From Albania to Arrān

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

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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.


RYAN J. LYCH

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 (‘ānṣīṣ, ṭūḥāf), for instance. Furthermore, the means by which these territories were protected and managed frequently varied considerably. 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 Arrán (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

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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.

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 Baladhuri (d. ca. 892) in his chapter on “The Conquest of Armenia” in the Kitab Fītāḥ al-Abdān (“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 Sassanians. 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 Baladhuri 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.

Baladhuri’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 Fītāḥ. In his chain of transmission (isnād) which begins the chapter, he specifically specifies that he is providing these traditions in a compound, abbreviated form known as ikhtiyār:

Muhammad b. Ismā’il informed me, on the authority of Sīkanā of Barda’ and others on the authority of Ābā Bāši’ Amāra b. Bist al-Āsrānī. Muhammad b. Bist al-Qill also informed me on the authority of his teachers (zawjākū): Barmuk b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Dabālī, Muhammad b. al-Khāyāy al-Khālīfī 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 (raddadith min bu’diš ‘aš’i bi ḍ). They said (qabīl):...1

1 Arab. Arminiyâ, 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 Caucasus and not just those in Armenia”; see also ch. 3 by Yacca above).

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

This is, from the outset, very unusual for the Fītāḥ. The only other time Baladhuri is explicit in his use of ikhtiyār is at the very beginning of his book, where the first chapter on Medina opens with the line “Aḥmad b. Yahyā b. Jābir [Baladhuri] says: I have been informed by men knowledgeable about traditions (budāḥah) biography (ṣīr) and the conquest of lands (fītāḥ al-Abdān), and I have brought together their traditions and I go repeatedly between them here...” Baladhuri chose to introduce the overwhelming majority of the traditions in the Fītāḥ in one of two ways: either he provided a standard chain of transmission, which served as a roadmap from Baladhuri’s informant to the origin of the information, or he abridged the tradition with a simple “they said” (qabīl). Neither form is found in the opening section on Armenia, which contains all of the pre-Islamic material.

Furthermore, it is immediately apparent that Baladhuri relied on informants for this information on “Armenia” who were completely separate from those he named elsewhere in the Fītāḥ. Both Muhammad b. Ismā’il and Muhammad b. Bist al-Qill appear nowhere else within the text as informants for Baladhuri’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 Baladhuri chose to break from his own established pattern in only this section of the Fītāḥ 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 Fītāḥ’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 Baladhuri includes in the entirety of the Fītāḥ. 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 clans in the marshlands of southern Iraq, he notes how they fared in the time of the Sasanian emperors Kawād (488–531; Arab. Qubādīh) and Khusraw Anushāwīn (531–79) before discussing their fate during the time of the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūnuf (d. 714) and the Abbasid caliph al-Muṣṭaḥfīr (754–75). Elsewhere, in discussing the origins of the contemporary population of Sinjar in the Jazīr, Baladhuri provides a tradition that originates with the elders of the people of Sinjar (wa muṣaḥḥah min min al-sinjar) on how Khusraw Aharwīz (591–628) intended to put to death 100 Persians for rebelling before being convinced to have them participate in his conquest of Sinjar instead, and thereafter “they settled and they multiplied” in the town.2 Both of these sections, however, include only a few lines of Arabic on the pre-Islamic past, whereas

Both this sentence and the one at the beginning of his section on Armenia quoted above contain the expression wa muṣaḥḥah min min bu’diš ‘aš’i bi ḍ, which conveys the point that Baladhuri weaved together the reports of the different transmitters into a single narrative rather than presenting their reports separately.


Ibid., 177 (tr. Hindi, 277).
the pre-Islamic material from the opening of the Fatih’s section on Armenia constitutes two to three folios of the surviving manuscripts.

In both of these cases, Balâdhuri’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 Balâdhuri’s own lifetime. In the case of the Fatih’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, Balâdhuri ends his discussion of the region with an account of the investment by Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 738/1211) of three million dirhams on land reclamation in the area in order to receive it as a ‘qift’ (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 Balâdhuri in his text is useful to keep in mind as his traditions on the Caucasus are considered.

THE CONQUEST OF THE CAUCASUS

Balâdhuri’s Fatih 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 Kâwâd and Khusrav Anûshirwân. The traditions Balâdhuri 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. That Balâdhuri’s contemporary and near contemporaries 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 Fatih, was “in the hands of the Romans” and governed by “the governor (fasil) of Armenia-iqâs.”12 The exceptions were the regions of Jûrân, which Balâdhuri states constituted the entirety of Armenia II, and Arrân, both of which were “in the hands of the Khazars.”13 While the information about the division of the region seems useful, Balâdhuri 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 anarchism is not unheard of in early Arabic historical texts concerning the borderlands, and Michael Bonner has highlighted such a discrepancy in the Ta’rîkh of Ya’qûbî (fl. late ninth/third century), who projects the existence of a distinct frontier region (al-‘awajiyn) as far back as the reign of Mu’tamib b. Ahû Sufîyân.14

The next two large accounts transmitted by Balâdhuri discuss the problems the Sasanians faced in managing the northern frontier and the threat of tribal raiding from the Caucasus, which “reached Dinawar,” in western Iran. This harassment, Balâdhuri informs us, was what led Kâwâd to send an army of 12,000 men to attack the Khazars, whom the tradition blames for these attacks against the Sasanians. Kâwâd’s men invaded (fasila) Arrân and conquered (fasillu) the region that lay between the “river known as al-Ras,” the Araxes, and Sharwan, the coastal region of eastern Arrân. We are then told:

Kâwâd met him [the general he sent to the region] and he built in Arrân the city of Byâlu-iqâs, the city of Bâdha’a – which is the [chief] city over the entirety of the frontier – and the city of Qabals, which is al-Khazar. Then he built the barrier of brick (sadd al-hâl) in what was between Sharwan and the gate of the Alânas (bât al-âlâ). He built along the barrier of brick 360 cities which were abandoned after the building of Bâb al-Abwâb.15 This process of the construction of frontier towns by the Sasanians is reported to have continued under his son and successor, Khusrav Anûshirwân. In addition to founding a number of important cities, including the aforementioned Bâb al-Abwâb,

9 Balâdhuri, 294 (tr. Hitti, 456).
11 See ch. 3 above, where she notes Balâdhuri’s “remarkable knowledge of seventh-century Albanian geography that does not enter the mainstream Arabic geographical tradition,” and her Non-Arabic Provinces Under Early Islamic Rule and Iranian Legitimacy in Armenia and Caucasian Albania (Cambridge, 2017), 43–77.
12 For elaboration on this see Walter Kaegi, “Balâdhuri and the Armenian Theme,” Byzantion 38.1 (1968), 273–77.
13 Balâdhuri, 194 (tr. Hitti, 305).
14 Bonner, “Naming of the Frontier,” 22; Ya’qûbî, Ta’rîkh, 2.278. Bonner, however, goes on to say that both Ibn Khurra‘idîbîb and Qudâma b. Ja‘far define the ‘awaja as part of a combined jurisdiction with Qinmasîn in Syria. Qudâma takes this information directly from Balâdhuri, but Ibn Khurra‘idîbîb’s source for this is harder to place. On Qudâma’s use of Balâdhuri’s Fatih as a source see Ryan J. Lynch, Arab Conquests and Early Islamic Historiography: The Fatih al-Buddûn of al-Balâdhuri (London, forthcoming), ch. 6.
15 Literally, “the gate of gates,” which is modern Darband in Dagestan. The entire tradition is found in Balâdhuri, 194 (tr. Hitti, 300). I have kept the translation of sadd al-hâl as barrier of brick, but see Gadjiev 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, Waws and al-Kilba), which are variously described not as cities (al-mdar, sing. madina, but as various forms of fortified buildings (qasr, qast, biha/laqina, qalat/gilat). The purpose of the foundations under Kaywad is not explicitly described this way, but they probably should be.18 Baladhi then recounts how Khusraw ‘garrisoned (atkhana) these fortresses and strongholds with men of valor from the al-Siyasiyya,’ making clear that the peoples being settled in these frontier strongholds were there to protect the Caucasian border on behalf of the Sassanian state.

Precisely who these al-Siyasiyyas/al-Siyasiin 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 Fatihah in 1865, provided the reading al-Siyasiin, it would seem, on the assumption that the people referred to here were the inhabitants of the region of Siqistin.19 He likely came to this conclusion as this group are described as being garrisoned in this region in one section of Baladhi’s account. These traditions found in Baladhi’s Fatihah 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 unpointed말 산사리 and its variants as the 산사리n appeared in a huge variety of texts, notably geographical ones. Starting with Baladhi’s Fatihah and his interpretation of the surviving Leiden and British Library manuscripts of the texts, de Goeje seems to have continued to see these al-Siyasiin in places where other manuscripts containing similar traditions contained clearly distinct variations.20 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-Siyasiin were, J.H. Kramers was the first to recognize the enduring oddities within the manuscript tradition and de Goeje’s theory about them. Kramers suggested instead that the unpointed말 산사리n should actually be linked to Middle Persian말 산사리, belonging to the Middle Persian verb nishistan, the causative form of nishastan. The meaning would be “somebody who has been made to dwell in a certain place,” and in a Persian sense, a “garrisoned warrior.” The Arabic verb ملك نک ملك niskam is used in the first passage of Baladhi in the exact counterpart of nishistan in this sense.21

While Kramers’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 his extensive work on the region.22 Moreover, an analysis of the three surviving manuscripts of Baladhi’s Fatihah 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 ملك, in line with Kramers’ hypothesis (see Fig. 1). He further suggests that the ملك ending used by Baladhi in Ibn al-Faqih “seems to be a compromise between the Persian ending ملك and the Arabic sound plural ملك (gen. ملك).”23

While Kramers’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-Qadi, who, in dissecting Baladhi’s section on the founding of the Iraqi city of Basra, identified a number of people and place descriptors that seem to be of clear Middle Persian origin. Important to note is al-Qadi’s suggestion that Baladhi had access to this Middle Persian material likely via the state register (dirawat) of archival material that was still available during his lifetime, a fact the author is not always explicit in identifying.24 While the opening to this chapter and the analysis of the traditions therein makes it seem unlikely that Baladhi 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 Sassanian ‘labhunbahu make the defensive purposes

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18 It seems probable that “cities” (al-mdar), as referred to by Baladhi, should really be translated as “fortifications,” as proposed by James Montgomery in reference to the work of Ibn Khumaradibib (“Ibn Rusta’s Lack of ‘Eloucaissance, the Rain, and Samarid Cosmogony,” Edebiyet 12, 2001, 75 n. 5).
19 De Goeje, Liber Excogitationes Regionum (Leiden, 1866), 194, states in a footnote on the first mention of the term “Est populus cuius genealogiae princeps appellatur Singa.”
20 This is especially clear in the case of Ibn al-Faqih, 288 and 291, which notes that the towns surrounding Bb al-Abwab were settled with “warriors from among the Persians called al-siyasikhm,” where the manuscript tradition clearly shows the radical ملك, and yet de Goeje still says that it should be ملك. This particular passage, unlike the others, is not a parallel to that found in the Fatihah. For this analysis see J.H. Kramers, “The Military Colonization of the Caucasus and Armenia under the Sassanids,” RFO-AF II (1936), 615.
21 For the sources and much of the basis of this discussion on 만 산사리 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.
23 Vacca, Non-Muslim Provinces, 160–63.
of these facilities clear, as does the use of the verb askana. Ibn al-Faqih, in one of the few lines on these Sasanian frontier settlements he transmits that does not find a parallel in Baladhibi’s Fatihah, proposes that at least a portion of these men were Persians settled in the region for this explicit purpose, writing that they were “warriors (mugidhmar) from [among] the Persians.” 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 Sīyūnīyās, we are granted the name of two other groups that Khusraw garrisoned in the region: Dīdā (al-Dīdānīyā), after which an area of Arrān, Abīwāl al-Dīdānīyā,25 became known, and Soghdians (al-Soghd).

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 nān.

KHUSRAW’S WALL IN ARRĀN

The cornerstone of the pre-Islamic traditions which define the opening of Baladhibi’s section on Armenia is a tale of the Sasanian šabristāh 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-Barsbahlīyā,26 and an apparent attempt to create peace between the two parties. The Turks, the Fatihāh 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 (sūmū) who had been adopted by one of his wives, and he told him that she was his daughter. The Turk therefore gifted his daughter (as a bride) to Anūshirwān. The two met at al-Barshahlīyā 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 (khāqānštihī wa-thaqīfitih) 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 (dabhāiba).29 After this, the Khagan was told: “He...
The first aspect of this tradition, the marriage ruse, is a topia 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 (c. 550s BCE) demanded the Egyptian king Amasis (c. 550s 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 slipped 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 Baladhuri 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 Khosrow. 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 Anūshirvān 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 Baladhuri 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 throughout the early Islamic period. 34 The Islamic narrative sources portray the famed Muslim commander Musa b. ‘Abd al-Malik as a conqueror and bulwark for the region, retelling Bīb-e Abwab and, according to Baladhuri, garrisoning “24,000 Syriacs (abd al-shaykh)” in the area to protect it from the Khazars. 35 But the attention that each of these authors – including Baladhuri – 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 Khosrow’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 Baladhuri’s Fatīḥah, the tradition can also be found in Ibn Khurrazbiddibb’s Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik (“The Book of Roads and Kingdoms”), Ibn al-Faqīḥ’s Kitāb al-Bulūdān (“The Book of the Lands”), 36 Qudama ibn Ja‘far’s Kitāb al-Kharīj (“The Book of Taxation”), and Yāqūt al-Hamawi’s (d. 1229 CE) (636 AH) Mu‘jam al-baladān (“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 Arran, or the Caucasus more generally, is another matter.

Ibn Khurrazbiddibb’s version of the tradition appears in his seventh chapter, on “the frontiers” (thughūr) of Islam, its people, and the races of men (al-aḥrār) which surround it. 37 It is almost identical to the account of Baladhuri except for specifying, anachronistically, that it was Khazars, not Turks, that Khosrow 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

31 Baladhuri, 196 (tr. Hitti, 307–308); cf. Ibn Khurrazbiddibb, 260–61 (again almost exactly the same wording).
32 Priscus, The Fragmentary History, tr. John Givens (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 Porphyrogennetos (d. 959). This connection between Priscus and the Muslim authors was previously noted by D. M. Dunlop, The History of the Jastak Khagars (Princeton, 1954), 24.
33 Significant archaeological excavation in Gorgan 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 borders. See Eberhard W. Saucq et al., Persia’s Imperial Power in Late Antiquity: The Great Wall of Gorgan and Frontier Landscapes of Sasanian Iran (Oxford, 2013).

36 While the dating of Ibn Khurrazbiddibb’s text has been debated, Ibn al-Faqīḥ’s text has been more firmly attributed to the early tenth century, ca. 903. See Henri Massé, “Ibn al-Faqīḥ,” in EJF, relying on the dating of Aloys Sprenger, Die Past- und Residenzorte des Orients (Leipzig, 1864), xvi.
37 Ibn Khurrazbiddibb, 252.
38 I had previously identified the similarities between Ibn Khurrazbiddibb and Baladhuri’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 Khurradadhbih, likely compiling his Masa'id after Baladhi's Fatih was completed (probably in the late ninth century), was relying on a different source that used by Baladhi, or Ibn Khurradadhbih was possibly more interested in reflecting the reality of his own lifetime, when Arrin and the surrounding region of the Caucasus was occupied by the Khazars. This would not be completely unexpected, as Baladhi's Fatih is far more interested in the history of regions and the development of policy therein, while the Masa'id 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 Khurradadhbih even includes a tradition about the naming of the settlements in the region founded by Khusraw, which is almost identical to that included in Baladhi's Fatih and in the same order. The close similarity between Baladhi's and Ibn Khurradadhbih's accounts—both as regards vocabulary and the details they contain—would strongly suggest a common source or, perhaps less likely, the Masa'id's direct reliance on the Fatih 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 Fatih, Ibn Khurradadhbih's Masa'id or an unnamed predecessor of both was actually the source of their account. In the case of Qudama b. Ja'far, as I have outlined elsewhere, Baladhi's Fatih is the primary source of information relied upon by Qudama for all of his fatih section. This reliance includes not just the verbatim repetition of many of Baladhi's traditions, but also the near identical organization and chapter
titling of the whole section. As regards the wall tradition, however, Qudama follows Ibn Khurradadhbih in specifying Khazars rather than Turks. In Ibn al-Faqih's version, we are given slightly more information than is found in Baladhi and Ibn Khurradadhbih. He agrees with Ibn Khurradadhbih in speaking of the Khazars rather than the Turks, but frames the entire event as taking place just outside Bâb al-Abîb. Citing a certain Abû 'Abd Allah at-Tâibi, the Abbasid calliph al-Manṣûr is purported to have asked if anyone "knew how Anishirvân built the wall which is called 'the gate' (al-bâb)," before providing a similar version of the account but with substantially different vocabulary and some variation in content.

The narrative in all of these texts culminates in a description of Anishirvan'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:

Baladhi: Anishirvan 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 Khurradadhbih: Anishirvan 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.

Qudama b. Ja'far: Anishirvan 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 Khurradadhbih's version shares the same minor variations as Qudama'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-Faqîh/Yáqût's version. There is
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:

Anšīšwín 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-Faqīh'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-Faqīh 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 Anšīšwín's building methods, and Ibn al-Faqīh chose a different explanation to the other three. It is also possible that Ibn al-Faqīh 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-Faqīh explicitly mentions on two occasions that he is using Baladhrū as a source, and James Montgomery has highlighted that Ibn al-Faqīh also makes extensive use of Ibn Khurarradāhbīh's Masā'idk. Moreover, Ibn al-Faqīh's Kitāb al-Bylādan was shown to be a major source of information for Yāqūt's dictionary by De Goeje, and it is also evident that Yāqūt draws heavily on Baladhrū's Fatūh. In addition, Qudāmā exhibits significant reliance on Baladhrū's Fatūh for the Fatūh section of his Kitāb al-Khurāj, though in the instance above it seems more likely that Qudāmā was relying on Ibn Khurarradāhbīh, or an unnamed, shared source.

While it is distinctly possible that Baladhrū's Fatūh 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-Faqīh's writing — perhaps a common teacher whose traditions he combined with others through Ḣikātāt. 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 Baladhrū's reliability as a transmitter of this material.

45 Although neither of these two citations occurs in the section on the Caucasus.
48 He cites him by his name Ahmad b. Yahiya b. Jahlār a total of 32 times and another 56 times by the name Baladhrū. See Lynch, Arab Conquests, ch. 6.

CONCLUSIONS: FROM THE INSIDE, LOOKING OUT
What explains Baladhrū'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 Baladhrū 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 Fatūh 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.

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 Sassanian period, Baladhrū 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 Fatūh does not include any material on how the Sassanians, for instance, had utilized Arab tribes like the Dāni Lakhm to prevent indiscriminate raiding of their southern and western borders; this was simply no longer relevant for Baladhrū, and so this type of information finds no mention in the Fatūh. Whether these political and social divisions were historically accurate is far more difficult to ascertain, but their explanations seem to have held 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, one finds no such story of wonder included in Baladhrū'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 Sassanian Khusrav 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 Baladhrū 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 Baladhrū's amalgamation of traditions within the Fatūh or on possible archival materials which no longer survive — demonstrates that a

50 On this point, along with the parallels in historical memory between Alexander and Mamlam b. Abd al-Malik, see Antoine Borrut, Entretien et pouvoir: L'espace syrien Sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbasides (Leiden, 2011), 267–69.
multiplicity of accounts cannot be taken as evidence itself for the validity of this information.

5. THE MISSION OF BISHOP ISRAYÉL 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,” Movses Daxurane'i discusses the embassy ordered by the prince ( וישוע ) of Caucasian Albania, Varaz-Tshat, and led by Bishop Isayēl of Mec Kofmank’ to the Huns and their leader, Alp litšer, in the winter of 681–82. Researchers have repeatedly addressed this unique report of the Albanian historian, proposing illuminating reasons for the organization

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* Translated from “Миссия епископа Исраïэля и вопросы исторической географии васальской Албании,” Сретенский сборник: Новейшие археологические работы и изыскания (Москва, 2001), 162–70.

1 Daxurane'i, 2,39 (tr. Dowsett, 154–55; tr. Smbatyan, 123–24).