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The Evolution of Historical Writing Among Historians of Islamic Civilization Between the 2nd–5th Centuries AH / 8th–11th Centuries CE (Selected Examples)

تطور الكتابة التاريخية لدى مؤرخي الحضارة الإسلامية بين القرنين الثاني والخامس الهجري / الثامن والحادي عشر الميلادي (أمثلة مختارة)

Khaled KRIBI [1*]
1 Laboratory of History, Civilization and Applied. University Center Si El-Houas Barika (Algeria), khaled.kribi@cu-barika.dz

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Abstract

The field of historiography experienced significant development among the historians of Islamic civilization between the second and fifth centuries AH. This evolution was driven by various social, cultural, and political factors, as well as advancements in other sciences that directly influenced historical writing methodologies. The interest in Islamic history began alongside the compilation of prophetic traditions, as historiography was viewed as a tool for documenting the Prophet's biography and the events of early Islam (Ibn Ishaq).

Historians began to explore diverse social, cultural, and political aspects, analyzing events and discussing their causes and consequences, thus introducing an interpretative dimension to historiography (al-Mas'udi). During this period, historical writing evolved from mere narration of events to a more sophisticated methodology based on analysis and interpretation. Historians of this era contributed to establishing scientific foundations for the study of history, and their works remain invaluable references for researchers in Islamic history.

Keywords: Historiography; Islamic civilization historians; Islamic history; al-Tabari; historical writing.

ملخص:

شهد علم التاريخ تطوراً ملحوظاً عند مؤرخي الحضارة الإسلامية بين القرنين الثاني والخامس الهجريين، وذلك نتيجة لعدة عوامل اجتماعية وثقافية وسياسية، إضافة إلى تطور العلوم الأخرى التي أثرت بشكل مباشر في منهجية كتابة التاريخ،وبدأ الاهتمام بالتاريخ الإسلامي بالتزامن مع جمع الحديث النبوي، حيث كان يُنظر للتأريخ كوسيلة لتوثيق السيرة النبوية وأحداث صدر الإسلام (ابن إسحاق).

حيث أصبح المؤرخون يهتمون بمختلف الجوانب الاجتماعية والثقافية والسياسية، وبتحليل الأحداث وذكر أسبابها ونتائجها مما أضفى بعداً تفسيرياً على الكتابة التاريخية (المسعودي)، وتطور علم التاريخ بذلك من سرد الأحداث إلى منهجية أكثر تعقيداً تقوم على التحليل والتفسير. وأسهم المؤرخون في هذا العصر في وضع أسس علمية لدراسة التاريخ، ولا تزال أعمالهم مرجعاً مهماً للباحثين في التاريخ الإسلامي.

كلمات مفتاحية:علم التاريخ؛ مؤرخي الحضارة الإسلامية؛ التاريخ الإسلامي؛ الطبري؛ الكتابة التاريخية.

* Corresponding authors.

1. Introduction

Historical writings among Arab Muslims represented one of the most prominent features of the scientific and intellectual renaissance witnessed by Islamic civilization. These writings evolved to become a record of events, figures, and incidents experienced by Muslims or transmitted through generations. Initially, they were influenced by oral narratives and documented reports, serving various purposes, such as documenting the Prophet's biography, recording Islamic conquests, and chronicling the history of states and caliphs.

Historical writing intertwined with other sciences, such as hadith studies, genealogy, geography, and literature, which imparted diversity and comprehensiveness to its scope. These writings did not merely recount events; they also analyzed the political, social, and economic factors shaping the course of history.

Between the 2nd and 5th centuries AH (8th–11th centuries CE), historical writings by Arab Muslims underwent distinct phases, with each phase characterized by its themes, methodologies, and distinctive features. What distinguished historical writing by Muslim historians during this period? And to what extent were these writings influenced by intellectual and political transformations?

2. The Emergence of Historical Writing Among Arab Muslims

The development of Arab-Islamic historical writing arose naturally and authentically, fulfilling the pressing need of the nascent Islamic society to reflect on the glories of Islam and its conquests. This growth also responded to the demands of the prevailing circumstances. Therefore, history among Muslims was not a continuation of ancient historical traditions but rather a natural evolution driven by societal necessity (Al-Duri, 2000, p. 22).

The earliest writings of Arab Muslims appeared in the form of narrations about past events, the conditions of Arabs before Islam, and detailed accounts of the Prophet’s biography (peace be upon him) and the stories of his companions. Consequently, historical writing among Arab Muslims initially took the form of biographies, reflecting the deep attachment of Muslims to the Prophet and their efforts to immortalize his virtues and struggles in establishing the foundations of Islam. From these biographies, they expanded to include accounts of conquests and the conditions of the lands that came under Muslim rule (Nassar, 1980, p. 90).

It is well known that the emergence of historical writing among Arab Muslims, in its widely recognized form, was delayed until the late Umayyad period. This was due to the esteemed status of oral preservers (ḥuffāẓ) in

society, which led people to perceive no pressing need for documenting events or compiling written works. Many even doubted the reliability of written accounts, considering them susceptible to forgery and manipulation. Additionally, some believed that Muslims should avoid having written works other than the Qur'an, as Islam was seen to supersede all that preceded it, including the narratives of pre-Islamic days and their tribal glories. Consequently, the recording of hadiths was prohibited until the time of Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, out of concern that the Qur'an might be confused with hadiths.

However, the growing accumulation of historical information and the increased availability of resources led people to begin recording events, transitioning from oral narration to written documentation (Shakir, 1983, pp. 93-94).

Historical writing, as a distinct discipline, did not initially separate itself from the fields of hadith transmission and Qur'anic exegesis. This was driven by society's need to understand and apply the rulings of Islamic law through Qur'anic interpretation, reference to the Prophetic Sunnah, and the consensus of Muslims. As a result, early chroniclers, hadith scholars, and genealogists were engaged in both jurisprudential matters and event narration. Indeed, books of hadith included sections dedicated to military campaigns (maghāzī) and the Prophetic biography. Examples include Kitāb al-Maghāzī in the Musnad of Imām Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, Kitāb al-Maghāzī in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī (d. 265 AH/884 CE), and Kitāb al-Jihādwa'l-Siyar in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim (d. 261 AH/880 CE) (Fawzi, 2004, p. 44).

2.1. Advantages and Disadvantages of This Phase

2.1.1.Advantages

Islamic historical writings during this phase faithfully reflected the characteristics of Islamic society, accurately representing its intellectual development and prevailing tendencies. These writings complemented religious sciences, particularly Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), due to their connection with the circumstances of revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl). The early focus on collecting Prophetic traditions (hadiths) by the end of the first century AH provided a rich historical foundation, encompassing the biography of the Prophet (peace be upon him), the military campaigns he participated in, and the expeditions he dispatched. This collection became a fundamental source and material for initiating historical writings that addressed various aspects of life in Islamic society (Al-Sabbagh, 1998, p. 35).

These writings were generally committed to accuracy in recording historical events, specifying the year, month, and even the day of occurrences. They adopted the Hijri calendar from the time of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allah be pleased with him) in 17 AH/638 CE. Before this, events were dated using notable occurrences, such as famous wars (e.g., the "Dāḥis and Ghabrāʾ" war) or significant incidents like the "Year of the Elephant." This meticulous approach to dating events stood in contrast to non-Islamic writings of the time, which often lacked emphasis on chronological precision.

Islamic writings were not composed to flatter rulers, praise emirs, or curry favor with those in power. Instead, these works were characterized by neutrality, impartiality, and a lack of bias, for the most part. This was primarily due to the fact that most historians were distanced from the courts of rulers. Furthermore, their predominantly religious upbringing instilled in them a sense that their focus on Islamic history was a profound religious duty, aimed at earning divine reward and satisfying their conscience (Arar, 2014, p. 161).

Islamic historical writings were distinguished by their reliance on and influence from hadith methodology. This involved meticulous attention to narration (riwāyah), chains of transmission (isnād), adherence to principles of integrity and accuracy, and strict verification of sources. As a result, only those events that conformed to these rigorous standards were documented and deemed reliable for inclusion in historical records (Shakir, 1983, p. 86).

The style adopted by chroniclers, narrators, and genealogists was dynamic and realistic, blending poetry with prose and interweaving myth with truth. Their works combined an educational purpose with an aim to provide insight into the past, which imbued their writings with vitality and increased their appeal (Hamid, 2008, p. 94).

2.1.2.Disadvantages

The emphasis on chains of transmission, aimed at ensuring the reliability of narratives, led to a focus on preserving the content of the report itself while neglecting its context and nature. This approach resulted in scrutinizing and analyzing accounts based solely on their sources, rather than their events. Consequently, the individual character of the historian or narrator was absent, as their role was largely confined to collecting information without offering opinions or judgments on the events they documented.

The narrative approach, which combined poetry, anecdotes, tales, and accounts, led to a fragmentation in the recording of history and introduced additions with little historical value. This weakened the credibility of historical documentation, as it became an amalgamation of language, literature, poetry, and reports. Moreover, historians and narrators neglected to adequately

document the pre-Islamic accounts that had reached them. This oversight diminished the historical value of their records, particularly as they failed to fully utilize the historical texts of neighboring civilizations, such as the Persians and Greeks.

The perspectives of chroniclers and genealogists were shaped by material derived from certain Jewish and Christian sources, as well as from converts from Zoroastrianism. This body of material, known as Isra'iliyyat, consisted of narratives that were incorporated into Islamic historical writing, particularly in exegetical works. Key figures who introduced Isra'iliyyat into Islamic historiography included ʿUbayd ibn Sharīyah al-Jurhumī al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 67 AH/686 CE)* (Al-Zarkali, 2002, p. 189).

Kaʿb al-Aḥbār al-Yamānī(d. 32 AH/651 CE) (Al-Zarkali, 2002, p. 228),† and Wahb ibn Munabbih al-Fārisī al-Yamanī (d. 114 AH/732 CE) (Al-Zarkali, 2002, p. 126).‡

Islamic historical writings during this period did not develop a distinct methodology. History remained closely linked to the sciences of hadith, exegesis, and linguistics for a long time. Historians of this era can be categorized into chroniclers, hadith transmitters, and genealogists, who primarily focused on recording events and narrating accounts without critically evaluating their content or investigating their nature. They included material that at times contradicted reason and logic, without scrutinizing sources or assessing the reliability of narrators. Among those associated with this approach were Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, Ziyād ibn Abīh, ʿUbayd ibn Sharīyah, Wahb ibn Munabbih, Hishām ibn ʿUrwah, Muḥammad ibn al-Sāʾib al-Kalbī, ʿAwānah ibn al-Ḥakam, and others.The biographers of the Prophetic life (sīrahnabawiyyah) and military campaigns (maghāzī), who were influenced by the principles of hadith methodology and focused their efforts on documenting the Prophet's biography, Islamic conquests, and military expeditions, included notable figures such as ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwwām (d. 92 AH/710

*- One of the sages of the pre-Islamic era, summoned by Mu'awiya from Sana'a to Damascus to recount the ancient stories of the Arabs. He is attributed with the books Accounts of Kings and Past Generations and Proverbs. He passed away during the caliphate of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan.

†- One of the leading Jewish scholars in Yemen who converted to Islam during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. He traveled to Medina during the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab, where many Companions and others learned extensively from him about past nations.

‡- A scholar from Persia who was Jewish before converting to Islam. He was an expert in the legends of earlier peoples, particularly Israelite traditions. Umar ibn Abdul Aziz appointed him as a judge in Sana'a. Among his works are Stories of the Prophets and The Mention of Crowned Kings of Himyar, Their Stories, and Accounts.

CE), ʾUbān ibn ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (d. 105 AH/723 CE), ʿĀṣim ibn ʿUmaribn Qatādah (d. 120 AH/738 CE), Shuraḥbīl ibn Saʿd al-Madanī (d. 123 AH/741 CE), and Muḥammad ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī al-Makkī (d. 124 AH/742 CE). Another key contributor was ʿAbdullāh ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ḥazm al-Madanī (d. 153 AH/771 CE). These individuals formed the first generation of sīrah writers, most of whom resided in Medina or the Hijaz region.

The second generation of sīrah writers consisted predominantly of mawālī (non-Arab Muslim clients), many of whom lived in Kufa and Basra. Among them were figures like Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah (d. 141 AH/759 CE) and Maʿmar ibn Rāshid al-Baṣrī (d. 150 AH/768 CE). The most prominent among them were Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yasār (d. 152 AH/770 CE) and Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidī, both of whom exemplified this stage of historical writing.

A. Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq

Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yasār (85–152 AH) was originally from the mawālī of Iraq. He studied hadith under the scholars of Medina and Alexandria. Upon settling in Medina, he gained prominence and was renowned for his extensive knowledge of hadith and historical reports, despite facing accusations of adopting Qadarite beliefs and other controversial behaviors. His scholarly reliability was also questioned, particularly after he clashed with Mālik ibn Anas, who criticized him severely, even referring to him as "a deceiver among deceivers" and stating, "Look at this deceiver claiming knowledge superior to that of Mālik (Al-Baghdadi, 2004, p. 239)."

This animosity compelled Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq to leave Medina and travel to Iraq, where he eventually settled in Kufa, then the Jazira, and finally Rayy before making Baghdad his permanent home during the reign of Caliph al-Manṣūr. He passed away in Baghdad and was buried in the Khayzurān cemetery, the resting place of Hārūn al-Rashīd's mother (Al-Zarkali, 2002, p. 28).

Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq left behind a work on the sīrah, which has reached us through the transmission of ʿAbdullāh ibn Hishām. It is considered the earliest complete text on the biography of the Prophet, although parts of it are missing. It is believed that the work was commissioned by the Abbasid Caliph AbūJaʿfar al-Manṣūr. However, he faced criticism for allegedly favoring the Abbasids in his narrative, particularly by portraying their ancestor al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib in a more favorable light regarding his role during the Battle of Badr.

His book, which encompasses narratives, documents, and poetry, is divided into three sections: Al-Mubtadaʾ (The Beginning), Al-Mabʿath (The Prophetic Mission), and Al-Maghāzī (The Campaigns).

In Al-Mubtadaʾ, he addressed the pre-Islamic era, discussing the history of Yemen, the tribes of Arabia during the early periods of Jāhiliyyah (pre-Islamic ignorance), idol worship, the Prophet's ancestors, and ancient religions. In Al-Mabʿath, he focused on the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) life in Mecca and the first year in Medina, drawing heavily on the narrations of his teachers. The Al-Maghāzī section documented the Prophet's life in Medina, detailing his campaigns against the polytheist tribes until his passing. In this section, Ibn Isḥāq connected individual accounts with concise yet detailed commentary, reflecting his thorough investigation and meticulous documentation of events.

Despite the criticism directed at his work, including accusations of Shi'ite inclinations and Muʿtazilite beliefs, Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq is rightly regarded as the leading historian of the Prophet's biography. Many later scholars, such as al-Wāqidī and Ḥamd ibn Asʿad, drew extensively from his work (Al-Sabbagh, 1998, p. 37).

Regardless of the controversies surrounding it, the Sīrah of IbnIsḥāq remains a critical reference for the history of pre-Islamic Arabia and the early Islamic period. It has been praised by numerous scholars and served as a key source for both Imām Muslim and Imām al-Bukhārī in their compilations (Fawzi, 2004, p. 55).

B. Al-Wāqidī

Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidī al-Madanī (130–207 AH / 747–823 CE), a mawlā affiliated with the Hāshimites, studied under Mālik ibn Anas in Medina and Sufyān al-Thawrī. Renowned for his extensive knowledge in jurisprudence, hadith, and history, he was also known for his generosity, loyalty, and piety. Al-Wāqidī eventually settled in Baghdad, where he served as a judge and remained until his death (Shakir, 1983, p. 163). He authored a notable work on the sīrahnabawiyyah (biography of the Prophet). His contemporaries described him as "the most knowledgeable about Islam, though ignorant of pre-Islamic history (Al-Dhahabi, 1996, p. 452)."Consequently, his writings focused exclusively on the Prophet's life, particularly during the Medinan period.

His sīrah is characterized by its meticulous detail, compiled through narratives, observations of relics, and accounts from those who either

experienced the events firsthand or transmitted them from eyewitnesses (Shakir, 1983, p. 165).

Al-Wāqidī's book, Al-Maghāzī, attained great renown and was even taught in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. However, some critics questioned his credibility, accusing him of embellishment. Caliph al-Maʾmūn once remarked, "He memorizes interpretations but not revelations (Al-Dhahabi, 1996, p. 461)." Al-Wāqidī also had a contentious relationship with ImāmAḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, a leading authority on hadith in Baghdad, who labeled him "a liar." Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal did not support him during his ordeal with al-Maʾmūn, when the latter attempted to coerce him into endorsing the doctrine of the Qur'an's creation.

Hadith scholars criticized al-Wāqidī for compiling chains of transmission (isnād) and attributing them all to a single text (Hamid, 2008, p. 169). They also reproached him for his perceived favoritism toward the Abbasids, as he was close to their caliphs. Al-Maʾmūn, in particular, honored and favored him (al-Imad, 1988, p. 38).

Moreover, al-Wāqidī relied heavily on the work of Ibn Isḥāq, without explicitly acknowledging this, and drew more from Ibn Isḥāq than any other source. He was also criticized for citing poetry and using written documents, which his contemporaries deemed susceptible to forgery, in contrast to oral transmission, which was considered more reliable (Ja'arah, 2014, p. 153).

3. The Phase of Development and Renewal

This phase, which spanned the late third and fourth centuries and extended into the fifth century AH, marked a period of evolution and renewal in historical writing among Arab Muslims. During this time, historical documentation attained a level of vitality and innovation, characterized by novel approaches to analysis and enriched content. Several factors influenced this transformation:

3.1 Major Political Events

The significant political developments of the era deeply impacted historians, prompting them to explore the causes behind these events and investigate the reasons for the strength and greatness of Muslims. As a result, historical writings began to cover a vast geographical expanse, encompassing the entirety of the Islamic world (Dār al-Islām). Chronologically, they extended to the later days of the Abbasid Caliphate.

3.2 Encouragement from Rulers and Officials

Caliphs, emirs, and regional governors, particularly those in provinces that had gained autonomy from Baghdad's authority, actively encouraged the

documentation of history. They commissioned the writing of their biographies, highlighted their achievements, and glorified their legacies. Among the most prominent figures to promote historical documentation were Muʿāwiyah ibn AbīSufyān of the Umayyads and AbūJaʿfar al-Manṣūr of the Abbasids (Al-Sabbagh, 1998, p. 39).

3.3 The Shuʿūbiyyah Movement

The cultural and intellectual rivalry between the mawālī (non-Arab Muslims) and Arabs, known as Shuʿūbiyyah, played a significant role in shaping historical writings. This rivalry was reflected in debates over precedence and merit. The mawālī were eager to document the glories of their ancient civilizations and celebrate their achievements, while the Arabs were driven to preserve and recount the greatness of their own past (Arar, 2014, p. 158).

3.4 The Intellectual Renaissance in The Islamic World

The intellectual revival that distinguished this period in the Islamic world was significantly influenced by the translation movement, which introduced foundational works from Persian, Greek, Latin, and Syriac into Arabic. This movement began with Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, who translated the Khudāynāmeh from Middle Persian and renamed it Kitāb Siyar al-Mulūk (The Book of Kings' Histories) (Al-Duri, 2000, p. 53). Similarly, al-Balādhurī translated Ahd Ardashīr from Persian (Al-Baladhuri, 1987, p. 03). The volume of translations from these languages increased to such an extent that Arabic became a key language for the transmission of knowledge.

This development enabled Muslim historians to access and engage with the heritage of the Sasanian and Greco-Roman civilizations. Christian and Jewish scholars played a pivotal role in this translation movement, both to and from Arabic.

During this period, historical writings began to exhibit distinct characteristics as history gradually emerged as an independent scholarly discipline. The shift was facilitated by a change in motivation for historical documentation, which became increasingly personal, driven by religious incentives. This independence of perspective gave rise to several notable features in the historical writings of the time, including:

3.4.1 The Historians' Need for Context in Understanding the Qur'an

The interpreters of the Qur'an required a deep understanding of history and the circumstances under which Islam spread to enhance their study and comprehension of the Qur'an. This need arose because the Qur'an itself

provides a profound and comprehensive historical perspective, encouraging Muslims to reflect on historical patterns and human actions. Verses such as "There have been ways before you" inspire contemplation, and the Qur'an's chapters often reference historical events, incidents, or reminders of past traditions. Moreover, the Qur'an's emphasis on belief in the Day of Judgment and accountability imbued history with a forward-looking dimension (Othman, 1988, p. 82).

3.4.2 Administrative Necessities

The nascent Islamic administration required detailed records to manage its administrative, financial, and judicial systems efficiently. This included organizing bureaus such as the Dīwān al-Jund (Army Bureau), Dīwān al-Kharāj (Revenue Bureau), and the postal system (barīd), as well as recording distributions of stipends, tithes, war booty, and taxes on conquered lands. These administrative needs enriched the historical material with detailed information about various aspects of life (Al-Sabbagh, 1998, p. 38).

3.4.3 Political Factions and Sectarian Influences

Various political factions and sects actively recorded events connected to their causes. The rivalry between groups such as the Mudariyya and Qaysiyya or the Alids and Umayyads contributed significantly to the expansion and evolution of historical material (Hamid, 2008, p. 87).

Historical writings during this era relied on firsthand observations, biographies, reports, accounts of campaigns (maghāzī), official records, and translations from other languages. These works were often characterized by a style that leaned heavily on rhymed prose and flattery, especially in biographical entries (Al-Duri, 2007, p. 19).

The primary focus of historical works in this period was on events closely linked to religious matters. Historical causality was often attributed to divine will rather than practical or worldly causes. Some writings were influenced by the annalistic style, emphasizing a detailed chronological description of events tied to specific times and places. This approach, however, often hindered deeper exploration of realistic causes or the broader dynamics of Islamic society's public affairs.

Moreover, historical writings of this period generally lacked systematic organization based on contemplation and inquiry into the causes of the rise and fall of states. They seldom analyzed the economic and social factors shaping societies. Exceptions to this trend appeared later with scholars such as Miskawayh, al-Sakhāwī, and al-Ṣafadī, who delved into these aspects.

A significant portion of these writings consisted of summaries or extensions of earlier works, often copying earlier sources verbatim. This practice led to overlaps and redundancies in some historical compilations (Othman, 1988, pp. 155–170).

3.4.4 The Historical Content of This Period

The historical material of this period encompassed the history of nations and peoples, presenting a general history of the Islamic world in terms of time and place. Prominent contributors to this field included al-Yaʿqūbī, al-Ṭabarī, Miskawayh, al-Masʿūdī, Ibn al-Athīr, Abū al-Fidāʾ, and al-Dhahabī, among others (Al-Duri, Introduction to the History of Early Islam, 2007, p. 58).

As for local histories focused on cities, dynasties, and regions, key authors included al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn Ḥammād al-Ṣanhājī, Ibn ʿAsākir, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī, Ibn ʿAdhārī al-Marrākushī, and Ibn Taghrībirdī.

Works on biographies, layers of society (ṭabaqāt), personal histories, obituaries, indexes, and encyclopedias featured contributions from Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, al-Sakhāwī, al-Nuwayrī, al-Juhayshārī, Aḥmad ibn Tamīm al-Qayrawānī, and Aḥmad al-Maqrī al-Tilimsānī (Shakir, 1983, p. 360).

Regarding accounts of cities, kingdoms, and geographical works by travelers, notable authors included Ibn Khurradādhbih, al-Balkhī, al-Iṣṭakhrī, al-Muqaddasī, al-Masʿūdī, al-Yaʿqūbī, Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfar, al-Hamadhānī, Ibn Ḥawqal, al-Bakrī, al-Sharīf al-Idrīsī, and Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī (Al-Sabbagh, 1998, pp. 41–42).

One of the most comprehensive and distinguished works from this phase of historical writing among Arab Muslims was Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk (History of Prophets and Kings), also known as Tārīkh al-Umamwa al-Mulūk (History of Nations and Kings), by al-Ṭabarī. This work represents a pinnacle of Arabic-Islamic historiography, building upon the efforts of earlier historians such as Ibn Saʿd, al-Balādhurī, and al-Yaʿqūbī, while paving the way for later historians like Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Khaldūn, and others.

A. The Historian AbūJaʿfarMuḥammad Ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī (224–311 Ah / 834–923 Ce)

Born in the region of Ṭabaristān, al-Ṭabarī received his early education there. He famously stated: “I memorized the Qur'an at the age of seven, led prayers at eight, and began writing hadith at nine (Al-Tabari, Beirut, p. 04).” He studied in Rayy under the hadith scholar Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd al-Rāzī before moving to Baghdad. From there, he traveled to Kufa, Wāsiṭ, and Basra,

where he learned from the leading scholars of his time. He eventually returned to Baghdad, then to Egypt, and finally to his birthplace.

While in Baghdad, al-Ṭabarī became embroiled in a dispute with the Ḥanbalīs over a remark they considered insulting to their leader, leading to accusations of Shi'ite inclinations. Despite this, he adhered to Sunnah practices and was known for his condemnation of the Khārijites and the Rāfiḍah.

In his hometown, al-Ṭabarī's reputation as a scholar of hadith, jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis, recitation, and history grew immensely. His works include Jāmiʿ al-BayānʿanTaʾwīl al-Qurʾān (in 30 volumes) and Akhbār al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk (History of Prophets and Kings), which spans events up to 302 AH / 924 CE and was published in 10 volumes. This historical work contains unique accounts not found in other sources and reflects his commitment to rigorous verification of transmitted reports. It became a foundational resource for subsequent historians, such as Miskawayh, Ibn al-Athīr, Abū al-Fidāʾ, and Ibn Khallikān (Fawzi, 2004, p. 84).

Al-Ṭabarī employed an annalistic approach in his historical writings, organizing events year by year. He introduced each year with phrases such as, "Then came the year..." and based his accounts on multiple narrations, tracing events back to their original sources. He explained his methodology, stating:

"Let the reader of this book understand that my reliance for everything I have recorded here is upon the accounts and reports I mention, which are traced back to their transmitters. If the reader encounters in this book an account about a past event that seems unusual or objectionable, they should know that the issue lies not with us but with the original transmitters. We have merely conveyed what was handed down to us, precisely as it was delivered (Al-Tabari, Beirut, p. 13)."

It is understood from this statement that al-Ṭabarī included reports that might provoke doubt or skepticism, presenting them as intellectual exercises, leaving it to the reader's reasoning and analytical skills to interpret and evaluate his writings.

His work, Tārīkh al-Umamwa al-Mulūk (History of Nations and Kings), offers a comprehensive account of history in terms of both geographical scope and chronological span, covering events from the creation of the world to the author's own time, with a particular focus on Islamic history. This was presented in the annalistic style by historians such as al-Ṭabarī, Miskawayh, Ibn al-Athīr, Abū al-Fidāʾ, and al-Dhahabī. Others, like Miskawayh, wrote from a more personal perspective, while some, like al-Masʿūdī and Ibn Khaldūn, documented history through the lens of ruling dynasties and families. Certain historians adhered to a chronological order based on years, maintaining

a thematic focus, thus rendering Islamic general history both comprehensive and methodologically sound in terms of material, structure, and writing approach.

The significance of Tārīkh al-Umamwa al-Mulūk lies in its ability to consolidate diverse materials from various disciplines, including hadith, Qur'anic exegesis, linguistics, literature, biographies, campaigns (maghāzī), historical events, notable figures, poetry, speeches, and treaties. Al-Ṭabarī arranged these elements in an appropriate and coherent manner, presenting them with remarkable clarity. He attributed each narration to its source and every opinion to its originator.

Additionally, al-Ṭabarī's book preserves significant passages and a variety of excerpts from earlier texts, many of which are no longer extant. He included statements from scholars that are unique to his work, further enhancing its value as a historical and scholarly resource.

4- Conclusion

Historical writing among historians of Islamic civilization during the 2nd to 5th centuries AH (8th to 11th centuries CE) underwent significant development, reflecting the flourishing intellectual and scientific life of the period. Historians transitioned from relying on oral traditions and storytelling to adopting a more organized and precise approach based on documentation and analysis.

This era was marked by substantial contributions from prominent historians such as Ibn Isḥāq, al-Wāqidī, and al-Ṭabarī, who laid the foundations of Islamic historiography. These historians focused on documenting political, social, and cultural events from a comprehensive perspective, imparting objectivity and scholarly rigor to historical writing. Moreover, this period witnessed the emergence of diverse approaches, including local histories, biographies, and genealogies, reflecting the historians' wide-ranging interests and intellectual horizons.

On the other hand, historical writing during this period was deeply influenced by Islamic values. Historians sought to derive moral lessons and wisdom from historical events while adhering to principles of justice and fairness. This approach contributed to the creation of a rich and diverse historical tradition that continues to inspire researchers today.

In summary, the period spanning the 2nd to 5th centuries AH was a pivotal phase in the evolution of historical writing in Islamic civilization. It established a robust methodological foundation that influenced other civilizations and remains a critical reference for the study of Islamic history.

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