

SELF-REVISION AND THE ARABIC HISTORICAL TRADITION: IDENTIFYING TEXTUAL REUSE AND REORGANIZATION IN THE WORKS OF AL-BALĀDHURĪ

RYAN J. LYNCH

THE PRE-MODERN ISLAMIC historical and literary tradition is massive, on a scale that many historians of other regions and linguistic traditions may find surprising. To quote the modern scholar of Islam, Josef van Ess: “We have about two million Arabic or Persian manuscripts in the world. There are more than 500,000 in Istanbul alone. Only a small percentage of the texts—perhaps six or seven percent—are known and printed.” Millions of Arabic manuscripts survive in collections—both public and private—around the world; but until recently, the growth in pre-modern Islamic historical studies has been slow in comparison to the activity of our colleagues who work in other branches of global medieval studies. When Van Ess made that original comment in 1973, he also stated his opinion that “Islamic studies are one century behind Latin medieval studies; there are only a few Arabicists.”¹

Although the landscape of pre-modern Islamic studies and history has certainly changed since then, the core of Van Ess’ comment is worth reflecting upon. In other fields that revolve around the classical and medieval Mediterranean, source criticism and the literary analysis of textual traditions have been ongoing for hundreds of years, as has the editing of corpora in languages such as Greek and Latin. In some cases, this has been aided by the paucity of sources—the surviving collection of ancient Greek texts, for instance, is dwarfed by the massive size of what exists in Persian alone, let alone in other languages such as Arabic and Turkish. And even with the growth of Islamic studies across the world over the last fifty years, there is still a great deal that we have yet to learn about the compilation of these texts and the authors-cum-compilers behind that work.

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¹ Van Ess, “The Beginnings of Islamic Theology,” 110–11.

The study offered here deals with just one small part of the Arabic historical tradition as it developed up to the ninth century CE/third century AH.² The corpus of surviving literary material from this period is substantially more limited than the medieval Arabic tradition at large, and for that reason it affords an opportunity to further our understanding of these earliest surviving texts, their authors, and their re-use. Specifically, this article provides a comparative analysis of the two surviving works created by a single Muslim author: Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 892 CE/279 AH), a secretary (*kātib*) serving the Abbasid administration in Baghdad during the middle of the ninth century CE. It builds upon a technique I introduced in the final chapter of my monograph, in which I used computer-mediated textual reuse analysis of medieval Arabic historical works to identify which materials from his *Kitāb Futūḥ al-buldān* (*The Book of the Conquest of Lands*) had been reused in later Arabic books by other authors, and how; and whether analysis of that textual reuse could allow me to say anything about the sustained utility and/or popularity of al-Balādhurī's work among successive generations of Muslim scholars.³ When I originally began the process of analyzing the extensive passages of reuse that were identified by this method, I was struck by a noteworthy overlap between *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* and al-Balādhurī's other surviving work, the massive genealogical compendium *The Lineage of Nobles* (*Ansāb al-Ashraf*).

In this article, I accordingly consider how this shared material is positioned within both of al-Balādhurī's surviving books, and why it was reused at all. My intent is to reveal more about his own authorial agency in the gathering and reshaping of historical traditions in two such very different books, while advancing our understanding of how early Islamic works were compiled. This is particularly valuable given that the early Islamic tradition's emphasis on chains of transmission and the verifiability of information often suggests to the reader that this material was immutable when transmitted by "trustworthy" authorities. More broadly, I hope to engage the larger community of global medievalists interested in textual reuse and to show how the study of Islamic historiography can help us to rediscover pre-modern practices of authorial self-revision.

² The "AH" dating system refers to the traditional Muslim calendar and stands for *Anno Hegirae* or "After the Hijra": that is, the emigration of Muḥammad and his community from their home in Mecca to the city of Yathrib (Medina) in the year 622 CE. The days of the year within the Muslim lunar calendar are fewer than those in the reformed Gregorian calendar.

³ Lynch, *Arab Conquests and Early Islamic Historiography*, 189–221.

Notes on the Arabic Historical Tradition and Its Source Materials

The overwhelming majority of the information contained in al-Balādhurī's two surviving books does not pertain to events that were contemporary with the author's lifetime; rather, both books cover the foundational period of Islamic history: the events that occurred during the career of the Islamic Prophet Muḥammad (d. 632 CE/11 AH), his immediate successors, and the reign of the first Muslim dynasty, the Umayyads (r. 661–750 CE/41–132 AH). Al-Balādhurī lived and worked in an era when the Arabic historiographical tradition was still in its infancy, and when most information—legal, historical, or otherwise—was transmitted orally from master to student. Meanwhile, the developing Islamic legal tradition began to place an intense emphasis on verifying the sources of information by tracing the *isnād*, or chain of transmission, particularly with respect to traditions such as *ḥadīth*: working backward from direct citation of the immediate informant all the way back to the person who had (ideally) witnessed the original event. *Isnāds* traditionally take the form of "I was informed by Person A, on the authority of Person B, on the authority of Person C, who witnessed the following. He said ..." Many of the narrative historical sources from the earliest period of Arabic Islamic writing include these chains of transmission, albeit inconsistently.

Al-Balādhurī's two books were thus constructed at a crossroads between the methods of the narrative historians—who employed *isnāds* sparingly—and those of the jurists, who almost exclusively used them. His books, therefore, will sometimes inform the reader directly of his sources; but at others times, information will be introduced only indirectly, via such locutions as "they said" (*qālū*) or "it was said ..." (*qāla*). Much of the work al-Balādhurī does in the creation of these texts, then—in his role as author—is through the reuse, reshaping, reorganization, and assembly of historical material from a wide variety of sources. This is, of course, true of other medieval textual traditions. But this early Arabic historian's frequent reliance on chains of transmission can accordingly provide unique insight into networks of historical scholarship that might otherwise be obscured.⁴ In the case of al-Balādhurī's texts, to be sure, the mixture of detailed citation with more abstract reportage means that the reader receives an uneven understanding of his sources.

⁴ There are numerous studies of these chains of transmission and the networks of *ḥadīth* transmitters connected by them, from the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis promoted by Harald Motzki and others to the modern digital analysis of scholarly networks derived from biographical dictionaries, by Maxim Romanov and others.

The forms of al-Balādhurī's two works are markedly different from one another. *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* is a much more concise text, organized geographically, that focuses on the establishment and development of the first Islamic states. It shares features with a wide variety of contemporary subgenres of Arabic historical writing, including administrative geographies, books of law, and conquest literature (*futūḥ*). The *Lineage of Nobles*, by contrast, is massive, comprising some 1.7 million Arabic words, making it not much smaller than the magisterial and universally celebrated *History of the Prophets and Kings* (*Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*) by Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE/310 AH), a well-known Muslim jurist and arguably the medieval Islamic world's most famous historian.⁵ Unlike *The Book of the Conquest of Lands*, *The Lineage of Nobles* is really a substantial biographical dictionary of the *ṭabaqāt* subgenre, which Chase Robinson has described as "compilations of biographical material organized chronologically, according to a more or less flexible measure of what constitutes a generation."⁶ The majority of its entries are genealogical, varying in detail based on the importance of the person or tribe being discussed. Although both books cover a similar time period, they have different forms and foci. Both harken back to the earliest centuries of Islam: to the time, places, and people that played such a major role in forming the Abbasid state as al-Balādhurī knew it; they also serve, in part, as *lieux de mémoire*, recounting the circumstances and eulogizing people that had defined Islam and the Islamic state in its formative period.⁷ But *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* places more emphasis on the former, *The Lineage of Nobles* on the latter. Both texts also touch on events that occurred during the early Abbasid period, but their primary attention remains fixed on earlier times.⁸

My discussion here relies on a fairly major assumption: namely, that the man known to scholars as al-Balādhurī is the author of both *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* and *The Lineage of Nobles* as they currently survive. This begs the question of what we know about the process of early Arabic book publication and the idea of authorship in this period. With respect to many of the earliest surviving Arabic narrative texts, this assumption would be a dangerous one because scholars still

⁵ Kennedy and el Sakkout, "Book Review: The *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*," 410–13. See note 12.

⁶ Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 29–35.

⁷ On the idea of a "site of memory," see Nora, "Between Memory and History." On its application to Islamic history, specifically, see Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, especially 179–228; and Borrut, "Remembering Karbalā'."

⁸ On the general contents of *The Lineage of Nobles*, see Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 58–61; Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing*, 61–64; and Goitein, "The Place of Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*," 603–6. On *The Book of the Conquest of Lands*, see Lynch, *Arab Conquests*, 103–50; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 67–68.

debate the meaning of a “book” (*kitāb*), especially when this term appears in biographical dictionaries to describe the output of medieval Muslim authors.⁹ For it is unclear whether a “book” always meant knowledge in textual form, or whether it meant a body of knowledge collected by a teacher and imparted to his students through personal instruction. It is also unclear whether such “books” were committed to writing before or after the deaths of the authors to whom they were attributed. With respect to al-Balādhurī’s authorship, I rely on Gregor Schoeler’s characterization of these texts as his “finalized, published written works.”¹⁰

Moreover, the evidence we have suggests that al-Balādhurī actually produced these books himself, or that they were compiled shortly after this death. As I discuss at greater length elsewhere, the three surviving manuscripts of *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* display no major variations in format or content. My analysis of a previously unpublished version of the text suggests that it is the earliest of these manuscripts, perhaps dating from the tenth century CE, as it bears a note on the title page reading “this portion by the hand of al-Farghānī, the author of the appendix of al-Ṭabarī (*hādihā al-ḥadd bi-khaṭṭ al-Farghānī ṣāhib dhayl al-Ṭabarī*),” suggesting that the copy was produced by Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ja’far (d. 972–973 CE/362 AH), a student of al-Ṭabarī.¹¹ This manuscript shows no noticeable variation from the other, later manuscripts of the text. This strongly suggests that *The Book of the Conquests of Lands* had already attained a finalized written form less than a century after al-Balādhurī is said to have completed it.¹² When considering *The Lineage of Nobles*, we may be on even firmer ground: the Andalusī scholar Ibn al-Abbār (d. 1260 CE/658 AH) mentions that he used an autograph copy of *Lineage* as a source for his own work.¹³ All of this evidence indicates

9 An important discussion, along with a summation of the early debate surrounding Arabic writerly culture, can be found in Schoeler, *Oral and the Written*, 33–37.

10 Schoeler, *Genesis of Literature*, 1.

11 New Haven, Yale University Landberg MSS 33, folio 2a. Al-Farghānī’s appendix to al-Ṭabarī’s history does not survive. For a discussion of the manuscripts, see Lynch, *Arab Conquests and Early Islamic Historiography*, 25–32.

12 This might mean that al-Balādhurī completed and “published” *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* orally, after which it was recorded by one of his succeeding generations of student redactors. But given al-Balādhurī’s secretarial position at the court for at least a period of his career, he would have been both a skilled scribe and likely to have been interested in committing his own material to writing. On “oral publication,” see Schoeler, *Genesis of Literature*, 69–71; Schoeler, *Oral and the Written*, 28–35.

13 Ibn al-Abbār, *Kitāb al-Hulla al-siyarā’*, 173: “I read in the writing of Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir al-Balādhurī, in his *Book of the Lineage of Nobles*, from his own writing ...” (*Qara’u bi-khaṭṭ Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir al-Balādhurī fī Kitāb Ansāb al-ashrāf min ta’lif ...*).

that both books attributed to al-Balādhurī were circulating in a consistent form by a date not long removed from his lifetime, if not before his death.

Additionally, we can say something about the order in which al-Balādhurī produced both of his books. Based on the form and content of *The Book of the Conquest of Lands*, Norman Calder and I have posited that it was composed during the later part of the “anarchy at Sāmarrā’” which defined the tumultuous period of Abbasid rule during the 860s CE.¹⁴ With al-Balādhurī’s suggested date of death ca. 892 CE, this leaves the better part of two decades in which he is likely to have turned his attention to *The Lineage of Nobles*. Within *Lineage*, there are also several instances where he appears to reference his earlier work: the *Book of Lands* (*Kitāb al-Buldān*) almost certainly refers to *The Book of the Conquest of Lands*.¹⁵ This is further evidence that it was completed before he turned his attention to *The Lineage of Nobles*, to which he refers the reader for additional information.¹⁶ This also means that the reuse of material is very likely to have gone one way: the material that was already compiled and emplotted in *Conquest* was then duplicated and redacted for *Lineage*.¹⁷ However, the bulk of this reused material is not made explicit; there are only a few such references to his previous work.

Author and Compiler—Compiler as Author

But how should al-Balādhurī and other early Islamic authors be described and categorized?¹⁸ As I have already noted, the early Arabic historical and legal traditions relied heavily on oral transmission during the majority of the first two centuries of Islamic history. Traditions were recited aloud, memorized, and repeated back to the teacher in order to certify that students had learned them to a satisfactory degree. The Muslim scholars working with this material—narrative historical accounts (*akhbār*) and the *ḥadīth* which became vehicles for legal

¹⁴ Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence*, 150; Lynch, *Arab Conquests*, 9–10.

¹⁵ *Ansāb*, vol. 10, 208; vol. 11, 20; vol. 13, 233 and 247. This was previously noted by Athamina, “Introduction,” 8.

¹⁶ For instance, al-Balādhurī briefly mentions the achievements of the Arab general Khālid b. al-Walid in the *Ridda* Wars and in the conquest of Syria without elaboration, before writing “I have mentioned reports of it in *The Book of Lands*”: *Ansāb*, vol. 10, 208.

¹⁷ Here, I reference Hayden White’s definition of emplotment as a historical narrative created through the organization (and reorganization) of evidence: *Metahistory*, especially 11–13.

¹⁸ The concept of authorship when applied to the earliest classical Islamic texts is a topic that has invited surprisingly limited research. The many contributions to *Concepts of Authorship*, ed. Behzadi and Hämeen-Anttila, are helpful, but there is still much more work to be done.

precedents—began a process of oral compilation and codification in both formal and informal settings through recitation, repetition, and imitation, from the seventh century CE through the end of the eighth and early ninth centuries.¹⁹ By then, the process of selecting, organizing, and committing this information to writing had begun, although certainly not without controversy.²⁰

In the mid-ninth century, then, al-Balādhurī's method of reusing and reshaping historical material that had already been in circulation for decades was not particularly unique—especially for an author interested in the first two centuries of Islam's embryonic history. Much of the historical tradition surrounding this period survived by the way of scholarly intermediaries who continued to be vital sources of information for those working in al-Balādhurī's day and after, although whether these intermediaries ever committed anything to writing themselves is a question we cannot firmly answer. This means that, for scholars of al-Balādhurī's generation, the creation of written texts emerged at the intersection of authorship and compilation. The bulk of al-Balādhurī's surviving works consist of small segments of historical tradition (*akhbār*; singular: *khbar*) transmitted to him by those scholarly intermediaries and then stitched together and rearranged.²¹ Patricia Crone has described this transmission process as “atomistic,” for these *akhbār* could be as brief as a single line or two of text: “isolated sayings, short accounts of people's acts, brief references to historical events and the like.”²² However, the study of oral transmission has increasingly shown that while these “atoms” were indeed malleable, many maintained a great deal of consistency over long periods of time. Early Muslim authors such as al-Balādhurī were bringing together thousands of traditions—in some cases, disparate or contradictory—which had been in circulation for decades, if not centuries. According to al-Ṭabarī, their role in this process was to “merely report it as it was reported to us.”²³ Or, as Robinson has

19 This process of teaching through oral/aural means is discussed at length by Schoeler, *Genesis of Literature and Oral and the Written in Early Islam*; and Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 171–86.

20 For some scholars—transmitters of *ḥadīth* in particular—there was an apparent distrust of those who needed to rely on writing rather than memory. In other instances, the recording of these traditions was regarded as the most practical way to enable more students to receive and engage with them. This ambiguity is perhaps best embodied by the *ḥadīth* transmitter al-Zuhrī (d. 742 CE/124 AH), who purportedly “blamed” the Umayyads for the new reliance on writing: “We disproved of writing down knowledge until these rulers [the Umayyads] compelled us to do it. Then we were of the opinion that we should not prohibit any Muslim from doing so.” See Schoeler, *Genesis of Literature*, 47–50; Judd, *Religious Scholars*, 56–57.

21 Leder, “The Literary Use of the *Khbar*,” 277–315.

22 Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 5.

23 Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, 17.

put it, “‘authorship’ turned less on the quality of one’s prose, originality of one’s vision, or depth of forensic research, than it did upon the judiciousness or comprehensiveness of one’s material and the narrative organization in which all the accounts were placed. The operating principles of authorship thus lie somewhere between what we would regard as ‘writing’—that is, ‘composing’—and ‘editing’ or ‘redacting.’”²⁴

In selecting their materials, author-compilers were thus breathing new life into old traditions, and their very selection of material on the authority of some transmitters necessitated omitting others. Where and how they chose to organize (and reorganize) and deploy this material was an act of creation. Al-Balādhurī, in particular, intentionally diversified the sources he used in the composition of his books: he relied on an assortment of teachers from throughout the ninth-century Abbasid realm, men with a variety of interests from whom he had learned directly. He also utilized the nascent Arabic written tradition to borrow directly from the works of others—often those who predeceased his scholarly career. This amalgamation of older, established traditions into new shapes was the work of “authors as actors,” in the words of Konrad Hirschler.²⁵ This process of repetition and redaction was a defining feature of the early Arabic historical tradition and the foundation of Islamic historiography. Yet, at the same time, this mode of transmission, compilation, and creative reuse was common across regional and linguistic traditions in the medieval world.²⁶

Detecting Textual Reuse via Computer-Mediated Analysis

My computer-mediated textual analysis of al-Balādhurī’s texts relied on an algorithm called *Passim*, which enables researchers to compare a base text with other works in a defined corpus, in order to identify shared material.²⁷ *Passim* and other algorithms perform “a step-by-step reduction of a text in a natural language to a machine-readable abstraction, which is then followed by the analysis of shapes, relations, and structures.”²⁸ Computer-mediated analysis has not been performed

²⁴ Robinson, “Islamic Historical Writing,” 248.

²⁵ Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*.

²⁶ For example, the creation of miscellanies and anthologies in contemporary Christendom: see e.g. Pratt et al., *The Dynamics of the Medieval Manuscript*.

²⁷ *Passim* was developed by a team of researchers at Northeastern University: see Smith et al., “Detecting and Modeling,” especially 184–85; Smith and Cordell, “Text Reuse.”

²⁸ Romanov, “Algorithmic Analysis,” 227–28.

without controversy, and it has led to instances of authorial misattribution.²⁹ However, the tools of the digital humanities, when used judiciously, hold enormous promise for those working on pre-modern texts. As Matthew Jockers has written, “new methods of analysis allow us to extract new forms of evidence” and “to go beyond what we are capable of reading as solitary scholars.”³⁰ My study is part of the larger Arabic textual reuse project known as KITAB (“Knowledge, Information Technology, and the Arabic Book”) based at Aga Khan University and supported by the European Research Council. While still in an early stage, it is being developed to assist researchers in applying the *Passim* algorithm—along with others—to the unique language and script of Arabic and Persian and the massive corpora of pre-modern texts in those languages.³¹ The first major step in this process has involved assembling a digital corpus of machine-readable texts, which is no small feat on its own.³² Applying *Passim* to this huge body of texts enables researchers to locate “all pairs of passages that share some minimum amount of text and to cluster these pairs of passages into larger textual traditions.”³³

In my current research, the algorithm within the KITAB database has been used to identify “syntactic text reuse” in the works of al-Balādhurī and has yielded numerous examples of verbatim and near-verbatim reuse of common material.³⁴ Verbatim text reuse occurs when many characters—and, indeed, the majority of words in a sentence—appear in precisely the same form and order with no variation. In essence, this is a form of quotation where the location (and, often,

29 Most notably Donald Foster’s misattribution of “A Funeral Elegy” to William Shakespeare using computer-mediated means. Ultimately, through traditional literary analysis, Gilles D. Montsarrat came to identify the poem as written by John Ford (d. 1640) and Foster conceded his error. In many ways, however, the example of “A Funeral Elegy” helps to emphasize that the growing field of the digital humanities is intended to enhance the training and work of our individual disciplines, not to completely supplant it. See Neiderkorn, “A Scholar Recants”; Montsarrat, “A Funeral Elegy,” 186–203.

30 Jockers, *Macroanalysis*, 10, 27.

31 On this corpus, see Belinkov et al., “Shamela.”

32 Smith et al., “Detecting and Modeling”; Vesanto et al., “Applying BLAST”; Romanov et al., “Important New Developments.” As I observed above, the number of surviving Islamic texts still in manuscript form is enormous, which means that they are not accessible via these databases. Moreover, the Arabic and Persian texts found online are often the most popular or those considered most relevant for a modern audience, which skews databases such as *al-Maktaba al-Shamela* toward Sunni texts. However, group efforts like the Open Islamicate Texts Initiative (OpenITI) are working to address many of these issues: see Miller, Romanov and Savant, “Digitizing the Textual Heritage,” 103–9.

33 KITAB Project, “About *Passim*.”

34 For a general discussion of textual reuse and its identification through digital means, see Franzini, Franzini, and Büchler, “Historical Text Reuse.”

the context) of the shared material has been either “recycled” or even “laterally cycled,” but the wording itself has not been altered even if its purpose has.³⁵ Near-verbatim text reuse occurs when there is some variation in the structure or form of a reused sentence or paragraph: in the case of Arabic texts, this takes the form of a change in word order where the vocabulary is otherwise the same, instances when certain joining words or prepositions may vary (the use of the Arabic *fa-* instead of *wa-*, for instance), and the occasional case where only a few words in a paragraph have been removed or altered. These changes may sometimes alter the meaning of a text, yet they can also be highly nuanced. The examples discussed below reveal that al-Balādhurī’s reuse of material across his two books exhibits far more subtle contextual shifts than large-scale changes.

Recycled Material from *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* in *The Lineage of Nobles*

Given the relative brevity of *The Book of the Conquest of Lands*, a researcher could be forgiven for assuming that the vast majority of its materials would be recycled in the larger and later work. However, the extent of the reused material is actually quite limited in scope. The majority of the longer excerpts reused in *The Lineage of Nobles* are single *khabar* found in many disparate places within the earlier work which, as noted above, is organized geographically by region. This means that al-Balādhurī did not choose, for instance, to reuse only information about Syria and North Africa while ignoring Persia. Instead, my analysis shows that he was excerpting materials that highlighted the qualities and personal characteristics of early Muslim leaders—the first converts to Islam during the lifetime of Muḥammad, the Companions of the Prophet³⁶—and the subsequent generals, governors, and other administrators who followed, in keeping with the very different focus of the later work.

The first extended example of reuse appears in a chapter entitled “Reports of the Apostasy of the Arabs During the Caliphate of Abū Bakr.” Here, al-Balādhurī recounts a particularly troubling episode that occurred during the tenure of the famed military commander Khālīd b. al-Walīd (d. 642 CE/21 AH). Immediately

35 Here, I reference the reuse of physical materials discussed by Michael B. Schiffer, where lateral cycling is defined as “the termination of an element’s use (*use-life*) in one set of activities and its resumption in another, often with only maintenance, storage, and transport intervening.” See Schiffer, “Archaeological Context and Systemic Context,” 158–59, and Shack and Weaver, “Introduction,” pp2–3.

36 On the Companions of the Prophet and their memorialization in the early Islamic historical record, see Tayob, “Ṭabarī.”

following the Prophet's death and the proclamation of Abū Bakr as his first successor (caliph, *khalīfa*), a number of prominent Arab tribes that had aligned with Muḥammad and his community had purportedly forsaken their earlier alliances and commitment to Islam and returned to their home territories, with some going as far as to proclaim themselves prophets, too. The caliph is said to have sent a number of loyal Muslim tribesmen to contest this perceived apostasy, which resulted in a conflict known as the *Ridda* (Apostasy) Wars. Among those Muslim generals sent to quell this perceived rebellion was Khālid, who appears in the historiographical tradition as travelling throughout Arabia combatting apostasy and breaking down Arab resistance to Islam.³⁷ When Khālid arrived in central Arabia to confront the tribe of Tamīm, the conflict led to the death of Mālik b. Nuwayra, a Companion of the Prophet and chief of another Arab tribe, the Banū Yarbū', who was accused of apostasy.³⁸ Mālik was executed by Khālid although (according to al-Balādhurī) he had declared, "By God, I did not apostatize!"

Mālik's brother, the poet Mutammim b. Nuwayra, later lamented these events during a discussion with Abū Bakr's successor, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–644 CE/13–23 AH). The passage below is a verbatim quotation of material previously included in *The Conquest of Lands* but here recycled as relevant to *The Lineage of Nobles*. The only additions to the previous text are marked in bold.

It is reported (*ruwiya*) that Mutammim b. Nuwayra came to see 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb who asked him, "How far did your grief (*wajd*) over your brother, Mālik, reach?" Mutammim responded, "I wept over him for one year, until my healthy eye envied the one that had gone, and I do not see fire without feeling as if my grief were strong enough to kill me, because he always left his fire burning until the morning lest a guest should come and fail to locate his home." 'Umar said: "describe him to me," and Mutammim said "He would ride an unruly steed.... His face was like a fragment of the moon." 'Umar asked: "Recite for me from your verses about him." And so he recited for him his lament, in which he said:

"For a long time we were boon companions,
like the two fellow drinkers of Jadhīma,
The people said, 'they will never be separated.'"

And so 'Umar replied "If I could write good poetry, I would have written a lament for Zayd, my brother." But Mutammim said "It is not the same misfortune, oh Commander of the Believers. **Your brother was killed by an unbeliever (*kāfir*)**. If my brother had died the same death your brother

³⁷ Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 82–90; Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 31–39.

³⁸ Landau-Tasseron, "Mālik b. Nuwayra."

did, I would not have **eulogized him nor** mourned him.” ‘Umar then said “No one consoled me as well as you have consoled me.”³⁹

The appearance of this anecdote in both texts, and the slight changes in its handling, are revealing. In *The Conquest of Lands*, its source remains obscure; al-Balādhurī writes at the outset only that it was “according to other transmitters (*wa-qāla ba’d al-ruwā*).”⁴⁰ In *The Lineage of Nobles*, he includes information about its chain of transmission: “I was informed by ‘Abbās b. Hishām al-Kalbī,” a major source for both books.⁴¹ Because ‘Abbās’ own works do not survive independently, and may not have been written down at all, it is only through the comparison of these two texts that we can identify his reuse by al-Balādhurī, although it is still not clear why he chose to name his informant only in the later work. Had only the account in *Conquest* survived, we would assume that this was an amalgamation of anonymous accounts (*ikhṭiṣār*).⁴²

Moreover, each book uses this anecdote in unique ways. In *Conquest*, it is framed by the narrative of the *Ridda* Wars and the campaigns of Khālid b. al-Walid within a larger description of the Arabian conquests of Arabia. In this context, the story of Mālik’s questionable execution by Khālid would remain also a contentious issue for subsequent generations of Muslims when considering the general’s legacy.⁴³ In *Lineage*, however, this version of the story does not appear in the entry on Khālid, and Mālik does not have his own entry in the book. Instead, it appears in the entry on ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb because it portrays the second caliph as caring about the concerns of his community while expressing his emotions over the loss of his own brother. In *Conquest*, by contrast, the juxtaposition of the conversation with the story of Mālik’s execution exacerbates the tragedy and stresses the questionable nature of Khālid’s actions.

The second significant example of textual reuse concerns another Companion of the Prophet, al-Mughīra b. Shu’ba (d. ca.668–671 CE/48–51 AH), who is

39 *Futūḥ*, 117–18 (trans. Hitti in *Origins*, vol. 1, 150–51); *Ansāb*, vol. 10, 333.

40 On the use of this term by al-Balādhurī, see Athamina, “The Historical Works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī,” 147. Athamina argues “it can be unequivocally established that al-Balādhurī uses this formula to transmit information from a written source.” I find this statement unconvincing, and Athamina does not offer any evidence as to why he believes this aside from continuing that “the use of these terms is not particularly frequent in comparison with other terms of transmission from this category,” which is true.

41 On ‘Abbās as well as Hishām, his father, as sources for al-Balādhurī, see Khālidī, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 59. On the general sources al-Balādhurī used in *Lineage*, see Athamina, “The Sources of al-Balādhurī’s *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*,” 237–62.

42 Athamina, “The Historical Works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī,” 152–53.

43 Shoshan, *Arabic Historical Tradition*, 94–97.

remembered in many accounts as a notorious lecher.⁴⁴ A number of his fellow Muslims suspected that he was having an affair with the wife of a man from the tribe of Thaqīf, and so they followed him closely until they found him *in flagrante delicto*. The material recycled in the later work begins with the report of al-Mughīra's adultery and continues to describe his trial. Variations in the texts are marked in bold for *Lineage* and underlined for *Conquest*:

And when al-Mughīra reached [the caliph] 'Umar, the witnesses were gathered between them both. And so Nāfi' b. al-Ḥārith said "I saw him on the belly of the woman, thrusting into her, and I saw him inserting and withdrawing his penis (lit., "what is with him," *mā ma'ahu*) like the **kohl pencil** in the kohl container."⁴⁵ Then, Shibl b. Ma'bad gave **the same** testimony. Then, Abū Bakra. When Ziyād b. 'Ubayd came as the fourth witness [required for conviction], 'Umar looked at him and said "Truly, I see the face of a man through whom I hope one of the Companions of the Messenger of God, blessings of God and peace be upon him,⁴⁶ will not be stoned to death through his testimony **and by whose testimony he will not be disgraced.**" **For al-Mughīra had come from Egypt to convert to Islam**, and he was present at the battle of al-Ḥudaybiyya together with the Messenger of God, blessings of God and peace be upon him. And Ziyād said, "I saw a shameful sight and I heard intense breathing, but I do not know whether he had intercourse with her or not." It is also said that he did not give any testimony. Thus, 'Umar ordered that the three witnesses be flogged, which was done. Shibl then said, "You order those who bear witness to the truth flogged, and render punishment meaningless?" And after Abū Bakra was flogged, he said "I testify that al-Mughīra is an adulterer." 'Umar said "Punish him." But 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said "If you admit this [repetition] as [the fourth] witness, then have your companion stoned." Abū Bakra swore he would never

44 Lammens, "al-Mughīra b. Shu'ba."

45 *Ansāb: al-mulmūl; Futūḥ: al-mīl*. There are multi-layered euphemisms in this comparison of intercourse to the continual dipping of a cosmetic applicator into a container of cosmetic eyeliner. However, *al-Mulmūl*, as discussed in Kazimirski's *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français*, is also the word used for the penis of certain animals, including the fox—an animal known for its cunning in many traditions. It is clear that the witnesses against al-Mughīra were making a point in their testimony!

46 Both texts include the standard honorific of the Prophet, even though such honorifics do not often appear in the surviving text of the *Futūḥ*. It is clear that the transmitter—or perhaps al-Balādhurī—was emphasizing the gravity of the situation and the standing of al-Mughīra.

speak to Ziyād again, even though he was his brother through his mother Sumayya. Then, ‘Umar sent them back to their city.⁴⁷

In the later work, this anecdote is placed within the biographical entry dedicated to al-Mughīra. In the earlier work, it appears at the end of “The Conquest of the Districts of the Tigris,” after an account of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī’s appointment as governor of Basra (now in Iraq): a region which al-Mughīra had previously been involved in conquest. Its function in this text, then, is to explain how Mughīra lost that post to Abū Mūsā. For when the caliph ‘Umar is informed of Mughīra’s affair, ‘Umar purportedly tells Abū Mūsā that “I wish to send you to a country where there is a nest of Satan (*al-shayṭān*),” appointing him governor while having him send Mughīra back to him for an audience. In *Conquest*, therefore, al-Balādhurī connects these two events and the two traditions detailing them to create a new narrative in order to explain how, as a result of his adultery, Mughīra was relieved of his position and forced to face trial.

While *Conquest* concludes this chapter with an account of Basra’s governance that has nothing to do with Mughīra, in keeping its focus on Islam’s geographical expansion, the biographical entry in *Lineage* continues with other versions of this story that do not appear in al-Balādhurī’s earlier work.⁴⁸ This sheds further light on the author’s creative process: he chose not to include all of the materials to which he had access in *Conquest* because he merely wanted to provide an explanation for Mughīra’s removal from Basra.⁴⁹ In *Lineage*, by contrast, the life and personality of Mughīra are the centerpiece of the entry, along with ‘Umar’s handling of a challenging situation. However, it is noteworthy that al-Balādhurī still includes the information about Abū Mūsā being sent to Basra as part of Mughīra’s story, suggesting either that he viewed Abū Mūsā’s role as integral or that he was unwilling to edit the contents of the *khbar*.

As a final example, I adduce an extended passage from the concluding section of al-Balādhurī’s *Conquest* which was re-used in *Lineage* (Figure 2.1).⁵⁰ In the

47 *Futūḥ*, 423–24 (trans. Murgotten, *Origins*, vol. 2, 58); *Ansāb*, vol. 10, 387–88.

48 *Ansāb*, vol. 10, 388.

49 Alternatively, it demonstrates that al-Balādhurī continued to seek additional material after completing *Conquest*.

50 Murgotten’s decision (*Origins*, vol. 2, 235–74) to label the thematic final chapters of the *Futūḥ* as “appendices” is misleading, since it implies that they were added as an afterthought or, perhaps, at a later time. Quite the contrary, I would argue that this material was placed in a separate section because it did not have a single geographic focus, and perhaps because it was most valuable to readers as a reference chapter. None of the three surviving manuscripts suggests that these final chapters were added later, although this by itself is not definitive evidence.

<p>ثم قال للرسول إن أمير المؤمنين أمرني أن أطيع أمرك فيه فمرني بما شئت فقال الرسول أدع لي بجامعة أعلقها في عنقه فأتى بجامعة فجعلها في عنقه وجبذها جبذا شديدا ثم قال للمغيرة احبسه حتى يأتيك فيه أمر أمير المؤمنين ففعل وكان السجن يومئذ من قصب فتحيل معن للخروج وبعث إلى أهله أن ابعثوا لي بناقتي وجاريتي وعباءتي القطوانية ففعلوا فخرج من الليل وأردف جاريتيه فسار حتى إذا رهب أن يفضحه الصبح أناخ ناقته وعلقها ثم كمن حتى كف عنه الطلب</p>	<p>فقال للرسول إن أمير المؤمنين أمرني أن أطيع فيه أمرك فمرني بما شئت فقال ادع بجامعة فاجعلها في عنقه ففعل وجبذها جبذا شديدا ثم قال احبسه إلى أن يأتيك فيه أمر أمير المؤمنين ففعل وكان السجن يومئذ من قصب فتحيل معن للخروج وبعث إلى أهله أن ابعثوا لي بناقتي وجاريتي وعباءتي القطوانية ففعلوا وخرج من الليل وأردف جاريتيه وسار حتى إذا رهب أن يفضحه الصبح أناخ ناقته وعلقها ثم كمن حتى إذا سكن عنه الطلب</p>
The Version of <i>Futūḥ al-buldān</i>	The Version of <i>Ansāb al-Ashraf</i>

Figure 2.1. Two versions of al-Balādhuri's narrative.

former, this material appears in the third thematic chapter, entitled "The Matter of the Seal"; in the latter, it is part of the biographical entry devoted to 'Umar. This tradition discusses the machinations of Ma'n b. Zā'ida, who had counterfeited the official seal of the caliph and used it illegally to extort tax money (*kharāj*) from the Iraqi city of Kufa. 'Umar learned of Ma'n's misdeeds and wrote to none other than al-Mughīra, ordering him to apprehend Ma'n. Variations in the texts are again marked in bold for *Lineage* and underlined for *Conquest*:

Then [al-Mughīra] said to the messenger [from 'Umar]: "The Commander of the Believers ordered me to obey your order **concerning it**,⁵¹ so command me with what you will." And so **the messenger** said: "Bring to me a binding, **in order that I might bind him** by his neck." **And so it was done** (*fa-fa'ala*) / **And so he brought him a binding and he placed it around his neck**, and he tied it very tightly. Then he said: "Detain him until the order of the Commander of the Believers arrives to you." And so it was done. The prison was, at that time, made of reeds, and so Ma'n schemed to escape, and he sent [word] to his family: "Send to me my camel, my servant,

51 The phrase "concerning it" (*fi-ha*) as I have translated it is present in both versions of the text, it simply has its order shifted to before or after the word "your order."

and my cotton cloak.” And so they did. He escaped at night, and his servant followed him. **And so** he traveled until he feared that the dawn would reveal him. He made his camel kneel and he tied her. Then, he hid until the search passed by him.⁵²

This near-verbatim episode of reuse continues to recount the complete story of Ma’n’s punishment by the caliph and his eventual release from prison.

At the outset of each account, al-Balādhurī traces a similar chain of transmission, but names two different informants. In *Conquest*, he records that “Hannād informed us”; in *Lineage*, the informant’s name is given as ‘Affān.⁵³ In both cases, though, the information was transmitted to them on the authority of al-Aswad b. Shaybān, by way of Khālīd b. Sumayr. What should we make of this divergence? It seems that al-Balādhurī had two slightly different versions of this account at his disposal, presumably received orally, one from Hannād and one from ‘Affān. A tradition received from a certain ‘Affān b. Muslim, in fact, opens the chapter on the counterfeiting of the caliph’s seal in *Conquest*. This makes the author’s citation of Hannād as his informant, only six *akhbār* later, further evidence of the two separate informants.

Conclusions

Opportunities to trace the movement and reuse of material between texts have been greatly expanded by the development and application of digital resources. The material from the early Arabic historical tradition which I have highlighted here could have been identified through a close reading of both texts, but only after a significant commitment of time; however, the work of analyzing these instances of reuse must still be carried out by the researcher. As I have shown, the creative agency of early Arabic authors can be discerned in their sophisticated compilation, redaction, and recycling of traditions. However, these authorial methods are rarely revealed in any direct way, and the regular citation of chains of transmission has the effect of obscuring this creative work. The repetition of previously circulating information in al-Balādhurī’s *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* and *The Lineage of Nobles* is, therefore, valuable evidence of the author’s praxis. They also show that al-Balādhurī had a specific interest in employing materials that described the characteristics of prominent early Muslim figures. Despite their differences in

⁵² *Futūḥ*, 567–68 (trans. Murgotten in *Origins*, vol. 2, 257); *Ansāb*, vol. 10, 365–66.

⁵³ This Hannād is likely Hannād b. al-Sarī (d. 864 CE/250 AH), while ‘Affān is almost certainly ‘Affān b. Muslim (835 CE/220AH).

length and purpose, both texts thus share a common focus: the eulogizing of the formative period of Islam and the people who defined that era. The later work was devoted to biographical accounts of the figures that had established the Islamic state, while the earlier had described the formation of that state through conquest and the establishment of institutions. The contexts in which shared information was emplotted varied, and could thus shift the emphasis placed on a given tradition, or even its meanings, depending on the author's varying goals.

This process of self-redaction was not, however, straightforward or direct. On the rare occasions when al-Balādhurī cites his previous work in the later, he does not copy material verbatim. In the three most significant examples of reuse that I have identified, moreover, he does not cite himself as a previous redactor of those accounts. The subtle variations in his use of materials—both the contextual shifts and, in two of the cases, differences in the citation of informants—demonstrates that he was working with a variety of sources. It also firmly suggests that he was working on these books in isolation from one another, having completed *The Book of the Conquest of Lands* before he turned his attention to *The Lineage of Nobles*. It is ironic that researchers today, with the aid of digital resources, may be able to detect these instances of reuse more easily than he could, himself. But like al-Balādhurī and other early author-compilers, I and my colleagues in the Open Islamicate Texts Initiative remain dedicated to creating a “transparent intellectual supply chain, not use without attribution.”⁵⁴

54 Miller, Romanov, and Savant, “Digitizing the Textual Heritage,” 104–5.

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Ryan J. Lynch (lynch@columbusstate.edu) is the Assistant Professor of the History of the Islamic World in the Department of History and Geography at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia. He completed his DPhil at the University of Oxford. His research focuses on the earliest centuries of Islam and the Arabic historical tradition and, in particular, the materials surrounding the early Islamic conquests and the first Islamic states. He is the author of *Arab Conquests and Early Islamic Historiography: The Futuh al-buldan of al-Baladhuri* (2020).

Abstract While there is growing historiographical analysis of the reuse of circulating narrative materials in medieval books from various textual traditions, there have been fewer studies of the late antique and early medieval periods that have considered the process of authorial self-revision. This is especially the case with early Arabic/Islamicate texts. This study is a discussion of the historical material that is reused in the two surviving Arabic works of the Muslim author al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 892 CE/279 AH), material which appears in his *Kitāb Futūḥ al-buldān* (*The Book of the Conquest of Lands*) and that was apparently reused in his *Ansāb al-Ashrāf* (*The Lineage of Nobles*). In discussing how al-Balādhurī recycled this information and emplotted it in verbatim and near-verbatim forms, it shows how shifting the location of these shared traditions demonstrates the different goals of his two books and also showcases his work as an author: in the former, he places an emphasis on the creation of early Islamic institutions; in the later, he eulogizes the character and qualities of Islam's earliest leaders. Additionally, all of the reused material discussed here was identified through computer mediated analysis, so this study also highlights how the tools of the digital and computational humanities demonstrate immense promise in enhancing and expediting the research of scholars across the medieval globe.

Keywords al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, Arabic historiography, computer-mediated analysis, digital humanities, early Islamic history, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, text reuse