

Book Review/Kitap Tanıtımı

Peacock, Andrew C. S, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Bal'amī's Tārīkhnāma*, London (Routledge), 2007.

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Bal'amī is a given name to Abu 'Alī Muhammad ibn Muhammad. His basic work, Tārīkhnāma, is the earliest work of Persian prose, translated into Persian from the Arabic version of universal history (Tabarī (Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabarī)'s work, *History of the Prophets and Kings or Ta'rīkh*, is a universal history from the time of Qur'anic Creation to AD 915) that starts from the Creation to Islamic times, written by Al-Tabarī. Later on, it is also translated into classical languages of Middle Eastern such as Arabic, Ottoman Turkish. The ruler of the Samanid dynasty of Central Asia, who becomes one of the

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most powerful Muslim states of the tenth century, commissioned it. Tārīkhnāma tells us much about not only the political and ideological situations of the Samanid state but also reflects the development of Islamic historiography in general. To understand to what extent Bal'amī's work altered from its original, finding an answer to this question is a long-lasting topic. However, some current studies make deconstruct Tabarī's history. When one looks at the history of Tabarī, it will be seen that he exercised a distinct authorial hand; he was rather a portrayal of Abbasid propaganda. On the other hand, the Ta'rikh and the Tafsir, written by al-Tabari, contain the same symbols but have different purposes, closely interrelated in that moral guidance. Those symbols are part of his method in terms of researching history due to understanding a complex view of society, and the religious symbols guide this analysis. Although Bal'amī used Tabarī's Ta'rikh; evidently, the work of Bal'amī differs from Tabarī's in both form and contents.

First of all, in the introduction of the book, Andrea Peacock talks about the origins and early development of historical writing in the Arabic language and states that it is quite a controversial topic because there is no harmony in the manuscripts. Its origins are connected to hadith and akhbār, and isnad not frequently was being used. In the 9th century, history and hadith began to be being used at the same time. Then, he states how Tabarī's perception of history writing appeared in such a milieu is that Baghdad was riven with disputes between various Shī'ite and Sunnī groups, in which declining 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, was unable to control (Peacock, 2007: 9). He stresses Tabarī's way of teaching, methodology on history and tafsir were being strongly seen in his history writing that illustrates examples of pro-Sunnī tendencies of him rather than Shī'ism. And also, he discusses traditional Islamic written culture and shows that the sources used by Tabari are based on both oral and written in a socio-cultural milieu that accepts oral sources as more reliable. As a result, he concludes that the moral purpose of al-Tabarī was obvious in his history.

It is also significant to stress here that Bal'amī version of Tabarī's history, particularly its manuscripts scattered around the world. Most authorities in Islamic countries altered these manuscripts which are

used in favor of themselves in sectarian conflicts. For instance, when pro-Shī'ite episodes were added to the texts, Sunnī ones were being ignored. The book, therefore, is based on approximately 30 Persian manuscripts of Tārīkhnāma, together with its various Arabic and Turkish versions. Besides this, the book introduces early translations of Tārīkhnāma that reflect transmission matters and changing official ideologies. Most early Arabic translation of it has a conservative character.

In chapter one, Peacock argues that the predominant cultural atmosphere, that brought Tārīkhnāma into being of Persian literature, was the religious conservative milieu of the Samanids rather than Persian national sentiment. However, Peacock also clarifies that the Samanid state encountered internal problems sourced from sectarian disputes that are very related with not national but doctrinal differences between Shī'ism, Ismā'īlism, those appeared as heretical religious movements, and Sunnīsm. In addition, it gives quite vital information concerning the geography and society of Transoxiana, where most of the population were living as a majority by giving a snapshot of conservative Transoxiana, where the Sunnī orthodoxy concentrated. For this purpose, political legitimacy by changing history writing played a very important role among those groups by not only the contributions of various dynasties but also ulemas. There is going on discussion is that Tārīkhnāma played a key role in combatting the threat of Ismā'īlism, namely Shī'ism, heresy to the Samanid state. He compares Arabic and Persian poetries; then, he means that poet-viziers achieved literature and politics cooperatively. Thus, legitimization of dynasties was notably specified with poetry whether their poems were court-sponsored projects or not. The most popular methods used in Persian poetry in the 10th century were panegyric and lampoon.

In Chapter two, Peacock criticizes the transmission of the Tārīkhnāma's text by stressing the importance of oral and written tradition, which is seen as more desirable and reliable, of the Islamic society. Then, he touches upon these general characteristics of literary sources reflected in the manuscripts as well. He also mentions the difficulties one might counter when wanting to research Tārīkhnāma's

manuscripts, and then, he states that the sources are unknown, uncatalogued, inaccessible. Therefore, the mess appearance of Tārīkhnāma shows its problematic view that changes by adding interpolations and redactions along centuries, even though earliest manuscripts contain major interpolations. Furthermore, he notes the earliest attempts of two scholars to analyze and resolve the textual problems of Tārīkhnāma. One is Zotenberg, and the other one is Elton Daniel, their efforts can be seen in the appendix of this book. Particularly, Daniel groups the manuscripts into three redactions: a late redaction, a full redaction, and an abbreviated redaction according to their classifications (Peacock, 2007: 54). While Peacock did not find all the explanations mentioned in the book satisfactory, he brought a new explanation as to why there were many differences between the contradictory and variants manuscripts. There is a loss of properly documented evidence that increases the reliability of Peacock's book. When it is looked at appendixes of the book, it will be seen that the book comparatively approaches the documents, and points out the differences of the manuscripts between the Arabic and Persian texts. The author shows several examples of the anonymous Arabic translation of the Tārīkhnāma that was copied in different centuries, kept in Berlin, Leiden, Cambridge. Differences between these three texts are minimal in spite fact that there are no huge numbers of alterations or interpolations as exists in the Persian manuscripts. Then, he bases his discussion on the document named Add 836. That gives information about the circumstances of its copying and presents more reliable sources than Persian versions of Tārīkhnāma.

Thereafter, Peacock adds Balami's reshaping of Tabari's history in chapter three and concludes that Bal'amī's alterations to the al-Tabarī's history can be divided into two general characteristics in terms of form and contents. In terms of form, the most apparent difference was the removal of the isnāds and variant akhbār from Tārīkhnāma despite they kept the same chronology understanding. On the other hand, Bal'amī used to use angelic interventions that assure the Muslim victory in the way of political legitimacy. In terms of content, Peacock states that Bal'amī had taken information from other sources to supplement Tabarī. He incorporated materials from Ibn

Ishāk, an early Arab historian, and also, he cited Katib al-Futūh. Most of the time, the same stories differ in Tabarī and Bal'amī. Sometimes, he changes the poet's name, where he cited from, and the context. Peacock also illustrates same-content texts written by different authors, and analyses there was no big difference between these, even if one text was written 200 hundred years ago than Bal'amī. Shortly after Peacock gives a detailed explanation of the Abbasid and Umayyad dynasty's historical background in this chapter. He states that changes in the political environment were one of the reasons why the contents and episodes of Bal'amī's and Tabarī's work were being differentiated.

In chapter four, Peacock shows pieces of evidence how Bal'amī's history writing was attributed to his Persian perspective and notes that the effort for acculturation of newcomers and Persianization of frontier regions embodied in Tārīkhnāma. Bal'amī's preference to use sources is not pro-Iranian to explain the career of Alexander, who is an important figure for Iranians and Islamic tradition; rather, he uses quotations from Qur'an as his fundamental source and constitutes his narrative in Islamic character. On the whole, Peacock says that Bal'amī was legitimizing all of these through using the past, while he underlines the importance of prophecy by establishing a link between previous prophets and Islam.

Chapter five focuses on the process that appears after Bal'amī and argues that political and religious circumstances affected the text of the Tārīkhnāma. In the later period, Tārīkhnāma was translated into several many other languages and used as a matter of legitimizing the ruling authorities or past figures. For example, as Peacock indicated, the Mongols saw the Tārīkhnāma as a means of legitimizing their rule that could teach lessons relevant to their circumstances (Peacock, 2007: 143).

In conclusion, the existing researches on the medieval perception of Islamic historiography where religion and politics played very significant roles side by side during the process of composing the historiographical works due to legitimate the place of the ruling elite and power in the Islamic culture and political milieu need further studies in spite the fact that major historical works are subjecting

Medieval Islamic history and historiography. At this point, *Medieval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Bal'amī's Tārīkhnāma* stands as a significant effort to resolve the deficiency in Islamic historiography. The undertaken book tried to resolve the method crisis with a comparative perspective while approaching the texts and demonstrates how alternative sources can be used to make an accurate analysis of medieval Islamic historiography by making a comparative analysis of numerous manuscripts and alternative works. In this context, Peacock, who specializes in the history of Anatolia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, analyses controversial topics of Islamic historiography by showing examples from different manuscripts and trying to conclude by taking its departing point from Bal'amī's Tārīkhnāma. His methodology to evaluate the manuscripts is to give first the example and make its critical analysis. However, he is aware of the wide differences between the texts of the various manuscripts that create textual problems for researchers who transmit them. As Peacock pointed out, the main aim of his book is threefold: to understand why the Tārīkhnāma was written; its texts came to have their current forms, and they remained influential for so long. The book talks about how these texts demonstrate the political agenda of particular periods rather than legitimacy that does not go beyond a few paragraphs within the book. In addition to this, Peacock makes many repetitions to incline his audience to come up with what he explained because the texts include similar problems more or less. Peacock's general tendency in the method is source-criticism. He gives firstly the account, which is related to the context, then makes a critical analysis of those accounts with the extent other copies written in different time zones. Besides this, Peacock states weaknesses, he states that Tārīkhnāma did not intend to counter heretical ideas; his contradictory statement to this a few pages later, he says that Tārīkhnāma's composition was indeed the desire to combat heresy while evaluating different episodes. These types of relative statements show his argument weaknesses, even if he evaluates the different episodes. However, this work can be considered for the one who wants to study Medieval Islamic historiography or, for the researchers who desire to study Medieval Middle Eastern and Central Asia will be a very useful source because it bases on primary texts and manuscripts

that shed light on regional changes and the inclusion of sectarian groups into the politics. However, the book, sometimes, might make the reader feel like Islamic historiography is the history of conflicts created by these sectarian groups, or dealing with leading religious leaders mentioned in the book, and their legitimization efforts by putting forward their claims. Nevertheless, it is quite an important book concerning Arabic, Persian, and Turkish-speaking people's history. It is also a good source to evaluate first-hand sources by comparing with Arabic written History and Persian written Tārīkhnāma; thereby, the general tendency of the book is to show an accurate Medieval Islamic historiography depends on different versions of Tārīkhnāma, and variant accounts one another.