

## Islamic Historical Writing: A Critical Analysis

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**Abstract:** Throughout many centuries of change and development, the Islamic history continues to represent the memory reservoir of the Muslim nation with its multiple backgrounds and affiliations. The need for a critical method of the Islamic history to help capture its diversity and richness is unavoidable. This study examines the reasons causing a decline in historical objectivity and in the poor vision affecting the process of historical writing and codification throughout longer periods of time. This research discusses the different factors that negatively affected the writing of the Islamic history while drawing on the sources of the Islamic revelation in its capturing of a number of historical events and developments of previous nations. This inquiry also highlights the rational justifications for interpreting the Islamic history and the need for an integrated approach to it. Such an approach however, merge issues of chains of transmission with the need for critiquing the historical texts in addition to the use of modern methods to scrutinize the historical narrations found in the Islamic historical literature. This exploration is instrumental for current research on Islamic history, particularly towards the process and style of re-writing Islamic historical themes for contemporary contexts and audiences.

**Key words:** Islamic History • Historiography • Historical Methodology • Historical Criticism

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the last century, the study of history has moved away from mere reporting and has pursued a more analytical approach to understanding and presenting history. History is no longer satisfied with simply recording the facts and events that transpired between states and nations. It has moved away from reporting and description of facts and events and now addresses the activities of human beings and civilizations. Analysis, comparison and criticism are now directed towards better understanding the minutiae and specific details of framed historical periods according to specified paradigms and procedures. Early Muslims enjoyed the share of the predecessor in historical writing and lead scholarship in the science of history and its philosophy. Evidence of systematic historical writing and the philosophy of history are present in early Islamic historical books. This indicates the absorption of the early Muslims of the value of studying history and the pros and cons of its various approaches. This paper attempts

to answer questions related to the methodology of writing Islamic history and the credibility resultant from such methods. In addition, the methodological problems they encountered are discussed in the capacity of how such challenges have undermined objectivity in historical recording. This research addresses the methodology of Muslim historian through a critical and analytical comparison with the methods of the Qur'ān and Sunnah in dealing with historical events and history in general.

**The Methodology of Historical Writing:** Scholars in Islamic history both old and new collectively agree that the aim of the study of history is to draw historical lessons. The reason for this agreement is the Qur'ānic verse, "*There is, in their stories, instruction for men endowed with understanding.*" (Yusuf: 111)[1]. The Holy Qur'ān recounts stories in the context of providing historical lessons. To it can be attributed the beginnings of the science of history among Muslims. Many books are testimony to the Muslim historical method being constructed upon a Qur'ānic basis from its early inception

through to the heights of historical scholarship in Islam as evidenced by the golden ages at the hands of IbnKhalidūn. However, despite the skill and leadership of Muslims in the science of history, their efforts varied in terms of scientific maturity that combines between facts and judges historical material according to fixed norms and standards.

If the aim of historical instruction was to preserve the memory of nations, the aim of Islamic history, in addition to preserving the memory of nations, is to answer the crucial set of questions and the interpretation of the repeated disasters that have taken place in Islamic history. Among those questions are: Why is Islamic History is focused on political events? Why did the Muslims fail in Andalusia? How did the Crusaders come to invade Jerusalem? And who is responsible for the destruction of many historical achievements and the loss of the Caliphate? Failure to provide answers to these questions has had a lasting effect on Muslim culture. In addition, focusing on the histories of central areas in the Muslim world risks ignoring the histories of other regions in the Islamic world. Islamic history became confined to the geography of human beings and specific periods and often did not exceed the Arab world. In light of this, historical criticism appears to be weak and the treatment of historical reports appears to have deteriorated due to this partial and fragmented approach.

Furthermore, the lack of clarity in the Islamic perception of historical movements among many historians, along with the ambiguity of the effects of the controversy regarding the relationship of fate and freedom, the law of causality and the association of premises with conclusions, are matters that are largely absent from old historical narratives. This fails to provide us with a clear direction in analysis due to its sole reliance on narratives free from any discernable analysis. Seldom do early historians refer to laws and norms despite the fact that the Qur'an drew attention to such considerations. Muslim historians did not attempt to formulate a Qur'anic view of history and failed to construct a comprehensive theoretical view of history that could possibly be termed the Islamic or Qur'anic methodology of historical writing. Doubtless there were a number of ingenious attempts; however they occurred much later as in the case of IbnKhalidūn for example [2].

There are many shortcomings in the writing of Islamic history. In this context, Ma'mūdShākir is of the view that the knowledge we currently have of many of the caliphs is both questionable and incorrect. This is because we drew our accounts of the past from unreliable sources that

were composed by those who showed enmity and malice towards newly appointed caliphs irrespective of their belonging to the rightly guided caliphs or the Umayyad or Abbasid dynasties. Much of what has reached us from the accounts of the caliphs are one sided. The caliph, for example, is not only a ruler who sits on the throne and issues decrees, replies to letters, receives compliments and congratulations and listens to the poets praises of him, these are but few of the aspects that were recorded distorted. More importantly, the caliph was also the imam of the Muslims in prayer, gave the Friday and festive sermons, their leader in Jihad, the Judge in special tribunals and a public official who derived legal injunctions and discussed and traded views with scholars, however these aspects of the life of a caliph have not reached us [3].

#### **The Methodological Background of Writing Islamic**

**History:** Revelation constitutes a methodological reference in the writing of Islamic history. The Qur'an recalls the positions of tribes and nations towards God along with the reasons for the rise and fall of societies as repeated abstract models regardless of geographical and chronological differences. Prophets in the Holy Qur'an represent the custodians and defenders of the truth, whereas the persons of Pharaoh, HāmĒn and QārĒn are human models of darkness and oppression. As for Satan, he is a deceitful and manifest enemy. He has no power to determine historical events as the flow of history is solely the preserve of mankind and is testimony to his conscious and rational or irrational choices. The Qur'an has chronicled the history of mankind through its recollection of the trends of civilizations and the stories of notable individuals to an extent that is sufficient to guide mankind to a more peaceful and superior future. This is achieved when mankind avoids the errors of past centuries.

To educate Muslims and to establish an exemplary model of society, Prophet Muhammad drew from the stories of former nations as well as from the lessons of those who were destroyed as exemplified in the following saying of the Prophet: Narrated KhabbĒb bin al-AraĀ: We complained to God's Apostle (of the persecution inflicted on us by the infidels) while he was sitting in the shade of the Ka'ba, leaning over his Burd (i.e. covering sheet). We said to him, "Would you seek help for us? Would you pray to God for us?" He said, "Among the nations before you a (believing) man would be put in a ditch that was dug for him and a saw would be put over his head and he would be cut into two pieces; yet that

(torture) would not make him give up his religion. His body would be combed with iron combs that would remove his flesh from the bones and nerves, yet that would not make him abandon his religion. By God, this religion (i.e. Islam) will prevail till a traveller from *Qan'É* (in Yemen) to *al'ar'ama* will fear none but God, or a wolf as regards his sheep, but you (people) are hasty [5].

The historic vision in the Qur'an present in all inherent historical references collectively contributes towards forming an integrated interpretative historical cycle. The Qur'an has identified the aim of history. The stories recalled therein were not intended for mere metal luxury and emotional excitement, rather historical lessons and the laws of human civilization lead mankind to the aim of existence itself and encourage him to avoid the regrettable mistakes of nations and societies that have transpired since the beginning of creation.

It seems that the logic of history in the Qur'an is closely related to this goal as evidenced by the verse, "There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding." (Yusuf: 111). Al-Üabari was of the view that reference to the pagans of Quraysh taught them that the lessons drawn from the brothers of Prophet Yüsuf reflect the circumstances of Muhammad, in that he (God) removed him from their ranks and assisted him and established him on earth. He then furnished for him an army as he did with Prophet Yüsuf [7].

It would appear that the Qur'anic exegeses of these verses do not differ. In the book titled *'al-Awā'* (the lights), for example, Shaykh Mu'ammad al-Amīn al-Shinqī'i, is of the view that these verses pertain to the reports of the Messengers concerning their respective nations and that the main lesson apparent to those who can reason is that God will save the faithful and destroy the disbelievers [6]. This explanation is offered by other Qur'anic exegeses in which it appears that the scholars in Qur'anic exegesis and historians collectively agree that the stories in the Qur'an are lessons that move the hearts and minds and calls for reflection and meditation. They further agree that the Qur'an presents history in such a way that relates the present to the past and it is by virtue of this characteristic of the Qur'an's vision of history that is evidence of the aim behind the study of history.

It is also important to note the achievements of bygone nations and to recognize their might and civilization. However at the same time, it is similarly important to recognize the failures that led to their ruin in that they turned away the apostles for which they merited a wretched ending. This is testimony to the responsibility of nations for their destiny and future, as evidenced in the

verse, "Do they not travel through the earth and see what was the End of those before them?" (Ghāfir: 82). Al-Üabari's of the view that God addresses nations in such a way that they learn from the experiences of bygone nations and contemplate what befell them [8].

The Qur'an invites to a contemplative reading of its stories in order to recognise the interrelationship between the intellectual, historical and civilizational phenomenon in the Qur'an. In this, the common denominator is mankind; the subject of the universe, Qur'an and history. Among the features of the Qur'anic methodology in history is the unity of time. Time in Qur'an is one integrated unit and it is upon this basis that Muslim historians have treated time. History is not solely the past, but is at once the past, present and future. By way of its futuristic nature, the Qur'an invites towards the contemplation of the past in order to learn from its lessons despite it having predicted the future as in the verse, "A. L. M. The Roman Empire has been defeated in a land close by; but they, (even) after (this) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious-within a few years." (Rūm: 1-4). In addition, the metaphysical dimension that welds the present, past, future and the rest of life's details with the realm of the unseen, is an important feature in the treatment of historical events. Through the Qur'anic exposition of the history of mankind, it is possible to discover instances of methodological norms and standards for the treatment of history in its creedal and moral dimensions and in its historical and geographical context.

Works of *Ādīth*, biographies and military literature (*al-Maghāzī*) provide substantial material for the study of Islamic history while at the same time promotes the Qur'anic philosophy and its methodological viewpoints. For example, the biographical works of al-Wāqidi and al-BalādhĒrĒorganize events chronologically whereas the fragmentation of events is a characteristic of the works of the Mu'addithīn who strictly adhered to the laws of narrations and the methods of distinguishing between the chains of narrators. Perhaps their narration was incomplete. Part of the narration may have appeared in one place while the other in another as is the case of the *Maghāzī* of al-Bukhārī and to a lesser extent in Sa'īī Muslim due to his attention to the text [2]. Few have combined between the character of the historian and the mu'addith such as Mu'ammadibnIs'āq or Mu'ammadibnJarīr al-Üabari. The remaining biographical works gathered of narrations what they could and published their works without setting the truth of those narrations a condition for their acceptance with the

exception of al-Bukhārī and Muslim because of their setting truth *Ḍalīl* has a condition for accepting narrations related to the Prophet's biography [2].

From a reading of Islamic history, there is a discernable lack of consideration of the norms and standards set by the Qur'ān be they physical or moral in the process of recalling and recording historical events. Al-Ḍabārī for example, landed in this problem when he wrote on the battle of Badr without referring to Sūrah al-Anfāl which is not only related to this battle but identified the problems at hand. He quoted small portions of the Sūrah to the extent that it did not cover the event. Al-Ḍabārī is guilty of this in his coverage of all the Prophet's remaining battles. Ibn Kathīr followed suit and did not bother to add to the narrative or to its review. All he did was summarise the relevant Qur'ānic verses and al-Ḍabārī's narrations. Surprisingly, his book is almost bear of any prophetic traditions and relies on historical material for the reconstruction of the event which is interesting given that this is a subject in which authority and credibility primarily rest in Qur'ān and Ḍadīth [8]. Muslim historians were keen to realise the historical lesson, however their historical sources were not governed by the Qur'ānic method of recalling history with its historical, geographical and spiritual dimensions. It is not possible to write Islamic history and record the progress of the Islamic civilization without considering the various perspectives offered by the methods of Qur'ān and Ḍadīth in the process of recording history. The Qur'ānic method subjects the recording of history to the precise methodological standards set by the Qur'ān.

**Methodological Issues in the Recording of Islamic History:** In order to better understand the methodological problems afflicting the recording of Islamic history, it is necessary to contemplate the most important challenge and methodological issue that negatively impacted on the recording of Islamic history so that it becomes part of the consciousness of present day researchers in the field of Islamic history. If light is not shed on these issues then it runs the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past. Moreover, the study of the history of the recording of Islamic history aims to learn from the mistakes of earlier scholars.

**The Historical Narrative:** Shalabī divides the recording of Islamic history prior to the fall of the Caliphate in Baghdad in 656AH into two types. The first is concerned

with general narratives free from analysis or commentary, or research into its motives and its immediate and long-term results. This is the approach of the early historians who composed voluminous works containing narratives of historical events. The second type consists of an analysis of historical narrations without due attention awarded to the sequence of historical events. This is the approach of later historians who occupied themselves with the recording of a single event or one specific personality. Shalabī believes that one method cannot dispense with the other in the recording of history. Historical events that are not analysed and properly understood is an act of naivety and is of limited benefit. As for the isolation of events from among the sum of historical events, it provides an incomplete image. To record history along the lines of the recording of Ḍadīth in that it reports the narration and the narrators without paying attention to the manner has rendered the study of history in the modern era elusive and burdensome [8].

The challenges afflicting the historical narrative are serious and are inherited from past centuries. The historical texts have been exaggerated and have inherited a trend that is bent towards a form of storytelling necessitated by the logic of the narrative at the expense of the scientific method of history. In addition, the magnitude of narrations has affected the quality to the point that many historians repeat the same material without proper analysis and divorce of an overall detailed understanding of the events. It is as if it does not concern them. Historical reports are recorded for their narrations without addition or deduction.

Scientific integrity recognizes that the interest of the historians in the first three centuries in recording events along with the names and biographies and their chain of narrators are indicative of the care they took to ensure the truth of the reports and their objectivity and sincerity in reporting information without interpretation or explanation. However, following this approach in other historical books and to ignore the difference between the methodology of Ḍadīth and the methods of history, in addition to not taking into account the historical developments and the need to develop methods of presentation, have led to a problem in the reading of historical material that historians treat on the basis of being narratives. It has become important for the historian to objectively relate that which he has heard even if it appears contradictory. Historians have succumb to classifying historical events according to political periods

and the transition from one historic period to another often meant the fall of an authority, state, or the death of a ruler, as in the history of the caliphs, or the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. This classification is in need of a unified vision of history and constitutes an obstacle in the scientific reading of historical events.

**Footnotes and Additions:** There is another calamity that has not spared the recording of Islamic history. It is a practice adopted by those who added their own views and additional information in the margins, footnotes or at the end of chapters and sections of scholarly works. As time passed, scholars would add additional information into the original text and proceed to explain it in the margins. This confused later scholars who were not immune from mistaking the addition for the original which would lead them to attribute the later version to the original author [9]. This is a form of fraud both intentional and unintentional that has led to confusing the original texts with the later additions. This is undoubtedly one of the disadvantages in the recording of Islamic history.

**History and its Relationship with Islamic Science:** Islamic history maintained a close and objective relationship with the rest of the Islamic sciences. However, from the point of specialization it is possible to separate it from the rest of the Islamic studies [8]. There is no justification for the historian to be ignorant of the rest of the Islamic sciences. The early historians were sufficiently cultured and were well read in the complete spectrum of Sharī'ah sciences. They did not neglect the sciences of ġadīth and fiqh and did not forego the methodology of the Uūliyyīn (scholars in Islamic jurisprudence). Regrettably, we have arrived at an age wherein many orientalists are more familiar with the Islamic sciences. They refrain from writing on Islamic history until after they are sufficiently familiarised with Islamic studies, regardless of their ill-intentions and the serious mistakes which befall them out of their severe bias and the nature of the colonial enterprise in which they endeavoured. However, in reality they wrote and delved deeply into the study of the Islamic civilization and adopted the modern methods in their treatment of events in a time where this characteristic is lacking among many contemporary specialists in Islamic history. It is also unjust to attribute the critical methods to the orientalists as there is numerous evidence of textual criticism among early Muslim historians. Early and contemporary Muslim scholars reject anecdotes on the grounds that it violates logic and reason [2].

The extremism that takes place in the name of textual criticism manifests in the deceptive understanding of texts according to the approach of the orientalists and their students and is a result of religious and racial prejudices. It is not merely because of a misunderstanding of the language and provisions of Islam along with its rules and objectives [2]. This does not however entitle Muslim historians to reject criticism and the implied objectivity which is an original Islamic approach nor can the two approaches in the recording of Islamic history be ignored, namely the criticism of both the chains of transmission (*naqd al-sanad*) and content of traditions (*naqd al-mutĒn*).

It can be observed from many of the writings of Muslim historians that they failed to distinguish between narrations according to the rules for the classification of ġadīth, whereas in the last two centuries the writings of contemporary historians are characterised by the critical methods that have been influenced by the western methodology. There is a need to adapt the reports of Islamic history in which the chain of narrators (*isnād*) and a massive library of biographies are among its defining features. No one can deny the scientific and historical value of the *isnād* and a vast library of biographies; unfortunately however they remain a wealth of information in isolation from the historical writings on the history of Islam and the study of the Prophet's biography. As for textual criticism and the analysis, comparison and annotation adopted by the historical method, it has its importance such as the criticism of the chain of narrators the importance of which is manifest. Historical texts must equally comply with the critical and rational standards along with the standards set for correct transmission. This is particularly true in the case of the history of the beginning of Islam which cannot dispense with the method of the *isnād*. What details would there be regarding the historical events concerned with the beginning of Islam if the researcher was to dispense with the methodology of the muġaddithīn regarding criticism of the chain of transmission (*isnād*)?! [2]. Objective historical writing cannot dispense with the two approaches.

**The Absence of the Realistic Dimension:** The Qur'ān divested historical events of time and place for the betterment of man's future. As such, historical events should be written in such a way that establishes a direct relationship with reality so that it may provide answers for current questions, explain confusion and events, interpret flaws, determine the hidden and obvious errors, to

discover the secrets of the past and the reasons behind the weakness of the Ummah, the decline of its culture and the corruption of its societies. This is because history is the first to ask about the fall of a civilization. However, the history of Islam consists of reports of the ebb and flow of history and defeats and victories. According to al-Ghazālī, history is recorded on pages just as news agencies record news on billboards or chess tournaments [11]. What is required from Islamic history is to imagine the steps of the Prophet step by step and to interpret them accordingly. How did he choose his men and from which region, how did he prepare them, what was the nature of the conditions that surrounded the rise of this Ummah and how did the Prophet construct his nation, instilled its laws, nurtured its individuals and families, constructed its dwellings and moulded its social, economic, geographical and vital relations?

It is not the preserve of the historian to decide what is recorded or rejected. Some historians were guilty of this in that certain important events were ignored or reported in the most sparing manner. They did not record the spiritual, intellectual, social and military events associated with those important events [11]. It was incumbent upon the historians of Islamic history to analyze those periods and those preceding it and to keep track of the developments and changes that transpired in Islam. They are obliged to treat the Islamic system according to the ideas and beliefs and the cultural and social systems prevalent at the time in addition to considering the economic conditions, the historical remnants and the large diversity of human relations [11]. However, the books of Islamic history were divorced from reality and in many instances exaggerated events and inflated numbers as if they are not governed by the logic of reality.

**Neglecting the Cultural and Social Dimensions:** The majority of historical records address the histories of kings and politics. This came at the cost of neglecting social histories and details of the general lives of civilizations which were secondary considerations after kings and armies. This is a serious mistake that befell al-Ūbarī, IbnKathīr, al-Dhahabī and others when they pursued political histories. This contributed to the deterioration of social and cultural histories and the omission of the histories of knowledge, culture, society and art. Muġammad ‘Imārah raised a critical question concerning this ambiguity when he titled his article ‘Was Our History Particularly Dark?’ in which he expressed the lack of interest in scientific and literary life as compared to political life. This led to the absence of the reality of

bureaucracies and institutions, architecture and cities, markets, fields, schools, mosques, libraries, hotels, sanctuaries and hospitals...etc. [12]. ‘Imārah says:

“I realized that the cause for this false image of our history is the incorrect approach of the incapable through whom this history was written. Most of the old records of Islamic history among them ġadīth, shed light on authority and the sultan. This history is absent of historical records pertaining to the history of the Ummah which remained confined to the works of the jurists, philosophers, theologians, scholars of Qur’ānic exegesis, Muġaddithīn, reciters, doctors, literatures, poets, Sūfīs, ascetics, experimental scholars, the mujahidin, artisans, hobbyists, traders, farmers...even singers and musicians...etc.” [12].

**The Absence of Objectivity:** The commitment to objectivity in historical writing is considered the shortest route to scientific and historical credibility so that there is no need to defend or to justify historical wrongs. Plenty of works have been composed in response to the claims of critics without proving the facts, removing confusion, or painting a clear picture. The writing of history is the systematic use of methodological mechanisms and to embrace a wide range of facts and sciences with due attention paid to the manner and means used to prove historical events both new and old in order to ensure the validity and credibility of the report. But what happened is that a group of historians were caught in the pitfalls of beautifying, glorifying, exaggerating, nepotism, fabrication and praising the qualities of kings and leaders and turned a blind eye to the mistakes of kings and politicians as is evident in the history of kings and kingdoms. They rendered them great and defamed their enemies to no end.

It is amazing to note the difference in methods of recording history between YaġyaIbnKhalduġ and his brother ‘Abd al-RaġmānIbnKhalduġ. In his book titled ‘Bughya al-Ruwwād’ (The Aspiration of the Pioneers), YaġyaIbnKhalduġ records the actions of the Sultan AbĒ ×ammĒ the second and the victories of his armies without recording the historical events caused by the conflict of the Sultan with his eldest son AbĒTashfīn. In addition, the subsequent weakness of his armies’ influence and Arab-Bedouin seizure of territories in the emirates were also not recorded. The first section of this book is a comprehensive introduction to the history of the state in which the historian dwelled on the description of the Ziyānid Dynasty and the status of Tlemcen in the ġadīths of the Prophet.

The impact of some of the companions and the righteous and the virtue of its scholars and the importance of scribes were contained in the biographies of the majority of scholars of his time. The book also contains lengthy praises of the governors and princes and his approach is similar to that of his contemporaries in rhymed prose and the mincing of words in the description of the court and the anecdotes of the sultans. It does not mention the defeats that permeated the political and military life in the era of BanĒZayyān, whereas his brother the famous IbnKhalidūn paid attention to the political defeats inflicted by the Merinids on the 'Ibādiyyah state [13]. The difference in approaches can be attributed to their different understanding of history.

Many historical records appeared containing little analysis and refinement and were little questioned and critiqued to the extent that the historian would present a collection of contradictory narrations without criticism and analysis in order to select his preferred opinions without supporting evidence. Perhaps that is what caused Sheikh Muġammad al-Ghazālī to believe that Islamic history was deceitfully written and there is no place for such things in Islam [10]. Nobody knows the true reasons for the collapse of the Islamic civilization because the reports of the historians are often descriptive, without due investigation of the facts, causes and habits of history that form the very bases for the study of history.

Among the examples of this is the story of the burning of the K'abah. Al-BalādhĒrī reports in his book 'Futūġ al-Buldān' (The Conquest of Nations) that a spark flew out into the wind from the camp of IbnZubayr. In the book 'AkhbārMakkah' (The News of Makkah), al-Azraqī reports two narrations of al-Ūbarī which both affirm that the cause of the fire was a spark carried by the wind. Other narrations attest to this without referring to the Umayyad army. Furthermore, two contradictory narrations are reported in the '*al-Kāmilfī al-Tarīkh*' (The Complete History) of IbnAthīr one of which suggests the fire was caused by a blow to the K'abah from the Umayyad army, while the other suggests that the fire was caused by a spark from a fire built by a person from the camp of IbnZubayr. IbnAthīr chose the second narration without mentioning his reasoning behind this choice. As for the fifth source, in the 'Murūġ al-Dhahab' (Meadows of Gold) of al-Mas'ūdī one narration is reported that indicates that the Umayyad army was the cause of the fire [14].

**Sectarian Fanaticism:** Many historians have been caught up in the trap of sectarianism and the inclination towards their respective communities. The Mu'tazilite for example,

glorifies the Mu'tazilite doctrine and constructs history in its favour, whereas the ShĒ'ite curses the Sunnis and distorts their history. Moreover, this sectarian fanaticism and general intolerance of the doctrines of others has led to the practice of slandering those of other doctrines and accusing them of blasphemy. Traces of this can be found even in the works of respectable scholars such as al-Subkī. In his book '*Ūbaqāt al-Shāf'iyyah*' (The Stations of the ShĒ'is), he glorifies the Shāf'īs over others. He says of AbĒ al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī for example: al-MĒzinĒ is a drop from a cloud while al-Ash'arī is a hair on his chest. Al-Subkī detracts from the value of IbnTaymiyyah, al-Barāzilī, al-Dhahabī and others and belittles them out of his severe intolerance, without providing any objective reasons or evidences for raising certain personalities and debasing others. This is an error that results from the absence of an established methodology for the treatment of events. The methodology adopted by historians is often spontaneous [15].

The history of whole nations has been distorted. The history of the Umayyad dynasty for example which was written in the Abbasid era was replete with distortion, spin and prejudice against the caliphs. It focuses on the many political differences that transpired in the court of the Abbasids. It was written from the perspectives of individuals who were at odds with the former dynasty and in the process they disregarded all objectivity towards the other. The history of the Mamluk era in Egypt [3, 16] also calls for a revision due to the negativity for which it was portrayed. Ahmad ShalabĒ says in his encyclopedia that there are self-imposed elements of truth that invite the historian to consider these elements as a basis for his research. The study of the Umayyad dynasty cannot possibly ignore their achievements, victories, bureaucracies, thought, civilization and reforms [8].

**The Political Influence:** The books of history report strange stories of political corruption of which the historian hastily passes by. The story of the Abbasid Caliph Must'asimBillah was known for his insatiable love of money to the point that he halted the salaries of the troops until they were afflicted with hunger and began begging at the gates of the mosques. This happened at a time when Hulagu intended Baghdad wreaking therein unprecedented killing. The question is what did the historians write about this incident and who is responsible for the fall of Baghdad? As for IbnKathīr, he chronicled the Abbasid Caliph and his niggardliness towards his soldiers along with his extravagant spending on domestic servants [10]. However, he did not mention

the social environment of the scholars owing to the Caliph's niggardliness and was content in deducing Hulagu's contempt of the caliph. Hulagu marvelled as to how the Caliph with all these treasures can withhold the salaries of the army. Hulagu wrote to the Governor of Damascus and warned him to hand over the city and frightened him of the fate of the Caliph. The following is a part of the text of his letter, "*We summoned the Caliph and queried him for which he lied and felt remorse. He was then executed. He had many valuable treasures yet he was miserable so he amassed wealth and cared not for others*" [10]. The context of the story inevitably raises questions. However, the majority of the books of history that recount this event have been content with sparing narratives, which has led to the Tatars bearing full responsibility for the fall of Baghdad. This is true at least for school and university readings.

The science of history has matured according to IbnKhalidūn who in his Muqaddimah required the historian to be knowledgeable of the nature of civilizations so as to facilitate his examination of reports and to prevent him from bias. Understanding the nature of civilizations enables historians to distinguish truths from falsehoods and honesty from lies. Historians are required to understand that history is the account of human societies. They should be aware of the various civilizations of the world, the conditions inflicted upon it, the vagaries of mankind along with the remainder of what transpires in a civilization [13].

The standard of IbnKhalidūn is the construct of civilization and what transpires within. He distinguishes between a civilization's self-imposed conditions namely that which transpires out of its very nature and that which is externally inflicted upon it, along with that which cannot possibly afflict it [13]. This requires complete knowledge of the differences between the conditions and symptoms like a physician who diagnoses the ill. He does not investigate the symptoms except as a function of determining the cause. Some symptoms may be misleading which is known only by a skilled physician. IbnKhalidūn proceeded on the conviction that history is not merely a record of events. In his Muqaddimah he was interested in growth or historical development and observed the changing conditions of nations and their customs. He considered it a subtle yet severe mistake in history to be perplexed by the changing conditions of nations and generations due to the changes in eras and the passing of days. It is a severely subtle melody which does not manifest except after the passing of long periods.

IbnKhalidūn also recognized that the historian in need of knowledge on a vast range of subjects, perceptive understanding and certitude in order to avoid landing in pitfalls and errors. A historian should not singularly rely on reports without regard for the nature of civilizations and the social conditions. He should consider the past in the present. Furthermore, IbnKhalidūn did not lose sight of the histories of nations and the differences in their environments and natures. He is the first to refer to the methodology of history in his Muqaddimah, "*In its substance lie contemplation and verification, the explanation of entities and its principles are precise, knowledge of the manners of actualities and their causes is profound and it is fundamentally inherent in ancient wisdom*" [13].

#### **Orientalism and Colonialism and the Writing of Islamic History:**

There is a measure of arbitrariness in the understanding of the Orientalists and their interpretation of historical texts that results from racial and religious prejudices, along with a poor understanding of the language and provisions of Islam in addition to its rules and objectives [2]. On this occasion, SayyidQu'ib is of the view that the cause of deficiencies in the historical writings of Islamic history at the hands of the Orientalists is the lack of an element or elements in the understanding of Western writings regarding Eastern lifestyles particularly the Islamic lifestyle. This is a spiritual and metaphysical element in which lies the difference between the two natures (East and West) and a misunderstanding of the nature of spirituality or the spiritual dimension of an event which a westerner is unable to perceive, especially after the spread and dominance of material theories and the experimental method [11]. This perspective has its value if we were to examine the nature of the mistakes that Orientalists commit in their view of Islamic history. The details they provide are dictated by their imagination and the caliphs are portrayed as being free to engage in fun, absurdities and immoralities, not to mention the myths they have fabricated regarding the Messenger of God and his wives and the Muslim caliphs and the Sultans and the many circumstances and relationships they have conjured up that do not exist and for which there is no evidence.

If this explains part of the extremism occurring in the understanding of Islamic history from the perspective of the Orientalists the examples of which are almost incalculable, then the writings of Henri La Manse and the IgnazGoldziher and Geatani overflow with the colonial outlook, which is closer to myth than to truth. Their writings did not treat Islamic history as the history of the



Ummah, but on the basis of being a mixture of political parties, tribes, social classes, minorities and races. They spread accusations and issued judgments and interpretations emerging outside of the spirit of Islamic history [17].

As for Montgomery Watt, he interpreted the essential environment which gave rise to Islam as being the contrast and conflict between the nomadic aspirations of Mecca on one hand and the new material environment in which it found itself on the other. It is as if he perceived nothing outside of Mecca's markets and traders. His reading is a materialistic interpretation based on a partial reading of Islamic history [18]. Although Watt gave a materialistic interpretation of Islamic history in which the decisions of the Prophet revolved around economic interest and the forging of economic relations, what is more troubling is that an entire generation of Arab students of the Orientalists has exceeded all reasonable limits in their adoption and defense of these views. This is the case for Sha'bān Muḥammad 'Abd al-ḥay in his book 'Øadr al-Islām wa 'al-Dawlah al-Umayyiyah' (The Rise of Islam and the Umayyad Dynasty) in which he is caught providing a materialistic interpretation of history and two hundred pages go by without anything other than his emphasis that the strategy of the Prophet was primarily concerned with economic interests and forging alliances. He asserts that the people of Medina appointed him their leader in order to solve their economic problems and their political differences. There is no mention of their faith in him and his message [19].

The colonial institution has distorted Islamic history in the name of scientific research while using certain statements and documents issued by some Arab governments to further promote negative prejudice against it. It has promoted ignorance of the history of the Ottoman Empire among Arab researchers and managed to portray it in the minds of the Arabs as being nothing more than taxes, injustice and abuse, isolation, poverty, ignorance and having been poor in the Arabic language. In contrast, Napoleon (d. 1821) whose empire began and ended in the same year of 1815 is still seen as a symbol of heroism. To them, Napoleon's colonial campaigns in the East are considered among the most beautiful epithets and symbols of humanity. However, history failed to record the achievements of the Ottoman Empire like how they saved the Arabs from the infiltration of the Portuguese armies and prevented them from entering the Red Sea to conquer Jeddah and then to march to Mecca and Medina. It overlooked its spread in vast areas that had not hitherto been subjected to Islamic rule. It was an empire that governed three continents and its armies

remained powerful until the beginning of the nineteenth century. This Islamic Empire established itself in many parts of Europe and the loyalty of the Ottomans to Islam was unquestionable. Their conversion to Islam was voluntarily and in good standing. For centuries it stood as a formidable barricade from the tide of Crusader expansion. Different religions and cultures coexisted and flourished within the Ottoman Empire in a state of peace and harmony.

As for the Arabs, the ḥijāz and the Levant voluntarily accepted Ottoman rule during the reign of Selim I (1465-1520) and received protection from the Portuguese in the Red Sea [20]. The Ottoman Empire provided abundant public funding for the Al-Aqḥ Mosque and built walls around it. The Ottomans worked hard towards applying Islamic law. They encouraged and respected scholars. The Mufti or Islamic teacher always enjoyed positions of prominence and authority in all regions [20].

In spite of their many achievements and contributions, Ottoman rule is still considered colonialism and occupation. This position was championed by one of the advisors of Jamal Abdel Nasser who in 1962 claimed that the Ottoman occupation initiated out of religious convictions. One of his proofs is the separatist movements that declared insurgency against the Ottoman Empire, which were led by gang leaders and military commanders. It did not reflect Arabia such as the movement of Alibeck in Egypt, the Kurdish insurgents, the Turkish Pashas and the Zaydi movement in Yemen [20]. However, is this sufficient evidence to question seven centuries of civilization and urbanization and to judge a great empire as just being colonialism? Yes that is what happened. The problem was that Orientalist mistakes and Muslim myths were not purged from Islamic history.

Plenty material on Islamic history remains published by orientalist and colonial institutions, which is one of the ills afflicting the Islamic culture and manifests in the form of contradictions exploited by orientalists and colonial researchers to sow intellectual and political chaos among the Ummah. Colonialism has corrupted the histories of past nations and in doing so has obliterated much of the Islamic heritage. It has filled minds with histories designed to divide the Muslim world (ShannÉwÉ, 1980, 1:20). It brought the French to Algeria and the Jews to Palestine and manipulated history to support the colonial migration to Algeria and the Jews to Palestine. It further supported the migration of Chinese and Indians to the Malay Archipelago and Singapore which was once a Muslim majority is now predominantly occupied by Indians and Chinese [20].

On the other hand, the recording of history reflects Muslim ignorance of others and a failure to recognize their histories. This is another defect in the recording of Islamic history, especially since this 'other' may be an adversary in waiting. Al-Ghazālī believes that most of the attacks that have undermined the civilizational structure of the Ummah resemble unexpected earthquakes due to a failure to realize what is taking place around us. Capital cities have fallen, regions were lost and Andalusia usurped and studies of 'the other' remain close to zero. In contrast, others are carefully studying Muslims and Islamic history [10]. Even when Muslims appear to pay attention to others, their interest is often superficial and does not reach the point of offering detailed and credible information. This ignorance could lead to blindness of the other, at a time where the world has become a single community and scientific and historical data is accessible to everyone. In spite of this, Islamic history remains written in isolation from global events and the historical stories of Islam remain in the margins of world history. Furthermore, underdevelopment in Muslim intellectual production will only lead to nurturing generations of Western minds formed over a centuries' long preoccupation with deadly materialism and a rebellion against spiritual values that is??guided by perplexing positivistic thought [2].

**Review of Islamic History:** All the shortcomings hitherto presented in addition to the failure to consider the extents of the geographical, cultural and human diversity in the Ummah call for the recording of Islamic history to be revisited. Muslims consist of diverse races among them Arabs, Turks, Persians, Malays, Chinese and Eastern Europeans. There are also Muslims in Europe and the Americas. Despite this geographical and racial diversity, Islamic history is still a term used to refer to the history of the Middle East because it is mostly interested in the history of the Arabs. This indicates the absence of the history of other Islamic nations and culture which is the view held by Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazālī (Ghazālī, 1991, 105). School curricula throughout the Muslim world still do not teach the history of the Ummah and there is a profound ignorance of other Muslims. Muslim nations do not know each other's histories because it was not written collectively. Muslim nations have acted individually in recording their local or national histories [10].

To move away from this partial view of events and its corresponding practices requires the absorption of historical material and historical lessons, the elements of

time and space, to connect between the parts, goals and the general historical contexts and their examination in order to consciously understand their meaning and implications, so that we may return to history meaning. Some historical events are peculiar and the majority are separated from their contexts and the related factors that contributed towards the creation of the event [21]. The Islamic approach is a combination of elements from the school of *ĪadĒth* and Islamic jurisprudence and its respective rational and logical methods. It further combines elements from the school of medicine, astronomy and mathematics and its experimental approach. This is the thread that has associated the history of the West with Islam as stated by Gustave Le Bon in his book 'The civilization of the West.' [2]. However, this comprehensive approach is not found in the recording of Islamic history either among the early scholars or the later. The methods of *al-Jarġwa al-Ta'dĒl* (Principles of disparagement and crediting of narrators of *ĪadĒth*) are essential for historical narrations. Historical reports are also subjected to the surrounding factors and are influenced by a number of considerations. For this reason Ibn Khaldūn considered a pioneer in historical criticism by virtue of his subjecting historical narrations to reason and the established habits of civilizations. If the methods of scientific research along with the new approaches of historical scrutiny available today were available to Ibn Khaldūn, he would not hesitate to adopt them.

These conditions have merited calls from notable scholars in Islamic history to review Islamic history such as Aġmad ShalabĒ, Maġmūd Shākir, 'Imād al-Dīn Khalīl, Syed Quġb and Sheikh Muġammad al-Ghazālī to name a few. Their calls are a natural reaction to the many problems inherent in the recording of Islamic history, over which researchers have become confused, the wheat has yet to be separate from the chaff and the details of the narrative are in chaos. This form of Islamic history no longer constitutes a substantive background to the identity of a nation. Although the terminologies of the advocates for the revision and rewriting of history differ, with some reflection on the nature of the call it can be noticed that the motive and goal are one. In any case, the nature of the times calls for a review of the recording of history to facilitate its study and to collect scattered documents and sporadic perspectives for the benefit of future generations so that each event is awarded its due of scientific and objective treatment.

## CONCLUSION

History is the renewed reading of events according to the information available. Newly discovered information and scientific developments assists in the verification of much of what has been written in the past through limited means and mechanisms. We are in a better position today to examine and analyse human remains, tools and paper to determine the actual age of nations, cultures and people, not to mention the ability to retain an expansive amount of the historical heritage and to authenticate its origins and to determine later additions from the original. Furthermore, computers have made it possible to collect encyclopaedias of Islamic history susceptible to the review of millions of scholars online. Muslim scholars can participate by sharing the findings of their research. The least that can be said of the changes in nations caused by Islam and the rich accumulation of knowledge, concepts and cultures is that it is humanitarian and concerns all human beings. However, what happened is that Islamic history became preoccupied with the study of the past and reporting historical stories, reality was mixed with myth and truth with fiction. As for the life of the Prophet, it is a wealth of historical and educational material that remains confined in the annals of the past and is in wait of methodological and scientific reading in order to link between its various parts to highlight the lessons inherent in its various stages and cycles, or to explain the nature of the leadership requested of it. Until that time, our Noble Prophet, sent as a Mercy for all creatures, remains unknown until his life can be recorded through prudent historical writing and the rich outcomes of the prophetic legacy are highlighted to readers through the scientific method which is one and the same as the approach of the Qur'an.

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