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Arabic historical thought in the classical period

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often be identified with only one region.¹³ In Prophetic and Qur'anic studies especially a pan-Islamic interest is in evidence from the outset and eventually these regional distinctions were no longer valid even for historical writing. In a search for origins, however, these initial differences of nuance should be kept in mind because they illustrate the extent to which early historiography received different stimuli from differing environments. These three areas of historical curiosity came into being under the shadow of *Hadith*, to which we now turn.

¹³ Duri's distinction between a *hadith*-oriented Medinese school of historians and a tribal-oriented Iraqi school (see *The Rise of Historical Writing*, chapter 4) has been criticized in Albrecht Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsbearbeitung* vol. I (Bonn: Bonner Orientalistische Studien 25, 1973). I argue above that while regional specialization may be untenable, the different environments provided different stimuli to early-Islamic scholarship.

Noth's work has been translated into English and revised under the title *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993). The work, very influential in other respects, suffers from the lack of any analysis of the larger theoretical issues within which one can assess historical sources, e.g. the definition of historical 'truth' in various periods: this has recently been done for Greek and Roman historiography by A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); see also Ernst Breisach, ed., *Classical Rhetoric and Medieval Historiography* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1985), especially the essay by Nancy F. Partner. Noth also makes liberal, even arbitrary, use of the concept of 'topos' but without placing it in any larger theoretical framework, or explaining why a concept originally developed by Erich Auerbach and E. R. Curtius for the aesthetic appraisal of medieval Latin literature is also relevant to the assessment of the facticity of early-Islamic historiography. Belonging to the Noth 'school' but less clear in methodology is Stefan Lederer, 'The Literary Use of the *Khabar*: A Basic Form of Historical Writing', in Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I, Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992), 277-315.

CHAPTER 2

History and Hadith

It was under the general rubric of *Hadith* that the basic religious sciences of Islam, including historical writing, were to develop. In Europe, sustained academic study of *Hadith* began in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the Muslim world, the study of *Hadith* has been continuous and, in the last fifty years or so, has begun to take stock of western scholarship on the subject. Its *origins*, *mode of transmission* and *authenticity* have all absorbed a long tradition of commentary. The critical examination of these three aspects of *Hadith* carries us into the heart of one of the most intricate problems that a historian can face in connection with a textual source. The *Hadith* for one thing is vast. Its apparent simplicity of structure is deceptive. It has its own ancient critical apparatus in the form of the chain of transmitters (*isnad*) of each individual *hadith* and its own technical vocabulary of transmission (*tahammul al-'ilm*). Almost from its inception, the *Hadith* literature has carried within itself its own 'antibodies': a streak of scepticism regarding its validity and authenticity as well as many *hadiths* which flatly contradict one another, to the point where many Islamic reformers or leaders have advocated its partial or complete abandonment as a pillar of the *Shari'a*, the Islamic law of life. Moreover, and within the last half century or so, a lot of early *Hadith* texts have come to light, often necessitating modification or rejection of existing theories or views.

In the long history of *Hadith* and of the various sciences which evolved from it, including historical writing, two ages of intensity may be distinguished: the first in the 3rd-5th/9th-11th centuries, when *Hadith* was classified and edited, and the second in the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries, when the great Mamluk biographical dictionaries of *Hadith* transmitters and related topics were completed. Only the first age will be discussed here for it was during this period that history and *Hadith* were most intimately connected. But something must first be said about origins.

The word *hadith* is one of a number of Qur'anic terms which came to constitute the common vocabulary associated with reporting and representing the past. *Hadith* is to be found in the company of such other terms as *khabar*, *naba'* and *'ilm*. In the Qur'an, *hadith* has two basic meanings.

In Meccan verses especially, the *hadith* of Moses or of Pharaoh, for instance, means 'story' or, better still, 'parable'. In Medinese verses, *hadith* tends to mean 'speech' or 'report'. This is already, if correct, an indication of a shift in the function of *hadith* from a private to a more public role of guidance. A *muhadith* (21:2) is a preacher or reciter. Again, *khabar* and *naba'* occupy approximately the same area of meaning; *khabar* is perhaps closer to *hadith* in its meaning of parable while *naba'* is more often a piece of information, of neutral moral content. The word *'ilm* is still more problematic. In Qur'anic, and particularly Medinese usage, it connotes knowledge or wisdom, especially such as is derived from sacred scriptures, and is therefore often contrasted with *zann*, or guessing, an attribute of the unbelievers. It is a term which serves to highlight the kind of wisdom acquired through reflection upon the moral of Qur'anic narratives: real history as opposed to legend or illusion.¹

A set of terms was thus provided through which to report and unveil the past. The vocabulary now made available, e.g. *hadith*, *khabar*, *naba'*, *qissa* and so forth, could refer to a variety of events, secular as well as sacred. Early *Hadith* was like a ball of many coloured threads. The material relating to the life and sayings of the Prophet and his Companions was an undifferentiated mass of individual reports of widely differing import and religious gravity. Legal injunctions, ritual, the virtues of individuals or tribes, eschatology, ethical conduct, biographical fragments, the Prophet's expeditions, correct manners, admonitions and homilies were all intertwined.² This tallies well with what we know about the loose and interchangeable manner in which many early technical terms were used and indeed with the lack of specialization in public functions throughout the Rashidun and early-Umayyad periods.³

But an awareness of history-in-the-making was probably the primary and dominant urge among Islam's earliest scholars:

[Yazid ibn Abi Habib (d. 128/746)] was the *mufiti* (jurisconsult) of the people of Egypt of his days. He was a moderate and wise man, the first to establish the primacy of religious knowledge in Egypt and to expound on the licit and the illicit. It is reported that *before this* [my italics] the people of Egypt used to relate *hadith*

¹ On *'ilm*, the standard classical treatise is Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1070), *Jami' Bayan al-'ilm wa Fadlithi*. F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden: Brill, 1970) is a recent and exhaustive treatment.

² The reader would get a good idea about the contents of early *Hadith* by examining the earliest collections to be found in works like the *Misnad* of Ibn Hanbal or the *Muwat'at* of Malik. On the genesis of *Hadith*, the reader should consult both books as well as the detailed studies of Schacht, Abbott, Sezgin, Azmi, Wansbrough and Juybolli, to name only a few of the more significant modern treatments of this topic.

³ Such terms as *jizya* and *kharij* in the sphere of taxation or *sunna*, *sira* and *maghazi* in religious scholarship were used with considerable latitude up to the mid-Umayyad period. Likewise, the early governors had very wide executive, judicial and even legislative powers.

about the incitement to virtue (*targhib*), times of trouble (*fitan*) and cataclysms (*malahim*).⁴

Hadith, the earliest vehicle of Islamic scholarship, came into being and reached maturity very much under the impact of political events and conflicting expectations. The early conquests, the first civil war between 'Ali and Mu'awiya (36/656-40/661) and the second between 'Abd al-Malik and Ibn al-Zubayr (65/685-73/692) - all these events had a devastating effect on the loyalties and beliefs of early-Islamic society and the *Hadith* echoes the resultant social and economic upheaval:

Time was [says 'Utha ibn Ghazwan (d. 17/638)] when, as the seventh of seven followers of the Prophet of God, I and my companions had no food but the leaves of trees, to the point where our mouths became ulcerous. I would pick up a garment, tear it in half and share it between me and Sa'd ibn Malik. But today, lo and behold, there is not one of us who has not become governor of some city or another. God forbid that I should be great in my own eyes but small in the sight of God. But then, there has never been a prophecy which time has not in the end transformed into a kingdom. You will indeed experience what governors are really like when we are gone.⁵

The *Hadith* began hesitantly, almost shyly. It had to overcome the reluctance of many early Muslims to tolerate *any* text that seemed to them to threaten the textual finality of the Qur'an or the sense of awe which this inspired. Recorded in both memory and writing from the earliest decades after the death of the Prophet, the *Hadith* rapidly asserted its authority as a repository of the community's early religious and historical experiences. The periods it traversed in its first hundred and fifty years of existence may roughly be described as moving from an initial stage of *collectanea*, simple jottings recorded as heard or remembered, to a second stage when these were put together in a book, to a final stage when the various items were classified according to subject. This corresponds with the transition from a *sahifa*, one or more pages of parchment, to a *kitab* (or *diwan*, an official archive, a significant synonym derived from early bureaucracy) to a *musannaf*, or specialized monograph. At every stage in this evolution,

⁴ Dhahabi, *Tarajim*, p. 83; cf. the early popularity of the Book of Daniel in Baghdad, *Taqyid*, pp. 51, 57. See also the report that knowledge of the licit and the illicit reached North Africa only in the days of 'Umar II, as cited in Ibn 'Idhart, *Bayan*, 1:48. On the apocalyptic literature, see Lawrence Conrad, 'Apocalyptic Tradition and Early Islamic History', paper presented at the Seminar on Early Islamic Historiography, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 28 January 1985. Conrad argues that much of this literature is as old as the mid-Umayyad period. I would say it is as old as anything else in *Hadith*.

⁵ Muslim, *Sahih*, 8:215; cf. also 8:220 for the exchange between 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar and a supposedly poor Meccan Emigrant. Quite apart from the historicity of such *hadiths*, they nevertheless typify conditions and states of mind that are very widely documented in the biographies of Companions and Successors (*Sahaba* and *Tabi'un*).

social and administrative factors and political partisanship were of paramount importance in determining both content and structure. And at every stage also, tension may be noted between the 'writers' and the 'memorizers'. When the evidence is carefully weighed, little doubt remains that a substantial corpus of written *Hadith* existed by at least as early as the first half of the first century AH, while the stage of classified works was in all likelihood reached by the first half of the second century.⁶

When we turn to the mode of transmission of the *Hadith* literature, we encounter even greater complexities than those associated with its origins. We might begin by asking why it took the form it did, that is to say the form of what were predominantly short, i.e. one- to ten-line reports, and what significance this had for their mode of transmission. At issue, to begin with, is a cluster of reasons which may have dictated the concise and fragmentary character of earliest *Hadith* such as the scarcity of writing materials and early suspicion of any non-Qur'anic texts. But there are more complex reasons for the form that *Hadith* took, reasons which have to do with the evolution of religious knowledge in general and which need to be examined in some detail.

In early days, the possession of only a few *hadiths* afforded their possessor a nucleus of early Islamic 'ilm, that is to say a body of knowledge emanating from Muhammad or his pious Companions to complement the Qur'anic text, particularly in absorbing and digesting the drama of the first fifty years of Islamic history.⁷ The transition from this early *sahifa* stage to a stage of greater control and legalization of the material was

⁶ To substantiate the arguments of this paragraph would require lengthy documentation. The standard classical treatise on the subject of the origins of recorded *Hadith* is Baghdadi (d. 463/1071), *Taqyid al-'ilm*, with a valuable introduction by the editor, Yusuf al-'Ishah. The arguments of N. Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967) and F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1967) regarding the historicity of early *Hadith* are fortified by M. M. Azmi, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978). All three address themselves to the scepticism of Schacht in his *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953) and *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964). The return to scepticism regarding early origins in the works of J. Wansbrough, especially his *Quranic Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), seems to run directly counter to the researches of J. Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). G. H. A. Juybol, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) is prepared to grant authenticity to at least part of the prophetic traditions'. The debate within the Islamic tradition is partly reflected in M. A. al-Khatib, *Al-Sunna qabl al-Tadwin*, 2nd edn (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1971) as well as in the works of al-'Ishah and Azmi, cited above. R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1986), pp. 68 ff. reviews the literature on the subject of the early historical tradition but his own views are, in many places, questionable. See also the interesting article by Gregor Schoeler, 'Die Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im frühen Islam', *Der Islam*, 62/2, (1985), 201-30, who argues that the controversy over written versus oral transmission hinges upon an exact definition of the terms 'written' and 'oral'.

⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jami'*, 2:120-33, cites and comments upon numerous reports warning against excess in *Hadith* collection. See also al-Khatib, *Al-Sunna*, pp. 110-11.

accomplished by the end of the first century at the hands of specialists, many of whom were in the service of political causes. The first serious and systematic challenge to the Umayyad caliphate by the Zubayrid counter-caliphate (64/683-73/692) probably coincided with the appearance of the more manageable and more easily disseminated *kitab* which carried more clearly the stamp of its scholarly transmitter:

We used [says Abu 'Imran al-Jawni (d. 128/746)] to hear about a *sahifa* which contained religious knowledge ('ilm) and would visit it repeatedly as a man visits a legal scholar (*faqih*) until the Zubayrids came to us in Basra and had with them a group of *faqihis*.⁸

To meet this challenge, the Umayyads, beginning with 'Abd al-Malik (reigned 65/685-86/705), made a serious and sustained effort to garner as much *Hadith* as possible and then to mobilize their own party of *faqihis* charged with its diffusion. Regarding two of these *faqihis* in particular several oft-quoted reports survive, e.g.,

We used [says al-Zuhri (d. 124/742)] to dislike the writing down of 'ilm until forced to do so by these rulers and thus we came to believe that it should not be withheld from any Muslim.

They were not [says Ibn Sirin (d. 110/728)] in the habit of asking about the *isnad* but when civil war broke out they said 'Mention to us your transmitters'. The people of the community (*ahl al-sunna*) were investigated and their *hadith* was accepted while the heretics (*ahl al-bida'*) were investigated and their *hadith* was rejected.⁹

From this battle of the *faqihis*, not a single *faqih* of the first century can be said to have escaped unscathed. Each and every one of them, including the masters, is tainted by an imputation of ignorance or political partisanship or of some moral turpitude, as if they were all dabbling in a commerce of dubious religious validity.¹⁰ In fact the term 'money-changers' (*sayarifa*) came to designate those masters who considered themselves or were held by their disciples to be adept at distinguishing true from false *hadiths*:

⁸ Baghdadi, *Kifaya*, p. 355 and see also Baladhuri, *Ansb*, 4/1:402 and 407 for early-Zubayrid *faqaha'*; cf. footnote 4 above for the transition from *hadith* on *fiat* to *hadith* on *hoit* and *ihlicit*.

⁹ For Zuhri, see Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, 2:389; see also Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jami'*, 1:76, as well as the reports about Zuhri assembled in H. 'Atwan, *Al-Riwaya al-Tarikhyya fi Bilad al-Sham fi al-'Asr al-Umawi'* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1966), pp. 105-8, and cf. the similar and revealing comments of Ayyub al-Sakhtyani, d. 131/748] in Baghdadi, *Kifaya*, p. 240. For Ibn Sirin, see Muslim, *Sahih*, 1:11 and Azmi, *Studies*, pp. 213, 217. Confirmation of growing rigour in *isnad* usage is found in, e.g., Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, 7:231.

¹⁰ See, e.g., the remark by Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan (d. 198/814) reported in Muslim, *Sahih*, 1:13-14: 'We have not witnessed pious men to be more untruthful in anything than they are in *Hadith*'. Muslim adds the comment that they do so unintentionally. See also the report about the ignorance displayed by the great Malik in Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*, 1:422, para. 1018, and, further, A. Fischer, 'Neue Auszüge aus ad-Dhahabi und Ibn an-Naggar', *ZDMG* 44 (1890), 418, on Nakha'i's opinion of Sha'bi and Sha'bi's opinion of 'Ikrima.

Al-A'mash [d. 147/764] said: Ibrahim al-Nakha'i [d. 96/715] was a money-changer (*sayraf*) in *Hadith*. I would hear *hadiths* from some men and then make my way to him and submit what I had heard. I used to visit Zayd ibn Wahb and others like him in *Hadith* once or twice a month, but the man I visited almost daily was Ibrahim.¹¹

It was during this same period also, that is, the second half of the first century, that these state- or faction-sponsored lawyers began to introduce new rules into the manner of transmission and then into *isnad* itself. Hitherto, one must assume that in the first, or *sahifa* period, the importance of direct oral transmission was highly prized, and this continued to be so for a slowly decreasing band of purists:

This *im* [says al-Awza'i (d. 157/774)] was a noble thing when it was received and memorized from the mouths of men. But when it came to be in books, it lost its glow and passed on to people who are unworthy of it.¹²

But the propagation of religious knowledge in a manner which would make it available to state or faction use was soon to lead to a situation where the transmission of *texts* without direct oral authorization was more practicable. To compensate for the loss of personal authority in transmission, i.e. the value of having heard or recorded *Hadith* 'from the mouths of men', the *isnad* was applied with increasing rigour. The *isnad* was in reality a chain of *authorities* appended to each *hadith*. It was to become an instrument of control in the hands of master traditionalists as they prepared to battle each other's claims or interpretations. The more intense the polemic the more rival masters strove to outwit one another in assembling or authenticating their own, and in casting doubts upon the *isnad* of their opponents. At about the same period when the caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (d. 86/705) was standardizing the imperial coinage, *Hadith* was becoming the basic 'coinage' of Islamic scholarship and the *isnad* an essential aspect of its 'circulation'.

The *isnad*, at least in the highly developed form which it reached in the second Islamic century, was a unique product of Islamic culture.¹³ With

¹¹ Ibn Abi Hatim, *Jarh*, 1:17; cf. Ibn Abi Hatim, *Taqdima*, pp. 349-51. There is an interesting antecedent usage of the term 'expert banker' in Origen, in connection with the establishment of the New Testament canon: see E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963), 1:54, and the Jesus *agraphon* at 1:88.

¹² Baghdadi, *Taqyid*, p. 64. Important parallels in Jewish and early-Christian literary traditions are found in B. Gerthardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1964), especially pp. 123 ff., 196 ff. See also J. Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), chapter 3.

¹³ The classical literature on the *isnad* is vast. A modern Muslim view is forcefully set forth in Azmi, *Studies*, chapter 6, who among other things re-examines the theories of Schacht and Robson. The works of Abbott, Sezgin and Juybnoll cited above should also be consulted. Oddly enough, only twelve lines are devoted to *isnad* in the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

time, the *isnads* came to resemble pyramids of authority, the apex being the substance (*matn*) of the *hadith* in question and the sides and base a slowly increasing company of narrators. Among other effects of this enormous growth in *isnad* was the impulse it gave to the production of books:

The *isnad* has grown long [says Marwan ibn Muhammad (d. 210/825)] and people will have to consult books.¹⁴

The *isnad* was thus a network of scholarly relationships which came into being, in all likelihood, in the heat of early polemic, its equivalent in the social realm being the principle of *sabiqa* or seniority in embracing Islam, according to which a Muslim found his proper place in the hierarchy of the early community. But other and competing sources of privilege, e.g. tribal aristocracy, were also advanced, and the struggle between these varying concepts of political authority intensified the need for a tightly regulated transmission of authoritative religious knowledge. The *isnad* was particularly suited to both controversy and documentation: to controversy because it forced consideration of what constitutes a man's reputation (e.g. trustworthy/untrustworthy) and to documentation because *isnad* created discrete, self-contained units of knowledge, easily memorized if needed and easily classifiable under separate headings if books or monographs are required. Hence the form that *Hadith* took was bound up with the development of the *isnad* and with the emerging class of scholars who sought to regulate the production of religious scholarship.

As may be expected, the new *isnad* expert was a different type of scholar from the earlier *rawiya* or *qass*, who was, or came to be perceived as, a relic from the days of *jahiliyya*. More often than not, these experts were in government service.¹⁵ They were increasingly called upon by rulers or governors to supply information or deliver learned opinions on specific issues relevant to public policy and this fact contributed both to the appearance of specialized monographs as well as to a new sense of poise and self-confidence among them:

Al-Mahdi said, 'O Abu 'Abdallah, [i.e. Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161/778)] relate something to the Commander of the Believers which God Almighty might cause him to benefit therefrom.' Sufyan replied, 'If you were to ask me about something of which I have knowledge [*'ilm*], I will inform you.' When al-Mahdi persisted in his request, Sufyan answered, 'I am not a *qass*.'¹⁶

¹⁴ Baghdadi, *Kifaya*, p. 230.

¹⁵ See, e.g., the biographies of some of these early experts in Dhahabi, *Tarajim*, and in Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*, 1:198 ff.

¹⁶ Ibn Abi Hatim, *Taqdima*, p. 112. Sufyan's antipathy towards *qassas* is confirmed in Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, 7:281. See also a similar sentiment expressed much earlier by Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 74/693) in Muslim, *Sahih*, 1:15, as well as other reports collected in M. A. al-Khatib, *al-Sunna*, pp. 210-13, and in Juybnoll, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 11, note

Much of their expertise was transmitted by correspondence, with each other or with officialdom. The fact that the word *kitab* came to mean both book and letter in the course of the first century underlines the role played by scholarly epistles in the formation of the earliest monographs. A letter writer is more clearly an author than an anthologist, a narrator or an editor. A case in point is a sizeable body of letters from the celebrated jurist al-Awza'i (d. 157/774) to caliphs, high officials and colleagues which is preserved and appears authentic.¹⁷ These letters indicate how a *Hadith* expert was induced through correspondence to focus his materials upon a certain topic in order to make them yield legal or ethical rulings, thus contributing to the growth of specialized authorship. This was the stage of the *musannaf*, or specialized monograph, which, as we have seen above, was reached by the first half of the second Islamic century.

Much, too, has been written about the 'journey in quest of knowledge' (*rihla fi talab al-'ilm*) and about debates between scholars as important aspects of the transmission of early *Hadith*. By establishing a civil service drawn from multi-tribal roots and by rotating its members from one province to another, the Umayyads undoubtedly contributed to the mobility of a class to which religious scholars also belonged. Debates between scholars, on the other hand, were a reflection of the growing polemical skills and diverse political loyalties of *Hadith* scholars in the first century. The sharpening of differences tended to the creation of scholarly factions led by masters the integrity of whose teaching was controlled by a 'licensing act' (*ijaza*) through which the material was transmitted and a 'following' (*ashab*) of the master established:

I heard Sa'id ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz [d. 167/783] reproving the followers of al-Awza'i and saying, 'Why do you not meet together? Why do you not review [your religious knowledge] together?'¹⁸

In general, these *Hadith* scholars of the first hundred and fifty years did not believe that they were creating a new science but simply preserving

7 (where Sulami's remarks need to be considered) and p. 162. See also the comments on *qussas* in R. G. Khoury, 'Un écrit inédit attribué à Wahb b. Munabbih', *Al-Machriq*, 64 (1970), 600-4; G. H. A. Juynboll, 'On the Origins of Arabic Prose', in G. H. A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 165-7 and Khalil 'Athamina, 'Al-Qasas: Its Emergence, Religious Origin and Its Socio-political Impact on Early Muslim Society', *Studia Islamica*, 76 (1992), 53-74. The Umayyad 'Abd al-Malik seems to have separated the office of judge (*qadi*) from that of preacher (*qass*): see Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*, I:200, paras 146-8.

17 See Ibn Abi Hatim, *Taqdim*, pp. 187-202, and Fazari, *Siyar*, pp. 125-30. Baghdadli, *Kifaya*, pp. 342-5, details the importance of correspondence between scholars, a subject which merits further investigation.

18 Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*, I:361, para. 775. On the evolution of the *ijaza*, the best treatment is still in Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:58 ff. The first few pages of Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, preserves a vivid record of scholarly debates and the polemical uses of early *Hadith*. On Umayyad bureaucrats in Syria, see Saïh Ahmad al-'Ali, 'Mawazabat Biad al-Sham fi al-'Ahd al-Umawi', *Al-Abhath*, 19 (1966), 44-79, and, in Iraq, by the same author, *Al-*

for the community a record, normative, didactic or homiletic, of Muhammad and the drama of the early years of the community's history. They were animated by an essentially conservative spirit which tended to view the past as a process of steady decline and their own days as inferior in morality and knowledge to the days of Muhammad and of his four 'rightly guided' successors. Among the great *Hadith* masters of the mid-second century, the belief that real scholars are few in number is very common; as is the apprehension that religious scholarship is being perverted or put to worldly use by opportunists:

[Sufyan al-Thawri] said, 'We have become a mere merchandise to the people of this world . . . A man becomes our disciple until, when he is known as such and transmits our knowledge, he is appointed governor or chamberlain, steward or tax-collector and says, "Al-Thawri related to me."¹⁹

In passing on the wisdom of ancestors these scholars believed that they were transmitters rather than creators. But the process of transmission became, as so often in the history of cultures, creation through transmission. Succeeding generations of scholars spoke for their own day and age for which the pious wisdom of the ancestors had to be newly interpreted. In the process, the *Hadith* made its own distinctive contribution to Islamic culture, was indeed the first Islamic science.

The last aspect of *Hadith* that needs to be examined here is the labyrinthine problem of its authenticity. At issue is not merely the truth or falsity of reports about the Prophet and his followers but the history of Islam itself as recorded and transmitted up to the second or third centuries. In the last decade or so, some western Islamicists have subjected early-Islamic tradition to a withering critique, attempting to show that no trust can be placed in the authenticity of any *Hadith* or *Hadith*-like material before the third century, all such materials being essentially an imaginative reconstruction by later generations. The force of this attack has been blunted somewhat, if only because the advocates of this radical view do not seem to have won many adherents. More telling is the fact that this critique seems so far not to have inspired alternative strategies of interpretation as to the origins and evolution of Islamic history or scholarship in these first two or three, allegedly dark centuries. There are on the other hand western scholars who, while admitting the authenticity of much of the early materials, despair of ever being able to devise reliable criteria which can distinguish genuine from spurious.

There is value of course in advancing hypotheses to explain how the *Hadith* was put together by succeeding generations or to classify *Hadith* into literary types, especially when one is faced by seemingly insurmount-

¹⁹ *Tanzimat al-Jima'iyya wa'l Iqtisadiyya fi Basra fi'l Qarn al-Awwal al-Hijri*, 2nd edn (Beirut: Dar al-Tal'a, 1969), p. 122, and *passim*.
²⁰ Ibn 'Abbad al-Rundi, *Al-Rasa'il al-Sughra*, p. 41.

able internal contradictions. There is value also in employing a control mechanism in the form of other comparable traditions, e.g. Greek or Syriac, to test the veracity of the *Hadith* materials. When one learns to recognize the mythopoetic activity of third-century scholars and to understand that much of this material is meant to edify or to propagandize a sectarian viewpoint rather than to inform, one might begin to see the material in a new light. This said, however, the proponents of the view that this material basically came into being two to three centuries after the 'events' reported in it and contains little if any facticity would still need to explain how and why something that must have resembled a massive conspiracy produced not only *Hadith* but also the Qur'anic text itself.

One central issue in this controversy about the authenticity of the *Hadith* materials is the theory that Islamic scholarship passed through two phases, the first oral and the second written. Despite the very detailed arguments advanced against this theory, its supporters still cling manfully to its tatters. If one argues that this scholarship began by being oral in nature and transmission, then one can more easily posit the view that little trust can be placed in its authenticity, although even this view is debatable as we learn more about the oral traditions of various peoples. In point of fact,

²⁰ We arrive here at the heart of the problem of authenticity. It is a problem which will certainly occupy Islamicists for decades to come, if only because new material is being constantly added to the debate with the publication of several important *Hadith* collections every year. It will not be necessary to substantiate all the arguments advanced in the three paragraphs above: the *Hadith* specialist will be familiar with the issues while the student of the subject would hopefully find the references cited to be of use.

The latest phase in Western orientalist scepticism regarding the authenticity of *Hadith* began some forty years ago with Joseph Schacht, whose works are cited in footnote 6, above. Schacht's scepticism was itself attacked by Abbot and later by Azmi: see also footnote 6. Scepticism was renewed and resupplied with arguments in the works of Wansbrough, Crone and Cook. A view which comes close to despair at ever arriving at a meaningful solution is found, e.g., in Junybolli, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 71. In recent years the non-Muslim scholar who has explored *Hadith* collections most thoroughly is M. J. Kister. His attitude may be characterized as one of cautious acceptance: see, e.g., his 'On "Concessions" and Conduct. A Study in Early *Hadith*' in G. H. A. Junybolli, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, pp. 89-107, where he discusses certain first-century customs whose historicity is reflected in *Hadith*.

In his *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) John Wansbrough is not directly concerned with the question of authenticity, unlike his earlier *Qur'anic Studies* which is very sceptical about early-Islamic traditions. His attention is focused rather on what he calls 'morphological constants' derived, via Structuralism, from the Judaeo-Christian tradition. He nowhere explains why he chose to ignore the 'morphological constants' spawned by the vast *Hadith* literature itself, and seems to regard most *Hadith* as the product of recasting by later generations. But scepticism also assumes other forms. In his *Muhammad*, Past Masters Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), Michael Cook devotes pages 61-76 to a discussion of sources. Cook not only clings to the old view that postulates an oral first century, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, but seeks also to question the authenticity of reports about the literary activity of early historians, e.g. al-Zuhri. These reports depict Zuhri as being at once a writer and a non-writer of traditions. Therefore, the sources are 'bewilderingly inconsistent', p. 66. An illuminating parallel, however, may be found in the practice of the early Church Fathers, e.g. Origen as recorded in Eusebius,

however, a close reading of the *Hadith* literature would unearth evidence in plenty that written materials existed alongside oral transmission from the very beginning and that respect for prodigies of memory did not necessarily exclude resort to writing. It was argued above that the Umayyad state was probably the major sponsor of the written tradition but this does not mean that the Umayyads ushered in the age of writing. The dilemma that the Umayyads, and indeed the drama of events, created for some scholars was not that they forced them to write down their oral learning but rather that they encouraged, perhaps even pressured, them to make their materials available in written form *to a wider public*. If this situation is kept in mind and close attention is paid to the vocabulary of transmission, many apparently contradictory reports about the same scholar which depict him at one time as a memorizer, at another as a writer would be resolved. A prodigious memory was always a highly prized gift and part of the scholarly image, but this could and did coexist with a willingness to dispense knowledge in written form as private and public need for this increased.²⁰

Then again, if these first century materials were doctored *in toto* by later ages, all one can say is that it was a pretty bad doctored job. The fragmentary *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 35, where Origen consented at last to have his lectures recorded in writing though he had never before agreed to this. In the case of both men, consent to writing was the result of a new and vigorous phase in the propagation of the religious message.

But what do we really need to do before we can tackle the problem of the authenticity of *Hadith*? We must first of all recognize the fact that we are dealing with a scripto-oral tradition. Therefore the question of authenticity cannot be brushed aside, nor need we despair of ever finding the needles of historicity in a haystack of religious lore. Then again, modern anthropological studies of oral tradition, e.g. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) stress the importance of studying traditions in their context, not as they relate to some other tradition which they supposedly 'tape' (e.g. the Judaic in the case of Wansbrough). We have much to learn from such accounts of how traditions originate and spread, and how and why they eventually become specialized. More general studies of tradition also contain material that is of much help to the overall study of *Hadith*, for instance Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). Much may also be learnt from current folklore theory as regards the historicity of orally transmitted narrative, e.g. Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore, Selected Essays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), especially pp. 208-13, and from studies in mythology, e.g. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), especially chapters 7 and 9. When comparative material is being sought, the net should be cast wide. Thus, the genesis and evolution of attitudes towards a heroic past in the classical Chinese and Greek traditions, both of which were scripto-oral, can illuminate certain aspects of *Hadith*, e.g. the creation or preservation of an ethical ideal couched in historical terms for purposes of unification or central state building; see M. I. Finley, 'Myth, Memory and History', *History and Theory*, 4 (1965), 281-302 and Jean Gates, 'Model Emperors of the Golden Age in Chinese Lore', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 56 (1936), 51-76.

In my view, one of the most urgent tasks for researchers in this field is the exhaustive examination of the rise and development of the critical methodologies employed by the *Hadith* scholars themselves. This would certainly throw light on the question of authenticity, where a great deal of modern argument still reflects subjective standards of credibility.

mented, often contradictory state in which these materials are found is perhaps the best proof that they were transmitted with only haphazard and generally recognizable doctoring, of the type and quantity that one may well expect in any similar body of traditions transmitted in both written and oral form. After having allowed for this doctoring (admittedly with the numerous problems raised therein) we still possess a body of materials, daunting in volume and constantly increasing, which needs careful and laborious examination. To determine its authenticity, one ought to apply to it the usual rules of evidence and, especially where *Hadith* is concerned, the juxtaposition of text and historical context, despite the dilemma created by the fact that the context itself is furnished by *Hadith*. One must also bear in mind that one is dealing with material which is remarkably self-critical. Thus, for example, one of the most prestigious collections of early *Hadith*, the *sahifa* called *Al-Sadiqa* (the truthful), ascribed to 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As (d. 65/684), was challenged as early as the first century by certain scholars:

Al-Mughira [ibn Miqdam (d. 136/753)] attached no value to the *hadith* of Salim ibn Abi al-Ja'd (d. 98/716), the *hadith* of Khilas (d. end of first century) or the *sahifa* of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr. Al-Mughira said, "Abdullah ibn 'Amr had a *sahifa* called *Al-Sadiqa* and I would not possess it even if it cost two *fls.*"²¹

Lastly, and in seeking to classify *Hadith* by genre, topos, trope or any other model derived from literary theory prior to determining authenticity, one must remember that the *Hadith* has its own thematic classification scheme, e.g. into *sunna*, *sira*, *targhib*, *tarhib* and so forth, which should form the basis for any other classificatory model one may care to adopt. The exploration of these terms and the delineation of their respective areas of meaning in various periods of the history of *Hadith* is a task which, if properly fulfilled, would greatly enhance our understanding of the conceptual structure of the diverse materials from which the *Hadith* was composed.

From *Hadith* to history

Somewhat like Mollière's M. Jourdain, cultures often practise history before they are conscious of its parameters as a special discipline or craft. The incubation period may be either long or short, depending largely upon how quickly a society acquires distinct social and political parameters. Concurrently, the past as image-building frequently precedes the past as 'neutral' information; it becomes easier for specialists to wield and more interpretable as it becomes more charged ideologically. Built into *Hadith* from the start, as we have seen above, was the urge to put a certain image into a certain kind of record. We have also argued that this urge, this

proto-historical consciousness was at first less impressed by the overarching historical lessons of the Qur'an, and more by the drama of events, especially the early conquests and civil wars – what Ibn Khaldun would later call the 'amazement' (*dhuḥul*) of early Muslims. As the Umayyads in their middle period (c. 685–724) acquired the stability needed to settle down to serious state formation, specialization on a wide spectrum of activities became more evident. In large measure, specialization was the result of two processes: greater differentiation of social and economic functions associated with new or rejuvenated cities reasserting mastery over their hinterlands, and greater institutionalization of power by both the Umayyad state and its internal rivals.²²

Accordingly, as the *Hadith* moved into this new middle Umayyad period, important structural changes began to occur in its content and form. Hitherto, *fiian* and *malahim*, i.e. the apocalyptic mood, was in all likelihood the prevailing manner in which the early Muslims interpreted their present, that is to say the present in terms of an onrushing future.²³ But a state which has just suppressed its enemies and consolidated its vast international dominions seeks the vision of a legitimizing past rather than that of an apocalyptic future. The elaboration of this vision had become the speciality of jurists. The apocalyptic literature of earlier days together with its chief purveyors, the *qussas*, became suspect:

'Asim [ibn Bahdala, d. 127/744] said, 'We used when young to visit Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami [d. 74/693] who would say to us, "Do not keep the company of the *qussas* except for Abu al-Ahwas."²⁴

The *fiian* and *malahim* were not to disappear. They were to provide a powerful stimulus to the rise of 'world' historiography, and especially when *Adab* (Belles-Lettres) began to affect historical writing in the third/ninth century. The jurists, meanwhile, turned their attention to the life of Muhammad and his military exploits, the *Sira* and *Maghazi* genre. Here, so to speak, was the historical parallel, and not the Book of Daniel.

The new historical mood was characterized by the systematic collection of reports of the Prophet and his age, at first with minimal linguistic or

²² Instructive parallels drawn from African societies as regards the relationship between political centralization (including a system of clientship) and historiography are to be found in Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: RKP, 1965), pp. 166–9.

²³ See footnote 4 above. The *fiian* and *malahim* genre may well have been encouraged in the early-Islamic milieu by Jews and Christians who saw in the Islamic conquests a fulfilment of their own millenarian expectations. *Their Hour* had come – or at least they had had a taste of it. In this regard, see S. P. Brock, 'Syriac Views of Emergent Islam' in G. H. A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies*, pp. 9–21.

²⁴ Muslim, *Sahih*, 1:15; see also the attitude adopted by jurists to Wahb ibn Munabbih in R. G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972), p. 311, and A. Fischer, 'Neue Auszüge . . .', *ZDMG*, 44 (1890), 419 for the hostile view of *malahim* expressed by Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

²¹ Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, pp. 53–4.

historical commentary and later with more obvious signs of editorial activity. It may therefore be appropriate at this juncture to recall and elaborate the three-fold division of themes or historiographical shades of interest suggested at the end of the last chapter, namely, sacred history, tribal history and 'world' history. Each was to spawn its own sub-divisions: the *Sira* and *Maghazi* of sacred history, the *Ayyam* (battle-days) and *Ansab* (genealogies) of tribal history and the *Qisas al-Arabiya*²⁵ (tales of the prophets) of 'world' history. In turn, these sub-divisions also radiated their own branches, for example the *Futuḥ* (conquests) reports were a natural extension of the *Maghazi* literature, the *Ansab* applied rigour in the delineation of the new Islamic aristocracy while the *Qisas al-Arabiya*²⁶ supplied pre-Islamic materials with chronology and system. How all these themes unfolded in detail is a problem which one may not be able to answer but it is clear that what we have is a mass of interlocking materials which is becoming progressively more circumscribed and less tangled as we move into Islam's second century. Each theme will now be examined in turn.

Sacred history

The formalization of sacred history, i.e. the *Sira* and *Maghazi* of the Prophet, may be examined in the work of 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/712) and his student al-Zuhri (d. 124/742). They were both from Quraysh and thus aristocrats in the new Umayyad state for which both men represented the type of scholar best suited to bring order and authoritative interpretation to prophetic and early-Islamic materials. Neither can be described as a propagandist for the Umayyads but both had certainly made their peace with the new regime, as many other influential Qurayshites were to do in the course of the first century. Both men possessed in their own lifetime a widely recognized authority which derived at least in part from their being regarded as experts in law by the imperial family. They are both vivid personalities, single-minded in their pursuit of historical reports and vehement in expressing their opinions on points of juristic or historical dispute. Most important of all, they are *authors* who speak with the historian's voice, and not mere collectors or editors. It is this aspect perhaps which more than any other entitles this teacher-student pair to special attention as we investigate the transition from *Hadith* to history.

Piecing together the fragments of their works found in later writers, the modern scholar can nowadays arrive at fairly reasonable conclusions regarding the scope and nature of their achievement. 'Urwa seems to have attached himself closely to his maternal aunt, 'A'isha (d. 58/678), the Prophet's favourite and most important wife, and after her death gained enormously in stature from being the expert on her *hadith*. 'Urwa must first of all be regarded as the founder of the Zubayrid school of jurists who as we saw above displaced the earlier solitary masters with their

unsystematic collections.²⁵ He is frequently depicted in our sources as an interrogator, a man who questioned his informants closely in search of accuracy and then passed authoritative judgements based on wide-ranging knowledge of Qur'anic *tafsir* (exegesis), prophetic lore, poetry and juristic skill.²⁶ His reports tend to be somewhat short and are often legal in their implications. A widely known body of his writings is his correspondence with the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan.²⁷ It is a good example of the influence of the epistle on the rise of specialized historical monographs.

This correspondence shows 'Urwa as a careful composer of historical narrative. A detailed examination of his letter to the caliph regarding the caravan of Abu Sufyan and the Battle of Badr (2/624), which is one of the longest fragments of his work, reveals the following features:

- 1 The report is transmitted on 'Urwa's own authority, i.e. it is without *isnad* and suggests that it is based upon a composite account made by 'Urwa. At least half of all surviving fragments from 'Urwa are without *isnad*, hinting at his authority.
 - 2 The narrative is made up of short segments tightly woven together with conjunctions and causal phrases, and furnished with numbers, routes of advance and three references to the verses of the Qur'an that relate to this incident.
 - 3 The dramatic climax of the narrative is the capture of an enemy slave and a comic scene ensues when he reveals to his Muslim captors whatever they wish to hear, being genuinely ignorant of the whereabouts of the caravan. The Prophet intervenes and skilfully extracts the truth, that the man is part of a relieving force, and not of the caravan. The Prophet also gives an accurate estimate of enemy numbers.
 - 4 The conclusion is a precise answer to the caliph's inquiry. The focus is on Abu Sufyan and his group and the battle itself together with its outcome is mentioned in one concluding sentence.
- It is not difficult to gauge from this account something of 'Urwa's concern for precision as well as some features of his historical method. With 'Urwa we detect the hand of the legal expert moulding his materials into fairly short and manageable units that allow him to assign precise dates

²⁵ See footnote 8 above. The starting point for the investigation of this school, which lasted well into the third Islamic century, is Zubayr ibn Bakkar, *Tamḥarir Nasab Quraysh wa Akḥarika*, 1:32-350, where many members of this family are said to have been either scholars or generous patrons of scholarship and poetry.

²⁶ 'Urwa's habit of interrogating his informants may be found in Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, p. 77, para. 96 and p. 212, para. 308; see also Abu Zur'ā, *Tarikh*, 1:647, para. 1914.

²⁷ Tabari, *Tarikh*, 1:1284-8. 'Urwa's correspondence as well as other aspects of his life and work are discussed in Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing*, pp. 76-95, with updated bibliography on 'Urwa by the editor-translator of this work. M. M. A'zami has collected 'Urwa's *Maghazi* and provided them with an introduction under the title *Maghazi Rasul Allah li 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr* (Riyad: Maktab al-Tarbiya al-'Arabi, 1401/1981).

and exact Qur'anic parallels to the events reported. His precision may also be seen in his lists of names of participants in various incidents in the life of the Prophet. Such lists had political as well as fiscal importance in the new Umayyad state as it strove to create uniformity in governmental routine. His own critical comments or glosses on the material he transmits are very few in number but the sources preserve occasional reports in which 'Urwa expresses forthright opinions on such things as the dating of various incidents in the Prophet's life and shows himself to be something of a poet.²⁸ The material dealing with the early caliphs does not seem to possess the same structure or authority and may even be spurious. It serves in any case to underline the fact that 'Urwa was a specialist primarily in the life of the Prophet, to which he devoted his juristic and historical skills.

'Urwa's student, Zuhri, seems from early times to have been intimately associated with his master. There are even suspiciously similar incidents in their lives: both, for example, are insulted in the presence of caliphs and both are reprimanded for alleged anti-'Alid remarks. But the scope and content of Zuhri's work, more voluminous and more recoverable than that of 'Urwa, reveals the same authoritative voice of a historian not merely transmitting but also judging his materials.²⁹ Here is a more than usually detailed example of Zuhri's authorial activity:

Zuhri said, 'I was informed by (*al-khbarani*) Sa'id ibn al-Museyyab, 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, 'Abdama ibn Waqqas and 'Ubaydullah ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Urba ibn Mas'ud about the *hadith* of 'A'isha, wife of the Prophet, when the liars said what they said about her and God declared her innocent. All of them related to me part of this *hadith*, some of them being more mindful of it than others and more sound in preserving a record of it. I myself took care to preserve from each inform-

²⁸ Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, p. 197, para. 283: 'Urwa elucidates to Zuhri an incident connected with the emigration to Abyssinia. Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, 2:180: 'Urwa specifies that he was present when a report was transmitted about the Prophet's last pilgrimage. Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 3:17: 'Urwa comments on a report from the Meccan period by saying that Islam was then still preached in secret. Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*, 1:144-6, paras. 4-5: 'Urwa corrects a date in the Prophet's life by tracing the error to a poet. Tabari, *Tarikh*, 1:1243: 'Urwa suspends judgement on the Prophet's early living quarters in Medina by stating that he had heard two different versions. Tabari, *Tarikh*, 1:1654: 'Urwa states emphatically that the Prophet remained no longer than half a month in Mecca after his conquest. For his lists, see 'Azami, *Mughazi Rasul Allah*, pp. 121-2, 126, 127-60 and *passim*. For Umayyad attempts to create uniformity in governmental practice, see the interesting reports in Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*, 1:202, para. 156 and 1:351, para. 723.

²⁹ Similar incidents in the lives of 'Urwa and Zuhri may be found in Abu Hilal al-'Askari, *Sina'atun*, p. 17, and in Dhahabi, *Tarajim*, pp. 72-3 and cf. Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 5:370-1. Zuhri studies are likely to expand in the future as more early texts come to light containing his materials, most recently in al-San'ani, *Musannaf* and Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*. Modern scholarship on Zuhri began with the works of Duri and Abbott, often cited above. Most recently, H. 'Atwan, *al-Riwaya al-Tarikhyya*, pp. 105-202, has collected and classified many Zuhri reports, performing a valuable service to any scholar who wishes to analyse these reports.

ant the *hadith* he related to me, with some parts of their *hadith* confirming other parts. This is what they related.³⁰

It is in this and similar comments that one begins to glimpse the critical editorializing of Islam's earliest historians. Zuhri is of course still the *Hadith* scholar. But in creating composite accounts out of discrete narrative and in exercising upon them certain formal norms of testing their accuracy, i.e. norms that had to do essentially with his opinion of the memory and methodical competence of his informants, Zuhri was preparing the ground for the emergence of a new style of historical narrative.

Like his teacher, 'Urwa, Zuhri was known for his interrogatory style and his assiduous cultivation of informants. He seems to have acquired his scholarly reputation in his early youth and with it a self-confidence that remained with him for the rest of his life:

I have been travelling from Hijaz to Syria and from Syria to Hijaz for forty-five years and have not come across a single *hadith* that was new to me.³¹

His relations with the Umayyad court were more intimate than those of 'Urwa. He was advisor to several caliphs and governors and was a tutor to Umayyad princes. This elevated position may well explain the authority that his historical materials carry since approximately one-third of these materials have no *isnad* even though he is said by some later scholars to have been the first to lay down the rules of *isnad*. We possess a considerable body of reports relating to his life and his views on various topics but the materials he transmitted do not carry many more critical comments or glosses than those found in 'Urwa. It is clear however that the attempt to transform scattered information into connected and organized narrative was now being achieved.

Zuhri's historical reports have a polished structure. They have distinct beginnings and endings. A final comment frequently 'wraps up' the report, either bringing it up to date or drawing its moral or giving it a literary ending or deducing its legal significance or quoting a Qur'anic verse as a conclusion. The speeches he reproduces are stylized and well-structured polemics. His terse judgements on historical points of dispute are accepted without question by later writers who incorporate his materials into their works.³² But perhaps most indicative of Zuhri's historical interests is his concern to establish 'firsts': the first person to do this or that or the 'great-

³⁰ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 6:194.

³¹ Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*, 1:409, para. 948. For Zuhri as interrogator, see Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, 2:389 and Dhahabi, *Tarajim*, p. 69.

³² The Zuhri materials preserved in Ibn Sa'd are the easiest to consult for structure and style: see references in 'Atwan, *Riwaya*, p. 123, note 10 and Duri, *Balith*, pp. 143-51. See also the precious fragment from a formal report by Zuhri on taxation in Abu 'Ubayd, *Amwal*, p. 231.

est' event up to a particular time. This interest in historical signposts has its parallels in other historiographical traditions, e.g. the Greek.³³ In both cases it indicates a growing awareness of progress in both moral and political life. In Zuhri's case one might add that this interest coincided with the many 'firsts' that the Umayyad empire itself was experiencing, momentous events which carried it from under the shadow of the timeless Qur'anic vision of history and into the more time-bound realities of empire building. Thus the Qur'anic verses most often commented upon by Zuhri are those that allude to the Prophet's political activities rather than to the abstract *umam* and *qurun* of the larger Qur'anic scheme of world history.

Therefore, in selecting 'Urwa and Zuhri as two prominent examples of the transition from *Hadith* to history, one might argue that their importance lies not so much in their selection or choice of materials but in the consciousness displayed in their works of a history being made by a community and arranged in accurate sequence to serve as moral and legal precedents. The transition from *Hadith* to history is the transition from providential to communal history, from the overwhelming and monumental Qur'anic time to the sequential listing, dating and recording of individual actions performed by members of a community that was beginning to realize the merit of its progress in time. Who performed what action and when were not points of pedantic dispute but signs of the coming into being of a time scheme which strove to historicize early Islam and to use it to establish hierarchies of moral or social seniority or prestige.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq (d. 151/761)

The work of 'Urwa and Zuhri and of other less renowned contemporaries was consummated by Muhammad ibn Ishaq, a figure styled 'Prince of *muhaddiths*' or even 'Commander of the Believers in *Hadith*' by men of his own generation.³⁴ He is of pivotal importance in the transition from *Hadith* to history and his life and achievements have been scrutinized for a millennium or more by Muslims and for about a century by western orientalisists. In more recent years, Muslim scholars have unearthed and edited portions of the Ibn Ishaq materials which approximate more closely than ever to his original work, thus facilitating the examination of the work's basic structure.³⁵

³³ For Zuhri's interest in 'firsts' see, e.g., Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, 1:241, 251, 381, 430; Abu Zur'a, *Tarikh*, 1:575, para. 1604; Waqidi, *Maghazi*, p. 358; Baladhuri, *Anساب*, 1:455, 458, 470, 471, 528, 543; Abu 'Ubayd, *Amwal*, p. 19; Duri, *Balith*, p. 148. For parallels with Greek historiography, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern History-ography* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 194.

³⁴ Baghdadi, *Tarikh*, 1:214-33, *passim*.

³⁵ I am referring primarily to the two *Siras* published by Suhayl Zakkar (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1978) and Muhammad Hamidullah (Rabat: Ma'had al-Dirasat wa'l Abhath li'l

Ibn Ishaq's major work goes by many titles. It has been known as the Book of the Genesis of Creation (*Bad' al-khalq*; also *al-Mubada'*) and of the Life of Muhammad (*Sira*) and his Military Exploits (*Maghazi*). It is often called simply the *Maghazi* or else the *Sira*. There is no doubt, however, that we are dealing here with one work originally structured in two, possibly three divisions. In the earlier part, one finds material that aims to organize prophetic history in a historical continuum within the non-historical (or perhaps meta-historical) framework provided by the Qur'an. In the other two divisions, the same continuum is imposed upon the life of Muhammad. Within half a century of its appearance, the work was edited, or perhaps bowdlerized, by Ibn Hisham (d. 208/834) but the numerous passages or phrases excised can now be more fully recovered than hitherto, thanks to recent discoveries of manuscripts of the original work.

What made this work possible and what is its originality? To answer the first question, one must recreate the transitional period between the Umayyads and the Abbassids as it related to Ibn Ishaq's work. One notes, to begin with, a certain hardening of attitudes during the late-Umayyad caliphate. An 'official' party of scholars had made their peace with the ruling dynasty, helping to confer legitimacy and orthodoxy upon the Umayyad system. This in turn had bred, as we have seen above, pockets of counter-orthodoxy. As Umayyad power declined, scholarly polemics became more deeply charged with political undertones.³⁶ 'Urwa and Zuhri had each in his own way contributed to the formation of the official orthodoxy of the community by providing the necessary historical scaffolding for the life of Muhammad. Ibn Ishaq was a major beneficiary of their work but his age was more revolutionary than theirs, as the enemies of the Umayyads began to sharpen their ideological weapons.

One way of countering the prevailing orthodoxy was for disgruntled scholars like Ibn Ishaq to challenge its view of history by appealing to a wider, and specifically prophetic, vision of legitimacy. To show how the world began and then to place the life and deeds of Muhammad within that larger perspective was to measure power and legitimacy against prophetic standards as opposed to their being founded upon communal consensus. This may also be related to the fact that the Abbasid revolution failed to satisfy general expectations; hence the emphasis on the role of Muhammad in prophetic history as the fulfilment of God's promises to mankind. With Ibn Ishaq we have reached the stage where the Qur'anic view of history in its larger, moral sense begins to be examined, following an earlier period

³⁶ Ta'rib, 1976) and of the *Tarikh* of Abu Zur'a, often quoted above. The preface by Hamidullah to his edition of the *Sira* has a useful introduction to the life and works of Ibn Ishaq. A good example of such political undertones in the field of theology is analysed in J. van Ess, 'Early Development of *Kalam*' in G. H. A. Juybnoli, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, pp. 109-23.

when, as argued in Chapter One above, attention had been focused on Muhammad's immediate period as it related to state and community building. Ibn Ishaq's emigration from Medina to the more ancient world of Iraq, Egypt and the East symbolizes the move from Muhammadan *Hadith* to prophetic history.

Wherein lies his originality? Like most scholars of his day and age, Ibn Ishaq was a controversial figure, even more so than 'Urwa and Zuhri.³⁷ His mastery of his subject was widely acknowledged even if the charge of transmitting *hadiths* with defective *isnads* (*tadlis*) was also made against him. He had received materials directly from Zuhri and indirectly from 'Urwa and his own work is made up of essentially the same discrete units of individual *hadiths*, varying in length, although they tend to be more substantial in size. Like them, too, there is in Ibn Ishaq a large corpus of *hadiths* related only by him, a display of the authority he commanded. And, finally, like them also, Ibn Ishaq helped to suppress the messianic-apocalyptic mood through which events had often been filtered in earlier periods.

The reader of Ibn Ishaq detects the voice of the historian beginning to speak and not merely that of the transmitter, however authoritative. Personal comments and reflections come to the fore and the *hadiths*, in the traditional sense of reports with their *isnad*, are now used as evidence to support such reflections. Typical is the following:

When the time came for revelation to descend upon the Prophet of God, he was already a believer in God and in what was to be revealed to him. He was, moreover, fully prepared to act accordingly and to suffer for his faith what God had imposed upon him, both the pleasure and displeasure of mankind. Prophecy imposes heavy burdens and responsibilities which can only be shouldered by prophets of authority and courage, with the aid and blessing of God. This is because of what prophets meet with from people and what God-ordained events may befall them.

These are of course Ibn Ishaq's own reflections on the history of prophecy. But right next to these reflections, Ibn Ishaq appends a *hadith* transmitted from Wahb ibn Munabbih:

I heard Ibn Munabbih in the mosque of Mina when he was asked about the Prophet Jonah. Wahb said, 'Jonah was a pious servant of God but he was an impatient man. When the burdens of prophecy – and prophecy is burdensome – were imposed upon him he cracked under the heavy strain. Jonah threw off this burden and fled.'

In these and similar passages,³⁸ Ibn Ishaq handles *hadiths* not as ends in themselves but as illustrations. The main building-blocks of his narrative are made up of these reflective passages which help to tie the work

together, making it more decidedly a *book*, a work of individual authorship rather than a body of transmitted materials.

Characteristic also of Ibn Ishaq's style and pronounced literary interests is a large body of verse which he uses to dramatize events. Audiences of his day were accustomed to accounts of men both acting and reciting poetry. Although the authenticity of this verse has been questioned by Muslim scholars since very early days, the role it plays in Ibn Ishaq's work is a sign of his attention to the literary polish of his narrative. In tandem with this is a much broader concern, as exemplified by the first part of the work, with Yememite, Biblical and legendary materials. Among other things, this enables Ibn Ishaq to project an image of Muhammad as sharing many of the miraculous or supernatural attributes of earlier prophets, including, for instance, miracles of loaves or of gold multiplying, and temptation stories like the following, related from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib:

I heard the Prophet of God say, 'I never desired women as the people of the *Jahiliyya* used to do except on two nights, on both of which God Almighty granted me chastity. One night I was with some Meccan youths herding our families' sheep and said to my companion, 'Will you look after my sheep while I enter Mecca and spend the night there as youths are in the habit of doing?' He agreed so I went into Mecca and in the very first house I came to I heard the music of drums and pipes. I asked what the occasion was and was told that a wedding was taking place. So I sat and waited. God made me deaf to the music and I awoke when the sunlight touched me and returned to my companion. He asked, 'What did you do?' 'I did nothing,' I replied, and related what I had experienced. [Exactly the same experience takes place on another night and the Prophet continues:] 'I never desired or returned to the same sort of act thereafter and then God Almighty dignified me with His prophecy.'³⁹

If in such stories Ibn Ishaq touched upon the sensitivities or credulity of his audience, he was not prepared to excise, like his pious-minded editor Ibn Hisham, many stories whose bold, embarrassing character lend the life of Muhammad an earthier and thus perhaps more credible aspect. The following account relates to the period when 'signs' of the coming of Muhammad began to appear:

A certain clan of the Ansar would relate what they heard from the Jews regarding the mention of the Prophet of God. They relate that the first such sign to occur in Medina before the mission of Muhammad began was that a woman called Fatima . . . a prostitute of the *Jahiliyya*, had a companion. She would relate that whenever he entered her house, he would break in upon her and whoever was with her. One day he came in and fell against the wall, not acting in his usual manner. When she asked him what the matter was he replied, 'A prophet has been sent forbidding fornication.'⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibn Ishaq was accused of being a Qadarite as well as a pro-Shi'i. What exactly these terms meant at the turn of the first century AH is a difficult question. But they certainly imply an attitude of opposition on the part of Ibn Ishaq towards the ruling Umayyads.

³⁸ Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, p. 111, paras. 153-4. For other examples, see *Sira*, p. 57, paras. 54-5.

³⁹ Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, p. 58, para. 57. For miracles of gold or loaves multiplying, see *Sira*, p. 71, para. 70 and p. 126, para. 189, some of them being echoes of the miracles of Jesus.

⁴⁰ Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, p. 92, para. 122. Other accounts of the same nature, omitted of course by Ibn Hisham, may be found in *Sira*, p. 21, para. 26 and p. 217, para. 319.

Such stories must have scandalized men of the following century like Ibn Hisham or Ahmad ibn Hanbal. But so also did some of Ibn Ishaq's methods of collecting information. He was criticized, for example, for having Jewish informants and for his cavalier use of *isnad*. In both cases Ibn Ishaq was in fact helping to move *Hadith* in the direction of wider historical perspectives and of connected, more interpretative historical narrative. The range of his scholarly interests may be gauged from his frequent lexical, exegetical, geographical and anthropological comments, as in the following passages:

The name of the Abyssinian Negus was Mashama which in Arabic is 'Atiyya.

The Negus is in fact the title of their kings as you might say Kisra or Herakles. At that time [i.e. the period of the Prophet's grandfather] the land between al-Sham and al-Hijaz was desert.

Quraysh and other Arabs of the *Jahiliyya* would, when in earnest prayer, break into *sa'i* and recite poetry.

The Arabs of the *Jahiliyya* were illiterate, having no books to study, knowing nothing of prophetic covenants and ignorant of paradise, hell or resurrection except for what they heard from the People of the Book. But they preserved nothing of this in their hearts and it had no effect on their behaviour.⁴¹

Numerous also are his explications of the historical circumstances attending various passages in the Qur'an, these glosses eventually becoming a major source for later Qur'anic exegetes. This branch of knowledge, later called 'circumstances of revelation' (*asbab al-nuzul*) had already come to constitute an important segment of the work of *muhadith*-historians like 'Urwah and Zuhri. In Ibn Ishaq, however, such explications tend to be fuller, but also more guarded where doubt seems necessary, and more ready to challenge the old masters:

They allege that 'Umar ibn al-Khattab recited the following verses after his conversion . . . Others say that the verses were recited by Abu Talib. God knows best who recited them.

It is said that these Christians were from Najran, but God knows best. It is also said that the Qur'anic verses . . . were revealed on their account, but God knows best.

'Urwah said, 'It was 'Uthman ibn 'Affan who addressed the Abyssinian Negus' . . . Ibn Ishaq said, 'This is not so but it was Ja'far ibn Abi Talib who addressed him.'⁴²

Ibn Ishaq's use of the *isnad* and other issues having to do with his informants have been the object of attention of Muslim and western orientalist scholars. One must first recall that Ibn Ishaq antedated the great debate about the *isnad*, to be discussed below, which was to flare up in the half century after his death. No strict rules of *isnad* usage had evolved

in his days. Ibn Ishaq quoted *isnads* in full, and also used collective *isnad*. But he also often quoted 'a trustworthy informant', 'a man of good memory', 'an old man in Mecca some forty or more years ago', 'some scholars', 'one of my companions', 'I asked Zuhri'. Alongside this insistence in *isnad* usage there is Ibn Ishaq's frequent interest in specifying dates and years authoritatively. This, together with the careful chronological structure of his narrative, suggests that Ibn Ishaq was prepared to accept other criteria of veracity besides that of personal witness, the backbone of *isnad*. The inclusion of non-Muslim informants, mainly Christian and Jewish, is of course tacit acknowledgment of the expertise of these communities in pre-Islamic history in general and in Biblical history in particular. This was to become a source of great enrichment for later Muslim historiography.⁴³

Ibn Ishaq's ultimate achievement rests upon the degree to which he was able to integrate Muhammad's life into the history and hagiography of Near-Eastern prophecy and to arrange that life sequentially by subordinating *Hadith* to interpretation and chronology. But the image of Muhammad which passes through his filter is still one which retains credibility and humanity. We are not yet in the days when Muhammad is cast in an infallible or supernatural mould:

The Prophet of God was frequently subject, when in Mecca, to the evil eye, before revelation descended upon him. Khadija his wife would use the services of an old Meccan woman who would employ the necessary magical spells to protect him. When the Qur'an descended upon him and he still suffered from the evil eye, Khadija asked him, 'Prophet of God, shall I send for that old woman to perform her spells?' He replied, 'It is no longer necessary.'

Every day the Prophet received from Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah a bowl of food which followed him wherever he went. Whenever the Prophet asked for the hand of a woman, he would offer her the bridal money he wished and add, 'And Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah's bowl of food will come to you every morning.'⁴⁴

The *isnad* debate of the third/ninth century

In the period that followed the death of Ibn Ishaq, the *Hadith*, or more specifically its principal criterion of veracity, the *isnad*, became the object of an intense debate. This debate had far-reaching results for the science of *Hadith*, a matter which does not concern us directly here. What does concern us are the implications of the debate for historical writing, especially for the manner in which this debate helped to create for historiography a more sharply focused territory and method.

When the Abbasids came to power as a result of some thirty years of

⁴¹ Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, p. 201, paras. 292-3; p. 4, para. 6; p. 6, para. 12; p. 62, para. 61.

⁴² Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, p. 193, para. 278; p. 199, para. 287; p. 199, paras. 284-5.

⁴³ For Ibn Ishaq's use of the *isnad* and related matters, see the bibliography in the Hamidullah edition of the *Sira*.

⁴⁴ Ibn Ishaq, *Sira*, p. 104, para. 143; p. 243, para. 376.

intense revolutionary propaganda, they posed as the champions of a restored legitimacy. They were to rule as the guardians of the prophetic heritage, claiming spiritual as well as political authority. But far from rallying the *Umma* around the Prophetic 'House' their first century in power witnessed an intensification of the intellectual ferment of the late-Umayyad period. *Hadith* was deeply, indeed irretrievably embroiled in political-religious polemic. And much of this polemic was historical in nature: Did Muhammad establish clear guidelines regarding the question of political succession? Did Muhammad specifically delegate authority to 'Ali? Were the Umayyads legitimate? These and similar questions entailed historical research. In the course of such research many questions were also raised regarding the criteria of trustworthiness among transmitters, that is to say the criteria of *isnad*. The *isnad* tended to be divided into series and groups and various parties or sects arrogated to themselves those chains of transmission which seemed most unassailable and to attack or otherwise disparage rival chains. Certain chains, for instance, would be labelled 'Shi'i' by opponents and if such chains recurred in the works of someone, he would be liable to the charge of Shi'ism. The case for Shi'ism rested ultimately on the historical determination of a delegation of authority of some sort from Muhammad to 'Ali and/or his uncle 'Abbas, and a large proportion of the historians of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries who were sympathetic to the Alid cause were indiscriminately called Shi'i. In any event, the case for or against Shi'i claims was a most powerful stimulus of historical *Hadith* and of historical writing in general. The influence of sectarian polemics on the evolution of *isnad* and of historical thought cannot be overemphasized.

One place in which this debate about the *isnad* can best be examined is the introduction to the *Sahih* of Muslim (d. 261/875), one of the most authoritative collections of *Hadith*. The discussion of *isnad* methodology in this introduction is almost certainly the earliest comprehensive analysis of a problem which had become, by Muslim's days, a source of considerable controversy among *Hadith* scholars. By examining Muslim's introduction, one gains insight into the divergent opinions relating to *isnad* among the various Islamic sects, and Muslim himself is writing from a committed standpoint, best described perhaps as proto-Sunni.⁴⁵ But one can also detect in this debate changes in the conception of *isnad* which relate directly to the question of the status and style of historical narrative.

Muslim begins by arguing that,

⁴⁵ Muslim's views on *isnad*, from which the quotations in this section are taken, appear in *Sahih*, 1:2-28. By criticizing the views of Ali'd, Mu'tazilite and Hanbalite scholars, Muslim was preparing the ground for the consolidation of Sunni *Hadith* and thus of Sunni jurisprudence, or *fiqh*.

The correct delimitation (*dabt*) of a small number of reports and doing so well (*itqan*) is easier for a person to undertake than to deal with too many, especially when done by the ignorant masses ('*awamm*) who lack discrimination. . . . Hence, to seek to attain knowledge of a small number of authoritative (*sahih*) reports is more proper than to increase the number of flawed (*sagim*) reports. . . . As for the ignorant masses, who are to be distinguished from the select few, men of perception and knowledge, there is no point in them seeking to collect many reports when they are unable to master a few.

He proceeds to explain his own method of selection:

Hadiths will not be repeated except in cases where it is necessary to repeat a *hadith* which contains some significant addition or an *isnad* standing next to another for some reason, in which case the significant addition acts like a complete *hadith*. In such cases, it is necessary to repeat in full the *hadith* containing that addition, or else the addition itself may be explained in brief in the body of the *hadith*. . . . But we do not intend to repeat *hadiths* in full where there is no need to do so.

He then divides reports (*akbar*) into three categories and transmitters likewise into three groups. The first category consists of

reports which are more free from blemish and more genuine than others, their transmitters being men of uprightness in *Hadith* and of skilled knowledge. . . . while their reports are free from any serious contradictions or grave misrepresentation (*ikhtilaf shadid, takhliq fahish*) as may be found among a great number of *Hadith* transmitters.

The second category consists of reports transmitted by men of lesser knowledge although upright in character. The third consists of reports which Muslim calls 'suspect' (*munkar*) because of fabrication or error. For Muslim, a suspect *hadith* is one which,

when compared with other *hadiths* transmitted by upright men is found to be totally or almost totally divergent. If most *hadiths* of a certain transmitter are of this type, his *hadith* is considered unacceptable and unusable. . . . For it is the judgment of men of learning and of what we know of their method regarding the status of uniquely transmitted *hadiths* that the man who does so needs to share with trustworthy scholars some of what they have transmitted and to share also their opinions. If he then adds something not to be found in the works of his colleagues, such addition becomes acceptable. As for the man who resorts to relating *Hadith* from such venerable authorities as Zuhri or Hisham ibn 'Urwah whose multitude of scholarly disciples and corpus of well-known writings are all acceptable by common consent, and then dares to relate from them a number of *hadiths* that are unfamiliar to these disciples and does not, moreover, share with them authoritative *Hadith*, then such a man's *Hadith* cannot be accepted.

Suspect *hadiths* circulate because their greatest appeal is to the stupid (*aghbiya'*) and vulgar (*'awamm*) for these people cannot tell sound from unsound *isnad* nor recognize the weaknesses of substance or transmission,

nor are they able to shun reports transmitted by the suspect, the renegade or the heretical. Muslim then adds:

Although a report (*khabar*) differs in some respects in its meaning from legal witness (*shahada*), in most other respects they have a common connotation. For the report transmitted by a sinful man (*fasiq*) is unacceptable to scholars just as his witness is inadmissible to all. In this respect, the manner in which Prophetic tradition (*Sunnah*) rejects suspect reports is similar to the manner in which the Qur'an rejects the reports of sinners as occurs in the famous tradition from the Prophet: 'He who relates from me a *hadith* that he knows to be a lie is himself a liar.'

But not all suspect *Hadith* is necessarily fabricated. Many *hadiths* according to Muslim circulate through perfectly good intentions as in cases where the transmitter is truthful but not discriminating, like the man who 'receives reports from every comer and goer or the one who unconsciously improves the *isnad* the longer he transmits *Hadith*.' To illustrate his point, Muslim relates at some length stories of early transmitters, most of which sound credible. In general, they reflect the intense heat of *Hadith* and related controversies. Through them we glimpse the scholarly contempt for story-tellers, for extreme Shi'ites, for Mu'tazilites, for simpletons, for well-intentioned people who expatiate upon *hadiths* when carried away by their imagination.

Summing up his argument thus far, Muslim affirms that there is enough authentic *Hadith* around, making it unnecessary to transmit from untrustworthy or non-credible sources, except where a transmitter wishes to show off his extensive knowledge before the ignorant masses.

His final critical comments are reserved for what one might call the rigorists, that is, those who argued that oral transmission (*sana'*) was a prerequisite of sound *Hadith*. Muslim rejects this view. Since the issue cannot often be positively established but remains possible (*'ala al-imkan*), the report is to be accepted if it is known in general (*'ala al-jumla*) that any two parts of the *isnad* chain lived in the same period, even if direct contact between them is unattested. For Muslim, it is only when fabrication is suspected that one must ask for evidence of *sana'* as one means of establishing veracity. Since Muslim does not mention by name any of those who held this rigorist view, one must assume that he is referring to Hanbalite circles whose basic method in *Hadith* arrangement was one by transmitters rather than by topics, thus overemphasizing personal authority.

In sum, the views of Muslim were probably typical of an emerging consensus among scholars as regards the function and methodology of *Hadith* in an age when the mantle of the just state was being claimed by the scholars, judges, notaries-public, witnesses and other legal officials now well structured and well organized in hierarchies. This class was closing

its ranks against heretics on the one hand and conservatives on the other. They were beginning to construct an image of an enduring traditional orthodoxy, regarding themselves as the true heirs of Islam's earliest saints and scholars. For them, the *Hadith* was a major purveyor of this image behind which lay a particular and slowly congealing interpretation of the history of Islam and the Muslim community. An intimate knowledge of the orthodox scholars in this field was essential, whence the importance of biographical lists and of biographical literature as a whole. So also was a knowledge of a fixed corpus of *hadiths*, now sufficient in number to constitute the basic mass from which legal and historical expositions could be derived. Significantly, this mass is often called 'reports' (*akhbar*) by Muslim, a term wider in connotation than *Hadith* because it now included not only the prophetic materials *per se* but the historical reports, i.e. the image, in which these materials were embedded. The *isnad* was becoming a science, mastered only by a long-trained elite. It was also acquiring distinct literary conventions: useless repetition was discarded and latitude was allowed in merging reports which dealt with similar subjects. Rigorism was attacked as unnecessary and literalist and, in accepting reports, the criterion of possibility was advanced as a rational alternative to insistence upon direct oral transmission. The arrangement of these reports by topic, e.g. Prayer, Faith, Fasting and so forth, laid down a clear structure, emphasizing the practical use for which such *Hadith* was intended.

In delimiting the scope and criteria of *Hadith*, Muslim and his generation were in fact helping to emancipate historical writing. *Hadith* had reached its quantitative limit and spelled out its method. In the process, however, a field of knowledge broader than *Hadith* had evolved, that of *akhbar* or historical reports in a general sense. A new principle of regulation had also been introduced, the principle of historical possibility. This principle would clearly become of relevance in reports where *isnad* was either unavailable or unnecessary, e.g. in areas such as ancient or Biblical history. In other words, over a wide spectrum of 'reports' the status of *isnad* was not as clearly defined as it had now become for Prophetic *Hadith*. Furthermore, veracity had been linked to consensus to the point where one might speak of a consensual theory of truth to be employed by *Hadith* scholars and historians, as will be discussed below.

For Muslim and his generation of *Hadith* scholars and *Akhbaris* (transmitters of *akhbar*), the lines were being more tightly drawn around their respective territories of interest. The *Hadith* scholars were surrendering the open spaces around them to looser, more ambiguous standards of evidence and to greater latitude in literary form and expression. *Hadith* was removing itself from history: it was becoming a fixed, almost theophanic subject. But all around it the flow of history would continue and need to be written and understood in new ways.