

Prior Connections to Islam

Every child is born in the state of *fiṭra* [with a natural disposition for Islam]. Then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian.
Muḥammad, the Prophet

One of the central challenges the early Muslim community faced was determining the relationship between kinship-based ways of organizing Muslim society and those that claimed to transcend kinship in the name of Islam. In the end, genealogy was put to many uses and provided a common vocabulary that expressed and mobilized modes of social organization.¹ Muḥammad's family tree, enumerating his ancestors, descendants (known as *sayyids* or *sharīfs*), and adoptive clients (*mawālī*), served as the most important paradigm. The families of *sayyids* and *sharīfs* were, and still are, accorded enormous prestige, as their lineages underwrote dynastic arrangements, provided access to patronage, and created power brokers and mediators. Converts who adopted familial connections to other Muslims as *mawālī* gained a sense of belonging to their new faith. And other forms of kinship, such as tribal lineages or descent from Sufi saints, conferred similar forms of belonging, prestige, and benefits, including access to office and positions of leadership.

¹ Early Arab Muslims' fascination with genealogy can readily be seen in the *Jamharat al-nasab* of Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. ca. 204/819 or 206/821): *Ġamharat an-nasab: Das genealogische Werk des Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī*, ed. Werner Caskel, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966). See now esp. Sarah Bowen Savant and Helena de Felipe, eds., *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and Savant, "Genealogy," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Böwering et al., 189–90 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

This chapter traces the importance of genealogical representation during the process of Iran's conversion to Islam, when there was a great need for a persuasive image of a Persian community with deep connections to Islam. Traditionists promoted the idea that in the distant past the Persians were descended from Muḥammad's spiritual ancestors, that is, the prophets who preceded him and populated the planet; in this way, their reports connected Persians to history before Muḥammad and God's final revelation. Islam became part of the ancient landscape and heritage of Iran, and all that followed the conquests likewise became part of a developmental progression. This primordial vision was articulated most forcefully in Iraq and western Iran, spoke for the entirety of the Persian population, and eventually was woven into the dominant narratives of the history of Islam. It ultimately even provided a creative license to claim Muslim associations for Iran's monuments of antiquity. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) – a towering figure in Muslim historiography – played a central role in promoting the idea of the Persians' primordial connections to the spiritual tradition of Islam. His work consequently receives significant attention in what follows.

The Origins of the Idea of Ethnogenesis

The Persians' prophetic genealogies were first and foremost an extension of Muḥammad's own genealogy and represented the development of ideas surrounding the history of his countrymen, the Arabs; the relationship of Muḥammad and his people to the history of monotheism; and the significance of blood ties for securing bonds within and among peoples. The parallels between biblical traditions and those of Islam have been noted, as have the ways in which Muslims developed these in their narratives about the Prophet's life and the origins of their faith. To summarize: just as the Bible traced the ancestries of patriarchs, prophets, and Jesus back to Adam, Muḥammad was shown to descend from Adam through a series of prestigious ancestors including Noah, Abraham, and Ishmael. Jesus' genealogy in the gospel of Matthew shows, in the words of one Bible scholar, that "the entire history of Israel finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ."² Muḥammad's genealogy, likewise, shows that Muḥammad was the fulfillment of prior monotheisms: he completes the prophecy especially of Abraham, from whom the Arabs, as sons of Ishmael,

² Barclay M. Newman Jr., "Matthew 1.1–18: Some Comments and a Suggested Restructuring," *Bible Translator* 27, no. 2 (1976): 209. Jesus' genealogy is detailed in Matthew 1:1–18 and in Luke 3:23–38.

descend – in parallel to Jewish prophets, who descend from Abraham’s other son, Isaac. The biography of Muḥammad by Ibn Ishāq (d. ca. 150/767) – transmitted by Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828 or 218/833) in the edition dominant today – begins with the Prophet’s genealogy and runs through key Arab eponyms and Arabized biblical figures back to Adam: “Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib . . . b. Ka‘b . . . b. Fihr . . . b. Muḍar b. Nizār b. Ma‘add b. ‘Adnān . . . b. Nābit b. Ismā‘īl b. Ibrāhīm [Ishmael, son of Abraham] . . . b. Arfakhshadh b. Sām b. Nūḥ [Arpachshad, son of Shem, son of Noah] . . . Shīth b. Ādam [Seth, son of Adam].”³ As Daniel Martin Varisco has written, it is in the generation after Abraham, with Ishmael, that the line is Arabized at the joining point of the biblical with the Arab genealogy that continues through Muḥammad himself.⁴

Traditionists extended these ideas by elaborating Muḥammad’s ancestors. For the Arab part of his ancestry, this yielded a schematized map of Arab tribes. For the biblical part, it resulted in different peoples, all linked by blood ties to Noah or Abraham, and implicitly to Muḥammad himself. Such a genealogy was supported by a discourse according to which Muḥammad belonged to a prophetic family. He was remembered to have referred to his fellow prophets using familiar terms, suggesting a shared kinship. In one Hadith, Muḥammad is quoted as saying that the prophets are sons of one father by different mothers. In another version, he refers to them as brothers.⁵ God bestowed His favor not just on previous prophets but on their progeny as well, or at least on those of their progeny who believed.⁶ This family knew *islām*, or the monotheistic submission to God that He revealed throughout the ages to particular prophets and their peoples. Every time God sent a prophet, “a window onto the unseen was opened up and a glimpse of ultimate reality

³ ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and ‘Abd al-Ḥafīz Shalabī, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1955), 1:1–3.

⁴ Daniel Martin Varisco, “Metaphors and Sacred History: The Genealogy of Muhammad and the Arab ‘Tribe,’” “Anthropological Analysis and Islamic Texts,” special issue, *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (1995): 139–56. Cf. Franz Rosenthal, “The Influence of the Biblical Tradition on Muslim Historiography,” in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, 35–45 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. M. Ludolf Krehl, 4 vols. (vol. 4 partly ed. Th. W. Juynboll) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1862–1908), 2:369.

⁶ Qur’an 3:33–4: “God chose Adam and Noah and the family of Abraham and the family of ‘Imrān above all created beings, the seed of one another. God is the Hearer and the Knower.” Throughout this book, I rely most on the Qur’an translation of Alan Jones (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007). On these verses, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2:365. See also Qur’an 6:83–7.

was transmitted to the earth.”⁷ The Qur’an therefore refers to Abraham and his sons Ishmael and Isaac as *muslims*, or “submitters” to the one God.⁸

The Persians’ genealogies were, equally, an attempt to account within an “Islamic” model for Iranian ways of explaining the origins of the world and the course of human history. These ways posed a challenge to a history centered on prophets, as they proposed their own accounts of the origins of humanity, its development into distinct peoples, and the overall diversity of human relations. They were related in tales within which chronology typically moved according to a different rhythm, that of a history of kingship. Most importantly, they featured ideas of “Īrān,” sovereignty, topography, and heroes and villains going back, with some interruptions, at least to Sasanian times if not further. They also featured noble Iranian families and their descendants in the present, which, insofar as prophetic history was concerned, could be reckoned, theoretically, as merely late offshoots.

Iranian accounts of the past attracted the early interest of Muslims (including Persian Muslims), who responded to them by translating them from Middle Persian into Arabic, debating their ideas, reworking them into their own narratives, and otherwise engaging with them. Such rewriting occurred within what scholars have called Iranian “national” history. Its best-known representative, the “Book of Kings,” known in Middle Persian as the *Xwadāy-nāmag* (in Arabic written as *Khudāy-nāma*, *-nāmaj*, or *-nāmak*), covered Iranian history from its beginnings until the last Sasanian monarch to rule Iran, Yazdagird III (r. 631–51 CE), though a final chapter seems to have been added after that monarch’s death.⁹ The work seems to have been compiled at different stages, but it

⁷ Patricia Crone, *God’s Rule: Government and Islam; Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 10.

⁸ For the term *muslim* as applied to Abraham and his family, see Qur’an 2:127–8, 2:131–3, and 3:67–8; for Noah, see 10:72; for Joseph, 12:101; for Moses, 10:90; and for Lot, by interpretation, 51:36.

⁹ Much has been written about the *Xwadāy-nāmag*. See especially Nöldeke, *Das Iranische Nationalepos*, 13–15; Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, 53–6; Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” 359–60; J. Derek Latham, “Ibn al-Muqaffa’ and Early ‘Abbasid Prose,” in *‘Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al., 48–77 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), at 53–4; A. Shahpur Shahbazi, “On the *Xwadāy-nāmag*,” in *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater*, 208–29 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990); Latham, “Ebn al-Muqaffa’, Abū Moḥammad ‘Abd-Allāh Rōzbeh,” in *Elr*; Zeev Rubin, “Ibn al-Muqaffa’ and the Account of Sasanian History in the Arabic Codex Sprenger 30,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30 (2005): 52–93; Rubin, “Ḥamza al-İṣfahānī’s Sources for Sasanian History,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 35 (2008): 27–58; and M. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic*

was fixed in a coherent form by the end of the reign of Khusraw Parvīz (r. 590–628 CE). It was first translated into Arabic in the ‘Abbasid period by the prolific courtier ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 139/756) and retranslated several times later. In Arabic, it served as a major source for Arabic traditionists and in some fashion as one of the likely sources for Firdawsī’s Persian *Shāh-nāmāh* (completed ca. 400/1010).¹⁰ On the other hand, Muslims ignored, or were unaware of, much of Iranian historical knowledge. This was particularly true of Iranian “religious” history, namely, Zoroastrian ideas about the past; these received highly selective attention in Muslim historical works.

The greatest challenge to studying how Muslims took account of such history lies in the nature of the surviving sources, nearly all of which postdate the rise of Islam. This does not allow for a stable point of comparison, that is, a “pure” pre-Islamic national or religious historiography against which to measure interpretations by Muslims. No historical books have survived intact from Seleucid, Parthian, or Sasanian times that could chronicle Iranian national history, although there is some non-narrative evidence of it in the Avesta, Achaemenid inscriptions and tablets, Middle Iranian inscriptions, ostraca, papyri, graffiti, coins, and the Arabic and Persian Muslim sources themselves.¹¹ This has had the odd result that attempts to describe the *Xwadāy-nāmāg* have relied on Firdawsī’s epic or on al-Ṭabarī’s *History of Prophets and Kings* (*Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*). Likewise, Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts, while containing much old material, came into their current forms in the eighth century CE and afterward, when Zoroastrians had been interacting with Muslims for some time.¹² A further challenge arises from the fact that while one can

Iran, companion volume 1 to *A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch, 116–96 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), at 172–81.

¹⁰ On the sources for the *Shāh-nāmāh*, see also Nöldeke, *Das Iranische Nationalepos*, who holds that the *Xwadāy-nāmāg* likely passed directly from Pahlavī through versions in neo-Persian to Firdawsī’s epic (pp. 16–19); and esp. W. Barthold, “Zur Geschichte des persischen Epos” (trans. Hans Heinrich Schaeder), *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 98 (1944): 121–57; F. Gabrieli, “Ibn al-Muqaffa‘,” in *EI*²; Mahmoud Omidšalar, “Could al-Tha‘ālibī Have Used the *Shāhnāma* as a Source?” *Der Islam* 75, no. 2 (1998): 338–46; and Macuch, “Epic History and Geographical Works,” 172–4. Cf. Dick Davis, “The Problem of Ferdowsī’s Sources,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 1 (1996): esp. 50–1, and Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), esp. xix–xxiv and 60ff.

¹¹ Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” 360.

¹² On this problem, see esp. J. de Menasce, “Zoroastrian Pahlavī Writings,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 3(2):1166–95, and “Zoroastrian Literature after the Muslim

speak of Zoroastrian historiography, elements of Iranian national and religious history are often merged in the Arabic sources.¹³ Other times, what once may have counted as Zoroastrian history is “nationalized,” becoming part and parcel of the history of all Persians. Whatever the heuristic value of a religious/national distinction, the state of our sources should cause misgivings about any rigid categorization of contents as simply either “national” or “religious,” since although it may be true that such a division held once upon a time, as the two types of history were produced and first consumed, the distinction softens in Arabic and Persian, as traditionists make use of a variety of sources.

Finally, there is every reason to believe that historical knowledge of a more local nature also served as a source for genealogies featuring the prophets and for Muslim historiography more generally, though identifying its original, pre-Islamic forms is fraught with difficulties. Some of this evidence is circumstantial: Jews and Christians, who may have served as sources of such knowledge, inhabited Iranian towns such as Hamadhān, Nihāwand, and Jayy, from which we also have testimony about prophetic genealogies. Other support is derived from pure conjecture: Iraq with its Jewish and Christian populations would have provided a fertile ground for discussions of the prophets’ ancestries.¹⁴ Local histories contain much material relating to pre-Islamic times, and they even take archaic forms, such as the Pahlavi treatise on the “Wonders and Magnificence of Sīstān.”¹⁵ Although their first audiences resided in Iranian localities, they circulated widely and transmitted their ideas about ancient history, and other matters, to wider horizons.

Conquest,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4, *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. R. N. Frye, 543–65 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Shaul Shaked, “Some Islamic Reports Concerning Zoroastrianism,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994): 43–84; M. Stausberg, “The Invention of a Canon: The Case of Zoroastrianism,” in *Canonization & Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR) Held at Leiden 9–10 January 1997*, ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn, 257–77 (Leiden: Brill, 1998); and D. Neil MacKenzie, “Bundahišn,” in *EIr*.

¹³ They may even have been blended in the *Xwadāy-nāmag* itself.

¹⁴ Work on the Babylonian Talmud under the late Sasanians is suggestive of the possibilities for exchange of ideas on a variety of matters, genealogy included. Also, for Mandaeen appropriation of the Kayanids, see Louis H. Gray, “The Kings of Early Irān according to the Sidrā Rabbā,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 19, no. 2 (1906): 272–87.

¹⁵ For a translation, analysis, and bibliography, see Bo Utas, “The Pahlavi Treatise *Avdēh u sabikēh ī Sakistān* or ‘Wonders and Magnificence of Sistan,’” *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 28 (1980): 259–67.

When Muslims tried to account for Persians in prophetic history, they therefore had to offer a complex network of traditions from which to choose: those preoccupied with Islam's biblical heritage; those reflecting native Iranian knowledge in different forms, including that produced for particular localities and disseminated widely; and ideas originating with longstanding local Jewish and Christian populations.

The Inheritance of Noah

Let us look at the most commonly mentioned prophet-forefather for the Persians, Noah, and at the various ways in which descent from him could connect them to prophetic and Islamic history. The story of the Flood that destroyed all peoples except Noah's family has required those who subscribe to its mythology of ethnogenesis to trace their ancestries to one or another of his sons, Shem, Ham, or Japheth. This has been accomplished in a variety of ways. Although early European Christians, for example, were not mentioned in the Genesis 10 account of Noah's progeny, they traced their lines to Japheth.¹⁶ Jewish traditions supported this ancestry, but details proved difficult to work out¹⁷ and, in some cases, involved the recasting of a former god as a royal figure.¹⁸ According to an unusual tradition circulating in ninth-century England, the Anglo-Saxon royal line of Wessex descended from an ark-born son of Noah named Sceaf.¹⁹ In the complex search for roots that took place in Reformation era Germany, Christians identified Ashkenaz, a grandson of Japheth, as their forefather.²⁰

¹⁶ Genesis 10:2–5 mentions Japheth's seven sons and adds that "From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations." (Throughout this study, I rely on the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.) Genesis 10 mentions Japheth's grandsons through his sons Gomer and Javan, omitting mention of progeny through Japheth's other five sons.

¹⁷ Donald Daniel Leslie, "Japheth in China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 3 (1984): 404–5.

¹⁸ Craig R. Davis has described this as a reversal of the process described by Euhemerus in the third century BCE: "The ancient gods are not glorified heroes; heroes, or at least some of them, are fallen gods." Davis, "Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies," *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992): 23–4.

¹⁹ Daniel Anlezark, "Sceaf, Japheth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons," *Anglo-Saxon England* 31 (2002): 26–7.

²⁰ For Noah's sons in European historiography, see esp. Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 103–42.

In adopting the ancient Near Eastern idea of the Flood, Muslims inherited its ethnogenic imperative as well: if all other peoples perished at that time, then Muslims and their ancestors, whatever their origins, must descend from Noah, too. There could be no autochthons. For Arabs, this was quickly addressed. The early biographers of Muḥammad, as mentioned, constructed for him a lineage that went back to Noah (and before him, to Adam). The Arabian prophets – Hūd, Šāliḥ, and Shu‘ayb – were also given lineages. The eponyms of Arab tribes, such as Qaḥṭān, also became Noah’s progeny, conferring this ancestry upon the tribes generally and upon the individuals within them.

Scholars of the genealogical sciences placed non-Arab peoples in a great number of segmented lineages that showed more than one line of descent from a given ancestor. Such lineages contain multiple branches, and are therefore well suited for different purposes. For many scholars, no matter what their own locale, a clear primary concern was the way in which kinship to Noah provided a biological explanation for the Arabs’ relations with other peoples, especially the “Children of Israel” (*Banū Isrā’īl*).²¹ For others, genealogy reflected a salvific hierarchy of peoples (in which, for example, Ham’s descendants tended to fare poorly), or it could root in primordial times devolution from an original Islam and therefore serve as part of a critique (as I discuss in Chapter 4).

Persians were considered in some of the earliest schemes that gave an anthropology of the world’s peoples. For example, traditions attributed by al-Ṭabarī to ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 68/687 or 688) or Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110 or 114/728 or 732) would have the Persians descend from Shem or Japheth. Ibn ‘Abbās reportedly named Shem’s descendants as Moses’s people (*qawm Mūsā*, i.e., the Children of Israel), the Arabs, the Persians (*al-Furs*), the Nabat (*al-Nabaṭ*, that is, the Aramaic-speaking population of Syria and Mesopotamia, not the Nabateans of Petra familiar to modern readers), and the people of India and Sind (*al-Hind wa-l-Sind*).²² Wahb, meanwhile, specified Persians, Arabs, and the people of Byzantium as Shem’s descendants, thus rendering the Arabs kin

²¹ This agenda, in which Abraham also figures prominently, animates works composed across the Muslim world, including in Muslim Spain, as demonstrated by Ibn Ḥazm’s (d. 456/1064) *Jamharat ansāb al-‘Arab*, ed. É. Lévi-Provençal (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1948). For a broad study, see Zoltan Szombathy, “The *Nassābah*: Anthropological Fieldwork in Mediaeval Islam,” *Islamic Culture* 73, no. 3 (1999): 94.

²² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh* I:218–19. Regarding this genealogy, see *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 2, *Prophets and Patriarchs*, trans. William M. Brinner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 17–18, n. 61.

to the two major imperial powers they conquered. For him, “the Blacks” (*al-Sūdān*) descended from Ham and the Turks (*al-Turk*) and Gog and Magog from Japheth.²³

The Accommodation of al-Ṭabarī

The most systematic attempt to account for translocal Iranian historiography was undertaken by al-Ṭabarī in his *History of Prophets and Kings*. For al-Ṭabarī, the Persians’ genealogies, including Noah as a forefather, were part of a larger project of narrating the history of Islam and the Muslim community upon the premise that knowledge of true monotheism, *islām*, came into the world with the first prophet, Adam, and was reinforced by all prophets after him. In al-Ṭabarī’s work, Persians play a major role in this early history, which prepares audiences to spot them in the narratives that follow and lead to the early fourth/tenth century. By this logic, it would not be too far-fetched to view Islam as an indigenous religion, forgotten and then recovered.

Al-Ṭabarī was born in 224 or 225/839 in the city of Āmul in the Persian province of Ṭabaristān on the Caspian Sea, which developed loyalties to Islam rather late and whose control was contested at the time of al-Ṭabarī’s birth.²⁴ His own family may well have had Arab roots, though he discouraged speculation about his ancestry.²⁵ He left home at the age of twelve and finally settled in Baghdad when he was about thirty, funding his studies with income from the rent of properties in his home town.²⁶ He was well acquainted with Iran’s cultural and literary heritage but at some remove, and he was certainly no chauvinist. Rather, he likely wanted to preserve an Iranian historiographical tradition, to make other Muslims aware of it, and to give it a certain pride of place, but also to urge Iranians to see their history as part of a wider Muslim history. And so, in

²³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I:211.

²⁴ In 224 and 225 AH, a recent convert to Islam and member of a non-Muslim dynasty known as the Bāwandids revolted unsuccessfully against the central authorities of the caliphate; heavy taxes were imposed on the landowners of Āmul, and the city itself was laid waste. See R. N. Frye, “Bāwand,” in *EI²*, and Franz Rosenthal’s description of al-Ṭabarī’s early life in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, *General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 10–11.

²⁵ See the comments by Rosenthal; *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 1:12.

²⁶ Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 323–8; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 162; Claude Gilliot, “La formation intellectuelle de Tabari (224/5–310/839–923),” *Journal Asiatique* 276 (1988): 203–44.

his book, al-Ṭabarī presents a wealth of possible ways in which Persians might be related to prophets and other Qur'anic figures – including Adam, Seth, Noah, Dhū al-Qarnayn, al-Khiḍr, Solomon, Abraham, and Isaac – whose lines intertwined with, and spawned, many possible Persian ones. The Persian lines include those of Gayūmart – about whom we will have much to say in this study – as the father either of the human race as a whole or of the Persians in particular; Hūshang, as the first king of the so-called Pishdādian dynasty; Mashī and Mashyāna, figures of Zoroastrian cosmogony; Jamshīd, Farīdūn, and Manūshīhr, all known from the Persian epic tradition; Kay Qubādh, who features in al-Ṭabarī's account as the first Kayanid ruler; and Yazdagird III, the last Sasanian ruler of Iran. He identifies many different advocates of varying views of Persian genealogy: Muslim *akhbārīs*, Arab and Persian genealogists, poets, and Zoroastrian priests, as well as Persians, Zoroastrians, and Jews (the Children of Israel) in general.

As a whole, al-Ṭabarī's volume presents its readers with a range of possibilities relating to the origins of humanity, its branching out, its ancient history of prophets and kings, especially in Palestine, Arabia, and Iran, and its religious and ethnic forms in his own day. The possibilities address problems in merging what al-Ṭabarī likely saw as a Qur'anic vision of history with the Iranian views he apparently knew quite well. The thrust of his inquiry is earnest, searching, and literal, if not philosophically systematic, in its mode of thinking: With whom does the human race start? When did the major communities we know today come into existence? What role did the Flood, its devastation of humanity, and its aftermath have in shaping humanity in the present? Genealogically speaking, what are the origins of the key figures of the Persian epic tradition – especially Jamshīd, Farīdūn, and Manūshīhr?

It was once held that al-Ṭabarī was unoriginal in his presentation because of his extensive citation of authorities, his reproduction of substantial portions of earlier texts, often without attribution, and the general discourse of learning in his day that was based on faithful reproduction through both memorization and scrupulous note taking. Although one still finds some adherents to such a view, the consensus of scholars now begins with the premise of al-Ṭabarī's intervention and looks for his own position in his comments on reports, his references to sources in different, distinguishing ways, and his choices regarding emplotment (how he structures his text, and with what narrative economy), weighting (by length, chiefly), and assumptions within and across portions of the text. In his general introduction to the translation of al-Ṭabarī's *History*, Franz

Rosenthal went so far as to assert that “the most remarkable aspect of Ṭabarī’s approach is his constant and courageous expression of ‘independent judgment (*ijtihād*).”²⁷ While this is surely an overstatement, as al-Ṭabarī rarely speaks in his own “voice,” it is often possible to discern his perspective.²⁸

His view of the Persians’ genealogy runs something like this and emerges out of the various contradictory details. The Persians’ history begins with famous figures whose lineages run deep into prophetic history: they begin either at creation or, more likely, after the Flood, probably with Noah’s son Shem. Afterward, pre-Islamic Persian history, particularly dynastic history, runs mostly on its own track, independent of prophetic history. It provides a useful and stable point of reference for prophetic history but is also part of prophetic history, both because it originates in the latter and because it is part of a broader narrative and telos leading to Muḥammad, the final prophet, and Islam in Iran itself.

Three aspects of al-Ṭabarī’s position deserve special comment. First, he treats Zoroastrian opinions as plausible; reports them, he says, directly from Zoroastrians; and uses them to flesh out the early history of the Persians. For him, such opinions are not disqualified by the religious identity of their proponents and may even be a valid source of information, at least insofar as the Persian branch of humanity is concerned. Most interestingly, al-Ṭabarī singles them out as representing the native “Persian” view with which a history of Islam must come to terms. He does not describe them as Sasanian, nor as expressly part of the heritage of an imperial Iran.

Second, Zoroastrian ideas, though treated seriously, cannot be accepted as plausible if they contradict basic tenets of Muslim belief about the past, chiefly about human origins and the Flood. Adam, not Gayūmart, was father to the human race, whatever the relationship between the two. There was a Flood. The Zoroastrians, al-Ṭabarī notes, say there was no Flood, or they say there was, but it did not cover their lands or interrupt their genealogies, as they “assume that it took place in the clime

²⁷ Rosenthal, *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 1:55–6. Rosenthal is speaking here of all of al-Ṭabarī’s works. He cites unfavorably Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1943–9), 1:148, and the latter’s assessment of al-Ṭabarī as “kein selbständiger Kopf,” or unoriginal.

²⁸ See “Ṭabarī’s Voice and Hand,” in Boaz Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Ṭabarī’s History* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 109–54. Cf. Tayeb El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography* and “Ṭabarī’s Biography of al-Mu‘taṣim: The Literary Use of a Military Career,” *Der Islam* 86, no. 2 (2011): 187–236.

of Babylon and nearby regions, whereas the descendants of Gayūmart had their dwellings in the East, and the Flood did not reach them.”²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī points to the error of this view: “The information given by God concerning the Flood contradicts their statement,” he says, citing Qur’an 37:75–7, in which the Qur’an describes Noah and his offspring as “survivors,” saved by God.³⁰ God therefore indicates that “Noah’s offspring are the survivors, and nobody else.”³¹ Al-Ṭabarī repeats this assertion amid a discussion of the mythic tyrant Ḍahḥāk, as he notes that “some people” (*ba’ ḍahum*) claim that Noah lived during his reign.³² For him, it is clear that there is in reality no uninterrupted and independent Persian line that preceded the Flood and continued after it. He goes on to discuss various theories about the Persians’ genealogies that may explain the Zoroastrians’ errors regarding their origins. One theory is based on a simple confusion of names: he reports that the Magians of his day believed Gayūmart to have been the same person as Adam, with 3,139 years passing between Gayūmart’s lifetime and the hijra of Muḥammad.³³ He also notes that Persian scholars – whom he does not describe specifically as Zoroastrians but rather as members of a scholarly class (*‘ulamā’ al-Furs*) – assume that Gayūmart was Adam.³⁴ A second explanation relies on genealogical sublimation through the depiction of Gayūmart as “the son of Adam’s loins by Eve.”³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī also reports a combination of these two methods of reconciliation with regard to Hūshang on the authority of “some Persian genealogists” (*ba’ ḍ nassābat al-Furs*). This theory takes the equation of Gayūmart with Adam as its starting point and further assumes that Hūshang descends from Gayūmart through Gayūmart’s son Mashī, grandson Siyāmāk, and great-grandson Afrawāk (Frawāk). Thus Gayūmart would be Adam, Mashī would be Seth, Siyāmāk would be Enosh, Afrawāk would be Kenan, and finally Hūshang would be Mahalalel – perfectly reflecting Adam’s biblical descendants.³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī puzzles over whether the equations would

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I:199.

³⁰ Qur’an 37:75–7 says: “Noah called out to Us, and how excellent was the Answerer. We delivered him and his household from the great distress, and made his seed the survivors.”

³¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I:199.

³² *Ibid.*, I:210.

³³ *Ibid.*, I:17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I:147.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I:155; Genesis 5:1–12.

plausibly permit Hūshang to be a contemporary of Adam, as Mahalalel was, and concludes that it would be possible.³⁷

A third important aspect of al-Ṭabarī's position is his belief that the Persians were born early in the history of humanity, whether at its inception, with Gayūmart, or more likely afterward, from Noah's sons. They are among its original stock, their history emerging before that of either Jews or Arabs. An alternative genealogy, which al-Ṭabarī also mentions, traces the lineage of the Persians to the later figure of Abraham and his son Isaac (through Manūshihir, a claim considered below), and so places them chronologically on a par with the Jews and Arabs. However, al-Ṭabarī discounts this theory; he credits it to an unnamed source or sources (*ba'ḍ ahl al-akhbār*); he notes that this is a view not shared by the Persians themselves; he quotes a good Muslim source that contradicts it (Ibn al-Kalbī, d. ca. 204/819 or 206/821); and in a subsequent mention of Manūshihir, al-Ṭabarī casually refers to him as Manūshihir b. Īraj. He thus dispenses with the possibility that the Persians descend from Abraham.³⁸

The cumulative result of these features of al-Ṭabarī's discussion is the placement of Persians within the story of Islam at an early stage, and in ways that respect and preserve some of their native traditions, for which Persians, and even Zoroastrians, are given significant credit. Genealogical autonomy, after a point, paves the way for autonomy in other realms. Persian history sets the pace for, and is part of, prophetic history. Toward the beginning of the *History* al-Ṭabarī remarks that pre-Islamic Persian history, beginning with Gayūmart, is the most reliable benchmark for measuring history. That is, "the history of the world's bygone years is more easily explained and more clearly seen based upon the lives of the Persian kings than upon those of the kings of any other nation (*ghayrihim min al-umam*)."³⁹ Indeed, "a history based upon the lives of the Persian kings has the soundest sources and the best and clearest data."³⁹ This history shares much of the same Near Eastern geography as other narratives of prophetic history, overlaps in dramatic content, and runs toward the lifetime of the Prophet and the Muslim conquests, including of Iran itself.

In al-Ṭabarī's writing, one gets a sense of the challenge the author probably first encountered when, as a youth, he moved south from Āmul

³⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I:155.

³⁸ "As for the Persians (*al-Furs*), they disclaim this genealogy, and they know no kings ruling over them other than the sons of Farīdūn and acknowledge no kings of other peoples. They think that if an intruder of other stock (*min ghayrihim*) entered among them in ancient times, he did so wrongfully." *Ibid.*, I:432–4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I:148; *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 1:319; see also *Ta'rikh*, I:353.

to Rayy, located near modern Tehran and a major center of the empire in his day, to study Muslim traditions, including Ibn Iṣḥāq's biography of the Prophet and *Kitāb al-Mubtada'*, which treats prophetic history prior to Muḥammad's lifetime, with major figures such as Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd (d. 248/862).⁴⁰ While there and afterward in Baghdad, he certainly recognized the problem of reconciling prophetic history with knowledge otherwise available in Iran. When he sat down to write the *History*, which he finished in 302/915,⁴¹ he ostensibly had a full range of Islamic and older Iranian materials at his disposal, and he chose to address the conflicts that they presented by assembling them in this particular way.

In contrast to his general precision in citing sources in his *History*, it is remarkable that al-Ṭabarī describes the sources of his knowledge about Gayūmart, Hūshang, Farīdūn, and Jamshīd and these very first chapters of prophetic history in such general terms, as owing to Zoroastrians or to Persians in general. He does not specify Ibn al-Muqaffa', the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, or a *Siyar al-mulūk* (as Ibn al-Muqaffa' 's translation of the latter is sometimes called), nor does he otherwise name his informants, unless they are Muslims (including Ibn al-Kalbī). Instead, he employs the passive voice (*dhukira*, "it is said that") and generally speaks ambiguously. Modern scholars have persuasively argued, however, that al-Ṭabarī's knowledge of Iran's pre-Islamic history derived in significant measure from the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, if not through a copy of Ibn al-Muqaffa' 's translation, then through another channel.⁴² His way of citing contrasts sharply with that of later traditionists writing outside of Iraq, who seem to have felt much more comfortable identifying Iranian sources by name. These other reporters include Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 350/961) – a particularly strong point of contrast, surely – who spent most of his life in Iṣfahān and who begins his work by listing eight sources for knowledge about Iran's pre-Islamic history, first on the list being Ibn al-Muqaffa' 's *Kitāb Siyar mulūk al-Furs*. Ḥamza mentions a Zoroastrian priest named Bahrām who claimed to have collected more than twenty copies of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*

⁴⁰ Gilliot, "La formation intellectuelle de Tabari," 205–6; Rosenthal, "The Life and Works of al-Ṭabarī," in *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 1:17–19.

⁴¹ Rosenthal, *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 1:133.

⁴² Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879; repr., 1973); Arthur Christensen, *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens*, vol. 1, *Gajōmard, Masjaj et Masjānay, Hōšang et Taḫmōruw* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt, 1917), 64–6. See also Gabrieli, "Ibn al-Muqaffa'," in *EI*².

in order to establish the correct dates of the reigns of Persian kings.⁴³ The other reporters also include Bal‘amī (d. ca. 363/974), who was, until the studies by Elton L. Daniel and Andrew C. S. Peacock, widely regarded as al-Ṭabarī’s “translator” into Persian.⁴⁴ In his adaptation of al-Ṭabarī’s work, produced under the autonomous Samanid governate of Khurāsān and Transoxiana and considered the earliest work of Persian historical writing, Bal‘amī mentions a far more varied list of sources that also features Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, a *Shāh-nāmah-yi buzurg* (attributed to the Samanid era Persian poet and writer Abū al-Mu‘ayyad Balkhī), and “the book of Bahrām b. Mihrān Iṣfahānī,” perhaps referring to some version of what Ḥamza had on hand – among several other works.⁴⁵

Why does al-Ṭabarī not give credit where it was likely due? It could be that such knowledge was diffusely held, with al-Ṭabarī gaining it directly from Persians, especially Zoroastrians, so it deserved the general attributions he gave to it; he also may have known it to be part of a Persian corpus already heavily filtered by the Arabic sources. But there may be more to his silence. His reluctance to name the work represents a way of dealing with two possible historical visions identified by Julie Scott Meisami in Persian-language historical texts: one is “Iranian, focusing on pre-Islamic Iranian monarchy up to the Islamic conquest,” whereas the other is “Islamic,” and gave rise to dynastic history. Meisami traced these visions to the emergence of Persian historical writing in the last

⁴³ Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb Ta‘rīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-l-anbiyā’* (Berlin: Kaviani, 1340/1921 or 1922), 9 and 19.

⁴⁴ For the hugely complex history of the work’s transmission, see Elton L. Daniel, “Manuscripts and Editions of Bal‘amī’s *Tarjamah-yi Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s., 122, no. 2 (1990): 282–321. Andrew C. S. Peacock’s recent study raises further, serious questions about how historians have traditionally used Bal‘amī’s text; see his *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Bal‘amī’s Tārīkh-nāma* (London: Routledge, 2007), esp. 73–102, “Bal‘amī’s Reshaping of Ṭabarī’s History.”

⁴⁵ *Tārīkh-i Bal‘amī: Takmilah va Tarjumah-yi Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī Bahār and Muḥammad Parvīn Gunābādī, 2 vols. (Tehran: Zavvāl, 1974), 1:3–5 (incl. 5, n. 11); on this passage, and Bal‘amī’s treatment of Gayūmart generally, see esp. Maria Subtelny, “Between Persian Legend and Samanid Orthodoxy: Accounts about Gayumarth in Bal‘amī’s *Tarikhnama*,” in *Ferdowsi, the Mongols and Iranian History: Art, Literature and Culture from Early Islam to Qajar Persia*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand, A. C. S. Peacock, and Firuza Abdullaeva (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013). Subtelny persuasively argues, however, that Bal‘amī copies a passage, including a list of sources, from the so-called older prose preface to the *Shāh-nāmah* (completed in 346/957 for Abū Maṣū‘ūr b. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, the governor of Ṭūs); i.e., he would seem to overstate the variety of what he actually had at hand. For the relevant passage, see V. Minorsky, “The Older Preface to the *Shāh-nāma*,” in *Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida*, 2 vols., 2:159–79 (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1956), 2:173.

half-century of Samanid rule (the second half of the fourth/tenth century).⁴⁶ It seems more likely, however, that these visions existed in tension much earlier and in Arabic, from the moment of Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation, as can be seen in a complaint of the 'Abbasid litterateur al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868 or 869), who said that his contemporaries were overly impressed by old models.⁴⁷ In the early days extending to those of al-Ṭabarī, the conflict was often resolved with little acknowledgment of the pre-Islamic and Iranian strand. It is significant that even Ibn al-Muqaffa's own Arabic translation was eventually lost – a fate that would have seemed shocking from the perspective of other fields of knowledge where the past was meticulously (if differently) recorded, such as Hadith study. The result can be seen in the fourth/tenth century, when Ḥamza cites a Mūsā b. 'Īsā al-Kisrawī, who bemoans the instability of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*'s textual tradition. Mūsā notes that all of the copies of the Arabic text differ, and he could not find even two copies agreeing in content.⁴⁸

Generally speaking, al-Ṭabarī's *History* played a large role in shaping the historiographical tradition that followed him, so much so that a Buyid amir was once chastened by Maḥmūd of Ghazna for having failed to read his al-Ṭabarī.⁴⁹ Besides all of the other topics al-Ṭabarī treats in his work, we have him to thank for a considerable amount of our knowledge of Iran and its pre-Islamic history. But whatever he and other giants of Arabic or

⁴⁶ J. S. Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," "Cultural Processes in Muslim and Arab Societies: Medieval and Early Modern Periods," special issue, *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 249 and 257. According to Meisami, the *Shāh-nāmah* represents a pre-Islamic and Iranian narrative, whereas a variety of other texts represent an Islamic one. In speaking of Firdawsī's ambitions, however, Meisami softens the distinction. The *Shāh-nāmah* reflects a cyclical view of history and the rise and fall of states. Implicit in this structure, she argues, "is the hope for the appearance of a house which would combine both Iranian and Islamic ideals, a hope clearly expressed in the poem's panegyrics."

⁴⁷ See al-Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbih*, 76–7 (al-Mas'ūdī criticizes here a romanticization of past authorities, citing al-Jāhiz). Cited by Edward G. Browne in "Some Account of the Arabic Work entitled '*Nihāyatul-irab fī akhbārī'l-Furs wa'l-'Arab*,' particularly of that part which treats of the Persian Kings," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s., 32, no. 2 (1900): 200. See also al-Jāhiz's skepticism regarding the authenticity of ancient Persian writings transmitted in Arabic; *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 2nd ed., ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1960–1), 3:29.

⁴⁸ Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Ta'rikh*, 15. On this passage of Ḥamza's text and its implications for historiography, see Zeev Rubin, "Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī's Sources for Sasanian History," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 35 (2008): 43–4.

⁴⁹ For this example, see Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 115. Robinson cites Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233); see *al-Kāmil fī al-Ta'rikh*, 9:261. Firdawsī's *Shāh-nāmah* is dedicated to Maḥmūd; the anecdote might represent a comment on the relative worth of the two texts so as to show the importance of the *History* (see also Chapter 4).

Persian letters give us, we should not underestimate the significance of the fact that first the Pahlavi and then the Arabic texts are so quietly absorbed into other texts, a process that we explore in the second half of this book. Contents cannot survive unchanged regardless of the structures in which they are encased; nor can the memories they encapsulate, especially when their origins date back to a conquered empire. And quiet absorption suggests less fidelity to an original text than diligent attribution.⁵⁰

Abraham and a New Divine Election

A further theory regarding the Persians' genealogy enjoyed currency in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. This theory, briefly mentioned earlier, held that the Persians descended from Abraham through his son Isaac. In ancient times, Persians even made their way to Mecca for the pilgrimage that Abraham first established. In his *Murūj al-dhahab*, the historian and litterateur Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956) describes the visits: "the Persians' ancestors (*aslāf al-Furs*) would betake themselves to the Sacred House [i.e., the Ka'ba] and circumambulate it to honor their grandfather Abraham, to hold fast by his way, and to preserve their genealogies."⁵¹ The last pre-Islamic Persian to perform the pilgrimage was Sāsān, the dynasty's eponym: "When Sāsān came to the House, he circumambulated it and mumbled prayers (*zamzama*) over the well of Ishmael. It is named 'Zamzam' only on account of his and other Persians' mumbling prayers over it. This indicates the frequency of their practice over this well."⁵² Al-Mas'ūdī cites two poets, whom he does not name, attesting to this "mumbling." The first states: "The Persians mumbled prayers over Zamzam (*zamzamat al-Furs 'alā Zamzam*). That was in their most ancient past."⁵³ Al-Mas'ūdī also cites this line in his *Tanbīh*, noting there that the Persians would bring to the Ka'ba offerings to show respect for Abraham and his son: "it is, according to them, the greatest of the seven

⁵⁰ In a related vein, see Fred Donner's caution against the "Ṭabarization" of history in his review of Hugh Kennedy's *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990): 182–4. Also, on the same tendency in scholarship, see Antoine Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 106–7.

⁵¹ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar*, vols. 1 and 2, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi'a al-Lubnāniyya, 1965–6), 1:283 (no. 573). Regarding al-Mas'ūdī, see esp. Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

⁵² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 1:283 (no. 574).

⁵³ *Ibid.* Neither poet can be identified.

great temples (*hayākil*) and the world's noble houses of worship."⁵⁴ The second poet al-Mas'ūdī cites in the *Murūj* "boasted after the appearance of Islam" because of the Persians' ancient practices, saying:

In bygone times we kept visiting the sanctuary (*naḥajju al-bayt*),
 And setting up camp securely in its valleys.
 Sāsān b. Bābak journeyed from afar
 To support religion with a visit to the Ancient House.
 Then he circumambulated it and mumbled prayers (*zamzama*) at a well
 belonging
 To Ishmael that quenches the drinkers' thirst.⁵⁵

The topos of pilgrimage to the Ka'ba before Islam is found elsewhere in Arabic historiography.⁵⁶ In genealogical terms, the significance of the idea lies in the ties it establishes with Arabs and Muḥammad, of whose genealogy the Arab portion, as noted above, begins with Abraham's son Ishmael. In this manner, Persians become Muḥammad's kin and, as is more often emphasized, kin to the Arabs; see, for example, the following poem that was recited by Jarīr b. 'Aṭīyya (d. ca. 110/728–9), an Umayyad-era Arab poet, and circulated widely:

The sons of Isaac are lions when they put on
 Their deadly sword-belts, wearing their armor.
 When they boast, they count among themselves the Ispahbadhs,⁵⁷
 And Kisrā and they list al-Hurmuzān and Caesar.
 They had scripture and prophethood,⁵⁸
 And were kings of Iṣṭakhr and Tustar.

⁵⁴ Here he refers to the poet as an Arab poet from pre-Islamic times (*jāhiliyya*), whom the Persians cited as proof of their ancient practice. Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbih*, 109. The "seven great temples" refers, according to Bernard Carra de Vaux, to a Sabian syncretism. The Sabians, he writes, believed these temples to have been founded by Hermès. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Le livre de l'avertissement et de la revision*, trans. Bernard Carra de Vaux (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1896), 155, n. 2. See also Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld as *Jacut's geographisches Wörterbuch*, 6 vols. (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1866–73), 3:166, s.v. "Zamzam." All of the preceding should, however, be read in light of Kevin van Bladel's sober *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 1:283 (no. 574).

⁵⁶ For example, in Alexander the Great's pilgrimage; see al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhhbār al-tiwāl*, ed. 'Iṣām Muḥammad al-Ḥājj 'Alī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001), 75. See also G. R. Hawting, "The Disappearance and Rediscovery of Zamzam and the 'Well of the Ka'ba,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (1980): 44–54.

⁵⁷ Arabic, *al-ṣibabbadh*.

⁵⁸ Regarding post-conquest characterizations of Zoroaster as a prophet bringing a book, see Stausberg, "Invention of a Canon," 268–70.

They included the prophet Solomon, who prayed
 And was rewarded with distinction and a pre-determined
 sovereignty.
 Our father is the father of Isaac;
 A father guided [by God] and a purified prophet unites us.
 He built God's *qibla* by which he was guided,
 And so he bequeathed to us mightiness and longlasting sover-
 eignty.
 We and the noble sons of Fāris are joined by a father
 Who outshines in our eyes all those who have come after him.
 Our father is the Friend of God and God is our Lord.
 We have been satisfied with what God has given and decreed.⁵⁹

The “sons of Isaac” whom Jarīr so proudly claims as kin were both worldly leaders and prophets. They included “Caesar,” the usual Arabic name for the Roman and Byzantine emperors, and the Children of Israel as Solomon’s descendants. More unusually from a biblical perspective, they included the “Ispahbadhs,” a reference to the Persian title for army chiefs of pre-Islamic Persian empires;⁶⁰ “Kisrā,” referring to the Sasanian rulers collectively; and “al-Hurmuzān,” referring to a famous Persian general who was defeated by Caliph ‘Umar (r. 13–23/634–44) but who later was said to have converted to Islam. Isaac’s sons were kings of Iṣṭakhr in the province of Fārs, the religious center of the Sasanian kingdom and its capital. They were also kings of Tustar, a town in southwestern Persia in the province of Khūzistān, where al-Hurmuzān was captured.⁶¹ All of Isaac’s sons benefited from their ancestry with Abraham, who was a “father guided [by God],” “a purified prophet,” and “the Friend of God” (*khalīl Allāh*, Abraham’s common epithet).

The portrayal of Abraham as the common ancestor linking the Arabs and the Persians played a crucial role in enabling the latter to be integrated into the communal world view of Muslims. Recent work on ethnicity and nationalism has emphasized the importance of ideas of divine election for social mobilization and national coherence. The work of Anthony D. Smith, in particular, has drawn attention to the ways in which myths of divine election both promote sociocultural survival and serve as a stimulus for ethnopolitical mobilization. For Smith, divine election signifies

⁵⁹ Cited in al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, 1:280–1 (no. 568). Otherwise, see, e.g., Jarīr b. ‘Aṭīyya, *Dīwān Jarīr bi-sharḥ Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb*, ed. Nu‘mān Muḥammad Amin Ṭāhā, 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1969–86), 1:472–4 (no. 112, lines 27–39); al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I:433; and Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 2:862–3, s.v. “al-Rūm.”

⁶⁰ C. E. Bosworth, “Ispahbadh,” in *EI*².

⁶¹ On his defeat at Tustar, see Chapter 6.

a community's shared belief in its special destiny. Ethnic election is not ethnocentrism in a simple sense, but far more demanding:

To be chosen is to be placed under moral obligations. One is chosen on condition that one observes certain moral, ritual and legal codes, and only for as long as one continues to do so. The privilege of election is accorded only to those who are sanctified, whose life-style is an expression of sacred values. The benefits of election are reserved for those who fulfil the required observances.⁶²

For Smith, there are two basic types of myths of ethnic election. "Missionary" election myths exalt their community "by assigning them god-given tasks or missions of warfare or conversion or overlordship."⁶³ The community believes itself to be chosen to preserve and defend the true faith. This is the most common type of ethnic election and has been invoked by, among others, Armenians, Franks, Orthodox Byzantines, Russians, Catalans, and Catholic Poles. "Covenantal" election, by comparison, is contractual and conditional upon compliance with the will of God. This type of election has been seen less often, but it has surfaced among certain Protestant communities that have seen themselves as the heirs of the ancient Israelites (including the Puritan settlers of New England, the Ulster Scots, and Afrikaners).⁶⁴

From an early date, the Arabs often espoused a missionary sense of chosenness when they sought new converts, first among other Arabs and then among their neighbors.⁶⁵ Arabic literature is filled with claims representing them as a people of religion, set apart from others. A common identity, documented through tribal genealogies, was nurtured, and it was also their election that made Arabs out of former non-Arabs. An ideology of election was supported by the Prophet as well as by the supreme

⁶² Anthony D. Smith, "Chosen Peoples: Why Ethnic Groups Survive," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15, no. 3 (1992): 441. See also Smith's *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. ch. 3, "Election and Covenant," 44–65, and "Ethnic Election and Cultural Identity," "Pre-Modern and Modern National Identity in Russia and Eastern Europe," special issue, *Ethnic Studies* 10, no. 1–3 (1993): 9–25, esp. 11–12. For a useful summary and analysis of much of Smith's work on myths of divine election, see Bruce Cauthen, "Covenant and Continuity: Ethno-Symbolism and the Myth of Divine Election," *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 1/2 (2004): 19–33.

⁶³ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15.

⁶⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 67; Anthony D. Smith, "The 'Sacred' Dimension of Nationalism," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 3 (2000): 791–814, esp. 804–5. See also Cauthen, "Covenant and Continuity," 21–2.

⁶⁵ Although some members of the Umayyad elite reportedly discouraged conversion.

importance of the Arabic language in Muslim religion and ritual. It is a mature sense of Arabness that is reflected in the statement of al-Jāḥiẓ:

Since the Arabs are all one tribe, having the same country and language and characteristics and pride and patriotism and temperament and disposition, and were cast [in] one mould and after one pattern, the sections are all alike and the elements resemble each other, so that this became a greater similarity than certain forms of blood-relationship in respect of general and particular and agreement and disagreement: so that they are judged to be essentially alike in style.⁶⁶

As their kinsfolk, Persians were given a share in the Arabs' ethnic election through reference to the most antique source of this chosenness, Abraham. As Jarīr said: "Our father is the father of Isaac; A father guided [by God] and a purified prophet unites us." The idea may well have originated in pre-Islamic times, as extensions to Abraham's genealogy were made by eastern Jews, who were also Isaac's descendants. In any event, by 'Abbasid times, the view was credible to Arabs because they knew it to have been voiced by earlier Arabs, who claimed kinship with Persians as a point of pride. The Arab tribal context for such claims is alluded to by al-Mas'ūdī and other traditionists. Al-Mas'ūdī explains to his readers that Jarīr was directing his poem against Qaḥṭān, the name given to the southern Arabian tribal alliance.⁶⁷ Jarīr, as a "northern" Arab, thus boasted of his noble kinsmen against a southerner.⁶⁸

In 'Abbasid times, the clearest (but by no means only) rhetorical context in which ideas about the Persians and Isaac were articulated was that of the Shu'ūbiyya movement. The name of the movement's "Shu'ūbī" proponents derived from a Qur'anic verse they were fond of quoting, which includes the statement: "We have created you male and female and made you peoples (*shu'ūb*) and tribes so that you may know one another. The most noble among you before God is the most God-fearing" (Qur'an 49:13).⁶⁹ The movement had its roots among the Persian court secretaries and was mainly centered in Baghdad; its members were overwhelmingly

⁶⁶ Translated by C. T. Harley Walker in "Jāḥiẓ of Baṣra to al-Faḥr ibn Khāqān on the 'Exploits of the Turks and the Army of the Khalifate in General,'" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s., 47, no. 4 (1915): 639.

⁶⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 1:280 (no. 568).

⁶⁸ Elsewhere different tribal loyalties are cited, suggesting a rivalry among "northern" Tamīmīs. See Jarīr b. 'Aṭīyya, *Naqā'id Jarīr wa-l-Farazdaq*, ed. Anthony Ashley Bevan, 3 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1905–12), 2:991–1003 (no. 104), and Savant, "Isaac as the Persians' Ishmael: Pride and the Pre-Islamic Past in Ninth and Tenth-Century Islam," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2006): 18–19, n. 19.

⁶⁹ Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl al-'Arab wa-l-tanbīh 'alā 'ulūmihā*, ed. Walīd Maḥmūd Khālīṣ (Abu Dhabi: Cultural Foundation Productions, 1998), 109; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Kitāb al-'Iqd*

Persians. It took issue with the idea of Arab election, based on what the movement's adherents saw as the egalitarian ideals of Islam, the ill-conceived idea of a chosen people, and the failures of Arabs generally in the realms of culture and social manners. The Shu'ūbīs belittled the Arabs as the sons of a slave, since Ishmael, their father, was born of the slave woman Hagar, whereas the Shu'ūbīs' "mother" was Sarah, Abraham's wife. Shu'ūbīs even referred to Arabs as "sons of the unclean woman" because of Hagar's lowly origins. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), whose own lineage went back to Khurāsān, responded to the Shu'ūbīs by noting that not all slaves are unclean and that many great figures of Islamic history had been born of slave women. Is it allowable, he asked, for an apostate (*mulhid*), let alone a Muslim, to describe Hagar as unclean?⁷⁰

The idea that the Persians descend from Isaac is attested after the Shu'ūbiyya and, in the rarefied world of 'Abbasid Baghdad, involved assertions about hierarchy, social status, and privilege, and would appear to assert the chosenness of Persians, alongside Arabs. After the fourth/tenth century, the idea of Isaac as a father persists, though it is hard to say how widely it was held. A few cases suggest that it endured in wider circles than Iranians might imagine today. Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), in his history of Iṣfahān and its scholars, cites a Hadith in which Abū Hurayra quotes Muḥammad as saying that "Persia is the Children of Isaac (*Fāris Banū Ishāq*)."⁷¹ In seventh/thirteenth-century Baghdad, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 656/1258) in his commentary on the *Nahj al-balāgha* – an anthology of speeches, letters, testimonials, and opinions traditionally attributed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – cites a report in which 'Alī puts an Arab woman belonging to the Banū Ismā'īl on a par with a woman from the 'Ajam belonging to the Banū Ishāq.⁷² An early folio of a local history of Nīshāpūr (the *Kitāb-i Aḥvāl-i Nīshāpūr*) from the ninth/fifteenth century or later cites a Hadith in Arabic and then translated into Persian in which Ibn 'Abbās reports that "Fāris" was mentioned in the presence of the Prophet. The Prophet stated that Fāris, that is, Persia, was "our paternal relations" and part of the *ahl al-bayt* ("people of the house," that is, the Prophet's family). When prodded

al-farīd, ed. Aḥmad Amīn, Aḥmad al-Zayn, and Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, 7 vols. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1940–53), 3:404.

⁷⁰ Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl al-'Arab*, 47–8.

⁷¹ Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Dhikr akhbār Iṣbahān*, ed. Sven Dederling, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1931–4), 1:11.

⁷² Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 20 vols. (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1959–63), 2:200–1.

for an explanation, the Prophet said: “Because Ishmael was the paternal uncle of the descendants of Isaac, and Isaac was the paternal uncle of the descendants of Ishmael.”⁷³

Still, in the long term, the theory of the Persians’ descent from Isaac convinced neither al-Ṭabarī nor Iranians generally, likely because it was so thin on supporting mythology. The lineage seemed forced, as when al-Mas‘ūdī notes a claim that Manūshihir was the son of a man by the name of Manushkhūrnar b. Manūshkhūrnak b. Wīrak, with Wīrak being the very same person as Isaac, the son of Abraham.⁷⁴ According to the claim, Manushkhūrnar (Manūshihir’s father) went to the land of Persia, where he married the Persian queen, a daughter of Īraj named Kūdak, who bore Manūshihir, whose descendants multiplied, “conquering and ruling the earth.”⁷⁵ With their rise, the “ancient Persians disappeared like past nations and the original Arabs (*al-‘Arab al-‘āriba*).”⁷⁶ Al-Mas‘ūdī does not bother to follow through by, for example, reconciling the relationship between Isaac’s known sons and the person of Manūshkhūrnak. And although he says that Persians “are led to this” opinion and do not deny it, he admits that the genealogy was offered by Arab savants.⁷⁷ Nor does the idea have a narrative to accompany it that would explain the Persians’ origins, describe the lives of exemplary forebears, and connect this history to the Persians in their own day. By comparison, Arabs, Persians, and Muslims in general knew the detailed history of the Jewish people, beginning from Isaac and Abraham.

Instead, it is probably best to view the advocates of this idea, al-Mas‘ūdī among them, as seeking to offer the Persians a prominent place in prophetic history in lieu of older Iranian genealogies. They were losers in an ideological contest, insofar as their model was not accepted.

⁷³ *The Histories of Nishapur*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), fol. 4. The *Kitāb Aḥvāl-i Nīshāpūr* is based on a lost Arabic history of Nīshāpūr by Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Bayyī’ (d. 405/1014). On the manuscript, see Frye’s remarks in *Histories of Nishapur*, 10–11. The manuscript has been edited and published by Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī’ī Kadkanī as Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *Tārīkh-i Nīshābūr: Tarjamah-yi Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Khalīfah-yi Nīshābūrī* (Tehran: Āgah, 1375/1996), 64.

⁷⁴ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, 1:279 (no. 566). There are variants of these names; I follow Pellat.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* The other kings feared Manūshihir’s descendants “on account of their courage and horsemanship.”

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Most of the Arab savants from Nizār b. Ma‘add, according to al-Mas‘ūdī, say this and make it a foundation for genealogy; they have, he says, boasted about their kinship with the Persians, who descend from Isaac b. Abraham, against the Yemenites, who descend from Qaḥṭān (*iftakharat ‘alā al-Yaman min Qaḥṭān*). *Ibid.*, 1:280 (no. 567).

Al-Mas'ūdī was almost certainly aware of the sentiments of the Shu'ūbiyya, Ibn Qutayba, and al-Ṭabarī regarding the Persians' putative link to Isaac since he was educated in Baghdad by some of the city's most respected scholars; indeed, al-Mas'ūdī listed al-Ṭabarī's *History* as one of the many sources he consulted for the *Murūj*, though he did not share his predecessor's judgment on Isaac's progeny.⁷⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī traveled widely, including throughout Iran, and extensively documents more Iran-centric accounts in the *Murūj* and *Tanbih*.⁷⁹ Still, he gives no sense of the controversies or polemics surrounding the Isaac claim. It may well be that al-Mas'ūdī, an Arab of reputable stock himself, simply wished to provide the Persians with a way of viewing their history and genealogy as inseparable from those of the Arabs.⁸⁰ But in another, more fundamental sense al-Mas'ūdī was part of a successful campaign to get Iranians to see themselves as part of a broader prophetic history.⁸¹

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It was not just the collective category of Persians that was swept into prophetic history, but also individual localities. Consider the cases of Hamadhān and Nihāwand, two towns of ancient standing in the medieval province of Jibāl, which are located less than fifty miles apart as the crow flies. Hamadhān had been the capital of the Medes, the summer capital of the Achaemenids, and under the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian dynasties, an important city on the trading route from Mesopotamia to the East. It is mentioned throughout antiquity as a wealthy city renowned for its architecture.⁸² Nihāwand has a somewhat less documented and illustrious heritage, although in Sasanian times it seems to have played a role in the politics of the Sasanian state, and its Zoroastrian associations were reportedly strong.⁸³ By the 'Abbasid period, however, both cities

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:15.

⁷⁹ On al-Mas'ūdī as a source for Iranian history, see esp. Michael Cooperson, "Mas'ūdi," in *EIr*.

⁸⁰ Biographers give him a pedigree running back to the Prophet's companion 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd. On his travels, see Ahmad M. H. Shboul, *Al-Mas'ūdī and His World: A Muslim Humanist and His Interest in Non-Muslims* (London: Ithaca Press, 1979), 1–28.

⁸¹ For a fuller discussion of al-Mas'ūdī's ideas, see Savant, "Genealogy and Ethnogenesis in al-Mas'ūdi's *Muruj al-Dhahab*," in *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies*, ed. Savant and de Felipe.

⁸² R. N. Frye, "Hamadhān," in *EI*², and Stuart C. Brown, "Ecbatana," in *EIr*.

⁸³ V. Minorsky, "Nihāwand," in *EI*²; al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akbbār al-ṭiwāl*, 197.

were traditionally associated with the figure of Noah. A widely cited late ninth/early tenth-century geography by Ibn al-Faqīh gives some sense of the association. In it, there is a report that Hamadhān – the possible birthplace of Ibn al-Faqīh – was named for a descendant of Noah named Hamadhān, who was a son of Peleg (in Arabic al-Falūj) b. Shem b. Noah and the brother of a certain Iṣfahān, who built his own eponymous city: “and so, each of the cities was named after its builder.”⁸⁴ Nihāwand, however, was built by Noah himself and was called *Nūḥ awand* (the *awand* suffix signifying a possessive relationship).⁸⁵

Ibn al-Faqīh also furnishes such founding fathers for other locales and peoples; the Hephthalites of Central Asia, for example, descended from a certain Hayṭal, who was a great-grandson of Noah who moved eastward after languages became confused (in Babylon, as the story goes).⁸⁶ The northwestern province of Azarbaijan provides a particularly interesting case. Throughout the Sasanian period Atropatene/Āturpatakān, as it was then known, was an important religious center and home to one of the empire’s most sacred fires, that of Ādur Gushnasp, whose hearth was in the town of Shīz (see Figure 1.1). Legend has it that every newly crowned Sasanian king had to visit it on foot. There was also a royal palace in the province.⁸⁷ Muslims acknowledged this Zoroastrian heritage, with a good number believing the region to be the birthplace of Zoroaster himself.⁸⁸ However, Ibn al-Faqīh quotes Ibn al-Muqaffa’ as tracing the name of the province back to a prophetic eponym, one Āzarbādh b. Īrān

⁸⁴ Ibn al-Faqīh here cites Abū Mundhir Hishām b. al-Sā’ib al-Kalbī. Ibn al-Faqīh (fl. second half of the third/ninth century), *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. Yūsuf al-Hādī (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1996), 459 and 529.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 527. See also the “abridgment” of Ibn al-Faqīh’s text by Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ja’far b. Aḥmad al-Shayzarī (ca. 413/1022); *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. Michael J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1885), 217, 258, and 263. On Ibn al-Faqīh’s text and the abridgment, see André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusq’au milieu du 11^e siècle*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Paris: Mouton, 1973–80), 1:153–60, and Travis Zadeh, “Of Mummies, Poets, and Water Nymphs: Tracing the Codicological Limits of Ibn Khurradādhbih’s Geography,” in *Abbasid Studies IV: Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies*, ed. Monique Bernard (forthcoming in 2013). Cf. Anas B. Khalidov, “Ebn al-Faqīh, Abū Bakr Aḥmad,” in *EIr*. See also Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 5:313 and 410 (Yāqūt borrows from Ibn al-Faqīh, whose reporting he closely follows).

⁸⁶ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, 601; *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-Buldān*, 314. Muslim exegetes followed the myth in Genesis 11:5–9.

⁸⁷ Klaus Schippmann, “Azerbaijan iii. Pre-Islamic History,” in *EIr*. See also Klaus Schippmann, *Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), 309ff.

⁸⁸ C. E. Bosworth, “Azerbaijan iv. Islamic History to 1941,” in *EIr*.



FIGURE 1.1. Ādur Gushnasp. Azarbaijan (Iran). Photo by Wahunam.

b. al-Aswad b. Shem b. Noah.⁸⁹ This is a bold attribution, especially since Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ was a major transmitter of Iran’s pre-Islamic Sasanian heritage and seems an unlikely advocate of such an idea.

The shape and contours of the earliest history writing connected to localities are still debated among today’s historians, in large measure because so few sources survive, but the problem is also partly terminological.⁹⁰ Whatever its earliest forms, starting approximately in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, we have local histories for Iranian territories that are filled with descriptions of towns and regions, geography, topography, biographies of notable residents (especially the *ʿulamāʿ*), and political history and that reflect the density of religious learning, at least among elites. Such works were composed for many of the major centers of Iranian Islam, including old cities such as Hamadhān and Iṣfahān and new ones such as Shīrāz, as well as places where wide-scale conversion

⁸⁹ Alternatively, Ibn al-Faqīh identifies the province’s founder as Āzarbādh b. Bīwarāsf, Bīwarāsf (i.e., al-Ḍaḥḥāk) being a tyrant of Iranian legend. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, 581; *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-Buldān*, 284. See also Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Buldān*, 1:128–9, s.v. “Āzarbaijān.” Compare a foundation myth for Shīz relating to Jesus’ nativity, which Vladimir Minorsky attributes to Christians or Zoroastrians; “Two Iranian Legends in Abū-Dulaf’s Second Risālah,” in *Medieval Iran and Its Neighbours* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982), 172–5.

⁹⁰ On the question of regional schools of historiography, see Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 138–42. In the late second–third/ninth century, there were already works that sang the praises of particular localities such as Medina, Basra, and Kufa. For Iran, see Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 1:351–4.

and Islamization appear to have occurred at a slower pace and where significant Zoroastrian communities lived on, including the provinces of Fārs in the southwest of Iran, Yazd in central Iran, and Ṭabaristān.

These works also took up ideas about the prophets, and they suggest the importance of the earlier, schematizing sources, such as those of Ibn al-Kalbī and Ibn al-Faqīh. Whatever the paths that such knowledge traveled, perhaps including transmission by Jews and Christians, the legacy of 'Abbasid Iraq is visible in works such as the early sixth/twelfth-century *Fārs-nāmāh*, which cites al-Ṭabarī as one of its authorities for Iran's earliest history. The Persian-language text is attributed to a little-known author whose ancestors hailed from Balkh and who is consequently known as Ibn al-Balkhī. The work treats Gayūmart as the first king to rule the world and faintly echoes al-Ṭabarī's reporting on theories about him as well as ideas about his kingly successor Hūshang, including that Hūshang fathered the biblical prophet Enoch, also known as the Qur'anic Idrīs.⁹¹ This was a well-traveled proposal and an apparently fitting way to start a text that, while containing abundant detail on Fārs, also constitutes an important source on Iran's pre-Islamic rulers.⁹²

A result of this transmission of ideas was the gradual conversion of Iranian sites of great antiquity into ones with Muslim associations. In this transformation, the prophet Solomon, with his extensive travels and his association with major sites of antiquity, played an important role. Solomon was recognized as ruler over Greater Syria and associated with several sites of its antique heritage, including Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, Baalbek, and Palmyra,⁹³ but Iran also figured prominently in his itinerary.⁹⁴ A good example relates to the abovementioned sacred fire of Ādur Gushnasp. While the name of Azarbaijan came to be linked to Noah, the fire and its temple became folded into a set of ruins surrounding a clear

⁹¹ Ibn al-Balkhī, *The Fārsnāma of Ibnu'l-Balkhī*, ed. Guy Le Strange and Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1921), 8–10. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, esp. I:155, and Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Ta'rikh*, 19 and 23.

⁹² For the text, see Ibn an-Balkhī, *Description of the Province of Fars in Persia at the Beginning of the Fourteenth Century A.D.*, trans. and ed. Guy Le Strange (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1912). See also Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "Ebn al-Balkī," in *Elr*.

⁹³ Borrut, "La Syrie de Salomon: L'appropriation du mythe salomonien dans les sources arabes," *Pallas* 63 (2003): 107–20, and *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 217–38.

⁹⁴ On his travels in Iran, see Roy P. Mottahedeh, "The Eastern Travels of Solomon: Reimagining Persepolis and the Iranian Past," in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi*, ed. Michael Cook, Najam Haider, Intisar Rabb, and Asma Sayeed, 247–67 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).



MAP 1.1. Fārs

blue lake and known as the Takht-i Sulaymān (“Throne of Solomon”). The ruins’ name pointed to a belief that the buildings were a royal palace built and used by Solomon during his travels.⁹⁵

Another case is that of Persepolis (Takht-i Jamshīd) in the province of Fārs, an enormous complex of columned halls, palaces, gates, and a treasury created by Darius the Great (r. 522–486 BCE) and his successors that covers some 125,000 square meters and was one of the five royal capitals of the Achaemenid empire. The site was founded on a promontory above the plain of Marvdasht, and the natural drama surely served it well in Achaemenid times for royal and religious occasions, as it did in the Sasanian era and in 1971, when Mohammadreza Shah Pahlavi celebrated the 2,500th anniversary of Iran’s monarchy (reckoned by Iran’s solar hijri calendar). The term *Takht-i Jamshīd* signaled the role that the great king of Persian legend, Jamshīd, was meant to have played in the site’s founding.⁹⁶ After Alexander the Great sacked Persepolis, the city of Ištākhr grew up a short distance away, and the ruins of Persepolis served as a quarry for the new city. Sāsān, the eponym of the Sasanian

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ An important study of the site is that of Eric F. Schmidt, *Persepolis*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953–70); see also A. Shapur Shahbazi, *Persepolis Illustrated* (Persepolis: Institute of Achaemenid Research, 1976), 4–6.

dynasty and sometimes remembered as the grandfather to its founder, Ardashīr, was reportedly the superintendent of the Fire Temple of the goddess Anāhīd in Iṣṭakhr. Muslims appropriated Persepolis's charisma for prophetic history through traditions that conflated it with nearby Iṣṭakhr and associated it to Solomon. The geographer Abū Ishāq al-Fārisī al-Iṣṭakhrī (d. mid-fourth/tenth century), for example, said of the town whose name he bore:

As for Iṣṭakhr, it is a medium-sized city, a mile in width, and among the oldest and most famous cities of Fārs. The kings of Persia dwelled in it until Ardashīr transferred rule to Gūr [also in Fārs]. It is relayed in reports that Solomon (eternal peace be his), the son of David, traveled from [the town of] Tiberias to it in a day [lit. "from morning to evening"]. In it, there is a mosque known as the "Mosque of Solomon." A group of Persian common folk claim with no proof that Jam[shīd], who preceded al-Ḍaḥḥāk, was Solomon.⁹⁷

In his *Fārs-nāmāh*, Ibn al-Balkhī vividly described a carved figure at Persepolis that he took to represent Burāq, the horse upon which Muḥammad reportedly made his night journey to heaven: "The figure is after this fashion: the face is as the face of a man with a beard and curly hair, with a crown set on the head, but the body, with the fore and hind legs, is that of a bull, and the tail is a bull's tail."⁹⁸

The path by which such ideas about prophetic history came to be accepted among Iranian Muslims was surely complicated. In weighing evidence, though, Muslims appear to have frequently recognized as authoritative Arabic traditions from earlier centuries that wrote Iranian locales into prophetic history.

Conclusion

To sum up, genealogies were important ingredients for stories about the origins of the Persians that circulated at least from the third/ninth century

⁹⁷ Abū Ishāq al-Fārisī al-Iṣṭakhrī, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1927), 123; regarding Iṣṭakhr, see C. Barbier de Meynard, *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et littéraire de la Perse et des contrées adjacentes* (Paris: L'Imprimerie impériale, 1861), 48–50 ("Isthakhr"). The term "mile" likely refers to a distance of between roughly one-and-a-half and two kilometres; see Walther Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte: Umgerechnet ins metrische System* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 63, and Moshe Gil, "Additions to *Islamische Masse und Gewichte*," in *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Scheiber*, ed. Robert Dán, 167–70 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), 169. Regarding the Sasanians' genealogy, see esp. R. N. Frye, "The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 3(1):116–77, at 116–17.

⁹⁸ Ibn al-Balkhī, *The Fārsnāma of Ibnu'l-Balkhī*, 126; Le Strange, *Description of the Province of Fars*, 27.

onward. Ramón d'Abadal i de Vinyals, John Armstrong, and Anthony D. Smith have termed such stories *mythomoteurs*, and much of what they say about these stories applies to the Persian case.⁹⁹ At the center of every ethnic community and its view of the world lies a “distinctive complex of myths, memories, and symbols” that advance claims about the community’s origins and lineages. These are the engines that distinguish one ethnic group from another, and much of their emotional pull is nostalgic. As they describe origins, the Persians’ genealogies are schematic, positioning Persians relative to other groups and notable ancestors relative to one another. Blood ties in the remote past create filiations that explain relationships and recover and present other filiations for consideration. These bonds, in turn, inspire and encourage recognition of particular loyalties, even as they also represent antagonisms. Traditionists saw the Persians’ descent in different ways, which reflects both the layering of traditions and, more profoundly, different appeals for modes of social definition. This is to be expected in a community in transition. But the divergent accounts also offer a picture of primordial continuity. Since the Persians were written into prophetic history as descendants of either Noah or Abraham, the subsequent historical trajectory that yielded the arrival of Islam in Iran represents a process of recovering the initial, collective state of *fitra* into which every child is born, as mentioned in the Prophetic tradition cited at the beginning of the chapter. This process also provided a license to appropriate monuments of Iran’s antique history and to integrate these creatively into a narrative about Persians. And so we have a glimpse into the conflictual understandings of what it meant to be a Persian during the period of Iran’s conversion to Islam.

⁹⁹ The notion of *mythomoteur* originated with d'Abadal i de Vinyals, “À propos du Legs visigothique en Espagne,” *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 5 (1958): 541–85. See also John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), and Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*. For a trenchant criticism of Smith and the school of ethnosymbolism that he represents, see Umut Özkirimli, “The Nation as an Artichoke? A Critique of Ethnosymbolist Interpretations of Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 3 (2003): 340.