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## **The Early Muslim (The Arab) Contribution to the Development of Historiographical Traditions and Methods: A Critical Appraisal**

*This article aims to highlight impacts and contribution of the early Muslims (The Arabs) to the field of historiography in terms of different traditions and methods. The early Muslims or the Arab contribution is significant for the genesis and introduction of some emerging trends and traditions in this field. This research is fundamentally based upon analysis of the early Muslim historical literature which offers an overview of the sirah, hadith, maghazi literature concerning the characteristics adopted from the pre-Islamic historical traditions. The paper explores the genesis and major trends set up during the formative phase of early Muslim (The Arab) historiography in terms of authentication and assessment of historical data. The paper tries to highlight some emerging categories in history introduced by the early Muslim historians besides the non-Arab (the Persian) contribution in the field of history writing.*

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## ■ Introduction

The term *Tarikh* (History) is derived from the Arabic root 'arkh' that means 'recording the time of an event.' It actually means the 'time' at which an event takes place.<sup>1</sup> On the other side, it termed as 'era' or 'chronology'. It originally means 'dating' and acquired also the meaning of 'chronicle, historical work, history' and likewise that of 'chronogram'.<sup>2</sup> History became a discipline of knowledge among the Muslims in which they were considerably indebted to the Greeks; however they had their own historical traditions from pre-Islamic era such as *Ayyam al-Arab* (The battle memories of the Arab), *ansab* (genealogy), poetry and odes.<sup>3</sup> The Arab scholars ignored the Greek and Roman history and consequently the scholarly traditions of Greek historiography did not influence them. Instead they established their own way by using the ancient traditions of Arabia and Persia.

However, after the Greco-Romans, the second phase of historiography takes its birth from Islam. Muslim historians followed the tradition of compiling historical writing. They have a distinction of introducing the practice of date-mark and chronology in their writings. They recorded historical anecdotes with particular emphasis on date and year- a practice quite unknown to other nations till that time. The

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<sup>1</sup> N. K Singh and A. Samiuddin, *Encyclopedic Historiography of the Muslim World* (Delhi: Global Vision Publication House, 2003), Preface, p. V.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton Gibb and J. H, Karmers (Editors), *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Karachi: South Asian Publishers, 1981), p. 578.

<sup>3</sup> K. M. Ashraf (Editor), *Indian Historiography and Other Related Papers* (New Delhi: Sunsire Publications, 2006), pp. 10-11.

earliest Muslim literature provides an insight of significant evidences of their historical consciousness as well as their sense for scientific treatment in compiling of historical literature.

However, the beginning of Muslim historiography actually meant the beginning of historiography among the Arabs. However, history had always been a decisive factor in the contemporary outlook of the Arabs.<sup>4</sup> The role of the pre-Islamic period in the development of historiography is not possible to overlook from both historical and cultural perspective. A transition took place from the pre-Islamic to the Islamic period in terms of literary and cultural development. Historical and cultural developments are interdependent and inevitably contributed in the development of the pre-Islamic historical consciousness among the Arabs. For a comprehensive understanding of origin, development and progress of early Muslim historiography, it may be appropriate to analyze the influence of Pre-Islamic, Islamic and the Persian traditions of historiography and their characteristics.

## ■ **Historical Traditions during Pre-Islamic Era: Its characteristics**

### ■ ***Oral traditions***

Apart from a composite idea of history, *Jahiliya* or the age of ignorance (this term refers to the pre-Islamic era of the Arabs) developed its own primitive techniques of historical narration according to the requirements of the age. However, they followed oral traditions particularly among the Arabs of Hijaz. It is an established fact that the Arabs, before the advent of Islam, were illiterate and the tradition of

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<sup>4</sup> A. A. Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, ed and trans. Lawrence I, Conard (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 12.

written narration was not popular among them, however, they were aware of it. The hindrance that kept them away from the development of written narration was their temperament which was rooted in the social structure of the Arab society as they had pride on their memory. They memorized and delivered these records in the form of poetry and other oral communication.<sup>5</sup>

Fundamentally, there are two main techniques found in pre-Islamic historical traditions: *Ayyam al-Arab* (the battle tales) which are related to the *Diwan al-Arab* (the Arab Poetic Saga), and the *ansab* (genealogy).<sup>6</sup> Both of these traditions were presented by the *Akhbar* (the reports), and were recited by the *qusas* (the narrators) of the tribes in order to glorify the tribes' heroism.<sup>7</sup> *Ansab* or genealogy was of historical interest to the people of the pre-Islamic Arabia and was significant due to their pride on tribal ancestry.

This sense of superiority of the tribes was so strong that they traced their origin from Hadrat Abraham (A.S) and sometimes as far back as Hazrat Adam (A.S) himself.<sup>8</sup> Pride in the clan and in its heroic deeds was the main motive behind this tradition. The Arab Poetic Saga dates back towards the end of the fifth century CE. This poetry provided a connection to the past. A poet served as an artist, entertainer, and a chieftain of his clan, historian, and more importantly, protector of the tribe.<sup>9</sup> Besides, the pre-Islamic semi-historical accounts also include *ayyam al-Arab* (the battle tales) narratives,

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<sup>5</sup> F. Robinson Chase, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Duri, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1952) p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> H. A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, edited by Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 583-584.

genealogy, poetry and odes (mostly oral) apparently show such relationship.

During the pre-Islamic era, Arabic was predominantly a spoken language with an oral literature of elegant poetry and, to a lesser extent, prose. Writing had not yet fully developed and memorization was the most common means of preserving the literature. Both poetry and prose, before the emergence of Islam, dealt with a rather limited range of topics which included in the case of poetry praise, eulogy (panegyric), defamation, and love, and in the case of prose superstition, legends, parables, and wisdom tales.<sup>10</sup> Pre-Islamic Arabs took great pride in their language and in articulate and accurate speech, the latter being one of the main requisites for social prominence. Professor Phillips. K. Hitti opines in this regard that, "No people in the world manifest such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and are moved by the words spoken or written, as the Arabs. Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such an irresistible influence as Arabic."<sup>11</sup> Eloquence and the ability to compose articulate prose or poetry were foremost among the traits of a worthy Bedouin. Whenever a poet emerged in an Arab tribe, other tribes would come to congratulate, feasts would be prepared, the women would join together on lutes as they do at weddings and old and young men would all rejoice at the good news. The Arabs used to congratulate each other only on the birth of a child and when a poet rose among them.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anwar G. Cheyne, *The Arabic Language: Its role in history* (Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Rashiqaal-Qayrawani, *Al-'Umda*, vol. I, (Cairo: McEwan, 1934), p. 65.

Yet, *Ayyam al-Arab* (The battle memories of the Arab) was a significant feature of pre-Islamic Arab history that was represented by the orally transmitted odes. Their main subject was inter-tribal conflicts and wars, raiding and plundering generally termed as 'Yawm' or 'a day'.<sup>13</sup> The Arabs were quite concerned about fixation of dates of any event of historical significance such as the event of *as'hab al-fil*, when an expedition set out by Abraha (the king of Yeman) to destruct the Holy Ka'ba in 570 CE, but Allah caused stones to rain upon the large army, in which there were some elephants, and it was totally destroyed. This was the year when the memorable event of Holy Prophet's birth took place. However, such remarkable historical events were not dated due to the absence of any calendar but were named after some places or events for instance the Day of *Kulab*, the Day of *al-Dalis*, the Day of *Ukaz*, and the Day of *Basus* etc.<sup>14</sup> The high merits most worthy in the *Ayyam al-Arab* narratives are bravery and virtuous deeds in battles, loyalty to one's fellow-tribesmen, pride in purity of blood and race and persistence in blood-revenge.<sup>15</sup> The main purpose of the narration of *ayyam al-Arab* (or the battle-days' narratives) by the storytellers was entertainment and to preserve tribal pride such as their traditional horsemanship, courage, hospitality and charity, not had any historical perception, so had little historical value. These tribal tales of the Arabs also transmitted through the odes were not free from tribal prejudices, partiality and political partisanship.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Philip K. Hitti, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 89-94.

<sup>15</sup> Haroon Khan Sherwani, *The Genesis and Progress of Muslim Socio-Political Thought, Islamic Culture*, Vol. 27, 1953, pp. 135-148.

<sup>16</sup> Faruqi, op. cit., p. 5.

### ■ **The Ruwat (Individual narrators)**

Along with the informal oral traditions, there were also professional *ruwat* (individual narrators) who continued to exist from pre-Islamic times to the end of the first Hijrah century. Afterward, this pre-Islamic narratives and poetry included biographical accounts, compiled and edited by the Muslim scholars in the second and third centuries of Islam.<sup>17</sup> Even though, the pre-Islamic historical literature did not play a significant contribution in world history before the advent of Islam but considered as a valuable source as it sheds light on socio-political and cultural conditions of pre-Islamic era. It expresses a unique historical consciousness of the Arabs. In his *'Uyun al-Akhbar*, Ibn Qutayba defined poetry as follows:

"Poetry is the mine of knowledge of the Arabs and the book of their wisdom, the archive of their history and the reservoir of their epic days, the wall that defends their exploits, the impassable trench that preserves their glories, the impartial witness for the Day of Judgment."<sup>18</sup>

This is notable that this legacy in historical consciousness did not provide any foundation for the forthcoming early Muslim historiography and as a whole differs from later Muslim historical consciousness. However, the Arabs had learnt *the art of writing* from the *people* of Hira who had taken it from the Himyarites (the people of South Arabia as Yeman) but it had not been developed as a common art. According to some early reports, there were *only seventeen* people in the

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<sup>17</sup> Afzal Iqbal, *Culture of Islam: The First Hundreds Years* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1990), p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *'Uyun al-akhbar*, vol. II (Cairo, 1964), p. 185.

tribe of *Quraysh* who were acquainted with reading and writing at the time of the advent of Islam. Though Hadrat Ayesha (R.A) and Umme Salma (R.A) were able to read but could not write.<sup>19</sup>The emergence of *diwan* (registers) promoted writing and record keeping for the purpose of administrative organization and revenue collection with the expansion of the Muslim Empire during the reign of Hadrat Umar (R.A) and became two major prerequisites of history writing.<sup>20</sup>

During the Umayyad period, the odes and tales of *ayyam* known as the *diwan* al-Arab were used as the historical source by the Muslim historians.<sup>21</sup> However, more or less all authorities considered the Arab stories of *ayyam* tales (the Arab Poetic Saga) as an indispensable component of history because it gleaned the 'characteristic qualities and salient features of the Arabs.' It occupied the position of an important source of the cultural and intellectual activities of the people of Arabia. Soon it became a matter of research on its composers, persons referred to therein, strange words and idioms, dialects of various tribes and their regions. Some eminent scholars during the Abbasid period like Abu Ubaida (d. 824 CE) and al-Asma'i (d. 831 CE) took keen interest in this subject and known to be a linkage between literature and history.<sup>22</sup> The term *diwan* (lit. a list or register), a middle Persian word refers to a collection of poems, not for a genre but for a form of traditional publication came into vogue for

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<sup>19</sup> N. K. Singh, op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>20</sup> Duri, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Nisar Ahmed Faruqi, *Early Muslim Historiography: A study of early transmitters of Arab history from the Rise of Islam up to the End of Umayyad period (612-750 A.D)*. (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1979), pp. 37-40.

<sup>22</sup> N. K. Singh, op. cit., p. 231.



collection of the works of pre-Islamic Arab poets since the Abbasid period (750-1258 CE) by Armenian philologists, most of them were of Persian origin.<sup>23</sup>

## ■ **Historiography during the Early Islamic Era: The Formative Phase**

### ■ ***Its Genesis and Major Trends***

With the emergence of Islam, the Arab society transitioned from oral tradition to written narration. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W), for the first time, shook up the old traditions and customs in order to reconstruct it with the new spirit that had Divine guidance. The tradition of written narration was just one aspect of the manifestation of the revolution brought forth by the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W). The Quran is not only the first book, but the highest linguistic achievement of the Arabic language. The inimitability of the Quran is not limited to its content. In fact, the Holy Book of Islam is held by Muslim scholars to be inimitable not only in its content but also in its language. The Quran, it has been constantly maintained, embodies linguistic and literary beauty which exceeds anything of human origin. This is borne out by the fact that no-one has ever been able to compose anything remotely resembling it in its linguistic, literary, or conceptual elegance.

However, Islam played a vital role in the political, social, cultural, economic and all other areas of the life of the Arabs. It created a strong bond among them and became the basis

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Jahan Ramazani, Paul Rouzer (ed.), *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. IV (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 371.

of certainty as it is the most consequential event in the Arab history. Without understanding the Islamic concept of history as presented by the doctrine and later by the Arab classical works of history, it is not possible to understand the major trends of contemporary Arab Historiography. Actually, the early Muslim dogmatic idea of history and historiography was meant to 'obtain the pleasure of Allah'. The origin of historiography during the Islamic era is significant as it was perceived from the scriptural writings based on the Holy Quran and the *ahadith*.

### ■ ***The Nusus: the Quran and the Sunnah***

The early Arab historians considered Quran and the Prophet's traditions (*sunnah*) as its main sources.<sup>24</sup> In order to correctly understand the *nusus*: the Quran and the *hadith*, the two bases of their faith, they felt the need of developing intellectual tools for checking and sifting evidence to arrive at the truth. Hence, in the early phase, there was no difference between *hadith* scholars and *muwarrikhin* (historians). Authentication of events and facts regarding *hadith* (*isnad*), and biography of the narrators of traditions (*asma al-rijal*) was given so much importance that historiography entered a new phase that gradually became a full-fledged discipline of knowledge. *Asma' al-Rijal* includes all the several works which deal with chronology, biography and criticism of the narrators of traditions or of any class of narrators, or with any such aspect of their life as may be supportive in defining their identity.

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<sup>24</sup> Syed Ali Ashraf, *The Quranic Concept of History* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1980), pp. 8-12.

The consideration of timeline or chronology of events began and developed among the Muslims at an early period in the history of Islam. There is a difference of opinion as to the exact time when it was first used by the Muslims. According to some authorities, dates were introduced into official correspondence by the Prophet (S.A.W.W) himself in the fifth year of the *Hijra*, when a treaty was concluded between him and the people of Najran. But it is generally held that this was done by Hadrat Umar b. al-Khattab (R.A), on the unanimous advice of a congregation of important Muslims in the sixteenth or the seventeenth year of the *Hijra*.

Nevertheless, the Quran reveals the history of mankind from its primordial times. Man had always been a part of history "for the relationship between man and God is based on a historical record, a register of deeds and misdeeds which need to be impressed upon memory."<sup>25</sup> The Quran was revealed like many other scriptures in order to make man remind his promises with God. The Holy Quran also provides incidental remarks and references from the lives of the prophets and their nations which have been proved historically accurate and authentic by the Muslim historians. The compilation of *hadith* and *maghadis*, especially its historical dates provided early Muslims with the incentive to pursue historical interest, thus influenced directly the emergence of Muslim historiography.

The Quran narrates many accounts and references to ancient history of generations and civilizations. The Quranic historical accounts are more instructive rather than informative. The Quranic references which have a historical value cover a wide variety of subjects and provide references

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<sup>25</sup> Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thoughts in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 12.

to the ancient history of generations, peoples, prophets such as the A'ad, Tham'ud, Jurhamites, Tasm, Jadis, Minaeans, Lihiyanites etc.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, it represents a concept of universal history whose beginnings goes back to the beginning of creation of mankind.<sup>27</sup> The Quran also mentions names of certain historical nations, places and persons before and after the birth of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W).<sup>28</sup> However, its main objective is to interconnect the past, present and future in a sequence of time with harmony and to learn moral lesson from the people of the past in reference to God's punishment of the evildoers, as a sign and a warning for succeeding generations.

### ■ **Biographical Literature: The Sirah, Hadith and Maghazi**

Besides the Holy Quran, the traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W.W) (the *hadith* and the *Sunnah*) also served as the main source for the early Muslim historiography. The traditions are significant as supplanted historical material to the Quranic revelations and as a source for documentation of the early events of Islam. The Muslim historical consciousness was motivated by the development of the science of *hadith*.<sup>29</sup> The Holy Prophet took keen interest in history. Rosenthal in this regard opines that "the Prophet himself planted the seeds from which a wider interest in

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<sup>26</sup> See S. Muzaffar al-Din Nadwi, *A Geographical History of the Quran*, reprinted, (Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2009)

<sup>27</sup> Rosenthal, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Fred Mc Graw Donner, *Narratives of Islamic origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton; Darwin Press, 1998), p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad Ghulam Rasul, *The Origin and Development of Muslim Historiography* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1976), p. 3.

history was to arise."<sup>30</sup> These tradition became an impetus for the early Muslim historians to study the life and times (*Sirah*) of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) as the Quran emphasized on it. It circulated a number of disciplines, later gave birth to three historical concerns: the *Sirah* (biography of the Prophet (SAW), the *hadith* (his speeches and actions), and the *maghazis* (his material expeditions).

The term *Sirat al-Nabawi* refers to the study of the life and times of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W). It was first associated to the biography of Muhammad by Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri and later promoted by the work of Ibn Hisham. In the first two centuries of *hijrah*, *sirah* was more commonly known as *maghazi* (lit. stories of military expeditions), which is now considered to be only a subset of *sirah*. The *sira* literature comprised of a variety of materials, such as stories of military expeditions undertaken by Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) and his companions. These stories are considered as historical accounts. The *sirah* also includes a number of written documents, such as political treaties, military organizations, assignments of the officials, letters to the foreign rulers, sermons and speeches etc.<sup>31</sup>The *sirah* literature includes verses of poetry commemorating certain events and battles too. Early works of *sirah* contain manifold historical reports, or *akhbar*, and each report is called a *khabar*. Sometimes the word *tradition* or *hadith* is also used instead.<sup>32</sup>

The *hadith* literature was not committed to writing during the early period but after the compilation of the Quran and

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<sup>30</sup> Rosenthal, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> W. Raven, *Sira, Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. 2<sup>nd</sup>, (Brill Academic Publishers, 1997), pp. 660–663.

<sup>32</sup> R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A framework for Inquiry*, Revised ed. (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 83.

after the death of a large number of companions, who preserved *hadith* in memory, the need to compile the *hadith* from the oral transmitters became a necessity for fear that it should be lost. The *hadith* literature, its nature and science is a great depository on study and investigation of early Islamic history. It provides material for an understanding of the legal, cultural and religious ideas of this period.<sup>33</sup> In the beginning, the compilers of *hadith* literature took painstaking task of collection and authentication of *ahadith* from the *Sahabah* (companions of the Prophet (S.A.W.W)), while during the later period they sought *Tabaeen* (the followers of companions) and the *Taba Tabaeen* (the followers of the followers of companions). The later period manifests a great deal of suspicion about authentication of some of the Holy Prophet's discourses. Thus, the *hadith* scholars enthusiastically evaluated the sources or the chain of authorities (*isnad*).<sup>34</sup> Though, *ahadith* (the Traditions) are not considered as an authentic and pure historical literature, but provide important historical references and regarded as the first Islamic Science.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding, *sirah* and *maghazi* emerged as the first phase of the growth and development of Muslim historiography. *Maghadi* is termed as a description of the battles in which the Holy Prophet and his close associates personally participated. Though, some historians consider the *sira* and *maghazi* literature to be a subset of *hadith*. With the development of these disciplines, Madinah became the

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<sup>33</sup> M. M. Azmi, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature* (Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1978)

<sup>34</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *The Materials used by Ibn Ishaq*, in Lewis and Holt, eds., *Historians of the Middle East*(London, 1962), p. 31.

<sup>35</sup> Khalidi, op. cit., p. 26.

centre of study of *hadith* and *Sirah School* of history that set very high standards regarding the authenticity of the sources, collection of events and sequence of time.

■ ***Authentication and Assessment of Historical Data: The Akhbaryun Andisnad***

There can be no doubt that in the field of historiography, Muslims established high traditions regarding correctness of authority, compilation of historical data and chronology. The *first* Islamic *calendar* was introduced during the reign of the Second pious Caliph Hadrat *Umar* (d. 644 CE). He did it in an attempt to rationalize the various, at times conflicting, dating systems used during his time. He consulted with his advisors on the starting date of the new Muslim chronology. It was finally agreed that the most appropriate reference point for the Islamic calendar was the *hijrah*, so it was designated as the first year of Islamic calendar.<sup>36</sup>

By the beginning of the second century of *hijrah*, a developed kind of *ruwat* (individual narrators) are seen to be appeared, who are known as the *akhbaryun* (reporters), the learned *ruwat*.<sup>37</sup> These *akhbaryun* were conscious of the value of history and gathered pre-Islamic materials of the various tribes in monograph (*kutub*). Their centers of activities were Kufa and Basra. They provided data for the later chroniclers and historians. The historians also started visiting among the scattered tribes of the desert in search of historical material. This is also notable that besides local accounts, they were also aware of some foreign histories

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<sup>36</sup> N. K. Singh, op. cit., p. V.

<sup>37</sup> Duri, op. cit., p. 42.

such as Biblical accounts and the Persian historical traditions.<sup>38</sup>

Soon, the knowledge of the *hadith* developed as a science in terms of evaluation of *hadith* literature. In the beginning of the second century after *hijra*, there appeared a common practice of fabricating and forgery of the *hadith* material. Consequently, a critical evaluation of the entire substance developed as a timely demand of the situation.<sup>39</sup> The *hadith* scholars carried out a meticulous task of authenticating and assessing the historical data and its source. *Rijal al-Hadith* (the study of the reporters of *hadith*) secured much importance. In scrutinizing the reporters of a *hadith*, authenticating or disparaging remarks made by recognized experts, from amongst the successors of the companions and those after them were found to be of great help.

The organization of *hadith* into *sahih* (sound), *hasan* (good) and *da'if* (weak) was firmly established by Ali b. al-Madini (d. 84CE). Later, al-Madini's student Muhammad al-Bukhari (810–870) authored a collection that he believed contained only *Sahih hadith*, which is now known as the *Sahih Bukhari*. Al-Bukhari's method in historical criticism of testing *ahadith* and *isnad* is considered as the creation of the method of citation. I. A. Ahmad writes: "The vagueness of ancient historians about their sources stands in stark contrast to the insistence that scholars such as Bukhari and Muslim manifested in knowing every member in a chain of transmission and examining their reliability. They published their findings, which were then subjected to additional

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<sup>38</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> N. K. Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 324.



scrutiny by future scholars for consistency with each other and the Quran."<sup>40</sup>

Apparently, the early Muslim historians were so professional in their attitude that they adopted a developed technique of comparison by using various authorities to authenticate an event. When the 'followers of the followers of the companions' were sought during the later phase of collecting *hadith*, it proved to be a painstaking task of endless evaluations for the transmitters of the *hadith* (authenticating the chain of authorities known as the *isnad*). The *isnad* made great contribution in terms of authenticity of the sources and diminished many fake accounts in this regard. "But although *isnad* is important in a negative manner; it cannot constitute a final positive argument."<sup>41</sup>

As the art of historiography developed the *akhbariyun* (reporters) of Iraq and the traditions of Madinah secured significance as the earliest Arab historians with their developed techniques, history consciousness and skilled qualification. They also provided noteworthy analyses and meaningful association for important historical events.<sup>42</sup> It was given utmost attention in order to authenticate the traditions as not only the reliability of the source but the disposition and authenticity of the narrator (*rawi*) and the chain of authorities (*isnad*) and criticism gave this tradition a historical outlook.

However, historiography had been emerged as the most initial and exceedingly developed literary activity among the Muslims in all regions but the first century of Hijrah hardly

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<sup>40</sup> I. A. Ahmad, (June 3, 2002), *The Rise and Fall of Islamic Science: The Calendar as a Case Study* (PDF). *Faith and Reason: Convergence and Complementarity*. Al Akhawayn University. <http://www.minaret.org/ifrane.pdf>. Retrieved, 2011-5-12.

<sup>41</sup> Fazl al-Rehman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965), p. 72.

<sup>42</sup> Duri, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

witnessed the compilation of any written record. All the knowledge transmitted and handed down orally rather the Quran remained almost the only prose work. Great mass of historical writing was narrated during the second century of Islam but its characteristics, formal structure, subject matter and explanatory paradigm took shape between the early eighth to the eleventh centuries C.E. Though, Urwah b. al-Zubayr is regarded the earliest scholar who collected the *hadith* literature, but during the Abbasid period Ibn Ishaq (d. 767 CE.) became an authority on *hadith* science. His work entitled the '*Biography of the Prophet (S.A.W)*' in three volumes in the recension of Ibn Hisham (d. 834 CE.) is considered as the two oldest Arabic prose works.<sup>43</sup>

### ■ **Contemporary Historiography**

Despite of the fact that historiography in its true sense developed during the Abbasid period but some prose historical literature had already been composed during the Umayyad reign. These writers are significant for their work during the transitional phase of the Muslim historiography. Abu Mikhnaf Lut Yahya al-Azdi (d. 750 CE.) celebrated for his historical romances. Ibn Uqba (d. 758 CE.) is the oldest biographer of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W), whose work is unfortunately entirely lost. Muhammad b. Abdullah al Azdi (d. 777 CE.) wrote a History of the Conquest of Syria and Ibn Zabala (d. 814 CE.), a pupil of Malik b. Anas composed a History of Madina. Al-Waqidi (d. 823 CE.), the great historian of the Muslim conquests, who was substantially patronized by Yahya Barmakid, and on his death, left behind him 600 huge boxes of books and manuscript notes.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> N. K. Singh and A. Samiuddin, *op. cit.*, pp. 388-394.

<sup>44</sup> E. G. Brown, *Literary History of Persia*, vol. I (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp, 273-278.

Al-Mada'ini, Awana b. al-Hakam, Sayf b. Umar, Aban b. Uthman b. Affan, Urwah b. al-Zubair, Shurahbil b. Sa'ad, Wahab b. Munabbih, Asim b. Umar, Muhammad b. Muslim b. Shihab al-Zuhri and Musa b. Uqbah are some of the great classical historiographers.<sup>45</sup> However, most of the works have survived only in the form of fragment in the classical sources they brought the Arab history from the pre-Islamic era to their own times in a continuous manner. They emphasized on evaluation and authentication of the sources, internal and external criticism. They used the eye-witnesses, oral traditions and official archives (the *diwans*) as their sources.<sup>46</sup>

Along with the political expansion, the Arabs also progressed in the field of culture and furthermore during the Abbasid period (begins from 750 CE), they also adopted a system of philosophy of their own besides science, arts, literature and history. They had a genius for history and gradually evolved some techniques in this particular field. This period is significant for its unique developments in the realm of intellectual and cultural development of Muslim thoughts and ideas. Following are some new trends that can be traced from this work.

### ■ ***Influence of Religious Doctrines and Political Movements***

However, historiography also became a part of religious studies with certain doctrinal guidelines, principles and values imposed by Islam. Advent of Islam became the beginning point for the medieval Arab historians. The Arabs were strongly aware of the significance of history and their

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<sup>45</sup> See A. A. Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

histories were composite and well-documented. They preserved the chronological data and had a unique sense of historical laws such as causation and periodicity. However, they had no precedent in the technical development of historiography, there are found some flaws and shortcomings in their work which was a result of their temporary requirements and of the imposing dogma of their religion. Historical evidences were presented to further the belief in religion. The medieval Arab historians were also influenced by the various Islamic political movements which also may be traced out during the later period. Some mercenary historians compiled history in order to justify a certain dynasty's control of the caliphate.

### ■ **Urban History: History of the Newly Conquered Cities and Towns**

Ali bin Muhammad al-Madaini (d. 840 CE) may be regarded as the earliest Muslim historian, an erudite author compiled hundreds of books on history. His particular field of interest was the Muslim conquests and wrote on history of caliphate and history of Basra and Khurasan. He was the first who used scientific methods in history writing.<sup>47</sup> However his writings could not survive from the destruction of the period but his pattern influenced his contemporaries and successors including Ahmed bin Yahya al-Biladhuri (d. 892 CE) followed by Omer al-Waqaidi (d. 832) and Ibn Sa'd (d. 845 CE) and this method of internal criticism and evaluation was continued in the works of later Muslim historians. Dr. N. A. Baloch discovered that author of the *Fateh Namah-i-Sind* alias *Chach*

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<sup>47</sup> I. H. Siddiqui, op. cit., p. 3.

*Namah*, the Persian version of an Arabic account entitled the *Minhaj al-Din Wa'l Mulk* compiled most probably between 830-868 CE by an anonymous writer and regarded as the earliest record on history of India and Sindh grew his information from the work of Mada'ini which is unfortunately no longer extant and also from the *Fatuh al-Buldan* of al-Biladhuri.<sup>48</sup>

### ■ **Historico-geographical Science in History**

Later on, Al-Masudi (d. 956-7 CE), an Arab historian and geographer known as 'Herodotus of the Arabs' set some fresh markers in Arab Muslim historiography by his work entitled '*Muruj al-Dhahab*' (Meadow of Gold), a world history. He was one of the first who historico-geographical science on a large-scale work.<sup>49</sup> He raised the standard of Muslim historiography in terms of quality and quantity and secured the status of a science. He applied the principle of scientific description and of correlation between human and physical facts. This scientific quest of Muslim scholars persuaded them to take tours to far regions in pursuit of knowledge and the knowledge of Islamic history attained symbolic importance as an '*ilm*'.

The Arabs extensively contributed in the origin and growth of early Muslim historiography. This era may rightly be regarded as the 'Golden Era' of Muslim History. The earliest surviving Islamic biography is Ibn Ishaq's (d. 761 CE) entitled *Sirah Rasul Allah* (The Life of the Apostle of God (S.A.W.W) known to us only from later quotes and in the

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<sup>48</sup> Dr. N. A. Baloch, *Sindh: Studies Historical* (Jamshoro: University of Sindh, 2003), p. 56.

<sup>49</sup> I. H. Siddiqui, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

recension of Ibn Hisham (d. 834 CE). A work on genealogy by Ibn al-Kalbi (763-64 CE) also regarded as the earliest works compiled by the Arab scholars. However, Urwah Ibn Zubayr (d. 712 CE), and al-Zuhri's histories compiled earlier no longer exist, but they are referenced in later works. Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri's (d.741) compilation and Abi Mikhnaf's (d. 774) *Maqatal al-Husayn* were also compiled during the second phase. Other famous Arab historians who compiled historical accounts included Wahab b. Munabbih (d. 728 CE), al-Waqidi (d. 822 CE), Ibn Hisham (d. 834 CE), al-Miqrizi (d. 1442 CE), and Ibn Hajar Asqalani (d. 1449 CE), among others.

The first detailed studies on the subject of historiography itself and the first critiques on historical methods appeared in the works of the historian of an Arab stock Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 CE), who is regarded as the father of sociology and philosophy of history. He was the foremost who perceived history as a tool for development of social structures and social relationships. He applies his approach of investigation over Arab classical histories. He gave history a new dimension and outlook. He linked up "the development of historical politics with economic activities of society." In the way, Khuldun paved way for the theories like those of Hume, Spencer and Comte.<sup>50</sup>

However, the Arab historians are at variance from all others in the unique forms of their compositions. The Arab historians adopted 'Narrative style' for history writing. The Arab historiography was significant and dominant through its chronicles on different themes and subjects such as cities, families, dynasties and some other inconsequential concerns and personalities. During the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE) the Arab historiography besides other intellectual

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<sup>50</sup> Dr. M. A. Al-Da'mi, *Major Trends of Arab Historiography*, The Quarterly 'Historicus', J.P.H.S., vol. XLI, No. 2, July 1993, p. 266.

activities gradually dominated by the Persian influence and a large co-existent Arabic literature produced by the Persians.

### ■ The Non-Arab (The Persian) Contribution towards Early Muslim Historiography

This is evident that the early Muslim historians were not of all Arab origin. Most of them were the Persians. The historians of Persian origin, writing in Arabic were al-Tabari, Abu Hanifa ad-Dinavari, Hamza al-Isfahani to name only a few. Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) is known for writing a detailed and exhaustive account of Mediterranean and Middle East entitled the *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* (History of the Prophets and Kings) in 915 CE. It is popularly known as the *Tarikh al-Tabari*.

Though, they were in no way inferior to the native Arab writers, found very little stimulus for their work at home. Generally, they were obliged to apply the specific method handed down by the prevailing Islamic tradition. Only in the later times, when the Persian language and mentality had won their position in literature, Persian historiography was able to certain extent to pursue its own course.<sup>51</sup> Yet, no traces of Arab history writing being influenced by the Persian historiographical trends are to be found in the first two centuries of the Islamic era.

The Persian influence significantly increased during the eighth century (the Abbasid period) not only in the political, cultural and literary activities but in the every manner of life. Besides, they occupied significant status among the historians of the classical period. Their work, in terms of content, may be

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<sup>51</sup> Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Holland: D. Reidel, 1968), p. 238.

categorized as the histories of the world or the universal history, monographs, devoted to certain period, dynasty or person, And histories of certain countries or cities. These histories, like the other narrative types of Persian learned literature, works in simple, strictly objective style of the old Arabic histories. However, the Persian also introduced some new trends to the early Muslim historiography which are given below.

### ■ ***The Rise of Royal (dynastic) and Political History***

The impetus provided by the Persians was essential not only for the development of the Islamic civilization but also for the early Muslim historiography. Muslim historiography is indebted to the Persian for introducing some new development such as the history of dynasties and political institutions. One of such historian was Ibnul-Muqaffa (d. 757 CE.), the converted Magian who is famous for his translation of the Pahlawi '*Book of Kings*' (*Khudhay namah*) being only known to us by citations of later historians as Ibn Nuqala and Ibn Khaldun.<sup>52</sup> Another of them was Ibn Qutayba (d. 828 CE.), a historian of the first rank. Of the twelve works composed by him, the best known are his '*Kitab ul Ma'arif, Adab ul Katib*' (Secretary's Manual) and '*Uyunun al Akhbar*'.<sup>53</sup> These books now have been published by Brockelmann at Berlin.

### ■ ***Socio-religious History***

The involvement of the non-Arab or the Persian Muslim historians seems to be the most significant during the period of classical Islam under the Abbasid caliphate. The classical traditions laid down by these historians concluded in the

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<sup>52</sup> E. G. Brown, op. cit., p, 275.

<sup>53</sup> Hamilton Gibb, and J. H. Karmers, (Editors), Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam (Karachi: South Asian Publishers, 1981), p. 431.



writing of Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923). His work entitled '*Tarikh al-Rasul wal-maluk*' (History of Prophets and Kings) or abbreviated as '*Tarikh al-Tabari*' is significant for his records on socio-religious changes brought about by Islam, the rationalization of religious and Para-religious phenomena, the development of scientific curiosity and a critical sense which entailed a new organization of knowledge, and the mastery of the world imagination.<sup>54</sup> Al-Tabari was a traditionalist and his writing is based on the Islamic sources of the Quran and the Traditions.

During the ninth to the eleventh century CE, there produced a massive amount of historical literature about different regions and people of the Islamic world. The historians started to compile the history of their native regions by using traditional sources whether authentic or invalid. Among them, another outstanding Persian historian was Ibn Abi Tahir Taifur<sup>55</sup> who belonged to a family formerly holding princely rank in Khurasan, wrote a volume of '*History of Baghdad*'. However, most of the work written in the tenth century CE has been lost except the one that has been mentioned yet.

### ■ **Official History**

The eleventh century also witnessed a new emerging trend; the origin and growth of official history writing by the official court historians who were employed for the purpose of glorify the life and times of the ruler.<sup>56</sup> In this regard, the Seljuks, and the Ghaznavids were the most prominent. When the Abbasid caliphate started to decline and split into many

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<sup>54</sup> I. H. Siddiqui, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> N. K Singh and A. Samiuddina, op. cit., p. 345.

<sup>56</sup> I. H. Siddiqui, op. cit., p. 5.

petty states, the rulers of these regional dynasties patronized the historians besides other scholars and learned men. They also nurtured the cultural and literary activities and in this way, history also secured a place of erudite field of knowledge.

## ■ Conclusion

However, the early Muslim or the Arab historiography is crucial not only in terms of laying the ground work of modern historical method but also in terms of providing roots for the upcoming historians focusing on the history of different nations and cultures under the Muslim rule. The early Arab historiographers somehow preserved the 'values' of history in addition to adopting the new scientific methods in interpreting it; however, some advocated an approach to copy the past with no modification as the early Islamic period is considered as an ideal. The liberal educated historians have also made attempts to use the scholarly tools of rationalism in their treatment of the past. Hence the early Muslim historiography is instructive and informative that laid foundation on the necessity to understand and interpret the Message of God and instigated the interest of Early Muslim scholars in compiling historical literature.

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