

MUSLIM HISTORIOGRAPHY

I THE WORD TARIKH

There are two words which have been used by the Arabs to convey the sense of past history. The first is *Al-akhbar* (its singular is *khbar* and the other is *tariikh*. Rosenthal has made a research and has endeavoured to show their origin and the scope of their meaning.

“The two technical terms by which the idea of history is commonly denoted in Arabic are (*Ilm*) *al-ahbar* and *tarih*. *Ahbar*, the plural of *habar*, is the more general term. The etymology of the root *hbr* is not clear. There is no clue to its possible original meaning in Arabic itself. The evidence of the other Semitic languages also does not permit a clear-cut decision. In historical times, the Arabic word means “information (about remarkable events)”, and also the events themselves, in which latter meaning it has a large number of non-technical synonyms. *Ahbar* corresponds to history in the sense of story, anecdote. It does not imply any fixation in time, nor is it ever restricted to mean an organically connected series of events. The term soon assumed the additional meaning of information about the deeds and sayings of Muhammad (peace be upon him), and, together with other words such as *atar*, became in fact something of a synonym of *hadit*”¹

“*Tarih*, then, acquired the meaning of “historical work”, and afterwards that of “history”, exactly as history or *Geschichte* may mean both history and historical work. Again it would be very difficult to fix an exact date for the first occurrence

of *tarikh* in the meaning of "historic work". It is firmly established in this meaning from the second century of the Hijrah on. *Tarikh*, acquired this meaning through being used to designate works which contained dates. Originally, therefore, historical works in which no dates occurred could not properly be called *tarikh*. It should, however, be stated that in the oldest works called *tarikh*, which were collections of biographies, dates were most sparingly represented".²

"The meaning of "history" in general developed with the use of the word for analytic histories and only slowly gained currency from the third century on".³

Rosenthal has kept in view the Muslim view of historiography and the modern definition of historiography and, then, said: "Muslim historiography includes those works which Muslims, at a given moment of their literary history, considered historical works and which, at the same time, contain a reasonable amount of material which can be classified as historical".⁴

2. Pre-Islamic historiography—

The complete silence of our sources with regard to any appreciable amount of true literary activity in pre-Islamic times may have been caused by the Muslim view of ancient Arabia as a country of "ignorance". It is, how ever, much more likely to assume that this silence is explained by the fact that there actually was nothing to report. The cultural and economic level of the nomad population was, as it has always been, too low to support any sustained literary effort.⁵

In pre-Islamic period, it is claimed by Rosenthal, there existed a natural interest in great happenings, and they were used as points of orientation in the history of individuals. The oldest reserved Arabic inscription, that of Imru'ul-Qays from the year 328, celebrates the historic achievements of a deceased prince. Another inscription, that of Sarahil from the year 568,

seems to refer to a destruction of Khayber which had taken place a year before.⁶

Let us critically evaluate this theory propounded by Rosenthal. It is a fact that in southern Arabia, which had been a cradle and civilization, there existed inscriptions, and some of those even now exist, which contained information about the names of the kings of those regions and told certain stories related to the early periods and depicted an obscure, yet comparatively less exaggerated, picture of the century preceding Islam. But nothing would be farther from truth to call them histories.

- (a) Such inscriptions had little attraction for the adherents of the creed of Islam, for, what these inscriptions recorded directly is not tribal or national history. It is the service rendered by a fictitious deity, rewarded by a pagan title. The very names of deities and offering of images were sufficient to evoke a dislike in the mind of the Muslim Arabs.
- (b) No doubt, Ubaid Ibn Shuryah on the orders of Amir Muawiyah wrote 'Kitab al-Amthal' and 'Kitab al-Muluk wal-Akhhbar al-Madiyyun' and Wahab Ibn Munabbih composed 'Kitab al-Mubattala'; but these works are not before us to show how they utilized the oral tradition and whether they accepted that with or without criticism.
- (c) Arabic historians in general seem to be very cautious in accepting ancient history. In the first century of their era they had, under the influence of the Quran and the Hadith, developed an absolute critical outlook. Especially, the Science of Tradition had contributed much to the cause of history, it furnished the Muslim historians with a science of criticism, which

they applied to every aspect of this particular field.

(d) If, at all, the alien influence, through certain sources, crept in the sphere of Muslim historiography, it is so insignificant that Rosenthal has failed, despite all his efforts, to highlight it.⁷

About the influence of the northern regions of pre-Islamic Arabia in the domain of Muslim historiography, we may say that it does not seem to have extended beyond the sphere of the mode of expression, the method of narrating the tribal traditions and to an insignificant extent to genealogy.⁷

The Arabs had an interest in preserving their genealogies from the early times, as they attached special attention to descent. An impetus was, however, given to the study of genealogy by the introduction of the system of Ata (assigning State pensions) by Hazrat Umar Ibn al-Khattab. It gave rise to the necessity of ascertaining the genealogical relationship of each Muslim Arab. His kinship to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), his precedence in accepting Islam and other related information.⁸

Muslim historiography was original and different. What preceded, according to Morgenthau, had no impact on it. "That Arabic history owes nothing to Greek history and little if anything to Persian history, seems clear; but it also appears to be independent of pre-Islamic Arabian chronicles".⁹

3. Religious Influence—

The Islamic teachings, the Quran, the keen interest of the Muslims to preserve the life and teaching of their Holy Prophet, and the study of Hadith, played the most vital role in the origin and the development of historical outlook among the Muslims, and this made all other influences to yield before this predominant trend.

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Rosenthal held the view that in the early period of Islam, history was not given a high place. Whether al-Kindi, in his books on the divisions of human knowledge and on what knowledge is and its divisions referred to history, we are not in the position to say since those works have not yet been recovered. In all likelihood, al-Kindi did not mention it, and thus inaugurated a tradition which was to linger on for many centuries. The leading Muslim philosophers, al-Farabi, in his Enumeration of the sciences, and Ibn Sina, in his Treatise on the divisions of the intellectual sciences, did not include history in their encyclopaedic treatment of the sciences. Further classifications which originated under Ibn Sina's influence, such as the one contained in Ibn 'Abd-al-Barr's *Jami bayan al-ilm*, or Ibn Badrun's *Kimamah*, a historical work, pay no attention whatever to history. The encyclopaedia of Al-Akfani, from the fourteenth century, contains a brief list of historical works and has a word of customary praise for the usefulness of history, but, although a great number of sciences are treated in detail, there is no special section devoted to history which, like poetry, is classed among the non-sciences. It is obvious that in the context of his work, al-Akfani did not think of history as an independent discipline. His contemporary, ad-Dahabi, whose fame rests upon his achievements as a historian, makes no mention of history in his small encyclopaedic, if predominantly theological, treatment of the science, *Bayan asgal al-ilm*. It comes, therefore, hardly as a surprise that Ibn Haldun, in the Introduction of his History, has nothing to say about history in his enumeration of the sciences. The reason for this omission apparently is not to be looked for in the fact that history, as the main subject of the *Muqaddimah*, is dealt with in many places of the work. In connection with astronomy, Ibn Haldun refers briefly to the knowledge of "past eras (at-tawarikh al-madiyah)", but his wide canon of learning does not include

the occupation with historiography as an independent intellectual pursuit.¹⁰

We are unable to accept this view of Rosenthal. The importance of history in Islam is quite fundamental and stems from the basic human dignity and man's limitless possibilities which are embodied in the religion. In the introduction of the History of Malesah (Malaga), Abu Bakr Mohammad b. Mohammad b. Ali b. Khamis (d. after 636 A.H.) wrote: "Next to the Quran and the Sunnah, the most deserving subjects of assiduous study are history and biography. They serve to remind (man) of the fact that time turns its children up and down".¹¹ And Quran says: "In their history verily there is a lesson for men of understanding. It is no invented story but a confirmation of the existing (scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and a guidance and a mercy for folk who believe".¹²

A practical incentive for the study of history was the abundance of historical data in the Quran. The Quran narrates the history of the peoples of the past; it tells us, among other things, about the people of Noah; and of Hud, and Madyan, and Thamud. There are information about Moses (Musa), Aaron (Harun), the Pharaohs, the Seven Sleepers, Abraham (Ibrahim) and Joseph (Yusaf). They inculcate a sense of history among the Muslims and explain to them the real purpose of this great branch of knowledge.

As the art of "Tafsir" (commentary) developed among the Muslims, the interpreters of the Quran were forced by the above circumstances to look for illustrative historical information. And in the course of time, the occupation with the historical material of the Quran came to be considered as one of the branches of learning.

The Quran infuses in its followers a spirit to preserve

contemporary history. This lesson was imparted by predicting the outcome of the struggle between the Byzantines and the Persians. "The Romans have been defeated in the nearer land and they, after their defeat will be victorious within ten years—Allah's is the command in the former case and in the latter—and in that day believers will rejoice in the Allah's help to victory. He helpeth to victory whom He will. He is the Mighty, the Merciful".¹³

Many events, concerning the life and time of the Holy Prophet, are enunciated in the Holy Book. These events became historical happenings of supreme significance to the Muslims and they stimulated historical research.

God gives an idea of the science of time-reckoning by revealing: "We made night and day two signs: We darkened the sign of the night, and we made the sign of the day luminous, so that you might desire excellence from your Lord and know the computation of years and (the science of time) reckoning. And everything we have explained with a detailed explanation".¹⁴

Again it reveals: "They ask thee about the new moons. Say, "They are means for measuring time for (the general good of) mankind and for the Pilgrimage".¹⁵

At another place we find: "It is He Who made the sun a luminary, and the moon alight, and ordained for it stages, that you might know the number of years and reckoning of time). Allah only created that for a good reason establishing distinct signs for people who have knowledge".¹⁶

The Quranic influence, and the administrative need, showed the great importance and instructiveness of annalistic fixation of history. Accordingly, Hazrat Umar ibn al-khattab, helped by the companions of the Prophet who were still alive, invented the Islamic Era.

Professor Morgoliouth had commented on this most significant step and has compared it with the European practice: "we note certain methods devised by the Arabic historians for ensuring accuracy in the record of events. One is dating them by the year and month, and even the day. The historian of civilization, Buckle, states that this practice in Europe is not earlier than 1597 A.D. Among Arab historians we find it developed in Tabari and an earlier author al-Haythum b. Adi. (born 130 A.H.) is credited with a history arranged in order of years. For such a purpose an era was necessary and it is asserted that the practice of dating by the Prophet's Hijrah was introduced by the second 'Caliph'".¹⁷

4. Prophet's historical ideas—

The stimulus which Muhammad's [peace be upon him] historical ideas could give and, later on, actually did give to the occupation with history could not have been any stronger. The actions of individuals, the events of the past, the circumstances of all peoples of the earth had now become matters of religious importance. A definite dividing line in the whole course of history, which later Muslim historiography never crossed, was drawn in the person of Muhammad [peace be upon him].¹⁸

5. Growing recognition of history among the Muslims—

Rosenthal has discussed the growing recognition of history among the Muslims. Some of the aspects which were kept in view shows that the art of history attracted most eminent scholars. This somewhat contradicts with his previous position and shows the validity of our criticism.

A catalogue of book titles, such as the *Fihrist* of Ibn an-Nadim, would have been incomplete without a chapter on historical works.¹⁹ The *Rasa'il* of the Ikhwan as-safa contain a classification of the sciences in which history is relegated to a

similar place as it occupies in al-Huwari's.²⁰

Another remarkable work which appears to date from about the middle of the tenth century and thus would probably be the oldest of the preserved "Arab-Greek" encyclopaedias is entitled *Jawami al-uhm*. Its author is a certain Ibn Farigun who is said to have been a student of Abu Zayd al-Balhi. The work is a comprehensive encyclopaedia in tabular form, which is quite a remarkable arrangement to be found in so early a period. The main topic in each case is written in large letters. Thin lines lead from it to the detailed explanations which are written in smaller letters and, as a rule, vertically. The first reference to history in this work is one to the historical knowledge which secretaries must possess. Then, in the second chapter, the author has the following to say about history which he classifies among the nations of "wisdom (*ilm al-hikmah*)": 1) History (*ilm al-tarikh*) is based upon rare events of far reaching significance, such as a deluge, an earthquake, an epidemic, or a famine: 2) It is necessary to know the succession of dynasties, and the rulers, according to the climates in which they lived, with their number, days, and the length of their respective reigns. 3) The beginning of creation and the events surrounding Resurrection as well as the physical and intellectual conditions of past generations. Because of its remoteness, this material often is corrupt. The material is so extensive that only God knows it all. It is acceptable only inasmuch as it is based upon literary sources or trustworthy information. 4) The biography of Muhammad, which is instructive for political and military activities. 5) The biographies of the Quresite caliph, their conquests, administrations, and the revolts that took place during their reigns, as well as 6) the history of the transition of power from the Umayyads to the 'Abbasids, which is illustrative of the changes of time. 7) The Bedouin (Pre-Islamic) history, which contains much

poetry. 8) The Persian books and biographies, such as the *Covenant of Ardashir Babakan*, the speeches of Anusarwan, the *Karnamah*. All this is instructive with regard to political affairs and the administration of justice. 9) The main events, stories, and actions connected with the individual rulers, and 10) The history of persons of noble birth, scholars, secretaries, poets, eloquent men, kind men, and faithful men. Owing to his chosen form of presentation, the author had to be brief. The absence of any reference to later dynasties and above all, the absence of any specific theological elements as well as the comparatively minor position assigned to the history of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and to that of scholars and cities would seem to be characteristic of the tenth century.²¹

The eleventh century is represented by the brilliant Spaniard Ibn Hazm.²² For the second part of the following century, we may refer to the encyclopaedia of Fahr-ad-Din ar-Razi, entitled *Hada'iq al-anwar fi haqiq al-arar*, a Persian work, which is more easily available than the Arabic recension *Jami al-ayum*.²³ About a hundred years later, another Persian scholar, Muhammad b. Mahmud al-Awali, who wrote in 1340, dealt with history in his ponderous encyclopaedia, *Nafais al-funun fi ara'is al-ayun*. In his work, too, history occupies a position among the Muslim religious and Arab literary sciences which form the subject of the first part of the work.²⁴

The discussions of historiography by al-Kafji, who wrote his *Short work on historiography* in Cairo in 867/1463, and the Egyptian as-Sahawi, who finished his *Open denunciation of the critics of the historians* in Mecca in 897/1492, become understandable as the result of the favourable situation which historical studies enjoyed in the Egypt of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁵

The historical work of the statesman and judge, Ibn Haldun, was widely discussed, frequently attacked, always

highly appreciated, and little understood—in short, it fulfilled the most important function of a scholarly work, that is, to act as an incentive and stimulus.²⁶

Among the questions they treat are those of the object and definition of history, its purpose and usefulness, its origin, the qualifications and methods of the historian, the criteria and degrees of reliability of historical information (al-Kafji) and the various products of Muslim historiography (ar-Sahawi).²⁷

6. Features of Muslim Historiography—

(i) While the Muslim historiographers were aware of the importance of information from living sources, they much less availed themselves of the possibility to make the historical past through its inanimate relics, and in this regard, literary sources replaced observation. Yet, we have stories such as that about al-Waqidi who was once seen in Mecca carrying a knapsack. Being asked where he was going he replied: "To Hunayn, in order to see the place and the historical event which took place there".²⁸

(ii) The purpose which Muslim historians sought to accomplish was to produce works which would be useful and improve the social position of the individual which was acquainted with them. The later theologian-historians stressed the need for fairness and objectivity in historians, and this plainly suggests that historians often were guided by their personal inclinations and prejudices. However, whether or not this was true, the scholars who made the statement concerning the qualifications of historians were only thinking of theologians and their quarrels, and their judgment cannot be used for the evaluation of the attitude of historians in general.²⁹

(iii) The oldest form of Muslim historiography, a direct continuation of the battle-day narratives, is the comprehensive description of a single event, usually of no more than a few

pages. Such a description is called *Khabar*. In the context of the larger historical works, the word *dikr* "report" as well as, occasionally, *amr* "affair" or *hadith* "story", all of which are used in the same manner. From the tenth century on, the narrative of the *Khabar* history is at times introduced by *wa-kam ar-sabab* "and the reason of it was", after a particular event had been summarily referred to. The character of the *khabar* as a self-contained unit is stressed by the chain of transmitters which precedes each *khabar* and which is omitted only in order to achieve brevity or to remove the appearance of scholarly austerity.³⁰

Three features are characteristic of the *khabar* form of historical writing. First, by its very nature, it does not accept the establishment of a casual link between two or more events. Each *khabar* is a complete piece and makes no reference to any kind of supplementary material. If a historical work is made up of more than one *khabar*, as in practice it usually happens, the juxtaposition of the individual *khabars* (as much as they are not different versions of the same story) may occasionally indicate a transfer of the historical locale from one geographical region to another, but as a rule it indicates a progress in time. The time intervals, in this case, can be of an undetermined length, although a kind of chronological continuity is frequently intended. It is obvious that no deeper historical penetration of whatever kind can be achieved in this manner. It is also obvious that in writing the history of a long period of time, the *khabar* form becomes quite unmanageable with regard to its size, since a *khabar*, unless it is to lose its true character, can be compressed only to a certain degree and no more.³¹

Secondly, from its ancient predecessor, the battle-day narrative, the *khabar* form retained the character of the vividly told short story, the preference for situation and color as against sober facts.³²

The third characteristic feature of the *khabar* form is rather in the nature of a mixed blessing. As a continuation of the battle-day narratives and an artistic form of expression, the *khabar* history required the presence of poetical insertions.³³

(iv) Annalistic historiography constitutes a specialized form of chronological historiography. As its name says, it is dominated by the succession of the individual years.

The first Muslim author of annals whose work is preserved was al-Tabari (224-310 A.H.). Al-Tabari's *Tarikh-al-Rasul wal Muluk* occupies a unique position. The text of the annals contains the history from the creation till the year 302, A. H. The work begins after an introduction with the history of Prophets and rulers etc., of the early period. Then comes the history of the Sasanian period and of the period of our Holy Prophet and the first four Caliphs; the history of the Umayyads; and lastly the history of the Abbasides up to 302, A.H. From the beginning of the Muslim era, the material is arranged annalistically under the years of Hijra. Maraghihah paid rich tribute to his work. He says that "probably we are to regard Tabari as performing for history a task similar to what Bukhari and Muslim did for Tradition; the selection of really historical matter out of the quantity of material presented by the works of Madaini and others. Followed by the difficult and to some extent dangerous task of bringing the record up to his time".³⁴

For the development of the annalistic form in Islam after it had been adopted in its early years, it is important to note that by its very nature annalistic historiography is primarily concerned with facts, bare facts, which were, or at least were in theory, recorded by contemporary sources, and could not be corrected, improved, or enlarged by any later writer. Subsequent annalistic works were thus conceived as mere continuations of the annalistic works of former authors. The great

value of this pattern of recording -- past is that, very largely, it is a correct and truthful account.

(v) No annalistic history in Islam is entirely free of a superimposed principle of arrangement, that is, the reigns of caliphs and other potentates. In addition, a special biography is as a rule devoted to the particular ruler either in connection with the year of his accession to the throne or the year of his death. Those biographies stress the moral and ethical qualities (or lack of such qualities) of the particular ruler and often also give a description of his physical appearance. A list of his children, wives, officials, and other statistical information (for instance, the names of the leaders of the pilgrimage during his caliphate) is also found in this connection.³⁵ Political events are not lost sight of. This is done to bring out clearly the personality of the ruler.

(vi) On a larger scale, geneology influenced historical writing in the *Ansab* work of al-Baladuri, whose contents were exploited by later historians such as Ibn al-Atir in his *Kamil*, and in the geneological literature of western Islam. Minor traces of the great interest in geneology are encountered all over Muslim historiography. Wherever possible, long pedigrees are given. There are lists of the wives and children of rulers. The ethnic origin of rulers is often discussed, as in the case of the Daylamite Buyids, the Mongol rulers, or the Berber dynasties in the West. More important than all this was the universal retention of the geneological view of human relations as the driving force in history and the fact that the interest in geneology was soon transposed into one in biography. Hisham al-Kabi was a great geneologist, and composed works on geneology, Islamic history and other fields. Ibn-i-Khalikan wrote: "The most comprehensive and useful among them are his works like *Kitab* known as '*al-Jamharah Fi Marifat al-Ansab*', and

in that subject nobody has composed better work than his; and his book to which he gave the name, '*Al-Munazzal Fil-Nasab*' and that book is voluminous than '*al-Jamharah*', and his book '*al-Mujaz Fil-Nasab*' and '*Kitab al-Farid*' on geneology, which he composed for al-Mamun; and his book '*al-Muluki*' also on geneology, which he wrote for Jafar b. Yahya at Bar-makki".³⁶

(vii) Muslim historiography is rich with biographies. One of the first biographies is that of Ibn-i-Ishaq. His reputation rests on his most informative and valuable book, *Kitab al-Siyar wal-Maghazi*, which has also come down to us, and is the earliest existing work on history and biography composed by the Muslims. Ibn-i-Ishaq already acquired the widest reputation in Maghazi and is known to us as Imam. The judgement of the Traditions, in general, is that his narration may be quoted as authority in Sirah and Maghazi. It is certain that his biography of the Prophet had no serious rival. Ever since its compilation, this book has been regarded as the chief source of Muslim history.³⁷

(viii) Much less important than the contribution of biography to historiography, but not entirely insignificant, was that of geography. The historian and geographer al-Ya'qubi described how he collected material for his geographical work. He travelled extensively and asked everybody he met for information about his country. He wrote down what his informants told him and took notes about the history of the Muslim conquest as well as the administrative and economic history and the present situation of each region.³⁸

The geographical dictionary of Ya'qut seldom fails to include short biographies of the most outstanding personalities who were born in a particular locality.

The author who to our knowledge was the first to combine

history and scientific geography in the grand style was al-Mas'udi, Al-Yaqubi had still kept his geographical and historical works separate. Al-Masudi, on the other hand, described in his history, before he went into the historical narrative, the form of the earth, the cities, the noteworthy geographical phenomena, the oceans, mountains, rivers, island, lakes, buildings, and the physical transformations which the earth had undergone, and similar topics.

Thus, we find al-Yaqubi indicates the astrological constellation in the beginning of each reign, and local histories later on sometimes indicate the astrological constellation which prevailed at the foundation of a given city.

Astrologers, according to the *Ihwan as-safa*, ought to have a good knowledge of dates (*sa-rihats*). And, for the same author, the activity of the astrologers (*munajjimun*) has bearing upon seven points which read like a list of the contents of an annals history. Those seven points concern 1) the religious groups (*milal*) and dynasties 2) the transfer of power (*manlakah*) from one nation to the other, or from one country to the other, 3) the changes of individual rulers and the wars and disturbances which take place in connection with that, 4) the events that take place each year, namely rising and falling prices, fertility and sterility, pestilence, death, and drought, diseases and illnesses and safety (well-being), 5) the daily events, month by month and day by day, 6) the nativities of each human being, and 7) the indication of concealed items, namely, misplaced and concealed objects, stolen and un-known things, and the answer to queries. Thus, astrologers, were concerned with everything that was of interest to histories, and a little more.³⁹

(ix) The closest approach to subordinating history to philosophy, at least outwardly, was made by al-Mutahhar b. Tahir al-Maqdisi in the *Bad wa-t-tarih*, which he wrote in 355/966. The introductory chapter of the Beginning and History

contains a theoretical discussion of knowledge and intellect and thus shows the author's intention to view the whole universe and its history under the aspect of philosophy.⁴⁰

(x) Complete *fauslamiyat* were prefixed to Ibn al-Tarikh's *Fahr*, whose description of the ideal ruler is enlivened by some examples derived from personal experience in the late thirteenth century, and, owing to special circumstances which made that seem very appropriate to the History of Tabaristan of Ibn Isfandiyyar in the early years of the same century. Political Science as a matter of theoretical speculation did not enter Muslim historiography until Ibn-i-Khaldun.⁴¹

(xi) Al-Tabari's history was incomparably more important than al-Yaqubi who soon was all but forgotten. Al-Tabari brought to his work the scrupulousness and indefatigable long-windedness of the theologian, the accuracy and love of order of the scholarly jurist, and the insight into political affairs of the practicing lawyer-politician.⁴²

The third great historical work of the period is al-Masudi's *Muruj*, which belonged to a series of apparently quite similar historical works by the same author. The author's brief *Kitab at-tambih*, with its constant references to other parts of the series, makes it fully evident that it was the object of that series to treat all material phenomena of the world under the aspect of history.⁴³

Universal historiography thus lost its power to give a well-rounded picture of the world which it had possessed for many centuries, and which was curtailed only by the circumstance that for the Muslim period the knowledge of the events of the non-Muslim part of the world was extremely scant. The Muslim approach to the writing of universal history, always offered many inducements to historians to be superficial, to copy their sources mechanically, to prefer quantity to quality

But it also represented a kind of historical consciousness which is one of the first necessary stages on the road toward a truly human concept of the world.⁴⁴

(xi) The occupation with local history has at all times been a favourite literary expression of group consciousness. The strong attachment which binds human beings to the place where they were born was expressed by all the various population groups which constituted the Muslim realm.

As a truncated form of theological local historiography, the *fada'il* works in praise of a given locality may find a place here. Up to the eleventh century, the words *fada'il* or *khawariq* (praise-worthy, or peculiar qualities, respectively) in connection with a city or region would indicate a work which contained only a limited amount of historical information and dealt with the praiseworthy physical and geographical features of that city or region and the excellence of its inhabitants; often, also the literary topic of the rival praise and blame of two localities was treated. Later on, the title *fada'il* usually denoted a monograph collection of quotations from Quran and *hadith* related sources in praise of a particular locality, exactly as we find them included in the introductions of local histories (both secular and theological). All this can no longer be considered a part of historiography, though it remains another manifestation of the devotion to regional divisions which often influenced the course of Muslim history with not too happy results, but contributed to Muslim historiography as one of its most productive branches.⁴⁵ Indeed, it may be doubted whether anywhere in earlier history, there existed so large historical literature as we find it in Islam.

The development of modern historical writing seems to have gained considerably in speed and substance through the utilization of a Muslim historical literature which enabled western historians, from the seventeenth century on, to see a

large section of the ... through foreign eyes.

And if there is a basic truth which Muslim historiography could teach us after all historiographical efforts, would it not be this that the simple approach to history as a source of facts and examples, both useful and informative, might still be the best key to historical understanding?⁴⁶ This question is raised by Rosenthal with a view that reply to it is preserved to be affirmative. In the field of historiography the Muslim have an edge over the Westerners. This is the conclusion which modern historiographer cannot miss after the study of Muslim historiography.

A STUDY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

for

M.A. Students
&
OTHER COMPETITIVE EXAMINATIONS

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