



THE FORMATION AND MAIN GENRES OF ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY: SIYAR, MAGHAZI, TARAJIM AND TABAQAT

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Abstract. *This article examines the formation of Islamic historiography and analyzes its main genres, including siyar, maghazi, tarajim, and tabaqat. The study explores the semantic and terminological meanings of these genres and their development within the framework of Islamic sciences. Special attention is given to the early sources of Islamic history such as Ibn Ishaq's Siyar, Ibn Hisham's As-Siyra an-Nabawiyya, and al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi. The role of hadith scholarship in shaping historical methodology and ensuring the reliability of historical reports is also discussed. The article highlights how Qur'anic narratives, hadith collections, and biographical literature contributed to the emergence of Islamic history as an independent scholarly discipline.*

Keywords: Islamic historiography, siyar, maghazi, tarajim, tabaqat, hadith studies, biographical literature, early Islamic sources.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic historiography occupies a significant place within the system of Islamic sciences, as it preserves the memory of the emergence, development, and institutionalization of Muslim society (Gibb, 1962). From the earliest period of Islam, the need to document the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his companions, and the major events of the Islamic community led to the gradual formation of a distinct historical tradition (Ibn Hisham, 1990; al-Tabari, 1960–1970). Unlike purely narrative chronicles, Islamic historical writing developed in close connection with other religious sciences such as hadith, tafsir, and fiqh, which greatly influenced its methodology and authenticity (Gibb, 1962).

The first manifestations of Islamic historiography appeared in the genres of siyar and maghazi, which focused primarily on the life, character, and military expeditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) (Ibn Ishaq, 1988; al-Waqidi, 1989). These works were



initially transmitted by scholars of hadith, whose attention to chains of transmission (is-nad) and textual criticism strengthened the reliability of historical reports (Ibn Hisham, 1990). Over time, historical writing expanded beyond prophetic biography and evolved into broader biographical and prosopographical works known as tarajim and tabaqat, which systematically recorded the lives of companions, successors, scholars, jurists, and other prominent figures of the Muslim community (Ibn Sa‘d, 1968).

The Qur‘an and hadith literature also played a foundational role in shaping the Islamic historical worldview. Qur‘anic narratives about earlier prophets and communities, together with detailed hadith reports concerning the Prophet’s life and the early caliphate, provided both the content and the methodological framework for historical inquiry (al-Tabari, 1960–1970). As a result, Islamic historiography gradually emerged as an independent and structured field of knowledge, grounded in religious sources yet enriched by scholarly analysis (Gibb, 1962).

This article aims to examine the formation of Islamic historiography and to analyze its principal genres – siyar, maghazi, tarajim, and tabaqat – highlighting their definitions, historical development, and significance in the broader context of Islamic intellectual tradition.

MAIN PART

Islamic history constitutes a distinct category within the Islamic sciences and is divided into several genres. The earliest among them are siyar and maghazi. The writing of independent historical works in the Islamic world began with these genres (Ibn Ishaq, 1988).

The word siyar (السيّر) is the plural of sīra (السّيّرة), meaning “conduct,” “way of life,” or “biography.” In Islamic terminology, it refers specifically to the traditional biography of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Ibn Hisham, 1990). The term sīra appears in the Qur‘an in the sense of “state” or “condition” (Qur‘an 20:21). In hadith literature, it describes the lifestyle and conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instructed Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf (r.a) during the appointment to lead the Dumat al-Jandal campaign: “Oh son of Awf! Get



the flag! All of you fight in the way of Allah with those who do not believe in Allah, do not betray the trust, do not do injustice, do not cut off anyone's part of the body, do not kill women and children. This is the covenant of Allah and the siyrat (behavior, lifestyle) of your Prophet who guided you" (Ibn Hisham, 1990).

The term *maghazi* (المغازي), plural of *maghza*, denotes military campaigns or expeditions. In Islamic historiography, it refers to all the battles of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (al-Waqidi, 1989). The word *ghazwa* (الغزوة) refers to battles in which the Prophet personally participated, while *sariya* (السرية) refers to military missions led by companions without his direct involvement (al-Tabari, 1960–1970).

Some historians argue there is no strict difference between *ghazwa* and *sariya*. For instance, Ibn Hisham referred to the *Mut'a sariya* as "Ghazwa," and al-Tabari described the *sariya* Zatus-savari as "Ghazatus savari" occurring in 31 AH (651–652 CE) (Ibn Hisham, 1990; al-Tabari, 1960–1970). Moreover, Islamic historical works sometimes use *maghazi* alone or in conjunction with *siyar* to refer to the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him). For example, Ibn Kathir occasionally referred to Ibn Ishaq's *Siratu Ibn Ishaq* as *Maghazi Ibn Ishaq* (Ibn Hisham, 1990).

The earliest scholars of *siyar* were primarily muhaddithin (hadith scholars), including Urwa ibn az-Zubayr, Aban ibn Usman, and Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri, who collected extensive information about the Prophet's life (peace be upon him) (Gibb, 1962). Their meticulous attention to textual and transmission analysis ensured the reliability of early *siyar* and *maghazi* works, which remain fundamental sources of Islamic history (Ibn Ishaq, 1988).

Among the most renowned works in the genres of *siyar* and *maghazi* are Ibn Ishaq's *Siyar* (Ibn Ishaq, 1988), Ibn Hisham's *As-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* (Ibn Hisham, 1990), and al-Waqidi's *Kitab al-Maghazi* (al-Waqidi, 1989). These texts continue to be central to historical research and scholarly discourse.

The emergence of biographical literature expanded historiography beyond the Prophet's life, developing into *tarajim* and *tabaqat*. The term *tarajim* (تراجم) refers to individual biographies, while *tabaqat* (طبقات) organizes individuals according to age, scholarly or professional rank, lineage, title, sect, tariqah, or region (Ibn Sa'd, 1968). Notable examples include Ibn Sa'd's *At-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Abu 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Barr's *Al-Is-*



ti‘ab, Izzuddin ibn al-‘Asir’s Asadul-ghoba fi ma‘rifatis-sahaba, and Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani’s Al-Isaba (Ibn Sa‘d, 1968; Gibb, 1962).

The Qur’ān and hadith provide foundational historical information about the lives of earlier prophets and the early Muslim community (al-Tabari, 1960–1970). The presence of these religious documents encouraged careful compilation and verification by scholars, leading to the systematic collection of hadiths, which are not only narrations of the Prophet’s life but also sources of broader historical context (Ibn Hisham, 1990).

The development of tafsir, hadith studies, and fiqh necessitated deeper examination of the periods of prophecy and the Rashidun caliphate, encompassing administrative, military, political, and religious aspects (al-Tabari, 1960–1970). Consequently, Islamic historiography evolved into a structured scholarly discipline, grounded in religious sources yet systematically analyzed (Gibb, 1962).

CONCLUSION

Islamic historiography emerged as an essential part of the Islamic sciences, gradually developing into an independent scholarly discipline (Gibb, 1962). Its foundation lies in the preservation and transmission of knowledge about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his companions, and formative events of the Muslim community (Ibn Ishaq, 1988; Ibn Hisham, 1990).

Siyar and maghazi represent the initial stages of historical writing, emphasizing prophetic biography and military campaigns (al-Waqidi, 1989). The subsequent emergence of tarajim and tabaqat broadened historiography by documenting the lives of scholars, jurists, and other influential figures, thereby preserving the intellectual and social history of Islam (Ibn Sa‘d, 1968).

Religious texts like the Qur’ān and hadith collections provided both primary historical sources and methodological frameworks, ensuring the rigor and reliability of Islamic historiography (al-Tabari, 1960–1970). The study of these genres remains critical for understanding the development of Islamic historical thought and the intellectual evolution of Muslim societies (Gibb, 1962).



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