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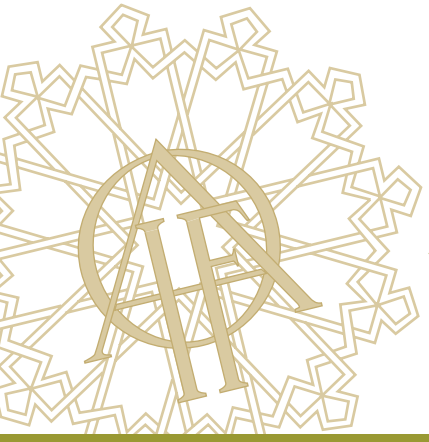

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Sarah Bowen Savant

“Persians” in Early Islam.

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SARAH BOWEN SAVANT

"Persians" in Early Islam

In the period following the conquests and coinciding with Iran's conversion, the terms "Persia" and "Persians" came under new consideration by both Iranians and non-Iranians. In what follows, I begin with lexical practice and the use of the terms Persia and Persians, and note a diminishment in competing ideas of Iran in early Islam. I then propose that changes in conventions of lexical practice point to a re-imagining of Iranian social identities through which new ideas about Persia and Persians emerged. In this process, traditionists undertook to explain the association of Persia and Persians with Islam through reconsideration of the Persians' past. The remainder of this article is divided into two sections in which I suggest the role that memories about the Persians' past played in authenticating and reshaping Persians as Muslims. First, I propose that traditions about the pre- and early Islamic past provided satisfying new profiles for converts. Second, I propose that traditions helped to produce Persian Muslims' estrangement from their Sasanian pre-Islamic past. Many readers may be familiar with the traditions presented; my contribution lies in bringing them together and introducing the argument that they, and others like them, indicate and produced transformations in ideas about Persians.

The Idea of Persia and the Persians

In modern scholarship, the term Iran is conventionally used to refer to a concrete geography centered on a plateau. Geographical terms, however, are always imaginative ways of putting order to physical space. Rivers, oceans, deserts, plateaus, and mountain ranges may be employed to naturalize boundaries, but the ways in which borders are redrawn to suit new circumstances renders clear that the seemingly natural can, with the passage of a few

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generations, be reconfigured to reflect new human situations. Furthermore, borders themselves reveal very little about the ways in which those who live within and beyond them experience them. Homelands, even, are surprisingly difficult to specify, all the more so when the groups that inhabit them move, bringing home with them.

In Achaemenid (559–330 BCE) and Sasanian (224–651 CE) times, the term "Persia" was used both to refer to the ethnic homeland of a "Persian" people in southwestern Iran, and to the vast lands under its imperial control and cultural influence after its people moved.[1] Scholars (i.e., Browne, de Planhol, Morgan) have traced ambiguous usage of the geographical term "Persia" in early Islam to this prior pre-Islamic ambiguity.[2] In early Arabic sources, one can thus find the term فارس (*Fārs/Fāris*) applied both in the narrow sense of the province, particularly by geographers, and in wider senses to refer to a territory including the province but also exceeding it. Likewise, the term اهل فارس or sometimes just *Fāris*, may constitute either a "Persian" people, generally, or the province's people, whereas the much more common term الفرس (*al-Furs*) most often refers to a people not limited to a province.[3]

Nearly twenty years ago Gnoli initiated reconsideration of the origin of the related idea of Iran (Middle Persian, *Ērān*) with the argument that the idea of *Ērān* reached a point of clarity only at the beginning of the Sasanian period.[4] The idea of *Ērān* was part of a program that included among its elements an appeal to Achaemenian origins.[5] Accordingly, the Sasanians introduced the Middle Persian titles of *Shāhān shāh Ērān* and invented the idea of *Ērānshahr* to refer to their realm and as part of state propaganda.[6] Sasanian titles made extensive use

1. Both the "Persian" Achaemenid and Sasanian rulers established imperial centers outside of Fārs, including Susa (Achaemenids) and Ctesiphon (Sasanians).

2. "The confusion between the two senses of the word was continuous, fueled by the Greeks who used the name Persai to designate the entire empire. It lasted through the centuries of Arab domination, as Fārs, the term used by Muslims, was merely the Arabicized version of the initial name." De Planhol, "Fārs", p. 328. Cf. Morgan, *Medieval Persia*, p. 1; Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, p. 4–5.

3. E.g., the *Tanbīh*, p. 77–78, where al-Masʿūdī includes in the land of Persians Fārs, as a province, as well as other regions and towns, including Nishapur, Herat, and Marv in Khurāsān. Al-Masʿūdī describes seven original nations (*umam*), including Persians, *al-Furs*. The term *al-ʿAjam* is sometimes also translated as "Persians". For understanding the history of the idea of Persians, sources' choice of the term *al-ʿAjam*, rather than Persians, is significant.

4. For Gnoli's contribution to scholarship, see Shahbazi, "The History of the Idea of Iran", *Idea of Iran* 1, p. 100.

5. "The appeal to Achaemenian origins, the identification with the Kayanids, the setting up of a traditional heritage that met the requirements of the new dynasty and the social forces that were its mainstay, the codification of the religious scriptures as a result of selection and censure in accordance with the canons of an orthodoxy that was, in its turn, invented by the clergy of the *mowbeds* and *ēhrbeds* are just so many aspects of a single political and cultural process that was vigorously upheld by the Sassanians' propaganda". Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, p. 178.

6. "This new title had a very important value insofar as, in its adoption by Ardaxšīr and his successors, we can actually detect the birth of the very idea of Iran in its political, cultural and religious meaning. He who coined that title wanted to refer to the *arya* and Zoroastrian tradition so as to cement his politics and to differentiate them from those of his hated predecessors". Gnoli describes *Ērān-shahr* as "something new, though in the guise of a venerable tradition", and invokes Hobsbawm and Ranger's notion of the "invention" of tradition. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, p. 138, 139 and 177. Gnoli cites Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

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of the name *Ērān*, and *Ērān* was also used as part of personal names.[7] Regarding the "prehistory and protohistory" of the idea, Gnoli developed a series of arguments to demonstrate the innovation that the Sasanian idea represented. For example, the Achaemenids themselves, he argued, did not invoke *Ērān* to refer to their domain since they had a more universalistic conception of it.[8]

For scholars of pre-Islamic Iran, Gnoli's essay represented a forceful case for rethinking the production and reception of the idea of *Ērān*.[9] Importantly, though his essay briefly treats the idea of *Ērān* (Arabic, *Īrān*, *Īrānshahr*) after Islam, this was not his focus, nor was Gnoli's principle concern "Persia", except in relation to *Ērān*.[10]

In comparison to the Sasanian period, early Islam is the era of Persia and Persians.[11] The terms *Īrān* and *Īrānshahr* continue to be used by Muslims, although at the very least one can say that Muslims, Iranian and non-Iranian alike, do not appear to have been attuned to the term's potential. Geographers, in their entries, treat separately *Īrānshahr* and *Fārs*, the province.[12] Likewise, Muslims refer to *Īrānshahr* in contexts in which Iran's pre-Islamic past is mentioned, especially in the form of its "national" tradition.[13] Still, otherwise, the term "Persia" is generally preferred, and often even in discussions of geography and that national past.[14] Muḥammad himself is remembered to have spoken of "Persia," but not *Īrānshahr*.

7. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, p. 130. Cf. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, esp. p. 108ff., 214–215, 416, and 513ff.

8. While the inscriptions of Darius I (522–486 BCE) evidence "a sort of awareness that we might define as Aryan," and the Old Persian *arya* was used by Darius or Xerxes (486–465 BCE) "to define the stock they were proud of belonging to," the term *arya* was connected not so much with a political situation as with a cultural and religious heritage. In fact, the "true national feeling, in Achaemenian times, was more closely connected with the awareness of being 'Persian' rather than coming from 'Aryan' stock". By comparison, the Avestan Airyas possessed a stronger "Iranian" identity, but this too lacked a sense of a nation with a fixed territory. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, p. 6–7, 69, and 175–177.

9. Wiesehöfer, for example, likely refers to Gnoli in the preface to his book, *Ancient Persia*, p. xi.

10. For work that begins with Gnoli, see especially Curtis and Stewart, eds., *Idea of Iran*, vols 1–4. In vol. 1, especially noteworthy is Shahbazi's critique (p. 100–111) in which he argues that Gnoli's "*argumentum ex silentio* is quite untenable and that a closer examination of our sources reveals a much greater antiquity for the idea of 'Iran' as a national state".

11. A strain of recent scholarship relating to Iran has also sought to strictly limit the size of a social group called Persians in early Islam, with the argument that early Muslim sources, when they refer to *al-Furs*, err by confusing the people of part of Iran, that is, Fārs, for the entirety of Iranians. For example, see Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, p. 8–9. Considering that early Muslims, including Iranians, themselves use the term "Persians", such scholarship risks favoring a hypostacized notion of Iranians. One can refer to Iranians, but with the acknowledgment that for early Islam this is not the primary category of Muslim sources.

12. E.g., Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* 1, p. 343–344 and vol. 4, p. 256–258.

13. For an example, al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 229–230. Cf. al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt* 1, p. 32. For the distinction between a pre-Islamic "religious" vs. "national" tradition, see Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, p. 35ff. and Yarshater, "Iranian National History", *Cambridge History of Iran* 3/1, p. 395ff.

14. For example, see al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 178ff. Also see Boyce, *The Letter of Tansar*, p. 26, n. 1 and Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, p. 153–155.

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Persia was likely preferred for a variety of reasons. The hypothesis, advanced by Gnoli and others, that after the conquests Muslims found Persia less ideologically suspect than *Īrān* seems plausible.[15] Gnoli advanced the argument that after the Arab conquests *Īrān* was problematic because of its associations with the Sasanian national and religious past. From the viewpoint of Muslims, at the very least, the connections, in Sasanian times, between Sasanian and Zoroastrian authorities, certainly may have rendered it problematic.[16] Furthermore, there may have been a perception that *Īrān* remained a distinctively Zoroastrian concept since Zoroastrians continued to use it. It seems at least as likely, however, that *Īrān* fades from use for other reasons. As Shahbazi argued, the Islamic conquest may have forced out *Ērānshahr* from official records since the Sasanian empire ruling over *Ērānshahr*, as such, had in fact collapsed.[17] Additionally, insofar as Muslims, practicing a religion of Arab origin, preferred the term "Persia," they gave new life to a long-standing term preferred by non-Iranian, pre-Islamic sources, including Arab ones.[18] Iran's Manichaeans had employed the term Persia, in preference to *Īrān*, and likewise Christians and Jews had long referred to Persia.[19] Arab Muslims, thus, in the beginning, would simply have followed a past practice directly available and more familiar to them, one which Iranian Muslims themselves came to adopt. This being said, the opinion that *ʿIrāq* was an Arabization of *Īrān* is often stated in early Muslim sources, and would indicate that at least some people preferred to consider that an idea of *Īrān* was retained.[20]

Changes in conventions of lexical practice point to a rethinking of Iranian social identities. In Islam's first years in Iran, Persians were not Muslims, and Muslim sources use the term Persians in contexts where plainly they mean Zoroastrians.[21] Even in the ninth century Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) accuses Persians of only weak loyalty to Islam. He disputes a practice, according to which Khurāsānians were called Persians, and laments that many Arabs lump

15. E.g., Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia*, p. xi-xii.

16. For Gnoli's comments regarding the strength of Zoroastrianism in Sasanian *Ērānshahr*, see *Idea of Iran*, p. 172–173.

17. Shahbazi raises this point within a discussion of usage of the term *Ērān* after the Achaemenids: "Let us now consider the Hellenistic and Parthian periods. Once the Persian world empire collapsed, the Graeco-Macedonian rule did not permit the continuation of a term such as **Aryānām xšaΘram*, just as the Islamic conquest was to force out *Ērānšahr*/*Ērān* from *official* records" (emphasis Shahbazi's). Shahbazi, "The History of the Idea of Iran," p. 106.

18. One finds the term "Persia" across pre-Islamic Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic sources. Cf. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, p. 155–156.

19. On the Manichaeans and their knowledge of *Ērānshahr*, see MacKenzie, "Ērān, Ērānšahr", p. 535. Cf. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, p. 151–153, and Shahbazi, "The History of the Idea of Iran", p. 108.

20. The philologist al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213/828) is reported to have said that ʿIrāq was Īrān Arabized; e.g., Yāqut, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. 1, p. 417 ("Īrānshahr") and vol. 3, p. 628–629 ("Irāq").

21. In early sources of Muslim tradition one can find the term "Persians" (i.e., *al-Furs*) with the apparent intention of Zoroastrians. Likewise, one detects corrections of reports when mostly later transmissions of them prefer either *al-Majūs* or *al-ʿAjam* to *al-Furs* and *ahl al-Fāris* (or *ahl bilād al-Fāris*). For example, see Hadith reports cited by Cook, "Magian Cheese", p. 449–467. Though it would not seem to be Cook's intention, the traditions he provides suggest an original assumed equivalence of the terms *al-Furs* and *al-Majūs*, and the way that subsequent traditionists distinguished between the two.

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the people of Persia and Khurāsān together as Persians because Persia and Khurāsān are connected to one another and share the Persian language.[22] His own roots, notably, were in Khurāsān. According to Ibn Qutayba, when Muḥammad said, "If faith were hung from the Pleiades, then the men from Persia would take it," he meant, in fact, the people of Khurāsān, not the people of Persia. That is because in this Hadith there is evidence of the designated people's desire for religion, their hastening to it, and their holding fast to the norms of the Prophet.[23] The history of Islam among the people of Persia would prove that Muḥammad could not have had them in mind since the people of Persia in Islam's early days felt an intense enmity to Muslims and fought until they were overcome, routed, and torn to pieces.[24]

Remembering Persians' Early Connections to Islam

Neither Persia nor Persians can be understood through conventions of lexical practice in isolation. Of great relevance are traditions about the history of Persia and Persians that describe the origins of Islam among Persians and that help constitute Persians as Muslims. Many of these traditions describe Persians' earliest encounters with Islam in ways that would demonstrate their present affinity for Islam: Islam has antique origins in Persia; Persians were present and active in Arabia during Muḥammad's mission; and many Persians welcomed the arrival of Arabs and their Islam.

The term tradition, as used here, refers to ways of remembering the past that connected transmitters and readers/listeners backwards in time and that served as the medium for reflecting on the present. Tradition includes Hadith and historical reports (*akhbār*), but exceeds them. Tradition, in the words of Shils, is "anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present."[25] Shils' minimal definition of the material of tradition is helpful insofar as he is silent on questions of soundness, authenticity, and truth, and in relation to the intentions, effects, or functions of tradition. The decisive criterion for tradition is transmission: traditions are handed down from generation to generation.

Students of material culture have long sought ways to identify the original context of an artifact's production. They have also recognized the difficulties and rewards of identifying the significance of physical objects and how such significances change over time. Traditions are artifacts of their own times insofar as transmitters, choosing to remember them, engage in acts of production. Understanding them requires interpretation and its admitted difficulties.

22. "Fārs and Khurāsān were, according to the Arabs, one thing" because they "sit opposite one another and are connected to one another" and "because the language of the people of Fārs and the people of Khurāsān is Persian." *Faḍl*, p. 105. Ibn Qutayba's statement suggests an idea that Fārs is not strictly provincial since Khurāsān did not border Fārs province. Le Strange, *Lands*, p. xx.

23. See *Faḍl*, p. 104ff.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 104; the manuscript is damaged here. I have translated what remains. Cf. al-Bayḥaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* 6, p. 333, where al-Bayḥaqī states that many sound traditions relating to the conquest of Fāris have been reported, and that some of the *ahl al-ʿilm* have claimed that these traditions apply to everyone who speaks Persian, including people from Khurāsān.

25. Shils, *Tradition*, p. 12.

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Based on their dating, the traditions that follow likely belong to the time of Persia's conversion, and are handed down, in fact, in many of the very sources through which Muslims would have learned about their faith and its history. They are repeated by both Persian and non-Persian traditionists, and give some sense of what Persians and other non-Arabs, including Central Asians and many Iraqis, may have been speaking about when they considered the history of Islam, and their place within it and Islam generally.[26] The traditions played a role in describing Persians as Muslims by describing the origins and history of their connections to the faith.

The Persians' Genealogies and Islam's Antique Origins in Persia

In the traditions, Persians' origins are traced to prophets that award them pedigrees as true believers before the advent of Muḥammad's Islam. For example, traditions recalled by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), born in Āmul, just south of the Caspian sea, show that Persians descend from Gayūmart, Persia's first king, who was Adam, Adam's descendant, or Noah's grandson. Al-Ṭabarī also provides other possible ways that Persians belong to Noah's family.

In the case of Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (d. *c.* 281 or 282/894–895), the ninth-century historian from Jibāl, one sees an historian treating genealogies of the *ʿAjam*, his preferred term. Al-Dīnawarī incorporates indigenous Iranian legendary figures into a single genealogical tree in which all persons descend from Noah. Al-Dīnawarī thus assigns genealogies from Noah to both heroes of epic—such as Farīdūn, Īraj, and Manūchihr—and to eponymous ancestors of Iran's regions, including Fārs and Khurāsān. Because of their descent, Iranian figures are blood relatives of other figures of Islam's salvation history. Al-Dīnawarī holds this genealogical tree together as he synchronizes each generation of Noah's descendants in his narrative, and thus, the leading personalities in the drama of salvation history.[27] For example, he shows that Moses was a contemporary of the ʿĀdite al-Walīd b. Muṣʿab, the Yemenite al-Milṭāṭ, the Persian Kay Qubād, and the prophet Shuʿayb.[28]

26. In reconstructing the history of early Islamic Iran, historians have often expressed frustration at the apparent lack of both material and textual survivals that would document and explain the likely success of Islam in Iran in the ninth and tenth centuries. In the words of Bulliet, "Without data it is difficult to write history, and medieval Islam produced no missionaries, bishops, baptismal rites, or other indicators of conversion that could conveniently be recorded by the Muslim chronicler". Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*, p. 4. For Morony's reflections on Bulliet's *Conversion to Islam*, and periodizations of conversion in general, see "The Age of Conversions". The material that follows, thus, contributes to the study of conversion in its representation of ideas, especially simple ones, which likely helped Islam prosper in Iran.

27. As Mottahedeh has noted, early Muslim historians, when they examined the pre-Islamic past, demonstrated a keen interest in "comparative chronology". Having inherited separate chronologies for "the sages of the Greeks, the prophets of the Jews, and the kings of the pre-Islamic empires, especially of the Iranian empires", Muslim scholars set to work trying to determine "which of these sages, prophets and kings were contemporaneous with each other". In the end: "The problems posed by comparative chronology and the assumed filiation of all traditions were 'solved' in a variety of ways". These included, he noted, the forging of genealogical connections and identification of figures with different names (as al-Dīnawarī does in the *Akhbār*). Mottahedeh, "Some Islamic Views", p. 20.

28. Al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 47–49.

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Muslims knew Muḥammad's descendants and elaborated other genealogies in scientific sorts of ways, including Arab tribal genealogies and in the institution known as *walā'*, according to which converts to Islam became affiliated to an Arab tribe and were recognized as kin, and thus part of a Muslim society defined in Arab terms. While the prophets' genealogies are mentioned by the learned genealogists, they belong to a different sort of imaginative territory characterized more by general assertions about ancestry than by itemized lists of ancestors.[29] Al-Dīnawarī was unusual, in fact, for his attention to detail. The most proximate origins of the genealogical material can be traced to the general idea of *islām* which emerged with some clarity in the early years of Qur'an interpretation and collection of traditions about Muḥammad and his life.[30] Muḥammad belonged to a prophetic family possessed of both spiritual and in some cases blood ties. He was remembered to have referred to his fellow prophets using familiar terms, suggesting a kinship he shared with these earlier prophets, and they with each other.[31] Muḥammad himself descended from Adam through Abraham and Ishmael.[32] God bestowed His favor not just on previous prophets, but on their progeny as well, or at least those who believed.[33] Muḥammad himself recalled that the noblest form of descent was descent from prophets.[34] This family of prophets knew *islām*, or the monotheistic submission to God that God had revealed throughout the ages to particular prophets and their peoples. The Arabs and their prophet, Muḥammad, were only the last to be invited to embrace *islām* by one of God's prophets. The Qur'an therefore refers to Abraham and his sons Ishmael and Isaac as muslims, or "submitters" to the one God.[35] This idea of an *islām* before Muḥammad's Islam placed the new religion, and its followers, within the history of Near Eastern monotheisms and certainly was important for the Muslim community's earliest self-understanding.

This idea of a prophetic family also provided the opportunity for its latter-day descendants to recover their roots. With the passage of time, many peoples in what Muslims came to identify as the civilized world—Greeks, Turks, Africans, and others—were found to descend in one way or another from prophets. Yet claims that the Persians descend from prophets, in fact, appear in ways that would seem to speak directly to Iranian audiences. One wonders how non-Iranian audiences received, for example, al-Dīnawarī's statement that the Iranian holiday of Nawrūz was established by Noah's descendant, Jamshīd.[36]

29. See for example Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿArab*, p. 463.

30. For this point, see also Savant, "Isaac as the Persians' Ishmael", *Comparative Islamic Studies*, p. 5–6.

31. In one Hadith, Muḥammad is remembered to have said that the prophets are "sons" (of one father) by different mothers. In another version, he referred to them as "brothers." E.g., al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 2, p. 369.

32. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, p. 1–4. Cf. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* 1/ 1, p. 27–30.

33. Qur'an 3:33–34 and 6:83–88. Al-Bukhārī cites Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/686–688), who says Qur'ān 3:33–37 refers to the believers (*al-mu'minūn*) from the families of Abraham, ʿImrān, Yāsīn, and Muḥammad. The closest to Abraham are those who follow him (Qur'ān 3:68); they are the believers (*al-mu'minūn*). Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 2, p. 365.

34. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 2, p. 350 and 352.

35. For the term *muslim* as applied to Abraham and his family, see Qur'an 2:127–128, 2:131–133, and 3:67–68. The term is also applied to Noah (10:72), Joseph (12:101), Moses (10:90) and Lot (51:36, by interpretation).

36. Al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 33.

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Salmān, Muḥammad's Persian Companion

A Persian was also found as a central figure in the early Muslim community. Salmān al-Fārisī appears throughout Muslim tradition as Muḥammad's foremost Persian companion who, abandoning his home in Persia, set out in search of the most perfect form of religion, finally achieving his goal in Arabia.[37] Details of this, first chapter of Salmān's biography vary, but often they include his Persian birthplace,[38] his Zoroastrian origins, his departure from Persia in search of a more perfect religion, his services to Christian monks, and his first encounter with Muḥammad.[39] Salmān is also treated as a person who had an especially long life (as one of the *muʿammarīn*), during which he knew Muḥammad's predecessor Jesus.[40] For many Qur'an exegetes and biographers of Muḥammad, the story of his life illustrates firstly the existence of spiritual men who anticipated Muḥammad. Salmān's early encounters with Muḥammad also provided material for reflection on several other issues relating directly to Muḥammad, the Qur'an, and the early Muslim community. Thus, in his *Tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarī's reporting links Salmān's journey to Muḥammad to the theological issue of the ultimate fate of monotheists who do not convert to Islam. The point of departure is whether the good monotheists who led Salmān to Muḥammad faced hellfire—Muḥammad's opinion, we are told, before Qur'an 2:62 was revealed.[41] Qur'an commentators also wrestled with the issue of whether Salmān, strictly speaking, was a *ḥanīf*.

For many traditionists, Salmān's recognition of Muḥammad reveals the universality of Muḥammad's message. Salmān is thus one of Muḥammad's key interlocutors when Muḥammad states that God has sent him to all peoples, not just to Arabs. Salmān figures in listings of Muḥammad's non-Arab followers, who also include Bilāl and Ṣuhayb, and in some cases is

37. Major European studies relating to Salmān include: Huart, "Selmân du Fârs", p. 297–310; Caetani, esp. "Salmān al-Fārisi", p. 399–419; Horovitz, "Salmān al-Fārisi", p. 178–183; Massignon, *Salmân Pâk*, p. 443–483; and Hämeen-Anttila, "The Corruption of Christianity", p. 115–126. Also see Della Vida, "Salmān al-Fārisī", p. 701–702.

38. Locations include the village of Jayy within Iṣfahān; Iṣṭakhr in Fārs; or Rāmhurmuz or Jundaysābūr in Khūzistān.

39. Salmān is frequently given the *kunyā* Abū ʿAbd Allāh. He is also known as Salmān al-Khayr and Salmān b. Islām. For a treatment of Salmān's journey to Muḥammad, and early variant traditions, see Massignon, *Salmân Pâk*, p. 450–452.

40. E.g., al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* 1, p. 164.

41. In al-Ṭabarī's commentary on Qur'an 2:62, Salmān says to Muḥammad: "They were fasting, praying, and believing in you and testifying that you would be sent as a prophet". Muḥammad replies: "Salmān, they are among the people of Hell". This, al-Ṭabarī reports, distressed Salmān. Salmān said to Muḥammad: "If they had come to know you, they would have granted your veracity and followed you". At this point, God sent Qur'an 2:62, which refers to "Those who believe and those who are Jews, and the Christians and Sabians, those who believe in God and the last day [and perform good works]". Qur'an 2:62 continues: "Their reward is with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve". Subsequent generations of Christians face a more dire future. Al-Ṭabarī's text continues to state that until Jesus came, one can say that Jews were believers insofar as they held fast to the Torah and the Sunna of Moses. When Jesus came, he who held fast to the Torah and took the Sunna of Moses, and did not renounce it and follow Jesus was damned (*hālik*). Likewise, Christians were believers insofar as they held fast to the Gospels and the laws of Jesus. They were believers until Muḥammad came. Those among them who did not follow Muḥammad and renounce the obligations of the Sunna of Jesus and the Gospels were damned. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* 2, p. 40–45 (on Qur'an 2:62). Cf. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr* 1, p. 111–112 (on Qur'an 2:62).

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made to speak for non-Arab converts generally.[42] As such, Salmān is an "other" in Muḥammad's midst. European scholars have also pointed out that legends about Salmān appealed to many different Muslims, not just Persians.[43] One could highlight in this respect Salmān's role in traditions that support sectarian claims, that advance tribal interests, and Hadith of ascetic and gnostic bends. Indeed, Salmān figures as a key supporter of ʿAlī.

Whatever other purposes such traditions may have served, and whatever their origins, many traditions relating to Salmān that are contemporary with the period of Iran's conversion do seem to speak directly to Persians. As Massignon observed, "Il est exact que la légende de Salmân s'est amplifée et conservée surtout grâce à la dévotion des musulmans iraniens."[44] The transmission and circulation of traditions relating to Salmān from the period of Iran's conversion and afterwards suggest the relevance of these traditions, and invite reflection on their placement, literary features, contexts of reception, and potential functions.

Among traditions that would seem to speak directly to Persians, is one in which Muḥammad declares that if faith (*īmān*) were hung from the Pleides constellation of stars, then the people of Persia would reach it. This Hadith both attests to Muḥammad's confidence in the Persians' steadfastness in their faith (*īmān*; var., religion, *dīn*; or knowledge, *ʿilm*) but also is used by Qur'an exegetes to show that the Qur'an had Persians in mind as a people. The Pleides Hadith is remembered by traditionists as stated by Muḥammad at the time of revelation of Qur'an 9:39,[45] 47:38,[46] or 62:3.[47]

42. For example, Ibn Ḥanbal recalls that Salmān, upon hearing (Christian) men at prayer for the first time exclaimed: "My God! This is a better religion than ours!" Here, the key point is that Salmān recognizes true monotheism, not Christianity, *per se*. *Musnad* 5, p. 441–444. Salmān is also made to witness Muḥammad's protection of Arabs. Ibn Qutayba thus cites a report in which Muḥammad says to Salmān: "O Salmān! Do not hate me and thus forsake your religion". Salmān replies: "O Messenger of God! How could I hate you when God has guided me by you?" Muḥammad says: "Do not hate the Arabs and thus hate me". Ibn Qutayba cites this report as he argues that Muḥammad himself alluded to the special status of Arabs and his tribe of Quraysh. *Faḍl*, p. 91–93.

43. E.g., Caetani, "Salmān al-Fārisi", p. 418–419.

44. Massignon continues, however: "[m]ais c'est en arabe qu'elle s'est constituée et définie d'abord, à Kûfa; et c'est parce que la mémoire de ce client persan du Prophète persistait qu'elle s'est imposée petit à petit à la dévotion populaire iranienne; ce n'est pas par une poussée inconsciente de revanche raciste chez des Persans nouvellement islamisés que le type de Salmân fut inventé". Massignon, *Salmân Pâk*, p. 448. Massignon would also show contexts in which Salmān's Persian ethnicity is a secondary aspect of his identity. Also, Della Vida, "Salmān al-Fārisī", p. 701–702.

45. Qur'an 9:39: "If you do not go forth He will afflict you with a painful affliction, and will replace you with another people. You cannot do him any harm. God is Able to do all things". The "another people" is understood to be Persians.

46. Qur'an 47:38 concludes: "If you turn away, he will replace you with another people, and they will not be like you".

47. Qur'an 62:2–3: "He it is Who has sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite His signs to them and to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the Wisdom, though before they were indeed in manifest error; And others of them who have not yet joined them. He is the Mighty, the Wise". The "others of them who have not yet joined them" are understood to be Persians. For examples where the Pleides Hadith is connected to the Qur'an verses see al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* 5, p. 384 (on Qur'an 47:38) and vol. 5, p. 413–414 and 725–726 (on Qur'an 62:3); Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Geschichte Iṣbahāns* 1, p. 2–3, where Abū Hurayra relays the Hadith in relation to both Qur'an 47:38 and Qur'an 62:3; cf. al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr* 4, p. 219–220 (on Qur'an 47:38), and vol. 5, p. 81–82 (on Qur'an 62:3). The Hadith is not always connected to a revelation of the Qur'an, e.g., Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* 2, p. 417 (on Qur'an 62:3) vs. vol. 2, p. 297, 309, 420, 422, and 469.

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The variable ways in which Salmān's compatriots are named specify who precisely God had in mind, *fāris*, *abnā' fāris*, or *al-furs*.[48] Just as important are the other groups that exegetes mention as intended in these verses, and which serve as alternatives to Persians; the way a given exegete manages the possibilities thus provides an index to his views on the specialness of Persians in the Qur'an's vision.

It would also seem significant that Persians knew that Salmān, a Persian himself, was among those companions who played a role in the conquest of Persia. One Hadith that circulates widely from the beginning of Iran's conversion would, in fact, make Muḥammad, at the Battle of the Ditch (*al-khandaq*), show Salmān the Muslims' future conquests, in which case Salmān, as the witness, cannot be accidental. Muḥammad borrows a tool from Salmān to break apart a large rock, with each blow producing a spark that lights the lands of the Muslims' future conquests. Exegetes cite this *khandaq* tradition to explain Qur'an 33:12, in which the Qur'an refers to hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*) and those with disease in their hearts who said that God and his Messenger promised nothing but delusions.[49] Here, reader/listeners are made to understand the fulfillment of the promise of God and Muḥammad. The *khandaq* tradition is also reiterated in commentaries on Qur'an 3:26, which refers to God's power to give and take *mulk* from whom He pleases.[50]

Traditionists also knew Salmān to have accompanied the Muslims on their expedition to Iraq and to have been present at the conquest of Madā'in, the Sasanian administrative capital on the Tigris that included Ctesiphon.[51] Salmān remained there afterwards, and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) claims to have himself visited Salmān's grave in the vicinity of Kisrā's īwān.[52] In payments made to the earliest Muslims, early conversion to Islam made a difference. Al-Ṭabarī recalls a tradition, however, that, as an exception, Salmān, who did not fight at Badr, received the same pay as Muḥammad's grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and Muḥammad's companion Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī.[53]

For the approximately two centuries that Iran was ruled by Arab governors there is ample evidence that the many inhabitants of Iran, including Persian converts, felt the burden of occupation. The sense of loss that Iranians, including Persians, experienced is revealed in an exchange between Salmān and ʿUmar, who reigned as caliph during the conquest of Iran. ʿUmar says: "Am I a king or a caliph?" and Salmān replies: "If you collect from Muslim territory one dirham—or less or more—and then you put it to use other than for what it is by right intended, you are a king, not a caliph." ʿUmar, the source says, wept.[54]

48. The people in question are also named as *al-aʿājim*. Sometimes the people are given no name. E.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* 22, p. 628–630, commenting on Qur'an 62:3, where Muḥammad simply states *rijāl min hā'ulā'i*.

49. Muqātil, in explaining the verse, cites the tradition to recall that when the Muslims were besieged by the *mushrikīn* from Mecca, Muḥammad correctly saw the conquest of the Yemen, the White Palace of Ctesiphon (*abyaḍ al-madā'in*), and the cities of Byzantium. *Tafsīr* 3, p. 477–478.

50. For example, see the *Tafsīr* of al-Samarqandī 1, p. 257. Here Qur'an 3:26 is said to have been revealed in response to doubts from the *munāfiqīn* about the possibility that the Muslims could conquer Byzantium (*al-Rūm*, also stated Syria, *al-Shām*) and Persia (*Fāris*).

51. See, e.g., al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* 1, p. 163.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 1, p. 2413.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 2752–2753.

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Persia's Earliest Muslims

Persians were also named as early converts to Islam. The first Iranian converts—that is, those who converted prior to the ʿAbbasid revolution in the 740s—did so when conversion involved assimilation to an already existing umma of Arab tribal origins. Therefore, conversion involved, hypothetically, a negotiation between one's ties to kin, land, and social groups and one's new ties to Arabs and Islam. The system of *walā'* gave legal expression to an idealized transfer of loyalties, and when non-Arabs named their children, they stereotypically gave them Arab names. As recalled by al-Ṭabarī, a Persian amidst the conquests thus converts to Islam in a way that affirms assimilation: the Arab commander Saʿd b. Abī Waqqās renames him Muslim, the Persian declaring: "By God, you will not be defeated as long as you are as faithful, truthful, benign, and charitable as I see you now. I do not need [anymore] to be associated with Persia".

Traditions in the earliest sources that claim peaceful acceptance of Islam could be used to advance claims for material benefits. With the passage of time and the development of Muslim historiography, however, the functions of traditions about peaceful surrender certainly changed.[55] Whereas historians have often treated as simple presentations of fact traditions about the surrender and conversion of a segment of the Sasanian army, one should read such traditions mindful of their repetition in a ninth or a later century source, the questions addressed by those sources, and the answers provided.[56]

In al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, when a Persian, just prior to the battle of al-Qādisiyya, which opened the way for the conquest of Persia, converts to Islam, he assumes a place in al-Ṭabarī's text as a narrator of the events. According to one recollection, al-Rufayl says that on hearing the words of the Arab Zuhra to the Persian commander, Rustam, he converted to Islam. Besides a statement of the *shahāda* as an article of faith, Zuhra's words, repeated by al-Ṭabarī, include an ample description of equality of status in Islam.[57] Al-Rufayl's comment that when he converted to Islam Zuhra gave him spoils equal to those of the participants at al-Qādisiyya would speak more to the equality granted by Islam, than to the rights of al-Rufayl's heirs, one of whom is often cited as an authority in al-Ṭabarī's account of al-Qādisiyya, but who otherwise are remembered as minor Hadith transmitters.[58] Zuhra's status grows when, in

55. For a general periodization of the development of Islamic historiography, see Robinson, "The Emergence of genre", *Islamic Historiography*, p. 18–38. With regard to the conquests, Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests*, p. 12–32, esp. p. 14–20. Bulliet's point regarding ambiguity in the meaning of *aslama* (either indicating surrender or conversion) should also be born in mind when considering either earlier or later traditions. "Conversion Stories," p. 123.

56. E.g., al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 280. Cf. pseudo-al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām* 2, p. 190–191. For a recent reference to the Sasanian army segment known as *al-Ḥamrā'* converted to Islam, Berkey, *Formation of Islam*, p. 101.

57. To which Rustam replies: "You have spoken to me truthfully. But, by God, since Ardashīr ascended the throne, the Persians did not allow any lowly person to leave his work. They used to say, 'If they leave their work, they overstep their bounds and become hostile to their nobles'". Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 1, p. 2269; Friedmann trans. vol. XII, p. 64.

58. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 1, p. 2269. Cf. *id.*, p. 2257 for a different account of Rufayl's conversion. For al-Rufayl's sons, e.g., Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl* 4, p. 94–95.

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sources subsequent to al-Ṭabarī, al-Rufayl converts at the hand of Saʿd or even at the hand of ʿUmar himself.[59] It is as if the tradition, in demonstrating an early Persian convert, required a better-remembered agent of conversion.

Like other Muslims, many Iranians traced their genealogies back to a convert. A key, but under-appreciated point raised by Bulliet in his study of Iran's conversion is that compilers of biographical dictionaries often begin a subject's genealogy with his first ancestor to have converted to Islam.[60] In such cases, personal history would begin with Islam, or to state the point another way, personal history prior to Islam is not remembered.

The most important accomplishment remembered about the Sāmānids' (204–395/819–1005) eponym was that he converted to Islam, reportedly at the hand of the Umayyad governor of Khurāsān Asad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qasrī, who governed during the years 106–109/724–727 and again from 117–120/735–738.[61] Sāmān proceeded to name his son, Asad, after this governor. Whatever else Sāmān accomplished in his lifetime is forgotten by al-Samʿānī (d. 562/1166) in his book, *al-Ansāb*. In his entry on al-Sāmānī, al-Samʿānī notes that the name al-Sāmānī is a *nisba* for *jamāʿat min mulūk sāmān*. He begins his description of famous Sāmāns with the eponym's great-grandson, Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad (234–295/849–907). For Sāmān, he recalls only his place in genealogy, including his descent from the Sasanian general Bahrām Chūbīn, who unsuccessfully turned against the Sasanians and Kisrā Parvīz (r. 591–628).[62]

Replacing Persians' Pre-Islamic Loyalties

Traditions that explained the origins of Islam in Iran in transparently satisfying terms complemented and competed with other ways of remembering the pre- and early Islamic past. Pre-Islamic Zoroastrian genealogies, for example, are radically transformed in the Persians-as-the-descendants-of-prophets tradition. In such cases, one might see Muslim converts mobilizing their new religion's resources to produce forgetfulness of non-Muslim origins. An exciting strain of theory has drawn attention to the importance of remembering for forgetting. As Eco observed, one forgets "not by cancellation but by superimposition, not by producing absence but by multiplying presences".[63]

Whereas many traditions recall the origins of Islam among Persians in satisfying terms, other memories about the history of Islam among Persians emphasize the failures of Persians to recognize the promise of Islam. A small number of symbolically charged events are recalled and repeated. For example, Persia's leaders rejected Muḥammad's summons. Muḥammad

59. At the hand of Saʿd, Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* 4, p. 839–840 ("Nahr Rufayl"); at the hand of ʿUmar, Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl* 4, p. 94–95.
60. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*, p. 18–19.
61. Bosworth, "Sāmānids", p. 1026; "Asad b. Sāmān<u>k</u>odā", p. 696–697, and "The Heritage of Rulership", p. 51–62; Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 209–210. Also mentioned by Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, p. 157.
62. Al-Samʿānī, *al-Ansāb* 7, p. 24–28. See Bosworth, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī* V, p. 301–302, n. 706.
63. Eco, "*Ars Oblivionalis?*", p. 260. Cited by Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 108.

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promised the destruction of Kisrā's kingdom. Arab Muslim armies massacred Kisrā's army. In these, Persians are called to remember a past that does not include Islam.

At first, these traditions might seem to oppose those that document the early origins of Islam among Persians. They occur, however, in many of the same sources that hand down traditions about the antiquity of Islam in Persia. On reading these traditions, repeated and passed on, one might suspect traditionists neither of opposing other ways of recalling the past of Islam in Persia, nor of disinterested transmission, but rather of choosing other ways to address the history of Islam among Persians, and to reflect on Persians as Muslims. The related functions of these traditions may have been many, including to explain and justify the conquest of Persia and to summon Persians to forget their former loyalties.

Kisrā's Failure to Respond to Muḥammad's Summons

Noth pointed to the topological character of the summons to Islam, or *daʿwa*, noting its typically tripartite character.[64] In identifying the *daʿwa* as a topos, Noth showed the tendency for the summons to appear in "completely inappropriate material contexts."[65] The *daʿwa* occurs most frequently in traditions relating to events seen as "fundamental for the rule of Islam in places beyond the land of its birth", but "hardly ever occurs on less spectacular occasions".[66] Noth argued that the "principles which underlie this invitation to Islam, set in such highly visible places, tend in one direction: they are polemical." The polemics revolve, especially, around the issue of the equality of rights between converts and other Muslims, and likely originated "from the milieu of the *mawālī* (later converts to Islam, of non-Arab stock), who were seen as second-class Muslims, and perhaps also of like-minded Muslim Arabs".[67]

64. "The non-Muslims are first invited to accept Islam; should they decline to convert, they are invited to pay tribute (*jizya*); and should they refuse this as well, they are called to a decisive battle". Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, p. 146.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 146–147. As an example, Noth cites two letters which Khālid b. al-Walīd is reported to have sent to the lords of Persia (*mulūk Fārs*) and the *marzubān*-s (governors, pl. *marāziba*) of the Sasanian Empire, after the first skirmishes on the Iraqi border. Noth writes: "At that particular time, any further penetration of the Persian empire could not have been anticipated and the possibility of establishing any sort of written contact with the rulers of that empire was simply out of the question".

66. Noth notes that the invitation appears on all occasions "which could and did provide opportunities for proclaiming the fundamental principles and goals of Islam". These include: "The first taking of a town under Persian rule (al-Ḥīra), the decisive battle which assured the Muslims control over Iraq (al-Qādisīya), the conquest of the residence of the Sasanian monarch (Ctesiphon/al-Madā'in), the battle of al-Yarmūk, which brought about the collapse of Byzantine rule in Syria/Palestine, and the negotiations conducted with the rulers of Egypt over terms of surrender, which proved crucial for the incorporation of that land into the realm of Islam". Noth is less skeptical about the *daʿwa* in Muḥammad's lifetime. He writes that "[i]t can hardly be contested" that during Muḥammad's lifetime Muslims extended the *daʿwa* to non-Muslim Arabs. Traditions mentioning the invitation in the *maghāzī* literature occur fairly often, and, he argues, "are generally beyond reproach" since while "Muḥammad was attempting to unite the Arabian peninsula under the leadership of Medina, it made perfect sense to invite one's enemies to Islam before beginning an armed confrontation with them, with all the risks which that entailed". Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, p. 146, 152–153 and 161, with accompanying notes.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 153ff.

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Muslim sources also repeatedly recall Kisrā's failure to respond to Muḥammad himself.[68] Traditions concerning letters from Muḥammad show his status as a world ruler in his own lifetime and his foresight regarding the umma's destiny to expand beyond the boundaries of Arabia.[69] In the traditions, letters also provide expositions of the faith.[70] Where the letters were received warmly, accounts of them show the persuasiveness of Muḥammad's message and the receptivity of particular peoples to it.[71] The Abbysinian Negus, for example, is remembered by some early sources to have converted to Islam. In Ibn Saʿd's (d. 230/845) account, Muḥammad sent six men to kings, inviting them to Islam. The first to depart was the messenger sent to the Negus. Receiving Muḥammad's letter, the Negus placed it on his eyes, and then descended from his throne and sat on the earth, humbling himself. The Negus converted to Islam and recited the *shahāda*, saying: "If I were able to go to him, then I would go".[72]

In Ibn Saʿd's tradition, Persia's Kisrā represents, by comparison, rejection of Islam. Ibn Saʿd repeats the commonly found statement that when Muḥammad's letter was read to Kisrā, Kisrā tore it up (*mazzaqahu*).[73] On hearing this, Muḥammad said, "May God tear up his kingdom".[74] The term *mazzaqa* echoes Qur'an 34:19, and is frequently used to describe the action of both Kisrā and, in his reply, Muḥammad.[75] Ibn Saʿd and other traditionists also implicitly compare Kisrā with his own clients, to the latter's favor since they converted to Islam.[76]

68. Noth does not explicitly dicuss the letters reportedly sent to the world's leaders by Muḥammad. ʿAbbāsid-era sources mention such a letter delivered to Kisrā by ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥudhāfa, who is most remembered in Islamic history for this delivery. Or, the letter was delivered by ʿAbd Allāh's brother, Khanīs; Shujāʿ b. Wahb; or even ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb himself. In the majority of accounts, the letter was delivered directly to Kisrā, but in others, it was delivered to Kisrā through an intermediary in Baḥrayn. Kisrā sometimes is said to have read the letter, but in others, it was read to him. Although often accepted uncritically as an historical document, accounts of these letters, and particularly the letter to Kisrā, are historically suspect. The letter to Kisrā is widely mentioned. An early list of these letters, including the names of the men who delivered them and their destinations, is preserved by Ibn Khayyāṭ al-ʿUṣfurī, and includes letters to both Arab tribal and non-Arab leaders. Ibn Khayyāṭ al-ʿUṣfurī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 74.

69. Arnold uses the letters to illustrate that "Islam was not to be confined to the Arab race". He cites Ibn Saʿd's account in which Muḥammad sends out the messengers, with the note: "This story may indeed be apocryphal, but [it] is significant at least of the early realisation of the missionary character of Islam". Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, p. 29–30.

70. When al-Bāqillānī cites the letter in his *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, the text of Muḥammad's letter to Kisrā provides a statement of faith and is immediately followed by Muḥammad's letter to the Negus of Abyssinia, in which Muḥammad is made to express, using theological terms, his own ideas regarding Christian doctrine with regard to Jesus. Here, al-Bāqillānī would seem to be most concerned with the evidence for Muḥammad's theological ideas that the letters represent. Al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, p. 134.

71. When a traditionist describes a number of such letters, the order of recipients named, the list's placement within the text, the contents of Muḥammad's letter, the reaction of the recipients, and Muḥammad's subsequent response are critical to understanding what a given tradition might be intended to convey to readers/listeners.

72. *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* 1/ 2, p. 15.

73. Cf. al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* 2, p. 83, for a case in which Kisrā does not rip the letter, but would seem to afford it respect.

74. *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* 1/ 2, p. 16.

75. Qur'an 34:19: "But they said, 'Our Lord, make the stage between our journeys longer'; and they wronged themselves, so We made them as but tales, and We tore them completely to pieces (*wa mazzaqnāhum kulla mumazzaq*). Surely in that are signs for every [man] enduring, thankful".

76. After tearing Muḥammad's letter, Kisrā wrote to Bādhān, his governor (*ʿāmil*) in the Yemen instructing

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Kisrā's rejection, importantly, provides an explanation for the need for military conquest, and thus returns to Persians, and specifically the Sasanians, responsibility for Persia's destiny. Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) states that the caliphs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar fulfilled the promise made by Muḥammad when he stated "His kingdom will be torn up."[77] He cites a statement reportedly made by Muḥammad: "When Kisrā perishes, no Kisrā will follow him, and when Caesar perishes, no Caesar will follow him. I swear by Him who holds my soul in His hand, their treasures will be spent in the way of God".[78] It was just as Muḥammad promised: after (the last) Kisrā died, there were no more Kisrās in Iraq or Persia. Caesar placed the letter Muḥammad sent him in musk, and thus treated it with respect, although he did not convert to Islam. His fate was somewhat better than Kisrā's: Caesar remained in Byzantium (*al-Rūm*), though Syria fell out of his control.[79]

Celebrating the Slaughter of Persians

Robinson has compared the French Revolution with the Arab conquests, both being events that "stubbornly resist definitive interpretation".[80] Traditions across Muslim sources recall that the Muslims' success at al-Qādisiyya opened Persia to Islam, extol the bravery of the *ahl al-Qādisiyya*, and, in addition to details charting the battle itself, feature motifs that beg interpretation. Among historians, al-Ṭabarī provides likely the most extensive surviving treatment, approximately one-hundred and fifty pages in the Leiden edition.[81]

Without reducing the complexity of al-Ṭabarī's composition, many of its more literary elements would address the Sasanians' failure to recognize the tremendous promise of Islam. *Daʿwa* declarations thus repeat what Islam has done for Arabs, and what it promises Persians. After admitting that prior to Islam the Arabs were a "people living in gross error", the messenger al-Mughīra tells Rustam about a seed which God had given to the Arabs and which could also grow in Persia.[82] Al-Mughīra explains to Rustam that the Arabs had come to give the Persians the seed and that they were ready to accept death as a price for their efforts.[83]

him to send two men to Muḥammad so that they might bring some news. Muḥammad received the men, invited them to Islam, and then told them to return the next day. When they returned the next day, Muḥammad informed them that God, his (Muḥammad's) lord, had killed the previous night Bādhān's lord, Kisrā, and given power to Kisrā's son, and then killed him, too. The Yemenīs returned to the Yemen with this news, whereupon Bādhān and his men converted to Islam, presumably, in the view of the traditionist, impressed by Muḥammad's miraculous knowledge. *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* 1/2, p. 16. Ibn Saʿd does not appear to have known the text of the letter to Kisrā.

77. Al-Shāfiʿī cites here Qur'an 61:9: "He it is who has sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religion, however much the polytheists may detest that". *Kitāb al-Umm* 5, p. 397–399.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 397–399.

80. Robinson, review of *The March from Medina*, p. 741.

81. Although al-Ṭabarī's account is frequently cited by modern historians, they have given serious consideration to only a fraction of this reporting. See especially Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 202–209.

82. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 1, p. 2236–2237; Friedmann, trans., vol. XII, p. 31. This tradition is transmitted from Abū Wā'il. This tradition is cited elsewhere, also on the authority of Abū Wā'il, e.g., Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf* 12, p. 562ff.

83. A variant, reported later by al-Ṭabarī, vol. 1, p. 2279.

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In al-Ṭabarī's traditions, the Sasanians, through their rejection of the *daʿwa*, are directly responsible for Persia's loss. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, recalls a tradition according to which Kisrā sends away one of the Arab messengers, ʿĀṣim b. ʿAmr, with dirt, with the intention of insulting him.[84] ʿĀṣim carries the dirt to Saʿd, who states: "By God, rejoice, because God gave us the keys to their kingdom!"[85] When Rustam learns of Kisrā's action he is worried and sends a messenger to catch the Arabs, with the prediction that if he cannot overtake them, then the Persians will lose. When the messenger returns, Rustam himself is made to say: "They have taken the keys to our kingdom".[86]

Al-Ṭabarī's traditions unambiguously celebrate the Persians' losses, which seem a punishment for their failure to accept Islam. The traditions lead to the dramatic moments of the Persians' defeat, and the highly symbolic killing of Rustam. Hiding in the shade of a mule, Rustam is badly injured when an Arab opponent cuts the mule's litter, which collapses onto Rustam's spine. Rustam manages to drag himself to the nearby canal, but before he can swim to safety, the Arab, in pursuit, wades into the river's waters and gets ahold of Rustam's leg. He drags the injured Persian to the canal's bank, and strikes him in the forehead with his sword, killing him. Al-Ṭabarī continues: "Then he dragged him farther and threw him at the feet of the mules. He seated himself on Rustam's throne and exclaimed: 'By the Lord of the Kaʿbah, I have killed Rustam! Come to me!' Men gathered around him without noticing or seeing the throne, proclaiming, 'God is most great!' and calling out to each other. At this point the polytheists (*mushrikūn*) lost heart and were defeated".[87]

In the aftermath of Rustam's death, thirty thousand Persians follow Rustam's example, throwing themselves into the canal. Their fate is similar to that of Rustam: "[N]one of them escaped to tell the story".[88] The Arabs pursue the Persians up and down the canal al-ʿAtīq, massacring them, and carrying away the spoils. A group of Christians enquire of Saʿd b. Abī Waqqās: "O commander, we have seen the body of Rustam near the gate of your castle, but he had the head of another man; the blows have disfigured him." At this, al-Ṭabarī recalls, "Saʿd laughed".[89]

Traditions about Rustam's death, the battle of al-Qādisiyya, and the conquest of Persia express an interest in the origins of Islam among Persians, and would benefit from further ventilation. It is certainly important, for example, that al-Ṭabarī chose to emphasize the

84. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 2242–2243. Cf. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 203–204 and 337, n. 175. Donner cites this tradition as illustration when he writes: "At this time may have occurred the dispatch of envoys from Saʿd's camp to the Persian leaders, an episode presented in much embroidered form in the Arabic sources, which depict the rebuff of the Muslims' ambassadors by Rustam in very dramatic and heavily symbolic terms".

85. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 2243; Friedmann, trans., vol. XII, p. 39.

86. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 2244; Friedmann, trans., vol. XII, p. 40.

87. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 2236–2237; Friedmann, trans., vol. XII, p. 124.

88. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 2237; Friedmann, trans., vol. XII, p. 124.

89. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, p. 2340; Friedmann, trans., vol. XII, p. 127.

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violence of Persia's defeat, a choice that would suggest an effort to produce estrangement from the Sasanian pre-Islamic past. That Rustam's death, for example, could be remembered in ways significantly more respectful of the loss Persians suffered can be seen in both Balʿamī's (d. *ca.* 363/974) heavily edited Persian "translation" of the *Ta'rīkh* and in Ferdowsī's (d. 411/1020) *Shāh-nāma*, where the death of Rustam occurs as one of the epic's final events. In the *Shāh-nāma*, Rustam goes down fighting Saʿd, a more worthy opponent.

Conclusion

Studying conventions of lexical practice reveals the popularity of the idea of Persia and Persians after the rise of Islam, and the diminishment and confinement of use of the term *Īrān*. Muslims, including Ibn Qutayba, debated the geography covered by Persia, but they did not dismiss the idea that there were Persians.

In Islam's first years, the ideas with which Persians were associated were still linked to a pre-Islamic past, as evidenced in early traditionists' indiscriminate use of terms such as al-Majūs and Persians. With conversion, the bases of a Persian social identity change, and traditionists respond by engaging and reshaping this past. As well as in fact, Persians become Muslims through the loyalties these traditions call forth and dismiss.

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