

The History of Islam: New Directions

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History is very important from the ideological and educational standpoint in addition to its importance as a discipline of knowledge and as information. The Qur'an teaches us, "Indeed in the stories of these men, there is a lesson for those who can think." [12:111] Educationally, then, for the new generations and ideologically for those who are committed to Islam as a way of life, it is very important to get the message of history which enlightens us in dealing with contemporary circumstances.

Some introductory remarks

- Is it more correct to say *Islamic history* or *Muslim history*? Each description has its pros and cons. When you say "*Islamic history*" you care more about *commitment to Islam and assessment according to Islamic criteria*, since not everything which happened in the past or happens at present on the Islamic scene can really be considered Islamic. Historical events should be evaluated under such a term according to Islam whether they are social, cultural, political or economic. What may be positive in terms of a historical development or very important as a mere material accomplishment may or may not be something important from the viewpoint of Islam. Suppose that we have a very magnificent tomb made by Muslims, would you consider this Islamic or not? Calling our history "*Muslim history*" may draw a line between human behavior and Islam itself. History represents the outcome of Muslim practices and each can be evaluated according to Islam. It is just a development of Muslim thinking and behavior—Muslim interaction with other human universal effects. Muslim history is *the product of Muslims as human*

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beings. It may be right or wrong ideologically, but it is the product of people. According to Western terminology, Islam may be “*the religion*,” “*the history*,” or “*the people*” of the present time. When Westerners write about Islam they may mean contemporary Muslims or past Muslims or Islam as a religion. Consequently, when you say Muslim history you remove any confusion, you are talking about “people” and this people may or may not comply with the teachings of the religion and their practice may or may not be accepted by Islam. The term “Muslim history” seems preferable to emphasize the human nature of this history, and to underline the fact that any event in that history might be positive or negative, good or bad, might comply with or contradict Islam. Muslim history might be a direct reflection of Islam or any other influence which is allowed by Islam. Therefore, Muslim practices may not necessarily represent Islam as revealed by God, and the word “Islam” should be used exclusively for the “religion” in its divine sources: the Qur’an and Sunnah, while “Muslims” live as human beings and may abide by or deviate from divine guidance.

- Are we *rewriting*, or just *reviewing*, or *representing* the history of Islam in an understandable way? I don’t like the word “rewriting,” since it is far from reality. The sources of our history have been there for centuries even though reading these sources, scrutinizing and analyzing their reports may be successful or not, and thus successive efforts are needed and expected. We are just reading and presenting that history through our fresh understanding and benefiting from general current knowledge.
- What about the *Islamization of knowledge* with regard to the history of Islam? It may mean that we care about objectivity and accuracy because we have Islamic criteria concerning extending or receiving information. It may mean that a study of Muslim history should include a study of Islam itself because you cannot study any history without knowing the cultural background of the people. One cannot understand the political history of ancient Greece unless one studies Greek mythology, beliefs, philosophy, arts, etc. Similarly, the history of Islam is not just information about the succession of rulers and the military confrontations with internal or external forces. It is necessary to really know the cultural background of Muslim society: the rulers and the ruled.

However, Islamization in the field of history *should never mean—as it may be understood by some people—that we will be selective and that we will choose what we like* and defend it as authentic while we reject what we don't like and consider it false. History is history and Muslims were and are merely fallible human beings, not perfect angels. We are consistent in all our approaches and we accept the facts according to applied criteria, whether we may be happy or unhappy with these facts. We try to understand why the unIslamic practices happened, not to deny that these practices existed. What we may be criticized for in our history, cannot be ignored or erased since it happened, but it should be analyzed so that contemporary and future Muslims may not allow it to happen again. Our past, whatever its glories might be, also had its shortcomings and failures, and that past should enlighten, not dominate our present and future. Of course we respect the past and the time of the Prophet (SAAS) and his Companions: those who had direct access to Islam. However, the Qur'an teaches us that those earliest Muslims might make mistakes; and it corrected them when they were mistaken and praised them when they were right. This does not mean that we consider the past a paralysis preventing us from planning our future. The past guides us with many positive elements and warns us against the negative elements which were practiced and could be repeated in any human society if we do not learn from past lessons. This is obvious in what the Qur'an has mentioned about the battles of 'Uhud and Hunayn for example.

After this introduction about some terms and concepts related to Muslim history, focus is drawn to the sources of this history, then the perspective and the methodology and, in the end, the interpretation and ideology of that history.

The Sources

As for the sources of Muslim history, we hope that the IIIT and other research institutions may be able to establish a *data bank* of Muslim history, which should include a list of *manuscripts* presently scattered all over the world and construct one *computerized master catalogue*. Muslim history is not restricted to the middle ages, it is continuous history and the data bank

should therefore include any available medieval (e.g., papyrus) or modern manuscripts, and all accumulated data from different times and places which need to be classified and accessible.

Our Muslim history is one of the wealthiest histories with regard to material sources, yet there is a split in dealing with historical sources between our literary (or written) sources and our material sources: i.e., architecture and numismatics (i.e., coins, etc.) which offer a lot of direct information about a given historical period. We need coordination of work and cooperation between the archeologist and the historian in Muslim history as it is maintained in other fields of history.

For example, the Egyptian papyrus related to the Umayyad period has provided information about using two calendars in agricultural countries such as Egypt, and similarly Iraq and Iran. The lunar Islamic Arab calendar in use was general, but side by side there was a solar calendar for particular use in farming and governmental archives related to taxation. Such a necessary arrangement was not considered undesirable as introduced by Muslim administration. There was actually a need for this arrangement in an agricultural society as well as in any other society which may find difficulty with the lunar calendar.

The modern archives such as that of the Ottoman Empire can remove a lot of ambiguity or prejudiced judgments about some important events, such as Ottoman policies towards the Greeks, the Armenians or the Arabs. Modern Turkey used to ignore the Ottoman era of its history, while it elevated the status of the old Turkish past before Islam. This has been changing recently because of several factors foremost of which has been the contemporary revival of Islamic identity everywhere including Turkey. So we need to make use of our rich material sources in our present approaches to Muslim history, whether these are documents, buildings, coins or other material sources.

In relation to written sources, we have to make use of our heritage in its various fields. A historian should not be restricted to a book which has the word "history" in its title or deals with pure historical material in its content (history proper) such as al-Tabari or al-Mas'udi. Many other sources contain information which may be very relevant to the historian, especially when we recall that the field of history is not restricted to political history only. History may be social, economic, cultural or intellectual, etc. One can find, for example, a rich source of social history in juristic works. When one focuses in successive works on the change of rules about a certain practice according to changing circumstances, or considers the general benefit "maslaha" or the emerging disaster "nazila" in Mālikī heritage or the common practical pressure "umum al-balwa" in Hanafī heritage, juristic works obviously become an invaluable source of social history. The change of juristic views and fatwas in successive periods reflected social development. Successive works on

legitimate administration “al-Siyasa al-Shar‘īyah” pointed out how juristic views tried to cope with changing needs and circumstances. Literary sources provided valuable information about the society in general and with regard to the aristocracy and the intelligentsia in particular. Geographic sources and travel works are very useful in social, cultural and economic fields of history. It is now universally admitted that history should not just inform about kings, rulers, or wars. The people or the ruled should be the center of historical information and Muslims have been privileged in this respect by the wide variety of information in their heritage. There are many books of biography, “tarājim” whether dealt with individually in monographs, classified in encyclopedia form ordered alphabetically, or presented as successive generations (*tabaqāt*) which represent a huge source of social history. We may think that classical Muslim authors did not care about statistics when they provided information, but you find special care given to numbers related to revenues and expenditure, different taxes, imports and exports, military forces, distances, money values, population, etc. in historical and geographical works. All this information cannot be ignored in presenting Muslim history accurately and comprehensively.

Moreover, we need today to deal with various sources of Muslim history in different languages, since Islam is universal and various ethnicities and cultures have contributed to its history and civilization. It may not be required for the historian to know all the languages of Muslim peoples (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay, Swahili, etc.), but the more one knows, the wider and deeper one’s appreciation of Muslim history becomes. However, one can follow published works in the languages one knows about the works in languages one does not know.

In addition to the information given by various Muslim sources, the historian realizes that Muslims never lived in a vacuum, they had relations with other nations and countries all over the world. Even when the Muslim universal state represented a super power in the medieval world, it established and maintained relations with other political powers from the Pacific to the Atlantic Oceans and from the Baltic Sea to the Indian Ocean. Those global relations were reported in non-Muslim material and written sources as well as those of Muslims. We know about relations between Muslims and China not only from Muslim sources but also from some Chinese sources. The other perspective might complement or correct the Muslim one. Sassanian, Byzantine, Carolingian, Spanish, Sicilian or other historical sources are essential for figuring out Muslim relations with each of these authorities and countries. The study of the Crusades requires a deep comparative study of Muslim and Western sources. While such an approach is sometimes practiced in Western scholarship, Muslim historians who have such an approach are very limited in number. In Arabic, for example, as far as I know, there is

a complete work, in two volumes, by Sa'id Ashur from Egypt, another, but incomplete, work exists by al-Baz al-Arini from the same country, and a third exists written by Suhayl Zakkar from Syria. Probably there are other contributions in other Muslim languages which I don't follow. Similarly, Muslim history in colonial times requires a study of the archives and the works of the colonial power which occupied a certain Muslim land. There must be an attempt to benefit from all these sources if we want to have a better understanding and presentation of a Muslim history which can cope with the progress in modern historical research. There may be a need for a team to deal with a certain topic rather than just one person, a team of different scholars who speak different languages or who may be related to different specializations.

The Perspective and the Methodology:

A challenging character of Muslim history is its openness and universality. It is not an isolated phenomenon. We believe that Islam is a continuation of the message of God to all mankind since its creation and we have to reach back before the message of *Muhammad* (ṢAAS) and after the middle ages in order to follow the human response to the divine message in different times and places. This may explain why classical Muslim historians started their works with the stories of the Prophets and their peoples before Muhammad (ṢAAS), and the histories of the great powers and civilizations before Islam. We may not follow precisely the same approach but we should at least keep in mind the fact that Islam is just a completion and development of the divine message and Muslims did not appear in history in a vacuum. Besides, the rise of Islam in Arabia, and its spread as a faith, political power, and a civilization had never been isolated from the existing political and cultural circumstances of the world. Meanwhile, Islam has existed in history as a religion, a society, a political power, a civilization and culture—all together in totality and harmony. The Orientalists in the 19th and early 20th centuries were limited in their study of Islam, but one of their positive qualities was their appreciation of the “wholeness” of Muslim life. An Orientalist who was concerned with Islam had to study the religion, the Arabic language and literature, and Muslim history, and in most cases this was achieved after studying the Bible and Hebrew and Greek heritages. He had this package of knowledge before writing about a certain topic related to Islam and Muslim history. Now you find new generations of Western scholars concerned with Islamic studies trained differently. There may be a sociologist who likes to concentrate on the Sociology of Islam or contemporary Muslim societies,

an economist, who is concentrating on the economics of Muslim countries, an anthropologist, a historian, a scholar of comparative linguistics or literature or religion, etc. These contemporary Western scholars may be less biased than the classical Orientalists but they are also less knowledgeable about the background studies of Islam as a whole package which could have enabled them to understand Islam and Muslim practices in the past and present in a better way.

Because of the openness, universality and continuation of the Muslim history, one encounters difficulty in fitting information about Muslims into the classical division of historical ages to such as ancient, middle or modern. Such a division cannot be applied to Islam blindly, since these classical divisions emerged in a particular perspective in the West. Even Western scholars have been facing difficulty in determining some turning points such as the beginning (and perhaps also the end) of the middle ages. The division of Islamic periods themselves—the early four Caliphs, then the *Umayyads*—both together have long been considered as one era—and the Abbasid era which has been divided into two periods—the first and second—has proven to be far from perfect with regard to quantity and quality. While the era of the early four Caliphs and Umayyads covered about a century, the Abbasid era covered more than five centuries, throughout which changes continued in political and cultural circumstances, and regional differences could not be ignored. Besides the supposed first Abbasid period lasted about a century, while the second one lasted five centuries. All these need to be reviewed. Some scholars preferred to deal with “later Abbasid periods” instead of a whole second period. Moreover, what was considered for Europe medieval dark ages was for Islam a flourishing and illuminating civilization.

It may be suggested that what may seem reasonable and suitable is to make *divisions according to Muslim political power and its form: from a city-state in Medina, to the country-state in Arabia to the universal-state*, even though we again face multi-entities with distinctive historical developments. With regard to Muslim civilization, one may start with *civilizational forces* (Islam, the Pre-Islamic Arabs and their culture, other cultures in contact, etc.), and then *civilizational development* (translation, education, etc.), which may be followed by *civilizational contributions* in different fields, and in the end comes the decline. Ahmad Amin used allegorical terms for the early and Abbasid eras of Muslim history as: dawn, forenoon, noon. Sayyid Qutb and similarly, to a certain extent, Abul-Hasan al Nadwi, preferred to divide our history into: progress, retreat and the contemporary times. Von Grunebaum, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and other Western scholars have divided Muslim history into classical (from the beginning until early Abbasids), medieval (later Abbasids and this period may be extended to early Ottomans, to the time before the Renaissance in the West), and then one

comes to modern Muslim history. Other suggestions have appeared and may still emerge, but the need for reconsidering traditional or conventional division of eras and periods of Muslim history is essential and urgent. A main factor in suggesting any division of eras in Muslim history should be how to maintain a comprehensive perspective for any given period which does not restrict itself to the political development detaching it from the socio-cultural context.

The openness of Muslim history in relation to time and place requires the historian to be always aware of the essential balance between the continuation and the change, between the diversity and the unity. A Western scholar like Von Grunebaum edited a whole work with the title of "Diversity and Unity in the Muslim Civilization," and this direction has to be followed and enriched, especially from an Islamic perspective. A Muslim scholar who is loyal to the universality of Islam should not be reluctant or too sensitive to underline regional aspects or events. Our ancestors left voluminous contributions on the histories of particular regions (Syria, Egypt, Maghrib, India) and cities (Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Baghdad, Mosul, Isfahan, etc.) one can always deal with particulars while maintaining the general. We have to deepen our research by delving into the impact of Muslim civilization on the Renaissance and even the impact of Islam on the Christian Reformation. In any case, we should never forget that human history, and Muslims are no exception, represents the human nature of combining positives and negatives, high and low points.

The Criteria For Evaluating Historical Data:

What can our criteria be in evaluating the different information which we get from Muslim sources of history? Our history suffers not from a scarcity of information but from its abundance and difference, and as a result we have to go through the hard work of evaluation. We had the earliest experiences in accurate evaluation in the project of collecting the Qur'an (fourteen centuries ago) and later in the project of collecting the Sunnah (thirteen centuries ago) and we did this marvelously. Muslims need to maintain such experience in the evaluation of these plentiful historical reports. Several suggestions have been made about the required criteria in this field. Ibn Khaldun (d. 708H/1406) suggested that the natural laws of human society and civilization "*tabā'ī al-'umrān wa al-ijtimā' al-insānī*" should be applied to any event reported in history. If any reported event seems impossible according to these laws, the information should be rejected, and no discussion about the credibility of the informer is needed at all in such a case. The requirements used by "hadith" scholars for credibility and authenticity have also been suggested in the past

and present as a criteria for evaluating historical reports, and Muhibb al-Dīn al-Khatīb has revived this opinion in modern times through many of his writings. He mentioned these ideas in the introduction of his authenticated edition of the book of Abū Bakr ibn al'Arabī "al-Awāsīm mina al-Qawāsīm" in the part on the deeds attributed to some Companions of the Prophet after his death. He also mentioned these ideas in later articles in "al-Azhar" monthly while he was its chief editor. However, applying the requirements for authenticity of "hadith" in the field of history has proven to be a big problem, since chains of informers might be ignored by some important historians, and wherever they might be mentioned, some links might be missing or might be unknown. As history represented information which might not imply any religious obligation or prohibition, early compilers of historical information did not care to indicate, present information about every link, nor scrutinize the chain of reporters. When Muhibb al-Dīn himself published the authenticated edition of "Al-Kharāj" by Abu Yusuf (d. about 182H/798) he found that he could not practice the suggested criteria of hadith scholars in editing the text and footnoting it. Another contemporary scholar originally from Hyderabad in India, Muhammad Hamidullah, has stated that "the interest of the informer" in the information should be investigated, and that whenever the informer could not have any interest in his information it should be accepted.

It is important to reach some multi-based criteria which considers more than one element to secure some counter-checks and balances for historical evaluation. We should make use of what the Qur'an has taught about human nature, the cycles of power and weakness, the contradictions and conflicts of different social forces, etc. (e.g., the Qur'an 2:251; 3:26-27, 140; 4:133; 5:48, 7:34, 9:105; 10:24; 11:15, 118-119; 13:11, 17; 17:18-20; 22:40, 42:30; 47:4, 31, 38)¹. In addition, the pioneering thinking of Ibn Khaldun which underlined the natural laws of society and civilization should guide us to benefit from the findings of social sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology, economics, etc.) in forming our historical criteria.

College requirements for a student of Muslim history should allow a package of such basic knowledge which is indispensable for a historian, and the flexibility of the credit system with its offered options can help in this respect. Some Muslim countries have begun to apply this system, but serious shortcomings undermine the flexibility and other advantages of it. It is a matter of shame for Muslims that Ibn Khaldun developed such a historical criteria several centuries ago, but his pioneering attempt has not been followed and extended up to the present time.

Specific Areas:

Modern historians are extending their concerns to various areas, especially social and economic histories, which Muslim history must also take into account. Our various sources of history, biography, geography, jurisprudence, literature and other fields provide treasures of information. Family life, women's status and role, education, urban and rural life—such areas have to be discussed in Muslim history. Intellectual history as an indicator of intellectual development as a whole, encompassing juristic, literary, scientific, and artistic developments in their main features and totality without being absorbed in the details of a particular area, can be an outstanding area of Muslim history. Inter-relations in such areas of human activities can prove the universality of Islam and Muslims in practice, not only in theory. Even in matters of faith, Muslim theologians and philosophers contributed to Western Christian thinking in the middle ages [e.g. St. Aquinas (d. 1274) and the contributions of Ghazali (d. 505H./1111) and Ibn Rushd (d. 595H./1188)] just as Muslim thinking benefited from Greek philosophy. Muslim scholars were open to any useful knowledge: Greek, Persian or Indian; Muslim societies were open to all acceptable customs and traditions; and Muslim rulers were open to all government experiences as early as the time of Caliph Umar who decided to adopt the previous practices of land-tax (*kharaj*), professional army and state administration (*diwan*) in the Muslim Caliphate. A special branch can be devoted to the history of Islam as a religion: its spread, its social dynamism and inter-relations with existing cultures, the development of theology and jurisprudence according to changing circumstances, etc. Moreover, history can benefit and widen the perspective of any group of specialists. Physicists, astronomers, biologists, physicians, chemists, mathematicians, engineers, . . . etc., may concentrate on the Muslim contributions in a specific field. Such approaches will benefit any specialization, as well as widen the human perspective of knowledge and provide common ground for different specialists in the whole world, especially within the Muslim Ummah. While Muslims enjoy rich sources in such areas, they are still lagging behind Western and some other scholars.

Interpretation of History and Ideology:

This is a very wide, complicated and controversial field, which requires another chance so that it may be given enough time and care.² However, some idea about it may be necessary on this occasion because of its extreme importance. There has been an attitude among some historians who believe

that history is just information about the past which should be as accurate as possible. They believe that a historian's task is to scrutinize the information to make sure that it is accurate. He should not be involved in interpretation since this is beyond any purely scientific or objective approach. A historian will never be able to tell you surely whether human history in general or in a particular time and/or area is going forward or backward, going in a cyclical or spiral course or otherwise. Human behavior can be motivated by many different factors and can have various responses in a given situation, thus it can never be surely predicted. Other historians believe that human behavior is the same as any natural phenomenon, and it has its rules or laws and consequently the past can be interpreted and the future can be predicted according to these laws or at least to these "theories" about supposed laws. This attitude in history has been nurtured in the past by faith, and in our times by the development of social sciences, such as psychology, sociology and economics. Ibn Khaldun tried in the first volume of his history—the well-known "Muqaddimah"—to uncover the natural laws of human society and civilization which could be implemented for scrutinizing and interpreting history. Ideas about various kinds of determinism (e.g., geographical, ethnological, psychological, etc.) appeared but could not survive. The "historical materialism" of Karl Marx (d. 1883) and Frederick Engels (d. 1895) is well known in this respect in modern times.

Some approaches in this direction occurred in dealing with Muslim history or with particular topics from it. As early as 1928 an Arabic book was published in Jerusalem by Bandali José in which he attempted to apply the materialist interpretation to some events in Muslim history, especially some intellectual trends as the book's title reveals (*From the History of Intellectual Movements in Islam*) "*Min Ta'rikh al-Harakāt al-Fikrīyah fī al-Islam*." More recent works have followed the same attitude, concentrating on certain movements like the rebellion of the Blacks "al-Zanj" and that of the Qaramites "al-Qarāmitah" during Abbasid times (e.g., works of Faysal al-Sāmīr, 'Ahmad 'Ulbi, 'Arif Tāmīr). Moreover, the same interpretation was applied to the life of the Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS) and his message and struggle by Abdul-Rahman al-Sharqāwī in his book (*Muhammad, the Messenger of Freedom*) "*Muhammad Rasūl al-Hūrīyah*." Another work, of 'Ahmad 'Abbās Ṣāliḥ, has interpreted the disputes and conflicts in the early Caliphate as "The Struggle between the Right and the Left in Islam." Most of these works have represented limited knowledge about the sources, and about the assessment of reliability of the reported information and how it may be interpreted if it is accepted. The advocates of the materialist interpretation of Muslim history seem very selective in their quotations, and their "a priori" ideology dominates their reading and interpretation. *Any interpretation should start with well-founded facts*. If this is observed, history readers and scholars can benefit from any

attempt at interpretation, and even if it fails it will at least exclude some hypotheses and limit possibilities. Human behavior is very complicated, and many simultaneous and consequent interactions contribute in totality to the historical event. To avoid an extreme oversimplification of interpretation in which facts may be twisted to fit the one-sided interpretation, multi-factors have to be considered. In the West, it was admitted that Marx and Engels knew very little about Islam and its history. Max Weber (d. 1930) only knew something about certain contemporary Muslim societies and believed—as other modern sociologists do in general—that religion is a product of the society, and is evolutionary. Montgomery Watt, in his two volume work on the life of the Prophet in Makkah and Madīnah, believes in the power of economic factors although he is not a Marxist nor a materialist. He seems more knowledgeable about the sources, but he also seems selective in presenting facts and inconsistent sometimes in his evaluation and interpretation. The Arab attempts to achieve a materialist interpretation of Muslim history have not been more successful.

However, this field should not be rejected or excluded from historical activities, whatever the difficulties may be. The Qur'an has revealed that human society has its laws which are created by God the same way as the physical and biological laws of nature "Sunnān Allah" (e.g., Qur'an 3:26-27, 137; 33:38, 35:43) were created by God. We have to work hard to discover these laws guided by the Qur'an (see the previous reference to Qur'an in dealing with: The Criteria)⁴ and informed by human observation and intelligence (Qur'an 22:46, 29:20; 30:9, 35:43-45, 29:20).⁵ Interpretation of history may be influenced by ideological or religious concepts, but this would not eclipse the benefits of intelligent attempts as long as they are built on solid historical facts and the ideological or religious basis is known. I believe that the attempts in this field should be encouraged within these guidelines, whether they apply a known theory to certain facts of Muslim history, or they try to introduce a new theory of interpretation. However, an interpretation can never turn unreliable information, suggestion, or hypothesis into a historical fact. Historical facts can be provided by reliable sources after the necessary scrutiny. Any interpretation is welcome but we should be aware of the limitations of interpretations—especially of human behavior—in general and of any given interpretation in particular. A bias is always inevitable in such a field, but if it is known in advance, it will not hurt and some light may be cast in the darkness of the past and some progress may be achieved in such an obstacle course.

The success of the message of Islam in Arabia, and the success of the early Caliphate in defending, administering and extending the Islamic state until it became universal, may be explained geographically, sociologically, economically, psychologically or otherwise in addition to the strong faith

of the believers. Such an explanation of the existing natural circumstances may help us to understand different effects in different given cases and to avoid wishful thinking about a miraculous repetition of history. Study of the natural and human factors in Muslim history underlines the role of human intelligence and action which is required by the Qur'an and Sunnah in order to attain success in this life and in the after-life. The challenges and difficulties which the Islamic state faced inside Arabia and after establishing a universal Caliphate (apostasy: *al-ridda*; split and conflict: *al-fitna*) become more understandable through realistic analysis of the situation, rather than an idealistic simplification about losing divine support. Some political developments such as the emergence of hereditary dynasties or secessionist conflicts, would be more obvious according to natural and social laws, instead of considering such phenomena as mere sins or deviation from Islam. I may emphasize in the end what I have mentioned in the beginning, that Muslim history is not infallible or immune to the natural laws of human societies, and that the message of Islam and its laws do not contradict such natural laws, as Ibn Khaldun intelligently stated in his "Miqaddimah", and as the Qur'an has repeatedly stressed.

We have to work hard in such directions. My goal here is simply to underline how necessary, urgent, and comprehensive, our plans should be in various areas of Muslim history, and not to present a complete or concrete project of research. All genuine and capable efforts are invited to collaborate in this field which certainly needs collective work, and I am sure that the International Institute of Islamic Thought and the Association of Muslim Social Scientists can be a pioneering front in such needed directions.

History of Islam

Notes

- (1) It may be helpful to present here the Qur'anic verses which are referred to as examples for the Qur'anic perspective about human nature and historical changes. The translation of Muhammad Asad is used here with very limited changes, in which case the translation of T. B. Irving is sometimes used:

- ". . . And if God had not enabled people to defend themselves

against one another, mischief would surely overwhelm the earth . . .” [2:251]

- “. . . And if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in which God’s name is abundantly extolled would surely have been destroyed . . .” [22:40]
- “Say: O God, Lord of all dominion! Thou grantest dominion unto whom Thou willest, and takest away dominion from whom Thou willest; and Thou exaltest whom Thou Willest, and abasest whom Thou willest. In Thy hand is all good. Verily, Thou hast the power to will (and do) anything. Thou wrap night up in daylight and wrap daytime up in night. Thou bringest forth the living out of that which is dead, and Thou bringest both the dead out of that which is alive . . .” [3:26-27] (*Notice that the human, social, and political changes mentioned in the first verse, are followed in the following one by reference to physical and biological changes which have their laws . . .*)
- “. . . and it is by turns that We apportion unto men such cycles (of fortune and misfortune): and (this) to the end that God might mark out those who have attained to faith . . .” [3:140]
- “. . . Verily, God does not change man’s condition unless they change their inner selves” [13:11]
- “. . . In this way does God set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: *as for the foam, the scum will go away; while whatever benefits mankind abides on earth.*” [13:17]
- “And for all people a term has been set: and when (the end of) their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it.” [7:34]
- “. . . and when the earth has assumed its artful adornment and has been embellished and they who dwell on it believe that they have gained mastery over it—there comes down upon it *Our command by night or by day*, and we cause it to become (like) a field mown down, as if there had been no flourishing yesterday. Thus clearly We spell out these signs (and messages) unto people who think” [10:24]
- “*As for those who care for (no more than) the life of this world and its bounties—We shall repay them in full* for all that they do in this (life), and they shall not be deprived of their just due therein” [11:15]
- “Unto him who cares for (no more than the enjoyment of) this fleeting life We readily grant thereof as much as We please

But as for those who care for the (good of the) life to come, and strive for it as it ought to be striven for, and are (true) believers withal—they are the ones whose striving finds favor (with God). *All (of both parties)—these as well as those—do We freely endorse with some of thy Lord's gifts, since thy God's giving is never confined (to one kind of man).*" [17:18-20]

- "And say (unto them, O Prophet): Act! And God will behold your deeds, and (so will) His Messenger, and the believers: and (in the end) you will be brought before him who knows all the unseen and the visible . . ." [9:105]
- "Now whatever calamity may befall you will be an outcome of what your own hands have done, although He forgives much." [42:30]
- ". . . And (know that) had God so willed, He could Himself defend (his message) against them (those who are bent on denying the truth), *but (He wills you to struggle) so as to test you (all) by means of one another . . .*" [47:4]

"And most certainly We shall try you all, so that We might mark out those of you who strive hard (in Our cause) and are patient in adversity: for We shall put to a test (the truth of) all your assertions" [47:31]

- *"If He so wills, He can cause you, O people, to disappear, and bring forth others instead . . ."* [4:133]
- ". . . and if you turn away (from Him), He will cause other people to take your place, and they will not be like you" [47:38]
- *"And had thy Lord so willed, He could surely have made all mankind one single community: but (He willed it otherwise, and so) they continue to hold divergent views—(all of them,) save those upon whom thy Lord has bestowed His grace. And to this end has He created them (all)."* [11:118-119]

Author's Note: Those "upon whom thy Lord has bestowed His grace" are those who follow God's guidance—methodologically and ethically—in dealing with human differences.

- *"Unto each of you who followed the successive (divine messages) We have appointed a (different) law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but (He willed it otherwise) in order to test you by means of what He has given you.*

Vie, then, with one another in doing good deeds! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that about which you have been disagreeing” [5:48]

The Qur’an calls upon human attention to observe, study thoroughly and find out what the material traces of past societies and civilizations may reveal, as well as teaching that any report about any event should be examined:

- “*And how many a township have we wiped out, while it was being immersed in evildoing—and now they (all) lie deserted, with their roofs caved in! And how many a well (or a water-source in general) lies abandoned, and how many a castle (or a palace) that (once) stood high! Have they, then, never travelled around the earth, with hearts (open) to gain wisdom, and their (open) ears to hear? Yet, verily, it is not their eyes that have become blind—but blind have become their hearts that are in their breasts” [22:45-46]*
- “. . . If some scoundrel should come up to you with some piece of news, *clear up the facts lest you afflict some people out of ignorance*, and some morning you (find yourselves) feel regretful for what you may have done” [49:6]
- “. . . *refrain from conjecturing too much*, for some conjecture maybe a sin . . . ” [49:12]
- “Say: Have you any knowledge. Then bring it to us. Why you only follow conjectures, you are merely guessing.” [6:148]
- “Bring me a previous book or a trace of knowledge if what you claim is true.” [46:4]
- “Say: Bring on an evidence for what you are claiming, if what you say is true” [2:111]
- “But, behold, many people lead others astray by their own passions without having any knowledge. Verily, thy Lord is quite aware of those who transgress the bounds of what is right” [6:119]
- “Most of them merely follow conjecture: However, guessing can never provide any grounds for truth” [10:36]

(2) See for the same author in Arabic: *al-Madkhal ilā al-Ta’rīkh al-‘Islāmī*: Beirut 1988; *al-Ta’rīkh al- ‘Islāmī wa-l-Madhab al-Mādī fī-l-Taḥsīn*: Kuwait 1970, 1976, “Falsafat al-Ta’rīkh wa-l-nazariyyāt al-Mu’āsirah”: a lecture in the “Lectures of the First Cultural Season

1984-1985” by the Foundation of Culture and Arts: Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

- (3)
- The previously mentioned verse “O God, Lord of dominion! Thou grantest dominion unto whom Thou willest, and takest away dominion . . .”, is significantly followed by a verse that refers to astronomical and biological cycles whose laws could be known [2:27]
 - “Several (divine) laws have had their effect before your time: travel around the earth and observe what the outcome was for those who denied the truth (and those laws).” [3:137]
 - “. . . and can they expect anything but (to be made to go) the same way of those of olden times? Thus (it is): no change wilt thou ever find in God’s way; yea, no deviation wilt thou ever find in God’s way.” Have they not travelled around the earth and observed how the outcome went by those who preceded them. . . . If God should take mankind to task for whatever they have been doing He would not leave any creature on the surface, but He grants those respite for a term set (by Him)”
 - “(Indeed, such was) God’s way with those who have passed away aforetime, and (remember that) God’s will is always destiny absolute.” [33:38]
- (4) See note 1
- (5)
- The previously mentioned verses “And how many a township have We wiped out. . . . Have they, then, never travelled around the earth, with their hearts (open) to gain wisdom their ears (open) to hear . . .” [22:45-46]
 - “Have they, then, travelled about the earth and seen what the outcome was for those who existed before them? They were even stronger than they are: they cultivated the earth and developed it more than they have ever done . . .” [30:9]
 - “Say: Travel around the earth and see how (wondrously) He began with creation; later on God raises up another life—for, verily, God has the power to do everything” [29:20]