

The Tradition and Renewal of Islamic Historiography

Hanxu Qi

School of Oriental and African Studies, Xi'an International Studies University, China

Qihanxuxisu@163.com

Abstract. Since the nineteenth century, the study of history has become an important branch of historiography, and the number of related research discourses has renewed our understanding of the discipline in general. The study and learning of history has been undertaken in order to examine and summarise the lessons of historical research in order to make it better in the future. The Arab Islamic civilization of the Middle East has created a rich tradition of historiography, which has alternated and interpenetrated with various religious, humanistic and natural disciplines, occupying an important place in the history of Islamic culture and making a great contribution to the history of world civilization, while the tradition of Islamic historiography and its renewal in modern times have provided us with valuable lessons for the study of history today.

Keywords: Islamic historiography; historiographical tradition; Islam; origins and development of historiography; renewal.

1. The Origins and Development of Islamic Historiography

Islamic historiography, also known as Arab-Islamic historiography, was one of the constituent disciplines of medieval Islamic culture. Arab-Islamic history is the result of a long process of collecting, collating, examining, researching and writing on the history of the Arabian dynasties and the history of the spread and development of Islam, in order to better meet the needs of the political, economic, cultural and religious development of the empire. It is a comprehensive historical discipline founded on the collective wisdom of the Arab dynasties and the history of the spread and development of Islam. [1]

1.1 The germination of Islamic historiography

The Arabs before unification and expansion were typically nomadic, living a nomadic life of living by water and grass. They had no written language of their own, only a few epics and genealogies passed down orally, either celebrating the glory of their families or remembering acts of bravery in war, as a spice to the monotony of desert life. Later, as Muhammad and the subsequent caliphs united the peninsula and consolidated their unity, they needed to acquire knowledge of genealogical records, so they would often consult genealogists, but the Arabs, in their ignorance, did not yet have a complete and specific view of history or a clear way of writing it, and this was the period when Islamic historiography was in its infancy.

In the seventh century AD, the Arab empire rose rapidly, spanning three continents: Asia, Europe and Africa. Having absorbed the cultures of the two river basins and the Mediterranean coast, the Arabs quickly developed a flourishing and distinctive Arab historiography. The birth of Islam during this period brought about profound changes in every aspect of Arab life, and in the field of history the Qur'an had a significant and far-reaching impact on the formation and establishment of the Arab concept of history. However, the history of preaching, jihad and some other historical events of this period are still not systematically recorded in books, but are mostly transmitted orally by the disciples of the holy sect, [2] As for the hadiths (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad), there are only scattered accounts.

1.2 The development of Islamic historiography

During the period of the Four Caliphs: The Qur'an became the theoretical basis for the establishment and development of the various religious disciplines and historical studies of Islam. At this time, many disciples of the Holy Family and religious scholars would combine their religious

knowledge with their personal experience of historical events in their preaching to explain and exegete the meaning of certain verses and the historical context in which they came down to earth. The Qur'an was first studied from a historical perspective, providing an example for future generations of scholars to study Islamic history. [3]

The Umayyad period (661-750): the beginning of the development of Islamic historiography. As the Arabs continued to expand, the caliphate appointed scholars to collect and collate historical books from Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Persia and other countries that had been acquired from various parts of the world. Learned scholars were also encouraged to translate and study Byzantine and Persian historical works and learn from them.

One of the first Islamic histories to receive attention was the life of the Prophet and his holy wars, which were extensively collected and carefully documented during the reign of Caliph Umar II. These histories tell the story of the Prophet Muhammad's life, his achievements and his sayings from different perspectives; the history of the early Islamic period, the history of jihad and the general situation of society; and the legends and stories of the people. This period saw the emergence of Islamic historical writing as an adjunct to religious studies, not as a separate discipline, in order to meet the needs of the religious life of the Arabs and the founding of Islam.

The Abbasid period (750-1258): a period of prosperity for Islamic historiography. During the Abbasid period, the economy flourished and transport became more convenient, so that scholars travelled to different parts of the world to study. Historians blended poetry, geography and history into one, [4] Thus the knowledge of the history and culture of other countries also increased greatly during this period, and the field of historical research became more extensive. In particular, during the century-long translation movement, many works from ancient Greece, Byzantium, Persia, and India were translated into Arabic, and scholars were able to gain extensive access to the rich materials, historical perspectives, and methods of ancient history of various countries, which greatly broadened the horizons of historical research. [5] In this period, Islamic historiography gradually began to separate itself from religious disciplines, forming an independent discipline from which other disciplines could intermingle and draw upon.

During the first 100 years of the Abbasid period, the scope of Islamic historical research centred on the history of the spread of Islam and the production of works on early Islamic history. This included works on the biographies of prophets and personalities, the history of jihad, historical events and family genealogies. In the later Abbasid period, as the level of research increased and the collection of historical material became more extensive, many historians produced complete general histories, and chronicles or chronicles of events emerged.

The Mamluk dynasty (1250-1517): a continuation of the development of Islamic historiography. Islamic historiography in the Mamluk dynasty, centred on Cairo, Egypt, and Damascus, Syria, made considerable achievements in chronicles, dictionaries, biographies, geographical and administrative encyclopaedias, and achieved major breakthroughs in the philosophy and theory of history. [6] The historical studies of this period inherited the academic tradition of Islamic historiography and made significant contributions to the development of historiography. The scope, content and methods of writing Islamic history were expanded and enriched, and to a certain extent, it was freed from the constraints of religion and gradually began to pay attention to the influence of economic, geographical, cultural and social factors on the development of history.

It is noteworthy that some historians of this period had already begun to address questions concerning the philosophy of history, the basic theories of history and the methods of historical research. In his masterpiece *Introduction to History*, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) shifted the paradigm of Islamic historiography from narrative history to the philosophy of history, analysing, summarising and critiquing the historical views of his predecessors and presenting his own views and opinions in a more systematic manner.

From the mid-16th to the end of the 18th century: the decline of Islamic historiography. During this period, a series of political changes had taken place in the Middle East, with the establishment of

the Persian and Ottoman empires, and the glory of Islamic historiography had become history, with fewer texts surviving.

2. The Main Elements of Islamic Historiography

Islamic historiographical works are rich and varied, covering the following main areas.

2.1 The Life of the Prophet and his Jihad

The biographies of the Prophet and the Jihad are the earliest texts of Islamic historiography, covering the life of the Prophet Muhammad, his birth, upbringing, the founding of Islam, his struggle with the infidels, his death, and so on. The most famous is the biography of the Prophet by Ibn Hisham (d. 828), which is the most complete biography of the Prophet preserved in Islamic history to date.

The history of jihad, or military expeditions, is a record of the Arabs' expansion into Europe, Asia and Africa under the banner of 'jihad'. Four of the earliest historians to write about jihad are

Four historians are known to have written the history of jihad: Abanay, son of Caliph Uthman (d. 105 AH); Awal ibn Zubair; Shulehbil ibn Sa'ad; and Wahab ibn Munaybih.

2.2 The History of Important Islamic Events

In addition to focusing on biographies, Islamic historians have paid great attention to the history of important Islamic events. For example, the wars between Muslims - the Battle of Camel and the Battle of Suifen - the wars fought between Muslims and other peoples such as the Persians, Romans and Hindus, and the major events in foreign expansion. [7] Islamic historical events were first narrated by those who participated in or witnessed them, with later generations passing them on by word of mouth and some fragmentary accounts by others. It was not until the second century of the Islamic Era that the history of events was collected and written down in books. He is the author of more than two hundred and thirty major works, covering many major historical events.

2.3 Genealogy

Genealogy is the history and lineage of tribes and families. Genealogy was widely known to the Arabs during the period of ignorance, when it was used in the service of tribal clans. Because the Arabs first lived a tribal life, the tribe was treated as one big family, poets wrote poems for the tribe, orators spoke for the tribe, and the tribe was the master of everything. Later on, after the advent of Islam, the concept of tribe and clan did not disappear, for example, in warfare people still belonged to tribes and everything was still based on the tribe. After the establishment of the Abbasid dynasty, polygamists began to collect and exaggerate the weaknesses and flaws of the Arabs and Arab tribes, which in turn contributed to the development of genealogy, which was taken more seriously and became popular. The main works include: Hisham ibn al-Kalebi's (c. 747-821) *The Complete Genealogy*; Zubair ibn Bakr's (? -869) *The Ancient Genealogy*. -869); Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Jaber al-Balazari's *Genealogy of the Nobles*, etc.

2.4 The history of the Persian and Roman peoples and other religions such as Judaism and Christianity

The history of Persia, Rome and other religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, pre-dates the Abbasids, mainly because the Caliphs wanted to learn about the history of the conquered nations and to learn from them after their conquest. Secondly, as Islam spread among the conquered countries, a large number of people became Arabised and many of them wrote their own history in Arabic or translated their own historical works into Arabic, thus giving the Arabic-speaking people the history of other peoples, which later became the basis for historians to write their histories.

2.5 Biographies

Biographies include biographies of prophets and personalities. The biographies contain the name, place of origin, genealogy, biographical details, character, ideology, writings and events of the biographer. The Arabs were much more interested in biographies than their contemporaries, and once a person had learned something - even if it was a hadith or an epic - scholars would flock to him for advice.

The biographies of famous personalities include those of disciples of the Holy Family, caliphs (sultans, emirs, shahs), generals, judges and eminent scholars of various disciplines. The biographies of the caliphs, the Sultan, the Amir, the Shah, the generals, the judges and the scholars of various disciplines are represented in the biographies of Ibn Sa'ad (1211-1282), Ibn Hurikan (1211-1282), Attar (1145-1230), and the Caliphs (1445-1505). (1445- 1505), the biographies of the Caliphs, etc.

2.6 Travelogues

A collection of accounts and histories of the travels of merchants, travellers and scholars around the world. It covers the routes, cities, products, politics, economics, religion, ethnicity, culture, people, rules and regulations, curiosities and folklore of different places. The most representative works include the 9th-century book "A Book of India in China", based on the travels of the Arabian merchant Suleiman to the east; Nasir Khosrow's "Travels"; and Ibn Jubair's "Jubair's Travels". There are also works on historical geography, such as Mas'odi's Golden Meadows.

3. Methods of Research and Codification in Islamic Historiography

The above is an overview of the process of the development of Islamic historiography in Arabia and the main elements it contains, from which the basic Arab approach to the study and compilation of Islamic historiography can also be seen.

Islamic historiography was born, formed and codified on the basis of traditional religious studies, as a natural consequence of the rapid spread of Islam. The Qur'an is the supreme text that regulates the conduct of Muslims, and all cultural exploration and learning is based on the Qur'an and revolves around it.

Islamic historians attached great importance to the rigour of collecting a wide range of historical sources, and since the first historical sources were mostly oral and rarely written down, they were careful and rigorous in their collection of historical sources, often collecting only what they considered to be credible, i.e., information that had been handed down from a trusted source, provided that the narrators came from personal or direct witnesses, in order to ensure that the sources were informative, reliable, authoritative and convincing. This is to ensure that the sources are reliable, authoritative and convincing.

Islamic historians, when examining a wide range of historical sources, examine the background, experience, character, hobbies, learning, competence, religious affiliation and social status of the narrators in order to determine whether they are credible and authoritative in their conclusions. In fact, such an approach to evidence plays an important role today and is one of the most important methods of writing contemporary historical research.

Most Islamic historians have adopted the chronological approach to history, in which history is recorded chronologically, year by year, month by month, and day by day, in order to facilitate clearer access.

4. The renewal of Islamic historiography

With the development of science and the advancement of society, the development of Islamic historiography in modern times has been characterised by a blend of the secular and the religious, the traditional and the modern.

Prior to the 18th century, medieval European civilisation was rather backward compared to Islamic civilisation, and Islamic historiography during this period showed little regard for the traditions of European historiography. As the Persian Empire became more powerful, Islamic historiography reached a heyday in the tenth century, with a wide range of subjects and a significant increase in secular content. This change was also reflected in historical writings - from the 17th century onwards, Islamic historiography began to include much about Europe.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, during the reign of Ali, Egypt saw the emergence of such distinguished historians as Taqawi (1801-1873), who advocated the study of 'pre-Islamic civilisation', i.e. the history of Islam before it emerged. Once historians in the Middle East stepped outside this sphere and began to study history outside and before Muslim civilization, it was a new page in Islamic historiography; as in the West in modern times, national and secular historiography gradually became the mainstay of historical research, but Islam has always had some influence on it. Islam has always had some influence on it. [8]

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Islamic historiography is neither purely religious nor purely secular history, but is an ingenious combination of religious and secular histories, and is a disciplinary system with an original Islamic cultural connotation, based on an understanding of the real world, social life, the rise and fall of peoples, dynastic changes and religious history. It has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the development of world history and has helped us to study the current situation, trends and prospects of its development. However, there are still some drawbacks and shortcomings, such as the fact that most historians have not been able to break away from a theological view of history and the lack of a systematic approach to historical criticism, etc. However, with the progress and development of the times, and under the influence of a globalised view of history, Islamic historiography has also broken through some of the constraints and sought to renew and develop itself.

References

- [1] Yang Keli. The trajectory of historical evolution: an overview of Islamic historiography [J]. Chinese Muslims, 1994(04), 210-211.
- [2] Yang Keli. The trajectory of historical evolution: an overview of Islamic historiography [J]. Chinese Muslims, 1994(04), 230-231.
- [3] Zhao Junli. Methodology of medieval Arabic history [J]. Studies in Historical Theory, 1992(04), 151-152.
- [4] Wang Qingjia, Li Longguo. History of foreign historiography [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005(172).
- [5] Wang Jian'e. The historiography of medieval Arabia [J]. Journal of Northwest Normal University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 1995(14).
- [6] Liang Daoyuan. Staging and characteristics of ancient Arabic historiography [J]. Studies in Historical Theory, 2017(01).
- [7] Ahmed-Amin. The History of Arab Islamic Culture (3) [M]. In: Xiang Peike, Shi Xitong, Zhu Kai. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2019(351-353).
- [8] Wang Qingjia, Li Longguo. History of foreign historiography [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005(439).