An Oriental Samuel Pepys? Abu'l-Faḍl Bayhaqī's Memoirs of Court Life in Eastern Iran and Afghanistan, 1030–1041.

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"An oriental Samuel Pepys". The phrase has been lodged in my mind for the several decades during which I have been working, on and off, on this early Persian historian Bayhaqī. I am pretty certain that I read it originally in that monument of mid-Victorian Anglo-Indian scholarship, *The History of India as told by its own Historians. The Muhammadan period*, by Sir Henry Elliott and John Dowson.[1] This multi-volume work consists of translated extracts, many quite lengthy, from texts illustrating the history of the Indian subcontinent, the greater part of them dealing with what was then some eleven centuries of Muslim rule there. In Volume II, the compilers presented several passages from Bayhaqī's work, *The History of Sultan Maʿsūd of Ghazna*, which had just appeared in a printed edition at Calcutta in the Bibliotheca Indica series, edited by the person who had in fact produced the pioneer catalogue of the Royal Asiatic Society's Arabic and Persian manuscripts, William H. Morley.[2] Elliott made many translations himself, but sometimes employed local *munshis*, not always with happy results. Although Persian culture was still very much alive in India in the mid-nineteenth century, these *munshis* were far from being *au fait* with the early eleventh-century Persian style of Bayhaqī and were at times flummoxed by his idiomatic usages. One of my favourites here is the Persian saying *ṭablī zīr-i gilīm mīzadand*, translated literally and ludicrously in its context as "they were beating a drum under a carpet". Why anyone should crawl under a carpet and beat a drum, in the midst of a high-level discussion between Sultan Maʿsūd and his administrators, the equivalent of a cabinet meeting, is rather baffling; the idiom, already used by Firdawsī in the national epic, the *Shāh-nāma*, means of course "to spread rumours clandestinely".

But to return to our proper subject. Who was this putative Samuel Pepys of eleventh-century Afghanistan? He was Abu'l-Faḍl Bayhaqī, a Perso-Islamic secretary and bureaucrat

[1] 8 vols., London, 1867–77.

[2] *The Táríkh-i Baihaki Containing the life of Masaúd, Son of Sultán Mahmúd of Ghaznín*, Bibliotheca Indica (Calcutta, 1862).

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typical of his milieu and his age, and we know a reasonable amount about his official career from internal evidence of his own *History* and from a biographical notice, compiled about a century after his time, by the local historian of his home town, Bayhaq, the modern Sabzavar in Khurasan or eastern Iran. We know that he was born there in the 990s and that he lived till well into his eighties. He clearly had what must have been a typical Islamic education in the Arabic and foreign, *ʿajamī*, sciences making up the concept of *adab*, polite learning – which would mean also that he was probably bilingual in Arabic and Persian – this being the normal foundation for a future career in the central administration of the Ghaznavid sultanate. Within Bayhaqī's youth and early manhood, Maḥmūd of Ghazna, whose father Sebüktegin had been a *ghulām*, a Turkish military slave, in the service of the Iranian Samanid amirs of Bukhara in what is now Uzbekistan, had built up a vast military empire, the mightiest ever known in the eastern Islamic world. At his death in 1030, it extended from western Iran through Khurasan and what is now Afghanistan to northwestern India in the east, and from Khwarazm, the classical Chorasmia, in Central Asia southwards to the shores of the Arabian Sea. Maḥmūd, indeed, achieved a great contemporary reputation as the Ghazi Sultan, hammer of the infidel Hindus and the bringer of Islam to India, a reputation built up posthumously but far from reality.[3] The lure of India for Maḥmūd and his successors over the next century and a half was not the salvation of Indian souls but the spoliation of Hindu shrines and temples, whose treasures were carried off to beautify their capital Ghazna, until Maḥmūd's time an insignificant place on the extreme eastern periphery of the *Dār al-Islām*.

Bayhaqī entered the Ghaznavid administration during Maḥmūd's reign, probably towards 1020. He began in the Chancery, the *Dīvān-i Risālat*, and remained there all his working life, at first as assistant to the Chief Secretary, Abū Naṣr Mushkān, and then, after the latter's death in 1039, to the new head of the Chancery, ʿAbū Sahl Zawzanī. Finally, in the sultanate of ʿAbd al-Rashīd b. Maḥmūd, that is the late 1040s, he himself became head of the Chancery. Soon afterwards he fell from grace, for reasons that are not very clear; a dispute over payment or the return of a dowry is mentioned, causing him to suffer a spell in jail. In the end he retired after some forty years' official service, employing much of this time on writing his administrative memoirs. Bayhaqī was thus one of the many Khurasanian officials who were attracted to the service of the Ghaznavids and who gave the administration in Ghazna such a strong imprint of the preceding rulers in Khurasan, the Samanids.[4]

Bayhaqī put together his official experiences and his personal memoirs in a series of volumes called, simply, the *Mujalladāt*, "volumes". According to his biographer of a century later, Ibn Funduq, there were originally over thirty of these. During the course of his career, he took copious notes and often made copies of official documents, diplomatic despatches, treaties, accession announcements, and so on, for his own purposes. These papers went back to 1018, and during his retirement he began to put them in order and compile them into a continuous narrative. Bayhaqī's own, original work in the *Mujalladāt* accordingly

[3] As observed – to a deluge of obloquy in the Urdu-language press of India on the first publication of his book in 1925 – by Mohammad Habib, *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin*, 2nd ed. (Delhi, etc., 1952), pp. 76–77, 81ff.

[4] For Bayhaqī's life, see C.E. Bosworth, 'Early Sources for the History of the First Four Ghaznavid Sultans (977–1041)', *Islamic Quarterly* 7 (1963), pp. 10–14; Marilyn R. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative. A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography* (Columbus, Ohio, 1980), pp. 77ff.; C.E. Bosworth, Introduction to *The History of Sultan Masʿūd of Ghazna 1030–1041*, vol. I, forthcoming in the Persian Heritage Series, 3 vols. (New York, 2005).

covers forty-two years, from the middle years of Maḥmūd's sultanate till almost the end of that of Farrukh-zād. Events up to 1018 had been dealt with by another historian in Ghazna, one Maḥmūd Warrāq, whom Bayhaqī describes as "trustworthy and authoritative" but of whom nothing else is known. Unfortunately, on Maḥmūd Warrāq's death, his sons prevented Bayhaqī from using their father's work more extensively on the pretext that it had not yet been copied and disseminated widely enough.[5] Whether this work of copying and distribution of manuscripts was ever done is unknown, but Maḥmūd's own history has certainly been lost without trace. It is true that the years up to 1020, covering the period of Sebüktegin's amirate in Ghazna and the first two-thirds of Maḥmūd's sultanate, are covered by another historian, Abū Naṣr al-ʿUtbī in his *Ta'rīkh al-Yamīnī*, but the florid, opaque Arabic style of this work, and the lack till now of a critical edition, make it difficult to handle and unsatisfactory as a detailed historical source for events.[6] It is, however, possible to supplement ʿUtbī by the simpler Persian chronicle of Abū Saʿīd Gardīzī, which is quite detailed for the reigns of Maḥmūd and Masʿūd, although jejune in its bare chronicle of events compared with the richness of Bayhaqī's writing; and the extant part of Gardīzī's *Zayn al-akhbār* ends only a year after the extant part of Bayhaqī, with Masʿūd's abandonment of Ghazna and then deposition *en route* to India in 1041 after his defeat by the Seljuqs at Dandanqan.[7] It is regrettable that two major sources for the middle years of the eleventh century in Ghazna, those of Bayhaqī and Gardīzī, have thus been lost.

Bayhaqī's intention was to produce a history of the whole Ghaznavid dynasty up to the death of Farrukh-zād and the accession in 1059 of Ibrāhīm b. Masʿūd, as the general title *Tārīkh-i āl-i Sebüktegin* implies. The divisions dealing with the separate reigns seem to have had separate names, the *T.-i Nāṣiri*, the *T.-i Yamīnī*, the *T.-i Masʿūdi*, and (presumably) the *T.-i Mawdūdī*, etc. Only the section dealing with Masʿūd's reign, amounting to three complete volumes and two bits of them at each end, are substantially extant; but even here, the final year of Masʿūd's reign is missing and has to be pieced together from Gardīzī and Ibn al-Athīr, and there is a lacuna in our text covering about nine months in the mid-1030s. This lacuna probably contained an account of the rebellion against the Sultan of the commander-in-chief in India, Aḥmad Ināltegin, after the latter's expedition in early 1033 against Benares, and Masʿūd's expedition into India to suppress this revolt, which also included the capture of Sarusati and his siege of Hansi (in what is now the Indian state of Haryana) and then his return to Ghazna in the winter of 1033–4. It thus seems that at least twenty-five volumes of the *Mujalladāt* have been lost. This probably happened fairly quickly. Ibn Funduq, who wrote in the middle years of the twelfth century, says that he saw various volumes in a library at Sarakhs, in the library of the Khātūn Mahd-i ʿIrāq (the Seljuq princess who married the Ghaznavid Sultan Masʿūd III) in Nishapur, and in private libraries, but not a complete set.[8] There cannot have been much incentive to copy such a gigantic work, whose subject matter was in any case only of local interest in what is now Afghanistan. Ghazna itself would be the place where one would expect to find a complete set, but Ghazna suffered a savage sacking

[5] *Tārīkh-i Masʿūdī* (hereafter: *TM*), ed. ʿAlī Akbar Fayyāḍ (Mashhad, 1391/1971), p. 342.
[6] See on this, Bosworth, 'Early Sources', pp. 5–7.
[7] See on this, *ibid*., pp. 8–10.
[8] ʿAlī b. Zayd Bayhaqī, called Ibn Funduq, *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*, ed. Aḥmad Bahmanyār (Tehran, 1317/1938), pp. 20, 175.

by the Ghurid 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusayn in 1150, and we know that the libraries of the towns of Khurasan suffered from the ravages of the Ghuzz, the campaigns of the Khwarazm Shahs and, finally, the ravages of the Mongols.

What survives today is thus in part a dynastic history because the Ghaznavid sultans and their empire provided him with a satisfactory chronological and territorial framework, but it cannot be called a panegyric of the sultans. When he wrote, he was a retired civil servant, enjoying, so far as we can tell, his old age and without material reasons for writing exaggerated praises of his former masters. Hence in his *History* he states that his aim is not to praise the greatness and the courage of Amir Mas'ūd, since these are well known and contemporaries are able to witness these for themselves. Instead, he states, "My aim is to write a history which will be of permanent value, and to raise up a mighty monument, whose fame will endure till the end of time".[9] He records, without comment and letting the facts speak for themselves, the episode when Mas'ūd, against the advice of his Vizier Aḥmad b. Ḥasan Maymandī, and his Chief Secretary Abū Naṣr Mushkān, tried to get back the seventy or eighty million dirhams' accession money, the donatives, *māl-i bay'at*, expended by his brother and predecessor Muḥammad in an effort to secure the loyalty of the army; even the court poets, court buffoons, singers and musicians were to be mulcted. The attempt was in part a failure and created a great amount of ill-feeling, but the Sultan tried to wriggle out of it and to push the responsibility for the whole affair on to others, including the Vizier.[10] Bayhaqī is more explicit, however, in recording Mas'ūd's obstinacy, his self-will and failure to listen to disinterested advice from his officials, and his repeated errors of judgement in dealing with the Seljuq incursions into Khurasan. He realised, too, that his account of Mas'ūd's behaviour at Amul in Gurgan in 1035, when Ghaznavid troops forcibly collected arrears of tribute due and the news of their violence redounded all over the eastern and central parts of the Islamic world as far as Baghdad – an episode that will be mentioned later – was very unflattering to the Sultan, who ought, he says, to have restrained his troops from such excesses: "It comes hard for me to let my pen set down such words, but what can I do? One must not show partiality in writing history."[11]

Bayhaqī was also, it seems, the author of a work on the secretarial art, *kitāba*, called the *Zīnat al-kuttāb*, "Adornment of secretaries", mentioned only by Ibn Funduq, who in his biographical section on Bayhaqī quotes some interesting reflections on the position and obligations in the state of the secretarial class. A recent editor of Bayhaqī's *History*, 'Alī Akbar Fayyāḍ, has mentioned some leaves of a *majmū'a* in a Tehran private library giving definitions of terms of *kitāba*, and these leaves may have come from the *Zīnat al-kuttāb*. Otherwise, the work is, like the greater part of the *Mujalladāt*, lost. Bayhaqī may also have been the author of a collection of reminiscences and episodes which he took down from his old master when working in the *Dīvān-i Risālat*, called the *Maqāmāt* of Abū Naṣr Mushkān, these being quoted by such later writers as Muḥammad 'Awfī and the author of a collection

[9] *TM*, p. 112; cf. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, p. 52, and Julie S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography till the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 80.

[10] *TM*, pp. 336–340; cf. C.E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids, their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran 998–1040* (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 60.

[11] *TM*, pp. 600–601; cf. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, pp. 90–91.

of biographies of viziers, the *Āthār al-wuzarā'*, of Sayf al-Din ʿAqīlī; but it may well be that these *Maqāmāt* were rather part of the *Mujalladāt*.[12]

One of the most striking features of Bayhaqī's *History*, even in its surviving, truncated form, is its length, a feature of which Bayhaqī himself was well aware. He anticipates criticism of the work's inordinate length by asserting the paramount claims of completeness and of doing justice to the actors concerned in events:

> "Other chronicles are not so lengthy and discursive as this one, since they have dealt with less complex affairs and have not mentioned many valuable and significant details. I, on the other hand, when first I embarked on this work, was wanting to give the true picture of this history in its entirety. I went into every corner and hidden place so that no aspect of events might remain hidden. If this book turns out to be long and readers of it become increasingly fatigued by reading it, I nevertheless earnestly crave their indulgence that they should not account me a prolix bore; for there is nothing which can be said to make tiresome reading, simply because there is no tale which does not have at its conclusion some profitable point."[13]

The freshness of his ideas on historiography is seen in the contempt which he expresses for what the philosopher of history R.G. Collingwood called "scissors-and-paste history", historical facts brought together without any thoughtful analysis or any underlying connecting thread. Hence Bayhaqī denounces the kind of history writing where "so-and-so king sent so-and-so general to some war or other; on a certain day they gave battle or made peace; this one beat that one or that one this; they proceeded there."[14] He likewise excoriates the popular love of wonders and exaggeration, stories like those from the *Thousand and One Nights* or incredible travellers' tales, compared with sober history:

> "Unfortunately, most people are so constituted that they prefer the absurd and impossible, such as stories about demons and fairies, and the evil spirits which inhabit the deserts, mountains and oceans, as when some fool creates a commotion and a crowd of other fools gathers round him; then he says, 'In a certain ocean we saw an island, and five hundred of us landed on it. We baked bread and set up our cooking pots. When the fire got really hot and the heat penetrated the ground, the earth moved, and when we looked hard at it we saw that it was a fish.' Or again, 'On a certain mountain we saw such-and-such, and an old sorceress had changed a man into a donkey, and another old sorceress changed him back again into human form by anointing his ear with some unguent or other', and other nonsense of this sort which, read at night-time to ignorant people, induces sleep. But those people who accept the truth, so that they may believe it, are reckoned to be learned men; but their number is extremely small. Such people accept the true and reject the false . . ."[15]

As against such uncritical and credulous approaches, in laying down his principles of historiography, Bayhaqī shows an insight into historical method and source criticism; his

[12] Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, p. 44; Bosworth, Introduction to *The History of Sultan Masʿūd of Ghazna*.

[13] *TM*, p. 11; cf. R.M. Savory, 'Abo'l-Faẓl Bayhaqī as an Historiographer', in *Yād-nāma-yi Abu'l-Faḍl-i Bayhaqī, majmūʿa-yi sukhanrānīhā-yi Majlis-i Buzurgdāsht-i Abu l-Faḍl-i Bayhaqī, Mashhad, 21 tā 25 Shahrivarmāh 1349* (Mashhad, 1350/1971), English section, pp. 91ff.

[14] *TM*, p. 451; Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, p. 54.

[15] *TM*, p. 905; cf. Savory, 'Abo'l-Faẓl Bayhaqī as an Historiographer', p. 87, and Meisami, *Persian Historiography*, pp. 80–81.

attitude testifies to the high level of Khurasanian culture during his time that it produced so judicious and careful a scholar. He enunciates his principles here at the beginning of the tenth volume of the *Mujalladāt* (the last volume in part extant). He lays down that the thirst for historical knowledge, knowledge about the past, is a universal one. But this knowledge can only be acquired by much personal effort, entailing travel in search of knowledge, *fī ṭālab al-ʿilm*, or else by reading it in books. Man's wisdom and critical faculties are therefore most important:

> "Your informant must be a trustworthy and veracious person, but your own wisdom must also testify that the statement is true and must give sanction to that saying of God's which they speak about, 'Give no credence to any reports which offend against your judgment.' A book should be such that the reader's intelligence does not reject the reports set forth in it; that anyone who hears it credits it; and that wise men, when they hear it, should accept it."[16]

In consequence of this, he lays down as his own guiding principle that, whatever he wrote, should be based on reliable documentation, such as documents which he saw or of which he acquired copies during his professional career, or on personal observation or on reliable informants known to him personally (*yā az muʿāyana-yi man yā az samāʿ-i durust az mardī thiqa*). The freshness of his material is frequently emphasised by his interposing phrases like "I, Abu'l-Faḍl, saw such-and-such with my own eyes . . .".[17] He was of course a personal witness of many of the Sultan's campaigns, since the divans were peripatetic and accompanied the court around the empire. Where he had no first-hand knowledge, such as for events before his own time, he sought out the requisite information from some more senior person in the bureaucracy; thus he got an eyewitness account of Prince Masʿūd's youthful bravery during the expeditions into the pagan enclave of Ghur in central Afghanistan from the secretary ʿAbd al-Ghaffār fifty years after the events in question.[18] As already mentioned, Bayhaqī's official duties in the Chancery meant that he had frequently to make copies of official documents, appointments to offices and communications with outside powers. Unfortunately, when he fell from favour during Sultan ʿAbd al-Rashīd's reign, he was deprived of his official records, so that in some cases he was unable to quote official documents verbatim. If he had been able to keep his own exact copies, so he says, his *History* would have had a different complexion.[19] As it was, he had to spend years in searching for the text of Masʿūd's pledge of allegiance, *bayʿat-nāma*, to the new ʿAbbasid caliph al-Qā'im before he came across it in the possession of the children of his master Abū Naṣr Mushkān.[20]

Bayhaqī's honesty in recording episodes unflattering to his masters has been mentioned already, but it was in his nature to act fairly, even to his opponents. He suffered personally at the hands of the ʿĀriḍ or head of the Army Department, Abū Sahl Zawzanī, who was in many ways the evil genius of the Sultan during the earlier part of his reign. He says of Abū Sahl that "evil and malevolence were engrained in his nature, and along with that evil,

[16] *TM*, p. 904; cf. Savory, 'Abo'l-Faẓl Bayhaqī as an Historiographer', pp. 86–87, Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative,* p. 58, and Meisami, *Persian Historiography*.
[17] See the references to *TM* in Savory, 'Abo'l-Faẓl Bayhaqī as an Historiographer', p. 89.
[18] *TM*, pp. 130–131.
[19] *TM*, p. 389.
[20] *TM*, p. 381.

he had no compassion in his heart".[21] Abū Sahl had in fact been the prime mover behind the execution early in Masʿūd's reign of a former Vizier of Sultan Maḥmūd, Ḥasanak, accused on a flimsy pretext of collusion with the Ismaili Shiʿite Fatimids of Egypt when he had passed through their Syrian territories on his way back from the Pilgrimage, and he had had the vindictiveness and bad taste to serve up and uncover Ḥasanak's head on a platter at a feast after the execution.[22] Further, he had also been responsible for devising a plot to procure the assassination of the governor of the province of Khwarazm, the Khwarazm Shah Altuntāsh. Altuntāsh was an old and trusted Turkish warrior and adherent of the dynasty whose service to the Ghaznavids went back through Maḥmūd's reign to the time of Sebüktegin and whose links with the former regime accordingly made him an object of Masʿūd's irrationally suspicious nature. The plot misfired, and the assassin was himself killed in Khwarazm by Altuntāsh's bodyguards, but the worst aspect of the affair for Masʿūd was that Abū Sahl had got the Amir to send instructions to the would-be assassin in his own, Masʿūd's handwriting; much ingenious and tortuous grovelling and excusing had subsequently to be concocted by his advisers to get the Amir out of this hole.[23] Nevertheless, although many years had passed and Abū Sahl had been dead for some time when Bayhaqī was setting down these events, he wanted to be fair to him and to avoid charges of *parti-pris* and prejudice, *taʿaṣṣub va tarabbud*, lest readers might think him a cantankerous old man.[24]

Taking into account the vast cultural gulf between, on the one hand, a Muslim of Inner Asia living within an authoritarian, hierarchical society and polity, in the mid-eleventh century, when, at the other end of the Old World, England was experiencing the last decades of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy, and, on the other hand, a sophisticated Englishman of the Restoration era, a man who had already lived through violent changes of regime but who was emerging into an era when religious passions were beginning to moderate and the process of discovery of the workings of the natural world was accelerating, we can indeed fairly characterise Bayhaqī, from the point of view of his public persona and life, as "an oriental Samuel Pepys". The temporal limits of their writing were very similar. What survives of Bayhaqī's chronicle-cum-journal covers eleven years, the reign of Sultan Masʿūd, 1030 to 1041, whilst Pepys' diary covers the years from 1660 to 1669. Both lived into old age having suffered vicissitudes, including incarceration, having witnessed violent changes of regime and having been, in the end, made redundant or compulsorily retired, as it were. As we have heard, Bayhaqī's career was in its last years under some cloud, whilst Pepys' fortunes declined temporarily with the eclipse of his patrons the Montagues, and he was unjustly imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1679–80 at the height of anti-Popery agitation through his association with his friend, the Duke of York. After the Duke, as James II, lost his throne in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, it was impossible for Pepys to survive in office under William of Orange and in the spring of 1689 he was replaced by someone else. No mediaeval Islamic chronicle gives us anything like Bayhaqī's day-to-day, at times hour-to-hour, account of court life and of administrative and military affairs; only, perhaps, the historian and philosopher of two decades before, Miskawayh, who worked for

[21] *TM*, p. 222.
[22] *TM*, pp. 235–236.
[23] *TM*, pp. 402ff; cf. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, pp. 60–61.
[24] *TM*, pp. 221–22; cf. Savory, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, pp. 90–91.

the Buyid dynasty in Iraq and western Iran, approaches anywhere near him. Pepys likewise provides a wonderfully detailed account of official life as a key official, first "Secretary to the Lord High Admiral" and then "Secretary for the Affairs of the Admiralty of England" in a key government department during a decade which saw the Restoration of King Charles II and such traumas, at least for Londoners, as the Plague and the Great Fire and the appearance of the Dutch fleet, burning and destroying, in the Thames and Medway.[25]

But here the comparison would seem to end. Pepys never meant his diary for publication and disguised its contents by using a shorthand and by slipping on occasion into Spanish or French, so that it did not attract attention till the early nineteenth century, and then another 150 years intervened until the first complete, unexpurgated edition, the eleven splendid volumes of diary and commentary of Latham and Matthews, appeared in 1970–83. I think that it is true to say that we know more about Pepys' private life in that decade of the 1660s than about the daily life of any person in public life who has ever lived, not excluding Winston Churchill or John F. Kennedy or, descending far down the scale, Alan Clark: everything from his medical history, including the horrific episode of his being cut for the stone in 1658 and miraculously surviving for another forty-five years, and his bowel movements; his sexual life, with numerous fumbling infidelities in places as varied as his own home in Seething Lane, at Westminster Hall, in theatres, parks and gardens, not forgetting his quiet masturbating more than once whilst in church; the fluctuations in his finances; and, despite all the previously-mentioned traits of behaviour, an appreciation of at least the outward forms of religion, including listening to sermons and attendance at church services, latterly at St. Olave's, Hart Street.

In contrast, Bayhaqī's private life is a total blank. Except for the single mention of a legal dispute over a dowry in the later part of his life,[26] there is nothing to show that he was even married, and certainly, no children are ever mentioned; if he had had children, it might have been better for the survival within his family of the complete volumes of his *History*. This reticence and rigid separation of public and private lives is nothing unusual in Islamic literature, and as all Islamicists know, writing really rounded biographies of great Islamic figures is very difficult.

I would like now to try and convey something of the flavour of Bayhaqī's writing by looking at three episodes from his *History*. A salient feature of Bayhaqī's *History* is the large number of interpolations, both of poetry and of prose, the latter being mainly anecdotes drawn from earlier Islamic history.[27] They are not inserted haphazardly or merely for purposes of adornment of the narrative, but are meant rather to give moral examples and homilectic warnings, a didactic procedure of which mediaeval Islamic writers were particularly fond. The sole apparent exception to a rule that Bayhaqī's examples here are all Islamic ones (indicating a lack of interest in the pre-Islamic Iranian past and a belief by the author that the only history worth recording for man's edification and salvation begins with Islam) is a story about Buzurgmihr, the semi-legendary vizier of the Sasanid emperor of Persia, Khusraw Anūshirvān. It describes how Buzurgmihr abandoned the faith of Zoroaster and

[25] Information on Pepys is taken from the recent biography by Claire Tomalin, *Samuel Pepy, the Unequalled Self* (London, 2002).
[26] Ibn Funduq, *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq,* p. 177; cf. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, p. 42.
[27] Cf. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, pp. 68–71, and Meisami, *Persian Historiography,* pp. 86–88.

embraced the religion of "the prophet Jesus". Since he refused to recant, the emperor imprisoned him in a horrid dungeon for two years, at the end of which Buzurgmihr, however, emerged glowing with health and fresh as a daisy; but since he remained obdurate in his new faith, Khusraw had him put to death. Bayhaqī's comment at the end of the story is that "Buzurgmihr went to Paradise and Kisrā went to Hell".[28]

Such a fate for the emperor is very much against the usual picture of Anūshirvān in Persian *adab* literature, the "Mirrors for Princes" and so forth, where the emperor is held up as the very model of a just ruler, solicitous for the welfare of the humblest of his subjects. Bayhaqī's choice of an anecdote from pre-Islamic times may not, however, be exceptional for him. The story is full of evocative symbolism and significant touches. In his imprisonment, Buzurgmihr is dressed in a coarse garment of wool, *ṣūf*, *pashmīna*, the characteristic garb of Muslim ascetics, and there is an emphasis on going from darkness into the light of true faith which reminds one of the gnostic and illuminationist strands in some currents of Sufism. Buzurgmihr is in fact portrayed not as a figure from the unenlightened, pre-Islamic past but rather as a figure looking forward, a proto-Muslim martyr. On a deeper level, since the anecdote comes at the point in Bayhaqī's *History* when ʿAbū Sahl Zawzanī overreached himself in relation to the bungled assassination of Altuntāsh, lost his post as head of the Army Department and was consigned to jail, Bayhaqī may well have intended the story to show up the contrast between the virtuous vizier Buzurgmihr and the devious and unscrupulous minister Abū Sahl.

Passing on to another story, in July 1031 there was a sudden, violent rainstorm at Ghazna, causing a flood, which Bayhaqī describes graphically:

> "On Saturday, 9 Rajab, between the dawn and the midday ritual prayers, a gentle drizzle started to come down, in such a fashion that it just made the ground slightly damp. A group of herdsmen and their flocks had encamped in the dry bed of the river of Ghaznin and had penned their cattle there. Although people told them, 'Get away from here, for it's unwise to remain in the path of the torrent', they took no heed until it began to rain harder, and then they arose in a slothful manner and ensconced themselves at the foot of those walls adjoining the quarter of the blacksmiths, seeking shelter – this being another mistake. They rested there, having tethered a large number of mules belonging to the Sultan on that side of the river which extends towards Afghān-shāl among the trees as far as the walls of the mill, and had set up stables and pitched tents, and had planted themselves down, feeling safe and secure. That, too, was an error, since they were right in the path of the torrent. Our Prophet, Moḥammad the Chosen One, has said, '*We seek refuge in God from the two dumb and deaf things!*' and by these two dumb and deaf things he meant water and fire. At that time, the bridge of Bāmiyān was not as now; it was a sturdy bridge erected upon sturdy columns, and on it were two rows of shops facing each other, as at present. When it was destroyed by the flood, the merchant ʿAbawayh, that pious and generous man, may God's mercy be upon him, constructed a bridge with a single arch, displaying great elegance and beauty. Such munificent works remain behind and serve as memorials to their founders.
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> "At the time of the afternoon prayer, such an amount of rain fell on the bridge that no-one could remember its like, and it persisted until some time after the evening prayer. Then early in the night itself, a torrent came down such that even extremely aged persons affirmed that they could never remember its equal. It swept down suddenly out of the blue and uprooted many

[28] *TM*, pp. 425–438; cf. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, 103–104, 134.

trees. The herdsmen fled and saved their lives as did also the muleteers. The torrent carried off cattle and mules, and reached the bridge, which created a bottleneck, for how could so much tangled brushwood, tree trunks and drowning beasts all get through at one time? The channels under the arches of the bridge became blocked so that the water could not get past, and it flowed over the top of the bridge. Fresh tides of torrential water kept arriving like waves of wrathful and rebellious troops to reinforce the flood. The waters mounted and overflowed from its banks, and swept into the markets, reaching the quarter where the moneychangers lodged, inflicting great damage. The greatest calamity of all was that the torrent uprooted the entire bridge, together with the shops, from its foundations and water found its way everywhere. It also destroyed many caravanserais that were ranged along, and the markets were entirely obliterated. The waters reached the lower foundations of the citadel, which already existed before the time of Yaʿqūb, son of Layth; for it was ʿAmr, Yaʿqūb's brother, who restored the inner city (*shārastān*) and the citadel (*qalʿat*) of Ghaznin. Master Maḥmūd Warrāq has given an excellent exposition of these events in the history which he composed in the year 450 [1058–9] spanning several thousand years and going up to the year 409 [1018–19] . . . This great torrent brought people incalculable loss. The next day, people stood and watched the spectacle from both sides of the river. Towards the time of the midday worship, the force of the torrent began to slacken. For several days there was no bridge, and only with difficulty could people cross from one bank to the other until they were able to repair the bridge. I heard from several reliable local Zāvulīs that, after the torrent subsided, people were finding gold, silver and damaged articles of clothing that the torrent had thrown up. God, He is exalted and magnified, knows how much bounty reached the wretched and hungry found in all this!"[29]

A third episode in Bayhaqī's *History* describes the expedition which Sultan Masʿūd led to the Caspian coast region, to Gurgan and Tabaristan, the modern Iranian province of Mazandaran, in early spring 1035. The aim was to make a show of military strength there and to recover arrears of taxation and tribute due from the local ruler, Abū Kālījār of the Ziyarid dynasty, regarded as a vassal of the Ghaznavids. The expedition was, however, opposed by the Sultan's senior advisers, including the Grand Vizier and the Chief Secretary, Bayhaqī's own boss, as a dangerous distraction when Khurasan was being threatened by incursions of the Turkmens from the deserts and steppes to its north, what is now Turkmenistan. It was these Turkmens, under the leadership of the Seljuq family and other chiefs, who were within five years to overthrow Ghaznavid power in the West, wrest Khurasan and the western part of Afghanistan from them and leave the truncated Ghaznavid empire as essentially one of eastern Afghanistan and Northwestern India, at the end of its life with its capital at Lahore. Bayhaqī describes the contrast between the bitter cold of the arid Khurasan plateau as they descended something like 3,000 to 4,000 feet to the below-sea level Caspian coastlands:

"The Amir, may God be pleased with him, set out from Nishapur via the Isfarayin road, in order to travel to Gurgan, on Sunday, 25 January 1035. En route, there was cold and a very strong wind, especially up to the head of the Dīnār Sārī valley . . . I, Bu'l-Faḍl, found myself in such a state that, at the head of this valley, I wore a *m.y.'.v.r.y* of *hāwāṣil* [apparently some sort of warm outer garment, perhaps quilted and stuffed with birds' feathers], a jacket of red fox fur, a rainproof coat [*bārānī*] and other things suitable for this weather. I was so cold mounted on my horse that it was as if I was not wearing anything at all. When we came to the Dīnār Sārī valley and entered the

[29] *TM*, pp. 240–243.

valley – the distance having been two *farsakhs* altogether – those garments had become weighing heavily on me [i.e. because of the wet and the cold]. I came out of the valley, and the whole world was filled with narcissus, violets [and] many kinds of aromatic plants and greenery. The trees were densely packed together on the plain and no end or limit was visible. One could say that no more pleasant region than Gurgan and Tabaristan exists, but it is very plague-ridden, just as Bu'l-Faḍl [i.e. himself] extemporised:

Jurjan! What has let you know what Jurjan is – A mouthful of figs and speedy death! – When a carpenter sees a Khurāsānī, he makes for him a coffin made according to his size!

"The Amir arrived in Gurgan town on Sunday, 8 February 1035. He passed by the tomb of Qābūs [this is the famous tomb tower, still standing, the Gunbadh-i Qābūs, erected to commemorate the Ziyarid Amir Qābūs b. Vushmgīr[30]] which is on the road, and camp was made at a place on that further side of the town which is called Muḥammadābād, on the banks of a large river."

Mas'ūd continued to enjoy the surroundings of the semi-tropical climate and its luxuriant vegetation, and Bayhaqī describes how he had his tent pitched on a tepe:

"On the day after next, from dawn onwards the Amir indulged in wine-drinking on top of this mound. It was the season of citrons and oranges, and the gardens of this region had appeared as if they were limitless, and could be seen from this mound. He gave orders that great amounts of citrons and oranges and branches bearing fruit should be gathered, and these were brought. They piled them up on that mound all round the tent, and that place was adorned as if it were the garden of Paradise. He summoned the boon-companions and the singers and musicians also came, and wine drinking got under way. In truth, it was indeed a most pleasant and happy day!"

Things became less pleasant, however, as the Ghaznavid army pushed on and had to cut its way through the dense jungle of the region. The recalcitrant Daylamīs and Gīlānīs were defeated but only retreated further westwards into even more impassable territory, and the frustrated Sultan vented his anger and indulged his avariciousness on the people of Amul and Tabaristan, with his army collecting tribute from them with uncontrolled violence. As already mentioned, Bayhaqī records that, as a result, a stream of persons complaining of this tyranny carried the news as far as the caliphal court in Baghdad and reputedly as far as the Holy City of Mecca, with deleterious effects on the Sultan's reputation.[31]

An interesting detail recorded by him here is that, at one point during their stay in the Caspian provinces, the Amir and his courtiers encamped by the shore of the "Sea of Abaskūn", that is the Caspian, catching fish, wine-drinking and generally relaxing, and they saw the ships of the Rūs pass along. These must have been the vessels of the Scandinavians, or by now Slavicised Scandinavians, who had sailed down the river systems of Russia and had from time to time raided Muslim settlements on the southern shores of the Caspian.[32] In connection with this last point, according to Robert Chenciner[33], the accepted assumption that these Vikings, the Varangians, sailed down the Volga to the northern head of the Caspian may not be true, and that they may rather have sailed down rivers of Russia further to the west, such as the Dniester, Bug, Dnieper or Don, sailed down the Black Sea coastlands to

[30] See on it, R.M.Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture. Form, Function and Meaning* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 282–283.
[31] *TM*, pp. 580–602; cf. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, pp. 90–91, and Meisami, *Persian Historiography*, pp. 95–97.
[32] See *Encycl. of Islam*, new edn, art. "Rūs" (P.B. Golden).
[33] Personal communication.

Georgia and then up the rivers there, portaging over the watershed to the Kur river and thence to the Caspian shore south of Baku.

Both of these last two episodes in Bayhaqī's *History*, the stories of the flood at Ghazna and the Caspian coastlands expedition, seem, as had the story of Anūshirvān and Buzurgmihr, to have had subtexts which the author must have expected intelligent readers to pick up in the light of subsequent historical events. The flood was momentous enough to have been mentioned by the general historian Ibn al-Athīr, writing in northern Iraq two centuries late, but Bayhaqī uses it as emblematic of Sultan Masʿūd's reign, how his eventual downfall began, like the light drizzle presaging the flood, with administrative disturbance and malfunctioning and turned into the raging torrent of the Seljuq onslaught which led to the loss of Khurasan and, indirectly, Masʿūd's own death. Likewise, the Gurgan expedition is ascribed by the historian to the Sultan's own greed, stimulated by the bad, self-motivated advice of sycophantic courtiers, with the sound common sense of his senior, experienced officials ignored; and once there, the Amir lets his troops plunder indiscriminately, with Amul burning whilst he indulges in his pleasures of wine-drinking. Thus, we have the familiar topos of the negligent ruler neglecting affairs of state for his own pleasure, heralding his own downfall or that of his dynasty, and this is linked by Bayhaqī's accounts of how things went from bad to worse in Khurasan through the Sultan being diverted, from his cupidity, to sideshows like this Gurgan expedition and, three years later, to a second expedition against Hansi in northern India. In all these mistaken policies, the Sultan ignored the advice of old and trusted counsellors in favour of the ostensibly attractive but flawed policies of opportunist "new men", often called by Bayhaqī *naw-khāstagān* or *naw-rasīdagān* "upstarts". The culmination of the whole process was, of course, the Sultan's campaign of spring 1040, yet again undertaken against the unanimous advice of his advisers, from Sarakhs in northern Khurasan towards Merv. His heavily-encumbered conventional army, with its lengthy baggage train, suffered terribly from lack of water in the Qara Qum desert – the Turkmens had capped or poisoned many of the wells – and was crushingly defeated by 16,000 lightly-armed but mobile Turkmen archers, inured to hardship and unencumbered by baggage, after which most of the main towns of Khurasan speedily passed into Seljuq hands, the foundation of what soon became the Seljuq Sultanate of Iran and lands further west, dominating the Middle Eastern heartlands for the next century and more.[34]

Bayhaqī's implicit theme through all this is a contrast between the good old days of the "Just Amir" Sebüktegin and the "Warrior Sultan" Maḥmūd, and Masʿūd's self-will and wrong-headedness, what the historian repeatedly calls his *istibdād*, a term used in more modern Islamic political theory for the over-wheening self-confidence of a despot who rejects consultation with ancient, trusted, sincere advisers and thereby loses the benefit of their accumulated experience. At times this contrast is made explicit; Bayhaqī lets his master Abū Naṣr Mushkān comment when bad news is received about the depredations of the

[34] *TM*, pp. 816ff.; cf Bosworth, 'The Political and Dynastic History of the Iranian world (A.D. 1000–1217)', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, V, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 18–23.

Turkmens that

> "This lord is the opposite of his father in resolution and forcefulness. Maḥmūd was a man who was forthright and thought about the ultimate consequences of actions. If he said something that was wrong, asserting 'I intend to do such-and-such', he would speak out of his autocratic nature and sense of royal power, and if someone pointed out the correctness or incorrectness of that intention, he would fly into a rage, create a great turmoil and launch into invective; but then he would once more bring his powers of reflection to bear and would arrive at the right decision. This lord is of a different stamp; he is behaving in an arbitary and self-willed fashion without taking thought or reflecting. I don't know what the consequences of these actions will be."[35]

Also, all through his work Bayhaqī stresses the value of loyalty as a guiding thread in life: the Sultan repeatedly ignores his obligations towards faithful subordinates and destroys family solidarity by his hypocritical and shabby treatment of his uncle Yūsuf b. Sebüktegin, whose downfall he procured by suborning an ostensibly trusty but in fact venal *ghulām* of his.[36] Thus, Bayhaqī's attitude towards history becames a profoundly moral one; history demonstrates the working-out of human character on events, and this link between history and ethics becomes for him the fulfilling of an aim which he expressly set out to fulfill, the establishing of a "basis for history", *pāya-yi tārīkh*, and the prominence and rigorousness of such moral judgement is, perhaps, something which marks him off from our other hero under discussion here, Samuel Pepys, who was indeed a man of varied interests, with his aesthetic, musical and scientific interests, including his membership of the Royal Society right from its inception, but one who showed a marked lack of religious bigotry and eagerness to judge others.

[35] *TM*, p. 514; cf. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, p. 230.
[36] *TM*, pp. 322–329.