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Becoming Muslim: Identity, Homeland, and the Making of the Perso-Islamic World

DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

To

my parents, friends,

and to my grandfather

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Becoming Muslim: Identity, Homeland, and the Making of the Perso-Islamic World

By

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This dissertation studies the formation of Muslim and Persianate identity in the post-caliphal world of the 10th to the 13th century. This is a study of how Muslims articulated a sense of belonging once the political and social core of the Muslim world began to fragment through the myriad imaginings of territory, space, and homeland. I trace how the emerging concept of homeland produced sentimental bonds of belonging that engendered a sense of continuity and connectivity and how the pluralistic categories of belonging simultaneously redrew the borders between communities geographically and socially, while providing the mechanism for religious and cultural conversion. This dissertation is also an examination of how these premodern histories are absorbed and reinterpreted in the modern pan-Islamist movement as they articulated the need for a territorial Muslim homeland.

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Vice News scored a unique exclusive; granted a first-hand opportunity to follow ISIS with camera in hand. ISIS, or Daesh, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria emerged as one of the deadliest manifestations of sectarian political violence during the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. Vice News followed several Daesh fighters in the flatbed of a trucks as they raced through the desert. The camera pans to individual, masked fighters cradling machine guns. In turn, they declared their background and the success of their group. One man raises his hand and states he is from Tunisia, while another claims to be from Syria. Both declare that for the first time they can travel in Iraq and Syria without passports. Shortly afterward, the fighters stop at an empty dirt mound and call for a bulldozer while another looks around frantically for a Qur'an. The heavy machine drives through the dirt while the fighters walk around awkwardly in an anti-climactic moment that culminates with one of the leaders stamping his foot and shouting this marks the end to the Sykes-Picot agreement.¹ It is an unusual scene and head-scratchingly confusing. What was so important about the symbolic act of bulldozing a dirt plot that it was one of Daesh's first act and something they crowed in all their propaganda channels? Why was an agreement from 100 years ago an animating force in 2012?

The group was assembled from fractions of Al Qaeda in Iraq and former Baathist military commanders.² In 2012 they captured headlines as the most organized and successful terrorist organizations in the region; annexing sizable territories in Iraq and Syria and declaring a caliphate. Pundits and journalists framed Daesh as a return to a medieval Islamic institution with

¹ Vice News. "Bulldozing the Border Between Iraq and Syria" [August 2014]. Youtube Video, 8:35. Posted [August 2014]. https://youtu.be/TxX_THjtXOw

² Fawaz Gerges, *ISIS: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 17

aspirations for a global imperial caliphate.³ Not only overly simplistic and reductive, the analysis missed the crucial nature of Daesh.

While much of the analysis of Daesh fixed on its claim of the caliphate, it overlooked a central component of Daesh's caliphal aspiration; a territorial homeland for Muslims. In 1919, with the Ottoman Empire facing imminent collapse, French and British colonial officials secretly planned to carve up the Middle East into protectorates under European administration.⁴ For Daesh, the Sykes-Picot Agreement was the marked division and disruption of a unified Muslim world. While, Daesh is in no way representative of Islamic orthodoxy, or Muslim politics in general, the idea of a Muslim world is found throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. It follows, does such a Muslim world truly exist?

Scholars pinpoint the rise of Islam as the beginning of the territorial category of analysis we refer to as the Middle East.⁵ Yet, from the death of Muhammad on, Islamic history is riven with political turmoil, imperial competition, and a crisis of legitimacy. The religion of Islam develops over centuries as Muslims refine its orthodoxy and the main cornerstones of its faith and identity. No such unity of the Muslim world exists. While the Skyes-Picot Agreement indeed marks a severe colonial rupture with disruptive effects on the lives of ordinary people in the region, it is not the beginning of division interfering with centuries of Islamic unity. Yet, we do find language in early histories of "Muslims realms," and a Muslim homeland. These references to an *imagined* territorial unity are found throughout Islamic historiography and play a crucial

³ Greame Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic* (2015)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>

⁴ James Barr. *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East 1914-1948* (New York WW Norton, 2012).

⁵ Garth Fowden. *Before and After Muhammad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014)

constitutive component in the shaping of Muslim identity, and are then absorbed and repurposed to animate modern Muslim politics.

Scholarship

Recent years have seen a blossoming of new scholarship on Islam, particularly the early period. Questions of sources, political formations, theology, jurisprudence, and identity are being reexamined in critical and nuanced ways. My own research intervenes in multiple streams of historiography. Work on early Islam inform much of my research, especially the scholarship of Fred Donner and his *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic History Writing* in regards to interrogating the way Muslim writers fashioned narratives and histories. His *Muhammad and the Believers* provides my research with a framework for the formation of categories of belonging in the expanding Muslim empire. Patricia Crone's work on the caliphate and Sarah Savant's *The New Muslim of Post Conquest Iran* contribute immensely to my research. Crone's scholarship on the caliphate and its contested meanings and development, provide the fundamental definition for my own understanding of the institution. Savant's history of Islam in the Persianate world is a crucial resource detailing the process of conversion and identity. My research offers an intervention by historicizing the process of conversion as an ongoing and dialogical construction of sites of belonging through the imagining of homeland.

For scholarship on the time period and region of the 10th-13th century Persianate world, the work of Richard Frye is a good representation. Along with being a canonical work, Richard Frye's geographic and temporal scope aligns with my own panoramic research interests and it is those boundaries I aim to trouble and expand. His particular focus on the cultural renaissance of the medieval Perso-Islamic world provides important studies and work for my own research.⁶

⁶ Frye. *Bukhara: A Medieval Achievement*, 2012

My research is indebted to brilliant scholarship of Zayde Antrim, in particular her *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World*. Her meticulous work details the emergence of Muslim literatures of place, spatiality, and territoriality in what she calls, the “discourse of place.” Her analysis and intervention lay a crucial foundation and inspires my own interest, though our focus differs. Her work is a methodical and panoramic view of the body of literature, providing necessary methods of analysis and theories of reading, while I am more interested in the consequences of the discourse of place on identity.

For the modern Middle East, I draw upon Nikki Keddie’s work on Al Afghani along with a broad range of scholarship on the modern Islamic world which thematically explore questions of modernity, identity, and history-writing like the works of Margaret Kohn and Mohamed Tavakoli-Targhi.⁷ Cemil Aydin’s intellectual history, *The Idea of the Muslim World* grants background to the discourse of pan-Islamism though we take our arguments in different directions.

Theoretically, my research draws heavily from scholarship on narrative, history-writing, and memory. I couple Hayden White’s writing on metahistory with Margaret Sommer’s “narrative identity” to analyze the way in which Muslims constructed, imagined, and articulated belonging in their writing. Maurice Halbwach and Jan Assmann’s work on collective memory shape my own understanding of the way in which memory as a social process is ordered and formalized into history, particularly its consequences for identity-making.

⁷ Margaret Kohn, “Afghani on Empire, Islam, and Civilization,” *Political Theory* vol. 37 no. 3 (2009): 399 And Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad. *Divergent Modernities: Critical Perspectives on Orientalism, Islamism, and Nationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press), 1996.

Hayden White views all of history as narrative, as a literary tool of explanation. As an lens of analysis and approach to my sources-as-narrative permits, his thesis encourages me to examine the their compilation and function rather than mine them for information. Sommer's notion of narrative identity hones my approach by narrowing down my analysis to focus the function of the sources on identity-formation. I ask of my sources; how do these histories and narratives imagine categories of group belonging? The politics of what is remembered, what is forgotten, and the process of how memory is integrated untangle the anxieties and context of the people writing these histories. Using this lens, I am able to pinpoint the way in which local cities underwent a process of Islamization and Persianization; how the local was integrated into the global and how the global was localized.

I have oriented this present scholarship to answer the call of the late Shabah Ahmed in his *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. My approach to the religion of Islam is ground in history. I aim to move beyond the debates of theology, orthodoxy, and reliability of sources that is characteristic of the scholarship of early Islam. My own definition mirrors that of Ahmed's and I use "Islam" in the broad and pluralistic sense of the "Islamic."

Chapters

My first chapter provides the context and background for my research. After a short sketch of the history of the caliphate, I provide a deeper analysis of the importance of the title for the Muslim political body and communal identity. I examine how the caliphate fashioned a social core for Muslims and the consequences of when that core begins to fragment. I bracket the era of the 10th-13th century as the period in which the caliphal core begins to fragment, not only from contested caliphates, but from within with the rise of local autonomous dynasties. In particular, I am interested in the rise of the Samanids, a short-lived but deeply impactful dynasty

in Khorasan, the region of eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. This chapter maps out the way in which Muslims imagined their caliphal core and the anxieties they expressed as that core began to fracture. I argue that those anxieties were exacerbated with the migration of Turkic-slave soldiers. The combination of a fracturing political score and shifting social and demographic realities contribute to the historical context for the changes I study.

The chapter, “Watan, Homeland, and the Sacred City” investigates what I call the geographic turn. Not a “turn” in the sense of contemporary historiography, but a shift in medieval Muslim literature in which territoriality increasingly is used to forge a sense of connectivity and continuity. Dating from the 10th to the 13th century, the geographic turn saw an increase in literature called “anthologies of place.” From the writings of geographers, to the chronicles of historians, and even the composition of poetry, the geographic turn marks a period in which the land is reimagined as part of a unified territorial Muslim homeland from which local communities feel a sense of belonging to the broader Muslim *ummah*.

The chapter details the body of literature dealing in which Muslims imagine spatiality. I analyze the vocabulary used to describe space and land by linking the affective and sentimental components of poetry with the descriptive ways historians and geographers divide up the land. I interrogate the role of cities in the imagining of place and how they provide a template for the integrative, appropriative, and pluralistic way in which the local was imagined linked in the broader regional and universal. The myriad ways in which territoriality was envisioned provide the core evidence for the geographic turn and shape the analysis of identity in the following chapter.

In “Becoming Muslim and Inventing Persians” I interrogate the consequence of the geographic turn for religious and cultural identity. Tracing the anxieties established in the first

chapter, I examine how Muslim writers envisioned the “other” specifically the relationship between local communities in Khorasan with Turkic people and the people of South Asia. I examine the methods of border-making both in terms of geography and communal identity. I excavate from the sources a sense of integrated and stratigraphic belonging; integrated due to dialogical ways in which pre-existing fragments, testimonies, and memories were compiled and stratigraphic because of identity was hybrid and layered. Drawing upon Sommer’s framework of narrative identity, I parse the categories of Muslim belonging and postulate a historic identity of Perso-Muslimness that is forged from a process of Islamization. In this chapter I link the idea of a “Persian” culture to a process that is articulated within the umbrella Muslimness. I argue that both Muslimness and Persianess were shaped in the geographic turn as intimately linked to one another and as imbricated processes. To untangle the details, I put into conversation works of geography and history with poetic expression. I hone in on the way in which Turkic-slave soldiers become Muslim and Persian simultaneously.

In my final chapter, “Between Pan-Islamism and the Nation” I draw the threads of the premodern into the modern. I examine the way in which the imaginings of homeland, territoriality, and space are appropriated, politicized, and deployed in the projects of the modern Middle East. I argue that as in the case of the post-caliphal crisis, Muslims addressed the crisis of modernity—this time encroaching colonialism and contested nationalism—by turning to an imagined territorial unity to forge Islamic solidarity as anti-imperial resistance. By centering the discourse of place, I examine the ways in which premodern Islamic history endures in modern Muslim politics through a reinterpretation of the past in service of communal solidarity.

The geographic turn and the subsequent consequence for identity is an invitation for a conversation; an opening in the scholarship to examine Muslim identity beyond the theological

and the jurisprudential and to ground it in the lived realities of ordinary people. The period of the arrival of Muslims in Iran is an interesting, and complicated era, but offers modern scholars an illuminating look into the way in which identity was shaped in dialogical ways and how the process of conversion coincided with empire, memory, and history-writing. What I offer is not a definitive history of the time period, but a new lens by which to analyze religion, identity, and politics. In this work, I will ask the questions and offer a sketch of some possible answers.

Fragmenting Caliphate and Migrating Turks

The institution of the caliphate is not easy to define as a concept it has changed over the centuries. Early Muslim thinkers were constantly refining, experimenting, and challenging the idea of the caliphate and its relationship to the community. Though it is fair to refer to the caliphate as an institution theoretically, in function it was mostly the rule of individuals. The caliphate did not constitute an impersonal state, in the sense of a modern *dawla*. Its nature as the personal reign is reflected in the writings of Muslims who referred to the caliphate by the names of the caliph rather than as an abstract office. The process of refining, debating, and challenging what the caliphate had three major themes: who could be a caliph, the powers and restrictions of the caliph in respect to rights of the community, and the function of the caliph in communal identity. My research will interrogate the latter component of the caliphate.

Hugh Kennedy's work on the history of the caliphate is an important work that grounds contemporary understanding of what the caliphate was. In his *Caliphate: History of an Idea* and *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* he traces out the contested meaning of the caliphate, its history, and significance for the Muslim world. Kennedy highlights the ambiguity of the role of the caliph, "There is an important uncertainty in the use of the term caliph, Khalifa, as has already pointed out, can mean either deputy or successor, but which was it?"¹ Patricia Crone's work on the political and theological significance of the caliphate offer an important intervention that demonstrate the ways in which the caliphate drew upon older Arabian concepts while appealing to the imperial structures it encountered.²

Caliphs varied widely in their reign. Early caliphs saw themselves as first among equals, or commanders of the Muslim armies. Others like Uthman were administrators and bureaucrats. The Umayyads famously ruled as aristocratic merchants, while the Abbasids imagined the

¹ Kennedy, Hugh, *The Caliphate: History of an Idea* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 6.

² See Patricia Crone, *God's Caliph* and *God's Rule*, 22

caliphate as an absolute monarchy. The history of the caliphate is contested and there are many instances of rebellions, conflict, and crisis of legitimacy. However, the core function of the caliph has been a relatively unchanging feature. At its most fundamental, the caliph is the leader of the Muslim community. He is viewed as the successor of Muhammad's social office, if not his prophetic mantle. Entry way into the Muslim community required recognition of the caliph as leader through an oath.³ Allegiance to the caliph would in turn forge social bonds between groups, bloodlines, and individuals fashioning a supra tribe with the capacity to incorporate those who fell outside of traditional tribal society. In turn, it would provide those vulnerable outsiders the usual benefits of a tribe: protection and unity.

Followers of the Caliph

In Late Antiquity imperial allegiance and confessional religious identity intersect. Religion as a category is complicated and ancient people's beliefs, identities, and traditions do not always map out neatly on the modern concept of "religion." Much of Late Antique records of conversion speak more to communal identity than personal matters of faith. In the case of Islam, there is strong evidence that Muslimness as a discrete separate identity took several centuries to develop. The nature of the community, who was included in the community or excluded, and the nature of leadership were all highly contested. It would be inaccurate to pinpoint these contentions as the origin in which Muslim sects developed wholly formed, but rather view these tensions as an ongoing process from which eventually sectarian interpretations formed. Later Muslim would re-interpret the differences of the Muslim community, attach meaning and value, and as such define more concrete and identifiable sects. It is equally difficult to distinguish the early 7th century religious movement of Muhammad as "Muslim" as distinct from Jewish and

³ Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 22.

Christian. Instead, compelling scholarship points to the character of this movement as not fully developed and an ongoing process. There is strong evidence that Muhammad did not view himself as establishing a new religion, but rather saw himself as a leader of a monotheist coalition movement.⁴ It might perhaps be more accurate to rethink early Islamic history as a series of partitions that divide this movement until a more discrete category of “Muslim” is defined. One of the earliest tensions in the community, centers on the question of leadership *in* the community. It was taken for granted that the community of believers would have a leader, though it was contested who it might be.

The thread that links the early community of believers to the later imperial conquests is organizing the religious community around the caliph. Islamicist Patricia Crone states, “Hence one could not be a member of the Muslim community without declaring allegiance to its leader; in the Prophet’s days one converted to Islam by paying allegiance to him (with a handclasp), *in* person or via tribal delegations; thereafter one remained a member of the *umma* by paying allegiance to his successors, in person or via his governors.”⁵ Allegiance to the caliph forged bonds that drew the community together. Theologically orthodoxy took centuries to refine, but the role of the caliph was relatively stable from the time of Muhammad until the Abbasids. The architecture of the caliphate role in the community reflect the early narratives of Muhammad. Biographies of Muhammad recount a famous event in which Muhammad, after agreeing to a compromise with his opponents, Muhammad is reputed to have gathered his followers and asked for an oath reaffirming their loyalty. The oath, *bayah* is a function of Arabian tribal society in which tribes established social order and structure by giving an oath to a *shaykh* who would lead the group. A tribe is historically more than direct blood lines, but a series of relations, organized

⁴ See Fred Donner, *Community of Believers*, 36

⁵ Patricia Crone. *God’s Rule*, 21-22

together through blood, proximity, and allegiance to form a social unit. The caliph's function then may be an extension of this earlier practiced sutured onto an imperial structure.

As the imperial caliphate expanded, conquered territories were incorporated into the caliphate through oaths of allegiance. A common practice was for local governors to appear before the caliph and give an oath, in turn local communities would then give their allegiance to the governor thus creating an expanding network with the caliph in the center. Ibn al Tiqtaqa describes the ascension of caliph Al Muqtadir: "The oath of allegiance was given to him when he was thirteen years of age."⁶ Governors and local leaders would verbally assert the symbolic link to the caliphal center when they would recite *khutbah* or Friday sermons in the name of the caliph and therefore regularly reinforce the bonds that bound the local community to the wider empire.⁷ The practices of oaths creating social links was not unfamiliar to those living in the previous Sassanian Empire; the caliphate continued an older practice with an Islamic interpretation of the oath of allegiance. The Muslim community then was structured around the caliph who created a social and political core.

The caliphal center however was not always stable. From the very beginning the caliphate was rocked with strife and intracrine conflict. Civil wars and outright rebellions were not uncommon. It took several decades and the quelling of repeated uprising before the Umayyads established any sense of stability. In turn, they were overthrown by the Abbasids who managed to hold power until 1258 CE. It is under the Abbasids the caliphate begins to fracture long before its collapse.

Fragmenting Caliphal Core

⁶ Ibn al Tiqtaqa, *Al Fakhri*

⁷ Patricia Crone, *God's Rule*, 60

By the 10th century the political center of the Muslim world was in crisis. The Abbasid Caliphate was fracturing as increasingly local dynasties exerted their autonomy. The political fragmentation produced a social fracturing. While the caliph remained an important figurehead, allegiance to the caliph was no longer the bond that held the Muslim community together. Several Muslim writers articulate the anxiety of the fragmentation as an existential crisis.

Al Muqtadir was the youngest caliph in Abbasid history, taking the throne at 13 years old. His reign is considered by many the genesis of the turbulence that fractured the caliphal core. The famed chronicler and scholar, Al Masu'di writes, "He was named caliph when he was still young and inexperienced and inclined to indulgence. He did not take great notice of the affairs of the state, nor did he deal with the issues of rule. Instead, military commanders, viziers, and secretaries conducted all the matters of state on his behalf."⁸ Al Muqtadir was described as indulgent, but on the whole blame for the crisis falls to those around him. Factions around the caliph vied for power, leaving the caliph as a mostly symbolic figurehead. The reign of Al Muqtadir marks the beginning of the era in which a caliphal center fractures and is distributed among several focal points. From this moment on, the caliphate faces a series of fractures resulting in the caliphal core holding less importance for communal Muslim identity.

For some historians the understanding of the crisis of Al Muqtadir is filtered through a lens of gender. Ibn Tiqtaqa accuses women and eunuchs as having an undue influence over Al Muqtadir. While the young caliph was not deemed blameless, his major fault according to Ibn Tiqtaqa was allowing his mother to manage much of the affairs of the state.⁹ Gender as a lens by which Muslim writers articulate and understand the crisis of communal identity is a common motif to explain and make legible a sense of loss. Poets would use gender, specifically motifs of

⁸ Al Masudi, *Kitab al tanbih wa-l ishraf*

⁹ Ibn al Tiqtaqa, *Al Fakhri*

an imprisoned bride when describing the Crusader capture of the Holy Land; historians of cities would elevate the importance of their homelands through imagery of brides being carried on sedan chair; even 19th and 20th century pan-Islamic and nationalist thinkers would talk about the state as either a burdened mother or a beloved owed loyalty and allegiance.¹⁰ Gender is used as a narrative tool to explain the origins of the fragmentation of the caliphate, of a center that is no longer focused on a singular individual, but diffused among several. Interestingly under Harun Al Rashid, we also see reference to powerful women, namely his wife Zubayda, though in this instance Harun Al Rashid's reign is considered exemplar of the ideal caliph. So powerful women alone were not accused of the political fragmentation. Zubayda was considered equal to her powerful husband. In the case of Al Muqtadir, his weakness combined with his mother's strength is used narratively to explain the fracturing of the caliphal core. Of course, while Al Muqtadir's misrule may have been a point of political upheaval, the fragmentation of the caliphate does not stem from a single reign, a single family, or a single event, but rather a series of major political upheavals that in turn shape the social bonds of the Muslim world. Al Muqaddai records some of these tribulations.

Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad al Maqdisi also known as Al Muqaddasi was a famous 10th century geographer and historian. Originally hailing from Jerusalem, he spent his life traveling throughout the Muslim empires with the exception of Al Andalus. He chronicles his journey in the *kitab ahsan al taqasim* where he refers to two separate individuals as "Emir al Mu'minin" or "The Commander of the Faithful."¹¹ The reference is to the caliph in Baghdad and the Caliph in Cairo. By the 10th century the Fatimids had seized much of North Africa and Egypt

¹⁰ See Osman Latiff's *The Cutting Edge of the Poet's Sword: Muslim Poetic Response to Crusades*; Al Waiz's *Fad'ail al Balkh*; and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi's "From Patriotism to Matriotism: A Tropological Study of Iranian Nationalism, 1870-1909"

¹¹ Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad al Maqdisi *kitab ahsan al taqasim*

and established themselves as a rival caliphate to the Abbasids. Claiming descent from Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, the Fatimids invoked an Alid connection in the similar vein of the Abbasid's claim to the *Hashimiyya* through Abbas. The title of *emir* again reinforced the most very basic function of the caliphate, that of a central leader for the faithful. Yet, the existence of rival caliphates does not seem to be a point of major concern for most Muslims. Al Muqaddasi himself if able to travel freely between the caliphates without trouble or interference.

Geographically, there are no imagined boundaries between the caliphates. Rather it is more accurate to view them as spheres of political influence reinforced by a network of allegiance that create a sense of belonging. We find repeated references to the multiple caliphates through out the writing of geographers in particular who fashioned a sense of territories ruled over by Muslims. The reference to multiple caliphates is not unusual in Abbasid historiography. We a sense of fracturing within the Abbasid caliphate itself. In other words, the presence of multiple caliphs was not the issue, rather it was the diffusing of the core within the community itself. Al Muqaddasi also makes reference to Nuh ibn Mansur, the Samanid ruler in Bukhara. Reference to the Samanid ruler alongside reference to two caliphs is likely indicative of the political shift experienced in the 10th-13th century; the rise of autonomous local dynasties who remained nominally loyal to the caliph in Baghdad but whose political power surpassed the supposed leader of the Muslim community.

The shift in political power is a major turning point in the Abbasid Caliphate. While, their predecessors had dealt with rival claimants and rebellions, the Umayyads never faced a situation in which they had to accommodate political rivals in the long term to the degree of the Abbasids. Some historians call this period the Shi'a century on account of the power of the Buyids, who

become the dominant political force in Baghdad and its surrounding areas.¹² Other's refer to the period as the Iranian Intermezzo reference a linguistic and cultural resurgence of Persianate people.¹³ While sectarian difference does begin to coalesce and something akin to Persian identity is imagined, neither terms capture the complexity of the era, for it is not the Buyid core where the idea of a Muslim world take shape. This period is more accurately viewed as the era where a centralized cultural, social, and political core gives way to a multi-focal lived reality. Reflecting the change, caliphs, begin to confer the title of *emir* upon the various local rulers. These rulers draw legitimacy and title from the caliph, vowing to govern on his behalf, but are truly autonomous in most ways.¹⁴ The classic title of the caliph, the most fundamental of his functions was, *emir al mu'minin*. That function was spread across multiple personages. Instead of a single "Commander of the Faithful" the Abbasids had multiple emirs. It is in this diffusion of power that the reference to the Samanid emir highlights the nature of the emerging multi-focal caliphate.

The inclusion of the Samanid ruler indicate the role of the dynasty as part of the historical experience that produced the geographic turn, a period in which the fragmenting of the political and cultural core of the caliphate along with anxieties about Turkic migration shift the imagination of Muslim away from social bonds forged through allegiance to the caliph to an integrated sense of interconnected belonging rooted in territoriality. Ideas of homeland are fashioned in the margins alongside imaginings of a unified territorial Muslim world. While poets and historians in Baghdad also write about the homeland, it is in Samanid lands to the east, in Greater Khorasan—on the margins of empire—where Muslims imagine a land for themselves.

¹² Ira Lapidus. *History of Islamic Societies*, 179.

¹³ Richard Frye *Cambridge History of Iran*, 43

¹⁴ Ira Lapidus *History of Islamic Societies*, 182

The fracturing and fragmenting of caliphal core as represented in the distribution of the title of *emir* also manifests in a geographic transformation. Since its founding in the 8th century, Baghdad was viewed by the wider Muslim community as the cultural and political capital of Islam. Though Mecca and Medina both held special importance spiritually, Baghdad was the seat of the caliphate. Even rival caliphates and dynasties from the remnants of the Umayyads in Al Andalus to the Fatimids in Cairo viewed Baghdad as special above all other cities. In *Fad'ail* literature, Baghdad is a city “the like of which is not known in all the world.”¹⁵ Its centrality to Muslim imagination is reflected in its appellation as “*qalb al Iraq*” or the “heart of Iraq.”¹⁶

The fracturing of the caliphal core meant a literal divided capital. Under Caliph Mu'tasim the administrative capital is shifted to Samarra. The geographer Al-Yaqubi refers to Baghdad and Samarra as the “two seats of the caliphate.” While Baghdad remained a cultural and economic hub, Samarra became the administrative center of the Abbasid caliphate. The shift to Samarra coincides with an influx of Turkic slave soldiers. In literature from the period, Muslim historians allude that the influx of slave soldiers was met with resistance by locals who viewed the newcomers as an economic threat. To ameliorate the tension, the caliph left Baghdad to the elites of the old families while moving to Samarra with the Turkic regiments.¹⁷ The move to Samarra was a major change; Baghdad has been the capital of the caliphate for well over 200 hundred years and as a city was designed symbolically with the caliph at the center. Now the caliph was gone. The center was empty. The fracturing of the caliphal center occupies an important part of the literature of the time. Historian Al Baghdadi references a prophecy that states, “When he has laid its foundation, a crack will appear in the Hijaz, so he will interrupt the construction to repair

¹⁵ Yaqubi citing Khatib al Baghdadi's *Tarikh Baghdad*

¹⁶ Abul Qasim Ubayd Allah ibn Abd Allah ibn Khurradadhbih, *Kitab al Masalik wa al mamalik*

¹⁷ Ira Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies*, 106.

the crack. When he has just repaired it, another crack will arise in Basra, which will be gigger than the first.”¹⁸ Here prophecy acts as a literary device predicting the fragmenting of the political core through a story about literal cracks in buildings. The cracks appear in Arabia and Iraq likely referencing the growing anxieties about the political fragmentation of the caliphate. The Fatimids eventually capture the Hijaz and the local Buyid dynasty becomes the de facto rulers in Iraq. A fluid and fracturing caliphate coincides with the appearance of a particular type of literature, referred to as anthologies of place.¹⁹ As a body of work, the anthologies of place record the myriad ways in which Muslims begin to imagine geography, place, and homeland.

The Basran theologian al Jahiz tells us he is inspired to write about the longing for *watan*. He writes: “Truly, the reason for gathering together bits from the reports of the Bedouin on the topic of their longing for their homeland...is that I had a discussion with one of those kings who has moved around on the topic of abodes and homelands.”²⁰ His curiosity about homeland stems from the longing he sees in those around him. He pinpoints the longing for homeland as a trait among the Bedouin, as a desire to be one with the land. The king in question is uprooted, mobile, and ruling over a decentralized country. The experience mirrors the historical reality of the caliphate. The invocation of the nomadic Bedouin alongside the king is revealing. The king himself is rootless, but it is the Bedouin who long for their homeland.

In a related anecdote, a famed minister of the caliph, once a Bedouin, begs his master to let him retire to the desert. When the caliph inquires as to why the sudden desire to retire, the minister describes the desert as his homeland and him as a traveler away from it. The caliph grants the request and provides the minister with sheep to take with him.²¹ The desert was the

¹⁸ Khatib al Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*

¹⁹ Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 11

²⁰ Al Jahiz *Al Risala*

²¹ *Ibid.*,

minister's homeland. He was a man away from his home and longed to return to his migratory life, simultaneously mobile but belonging to a land. The theme of migration and mobility are commonly wrapped up in the descriptions of homeland. People are either always away from their homeland, or leaving their homeland. The mobility engenders the sense of nostalgia, belonging, and desire to return. Here we also see the tension between settled urban life and migratory nomadic life picked up later in the 13th century by historian Ibn Khaldun.²²

The emerging literature on homeland is intimately wrapped up in a sense of a rootless caliphate, of a political core that was fractured, fragmented, and fluid. The caliphate had literally been uprooted from Baghdad. Yet, these anxieties likely reflect an elite sentiment. Ordinary people were linked to the caliph in distant Baghdad through loyalty to their local governor or ruler, the emergence of autonomous *emirs* is unlikely to have been a major shift for them. Despite political fragmentation, merchants, travelers, and ordinary people were able to move about within the caliphate and beyond. There is no compelling evidence of boundaries between rival dynasties, or even clashing caliphates; rather the flow of people is uninterrupted. It is likely the anxiety of waning caliphal power is an elite articulation of their own loss of prestige and privilege. Many writers were patronized by the caliph and their position rested with the wellbeing of the institution. Even tensions about Turkic slave soldiers were expressed as a loss of privilege; of a caliph who was rejecting the traditional structure of the *divan*, of paying a stipend to his Muslim troops in favor of foreign transplants. Yet, the anxiety about Turkic slave soldiers is intrinsically tied to a sense of a rootless caliphate and a major demographic anxiety.

The Turkic Threat

²² Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*

In both Muslim and pre-Islamic imagination, histories designate Turks as a warring nomadic people who were a threat to the frontier of empires.²³ Sources interchangeably refer to the nomadic people of the steppes as Turks and Tartars, imagining a mostly undifferentiated mass as invaders and raiders. At a meeting with a recently appointed governor, Abu'l Abbas al-Fadl ibn Sulaiman Tusi, the residents of Bukhara complain, "We suffer from the infidel Turks who come without warning and ravage villages. They recently came and plundered the village of Samdan and carried off Muslims."²⁴ Bukhara was on the eastern edges of the Abbasid caliphate, part of Greater Khorasan. The city was a recent addition to the empire and part of fluid frontier with nomadic tribes to the north and India to the Southeast. The issue of nomadic Turkic raiders is also a pre-Islamic theme. The king of Sughd, Yazid ibn Ghurak says in the same meeting, "In the Time of Ignorance, the Turks used to raid the district of Sughd. A woman was ruler in Sughd. She constructed walls around Sughd and the district had respite from them."²⁵ The motif of walls to protect against invaders is repeated throughout the *Tarikh-i Bukhara*, a physical demarcation between those considered part of the Muslim empire and those outside of it. While the histories refer to physical walls that were built and fell in disrepair in a cycle that represent the mindfulness or neglectfulness of rulers, the walls were also metaphorical. In the same passage, Ismail Samani promises, "So long as I live, I will be the wall of Bukhara."²⁶ Ismail Samani was the Samanid emir who expanded the dynasty's territories into Northern Iran and consolidated most of Khorasan into a single territorial rule. Though nomadic raids continue under the Islamic period, the cycle of repeated invasion and repulsion is commonly associated as a pre-Islamic one. Muslim rulers like Ismail Samani were deemed anointed because of their success in reducing or

²³ See Ferdowsi's claims on Turks

²⁴ *Tarikh-i Bukhara*

²⁵ *Ibid.*,

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

entirely eliminating the cycle. A good ruler would build new walls or rebuild old walls, while poor rulers would let the walls fall into ruin. After a Tartar invasion in 1219 the city is conquered and “the wall again fell into ruin.” Muslim rulers would build walls and nomads (or “Tartars” or “Turks”) would destroy them.

Turks or Tartars are not racial or ethnic categories in early Muslim historiography but they are discursive formations of the other. They originate from somewhere else, they speak a different language, and are culturally different. The difference is not necessarily explained along racial lines, but cultural and sometimes even environmental—as in they are products of a different climate. Yaqubi, who we earlier saw talk about a divided caliphate, is a 9th century geographer who imagines *ard-Islam* or the Muslim lands as distinct from the lands of the Turks. He also references other lands like India and China.²⁷ In his imagining there are Muslim lands and then there are distinct non-Muslim lands. The Turks are deemed outside the realms of Islam, though intimately linked. He makes mention how goods flow from these “outside” lands into Baghdad, reflecting a far more fluid experience than the fixed walls of Bukhara. A similar division of the world is found in Abul Qasim Ubayd Allah ibn Abd Allah ibn Khurradadhbih’s writings. As the author of the 9th century *Kitab al masalik wa al-mamalik* he writes:

As for Tibet, the *bilad* of the Turks, China, and al-Mansura, which extends eight degrees beyond the midpoint of the east, their *qibla* is close to the Black Rock. As for the *qibla* of the people of Yemen, their prayer is towards the *Yamani*, and they face in prayer the people of Armenia. As for the *qibla* of the people of Al Maghrib, Ifriqiyya, Egypt, and Syria, which is to say the midpoint of the west, their prayer is towards the *Shami*, and they face in prayer the people of Al Mansura.²⁸

²⁷ Ahmad bin Abi Yaqubi *Kitab al Buldan*

²⁸ Abul Qasim Ubayd Allah ibn Abd Allah ibn Khurradadhbih, *Kitab al Masalik wa al mamalik*

Ibn Khurradadhbih divides the world through the radial lines of the *qibla* or prayer directions. Though, “Tibet” as the lands of the Turks is deemed a land all its own, through the *qibla* as a focal point, they are brought into the fold of Muslimness. Language is also used to delineate between groups of people. The *Shahnameh* identifies foreign lands based on the language they speak, but also explicitly accuses the Turks as a diluting that linguist difference.²⁹ The anxiety of dilution is a uniquely post-Muslim conquests anxiety.

Both in the *Shahnameh* and in *Kitab al Masalik wa al mamalik*. The Turk is present within the boundaries of Muslimness. If the Turkic lands fell outside the imagined Muslim realms, Turkic people however did not. In the 9th century, the Abbasid caliphate began to import large numbers of Turkic slave soldiers to replace the traditional Muslim armies they relied on. Militarily, the Abbasids relied on various military commanders who each had regiments and armies more loyal to their immediate superiors than the caliph in Baghdad. In the past this had been a source of political turmoil, with the Abbasids executing overly popular general they deemed a threat to their rule.³⁰ In an attempt to centralize military power, they imported Turkic slave soldiers who would be loyal directly to the caliph. The attempt to centralize military power is synchronous with the political fragmentation of the caliphate. The reliance on Turkic slave soldiers elicited a backlash among Muslims. Military elites faced the reality of a losing their privileges to outsiders, while local Muslims in Khorasan, who had deemed the Turks as a foreign other, saw them migrate into Muslim lands as allies. The anxiety is expressed as a sense of displacement and alienation.

In the *Shahnameh*, the Sassanian general, Rostam says, “A mongrel people will appear from the mixing of Persian, Turks, and Arabs that will be neither Iranian, nor Turkish, nor Arab.

²⁹ Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*

³⁰ ibn Khurradadhbih, *Kitab al Masalik wa al mamalik*

Their words will be worthless gibberish.³¹ Ferdowsi anxiety about identity and difference is articulated through a prophetic warning from Rostam, a pre-Islamic general. Attempting to use prophecy as a literary tool, we can read Rostam's warning as an admonishment from Ferdowsi himself. It is not coincidental that Ferdowsi is writing under the Ghazavids, the Turkic dynasty that overthrew the Samanids while adopting their customs and literary and cultural projects. The anxiety of the Turks as usurpers is also found in the *Tarikh-i Bukhara* where Narshakhi relates the death of Ahmad ibn Ismail Samani, the son of the famed emir who consolidated Khorosan under Samanid rule. He writes, "He fell asleep and a group of the emir's slaves entered and cut off his head. This happened on a Thursday the eleventh of Jumada the second in the year 301. He was brought to Bukhara and laid in the cemetery of Naukanda... some of the slaves were caught and executed and others fled to the land of the Turks."³² The Samanids borrowed the Abbasid policy of importing Turkic slave soldiers. Like their caliphal patrons, they relied on mercenary armies to consolidate military power. The importation of these soldiers was a source of deep anxiety for Bukharrans who traditionally viewed Turks as nomadic raiders and built walls to protect themselves. The Samanids who had promised under Ismail Samani to be the wall for Bukhara were also responsible for importing the very same groups the wall was meant to protect from. The imagined Turk as a discursive other uncover a demographic anxiety that is articulated through historical claims of marauding. The assassination of Ahmad ibn Ismail Samani was evidence of the mistrust, but also highlight an important component of this entanglement; nomadic Turks were becoming Muslim.

The Abbasid regular military corps comprised of multiple regiments, the Berber *Maghariba*, the *Faraghina* hailing from Transoxiana, the Khorasani cavalry, *shakiriyya* and

³¹ Ferdowsi, *Shahnamah*, viii; 419: 105-106.

³² Narshakhi's *Taikh-i Bukhara*

many others. Al Jahiz divides up the caliphal armies into five divisions.³³ The Turkic, *ghilman* were viewed as a rival to these various military regiments. The caliph, Al Mutawakkil in particular owed his crown to the Turkic *ghilman*. Highly paid and immensely influential, Turkic slave soldiers killed caliphs, rebelled, and became king-makers in their own right. Al Mutawakkil was named caliph thanks in large part to the Turkic generals, Itakh and Wasif al-Turki. Al Mutawakkil would go on to kill Itakh eventually leading to his own assassination and an outright rebellion in Samarra. However, during his reign, he patronized the Basran Al Jahiz, who writes *Manaqib at turk*. In it the theologian praises the martial prowess of imported slave soldiers. Written likely as a type of propaganda, the treatise conveys an explanation in which Turks by adopting Muslim practices and language become part of the community.³⁴ Despite the tensions between the different military regiments and the anxiety of demographic changes among locals, the flexibility of “Muslimness” was imagined as absorbing and incorporating Turks. He goes on to claim, “The Khorasani and the Turks are akin, and that they came from the same region...and if their roots are not firmly fixed in the same stem, they resemble one another.”³⁵ Al Jahiz is responding to a series of arguments about purity of lineage. His writing is designed as a counter to arguments about purity and unmixed tribal bloodlines, instead arguing there are more in common between distinct groups. He frames the Turks in particular, not as the other, but a related group, integrated into Muslim society. He cites Islamic egalitarian theology as justification. He says, “And the Lord is able to take for His servant an Arab or a non-Arab, a Qurayshyy or a black man as He Wills.”³⁶ His theology however is functional. Turkic soldiers provide an important service for the caliph. He goes on to say, “The dignity of the Turks is a

³³ Al Jahiz Exploits of the Turks

³⁴ Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr Al Jahiz. *Manaqib at turk* and *Risalat mufakharat al-sudan 'ala al-bidan*

³⁵ Al Jahiz Exploits of the Turks

³⁶ Ibid.,

credit to the whole community and their honor is a credit to the whole community.”³⁷ Al Jahiz sees diversity as a strength for the Abbasid regimens. While difference is not erased, he argues a common and related origin for what were deemed distinct groups. His letters imply a universal understanding of history originated with Adam and culminating in the present. He leans on the idea of a universal history to establish a dynamic, flexible, and integrative Muslim identity, one in which “foreign” Turks could be made Muslim. Al Jahiz’s defense of Turkic soldiers and his appeal to diversity is also couched in terms of their military prowess. At one point claiming that the cavalry charge of Turkic soldiers is as devastating as the Khawarij and when “loose a thousand arrows all together, they prostrate a thousand men.”³⁸ Al Jahiz’s writing about the Turks and their virtues comes at a time in which the core of the caliphate was fracturing. The increase in Turkic slave soldiers and their elevation is synchronous with the political crisis of the caliphate as a body. What reception, Al Jahiz’s writing received is unclear, but they evidence a deep anxiety.

Some of the anxiety of the inclusion of the Turkic *ghilman* stems from competing interests of military regiments. Arib ibn Sa’d al Qurtubi writes:

“When they received six extra payments and the raises they demanded, they took control of the caliphate and pitched their tents around the palace. They said, ‘We were more important than the *ghilman* in protecting the caliph and his palace.’ Many men flocked to their numbers...They consorted with criminals, prevented the meting of justice and lorded over the Muslims. Their leaders took liberty with the caliph...”³⁹

The elevation of the *ghilman* was viewed as a threat to the rest of the factions. But the anxiety was not merely an elite fear of loss of privilege. Many of the local populations, who themselves

³⁷ Ibid.,

³⁸ Ibid.,

³⁹ Arib, *Silat*

were recent converts to Islam, viewed the *ghilman* as the former marauders of cities. The anxiety of the elite and non-elite alike towards the *ghilman* is what made the question of their inclusion a deep anxiety for the communal sense of Muslimness. If newcomer Muslim rulers to Bukhara and Balkh were to be guardians against invasions from the “land of Turks” than their importation of the *ghilman* was a direct challenge to that promise. If the border between the “land of Turks” and newly converted Muslim cities could not be maintained, then they would be agitate the borders of Muslimness itself.

It is clear from Jahiz’s letter there is significant resistance to Turkic slave soldiers. While his letter is addressed to a fellow elite member of society, taken with the anxieties in the various local urban histories of raiding and marauding Turks, we can surmise the backlash was a fusion of both military elites fearing loss of status and demographic fears among the ordinary populace. Al Jahiz’s cursory mention of regiment division gesture to competing military interests. The Abbasid military forces were not a single unit despite serving the same empire. Rather they were drawn from a variety of forces that make up the Abbasid caliphate. While the diversity of the regiments illustrates the diversity of the empire itself, it also reveals its terminus. By the time 9th and 10th century the caliphate had reached its territorial apogee and had begin shrinking at the edges. With the Fatimids taking North Africa and the Levant becoming a sort of frontier land. On the eastern edges, the caliphates extent is caught between Northern India and the so-called lands of the Turks. While the Abbasid caliphate had a diverse population imbedded in its territorial empire, Turkic slave soldiers represented forces that came from outside that territorial limit. They were outsiders. The combination of the imagined other, the limits of imperial Muslimness, and the elevation of Turkic soldiers among the caliph’s personal regiments all contributed to a deepening crisis. By marking Turks as outsiders, Muslims were etching both the limits of

Muslimness and the boundaries of the so-called Muslim realms. Ironically, Turkic *ghilman* prized due to their direct loyalty to the caliph. In other words it was their allegiance to the caliph which was a constitutive aspect of the fragmentation of communal Muslim identity away from loyalty to the caliph as the organizing principle of Muslimness.

Conclusion

From the 9th to the 13th century the center of the Muslim empire faced a series of concurring and imbricated crises. Early communal Muslim identity rested in an interlocking social web in which the caliph was at the center. Drawing upon Arabian tribal relationships combined with an expanding imperial structure, the caliphate fashioned an imagined super tribe that provided the basis of an imagined religious community. The center however cannot hold for long. As the political and social center of the caliphate begins to fracture, the caliph maintains some of his symbolic status while dissolving most of his political authority. This shift produces a multi-focal social fabric with local governors and military commanders exerting their own supremacy. The caliphate is caught up in series of internal struggles. While in centuries earlier the military power of the caliphate was directed outward in an ever-extending empire, by the 10th century autonomous dynasties are warring within the caliphate itself. The fundamental function of the caliphate as the social core of the imagined Muslim community is diffused from a singular *emir al mu'minin* to competing multiple *emirs*. The political and social fragmentation of the caliph core coincides with anxieties about demographic changes and loss of privilege. While Turkiic slave soldiers were incorporated into the Abbasid armies early on, the fragmenting of the caliphate brought tensions between factions to the forefront. The influx of Turkic soldiers and their elevation to the caliph's inner circle elicited a backlash among elite military regiments and ordinary population alike. Urban historians reflect the anxieties through stories of Turkic

marauders, where bandits are reimagined as a homogenous entity origination from *somewhere*. The shifting political and social landscape produced uncertainty and a need to create a new core around which to organize imperial Muslim communal identity.

The shifting political and social situation is the context for the geographic turn. Muslims needed to find a new commonality upon which to build stable social connections, if bonds with the caliph were fraying. Ideas of homeland and an imagined territorial Muslim realm provided a sense of stability and connectivity during uncertain times. Muslim writers and thinkers drew together popular social memory to capture a new integrated sense of interconnected belonging. The geographic turn would allow Muslims to feel part of a larger whole, while expressing local pride. The geographic turn became the mechanism by which Muslimness was recentered and the framework that allowed for and incorporated the influx of Turkic soldiers while redrawing the boundaries between the in-group and out-group.

Watan, Homeland, and The Sacred City Dissertation Chapter

Fashioning a Homeland

One early Muslim historian, al Jahiz, claims, “If it were not incumbent on us to put first what God put first and to put last what He put last, the majority would mention the homelands, because they hold in the human heart.”¹ He uses here the word *awatan*, or homeland to denote a space, locality, or physical place to which a person may belong. The sentiment is clear, the affective connection to homeland is so dear it may rival the faithful’s duty to God. Spatiality and place are important fields of inquiry in Islamic history, particularly given the abundance of literature that marks the 10th to the 13th century.

Historians like Arezou Azad have dealt with the specific body of literature revolving the histories of cities. These *Tarikh* are unique works that begin appearing in the 9th century detailing the local urban histories of Muslims cities. Many of them seem to originate from Khorasan, but others are found from the center of the caliphate. Azad’s *Sacred Landscape in Medieval Afghanistan* is one of the first books to deal with an early example of Tarikh literature, *Fada’il-i Balkhi*, a curious medieval document compiled by Shaykh al-Waiz al-Balkhi as both a history, a compilation of biographical information, and praise for the city of Balkh, on the border of Iran and Afghanistan today. Her meticulous analysis of the text illustrates the way in which the city was viewed by its inhabitants, its sacredness articulated, and the broader implications for Islamic historiography.

Zayde Antrim’s *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* provides a more panoramic view of the emerging geographic literature she labels, “anthologies of place.” Her work details the different literature of the early Islamic period related to place from histories of cities, maps and atlases, anthologies of homelands, and other literature that

¹ Al Jahiz, *Kitab al Buldan*

form part of what she calls the “discourse of place.”² Antrim’s work is an important intervention into understanding the literature at the core of my own research. Her approach is to detail, catalogue, and examine the variations in the discourse of place.

The work of Arezou Azad and Zayde Antrim inspire my own research tremendously and their scholarship, theoretical interventions, and conclusions form the basis for my own intervention and direction. While Azad’s work is crucial for revisiting a particular document and its implications for the city history of Balkh and Antrim’s scholarship provides an important illumination of a little studied body of literature, my own research draws back to examine the broader implication of the discourse of place on communal Muslim identity. This chapters explores and interrogates the myriad way in which “Muslim lands” were imagined and the communal connectivity they provided in the context of post-caliphal history. I label this transformation of place into homeland the geographic turn.

In addition to the works of Azad and Antrim, I also draw heavily on the recent explosion of scholarship on Islamic historiography to situation the various *Tarikh* literature I examine as sources. The scholarship of Chase Robinson, Patricia Crone, and Fred Donner also inform the historiographical portions of this chapter. Chase Robinson’s *Islamic Historiography* provide crucial analysis and understanding of the process of history-writing among Muslim scholars.³ Patricia Crone’s *God’s Rule Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* ground my understanding of caliphal politics.⁴ Fred Donner’s *Narratives of Islamic*

² See Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 1

³ Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴ Patricia Crone, *God’s Rule*, Chapters 1, 2, and 17 in particular

Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing shape this chapters understanding of the narrative and metanarrative of Muslim history writing.⁵

With the fragmenting of the caliphate and demographic anxieties, Muslimness undergoes a geographic turn; identity is restructured around the concept of an imagined homeland suffused with a sense of shared history which produce an integrated sense of belonging. From poetry to genres of geographic literature and history-writing, Muslims increasingly imagined a sense of belonging grounded in territoriality. The land was suffused with nostalgia, of something that had been forgotten, a past and a memory reflecting the anxiety of the times. In turn the affective capacity of the land engendered a sense of belonging.

Rudaki's famous poem reflect the sense of longing and invoke nostalgia:

The sweet scent of the creek of Mulyan
Recalls memories long ago forgotten
The rough sands of the Oxus beneath my feet
Caress them as softly and sweetly as silk
Celebrate life everlasting full of mirth
Your guest is the Emir, precious and cheerful
Stormy waters of the Oxus full of mirth
Greeting us warmly, leaping up
Oh Bukhara!
You are the heavens and he is the luminous moon
Oh might heavens embrace the moon with joy
You are the wine and he is the mighty cypress tree
Receive the cypress tree.⁶

Frederick Starr recounts when the Samanid emir, Nasr II had been vacationing in Herat for too long, his courtiers, restless to return to the palace in Bukhara, called on Rudaki to move the emir's heart with verse. Rudaki composed the poem in the style of the *gosan* with both Persian and Islamic elements and it was recited before the emir who was so moved that he

⁵ Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998).

⁶ Rudaki, "Mulyan Brook"

immediately set off back home.⁷ The story, likely apocryphal, relates not just the power of poetry, but the idea of a land suffused with a sense of longing. The land in Rudaki's poem is pregnant with powerful memories. The nostalgia of those memories was a reminder to the emir of what had been forgotten—remembering recalls the natural order; an emir intertwined with the land. The juxtaposition of the moon and the heavens for the emir and Bukhara is a panegyric that both praises the ruler and thematically makes the act of remembering and the act of returning to the city tied to nature and order. The poem takes for granted that the emir understands the link between memory, land, and identity.

Another poet, Ibn Rumi of the 9th century, composed similar verses about homeland. One stanza states, “When they remember their *awatan* they are reminded of the time of childhood spend there, and for that they yearn.”⁸ Recorded in an *adab*, later compilers would credit Ibn Rumi as one of the first to record the sentimental yearning for homeland. The poem links *watan* to childhood, a sense of the past that is fading away. Yearning then becomes the affective link between past and present, between land and individual, between something fading and something enduring. Literature revolving around ideas of place is not new to the Muslim world, but within the context of a fragmenting political center, what land signifies is transformed. It is not merely where one originates from, but is suffused with a sense of integrated belonging.

Poets like Rudaki and Ferdowsi made regular invocations to various ideas of land. Abu Abdullah Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Rudaki was a popular street performer and court poet. The 10th century Samanid ruler, Nasr ibn Ahmad patronized Rudaki during his life. Abul Qasim Ferdowsi lived a few decades after Rudaki under the Samanid successors, the Ghaznavid

⁷ Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 225

⁸ Shihab al Din Ahmad ibn Abd al Wahhab Al Nuwari. *Nihayat al arab fi funun al adab*

dynasty. Both were part of a series of writers, poets, historians, and geographers alike, who wrote about land, place, and homeland, what Antrim calls, the discourse of place.⁹

In the *Shahnameh*, the Persian army says to foreign warriors, “We are not from your homeland” recognizing they are not in their own homeland because their encounters speak a different language.¹⁰ The idea of lands of origin emerged early in Muslim writing, but with the fragmenting of the caliphate land begins to take on more affective qualities. The epic poetry of Ferdowsi, repeatedly refers to homeland, relating it to a beautiful garden with walls:

Iran is like a lush garden in the Spring
Where rose bloom eternally
And narcissus, pomegranates, apples, and quinces thrive.
When the garden is abandoned by its guardians
Other will uproot its flower-patches...
Risk not the safety of Iranians’ wives, children, and land¹¹

Homeland is imagined as feminine and it is the duty of its people to protect it. In verse, the male guardians are called the “garden’s walls” who are to bar entry and protect from invaders and to protect the safety of “wives, children, and land.”¹² Possessiveness and protectionist sentiment engender the sense of belonging to a homeland. Though, homeland is viewed as feminine, it is not exclusively female. More commonly, it is linked to the idea of family. In the case of Ibn Rumi, homeland is linked to children and childhood. Though multiple words are used to describe homeland, the commonality is a sense of belonging engendered through fictive local kinships as well as literal blood bonds.

Poetry conveys the powerful sense of yearning and belonging. The idea of a homeland is part of the language of poets, but is articulated in the writing of historians and geographers as

⁹ Antrim, Zayde. *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in Early Islamic World*, 3

¹⁰ Ferdowsi., vii:114:355

¹¹ Ferdowsi viii 345: 275-82

¹² Ibid.

well. From the 10th century to the 13th century, reaching a peak under the Samanids, we find repeated references to *watan* as a homeland in the imagined landscape of the Islamic world.

For example, similar notions of longing are found from Beyhaqi to Al Masudi. Both Beyhaqi and Masudi were famous historians, writing as part of the geographic turn. Behaqi was an 11th century historian and secretary to the Ghazanavid dynasty while Al Masudi was a traveler and geographer in the 10th century. In both we find repeated references to “the country that suckled you with its waters” and “the country that gave you the milk you suckled.”¹³ Both instances use *balad* for country but like in the case of Ferdowsi clearly gendered. Your country nurtured you and raised you as a mother. They use *ghilda* to mean nourishment or sustenance. The land where you belonged to, on account of giving you the nourishment you needed to live, held certain privileges over your, according to Beyhaqi and Masudi. The pattern of birth, nourishment, and obligation imagines a fictive kinship.

The reference to suckling invokes the concept of *rada* in Islamic jurisprudence, a legal relationship between a wet-nurse and their charge, one that is seen as equally binding and strong as blood relationships.¹⁴ If blood bonds created family kinship, milk bonds created social relationships between people you were not related to, but had an intimate relationship. Homeland, therefore, need not be the place of birth, but could easily be any site of belonging. Watan could be adoptative. Alongside references to suckling and mothers, watan as homeland is also the place of the family. Ferdowsi warns, “Risk not the safety of Iranians’ wives, children, and land.”¹⁵ Family, namely wives and children, are directly linked to the land itself. Guardianship of the land in turns guards the family. Similarly, the poet Abu Tammam writes:

“The inclination of the soul toward family and homeland

¹³ Beyhaqi *Al Mahasin wa-l Masawi*

¹⁴ Kecia Ali. *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*, 73

¹⁵ Ferdowsi viii 345: 275-82

Should not prevent the life of ease you seek!
In every country, if you settle there, you will meet
Family to replace family and neighbors to replace
neighbors.”¹⁶

Attributed to Abu Tammam by Beyhaqi and others, the verses—like those from Ferdowsi—link the ideas of homeland to family. Abu Tammam was originally from Syria and settled in the court in Baghdad while Ferdowsi was Persian in the Turko-Persian emirate of the east. While Abu Tammam’s verses convey a sense that *watan* could be adoptive, Ferdowsi expresses an anxiety about breached garden walls. They are both a product of the shifting political and demographic realities discussed in previous chapters—the political fragmentation of the caliphate and the influx of Turkic-speaking slave soldiers. Their positionality is illustrative of the competing discourse of homeland; Abu Tammam’s homeland allows movement and migration whereas Ferdowsi’s homeland, on the edges of the imagined Muslim world, requires defense. In an era where feelings of displacement, alienation, and a fracturing center, and rootlessness the idea of homeland then structures a sense of stability from Baghdad to Bukhara. The historians Beyhaqi and Al Masudi’s reference to homeland is conceptualized vaguely as a place of origin to which one has a sense of obligation. The consistent is the sense of longing and belonging. *Watan* is home. It may be a specific city, it may a region, but it is always home. It also follows that home may be one where blood ties are formed, or adoptive; home was between milk and blood.

In the nationalist discourses of the 19th and 20th century, gendering *watan* becomes an important constitutive element of fashioning the citizen and nation and engendering the relationship between the two. Political thinkers continue to link *watan* to the mother, but less so

¹⁶ Al Beyhaqi 1:493

with the family and instead *watan* becomes the female beloved and thus setting the heteronormative relationship at the core of citizenship in countries like Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan.¹⁷ The use of *watan* and shared history and the tension between nationalism and pan-Islamism is explored further in later chapters.

Watan could be both specific in locality and abstract. In the case of Rudaki's poem, the homeland is Bukhara, a specific city. In Abu Tammam's poem, both *watan* and *balad* are used to reference a vague stretch of territory. Lexicons of Arabic and Persian relate a host of words used interchangeably with *watan*, each with slight variations and nuance, but all referring to a range of ideas of territoriality both specific and abstract. *Watan* as homeland could also be *balad* meaning "familiar country," *mamlakat* meaning "realm," and *khaneh* meaning "home."¹⁸

In the previous chapters we examined the historical conditions at the core of the geographic turn. We see that experience acutely in the formulations of homeland. In the context of the political fragmentation of the caliphate and the influx of Turkic slave soldier, *watan* is both a product of the political and demographic changes and articulates the experience. Passages from al Jahiz illustrate the former.

The Basran theologian al Jahiz tells us he is inspired to write about the longing for *watan*. He writes: "Truly, the reason for gathering together bits from the reports of the Bedouin on the topic of their longing for their homeland...is that I had a discussion with one of those kings who has moved around on the topic of abodes and homelands."¹⁹ His curiosity about homeland stems from the longing he sees in those around him. He pinpoints the longing for homeland as a trait among the Bedouin, as a desire to be one with the land. The Bedouin, of course are a rootless,

¹⁷ Afsneh Najmbadeh, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards*, 98

¹⁸ Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 17.

¹⁹ Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bhahr Al Jahiz, *Al-Hanin ila awatan* translated by William M. Hutchins.

migratory people and yet are reputed to have an authentic relationship with the land, many times more so than city-dwellers. Jahiz's interest stems from the Bedouin being away from their homeland. He believes the increase in homesickness and sentiment stems from major migratory changes.

In a related anecdote, a famed minister of the caliph, once a Bedouin, begs his master to let him retire to the desert. When the caliph inquires as to why the sudden desire to retire, the minister describes the desert as his homeland and him as a traveler away from it. The caliph grants the request and provides the minister with sheep to take with him.²⁰ The desert was the minister's homeland. He was a man away from his home and longed to return to his migratory life, simultaneously mobile but belonging to a land. The theme of migration and mobility are commonly wrapped up in the descriptions of homeland. People are either always away from their homeland, or leaving their homeland. The mobility engenders the sense of nostalgia, belonging, and desire to return. Here we also see the tension between settled urban life and migratory nomadic life picked up later in the 13th century by historian Ibn Khaldun.²¹

While there is no cohesive understanding of homeland, earlier works like that of Yaqubi take Baghdad as central to the territorial imagining of the *mamlukat al Islam*.²² By the time of the Samanids, Baghdad and Mecca are important, but watan is envisioned as the embodiment of the bond between the individual and something stable; the place where allegiance is owed. Anthology literature called *al hanin ila l-watan* were dedicated to the recollecting the sense of longing for the homeland and were funded and patronized by the Samanid emirs, just as Rudaki was patronized by the famed Samanid vizier, Balami. For the Samanid dynasty, at once client

²⁰ Al Beyhaqi "Mahsasin al-hanin ila l-awatan" in *Al Mahasin wa-l-masawi*

²¹ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqqadimah*

²² Al Yaqubi, *Kitab al Buldan*

and autonomous rulers, watan produces the emotional connectivity that fill in the fractures, but also expresses a sense of belonging and loyalty.

To illustrate the underpinning of watan—the migration of Turkic-speaking slave soldiers—we return to Ferdowsi with its intersection of language and homeland. While in Ferdowsi, language signifies whether one is in the homeland or foreign land, Al Jahiz in his *risalah* takes a view in which inhabiting a territory allows one to become part of its make up. Speaking specifically about the Turkic slave soldiers transplanted in the Muslim armies, he argues that the client-patron relationship, that becoming a *mawali* integrates Turks.²³

The influx of Turkic slave soldiers and their integration is a source of anxiety and tension. For Ferdowsi the anxiety about integration is evident in his line:

“A mongrel people will appear
From the mixing of Persians, Turks, and Arabs
That will be neither Iranian, Nor Turk, nor Arab
Their words will be as worthless as gibberish.”²⁴

Samanid emirs adopted the caliphal policy of importing Turkic slave soldiers who were converted to Islam and given honors and titles. Ironically, those same Turkic troops would overthrow the Samanids and replace them as the Ghaznavid dynasty, but in doing so would continue the process of imagining homeland. In Ferdowsi in particular, we see homeland tied to language, rectifying boundaries. The *Iranian*, that is, those from *Eranshar*, speak *parsi* and as such are different from those who speak other languages. Language divides people into their respective homelands. While Ferdowsi makes great pains to distinguish the identity of the Iranian as something ancient and given, in reality it is constructed and fashioned concurrently alongside the reshaping of Muslimness. In the next chapter we will see how both of these

²³ Al Jahiz *Risalah*

²⁴ Ferdowsi, viii:419:105-106

identities were shaped alongside one another and were intertwined with Iranianness being shaped as an identity within and under Muslimness.

Though Ferdowsi sees language as a site of exclusion—a discursive boundary—homeland also provides the alchemical process by which the foreign could be made familiar. Al Jahiz’s *Manaqib at turk* praises the martial prowess of imported slave soldiers. Written as propaganda on behalf of Al Mutawakkil, the treatise convey an explanation in which Turks by adopting Muslim practices and languages become part of the community.²⁵ The idea of Turks as a homogenized other is part in parcel with the discourse on homeland. The imagining of the *mamlakut-al Islam* geographically divides up the world with homelands for various people. Al Yaqubi writes how merchandise flows from *al Hind* (India), *al Sin* (China), Tibet, *al Daylam* (land of Khazars), and *al Habasha* (Ethiopia). These lands are homeland of various people and outside *ard al-Islam* or “Islamic lands.” However, by moving into the homeland and adopting its language and customs the foreign could become familiar, a process born about by the Ghaznavids. The dynasty saw its origins as Turkic slave soldiers and generals under the Samanid emirate, converted to Islam, adopted Persian and Arabic as their language, were elevated to the highest echelons of society and when they overthrew the Samanid dynasty, they continued all of the Samanid cultural projects including translating treatises into Persian.²⁶ The transformative power of homeland had made Turks into Persians. The world *Tarikh* brought everyone within the scope of Islam, so even if homeland was defined by language, all could be part of the shared history. The concept of a shared past mediated the exclusive elements of *watan* permitted integration of migrating populations. Homeland was at once a product of the anxiety of migration and displacement and the mechanism of conversion. Homeland was fashioned to

²⁵ Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr Al Jahiz. *Manaqib at turk* and *Risalat mufakharat al-sudan ‘ala al-bidan*

²⁶ Beyhaqi, *Tarikh-i Mausdi*

define what it meant to be Muslim, what it means to be Persian, but also became the dynamic vehicle of integration.

Bringing together these threads, we see a clearer image emerge. In a period of political fragmentation and migration, with the cultural and administrative heart of the Muslim world under strain, the idea of *watan*, a homeland defined at once locally and in abstract terms, becomes the connectivity that produces continuity in uncertain times. Homeland becomes the core around which communal identity is shaped; people belong to a homeland. While *watan* is not always defined clearly, the notion of homeland appears both in works of poetry, in geographic imaginings, and historical treatises. Patronized by Samanid rulers, authors would write poems that evoked a sense of longing and belonging, of a place of embodied memory that called to one, while historians would collect stories of the compelling power of the *watan*. Together they provide the bonds that bind when allegiance to the caliph was loosened.

The Sacred City

Within the constellation of meaning found in *watan* we find the sacred geography of the city. For the Samanid dynasty, Bukhara is the sacred city. Abu Mansur Al Tha'alibi commented on the significance of Bukhara to those who visited. He said:

Bukhara under the Samanids was the center of splendor, the dome of the empire, and the home of noble scholars of the world and the brilliant writers of the age. These men of letters gathered and offered flowers of dialectic and discussion, pursuing the fragrance of culture and civilization. It was an incomparable city in an incomparable age.²⁷

²⁷ Hassan, Anushe, *Daneshnameye Adabii Farsi*.

Bukhara's is given religious significance; it is the home of scholars of Islam. The Samanid dynasty patronized a variety of scholars, from historians to theologians, astrologers to philosophers. The sacred city was an important constitutive component of the geographic turn within collective Muslim identity. Cities provided a sense of continuity, an unbroken link to the past, incorporated the past into the constructed imaginings of the Islamic world, weaving together and integrating fragments of identity and memory into a sense of belonging.

Bukhara's importance predates Islam as a major textile city and an urban hub on the eastern edges of the Sassanian Empire and later the Abbasid Caliphate.²⁸ Under the Samanids, Bukhara is transformed into a mirror of Baghdad and reimagined into a sacred city. Rudaki's "Mulyan Brook," written as a panegyric to the city, holds several crucial motifs for our understanding of the geographic turn. The sentiment of the poem is a sense of loss, of spectral memories forgotten. While, not explicit as to what those memories are, the poem makes clear they are intimately tied to the land itself. From the sands of the riverbanks, to the bubbling waters, geographic markers are imbued with emotion. In turn the city itself is linked to the emir; the two joined in a natural relationship. The affective element links past to present, drawing a forgetful and absent emir back to where he belongs.

Alongside poetry, the tenth century saw a proliferation of local urban histories. Authors compiled histories of cities like Bukhara and Balk in detail. Much of these texts were compilations, drawing fragments of histories already written, including biographic genealogies or *tazkira*, local legends, and lists of monarchs.²⁹ Local histories illustrate the ways in which an integrated sense of belonging was fashioned through the incorporation of the local into the imagined global.

²⁸ Richard Frye. *Bukhara: The Medieval Achievement*, 31.

²⁹ Azad, *Sacred Geography in Medieval Afghanistan*, 25

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al Narshakhi compiled the *Tarikh al Bukhara* on behalf of his patron, the Samanid emir Nuh ibn Nasr in the 10th century. The city history includes a detailed chronology from the early arrival of Arabs to the establishment of the city as a major capital. The text is a history of a city, but also of the establishment of the Samanid dynasty. A first glance might lead one to dismiss the text as predominantly a vanity project for a ruling family, but *Tarikh al Bukhara* is revealing of the subtle ways in which history-writing as a discursive strategy incorporated local histories into constructions of *mamlukat-al Islam*. Narshakhi writes about the arrival of the Arabs and the eventual conquest of Bukhara, but takes for granted the reader being familiar with chronology and narrative of al-Tabari's *Tarikh al Rasul wa al Mulk*.³⁰ If Tabari provides the broad outline of history, Narshakhi provides the granular details, the narrowing down of the universal to the local. His history relates the conquests of Bukhara and the eventual arrival of Islam. He notes the difficulty in the conversion of the people of Bukhara and their repeated apostasy.³¹ He tells a particular story about a *dehqan*, a feudal land owner, Khina who changed his name to Ahmed upon conversion. The descendants of the Ahmed lose the land that was rightfully theirs and so take their case before the caliph, Mansur. They take deeds, witnesses, and other proof attested to their past ownership of the land. Despite the evidence coming from before the coming of Islam, the caliph recognizes it, accepts it, and issues a ruling that returns the land back to the family. Narshakhi goes on to say that over the years, they sold bits of the land to other Muslim families.³² The story is indicative of the process of remembering a pre-Islamic past, recognizing the validity of that past within an Islamic context, and incorporating into the past into the present. The fragments of the past, via deeds, letters, and

³⁰ Al Tabari, *Tarikh wa Rasul wa Mulk*

³¹ Al-Narshakhi, Abu Bakr Muhammad. *Tarikh-i Bukhara*

³² *Ibid.*,

oral testimony are integrated into unified narrative, thus bringing the local into the wider “Muslim realm,” bringing the pre-Islamic into the Islamic. The process mirrors Islamic history writing in which fragments of testimony are integrated into a universal Muslim narrative. The city with its attending parts becomes part of the many threads woven together into an integrated sense of belonging.

Old cities like Bukhara were integrated into imaginings of the Muslim world gradually, they were recognized on account of their pre-Islamic importance, but reworked both imaginatively and architecturally. Narshakhi details that the grand mosque in Bukhara was originally a temple.³³ It is unclear to which deity the temple belonged too, but the conversion of churches was a common practice during the early Islamic expansions. The conversion of a temple was less common, but a practice found in the eastern parts of the empire and speaks to the way in which local architecture and sacred geography were integrated into the emerging Islamic world. Most cities follow the same process in which Muslims arrive either through conquest or negotiation and then a mosque is built.

Historian Arezou Azad’s research on the Samanid city of Balkh highlights the relationship between religion and emerging ideas about the landscape of a city. She notes that Balkh’s reputation as a sacred landscape was found on the burial of notable scholars, both Buddhist and Muslim, near one another. By virtue of their scholarship they were exalted and their burial in turn transformed the landscape of the city, imbuing it with sacredness.³⁴ Living scholars would travel to the city to partake in its intellectual culture, but the city also became a place of pilgrimage for people wishing to visit the sacred site. We see the same process at work

³³ Ibid.,

³⁴ Arezou Azad. *Sacred Landscape of Medieval Afghanistan*, 79

in Bukhara. The intersection of scholarship and religion imbues Bukhara with sacredness and meaning.

Bukhara is brought into the fold of the Islamic world by drawing the threads of its pre-Islamic past into its Muslim present. Bukhara is important to Muslims precisely because of its importance in the pre-Islamic world. Narshakhi boasts, “In Khorosan there is no city with as many names as Bukhara.”³⁵ These many names were drawn from pre-Islamic appellations like “the copper city” or “the city of merchants.” Celebration of those pre-Islamic names is part of the discourse of inclusion in which the city as a pre-Islamic edifice is drawn into the fabric of the Muslim world. The integration of cities into the imagining of *ard-Islam* simultaneously draws them into the wider Muslim realms, while also constructing those imagined realms. The local urban history draws from and weaves into the broader universal history written by Al Tabari in the same way that the local pre-Islamic landowner is made whole again through the caliph’s proclamation. A similar process is at work in the granting to Samanids the territories of Bukhara to rule on behalf of the caliph. The founder of the dynasty, Saman, is reputed to be a descendent of the ancient Persian ruler, Bahram Chobin, and therefore in the eyes of the caliph he is deemed an aristocrat.³⁶ Saman, is granted the lands on account of his lineage and his loyal service to the caliph of Islam; his pre-Islamic roots are fused with his Muslim present.

The geographic turn marks not just the rise of anthologies of place that detail the names and histories of lands, but the transformation of the land into a symbolic embodiment of memory, memory that links past to present and fashions a sense of continuity and integration. The connectivity of cities fashions an integrated and inclusive sense of belonging that draws in the pre-Islamic past into the *mamlukat-al Islam*.

³⁵ Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Jafar Narshaki *Tarikh-i Bukhara*

³⁶ Richard, Frye. *Bukhara: The Medieval Achievement*, 33 and also in Balami’s *Tarikhnama*

The poetry of the Samanid emirate built upon the already growing reputation of Bukhara as a city of scholarly splendor and popularized it among the people far and wide. Poetry recited as far away as Samarkand or Herat invoked Bukhara, making the city part of the wider imagination of the region and traversing beyond the boundaries of the city itself.³⁷ Unlike the poetry of preceding generations which borrowed primarily from motifs of praising heroic figures of piety or God, the poetry of the Samanid era valorized the land itself. It was the landscape with its cities and rivers that was the hero and worthy of praise. Poetry recounted not the deeds of emirs or conquerors, but the beauty of the land itself. The city of Bukhara as the dome of the empire with its famed scholars invokes the Islamic ideals of Baghdad with its *Bayt al Hikmah*, or House of Wisdom and offers a rival to it found at the borders of the empire.

The elevation of Bukhara served the political agenda of the Samanid rulers well. As the seat of their political power, the reimagining of Bukhara, incorporating older Jewish and Buddhist elements to legitimize its importance, created a landscape in which the Samanid city would rival Baghdad as a cultural center.

The city of Balkh similarly draws heavily from its pre-Islamic Jewish roots. Al Waiz, the author and compiler of *Fada'il-i Balkh* claims that on the Day of Judgement the angel Gabriel will lift up Balkh and carry the city “softly as a bride’s sedan chair” to Jerusalem.³⁸ Though much of the notions of homeland had clear gendered imagery, it was generally articulated through the lens of kinship. A similar reference is found with Bukhara. Narshakhi relates a hadith in which the angel Gabriel speaking to Muhammad states, “These angles will bring forth these cities onto the plains in grandeur and splendor, like a bride who is brought into the house of

³⁷ Ehsan Yarshater and Melville, Charles. *Persian Historiography: A History of Persian Literature*, 102

³⁸ From Arezou Azad’s translation of *Fada'il-i Balkh* in *Sacred Landscape in Medieval Afghanistan*.

her betrothed.”³⁹ Gendered metaphors are used to articulate a Muslim sense of belonging. While in previous instance we examined references to “suckling” and “kinship” here the act of motion is significant. A bride or betrothed is carried to their lover. The implication being the two may not be joined by blood, but by contract and sentiment. Bukhara and Balkh are carried into the world of Islam. The invocation of a bride is somewhat unique and mirrors the discourse on Jerusalem that emerges after the First Crusade where poets in particular played a crucial role in expressing the loss of Jerusalem through imagery of a beloved bride in captivity.⁴⁰ Balkh was referred to as the “Mother of Cities” in various treatises, but Al Waiz may be the first to invoke the imagery of a bride. His *Fada'il-i Balkh* was written two centuries after the Crusades and it is entirely possible, he is engaging with the discourse of Jerusalem in the Levantine Muslim world, or he is compiling an older tradition local to Balkh itself. Regardless, of the origin of the imagery, the link between the sacred city of Jerusalem with Balkh is part of the emerging discourse on cities.

The reference to Jerusalem continues the integration and incorporation of Jewish history into the construction of an imagined Islamic universal history. As the universal history shapes the wider Muslim identity, so too does local history situate the denizen of the city within the emerging framework of what it meant to be part of the Muslim community. If Muslimness was the products of a shared history, then the inhabitants of Bukhara or Balkh were the product of the universal history manifesting in the local, the global in the local, the ummah within the homeland. Local histories ground Muslimness in the lived experience of the inhabitants of the city while simultaneously constructing what it meant to be Muslim by drawing in the local into the wider imaginings of the “Muslim realms.” The reference to Jerusalem articulates Balkh’s

³⁹ From Richard Frye’s translation, *History*, 21-22.

⁴⁰ See Osman Latiff. *The Cutting Edge of the Poet’s Sword: Muslim Poetic Response to the Crusades*. Brill, 2017

pre-Islamic history. It predates Islam and therefore is important to Islam for that very history. A similar impulse is found in the early Muslim biographies where older Jewish stories about prophets were recording as the *Isra'iliyat* and became part of the cannon of Islamic lore. Al Waiz goes on to relate the original builder of Balkh was Cain again linking the city to a pre-Islamic biblical past, but that he was succeeded in the task by the ancient Iranian King, Goshtasp.⁴¹ The biblical and Jewish roots pass to the Iranian and the mythic. Having established its biblical and Iranian past, Al Waiz makes reference to a *hadith*:

“The messenger of God said: Abraham, Friend of God, came to Balkh and reached the asp-ris, which is the center of the city. He said to the angel who accompanied him and who guards the earth, and is called Salsa'il, or in some traditions, Sarsarm'il: 'What is this place?' [The angel] said: 'Oh, friend of God! Stay here, for it is a blessed place. In it [lies] a prophet's grave.' And so Abraham—may peace be upon him—alighted at the time of the dawn prayer, and performed two rak'as. When he finished his prayer, he turned to Balkh and said: 'Oh God, make abundant its rivers. Give the tress fruits, bless it, and give it plenty of legal scholars.’”⁴²

While the author claims the hadith cited is of sound transmission, the traditional chain is not presented. We can conclude that either the hadith is fabricated or perhaps lesser known. I am less interested in the authenticity of the hadith, but rather its role in historical narrative. The hadith is used as vehicle to draw Balkh, whose importance is already established on account of its biblical and Iranian past, into the fabric of the imagined Muslim world. Abraham, who is viewed by traditional Islamic scholarship as the prototypal pre-Muhammad Muslim, travels to the city, whose sacredness is verified through the divine affirmation of an angel, performs the Muslim salat, and offers blessing. The blessing is directed towards the land itself. Like in the poetry

⁴¹ Azad, *Sacred Geography in Medieval Afghanistan*, 69

⁴² *Ibid.*, 70

about Bukhara, Balkh's sacredness is in rivers and trees, the natural geography, but also in its connection to scholars.

Al Waiz, like many of the biographers and historians of his day, was more a compiler of pre-existing accounts.⁴³ The creation legends and eschatological claims about Balk likely predate the arrival of Muslims and is appropriated here by the Muslim historian to both justify the importance of the city at the eastern edges of empire, but also to articulate its integration into the territorial imaginings of the Islamic empire. Through a dialogical process, an integrated and inclusive sense of belonging was fashioned that brought together disparate threads of identity and meaning.

Pre-Islamic cities that were drawn into the fold of the Muslim realms had diverse religious populations. In the region of Khorasan in particular, there were thriving Jewish communities in the cities of Bukhara, Balkh, and Herat. How *watan* and *mamlukat-al Islam* imagined relations with these Jewish communities is crucial in our understanding of the discourses of inclusion and integration.

Jerusalem held an important place in the imagining of the sacred landscape of homeland. Along with Mecca and Medina, Muslims viewed Jerusalem as a perennial sacred city. How Jerusalem becomes important to Muslims is contested, especially as its importance waxes and wanes contingent upon the changing political climate. Yet, why Jerusalem is important to Muslims illustrates the process in which pre-Islamic sacredness is incorporated, integrated, and re-interpreted within an Islamic context. Al Tabari chronicles a universal history in which Jewish prophets in Jerusalem become Muslim prophets, reflecting the theological re-interpretation found in the Qu'ran itself. For Al Waiz, Balkh is similarly reinterpreted. Imagined as sacred as

⁴³ Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 13-17

Jerusalem on account of its pre-Islamic history integrated into a Muslim present. It is not a coincidence that a sizable minority Jewish population lived in Balkh. There is a lacuna in the scholarship in regards to the Jewish reception of Muslim conquerors of Balkh and Bukhara. While there is evidence of Jewish scribes and translators participating along with Christians in the translation and literary compilation projects of both cities, it is less clear what the Jewish reception to having their sacred history Islamized was.⁴⁴ Was this a dialogical process, or appropriation? Questions of participation, power, and the role of minority religions are important to consider.

Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem are all imagined as sacred cities with connectivity to the divine realms. Scholars imagined a connectivity between heaven and earth, spiritual and material, they are “actually physically connected, linking heaven and earth.”⁴⁵ Sacredness of the city was then reaffirmed through the presence of scholars’ burial. The tradition of associating scholarly burials predates Islam as Bukhara, Balkh, and Herat all had significant burial grounds for Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Indian sages. Jewish burial was often separate. The process of Islamizing the cities included burial of Muslim scholars alongside their predecessors. The burial of scholars linked cities together through pilgrimage and forged a network of belonging mapping out Muslims sites of meaning.⁴⁶ We find in the *Fada’il al Balkh*, reference to a sage who died in Bukhara but whose body was carried to Balkh to be buried. The bodies of scholars sketched out a lineage connecting past to present, fashioning a transhistoric sense of belonging. Muslims living in 10th century Bukhara would have an embodied link to Muhammad in the 7th century through either his lineage or through chains of scholarly transmission. Azad details how Muslim sages

⁴⁴ See Gutas, Dimitri. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* and Beyhaqi’s reference to translators in *Tarikh-i Masudi*

⁴⁵ Zayde, Antrim. *Routes and Realms*, 40.

⁴⁶ See Ho’s *Graves of Tarin* and Sophia Rose Arjana’s *Pilgrimage in Islam*

and their burial became important sites of pilgrimage. In turn, Muslim historians attempted to Islamize the pilgrimage and burial sacrality through an Islamic reinterpretation. In cited hadith, an angel tells Abraham that at the center of Balkh was the burial site of a prophet.⁴⁷ There is no reference to who the prophet is, but the reference to a *nabi* clearly indicates an Islamic one. Pilgrimage to Balk and Bukhara predate Islam as does the burial of pre-Islamic sages. The integration and appropriation of the sacredness of both cities involves the process of entombing Muslim scholars and articulating the pre-Islamic pilgrimage practices along Islamic lines. The pilgrimage is explained as within the scope of Islamic tradition. The act of appropriation integrates the pre-Islamic into a sense of belonging to ard-Islam. Entombing scholars built upon and appropriated pre-existing notions of sacredness and forged embodied links to the past through lineage; it also shaped the connotations of *watan* as burial-turned-homeland.

Earliest Arabic lexicographical accounts defined *watan* as a place where one is buried. The city you are buried in holds certain obligations over you. It is a relationship of symbolic kinship related to the womb—there are two wombs, one that gives birth and the other than entombs. Both create powerful bonds in a person’s life. Birth shapes one’s blood relationships but the place of burial creates voluntary bonds. Over a period of several centuries, *watan* increasingly is associated as homeland. The poetry of bards, the writings of historians, the compilation of anthologies all participate in shaping the discourse of place, but also reflect and record a popular discursive transition. The entombing of scholars in local cities is a physical embodiment of this change. Their burial in *watan* reflects both the older ideas of the land of the grave as well as the emerging notions of an Islamic homeland; the land to which Muslims

⁴⁷ From Arezou Azad’s translation of *Fada’il-i Balkh*, 70

belong. Community is not only defined by blood, but by location with cities as crucial grounding sites for integrated networks of belonging.

Mapping the Muslim Realms

As cartographers began visualizing *ard-Islam*, cities became important dots crisscrossing the Muslim realms, linking the disparate into an imagined cohesion. While poetry and history-writing articulated the various imagined geographies of the Muslim world, maps visually drew a constructed territorial unity.

The 10th to the 13th century saw an explosion of cartographic projects among Muslim intellectuals.⁴⁸ Maps and atlases not only visualized *ard-Islam* but were exercises in ethnographic division. Neither history-writing, nor geography were separate, distinct endeavors, but rather related studies. Books of *Tarikh* included geographies and geographies included biographies and histories. Al Masudi's *Muruj al-dhahab wa-ma adin al jawhar* best represents this marriage. His is a work of world history and geography that is illustrative of ways in which Muslim writers imagined *ard-Islam* while incorporating pre-Islamic peoples into that imagining. Al Masudi divides up the world into regions: Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Al Hijaz, Iraq, Khurasan, Fars, al-Jibal, Khuzistan, and al-Jazira.⁴⁹ Each of these regions belong to a people with distinct characteristics. Geographic division order the Muslim world into those who are integrated into it and those who fall outside. India and the "land of the Turks" make frequent appearances as lands bordering *mamlukat-al Islam*.

We've discussed the mythic origin of Balkh recorded in the *Fada'il-Balkh* which cites both ancient Iranian origin and biblical origin. The text also makes reference to India. According

⁴⁸ Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 90

⁴⁹ Al Masui *Muruj al-dhahab wa-maa'din al jawhar*

to the author, Balk is one of the earliest cities built after a city in *balad-al hind*.⁵⁰ The reference to India indicates a particular special imagination among Islamic geographers and historians. One the one hand, India is attributed with a deep history, an ancient land on the peripheries of the world. The “Muslim world” ended at the edges of India, making *balad-al hind* a liminal and imagined geography. Proximity to *balad-al hind* attested to Balkh’s own ancient roots, but also reflects the reality of its positionality. Balkh was on the crossroads of intersecting cultures, religions, and peoples. Al Waiz mentions, inaccurately, of Zoroastrians worshipping in Balkh:

In ajam during the Time of Ignorance, [New Bahar] was the sanctuary and temple of the Magians... They also transmit from Ibn Shawdhab that at the beginning of each solar year the great and noble [men] of Tukharistan, Hindustan, and Turkistan and the lands of Iraq, Syria and Greater Syria would come to and celebrate for seven days at New Bahar.⁵¹

While it is likely Zoroastrians did live in Balkh, his references point to Buddhist sites of worship. Al Waiz seems unaware of the differences between Buddhist and Zoroastrian practices, but rather saw them as an undifferentiated religious other. He writes about Balkh as the center of a network of pilgrimage streaming from all over. His spatial and regional understanding divides the realms into Tukharistan, Hindustan, and Turkistan on one end and Iraq, Syria, and Greater Syria on the other. From each, pilgrims’ stream into Balkh. Though the pilgrimages practices are deemed a rite from the “Time of Ignorance” that is the time before Islam, it is quickly Islamized in Al Waiz’s narrative. He writes: “... in one of the villages of Balkh there is a village called Bat, and it is [the site of] a prophet’s shrine. Similarly, it is said that the tome of Abu Na’ama b. Adawi is in the village of Bat...”⁵² Indeed, the sacredness of Balkh rests with its function as the

⁵⁰ Azad, *Sacred Landscape in Medieval Afghanistan*, 69.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 79

⁵² *Ibid.*, 73

abode of scholars and saints. Buddhist sages were buried in Balkh. Muslim sages would be buried on top of and alongside their Buddhist predecessors. In this way, the physical body of the dead ancestors would articulate a Muslim understanding of Balkh's sacredness, while building on what came before. Though the signifier would change, the sacredness of the landscape would endure.⁵³ Al Waiz uses the word *maqdis* to refer to the sacred shrines, a similar reference is found to Jerusalem which is called *bayt al maqdis*. Al Waiz goes on to say:

“Today the shrines of these pure people are mostly in this pure earth, and like the treasures and tombs of kings, their graves are stored up and buried here. Their spirits in the sacred fold (*hadirat al quds*) make Balkh the glory of the witnesses of the Kings of Kingds, whose blessings are all encompassing.”⁵⁴

Balkh is sacred because it was a site of Buddhist pilgrimage. That sacredness is kept, but its meaning is changed through the physical entombing of Muslim sages. Al Waiz calls the land, “*khak-i pak*” meaning pure earth, or clean earth. There is however no reference to a process of purification. Despite the pre-Islamic nature of the pilgrimages they are not viewed as a form of corruption needing to be expunged. Rather the land is pure by nature of its burial. It is pure because it is a type of *watan*. Buddhist sacrality is re-articulated through a Muslim lens:

“It is attributed to Anas b. Malik, may God be please with him, through the messenger of God—may God honor him and his family and grant him peace—that there is in Khursasa a city called Balkh. Verily it has four gates (*darwaza*). Around this city are running rivers and countless tress. At each of its gates there are seventy thousand angels that steadfastly guard the city until the Day of Resurrection.”⁵⁵

Balkh is linked to Muhammad through a *hadith* that places it within an Islamic eschatology. Just as the Buddhist shrines link Balkh to a pre-Islamic past, the bodies of Muslim scholars along

⁵³ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 71.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 76.

with an Islamic narrative vis-à-vis a *hadith* create an Islamic lineage. The city's sacrality is reaffirmed while its semiotic signifiers are remade into Islamic ones.

Visitation to the burial of wise sages became a common feature of the geographic turn. Though pilgrimage is a major feature of Islam vis-à-vis the *hajj* and Shia visitation to Alid shrines in Iraq, by the 10th century local cities become sites of pilgrimage. *Ziyarah* visitation replicated the *hajj* pilgrimage, transforming local cities like Bukhara, Balkh, and Qom into mirrors of Mecca.⁵⁶ If the city of Mecca was imagined as a lodestone for the global Muslim body, local *ziyarah* would incorporate the regional into the wider constellation of Muslimness. Local pilgrimage practices were reimagined as Islamic, given new semiotic expression for older rites. In the *Tarikh-i Qom* the author attributes Jafar al-Sadiq with saying:

“Allah has a sanctuary, Mecca. The Prophet of Allah has a sanctuary, Medina. The Commander of the Faithful Ali has a sanctuary that is Kufa. And we have a sanctuary, the city of Qom. Know that a woman of my descendants, who is called Fatimah will be buried in Qom and all who do *ziyarah* to her will certainly go to heaven.”⁵⁷

Ziyarah has a practice was well-established by the 10th century and among early Shia groups in particular, Alid sites of pilgrimage dotted the landscape of the Iraq and Iran.⁵⁸ Yet, the practice which traditionally is viewed through a Shia lens is interpreted by later historians as implying fixed sectarian boundaries. In actuality, a sectarian lens is deeply misleading. It is true that we begin to see the tension between Shia and Sunni confessional community, particularly on account of Fatimid evangelism in the Abbasid territories, but the practice of *ziyarah* is evidence of an inclusive and universalist understanding of the Muslim realms. In Balkh and Bukhara, the

⁵⁶ See *Kutub al Ziyarah* as representative of pilgrimage literature.

⁵⁷ Qummi, *Tarikh-i Qum*, 573.

⁵⁸ Calmard, J. “Kum” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*

burial of sages was a predominantly Sunni practice and the population was mostly Sunni as well. Those who attended the pilgrimages did not identify exclusively in sectarian terms, but rather participated in a broader Muslim sense of belonging. *Ziyarah* built upon an older Shia practice of local pilgrimage, transformed the semiotics of Buddhist sacred sites, and fashioned a universalist understanding of Muslimness that incorporated the local into the global. The physical act of pilgrimage would embody a network of interconnectedness between the regional and particular and the global and universalist. Just as geographers etched a Muslim realm onto paper, the pilgrim would fashion Muslimness through ritual migration of elite and popular folk alike, linking the local to the broader sweep of sacred history and territorial imagining.

In the case of Bukhara, Narshakhi draws the city into the sweep of Islamic history and territorial imagining by linking the city to Prophet Muhammad. He writes,

The third in Arabic is Fakhira, and in Persian Bukhara.’ The Prophet asked, ‘Oh Gabriel why is it called Fakhira?’ Gabriel replied, ‘Because on the Day of Resurrection and Final Judgement, Bukhara shall excel all other cities in glory because of the multitude of martyrs buried there.’ The Prophet cried, ‘God bless the people of Fakhira and purify their hearts through fear of God. Improve their actions and make them among the merciful of my people.’” The significance of this is that from the east to the west it is attested that the people of Bukhara are noted for their belief and purity.”⁵⁹

Narshakhi’s hadith is interesting for several reasons, namely its geographic imagination. Earlier in the hadith, the angel Gabriel makes reference to “Khurasan” as a region to the East. While the regional definition of Khorasan varies, it exists as a vague territory in pre-Islamic accounts.⁶⁰ Narshakhi’s hadith puts Bukhara squarely within a regional unit, then draws the entire region and city within an Islamic fold. Narshakhi’s report constructs an imagining of an Islamic realm with

⁵⁹ From Frye’s translation, 21-22.

⁶⁰ Sassanian coinage make reference to a region called Khorasan and we find certain kings called the ruler of Khorasan. See the work of Khodadad Rezakhani’s *ReOrienting the Sassanians* and Touraj Daryaee’s *From Oxus to Euphrates*.

cities connected into territorial regions all linked together through a constellation of Muslim belonging. He also references the burial of martyrs in Bukhara as the justification for why it is elevated above all other cities. The entombing of Muslim bodies, imbues the land with a sense of Muslimness, marking it part of constructed Muslim realms. Through entombing and burial, the land itself becomes embodied with sacred history. Bukhara becomes linked to an Islamic metanarrative through a prophetic saying. Narratives worked alongside cartographic works to etch out the borders of the Muslim world; while narratives drew together multiple pasts into a Muslim present, cartography imagined territorial unity and liminality.

References to Jewish and Iranian pasts while situating Balkh alongside a liminal India traces a geographic imagining that draws in the fabric of people living in the city into Muslim sacredness. The Muslim homeland is a tapestry of communities, peoples, and even religious traditions that are integrated into a communal sense of belonging. By invoking a sense of deep roots, Muslim writers fashioned connectivity and stability that transcended contemporary political fragmentation through an imagined continuity. The local was drawn into a universalist framework engendering a sense of interconnected belonging.

The geographer, Al Biruni traced out the world in an iconic map that is reproduced for centuries, right up until the 20th century. The map is not designed to be geographically accurately, but symbolically representative. They are meant to be iconographic and representative of the Islamic imagining of the world.⁶¹ It depicts a single continent, stretched out without clear divisions, but labeled with markers to indicate the major regions of the world. The Eastern edges of the map reference Khorasan, the territory of the Samanids and their successors the Ghaznavids, in between India and the land of the Turks. The liminal boundaries of the

⁶¹ Karen Pinto, *Medieval Islamic Maps*, 15

Muslim world are depicted visually in Biruni's sketch. Biruni was born in Khwarzm, when the Ghaznavid Turks established their Perso-Turkic dynasty. The land of the Turks, while a fixed spot on the map, is a site of fluidity during the 10th-13th century. It is the realm from which the Turks arrive from outside *ard-Islam*, but by adopting the Muslim homeland are made Muslim. The Ghaznavids succeeded the Samanids as the dominant dynasty of Khorosan. Originally, they were Turkic slave-soldiers hired by the Samanids and elevated to the highest echelons of power. Though they eventually replace the Samanids, they adopt their customs, religion, and language becoming not only Muslim but Persianate in nature.⁶² The integrated sense of belonging rooted in homeland not only drew together pre-existing identities, but allowed for the incorporation of new ones.

In Biruni's map, to the other side of Khorosan is India, on the border of *ard-Islam* but intimately linked to it. India marks both the edges of the Muslim realms as well as another site of motion. Unlike Turks, the flow of people to India constitutes a porous border. Turks, seen as outside the realm of Islam become Muslim by adopting new homeland. Indians are viewed as visitors from an ancient, but distinct land who do not become Muslim by entering Muslim lands. They remain Indian. However, Indian ideas are integrated and incorporated into an "Islamic" understanding of the world. Biruni's style of map making, namely its mathematic components are drawn entirely from the Indian method of *Zij*.⁶³ Biruni spent time in India where he learned geography and cartographic methods. His style of fusing Indian mathematic systems with the continental atlas became iconic of the Balkh school of map-making. Biruni's atlas would be reproduced in the *Aja'ib al-Makhlukat* and countless crucial works of geography. Indian ideas are also embodied in the physical urban plans of Bukhara and Herat.

⁶² Richard Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia: The Arabs in the East*, 95

⁶³ Karen, Pinto, *Medieval Islamic Maps*, 75

Architectural historians have pondered the roots of the design of cities like Bukhara and Herat, both of which have some Hellenic influence. Gangler, Guabe, and Attilo argue an Indian origin of the city planning of Bukhara which we find in Herat as well. Both cities are rectangular, with square walls, oriented towards the cardinal directions, four overland roads, inner gates, and a citadel. The probability is they were laid out “according to a plan that originated in India.”⁶⁴ The design of Balkh is less clear, but many of the cities of eastern Khorasan show the classic signs of Indian influence. India acts then as a liminal and fluid site that simultaneously flows into *ard-Islam* but also remains outside it. The supposed ancientness of India is vaunted and embodied in the cities themselves, making them sacred sites. Yet at the same time, India is contrasted to *ard-Islam* as the realm of religion outside the “book” religions.

Al Biruni compiles one of the first works of comparative religion, *Tahqīq mā li-l-hind*. The text is a meticulous recollection of Indian culture, religion, and daily life. He discusses in depth the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, taking great pains to highlight the differences between the religions and Islam. While clearly respectful and there are several passages dedicated to bridging understanding between two cultural and religious traditions, he does view them as separate and inherently different. The difference simultaneously imagines a unified “Islam” while also imagining a whole other “Hindu.” If there is a land that can be identified as the *al-hind*, identifiable by its different religion, then so too does an *ard-Islam* exist. India becomes the border by which the “Islamic realms” are defined and identified.

Cities played a crucial role in the imagining of the Muslim realms. Just as their integration produced Muslim sense of belonging to a homeland, so too did their positionality draw together regions into a cohesive imagined unity. Merv is given the appellation of “Mecca of

⁶⁴ Gangler, Guabe, and Attilo, *Bukhara, Eastern Dome of Islam*

Khorasan” by Muqaddasi.⁶⁵ The reference here creates a central node within a network of cities in the region of Khorasan. The symbolism of Mecca, as the spiritual center of Muslim imagination is invoked to elevate the importance of Merv. The city is identified symbolically as a center all its own. Merv is an old city in Khorasan, predating Islam. Its importance is reinterpreted through an Islamic lens, but also used as a means to connect the cities of Khorasan together therefore fashioning an imagined unified territorial Muslim realm. Cities were given names emphasized their importance and connectivity, while maps drew cities as literal nodes within winding networks that would stretch far and wide, linking peripheral areas into a cohesive imagined region.

The envisioned Muslim realms imagined territorial unity and a shared civilizational, religious, and even cultural fabric. It does not however refer to a unified or singular geopolitical unit. The same literature that constructs territorial unity reflect political fragmentation. Indeed, the geographic unity is likely a response to political disunity; a way of restructuring an imagined focal point in an era where the center is fracturing. In Al Muqaddasi’s *kitab ahsan al taqasim* he refers to two separate individuals as “Amir al Mu’minin” or “The Commander of the Faithful.” He is referencing the caliphs in Baghdad and Cairo. The era of the geographic turn coincides with the rise of the Fatimid Caliphate in North Africa. The Abbasid Caliphates hold over the Western parts of their empire dissolved with the Fatimids taking power in the Levant and Egypt while in the Eastern fringes of the empire, autonomous dynasties exerted their own sovereignty. Muqaddasi mentions Nasr ibn Mansur, the Samanid ruler of Bukhara alongside his reference to the two Amir al Mu’minin, explicitly making reference to the fractured political state of the

⁶⁵ Al Muqaddasi, *Kitab ahsan al taqasim*

Islamic empires. The imagined geographic unity of the Muslim realms was a mirrored reflection of its political disunity.

Conclusion

The 10th to the 13th century is marked by a geographic turn where a discourse of place with its attending literature shapes communal Muslim identity. Through poetry, history-writing, and geographic literature, Muslims imagined *watan* as homeland and in turn reimagined what it meant to be Muslim through an integrated network of belonging that drew together pre-Islamic pasts into a Muslim present. Poets like Rudaki and Ferdowsi wrote praises of abstract regions and specific cities alike, embodying the material land with sentiment and longing. They reflected and shaped an emerging sense of belonging. Historians like Narshakhi catalogued the histories of cities. Collecting fragments of origin myths, details of daily life, and biographies of saints and sages, urban histories wove together pre-Islamic pasts into a Muslim present. Geographers mapped out an imagined unified territory, *ard-Islam* or *mamlukat al-Islam*. The imagined Muslim realms were plotted by cities connected far off lands through a constellation of meaning and legibility.

Through the geographic turn local identities and histories were integrated into a constructed Muslimness. To be Muslim was to belong to a homeland, that homeland was recognizable by the language of its inhabitants, held obligations and duties over the individual, and could be adopted by visitors and newcomers alike. The discourse of place provided the mechanism by which local peoples were integrated into a broader religious imagining without a complete abandonment of what they held dear previously. Their histories, their local identities, and customs were integrated and linked into a cohesive imagined territorial unity that mapped out constellations of meaning and belonging. Attachment to the land forged a connectivity that

brought together multiple pasts into a new present; producing a sense of stability and continuity in uncertain political times. Through the geographic turn, religious, cultural, and ethnic identity was forged, imagined, and invented as new categories of belonging. To be Muslim, to be Persian, all took new meaning in the era of the geographic turn.

Becoming Muslim and Imagining Persians

As the Muslim armies were expanding into Sassanian territories, the ancient Iranian king, Yazdegerd III sent the *asawira* to defend Kuzestan. The *asawira* were 1,000 Iranian noblemen and cavalry. Famed for their fierceness and skill with the bow, the Sassanian king was confident they would repel the Muslim invaders. The *asawira* rode up to Abu Musa Asari's Muslim army, knelt, and converted on the spot. Shortly afterwards, Yazdegerd III was defeated and the whole of the former Sassanian territories were brought into the fold of the nascent Muslim empire.¹ The story of the *asawira* is related in the major chronicle of Al Tabari and became legendary throughout the Muslim world. The inclusion of their story is a peculiar one. Their conversion is sudden and they are absorbed into the Muslim armies without much difficulty. What does this tell us about the way in which categories of Muslim belonging were shaped and accommodated the local people of Khorasan?

Throughout the anthologies of place and other related literature from the geographic turn we have seen references to territorial units; *watan*, *balad*, *mamlukat-al Islam*, *ard-Islam*, Khorasan and many others. Yet, the question remains, who lived in these regions? How did the inhabitants of the *ard-Islam* identify? Are they Muslims? Is Muslimness a foreign interpolation brought about by imperial conquest? What is the role of local identity? Are they replaced by the category of "Muslim?" How does the narrative of the *asawira* reflect the process in which the global turn structures identity? This chapter is dedicated to analyzing and charting the hybrid and multi-faceted identities of the denizens of the eastern territories of the Abbasid Caliphate by exploring how the geographic turn shaped communal local and religious identity.

The recent scholarship on Muslim identity and ethnic identity is a rich and robust body of literature. Works span a vast chronology from early Islam to Safavids and the contemporary

¹ Tabari, Vol. 1

Middle East. Peter Webb's recent *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* provides an important intervention by tracing *al arab* as a category and correcting the homogenization of "Arabs" as a singular people from the Arabian Peninsula.² Sarah Savant's *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* is crucial for our understanding of the arrival of Islam to the Iranian plateau, the conversion of Persianate people, and the narratives and memory of conquest. Iranologist,³ Touraj Daryaee's "Ethnic and Territorial Boundaries in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval Persia" provide a fundamental framework of understanding the ethnogenesis of Persianess.⁴ I draw particularly from the latter two along with theories of memory and narrative identity in my analysis of the literature of the geographic turn to uncover the varieties, negotiations, and formulations of identity.

In this chapter we trace Persianess as ethnogenesis, treating "Persianess" as a flexible identity within Muslim categories of belonging. Persianess is a process, not static, an ethnos shaped by historical conditions, subject to change over time, and a discursive category that engender belonging and a sense of continuity. It is my contention that Persianess, contrary to nationalist reimagining, is not a perennial category, but a construction of the geographic turn that draws together fragments of the past into a new sense of integrated and interconnected belonging. Persianess is a consequence of historical imagination, not the cause of it.

Eran-shahr and Ahl Fars

Today, Iran refers to a nation-state on the Iranian plateau, a geographic entity and state. The name "Iran" is drawn from ancient sources as a name for an imperial territorial unit.

² Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2017).

³ Sarah Bownen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴ Touraj Daryaee, "Ethnic and Territorial Boundaries in Late Antique and Early Medieval Persia," in *Border, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis, Frontiers in Late Antiquity and Middle Ages*, 2005.

Scholars of antiquity trace *Eran-shahr* as a Sassanian construction, that is the domain of Iranians.⁵ Iranianess is a category of belonging that incorporated both the people of the Sassanian Empire and represented a sense of a territorial core with boundaries. At its heart was a constructed ethno-religious category of belonging and exclusion. As detailed by scholar of ancient Iran, Daryaee, *er* while historically linked to a Zoroastrian/Avestan origin simultaneously incorporated some religious groups, like Christians, while excluding others like Manichaeans.⁶ During the geographic turn, the territorial unit of *Eran-shahr* is replaced with the Muslim homeland of *ard-Islam* while a Persian-Muslim category of belonging is shaped. I refer to this identity as Perso-Muslimness to encompass and highlight the broad sense of the Islamic.

The broader category of *ahl Fars* denotes a more flexible category than *er*. The *ahl Fars* need not be directly linked to *Eran-shahr* but is more ambiguous. The word “Persian” comes from the older *fars*. According to Sarah Savant, “The term ‘Persian’ was used in Achaemenid (559-330 BCE) and Sasanian (224-651 CE) times to refer both to the ethnic homeland of a ‘Persian’ ethnic group in southwestern Iran and to the vast lands under the imperial control and cultural influence of this people following its dispersal.”⁷ The ambiguity of *ahl Fars* continued under Islam with Muslims using it to refer to a cultural community on the eastern edges of their empire. Terminology is further complicated with the use of *mawali* an ambiguous appellation for recent converts to Islam from outside the Arabian Peninsula. The *mawali* were predominantly Persian-speaking people, though not limited to them, and were adopted into the patron-client system of early Islam.⁸ Through patronage they became part of Islamic society and many

⁵ Touraj Daryaee “Ethnic and Territorial Boundaries in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval Persia,” in *Borders, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis in Late Antiquity and Middle Ages*, Edited by Florin Curta, 123-138, Brepols, 2005.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷ Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran*, 8-9.

⁸ Ira Lapius. *History of Islamic Societies*, 61

Abbasid caliphs would be descended from them. The broadness of Persianness as a category outside imperial territorial imagination allows it to endure well into the Islamic period. Muslim chroniclers would use both *eranshahr* and *ahl Fars* in their writings, though the former is often referred to in a pre-Islamic Sassanian context while *ahl Fars* was used as a contemporary category within their writing. How Muslimness and Persianness were imagined as linked categories is my central interrogation of the narrative identity of Islamic historiography.

Muslims and Persians

Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Jarir-al Tabari was born in Tabaristan though he eventually settles down in Baghdad. In the 10th century he writes a multi-volume history of the world called, *Tarikh al Rasul wa al-Mulk*, or a “History of Prophets and Kings.” His history would go on to become the most important canonical work of history for the Muslim world. Thematically a mythic history that fuses local accounts, pre-Islamic chronicles, and Biblical and Qur’anic narrative into a chronology that would form the basis of the Muslim ideas of the past until the 18th and 19th century.⁹ Al Tabari’s *Tarikh* draws heavily both from Biblical accounts as well as older Iranian history. Several of Al Tabari’s volumes focus on pre-Islamic Iranian kings. Figures like Fereydun and Jamshid both make an appearance as Al Tabari recounts a pre-Islamic past that gives way to the arrival of Muhammad.

The inclusion of pre-Islamic Iranian kings is significant. Hayden White writes, “formalizations of poetic insights that analytically precede them and that sanction the particular theories used to give historical accounts the aspect of an ‘explanation.’”¹⁰ History-writing as narrative provides explanation; Al Tabari’s *Tarikh* explains how the present came to be, how

⁹ Franz Rosenthal, *The History of Al Tabari*, introduction.

¹⁰ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in the Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 3.

world history and prophetic genealogy is universal and encompassing of the people of the Islamic empire. Al Tabari draws his chronology from diverse authorities and sources. Indeed, there is very little of Al Tabari's voice in his *Tarikh* however what he chooses to compile and include is a result of his own historical circumstances.¹¹ Al Tabari is writing in the 10th century during what I have identified as the "geographic turn." He is writing during an era of political fragmentation and demographic changes. Not only is his adoptive home city of Baghdad caught between rival dynasties, but it is the cosmopolitan core of large migration of Turkic-speaking people. Al Tabari's likely drew much of his understanding of pre-Islamic Mesopotamia from fragments of *Khuday-nama* or the "Book of Kings" which Ferdowsi will also draw from for his *Shahnameh*.¹² Al Tabari's reliance of the "Book of Kings" is indicative of his incorporation of Persianate people into an Islamic framework. For example, Al Tabari's chronicle incorporates both the story of Al Khidr and the prophet Ilyas. The story goes, which is also alluded to in the Qur'an, Moses was searching for a teacher to guide him, to instruct him on piety. God leads him to Al Khidr, a prophetic figure of mysterious origin. Al Khidr, agrees to take an eager Moses on, but on the condition that he is only to observe and ask no question. Moses agrees. The two prophetic companions set off, boarding a ship from friendly sailors who offer them a generous fare. Upon disembarking, Al Khidr strikes the ship with his staff, damaging it immensely. An outraged Moses, cries out, "Why have you made a hole to drown the shipmates" only to be reminded of his promise to mind his tongue. Next, they come upon a couple with a young child. Al Khidr strikes the child with his staff, killing him. Moses horrified once more presses his companion only to be rebuked. Chastened, they continue on their journey until they come upon a

¹¹ Boaz Shoshan, "Tabari's Voice and Hand," in *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Tabari's History* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 148.

¹² Savant, *New Muslims of Post Conquest Iran*, 34-35.

town whose inhabitants deny them hospitality. Al Khidr proceeds to rebuild their decrepit wall. At this point, Moses loses all patience and asks how Al Khidr could do such horrible things to people who were nice to them while working without recompense for people who denied them hospitality. Al Khidr responds:

This shall be where we part; now I will inform you of the significance which you did not have the patience for. Many acts which seem to be evil, or malicious, actually are merciful. The boat was damaged to prevent its owners from falling into the hands of a tyrant who seized every boat by force. And as for the boy, his parents were believers and we feared lest he should make disobedience and ingratitude to come upon them. God will replace the child with one better in purity, affection and obedience. As for the restored wall, the Servant explained that underneath the wall was a treasure belonging to two helpless orphans whose father was a righteous man. As God's envoy, the Servant restored the wall, showing God's kindness by rewarding the piety of the orphans' father, and so that when the wall becomes weak again and collapses, the orphans will be older and stronger and will take the treasure that belongs to them."¹³

While Tabari records the Qur'anic story, he attributes Khidr with being a companion of Abraham, not Moses. He goes on to say that Al Khidr is Persian while Ilyas, another figure associated with Al Khidr, was an Israelite prophet. By connecting Al Khidr to Abraham he dates him to the era of the mythic Iranian king, Afridun.¹⁴ In this way, the pre-Islamic Persian and Biblical are drawn into an Islamic narrative. The *Tarikh al Rasul wa al-Mulk* becomes not only a chronology leading up to Muhammad, but an attempt to imagine the Persianate people as part of the Islamic narrative, to genealogically link Persians, Jews, and Muhammad together.

A relative contemporary of Al Tabari, Al Hasan Ali ibn al Husayn ibn Ali al Masudi, writes "The Persians' ancestors would take themselves to the Sacred House and circumambulate

¹³ Qu'ran 18: 60-82.

¹⁴ Al Tabari, *Tarikh al Rasul wa al-Mulk*

it to honor their grandfather Abraham, to fast in his way, and to remember their genealogy.”¹⁵ Masudi links the Persians as kin to Muhammad, both having descended from Abraham. His account has the Persians performing rituals to “remember their genealogy.” The act of remembering constructs social links that fashion a collective identity. Persians, or *ahl Fars* were not a separate category, but related kin to Arabs. Peter Webb argues in his book *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* that Arabs were not a singular identity, but rather a construction intimately tied to the rise of Islam.¹⁶ Muslim historians like Al Tabari and Masudi are part of a literary attempt to fashion religious identity in the 9th to the 13th century. Just Arabs were being imagined so too were Persians, as related kin of Muhammad.

History as narrative is a literary tool of explanation, but is also the formalization of identity. The narrative process of integrating and locating Persians in an Islamic history constructs what Margaret Somers calls “narrative identity.” She says people make sense of their place by “numerous crosscutting relational story-lines in which social actors find or locate themselves.”¹⁷ Somers draws her theory of narrative identity from Maurice Halbwach’s work on “collective memory” an analytic category from which a social group becomes self-aware.¹⁸ Jan Assman further elaborate Halbwach’s theory, “Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social obligation. One has to remember in order to belong.”¹⁹ Al Tabari was of Persianate origin, born in Tabaristan while Masudi was born in Baghdad. Their works of history integrated fragments of pre-Islamic chronicles and stories, from oral accounts into an Islamic narrative,

¹⁵ Al Masudi, A Hasan Ali ibn al Husayn ibn Ali. *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma’adin al jawar*.

¹⁶ Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 177-178.

¹⁷ Margaret Sommers, “The Narrative Construction of Identity: A Relationship and Network Approach,” in *Theory and Society* 23: 5 (1994): 607.

¹⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992)

¹⁹ Jan Assman, “Communicative and Cultural Memory” in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning 109 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

locating Persianness within Islam as a category of Muslim belonging. The overarching universalist narrative was then localized.

In Balkh, Al Waiz's treaties exemplifies a similar process of integration. The collective memory of Balkh was fashioned out of various origin myths. In the *Fa'id al Balkh*, the author makes reference to a transmission,

“And to Hasan [al-] Basri, may God's Mercy be upon him, they attribute that Job, the Forbearer is in a city called Balkh, and that he lies in a place called *maydan*, and that it is said that Job, the Forebearer, and Gushtasp are both buried in the *maydan*. And one of the famous mosques is the Mosque of the Tomb (*maqbar*), and it is said that there is a tomb of a prophet in that mosque.²⁰

As in the previous chapter, Al Waiz draws together Biblical and Persian origin stories into an Islamic narrative. Maydan is a small village in the proximity of Balkh and part of the wider structure of the ancient city in modern day Afghanistan. According to Al Waiz, the famed Biblical figure of Job is buried in Maydan drawing the city into a Biblical imagination while articulating its religious importance. The narration claims that Maydan also contains the entombed body of Gushtasp the ancient Iranian King. Finally, there is a reference to a Mosque that memorializes the tomb of pre-Islamic figures. The building of the mosque enfolds the Biblical and Iranian into an Islamic framework. The pre-Islamic importance of Balkh is signified by a Muslim mosque memorializing its past. Al Waiz likely records what were common collective memories. He draws them together into a unified imagining that reinterprets the memories into an Islamic narrative. Disparate memory is drawn into a history, fashioning a Muslim present out of a pre-Islamic past. Al Waiz's follows a similar process to that of Al Tabari and Masudi, but on a local level. Through the act of remembering, Al Waiz fashions a local sense of integrated and stratigraphic belonging and locating Balkh in Islamic history.

²⁰ From Azad's translation in *Sacred Landscape in Medieval Afghanistan*, 74.

The local histories establish an intertextuality with the universalist history of Tabari to fashion a metanarrative.²¹ They fit within a cultural architectonic that provide a framework of understanding. For example, Narshakhi ties the city of Bukhara to Muhammad through an apocryphal hadith:

“The Prophet of God said that Gabriel told him that in the land of the East was a place called Khurusan. On the Day of Resurrection and Final Judgement, three cities of Khurusan will be adorned with red rubies and coral, and their radiance will shine about them. Around these cities there will be many angels, and they will praise, glorify, and exalt God. These angles will bring forth these cities onto the plains in grandeur and splendor, like a bride who is brought into the house of her betrothed... The Prophet said, ‘Oh Gabriel, tell me the names of these cities.’ Gabriel replied, ‘The name of one of these cities in Arabic is Qasimiya and in Persian Yishkard. The second name in Arabic is Sumran, in Persian Samarqand. The third in Arabic is Fakhira, and in Persian Bukhara.’ The Prophet asked, ‘Oh Gabriel why is it called Fakhira?’ Gabriel replied, ‘Because on the Day of Resurrection and Final Judgement, Bukhara shall excel all other cities in glory because of the multitude of martyrs buried there.’ The Prophet cried, ‘God bless the people of Fakhira and purify their hearts through fear of God. Improve their actions and make them among the merciful of my people.’” The significance of this is that from the east to the west it is attested that the people of Bukhara are noted for their belief and purity.”²²

Narshakhi draws Bukhara into the Islamic metanarrative, in which the local becomes linked to Muhammad himself creating a spiritual genealogy. Bukhara, on the edges of the Muslim world, is drawn into an Islamic imagination, transforming the peripheral city into a central site of spirituality. Bukhara by the time of Nashakhi was already a Muslim city, a bustling urban center of splendor and the heart of the Samanid Emirate. Yet, while apocryphal *hadith* articulates the

²¹ Senturk Recep, *Narrative Social Structure: Anatomy of the Hadith Transmission Network, 610-1505* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 34.

²² From Frye’s translation, 21-22.

importance of Bukhara, using memory to justify its contemporary centrality, its origins reveal a more negotiated self-identity.

Narshakhi writes, “The inhabitants of Bukhara converted to Islam but every time the Arabs withdrew, they became apostates. Qutaiba ibn Muslim converted to Islam three times, but they constantly became infidels.”²³ Conquest literature written centuries after the early Muslim expansions tend to over-emphasize military conquest as an attempt to valorize, lionize, and celebrate the past while justifying contemporary imperial domination.²⁴ Certainly militant piety was one of the mechanisms of navigating and reifying communal religious boundaries in Late Antiquity, but there was also space for negotiation.²⁵ Narshakhi writes about the pre-Islamic regent of Bukhara, Khatun, a powerful woman who ruled when her husband died and her son was young. In several instances, she defends Bukhara from Muslim invaders, but spends most of her time in negotiation. The emir of Khorasan, Sa’id ibn Uthman was sent to conquer Bukhara. Instead, he made peace with her. Narshakhi writes, “It is related by locals that Khatun was a beautiful woman of sweet disposition and Sa’id became enamored of her. The people of Bukhara had songs of this affair which they relate in their language.”²⁶ Contracts, bonds, negotiation, and force were all present as themes bringing Bukhara into the Islamic imagination. We see here again the role of gender in drawing the city into the Islamic fold. In previous chapters we read about brides on sedan chairs, metaphorically describing how a city would be elevated on the Day of Judgement. The gendered interpretation of Islamic eschatology was only one way of articulating a Muslim sense of belonging. Bukhara is narratively drawn into the fold of Islam

²³ Al Narshakhi *Tarikh-i Bukhara*

²⁴ See the recent work of Robert Hoyland’s *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* as well as Fred Donner’s *Narratives of Islamic Origin: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Writing* or Thomas Sizgorich’s work, “Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity”

²⁵ Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 145.

²⁶ Al Narshakhi *Tairkh-i Bukhara*

through the love between Khatun and Sa'id. In other words, the Islamic origins of Bukhara is understood through gender and love. The role of the affective in memory is a significant device in forging a sense of integrated and interconnected belonging.

Bukhara, Balkh, and the cities of Khorasan are drawn into a wider Islamic narrative. Their pre-Islamic roots are acknowledged, collected as a memory, codified, and located within an Islamic metanarrative. Al Tabari and Masudi both locate Persians within an unfolding Islamic history. Tabari's chronicle is an explanation of who Muslims were and that explanation included a link to Persians. On the other hand, local histories situate their cities and therefore their inhabitants into an Islamic chronology and in doing so link the city to *ard-Islam*, localizing the universal. The intertextuality between the universal history of Al Tabari and local *tarikh* fashion a narrative identity that at once is global and local. Persianness and Muslimness become interwoven as identities that integrate, negotiate, and construct a pluralist sense of belonging. The local inhabitant *belongs to ard-Islam*. In the geographic turn, Persianness is imaged as part of the category of Muslimness.

The intimate link between Persianness and Muslimness is expressed ultimately in the translation of the Qur'an into New Persian. Samanid emir, Mansur initiated the earliest translation of the Qur'an and its *tafsir* into Persian culminating with the work of the scholar, Najm al-Din Umar al Nasafi.²⁷ The translation of the Qur'an into Persian is a significant moment in Islamic history. Through translation, New Persian as a language is elevated to the level of Arabic. New Persian was a fusion combining the local Iranian dialect with Arabic script as a courtly language. While Arabic continued to be used in the court, New Persian made Islam and the Qur'an legible to ordinary people. Until this point the Qur'an was transcribed, read, and

²⁷ Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment*, 228

understood in Arabic. Scholars of Arabic who read and commented on the Qur'an were afforded exalted positions in society and had power to instruct in religious doctrine and rite to non-Arabic speakers.²⁸ The heart of Arabic translation and language was located in Baghdad with its great library. Religious authority rested in the hands of the caliph and his Arab scholars.²⁹ Translating the Qur'an challenged that authority and carved out a level of religious autonomy for the Samanid emirate. By translating religious texts, the people of the Samanid emirate did not need to rely on the scholars of far off Baghdad. Rather authority to interpret and understand the Qur'an was localized. By placing New Persian on par with Arabic, not only as a court language, but as a sacral tongue, the emir and his scholars negotiated autonomy and legitimacy within empire. The people of Khorasan were drawn into Muslimness, but a Muslimness that constructed a Persian identity alongside Arabic.

Before translation, the Samanid emirate relied on a literate class of scholars, the *ulema* and scribes, the *dabir* to mediate between Arabic texts and Persian understanding. The tenets of Islam were explained in Persian while prayers were recited in Arabic.³⁰ Despite a lack of an explicitly hierarchal clergy in Islam, the scholars of Baghdad held supremacy when it came to interpreting meaning and religious law. This power rested with the *ulema* and *dabir*. New Persian circumvented that supremacy, not by eliminating the literate class but by expanding it. The literate class of Arabic-speaking *ulema*, was expanded to include Persian-speakers.

The Samanid emirate also commissioned the translation of Al Tabari's *Tarikh al Rasul wa al-Mulk*. Samanid vizier, Muhammad Balami's translation, called *Tarikh-i Balam* or the *Tarikhnameh*, is not a direct word-for-word translation, but a conscious editing and reshaping the

²⁸ Richard Frye. *Bukhara*, 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*,

³⁰ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 77.

universal history presented in Tabari.³¹ Interestingly, Balami does not dedicate any more time to the pre-Islamic Iranian past than Tabari does. This likely indicates that by this point the integration of pre-Islamic Iranian past with Muslim present was taken for granted. Given the reception of Tabari and its widespread importance, it is likely his narrative was widely accepted. Instead, Balami focuses predominantly on the pre-Islamic prophets, reconnecting Persians to the spiritual genealogy of Muhammad. There is one major occurrence of a pre-Islamic Iranian reference in Balami's *Tarikhnameh* which details the life of the Samanid ancestor, Bahram Chobin. According to Balami, Bahram Chobin is sent by Hurmuz to defeat an invading army of Turks which he does handily.³² The story goes on to relate the break between Hurmuz and Chobin and the ascent of the latter. However, for our purposes the story of invading Turks is significant. The narrative identity within the *Tarikhnameh* constructs Persio-Muslimness as a category of belonging. The inhabitants of Khorasan under the Samanid emirate are Muslim and within the umbrella of Muslimness are Persian. The two are not seen as separate, but explained in the metanarrative of Tabari transmitted into Balami. Yet, Turkic invaders remain a point of anxiety as seen in the battle between Chobin and the invading army.

Limits of Identity

It would be a mistake to assume the Samanid emir was an all-powerful autocrat. The real power in the 10th century rested with the *ghilman*, Turkic slave-soldiers who served as the most significant military corps of the dynasty. In the account of Ibn Zafir al Azdi of the Samanids, Turkic slave soldiers are called “*arbab al mamlaka*” or the “lords of the kingdom.”³³ The Samanids who under Ismail Samani had promised to protect cities like Bukhara from Turkic

³¹ Peacock, *ACS Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 76.

³² Muhammad Balami, *Tarikhnameh II*.

³³ From Luke Treadwell's translation in *Studies in Honor of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, 410.

marauders employed the same policy of the Abbasids in importing Turkic *ghilman* for their military. While the *ghilman* were praised for their loyalty and fighting prowess, anxieties about their place in society were clear from their increasing power. Narshakhi recounts the tale of how Ismail's son, Ahmad ibn Ismail Samani was assassinated by his Turkic slaves. He writes, "When he fell asleep a group of the emir's slaves entered the tent and cut off his head."³⁴ Eventually, the Samanids would be overthrown by their own Turkic *ghilman*, their territories divided up among the Qarakhanids and the Ghaznavids with the later going on to unite all the former Samanid lands.³⁵

The *ghilman* were a product of a militarized but fluid border. In previous chapters we saw how Muslim geographers divided the world into regions with the land of the Turks as a separate, distinct realm from those territories that would come to be *mamlukat-al Islam*. The border between the land of the Turks and *mamlukat-al Islam* became a site of communal violence through the *ghazi*, warriors who performed *jihad* against outsiders. The conflict is interpreted as a religious obligation of *mamlukat-al Islam*, the means to protect the borders with the *dar-harb* or the "Abode of War." The division of the world into the Abode of War and the Abode of Peace is done as a jurisprudential category legitimizing just war, but does not map out onto the geographic imagining at the heart of our study. While some scholarship interpret the activities of the *ghazi* as militant piety or proselytization, scholars like Michael Bonner and Thomas Sizgorich point to a more complicated understanding with the *ghazi*'s war stemming from tribal raids and reinterpreted in the context of empires as the regulation of communal boundaries.³⁶ It is certainly possible the *ghazi* were drawn to the eastern edges of the Muslim empire to do warfare

³⁴ Narshakhi, *Tarikh-i Bukhara*

³⁵ Ira Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies*, 177.

³⁶ See the works of Robert Hoyland, name in *God's Path* as well as Michael Bonner's *Jihad in Islamic History* and Thomas Sizgorich's *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*.

with the Turks, but it is equally likely their war-making was a type of border-making, particularly when taken into consideration with the intellectual division of the world into separate sphere or realms. Warfare, the establishment of the caliphate, and the *ghazi* were all intimately tied to borders or frontier lands.³⁷ In the eastern part of the Islamic empire this meant the land of the Turks. Warfare was also the source of the *ghilman* themselves who were taken from conquered people, through war booty, or through contractual exchange.³⁸ The *ghilman* were then drawn into the Muslim regiments through conversion. The Turkic *ghulam* would become Muslim by entering Muslim lands, while the land of the Turks remained outside *mamulat-al Islam*. The *ghilman* were produced from violence, but integrated through narratives of an imagined Muslim homeland.

Writing in the 11th century, Abul al Fadl Beyhaqi describes the origins of the Ghazavid Emirate. He writes in the *Tarikh-i Beyhaqi* also known as *Tarikh-i Masudi* of a young Sebuktigin enslaved to his master, Alptigin. After a particular humiliating day, he has a dream:

“In a dream I saw Khidr come to me and ask ‘Why are you so sad?’ I reply to him ‘Because of my ill-fortune’ To which he replies ‘Do not despair, I bring good news, you will be a great and celebrated man, so much so that one day you will pass through these steppes with many important people and you will be at their head.’”³⁹

Sebuktigin spends his early life as a *ghulam*, a converted slave to his master. He ends up marrying his master’s daughter and founds the Ghaznavid dynasty. The recollection of the dream by Beyhaqi acts as a literary device, a prophecy that retroactively explains—in the Haydenian sense—the rise of the Ghaznavids, but also their place in the Islamic narrative. Khidr is an

³⁷ Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 133.

³⁸ ACS Peacock, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy*, 18.

³⁹ Beyhaqi, *Tarikh-i Masudi*, 203.

Islamic figure with deep connections to Sufism, a perennial prophetic teacher who took Moses on as his pupil. In Tabari we saw Khidr used to draw together Jewish and Iranian pasts into an Islamic narrative. With Beyhaqi we have similar process; the dream of Al Khidr is a literary device that draws the Turkic ancestor of the Ghaznavids into Perso-Muslimness. Beyhaqi, like the historians we have previously discussed was more a compiler of accounts and so it is likely the dream was part of the popular memory of the time. He formalizes the memory into *Tarikh* fashioning a narrative identity in which the rise of the former Turkic slave soldiers is articulated through an Islamic lens. The Ghaznavids are narratively drawn into the fold of Muslimness. Beyhaqi also mentions that Sabuktigin's other wife is an Iranian noble from Zabulistan. Therefore, his son, Mahmud of Ghazni, the first true independent ruler of the Ghaznavids who conquered the Samanid territories and expanded into India, was half-Persian. We find a similar story with one Israil ibn Seljuq. According to Beyhaqi Abu'l Fawaris abd Al Malik ibn al Rida, a local governor "came to the Ghuzz Turks whose leader was Israil ibn Seljuq... the leader converted to Islam and gave him his daughter in marriage."⁴⁰ I am less interested in mining Beyhaqi for factual details than the narrative strategies uses by the historian to create categories of integrated and stratigraphic belonging. Turks may have had their own homeland, but once they were brought into *mamlukat-al Islam* they were converted, married, and born into Muslimness. Their sense of Muslim belonging was interwoven with their adoption of Persianness.

The Ghaznavid's not only converted to Islam, but culturally continued many of the Samanid traditions and projects. They adopted New Persian as their language and as evidenced by Sabuktigin married into Persian lineages.⁴¹ Under the Ghaznavids the famed poet Ferdowsi

⁴⁰ Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*.,

⁴¹ Peacock, *ACS Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy*, 21.

composed his *Shahnameh*, an epic that straddles the boundary between poetry and history. Similar in style to the Latin *Aeneid*, or the Greek *Illiad*, the *Shahnameh* was written as an epic poem that recounted the origins and history of the Persian kings. Like Al Tabari's *Tarikh*, it begins in a mythic age, but the characters of the *Shahnameh* are not biblical prophets, but pre-Islamic monarchs and heroes. Its focus is not on the prophets or religious patriarchs, but specifically on the legendary kings of the Iranian empires who were geographically bound to a land called *Eranshahr*. Like Al Tabari's *Tarikh* it places the Samanids and therefore their successors, the Ghaznavids within a historical imagination. One which saw the Ghaznavids as the inheritors of the Sassanian legacy. Ferdowsi's poem is Persian in nature, recounted in New Persian but with Arabic loan words. The epic opens with both Islamic and what can be characterized as Zoroastrian invocations.⁴² It concludes with the coming of Islam. Therefore, though the focus of the *Shahnameh* is on the Persian kings, Islam bookends the epic. There is a teleology implicit in the narrative of the *Shahnameh*. It begins in a mythic age of Iranian kings which leads to the religious age of righteous prophets and caliphs.⁴³ The chronology of Tabari's *Tarikh* and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* match up relatively evenly. This is likely due similar source material. Both use fragments of the *Khuday-nama* or the "Book of Kings."⁴⁴ Ferdowsi and Tabari both provide a chronicle that shape narrative identity, they provide an explanation by situation peoples within a metanarrative. If Tabari was universalist history, then Ferdowsi provided the Ghaznavids the story of self-awareness.⁴⁵ Ferdowsi's epic, read as a product of the

⁴² *Shahnameh* i:9-11

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Savant, *New Muslims of Post Conquest Iran*, 34-35.

⁴⁵ See the works of Nizami as an example and for earliest examples of the narrative of the *Shahnameh* can be found in fragments of Daqiqi.

historical context of the Ghaznavid's provides ample evidence for the anxieties over the limits of Muslimness and Persianness.

We have previously cited some of the linguist anxieties in Ferdowsi. He writes,

“A mongrel people will appear
From the mixing of Persians, Turks, and Arabs
That will be neither Iranian, Nor Turk, nor Arab
Their words will be as worthless as gibberish.”⁴⁶

Attributed to Rostam, Ferdowsi uses the literary device of ancient prophecy to comment on contemporary anxieties. The Ghaznavids were Turkic *ghilman* who has usurped the Persian Samanid and in turn had themselves become Persian through adoption and marriage. The lineages present in Tabari already accounted for a genealogy that linked “Persianness” to “Muslimness” but could the integrated and interconnected categories of belonging extend to Turks. We saw in Jahiz that by entering the homeland, adopting languages, patronage, and marriage, Turks became Muslims and so became Persian.⁴⁷ But in the case of Ferdowsi the anxiety is present. He writes about the warrior-king, “Rostam took the fight to the Turan army, just as a leopard sights its prey.”⁴⁸ The ancient Iranian hero-kings were waging war with Turan, the land of the Turks. Narrative violence is used to reify the boundaries between Persians and Turks. Yet at the same time, the *Shahnameh* as ethnogenesis provides a genealogical connection. Rostam, from Eranshahr fights against the armies of Turan, with the latter viewed as outside the Iranian lands. Yet, according to the *Shahnameh* itself, King Fireydun divides all the world among his three sons, Iraj, Tur, Salm who go on to rule, Eranshahr, Turan, and Asia Minor respectively.⁴⁹ Ferdowsi's writing reflect both the anxiety about the limits of Muslimness and

⁴⁶ Ferdowsi, viii:419:105-106

⁴⁷ Al Jahiz *Risalah*

⁴⁸ Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Persianness, while simultaneously creating a Persianness that would narratively integrate Turks, in the same way Tabari narratively accommodates Muslimness to Persianness. If Tabari's work constructs an integrated category of Muslim belonging, the *Shahnameh* fashions an integrated category of Persian belonging within and under Muslimness. A constructed identity of Perso-Muslimness category of belonging is fashioned intimately linked to a Muslim homeland.

The borders between *mamlukat-al Islam* and the land of the Turks finds a parallel and equally complicated relationship with *al-hind*. The Ghaznavids consolidated the former Samanid territories and expanded into South Asia in a series of raids. The Ghaznavid expeditions have been interpreted and politicized by historians of India. In particular Mahmud of Ghazni's raid on the Somanatha Temple in 1026. Famed historian of early India, Romila Thapar notes that the raid on the temple becomes a symbolic event justifying communal and sectarian violence between Muslims and Hindus.⁵⁰ Her trenchant analysis points out that the events of Somanatha as trauma was first mentioned not in India, but in the House of Commons during the early stages of British colonialism in India.⁵¹ The events are bolstered by the chauvinist accounts of Turko-Persian historians. Writing after the fact and during the supremacy of the Ghaznavid emirate, their accounts exaggerate and magnify the events to glorify and justify empire much in the same way of earlier Muslim conquest literature or *futuh*. Thapar notes that the Arabic and Sanskrit sources are suspiciously silent of the event and that further the temple never stops functioning as a temple. This is not to say that the raid did not occur, but historicizing it is crucial. Later politicization of the events likely draw from the narrative strategies of the Turko-Persian historians themselves who use the event to shape ideas of homeland and the other. The royal poet, Farrukhi Sistani relates that the temple was not even Hindu, but dedicated to the pre-

⁵⁰ Romila Thapar, *Somanatha* (London: Verso, 2005), 164.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*,

Islamic Arabian goddess, Manat.⁵² The claim is likely fiction, but narratively and thematically casts the raid as the inheritor of the struggle against pre-Islamic Arabian pagan oppression. Mahmud of Ghazni is recast as the ideal Muslim ruler, a just and fair warrior waging *ghazw*. Violence is then used to affirm the borders between *al-hind* and *ard-Islam* between Hindu and Muslim. Yet, the categories of Muslim belonging are more abstract than the narratives of violence lead us to believe.

Beyhaqi writes that when the Turkic governor of Lahore, Yenaltegin rebelled, Sultan Mahmud turned to Tilak the Indian. Tilak is reputed to have said:

“May the lord’s life be long! I myself will go and perform this act of service so that I may fulfill my obligation of rendering thanks for the lord’s favor. I, myself, am from India and it is the host season, and I shall be better able to travel within the land.”⁵³

Sultan Mahmud praises Tilak for his eagerness, specifically as he is the only commander who steps forward. Little is known of the biography of Tilak, but it is mentioned he was the son of a barber in service of the local Turkic commander. He works his way up from tax-collector, to military commander, secretary, translator, and confidant of the sultan.⁵⁴ His name indicates he was likely Hindu himself, “*tilaka*” from the Sanskrit from “mark” referencing religious markings on the body. Tilak’s body is inscribed as other. He is Hindu, distinct from Muslims. Under the Samanids Turkic soldiers were converted to Islam; though the land of the Turk was separate from *ard-Islam*, entering Muslim realms they were Persianized and Islamized. Hindus on the other hand retained their own religious practices. Yet, they were also integrated into the Ghaznavid dynasty as important members of society. Hindus made up a large portion of the

⁵² F. Sistani in M. Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni* (Cambridge, 1931).

⁵³ Beyhaqi, *Tarikh-i Masudi*

⁵⁴ Mohammad Habib, *The Sultanate of Muhammad of Ghazni*, 63

Ghaznavid forces with their own regiments and their own commander, the *sipahsalar-i-hinuwan*, and continued to practice their religion.⁵⁵ Narratively we are told the borders between *ard-Islam* and *al-hind* were maintained through raids; violence used to forge a Persian-Muslim homeland as distinct from the land of Indians, yet we also read of the integration and inclusion of Hindus in Turko-Persian society. How can both be simultaneously be true? It is likely that we are seeing multiple socialized forces at work, on the one hand an attempt to forge a homeland integrating pastoral societies into a cosmopolitan culture, localizing the universalist sweep of Islamic history, creating a sense of integrative belonging through imagining homeland and narrative identity while simultaneously maintaining a vast commercial and imperial enterprise. Thapar notes wryly, that the materialist incentive of loot was likely as equally motivating as any religious zeal for the raids.⁵⁶ Indians, like Turks, had their own homeland and as in the case of Turkic lands, the border was porous allowing for movement and migration. Unlike Turks however, Indians kept their confessional religious identity.

Conclusion

In the *Shahnameh* Ferdowsi makes reference to a sense of recovering something lost. He is famously quoted as having said in the epic, *Basi ranj bordam dar in saal si, ajam zende kardam bedin parsi* meaning “Much toil I have endured for thirty years—I have revived Ajam through the Persian language.”⁵⁷ Two features of this quote stand out, the *ajam* and its connection to “Persian language” or *parsi*. Though boastful in tone, the claim is laden with a sense of loss, nostalgia, and recovery. He uses the word *ajam* to represent an imagined perennial Persian people, an Arabic word that referred to barbarians, foreigners, and simultaneously

⁵⁵ Thapar, *Somanatha*, 42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 98

⁵⁷ Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*

gestured to the Eastern parts of the wider Islamic world, i.e. Khorasan where the Samanid emirate was. *Ajam* also refers to a lack of language. Coming from the Arabic tri-literal root of *Aiyn, Jeem, Meem* it also forms the root of words like *musta'jim* or “mute.” The *ajam* then was a voiceless people, a people without a language. To Ferdowsi the *ajam* claim their voice through *parsi* or the Persian language. Language becomes the identifying feature of the *ajam*, or the Persian people. Ferdowsi imagines a Persian people stretching back to ancient and mythic times, ruled over by successions of heroic kings. Yet, the connection between the ancient Iranians and the Persians of the 10-13th century is a constructed one.

In ancient sources we find reference to both *eranshahr* and *er* but the idea of a singular continuous link between said ancient people is a product of a narrative identity constructed over the centuries. During the geographic turn, history-writing drew together fragments of older chronicles and local memory and sutured onto Jewish and Iranian narratives to construct a sense of integrated and stratigraphic belonging. The new categories of belonging constructed a sense of Muslimness and Persianness interwoven as related and inseparable categories.

The idea of a silenced and then recovered Iranian is a tantalizing nationalist myth that continues to find purchase.⁵⁸ Even theories of mnemohistory imply a sense of forgetting and recovering, or as Sarah Savant puts it, the “need to forget some elements of Iran’s past” to make room.⁵⁹ Narrative, nostalgia and a vague sense of forgetting or loss served the function of creating affective bonds between land and individual mediated by memory. The geographic turn is marked not with mass forgetting, but creative and constructive acts of recalling, of formalizing memory into history, and of drawing threads of the past together to fashion Muslim categories of belonging.

⁵⁸ Zarrinkoub, Abdolhossein, *Two Centuries of Silence*

⁵⁹ Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran*, 26.

Turkic *ghilman* were converted en mass. “During this period... two hundred thousand Turkic tents were converted to Islam.”⁶⁰ Mass movement of Turkic slave soldiers and a fragmented political core troubled the imagined boundaries of the Muslim world. Perso-Muslimness as a category of belonging to *ard-Islam* was constructed both as a result of the experience and as the mechanism to absorb Turkishness into Islam. Turks may have converted in large numbers, but the social process of conversation was far more drawn out. They were Islamized simultaneously as they were Persianized. Persian became the category of belonging that culturally drew in former Turkic slaves and transformed them into warriors and rulers for Islam.

⁶⁰ Ibn Zafir al Azdi's *Akhbar al duwal al munqita*.

Between Pan-Islamism and the Nation

When dark-clad, Rolex-wearing Al Baghdadi declared a new Islamic Caliphate, the frenzy of attention fixated on defining what a “caliphate” was. A related question, about Muslim-identity and its relationship to geography is the organizing query of this chapter. One of Daesh’s first acts was to film themselves bulldozing an empty plot of dirt between Iraq and Syria and declaring an end to the Sykes-Picot agreement.¹ Why was the abolishing of a historical border so important? How was colonialism an animating force in the 21st century? The invocation of a particular Muslimness grounded in religious solidarity in opposition to colonialism and nationalism has a long and important history. Similarly, the arrival of Daesh on the international stage has spawned countless monographs about the history of the idea of the caliphate. Less attention has been paid to the geographic imagining at the heart of Islamist project. While Daesh is not representative of Islam or Muslims as a whole, their ideology draws from a form of religious nationalism, though crude in interpretation. In the 19th and 20th century with the fragmenting of the last Muslim empires and in the context of encroaching European colonialism, Muslim thinkers reimagined religious solidarity against a backdrop of nationalism and colonialism as united by a shared territorial homeland and civilization. Land and history became the connectivity producing continuity in a time of political upheaval.

Scholarship on Muslim political projects of the modern era focuses entirely on the ways in which thinkers and reformers imagined the state or civil society. Recently, Cemil Aydin book *The Idea of the Muslim World* provided a crucial intervention into this historiography through an intellectual history of the concept of the “Muslim world” as a global community. His critical scholarship meticulously traced the origin of the “Muslim world” as a modern invention. He states, “Muslims did not imagine belonging to a global political unity until the peak of European

¹ Vice News. “Bulldozing the Border Between Iraq and Syria” [August 2014]. Youtube Video, 8:35. Posted [August 2014]. https://youtu.be/TxX_THjtXOw

hegemony in the late nineteenth century, when poor colonial conditions, European discourses of Muslim racial inferiority, and Muslim's theories of their own apparent decline nurtured the first arguments for pan-Islamic solidarity."² Aydin pinpoints the era of global imperialism as the origin of the idea of the Muslim world. His important intervention into the history of political pan-Islamism accurately depicts Muslim thinkers as responding to colonialism and racialization as the core motivators for their desire for political unity. However, the idea of a "Muslim realm" predates the 19th and 20th century. When Muslim political activists began speaking about a unified Islamic world, they turned not to Europe, but to their own past to fashion religious solidarity in the modern era.

The pre-modern "Muslim world" built a sense of belonging in which individuals separated by thousands of miles shared in a notion of Muslimness. Scholars from Bukhara to Qom to Baghdad would share textbooks, students would learn and therefore be adopted into lineages of sages stretching all the way back to Muhammad, while locals would imagine themselves as part of a unified territorial unit. By the time of Ibn Battuta, the Muslim world was imagined as interconnected and global, even as it was divided politically. The idea of a Muslim world is then drawn from the pre-modern to cope with the anxieties of colonial modernity.

Orientalist depictions of the Middle East as backwards and in need of salvation formed the backbone of the intellectual justifications for European colonialism. Of the "oriental" mind Ernest Renan once said, "What distinguishes the Muslim is the hatred of science..."³ He goes on to state, "Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race...a race of tillers of soil, the Negro...a race of masters and soldiers, the European race."⁴ Renan's writings were read by

² Cemil, Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*. Harvard, 3.

³ From Ernest Renan's famous lecture at Académie française the text of which was published in May 13th 1883 by *Journal des Débats*

⁴ Ernest Renan. "*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*" 1882.

Muslim thinkers who responded with their own polemics. Among the people who engaged with Renan's thinking was the famed Islamic political thinker and scholar, Sayyid Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani. The result is a discourse between pan-Islamists and European colonists, at times contradictory, but born within an intersection of colonial anxieties about land and identity. Al Afghani is a paradoxical figure; as the progenitor of the pan-Islamist project of the modern Middle East, I examine his writings alongside other pan-Islamists, centering their constructions of a geographic Muslim homeland in their anti-imperialist writings. Probing the writings of Al Afghani and his contemporary pan-Islamists, uncover the way they absorbed and received the architecture of *watan* and *ard-Islam* formulated in the post-caliphal moment and the how in turn they deploy it in redrawing the boundaries of the Muslim world. The connection is not linear, there is no direct line from the imagining of the post-caliphal *watan* and modern nationalist movements, rather ideas formed in the medieval era were part of a set of competing discourses floating in cultural understanding and intellectual writings that are repurposed and deployed in the modern era. The anti-imperial pan-Islamist project's goal was protecting the borders between Islam and Europe by dissolving internal boundaries deemed detrimental to unity, thus recovering an imagined global Muslim solidarity grounded in an unified "Islamic realm."

Scholars working on this subject have fallen into two camps. Nikki R. Keddie, the preeminent scholar of Iranian history argues that Al Afghani and similar pan-Islamists like Mirza Malkam Khan tended towards secularism and the cause of rationalism while employing a superficial religious rhetoric.⁵ For Keddie, Al Afghani is speaking truth when engaging with Europeans but dissembling when engaging with his fellow Muslims. In the second camp we have Margaret Kohn who argues the pan-Islamic project—and in particular Al Afghani's writing—

⁵ Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal Ad-Din Al Afghani: A Political Biography*, 90-91

recognized the usefulness of religious rhetoric in establishing solidarity. Margaret Kohn's proposal centers the political project of pan-Islamism. Much has been written about two of Al Afghani's letters: "Response to Ernest Renan" where he defends Islamic civilization while acknowledging religion as a stifling force" and "Refutation of the Materialist" in which he defends Islam as a religion. Rather than seeing contradiction in "Response to Ernest Renan" and "Refutation of the Materialist," Kohn aims to reconcile them by centering the political ideology expressed which she then links to Guizot's theories on the evolution of civilization.⁶ However, while Guizot's evolutionary approach to civilization is useful to understanding Al Afghani and the broader pan-Islamist project, it assumes Europe as the model for the Middle East, when in his own writing, Al Afghani takes a decidedly harsh approach to imitation. Pan-Islamist thinkers generally saw Europe not as a model, but a threat and uncritical emulation of Europe as signifying loss of culture.⁷ Certainly, Al Afghani and his colleagues thought that Islamic world could learn from Europe and he was inspired by European thinkers like Guizot, but he was not interested in following Europe's footsteps or transforming the Middle East into Europe. The entirety of the "Refutation of the Materialists" addresses this and he frequently clashes with individuals who are too pro-Europe. Other pan-Islamists like Rashid Rida went so far as to view Europeans as deliberately undermining Islamic education by interfering in the classic education of Muslims.⁸ For many pan-Islamists growing European hegemony might have provided the technologies of power and modernity, but not a model to emulate wholly.

Like Kohn, I approach the texts not as separate, but acknowledge an intertextuality that gesture towards the thinking process behind pan-Islamist constructions of an imagined territorial

⁶ Margaret Kohn, "Afghani on Empire, Islam, and Civilization," *Political Theory* vol. 37 no. 3 (2009): 399

⁷ See Al Afghani's "Refutation of the Materialists" and Rashid Rida's *Al-Manar*

⁸ Rashid Rida. "Al Lord Faruq Hidli wa Khuja Kamal ad-Din," *Al Manar*. (1923).

unity. I acknowledging the shifts and variations in his writings not as contradictions, but part of the constructed nature of his anti-imperial ideology aimed at preserving territorial integrity. By centering the discourse of place within the pan-Islamist project, we are able to untangle the complex genealogy of a Muslim homeland that situates it as a modern reception and deployment of an older pre-modern history and thus re-establish the links between modern political movements and their use of premodern history.

Nation-States and Colonialism

The backdrop of the anti-imperial pan-Islamic solidary project is deep-seated anxiety about colonialism and nationalism. The 19th century saw Ottoman imperial territories slip from their hands; the Balkans from 1828 to 1878 and North Africa from 1830-1882. In response to the loss of physical territory, Ottoman sultans turned to religion to create bonds of solidarity across geographic separation. Moshir ud-Dowla, an Iranian diplomat in Istanbul, wrote to Tehran saying that the vision of pan-Islamic unity was forged after the Ottomans lost their territories, going so far as to claim a parallel between pan-Islamism and the manner in which Germans forged a German state.⁹ The connection with nationalism is not novel; Nikkie Keddie has argued pan-Islamism as a type of proto-nationalism.¹⁰ More significantly, pan-Islamism is promulgated as an alternative *to* nationalism. The Balkan territories broke away under separatist and independent nationalist movements by formerly Christians subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Communities who initially operated under the millet system sought sovereign nation states. The ideology of pan-Islamism consequently is a redrawing of boundaries not just between nations, but between former religious subjects; between Muslims and Christians. The drive to create a unified polity that redraws religious boundaries from a previously multi-religious empire with

⁹ Ibrahim Safai. *Bargha-yi Tarkish*. (Tehran 1972), 115

¹⁰ Nikki Keddie. "Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism." *Journal of Modern History* Vol 41, No. 1 (1969): 17-28

sizable Christian populations into one unified by religious solidarity rested on exclusion of those same populations. The medieval imagining of the Muslim world, while drawing porous and flexible borders, was not predicated upon a civilizational clash, but imperial integration. In the era of colonialism, however, there is a clear anxiety about competing civilizations. Pan-Islamic religious solidarity was an alternative to *jinsiyya* or ethnic solidarity, which was equated with a pre-Islamic, backwards tribalism.¹¹ The geographic turn in the medieval Islamic world which produced a relatively inclusive and integrative sense of belonging was threatened by ethnic nationalist movements. If Muslimness was grounded in an imagined Muslim realm then any political project that threatened territorial integrity had to be resisted. The separatist nationalist movements were deemed a European interpolation—an intellectual and political ancillary to the machine of empire.

Many pan-Islamist thinkers were shaped by their experience with contested nationalisms and colonialism. Al Afghani spent his formative years in India, seeing British colonialism first hand. His chief concern was warning Muslims of the West’s “domination” over Muslim lands.¹² The positionality of India in the imagining of the Muslim realms is an interesting historical parallel to the way Muslims imagined *ard-Islam* during the geographic turn. If India ancientness and its proximity simultaneously flowed into Muslim realms and demarcated its boundary during the geographic turn, then in the modern era India’s liminal state was intimately part of the colonial anxiety. It was the British overthrow of the Mughals that worried people like Al Afghani. India was seen as a threshold from where colonialism could penetrate into the Muslim world. The positionality of India in the post-caliphal imagining as outside *mamlukat-al Islam* but

¹¹ Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani “Urwa al Wuthqa” No 2 (1884).

¹² Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani, “Lecture on Teaching and Learning,” *Maqalat-I Jamaliyyeh*

flowing into it, informs the sense that colonialism in India could bleed into Afghanistan, Iran etc. Pan-Islamists saw British colonialism as a territorial threat.

Rashid Rida famously said the, “British plot to colonize nations, to enslave people, and to destroy their governments and religions.”¹³ British colonialism was not an abstract threat, but a lived reality in India and Egypt as colonial officials governed over former Ottoman and Mughal territories. Pan-Islamism is in essence a transregional resistance movement to European imperialism; an appeal to religious solidarity in the face of fracturing Muslim empires and encroaching European colonialism.¹⁴ Wherever European colonists went, pan-Islamist sentiment flourished. Other pan-Islamists lived during Middle Eastern attempts at fashioning their own nationalisms, for example Mirza Khan lived during the Qajar dynasty’s nationalist project. Just as pan-Islamist ideas were etched with anxieties about colonialism so too was it a response to emerging nationalist ideas within the Muslim world and drew upon similar sentiments to craft an alternative.

From the Ottoman heartlands to Iran to North Africa, national aspirations carved empires into nascent nation states. In Egypt, the slogan of “Egypt for Egyptians” gained more and more purchased throughout the 19th and 20th century, while attempts at defining the Ottoman state along ethnic Turkish lines competed with Ottomanism.¹⁵ Anxiety about nationalism was intimately tied the desire to preserve an imagined territorial integrity. Al Afghani’s student and intellectual successor, Muhammad Abduh writes, “If anyone believes that the name of the fatherland, the interest of the country and other such resounding words can take the place of

¹³ Rashid Rida, “Taliq al Manar wa Tanbih al Muslimin al Aghrar.” *Al Manar*. (1929).

¹⁴ Keddie, “Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism,” 19

¹⁵ Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire*. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1997.

religion ... then he has strayed onto an evil path.”¹⁶ Muslim solidarity was defined along territorial terms as the political project working towards the preservation of the “Muslim world.”

The actual term for pan-Islamic solidarity, *iitihad-I Islam*, literally “Islamic unity” was coined by the Young Ottomans at the turn of the century.¹⁷ Proponents of pan-Islamism were less clear in the use of terms, interchangeably referring to the *iitihad-I Islam*, the *ummah*, and the *millet*.¹⁸ The *millet*, originally autonomous religious communities, became sites of national aspiration. The transformation of the *millet* into national movements is a well-documented history and the early references to the pan-Islamic community using similar terminology illustrates a growing national sentiment pan-Islamists were both responding to and integrating into their project. The pan-Islamic *millet* was an alternative to the ethnic *millet* with its nationalism, yet the appeal to religious solidarity simultaneously imagined a new Muslim polity that stretched across territories into Tartar Russia, British India, while redrawing a barrier with the Christian *millet*.¹⁹ To forge the new borders, pan-Islamists had to rethink the boundaries that kept them from unity.

The Prescription: Dissolving the Boundaries to Unity

On March 29th 1883, Ernest Renan delivered a series of popular lectures on the orient entitled “Islam and Science.” In it he states, “All who have been to the Orient or Africa are struck by what is the inevitably narrow-mindedness of a true believer, of that kind of iron ring around his head, making it absolutely closed to science, incapable of learning anything or of opening itself up to any new idea.”²⁰ The central thesis of his argument is that the oriental is

¹⁶ Muhammad ‘Abduh, 1887.

¹⁷ Serif Mardin. *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*. (Princeton, 1962), 59-60

¹⁸ See Al Afghani’s speech at a University in Istanbul in Osman Keskioglu’s *Ilahiyat Fakultesi Dergesi*

¹⁹ Rashid Rida, *Al Manar* (1929).

²⁰ From Ernest Renan’s famous lecture at Académie française the text of which was published in May 13th 1883 by *Journal des Débats*

intellectually different from the European and needed saving, going on to say, “Muslims are themselves the first victims of Islam.”²¹ The racialization of Muslims as part of a Semitic other was part of a broader discourse on race and the nation.

The very same *Journal des débats* which published the lectures of Renan also published Al Afghani’s response in May 1883. Almost all of Al Afghani’s thoughts are expressed in newspaper and journal publications or public lectures, though there is some doubt whether he wrote anything himself or it was transcribed by his student, Muhammad ‘Abduh. In his refutation, Al Afghani articulates a seeming defense of Islam by claiming that all religions stifle the progress of science, not just Islam. But he goes on to refute that the Orient was in dire need of saving. He states:

I will say that no people at their origin are capable of letting themselves be led by pure reason. Haunted by terrors that they cannot escape, they are incapable of distinguishing good from evil, of distinguishing that which could make them joyous from what which might be the undeniable source of their unhappiness and misfortune. It does not know ultimately, either how to trace back causes or to discern results.²²

His argument is structured by a teleological interpretation of the nation. His evolutionary understanding of civilization is rightly noted by Margaret Kohn as being inspired by Guizot, something she recognized from Albert Hourani’s mention of Al Afghani’s interest in Guizot’s writings.²³ But he is also invoking Ibn Khaldun’s understanding of civilization. A stagist and cyclical view of history that simultaneously reminds Renan that the Islamic world had already a taste of progress in its past and warns that it was merely a stage behind in the temporal scale and would soon catch up. Al Afghani, like many thinkers of his age, was educated in Islamic history

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani, “Exchange with Ernest Renan.” *Journal des Débats*, May 18th 1883.

²³ Kohn, “Afghani on Empire, Islam, and Civilization,” 412.

which from Al Tabari on envisioned Islamic civilization, and therefore Muslims, as the latest in a cycle of civilizations stretching back to the mythic Adam.²⁴ The chronological framework is one pan-Islamists accept as given from Al Tabari. The geographic turn absorbed Al Tabari's chronology as a way of integrating local histories into the universal Islamic narrative. In turn this formulation becomes part of Muslim understanding. Muslims were a product of a particular history, one in which thousands of years all led to the so-called golden age of Islam. In previous chapters we saw how the intertextuality of Al Tabari's universal history with local urban histories produced an integrated and interconnected sense of belonging that drew together pre-Islamic pasts into a Muslim present. Al Afghani's understanding of civilization and time attempts to revive and reclaim a similarly imagined past. His regularly reference to a height of knowledge and civilization in the past is taken as not merely apologia, but aspiration for the present. Yet, with the realities of British colonialism on the doorsteps of Muslim lands, where did that leave Muslims on the cycle of civilizations? His understanding of the past is interwoven with his objective of preserving an imagined Muslim territorial unity.

Al Afghani goes on to say, "The Arab people, while it was still in the state of barbarism, rushed into the road of intellectual and scientific progress with a rapidity only equaled by the speed of its conquests... One might say that in all this period the sciences made astonishing progress among the Arabs."²⁵ So while, Al Afghani agrees with Renan's diagnosis of the Orient languishing in a state of decay, he rejects Renan's prescription. The Orient did not need saving, and it certainly did not need European imperialists, it was merely a step behind in the evolution of civilizations. He also rejects Renan's racialization of the Muslim world. While Renan makes a

²⁴ J.S. Meisami, "Past in Service of Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia." *Poetics Today*, Vol 12, No. 2 (1993); p 247-275.

²⁵ Afghani, "Exchange with Ernest Renan."

distinction between Arab and Persian deeming the former Semitic and the latter Arayn, he places the blame of religious backwardness of the Semitic other. Al Afghani's defense of the Arab can be read as a rejection of European racialization. By also claiming civilizations move in cycles and through stages, he reinforces the Muslim world had already experienced progress once before and it could do so again. How, then could Muslims rekindle this spirit of progress and therefore protect the borders of Islam against imperial incursion? For pan-Islamists the key lay within dissolving the boundaries within-in the Islamic world; in other words, to protect the borders of Islam against European imperialism, Muslims must dissolve the barriers within its borders. They pinpoint three: the boundary between religion and science, the boundary between sects, and the boundary keeping women from education. By doing so, they could recreate the imagined territorial unity of the *mamlukat-al Islam*.

For many early pan-Islamists, Islam and science are compatible aspects of modernity. In *Lecture and Learning* we read, "The Islamic faith is the closest of religions to science and knowledge and there is no incompatibility between science and knowledge and the foundation of the Islamic faith."²⁶ While Renan sees Islam as inherently stifling science, pan-Islamists like Al Afghani invoke past Islamic learning to argue that the boundary between science and religion need not stifle progress. For both Renan and Al Afghani, Islam has an essence, but define that essence differently. Al Afghani says:

Islam is the only religion that censures belief without evidence and that follows these ideas: rejection of blind submission, and attempts to show the evidence of something to its followers, always appeals to reason, believes all happiness to come from wisdom and clarity, links suffering to ignorance and lack of knowledge, and establishes proofs for each fundamental article of faith so that it may be of use to the people. Indeed, when the Holy

²⁶ Al Afghani, "Lecture on Teaching and Learning," *Maqalat-I Jamaliyyeh*

Quran mentions its rules it states their purpose and benefit.²⁷

Though in his stance with Renan he acknowledges to some degree that scientific learning had become stilted, he also notes that progress is possible, specifically by recalling Islam's "golden age." He states:

Oh, sons of the East, do you not know the power of those in the West and that their domination over you comes through their advancements in learning and education and your own decline in these domains? Are you content after your past accomplishments after you had reached the peak of glory through knowledge and education that you now remain in a state of wretchedness cast into by your ignorance and error. Rise up brothers and make the effort to gain knowledge and [once more] become enlightened with the light of truth so that you may recover the glory and gain true independence.²⁸

While acknowledging the potential of the Islamic world to "recover the glory" and therefore move forward in the cycle of civilization, he constructs and imagines a pan-Islamic society, one where rationalism and religion are reconciled.²⁹ Education, pluralism, and enlightenment are adopted in the pan-Islamic movement as universalist ideals, but are re-imagined as Islamic in origin. The Shia pan-Islamist, Syed Ameer Ali describes Islam as having "a spirit" which he equates to universalist religions like Christianity and philosophical projects like the Enlightenment.³⁰ Islam is not merely compatible with science and rationalism, but is a religion of enlightenment itself. For Al Afghani and Syed Ameer Ali, Islamic tradition and civilization had

²⁷ Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani, "The Materialists in India." *Al- 'Urwah al-Wuthqa*. August 28th 1884.

²⁸ Jamal Ad Din Al Afghani. *Misr*. Alexandria, 1878.

²⁹ The concept of a "golden age" or a glorious past is a common theme among pan-Islamists but they disagree on which time period specific. Salafists tended to invoke the first and second generation of Muslims, while Al Afghani and his contemporaries invoke the height of the Abbasid Caliphate. See Ira Lapidus, "The Golden Age: The Political Concepts of Islam" in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol 524 (1992), p. 13-25.

³⁰ Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, 36

its own rival and parallel tradition to the European Enlightenment. Many of these apologetics refer to Islam's past relationship with science as a reminder of its potentiality.

Nostalgia is an important sentiment in the pan-Islamist understanding of history. While the geographic turn imbued the land itself with a vague sense of nostalgia, creating local sentiments of attachment to a broader sense of Muslim belonging, for pan-Islamists nostalgia was aspirational and cyclical. An imagined glorious past meant that Muslims could achieve greatness again if they would only remember. But nostalgia also implied a cyclical understanding of history; greatness is followed by forgetting and through forgetting civilizational decay, from which remembrance would offer salvation and the cycle would continue again. While Al Afghani admonishes his "sons of the east" to remember past glory, Muhammad Iqbal mourns previous declines when he remarks about the loss of Cordoba to Catholics.³¹ During the geographic turn nostalgia is used to create affective bonds, to integrate the local into the imperial communal Muslimness. For pan-Islamists nostalgia would revive the communal sense of Muslimness, a transregional sense of belonging and solidarity. The narrative of decline, nostalgia, and civilization are interwoven to fashion an aspiration sense of Muslim unity.

The second boundary, between nations is dissolved in a single polity, unified by Islam, regardless of national and sectarian boundaries. A unified Islamic world could successfully restore the light of progress in the Islamic world and therefore protect it from imperial machinations. Pan-Islamists employ the concept of *watan* as a unified territory; the beloved motherland of the Islamic East protected by a fraternity of brothers referred to as the "sons of the east".³² The sons of the east are not citizens of any one nation, but the enlightened guardians of a transregional ummah. Here Al Afghani himself is exemplary of the sons of the east. Deliberately

³¹ Muhammad Iqbal

³² Jamal Ad Din Al Afghani. *Misir*. Alexandria, 1878.

fashioning himself, liminal and international, his clothing is a mismatch of garb from various nations; robe from Egypt, turban from Iran, trousers from Afghanistan. He remarks about his ambiguity:

“The English people believe me a Russian
The Muslims think me a Zoroastrian
The Sunnis think me a Shi’i
And the Shi’is think me an enemy of Ali
Some of the friends of the four companions have believed me a
Wahhabi
Some of the virtuous Imamites have imagined me a Babi
The theists have imagined me a materialists
And the pious sinner bereft of piety...³³

Al Afghani’s experiences as a liminal figure in turn shape his project. Born likely in Iran, he experienced British colonialism in India, spent time as an adviser to the Afghan emir, traveled to Egypt, Europe, and Ottoman Istanbul. Pan-Islamists fashioned the new “Muslim” bound to an imagined territorial unity within the context of global imperialism. The invocation of enlightenment is deliberate, fashioning a parallel Muslim interpretation of the historical European Enlightenment. If Europe had Locke then Muslim would have their own enlightened sons of the east.

The third boundary that Al Afghani prescribes dissolving is the boundary that keeps women from education and science. In “Hakim ash-Sharq” which translates to “Wisdom of the East,” we read:

I am warning you gentlemen against thinking that you will attain the qualities of civilization, acquire knowledge, and advance toward progress and happiness if knowledge among you is confined to men; I am warning you that you should ignore that it is impossible for us to emerge from stupidity, from the prison of humiliation and distress, and from the depths of weakness and ignominy as long as women are deprived of rights and ignorant of

³³ Nikki Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din “Al Afghani”: A Political Biography*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 10.

their duties, for they are the mothers from whom will come elementary education and primary morality.³⁴

There is little evidence that various pan-Islamist groups actually interacted with women, but they become a metaphor for their anti-imperialist project, particularly given the way that gender was deployed in orientalist discourses. If the Muslim world was to ensure its borders with Europe remain intact, it must remove what orientalists saw as a marker of backwardness—that is women secluded from modern education. Coached in the language of women’s rights and duties, pan-Islamists imagined Muslim women educated in traditional Islamic principles and in contemporary sciences as the generational force of instruction for the “sons of East.” The productive labor of women is implicit; women’s access to education is intimately tied to their capacity as mothers. The emerging image is that of a unified Muslim world, populated by pedagogic mothers and guarded by enlightened “sons of the East.”

Reclaiming the Past

The dissolving of the three boundaries that divide up the Muslim world would have the prescribed effect of re-etching the boundaries between the Muslim world and the European. The etched line, or *khatt*, would affect a barrier safeguarding against imperial incursion. The core constitutive component of the pan-Islamist anti-imperial project is the reimagining of the Muslim. Implicit throughout their prescription is a deliberate construction of what it means to be Muslim.

According to Al Afghani, Muslims suffered from a historical amnesia that stripped them of important understandings of the self. This collective fugue erased not only the past, but Muslim identity. Recall his statement:

³⁴ Al Afghani, “Hakim ash-Sharq” *Misr*, Vol. II no. 47, May 24, 1897

Are you content after your past accomplishments after you had reached the peak of glory through knowledge and education that you now remain in a state of wretchedness cast into by your ignorance and error. Rise up brothers and make the effort to gain knowledge and [once more] become enlightened with the light of truth so that you may recover the glory and gain true independence.³⁵

The invocation of the past is structured by emplotment. Islam rose to greatness rapidly through knowledge, education, and enlightenment, but has now been cast into wretchedness through collective ignorance and forgetting.³⁶ Muslim identity is rooted in shared history or *tarikh*, a product of an evolution of civilization. The pan-Islamist political anti-imperialist project is entangled with their project of rekindling the supposed enlightened identity of Muslims found in their shared history, therefore jumpstarting the cycle back upwards. For many pan-Islamists, transregional Muslim identity is imagined as a fraternity of enlightened scholars. “The ulema of our time are like a very narrow wick on top of which is a very small flame that neither lights its surroundings nor gives light to others. A scholar is a true light if he is a true scholar. Thus, if a scholar is true he must shed light on the whole world.”³⁷ Examples of great scholars shedding light on the whole world are also found in Islam’s past. In *Mu’allim-I Shafiq* we read, “Is complete satisfaction to be found in the works of Al Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Bajja Shihab ad Din, Mir Baqir, Mulla Sadra, and other treatises and works concerned with philosophy, or is it not?”³⁸ Recovering enlightened identity therefore rekindles the civilizational cycle for “virtuous men whose life with brothers have reached this step of civilization is based on love, wisdom, and justice. This is the aim of the wise and the peak of human joy in the world.”³⁹ Rationality,

³⁵ Jamal Ad Din Al Afghani. *Misir*. Alexandria, 1878.

³⁶ A similar emplotment structures early Islamic history, with the pre-Islamic defined as a state of *jahiliya* or ignorance and Islam as call to remember what was forgotten, i.e. past revelations. See Al Tabari, Jahiz, and Fred Donner’s *Narratives of Islamic Origins*.

³⁷ Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani “Teaching and Learning,” November, 8th 1882.

³⁸ Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani, “The Benefits of Philosophy,” *Mu’allim-I Shafiq*.

³⁹ Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani, “The Materialists in India.” *Al- ‘Urwah al-Wuthqa*. August 28th 1884.

progress, enlightenment are figurative sites of memory, traces left within contemporary Islamic civilization. The forgotten past is a promissory, budding and embryonic. Recovering the past enlightenment is inscribed on the very essence of the “sons of the east” as reimagined global Muslims guarding the borders of a unified pan-Islamic Ummah, an ummah united through its past.

Pan-Islamists received the Islamic view of history that emerged in the post-caliphal moment, which integrated the pre-Islamic civilizations as part of the fabric upon which Islam was built. From Al-Tabari on, Muslim historians saw Islam as the final stage of a universal history. Pan-Islamists emphasized this shared history as they rallied support for their cause. In Egypt, pan-Islamists recalled the country’s pharaonic past, invoking past glories that should inspire Egyptians with pride.⁴⁰ The glorious past was aspiration and a rallying call, exhorting brothers to rise up and reclaim “glory and gain true independence.”⁴¹ History was not simply memory, but the key to unity. We see this explicitly when Al Afghani says, “A people without history are a people without glory.”⁴² The imagined glorious past became the source of continuity in an era of contested nationalisms and looming colonial powers.

Muslim Lands and Watan

Territoriality is at the heart of the pan-Islamic imagining of Muslimness. The Muslim is rooted in a homeland. Reviving and appropriating the discourse of place shaped in the post-caliphal experience, pan-Islamists reimagine the *watan* and the *mamlukat-al Islam*. The earliest attempts at pan-Islamic unity can be traced arguably to the Ottoman use of Islam to create solidarity in the face of the Crimean war and loss of territory to Russia. The event also saw a

⁴⁰ Salim al-Anhuri. *Tar'ikh al ustadh al-iman*. (Cairo, 1931).

⁴¹ Jamal Ad Din Al Afghani. *Misr*. Alexandria, 1878.

⁴² Al Afghani’s speech in Sylvia Haim’s *Arab Nationalism*

concerted effort to reinvigorate the title of the caliph. In the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca in 1774, the Ottoman sultan claimed the type of caliph, arguing he had dominion over all Muslims, stating explicitly “they [Tartars] shall regulate themselves, with respect to his Highness, in his capacity as the Grand Caliph of Muhammadanism.”⁴³ The attempt to redefine Muslimness along the lines of loyalty to the caliph recreates the way Muslimness was defined in early Islamic history.⁴⁴ Yet, the pan-Islamists also incorporate the post-caliph restructuring of Muslim identity as grounded in a shared homeland.

The re-emergence of the title of the caliph was viewed as a distinct threat to the Shia legitimacy in Iran. The Safavids had successfully converted the population, but in doing so had introduced a class of autonomous ulema who would outlive them as a political power base. Under the subsequent Qajar, the Shia ulema claimed for themselves the exclusive religious authority to interpret Shi’ism. The political utility of Shi’ism as religious legitimacy for the clerical and ruling class rested in its opposition to the Ottoman Sunnis. The symbiotic relationship between the Iranian state as the defenders of Shia Islam and the ulema as the interpreters of Shia Islam justified the existence of the Iranian state on its capacity to oppose the Ottomans.⁴⁵ Pan-Islamism, then, with its mission of erasing sectarian boundaries within to create solidarity was a direct threat to the Shia project of Iran. Yet, contrary to the elite opposition and state monitoring, Pan-Islamism found purchase among the population and in particular among reform-minded intellectuals. One of the early pioneers of the Constitutional Revolution, Mirza Yusef Khan Mostashar al Dowleh expressed a vision of pan-Islamic unity that joined Iran,

⁴³ “Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca,” 1774.

⁴⁴ Crone Patricia. *God’s Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2004.

⁴⁵ Ali Mozaffari. *Forming National Identity in Iran: The Idea of Homeland Derived from Ancient Persian and Islamic* (London: IB Tauris), 2014.

Afghanistan, and the Ottoman Empire into a fraternal alliance.⁴⁶ Iranian pan-Islamists would explicitly reject the manufactured sectarianism of the Ottomans and Safavids, threatening the claims of legitimacy of the state which was born through their role as the defenders of Shi'ism and Sunnism respectively.⁴⁷ The subversive rejection of the core claim of legitimacy of the state, did not translate to a reflexive rejection of the Iranian national aspirations, but rather shifted the Iranian state identity from one of antagonism towards the Ottomans to an imagined alliance grounded in shared religious identity and territorial unity. Central to pan-Islamic identity as a notion of a shared history; of a singular civilization that rose to great heights in a golden age but who had now lagged behind. History was embodied in the notion of a homeland that saw Ottomans and Iranian lands as a Muslim homeland. Homeland or *watan* was an imagined geography of Muslim realms. They simultaneously gestured to a single unified polity and a loose confederation of nations bound in shared history.

Many of the major thinkers of pan-Islamism wrote so from places of exile. The Iranian pan-Islamists and modernist, Mirza Malkam Khan, wrote from London. An Armenian Christian, he extolled the virtues of pan-Islamism while lambasting the Iranian state. Writing in *Qanun*, he states, "A great gathering of the people of Iran has been drawn from their familiar homeland for a number of reasons and has been scattered among foreign countries."⁴⁸ While Mirza Malkam Khan penned in London, Mirza Mohammad Amin al-Tojjar wrote his pan-Islamist *Da'vat al-Islam* in British Bombay in Urdu and Persian. Sayyid Jamal ad-Din Al Afghani, on the other hand, wandered aimlessly from India to Afghanistan to Egypt, to Istanbul. Their own lack of a homeland, or sense of loss paralleled and perhaps animated their anxieties about loss of territory

⁴⁶ Nazim ul Islam Kerami. *Tarikh-I Bidari-yi Iran* (Tehran, 1983), p. 176

⁴⁷ Abdol Rahim Talibov-I Tabrizi. *Massalik ul-Muhsnin* (Tehran), p. 52

⁴⁸ Mirza Malkam Khan. *Qanun* (Tehran, 1976).

to colonists. At the heart of their writing was a political solidarity founded in a shared religious identity and longing for a lost homeland. Deterritorialization and the looming threat of European colonialism shaped the anxieties of pan-Islamic thinkers as their discourse increasingly imagined a *watan* lost, a *watan* under strain, and a *watan* that could be recovered, if only the Muslims could unite.

Watan as homeland is a nebulous concept among pan-Islamic thinkers. Like their predecessors in the post-caliphal moment who articulated a Muslim identity grounded in longing for watan, the pan-Islamic thinkers imagined an Islamic realm, but it was unclear how such a territory was to be governed.⁴⁹ Contrary to contemporary Islamist parties, the earlier pan-Islamists were less interested in the mechanics of governance and more consumed by a sense of loss. Articulating the colonial anxieties of their era, they dreamed of preserving the territorial integrity of what they deemed Muslim lands. In the works of Al Afghani in particular, *watan* and *millet*, that is a people, are tied together. In this formulation, a people belong to a homeland, their identity is defined by that homeland. Similar sentiment can be found in Mirza Malkam Khan's *Qanun*.

Conclusion

As the large Muslim empires faced political fragmentation under the intersecting forces of European colonialism and ethnic nationalist movements, Muslims reimagined communal Muslimness and its relationship to geography and civilisation. To preserve the integrity of the boundaries between a constructed Islamic realm and Europe, they turned to the pan-Islamists, activists and political thinkers who invoked a glorious past grounded in territorial homeland to weave together religious solidarity. Their speeches and writings all share a common goal of

⁴⁹ Zayde Antrim. *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2012.

protecting what they saw as the deteriorating border between the Muslim world and Europe. In order to keep what was happening in India from happening in the rest of the Muslim world, they prescribe a religious unity that crosses transregional boundaries, sectarian differences, and imperial difference. By dissolving the internal divisions between rationality and religion, the boundaries between sects, and promoting women's access to education, they could create a united enlightened ummah. Some like, Al Afghani, recognizing Ernest Renan's description of the Orient as the language of empire, remind the orientalist and his fellow Muslims, that while true that the so-called Orient had lagged behind, that it could be restored to glory and therefore safeguard its borders. Pan-Islamists turned to history for inspiration and their writings gained mass popular appeal, inspiring later Islamic reformist movements, and their thought was even co-opted in nationalist projects who employed similar appeals to history and homeland to craft civic identities. While speaking about Islam, most pan-Islamists actually address European audiences, or are aware of the colonial gaze. Their writings, even when addressing fellow Muslims, are shaped by an awareness of the polemics and discourse of Europe. Pan-Islamism is often seen as a merely a political project, but the anxieties the movement addresses—namely the restructuring of Muslimness within the context of colonialism and nationalism endure culturally as well as politically in the Muslim world.

Conclusion

In 1258 CE, the Mongols swept through Khorasan right up to political heart of the Muslim world. The great khan demanded the caliph to tear down the walls of the magnificent city, but the caliph demurred. In response the Mongols laid siege to the city, overwhelming its defenders, and destroying the remnants of the Muslim armies. The Mongol cavalry with their lethal composite bows were a devastating force. They ransacked Baghdad and took its caliph captive. Bound by ancient Mongol law to not spill the blood of a king, they wrapped him in a carpet and trampled him with their horses, bringing the institution that had led the Muslim community and its empires for six centuries to an end.¹ The title of caliph fell out of favor and was replaced by that of “sultan.” Muslims had already begun restructuring communal identity around loyalty and belonging to land centuries before the caliphate ended and so the new land-based empires were a natural extension of a long process of transformation. Six hundred years later, as the Ottoman Empire was dying, Britain, France, and Russia carved up several periphery territories in North Africa and the Caucasus. In an attempt to salvage the loss, the Ottoman sultans sought to revive the ancient Islamic title of the caliph. Yet, for much of the Muslim world the caliphate no longer held the organizing or mobilizing zeal of centuries past. The Ottoman caliphs in Anatolia would find their strongest allies thousands of miles away in India.

The Khalifat Movement was a broadly organized group who expressed solidarity with the Ottoman caliph while resisting British colonialism. Maulana Muhammad Ali Johar founds the group as an attempt to revive and reconstitute the caliphate. He was joined by several prominent Muslims, but also by Chittaranja Das, a Hindu poet. The Khalifat Movement worked closely with Gandhi’s Indian National Congress and was a pivotal part of the Hindu-Muslim unity which

¹ There are conflicting reports of the death of Mustasim, reports from Marco Polo claim that he was forced to live off his amassed wealth, while other reports claim the gold was melted down and fed to him.

successfully resisted British colonialism.² This unity however does not last. Under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the All-India Muslim League won a series of elections leading to an evolution of its stance from a united and free India to separate homelands for Muslims and Hindus. In a famous speech on December 6th 1945, he stated, “It is high time the British Government applied their minds definitively to the division of India and the establishment of Pakistan and Hindustan.”³ Jinnah was eventually successful and Northern India was partitioned into Pakistan named after the idea of “*khak-i pak*” the premodern concept of a pure land. And purification is exactly what happens, with a massive ethnic cleansing of Hindus and Muslims and communal violence on either side. The twist of irony is the use of *pak* to mean “pure.” During the geographic turn, *pak*, as pure land meant not the process of purifying the land, but a recognition that the land was pure already. The Islamization of sacred sites was not the erasure of its Buddhist past, but the integration of that past. In the 20th century the politicization of purity birthed communal violence. Today the politicization of Islam and Hinduism has plagued Pakistan and India both. It is unclear if Jinnah had intended partition from the start and the evolution of the Muslim-Hindu unity into politicized communal violence is a long and complicated history.⁴

The partition of India also had consequences for the Sikh community. Writing in the *Liberator*, the spokesperson for the community argued, “To say the least, it is highly disappointing from the Sikh’s point of views- A clever British I lawyer has deprived us of our innumerable holy shrines, including our Mecca and Jerusalem, Sri Nankana Sahib, and more than 70 per cent, of our holdings just with one stroke of his pen. Can any Sikh tolerate this intolerable position?”⁵ Once more we see the reference to Jerusalem and Mecca as markers of an

² Gail Minault, *Khalifat Movement*, 92-95.

³ Muhammad Jinnah Ali, December 6th 1945.

⁴ R. J. Moore, “Jinnah and the Pakistan Demand.” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol 17, No 4 (1983)

⁵ *Liberator*, September 21 1947

imagined territorial and spiritual unity. The argument is that the division of land, interferes with networks of pilgrimage that forged territorial unity. Geographic imagination that emerged in the premodern Perso-Islamic world is appropriated and deployed repeatedly in the nationalist discourse of the 20th century.

In turn for some in the Hindu community the past events of Samonatha become symbolic of an Islamic past that must be expunged. Mahmud of Ghazni is selectively remembered as emblematic of Muslim violence and exclusion while Thilak and his relationship to Mahmud is silenced.⁶ Instead, the complex history and territorial imagining of the geographic turn is politicized into claims of genocide, with polemicists like Daniel Pipes and prominent Hindu nationalist blogs encouraging anti-Muslim sentiment.⁷ Just as Pakistan becomes a land “purified” so too in India, Islam is made foreign.

The experience is not unique to South Asia but partition and the subsequent politics of Pakistan and India invoke a particularly illustrative example of the way in which complicated premodern history is drawn into the modern discourse, politicized, and deployed as justification for contemporary narratives of communal boundaries.

Meanwhile from North Africa to Afghanistan Islamist groups imagine a Muslim heartland drawn from the writings and experience of the geographic turn. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, fighters from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Yemen, Chechnya, and all over the Middle East flocked to the small nation to join the *mujahideen* or resistance fighters. Despite having no real political, social, or cultural connections to Afghanistan, there was an intentional promotion of the resistance as a fight for the territorial integrity of a “the Muslim world.”⁸ Such a

⁶ Romila Thapar, *Somanatha*, 197.

⁷ See <http://www.danielpipes.org/comments/45331>

⁸ Barfield, Thomas, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 236.

world may not have existed, but drew upon the discourses of an imagined and unified territorial Muslim homeland to animate fervor for *jihad*. Just as in times past, Muslim warriors flocked to a frontier to protect the integrity of their lands against what they deemed foreign.

The so-called Muslim world was divided from the very beginning. Rival claimants to leadership, competing caliphates, and clashing land empires all divided the imagined territorial unity of the Muslim world. Yet, despite political division an imagined sense of unity emerged in the 10th-13th centuries as part of a discourse addressing the lived realities of a changing world in which the caliphate was fracturing and massive demographic changes forced Muslims to rethink the categories of belonging. The imagining of a Muslim homeland allowed Muslims to absorb these changes while reifying the boundaries of their territorial empires. The imagined geography became an important part of Muslim discourse, waxing and waning with changing political tides, but present in cultural, social, and intellectual understanding of the relationship between Muslims and the land itself.

There remains a lacuna in the scholarship on this topic and this dissertation is only a drop in a much larger bucket. Further scholarship can open up doors in multiple directions. Cultural and intellectual histories of how homeland was depicted throughout the centuries offers a chance to examine cartographic and artistic expression, while histories of political thought can explore the ways in which the empires of the early modern era imagined a Muslim homeland and contested legitimacy. Histories of terrorism can examine the ways in which political violence is used as justification for an imagined homeland. The opportunity for further scholarship is diverse, but require a reentering of geographic imagination as a lens of analysis. By using both the discourse of the geographic turn and the categories of Muslim belonging as a starting point for further scholarship, historians can uncover nuanced and complicated expressions

Muslimness, its relationship to land, identity, and politics. Recognizing the impact of the geographic turn, we can interrogate the way in which Muslimness as a category of belonging interacted at the local level to engender broader universal connectivity while discussing a Muslim politics that goes beyond the caliphate.

At its genealogical root, the imagined homeland was part of restructuring Muslim categories of belonging into what I called, Perso-Muslimness, a mechanism that absorbed local populations into an integrative and pluralistic umbrella of Muslimness. In the modern era, homeland was politicized into movements of anti-colonialism and exclusion. The history linking these two periods is not a long, unbroken chain, nor a teleology as the past does not give way to the present in uninvertible unfolding, but rather competing notions of belonging, overlapping imaginings of nation, homeland, and global community formed the cultural and intellectual underpinnings of modern understanding and were consciously deployed in political projects. This is a history that is very much alive. It is at the heart of Muslim politics in a variety of discursive formulations, or articulated intentionally. From invocations of Muslim solidarity with Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan, or other war-torn lands, to the explicit call for a Muslim homeland among insurgent groups, the idea of a Muslim homeland is a central animating force.

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