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From Albania to Arrān

**The East Caucasus between the Ancient and Islamic Worlds
(ca. 330 BCE–1000 CE)**

Edited by

Robert G. Hoyland

**GORGias
PRESS**
2020

Albanian communities led to a spiraling political fragmentation that cannot make sense of a singular Albania, built conceptually and geographically on scaffolded texts instead of common characteristics that might serve to unify a province.

4. "THE WALL OF ROCK AND LEAD:" ABBASID REFLECTIONS ON SASANIAN CAUCASIAN POLICY IN ARRĀN¹

RYAN J. LYNCH

The early Islamic narrative sources often give the impression that the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods consisted of a homogeneously-ruled empire with legal requirements and expectations that were largely uniform across conquered places and peoples. When frontier territories are considered, however, this consistency is often shattered. The reader finds a variety of terms used to refer to the contested frontier territories between the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphate (*'awāṣim*, *thughūr*), for instance. Furthermore, the means by which these territories were protected and managed frequently varied considerably.² In the case of a growing empire like that of the Umayyads, where borders were spread over a huge geographic area and a variety of peoples, speaking of "borderlands" as consistent, monolithic territories is also counter-intuitive. Frontiers were liminal spaces, unlike much of the central lands of these empires. But for outsiders – people not from the region, or people with only a tangential understanding of the traditions, languages and influences that shaped an area – reflecting on how these contemporary realities came to pass was a particularly difficult task.

This chapter will primarily be concerned with the historical memory of late antique and early medieval Caucasia, including the territories of Armenia and Arrān (often referred to as "Caucasian Albania"). While a contested area between the influence of Byzantium and the Caliphate during the seventh-tenth centuries CE, it was a region with a long history as a liminal space. This was a territory that maintained the memory and influence of three groups prior to their existing situation: the local indigenous populations, the Sasanian Persians, who had ruled much of the territory before the rise of Islam, and the tribes that inhabited – and regularly raided – portions of the

¹ I would like to thank Robert Hoyland and Alison Vacca for their comments on early drafts of this article as well as to those of participants in the inaugural Nizami Ganjavi Workshop at the University of Oxford in 2015. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own.

² Michael Bonner, "The Naming of the Frontier: *Awāṣim*, *Thughūr*, and the Arab Geographers," *BSOAS* 57.1 (1994), 17–24.

region. While much has recently been done to further the study of the people and places that made up the Caucasus from the perspective of the people living in this region, this chapter will be focused on what we can say about the much-used Muslim historians' reflections on the region's history. It will serve primarily as an analysis of important early Islamic writings on the political, administrative, and social policies in the area during this period by Abbasid-era scholars primarily working in the ninth and early tenth centuries. In particular, it will focus on the accounts provided by the Abbasid secretary Balādhurī (d. ca. 892) in his chapter on "The Conquest of Armenia"³ in the *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān* ("The Book of the Conquests of the Lands"), which proposes that the fortifications of the region relied on by the Abbasids was a continuation of policy and practice originally instituted by the Sasanians. The traditions at the outset of this section will be detailed and a discussion of their content and their transmission history will be provided as an attempt to understand where Balādhurī received his information from, why he chose to organize it in the way he did and why his writing likely represents memory contemporary to his lifetime rather than a convincing recollection of past realities.

BALĀDHURĪ'S CHAPTER ON THE CONQUEST OF ARMENIA

Balādhurī's material on the early Islamic period has long been recognized to be of paramount importance in the discussion of seventh and eighth century Islamic history. His traditions on the Caucasus are among the earliest Muslim reflections on the region and its governance during late antiquity. He opens his section on Armenia in a way that is immediately unique compared to the rest of the *Futūḥ*. In his chain of transmission (*isnād*) which begins the chapter, he promptly specifies that he is providing these traditions in a compound, abbreviated form known as *ikhtisār*:

Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl informed me, on the authority of Sākanā of Bardha'a and others on the authority of Abū Barā' 'Anbasa b. Baḥr al-Armanī. Muḥammad b. Bishr al-Qālī also informed me on the authority of his teachers (*ashyākh*): Barmak b. 'Abd Allāh al-Dabīlī, Muḥammad b. al-Khayyas al-Khilāfī among others, on the authority of learned people concerning the affairs of Armenia. I have brought together their traditions, and I have gone repeatedly between them here (*raddadtu min ba'dihī 'alā ba'd*). They said (*qālū*):...⁴

³ Arab. Armīniyya, which generally designated all of the Muslim-ruled Caucasus in the early Islamic period, either by synecdoche (i.e. the region of Armenia standing for the Caucasus as whole) or because of some long-standing tradition (Rapp in ch. 8 below, n. 44, observes that Old Persian Armina referred to "all Achaemenid domains in Caucasia and not just those in Armenia"; see also ch. 3 by Vacca above).

⁴ Balādhurī, 193 (tr. Hitti, 305). It is worth noting here, for the benefit of the reader of Hitti's English translation, that Hitti does not provide any full chains of transmission in his version of the text even when Balādhurī himself did so. Instead, he only provides Balādhurī's immediate informant and the originator of the information.

This is, from the outset, very unusual for the *Futūḥ*. The only other time Balādhurī is explicit in his use of *ikhtisār* is at the very beginning of his book, where the first chapter on Medina opens with the line "Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir [Balādhurī] says: I have been informed by men knowledgeable about traditions (*ḥadīth*), biography (*sīra*) and the conquest of lands (*futūḥ al-buldān*), and I have brought together their traditions and I go repeatedly between them here...⁵ Balādhurī chose to introduce the overwhelming majority of the traditions in the *Futūḥ* in one of two ways: either he provided a standard chain of transmission, which served as a roadmap from Balādhurī's informant to the origin of that piece of information, or he adduced the tradition with a simple "they said" (*qālū*). Neither form is found in the opening section on Armenia, which contains all of the pre-Islamic material.

Furthermore, it is immediately apparent that Balādhurī relied on informants for this information on "Armenia" who were completely separate from those he named elsewhere in the *Futūḥ*. Both Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl and Muḥammad b. Bishr al-Qālī appear nowhere else within the text as informants for Balādhurī's traditions. Due to this uniqueness, it is extremely difficult to identify precisely the sources of this information or to speculate fully on their validity. However, the names listed, which all betray local origins, would strongly suggest indigenous scholars of the history of the region with access to traditions outside the circle of established Muslim scholarship. The very fact that Balādhurī chose to break from his own established pattern in only this section of the *Futūḥ* makes these traditions tremendously thought-provoking. It presents interesting questions about not just where he obtained this information, but why he chose to include it at all. Yet the peculiarities of the *Futūḥ*'s section on Armenia do not end here.

The traditions at the opening of "The Conquest of Armenia" are the only extended passages of pre-Islamic material that Balādhurī includes in the entirety of the *Futūḥ*. The other rare inclusions of pre-Islamic material are only passing mentions and are typically intended to demonstrate change in the status of a region, people or facility, and most often detail the origin of something. For instance, in his chapter on the dams in the marshlands of southern Iraq, he notes how they fared in the time of the Sasanian emperors Kawād (488–531; Arab. Qubādh) and Khusraw Anūshirwān (531–79) before discussing their fate during the time of the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 714) and the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (754–75).⁶ Elsewhere, in discussing the origins of the contemporary population of Sinjār in the Jazīra, Balādhurī provides a tradition that originates with the elders of the people of Sinjār (*'an mashāyikh min abl sinjār*) on how Khusraw Abarwīz (591–628) intended to put to death 100 Persians for rebelling before being convinced to have them participate in his conquest of Sinjār instead, and thereafter "they settled and they multiplied" in the town.⁷ Both of these sections, however, include only a few lines of Arabic on the pre-Islamic past, whereas

⁵ Both this sentence and the one at the beginning of his section on Armenia quoted above contain the expression *suqtu ḥadīthabun wa-raddadtu min ba'dihī 'alā ba'd*, which conveys the point that Balādhurī weaved together the reports of the different transmitters into a single narrative rather than presenting their reports separately.

⁶ Balādhurī, 292 (tr. Hitti, 453).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 177 (tr. Hitti, 277).

the pre-Islamic material from the opening of the *Futūḥ*'s section on Armenia constitutes two to three folios of the surviving manuscripts.

In both of these cases, Balādhurī's decision to include this material can be explained by an intention to show the development of the realities which were found in the early Islamic period, long before Balādhurī's own lifetime. In the case of the *Futūḥ*'s traditions on southern Iraq and its irrigation system, the development and changes of this system from the Sasanian period into the Abbasid period were particularly relevant for the level of taxation which could be expected from the region. To emphasize this point, Balādhurī ends his discussion of the region with an account of the investment by Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 738/121) of three million dirhams on land reclamation in the area in order to receive it as a *qaṭī'a* (land grant),⁸ which later became the property of the Abbasid state upon the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty.⁹ This deployment of small amounts of pre-Islamic material by Balādhurī in his text is useful to keep in mind as his traditions on the Caucasus are considered.

THE CONQUEST OF THE CAUCASUS

Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* purports to provide a significant amount of detail on the political situation in the Caucasus from the perspective of the Sasanian state, in particular, during the reigns of Kawād and Khusraw Anūshirwān. The traditions Balādhurī provides begin with the explanation that "Armenia" was divided into four provinces, listed as Armenia I-IV. An immediate issue of concern expressed by Tim Greenwood and others is precisely what "Armenia" constituted in this period when an author used this term,¹⁰ especially as the regions of the northern and eastern Caucasus are often grouped together as 'Armenia' despite the unique identities of the people in the region during the lifetime of the author. That Balādhurī's contemporary and near contemporary authors of geographies do not often provide lengthy geographic descriptors about where particular locations are to be found is also an issue, as Alison Vacca has observed.¹¹

The bulk of the region, we are informed by the *Futūḥ*, was "in the hands of the Romans" and governed by "the governor (*ṣāḥib*) of Armaniyāqus."¹² The exceptions

⁸ Hugh Kennedy has written extensively on the system of land grants and their repercussions in the early Abbasid period. See, in particular, his "The Feeding of the Five Hundred Thousand: Cities and Agriculture in Early Islamic Mesopotamia," *Iraq* 73 (2011), 177–99, esp. 181–82.

⁹ Balādhurī, 294 (tr. Hitti, 456).

¹⁰ Tim Greenwood, "Armenian Neighbours (600–1045)," in J. Shephard, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492* (Cambridge, 2008), 333–64.

¹¹ See ch. 3 above, where she notes Balādhurī's "remarkable knowledge of seventh-century Albanian geography that does not enter the mainstream Arabic geographical tradition," and her *Non-Muslim Provinces Under Early Islam: Islamic Rule and Iranian Legitimacy in Armenia and Caucasian Albania* (Cambridge, 2017), 43–77.

¹² For elaboration on this see Walter Kaegi, "Balādhurī and the Armeniak Theme," *Byzantion* 38.1 (1968), 273–77.

were the regions of Jurzān, which Balādhurī states constituted the entirety of Armenia II, and Arrān, both of which were "in the hands of the Khazars."¹³ While the information about the division of the region seems useful, Balādhurī does not explain whether this division pertained to his own lifetime, or whether it represented the administrative divisions of the Umayyad or pre-Islamic periods, or if he considered that the same division had endured across this span of time. The tradition seems to serve as a framing device to allow the reader to digest the regions he spends the rest of the chapter discussing, and the mention of the Khazars holding such a considerable amount of territory already would suggest that the tradition represents an Abbasid reality, when an independent Khazar state was in place. At the same time, however, such an anachronism is not unheard of in early Arabic historical texts concerning the borderlands, and Michael Bonner has highlighted such a discrepancy in the *Ta'rikh* of Ya'qūbī (fl. late ninth/third century), who projects the existence of a distinct frontier region (*al-awāsim*) as far back as the reign of Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān.¹⁴

The next two large accounts transmitted by Balādhurī discuss the problems the Sasanians faced in managing the northern frontier and the threat of tribal raiding from the Caucasus, which "reached Dīnawar," in western Iran. This harassment, Balādhurī informs us, was what led Kawād to send an army of 12,000 men to attack the Khazars, whom the tradition blames for these attacks against the Sasanians. Kawād's men invaded (*waṭi'a*) Arrān and conquered (*fataḥa*) the region that lay between the "river known as al-Ras," the Araxes, and Sharwān, the coastal region of eastern Arrān. We are then told:

Kawād met him [the general he sent to the region] and he built in Arrān the city of Baylaqān, the city of Bardha'a – which is the [chief] city over the entirety of the frontier – and the city of Qabala, which is al-Khazar. Then he built the barrier of brick (*sadd al-libn*) in what was between Sharwān and the gate of the Alāns (*bāb al-lān*). He built along the barrier of brick 360 cities which were abandoned after the building of Bāb al-Abwāb.¹⁵

This process of the construction of frontier towns by the Sasanians is reported to have continued under his son and successor, Khusraw Anūshirwān. In addition to founding a number of important cities, including the aforementioned Bāb al-Abwāb,

¹³ Balādhurī, 194 (tr. Hitti, 305).

¹⁴ Bonner, "Naming of the Frontier," 22; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, 2.278. Bonner, however, goes on to say that both Ibn Khurradādhbih and Qudāma b. Ja'far define the *awāsim* as part of a combined jurisdiction with Qinnasrīn in Syria. Qudāma takes this information directly from Balādhurī, but Ibn Khurradādhbih's source for this is harder to place. On Qudāma's use of Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* as a source see Ryan J. Lynch, *Arab Conquests and Early Islamic Historiography: The Futūḥ al-Buldān of al-Balādhurī* (London, forthcoming), ch. 6.

¹⁵ Literally, "the gate of gates," which is modern Darband in Dagestan. The entire tradition is found in Balādhurī, 194 (tr. Hitti, 306). I have kept the translation of *sadd al-libn* as barrier of brick, but see Gadjeiev in the next chapter for the argument that it should be understood as the barrier of the (country of the) Lpin people.

we are informed that Khusraw settled a number of different tribal groups in these cities. Some of these cities are clearly described as serving the purpose of fortifications (such as al-Sughd, Wayṣ and al-Kilāb), which are variously described not as cities (*al-madā'in*, sing. *madīna*), but as various forms of fortified buildings (*qaṣr/qusūr*, *ḥiṣn/ḥuṣūn*, *qala'/qilā'*). The purpose of the foundations under Kawād are not explicitly described this way, but they probably should be.¹⁶ Balādhurī then recounts how Khusraw “garrisoned (*askana*) these fortresses and strongholds with men of valor from the al-Siyāsijīyya,” making clear that the peoples being settled in these frontier strongholds were there to protect the Caucasian border on behalf of the Sasanian state.

Precisely who these al-Siyāsijīyya/al-Siyāsījīn were has proven a troublesome issue, especially as the manuscripts which include this name in various early Arabic geographical works largely lack diacritical marks. M.J. de Goeje, who completed the first critical edition of the *Futūḥ* in 1865, provided the reading al-Siyāsījīn, it would seem, on the assumption that the people referred to here were the inhabitants of the region of Sīsajān.¹⁷ He likely came to this conclusion as this group are described as being garrisoned in this region in one section of Balādhurī's account. These traditions found in Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* are also found, as will be discussed, in a number of additional early Arabic texts. Unfortunately, the prolific nature of de Goeje's editorial career in the nineteenth century meant that this interpretation of the largely unpointed *السياسيين* and its variants as *السياسيين* appeared in a huge variety of texts, notably geographical ones. Starting with Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* and his interpretation of the surviving Leiden and British Library manuscripts of the texts, de Goeje seems to have continued to see these al-Siyāsījīn in places where other manuscripts containing similar traditions contained clearly distinct variations.¹⁸ Those editors who worked on texts other than de Goeje simply followed his lead in their transcription of this group.

But can anything more be said about who these people were? While many had attempted to identify who these al-Siyāsījīn were, J.H. Kramers was the first to recognize the enduring oddities within the manuscript tradition and de Goeje's theory

¹⁶ It seems probable that “cities” (*al-madā'in*), as referred to by Balādhurī, should really be translated as “fortifications,” as proposed by James Montgomery in reference to the work of Ibn Khurradādhbih (“Ibn Rusta's Lack of ‘Eloquence,’ the *Rūs*, and Samanid Cosmography,” *Edebiyāt* 12, 2001, 75 n. 5).

¹⁷ De Goeje, *Liber Expugnationis Regionum* (Leiden, 1866), 194, states in a footnote on the first mention of the term: “Est populus cuius genealogiae princeps appellatur *Sisag*.”

¹⁸ This is especially clear in the case of Ibn al-Faqīh, 288 and 291, which notes that the towns surrounding Bāb al-Abwāb were settled with “warriors from among the Persians called *al-siyāsikīn*,” where the manuscript tradition clearly shows the radical ك, and yet de Goeje still says that it should be *al-siyāsījīn*. This particular passage, unlike the others, is not a parallel to that found in the *Futūḥ*. For this analysis see J.H. Kramers, “The Military Colonization of the Caucasus and Armenia under the Sassanids,” *BSOAS* 8 (1936), 615.

about them. Kramers suggested instead that the unpointed *السياسيين* should actually be linked to Middle Persian *النشاستجين* (*al-nashāstajīn*):¹⁹

The word would render then an Arabicized plural of Middle Persian *nishāstaq*, belonging to the Middle Persian verb *nishāstan*, the causative form of *nishastan*. The meaning would be “somebody who has been made to dwell in a certain place,” and in a pregnant sense, a “garrisoned warrior.” The Arabic verb *اسكن* used in the first passage of Balādhurī is the exact counterpart of *nishāstan* in this sense.²⁰

While Kramer's final comment on the word being an “exact counterpart” of the Arabic verb, which appears in the passage, is somewhat of an assumption, his logic appears sound, and Vacca reached the same conclusions in her extensive work on the region.²¹ Moreover, an analysis of the three surviving manuscripts of Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* appears to support their suggestions. In two cases, the manuscripts even include instances of a diacritical mark on the first radical of the word, which is the letter *nūn*, in line with Kramers' hypothesis (see Fig. 1). He further suggests that the ‘*n*’ ending used by Balādhurī and Ibn al-Faqīh “seems to be a compromise between the Persian ending *-ān* and the Arabic sound plural *-īn* (gen. *-īn*).”²²

While Kramer's original suggestion of a Middle Persian origin for the name of this group of people is an old one, it is further supported by the recent work of Wadad al-Qadī, who, in dissecting Balādhurī's section on the founding of the Iraqi city of Baṣra, identified a number of people and place descriptors that seem to be of clear Middle Persian origin. Important to note is al-Qadī's suggestion that Balādhurī had access to this Middle Persian material likely via the state register (*dīwān*) of archival material that was still available during his lifetime, a fact the author is not always explicit in identifying.²³ While the opening to this chapter and the analysis of the traditions therein makes it seem unlikely that Balādhurī relied on any formalized written sources for this section of his text, his access to local or Middle Persian resources in the construction of portions of his text seems increasingly likely.

The context of the overall passage and the words used to describe the settlements purportedly founded by the Sasanian *shāhanshāhs* make the defensive purposes

¹⁹ For the sources and much of the basis of this discussion on *al-Siyāsijīyya* that appears here, I am completely indebted to Alison Vacca for sharing portions of her book manuscript with me and for pointing me to Kramers' article. For a much more thorough discussion of the linguistic peculiarities and implications of this term/group in the text see her *Non-Muslim Provinces*, 160–63.

²⁰ Kramers, “Military Colonization,” 616.

²¹ Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*, 160–63.

²² Kramers, “Military Colonization,” 617.

²³ “The Names of Estates in State Registers before and after the Arabization of the ‘Dīwāns,’” in Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, eds., *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain* (Leiden, 2010), 255–80. I have also explored Balādhurī's use of this archival material in the *Futūḥ* in my “Cyprus and Its Legal and Historiographical Significance in Early Islamic History,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136 (2016), 535–50.

of these facilities clear, as does the use of the verb *askana*. Ibn al-Faqīh, in one of the few lines on these Sasanian frontier settlements he transmits that does not find a parallel in Balādhurī's *Futūḥ*, proposes that at least a portion of these men were Persians settled in the region for this explicit purpose, writing that they were "warriors (*muqātila*) from [among] the Persians."²⁴ This would mean that these were people settled in these areas to fortify the frontier rather than local groups co-opted into the service of the Sasanian state. In addition to these Siyāsijīyya, we are granted the name of two other groups that Khusraw garrisoned in the region: Didoi (*al-Dūdāniyya*), after which an area of Arrān, Abwāb al-Dūdāniyya,²⁵ became known, and Soghdians (*al-Sughd*).

Fig. 1: Images from British Library MS Add 23264, f. 43B (left); Leiden University Library MS Or 430, f. 113 A+B (center); and Yale University Beinecke Library Landberg MSS 33, f. 40A (right). In the second instance of the word, note that the BL and Yale manuscripts include pointing over the initial nūn.

KHUSRAW'S WALL IN ARRĀN

The cornerstone of the pre-Islamic traditions which define the opening of Balādhurī's section on Armenia is a tale of the Sasanian *shāhanshāh* Khusraw Anūshirwān's interactions with an unnamed "King of the Turks" (*malik al-turk*, and in one separate instance referred to by the title of khagan (Arab. *khāqān*) at a place called al-Barshaliyya,²⁶ and an apparent attempt to create peace between the two parties. The Turks, the *Futūḥ* informs us, had been harassing the Sasanians on their northern borders, forcing them to develop a new series of frontier defenses to prevent continued incursions into the region, but the Persians desired greater security. The encounter begins with a series of ruses and a pretense at friendship, including a marriage proposal:

Anūshirwān wrote to the king of the Turks asking him for reconciliation and peace, and that they act as one. Anūshirwān asked to marry the king's daughter in order to assure him of his commitment, and made clear his wish to be his son-in-law. Meanwhile, he sent him a maid of his (*amma*) who had been adopted by one of his wives, and he told him that she was his daughter. The Turk therefore gifted his

²⁴ Ibn al-Faqīh, 291.

²⁵ See Gadjev's comments on the Didoi in the next chapter below.

²⁶ Al-Barshaliyya's exact location in the eastern Caucasus is not specified; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (1.566) says only that it was "a place (*waḍ'*) of Arrān, mentioned in the 'History of the Kings of Persia'."

daughter (as a bride) to Anūshirwān. The two met at al-Barshaliyya where they parted together for days, and both felt the other was friendly to him and displayed devotion. But Anūshirwān ordered a group of his elite and trusted men (*khāṣṣatibi wa-thiqātibi*) to wait until nightfall and then set fire to the edge of the camp of the Turks, which they did. In the morning, the Turkish king complained to Anūshirwān, but the latter denied ordering it or knowing that any of his men had done it...²⁷

After again setting fire to the Turk's camp before then intentionally setting fire to a part of his own camp, so as to remove suspicion from himself, Khusraw meets with the Turk and suggests that the two groups should be separated by the construction of a permanent wall²⁸ for their mutual benefit:

Anūshirwān said to him: "My brother, our army and your army detest the peace we have made, because the spoils from the raids and wars between us have been cut off. I fear that they are undertaking things to corrupt our hearts after our mutual agreement of sincerity, so that we may once more have recourse to enmity after our new blood relationship and our friendship. I think, therefore, that you should allow me to build a wall between you and me and we make for it a gate, so that none shall enter from us to you or from you to us except whomsoever you and we want." The Turk accepted the proposal and left for his own land.²⁹

Anūshirwān began building the wall. He built the side of it that faced the sea with rock and lead. He made its width 300 cubits and he joined it up with the summits of the mountains. He ordered that stones be carried in boats and dropped into the sea so that when they appeared upon the surface of the water he could build on them. The wall went into the sea for three miles. When he finished building it, he affixed at its entrance iron gates and stationed one hundred horsemen to guard it; before this it required 50,000 troops (to guard the frontier). On the wall he also placed a siege weapon (*dabbāba*).³⁰ After this, the Khagan was told: "He

²⁷ Balādhurī, 195 (tr. Hitti, 307); cf. Ibn Khurradādhbih, 260 (almost verbatim, but specifies the Khazar king).

²⁸ While it has been regularly assumed that this wall is the wall of Darband, neither Balādhurī nor any of the other sources discussed here ever explicitly say this. The mention that the wall was constructed along the sea, however, leaves the pass at Darband as the only real option.

²⁹ Balādhurī, 196 (tr. Hitti, 308); cf. Ibn Khurradādhbih, 260 (again almost exactly the same wording).

³⁰ The *dabbāba* is traditionally viewed by modern scholars as a shielded siege weapon that would be used to attack a fortification rather than defend it, protecting its occupants from projectiles. Here, I think it is possible that it is referring to a type of siege weapon where defenders could fire projectiles while also protecting them from projectiles launched by attackers. Hitti translates the term as "mantelet," while de Goeje, in his French translation of the corresponding passage in Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Masālik*, opts for "muscule."

(Anūshirwān) has duped you and married you to someone other than his daughter, and he has fortified himself against you.”³¹

The first aspect of this tradition, the marriage ruse, is a *topos* with a long classical pedigree. Herodotus, at the outset of book three of his *History*, states that the Persians claimed that their ruler Cambyses II (fl. 500s BCE) demanded the Egyptian king Amasis (fl. 500s BCE) send him his daughter to wed, and that after much concerned deliberation Amasis chose instead to send the daughter of a late king as if she were his own. The ruse was then revealed by the “daughter” herself, resulting in conflict between the two sides. The better part of a millennium later, it was the Roman Priscus (d. after 472) who moved this tradition eastward and flipped it, with the Persians conducting the ruse against the Kidarite Huns.³² Similarly, the “daughter” reveals the trick before conflict was renewed between both sides. The account of Priscus and the one transmitted by Balādhurī are imperfect matches, however. There is no mention of the construction of a wall in the Roman version, and the Sasanian ruler named is Peroz I (459–84), not Khusraw. It is possible, though, that these stories – of the marriage ruse and the erection of a wall – may originally have been separate traditions. There is a natural break between the Turk returning to his own land and Anūshirwān beginning construction of the wall, aside from the reality that the building of such a massive wall would not have gone unnoticed, regardless of how inept the Turks may have been.

The construction of these border fortifications was more than just stories intended to emphasize the cleverness of “civilized” peoples over backward barbarians, however. Such walled fortifications were also more than quaint stories of antiquity with little relevance to the lifetime of Balādhurī and his contemporary Muslims. There is a plethora of surviving physical material from the Sasanian borderlands which demonstrate that the Persians were regularly erecting walls and fortified settlements along their northern frontiers to limit raiding from people beyond their border.³³ The archeological evidence of these walls and other fortifications dotted throughout Georgia, Albania and other parts of the Caucasus show sustained or even increased use

³¹ Balādhurī, 196 (tr. Hitti, 307–308); cf. Ibn Khurrādādhbih, 260–61 (again almost exactly the same wording).

³² Priscus, *The Fragmentary History*, tr. John Given (Merchantville NJ, 2014), 144–46. It should be noted that the writings of Priscus do not survive independently, but only through the intermediary transmission of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (d. 959). This connection between Priscus and the Muslim authors was previously noted by D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton, 1954), 24.

³³ Significant archaeological excavation in Gorgān in north-eastern Iran near the Caspian Sea provides great detail on how the Sasanians constructed such fortifications, while also providing insight on Sasanian policy in managing their northern borderlands. See Eberhard W. Sauer *et al.*, *Persia's Imperial Power in Late Antiquity: The Great Wall of Gorgān and Frontier Landscapes of Sasanian Iran* (Oxford, 2013).

throughout the early Islamic period.³⁴ The Islamic narrative sources portray the famed Muslim commander Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik as a conqueror and bulwark for the region, refortifying Bāb al-Abwāb and, according to Balādhurī, garrisoning “24,000 Syrians (*ahl al-shām*)” in the area to protect it from the Khazars.³⁵ But the attention that each of these authors – including Balādhurī – places on the enhancement of the fortifications in the Caucasus by Maslama is minimal as compared to the memory of the original role the Sasanians played in establishing them.

A cursory search of other early Arabic texts conveys the impression that this tradition on Khusraw’s meeting with the Turks and the construction of the wall was widespread, particularly in geographical works. In looking slightly deeper, however, it seems that the transmission of this account takes a more linear trajectory than might be immediately obvious. In addition to being found in Balādhurī’s *Futūḥ*, the tradition can also be found in Ibn Khurrādādhbih’s *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik* (“The Book of Roads and Kingdoms”), Ibn al-Faqīh’s *Kitāb al-Buldān* (“The Book of the Lands”),³⁶ Qudāma b. Ja’far’s *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (“The Book of Taxation”), and Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī’s (d. 1229 CE/626 AH) *Muḥjam al-buldān* (“The Dictionary of the Lands”). In each case, the similarities between the stories are clear, although some of the traditions include much more variation than others. The majority of the details in the stories remain the same, although whether the story is found simply in a regional discussion of Arrān, or the Caucasus more generally, is another matter.

Ibn Khurrādādhbih’s version of the tradition appears in his seventh chapter, on “the frontiers” (*thughūr*) of Islam, its people, and the races of men (*al-ajyal*) which surround it.”³⁷ It is almost identical to the account of Balādhurī except for specifying, anachronistically, that it was Khazars, not Turks, that Khusraw dealt with. This sustained section of shared material between the two authors is striking, and one might at first assume that there must be a greater amount of overlap between the two texts that has hitherto been identified. A closer comparison of the two, however, shows that this is not the case. This section on the Caucasus is seemingly the only sustained verbatim text reuse that I have presently been able to identify between the two books.³⁸

³⁴ See in particular Eberhard W. Sauer *et al.*, “Northern Outpost of the Caliphate: Maintaining Military Forces in a Hostile Environment (the Dariali Gorge in the Central Caucasus in Georgia),” *Antiquity* 89 (2015), 885–904; *id. et al.*, “The Caspian Gates: Exploring the Most Famous Mountain Valley of the Ancient World,” *Current World Archaeology* 80 (2016), 18–24.

³⁵ Balādhurī, 207 (tr. Hitti, 325). Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh*, ed. Akram Diyā’ al-‘Umārī (Damascus, 1977), 343; Ṭabarī, 2.1531–32.

³⁶ While the dating of Ibn Khurrādādhbih’s text has been debated, Ibn al-Faqīh’s text has been more firmly attributed to the early tenth century, *ca.* 903. See Henri Massé, “Ibn al-Faqīh,” in *EP*, relying on the dating of Aloys Sprenger, *Die Post- und Reiserouten des Orients* (Leipzig, 1864), xvii.

³⁷ Ibn Khurrādādhbih, 252.

³⁸ I had previously identified the similarities between Ibn Khurrādādhbih and Balādhurī’s texts before attending a textual reuse workshop hosted by Sarah Savant at the Aga Khan

But what more can be said about the textual reuse that appears in these sections of the two texts? And why does any variation in the texts appear at all? There are several possibilities for why this differentiation might have occurred: Ibn Khurradādhbih, likely compiling his *Masālik* after Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* was completed (probably in the late ninth century),³⁹ was relying on a different source to that used by Balādhurī, or Ibn Khurradādhbih was possibly more interested in reflecting the reality of his own lifetime, when Arrān and the surrounding region of the Caucasus was occupied by the Khazars. This would not be completely unexpected, as Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* is far more interested in the history of regions and the development of policy therein, while the *Masālik* is far more concerned with the realities of the Islamic world contemporaneous with its writing. It seems highly likely that the two authors were, at the very least, relying on a common source. The accounts are far too similar and with much too limited variation between them to not be directly connected. Prior to this account of the meeting between Khusraw and the Turk/Khazar king, Ibn Khurradādhbih even includes a tradition about the naming of the settlements in the region founded by Khusraw, which is almost identical to that included in Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* and in the same order.⁴⁰ The close similarity between Balādhurī's and Ibn Khurradādhbih's accounts – both as regards vocabulary and the details they contain – would strongly suggest a common source or, perhaps less likely, the *Masālik*'s direct reliance on the *Futūḥ* as the uncredited source of the story.

The remaining texts that quote the wall tradition have a great deal in common too. There are only minor variations in the narrative and none ever states whether the *Futūḥ*, Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Masālik* or an unnamed predecessor of both was actually the source of their account. In the case of Qudāma b. Ja'far, as I have outlined elsewhere, Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* is the primary source of information relied upon by Qudāma for all of his *futūḥ* section. This reliance includes not just the verbatim repetition of many of Balādhurī's traditions, but also the near identical organization and chapter

University in London in the fall of 2015. By using the computer-mediated reuse tools of Savant's KITAB Project, along with the techniques of TRACER developed by Marco Büchler and the eTRAP team at the University of Göttingen, I was able to compare the texts more fully. Through this research I was surprised to discover that neither tool identified very much shared material outside of these passages on the Caucasus.

³⁹ The most recent discussion of Ibn Khurradādhbih's text is by Travis Zadeh, who analyzed not only the work's content, but also the two extant manuscripts of the text. Despite this in-depth and extremely important analysis, Zadeh understandably would not be drawn on dating the text any more precisely than classifying it as a ninth-century work, but his evidence casts significant doubt on de Goeje's original suggestion that one version of the text dates from as early as 848–49. See Travis Zadeh, "Of Mummies, Poets, and Water Nymphs: Tracing the Codicological Limits of Ibn Khurradādhbih's Geography," in Monique Bernards, ed., *Abbasid Studies IV: Occasional Papers of the School of 'Abbasid Studies* (Oxford, 2013), 8–75. As for Balādhurī's *Futūḥ*, I have suggested that it likely dates from the end of the so-called "Anarchy at Sāmarrā," in the late 860s (*Arab Conquests*, 11–13).

⁴⁰ Ibn Khurradādhbih, 259; Balādhurī, 195 (tr. Hitti, 306–7).

titling of the whole section.⁴¹ As regards the wall tradition, however, Qudāma follows Ibn Khurradādhbih in specifying Khazars rather than Turks.⁴² In Ibn al-Faqīh's version, we are given slightly more information than is found in Balādhurī and Ibn Khurradādhbih. He agrees with Ibn Khurradādhbih in speaking of the Khazars rather than the Turks, but frames the entire event as taking place just outside Bāb al-Abwāb. Citing a certain Abū l-'Abbās al-Ṭūsī, the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr is purported to have asked if anyone "knew how Anūshirwān built the wall which is called 'the gate' (*al-bāb*)," before providing a similar version of the account but with substantially different vocabulary and some variation in content.⁴³

The narrative in all of these texts culminates in a description of Anūshirwān's wall, which nicely demonstrates the sort of variation that occurs across these accounts (highlighted in bold in the quotations below) as well as the extent of the similarity in vocabulary and content:⁴⁴

Balādhurī: Anūshirwān began building the wall. He built the side of it that faced the sea with rock and lead. He made its width 300 cubits, and he joined it up with the **summits** of the mountains. He ordered that stones be carried in boats and **submerged** into the sea, and then when they appeared upon the surface of the water, he built on them.

Ibn Khurradādhbih: Anūshirwān began building the wall. He built the side of it that faced the sea with rock and lead. He made its width 300 cubits **until** he had brought it up to the mountains. He ordered that stones be carried in boats and **thrown** into the sea, and then when they appeared upon the surface of the water, he built on them.

Qudāma b. Ja'far: Anūshirwān commenced building the wall. He built the side of it that faced the sea with rock and lead. He made its width 300 cubits **until** he had brought it up to the mountains. He ordered that stones be carried in boats and **thrown** into the sea, and then when they appeared upon the surface of the water, he built on them.

The variation between these three traditions is minimal, although Ibn Khurradādhbih's version shares the same minor variations as Qudāma's. The three texts continue in identical manner as the construction of the wall continues to be detailed. Then, there are the variants that are found in Ibn al-Faqīh/Yāqūt's version. There is

⁴¹ Lynch, *Arab Conquests*, ch. 6. However, interestingly, Qudāma's repeated tradition on the construction of the wall does *not* appear in the same section of his text as it does in Balādhurī, namely, the chapter on "the conquest of Armenia."

⁴² For a discussion of some of these issues surrounding the Khazars, see Károly Czeglédy, "Khazar Raids in Transcaucasia in 762–764 A.D.," *Acta Orientalia* 11.1 (1960), 75–88.

⁴³ This passage is not in Ibn al-Faqīh's text as edited by De Goeje, but it is in Yusuf al-Hadī's edition (Beirut, 1996, 587), which uses the Mashhad manuscript unavailable to De Goeje. It is also reproduced verbatim by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, 1.439, s.v. "al-Bāb."

⁴⁴ Balādhurī, 196 (tr. Hitti, 308). Ibn Khurradādhbih, 260–61; Qudāma (Zubaydī), 194. For Ibn al-Faqīh/Yāqūt's version see previous note.

a great deal of shared material here and very similar use of vocabulary between this version and the three cited above, but there is also clear variation:

Anūshirwān commenced building the wall. He built the side of it that faced the sea with rock and lead. He made its width 300 cubits, and [he increased] its height until he brought it to the summits of the mountains. Then he led it out into the sea and it is said that he inflated skins and built on them.

Both the similarities and differences between these traditions make analysis problematic. Ibn al-Faḳīh's explanation is a different one for the actual process of building the wall from that offered by the other three authors. Was Ibn al-Faḳīh using a different source of information for his narrative? This seems somewhat unlikely, as the first part of his account contains not just the same information, but also the same vocabulary and word order. Perhaps a common source for all the texts had provided two explanations for Anūshirwān's building methods, and Ibn al-Faḳīh chose a different explanation to the other three. It is also possible that Ibn al-Faḳīh chose to offer his own explanation for some unknown reason.

What makes the discussion of the intertextuality of these traditions so problematic is the degree of reuse of material that can be identified between these works. Ibn al-Faḳīh explicitly mentions on two occasions that he is using Balādhurī as a source,⁴⁵ and James Montgomery has highlighted that Ibn al-Faḳīh also makes extensive use of Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Masālik*.⁴⁶ Moreover, Ibn al-Faḳīh's *Kitāb al-Buldān* was shown to be a major source of information for Yāqūt's dictionary by De Goeje,⁴⁷ and it is also evident that Yāqūt draws heavily on Balādhurī's *Futūḥ*.⁴⁸ In addition, Qudāma exhibits significant reliance on Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* for the *futūḥ* section of his *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, though in the instance above it seems more likely that Qudāma was relying on Ibn Khurradādhbih, or an unnamed, shared source.

While it is distinctly possible that Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* may have been the antecedent for a number of these "wall" traditions, the variations which occur here suggest that it is far more likely that there was a common source in circulation that preceded both his and Ibn al-Faḳīh's writing – perhaps a common teacher whose traditions he combined with others through *ikhtisār*. This might also explain the variation in the explanations for the construction of the wall at sea. What can be seen here, however, is the considerable intermingling of historical material that was ongoing in the compilation of texts in the early Abbasid period, and a reiteration of Balādhurī's reliability as a transmitter of this material.

⁴⁵ Although neither of these two citations occurs in the section on the Caucasus.

⁴⁶ James E. Montgomery, "Serendipity, Resistance, and Multivalency: Ibn Khurradādhbih and his *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*," in Philip Kennedy, ed., *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden, 2005), 177–232, esp. 190–91.

⁴⁷ Ibn al-Faḳīh, "Praefatio," viii–xiii; cf. H. Massé, "Ibn al-Faḳīh," *EP*.

⁴⁸ He cites him by his name Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir a total of 32 times and another 56 times by the name Balādhurī. See Lynch, *Arab Conquests*, ch. 6.

CONCLUSIONS: FROM THE INSIDE, LOOKING OUT

What explains Balādhurī's decision to include such a substantial number of traditions on pre-Islamic history in his section on the Caucasus, and in this section alone? What seems most likely is that Balādhurī made the decision to include these traditions as he believed them to explain the origins of the peculiarities of the organization and defense of the Caucasian frontier region which existed into the early Islamic period. While the *Futūḥ* has been under-utilized and at times mis-categorized simply as a "history," it is first and foremost a work overwhelmingly interested in precedent and the development of policies that governed the Islamic world into the Abbasid period. Frontier regions, by their very nature as transitional spaces – the margins of empire – often present unique challenges for their governance, especially when one considers the vast geographic and ethnographic differences that constituted the ninth-century Abbasid world.⁴⁹

In this period, the Caucasus remained a contested space between Byzantine and caliphal influence, and between tribes such as the Khazars, the Circassians and the Alans. By including these traditions on the Sasanian period, Balādhurī attempted to provide an explanation for the social and political realities of the Caucasus in his own lifetime. It is for these reasons that the *Futūḥ* does not include any material on how the Sasanians, for instance, had utilized Arab tribes like the Banū Lakhm to prevent indiscriminate raiding of their southern and western borders; this was simply no longer relevant for Balādhurī, and so this type of information finds no mention in the *Futūḥ*. Whether these political and social divisions were historically accurate is far more difficult to ascertain, but their explanations seem to have had at least some root in the local memory of the region. While the wall in Arrān was at times imagined to be a wall built by Alexander to keep at bay Gog and Magog,⁵⁰ one finds no such story of wonder included in Balādhurī's text; rather, the reader is met with the classical trope of a clever ruse and a hoodwinked foreigner to explain why and how the Sasanian Khusraw was able to construct such a large fortification on the northern edge of the empire. Whether the story happened that way or not was less important for Balādhurī than detailing how and when the fortifications that were still relied on in his own day came to be constructed.

The continued consideration of these traditions may prove beneficial for understanding late antique frontier policy in the Caucasus, but the numerous mentions of these policies across a swath of texts within the early Arabic historical tradition urges some caution. The likely reliance of so many medieval Arabic sources on a single common source – whether that be Balādhurī's amalgamation of traditions within the *Futūḥ* or on possible archival materials which no longer survive – demonstrates that a

⁴⁹ On the uniqueness of frontier regions and the problems of their governance into the early Abbasid period see Lynch, "Cyprus and Its Significance," and Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven, 1996).

⁵⁰ On this point, along with the parallels in historical memory between Alexander and Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik, see Antoine Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides* (Leiden, 2011), 267–69.

multiplicity of accounts cannot be taken as evidence itself for the validity of this information.

5. THE MISSION OF BISHOP ISRAYĒL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA *

M.S. GADJIEV

In chapter 39 of the second book of his "History of Albania," Movsēs Dasxuranc'i discusses the embassy ordered by the prince (*iṣṣan*) of Caucasian Albania, Varaz-Trdat, and led by Bishop Israyēl of Mec Kolmank' to the Huns and their leader, Alp Ilit'uēr, in the winter of 681–82.¹ Researchers have repeatedly addressed this unique report of the Albanian historian,² proposing illuminating reasons for the organization

* Translated from "Миссия епископа Исраела и вопросы исторической географии кавказской Албании," *Северный кавказ: Историко-археологические очерки и заметки* (Moscow, 2001), 162–70.

¹ Dasxuranc'i, 2.39 (tr. Dowsett, 154–55; tr. Smbatyan, 123–24).

² M. Barxudaryanc', *Albania and its Neighbors* (Arm.; Tbilisi, 1893), 91–92, 145–47; *id.*, *History of Albania* (Arm.; Valaršapat, 1902), 26; S.T. Еремян, "Моисей Каланкатуийский о посольстве албанского князя Вараз-Трдата к хазарскому хакану Ала-Илитверу" [Moses Kalankatuac'i on the Embassy of Albanian Prince Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar khakan Alp-Ilitver], *ЗИБ АН СССР* 7 (1939), 129–55; A.R. Shikhsaidov "О проникновении христианства и ислама в Дагестан" [On the Penetration of Christianity and Islam in Dagestan], *Academic Proceedings ИЯЛ* 3 (Makhachkala, 1957), 55–62; M.I. Artamonov, *История хазар* [History of the Khazars] (Leningrad, 1962), 184–89; Minorsky, *Ширвана и Дербенда*, 115, 128; Z.M. Buniyatov, *Азербайджан в VII–IX вв.* [Azerbaijan in the VII–IX centuries] (Baku, 1965), 103; V.G. Kotovich, "О местоположении раннесредневековых городов Варачана, Беленджера и Таргу" [On the Location of the Medieval Cities of Vagachan, Balanjar and Targu], in *Древности Дагестана* [The Antiquities of Dagestan] (Makhachkala, 1974), 182–89; A.V. Gadlo, *Этническая история Северного Кавказа IV–X вв.* [Ethnic History of the Northern Caucasus IV–X centuries] (Leningrad, 1979), 140–45; B.A. Arutunyan, "К вопросу о местоположении Лпинка" [The Question of the Location of Lpink], *Вестник Ереванского университета* 1 (Yerevan, 1981), 108–24; Ju.R. Djafarov, "Город Цри и страна чилбов в «Истории албан» Моисея Каланкатуийского" [The City of C'ri and the Land of the Chilbs in 'The History of Albania' by Moses Kalankatuac'i], in *Древний и средневековый Восток* 1