



THE REPRESENTATION OF THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE SAMANID STATE IN GENERAL HISTORICAL WORKS WRITTEN IN ARABIC AND PERSIAN

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Abstract

This article evaluates the source-studying potential of universal history works written in Arabic and Persian in the systematic analysis of the history of the Samanid state (819–999), which ruled Transoxiana and Khorasan in the 9th–10th centuries. The study comparatively examines data from the works of major historians such as Baladhuri, Tabari, Ibn al-Athir, Utbi, Bayhaqi, and Mirkhwand. The research highlights the structure of Samanid central administration, particularly the formation stages of the Turkic hajib elite, their influence on political life, and their conflicts with viziers through the prism of primary sources. Furthermore, unique facts regarding the activities of Fergana governors and internal palace intrigues reflected in these chronicles are integrated into scientific discourse, making the article highly significant for studying the history of Uzbek statehood and military aristocracy

Keywords: Samanid state, state administration, universal history, Arabic-Persian sources, source studies, Turkic hajibs, Tabari, Ibn al-Athir, political elite.

Introduction

The Samanid period (819–999) occupies a distinctive place in the history of early medieval Central Asian statehood due to its high level of political, economic, and cultural integration. By uniting Transoxiana and Khorasan under a single centralized state, the Samanid dynasty not only shaped the regional order but also influenced the geopolitical framework of the broader Islamic world. Therefore, a



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comprehensive study of the administrative mechanisms, court hierarchy, and military-administrative system of the Samanid state remains highly relevant to the historiography of national statehood. However, analyzing this period solely through local dynastic chronicles is insufficient to fully reveal the broader significance of political processes on a global scale.

From this perspective, Arabic and Persian universal historical works, which were widely circulated within the intellectual milieu of the Islamic Caliphate, are of exceptional importance for the study of Samanid history. The works of authors such as al-Baladhuri, Abu Ja'far al-Tabari, Ibn al-Athir, and later historians including al-Utbi, Bayhaqi, and Mirkhwand belong to this category of globally oriented sources. The uniqueness of these works lies in the fact that they portray the Samanid state as an integral component of the broader political dynamics of the Muslim East and illuminate a number of hidden political processes that are absent from local sources.

In particular, these universal historical sources provide comparative chronological accounts of the activities of powerful Turkic hajibs (military elites), who emerged as an influential force alongside the vizieral institution within the central government, the political status of governors of strategically important provinces such as Fergana, and major palace coups in the capital city of Bukhara. This article analyzes the significance of these Arabic and Persian fundamental sources for reconstructing the history of Samanid statehood and evaluates the reliability of the information they contain.

Among such sources are al-Baladhuri's *Futuh al-Buldan*, Zafir al-Azdi's *Akhbar al-Duwal al-Islamiyya*, al-Tabari's *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, al-Utbi's *Tarikh-i Yamini*, Ibn al-Athir's *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, Rudhrawari's *Kusuf al-Khilafat al-Abbasiyya*, Ibn Khaldun's *Kitab al-'Ibar*, Bal'ami's Persian *Tarikh al-Anbiya wa al-Rusul wa al-Khulafa*, Abu'l-Fazl Bayhaqi's Persian *Tarikh-i Mas'udi*, Minhaj al-Din Siraj Juzjani's *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, Qazvini's *Tarikh-i Guzida*, and Mirkhwand's *Rawzat al-Safa*.

Al-Baladhuri, a ninth-century historian and geographer, was a disciple of al-Mada'ini, one of the earliest Muslim historians. His most important work for the study of Central Asian history is *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* ("The Book of the Conquests of Lands"), which is regarded as one of the principal sources for



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examining the century-long Arab conquests in Central Asia. The critical Arabic edition of the work was published by de Goeje in Leiden in 1866. The section dealing with the conquest of Khorasan was translated into Russian by Tajik scholars G. Goipov and Sh. Zakirov and into Uzbek by Sh. Kamoliddin. The work contains valuable information concerning the rise of the Samanids to power.

One of the sources unknown to scholarship until the second half of the twentieth century is Akhbar al-Duwal al-Islamiyya (“Accounts of the Islamic States”) by Jamal al-Din Ali ibn Zafir al-Azdi, which includes a chapter devoted specifically to the Samanids. Much of the information contained in this chapter corresponds to data already known from other historical sources. Nevertheless, the work preserves unique accounts concerning the events that led to the assassination of Ahmad ibn Isma‘il (d. 914) and the accession of Nasr ibn Ahmad to the throne.

Ibn Zafir does not explicitly identify the immediate source of this information. According to historian L. Treadwell, Ibn Zafir relied on the work of Thabit ibn Sinan al-Sabi when composing his account. Ibn Zafir himself states on two occasions—once in the Samanid chapter and once in the Buyid chapter—that he quotes from Thabit ibn Sinan al-Sabi’s work Ghars al-Ni‘ma. The Samanid section contains valuable information regarding the history of the hajibs Bars, Muhammad ibn Bashr, Abu’l-Abbas Tash, Bektuzun, and Fa’iq al-Khassa, as well as their participation in state administration and military affairs.

Al-Tabari’s Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk (“History of Prophets, Kings, and Caliphs”), although written in the genre of universal history, stands out among historical works due to the richness of its factual material. It contains valuable information on events that took place in Arabia, Asia Minor, the Arab Caliphate, and Central Asia from the creation of the world until 912–913 CE. The work also covers the history of ancient Persian rulers, Roman and Byzantine emperors, as well as the regions of the Caliphate, particularly Khorasan and Transoxiana. During the nineteenth century, Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk was translated into Old Uzbek and Uyghur languages. In 1989, an abridged Russian translation of the work was published by V.I. Belyaev and O.G. Bolshakov. The complete surviving version of the work was translated into English and published in forty volumes in New York. This edition is considered the most comprehensive translation of the text and contains valuable information on the history of



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Khorasan and Transoxiana that is absent from Turkish and Russian translations. The work also provides important evidence concerning the formation of the political elite of the hajibs.

Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Abd al-Jabbar al-Utbi (10th–11th centuries), originally from the city of Rayy, belonged to a wealthy and noble family. During his lifetime, he served at the courts of the Samanids, Ziyarids, and Ghaznavids. Al-Utbi's *Tarikh-i Yamini* is the only one of his works that has survived. In this work, the author describes political events that took place in the Ghaznavid state during the reigns of Sebuktegin and Sultan Mahmud. The Arabic text and Persian translations of the work have been published several times. An English translation prepared by J. Reynolds is also available. The information contained in the work regarding the history of Khorasan and Transoxiana in the tenth century is unique and cannot be found in other sources. For example, information concerning Ayachtegin, the last Turkic governor (hajib) of Fergana during the Samanid period, does not appear in the writings of other medieval historians. Furthermore, according to al-Utbi, the Samanid amir Mansur ibn Nuh was deposed and blinded by the hajibs Fa'iq and Bektuzun under the orders of his brother Abd al-Malik.

The prominent Arab historian Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari (1160–1234) authored several historical works. Of particular importance is his twelve-volume *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* ("The Complete History"). Volumes one through six are largely compilations based on the works of al-Tabari, Ibn Miskawayh, al-Sulami, and others. Volumes seven through twelve, however, possess independent value and cover events that occurred in the Eastern Islamic world, including Central Asia, between 924 and 1231. This section was written on the basis of manuscript sources, reports provided by knowledgeable contemporaries, and the author's own observations.

Various sections of the work devoted to the history of particular countries and peoples were translated and published in Russian, French, and Danish in cities such as St. Petersburg, Algiers, Copenhagen, Istanbul, Moscow, Baku, Dushanbe, and Tashkent. The only complete translation of the work was produced in Turkish. Between 1851 and 1876, S.J. Tornberg published a fourteen-volume critical edition of the Arabic text. The sections concerning Central Asia were translated into Russian by P.G. Bulgakov and his student Sh. Kamoliddin and published in



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Tashkent in 2006. Uzbek translations of the work were also produced in the Khanate of Khiva during the reign of Muhammad Rahim Khan II.

This work is particularly valuable because it contains information, albeit scattered, concerning the history of Khorasan and Transoxiana from the Arab conquest up to the collapse of the Samanid state. The account of Shukurtegin, the first Turkic governor of Fergana during the Samanid period, and his successor Bakr al-Farghani is not found in any other historical source. The activities of other Turkic hajibs, including Bars al-Kabir, Abu al-Abbas Tash, Fa'iq al-Khassa, and Bektuzun, are described in a relatively detailed and systematic manner.

For example, Ibn al-Athir reports that after Amir Isma'il seized Jurjan from Muhammad ibn Zayd, he initially appointed his son Ahmad as governor there, but later replaced him with Bars al-Kabir. Bars controlled a vast amount of revenue collected from the taxes of Rayy, Tabaristan, and Jurjan, amounting to eighty camel-loads (waqr). He intended to send this wealth to Isma'il, but upon learning of the latter's death, he attempted to reclaim the funds. When Ahmad set out for Jurjan, Bars, fearing the consequences, wrote to the Abbasid Caliph al-Muktafi seeking protection. The work also records that Abu al-Abbas Tash died of plague in Jurjan.

Another Arab historian of the eleventh century was Zahir al-Din Abu Shuja Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Rudhrawari, who served as a vizier at the court of the Abbasid Caliph Ja'far al-Muqtadir (908–929, 929–932). His work *Kusuf al-Khilafa al-Abbasiyya* ("The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate") preserves information about the hajib Tash, who exercised considerable political influence within the Samanid state. According to Rudhrawari, after arriving in Jurjan, Tash was appointed governor of the province by Fakhr al-Dawla and granted authority to collect taxes, while Fakhr al-Dawla himself withdrew to Rayy. Tash governed Jurjan until his death, which some sources attribute to poisoning.

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), in his famous *Kitab al-'Ibar* ("The Book of Lessons"), also provides information regarding hajibs who served the Samanid state. However, much of this information represents an abbreviated version of Ibn al-Athir's account of the Samanids. Although the work offers supplementary information about the dynasty, it also contains certain inaccuracies. For instance, the hajib Bughra was confused with the Qarakhanid ruler Bughra Khan.



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There also exists a Persian recension of al-Tabari's *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, prepared in 963 by Bal'ami, the vizier of the Samanid ruler Mansur ibn Nuh (961–976) and a renowned scholar and patron of learning. Bal'ami's version is not merely a translation but rather a revised and, in some instances, expanded adaptation enriched with additional information. A complete French translation was published in Paris by G. Zotenberg between 1867 and 1874. The Persian text itself was published in Lucknow and Kanpur (1874, 1876, 1916) and later in Tehran (1962, 1967).

Notably, the information contained in Bal'ami's version regarding the situation in Khorasan and Transoxiana during the Muqanna' uprising is absent from the Arabic version of *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*. This feature significantly enhances the value of Bal'ami's work as an independent source for the political and social history of the Samanid period and early medieval Central Asia.

Abu Ali Muhammad ibn Muhammad Bal'ami was a tenth-century historian and statesman from Bukhara. He was born in the village of Bal'amon, located near Merv. Bal'ami served as the chief vizier of the Samanid amirs Abd al-Malik ibn Nuh (954–961) and Abu Salih Mansur I (961–976). However, he gained fame not only as a high-ranking official but also as a distinguished historian. He produced a Persian abridgment and adaptation of the renowned work *Tarikh al-Anbiya wa al-Rusul wa al-Khulafa* ("History of the Prophets, Kings, and Caliphs") by the famous Arab historian Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839–923), completing it in 963.

This work reflects political events up to the ninth century and is considered the first historical work written in New Persian in Central Asia. Compared with al-Tabari's Arabic original, published in Leiden between 1879 and 1889, Bal'ami's version contains more precise information and, in certain cases, more detailed accounts. First, it includes information absent from the abridged Arabic version. Second, Bal'ami supplemented the text with new material drawn from additional sources. It appears that he had access to more complete versions of al-Tabari's work than those surviving today.

The work narrates social and political events from the creation of the world until 912–913 CE in Arabia, Byzantium (Asia Minor), Iran, the territories of the Arab Caliphate, and Transoxiana. Events are arranged chronologically, year by year,



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making the source particularly convenient for historical research. Manuscripts of the work are preserved in libraries in Russia, Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Palestine (Jerusalem), India, England, the Netherlands, France, the United States, and other countries. Portions of the work have been translated into English (1798, 1811–1821, 1824, and 1903), French (1836, 1867–1874), Turkish (1844), Old Uzbek (1913), Uyghur (18th century), and Urdu (1870).

Tarikh-i Mas‘udi (“The History of Mas‘ud”) is a historical work written in Persian by the eleventh-century historian Abu’l-Fazl Bayhaqi. Although much of this extensive work has been lost, it remains one of the most important sources for the final period of the Samanid state and the history of the Ghaznavid Empire. The work was composed within the Ghaznavid chancery with the intention of placing the Ghaznavid rulers of Turkic origin on the same level as the kings of ancient Iran.

Tarikh-i Bayhaqi originally consisted of thirty books, of which only six have survived. The surviving sections focus primarily on the reign of Sultan Mas‘ud I of the Ghaznavid Empire. In 1962, the work was published in Russian in Tashkent with an introduction and commentary. In 2020, L. Abdugarimov published an Uzbek translation of those sections dealing with the Khwarazm region. The work contains valuable information concerning Fa’iq al-Khassa, Abu Ali Simjuri, Bektuzun, and other hajibs and members of the political elite. Compared with other Persian sources, Bayhaqi’s account is significantly more detailed and comprehensive.

Tarikh-i Sistan (“History of Sistan”) is an anonymous Persian work dating to the eleventh century. The text is conventionally divided into three parts: the first, the oldest section, covers the history of Sistan from its foundation to the Arab conquest; the second begins in 1053; and the third continues from 1073. This structure suggests that the work had three different authors who also utilized earlier historical writings.

The source is primarily devoted to the history of Sistan and Iran from ancient times until the Mongol invasion, while also providing information concerning the territories of Khorasan. Tarikh-i Sistan was published in Tehran in 1935 by Muhammad Taqi Bahar and has also been translated into Russian. The work contains important information regarding the formation of the hajib political elite.



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Based on these accounts, it may be concluded that the institution of the hajib elite existed in the courts of the Abbasid Caliphs even before the Samanids and that a similar system was present among their contemporaries, the Saffarids.

Furthermore, the work records Abu'l-Hasan Simjuri's administration of Sistan and his correspondence with Fa'iq al-Khassa concerning a plot against Abu'l-Husayn al-Utbi. It also provides valuable information about Abu'l-Hasan and Fa'iq al-Khassa, particularly regarding the latter's role in governing Sistan during the 970s.

Tabaqat-i Nasiri is a Persian universal history of the Islamic world written by Minhaj al-Din Siraj al-Juzjani in honor of the Delhi Sultan Nasir al-Din and completed in 1260. Consisting of twenty-three sections (tabaqat), it is written in a simple and accessible style. Juzjani worked on the text for many years and carefully cited his sources.

Although much of the work is devoted to the Ghurids, it also contains information about the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty, Sebuktegin, before his rise to power in Ghazna. In compiling Tabaqat-i Nasiri, Juzjani drew upon several works that have not survived, including Bayhaqi's writings on the reign of Sebuktegin, Abu'l-Qasim Imadi's Tarikh-i Mujadwal, and possibly Ibn Haytham's Qissa-yi Sani.

Juzjani's Tabaqat-i Nasiri also includes information about the history of the Samanids. Although the chapter devoted to them is relatively brief, it contains several important details absent from other sources. These include the causes of Ahmad ibn Isma'il's assassination and accusations of Isma'ilism directed against high-ranking officials during the reign of Abd al-Malik ibn Nuh. The activities of Turkic hajibs such as Bakr al-Farghani, Fa'iq al-Khassa, Tash, and Bektuzun are likewise described.

Hamdallah Mustawfi Qazvini (1281–1349) was an official in the administrative system of the Ilkhanid state in Iran and enjoyed the patronage of Rashid al-Din Hamadani, the vizier of Ghazan Khan. He composed his historical work Tarikh-i Guzida ("Selected History") in 730 AH (1329–1330 CE).

The author relied upon numerous sources, including several chronicles mentioned above. His account of the early history of the Samanid dynasty contains many legendary details not found elsewhere. However, his treatment of the later history



of the dynasty is based directly on al-Utbi's work. According to Qazvini, Abu'l-Hasan ibn Simjur was removed from the governorship of Khorasan and replaced by Tash, after which he was sent against Khalaf, an enemy of Amir Nuh. Abu'l-Hasan reached an agreement with Khalaf and later conspired with Fa'iq to assassinate the vizier Abu'l-Husayn al-Utbi. Subsequently, disorder spread throughout Khorasan: Tash seized Nishapur, Fa'iq occupied Balkh, and Abu'l-Hasan ibn Simjur took control of Herat. The source also contains information about other hajibs who served the Samanid state.

One of the most important sources for the study of medieval Central Asian history is *Rawzat al-Safa fi Sirat al-Anbiya wa al-Muluk wa al-Khulafa* ("The Garden of Purity Concerning the Lives of Prophets, Kings, and Caliphs") by Mirkhwand (1433–1498).

Written in Persian, *Rawzat al-Safa* is a historical work devoted to the emergence of Islam, the development of early Islamic civilization, and the history of Iran. Mirkhwand began composing the work in 1497. It consists of eight volumes and a concluding section. The work is highly scholarly in character; Mirkhwand consulted nineteen major Arabic historical sources and twenty-two well-known Persian historical works of his time, frequently quoting from them directly. As a result, *Rawzat al-Safa* occupies a prominent place among the major historical compilations that preserve valuable information about the political history of the Samanid state and the broader Islamic world.

The section most relevant to our research is found in Volume IV of the work. In Mirkhwand's account, Ayachtegin, the last Turkic ruler of Fergana whose name is only rarely mentioned in historical sources, is referred to as **Inanj Hajib**. Although Mirkhwand's work was written in the sixteenth century and much of it is compilatory in nature, it nevertheless contains certain facts that are absent from other historical sources. This suggests that Mirkhwand made use of additional sources that have not survived to the present day.

The text of the work was published in lithographic editions in Bombay, Tehran, and Lucknow at various times. Portions of the work have also been translated into French, Russian, English, and German. During the reign of the Khivan Khan Muhammad Rahim Khan II, *Rawzat al-Safa* was translated into Old Uzbek as well.



Conclusion

In conclusion, universal historical sources written in Arabic and Persian constitute the principal foundation for the systematic study of Samanid statehood and its administrative and military structures. A comparative and critical analysis of the works of authors such as al-Tabari, Ibn al-Athir, and al-Baladhuri demonstrates that these sources possess a high degree of informational value in objectively portraying both the internal socio-political situation of the Bukhara court and the characteristics of regional administration.

Based on the source-critical analysis conducted in this study, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Administrative Dualism

Universal historical sources clearly illustrate the dynamics of interaction between the executive administration (the diwans and viziers) and the military establishment (the court and the hajibs) within the Samanid state. These chronicles provide detailed evidence that during the final stage of the dynasty, the political influence of the Turkic hajib elite increased significantly, eventually reaching the point where they exercised decisive influence over the appointment of rulers.

2. Regional Administration and Fergana

The information preserved in these sources clarifies the relationship between strategically important regions such as Fergana and the central government. It sheds light on the participation of local governors in internal political conflicts and enhances our understanding of the geopolitical activities of historical figures such as Salih ibn Ahmad.

3. Continuity of Historical Tradition

Later Persian historical compilations, including the works of Mirkhwand and others, continued the historiographical traditions established by earlier Arabic chronicles such as those of al-Tabari. These later works contributed to the systematization of historical narratives and provided a deeper understanding of the internal causes behind the decline of the Samanid state.



Overall, the universal chronicles analyzed in this study conclusively demonstrate that the Samanid state was not merely a regional political entity governed by internal territorial principles. Rather, it was a powerful state whose development was shaped by extensive international relations and by the broader patterns of military and political integration within the Islamic world.

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