

# The Transformation of a Historical Tradition: From *Khabar* to *Ta'rikh*

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## Introduction

Some idea of the past is present in every culture, and historical consciousness as an awareness of this past is a distinctive element in total cultural expression. Hence, it would be a mistake to assume that there was no historical consciousness among the Arabs predating Islam. However, it was the religious, political and social transformation of the Arabs through Islam that motivated an extensive interest in the past and its systematic recording.

Muslim historians developed the idea of the past they had inherited from pre-Islamic Arabia and expressed it in an extensive historical literature. The study of the past in early Islamic history was motivated and determined by a number of factors. This article seeks to outline some of the important developments which led to a distinctive Islamic historiography. It seeks to do so by an examination of studies conducted on the early Islamic historical tradition. In particular, three fundamental aspects of the different phases of historical writings from pre-Islamic Arabia through the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Hijrah are investigated: the external form of historical recollection; its subject matter; and the meaning and significance of both the form and the subject matter of historical recollection in the culture.

## 1. Pre-Islamic Arabia

The interest in the past among the pre-Islamic Arabs is best exemplified by the custom of evening tribal gatherings, called *majālis*, at which the special

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moments in the tribe's history were recounted.<sup>1</sup> The tribal stories were passed on orally from one generation to the next, each one retelling it in their own way. The form in which the reports were couched was uniform. It was a *khbar* (pl *akhbār*), a story or an anecdote, which was not so much fixed by any reference to a general time frame as it was to a particular and usually remarkable figure or event.<sup>2</sup> The oral nature of the anecdote ensured that it was told in an animated and vivid style. Verse usually formed the center of the tale charging it with an emotional and sentimental value.<sup>3</sup>

This centrality of verse and the focus on important events or figures, may be viewed as a combination and synthesis of elements from the Northern and Southern Arab tribes. Even though it would be difficult to find a clear historical point at which the two strains are differentiated, both are present in the *khbar*.<sup>4</sup> The Northern Arabian tradition tended to focus on verse forms with a seeming disregard for the chronology of the *akhbār*. On the other hand, the Southern Arabian Kingdoms, reigning from 1200 B.C. to 527 A.C., have left stone inscriptions which indicate that a kind of dating system had been employed in the administration. Specific historical occurrences, usually of religious significance, were used as reference points in dating political events and administrative measures. At first, these references changed from one event to another and no single event seems to have commanded sufficient notice to be adopted as a single reference point. However, from 115 A.C. onwards there appears to be a fixed dating system in use there.<sup>5</sup> There is no evidence, though, that such a uniform system of dating was used in historical recollection. Nevertheless, what can be said is that, in general, an animated and stylistic presentation without regard for its chronology or concern for some form of fixed points of time reference, existed side by side in the pre-Islamic tradition of history.

The subject matter of these *akhbār* covered every aspect of the culture. It could include a discussion of the tribe's gods, ancestors and the most important battles in which the tribe was involved. In such battle stories, the individual or individuals would represent the best of the tribe's values and aspirations. History was a recounting of these "Days" (*Ayyām*). Since the battles occupied the central position of these *akhbār*, the latter were usually

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<sup>1</sup>Abd al-'Aziz Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*, ed. and trans. Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Franz Rosenthal, *The History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Duri, *Rise*, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, ed. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk (Boston, Beacon Press, 1962), p. 109; Rosenthal, *History*, p. 21; Duri, *Rise*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

associated with the (*Ayyām*). The (*Ayyām*) then, refer to the days during which the Arabs fought their epic battles. These being the cherished *akhbār*, the social gatherings tended to focus on the virtues (*murūwwah*) esteemed in the warrior: manliness, courtesy, observance of the rules of combat, and a concern for his lineage (*nasab*).<sup>6</sup> In all these recollections, though, the purely historical, which dealt exclusively with the past, was always mixed with other immediate tribal concerns.

The lack of a fixed method by which chronology could be maintained, and the varied cultural concerns of the *majālis*, fostered a historical consciousness which valued the past only for the immediate present. For all practical purposes, an account of a battle in the distant memory of the tribe was timeless. It was important and significant at the time when it was told, in the values that it portrayed and taught. It was an anecdote about a past event or figure but it was not a concern to accurately present the past as such. This view is most clearly illustrated in the cultural vocation of the storyteller who had the specific task of remembering and recounting the *akhbār*. The storyteller enjoyed a special status in Arab tribal society and was expected to propagate his tribe's merits, and if need be, protect and defend its honor.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the historical material in the pre-Islamic period cannot be separated from the other cultural expressions of the tribe, as this historical material was usually to expound cultural identity.

## 2. The Advent of Islam:

### Elements for Historiography in the Qur'ān.

The pre-Islamic conception of the past was taken up by the Qur'ān and changed to suit its own purposes. The modification of the historical tradition of pre-Islamic Arabia was extensive, affecting the form, the subject and the meaning of the historical recollection.

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<sup>6</sup>Duri, *Rise*, p. 18; Erling Ladewig Petersen, *Ali and Mu'awiyah in Early Arabic Tradition*, trans. P.L. Christensen (Copenhagen: Scandinavian University Books, 1964) p. 26 *Ayyam* is a word which refers in general to the sometimes endless conflicts among the Arab tribes. c.f. Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, ed. by Stanley Lane-Pool, 2 bk. 8 parts (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968; reprint ed., London, Edinburgh: William & Norgate, 1863), bk. 1, part 8 p. 3064; Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi, *Taj al-'arus*, 10 vols. (Libya: n. p., 1386/1966), 9:116. Cf. *murūwwah* in Muhammad b. Mukarram b. Manzur (d. 711/1292), *Lisan al-Arab*, 3 vols., ed. Yusuf Khayat and Nadim Mar'ashli, with an Introduction by Shaykh 'Abd Allah al-'Alayali (Beirut: Dar Lisan al 'Arab, 1970), 3:459; Ignace Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2 vols., ed. by S. M. Stern, trans. by C. R. Barber and S.M. Stern (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 1:22.

<sup>7</sup>Petersen, *Ali and Mu'awiyah*, p. 47.

### a. *Akhbār* as Part of the Unseen.

The basic form of history, the *khabar*, was not altered. It was adopted and formed the basic material of early Islamic historiography. Now, however, the *khabar* was not only information about the past restricted to Arab culture; it was also placed within the world-view of the Islamic message.

The past was declared inaccessible to the present except through the mediation of one who has actually witnessed it. Addressing the Prophet about an event in the past, the Qur'ān says:

You were not on the western side when We assigned the Commandment to Moses. You were not of those who witnessed (*min al-shāhidīn*) it . . . Nor were you on the side of Tur when we called to Moses . . . (28:45-46)

In these verses, the fact that the Prophet was not present and did not actually witness the event (i.e. was not *shahīd*), rendered him ignorant of the event. A similar view is expressed in one of the verses discouraging the tendency to quibble over minute details of the past. The purpose of this, no doubt, is to focus on the moral lessons of history rather than on the details; but at one point, the Qur'ān describes the efforts to guess at the details as "a shot in the dark" or (*rajmān bi l-ghayb*) (18:22). This alludes to the notion that the details of the past, and possibly the past itself, fall into the domain of the "unseen", and this domain is best known by God alone. In contrast, the word used in the previous verse to emphasize presence at an actual event is *Shahīd* which is on the opposite extreme of knowing: God being "Knower of the unseen (*ghayb*) and the seen (*shahādah*)".<sup>8</sup> Izutusu has identified *ghayb* (unseen) and the (*shahādah*) (seen) as one of the central contrasts in the message of the Qur'ān, and it seems that the knowledge of the past falls on the side of the *ghayb* (unseen).<sup>9</sup> The following verse directly connects the unknown *ghayb* with the past, only fully known by God and thus revealed by Him to the Prophet:

"This is the information of the unseen *ghayb* which we reveal to you (*nūḥīhi ilayk*); you (the Prophet) were not with them . . . "(3:44)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>There are numerous references to God in the Qur'ān as the knower of both the invisible and the visible, with the former always taking precedence, eg. (6:73), (9:94), 10:105), (13:9), (64:18).

<sup>9</sup>Toshihiko Isutzu, *God and Man in the Koran* (New York: Books for Libraries, A Division of Arno Press, 1980; reprint ed. Keio University, Tokyo, 1964), pp. 82-85.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. also, Qur'ān, 11:49: 12:102.

In this verse, the real and ultimate knowledge of the past is closely associated with revelation *wahy*, which places it even further out of reach.<sup>11</sup> Like the other verses quoted above, the phrase “you were not with them”, though, suggests a reason for the Prophet’s ignorance about the particular event. It thus sets the limits within which the past may be accessed at all.<sup>12</sup> The witness, and particularly his presence at an event, is the irreplaceable condition for ensuring information about the past.<sup>13</sup>

## b. The Subject of the New *Akhbār*

Since revelation confirmed the condition that only eyewitnesses could faithfully report the past in revelation, the pre-Islamic emphasis on the battles and great events of the past is confirmed in the Qur’ān. An eyewitness, for example, cannot report a slow trend or development. He is restricted to reporting the battle, the anecdote or the moral virtues of the individual. Now, however, in the Qur’ān, instead of the tribes, the focus of history is on the Prophets and the message they brought to all of mankind. Even locally, the tribes are completely ignored in more ways than one.

The Qur’ān should not be thought of as a book of history which proposes to trace a chronology of events from a certain fixed point onwards or deals exhaustively with each and every topic in human history. By its own admission, it has even omitted some aspects of the past which are otherwise important. It states, for example, “that only some of the Prophets have been mentioned (40:78).” Even so, the Qur’ān’s extensive discussion of the Prophets went beyond the tribal stories and anecdotes and broke the boundaries of the pre-Islamic vision of the past. The idea that the central message of the Prophet was a legacy of a line of Prophets extending from the creation of man, underlined the unity of man and bore far-reaching implications for the subject matter of history.

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<sup>11</sup>In fact, the entire Qur’ān was conveyed by a “trusted messenger.” The testimony of Gabriel guaranteed the message to Muhammad. Cf. Laroui, ‘Abd Allah, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*, trans. by Diarmid Cammell (Berkeley, Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1976), p. 16.

<sup>12</sup>Based on such verses, some Muslims identified the knowledge of the past given in the Qur’ān as one of the special characteristics of Muhammad’s prophethood. Cf. ‘Iyad b. Musa (d. 544/1149), *Kitab al-Shifa’ bi ta’rif huquq al-mustafa*, ed. ‘Ali Muhammad al-Bukhari, 2 vols. (Cairo: Isa Babi a-Halabi, 1398/1977), 1:501; Mas’ud b. ‘Umar al-Taftazānī, *Sharh ‘aqa’id al-Nasafi ma’a hashiyah al-mawlawi Ahmad al-Jundi* (Petersburg, Russia, 1897), pp. 156,255; Abu Bakr b. al-Tayyib al-Baqillani, *I’jaz al-Qur’ān*, ed. by Sayyid Ahmad Saqar (Egypt: Dar al-Ma’arif, (1954)), pp. 10-20; Jalal al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Kitab al-Itqān fi ‘ulum al-Qur’ān* (n.p., (1854), 745).

<sup>13</sup>For a discussion of this view, see Isma’il R. al-Farūqī, “Towards a Historiography of Pre-Islamic Hijrah,” *Islamic Studies* 1 (1962): 65-87.

Recognizing the plurality of tribes and clans, the Qur'an, emphasized the essential unity of man. Its stories did not deal with the recognized heroes and legends of Arabia; however the Prophets of Arabia, namely Hud, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu'ayb, are given extensive treatment. Moreover, they are set within a universal framework wherein a Prophet has been sent to every group of humanity (16:36). The Qur'anic historical focus is set precisely on these Prophets that have been sent to man and the latter's reaction to them.

The emphasis on man's common humanity beyond the structure of tribes and clans is clear in the Qur'an's usage of collective terms. *Shu'ub* and *qabā'il*, peoples and tribes, are used only once in the Qur'an and in this single case it is to illustrate the structure of kinship among mankind. More importantly, the point made is that these structures have no real value: "O Mankind, we have created you, male and female, and appointed you peoples (*shu'ub*) and tribes *qabā'il*, that you may know one another. Surely, the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you. God is all-Knowing, all-Aware" (39:19). Both *shu'ub* and *qabā'il* denote spreading out and dividing in the process of generating from a single source.<sup>14</sup> They have the same connotation as the more direct usage of *bani* (sons) among the Arabs to denote the tribes who, through a complex web of subtribes and supertribes, were ultimately thought to be originating from a single source.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on this metaphor, the Qur'an uses "*Banī Ādam*" to refer to mankind in general. Thus, it uses "*bani*" in the tribal structure referring to a particular tribe, for a notion where all of mankind is one single tribe deriving from Adam.<sup>16</sup>

The two most common terms used in the Qur'an in reference to particular groups among mankind are *qawn* and *ummah*. In Arabia, "*qawn*" is a tribal unit which can be loosely translated as clan. It is derived from "*qām*" which in its simplest form means "to stand". The Qur'an, while it continues its usage as a word related to kinship,<sup>17</sup> introduces a nuance to it by using it exclusively

<sup>14</sup>Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-ʿArab*, 2:319 for "*shu'ub*" and 3:12 for "*qabā'il*".

<sup>15</sup>For this tribal structure and a full treatment of the Arab social and political structure, see Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 20-25.

<sup>16</sup>For example, see Qur'an, 7:26, 27, 31, 35, 172; 17:70. Cf. Julian Obermann, who discusses the new, more universal, prophet-centered genealogy introduced by the Prophet Muhammad, which replaced the Arab isolationist genealogy, in "Early Islam," in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, gen. ed. Robert Claude Dentan (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 245-248, 290, 299, 303.

<sup>17</sup>The use of "*qawn*" as a kinship relational term is illustrated by some of the exegetes' explanation of how Jesus never addresses the Jews (*Banī Isra'īl*) as "my people" (*qawmi*) in the Qur'an, having no father among "his" people. A striking contrast occurs in (61:5-6) where Moses addresses his people as "my people" (*qawmi*) while Jesus calls on his audience as "children of Israel" (*Banī Isra'īl*). Mahmud b. 'Umar al-Zamakshari, *Al-Kashshaf 'an haqa'* footnotes (continued next page)

for communities to whom prophets have been sent and who may then accept or reject him. In this usage, extending the root meaning, it denotes a group which is offered some responsibility with the freedom to accept it (i.e., stand by it) or reject it.<sup>18</sup> But there is another more direct term used by the Qur'ān to underscore its universal message, and that is "ummah". It is a more cohesive and well-defined group than *qawm*. An "ummah" is a group which has a particular purpose (*qaṣd*) which differentiates it from other such groups. In the Qur'ān, it is used to refer to a people who have a single purpose around which they unite.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, both terms, "*qawm*" and "ummah", as used in the Qur'ān, are collective nouns connoting a sense of belonging and unity based on something other than the immediate tribal bond.

This panorama of humanity, where each group is the recipient of the Divine Message from God, is a ready map for historians to fill in. There are many empty spaces, but the outline is clearly drawn. However, the picture of the past in the Qur'ān is firmly anchored in a conception of the Divine principle in history, and a unique view of the future, both of which infuse a particular meaning into the past.

### c. The Meaning of the *Akhhbār*.

The focus of the Qur'ānic message on the Prophets of God pointed to the importance and value of man's reaction to them. This moral response is placed under two fundamental parameters. In the persons of the Prophets, God sustains and advances the cause of the moral against the immoral and amoral. Moreover, having placed man in this situation, God intervenes, alternately saving and destroying people for their particular responses.<sup>20</sup> This is a feature of the Abrahamic traditions, and renders history on earth fundamentally important.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the deeds and the events of history are

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iq qhawamid al-tanzil wa 'uyun al- 'aqawil fi wujuh al-ta'wīl, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1947), 4:525; Muhammad b. Ahmad al- Ansari al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi li al-Tiba'ah wa'l-Nashr, 1387/1967), 17:83.

<sup>18</sup>Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, 3:191-195. For some examples of the usage of *qawm* in the Qur'ān, see (2:164), (2:230), (2:264), (2:285), (6:47), (6:98), (6:144-147).

<sup>19</sup>Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, 1:102-103. In the Qur'ān, 2:134 and 143 indicate that "ummah" is a well-defined group while 2:213 and 6:38 describe it as a united and cohesive group. For a detailed study of the term which underlines its religious and ethical connotation, see Frederick M. Denny, "The meaning of ummah in the Qur'ān," *History of Religions* 15 (1975): 34-70.

<sup>20</sup>For a synoptical illustration of the moral frailty of man in response to the Prophets and Messengers of God, see the Qur'ān, (47:10-227).

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of meaningful time and history in the Abrahamic traditions in particular, cf. *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. "Sacred Time," by Barbara C. Sproul, and *History* by C. T. McIntire.

not simply happenings, they are religiously meaningful within the motif of God's Will: "Whoever God wills, He leads astray; and whoever He wills, he places on a straight path" (6:30); ". . . had it not been for the bounty of God, He would never have purified anyone." (24:21); and "God sets aside whoever He wills for His Mercy" (2:105) some of the numerous verses in the Qur'an which repeatedly feature God's "involvement" in history.<sup>22</sup>

The other component of Abrahamic historical consciousness is that of the ultimate destiny of humanity.<sup>23</sup> In the case of Islam, the ultimate destiny of humanity features in the fundamental Qur'anic emphases on the Day of Judgement and man's accountability to God on that day. This had far-reaching implications for the historical consciousness of pre-Islamic Arabia. The promises and threats that accompanied the notion of accountability on the Day of Judgement forced the individual to become acutely aware of his actions. In the case of history, actions in the past were relevant and "meaningful" since they implied serious consequences in the future.<sup>24</sup>

In this case, in contrast to the Will of God, the meaningfulness of the historical place rested ultimately on a future metaphysical plane. The relation between the historical and the eschatological is certain and indubitable. In contrast, there may not necessarily be a direct causal or other relational connection between deeds or actions in a linear historical plane. There is nothing in the Qur'an, though, to completely rule out the moral law of cause and effect in history. In fact, the Qur'an declares emphatically that a reflection on the actual human past may actually reveal moral lessons for the present.

Two related terms in the Qur'an emphasize the aspect of history as moral lessons. The past exhibits a constant pattern (sunnah) which contains a lesson (*ibrah*) for those who ponder over it. It is the Sunnah of God in the past, meaning His Path, Method, Way and Pattern. Since it is the Sunnah of God, it is immutable and constant, and based on the real nature of man and the real nature of the world, and it is ultimately contingent on the Will of God.<sup>25</sup> However, there are patterns which may be detected. The patterns found in

<sup>22</sup>The presence and involvement of a transcendental God in history is problematic for Islam. The Will of God in history, is, though, indubitable. For some of the numerous studies of Islam's historicity in terms of God's Will in History, cf. Laroui, *The Crisis*, pp. 21 ff.; cf. also, Rosenthal, *History*, pp. 24-25; Gustav Richter, "Medieval Arabic Historiography," *Islamic Culture* 33 (1959), p. 241; Fr. Gabrielli, "Arabic Historiography," *Islamic Studies* 18 (1979), p. 82; Tarif Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*, p. 63. Wilfred C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 11-16.

<sup>23</sup>*Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. "History," by C. T. McIntire.

<sup>24</sup>Rosenthal, *History*, pp. 23ff.

<sup>25</sup>Sunnah in the Qur'an has two referents; it is the "sunnah of the ancients" and "sunnah of those who came before" [(8:38, (15:13), 17:77), (18:55), (35:43)], and "sunnah of God" [(48:23), (35:43), (4:85)]. The following is a clear example where the two are tied together: "The sunnah of God with respect to those who came before" (33:38).



his-tory have both physical and metaphysical significance for the present. As such, the relevance of the past to the present is not historically relational in the sense that a number of preconditions necessitate, through some laws or generalities, that a certain situation would, and must, prevail. In historical terms, in fact, the good and virtuous person or persons may be put to extremes of hardship in the form of trials and persecutions, while those who commit evil may seem to prosper.<sup>26</sup> In this way, in contrast to God's eschatological promise, temporal life may not seem advantageous to the good and virtuous. However, sometimes even in this world, the good will be victorious in a total, even material, sense and evil will always be defeated.<sup>27</sup> Worldly success notwithstanding, history's real significance is found in eschatology; and this seems to be the *'ibrah* (lesson) of history. The outer appearance of the vicissitudes of history may not be exact, but are certainly a source of reflection, which may serve as a bridge over which one may cross (Arabic verb: *'abara*) over to the inner meaning:

“Surely, in their (Prophets') stories is a lesson (*'ibrah*) for those of understanding . . .”(12:111);

and, again with references to situations in the past,

“In this, there is a lesson (*'ibrah*) for those of understanding (or, for those who fear)” (3:13), (79:26).<sup>28</sup>

Hence, in spite of the fact that the sunnah is never clearly and absolutely known, the past can and must inform the individual of his moral presence in the present world.

<sup>26</sup>See the Qur'ān, for example: “Do you think you will enter Paradise without going through that which those before you went through? All kinds of afflictions struck them and they were shaken (to the extent) that the Messenger and those who believed with him cried: “When does the help of Allah (come)?” (2:214); and, “Do you think you will be left alone by saying you believe, and not be tempted and tested?” (29:2). On the other hand, with regard to the success and prosperity of the disbelievers, the Qur'ān says: “I (God) extend (*umli*) to them, but my plan is tight” (68:45); and, “Let not those who disbelieve think that the good we extend to them (*numli lahum*) is good for them; we only do so that they increase in error. They will have a disgracing punishment” (3:178).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 4:55; cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), pp. iv, 57-61; Isma'īl R. al Fārūqī, *Tawhīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Virginia, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1402/1982), pp. 40-45.

<sup>28</sup>In (3:13), the Qur'ān refers to the victory of the believers over a powerful enemy. On the other hand, (79:26) is related to the Pharaoh's arrogance toward Moses' message. Cf. “*'ibrah*” in Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 65-8.

A Qur'ānic example will illustrate this more clearly:

Have they not travelled in the land and seen what was the result of those who were before them? They were stronger than themselves in power, plowing the land and building upon it more than them, when the Messengers came to them with clear signs. Surely, God did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves(30:9).

In this example, the Qur'ān turns the attention of the reader to those who, in spite of their power, wealth and spirit of enterprise, were destroyed by God in both worldly and other-worldly terms. They rejected the signs of the Messengers sent to them, and thus brought about their own real destruction.

The past, then, holds a lesson (*ibrah*) for those who reflect on it. The material repercussions in history may be instructive, but the real meaning of events can be comprehended by considering the inevitable consequences of actions on the Day of Judgement.

The stories (*qaṣaṣ*) in the Qur'ān about the mission of the Prophets and earlier peoples are scattered throughout the chapters and are often repeated with different emphases. At every point, though, this particular sense of the past is maintained. The Will of God and the Day of Judgement form the backdrop against which individual human choices are made in history. In this way, the pre-Islamic Arab conception of the past is infused with new meaning and significance. Now, through the vision of the worldly and eschatological future, the present carries meaning for the future. For the pre-Islamic Arab, the present drew freely from the past to make itself meaningful. For the Muslim Arab, the imminent and distant future shed light on the past so that the latter could contribute to the present. In its turn, the present keeps its vision focused on the future.

The overall Qur'ānic message is, thus, that all men, created by God, originate from the same source, and have the same purpose to fulfill in the world. That purpose is made known very clearly through the agency of the Prophets sent by God. Throughout the history of the Prophets and their missions to humanity, the Will of God has been clearly manifested. Even though the extent to which the morality is realized may be witnessed in the world, it will definitely and decisively be evaluated in the Hereafter. This very religious view of history provided the framework for a new historical consciousness for the Arabs. The actual historiography, moreover, was firmly lodged in the *akhbār* within a divine epistemology. The past is and should be instructive, but from the human perspective, it is an area which is hazy and can only be accessed through the reports of eyewitnesses.

### 3. Early Islamic Historiography.

The foregoing discussion of the elements of a new “Qur’ānic” historiography does not mean that early Muslim historiography took on this shape. Due to the paucity or utter lack of extant works of early Islamic historiography, it is almost impossible to verify whether the early Muslims (1st/7th century) adopted these Qur’ānic suggestions for a new historiography. We have full and complete historical works only from the late 2nd and 3rd centuries A.H. (8th and 9th centuries A.C.), the historians in this period refer largely to their sources in the 2nd century A.H. (8th century A.C.)<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the following exposition of Islamic historiography from the 2nd century A.H. (8th century A.C.) will attempt to outline its basic elements, and where relevant, to point out its relation to the Qur’ānic view discussed above.

#### (A) From *Akhbār* to *Ta’rīkh*

The *akhbār* were implicitly endorsed by the Qur’ān and did not disappear; but one of the most significant events in the life of the Prophet became their central reference point. The emigration of the Prophet Muhammad from *Makkah* to *Madinah* was established by the Caliph ‘Umar as the dating reference for his administration. The event is known as *hijrah* and the calendar system goes by this name. The date itself or the act of assigning a date to a measure or event is called *Ta’rīkh*. Its first usage, according to Muslim scholars, was that of a specific time or date, and this usage can be traced back in a papyrus to the year 22 A.H. / 643 A.C.<sup>30</sup> The use of a fixed reference point was certainly adopted from Southern Arabia. However the selection of the *hijrah* as the reference and not any other, was a direct result of the historical consciousness of the Qur’ān. In reference to the Prophet’s *hijrah*, the Qur’ān says:

If you do not assist him, then God has certainly assisted him when those who disbelieved expelled him. He was the second of the two in the cave when he told his friend: “Do not grieve! God is with us!” Then God sent down His succor on him and aided him with troops you did not see, bringing low the word of those who disbelieved, and raising high, the word of God. And God is Mighty, Firm (9:40)

<sup>29</sup>R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History, a Framework for Inquiry*, Studies in Middle Eastern History—Number Nine (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988), pp. 74-75.

<sup>30</sup>Jalal ‘l-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Shamarikh fī ‘ilm al-ta’rīkh*, ed. by Chr. Fr. Seybold (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1894), pp. 4-5; Al-Kafijī, “al-Mukhtasar fī ‘ilm ‘l-ta’rīkh,” in *History*, ed. Rosenthal, p. 472; Rosenthal, *History*, p. 12.

The verse makes it unmistakably clear that Divine intervention was in favor of the Prophet Muhammad and his emigration. The establishment of the reference point was thus an expression of the historical and religious consciousness of the early Muslims.

Later Islamic historiography totally appropriated the term *Ta'rikh* by calling any collection of annalistically arranged reports about the past a *Ta'rikh*. The earliest instance of this has been traced to Haytham b. 'Adi (d.206-207 A.H./821-822 A.C.).<sup>31</sup> It does not seem mere convenience which prompted historians to call a book of history, a *Ta'rikh*. A closer look at the word *Ta'rikh* reveals a more significant explanation than the fact that a book dealing with history was simply considered to be full of dates (literally, *Ta'rikh*). According to Rosenthal, the form of the term is probably of South Arabian origin meaning "moon" or "month". Moreover, al-Sakhawi suggests that the rod is derived from "arkh" or "irkh" which means the young one of a wild cow. It denotes something new and by extension, it is related to an event or occurrence.<sup>32</sup> Hence, taking both these nuances of *Ta'rikh*, the term becomes more significant for it means both a specific date and a significant event associated therewith. It was thus clearly suited for the historical consciousness generated by the Qur'an, where each event in history was significant from a moral and religious perspective.

Nevertheless, historians did not immediately start dating their material. The use of exact dating in history has been found to be rare until the 3rd century A.H. 9th century A.C.<sup>33</sup> When dating did not take hold as a practice, however, it spread and was widely adopted. In fact, well before specific dating can be found to be standard practice, early scholars interested in the past were concerned about the chronological arrangement of the reports.<sup>34</sup> The idea of dating material as a logical growth of chronological arrangement was thus easily adopted in historiography.

Thus, the *akhbār* tradition of pre-Islamic Arabia was transformed into the *Ta'rikh*. The latter carried over some of the *akhbār's* essential characteristics but emphasized a greater concern for dating and chronology. Moreover, the

<sup>31</sup>Haytham was a Kufan known for his knowledge of *akhbār* and poetry. Three of his works have titles with *ta'rikh*: *Kitab Ta'rikh al-'ajam wa bani Umayyah* [The book of *ta'rikh* of the non-Arabs and the Umayyads], *Ta'rikh al-ashraf al-kabir* [The *ta'rikh* according to years]. Rosenthal, *History*, p. 65; Ishaq b. Ishaq al-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist*, ed. Gustav Flügel (Beirut: Maktabah Khayat, n.d.; reprint ed. posthumously published by J. Roedinger and August Mueller, 1871), pp. 99-100.

<sup>32</sup>Rosenthal, *History*, pp. 11-12; Al-Sakhawi, *Al-I'tan bi l-tawbikh li man dhamma l- ta'rikh*, ed. by Franz Rosenthal, in *History*, Rosenthal, p. 203.

<sup>33</sup>Rosenthal, *History*, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup>For the early concerns about chronology, see Duri, *Rise*, pp. 28, 111.

hijrah and the *Ta'rikh* underscored the distinctively Islamic character of the form and meaning of historiography.

The interest in the past in early Islamic history was cultivated by people with varying interests. *Duri* has distinguished two "schools" who then merged together to produce the great 9th-century historians like al-Baladhuri (d. 279 A.H./892 A.C.) and al-Mada'ini (d. 225 A.H./839 A.C.). Both used the pre-Islamic legacy of Arabia and both contributed to the growth and development of *Ta'rikh*.

## b. Madinah School of Historiography.

The momentous event in the memory of the early Muslims was the life of the Prophet. His prophetic venture was an overwhelming event in Arabia's history, and it was a compelling example of the Prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān. In terms of the meaningfulness of history, the early Muslims did not have to look any further for significant and pivotal moments in their past; moments which left no doubt in their minds that God has sustained His Messenger every step of the way. It is in this light that the life of the Prophet was the first subject matter of early Islamic historical recollection. However, the recording of the life of the Prophet was not just a reminiscence of the past; it was also a recollection, which was more firmly anchored in the desire to emulate the Prophet in his religious and moral behavior rather than a purely historical tradition. The life of the Prophet and by extension, the lives of his immediate followers, became a widespread subject matter among the early Muslims, but it was most vigorously pursued in *Madinah* by the followers of the companions (*tabi'ūn*). As time went on, the historical growth and development of the Islamic order steadily expanded this base by providing it with more diverse subjects.<sup>35</sup>

The interest in the life of the Prophet covered two aspects: (1) his exemplary character and life; and (2), the battles (*maghāzi*) in which he participated. The first came to be known as the *sīrah* which in its root meaning stands for a "path" or "structure".<sup>36</sup> The later technical usage came to mean the "path" or "structure" of a life (biography). In fact, *'al Sīrah*, as "the *Sīrah*", came

<sup>35</sup>Duri, *Rise*, pp. 152ff.

<sup>36</sup>The *Lisan al Arab* gives three meanings to "*sīrah*": (1) sunnah, in the sense of a path being followed; (2) *hay'ah*, meaning a form or structure; and (3), with the verb *sayyara* meaning "speaking about the past". All the meanings are derived from the word "*sara*" which means "to go," "to travel" and "to move." The first two meanings follow directly from the root verb. One of the meanings of "sunnah" is something which has been trodden upon or walked upon. Form *hay'ah* is a structured, regulated outline and hence carries the meaning of being moved over. The third meaning comes closest to the technical meaning of biography but is not restricted to it. Ibn Manzur, 2:252-3.

to be associated exclusively with the life of the Prophet. In this light, it would appear that the (*maghāzī*) would be included in the general framework of *sīrah*. This usage is, and has been interchangeable, but it seems that the *maghāzī*, being an echo of the *Ayyām* of the Arabs, was thought to be a distinctive element in the biography of the Prophet.<sup>37</sup>

There was in the society at the time, a corresponding interest in the battles and the life of the Prophet from a more popular and general interest. This was developed and cultivated by the storytellers (*quṣṣās*). The storyteller freely used elements from the (*maghāzī*), embellishing and changing them to suit his needs. This flowered into a kind of folklore which was distinct from the literature developed by the pious in Madinah.<sup>38</sup>

The Madinah school's presentation of the life of the Prophet and battles and raids was framed with an emphasis on the authority of the source material and a close scrutiny of the material and sources themselves.<sup>39</sup> The historiography of Madinah developed within the parameters of the broader religious and moral interest in the life of the Prophet, and the leading representatives of the school, 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr (d. 94 A.H./ 712 A.C.), Muhammad b. Shihāb al-din al-Zuhrī (d. 124 A.H./741 A.C.) and Māsa b. 'Uqbah (d. 141 A.H./ 758 A.C.), were as much hadith scholars as they were historians.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Even though the earliest extant biography of the Prophet, that of Muhammad b. Ishaq, is known simply as *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, Ibn Khallikan mentions that the book was first called *al-Maghāzī wa 'l-siyar*. Moreover, Muhammad b. 'Umar Al-Wāqidi, who wrote the famous *Kitab al-Maghāzī*, includes pilgrimages and other non-military material in it. Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Khallikan (d.681/1282), *Wafāyat al-a'yan wa anba' abna'al-zaman*, 8 vols., ed. by Ihsan 'Abbas (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafah, (1968-1972)), 4:276-277; *Kitab al-Maghāzī*, 3 vols., ed. by Marsden Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1:8.

<sup>38</sup>The story-tellers exercised their craft in all circumstances, from the battle-field to the mosque. Very early in Islamic history, religious movements (like the Kharijites) and political groupings (like the Umayyads) had their own story-tellers to serve their interests. Shawqi Dayf, *al-Fann wa madhāhibuh fī al-nathr al-'Arabi* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1965), pp. 74-75; Goldziher, *Studies*, 2:151-159; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., s.v. "Kissah," by D. B. Macdonald.

<sup>39</sup>Abd al-'Aziz al-Duri, "The 'Iraqi School of Historiography in the Ninth Century," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. B. Lewis and P.M. Holt, Historical Writing on the Peoples of Asia, v. 4 (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 46.

<sup>40</sup>'Urwah is a second generation Muslim scholar (*tabi'i*) who was among the first to take an interest in the biography of the Prophet. He taught the great al-Zuhri who distinguished himself as a hadith scholar with a particular interest in the biographical and historical aspects of the Prophet's life. Musa b. 'Uqbah wrote a book called *Maghāzī* from which historians as late as Ibn Kathir cite. *Ibn 'Uqbah is considered a trustworthy hadith authority who relied, among others, on 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr and al-Zuhrī. In addition, he is also regarded by some as the most accurate and authentic biographers of the Prophet. Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajr al-Asqalani (d.853/1449), Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1968; reprint ed., Hyderabad, 1325-27/1888-1890), 7:180ff, 10:361; Ibn Khallikan, *Wafāyat*, 3:255-258, 4:177-179; Duri, *Rise*, pp. 23, 25, 78, 91-92, 95.

Following the pre-Islamic form of oral narration as confirmed by the Qur'ānic view of the past, the form of a historical report in this school consisted of an *isnād* (chain of narrators) which sought to establish authenticity by tracing every report to an eyewitness through a series of connected, and reliable, secondary reporters. This was the ideal method of establishing the veracity of an event or statement. Often, however, scholars in the field of history departed from this method by collecting different reports supported by different *isnāds* from the primary source and combining it into one "collective *isnād*".<sup>44</sup> This was done primarily to produce a smooth narrative out of a number of disjointed reports. In this way, the first move was made to develop a continuous story. However, the more stringent method of verification was still upheld as an ideal.

The early *sīrah-maghāzī* authors were generally realistic and relatively free of gross exaggeration. But, this is less true of the later historians as they expanded their histories to include all the known historical and quasi-historical material. Muhammad b. Ishaq, the famous biographer of the Prophet, relied on Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 114 A.H. / 732 A.C.) for material about pre-Islamic Yemen and the stories of the Christians and Jews in the form of legendary and historically inaccurate anecdotes, called *isrā'iliyyāt*.<sup>42</sup> Though Ibn Munabbih was known to have been an unreliable authority in terms of accuracy, some historians took from him simply as a result of the paucity of more reliable authorities and information in these areas.<sup>43</sup> The Qur'ān's repeated reference to the past, and especially the previous Prophets, clearly suggested that knowledge of the peoples or civilizations who had appeared before Islam was important and could be informative and valuable. Following upon this, the historian was filling in the detail not included in the Qur'ān. The method of *isnād*, however, could not be extended to include the vast range covered in the Qur'ān, and this left the historian with no choice but to report what he had heard and leave it in the security of the *isnād*. He could simply say that this was what he had heard.

The Madinah school of historiography was, then, the Islamic response to the problems of historical recollection. They used the basic framework of the *khābar* to carry the information about the past but supported it with an elementary form of *isnād* to connect the past to the present. The primary purpose seems to have been to expound and transmit the religious and historical significance of the life of the Prophet. The historical tradition grew out of the religious concerns, and the historians considered it their moral obligation to keep the memory of the Prophet alive. From this initial point, it grew

<sup>41</sup>Duri, *Rise*, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed., s.v. "Isrā'iliyyāt," by G. Vajda.

<sup>43</sup>Duri, *Rise*, p. 157.

and flowered by drawing upon the historical dimensions of the Qur'ān and the Arab milieu which it had inherited.

### c. The Iraqi School of Historiography.

More so than the Madinans, the champions of this school continued the use of the tribal form of historical recollection and dissemination. The *akhbār* continued to be passed along the generations. The conquering Muslim armies in Iraq were composed of tribes who were encouraged to settle in the garrison towns (*amsār*) of Basrah and Kufah where they continued their tribal legacies. In fact, they added and enriched the tribal *akhbār* with the new experiences during the conquests. No doubt, they were also influenced by the Islamic demands made by the Madinah scholars, and slowly adopted their methods. But the Iraqis, in their turn, influenced developments in Madinah.

The champions of the Iraqi school of historiography were the well-informed *rāwīs*, or *akhbārīs* as they later came to be known.<sup>44</sup> These "narrators" of the *akhbār* were not exclusively interested in the past as such. Rather, they had broader interests ranging from a knowledge of the *akhbār* and genealogies to poetry and philology. 'Awanah b. al-Hakm (d.147 A.H./764 A.C.), one of the earlier *akhbārīs*, had a special interest in poetry and genealogy, while Abu Mikhnāf (d. 157 A.H./774 A.C.) was a well-known genealogist representing the interests of the Azd tribe in his reports.<sup>45</sup>

The various disciplines mastered by the *akhbārī* were interconnected though they sometimes fulfilled particular functions in society. Each discipline expressed tribal identity in terms of its language (philology and poetry), descent and status (genealogy) and history *akhbār*. Poetry sometimes drew from the *akhbār* for its subject matter. Genealogy's chief importance lay in its procuring for the tribe the esteem and status in relation to other tribes and the arsenal with which to attach and to insult other lesser tribes. As the tribal advocate, the *akhbārī* used the information supplied by genealogy.<sup>46</sup>

Having settled down in the garrison towns, the tribes established new alliances both among themselves and the conquered people. Each of the tribes

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<sup>44</sup>The *rāwī* was basically an oral narrator of the *akhbār*, who acquired the name of *akhbārī*. Even though the oral nature of his vocation was never completely lost, the *akhbārī* was basically a *rāwī* who put down the reports in writing. The earliest known person to have put down some poetry and *akhbār* into writing was Daghfal b. Hanzalah al-Sadūsī (d.70/690). This trend was later accelerated by the introduction of paper on a mass scale through the paper factory set up in Baghdad in 178/795. Duri, *Iraqi School*, p. 47; Gibb, *Studies*, p. 115; Shawqi Dayf, *al-Asr al-Islamī*, Ta'rikh al-adab al-Islamī, no. 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1963), p. 451.

<sup>45</sup>Duri, *Rise*, pp. 43 ff. passim., 48.

<sup>46</sup>Petersen, 'Ali and Mu 'awiyah, pp. 45ff.; Duri, *The 'Iraqi School*, p. 51.



had contributed to the great conquests, and they were determined to jealously guard their new-found prestige and fame. The exploits of the individuals who had excelled in these conquests became the focus of cherished anecdotes and accounts of the tribe.<sup>47</sup> The *akhbārī* responded to the new challenges on behalf of their tribes. Furthermore, a renewed interest in genealogy and hence, past events, was facilitated by the system of allotting land (*aṭā'*) to the tribes in the garrison towns according to tribal affiliation. Disputes about land distribution always required a knowledge of genealogy and the versatile *akhbārī* could provide that information.<sup>48</sup>

The *akhbārīs* were thus strongly linked to the tribal network of the garrison towns. As the old alliances were transformed under the influence of the new political and religious situations, the *akhbārīs* followed suit. Abu Mikhnaf, for example, was partial to his own Azd tribe, but on the new political front, he was a supporter of *ʿAlī* against the Umayyads. But all the Iraqis were not pro-*ʿAlids*. We find a prominent person like ʿAwanah b. al-Hakm to be an open supporter of the Ummayyads.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, the *Madinans* tried to maintain a relatively non-partisan stand in the political conflicts that took place between the Umayyad dynasty and the contending supporters of *ʿAlī* in Kufah and Basrah.<sup>50</sup>

#### d. Common Ground between the Two Schools—The Foundation of the *Taʿrīkh*.

The *akhbārīs* in Iraq and the hadith scholars in Madinah did not cultivate their interests in the past without being mutually affected. In fact, the interest in the life of the Prophet and the early Muslim community (i.e. the companions of the Prophet) was a common theme in both schools. The events in this period, ranging from the Prophet's alliances and battles with the tribes to the conquests and the conflicts during the early caliphate, were set within a political milieu which had a definite tribal character. Hence, the religious unfolding of Islam is inseparable from the politico-tribal alliances of Arabia, and this is reflected in the historical literature.

The interest in the life of the Prophet is most striking among the Madinah

<sup>47</sup>Duri, *Rise*, pp. 42, 153ff.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>49</sup>Duri, *Rise*, p. 43; Petersen, *ʿAlī and Mu ʿawiyah*, p. 32.

<sup>50</sup>The Madinan silence and apparent neutrality has been interpreted as a tacit approval of the Umayyads. Petersen says that al-Zuhrī, for example, compromised his principles for the Umayyads (especially the first of them, Mu ʿawiyah). Duri, on the other hand, maintains that the evidence available does not support such a conclusion, and insists on the neutrality of the Madinans. Duri, *Rise*, p. 119; Petersen, *ʿAlī and Mu ʿawiyah*, p. 51.

scholars. It seems though, that more than the biography of the Prophet, the two schools shared a marked common interest in the period of the caliphate. In the 2nd century A.H. (8th century A.C.), the numerous *kutub* (monographs) proliferating in Iraq cover the *akhbār* of all the major events during the early caliphate. For example, Abu Mikhnaf (d. 157 A.H./774 A.C.) was credited with writing monographs on the *Riddah* (or Apostate wars), *Ṣiffīn* and the *kharijites*.<sup>51</sup> In a similar manner, the Madinans naturally extended their interest in the life of the Prophet into the early caliphate.<sup>52</sup>

Later scholars interested in history borrowed freely from both schools and were influenced by trends in them. Al Madā'īnī, still very much of the *akhbārī*, consulted the books of *sīrah* from the school in Madinah, the "books" (*kutub*) of the earlier *akhbaris* and other genealogical and philological works, to compose his writings. In fact, Duri considers al-Mada'ini to be a historian who represents the best of both schools. Even the work of Muhammad b. Ishaq is a combination of the elements from the tribal and Madinan literature.<sup>53</sup>

The work of the later scholars reflected the extensive range of Islamic historiography. For example, 'Abu 'Ubaydah (d. 211 A.H./826 A.C.), a philologist, took a keen interest in Persian affairs and Hisham b. Muhammad al-Kalbi (d. approx. 203-205A.H./819-820 A.C.), a genealogist, directed his attention to biblical history.<sup>54</sup> The *Fihrist* of al-Nadīm attributes a work entitled *Kitāb al-Muluk wa Akhbār al-Māḍīn* (*The Book of Kings and the Reports of the People of the Past*) to 'Abid b. Sharyah.<sup>55</sup> But the most striking example of this extensive range is Muhammad b. Ishaq's biography of the Prophet. The *Sīrah* is divided in three parts: the *mubtada'* (the beginning from Adam to the first revelation of Muhammad), the *mab'ath* (the call) and the *maghāzī*. It not only denotes a wide and extensive scope of his work, but also covers all the known past, as Ibn Ishaq knew it, and it seems to be set within the holistic framework suggested by the Qur'ān. Hence, the individual events of the *akhbār* were not told in isolation of the whole vision of the past. The

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<sup>51</sup>The *Fihrist* of al-Nadim lists numerous titles of monographs written by these *akhbārīs*, some of which are given here: Ma 'mar b. Rashīd (d. 152/769) (*al-Maghāzī*) [Raids]; Sayf b. 'Umar d. (199/815) (*Kitāb al-futuh al-kabīr*) [The Large Book of the Conquests], (*al-Riddah*) [The Apostate Wars]; and, Nasr b. Mazāhim (d. 213/827) (*Siffīn*), (*Jamal*), (*Maqal Husayn b. Ali*) [The Murder of Husayn b. 'Ali]. Al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, pp. 91-93.

<sup>52</sup>Urwah ibn al-Zubayr and al-Zuhri wrote at least on the *riddah* and aspects of the Prophet. Duri, *Rise*, pp. 28, 89, 99.

<sup>53</sup>Duri, *Rise*, pp. 40, 43, 48, 61, 152ff.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 52ff.

<sup>55</sup>'Abid was supposedly a Yemenite contemporary of the Prophet but not his companions. He lived reportedly through the reign of Mu 'awiyah, to who he related the stories and legends of Yemen. Duri, *Rise*, 32; Fārūqī, Nisar Ahmad, *Early Muslim Historiography* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, 1979), pp. 87-88; al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, pp. 89.

same thing can be said of the title of Haytham b. 'Adi's book *Kitāb al-ta'rikh alā al-sinīn* (The Book of *Ta'rikh* According to Years), which uses an annalistic ordering and appears to achieve the same scope in breadth and vision.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, centered in the biography of the Prophet, flowering in the events related to the companions and sweeping through all of time, the *ta'rikh* came to represent Islamic historiography. It was a collection of dated and chronologically arranged *akhbār* which were significant and meaningful. In early Islamic historiography, though, the meaningfulness and significance was most pronounced in the biography of the Prophet, and as a result thereof, in the events in the life of his companions.

## Conclusion

The Arabian Peninsula bequeathed a historical legacy expressed in the *akhbār*. The Muslim historians used this medium to express their new historical interests. Some historians, mainly in Madinah, adopted only the form while others, in Iraq, continued the *akhbār* in its totality. Even though the *akhbār* as a form of historical recollection was confirmed by the Qur'ān, it was given a new meaning within the belief-system of the Qur'ān. Under the effects of the religious impact of the Qur'ān and the new historical circumstances, the *akhbār* changed and took on an entirely new function in the major regions of historical work conducted by the early Muslims. Organized in Islamic culture as *Ta'rikh*, the *akhbār* expressed the holism of the Qur'ānic view of history, and underlined the meaningfulness of the past.

The biography of the Prophet was the most significant occurrence in the history of early Islam, and received extensive attention. It was the moral and religious elements in the biography of the Prophet which prompted an interest in the past. From this initial point onward, the vision of the past expressed in the Qur'ān was appropriated by Muslim historians in varying degrees.

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<sup>56</sup>Rosenthal, *History*, p. 65.