

Arab History Writing: A Study of Methodology

*Dr. G. N. Khaki**

i) What is *Tārīkh*?

The origin of the word *Tārīkh* which is now generally used for history, is very difficult to trace.¹ Though its roots form, came to be used in Yaman in the pre-Islamic days, yet in all probability it referred to time, not to history.² Although the earlier meaning of the word *Tārīkh* is obscure yet some of the earlier writers in Muslim times have used the term *akhbār* for history.³ The word *Tārīkh* so commonly used for 'history' is derived from the root *arkh* which means recording the time of an event, and as such *tārīkh* is actually the 'time when a particular even took place.'⁴ Thus the word *Tārīkh* is used more often in the meaning of a date⁵ than of history.⁶ According to Ibn Khaldun history refers to events that are peculiar to a particular age or race.⁷ He defines history in terms of a cyclic motion (with a slight but continuous forward movement) of growth and decay within the various forms of human associations.⁸

To the classical Arabic historiographers, it is knowledge pertaining to a country,

*Senior Lecturer (Islamic Studies), Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

customs and manners of people, remains of the people of yore as well as an account of the actions of those alive.⁹ Thus history as a science traces the rise and development of civilisations.¹⁰ Al-Kafiyaji in his *Al-Mukhtasar fi 'Ilm al-Tārīkh* defines *Tārīkh* as:

لتاريخ في اللغة هو تعريف الوقت و في العرف والاصطلاح هو تعيين وقت ينسب إليه زمان مطلقاً
سواء كان قديمضياً او كان حاضراً او سيأتي¹¹

“Linguistically, *tarikh* is the indication of time. In the customary usage and as a technical term, *tarikh* is the general fixation of time, for the purpose of relating to it a time-section, either of the past, the present or the future.”

According to Abd al-Rahman al-Sakhwai:

“*Tārīkh* is the indication of time that serves for an accurate establishment of circumstances affecting transmitters of traditions and religious leaders. It indicates the dates of their birth and death, their soundness of mind and body, their travels and pilgrimages, their accuracy and knowledge of traditions the degree of reliability and unreliability ascribed to them and similar matters.”¹²

Further more he says that:

“Important events and occurrences are also added to it. Such events are the appearance of a religion. The imposition of new (religious) duties, events concerning caliphs and wazirs, raids, battles and wars, conquests of countries and change of dynasties.”¹³

Thus historiography (history) is a branch of learning which investigates time-sections and the circumstances prevailing in them, as well as the circumstances which

are connected with those time- sections with a view to their fixation as to time.

واما علم التاريخ فهو علم يبحث فيه عن الزمان احواله وعن احوال ما يتعلق به من
حيث تعين ذلك و توقفة¹⁴

Al-Maqrizi defines the object of historiography as giving information about what once took place in the world.¹⁵

ii) **Muslim Attitudes Towards History**

The Arabs of course had only a little concept of history before the advent of Islam. They had a few stories of what they had considered to have been important or interesting events and vague, probably untrue legends of the people who had inhabited the old ruins that were scattered in some parts of the peninsula. They lacked even a proper epic, and were a people with no consciousness of history. The Muslims, therefore, says I.H. Qureshi, could not have drawn any inspiration for the development of a tradition of historiography from the pre-Islamic Arabs.¹⁶ It is, therefore more likely that the Arabs developed a sense of history both as a result of Prophet Muhammad's (صلى الله عليه وسلم) mission and the revealed verses of the holy Qur'an. The Muslim historians own views regarding the meaning of history are implied in their works and spelled out in the methodological writings just mentioned. They were convinced that history was the chosen instrument of God for the gradual development of mankind and for man's preparation for the final reckoning at the inevitable end of the world. The coming of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was viewed as the great turning point of world history at which for the first time the purpose of history revealed itself clearly and history became a comprehensible reality.¹⁷ Thus to Muslim historians history does not mean the history of kings and their kingdoms. It is rather the story of nations which include kings. History describes the character and behaviour of different people. It records the extent of their intellect, wisdom and other accomplishments. It depicts the

phenomena of collective rise and fall of communities. It reports the causes and reasons of the rise and fall that appear again and again.

Ibn Khaldun vehemently says:

فالماضى اشبه بالآتى من الماء بالماء¹⁸

“The past is more similar to the present than water is to water”

According to him the study of history demands depth of knowledge and breadth of vision which enables one to understand causes and effects. He asserts:

فهو التاريخ لذلك اصيل فى الحكمة عريق و جديد بان يعد فى علو مهمما و خليق¹⁹

“Hence it (History) is solidly rooted in philosophy and is quite worthy of being treated as one of its departments.”

The Muslim paid their attention towards this branch of knowledge just to obtain the pleasure of Allah.

واما غاية علم التاريخ فالترجى لرضاء الله²⁰

The Qur'an stresses the need of historical knowledge as a moral exhortation to the faithful, when it says:

أولم يسيروا فى الأرض فينظروا كيف كان عاقبة الذين كانوا من قبلهم²¹

كانوا هم أشد منهم قوة وء اثارا فى الأرض فأخذهم الله بذنوبهم وما كان لهم من الله من واق²¹

“Have they not travelled in the land to see the nature of the consequences for those who disbelieved before them? They were mightier than these in power and (in the) traces (which they) left behind them in the earth, yet Allah seized them for their sins and they had no protector from Allah”

Muslim commentators, in general are of the view that 'to travel on earth' was a substitute for a formal study of history, because the historical accounts of that period were extinguished and the only way to acquaint oneself with their history was to see their ruins.²²

The holy Qur'an interprets history neither a constantly moving equilibrium between self developing spiritual forces nor as a constant clash between economic classes but as a perpetual tussle between the forces of good and evil.²³ This is a theme to which the Quran frequently refers and quotes instances from history, both the past and contemporary. In fact the view point of Muslim historians is influenced by the holy Qur'an. The Qur'an asks the human beings time and again to go through the world with open eyes and diligent hearts.²⁴ The Qur'anic way of referring to ancient people and their civilisations and of exhorting the faithful to learn a lesson from their history, clearly show that Islam is a religion essentially history-conscious.²⁵

From the life of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) we also gather sufficient evidence that he was well informed about the life and teachings of the Prophets who preceded him.²⁶ Description of various Prophets is found in the Qur'an.²⁷ Therefore, the idea of the continuity of Prophethood, as presented in the Qur'an had to be elaborated by the early commentators and *Sirah* writers, which led to the realization of the importance of history in general. Thus, those who collected and compiled historical data during the early Islamic period, belonged to the religious elite i.e. Jurists and *Muhaddithū*.²⁸

iii) Concept of history in the Qur'an

From the historical point of view the holy Qur'an is the first and most authentic available source of the history of Islam. It covers various events of the life of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), accounts of the battles fought by him and the circumstances in which certain commandments of Allah were revealed unto him. Revelation of the holy Qur'an on to the Prophet directly, references to all major developments in the early

period of Islam and the process of its preservation add to the historical importance of the Qur'an.

A remarkable testimony to the historical sciences of the Muslim is, besides the collection of Hadith, their efforts in preserving the text of the Qur'an. It really arose from two of the teachings of the Book itself. The first of these is the doctrine of the corruption of the previous scriptures through changes or interpretations. The other is the promise that the Qur'an shall be preserved.²⁹ Thus, the historiography in the Muslim world had religious beginnings. Though the verses of the holy Qur'an exercised a great influence on the early historical writings. Yet the text of the Qur'an was itself preserved by the Muslims which demonstrates their historical sense. Besides other sources, the religion of Islam itself (Al-Qur'an) had an ever lasting influence on the development of Muslim historiography. It gave the Muslims their historical sense and made it imperative for the Muslim theologians to undertake historical research and to lay down canons of evaluating historical data for eliminating doubts and errors. It led them to explore the traditions of religions allied to their own which had preceded the mission of the Prophet in point of time. Indeed, historical studies started in Islam as a necessary adjunct of theological development.³⁰ It was therefore, necessary for the Muslims to cultivate a religious attitude towards history which could not be discarded easily. It was because of this fact that various verses of holy Qur'an were interpreted in historical perspective and were given a historical colour. Even most of the verses of the text were explained by other verses of the Qur'an to depict their reliability. Abu Ja'far al-Tabari while presenting the verses of holy Qur'an in historical prospective has followed the same path.

Besides, providing a description of various races, dynasties, civilisations and people of yore holy Qur'an refers to the history of prophethood describing some of the important prophets prior to the advent of Islam. It also refers to the life of the Prophet in its various phases. Muslim historiographers and *Sīrah* writers after giving a description

of the conquest of Mecca, describe the events relating to the last pilgrimage of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), the year of Deputation that came to him, the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه وسلم) illness and his death, references to all such events especially the *sirah* of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) are available in the verses of the holy Qur'an.³¹ The Qur'an also describes the social evils present in the Arabian society during the advent of Islam. All such events when pieced together form a major component of Muslim historiography. The works of major Muslim historiographers including al-Tabari and Ibn Ishaq as such can be fully authenticated by the Qur'an in almost all aspects. The truth is that with the thoughtful study of the holy Qur'an, a particular world view takes place giving birth to a particular behaviour. Study of the Qur'an brings us to the conclusion that the fountain head of several sciences and disciplines is the Book itself and history is one of them.³²

II) Muslim attitude towards the early historical material:

(i) **Poetry:** Though there is no clear outline of Arabic history before the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه وسلم) advent, yet the literature which is available to us gives very distinct information about the level of the culture of the Arabs, their intellectual interests and their social life in the pre-Islamic times.³³ This literature consists almost exclusively of high developed and artistically modelled poetry.³⁴

During the pre-Islamic days Arabs were not aware of the art of historiography in its strict sense. Such consciousness, as a matter of fact, was, to have been developed during the third century of Hijrah. Instead, they took for historical material their folk literature, poetry, tribal legends, Biblical myths and the like. The Arabs, unlike ancient Greeks who are known for their mythological conceptions, had a historical sense and possessed a sharp memory. In pre-Islamic Arabia the historical sense of the Arabs existed in its rudimentary form and confined itself to tribal life and inter-tribal feuds. Poetry served merely as the means of the descriptions of the battles, personal feuds and

tribal glorifications.³⁵ Tribal pride which was the main spring of pre-Islamic Arab activities contribute chiefly to the development of genealogical tables. However, it was not the historian to whom we owe the first records of the Arabic past but the imagination of the poet, who inspired by the valient deeds of his tribe in the past and swelled with pride at the thought of the exploits of his ancestors or relatives, gave expression to these feelings in his poetry. Thus ancient Arabic poetry may be regarded as the first attempt at preserving the memory of the past events.³⁶ The political descriptions of battles and feuds and the genealogical tables of the tribes served as the basis of historical memory of the Arabs which later on developed into a full fledged science.³⁷ The advent of Islam systematised the whole structure of Arab poetry to produce the glorifying results. In early Islamic days poetry was regarded by traditionists as an integral component of history in view of the fact that early Arab poetry gave a sound description of the characteristics and silent features of the Arabs. The transmitters of poetry and genealogists co-operated in compiling of historical material and poetry. Thus gained a significant position in the field of historiography a source of cultural and intellectual activities of the Arabs. It become a subject of research with regard to its composers, persons referred to therein and dialects of various tribes and their regions.³⁸ So at times poetry was the tribal method of recording history and the earlier historians cite verses in illustration of the chief events.

Almost all traditionists of the early Islamic period held poetry as an essential part of history, because of the fact that *jāhiliyya* poetry mirrored the characteristic qualities and silent features of the Arabs.

ii) **Ayyām al-Arab:** The term *Ayyām al-Arab* literary means the 'days of the Arabs' is used for the tales which the Arab told of their wars and raids in pre-Islamic days. They continued narrations of war between rival tribes like the war of Basus, Dahis, al-Ghabra etc.³⁹ The endless inter-tribal warfare, the blood fudes, often protracted into decades and the raids upon hostile tribes for the sake of booty formed

the material for these 'ayyam-tales'. These ayyam tales were passed on from mouth to mouth and generation to generation. In fact it was incumbent upon every member of a tribe to know, remember and transmit the personal qualities and adventures of their former chiefs and tribesmen. This developed into a sort of cultural heritage for the tribes and was part of their tribal tradition.⁴⁰ These tales were for long narrated in informal get-together or tribal assemblies until the ummayyad court engaged them as professional artists. Abid b. Sharya' was one such narrator of tribal tales who did also compiled book entitled *Kitāb al-Muluk wa Akhbār al-Madin* for caliph Mu'awaiyah bi Abi Sūfyan. These *ayyām tales* were often interwoven with poetical verses which were composed by the tribe poet.⁴¹ These verses either occur at the end of the tale or the tale is attached to the political verse in the form of prose as explanatory notes. The political verses added to the preserverence of the *ayyām tales* as verses are easily learnt by heart even though literal alterations through successive generations cannot be ruled out.

The events related in the *ayyām al-Arab* are mostly the same as those to which the poets refer in their odes. However, whereas the poet only hints at the happenings, the narrator of the *ayyām-tale* means to tell the story in full. He tries to set it before his hearer in its chronological order, he explains the reasons for the 'battles' and even attempts to judge impartially the respective merits of the contesting parties. By and by, in the gradual development of the *ayyām al-Arab* from actual reports to their crystallisation into a literary form, a certain style developed to which the narrator had to confirm. It was of the utmost importance for the development of the style of historiography in Islamic times.

These *ayyām tales* may not be regarded as history in the strict sense of the word as their composers had very little historical sense and because of the fact their trustworthiness can be questioned in recording the details of a battle of and the role of those who participated in them, yet their significance as a source of Muslim historiography cannot be undermined, as they narrate the religio-political as well as

socio-cultural heritage (being the main components of historiography) of a particular tribe.

There is no indication that in pre-Islamic times historical consciousness even progressed. So far that an attempt was made to bring those materials into some kind of historical sequence. As such, the battle-day narratives could not have developed into or given an impetus to, the development of a historical literature, although their technique and their form were to play an important role in Muslim historiography.⁴² The beginning of history among the Arabs go back to the time of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and earlier, when famous story tellers or authorities on Arab tradition flourished and left their names at least, if not their works to subsequent generations. Such were al-Nadr b. al-Harith, who knew the heroic sages of the Persians and was killed after the battle of Badr. Nawfal al-Zuhri was commissioned by the caliph 'Umar to make lists and a register of the Arab tribes.⁴³ Abu 'Ubaidah had compiled two books containing the *ayyām tales*.⁴⁴ Thus, the scholars of first century A.H., have utilized the *ayyām tales* for historical purposes. We find in early traditions, names of many persons who were regarded as scholars of *ayyām*, *ansāb* and *akhbār* of the *jāhilliya* period. So during the century immediately preceding Islam, knowledge of *ayyām* was a specialized field of study, so much so that *maghāzi* and *ayyām* became the two branches of history. According to Haji Khalifah, knowledge of the battle days of the Arab should be taken as a branch out of many branches of history.

iii) Genealogy: The interest in scientific knowledge found its expression in the researches to the antiquities of the Arabs. Some particulars of this branch of investigation were produced by the commentaries on ancient poetry, systematically. However, they were developed in the historical studies. These studies extended not only to the stories *akhbār*, customs and institutions of Arab antiquity. One of the most important element was the researches into and the knowledge of the genealogical conditions *ilm al-ansāb* as one of the chief interests of ancient Arabian society.⁴⁵

Pre-Islamic Arabs took a keen interest in genealogy and in major events affecting tribal politics.⁴⁶ The earliest Arabian society of the Nomad's and Bedouins were organised in tribes.⁴⁷ Though this society could not be considered as a body politic, yet the tribes were aware of their historical connotation, of their past, their relationship with one another and their descent from the common ancestors of their race.⁴⁸ This historical sense found expression in their deep interest for the inter-relation of the tribes which later developed into the science of genealogy. The faithfulness with which the traditions about their ancestors and the members of their family and tribes were preserved show how keen this sense was. These tribal traditions were passed on orally from generation to generation and were in this manner, preserved for many centuries. They were written down only at a very late date and are considered the main source for the knowledge of pre-Islamic Arabic history.

The pre-Islamic Arabs generally kept verbal records which on some occasions were even publicly recited. The practice of maintaining genealogies was kept under Islam as well and many non-Arab families seem to have adopted the habit. The main features of these genealogies were fairly well known even outside the group of those to whom a genealogy belonged and any fraud was soon countered.⁴⁹ In this sphere of investigation, the greatest fame was acquired by Muhammad ibn al-Kalbi (died in 146/763) and still more his son, Hisham ibn Muhammad ibn al-Kalbi (died in 204/819).⁵⁰ They, especially the son, very assiduously collected all that could still be learned in their time of the conditions, genealogy and religion of the ancient Arabs, their works, however, have been lost and are only known from the quotations of later authors. In all matters of Arab antiquity particularly in genealogy the name of Hisham al-Kalabi stood high as that of great authority.⁵¹ His *Kitāb an-Nasab al-Kabīr* (Great Book of genealogy) dealt with the whole subject extensively and pointed the way of later works. Such as the *Kitāb al-Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, (Book of the Genealogies of the Nobles) of al-Baladhur. Urwah al-Zuhri (670-740) is also said to have written a work on "The

genealogy of his People.”

Since the honour of a family was dependent upon the achievements of its ancestors, it was considered necessary to have genealogical information about one's tribe. Despite the fact, holy Qur'an declared in most unequivocal terms that nobility was dependent upon pioussness, the interest in genealogy continued to increase while the first caliph Abu Bakr has considerable expertise in the genealogy of the Quraish and other tribes of Hijaz, the second caliph Hazrat 'Umar introduced the institution of 'Diwān' in this context.⁵² The establishment of the *Diwān* by 'Umar necessitated the study of the people and their deeds. In the pre-Islamic period genealogical tables were remembered by heart but in the Islamic state the idea of recording those tables was adopted early. Thus an interest in recording the genealogical lists was developed in Muslims which widened their historical sense. During the first century of Hijrah, however, genealogy was mostly practised orally and written works appeared during the Umayyad period. Most of the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers provided state patronage to encourage researches in this branch of knowledge just to prove their own blue blood and purity of race.⁵³ The differences between the Arabs and the *Shu'ubiyya* movement also added to the development of the science of genealogy as both pro-Arab and anti-Arab lobbies needed genealogical details to prove or condemn the nobility of each other.

The early Arab way of remembering their tribal origin had little to do with real history when the Muslims took up historiography, genealogies proved helpful in understanding the part played by the Arab tribes in Islamic history. With the growing participation of the non-Arab Muslims in the affairs of the Islamic world the genealogical pattern came to be discarded in the greater part of the Muslim world.⁵⁴ The origin of the genealogical works like Zubair bin Bakkar's *Nasab u-Quraish* was the exaltation of the Quraish. This was feasible because the ruling dynasties of the Ummayyads and the Abbasids were alike Quraish. Baladhuris, *Ansāb ul-Ashrāf*

(Genealogies of the Noblemen) is the classical example of history being dealt with from the angle of genealogy. Thus on a large scale, genealogy influenced historical writing in the *Ansāb* work of al-Baladhuri whose contents were explained by later historians such as Ibn al-Athir, in his *al-Kāmil*.⁵⁵ Baladhuri's work is based on the ancient conception that the tribal unit is the backbone of Arabian society. Therefore, Islamic history is, in this work, conceived as the history of the noble families and their members. As such the book is neither arranged chronologically, nor does it present historical events in sequence; it rather tells them in connection with the biographies of the principal actors and since these belong to different families, they are treated in different parts of the work.

The most important factor that has led to the development of genealogy as an independent subject in the early Islamic period was the desire and necessity of the traditionists and the *sīrah* writers to know the genealogy of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and that of various narrators of *Hadīth*. Thus Islam added a new dimension to the study of genealogy. The science of genealogy was approved by the Qur'an as a source of knowledge when it says, "Verily we created you in tribes and so that you may recognise each other."⁵⁶ The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) had also shown his interest in genealogical knowledge. According to Ibn Sa'd, the Prophet once informed Uqba b-Amir-al-Juhani of the latter's genealogy.⁵⁷ Thus, the advent of Islam was such a favourable circumstance which permitted genealogy to activate its historical potentials. The interest in genealogy increased when Muslim historiography came into being.

III) Basic forms of Muslim Historiography:

i) **Maghāzi:** From the early Islamic period to the Abbasid regime Muslim historians have the credit of introducing new methods and techniques to bring accuracy in their historical works. Among the various forms and techniques, *Isnād*, *Khabar* etc. were utilized and were introduced first by Muslim elites. Even among the civilised

nations, these methods were unknown. Historical materials related to Prophet's various phases of life were eagerly collected and compiled. *Maghāzi* was one among them.⁵⁸ Though initially there was no differences between a *Maghāzi* writer and a traditionist, yet, afterwards they became independent writers of their individual subjects. As such the basic forms introduced by Muslims gave a new dimension to the Muslim historiography. *Maghazi* was concerned with the battles fought by the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

The battles fought by the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) with the exception of the 'Battle of Ditch' did not differ from bedouin warfare in the pre-Islamic times in essential respects.⁵⁹ These were still characterised mainly by raids and skirmishes in which the courage of the individual was still of the utmost importance. It was, therefore, easy to speak of that raids in the same manner as did the bedouin of pre-Islamic days. This description of the battles fought by the Prophet is known as *Maghāzi*.

The word *Maghāzi* expanded in its meaning and it was used for all topics concerning the *sīrah* or biography of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). It did also include the character of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) his day to day life, convictions and behaviour. The only distinction apart from the term *Maghāzi* (raids) which came to mean raids of the Prophet par excellence— was that the *Maghāzi* were undertaken for the sake of Allah.

The holy Qur'an not only influenced the *Maghāzi* writings but gave a new shape to it its domain. Its influence was very sharp on the Arab *Maghāzi* writers. Instead of tribal feuds which were like storms in a stagnant pool and which only served to swell tribal vanities. *Maghāzi* writers had now to record wars with a changing meaning and significance, wars which destroyed the old and created the new world and the cities became the social centres of the new civilization that was spreading on all sides. The *Maghāzi* narratives present a chronological sequence of expeditions launched by the Prophet were transmitted on the pattern of *Hadīth* supported by chains of authority and

thus were of considerable historical significance. The *Maghāzi* narratives were full of historical literature and mostly free from tribal partitionism and favouritism and thus *Maghāzi* narratives distinctly differed from those of the *ayyām tales*.⁶⁰ The transmitters of the *Maghāzi* were the companions of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) as such the biographical accounts of most of them are available to us as a source of historical literature.

Some of the *Maghāzi* writers have been Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, Ma'mar b Rashid, Muhammad b Ishaq, Musa bin 'Uqba.⁶¹ However, the fundamental work of the *Maghāzi* literature has come to us through Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Waqidi's work *Kitab al-Maghāzi*. According to Ibn Nadeem, the title of the book was *Kitab al-Tā'rikh wa al-Maghāzi*.⁶² This work has always been accepted as authoritative⁶³ and the material contained in it has supplied the basis of the great majority of later studies on the life of the Prophet and beginning of the Islamic era. His work gives a detailed account of the holy wars of the Prophet.⁶⁴ Its interesting style and graphic description of events, made the book popular among the 'Abbasid caliphs.⁶⁵ Born at Madinah in 130, al-Waqidi had a good opportunity to collect the most authentic records of the wars of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم).⁶⁶ Later he moved to Baghdad where he became a *qādi* and where he composed his *Kitāb al-Maghāzi* on the beginning of history of Islam. Soon al-Waqidi's name as chief representative of the *Maghāzi* literature became so famous that in later days all sorts of books on the first wars of Islam were attached to his name although not written by him.⁶⁷

Waqidi, according to Ibn Sa'd, was well versed in *Maghāzi*, *Sirah* traditions and history.⁶⁸ According to Muhammad bin Salam al-Jumahi, he was a great scholar of his time, well versed in Islamic learning and wrote many books on different branches of knowledge like *Maghāzi*, *Hadīth*, *Tabaqāt*, Biographies and Jurisprudence.⁶⁹ However, says Prof. Gibb, taking as his theme the expansion of the Islamic community, he neglected all traditions relating to the period prior to the Hijrah and in a separate work

carried his narrative down to the conquests made under the early caliphs.

Al-Waqidi was the author of other works besides the *Kitāb al-Maghāzi* of which the *Kitāb al-Ridha* (Book of Apostasy) deserves special mention.⁷⁰ Al-Waqidi's object was not only the preservation of all the information of the *Maghāzi* but also the preservation of all the information relating to the age of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), namely the records bearing on the 'Companions' who had lived in the immediate environment of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). This biographical data preserved in the form of *Hadīth* were taken over from him by his pupil and secretary Muhammad bn Sa'd (d.230 A.H.).⁷¹ While narrating specific events, al-Waqid has quoted the verses of the holy Qur'an related to particular event.⁷² It was during the reign of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz that both *Sīrah* and *Maghāzi* writings received state patronage. The caliph ordered that people should be taught and trained in this branch of knowledge. 'Asim ibn Qatadah al-Ansari (d.121 A.H.) being well versed in *Maghāzi* and *Sīrah* was ordered by the caliph to start a school in the mosque of Damascus for imparting lessons in *Maghāzi* and *Manāqib*.⁷³

ii) *Isnad*: History as a discipline started in Islam with the search for and the collection and transmission of individual reports about specific events. These reports were first transmitted orally and when written records were gradually introduced, they were accepted at first merely as aids to memory. The historians took pains to ascertain the competence of the authorities who transmitted these reports and used the science of biography (*'ilm al-rijā'*) and of authority criticism (*al-Jarh wa'l- ta'dīl*) as the main tools. The Arab historians devised many methods to ensure accuracy in their respective works. The *Isnād* was utilised as the surest method of recording the statement of an eye or ear witness to the event in question. History, says Saeed Raad, has never known such an extensive use of 'chain of transmitters' prior to Islam⁷⁴ as one single tradition was recorded through different chains of transmitters. As such historical criticism as an independent science called *'al-Jarah wa-l Ta'dīl* was evolved by the early Muslims.

This discipline is such a contribution of the Muslims to the science of historiography which perhaps is not found in the annals of any other nation of the world. It was also later on applied to the study of history, although not with the same rigidity. As such the science of *Hadīth* developed a unique discipline in the shape of *Isnad*- the transmitters of *Hadīth*, which is very much allied to real historiography.

The *Ahadīth* were arranged and confirmed by fixed chains of authorities i.e. every one who knows and reports a tradition must not only be satisfied with a mere statement about it but also refer to the person who narrated it to him and that person must again refer to his reporter and so on till the chain ends with the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) or one of his well known companions as the original eye witness.

According to D.S. Margoliouth, the best expedient for securing exactitude is the *Isnād* the chain of authorities whereby a narrative can be traced to the original eye-witness who narrated it. In the case of the sayings and doings of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) this study has furnished a science which consists in testing the links whereby each tradition has reached the men of the Prophet's time.⁷⁵ The principle of investigation has been laid down by the Qur'an itself as it says:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا اِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَاٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوْا⁷⁶

“O you who believe, if an evil doer comes unto you with a report, then enquire strictly.”

The best principle of investigation in order to ascertain the truth of a report is to see whether the statement stands to reason. This principle, too, has been enunciated by the Qur'an. With this corpus of *Hadīth* soon developed an enormous amount of material of quite diverse value which learned Muslims shifted and digested in their own fashion. Nevertheless, this method of recording from an unbroken chain of reporters, the first fundamental principle of historical thinking by defining distinctly the consciousness of time, takes into consideration the fact that a historical event occurs

only once.⁷⁷ This prevented any mystical or esoteric disappearance of the personality of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) as long as the method remained consistent. At the same time reports which obviously had no chain to authenticity were eliminated, although only by external criticism.⁷⁸ Even after the period concerned with the Prophet's own deeds. This material was transmitted by the same system of a single *Hadīth* preceded by the *Isnād* relating to it.

In short, Muslims alone among the nations of the world may claim the credit of having established a superior standard of writing history.⁷⁹ Muslims conceded *Isnād* as an indispensable part of tradition. They developed it and gave it a firm foundation introducing to it the chronological method and collecting the biographies of the transmitters and by establishing various principles for determining the value of its different classes.⁸⁰ The first principle of Muslim historian was to see that the incident to be incorporated has been reported by a person who had personally witnessed the affair. If not, the name of all the intermediaries had to be serially mentioned up to the man who had been an actual participator or eye-witness. The main aim was to see the type of persons the reporters were, what character they bore, how they stand in the matter of memory and judgement, whether they were reliable or untrustworthy, had a keen intellect or shallow mind, were well informed or ignorant. Though it was almost impossible to collect all these details, yet a number of scholars devoted their lives to this arduous task. These traditionists, without being influenced by anybody's status and position, gathered all relevant information, detected the inner most moral weaknesses, sparing neither kings nor religious heads. As such hundreds of works came into being. Thus the system of *Isnād* and its use by Muslim historians proved useful to determine the genuineness of the past records.

iii) Khabar: By *Khabar* is meant a report, an item of news or information. As the name implies, *akhbār* (plural of *Khabar*) is generally used to mean a string, a collection or a connected sequence of reports and only in the last form, says I.H. Qureshi, does it

achieve the form of a historical narration of events.⁸¹

During the early Islamic period, Muslim elites developed the formula of *Khabar* authenticated by a chain of authority for presenting events of the past to posterity. It was not in vogue prior to the advent of Islam. Muslims were the first to introduce the formula of *khabar* with *Isnād*.⁸² The formula of *Isnād* for preservation of *khabar* was not evolved by the Muslims for the art of history-writing, but was purely religious in nature. In this connection Abu Sufyan al-Thauri is reported to have said, “transmitters of *khabar* started indulging in false narrations, we built up history to meet their challenge.”⁸³ Though the early history of the Arabs does not exclude myths and legends, yet the principle of screening the available historical data evolved by the *Muhaddithūn* paved the way for historical research and careful evaluation of sources.

Historians of early centuries viewed the institution of personal transmission of *Khabar* as more reliable than other methods of collecting material. A *rawi* or reporter was supposed to transmit a report and to collect all versions of *khabar* as objectively as possible, without providing his own personal view.⁸⁴ The historian could, however, make his assessment of the general moral character of the reporter to indicate the reliability of his report. It was because of this principle that all the versions of the *Akhhbār* of early period were transmitted to history writers and used by them in their historical works.

The narration of single events and their reporting was capable of independent and impartial treatment and thus provided us with the raw material of history. These events were strung together either chronologically or on the basis of a period or topic.⁸⁵ This form of historiography came into vogue among the Muslims fairly early. In the oldest form of Muslim historiography, one comes across small pamphlets written to describe a single event. Like the pre-Islamic narration of single battles. The simple narration soon gave place to the description of the event followed by a discussion of the causes responsible for its happenings. The single *khabar* gave place gradually to *akhhbār*, a

collection of many *khabars*.⁸⁶ Its beginnings were purely religious in nature because it developed out of the desire to collect all the information about the life of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). The biographies of the narrators of *Hadith* were its by-product.

Before we conclude, it would not be out of place to mention that Muslim elite were able to expand the scope of history from mere recording of facts to a repository of political, administrative and cultural experiences and made fruitful efforts in the analytical fields as well. During the golden age of the Abbasids, historical works became the mirror of the most progressive phase of the Muslim renaissance, the experimental ground on which constantly new methods were tried out to present, as many of the results of the contemporary science and learning as possible to men of general education. Though the debt that the history owes to the efforts of Muslim writers is generally recognized by the Orientalists, yet the consciousness of the value and significance of the Muslim contribution in the field of historiography is rare among western scholars. Every known collection of Islamic manuscripts includes a good proportion of historical works which indicates the importance attached by Muslim scholarship to history.

REFERENCES AND NOTES:

1. Franz Resenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, 1952, p.11
2. Al-Sakhwai, *Al-E'lan bial Taubikh Liman Dhamma al-Tarikh*, Baghdad, 1963, p.29.
3. Franz Resentha, *op. cit.*, p.11
4. Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-Arab*, Vol.3, Cairo, p.481
5. Ibn al-Athir, *Tarikh al-Kāmil*, Vol.I, p.4.
6. I.H. Qureshi, "Historiography"- M.M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Germany, 1966, Vol.II, p.1196
7. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, Vol. I. New York, 1958, p.50.
8. *International Encyclopaedia of Social Science*, Vol. 6, p. 412.
9. Nisar Ahmad Faruqi, *Early Muslim Historiography*, Delhi 1979, p.2.
History is the record of human events and actions which includes the culture in its different phases, it is the record of civilization in its fullest form. Saeed Raad, "Islamic Contribution to the Study and Writing of History." *The Proceedings of the Pakistan History Conference*, Karachi, 1952, p.54.
10. Henry. Elmir. Barnes, *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, p.25.
11. Al-Kafiyaji, *Al-Mukhtasar fi 'Ilm al-Tārīkh*, Delhi, 1979, p.547.
12. Al-Sakhwai, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.
13. *Ibid.*, p.32.
14. Al-Kafiyaji, *op. cit.*, p. 549.
15. F. Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
16. I.H. Qureshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 1196-97.
17. *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, vol.6, America, The Macmillan Company and the free press, p. 411.
18. Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, p.10.
19. *Ibid.*, p.10.
20. Al-Sakhwai *op. cit.*, p.86.
21. Al-Qur'an, XLI, 21

22. Siddiqi, M. Mazhar-ud-Din, "*Islām kā Nazriyya-e-Tārīkh*", Lahore, 1962, pp. 12-13. Quoted in N.A. Faruqi, *op. cit.*, p.6.
23. Fazal Ahmad, "The Islamic Interpretation of History", *Proceedings of the Pakistan History Conference*, Karachi, 1952, p.81.
24. Omar Zafar, "The Development of Muslim Historiography", *Islamic Thought*, Vol. IX, Delhi, 1963, p.52.
25. Nisar Ahmad Faruqi, *op. cit.*, p.6.
26. For instance, when he was distributing booty at Hunayn, one of the Ansars of Medina protested against the system of distribution adopted by him, the Prophet expressed his annoyance in these words: 'May Allah shower his mercy on Moses' he was pestered more than this', (Al-Bukhari, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Vol.1, Cairo, 1378, p.481.
27. A.K. Brohi, *The Quran and its Impact on Human History*, Aligarh, 1981, p.9.
28. Nisar Ahmad Faruqi, *op. cit.*, p.7.
29. I.H. Qureshi, *op. cit.*, p.1202.
30. Al-Sakhwai, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-261.
31. Nisar Ahmad Faruqi, *op. cit.*, p.134.
32. Muhammad Munawar, *Iqbal and Quranic Wisdom*, Delhi, 1987, p.44.
33. Shakir Mustafa, *Tārīkh-i-al-Arabia-wa-al Muarikhoon*, p.52.
34. G. Ritcher, "Medieval Arabic Historiography" *Islamic Culture*, Vol.xxxiii, Jan,1959, p.241.
35. Suhail Ibn Salim Hanna, "Notes on the Historiography of the pre-Islamic Odes" *Islamic Studies*, Vol.5, Pakistan, 1966, p.306.
36. Ilse Lichtenstadter, "Arabic and Islamic Historiography", *The Muslim World*, Vol. xxxv, p.126.
37. Zafar Omar, "The Development of Muslim Historiography", *Islamic Thought*, Vol. ix, 1963, p.51.
38. N.A. Faruqi, *op. cit.*, p.43.
39. Abdul Fadl Ibrahim, *Ayyām al-Arab fi al-Islām*, Egypt, 1968, p.488.
40. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. vi, New York, 1959, p.717.
41. Jawad Ali, *Tārīkh al-Arab Qabla al-Islām*, 1953, vol. 4, p.345.

42. F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, p.21.
43. D.M. Dunlop, *op. cit.*, p.70.
44. Haji Khalifah, *Kashf-al-Zum̄n*, Istanbul, 1941, vol.I, p.204.
45. Ignaz Goldziher, "Arabic Literature During the Abbasid period" Trans. Joseph Somagyi, *Islamic Culture*, vol.32, jan. 1958, p.21.
46. I.H. Qureshi, *op. cit.*, p.1207.
47. Haji Khalifah, *op. cit.*, p.80
48. *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, vol.6, p.908.
49. I.H. Qureshi, *op. cit.*, p. 1207.
50. Haji Khalifah, *op. cit.*, p.80.
51. Al-Tabari, *Tarīkh al-Rusūl wal-Muluk*, vol.I, p.86.
52. Ibn Abd al-Barr, *Al-Iqd al-Farīd*, Cairo, 1370, A.H. vol.II, p.51.
53. N.A. Faruqi, *op. cit.*, p.50.
54. I.H. Qureshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 1207-1208.
55. F. Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p.88.
56. Al-Qur'an, XLIX:13.
57. Ibn Sa'd, *Tabqāt*, vol. iv, pp.344-347.
58. Ahmad Amin, *Duhal Islam*, Vol. II, p.321.
59. Clement Huart, *A History of Arabic Literature*, London, 1903, p.175.
60. N.A. Faruqi, *op. cit.*, pp.41-42.
61. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113; Isfahani, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 220.
62. Ibn Nadeem, *Al-Fihirist*, p.150.
63. J. Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its fall*, p.xiii
64. Al-Waqidi, *Kitāb al-Maghāzi*, 1352. A.H., p.3.
65. Imtiaz Ahmad, "Waqidi as a Traditionist", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. xviii, Pakistan, 1979, p.243.
66. H.A.R. Gibb, *op. cit.*, p.41.
67. Ahmad Amin, *Duh-al-Islam*, Vol. II, p.333; J. Wellhausen, *The Arab Kindom and its Fall*, p.13.
68. Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt al-Kabīr*, vol.V, Beirut, 1957, p.425.

69. *Khatib al-Baghdādi*, *Tarikh Baghdad*, Vol, iii, Cairo, 1931, p.6.
70. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, Vol, iii, pp.229-230.
71. Ibn Nadeem, *op. cit.*, p.151.
72. Al-Waqidi, *Kitāb-al-Maghāzi*, p.43.
73. Shibli Numani, *Sirat-un-Nabi*, tr. Tayyib Bakhs Budayoine, Delhi, 1983, p.20.
74. Saeed Raad, "Islamic Contribution to the Study and Writing of History— *The Preceedings of the Pakistan History Conference*, Karachi, 1952, p.7.
75. D.S. Margoliouth, *op. cit.*, p.19.
76. Al-Qur'an, XLIX:6
77. Al-Abadi, Ab Hameed, *Ilm al-Tārīkh In dal Muslimeen*, Cairo, 1937, p.57.
78. G. Richter, "Medieval Arabic Historiography" *Islamic Culture*, Vol. xxxiii, 1959, pp.244-245.
79. Nisar Hussain, *Nishāt al-Tadvin al-Tārīkh In dal Arab*, Cairo, 1956, p.102.
80. Muhammad Shabir, *The Authority and Authenticity of Hadith, as a source of Islamic Law*, Delhi, 1982, p.64.
81. I.H. Qureshi, *op. cit.*, p.1196.
82. N.A. Faruqi, *op. cit.*, p.9.
83. Al-Sakhwai, *Al-E'lan*, pp. 33-34.
84. Abd al-Aziz Salim, *Al Tārīkh wa al Muarikhon al-Arab*, Iskandarrih, 1967, p.25.
85. Abd al Azizi al-Doori, *Bahath fi Nashāt al-Tadvin al-Tārīkh Indal-Arab*, Beirut, 1960, p.94.
86. Hasan Muhammad Abd Gani, *Ilm al-Tārīkh Indal Arab*, Cairo, 1961, p.70.