1

Introduction

Whosoever sees me in a dream sees me in waking life, because Satan does not take my appearance.[1]

Nearly 200 years after the Prophet Muḥammad died, he reappeared in the city of Bukhara in present day Uzbekistan. Muḥammad wore a white cap[2] on his head as he rode his camel al-Qaswāʾ into the central bazaar of Kharqān.[3] A large crowd gathered around Muḥammad, overjoyed that the Prophet of Islam had come to their city located on what was then the far eastern fringe of the Islamic empire. Muḥammad, the seal of the Prophets and the last of God's messengers, to whom God transmitted the final revelation in the form of the Qurʾan through the Angel Gabriel, had come to their city. The Bukharans were delighted.

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[1] Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿl al-Bukhārī (810–870), *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī; Jamʿ jawāmiʿ al-aḥādīth wa-al-asānīd wa-makniz al-ṣiḥāḥ wa-al-sunan wa-al-masānīd*, 3 vols. (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Jamʿīyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmī, 2000), Kitāb 92 *al-taʿbīr*, Bāb 10, p. 1415, *hadith* 7079.

[2] Narshakhī describes Muḥammad as wearing a "*kulāh-i safīd*," and *kulāh* is the general Persian term for a cap, though it could also more specifically mean a high or medium high soft cap. The *kulāh* and the *qalansuwa* – a cap worn either under a turban or by itself – were both part of a typical medieval Persian costume. Both items are distinct from the turban (*ʿimāma* or *dulband*). Y. K. Stillman, N. A. Stillmann, and T. Majda, "Libās," *EI2*. See also W. Björkman, "Tulband," *EI2*; W. Björkman, "Ḳalansuwa," *EI2*.

[3] The female camel is known as al-Qaswāʾ, al-Jadʿāʾ, or al-ʿAdbāʾ. Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, vol. IX; The Last Years of the Prophet: The Formation of the State A.D. 630–632/A.H. 8–11*, translated by, Ismail K. Poonawala (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 150–151.

1

2   Introduction

The assembled multitude decided to lodge the Prophet in the home of a certain Khwāja Imām Abū Ḥafṣ al-Bukhārī, a pious and praiseworthy man who was a prominent denizen of the city. Khwāja Imām Abū Ḥafṣ was a learned ascetic who had pursued his religious studies in Baghdad. After returning from Iraq to Bukhara, he had become one of the honored teachers in his home city. Khwāja Imām Abū Ḥafṣ hosted Muḥammad in his home. In a fitting tribute to his illustrious guest, he recited the Qurʾan for Muḥammad for three days and three nights. In fact, it is unknown if he did anything else during those three days when he hosted the Prophet. The Prophet listened in silence. Muḥammad never once corrected Khwāja Imām Abū Ḥafṣ, since his recitation of the revelation was flawless.

The events in the preceding story read like fantasy. But they are real, in so far as they occurred within someone's dream, which was then recounted in *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā*, a medieval Central Asian book of local history.[4] Such dream narratives, which appear in various forms of historical writing in the medieval Islamic world, are an overlooked thread in a gauzy gossamer web of references, one of myriad tensile cultural strands that reinforced and reflected one another in the once glistening and now dusty web of early Islamic historical writing. The fantastical nature of this encounter with the Prophet did not make it any less significant for the author, al-Narshakhī, who included this episode in his history about the city of Bukhara. Muḥammad ibn Salām Baikandī, the man who is credited with dreaming the encounter, lived in a milieu in which pious dreams – especially those involving Muḥammad – were as real and as significant as events that occurred during waking life. But what do we – as historians, scholars, and modern readers – do with such a history penned more than a millennium ago, which records events that may be imagined or may never have transpired?

Positivist history has been the dominant trend over the past century in scholarship on the history of Islam. Scholarship on the political, military, economic, legal, and social history of the Islamicate world has traditionally placed a high premium on ascertaining the names, dates, facts, and figures that allow us to reconstruct history and what precisely happened.

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[4] Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar Al-Narshakhī, *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā*, edited by, Mudarris Razavi (Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1972), 77–81; Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar Al-Narshakhī, *The History of Bukhara*; *Translated From a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshakhī*, edited and translated by Richard N. Frye (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1954) 56–59.

This line of scholarship has been invaluable in providing a narrative history of the emergence and development of Islam as a social, military, political, legal, and religious phenomenon. It has allowed us to contextualize the early Islamic community within its Late Antique milieu and to trace the expansion of Islam over vast expanses of land during the early centuries of Islamic rule.

This traditional positivist approach forms the bedrock from which to further investigate the various and complex dimensions of the Islamicate world that have developed during the past 1400 years. As we move beyond the questions of "what happened, and why?" we are able to engage with the thorny, more open-ended questions of "how did these communities perceive themselves and the others around them, and how did they crystallize and express these understandings?" Following the latter, more open-ended line of research, this project pays close attention to the purpose and intention behind a text's creation and what the texts reveal about how their authors perceived themselves and the world around them. These are insights that can be gleaned, in significant part, from the themes, claims, references, and strategies evident in the texts themselves.

Over the past three decades, scholars have paid increasingly closer attention to the political and literary dimensions of Islamicate historical writing produced in the medieval Middle East. These scholars include Stephen Humphreys, Stefan Leder, Albrect Noth, Fred Donner, Jacob Lassner, Chase Robinson, John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, Richard Bulliet, Tayeb El-Hibri, Julie Meisami, and Christopher Melchert, all of whom have pioneered fruitful methodological approaches to Islamic history and place a premium on considering why medieval authors presented themselves and their histories in that way that they did.

In line with this turn in scholarship away from primarily positivist history, this project builds on existing scholarly assumptions and proposes an innovative method of approaching local histories of the Persianate world written in Arabic and Persian. This approach – freed from the reconstruction of events as the primary goal of scholarly endeavor – allows the sources to be read and used in new ways to understand how these Perso-Muslim individuals and communities understood and expressed their hybrid identities, perched on the fringes and peripheries of the Islamic empire. The intriguing dreams, fanciful genealogies, and suspect etymologies are transformed from data-poor curiosities into rich sources of information about identity, rhetoric, authority, legitimacy, and center-periphery relations.

PERIPHERIES AND EMPIRES

Texts composed by scholars and bureaucrats on the peripheries of Islamic empires during the tenth to early fifteenth centuries provide, along with the hard facts of history, richly imagined histories of their local towns and cities. Prophets, saints, Companions and descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad, and other devout Muslims populate these sprawling literary worlds. Local histories are interested in dynastic history and the events of successive *dawla* – or the reigns of dynasties and rulers – but they also describe the physical and spiritual contours of regional landscapes, including sacred sites and graves of the pious, while toponyms boast extraordinary and magical etymologies. These histories also record the human capital – teachers of religious sciences, holy men, and pious women – that the authors believed would place their city on the map of the Islamic world as a *bona fide* Muslim community of significance.

Trimmed like frivolous fat off the real meat of history that historians so often crave – names, dates, facts, and figures – accounts of dreams, myths, improbable etymologies, and dubious stories have generally been disregarded as fabulist embellishments created for literary effect. This historiographical study turns its attention to precisely such narratives that appear in local histories written about provinces and cities on the peripheries of Islamic empires that had their heartlands in Arabia, Syria, and Iraq. On close examination, these events and myths, which may have been fabricated or occurred only in the dream world, express profound truths about the people who wrote the histories and the times in which they lived.

READING LOCAL HISTORIES AS SOCIAL HISTORY

Fantastical historical narratives are especially useful for elucidating how Muslims on the peripheries of Islamic empires positioned themselves in relation to the central powers in the Middle East during critical periods between the tenth and early fifteenth centuries. Persian local histories composed during the tenth through early fifteenth centuries evidence a preoccupation with authority to rule and legitimacy as distinct religio-political communities. In so doing, these local histories participate in a discourse of authority and legitimacy.[5] For example,

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[5] For a detailed discussion of early Muslim attitudes toward lands and homelands and the conceptual framework of a discourse of place, see Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Tārīkh-i Bukhārā, the book written by Narshakhī in the tenth century and then translated into Persian, extended, and then abridged during the twelfth century, relates Muḥammad's pronouncement that on the Judgment Day angels and martyrs will adorn the city of Bukhara in Khurasan, which is located in present day Uzbekistan. It will be resplendent with rubies and coral and will be the most exalted of all cities. *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*, composed about the city of Bayhaq and its environs in Khurasan in the mid-twelfth century, tells us that descendants of a particular Companion of the Prophet Muḥammad lived and taught *hadith* in the city, despite evidence to the contrary in biographical sources. Other similar narratives of cities and regions, from Qum to Tabaristan (both located in modern-day Iran) bind specific cities to pivotal moments and characters in Islamic history.

What literary strategies did Persian writers use to weave these narratives into their histories and legitimate themselves within structures of authority in medieval Islam that were predominantly Arab and based largely on genealogies into which they did not fit? Following the Arab conquests, these individuals and communities had to forge new Muslim identities. This was a multi-layered process, since "to change overt religious identification was symbolically to die in one community and be reborn in another."[6] How did Persians balance their multiple identities as Persians, Muslims, and members of various regional, provincial, ethnic, sectarian, ideological, and professional communities while writing these histories? Patterns within Islamo-Persciate writing from the peripheries of Islamic empires enable us to explore local structures of authority and legitimacy. The literary patterns that authors employed to bring the sanction and prestige of religious authority and importance to their respective cities and provinces are, in turn, vehicles through which to understand the more subtle societal conversations and anxieties that would have given rise to them in the first place.

For the local significance of topographical descriptions and an articulation of place and space in the massive twelfth century Syrian biographical dictionary and historical text, see Zayde Antrim, "Ibn ʿAsakir's Representations of Syria and Damascus in the Introduction to the Taʾrikh Madinat Dimashq," *IJMES* 38: 1 (2006): 109–129.

[6] Richard Bulliet, "Conversion Stories in Early Islam," in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands: Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, edited by, Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 129; 131. Bulliet concludes that the initial decision to convert was driven more by the desire to improve or maintain one's status in the shifting post-conquest dynamics than it was by faith and religious conviction.

A privileged connection to Muḥammad is important and occurs in various forms: Muḥammad and other prophets visit the city in waking life or in dreams, *hadith* transmitters live and teach in the city as living virtues or merits (*faḍāʾil*) and custodians of the faith, and Imams, Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), and descendants of the Prophet live and die in the region. These medieval authors also claim their territory as sanctified and hallowed ground in ways that are simultaneously localized and yet resonate with overarching notions of the Muslim *umma*. These texts evidence the dynamic of local histories making the global – the Muslim *umma* – locally and regionally differentiated. Local and regional histories are avenues that illustrate the formation of Muslim identity along the peripheries of medieval Islamic empires.

SOURCES

The central project of this book is to examine these rich and mysterious portions of early Islamic historical writing that involve dreams, prophets, saints, tangled genealogies, and fabulous etymologies and offer a new framework for considering them. It focuses most closely on annalistic Persian city and regional histories from the tenth to early fifteenth centuries. It also considers histories produced in another notable periphery, Anatolia, as a heuristic device to flesh out a comparative perspective. The political and social situations in Persia and Anatolia were distinct, and the two regions were Islamized at different times, in some areas centuries apart. Comparing Persia and Anatolia allows us to consider the underlying issue of how early medieval local histories on the peripheries framed and presented what constituted authority to rule, legitimacy as a Muslim, and legitimacy as political and religious communities with distinct practices and identities who nevertheless had an integral role in the broader *umma*.

The Persian local histories from the tenth to early fifteenth centuries analyzed in this book are *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā, Tārīkh-i Bayhaq, Tārīkh-i Qum, Tārīkh-Sīstān*, and *Tārīkh-i Tabaristān*.[7] This study extends to Anatolian sources the questions and methodologies applied to Persian

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[7] Persian sources that fall beyond the chronological or structural framework of this study or are excluded from analysis include, most notably, *Tarjama-i Maḥāsin-i Isfahān, Tārīkh-i Rūyān*, and *Shīrāz-nāmah* from the fourteenth century; *Tārīkh-i Tabaristān va Rūyān va Māzandarān, Tārīkh-i Yazd, Tārīkh-i jadīd-i Yazd*, and *Rawzāt al-jannāt fī awṣāf-i madīnat-i Harāt* from the fifteenth century; *Tārīkh-i Khānī* and *Tārīkh-i Gīlān dar vaqāyiʿ-i sālhā-yi 923–1038 Hijrī Qamarī* from the sixteenth century.

histories to explore *al-Avāmir al-ʿalāʾiyya fī al-umūr al-ʿalāʾiyya, Musā-marat al-akhbār va musāyarat al-akhyār, Tārīkh-i Āl-i Saljūq dar Ānātūlī, Saljūqnāma*, and *Abū Muslim-nāmah*. These texts were written in Persian or Arabic or both. Some sources were originally written in Arabic and later translated into Persian, some only surviving in this later translation. The term author includes editors, authors, compilers, translators, and individuals who made any substantive change – in content, form, order, or language – to a text. In this sense, all of these texts have multiple authors and are the product of many hands over the centuries, only some of whom are known and identifiable.

These texts are not simply histories but are also works of commemorative literature that evidence the dynamics, both rhetorical and physical, of the construction of authority to rule and legitimacy as a Muslim. Local histories are not only manifestations of "local pride," as Rosenthal claims, but also express a deeply felt desire and need to embed a place into the global *umma* while simultaneously expressing a specifically local identity.[8] This wealth of previously underutilized sources illustrates the ways in which authors bind cities and regions to key moments and figures in Islamic and cosmic history and to prophetic authority. They also provide an opportunity to compare and contrast iterations of Islam that varied along and across lines of ethnicity and language in the medieval Islamic world. Local and regional histories from Persian and Anatolian areas exhibit a tendency to articulate an identity that is simultaneously local yet enmeshed within the broader Muslim *umma*, with its perceived heartlands in the Arab realms of Iraq, Syria, and Arabia.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This project draws on theories and methods in historiography, social history, rhetoric, material culture, and literary criticism to identify the ways in which the authors of Persian local histories employed diverse but interrelated themes, strategies, and literary devices to portray the virtues of their cities. This in turn bound the region or city in question to key moments and characters in Islamic history. By embedding the city deep into the fabric of Islamic history and its continued development, the authors of these local histories fostered a sense of regionally specific and locally differentiated Persian Islamic identity in ways that "centered"

[8] Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography, 2nd revised edition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 150.

these histories written on the ostensible "peripheries" of empire. Chapter 2 establishes the conceptual framework that provides the intellectual scaffolding for this project.

STRUCTURE AND CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This book traces and explains the emergence and use of themes and literary strategies that "centered" texts from "peripheral" regions from a variety of angles. The following chapters address ways in which authors of local histories composed in Persia during the tenth through early fifteenth centuries wove their lands and their communities into Islamic narratives rooted in the perceived Islamic heartlands of Iraq, Syria, and Arabia. Authors "centered" their cities and regions by including narratives about descendants of the Prophet associated with the region; incorporating narratives of legitimating dreams and visions; associating *ṣaḥāba* with the land; highlighting sites of pious visitation (*ziyārat*) and other sources of blessing or sacred power (*baraka*); and incorporating sacralizing etymologies.

Authors positioned their communities to better fit into the scope of Islamic history and claimed privileged connections to Muḥammad and divine or prophetic authority in various ways. Consequently, local histories from Persia both respond to and challenge assumptions about the centrality of Arabs, Arabic, Arabia, Iraq, Syria, *ṣaḥāba*, *tābiʿūn*, ʿAlids, *sayyids*, and *sharifs* while at the same claiming their own centeredness and importance within these same frameworks. These sources simultaneously accommodate, challenge, and reconfigure notions of what constitutes "central" or "peripheral" in the medieval Islamicate world.

Each chapter provides a prism through which to understand how authors "centered" their cities and regions by integrating specific themes and literary strategies into their works. Reading local histories with an eye to these literary strategies and how these local histories accommodated and challenged traditional structures of authority brings into the foreground the hybrid identities – globally Muslim and locally unique – of these communities on the peripheries of empire. Each chapter provides depth by exploring how the theme and literary strategy is reflected in local and regional histories. Each chapter also provides breadth by placing these specific claims to authority within their broader social and political contexts.

Chapter 2, ***Methodologies for Reading Hybrid Identities and Imagined Histories***, situates this project within the literature and argues

that the methodology proposed here is a compelling new way of reading narrative local histories. The long trajectory and strong influence of positivist history in scholarship on Islam has yielded many valuable insights, but it has failed to fully make use of the ostensibly data-poor aspects of histories, such as etymologies and dream narratives. Building on existing scholarly assumptions and insights gained from positivist history, this project demonstrates how a shift away from positivist history that has gained traction in recent decades opens up new possibilities of how to understand identity, rhetoric, and center-periphery relations. The methodology applied to Islamicate history has strong implications for medieval history, particularly European history. This chapter also assesses the genre of local historical writing, which lies on a spectrum from biographical dictionaries at one end to narrative chronicles on the other, and explains why this project's methodology is ideally suited for the narrative local histories examined here.

Chapter 3, *Contexts and Authorship*, brings into one cohesive chapter the contexts of the production of the five main texts analyzed in this study: *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā, Tārīkh-i Bayhaq, Tārīkh-i Qum, Tārīkh-Sīstān, and Tārīkh-i Tabaristān*. There are three levels of context that are integral to any discussion of these texts: relevant events that occurred during the texts' production at the level of the caliphate; events that occurred in the local area during the texts' production; and what we know about the author or translator, including whether the text was commissioned or written for a patron.

Chapter 4, *Dreaming of the Prophet*, examines dreams as tools of legitimation and offers a typology of dreams that emerges in Persian local histories. It contextualizes dreams in the framework of Persian and Arabic historical writing as well the Qurʾan and *hadith*. Persian local and regional histories evidence a move to bypass genealogical affirmation and instead claim affirmation through dreams as an alternative investment of power. Claims of investments of power by pivotal characters – including the Prophet Muḥammad, pre-Islamic prophets, and holy men – create alternative avenues to genealogical legitimacy gained through descent from the *ahl al-Bayt* (family of the Prophet) and Companions of the Prophet and the subsequent generation (*ṣaḥāba* and *tābiʿūn*). Such connections to divine or prophetic authority occur through dreams or waking visions. The dreamscape of the city's denizens was a vibrant dimension of the medieval city, and dreams formed a liminal space where information about the sacred was transmitted. This chapter engages with the arguments, evidence, and theoretical

frameworks about sainthood and dreams proposed by scholars of mysticism, who have generally been more attuned to the literary significance of dream narratives than positivist historians.

Chapter 5, **Holy Bloodlines, Prophetic Utterances, and Taxonomies of Belonging**, moves from dreams about the Prophet to his descendants and utterances. It demonstrates how descendants of the Prophet functioned as legitimating devices in Persian local histories. Following Kazuo Morimoto and Theresa Bernheimer, this book defines as descendants the wide array of cross-sectarian individuals and families who claimed and were believed by their communities to enjoy kinship with the Prophet, a phenomenon that was both biological and socially constructed.[9] ʿAlids (al-ʿAlawī), Hasanids, Husaynids, Talibids, *sayyids*, and *sharifs* are all ambiguous terms and phenomena, and the terms are used flexibly and with wide variation in the medieval sources themselves, especially in the medieval Islamic east of Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.[10]

These descendants – including but not limited to *sayyids* and *sharifs* – constitute the living virtues, or *faḍāʾil*, of the land and become integral to the discourse of legitimation that these local histories construct through their form and content. This section also analyzes how *hadith* attributed to the Prophet or his descendants function as legitimating devices. It explains the significance in local histories of legitimating *hadith*, sometimes uttered by descendants of Muḥammad. A discussion of Moroccan *shurafāʾ* adds a comparative dimension to the consideration of how the family of the Prophet is portrayed and integrated in Persianate histories.

Chapter 6, **Living Virtues of the Land**, charts the roles of the Companions of Muḥammad and the subsequent generation (*ṣaḥāba* and *tābiʿūn*) in local histories. Persian local histories claim connections with divine authority that tie the city or region to prophetic authority, which can occur in the form of *ṣaḥāba* and *tābiʿūn* living, teaching, or dying and being buried in the city. Companions and descendants of Muḥammad appear in Persian local histories as living virtues of the city and custodians of the faith who are tied to a particular place. This chapter also argues

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[9] Kazuo Morimoto and Theresa Bernheimer and their work on ʿAlids (Bernheimer) and sayyido-sharifology (Morimoto) and genealogies of the Prophet's family provide the basis for my definition of these terms. See Kazuo Morimoto, "Toward the Formation of Sayyido-Sharifology: Questioning Accepted Fact," *Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 22 (2004): 87–103; Morimoto, ed., *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the Prophet* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Teresa Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids: The First Family of Islam, 750–1200* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

[10] Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids*, 2–4.