

Historiography

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Part 3. Social Studies

Chapter LX

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The debt that history owes to the efforts of Muslim writers is generally recognized by Orientalists, but the consciousness of the value and significance of the Muslim contribution is rare among Western historians. Every known

sizable collection of Islamic manuscripts includes a good proportion of historical works,¹ which in itself is a fair indication of the importance attached by Muslim scholarship to history. A comparison between the output of historical literature by the Muslims before decay set in and the Islamic civilization began to decline and the histories written during or before that period by other peoples will show what great interest was taken by the followers of Islam in history. A similar comparison in the standards achieved will be equally illuminating. It would be no exaggeration to say that in the Middle Ages, history was very much a Muslim science. Their contribution is even more remarkable in view of the fact that the Muslims had inherited very meagre traditions on which they raised so glorious an edifice.

For several decades the Orientalists were not impressed with the Muslim traditions regarding the magnitude of ignorance in pre-Islamic Arabia. They saw in them an endeavour to exaggerate the achievement of Islam by belittling pre-Islamic Arab effort; even the silence of Muslim writers was suspect. Partly for this reason and partly with the desire to belittle the success of Islam in uplifting the Arabs, the Orientalists made strenuous efforts to find proofs of pre-Muslim attainments, but they did not discover much. In the words of a recent authority, "the cultural and economic level of the nomad population was, as it has always been, too low to support any literary effort."² The Arabs did produce some poetry, a fact mentioned and recognized by Muslim authorities, but they had little conception of other branches of literature. They do not seem even to have a word for history. Some of the earlier writers have used the term *akhbār* for history; the singular form, *khbar*, is used even today for a report or information. This has been the meaning of the word in Muslim times; the earlier meaning of this word is obscure. As the name implies, *akhbār* is generally understood to mean a string, a collection, or, at best, a connected sequence of reports, and only in the last form does it achieve the form of a historical narration of events. The origin of the word *tārīkh*, which is now generally used for history, is even more difficult to trace. Its root form perhaps came to be used in the Yaman in the pre-Islamic days, but, in all probability, it referred to time, not to history.³ This significance of the word has not yet been lost; indeed, the word *tārīkh* is used more often in the meaning of a date than of history. It is obvious that without even a proper word for it, the Arabs could have little conception of history before the advent of Islam. They had a few stories of what they had considered

¹ C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 2 Vols., Weimar, 1898; Berlin, 1902; *ibid.*, *Supplementbände*, 3 Vols., Leiden, 1937-42; C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature, A Bibliographical Survey*, London, 1935-59; F. Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke*, Leipzig, 1927 (gives good surveys of the literature discussed in this chapter). Details of the works mentioned here have not been given because they are available in these surveys.

² Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, 1952, p. 16.

³ A. Jaussen and R. Savignac, *Mission Archeologique en Arabie*, Vol. II, Paris, 1909-14, Minaen Inscription No. 32.

to have been important or interesting events and vague, probably untrue, legends of the peoples who had inhabited the old ruins that were scattered in some parts of the peninsula. They lacked even a proper epic; indeed, they were a people with no consciousness of history. The Muslims, therefore, could not have drawn any inspiration for the development of a tradition of historiography from the pre-Islamic Arabs.

The Greek sciences made a most significant contribution to Islamic culture, but in the field of history, the Greek influence is difficult to trace. No classical Greek history ever reached the Arabs; the Greek and the Latin annalistic literature has been lost and is not available even to the modern scholar.⁴ History, however, was a much less important sector of Greek and Latin scholarship; it was not considered of sufficient merit to be included in the curriculum of regular studies. The Muslims adopted the branches of learning that were considered to possess sufficient importance in the eyes of the Greeks themselves; the Greek tradition was kept alive in these subjects. One of the reasons for the loss of classical Greek historical literature may be the fact that the Arabs showed no interest in its preservation. The Byzantines had traditions of historiography and it is not beyond the range of possibility that some of their works came into the hands of the Arabs through Syrian Christians and converts to Islam. They might have contributed some techniques, but these techniques could not have been important.⁵ In any case, the Arabs could not have derived their historical sense from the Byzantines.

The other two great civilizations with which the Arabs came into close contact were those of the Iranians and the Hindus. The Hindus never developed an interest in history. There is little indication of the Iranians possessing any notable historical literature at the time of the Muslim conquest.⁶

It is, therefore, more likely that the Arabs developed a sense of history as a result of the Prophet Muhammad's mission. Indeed, all indications point in this direction; hence they need exploration. It should be remembered that Islam itself claims to work in the context of history. It fulfils the previous

⁴ Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 66, n. 5.

⁵ The main argument in favour of Byzantine influence is that some historical works written before the known Muslim histories show a similarity in arrangement. The annalistic arrangement, thus, could have been taken over from the Byzantines. On the other hand, the annalistic form could be a natural development. The argument against the acceptance of the view that the Byzantines had any influence is that the Muslim historians do not mention Byzantine authors, in spite of the fact that they were fond of mentioning their sources of information.

⁶ The work that has come down through an Arabic translation is *Khwātainamak*, which can hardly be called a history. Other sources of Iranian history were translated into Arabic towards the second quarter of the eighth century A.D. None of these was considered important enough to be preserved in spite of the Iranian tendency to glorify their past. Firdausi's *Shah Nāmah* written in the fourth/tenth century depended upon legend rather than history. If there had been any sober history available at that time, more of it would have entered the poem.

missions of the prophets who had come before Muḥammad.⁷ It seeks to abrogate the excrescences that came to disfigure truth in the course of time, because the generations that had gone before had failed to preserve the earlier revelations.⁸ Prophets had come in various societies at different times and had preached the same essential truth, but there had grown up errors and misunderstandings, some deliberate and perverse and others as the result of folly, and divine revelation had become clouded. Now this basic belief shows a consciousness of history. It is concerned with the past, the present, and even the future. The future comes in because Muḥammad being the last of the prophets⁹ and the bearer of a message of transcendent importance, his mission will remain effective throughout the future. This conception of religion is not concerned with the present only. It does not look upon the present as merely transient, nor upon the past as the sum total of merely so many transient and insignificant presents. This is borne out by the fact that the Qur'ān draws attention repeatedly to the misdeeds of previous peoples and their destruction as the result of these misdoings.¹⁰ The warning is implicit in the narrative itself, but it is also given explicitly on many occasions. If the past produced all those disastrous results, or if, conversely, virtuous deeds in the past were fruitful in producing good results, there is a relationship between the past, the present, and the future which is significant in fashioning human life. History, in this manner, achieves great importance in understanding life.

There is another aspect of Islam that has an important bearing upon history. Muḥammad has a unique place in history. According to the Muslim belief, Muḥammad stands, as if it were, on the watershed of time. The progress that had been vouchsafed to humanity before him was to find fulfilment in his mission. The previous messages were limited to particular peoples and their environments and conditions. They had the special circumstances of these people in view; hence they had contained, in addition to an emphasis upon the universal nature of the absolute values, certain teachings that were valid only in the circumstances in which they were revealed. The succession of the previous prophets had worked for the completion of religious belief, for a perfection in the unveiling of the great truths, and for giving humanity the essence of religious truth, untrammelled by the need to circumscribe it by a consideration of the transient environment. Muḥammad, thus, represents the culmination of one divine plan and the beginning of another. The first plan was designed to meet the differing needs of various segments of the

⁷ This is inherent in the Muslim belief, based upon the Qur'ān, v, 48; vii, 30, etc.

⁸ *Ibid.*, v, 68ff., etc.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xxxii, 40, where the Prophet has been called "the seal of the prophets." The seal comes at the end of an epistle. There is also a *ḥadīth* which says, "There shall be no prophet after me."

¹⁰ Qur'ān, e.g., vi, 6; x, 70ff.; xi, 25ff.; xix, 74; xxix, 20ff.; xxx, 9, 42-47; xxxv, 44, 45, etc., etc.

human race, the second plan for the entire humanity. The very pattern of religious progress changes after Muḥammad, because now there is a universal message to follow, the essence indeed of all that has gone before.

With this belief about the position of the Prophet in time, it was natural that the Muslims should cultivate the historic sense. Christianity also believes in a divine plan of history; indeed, the Church, encouraged by the power and expansion of the Christian nations, came to believe strongly that it was the will of God that Christianity should prosper in the world and in this manner the Kingdom of God should be ultimately established on earth. Only recently with the growth of communist States has this belief somewhat weakened. However, even when the Church held a strong conviction regarding the ultimate triumph of Christianity and looked upon history as the gradual revelation of the divine plan, its conception of the importance of the unfolding of the historical processes was not the same as that of the Muslims. According to the Christian dogma, Christ is the man-god; he did come at a particular time in history, but that time has no special significance because, as God, Christ is eternal, timeless, infinite. Only for the time that he was in this world, did he put upon himself the limitations of a finite human existence. He came to redeem the world and he did it by paying for it with his own life. In a sense this redemption is the culmination of religious evolution. It was for this reason that the earlier Christians saw in every disaster the approach of the end of the world. Having been redeemed, the world had achieved the goal; there was nothing beyond it. The further unfolding of history was irrelevant. The Muslim position was basically different. The Qur'ān enjoined that there should be a body among the Muslims dedicated to the task of preaching the truth;¹¹ indeed, the Muslims themselves were to form a nation to invite others to accept the truth and to set an example for the world.¹² Muḥammad was the last of the prophets, but his mission was to be carried on by the learned among his people. It was for this reason that he had said that these learned people were to be like the prophets of Israel; in other words, what had hitherto been achieved through a succession of prophets was to be accomplished through the agency of learned men.

This sharp contrast between the destiny of Islam and the earlier religions was bound to set people thinking about the elements responsible for this change in the divine plan. How had the world changed to need a new dispensation so radically different in its purpose from what had gone before? This question was even more pertinent since it was not the nature of the truth that had changed; for did not Islam claim to be all revealed truth, whether it had come before Muḥammad or through him? And what was the truth that had come before? How far did it conform to the message of the Qur'ān? How much of the truth claimed by the previous religions was interpolation,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, iii, 104.

¹² *Ibid.*, iii, 110.

and how much of it incidental to the circumstances of those days and the peoples who had been its recipients? These were the questions that arose naturally, and all of them are either directly historical or have historical overtones. They were rooted not only in natural curiosity, but, as we shall see later, also in theology itself.

In its exhortations for belief and righteousness, the Qur'ān does not depend entirely upon appeal to emotions. It argues and appeals to reason at innumerable places. Phenomena of nature, legends contained in older Scriptures, the impact of ruined cities and buildings upon the imagination of a sensitive people, and historical events are all pressed into service. Indeed, there are considerable historical data in the Qur'ān.¹³ The inclusion of these allusions in large numbers led the critics of the Prophet to question the relevance of human experience in the past. They dismissed them as being merely the records of peoples who had gone before.¹⁴ The unbelievers implied that what had happened in the past was of little importance to them. They certainly did not believe that history had any lessons for them. The Qur'ān, on the other hand, considers the experience of the past generations and of other peoples to be of vital importance. The underlying argument is that similar actions and circumstances produce similar results. The Qur'ān thus lays down one of the first principles that guided the Muslims in their study of history. They wanted to learn from the experience of others. Besides, human activity is not an isolated phenomenon; it is linked with the past as much as with the future. Being implicit in the very conception of Muḥammad as one of the prophets and the last of them, it found confirmation in the insistence of the Qur'ān on the importance of historical phenomena in the determination of right and wrong. If any human action has brought disaster, that action could not be right except as the vindication of the principle of righteousness itself. And in judging the results of human activity, the Qur'ān does not take into consideration the individual. It is the sum total of communal activity which cannot be right if it produces disasters.¹⁵ A good man working for the common good in a bad community may suffer, but he has his other rewards. A bad man in a good community may not suffer, but he has his other punishments. This is the

¹³ *Ibid.*, xi, 100.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vi, 25; viii, 31; xvi, 24, etc., etc.

The Qur'ān uses the word "*asāfir*" which has generally been considered to mean stories, because of its resemblance to the Greek word *historia* (Goliuz, *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum*, Leiden, 1653, column 1171), but this seems to have little substance in fact, except for the coincidental resemblance. Several European authors have followed Goliuz, but opinion has now changed. Indeed, the Arabs should have been the first to notice the resemblance and to use the word in the sense of history if there were any substance in this identification. It is more likely that the word has been derived from *saṭar* (to write); hence *asāfir* should mean a record. They certainly do not seem to imply that the Prophet was reciting to them merely fables.

¹⁵ This is obvious from the references to communities like 'Ād, Thāmūd, etc., vide note 10; also Qur'ān, xiii, 30; xiv, 36.

reason why prophets and martyrs seemingly failed in bad communities which hurled themselves into disasters; from a purely worldly point of view they even suffered grievously, but actually they were saved and the evil-doers really suffered. And in the stories of the bad communities and the suffering prophets, there is another implication. The good that the prophets had sought to achieve might not have been established in their own times or communities but it ultimately did prevail, and this shows a continuity of the historical process in which righteousness ultimately wins.

Apart from their moral and philosophical implications, which helped in creating a historical sense in the Muslims, the historical allusions in the Qur'ān presented a challenge to the Muslim mind. The Muslims wanted to learn more about them, and thus began a search for more detailed information. It is true that with their limited resources and the condition of human knowledge in their days, the information collected by the early Muslims was not always accurate. Considerable legendary material, folklore, and mythology entered into their understanding of the historical facts mentioned in the Qur'ān. A fertile source of legendary material was the Jewish tradition. The net gain was that historical curiosity had been aroused. Some of the earlier mistakes were never corrected, but others were discarded when critical faculties got sharpened by greater experience and knowledge.¹⁶

There was yet another aspect of religion that directly led to the cultivation of history. Muḥammad is a historical figure; he lived in the limelight of history. His biography has always been considered to be a cornerstone of Muslim theology,¹⁷ and, therefore, the events of his life were eagerly sought and collected. So long as his immediate disciples and Companions were alive, this was a simple matter, but as time elapsed, it was considered increasingly necessary to collect all information about him. Where the believers could not find clear guidance from the Qur'ān, or where there was dispute in the interpretation of its text, the best authority could be the Prophet's actions and sayings. Thus, there grew up the tradition of collecting the *aḥādīth*, and after some time when the original narrators had died and there had intervened several generations so that for every *ḥadīth* there were several narrators in succession, it was necessary to submit the reports to searching criticism. The scholars developed canons of criticism that have not only endured but have earned the respect of the succeeding generations for their soundness.¹⁸ Modern scholarship can find fault with some of the traditions that have been judged to be

¹⁶ Many religious thinkers in Islam refer to the Jewish legends adopted by some *mufasssīrīn* as *Isrā'īliyyāt* and disapprove of their use.

¹⁷ Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-I'ān bi al-Taubīkh li man Dhamma Ahl al-Tārikh*, translated into English by Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 246, 247, 263.

¹⁸ Muḥammad bin Sulaimān al-Kafīyāji, *al-Mukhtaṣar fi 'Ilm al-Tārikh*, selected passages translated into English by Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 189, 190; al-Sakhāwī, *op. cit.*, pp. 205 ff.

sound, but the canons of criticism and of testing the validity of reports are trustworthy even today. This was no mean achievement and shows not only a keen sense of responsibility but also a high perception of the criteria which should be applied to any narration. After all this is the kernel of all methods of historical research.

A by-product of this search was the compilation of working biographies of all the better known narrators. In this process those considered unreliable were branded as such. The biographers made the most careful and impartial scrutiny, and if they found any trace of deceit or even a charge of lying in any respect, they exposed the narrator so that the traditions, in the chain of the narrators in which he appeared, might at least be treated with extreme caution. As it was a theological and religious matter and concerned the beliefs of all Muslims, the critics developed the highest sense of intellectual honesty. Despite these efforts and precautions, some unreliable traditions have found their way into the "authentic collections," but when it is remembered that the collectors discarded many more traditions than were considered sufficiently sound to be accepted, it would be clear how well the criteria were applied.

A remarkable testimony to the historical sense of the Muslims is their success in preserving the text of the Qur'ān. It really arose from two of the teachings of the Book itself. The first of these is the doctrine of the corruption of the previous Scriptures through changes or interpolations. The other is the promise that the Qur'ān shall be preserved.¹⁹ According to the Muslim belief, the corruption of the previous Scriptures resulted in the misguidance of the people to the extent that the shape of the original faith was changed beyond recognition. The Muslims had been given the Qur'ān, which they were to cherish and preserve in the original form. They believe in the verbal sanctity of the Qur'ān. This led them to preserve the text. Taking into consideration the differences in languages in the Muslim world and the rise of various sects in Islam, this is quite an achievement. The preservation of the text of the Qur'ān could not but have engendered a respect for the texts of documents of any importance.

It would be seen from this discussion that historiography in the Muslim world had religious beginnings. It was religion that gave the Muslims their historical sense, and the requirements of developing a theology made it imperative for the Muslim theologians to undertake historical research and to lay down canons of evaluating historical data for eliminating doubt and error so far as it was humanly possible. It led them to explore the traditions of religions allied to their own which had preceded the mission of the Prophet in point of time. Indeed, historical studies started in Islam as a necessary adjunct of theological development.²⁰ It was necessary, therefore,

¹⁹ Qur'ān, vi, 116; the corruption of previous Scriptures finds mention also at other places, e.g., v, 13.

²⁰ Al-Sakhāwī, *op. cit.*, pp. 259, 261.

for the Muslims to cultivate a religious attitude towards history, which could not be discarded easily. Indeed, even when history ventured out into the courts of worldly monarchs, it was not able to overcome some of the conceptions developed in the cloisters of the mosques and the colleges of theology.

The theologians looked upon their work as an act of worship; hence it was to be approached with the utmost sincerity. In such work all merit was lost if any selfish motives were permitted to interfere with its objectivity. The scholar considered himself to be accountable to God for every fact that he reported or any opinion that he expressed.²¹ Indeed in the beginning he was doubtful whether he was justified in expressing an adverse opinion about anyone.²² However, he was strengthened by the Prophet's example of not hesitating from censuring a person in the public interest, or from expressing an opinion that would save others from trouble and hardship.²³ In the reporting of facts and the expression of opinions, therefore, the writer felt himself bound by the ethics of a witness or a judge. He would not report anything about which he was not certain; he would weigh all the evidence at his disposal and try to adjudicate fairly upon the merits of the report and the character of the narrator. He would not be a party to the perpetuation of a false report. In reporting a tradition of the Prophet he was conscious of the Muslim belief that the Prophet had strongly forbidden his followers to ascribe a saying or a tradition to him falsely. Therefore, he wanted to avoid at all costs any participation in such an act. The secular historians unhesitatingly imbibed these ideas and adopted the same attitude in their fields.²⁴

This attitude created high standards of objectivity. Indeed, quite often objectivity was carried to ridiculous extremes. Not a few books written by Muslim authors are dry and jejune chronicles of events without any comments or value-judgments. The authors felt that it was their duty to narrate the events and that it was the business of the reader to arrive at his own conclusions. They did not believe that the historian's function was to narrate the facts as well as to interpret them. Such an attitude was crippling for a proper development of history as a social science. There was, however, a brighter side to this objectivity, a scrupulous regard for the truth. Even when history was written with a political objective in view, the facts were not mutilated.

The best examples are furnished by two Muslim historians of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Abu al-Faḍl wrote the *Akbarnāmeḥ* with the blatantly clear object of extolling his patron, Akbar.²⁵ Mulla 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūni, on the other hand, wrote his *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, it seems, to prove to the world that Akbar had strayed away from the right path. Shorn of the propaganda against Akbar, Badāyūni's book is merely an avowed redaction

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 264.

²³ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghḍādī, *Kifāyah*, Hyderabad, 1357/1938, pp. 39ff.; also, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, 121, 126, 142 (Krehl).

²⁴ E.g. Diyā' al-Din Barani, *Tārīkh-i Firūzshāhi*, Calcutta, 1860-62, pp. 16, 17.

of Nizām al-Din Ahmad's *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbari*. Badāyūni has added information about Akbar's lapses from his personal observation and also from hearsay. The general effect is pretty damning from the orthodox Muslim point of view. On closer analysis, however, it appears that Badāyūni has suggested more than his words really convey, and, being a master of studied ambiguity and innuendo, he is able to create impressions without taking responsibility for some of the events that he reports. Wherever he is reporting an incident or a fact that is obviously not correct, he prefaces it by a vague remark like "It is reported that. . . ." Sometimes he writes sentences that can be translated in more than one way.²⁵ Such ambiguity, however, occurs only where the author deliberately seeks to suggest what he does not want to say. This was not done for any fear of the monarch, because Badāyūni's book was kept secret during Akbar's reign.²⁶ It was Badāyūni's regard for the verbal and the literal truth that led him into these devious paths. He was perhaps not bothered about the general effect because he was probably convinced, as were several other men of high repute, of Akbar's heterodoxy. Badāyūni left the path of historical rectitude only in heightening an effect that he considered to be true. Abu al-Faḍl, who approached his task with an entirely different purpose, is hard put to it where he finds it difficult to justify or explain away some measure or action of the monarch. He adopts the method not of ignoring it, but of making a veiled reference to it that a discerning reader can well understand. Abu al-Faḍl, his general panegyrics apart, shows a high regard for truth in reporting events. He was probably also convinced of the truth of the general theme of his work, namely, that Akbar was a monarch of unusual ability and that he was inclined to show remarkable benevolence towards his subjects.

Whatever axes the two authors had to grind are, however, quite apparent to the reader, but he cannot help being impressed by the pathetic regard for truth that is so apparent in these works and that is so difficult to maintain because of the patently partial approaches of the authors. These are perhaps extreme examples, but they are by no means unique in the history of Muslim historiography. Nizām al-Din Ahmad, whose work has been mentioned above, provides a good example of the extreme objectivity observed by some Muslim historians, because, living in the midst of such acute controversy regarding the monarch's religious policies and attitudes and himself being orthodox in his own religious beliefs, he does not even as much as mention the topic. He could not have considered it unimportant, being an observer of good sensitivity, but he left it out because he did not want to pass value-judgments on matters which he disliked.

The Muslim monarchs were extremely sensitive regarding the verdict of the posterity on their deeds. They had the common human weakness of being

²⁵ Jalāl al-Din Muḥammad Akbar (1556-1605), third in the line of succession among the Mughul Emperors of India.

²⁶ His subtle insinuations have, through faulty translation, caused grave misunderstandings among European writers like Vincent Smith.

desirous of leaving a good name behind them. Historians were, therefore, courted and patronized. A number of histories have been written by men who in varying degrees can be called "Court historians." In some European circles their works are treated with suspicion, which is not justified in all cases. We have seen how men of probity have not twisted facts even when they seemed to mar their own thesis; at worst, they may have been guilty in some instances of the suppression of some unpalatable truth or the suggestion of virtues that did not exist. They could not have invented events. Their faults can mostly be remedied easily—any hyperbolic praise of a patron is understood to be merely a matter of form; the pure and unabashed panegyric can be easily dismissed as being out of context.²⁷ When a weakling is called a world-conquering hero by a writer, it is understood that the epithet is only an expression of courtesy conveying nothing, but a Muslim historian does not invent imaginary victories to adorn sober history. If a historian misses some event, he knows that others are likely to mention it and that he will be held guilty by posterity; therefore, there are few instances of deliberate misrepresentation by Muslim historians, and these have often been corrected by subsequent writers or even their own contemporaries.

The historians who had access to monarchs and their ministers were well informed and to that extent are more reliable. In an age when the printing press had not made the daily newspaper possible and governments were not publicity-conscious in the modern sense of the term, the isolated scholar was hard put to it to collect the necessary data for an informative book relating the events of a reign. One has only to compare the bazaar gossip related by European travellers to India with the sober histories of the period to see how distorted the reports of events did become once they had left the precincts of the Court and the circles of persons in contact with the high officials. A Court historian was in no less desperate a position than a historian of today who is overwhelmed by the information material issuing from the publicity departments of modern governments, especially when his own emotions are also deeply involved, e.g., in a crisis in which his own nation is concerned. The Court historian had his own reputation at stake because he intended to write for posterity. The professional code established by historians could not be transgressed with impunity.

However, not all historians who were otherwise attached to a Court can be called Court historians. There have existed men of the highest probity who were attached to Courts and wrote historical works, but they cannot be termed Court historians. Amir Khusrāu enjoyed the patronage of several monarchs

²⁷ E.g. passages quoted in *Sources of Indian Tradition*, ed. William Theodore de Bary, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 527, 528, show quite clearly that the authors do not intend the readers to take all their adjectives seriously. Akbar was certainly not "the ruler of the world and of all who inhabit it" nor the "origin of the canons of world-government" and "author of universal conquest."

but he was not employed as a historian. Bādāyuni, while attached to Akbar's Court, wrote against him. Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad held a high office in the government, but the recording of history was not one of his duties. It is doubtful whether even abu al-Faḍl can be called a Court historian in spite of his great partiality for Akbar, because his official assignments were of an administrative or military nature. The famous Aḥmad bin Yahya al-Balādhuri was a *nadīm* of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil; 'Aṭa bin Muḥammad al-Juwaini was a *wazīr*; other government officials who were also historians of some eminence include Muḥammad Yahya al-Ṣūlī, Sinān bin Thābit, abu 'Alī Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Miskawaih, and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl bin Aibak al-Ṣafadi, to name only a few. The great ibn Khaldūn was a Qāḍī, but this was not considered so much of a government office as a religious obligation to be discharged by those qualified for it if they were called upon by the monarch to assume the responsibility. There were some princes and rulers who took an interest in history and wrote works of considerable merit. An outstanding example is Ismā'il bin 'Alī abu al-Fidā' who, in the midst of the busy life of a statesman and soldier, found time to write authoritative history. The 'Abbāsīd prince abu Hāshim Yūsuf bin Muḥammad al-Zāhir wrote a history of the reign of his brother, al-Mustansir bi-Allah. Some of the rulers of the Yaman, like Jaiyās bin Najāḥ (d. 501/1107), al-Afḍal al-'Abbās bin 'Alī (d. 779/1377), and al-Ashraf Ismā'il bin 'Abbās (d. 805/1402) were responsible for historical works.²⁸ None of these can be called Court historians, nor are their works prejudiced because of their high offices.

Diaries and memoirs are a fruitful source for historical studies. Indeed, some memoirs are our mainstay so far as the historical information regarding some areas at certain times is concerned. In this category come the memoirs of Zāhir al-Dīn Muḥammad Bābur, whose stormy life presents not only one of the most exciting studies in history, but also gives us an insight into the political conditions of Central Asia after Timūr's Empire had collapsed. He is rightly known as the prince of all diarists because of his frank narration of events, in which he also discloses his own humane personality, telling us in a most charming manner his weaknesses and recording his triumphs without any bragging. He hides neither his elation at success, nor sorrow at his defeat. This chiaroscuro of victory and defeat, of weakness and strength, of lapses and piety, and of ambition and frustration reveals a sensitive and lovable personality possessed of artistic sensibilities, all of which makes the *Tuzuk* extremely readable in addition to being informative. To take another example, his great grandson, Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad Jahāngir, also wrote his memoirs. Jahāngir had known no adversity; his tale could not be so thrilling as that of Bābur; besides, he wrote not as an ambitious adventurer, albeit crowned and of imperial descent, as Bābur did, but as an established ruler of a great

empire. And yet, Jahāngir's memoirs do not show any lack of sensitivity. He is as keen an observer of human character as his illustrious ancestor was, as artistic in his own manner, being one of the greatest patrons of art, and an excellent critic and connoisseur. In spite of the inherent pomposity in the writing of an emperor who knows that his book will be read by his subjects even in his own lifetime, the book does not lack obvious sincerity. These examples can be multiplied from other periods and other lands in the context of Muslim historiography. The main point is that the suspicion in which certain Western writers uncritically hold any writer associated with a Court is not justified. Those who transgressed the requirements of historical objectivity were forgotten and subsequent scholars and historians did not fail to criticize or even condemn them for their lapses. In the words of Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Barani, "it is necessary that the historian be . . . known and famous for his truth and just dealing" and when "he writes of the excellences, the good deeds, the justice and equity of the ruler or of a great man, he must also not conceal his vices and evil deeds . . . ; the attention of the truthful, pious, and sincere historian should be directed towards writing the truth. He should be in fear of answering on the Day of Judgment. . . . In sum, history is a rare and useful form of knowledge and its writing is a great obligation. . . ."²⁹ As the writing of history was looked upon as a religious duty, the highest objectivity and impartiality were its criteria in the mind of the Muslim historian. There were black sheep as well and sometimes the desire for gain or the fear of a tyrant overcame the sense of responsibility of the writer, but he generally was relegated to oblivion.

Muslim historiography took several forms. The pre-Islamic Arabs took great pride in their genealogies. Like other primitive peoples, they generally kept verbal records which on some occasions were even publicly recited. Of course this often resulted in bragging and was a fruitful source of tribal warfare and vendetta. The practice of maintaining genealogies was kept up under Islam as well, and many non-Arab families seem to have adopted the habit. It is unlikely that in the pre-Islamic period the Arabs bothered to remember the main events connected with the life of every ancestor. Some famous anecdotes or events might have been associated with some outstanding names, but an idea of a connected family history or biography, however sketchy, of even the better known men in the family tree was unknown. It is even more improbable that any of these genealogies were committed to writing in the pre-Islamic period. The main features of these genealogies were fairly well known even outside the group of those to whom a genealogy belonged and any fraudulent claim was soon countered. In a way this was the early Arab way of remembering their tribal origin, but it had little to do with real history. When the Muslims took up historiography, genealogies proved helpful in understanding the part played by the Arab tribes in Islamic history. With

²⁸ O. Lofgren, *Arabische Texte zur Kenntnis der Stadt Aden im Mittelalter*, Upsala, 1936, II, pp. 20, 43-47.

²⁹ Barani, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 17.

the growing participation of the non-Arab Muslims in the affairs of the Islamic world the genealogical pattern came to be discarded in the greater part of the Muslim world. The origin of the genealogical works like Zubair bin Bakkār's *Nasab-u Quraish* was the exaltation of the Quraish; this was feasible because the ruling dynasties of the Umayyads and the 'Abbāsids were alike Quraish. Balādhuri's *Kitāb al-Ansāb* is the classical example of history being dealt with from the angle of genealogy. However, with the inclusion of so many non-Arab peoples in the world of Islam and their rise to power, such treatment became obsolete. It, however, thrived in the Maghrib, especially in Spain, because tribal considerations continued to play an important part in the area and history could be grouped around the activities of some tribes and clans. Private families, particularly some of the 'Alids and Hāshimites, were interested in keeping a record of their ancestry. Family histories have continued to be written up to this day. Most families, however, contented themselves with keeping their genealogies in tabular forms. *Shajarahs* were quite common in the Muslim world, but they cannot be classified as history. The Arabs, however, were given to tribal fighting which continued for considerable time and had the tendency to be rekindled at the slightest pretext. The memory of a spectacular or significant victory was kept alive. The battle-day tradition occupied an important place in the folklore of early Arabia. Those who had distinguished themselves in a battle or had inflicted a humiliating defeat on their adversary continued to brag about it long after. In fact, scholars are inclined to think that this form of narration was common to the earlier Semites as well. It is present in the older sections of the Bible.³⁰ These traditions did not form a continuous narration like an epic; every anecdote stood by itself and spoke of a single event. In the Bible they have been grouped into a continuous narration, but each event can be read separately. It is improbable that any such anecdotes were committed to writing in pre-Islamic Arabia.³¹ They were, however, known to the Arab historians of the Muslim period. They did not find their way into the Muslim historical literature before the seventh/thirteenth century, because the earlier historians were doubtful of their historical worth. They were valuable for philological studies, but not as sources of history, because they partook of fiction, being generally one-sided and meant to glorify one side. Besides, they were not intended to be sober history; indeed, their original purpose was not the preservation of any historical fact, the conception of which was unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs, but to be sources for entertainment for the listeners when recited. They were, however, significant in one sense: they created a tradition of recording a single event.

The narration of single events and their reporting is capable of independent

³⁰ "Exodus," xiv, 30; "Samuel," I, xvii.

³¹ Some scholars are of the opinion that no written prose literature existed in pre-Islamic Arabia, e.g., William Marçais, "Les Origines de la prose littéraire arabe," *Revue Africaine*, LXVIII, 1929, pp. 15-18.

and impartial treatment, and thus provides us with the raw material of history. These events can be strung together either chronologically or on the basis of a period, a locality, or even a topic. The treatment, however, tends to differ from continuous narration, because every report is a unit in itself. The line is not easy to draw and yet it is not difficult to see where the emphasis upon individual events is, even though they may be connected. This form of historiography came into vogue among the Muslims fairly early and is referred to by the name of *akhbār*. In its singular form, *khabar*, the word means a report, an item of news. In the oldest form of Muslim historiography one comes across small pamphlets written to describe a single event, like the pre-Islamic narration of single battles. The simple narration soon gave place to the description of the event followed by a discussion of the causes which were responsible for its happening. Even though such a description related to only a single event, it came closer to the present method of discussing the genesis of a happening. The single *khabar* gave place gradually to *akhbār*, a collection of several or many *khabars*. Theoretically, this could be quite disconnected, but the events or anecdotes came to have a focal point regarding a place or a subject and in their arrangement showed a consciousness of chronological sequence. Even in this form the method had serious handicaps.

A *khabar* was a well-rounded narrative, but the continuity of a historical process is difficult to convey in this manner. Any deep interpretation of facts also is ruled out, because the tendency is to look upon life as a series of separate incidents without much anxiety to discover their interaction. Every *khabar* was told like a vivid short story, hence it tended to sacrifice clarity and factualism for the creation of effect. This was sometimes achieved by the insertion of a few verses to drive a point home or to give it a dramatic quality. Indeed, it was not uncommon for the historian to retreat into the background and let the chief characters speak for themselves, very much like a dramatic dialogue. In this form the facts were lost in the midst of the emotions of the speakers, who, to ring true, had to be shown saying what, in the opinion of the historian, they would have felt in the circumstances. Being the earliest form of historiography among the Arabs, the *khabar* was naturally integrated into other forms and was rarely found in its original and pure shape. It occurs in other works as well and can be spotted by its vivid style and the insertion of faked or actual conversations.³² Its most developed form was the monograph on some single historical event. A well-known historian in this style was 'Alī bin al-Madā'ini (752-830/1351-1417), known only through quotations from his works in other histories. A list of the books written by him is preserved in *al-Fihrist*. In the sub-continent of India and Pakistan, perhaps Amīr Khusrāu's *Khazā'in al-Futūḥ* furnishes the best example. His *Tughluq-namah*, though written in verse, which is not usual with *khabar* histories, has many of their characteristics.

³² A good example is Sultān 'Alā' al-Dīn Khālji's conversation with Qāḍi Muḥith, reported by Barani, *op. cit.*, pp. 293-97.

It would, however, be a mistake to think of all books written on single reigns as falling into the category of the *khavar* literature. Its beginnings were, as has been mentioned, religious because it developed out of the desire to collect all the information about the life of the Prophet. The biographies of the narrators of *ḥadīth* were a by-product. The biographies of religious and political persons followed naturally. Some biographies were written for sectarian purposes, for instance, the earlier works on the descendants and sons of the Caliph 'Ali; several biographies of Husain, Zaid bin 'Ali, and others fall in this category. Sometimes biographies were written at the request of a noble or a monarch. Thābit bin Qurrah wrote a biography of al-Mu'taḍid, which was completed by his son Sinān; this was supervised by the patron himself. Shams-i Sirāj 'Afif's *Tārīkh-i Firūzshāhi* is a typical biography of a monarch; the *Sirat-i Firūzshāhi* partakes of memoirs because it was supervised by the monarch. Sometimes the biography of a patron was also a record of the author's own times and it is not always easy to draw the line between biography and memoirs. An excellent example is the *Nawādir al-Sultāniyyah w-al-Mahāsīn al-Yūsufiyyah*, being the biography of Sultān Ṣalāh al-Dīn by ibn Shaddād. It achieves a high standard in depicting the character of the great monarch. Abu al-Faḍl's *Akbarnāmah* can be looked upon as a highly successful biography of a remarkable man in spite of the author's obvious endeavour to paint the monarch in as favourable a light as possible. The success of the book lies in a faithful record of the events of the reign, which find confirmation in other authorities as well. The character of the monarch stands out clearly and in spite of the profusion of the adjectives in praise of Akbar, the panegyrics can be separated quite easily from what is the substance of the narration, because these are introduced as much to deliver formal homilies of praise as to show off the capacity of the author as a master of ornate style. They are not spun into the texture of the narrative in a manner to confuse the reader.

A biography sometimes includes accounts of some of the ancestors of the subject, but their lives occupy a minor place in the book and are introduced more often to trace the exalted line of descent of the main character. Sometimes, however, the biography is extended to include others. In this category would fall the histories of dynasties or families. There are good examples of dynastic histories; the *Tārīkh al-Ghazāni* by Faḍl Allāh Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 718/1318) being a history of Chingiz Khān and his family³³ may be cited as one.

Another form of the collected biographies was the *tadhkirah*. Some of the *tadhkirahs* dealt with poets, others with Sufis, yet others with scholars, but they all had the common characteristic of being collections of short biographies of a number of persons. As a matter of fact, like other forms of biography, they differed considerably not only in their subject-matter, but also in the

³³ Many of the histories written in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent do not fall into the category of dynastic histories. They generally take up certain periods of Muslim rule or of a dynasty, but few works are devoted entirely to a dynasty.

standards achieved. The *tadhkirahs* of poets always incorporated some critical material; the best of these were highly instructive as essays in literary criticism. The *tadhkirahs* of the Sufis were extremely popular, partly because of the growing popularity of the Sufi *silsilahs* and the great esteem in which some of the saintly Sufis were held by the populace, and also because of the Muslim tradition of teaching religious truths through the biographies of learned and pious personages.³⁴ This was based on the fundamental Muslim thinking that the best way of understanding Islam was through the study of the life of the Prophet. It was for this reason that biographies of jurists and scholars also were not neglected. Apart from monographs on biographies, it became the fashion to include sections on the biographies of important people in general histories.³⁵ These would include the lives of theologians, Sufis, physicians, poets, and nobles. The disciples of famous Sufis sometimes collected their sayings into *maḥfūzāt*; these consisted of the more significant utterances of the *shaiḥ* with a record of the circumstances in which they were made.³⁶ In a way this may be considered to be a form of the *khavar* literature; it is, however, different in spirit, because the intention here is not to entertain but to instruct. Some *tadhkirahs* of the Sufis suffer from the admixture of supernatural fictions with truth. The defect is generally found in books written long after the subject of the *tadhkirah* had died and legends had grown about his supernatural powers. The writers of the *tadhkirahs* were seldom guilty of deliberately inventing tales; they only uncritically incorporated what they had heard. The *tadhkirahs* are very valuable because they generally give a picture of the social conditions of an age in which the general histories seldom devoted sufficient space to non-political topics.

The chronological order of the development of Muslim historiography has been transgressed in tracing the growth of the *khavar* form of historiography. Long before some of the developments narrated above, there had grown the annalistic form, in which the events were grouped around years. The historian took up the years in succession and then narrated the important happenings of each year. This was an excellent device for fixing the chronological sequence of events; and in all probability it gave to history the name of *tārīkh*. It has been mentioned above that the word *tārīkh* seems to have come into use in the pre-Islamic Yaman in the sense of fixing a deed in time; in other words, giving a date to a transaction. The earliest Islamic use is in connection with the establishment of the era of the Hijrah.³⁷

Thus, apart from the narration pure and simple, which was *khavar*, *tārīkh* was properly the assigning of a date to an event and, conversely, the fixing of

³⁴ E.g., Sheftah's *Gulshan-i Be-khār*, Azād's *Āb-i Hayāt*, and Shibli's *Shi'r al-Ajam*.

³⁵ E.g., Badāyūni in his *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, abu al-Faḍl in his *Ā'in-i Akbari*, etc.

³⁶ E.g., Hasan 'Ali Sajzi's *Fawā'id al-Fuwād*.

³⁷ Al-Sakhāwī, *op. cit.*, p. 310; al-Kafiyāji, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

an event in time by giving it a definite date. The annalistic form, therefore, seems to have played an important role in giving the name of *tārīkh* to history. The greatest name in this form of history is the well-known abu Ja'far al-Ṭabari, whose famous history was written in the early fourth/tenth century. This is the first history in the annalistic form written by a Muslim that has come down to us. Ṭabari's greatness is recognized now in all quarters because of his accuracy and great diligence in collecting data and giving them the form of authentic history by sifting evidence, which he must have done to achieve the result. There are indications that others may have preceded him in using this form; indeed one 'Umārah bin Wathimah has been mentioned to have written a history in the annalistic form in the third/ninth century, but we know very little about the book.³⁸ It is, however, reasonable to believe that Ṭabari was not the first to use the form, but he is undoubtedly the greatest among those who have used this method both before and after him. The tradition, however, was continued and 'Ali bin Yūsuf al-Qifṭī has mentioned a succession of trustworthy authors beginning with Ṭabari and ending with the year 616/1219.³⁹ The best example in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent is the *Tārīkh-i Aḥī* composed by a commission appointed by Akbar.

The annalistic form had serious limitations; for this reason it was not imitated on a large scale. It made an absolutely reliable chronology indispensable but where dates could not be determined with absolute certainty it was useless. Besides, this treatment tends to become merely a catalogue of facts in the hands of an unimaginative historian. Even at its best, it leaves little scope for philosophical synthesis or analysis. Even the inclusion of cultural and administrative data becomes difficult; the tracing of the growth of cultural, social, and administrative institutions is ruled out. The understanding of social or even political processes is not aided by this form of history. When this form was combined with the idea that the highest expression of objectivity lay in a bare statement of the naked fact unadorned by any illuminating comment or opinion, it became little better than a chronology in tabular form that many historians found useful to append to their works. The subsequent arrangement of information in decades, generations (*qarūn*), or centuries, may have been derived from annalistic historiography. In any case, the grouping of biographical information in accordance with periods of time seems to have been affected as much by annalist traditions as by other considerations like the convenience of grouping people together by the years of their death.

An outgrowth of these forms was the *genre* of *ṭabaqāt*. A *ṭabaqah* means a layer; it generally refers to a generation. The word *qarn* meaning a generation preceded the word *ṭabaqah*, but later *ṭabaqah* came to be used more often

³⁸ 'Abd al-Rahmān bin 'Ali al-Jauzi, *Muntazam*, Hyderabad, 1357-58/1938-39, p. 37.

³⁹ 'Ali bin Yūsuf al-Qifṭī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, ed. A. Müller and J. Lippert, Leipzig, 1903, pp. 110ff.

until works were called by the names of *ṭabaqāt*. The term was originally applied to different generations of the narrators of Ḥadīth; then it began to be applied more loosely, until it embraced the succeeding generations of all kinds of men. A history which was named by its author as *ṭabaqāt* was meant to give information about various classes of people; however, the author seldom used the term in this wide sense and, therefore, only the classes that mattered in the opinion of the author were included. Quite often a *ṭabaqāt* work could limit itself to a single reign. Some of these are more like *tadhkirahs*, as, for example, ibn abi Uṣaibi'ah's history of physicians or abu Ishāq al-Shirāzī's history of the jurists. *Tadhkirahs* and *ṭabaqāt* of this nature alike gradually adopted an alphabetical arrangement to make reference easy, so that some of them came to be biographical dictionaries, often concise and limited to the barest facts. There were notable exceptions and, as has been mentioned earlier, many books dealing with poets incorporated critical reviews of their main works.

The Muslim historians developed many useful mechanical techniques. They were not averse to putting statistical and other factual information in the form of tables.⁴⁰ They appended in many places their authority for a statement.⁴¹ Indeed, with the more careful historians, the sources of their information are almost invariably revealed. They attached bibliographies to their works, utilized official documents and correspondence, and when they thought that it was necessary to do so, they quoted the document verbatim. Consequently, some important documents have thus been preserved for us.⁴² They utilized all official material that was available to them including the more important decisions of the courts. The Muslim governments kept good records; the courts also had records of all the cases that came before them. The historians, therefore, had no dearth of official material and they used it whenever they found it relevant to their subject. They were aware of the importance of numismatic and epigraphical evidence and used both frequently.

It has been mentioned that the Muslims look upon themselves as a world community. Muḥammad as a successor to all the prophets of the world came to fulfil the missions of all of them. The history of the world was, therefore, a matter of vital concern to the Muslims. A fairly large number of histories were, therefore, planned as world histories. The knowledge about the history of the non-Muslim world was fragmentary and depended upon the accuracy of the local tradition which was not reliable in most instances.

⁴⁰ *Ā'in-i Akbari* abounds in such tables; Barani gives tables of the names of officers in each reign, etc.

⁴¹ This was derived from the way *ahādīth* were narrated: "A heard from B who heard from C who heard from D that the Prophet said . . ."

⁴² Some examples are: Baihaqi in *Tārīkh-i Baihaqi* has preserved the oath of allegiance taken by Mas'ūd of Ghazni to the Caliph; Badāyūni has preserved the text of the *maḥḍar* recognizing Akbar's authority to choose an interpretation where the doctors of law disagreed; abu al-Faḍl has preserved the letter Akbar wrote to 'Abd Allah Khān Uzbek of Transoxiana, etc.

There were large regions which had no history; it is, therefore, obvious that the Muslim histories could not be perfect in the recording of the events of other regions or of the past of the regions where Islam had domination. The science of archaeology had not been developed; the methods of deciphering dead languages had not been invented. Because of these factors some non-Muslim pretenders to knowledge practised curious frauds upon Muslim rulers and Muslim scholars.⁴³ History based on traditions and legends cannot be satisfactory; hence we find that the Muslim accounts of the ancient history of Mesopotamia or of Egypt are unreliable and fragmentary. The knowledge of the Arabs grew as their geographers succeeded in accumulating knowledge. Yāqūt bin 'Abd Allah al-Ḥamawī's geographical dictionary, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, seldom fails to incorporate biographical material of the people of note belonging to a locality. 'Ali ibn al-Ḥusain al-Mas'ūdī is the best example of the interaction of geographical and historical knowledge; indeed, he combines the two disciplines in a remarkable manner. Today the works of the Arab geographers form a good source of history and are indispensable; even to their contemporary historians they were of extreme importance.

So far as the world of Islam was concerned, it was a real entity. In the earlier period before the rise of the 'Abbāsids split the Muslim world into the East and the West, it formed a single polity. Juristically and theologically, the indivisibility of the Muslim world is an axiom, based as it is upon the Qur'ānic doctrine of the brotherhood of all Muslims and upon the implied universalism in the conception of the unity of the Muslim community. It is, therefore, a matter of no surprise that it seemed only natural to the Muslim historians that they should look upon the whole of Muslim history as a single entity. Some of the works, thus, became huge compendiums because they had to treat the various regions and States which in spite of the theory came to have separate histories. With the weakening of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, it remained no easy matter to treat the entire Muslim world in one work. The most outstanding work that achieved great success in this respect is ibn Athīr's *Kāmil fi al-Tārīkh*. It maintains its balance despite the length of the period which it covers and the large number of countries that it deals with. Despite its annalistic arrangement, it is not devoid of philosophical reflections on the happenings of some importance.

However, this trend of writing universal histories could not last long. For one thing, the distances were enormous and it was not easy to keep an eye on the happenings of so many corners of the Muslim world. Ibn Athīr himself complains; "A man sitting in Moṣul cannot but miss some events happening

⁴³ When Asoka's pillar was brought by Firūz Shāh from Meerut and erected at Delhi, the Hindu pundits who do not seem to have known Pali said that the inscription on it prophesied the great success of Firūz Shāh as a ruler; also cf. Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

in the remote corners of the East and the West."⁴⁴ It must be remembered that ibn Athīr was more successful than anyone else. Broken into numerous independent States, even though most of these continued to owe allegiance to nominal Caliphs, the Muslim world could not, despite the doctrine of the unity of the Muslim world, ignore its division. It entered the domain of religious thinking as well and there grew up proponents of legally sovereign States, every monarch exercising the functions of the Caliphate within his own dominions and enjoying the prestige of being the Caliph in his territories. The Mughul Emperors of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent were an outstanding but not the only example of the dynasties that accepted this theory of divided Caliphate. Even before, there had been written dynastic and local histories, but gradually the new trends brought to an end the tradition of universal histories of the Muslim world. The intermediate stage was that of the historian who would begin with the beginnings of the Islamic history and then trace the developments in the area about which he was writing, thinking that the Islamic traditions in his own land were a continuation of the history of Islam. Abu 'Umar Minhāj al-Dīn 'Uṭmān bin Sirāj al-Dīn al-Juzjānī's *Tabaqāt-i Nāṣiri* is a good example. The dynastic and local histories have already been discussed.

The connection between political science and history was generally understood by the historians. As a matter of fact, the knowledge of history was considered essential to the work of statecraft.⁴⁵ The policies pursued by previous monarchs were put forward as object lessons to illustrate the consequences of foolish as well as wise methods. For this reason many authors included a good deal of information about administrative measures in their books and summed up their success or failure. In the sub-continent of India and Pakistan a considerable amount of space was devoted to the administrative reforms undertaken by the rulers. Diyā' al-Dīn Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Firūzshāhi*; Shams-i Sirāj 'Afīf's *Tārīkh-i Firūzshāhi*, the *Sīrat-i Firūzshāhi*, and the *Futūhāt-i Firūzshāhi*; 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī's *Muntakhabat al-Tawārīkh*; 'Abd al-Ḥamid Lāhorī's *Padishāhnāmeḥ*; 'Ali Muḥammad Khān's *Mir'āt-i Aḥmadi*, to name but a few, are replete with this kind of information. The most outstanding work, however, is abu al-Faḍl's *Akbarnāmeḥ*, of which the *Ā'in-i Akbari* is intended to be an appendix. But what an appendix it is! It is a virtual gazette of the Mughul Empire and contains so much economic and administrative data that scholars have not yet been able to utilize them fully. The administrative institutions, the policies of the State, the divisions of the population, the agricultural produce of the various areas, the crafts and industries in the different parts of the Empire, and a host of other matters have been recorded. In addition, a considerable amount of cultural material is

⁴⁴ Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil fi al-Tārīkh*, Cairo, 1301/1883, I, p. 3.

⁴⁵ This was the reason why historical studies formed an essential part of a prince's education, e.g., Sinān bin Thābit bin Qurrah quoted by ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyāt al-Talab*, Cairo, MS. *Tārīkh*, 1566, I, p. 137; ibn Ḥamdūn, *Tadhkirah*, Bodleian MS. (Ar.) Marsh 316 part 3, 80b, etc., etc.

included. Compared to al-Birūnī's *Kitāb al-Hind*, there is no medieval book that gives such a sympathetic account of the Hindu faith and philosophy.

The incorporation of the accounts of alien faiths and cultures is an old Muslim tradition of Muslim historiography. The great geographers seldom mentioned an area without giving some account of the religious beliefs and social customs of its inhabitants. For the non-Muslim times, whenever, for want of historical information of a political nature, the Muslim historian felt at a loss to collect much data, he fell back upon the knowledge of the culture of the people.⁴⁶ The histories quite often incorporate large sections of the biographies of men noted in some fields of culture. Abu al-Faḍl's data are mainly based upon al-Birūnī so far as Hinduism is concerned, but his book also contains his own observations and research. In view of the immediate sources of knowledge available to him and because of his voracious thirst for knowledge, it is unlikely that he did not check all that al-Birūnī had said, especially when the Emperor himself was taking so great an interest in Hinduism and abu al-Faḍl was his constant consultant. The fact that abu al-Faḍl had so little reason to differ shows how well al-Birūnī had dealt with the subject.

The fact that history had a deep relationship with statecraft was recognized by the monarchs themselves.⁴⁷ The Caliph Mu'awiyah is reported to have spent some time regularly every night in the study of history; the narrator of this story gives details that show that the Caliph devoted this time to the study of mundane and secular history.⁴⁸ These examples can be multiplied *ad infinitum*. Hārūn al-Rashīd, the Mughul Emperors of India, the Iranian rulers, indeed, monarchs of practically every part of the Muslim world and in every age attached the greatest importance to the study of history. Gradually, a literature grew up that emphasized only those aspects of history that had some direct relevance to statecraft. Sadīd al-Dīn Muḥammad al-'Aufī's *Jawāmi' al-Hikāyāt wa Lawāmi' al-Riwayāt* contains selections of historical stories and information that illustrate some principles of politics or administration. This kind of literature gave place to treatises on administrative matters pure and simple and on politics and statecraft. Even the latter were replete with historical anecdotes. Some were written by men of

⁴⁶ The reason has been given by al-Tha'libī, *Ghurur*, Paris, MS. (Ar.) 1488, f. 247a, where he says, "The narration of these matters is like reporting about their kings, because people follow the religion of their kings, especially the Indians who immolate themselves for the glory of their kings and some of them even worship their kings." The author has explained earlier that historical data regarding India are difficult to obtain.

⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥamdūn, *op. cit.*, says, "Genealogy, history, and elements of jurisprudence are royal sciences." Compare Yāqūt, *Irshād*, Cairo, I, p. 27, who says, "the knowledge of genealogy and history belong to the sciences of kings . . ." Shāh Jahān made a habit of listening to history every evening ('Abd al-Ḥamid Lāhori, *Pādishāh-nāmah*, Bib. Indica, Calcutta, I, p. 153).

⁴⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, Cairo, 1346/1927, II, p. 72.

administrative experience like 'Unṣur al-Ma'ālī Kaikā'ūs bin Sikandar bin Qābūs' *Qābūs-nāmah* or Nizām al-Mulk Ṭūsī's *Siyāsat-nāmah*; others were written by professional historians like Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Baranī—*Fatāwa-i Jahān-dāri*; yet others by saintly Sufis who were interested in securing the welfare of the people through the instruction of monarchs. In this last category falls the *Dhakhīrat al-Mulūk* by Sayyid 'Alī bin Shihāb Hamadānī. The great Ḡhazālī also has a treatise of this nature in his *Naṣā'ih al-Mulūk*. Some were written by obscure writers and to give importance to their works, they ascribed them to well-known historical characters, as the *Tauqī'āt-i Kisra* is ascribed to Nuṣhīrwān and the *Waṣāya-i Nizām al-Mulk* to the statesman whose name it bears.

History today is related to sociology and endeavours to find the relationship between economic, social, and political factors and course of events. Indeed, history is no longer a mere recording of facts; it seeks to understand the significance of these facts as agents in fashioning the social and political fabric; it explores the impact of the past on the present in a more vital and deeper sense. It would be idle to expect the developments of the fourteenth/twentieth century in classical Muslim historiography because a good many of the sciences that are so important in understanding the full significance of historical processes had not developed until recently. For instance, the science of economics has made such rapid strides that it can hardly be recognized to be in the least related to the medieval economic thinking. Economic relations were neither so widespread nor were they so complex in a world where rapid means of transport were not known and the impact of world forces was not felt so quickly as in the world of today. Yet the Muslim historians were not unaware of these considerations. It is a truism to repeat that ibn Khaldūn's contribution in connecting history with sociology has been outstanding. He has been highly praised by modern authors and he has richly deserved this praise. "In the *Prolegomena (Muqaddimah)* to his Universal History (*Kitāb al-'Ibar*) he has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time or place."⁴⁹ "Ibn Khaldūn was a historian, politician, sociologist, economist, a deep student of human affairs, anxious to analyze the past of mankind in order to understand its present and future."⁵⁰ "Ibn Khaldūn (732-808/1332-1406), considered simply as an historian, had superiors even among Arabic authors, but as a theorist on history he had no equal in any age or country until Vico appeared, more than three hundred years later."⁵¹ So far as ibn Khaldūn's own position and contribution are concerned, it would suffice here to give these quotations, because a fuller discussion of his work is given in Chapters XLVI and XLIX of this work. It

⁴⁹ Charles Issawi, *An Arab Philosophy of History*, London, 1950, p. x, quoting Arnold J. Toynbee.

⁵⁰ *Idem*, pp. x, xi, quoting George Sarton.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. xi, quoting Robert Flint.

is true that ibn Khaldūn had no peers in the world of Islam, but it is not correct as has become fashionable to assert that he had neither predecessors nor successors in what he set himself to do.

Muslim historians do, in their search for causes, go into fields that are not merely political and search out causes that are not discernible on the surface. The Muslim writers had tried to understand the working of economic laws and were conversant with the Greek works on the subject.⁵² The writers on revenue in particular brought in economics and sound finance within the scope of their work.⁵³ Of these perhaps Qudāmah bin Ja'far deserves special mention, who in one of his chapters presents a systematic discussion of political and social sciences.⁵⁴ He enters into fundamental considerations regarding the social and economic needs of human beings and the steps taken to meet them. Observations on political, economic, and social factors are found scattered throughout the books of ethics, politics, and history. In the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, abu al-Faḍl among others has brought in questions of economics and social organization while commenting upon administrative measures. The most outstanding example is Shāh Wali Allāh, who based his philosophy on economic and social foundations.⁵⁵ Being confronted with the problem of the decline of the Muslim political power in the sub-continent of India and Pakistan, he analysed the forces at work to diagnose the disease from which the polity as well as the society suffered at that time and came out with his suggestions for curing their ills, in doing which he explored a wide range of economics, sociology, history, and politics. He examined the relations subsisting between the producers and consumers and laid down the dictum that in a balanced society everyone must contribute to its welfare. Then he pointed out how some sections of the society had become parasites and, thus, had upset the balance. This kind of analysis runs right through his discussions, whether he is discussing social conditions or examining political and economic ills. He has a historical mind because he brings in the examples of the great civilizations that had preceded Islam and draws relevant conclusions from their fate.

In conclusion one may say that history has been a favourite discipline with the Muslims. They brought the highest standards of objectivity into their writings; they showed great enthusiasm for the discovery of true facts; they produced a vast literature of considerable merit at a time when even among the civilized peoples there was not much flair for historiography; indeed, there were cultures of a highly developed nature that had no place

⁵² M. Plessner, *Der ουνογονους des Neupythagoreers "Bryson" und sein Einfluss auf die islamische Wissenschaft*, Heidelberg, 1928, Orient und Antike, Vol. V.

⁵³ The various books on *Kharāj* and the *Ā'in-i Akbari* of abu al-Faḍl are good examples.

⁵⁴ Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 462-63, gives a table of contents.

⁵⁵ Such material is found in several of his books, especially *Hujjat Allāh al-Balighah*; an Urdu translation is available, Lahore, 1953.

in their learning for historiography. At such a time the Muslims established standards which have not always been improved upon in the modern world. For instance, contemporary nations have to learn a good deal in standards of objectivity and in distinguishing between national glorification and history. The Muslims were able to expand the scope of history from mere recording of facts into a repository of political, administrative, and cultural experiences and made fruitful essays into the analytical field as well. They failed like the political thinkers of Islam in suggesting the evolution of institutions that would have enabled greater and more responsible participation of the people in the affairs of the State, but they did help in making the Islamic governments beneficent and benevolent at a time when other governments tended to be arbitrary and even tyrannical.

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Chapter LXI

JURISPRUDENCE

In this chapter it is proposed to bring into relief the philosophical significance of certain salient points and aspects of Muslim Law, otherwise known as *Fiqh*. But before doing so, let us have a tolerably precise idea of what one understands by law, and in particular what the Muslim jurists have understood by it.

A

THE LAW

Law roughly means the rules of conduct. But not every rule of conduct forms a part of law. There are things people instinctively do under the dictates