against the outsider.

148. Arcruni, *History*, 177; *Patmut'iwn*, 174-6.

149. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 114; *Taʾrīkh*, III 1409.

Gender, Power, and Identity Construction

Modern studies on identity and conflict, particularly those written about al-Andalus, have established the role of interfaith marriage as a key to understanding boundary construction and maintenance between discrete groups. Following Pitt-Rivers's study of intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible, several modern studies on al-Andalus suggest that a powerful group would not allow their women to marry an outsider because such a marriage would symbolize their inferiority or their inability to protect their own community. The dominant group marries or enslaves the women of the weak group in an "aggressive strategy" to proclaim their hegemonic power over their neighbors by controlling the reproductive abilities and subsequent children of their weaker neighbors.[150] This perspective relies on an assumption that sexual intercourse is an expression of hegemonic power: "Penetration symbolizes power. For men of one group to have sex with women of another is an assertion of power over the entire group."[151] As Barton claims, "[a]llowing outsiders to engage in sexual relations with a group's own women could be construed as an act of submission, as a metaphor for external domination."[152] He goes so far as to recognize intermarriage between Muslims and Christians in al-Andalus as "an instrument of psychological warfare"[153] and claims that interfaith "sex was, perhaps, the ultimate colonizing gesture."[154] These claims rely heavily on the assimilation of sex and hegemonic power and on the laws and customs dictating that children of mixed marriages belonged to their father's ethnoreligious community.

With the possible exception of the marriage reported between al-Mutawakkil and the wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, none of this adequately describes our examples. In the medieval Caucasus, the emphasis is not on contesting or displaying power, but on accruing power. It is hard to imagine that the marriage between Mūsā b. Zurāra and Bagarat Bagratuni's daughter signifies an admission that the Bagratunis were politically submissive to the *amīr* of Arzan/Arcn. Arzan/Arcn was not powerful, nor could it have been representative of Islamic power.[155]

The interpretation of interfaith sex as boundary-maintenance in al-Andalus relies on sources from a period when Islamic power in the peninsula had fallen, or at least collapsed southward, and such boundaries were part of the broader process of societal transformation

150. Ragnhild Johnsrud Zorgati, *Pluralism in the Middle Ages: Hybrid Identities, Conversion, and Mixed Marriages in Medieval Iberia* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 160. Many of the studies on al-Andalus rely on Julian Alfred Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem: or, The Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). In particular, his seventh chapter examines sexual hospitality and marriage patterns in Genesis to analyze the relationship between political power and intermarriage between discreet cultural or familial groups.

151. Karras, apud. Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 39.

152. Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 69.

153. Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 6.

154. Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 41.

155. If the modern theorists on Muslim-Christian intermarriage have the key to understanding this, it may very well lie in the fact that interfaith marriage in al-Andalus tended to involve *muwallad* families, that is: locals who had converted to Islam, instead of Arab or Berber émigrés. On this, see Zorgati, *Pluralism*, 94. This seems to hold true for our examples, as well, given that both Muslim *amīr*s in question were probably not Arabs, but rather converts or descendants of converts.

at that particular time. The intermarriages of the medieval Caucasus are perhaps more easily compared to the many instances of intermarriage in Islamic al-Andalus before the expansion of Christian power in that they serve as political alliances.[156] In the Caucasus, interfaith marriage was a way to collapse boundaries by blending discrete communities and to solidify relations between groups of different ethnicities or religious affiliations.

Intermarriage produced immediate ambassadors in the wives and, later, the children who could traverse both worlds. So, while Mūsā b. Zurāra's Bagratuni wife could stand between and negotiate with her brother and her husband, the half-Bagratuni, half-Zurārid son from that union was similarly claimed by both sides. Abū al-Maghrāʾ, who also appears as Abū al-Muʿizz in Arabic and is known as Aplmaxray in Armenian, clearly maintained a close relationship with both the Armenian noble houses (he married an Arcruni woman) and local Muslim *amīr*s (in particular, the nearby banū Shaybān). He crosses the ethnoreligious boundaries and appears simultaneously as part of both communities. Despite the fact that Abū al-Maghrāʾ usually appears as a Muslim, Drasxanakertcʻi claims that he was secretly Christian,[157] allowing him the religious identifiers that mark him as an insider to both Bagratuni and Zurārid society. In Abū al-Maghrāʾ, we find the results of a deliberate blurring of ethnoreligious communities to create a locally organized identity in order to facilitate close alliances between Muslims and Christians, Armenians and others. Again, the study of the main alliances responding to Bughā's campaign reveals the significance of local instead of universal markers of medieval identity.

Agency, Belonging, and the Flexibility of Identity

The recognition that women both created and crossed boundaries—the very thing that allows historians like Nadia El-Cheikh to place women as a central element to the contestation of identity as a whole—presents modern scholars with a promising approach to the role of both women and gender in history and historiography. Women mediated between different ethno-religious groups and, in the specific examples associated with Bughā's campaign, this even placed women directly on the battlefield.

At the same time, the jump from power to agency requires substantiation. Despite the centrality of these women in the history of the campaign—the clear recognition of their political and social power—historians recorded very little about them personally. Extant sources do not even preserve the names of the wives of Mūsā b. Zurāra or Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, let alone speak to their own self-identification as Armenian or as Avar or to their attachment to any particular religion. Modern scholars might hypothesize, for example, that the wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl is a Christian Avar because she is the daughter of *ṣāḥib al-Sarīr*, but this is an inference based on generalized group identity rather than self-referential evidence. Did her identity perforce mirror her father's identity?[158] Did she see herself as Avar? Did she remain

156. For examples, see Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 105-6; Janina M. Safran, *Defining Boundaries in al-Andalus: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Islamic Iberia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 105-06.

157. Drasxanakertcʻi, *History*, 145; *Patmutʻiwn*.

158. Eastmond, in his study of Tamta, similarly examines the blurred lines between Georgianness and

Christian even as she married a Muslim man? T'ovma claims that she wandered the camp unveiled "which was not customary for the women of the *tačik* people" (տաճկական ազգի կանանց);[159] does this mean that she had converted or that she had always been Muslim? Perhaps she remained Christian, but was expected to follow Muslim customs as the wife of a powerful *amīr*. Could she, as an individual instead of as a representative of her father's or husband's communities, make her own religious or cultural decisions? Did she choose to marry Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl? She certainly did not choose to marry Bughā, but she was subsequently able to demand revenge.

Historians of al-Andalus have also tackled this problem, recognizing the liminality of women in medieval sources even while women stepped over the lines of religious, ethnic, and cultural difference. J. Coope, for example, recently noted that "[t]he ideology of gender also created unclear boundaries during the Umayyad period. A woman was both part of and not part of her ethnic and religious group."[160] By framing women as outsiders to their own communities instead of allowing them access to multiple communities and the ability to mediate between different communities, these women retain their subaltern position in the world drawn and ruled by men. The primary disconnect between Coope's position and the evidence marshalled here relates to questions of belonging and, again, to power. Coope argues that the status of women of al-Andalus was akin to *dhimmitude*, i.e., that they were outsiders even to their own communities, because they were all similarly "a subordinate category of person in Sharīʿah" without full legal rights.[161] Men might change their identities by becoming Muslims or Arabs through conversion or *walāʾ*, but women will always retain secondary status.[162] This opens a few possible avenues of discussion. First, belonging in an ethnic or religious group is not akin to citizenship, and does not entail or require full legal rights and responsibilities. Women might have curtailed rights but still rightfully claim Arabness or Christianness, etc. Further, secondary legal status—as Coope herself points out—cannot equate to how power plays out on the ground. Even if the political and social systems stacked against them, we might still talk of women's agency within these structures.

The centrality of women in the narratives about Bughā's campaign has little to do with the formal status of women in Caucasian society or under Armenian or Islamic law, but with the ability of élite women to speak to power. As rare as it may be, there are at least some indications that women asserted themselves, meaning that they were not solely pawns in

Armenianness and, further, the marriage of an Armenian woman to men of different ethno-religious affiliations. He claims that we might discuss Tamta's identity based on what we know of her father's identity; Antony Eastmond, *Tamta's World: the Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

159. Arcruni, *History*, 239 except that Thomson supplies "Muslims" for *tačkakan*; *Patmutʿiwn*, 272.

160. Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 2.

161. Coope, *Most Noble of People*, 87.

162. Coope, *Most Noble of People*, 90.

their fathers', brothers', or husbands' contestations.[163] Bughā did not technically deport Hṙip'simē Arcruni, but rather she followed her sons to Samarrā[ʾ] in grief. Further, Gurgēn the son of Apupelč married a widow named Helen to gain control of al-Zawazān/Anjewacik' after she not only proposed marriage to him, but ordered him to be quick about it. The wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl confronted Bughā, and then demanded recompense for her fate from the caliph himself. In short, T'ovma's account of the conflict suggests that women claimed their own voices in the Caucasus, albeit within the restraints of both a patriarchal society and a hierarchical power structure. In other words, they were constrained not only by their position as women in a male-dominated society, but also by the expectations placed on them due to their social status as wives or daughters of the political élite. Yet even with these restrictions, they were actors, not outsiders, in their own multiform communities. If modern scholars cannot create a space for women to claim some modicum of agency, they actively efface those moments when women such as the wives of Mūsā b. Zurāra or Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl effectively shifted (or even ineffectually attempted to shift) the political and military landscape, as we see happening during Bughā's campaign.

Conclusions

The focus on identity in this article is dictated by the role that the campaign currently plays in discussions of medieval Armenian history. Modern scholars have allowed T'ovma's agenda to inform our discussions about the campaign, maintaining his claim that Armenian Christians defended their Armenianness and Christianness against the *tačik*s. This article has challenged this interpretation by using both Armenian and Arabic sources on the campaign to identify and problematize the metanarrative offered in T'ovma's version. It has also explored the campaign in a broader Caucasian setting to decentralize the focus on Armenia and Armenianness for a campaign that stretched much further afield.

Ethnic differences cannot make sense of this campaign. We focused above on Arabness, particularly on the fluidity of the term *tačik* and our sources' frequent inability or unwillingness to assert ethnic difference. Instead, there are several examples, such as Mūsā b. Zurāra, Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, and even Bughā himself, where our authors obfuscate or completely avoid ethnonyms. The fluidity of ethnonyms suggests that the campaign cannot have mobilized communities based on ethnic solidarity. Further, to assume such categorical division between Armenian and "other" requires the reader to recategorize the Armenians who cooperated with Bughā as non-Armenians, to brand them as traitors, or to expunge them from the record entirely. Yet the Armenian allies of Bughā such as Smbat Aplabas Bagratuni and Vasak Arcruni were just as Armenian as Ašot and Gurgēn Arcruni. They merely had agendas that arrayed them against the people whom the Armenian historical tradition identified as the Armenian heroes.

Religious difference also cannot make sense of this campaign. We frequently find moments when Christians and Muslims fought their coreligionists, as well as evidence of

163. On agency, Coope again refers back to legal definitions: "Sharīʿah does not, however, grant women much agency. Agency belongs to men, who are responsible for fulfilling their obligations to women and enforcing their obedience"; Coope, *Most Noble of People*, 117.

multiconfessional armies. Despite T‘ovma’s frequent assertions, no one rallied around Christianness or Muslimness. Bughā deported not just Bagarat Bagratuni and Ašot Arcruni, but also Mūsā b. Zurāra. He beheaded Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl. T‘ovma supplied the religious overtones to tap into the metanarrative of Christian persecution, but he also revealed details that counter his own narrative. Mušeł Bagratuni served Bughā in the campaign against Albanian Christians and numerous rival Arcrunis joined up with Bughā and the ʿUthmānids to battle Gurgēn son of Apupelč. Yet again, their goals, not their families or language or religion, set them apart from the celebrated heroes. Firm boundaries around homogenous ethno-religious communities as constructed in T‘ovma’s account make little sense of the frequently multiconfessional and multiethnic alliances among the communities of the South Caucasus.

None of this suggests that ethnicity and religion were unimportant, merely flexible and rhetorically useful. There were many ways to be Armenian, Muslim, Albanian, Georgian, Christian, or Arab. While T‘ovma had a clear sense of what Armenianness and Christianness meant, in reality religion and ethnicity could serve to unify or to divide communities depending on circumstances. Instead, this example showcases the flexible nature of identity construction around local concerns, which trump abstract notions of ethnicity or universal religious community. A gendered look at the campaign confirms that ethnic and religious difference was entirely surmountable. To solidify close relations between Muslim and Christian families of various ethnicities, women crossed borders that medieval and modern authors alike apply to make sense of pluralist environments.

Ter-Łevondyan claims that “[i]t was natural for Mūsā [b. Zurāra] to be on bad terms with Bagarat Bagratuni, since he was the feudal lord of the lands immediately adjoining Tarōn.”[164] This article suggests the opposite conclusion. Proximity led to common sets of concerns and, accordingly, alliances across religious and ethnic lines.[165] We see this in Mūsā’s marriage to a Bagratuni woman, in her ability to serve as a mediator in disputes between communities of different religions and ethnicities, and in their son’s acceptance in both of his parents’ communities. Above all, we see it in Mūsā’s decision to fight against Bughā and in the deportation of the entire Zurārid family to Samarrāʾ. T‘ovma ignores Mūsā’s role in the conflict and his fate because these do not add substance to his own reading in ethno-religious absolutes. Yet reading T‘ovma alongside Arabic sources reveals how Bughā’s campaign can serve as a clear exemplum of how local alliances played out against T‘ovma’s expectations in moments of conflict.

164. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 42.

165. Mottahedeh explains that “consciously shared interests inevitably produced a shared loyalty to guard and promote that interest.” His “loyalties of category” do not fit easily into this example, though, with the possible exception of the *aʿyān*; Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 107.

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Reflections on the Identity of the Arabian Conquerors of the Seventh-Century Middle East

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Abstract

This paper offers some reflections on the nature of the identity of the seventh-century Arabian conquerors of the Middle East based on the author's own experience of writing about this topic in his book In God's Path *(Oxford 2015). This subject has been considerably enlivened by the influential and provocative publications of Fred Donner (*Muhammad and the Believers*, 2010) and Peter Webb (*Imagining the Arabs*, 2016). What follows is an attempt to respond to and engage with these publications and to offer some thoughts on how this debate might productively move forward.*

Introduction

This article began its life as a reply to some negative reviews of my book *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the First Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), in particular those by Fred Donner and Peter Webb. However, in the process of reflection I became more interested in the issues which underlay their reviews, especially the matter of the identity of the key participants in the Arabian conquest of the Middle East. Both scholars have written books which deal innovatively with this issue and which, despite their recent date, have already had a substantial impact upon the field.[1] This is due in part to the originality of their ideas and in part to the current enthusiasm for this topic, for, as Webb has recently observed, "the study of communal identities in the early Muslim-era Middle East is perhaps

1. Donner articulates his theory in three works: "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community," *al-Abhath* 50-51 (2002-03): 9-53; *Muhammad and the Believers. At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2010); and his review of my *In God's Path* in *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 23 (2015): 134-40. Webb presents his theory in his book *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), on which see Philip Wood's review in this issue of *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā*; in his review of my *In God's Path*: "The March of Islam", *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 March 2015, 24; and in the article in the following footnote.

the most direct pathway into the heart of pressing questions about the rise of Islam".[2] What follows is a discussion of their theories about the identity of the Arabian conquerors together with some ideas of my own and replies to what I feel are misunderstandings of my position in *In God's Path*. Since the three of us have thought long and hard about this topic, it is to be hoped that it will be of some benefit to readers to see our different perspectives contrasted and compared.

Although it is by now something of a ritual, it is necessary to highlight, for newcomers at least, the paucity of documentation coming from within the community of the prophet Muhammad in the first sixty years after his death in 632 CE, which makes it difficult to say anything concrete about this community's self-definition. It is not just that documents are few, but also they are not really of the right sort (mostly they are army requisition notes, tax demands, prayers and coin legends) to yield information on this topic.[3] Inevitably this has led to a proliferation of theories about what was going on. It is crucial to bear in mind, though, that all are to some extent speculative—notwithstanding their purveyors' often assiduous protestations to the contrary—and the scraps of evidence that are deployed to underpin them are open to different interpretations. For example, the most striking thing in the eyes of many is that Muhammad is not mentioned on any media until the 680s, but conclusions from that vary from the non-existence of Muhammad (Yehuda Nevo) to the ecumenical nature of early Islam (Fred Donner).[4]

We do of course have voluminous accounts from Muslim authors of the ninth century telling us exactly what Muhammad and his companions said and did throughout their lives, but since these also serve as legal and moral proof texts there is good reason to be critical of their worth as historical texts.[5] One solution offered in the past was to "step outside" and use non-Muslim sources that predate the crystallization of the official Muslim view of their sacred past in the second half of the eighth century.[6] I adopted that solution myself for some time, though also striving "to bring out the parallels and similarities between the reports of Muslim and non-Muslim witnesses".[7] However, I have become convinced in recent years that

2. "Identity and Social Formation in the Early Caliphate," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, ed. Herbert Berg (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 129.

3. Jeremy Johns, "Archaeology and the Early History of Islam: The First Seventy Years," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46 (2003): 411-36.

4. Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), esp. III.3. Donner promotes his ecumenical Islam theory in all three of his works listed in note 1 above.

5. There is a huge literature on this topic, but arguably the best introductions to it are still Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3-17, and R.S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), ch. 3.

6. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 3.

7. Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 591. I would like to note here that I did not write *Seeing Islam* in order to refute *Hagarism*, which some students have told me is a commonly held opinion, but rather to penetrate deeper into the question of Islam's origins, with the idea that I was going to find out the Truth of the matter (strange as that seems to my now cynical/wiser self), but certainly with no sense that *Hagarism* was wrong.

this approach is not really valid, since the two bodies of material are much more intertwined than had previously been thought,[8] and so I changed tack. As I put it in my introduction to *In God's Path*:

> I do not want to champion non-Muslim sources over Muslim sources; indeed, it is my argument that the division is a false one. Muslims and non-Muslims inhabited the same world, interacted with one another and even read one another's writings. In this book the distinction I make is simply between earlier and later sources, and I favor the former over the latter irrespective of the religious affiliation of their author (pp. 2-3).[9]

Fred Donner and Jens Scheiner failed to pick up on this change of stance in their reviews and it was also missed by Glen Bowersock in his recent book, who likewise assumed that I was following my older position of distinguishing between non-Muslim and Muslim sources.[10] In the case of *In God's Path*, I chose instead to write according to the methods that a historian of any other civilization would employ, avoiding the usual sectarian approach of Islamic studies and privileging early sources over later ones irrespective of whether they were by Muslims or non-Muslims. The pioneer of this approach was Lawrence Conrad, who has greatly influenced my thinking, and it has recently been taken up by Antoine Borrut in his sophisticated discussion of the ways in which the later Umayyad caliphs were portrayed and remembered.[11]

Terminology

If we are to investigate the identity of the members of the early Islamic community, we need to pay heed to the ways in which they referred to themselves and in which others referred to them. Of course, we have to be attentive to the fact that there was often a discrepancy between the two sets of terms, since outsiders to a group often apply labels to its members that they would not use themselves and that they may reject as inaccurate or offensive. Given that my book *In God's Path* was aimed at a non-expert audience, I decided to use the widely accepted terms Arab and Muslim, but, as I acknowledge, there are problems with this:

> Both terms [Arab and Muslim] are to some degree inaccurate, since the conquerors were neither all Arabs nor all Muslims, and the meaning of both terms was in any case

8. Noted in my *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 26-32.

9. My source appendix on pages 231-33 sometimes harked back to my earlier stance, as unfortunately an unrevised version of it was used in the final text.

10. Donner, "Review of *In God's Path*," 135; Jens Scheiner, "Reflections on Hoyland's *In God's Path*," *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 7 (2016): 25-26; Glen Bowersock, *The Crucible of Islam* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 5. Not appreciating my intention, Donner and Scheiner censure me for not acknowledging those who had advocated using non-Muslim sources before me.

11. Conrad already advocated this approach in his "Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition: Some Indications of Intercultural Transmission," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15, 1990, 1-44). See Antoine Borut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir. L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbasides* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), which discusses this exact point on pages 137-66.

evolving in the immediate aftermath of the conquests (p. 5).[12]

Moreover, though these two terms are the usual ones employed by ninth-century Muslim authors to designate the followers of Muhammad and the Arabian conquerors of the Middle East, they only feature very rarely in our surviving seventh-century texts. So what did the early conquerors call themselves?

The Conquerors as Non-Confessional Believers

Donner dislikes use of the terms "Muslim" and "Islam" for Muhammad's time and the first decades thereafter because he feels it is wrong to assume that "Islam from its earliest days constituted a separate religious confession distinct from others."[13] This is true inasmuch as it certainly cannot be what Muhammad had wanted to achieve. The Qurʾan makes it clear that he believed that there had only ever been one true religion (*dīn al-ḥaqq*)—Christianity and Judaism were simply the result of people introducing false doctrines into it—and he was now calling on everyone to return to the original pure form that had been conveyed by all God's messengers from Adam to himself. As the Qurʾan says, "with regard to religion we have prescribed for you what we entrusted to Noah, and what we have imparted to you is (the same as) what we entrusted to Abraham, Moses and Jesus: uphold the (one true) religion and do not become divided over it" (42:13). So Muhammad was not trying to devise a new creed. Many of his contemporaries, of course, disagreed and regarded him as an innovator, but this is a very common experience for would-be religious reformers: they preach a return to the true form of the faith, their reform program is rejected and their followers are repudiated by the mainstream, which means that these followers, if they hold firm to the reformer's utterings, will end up by giving rise to a new sect rather than reforming the old faith. This is what happened in the case of Jesus, Luther, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and many others.[14]

The ur-monotheism preached by Muhammad, by the very fact that it was, in his eyes, the only true faith of all mankind, was in this sense free of all sectarian divisions, or as Donner puts it: "independent of confessional identities."[15] Muhammad wished to bring together under one umbrella all those who would affirm the oneness of God and the imminence of the Day of Judgement and who were prepared to live piously.[16] This is unproblematic. It is

12. To get round this problem of the evolution of the term Muslim some modern scholars coin new terms; e.g. Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Politics* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 63 (proto-Muslim), and *id*., *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Budapest: Central European University, 2007), 102 (palaeo-Muslim).

13. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 9.

14. There is a slight complication in Muhammad's case in that we do not really know the nature of the religion in which he was raised.

15. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 11.

16. Possibly for apocalyptic reasons, i.e. an ingathering of mankind under one religious banner in time for judgement day, as is argued by Donner (Donner, "From Believers to Muslims,"13). However, it is difficult to distinguish in our sources between eschatological speculation (continual and ubiquitous; see chapter 8 of my *Seeing Islam*) and apocalyptic action, i.e. a decision that we must act now to be ready for the imminent End. For an excellent recent argument in favor of the latter in the case of Muhammad's community, see Stephen

easy to believe that Muhammad was happy to welcome everyone to his new community—Islam still today has a strong missionary component to it and accepts all comers without restriction.[17] Moreover, it was increasingly taken as a given in the Late Roman world that there was only one true religion and that it was the same religion that had been imparted by God to Abraham. As Paul the Apostle put it in his letter to the Galatians, "the believers (those of belief) are children of Abraham" (3:7). Paul's attitude towards the Jews is similar to that of Muhammad vis-à-vis Jews and Christians: they are still children of Abraham, it is just that they are "disobedient children for rejecting Jesus as the Christ".[18] Interestingly, Paul also has a universalist view of "the faith of Abraham" (Romans 4:16), emphasizing that it is belief in Christ that saves ("the righteous will live by faith", Galatians 3:11), not practice of the law, and in this respect "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

However, Donner throws in an extra ingredient which would make Muhammad's community unusual: "Believers could be members of any one of several religious confessions—Christians or Jews[19] for example—if the doctrines of their religious confession were consonant with strict monotheism and not too inimical to the Believer's other basic ideas."[20] So within Muhammad's community, says Donner, there were Jews and Christians who continued to be Jews and Christians, following their own customs and laws, but acknowledging Muhammad as "the community's supreme political authority."[21] The idea is interesting, but is it backed up by the evidence? No source actually specifies an individual who was in this situation,[22] but does the Qurʾan allow for this eventuality? Let us have a look, beginning with the Qurʾanic verse that Donner regards as a clear support of his thesis:

> Those who believe, and Jews and Sabians and Christians—those who believe in God and the Last Day and who act righteously—will have no fear and shall not grieve (on the Day of Judgement) (5:69)

Shoemaker, "'The Reign of God Has Come': Eschatology and Empire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam," *Arabica* 61 (2014): 514-58.

17. In the fourteenth century, for example, Ibn Khaldūn wrote: "In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the (Muslim) mission and (the obligation to) convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force" (*The Muqaddimah*, tr. Franz Rosenthal, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958, 473 = I.3.31).

18. Jeffrey Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 13.

19. It is a moot question whether Jews at this time would have thought in terms of being a believer—was not being a Jew the key to salvation rather than being a believer? (See Menachem Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything* (Oxford: Littman Library, 1999)—my thanks to Adam Silverstein for this reference)—but I leave that aside for the purposes of this article.

20. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 11.

21. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 16.

22. Donner points to people who worked in the conquerors' administration or spoke positively about them, but as Patricia Crone observes in her review of Donner's book, "evidence for warm attitudes and collaborators is not evidence for full integration without conversion" ("Among the Believers," *Tablet*, August 10, 2010: http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/42023/among-the-believers, paragraph 5).

One could interpret this for or against Donner, since on the one hand, "those who believe" are distinguished from Jews, Sabians and Christians, intimating an awareness of confessional boundaries, but, on the other hand, they are categorized together with Jews, Sabians and Christians in respect of their common belief in God and the Last Day, their righteous behavior and an implication of easy entry into heaven.[23] Thus, although it is not made explicit in what way other monotheist groups related to Muhammad's community in this world, they certainly would appear to be on a par with Muhammad's community in the next world, sharing equally in the benefits of the afterlife. As 5:65 says: "If the people of the book believe and are god-fearing we shall efface their evil deeds and admit them to the gardens of bliss". This implies, says Donner, that, in the Qurʾanic view, "proper piety, avoidance of sinful behavior, is what saves, alongside a basic abstract belief in one God and the Last Day" and consequently "it is virtually immaterial to which monotheism community one belongs."[24] This is nicely illustrated by 2:111-112, which first quotes what the people of the book say: "Only those who are Jews and Christians will enter paradise" and then contrasts it with the Qurʾan's own position: "Rather whoever submits before God and is virtuous will have his reward with his Lord, they shall have no fear and shall not grieve."

Christians and Jews could, therefore, continue on in their faith as long as they did not do anything that violated the core tenets of the original monotheism and as long as they properly followed the message that God had addressed specifically to them: "If they uphold the Torah and the Gospel and what has been sent down to them from their Lord, they will eat (the fruits of paradise) that are above them and below their feet" (5:66).[25] Donner postulates that "those individuals among the *ahl al-kitāb* who embrace right belief and right action will be welcomed among the believers,"[26] and the Qurʾan does frequently emphasize that these two qualities will provide succor on the Day of Judgement:

> Whoever follows my guidance will have no fear and shall not grieve (2:38)
> Whoever believes and is righteous will have no fear and shall not grieve (6:48)
> Whoever is God-fearing and is righteous will have no fear and shall not grieve (7:35)
> As for he who believes and does good he will have the finest recompense (18:88)
> Whoever says our Lord is God and is upright will have no fear and shall not grieve (46:13)

However, even if Muhammad allowed Jews and Christians to join his non-confessional form of monotheism, it does not mean that many of them did so. The Qurʾan seems to suggest that

23. The verse is repeated at 2:62 with the addition of "they will have their reward with their Lord". Another list has: Believers, Jews, Sabians, Christians, Magians and Associators (*alladhīna ashrakū*), and this time it is said that God will distinguish between them on Resurrection Day (22:17)—presumably the Magians and the Associators do not get an easy entry into heaven. Note that the expression "will have no fear and shall not grieve" is particular to these expressions about the rewards for virtuous believers (see below) and seems to imply that all will go well for them on Judgement Day.

24. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 20.

25. Though note that the Qurʾan only ever talks about the situation of righteous Jews and Christians in the next life, never in this life.

26. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 21.

only a few of them accepted the call, while most of their co-religionaries were dismissive. Sometimes this is stated only briefly: "Among them is a moderate community (*umma muqtaṣida*), though most of them act evilly" (5:66); "Among them are believers, but most of them are wicked" (3:110); "they (the Jews) do not believe except for a few" (4:46). Occasionally it is set out at length: "Among the people of the book is an upright community; they recite God's revelations through the night, prostrate, believe in God and the Last Day, command good and prohibit evil, are quick to do good things and are righteous" (3:113-114). It is often argued that these were Judaeo-Christians of one sort or another,[27] but it may be that they were regular Christians who decided to accept Muhammad's Christological position.[28]

Two conditions for membership of Muhammad's community perhaps limited its appeal. The first was submission to Muhammad as head of the community, for discussion of which see the next section below. The second condition was a strict monotheism that allowed no room for any divine entities besides God; Muhammad's strongly anti-Trinitarian stance, in particular, would have posed a problem for any orthodox Christian. The opposite of believers are deniers (*kāfirūn*) and the Qurʾan makes it abundantly clear that those who say that God is "the Messiah son of Mary" or "the third of three" or that Jesus was a son of God are very definitely deniers and not believers (e.g. 5:17: "Those who say that God is Christ son of Mary have certainly disbelieved"). What they had to do is spelled out in verse 4:171: "O people of the book, do not exceed proper bounds in religion and speak only the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God and His word, which He cast into Mary [...] so believe in God and His apostles and do not say 'three'; desist (from that), it will be better for you." Donner takes this to mean that Christians were "seen as suitable for 'rehabilitation' and inclusion among the believers."[29] This seems reasonable, but surely only in the way that you can join most religious groups, namely by disavowing your former incorrect beliefs, in this case the Trinity. Donner adds a couple of extra mitigating factors regarding "passages that seem to contradict our hypothesis", namely that "these particular Qurʾanic verses were not widely known among the Believers" or that the Believers were happy to live with the contradictions between the false doctrines of the people of the book among them and the Qurʾanic doctrines.[30] Yet Christian Trinitarian views were diametrically opposed to the original monotheism that Muhammad sought to revive, and both were core beliefs to the respective communities, so it is hard to see how they could pass unnoticed or be disregarded.

An illustration of how non-Muslim cooperation with Muhammad could have worked is illustrated by a document that is commonly known as the "Constitution of Medina". It marks the foundation of Muhammad's polity and is widely considered to have been faithfully

27. Most recently see Patricia Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾan," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74 and 75 (2015 and 2016): 225-53 and 1-21. This option is then seen as explaining the origin of some of Muhammad's Christological doctrines (a prophet but not son of God, not crucified, preached to the Israelites etc).

28. Of course, Christians who adopted Muhammad's anti-Trinitarian position would have run the risk of excommunication from their own community.

29. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 26.

30. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 26-28.

transmitted and to be what it says it is, namely "a writing from the prophet Muhammad between the Believers and the Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who follow them, join with them and fight alongside them".[31] Those who adhere to this document are "a single community (*umma wāḥida*) to the exclusion of the (other) people" (§1) and for them "the inner part (*jawf*) of Yathrib (i.e. Medina) is sacred" (§49).[32] Each clan is still responsible for its own affairs, but "they help one another against whoever fights the people (who are signatories) of this document" (§45), and God and Muhammad are the arbiters for all parties (§§26, 52). Importantly for Donner, among its adherents are the Jews who are specifically catered for in a number of clauses. As I noted back in 1995, the document seems to have been "meant as a blueprint for a politico-religious community, uniting Muslims and Jews under the protection of God (*dhimmat Allāh*) so that they might fight" God's enemies.[33] However, its purpose is not to advocate a non-confessional form of monotheism, but simply to say that confessional differences should be put aside ("the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have their religion", §28) so that all efforts could be directed towards fighting the unbelievers. A unifying formula is advanced that all parties could agree to: a believer is "he who has affirmed what is in this document and believes in God and the Last Day" (§25). Although signatories are most frequently designated as "believers" (32 times), the terms "Muslim" (3 times) and "Jew" (6 times, excluding the term "Jews of Banū...") are used, which suggests some distinctions are made within the overall category of believers. Again one could take this as for or against Donner's theory. The participants in the Constitution of Medina could be part of a grand a-confessional religious movement, but it could also be argued that what the Constitution shows is that Muhammad had formed a community of "Muslims"/"submitters (to the One God)" and that he was willing to enter into military pacts with other monotheist communities for the sake of the greater purpose of defeating ungodly opponents. In either case, though, Donner is right that belief in one God and the imminent reality of the Last Day was a key component of the identity of the members of Muhammad's community, who referred to one another as "believers".

The Conquerors as Muhammadans

Both Christian and Muslim scholars who strove to categorize religious groups would typically name them after their founder (e.g. Bardaisanites, Marcionites, Lutherans, Calvinists, Azraqites, Ibadites, Zaydis, Ahmadis, etc). For at least four centuries European scholars did the

31. The sense of the phrase "the Believers and the Muslims" is unclear (perhaps a hendiadys), and Donner's explanation (Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 33) that Believers = believing Jews + Muslims is not very satisfying (if "believers" comprise both Jews and Muslims, there would be no need to say "and the Muslims"). The Constitution also mentions "the *muhājirūn* of Quraysh" (§3) with no hint that this group overlaps with the Believers and/or Muslims.

32. The paragraph numbering is that of Michael Lecker, *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004), who provides text, translation and commentary and cites earlier literature. For a more recent study see Saïd Arjomand, "The Constitution of Medina: A Socio-Legal Interpretation of Muhammad's Acts of Foundation of the *Umma*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009): 555-75.

33. "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam," *Muslim-Jewish Relations* 2 (1995): 94.

same thing and frequently referred to believers in Muhammad's mission as Muhammadans.[34] It was dropped out of respect to Muslims, who objected that they followed God, not a man. I would certainly not recommend re-adopting it, but the term does serve to remind us that acceptance of Muhammad's mission was one of the key defining features of Islam from its first days. Our earliest Christian witnesses to the conquests, from the late 630s onwards, describe the conquerors with reference to Muhammad.[35] And the north Mesopotamian monk and chronicler John bar Penkāyē, who states that he is writing in the year 687, makes clear the importance of Muhammad to his followers, calling him their "guide" and "instructor" and asserting that "they kept to the tradition of Muhammad [...] to such an extent that they inflicted the death penalty on anyone who was seen to act brazenly against his laws".[36]

Both the Qurʾan and the Constitution of Medina reinforce this view of Muhammad, that he was supreme arbiter and leader of his community. Both make the point that if members have a disagreement, they should defer to the judgment of Muhammad.[37] A number of times the Qurʾan states that "the Believers are those who believe in God and His messenger" (24:62, 49:15), commands its audience to "believe in God and His messenger" (4:136, 7:158, 57:7, 64:8), warns that God's enemies are those who "disbelieve in God and His messenger" (9:81, 9:84, 48:13), and urges its members to "fight those who do not believe in God and the Last Day and who do not forbid what God and His messenger have forbidden" (9:29). And occasionally the simple promises of reward to those who believe and behave are extended to include allegiance to Muhammad; e.g. "Whoever of you is obedient to God and His messenger and does good will be brought his reward" (33:31). This is of course pretty much in line with the standard Muslim confession of faith—"I witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger", the first step in becoming a Muslim since at least the eighth century. It is true that other verses say only that believers were those who believed in God and the Last Day and do not mention Muhammad, as pointed out by Donner,[38] but that just goes to show that none of these elements were as yet formalized into a rigid creed, so we cannot justifiably favor some elements over others.

Donner seeks to play down Muhammad's status, especially his role as a prophet, since he worries that this would give Muhammad's community greater confessional distinctiveness.[39] It is nevertheless evident from the Qurʾan's own testimony that many did find this membership criterion too much for them and they rejected Muhammad's role as a messenger for a variety of reasons, such as fear that he was some sort of sorcerer (14:47, 25:8, 26:153, 26:185,

34. Probably the last two major Western academics to do so were H.A.R. Gibb (d. 1971): *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), and Joseph Schacht (d. 1969): *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

35. See my "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muhammad: An Appraisal," in *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources,* ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 277 n. 6 ("a prophet who has appeared with the Saracens"), 277-78 (the *ṭayyāyē d-Mḥmṭ*); and two longer descriptions come in the 660s—the Khuzistan Chronicle and Sebeos (*ibid*., 278 and 283)—that make Muhammad the leader and instigator of the conquerors.

36. *Ibid*., 284.

37. Qurʾan 4:65; Constitution of Medina, §§26, 52.

38. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 38.

39. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 34-44.

30:58, 46:7), or that he could not be genuine since only angels brought down messages from God.[40] Nevertheless, the Qurʾan does make Muhammad say that "I am only a man like you", it is just that "it was revealed to me that your God is one God" (41:6), and so there was no big gulf that separated him from ordinary mortals. Moreover, accepting him did not require rejecting any of the previous prophets and warners that God had sent to mankind, which in the Qurʾan's inclusivist worldview was a particularly long line-up, comprising figures like Adam, Noah, Lot and Job, and a couple of Arabian characters (Hud and Salih), as well as the A-listers Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

A big change in the status of Muhammad for his community is heralded by three Arab-Sasanian *dirhams* on the margin of which is inscribed a truncated Muslim profession of faith: "In the name of God, Muhammad is the messenger of God". All were minted at Bīshāpūr in Fārs and bear the usual imperial bust on the obverse and a Sasanian fire-altar on the reverse. Two of them are dated to the years 66 and 67, which in the Hijri era correspond to 685-86 and 686-87 CE, and the issuing authority is named as ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbd Allāh. He was married to the sister of the would-be-caliph Ibn al-Zubayr, and his brother was entrusted with the governorship of Sīstān by Ibn al-Zubayr's brother in AH 66. The earliest attested Islamic profession of faith, therefore, comes from the party of Ibn al-Zubayr, the rival to ʿAbd al-Malik (685-705 CE). The contemporary north Mesopotamian monk John bar Penkāyē says of him that "he had come out of zeal for the House of God," and so it was presumably to bolster his religious claims that he placed the name of Muhammad on his coins. ʿAbd al-Malik, once he had triumphed over Ibn al-Zubayr and all other contenders, decided to take over this idea, though prefacing it with "there is no god but God", thus making the confession of faith that is still used today.[41]

*The Conquerors as Emigrants (*Muhājirūn*)*

The most substantial corpus of seventh-century material that we possess are the numerous papyri related to the local Arab administration in Egypt, which start from 21/642. The new armies had not only to be paid, but also to be fed, housed and equipped, which led to a flurry of documentation as demand notes were dispatched and receipts were issued for a wide variety of goods, such as grain, oil, fodder, blankets, saddles and horses. Most of these texts are written in Greek and a number of them refer to the conquerors as *magaritai* (or *mōagaritai*), which is matched by the appearance of the term *mhaggrē* (or *mhaggrāyē*) in Syriac literary texts from the 640s onwards. Both terms are evidently intended to convey the Arabic word

40. A point discussed by Patricia Crone, "Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God," in *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity*, eds. P. Townsend and M. Vidas (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 315-36.

41. This point is made and discussed in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 550-52. Donner's claim that "the earliest documentary attestations of the *shahāda* found on coins, papyri and inscriptions dating before about 66/685, include only the first part of the later 'double *shahāda*': 'There is no god but God'—Muhammad is not yet mentioned" (Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 112; also Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 47) is incorrect. The creedal statement "Muhammad is the messenger of God" is attested in our extant documentary record *before* the statement "there is no god but God".

muhājir, which features in the Qurʾan and the Constitution of Medina.[42] Crone and Cook take it to be the earliest self-identifier of the conquerors, and they became interested in it for its Biblical allusions: Hagar and *Hijra* (i.e. Exodus), which in their view cast the conquerors "as Hagarene participants in a *hijra* to the promised land".[43] In the Qurʾan it is often linked with jihad, both being conducted "in God's path", and in early Arabic poetry it means those who accept to leave tribal life to settle in a garrison city in order to participate in the conquests. It becomes contrasted with and opposed to the idea of *taʿarrub*, returning to desert life, or to the person of the nomad (*badū* or *aʿrābī*), who continues to lead a carefree existence as a desert pastoralist, shirking his duty to fight for God's kingdom on earth. This clash of values is frequently encountered in verse, as when one poet worries that his beloved "is alarmed by the remnants of nomadism in a garrisoned soldier (*aʿrābiyya fī muhājir*)", and in the terse statement of one early governor of Iraq that "a *muhājir* is never a nomad (*laysa bi-aʿrābī*).[44]

The word has the meaning, then, of both soldier and settler, but to the conquered peoples it simply served as a label for the conquering armies, and in the rare cases that *magaritai* features in a bilingual Greek-Arabic document it is rendered in Arabic by the word *juyūsh*, that is, troops.[45] As I noted in my book *In God's Path*:

> Since it is the most common word for the conquerors in the seventh century, employed by themselves and by the conquered, we should really speak of the conquests of the *muhājirūn*, rather than of the Arabs or Muslims, which only become popular terms in the eighth century. At the least, we should recognise this primary impulse of the movement after Muhammad's death, namely to conquer and settle, a message that must have originated in the early drive to recruit the nomadic tribes of Arabia and the Syrian desert (p. 102).

The term *muhājir* also had economic implications, for it was linked to entitlement to the revenues that accrued from the conquered lands (*fayʾ*). The settler soldiers automatically received regular stipends (*ʿaṭāʾ*) paid out of these revenues, but conversely if they were to abandon the *hijra* lands in which they were garrisoned they would automatically forfeit

42. Scheiner, "Reflections on Hoyland's *In God's Path*," 26, resurrects Sidney Griffith's doubts about whether the Greek and Syriac terms were derived from the Arabic, which seems unwarranted given their simultaneous appearance. See my *Seeing Islam*, 180, n. 25, and Ilkka Lindstedt, "*Muhājirūn* as a Name for the First/Seventh Century Muslims," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74 (2015): 68 (this article provides a nice illustration of the use of the term in Arabic literary texts).

43. *Hagarism*, 9.

44. Saleh Said Agha and Tarif Khalidi, "Poetry and Identity in the Umayyad Age," *al-Abhath* 50-51 (2002-3): 80. The governor is al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf who makes this statement in the course of his inaugural speech in 75/694 (Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje *et al*., Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901, 2: 864). Note that in Sabaic and Ethiopic *hajar* means town or city, and in Sabaic we find the same contrast as in Arabic between *muhājirūn* and *aʿrāb*; e.g. the inscription Ry508 qualifies the tribesmen of a region with the words: "their town-dwellers and their Bedouin" / *hgrhmw w-ʿrbhmw* (cited in Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 263).

45. Jean Gascou, "Sur la lettre arabe de Qurra b. Šarīk P. Sorb inv. 2344," *Annales Islamologiques* 45 (2011): 269-71. For more discussion about the significance of the term and its occurrence in the seventh century see Patricia Crone, "The First-Century Concept of *Hiǧra*," *Arabica* 41 (1994): 352-87; Kh. Athamina, "*Aʿrāb* and *Muhājirūn* in the Environment of *Amṣār*," *Studia Islamica* 66 (1987): 5-25; Webb, Imagining the Arabs, 141-46.

their stipends.[46] The term drops out of the documentary record in the first half of the eighth century as a consequence of the professionalization of the army, which meant that stipends were no longer determined by past entitlement but only in return for ongoing military service.[47] The trajectory of this term, from high frequency to disappearance, nicely illustrates the fact that the identity of the early conquest community was evolving in the course of the first century of its existence.

The Conquerors as Subjects of the "Commander of the Believers"

Moving a little later in time, we encounter the term "believers" in the context of political ideology. We have no texts from the time of the four Medinan caliphs (632-60) that tell us how they conceptualized their rule,[48] but the fifth caliph, Muʿāwiya (661-80), styles himself as "commander of the believers" on five coins minted at Darābjird in southwest Iran in the year 43/663-64 and on three building inscriptions.[49] This is written in Persian on the coins (*amyr y wrwyšnykʾn*) and in Greek (*amira almoumenin*) and Arabic (*amīr al-muʾminīn*) on the inscriptions. There are also two papyri which are dated according to the "dispensation of the believers"/*qaḍāʾ al-muʾminīn*, presumably also relating to the way that Muʿāwiya chose to portray the nature of his rule.[50] Does "believers" refer here just to the conquerors or is Muʿāwiya reaching out to all monotheists? Donner takes the title as evidence that "the members of Muhammad's religious movement continued to conceive of themselves in the first instance as Believers as evidenced by the Qurʾan,"[51] i.e. as non-confessional believers in God and the Last Day. Before accepting this, however, there are a few points that need to be borne in mind. Firstly, the title only appears on coins in southwest Iran, a region that was a stronghold of Zoroastrianism with a very low Christian and Jewish population, and, as noted above, the Qurʾan excludes Zoroastrians from the category of believers. Secondly, one could read this not as an ecumenical move by Muʿāwiya, but as a projection of power, a claim to

46. This is clearly stated by Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, ed. Abū Anas Sayyid ibn Rajab (Cairo: Dār al-Hudā, 2007), 1: 317. See also Petra Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 65 and 77-78.

47. Discussed in Crone, *Slaves*, 37-41, and Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 164-66.

48. The inscription of ʿUmar I (634-44) published by ʿAli ibn Ibrahim Ghabban ("The Inscription of Zuhayr, the Oldest Islamic Inscription (24 AH/644-5 AD), the Rise of the Arabic Script and the Nature of the Early Islamic State", *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19, 2008) accords him no title. This is also true of the inscriptions mentioning ʿUmar and ʿUthman (644-56) published by Frédéric Imbert, "Califes, princes et compagnons dans les graffiti du début de l'Islam," *Romano-Arabica* 15 (2015): 64-66. Note that the inscription of ʿUmar at *ibid*., 64 and fig. 2, is likely to be quite late, if not modern, since the *lām* of al-Khaṭṭāb sits on the following *khā* and the medial *alif* is written, both of which are late features.

49. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 690-91. The building inscriptions are on two dams in the Hijaz (in Arabic) and on a renovated bath complex at ancient Gadara, at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee (in Greek). For discussion of their physical setting see Donald Whitcomb, "Notes for an Archaeology of Muʿāwiya: Material Culture in the Transitional Period of Believers," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2016), 11-27.

50. Yusuf Raġib, "Une ère inconnue d'Égypte musulmane: l'ère de la juridiction des croyants," *Annales Islamologiques* 41 (2007): 187-204.

51. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 99.

have usurped the Byzantine Emperor as God's representative on earth. This is implied in his alleged challenge to the emperor Constans: "Deny (the divinity of) Jesus and turn to the Great God whom I worship, the God of our father Abraham".[52] And it is also suggested by one of his Arabic inscriptions, which commemorates the construction of a dam in the Hijaz.[53] It contains a request from Muʿāwiya to God for forgiveness, strength and support, and a plea to let "the believers profit by him", evidently maintaining that he stood between God and the faithful, and the latter needed him for their wellbeing.

Thirdly, "believer" is a standard in-group designation for any religious grouping, the out-group designation being "unbeliever". Both are, for example, ubiquitous terms in Late Antique Christian texts, referring both to individuals and to concepts such as "the polity of the believers" and "the city of the believers, in which virtue and justice reside".[54] Emperor Heraclius took the title of "the believer-in-Christ king" (*pistos en Christǭ basileus*), and so Muʿāwiya is effectively taking matters to their logical conclusion by proclaiming himself "commander of the believers". Assuming that his subjects did accept this designation, i.e. called themselves believers, how could we tell if they were using it in an "ecumenical" vein (à la Donner) or in the same way as Christians and Jews used it, i.e. to indicate their membership of an in-group as defined against the out-group of unbelievers? The principal evidence that Donner adduces in support of the ecumenical sense of the term is the presence of Jews and Christians in the new imperial administration and army. Yet every successful conquering army in history has attracted to their cause, and often actively recruited, willing outsiders, and all conquerors leave in place the lower echelons of the previous administration and then tend to pick for the more senior posts the most talented, often favoring those who were not members of the *ancien régime*. Observers often remark upon their indiscriminate choice of personnel. For example, the comment of the churchman and historian Bar Hebraeus about the Mongols—"With the Mongols there is neither slave nor free man, neither believer nor pagan [...] Everyone who approaches them and offers to them any of the mammon of the world, they accept it from him, and they entrust to him whatsoever office he seeks; all they demand is strenuous service and submission"—finds some echo in the lament of John bar

52. Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 105 (quoting Sebeos, a contemporary of Muʿāwiya). The importance of Abraham to Muslims is noted in the mid-seventh-century *Chronicle of Khūzistān* (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 187-88) and is of course emphasized in the Qurʾan, but Christians also thought that their faith "took its beginning from Abraham, the first of the fathers" (Adam H. Becker, *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008, 25, citing the sixth-century bishop Simeon of Beth Arsham).

53. George C. Miles, "Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭāʾif in the Ḥijāz," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7 (1948): 237-41.

54. Olympiodorus the Deacon (6th-century), "Commentary on Ecclestiastes", *Patrologia Graeca* (ed. J.P. Migne) 93 (1865): 536 (*tōn piston hē politeia*); Procopius of Gaza (d. ca. 520), "Commentary on Isaiah", *Patrologia Graeca* (ed. J.P. Migne) 87.2 (1865): 1857 (*polin tēn tōn piston*). For a wealth of other examples see under *pistoi* / "believers" in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. Note that Olympiodorus' expression ("administration/ government of the believers") is reminiscent of the aforementioned phrase *qaḍāʾ al-muʾminīn* that occurs in two early Arabic papyri.

Penkāyē that under the new Arabian rulers "there was no distinction between pagan or Christian, the believer was not known from a Jew".[55]

The Conquerors as Arabs

The idea that the Arabian conquerors were Arabs, once ubiquitous, has received quite a hammering of late. The reason for this is twofold. First, it has been noticed that the Arabian conquerors seldom called themselves Arabs in their writings,[56] though the term does feature in Arabic poetry. Secondly, it has become increasingly common to define Muhammad's movement as a wholly religious one (in a spiritual/pious non-material vein) without any hint of "nationalist" or ethnic undertones.[57] This point has been made most forcefully by Donner and it has been embraced enthusiastically by many young scholars. In particular, Peter Webb has convincingly argued for "the comprehensive construction of Arabness in the early Muslim period."[58] As the conquerors ranged far afield, they encountered ever more peoples, many with a much more ancient and illustrious pedigree than themselves. This prompted the new leaders to use their new found wealth and power to redefine and project their identity in a way that would highlight their difference from and superiority to all other peoples. Accordingly, the sense of the term Arab was expanded in geographical scope (e.g. incorporating within it groups like the South Arabians, who had never defined themselves as Arabs before Islam) and historical depth (going all the way back to Abraham and his son Ishmael, "father of the Arabs") and equipped with a literary patrimony (pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and lore). This sense of difference is reflected in the expression that occurs very often in Arabic historical texts referring to the first century of Islam: *al-ʿarab wa-al-mawālī*, the latter being members of the conquered population who became affiliated to the conquerors, usually to perform services for them. The expression would appear to correspond to the Latin *ingenui et clientes*, where the first word means free and noble, and if so then the term Arab also had a social dimension to it. Moreover, from the number of times that Arab is used when Muslim or Arabic-speaker is meant, it must have been perceived to be closely associated with the religion and language of the conquerors.[59] Given that the latter enjoyed privilege and

55. Bar Hebraeus is quoted by D.O. Morgan, "Who ran the Mongol Empire?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 114 (1982): 124, who adds: "All sorts and conditions of men were inevitably conscripted by the conquering Mongols to lend a hand in administering their newly-acquired possessions". John bar Penkāyē is cited in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 11.

56. Pointed out by Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 505-25.

57. See especially Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, xii, 218.

58. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 5.

59. E.g. the financial governor of Khurāsān in the 720s wrote to the governor about the mass conversions to Islam, saying: "Who will you take the tax from now that all the people have become Arabs" (al-Ṭabarī, 2.1508); Abū Muslim, the leader of the Abbasid revolution in the East, was ordered "to kill every Arabic-speaker in Khurāsān" (*ibid*., 3.25, 2.1937).

prestige, many of the conquered applied the term to themselves, which led to competing notions about what it meant to be an Arab.[60]

In order to reinforce his point that a new Arab identity was forged in the wake of the Arabian conquests, Webb chose to deny the term Arab any meaning for the period before this, stating bluntly that "for over 300 years before Islam 'Arab' never appears in Latin or Greek literature to identify Arabian communities" and that "the inhabitants of the geographical area now known as Arabia did not call themselves Arabs".[61] However, this assertion is both unnecessary and untrue. It is unnecessary because Webb's argument for the emergence of a new Arab identity after Muhammad in no way precludes the existence of a different sort of Arab identity before Muhammad. And it is untrue because we do actually have a few examples of persons self-defining as Arabs in late antiquity:[62]

1. "Rufinus son of Germanus, bird-augurer, Arab" from Qanawāt (southern Syria)
2. Marʾ al-Qays, "king of all the Arabs" from Namāra (southern Syria)
3. Two soldiers named John "from the lands of the Arab *ethnos*", from Pella
4. "John the blessed cell-dweller, Arab" from near Jericho

The names in numbers 1, 2 and 4 signal that there was likely a big difference between this late antique Arab identity and the early Islamic one that we know from our Muslim sources. I have argued elsewhere that the basis of this late antique Arab identity was probably geographical, connected with the province of Arabia that was created with the Roman annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom in 105-6 CE, principally because the above four inscriptions were all found in the territory of Roman Arabia and because provinces of the Roman Empire tended over time to generate a sense of identity.[63] This process, combined with the declaration of universal citizenship for all imperial residents in 212 CE, gave a new

60. In my *In God's Path*, 163, I contrast the narrower geographical/genealogical definition (from Arabia/an Arabian tribe) with an emerging broader linguistic-cultural definition. See also Patricia Crone, "Imperial Trauma: the case of the Arabs," *Common Knowledge* 12 (2006): 107-16 (note p. 112: "the locally made Arabs had swamped the category").

61. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 47, 95; cf. *ibid*., 40: "nor does it seem pre-Islamic Arabians called themselves Arabs".

62. References given in Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 23, and *id*., "Arab Kings, Arab Tribes and the Beginnings of Arab Historical Memory in Late Roman Epigraphy," in *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, ed. Hannah Cotton *et al*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 379, 392.

63. *Ibid*., 392-93. Fritz Mitthof, "Zur Neustiftung von Identität unter imperialer Herrschaft: Die Provinzen des römischen Reiches als ethnische Entitäten," in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100*, ed. Walter Pohl et al. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), e.g. 70: "Die Provinzen galten im 2.-4. Jh. nicht nur als Verwaltungseinheiten, sondern auch als (pseudo-) ethnische Entitäten". Note that it was not only that the provincial labels were applied to inhabitants of these provinces by the Romans, but that these inhabitants started to refer to themselves by these labels ("We Syrians" etc). Even when administrative borders changed, people's conceptions of their province often did not; for example, Epiphanius of Salamis, writing in the fourth century, describes Petra as being "the main city of Arabia," even though in his day it was in Palestina III Salutaris (Hoyland, "Arab Kings," 392). In Arabia's case this is perhaps because it was the Nabataean kingdom before it was the province of Arabia, putting its history back into the first millennium BC.

twist to the meaning of the term Arab. Whereas classical writers had used it rather vaguely and liberally (and incorrectly) to apply to anybody who lived in or hailed from the Arabian Peninsula and adjoining desert areas, it now became increasingly reserved for natives of the province of Arabia, which was called "province of the Arabs" (*provincia araborum*) in official documentation.[64] These settled provincial Arabs are clearly distinguished in our literature from the pastoralists who lived among and around them, but were not imperial citizens, and who were designated by such terms as "Saracens" (in Greek and Latin), Ṭayyāyē (in Aramaic and Persian), and *aʿrāb* (in the Qurʾan and in the inscriptions of pre-Islamic Yemen).[65] For example, John Cassian, writing in the early fifth century, observes that some monks killed in the Judaean desert by "Saracens" were mourned "by the whole people of the Arabs" (*a universa plebe arabum*). And the sixth-century historian Procopius of Caesarea, informs us that al-Ḥārith ibn Jabala, a powerful tribal chief based in the region around Bostra and a key ally of Byzantium, "ruled the Saracens among the Arabs" (*en arabiois*).[66] There is also a nice link between the late antique and the early Islamic worlds in the appearance of the Greek expression for dating by the era of the province of Arabia, "year x according to the Arabs (*kata arabas*)", in the inscription of Muʿāwiya at the baths of Gadara in what would have been the north of Roman Arabia.[67]

It is also possible that there was a linguistic dimension to the term Arab in late antiquity. The reason for thinking this is the coincidence of a number of new developments in the period 470-630. Firstly, there is the emergence of inscriptions written in the Arabic language and in recognisably Arabic script from Najrān in the south to Aleppo in the north. It used to be thought that there were no more than three or four of these, but there have been a number of discoveries in the last few years that have brought the number up to more than thirty, and there is every chance that many more will be found as more professional surveys

64. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 137, notes that *arḍ al-ʿarab* is probably the earliest geographical term for "Arabs' land" and that it did not refer to the whole of the Arabian Peninsula (*jazīrat al-ʿarab*), but to "Mecca and the wider al-Ḥijāz"; it would then be a perfect fit, geographically and linguistically, for *provincia araborum* (*arḍ* is the term used to designate a province on early Islamic seals).

65. So it was not that Saracen replaced the word Arab (*pace* Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 47), it is simply that the two came to refer to different things. Since the Arabs were just inhabitants of a backwoods province, whereas "Saracens" designated all pastoralists who were not Roman citizens (as was the case also for the term Ṭayyāyē in the Syriac-speaking and Persian realms), who presented both military threat and opportunity, it is not surprising that Saracens (and Ṭayyāyē) are dramatically more common in our sources. I should emphasize that the terms Saracens, Ṭayyāyē and *aʿrāb* are applied to the pastoralists of Arabia by outsiders, and were not, so far as we know, used by them.

66. Hoyland, "Arab Kings," 392. For the late antique period Webb's point that one should not translate Saracen and Ṭayyāyē by "Arab" is, therefore, correct, but since Greek-speakers and Syriac-speakers kept using these two terms for many centuries after Muhammad to mean subjects of the caliphate, one presumably should translate them by "Arab" and/or "Muslim" at some point. Webb does not grapple with the problem that group labels can shift in meaning over time.

67. Yiannis Meimaris, "The Arab (Hijra) Era mentioned in Greek Inscriptions and Papyri from Palestine," *Graeco-Arabica* 3 (1984): 177-89 (nos. 1-5 = late antique, no. 6 and Nessana papyri 60-66 = Islamic).

are carried out in Saudi Arabia and neighbouring areas.[68] Secondly, there is the employment of Arabic alongside Greek in a bilingual inscription on the lintel of a church in the village of Ḥarrān, south of Damascus, that was commissioned by one Sharaḥīl son of Ẓālim, described as a phylarch in the Greek text. He evidently wielded some power in the region and should be seen as emblematic of a newly emergent Christian Arabophone elite in the province of Arabia. Thirdly, there is the use of the term *ʿarabī* in the Qurʾan to refer to the language in which it is revealed, which is patently close to the language of the aforementioned sixth-century Arabic inscriptions. When one adds to this the enhanced presence of Christianity and the increase in commercial activity from Najrān to Damascus at this time, one gets a sense of major changes taking place in this region.[69] Whether this is also connected with developments in Arab identity is too early to say, but it seems premature to rule it out entirely. The exciting discoveries of such innovative and dedicated scholars as Laïla Nehmé and Ahmad al-Jallad are bringing new insights to this field and are sure to lead to a revision of current thinking.

I fully sympathize with Webb's desire to prevent the retrojection of the Arab identity forged in the Islamic period into pre-Islamic Arabia. Medieval Muslim authors did just that and many modern scholars have followed them, and it has certainly impeded a clear understanding of the identities of the various peoples of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. However, Webb's conviction that Arab identity arose ex nihilo in the Islamic period leads him to dismiss too quickly any signs of its existence in Late Antiquity. It takes Webb, for example, less than five pages to conclude that pre-Islamic poetry shows that the term Arab meant nothing to its authors.[70] Part of the problem is that he operates with the notion that either we have a coherent all-embracing Arab identity or no identity, whereas a much more nuanced approach is needed. Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry would have been intended for internal consumption, mostly involving intertribal activity, so rarely necessitating reference to any higher-order identity terms. An example of one of these rare occasions is the verse by Durayd ibn al-Ṣimma: "I travelled throughout the land and yet I do not see the like of Ibn Jadʿān among the Arabs";[71] presumably the term was used to imply how widely Durayd

68. Greg Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 410-15; Christian Robin *et al*., "Inscriptions Antiques de la Région de Najran (Arabie Séoudite Meridionale)," *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes Rendus* 2014, esp. 1087-1107; Laïla Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions (Nabataean and pre-Islamic Arabic) from a Site near al-Jawf, Ancient Dūmah, Saudi Arabia," *Arabian Epigraphic Notes* 3 (2017): 121-64 (on a new Arabic inscription dated 548-49 CE); ʿAbdallāh al-Saʿīd, "Nuqūsh ʿarabiyya bi-lukna nabaṭiyya," *al-Sahra*, September 5, 2017: http://alsahra.org/?p=17938 (6 plausibly pre-Islamic Arabic graffiti from the Hegra-Tabuk region). Others have been found by Ahmad al-Jallad, who will be publishing them in due course.

69. Robin, "Ancient Inscriptions," 1052-5; Patricia Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman Army: Making Sense of the Meccan Leather Trade," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70 (2007): 63-88; Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 133-40, 263-76.

70. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 66-70.

71. Louis Cheikho, *Majānī al-adab fī ḥadāʾiq al-ʿarab*, vol. 6 (Beirut, 1913), 290. The Hebrew University's concordance of early Arabic poetry throws up at least ten references on top of those looked at by Webb. A couple more are analyzed in Agha and Khalidi, "Poetry and Identity in the Umayyad Age" (not cited by Webb). It is also a shame that Webb decided to take no account of poets who lived into the Islamic period, though born before it,

searched. There is no hint of course of a politically-conscious Arab community, but nor does it endorse the idea that the term had no meaning. I am absolutely not suggesting that "it was the powerful desire to realize this latent collective identity as 'Arabs' in political form that really generated the Believers' expansion and the creation of their empire"[72] or that "there was one pre-Islamic 'Arab' identity". I just feel that one should factor into the equation of the rise of Islam and the ensuing conquests all the complexities of the late antique setting.

The Conquerors as Muslims

Crone and Cook observed long ago, in reference to Muhammad's followers, that "there is no good reason to suppose that the bearers of this primitive identity called themselves 'Muslim'".[73] The Qurʾan does employ the word "Muslim", but only to indicate the action of submitting to God rather than to qualify members of a defined group, except perhaps for the Qurʾanic phrase "He called you the Muslims" (*huwa sammākum al-muslimīn*, 22:78). Even in the Dome of the Rock inscription in Jerusalem, it does not appear to have a technical sense: *naḥnu lahu muslimūn* evidently means "we are submitting to Him" rather than "we are Muslims for him". Similarly, the phrase *al-dīn ʿind Allāh al-islām* should be translated "religion in God's view is about submission (to Him)" rather than "religion in God's view is (the faith that bears the name) Islam".[74] However, the creed of the conquerors might have been distinguished from Judaism and Christianity even before their naming had been settled, and there are good reasons to believe that this would have been the case. The first and most obvious one, mostly ignored by armchair academics, is that war is nasty. Once people start dying, the lines between the opposing groups tend to harden. Not having any worries about political correctness, Muslim authors happily talk of beheadings and large-scale slaughter, though, as Donner is right to emphasize, they also speak of peace treaties and non-aggression pacts.[75] This leads us to a second factor that might have precipitated the erection of communal boundaries. In return for protection of their life and property the conquered had to pay a

which would have yielded at least forty references to "Arab(s)", since they appear to demonstrate an increase in the use of the term even at this early stage.

72. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 218; Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 5. Contrary to what both imply (*ibid*., 17 n. 15, lumps me with those who "view Islam's rise as a racial/national movement"), I have never written that Arab ethnogenesis drove Muhammad's movement or the Arab conquests. Often authors are using the label "Arab" because it is convenient, not because they necessarily think that all so labelled were participants in an outpouring of ethnic/nationalist sentiment (just as one can speak of the French conquest of north Africa without meaning that it was a consequence of French ethnogenesis, so also one might write about the Arab conquest of the Middle East without meaning that it resulted from Arab ethnogenesis).

73. *Hagarism*, 8. Though as noted above, the term Muslim seems to have more of a confessional sense in the Constitution of Medina.

74. Max van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum II.2 Jérusalem* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1927), 231 (no. 215, inner band, *islām*), 250 (no. 217, copper plate on lintel of north door, *muslimūn*). Possibly Muslim became a technical term not so much because the community was now becoming confessionally distinct from others, but because it was attracting large numbers of converts, who had to make a declaration of submission (*islām*) to the one God and to their new community.

75. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 107-9.

special tax, a poll tax, and this was not paid by the conquerors.[76] This differential tax status may initially have only signified the distinction between conquerors and conquered, but it very soon came to be perceived and represented as one between followers of Muhammad's religion and the people of the book (Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, etc), prompting many to "convert" to gain this tax-free status and so further reinforcing the divide between the religion of the conquerors and all other faiths.

A final factor that must have some relevance to the question is the radically changed situation in which the Hijazis found themselves as their conquests progressed. They were now rulers of a vast empire that comprised numerous different peoples and cultures. Donner takes it for granted that change was gradual and there was initially continuity of ideology between Muhammad's community and the subsequent conquest society, but possibly the drastically changed situation and/or the entry into the ranks of the conquering army of vast numbers of non-Hijazis forced a swift rethinking of aims and expectations.[77] One could even argue that a discontinuity between the Prophet's days and later times was perceived by the early conquerors, who mythologized it in the tale of how the caliph ʿUthman lost Muhammad's ring down a well halfway through his reign, ushering in a period of more unjust rule. But whether rapid or gradual, Donner is right that one of the changes was the transition from a confessionally open religious grouping to a more tightly defined and exclusivist one.[78] However, the present state of our evidence does not allow us to reconstruct this transition or ascertain when it occurred. One could argue, for example, that ʿAbd al-Malik's citation of the Qurʾanic verses instructing Christians not to "say three" or that God has a son on the Dome of the Rock indicates that Christianity was not yet perceived as a distinct confession from the conquerors and that the caliph was still trying to attract the Christians into the believers' fold. Yet, in the absence of context or commentary, one could equally make a good case for the opposite view: that ʿAbd al-Malik was being deliberately confrontational and intended to demonstrate the superiority of the conqueror's religion over those of the conquered.[79]

Conclusions

The question of the identity of the seventh-century Arabian conquerors is a difficult one to answer, but it is clear from the above that there is much more to be said about it and in certain fields, such as epigraphy and Qurʾanic studies, there have been some fascinating discoveries and important advances. By way of conclusion, I would just like to comment on some of the challenges that I have encountered in writing on this topic.

76. For discussion and references see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 72-74.

77. Patricia Crone, "Two Legal Problems bearing on the Early History of the Qurʾan," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994): 7, speaks of "discontinuity of a more drastic kind" in trying to explain why the meaning of a number of Qurʾanic words and concepts seem to have been unknown to the generation after Muhammad.

78. To my mind Muhammad had already initiated this process when he changed the *qibla*, opted for Ramadan as the month of fasting and instituted the hajj, as these sort of practices tend to mark out people as different.

79. One could likewise interpret the early Muslim use of churches for prayer as either a reflection of non-sectarianism (Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 51-52) or as a demonstration of colonial power.

Acceptance of Diversity

At the beginning of *In God's Path* I quoted the aphorism of Marc Bloch that "to the great despair of historians men fail to change their vocabulary every time they change their customs". This is particularly worth bearing in mind for the period of the rise of Islam, since the rapid transformation in the fortunes and circumstances of Muhammad's followers is likely to have led to equally quick shifts in the meanings of the terms that we use to speak of them. Moreover, one must accept that people do not operate with just one label for themselves, but employ different ones according to context and over time. Even if being a "believer" were paramount, other affiliations—to tribe, to city or region, to fellow traders or agriculturalists, and so on—would still have been in play.

As regards the term Arab, "Each individual could hold several passports," as one scholar has recently remarked in a consideration of ethnic identity in early medieval Europe.[80] It is possible, then, that some of the early conquerors would have used all the terms "believer", "Muslim", "*muhājir*" and "Arab" in different contexts, since they are in no way contradictory, but have different significances and connotations. As regards the term Arab, it might be better not to worry about ascertaining the moment of Arab ethnogenesis, or even thinking that there would have been such a moment,[81] but rather to accept that terms like Arab have been around for millennia, but who, what and where they refer to have changed frequently in the course of those years. In this respect Webb is certainly right to draw a line between the pre-Islamic and Islamic senses of the term (even if he negates the former), for there is no doubt that Arab came to be applied to many more people in many more places and with much changed content in the aftermath of the Arabian conquests. In sum, we need to have a nuanced approach when handling these terms and we should not get too fixated on coming up with a single term to describe the conquerors, the more so as their enormous success attracted huge numbers to their venture, quickly making the conquest society a very pluralist one.[82]

The Role of Religion

The most common criticism against my book, *In God's Path*, was that I was trying to minimize or even reject the role of religion. Thus Webb alleges that I neglect religion in favor

80. Herwig Wolfram, "How Many Peoples are (in) a People?" in Pohl *et al*., *Visions*, 105.

81. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs,* 6: "The moment when self-styled 'Arabs' began to imagine an ancient history for themselves is precisely when meaningful ethnogenesis was underway," but do we know that the self-styled Arabs of late antiquity that I listed above did not imagine an ancient history for themselves? I am increasingly thinking that ethnogenesis, with its implications of a people born anew and its close links to the "birth" of the new peoples of Europe out of the ashes of the Roman Empire, is not a helpful concept for thinking about identity shifts in the wake of the Arabian conquests. Was Arab ever an ethnic term, as opposed to a geographical, supratribal, linguistic or cultural one? For some thoughts see Chris Wickham, "Conclusions," in Pohl *et al*., *Visions*, 551-58.

82. See my *In God's Path*, 56-61, for the idea that the conquest armies comprised many non-Arabs and non-Muslims in their ranks, and the excellent study of Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Non-Muslims in the Muslim Conquest Army in Early Islam," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Fred Donner (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2016), 83-128.

of "realpolitik" and adopt "a secular perspective,"[83] and Scheiner attributes to me the views that "it was not religious zeal that motivated the conquests" and that "Islam functioned as an integrating factor but not as means of personal motivation".[84] Donner goes further and makes the repeated charge that I seek "to avoid a religious explanation of any kind," "to downplay the religious impetus" and view the Arab Muslim conquests as a process "that lacked a religious underpinning."[85] In reality I strongly emphasized the importance of religion to the conquests:

> I do not want to belittle the role of religion but rather to expand its remit. Religion is integral to the conquests and the evolution of an Islamic Empire, but religion is not just piety and devotion, especially not in the seventh century; it is as much about power and identity as spiritual yearnings and righteous behavior (p. 5).

Furthermore, I pointed to the conquerors' "ideological commitment" (p. 62), which I prefer to the rather amorphous term "zeal", and I underlined the mutually reinforcing motivations of God and booty: "the gains won by fighting for God made His warriors more desirous to serve Him in war and worship" (p. 64).

It would seem, therefore, that what divides me and these reviewers is not whether religion contributed to the Arabian conquests, but rather the nature of that contribution. This to some extent reflects a difference in the approaches of the disciplines of Islamic Studies and History. Whereas the former tends to stress heavily the belief aspect of religion, the discipline of History, while acknowledging this aspect, also seeks to bring out its socio-economic and political dimensions. So whereas Donner focuses on Islam "as a religious movement—not as a social, economic or 'national' one,"[86] I strove to bring out its other traits, such as its strong integrative capacity, which enabled it to assimilate the native population into the conquest society, a crucial precondition for the formation of a new civilization. I also take it for granted that, as a historian, one should look more to long-term processes rather than to individuals to explain major events and phenomena, so in seeking to explain the Arabian conquests one would want to consider what lay behind the collapse of Ḥimyar and Axum, the drop in settlement in east Arabia, the endemic fighting between Byzantium and Iran, the expansion of the Turks into the Middle East and so on, rather than just concentrate on Muhammad's activities in the Hijaz.[87] One could construe this as an attempt to reduce the role of religion, as my critics did. However, I think it is just a recognition that, like it or not, humans are embedded in the material world, so that even piety and spirituality cannot be regarded as free of all worldly connections (though they will often be portrayed as such), and that we

83. Webb, "The March of Islam," 24.

84. Scheiner, "Reflections on Hoyland's *In God's Path*," 25.

85. Donner, "Review of *In God's Path*," 137-38.

86. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, xii.

87. In the first draft that I sent to Oxford University Press I actually did not discuss Muhammad at all, since I felt that in some respects it made sense to separate out Muhammad's missionary work from the onset of the Arabian conquests, but it was felt to be unacceptable not to mention him at all.

are all to some extent subject to larger forces that both limit our ability to act and drive it in ways that we do not fully control.

Isolationism and Exceptionalism

Patricia Crone once mused on the dearth of new studies on the relationship of Islamic law to Roman law and attributed it to "the intellectual isolation in which Islamic studies have come to be conducted since the First World War." Her explanation for this was that "as the era of the colony gave way to that of the mandate and eventually to that of independence, Islamicists increasingly preferred to study Islam as an autonomous system developing internally in response to its own needs and by the use of its own resources."[88] Historians, by contrast, find it helpful and instructive to compare and contrast different cultures and polities. Donner states that "the basic argument of *In God's Path* is that the expansion of Muḥammad's community, which took over most of the Near East in the seventh and eighth centuries, should be seen as akin to the expansions of other 'peripheral peoples'."[89] However, I do not argue that the various expansions have some "intrinsic similarity,"[90] but rather that the weakness of Eurasian empires at this time and the simultaneous emergence of a number of different peoples who had been deemed marginal by their imperial neighbors should make one pause for thought and ponder whether there are common environmental or geopolitical forces at work. In each case, though, the emergence is triggered in different ways, follows a different trajectory and results in different entities. Yet it seems to me that it facilitates and enhances our understanding of the rise of Islam to think about the bigger picture rather than to look solely to Muhammad and West Arabia, but that does not mean that I wish in any way to downgrade the importance of the Prophet and his homeland.

A related problem is the idea of Islam's exceptionalism[91]—that Islam is so radically different that it cannot be subject to the usual rules of historical enquiry. This idea lies behind the disinclination to compare Islamic civilization with any other and the desire to portray the Islamic conquests as different from that of any other group. As noted by Aziz al-Azmeh, "claims for exceptionalism are used to justify an egregious disregard to both the normal equipment

88. *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1, 6.

89. Donner, "Review of *In God's Path*," 136.

90. Donner, "Review of *In God's Path*," 136. Likewise I do not argue that the Arab conquests are "similar to the Germanic invasions" and I certainly do not "see them both as processes that lacked a religious underpinning" (Donner, "Review of *In God's Path*," 138); I actually made the opposite point, i.e. *not* that religion was less important to the Arab Muslims, but that religion was a lot *more* important to the Germanic kingdoms than Islamicists tend to think; e.g. see Emöke Horvath, "The Role of Arianism in the Vandal Kingdom," in *Religion, Ritual and Mythology: Aspects of Identity Formation in Europe*, ed. Joaquim Carvalho (Pisa: Edizioni Plus, 2006), 171-79. There are, therefore, some grounds for fruitful comparison.

91. This term has been commandeered recently by Shadi Hamid in his book *Islamic Exceptionalism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2016), where he argues that Islam is unique in its relationship to politics. He is right that modern Islam is quite different from other contemporary religions in its involvement with politics, but in the past other religions, including Christianity, became intertwined with the political sphere. He is also right that the beginnings of a religion have some impact upon its future course, and yet many Christian groups have employed violence despite Jesus' injunction to turn the other cheek, and plenty of Muslim ones have urged peace despite Muhammad's role as a military leader.

of the historical science and the usual workings of human societies."[92] This is particularly evident in recent works dealing with the conquests. Webb states that my "purpose is to explain Islam's rise in rational terms, comparing it to other world empires," letting it be known that he regards both strategies as misplaced.[93] And it is common to encounter assertions such as "the success of the conquests is virtually beyond plausible historical explanation"[94] and "the dynamism of Islam's expansion defies explanation in ordinary human terms," or even that we should "dissuade historians from striving vainly to explain the almost inexplicable in normal historical terms".[95] I assume that there is a (presumably subconscious) apologetic aim at work, striving to counter the heavily negative press Islam receives in our day. However, to my mind such an approach, though well intentioned, does a disservice to the subject, and to Muslims for that matter, since it implies that they and their past are not part of the ordinary ebb and flow of human history. In my own words from my book, "my aim is to re-integrate these conquests and their impact into the fabric of human history, against the prevailing trend to see them as utterly exceptional, and I hope thereby to make them more explicable according to the usual norms of human behaviour" (p. 6). That does not mean that I wish to downplay their extraordinary nature—I emphasize that "the achievements of the Arab conquerors were immense"—but I feel that to give differential treatment is to risk exclusion, and it is surely better for all concerned if Muslims and their history participate, and are included, fully in the struggle of humanity to understand where it came from and where it is going.[96]

92. *The Times of History*, 249. Cf. Chase Robinson: "The supposed 'exceptionalism' of Islamic History says as much about professional expertise and religious belief as it does about the history made by Muslims: the laws of history (insofar as they exist) are not suspended in southwest Asia" ("Reconstructing Early Islam: Truth and Consequences," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. Herbert Berg, Leiden: Brill, 2003, 134).

93. Webb, "The March of Islam," 24. He also says that I call the conquests "ordinary", which I do not (I do not use that word in the book, rather I call them an "immense" and a "stunning" achievement), and "an accident which Arabians happen to pull off", whereas I offer a list of plausible causes. He also says that it is my "principal argument that Islam's rise was not exceptional," which I do not say at all in the book; but I would say that it was not exceptional in the literal sense of being an exception to human history at large. Yet it is surely not the job of a historian either to write a paean to his/her subject or to say that it is inexplicable.

94. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 50.

95. James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 463 and 464.

96. Arguing in a slightly different but related vein, Crone concludes her reply to Robert Serjeant's review of her *Meccan Trade* by saying "I have simply refused to treat the Arabs as an exception to the normal rules of history, and something is badly wrong in Islamic studies if I have to justify this procedure" ("Serjeant and Meccan Trade," *Arabica* 39, 1992, 240).

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Conference Report

Spatial Thought in Islamicate Societies, 1000-1600: The Politics of Genre, Image, and Text (Tübingen, 30 March to 1 April 2017)

Zayde Antrim, Jean-Charles Ducène, and Kurt Franz

For two days in the picturesque Swabian university town of Tübingen, a lively cohort of researchers came together for the first international conference on spatial thought in Islamicate societies, 1000-1600 CE. Organized by Kurt Franz, Jean-Charles Ducène, and Zayde Antrim and funded by the University of Tübingen, the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE)—Research University Paris, the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), and Trinity College (Hartford, CT), the conference schedule was intense, but also left time for informal, if no less vigorous, discussions over walks and meals in a variety of attractive local venues. What was absolutely clear at the end of two days is that a new generation of scholars is challenging traditional approaches to historical geography and cartography, uncovering exciting new sources, and integrating novel theoretical considerations and methodologies into their work.

The presentations were organized in panels that treated each of the themes in the conference subtitle: genre, image, and text. Kicking off the conference on Thursday evening, Zayde Antrim (Trinity College, Hartford, CT) gave an introductory lecture in Tübingen's historic Alte Aula entitled "Spatial Thought and the Limitations of Genre." Antrim questioned the dichotomizing effects of conventional genre distinctions, such as that between mathematical and human geography or that between geography and history. She also invoked, not for the last time during the conference, the foundational work of André Miquel and its complicated ramifications for the study of spatial thought in the period after about 1000 CE.

On Friday morning, the participants gathered in the lofty tower seminar room of the Institute of Classical Archaeology in Hohentübingen Castle, boasting panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. Opening the first panel on the theme of genre, Emmanuelle Tixier du Mesnil (Université Paris X Nanterre La Défense)

challenged traditional history of science approaches to Islamicate geography that amount to a catalog of discoveries (or, as she quipped, errors) shorn of social or political context. She argued, following Miquel, that medieval Arabic geography was not merely a vector carrying ancient geography to Renaissance Europe, and that its significance cannot be properly appreciated without understanding the social and political context in which it emerged. As a case in point, she demonstrated the effect of the turbulence and fragmentation of eleventh-century al-Andalus on the geographical work of al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094), who, by turning toward the south, was emphasizing its importance in his own political context.

While Tixier du Mesnil critiqued the way geographical literature has been treated as a decontextualized genre by historians of science, Kurt Franz (Universität Tübingen) introduced a new way of reading what might be called a "subgenre" of Arabic geography—the encyclopedia—exemplified by Yāqūt's thirteenth-century *Muʿjam al-buldān*. Instead of using Yāqūt's encyclopedia as a "quarry" from which to solve problems in footnotes, he argued that it should be approached as a coherently composed work that conveys meanings and opinions. Proposing narrative analysis as the best way to understand Yāqūt's project, Franz identified geographical micro-narratives at the level of individual articles and meta-textual master narratives that integrate the book. Although doing so for the entire work brings up problems of scale and methodology, Franz demonstrated his approach with a subset of Yāqūt's entries for the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, and al-Jazīra. His analysis revealed a preoccupation with forgotten places and uninhabited sites in the desert or steppe that might be reanimated by a "salvage operation" that featured, most prominently, poetry. These were not spaces shaped by the reach of imperial power, but rather by poetic allusions and the memory of readers whose knowledge of the poetic canon Yāqūt relied upon to fill in the blanks in his entries.

Rounding out the panel, Travis Zadeh (Yale University) used the concept of wonder, often associated with but not confined to the genre of *ʿajāʾib* literature, to interrogate the epistemological basis upon which Western discourse has determined what "qualifies," drawing from Ann Stoler's work, as "discovery" and "curiosity." Opening his paper with the claim made by the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in 2014, that Muslims were the first to discover America, Zadeh argued that this represented a response to a persistent colonial history in which Islamicate society has been deemed inward-looking and lacking in curiosity about the rest of the world. Instead, he proposed the concept of wonder as a discursive formation within Islamicate societies that made possible a serious engagement with the heterogeneity of existence, the ever-shifting boundary between the known and the unknown, and the limits of human capacity. According to Zadeh, meditations on wonder presumed curiosity to be a powerful drive. It was therefore never a matter of lack of curiosity, but of how—or where—to channel it. This was one of the purposes of spatial thought and geographical writing, Zadeh concluded, to establish frontiers as relational concepts—not as barriers to the unknown, but as historically contingent,

and thus always changing, ways of ordering a world defined by its diversity.

The second panel, on the theme of image, was convened after a refreshing lunch at Café Ranitzky in the Marketplace Square of Tübingen. Yossef Rapoport (Queen Mary University of London) opened the panel with a paper on mapping urban space. He began by noting that scholars have frequently dismissed maps of cities as rare or ignored them entirely. In response, he assembled a sampling of maps from manuscripts, such as the "Book of Curiosities," an anonymous cosmographical work composed in the eleventh century, and Ibn Mujāwir's thirteenth-century account of the Arabian Peninsula, to show a recurrent pattern in the graphical depiction of cities. According to Rapoport, these images focus on protection—walls, harbors—and sites of political authority. The rest of the urban space is frequently portrayed as empty. This offers a contrast to written representations of cities and urban life, which often emphasize religious structures and markets. This paper prompted a debate about whether or not such maps represent continuity with pre- and extra-Islamicate depictions of cities, such as the Madaba map.

Next, Feray Coşkun (Freie Universität Berlin) addressed world maps in manuscripts of the popular sixteenth-century Ottoman Turkish translation of Ibn al-Wardī's fifteenth-century *Kharīdat al-ʿajāʾib*. With examples from a variety of manuscripts, Coşkun argued that these world maps are particularly revealing of the historical context of their copying. For instance, the legendary Throne of Iblīs, pictured in East Africa in fifteenth-century Arabic manuscripts, was moved to northern Europe in one of the earliest manuscript copies of the Turkish translation, mirroring an Ottoman orientation toward the north as the land of the unknown or the dangerous. Another compelling example came from a seventeenth-century manuscript, which features an extremely large depiction of Constantinople, along with additional copyist commentary describing the city as the divinely protected center of the Caliphate. Coşkun concluded that these changing features indicate the flexibility of maps, which can be altered in dramatic or subtle ways to reflect their historical context, and help account for the prolonged popularity of the work in the Ottoman milieu. Like Rapoport, Coşkun showed that maps provide alternate venues for promoting conceptions of space than written works.

In the third and final paper on image, Nadja Danilenko (Freie Universität Berlin) analyzed the manuscript tradition of one of the most frequently copied cartographic texts from the medieval Islamicate world, al-Iṣṭakhrī's "Book of Routes and Realms." Danilenko's paper made three main points: first, that al-Iṣṭakhrī employed a novel visualization strategy that stayed relatively stable across centuries of manuscript copying; second, that al-Iṣṭakhrī's work was the only tenth-century Arabic geography translated into both Persian and Ottoman Turkish, a fact that reflects the cultural efflorescence of the Mongol and post-Mongol Persianate world; and third, that the continued copying of the manuscript up to 1898 was driven by many factors but perhaps primarily by its aesthetic appeal as a showpiece for elites. Danilenko's research has uncovered heretofore unknown manuscripts of this

work, bringing the total extant copies up to 51 (Arabic, Persian, Turkish), a major contribution to the field that has entailed painstaking archival work on four continents. Hers was one of the few papers in the conference that addressed the materiality of the sources and their role as commodities in circulation.

A long and lively day was capped by a visit to the Research Unit for Islamic Numismatics (FINT) hosted by the Department of Oriental and Islamic Studies at the University of Tübingen. There, conference participants were treated to a presentation by curator Lutz Ilisch on coins as sources for historical geography. It was a fascinating lesson not only on the ways in which distributions of coins and mints yield insight into political and economic fluctuations, but also on the challenges of assembling and maintaining such an extensive collection, second only to that of St. Petersburg. Afterwards, we gathered in Kurt Franz's office for a brief introduction to "*e*TAVO" (Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients), the massive geoinformation project under preparation he is coordinating, and the alpha version of the community-building website "Mamâlik: Place and Space in Islamic History," to be launched shortly.

Day two was equally exciting, featuring two panels on the theme of text: a poster session in which four graduate students presented their dissertation work, and an energetic and fruitful summary discussion. The Saturday morning panel was convened by a guest chair, Dana Sajdi (Boston College), and opened with a presentation by Stefan Heidemann (Universität Hamburg) on a digital humanities project that draws from ninth- through twelfth-century Arabic geographies to map the Abbasid Empire "on its own terms." Focusing on the five regions of Ifrīqiya, al-Shām, al-Jazīra, Fārs, and Khurāsān, the project's preliminary findings show that the locations included in each regional unit varied considerably among the geographers under study. This suggests that such regions did not function as territorially-defined provinces, but were rather administrative projections from the center without defined territoriality. He presented a sampling of maps of al-Shām from the project, which use translucent polygons to represent each of the region's administrative districts (*ajnād*) superimposed on a Google Earth base. This method makes it possible to layer different interpretations of the *ajnād* on the same map. It also has an advantage over previous attempts to map the Abbasid Empire, which have been less successful at conveying ambiguity and territoriality at the same time.

The second paper of the morning on al-Idrīsī's twelfth-century *Nuzhat al-mushtāq* constituted one of the only in-depth discussions of an author's method for integrating word and image. According to Irina Konovalova (Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow), al-Idrīsī used route data to organize space, but this presented problems, since the singularity of each of his sectional maps fragmented long-distance itineraries. He managed the limitations of his cartographic method by taking advantage of the possibilities of the written text for toponym repetition and intratextual cross-referencing, which together allow a reader to keep track of itineraries that stretch over more than one sectional map. Konovalova also argued that toponyms function in al-Idrīsī's work like "geographical objects." Consumers of this toponymy might appreciate the

Conference participants in Tübingen, Germany, 2017.

"idea" of the toponym—the object that it constituted, rather than the one it signified—without having need of detailed locational information about it. This was particularly true for faraway or large and boundless places. She concluded that for al-Idrīsī word and image not only represented two different ways of presenting information but also conveyed two different types of information, sometimes in interdependent and sometimes in independent ways.

The last paper of the morning panel straddled the themes of genre and text, as Jean-Charles Ducène (École pratique des hautes études, Paris) examined a set of works usually identified as administrative or chancellery manuals from the Mamlūk period. While al-ʿUmarī's fourteenth-century *Masālik al-abṣār* is sometimes included under the rubric of geographical literature, in particular because of its maps, other works, such as his *Taʿrīf bi-l-muṣṭalaḥ al-sharīf* and Qalqashandī's *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, not to mention works by their lesser known contemporaries Ibn Nāẓir al-Jaysh and al-Saḥmāwī, are rarely considered in discussions of spatial thought. Indeed, Ducène argued that analyzing these texts reveals a very different approach to space than that of more "universalist" geographers like al-Idrīsī. Mamlūk-era chancellery manuals order space in terms of proximity and relevance to the imperial center—in this case, Egypt—and sketch a geography of "states," recognized as such by their political, economic, and military power and their diplomatic relations with the Mamlūks. In short, Ducène contended, these authors developed a real political geography.

Before breaking for lunch on the lovely terrace of the Hotel am Schloss, the group assembled for a poster session featuring four PhD researchers who won travel grants to attend the conference. Brief presentations accompanied by compelling visuals addressed the importance of the

qibla as ritual, metaphor, and identity marker in early Islam (Ari M. Gordon, University of Pennsylvania); Bosnian hajj literature and local cosmopolitanism in the Ottoman Empire (Dženita Karić, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London); Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's vision of Southeast Asia as a frontier (Aglaia Iankovskaia, Central European University, Budapest); and a new digital approach to comparing descriptive geographies (Masoumeh Seydi, in collaboration with Maxim Romanov, Universität Leipzig).

The Saturday afternoon panel on the theme of text consisted of two, rather than three, papers, as unfortunately Sergey Minov (Oxford University) was prevented from presenting his work on Syriac cosmography due to last-minute visa complications. The panel was opened by Alexis N. Wick (American University of Beirut), whose paper on Ibn Mājid's fifteenth-century navigation guide to the Indian Ocean moved us from land to sea. Like Konovalova's al-Idrīsī, but unlike Ducène's Mamlūk administrators, Ibn Mājid organized space in terms of toponyms and routes, not sovereignty. His regular use of the first and second person suggested the importance of personal experience in providing practical guidance to others. Such references to firsthand knowledge were, of course, a means of authorial legitimation, but Wick argued that they must also be seen as part of a wider epistemological system in which experience, scholarship, and instruction were seamlessly integrated in the service of ordering, appreciating, and enabling movement through space. This system produced the sea as an inclusive space, mediated by the authority of navigators to be sure, but with the effect of making it more, not less, accessible outside of limited circles of personal experience and expertise.

The final paper of the conference was also the first one to deal with a text emerging from what has been called the genre of local history rather than geography. In a discussion of Ibn Isfandiyār's early thirteenth-century Persian *Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān*, Robert Haug (University of Cincinnati) stressed the importance of an author's autobiography to the representation of space. According to Haug, Ibn Isfandiyār's experience in exile, watching the Bāwandid dynasty fall to the Khwārazmshāhs, caused him to represent Ṭabaristān as a place of sanctuary. By narrating anecdotes about foreigners seeking refuge in Ṭabaristān over the centuries, Ibn Isfandiyār inserted his home region into the larger political dramas of the time. Haug concluded by speculating that this may also be a clue as to Ibn Isfandiyār's intended audience, a circle of fellow exiles for whom the ill treatment of refugees was a pressing concern.

The closing event of the conference was a summary discussion led by Nasser Rabbat (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Rabbat began by sketching three modes for depicting space in Islamicate societies between 1000 and 1600. The first, "verbal," consisting of oral or written descriptions of space, was already highly developed by the beginning of this period. The second, "graphic," consisting of non-mimetic visualizations of space, was gathering momentum over the course of, but especially toward the end of, this period. And the third, "representational," consisting of mimetic, perspectival visualizations of space, became important

only from the sixteenth-century on. Rabbat cautioned that this typology should be seen along a historical continuum, not as a template for discrete, consecutive periodization. Indeed, the "verbal" persisted as, arguably, the dominant mode for expressions of spatial thought until the modern period, and there have always been overlaps between the three modes, both within the sources themselves and within historical periods. Nonetheless, Rabbat contended that a pressing question for the study of spatial thought after circa 1000 is why—and in what cultural or historical circumstances—one mode was chosen rather than another. What do these choices tell us about, for instance, the development of genres, technologies, and divisions of labor?

Rabbat then provided some comments on recurring themes over the two days of paper presentations. He noted the importance of the political context to the production and circulation of spatially oriented texts, as well as to the shaping of their contents; he suggested ekphrasis as a conceptual tool to understand the rhetorical purpose of many of these texts; and he emphasized the significance of the concept of wonder and questions of the unknown—or unknowable—in spatial thought. The discussion that ensued was extremely vigorous and thought-provoking, as the group grappled with questions of epistemology—what "counts" as geography or cartography? How do we respond to persistent discourses that identify "absences" in Islamicate societies? Do we respond with "presences"? Or do we reject the epistemological terms that such questions force us into? The issue of genre was one of the more contentious, with some participants insisting on the usefulness of generic distinctions between, for instance, mathematical and human geography and others seeing such distinctions as problematic or ill-suited to the sources. Rabbat asked whether it is even possible for us to identify "indigenous" genres of medieval spatial thought or whether we are trapped between two options, imposing our own genres or defaulting to assumptions of "genre fluidity." In other words, have we arrived at limits of our own, a frontier behind which lies the unknown—or unknowable?

While leaving this open to future debate, the conference did generate consensus in several areas. The period 1000-1600 proved productive, despite often-heard classicist opinions of a deep decline following roughly the year 1000. Instead of denigrating "post-classical" geographies as derivative or inferior, participants stressed the ability of authors to innovate and adapt to a variety of contexts in a changing world. Also, it was consistently emphasized that the stock of relevant books and maps from this period is by no means exhausted. Making more manuscript materials available was deemed a prerequisite for understanding better the significance of spatially oriented works. Third, it went almost without saying that the multifold linguistic and cultural character of these centuries calls for more cross-sectional and interdisciplinary study. This pertains not only to the movement of spatial concepts between Arabic, Persian, Ottoman, and other literatures, but also to intertextuality among works composed in different genres or for different audiences, and, it may be added, even among literary or cartographical sources and spatially-relevant objects or buildings. Finally, the wrap-up session allowed participants to

place the discussion in a larger framework. Some of the most frequently raised questions during the conference addressed the social context in which geographers and mapmakers worked, to what extent their thought was shaped by practical needs, and what impact their products had on others and on the physical environment. These questions, as Franz put it, implied that the spatial thought of expert literati should be seen as but a very specialized and visible expression of the basic human activities that are movement and spatial cognition. As such, Franz concluded, the conference provided an incentive to integrate the study of spatial thought more fully into the field of social history.

If two days of papers on these topics taught us anything, however, it was that frontiers are always shifting. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity, and the group resolved to continue such discussions with the goal of reconvening in some form in two years. A celebratory farewell dinner at Tübingen's culinary treasure Le Romarin cemented this resolve and we dispersed into the night, some to early morning flights and others to a final day of spring weather on Tübingen's River Neckar, but all looking forward to future work on the frontiers of Islamicate spatial thought.

For the full conference programme and paper abstracts, see: http://www.spatial-thought.uni-tuebingen.de/

Conference Report

New Insights into Early Islamic Historiography: A Substantial Conference Report (Göttingen, 25-26 June 2015)

Yoones Dehghani Farsani and Jens Scheiner
with contributions by

Mehmetcan Akpınar, Antoine Borrut, Yoones Dehghani Farsani, Fred M. Donner, Georg Leube, Ilkka Lindstedt, Masoud Sadeghi, Jens Scheiner, Mónika Schönléber, Isabel Toral-Niehoff, Manolis Ulbricht

In his seminal study, *Islamic History: A Framework of Inquiry*, Stephen Humphreys presented the central question all scholars who try to reconstruct the origins of Islam have to answer on a methodological level: "In what sense [...] is it possible to reconstruct the political history of early Islam?"[1] In order to address this question several related issues have to be taken into account: (1) the textual form of the sources we use, (2) the degree of accordance between available sources to their previous textual forms in terms of narrative structure and content, (3) the paucity of reliable criteria for evaluating the texts' authenticity or fictiveness, (4) the problem that intensive source criticism does not leave much material for a historical reconstruction, (5) the issue that many of these texts do not respond to our contemporary questions.[2]

These (and related) challenges have long puzzled historians of the Islamicate world. In a workshop held at the University of Göttingen in June 2015,[3] seventeen junior and senior researchers of early Islamic history discussed questions of source criticism, authorship, and authenticity of Arabic sources by also contextualizing them with Syriac, Greek, and Ancient Near Eastern sources. Most of the participants presented their individual perspectives on one of the points raised above. These approaches (in addition to the ensuing discussions)[4] were not only

1. R. Stephen Humphreys: *Islamic History. A Framework for Inquiry.* 2nd ed. London 1991, p. 70. Of course, this question can also be applied to social, economic, religious or any other type of historical approach to this period.

2. This list is inspired by Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 70-71.

3. This workshop was sponsored by the Courant Research Center "Education and Religion (EDRIS)," the Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony, and the Göttingen Graduate School for Humanities.

4. The organizers would like to thank the panel chairs Prof. Dr. Lale Behzadi, Dr. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Dr. Zachary Chitwood,

thought-provoking, but also offered new individual insights into some of the central problems of early Islamic historiography described above. Therefore, the workshop conveners together with the participants agreed to publish these approaches in the rather unusual format of a "substantial conference report".

Thus, each participant was asked to summarize his ideas, case study or argument in a two-to-four-page long text in order to introduce them to an interested audience before the publication of the respective papers, monographs, translations, and studies. The outcome was impressive. Each contribution had something important to say on the above-mentioned issues and is worth being read. For instance, one contribution is—after severe source criticism—event-orientated, i.e. focusing on the status of the Jews of Khaybar after the town's conquest by the Prophet (F. Donner). That only one study pursues this path shows how significant the methodological obstacles are in writing the political history of early Muslim society. Most contributions, instead, are source-orientated, i.e. they either study the textual forms of the available sources or try to come up with older textual forms of these sources. To the first group belong the contribution on geographical terms in al-Azdī's *Futūḥ al-Shām* (J. Scheiner) and on Ibn Aʿtham's *ridda* narrative (M. Schönléber), while the second group includes contributions on the Prophet's nocturnal journey to Jerusalem (M. Akpınar), on ʿUmar's *khuṭba* at al-Jābiya (Y. Dehghani Farsani), on the ʿAbbāsid revolution (I. Lindstedt), and on the oldest Greek translation of the Qurʾān (M. Ulbricht). A third group of contributions highlights general features of early Islamic historiography, such as the one that discusses factuality and fictionality as doubtful criteria for a source's authenticity (I. Toral-Niehoff). Other contributions tackle multi-layer intertextuality as typical feature of this type of literature (G. Leube), the origins of the *fitna* theme in historical sources (M. Sadeghi) or the change of societal definitions on what constitute historical sources (leading to the exclusion of astrological histories) (A. Borrut).

The discussions during the workshop as well as this report prove that some stimulating studies are currently underway that—once published in fully developed forms—will further deepen our understanding of the potentials and boundaries of writing early Islamic history.

and Prof. Dr. Sebastian Günther for their effective moderation and engaged discussion.

Contents

I. The Status of the Jews of Khaybar

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There exist in the traditional Arabic sources many reports about the Prophet Muḥammad's conquest of the oasis town of Khaybar in northern Arabia. More than 125 reports are known, which vary in length, detail, content, and focus; some are related with full or partial *isnād*, others with no hint as to their origin or transmission. There are many conflicting details among these reports, and some exhibit clear signs of being later creations rather than accurate reports going back to the events themselves, such as the presence of *ṣulḥ-ʿanwa* traditions of the kind analyzed long ago by Albrecht Noth.[5]

This contribution focuses on reports about the status of the Jews of Khaybar following the Prophet's conquest of the town. The general impression one receives after studying the many reports is that the Jews of the city, after being conquered by the Prophet's forces, were at first asked to leave the oasis, taking with them only what they could carry: that is, the Prophet condemned the Khaybar Jews to almost total dispossession. Some reports include a story involving deceit by some of the Jews' leaders, which seems to provide the reason for the Prophet's harsh treatment of these leaders, although it is not explicitly given as a cause for the decision to evict the Jews as a whole. However, when the Prophet realized that the Medinese did not have sufficient manpower to cultivate the palm groves of Khaybar, the Jews were allowed by the Prophet to stay temporarily, so they could care for and harvest the date palms as sharecroppers, in exchange for half of the crop. Many reports describe the process of crop estimation and division, and many others discuss specifically how the lands of Khaybar were divided among the Prophet's followers. This arrangement—according to which the Jews continued to occupy the town and work its palm groves in exchange for half the produce—lasted until the time of ʿUmar; by then, we are told, the Muslims had enough manpower to work the lands themselves, and so the Jews were expelled and the lands divided up among their Muslim owners. When the Jews objected, ʿUmar quoted as justification a saying of the Prophet that "No two religions should exist in Arabia."

A number of reports exist, however, that diverge somewhat, or sometimes considerably, from the general narrative summarized above. But there are, as I argue, two basic facts on which all reports agree. They are (1) that Jews remained in Khaybar, in some status, after the Prophet took it over, and (2) that the Jews were

5. Albrecht Noth, "Zum Verhältnis von kalifaler Zentralgewalt und Provinzen in umayyadischer Zeit. Die „Ṣulḥ"—„ʿAnwa"-Traditionen für Ägypten und den Iraq," *Die Welt des Islam* 14 (1973), 150–162. An English translation by Gwendolin Goldbloom is found in Fred M. Donner (ed.), *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State* (Aldershot, 2008), 177-188. See for example the reports traced back to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741-2) in Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-sunan*, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (n.p., ca. 1990?), III: 171 (no. 3018), or Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. de Goeje as: *Liber Expugnationis Regionum. Auctore Imámo Ahmed ibn Jahja ibn Djábir al-Beládsorí* (Leiden, 1866), 23.

eventually expelled from the oasis by ʿUmar and their lands divided among the Muslim settlers.

To explain the evolution of the many confusing traditions about Khaybar and its Jews, I propose that the actual course of events was different from that implied in the traditions found in Ibn Hishām, and in many others that resemble it. The actual sequence of developments may have been as follows:

(1) When the Prophet and his forces subjected Khaybar, its Jewish population was left on the land because of a treaty they had concluded with the Prophet. The town's inhabitants, however, were required to pay half the annual date-crop as tribute. This arrangement continued until the time of ʿUmar (or later).

(2) The Jews of Khaybar were expelled by ʿUmar (or at a later time?) and their lands divided among the Muslims. (The division of lands may reflect an earlier division by the Prophet of the date crop taken as tribute.)

(3) In order to legitimate ʿUmar's action, three stories (or sets of stories) were generated by later traditionists and must have been already in circulation by the early second/eighth century. I argue that these three stories are:

(a) The story that the Jews were "hired" by the Prophet as sharecroppers because of a shortage of labor. This story effectively changed the initial status of the Jews of Khaybar from that of rightful owners having treaty rights to that of temporary sharecroppers who could be expelled at any time. This story is contradicted by a few reports that imply that the Jews had actually concluded a treaty or security agreement (*amān*) with the Prophet[6] (in which case they would not have been subject to expulsion).

In yet other reports, the Prophet tells the Jews "I affirm you on this basis as long as we wish" (*uqirrukum ʿalā dhālika mā shiʾnā*), or "as long as God wishes" (*mā shāʾa Allāh*),[7] but a variant transmitted via al-Wāqidī reads "I affirm you in that which God affirmed you" (*uqirrukum ʿalā mā aqarrakum Allāh*),[8] which sounds like a recognition of the Jews' possession of the land. The idea that the Prophet himself planned to expel the Jews of Khaybar until he changed his mind and let them stay was, of course, a convenient way of providing an exculpation for ʿUmar's (or someone's) later act of expelling them.

(b) The stories of Jewish perfidy. These stories seemingly justify the decision to expel Jews from Khaybar, but they are suspicious because they assume distinctly different forms in different reports. In one version, the Jewish leaders hide things the Prophet explicitly asks about, pleading that they no longer have them, and when

6. E.g., Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, ed. M. Khalīl Harrās (Cairo, 1969), 241-242 (no. 457).

7. Ibn Shubba, *Taʾrīkh al-madīna al-munawwara*, ed. F. Shaltūt, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1990), 178.2 and *ibid*., 177.2.

8. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, ed. J. M. Jones, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1966), 690-691.

their deceit is revealed by discovery of the hidden objects, the leaders are killed.[9] In a second form, however, the story is completely different: in it, the Jews kill ʿAbdallāh b. Sahl, who had come to Khaybar in the time of the Prophet (but after the conquest) as crop estimator.[10] The fact that the Jews' offense is described differently in various kinds of reports, each situated in a different time-frame, makes it appear to be a floating *topos* of "Jewish perfidy" used to justify their eventual expulsion, by either the Prophet or ʿUmar. It seems also possible to suggest that the ultimate expulsion of the Jews took place later than the time of ʿUmar, since ʿUmar, no less than the Prophet, was a convenient grafting-point for justifications of actions taken at later times.

(c) The story that the Prophet said, "No two religions should exist in Arabia." Some features of the wording and conceptualization of this report already make it suspicious, in particular its use of the phrase *jazīrat al-ʿarab*, which seems likely to reflect conditions toward the middle or end of the second/eighth century, when the concept of "Arabness" appears to have been developed and circulated by traditionists. Moreover, other reports suggest that the Prophet did not take such a negative view of other religions, or of the Jews—indeed, among the reports on Khaybar is one stating that the Prophet took ten Jews of Medina along with him when he went on the Khaybar campaign, evidently as advisers[11]—suggesting that he was not hostile to Jews as such, and making very suspect the claim that he issued a sweeping statement barring the existence of two religions in Arabia. The use of the word *dīn* in this report to mean "religion" in an abstract sense also arouses our skepticism. In the Qurʾān, *dīn* generally means either "custom" or "law, judgment"; it seems to have become commonly used to mean "religion" only in the eighth century,[12] which is therefore a more likely time-frame for the origin of the "no two religions" *ḥadīth* than the time of the Prophet in the early seventh century.

In conclusion, it seems likely, in other words, that the "discovery" of this supposed *ḥadīth* of the Prophet was another way to exculpate ʿUmar (or whoever eventually drove the Jews from Khaybar) for having expelled the Jews of Khaybar, via an appeal to alleged prophetic authority.

9. E.g., Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd: *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau et *al*. as: *Ibn Saad. Biographien Muhammeds, seiner Gefährten und der späteren Träger des Islams bis zum Jahre 230 der Flucht*, 9 vols. (Leiden, 1904-1940), II-1, p. 79, l. 27; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, III, 157-158 (no. 3006).

10. ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *Al-sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld as: *Das Leben Muhammed's nach Muhammed Ibn Ishâk bearbeitet von Abd el-Malik Ibn Hischâm. Aus den Handschriften zu Berlin, Leipzig, Gotha und Leyden*, 3 vols. (Göttingen, 1858-1860), 777-778.

11. Al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, 684.

12. See Fred M. Donner, "Dīn, islām, und muslim im Koran," in Georges Tamer (ed.), *Kritische Koranhermeneutik. In memoriam Günter Lüling* (Erlangen, forthcoming).

II. Geographical Terminology in al-Azdī's *Futūḥ al-Shām*

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In 1850, the famous orientalist, Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893), discovered an old and worm-eaten manuscript in one of Delhi's private libraries, which was said to have been established by the Great Moghuls. Since then this manuscript has been the focus of the study of the origins of Islamic religion and culture. According to its colophon, the manuscript bears the title *Kitāb futūḥ al-Shām* (i.e. *The Book on the Conquests in Syria*) and was copied in Jerusalem in 613/1217 by an unknown writer called Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ghassānī. This work mainly describes how a group of people called "Muslims" (i.e. submitters [to God's will]) took control of Southern Mesopotamia and Greater Syria (today's Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and the north of the Arabian Peninsula) in the course of a few years by means of negotiating with local people and fighting the Byzantine overlords. The detailed events and their narratological features shall not concern us here.

It is rather the question of authorship that is addressed in this contribution. Since the time when William Nassau Lees prepared the first critical edition of the manuscript in 1854, there seems to have been a consensus among scholars that the work was composed by a single compiler-author. On the basis of the manuscript's chains of transmission (*riwāyāt*) and the approximately 200 single chains of transmitters (*asānīd*) that are found throughout the manuscript a case can be (and was) made for Abū Ismāʿīl Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Azdī al-Baṣrī as compiler-author of the work.[1] Although biographical information on al-Azdī is scarce, based on his name he seems to have belonged to the Southern Arabian tribe of Azd and he—or one of his ancestors—seems to have dwelled in Baṣra where the Azd had settled in early Islamic times. Al-Azdī's death date is not preserved. On the basis of his teachers and disciples as documented in the *asānīd*, various years in the last quarter of the second/eighth or the early decades of the third/ninth century were suggested, making al-Azdī a contemporary of the well-known Iraqi scholar Sayf b. ʿUmar (d. ca. 180/796-797), who belonged to the Northern Arabian tribe of Tamīm.

The aim of this contribution is to give additional support to the view that the *Futūḥ al-Shām* was compiled by one person (who most likely was Muḥammad

1. Already Lees argued on the basis of the *asānīd* for al-Azdī's authorship: See Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Azdī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, ed. W. Lees as: *The Fotooh al-Shām. Being an Account of the Moslim Conquests in Syria by Aboo Ismāʾaīl Mohammad bin ʿAbd Allah al-Azdī al-Baçrī, Who Flourished About the Middle of the Second Century of the Mohammadan Era* (Calcutta, 1854 [Reprint Osnabrück 1980]), p. V. For a more detailed argument see Lawrence I. Conrad, "Al-Azdī's History of the Arab Conquests in Bilād al-Shām. Some Historiographical Observations," in Muḥammad ʿA. al-Bakhīt (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Shām During the Early Islamic Period Up to 40 A.H./640 A.D. The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham (1985). Vol. 1. English and French Papers* (Amman, 1987), 28–62.

b. ʿAbdallāh al-Azdī). This can be done by studying several clusters of information that serve as indicators for the work's textual cohesion. To these clusters belong the set of individuals and tribes mentioned in the work, the religious depiction of the Byzantines and the Muslims therein, and the usage of geographical terms in the text. While I have tackled the first two points in the study accompanying my forthcoming English translation of the *Kitāb futūḥ al-Shām*, some thoughts on the spatial feature of this work shall be presented here.

"Greater Syria" is expressed in the Arabic original as "*bilād al-Shām*" (i.e. the lands—or the regions—of Syria). In other words, this geographical space is conceived as an aggregation of regions that, together with some major cities, are mentioned in the work as well. Going roughly from north to south, these regions are: *arḍ Qinnaṣrīn* (i.e. the land of Qinnaṣrīn); *arḍ Ḥimṣ* (i.e. the land of Ḥimṣ) with Ḥimṣ as the major city; *arḍ Dimashq* (i.e. the land of Damascus) with Damascus as the major city; *arḍ al-Balqāʾ* (i.e. the land of al-Balqāʾ) with ʿAmmān as the major city; *arḍ Ḥawrān* (i.e. the land of Ḥawrān) with Bosra as the major city; *arḍ al-Biqāʿ* (i.e. the land of the Beqaa valley) with Baalbek as the major city; *arḍ al-Urdunn* (i.e. the land of the Jordan river) with Fiḥl as the major city; and *arḍ Filasṭīn* (i.e. the land of Palestine) with Caesarea and Jerusalem as the two major cities. These regions and cities are referred to over and over again, sometimes in relation to one another, for example, "*arḍ al-Urdunn* is adjacent to *arḍ Filasṭīn*", while at other times a city is related to the respective region, as in the case of Bosra, "the city of Ḥawrān." In analogy, Southern Mesopotamia is referred to as *arḍ al-ʿIrāq* (i.e. the land of Iraq), which consisted of the "land of al-Kūfa," "the land of al-Baṣra," and "the arable lands of Iraq" (*sawād al-ʿIrāq*), and includes the major cities of al-Kūfa, al-Baṣra, al-Ḥīra, al-Ubulla, and ʿAyn al-Tamr.

Neighboring "the lands of Syria" and "the land of Iraq" is, according to the *Futūḥ al-Shām*, the geographical space of "al-Ḥijāz" that is described as lying south of *bilād al-Shām* and north of Yaman (i.e. Yemen), and that represents the Muslims' home region. Al-Ḥijāz seems to have ended somewhere north of Medina, because Ayla, the port city at the gulf of ʿAqaba, is described as a "Syrian" town (most likely belonging to the "land of Palestine").

Beside these geographical terms, many more place names are mentioned in the *Futūḥ al-Shām*. However, most of them occur only once and cannot be taken into consideration here. Suffice it to say that all place names and in particular the regions and major cities are consistently used throughout the work, thus creating a coherent geographical image of these parts of the Middle East. This coherence speaks in favor of a single authorial hand that has shaped the work. In addition, the historio-geographical image that arises from this analysis can be tentatively associated with a well-known historical context. Hence, this image does not fit the context of the Ayyubid or Mamluk periods, i.e. a period during which the *Futūḥ al-Shām* is erroneously said to have been written.[2] On the contrary, this image is in accord to all what is known about Syrian space in the

2. Michel J. de Goeje, "Mémoire sur le Fotouho's-Scham attributé à Abou Ismaïl al-Baçri," in M.J. de Goeje (ed.): *Mémoires d'histoire et de géographie orientales* (Leiden, 1862-1864), II: 22-23.

first/seventh or second/eighth centuries. In other words, it fits the periods when the events are said to have taken place or when the suggested compiler-author, al-Azdī, is said to have flourished.

In conclusion, on a methodological level, this case study has shown that the analysis of geographical images can serve as an argument for a work's cohesion and its authorship. On a content level, the usage of geographical terminology (in addition to other indicators that earlier scholars had brought forward) strongly supports the argument that Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Azdī was the compiler-author of the *Futūḥ al-Shām*.

III. Ibn Aʿtham's Arrangement of *Ridda* Material

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Ever since C. Brockelmann's comment, in his magisterial *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, according to which Ibn Aʿtham's (d. ca. in the first quarter of the 10th century[1]) *Kitāb al-futūḥ* is a "*fanciful history* [...] *written from a Shīʿī viewpoint*",[2] certain suspicions swirl around this work.

Of course, this has not prevented specialists to use Ibn Aʿtham's texts for various purposes, although their access to the *Kitāb al-futūḥ* was for a long time significantly complicated by the lack of a comprehensive edition, which was only published in the 1970s.[3] However, this edition, prepared on the basis of four incomplete Arabic manuscripts[4] and a sixth/twelfth-century Persian translation of the work, did not necessarily clear up all important uncertainties. To mention only a single eloquent example, I refer to the fact that little more than one-third of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*'s Hayderabad edition could be created by relying on texts provided by more than one manuscript, given that the work's first ca. 22% (168 fols.) were

1. For Ibn Aʿtham's life, see recently Ilkka Lindstedt, "Al-Madāʾinīʾs Kitāb al-Dawla and the Death of Ibrāhīm al-Imām," in Ilkka Lindstedt, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Raija Mattila, and Robert Rollinger (eds.), *Case Studies in Transmission* (Münster, 2014), 103–130, esp. 118–123. For an earlier dating, cf. Lawrence I. Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī," in Julie S. Meisami and Paul Starkey (eds.), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (London, 1998), 314, and his long-awaited and recently published study: Lawrence I. Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham and His History," *Al-ʿUsūr al-Wustā* 23 (2015), 87–125, henceforth Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham".

2. Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur. Supplement*, 3 vols. (Leiden, 1937-1942), II: 220. The English translation follows Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham,"88.

3. Aḥmad b. ʿAlī Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, ed. M. Khān, 8 vols. (Hyderabad, 1968-1975), henceforth Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*.

4. Namely, FB Gotha MS. orient. A 1592, Ahmet III 2956/I–II, Chester Beatty 3272, and MS Mingana 572. For the proportion of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*'s preserved parts in the respective manuscripts, see the concise summary in Mónika Schönléber, "Notes on the textual tradition of Ibn Aʿtham's Kitāb al-Futūḥ," in Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Petteri Koskikallio, and Ilkka Lindstedt (eds.), *Contacts and Interaction. Proceedings of the 27th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants. Helsinki 2014* (Leuven, 2017), 427–438.

preserved only in a unique manuscript now kept in Gotha,[5] while another ca. 38% (278 fols.) containing the final parts of the book is again known from a single copy.[6]

In view of this unfortunate distribution of preserved sections, the exploration and proper identification of a new codex[7] (kept in Patna, India) incorporating a further copy of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*'s first chapters—covering the story of Abū Bakr's election, the *ridda* wars, and the early *futūḥāt* in Iraq—has enabled a significant breakthrough in the study of the early parts of Ibn Aʿtham's book.[8] It is, therefore, more than surprising that all successive editions[9] of the Patna manuscript ascribed the text to al-Wāqidī and, consequently, their accompanying critical apparatuses mirror the editors' firm belief in al-Wāqidī's authorship. Moreover, their misidentification also prevented them from correcting the mistakes of the Patna text on the basis of the corresponding part of the Gotha codex, or vice versa.

Thus, at the onset of my research, all these inadequacies prompted me to make an attempt to prepare a new critical edition of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*'s above mentioned early parts basing it on the available Arabic manuscripts and the lessons provided by the late sixth/twelfth-century Persian translation, in the hope that a new, firmly established text accompanied by an in-depth analysis of the work's textual tradition would be able to serve the needs of further studies.[10] The creation of a reliable text is likewise a *sine qua non* of the investigations of my PhD dissertation (in preparation), whose main aim is to understand Ibn Aʿtham's authorial contribution and concept when producing his version of the *ridda* wars. Instead of trying to fulfil the Rankeian maxima, i.e. to reconstruct "*what actually happened*" during the *ridda* fights, the focus of my research is rather on finding the place of Ibn Aʿtham's *ridda* narrative among the other written accounts reporting about these events.

The value of Ibn Aʿtham's text lies firstly in the fact that his narrative is not only one of the few literary sources informing us about the tribal conflicts after the death of Muḥammad, but it is—beside al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923), Ibn Ḥubaysh's (d. 584/1188), and al-Kalāʿī's (d. 634/1237) respective accounts—one of the longest and most informative one as well. This latter fact seems especially important because, with the exception of the above-mentioned authors, all other extant written sources

5. Published in Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, I–II, p. 146.

6. Ahmet III 2956, II, published in Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, VI, p. 101–VIII.

7. KBL Cat. No. 1042, ff. pp. 1r-44v.

8. Miklos Muranyi, "Ein neuer Bericht über die Wahl des ersten Kalifen Abū Bakr," *Arabica* 25 (1978), 233–260 and Fred M. Donner, "The Bakr b. Wāʾil Tribes and Politics in Northeastern Arabia on the Eve of Islam," *Studia Islamica* 51 (1980), 5–38, esp. 16, n. 2.

9. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-ridda wa-nabdha min futūḥ al-ʿIrāq. Kilāhumā riwāyat Ibn al-Aʿtham al-Kūfī ʿalā asās al-makhṭūṭa al-waḥīda bi-Bānkī Būr (Bāqī Būr/al-Hind)*, ed. M. Ḥamīdallāh (Paris, 1989); idem: *Kitāb al-ridda maʿa nabdha min futūḥ al-ʿIrāq wa-dhikr al-Muthannā b. Ḥāritha al-Shaybānī. Riwāyat Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aʿtham al-Kūfī, ed. Y. al-Jabūrī* (Beirut, 1990), henceforth (Ps.-) al-Wāqidī, *Ridda*, ed. al-Jabūrī; and idem: *Kitāb al-ridda*, ed. M. ʿAbdallāh Abū al-Khayr (ʿAmmān, 1991).

10. For some preliminary remarks on the textual tradition, see Schönléber, "Notes."

on the *ridda* are only several pages long, while the works of the known later second/eighth- and third/ninth-century authors, who are reported to have written separate works on the *ridda* or one of its individual subjects, are now lost.[11] Beside this, Ibn Aʿtham's *ridda* narrative has another interesting characteristic, namely that, although it is formally inserted into a book entitled as "*futūḥ*", it is, in fact, an independent theme within the whole work marked off by its own introductory section and a brief closing passage.[12]

The present contribution offers some of the results of a case-study that concentrates on the figure of Khālid b. al-Walīd as characterised in Ibn Aʿtham's *ridda* narrative. This examination does not only make it clear that Ibn Aʿtham was remarkably familiar with a considerable number of sources and traditions available in his time, but it also serves the recognition of the compiler-author's material-arrangement method. The incorporation of several motifs originating from different traditions, as well as the omission of others, enabled Ibn Aʿtham to reshape pre-existing narrations and to construct his own version by placing special emphases on certain characteristics of his protagonists. It is also interesting to note that Ibn Aʿtham's rendering preserved several motifs, not mentioned in other written sources, that might have been derived from now lost traditions, but which, for one reason or another, had not gained currency in Muslim historiography. Further similar analyses are needed in order to gain a better understanding of the emergence and *raison d'être* of this long neglected source.

But the limits of such an investigation are also clear. Many important issues raised by L. I. Conrad's ground-breaking study, such as, among others, the authorship, structure and later continuation of the work, and the use of *isnād*s, can only be conclusively answered after an in-depth analysis of Ibn Aʿtham's entire work.[13]

In conclusion, the above-mentioned (as well as some further) characteristics of the *ridda* narrative strongly suggest the benefit of conducting a separate analysis of Ibn Aʿtham's *ridda* story, whose results offer useful starting points for further research into the entire work.

11. See Wilhelm Hoenerbach, *Waṭīma's Kitāb ar-Ridda aus Ibn Ḥağar's Iṣāba. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Abfalls der Araberstämme nach Muḥammads Tod* (Wiesbaden, 1951), esp. 18–21.

12. This detached nature has been already pointed out by Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-critical Study. In Collaboration with Lawrence I. Conrad. Translated from the German by Michael Bonner*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1994), 29.

13. See Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham."

IV. Parallelisms between Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīra* Material and Muqātil b. Sulaymān's *Tafsīr*

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The *tafsīr* work by Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. ca. 150/767) is a prime source for extensive narrative material (e.g. *asbāb al-nuzūl*) that can be dated to the second/eighth century. A significant number of the narratives recorded in the *Tafsīr* also have parallels in Ibn Isḥāq's (d. 150/767) *sīra* work. However, Muqātil is silent about his informants, and his sources are unknown to us. By undertaking a comparative source analysis, this contribution investigates the possibility of common sources for the traditions of Muqātil and Ibn Isḥāq. Earlier scholarship has already indicated certain parallels between the two sources. Thus, John Wansbrough pointed out similarities between Muqātil's and Ibn Isḥāq's versions of a dialogue between the Meccan polytheists and the Jewish rabbis from Medina.[1] Similarly, Harald Motzki highlighted many parallels between Muqātil's and Ibn Isḥāq's accounts of the story according to which Walīd b. Mughīra devised a plan to defame the Prophet during the fair season in Mecca.[2] In expanding this investigation, I examine another account in which Muqātil's and Ibn Isḥāq's versions resemble each other more than any other available account. I focus on various episodes from the Prophet's nocturnal journey to Jerusalem, notably the description of Burāq and the detailed characterization of the physical features of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, as well as the episode in which Abū Bakr meets the Quraysh, and then goes to the Prophet to inquire about the details of Muḥammad's journey.

While, for example, an analysis of a wide range of classical sources on the descriptions of Burāq has shown that the information about its physical appearance originates exclusively in Basra, and is found especially in the Basran exegete Qatāda b. Diʿāma's (d. 118/735) narrations, I can show that Ibn Isḥāq's accounts on the *isrāʾ* episodes also demonstrate that the Basran exegetical traditions (i.e., a mixture of Qatāda's and his teacher al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's [d. 110/728] narrations) are his main source(s) for descriptions of Burāq. The physical appearance of Burāq as described in Muqātil's *Tafsīr* is also similar, and thus constitutes another parallel between his and Ibn Isḥāq's work. Although Muqātil almost never mentioned his sources, I can show other instances in which Qatāda's accounts are integrated into his *Tafsīr*.

Overall, my contribution discusses the role of the early second/eighth Basran exegetical material, especially the traditions which are often attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatāda, both in

1. John E. Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptual Interpretation* (Amherst, 2004), 122ff.

2. Harald Motzki, Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Sean W. Anthony (eds.), *Analysing Muslim Traditions. Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth* (Leiden, 2010), 274-276.

Muqātil's and Ibn Isḥāq's works. Thus, I raise the question about the symbiotic relationship between the individual exegetical traditions and the new forms that they take, not only in exegetical works, but also in the *sīra* literature.

V. Genesis and Textual Development of the *Futūḥ al-Shām* Ascribed to al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823)

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Among the extant *futūḥ* works there is one known under the title *Futūḥ al-Shām*, which is conventionally ascribed to al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823), the Medinan-Baghdadi historian of early ʿAbbāsid times. Unlike other available *futūḥ* works, such as that of al-Azdī and of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, which enjoy recognition among scholars of Islamic Studies as being valuable historical sources, the *Futūḥ al-Shām* ascribed to al-Wāqidī has been considered as a "pseudo-work" on the Muslim conquests that, although drawing on historical materials, is mostly a work composed in later times.[1]

According to bio- and bibliographical dictionaries, al-Wāqidī wrote several books on the early Muslim conquests during his lifetime, among them the one entitled *Futūḥ al-Shām*. We find accounts on these works and citations from them in later sources as well. This provides us with an opportunity to compare the extant corpus of the *futūḥ* material written/compiled by al-Wāqidī in his *Futūḥ al-Shām* (from now on *FSW*) with the book *Futūḥ al-Shām* ascribed to him (from now on *FSAW*) as two text corpora. I will provide a summary of this comparison in this contribution.

The comparison between the quotations from the *FSW* and *FSAW* was conducted from the viewpoints of the *isnād*s, the compilation methods of the compiler-authors of the two corpora, and the content of selected passages. At the end it should yield an image for each corpus, which then shows, how similar or diverse the *FSAW* and *FSW* are. In doing so, I aim to suggest a hypothesis regarding the genesis and development of the *FSAW*. In this contribution, I will confine myself to one example from the *isnād*s and one selected passage contained in the two corpora. I will therefore first provide a short account of the classical perception of the *FWS*, then a comparison between the two corpora. I will then discuss the results of this comparison.

Little is known about the original book, *Futūḥ al-Shām* by al-Wāqidī (*FSW*); few identifiable citations from it can be found in later sources. Muḥammad b. Saʿd, al-Wāqidī's distinguished pupil, speaks in the entry on his master in the *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* about the great knowledge of his master in the fields of prophetic campaigns, the biography of the Prophet, and the early Muslim conquests, about each of which al-Wāqidī is said to

1. Three versions have been edited and published, although no edition is a critical one.

have written books.[2] More than a century later, Ibn al-Nadīm provides a list of al-Wāqidī's works, in which a book under the title *Futūḥ al-Shām* can be found.[3] One century later, we find the *FSW* mentioned and quotations taken from it in the *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq* (*TMD*) by Ibn ʿAsākir.[4] Ibn ʿAsākir's reports show that he must have had the book at his disposal. In one place, he even points out that he read the quoted account in the *Futūḥ al-Shām* which al-Wāqidī wrote.[5]

Let us now turn to the comparison of the extant corpus of *FSW* with the book *FSAW* from the viewpoint of *isnād*s and selected passages from the two corpora, respectively.

(1) The *TMD* provides a single *isnād* three times in different places that connects Ibn ʿAsākir to al-Wāqidī. This *isnād* reads:

> Abū al-Faraj Ghayth b. ʿAlī > [...] > Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar al-Khiraqī > Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Sufyān al-Naḥwī > Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd b. Nāṣiḥ al-Naḥwī > Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidī [...].

As one can see in this *isnād*, before reaching al-Wāqidī, there are two scholars mentioned, i.e. Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Naḥwī and Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd, respectively. According to the biographical dictionaries, Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd was one of al-Wāqidī's pupils, while Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan was a pupil of Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd.[6] Furthermore, the former used to study the works of al-Wāqidī with his master Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd and transmitted them to later generations.[7]

In the collective *isnād* that stands at the beginning of the *FSAW*, one recognizes the names of Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd and Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Naḥwī.[8] This part of the collective *isnād* reads:

> Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidī > Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Sufyān al-Naḥwī > Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd

It is obvious that al-Wāqidī is falsely positioned at the beginning of this *isnād*, since he could not have studied with a pupil of his pupil. If we put al-Wāqidī in the right place in this *isnād*, i. e. after Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd, then we gain the last part of the *isnād* as found in the *TMD* mentioned above. This chain of al-Wāqidī, Aḥmad

2. Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau et *al*. as: *Ibn Saad. Biographien Muhammeds, seiner Gefährten und der späteren Träger des Islams bis zum Jahre 230 der Flucht,* 9 vols. (Leiden, 1904-1940), I: 314.

3. Muḥammad Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. A. F. Sayyid (London, 2014), II: 308.

4. See for example: ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ʿU. al-ʿAmrawī and A. Shīrī, 80 vols. (Beirut, 1995-2001), XXVII: 139.

5. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, XL: 455. That Ibn ʿAsākir used al-Wāqidīs work was also recently argued for by Scheiner. See Jens J. Scheiner, "Ibn ʿAsākir's Virtual Library as Reflected in His Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq," in Steven C. Judd and Jens J. Scheiner (eds.), *New Perspectives on Ibn ʿAsākir in Islamic Historiography* (Leiden, 2017), 176-178.

6. Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-Salām*, ed. B. Maʿrūf, 12 vols. (Beirut, 2001), V: 142.

7. Ibid.

8. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, ed. W. Lees as: *The Conquest of Syria. Commonly ascribed to Aboo ʾAbd Allah Moḥammad b. ʾOmar al-Wáqidí*, 3 vols. (Calcutta, 1854-1862), I: 1.

b. ʿUbayd, and Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan occurs at least one more time in the *FSAW*.[9] What one may conclude is that in both the *FSAW* and the *FSW* a similar *ṭarīq* of transmission of knowledge from al-Wāqidī to later generations is identifiable.

(2) As mentioned above, Ibn ʿAsākir quotes short accounts directly from the original *FSW*. In one place he mentions the beginning of the *khuṭba* which ʿUmar delivered in al-Jābiya.[10] It reads:

> *Ayyuhā al-nās, ūṣīkum bi-taqwā llāh al-lādhī yabqā wa-yafnā mā siwāhu, wa-l-lādhī bi-ṭāʿatihī yanfaʿ awliyāʾuhū wa-bi-maʿṣiyatihī yaḍurru aʿdāʾuhū. Fa-dhakara al-khuṭba.*
>
> Oh people! I advise you to fear God, who is everlasting and everything but him will perish, whose friends will benefit from their obedience to them, and whose enemies will be harmed through their disobedience towards him. Afterwards he started his speech.

A *khuṭba* which ʿUmar is said to have delivered in al-Jābiya is found in the *FSAW*, as well.[11] The beginning of this *khuṭba*, according to the *FSAW*, reads:

> *Ammā baʿd: fa-innī ūṣīkum bi-taqwā llāh ʿazza wa-jalla al-lādhī yabqā wa-yafnā kull shayʾ siwāhu, al-lādhī bi-ṭāʿatihī yanfaʿ awliyāʾuhū wa-bi-maʿṣiyatihī yafnī aʿdāʾuhū. Ayyuhā al-nās! Addū zakat amwālikum.*
>
> Now to the topic: I advise you to fear God—the Strong and Exalted—who is everlasting and everything but Him will perish, whose friends will benefit from his obedience and whose enemies will be harmed by their disobedience towards him. Oh people! Pay the alms tax from your ownings [...].

This example shows that both works preserve the same texts and that one should expect to find this *khuṭba* in both corpora. However, Ibn ʿAsākir abbreviated his version. A number of other parallel passages occur in the *TMD* and the *FWAS* as well.[12]

In conclusion, one may observe that the two corpora, i.e. the *FSW* and the *FSAW*, resemble each other from the viewpoints of *isnād*s and the content of selected passages. Therefore, it seems possible to suggest the hypothesis that the *FWAS* actually represents in its core the *FSW*, which however has presumably suffered changes during the pass of time. This hypothesis has to be supported by more evidence which I will provide in my forthcoming study of the *FWAS*.

9. Al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, III: 1.

10. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, XL: 455.

11. Al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, II: 261.

12. I am aware that one should take the possibility into account that the two very similar passages could represent a standard formulaic beginning for a *khuṭba*. However, even in this case it is more likely that both corpora have a similar content.

VI. The ʿAbbāsid Revolution and Its Earliest Historiography

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This contribution centers on the narratives of the ʿAbbāsid revolution (*dawla*) and its aftermath that took place in the years 129–137 AH/747–755 CE. I study two works on these events, both called *Kitāb al-dawla*, composed by Arab Muslim collectors (*akhbārī*s) of historical narratives, al-Haytham b. ʿAdī (d. ca. 205/820–1) and al-Madāʾinī (d. ca. 228/842–3). The works are not extant, but can be reconstructed, to some extent, on the basis of later quotations.[1]

The principles for reconstructing al-Madāʾinī's *Kitāb al-dawla* from Ibn Aʿtham's *Kitāb al-futūḥ* and al-Ṭabarī's *Annales* have been discussed previously by Gernot Rotter and myself.[2] Al-Haytham b. ʿAdī's *Kitāb al-dawla* has been reconstructed in a study by Tilman Nagel on the basis of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's (d. 328/940) *Al-ʿiqd al-farīd*.[3]

I argue that themes in preparation of the revolution are not very important in al-Madāʾinī's narrative.[4] The fact that al-Madāʾinī did not have much to do with the ʿAbbāsid ruling elite might be a factor in this. As to al-Haytham b. ʿAdī, who frequented the ʿAbbāsid Caliphs from al-Manṣūr to al-Rashīd, themes of preparation were much more important for him, as far as we can judge from Nagel's reconstruction. In his *Kitāb al-dawla*, al-Haytham b. ʿAdī emphasized the significance of Abū Hāshim b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya's testament to the ʿAbbāsids.[5] For him, the role of al-ʿAbbās as the Prophet's uncle is not an important factor for the genealogical legitimation of the ʿAbbāsids. According to al-Haytham, the "secret *bayʿa* and the clandestine *daʿwa*"[6] was carried out by the Hāshimites since the killing of al-Ḥusayn. His narrative, then, links the advent of the ʿAbbāsids with the wider context of the Shīʿa. In al-Haytham b. ʿAdī's narrative, the testament of Abū Hāshim foretells that the two first ʿAbbāsid Caliphs (Abū al-ʿAbbās and al-Manṣūr) will both be *ṣāḥib hādhā al-amr*, "possessor of this authority/cause."[7] Ibrāhīm al-Imām is overlooked, probably showing embarrassment of his fate: his untimely death in Ḥarrān at the hands of Marwān.[8]

1. Ilkka Lindstedt, "Al-Madāʾinī's Kitāb al-dawla and the Death of Ibrāhīm al-Imām," in Ilkka Lindstedt, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Raija Mattila, and Robert Rollinger (eds.), *Case Studies in Transmission* (Münster, 2014), 103–130.

2. Gernot Rotter, "Zur Überlieferung einiger historischer Werke Madāʾinīs in Ṭabarīs Annalen," *Oriens* 23-24 (1974), 103–133; Lindstedt, *Al-Madāʾinī's Kitāb al-dawla*.

3. Tilman Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des abbasidischen Kalifates* (Bonn, 1972), 9–69; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi al-Andalusī, *Al-ʿiqd al-farīd*, ed. A. Amīn, A. al-Zayn, and I. al-Abyārī, 7 vols. (Cairo, 1940), IV: 475–482.

4. Only Aḥmad b. ʿAlī Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, ed. M. Khān, 8 vols. (Hyderabad, 1968-1975), VIII: 159–160, represents them.

5. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Al-ʿiqd al-farīd*, IV: 475–476.

6. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Al-ʿiqd al-farīd*, IV: 475.

7. Jacob Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory. An Inquiry into the Art of ʿAbbāsid Apologetics* (New Haven, 1986), 57–58.

8. On the accounts of Ibrāhīm al-Imām's demise, see Lindstedt, *Al-Madāʾinī's Kitāb al-dawla*.

In al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-dawla*, the sending of the ʿAbbāsid propagandists (*duʿāt*) is placed at the year 100 AH,[9] a figure that has clear apocalyptic undertones. In the same year, it is said, the ʿAbbāsid *mahdī*, the first Caliph Abū al-ʿAbbās, is born.

Indeed, it seems that al-Madāʾinī's *Kitāb al-dawla* also began with a narrative that 'demonstrated' the ʿAbbāsids' supremacy over the Ḥasanids (and, one suspects, at the same time of the ʿAbbāsids' supremacy over the other lineages of the family of the Prophet).[10] In the story, which takes place in the Umayyad era, ʿAbdallāh b. al-Ḥasan, al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's father, says that it is not yet the time for his sons to revolt. However, the ʿAbbāsid ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlī says that if the Ḥasanids will not revolt, he will snatch the power from the Umayyads.

According to Nagel, in the early narratives speaking about the revolution itself, the word *dawla* takes on messianistic overtones.[11] There are accounts ascribed to al-Haytham b. ʿAdī that connect the ʿAbbāsids *daʿwa* and *dawla* to the different Shīʿī uprisings of the last years of the Umayyads. These accounts can be adorned with poetic embellishment, such as the poetry of Sudayf b. Maymūn that link together the killings of al-Ḥusayn (called *sibṭ Aḥmad*, "the grandson of Aḥmad [the Prophet]"), Zayd b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn, his son Yaḥyā b. Zayd, and Ibrāhīm al-Imām.[12] The ʿAbbāsids are in this way connected to the Shīʿa, broadly understood, and are seen as avengers of the deaths of the earlier Shīʿī figures.[13] Moreover, Abū al-ʿAbbās is transformed as the sole real, legitimate caliph that the Muslim community has ever had in addition to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[14]

Also in al-Madāʾinī's *Kitāb al-dawla* the killings of Zayd b. ʿAlī and Yaḥyā b. Zayd play a significant role. It is said that donning the color black was a sign of mourning for the two figures.[15] In one tradition, when the Khurāsānians address Ibrāhīm al-Imām, they note that Zayd b. ʿAlī and Yaḥyā b. Zayd are called "people of your house" (*ahl baytika*).[16]

ʿAbbāsid historiography, then, showed the ʿAbbāsids drawing legitimacy from three different Shīʿī sources: a) through a testament from Abū Hāshim ← Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya ← ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib; b) al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, by avenging his killing; c) Zayd b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī and his son Yaḥyā b. Zayd, by avenging their killings. No wonder, then, that according to al-Madāʾinī's *Kitāb al-dawla*, the people in al-Kūfa expected the Khurāsānian troops to proclaim an ʿAlid as caliph.[17]

The narratives representing the themes in the aftermath of the battle were important in al-Madāʾinī's *Kitāb*

9. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Al-ʿiqd al-farīd*, IV: 477.

10. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, VIII: 159–160.

11. Nagel, *Untersuchungen*, 9–12.

12. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf,* ed. ʿA. al-Dūrī et *al*. To date 7 vols. in 9 (Beirut, 1978), III: 126, 162.

13. Elton Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under Abbasid Rule 747–820* (Minneapolis, 1979), 39 remarks: "As always, the Abbasids capitalized on the strength of other movements by assimilating them with their own."

14. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, III: 140–141.

15. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, VIII: 160.

16. Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East. The Establishment of the ʿAbbāsid State. Incubation of a Revolt* (Leiden, 1983), 147, n. 176, referring to the Anonymous, *Akhbār al-ʿAbbās,* ed. ʿA. al-Dūrī and ʿA. al-Muṭṭalibī as: *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿabbāsiyya wa-fīhi akhbār al-ʿAbbās wa-waladihī* (Beirut, 1971), 241.

17. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, VIII: 177, last line.

al-dawla. The accounts form a story how the ʿAbbāsids, once in power, cleansed their political base of figures that were not anymore needed or that were dangerous to the new dynasty in the post-revolutionary reality. For al-Haytham, these themes were not as central. His *Kitāb al-dawla* virtually ends with the *bayʿa* to Abū al-ʿAbbās in the year 132/749. The reign of al-Manṣūr and the murders of Abū Salama and Abū Muslim are only briefly hinted at.[18]

Al-Madāʾinī continued the story to the first years of the second ʿAbbāsid caliph, al-Manṣūr, who is indeed the principal figure in the political murders. In al-Madāʾinī's *Kitāb al-dawla*, the aftermath consists of four different narratives:

(1) The murder of Abū Salama which takes place in the reign of Abū al-ʿAbbās but in which al-Manṣūr is the central player.[19]

(2) The death of Abū al-ʿAbbās (136/754) and the *bayʿa* to al-Manṣūr. However, at the former's death, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlī also proclaims himself caliph, which leads al-Manṣūr to send Abū Muslim to fight him. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlī is defeated but not killed.[20]

(3) Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ drafts a foolproof *amān* for ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlī. This irks al-Manṣūr who wants to have Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ killed. The murder is carried out by Sufyān b. Muʿāwiya al-Muhallabī who had also a personal grudge.[21]

(4) The ending and the culmination of the *Kitāb al-dawla* is the murder of Abū Muslim at the hands of al-Manṣūr. The leading figure in the revolutionary phase is done away with and the rule belongs completely to al-Manṣūr.[22]

Al-Haytham b. ʿAdī does not mention Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ in his *Kitāb al-dawla*, as far as it can be reconstructed. To add the killing of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (ca. 139/756–7) to those of Abū Salama and Abū Muslim seems to be a novel innovation of al-Madāʾinī.

In conclusion, the early third/ninth century was a time when interest in the history of the ʿAbbāsid *dawla* really began, although it is impossible in most cases to date the works with any precision. Early compilations, like those by al-Haytham b. ʿAdī and al-Madāʾinī, were later incorporated in the longer works of authors such as Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī and al-Ṭabarī and into the grand narrative of the Muslim community.

18. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Al-ʿiqd al-farīd*, IV: 482; Nagel, *Untersuchungen*, 11.

19. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, VIII: 207–209; Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. de Goeje et *al.* as: *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari*, 15 vols. (Leiden, 1879-1901), III: 58–59; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, III: 154–155.

20. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III: 89–98; Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, VIII: 214–218.

21. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, VIII: 218–219; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, III: 221–223.

22. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, VIII: 219–229; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III: 99–119; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, III: 201–204.

VII. The Earliest Translation of the Qurʾān

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My contribution aims at examining the very first translation of the Qurʾān, produced in Greek in the third/ninth century, and to compare it with the original Arabic text. This translation by an anonymous author, while generally very accurate, contains some textually subtle, but theologically highly important differences with respect to the Arabic text. This seems to be the result of a Christian hermeneutical reading of the Qurʾān.

The translation was used in a Byzantine polemic against Islam, the so-called *Refutation of the Qurʾān* (Ἀνατροπὴ τοῦ Κορανίου)[1] by Nicetas of Byzantium (fl. 9th century). Additionally, and beyond the comparison, the research analyzes the use and function of this translation in Nicetas' *Anatropē*, which is its main and oldest source (Vat. gr. 681). This is important in order to determine Nicetas' image of Islam and to consider his impact on later Byzantine and Western writers concerning Islam.

Nicetas is the first to actually use the Qurʾān itself for a refutation of the Islamic faith. His attempt had a vast influence on later Byzantine and even mediaeval European apologetic writing against Islam. He composed, besides a polemical treatise against the Latins and Armenians respectively, two letters directed to a Muslim emir as well as his *opus magnum*, the *Refutation of the Qurʾān*, which he wrote around 860 CE. Nicetas ought to be seen in the light of the re-emerging Byzantine Empire in the ninth century; he is likely to have been a monk[2] and a member of the clerical elite of Constantinople, since he was close to the Emperor's court and to the patriarch of Constantinople, Photios (858–867 & 878–886).[3]

Biographical details about Nicetas are very scarce and can only be reconstructed from his works, even though he was one of the most important polemicists, wielding the greatest influence on Byzantine and even medieval views of Islam until the late Middle Ages. It is astonishing, therefore, that until now there has been conducted no complete analytical research of Nicetas' writings. Furthermore, no studies have been written about possible interrelations between the first translation of the Qurʾān, which was used by Nicetas, and later translations, such as the one commissioned by Petrus Venerabilis (1142), from which

1. Henceforth *Anatropē*.

2. Inferring from some expressions in his works which apply the conviction of a monk, cf. Manolis Ulbricht: "Al-tarjama al-ʾūlā li-l-Qurʾān al-karīm min al-qarn 8/9 m. fī sijjāl Nīkītās al-Bīzanṭī (al-qarn 9 m) maʿa al-islām bi-ism Tafnīd al-Qurʾān" [In Arabic: "La première traduction du Coran du 8ème/9ème siècle et son utilisation dans la polémique de Nicétas de Byzance (9ème siècle) avec le titre 'Réfutation du Coran'"], *Chronos: Revue d'histoire de l'Université de Balamand* 25 (2012), 33–58, here p. 37 (or online URL: http://edocs.fu-berlin.de/docs/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/FUDOCS_derivate_000000005501/Ulbricht_Traduction-du-Coran_Chronos-25_2012.pdf)

3. As he was officially assigned to compose the response to the Armenians. Cf. also the title of his letter against the Armenians (in *PG* 105, 587–588).

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was inspired, or the one later made by Marcus of Toledo (1209/10).

As part of my research on the *Coranus Graecus*,[4] I will provide a critical edition of the fragments of the Greek translation of the Qurʾān, preserved in the *codex unicus* Vat. gr. 681 of Nicetas of Byzantium, and an analytical commentary of Nicetas' work. Furthermore, I will analyze Nicetas' argumentation in his *Anatropē* along with his methods of adapting the Greek translation for polemical theological purposes. This forthcoming work will include a concordance and indices, such as for grammatical phenomena, transliterated terms, syntactical patterns, and the translation of particular Arabic expressions into Greek, and so on.

The commentary studies the Greek translation of the Qurʾān with respect to historical, theological, and socio-cultural aspects. First, I examine the differences between the Greek and the Arabic texts of the Qurʾān by verifying if another reading, besides the reading of Ḥafṣ *ʿan* ʿĀṣim, i.e. the one of the current Cairo edition of 1924, was used for the translation. From the typology of linguistic inconsistencies between the Greek and the Arabic texts, I furthermore draw conclusions about the religious and cultural environment of the translator and about the character of the translation. Finally, I give insight into how Nicetas used this translation by classifying the usage of the Qurʾān within his polemics into different subjects, such as: 'ethics', 'Christology', 'violence', etc. This way one can illustrate that Nicetas' arguments had a long afterlife not only in the Byzantine realm, but also in the Latin Middle Ages up to the Modern Period.

Focusing on the translation itself, it became clear, that it is an accurate and mostly literal one.[5] However, it does not seem to be an official work since its language level is close to the spoken Byzantine Greek. It has rather strong influences of a vulgar Greek of the Byzantine era, which makes the manuscript one of the rare testimonies of written Byzantine colloquial language. Moreover, as the concordance and indices will show, there are a number of irregularities within the translation process, which might stem from the use of another Arabic Qurʾān reading than Ḥafṣ *ʿan* ʿĀṣim and/or from the fact that it was not only one person who translated the Qurʾān.

The translator obviously possessed deep knowledge of the Christian Orthodox liturgy as he uses various technical terms from the Greek liturgical books in his work. For example, he depicts the Arabic word "*qurʾān*" in Greek as «ἀνάγνωσμα» ('reading') with a clear reference to the Gospel readings in Christian liturgy, or he translates the word "*sūra*" as «ᾠδή» ('ode'), which is an expression for a certain form of liturgical hymn. These observations lead to the conclusion that the anonymous translator is most likely a Christian, maybe a monk, but at the same time acquainted with a profound knowledge of Islamic rites and prayer practices. He can only have acquired this knowledge by cohabitation with Muslims. As I argue, the translator, who lived somewhere in the Middle East, was also part of this cultural-religious exchange and therefore followed the

4. Manolis Ulbricht, "*Coranus Graecus*" [in preparation for *Studi e testi*, Rome (Vatican) forthcoming].

5. For the following see Ulbricht, "Al-tarjama."

tradition of John of Damascus and Theodor Abū Qurra.

It is remarkable that discrepancies between both the Greek and the Arabic version appear particularly in expressions related to doctrinal questions in Islam and Christianity. For instance, a certain kind of difference appears regularly in verses referring to Jesus Christ: in different *sūra*s, his name is connected to the term *kalima* ('word'). However, in the Arabic text, the word appears without the article. The Greek translation, by contrast, determines this expression by adding the definite article, calling him e.g. «ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ» ('the Word of God'), while the Arabic text gives 'a word of God'. This radically changes the sense of the Qurʾānic text because it thereby assumes the Christian teachings about Jesus Christ as 'the Word of God' and thus, as the 'only begotten Son of God', which is strictly refused by Islam and in the Qurʾān itself.

In conclusion, my research is directly related to the question of understanding the Qurʾān itself, which requires consulting lexicographical and exegetical literature. By analyzing the Greek translation, we can get an idea of the comprehension of the Qurʾānic text itself in early times and furthermore, of the literature the translator had at his disposal for both understanding and translating the Qurʾān. This would provide us with a better understanding of the historical development of exegetical literature on the Qurʾān.

VIII. The Fact-Fiction-Debate in Early Muslim Historiography

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Since the pivotal publications in the seventies by Albrecht Noth, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook, there has been an ongoing and most likely never-ending debate on the validity, authenticity, and historicity of Arabic historiography for the study of early Islam. It has produced conflicting and mutually exclusive "schools" of historians working on this period.[1] Against the background of the general "linguistic" and "literary" turn in Historical Studies of recent decades,[2] we can further observe that Islamicists increasingly have started to apply methodical tools drawn from Literary Studies (as e.g. from the broad field of narratology[3]), in the hope that these might help to assess the factuality (and therefore reliability) of these texts. The articles by

1. Cf. for a survey Fred M. Donner, "Modern Approaches to Early Islamic History," in Chase Robinson (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam. Vol. I*, (Cambridge, 2011), 625-644; cf. also Robert G. Hoyland, "History, Fiction and Authorship in the First Centuries of Islam," in Julia Bray (ed.), *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam. Muslim Horizons* (London, 2006), 16–46.

2. This process was strongly influenced by Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973).

3. See for instance Gérard Genette, Nitsa Ben-Ari, and Brian McHale, "Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative," *Poetics Today* 11 (1990), 755-774.

Stefan Leder have been pioneering in this regard,[4] since he introduced the theses of the German Medievalist Wolfgang Iser on the origins and ontology of fictionality ("Fiktionalität") into the field of Arabic and Islamic Studies.[5]

In the following contribution, I want to renew the discussion by making some points inspired by theoretical approaches developed in the thriving field of Medieval Studies in Germany. I will argue that the many similarities between early Arabic historiography and medieval chronicles call for a closer cooperation to better evaluate the status of these texts.

(1) On the one hand, there is a discussion among Arabists regarding the alleged "rejection of fiction" within classical Arabic literature. Except *maqāmāt* texts and fables, we do not have any prose text from the initial period that overtly refer to a literary and autonomous world of fiction.[6] Critical statements of premodern Arab scholars against "inventions" and "lies" in literature have contributed to convey the impression that there was an ideological taboo working against fiction. Furthermore, classical Arabic literary criticism does not have any reflection about the concept of fiction. All seems to indicate that literary fiction—though existent, as shown by the list in the *Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm[7]—was relegated to the depreciated realm of trivial literature. Medieval studies, on the other hand, discuss the "invention" of fiction in the late medieval period,[8] which was apparently unknown till then.[9]

(2) A special problem seems to arise from the narrative style we find in early Arabic prose texts (so-called *khabar* style), since it harmonizes with our understanding of factuality. However, this apparent factual status often contradicts the obviously fictitious content. Some scholars argue that this "confusion" is a special problem of Arabic text traditions, so that they regard it as crucial to "detect fiction" by establishing specific textual signals.[10] However, European medieval chronicles are equally fuzzy in their delimitation of "fact and fiction". This discrepancy between "factual style and fictitious content" might also be due to our distorting Eurocentric[11] and maybe anachronistically modern[12] understanding of reality. In addition, as the Medievalist

4. See for example Stefan Leder (ed.), *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1998); especially his "Conventions of Fictional Narration in Learned Literature," in S. Leder (ed.), *Story-telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1998), 34-60.

5. Wolfgang Iser, *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre. Perspektiven einer literarischen Anthropologie* (München, 1983).

6. Rina Drory, "Three Attempts to Legitimize Fiction in Classical Arabic Literature," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994), 289-307.

7. Mohammed Ferid Ghazi, "La litterature d'imagination en arabe du IIe/VIIIe au Ve/XIe siècles," *Arabica* 4 (1957), 164-168.

8. Cf. Walter Haug, "Die Entdeckung der Fiktionalität," in W. Haug (ed.), *Die Wahrheit der Fiktion. Studien zur weltlichen und geistlichen Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen, 2003), 128-144.

9. Cf. Jan-Dirk Müller, "Literarische und andere Spiele. Zum Fiktionalitätsprinzip in vormoderner Literatur," *Poetica: Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 36 (2004), 281-312.

10. Leder, *Story-telling*.

11. Cf. Julie Scott Meisami, "History as Literature," *Iranian Studies* 33 (2000), 15-30.

12. Müller, *Literarische und andere Spiele*.

Jan Müller emphasizes, a factual style does not necessarily indicate a non-fictional status, but might be a peculiar literary strategy.[13]

(3) Further problems arise from semantic confusion and imprecise terminology. This applies not only to the semantic field of fact/fiction, e.g. *true/false*, *real/imaginary*, *real/unreal*, *fiction/fictionalized*, etc., that tend to get blurred and mixed. It is also important to note that we still cannot establish often all the semantic dimensions of core Arabic terms used in this regard like *kadhib* ("lie", "falsehood", "dishonesty" ?). Hence, we need further clarifications on Arab terminology and conceptualization.

(4) One critical point noted in both fields is the lack of distinction made between rhetorical embellishment, or functional fictionality on the one hand, and free invention and autonomous fictionality on the other hand.[14]

(5) It is important to keep in mind that the idea of "fiction" in the sense of German "Literatur" presupposes an independent framework (Bourdieu: "field") where "fiction" is allowed, expected, and appreciated—something that would emerge in European modernity. This is not the case in classical Arabic literature, and likewise in earlier medieval literature.

(6) Arabic *akhbārī*s worked in a different manner than modern historians; and thus they rather resemble those medieval historians doing "Vorzeitkunde" (antiquities). Their main endeavor was not to draw, via scientific methods, verifiable and accurate representations of the past, but rather to evoke the resonance of these memories and to produce historical meaning. The *isnād* served to establish further the validity of the record, since absolute certainty was impossible to obtain.

(7) Another potentially useful concept is that of rhetoric history,[15] whose purpose is to convey moral values by referring to *exempla* of the past and so convince the reader via rhetoric embellishment. These historians wanted to reconstruct a plausible and version of the past according to the testimonies of reliable transmitters, and then to interpret these events according to their world-view.

In conclusion, as these parallels between Arabic and medieval European source material have shown, there is much to be learned through interdisciplinary exchange and scientific cooperation between both fields. Therefore, any further intercultural study between both fields of research is more than welcome.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Meisami, *History as Literature*.

IX. Intertextuality as a Typical Feature of Early Arabic Historiography

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If the work of a historian consists of patient chiselwork in a quarry of sources, early Arabic historiography, particularly when dealing with Islamic salvation history, rather resembles an ocean: *There is always more material relevant to any particular topic, than one is able to keep in mind, and the closer one looks at any episode, the less clear it becomes where exactly this episode belongs to.* While the first aspect of the oceanic extent of early Arabic historiography makes it particularly difficult to construct any argument *ex negativo* and makes indispensable a systematic evaluation of the source-material as a whole, I will in this contribution concentrate on the multitude of equally relevant intertextual references pertaining to any particular episode.

As an example, I study the conquest of Dūmat al-Jandal by Khālid b. al-Walīd. While this is by no means the only account linking Muḥammad and his time with the North Arabian oasis-town of Dūmat al-Jandal, there exists a fairly well defined corpus of stories describing the capture of a "king" affiliated to the Arabic tribe of Kinda by Muslim troops led by Khālid following a prediction by Muḥammad.

> They say: The Messenger of God [...] sent Khālid b. al-Walīd [...] against Ukaydir b. ʿAbd al-Malik [ruler] of Dūmat al-Jandal. Ukaydir was the king (*malik*) of Kinda and he was a Christian. Khālid asked: "[...] How can I get at him in the middle of the land of [the tribe of] Kalb?" [...] The Prophet [...] answered: "You will find him hunting cattle (*al-baqar*) and will take him captive!"[1]

I argue that the first dimension in which intertextual references can be traced in this simple story is the general depiction of Kindites as part of a coherent pattern extending across images of Kinda. I will limit myself in the following to an exemplary enumeration, having discussed the motives mentioned in the following in more detail elsewhere.[2] The portrayal of Ukaydir as king over Arabs belonging to other tribes fits into a general trend to portray Kindītes as rulers over other tribes. The costly cloak of Ukaydir's brother dazzles the Muslims as does the garment presented by Ukaydir to Muḥammad during his audience. Both form part of general tendencies to ridicule Kindītes as *weavers of textiles* and praise the their beautiful clothing. The princely pastimes of the Kindīte ruler, hunting for example, and his haughty opposition to Islamic authority can also be described as part of a more widespread trend in the depiction of Kindītes.

The second dimension of conflicting intertextual references concerns the early Islamic polity of Islamic salvation

1. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, ed. M. ʿAṭā, 2 vols. (Beirut, 2004), II: 405.

2. See Georg Leube, *Kinda in der frühislamischen Historiographie* (Würzburg, forthcoming).

history in general. The structure of the prediction and its eventual fulfillment in the above mentioned text confirms the status of Muḥammad as a true prophet; the confident obedience of Khālid b. al-Walīd serves as a rehabilitation of this general often censored harshly for un-Islamic behaviour; the subsequent agreements over tribute and protection, *jizya* and *dhimma*, serve as prophetic precedents for administrative structures in the lands conquered under Muḥammad's successors; and Muḥammad's acceptance of the presence of an unbeliever (*mushrik*) serves as precedence for the acceptability of all kinds of gifts by Islamic authorities.

How then is one to interpret a story torn between such a multitude of conflicting contexts? I would like to make two suggestions. While the interweaving of such a multitude of strands makes the exclusive interpretation of any single one of the potentially viable contexts highly problematic, the origin of a body of material that is *thought through* in this manner can be explained by assuming a high degree of *Unfestigkeit* and philological *contamination* of the text during the process of transmission. As synchronous *contamination* is not usually reflected in the *isnād*s, this necessitates a reinterpretation of the *isnād*s, commonly understood as *chains of transmission*, as *chains authorizing accounts known, discussed and thereby transmitted in much wider circles*. Put axiomatically, *every transmitter knows more than he is quoted for and every account is known to more people than show up in its isnād*(s). This in turn offers the possibility to trace in process the multivocal negotiation of tradition inside a community characterized until today by the paradigmatic importance of its salvation history.

X. The Origins of *Fitna*-Writing in Islamic Historiography

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The theme of *fitna* was one of the main themes of classical Islamic historiography. *Fitna*, as a historiographical theme, referred to religio-political conflicts within the Muslim community itself. The term *fitna* ("temptation", "discord") is generally negative and the antithesis of obedience and stability (more commonly expressed as "unity of the community"). My main question in this contribution therefore is: When, where, and why did the theme of *fitna* arise? Before proposing my answer I scrutinize three previous answers to this question.

(1) In his *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing,* Fred M. Donner argues that the theme of *fitna* was inaugurated by the Shīʿa during the First Civil War, because—as a losing party—they "*needed* to justify their continued resistance to Umayyad rule and their continued support of the political claims of ʿAlī's descendants."[1] Tackling the

1. Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins:*

question how the *fitna* theme was included into the Sunnī historical tradition, Donner ventures that the ʿAbbāsids' revolutionary movement took over the bulk of the Shīʿa narrative tradition, including this theme.[2]

I have several remarks concerning Donner's view. First, the term *fitna* did and does generally carry a negative connotation and was the antithesis of obedience—a strongly recommended principle in the early Muslim society—and stability. So this term was not used by actual participants in the early civil wars—whether Shīʿa or other groups—to refer to those events or to the motivations of various actors in them. Second, explaining the emergence of this theme, Donner stresses the political *incentive* and *need*, and does not point out the difference between history written for the purposes of political patronage and historicizing legitimation, and history written in response to or as a result of political events and issues. Finally, the use of *fitna* in Shīʿi collections of *ḥadīth* and monographs mostly carry an apocalyptic sense and has to do with the messianic literature (like the *Kitāb al-fitan wa-l-malāḥim* written by Ibn Ṭāwūs).

(2) Although Chase F. Robinson does not pay attention to *fitna* writing as a historical type, he regards the writing of *fitan* and *malāḥim*, in the apocalyptic sense, to be influenced by the Syriac Christian tradition. "We have reports", he says, "that histories in the Eusebian tradition were being translated during the reign of al-Manṣūr (r. 136-158/754-775), and it seems that one Muslim apocalyptic text [i.e. the *Kitāb al-fitan wa-l-malāḥim*], perhaps written about 163/780, is the reworking and translation of a Christian version written in Syria".[3] To Robinson's origin of the apocalyptic sense of *fitna*-literature has to be added the political and social circumstances of the early Muslim society that had an impact on accepting and reworking this literature.

(3) In their *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source Critical Study*, Albrecht Noth and Lawrence Conrad divide the major themes around which historical texts were composed into primary and secondary ones, and consider *fitna* (sedition), along with *futūḥ* (conquests), *ridda* (apostasy), *ansāb* (genealogies), and administration as a primary theme that is said to have some roots in historical reality. In contrast, secondary themes are considered to be derived from the primary ones and provide less reliable information to historians.[4] Although they do not propose a general dating scheme for their "themes", they base the view that the annalistic form as an established historiographical feature is a product of the late second/eighth or early third/ninth centuries and works arranged by caliphates appeared thereafter, and probably derived from, the annalistic scheme, on the reason that such "original" themes as *futūḥ* and *fitna* "clash with a thematic outlook oriented towards everything that happened under each individual caliph".[5] In other words,

The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing (Princeton, 1998), 187 (italics mine).

2. Donner, *Narratives*, 188-190.

3. Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, 2003), 49.

4. Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-critical Study. In Collaboration with Lawrence I. Conrad. Translated from the German by Michael Bonner*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1994), 27.

5. Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 27.

since the *futūḥ* and *fitna* themes occurred during more than one caliphate, the material could not have been fitted into a caliphate based arrangement. However, it may be said that since the *futūḥ* and *fitna* themes historically occurred during more than one year the material could not have been fitted into an annalistic scheme, either.

Therefore, I argue that to answer the question on the origins of *fitna* literature, a closer look at *ḥadīth* literature and monographs on the theme of *fitna* is necessary. The usage of *fitna* in *ḥadīth*s can be regarded as a middle phase between its Qurʾānic and historical usage. It was through *ḥadīth* literature that *fitna* could have been used as a historical theme and could have found different connotations from its previous Qurʾānic meanings. In addition to a chapter on *fitna* in Maʿmar b. Rāshid al-Azdī's (d. 151/768-769) *Al-jāmiʿ*, the Sunnī authoritative *ḥadīth* collections that emerged in the mid-third/ninth century also include a chapter on *fitna*. For example, al-Bukhārī's (d. 256/870) chapter on *fitna* in his authoritative *ḥadīth* collection *Al-ṣaḥīḥ* was arranged into 28 sections (*abwāb*).[6] Other *ḥadīth* collections' chapters on *fitna* were arranged somewhat differently. Although there are in fact differences among various *ḥadīth* collections, for instance, in the methods and purposes governing the selection, the use of the materials, and in the contents of such materials themselves (hence, every one of them needs a proper study), for the present purpose it is sufficient to derive some conclusions regarding the semantics of the word *fitna* from the respective *ḥadīth* collections' chapters. *Fitna* in these collections is used in two general different, but related, senses:

(1) *Fitna* as opposed to obedience means revolt, as opposed to unity, order, and stability means conflict, turmoil, and disorder, and as opposed to the *Sunna* of Prophet means innovation and heresy.

(2) In contrast, *fitna*, is also used in an apocalyptic sense when associated with *malāḥim* and the coming of the Mahdī.

I argue that on this basis it is possible to differentiate two types of *fitna* writings: *fitna* writings as history of rebellion, revolt, and turmoil (i.e. civil war) and *fitna* writings as history of the future, i.e. the coming of the Mahdī and apocalyptic events.

The first type of literature was formed in the late Umayyad and the early ʿAbbāsid periods. Although it did not witness worries of the Prophet about the future of his community, it testifies to the political and social circumstances after the death of the Prophet and reflects the conservative approach of the early Muslim society to its social and political problems. The second type was influenced by Near Eastern religious communities in the years before and following the rise of Islam. The apocalyptic connotation of the second and the predicting character of the first type are, therefore, the fictional aspect of most *fitna* writings by Muslim scholars.

6. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Al-jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. L. Krehl as: *Le recueil des traditions Mahométanes par Abou Abdallah Mohammed ibn Ismaîl el-Bokhâri*, 4 vols. (Leiden, 1862-1908), IV: 365-383.

XI. Addressing the 'Gap of Sources': Historiography and Cultural Memory in Early Islam

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My contribution addresses the construction of historical knowledge in early Islam, and the chances of survival of early texts. In particular, I am interested in the construction of what became a historiographical vulgate, and what it represented for the society that produced it, in order to shed light on the cultural memory of early Islam. In this line of enquiry, I also question the gap of narrative sources we are facing for the first 200 years of Islam or so, and address the problematic question of the disappearance of earlier texts.

To discuss these thorny issues, I look at the specific example of Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārizmī (d. after 323/847), who was arguably one of the most famous scholars of the early ʿAbbāsid period. He enjoys an impressive scholarly fame and legacy, ranging from algebra and mathematics to astronomy, geography, and cartography. Yet, he has been almost totally forgotten as a historian, even if it is well established that he wrote a now lost *Kitāb al-taʾrīkh*. How can we make sense of this selective memory of his work?

I argue that a substantial amount from his lost history can be retrieved and that it sheds a new light on ʿAbbāsid historiography in the making. I also contend that his history primarily vanished because of its specific genre. Indeed, al-Khwārizmī wrote an astrological history that represented a very popular genre in early ʿAbbāsid times, using planetary conjunctions to explain past, present, and future events.[1] I study the various reasons behind the eventual decline of this mode of historical writing, and suggest that, with the waning of astrological histories, came the vanishing of al-Khwārizmī's history.

Why is this significant and what does this tell us about historiographical developments during the first centuries of Islam? One point to emphasize is that scholars like to lament the dearth of narrative sources for early Islam but we should take into account all existing texts, even when they do not fit our traditional categories. Thus, for various reasons, astrological histories have been excluded from traditional accounts of the rise of Islamic historiography, even though they shed fresh light on the construction of historical knowledge in early Islam. Indeed, some of these astrological histories are significantly earlier than our more traditional narrative sources and thus offer rare access to early layers of Islamic historiography. Moreover, the vanishing of astrological histories reveals a radical shift in historical writing in early Islam, and in historical causality in particular. Their disappearance bears testimony to a change of "régime d'historicité" in the late

1. For more on astrological histories, see Antoine Borrut, "Court Astrologers and Historical Writing in Early ʿAbbāsid Baghdad: An Appraisal," in Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos (eds.), *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750-1000 C.E.* (Princeton, 2014), 455–501.

third/ninth century, that is a moment in which a society redefines its relationship between "past, present, and future" in the context of a "crisis of time," to follow French historian François Hartog's definition.[2] Finally, and more broadly, I argue that these elements should force us to re-evaluate the gap of (narrative) sources we are facing for the first centuries of Islam. Astrological histories only represent one alternative mode of historical writing that flourished in early ʿAbbāsid times if not earlier. We should also make room for other genres and categories (*quṣṣāṣ* or *futūḥ* literature, Muslim apocalyptic, etc.). And we ought, furthermore, to stop opposing "internal" (i.e., Muslim) to "external" (i.e., non-Muslim) sources. Non-Muslim sources have a critical role to play if we want to properly integrate early Islam into the multicultural world of Late Antiquity. Besides, a sizeable number of texts produced by non-Muslim scholars were composed while their authors were serving at the caliphal court in some official capacity, and so they can hardly be regarded as "external".

Such an approach not only significantly reduces our gap of sources but also opens up new perspectives on the circulation of historical information and the construction of historical knowledge. The first two and a half centuries of Islam remain a formidable methodological challenge for scholars. Perhaps a preliminary step is to fully acknowledge that the so-called gap of (narrative) sources we are facing up to the middle of the third/ninth century is, for a large part, an optical illusion and a historiographical construct, both ancient and modern. The vanishing of histories, of alternative pasts and memories is, ultimately, *historically* explainable.

2. François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris, 2003), 27.

Book Review

Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 403pp. ISBN: 9781474408264, Price: $44.95 (Paperback).

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Peter Webb's *Imagining the Arabs* re-examines the relationship between the advent of Islam and the emergence of the Arabs. Turning much received wisdom on its head, he argues that there was no homogenous Arab people that lived in pre-Islamic Arabia to whom Muhammad delivered his message. Rather, he argues, Arabness was a product of a post-conquest environment, in which the conquerors emphasized language and descent as a means of excluding new converts from claiming the massive resources of the new caliphate. Arab identity is not a legacy from pre-Islamic times but a new solution for post-conquest questions of self and community in the Marwānid period (129-41).

Webb argues that the ethnonym Arab is absent from securely dated pre-Islamic poetry and that the term *ʿarabī* in the Qurʾan simply means 'clear', as opposed to *ʿajam*, unclear or distorted (119). To imagine that the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula share an identity is, therefore, to accept the stereotypes of external powers, ranging from the Assyrians to Romans, in their descriptions of nomadic and changeless barbarians (23-36).

Building on the work of the late Rina Drory, Webb argues that it is only in the Abbasid period that events like the Sasanian defeat at Dhū Qār in 609 were read as victories of an Arab people over Persian opponents (rather than as a victory by members of Shaybān and Qays) (88-95; 185). He plausibly argues that this re-reading of history needs to be understood against a context of cultural competition between proponents of Arab and Persian heritage in Baghdad. This was the world in which genealogists such as Ibn al-Kalbī traced the tribal lineages of ninth-century Baghdadis or sought to map paths of descent all the way back to Ishmael (194-8; 262). Such acts could obscure the matrilineal descent of many converts to Islam to Persian or Aramaic speaking populations and allowed a complete amnesia over the distinctive culture of pre-Islamic Yemen, which was

now rendered simply as a part of the Arab past (203; 210-20).

I found Webb's nuanced reading of the Abbasid representation of the *jāhiliyya* especially persuasive. It was not simply a period of ungodly impiety for all writers, and he emphasizes the degree to which authors like al-Balādhurī recognized a nobility among pre-Islamic Arabs that anticipates the cultural competition between their (alleged) descendants and non-Arab Muslims (268).

This is a wide-ranging and ambitious book. I would like to raise several points where I disagreed with Webb's interpretation, but I should stress that this should in no way undermine my praise for its breadth and scholarship: to be stimulated to disagree is a sign that one has encountered a work that is provocative and thought-provoking.

At a number of points, Webb attacks those who have placed too much weight on what he (following Frederick Barth) calls "culture stuff" (language, custom, notions of shared descent and territory) in explaining shared Arab identity, to the exclusion of "creed, politics and economy". I am certainly sympathetic to his warning against presuming a natural shared identity across the peninsula and his interest in how boundaries are constructed. Nevertheless, I think there are several areas where he presses this line of argument too far. In particular, I feel that he gives rather short shrift to the possibilities of using parallels to other Roman frontiers to build more complex models for what was occurring in the Arabian Peninsula on the eve of Islam.[1]

Webb holds a minimalist position on the spread of Old Arabic, the ancestor of the Arabic spoken and written by the 'Arabs' of the early caliphate: "The absence of 'Old Arabic' inscriptions and the almost complete absence of development of the Arabic script itself implies that Arabic lacked a body of writers promoting its use in pre-Islamic times, and it perhaps lacked prestige too [...] Pre-Islamic 'Old Arabic' speakers [...] were possibly a tiny minority" (61). He argues that inscriptions of Old Arabic in what we now call Arabic script are restricted to a cluster in the north of modern Saudi Arabia, with examples in Jordan and southern Syria (62).

However, this minimal position is untenable in the light of extensive discoveries of fifth-century Arabic

1. I think in particular of work on the Rhine and Danube that differentiates clearly between different phases of contact with Rome: 1) the acquisition of military experience and resources by barbarians that generates social stratification across the frontier; 2) conflict in the course of migration that causes different, but related cultural groups to merge and 3) the propagation of specific forms of post-Roman identity in successor kingdoms. I have found the works of P. Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford, 1996); G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge, 2005) and F. Curta, *South-eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500-1250* (Cambridge, 2006) especially helpful. R. Hoyland, "Arab kings, Arab tribes and the beginnings of Arab historical memory in the Late Roman epigraphy,", in H. Cotton, R. Hoyland, J. Price and D. Wasserstein (eds.), *Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge, 2009), 374-400; G. Fisher, *Between Empires. Arabs, Romans and Saracens in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2011) and P. Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman army: Making sense of the Meccan leather trade," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70 (2007), 63-88 are all explicitly influenced by studies of other parts of the Roman frontier in their examination of pre-Islamic Syria and Arabia. Y. Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique Romaine (IVe-VIIe siècle.)* (Rome, 2004) may also offer fruitful comparisons to the situation in Arabia.

inscriptions, written in a transitional Nabateo-Arabic script, by Frédéric Imbert near Najrān in 2012.[2] This shows that the language had a much wider distribution that Webb presumes, and this means that our analysis needs to give greater weight to the mechanisms that gave Arabic a distribution across the peninsula (as a spoken and written language) before Islam.

In particular, I think we should emphasize the prestige contexts in which Arabic script is used before Islam and the uniformity with which it is written. The examples that Webb refers to from Syria and Jordan are dedicatory inscriptions made by Jafnid phylarchs or those allied to them that were situated on Christian religious sites alongside inscriptions in Greek and Arabic. Michael MacDonald comments that script has no simple connection to ethnicity (quoted by Webb at 63, note 17), and he is surely correct across the peninsula as a whole. But the inscriptions at Zebed and Ḥarrān are cases where Arabic has been raised to the status of Greek *within* the Roman empire, and this should be taken as a key sign of the significance of script and language for the elites who created these buildings.

Likewise, we should also point to the uniformity of epigraphic Arabic compared many of the Ancient North Arabian scripts such as Safaitic. Arabic is inscribed with a clear *ductus* and reasonably consistent letter forms in the very early decades of Islam (as on the dam built by Muʿāwiya in the Hijaz in 661).[3] To my mind, this suggests that the use of the script already had a history of formal use before Islam, which enabled it to compete with the rival statements made in Greek or other scripts in the seventh century.

Webb objects to the idea that pre-Islamic Arabic was standardized. But the linguistic variety of the peninsula does not preclude the existence of standardized *written* expression. The development of the Arabic script from 'transitional Nabatean' suggests widespread use of script on perishable materials, probably in institutional contexts such as royal or ecclesiastical scriptoria.[4] And the use of Arabic in papyri from Egypt very soon after the conquests to issue receipts,[5] or the use of non-Roman legal terminology,[6] suggests that the conquerors drew on a pre-conquest experience of using Arabic for administration. The choice to administer conquered lands in the language of the conquerors as well as those of the conquered is a symbolic as well as a

2. http://www.arabnews.com/news/art-culture/611411 and http://www.leparisien.fr/international/arabie-saoudite-decouverte-de-la-plus-vieille-inscription-en-arabe-du-monde-01-08-2014-4041101.php. Cf. C. Robin, A. al-Ghabban, S. al-Said, "Inscriptions antique de la region de Najrān (Arabie séoudite méridionale): nouveaux jalons pour l'histoire de l'écriture, de la langue et du calendrier arabes," *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et de belles lettres* 3 (2014), 1033-1128.

3. Published in G. Miles, "Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭāʾif in the Ḥijāz," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7.4 (1948), 236-42.

4. L. Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic? The Nabataeo-Arabic Script and the Language of the Inscriptions Written in This Script," in A. Al-Jallad (ed.), *Arabic in Context. Celebrating 400 years of Arabic at Leiden University* (Leiden, 2017), 75-98.

5. PERF 558, cited and discussed in A. Papaconstantinou, "Administering the Early Islamic Empire: Insights from the Papyri," in J. Haldon (ed.), *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: A Review of Current Debates* (Ashgate, 2010), 57-74, at 65.

6. G. Khan, "The Pre-Islamic Background of Muslim Legal Formularies," *Aram* 6 (1994), 193-224.

practical choice, and is a key factor that differentiates the Arabs from the Goths or Franks in the Roman West. I think we have to see the use of Arabic in formal contexts as an important differentiating symbol that bound the conquerors together, which a literate class had inherited from their pre-conquest experience.

A second area where I disagree with Webb is the role of the Naṣrid and Jafnid kings in providing patronage for the kinds of cultural forms that gave prestige to the Arabic script and language (chiefly poetry and epigraphy). He argues that it would be "remarkable if a sense of Arab communal cohesion could have been incubated across northern Arabia" in light of the contradictory lifestyles of the Naṣrid and the Jafnids and peoples of the interior (78-79) and he stresses the internal religious divisions of the royal houses and the confederations they ruled (80).

There was indeed debate among later genealogists and exegetes about whether or not the men of al-Ḥīra could be included as Arabs (e.g. 186). This seems to be a function of their Christian associations and the efforts by some to render the pre-Islamic Arabs as proto-Muslims. And some of the pre-Islamic poetry does mock the unmanliness of the kings of al-Ḥīra.

But I think it is too great a leap to imagine that *all* of peoples of the interior of the peninsula had no affiliation to the Beduinizing poetry written at al-Ḥīra. To my mind, this poetry seems to champion a martial ethos that it claims both for the Bedouin and for the Ḥīran kings. Indeed, the reason that the Sasanians or the Romans sponsored the Naṣrids and the Jafnids was because of their ability to suborn other 'Saracen' populations in a way that the great powers could not accomplish directly.

Similarly, Isabel Toral-Niehoff plausibly suggests that nomadic groups gradually settled, Christianized and acculturated at al-Ḥīra.[7] If she is correct, then we have to envisage the Naṣrids communicating across a cultural continuum within Arabia rather than shouting unheard across a void. I do not think that religious diversity would have prevented this either: Jafnid princes sponsored pagan temples as well as Christian churches, and the Naṣrid queens founded Christian monasteries and churches while their husbands remained pagan. An element of religious and cultural code-switching was a key part of the utility of both dynasties to their sponsors, and it should help us to understand how ideas and practices from the world of the great powers was disseminated and reformulated into the Arabian Peninsula.

The third area where I disagree with Webb is his treatment of "Christian Arabs" (including the descendants of those who had once served the Jafnids and Naṣrids). He notes that "Christian groups which had assisted the first Conquerors but did not subsequently convert to Islam faced intractable problems for they could not easily become 'Arabs' without nudging their monotheistic belief toward Islam too" (156). He situates the anxiety about where to place these groups within the definition of both Muslim and Arab identities under the Marwānids, as "the ecumenical believers' movement" began to set up new boundaries to preserve its resources.

7. I. Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra. Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext* (Leiden, 2014).

I think he is correct to stress the emphasis on religious boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims under the Marwānids and the pressure this placed on Christian populations who had once served the caliphate in a military capacity. Thus Muʿāwiya made extensive use of the Banū Kalb and married two Christian Kalbis, but al-Walīd I was responsible for several persecutions of the Banū Taghlib. Michael the Syrian even accuses him of eating the flesh of a martyred Taghlib chief.[8]

But Webb's statement imagines that Arabness is created under the Marwānids and that conquerors who are not Muslims (or quasi-Muslims?) are ejected at this point. He is forced into this position by his earlier argument that 'Arabness' is a product of the Marwānid *amṣār* and has no other basis (130-39). Yet this ignores the fact that Christian Arab groups such as the Taghlib were not migrant conquerors and dwelt in the Jazīra between Aleppo and Mosul, where they had been converted to Miaphysite Christianity in the late sixth century. Several reports indicate that the Taghlib were considered as, and considered themselves as, Arabs. Abū Yūsuf states that ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb had deemed it desirable to tax the Taghlib harshly since they were Arabs, and therefore more susceptible to conversion.[9] Al-Balādhurī reports that the Taghlib paid the double *ṣadaqa* (rather than the humiliating *jizya*) because they were "Arabs [and] too proud to pay the poll tax".[10] Later sources even describe the Taghlib approaching ʿUmar II for the right to wear the turban and to be reckoned as Arabs.[11] This request seems to have been a pitch for higher status on the basis of shared ethnic affiliation without converting to Islam and without being migrants or conquerors. The "culture stuff" of language, lifestyle and custom mattered in this instance, since it was the basis of a claim to the caliph that others could not make.

Finally, Webb argues for the post-Qurʾanic origins of the term *ʿarabī* as an ethnonym. He sees its original meaning as 'pure/clear', as opposed to *ʿajam*, 'impure/unclear'. For Webb, it is only later that it came to mean a pure people, to distinguish the conquerors from those around them. I do not find this convincing.

Webb lays great store by the stereotypical nature of the outside sources that describe the Arabs of the Peninsula, which he compares to the stereotyping of Native Americans as a homogenous unchanging people (40). But stereotypes can be inverted and reclaimed, and the terms used to vilify disparate peoples can end up giving them a shared identity. This is exactly what many scholars have suggested occurred

8. Michael the Syrian, ed. and tr. J.-B. Chabot, *Le chronique de Michel le Syrien* (Paris, 1899-1910), ed. IV: 451-52, trans. II: 481-82. Chabot's translation has al-Walīd forcing the martyr to eat his own flesh, but the Syriac is ambiguous. Here I follow C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs and the Making of an Islamic Society in the Post-Conquest Period*, Phd dissertation (Princeton, 2015), 60.

9. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, ed. I. Abbas (Cairo, 1985), 121-22, tr. E. Fagnan, *Le livre de l'impôt foncier* (Paris, 1921), 186.

10. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. De Goeje (Leiden, 1866), 182, tr. P. Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State* (New York, 1916), 285.

11. Y. Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam; Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 2004), 64-65. Cf. M. J. Kister, "'The Crowns of this Community'...Some Notes on the Turban in the Islamic Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), 217-45.

in North America, where populations that fled the "shatter zone" of the east coast built new confederations further inland, which embraced more expansive notions of 'Indian' identity.[12]

To my mind, the origin of the ethnonym 'Arab' is more profitably sought in this kind of inversion of Roman imperial stereotype. The catch, as the work of Fergus Millar indicates, is that no seventh century Roman would have expected their conquerors to have called themselves Arab, since the term had not been used by the Romans for the inhabitants of the peninsula since the early second century.[13] Webb recognizes this shift in usage (47-48, 111-15), but he seems to make the fact that the Romans had once used the term Arab as simply a curious coincidence, unrelated to the Qurʾan's use of *ʿarabī*. But I think the very use of this term after such a time-lag suggests that it was adopted as an ethnonym by a population in the peninsula during the first century (though this tells us nothing about how widely the term was disseminated). So while Webb is right to highlight how important the settlement of the Arabs was for the development of an Arab identity, I would argue that language, script, poetry and ethnonym all have a pre-Islamic history as articulations of different kinds of common identity that were important ingredients for Islamic-era assertions of Arabness.

12. R. Ethridge, *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South* (Lincoln, NE, 2009); W. Lee, 'The Military revolution of Native North America. Firearms, forts and politics,' in W. Lee (ed.), *Empires and Indigenes. Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion and Warfare in the Early Modern World* (New York, 2011), 49-80, esp. 68-70.

13. F. Millar, *Empire, Church and Society in the Late Roman Near East* (Leuven, 2015) would have been a fruitful text for Webb to have engaged with, especially his observations on the role of Christian ethnography (e.g. Cyril of Scythopolis) in re-imagining the inhabitants of Arabia as Saracens or Ishmaelites. M. MacDonald, "Arabs, Arabia and Arabic before late antiquity," *Topoi* 19 (2009), 277-32, not cited by Webb, stresses the use of Arabic as a self-description in epigraphy from Ptolemaic Egypt and elsewhere. MacDonald sees 'Arab' as a pre-Islamic self-designation based on a complex of cultural and linguistic features.

Book Review

Joshua Mabra, *Princely Authority in the Early Marwānid State: The Life of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān (d. 86/705)*. Islamic History and Thought, vol. 2 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017), bibliography, index. ISBN 9781463206321. Price: $76.00 (cloth).

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Those subject to Arab-Islamic rule are likely to have wondered at the life span of the new religio-political order at the close of the first/seventh century. The conquerors were a quarrelsome lot, as quick to engage in internecine violence as they were to subdue local opposition: the 'believers' were at each other's throats. From, in part, the accounts of a then burgeoning and variegated population of clients and slaves (*mawālī*), it is clear that a new religious program was taking shape. But sharp disagreements over its central precepts were no less obvious; divisions of belief ran as deep as those of kinship. How long could the new masters carry on this way?

The Christians of the Levant and Egypt had certainly a special interest in the fortunes of the nascent order given their majority standing. If, at first, somewhat detached, as some modern scholars have argued, following the clashes at Marj Rāhiṭ (c. 64-65/683-684) and a more aggressive assertion of Arab-Muslim authority, engagement with the new Umayyad rulers took on urgency. The policies of the newly ascendant branch of the Umayyad clan (the Marwānids) sought a new sectarian-style unity. The effort sparked a response from Christian communities and their respective elites against whom such policies were often aimed. Thus, in Egypt, attitudes shifted on the part of the Coptic Church and its adherents. Joshua Mabra, in his concise and understated new book, sees the shift as having taken place under ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān (d. 85/705), the newly appointed governor, and, again, in good measure, *because* of his approach to office.

ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz governed Egypt for twenty years—65/685 to 85/705—during which time he stood as heir to ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 85/705), the caliph, his far better known half-brother. The two men had assumed office, respectively, following the untimely death of their father, Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. 65/685). *Princely Authority in the Early Marwānid*

State brings together literary, numismatic, and archeological information in a close discussion of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's tenure in office. A political biography, it has much to say about ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz but also widens a useful window onto the quarrels of the new empire and emergent patterns of Arab-Islamic legitimation.

Mabra sees, as a failing of modern scholarship, its passing treatment of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. (A quick survey of the indices of modern studies of the Umayyad period confirms the point: mentions of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz are scattered and few). The lion's share of attention has been devoted to ʿAbd al-Malik. This is as it should be given the latter's achievements, and on many fronts: he is typically held to be the architect of the first Islamic state. ʿAbd al-Malik, more than any other Arab/Muslim leader, drew on Islamic symbols and rhetoric in a bid to join a fractious Muslim realm under Marwānid rule. But Mabra would have ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz play a "paramount role" (p. 10) in this regard as well. He makes a strong pitch for the significance of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's contribution and the lessons it offers on Umayyad politics. The book joins a now fairly substantial and growing library of revisionist scholarship on the early Islamic period. But it has problems, and I address these below.

Princely Authority opens with a discussion of the introduction of Umayyad family rule over Egypt, a situation that would prevail into the early second/eighth century. Mabra only gets to his main arguments at the close of the first chapter ("Egypt and the Early Umayyads"). This is a touch annoying: history writing ought not adhere to narrow formulas, but there is reason to provide direction early on.

His theses are two in number. There is his argument that the new governor sought independence from central authority; I take this up below. The other thesis is that Marwān assigned ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz over Egypt because of the legitimation conferred by his mother's "royal Kalbī lineage" (p. 11). Through her, Marwān and, following the latter's demise and his own ascent to office, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz himself, could count on the backing of the Quḍāʿa. This is to see ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz as having continued where Muʿāwiya had left off, decades earlier, in drawing support from the Syrian tribes, led by the Kalb. Modern scholarship has long recognized this feature of early Umayyad politics. But Mabra seems justified in seeing that modern (Western) historiography often moves too quickly through the intricate Arab tribal politics of the Second *Fitna*. It often overlooks, in particular, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's role in moving the Quḍāʿa-Marwānid alliance forward and, thus, consolidating the authority of the Marwānids following Marj Rāhiṭ and the collapse of the Zubayrids. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz provided continuity: he was the best choice to succeed his father as *amīr* of Egypt upon his (Marwān's) rise to the caliphate.

Mabra stays with tribal politics in his second chapter ("The Coalition of Kalb and Umayya"). He points to the strained efforts by Julius Wellhausen, among others, to explain the rise of the Marwānids. Why *that* Umayyad house? Again, Mabra locates Marwānid success, and does so convincingly, in the support from powerful Quḍāʿī circles following Marwān's marriage to Laylā bint Zabān ibn al-Aṣbagh from the ruling house of Dūmat al-Jandal, a key site linking Syria to the Najd (north-central Arabia).

The marriage was only one in a series: the early Muslim elite long knew to forge such ties to the Kalb powerhouse. Marwān did so in style, marrying twice, in fact, into the Kalb, then in his appointment of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz as governor and second heir to the caliphate (after ʿAbd al-Malik). Mabra provides two handy charts of these alliances, and in a rare addition to such charts, includes the women to whom the Marwānid chiefs were married (pp. 31-32). The marital ties were critical: "ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān was well aware of the value of his maternal lineage, and he leaned heavily on his mother's name and nobility" (p. 29).

A virtue of Mabra's book is his keen sense of Umayyad politics: he is a close reader of his sources, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, al-Kindī, and al-Ṭabarī among the Arabic writers. Mabra knows, in other words, how to build an argument. It is ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's shaping of a "power network" (p. 34) that concerns the third chapter, "Al-Ḥasham: A Provincial Power Base." Echoing Wilfred Madelung and Patricia Crone especially, Mabra points to the predominance of the Yamānī "super tribal bloc" in Egypt and the new governor's efforts, following the Second *Fitna*, to further consolidate his ties (through his Kalbī connections) to that same bloc. A key decision was to marry the granddaughter of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, Egypt's original boss. No less a measure was the acquisition by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz of a series of properties in central Fusṭāṭ. This is a useful insight on Mabra's part. He argues that the properties, surrounding the original congregational mosque, gave the governor access to Egypt's best families: the properties provided proximity and prestige alike.

Poetry is the stuff of Chapter Four: "The Poetic Battle for Succession." As would be the case of future Egyptian claimants, local poets did much to serve political ambitions along the Nile. (Michael Bonner has demonstrated as much for Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn of third/ninth century fame[1]). Two poets, in particular, lauded ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz: Ibn Qays al-Ruqayyāt (d. 85/705) and al-Aḥwaṣ al-Anṣārī (d. 105/723). Six poems survive, four from Ibn Qays, two from his counterpart, and Mabra investigates them with care. He includes selections, both in the original Arabic and in serviceable translation. I find the latter passages often too close to the Arabic: here, as in other ways, Mabra should have been better served by his editor and reviewers. But, again, he has studied the poems carefully, and draws out telling evidence that, in particular, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz relied heavily on his maternal lineage in gilding his claims, both as *amīr* and as heir apparent.

Mabra turns to the second of his overall theses in the final two chapters. The argument, I believe, is new: ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz insisted on ruling Egypt on his own terms, rather than those set out in Damascus by ʿAbd al-Malik. Mabra refers to it as independence on the governor's part: "he ruled with almost no involvement from his brother, the *amīr al-muʾminīn* ʿAbd al-Malik...[refusing] to participate in a number of his brother's Islamicizing and centralizing reforms." (p. 11). Again, it seems to me, this is a significant statement in the light of a near scholarly orthodoxy, which holds that, following ʿAbd al-Malik's sweeping reforms, the interlocking streams of Islamisation and Arabisation swept forward across the Muslim realm.

1. "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihād: The Damascus Assembly of 269/883," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 130:4 (2010), 573-605, see, on the poetry, 593-597.

Rather than counter this view outright, I think, Mabra complicates it. It would have been helpful had he opted to extend his thinking on this score: again, his style is very understated.

So, how did ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz proceed in constructing his "Independent Polity" (Chapter Five)? Mabra relies on the evidence contained in the Aphrodito documents (P.Lond. IV) and the so-called ABAZ coin, "the first completely original [copper] coin minted in Islamic Egypt" (p. 113). The former body of evidence, in Mabra's reading, points to a refusal by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to share Egypt's fiscal and human wealth with the empire: the governor kept revenue and tradesmen at home for his own purposes. The coin, for its part, speaks to the effort by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to nurture relations with Egyptian Christians. It was, Mabra states, "a compromise coin," designed to avoid the overtly Islamic program put in place by ʿAbd al-Malik. The aim, in other words, was to address political challenges at a regional (Egyptian) level quite in contrast with his brother's more universal (Islamic) program. The latter program thus comes off as less uniform, less imperial, less sweeping. And, as Mabra demonstrates, citing al-Yaʿqūbī and al-Kindī, both writers well acquainted with Egypt's recent political history, the governor's stance had as much to do with a fraternal clash: ʿAbd al-Malik, at one point, sought to convince ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to step down as heir apparent in favor of his own offspring, an offer he rejected out of hand.

A further virtue of the book lies in turning our lens from center to periphery, which is to say, the dynamics internal to Egypt this early in the Arab/Islamic period. Mabra shares ground with at least two recent publications, Petra Sijpesteijn's *Shaping a Muslim State* (Oxford, 2013) and Majed Mikhail's *From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt* (London & New York, 2014), from which we learn a very great deal of the shaping of Islamic-era Egypt. Mabra appears to have relied on Sijpesteijn's doctoral thesis of the same name (Princeton, 2004), although it is a bit difficult to tell (see below). The turns of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's busy career were, in many cases, predictable, given the significance of Egypt: these were matters of tribute and imperial administration. But other matters had a longer ripple effect: so, for example, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, standing up to ʿAbd al-Malik, did so at one point by rejecting the standardized version of the Qurʾanic text produced by al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf and ordering up an 'Egyptian' *muṣḥaf*, a legitimating gesture paralleling that of his rival in Damascus. But the wider point, again, goes to Egypt's often edgy relations with the imperial center, not simply in the Umayyad period, but through the first Abbasid period as well, that is, into the first part of the fourth/tenth century and the destruction, by an Abbasid force, of the Tulunid polity.

Mabra's contribution, and, again, his discussion overlaps particularly with Mikhail, is to insist on paying closer attention than is normally the rule to the evidence provided by Coptic sources, chief among them the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. As Mikhail points out (see, for example, *Islamic Egypt*, 41-42), ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's policies towards the church were singular in their aim of integrating Coptic officialdom into the new Arab/Islamic administration. Mabra moves forward with this same evidence. First, he sees the governor's policies as extending well beyond a warming of relations with

the Coptic religious establishment: ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz worked deliberately to wield close authority over the church. But, more to the point, he did so as part and parcel of the effort to consolidate an autonomous authority. The difference, in other words, is that Mikhail seems content to see this new relationship as a step in the extension of Muslim/imperial hegemony, whereas Mabra appears to be arguing for a break occasioned by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's particular political and administrative strategies. I liked this chapter in particular for its reliance on a mix of literary, numismatic and archeological evidence.

I have described the book as understated: Mabra is a reticent writer, for all of his clarity. Perhaps this is proper in a first book, and fair enough. But Mabra has a way of stopping just short of a full argument. So, for example, he treats the critical part played by maternal lineage, as indicated above, and names several of the Kalbī women in question, but could underscore the point that, without the perspective of gender, a retelling of Umayyad history falls short. He might also have said more about the use of the physical landscape. He speaks to the purposes to which property and city-building were put by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, especially in his discussion of Ḥulwān, the governor's new capital. He sees it, properly, as an ideological use of brick and mortar, and comments, in this regard, on the later construction of al-Ramla by Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 99/717), which he treats similarly in symbolic terms. But I thought it right for Mabra to offer a wider comment that, in this way, as in many others, the Umayyad house developed patterns of legitimation—including city-building—that flourished well beyond the dynasty's fall.

I wondered, too, about the counter-evidence. It perhaps goes without saying that, largely due to the vagaries of transmission (oral and written), Arabic sources on the first Islamic period contain contradictory and inconsistent evidence. Purely by happenstance, I noted a reference to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz in Christophe Picard's new study of the 'Islamic Mediterranean,' *La Mer des Califes* (Seuil, 2015).[2] Picard quotes a long passage from al-Bakrī's *Kitāb al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, so admittedly a later (fifth/eleventh century) Andalusian geographical text. It has ʿAbd al-Malik, as caliph, order ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, as governor, transfer a population of one thousand Coptic shipbuilders and their families to Tunis, where they were to construct a new fleet with which to engage the Byzantines. It has ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz work out the details with the governor of Ifrīqiya, Ḥasān ibn al-Nuʿmān. There is much here: the passage evinces a practice of population transfer on the part of the Umayyads that one reads of in other sources as well (and which was very much a practice of most ancient and medieval empires). It complicates Mabra's account: first, it has ʿAbd al-Malik working *with* his brother at a point when, if we follow Mabra, the two men were at odds and, second, it has Ibn al-Nuʿmān on the scene when, according to Mabra (p. 93), ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had replaced him years earlier as governor of Ifrīqiya. This is not to challenge Mabra—I find his theses very well supported—so much as to suggest that an engagement with uncomfortable evidence makes for richer history.

2. See my review of Picard's book in this same issue.

Finally, the book is marred by two problems that, unfortunately, appear to have become common to academic publishing. One wants not to be naïve as regards the perilous state of book publishing, but the volume is far too expensive. And the shame of it goes to its availability to instructors. As perhaps other colleagues have as well, I have used Chase Robinson's *ʿAbd al-Malik* (Oneworld, 2005) with students to good effect. It works well in part because of its brevity, focus and the narrative 'story' inherent to biography. I could see using Mabra's book—it bears the same features—in similar fashion. But the cost is prohibitive. One hopes that Gorgias Press will see to an affordable paperback edition.

The second problem is more serious: the lax editing of the book. It contains, first of all, no small number of typographical errors. More serious are the problems of citation: I checked only a handful of the notes, and in random fashion, and found at least four that needed correcting, which suggests others exist as well. The citation to al-Kindī (p. 94, note 33) should be to p. 58 not 55; the references to Petra Sijpesteijn's *Shaping a Muslim State* (eg. p. 100, note 49 and p. 105, n. 61) are misleading in that they apparently refer to Sijpesteijn's 2004 Princeton dissertation, which bears the same title as her later monograph (Oxford University Press, 2013), but Mabra makes no effort to distinguish the two works; and, finally, Phil Booth's *Crisis of Empire* (University of California Press, 2013), is cited (p. 141, note 59) but does not occur in the bibliography. Casual errors, perhaps, and certainly not exceptional, but they are pernicious nonetheless in that they reduce confidence.

Book Review

Lyall Armstrong, *The* Quṣṣāṣ *of Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), xii + 342 pages. ISBN: 9789004335516, Price: $165 (Hardback).

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This book focuses on the (often neglected) *quṣṣāṣ* (pl., sg. *qāṣṣ*) of early Islam. Its main argument is that, despite their later image as unreliable storytellers, popular preachers, and innovators, the *quṣṣāṣ* of early Islam were, for the most part, reliable, reputable, and conformist religious scholars. Armstrong's book joins a significant body of modern scholarship on early and later medieval Islamic preaching[1] with the aim of re-defining the category of the

1. Some of the main works that have dealt with early Islamic preaching are: Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, tr. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (London, 1971), II, 150-9; Johannes Pedersen, "The Islamic Preacher, *wāʿiẓ*, *mudhakkir*, *qāṣṣ*" in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume* (Part 1), ed. S. Lowinger and J. Somogyi, Budapest, 1948, 226-51; Idem, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher," *Die Welt des Islam* II (1953), 215-31; Charles Pellat, "Ḳāṣṣ" *EI2*, C. E. Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Underworld* (Leiden, 1976), 23-9; al-Najm Wadīʿa Ṭāhā, *al-Qasas, wa-'l-quṣṣāṣ fī al-adab al-islāmī* (Kuwait, 1972); Q. al-Sāmarrāʾī "Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ wa-'l mudhakkirīn, *Majallat majmaʿ al-lugha al-ʿarabiyya bi-Dimashq*, 4 (50) 1975, 849-88; Jamāl Jūda, "al-Qaṣaṣ wa-l-quṣṣāṣ fī ṣadr al-Islām: bayna al-wāqiʿ al-tārīkhī wa-'l-naẓra al-fiqhīya," *Dirāsāt tārīkhiyya* 33/34 (Damascus, 1989), 105-141; Khalil ʿAthamina: Al-Qasas: Its Emergence, Religious Origin and Its Socio-Political Impact on Early Society," *Studia Islamica* 76 (1992), 53-74; Maxim G. Romanov, "Computational Reading of Arabic Biographical Collections with Special Reference to Preaching in the Sunnī World (661-1300CE)" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013). The most recent works that have focused more on later medieval Islamic preaching are: Jonathan Berkey, *Popular preaching and religious authority in the medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle, 2001); Linda G. Jones, *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World* (Cambridge, 2012); Vanessa De Gifis, *Shaping a Qurʾanic Worldview: Scriptural Hermeneutics and the Rhetoric of Moral Reform in the Caliphate of al-Maʾmun* (London, 2014); Jens Scheiner, "Teachers and *Ḥadīth* Transmitters: The Quṣṣāṣ in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*," in *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750-1000 CE,* eds J. Scheiner and D. Janos (Princeton, 2014), 183-236. On the stories of the prophets in the Qur'ān—material often connected with the *quṣṣāṣ*—see Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾan and Muslim Literature* (Hoboken, 2013), especially chapter 5, 86-96. On Ibn Aʿtham, a historian-*qāṣṣ,* see Lawrence

quṣṣāṣ and to re-assess their role in early Islamic society. For this reason the author keeps the term untranslated throughout the book, though he considers the most fitting label for them to be 'preachers' (p. 9). The difficulty in defining the *quṣṣāṣ* lies in the untidy landscape of early Islamic preaching, which the *quṣṣāṣ* shared with other figures such as the *wuʿʿāẓ* (admonishers), *mudhakkirūn* (reminders),[2] or the *khuṭabāʾ* (orators). The sources do not draw clear boundaries between these categories and at times use some of these terms interchangeably.

However, Armstrong is concerned only with the *quṣṣāṣ* and sets out to nuance our understanding of them by addressing what he has identified as two main flaws in the treatment by modern scholarship of the *quṣṣāṣ*. First, the association of the *quṣṣāṣ* with storytelling (based on the lexical meaning of *qaṣṣa* "to tell stories"[3]), is too limiting. Indeed, the *quṣṣāṣ* related material beyond narratives, such as verses of poetry, legal rulings, and short *ḥadīth*s as he shows mainly in Chapter 1. Second, the broad definitions of the *quṣṣāṣ* as Islamic religious teachers, stemming from the sources' treatment of preachers, render the term *qāṣṣ* void of any meaning of its own. To remedy this terminological imprecision, the author has opted for establishing a clear criterion of selection: an explicit association with the root *q-ṣ-ṣ*. So, while previous scholars in their discussions of the *quṣṣāṣ* mainly relied on what medieval compilations, the most influential among them being Ibn al-Jawzī's (d.597/1200) *Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ wa-al-mudhakkirīn,* have said about them, Armstrong has also collected his own pool of *qaṣaṣ* material. Drawing on a wide range of later narrative sources, such as chronicles, *ḥadīth* compilations, biographical dictionaries, literary works, and works on Sufism and asceticism, and setting an end date of 750, he has assembled all the instances in which a *qāṣṣ* is mentioned, in which the sources designate a certain statement as *qaṣaṣ,* or

I. Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature,* eds. J. S. Meisami and P. Starkey (London, 1998), 1:314; Ibid. "The Conquest of Arwād: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Problems in the Literary Source Material,* ed. A. Cameron L. I. Conrad (Princeton, 1992), 317-99; and ibid., "Ibn Aʿtham and His History," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā: The Journal of Middle East Medievalists* 23 (2015), 87-125. On the more formal genre of oratory (*khaṭāba*) see Tahera Qutbuddin, "Khuṭba" in *Classical Arabic humanities in their own terms festschrift for Wolfhart Heinrichs on his 65th birthday,* eds. Wolfhart Heinrichs and Michael Cooperson (Leiden, 2008), 176-273; *A treasury of virtues: sayings, sermons and teachings of ʿAlī al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʾī: with the one hundred proverbs attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ* (New York, 2013).

2. A more precise translation would be something along the lines of "Those who call others to be cognizant of God," as Armstrong refers to them on p.135.

3. The accepted meaning of *qaṣṣa* is indeed "to tell stories" as Armstrong notes (p.6); however, it seems that the term itself is wider than that. Etymologically, it means "to follow after the footsteps of, to trace someone." Lane's examples and translation of *iqtaṣṣa al-ḥadītha* hint at the logical connections between the two meanings: "he related the tradition, or story, in its proper manner [...] as though he followed its traces, in pursuit, and related it accordingly." In this way, *qaṣṣa* delivers a connotation of a more serious "storytelling," which strives for precision and details and is not necessarily based on narrative. The etymological meaning of the term may perhaps serve in support of Armstrong's thesis that the early *quṣṣāṣ* were not primarily narrators of entertaining and spurious stories.

in which they introduce it by a cognate phrase, such as *kāna yaquṣṣu fa-qāla* (p.7). To compare, Armstrong created a list of 109 *quṣṣāṣ* while Ibn al-Jawzī listed only 45 *quṣṣāṣ* and the two lists overlap only partially (see table on p.12).

This collection of the vast body of material directly associated with *qaṣaṣ* that Armstrong has collected to support his argument, along with the clear presentation of this material with many quotations in Arabic with English translations, and the biographical sketches of the 109 *quṣṣāṣ* in the appendix, are among the main strengths of the book.

Chapter One ("*Qaṣaṣ:* Textual Evidence") presents his collection of *qaṣaṣ* statements. These comprise 43 *qaṣaṣ* texts, which he divides into three main thematic groups of religious (34), martial (8), and religio-political *qaṣaṣ* (1). They display a wide array of themes, as they deal with the questions of divine will and human responsibility, death and afterlife, narrate exemplars from prophets' lives, or instruct soldiers in military tactics and incite them to fight. Some *qaṣaṣ* statements also include verses of poetry, prophetic *ḥadīth,* and legal rulings. This wide range of themes and forms show that *qaṣaṣ* is not limited to the stories of prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), which in turn should not be seen as originating with the *quṣṣāṣ* (p. 38). This constitutes an important aspect of Armstrong's effort to rid the *quṣṣāṣ* of the label "storytellers," though it would be unjust to say that all earlier scholars have considered the *quṣṣāṣ* as such.[4] But this chapter's discussion of the *qaṣaṣ* statements offers more than that. Especially the author's presentation of *qaṣaṣ* in the martial context brings to light interesting material. Al-Ṭabarī's and al-Azdī's use of the term *qaṣṣa* for Byzantine bishops, monks, priests, and deacons who exhorted the Byzantines to fight, or al-Ṭabarī's report in which he recorded the Khārijite rebel Shabīb's call for the *quṣṣāṣ* and "he who recites the poetry of ʿAntara" (p. 69) before a battle, show the firm place that these oral ways of incitement and exhortation had in the turbulent environment of early Islam. Based on the diversity of themes among the 43 *qaṣaṣ* texts discussed in Chapter One, Armstrong reasons that the content was not the only thing that defined the *qaṣaṣ* but that its unifying factor was "the aim of eliciting a fervent response from the listener" (p. 74).

Chapter Two explores the *quṣṣāṣ'* associations with Qurʾān reciters (*qurrāʾ*), Qurʾān commentators (*mufassirūn*), *Ḥadīth* transmitters (*muḥaddithūn*), jurists (*fuqahāʾ*), judges (*quḍāt*), orators

4. Armstrong claims that many scholars have considered the *quṣṣāṣ* to be popular preachers and storytellers, and this is undoubtedly true. However, taking the example of the two scholars who have dealt with the issue and whom he includes among those holding such view (on p. 5, n. 17 and p. 151) Berkey and ʿAthamina, we can note that both views are much more nuanced than that. Berkey for his part and precisely on the point of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* notes that these should not be associated specifically with the *quṣṣāṣ* because the major collections of them were compiled by exegetes like al-Thaʿlabī. Jonathan Berkey, *Popular preaching and religious authority in the medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle, 2001), 40. And though Armstrong attributes to ʿAthamina the view that the *quṣṣāṣ* were "popular religious teachers targeting the simple masses," ʿAthamina also acknowledges the "broad spectrum of functions fulfilled by the *qāṣṣ* and the high erudition he must have possessed. See Khalil ʿAthamina, "Al-Qasas: Its Emergence, Religious Origin, and its Socio-Political Impact on Early Muslim Society," *Studia Islamica* 76 (1992), 54.

(*khuṭabāʾ*), admonishers (*wuʿʿāẓ*), reminders (*mudhakkirūn*), and ascetics (*zuhhād, nussāk*) to prove that the *quṣṣāṣ* were engaged in most religiously-oriented activities of the day. He acknowledges that some of these categories were rather fluid and is interested in the *quṣṣāṣ'* interaction with them, based once again, on linguistic parameters. (In other words, he considers a *qāṣṣ* to be associated with *waʿẓ* only if the sources identified him also as a *wāʾiẓ* or having given a *mawʿiẓa,* p. 75.) This chapter thus represents, to my knowledge, the first attempt to categorize the *quṣṣāṣ* based on their affiliations with other disciplines. Armstrong shows that almost one third of the *quṣṣāṣ* were known also as Qurʾān reciters (*qurrāʾ*) and one quarter as Qurʾān commentators (*mufassirūn*). He addresses the accusation that the *quṣṣāṣ* introduced Jewish and Christian elements to Islam in the form of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbyāʾ/isrāʾīlīyāt*. Armstrong shows that relatively few *quṣṣāṣ* were known for their knowledge of this pre-Islamic material and that the main alleged culprit among them, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, is not very sympathetic to the Jews and Christians nor has he adopted more material than others. Having discussed the associations of the *quṣṣāṣ* with the rest of the above-mentioned disciplines, Armstrong concludes that the *quṣṣāṣ* included some of the most respected religious authorities of the time and that out of the 108 (109?) *quṣṣāṣ* he collected, 74 were considered reliable *ḥadīth* transmitters (p. 151). From this perspective he thus sees the *qāṣṣ* mainly as a respected scholar.[5]

Chapter Three, most interestingly, brings together reports and debates about the *quṣṣāṣ'* performances: skills of effective *quṣṣāṣ* and their conduct and postures during the *qaṣaṣ*-giving and where and what time of the day it took place. It also discusses what he sees as 'malpractices' which harmed the *quṣṣāṣ'* reputation, such as mixing of genders, loudness, raising hands, or fainting during the sessions. This chapter is especially valuable because it gives readers an insight into the variety of the *qaṣaṣ* performances and the discussions that surrounded them. And the *qaṣaṣ* performance was indeed varied: The *quṣṣāṣ* might stand on the pulpit, sit in a corner of the mosque or hold sessions outside of the mosque—in public places and in their homes; they might preach twice a day or twice a week. Raising hands, for example, seemed to have been a controversial issue, which was not limited to *qaṣaṣ.* It was also recorded during funeral processions, during an eclipse of sun, and upon seeing the Kaʿba during the *ḥajj* (p.181-182). And in terms of *qaṣaṣ,* it was not necessarily only the *qāṣṣ* who would raise his hands, Armstrong mentions two instances in which the audience would join him in this practice (p. 182). It would be extremely interesting to further investigate into a deeper meaning of such a practice.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five follow the *quṣṣāṣ* chronologically through the Rāshidūn era (Chapter Four) and through the Umayyad period (Chapter Five). Chapter Four engages with the reports that reject *qaṣaṣ* as innovation (*bidʿa*) that had no precedent in the time of the Prophet and thus represents a dangerous deviation from his *sunna.* Some of the most interesting attacks represent the reports that connect the emergence of

5. L. I. Conrad considers Ibn Aʿtham an example of a *qāṣṣ* who successfully entered the field of historical studies in the early Abbasid times. L. I. Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī," 314.

qaṣaṣ with the Apocalypse (p. 225-229). The author counters the anti-*quṣṣāṣ* material by arguing that a body of traditions suggest that that *qaṣaṣ* existed already in the time of the Prophet and with more positive representations of the *quṣṣāṣ* who lived under the first four caliphs.

Chapter Five follows the *quṣṣāṣ* and their increasing involvement in political affairs during the Umayyad period. The *quṣṣāṣ* were especially active in the caliphates of Muʿāwiya, ʿAbd al-Malik and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, both for and against the Umayyads. Yet, the author cautions against considering them all as political figures, for some, including Bilāl b. Saʿd, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim, or Mūsā b. Sayyār, remained politically disengaged, and dedicated themselves only to religious education.

To Armstrong, all the material he collected proves that the early Islamic *quṣṣāṣ* were not exclusively or primarily storytellers but rather reputable religious scholars, who were part of the orthodox religious establishment, often praised for their contribution to a number of Islamic religious disciplines.[6] Their bad reputation originated only during the Umayyad period as a result of some of their 'malpractices', political affiliations, and negative effects on the public. They were not popular preachers, because their audiences were not only the masses but in some instances also the students of *ḥadīth;* they were public speakers or simply "preachers," and different elements set them apart from other public performers: *qaṣaṣ* was less formal than *khaṭāba* and wider in content and objective than *waʿẓ* and *dhikr*, as its use in martial contexts suggests. Armstrong concludes: "Indeed, the feature that seems to distinguish *qaṣaṣ* from other public pronouncements and that connected all of its varied expressions, be they religious, martial or religio-political, was exhortation. The objective of the early Islamic *qāṣṣ* was not simply to educate, it was to motivate." (p. 282).

Armstrong's methodology and treatment of the sources raises various questions. These are related to either of two issues: (1) a conflation of *qaṣaṣ* and *quṣṣāṣ* and (2) authenticity. First, he includes in his discussion of the *quṣṣāṣ* all those who at some point gave *qaṣaṣ, qiṣṣa* or *qaṣṣū*, yet it ought to be asked whether everyone who tells a *qiṣṣa* or engages in *qaṣaṣ* is a *qāṣṣ*. One could say that not everyone who writes is a writer. Armstrong's criteria throw together disparate characters of early Islamic society: the Prophet Muḥammad, prominent Rāshidūn-era political figures like Abū Bakr and ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀs and semi-legendary figures of early Islam like Tamīm al-Dārī and, Umayyad scholars, and what seem to have been semi-professional martial and partisan Umayyad *quṣṣāṣ*. Based on these criteria, God Himself could have made it to Armstrong's list.[7] Armstrong's criteria thus make for a too-large and too varied body of individuals to be discussed as a distinct sociological group, something that seems

6. In this regard, we may think of Steven Judd's recent book *Religious Scholars and the Umayyads: Piety-Minded Supporters of the Marwānid Caliphate* (Abingdon, 2014) in which he argues that while pious scholars have been considered to have been opposed to the Umayyads, a sizeable number of them in fact supported the regime through their scholarly activities and public performance of piety.

7. The Qur'ān says "We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories" *naḥnu naquṣṣu ʿalayka aḥsana al-qaṣaṣi* Q 12:3.

to be Armstrong's main concern here as he tries to redeem the *quṣṣāṣ* as reputable and conformist scholars.

Second, the later nature of sources is something that cannot be avoided, as we have no contemporary accounts of the *quṣṣāṣ*. Yet, the author discards the question of authenticity all too easily. He mentions the general problem in passing during his discussion of the *qaṣaṣ* statements (Chapter One): "For my part, I have accepted the attribution of the statement as a *qiṣṣa* recognizing that this, in itself, reveals the viewpoint of what constitutes a *qiṣṣa* in the mind of the author of the specific source text, if not of the Islamic community in general at the time of the compilation of the source, preserving an earlier view of the features of *qaṣaṣ* (p.15). Yet Armstrong does speak mainly about the *quṣṣāṣ* of early Islam, as the title clearly states, and not about their later perception. He also refers the reader to Aziz Al-Azmeh's excellent essay that criticizes the overly critical approach to Arabic sources that has become characteristic of Western scholarship.[8] But while Al-Azmeh is correct in his assessment of Western scholarship's obsession with the issue of authenticity, this does not mean that we can stop being cautious about what the sources tell us or that we need to follow their argumentative lines. For example, Armstrong makes an effort to represent the *quṣṣāṣ* as "conformists," rather than innovators, as they have been cast by some later sources. That's why it is important for him to prove that *quṣṣāṣ* and *qaṣaṣ* existed in the time of the Prophet, something about which scholarship has been either divided or agnostic, and he concludes that rather than later back-projections "it seems more likely [...] that this miscellany [of perceptions and reports about *quṣṣāṣ* and *qaṣaṣ*] signifies that we have an authentic corpus of reports preserving the complex and evolving religious milieu of the early period." (p. 206). I do not follow the author's argument here: Why cannot the existence of diverse views on pre-Umayyad *quṣṣāṣ* reflect later attempts to legitimize or de-legitimize the practice of preaching, which was clearly a significant feature of Islamic society and a powerful tool of propaganda? Nor do I see the need to portray them as conformists. This contention stems from the author's following too closely the later sources that engage in such debates. However, we cannot be sure that the discussion about the *quṣṣāṣ* as innovators took place during the early period of Islam (until 750). These debates might be of later origins and their application to the historical early *quṣṣāṣ* may thus be anachronistic.

These two issues—conflating *qaṣaṣ* and *qāṣṣ* and downplaying the problem of authenticity—raise further questions about Armstrong's book. As far as the definition of *qaṣaṣ* is concerned, it may be asked whether all the instances in which the later sources preserved statements containing the verb *qaṣṣa* used it deliberately to refer to the practice of *qaṣaṣ*, and did not replace, for instance, *akhbara* at an earlier stage of transmission. And even if the term's usage were constant, we may ask whether *qaṣṣa* meant the same thing in different time periods. Furthermore, if one of the author's main goals is precisely to define

8. Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity: A Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources* (Berlin, 2014).

qaṣaṣ, his conclusion (see above or p. 282) seems rather unsatisfying. "Exhortation" and "to motivate" are indeed objectives of most public speakers throughout human history; Aristotle considered rhetoric to be the art of persuasion (*Rhet*. I.2). If one of the main flaws of modern scholarly treatment of *qaṣaṣ* is too a broad definition, as he claims, he has not satisfactorily solved the problem. In any case, the main purpose of this book lies in correcting the other misconception that he sets to refute: the view of the *quṣṣāṣ* as storytellers. This is what leads us to the second point: Armstrong's treatment of the material and his arguments turn his list of *quṣṣās* into a homogeneous group, as it were. But as we have seen, the *quṣṣāṣ* were rather amorphous. Jonathan Berkey, talking about later medieval Islamic preachers, notes that using terms such as *qāṣṣ* and *wāʿiẓ* "is in a way misleading, because the *quṣṣāṣ* and *wuʿʿāẓ* did not necessarily form a discrete social or occupational category"; rather, their performances should be seen rather as "activities or even different aspects of the same activity."[9] Such understanding of *qaṣaṣ* is even more plausible in early Islam before many occupations became professionalized. It is therefore warranted to ask whether the *quṣṣāṣ* existed as a separate social group. The third point would be that Armstrong, as we saw with his discussion of innovators and conformers, is perhaps too eager to pass value judgments. To give a more concrete example, he discusses the various forms of *qaṣaṣ* performance, such as hand raising or fainting, as 'malpractices' that harmed the reputation of the *quṣṣāṣ* rather than as extremely interesting evidence of the ritual and performative dimension of their work. And since his main focus lies in redeeming the reputation of the *quṣṣās,* he casts, to this end, secular (storytelling) against religious, reputable against popular, and unorthodox against orthodox, creating dichotomies that did not necessarily exist.

Even readers unpersuaded by all aspects of Armstrong's methodology will be grateful to him for collecting a comprehensive body of *qaṣaṣ, qiṣṣa,* and *qāṣṣ* material and for its clear presentation. It contains many excerpts in Arabic and in English translation and a helpful appendix of early Islamic figures engaged in *qaṣaṣ* activities. It is an indispensable work for any Islamicist or historian interested in early Islamic and medieval preaching.

9. Jonathan Berkey, *Popular preaching and religious authority in the medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle, 2001), 14.

Book Review

Christophe Picard, *La Mer des Califes: Une histoire de la Méditerranée musulmane*. (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2015), 439 pages, glossary, bibliography, maps. ISBN: 9782020983815, Price: €26.00/$31.00.

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La Mer des Califes, a challenging and erudite work, deserves a wide audience. It raises many new questions in centering the Mediterranean in early and medieval Muslim history *and* historiography. The sea, Christophe Picard argues, was a preoccupation of empire and the stuff of memory. A proper English translation is very much in order.[1] Readers should be forewarned that, particularly for modern works, Picard's annotation is rather spare. He furnishes citations, to be sure, but these are few relative to the wealth of his discussion; the decision is likely to have been editorial, as the volume seems intended for a broad audience. This is less a failing of an excellent book than a source of regret that one cannot more readily engage its many ideas.

Picard has produced to date a rich body of work on the Muslim presence in both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean, including *La mer et les musulmans d'Occident au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1997), *L'Océan Atlantique musulman de la conquête arabe à l'époque almohade: Navigation et mise en valeur des côtes d'al-Andalus et du Maghreb occidental* (Paris, 1997) and a long series of article-length studies. His many ideas are on display in this new volume. Given their range, however, the book eludes easy summary. It works on several levels (and, for this reason, would serve well in graduate seminars). Picard, again, argues for maritime concerns as essential to the course of Islamic imperial history from its very onset. This corrects, he argues, a long-held view, a "vulgate of medieval history" (p. 11), that underplays the engagement of early and medieval Islamic society with the Mediterranean. This seems right: consideration of Muslim naval warfare, for example, is often tacked onto discussions of the early conquests and subsequent periods of Islamic/Middle East military history. The

1. A translation, by Nicholas Elliot, is to be published by Harvard University Press in early 2018.

tendency in Western historiography has been to reduce the Arabo-Muslim presence in the Mediterranean to piracy and a secondary role in the commercial history of the Sea. Picard's central point is that, on the contrary, one sees a consistent commitment to maritime matters on the part of successive regimes, whether the Abbasid caliphate, the 'successor' states (eg. Tulunids and Aghlabids), the rival Fatimid and Umayyad caliphates or, finally, the Almohad state late in the medieval period.

Picard provides a full body of evidence; he has read widely, and his extensive, two-part bibliography is a contribution in its own right.[2] The book, which includes a useful set of maps (pp. 407-418), is made up of two parts. It opens with a précis of the main points: (i) a fresh look at the Islamic Mediterranean is in order, one that acknowledges the sea as the venue of close and deliberate interaction of the three medieval realms (Islamic, Byzantine and Latin); (ii) the extant written evidence, still our best source despite considerable archeological gains in recent decades, consists in largest part of works produced by traveller-scholars serving imperial agendas; and (iii), finally, the project, done properly, needs therefore to engage not simply the history proper but the sources themselves. The weave of interrogation, of events and texts alike, makes *La mer des califes* a very contemporary work of history.

Part One ("La Méditerranée des Arabes: entre représentations et appropriations") takes up both tasks: an assessment of Muslim imperial maritime policy set against a close look at the Sea as imagined in Arabo-Islamic sources. It consists of seven chapters. The first chapter, "La découverte de la Méditerranée par les Arabes," could stand easily on its own. Picard argues that the first generations of Arabo-Islamic scholars and writers took only mild interest in the sea. But, more to the point, this early material was shaped (*instrumentalisé*) to meet Abbasid caliphal needs: the aim was juridical, that is, an effort to define the fiscal standing of, say, Cyprus and coastal regions of the Levant, and legitimating, in that the Abbasids sought to frame their activity as taking up where the Prophet and his successors left off. The Mediterranean, in the latter sense, was framed principally as the venue of confrontation against Byzantium. Picard sees it as having also been, at this initial stage, secondary in interest to the Indian Ocean, the domain of maritime commerce. Only following the third/ninth century, with a proliferation of geographical writing, did the Mediterranean come into its own. Picard devotes the remainder of the chapter to the work of three notables of Arabo-Islamic letters: al-Masʿūdī (d. 344/956), al-Idrīsī (d. 560/1165) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 809/1406). He argues, with these works as evidence, for 'the creative

2. To the Arabic sources, one can add al-Balawī's fourth/tenth-century *Sīrat Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn* (ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī, Damascus, 1358/1939), which contains additional references to relevant activity by the Tulunid regime (*Mer*, pp. 265-267). Regarding modern sources, A. Borrut's studies, "L'espace maritime syrien au cours des premiers siècles de l'Islam (VII^{e}-X^{e} siècle) : le cas de la région entre Acre et Tripoli," *Tempora. Annales d'histoire et d'archéologie* (Université Saint-Joseph) 10-11 (1999-2000), 1-33, and "Architecture des espaces portuaires et réseaux défensifs du littoral syro-palestinien dans les sources arabes (VII^{e}-XI^{e} s.)," *Archéologie islamique*, 11 (2001), 21-46 , are cited but missing from the bibliography, while M. McCormick's two publications and A.-L. de Prémare's *Les Fondations de l'Islam* (Paris, 2002) are listed out of order.

wealth of Arab geographical literature, particularly as it relates to the maritime space' (p. 50).

The second chapter, "L'écriture arabe de la conquête de la Méditerranée," begins Picard's more substantial discussion. It takes up the evidence on the Arab/Islamic conquests and its careful shaping by Abbasid-era scholars. The first Muslims produced full accounts of the conquests, works that in turn underwent not simply (selective) transmission and collection but, critically, a reframing by bureaucrat-scholars writing on behalf of the Abbasid court. A similar process, but one that produced a counter-narrative to that of the Baghdadi and Samarran courts, ensued after the later third/ninth century in Aghlabid (then Fatimid) Ifriqiya and Umayyad Spain. In each case, one chased legitimation by reworking the past. So, in the case of the Abbasids, it was a matter of reworking (Syrian) Umayyad history, first, to align the '*ghāzī*' caliphs (eg. Hārūn al-Rashīd) with the 'heroes' of the previous age (eg. Maslama) then, second, justify a shift in the dynamics of jihad—for which the Mediterranean played an obvious role—from the offensive thrust of the conquest era to the defensive posture of their own age (the shaping of a frontier politics on the Taurus range and along the coasts). In this case, the Abbasid court made much of the decision by ʿUmar II to rethink imperial policy vis-à-vis the Byzantine foe, in halting the conquests in favor of a new policy of consolidation.

Picard takes up the Abbasid shift to a new-style jihad in his third chapter, "Les silences de la mer." The conquest of Constantinople now beyond reach, and notwithstanding Abbasid sorties into the Anatolian interior, the Muslim-Byzantine frontier stabilized and, thus, the caliphs and the scholars writing on their behalf reframed the terms of conflict. It was a shift in ideology and politics: the caliphs now sought to demonstrate Islam's superiority—its universality—a task achieved by the staging of elaborate receptions for Byzantine diplomats and, more grandly, laying claim to knowledge itself, through targeted translation of Greek and Sasanid works, and rituals of polemic. It was, no less, the pursuit of a new military strategy of, on the one hand, investment on an imperial scale in a defensive infrastructure (forts, ports and so on) and, on the other, the redefinition of jihad itself. The Abbasids played their part in shaping and projecting the ceremonial figure of the warrior (*ghāzī*) caliph.

The legacy of Baghdad—the cradle of Arabic geography and chronography—is the subject of chapter four, "La Méditerranée des géographes." Picard, drawing heavily on the work of André Miquel, sees the new discipline of geography as having turned on two objectives: fixing the Islamic realm (and Baghdad itself) at the center of the universe, and mapping for all to see the sovereignty of the caliph. If a first step introduced classical, above all Ptolemaic, principles, a second produced 'administrative geography,' as represented by the work of al-Yaʿqūbī and Ibn Khurradādhbih. A shift occurred with a second generation of these author-travellers: if al-Muqaddasī (much like al-Yaʿqūbī) limited themselves to a description of Muslim-held regions of the Mediterranean, it fell to Ibn Ḥawqal (fl. second half of the fourth/tenth century) to fully breach the mental frontier separating the eastern and western regions of the Islamic realm. The Mediterranean

became whole (*un ensemble singulier et cohérent*), and, over which, for Ibn Ḥawqal, the Fatimid imamate exercised true sovereignty. The sea was now a venue of frontiers: Ibn Ḥawqal, among other writers, references a maritime world of confrontation and commerce between Muslims, Byzantines and Latins.

Three subsequent chapters complete the first part of the book. The three chapters track the course of Muslim supremacy over the Mediterranean, from the late third/ninth century through the heyday of the fourth/tenth century, and its subsequent demise, with the waning of the Almohad state, in the mid-seventh/thirteenth century. From the fourth/tenth century on comes a wealth of evidence. Chronicles, works of geography, juridical texts and, notably, the Cairo Geniza documents, bespeak a remarkable flourishing of scholarship and commerce. But, so too, a 'media war' (p. 142) conducted by the Umayyad and Fatimid courts against one another, and against their Latin and Byzantine opponents. At the center stood the sea: control of the Mediterranean served aims that were ideological—again, the claims to universality on the part of successive dynasties—and strategic alike.

Students of Muslim military and economic history will find much to take away from these middle chapters. Picard recounts at length the considerable level of investment in fleets, ports, and coastal fortresses (*ribāṭ*s) on the part of each dynasty in turn. The Umayyads of Cordoba, for their part, imposed tighter administrative and fiscal control over Iberian ports, fleets and sailors; Tortosa, along the Ebro River in Catalonia, and Almería, on Spain's southeast corner, each flourished as military and commercial hubs with direct caliphal support. The Fatimids, Picard seems to suggest, moved matters even further, devoting rhetoric and investment alike in making a bid for authority over the Sea. And, finally, there is the case of the Almohads: "the texts make frequent mention of the attachment to the sea of the [Almohad] sovereigns, and, above all, their personal interest in the fleet and their sailors" (p. 214).

To the second part of the book—"Les stratégies méditerranéennes des califes"—falls discussion of the scale and complexity of Muslim maritime investment. Picard, though not explicit as to how the two parts of the book relate to one another, insists that, from as early as the reign of Muʿāwiya (41/661-60/680), the character of Muslim engagement with the Sea was extensive and diverse. If, in other words, the sea remained, through the early and medieval Islamic periods, a venue of confrontation, the Geniza documents, among other sources, make clear that it became a good deal more beside. The Umayyad sovereign, alongside ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, was quick to exploit the naval resources abandoned by the Byzantines in Egypt and Syria. The Abbasids, in their turn, as described in Chapter Eight ("La Méditerranée des deux empires") faced a resurgent Byzantium in the later third/ninth century, and thus saw little option but to sustain investment in their navies and the infrastructure of ports and coastal defenses. The Abbasids also carried forward an 'island strategy,' that is, a determination to take in hand the large seabound territories of both the western and eastern reaches of the Sea, Sicily most notably. Picard is mostly silent on the references to slaves and collective enslavement contained in reports of the major Umayyad assaults

on Cyprus. He barely mentions slavery, in fact, anywhere in the book, a missed opportunity, particularly in light of Michael McCormick's sweeping ideas on the significance to medieval European and Abbasid history of the slave trade, much of which, after all, was conducted at sea.[3]

I would also comment on two issues raised by Picard in his ninth chapter ("Contrôler la Méditerranée"), which is devoted to the shaping of an Abbasid 'model' of jihad. The model was taken up by successor regimes even as the Abbasid state surrendered authority beginning in the later third/ninth century. Once again, its ingredients were a 'formidable' material investment in coastal defenses and a 'remarkably effective' program of propaganda (p. 287). My first comment is brief: I would have liked Picard to elaborate on a passing observation (p. 253) that the Abbasid recruitment of 'eastern' forces—Iranian forces by al-Maʾmūn and Turks by al-Muʿtaṣim—reframed jihad as having more to do with cavalry than fleets. He suggests a shift in attitude in military circles but also, I think, in logistics and planning. But he cites no texts as evidence and I wondered if he had any particular ones in mind.

The second comment concerns the impact of investment in coastal and frontier defenses, by Byzantium and Muslim powers alike, but especially the Abbasid state. Picard sees it as having driven demographic and economic growth in these same areas, growth closely tied to the transfer and settlement of soldiers, artisans, workers and other populations (pp. 280-287). It is here, for example, where one wishes for better annotation: direct references are few. But, regarding one particular locale, Tarsus and its hinterland (the *Thughūr*), Picard seems clearly reliant on an argument developed by Peter von Sivers concerning the emergence and rivalry of, in effect, power interests in Tarsus—the one military, the other landed/commercial.[4] Michael Bonner[5] has raised objections of this argument, and I would follow suit: evidence for the socio-economic organization of Tarsus in the late third/ninth century does not appear 'thick' enough to support a description of the nature, extent and impact of transregional commerce along the frontier. The existence of *un véritable système économique* (p. 280) sustained by military and commercial investment is certainly plausible, but the question remains of whether it is borne out by the sources.

The fourth/tenth century brought the adoption of caliphal claims by the Umayyad and Fatimid states. Picard takes up the policies of both regimes, and their Almohad successors, in the final chapters of the book. Two developments occurred: the confrontation of the two caliphates, in which control over maritime waters stood front and center, and a heightened engagement with the Latin and Byzantine realms. If the two empires set their rhetorical sights on Baghdad and the overturning of the Abbasid house, their

3. See his *Origins of the European Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

4. "Taxes and Trade in the ʿAbbāsid Thughūr, 750-962/133-351," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 25:1 (1982): 71-99, see especially 89-93.

5. *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1996): 152-153.

real target was one another. Chapter Ten, "Contrôler la Méditerranée," sets the stage with a discussion of the Aghlabid commitment, very much in the Abbasid style, to the campaign against Sicily. Here, again, a central regime joined an ideological program to material investment in fleets and coastal infrastructure. Similar initiatives occurred to the west, with the Moroccan Salihid dynasty—a polity little discussed, it seems, in modern scholarship—and the early Umayyad state. In each case, jihad and measures to assure coastal security gave way to a more ambitious program of expansion and confrontation. The great flourish of activity—the stuff of Chapter Eleven, "L'impérialisme maritime des califes méditerranéens au x^{e} siècle"—involved not simply sustained military campaigning—jihad against Latin and Byzantine territory, and war of one caliphate against another—but new and vigorous commercial engagement as well.

Picard cites evidence provided by the Arabic geographers but, so too, a growing body of archaeological data in treating a burst of economic exchange across the fourth/tenth century Mediterranean. A key point is that it is likely to have been Mediterranean in origin, linking local and regional development—new productivity at the level of villages and local markets on both sides of the Sea—with heightened military and fiscal investment on the part of the Byzantines, Umayyads and Fatimids. This is less a rejection of the notion, developed by Maurice Lombard, among others, that trade flowing from the Indian Ocean, Red Sea and the Sahara fueled Mediterranean commercial growth, than an effort to assign credit to the Mediterranean region itself. A greater sense of security also explains the spread of European, Jewish and Muslim merchant networks; in the case of the Jewish networks, in particular, and here the Geniza letters serve their purpose, Fatimid support was decisive. Umayyad investment proved no less decisive further west: intense economic activity joined new Umayyad diplomatic engagement with the Latin powers. The same interplay of confrontation (read: jihad), on the one hand, commercial relations joining Latin, Byzantine and Muslim markets, on the other, was a hallmark of the Almohad period. Only with the waning of this last medieval Mediterranean Muslim power—the subject of Chapter Twelve ("La souveraineté maritime")—could the Latin maritime powers come into their own.

Picard concludes by insisting that naval men, operating in the Mediterranean across the medieval period, stood among the heroes of Arabo-Islamic tradition. Their campaigns, carried out in the name of imperial masters, the latter driven by a determination to project Islamic universality (read: hegemony), rendered the Mediterranean "the sole maritime venue of caliphal jihad" (p. 347). And, throughout, an eye to material gain remained: conquest and profit went hand in hand. And it was in this manner that later Arabic writers, al-Idrīsī, Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Khaldūn among them, would remember the Sea, the frontier from which to pursue expansion of the Islamic realm.

These comments only scratch the surface: *La mer des califes* is awash with compelling ideas and I have touched on only the main ones. Picard, as amply demonstrated by his long list of publications, has been working on the topics that inform this volume for many

years. Mediterranean studies has a long pedigree in Western scholarship; one thinks, of course, of Henri Pirenne and Fernand Braudel, and, more recently, of Chris Wickham and Michael McCormick.[6] In obliging us to reconsider the history of the (Islamic) Mediterranean—and, thus, perforce, the conclusions of his predecessors—Picard surely has earned a place in this worthy company.

6. Picard, acknowledging the contribution of Pirenne's much-discussed *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (1937), wrote the preface to a reedition of the work (Paris, 2005).

Book Review

Chase Robinson, *Islamic Civilization in Thirty Lives: The First 1,000 Years* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 272 pages. ISBN: 978-0520292987, Price: $29.95.

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The technique of using biography to make history accessible to newcomers is alive and well. Oneworld publishes the Makers of the Muslim World series, and Oxford University Press has The World in a Life. Textbooks often introduce chapters with an illustrative biography, such as the travelers in Valerie Hansen and Kenneth Curtis's *Voyages in World History*.[1] The Islamic world also has its own tradition of *ṭabaqāt* and *maʿājim* biographical literature highlighting worthies of different fields and serving as reference material for hadith criticism. Referencing the latter tradition, but certainly in harmony with the former, Chase Robinson has used brief accounts of 30 prominent men and women to introduce readers to the first millennium of Islamic history. These thirty chapters are more than just biographies, for the author is also concerned with the afterlives of his subjects and the sources on which our knowledge is based. As he says at one point, "A leitmotif throughout this book has been the task of disentangling the legendary from the reliable." (189)

The book's 30 chapters are divided into four chronologically defined parts, each of which begins with a few pages of historical background to contextualize the biographies it contains. Covering such a broad subject as "Islamic civilization" from 600 to 1525 naturally involves choices, and one aspect of this review will be to highlight the choices which have been made. This is usually not meant as criticism, and the present reviewer is in fact impressed with the amount of ground covered. Robinson defines "civilization" as "the distinctive yield, in lived experience and especially high culture, of the religious and political project undertaken by Muslims (11)." This "project" was shaped by military, political, and economic conditions, thus leading to an emphasis on conquerors and rulers.

1. Valerie Hansen and Kenneth Curtis, *Voyages in World History*, 3rd edition (Boston: Cengage: 2017).

In addition, according to Robinson, it was the elite who produced "the exemplars, the notables, the stars, the powerful, and the influential (11)." A further principle of selection seems to have been an emphasis on figures whose contributions remain evident today, as opposed to those involved in movements or trends which did not last.

The first section of the book has as its theme the creation of the early Islamic empire as the crucible of Islamic civilization. This empire was born of the creative transformation of the cultural material of Late Antiquity in ways that, in Robinson's interpretation, completed in the Middle East a process begun when Constantine the Great began making the Roman Empire into a Christian political order. More might have been said here about the Sasanian background, though the example of Damascus as "a model of change" is useful.

The individuals treated in this first section are characterized as "participants in the project of fusing prophecy and politics." The first biography, perhaps naturally, is that of Muḥammad himself. In this chapter, the author informs readers about the complexities of the sources, giving examples of legend and polemic while offering a standard account of his prophetic career and historical context in the Ḥijāz. He defines "jihad" as "religiously sanctioned warfare" (24) and translates the verbal form as "fight" in his Qurʾanic quotations (26). Robinson reads the motive for this warfare as the desire to ensure that monotheistic worship was possible in and around Mecca because of the Kaʿba. There follow biographies of ʿAlī and ʿĀʾisha, which establish the division between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam while further explaining the nature of the primary sources for the period. The biography of ʿĀʾisha also uses key episodes in her life—her marriage, the accusation of adultery against her, and her role in the Battle of the Camel—to illustrate what recorders of traditions about her found important and why. Robinson does not discuss the origin of the Kharijites, nor is there much about the beginning of Muslim historical memory, which could have involved ʿĀʾisha's later years as a source for Muḥammad's life.

The next two biographies, those of ʿAbd al-Malik and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, establish aspects of Islam's imperial high culture while continuing to highlight the types of primary sources available to historians. The biography of ʿAbd al-Malik calls attention to his coinage and its significance alongside monumental building and other "mass media of the day" in the establishment of a more centralized government for an empire with the developing religion of Islam as its ruling ideology (47). The centralized polity was run by officials such as Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, whose illustrative career is described alongside his literary output, an output which is used to highlight both the existence of *adāb* culture and the passing into Islamic civilization of elements of Sasanian high culture. Robinson then uses Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya to represent Islam apart from the ruling class, highlighting the ways in which the Sufis of later centuries claimed her as one of their own. His assertion that her renunciatory brand of Islam "transformed...the psychological terrain of late antique religion" (54) seems questionable, however, given the ascetic traditions of late antique Christianity. The section concludes with a biography of al-Maʾmūn dealing with his rise to power

and impact of the civil war it entailed, his own brief choice of an Alid successor, and the *miḥna,* all of which highlight the disputes over religious and political authority which served as crucial context shaping the reign.

Part Two, "The Islamic Commonwealth 850-1050," focuses on the high culture of the post-imperial age as the crystallization of Islamic civilization. Given his focus on a "*polyfocal* Islamic world" with "a multitude of ruling courts and wealthy cities," it is unfortunate that Robinson's eight biographies are all of people who flourished in Iraq or further east, and most of them are deeply connected to Baghdad (72). The section would have greatly benefited from having one or two figures from the Mediterranean world, such as the Ikshidid eunuch Kāfūr, the Fatimid historian-jurist Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, or al-Muqaddasī, the Jerusalem-born geographer. However, the eight biographies do cover much thematic ground. The introduction to this section alludes briefly to Iberia becoming independent while also highlighting as two major transitions the shift of economic power from Iraq to other regions and an increasing rate of conversion.

Two of the biographies, those of the Abbasid singer ʿArīb and the vizier and calligrapher Ibn Muqla, deal simultaneously with the arts, court life and politics. ʿArīb's career provides a lens with which to examine gender, elite slavery, and the culture of performance art, while Ibn Muqla's administrative career serves to illustrate the political lives of high government officials even as his calligraphy is the occasion for discussing that distinctive Islamic art form. Religious developments within Islam are explored through al-Ḥallāj and al-Ṭabarī. Al-Ḥallāj, of course, is an example of ecstatic Sufism, though as with Rabiʿa, Robinson notes he was not truly claimed by Sufis until a later period. Al-Ṭabarī's Qurʾan commentary is set amidst the debate over the proper uses of prophetic tradition and human reason, while his history is an example of how the leadership debates of the early caliphate were theologically resolved under the Abbasids.

With Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Robinson explores Abbasid "free-thinking," locating his medical advances in a willingness to criticize received wisdom that he also applied to religion. Robinson here discusses how the technological conditions of knowledge transmission in premodern societies made the preservation of unpopular ideas much less likely. Ibn Faḍlān and his diplomatic journey to Russia display "Baghdad's curiosity about an unknown world." (99) With Maḥmūd of Ghazna, Robinson introduces the role of regional military leaders, Turks, and the Muslim expansion into India and emphasizes the role of Persian Islamic culture in the eastern Islamic world, including the authorship of the *Shāhnāmah*. Notably, neither here nor elsewhere in the book is there a discussion of military slavery. The section concludes with al-Bīrūnī, who is situated within the Ghaznavid context and brought knowledge of and from India into his wide-ranging intellectual endeavors.

The geographic panorama grows more extensive in the book's third section, "A Provisional Synthesis 1050-1250." In this part's introduction, Robinson treats two major background themes for the period. One is the inauguration of a pattern of Turko-Mongol sultanates with the coming of the Saljuqs. The other is the prominence

of Mediterranean powers in the form of the Fatimids and Latin Christians. The first three biographies of the section lay out religious developments that represent an aspect of the "provisional synthesis." The Andalusian polymath Ibn Ḥazm appears primarily for his role in the Ẓāhirī school of Islamic jurisprudence, which focused on the explicit meaning of texts and rejected analogy. Despite often tying his material to the contemporary world, Robinson explains how the school lost out to the four surviving madhhabs, but does not mention the Ẓāhirī's revival by modern Salafis. In the next biography, Karīma al-Marwaziya is used to explore the world of hadith transmission and the role of women therein. Finally, al-Ghāzalī's life and harmonization of Sufism and rationalism is discussed alongside a critique of orientalist decline narratives, narratives in which al-Ghāzalī is said to have robbed Islam of its intellectual vibrancy.

The third section's remaining four biographies are an eclectic mix that deal with different facets of the period. The career of Abū al-Qāsim Ramisht opens a window onto the world of seaborne trade and the preservation of wealth through waqf endowments. Al-Idrīsī's biography displays how ancient traditions of geography and cartography were developed by Muslims and passed on to European civilization. With his biography of Saladin, Robinson again explores both the life of his subject and the development of later legend, beginning with his own contemporary biographers. Although the book views Crusading as a Mediterranean-wide phenomenon, the chronological view is narrow, as the author states that "by the end of the thirteenth century, Crusading was a spent military and political force." (161) The last biography in the section is that of Ibn Rushd, where there is an exploration of the differences among his own ideas about reason and revelation and the debates sparked in Western Europe by their Latin translation.

The fourth and final section of the work is titled "Disruption and Integration 1250-1525," referring to the Mongol conquests and the resulting integration of the "*Pax Mongolica*." The subjects of the first two biographies share a reputation for literary output in Persian. The first is the Sūfī poet Jalal al-Dīn Rūmī. Robinson here situates him and his poetry in a thirteenth-century Anatolian environment as a corrective to his modern reception as an example of "New Age religiosity" which is "often reduced to anodyne droplets of near-homeopathic concentration (188)." Thereafter, Rashīd al-Dīn serves as the exemplar for the multiculturalism of the Ilkhanate. The next two biographies are both those of theologians, al-Ḥillī and Ibn Taymiyya. The former is the occasion to focus on the development of Shiʿism over the centuries, with a particular focus on the development of Twelver Imamis, a contrast between the sectarian politics of early 21st century Iraq and integrated intellectual world of the thirteenth century, and the influence of rationalism on Shiʿite thought. A hiccup occurs when Robinson describes the Buyids as promoting Zaydism without mentioning their turn to Twelver Shiʿism as their power developed. The chapter on Ibn Taymiyya, in turn, seems to oppose him to al-Ḥillī, and focuses on the Sunni reactionary's ideas and their relationship with modern Islamists; unfortunately, the author seems to conflate that term with its

most extreme and violent examples.

A biography of Timur discusses his image over the centuries, including his use by modern Uzbek nationalists, before discussing the ways in which he fused Mongol and Islamic traditions of rule, including as patron of arts and letters. Next is Ibn Khaldūn, whose career and work are ably summarized, as is the interest shown in his work by recent figures such as Ronald Reagan. The final two biographies highlight the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, with which the book concludes. Robinson's biography of Mehmed II sets him against the background of the Ottoman dynasty and connects him to the Mediterranean Renaissance, including his interest in ancient Greece and Rome. Finally, Shah Ismāʿīl is seen as the progenitor of modern Iran as both a political unit and Shiʿite religious culture.

This last section begs the question of what we mean by the "Islamic" in "Islamic civilization." Robinson's definition of "civilization" is mentioned above, but he does not address the former term except implicitly with that definition's "undertaken by Muslims." If that is the only criterion, then by the dawn of the sixteenth century, there is definitely a need to move beyond the stereotypical "Islamic world" of the belt from Central Asia through North Africa. Mansa Musa, Bābā Farīd, Ruqaiya Sultan Begum and Malik Ambar are among the candidates one or two of whom could have represented the ongoing geographic spread of Islamic civilization, recalling Marshall Hodgson's line that, "In the sixteenth century [...] a visitor from Mars might well have supposed that the human world was on the verge of becoming Muslim."[2]

Each of the biographies has at least one illustration, and maps are found in the introductory material to parts one, three, and four. The book's copyright information occupies part of a column on the last page of the index (272). The glossary has only 18 entries; more would have been useful. There are also minor editing notes, as Rashīd al-Dīn and Ibn Sīna both come up before they are properly introduced, while the Mamlūks were mentioned enough to merit at least a bit more explanation. The "Suggestions for Further Reading" section has between three and five works for each biography. These include both primary and secondary sources and general works on broad topics in addition to those specific to the individual portrayed, e.g. books on the Crusades as well as those specifically on Saladin.

Readers of this review may doubtless be most interested in the book's potential for teaching. In a survey course covering the period, Robinson's would make an excellent text to use to introduce more in depth and comprehensive material. The engagingly written biographies will make the topic more accessible to students while also drawing out the variety of individuals who made up "Islamic civilization." The author's attention to political economy will in simple fashion help students grasp underlying concepts with which they sometimes struggle. Finally, the attention to source material, from Abbasid-period

2. Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam*, and World History, ed. Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 97.

biographies of Muḥammad through Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography to an inscription which confirms part of Shah Ismāʿīl's biography, will illustrate how historians study the past and stimulate thought and discussion, not only on what we know, but why we think we know it. Overall, the work is a sound introduction to the field from which people can learn much.

Book Review

Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016. Pp. xv, 390, with index. $45.00 (hardback). ISBN: 9780691166780. ISBN: 9781400883714 (eBook).

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Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History by Mona Hassan explores the idea of the caliphate—a means through which people could assume leadership after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 11/632—particularly its manifestations and valences under the Abbasids and the Ottomans through wide-ranging evidence, including poetry and juridical texts (5). Chronologically, the work spans two specified time periods, namely the first/seventh into the tenth/sixteenth centuries and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The study demonstrates strong grounding in theoretical approaches to collective memory and memory studies. It stands out overall as a work that contributes to and encourages important conversations among scholars of Islam and also between them and those working in other fields.

The work consists of six main chapters, along with an Introduction and Epilogue. Chapter 1, "Visions of a Lost Caliphal Capital: Baghdad, 1258 CE," is centered on the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 656/1258 and how the loss of this city was felt and conceptualized by Muslims in a multitude of sources, including written, visual, and aural texts. For example, Hassan explores how the scholar Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) wrote about this loss in his history, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-Kubrā*, focusing on how the work evokes and interprets the loss of Baghdad for Muslims collectively. Aside from such discussions of specific scholars and their works, the chapter also emphasizes a broader "cultural discourse" that they created and participated in, the contours of which begin to emerge if we assess such figures and their writings in light of one another (22).

The first chapter situates the destruction and loss of Baghdad as a central, defining event in Muslim collective memory, particularly in terms of subsequent conceptualizations of the caliphate, which is the topic of Chapter 2, "Recapturing Lost Glory and Legitimacy."

This chapter also examines various texts like Chapter 1, but it delves into the years following the seventh/thirteenth century Mongol conquest of Baghdad. In this vein, it explores how the conquest was conceived of, particularly in terms of reclaiming the past prestige, power, and authority of the caliphate. Hassan accentuates these ideas with historical examples of rulers, dynasties, and others in the political domain who sought to assume the power and position once held by the Abbasid Caliphate.

Chapter 3, "Conceptualizing the Caliphate, 632–1517 CE," expands the intellectual frame established by the first two chapters to demonstrate how an interest in the caliphate extended chronologically long before and well after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad. As such, the idea of the caliphate must be explored in light of the years surrounding the foundation of Islam itself, including early Abbasid articulations. On this note, Chapter 3 looks at how caliphates were conceptualized in juridical texts from the first/seventh into the tenth/sixteenth centuries, paying particular attention to the work of Mamluk-era intellectuals such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 784/1406) and al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418).

While Chapters 1, 2, and 3 focus on the premodern, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are situated in the modern period. Chapter 4, "Manifold Meanings of Loss: Ottoman Defeat, Early 1920s," relies on various types of texts to show how the notion of a caliphate at that time can be understood through a consideration of these texts, but in a contextually distinct moment—post-WWI and on the eve of the shattering of the Ottoman Caliphate and the launching of the Turkish Republic—than that of the first three chapters. In terms of sources, this chapter centers on historical documents to examine attitudes towards the caliphate, which ought to be contrasted with the emphasis on texts such as juridical in earlier chapters. This is notable because it suggests that discourse about the caliphate was not limited to a particular discursive domain, but rather pervaded multiple ones. Chapter 5, "In International Pursuit of a Caliphate," reviews conceptions of the caliphate on a global scale, particularly orchestrated efforts to imagine the caliphate beyond nation-state borders. As the title suggests, this chapter truly sheds light on the international character of such efforts, spanning discussions raging in Istanbul and Cairo to Indonesian and Chinese viewpoints on the composition of a caliphal council. Finally, Chapter 6, "Debating a Modern Caliphate," looks at specific figures in the Ottoman context with ideas, often differing ones, regarding the caliphate, including Mustafa Sabri (d. 1954) and Said Nursi (d. 1960).

Overall *Lost Caliphate* makes numerous noteworthy contributions to scholarship. First, it considers a variety of sources rather than remain confined to a single body of texts. In addition to written materials, the work features visuals, including reproductions of paintings, maps, and more, demonstrating the multidimensional pull of the idea of the caliphate. Because the work delves into numerous texts and forms of evidence, more studies on the topic in the future will be beneficial to move along this area of academic interest in memory studies and Islamicate pasts by exploring in greater detail some subset of what has been discussed here. Additionally, the work builds upon foundational studies on

memory and history, including those by Émile Durkheim, Maurice Halbwachs, and others, and it aptly considers their ideas in light of particular Islamicate contexts. Furthermore, it is highly useful in terms of advancing the study of Islamicate intellectual history, and ought to be put into conversation with other works that are also exploring the history of ideas in global and Islamicate contexts, including recent ones such as Cemil Aydin's *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Harvard UP, 2017).

Scholars and students alike, particularly those with an interest in the history of ideas and memory studies, will find this work intellectually engaging and highly informative. It can be assigned in classroom settings, especially at advanced undergraduate and graduate levels, across a range of departments, including history, religious studies, and literature. At its core, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate* is a timely and noteworthy book about the development and pull of the notion of the caliphate on Muslim communities and Islamicate contexts over time, and is as relevant to the twenty-first century world stage as ever.

Book Review

Abolfazl Khatibi, *Āyā Firdawsī Maḥmūd-i Ghaznavī rā hajv guft? Hajv'nāmah-i mansūb bih Firdawsī: Bar'rasī-yi taḥlīlī, taṣḥīḥ-i intiqādī, va sharḥ-i bayt'hā* [*Did Ferdowsi Satirize Mahmud of Ghazni? The Satire Attributed to Ferdowsi: Analysis, Textual Criticism, and Commentary*] (Tehran: Pardīs-i Dānish, 2016), 226 pages. ISBN: 9786003000568, Price: $23.95 (Paperback).

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In the year 400/1010, after more than three decades of toil, the poet Abū al-Qāsim Firdawsī completed the second, and probably final, redaction of his *Shāhnāmah*.[1] The work was begun around 366/976–7, when the Samanid dynasty was still nominally in power, but after 388/998 a new empire, based in Ghaznah, came to control much of Iran and Central Asia (and beyond). The Ghaznavid ruler at this time of expansion was Maḥmūd ibn Sebüktegin (r. 388–421/998–1030), and he apparently became the new dedicatee of the *Shāhnāmah* by default. As Firdawsī revised and expanded his epic, he added a number of passages in praise of Maḥmūd. This much is clear. But the question of what, if anything, took place between the poet and his assumed patron after the completion of the work has been one of the longest-running controversies in Persian literary history.

According to popular narratives that can be traced back at least as far as the mid-twelfth century CE, Firdawsī traveled to Ghaznah to present the *Shāhnāmah* to Maḥmūd, with the understanding that there would be a generous monetary reward. Unfortunately, as the story goes in its oldest documented version, there were certain individuals at the Ghaznavid court who disliked Firdawsī, and they spoke to Maḥmūd, a staunch orthodox Sunni, about the poet's Shiʿi (*rāfiżī*) leanings and allegedly Muʿtazilī theological views. As a result of this defamation, Maḥmūd decided to grant Firdawsī twenty thousand silver *dirham*s—a paltry sum for a masterpiece of fifty thousand lines. Firdawsī was so offended that he went straight to the public bath, bought a beer, and gave away all of the money. He then fled Ghaznah for

1. Romanization of Persian and Arabic words in this review follows the Library of Congress standard, with some exceptions for proper names (including Abolfazl Khatibi). Historical dates are generally given according to both the Islamic (AH) and Julian (CE) calendars. Please note that the English translation of the book title provided above is taken from the back cover.

the northwest, eventually seeking refuge at the court of the Bāvand dynasty in Ṭabaristān. Once there, the poet composed a verse satire (*hajv*, *hijā'*, or *hajv'nāmah*) against Maḥmūd, in which he lambasted the king for his lack of appreciation for a work as grand as the *Shāhnāmah*. The Bāvandid ruler, who was himself a vassal of the Ghaznavids, managed to defuse the situation by paying Firdawsī for the *hajv'nāmah* and then expunging it. Only a few lines, we are told, survived in popular memory. Some time later, Maḥmūd realized that he had done wrong by Firdawsī, and he sent a caravan bearing a new, much larger gift. The poet died shortly before its arrival.

This is a remarkable tale, and again, it has a long history. The earliest surviving account of Firdawsī's interaction with Maḥmūd (*i.e.*, the one just summarized) is given in the *Chahār maqālah* of Niẓāmī ʿArūżī, a prose work written around 551/1156 under Ghurid patronage.[2] Niẓāmī claims to have received some of his information from the locals of Nīshāpūr, near Firdawsī's home city of Ṭūs, during a visit in 514/1120–21. In a further indication of the currency of this story from a relatively early date, both Niẓāmī Ganjavī (d. *ca.* 605/1209) and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221) refer to Maḥmūd's mistreatment of Firdawsī at several points in their own narrative poems. Finally, and most importantly, many manuscripts of the *Shāhnāmah* contain some version of the *hajv'nāmah*, included either as part of an introduction to the work, or at the end as a kind of epilogue. This is where the problems begin; and the problems are numerous and confounding.

Our oldest extant copies of the *Shāhnāmah* date to the seventh/thirteenth century, meaning that the deepest layer of textual criticism is separated from the authorship of the work by two hundred years.[3] Whether or not Firdawsī ever visited Ghaznah, there was ample time for stories involving him and Maḥmūd to be told and retold—as indeed seems to have happened—with the original truth of the matter being difficult to recover. The text of the purported *hajv'nāmah* consists of just thirty or forty lines of poetry in some early *Shāhnāmah* manuscripts, while it runs to nearly one hundred and fifty lines in certain later codices. Throughout this range, the variations between one copy and the next are often extensive. It is also difficult to reconcile these presentations with the account of Niẓāmī ʿArūżī, who, writing in the 1150s, quoted what he claimed were the only six surviving lines of Firdawsī's diatribe against Maḥmūd. How are we to explain the dramatic growth of this poem, except as the result of a creative scribal tradition which, over the same period, increased the *Shāhnāmah*'s total size by roughly twenty percent? Looking closely at *any* recension of the *hajv'nāmah*

2. See Edward G. Browne, *Revised Translation of the "Chahár Maqála" ("Four Discourses") of Niẓámí-i-ʿArúḍí of Samarqand* (Cambridge, 1921), 54–9.

3. There may be a few exceptions to this statement, depending on how one views the earliest works that quote lines from Firdawsī, such as the anonymous chronicle *Mujmal al-tavārīkh va al-qiṣaṣ* (begun in 520/1126), and indeed the *Chahār maqālah*. It is worth noting, however, that these texts have also survived in significantly later manuscripts. While external sources that discuss Firdawsī and transmit segments of his work are clearly important, and provide some insight into the early textual history of the *Shāhnāmah*, the fact remains that we have nothing copied before the seventh/thirteenth century.

only reveals further problems. Some lines appear to have been duplicated from the body of the *Shāhnāmah*. Others are stylistically inferior, their meaning difficult to parse. Still other lines have metrical faults, or employ Arabic loanwords that occur nowhere else in Firdawsī's œuvre. (The Persian epic is famous for its small share of Arabic-derived vocabulary.)

Faced with such an array of historical dilemmas and textual inconsistencies (only a few of which have been mentioned here), scholars of the *Shāhnāmah* grew increasingly skeptical about the legitimacy of the *hajv'nāmah* over the second half of the twentieth century.[4] This trend went hand-in-hand with the process of establishing critical editions of the epic—first in Moscow by E. E. Bertels' team, and later by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh and his collaborators. In recent years, something approaching a consensus has developed among historians of Persian literature, that Firdawsī *may* have gone to Ghaznah; that there *may* have been some unpleasantness between him and Maḥmūd; and that other parts of the traditional narrative, including the composition of new verses against the ruler, *could* reflect actual events; but that we lack the necessary source material to substantiate these conjectures. More to the point, the highly problematic nature of the *hajv'nāmah* as it occurs in different manuscripts makes it difficult to imagine that any version of the poem could be labeled an authentic work of Firdawsī. And so it was set aside. The careful methods that were used to produce scholarly editions of the *Shāhnāmah* itself were never applied to the *hajv'nāmah*.

It is here that an important new monograph by Abolfazl Khatibi enters the conversation. For the first time, a researcher has collected a large number of copies of the *hajv'nāmah*—with a focus on earlier manuscripts, including those that form the basis of the Khaleghi-Motlagh edition—and studied them in depth to see what fresh insight can be gained. The short title of the book is *Āyā Firdawsī Maḥmūd-i Ghaznavī rā hajv guft?* or, in the translation provided on the back cover, *Did Ferdowsi Satirize Mahmud of Ghazni?* In reality, only the first chapter (of four) is directly concerned with answering this question. Khatibi begins by explaining the problem of the *hajv'nāmah*, after which he offers a concise but comprehensive review of prior scholarship. He then addresses the matter of the poem's status at some length (pp. 28–70). The conclusion that Khatibi reaches is in line with the suspicions of many *Shāhnāmah* scholars; namely, that whatever may have transpired between Firdawsī and Maḥmūd, we have no sound basis on which to claim the authenticity of the *hajv'nāmah*, whether by accepting one of the versions found in manuscripts, or by trying to separate some "original" core of the text from the accretions of the scribal tradition. Going perhaps a step further, Khatibi casts doubt on the idea that there was ever a unified, substantial poem in which Firdawsī denounced Maḥmūd. Some of the early sources, such as the (Arabic) *Āthār al-bilād* of Zakarīyā ibn Muḥammad Qazvīnī (d. 682/1283), give the impression that Firdawsī composed *a few lines* out of frustration at the ruler's failure to reward him as he deserved. If this were true, then

4. Several references on this topic are given by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh in two entries in *Encyclopædia Iranica*: "Ferdowsi, Abu'l-Qāsem i. Life," and "Ferdowsi, Abu'l-Qāsem ii. Hajw-nāma." Earlier studies by Muḥammad Amīn Riyāḥī and Maḥmūd Khān Shīrānī are of particular importance.

it probably would not make sense to refer to a *hajv'nāmah* in the first place.

While Khatibi's verdict may not come as a surprise to specialists, he is obviously able to discuss the subject with greater authority than earlier commentators, since he has assembled all of the relevant sources. In critiquing the legitimacy of the *hajv'nāmah*, Khatibi emphasizes problems that he organizes into six categories. First, there is a relatively large number of Arabic words in the *hajv'nāmah*, as compared to the remainder of the *Shāhnāmah*. This is most striking in the later, larger versions of the poem; but even in the six lines provided by Niẓāmī ʿArūżī, there are three loanwords—*ghamz*, *ḥikāyat*, and *ḥimāyat*—that cannot be found anywhere else in the work of Firdawsī. Second, Khatibi observes a lack of "organic connections" (*payvand'hā-yi andām'vār*) among the verses of the *hajv'nāmah*. In his view, the text reads more like a patchwork of individual lines drawn from various places. Third, on another point of style, Khatibi is critical of the empty verbosity (*iṭnāb*) of the *hajv'nāmah*, which is especially clear in the way that certain passages were expanded over time. Some of the later copies have added lines that are little more than lists of the kings whose stories are told by Firdawsī. Fourth—and here we come to an objectively severe problem—many lines in the *hajv'nāmah* appear to have been copied or adapted from elsewhere in the *Shāhnāmah*, and, in a few cases, from narrative poems by other authors. One of the oldest versions, found in the Cairo manuscript of 741/1340–41, includes a line taken from the *Būstān* (655/1257) of Saʿdī! Fifth, Khatibi points out that there are early Persian prose works, such as the *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr* (*ca.* 601/1204–5) of Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Rāvandī, which transmit a substantial amount of Firdawsī's poetry; but they do not quote any lines unique to the *hajv'nāmah*. Sixth, and finally, there is the blatant (in Khatibi's estimation) technical and stylistic weakness (*nāʾustuvārī*) of much of the poem, particularly in later versions. It may be that not all of these arguments will be equally persuasive for all readers, but, taken together, they make it more difficult than ever to accept the authenticity of the *hajv'nāmah*. And they stand beside the badly disordered codicological situation, which is confronted in the next section of Khatibi's book.

The second chapter (pp. 71–86) provides a concise guide to the early manuscripts that contain the *hajv'nāmah* in one form or another, as well as an explanation of the approach taken by Khatibi in attempting to construct discrete recensions of the poem. He has made use of about twenty manuscripts of the *Shāhnāmah*, plus a few ancillary sources. (For example, there is a *jung*, or book of miscellany, which includes a *hajv'nāmah* of thirty-eight lines and may date to the first half of the eighth/fourteenth century.) In all, Khatibi lists twenty-six copies, of which sixteen are considered "primary" (*aṣlī*) for the recensions to which they belong, while the remainder are "secondary" (*farʿī*), used for corroboration and largely drawn from newer codices. It should be noted that all of the oldest surviving manuscripts of the *Shāhnāmah* have been considered, including those that were relied upon by Khaleghi-Motlagh and his colleagues. Not all of them contain a *hajv'nāmah*—the incomplete Florence manuscript of 614/1217, for instance, seems to have offered a more positive account of

Firdawsī's rapport with Maḥmūd—but Khatibi has incorporated all available resources, with the result that his work will pair nicely with the critical edition of the *Shāhnāmah*.

In the third chapter (pp. 87–120), Khatibi's constructed recensions of the *hajv'nāmah* are presented. There are four, in addition to the original six lines transmitted by Niẓāmī ʿArūżī, and they mostly proceed in both chronological order and increasing size. (The correlation between the date of a manuscript and the number of lines in its *hajv'nāmah* is unmistakable.) The first post-Niẓāmī recension is labeled 1a; it consists of forty-four lines and is drawn from the introductions of three manuscripts dating to the eighth/fourteenth century. Next is recension 1b, which is clearly related but larger, at seventy-nine lines; it is based primarily on introductory material from five manuscripts of the ninth and early tenth centuries AH. Recension 2 is quite different; it comprises just thirty-two lines, sharing little with 1a or 1b, and it is sourced from the *end* of six manuscripts dating between the eighth and tenth centuries. Finally, recension 3 is the longest, at 143 lines; it is based again on introductory sections, with four primary manuscripts from the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries AH. The rough impression given by Khatibi's work is that one form of the *hajv'nāmah* evolved from the fragment quoted by Niẓāmī ʿArūżī (among other sources), growing progressively larger into recensions 1a and 1b as part of the prefatory material often added to the *Shāhnāmah*. A separate textual tradition may have given rise to recension 2, which is placed at the end of manuscripts and consists of mostly new lines. (None of it comes from Niẓāmī ʿArūżī.) Then, in later codices, the *hajv'nāmah* continued to grow, building upon all prior versions; and this is what Khatibi designates recension 3.

Of course, none of this is straightforward. As Khatibi acknowledges, it is unusual to find any two early manuscripts in which the *hajv'nāmah* has the same number of lines—let alone that the text be identical. The reader may be tempted to conclude that every copy represents a recension unto itself. Again, however, Khatibi discusses these problems openly. He is clear about his methods and his intent, and the resulting edition is a huge improvement over what was previously available. Most importantly, even if one were to take issue with the form of these composite recensions—and there is no need to treat them as authoritative—the variations among manuscripts are listed. Now we know which lines are found in which copies of the *hajv'nāmah*, as well as the broad arc of the poem's development over a few centuries.

The fourth chapter of the book (pp. 121–72) is devoted to commentary on individual lines (or groups of lines) from each recension. Potentially unfamiliar words are defined; attempts are made to parse ambiguous phrases; material that seems to have been taken from the body of the *Shāhnāmah* is traced back to its sources; *etc.* Khatibi also uses this chapter as a place to record additional lines that occur only in his "secondary" copies of the *hajv'nāmah*. (His stated goal is to document as much as possible from the manuscripts that he consulted.) Following these notes, the book ends with four shorter reference sections: a useful list of all of the lines in the *hajv'nāmah* and where to find each of them in the recensions (pp. 173–94);

photographs of some of the manuscripts (195–207); an index of proper names (208–15); and a bibliography (216–26).

There are questions about the *hajv'nāmah* that will probably continue to be debated. For example, how should we deal with lines that are strong, unique, and attested from an early date? Many copies of the poem begin with the following famous statement: "O Shah Maḥmūd, conqueror of lands / If you fear no man, then fear God!"[5] Should we refuse to attribute such a line to Firdawsī because it is part of a problematic whole? More broadly, it is worth wondering about the process whereby recent scholarly editions of Persian classics have either excised or modified passages that were widely known and beloved for ages in their previous, perhaps corrupted form. (Other examples include the introduction to the story of Rustam and Suhrāb in the *Shāhnāmah*, and the opening lines of the *Maśnavī* of Rūmī, d. 672/1273.) We might also ask what it means that popular narratives about the conflict between Firdawsī and Maḥmūd developed relatively soon after the poet's death. Niẓāmī ʿArūżī claims to have spoken about the issue with people in Nīshāpūr in 514/1120–21. The lore surrounding Firdawsī and his interactions with the Ghaznavid court therefore seems to predate, by a considerable margin, our earliest extant manuscripts of the *Shāhnāmah*. How much can we confidently reject? But these are difficult questions that may never be settled. For the time being, the work of Abolfazl Khatibi represents a major step forward in our understanding of the *hajv'nāmah*. He has, with his edition, carried out the one arduous task that was most needed. This book deserves a place on the shelf of anyone who cares about the textual history of the *Shāhnāmah*.

5. *Ayā Shāh Maḥmūd-i kishvar'gushāy / Zi-kas gar na-tarsī bi-tars az Khudāy*. See recensions 1a and 1b in Khatibi, pp. 88, 92. This line also occurs in recension 3, albeit not at the beginning; see p. 115.

Book Review

Thomas Würtz, *Islamische Theologie im 14. Jahrhundert. Auferstehungslehre, Handlungstheorie und Schöpfungsvorstellungen im Werk von Saʿd ad-Dīn at-Taftāzānī*, Welten des Islams 7 (Berlin: de Gruyter 2016), viii, 295 pp. ISBN 9783110399585, $113.00.

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Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. c. 1390) ranks among the most influential Muslim theologians of the late middle period and his works continue to shape Sunni religious thinking up to the present day. Nevertheless, scholars writing in European languages have largely neglected al-Taftāzānī, publishing only a few studies of very modest length about his life and works over the past decades. Würtz's book, which constitutes the first book-long study of selected aspects of al-Taftāzānī's thought, is based on the author's dissertation defended at the University of Zurich and represents a most welcome contribution to the field. It focuses on three key topics of al-Taftāzānī's theological writings: his teachings about resurrection, human actions, and creation. The study, furthermore, situates them within their intellectual context as defined by the traditions of *falsafa* and *kalām* in the late middle period. Moreover, it sheds light on the evolution of al-Taftāzānī's thought by paying special attention to differences in content between his early *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya* (written in 1367), his main work *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* (completed in 1383), and his late short summary work *Tahdhīb al-manṭiq wa-l-kalām* (written in the late 1380s).

The book consists of seven chapters, a bibliography, and an index. The first chapter (pp. 1-16) discusses the significance of al-Taftāzānī's works during the 20th and early 21st century by highlighting their ongoing use as teaching materials at Cairo's al-Azhar University. It also contrasts al-Taftāzānī's ongoing importance with the thus far very limited amount of research undertaken on him and his writings—a consequence of still widespread notions about an alleged intellectual stagnation of Islamic theology in the late middle period. The first chapter moreover reflects on the concepts of "theology" and "philosophy" as used by Würtz and argues *inter alia* that terms such as *kalām* and *mutakallim* can be meaningfully translated as "(rational)

theology" and "theologian," respectively. While one can disagree with Würtz's point of view in this regard and argue that translating *kalām* as "theology" bears the risk of attributing to *kalām* the status of Islamic theology *per se* instead of rather seeing it as *a* theological tradition within Islamic scholarship, the author deserves credit for explicitly discussing an issue that is often enough passed over in silence.

Chapter Two (pp. 17-36) offers the most detailed biography of al-Taftāzānī published hitherto in a European language. It begins with a synopsis of the political history of Greater Iran and Central Asia in the 13th and 14th centuries before discussing al-Taftāzānī's biography proper. Würtz focuses in particular detail on questions that have been controversial in earlier scholarship such as the dates of al-Taftāzānī's birth and death, the identity of his teachers in *kalām*, his *madhhab,* and his role in learned debates at Timur's court. The remainder of the chapter introduces al-Taftāzānī's works in the fields of rhetoric, grammar, logic, and law not dealt with in the subsequent chapters.

The third chapter (pp. 37-84) presents the three above-named theological works by al-Taftāzānī that form the basis of Würtz's analysis, whereby the author pays ample attention to their broader theological and philosophical background. To this end, the chapter begins with a general introduction to the early history of theological thought in Islam before broadly discussing the theological peculiarities of the theological group of the Māturīdiyya. Thereafter it turns, likewise briefly, to the teachings of Ibn Sīnā and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī inasmuch as these are relevant for al-Taftāzānī before shedding light on the Qurʾan commentaries of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī that Würtz uses in the remainder of his study to point to similarities and differences between al-Taftāzānī's writings and the *tafsīr* tradition of his period. The by far longest part of the chapter then deals one by one with *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya*, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid,* and *Tahdhīb al-manṭiq wa-l-kalām*. In each case it offers not only information on the structure and content of the respective work itself, but also on other texts with close intertextual relations, such as—in the case of *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya—al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya* by Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī and *Tabṣirat al-adilla* by Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī or—in the case of *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*—the pertinent works by Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ʿAbdallāh al-Bayḍāwī, and ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī.

The analysis of al-Taftāzānī's writings proper starts in Chapter Four, which is dedicated to his teachings on resurrection (pp. 85-152). Würtz selected this topic mainly because al-Taftāzānī's discussion of this notion is still relied upon by students of al-Azhar today, and because it offers a particularly clear case for demonstrating how al-Taftāzānī dealt with teachings of the *falāsifa* that were of theological significance. The chapter begins with short discussions of eschatological material in the Qurʾan, the *ḥadīth* literature, and early *kalām* works before turning to the relevant sections in al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya*, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid,* and *Tahdhīb al-manṭiq wa-l-kalām*, each of which is discussed separately. As Würtz shows, all three works seek to refute the teaching of the *falāsifa* that there is no bodily resurrection, thereby,

however, focusing on different aspects of eschatology. While the broader strands of this discussion are only hinted at in the generally rather concise relevant sections of *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya*, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* deals with this topic in great detail in the sense of a "theological encyclopedia" (p. 100) that seeks to discuss as broad array of different theological opinions about the topic as possible—regardless of whether al-Taftāzānī agreed with them or not. Moreover, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* also pays special attention to the importance of the subject within the *falsafa* tradition, as becomes apparent *inter alia* from the fact that it uses the word *maʿād* for "resurrection"—a well-established term in the philosophical discussions of the topic, but one that in al-Taftāzānī's time had also found entry into *kalām* debates, where it was reinterpreted to match the concept of a bodily resurrection. In *Tahdhīb al-manṭiq wa-l-kalām*, al-Taftāzānī presents a final systematic synthesis of his own position on the topic which agrees with its more general treatment in *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*.

In the fifth and longest chapter of the book (pp. 154-241), Würtz analyzes the passages of al-Taftāzānī's theological works which deal with the theory of human action, a time-honored topic of the *mutakallimūn* stimulated by the question of how human beings can be held responsible for their acts if these are known ahead of time and are brought into being by God. After a discussion of the relevant Qurʾanic verses, Würtz sheds light on earlier *kalām* debates about this topic and the respective positions held by the theological groups of the Qadariyya, the Muʿtazila, the Ashʿariyya, the Māturīdiyya, and the Jabriyya, thereby paying special attention to what he calls the neo-Jabriyya strand within late Ashʿarī *kalām*. The latter ascribed to human beings a smaller role in their actions than mainstream Ashʿarī authors usually did. As Würtz shows in his detailed discussions of the development within al-Taftāzānī's position, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya* seems to largely follow the standard Māturīdī position on the issue which postulated the existence of different aspects *(jihāt)* of an action that, in part, pertain to God and, in part, to human beings, as well as the presence of a human ability to act *(istiṭāʿa)* in addition to God's ability to act. This allowed Māturīdī *mutkallimūn* to endorse a pronounced intermediate position that neither negated a human being's influence on his or her acts nor curtailed God's power over them. In *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, however, which again offers a sophisticated and nuanced discussion of various theological views on the topic but pays also special attention to relevant Qurʾanic verses, al-Taftāzānī voices support not for the standard Māturīdī understanding, but for an Ashʿarī view that assumes positions of the neo-Jabriyya, while *Tahdhīb al-manṭiq wa-l-kalām* shows him embracing a mainstream Ashʿarī outlook and distancing himself from the neo-Jabriyya. Thus, Würtz is able to demonstrate that al-Taftāzānī's view on the issue of human actions as attested to in his writings evolved considerably over time.

The sixth chapter (pp. 242-277) deals with al-Taftāzānī's theory of creation and thus addresses another issue that was highly contested between the *mutakallimūn*, who opined that the world was created in time, and the *falāsifa*, who taught that the world was eternal. Beginning again with a discussion of

relevant Qurʾanic material, Würtz offers a brief outline of the positions of *falsafa* and earlier *kalām* on the topic before dealing again with the three studied works by al-Taftāzānī. His most important findings include the fact that, in *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya*, al-Taftāzānī sides again with the Māturīdiyya by viewing creation *(takwīn)* as an eternal attribute of God, a position he vehemently rejects in his later works, which exhibit a largely mainstream Ashʿarī character. Moreover, while in all of his works, al-Taftāzānī clearly objects to the *falsafa* opinion about the eternity of the world, his discussion of the philosophical teachings on this issue in *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* deserves special attention as here he deals with pre-Socratic positions that are otherwise only rarely discussed in pre-modern Arabic works.

The seventh chapter (278-283) summarizes Würtz's main findings. Among other things, in this chapter the author highlights al-Taftāzānī's clear embeddedness in the earlier *kalām* tradition as well as the profound impact that the writings of Ibn Sīnā, being the most prominent representative of the *falsafa,* had on al-Taftāzānī's works, also and especially when it comes to the latter's ontological terminology. These close connections between al-Taftāzānī and the earlier *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* become especially apparent when al-Taftāzānī quotes their works or implicitly tries to distance himself from their views. With regard to the intellectual tradition represented by Ibn Sīnā, Würtz speaks in this context of an "amalgamation *(Verschmelzung)* of *kalām* and *falsafa*" (p. 278). Moreover, Würtz highlights that his results suggest a development in al-Taftāzānī's thought that made him at later points in time, when he seems to have identified more strongly with the Ashʿariyya, reject Māturīdī positions that he had embraced earlier in his life. Furthermore, Würtz emphasizes that, at least when it comes to his teachings about resurrection and the human ability to act, al-Taftāzānī engages in more detail with relevant Qurʾanic verses and *ḥadīth*s than had previously been documented in the writings of other *mutakallimūn* of his time. Finally, Würtz notes that there is little to suggest any direct impact al-Taftāzānī's biographical experiences may have had on his theological writings.

Thomas Würtz's book is a pioneering contribution to our knowledge about one of the most influential *mutakallimūn* of the late middle period and thus helps to close a large gap in the state of research obvious to everyone working on Islamicate intellectual history of this period. His discussions of the selected aspects of al-Taftāzānī's writings are clear and—bearing in mind the highly technical character of much of the subject matter—relatively easy to understand. They offer not only valuable descriptions of al-Taftāzānī's views, but also contextualize them within their broader intellectual framework in a helpful manner. Among his broader conclusions, Würtz's arguments for a significant change in al-Taftāzānī's theological views over time are absolutely convincing, as are his findings regarding the assumption of *falsafa* terminology by the *mutakallim*. Furthermore, Würtz's discussion of al-Taftāzānī's engagement with pre-Socratic philosophy opens up a previously largely neglected area of our knowledge about the reception of Greek philosophy within the Arabic-speaking tradition. Likewise, Würtz's detailed

account of al-Taftāzānī's biography constitutes an important step forward in our understanding of this thinker. Finally, *Islamische Theologie im 14. Jahrhundert* is a very clearly structured book, written in a sophisticated and always appropriate German that might, however, not always be easily understandable for nonnative speakers. Moreover, especially the latter parts of the book would have profited from a more careful proofreading, which might have detected a number of missing words and incomplete sentences. These, however, do not compromise the general clarity of Würtz's argumentation.

Würtz's book should be understood as a pioneering foray into the sometimes dense, highly-developed, and broad theological thought of a prolific author. One cannot blame the author for hardly or not at all dealing with many key topics of al-Taftāzānī's thought, such as his epistemology, his teachings about God's attributes, prophethood, or the imamate, given that, with our present state of knowledge, no monograph could do equal justice to all facets of this *mutakallim*'s work. Likewise, the question of the reception of al-Taftāzānī's thought remains almost completely unstudied, apart from Würtz's short remarks about the use of his books at al-Azhar, which offer a valuable starting point for further inquiries. Furthermore, future scholarship should explore whether and to what degree one can discern connections between al-Taftāzānī's theological writings and his works in other scholarly disciplines such as law and rhetoric.

Nevertheless, there are passages in Würtz's often largely descriptive and in part redundant discussion of al-Taftāzānī's writings where one would have wished for greater analytical depth. This is especially the case with the generally rather short chapter on creation. Furthermore, while Würtz is absolutely convincing in tracing the evolution of al-Taftāzānī's away from Māturīdī towards Ashʿarī positions, the reasons for this development remain unclear and demand more study. Moreover, Würtz's discussion of the state of research remains, with less than two pages, overly brief, especially since the author has managed to gain access to several modern studies in Arabic that are not easily available to many scholars outside of the Arab world and might therefore have called for a more thorough discussion. At the same time, the general introductions to authors and traditions of thought predating al-Taftāzānī, based almost completely on secondary literature, are often of interest only to nonspecialists and might have been dispensed with given that most if not all of the readers interested in a book of this nature can be expected to have at least a general knowledge of key aspects of the earlier traditions of *kalām* and *falsafa*.

Finally, one of the author's terminological choices appears infelicitous. Given that Würtz refers to al-Taftāzānī's time, i.e., the 14th century CE, repeatedly as the "late period" *(Spätzeit)* of the *kalām* tradition, the question arises as to how we should denote even later periods in the development of the same intellectual tradition, especially since the recent work of Aaron Spevack, Khaled El-Rouayheb, and others showed beyond a doubt that the *kalām* tradition was very much alive in the centuries after al-Taftāzānī, up to at least the 19th century CE. Here, a clearer discussion of the chronological framework in Würtz's study would have been helpful.

These observations notwithstanding, *Islamische Theologie im 14. Jahrhundert* deserves applause as a very clear discussion of important aspects of al-Taftāzānī's thought. Indeed, it is the very first and thus groundbreaking monograph written in a European language on this much too long neglected important figure of Islamic intellectual history. Future studies in al-Taftāzānī will have a solid grounding in Würtz's book, and it is hoped that it will receive attention beyond the rather small germanophone community of scholars interested in *kalām*.

In Memoriam

Anna Dolinina
(12 March 1923—16 April 2017)

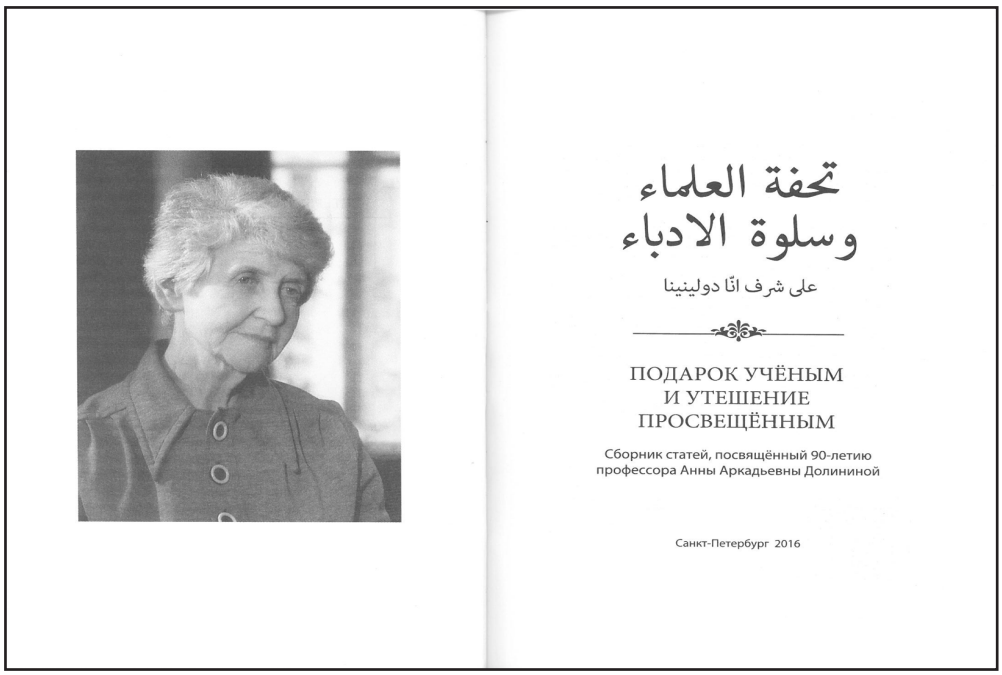
Anna Arkadievna Iskoz-Dolinina, a prominent Russian and Soviet Arabist, was born into a family of writers and educators. Her father, Arkady Semënovich Iskoz-Dolinin, was a Leningrad State University professor, specializing in Dostoyevsky. One of her brothers was a linguist, as was a cousin, while a sister-in-law was a writer and literature scholar. A nephew is a professor of Russian literature, while another nephew became a script writer and film director. Her life spanned a period of dramatic changes and tribulations in Russia and the Soviet Union. Born in Petrograd, which, after Lenin's death in 1924, became Leningrad, she lived to see the city regain its former name, St. Petersburg. So also the university, with which all her adult life was connected: Leningrad State became St. Petersburg State University ("State" had replaced "Imperial" in the university's name after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution). Anna Dolinina's intention in applying to the University was to study German literature. WWII changed her plans. The siege of Leningrad (1941-1944) forced the evacuation of academic institutions and civilian population to various eastern destinations. The Dolinin family, with parts of the University, ended up in Tashkent. There, she became fascinated with the Orient and developed an interest in Arabic literature. The leading Russian Arabist of the time was Ignaty Krachkovsky (Ignatii Iulianovich Krachkovskii, 1883-1951). Krachkovsky, who survived the

siege in Leningrad, wore several hats. A full member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, he became head of the Arabic Cabinet in the Oriental Institute of the Academy and the Department of Arabic Philology at the University. He presented her a copy of his 1945 book, *Among Arabic Manuscripts* ("Nad arabskimi rukopisiami"), with the inscription: "To Anna Dolinina in reward for abandoning German studies. The Author, Ignatii Krachkovskii."

The meeting was fateful in a number of ways. Limited staffing in the post-war university meant that Krachkovsky had to teach courses in Arabic as well as in classical and modern Arab literature. As a result, Dolinina was qualified, upon graduation, to teach language and literature courses as well. It was on his advice that she chose to specialize in modern Arab literature, then barely known in Russia. Dolinina's 1968 book, *Ocherki istorii arabskoĭ literatury novogo vremeni: Egipet i Siriia: publit͡sistika 1870-1914 gg.* ("An Historical Outline of Modern Arab Literature: Journalism of 1870-1914 in Egypt and Syria") was followed in 1973 by *Ocherki istorii arabskoĭ literatury novogo vremeni: Egipet i Siriia: Prosvetitel'skii roman 1870-1914 gg.* ("An Historical Outline of Modern Arab Literature: The Enlightenment Novel in Egypt and Syria, 1870-1914"). She also became a translator of Khalil Jibran and Ameen Rihani, published a volume of Rihani's *Selected Works ("Izbrannoe")* in 1988, and wrote about the reception of Russian literature in the Arab world.

Dolinina was not Krachkovsky's favorite student, but she became his first biographer. The publication of *Nevol'nik dolga* ("Prisoner of Duty," 1994) brought her profound recognition in Russian academic circles. Beyond extensive archival research and personal interviews with Krachkovsky's widow, Vera Aleksandrovna Krachkovskaia, the book painstakingly presented the tableau of Soviet intellectual life in the years when everything "foreign" was alien, and anything to do with religion suspect. In fact, Krachkovsky was publicly accused by another Soviet Arabist of admiring a "feudal" culture. Loyal to the Soviet regime, he nevertheless possessed enough civil courage to support the research of his arrested or exiled students, publish their dissertations (Kovalevsky), and hire them upon their release (Shumovsky). Appropriately, in 2010, Anna Arkadievna became the first recipient of the memorial Krachkovsky Medal, established by the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN). In 2015, she was finally able to bring out a volume of Krachkovsky's largely unpublished "Works on the History and Philology of the Christian Orient" *(Trudy po istorii i filologii khristianskogo Vostoka).*

Dolinina's professional life centered on teaching Arabic literature in the very same Department of Arabic Philology where she graduated in 1949. For 50 years after completing her graduate studies in 1953, she taught generations of students, some of whom became university faculty, academic researchers, professional translators and interpreters or diplomats. It was as a beginning student at Leningrad State, in the Oriental Faculty, that I first met Anna Arkadievna in 1960. Given the curriculum set in the 1950s, she would have been my instructor in one of the senior "Modern Arabic Literature" courses, because my major was History of Arab Countries. But in 1960, things were changing in Soviet



The 2016 *Podarok uchënym i uteshenie prosveshchënnym* ("A Gift to the Learned and Consolation for the Enlightened")

"Oriental Studies." Soviet influence was growing in the Near East, and the Oriental Faculty was charged by the Ministry of Higher Education to begin training Arabic military interpreters. This meant that the usual enrollment limit of one section of six (!) Arabic majors was raised to two sections. As a result, there was a sudden shortage of qualified Arabic instructors, and Associate Professor Dolinina, who previously only taught literature courses, became the Arabic instructor for freshman majors in the history of the Near East.

In the 2016 Festschrift from her loving students and colleagues, *Podarok uchënym i uteshenie prosveshchënnym* ("A Gift to the Learned and Consolation for the Enlightened"), numerous contributions refer to Dolinina's intellectual generosity, wry sense of humor, and demanding yet tactful treatment of students. Some authors reminisce about reading medieval Arabic prose with her or struggling with translations of classical poetry; a few contributed their own poetry. Paradoxically, although I became a medievalist and while Dolinina developed, in effect, a second career translating classical Arabic literature, we "Historians" never took a class in pre-modern Arabic literature with Anna Arkadievna and were long gone when her remarkable translator's gift became a boon to the reading public. My friendship with her developed in later years, when we met as professionals linked by warm memories and continuing interest in the health of Arabic studies in Leningrad/St. Petersburg.

It was at the Third All-Union Conference of Arabists (Erevan, 1969), which we both attended with other Arabists based in Leningrad, that Anna Arkadievna met the Moscow Arabist V. M. Borisov (1924-1987), with whom she embarked upon a project

that became her crowning achievement. Borisov was a lexicologist, translator and aphorist, and he cherished the ambition of rendering into Russian the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri, never before translated into Russian in full or from the Arabic original. Joining forces, they produced a volume of forty *maqama*s in 1978 and then of all fifty in 1987. In 1999, Dolinina published the *Maqamat* of al-Hamadhani (with Z.M. Auezova). These extraordinary translations entertain the reader in rhymed prose for *sajʿ* and in verse for poetic passages. Dolinina also produced the first Russian poetic translations of the *Muʿallaqat*, included in the 1983 anthology *Araviiskaia starina: Iz drevnei arabskoi poezii i prozy* ("Arabian Antiquity: Selected ancient Arab poetry and prose"), which also contains the first Russian translation of the *Ayyam al-ʿArab* by one of Dolinina's former students Vladimir Polosin.[1] In her Introduction, Dolinina explains the methodology and stylistics of producing a readable translation for the contemporary reader and tabulates the metre equivalents and rhyme and rhythm variations of Arabic and Russian poetry. In recognition of these sustained efforts, Dolinina became the first Russian scholar to be awarded the King ʿAbdallah bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz International Prize for Translation (2012). Her other awards include the 1999 award of the honorific title, *The Merited Worker of Higher Education of the Russian Federation* (Zasluzhennyi rabotnik vysshei shkoly Rossiiskoi Federatsii) and the 2013 medal "For Spiritual Unity" from the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation.

— Marina Tolmacheva
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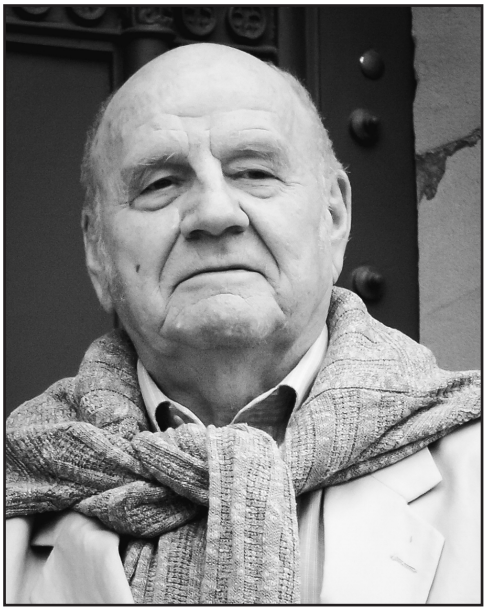
1. On Polosin's work see D.J. Stewart, "Scholarship on the *Fihrsit* of Ibn al-Nadim: The Work of Valeriy V. Polosin," *Al-ʿUsur al-Wusta* 18.1 (April 2006), 8-13.

In Memoriam



Günter Lüling
(1928—2014)*

Dr. Günter Lüling, author of a number of revisionist works on the Qur'ān and the history of Islam's origins, died on 10 September 2014, in Wasserburg am Inn, Germany. He had suffered a coronary thrombosis in April, followed a few days later by a stroke, and over the next few months was moved from his home in Erlangen to various rehabilitation clinics in southern Bavaria. He was 85.

Lüling was born on 25 October 1928, in Warna, on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, to Pastor and Missionary Gerhard Lüling and his wife Ilse (née Wilms). The family returned to Germany in 1935, where Günter attended elementary school in Altbelz, near the town of Köslin in eastern Pomerania (now Poland), and then (1939-1943) the Staatliche Oberschule für Jungen in Köslin.

Günter was drafted into military service on 1 January 1944, that is, at the age of 15, an indication of the desperate need for "manpower" of the Third Reich in the final years of the war. He was at first utilized as a support worker for the Navy, and then,

* I am grateful to Friedrich Lüling, Günter Lüling's son, for providing important information about his studies, and to the Lüling family for their warm support. The detailed information on Lüling's early life and studies is taken in part from a *Lebenslauf* prepared by Lüling himself, dated August 1975.

(Photo: Günter Lüling ca. 2012. Photo courtesy of Friedrich Lüling.)

starting on 15 March 1945 (still only 16), as an infantryman.

At the conclusion of the war, Günter became an Allied prisoner-of-war, and from October 1945, was entered into training near Braunschweig and Salzgitter (Lower Saxony) to be a mason or bricklayer. He was, however, able to return to formal schooling in spring 1947, attending the Große Schule in Wolfenbüttel, near Braunschweig, where he passed the Reifeprüfung in March 1949.

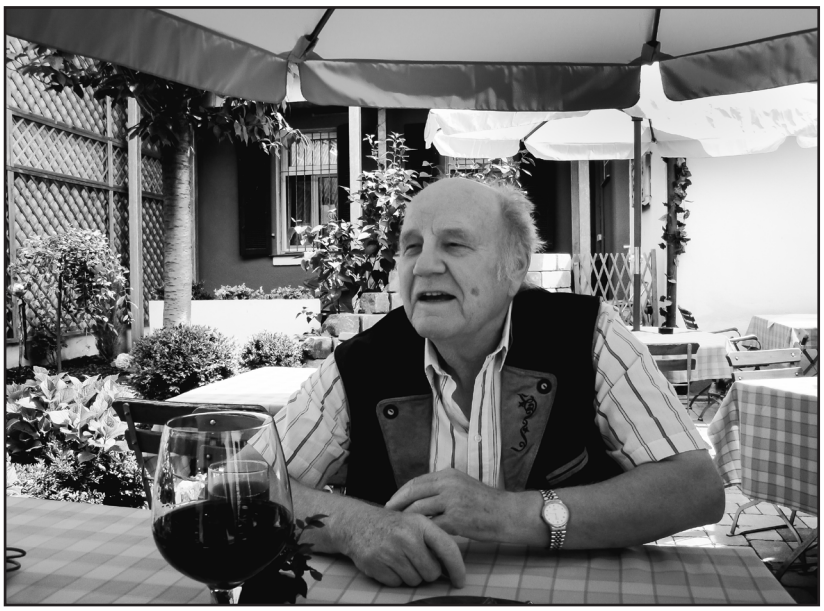
In early 1950, he embarked on university study, which he pursued continuously until 1961, mainly in Erlangen, but with stretches also in Göttingen and Bern, Switzerland. From 1950-1954, he studied Protestant theology, with secondary studies in Classical philology, History of Religions, Germanic languages and literatures, and Arabic studies. In the course of these studies, he worked with some of the foremost scholars in these fields, including Hans Wehr (Arabic studies), Walther Zimmerli (Old Testament), Ernst Käsemann and Joachim Jeremias (New Testament and systematic theology), and Hans Joachim Schoeps (History of Religions), among others. He was also deeply influenced by the work of Martin Werner of Bern (History of Religions), especially Werner's theory of an "angel Christology," although he never formally studied with him.[1] Lüling passed the First Exam in Theology in Göttingen in February 1954.

From 1954 to 1957, he undertook further studies in Erlangen, combining the fields of Sociology, History of Religions, and Semitic Philology; Hans Wehr and Hans-Joachim Schoeps again numbered among his teachers. He passed the civil examination for political economy (Diplomvolkswirt) in Erlangen in November 1957. In early 1958, he resumed his studies with a focus on Semitic Philology and Islamic studies, with Sociology and History of Religions as subordinate fields. Under the direction of Prof. Dr. Jörg Kraemer, he started work on an edition of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de pomo* as his dissertation. In September 1961, however, his progress was halted by a double shock: first, the news that another scholar was about to release an edition of the *Liber de pomo*, which made Lüling's work superfluous; and second, the tragic early death of his *Doktorvater*, Jörg Kraemer.[2]

Lüling had little choice but to break off his studies, and starting in January 1962, he worked for several months as an instructor in German for the Goethe-Institut in several towns in Germany. In August, 1962, he assumed the position of Director of the Goethe-Institut in Aleppo, Syria. It was there that his two children, Friedrich and Lieselotte, were born to him and his wife Hannelore (née Wolfrum), whom he had married in June 1960. Günter remained Director of the Goethe-Institut Aleppo until August 1965. The family then returned to Erlangen, where Lüling was able to work at the University, first as assistant in the Seminar for the History of Medicine, and eventually as assistant in the Seminar for Oriental Studies, where he taught courses in modern Arabic while working on a new dissertation, under the

1. A helpful summary of Werner's views is John Reumann, "Martin Werner and 'Angel Christology'," *Lutheran Quarterly* 8 (1956), 349-58.

2. Lüling informed me that Kraemer committed suicide. (Personal communication, Erlangen, 1970 or 1971).



Günter Lüling in July 2008. Photo courtesy of Fred M. Donner.

direction of Prof. Wolfdietrich Fischer, another former student of Hans Wehr. Lüling completed his dissertation, entitled "Kritisch-exegetische Untersuchungen des Qur'ān-Textes," in February 1970 and was awarded the doctorate in Islamic studies and Semitic philology, with history of religions as a secondary field. I had the good fortune to study with him in Erlangen in 1970-71.

Lüling's dissertation presented revolutionary views on the Qur'ān, advancing ideas that he continued to elaborate in subsequent publications, notably his *Über den Ur-Qur'ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Stropenlieder im Qur'ān* (Erlangen: H. Lüling, 1974) and *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad. Eine Kritik am "christlichen" Abendland* (Erlangen: H. Lüling, 1981). *Über den Ur-Qurʾān* was later translated by Lüling himself and issued in an expanded English version as *A challenge to Islam for Reformation. The rediscovery and reliable reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic reinterpretations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003).

It is difficult to summarize Lüling's arguments concisely, because they are complex and wide-ranging. His basic argument in these works is that the Qur'ān text, as we have it today, represents a reworking by Muḥammad of earlier Christian texts that had served as liturgy in a hitherto unknown pre-Islamic Christian community in Mecca. In developing these ideas, in which he was influenced by the work of Albert Schweitzer, Martin Werner, and Hans-Joachim Schoeps, he argued that Muḥammad's original message was a continuation of concepts found in Jewish Christianity that considered Jesus to be an angel (from Greek *angelos*, "messenger"). Hellenistic Christianity, including the Christian community of Mecca, had rejected this view and saw Jesus as divine; but Muḥammad, in Lüling's view, clung to the older Arabian "religion of Abraham"

and its concepts. Muḥammad, in his clash with the Meccan Christians, took strophic hymns that had been used in the Christian liturgy and emended them, changing individual words and phrases in order to bring their theology in line with his own views, particularly the idea of Jesus not as God, but as a divine messenger (*rasūl*) in accord with the notion of his status as an angel. Lüling attempted to recover the earlier Christian teachings of these buried Christian hymns by making relatively minor adjustments to the received Qurʾan text—in effect, reversing the very emendations to these texts that, in Lüling's view, Muḥammad himself had made.

Several observations can be made about Lüling's work. First, his manner of making emendations to the Qur'ān text can be criticized as capricious or, perhaps, circular—Lüling's emendations did not prove the existence of an earlier theological outlook in the text, but rather were made by him precisely in order to bring a passage of text in line with the theological arguments he thought "must be there," even though there was little or no external grounds for suspecting the passage had been subjected to prior manipulation. Second, Lüling's hypotheses represented a bold challenge to the traditional view of the Qur'ān and its environment held not only by Muslims, but also by Western scholars at the time, for which reason it was received with great hostility by most of the academic establishment in Germany (on which more shall be said below). Third, Lüling's impressive erudition in Old Testament and New Testament theology, Islamic studies, and Arabic studies, combined with his keen intellect, meant that his hypotheses are often intriguing but difficult to evaluate confidently, as few people have similarly wide-ranging training in all these areas; reading his work, one often feels that one is "over one's head" in unfamiliar technical material.

The revolutionary nature of Lüling's hypotheses on the Qur'ān and Islam's origins led fairly quickly to his being forced out of the German academic establishment, even though his dissertation had originally been supported enthusiastically by his *Doktorvater* and was accepted by his department with the mark of *eximium opus*, "extraordinary work." Lüling's ideas were just too threatening to certain established scholars whose work would have been overturned by it. His effort to submit a *Habilitationsschrift* or "second dissertation," necessary to qualify for a permanent teaching position in Germany, was thwarted; a number of senior Orientalists, led apparently by the influential Prof. Anton Spitaler of Munich, blocked his efforts to find a position, and organized a virtual conspiracy of silence against him so that his work was hardly reviewed in Germany[3]—and, since it was written in German, few foreign scholars were able readily to follow Lüling's complex argumentation or bothered to do so. It must be said that regardless of how uncomfortable or threatening a

3. Lüling describes these machinations in some detail in the Preface to his *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*. Spitaler was, of course, the same scholar who, for over fifty years, concealed the archive of photographs of early Qurʾan manuscripts amassed early in the century by Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl, claiming it had been destroyed by allied bombing during the war—and who thus single-handedly delayed critical scholarship on the Qurʾan for a generation or more. See Andrew Higgins, "The Lost Archive," *The Wall Street Journal* Jan. 12, 2008 (www.wsj.com/articles/SB120008793352784631).

scholar's ideas may seem, they deserve to be openly debated, and judged on their merits. The ideas of Lüling's hero, Martin Werner, were rejected by many German theologians, but Werner, as an already established scholar, was able to publish them, and his opponents were forced to write their own formal rebuttals in learned academic works. Günter Lüling, by comparison, was never shown the decency of straightforward critical engagement. The way Lüling was treated by those who should have been his colleagues can only be deemed shabby, and stands as a dark stain on the record of the German academic establishment of his time.

Deprived of a university career, Lüling nonetheless continued to pursue scholarship for the remainder of his life, working essentially in isolation. He and his wife lived frugally on her salary, and his scholarship was self-published. He was, naturally, embittered and considered himself a martyr to the causes of true scholarship and proper theology, and sometimes had choice things to say about the German academic establishment; but in his later years, he worked without much overt complaint, ever confident that his ideas would, in the end, be vindicated. When my wife and I last visited him in Erlangen in the summer of 2008 (he would have been just short of 80 at the time), he was cheerful, eager to discuss scholarly matters, and vigorous enough to lead us on a memorable bicycle tour of Erlangen, carefully pointing out apartments where he had lodged as a student and noteworthy architectural monuments of the town, including a church whose tower we climbed to enjoy a fine view of the city. He was even then deeply engaged in research for a new book, of which I think he had already written several hundred pages, on the early history of the Hebrews, in which he presented a characteristically radical new vision of their history and impact in the world—in short, it was, like everything he wrote, filled with revolutionary implications.[4]

Regardless of one's ultimate judgment on Lüling's work, he was in many ways a pioneer. That he was original, highly intelligent, thoughtful, independent of judgment, and possessed of an impressive range of knowledge can hardly be denied; this means that his work often contains intriguing insights and observations, even if his critical judgment, or the system underlying his approach, may be questioned. He was an early voice challenging the traditional Islamic origins narrative that represented the dominant consensus until the 1970s—a challenge later raised, albeit in different ways and with different arguments, by such scholars as John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, and others. His sense that the origins of Islam had, in some way, an intimate connection with Christianity is one that has been advanced more recently by numerous other scholars, notably those associated with the so-called "Inarah school" based in Saarbrücken. His bold attempt to "correct" the text of the Qur'ān to restore what he considered to be its presumed original meaning anticipated by a quarter-century the similar efforts of Christoph Luxenberg (who, however, never bothered even to mention Lüling's work—or, for that matter, anyone else's) in his

4. I do not know what the state of this manuscript was at the time of his death—largely completed? Mostly only sketched out?—nor where it may be today.

Die syrisch-aramäische Lesart des Korans (Berlin, 2000). Lüling's works contain many fertile ideas, particularly in the realm of the underlying theology that the Qur'ān text attempts to articulate, that deserve more sustained and detailed examination.

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Announcements

Join MEM or renew your MEMbership:
An invitation from Middle East Medievalists

Dear Colleagues,

We launched the new website of Middle East Medievalists (MEM) in 2015. Please visit the site at the following address:

http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/

It is now time to either renew your MEMbership or join MEM if you are not a member. The new website features a new database that will dramatically improve MEM's ability to communicate with MEMbers, manage MEMberships, and carry out other key functions. Just click the membership menu on our website and choose the "individual" or "institutional" option.

Please note that MEM's annual dues have risen in 2015 (after no increase for years). Individual dues are now $40.00 per year. This is a flat rate (domestic and international). Institutional dues are $250.00 a year.

You will be taken to the relevant MEMbership form. As in the past, you have the option to join or renew for one, two, or three years. If you are a member of Islamic History Commons (IHC), you might want to log in with your IHC credentials first on http://islamichistorycommons.org/. This will enable us to pre-populate the membership form (you may update it as needed). If you are not a member of IHC or if you are joining MEM for the first time, simply fill out the form directly.

You will then be directed to PayPal. There you can either pay with a PayPal account or with a credit/debit card. Once you are done, you will be redirected to our website. You should receive via email 1) a payment confirmation from PayPal and 2) a confirmation from our own website reflecting the changes to your membership. If you run into any problems at all, please be sure to contact us directly.

We have transformed *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* (*UW*) into an open access, peer-reviewed, and online journal. This decision followed much discussion, online and during our annual business meetings. Our aim, quite simply, is to transform *UW* into the journal of choice of Middle East Medievalists, the largest scholarly association in the field in North America. We might add that, the changes notwithstanding, *UW* will continue to provide a sense of community and common purpose for all of us in the discipline.

The new dues also reflect MEM's renewed commitment to the field. We reintroduced our graduate student paper prize in 2016, and we are inaugurating a

(Continued on next page)

Announcements

Join MEM or renew your MEMbership:
An invitation from Middle East Medievalists (Cont.)

MEM book prize this year. This comes on top of our existing Lifetime Achievement Award and Honorary Membership. Other new ideas are of course welcome!

As announced at last MESA, MEM has also noticeably increased its presence on social media. Make sure to follow us on Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/MideastMedievalists) and on Twitter (@MideastMedieval)!

Our new website will include, in due course, further new resources dedicated to teaching and digital humanities in particular, and will benefit from the many resources (such as working papers) that the Islamic History Commons have to offer.

We would also remind you that our list (H-MEM: https://networks.h-net.org/h-mideast-medieval) provides opportunity to engage colleagues worldwide with the topics and questions that concern us all.

Please join now. MEM is embracing change and needs you to continue to provide outstanding service to the field.

— The MEM Board of Directors

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