

Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic Historiography: Persian Histories from the Peripheries

Mimi Hanaoka

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Mimi Hanaoka's *Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic Historiography* offers an important and productive new perspective on the multifaceted identities and complex mentalities of elites in Persianate urban centers of the Islamic Middle Period. The book conducts a close study of a handful of Persian local histories from key urban localities of various sizes and geographic regions, which the author reads in comparison: Qum, Ṭabaristān, Bukhārā, Bayhaq, and Sīstān. The final chapter compares these with Anatolian histories. In this way Hanaoka aims to distill the common themes, tropes, schemas, and rhetorical strategies that she argues can reveal a variety of concerns which motivated elites of Perso-Islamic urban societies. A central assumption, evident from the subtitle of the book ("Persian Histories from the Peripheries"), is that the Persian-speaking authors of these works, and the members of the literate classes from which they came, considered themselves to be living on the peripheries of a religious and political world whose centers were located in the Hijaz, where Islam originated, and Arab Iraq, its current religio-political center. The main texts under inspection were all composed between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries CE and were all written in Persian. These are: *Tārīkh-i Qum* (the lost original was composed in Arabic in 988-999 by Ḥasan Qummī and translated into Persian by another Ḥasan Qummī in 1402-03); Ibn Isfāndiyār's *Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān* (early thirteenth century); *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā* (composed in Arabic by Narshakhī in 943-4 and rewritten in Persian by Qubavī in 1128-1129); Ibn Funduq's *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq* (mid-twelfth century); and the anonymous *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* (composed by multiple authors between 1062-1325 CE). As mentioned already, two of these works are Persian translations of earlier, Arabic histories composed during the tenth century. The original Arabic renditions are lost, and so Hanaoka is clear that one cannot easily determine the degree to which these works represent translations or new compositions. Hanaoka generally treats these works as artifacts of the later period and reads them with an eye to understanding post eleventh-century concerns. These concerns, however, are most evident in the author/transla-

tors' engagements with inherited memories of earlier periods; the works are all preoccupied with foundational moments in the cities' history, and most especially, with the history of the city during the first generations of Islam.

The central project of the book is to understand how these authors negotiated various competing notions of social identity, which were in part tied to concepts of place. Hanaoka sensitively exposes the tension between the universal identity of Islam, with its distant centers in Iraq, Arabia, and Syria, and local urban affiliations, with their local iterations of Islam and Caliphal politics. These were inflected with Persianate cultural idioms and political aspirations. The central thesis of the book is well developed and clearly demonstrated: local histories were strategically written to negotiate these tensions, and to legitimate peripheral locales by making them centers of the universal Islamic world, while simultaneously articulating these claims with local cultural idioms and vernacular flavors. Often these regions are represented as remaining independent from the political capital of the Muslim world, even while preserving close links to its spiritual center.

The book is composed in eight chapters, an introduction and a brief concluding chapter. The first two body chapters (chapters 2 and 3) introduce the variety of genres that comprise what Hanaoka calls local or regional history and profile the particular works that make up the core sources throughout the book. Hanaoka explains that the term local history refers to an intersection of city history, dynastic history, geographical writing, biographical dictionaries, shrine itineraries, and the like; however, with the exception of the final chapter, the study's chief sources, listed above, are city or regional histories. The following six chapters each take on one of a handful of typical themes and formal elements that the author has discerned as being characteristic of Persian local history writing in general. Episodes from the various local histories are selected to illustrate the particular ways in which the authors of these works engage with these key themes and rhetorical devices. Hanaoka carefully compares episodes on like themes to investigate how each of these historians, writing on the peripheries of the Islamic world, employed common tropes to take on the universal problem of establishing Islamic identity and universal legitimacy in ways that were prevalent in the Persianate world in general and particular to individual localities within it. In her words: "the aim is to discern patterns in the literature that the authors employed to bring the sanction and prestige of religious authority and importance to their respective cities and center their cities and regions on the ostensible peripheries of empire" (28).

Chapter 4 focuses on the frequency of dream-narratives in local histories. Hanaoka details the ways in which authors recount local residents' dreams of the Prophet Muhammad or of other early spiritual athletes to connect the city's legacy to the larger narrative of Islamic sacred history. Chapter 5 explores the use of genealogies, particularly of Arab tribes who settled in Iranian lands during the first centuries of Islam, and especially of the Prophet's family. Chapter 6 concentrates on stories about the Prophet's companions and devoted Muslims of the following generation who travelled widely to transmit hadiths and either settled or were buried in these localities. The seventh chapter studies the relationship between the narratives concerning key figures in Islamic mythology and their material remains in the local landscape, namely graves and relics of the prophet's descendants and companions, but also of Sufi saints. These sites were more than centers of storytelling; they were also the focus of devotional practices and ritual visitation, and, as such, served as economic powerhouses of the region. Chapter 8 develops this theme further, expanding the focus beyond particular sites within the city, and onto the origins of the city as a whole. Here Hanaoka studies the sources' preoccupation with founding myths and the exploration therein of the origins of the names of cities. In each of these six body chapters, Hanaoka repeatedly demonstrates that these stories all served to sanctify the peripheral lands of Islam, and moreover, that "Persian local and regional histories articulate communities that are profoundly local yet nested securely within an overarching Islamic narrative" (171).

Chapter 9 offers a welcome comparative study between Persian local histories and Anatolian ones of the Rumī Saljuqs, two different historical traditions (in Persian) from the two peripheries of the Muslim world. Hanaoka concludes here that "Anatolian sources do not share the Persian emphasis on the sanctification of the land. Instead, Anatolian sources frame Seljuq religio-political legitimacy by recording the Seljuq sultans' heroism, their legitimate descent from their eponymous ancestor, and the dynasty's prowess as warriors" (221). The author acknowledges that the sources propose a significant challenge here: there are no extant local histories for Anatolia of the kind produced in Iranian contexts. As a solution, Hanaoka chooses to compare the Persian sources with dynastic histories of the local Saljuqid rulers of Rum, which she sees as the closest analog. The comparison is not perfect and the resulting conclusion about the different sorts of motives among Anatolian writers, though interesting, may be somewhat skewed. The differences she observes might be explained more easily by the constraints of genre than by variations in local politics and culture. Local

dynastic histories produced in the Iranian world during the same period evidence the same sorts of concerns that these Anatolian ones do—proof of political legitimacy through lineage (often Turkic) and martial success. When we read, for example, the dynastic histories of the Muzaffarid dynasty, which originated in the city of Yazd, beside the local histories of Yazd, or the histories of the Āq Qūyunlū beside the history of Tabrīz, we can observe the same sorts of divergences that Hanaoka observes between Anatolian and Iranian histories. Both concerns are evident in the varieties of Iranian historical literature, whether local, dynastic, or universal.

Hanaoka implicitly takes up a subsequent question, namely why Anatolians did not write local histories like those of Qum and Ṭabaristān in the first place. In explanation she proposes the cultural differences between the peripatetic Turkic and more sedentary Persian societies, implying that Turkic patrons of Anatolian histories did not place much stock in ties to any particular land, and therefore had little interest in city histories. Her terminology, which places Anatolian and Persian styles of history-writing in opposition, may be problematic; both bodies of texts were written almost exclusively in Persian, the cosmopolitan language of culture in both contexts. The use of Persian language among Anatolians indexes certain affinities between these peripheries that might have been productively explored further. But the issue exceeds this question of terminology: one might argue that the rulers of the Iranian—or in Hanaoka's preferred nomenclature, "Persian"—environment were in reality no less peripatetic than Rumī ones, even into the Safavid era. This is not to say that there weren't important differences between the cultures of these two regions. Certainly, Anatolian Muslims during this period, living closer to the true frontier of the Dār al-Islām, did inhabit a rather different world than their neighbors in Iranian locales. Nevertheless the observation that Anatolians were more concerned with establishing local political legitimacy through reference to a universal Oghuz mythology rather than to the universal Islamic one common in Iranian contexts remains as of yet unsubstantiated, and again, seems to be an effect of the author's choice to read dynastic history as Anatolian local history in isolation from other genres. Other writings from Anatolia betray a deep and particularly local sense of commitment to Islam, as much scholarship about Anatolian *ghazā* along the *uç* demonstrates. And there are Anatolian works that may more closely parallel the formal elements of the local history traditions of Iran than do the Anatolian dynastic histories. A good example is Aflākī's hagiographical *Manāqib al-ʿArafīn*. Works like this one deeply engage with Islamic universals, but sometimes even invoke

heroic Iranian mythological themes in the process. When read alongside the dynastic histories, hagiographical works produced in Anatolia, which share certain formal features with the Persian local histories (albeit without a focus on individual cities), might yet add nuance to Hanaoka's dichotomous view of Anatolian and Persian modes of legitimation and sanctification.

As a whole, Hanaoka's book is a monumental piece of scholarship that will open important conversations among scholars of the medieval Islamic Persianate world. Historians who study local perspectives within the larger Muslim community will wish to further engage with two interrelated premises that pervade this work: the first has to do with the utility of the concept of "periphery," and the second concerns the scope and contours of Persian identity. Both are issues that the current reviewer wrestles with in his own work on Persian local histories in a slightly later period, and it is hoped that his reflections might constructively add to Hanaoka's findings here.

First, Hanaoka struggles to articulate exactly what the concept of periphery entails during the period in question. Certainly the regions of Iran she examines were on the frontiers during the earliest centuries of Islam, but by the time the Persian versions of these works were penned, one might point out that these peripheries constituted part of the heartland of the Muslim world, even while Baghdad still remained a symbolic center of the Caliphate. Hanaoka would allow that Iranian lands comprised key political and military strongholds, but they also encompassed important centers of literary production (in Persian and Arabic), and most crucially, centers of religious scholarship and pious devotion in their own right. She is certainly correct when she argues that the authors of these works believed that the prestige and sanctity of their cities could best be demonstrated by connecting their history with the foundational personages and places of Islam, namely the prophet's family, his companions, and the sites of Islam's founding and initial expansion. But one might suggest that establishing political/religious legitimacy vis-à-vis the historic heartlands of the faith is only one of the aims of these works, albeit a pivotal one. And while this may constitute a central concern of these authors, we might more productively read it as metaphorical one, standing in as a conceit for contemporary anxieties about how to negotiate more concrete struggles for legitimacy in a world that had become far more complex and multipolar than that portrayed in the prevalent narratives about Islam during its emergence. Indeed, by the tenth century, the notion of the center was increasingly relative and situa-

tional. For example, Sīstān was far from the center of the Caliphate, but it was also on the periphery of the rather more tangible Persianate dynasties of Buyids, Samanids, or Saljuks. At the same time, the town of Bayhaq may have been less important than Baghdad, and while it was also less important than the provincial city of Tus, its proximity to that famous city guaranteed that it was never a backwater. One might ask: were Qumīs of the early fifteenth century only concerned with establishing legitimacy in relation to places such as Mecca, Karbala, and Baghdad or were they more immediately concerned with establishing themselves as devotional centers or political hubs on par with more proximate, contemporary competitors, such as Isfahan or Herat? The same might be true for Bukhārī residents of the tenth and twelfth centuries. What one considers a center or a periphery changes in different contexts; we might productively consider such concepts to be relative and fluid ones, subject to comparative variations in both scales and kind.

Hanaoka repeatedly proves that establishing local sanctification and legitimation vis-à-vis the universal origins and centers of Islam was *sine qua non* for these authors. However, one might offer that this may represent only the beginning of their projects. It seems possible to read beyond the common tropes that structure these works around the search for identity and authority within the universals of religion. By design, the rhetorical strategies of these histories often function by collapsing complex and overlapping notions of identity and space into a single pair or a set of homologized pairs of oppositions, such as center-periphery, sacred-profane, and Arab-Persian. The very real and inclusive opposition between local and universal identities, which are at the heart of this study, tends to mask other, multivalent tensions along which such an opposition was imagined and articulated in the texts Hanaoka studies. These may go beyond the timeless issue of belonging and legitimacy in the Muslim *umma*.

Here we come to the issue of Persian identity, which looms large in the study. On a number of occasions, the author understands the notion of Persian-ness to be analogous to a sense of local identity and presents this local-Persian identity in opposition to the concept of a universal Muslim (possibly Arab tribal) identity (see 126-127). One wonders how much or when writers really thought of themselves as Persians? A longstanding, rich scholarly debate about the evolution of Persian identity reveals that in the eleventh or twelfth centuries it was nothing like an ethnic or national affinity. Nevertheless, even if we allow that medieval inhabitants of this world conceived of such a thing as a Persian (‘Ajamī, or Tājīk) identity or used it

to structure their social interactions, this would not have represented anything like a local identity, just the opposite. In some contexts one might imagine that Persian identity could coincide with a peripheral one, but is a peripheral identity necessarily the same as a local identity? Persian-ness—having to do with some mix of the use of Persian as either a spoken or a literary language, heritage from the pre-Islamic, Iranian aristocracy, or habitation within Iranian cities or villages—would have constituted another cosmopolitan identity, not a local one. A Persian identity would have encompassed many registers of expression (indicating participation in yet another universal community beyond the Muslim one) and was characterized by a fluid cultural system that stretched from Central Asia and northern Hind to Anatolia. It intertwined with a universal Muslim identity.

The point here is that these authors might have meant to convey a sense of local identity in competition with other local identities *within* the overlapping Persian and Muslim cosmopolitan ones. In their contemporary climates, the authors of these histories certainly needed to prove their legitimacy as Muslims, but they also needed to prove their prestige within a shared, cosmopolitan Persianate world. But again, both these universal modes of legitimation produced only a baseline of prestige and sanctity for these authors. On the ground, the particular contours of competition between inhabitants of cities within the Persianate world such as Qum and Shīrāz, Bukhārā and Samarqand, Yazd and Kirmān, Iṣfahān and Tabrīz was shaped not only by the ability of writers to prove universal legitimacy through appeals to the history of origins, but by the particularities of contemporary struggles for royal patronage, investment in agricultural infrastructure, and the attraction of merchants and pilgrims. These are to be found in the myriad anecdotes and notices about more recent figures and events that make up the rest of these works. While foundation stories are of prime concern to the authors of local histories, and while they expose a great deal about those authors' mentalities and strategizing, these present a more complex picture when read alongside the rich material about later periods that comprises the remaining chapters of these histories. Taken together, these allow us to account for contingencies that shed light on interactions between a rather complex array of imbricated identities that cohabit a fluid and multipolar sense of place and belonging. Hanaoka demonstrates that the widespread Persian narrative strategies designed to link cities or regions to the transcendent Muslim *umma* and its places of origin were reliable and effective signifiers of authority and legitimacy. Future studies will need to unpack the particular ways in which authors adapted this conceit

and deployed it for contemporary ends in the context of tensions between other centers and peripheries on a smaller scale or around other cultural domains than that of the global Muslim community.

Hanaoka's study of Persian local histories does much to further the scholarly debate on identities and mentalities within the medieval Perso-Islamic world and will provoke further discussion for the conceivable future on this topic. Her book should appear on every bibliography of medieval Islamic history or literature.

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