Mapping Historiography: An Essay in Comparison

Walter Pohl

This is an essay in the original sense of the word, 'essayer', to try: probing into the comparative perspectives raised by the chapters of this volume. These lines of comparison were not set when this volume was planned, but developed from the work done. In the 'Visions of Community' project of which the 'Historiography and Identity' series of workshops and volumes has been a part, this approach to a bottom-up development of comparative perspectives has proven most productive.[1] Preconceived grids of enquiry often turned out to be built too much on Europeanist presumptions, inadequate for rather different sets of evidence. We also found that rather than starting with preconceived parameters about different 'cultures', it is worth returning to the sources to test our assumptions. Therefore, this volume does not offer synthetic chapters about various 'historiographic cultures', but contains studies about particular texts or developments in the historiography of, roughly, the second half of the first millennium CE. On the basis of the similarities or differences in

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approaches to the past detected in these chapters, we can go beyond wholesale comparison between 'the' Chinese, Islamic, or Western historiographies.

The contributions speak to each other in often surprising ways. I can only explore a few possible lines of comparison. Following the layout of the volume, I will seek to map out some relevant traits of the different historiographic traditions, with relatively extensive summaries of the respective chapters. I will then suggest some comparative perspectives, which may be useful for future research. As in the second volume of the *Oxford History of Historical Writing*,[2] it seems best to start with the Chinese case, surely the most sophisticated and advanced historiography of the period, and end with Latin Europe.[3]

For scholars of the early medieval West such as myself, placing the Latin historiographic tradition in its wider Eurasian context can provide invaluable inspirations. What we have always taken for granted suddenly stands out in its particularities within the wide range of options found in a much larger universe of history writing. Capturing the 'phantoms of remembrance'[4] in writing was a matter of state in some societies and considered hardly worth the investment in others. Written histories were carefully transmitted in some societies, successively modified or rewritten in others, and neglected elsewhere. What has been transmitted represents a tightly controlled official historiography in some contexts, and highlights voices of dissent and bitter criticism in others. The texts range from detailed accounts of events to myths and legends of gods, heroes, and model rulers. Of course, such historiographic frames cannot simply be linked in an ahistorical way to the regional cases discussed in the following. It should be noted that the internal variety and the changes over time in each of the regional historiographies discussed here were much greater than can be addressed in this essay. My intention is not to describe 'the' medieval Chinese or Islamic historiography, but to sketch approximate historiographic models to explore the diversity of approaches to literate cultural memory current in the period, and above all to find features where these approaches differed.

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[2] Foot and Robinson, eds, *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, ii.

[3] Under 'Latin Europe', I understand the parts of Europe where Latin writing was predominant.

[4] Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*.

A Chinese Model 1: State Historiography

China, treated in this volume by Edward Wang and Randolph Ford, lends itself to very promising comparison with the West, a venture in which both authors engage with impressive results. The Chinese Empire is the quintessential case for the development of an official state history. When the system worked, the writing of history was ordered by state authorities, it was carried out by state officials trained in state schools on the basis of official court records, and its diffusion and transmission was controlled by the bureaucracy.[5] In the period on which this volume focuses, under the Tang and Song dynasties, this system of bureaucratic court historiography reached its full development. The past had already mattered much in the governance of the realm in the first millennium BCE.[6] It may be indicative that the Chinese graph *shi* 史 at the root of the modern word for history, *lishi* 历史, derives from 'employee', in the first millennium BCE used for 'scribe' and then also 'historian'. Soon, a variety of bureaucratic composite titles ending in -*shi* reflected a differentiated hierarchy of court historians. *Guoshi* (国史) is the 'state history' that this system produced. And its compiler, or 国史, the state historian, was written in exactly the same characters, suggesting the then dual meaning of the *shi* as both a history and a historian. *Shiguan* is attested as the 'office of historiography' at the imperial court, where the state historian worked on his history.[7] In Chinese, *guo* unproblematically describes the Chinese state and territory; its English counterpart, 'nation', is more controversial if used for medieval polities, as is its derivative, 'national history'.[8]

In his contribution to the present volume, Edward Wang briefly recounts the development of official histories, *guoshi*. Under the Han dynasty, from the second century BCE to the third century CE, it seems that the writing of history was not yet regarded as a fully fledged discipline of its own, but subsumed under the study of the classics, among which the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of the Age of Confucius served as a model. In the post-Han period, history writing gradually became an official practice, and was established as a distinct category

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[5] Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History*; Hartman and De Blasi, 'The Growth of Historical Method'. See also Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, on the development of historiography from Confucius to the end of the Tang dynasty.

[6] Leung, *The Politics of the Past*.

[7] Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History*, pp. 13–20; Hartmann and De Blasi, 'The Growth of Historical Method', pp. 21–23.

[8] See Wang, in this volume.

in the reorganization of the Imperial Academy in 438 CE.[9] The establishment of history as a distinct genre also coincided with discussions of the nature of history writing. The later third and fourth centuries saw a remarkable increase in historical writing; 'interesting times' stimulated the study of the ancient and immediate past.[10] A fifth-century history of the Han dynasty, the *Hou Hanshu* ('History of the Later Han'), relates a case in which a historian was accused of compiling a *guoshi* without court permission, which points to the (perhaps retrospective) idea that historiography should be kept under control.[11]

Edward Wang argues that a decisive step in the development of state history came between the Han and Tang dynasties, that is, in the third to sixth centuries, when China was divided. Han history had provided a universal perspective — *tianxia*, 'all under heaven', a cosmological epithet that was used to describe the famous *Records of the Historian* by Sima Qian (transcribed as Ssu-ma chien in the old Wade & Giles system).[12] Sima Qian 'rationalized' Inner Asian history, especially the Xiongnu Empire, and included it in a common cosmological frame with the fate of China.[13] The post-Han time of divisions, on the other hand, gave rise to histories of particular states and dynasties; among the earliest, Chen Shou's *History of the Three Kingdoms* (third century) and the *Spring and Autumn Annals of the Sixteen Kingdoms* by Cui Hong written around 500. Several more were produced under the early Tang. Edward Wang compares this flourishing of particular state histories with the works of the great historians of Goths, Franks, Anglo-Saxons, and Lombards in the early medieval West.[14] The parallels are very plausible: post-imperial political divisions create a demand for particular histories.

Under the Tang, the bureaucratic procedure of processing governmental data was refined, which started with the keeping of different sets of daily records, for instance of court meetings and statements of the emperor.[15] It then went through a gradual selection process in which annals, biographies, and 'monographs' about specific topics were compiled. Institutional history thus developed several genres which made it possible to represent overlapping aspects of

[9] Lewis, *China between Empires*, pp. 244–45; Lewis, 'Historiography and Empire'.

[10] Dien, 'Historiography of the Six Dynasties Period'.

[11] See Wang, in this volume.

[12] Nienhauser, Jr., 'Sima Qian'.

[13] Di Cosmo, *Ancient China*, pp. 294–311.

[14] See Reimitz and Heydemann, eds, *Historiography and Identity*, II, with the contribution by Pohl, 'Debating'.

[15] This process was reconstructed in detail by Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History*.

state activity: the chronological frame of events, the role of influential person-
alities, and relevant issues such as state ritual, finance, law, or the training and
organization of bureaucracy. These forms were then compiled into the official
state histories, mostly covering the rule of one dynasty and often only produced
under the following dynasty. They were written on official orders, mostly by a
committee of historiographers under the supervision of a top bureaucrat.[16]

The function of these histories was made explicit at an early date, and was
basically to learn from precedent. That applied, first, to particular instances or
constellations of state activity, for which well-trained bureaucrats and advisors
could refer to several parallel cases in the past. Second, it included a level of
pervasive moral judgement on the actions of past representatives of the state:
history was supposed to confer 'praise and blame' in order to serve as a moral
guideline for the present.[17] Third, it made it possible to sustain a cyclical model
of the historical process on the basis of previous experience: unified empires
rose, declined, and dissolved, which led to a period of warring dynasties and
states, until another powerful dynasty united the empire once again: 'the past
as a mirror to illuminate dynastic rise and fall', as the Tang emperor Taizong was
supposed to have said.[18] This cyclical vision of Chinese history was perfected
in the *Zizhi tongjian* ('The Comprehensive Mirror of Aid in Government',
1084) by Sima Guang, the great historian of the Song dynasty. The *Mirror*
was intended to 'look into history, identify a past point in a pattern that cor-
responds to the present situation, read what ensued after that point in the cycle,
and so obtain insight to help plan for the future'.[19] Indeed, Chinese history
in the last 2200 years has largely followed this preconceived model with some
regularity. We may speculate whether the cyclical conception of imperial his-
tory with its cosmological background and its detailed historical explication
may have contributed to this dynamic.

Chinese historiography, then, reached an 'age of maturity' under the Song
dynasty (960–1275), in which all the elements of 'state history' were in place.[20]
The strict examination system for the selection of top bureaucrats had created
an elite of literati geared towards competent administration within estab-
lished moral categories and professional hierarchies.[21] They were the ones who

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[16] Hartman and De Blasi, 'The Growth of Historical Method', pp. 22–28.

[17] Hartman, 'Chinese Historiography', p. 43.

[18] Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, p. 108.

[19] Hartman, 'Chinese Historiography', p. 38; see also pp. 46–49.

[20] Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*; Hartman, 'Chinese Historiography', pp. 37–56.

[21] Lorge, 'Institutional Histories', p. 492.

supervised and wrote the official histories, and tended to distribute 'praise and blame' in line with their vision of civil, conservative, and Confucian governance. Erratic emperors, uneducated and sometimes barbarian military officers, and rebellious dynasts were the risk factors in this calculated flow of 'state history'. Song historiography, in spite of its elaborate frame, thus represents a rather particular, if highly educated interest within the complex edifice of the Chinese Empire. Its Confucian outlook was basically preserved within a more complex religious and intellectual landscape, in which Daoism, Buddhism, and other creeds vied for influence.[22] Within the discipline of historiography, private works continued to be written, and sometimes in a rather critical vein. Yet even those major works of history that were composed 'in private' were often written by literati that had withdrawn or been banned from the court, as also happened to Sima Guang. However, these histories mostly only survived if they found the approval of later emperors.

A work's chances of transmission also depended on its use in the education of state officials. The more synthetic and morally grounded histories were, the better suited they could be for training bureaucrats, and therefore achieve wide circulation. From the tenth century onwards, they could be distributed in wood-print editions, both state-sponsored and privately produced. Despite this wide circulation, the transmission of original prints and manuscripts of Tang and Song historiography is patchy. The texts were subsequently selected, abbreviated, compiled, and adapted, and later also reconstructed by scholars during the Qin dynasty. As a result of continuous reworking, 'formal written histories outweigh the documents' in the sources preserved from China in the first millennium. The texts that have come down to us have, therefore, often gone through several redactions.[23] Furthermore, many histories kept at court were burnt when the European forces attacked Beijing in 1900. The careful control of state history thus ultimately proved detrimental for the 'chances of transmission' (*Überlieferungschance*)[24] of a wide range of texts and documents.

How can concepts of identity contribute to an understanding of this exceptional strand of 'state history'? The easy way would be to state that *guoshi* was

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[22] Adshead, *T'ang China*, pp. 130–67.

[23] Lorge, 'Institutional Histories', p. 487. This was certainly different in Europe from the eighth century onwards. However, Lorge's contention that 'European cartularies were not compiled into formal histories' (p. 482) is not quite correct, for instance in the case of the Italian 'cartulary chronicles' of the eleventh/twelfth centuries from Montecassino, San Vincenzo al Volturno, Farfa, and other monasteries.

[24] Esch, 'Überlieferungs-Chance'.

a way to affirm imperial Chinese identity. However, much of it seems to be Chinese, imperial, and Confucian by implication rather than by explicit affirmation. The Chinese imperial matrix was not in question, while the fundamentals of imperial legitimacy in Rome changed radically after the Christian 'revolution of Constantine'.[25] Still, like Western historiography, *guoshi* did have to provide new answers in times of disunity, but without changing the basics. What the identity construction that underlay the writing of Chinese history obviously achieved was a routine of imperial identification that was resilient enough to be maintained across periods of disunity and political upheaval, and could be recast in the mould of previous imperial dynasties after each period of crisis.

In the West, Roman imperial identity was also restated in many works of history, old and new, in the European Middle Ages, and was kept available for reappropriation. Yet however strong the impact of the Roman model was (for instance, in the thousand years of the 'Holy Roman Empire'), the many transmitted elements of empire could never be turned into a new imperial whole again. Roman, Christian, and ethnic elements of political legitimacy remained in an inescapable state of tension. In the medieval West, the contrast between influential ecclesiastic institutions and worldly powers could only be temporarily alleviated, but never resolved. Late antique and early medieval Christian historiography thus remained critical of the Christian emperors, few of whom qualified as role models; only Theodosius I enjoyed an undisputed reputation, principally because of his penance imposed by St Ambrose; even Constantine and Justinian received some scathing criticism.[26] Moreover, what Chinese historiography established was not least the ethos and importance of the heads of state, the court, and the educated bureaucrats: the identity of an elite whose success was measured by its commitment to emperor and state, according to Confucian standards. A similarly weighty moral discourse in the West was only developed in the Church, within which the tension between the ecclesiastic institutions and the *ecclesia* as the community of the faithful remained problematic. In spite of their unremitting engagement in mundane affairs and their attempts to provide moral guidance for the powerful, church leaders embedded the ethos of good governance in a religious set of rules of conduct that sat uneasily with the necessities of political leadership.

As Wang argues, both China after the Han and the post-imperial West shared similar interests in the history of particular successor states; yet, the subsequent development took different directions. In China, the Tang dynasty fed

[25] Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution*; see also Veyne, *When our World Became Christian*.

[26] Pohl, 'Creating Cultural Resources'.

the compartmentalized *guoshi* experience back into dynastic histories of imperial dimensions. In Western Europe, the major 'ethnic' histories of Jordanes, Bede, or Paul the Deacon written in the sixth to eighth centuries remained powerful models.[27] Carolingian restoration of the Roman Empire had a noticeable impact on the writing of history, but did not create a coherent imperial historiography.[28] From the tenth century onwards, a new wave of histories of the emerging duchies and kingdoms — Normans, Saxons, Danes, Rus', Bohemians, Hungarians — demonstrates that historiography had firmly settled in a political landscape of mid-sized polities.[29] This different development corresponds to the different political context — the deep-rooted imperial system that the Tang created in China vs the more ephemeral Carolingian empire. Most notably, relatively resilient ethnic-political identities formed in the West: Franks/French, Angles/English, Danes, Hungarians, and many more. In China, no lasting identities that could provide an alternative to empire remained of the Northern dynasties.[30] The Northern Wei dynasty of the Tuoba branch of the nomadic Xienbi (Xärbi) came closest to leaving a trace in the political topography of Asia: the Turks appropriated their ethnonym for China as a whole, which they called Tabghach, a name even mentioned in a Byzantine chronicle.[31] Yet this term disappeared soon, while the names of the two great imperial dynasties, Han and Tang, as Wang shows, became emblems of being Chinese, *Hanren* or *Tangren*, to this day.[32] That is almost as if modern Europeans would still call themselves Flavians, after the name of the Roman dynasty, a designation long used by barbarians as a honorary name or title, but not as an ethnic/national designation.

Chinese-style state histories also influenced historiography in other East Asian polities. The new Japanese dynasty adopted the format of official state histories in the seventh century, still preserved in the Six National Histories (*Rikkokushi*).[33] The two earliest works of Japanese historiography are the topic

[27] Reimitz and Heydemann, eds, *Historiography and Identity*, ii.

[28] Reimitz, Kramer, and Ward, eds, *Historiography and Identity*, iii.

[29] Pohl, Borri, and Wieser, eds, *Historiography and Identity*, v.

[30] See now Dien and Knapp, eds, *The Cambridge History of China*, ii.

[31] *Kültegin Inscription*, South 11–12, see Stark, 'Luxurious Necessities', p. 488; Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, trans. by Whitby and Whitby, lxxvii.11, p. 189; Pohl, *Avars*, p. 39.

[32] See also Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation*, pp. 141–210.

[33] Bentley, 'The Birth and Flowering of Japanese Historiography', p. 58. See also the contribution by Edward Wang, in this volume. I am grateful to Bernhard Scheid for advice on this section.

of Bernhard Scheid's chapter in this volume: the *Kojiki* (finished in 712) and the *Nihon shoki* (720). The preface of the *Kojiki*, influenced by Chinese rhetoric, reports the decision by the emperor Tenmu (672–86) to charge court officials with the revision of the old histories:

> We hear that the royal annals and the words of former ages possessed by the noble houses deviate from what is true, and that many falsehoods have been added to them. If these faults are not corrected now, the original import will be lost before many years have passed. This is no less than the fabric of the realm and the foundation of royal influence. Therefore, it is our wish that the royal annals be edited and recorded and the ancient words of former ages be sought out and examined, so that we may erase falsehood and establish truth, passing this down to later generations.[34]

Transmitted Japanese historiography thus starts with a reflection on source criticism, and with a clear distinction between truth and false tradition — of course, from the perspective of an emerging central power.

Time passed between Tenmu's order and its impact in writing some four decades later, not least, as Scheid shows, because the use of Chinese characters for rendering a Japanese text was still at an experimental stage. Yet the *Kojiki* became a foundational text, uniting the history of the gods with that of the early emperors, and omitting any reference to China, from where its compilers had clearly taken their cue. The almost contemporary *Nihon shoki* (720) followed the model of Chinese state histories more closely than the *Kojiki*, acknowledged Chinese influences on Japanese culture (for instance the introduction of Chinese writing), and referred to Chinese sources. Moreover, the *Nihon shoki* also emphasizes Tenmu's initiative, who entrusted twelve imperial princes with the task of compiling this imperial record.[35]

As Scheid argues, the translation of the Chinese 'state history' model into a different context also produced different results. The method of regular record-keeping at court, and of entrusting a group of high-level courtiers with the work, was similar. Tenmu's intention, however, seems to have been to legitimize the coup by which he had ousted a different branch of the dynasty from power. This entailed emphasizing the legitimacy of the dynasty, but also buttressing the claims to superior status of the noble families who had supported his takeover. Therefore, genealogical constructions of the nobility played a crucial role in both the *Nihon shoki* and the *Kojiki*. They harked back to a mythological age,

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[34] *Kojiki*, trans. by Heldt, Preface, p. 3.

[35] *Nihongi*, trans. by Aston, pt 2, p. 350. Cf. *Kojiki*, trans. by Heldt, Preface, pp. 3–4. Brownlee, *Political Thought in Japanese Historical Writing*.

in which the gods had set the stage for the rise of the empire and its leading families. Large parts of the *Kojiki*, in particular, relate myths about native gods, and the ways in which they had shaped the fates of Japan. It is also remarkable that in the *Nihon shoki* and other works of the canon, *nihon* appears in the title: it seems that Tenmu was the one to introduce the name *nihon*, '[land of] sun's origin' for Japan, as well as the ruler's title, *tennō*, 'heavenly sovereign', which reflected the Chinese emperor's title, 'son of heaven'. Unlike most contemporary Chinese 'state histories', then, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* did not tell the story of previous dynasties, but affirmed the legitimacy of the reigning one. The imperial order and the state history model advertised in the preface of the *Kojiki* were intended to enhance the credibility of the official politics of memory in the face of competing historiographic efforts, as Scheid shows.

The *Nihon shoki* proved more successful in establishing court control over a plurality of narratives about the past. It corresponded more closely to the Chinese model, and it was more open, allowing for a plurality of genealogical narratives, as Scheid suggests. Unlike the *Kojiki*, it incorporated variant versions of stories, in a way perhaps reminiscent of al-Ṭabarī (see below), or indeed of the New Testament. This 'eclectic inclusivism' of the 'imperial mytho-genealogy', as Scheid calls it, facilitated the rise of a lasting master narrative. Still, the model of state history was abandoned in Japan in the tenth century, and the court office responsible for it was closed in 969. State history was replaced by historical tales that appealed more to the tastes of the courtiers.[36] However, the early official histories were preserved and later supplemented by apocryphal works elaborated on their basis. This corpus of texts about the origins of Japan eventually turned into a national legacy.

A Chinese Model 2: Empires and Barbarians

Randolph B. Ford compares the representation of 'barbarians' in a late Roman work, the mid-sixth-century *Wars* by Procopius, and an early seventh-century Chinese text, the *Jinshu* by Fang Xuanling.[37] These histories have much in common — they deal with barbarian powers on imperial territories from the perspective of reunified empires (of Justinian and the Tang, respectively), and employ conservative style and rhetoric, moral judgements on political history, and a well-established ethnographic discourse. However, as Ford argues,

[36] Bentley, 'The Birth and Flowering of Japanese Historiography', p. 70.

[37] See also Ford, *Rome, China, and the Barbarians*.

these ancient stereotypes are used in different ways. 'Barbarian' rulers in for-
mer Western Roman lands are hardly styled as such, even when they appear
as enemies in the *Wars*. Some, such as the Ostrogothic king Theoderic, even
receive praise for ruling diligently in Roman ways. The rulers from the 'barbar-
ian' dynasties on Chinese territory, on the other hand, are described with the
full array of barbarian stereotypes, especially in those parts of the text that can
be identified as Tang-period additions. They are criticized and derided even
when they attempt to follow Chinese ways of government. Of course, when
Procopius wrote, 'barbarian' kings still ruled over most of the former Western
Empire, while the foreign dynasties had passed when the *Jinshu* was composed.
Still, Ford's contention that these texts may have had an impact on later devel-
opments is plausible: the imperial restoration under Justinian failed not least
because not even conspicuous representatives of the Roman system (such as
Procopius) could (or wanted to) challenge the basic legitimacy of barbarian
rule over former Roman provinces. These 'kingdoms of the empire' had, as I
would add, been formally recognized by treaties with the empire early on. Early
Tang historiography, on the other hand, integrated all the foreign rulers since
the Han period in a Chinese-style history of successive dynasties with Chinese
names — but it also questioned their basic legitimacy. This is in a sense para-
doxical, because the Sui and Tang dynasties that achieved Chinese reunifica-
tion had semi-barbarian origins themselves. Ford argues that this only made
the early Tang court more inclined to set itself off as properly Chinese from
the preceding 'Northern Dynasties' in the period of divisions. Thus, Tang his-
toriography laid the basis for the cyclical model of Chinese history in which
the unified empire was the norm, and the periods of disunity and foreign rule
the aberration. In the long run, the Chinese empire was always re-unified after
periods of division. In the West, by contrast, the political plurality of Christian
peoples and polities became the default setting. The periods of crisis were
mostly those in which an empire strove for hegemony in this political land-
scape: the 'Roman emperor' of the Germans in the Investiture Controversy in
the eleventh/twelfth centuries, the Habsburg Empire in the sixteenth/seven-
teenth centuries, Napoleon, or Nazi Germany.

The example of Chinese and Roman relations with barbarians may be seen
as an instance of the impact historiography could have by creating or amplify-
ing models and attitudes that motivate political action. In fact, the differences
between the textual representations only amount to nuances. Basically, both
cultural spheres operated on the basis of an us-vs-them dichotomy between
Hellenes (or Romans) and barbarians, or Chinese (*hua*) and barbarians (*yi*).
The Chinese terminology was more differentiated, and mostly distinguished

between different types of barbarians from the four cardinal directions.[38] In both worlds, the basic dichotomy could be handled flexibly, in texts as in practice. The difference between the historiographic approaches of Procopius and of the *Jinshu*, and in general between late Rome and China, was not determined by any fundamental divergence in the actual treatment of barbarians. Both empires were forced to negotiate and often also to collaborate with barbarians.

The early Han practised the *heqin* (appeasement) policy towards the Xiongnu, which mainly involved regular 'presents' and also led to several marriage alliances. This policy was resumed in various constellations after the fall of the Han Empire. The late Roman Empire also had to come to terms with barbarian powers, often paid tribute masked as 'the usual presents' (*consueta dona*) or similar, and recognized their possessions on Roman soil by treaty. Cases in which imperial princesses were given to barbarian kings were, however, rare in the West; the marriages of the Gothic king Athaulf and the Vandal king Huneric with princesses from the Theodosian dynasty were exceptions that happened under duress.[39] It was simply unacceptable to send Princess Honoria, who had reputedly taken the initiative for such a union, as a bride to King Attila the Hun. While the Chinese and the nomads shared some religious features, such as a cult of heaven,[40] Christian imperial dynasties could hardly enter into marriage alliances with pagan rulers from the steppe (although Byzantine emperors sometimes broke that principle under pressure).[41]

In the West, there was a considerable difference between barbarians seeking integration into late Roman society (such as Goths, Vandals, or Franks), and steppe peoples (Huns and Avars), who remained outside. Unlike in China, steppe peoples never appropriated Roman infrastructure and state apparatus, just the land, if at all. A characteristic example is the Avar siege of Constantinople in alliance with the Persians in 626: the Avar offer for a surrender of the city was that the population should leave without any possessions and be resettled by the Persians, while the Avars would plunder the empty city.[42] Thomas Barfield has made much of a similar distinction in Chinese relations between north-

[38] Di Cosmo, *Ancient China*; Pan, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan*; Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire*.

[39] Wolfram, *Die Goten*, pp. 169–70; Steinacher, *Die Vandalen*, pp. 236–37.

[40] Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*.

[41] For the marriage project of a daughter of Heraclius with a the Turkish khagan, see Kaegi, *Heraclius*, pp. 143 and 190; Justinian II and a son of Leo III got married to Chazar princesses: Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, pp. 76 and 84.

[42] Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 298.

eastern barbarians, who could be integrated more smoothly, and the nomads in the north-west. However, subsequent discussions have revealed the inconsistencies in this model.[43] Further similarities between Roman and Chinese barbarian policies could be mentioned, such as the employment of barbarian officers and units, who could have brilliant careers (and receive a positive echo in historiography, if they remained loyal). However, in the West there was a glass ceiling which excluded them from the imperial office. Thus, the new polities in the Roman West were ruled by kings, who theoretically remained subordinate to the emperors in Constantinople for a considerable time (although in Greek the title *basileus* was used both for the emperor and for kings).

The nuanced historiographic treatment of barbarians gives us some clues about the attitudes behind imperial (and post-imperial) politics. At first glance, it may seem that 'identity' and 'otherness' are employed in this field in a particularly stereotypical manner: in Procopius, we find some of the same barbarian topoi already employed by Herodotus over a thousand years earlier. Yet at a closer look, as Randolph B. Ford's contribution demonstrates, Procopius uses them in a much subtler way than often acknowledged. We know from his *Secret History* that this former advisor to General Belisarius during his first Italian campaign was very critical of Justinian and his politics of reconquest in the West, and we can detect these subdued criticisms in the *Wars* as well. The relatively positive depictions of barbarian rulers in the former Western Empire can also be understood in this light. Justinian's reign, later regarded as a kind of Indian summer of the Roman Empire, did not appeal to contemporary authors as much as it did to later historians. A unified empire did not seem to be worth either the heavy taxation of its wealthy subjects or the huge expenses for armies overwhelmingly composed of barbarians, who behaved almost as badly as the empire's enemies — and historians did not hesitate to say so, openly or indirectly. Finally, there was no 'office of historiography' at the court in Constantinople which controlled the transmission of the 'truth about the past' and the ideology of the present. It obviously makes a difference whether history is written by a government office, or by (possibly disappointed) government officials.

Sasanian and Islamic Iran

Many polities invested much less in the writing of extensive historical accounts than China, or the classical and post-classical Euro-Mediterranean world.

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[43] Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*; Di Cosmo, 'China-Steppe Relations'.

There has been much debate about the lack of pre-Islamic historiography in India. Romila Thapar has done much to contest this simplistic judgement.[44] And indeed, there were forms of historical writing in medieval India.[45] A chief medium of historical information were inscriptions of rulers or other elite members — direct representations of authority, often containing accounts of military conquests or pious foundations.[46] These self-laudatory epigraphic monuments easily lend themselves to wide-ranging comparison — pharaonic inscriptions, the *monumentum Ancyranum* transmitting the accounts of the victories of Augustus, the Aksumite Inscription of Adulis, the Sasanian monuments at Naqsh e-Rostam, the ancient Turkish ones in the Orkhon Valley, or the Bulgarian ones at Madara. They largely correspond to what Achim Gehrke has termed 'intentional history' in the first volume of this series, identifying inscriptions as a particular thread in Ancient Greek cultural memory, distinctive from long-form historiography.[47] These forms of self-representation of a historical actor, or of his remembrance in memorial inscriptions, cannot be addressed in the present volume.

Medieval India also knew much longer, discursive forms of remembering the past. Historical tales — heroic epics and poetry, myths and stories about the deeds of gods, rulers, or holy men — were a popular genre. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and (within it) the *Bhagavad Gita* told epic histories infused with divine agency and moral teachings, not unlike the *Ilias* or the Hebrew Bible (which, however, provided much more detail in its historical narrative). The *Puranas* combine cosmology, genealogies of the gods, and legends of kings.[48] Transmission, use, and comments on the Sanskrit Hindu epics are only attested on a considerable scale from the time of the Gupta Empire (fourth to fifth centuries CE) onwards, although some of them must be much older. The epics played a key role for Hindu teachings, for some form of overarching identity of the subcontinent,[49] and for the elite status of the Brahmans, and rooted the many dynasties of medieval India in a common mythical past. Yet long-form histories do not seem to have played an important role in this culture of memory.

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[44] Thapar, *The Past before Us*; Thapar, 'Historical Traditions in Early India'.

[45] Ali, 'Indian Historical Writing'.

[46] Thapar, 'Inscriptions as Historical Writing'.

[47] Gehrke, 'Intentional History'; Luraghi, 'Memory and Community'.

[48] Thapar, 'Historical Traditions in Early India'.

[49] A common notion of South Asia as Bhāratavarṣa (realm of Bhārata), or similar, seems to appear in the period, for instance in the *Vishnu Purana* (II.1.31–32); see Wilson, *The Vishnu Purana*, p. xii; Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, p. 111.

That seems to have been similar in late antique Persia, the topic of Sarah Savant's chapter in this volume. Sasanian rulers, like Indian princes, invested in monumental relief inscriptions, but do not seem to have promoted large-scale history writing. Legends about figures from the Avesta also existed and were probably written down towards the end of the Sasanian period in the *Kwadāy-nāmag*, and later used in Islamic historiography.[50] The relative profusion of major histories in Greek and Latin, from Ammianus Marcellinus to Theophylactus Simocat(t)a, has often been contrasted to the absence of extant contemporary Iranian chronicles.[51] The *Oxford History of Historical Writing* contains chapters about Coptic, Ethiopic, Syriac, and Armenian historical writing in the Middle Ages, while the 'Iranian historical tradition' is only briefly mentioned as a source for Islamic historiography.[52] Are Sasanian histories lacking because they never existed, or because they were not preserved under Islamic rule? Sarah Savant explores the second option. Al-Ṭabarī, who compiled a massive history of the world in 1.39 million words, had substantial information about Sasanian Iran, but he did not cite any authors or texts, in contrast to his practice when dealing with Arabic sources. Where did his material come from — were these fully fledged works of historiography?[53] Obviously, al-Ṭabarī did not regard his Iranian sources as authoritative in the same ways as his Arabic ones.[54] If histories from the Sasanian period existed up to the ninth century, they may not have been considered worth transmitting further. The fall of the Sasanian Empire may have reduced the interest in its history: an 'art of forgetting', as Savant puts it — a case quite contrary to the Chinese preservation of historical records even across political upheavals.

However, we should be careful not to juxtapose total recall in Chinese historiography with an eradication of pre-Islamic memories in Iran. The very sophistication in the selection process of Chinese historical records and the near-canonization of its final products, dynastic histories, also implied eras-

[50] Yarshater, 'Iranian National History'.

[51] An overview in Widengren, 'Sources of Parthian and Sasanian History', with a long list of Latin, Greek, Syriac, and Armenian works of history (pp. 1273–78), and only a few texts in Middle Persian; among them, a legendary account of the reigns of the first Sasanian ruler Ardashīr I and his son Shāpūr I (p. 1278).

[52] Marsham, 'Universal Histories', p. 436.

[53] See also Savant, *The New Muslims*.

[54] Much of the material he used was mythological; 'he gives the impression of doing that with some reluctance and an apparent unwillingness to take those alien beliefs too seriously': Rosenthal, 'Translator's Foreword', p. 160. Yet he had good relations with Iranians in Baghdad and elsewhere, who surely provided him with information.

ing dissident memories and suppressing original documents. Early Islamic Iran was, then, not so different: as Savant argues, the *ars oblivionalis* exercised in the transmission of cultural memory did not obliterate, but instead transformed pre-Islamic cultural memories. A number of techniques were used to that end: 'writing over', that is, substituting narratives, for instance by replacing the history of Muslim conquest with one of willing surrender; 'crowding out', that is, reducing Iranian history to a local feature of much richer accounts of Arabs and Muslims; and abstraction, leading to the loss of historical detail. This did not lead to a suppression of the Sasanian past, on the contrary. The *Shāhnāma*, a legendary epic account of the pre-Islamic period composed in the eleventh century, became a foundational text, not least for the eventual development of Iranian political identity as promoted by the Mongol Ilkhans in the thirteenth and fourteenth and the Safavid dynasty of Azeri Turkish origin in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. As early as the tenth century, local history writing in Iranian lands began to develop. The *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā*, for example, strove to create local pride within the *umma* at large.[55] Persian also became a language of Islamic history in concise form; while Arabic history writing usually retained a rather tight chronological structure: 'Persian-writing historians displayed less interest in precise chronologies of events', which 'opened the way for more continuous and more unified narratives'.[56] The merging of Muslim and Iranian forms of identification, and of their rationale, was ultimately more successful than in many other parts of the former Abbasid Caliphate. Still, the break at the end of the Sasanian regime may have interrupted the transmission of much of the historical record that might have existed at the time.

As Michael Cook shows, the blending of Sasanian memories into Islamic historiography was by no means a linear development. The eventual synthesis between Iranian and Islamic identities followed a period of sometimes sharp contrast. Cook demonstrates this tension using al-Ṭabarī's account of the fall of the Afshīn, the ruler of a peripheral Iranian subject kingdom in the ninth century.[57] The Afshīn had superficially converted to Islam, but his position and mindset remained rooted in what he called the 'refined traditions of the Iranians'. When his loyalty to the caliph seemed at stake, he was put on trial. Al-Ṭabarī's description of this trial is constructed in a series of contrasts between pagan Iranian and true Islamic rulership. The Afshīn was addressed

[55] Hanaoka, *Authority and Identity in Medieval Historiography*.

[56] Hirschler, 'Islam', p. 268.

[57] al-Ṭabarī, *History*, trans. by Bosworth, XXXIII, 185–93. For the relevant literature, see the contribution by Michael Cook, in this volume.

by his subjects as 'god of gods', possessed books about the pagan past, and had expressed his sympathy for 'Iranianness' (*al-a'jamiyya*). In a political crisis, his traditional Iranian identity and his allegiance to the caliphate came into conflict. In the eleventh century, when the pagan flavour of Iranian memories had largely become a thing of the past, these tensions could more easily be resolved, as Cook demonstrates with the story of the sixth-century rebellion of Mazdak in Niẓām al-Mulk's *Book of Government*, written as a 'mirror of princes' for a Seljuk ruler.[58] Mazdak had astrological knowledge that a new prophet would come, and erroneously believed that he himself was to be this prophet. His presumptuous activities were quelled by a Zoroastrian priest who realized that the new prophet would supersede all previous creeds, and by Prince Nūshīrwān, the future King Khusraw I Anūshirwān (531–79). In eleventh-century historical texts, Khusraw became the Sasanian model ruler. And it had become possible to claim that the Prophet Muḥammad had been predicted by a Zoroastrian priest. The contrast between the pagan past and the Islamic present had thus been smoothed over.

Cook concludes with a cautionary note that the progressive integration of the pre-Islamic past in Iran was a contested process. Elements of synthesis emerged early on, not least because already the Abbasids relied heavily on Iranian administrators. At the same time, however, ninth-century authors around the Abbasid court engaged in a heated debate about the relative merits of Arabs and Persians.[59] Anti-Iranian voices still made themselves heard in the eleventh century; but under Turkish rulers whose administrators used a Persian language written in Arabic characters, the political and cultural dominance of the Arabs had faded. In a period of political fragmentation, Iranian identity gained ground, though it could by no means be taken for granted.

It is worth noting that in Arabic, Iranians were not called Iranians or Persians, but '*ajam*, generally denoting those of non-Arab lineage who speak incomprehensibly.[60] Although this term was somehow less derogatory than the Greek/Latin 'barbarians', it denied them any distinctive and positive identifi-

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[58] Niẓām al-Mulk, *Book of Government*, trans. by Darke, II.IV.1, p. 190.

[59] Mottahedeh, 'The Shu'ubiyah Controversy'. A similar polemic took place between Northern and Southern Arabians (Yamanis), see Webb, 'From the Sublime to the Ridiculous'.

[60] Webb, 'From the Sublime to the Ridiculous', refers to the classification of non-Arabs by the ninth-century polemicist Di'bil, who 'uses a triad of words connoting non-Arabness: 'ajam (non-Arab lineage), nabaṭ (Iraqi indigenous agriculturalists) and 'ilj (originally "rough wild donkey", thence "boorish oaf", and thence "non-Arab non-Believer")'; the Iranians thus belonged to the least objectionable group of non-Arabs.

cation.[61] *ʿAjam* was also used in New Persian, so that Niẓām al-Mulk identifies Mazdak as *ʿajamī*, attempting to destroy the royal house of the *ʿajam*, *khāna-i mulūk-i ʿajam*.[62] However, Niẓām's *Book of Government* also uses the name Iran for the land, *Irān-zamīn*. Already under the early caliphate, there was a tendency to designate conquered countries with rather generic names. Yemen (*al-Yaman*) was 'the South', al-Shām (Syria/Palestine) 'the North', Maghreb (*al-Maghrib*) 'the West', as seen from the core areas of the Arab Peninsula; 'the East' (*al-Mashriq*) was only rarely used for Persia. The cardinal directions mattered for Muslims because they determined the direction of prayer (*qibla*).[63] This system of denominations, which largely superseded pre-Islamic terminology, is telling for the emerging imperial identity of the caliphate and for the distinct approach of early Islamic historiography.

Islamic Historiography

Unfortunately, not all contributions about Islamic/Arabic historiography in the eighth to eleventh centuries planned for this volume could be realized. Therefore, as a non-specialist, I can only briefly enumerate a few general points that seem crucial.[64] Pre-Islamic sources in Arabic mainly include inscriptions (preserved in considerable numbers between the Yemen and the desert fringes of Syria) and poetry (written down in Islamic times).[65] The Prophet provided a holy book, which contained several references to (not least, biblical) history, but — unlike the Bible — did not tell a (or better, 'the') history. After his death, a growing normative discourse, *ḥadīth*, supplemented the Qurʾān to deal with many aspects of the Prophet's life and sayings, mostly in legendary form. The writing of history proper in Arabic set in gradually after the conquests, and unfolded into many forms: world chronicles, local histories, biographies, and biographical and genealogical collections.[66]

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[61] Kommer, Liccardo, and Nowak, 'Comparative Approaches to Ethnonyms'.

[62] Niẓām al-Mulk, *Book of Government*, trans. by Darke, ILIV.12, pp. 265–66; see the contribution by Michael Cook, in this volume.

[63] Bashear, 'Yemen in Early Islam'; Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, pp. 96–101; Cf. Pohl, 'The Emergence of New Polities'. I am grateful to Daniel Mahoney for his suggestions.

[64] For this, I rely mainly on Humphries, *Islamic History*; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*; Robinson, 'Islamic Historical Writing'.

[65] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*; Hoyland, *In God's Path*.

[66] Rosenthal, *History of Islamic Historiography*; Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*;

The earliest extant texts of Islamic historiography date from the Abbasid period, starting after the mid-eighth century. A differentiated terminology for 'history' and the 'historian' also emerges at that time: *akhbār* (traditions, sg. *khabar*)/*akhbārī* (purveyor of reports about past events), *ta'rikh* (chronology, history)/*mu'arrikh* (chronicler), *aḥādīth* (narrative account).[67] In the third century after the Hijra, the ninth century CE, large syntheses appear, revealing their authors' access to surprisingly rich material. The oldest surviving long-form work of historiography that has come down to us is the *Chronicle* (*Ta'rikh*) of Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, spanning the period from the Hijra (622 CE) to the year AH 232 (847 CE) in annalistic form, and covering the entire Islamic world from the Atlantic to India.[68] The most spectacular work is the world chronicle by al-Ṭabarī (839–923 CE), the *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* ('History of Prophets and Kings'). It covers the entire period from the Creation up to the year 914/15 CE, a massive work, filling forty volumes in the English translation.[69] Al-Ṭabarī also included Jewish history, incorporating substantial accounts derived from the Hebrew Bible, as well as some Persian traditions and history, from unknown sources. A similarly broad compilation was written later in the tenth century by Abu Ali Miskawayh, the *Tajārib al-umam*, 'Experiences of the Nations'.[70] Both of these authors were witnesses of the decline of the caliphate.

In spite of the impact of the Abbasid court in and around Baghdad on cultural life and literary production in the late eighth and ninth centuries, no real official historiography, let alone institutional control on the writing of history was established. Al-Ṭabarī had been drawn to Baghdad from the distant Caspian province of Tabaristan, and profited from the opportunities arising around the Abbasid court. The authority that his writing soon acquired, however, did not stem from any official commission or approbation, but from al-Ṭabarī's erudition and the overwhelming richness of the material he had used (or claimed to have used). To support the credibility of his account, he used the method of *isnād* (support, chain of authorities), already well established by his time. The ascription of specific accounts to named informants could form entire chains of authoritative transmission. Al-Ṭabarī clearly explained his method in his introduction:

Cheddadi, *Les Arabes*, who argues for the appropriation of Greek, Persian, and Syriac models in early Islamic historiography; cf. Di Branco, 'A Rose in the Desert?'.

[67] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 6; Cheddadi, *Les Arabes*, p. 41.

[68] Andersson and Marsham, 'The First Islamic Chronicle'.

[69] al-Ṭabarī, *History*, ed. by Yarshater, 40 vols; Robinson, 'Islamic Historical Writing', pp. 238–42.

[70] Abu Ali Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, ed. and trans. by Amedroz and Margoliouth.

> The reader should know that with respect to all I have mentioned [...], I rely upon
> traditions (*akhbār*) and reports (*āthār*) which [...] I attribute to their transmitters.
> I rely only exceptionally upon what is learned through rational arguments and pro-
> duced by internal thought processes [...] For no knowledge of the history of men
> of the past and of recent men and events is attainable by those who were not able
> to observe them and did not live in their time, except through information and
> transmission provided by informants and transmitters.[71]

In the debates between traditionalists and rationalists that took place in Abbasid
Baghdad, this remark clearly links al-Ṭabarī's work with conservative Sunni
orthodoxy. The method of *isnād* was first and foremost used in collections of
the sayings of the Prophet (*ḥadīth*) and in legal manuals. Of course, historiog-
raphy usually did not face issues about the correctness of religious/legal norms,
but only about the veracity of reports about events in the distant past, with
more negligible societal consequences. It did not necessarily require decisions,
and allowed integrating alternatives. On the other hand, by using methods
from theology and law stakes were raised in providing correct narratives of the
past, and could provoke a remarkable degree of self-reflexion.

For modern historical critique, the *isnād* strategy of truth raises two prob-
lems. First, 'the question is whether *isnāds* (at least those produced by repu-
table scholars) represent genuine lines of transmission, or are instead forger-
ies intended to legitimize statements first circulated in a later period'.[72] And
second, al-Ṭabarī and many other compilers often quoted several accounts of
the same event, regardless of whether they contradicted each other, without
expressing a judgement of their own. 'The historian's task was decisively not
to interpret or evaluate the past as such; rather, he was simply to determine
which reports about it were acceptable and compile these reports in a conveni-
ent order'.[73] We rarely hear al-Ṭabarī speaking in his own voice.[74] For modern
historians, this may in fact be the preferable method because it leaves the inter-
pretation to them, in contrast to the Chinese office of historians that decided
once and for all which reports to include in the state histories.

Daniel Mahoney, in his chapter, addresses a region fairly distant from the
centres of the caliphate, but peripheral only in some respects: South Arabia.
Before the advent of Islam, the Himyarites had established one of the early

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[71] al-Ṭabarī, *History*, trans. by Rosenthal, I, Introduction, 7, p. 170. See also Humphreys,
Islamic History, pp. 73–74.

[72] Humphreys, *Islamic History*, p. 81.

[73] Humphreys, *Islamic History*, p. 74.

[74] Robinson, 'Islamic Historical Writing', pp. 247–48.

Arabic power centres in Yemen, with a rich epigraphic record. In the heyday of the Abbasid Caliphate, Yemenis formed an influential political network relying on claims to strong tribal traditions. Their rivalry with North Arabians gave rise to a rich polemical literature.[75] Resentments against North Arabians who had settled in Yemen also formed the backdrop to a key work of South Arabian historiography in the tenth century, the *al-Iklīl* by al-Hamdānī. Its ten books (only partly preserved) offer rather varied perspectives on Yemeni history: three volumes contain South Arabian tribal genealogies, three deal with the history of Himyar, and one presents memorable monuments and burial inscriptions, an indication that historiography should be seen in a wider context of cultural memory in which display script and material remains played an important role. The rest of *al-Iklīl* offers poems and proverbs, and engages in arguing for the merits of South Arabians and refuting false reports about them. It is a heterogeneous collection and clearly follows a political agenda, as Mahoney argues: constructing South Arabian identity, and countering a growing North Arabian influence in the region.

Similar to historiographic trends in Persia, the *al-Iklīl* has been seen as representing the emergence of a 'local' (or rather, regional) focus in writing about the past.[76] It directs attention to the pre-Islamic period, in which the Himyarite kingdom was the foremost Arab polity. This strong pre-Islamic basis for a South Arabian identity in the *al-Iklīl* is not anti-Islamic; it also bolsters the pre-eminence of Yemenis with reference to the prophets of God who had delivered the divine message to South Arabians before the advent of Muḥammad, and turned some of them into believers. The extended genealogical tables also serve as arguments for the virtues of Yemeni tribes. Here, al-Hamdānī also engages in polemics against Hisham ibn al-Kalbi and his father, the authors of classical Arabic genealogical collections. In a world where the cohesion and political standing of the tribes of Arabia had been undermined by their very success, but where tribal affiliation could still ease access to privilege, genealogies were a chief instrument for providing a sense of place in a changing society. Engaging in genealogical argument was bound to provoke controversy, and the fate of both al-Hamdānī and his work demonstrate that they were not always favourably received.

[75] Webb, 'From the Sublime to the Ridiculous'.

[76] Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, pp. 158–59.

Syriac Historiography

Syrian speakers of Syriac called themselves *Suryaye* or *Bnay Surya*, the Syrian people, who spoke *leshana Suryaya*, the Syriac language.[77] However, this solidly established terminology was far from representing a clearly circumscribed identity. Syriac was a branch of the Aramaic language first spoken and written in Edessa, and Christian Syrians continued to occasionally call themselves Arameans under Islamic rule. It was used for Christian liturgy and religious writing from early on, and thus spread as far as China, as a Syriac inscription in Xi'an shows.[78] Most educated Syrians were bilingual and also used Greek, or later Arabic. They cultivated a tradition of translations of Greek texts into Syriac, and subsequently into Arabic. This provided the main conduit of cultural flows from the classical Greek tradition to the Muslim world. After the Muslim conquest of the Levant in the seventh century CE, the Arab army in Syria, the *ahl al-shām*, formed the core of an alternative, Arab Syrian identity that, however, only became majoritarian in the region after many centuries.

For modern scholarship in English, this raises the problem of whether to speak of 'Syrian' or 'Syriac' historiography. Apart from some ambiguity in the use of 'Syrian' or (predominantly) 'Syriac' for the language, 'Syriac historiography' was not only written in Syriac, but also in Greek and later in Arabic, while some historiography in Syriac was not written in Syria, but in Egypt, in Iran, or even further east. At the same time, a parallel tradition of Arabic/Islamic historiography evolved in Syria. 'Syriac historiography', in this volume, means Christian historiography written by members of Christian denominations rooted in Syria. Christianity provided a unifying frame; yet it was split into four different confessions — the Nestorians/East Syrians, the Miaphysites (condemned at Chalcedon 451), the Melkites/Chalcedonians, who followed Byzantine orthodoxy, and the Maronites.

A single, homogeneous 'Syrianness' thus never really existed, although many authors claimed to represent it; Syrian/Syriac history both played a significant role in driving, and was at the same time driven by, the different confessions' competitive perceptions of the past. Some of the groups claimed to represent 'the' Syrians, others eventually ethnicized their confessional identity and adopted the ancient ethnonym 'Assyrians'.[79] As Jack Tannous has put it,

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[77] See the contribution by Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, in this volume, and Andrade, 'Syrian and Syrians'.

[78] Debié and Taylor, 'Syriac and Syro-Arabic Historical Writing'; Wood, 'Historiography'.

[79] Haar Romeny, ed., *Religious Origins of Nations?*; Haar Romeny, 'Ethnicity'.

the Christian Middle East was a fractured and fracturing, confessionally diverse landscape where educational institutions proliferated and, among the Miaphysites, sophisticated translations and retranslations were produced as church leaders sought to impose order to the disorderly world of the 'simple believers'.[80]

 Michael 'the Great' or 'the Syrian', who created a grand historical synthesis from a Miaphysite point of view in the twelfth century, tended to replace 'Syrians' of his sources with 'believers'. That echoed the self-assertive term 'orthodox' used earlier in the Byzantine *oikumene*, but was also equivalent to the *mu'minīn*, the Muslim 'faithful' referred to in the title of the caliph. Syrian Christian identities thus shifted somehow uneasily but stubbornly between religious/confessional, territorial, linguistic, and ethnic allegiances.

As Scott Fitzgerald Johnson demonstrates in this volume, the development of Syrian (and in particular, Syrian Christian) historiography and identity took a very different direction from Iranian historical writing after the Islamic conquest. It is not generally known that the number of historical texts transmitted in Syriac from the second half of the first millennium is unparalleled almost anywhere else in the period. By Johnson's count, there are twenty-five surviving major Syriac chronicles between the sixth and the twelfth centuries, produced by Christian communities of limited size, although scattered between northern Mesopotamia and the Egyptian desert, and beyond, and there are traces of more. Of those that survived, many have actually been preserved in manuscripts written not long after their composition, in contrast to the Byzantine, Islamic, or Chinese historiography of the period. Many Syriac manuscripts were kept in a single Syrian desert monastery in Egypt, where an abbot had collected them in the tenth century. Other Christian centres also kept their libraries: in the twelfth century, Michael the Syrian was still able to insert the sixth-century *Church History* by John of Ephesus into his *Chronicle*.[81] Syriac historical manuscripts offer an almost unique opportunity to trace the development of historiographic practice and intertextual relations between the sixth and twelfth centuries on the ground.

In many respects, Syrian historiography represents a contrast model to the Chinese one: 'a rare example of non-étatist, non-imperial, history writing'.[82] It

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[80] Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, p. 198.

[81] John of Ephesus, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Payne-Smith; Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, trans. by Chabot; Honigmann, 'L'histoire ecclésiastique'; Weltecke, *Die 'Beschreibung der Zeiten'*.

[82] Debié and Taylor, 'Syriac and Syro-Arabic Historical Writing', p. 156; Johnson, in this volume.

was a history produced in ecclesiastic and monastic settings. Syrian Miaphysite dissenters had already distanced themselves from the Byzantine imperial regime before the Persian and Islamic conquests, and certainly did not write state history after that. It is obvious that in order to preserve their separate identities as subservient populations under the caliphate, both Miaphysite and Chalcedonian Christian communities relied on their pride in the past and on well-ordered historical records about their fate as a community and the achievements of their holy men.[83] Christians could build on a long history of dissent and the experience of oppression and martyrdom under the pagan empire. As Johnson shows, Syrian Christian communities thus integrated local historical interest and church history into the grand edifice of universal history, largely following the model of Eusebius.[84] While West Syrians usually chose an annalistic structure and included political events, East Syrians structured their church or monastic histories as chain biographies.[85] The cultural memory of the Syrian churches prominently included Old Testament history, and more than other Christian communities they could feel entitled to place themselves in the direct succession of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets. The Syrian model thus also inspired Armenian Christians, who faced a similar challenge of adapting and defending their tradition under first Byzantine and then Muslim rule.[86]

Given the key importance of historical writing in the Syrian tradition, it has been noted that there was no single word for 'historian'.[87] Yet unlike the distinctive role of 'the historian' at the Chinese court, Syrian historians were not simply historians, but often leaders of their respective communities, for whom the study of the past was an integral part of their work for the well-being and cohesion of their flock. Not even classical and Byzantine writers of history were regarded as purely 'historians'. In contrast to the historiography of and about Iran in the early Islamic period, the faithful rendering of a received tradition mattered in Syria. The accepted status of Christian communities as 'people of the book' — in contrast to the rather disreputable Zoroastrian *majūs*, magians — surely contributed to preserving the traditional focus in their histories. This might also be due to the different roles Syrians and Persians had under

[83] See Haar Romeny, 'Ethnicity'.

[84] See also Wood, 'Historiography', p. 410. In general, see Allen, 'Universal History, 300–1000'.

[85] Cf. Mahoney, Ó Riain, and Vocino, eds, *Medieval Biographical Collections*.

[86] Greenwood, 'Negotiating the Roman Past'; Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 9; Preiser-Kapeller, 'Early Medieval Armenia'.

[87] See Johnson, in this volume.

Abbasid rule. Well-trained Persians made their careers as administrators by becoming Muslims and by skilfully adapting to the cultural environment of the court. Highly educated Syrians were mainly useful to the Abbasid Caliphate as translators and cultural brokers who transmitted the ancient knowledge of the Roman world; they could continue to adhere to their own traditions.

Byzantium

Early Byzantine historiography — written in Greek, apart from some very early works in Latin — continued both the Hellenic tradition of history writing and the imperial Roman outlook. It was very much centred on 'the' city, Constantinople (unlike contemporary Latin historiography, whose authors variously wrote from Italian, Spanish, Gallic, or African perspectives). The imperial city became even more dominant in Byzantine history writing after the loss of Syria and Egypt in the seventh century, which had had their own historical traditions. Many fourth- to seventh-century authors were government officials, jurists, or military men, and relied on official sources. As in the Latin West, the high clergy increasingly engaged in the writing of (mostly, but not exclusively) church histories. Still, in the mid-sixth century, Procopius's massive *Wars* established a strand of 'classicizing' lay historiography mainly covering military issues in a careful blend of Thucydidean narrative craft and Roman imperial attitudes. It was continued during the later sixth and early seventh centuries by Agathias, Menander, and Theophylact Simocat(t)a.[88]

It may be taken as indicative that this form of history writing seems to have stopped after Theophylact, who wrote in the 640s but only treated events up to 602, when the usurpation of Phokas and the ensuing Persian attacks set off a chain of events which shattered the empire. The almost 150 years of historiographic silence after Theophylact have been much discussed as an anomaly in Byzantine history. Undoubtedly, this break corresponds with the deep crisis of Byzantium after the Islamic (and Slavic) conquests. The 'Empire that did not die', as John Haldon has called seventh-century Byzantium, survived against heavy odds, and maintaining its imperial 'Roman' identity was one element in its tenacity; but it did not seem to invest much effort in writing its 'Roman' history in the period.[89]

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[88] Kaldellis, 'Byzantine Historical Writing'; Magdalino, 'Byzantine Historical Writing'; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*.

[89] Haldon, *The Empire that Would Not Die*; Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*.

The two chapters about Byzantine historiography in this volume set in after the 'historiographic revival' around 800 CE. Emmanuel C. Bourbouhakis analyses two massive compilations from the ninth and tenth centuries, respectively, that gathered together excerpts from a large number of works of older Greek historiography. In the second half of the ninth century, Photios, who had spent much of his career as a top administrator before becoming patriarch of Constantinople, compiled the *Bibliothēkē*, a selection of excerpts from the works of thirty-three ancient Greek historians, as well as literary texts. As Bourbouhakis argues, this was not a purely literary pursuit (although Photios also commented on the style of the texts he had chosen), but mainly served 'as a source of guidance in matters of governance', as Photios underlined in a letter to a court official: 'The errors of one's forerunners provide a sufficient counter-example by way of a corrective to future generations in similar circumstances'.[90] The selection was also intended to help the Byzantine elites 'to reassert continuity with a Graeco-Roman past which underwrote so much of their political identity'.[91]

In the first half of the tenth century, the *Excerpta* (*Eklogai*) were put together on the initiative of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Like Photios's collection, they contained selections from numerous works from over a millennium of Greek history writing; unlike the *Bibliothēkē*, these were arranged in thematic sections for easier reference. From the few sections that have been preserved, the *Excerpta de legationibus*, collecting accounts of diplomatic exchanges, are perhaps the most frequently used by modern scholars, because they incorporate fragments from otherwise lost late antique works such as Priscus and Menander Protector, who wrote mainly about negotiations with the Huns in the fifth and the Avars in the sixth century, respectively. But there is also a section of excerpts 'On virtues and vices', strongly reminiscent of the 'praise and blame' focus in Chinese historiography.

Yannis Stouraitis focuses on another of Constantine Porphyrogenitus's large historiographic projects, known under the name of *Scriptores post Theophanem*, the continuators of the early ninth-century *Chronicle* of Theophanes. The title given in the manuscript is studiously anonymous, 'those after Theophanes'. 'According to the proem of the first book, the emperor offered both material and guidance to the actual authors, whereas the rubric of the fifth book [...] implies an active role of the emperor in the writing of the text'.[92] While

[90] Photios, *Epistulae*, ed. by Laourdas and Westerink, 187, 11, 82; Bourbouhakis, in this volume, p. 206.

[91] Bourbouhakis, in this volume, p. 205.

[92] Stouraitis, in this volume, p. 222.

Theophanes followed an annalistic[93] scheme, the *Scriptores* were structured as serial biographies of rulers, similar, for instance, to the series of papal biographies in the *Liber pontificalis*.[94] In large parts, it was a dynastic history of the reigning Macedonian family. As Stouraitis argues, this was very much a history of the empire, the court, and the city, defending the sole legitimacy of the Byzantine emperor to represent the entire Roman world. It was not an 'ethnic' or 'national' vision in which the Roman people occupied centre stage.[95] The imperial outlook also determined the way of production by 'those after Theophanes'. 'By portraying this work as an impersonal product of the highest authority in the imperial office, an implicit but distinct claim to objectivity and authority of knowledge was made'.[96] The work was not least to be used for teaching new generations of courtiers and administrators.

This is as close as we get to Chinese-style 'state history' in early medieval Europe. However, it did not have the same effect of monopolizing historical truth by creating a canonical account of the past. When John Skylitzes set out over a century later to write a history up to his present, the second half of the eleventh century, he did not continue the continuators, but started all over again where they had begun, in 813, where Theophanes had stopped. In his foreword, he enumerates and criticizes several predecessors who had covered the same period:

> For in composing a rambling account of his own times (and a little before) as though he was writing history, one of them writes a favourable account, another a critical one, while a third writes whatever he pleases and a fourth sets down what he is ordered to write. Each composes his own 'history' and they differ so much from each other in describing the same events that they plunge their audience into dizziness and confusion.[97]

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[93] The terminology is confusing between Latin and Greek; in ancient/Byzantine usage, Theophanes wrote a chronicle, or chronography, similar to the *Chronicon paschale*, whereas a year-by-year structure came to be called annals in the medieval West. Extensive discussion of the terminology in Burgess and Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time*.

[94] For the genre of serial biography in a transcultural perspective, see Mahoney, Ó Riain, and Vocino, eds, *Medieval Biographical Collections*. For the *Liber pontificalis*, see McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy*.

[95] In this point, Stouraitis differs from the assessment forcefully proposed by Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*; and Kaldellis, *Romanland*. See also Stouraitis, 'Reinventing Roman Ethnicity'.

[96] Stouraitis, in this volume, p. 224.

[97] John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, trans. by Wortley, p. 2.

This negative judgement about the confusing multiplicity of Byzantine historiography reminds one of the criticism about Greek historians voiced a millennium before by Flavius Josephus.[98] Curiously, Skylitzes does not mention the *Scriptores post Theophanem* (unless he cites them under one of the names unknown to us), although he makes frequent use of the text.[99] The ambitious attempts by Constantine Porphyrogenitus to establish an official Byzantine 'state history' thus did have an impact, but ultimately failed to achieve their intended purpose. The writing of history in Byzantium remained, for the most part, closely attached to the court — Skylitzes himself is presented in the rubric of his work as 'the *kouropalates* who served as commander-in-chief of the watch'.[100] In a sense, Skylitzes's efforts to remove 'all comments of a subjective and fanciful nature' and 'the writers' differences and contradictions' from his sources parallels the goals of the *guoshi* writing about previous dynasties. Yet no systematic control of historiographic production was established in Constantinople, and we still have access to quite a range of different perspectives on the history of Byzantium.

On the whole, there are several obvious similarities between Byzantine and contemporary Chinese historiography that emerge from the two chapters by Bourbouhakis and Stouraitis. Both historiographies are imperial in outlook, and seek to reaffirm the millenarian tradition of empire in times of adversity and crisis. Both are essentially composed by an elite of administrators close to the court and in the capital, and rely on a long and well-established practice of historiography. Both mainly seek to serve the needs of state by providing precedent from ancient and recent experience for every possible political constellation. This also requires clearly marking out 'praise and blame', 'virtues and vices', good and bad policy and rulership. Both combine the practice of recording more recent events with selections from older texts processed to be more easily accessible in the search for precedent. In both cases, what was also at stake was to reaffirm the centrality of the respective empires and their elites. As Bourbouhakis puts it, for the Byzantine elites, the past 'was pivotal to the perception of their own place in history'.[101]

Significant differences between Byzantine and Chinese historiographies also emerge from the two chapters. It goes without saying that the Chinese system of providing for 'state history' and strict court control on its transmission went

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[98] Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, trans. by Barclay; see my Introduction, in this volume.

[99] Flusin, 'Re-writing History', pp. xviii–xx.

[100] John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, trans. by Wortley, p. 1.

[101] Bourbouhakis, in this volume, p. 198.

far beyond what was current in Byzantium at the same time. The Chinese court strove to canonize official history books, and often destroyed the documentation used to write them in order to impede later revisions. Stouraitis discusses the model proposed by Masayuki Sato, who distinguishes between East Asian 'normative' and Western 'cognitive' historiography.[102] Sato argues that in Europe the writing of history was a personal endeavour, mostly by single named authors, whereas in East Asia, it was the task of anonymous teams of historians writing on the order of the emperor. Ironically, however, both Bourbouhakis and Stouraitis deal with large historiographic projects executed on the initiative of the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus by anonymous authors and compilers. Not surprisingly, Stouraitis emphasizes Jörn Rüsen's balanced critique of Sato.[103] Western historiography also propagated moral norms and underlying meanings, yet in many respects these were and remained negotiable. One might add that a significant minority of major early medieval historiography in the West was also anonymous: the much-discussed 'Fredegar' in the seventh-century Frankish kingdoms, many of the annals in the Carolingian realm and elsewhere, or the *Salerno Chronicle* in tenth-century southern Italy. On the other hand, there are the towering figures of Sima Qian und Sima Guang in Chinese historiography. No single model of historiography was predominant at either end of the Eurasian landmass.

There is a further comparative issue that Sato's model raises: in the absence of canonical holy books, histories could assume a quasi-sacral function in East Asia, unlike their counterparts in Europe and the Middle East, which had to negotiate their relationship with historical information contained in the Bible or the Qur'ān. The *Spring and Autumn Annals*, eventually attributed to Confucius, indeed served as a sacred text, as demonstrated by the eighteenth-century calligraphic inscription of the annals and other Confucian classics on a long alley of marble slabs in the temple of Confucius in Beijing. However, one wonders whether there really is a sharp contrast in that respect, or rather a continuum. The Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament were mainly history books, and also considered as such. It is, of course, plausible that there was a difference in degree between East Asia and the West. In a passage from his letter to a court official quoted by Bourbouhakis, Photios argues that 'our Lord and Saviour gave no forethought to the types of government and their respective administration'.[104] Military matters and state negotiations, admin-

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[102] Sato, 'Cognitive Historiography'; Stouraitis, in this volume, p. 220.

[103] Rüsen, 'Morality and Cognition'.

[104] Photios, *Epistulae*, ed. by Laourdas and Westerink, 187, 11, 82; Bourbouhakis, in this volume, p. 206.

istration, trade, and justice were matters not to learn from divine teachings, but from experience, not least that of one's forebears, and to be gleaned from historical writing. Chinese officials were supposed to learn from histories in a similar way. However, there is a tension between divine revelation and earthly matters that is fundamental for Christian historiography, which was unlike the concepts of governance in harmony with the divine held by Chinese administrators informed by Confucian teachings.

The Latin West: The Transformation of Carolingian Historiography

In the West, the Carolingian period (*c.* 750 to *c.* 900) produced a variety of historical texts, treated in exemplary fashion in volume 3 of the present series.[105] In its heyday under Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, the court seems to have exerted considerable influence on the writing of history.[106] More than in many other European medieval contexts, these were affirmative histories, praising the ruler, legitimizing the dynasty and its takeover from the Merovingians in 751, and supporting its political and cultural agenda.[107] The *Annales regni Francorum* can be regarded as official records of events in the kingdom, and other annals kept at monasteries and bishoprics closely attached to the court, such as Lorsch or Metz, had a similar function. Previous histories were collected in 'history books', subtly tailored compendia, to suit contemporary uses of the past.[108]

Some features of history writing under the first Carolingian kings/emperors are reminiscent of the much more sophisticated system of Chinese 'state history'.[109] It relied to an extent on coordinated efforts of basic record-keeping, mostly by regular entries into annals. The perspective was predominantly imperial and dynastic, focusing on the exploits of the ruler, his court, and the

[105] Reimitz, Kramer, and Ward, eds, *Historiography and Identity*, III. Carolingian rule ended in the beginning of the tenth century in the East, and at its end in the West.

[106] Nelson, 'History-Writing', p. 438: 'History's flourishing as a genre in the ninth century to some extent responded to the centripetal pull of courts [...] Yet most history, clearly, was not actually produced in or at the palace.'

[107] McKitterick, *History and Memory*; Innes and McKitterick, 'The Writing of History'; Reimitz, 'The Art of Truth'; Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*.

[108] Hen and Innes, eds, *The Uses of the Past*; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, pp. 28–59; Gantner, McKitterick, and Meeder, eds, *The Resources of the Past*; Reimitz, 'The Social Logic'.

[109] Cf. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*; Meens and others, eds, *Religious Franks*.

army.[110] Biographies of rulers (most of all, Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*) and other notable persons promoted them as role models. Moral messages were always at hand, conferring praise but also blame on political actors. As Helmut Reimitz has observed, no alternative narratives of Carolingian history from before 829, when the *Annales regni Francorum* stop, have come down to us.[111] Historiography formed an integral part of much wider efforts to promote literacy and education, enhancing the quality of governance, ordering life at court and among the elites, communicating with the provinces and integrating newly conquered regions.

There are also obvious differences, not only in scale. Carolingian authors above all wrote histories of the current dynasty's rule and, quite surprisingly, did not produce a new history of the Carolingians' Merovingian predecessors — that period was mainly covered by a careful selection and subtle editing of older works in history books.[112] The authors were not specially trained bureaucrats and court historians, but mostly erudite clerics with close relations to the court, in several cases members of the Carolingian family. Many works, not only of history, were produced by monastic scriptoria, closely linked to the orbit of the court, but often also geared to particular interests. As Reimitz put it, 'they all talk to and not from the centres of royal power'.[113] That also meant that throughout the Carolingian period, a wide variety of forms of historical writing were produced and disseminated in the empire.[114] Historians of the period did not reduce the multiplicity of genres and texts that they had inherited from the age of the Merovingians, but rather extended it further: like their predecessors, they had a variety of choices.[115] Furthermore, no institutionalized control was exerted by the emperor or his administration. Thus, within the general frame of an affirmative Carolingian grand narrative of the past, criticism could be expressed, indirectly or directly. Even Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, a classicizing and very favourable posthumous portrait of the emperor that did much to establish his reputation for posterity, could at the

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[110] Nelson, 'History-Writing', p. 436, about the 'court-centredness' of Carolingian historiography; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, p. 154: 'a major and widespread effort to transmit a particular political message'; 'an extraordinarily focused sense of the past'.

[111] Reimitz, 'Histories of Carolingian Historiography'; Airlie, 'The Cunning of Institutions'; McKitterick, 'Political Ideology'.

[112] Reimitz, 'The Social Logic'.

[113] Reimitz, 'Histories of Carolingian Historiography'.

[114] Cf. Brunner, *Oppositionelle Gruppen*; Nelson, *Opposition to Charlemagne*.

[115] Reimitz, 'Genre and Identity'.

same time be understood as implicit criticism of the regime of his son, Louis the Pious.[116]

From the 830s, when the dynasty became enmeshed in internal conflict and suffered repeated external defeats, contemporary historiography switched into much more ambiguous modes, and bitterness about the shortcomings of the rulers and about the divisions between and within the Frankish kingdoms crept in.[117] This could also include voicing retrospective dissatisfaction, as in the *Epitaphium Arsenii*, a biography of Charlemagne's cousin Wala written in 835.[118] Mostly, writers addressed contemporary events gone wrong, such as Nithard's *Histories* written in the fraternal wars of the 840s, one of the rare historiographic works by a lay aristocrat. Much more than Einhard's biography, Notker's *Life of Charlemagne*, produced at the end of the ninth century, fashions the first Carolingian emperor as an almost miraculous model ruler in sharp contrast to his successors in Notker's day. In 907/08, during the reign of Louis the Child, the last Eastern Frankish king from the Carolingian family, Regino of Prüm composed, in Goldberg and MacLean's words, 'the first complete history of the empire's rise and fall'.[119] Regino's history begins with the incarnation of Christ, but his narrative of the years of glory of Charlemagne is surprisingly patchy, and even more so about the successive period: 'Concerning the times of the emperor Louis [the Pious], I have included very little because I have not found written texts, nor have learnt from the elders anything that was worth committing to memory'.[120] Was Trier (where Regino wrote) devoid of the many works from which Regino could have gained information on the crucial period in which Carolingian empire-building began to plummet into a phase of decline? Or was he perhaps weary of repeating the depressing stories of the struggles, first between Louis and his sons, and then among the sons for the best bits of the Carolingian heritage? By the early tenth century, historiography had again become an idiosyncratic venture under often adverse political conditions, in which access to the material and processing unpleasant memories had

[116] Tischler, *Einharts Vita Karoli*; Nelson, 'History-Writing', p. 439.

[117] Matthias Tischler has recently argued that the unrest and disputes already began to creep in earlier, for instance at Attigny 822: Tischler, 'Karl der Große'; Tischler, 'Karolingisches Schweigen'.

[118] De Jong, *Epitaph for an Era*.

[119] Goldberg and MacLean, 'Royal Marriage', p. 108. See also MacLean, *History and Politics*; Kortüm, 'Weltgeschichte am Ausgang der Karolingerzeit' (arguing that it was not world history).

[120] Regino, *Chronicle*, trans. by MacLean, a. 813, p. 129; ed. by Kurze, p. 73.

become a challenge: a historiography of disillusion, as I have argued in my contribution to volume 3 of *Historiography and Identity*.[121]

In spite of Regino's dissatisfaction (and that of other authors of the period), many of the parameters of their social world had been established in the Carolingian period. 'Regino's view of the social world as a world divided among peoples [...] had slid more firmly into place only in the century before he wrote', as Helmut Reimitz has observed.[122] Reimitz has also shown that early medieval Western historiography was characterized by constant shifts in the strategies of identification. In the late sixth century, Gregory of Tours wrote Frankish identity out of his history, and instead promoted identifications with the church of Gaul, with the sacred topography on which it built, and with the episcopal networks of proud senatorial families that governed it. The author of the so-called *Fredegar Chronicle* in the seventh century, by contrast, emphasized Frankish identity in an attempt to subtly direct loyalties away from the turbulent Merovingian kings of his day, and to appeal to groups of Frankish aristocrats increasingly represented by the ambitious Pippinid/Carolingian family from the north-east of the realm.[123] This line of argument was taken up in the eighth century by the 'continuators' of Fredegar, closely linked to the Carolingian rulers, who included strong expressions of Frankish agency in the historical narrative in order to establish the legitimacy of the ascending dynasty in the eyes of potential aristocratic competitors.

As Charlemagne successfully continued the trajectory towards empire and incorporated Bavarians, Lombards, Saxons, Avars, Slavs, and others into his realm, Frankish ethnic rhetoric gradually subsided, and imperial unity and multiplicity came to dominate the history books. Perhaps paradoxically, this opened new spaces for the affirmation of politically subaltern, but regionally dominant identities.[124] Romanness remained a symbolically potent, but at the same time counterfactual and ambiguous scheme of identification, a contradiction that was to haunt the recreated Roman Empire in all the thousand years of its existence. As Carolingian rule eroded in the second half of the ninth century, 'Frankishness' largely receded to core regions of the eastern and western kingdoms, which eventually were to become Rheinfranken, Franconia, and the Île de France, respectively. Beneath an often-precarious layer of royal power only intermittently defined as Frankish, regional units mostly

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[121] Pohl, 'Historiography of Disillusion'.

[122] Reimitz, *History*, p. 444. See also McLean, *History and Politics*.

[123] Wood, 'Fredegar's Fables'.

[124] Reimitz, 'When Did the Bavarians Become Bavarians?'.

ruled by dukes regained considerable room to manoeuvre. Many of them could mobilize ancient ethnic/regional solidarities: Bavarians, Swabians, Saxons, Burgundians, Aquitanians. Others were of more recent formation; in particular, the Lotharingians came to be called after Lothar II, the rather ill-fated king of a short-lived Carolingian splinter kingdom.

Simon MacLean's chapter surveys the traces of the 'Lotharingians' in the written record of the late ninth and tenth centuries, and particularly during the over fifty-year break in 'long-form' historiography between Regino and the 960s, when Liudprand of Cremona and Widukind resumed the writing of large-scale histories. In the emergent Ottonian Empire, the historiographic framing of its rise was still tentative; and similarly, the terminology of the political units and of the peoples that the Ottonians claimed to represent was volatile. As MacLean shows, most occurrences of 'Lotharingians' or 'Lotharingia' can be contextualized in particular political scenarios in which mentioning them made specific sense. The two terms only really became standard when the revived *imperium Romanum* of the Ottonians could be defined through the multitude of its ethnic components: Liudprand of Cremona, Otto I's envoy to Constantinople, recounts that when the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus challenged him: 'You are not Romans, but Lombards!', he replied that 'we, that is, Lombards, Saxons, Franks, Lotharingians, Bavarians, Suavians and Burgundians, regard "Roman!" as one of the worst insults'.[125]

Lotharingia was a paradoxical case: the former Carolingian heartlands around Aachen, Trier, and Metz had become a contested region on the frontier between the eastern and the western Frankish kingdoms, without consolidated political structure or firm loyalties. What is striking about its very tentative nomenclature is that its inhabitants could not simply remain 'Franks', not even with a regional specification like the *Ripuarii* of the late Merovingian period.[126] There was no sufficiently strong regional identity that corresponded to the delicate geopolitical situation and to the contingencies of post-Carolingian power games. On the other hand, the eventual emergence of a Lotharingian identity (still preserved today in the French region of Lorraine) attests to the need of rooting political power in a recognizable people. 'Ethnic labels could act as prox-

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[125] Liudprand of Cremona, *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana*, ed. by Becker, 12, pp. 182–83 (or ed. by Chiesa, p. 192); for an excellent analysis: Gandino, *Il vocabolario*, pp. 257–70.

[126] In the *Annales Xantenses*, what was to become Lotharingia is repeatedly called *Ripuaria*, its inhabitants *Ripuarii*; ed. by Simson, a. 861, p. 19 and a. 870, p. 28, Lothar II is called *rex Ripuariorum*. However, these attempts to revive the Ripuarian tradition did not have lasting success.

ies for claims to authority', as MacLean puts it. If none were available, they had to be devised, even from unlikely sources, as the Lotharingian case demonstrates.

While MacLean's contribution deals with a former core area of the Carolingian empire, Matthias M. Tischler presents a case study from a peripheral area in the Iberian Peninsula, Asturia. This region was peripheral in every sense: it had been peripheral in the former Visigothic kingdom that had been overcome by Islamic forces in 711; and in the ninth to eleventh centuries, it remained a frontier region on the edges of the dominant Umayyad Caliphate in al-Andalus. It was also far removed from the centres of Latin erudition (and historiography) in the Carolingian world. As Tischler remarks, unlike the Catalan monasteries, which engaged in lively exchanges with the Frankish realms, Asturia did not have much access to texts and manuscripts from north of the Pyrenees. Nevertheless, the monastic centres on these northern fringes of the peninsula produced a historiography that catered not only for their own needs, but also furnished identifications for the emergent regional Christian kingdoms. Similar to contemporary southern Italy, their historiography was transmitted in mixed compendia which also contained legal, hagiographical, polemical, and monastic texts.[127] Southern Italian monastic centres such as Montecassino also faced grave threats from Muslim raiders and mercenaries, but they were confronted with a confusing multitude of enemies: Naples, Byzantium, and not least the Lombard princes, who were engaged in continuous infighting.[128] In comparison, Asturian historiography was much more structured by the fundamental binary opposition between Christians and Muslims.

Thus, the manuscripts discussed by Matthias Tischler present a particular mix of local interests, transcultural perspectives, and apocalyptic undertones. The histories emphasize the link of the Asturian kingdom to the Gothic identity of the former kingdom that had fallen in 711, and their heroic resistance to the Islamic conquerors, which assumes particular urgency through the eschatological visions offered in the texts. This is most obvious in the late ninth-century texts nowadays known as the *Prophetic Chronicle* and the *Chronicle of Albelda*.[129] The rather brief *Prophetic Chronicle* is in fact a strange combination which represents the ambiguous horizon of Asturian historiography. It begins with the prophecy about Gog, the apocalyptic riders from the book of Ezekiel,

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[127] Cf. Pohl, 'History in Fragments'.

[128] Pohl, 'Historiography of Disillusion'.

[129] *Chroniques Asturiennes*, ed. by Bonnaz: *Chronique prophétique*, ed. by Bonnaz, pp. 1–9; *Chronique d'Albelda*, ed. by Bonnaz, pp. 10–30. See also Marschner, 'The Depiction of the Saracen Foreign Rule'; Marschner, 'Ethnic Naming'.

adapted and commented to fit the present. Following Isidore of Seville, Gog is identified with the Goths, and the text culminates in the prophecy that after 170 years, Gog would do to Ismael what Ismael had once done to him.[130] A long genealogy from Abraham and Ismael to the Umayyad caliphs follows, which traces the pedigree from the relatives of the Prophet Muḥammad up to Abd Allāh (d. 912) according to contemporary Islamic knowledge. This genealogy is then complemented by a detailed list of rulers of al-Andalus. Both texts must ultimately derive from the Umayyad court. The short life of the 'pseudo-prophet' Muḥammad, by contrast, which Tischler calls 'a piece of Christian anti-hagiography', shows little awareness of Islamic traditions about the Prophet.[131] The *Chronicle of Albelda* adds an extensive geographical section focusing on Spain (and including an overland itinerary from Cadíz to Rome and on to Constantinople), and three historical sections: an *ordo Romanorum* from Romulus to Tiberius III (d. 705); an *ordo gentis Gothorum*, from Athanaric to Roderic and the Muslim conquest; and an *ordo Gothorum regum* of the Asturian kingdom of Oviedo from the conquest to the present, that is, the year 883.

The monastic authors and copyists in Christian Asturia saw themselves in a Roman and Gothic tradition. They had records about Byzantium, at least until the early eighth century; they knew a lot about the rulers of al-Andalus and their background; but they cared little about events north of the Pyrenees. Some traits of the Asturian 'frontier historiography' remind one of Syriac Christian historiography — both were minority cultures of memory rooted in the greater social whole of Christianity, who clearly used the production and transmission of texts to affirm and defend an identity under pressure from the expansive dynamic of dominant Islamic religion, culture, and politics. Unlike Christian Syrians (and also the Christians of al-Andalus), who were well integrated in Islamic societies and accepted their subaltern but protected *dhimmī* status, the Asturian chroniclers lived outside the sphere of direct Islamic rule. They relied much on biblical and more recent history to understand the test of faith they had been subjected to, and this purpose clearly determined their historiographic choices.

Thus, both the late to post-Carolingian historiography in which Lotharingian identity gradually emerged, and the histories in which Asturian identity was attached to 'Gothic' precedent, did not operate on the basis of well-established, commonly accepted identities. Instead, these identifications

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[130] *Chronique prophétique*, ed. by Bonnaz, 1–2, pp. 2–3.

[131] Cf. Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad*.

were precarious, shifting, and insecure, and writers of histories sought to respond to these insecurities by projecting past identities into the future (in the Asturian case), or by using a vague term for categorization, which in this way became inscribed on the mental map. In this, the history writers were able to rely on the precedent of more successful polities, on time-honoured strategies of identification, and on ancient models of Roman, Christian, and ethnic community. Taken together, these provided a flexible matrix for ordering the historical scenarios of the recent past and the present into meaningful notions of history. Christian concepts of truth-in-history were open to interpretation by hermeneutics and exegesis. They offered several proven explanations for evident failures to solicit divine grace: the workings of providence; punishment for sins; snares of the devil; trials of faith; or eschatological signs. In the medieval West, empire remained deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, eschatological speculation asserted that the Roman Empire had to last until the drama of the apocalypse took place. On the other hand, the Byzantine model of a Christian Roman Empire increasingly appeared as 'Greek' and alien to the Latin commonwealth of peoples and kingdoms. In spite of the ambitious attempts under Charlemagne and Otto I to resurrect the Roman Empire, no particular polity in the medieval West succeeded in claiming a hegemonial role in the history of salvation. Thus, even smaller kingdoms and communities in crisis, under threat, or after defeat, could hope for a privileged role in the divine plan of salvation. The Asturian chronicles are a case in point, showing how traditional identifications could be recast in the mould of a biblical vision of the past and the future.

Comparative Perspectives

In conclusion, I would like to outline several themes, or axes of comparison, which have emerged from the chapters of this volume. It is no surprise that Chinese 'state history' differed in its control of cultural memory from the polyphony of classical/medieval European historiography. Yet in this volume, we have been able to transcend the Weberian ideal types on either side of this comparison, and shown that there was a diverse range of tendencies in each historiographic culture. In China between the Han and the Tang dynasty, a multiplicity of sub-imperial formations had their particular histories, which were integrated subsequently into the wider imperial frame of a succession of dynastic 'state histories'. On the other hand, the grand historiographic project of the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus represents an effort to create an authoritative and centrally controlled history which, however, as we

have seen, did not curb the multiple perspectives on the imperial past in subsequent historiography. Few of the historiographic cultures addressed in this volume can simply be located on one end of the axes that I will briefly sketch here. Rather, they all fluctuate along the spectrum, with only relative differences between them. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that these differences therefore did not matter. All 'cultures' may be hybrid, but not in the same way.[132]

Strategies of Truth

Several of the lines of comparison we have traced are linked to what Jörn Rüsen has identified as a core parameter of global comparison in historiography: the ways in which the reliability and truthfulness of a historical account could be claimed.[133] Plausible narratives were necessary to establish trust in the models of identification proposed in histories. In the introduction to this volume, I have used *Against Apion* by Flavius Josephus as an example of an elaborate argument about historical truth that combines several criteria of truthfulness:[134] a class of priests as guardians of historical memory; ancient literacy, documentary and archival practice; ethnic purity as a precondition for undiluted historical memory; codified divine truth; methodological standards of historiography such as accuracy, eyewitness evidence, impartiality, reliable sources; and, respectively, consensus or critical debate. Similar 'strategies of truth' appear in different constellations, if mostly less explicitly, in the historical cultures presented in the chapters of the present volume.

Sources, Witnesses, and Consensus

Early Islamic writers of history relied much on *isnād*, chains of authorities, to enhance the credibility of their information. In less elaborate ways, medieval Latin historiography often refers to written sources, to eyewitness accounts and to oral informants, though these were not always regarded as a guarantee of truthfulness. In many historiographic cultures, dissent and controversies were regarded as problematic, on the basis of the belief that truth ought to be consensual. It was rarely noted in the period that controversial debate might be a way to approach the truth, although a multiplicity of opinions has been part of

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[132] Cf. Rogers, 'Cultures in Motion', pp. 6–8.

[133] Rüsen, 'Einleitung'; see my introduction, in this volume.

[134] Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, trans. by Barclay, particularly the section 1.7.24–1.8.43, pp. 24–32.

the European tradition of historiography since its inception in classical Greece, and also pervaded Islamic history writing.

Transcendental Foundations of History

Transcendental or revealed truths are central to many cultures of memory. For Jews (for instance, Flavius Josephus) and Christians, the Bible was *historia* par excellence: a history based on revealed truth. Josephus's *Against Apion* allows us to gauge what strong aggregates of ethnic and religious identification were possible.[135] Many Western history books started with a summary of Old Testament history (as did some Islamic histories). Some (such as Otto von Freising's twelfth-century *Chronicle*)[136] even ended with a history of the future, the apocalyptic prophecies offered in the New Testament Book of Revelation. Many Christian writers of history sought to decipher disquieting events as apocalyptic signs. The Christian world view was framed as a history of salvation. Still, claims of truth in Christian historiography rarely built on divine revelation or at least indirect divine warranty. Divine truth, as most Christians were ready to acknowledge, was unfathomable to humans.[137] Therefore, late antique 'Christian historians fully appropriated the classical demands for exactitude and precision as hallmarks of history. [...] Theology of history is left to other works', as Peter Van Nuffelen states.[138] This required the joint efforts of the author and his readers in the search for truth.[139] The same goes for Islamic historiography. Outside the highly codified revelations in the Qur'ān, the words and deeds of the Prophet transmitted in the *hadīth* had to be ascertained by chains of authorities, *isnād*. By adopting the same instrument that conferred religious authority to norms and decisions, historians could stake a high claim of veracity, although unlike the jurists they had the option to leave many questions undecided.

Guardians of Memory

A caste of priestly 'guardians of memory' as in Flavius Josephus's argument is only found in some traditions. In China, the *shiguan* system came close, although the courtiers entrusted with record-keeping were not a hereditary

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[135] Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, trans. by Barclay; see also my Introduction, in this volume.

[136] Otto of Freising, *Chronica de duabus civitatibus*, ed. by Hofmeister, VIII, 390–457.

[137] Van Nuffelen, 'The Many and the One', p. 301.

[138] Van Nuffelen, 'Theology vs. Genre?', p. 194. See also Van Nuffelen, *Orosius*, pp. 1–20.

[139] As argued by Reimitz, 'Genre and Identity'.

class, but highly educated professionals selected by exams. In the Latin West, many authors were clerics, but record-keeping and even more so, writing history, was just one of their many tasks of writing, catechesis, or administration. Laymen prevailed among writers of history in China, in the Islamic world, and in Byzantium. In many cases, the dedicatees of works, who had often themselves commissioned their production, must have played a role in the shape and distribution of historiographic texts.

Memory Control or a Multiplicity of Voices

Chinese 'state history' was the model discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and it represents by far the most elaborate form of central control over the past discussed here. In fact, it combines several forms of appropriation of the past: record-keeping routine and archival practices organized by central institutions; governmental initiative for the production of historical works; trained historians integrated into the administration; high-level supervision of the selection and interpretation of the material; a unitary frame for a historical master narrative; official distribution of the resulting histories; elimination of alternative historical narratives and of the underlying documentation. At least, that is the 'ideal type' model for the *guoshi* of the Tang and Song periods.

Some of these elements are also present, if in different combinations, in other historical cultures. The relatively parallel set of features described by Flavius Josephus shows that no 'state' was necessary for the preservation of controlled and codified memories of the past: it could also be a religious elite that organized the transmission of relevant historical narratives. These elites could rely on a sense of divine election and/or on ethnic framing, and could preserve the memory of a former state and homeland (as the Jews did). Another case of a stateless historiography are the Syrian Christians, where confessional strife led to a competitive streamlining of narratives relevant for maintaining the cohesion of the group. The rich production of Armenian historiography in times of foreign domination provides a further example.[140] Such histories had to find a balance between a focus on a restricted community and claims of representing the true spirit of Christendom as a whole.

One might assume that due to their effective organization and wide-ranging agenda, Christian churches could have determined the writing of history more than other religious institutions. The production of the *Liber pontificalis* by the papal administration, traceable from the fifth to the ninth centuries, could be a

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[140] Preiser-Kapeller, 'Early Medieval Armenia'.

case in point.[141] It was based on administrative documentation (which allowed its authors to list promotions, church buildings, or pious donations, among others), closely linked to the interests of the institution and repeatedly, sometimes continually updated by anonymous officials. On a smaller scale, episcopal and monastic histories displayed similar historiographic strategies, but were mostly occasional activities. The majority of early medieval historians in Europe were clerics or monks; yet the institution they represented did not streamline historiography in the same way as it sought to do with theology, preaching, or liturgy.

Nor did empires or other power centres attempt to exert any message control in the early medieval West. Carolingian 'imperial historiography' under Charlemagne came closest to reaching some unity of purpose, but this faded quickly once the basic consensus among the elites eroded in the 830s and 840s. Individual works might always extol a particular ruler or a dynasty, but no system to marginalize opposing views was in place. In the medieval West, the writing of history was a multipolar activity. It was not concentrated at courts or in urban centres (as it was in Constantinople), but could take place in bishoprics or monasteries all over the continent, providing us with often rather decentralized perspectives of events.

Continuing or Rewriting Accounts of the Past

The basic unit of Chinese historiography was the dynasty, and official historiography under the Tang and Song was therefore structured as a succession of dynastic histories. These histories were mostly written under the successor dynasty and therefore always retrospective, so that overly laudatory narratives could be avoided. In later centuries, these official histories were reworked, and selections from them were produced. No other tradition of medieval historiography was as clearly structured as *guoshi*. The extent to which the need to rewrite the past was felt could differ widely among and within Eurasian historiographic traditions.

Continuation rather than rewriting was a frequent approach in the Christian Roman Empire. Jerome's Latin translation of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius was continued by generations of — mostly named — authors, and the ensuing compilations were copied as a basis for further continuations, forming veritable 'chains of chronicles'.[142] Similarly, a number of classicizing authors in sixth- and seventh-century Byzantium successively continued Procopius's *Wars* and

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[141] See McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy*.

[142] Wood, 'Chains of Chronicles'.

its continuations. However, other authors synthesized much larger chunks of history, such as Malalas or Theophanes. In the Carolingian empire, instead of writing new works of synthesis those interested in history produced historiographic compendia, combining copies or excerpts of earlier histories in order to provide an overview of Frankish history. In general, however, many Western historians preferred to rewrite the past, even though they rarely introduced any fundamental changes into the received narrative.

The *isnād* system in Islamic historiography represented a particular approach to the preservation of earlier records. It could be used to group excerpts from the available sources ascribed to their authors (and to chains of transmission) around specific events or topics, even if they contradicted each other, omitting only implausible ones; al-Ṭabarī and others left it to their readers to judge which version was correct. As most of the sources for the early Islamic period are lost, it is hard to judge in what ways bias or details changed in the process of transmission. The method of *isnād* leant itself to successive selection and recombination of historical accounts and thus preserved some of the polyphony of early Islamic writing of history.

The Persona of the Historian

To what extent the author is recognizable in a text differs considerably between the different works of historiography discussed in this volume. Many authors remain anonymous, and sometimes we do not even know whether we are dealing with a single-authored work, a compilation, a chain of continuations, or a group production. Masayuki Sato has juxtaposed Chinese histories written by anonymous teams with European ones written by named authors.[143] There is some truth to that but, as I argued above, things were more complex. First, the concept of the famous 'master historian' is not alien to the Chinese tradition. And second, a considerable part of the early medieval historiographic production in Europe was anonymous. In Islamic historiography, where chains of named authorities were central to the claims of truthfulness, we know most authors' names.

There is a further element, underlined by Nino Luraghi in his chapter in the first volume of the present series: what historians say about themselves as characters or historical actors in their work cannot necessarily be taken at face value. It may also be a, sometimes stereotypical, persona that an author assumes in order to lend more credibility to the message of the text: the politician in exile,

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[143] Sato, 'Cognitive History'.

the priestly intellectual of a polity overwhelmed by Hellenic or Roman power, or the senatorial competitor for rank and status in the Roman Republic.[144] In medieval Europe, it could be the bishop under pressure from lay powers, the pious monk worried about moral decay, or the courtier who had fallen from grace, among others. However, as Simon MacLean remarks in his chapter, in the later first millennium CE many authors of Latin histories feature quite prominently in their own accounts, and often bemoan their adverse fates: for instance, Paul the Deacon and Erchempert, Nithard and Regino, Liudprand of Cremona and Thietmar of Merseburg. There is a story to tell about 'authors and their identities', and often enough, it spells out 'ego trouble'.[145]

For good Christians, self-identification might also mean castigating and debasing themselves with all the literary means that ancient rhetoric offered. Thus, the early eleventh-century German bishop and chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg presented himself as the greatest of sinners, far beyond what the topos of modesty might have required. Even more drastic, the controversial tenth-century bishop Rather of Verona, maybe the most fascinating and idiosyncratic character of his time, wrote whole books of mock autobiography in which he accused himself of all evils under the sun.[146] Ancient topoi, rhetorical playfulness, Christian ascetic self-stylization, bitterness about enemies and competitors, and an acute sense of irony or even parody could contribute to such paradoxical strategies of self-identification.

Strategies of Identification

Universal, Imperial, or Particular Framings of the Historical Narrative

Thomas Göller and Achim Mittag have proposed a twofold matrix of comparison between different historiographies along the axes of universal vs particular and inclusive vs exclusive.[147] It is important to note that these are not equivalent contrasts. The established typology of medieval historiography distinguishes between different genres; most lists include universal chronicles, annals, 'national histories', episcopal and monastic chronicles, dynastic histories/genealogies, and biographies (hagiographic and secular).[148] Of course, the

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[144] Luraghi, 'Memory and Community'.

[145] McKitterick and others, eds, *Ego Trouble*.

[146] Van Renswoude, 'The Sincerity of Fiction'.

[147] Göller and Mittag, *Geschichtsdenken*, p. 12.

[148] For instance, the Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental (TYP) includes vol-

typology is often problematic; how universal is 'universal'? In particular, what such simple categorization cannot capture is the rather frequent 'zooming in' in the course of a book of history, which might begin on a cosmological level but then focus in on a particular community. Conversely, imperial histories often 'zoom out' in their emplotment of imperial expansion. We could also use different parameters to define 'genres': Where do histories begin, who are the main actors, on which forms of social cohesion do they build their narrative?[149] Such categories would correspond to different levels of identification, from a (not 'the') world via larger and smaller communities down to families or individuals.

Christian and Islamic histories were deeply rooted in the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible conceptualized the history of one people and region through its privileged relationship with the one and only, almighty God. Christian histories elaborated on the universal potential of this biblical *historia*. The first great Christian chronicle, written in Greek by Eusebius and later translated into Latin by Jerome, combined Old Testament history with Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman historical traditions into a synoptic overview of the *fila regnorum*, parallel columns synchronizing events in the different kingdoms of the known world. Eusebius/Jerome provided a sound 'universal' basis to which narratives with rather different foci could be added.

Unified Time

In Song China in the mid-eleventh century, a 'concept and possibility of a standard, "orthodox" universal history of China' was established, above all through the work of Ouyang Xiu.[150] Before that, the chronology of the separate dynastic histories had followed individual regnal dates, which had hardly allowed establishing a unified temporal frame, especially in the periods of division, during the 'Northern' or 'Five' Dynasties. Now all these separate dynastic strands could be drawn together within the wider imperial frame of 'legitimate' dynasties, including those established by 'non-Han' rulers of foreign origin.

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umes on annals (vol. 14, McCormick), genealogies (vol. 15, Génicot), universal chronicles (vol. 16, Krüger), *gesta* of bishops and abbots (vol. 37, Sot), and hagiography (vols 24–25, Philippart) <http://www.brepols.net/Pages/BrowseBySeries.aspx?TreeSeries=TYP> [accessed 1 August 2020]. See also the forthcoming collection by Van Nuffelen and Van Hoof, eds, *Clavis historicorum antiquitatis posterioris*. On the problem of genre in early medieval historiography, see Reimitz, 'Genre and Identity'.

[149] Reimitz, 'Genre and History'; Pohl, 'Historiography and Identity — Methodological Perspectives'.

[150] Hartman, 'Chinese Historiography', p. 39; Lorge, 'Institutional Histories', pp. 490–91.

This step must have had deep implications for the affirmation of an inclusive identity focused on state and empire. In the Roman Empire, a variety of dating systems were used, counting from the foundation of the city of Rome, or the Olympiads, the consular year, provincial eras, and later the indiction, a nineteen-year tax cycle. In the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, Christian historians introduced the Jewish system of world years calculated on the basis of the dates found in the Bible. However, there were different ways to establish a chronology of the Old Testament which could never quite be synchronized. The *annus mundi* system was also closely linked to eschatological speculations that the world would come to an end after six thousand years, when God, to whom 'a day was like a thousand years', would rest on the seventh day.[151] In the West, from the sixth century onwards the years began to be calculated from the birth of Christ, although regnal years remained in use throughout the early Middle Ages. Annals, which became an important genre north of the Alps in the eighth century, were often linked to calculations of time.[152] In the Islamic world, the Hijra provided a common chronology. The idea of a unified time enabled historians to construct a universal frame in which particular or overarching identities were contextualized: imperial time in China, religious time in Europe and the Middle East.

Anchors in the Deep Past

Medieval Latin chronicles often start with biblical epitomes, which remain understudied because modern editors often omitted them, on the grounds that they did not offer any 'original' historical material. Yet they have a bearing on the ways a text constructs or subverts identities. When in the sixth century CE Jordanes prefixed an account of Eusebian/biblical history to his *Romana*, the Roman past became subsumed within a broader Christian history. The Romans had become one Christian people among many within the wider frame of Christian salvation history, as is indicated by the (rarely cited) full title of the work: *De summa temporum vel origine actibusque gentis Romanorum*.[153] This plurality of *gentes* in the medieval West also set the stage for what could continue to be universal in Latin chronicles as they moved into the Christian centuries. In different sections, these narratives could move from the Middle Eastern universality of the biblical salvation narrative to the imperial inclu-

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[151] Koder, *Die Byzantiner*, p. 51.

[152] Borst, *The Ordering of Time*.

[153] Pohl and others, eds, *Romanness*.

siveness of the Roman *orbis terrarum*, and on to some of the shared history of Western Christendom (before zooming in on more specific scenarios). All three levels continued to provide frames of identification with a 'larger social whole' and routinely served as keys to the interpretation of historical events. However much the interpretation of current events might shift or remain contentious, this massive substructure of medieval Western history remained almost unchanged throughout the Middle Ages, up to Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik* printed in Nuremberg in 1493.[154] Extensive historiographic efforts went into keeping the deep past present and reinforcing its links to more recent events.

In the West, this inevitably meant that the first sections of historical works that included accounts of the biblical past centred on the Holy Land, just as medieval T-shaped world maps had Jerusalem at their centre: a remarkable decentrality of Western historiography. That was different in Islamic historical writing, which also appropriated the biblical past, but did so within an obvious geographical continuum. One way to integrate the Jewish-Christian tradition into Islamic history was as a history of prophets, as suggested by the title of al-Ṭabarī's *History of Prophets and Kings*.[155] The Qur'ān had incorporated previous Jewish and Christian prophets as legitimate precursors of Muḥammad, just as Jewish prophets had been regarded as prefigurations of Christ from a Christian point of view. Yet the Qur'ān also stated that ultimately all previous peoples and states had failed to follow the divine message. This provided the other grand narrative for incorporating pre-Islamic histories, for instance in Abu Ali Miskawayh's *Experiences of the Nations*.[156] Islamic history could thus easily absorb the preceding stages of the history of salvation.

Origins and Beginnings

Referring to or simply including earlier texts is one way to deal with a fundamental question of 'identity': the origins of the community or communities one feels part of. Where do histories begin, and how did authors link these beginnings to their present? Are these origins inclusive or exclusive? Do they matter? This certainly is a key question in research about the construction of identities.[157] It is not at the core of the present volume, but it is a possible line of comparison between its chapters. Some histories mentioned here begin with

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[154] Schedel, *Weltchronik*, ed. by Füssel.

[155] al-Ṭabarī, *History*, ed. by Yarshater.

[156] Abu Ali Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, ed. and trans. by Amedroz and Margoliouth.

[157] Cf. Pohl and Mahoney, eds, *Narratives of Ethnic Origin*.

the creation of the world, others with the birth of Christ or with the Hijra, others again with the foundation of a state or empire, or with the rise of a dynasty. Some contain rather elaborate arguments about who 'we' are, others do not discuss this at all or take it for granted. If the issue is whether 'identities' mattered or not, it is difficult to find out whether distant origins or acts of foundation are omitted because they went without saying, or because an author preferred to write them out of the narrative. If, however, the issue is how identities were constructed in historiography, the question can be posed in a more productive way: Was little or no narrative effort invested in stressing a core element of group identification — where do 'we' come from? — or do works of history begin with elaborate origin stories of peoples or kingdoms?

It also makes a difference whether or not a history is grounded in supernatural beginnings. A clear example of this is the Japanese *Kojiki*, in which the affairs of the gods only gradually give way to human agency. Biblical histories, from the Creation to the Passion of Christ, take up considerable space in many Christian works of history, such as in Eusebius/Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, Jordanes' *Romana* or Fredegar. They also do in al-Ṭabarī's *History*, who extensively explores discordant opinions, including on the Creation.[158] Some early histories of the Latin West also contain 'pagan' traces of divine agency in ethnic origin narratives, but they are mostly related with a disclaimer — which may also be taken as an indication that these pre-Christian memories could not simply be erased.[159]

The Role of 'the Other' and 'Identities of Contrast'

Identity is a relational principle, ordering the social world according to principles of inclusion and exclusion. 'Othering' is a strategy of implicit identification that does not focus so much on what 'we' have in common, but how 'they' are different.[160] In some cases, the option of othering is obviously chosen because the common ground between 'us' is not extensive enough to make a shared identity plausible; the outside threat is what brings out the common interest. In other cases, there is a strong idea of shared values and interests that is pitched against 'barbarians', 'pagans', 'heretics', or 'magians'. The more negative the depiction of the 'others', inside or outside a given society, the more may

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[158] al-Ṭabarī, *History*, trans. by Rosenthal, I, 168–249.

[159] Pohl, 'Narratives'.

[160] 'Historische Erzählungen präsentieren nicht nur die eigene kulturelle Identität, sondern sie beschreiben zugleich die Differenz zu den anderen und deren Anderssein.' Rüsen, 'Einleitung', p. 23.

we assume a lack of confidence that the shared identity can guarantee social cohesion and successful defence against outside attacks. However, active othering is not the only way to place one's community (or communities) within a landscape of diversity, and to highlight the particular significance of one group. 'Identities of contrast', as Peter Van Nuffelen has shown, can also be constructed in rather subtle ways.[161] Syrian historians could, but did not always choose to adopt polemical tones to carve out the unique position of their particular Christian grouping.

Multiple Identifications

Historiographic strategies of identification are rarely aimed exclusively at the group with which the work's audience is supposed to identify. They are always relational and construct both identity and difference. However, historiography does not only differentiate between 'us' and 'them'. In most cases, it also distinguishes among multiple groups of 'them'. Most importantly, it addresses several levels of 'us', from local and regional ones to overarching frames of identification. Thus, as Helmut Reimitz has shown, representations of a particular community usually place it within a 'larger social whole' (for instance, Christianity, empire, or a landscape of Christian kingdoms and peoples) to which it is related in rather complex ways.[162] Writers of history provide patterns of identification anchored in the past to guide their readers through present options of identification. Everyday identifications may be fuzzy, situational, or contradictory, and the weight of history can help to accentuate or even streamline them. We should not exaggerate the flexibility of such choices, and of the range of options that could be made plausible through historical arguments. There was more *Spielraum* in scenarios of shifting identities: religious change, the dissolution of empires, or the fall of kingdoms.

It is often hard to prove the short-term impact of such strategies of historiographic identification, and in some cases, it may have been very limited. The manuscript transmission or subtle rewriting of a text are usually reliable indicators of its long-term relevance. We can trace to a degree what a historian was trying to achieve, and what he was reacting to, and thus recover some of the multiplicity of dissenting voices from the past. Historiographers are often 'cultural brokers' — their 'visions of community' are not simply affirmations

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[161] His example is the depiction of dissenting currents in the East Roman 'Church Histories' of the fifth century: Van Nuffelen, 'The Many and the One', pp. 302–04.

[162] Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*.

of ethnocentrism, but take complementary and/or competing narratives into account. Tensions in a text can be read as evidence of the author's efforts to negotiate overlapping and often conflicting modes of identification. It is highly unlikely that none of these efforts had an impact on their audience. In the Chinese case, it would be hard to argue that imperial state histories had no effect at all, although one should not be tempted to overestimate their unanimous acceptance either. In general, traces of controversy in a text may be taken as a sign that this was an issue that mattered.

Affirmation or Criticism

Histories are rarely affirmative throughout; even the most flattering portrait of a ruler needs its foil against which he stands out. More extensive historical narratives require ups and downs, successes and failures, challenges and responses, praise and blame. Anything else would put the 'truth effect' of a historical work at risk. Within these requirements of genre, historical works differ widely. A text's tenor may be more optimistic (as in early Carolingian historiography) or disillusioned (as during the late Carolingian period); it may mainly criticize one's own community or the 'others', or distribute praise and blame rather evenly; it may be restricted to a rather straightforward factual narrative in which the author's position may only be read between the lines, or it may offer explicit moral and political judgements. It seems that the latter was more current in Chinese and Western histories, while classical Islamic historiography tended to let its sources speak for themselves. Judgements were more institutional in China and often rather idiosyncratic in the West. But these are only superficial observations, which require more precise study.

As I have argued in my chapter in volume 3 of this series: 'Positive affirmation is not the only form of identification. Ferocious critique of or desperation about the actions of other representatives of one's group may be a strong statement of identity: because one's affiliation mattered, and there was no escaping it'.[163] Identification with a social group does not require agreeing with what its representatives do. The most devout Christian authors condemned the sins of the Christians more fiercely than others. Identity is constructed in a field of tension between the community as it is, and as you think it should be. Seen the other way around, emphatic affirmation of a group identity may mean that the author felt the need to reverse current trends to the contrary, while silence about it may indicate that he took the cohesion of the group for granted.

[163] Pohl, 'Historiography of Disillusion'.

Historiography does not offer a mirror image of identities that unquestionably existed outside the author's scriptorium, but is a part of the ongoing efforts of constructing, modifying, or undermining identities.

Histories of Peoples, States, and Countries

The focus of many of the histories discussed in this volume, and thus also of the respective chapters, is on large, inclusive social groups and their leaders: the Chinese Empire or sub-imperial dynastic realms into which it had split; the Sasanian Empire; the caliphate; the Byzantine Empire; and the Carolingian realm. It also addresses some of the smaller groups that operated beyond their frontiers, or on their territories as autonomous units or as new powers in periods of imperial decline. Many works could be classed as imperial histories, although they revolved around precarious empires. They dealt with polities, but were not simply political histories. The allegiances and identities that mattered could be imperial or political, yet they could also refer to a — well-established or emergent — people, to a political elite, a tribal system (South Arabia), a region (Lotharingia), a religious creed or institution (Syrian Christendoms), a cultural tradition (pre-Islamic Persia), memories of past polities (Visigothic Spain), and in most cases, aggregates of some of these forms of identification.

Most (though not all) of the historical works addressed in this volume could be classed as 'national histories' or 'state histories' (Syriac and Yemeni historiography are the main exceptions). Yet that is a rather vague and possibly misleading label. 'National history' is a very European concept, bringing the early history of peoples and polities in line with the supposedly equivalent modern nations, and not very adequate for Islamic and other Asian histories. It is, however, hard to replace. As I wrote elsewhere, 'the focus of these histories fluctuates between the people, the polity, its territory and its Church. Authors do not necessarily distinguish between these forms of identification'.[164] As the selection of exemplary topics in this volume shows, imperial, post-imperial, sub-imperial, and clearly non-imperial histories share many features, and probing into these case studies from the point of view of 'identity' is a useful approach to detect such common features (as in the points sketched above).

No clear typology emerges from the comparative discussion attempted here, and that comes as no surprise. Many emerging communities used historiography to create a sense of their past 'with verve and a sense of urgency'.[165] Some

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[164] Pohl, 'Debating Ethnicity'.

[165] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, pp. 8–9.

of these historiographic enterprises were hugely ambitious, such as the work of the Tang office of historiography, the historical collections guided by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in Byzantium or the *History* of al-Ṭabarī. Relatively small communities could hold on to their identities under pressure from superior powers, such as the Syrian churches or the Christian kingdoms of northern Spain. Other creations of identity happened in series of almost casual remarks reflecting particular political interests, such as the invention of the Lotharingians; or they represent an 'art of forgetting' such as the Islamic 'writing over' the Sasanian past. Some of the most interesting works were rather idiosyncratic creations, for instance al-Hamdānī's *al-Iklīl*. These are just examples of the different forms that works of history could take towards the end of the first millennium. Whether such histories focused on the rule of Chinese dynasties, on the meaning of being an Iranian Muslim, on the genealogies of the tribes of Yemen, on the role of Syrian or Iberian Christian communities in the history of salvation, on the glorious imperial past of the Byzantine Romans, on the deeds of the Goths or the Franks, or on the precarious situation in the former heartland of the Carolingian empire implied particular historiographic choices. Yet these invariably tell us something about the dynamics of identification in often difficult political landscapes. We owe a number of very pertinent insights to the fascinating case studies presented in the chapters of this book.

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