

the work in the field of Islam and modernity, this work is admirably cohesive, innovative and somewhat different from the others as it approaches the subject through a dialogical process by reconstructing a theoretical framework, thus drawing upon hermeneutics and intercultural dialogue. This is used as a means to provide a better prospect for understanding the “other”. In short, this work makes a most useful and original contribution to one of the most pressing questions in academia. Can Islam and modernity be reconciled in the scientific context? Is it possible to integrate transcendental metaphysical beliefs with modern human sciences? This work is required reading for all those who are interested in this field of study as it offers key insights for those seeking answers to these questions.

Asif Mohiuddin

(Doctoral Candidate, Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies,
University of Kashmir)

**Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy:
Ba‘lamî’s Tārīkhnāma**

A. C. S. Peacock

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Andrew C. S. Peacock, who teaches at the University of St Andrews, is interested in the history of Anatolia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. He is the author of several articles on medieval Islamic history and historiography. This book, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Ba‘lamî’s Tārīkhnāma*, originated as a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Cambridge in 2003.

The significance of Peacock’s book lies in its being the first monograph on Ba‘lamî’s *Tārīkhnāma*, the earliest work in Persian prose and one of the most influential works of Islamic historical writing; this work was translated into Arabic and Turkish and remained in circulation for a thousand years. This work not only includes the textual history of the *Tārīkhnāma*, the form and content of which throw light on the processes by which it has been transmitted. It also depicts the political and ideological circumstances of the Samanid Dynasty of Central Asia, one of the largest and most powerful Muslim states of the 10th century, which included Greater Khurasan, Ray and Transoxiana.

As the book's title reveals, a leitmotif of the work is the intertwined relations between Medieval Islamic historiography and political legitimacy. Peacock contends that throughout the medieval period historical writing was commissioned by political authorities in the Muslim world in order to gain or maintain legitimacy both in the eyes of the *ulama* and the public. In this regard Ba'lamî's *Tārīkhnāma*, a Persian translation of Tabarî's *Tārīkh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk*, composed earlier in the 4th/10th century, is a critical selection; this is not only because there has not been much research conducted on it, but also because the *Tārīkhnāma* was the single most popular history book in the Muslim world for nearly a thousand years, appealing to a wide range of readers.

Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy is a work of six chapters and three appendices. In the introduction Peacock underscores the difficulties of studying pre-Modern Islamic historiography, particularly that of the *Tārīkhnāma*; many unedited manuscripts can be found throughout the world. The first problem with the *Tārīkhnāma* is that in spite of the claim by Ba'lamî and many modern scholars that it is an abridged Persian version of Tabarî's *Tārīkh*, "it is not so much a translation as a new, independent work which drew on the prestige of Tabarî's name" (p. 5). Moreover, there are radical differences between the extant copies of the *Tārīkhnāma*, which are at least 160 in number; as there is no original manuscript from Ba'lamî's own time, it is almost impossible to identify how the original version has been altered. This book examines 30 Persian and many Turkish and Arabic manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* in order to overcome this problem.

In the introduction Peacock also traces the interest in history writing in the Islamic realm, dating back to the early Abbasid period. Mas'udî, Miskawayh, Dinawari, Ya'qubi and Tabarî are renowned Muslim historians of the 9th and the 10th centuries. Except for Tabarî, they all gradually broke away from *akhbar*-based history, which depended on the ahadith. Moreover, according to Peacock, medieval Islamic historiography was closely linked to religion and politics and historiography was generally patronized by dynasties to legitimize their power by representing themselves as a significant part of Islamic history. For him, the translation of Tabarî's *Tārīkh* into Persian under the auspices of the Samanid Dynasty reflects interwoven relations between historiography, religion and politics. Throughout the book he constantly tries to prove that although it was produced in the 10th century, when the Persian literature produced its first great products, the *Tārīkhnāma* is far from being a patriotic work. Rather, according to Peacock, it was a part of a political and literary project that promoted the "official" ideology of Islamic history

in order to maintain the authority of the Samanid regime, whose reputation rested upon piety and support for the *ulama*.

Aiming to comprehend why the Samanid ruling elite commissioned this translation, in the first chapter Peacock examines the Samanid milieu. The Samanid Dynasty, a strong adherent of Sunnism, was surrounded by two major threats: pagan Turkish tribes to the east and north of Transoxiana, and the Shi'ite Buyids to the west. Eventually, in the second half of the 10th century the Samanids' power diminished. Mansūr b. Nūh (r. 961-976), one of the *amirs* in this period, commissioned the *Tārīkhnāma* and Ba'lamī, his vizier, composed it. In this chapter Peacock also provides the reader with information about the Samanid poetry and prose. For him, Persian patriotism barely appears in the realm of Samanid literature. The prose in particular was heavily utilized by the state for propagating conservative Islamic values. Moreover, Persian seems to have been a practical selection rather than a patriotic one. Peacock also claims that the Samanid rulers preferred using Islamic images and titles for legitimacy, rather than making reference to Ancient Persia.

In the second chapter Peacock focuses on the *Tārīkhnāma*'s exceedingly complex textual tradition. First of all, he reviews investigations into the manuscripts by previous scholars, and then presents his view on the transmission process of the *Tarikhname*; this process led to the text being interpolated and adapted by later copyists. Unlike previous scholars, who generally categorized the *Tārīkhnāma* manuscripts according to redaction, Peacock argues that "the *Tārīkhnāma* presents a case of 'horizontal transmission' where the text has been contaminated by the readings from several different sources, including Tabarī's Arabic original" (p. 52).

The earliest manuscripts were copied at least 200 years after the *Tārīkhnāma*, and these copies appear to be extremely corrupt. The contents, vocabulary and grammar differ substantially from one manuscript to another. Given the lack of early manuscript evidence, it is not possible to estimate when interpolations started. Peacock provides quotations that demonstrate the extent of variations between extant copies. After examining many Persian, Turkish and Arabic copies, he takes Add 836, an Arabic version preserved at Cambridge University Library, which was copied by Bayazīd b. Sadr al-Dīn b. Khidr Khātib for Sunni Kufans, probably around the 15th century, and also three of the oldest Persian manuscripts as the main textual witness in examining the *Tārīkhnāma*.

Though the copies vary considerably, there are certain features that can be found in all. The third chapter of the book examines these common characteristics that distinguish the *Tārīkhnāma* from Tabarī's original version. Ba'lamī

not only translated the Arabic text, but also made significant alterations in form and content. The most important formal alteration made by Ba‘lamī is the excision of *isnads* and *akhbar* (sing. *khbar*) of the original text by Tabarī, which is quite dense and repetitive. Tabarī preferred demonstrating various accounts (*akhbar*) on a given issue and presenting *isnads* rather than providing the reader with an authoritative account. Such a historiographical project allowed the reader to perceive various alternative reports. In contrast, Ba‘lamī removed the *isnads* and *akhbars*, presenting his own account which is a blend of information woven together from Tabarī’s *akhbar*.

Another formal alteration made by Ba‘lamī is related to chronology. While Tabarī took the *hijri* chronology as the basis of his narrative, Ba‘lamī eliminated the annalistic treatment of Islamic history. That is, he takes the events as the basis, rather than years. Unlike Tabarī’s *Tarikh*, Ba‘lamī’s text includes numerous Arabic quotations (Qur’anic and non-Qur’anic), many of which are not translated into Persian. According to Peacock, the Samanid public might possibly understand the Qur’anic quotations, but the literary ones from Musaylima and Sajah seem to have presumed “a good understanding of Arabic on the part of audience” (p. 86). Such quotations give an idea about the readership of the *Tārikhnāma*.

Ba‘lamī altered the content of Tabarī’s text as well. He not only used additional sources, such as Ibn A‘tham al-Kufī’s *Kitāb al-Futūh*, but also introduced new themes, in particular those related to pre-Islamic history. Though the latter did so to a greater extent than the former, both Tabarī and Ba‘lamī paid more attention to the Prophethood and pre-Islamic history than previous Muslim historians had done. This is because, for them, as Peacock underscores, “prophecy was not merely a fundamental tenant of Islam and a vital part of Muslim and pre-Islamic history, but a dogma which had come under attack (from the freethinkers) or been distorted (by Shi‘ites and Isma‘ilis)” (p. 100). Ba‘lamī’s preoccupation with the Prophethood was also related both to his traditionalist approach to history and the expectations of the conservative Transoxianan society. Peacock argues that it was these two factors that led Ba‘lamī to devote little space to more recent events in the *Tārikhnāma*.

After identifying the main characteristics of the *Tārikhnāma*, the author provides quotations which demonstrate how Ba‘lamī’s versions of events differ considerably from those of Tabarī. Many historians have assumed that extant differences in tone and detail are related to Ba‘lamī’s so-called Persian perspective, and it was this that caused Ba‘lamī to reshape Tabarī’s text. According to this view, the *Tārikhnāma* was part of a Persianization of the frontiers, the acculturation of the new Turkish military elite, and an effort to combat

Isma‘ilism. Having a totally different view about the reasons that lay behind Ba‘lamī’s alterations, Peacock tries to test these arguments with a thorough comparison of certain passages from Tabarī’s *Tārīkh* and the *Tārīkhnāma*. In the fourth chapter he takes five major issues in order to compare the accounts of Tabarī and Ba‘lamī. He begins with the story of Prophet Abraham, which is narrated in detail both in the *Tarikh* and the *Tārīkhnāma*. However, the latter emphasizes terms such as *masjid*, *hajj*, and *fitra*, which are associated with Prophet Muhammad’s teaching, rather than with Abraham. Ba‘lamī did not devote space only to the prophets in the pre-Islamic period, but also to the kings, including Alexander the Great; the latter occupies an important place both in Iranian and Islamic traditions. Unlike Zoroastrians, Ba‘lamī treats Alexander quite positively, relating him with the Qur’anic tales of Dhu’l-Qarnayn. According to Peacock, this is an essential difference between the traditional Iranian interpretation of the past and Ba‘lamī’s approach. They have different views also on Bahram Chubin, a controversial ancestor of the Samanids. After comparing accounts of this figure which are found in Ba‘lamī, Firdawsī and Tabarī, Peacock concludes that as his audience was not interested in the Iranian past, Ba‘lamī disregarded the Samanids’ descent from Bahram Chubin.

The incident of apostasy in the early Islamic period is another issue that the author examines to explain the purpose of Ba‘lamī’s alterations. This incident provided the model for the treatment of apostates. Peacock argues that “if the *Tārīkhnāma* was inspired partly by a need to respond to heretical movements, especially to the Isma‘ili propaganda which sought to convert the Sunnis of Transoxiana, we may expect to find this reflected here” (p. 124). This is because in the medieval period conversion to Isma‘ilism was paramount to apostasy. Peacock’s analysis manifests that Ba‘lamī was not greatly concerned with apostasy. Finally, regarding the martyrdom of Hussain b. Ali, Ba‘lamī selects and mixes Tabarī’s accounts. Unlike Tabarī, his narrative is close to the Shi‘ite interpretation of the incident. In addition to these alterations made by Ba‘lamī, the copyists after him made considerable interpolations, leading to discrepancies between the copies. The *Tārīkhnāma* was translated, recopied and readapted by wide range of communities, and continued to be relevant for almost a thousand years after Ba‘lamī, as it represented the orthodox Muslim view of history.

In the conclusion Peacock responds to the three major questions around which the book rotates. Before making his point, he reminds the reader that given the complexity of the *Tārīkhnāma*’s existing texts, “absolute certainty about the intentions is impossible” (p. 167). The first and most important question is “why were the translations of Tabarī commissioned?” According to Peacock, the translations of Tabarī’s *Tafsīr* and *Tārīkh* were commissioned

not as part of a campaign against heresy or a response to the conversion of large numbers of Turks to Islam. As the main focus point of the *Tārīkhnāma* is Islam rather than the role of Persians in history, apparently neither Ba‘lamī nor Mansūr b. Nūh aimed at Persianization. Moreover, as the *Tārīkhnāma* includes an Arabic preface and many Arabic literary quotations which are not translated, Peacock finds the translators dishonest in their claim that the Persian versions were made for those who did not know Arabic. According to Peacock, Tabarī’s *Tārīkh* was translated into Persian due to “the need to legitimize the ruling dynasty through the actual and symbolic transfer of knowledge” (p. 170). The legitimacy of the Samanid rulers depended on “being accepted as the defender of Sunnism” (p. 170) and the translation of Tabarī’s *Tarikh* was a demonstration of their credentials.

In the 10th century, the Samanid Dynasty was not the only political entity capable of defending Sunnism. The Turkish Qarakhanids and the Ghaznavids were seeking legitimacy as defenders of Sunni orthodoxy. At a time when their lands were rapidly shrinking and their power was declining Samanids needed to reassert their capability of upholding Sunni orthodoxy. Peacock argues that the readers of the *Tārīkhnāma* were none other than the “semi-professional *ulama* who were the basis of pious Transoxianan society” (p. 171). This is because maintaining the support of the *ulama* was vital for the Samanids to survive. Accordingly, the Samanid Empire collapsed not because of heretical movements, rebellious vassals or Shi‘ite Buyids, but because the *ulama* thought that the Samanids had lost their credentials as upholders of orthodox Islam.

Secondly, Peacock indicates the differences between the Persian translation and Tabarī’s original. The author argues that the purpose of Ba‘lamī in making radical alterations was not only to provide an authoritative and indisputable vision of the past, but also to appeal to a wide audience. Finally, according to Peacock, because the text was extremely popular the manuscript tradition of the *Tārīkhnāma* became so complex and confused. It was used for a variety of purposes, such as legitimizing the ruler, teaching converts the principles of Islam, presenting moral lessons and coping with heresy. Thus, it was adapted according to the interests and expectations of its readers as well as the ruling elite.

Peacock’s work is valuable not only because it deals with a historical issue that has been under-studied, but also because it is a well-designed research the arguments of which are defended well; this work nicely demonstrates the widely accepted notion that history is usually constructed by the ruling elites, which was the case particularly in the pre-modern period. According to Peacock, historiography in the Islamic world was used to propagate a state-ideology and to legitimize political power during the medieval era. However, he presents the

case as though this tradition was peculiar to Islamic historiography. Although the book is devoted to medieval Islamic historiography and not to medieval historiography in general, it would be more objective and comprehensive if Peacock, at least once, reminded the reader that almost all political entities, including those in Europe, tended to manipulate history writing to legitimize their power in the pre-modern period. Moreover, in the introduction he briefly compares the medieval perception of history and the modern one in terms of history writing; he could have expanded this comparison to make some general points regarding the relations between politics and history in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, Peacock argues that the Samanid Empire fell because it could not maintain the *ulama*'s support. Although the author's main objective is not to explain why the Samanid state collapsed, it is misleading to explain an event, particularly a historical one, mono-causally. It would be more appropriate if he had said that failing to obtain the *ulama*'s support was (one of) the most important factor(s) that led to the Samanids' decline.

Finally, the most important weakness in the book is that it provides a mono-causal explanation of the development of medieval Islamic history writing: depending solely on the case of *Tārīkhnāma*, Peacock underestimates a wide range of factors and concerns that could have encouraged Muslims to become involved in historiographical activities. Muslims wrote history for moralizing, instructing, entertaining and archiving. Political polarization, caused by the struggle for the caliphate, also led to history writing. Moreover, political and religious elites of Islamic dynasties were interested in historiography, due to "the desire to present an ideologically 'correct' version of Islamic history and doctrine intended to counter the teachings of heterodox and sectarian groups."¹ However, Peacock does not give credit to any other factor than political legitimacy; this latter could well have acted as the impetus to write history in the Islamic world throughout the middle ages. This is also a mono-causal explanation that can easily cause a misreading of the history of historiography by drawing an incomplete picture. It is obvious that social reality is too complex to be explained with reference to a single overarching cause and that historiography is not immune to this fact. Despite these weaknesses, Peacock's study makes a valuable contribution to the literature as a survey of the development of medieval Islamic historiography.

Fikriye Karaman

(Doctoral Candidate, College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
İstanbul Şehir University)

1 Julie Scott Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), s. 24.