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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Modern Islamic Historiography:

A Global Perspective from South Asia

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Islamic Studies

by

Mohsin Ali

2022

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2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Modern Islamic Historiography:
A Global Perspective from South Asia

by

Mohsin Ali

Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Studies
University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Asma Sayeed, Co-Chair

Professor Nile Spencer Green, Co-Chair

This dissertation examines how four prominent Muslim Indian religious scholars (*'ulamā'*) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wrote histories to construct authority and create communities. The four scholars are Shiblī Nu'mānī (1857-1914), 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī (1869-1923), Sulaymān Nadwī (1884-1953), and Abū Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī (1913-1999). All four shared institutional connections to Nadwat al-'Ulamā', a madrasa in north India, and Dār al-Muṣannifīn, a research and publishing house. Because of the centrality of historical writing in their scholarly career, the four scholars are referred to in the dissertation as *'ulamā'*-historians.

This dissertation tracks the rise of *'ulamā'*-historians as a new specialist of religious scholars since the late nineteenth century. The religious authority of *'ulamā'*-historians studied in this dissertation was largely built on their historical writings. History was their main scholarly endeavor, and it formed the bulk of their intellectual oeuvre. In accounting for the emergence of *'ulamā'*-historians from the nineteenth century, the dissertation argues that they gained recognition as religious authorities by putting their scholarly learning to use in recovering Muslim pasts to address concerns of Muslims in the present.

Recovering pasts entailed discovering new sources and/or approaches to write about moments from Muslim history that had been previously marginalized or forgotten. The *'ulamā'*-historians, through their act of recovery, became mediators between the past and the present as they utilized history to give meaning to what it meant to be Muslim in colonial and post-colonial societies. By putting themselves in dialogue with the scholarly traditions of the *'ulamā'*, even when they were critical of aspects of it, they enhanced the prestige of history as a scholarly endeavor for *'ulamā'*.

The dissertation of Mohsin Ali is approved.

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Michael Cooperson

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University of California, Los Angeles

2022

For my mother and father

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Note on Transliteration

I have largely followed the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration scheme for Arabic and Persian. For Urdu, I have followed the following scheme:

(ٹ) as ṭ

(ڈ) as ḍ

(ڑ) as ṛ

(ں) as ṇ

(ی) as e when it sounds like شیر sher

(و) as o when it sounds like دوست dost

I have left names that mostly appear in English in common usage: Ameer Ali and Muhammad

Ali Jinnah.

Acknowledgments

I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without the help of many people. Foremost among those I am indebted to are my parents, Muzaffar and Shamima Ali. Their constant love and support made it possible for me to pursue a PhD in Islamic Studies. I am similarly indebted to my wife Butool Abdullah for her love and patience during this long journey. When she agreed to marry me back in 2015, right before I began my doctoral program at UCLA, she could not have known how long and laborious writing this dissertation would be. Her dedication and compassion enabled me to finish the doctoral program. The support given by my father-in-law, Aslam Abdullah, and mother-in-law, Amtul Aziz, were invaluable during this journey. Whenever I needed help reading or translating Urdu, Aslam Abdullah was the first person to whom I turned. My siblings, Hassan Ali and Saima Ali constantly kept up my spirits. My in-laws, Suhail Abdullah, Khadeeja Abdullah, Faisal Abdullah, Adeel Syed, and Viviana Loporto, kept rooting for me to finish. Without my family, I would not have succeeded in writing this dissertation.

I am grateful for the attentive guidance and mentorship of my Committee Co-Chairs, Professor Nile Green and Professor Asma Sayeed. Their critical feedback on drafts of my chapters, along with enthusiasm for my project even when I felt lost, motivated me to continue researching and writing. I also benefited from comments provided by Professor Michael Cooperson and Professor Khaled Abou El Fadl. I consider myself fortunate to have committee members who were so invested in my dissertation and my growth as an academic.

In addition to my committee members, I benefitted from many professors at UCLA. My first serious introduction to the discipline of History came from Professor James Gelvin's seminar on Near Eastern Historiography and Professor Sanjay Subrahmanyam's seminar on

South Asian Historiography. Professor Vinay Lal's courses on colonialism and history were also formative in my decision to write my dissertation on historiography. Courses offered by Professors Michael Fishbein, Asma Sayeed, and Luke Yarbrough offered me the opportunity to read premodern Arabic historical works. Professor Green's Sufism and Social History seminar introduced me to Sufi hagiographical writing. Professors Banafsheh Pourzangi, Latifeh Hagigi, and Domenico Ingenito helped me to access the Persian sources cited in the dissertation.

Numerous friends provided insights, comments, and encouragement for this dissertation. I repeatedly pestered Saif ul Hadi with questions about sources and requested clarification on readings that confused me. His replies were full of wisdom and grace. Sohaib Baig was a willing interlocutor whenever I needed him. The "Connected Histories" WhatsApp group with Sohiab and Saif proved to be an invaluable resource. Maheen Zaman, Christopher Taylor, Uwais Namazi, and Michael O'Sullivan deserve mention for their advice and help in the research and writing processes. I am thankful to Ziyad Karim for the time he put into reading parts of Chapter 3. Finally, I am thankful to the encouragement I received from my college friends throughout these past seven years. Adil Kalam, Ali Sheikh, Jed Augustine, Khalid Khayr, Khalil Qato, Saad Syed Iqbal, Shuaib Ahmed, Zafir Khan, Hossam Tewfik, Saqib Hussein, and Zishaan Farooqui kept me grounded and apprised of the latest developments in the world of sports and politics.

My colleagues in the Islamic Studies program created a collegiate and supportive environment for which I am grateful. It was a pleasure working and learning alongside Syed Atif Rizwan, Anas Mahafzah, Faisal Abdullah, Evan Metzger, Holly Robbins, Sahar Youssef, and Timothy Garret. In addition to my fellow graduate students, I also want to thank the Student Affairs Officers Isamara Ramirez and Tiffany Chen. Their help in navigating the Graduate Division's bureaucracy and deadlines cannot be overstated.

I collected many resources for this dissertation in 2016 in India. In addition to the funding provided by the NELC Department, I benefitted from funding from the American Institute for Indian Studies (AIIS) to study Urdu in Lucknow. The staff at the libraries of Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, Dār al-Muṣṣaniffīn, and Aligarh University were extremely hospitable and generous. Professor Ishtiyāq Ahmad Zilli, the former head of Dār al-Muṣṣaniffīn, aided me tremendously while I was in India. I am also grateful to the late Professor Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui for inviting me to his house in Aligarh and speaking to me about my research interests. I would have loved to hear what he thought about my dissertation.

This dissertation is a testament to the love, support, encouragement, and guidance provided by those mentioned above and many others. All shortcoming and flaws are my own.

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Introduction

“In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”¹

This dissertation examines how four prominent Muslim Indian religious scholars (*‘ulamā’*) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wrote histories to construct authority and create communities. The four scholars are Shiblī Nu‘mānī (1857-1914), ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī (1869-1923), Sulaymān Nadwī (1884-1953), and Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī (1913-1999). All four shared institutional connections to Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ and Dār al-Muṣannifīn. Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, or Nadwa as it is often referred to, is a madrasa in the north Indian city of Lucknow that Shiblī and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy helped establish in 1896. Dār al-Muṣannifīn is a research and publication house in the north Indian city of Azamgarh that Shiblī and Sulaymān Nadwī founded in 1914. Because of the centrality of historical writing in their scholarly career, the four scholars are referred to in the dissertation as *‘ulamā’*-historians.

This dissertation tracks the rise of *‘ulamā’*-historians as a new specialist of religious scholarship since the late nineteenth century. What distinguishes *‘ulamā’*-historians from previous *‘ulamā’* who also penned historical works is that the latter were primarily scholars of *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, or *kalām*, that also happened to write history. However, the scholarly authority of *‘ulamā’*-historians studied in this dissertation was largely built on their historical writings. History was their main scholarly endeavor, and it formed the bulk of their intellectual oeuvre. In accounting for the emergence of *‘ulamā’*-historians from the nineteenth century, the

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

dissertation argues that they gained recognition as religious authorities by putting their scholarly learning to use in recovering Muslim pasts to address concerns of Muslims in the present.

Recovering pasts entailed discovering new sources and/or approaches to write about moments from Muslim history that had been previously marginalized or forgotten. The *'ulamā'*-historians, through their act of recovery, became mediators between the past and the present as they utilized history to give meaning to what it meant to be Muslim in colonial and post-colonial societies. By putting themselves in dialogue with the scholarly traditions of the *'ulamā'*, even when they were critical of aspects of it, they enhanced the prestige of history as a scholarly endeavor for *'ulamā'*.

'Ulamā' as Participants in Field of Scholarly Production

The heuristic devices of capital and fields of cultural production developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu are helpful in explaining how writers of history gained recognition as *'ulamā'*. According to Bourdieu, a field of cultural production is a set of relationships, often competitive, centered around specific kinds of valued resources, termed cultural capital, to produce a cultural good.² Importantly, cultural capital “does not exist and function except in relation to a field.”³ Fields of cultural production are autonomous from one another insofar as the actors within a field are governed by an internal set of logics and norms. “It is in the name of this collective capital that cultural producers feel the right and the duty to ignore the demands or requirements of temporal powers, and even to combat them by invoking against them their own

² Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 97.

³ Bourdieu and Wacquant, 101.

principles and norms.”⁴ Viewing the fields autonomously keeps competition over a specific form of cultural capital from being reduced to simply competition over social or political power.⁵

Nevertheless, the possibility of translating cultural capital into social, economic, or another kind of cultural capital exists, and thus part of what constitutes a field is the constant internal policing by a subset of actors against those who accumulate cultural capital for reasons external to the field.⁶ Social capital is the network of relationships that functions as a resource or provides some advantage. Economic capital is wealth. Symbolic capital refers to capital that has been legitimately transferred from one form to another.⁷

Islamic religious scholarship can be conceived of as constituting a field of cultural production centered on the cultural capital associated with *‘ulūm al-dīn*, religious sciences devoted to knowledge of the Qur’an, teachings attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, law, legal theory, theology, and necessary prerequisites, such as linguistics, logic, and even philosophy. Scholarly competition over defining religious knowledge, its sources, and types characterize the actors in the field, namely, the *‘ulamā’*. Importantly, Bourdieu acknowledged the porous boundaries of fields of cultural production since participants within a field struggle to define it and delineate who is included and excluded. Thus, a theoretical model of the field should capture

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 221.

⁵ Bourdieu, 204.

⁶ In his history of the emergence of the field of French literature, Bourdieu speaks of this struggle. “Internal struggles, notably those setting the proponents of ‘pure art’ against the proponents of ‘bourgeois art’ or ‘commercial art’ and leading the former to refuse to regard the latter as writers, inevitably take the form of conflicts over definition,” Bourdieu, 223.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32 (1987): 3–4.

this competition, evolution, and uncertainty.⁸ In the field of Islamic religious scholarship, “there has long been contestation on the fundamental questions of precisely what constitutes religious knowledge or who might properly lay claim to it.”⁹ This contestation includes struggles to include or exclude Sufism,¹⁰ Greek rationalism,¹¹ and, for our purpose, the importance of historical writing.

Moreover, disciplines like *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, and *kalām*, represented not only different types of cultural capital, but also capital of differing value depending on the context.¹² The relational values also changed, such as in India with the increasing importance of *ḥadīth* since the seventeenth century compared to other disciplines.¹³ In addition to the competition over categorizing and assigning value to different forms of knowledge, competition over mastery of one or more disciplines also has been a strategy for gaining cultural capital.¹⁴

⁸ Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, 225.

⁹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “The Ulama and Contestations on Religious Authority,” in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, and Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore and Martin van Bruinessen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 211.

¹⁰ Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 1 edition (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 25, passim.

¹¹ Gerhard Endress, “The Cycle of Knowledge: Intellectual Traditions and Encyclopaedias of the Rational Sciences in Arabic Islamic Hellenism,” in *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*, ed. Gerhard Endress (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 103–33.

¹² Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) observed that jurisprudence held the highest value during his time; Al-Ghazālī, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam*, 38–39; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) argued that *ḥadīth* was the most valuable discipline. “The science of *ḥadīth* is one of the best of the excellent sciences and one of the most beneficial of the useful disciplines ... For that reason, the errors of those writers on applied law who are unfamiliar with the science of *ḥadīth* are numerous and the imperfections in the remarks of those scholars who forsake it are plain.” ‘Uṭhmān Ibn-Ṣalāḥ-ad-Dīn Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Sharazūrī, Eerik Dickinson, and Muneer Goolam Fareed, *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth: Kitāb Ma‘rifat Anwa‘ ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2006), 1.

¹³ Francis Robinson, “Strategies of Authority in Muslim South Asia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 01 (January 2013): 3.

¹⁴ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 133; Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 154–55; The Indian scholar Nawwāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan

A further advantage of Bourdieu's concepts is that one can participate in more than one field of cultural production. Thus, the terms Sufi and *'ālim* designate participation in two different fields that may overlap in some places and times, and in other places or spaces it may not. Sherali Tareen has described how the Chishti Sufi Ḥājjī Imdādullāh, who had no legal training, nonetheless intervened on Islamic legal debates. His disciples explained his legal writings by stating that he received mystical knowledge from God.¹⁵ This is an example where Sufism functions as symbolic capital within the field of scholarly production of the *'ulamā'*.

To restate the argument then, the religious authority of the *'ulamā'*-historians resulted from their combining different forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital. They possessed social capital as graduates of traditional Islamic learning in India. They accumulated symbolic capital by gaining recognition in modern Muslim public spheres through historical scholarship. They developed cultural capital in the field of religious scholarship of *'ulamā'* by engaging the more dominant disciplines of *fiqh*, *hadith*, *tafsir*, or *kalam* through their historical writing, as well as arguing that history had become critical for understanding Islam.

The four scholars that are the focus of this dissertation could be classified in different fields of cultural production. All four were Sufis to the extent they participated in distinctive Sufi practices, read Sufi texts, or were formally affiliated with Sufi lineages. Yet their engagement with Sufi ideas in this dissertation will only be discussed when they are relevant to their historical approach, and usually that entails criticizing the constant references to miracles in Indo-Persianate historical writing. The decision to study them as *'ulamā'*, rather than as Sufis, is

Khān (d. 1890) argued that a person who knows legal rulings without mastery over proofs and evidences does not deserve to be called a scholar [lā yaṣṣih itlāq al-*'ālim* *'alayhī*] Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Sayyid Ṣiddīq Khān Ḥasan al-Qanūjī, *Abjad Al-'Ulūm* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002), 81.

¹⁵ SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 341–42.

on the one hand justified due to the emphasis of their writings on history. Yet it is also a classification imposed by me to organize information about them for my interests. Likewise, the interests of writers of Arabic historical works and Indo-Persianate works diverged, leading to a relative emphasis by the former on the category of '*ulamā*', and the latter to a relative emphasis on Sufis.

Shiblī, al-Ḥasanī, Sulaymān Nadwī, and 'Alī Nadwī adopted divergent historical approaches. Yet despite crucial methodological differences, they helped generate a local historiographical tradition between the north Indian cities of Lucknow and Azamgarh, even as they wrote for a transregional audience. To wit, their authority as religious scholars was built on their capability to produce histories to speak to their varied contemporary concerns.

The rise of '*ulamā*'-historians is noteworthy precisely because of the relatively marginal status history had occupied in traditional religious education when compared to other subjects. This is not to say historical writing was unimportant. The tremendous amount of historical output produced across Muslim regions testifies to its importance as a scholarly endeavor. However, history "never achieved the position of an academic subject ... in the formal system of Muslim religious education" like the subjects of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), study of teachings attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad (*ḥadīth*), and Islamic law (*fiqh*).¹⁶ Additionally, while methodological discussions and debates about interpreting the Qur'an, the Prophet's teachings, and Islamic law were common, as indicated by the disciplinary terms of *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, *uṣūl al-ḥadīth*, and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, ideas about how to think about and write history "were transmitted only in highly informal, personalized, *ad hoc* ways."¹⁷ Schools of thought did not form regarding history the way they did

¹⁶ Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1968), 42.

¹⁷ R. Stephen Humphreys, "Turning Points in Islamic Historical Practice," in *Turning Points in Historiography: A*

in other disciplines.¹⁸ However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ‘*ulamā*’-historians devoted overwhelming attention to history and historiography in their intellectual oeuvre, and their reputation as religious scholars rested largely on their exposition of history, rather than the more traditional subjects of *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, or *tafsīr*.¹⁹

Furthermore, they all shared a critical outlook towards previous historical works by Muslims and made important scholarly interventions in history. As a result of their historical interests, these ‘*ulamā*’ engaged in methodological discussions of sound versus unsound approaches to writing history. Moreover, for these scholars, a proper understanding of the history of Islam, its noteworthy personalities, and its presence in India were tied to their projects of religious reform and Muslim-world building. The scholars saw their roles as historians linked to their responsibility as religious authorities, and they gained prominence or notoriety among other ‘*ulamā*’ due to their historical perspectives.

Modern ‘Ulamā’

Through case studies of the historical approaches of four scholars associated with the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ seminary in north India, this study contributes to the growing research on modern, that is colonial and postcolonial, ‘*ulamā*’. Muslim scholars continued to be influential in Muslim societies in multiple ways. They increasingly wrote *fatāwa* for lay audiences,²⁰ religious

Cross-Cultural Perspective, ed. Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 90.

¹⁸ Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113.

¹⁹ This is not to say that these scholars did not write anything about these topics, but whatever they did write pales in both quantity and quality to their historical works.

²⁰ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 138–97.

primers for self-learning,²¹ and commentaries on *ḥadīth*.²² Intra-faith and inter-faith polemics further contributed to their authority,²³ as well as forging relationships with modern institutions of learning and political organizations.²⁴ Furthermore, ‘*ulamā*’ also organized themselves to disseminate their religious ideas,²⁵ mobilize politically,²⁶ and interact transregionally through journal-writing and travel.²⁷ Finally, they also established new institutions of learning,²⁸ taught at universities for Muslims,²⁹ and were involved in reforming older institutions.³⁰ In addition to the

²¹ Brannon D. Ingram, “The Portable Madrasa: Print, Publics, and the Authority of the Deobandi ‘*ulamā*’,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (July 2014): 845–71.

²² Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Commentaries, Print and Patronage: *Ḥadīth* and the Madrasas in Modern South Asia,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62, no. 01 (January 1999): 60–81.

²³ Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 198–234; Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity: A Critical Reading of the Works of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and His Associates (1898-1935)* (BRILL, 2009); Malika Zeghal, “Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State (1952-94),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (1999): 371–99.

²⁴ Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 99–100.

²⁵ Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and His Movement, 1870-1920* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2010), 68–96; Harlan Otto Pearson, *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-Century India: The Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008).

²⁶ Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 79–84; Meir Hatina, “*Ulama*”, *Politics, and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010).

²⁷ Nile Green and James L. Gelvin, “Introduction,” in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, ed. James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 13–14; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Arabic, the Arab Middle East, and the Definition of Muslim Identity in Twentieth Century India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 8, no. 1 (April 1, 1998): 59–81; Hatina, “*Ulama*”, *Politics, and the Public Sphere*, 80–94; Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 105–16.

²⁸ Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*.

²⁹ David Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton University Press, 1978); Kavita Saraswathi Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013).

³⁰ Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

aforementioned, historical writing constituted an important facet of intellectual activity for the ‘*ulamā*’ that contributed to their construction of religious authority.

Through focusing on the approaches, agendas, and reception of histories written by the ‘*ulamā*’, the dissertation sheds light on a genre of scholarly production that has not received sufficient attention. This is partially because historical writing, despite its importance in giving shape to ‘*ulamā*’ as a scholarly community, was not considered as important of a scholarly pursuit as *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *kalam*, or the other religious disciplines. By way of illustration, if one does a search for the words “*mu’arrikh*” or “*akhbārī*,” two words that correspond with my use of the word historian, in al-Dhahabī’s (d. 848/1348) *Siyar al-‘ulamā al-nubulā*, one of the largest Arabic biographical dictionaries, they will not find the titles listed ahead of titles that designate expertise in the other disciplines. Assuming that the order of titles indicates their relative importance, this shows the *relative* unimportance of history. Expertise in literature (*adīb*) takes precedence over history.³¹ The point is not to deny history’s importance for Muslim scholars, but to clarify its *relative* lack of prestige in comparison to other disciplines. It would be surprising to find an obituary stating that even though a scholar was not the most knowledgeable in *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, or *uṣūl*, he was nonetheless the greatest ‘*ālim* of a locality on account of his expertise in history. Yet that is how the Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) eulogized Shiblī Nu‘mānī.³² Part of this dissertation’s aim is to account for the greater prestige afforded to historical writing among ‘*ulamā*’ that enabled the four scholars to construct their religious authority largely based on their historical works.

³¹ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-‘ulamā al-nubulā* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), 15:306.

³² Rashīd Riḍā, “Muṣāb Al-Hind Wal-‘ālam al-Islāmī Bil-Shaykh Shiblī al-Nu‘mānī,” *Al-Manār* 18, no. 1 (February 14, 1905): 79–80.

The increased prominence of history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was of course not unique to religious scholars, and historians have analyzed global historiographical changes tied to modern notions and practices of history developed in Europe. Often this increased importance of history is tied to the rise of nationalism.³³ While acknowledging that the *'ulamā'* were part of a global historiographical shift, I argue that the increased historical interest of the *'ulamā'* cannot be reduced to a single explanatory factor, such as a nostalgic response to perceptions of decline generated by colonialism. A range of intellectual perspectives led to divergent approaches in history-writing.

In exploring the multiple influences, the dissertation carefully analyzes the premodern historical Arabic and Persian traditions that the Indian *'ulamā'* drew on, struggled with, and critiqued. Moreover, in the case of *'ulamā'* that did show interest in modern historicist views, the dissertation shows how they utilized their scholarly tradition to mediate their evaluation and engagement of modern European approaches to history. The scholarship of Shiblī, Sulaymān Nadwī, and *'Alī Nadwī* betrays a deep concern for the rise of nationalism in both India and the Middle East. Thus, historical scholarship became an important means of reflecting on broader intellectual and political developments both within India as well as transregionally.

Works on modern historiography have largely overlooked the writings of *'ulamā'* while studies of *'ulamā'* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have not sufficiently examined their historical scholarship. To fill this gap in the secondary literature, this dissertation argues that history became a much more significant subject among the *'ulamā'* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than it had been previously due in large part to the efforts of scholars like the

³³ Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang, and Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Routledge, 2013); Stuart Macintyre et al., eds., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 4: 1800-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Stefan Berger, ed., *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

four I focus on who used history to draw on their broad scholarly tradition to reflect on contemporary issues they felt affected Muslims.

There were multiple reasons that made displaying command over history an important means of constructing scholarly authority. The dissertation's argument extends insights by recent scholars about the role of modern *ḥadīth* commentaries in connecting Muslim audiences to an idealized Islamic past in seventh and eighth centuries.³⁴ Histories about the early Islamic period accomplished a similar goal for a much wider audience of Muslims than *ḥadīth* commentaries, especially in India where Muslims did not generally speak Arabic. Moreover, after the spread of historicist skepticism since the nineteenth century about the knowability of the past and the necessity of verifiable sources, rooting histories of Islam in Arabic sources lent them credibility as authentic.

Through credible historical narratives of the Islamic past, the '*ulamā*' historians of this dissertation were able to provide guidance for the present during massive sociopolitical upheavals related to colonialism and competing nationalisms. "Narratives create the field where history lives its cultural life in the minds of the people, telling them who they are and what the temporal change of themselves and their world is about."³⁵ To summarize some of what the histories studied in this dissertation demonstrated, Shiblī argued that Muslims were inheritors of an impressive civilizational heritage through his Urdu monographs on early Islam. His student Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī added through his Urdu histories that Muslims had lived peacefully with non-Muslims in India for centuries. Shiblī's colleague 'Abd al-Ḥayy in his eight-volume

³⁴ Joel Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary across a Millennium* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 143–63; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 38–59.

³⁵ Jörn Rüsen, *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 2.

biographical history presented Indian Muslim scholarship as a continuous chain from the present to the past, and showed that it constituted an important part of global Islamic intellectual history. Finally, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy’s son ‘Alī Nadwī argued in his best-selling Arabic book that Muslims constituted a global community united by their unique religious commitments. Despite these diverging agendas, what united them was their ability to utilize their scholarly training to produce compelling historical narratives that spoke to large segments of Muslim public spheres.

While the contemporary contexts are necessary to understand the historical projects of the ‘*ulamā*’-historians, the dissertation contends that their engagement with the scholarly religious heritage of the ‘*ulamā*’ is also crucial to fully grasp their diverse approaches and appreciate their popular reception. Building on Mona Hassan’s insights about the “lasting and recognizable cultural resonances” of cultural memory,³⁶ this dissertation examines the strategies used by the ‘*ulamā*’ historians in presenting their histories as continuous with the religious scholarly tradition. This was the case even when some of them appropriated historicist views. The dissertation thus departs from studies that have focused on the historical writings of modern Muslim intellectuals unconnected and unconcerned with the scholarly traditions of ‘*ulamā*’ and have concluded that modern Muslim historical endeavors are exclusively indebted to the intellectual and political contexts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁷

Arabic and Indo-Persianate Historical Writing

³⁶ Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 19.

³⁷ Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2009), 1–65; Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 111–13; Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

Arabic historical writing has been an important means for Muslim scholarly communities to define themselves as a social collective. From at least the ninth century, Arabic historical texts have identified scholarly communities as *'ulamā'* and designated them as authoritative figures for Muslims.³⁸ Their claim to authority rests on a perceived connection to the Prophet Muḥammad's teachings that entitles them to be his intellectual and religious heirs. However, their claim of being the Prophet's heirs on the basis that they have continued his teachings has not gone unchallenged. Collectives later referred to as Sufis, Imams, and caliphs have been recorded in historical works as heirs to the Prophet based on mystical, genealogical, and political connections.³⁹ Even as Arabic historical writing diversified in terms of genres and expanded in scope, biographical entries on figures that constitute the scholarly community of *'ulamā'* remained a salient feature.⁴⁰ Because of the inherent instability in the socially constructed category of *'ulamā'* for much of Islamic history – scholars cut across multiple social roles, from rulers, mystics, bureaucrats, merchants, and poets, to name a few – memorializing *'ulamā'* in histories has been necessary in maintaining their identity.⁴¹ By the eleventh century, specialists of the varied disciplines of scholarship, especially *ḥadīth* scholars, conceived knowledge as being embodied in chains of scholars connecting the present to the Prophet.⁴²

³⁸ Jonathan E. Brockopp, *Muhammad's Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities, 622-950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 9.

³⁹ Brockopp, *Muhammad's Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities, 622-950*; Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mun* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 167, *passim*.

⁴⁰ Wadad al-Qadi, "Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars' Alternative History of the Muslim Community," in *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Muslim World*, ed. Gerhard Endress (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 33–34.

⁴¹ R. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 137.

⁴² Garrett A. Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition: A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission Across a Thousand Years* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 267.

While Arabic historical writing that prominently featured, if not centered, ‘*ulamā*’ as a scholarly community were widespread across Muslim lands, they were noticeably absent in South Asia.⁴³ In Indo-Persianate historical writing that was predominantly used by Indian Muslims from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, writers mainly focused memorializing religious figures as Sufis.⁴⁴ By the fifteenth century, Arabic historical texts where ‘*ulamā*’ featured more prominently than in Indo-Persianate histories began circulating in parts of western and southern India,⁴⁵ but they remained marginal in comparison to Indo-Persianate histories until the nineteenth century.

Global Context of Modern Historiographical Changes

The shift in the cultural value of history for religious scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century happened at a time when Indian Muslims were thinking and writing about Islam “under conditions of intensified global interaction.”⁴⁶ New technologies of transport and communication in the nineteenth-century led to an increase “in the flow of people and ideas between South Asia and the Arab Middle East.”⁴⁷ Additionally, printing provided impetus for translations of European works and ideas, and modern transportation technologies facilitated

⁴³ James Pickett, *Polymaths of Islam: Power and Networks of Knowledge in Central Asia* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2020), 168.

⁴⁴ Marica K. Hermansen, “Imagining Space and Siting Collective Memory in South Asian Muslim Biographical Literature (Tazkirahs).,” *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 2 (2002): 1–21; Nile Green, *Indian Sufism Since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 36.

⁴⁵ Christopher D. Bahl, “Transoceanic Arabic Historiography: Sharing the Past of the Sixteenth-Century Western Indian Ocean,” *Journal of Global History* 15, no. 2 (July 2020): 203–23; Engseng Ho, “The Two Arms of Cambay: Diasporic Texts of Ecumenical Islam in the Indian Ocean,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2/3 (2007): 347–61.

⁴⁶ Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 18.

greater interaction between not only Muslims from different parts of the globe, but also between Muslims and non-Muslim orientalist and missionaries.⁴⁸

Scholars from India connected to the Indian Ocean network of *ḥadīth* studies promoted the reading and writing of Arabic histories to connect with transregional scholarship. They also felt Arabic histories were important to familiarize Indian Muslim scholars with the history of scholarly heritage going back to the first Islamic centuries. Concurrently, under British officials gaining further control over India sought to diminish the use of Persian and promoted the learning and use of vernacular languages, such as Urdu and Hindi. By the end of the nineteenth century, vernacular languages became conduits for spreading European notions of historical writing in India, especially historicism. This also corresponded with history becoming an important battle ground in India for overlapping and competing social agendas, including imperialism, anti-colonialism, nationalisms, and religious reforms.⁴⁹ This dissertation seeks to uncover what happened to the growing trend of reading and producing Arabic histories by Indian *‘ulamā’* in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A far-reaching result of the increase in movement and communication was the emergence of a modern public sphere where Muslims and non-Muslims wrote about, read, and discussed Islam and history much more extensively. Built on earlier forms of knowledge production and

⁴⁸ Green and Gelvin, “Introduction”; Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁴⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Public Life of History: An Argument out of India,” *Public Culture* 20 (June 1, 2008): 143–68, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2007-020>; Barbara D. Metcalf, “Nationalism, Modernity, and Muslim Identity in India before 1947,” in *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Avril A. Powell, “History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-Colonial Past in North-Western India in the 1860s and 1870s,” in *Invoking the Past: The Use of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91–133; Avril A. Powell, “Modernist Muslim Responses to Christian Critiques of Islamic Culture, Civilization, and History in Northern India,” in *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Judith M. Brown and Robert E. Frykenberg (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 61–91; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “A Venture in Critical Islamic Historiography and the Significance of Its Failure,” *Numen* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 26–50.

dissemination,⁵⁰ print culture and publication of texts allowed for quicker and more extensive circulation of ideas than had been possible before. Furthermore, the printing press allowed Muslims who had not been trained by traditional scholars access to the Quran, *ḥadīth*, and commentaries, often in translation.⁵¹ Nile Green has characterized the history of global Islam from the nineteenth century as a competitive religious marketplace, “as an exponential number of interactions had led to the creation of more and more Muslim responses by way of new authorities, theologies, organizations, ideologies, communities, modes of deportment and dress.”⁵² European works on Islam and Muslims, usually casting them in a negative light, constituted a powerful discourse in Muslim public spheres and contributed to Muslim interest in history.⁵³

In analyzing changes in Muslim historical writing, this study investigates how selected scholars adapted or ignored distinctly modern notions of history referred to as historicism. The historicist view posited that history was a discernable process of developmental change that could be scientifically investigated to reveal the true nature of complex human phenomenon.⁵⁴ This entailed viewing the past with an eye for making discoveries that could be used to explain human societies, much as scientists had built theories based on empirical observations.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 182.

⁵¹ Francis Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (February 1993): 229–51.

⁵² Green, *Terrains of Exchange*, 30.

⁵³ K. Humayun Ansari, “The Muslim World in British Historical Imaginations: ‘Re-Thinking Orientalism’?,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (April 1, 2011): 73–93; Donald Malcolm Reid, “Cairo University and the Orientalists,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 1 (1987): 51–75.

⁵⁴ Iggers, Wang, and Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, 12.

⁵⁵ Johnson Kent Wright, “History and Historicism,” in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. Theodore M. Porter

Historical discoveries took the form of new sources that could provide information about a past different from the present. These sources had to be read critically, mined for empirical facts while discarding nonrational or mythological elements, and synthesized with other sources to create a narrative of change over time.⁵⁶

There are two related bodies of scholarship on changing approaches to historical thinking since the nineteenth century that this dissertation engages, namely scholarship on orientalism and on the emergence of disciplinary history in India and the Arab world. In engaging with scholarship on orientalism, this dissertation is indebted to research that shows the contradictory and conflicting perspectives among Europeans interested in understanding Islam and India, from colonial administrators with little philological training,⁵⁷ to evangelical graduates from Oxford and Cambridge,⁵⁸ to scholars uninterested in missionary work with a background in Biblical source-criticism and philology.⁵⁹

Additionally, many Muslims at the turn of the century identified with European orientalist's endeavors to discover, edit, and study lost and marginalized Arabic texts. For some Muslims, orientalist were intellectual allies rather than opponents.⁶⁰ Muslims reacted to the

and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113–30.

⁵⁶ Iggers, Wang, and Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, 22.

⁵⁷ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "A Brief Survey of Colonial Historiography in India," in *Different Types of History*, ed. Bharati Ray (New Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2009), 75; Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (New York: Overlook Press, 2006), 163.

⁵⁸ Green, *Terrains of Exchange*, 45.

⁵⁹ Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Gail Minault, "Aloys Sprenger: German Orientalism's 'Gift' to Delhi College," *South Asia Research* 31, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 7–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272801003100102>.

⁶⁰ Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad, "Introduction," in *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze*, ed. Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–13.

awareness of the extent of Arabo-Islamic collections orientalists had collected and published with awe and concern,⁶¹ inspiring indigenous attempts to rediscover books from the earliest centuries of Islam that had been marginalized after the fifteenth century with the dominance of postclassical religious learning.⁶² The realization of a lost intellectual heritage, coupled with appropriations of European civilizational discourse, prompted Muslim reformers to view the recovery of classical Arabic language and heritage as a way to generate a civilizational revival of Islam.⁶³

History as a modern discipline distinct from other disciplines such as literature or philosophy, consisting of a positivist form and method that made it ‘scientific,’ and supported through institutions such as university departments, state archives, and research academies first emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ This view of history spread outside of Europe as well, both in European colonies as well as autonomous regions such as Japan and the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁵ Colonial intellectuals in India and the Arab world adapted historicism to develop nationalist histories and the institutional apparatuses to sustain it.⁶⁶ In attempting to construct a

⁶¹ Kathryn A. Schwartz, “An Eastern Scholar’s Engagement with the European Study of the East: Amin al-Madani and the Sixth Oriental Congress, Leiden, 1883,” in *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze*, ed. Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 52–53; Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), 128–31.

⁶² Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, 32, 147–71.

⁶³ Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, 182–93.

⁶⁴ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2014).

⁶⁵ Sebastian Conrad, “What Time Is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography,” *History and Theory* 38, no. 1 (February 1, 1999): 67–83; Iggers, Wang, and Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*.

⁶⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth* (Chicago: University

modern nationalist historical consciousness, nationalist historians sought to marginalize precolonial forms of remembering the past that were not rooted in verifiable sources open to rational inquiry, as well as historical thinking that did not center the nation as the proper subject of history.

Yet many authors outside the context of universities and government service produced widely read and influential histories. Often these histories departed from a nationalist perspective, relying less on modern historicism, and incorporating more local historiographical practices. Consequently, “the writing of history has not been the monopoly of professional academic historians.”⁶⁷ This is not to say that local historiographical traditions continued to exist in isolation from dominant historicist ideas. However, ignoring more traditionally rooted historical thinking leads to neglecting, “the whole question of the conditions of production and reception of academic knowledge, its relationships with different kinds of common sense.”⁶⁸ One such group of influential writers that represented an “historical awareness” different from nationalist historians were the *‘ulamā’*-historians studied in this dissertation. Many were interested in orientalist research, concerned with nationalism, and continued to engage with Arabic historical writing.

Method and Sources

In studying the ways in which historical writing contributed to the construction of religious authority, this dissertation asks three questions for each of the four scholars. What was

of Chicago Press, 2015); Deshpande Prachi, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (Columbia University Press, 2007); Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*; Sumit Sarkar, “The Many Worlds of Indian History,” in *Writing Social History*, n.d.

⁶⁷ Axel Harneit-Sievers, *A Place in the World: New Local Historiographies from Africa and South Asia* (BRILL, 2002), 1.

⁶⁸ Sarkar, “The Many Worlds of Indian History,” 1.

their historical approach, why did they write histories, and how were their histories received? It analyzes selected historical writings of the four scholars in three ways. First, it traces the intellectual traditions that they drew on to uncover the significant ways in which the ‘*ulamā*’ read and reflected on former and foreign ideas, as well as the reasons they found particular texts or concepts relevant instead of others.⁶⁹ Second, it locates the scholars in their local contexts in India to determine what the scholars hoped to achieve through their histories, and what concerns they attempted to address. The dissertation thus assumes that the histories produced were dialogical with historical narratives that they wanted to incorporate or refute.⁷⁰ Third, it explores the transregional connections that the scholars relied on or generated through interests in researching and writing history. The transregional perspective is important since religious thinkers from the late nineteenth century have “constantly generated, reproduced, communicated and, crucially, adapted” globalized cultural currents.⁷¹ In such a globalized context, local historical views become entangled with global historical views.⁷²

The main sources analyzed in this dissertation are historical writings of scholars in Urdu and Arabic. Arabic historical writing analyzed include Arabic biographical histories written by Indian scholars in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. These are prose works structured around a series of biographies that provide information about the subjects that the author considered relevant. The Arabic biographical histories studied here focused on the

⁶⁹ Quentin Skinner, *Vision of Politics: Regarding Method* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 75–76.

⁷⁰ Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali, eds., *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

⁷¹ Green, *Terrains of Exchange*, 10.

⁷² Sebastian Conrad, “Entangled Memories: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945–2001,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 1 (2003): 85–99.

subject's scholarly connections and achievements, and hence provide information about the subject's teachers, students, and works they studied and wrote. Most are structured chronologically, but some are organized alphabetically.

In either case, the primary objective here is not to mine these entries for biographical information, but to determine the approach of the writer in deciding who to select, what information to include and exclude, and what function the history served. This approach is indebted to what Konrad Hirschler has referred to as the “cultural turn” in reading historical writings “as agents in the historical process. They are thus works that were often composed because they were meant to do something, to be, at least potentially, performative ... where meaning was performed through the act of writing and re-performed through the act of reading.”⁷³To bring into sharper focus the divergences between the strategies and goals of Arabic historical writing and Indo-Persianate writing, the latter are examined as well. Specifically, Indo-Persianate *tadhkiras*, or biographical commemorations devoted mostly to Indian Sufis, are compared with Arabic histories in Chapters 1 and 3.

In addition to examining Arabic biographical histories, the dissertation also examines historical writings in the form of modern Arabic articles and monographs written by Indian scholars in the twentieth century. This is primarily undertaken in Chapter 5, and in a more limited way in Chapter 1. These texts are analyzed to determine the historical methodology of their writers and investigate traces of historicism and the older Arabic biographical tradition by scrutinizing the terms used to describe modern concepts such as civilization, culture, and progress, as well as through what sources are being drawn on as evidence for their arguments.

⁷³ Konrad Hirschler, “Studying Mamluk Historiography. From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn,” in *Ubi Sumus? Quo Vademus? Mamluk Studies, State of the Art* (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2013), 176–77, https://www.academia.edu/3288382/Studying_Mamluk_Historiography_From_Source_Criticism_to_the_Cultural_Turn.

The Urdu sources that are examined are historical essays and monographs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While they feature in every chapter, there is a greater focus on them in Chapters 1, 2, and 4. The emergence of Urdu historiography has been linked to the arrival of European historical ideas under British colonialism.⁷⁴ I employ a similar strategy described above regarding modern Arabic historical works to examine both the relevance of historicism but also of Islamic scholarly disciplines such as *ḥadīth* studies.

Finally, material from the British colonial archive is utilized in Chapter 1 to explore the context under which European historical ideas were introduced to Indians in the nineteenth century.

Chapter Breakdown

My dissertation is divided into five chapters, not including the introduction and conclusion. In the first chapter I identify and analyze three major traditions of historical writing that were prominent in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in India. They are Indo-Persianate historical writing, Arabic historical writing, and modern historicist writings. Drawing on Indo-Persianate histories of Sufis, Arabic histories of *‘ulamā’*, and British colonial archives, I track how the once-dominant Indo-Persianate mode of historical writing gave way to the increasing use of Arabic modern historicist modes of historical writing among Muslims. The major contributions of this chapter are its elucidation of the differences between Arabic and Indo-Persianate historical writing, the growing interest in reading and writing Arabic histories generated by the rise of *ḥadīth* studies in India, and charting how Urdu became an important conduit for historicism in India.

⁷⁴ Javed Ali Khan, *Early Urdu Historiography* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2005), 9.

In chapter two, I turn to the historical works of Shiblī Nu'manī (d. 1914) to show how he attempted to appropriate historicist perspectives into the scholarly discourse of the 'ulamā'. I examine his Urdu historical writings on early Islam to argue that he mounted an internal critique of the scholarly tradition and attempted to gain acceptability for his historicist views among 'ulamā' by drawing on the traditions of *ḥadīth* studies and theology (*kalām*). I shed light on his careful research of early Arabic sources, his founding of a journal to promote Urdu historical writing, and the creation of the Nadwat al-Ulama's research library. I also argue that his historical research facilitated transregional links, as many of his Arabic essays were published by the Egypt-based Arabic journal *al-Manār*. Ultimately, while the reception of his historical studies generated greater interest in history among the 'ulamā', Shibli's historicist interventions were not fully accepted by his scholarly peers.

In chapter three, I focus on the works of 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī (d. 1923) to argue that the Arabo-intellectual mode of historical writing continued without incorporating historicist perspectives. Specifically, I look at his eight-volume Arabic history about Islamic scholarship in India, and the different set of concerns that he had from Urdu historical works that were engaged with colonial historiography. Rather than responding to colonialist and nationalist narratives, al-Ḥasanī's scholarship is concerned with showing the relevance of Indian scholarship for Islamic intellectual history. Al-Ḥasanī's history highlights the importance of not overemphasizing the importance of historicism, as well as the continued relevance of Arabic historical writing in twentieth-century India.

In chapter four, I turn my attention to the Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī's (d. 1953) Urdu works, and his engagement with both anti-colonial and nationalist historical writing, his involvement in establishing the Dār al-Muṣannifīn to promote historical research on Islam and

India among *'ulamā'*, and his critiques of disciplinary history as it was emerging in India. Many of Sulaymān Nadwī's books were initially essays he delivered at recently founded associations for Indian researchers, historians, and orientalists. Through writings aimed at these audiences, he attempted to show a history of Muslims in India that did not center on conquests and imperial domination as a corrective to colonialist historiography that presented Muslims as foreign invaders. Indian historians had accepted this aspect of colonial historiography. By incorporating Arabic primary sources that Indian historians were ignoring, Sulaymān Nadwī emphasized a history of Hindu-Muslim peaceful coexistence. Simultaneously, he also wrote popular works about early Islamic history drawing on *ḥadīth* collections as well as early Arabic histories. He did not apply historicist skepticism towards his Arabic sources though. The chapter ultimately argues that for Sulaymān Nadwī, the question of how history should be written was intricately connected to why history should be written and to whom the historian was speaking.

Chapter 5 examines Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī's turn towards writing history in modern Arabic prose. The chapter argues that after an initial interest in historicist historical writing in Urdu, he moved away from that approach. In his widely popular Arabic history of an Islamic civilization, his historical approach constituted an *adabization* of history. The chapter explores how Nadwat al-'Ulamā', by attracting Arab scholars, became embedded in the Arabic public sphere. 'Alī Nadwī drew on Arabic discussions about *adab*, progress, and civilization in writing his history. The chapter also examines how he adapted elements from Arabo-biographical histories to write a history of Islamic religious revivers that proved controversial because of his inclusion of Sufis like Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī.

Chapter 1:

Modes of Historical Writing among North Indian Muslims in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

In 1878, Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898), a Muslim intellectual and founder of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh (1875), penned a negative review of a small book. The book was his own *Jalā' al-qulūb bi-dhikr al-maḥbūb* (The Polishing of the Heart through the Remembrance of the Beloved), a short *mawlid* tract to be read in gatherings celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad. Sir Sayyid had authored it in 1842 in Agra, when he was a young civil servant in the British East India Company (EIC).¹ Influenced by the reformist teachings of Shāh Ismā'īl Dihlawī (d. 1831),² he wrote in the review that he was critical of popular perceptions of the Prophet Muḥammad that were not rooted in early texts and disavowed the belief that by memorializing the Prophet, the latter's soul would become present.³ "The idea came to mind that an epistle should be written explaining the circumstances and events of his life and in which baseless discourse [*nā mu'tabar bāteṅ*] is avoided. However, now I regret that even in that epistle there is much baseless and even nonsensical [*laghū*] discourse."⁴ He claimed that even at that early age, though he was naïve about historical sources, he had begun to consider historical accuracy crucial to understanding the Prophet. Sir Sayyid had relied

¹ Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 37, 62.

² Harlan Otto Pearson, *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-Century India: The Tarīqah-i-Muhammadiyah* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008), 205–6.

³ For an overview on *mawlids*, see Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of The Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007); on critiques of the *mawlid*, see 169–207.

⁴ Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, ed. Muḥammad Ismā'īl Pānīpatī, vol. 7 (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab, 1991), 31.

primarily on two Persian works on the biography of the Prophet by the Indian *ḥadīth* scholars ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī (d. 1052/ 1642) and Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762), believing them to be credible sources. Looking back in 1878, Sir Sayyid expressed surprise that he ever felt proud to have written the book, since he no longer believed his sources were credible, going so far as to characterize ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq's work as "full of thousands of baseless stories."⁵ These miraculous and supernatural tales about the Prophet, according to Sir Sayyid, were not only impossible, but contradicted the *ḥadīth* scholar's own principles of "authentic reporting [*ṣiḥḥat-i riwāyat*]."⁶

In his more mature age Sir Sayyid did not care about the religious significance of popular rituals such as the *mawlid* as much as relaying a historically accurate narrative of the Prophet as a remarkable human who lived in a distant past [*purānī tārikh*].⁷ Sir Sayyid provided three reasons in the review for adopting a more historically critical perspective about the Prophet. First, a historically accurate biography of the Prophet would be an acknowledgment of gratitude for his contributions to humanity. Second, it would remind readers "to always maintain the benefits and goodness that he initiated." And finally, it would cultivate a stronger sense of communal [*qawmi*] identity among Muslims by reminding them of a common historical origin. However, Sir Sayyid warned that a historical perspective required ignoring religious ideas [*madhhabī khayālāt*] that turned people's attention away from human history to human destiny in the afterlife.⁸

Sir Sayyid's presentation of his own historical approach progressing from supposedly

⁵ Khān, 7:31–32.

⁶ Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, 7:34.

⁷ Khān, 7:33.

⁸ Khān, 7:33.

mythical thinking to slightly more historical albeit insufficiently authentic, to rational and historically critical provides a snapshot of important historiographical trends among Muslims in north India in the nineteenth century. The sharper sense of historical distance that separated the Prophet from the present and conceptually placed him in the past, the emphasis on critically utilizing authentic historical sources to try to understand the past, the focus on human actions and progress rather than religious or metaphysical truths, and the association between history and new notions of community represent some of the most important historiographical themes that concerned Muslims in the nineteenth century.

The Past and the Present in the Nineteenth Century

This chapter makes two main arguments. First, it argues that the once dominant Indo-Persianate mode of historical writing became less important over the course of the nineteenth century due to British support for vernacular languages and their use in disseminating historicist notions of history. The chapter will specifically focus on the emergence of Urdu as a vehicle for historicist ideas by the end of the century. Second, an interest in reading and writing Arabic histories, especially Arabic biographical histories, grew over the course of the nineteenth century due to a convergence of interests between orientalists and Indian *ḥadīth* scholars.

In the nineteenth-century, Muslims in India became more involved with reading, researching, writing, and publishing historical works than they had in previous centuries, especially as they related to Islam and India. This was due in part to the importance British administrators in India placed on history, but importantly also because of intellectual trends from the preceding centuries that brought renewed focus to *ḥadīth* studies in India.⁹ As British power

⁹ Joel Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary across a Millennium* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 143–63; Marcia K. Hermansen, “Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi’s ‘Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha’: Tension between the Universal and the Particular in an Eighteenth-Century Islamic Theory of Religious

spread in the subcontinent through the conquests of the East India Company (EIC), Indians gained greater familiarity with European historical perspectives influenced by, as will be shown below, early modern Enlightenment historiography,¹⁰ evangelicalism,¹¹ and eventually historicism.¹² The adoption of Urdu prose for historical writing and greater use of printing to disseminate ideas more widely through books and journals further contributed to historical debates.¹³

While the intersections of European thought and Urdu historiography have received some attention from academics,¹⁴ the relevance of a separate genealogy of historical thinking rooted in

Revelation,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 63 (1986): 144; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shāh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics, and Jihad* (Canberra: Ma‘rifat Publishing House, 1982), 138–48; Sohaib Baig, “Indian Hanafis in an Ocean of Hadith: Islamic Legal Authority between South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula, 16th – 20th Centuries” (Los Angeles, University of California, Los Angeles, 2020), 253–64.

¹⁰ Lewis Dacosta and Hakīm Molvī ‘Abd al-Majīd, *Lubb Al-Tawārīkh: Urdu Translation of Tytler’s Elements of General History* (Calcutta: Church Mission Press, 1829).

¹¹ Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43–103.

¹² Gail Minault, “Aloys Sprenger: German Orientalism’s ‘Gift’ to Delhi College,” *South Asia Research* 31, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 7–23; Jeffrey M. Diamond, “The Orientalist-Literati Relationship in the Northwest: G.W. Leitner, Muhammad Hussain Azad and the Rhetoric of Neo-Orientalism in Colonial Lahore,” *South Asia Research* 31, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 25–43.

¹³ C. Ryan Perkins, “From the Mehfil to the Printed Word: Public Debate and Discourse in Late Colonial India,” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 47–76; Asghar Abbas, *Print Culture: Sir Syed’s Aligarh Institute Gazette 1866-1897*, trans. Syed Asim Ali (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015); David Lelyveld, “Sir Sayyid’s Public Sphere: Urdu Print and Oratory in Nineteenth Century India,” *Cracow Indological Studies* XI (2009): 237–67.

¹⁴ Avril A. Powell, “History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-Colonial Past in North-Western India in the 1860s and 1870s,” in *Invoking the Past: The Use of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91–133; Avril A. Powell, “Modernist Muslim Responses to Christian Critiques of Islamic Culture, Civilization, and History in Northern India,” in *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Judith M. Brown and Robert E. Frykenberg (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 61–91; Jeffrey M. Diamond, “‘Calculated to Be Offensive to Hindoos’? Vernacular Education, History Textbooks and the Waqī’at Controversy of the 1860s in Colonial North India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, no. 1 (2014): 75–95; Blain Auer, “Early Modern Persian, Urdu, and English Historiography and the Imagination of Islamic India under British Rule,” *Études de Lettres*, no. 2–3 (September 15, 2014): 199–226; Kavita Saraswathi Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013), 82–105.

Arabic works by religious scholars remains to be investigated. The past attracted greater attention from many '*ulamā*' who drew on *ḥadīth* scholarship that prior to the nineteenth century had not been widespread in north India. These '*ulamā*' were interested in tracing scholars and texts of various religious disciplines to the earliest periods of Islamic history.

Questions of historical research, sources, and genres were enmeshed with questions about how to understand and relate to Islamic history. Hence, the task of this chapter is not to pinpoint when Indian Muslims began conceptually distinguishing the past from the present as a result of European historicism, but to identify the contours of different narratives about Islamic pasts, along with when and how they become prominent among Indian Muslims in the nineteenth century in Urdu and Arabic. This chapter thus argues that Muslim historical writings in the nineteenth century reflected a more acute sense of historical distance from various Islamic pasts.

The historian Mark Phillips has shown that the notion of historical distance can be a useful heuristic device to analyze changes in perceptions of the past and their connection or relevance for the present. "If assumptions about distance and mediation underpin important aspects of historical practice, it follows that significant changes in these assumptions play a part in the emergence of new schools of historical thought."¹⁵ Assumptions about the nearness or distance of the past fall on a spectrum, and do not automatically correlate to feelings of familiarity or estrangement, nor about continuity or change. For example, a greater attention to anachronism in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Europe contributed to many scholars feeling a sense of estrangement from the preceding centuries. They "began to perceive what they now described as the 'Middle' or even the 'Dark Ages' as distant, barbarous, or 'Gothic.'" For humanist scholars, this sense of discontinuity with the recent past was accompanied by a sense of

¹⁵ Mark Salber Phillips, *On Historical Distance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), xii.

closeness with classical antiquity. Church reformers on the other hand sought to establish a closer connection to the beginnings of Christianity to critique ecclesiastical corruption.¹⁶

Furthermore, multiple ways of experiencing the past or the pace of changes separating the present from the past can exist simultaneously. Reinhart Koselleck's geological metaphor of sedimentation to represent different layers of historical thinking is helpful in conceptualizing multiple relationships with the past coexisting. A geological structure is a product of multiple layers of sediments that correspond to different geological moments. However, because the processes of accretion and erosion are long and uneven, these layers are not neatly separated into clear horizontal blocks, but rather often bleed into each other. Similarly, the experience of historical change is uneven, and thus multiple ways of experiencing time and writing about the past can coexist.¹⁷

This chapter will discuss three modes of historical writing among Indian Muslims that are relevant for understanding nineteenth century historiographical changes: the Indo-Persianate tradition, Arabic historical tradition, and historicism. The trajectory of the latter two as they increasingly replaced Indo-Persianate forms of history will be traced. These were neither distinct ideologies nor schools of thought, but rather a set of assumptions about the past and intellectual tools for understanding it which could be used for divergent ends. Works that reflected a sense of rupture from the past, and thus equated the contemporary moment with modernity, are termed historicist. Meanwhile, works primarily interested in Arabic sources, and relevant to the scholarly tradition of the *'ulamā'* are referred to as part of an Arabic historical tradition.

¹⁶ Peter Burke, "A Short History of Distance," in *Rethinking Historical Distance*, ed. Mark Salber Phillips, Barbara Caine, and Julia Adeney Thomas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 23.

¹⁷ Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, trans. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 6, 9.

Nonetheless, the same author could choose to adopt different modes for different works due to what Margrit Pernau as termed "fluid temporalities" that existed in nineteenth-century India.¹⁸

Indo-Persianate Historical Writing

Prior to the nineteenth century, Indo-Persianate historical writing had dominated Muslim historical writing in India and was a specific genre of *adab*. *Adab* denoted both literary and cultural training. In Mughal India, *adab* texts not only displayed exemplary Persian rhetoric, but also helped cultivate proper social conduct, attitudes, and moral imaginaries through which to interpret the world.¹⁹ Although Persian writers adopted different genres and wrote with different agendas, they shared an assumption about an exemplary link that existed between the past and present. This exemplary link legitimated the present and reinforced universal historical patterns.²⁰ "The immutability of human nature and the universal validity of virtue and vice, wisdom and folly, indicate a conception of time and temporality in medieval Indian chronicles quite distinct from our post-Enlightenment sensibility of time as-progress or as a movement forward from the past to the present."²¹ Furthermore, because writers of histories attempted to convey moral, ethical, or political lessons, the style of writing was just as important as the content. Consequently, Persianate historians emulated the rhetorical conventions valued in their

¹⁸ Margrit Pernau, "Fluid Temporalities: Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Concept of Modernity," *History and Theory* 58, no. 4 (2019): 107–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12138>.

¹⁹ Mana Kia, "Adab as Literary Form and Social Conduct: Reading the Gulistan in Late Mughal India," 2014, 282, <https://doi.org/10.7916/D85D8QH5>.

²⁰ J. S. Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 253.

²¹ Sudipta Sen, "Imperial Orders of the Past: The Semantics of History and Time in the Medieval Indo-Persianate Culture of North India," in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 240.

specific contexts. Among court-centered chroniclers, this often involved literary embellishments, since part of the function of *adab* was to distinguish the cultivated from the vulgar.²² "Turbidity (*ta`qid*), affectations (*takalluf*), and verbosity (*atnāb*) turned out to be the dominant features of history writing," if not for the entire work then for key sections and momentous points in the narrative.²³

Additionally, from at least the fifteenth century many writers of court-centered Mughal chronicles and Sufi-centered prosopographies focused greater attention on Indian and Persian pasts over early Islamic pasts.²⁴ Heterogenous temporalities existed without a need to reconcile and create a singular sense of historical time. For example, the Mughal historian of Abū al-Faḍl ‘Allāmī (d. 1011/1602) drew on histories of Hindu kings and religious epics to present the Mughal Emperor Akbar (d. 1605) as "an inheritor of the heritage of universal humankind."²⁵ The deemphasis on Islam contributed to a more secularized historical perspective "in the sense of being distinctly this-worldly and largely devoid of religious and theological connotations."²⁶ For many chroniclers the lessons of history emphasized the role of human agency.²⁷ The expansion of the Mughal imperial bureaucracy and greater intrusion into local governance seemingly

²² Barbara D. Metcalf, "Introduction," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara D. Metcalf (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 3.

²³ Senzil Nawid, "Historiography in the Sadduzai Era: Language and Narration," in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 237.

²⁴ Sen, "Imperial Orders of the Past: The Semantics of History and Time in the Medieval Indo-Persianate Culture of North India."

²⁵ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 67.

²⁶ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 313.

²⁷ Ali Anooshahr, "Author of One's Fate: Fatalism and Agency in Indo-Persian Histories," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 49, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 197–224.

produced this 'secular' turn by the seventeenth century.²⁸ The impetus towards less religious history in favor of usable data was a product of bureaucratic bookkeeping's demand for more literacy and writing.

This same demand also led to an increased demand for *adab* texts to train the increasing number of imperial bureaucrats in proper etiquettes of speech and behavior, and more specifically led to an increase in the production of Indo-Persian biographical works, such as *tadhkiras*, especially in the eighteenth century.²⁹ Writers of *tadhkiras* commonly organized their collectives of memorable lives to highlight their role as Sufis or poets.³⁰ However, the collectives memorialized in *tadhkiras* were not mutually exclusive. A poet could also be a Sufi and statesmen, as well as lay claim association to multiple cities.³¹ According to Mana Kia Persian *tadhkiras* of poets constructed a transregional community of Persian *adab*. “*Adab*—proper ethical and aesthetic form—manifested a self’s moral integrity through proper behavior and collective moral integrity through proper order or governance.”³² Kia explains the increased production of *tadhkiras* in the eighteenth century as an attempt to create a sense of stability during a moment of political uncertainty.³³

²⁸ Anooshahr, 222.

²⁹ Nile Green, “The Uses of Books in a Late Mughal Takiyya: Persianate Knowledge Between Person and Paper,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 241–65; Kia, “Adab as Literary Form and Social Conduct.”

³⁰ Hermansen Marcia K., “Religious Literature and the Inscription of Identity: The Sufi Tazkira Tradition in Muslim South Asia,” *The Muslim World* 87, no. 3-4 (April 3, 2007): 324; Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 165.

³¹ Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 165.

³² Kia, 164.

³³ Kia, 177.

Indo-Persianate Sufi *tadhkiras* helped construct more local Indo-Muslim communities, albeit with links to a wider Muslim world. Most Sufi *tadhkiras* focused on a specific brotherhood or lineage,³⁴ and although *tadhkiras* could encompass Muslim figures going back to the Prophet, the greatest space was reserved for Indian and more local heroes. Thus, these literary reminders connected Muslims pasts to Indian locales and “created communities of memory.”³⁵ They did this not only through memorializing in Persian writing exceptional individuals that embodied divine grace (*baraka*), but also by channeling saintly memory to breathe life into the physical structures of shrines that housed – or were believed to have housed – the body of saints. Moreover, because Hindus cremate their dead, shrines became a distinct symbol of Muslim space in India.³⁶ Stories of Sufi miracle workers outperforming Hindu counterparts were also common.³⁷ But equally as important, Sufi hagiographies appropriated Hindu myths tied to local landscapes.³⁸

In addition to transforming physical places into sacred spaces, the hagiography-shrine relationship also situated a local sacred space into a wider Muslim geography. In retelling their subjects’ travels in pursuit of knowledge, pilgrimages in pursuit of blessings, and their eventual

³⁴ Marica K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence, “Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications,” in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 160.

³⁵ Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

³⁶ Marica K. Hermansen, “Imagining Space and Siting Collective Memory in South Asian Muslim Biographical Literature (Tazkirahs),” *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 2 (2002): 12.

³⁷ Nile Green, “Oral Competition Narratives of Muslim and Hindu Saints in the Deccan,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 63, no. 2 (2004): 221–42; Patton Burchett, “My Miracle Trumps Your Magic: Encounters with Yogīs in Sufi and Bhakti Hagiographical Literature,” in *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 345–80.

³⁸ Chitralekha Zutshi, *Kashmir’s Contested Pasts: Narratives, Geographies, and the Historical Imagination* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 50.

settlement at the locality that would be their final resting place, hagiographies constructed transregional connections to other Muslim centers. The physical presence of Sufi shrines thus anchored local Muslim communities, while the written life creatively crafted, preserved and extended the memory of the saint in time and space. Studies of Muslim historical memory related to different parts of India, such as Chitrlekha Zutshi's work on Kashmir,³⁹ Richard Eaton's about Punjab and Bengal,⁴⁰ Simon Digby's on Delhi,⁴¹ Jyoti Balachandran on Gujarat,⁴² and Carl Ernst's and Nile Green's on the Deccan,⁴³ all underscore the paramount importance of Sufi saints, their shrines, and their literary lives for creating and sustaining Muslim communities in India.

In creating communal memory, historical accuracy could be sacrificed for narrative purpose. For example, in the *Mir'āt al-asrār* of the Chishtī Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 1047/1683) "temporal disparities ... do not detract from ... [his] primary purpose: to retell the saga of Persian/Indo-Persian Sufism as a single dramatic endeavor shaped by the Unseen for the benefit of humankind."⁴⁴ Historical accuracy still mattered, but the job of the *tadhkira* writer was less to determine the veracity of available sources, and even less to investigate all possible

³⁹ Zutshi, *Kashmir's Contested Pasts*.

⁴⁰ Richard M. Eaton, "Shrines, Cultivators, and Muslim 'Conversion' in Punjab and Bengal, 1300–1700," *The Medieval History Journal* 12, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 191–220, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097194580901200202>.

⁴¹ Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India," in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, ed. Richard Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 234–62.

⁴² Jyoti Gulati Balachandran, *Narrative Pasts: The Making of a Muslim Community in Gujarat, c. 1400–1650* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁴³ Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (State University of New York Press, 1992); Nile Green, *Indian Sufism Since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁴ Bruce B. Lawrence, "An Indo-Persian Perspective on the Significance of Early Persian Sufi Master," in *The Heritage of Sufism Volume I: Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 27.

sources, than to cull reliable information and curate cultural memory for a broader didactic purpose.

Importantly, Indo-Persianate biographical works that presented memorable figures primarily as *'ulamā'* were rare prior to the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ While numerous biographical collections of saints and poets are found in D.N. Marshall's bibliography of Mughal-era manuscripts, the only work identified as devoted to *'ulamā'* specifically is the scholar-Sufi Ghulām 'Alī "Azād" Bilgrāmī's (d. 1200/1786) Arabic *Subḥat al-Marjān*, which will be discussed later.⁴⁶ In attempting to substantiate her claim that *tadhkiras* organized around *'ulamā'* did exist, Kia points to an essay about an Arabic biographical dictionary about north African *'ulamā'* from the sixteenth century.⁴⁷ For the purposes of constructing communities of memory in India, memorializing exemplary figures as Sufis rather than as *'ulamā'* was more effective, even though the memorialized figure may have been both. Additionally, when Indo-Persianate figures are identified as *'ulamā'*, they are usually differentiated as a separate class from Sufis and placed separately and often after the section devoted to the class of Sufis.

The Persian biographical writings of 'Abd al-Qādir Bada'ūnī (d. 1024/1615) and Āzād Bilgrāmī are two examples that differentiated a class of Muslim exemplars as *'ulamā'*. They show the relative lack of importance of classifying memorable figures as *'ulamā'* compared to the category of Sufis. Bada'ūnī in his *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh*, which "was essentially a counter

⁴⁵ James Pickett, *Polymaths of Islam: Power and Networks of Knowledge in Central Asia* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2020), 161, 168.

⁴⁶ D. N. Marshall, *Mughals in India: A Bibliographic Survey. Vol. 1, Manuscripts* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1967), 93.

⁴⁷ Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 256n11. The essay she references is Osama Abi-Mershed, "The Transmission of Knowledge and the Education of the 'Ulama in Late Sixteenth-Century Maghrib," in *Auto/Biography and the Construction of Identity and Community in the Middle East*, ed. Mary Ann Fay (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 19–36.

history" against depicting Akbar teleologically as the last and greatest inheritor of divine kingship,"⁴⁸ added a *tadhkira* as the third volume. His objective was to provide biographies of "nobles [*kirām*] who have chosen the way of God," while leaving out "nobles of the kingdom [*umarā*']".⁴⁹ The pious and learned "nobles" are divided into four sections, beginning with Sufis [*mashā'ikh*], then followed by 'ulamā', physicians, and poets. Similarly, Āzād Bilgrāmī, a scholar who had studied *ḥadīth* in the Hijaz,⁵⁰ wrote in the introduction to his Persian *tadhkira Ma'āthir al-kirām* (Virtues of the Noble) that he was moved by his love for his hometown [*waṭan*] of Bilgrām to write about its Sufis [*mashā'ikh*] and scholars ['ulamā'].⁵¹ In the titles for the two sections devoted to each category, he uses *fuqarā'* for Sufis and *fuḍalā'* for scholars.⁵²

The *tadhkira* of 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī (d. 1052/1642), *Akhbār al-akhyār* (Reports on the Pious) provides an interesting example of the importance of Indo-Persianate biographical writing in cultivating Sufi piety. 'Abd al-Ḥaqq was renowned *ḥadīth* scholar from Delhi who sought "to limit Sufi devotion within the parameters of *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence."⁵³ This made his *tadhkira* unique in many ways. One difference is that he focused on the moral piety and religious knowledge of Sufis while downplaying their association with shrines.⁵⁴ His interest in presenting

⁴⁸ Ali Anooshahr, "Mughal Historians and the Memory of the Islamic Conquest of India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 43, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 284.

⁴⁹ 'Abd-al-Qādir Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh*, vol. 3 (Calcutta: College Press, 1869), 1; 'Abd-al-Qādir Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhab Al-Tawārīkh*, trans. Wolseley Haig, vol. 3 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1925), 1.

⁵⁰ Carl W. Ernst, "Reconfiguring South Asian Islam: From the 18th to the 19th Century," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 255.

⁵¹ Ghulām 'Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Ma'āthir Al-Kirām* (Agra: Maṭba' Mufīd-i 'Ām, 1910), 3.

⁵² Bilgrāmī, 4.

⁵³ Scott Alan Kugle, "'Abd Al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, an Accidental Revivalist: Knowledge and Power in the Passage from Delhi to Makka," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2008): 238.

⁵⁴ Green, *Making Space*, 55.

Sufis as moral exemplars also lead him to downplay their miracles. According to Nile Green, “morality often came in a poor second to the exercise of miraculous power” in *tadhkiras*.⁵⁵ However, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq specifies that he wanted to include pious figures that were not famous for miracles.⁵⁶ Additionally, unlike the Chishtī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān's *tadhkira* which had been unconcerned with temporal disparities, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq's work is more meticulous about documenting the relationships between teachers and disciples, and thus openly questions the temporal continuity of saints from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān's sub-branch of the Chishtiyya.⁵⁷

Despite these differences, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s *Akhhbār al-akhyār* maintained continuity with Indo-Persianate biographical writing through its focus on Sufis as the center of communal memory. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s introduction confirms Hermansen and Lawrence’s argument that Indo-Persianate *tadhkiras* of spiritual and literary luminaries were not simply nostalgic commemorations of bygone eminent figures but were rather “memorative” insofar as they built on extant communal memories of Indian Muslim exemplars to remind, revive, and reanimate their legacy among the living.⁵⁸ According to ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, Muslims have written down, read, and listened in gatherings to the manners and morals of the pious [*buzurgān*] to benefit from their spiritual powers.⁵⁹ Remembering the pious encourages readers and listeners to emulate their deeds. He thus referred to remembering the pious as an act of worship, and because people enjoy

⁵⁵ Nile Green, “Making a ‘Muslim’ Saint: Writing Customary Religion in an Indian Princely State,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 3 (2005): 618.

⁵⁶ Abū al-Majd ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, *Akhhbār Al-Akhyār Fī Asrār al-Abrār*, ed. ‘Alīm Ashraf Khān (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āthār-o-Mafākhīr Farhangī, 1963), 13.

⁵⁷ Lawrence, “An Indo-Persian Perspective on the Significance of Early Persian Sufi Master,” 29.

⁵⁸ Marica K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence, “Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications,” in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 149.

⁵⁹ Dihlawī, *Akhhbār Al-Akhyār Fī Asrār al-Abrār*, 10.

listening to stories [*hikāyāt*], it was one of the easiest ways to receive divine blessings.⁶⁰ In addition to noting the important aural quality of *tadhkiras*, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq also noted the interaction between written and oral memories of Sufis. He stated that he utilized orally transmitted information about Sufis [*mashā’ikh*] from the recent past whose virtues were not written.⁶¹ Thus, his Persian biographical work reinforced the centrality of Sufis as anchors of communal memory due to their divinely bestowed blessings, embodiment of moral excellence, and charismatic authority that extended their popularity beyond the literary pages of hagiographies.

The above discussion on Indo-Persianate historical writing has demonstrated its role in creating exemplary links between the past and the present in support of divinely supported kingship, a transregional culturally Persianate world, and Sufi-centered Indo-Muslim communities. These were not mutually exclusive historiographical endeavors. Indeed, by the eighteenth century when smaller principalities and the East India Company were replacing Mughal rule, rulers depended on poets and Sufis for legitimacy, which was reflected in Indo-Persianate *tadhkiras*.⁶² Moreover, historical accuracy was not the primary purpose for Indo-Persianate biographers. Written and oral sources could be creatively combined to create narratives about the past that made spaces in India meaningful for Muslims. Supporters of royal dynasties drew on Pre-Islamic Persian and Hindu pasts. While Sufi writers drew on early Islamic history, they cultivated the strongest links “with the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries

⁶⁰ Dihlawī, 11.

⁶¹ Dihlawī, 13.

⁶² Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 92; Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 177.

when Persian Sufism crystallized its distinctive world view.”⁶³ Notably, ‘*ulamā*’ as a collective were not well represented in Indo-Persianate biographical writing. As we turn now to exploring Arabo-biographical writing, we will see that the greater presence of ‘*ulamā*’ and their role as scholars, teachers, and transmitters of *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, Qur’an, and other scholarly disciplines took on far greater significance.

Arabo-Biographical Writing

This section will explore the proliferation of critiques of Indo-Persianate historical writing by Indian ‘*ulamā*’ from the seventeenth century, as well as the increasing interest in reading and producing Arabo-biographical histories. ‘*Ulamā*’ writing in Arabic have employed Arabo-biographical histories since the ninth century to discursively construct religious scholars as a social collectivity,⁶⁴ affirm their centrality in Muslim societies as inheritors of the Prophet’s legacy,⁶⁵ and establish authorities of the various scholarly disciplines for each generation.⁶⁶

While Sufis are mentioned in Arabic biographical works penned by ‘*ulamā*’, they tend to be ones who also studied and taught the scholarly religious disciplines, and the importance of miracles are downplayed compared to Indo-Persian histories. Moreover, when non-scholarly Sufis are

⁶³ Lawrence, “An Indo-Persian Perspective on the Significance of Early Persian Sufi Master,” 31.

⁶⁴ Jonathan E. Brockopp, *Muhammad’s Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities, 622-950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 21.

⁶⁵ Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 108–30; Abi-Mershed, “The Transmission of Knowledge and the Education of the ‘Ulama in Late Sixteenth-Century Maghrib,” 19–21; Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma’mun* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13–18.

⁶⁶ R. Kevin Jaques, *Authority, Conflict, and the Transmission of Diversity in Medieval Islamic Law* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 117–20.

mentioned, it is to recognize their exceptional piety while reinforcing the normative social order envisioned by the *'ulamā'*.⁶⁷

Writers of Arabo-biographical histories tended to center scholarship and learning while displaying a comparative lack of interest in dynastic politics and courtly intrigue. Wadad al-Qadi has suggested that since the emergence of biographical dictionaries from as early as the ninth century, *'ulamā'* have used the genre as “the communal historical alternative to the largely political chronicle.”⁶⁸ Gibb had similarly elaborated that “the conception that underlies the old biographical dictionaries is that the history of the Islamic community is essentially the contribution of the individual men and women to the building up and transmission of its specific culture; that it is these persons (rather than the political governors) who represent or reflect the active forces in Muslim society in their respective spheres; and that their individual contributions are worthy of being recorded for future generations.”⁶⁹ When Arabic historical writing diversified after the thirteenth century due to greater participation from courtiers and bureaucrats more interested in literary history, concerns about the history of learning and scholarship centering *'ulamā'* “continued to appear as predominant” in the production of histories.⁷⁰ Even

⁶⁷ Zacharie Mochtari de Pierrepoint, “Tales of Reverence and Powers: Ibn Ḥajar’s Narratives of Religious Charismatic Authority,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 23 (2020): 103–32; Zacharie Mochtari de Pierrepoint, “Ibn Ḥajar Al-‘Asqalānī’s Texts and Contexts: Producing a Sufi Environment in the Cairo Sultanate,” in *New Readings in Arabic Historiography from Late Medieval Egypt and Syria*, ed. Jo van Steenbergen and Maya Termonia (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), 291–318, <https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004458901/BP000008.xml>.

⁶⁸ Wadad al-Qadi, “Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars’ Alternative History of the Muslim Community,” in *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Muslim World*, ed. Gerhard Endress (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 44.

⁶⁹ H.A.R. Gibb, “Islamic Biographical Literature,” in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 54.

⁷⁰ Jo van Steenbergen, “History Writing, Adab, and Intertextuality in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria: Old and New Readings,” in *New Readings in Arabic Historiography from Late Medieval Egypt and Syria*, ed. Jo van Steenbergen and Maya Termonia (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), 5, <https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004458901/BP000001.xml>.

annalistic Arabic histories increasingly incorporated biographical sections, which Steenbergen has interpreted as “a clear bias toward *ḥadīth* transmitters, giving priority to traditionists and their scholarly track record.”⁷¹

Recent historians have argued that the tradition of *ḥadīth* studies conditioned scholars with a particular sense of temporality, whereby they did not imagine history as the passing of years, changing of dynasties, or the rise and fall of polities, but as the transmission of knowledge going back generations, until ultimately connecting to the Prophet.⁷² By the thirteenth century, the discipline of *ḥadīth* required not only the study of texts attributed to the Prophet containing statements and stories attributed to the earliest generations of Muslims, but also required careful attention towards biographies of thousands of transmitters from the first four centuries of Islam, which included the Companions, as well as familiarity with the earliest works produced during and about the first centuries of Islam.⁷³ Scholars writing Arabo-biographical works also produced exemplary histories, but were more interested in early Islamic history, the histories of the religious sciences such as *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*, and more carefully rooting historical information in older, reliable (*mu‘tabar*) sources, especially early Arabic sources rather than Indo-Persianate histories. Similar to studies of *ḥadīth* where scholars pay keen attention to chains of narrators to track reports back to the Prophet and the Companions, scholars interested in the history of the intellectual disciplines such as *fiqh* carefully traced intellectual genealogies through documenting

⁷¹ Steenbergen, 13.

⁷² Scott C. Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Sa‘d, Ibn Ma‘īn, and Ibn Ḥanbal* (Brill, 2004), 44–49; Garrett A. Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition: A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission Across a Thousand Years* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 14–15, 266–67.

⁷³ Mohammad Gharaibeh, “Gharaibeh, Intertextuality between History and Hadith Studies: The Mūqizah Fī ‘ilm Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth in the Center of al-Dhahabī’s (d. 748/1348) Work,” in *Studies on the History and Culture of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517)*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Toru Miura (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2021), 263–98.

the links between scholars and students as well as authors and works. By doing so, these historians placed the present within the cumulative history of religious intellectual traditions.

There was some overlap between Persianate *tadhkiras* and Arabo-intellectual histories in that they both assumed that knowledge was embodied in people, not texts, and thus learning the various religious disciplines required not just studying texts but familiarity with the authors of those texts as well as the teachers who had carried that knowledge to the present. However, there was also a keener sense of historical distance in the Arabo-intellectual mode that was critical of transmissions about the past that did not have a reliable source. Thus, the past was only accessible through careful documentation.

This mode of historical writing had been relatively marginal before the nineteenth century in north India. "It was these Islamicate Persian traditions, more open to the adoption of legend and hearsay, rather than the austere and rigorous tradition of Arabic scriptural inquiry" that had been dominant.⁷⁴ However, historians studying early-modern Indian Ocean networks have pointed to the crucial role played by *ḥadīth* scholars in the emergence of a "transoceanic Arabic historiography."⁷⁵ They often cataloged the transmission of knowledge, especially of *ḥadīth*, transhistorically and transregionally. "These were essentially community-building exercises intended to anchor growing Muslim communities in a spiritual geography and an erudite Islamicate tradition."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Sumit Guha, *History and Collective Memory in South Asia, 1200–2000* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 53.

⁷⁵ Christopher D. Bahl, "Transoceanic Arabic Historiography: Sharing the Past of the Sixteenth-Century Western Indian Ocean," *Journal of Global History* 15, no. 2 (July 2020): 203–23.

⁷⁶ Bahl, 12; see also Engseng Ho, "The Two Arms of Cambay: Diasporic Texts of Ecumenical Islam in the Indian Ocean," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2/3 (2007): 358; Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God*, 161.

This Arabic historiography contributed to the formation of an Arabic cosmopolis in the early modern period. According to Ronit Ricci, an Arabic cosmopolis “defined by language, literature, and religion” produced a “translocal Islamic sphere” starting in the fifteenth century. It eventually included Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and Indian Ocean Muslim communities stretching to Southeast Asia.⁷⁷ Ricci’s work focused mainly on Tamil India and Southeast Asia. Engseng Ho has similarly explored Arabic scholarly networks between Sayyids from Hadramout, Yemen and the maritime Indian Ocean communities in the early modern period, as well as the histories that tied them together.⁷⁸ One such history was *al-Nūr al-sāfir* (The Traveling Light) by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-‘Aydārūs (d. 1038/1628), a Yemeni scholar with interests in Sufism and *ḥadīth* who lived and wrote in Gujarat.⁷⁹ It combined the annalistic and biographical genres to document notable events and figures, especially scholars, of the sixteenth century. Joel Blecher’s work has shown how regions of western and central India became incorporated in an Arabic cosmopolis through scholars and patrons of *ḥadīth* studies.⁸⁰ Christopher Bahl demonstrates the increasing importance of Indian scholars in Arabic biographical dictionaries written by Egyptian and Hijazi *ḥadīth* scholars from the fifteenth century, as well the circulation of Arabic historical works, especially Ibn Khallikān’s (d. 681/1282) biographical compendium *Wafayāt al-A‘yān*, in India in the sixteenth century.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 4.

⁷⁸ Ho, “The Two Arms of Cambay.”

⁷⁹ Ho, 356–57.

⁸⁰ Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God*, 143–63.

⁸¹ Bahl, “Transoceanic Arabic Historiography”; Christopher D. Bahl, “Reading Tarājim with Bourdieu: Prosopographical Traces of Historical Change in the South Asian Migration to the Late Medieval Hijaz,” *Der Islam* 94, no. 1 (April 30, 2017): 234–75.

As *ḥadīth* studies made greater inroads into India, Arabo-biographical sources gained greater prominence. Since the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), scholars in India paid greater attention to teaching and learning the "rational sciences" (*ma'qūlāt*) than the "transmitted sciences" (*manqūlāt*).⁸² Although it is difficult to definitively separate the two, the former "included those disciplines that relied neither for their principles and methods nor for their conclusions on a received textual corpus," such as logic, philosophy, and scholastic theology. The latter included subjects "whose validity did depend on the reception of authentic received knowledge," such as *ḥadīth*.⁸³ In the eighteenth century, the *dars-i nizāmī*, a rationalist-centered curriculum attributed to Mullā Nizām al-Dīn (d. 1161/1748) from the erudite Farangī Maḥall family based in Lucknow, dominated religious teaching in India. Under this curriculum, "Quran and hadis were only marginally studied, the former through two commentaires, the latter through one abridgment," the *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* compiled by Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh Khatīb Al-Tabrīzī (d. 1340).⁸⁴ It should be noted that in the western-coastal region of Gujarat and further south in the Deccan *ḥadīth* learning gained prominence from at least the fifteenth century. These regions were more-closely connected to the Hijaz and Cairo, centers of *ḥadīth* scholarship, through Indian Ocean and Red Sea commercial networks, and Muslim sultans in Gujarat and the Deccan patronized *ḥadīth* scholarship.⁸⁵

⁸² Ali Riaz, "Madrassah Education in Pre-Colonial and Colonial South Asia," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 46, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909610387758>.

⁸³ Asad Q. Ahmed and Robert Gleave, "Rationalist Disciplines and Postclassical Islamic Legal Theories: Introduction," *Oriens* 46, no. 1–2 (May 30, 2018): 2.

⁸⁴ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 250.

⁸⁵ Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God*, 143.

As scholars from north India, especially Delhi, began to participate in the Indian Ocean world of learning in greater numbers, the study of *ḥadīth* increasingly became more important. Wider historiographical implications of *ḥadīth* studies can be seen in biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad written by Indian *ḥadīth* scholars, since they utilize *ḥadīth* as sources for early Islamic history, and they display knowledge of Arabic biographical histories. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī’s (d. 1052/ 1642) *Madārij al-Nubūwwat* is one such example. He had traveled to Mecca and had trained extensively in the *ḥadīth* tradition. Upon his return to Delhi, he began teaching *ḥadīth*, and wrote a biography of the Prophet in Persian.

In the *Madārij al-Nubūwwat*, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq drew on works of *ḥadīth* and Arabic *sīras* to write "the longest biography of Muḥammad ever written in India."⁸⁶ He wrote it in response to philosophical trends that called into question the Prophet's miracles and the claims of antinomian Sufis who ascribed similar miraculous powers to other saintly figures.⁸⁷ He marshalled an array of sources and discussed the authenticity of reports according to the paradigm of *ḥadīth* criticism in writing the life of the Prophet. This approach is unusual for his time in north India. A good example of his focus on Arabic sources is his discussion of the "Satanic verses" episode when, according to some reports, the Prophet praised pagan idols in Mecca as a form of compromise.⁸⁸ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq critiqued these reports as unsound [*dā’if*] and cited *ḥadīth* from al-Bukhārī’s (d. 256 /870) canonical collection about the same event that make no mention of praising idols. While he asserted the historical unreliability of the event, he nonetheless conceded that some

⁸⁶ S.A.A. Rizvi, "Muḥammad in South Asian Biographies," in *Self and Biography: Essays on the Individual and Society in Asia*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Sydney: Sydney University Press for the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1975), 109.

⁸⁷ Rizvi, 108–9.

⁸⁸ For more about the "Satanic verses" incident, and the changing views of Muslim scholars regarding it, see Shahab Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

degree of ambivalence existed. "Because a group of scholars, such as Abū Ḥātim [al-Rāzi] (d. 277/ 890), al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Ibn al-Mundhir (d. 318/ 930), Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), Mūsa b. Uqba (d. 141/758), Abū Ma'shar (d. 170/ 787), and others have narrated these reports... overlooking their unsoundness, it appears that there is some basis to them."⁸⁹ 'Abd al-Ḥaqq demonstrated familiarity with early Islamic historiography as well as *ḥadīth*. He chose not to rely on later sources, or any Persian sources about the Prophet. This reveals a greater interest among Indian scholars in the early Islamic past and Arabic sources through which it could be accessed. Moreover, to the degree the past was accessible for 'Abd al-Ḥaqq, it was only through a limited set of sources that often only provided probable historical information.

While 'Abd al-Ḥaqq had primarily shown interest in Arabic sources from the first four centuries of Islam, the writings of Muḥammad Bāqir Āgāh (d. 1805) on the life of the Prophet demonstrate greater interest in Mamluk-era Arabic sources. Bāqir Āgāh was a scholar who had studied in the Hijaz, a Qādirī Sufi, and an Arabic and Persian poet in the court of Muḥammad 'Alī Khān Walla Jāh (d. 1795), the Nawab of Arcot.⁹⁰ His *Riyāḍ al-Siyar* and *Hasht Bihisht* are among the first Urdu biographies of the Prophet in Deccani, the style of Urdu prevalent in the Deccan region of south India.⁹¹ The former is written in prose and the latter in versified form; both were based on Arabic sources, especially the works of Mamluk-era *ḥadīth* scholars such as Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373), and al-

⁸⁹ 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubūwwat*, trans. Gulām Mū'in al-Dīn Na'imī (Lahore: Shabīr Brothers, 2004), 2: 64.

⁹⁰ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 176.

⁹¹ Anwar Maḥmūd Khālīd, *Urdū Nathar Mein Sīrat-i Rasūl* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1989), 242–46.

Suyūfī (d. 911/1505).⁹² Bāqir Āgāh asserted that works by *ḥadīth* specialists [*ḥāfīz-i ḥadīth*] are the strongest [*mazbūṭ*], most reliable [*mu‘tabar*], and most authentic [*ṣahīḥ*].⁹³ And although recent scholars such as ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq had presented this knowledge in Persian, many women and illiterate masses still did not have access to an authentic biography of the Prophet, hence Bāqir Āgāh's wrote his biography in Deccani Urdu.⁹⁴

Moreover, he stated that he did not merely transmit the information from the Arabic sources uncritically as one doing *taqlīd*, but rather sorted through them and selected that which was most authentic [*aṣaḥḥ*]. In fact, he had these books in view [*naẓar*] as he wrote.⁹⁵ The decision to write to correct and reform communal memory, as well as to anchor the authority of his narrative in books instead of teachers, both point to the important role books came to play in the late eighteenth century in producing and disseminating historical knowledge based on Arabic sources.⁹⁶

The writings of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq and Bāqir Āgāh discussed above shed light on the increasing use of Arabic historical sources by Indian scholars. Going beyond reading Arabic historical sources, Āzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1786) penned an Arabic biographical history of Indian scholars to connect Indian Muslims to the Arabic Islamic intellectual heritage in his *Subḥat al-marjān fī athār hindustān*. The Arabic book provides "a survey of Islamic learning in South Asia

⁹² Muḥammad Bāqir Āgāh, *Hasht Bihisht* (Bombay: Maṭba‘ Gulzār-i Ḥasanī, n.d.), 8.

⁹³ Āgāh, 6.

⁹⁴ Āgāh, 6.

⁹⁵ Āgāh, 8.

⁹⁶ Green, "The Uses of Books in a Late Mughal Takiyya."

in the eighteenth century.⁹⁷ Āzād Bilgrāmī hailed from an esteemed family of scholars. He travelled to the Hijaz after completing his initial studies in India.⁹⁸ His fame as a religious scholar is matched by his fame as a noted poet, who wrote more Arabic verses than any other Indian.⁹⁹

The second chapter of *Subḥat* is devoted to biographies of forty-five Indian Muslim scholars to show the importance of Indians in Islamic intellectual history. Āzād Bilgrāmī opens the chapter by approvingly quoting the Ottoman historian Ḥājī Khalīfa (d. 1068/1657) stating that non-Arabs have been the ones primarily responsible for preserving and transmitting the intellectual disciplines of Islam. "The disciplines required teaching ... and the Arabs are the furthest people from it [*al-‘arab ab‘ad al-nās ‘anhā*]."¹⁰⁰ Āzād Bilgrāmī then asserted that Indian Muslims have also played an important part in the intellectual history of Islam. Unfortunately, they had been too interested in recording the states and statements of Sufis and ignored the history of Indian ‘*ulamā*’.¹⁰¹ "I have not seen a single independent work from either the earlier or later scholars on this subject."¹⁰²

One of the consequences of this neglect is the lack of information about Indian authors of important books, such as the ‘*Ayn al-illm wa zayn al-ḥilm*, a short work based on al-Ghazālī’s (d.

⁹⁷ Ernst, "Reconfiguring South Asian Islam: From the 18th to the 19th Century," 250.

⁹⁸ Gūlām ‘Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Subḥat Al-Marjān Fī Athār Hindustān* (Beirut: Dār al-Rāfīdayn, 2015), 207.

⁹⁹ Abū al-Tayyib al-Sayyid Ṣiddīq Khān Ḥasan al-Qanūjī, *Abjad Al-‘Ulūm* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002), 713.

¹⁰⁰ Bilgrāmī, *Subḥat Al-Marjān Fī Athār Hindustān*, 71.

¹⁰¹ There is a play on words in his contrast between Sufis and scholars, where he refers to the former as “*mashā’ikh al-ṭarīqa*” and the latter as “*al-‘ulamā’ al-kāshifīn min al-ḥaqīqa*,” “the learned who unveil the truth.” Usually unveiling, *kashf*, is associated with the esoteric knowledge of Sufi saints, but here the author applies it to religious scholars of the intellectual disciplines such as *fīqh*, *ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr*. Bilgrāmī, 72.

¹⁰² Bilgrāmī, 72.

505/1111) *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*. Although such celebrated scholars as Mullā 'Alī Qārī (d. 1014/1605) and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqālānī had praised it, and the former even wrote a commentary on it, "no Indian historian has narrated any information about the author."¹⁰³ This points to a possible danger of the increased use of books for knowledge in the eighteenth century: reading texts without a familiarity with the author and the teachers that connect the living to the text. Although Bilgrāmī wrote Indo-Persian *tadhkiras*, he considered the lack of emphasis on tracing authors, texts, and teachers as a shortcoming in that mode of writing. In memorializing Indian scholars ['ulamā'] in the Arabo-biographical mode, Āzād Bilgrāmī stated that he was contributing to a branch of Islamic history as well as acknowledging that their blessings continue to accrue in the present.¹⁰⁴

Bilgrāmī was not alone in expressing criticisms of Indo-Persianate historical writing. The north Indian polymath Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) also expressed criticisms of it. After completing his basic education in Delhi, he had travelled to Mecca for further studies, where his teachers "exposed Shah Wali Allah to the trend of increased cosmopolitanism in hadith scholarship which began to emerge there in the eighteenth century due to a blending of the North African, Hijazi, and Indian traditions of study and evaluation."¹⁰⁵ When he returned to Delhi to teach, he encouraged Indian Muslims to study Arabic histories as part of his program of advancing *ḥadīth* studies in India. In his pedagogical advice to his children, he stressed the importance of teaching the *ḥadīth* collections.¹⁰⁶ Because he wanted Indian Muslims to

¹⁰³ Bilgrāmī, 72.

¹⁰⁴ Bilgrāmī, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Shāh Walī Allāh, *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi's Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha*, trans. Marcia Hermansen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), xxvi.

¹⁰⁶ Shāh Walī Allāh, *Waṣīyat Nāma Mutarjam Ma'a Risāla Dānishmandī* (Aligarh: Maṭba' Aḥmadī, n.d.), 11,

differentiate themselves from non-Muslims, and view Arabo-Islamic history as part of their own heritage, he recommended the inclusion of Arabic historical works for students,¹⁰⁷ and cautioned against wasting time on Persian chronicles that are too focused on “the conduct of kings and conflicts of princes.”¹⁰⁸

Shāh Walī Allāh’s exposure to *ḥadīth*, familiarity with Arabic historical works that described diverse juristic opinions different from those prevalent in India, and his transregional awareness of diversity of Muslim scholarship, led him to investigate historical reasons for juristic differences, resulting in his *al-Inṣāf fī bayān sabab al-ikhtilāf* (The Correct Explanation of the Cause of Juristic Disagreements). The book is an example of an eighteenth-century phenomenon Ahmad Dallal has described where intellectuals that were critical of a perceived intellectual stagnation employed “a critical awareness of the historicity of the received traditions” to criticize dominant religious views.¹⁰⁹

Walī Allāh’s demonstrated in the book that ignorance of *ḥadīth* literature and biographies of early Islamic scholars had caused Muslims to forget the developmental history of the Islamic juristic traditions. He attempted to rediscover this history and presented developmental narrative of change caused by sociological, political, and intellectual reasons. He traced these developments over four different historical periods, from the first century to the fourth AH. In the initial generation of Islam, Islamic law did not exist as a discipline;¹¹⁰ and prior to the fourth

<https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/wasiyat-nama-shah-waliullah-mohaddis-delhvi-ebooks>.

¹⁰⁷ Walī Allāh, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Shāh Walī Allāh, *Waṣīyat Nāma Mutarjam Ma’a Risāla Dānishmandī* (Aligarh: Maṭba‘ Aḥmadī, n.d.), 14,

¹⁰⁹ Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam Without Europe: Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 17.

¹¹⁰ Shāh Walī Allāh, *Al-Inṣāf Fī Bayān Sabab al-Ikhtilāf*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā’is,

century AH/ninth century CE, there were no institutionalized legal schools [*madhhabs*]. Most instances of legal disagreements in this early period were initially about which of the many inherited teachings to prefer.¹¹¹

However, after the fourth century AH, important changes occurred [*hadatha fīhim umūr*], among them that disagreements became reified into the legal schools. Shāh Walī Allāh adduced a number of factors that led to legal institutionalization, such as greater absorption of jurists into imperial administration. Walī Allāh noted this had the unfortunate effect of causing the masses to doubt the integrity of jurists associated with governments. Another factor that caused institutionalization was more pragmatic. Judges found it useful to anchor their authority in agreed-upon legal precedents.¹¹²

Unfortunately, according to Shāh Walī Allāh, his contemporary scholars have become victims of historical amnesia, and are under the assumption that the authorized rules of the *madhhabs* are actually the opinions of the eponymous founders, such as those of Abū Hanīfah (d. 150/767), whereas in reality they are the products of later legal developments.¹¹³ This historical amnesia has contributed to partisan bigotry [*ta'assub*], which he considers almost as bad as the first civil war [*fitnah*] when Muslims fought and killed each other.¹¹⁴ Walī Allāh links the past not only to the present, but sees in it possibilities for a different future. However, the history of

1986), 15–16.

¹¹¹ Walī Allāh, 95.

¹¹² Walī Allāh, 94.

¹¹³ Walī Allāh, 92.

¹¹⁴ Walī Allāh, 95.

Islamic law showed that it had undergone change, and he expressed hope it could change again to reduce partisan bigotry.¹¹⁵

Shāh Walī Allāh's use of the term *hikāyat* is evidence that he intended his history of Islamic law to enact change in readers, similar to how reading works of Persian *adab* were meant to refine readers. The last two chapters of his book dealing with the period before the fourth century AH, and the period after it when jurists became more partisan, are titled "The Chapter Relating [*hikāyat*] to the Condition of People before the Fourth Century"¹¹⁶ and The Chapter Relating [*hikāyat*] to What Occurred among People after the Fourth Century."¹¹⁷ The use of *hikāyat* is noteworthy because in eighteenth century Mughal India, it would have called to mind the short anecdotes and historical tales that make up Sa'dī's (d. 606/ 1291-92) *Gulistān*. This was a foundational book for learning social and literary *adab*, its popularity evinced by the numerous imitations produced during Shāh Walī Allāh's time. "The *Gulistān* and its imitations are also composed almost entirely of *hikāyāt* (plural of *hikāyat*), or short vignettes, designed to impart a moral point."¹¹⁸

Although these Persianate *hikāyāt* were quasi-historical, Shāh Walī Allāh's are anchored in early Arabic sources, including *ḥadīth* collections which provide information about how the Companions and their students practiced and interpreted Islam, as well as some of the earliest sources on Islamic law. The *hikāyat* about the condition before the fourth century offers a positive example to be emulated, and the *hikāyat* after the fourth century is an example of what

¹¹⁵ Walī Allāh, 88.

¹¹⁶ Walī Allāh, 68.

¹¹⁷ Walī Allāh, 87.

¹¹⁸ Kia, "Adab as Literary Form and Social Conduct," 284.

to avoid. Thus, Shāh Walī Allāh was concerned with modifying Muslim behavior and attitude through histories that connect Islamic law with the period of the Prophet, but at the same time not collapsing history so as to forget the developments that have led to the present.

As mentioned earlier, Shāh Walī Allāh placed renewed emphasis on the teaching of *ḥadīth* in India, where the discipline was not widely taught. His children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren all contributed to the dissemination of the discipline through their teaching efforts in Delhi.¹¹⁹ Shāh Walī Allāh's chain of *ḥadīth* transmission of the six canonical collections and the *Muwattaʿa* became renowned among scholars and students of *ḥadīth* even outside of India by the end of the nineteenth century, after his great-grandson, Shāh Ishāq (d. 1846) migrated from Delhi to Medina.¹²⁰

The lack of availability of books of and about *ḥadīth* and *sīra* posed a challenge for students and those interested in Arabic biographical writing. Shāh ʿAbd al-Azīz (d. 1824), Walī Allāh's elder son, wrote two introductory works in Persian to help students learn the history and principles of the discipline, *ʿUjāla-i nāfiʿa* (Beneficial Primer) and *Bustān al-muḥaddithīn* (Garden of Ḥadīth Scholars). In the introduction to the latter, the author stated that because students often are unfamiliar with the books from which *ḥadīth* are cited as well as the biographies of the authors, he wrote a short work, arranged chronologically, to familiarize them.¹²¹ *Bustān al-muḥaddithīn* became an important source for most later biographical works

¹¹⁹ Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Sayyid Ṣiddīq Khān Ḥasan al-Qanūjī, *Al-Ḥiṭṭa Fī Dhikr al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sitta* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Taʿlīmīyya, 1985), 145–46.

¹²⁰ For the family's chain of transmission for these collections through the famous Egyptian scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 1449) see Muḥammad Muḥsin b. Yaḥyā al-Bakrī al-Taymī al-Tirhutī, *Al-Yānī ʿal-Janī Min Asānīd al-Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghanī*, ed. Walī al-Dīn Taqī al-Dīn al-Nadwī (Amman, Jordan: Arwiqa lil-dirāsāt wal-nashr, 2016).

¹²¹ Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Bustān Al-Muḥaddithīn*, ed. Nūr al-Ḥasan Rashdi Kāndhlawī, trans. ʿAbd al-Samīʿ Deobandī (Kāndhla: Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh Akādīmī, 2016), 1.

about early Muslim *ḥadīth* scholars written in India.¹²² Moreover, Shāh ‘Abd al-Azīz acknowledged the difficulty in finding Arabic *sīra* books in India in ‘*Ujāla-i nāfi‘a*, an introduction to the principles of the *ḥadīth* studies.¹²³

‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, Bilgrāmī, Āgāh Bāqir, and Shāh Walī Allāh had all travelled to the Hijaz to study *ḥadīth*. They thus became familiar not only with *ḥadīth*, but the broader apparatus of biographical histories produced by scholars. While ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq preferred citing from Arabic histories from the first four centuries of Islam, Āgāh Bāqir’s familiarity with Mamluk-era histories made him confident in their historical reliability. Bilgrāmī went beyond reading Arabic histories to producing an Arabic biographical history of Indian scholarship, thus indicating a growing interest in further integrating India into an Arabic cosmopolis through historical writing. *Ḥadīth* studies and Arabic biographical histories provided Shāh Walī Allāh greater familiarity with the scholarly heritage from the first four centuries of Islam, and a critical appreciation of the historicity of scholarly disciplines such as Islamic law. He chose to write his history of changes Islamic law had undergone in Arabic, indicating his desire to speak to a wider Arabic-literate audience. Cumulatively, these early modern scholars show that the tradition of *ḥadīth* studies contributed to a different sense of time than Indo-Persianate histories, characterized by a desire to connect to early Islamic history, an awareness of greater distance between the present and the past, and the importance of utilizing Arabic biographical histories in writing histories of Islamic scholarship and of specifically Indian Muslim scholarship.

An impediment to the greater diffusion of *ḥadīth* studies in India was that copies of the major collections of *ḥadīth* continued to be difficult to find in north India into the early

¹²² Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, ‘*Ujāla-i Nāfi‘a*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥammād Karīmī Nadwī, trans. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Chishtī (Lucknow: Makatabat al-Ḥamd al-‘Ilmiyya, 2014), 30.

¹²³ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, 62.

nineteenth century. Given the important link between *ḥadīth* studies and Arabo-biographical histories, this also meant that Indians who did not travel to places more integrated with Indian Ocean networks of *ḥadīth* scholarship would likely not be exposed to Arabic historical writing. Sayyid Nadhīr Ḥusayn (d. 1902), who studied in Delhi with Shāh Ishāq and became his intellectual successor when the latter migrated to Medina, noted the dearth of *ḥadīth* books in India. According to him,

when Shāh ‘Abd al-Azīz needed a book he would request it from the king's library and make use of it. Nobody even knew about Faṭḥ al-Bārī [Ibn Ḥajar's commentary on Bukhārī]. In all of Delhi there were only three places where incomplete copies were found. Throughout Delhi there were only eighteen copies of Bukhārī. A few fortunate ones would divide up copies of Bukhārī among students so they would be able to study it. When I was studying al-Tirmidhī with Shāh Ishāq, I shared one copy with two other students, who lived in separate corners of Delhi. We took turns borrowing and studying every day. Nobody had the fortune to read an entire book.¹²⁴

But in the latter half of the century, according to Nadhīr Ḥusayn, "books they would not even have dreamed of" were easily available.¹²⁵ To understand the greater availability of not just books of *ḥadīth* but also history more generally, it is important to turn to historiographical changes of the nineteenth century, and the convergences and entanglements of Indo-Persianate historical writing, Arabic historical writing, and historicism under British colonialism.

The East India Company (EIC) and the Beginnings of Urdu Historiography

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the use of Persian declined, and the most widely used language by Indian Muslims for historical writing became Urdu. This section examines the early rise of Urdu historiography and its connections to European traditions of historical writing.

A tradition of Urdu historiography did not exist prior to the advent of British colonialism.

The EIC played an important role in promoting Urdu for historical writing, and as a result,

¹²⁴ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥasanī, *Dihlī Awr Uske Atrāf* (Delhi: Urdū Akādimī, 1988), 43. Nadhīr Ḥusayn's statements were recorded by his student, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, the subject of chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹²⁵ Ḥasanī, 43.

nineteenth-century Muslims increasingly chose it to narrate and reflect on the past instead of the previously dominant Persian. "In India, Urdu historiography began almost simultaneously with the introduction of English historiography."¹²⁶ Prior to the nineteenth century few historical works in the vernacular Urdu existed, and most had been produced for British officers of the East India Company. Bernard Cohn has illuminated the importance placed on history by British officers as part of their efforts to rule vast territories in India about which they knew very little.¹²⁷ To help address British deficit of intelligence about India, the Governor-General Lord Wellesley established the Fort William College in 1800 in Calcutta to help British civil servants learn 'oriental' languages as well as knowledge about the laws, customs, and history of Indians.¹²⁸

This included learning Urdu, as well as learning about Indian history through British-commissioned histories written in Urdu.¹²⁹ As part of its efforts to teach a vernacular Indian language, as opposed to classical languages such as Arabic, Sanskrit, or Persian, the Fort William College established a Department of Hindustani, headed by John Gilchrist (d. 1841). Hindustani was the term used by Gilchrist to refer to the vernacular spoken in large parts of India but especially in the north. This vernacular been referred to by Indians under many different names, including Hindvi, Hindi, Dihlavi, Gujri, Dakani and Rekhtah.¹³⁰ Under Gilchrist's auspices, the department ultimately bifurcated the Hindustani language into two: Urdu, written in

¹²⁶ Javed Ali Khan, *Early Urdu Historiography* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2005), 9.

¹²⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹²⁸ Khan, *Early Urdu Historiography*, 96.

¹²⁹ Auer, "Early Modern Persian, Urdu, and English Historiography and the Imagination of Islamic India under British Rule."

¹³⁰ Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part-I," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 806.

the Arabo-Persian script that Gilchrist associated with Muslims, and Hindi, written in the Sanskrit-derived Devanagari characters in an effort to "Indianize" the language.¹³¹ The Hindustani Department in the first decade of the nineteenth century published eleven histories related to Indian history in Urdu, nine of which were translations of earlier Persian works and two that were original works based on Persian sources.¹³² The production of all eleven works were requested by British officers to instruct young East India Company trainees who would be more familiar with the widely-spoken Urdu than with the more literary Persian. Indian Muslims were not the intended audience of these histories, and they were generally not widely read by Indians. Nevertheless, these early works shed light on the connections of early Urdu history-writing with the Indo-Persian traditions and on changes being introduced through colonialism.

The *Arā'ish-i-Mehfil* of Mīr Sher 'Alī Afsos (d. 1809) helps illuminate the early British interest in Indian history, as well as the shifting perceptions of history in early Urdu historical writing. Afsos was the head *munshī*, or Indian teacher and translator, in the Hindustani Department at Fort William College, working under John Gilchrist. He came from a family of Shī'ī Sayyids who had worked as government officials in various royal courts. Through royal contacts, Afsos gained employment at Fort William College in 1800.¹³³ After he finished an Urdu translation of the *Gulistān* that Gilchrist had tasked him with, he was asked by the East India Council to translate the late seventeenth-century Persian history *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* by Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, who died in the early eighteenth century.¹³⁴ The Council was interested in

¹³¹ Daniela Bredi, "Remarks on *Ara'ish-e Mahfil* by Mir Sher 'Ali Afsos," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 14 (1999): 37.

¹³² Khan, *Early Urdu Historiography*, chap. 7.

¹³³ Bredi, "Remarks on *Ara'ish-e Mahfil* by Mir Sher 'Ali Afsos," 34–35.

¹³⁴ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, *Arā'ish-i-Mehfil* (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab, 1963), 3. For information on Sujān Rā'ī, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 401–2.

this work because it "covered a range of three historiographical topics : the geography of India, the history of Hindu kings and kingdoms, and a history of Muslim rulers beginning with Nāṣir al-Dīn Sabuktigīn and continuing down to the time of Awrangzīb."¹³⁵ However, only the parts dealing with the first two parts were published of Afsos's Urdu translation by Fort William College in Calcutta,¹³⁶ in 1808, 1848, and 1863.¹³⁷

An interest in potentially relevant information about Indian geography and history motivated British interest in the Persian history. Afsos's purpose, however, much like the original Persian work, was to provide a moral and didactic narrative centered on the Mughal Empire and showcasing the special qualities of the land and people of north India.¹³⁸ He wrote in the introduction that his work was not so much a translation of *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* as much as based on it with alterations and interpolations from other works where he deemed appropriate.¹³⁹ The book included Afsos's introduction, followed by general comments about the lands and people of north India based on the *Khulāṣat*, then sections on the various provinces of the Mughal Empire, followed by a brief history of Hindu kings ending with the arrival of the Delhi sultans.

¹³⁵ Auer, "Early Modern Persian, Urdu, and English Historiography and the Imagination of Islamic India under British Rule," 211.

¹³⁶ Garcin de Tassy Joseph-Héliodore-Sagesse-Vertu), *Histoire de la Littérature Hindoui et Hindoustani: Biographie et bibliographie* (Paris: Printed under the auspices of the Oriental Translation Committee of Great Britain and Ireland, 1839), 31.

¹³⁷ Bredi, "Remarks on *Ara'ish-e Mahfil* by Mir Sher 'Ali Afsos," 34n2.

¹³⁸ For a description of the introduction of the original Persian text, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 404.

¹³⁹ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, *Arā'ish-i-Mehfil*, 6; Garcin de Tassy considered it an original work because of the changes Afsos made from the original. Joseph-Héliodore-Sagesse-Vertu), *Histoire de la littérature Hindoui et hindoustani*, 31–32.

Like Sujān Rā'ī, Afsos imbues the study of history with religious significance. An opening Persian hemstitch states: "Without knowledge, one cannot recognize God."¹⁴⁰ Unlike Sujān Rā'ī, who despite being a Hindu adopted a theologically ecumenical framework,¹⁴¹ Afsos clarified in his introduction that although he will recount praiseworthy information about Hindus, he only considered Imam 'Alī as the true spiritual guide of the "two worlds."¹⁴² Overall, he specified two benefits to studying history, one concerning the secular world and the other the metaphysical. "It alerts sultans and rulers of the virtues and vices of previous kings. They should accordingly adopt the way of virtuous kings and avoid the ways of those lacking virtue, so corruption does not enter their kingdom, and it slips out of their hand."¹⁴³ The second benefit was that history reminded one of the ultimate power of God, since many once-powerful and glorious kings left the world without a trace. "Perhaps they will not be greedy for status and kingdom, and understand that this world and what it contains is coming to an end [*mawrid-i fanā'*], while the world to come and what it entails is ever-lasting [*maḥall-i baqā'*]."¹⁴⁴ What is clear is that the past is not conceptually distinct from the present, but a source of ethical instruction, much in the same way as the stories he translated from Sa'dī's *Gulistān*. The continuity of time is made explicit in the final lines of poetry that Afsos writes in his introduction: "Whatever bad or good that they did, they have remained in the pages of time [*ṣafḥa-i daḥr*]."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, *Arā'ish-i-Mehfil*, 7.

¹⁴¹ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 403.

¹⁴² Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, *Arā'ish-i-Mehfil*, 6.

¹⁴³ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, 7.

¹⁴⁴ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, 8.

¹⁴⁵ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, 8.

In keeping with this sense of continuous time, Afsos's history has much to say about the blessed powers of saints in addition to the political powers of kings and governors. While discussing important tombs in Lahore, he asserted the most noteworthy one was that of the Sufi saint ‘Alī al-Ḥujwīrī (d. c. 464/1072). "He combined virtues and spiritual authority [*faḍīlat awr wilāyat*]." ¹⁴⁶ The word for spiritual authority of the saint is the same as the word for province, thus indicating the importance of both political and spiritual sovereignty for history. In fact, Afsos writes that Ḥujwīrī came to Lahore with Maḥmūd of Ghazna (d. 421/1030), and that the latter only succeeded in conquering the city due to the "blessed steps" of the saint. ¹⁴⁷ Although neither the *Khulāṣat* nor other historical works state that the conqueror and saint ever met, ¹⁴⁸ Afsos is not trammled by historiographical conventions in taking such liberties with historical facts to assert a narrative truth about the significance of saints. More generally, and in keeping with Sujān Rā’ī, ¹⁴⁹ wondrous and supernatural events are assumed possible. For example, after mentioning the natural resources, grains, and animals peculiar to the province of Thatta, Afsos discusses the witches apparently found there. He notes that the author of *Khulāṣat* writes that he saw a witch snatch the heart of a boy without ripping open his chest. Afsos reflects that although such a feat is difficult to believe, "God's power is abundant ... Just because our minds cannot comprehend it does not mean that it cannot happen." ¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Sujān Rā’ī Bhandārī, 262.

¹⁴⁷ Sujān Rā’ī Bhandārī, 262.

¹⁴⁸ "Intiqād," p. 81, in the introduction to Sujān Rā’ī Bhandārī, *Arā’ish-i-Mehfil*.

¹⁴⁹ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 407.

¹⁵⁰ Sujān Rā’ī Bhandārī, *Arā’ish-i-Mehfil*, 247.

Finally, it is important to note that the kingdom of *hindustān* forms the subject of Afsos's book because its primary source material was about the Mughal Empire, and not that of a broader India that became the subject of colonial histories. Hence, Afsos writes that "to the east of this kingdom is Bengal, in the southern direction is Deccan, and towards the west is Thatta."¹⁵¹ Later, he writes that "All of Hindustan, together with the provinces of Bengal, Deccan, and Kandahar are twenty provinces,"¹⁵² indicating that Hindustan primarily designates north India, but the Mughal kingdom has expanded to encompass neighboring regions. Sujān Rā'ī's Persian work represented an important trend in Indo-Persian historiography from the sixteenth century of incorporating pre-Muslim histories of India and non-Islamic chronologies into Mughal history.¹⁵³ This is continued in Afsos's Urdu history, and he mentions the *Mahabharata* as a credible [*mu'tabar*]source of history. He further extends the period covered by his source material to encompass the arrival of the British by including the East India Company as part of Mughal history as well. According to Afsos, after the reign of Aurangzeb, rulers became tempted by luxuries while righteous and wise ministers either left or remained quiet.¹⁵⁴ As a result, the kingdom fell into a state of anarchy [*tawā'if al-mulūk*], and the principalities did not obey the king, with the exception of the East India Company, which continues to serve the Mughal emperor Shāh 'Alam II (d. 1806).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, 10.

¹⁵² Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, 70.

¹⁵³ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 407.

¹⁵⁴ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, *Arā'ish-i-Mehfil*, 69–70.

¹⁵⁵ Sujān Rā'ī Bhandārī, 337.

The *Arā'ish-i Mehfil* marks an important moment in Urdu historiography, showing the continuity of earlier Persian historiography, but also its increasing marginalization. While "it remained one of the texts for the High Proficiency exam in Urdu for the junior members of Her Majesty's Indian Civil and Military Services" throughout the century,¹⁵⁶ it was deemed as lacking historical merit by British officers.¹⁵⁷ This negative appraisal of the work was tied to the changing nature of British imperialism and historiographical perspectives.

The Fort William College initially commissioned the translation and publication of the *Arā'ish-i-Mehfil* at a time when many officers, under the influence of Warren Hastings, first governor-general of British India (1773-1785), believed they had much to learn from Indians. This was motivated in part by a genuine fascination with oriental learning and culture, and in part out of pragmatism in order to conduct successful diplomacy and increase profits.¹⁵⁸ Relatedly, prior to the 1830s, British patronizing of Indian learning was not motivated by a civilizing mission as much as a desire to cultivate beneficial relations with the local populations. Thus, when Muslims in Calcutta requested Hastings to fund a madrasa, he obliged, setting up the Calcutta Madrasa in 1780, soon followed by the Sanskrit College in Benares.¹⁵⁹ However, detractors from Hastings perspective eventually proved more influential, especially in the wake of further military conquests in India. "Confident in the supremacy of British power, culture and religion, those who held this new imperial vision were far less concerned with reconciliation than

¹⁵⁶ Bredi, "Remarks on *Ara'ish-e Mahfil* by Mir Sher 'Ali Afsos," 34n3.

¹⁵⁷ Bredi, 35.

¹⁵⁸ "Introduction," p. 2-3, in Martin Moir and Lynn Zastoupil, *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843* (Routledge, 2013).

¹⁵⁹ "Introduction," p. 3, in Moir and Zastoupil.

with importing into India what was deemed to be the superior institutions, ideas, and faith of Britain."¹⁶⁰

The British debates between Orientalists, who favored patronizing indigenous learning to maintain good relations with Indians, and Anglicists who opposed it, were also tied up with assumptions about history. Until the 1830s, the Orientalists dominated the General Committee of Public Instruction (GCPI), which was established by the East India Company officers in 1823 to set the agenda for Indian education.¹⁶¹ Between 1824 and 1825, the GCPI helped establish three new colleges, the Sanskrit College in Calcutta, Agra College, and Delhi College.¹⁶² The East India Company Board of Directors, however, became skeptical of the decision to fund indigenous education, particularly questioning whether it qualified as "useful learning."¹⁶³ In addition to their opinion on the inadequacy of Indian learning on science, and the frivolousness of cultivating poetry, they also expressed a lack of confidence in the ability of Indians to translate historical documents. "As far as any Historical documents may be found in the Oriental Languages, what is desirable is that they should be translated and this it is evident will best be accomplished by Europeans who have acquired the requisite knowledge."¹⁶⁴

This sentiment became more pronounced once the Anglicists came to dominate in the 1830s. It was articulated in the infamous minute by Thomas Macaulay, a member of the governor-general Bentinck's (1828-1835) council. He decisively argued against any funding for

¹⁶⁰ "Introduction," p. 5, in Moir and Zastoupil.

¹⁶¹ "Introduction," p. 17, in Moir and Zastoupil.

¹⁶² "Introduction," p. 20, in Moir and Zastoupil.

¹⁶³ "Court of Directors' Revenue Department dispatch to the governor-general in council of Fort William in Bengal, dated 18th February 1824, paragraphs 79 to 86," in Moir and Zastoupil, 116.

¹⁶⁴ "Court of Directors' Revenue Department dispatch to the governor-general in council of Fort William in Bengal, dated 18th February 1824, paragraphs 79 to 86," in Moir and Zastoupil, 116.

indigenous education and publishing oriental books, and instead asserted that the British policy on education should be to promote English language and science. He proffered as support for his policy the apparent lack of historical knowledge among Indians and the necessity of importing British ideas and works.

The question now before us is simply whether[,] when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own, whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, wherever they differ from those of Europe differ for the worse, and whether, when we can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance, at the public expense ... history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography made of seas of treacle and seas of butter.¹⁶⁵

Even those who disagreed with the Anglicist view nonetheless agreed on the importance of teaching Indians history, albeit in the vernacular. In reading the British debates, it seems that historical instruction would help induce positive change among Indians as they learned lessons about civilizational progress and decline. Thus, in his response to Macaulay, H.H. Wilson, the former head of the GCPI, argued that gradually introducing British ideas of science, history, and philosophy using indigenous languages would yield greater positive changes in the long term. Only by reexamining their histories, Wilson argued, would a Hindu or Muslim Bacon or Luther emerge in India to reform their religions.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, such progress did not require from Indians a complete abandonment of their historical traditions: "we may in time and by judicious interposition instill into the native mind of India very different notions of Government, of morality, and of religion; but we shall never wean them, nor need it be attempted ... from the intelligible and amusing inventions of their dramatists and tale-writers – from the, to them,

¹⁶⁵ "Minute recorded in the General Department by Thomas Babington Macaulay, law member of the governor-general's council, dated 2 February 1835," in Moir and Zastoupil, 166.

¹⁶⁶ "Letter from H.H. Wilson to the editor of the Asiatic Journal concerning the 'Education of the Natives of India,' dated 5 December 1835," in Moir and Zastoupil, 216.

important facts of their history, and the interesting and not uninteresting legends of their tradition."¹⁶⁷

The Anglicists, for their part, believed orientalist scholars knowledgeable about Indian languages and cultures had an important role to play in the British civilizing mission in India. Charles Trevelyan, an Anglicist member of the GCPI in *On the Education of the People of India*, stated, "India is undoubtedly at the threshold of a new era; and it seems to be no less incumbent on us at this period to gather up the recollections of the past, than to provide matter of national improvement for the future."¹⁶⁸ Researching and teaching Indian history as a past, as what once was but no longer is present, should go hand-in-hand with teaching modern Western subjects oriented towards progress. Thus, while agreeing with Orientalists about the importance of oriental languages and literature, he argued they should be taught the way the Greek and Latin classics had recently begun to be taught in Europe, as evidence about previous civilizational stages that are now over: "Owing to the vastly superior means now at our disposal, they [Arabic and Sanskrit books] are worse than useless, considered as a basis of popular education; but as a medium for investigating the history of the country, and the progress of mind and manners during so many ages, they are highly deserving of being studied and preserved."¹⁶⁹ For the Anglicists now in power, such historical studies could not be undertaken utilizing Indian works. "Unlike the languages of Europe, which are keys to vast intellectual treasures, bountifully to reward the literary inquirer, those of the East, save to a limited extent in poetry and romance,

¹⁶⁷ "Letter from H.H. Wilson to the editor of the Asiatic Journal concerning the 'Education of the Natives of India,' dated 5 December 1835," in Moir and Zastoupil, 220.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Edward Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1838), 184.

¹⁶⁹ Trevelyan, 182.

may be said, without exaggeration, to be next to barren. For history and science, then, and all that essentially refines and adorns, we must not look to Oriental writers."¹⁷⁰ These ideas about inculcating in Indians a vision of the past that is over and disconnected from the present were put into effect through the institution of the Delhi College in the early nineteenth century.

Delhi College

European historical ideas entered Urdu writings in large measure through the Delhi College. While secondary scholarship has provided important studies on the institution, previous works have not fully explored its role in transmitting historical ideas and practices,¹⁷¹ both formally through classes and less formally through publications, that led to a new sense of historical distance where an Islamic past was ruptured from the modern present. Greater attention has been paid to Indian Muslim historical writings in Urdu in the latter-half of the nineteenth century, where brief reference is made to the Delhi College's role in producing Urdu textbooks.¹⁷² While the Delhi College's contribution towards the development of Urdu prose and a Muslim public sphere has been noted, its implications for broader historical thinking has not been fleshed out.¹⁷³ Finally, secondary literature on the Delhi College has been almost silent

¹⁷⁰ Trevelyan, 209.

¹⁷¹ For a good general overview and information about important individuals associated with the Delhi College, see Margrit Pernau, ed., *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) However, there is no chapter devoted to Mamlūk al-‘Alī, perhaps the most important and influential teacher of the Oriental Department of the college. For a helpful description of the historical books produced by the Delhi College, see Khan, *Early Urdu Historiography*, 134–55; ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s nostalgic work on the institution still remains an important source, which all secondary scholarship continues to draw upon ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, *Marḥūm Dihlī Kālīj* (Aurangabad: Anjuman-i Taraqqī-yi Urdū, 1933).

¹⁷² Powell, “History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-Colonial Past in North-Western India in the 1860s and 1870s”; Diamond, “‘Calculated to Be Offensive to Hindoos?’”

¹⁷³ Gail Minault, “Qiran Al-Sa‘dain: The Dialogue between Eastern and Western Learning at the Delhi College,” in *PERSPECTIVES OF MUTUAL ENCOUNTERS IN SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY 1760-1860*, ed. Jamal Malik (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 260–77; Gail Minault, “The Perils of Cultural Mediation: Master Ram Chandra and Academic Journalism at Delhi College,” in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, ed. Margrit Pernau (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 189–202; Mushirul Hasan, *A Moral*

about the ways in which it represented a moment and space of convergence between the historicist and Arabic modes of historical writing before the two diverged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As subsequent sections detail, the College played a formative role in engendering new historical sensibilities because it brought together streams of European historiography, provided an impetus on writing and translating history into Urdu, promoted the use of printing to publish books and journals in Urdu that influenced prominent Urdu writers in the latter half of the century, and finally because it precipitated an interest in discovering, critically editing, publishing, and discussing the early Arabic texts among *'ulamā'*.

The Delhi College began as a hybrid institution of higher learning that combined the impetus to impart English instruction to Indians with the desire to promote indigenous instruction. The GCPI decided to grant funds to the extant but barely functioning madrasa Ghāzī al-Dīn in Delhi to facilitate continued teaching of traditional Arabic, Persian, and, to a lesser degree, Sanskrit texts. Then in 1828, Charles Metcalf, the Resident at Delhi, and Charles Trevelayn, an Anglicist member of the GCPI, added an English class to the Delhi College, creating the Oriental and English Departments. After the 1835 decision by Lord Bentinck that official British policy should be to promote English, British administrators began encroaching on the curriculum in the Oriental Department by introducing courses on western subjects to be taught in Urdu. "It was not an appreciation for the beauty of the Urdu language and patronage for Oriental learning that" prompted the continued use of Urdu, "but the belief by inducing scholars to prepare translations, printing them, and introducing them into the schools," they

Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth-Century Delhi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 123; Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (University of California Press, 1994), 6–22.

could provide a far superior education.¹⁷⁴ The importance of procuring Urdu textbooks for government colleges became more pronounced after 1839, when Urdu replaced Persian as the official judicial and administrative language of the EIC in the North-Western Provinces (NWP).¹⁷⁵

Studying, translating, and publishing European works on history became integral to the educational endeavors at the Delhi College. History seems to have been dominant in the English department early on. According to Munshī Shahāmat ‘Alī, a secretary for EIC officers and one of the first graduates of Delhi College, the books that were initially taught in the English college were "the Histories of Greece and Rome, and the History of England, by Goldsmith ... four books of Euclid, and Abridgment of Arithmetic, Keith's Use of the Globes, and Guy's Geography. The above formed the whole stock of my instruction in the English language."¹⁷⁶ By the 1840s, the English Department's history books included David Hume's (d. 1776) *The History of England* (published between 1754-61) and Edward Gibbon's (d. 1794) *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published between 1776-1789), Oliver Goldsmith's (d. 1774) *The History of England* (1771) and *Roman History* (1772), and Alexander Fraser Tytler's (d. 1813) *Universal History, from the Creation of the World to the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century* (1834) were added to the English curriculum.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Margrit Pernau, "Introduction," in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, ed. Margrit Pernau (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.

¹⁷⁵ M. Ikram Chaghatai, "Dr. Aloys Sprenger and the Delhi College," in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, ed. Margrit Pernau (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 114.

¹⁷⁶ Shahāmat ‘Alī, *The Sikhs and Afghans, in Connexion with the India and Persia, Immediately Before and After the Death of Ranjeet Singh: From the Journal of an Expedition to Kabul Through the Panjab and the Khaibar Pass* (London: J. Madden, 1849), xi. The titles are not italicized in the original.

¹⁷⁷ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1847-48* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1849) Appendix B, lxxviii; ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, *Marḥūm Dihlī Kālīj*, 87–88.

By 1843, both the Oriental and English departments were brought under the same roof and moved to the Residency building in Delhi, and instruction on European scientific, mathematical, philosophical, and historical works began in Urdu in addition to English.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, government stipends for colleges ceased, and now students could only receive scholarships based on yearly exams where they wrote essays on specific subjects, in English and in a vernacular, including Urdu. History was one of subjects, with specific books listed by the GCPI, including the ones by Hume, Gibbon, and Tytler.¹⁷⁹ These decisions were intended to encourage more students to enroll in the English Department. Additionally, it was hoped that the students in the Oriental Department of the Delhi College would intermingle more with the teachers and students of the English Department to reduce the "bigoted and exclusive character" of the Oriental department.¹⁸⁰ A year after the decision, Felix Boutros (d. 1864), principal of Delhi College since 1841, deemed the merger successful because "the introduction of other subjects of study into the Oriental College than those usually read in Native Mudressas had tended to moderate the prejudiced and illiberal spirit, which the mere students of Arabic and Persian literature are apt to imbibe."¹⁸¹ Thus, by the 1840s, the Delhi College combined a traditional Arabic and Persian curriculum with a western "humanistic" curriculum taught in English and Urdu.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1843-44* (Agra: Agra Ukhbar Press, 1845), 65.

¹⁷⁹ Charles Hay Cameron, *An Address to Parliament on the Duties of Great Britain to India, in Respect of the Education of the Natives and Their Official Employment* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853), 104-8.

¹⁸⁰ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1844-45* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1846), 1-2.

¹⁸¹ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1844-45*, 75.

¹⁸² Gail Minault, "Delhi College and Urdu," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 14 (1999): 120.

While books in English were not difficult to find, suitable books for instruction in Urdu were rare in 1843. This problem was especially acute for history books. "Indian History," "Ancient History" (mainly ancient Greece and Rome), "English History," and "General History" were considered the main subjects for history,¹⁸³ yet none of the translations printed by the Fort William College were considered adequate. In his 1844-45 report for the GCPI, Boutros expressed hope that the students of the Oriental Department would be equally knowledgeable in every subject, "except History; to put them on a level in that science would require more extensive and voluminous translations than had yet been effected."¹⁸⁴

Boutros's statement betrays a peculiar anxiety around history that did not exist for other western knowledges such as math or science. Urdu books on these modern subjects would have been rare as well given the language's lack of literary history outside of poetry. Moreover, Urdu translations of Persian histories existed, such as the ones from Fort William College. And of course, histories in Persian abounded which would have been comprehensible for most of the students. But it is precisely the awareness of the vast historical traditions, at least in Persian, that made the task of replacing the Mughal-era Persianate historical knowledge with British historical knowledge comparatively more difficult.

One of the earliest Urdu histories the Delhi College adopted was a translation of Alexander Fraser Tytler's (d. 1813) *Elements of General History, Ancient and Modern*.¹⁸⁵ The English original had been published in 1809, of which the later *Universal History* was an expanded

¹⁸³ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1843-44*, LXXIII.

¹⁸⁴ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1844-45*, 74.

¹⁸⁵ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1843-44*, Appendix R, CXVI.

version. *Elements of General History* was based on his lectures at Edinburgh University, where he had been a professor of Universal History since 1780.¹⁸⁶ His work proved very popular as a textbook in the early nineteenth century not only in Britain, but also in the newly independent America as well as in British India.¹⁸⁷ The Bombay Native Education Society, a private organization of Indian elites and British officers, commissioned an Urdu translation of the ninth edition, which was published in Calcutta in 1829 under the title of *Lubb al-tawārīkh* (The Essence of Histories).¹⁸⁸ According to the title page, the translators were Lewis Dacosta, an assistant to the police superintendent in Calcutta, who received help from “learned natives,” with “Hukeem Moulvee Abd-ool Mujeed” being the only one named. This was perhaps the first British history to be translated into Urdu and provided a template for future Urdu translations undertaken at the Delhi College.

The Urdu translation of Tytler’s history sheds light on the reception of early modern British historiography in colonial India. The study of history gives access to accumulated human experience and is necessary to verify [*taḥqīq*] “the laws of morality and rules of conduct [*qawānīn-i ādāb-o- ‘ādāt*].” Thus, in the Urdu translation, history relates to proper *adab*. However, whereas Persianate *adab* is based on received exemplary literary texts, Tytler's text argues that proper moral conduct should be based on what has proved useful [*muntafi*] in the

¹⁸⁶ Alexander Du Toit, “Tytler, Alexander Fraser, Lord Woodhouselee (1747–1813), Historian,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, September 23, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27965>.

¹⁸⁷ Rodney F. Allen, “The Uses of History: A Perspective from the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 45, no. 4 (1968): 238–43.

¹⁸⁸ Lewis Dacosta and Ḥakīm Molvī ‘Abd al-Majīd, *Lubb Al-Tawārīkh: Urdu Translation of Tytler’s Elements of General History* (Calcutta: Church Mission Press, 1829).

past in promoting advancements in civilization [*adab mein taraqqī*].¹⁸⁹ Margit Pernau has argued that this use of "civilization" represented a new development in the British notion of "civility," where it "no longer exclusively or even primarily described a well-defined state that had to be reached (i.e., civility) but an open and never-ending process (i.e., civilizing or civilization)."¹⁹⁰

Moreover, this new notion of civilization-as-process also had within it the assumption of temporal progress, as nations and communities moved towards civilization, or declined and moved backwards. History should thus be studied with an eye to "tracing events [*hawādith*] to their causes [*asbāb*] ... the display of progress of society [*ṣuḥbat kī tahdhīb*], and the rise and fall [*taraqqī-o-tanazzul*] of states and empires."¹⁹¹ The difficulty faced by the translators in expressing the novel notion of history can be seen in the above translation of "progress of society," for which the Urdu is closer to "refinement of companionship." Later in the century, *tamaddun* and *tahdhīb* would replace *adab* as the Urdu (and Arabic) term for civilization.¹⁹² The use of the word *adab* for civilization also reflects early challenges to conceptualizing European notions of civilization into Urdu.

Tytler's translation also introduces the argument that the study of history should encompass not only political, but also literary, scientific, and legal developments. All these are important to understand civilizational progress and especially moments of significant change. For Tytler, the

¹⁸⁹ Dacosta and 'Abd al-Majīd, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Margrit Pernau, "Teaching Emotions: The Encounter Between Victorian Values and Indo-Persian Concepts of Civility in Nineteenth-Century Delhi," in *Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Institutions in Colonial India*, ed. Indra Sengupta and Daud Ali (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 231.

¹⁹¹ "Introduction," Lord Alexander Fraser Tytler Woodhouselee, *Universal History, from the Creation of the World to the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century* (Boston: Fetridge, 1850), 2; Dacosta and 'Abd al-Majīd, *Lubb Al-Tawārīkh: Urdu Translation of Tytler's Elements of General History*, 4.

¹⁹² C. M. Naim, "Interrogating 'The East,' 'Culture,' and 'Loss,' in Abdul Halim Sharar's *Guzashta Lakhna'u*," in *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition*, ed. Alka Patel and Karen Leonard (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 189–204.

fifteenth century is perhaps the most important period for European history. "Learning and the sciences [*'ilm-o-funūn*] underwent at that time a very rapid improvement [*baṛī taraqqī*]; and, after ages of darkness [*'aṣr-i zulmat*], shone out at once with surprising lustre."¹⁹³ Moreover, the continued use of the term *taraqqī* to designate advancement and progress in later Urdu works indicates the enduring influence this translation would have.¹⁹⁴

While Tytler's lectures were initially intended for a British audience, British educational directors were keen on imparting knowledge about ancient Greek, Roman, and European history to Indians. As "European history was anchored more firmly than ever in the bedrock of Graeco-Roman civilization" around 1800,¹⁹⁵ studying Greek and Roman history as well as British history provided a narrative of birth, decline, and rebirth. The apparent example of the Roman Empire having a hand in "spreading civilization [*adab ka pehlnā*]" to many communities [*qawmon*] served as a precursor to British presence in India.¹⁹⁶ James Mill's *History of British India* (1817), applied the same pattern to Indian history. Mill's book introduced the tripartite periodization of Indian history into three distinct periods: the Hindu civilization, the Muslim civilization, and the British era, which corresponded to the origins, decline, and possible rebirth of Indian civilization. Although Mill's book influenced British civil servants and officers in the nineteenth century, it

¹⁹³ "Introduction," Woodhouselee, *Universal History, from the Creation of the World to the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century*, 8; Dacosta and 'Abd al-Majīd, *Lubb Al-Tawārīkh: Urdu Translation of Tytler's Elements of General History*, 8.

¹⁹⁴ Nile Green has suggested that the Urdu use of *taraqqī* to mean progress likely came from the Turkish *terakki* in the 1860s; however, its use in the Urdu translation of Tytler's book seems to predate the Turkish usage. Nile Green, "Spacetime and the Muslim Journey West: Industrial Communications in the Making of the 'Muslim World,'" *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 412–14, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/118.2.401>.

¹⁹⁵ Phiroze Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

¹⁹⁶ Woodhouselee, *Universal History, from the Creation of the World to the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century*, 203; Dacosta and 'Abd al-Majīd, *Lubb Al-Tawārīkh: Urdu Translation of Tytler's Elements of General History*, 132.

was the Baptist missionary John C. Marshman's adoption of this periodization for his *History* that introduced this rise and decline narrative to Indians.¹⁹⁷

An additional key element of this early modern British historiography was differentiating between fact and fiction, and thus adopting a rhetorical style that was both pleasing but evoked impartiality. "If early modern historiography remained inextricably tied to rhetoric, it was a rhetoric that came to emphasize "fact," truth, and impartiality, to be suspicious of artfulness, partiality, and ornamented style, and to prefer firsthand witnesses over citations to authority."¹⁹⁸ Tytler similarly states that history should be presented in a way that is interesting, but with skepticism to its sources.¹⁹⁹ Ideally, one should read the earliest historians of any given period.²⁰⁰ While the historicist skepticism towards sources is noticeable in Tytler's work, the concomitant drive to find, collect, and critically read the earliest possible sources do not characterize any of the works assigned in the English Department of the Delhi College. Early modern historians such as Tytler felt compelled "to criticise and re-narrate" available sources, but not to completely sideline them by searching for new sources for an original historical narrative.²⁰¹

The effect of these histories can be seen in the essays written by Delhi College students in the annual scholarship exams. For example, Ramchandra, who would go on to become a teacher at the Delhi College in the Oriental Department, answered the question "What are the effects of

¹⁹⁷ Diamond, "Calculated to Be Offensive to Hindoos?," 83.

¹⁹⁸ Barbara J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720* (Cornell University Press, 2003), 3.

¹⁹⁹ Dacosta and 'Abd al-Majīd, *Lubb Al-Tawārīkh: Urdu Translation of Tytler's Elements of General History*, 2; "Introduction," 2-3, in Woodhouselee, *Universal History, from the Creation of the World to the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century*.

²⁰⁰ Woodhouselee, *Universal History, from the Creation of the World to the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century*, 224; Dacosta and 'Abd al-Majīd, *Lubb Al-Tawārīkh: Urdu Translation of Tytler's Elements of General History*, 146.

²⁰¹ J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Volume 6, Barbarism: Triumph in the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

intercourse with foreigners?" by drawing on ideas of civilization and Muslim invasion of India.

"The Mussulmans carried with them, wherever their arms penetrated, not only the religion taught by their prophet, but also the civilization and knowledge of the Greeks ... while several countries greatly suffered from the terrible invasion of the followers of Mahomed, there were some which, but for these invasions, had continued in the same barbarous, or rather savage, state in which they were found by the Mussulmans."²⁰²

Delhi College Publications

Tytler's history book was not sufficient for the needs of the Delhi College. Thus, Felix Boutros took the on the project of translating English works into Urdu and having them printed by enlisting the help of Delhi College teachers. He initially bore the cost of paying translators and having them printed, but in 1843 the Society for the Promotion of Knowledge Through the Medium of Vernacular Translations was formed.²⁰³ The Delhi Vernacular Translation Society, as it was more commonly referred to, with financial support from both local Indians as well as the EIC, carried out a massive project of translating mostly European, but to also some Persian and Arabic, works into Urdu.

The first translations of historical works came out in 1844. Many were translated by students in the English Department. These included *Tārīkh-i Inglīstān* (based on Goldsmith's book), *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh/ Brief Survey of History* (based on Marshman's book). Nūr Muḥammad, a teacher in the English Department, translated *Tārīkh-i Hind* (based on Marshman's book) and *Tārīkh-i Bangāl* (based on Marshman's book). The Persian *Siyar al-*

²⁰² *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1844-45* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1846), Appendix F, XLI. The quote is directly taken from the English answer recorded in the source.

²⁰³ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1843-44*, Appendix R, CXIV.

Mutakhkhirīn by Ghulām Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā‘ī (d. 1793) was also translated into Urdu by teachers at Delhi College.²⁰⁴ The EIC requested that sixty-six copies of each work be sent to schools and colleges in the north Indian cities of Agra, Benares, Allahabad, Ghazipur, Gorakhpur, Bareilly, Farrukhabad and Meerut.²⁰⁵

Under the Austrian Dr. Aloys Sprenger (d. 1893), principal of Delhi College from 1845-1847, important changes were introduced. At Delhi College, a convergence occurred between his philological and historical interests in early Arabic texts and that of ‘*ulamā*’ influenced by Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s teachings. The Austrian Sprenger was part of an emerging generation of nineteenth-century European orientalist who began applying philological source-criticism to early Islamic sources to understand Islam as a historical phenomenon that changed and developed over time. He had begun his studies of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish at the Oriental Academy in Vienna, and then had traveled to Paris to study under Silvestre de Stacy (d. 1838) and Etienne Quatremère (d. 1852),²⁰⁶ the two leading Arabic philologists of Europe at the time.²⁰⁷ Philology became an important tool for positivist historians, who believed "that only those facts which have been produced through strict application of scientific methods (here, usually philological ones) constitute real knowledge."²⁰⁸ Previously source-criticism had been used to compare recensions and discover anachronisms in the Bible and classics such as the *Iliad*

²⁰⁴ North-Western Provinces India, *Selections from the Records of Government: Volume 3* (Secundra Orphan Press, 1855), 134–48.

²⁰⁵ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1843-44*, Appendix R, CXXI.

²⁰⁶ Chaghatai, “Dr. Aloys Sprenger and the Delhi College,” 111.

²⁰⁷ Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (New York: Overlook Press, 2006).

²⁰⁸ Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 75.

to tease out their temporal and authorial compositions. The interest in Arabic texts was in part a continuation of Biblical studies since Arabic sources potentially could be more reliable than the Old Testament for early Jewish history.

Furthermore, influence of works of non-Orientalist historians such as Leopold von Ranke's (d. 1886) *Die römische Päpste im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (1834–6) also contributed to an interest in Islamic history. Ranke argued that the historian's task was to discover the divine purpose behind the unfolding of history through a carefully documented and fact-based study of races and civilizations. Islamic civilization had played the role of Christian Europe's enemy, but had also passed on the Greek heritage to Europe. Muslims, unlike Europeans, were still stuck in the Middle Ages. Robert Irwin has suggested that "Ranke was the first to think of Islam as the 'Other' in this way."²⁰⁹

Sprenger agreed with Ranke's assessment of Muslim stagnation, but he was also indebted to Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical notion of change.²¹⁰ Consequently, Sprenger believed that Indians were at the same historical moment that Europe was at between the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. The former reinvigorated study of Latin and Greek, leading to intellectual progress, while the turn to vernacular languages after the latter moment opened up learning for the masses, engendering further progress. With British support, Sprenger believed that Indians, and especially Muslims, could once again progress through a renewed interest in early Arabic literature, combined with diffusion of modern knowledge in the vernacular Urdu.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge*.

²¹⁰ Irwin.

²¹¹ Sprenger, "Three Remarks on the Education of Natives of India," in Cameron, *An Address to Parliament on the Duties of Great Britain to India, in Respect of the Education of the Natives and Their Official Employment*, 100.

Based on his experience in London with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, he wanted the Delhi Vernacular Translation Society to serve not only the needs of college students and teachers, but more broadly work towards educating society.²¹² To that end, he established the college press, the Maṭba‘ al-‘Ulūm, in 1845. Prior to that, the translations of the Delhi Vernacular Translation Society had been published at Dihlī Urdū Akhbār Press of Maulvī Muḥammad Bāqir, father of the famous Urdu literary historian Muḥammad Ḥusayn Azād (d. 1910) and a graduate of the Delhi College. Sprenger established the Maṭba‘ al-‘Ulūm press as a separate company with most of the teachers as shareholders because he wanted it to be informally affiliated but officially independent of the Delhi College. As profits increased due to greater private demand by Indians for Urdu translations, they were equally distributed among the shareholders.²¹³ Government records indicate that "Histories of England and India" were especially popular.²¹⁴

Beginnings of Historicism in Urdu

The Delhi College played an important role in disseminating historicist perspectives in India through its Urdu publications in the nineteenth century. As British education efforts led to establishing more schools for indigenous education, and Urdu was adopted as the language of instruction in the region of Punjab, annexed in 1849, the Delhi College translations became widely adopted. The Department of Public Instruction, Punjab commissioned both Karīm al-Dīn

²¹² Chaghatai, "Dr. Aloys Sprenger and the Delhi College," 115–16.

²¹³ Chaghatai, 120–21; For publications of the press from 1848-1853, see Muḥammad ‘Atīq Šiddiqī, *Sūba Shamālī Wa Maghribī Ke Akhbarāt Wa Maṭbū‘āt (1843-53)* (Aligarh: Anjuman-i Taraqqī-yi Urdū, 1962), 186–92.

²¹⁴ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1845-46* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1847), 5; The sales increased the following year as well; *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1846-47* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1848), 3.

(d. 1879) and fellow Delhi College alumni Ramchandra (d. 1880) to write a new Urdu textbook on Indian history. Based on Persian and British sources, the *Wāqī 'āt-i Hind* was published in 1863, and continued the themes of historical progress, skepticism towards Indian historical sources, and separating facts from fiction.²¹⁵

In addition to printing books, the Maṭba' al-'Ulūm press also began publishing periodicals. Sprenger initiated the *Qirān al-Sa'dayn* as the first college periodical, which was published weekly. Although two Urdu journals already existed in Delhi at the time, the *Dihlī Urdū Akhbār* of Muḥammad Bāqir and the *Sayyid al-Akhhār*, the *Qirān al-Sa'dayn* "opened up new vistas for Urdu journalism" through "the introduction of Western ideas, especially scientific ones, to the Indian people."²¹⁶ In addition to reports about current events, the journal "also printed notices of books published by the college press and book reviews, as well as translations of articles of literary and scientific interest."²¹⁷ Two other journals devoted to literary and scientific articles were also published from the press, the *Muḥibb-i Hind* and *Fawā'id al-Nāẓirīn*, both edited by Master Ramchandra (d. 1880), a graduate of the English Department of Delhi College who had become a teacher of mathematics and science in the Oriental Department in the 1840s and 1850s.

Ramchandra played an important role in not only disseminating scientific ideas into the still-nascent Urdu public sphere, but also historical ideas he had imbibed as a student at the Delhi College until 1844.²¹⁸ He championed scientific rationality and critiqued what he viewed as

²¹⁵ Diamond, "Calculated to Be Offensive to Hindoos?"; Powell, "History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-Colonial Past in North-Western India in the 1860s and 1870s."

²¹⁶ Chaghatai, "Dr. Aloys Sprenger and the Delhi College," 119.

²¹⁷ Minault, "The Perils of Cultural Mediation: Master Ram Chandra and Academic Journalism at Delhi College," 194.

²¹⁸ Gail Minault, "Master Ramchandra of Delhi College: Teacher, Journalist, and Cultural Intermediary," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 18 (2003): 97.

superstitious beliefs and practices. Ramchandra "was the first to introduce a spirit of rationalism and realism into nineteenth-century Urdu writing."²¹⁹ His writings reveal that he imbibed the progressive and civilizational perspective of history, decrying the backwardness of India in the hopes of engendering positive change. In 1849 he published *Tadhkirat al-kāmilīn* in Urdu from the College's press. The book is a biographical encyclopedia of exemplary personalities, mostly non-Indians, such as Newton, Galileo, Darwin, Confucius, Herodotus, and Cicero.²²⁰ An advertisement for the book in an 1848 issue of *Qirān al-Sa'dayn* announced to "history enthusiasts" [*shāyiqīn-i 'ilm-i tārikh*]" that the unique book containing pictures was coming out about such accomplished and wise figures because people were completely ignorant and neglectful about the past.²²¹

Ramchandra also started two new Urdu periodicals, *Fawāid al-Nāzirīn* and *Muhibb-i Hind*.²²² In an article for the former published in 1850 and titled "The Condition of Muslim Learning in India," [*Hāl-i 'ulūm ahl-i islām ka hindustān men*] Ramchandra argued that Islamic learning in India had stagnated because Muslims neglected the early Arabic religious and literary heritage. Instead, they have become busy with later translations, commentaries, and rhetorical embellishments, thus implying that an intellectual renaissance requires looking back to an earlier past.²²³

²¹⁹ S. Irfan Habib and Dhruv Raina, "The Introduction of Scientific Rationality into India: A Study of Master Ramchandra—Urdu Journalist, Mathematician and Educationalist," *Annals of Science* 46, no. 6 (November 1, 1989): 600, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00033798900200431>.

²²⁰ Habib and Raina, 610.

²²¹ Şiddiqī, *Sūba Shamālī Wa Maghribī Ke Akhbarāt Wa Maṭbū'āt* (1843-53), 186.

²²² Minault, "The Perils of Cultural Mediation: Master Ram Chandra and Academic Journalism at Delhi College," 194, 197.

²²³ Minault, 195.

A similar move away from Persianate historical writing towards a historicist mode is seen in the two versions of *Āthār al-ṣanādīd* (1847, 1854), the architectural history of Delhi written by Sir Sayyid Aḥmad. He wrote it while he was an employee of the EIC, on the request of Aloys Sprenger.²²⁴ Imam Baksh Sahbā'ī, Persian teacher at the college and close friend of Sir Sayyid, collaborated with him on the project.²²⁵ In the 1847 edition, Sayyid Aḥmad's description of Delhi "was inseparable from his own lived experience ... any narrative of Delhi, in his view at the time, had to include the people he cherished and considered integral to any definition of the city ... His wish to share with others something precious and personal also included an urge to edify, to make his readers draw some moral lesson."²²⁶ Moreover, the work was not primarily organized chronologically. The 1854 revised edition deleted biographical and anecdotal information about the inhabitants of the city, did away with wondrous and legendary tales, was rearranged chronologically, and was primarily attentive to providing historical facts. An important concern of the latter edition was determining whether monuments such as the Qutb Minar belonged to a Hindu or Muslim period of Indian history.²²⁷ Thus historicist notions were adopted and spread through print by Muslims not officially employed by the Delhi College but still informally connected with it.

Delhi College and Arabic Historical Writing

²²⁴ Chaghatai, "Dr. Aloys Sprenger and the Delhi College," 121–22.

²²⁵ C. M. Naim, "Shaikh Imam Bakhsh Sahba'i: Teacher, Scholar, Poet, and Puzzle-Master," in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, ed. Margrit Pernau (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 156–58.

²²⁶ C. M. Naim, "Syed Ahmad and His Two Books Called 'Asar-al-Sanadid'," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 3 (May 2011): 37–38, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000156>.

²²⁷ David Lelyveld, "The Qutb Minar in Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Āsār Us-Ṣanādīd*," in *Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Institutions in Colonial India*, ed. Indra Sengupta and Daud Ali (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 147–68, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230119000_8.

While the Delhi College played a crucial role in transmitting assumptions about historical distance and civilizational progress and decline to Indian Muslims, it also played a much more limited but nonetheless crucial role in promoting Arabic historical works.

Sprenger believed that a renewed interest in early Arabic literature could help Muslims progress.²²⁸ He found a willing partner in promoting Arabic studies in Mamlūk al-‘Alī (d. 1851),²²⁹ Arabic teacher in the Oriental Department from 1825-1851. His teacher and mentor Rashīd al-Dīn Khān (d. 1827) had been appointed the head teacher [*sadr-i mudarris*] of the Oriental Department when the college started in 1825, and after his death, the position was eventually given to Mamlūk al-‘Alī in 1841.²³⁰ Mamlūk al-‘Alī’s family was from the *qasbah* (town) of Nānawta in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, and had strong intellectual ties to Shāh Walī Allāh’s family. He had come to Delhi to study at a young age at Madrasa Raḥīmiyya, the madrasa of the Walī Allāh family, and developed a very close relationship with Shāh Rafī‘ al-Dīn (d. 1818), Shāh Walī Allāh’s youngest son.²³¹

The Oriental Department had three branches: Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit. As the Arabic teacher, Mamlūk al-‘Alī taught Arabic grammar, literature, and Sunni *fiqh*. Geometry, geography, arithmetic, sciences, and history were taught in Urdu by the 1840s.²³² *Ḥadīth* and

²²⁸ Sprenger, “Three Remarks on the Education of Natives of India,” in Charles Hay Cameron, *An Address to Parliament on the Duties of Great Britain to India, in Respect of the Education of the Natives and Their Official Employment* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853), 100.

²²⁹ Nūr al-Ḥasan Rashid Kāndhlawī, *Ustādh Al-Kull Ḥaḍrat Mawlāna Mamlūk al-‘alī Nānotawī* (Kāndhla: Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh Akādīmī, 2009), 73 According to the author, the spelling of his name as “Mamlūk ‘Alī” without the definite article “al” is incorrect, as indicated by his signature on his letters. He was likely named Mamlūk ‘Alī (‘Alī’s slave) at birth, but he changed the spelling to Mamlūk al-‘Alī (slave of the Esteemed) later, likely due to the reformist and anti-Shī‘ī teachings of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.

²³⁰ Kāndhlawī, 143.

²³¹ Kāndhlawī, 119.

²³² *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1846-47*, 85.

Arabic logic seems to have been removed from the official curriculum, and there may have been plans to remove *fiqh* as well. However, Mamlūk al-‘Alī likely taught these and other religious works privately at his residence, since many students came to study under him without enrolling at the Delhi College.²³³ The most famous such students were Muḥammad Qāsim Nānawtawī (d. 1880) and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangōhī (d. 1905), the founders of the Deoband seminary.²³⁴

While books that had been part of a traditional Islamic education in India were being sidelined in the Oriental Department, Sprenger was keen to add to the curriculum Arabic and Urdu works about Islamic history. Because published Arabic books were limited, this required editing and publishing manuscripts of selected Arabic historical works. He thought very highly of Mamlūk al-‘Alī and commended his classes in his official report to the Committee.²³⁵ He enlisted his aid in editing a book on the Umayyad Dynasty based on selections from *Murūj al-dhahab* by the historian al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956). The book was published in the college's press in 1846, titled *Kitāb al-mukhtār fī al-akhbār wa al-āthār*, and added to the official curriculum.²³⁶ In a handwritten preface in English, Sprenger acknowledges the help of his "friend Moulvee Mamlukalaly" in the difficult task of editing the book utilizing three manuscripts, only one of which was of the complete book, and all of which were defective.²³⁷ The preface is also

²³³ The General Committee for Public Instruction recommended changes to the Oriental Department in 1848 that seem to indicate that they favored outsourcing the teaching of higher-level religious subjects to private lectures. "The Committee proposed, with a view to effect a radical improvement in the Persian and Arabic Departments, that only useful Sciences should be cultivated as School studies, and that the scholastic studies such as the higher books on Arabic Grammar, Logic, the larger Law Books, the Traditions, &c., should be taught in free lectures." *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1847-48*, 55.

²³⁴ Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 74–78.

²³⁵ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1846-47*, 85.

²³⁶ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1847-48*, Appendix B, LXX.

interesting for what it reveals about the historiographical perspective Sprenger wished to convey to Indian Muslims.

The book on the history of the arabs, which have been published previous to the last fifteen years, are mere chronicles, recording year by year the birth, accession, wars, and deaths of princes. On the History of Civilization they are perfectly silent. Such a skeleton is necessary for history; but it is a skull without brains a chest without heart and blood, extremities without motion: soul and life are wanting - These selections are an attempt to supply part of what is defective in those chronicles, from Contemporary or at least early authors.²³⁸

Sprenger had envisioned four, possibly five volumes. The first would be devoted to pre-Islamic Arabia, "which would enable us to appreciate the times and circumstances, which made the arabic prophet and caused the revolutions ascribed to him - Though we must suppose that he, like other great men, was the produce of his genius."²³⁹ The second would be about the Prophet and first four caliphs. The third about the Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties. And a possible fifth volume about the Turkic tribes.²⁴⁰ Ultimately, out of the first four planned volumes, Sprenger was only able to publish a portion of volume three, the *Kitāb al-mukhtār*.

We do not know what Mamlūk al-‘Alī thought about Sprenger’s historical ideas since he did not leave behind any historical writings. It can nonetheless be surmised by his decision to collaborate with his colleague that he supported endeavors to increase the availability of Arabic histories in India. Given his relationship with Shāh Walī Allāh’s family, he was likely predisposed to Arabic historical writing. Thus, his efforts in editing and publishing Arabic historical works represent a convergence of historiographical traditions of Indian ‘*ulamā*’ interested in Arabic biographical histories and orientalists.

²³⁷ Sprenger’s preface to Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Mas‘ūdī, *Historical Selections from Arabic authors*, ed. Mamlūk al-‘Alī Mawlavī and Aloys Sprenger (Delhi: Maṭba‘ al-‘ulūm, 1846), 7, <http://tinyurl.gale.com/tinyurl/DF2927>.

²³⁸ al-Mas‘ūdī, 1.

²³⁹ al-Mas‘ūdī, 2.

²⁴⁰ al-Mas‘ūdī, 3.

The role of Karīm al-Dīn (d. 1879), a graduate of the Oriental Department of Delhi College in 1844, provides a second example of the convergence between a growing interest in Arabic historical writing and the influence of orientalism under Sprenger.²⁴¹ Sprenger tasked Karīm al-Dīn with translating into Urdu an Arabic chronicle popular among European orientalists, the *al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar* by the Mamluk prince and historian Abū al-Fidā' (d. 732/1331).²⁴² The Arabic work is a summary based largely on Ibn al-Athīr's (d. 630/1233) *al-Kāmil* from the beginning of creation to 1328.²⁴³ Karīm al-Dīn extended the Urdu translation of the history to 1529 based on other, unnamed sources. In the introduction Karīm al-Dīn explains that Sprenger chose this work for translation and publication due to it being sound [*ṣaḥīḥ*], reliable [*mu'tabar*], and of moderate size, yet unavailable in India.²⁴⁴ Published in 1847, this was the first Urdu translation of an Arabic history and was added to the curriculum of the Oriental Department.²⁴⁵

In addition to the chronicle, Karīm al-Dīn published other histories in Urdu for Sprenger, including two biographical dictionaries, one about Arabic poets in 1847 and the other about Urdu poets in 1848. The former reveals Karīm al-Dīn's familiarity with Arabic biographical histories, as well as the Arabic writings of Shāh Walī Allāh. The latter work sheds light on the ways in

²⁴¹ On Kārīm al-Dīn, see Avril A. Powell, "Scholar Manque or Mere Munshi? Maulawi Karimu'd-Din's Career in the Anglo-Oriental Education Service," in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, ed. Margrit Pernau (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 203–31.

²⁴² Daniella Talmon-Heller, "Abū L-Fidā'," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Brill, July 1, 2008), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_SIM_0286.

²⁴³ F. Rosenthal, "Ibn Al-Athīr," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, April 24, 2012), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3094.

²⁴⁴ Siddiqī, 207.

²⁴⁵ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1849-50* (Secundra Orphan Press, 1850), Appendix p. VI.

which the notion of a linear progressive history was becoming absorbed into Urdu historiography.

Karīm al-Dīn's Urdu history of Arabic poets, *Tārīkh shu 'arā'-i 'arab*, included 397 poets from the period before Islam extending to his contemporary period, arranged into thirteen sections corresponding to thirteen centuries. In the introduction, he states that Sprenger requested the work be comprehensive and contain important biographical details to be useful for history enthusiasts [*shāyiq-i tārīkh*]. He also notes that he relied extensively on Arabic biographical histories. The final two sections, corresponding to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries AH, are dominated by Indian poets of Arabic, including long entries on Shāh Walī Allāh, his children, Āzād Bilgrāmī, Rashīd al-Dīn, and Mamlūk al-'Alī. Clearly, according to the author, the tradition of Arab poetry had continued in India.²⁴⁶

A year later Karīm al-Dīn published another biographical collection, *Ṭabaqāt-i shu 'arā'-i hind*, a history of Urdu poets. His Urdu literary history continues the *tadhkira* genre's focus on Indian poets, but he critiques all previous *tadhkiras* of poets for their historical inadequacy. In his introduction he argued that the genre should be a branch of history,²⁴⁷ and thus should be structured chronologically, with biographical information provided for each poet as well as information about the historical context.²⁴⁸ While previous works of the genre had failed to do this, he believed that historical information could be gained from the available sources. "Whoever searches [*talāsh*] more and exerts greater effort will certainly write more."²⁴⁹ While

²⁴⁶ Şiddiqī, *Molvī Karīm Al-Dīn: Ḥayāt Awr Kārnāme*, 154–60.

²⁴⁷ Karīm al-Dīn, *Ṭabaqāt-i Shu 'arā'-i Hind* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdū Akādimī, 1983), 1.

²⁴⁸ Karīm al-Dīn, 12.

²⁴⁹ Karīm al-Dīn, 3.

writing his Urdu *tadhkira*, Karīm al-Dīn came across the first edition of Garcin de Tassy's (d. 1878) French *Histoire de la Littérature Hindoui et Hindoustani* and was so impressed, he decided to make it one of his primary sources.²⁵⁰ He also expressed skepticism towards Persian sources because he believed they tended to exaggerate [*mubāliga*] and not be as factual [*muṭābiq-i wāqi*'] as sources in other languages.²⁵¹

Rather than organizing the poets according to centuries or generations the way he did his history on Arabic poets, he imposed a developmental structure corresponding to five distinct historical periods. The first period charts the birth of Urdu, the second those responsible for the emergence of Urdu poetry, followed by poets who reformed and refined it, then the following generation who further developed it, and finally Karīm al-Dīn's contemporaries.²⁵² The assumption of progress and historical change is observable.

Karīm al-Dīn's criticisms of Persian sources and the use of a linear structure of distinct historical periods was likely indebted to both Arabic and historicist traditions of historical writing. Bilgrāmī and Shāh Walī Allāh had expressed shortcomings in Indo-Persianate histories in the previous century, and Karīm al-Dīn was familiar with both figures. Furthermore, Walī Allāh had utilized a developmental history in his *Inṣāf* about changes that Islamic law went through in the first four centuries. In light of this, it is difficult to agree with the noted literary critic Shamasur Rahman Faruqi that organizing history around distinct historical periods is a legacy exclusively of modern historicism.²⁵³ However, there is an important difference between

²⁵⁰ Karīm al-Dīn, 8–9.

²⁵¹ Karīm al-Dīn, 9.

²⁵² Karīm al-Dīn, *Ṭabaqāt-i Shu'arā'-i Hind* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdū Akādīmī, 1983), 11.

²⁵³ Shamasur Rahman Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13.

Karīm al-Dīn’s Urdu literary history, and *Āb-i Hayāt* (1880), the best-selling Urdu literary history written by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Āzād (d. 1910), a younger contemporary of Karīm al-Dīn who graduated from the Oriental Department of Delhi College in 1854.²⁵⁴ He expanded on the theme of change and characterized the latest historical period of Urdu as a period of decay.²⁵⁵ As we will see below, this notion of cultural and civilizational decline became common in Muslim historical works influenced by historicism, but is absent or much less pronounced in nineteenth-century Arabic historical works by Indian Muslims.

In addition to the publishing Arabic historical works, as well as Urdu histories utilizing Arabic historical works, the Delhi College was also affiliated with a project to publish the canonical *ḥadīth* collections. Through Mamlūk al-‘Alī and his student and companion Aḥmad ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī’s (d. 1880) efforts in publishing critical editions of *ḥadīth* collections, initially printed at the college’s Maṭba‘ al-‘ulūm press, a wider audience was able to access the distant Islamic past. Recall from above that *ḥadīth* works were difficult to find in north India in the nineteenth century. The availability of printed *ḥadīth* compilations along with biographical information about the compilers and narrators would become an important source for early Islamic history for Indian Muslim historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Members of the Walī Allāh family had begun using lithograph printing to publish religious texts, including the first Urdu translation of the Qur’an in 1829, *Mūḍiḥ al-Qur’ān*.²⁵⁶ In 1940, Shāh Ishāq published *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, the first printed *ḥadīth* compilation.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (University of California Press, 1994), 12.

²⁵⁵ Pritchett, 133.

²⁵⁶ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, His Successors, and the Qur’ān,” in *Ways of Knowing Muslim Cultures and Societies: Studies in Honour of Gudrun Krämer* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 287, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004386891_014.

Aḥmad ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī decided to use the new print technology to continue the work his teacher Shāh Ishāq had initiated and publish early *ḥadīth* collections. Aḥmad ‘Alī had traveled to Mecca from 1843 to 1846 to study with Shāh Ishāq. While in Mecca, he had collected manuscripts of different *ḥadīth* compilations. Upon returning to Delhi, he began teaching *ḥadīth* as well as collating a critical edition of *ḥadīth* collections. Between 1849 and 1857 Aḥmad ‘Alī printed critical editions of the collections of al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/ 892), al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875), and Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), as well as *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh*.²⁵⁸ He initially had used Delhi College’s press, but due to its slow pace of printing al-Tirmidhī’s collection, he bought his own press in Delhi, the Maṭba‘ Aḥmadī, and completed the printing for the remaining collections there.²⁵⁹

While Aḥmad ‘Alī and Mamlūk al-‘Alī were interested in facilitating *ḥadīth* studies in India,²⁶⁰ they were also aware that orientalists,²⁶¹ were interested in the *ḥadīth* collections as sources for Islamic history, and thus also were cognizant of a market for their works beyond *ḥadīth* scholars and students.²⁶¹ Sprenger, who had left the Delhi College in 1848 on a project cataloging manuscripts in the libraries of Lucknow, continued to correspond with the two scholars about their progress in publishing *ḥadīth* collections.²⁶² After Sprenger became

²⁵⁷ Nūr al-Ḥasan Rashid Kāndhlawī, “Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Aḥmad ‘alī Sahāranpūrī Kī Khidmāt-i Ḥadīth,” in *Hindustān Awr ‘ilm-i Ḥadīth Tīrhawīn Awr Chawdhwīn Sadī Hījri Mein*, ed. Fīrūz Akhtar Nadwī (Azamgarh: Markaz al-shaykh abī al-ḥasan al-nadwī, 2012), 276.

²⁵⁸ Kāndhlawī, 27.

²⁵⁹ Kāndhlawī, “Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Aḥmad ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī Kī Khidmāt-i Ḥadīth.”

²⁶⁰ Aḥmad ‘Alī states in the conclusion to his edition of al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* that his publication efforts were the fulfillment of a testament [*waṣīyya*] given to him by Shāh Ishāq. Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, ed. Aḥmad ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī (Karachi: Qadīmī Kutub Khāna, 1961), 2: 1129.

²⁶¹ Minault, “Aloys Sprenger,” 15–16.

²⁶² M. Ikram Chaghatai, “Ek Nādir Majmū‘a-i Makātīb,” *Anjuman Taraqqī-Yi Urdū Pākistān* 60, no. 3 (1984): 59.

Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1850, he wrote in the Society's journal about the progress being made by these scholars on publishing "the earliest collection of traditions."²⁶³

Sprenger also stated that Aḥmad 'Alī shared with him pages of al-Bukhārī as they were being printed, and he expressed admiration at Aḥmad 'Alī's skills as a critical editor.²⁶⁴

There had been some reluctance to share pages of their progress with Sprenger because of a fear that others might steal it, copy it, and print it. In a letter to Sprenger, Mamlūk al-'Alī explained his reluctance to send Sprenger the pages of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* while he was in Lucknow, because of the above reason. Mamlūk al-'Alī feared that it would lead to a loss of profits.²⁶⁵ The first printing of the first volume of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* had 325 copies, for 25 rupees, roughly the equivalent of the monthly expenditure of a middle-class family in Delhi at the time. Despite the high price, it sold out within months, and within ten years, eight more editions would be published from many other cities.²⁶⁶ This contrasts with the situation in Istanbul and Egypt at this time, where *ḥadīth* works were not being printed because there was no market for them.²⁶⁷

This moment in the mid nineteenth century when 'ulamā' first began to participate in a new print culture has received relatively little attention compared to the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century when 'ulamā' began publishing religious primers, polemics, commentaries, and fatwas. However, the convergence of intellectual interests in early Islamic

²⁶³ Aloys Sprenger, "Literary Intelligence," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 20, no. I. to VII. —1851 (1852): 282.

²⁶⁴ Aloys Sprenger, "Literary Intelligence," *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* 21, no. I. to VII. —1852 (1853): 429.

²⁶⁵ "Agar ko 'ī lakhna 'ū mein us kī naqal chhāpe to hamārā nuqṣān mutaṣawwar hai." Chaghatai, "Ek Nādir Majmū'a-i Makātib," 59.

²⁶⁶ Kāndhlawī, "Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Aḥmad 'alī Sahāranpūrī Kī Khidmāt-i Ḥadīth," 284.

²⁶⁷ Reinhard Schulze, "The Birth of Tradition and Modernity in 18th and 19th Century. Islamic Culture: The Case of Printing.," *Culture and History* 16 (1997): 58.

texts by Muslim scholars and orientalists as well as some degree of collaboration between the two groups in Delhi between 1840 and 1857 to discover, edit, and publish early Islamic texts created the material conditions for producing books that allowed access to the early Islamic past. Aḥmad ‘Alī’s edition of *ḥadīth* texts are still used today in India and Pakistan,²⁶⁸ and they were crucial sources for the next generation of Indian Muslim writers that wrote about life of the Prophet and early Islam, as will be seen in the next chapters.

More importantly, the spread of *ḥadīth* studies in India had generated a sense of continuity with the past through the recorded chains of narrators going back to the Prophet. Indian *ḥadīth* scholars who participated in interreligious debates in the late nineteenth century with Hindus and Christians deployed this sense of time to assert Islam’s superiority. Sherali Tareen describes two public debates in 1875 and 1876 that took place in the north Indian city of Shahjahanpur that were organized by the local British magistrate and drew hundreds of people to watch the spectacle.²⁶⁹ Qāsim Nānawtawī (d. 1880), the founder of the Deoband madrasa who had assisted Aḥmad ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī in printing *ḥadīth* works,²⁷⁰ represented Muslims. Tareen shows that history became an important battleground for asserting the authenticity of Islam. Nānawtawī asserted that Muslims had done a better job at recording their past than any other religious community, specifically mentioning the *ḥadīth* tradition. Muslim knowledge about the Prophet could be traced back to him, something neither Hindus nor Christians could claim regarding the founders of their religions.²⁷¹ Tareen interprets Nānawtawī’s arguments as a sign of modern

²⁶⁸ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1 pp. 3–12.

²⁶⁹ Sherali Tareen, “The Polemic of Shahjahanpur: Religion, Miracles, and History,” *Islamic Studies* 51, no. 1 (2012): 49–67.

²⁷⁰ Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 77–78.

²⁷¹ Tareen, “The Polemic of Shahjahanpur,” 60–61.

empiricism. However, many premodern *ḥadīth* scholars claimed that the chain of transmission of *ḥadīth*, and knowledge more generally, distinguished Islam from all other religions.²⁷² Tareen thus fails to appreciate that Nānawtawī's sense of history was indebted to the rise of *ḥadīth* studies in India, propelled by the publications of Mamlūk al-ʿAlī and Aḥmad ʿAlī.

Arabic Historical Writing After the Delhi College

Aḥmad ʿAlī had not deployed Arabic for historical writing beyond an appendix he attached to his second edition of al-Bukhārī's compilation providing biographical information about all the narrators.²⁷³ The publications of ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī (d. 1886) and Nawāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān al-Qanūjī (d. 1890), however, demonstrate greater use of Arabic biographical writing. There are three important themes from their Arabic biographical histories that are worth highlighting. First, they reveal an interest in the history of scholarly disciplines, especially *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*, and a greater appreciation of historical change. Second, from the perspective of these scholars, their period was not one of civilizational decline, but rather one of intellectual progress. Third, they assume as their audience both Indian Muslims and a wider Arabic cosmopolis.

Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, whose father was a disciple of the reformists Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd (d. 1831) and Shāh Ismaʿīl Shahīd (d. 1831),²⁷⁴ had become consort to Bēgum Shāh Jahān (r. 1868–1901), the third in a line of queens who ruled the Princely State of Bhopal, roughly 800 kilometers south of Delhi. With the state's resources at his disposal, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān "tapped ... into the print cultures" and intellectual currents of Delhi, Calcutta, Istanbul, Cairo, and the

²⁷² Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 11–12.

²⁷³ Kāndhlawī, "Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Aḥmad ʿalī Sahāranpūrī Kī Khidmāt-i Ḥadīth," 285.

²⁷⁴ Claudia Preckel, "Screening Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān's Library: The Use of Ḥanbalī Literature in 19th-Century Bhopal," in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz, Georges Tamer, and Alina Kokoschka (2013: De Gruyter, n.d.), 169.

Hijaz.²⁷⁵ He employed the works of al-Shawkānī (d. 1834), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), and Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1340) for his reformist Ahl-i Ḥadīth agenda, which principally argued for a rejection of the legal traditions, especially the Ḥanafī tradition in India.²⁷⁶ This range of scholarship also informed his historical outlook.

Despite his political position as male consort to Begum Shāh Jahān, his interest was primarily in Islamic intellectual history, as seen in one of his best known works, the three-volume encyclopedic work *Abjad al-‘ulūm* (The Most Established of the Sciences), published in Bhopal in 1878.²⁷⁷ He states that he based it primarily on the *Miftāḥ al-sa‘āda* of the Ottoman Ṭashköprüzāde (d. 1561), the *Kashf al-zunūn* of the Ottoman Ḥājī Khalīfa (d. 1657), the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), and the *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn* of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Tahānawī (d. 1792?).²⁷⁸ The last work once again shows the importance of the Delhi College, since the *Kashshāf* is an Arabic encyclopedic work on the various terms and categories of the Islamic intellectual disciplines studied in India until the eighteenth century, and was published at the behest of Sprenger by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1862 after Mamlūk al-‘Alī had brought the book to his attention and provided him a manuscript.²⁷⁹

The first part of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān’s *Abjad al-‘ulūm* is a discussion about the different ways scholars have categorized and conceptualized knowledge [*‘ilm*], followed by information about specific books divided by disciplines and arranged alphabetically. The third part is a

²⁷⁵ Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 283.

²⁷⁶ Preckel, “Screening Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān’s Library: The Use of Ḥanbalī Literature in 19th-Century Bhopal.”

²⁷⁷ Saeedullah, *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan, Nawab of Bhopal, 1248-1307 (1832-1890)*, 339.

²⁷⁸ al-Qanūjī, *Abjad Al-‘Ulūm*, 17.

²⁷⁹ For a printed letter from Mamlūk al-‘Alī to Sprenger discussing the book, and related information about Sprenger’s interest, see Chaghatai, “Ek Nādir Majmū‘a-i Makātib,” 53–57.

biographical encyclopedia of authors that have made contributions to the various disciplines. The final sections of the third part depart from an arrangement based on intellectual disciplines to one focused on the 'ulamā' of Hijaz [*ḥaramayn*], Yemen, and India, with special attention given to scholars of *ḥadīth*, the most important discipline according to Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān. While not dismissive of the other fields of knowledge, he does assert that at different moments in history, knowledge of *ḥadīth*, and thus a proper connection to the Prophet, has been neglected.²⁸⁰ His introduction to the six canonical *ḥadīth* collections, *Al-Ḥiṭṭa fī Dhikr Ṣaḥīḥ al-Sitta* also serves as a history of the discipline of *ḥadīth*. He devotes a special section to the discipline's history in India, criticizing Indian Muslim scholarship for giving it less attention than Islamic law. However, he accords Shāh Walī Allāh and his family a pivotal role of reinvigorating Islamic scholarship in India, which his generation has continued to improve upon.²⁸¹

These Arabic works portray the history of Islam as a history of religious learning. The central focus on learning is supported by his claim that many scholars have shown that remembering the virtues of illustrious 'ulamā' exposes readers to God's blessings.²⁸² Note the use of 'ulamā' instead of *mashā'ikh* or other words for Sufis. While blessings are important, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān is keen to emphasize the breadth of Muslim intellectual accomplishments and link India as part of this history. He repeats Bilgrāmī's approval of the quote from *Kashf al-Zunūn* that non-Arab 'ulamā' have dominated the intellectual history of Islam.²⁸³ In some of his biographical entries, he criticizes scholars for perceived shortcomings, especially regarding a

²⁸⁰ Saeedullah, *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan, Nawab of Bhopal, 1248-1307 (1832-1890)*, 105.

²⁸¹ al-Qanūjī, *Al-Ḥiṭṭa Fī Dhikr al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sitta*, 145.

²⁸² al-Qanūjī, *Abjad Al-'Ulūm*, 565.

²⁸³ al-Qanūjī, 691.

pernicious problem he viewed in Indian *'ulamā'*, *ta 'aṣṣub*, bigoted religious partisanship. Echoing Shāh Walī Allāh earlier, he believed the root cause of *ta 'aṣṣub* was the lack of familiarity with the early history of Islam.²⁸⁴ However he is hopeful that increased exposure to *ḥadīth* studies will make scholars more familiar with early Islamic views.

His confidence in Muslim intellectual history, as displayed in his biographical writing, led him to downplay the immense changes occurring under colonialism. This can be viewed in his *Luqṭa al- 'ajlān mimmā tamassa ilā ma 'rifatihi ḥājat al-insān* (Cursory Gleanings about Which Humans Should Have Knowledge), which was published in Istanbul in 1879.²⁸⁵ The book is mainly about how communities [*ummat* pl. *umam*] measure historical time based on different calendars, memorable events, and differing myths. The different communities are religious, such as Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus, as well as geographic, such as European and Chinese. He cautions readers from accepting the myths of other communities about ancient history because the great temporal gap has produced uncertainty about ancient history.²⁸⁶ He also includes large excerpts from Ibn Khaldūn critiquing *taqlīd* in history, that is uncritically accepting historical reports without verification (*taḥqīq*), or not mentioning one's historical sources.²⁸⁷ He also draws on Ibn Khaldūn to reflect on the fall of the Mughals. According to Ibn Khaldūn, there are periods of momentous change, and periods of unremarkable passage of time. Ibn Khaldūn's fourteenth-century North Africa was an example of the former since *'imrān*,

²⁸⁴ al-Qanūjī, 715.

²⁸⁵ Saeedullah, *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan, Nawab of Bhopal, 1248-1307 (1832-1890)* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1973), 339.

²⁸⁶ Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Sayyid Ṣiddīq Khān Ḥasan al-Qanūjī, *Luqṭat Al- 'ajlān Mimmā Tamassa Ilā Ma 'rifatihi Ḥājat al-Insān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- 'Ilmiyya, 1985), 2–4 There are many quotes taken directly from al-Maqrīzī's *al-Mawā'iz al- 'ibār* without attribution.

²⁸⁷ al-Qanūjī, 214–19.

"organized habitation,"²⁸⁸ had been devastated by a combination of Arab invasions and a plague. The Mughal Empire [*mamlakat al-hind*] in the eighteenth and nineteenth century had experienced devastation on a similar scale due to British colonialism.

It is important to note that just as Ibn Khaldūn, and the Ottoman intellectuals reading him, thought about cyclical rise and decline in history in terms of dynasties and polities, rather than in terms of civilization,²⁸⁹ so too did Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān. Moreover, just as Ibn Khaldūn viewed moments of historical change as especially worthy of being recorded [*tadwīn*] in history, so too did Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān.²⁹⁰ Scholars writing Arabo-biographical histories tended to emphasize the continuity of knowledge and thus not interpret the ascendancy of European powers over weakened Muslim polities in the nineteenth century as a civilizational crisis.

ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, a younger contemporary of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān from the prestigious Farangī Maḥall family in Lucknow, agreed with him about the quality of *ḥadīth* studies in India and that Indian scholars were too partisan in their adherence to the Ḥanafī school. However, unlike the Nawāb, al-Laknawī did not believe that the solution was to completely do away with the Ḥanafī legal tradition. Rather for him, the history of the legal school showed that it had undergone change and encompassed diversity, and he sought to inculcate among scholars and students of *fiqh* a historical perspective.

He did this through three ways. First, through critically editing and publishing the earliest sources of the Ḥanafī tradition, and one of the earliest Arabic works overall, the *Jāmiʿ al-saghīr* and the recension of the *Muwaṭṭaʿa* of Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805), student of Abū

²⁸⁸ This is Michael Cooperson's translation. Michael Cooperson, "The Abbasid 'Golden Age': An Excavation," *Al-ʿUsūr Al-Wuṣṭā* 25 (2017): 41–65.

²⁸⁹ Cooperson, 43–46.

²⁹⁰ al-Qanūjī, *Luḡat Al-ʿajlān Mimmā Tamassa Ilā Maʿrifatihi Ḥājat al-Insān*, 230–32.

Ḥanīfā. Al-Laknawī mentioned the difficult task of comparing variants for al-Shaybānī's *Muwaṭṭa* in his introduction to the work.²⁹¹ He later mentioned that he used six different manuscripts, and one commentary.²⁹² Second, he published critical editions of the two most popular Ḥanafī textbooks, *al-Wiqāya* and *al-Hidāya*. He also added commentaries and introductions to these works. His introductions are especially noteworthy since they provide historical contextualization for the texts by providing background information about the authors, their contemporaries, who came before them in the Ḥanafī tradition, and important commentators of their texts.²⁹³

Finally, he also wrote a biographical dictionary of Ḥanafī scholars. In fact, he explicitly stated in it that he wrote the various introductions precisely because he sensed his contemporaries were ignorant of the history of the Ḥanafī tradition. Al-Laknawī felt a book specifically about Ḥanafī scholars would be beneficial for Indian scholars since biographical works about them are difficult or impossible to find in India. "I have found the scholars in our land, from our time and many who came before, treating history as if it were strange and have turned their backs to it, and thus it has become a forgotten and lost treasure ... Because of this, scholars have no knowledge of distinguished notables mentioned in the records of nobles and of their lives and characteristics, not to speak of their birth and death dates."²⁹⁴ He also wrote that to include every notable Ḥanafī scholar would have led to a voluminous work which most people

²⁹¹ Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *Al-Taʿlīq al-Mumajjad ʿalā Muwaṭṭa Muḥammad*, ed. Taqī al-Dīn al-Nadwī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2005), 1: 62.

²⁹² al-Laknawī, 1: 276.

²⁹³ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *Maqālāt-i Sulaymān*, ed. Shāh Muʿīn al-Dīn Aḥmad Nadwī, vol. 2 (Azamgarh: Maṭbaʿ Maʿārif, 1968), 67.

²⁹⁴ Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *Al-Fawāʿid al-Bahīya Fī Tarājim al-Ḥanafīyya*, ed. Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Naʿsānī (Maṭbaʿ Dār al-Saʿāda, 1906), 2–3.

would not read due to its size, so he divided up the history of Ḥanafīs in different works to make it more accessible for scholars to benefit from them.

Ignorance about the history of scholars and scholarship had implications for the legal tradition. Al-Laknawī expressed frustration over scholars' ignorance about jurists mentioned in *fiqh* books. When scholars were asked basic information about individuals named in books, according to al-Laknawī, they were like wild animals caught off guard in a state of confusion.²⁹⁵ Some scholars mis-attributed books of one jurist to another and were unable to differentiate between jurists, especially when the names or titles may be similar. Al-Laknawī avers that when there are conflicting juristic opinions, scholars are unable to correctly give precedence to more senior-ranking scholars due to their ignorance of the hierarchy of Ḥanafī scholars. Samy Ayoub has shown that contested distinctions between early [*mutaqaddimīn*] and late [*mut'akhirrīn*] Ḥanafī jurists in the early modern period became a serious concern for Ottoman jurists interested in streamlining the process for issuing legal verdicts.²⁹⁶

Al-Laknawī attributes the ignorance of Indian scholars about the history of Ḥanafī scholarship to the focus on Indian Sufis in Indo-Muslim historical writing. He thus wrote that in his biographical history, he chose not to write about Sufis since information about them is easily found in India.²⁹⁷ Yet famous Sufis nonetheless appear in his biographical history of Ḥanafīs. For example, he has an entry on ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), the famous Sufī poet.²⁹⁸ Most

²⁹⁵ “Taraddadū fī dhālik ka taraddud al-bahā’im wa tafakkarū ka tafakkar al-bahā’im,” al-Laknawī, 3.

²⁹⁶ Samy Ayoub, *Law, Empire, and the Sultan: Ottoman Imperial Authority and Late Hanafi Jurisprudence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 8–13.

²⁹⁷ al-Laknawī, 4.

²⁹⁸ Cl Huart and H. Massé, “*Djāmī*,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, April 24, 2012), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1971.

of the entry details his Sufi teachers and Sufi writings. His inclusion in a biographical history of Ḥanafīs rests on a treatise wrote on the rites of Ḥajj.²⁹⁹ This indicates that his historiographical criticism of Indo-Persianate writings is not anti-Sufi, but rather addresses the lack of representation of aspects of the lives of pious figures related to their role as *'ulamā'*.

In the course of historicizing the *Hanaḥī* tradition, al-Laknawī at times criticized information in Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān's books about death dates, names, and other biographical information. This provoked responses, counter responses, and public debate in print about verifying historical information in printed works between 1883-4. Supporters of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (the authorship is unclear) published *Shifā' al-'ayy 'ammā awradahu al-shaykh 'abd al-ḥayy* responding to the supposed errors al-Laknawī had pointed out.³⁰⁰ Al-Laknawī, in turn, published *Ibrāz al-ghayy fī shifā' al-'ayy* in response, which led to the Nawāb's supporters producing *Tabṣīrat al-nāqid*. And again, al-Laknawī answered with *Tadhkirat al-rāshid*.³⁰¹

Importantly, these disagreements were written in Arabic. The fact that these debates were happening in Arabic also indicates the audience that the Indian writers and publishers imagined. Although they were writing and publishing in north and central India, they were engaging with books of history published in Istanbul and Cairo and writing for an Arabic public sphere. Both the biographical histories of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān and al-Laknawī created transregional communities of scholars, the formers more focused on *ḥadīth* scholarship and the latter's on Ḥanaḥī scholarship. Arabic historical writing in the late nineteenth century thus enabled Indian

²⁹⁹ al-Laknawī, *Al-Fawā'id al-Bahīya Fī Tarājim al-Ḥanaḥīyya*, 86.

³⁰⁰ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *Naqd Awhām Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān Al-Musamma Ibrāz al-Ghayy al-Wāqi' Fī Shifā' al-'ayy*, ed. Ṣalāh Muḥammad Abū al-Ḥāj (Amman, Jordan: Dār al-Fath, 2000), 13–14.

³⁰¹ Saeedullah, *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan, Nawab of Bhopal, 1248-1307 (1832-1890)*, 93–101.

scholars to imagine themselves as part of an Arabic cosmopolis. Thus, al-Laknawī sent a published copy of his *Ibrāz al-ghayy* criticizing Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān's historical citations to Nu'mān al-Ālūsī (d. 1899), Salafī scholar and admirer of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān in Baghdad.³⁰² Al-Ālūsī's note at the end of the book indicates he received it in 1885.³⁰³

Al-Laknawī's central critique in the book is that Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān was too dependent on later Ottoman and Yemeni sources, especially *Kashf al-Zunūn* of Ḥājī Khālīfah, *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldūn, and various books of al-Shawkānī, and did not go back to earlier sources to verify their information.³⁰⁴ The *Ibrāz al-ghayy* is basically nearly two-hundred pages cataloging the times the historical information Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān copied from the above scholars was wrong. His defenders claimed that Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān was not responsible for the veracity of what was in these sources but was only responsible for faithfully reproducing what they had written. Al-Laknawī disagreed: "is it allowed for a scholar to transmit [*yanqul*] everything in a work without first verifying [*taḥqīq*]? Is it allowed for the erudite [*fāḍil*] to state that which is not factual [*ghayr wāqī'iyya*] and contradictory, and then claim 'this is how it is in so-and-so's book?'"³⁰⁵ Al-Laknawī indicated his familiarity with the books, stating that the published versions are full of errors, and it was possible that the errors were due to the publishers and not the authors.³⁰⁶ At other times, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān had ignored the editor's footnotes casting doubt on the information in the text, such as when he quoted Ibn Khaldūn's claim that Abū Ḥanīfa only knew

³⁰² Itzchak Weismann, "Genealogies of Fundamentalism: Salafī Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Baghdad," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2009): 278.

³⁰³ al-Laknawī, *Naqd Awhām Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān Al-Musamma Ibrāz al-Ghayy al-Wāqī' Fī Shifā' al-'ayy*, 8 The final page of the the original print edition with al-Ālūsī's handwritten note is reproduced on p. 10.

³⁰⁴ al-Laknawī, *Naqd Awhām Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān Al-Musamma Ibrāz al-Ghayy al-Wāqī' Fī Shifā' al-'ayy*, 18,26.

³⁰⁵ al-Laknawī, 120.

³⁰⁶ al-Laknawī, 130.

seventeen *ḥadīth*. Al-Laknawī pointed out that the Egyptian editor of the 1274 AH (1858) printed edition added a note stating that he believed the "17" was a scribal error in the manuscript he was using.³⁰⁷ Thus the technology of print not only provided easier access to sources for Islamic history and for creating transregional communities, but it also generated debate about how to read and cite printed works.

Importantly, the historical critiques of the Indian scholars speak of specific intellectual shortcomings in India, not of a broader Muslim crisis. The main shortcomings pertained to lack of knowledge about early Islamic history, lack of knowledge about the histories of the intellectual traditions of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, and the lack of sources to adequately address the first two issues. Turning to historical discussions in the late nineteenth-century Urdu public sphere, it will be clear that the problems concerning historicist writers were drastically different.

Historicism in the Urdu Public Sphere in the Late Nineteenth Century

Although the Delhi College was shut down after the 1857 rebellion, historicist Urdu historical writings became more pervasive and prevalent in the latter-half of the nineteenth century. These works shared core assumptions about history, specifically that it was characterized by the progress and decline of civilizations and nations, that the arrival of British rule represented a modern period distinct from the past, that the great distance from the past meant that history could only be reconstructed on verifiable sources, and that a rationalist study of history shorn of divine intervention and miraculous happenings was necessary to halt Muslim decline and spark progress. Drawing on European historiographies, they perpetuated rationalist, empiricist, and progressive notions of historical thinking that rendered all prior Indian and Muslim historical works deficient.

³⁰⁷ al-Laknawī, 80.

British-sponsored schools and colleges in the later nineteenth century continued the Delhi College's efforts in promoting historicism in India. In 1858, the British government took control of India from the EIC, and the social and economic upheaval caused by colonialism and the rebellion left employment in the bureaucracy of the British Raj a lucrative option. The British Raj "had resolved to recruit native Indian youths in somewhat 'superior' tiers of executive and judicial administration if the aspirants had obtained Western/collegiate education. As the 1870s advanced, this policy of exposure to Western learning became less of a preference and more of a mandatory requirement."³⁰⁸ Because history constituted an integral part of a college education, modern historical learning "became part of a pedagogical processes that every aspirant to a job in the colonial administration and a middle-class existence had to undergo."³⁰⁹

As already noted above, colonial textbooks taught a positivist notion of history as a factually grounded chronological narrative about human progress in general, and British colonialism as a culmination of Indian progress in particular. Textbooks in the second half of the century represented Islamic and Muslim history more negatively, however. Mountstuart Elphinstone's (d. 1859) *The History of India: the Hindu and Mahometan Periods*, published in 1841, replaced the earlier histories of Marshman and Mills, reached a wider audience in India due to its popularity at Indian schools, and through its Persian translation.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Mohammad Sajjad, "Envisioning a Future: Sir Sayyid Ahmad's Mission of Education," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, ed. Yasmin Saikia, M. Raisur Rahman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 109.

³⁰⁹ Deshpande Prachi, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (Columbia University Press, 2007), 80.

³¹⁰ Muhammad Aslam Syed, *Muslim Response to the West: Muslim Historiography in India, 1857-1914* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1988), 24.

Unlike Mill, who never spent any time in India nor bothered to learn any of its languages, Elphinstone spent most of his life working and living there. He became a civil servant in the East India Company when he came to India in 1795 at the age of 16, and by the time he retired in 1827, he was the governor of Bombay Presidency.³¹¹ His work shows much more familiarity with the indigenous sources as well as local cultures and betrays a strong sympathy for Indians. This did not, however, extend to Islam and its history, which he held in great contempt. According to Elphinstone, Muslims arrived as conquerors under the Arab commander Muḥammad b. Qāsim in 712, held power through despotism, and were responsible for the decline of Indian civilization. Finally, the fanaticism of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb ultimately led to the breakup of the Mughal Empire and paved the way for "a new wave of conquerors," namely the British, to "unite the empire under better auspices than before."³¹²

Furthermore, post-1857 colonial history continued the emphasis on the putative tyranny and backwardness of Muslim rule in India much more than their predecessors, and depicted British rule much more favorably, especially for the heretofore oppressed Hindus. The most significant of such works was the eight volume *The History of India as told by its own Historians* by Sir Henry Elliot (d. 1853) and John Dowson (d. 1881). The volumes, published between 1867 and 1877, contained translations and edited excerpts from Indo-Persian chronicles and histories from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries. Many of the libraries that had housed some of these sources were subsequently destroyed by the British army in 1857-58. Elliot died before that, but his writings show his low opinion of Muslim historiography. He believed that the

³¹¹ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "A Brief Survey of Colonial Historiography in India," in *Different Types of History*, ed. Bharati Ray (New Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2009), 75.

³¹² Mounstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1841), 665.

Muslim historians were, "for the most part, dull, prejudiced, ignorant, and superficial."³¹³ Elliot expressed great perplexity that so many Hindus viewed Muslim rule in a positive light and hoped to disavow Indians of this view through selective translation from Muslim historians that were either critical of the Muslim rulers or otherwise depicted them in a negative light. This is all the more significant since after the publication of his book, it was a central reference for most major historians of India after him.³¹⁴

Indeed, the British emphasis on translating Indian works and utilizing them to publish original histories, usually to bolster an imperial ideology, garnered substantial attention. Despite the imperial ideology, "colonial historiography had an important unintended consequence. The history that Indian students were made to read ... engendered a critical reaction against that historiography."³¹⁵ Hindu and Muslim readers had to struggle with a narrative about the past characterized by conquest, conflict, and decadence.³¹⁶ Negative portrayals in textbooks provoked some controversy among Muslims, but not enough to bring about a change in government policy. When In 1867, Sir Sayyid complained about an Urdu history textbook used in schools in the NWP in 1867 for being antagonistic towards Muslims, Matthews Kempson, the Director of Public Instruction in the NWP remarked that "it is childish in Mahomedans to resent the publication of facts, the truth of which both Mr. Elphinstone and Sir H. Elliot have proved from

³¹³ Sir Henry Miers Elliot, *The History of India: As Told by Its Own Historians. The Muhammadan Period* (Trübner and Company, 1867), 1: xvi.

³¹⁴ Syed, *Muslim Response to the West*, 24–25.

³¹⁵ Bhattacharya, "A Brief Survey of Colonial Historiography in India," 85.

³¹⁶ Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 507.

the Mahomedan annals." The comment references the authoritativeness of British historians of India and illustrates the positivist historical outlook of colonial officials.³¹⁷

Despite Sir Sayyid's complaint about the history textbook, he, and other associates of the Delhi College, were instrumental in introducing historicist ideas to Indian Muslims more broadly through publishing books and journal articles. In a similar vein as the now defunct Delhi Vernacular Society, Sir Sayyid founded the Scientific Society in 1864 while stationed in Ghazipur to translate European works into Urdu. In his speech at the founding of the society, he singled out Indian ignorance of history as one of the primary impediments to progress.

Looking at the state of my fellow-countrymen's minds, I find that, from their ignorance of the past history of the world at large, they have nothing to guide them in their future career. From their ignorance of the events of the past, and also of the events of the present ... from their not being acquainted with the manner and means by which infant nations have grown into powerful and flourishing ones, and by which the present most advanced ones have beaten their competitors in the race for position among the magnates of the world ... they are unable to take lessons, and profit by their experiences. Through this ignorance, also, they are not aware of the causes which have undermined the foundations of those nations once the most wealthy, the most civilised, and the most powerful in the history of their time, and which have since gradually gone to decay or remained stationary instead of advancing with the age.³¹⁸

There was some initial opposition to Sir Sayyid's project. A "Moulvie Seraj Hoosein" who was a member of the Society voiced his objection in a letter to the focus on history, since the purpose of histories had been to teach political wisdom. Now that there were separate books on politics, "we need no longer go to Histories for such information."³¹⁹ Sir Sayyid strongly disagreed, writing back "I entirely disagree ... The native, in my opinion, stand in as great a need

³¹⁷ M. Kempson, "Memorandum", Aug. 1872, printed in Govt of India: Home, Educ., Sept. 1873. Quoted in Powell, "History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-Colonial Past in North-Western India in the 1860s and 1870s," 120.

³¹⁸ "SIR SYED'S SPEECH AT SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY" (Ghazeeepore, 9 January 1864). In Shan Muhammad, *The Aligarh Movement :Basic Documents, 1864-1898*, vol. 1 (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1978), 14, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015048703204>.

³¹⁹ Muhammad, 1:41.

for a knowledge of History" as other scientific subjects.³²⁰ Kempson, the Director of Public Instruction quoted earlier, expressed his opposition to the project of translating European knowledge into Urdu on the basis that it would be of no benefit to Indians. He wrote to Sir Sayyid that social reform could only happen through "close association with other more advanced races."³²¹ Undeterred, Sir Sayyid recommended to the Directing Council tasked with choosing books to select European history books to translate into Urdu. In the 1860s and 1870s, the Society published fifteen books total, seven of which were about history.³²²

The first two books to be accepted for translation, at Sir Sayyid's behest, were Elphinstone's *History of India* and Charles Rollin's *The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persian, Macedonians, and Grecians*. He admired Rollin's book for its emphasis on communal contribution to intellectual and cultural advancements and hoped it would motivate contemporary Indians.³²³ The Urdu translation of Elphinstone's book was published in 1866 by the Society and was received unfavorably by the Muslim members.³²⁴ Despite Sir Sayyid's complaint to Kempson, he defended Elphinstone's book among Muslims. When he initiated a committee to find out why more Muslims were not attending government schools in 1870, and many voiced concerns about history books, mentioning Elphinstone by

³²⁰ Muhammad, 1:42.

³²¹ Muhammad, 1:26.

³²² Asghar Abbas, *Print Culture: Sir Syed's Aligarh Institute Gazette 1866-1897*, trans. Syed Asim Ali (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), 27–28.

³²³ Muhammad, *The Aligarh Movement*, 1:43–44.

³²⁴ Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Educational Philosophy: A Documentary Record* (National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1989), 114.

name, Sir Sayyid brushed their criticisms aside.³²⁵ "If such books contain objectionable passages, they are very rare ... the remaining portions of the work would be open to no objection."³²⁶

It is likely that Sir Sayyid admired the realism and source-criticism of the work. For example, at times Elphinstone compared sources to sift out facts from "exaggerated praises" [*mubālighah kī ta 'rīfon*],³²⁷ and "wonderful circumstances [*anokhi bāton*] with which the historians have embellished."³²⁸ The unnamed translator of the history included his own footnotes to make the book more suitable for an Indian audience. Thus, when Elphinstone stated that he relied primarily on the history of al-Ṭabarī for the life of the Prophet, and quoted from him to describe the Prophet's self-doubt and possible insanity when he first became a Prophet, the translator provided background information about who al-Ṭabarī. He wrote, "there are many baseless stories and falsehoods" in his book. The translator stated that while he does not have access to the Arabic version, he did check the Persian edition that was available in the Scientific Society's library.³²⁹ Towards the end of the century, as historical interest increased and thus a market for histories proved profitable, Urdu translations of al-Ṭabarī and other early Arabic sources were published by famous Lucknow-based Naval Kishore Press.³³⁰

³²⁵ Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, *Translation of the Report of the Members of the Select Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of the Learning among Muhammadans of India* (Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1872), 17–18, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t4jm25p8q>.

³²⁶ Khān, 22.

³²⁷ *The Scientific Society, The History of India. The Hindu and Mahomedan Periods. By the Hon. Mountsuart Elphinstone. Translated and Published into Urdu* (Aligarh: Syud Ahmud's Private Press, 1866), 535; Mounstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, 1:547.

³²⁸ *The Scientific Society, The History of India. The Hindu and Mahomedan Periods. By the Hon. Mountsuart Elphinstone. Translated and Published into Urdu*, 545; Mounstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, 1:557.

³²⁹ *The Scientific Society, The History of India. The Hindu and Mahomedan Periods. By the Hon. Mountsuart Elphinstone. Translated and Published into Urdu*, 486.

³³⁰ Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008), 305.

In addition to publishing translations, the Scientific Society in 1866 began publishing the *Aligarh Institute Gazette (AIG)*, a bilingual Urdu-English journal that carried news, articles on various topics, editorials by Sir Sayyid, and the new Urdu genre of book reviews.³³¹ Dhakā Ullāh (d. 1910), a graduate of the Delhi College, wrote a number of reviews on historical works that had been published in Urdu.³³² From 1866 to 1877 *AIG* was issued weekly, and thereafter as subscription numbers dwindled it was issued less regularly.³³³ In 1872, it had 381 subscriptions, giving it the largest circulation of all vernacular journals in the NWP and Oudh.³³⁴

While the circulation numbers may seem small, Ryan Perkins' work on the emergence of an Urdu *pablik* in the late nineteenth century reminds us of the ways in which the circulation and reading of journals built on an existing tradition of oral performances and debates.³³⁵ In 1870, Sir Sayyid started a sister journal, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq (TA)*, with the aim of spreading his ideas of religious and social reform. Both the *AIG* and *TA* generated intense controversy. In city of Kanpur, for example, opponents of Sir Sayyid would gather every week at the Nizami Press and await the delivery by post of the latter journal, after which the articles would be read aloud to public rebuke and derision, followed by the penning of rebuttals to be published in journals issued from Kanpur.³³⁶

³³¹ Abbas, *Print Culture: Sir Syed's Aligarh Institute Gazette 1866-1897*, ix–xi.

³³² Abbas, 92.

³³³ Abbas, 37.

³³⁴ That year, total circulation of vernacular journals in the provinces of NWP and Oudh was less than six thousand. David Lelyveld, "Sir Sayyid's Public Sphere: Urdu Print and Oratory in Nineteenth Century India," *Cracow Indological Studies XI* (2009): 258.

³³⁵ C. Ryan Perkins, "From the Mehfil to the Printed Word: Public Debate and Discourse in Late Colonial India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464612474169>.

³³⁶ Abbas, *Print Culture: Sir Syed's Aligarh Institute Gazette 1866-1897*, 8.

The articles of Sir Sayyid and his closest friends, such as Alṭāf Ḥusayn Ḥālī (d. 1914), Mahdī ‘Alī Muḥsin al-Mulk (d. 1907), and Dhakā Ullāh (d. 1910), often shared similar concerns and conceptions of the past. Their historical writings were an attempt to address the decline of Muslims and to defend Islam against perceived polemics by European authors. Margrit Perneau has argued that Sir Sayyid's "conceptualization of temporalities" formed "the basis of all of his reformist projects."³³⁷ This included the notion of modernity, of the present period as radically different from the past. He used *jadīd* and *nayā* to designate modernity.³³⁸ The period of British colonialism was not simply a different moment in time, and thus incomparable other moments in the past that experienced changes. He drew a sharp line between *zamānā-i qadīm*, which encompasses all of history until the thirteenth century AH, after which *zamānā-i jadīd* began.³³⁹ Moreover, modernity corresponded with the lowest point of Muslims globally, as well as the Muslim community [*qawm*] in India.³⁴⁰ The dazzling European advancements in science and technology had rendered almost all Islamic intellectual disciplines useless and outdated, according to Sir Sayyid.³⁴¹ The ‘*ulamā’* should accept, averred Sir Sayyid, that their scholarly tradition no longer had social utility.³⁴²

³³⁷ Pernau, “Fluid Temporalities,” 122.

³³⁸ Pernau, 123.

³³⁹ “Madhhabī khayālāt: zamāne jadīd awr zamāne qadīm ka,” (1875) in Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, ed. Muḥammad Ismā‘īl Pānīpatī, vol. 3 (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab, 1984), 23.

³⁴⁰ “We have neither dominion nor reign, neither knowledge nor distinction... we are the most disgraced and worst of all nations [*qawmon*].” “Islām kī guzashta mawjūdah awr ā’indah ḥālāt,” (1896) in Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, ed. Muḥammad Ismā‘īl Pānīpatī, vol. 12 (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab, 1993), 149–50.

³⁴¹ “Madhhabī khayālāt: zamāne jadīd awr zamāne qadīm ka,” (1875) in Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, 1984, 3:23–27; “Zamāne ka athar madhhab par,” (1894) in Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, ed. Muḥammad Ismā‘īl Pānīpatī, vol. 1 (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab, 1984), 189–93.

³⁴² “Agle zamāne mein ‘ulūm-i dīnīyya awr ‘ulūm-i ‘arabiyya-o-falsafa-i yūnānīyya kī taraqqī kis wajah se thī awr ab kuyūn tanazzul ho giyā hai?” (From his final writings), in Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, 1984, 1:277.

In his attacks on the 'ulamā', he was influenced by Henry Thomas Buckle's *The History of Civilization in England* (1858). He published an Urdu translation of a part of it in 1874 with his own review in the *TA*. In Sir Sayyid's view, civilization, which he both transliterates into Urdu and translated as *tahdhīb*,³⁴³ is at the stage of progressing, of improving (*taraqqī*).³⁴⁴ Having absorbed the racist underpinnings of civilizational discourse of the time, Sir Sayyid believed some people could never become civilized, but others, like Muslims, could. According to Buckle, there were social laws that could be derived from history and could explain why some are able to progress while others could not. The two main impediments to civilizational progress were tyranny and religion. Sir Sayyid slightly modified the latter part, and stated that the false accretions and traditions that Muslims had accepted as Islam were responsible for their stagnation, but a pure Islam without later additions was no barrier to progress.³⁴⁵

These themes were amplified in dramatic fashion in Ḥālī's *Madd-o-jazr-i islām* (The Ebb and Flow of Islam), a versified narrative published first in the *TA* in 1879.³⁴⁶ The *Musaddas*, as it was popularly called due to its six-line stanzas, became an Urdu sensation. As the poem was memorized, performed, and published as a pamphlet numerous times, the "mass *Musaddas* mania" led to imitations, parodies, as well as critiques.³⁴⁷ While Ḥālī had not studied at the Delhi College, he had been studying in Delhi before he fled in 1857 during the uprising. He had returned to teach at the Delhi College's successor, the Anglo-Arabic College, from 1874/5-1887.

³⁴³ "Tahdhīb awr uskī tārikh," (1874) in Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, ed. Muḥammad Ismā'īl Pānīpatī, vol. 6 (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab, 1990), 1–8.

³⁴⁴ Pernau, "Fluid Temporalities," 120.

³⁴⁵ "Tahdhīb awr uskī tārikh," (1874) in Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, 1990, 6:7–8.

³⁴⁶ Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*, 42.

³⁴⁷ Christopher Shackleton and Javed Majeed, *Hālī's Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36.

He had also become a friend and supporter of Sir Sayyid, writing articles and reviews for his journals.³⁴⁸ The *Musaddas* had been written at Sir Sayyid's prompting, as Ḥālī admitted in his introduction, and carried the story of the beginning of Islam in Arabia after a period of pre-Islamic barbarity, the establishment of civilization [*tamaddun*] by the Prophet,³⁴⁹ leading to a cultural and scientific crescendo in an Abbasid Golden Age.

One of the accomplishments during this period was a revival of historical studies.

"Histories were overshadowed with darkness. The star of historical tradition was eclipsed. A cloud was passing over the sun of knowledge. The plain of testimony was darkened. The Arabs lit a lamp on the road, from which the trace of every caravan was found."³⁵⁰ The poem is full of historical details and names, from scientists to scholars, and Ḥālī provides footnotes to clarify these details for the reader. For the above quote, he provides a lengthy note about how modern European historians are indebted to the historical scholarship of early Arab historians. "It is a pity that historical books of the Arabs are not found among the Muslims, while whole archives of them exist in the libraries of England, Germany, France, and Rome."³⁵¹

After the Abbasid accomplishments, however, the narrative turns to the decline of Muslims, and specifically of Indian Muslims, and the '*ulamā'* are targeted harshly for being busy with fund-raising for their madrasas and their sectarianism.³⁵² Towards the conclusion of the

³⁴⁸ Shackle and Majeed, 1.

³⁴⁹ Shackle and Majeed, 121.

³⁵⁰ Shackle and Majeed, 137.

³⁵¹ Shackle and Majeed, 136, f.n. 92.

³⁵² Shackle and Majeed, 169–70.

poem, British rule is presented as a blessing and ultimately good for Muslim progress. The responsibility is put on Muslims to take advantage and improve their situation.³⁵³

While Sir Sayyid and Muslim historicists generally held a positive view about British rule, they were also sensitive to historical criticisms of Islam. Avril Powell has noted how after 1857, civilizational and cultural superiority was asserted through historical debates. The most famous response was Sir Sayyid's *Khuṭabāt-i Aḥmadiyya*, which he wrote in 1870 while visiting London, in response to William Muir's (d. 1905) *Life of Mahomet from Original Sources* (1858-61). William Muir was at the time the Lieutenant-Governor of the NWP, and like Sprenger he had collected recently published as well as manuscript sources on early Islam. Two themes formed the crux of Muir's criticism of Islam, namely the treatment of women and slaves, and violent intolerance of other religions. "His historical writings are suffused with references to the 'static' and 'stationary' character of Muslim societies that he deemed incapable of self-generated change."³⁵⁴ Powell and Christian Troll have analyzed the arguments and responses in detail.³⁵⁵

Muir, as well as Sprenger in his 1851 *Life of Muhammad from Original Sources*, convinced many Muslims readers to doubt the veracity of the earliest Arabic sources about Islamic history and the life of the Prophet.³⁵⁶ Sir Sayyid reproduced this skepticism in his Urdu writings. In one of his last articles, Sir Sayyid wrote that it was a general principle of history that the further

³⁵³ Shackle and Majeed, 204–5.

³⁵⁴ Powell, "Modernist Muslim Responses to Christian Critiques of Islamic Culture, Civilization, and History in Northern India," 72.

³⁵⁵ Powell, "Modernist Muslim Responses to Christian Critiques of Islamic Culture, Civilization, and History in Northern India"; Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 100–143.

³⁵⁶ Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 143.

removed in time a report is from an event, the more it becomes distorted.³⁵⁷ Regarding the life of the Prophet, he stated that "since the Qur'an is the only written source contemporaneous with the Prophet, any oral narrations that contradict it need to be thrown out of the religion the way that a fly is thrown out of milk."³⁵⁸ In fact, Sir Sayyid considered modernity [*ḥāl ka zamāna*] to be an age of skepticism [*shakk*], and thus everything is doubted until evidence is presented. Much of what is recorded and related in books of history is no longer believable.³⁵⁹ He goes so far as to state "It is impossible to reach the time of the Prophet and Companions."³⁶⁰ This leads to a paradox that Sir Sayyid realizes: the study of history is necessary to learn the causes of decline, to show Islam is capable of progress, and to inspire Muslims to work towards it, but "the problem lies in figuring out whether the information that has reached us is true. The feats of our ancestors are scattered and mixed with falsehoods."³⁶¹

Muḥsin al-Mulk, Ḥālī, and Dhakā Ullāh were among Sir Sayyid's associates who attempted to fill in the historical gap by focusing on later periods of Islamic history. Ḥālī wrote *Ḥayāt-i Sa'dī* about the Persian poet because he felt that a biography [*biyogrāfi*] adopting European methods of covering the entire life of a memorable figure based on careful scrutiny of sources would be an effective means of awakening Muslims.³⁶² He utilized the transliterated "biography"

³⁵⁷ "Muntahī al-kalām fī bayān-i masā'il al-islām," (From his final writings) in Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, 1984, 1:25.

³⁵⁸ "Muntahī al-kalām fī bayān-i masā'il al-islām," (From his final writings) in Khān, 1:29.

³⁵⁹ "Zamāne ka athar madhhab par," (1894) in Khān, 1:190.

³⁶⁰ "Agle zamāne mein 'ulūm-i dīnīyya awr 'ulūm-i 'arabiyya-o-falsafa-i yūnānīyya kī taraqqī kis wajah se thī awr ab kuyūn tanazzul ho giyā hai?" (From his final writings), in Khān, 1:277.

³⁶¹ "Dībāja-i al-ma'mūn," (1889) in Khān, *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, 1991, 7:310.

³⁶² Alṭāf Ḥusayn Ḥālī, *Ḥayāt-i Sa'dī* (Lahore: Mujtibā'ī Press, 1888), 3–6.

to distinguish it from traditional Muslim works of collecting reports and narrations about a person in *tadhkiras*.

Muḥsin al-Mulk wrote two reviews in the 1870s of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* in *TA*.³⁶³ Muḥsin al-Mulk saw in the work lessons about the rise and decline of entire nations, *qawm*, not merely *dynasties and empires*. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldūn's work was a reminder that despite having developed principles of source-criticism, Muslim historians failed to apply it, and thus much of what they wrote did not deserve to be called "historical." Often they were nothing more than stories and legends [*qiṣṣa/kahānī*], according to Muḥsin al-Mulk. Due to such carelessness, Islam had become disgraced, and its enemies were able to find fodder for their polemics.³⁶⁴ He further stated that according to Ibn Khaldūn, the historian must keep in mind laws related to nature [*naychar*] and society [*sosāyiī*].³⁶⁵ Because his review is based on the edition published in France, Muḥsin al-Mulk expressed that without Europe Muslims would be unaware of their own critical historians [*muḥaqqiqīn*] but also warned Muslims of the imperative to carry out their own historical research because of its use in religious polemics.³⁶⁶

Dhakā Ullāh included a discussion of Ibn Khaldūn in his own *Muqaddima-i Tārīkh*, the introduction to his ten-volume *Tārīkh-i Hindustān* (1897-98) to critique British historians of India who cast aspersions on Muslim historians. In it he argued that British historians tended to selectively use sources to confirm their own biases about Muslims or Islam in the abstract.³⁶⁷ Yet

³⁶³ Muḥsin al-Mulk Mahdī 'Alī Khān, *Tahdhīb Al-Akhlāq*, ed. Malik Faḍl al-Dīn, vol. 1 (Lahore: Kakkeza'ī Tājir Kutub Qawmī, n.d.), 162–89.

³⁶⁴ Muḥsin al-Mulk Mahdī 'Alī Khān, 1:164.

³⁶⁵ Muḥsin al-Mulk Mahdī 'Alī Khān, 1:165.

³⁶⁶ Muḥsin al-Mulk Mahdī 'Alī Khān, 1:173.

³⁶⁷ Manan Ahmed Asif, "Quarantined Histories: Sindh and the Question of Historiography in Colonial India—Part

the remaining volumes on the history of India remained largely derivative of British sources and appreciative of British rule, even if they were more sympathetic to Mughal rulers.³⁶⁸

The collective Urdu writings of Sir Sayyid, Ḥālī, Muḥsin al-Mulk, and Dhakā Ullāh, and other likeminded Muslim thinkers, reinforced historicist ideas taught at British-sponsored schools and colleges. These ideas included the separation of the past from the present, the inevitability of change with the passage of time, and the difficulty that posed to accessing historical information about the past. Even when such thinkers disagreed with the negative conclusions of European historians about Muslim history, they nonetheless utilized a historicist framework that prized critical use of primary sources and a skeptical attitude towards the cumulative Muslim historiographical tradition, especially the Indo-Persianate historical tradition. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, historicism became a mainstay of Urdu historical discussions in the nascent Urdu public sphere.

Conclusion

By the end of the nineteenth century, the historicism had become quite influential in the Urdu public sphere thanks to a combination of colonial schooling and the wide circulation of Urdu journals such as the *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*. Indian Muslims partial to historicist notions of history felt that the present was radically different from the past. While reading history could be useful to gain general lessons and for motivation, the past did not have much to offer in terms of substantive guidance for the present or the future.

It was not only the ever-advancing movement of time that rendered the past an ineffective guide for the present for Muslim historicists. It was also the lack of historical information about

II,” *History Compass* 15, no. 8 (2017): 3–4.

³⁶⁸ Hasan, *A Moral Reckoning*, 229–32.

the past, especially about early Arabo-Islamic history, that also made it problematic for them. The writings of Sir Sayyid and his supporters repeated that Muslim historians had not properly recorded history. Their books were putatively filled with baseless stories. Even information about the Prophet and the early history of Islam was suspect. For Muḥsin al-Mulk, Ibn Khaldūn was the exception that proved the rule that Muslims had not properly written history. Because historicists were some of the earliest adopters of Urdu prose and print to discuss historical topics, starting with those associated with the Delhi College and then continuing afterwards with Sir Sayyid's Scientific Society, their ideas gained wide circulation in a growing Urdu public sphere.

In addition to describing the growth of historicism and an Urdu public sphere in nineteenth-century India, this chapter also surveyed the growth of Arabic historical writing and the further incorporation of India into an Arabic cosmopolis by the end of the nineteenth century. This was also due in part to the early use of the lithographic press by '*ulamā*', such as Mamlūk al-'Alī and Aḥmad 'Alī Sahāranpūrī, and their association with the Delhi College. These scholars drew on a legacy of *ḥadīth* studies in India that stretched back to the seventeenth century and had gained prominence due to the focus of Shāh Walī Allāh and his family. The interest in *ḥadīth* studies not only led to editing and publishing early *ḥadīth* compilations, but a vision of the past structured by the transmission of knowledge over generations of Muslims. Azād Bilgrāmī in the eighteenth century lamented the lack of information in Indo-Persianate sources about Indian '*ulamā*', noting that there was a greater tendency to memorialize figures as Sufis instead. A century later, Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān repeated this criticism as he wrote his Arabic histories of Islamicate disciplines and centered '*ulamā*' and their scholarship. His contemporary and intellectual opponent 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, who disagreed with Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān's anti-Ḥanafī views, nonetheless agreed with him about the lack of information available in Indian histories about '*ulamā*'. He

thus wrote his biographical history of Ḥanafis specifically to address the dearth of historical knowledge he witnessed among Indian scholars. In choosing to write in Arabic, both Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān and al-Laknawī were aware that they were writing for a transregional audience of Arabic readers, indicating India's participation in an Arabic cosmopolis.

Moreover, the attacks against early Arabic sources of historicists, and the interest, on the other hand, of many 'ulamā' in discovering and studying early collections of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* generated distrust and controversy between the two groups. Persianate historical writing concerned "with space, local history, identity, and emotions of the inhabitants" continued to be used in Urdu, albeit less commonly.³⁶⁹ There was however less tension between the Indo-Persianate historical and Arabic historical writing. Many 'ulamā' still appreciated Sufi biographies and Indo-Persianate *adab*.³⁷⁰

While there was a much larger audience for Urdu books, Arabic literacy had increased in India. As Barbara Metcalf has shown, madrasas styled on the one established in Deoband in 1867 spread across north India, even as far south as Madras, numbering at least thirty-six by the end of the century. They would balloon to almost 9000 within a century of Deoband's founding, in 1967.³⁷¹ These and other madrasas affiliated with non-Deobandi movements, increased the market for Arabic books in India. Many Arabic historical works were increasingly available in

³⁶⁹ Razak Khan, "Local Pasts: Space, Emotions and Identities in Vernacular Histories of Princely Rampur," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58, no. 5 (November 23, 2015): 697, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341388>.

³⁷⁰ Marcia Hermansen, "Rewriting Sufi Identity in the 20th Century: The Biographical Approaches of Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī and Khwājah Ḥasan Nizāmī," *Islamic Studies* 46, no. 1 (2007): 15–39; Barbara D. Metcalf, "The Past in the Present: Instruction, Pleasure, and Blessing in Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya's Aap Bitii," in *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 67–95.

³⁷¹ Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 125–37.

Urdu as well by the late nineteenth century, including historical works of Shāh Walī Allāh.³⁷²

Thus, beyond the focus on European ideas entering Urdu historiography through colonial education and the public sphere, Ottoman and Indian Ocean connections with India must also be kept in mind when discussing nineteenth-century historiographies.

Yet, history was not studied as a formal discipline in Deoband or its sister institution, Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm in Saharanpur.³⁷³ While some ‘*ulamā*’ did write refutations and criticisms of articles in the *AIG* and *TA*, as mentioned earlier, there was little interest in responding to European histories, or for that matter writing new histories in Urdu for a specifically Indian Muslim audience. On the other hand, Urdu historicist writings of Sir Sayyid served to solidify the inchoate notion of the Indian Muslim *qawm* as both inheritors of an abstract Islamic civilization and as a minoritized and racialized community in India defined against a Hindu community.³⁷⁴ The emphasis on a territorialized identity of a Muslim *qawm* is hard to detect in Indo-Arabic historical writings in the nineteenth century. In the next chapter, Shiblī Nu‘mānī’s attempt to adapt historicist approaches while more seriously researching and utilizing early Arabic sources will be discussed.

³⁷² Zaman, “Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, His Successors, and the Qur’ān,” 289.

³⁷³ Nūr al-Ḥasan Rashid Kāndhlawī has provided the original curriculum of the madrasas at Deoband and Saharanpur based on their records until 1914. No history books are included in the curriculum for Deoband. Saharanpur had five: *madārij al-nubūwwat* by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī in year 5, *nafaḥāt al-uns [tadhkira-I awliya]* by mawlāna ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī in year 6, *akhbār al-akhyār* by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī in year 6, *Ma‘ārij al-nabuwwa fī mādarīj al-futuwwa* by Mullāh Mu‘īn al-Dīn Wā‘iz al-Kashifī al-Harawī (d. 1501) in year 8, and *Tuzuk-i jahāngīrī*, the autobiography of Mughal Emperor Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad Jahāngīr (1569-1627) in year 9. These were included primarily for Persian language instruction. Nūr al-Ḥasan Rashid Kāndhlawī, “Dār Al-‘ulūm Deoband Awr Mazāhir-i ‘ulūm Sahāranpūr Kā Sab Se Pihlā Niṣāb-i Ta‘īim,” *Aḥwāl-o-Āthār*, 1429 2008, 9.

³⁷⁴ Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, *Indian Muslim Minorities and the 1857 Rebellion: Religion, Rebels and Jihad* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 124.

Chapter 2:

Shiblī Nu‘mānī’s Adaptation of Historicism

Introduction

In the previous chapter, in discussing nineteenth-century shifts in Muslim historical understanding, we saw the bifurcation between a modern historicist approach promoted by Sir Sayyid and supporters of the Aligarh movement and an Arabo-biographical approach preferred by many ‘*ulamā*’. Sir Sayyid and his supporters evinced concern about the decline of an Islamic civilization and sought to utilize history to inspire progress, breaking with the past as part of embracing modernity [*jadīd dawr*]. By contrast, many ‘*ulamā*’ seemed uninterested in engaging with such historicism, and instead turned to the early Islamic past with renewed interest, and sought to find, edit, and publish classics of *ḥadīth* and Ḥanafī *fiqh*, and were more attuned towards carefully compiling information from early Arabic sources. Furthermore, many ‘*ulamā*’ viewed Sir Sayyid and his Aligarh movement with suspicion and disdain.¹ In 1883, however, Shiblī Nu‘mānī (1857-1914), a product of the traditional Arabic and Islamic curriculum of India, joined the faculty at Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College (MAOC) at Aligarh as a professor of Persian, and eventually of Arabic.² Although his employment officially entailed the addition of a new teacher of languages at Aligarh, it also represented the intellectual entrance of an ‘*ālim*’ into the world of modern historicism.

This chapter will focus on Shiblī’s method of historical analysis, his participation in the intellectual and social world of ‘*ulamā*’ through his historical studies, and his attempt to

¹ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 325–26; Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces’ Muslims 1860-1923* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 109.

² S. M. Ikram, *Yādgār-i Shiblī; ya ‘nī, shams al-‘ulamā ‘allāmah Shiblī Nu‘mānī ke tafṣīlī ḥālāt zindagī aur un kī taṣānīf aur kārnāmon par sīr ḥāṣil tabaṣurah*. (Lahore: Idārah-yi siqāfat Islāmiyyah, 1971), 82.

appropriate historicist methods into field of religious scholarship. The two main questions of this chapter are: what was Shiblī's method of historical analysis, and how did he support its legitimacy within the field of religious scholarship? The main argument of the chapter is that Shiblī adopted a historicist method towards history, rooted in finding primary sources, critically reading them, and writing a narrative history based on historical cause and effect without recourse to miracles or divine interventions.

In applying this approach to the history of early Islam, Shiblī's approach amounted to a genealogical critique. Talal Asad's recent insights about genealogical critique from within a tradition clarify Shiblī's argument for the importance of critical history for understanding Islam. "Critique is central to a living tradition; it is essential to how its followers assess the relevance of the past for the present, and the present for the future. It is also essential for understanding the nature of circumstance and therefore the possibility of changing elements of circumstances that are changeable ... This is not a challenge that consists in abstract theories but of embodied (and yet criticizable) ways of life."³ For Shibli, history did not necessarily require denying the continuity or relevance of the past, but rather necessitated asking what changes have occurred in Muslim intellectual and cultural history, and how those changes can clarify the practices and understanding of Islam in the present. After providing a brief overview of his early life, the chapter will proceed by tracking the development of his historical method and his strategies to legitimate it through three phases of his adult life, his Aligarh phase (1883-1898), his Hyderabad phase (1901-1905), and his Lucknow phase (1905-1913).

³ Talal Asad, "Thinking About Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today," *Critical Inquiry* 42 (September 1, 2015): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1086/683002>.

Muḥammad Shiblī Nu‘māni was born in Azamgarh on June 3, 1857, to a family of Rajput descent, who had converted to Islam about four centuries prior.⁴ His father Shaykh Ḥabībullāh was a respected landowner, lawyer, and merchant, and served as the Honorary Secretary for Azamgarh’s Municipal Committee.⁵

While Shiblī’s younger brothers attended western schools, Shiblī received his education at traditional madrasas. His most famous and influential teacher was Muḥammad Fārūq Chiryakōtī (d. 1909), a scholar trained in the rationalist *dars-i nizāmī* tradition of the Farangī Maḥall and was bitterly opposed to the modern English education Sir Sayyid championed. He was also an ardent supporter of the Ḥanafī school and bestowed upon a young Shiblī the name “Nu‘mānī” after Nu‘mān b. Thābit, the full name of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767). After completing the *dars-i nizāmī* curriculum, Shiblī went to Rampur for more specialized lessons in Ḥanafī *fiqh* and *uṣūl*. He also spent some time studying *ḥadīth* with Aḥmad ‘Alī Sahāranpurī, although it is not clear for how long nor what books he formally studied. Finally, Shiblī spent a few months in Lahore to informally study Arabic with Fayḍ al-Ḥasan Sahāranpurī (d. 1887), a Professor of Arabic at Oriental College in Lahore. Although he did not enroll at the college, he spent sufficient time with Fayḍ al-Ḥasan to receive a letter of recommendation from him to be appointed Professor of Arabic and Persian at Aligarh College in 1883.

Engaging with Historicism at Aligarh

Immersed in the intellectual opportunities at Aligarh, and having access to Sir Sayyid’s impressive library, Shiblī began his career as a historian. An overview of his historical production at Aligarh shows his preoccupation with historical writing between 1883 and 1898. In

⁴ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī* (Azamgarh: Dar al-Mussannifin, 2008), 78.

⁵ Nadwī, 82.

1886 he wrote *Musalmānoḡ kī guzashta ta 'līm* (Muslim Learning in the Past) about the history of Muslim learning and scholarship. This was followed by *al-Ma'mūn* in 1887 about the life and reign of the seventh Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun (d. 218/833), then *Sīrat al-Nu'mān* (Life of Abū Ḥanīfa) in 1889-90. These books made Shiblī famous in the Urdu literary world, and since the college owned the copyrights to them, they also financially benefitted Aligarh.⁶ Between 1887 and 1892 he wrote several well-received historical articles for the Aligarh College Magazine, the most famous being "Jizya," about the poll-tax imposed on non-Muslim subjects according to Islamic law, and "Kutubkhāna-i Iskandarīyya," (Library of Alexandria). Thereafter Shiblī became editor of Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental Magazine's Urdu section in 1894, and continued to publish articles on history and literature, most famously his "Ḥuqūq al-dhimmiyīn" (The Rights of Non-Muslim Subjects) about the history of Muslim treatment of non-Muslim subjects living under Islam rule.⁷ In 1892 he undertook a research trip to Istanbul, Cairo, and Syria to find material for his monograph on the Companion of the Prophet and second Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d.23/644). Upon his return that same year, he published a travelogue of the journey, *Safarnāmah-yi rūm wa miṣr wa shām* (Travelogue of Turkey, Egypt, and Syria). During his stay in Istanbul, he was awarded the Tamgāh-i Majīdiyāh medal on behalf of Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II (r. 1876-1909) due to his professorship at Aligarh.⁸ His monograph on 'Umar, *al-Fārūq*, was published in 1898.

The influence of historicism on his thinking can be seen in one of the first essays he wrote at Aligarh. In April 1883, he wrote an article titled "'Ulamā' -i Islam" in the *Aligarh*

⁶ Nadwī, 150.

⁷ Nadwī, 152–53.

⁸ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Safarnāmah-yi rūm wa miṣr wa shām* (Dihlī: Maṭba' -i Tuḥfah-yi Jannat, 1923), 133–34.

Institute Gazette, which shows he had a notion of the present estranged from the past. "Time has adopted a new disguise and the way it appears in the present is completely strange and unfamiliar. Thus, in these circumstances if we [i.e., 'ulamā'] do not participate in the present, is it possible for the past to come back to protect us?"⁹ One way in which Shiblī felt 'ulamā' were not participating in the present was by their absence in historical discourse in the Urdu public sphere. Historical discussions occurring in the Urdu public sphere were competing to shape Muslim communal consciousness. Shiblī's use of history to cultivate a sense of Muslim community [*qawm*] needs to be understood relationally within the context of competing narratives about Muslims in the public sphere.

Urdu had increasingly become the language of religious, social, and political discourse among north Indian Muslims, with publications, newspapers, and journals dominated by Urdu.¹⁰ Urdu journals especially "created new communities in print" through literary debates and discussions that garnered interest and controversy across India.¹¹ This interest in reading and quickly responding to articles sustained a commercial market that helped produce an Urdu public sphere.¹² The writers of the last decades of the nineteenth century were "the first in South Asia to

⁹ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Bāqiyāt-i Shiblī, Un maẓāmin, khuṭūṭ aur khuṭbāt kā majmū'ah jo maqālāt-i Shiblī, khuṭbāt-i Shiblī aur makātib-i Shiblī kī gayārah jildon meṅ se kisī meṅ nahīn hain*. (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab, 1965), 14, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/baqiyat-e-shibli-shibli-nomani-ebooks-2>.

¹⁰ David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 82; Hindi did not become the language of administration in north India until 1900, and thus Urdu books, journals, and newspapers outnumbered Hindi publications until the twentieth century. Jennifer Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018), 7.

¹¹ Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan Dreams*, 34.

¹² Megan Eaton Robb, *Print and the Urdu Public: Muslims, Newspapers, and Urban Life in Colonial India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 7–15.

write for the emerging reading and listening public,”¹³ and thus engaged with larger segments of Indians than had ever been possible. C. Ryan Perkins has argued that while religious debates had occurred prior to print, journals at the turn of the century transformed religious discourse. They quickened the pace of written debates and expanded both the audience and participants, and thus helped foster an Islamic public as the site of debate, replacing the royal court.¹⁴

In addition to the role of print in fostering an Urdu public sphere, voluntary associations and political organizations sprung up utilizing or promoting Urdu, including the Aligarh Scientific Society, the Anjuman-i Punjab (1865),¹⁵ the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta (1863),¹⁶ and the Muslim Educational Conference (1886). In meetings and assemblies of these associations, hundreds and thousands of people would have to travel and physically meet, mingle, and muse over common concerns in a shared language, and their speeches and deliberations would then be printed, circulated, and covered by newspapers, further solidifying a new sense of a Muslim and Urdu public.¹⁷

Appeals to a Muslim *qawm* in historical writings in the Urdu public sphere were often attempts to overcome the bitter divisions of caste, class, and sect, especially in the face of greater

¹³ Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan Dreams*, 20.

¹⁴ C. Ryan Perkins, “From the Mehfil to the Printed Word: Public Debate and Discourse in Late Colonial India,” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 47–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464612474169>.

¹⁵ Jeffrey M. Diamond, “The Orientalist-Literati Relationship in the Northwest: G.W. Leitner, Muhammad Hussain Azad and the Rhetoric of Neo-Orientalism in Colonial Lahore,” *South Asia Research* 31, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272801003100103>.

¹⁶ Shamim Firdous, “Role of Nawab Abdul Latif in the Development of Modern Education in Colonial Bengal,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 76 (2015): 509.

¹⁷ C. Ryan Perkins, “A New Pablik: Abdul Halim Sharar, Volunteerism, and the Anjuman-e Dar-Us-Salam in Late Nineteenth-Century India*,” *Modern Asian Studies* 49, no. 4 (July 2015): 1066–67, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000432>.

awareness of global European hegemony over formerly Muslim-ruled lands, and a growing unease in India against British rule. For example, Sir Sayyid argued in the 1870s that the aristocratic history of Muslim-rule in India explained a purported greater sense of pride and loss among Muslims, as opposed to Hindus. This history of privilege not only differentiated Muslims from Hindus, but also divided well-bred and elite Muslims, *ashrāf*, from Muslims of a lower status.¹⁸

European anti-Islamic sentiment further shaped Muslim conceptualizations of community. The Victorian press in the late nineteenth century explained global Muslim malaise by reference to Islam.¹⁹ Robert Osborn, a veteran of the British Army, summed up the common view in the *Contemporary Review* in 1877 that, '[a] Moslem, so long as he remains a Moslem, must acquiesce in a moral and intellectual life which is incompatible with progress and humanity.'²⁰ In the British press, subjugation of non-Muslims, political corruption, Muslim mistreatment of women and slaves, and fanaticism characterized Muslims historically as well as in the contemporary moment.²¹ These views were not limited to journalists. "Writers as widely located as Carl Becker (1873-1945), Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936) and Louis Massignon (1883-1962) seemed to manifest a consensus on Islam's 'latent inferiority' while D. S. Margoliouth thought that the Gospel was 'the only cure' against Islamic

¹⁸ Frances W. Pritchett, "Defending the 'Community': Sir Sayyid's Concept of Qaum," in *Cambridge Companion to Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, ed. Yasmin Saikia and M. Raisur Rahman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 164.

¹⁹ M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 46–47.

²⁰ Robert D. Osborn, "Muhammadan Law: Its Growth and Character", *Contemporary Review*, 29 (1877), p. 111, quoted in Paul Auchterlonie, "From the Eastern Question to the Death of General Gordon: Representations of the Middle East in the Victorian Periodical Press, 1876-1885," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28, no. 1 (2001): 20.

²¹ Auchterlonie, 20–22.

‘fanaticism.’”²² Shiblī observed that these views were spread in India by Christian missionaries who translated British books and articles into Urdu, especially in the 1880s when the Ottoman conflict with Armenians held the attention of the British press. “Europeans are claiming that oppression of Christians is required by Islam to explain Ottoman treatment of Armenians.”²³ Muslim intellectual turned to writing histories in large part to combat charges these charges and affirm an understanding of Islam more amicable to notions of moral progress.

Muslim responses often involved undermining the religious authority of ‘*ulamā*’ and their scholarly tradition, however. Ameer Ali (d. 1928), one of the most prominent Muslim voices responding to these polemics, argued that Islamic history revealed that Islam had been supportive of moral progress and social change. In his narrative, Islam constituted an ethical system that the Prophet had initiated but had not defined for all times and places. Thus, the ideals were historically concretized in different ways. “As the name of a system, Islam was so encompassing as to deprive all traditional authorities, such as clerics and mystics, of any real hold over it, thus permitting laymen like Ameer Ali to take the views of these worthies into account when writing about Muslim history, but quite ignore their modes of analysis and actual opinions to claim a kind of secular authority over the religion.”²⁴

Moreover, unlike modern intellectuals of Sir Sayyid’s generation, who although critical of the ‘*ulamā*’ still had largely shared the same classical education in Arabic and Persian, Ameer Ali had received no such formal religious education. This explains his more radical critiques of the ‘*ulamā*’, who became one of the main causes of Islam’s civilizational decline in his historical

²² Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics*, 46n206.

²³ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, ed. Sayyid Sulaimān Nadwī, vol. 1 (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 1999), 175–76.

²⁴ Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 203.

narrative.²⁵ In his *Spirit of Islam* (1891), which had great influence among English-educated Muslims in India and Egypt,²⁶ Ameer Ali described how the ‘*ulamā*’ in the later Abbasid Caliphate began to function like Christian clergy in giving support to whomever was in power while curtailing free thought. “The enunciations of the Fathers of the Church became law ... What has been laid down by the Fathers is unchangeable, and beyond the range of discussion ... Patristicism has thus destroyed all hope of development among the Sunnis.”²⁷ Even with the decline of the rational and humanistic essence of Islam’s ‘spirit,’ Ameer Ali asserted that Christian Europe historically had been more violent, intolerant towards other religions, racist, and oppressive towards women.²⁸ His combination of hollowing out Islamic history of specific religious traditions while arguing it represented a civilization superior to the West, provided a defining narrative for a global Muslim community increasingly subjugated by European powers and plagued by colonial inferiority.

At the MAOC, Shiblī Nu’mānī became critical of the lack of historical appreciation displayed by English-educated Muslims towards their own history. “Shibli had a low opinion of English-educated Muslims, bitterly taking them to task for their apathy toward the achievement of the past.”²⁹ Because Muslims who were educated in modern institutions failed to appreciate Islamic history, they were also losing respect for Muslim scholars. Thomas Arnold (d. 1930), the professor of philosophy at the college since 1888 and a close friend of Shiblī’s, agreed that the

²⁵ Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 58, 93.

²⁶ Ahmad, 87.

²⁷ Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (Calcutta: S.K. Lahiri and Co., 1902), 324.

²⁸ Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964*, 92–95.

²⁹ Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation*, 248.

students lacked confidence in their past.³⁰ This view was corroborated by one of their students at Aligarh, Muḥammad ‘Alī Jawhar (d. 1931), who states in his autobiography that “[o]ur communal consciousness was, therefore, far more secular than religious, and although we considered Islam to be the final message for mankind and the only true faith ... we were shamefully ignorant of the details of its teaching and of its world-wide and centuries-old history.”³¹ Moreover, on his Middle Eastern voyage, Shiblī encountered not only ignorance but derision towards the classical scholarly heritage among Muslims educated at European or European-styled institutions. Shiblī, unlike Sir Sayyid and Ameer Ali, did not believe that the Islamic scholarly traditions required wholesale rejection or reinterpretation in light of modern science and rationality. He felt that previous forms of knowledge and institutions of the *‘ulamā*, though requiring serious reform, still had much to offer, and in fact were integral for an ethical Muslim society.³²

Shiblī of course was well-aware of Urdu publications of Muslim historicists about Islamic history. He in fact acknowledged that this new group [*nayā gurūh*] of intellectuals were primarily responsible for increasing interest in Islamic history among Indian Muslims. In an introduction to a collection of his essays published in 1898, he wrote that while he appreciated their efforts in responding to anti-Islamic polemics and strengthening Muslim dignity, he considered their writings historically superficial, a first glance at best [*sarsarī kāṛ rawā’ī*].³³ He stated that the fault was not solely of these writers, but of the Muslim *qawm* who still had not

³⁰ Lelyveld, 247.

³¹ Mohamed Ali, *My Life, a Fragment: An Autobiographical Sketch of Maulana Mohamed Ali.*, ed. Afzal Iqbal (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1966), 22.

³² Nu‘mānī, *Safarnāmah-yi rūm wa miṣr wa shām*, 70.

³³ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *Rasā’il-i Shiblī* (Aligarh: Maṭba‘ al-‘ulūm ‘Alīgarh, 1898), 1.

developed a proper historical consciousness and preferred instead writings celebrating past glories that devolved into ancestor worship [*aslāf parasī*]. Thus, when the French orientalist Ernest Renan (d. 1892) famously proclaimed that Islam had hindered intellectual thought, and that the Arabs had merely translated Greek philosophy but had added nothing new, Shiblī claimed that Muslims were content with repeating the responses written by other European authors that argued otherwise. There was no interest in honestly researching what works Muslims had translated, how they had understood them, and what unique contribution they had made to philosophy. “The issue is not that obvious and cannot be addressed by relying [*taqlīd*] on a few European authors.”³⁴ Shiblī believed that English-educated Muslims generally lacked the linguistic training to research and study works in Arabic, unlike ‘*ulamā*’ who spent years studying Arabic and Persian.³⁵ He firmly believed that superior research would result in superior histories. He gives the example of his essay *Musalmānoḥ kī guzashta ta’līm* (1888) as an historical work that received positive reception all over India even though its research was not exhaustive.³⁶

Having reviewed Shiblī’s disappointment with the nature of historical discussion in the Urdu public sphere during his time at Aligarh in the late nineteenth century, we can proceed to analyze the historical approach he employed in his histories.

The most important aspect of writing history for Shiblī was basing it on primary sources rather than re-narrating information in secondary sources. This was in large part because there were so many Arabic sources for Islamic history that had been unexplored. When he came to

³⁴ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *Khuṭībāt-i Shiblī*, ed. Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 2008), 13-14.

³⁵ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *Makātib-i Shiblī*, ed. Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, vol. 1 (Azamgarh: Maṭba‘ Ma‘ārif, 1966), 17, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/makateeb-e-shibli-part-001-shibli-nomani-ebooks-1>.

³⁶ Nu‘mānī, *Rasā’il-i Shiblī*, 2.

Aligarh, he was immediately struck by the breadth of Arabic books on history and geography in Sir Sayyid's library; in a letter written shortly after his arrival, he wrote, "even the most senior scholars [*ulamā'*] are ignorant of them. They have all been published in Germany, so likely even Egyptians are unaware as well."³⁷

His *Musalmānoḡ kī guzashta ta' līm* sheds some light on the books that were available in Aligarh, and it provides an early example of how Shiblī envisioned sources should be used in writing history. It was an 80-page Urdu essay on the intellectual disciplines that the Muslim community (*qawm*) established, those they adopted from other communities and contributed to, and books that Muslims translated into Arabic. He also wrote about the institutions of learning that Muslims established, with special attention given to the Nizāmiyya in Baghdad. It was written for the second Muhammedan Educational Conference held on December 1887, in Lucknow on the topic of Muslim education.

The essay draws on numerous sources that Shiblī mentions in the body or footnotes. The most cited works are the *Kashf al-zunūn* published in London in 1848,³⁸ the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn published in Beirut, and *Wafayāt al-A'yān* of Ibn Khallikān published by William McGuckin Baron de Slane (d. 1878) in 1842. Shiblī's comment in the introduction indicates that he sought to synthesize Arabic sources to produce an original historical narrative, rather than compile a book made up mostly of excerpts from previous sources. He wrote that no single book had all the information on the topics he is interested in, but rather they are spread out across numerous sources, and it is likely that no Muslim author sought to write about these topics.³⁹

³⁷ Nu' mānī, *Makātib-i Shiblī*, 1:56–57.

³⁸ Shiblī Nu' mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, ed. Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, vol. 3 (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 2009), 5n.

³⁹ Nu' mānī, 3:4–5.

Nevertheless, the essay shared themes with earlier works on Islamic intellectual history such as Nawāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān's (d. 1880) *Abjad al- 'ulūm*. Reminiscent of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān and Āzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1786), Shiblī wrote in *Musalmānoḡ kī guzashta ta 'līm* that as different non-Arab ethnic communities embraced Islam, they also became part of the Muslim *qawm*, inherited the passion for knowledge that the Arabs had, and eventually surpassed them.⁴⁰ However, unlike the earlier works, Shiblī divides types of disciplines of knowledge by those which the Muslim *qawm* first produced, such as *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*, and those adopted from other *qawms*, such as Greek philosophy and logic. While Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān offered different ways of categorizing knowledge, contrasting between disciplines intrinsic to the Muslim community and extrinsic is nowhere to be found. Shiblī's work was not simply a scholarly endeavor to appreciate the breadth of Islamic intellectual history, but a history intended for wider consumption among a Muslim public. Consequently, he framed it to show that the readers and listeners were part of a long history of scholarship and learning, and that they were a community committed to the intellectual development of all kinds of learning, regardless of whether the specific discipline had been initiated by Muslims or non-Muslims. Muslims advanced intellectually because they were willing to learn from others, appropriate different systems of knowledge from Greek, Persian, and Sanskrit scholars and sources, while also developing sciences Islam generated.

He more explicitly asserted the relevance of history for cultivating communal consciousness in his book *al-Ma 'mūn*, published in 1888. According to Shiblī “many histories of India [*hindustān*] have been written glorifying the Mughals and Timurids, but it is clear that the

⁴⁰ Nu 'mānī, 3:90-91. Shiblī quotes Ibn Khaldūn in Arabic, “most of the carriers [*ḥamalāt*] of knowledge in Islam are non-Arabs [*al- 'ajam*].”

entire history of India is only a small portion of our *qawmī* history."⁴¹ Shiblī desired to orient Indian Muslims towards an Islamic past broader than the Muslim kingdoms in India. "Even if these dynasties were from different kingdoms and lineages, Islamic unity designated them one *qawm*, and their vicissitudes became our *qawmī* history. However, if we want to find this history in Urdu, we will fail."⁴² The lack of Urdu histories had deprived Indian Muslims of knowledge of their own history, which Shiblī believed were crucial for cultivating communal feelings [*qawmī fīling*] and consciousness [*qawmī khavesh*].⁴³ Shiblī designated early Arabo-Muslim history as "Islamic" history for a Muslim community.⁴⁴

Shiblī displayed a critical attitude towards previous Muslim historical writing and towards contemporary '*ulamā*'. He stated that although they had the linguistic skills to carry out research in Arabic, '*ulamā*' were absent from Urdu discussions, "too busy dreaming of the deserts of Arabia and the gardens of Persia, instead of producing serious works of Urdu prose."⁴⁵

Moreover, he averred that European progress [*taraqqī*] in the discipline [*fann*] of history had rendered Arabic historical works inadequate for modern audiences. According to Shiblī, the focus on royal and dynastic politics, courtly intrigues, rebellions, and the personal lives of noteworthy individuals led to a neglect of cultural and social aspects [*tarīq-e-tamaddun awr tarz-e-ma'āsharat*] in older histories.⁴⁶ He specifically mentioned the histories of al-Ṭabarī (d.

310/922), al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956-7), Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232), Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), Abū

⁴¹ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Al-Ma'mūn* (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, n.d.), 2.

⁴² Nu'mānī, 3.

⁴³ Nu'mānī, 4.

⁴⁴ Nu'mānī, 2.

⁴⁵ Nu'mānī, 3.

⁴⁶ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *al-Ma'mūn* (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, n.d.), 6.

al-Fidā' (732/1332), al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 279/892) as lacking a focus on socio-cultural aspects of history. A crucial element in the new [fann] of history that Europe has taken the lead in was to go beyond recording events and search out the causes and effects of the historical events. "In the world of history, every event is connected to multiple other events. Understanding their underlying intricacies and utilizing a critical philosophical approach to derive historical conclusions is the heart and soul of history [ilm-e-tārīkh kī jān awr rūḥ hai]."47

An important aspect of his historical perspective was the notion of a progressive development of knowledge. Shiblī felt that historians should utilize past histories but develop something new or original. In writing about the intellectual conditions of Baghdad during al-Ma'mūn's reign, as well as his system of governance, Shiblī stated he must "leave the footsteps of prior historians," since they did not ask these questions.⁴⁸ He nonetheless acknowledged that what past Muslim historians accomplished was impressive for their respective time periods and could be carefully used to write modern histories. For Shiblī, the fact that past historical works by Muslims did not meet contemporary standards was not a mark against them, but rather a normal feature of the progressive development of knowledge, leaving open the possibility that further advancement might render current histories obsolete.⁴⁹

Shiblī's criticisms of contemporary 'ulamā' should be viewed as an example of what Muhammad Qasim Zaman has referred to as "internal critique."⁵⁰ According to Zaman, internal

⁴⁷ Nu'mānī, 6–7.

⁴⁸ Nu'mānī, 94.

⁴⁹ Nu'mānī, 7.

⁵⁰ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

critiques “are frequently a product of efforts to claim religious authority with reference to a hallowed scholarly tradition, to put it to particular uses, and to reorient it in various ways.”⁵¹

Shiblī’s targeting of specifically ‘*ulamā*’ in his criticisms of Muslim historical writing indicates that he sought to change their opinions. His aim was not to attack the legitimacy of ‘*ulamā*’ as religious authorities the way Ameer Ali did, but to legitimate his historicist approach within the field of religious discourse.

Shiblī’s assertion for the importance of history should be seen against the backdrop of broader discussions by ‘*ulamā*’ over what constituted religious (*dīnī*) knowledge and what constituted worldly or secular (*dunyawī*) knowledge. As Brannon Ingram has recently clarified, this debate concerned the founders of the Deoband madrasa as well. Qāsim Nānawtawī wanted to continue instruction in *ma‘qūlāt* “subjects such as logic (*mantiq*), philosophy (*hikmat*), dialectical theology (*kalam*), rhetoric, and astronomy.” For Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, the cofounder of Deoband, “the *manqūlat* was not only properly ‘religious’ knowledge but the only knowledge worth knowing. He dismissed the *ma‘qūlat* as useless, if not dangerous.”⁵² During his time at Aligarh, Shiblī recognized that the bifurcation of knowledge in the ‘*ulamā*’s discourse between *dīnī* and *dunyawī* knowledge was a product of the loss of social power of the ‘*ulamā*’ in the wake of colonialism, and that the discourse had led them to abandon knowledge considered secular or worldly, and intensely guard what constituted religious knowledge. Shiblī attributed this anxiety over defending a narrow notion of religious [*dīnī*] knowledge to the intensification of polemics over ritual practice.⁵³

⁵¹ Zaman, 3.

⁵² Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland: Univ of California Press, 2018), 41.

⁵³ Nu‘mānī, *Khuṭībāt-i Shiblī*, 32–33.

Instead of engaging in the field of religious discourse through writing fatwas, sectarian polemics, or commentaries, Shiblī decided to apply his historicist perspective in writing histories to shape Muslim practice and beliefs. His *Sīrat al-Nu‘mān*, a biography about Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) published in 1889, is an example of this approach. Although Shiblī criticized the Muslim historiographical traditions, he nonetheless placed his works as a continuation of a tradition of Muslim historical writing through a historiographical introduction. He justified the book by stating that no Urdu biography on Abū Ḥanīfa’s life existed, even though most Indians were followers of his legal school.⁵⁴ He began his monograph commenting on what sources could be used to reconstruct the history of the subject, what sources he had available, and the limitations posed by the sources. He provided an overview of twenty-six Arabic books about the life of the scholar, before stating which ones he had available in India.⁵⁵ Shiblī noted that some sources that he was unable to find had been used by ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, such as *Tahdhīb al-kamāl* by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī (d. 742/1241). This was a biographical history of *ḥadīth* transmitters, and an important source for identifying *ḥadīth* scholars Abū Ḥanīfa may have met. Shiblī mentioned that his references to Abū Ḥanīfa’s teachers were taken from al-Laknawī’s quotations of al-Mizzī. He thus considered al-Laknawī’s writings an indispensable secondary source.⁵⁶

Shiblī’s biography of Abū Ḥanīfa represents a greater appreciation for critically reading sources than *al-Ma‘mūn*. Shiblī adopted a positivist approach in trying to weed out historical facts from legends. He deemed most biographical material on Abū Ḥanīfa’s life problematic. He

⁵⁴ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat al-Nu‘mān* (Lahore: Islāmī Kutub Khāna, n.d.), 7.

⁵⁵ Nu‘mānī, 8–12.

⁵⁶ Nu‘mānī, 39n.

believed they contained very little discussion of Abū Ḥanīfa's legal thought and opinions.⁵⁷ Moreover, he felt they were full of pious exaggerations.⁵⁸ Shiblī contended these were mostly baseless stories. Nevertheless, he wrote that information that was presented with a reference to an early source or did not require believing in miracles could be accepted. Furthermore, Shiblī attempted to overcome the problem by resorting to early books of law and *ḥadīth* that were critical of Abū Ḥanīfa as well as the replies by his defenders.

Shiblī also argued that neither of two extant books commonly ascribed to him were authentic, namely his *Musnad*, a collection of *ḥadīth* ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa, and *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, a theological treatise attributed to him. Regarding the former, Shiblī expanded on an argument from Shāh Walī Allāh that many of the compilations that the *Musnad* was based on did not appear prior to the seventh century AH.⁵⁹ Regarding the latter, Shiblī argued that its use of philosophical terminology such as *jawhar* (substance) and *ʿarḍ* (accident) are anachronistic. Translations of Greek philosophical works that were the source of these terms only began towards the end of the Abū Ḥanīfa's life, and it is highly unlikely that philosophical terminology became widely adopted that quickly.⁶⁰

In turning to the analysis of Abū Ḥanīfa's legal perspective, Shiblī engaged with traditional topics, offered new directions of scholarship, and responded to present concerns. Shiblī, like many Ḥanafī scholars, responded to criticisms that Abū Ḥanīfa ignored *ḥadīth* in legal judgments

⁵⁷ Nu'mānī, 13.

⁵⁸ Nu'mānī, 51–52.

⁵⁹ Nu'mānī, 83–84.

⁶⁰ Nu'mānī, 84–85; The contemporary Muslim theologian Mufti Abdur Rahman ibn Yusuf in his recent translation and commentary of the book argues against Shiblī's conclusion. However, he does not address Shiblī's argument that the use of such philosophical terms is anachronistic. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Maghnīsāwī et al., *Imam Abu Hanifa's al-Fiqh al-Akbar Explained* (London and Santa Barbara: White Thread Press, 2014), 24–29.

by showing that had studied under numerous scholars of *ḥadīth*, but also argued that his approach to *ḥadīth* criticism separated him from the majority of Muslim scholars.⁶¹ Agreeing with Shāh Walī Allāh, Shiblī argued that Abū Ḥanīfa seemed to believe that law served certain rational objectives, and *ḥadīth* that seemed to contradict those objectives were exposed to higher scrutiny.⁶² Shiblī conceded that it was difficult to determine a consistent principle of rational scrutiny based on the available evidence on Abū Ḥanīfa’s legal thinking, and this was likely why other scholars criticized Ḥanafīs as rejecting *ḥadīth*.⁶³

Building on Shāh Walī Allāh’s history of the development of Islamic law, Shiblī made the argument that Abū Ḥanīfa was responsible for the systematization of Islamic law and the development of principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), even though Imam Shāfi‘ī’s (d. 204/820) writings are the earliest extant works on the subject.⁶⁴ Shiblī argued that Abū Ḥanīfa’s legal thought was distinguished from, and superior to, the other major scholars of his time through his bifurcation of *ḥadīth* into those that the Prophet taught in his capacity as a Prophet, and those which he stated in his capacity as temporal leader. The latter were thus not universally binding.⁶⁵

In attributing to Abu Ḥanīfa the views that Islamic law should have rational objectives, that *ḥadīth* should be scrutinized not only based its chain of narrators but also its content, and that not all the Prophet’s statements are religiously binding, Shiblī in effect made arguments about how

⁶¹ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat al-Nu‘mān*, 104.

⁶² Nu‘mānī, 123.

⁶³ Nu‘mānī, 129.

⁶⁴ Nu‘mānī, 148.

⁶⁵ Nu‘mānī, 146–47.

Islamic law and *ḥadīth* should be interpreted in his contemporary context. The rigorous nature of his historicist method, and his drawing on respected scholars such as Shāh Walī Allāh and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, further enhanced his claim about the proper approach to law and *ḥadīth*.

In addition to using history to make a case for interpretative approaches to Islam, Shiblī also used history to defend the Islamic legal tradition from European critiques. He spends many pages arguing against the British jurist Sheldon Amos (d. 1886) who in his *History and Principles of the Civil Law of Rome as Aid to the Study of Scientific and Comparative Jurisprudence* (1883) had argued that Islamic law was based on Roman Law.⁶⁶ While admitting that his lack of familiarity with Roman law prevents him from providing a decisive conclusion – something that Amos’s lack of knowledge of Arabic did not prevent him from doing – Shiblī viewed this as another attempt to argue for the superiority of Europe. He recognized that just as the Qur’an references pre-Islamic customs, Islamic law utilized existing laws as resources in developing its legal system. Moreover, given that Abū Ḥanīfa was based in Persia, Shiblī noted that it was peculiar that Amos did not consider the Sassanian context’s influence in the development of Islamic law.⁶⁷

Responding to European criticisms of Islam became an increasingly important concern for Shiblī from the 1890s. He framed his responses as historical analysis and attempted to utilize superior empirical evidence to make his case, such as in his essay on the *jizya*. Shiblī built on the relevance of the Sassanian context for early Islamic law in essays on the *jizya* and the rights of non-Muslims under Muslim rule (*ahl al-dhimma*), by arguing that the laws pertaining to them were products of history rather than divinely sanctioned. Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) published

⁶⁶ Sheldon Amos, *The History and Principles of the Civil Law of Rome: An Aid to the Study of Scientific and Comparative Jurisprudence* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & CO, 1883), 406–15.

⁶⁷ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat al-Nu‘mān*, 153–58.

Shiblī's essay on the *jizya*, which Shiblī had translated into Arabic, in his *al-Manār* journal in 1899.⁶⁸

In building his arguments, Shiblī relies heavily on new historical sources that had become available in the late nineteenth century, such as the *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* by al-Balādhūrī by al-Balādhūrī (d. c. 892 CE) (Leiden, 1866) and *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk* of al-Ṭabarī (Leiden, 1879-1901). In his prior historical works, he only made mention of these works as examples of histories that do not meet contemporary standards. However, he did not cite from them. In *al-Ma'mūn*, he had mentioned that al-Ṭabarī was still being printed,⁶⁹ but otherwise made no reference to it in his history of the Abbasids. He likely acquired these works on his trip to the Middle East in 1892, since he began citing from them after that.

With regards to the *jizya*, Shiblī undertook a philological analysis to argue that the term was of Persian-origin,⁷⁰ and then argued that after the expansion of the Islamic empire into Persian territory, Sassanian-era taxation practices for non-soldiers were applied to non-Muslims.⁷¹ Shiblī thus concluded that the tax imposed non-Muslims was payment given for avoiding conscription as well as for their defense, and not a religious obligation to subjugate non-Muslims. When Muslims were unable to guarantee the defense of a city in Syria under the reign of 'Umar, the *jizya* was returned to its inhabitants.⁷² And when non-Muslims fought alongside Muslims during

⁶⁸ Shiblī Nu'mānī, "Al-Jizya Wa al-Islām," *Al-Manār* 1, no. 44 (January 21, 1899): 848–51; Shiblī Nu'mānī, "Al-Jizya Wa al-Islām (2)," *Al-Manār* 1, no. 45 (January 21, 1899): 872–77.

⁶⁹ Nu'mānī, *al-Ma'mūn*, 5n1.

⁷⁰ Nu'mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, 1999, 1:209–11.

⁷¹ Nu'mānī, 1:211–13.

⁷² Nu'mānī, 1:216.

the reign of ‘Uthmān, they were exempted from the *jizya*.⁷³ Again, we see that through history, Shiblī made arguments about how interpret Islamic law in the present. By historicizing laws concerning *jizya*, Shiblī could claim that they were products of an imperial context, not a religious decree applicable universally.

Historicizing The Caliph ‘Umar

Shiblī’s writings on early Islamic law related to his interest in early Islamic history. Even before he published *Sīrat al-nu‘mān* between 1889 and 1890, people were expecting a book on the Caliph Umar because he had announced in *al-Ma‘mūn* in 1887 that it would follow his monograph on the Abbasid caliph.⁷⁴ However, *al-Fārūq* was not published until 1898 because of the difficulties in acquiring source material for it, including the histories of al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī.⁷⁵ An additional impediment was Sir Sayyid’s opposition to the work out of fear that it might instigate Sunni-Shi‘i sectarianism.⁷⁶

For Shiblī, however, ‘Umar’s example constituted an integral part of the history of the Muslim *qawm*. In this, he was drawing on Shāh Walī Allāh again, who had argued in his *Izālat al-khafā ‘an khilāfat al-khulafā* (Revealing [the Legitimacy of] Caliphal Rule) that the four ‘Rightly Guided Caliphs’ represented a normative source for Islam similar to the Prophet. According to Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “[a] major theme of Caliphal Rule [*Izālat al-Khafā*] is how the prophetic mission of Muhammad was completed not by the time of his death but rather

⁷³ Nu‘mānī, 1:217.

⁷⁴ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq* (Azamgarh: Dārulmuṣannifīn Shiblī Akaidmī, 2008), 25.

⁷⁵ Nadwī, *Hayāt-i Shiblī*, 199.

⁷⁶ Nadwī, 200.

at the hands of his successors."⁷⁷ Shibli concurred and stated that the reign of the four caliphs “has a drop of prophethood in it [*īmāmat ka manṣab dar ḥaqīqat nubuwwat kā ek shā’iba hen*].”⁷⁸ While in agreement with Shāh Walī Allāh’s perspective, he was critical of his book on ‘Umar as insufficiently historical.⁷⁹

In his historiographical introduction to the book, Shiblī surveyed not only the sources he would be relying on, but also gives a short history of Islamic historiography.⁸⁰ This historiographical introduction is even longer than the one in *Sīrat al-nu‘mān*, indicating his desire to articulate his historical approach more clearly.

Just as prior biographies about Abū Ḥanīfa had been inadequate due to their lack of attention to the scholar’s legal thinking, Shiblī argued that biographical works on ‘Umar were inadequate for the modern historian interested in the caliph’s administrative and political systems. Muslim historians, including Shāh Walī Allāh, had been more interested in highlighting ‘Umar’s virtues [*faḍā’il*] and his military conquests. Shiblī held that the focus on rulers and courtly politics was in large part due to the nature of absolutist governments that dominated much of premodern history. This allowed Shiblī to claim that his criticisms of Muslim histories apply to premodern histories in general, including non-Muslim histories.⁸¹ Changes in politics and new forms of governance had led to new historical interests, and thus new historical methodologies needed to be utilized. Although prior histories on the second caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb had important

⁷⁷ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Political Power, Religious Authority, and the Caliphate in Eighteenth-Century Indian Islamic Thought,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, no. 2 (April 2020): 318, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S135618632000022X>.

⁷⁸ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 190.

⁷⁹ Nu‘mānī, 38.

⁸⁰ Nu‘mānī, 1–43.

⁸¹ Nu‘mānī, 35.

gaps, Shiblī was optimistic that a new book that encompassed social and cultural history could be written based on early sources that had recently become available. Some of the sources he mentioned were al-Mawardī's (d. 450/1058) political treatise *al-Aḥkām al-ṣulṭāniyya*, Abū Yūsuf's (182/798) *Kitāb al-kharāj* for understanding administrative and political history, Muḥammad b. Khalaf al-Wakī's (d. 393/1003) *Akhbār al-quḍāt* for judicial history, and the *Kitāb al-awā'il* and *Majālis al-wasā'il* of Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī (d. c. 400 AH/1010 CE) for information about institutions.⁸²

In critiquing older Muslim histories, Shiblī was careful not to be dismissive of the entire scholarly tradition. Rather, Shiblī asserted that Muslim historians needed to build on the work of past scholars regarding the historian's task of ascertaining the veracity of historical reports. He described the Islamic historical tradition as providing two ways to judge the reliability of information about the past: by scrutinizing the source of the information, and by scrutinizing the content of the report. He referred to the first technique as *riwāyat* and the latter as *dirāyat*.

Shiblī's use of the terms *riwāyat* and *dirāyat* were significant. It allowed him to claim that his proposal for a more critical historical approach based on his historicist view was in fact building upon resources that already existed within the Islamic scholarly tradition. Specifically, he expressed his interests in European historiographical approaches as an extension of *dirāya*, techniques that Muslim scholars had already been utilizing to analyze and criticize information about the past.

The terms held significance in the discipline of *ḥadīth* but did not have agreed upon definitions. This ambiguity in the terms aided their appropriation for delineating history as a modern discipline distinct and separate from literature. Historically, scholars of *ḥadīth* divided

⁸² Nu'mānī, 37.

the discipline into *‘ilm al-riwāyah* and *‘ilm al-dirāyah*, but there was no agreement over what these separate subfields denoted, as indicated by Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān’s writings about *ḥadīth* studies. According to one opinion, *‘ilm al-dirāyah* was restricted to understanding the content and interpretation of *ḥadīth*, and *‘ilm al-riwāyah* to everything else, including analysis and criticism of the transmitters. Other scholars used the term *‘ilm al-riwāyah* to refer to investigating the chains of transmissions and ranking the transmitters, while *‘ilm al-dirāyah* referred to the rules which governed when and how reports could be accepted as truthful and trustworthy, in addition to the analysis of the contents of the report. Scholars of *ḥadīth* in India during Shiblī’s time, most notably Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, were aware of these different usages of the term.⁸³

Shiblī relied on the latter interpretation of *riwāyat* and *dirāyat*. His emphasis on collecting a wide array of sources to research questions related to social and cultural history fell under the rubric of *riwāyat*. In stating that Muslim historians had not sufficiently analyzed and critiqued the content of historical reports, he called on scholars to expand the scope of *dirāyat*. *‘Ilm al-dirāyah* and *‘ilm al-riwāyah* could thus be utilized to develop a modern historiographical approach for Islamic history.

Shiblī aimed to show that there were examples of Muslim scholars through Islamic history and from different schools of thought that engaged in content criticism. This differentiated him from Sayyid Aḥmad Khān who had also drawn on the terms in writing his essays on the life of the Prophet in *Khuṭibāt-i Aḥmadiyya*. Khān referenced *‘ilm al-dirāyah* to discount *ḥadīth* he found objectionable. These included narrations attributed to or describing the Prophet that seemingly

⁸³ Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Sayyid Ṣiddīq Khān Ḥasan al-Qanūjī, *Al-Ḥiṭṭa Fī Dhikr al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sitta* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ta’līmiyya, 1985), 78.

portrayed him negatively and had been cited by William Muir in his biography on the Prophet, as well as all reports that depicted supernatural events.⁸⁴ Shiblī had initially used the concepts in his biography of Abū Ḥanīfa. For example, because Abū Ḥanīfa was concerned about the circulation of forged traditions attributed to earlier generations, as well as sensitive to the ways in which the intended import of teachings can be misinterpreted when paraphrased and decontextualized, Abū Ḥanīfa scrutinized the content of proof-texts by asking questions about context and audience.⁸⁵

In *al-Fārūq*, Shiblī broadened these principles of criticism to encompass not only *ḥadīth*, but historical reports in general. He acknowledged that while Muslims excelled in developing a system of analyzing transmitters of *ḥadīth* reports, *‘ilm al-rijāl*, Muslim historians did not exhibit the same degree of scrutiny. “In fairness, this method did not develop as much as it should have, and in history it was [almost] not made use of at all.”⁸⁶ He approvingly quoted Ibn Khāldūn criticizing historians for their lack of content criticism based on social and political norms:

If historical reports are relied upon based only on its transmission without firm knowledge of the principles derived from customs [*uṣūl al-‘āda*],⁸⁷ political norms [*qawā'id al-siyāsa*], nature of urban life [*ṭabī‘at al-‘umrān*], and social conditions [*al-aḥwāl fī al-ijtimā' al-insānī*] and furthermore, if what is unobservable and has passed is not evaluated through comparison with what is observable and present, then one will not be secure from stumbling, slipping, and deviating from the path of truth.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 138–43; Avril A. Powell, “Modernist Muslim Responses to Christian Critiques of Islamic Culture, Civilization, and History in Northern India,” in *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Judith M. Brown and Robert E. Frykenberg (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 61–91.

⁸⁵ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat al-Nu‘mān*, 122.

⁸⁶ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 36–37.

⁸⁷ Shiblī may have intended “natural laws.” See the discussion below about natural causality.

⁸⁸ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 37; The original quote is from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān Al-Mubtada’ Wal-Khabar Fī Tārīkh al-‘Arab Wal-Barbar Wa Man ‘āṣarahum Min Dhawī al-Sha’n al-Akbar*, ed. Khalīl Shaḥāda (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 13.

At numerous instances in *al-Fārūq* Shiblī undertakes literary analysis of historical works based on the possible social and political context of their production. Thus, he noted that events that became contested topics in religious polemics and foundational for sectarian identities, like the Prophet’s request for pen and paper before his death discussed below, had to be viewed with greater skepticism. Similarly, he noted the tendency of premodern authors to present historical figures as archetypes of specific virtues and moral qualities, and this was especially the case for ‘Umar. “The asceticism, piety, and seriousness of ‘Umar are mentioned in innumerable narrations.”⁸⁹ The consistency of these tropes led Shiblī to avoid sources that aimed to highlight them, such as the *Hilyat al-awliyā’* of Abū Nu‘aym Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038) and works of Ibn al-‘Asākir (d. 571/1175). He also noted that exaggerated and extravagant narrations about these qualities tended to be absent from more rigorously authenticated *ḥadīth* compilations. While historians should be cautious of reports on popular and contentious topics, Shiblī reasoned that information about more mundane affairs of social and political life mentioned in historical sources were more likely to be true since, according to Shiblī, there was little incentive to embellish or fabricate such information. Finally, the historical contexts under which works were produced also had to be kept in mind. In this regard, Shiblī observed that the earliest historical works often lacked the details found in later works, and that these details often served to legitimize religious prejudices.⁹⁰

One contentious episode that had traditionally received much attention in Sunni and Shi’i histories was when the Prophet had requested pen and paper to write down some final advice in the days before his death, but ‘Umar told the Companions not to comply since the Prophet was in

⁸⁹ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 40.

⁹⁰ Nu‘mānī, 39.

a state of delirium due to his illness. “In the Shi‘i sources, the emphasis is placed on the idea that this event represents a ‘calamity’ and a missed opportunity for the designation of the rightful successor, namely ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 35/656), to the leadership of the community.”⁹¹

Meanwhile Sunni sources accepted the occurrence of the event because the *ḥadīth* compilations of al-Bukhārī and Muslim included them. Sunni historians defended the wisdom of ‘Umar’s decision and argued that the written statement was intended to appoint Abū Bakr as the leader.⁹²

In *al-Fārūq*, Shiblī draws on his principles of *riwāya* and *dirāya* to express skepticism about such an incident happening. The event’s sectarian import meant for Shiblī that it should pass a high threshold of scrutiny; yet only a single Companion, ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbās, narrated this incident, while admitting that he was not present when it happened. He finds the response of the Companions as inexplicable, for a request for pen and paper would not have led them to conclude that the Prophet was delirious. Moreover, other narrations indicate that he continued to live for another four days, providing guidance and orders that were carried out. Interpretations over the significance of this event had become a contentious issue about Sunni and Shi‘i scholars, but Shiblī concludes that the entire episode itself most likely never happened.⁹³

While Shiblī touched on topics that had concerned previous Muslim historians, he also asked new questions born out of his colonial context in India, such as what lessons could ‘Umar’s reign provide about Muslim relationships with non-Muslims. Shiblī saved much of this discussion for the second part of his book which was dedicated to social and cultural history, whereas the first

⁹¹ Gurdofarid Miskinzoda, “The Story of ‘Pen and Paper’ and Its Interpretation in Muslim Literary and Historical Tradition,” in *The Study of Shi‘i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 234.

⁹² Miskinzoda, 242.

⁹³ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 69–72.

part offered a more conventional biographical sketch of ‘Umar’s life. S.M. Ikram argued that much of the book’s immense popularity was due to the first part of the book, with its meticulous attention to details of ‘Umar’s life and documenting the captivating events of conquests that made *al-Fārūq* read almost like a novel.⁹⁴ Although even in the first part, Shiblī highlighted aspects of ‘Umar’s reign that he felt Muslims in India should appreciate. For example, when describing the conquest of the Sassanian Empire, he called attention to the fact that early Muslim sources stated that statues were left in place and not destroyed. “Our jurists [*fuqahā*] will be amazed that Sa‘ad [b. Abī Waqqās], despite being a senior Companion of the Prophet and having spent years with him, did not follow the example of [the Mughal Emperor] Alamgīr and Mahmud [al-Ghaznavī]. Rather he left in place all the statues and pictures.”⁹⁵

Shiblī considered ‘Umar’s governance and administration to be as equally important for his legacy as his conquests.⁹⁶ Shiblī began the second half of the book stating he was aware that the first part of the book overlapped with expectations of many readers regarding the glory of battles and Muslim heroics, before addressing the reader, “you probably did not care to look at the events from the perspective of the philosophy of history.”⁹⁷ Such a perspective would require inquiring about the causes for the success of the conquests, the subsequent system of administration and justice, establishment of cities, religious policies, and the rights of non-Muslim subjects.

⁹⁴ Ikram, *Yādgār-i Shiblī*, 193.

⁹⁵ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 111.

⁹⁶ Nu‘mānī, 182.

⁹⁷ Nu‘mānī, 175.

In inquiring about the reasons early Muslims succeeded in conquering the Sassanian Empire and most of the Byzantine Empire and ruling over their former subjects, Shiblī once again departed from Shāh Walī Allāh’s approach, for whom the rapid conquests were the result of divine intervention.⁹⁸ Although Shiblī did not challenge the belief that the conquests succeeded because of God’s aid, he argued that there were discernable historical factors. For example, an important reason for the success of the conquests was the conversion or support from Arab tribes near Iraq and Syria who were experienced in fighting with and against imperial armies. Furthermore, Byzantine rule in the Levant and Egypt was based on their military might and alienated their subjects. Thus, they did not enjoy popular support. When Muslims overthrew Byzantine rule, they did not have to deal with popular unrest. The situation of the Persian Empire was different because it was more decentralized, and thus Muslims continued to face local oppositions by Persian nobles.⁹⁹ Nevertheless ‘Umar did not permit Muslims to engage in mass killings and plundering. Shiblī adduced an excerpt from Abū Yūsuf’s *kitāb al-kharāj* where ‘Umar stated to his officers “if the enemy fights you, do not deceive, mutilate, or kill children,” as evidence that ‘Umar had strict control over the behavior of military officers.¹⁰⁰

Shiblī pointed out that Muslim historical sources presented ‘Umar as taking a heavy-handed and discriminatory approach against non-Muslim subjects by excluding them from administrative posts, prohibiting Christians from ringing bells, baptizing their children, and

⁹⁸ Zaman, “Political Power, Religious Authority, and the Caliphate in Eighteenth-Century Indian Islamic Thought,” 319.

⁹⁹ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 178.

¹⁰⁰ Nu‘mānī, 179. The statement is part of a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet commanded military leaders he sent off on expeditions to avoid breaking pledges, mutilating, and killing women, children, and the elderly. Abū Yūsuf reports that ‘Umar would send learned men [*ahl al-fiqh wal-‘ilm*] with regiments reminding them of these commandments. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb Al-Kharāj*, ed. Ṭahā ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf Sa’d and Sa’d Ḥasan Muḥammad (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya lil-Turāth, 1999), 211-212. In citing Abū Yūsuf, Shiblī thus presents ‘Umar’s military policy as a continuation of the Prophet’s teachings.

imposing specific clothing to differentiate them from Muslims. It is worth noting that he did not directly engage with modern works by non-Muslims, but rather was interested in what Muslim sources have stated.

He addresses these concerns through recourse to both *riwāyat* and *dirāyat*. Shiblī utilizes the latter in his comparison of historical sources. Observing that later sources provide greater and more detailed information about discrimination against non-Muslim subjects than earlier sources, he asserted that these references go back to a period of Islamic history when “religious fanaticism” [*ta‘aṣṣub*] had emerged and colored Muslim thinking.¹⁰¹ He contended that in the earliest sources available, references to ‘Umar’s enactment of discriminatory rules are minimal, and they increase with exaggerated details in later sources. One of the earliest sources that Shiblī drew on extensively was Abū Yūsuf’s (d. 181/798) *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, a book about Islamic law and not history. Shiblī cited Abū Yūsuf to show that non-Muslim Persians in Iraq and Copts in Egypt were employed to help with the administration and collection of taxes,¹⁰² and those unable to pay the *jizya* due to old-age or illness were given funds from the central treasury [*bayt al-māl*].¹⁰³ He also regretted that Shāh Walī Allāh repeated the baseless claim that Umar did not allow his officials to appoint non-Muslims in the bureaucracy.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Shiblī stated that Abū Yūsuf specified that the prohibition to raise crosses applied near Muslim gatherings, and the prohibition to ring church-bells applied only during Muslim prayer times.¹⁰⁵ In regards to the

¹⁰¹ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 39.

¹⁰² Nu‘mānī, 282.

¹⁰³ Nu‘mānī, 286.

¹⁰⁴ Nu‘mānī, 262.

¹⁰⁵ Nu‘mānī, 290.

prohibitions of baptizing children, Shiblī averred that al-Ṭabarī only mentioned it in relation to Banū Taghlib, a Christian tribe that was accused of baptizing Muslim children whose Muslim fathers had died.¹⁰⁶ Shiblī ultimately argued that reports of unqualified and blanket discriminatory policies against all non-Muslims occur in later sources and without documenting their sources.

Like other historians, Shiblī's reflections on the past were also reflections on the present. In reflecting on the life of 'Umar, Shiblī presented his legacy as one of justice and general peace with non-Muslims, as opposed to emphasizing only the conquests and battles. In attempting to make 'Umar's reign exemplary for contemporary Muslims, Shiblī at times assumed that 'Umar's reign functioned like modern states. For example, he argued that 'Umar established the roots of a democratic system because he would set up consultative bodies when making decisions, as well as consult with cities when appointing governors and tax collectors.¹⁰⁷ He stated that a democratic system allows the public [*ʿawwām*] to intervene in governance, and by that definition, 'Umar's rule resembled a democracy.¹⁰⁸

While there is an element of nostalgic romanticism in presenting 'Umar as an ideal embodiment of justice, his careful elucidation of a historical methodology, and his repeated attempts to systematically apply it to new sources indicate that he was not simply interested in apologetics or polemics,¹⁰⁹ but in substantive research and scholarship to convince Muslims in India to work with non-Muslims for a better political future. This reading of his work aligns with

¹⁰⁶ Nu' mānī, 291.

¹⁰⁷ Nu' mānī, 183–86.

¹⁰⁸ Nu' mānī, 182. Ikram also criticized Shiblī's portrayal of 'Umar's reign as a democracy. Ikram, *Yādgār-i Shiblī*, 210.

¹⁰⁹ Mohammed Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), 362–63.

his more explicit political critiques of more parochial communal politics, such as the Muslim League's interest in securing greater privileges from the British for the Muslim community specifically,¹¹⁰ as well as arguments by the British and Muslim loyalists opposed to greater self-autonomy for Indians.¹¹¹

Al-Fārūq was Shiblī final work during his Aligarh phase. Before discussing his intellectual interests after he moved to Hyderabad, it is worth reviewing his motivations and methods for writing history.

Three concerns reappear in Shiblī's call for greater Muslim attention towards Islamic history while at Aligarh, and Shiblī would continue to repeat these concerns throughout his life. The first concern is of cultivating a sense of Muslim community (*qawm*). The second concern is the necessity to combat a colonial cultural hegemony he sensed among Muslims influenced by western education and writings. The third theme is a plea specifically for 'ulamā' to undertake greater historical research because history represented a new intellectual frontier for expanding their scholarly tradition and a means of publicly engaging Muslims.

Four primary elements of Shiblī's historical methodology from his Aligarh phase can be detected. First, the historian must base all claims on historical sources, with preference given to sources contemporaneous with the period being discussed. Second, the historian should critically analyze the sources to determine their veracity as well as to correctly interpret them. Third, the historian should not limit research to courtly and royal conflicts, but rather should cast a wider

¹¹⁰ Arshad Islam, "Allama Shibli and the Early Muslim League: A Dissenting Voice," *Intellectual Discourse* 21, no. 2 (June 2013): 197–219.

¹¹¹ Shiblī characterizes the British government's opposition to Indian self-representation as racist. While in the metropole the British apply a parliamentary system, "but when it comes to India, things change because of the country and color?" Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, ed. Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, vol. 8 (Azamgarh: Maṭba' Ma'ārif, 1972), 162-63., <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/maqalat-e-shibli-volume-008-shibli-nomani-ebooks-2>.

net and record events relating to social, cultural, and intellectual developments. According to Shiblī, the focus on royal and dynastic politics, courtly intrigues, rebellions, and the personal lives of noteworthy individuals led to a neglect of cultural and social aspects [*ṭarīq-e-tamaddun awr ṭarz-i-ma ‘āsharat*] in older histories.¹¹² Finally, the historian should not merely record events, but search out the causes and effects of historical events.

The secondary literature often identifies Edward Gibbon, Thomas Carlyle (d. 1881), and Leopold von Ranke as important influences on Shiblī.¹¹³ While an Urdu translation of Gibbon’s *Rise and Fall* was one of the first European histories Shiblī read when he came to Aligarh,¹¹⁴ he did not read anything by Ranke or Carlyle while at Aligarh. In *al-Farūq*, he wrote that an unnamed professor, likely Thomas Arnold, introduced Ranke to him as the originator of modern historiography that required the historian to be an impartial reporter of events, without preference to religion or nation.¹¹⁵ He referred to Ranke to argue for the separation of history as a discipline distinct from literature due to the former’s prioritization of facts based on evidence, which as we saw in Chapter 1 was not how the early modern Gibbon viewed history. He read Carlyle’s *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* in Arabic translation,¹¹⁶ which did not appear until 1911.¹¹⁷ My point in downplaying the individual influences of these historians is not to

¹¹² Nu‘mānī, *al-Ma‘mūn*, 6.

¹¹³ Ikram, *Yādgār-i Shiblī*, 172; Mushirul Hasan, *A Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 233; Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 211.

¹¹⁴ Nu‘mānī, *Makātib-i Shiblī*, 1:56.

¹¹⁵ Nu‘mānī, *al-Farūq*, 41.

¹¹⁶ Ikram, *Yādgār-i Shiblī*, 172.

¹¹⁷ Shaden M. Tageldin, “Secularizing Islam: Carlyle, al-Sibā‘ī, and the Translations of ‘Religion’ in British Egypt,” *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 123–39.

deny historicism's influence on Shiblī, but to point out that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historicist notions were already present in the Urdu, and Arabic, public spheres. One did not need to read specific works to be familiar with them.

Nonetheless, Shiblī often drew on European historians to bolster his ideas because of the cultural capital attached to them as historians. Despite Shiblī's denunciations of European prejudice against Muslims, he admired how many historians challenged popular memory. Shiblī wrote in the introduction to a collection of his Aligarh essays that in the past one hundred and fifty years, historians had undertaken critical research [*taḥqīqāt*] in overturning many biased beliefs regarding Islam and Muslims.¹¹⁸ "Famous researchers, including Gibbon, Carlyle, Godfrey Higgins, Bosworth, Renan, and others, have, have proven that many shameful traditions about Islamic events are baseless."¹¹⁹ Shiblī was impressed with the independent mindedness of many European historians, and stated in his 1898 introduction to a collection of historical essays that he was encouraged by their diligence in research to revise some of his earlier writings.¹²⁰

His appreciation of European scholarship was influenced by his friendship with Professor Thomas Arnold at Aligarh. The former helped Arnold with his Arabic, while Arnold taught Shiblī French. In addition, Arnold discussed with him European scholarly sources and conventions. They also aided one another in their respective historical research projects. Shiblī helped Arnold find and read the Arabic manuscripts he relied upon for his first book at Aligarh, *The Preaching of Islam*, published in 1896, and was translated into Arabic in 1913. In it, he argued that Muslims had spread their religion primarily through peaceful proselytization, rather

¹¹⁸ Nu' mānī, *Rasā'il-i Shiblī*, 125.

¹¹⁹ Nu' mānī, 126.

¹²⁰ Nu' mānī, 3.

than through violent conquests, and that most of the Muslims in India were in fact descendants of converts.¹²¹

His experience with critical European historians is likely why he singled out for emulation those Muslims scholars from the recent past whose original [*muḥaqqiqāna*] scholarship was based on understudied or rare sources, and critiqued aspects of the *‘ulamā’s* tradition, such as Shāh Walī Allāh and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī.¹²² In *al-Fārūq*, Shiblī had stated that history should primarily be about understanding and explaining changes in human thought and behavior.¹²³ This required greater emphasis on historical causes and a diminishing role for God in history. Such a historical approach had theological implications. It is precisely this aspect of Shiblī’s writings from his time in Hyderabad that will be explored below.

Making Theological Space for Historical Causation from Hyderabad

After Sir Sayyid’s death in 1898, Shiblī decided to resign from his position at Aligarh, and took up employment in the Kingdom of Hyderabad as Secretary in the Department of Education. While there, he wrote his series related to Islamic theology, namely *al-Ghazālī* (1902) about Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s life and theological views, *‘Ilm al-kalām* (1903), an intellectual history of Islamic theology, *al-Kalām* (1903), a modern theological tract about the existence of God, prophethood, and the challenges of modern science, and *Sawāniḥ mawlānā rūm* (1904) about Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, with a focus on his theological relevance. Our analysis will be restricted to aspects of the first three works related to his historical method. A complete study of Shiblī’s theological views is beyond the scope of this chapter.

¹²¹ Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation*, 243.

¹²² Nu‘mānī, *Khuṭibāt-i Shiblī*, 40.

¹²³ Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq*, 34.

In presenting his historicist approach in his writings from Aligarh, Shiblī repeatedly admitted it represented a historiographical departure from previous Muslim histories. He nonetheless attempted to ground his novel approach in the discourse of religious scholars, as seen above by his use of the concepts of *dirāya* and *riwāya* from the *ḥadīth* tradition. Shiblī’s arguments may appear as mere justifications for adopting European historicism – another case of an invented tradition. However, it precisely such argumentation that constitutes discursive traditions. And as Bourdieu shows, even if one appeals to ideas or authorities outside of a field cultural production, such as that of the ‘*ulamā*’, he/she must put them in conversation with "the dominant intellectual traditions" within the field to be taken seriously. “In this way, he separates himself from simple amateurs, politicians or great aristocrats, who are not troubled by these ‘theoretical’ preoccupations.”¹²⁴

One challenge to arguing for greater rational scrutiny of historical reports as well as arguing for prioritizing historical causation in narrating history was the popular Muslim belief in supernatural occurrences. Consequently, Shiblī devoted a considerable portion of his writings on the *kalam* theological tradition to create conceptual space for historical causality explainable through social and natural causes.

Shiblī criticized the Ash‘arite school of theology for its denial of secondary or natural causality. For the Ash‘arites, the denial of natural causality was necessary to preserve God’s omnipotence against Mu‘tazilite claims that humans create their own actions. Mu‘tazilites, deemed unorthodox by Sunnis, emphasized God’s omnibenevolence over his omnipotence. They “tended to let man’s efficient causality become rather completely free and independent of God’s

¹²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 222.

creation as the source of its actuality.”¹²⁵ The Mu‘tazilite theologian ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) clarified that humans must have an independent power or capacity to freely act in order for God to be just. God commands and prohibits humans to act, and if humans “did not have the power for it, it would not be good for God to command it because God does not impose on human beings what they do not have the power to do.”¹²⁶ Thus, if humans commit evil, they are the cause and producer of evil, not God. God has created humans with the power to act. For al-‘Ash‘arī (d. 324/936), however, this type of human agency impinges on God’s omnipotence. If humans can produce their own actions, then something other than God can be a cause of effects.

The first problem with such a scenario would be that humans could act in a way contrary to what God wills. But “if there were in God’s dominion something not willed by Him, one of two things would have to follow: either the affirmation of unmindfulness ... or the affirmation of weakness.”¹²⁷ The second problem natural causality would entail, according to al-‘Ash‘arī, is that the universe could exist independently of God. “If what takes place as an object of the power of someone other than God transcended the necessity of being created by God ... the same would have to be said of the motions of the celestial spheres and of the union and composition of the

¹²⁵ Richard M. Frank, “The Structure of Created Causality According to Al-Aš‘arī: An Analysis of the ‘Kitāb al-Luma’”, §§ 82-164,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 25 (1966): 24–25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595163>.

¹²⁶ Richard C. Martin, Mark Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu‘tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oneworld Publications, 2016), 98.

¹²⁷ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ismā‘īl Ash‘arī et al., *The Theology of Al-Ash‘ari: The Arabic Texts of al-Ash‘ari’s Kitāb al-Luma’ and Risalat Istihsan al-Khawd Fi ‘ilm al-Kalam with Briefly Annotated Translations, and Appendices Containing Material Pertinent to the Study of al-Ash‘ari* (Beyrouth: Impr. catholique, 1953), 34.

parts of the heavens. And if this were so, these things would cease to prove that God made them as they are.”¹²⁸

Shiblī’s concerns lay not with providing the correct proof for God’s existence or omnipotence, but in reducing God’s historiographical role. Al-‘Ash‘arī seemed to believe that the notion of natural causality not only impinges on God’s omnipotence but calls into question the necessity of His very existence. Al-Ghazālī in his refutation of Muslim philosophers connected the denial of natural causality to proving prophethood through miracles. Not only did a necessary connection between cause and effect restrain how God could act, but according to al-Ghazālī it also made the miracles ascribed to prophets in the Qur’an impossible. Thus “it becomes necessary to plunge into this question to affirm miracles and ... that God has power over all things.”¹²⁹

Shiblī was critical of the denial of natural causality both to prove God’s existence and to prove prophethood through miracles. According to Shiblī, the Ash‘arites believed that God directly and without any mediator creates everything that exists in the universe at every moment. There are no secondary causes. Shiblī provided an example clarifying the implications of this view. When rain falls, it was not because of precipitation and the water cycle, but because God created rainfall directly and independently of other natural causes.¹³⁰

Shiblī, however, was not interested in the debate about human agency or God’s omnipotence. He mostly presented his own views about natural causality in the context of the possibility of miracles. In attempting to address the issue of supernatural events [*kharq-i-‘ādat*],

¹²⁸ Ash‘arī et al., 61.

¹²⁹ Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Michael E. Marmura, 2 edition (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2002), 165.

¹³⁰ Shibli Numani, *Al-Kalam* (Azamgarh: Dar al-Mussannifin, 2007), 46.

Shiblī began with asserting that humans know natural causality exists through years of experience and progress. Additionally, scientists had uncovered physical processes that explain the existence of natural events. Shiblī asserted that these chains of causes and effects are part of a natural system created by God. He contended that a lack of familiarity with “the truth of things [*ḥaqāiq al-ashyā*]” led to ascribing all events directly to God. Increased knowledge about humans and the world they live in should lead to a greater acceptance of natural causality, according to Shiblī.¹³¹

The problem Shiblī had with the Asharite position was that it eroded trust in natural laws and contradicted observed regularity in physical and social phenomena. Instead of miracles being extremely rare occurrences, they became no different from every other natural event or human action in that God was always directly intervening and continuously controlling everything. Shiblī admitted that this was not a new criticism of the Asharite position, and offered an answer provided by Imam al-Rāzi (d. 606/1209) that miracles that go against the normal course of expected things are rare events, and thus they do not decrease one’s certainty about observed natural laws.¹³² But Shiblī did not find that answer sufficiently convincing because of the popularity of miracles in historical works. He stated that the problem with the Asharites and common Muslims is that they had unduly expanded the scope of miracles such that all types of impossible and unrealistic feats and events become possible and their narrations acceptable.¹³³ He mentioned that Asharites allow supernatural events to be performed by not just Prophets, but also saints, magicians, and those possessed by jinns and devils. He did not find the Asharite

¹³¹ Shibli Numani, 79–80.

¹³² Shibli Numani, *Ilm Al-Kalam* (Azamgarh: Dar al-Mussannifin, 1993), 195.

¹³³ Shibli Numani, *Al-Kalam*, 135.

distinction between miracles of the Prophet and other supernatural events substantively significant. The Asharites claimed that only Prophets claimed to be Prophets by performing miracles, but Shiblī noted that historically there have been many figures who claimed to perform supernatural events but are not recognized as true Prophets.¹³⁴

It is also important to note that Shiblī's concern about the acceptance of miracle stories included their presence in historical works. How does one judge which stories are authentic and which false? Muslim scholars maintained that only narrations that are reported by large numbers of people in each generation of narrators to reach the level of *tawātur* (widely diffused) were considered acceptable stories. But Shiblī pointed out that people from other religions could make similar claims of *tawātur*. For example, both Jews and Christians claimed that Jesus was crucified. If the answer to the objection was that only Muslim reports should be trusted, then that was a subjective standard, and other religious communities could make the same claim.¹³⁵

Instead, Shibli offered his own set of general guidelines for accepting reports about the past. First, the rarer and stranger the event described was, the stronger the evidence required should be. Second, the possibility an event can occur did not provide certainty or even probability. Third, the possibility of rare events did not create doubt about regularly occurring and observable phenomena. And fourth, when there was uncertainty about what happened, one should judge it by what was more likely and probable. Shibli believed these rules would meditate against acceptance of Sufi miracle stories, for example, which he lamented are all too common. For Shiblī, the possibility of a miracle occurring was not greater than the possibility that

¹³⁴ Shiblī Nu' mānī, *ʿIlm al-Kalām* (Azamgarh: Dārulmuṣannifīn Shiblī Akaiḍmī, 1993), 107–8.

¹³⁵ Shibli Numani, *Al-Kalam*, 73.

narrators or witnesses to the event misunderstood, misreported, or even fabricated what happened.¹³⁶

In substantiating his position about miracles and natural causality, Shiblī relied extensively on al-Ghazālī, who he believed had moved away from his earlier Asharite views on causality, and eventually accepted that God had created a system of natural laws. To that end, Shiblī quoted from the chapter on *tawakkul* in his *Revival of the Religious Sciences* where al-Ghazālī stated that God has enacted his way [*sunnatahu*] through a connection between causes and effects to display His wisdom, and whoever ignored this connection was ignorant of God’s way [*sunnatullāh*].¹³⁷ For Shiblī, this indicated that al-Ghazālī believed in natural causality.¹³⁸ Al-Ghazālī’s *Revival* was a popular work among Indian Muslims,¹³⁹ and likely influenced Shiblī’s choice to ground his historical view in that source. The choice also sheds light on how Shiblī’s engagement with historical ideas impacted his reading of theological and Sufi texts.

Importantly, Shiblī’s criticism of the acceptance of Sufi stories should not lead one to believe that Shiblī was critical of Sufism in total or the possibility of Sufis performing miracles, or *karamāt*. He did believe in the possibility of miracles, in part because the still-unknown power of the human “soul” could be a hidden cause for miracles.¹⁴⁰ Rather, his concern was with the

¹³⁶ Shibli Numani, 84–85.

¹³⁷ Shibli Numani, *Al-Ghazali* (Azamgarh: Dar al-Mussannifin, 2008), 134.

¹³⁸ More recently, Frank Griffel has also suggested that al-Ghazālī expressed ambivalence about the Asharite denial of natural causality. He states that, “in most of his works, al-Ghazālī wishes to leave open whether these events are created directly by God or are the results of secondary causes.” Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 204.

¹³⁹ Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 14, 131.

¹⁴⁰ Shibli Numani, *Al-Kalam*, 131.

widespread acceptance of such stories, especially in historical works, and their contribution to a lack of sensibility about the regularity of the physical and social world.

Shiblī's theological discussions help situate his historicist project within the scholarly tradition of *'ulamā'*. He attempted to make space for an approach to history that investigated underlying causes for social, intellectual, and political changes without recourse to divine intervention or saintly wonders. While written in Urdu, Shiblī's theological writings were nevertheless complex and thus did not have receive the widespread positive reception as his best-selling *al-Ma'māun* and *al-Fārūq*. However, after he moved to Lucknow in 1905, he became more engaged with promoting historical studies in the Urdu public sphere. The following section will analyze his efforts related to promoting historical research and writing while working for the Nadwat al-'Ulamā' madrasa.

Supporting Historical Writing through Curricular Reform, Journal Articles, and Research Library in Lucknow

While a fuller coverage of the Nadwat al-'Ulamā' movement will be provided in the next chapter, a short summary of its early history is necessary here. Founded in 1894, the Nadwa movement attempted to unite *'ulamā'* from the various Sunni (and initially even the Shia) persuasions and to reform the madrasa curriculums to facilitate the training of scholars capable of addressing modern challenges. The members of the Nadwa movement included not only scholars but also Muslim landlords and government employees.¹⁴¹ Shiblī had participated since its first meeting in 1894 in Kanpur. There seemed to be confusion among the members themselves about the objectives of the movement, and thus nothing was accomplished initially.

¹⁴¹ Jamal Malik, "The Making of a Council: The Nadwat al-'Ulama," *Zeitung Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 144, no. 1 (1994): 69.

Shiblī recommended that the Nadwa movement open their own madrasa and implement their curriculum reforms. The motion was approved, and Nadwa madrasa was inaugurated in Lucknow in 1896.¹⁴²

Shiblī promoted historical research and writing among ‘*ulamā*’ through institutional contributions while Secretary of Education [*mu’tamid-i ta’līmāt*] at the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ madrasa in Lucknow from 1905-1913. This was through his advocacy of curriculum changes, expansion of the institute’s library, and through founding and managing the *al-Nadwa* journal.

Although himself a product of the traditional madrasa curriculum, Shiblī’s experience at Aligarh had turned him into a critic of it, especially the emphasis on logic, philosophy, and Arabic grammar, as well as the overall method of studying books instead of studying subjects. He wanted to reduce the number the *ma’qūlat* books, and replace them with the study of modern subjects, foremost science and English. However, he faced strong opposition from members of the Nadwa movement to such changes, especially to making English a mandatory subject. When he prevailed in 1905 after he was appointed secretary of education, Nadwa’s Managing Committee refused to provide funding to hire English instructors. Undeterred, Shiblī succeeded in acquiring funding from the British Raj of 500 rupees a year in 1908 that partly went towards paying for English instruction.¹⁴³ In 1908 Shiblī also hired an instructor for Sanskrit, which he felt had become an important research language due to new Hindu revival movements trying to convert Muslims.¹⁴⁴ Finally, because Shiblī felt that the Indian madrasas focus on post-classical

¹⁴² Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 252–60.

¹⁴³ Nadwī, 376–77.

¹⁴⁴ Nadwī, 336–37; For more on the perceived threat of the Arya Samaj among Muslims, see Yoginder Sikand, “The Fitna of Irtidad: Muslim Missionary Response to the Shuddhi of Arya Samaj in Early Twentieth Century India,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 17, no. 1 (1997): 65–82.

Arabic left them deficient in understanding pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabic as well modern Arabic, he also added courses on both and assigned students to read modern Arabic journals, such as the Egyptian *al-Muqtaṭif*.¹⁴⁵ Although Sanskrit instruction ended in 1913 with Shiblī's resignation, and the emphasis on English instruction diminished, Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī (1884-1953), Shiblī's student, wrote that the students of the Nadwa madrasa during Shiblī's time learned English sufficiently well enough to make use of English sources for their research, mentioning as examples his own works, which will be covered in Chapter 4.¹⁴⁶

Seeking to expand historical consciousness beyond Nadwa's students, Shiblī established a monthly scholarly journal for the Nadwa movement in 1904, titled *al-Nadwa*. Although Shiblī was co-editor of the journal from 1904 to 1912 with Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān Khān Shirwānī (d. 1950), a scholar associated with Aligarh and Nadwat al-'Ulamā', most of the articles were written by Shiblī and the journal was considered Shiblī's project.¹⁴⁷ The title page of each issue stated the journal's objectives: "Reviving the Islamic sciences, harmonizing [*taṭbīq*] rational and transmitted knowledge, and comparing classical and modern sciences." Shiblī wrote the first article of the first issue, published in July 1904, and titled "The Need for *Al-Nadwa*." He specified in the opening page that there was a danger of Muslim communal identity [*qawmī khusūsiyāt*] being erased because both western educated Muslims and madrasa graduates were ignorant of history.¹⁴⁸ Shiblī later specified that presenting historical essays was one of the

¹⁴⁵ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 337–38.

¹⁴⁶ Nadwī, 335.

¹⁴⁷ Nadwī, 347–51. A notice in August 1905 clarified that readers should assume all editorials are being written by Shiblī. Shiblī Nu'mānī and Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān Khān Shirwānī, eds., *Al-Nadwa* (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 2016), vol. 2, pp. 293–94.

¹⁴⁸ Nu'mānī and Shirwānī, *Al-Nadwa*, vol. 1, p. 12.

primary goals of the journal.¹⁴⁹ In August 1905, in an appeal for donations to cover the cost of the journal, which was deliberately sold at the low cost of two rupees to attain greater circulation, the notice stated that “even though *al-Nadwa* has not reached its peak of excellence, the quality of essays written about Islamic sciences and history [*‘ulūm-o tārīkh*] found in it are unparalleled and are not found in any other publication.”¹⁵⁰

Shiblī’s essays were often based on impressive and original research or highlighted original research and publications from Europe and the Middle East. An example of the latter is his article in July 1904 about the project of searching for manuscripts and publishing of the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa‘d (d. 230/845) funded by Germany.¹⁵¹ Although only one volume had been published – which an unnamed friend from Europe had sent it to him as a gift – Shiblī was surprised at the details about the Companions not found in later works that had become the main sources for the lives of the Companions.¹⁵² Shiblī also wrote articles highlighting historical figures little known among Muslims at the time, including Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064). He also began shedding light on the role of women in Islamic history,¹⁵³ a topic he admitted he had overlooked.¹⁵⁴ He also turned his

¹⁴⁹ Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, vol. 1, p. 14.

¹⁵⁰ Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, vol. 2, p. 290.

¹⁵¹ Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, vol. 1, p. 43. Most of Shiblī’s articles from the journal have been published separately, including this one. Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, ed. Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, vol. 4 (Azamgarh: Maṭba‘ Ma‘ārif, 1956), 1, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/maqalat-e-shibli-volume-004-shibli-nomani-ebooks>.

¹⁵² He specifies *Istī‘āb*, *Iṣāba*, *Asad al-Ghāya*. Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, *Al-Nadwa*, vol. 1, p.45.

¹⁵³ Nu‘mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, 1956, 4:13.

¹⁵⁴ Nu‘mānī, 4:54.

attention more towards Indian history than he had previously, writing a series of essays on Aurangzeb from 1906-1909 critical of colonial historiography.¹⁵⁵

Shiblī used the journal to train students and recent graduates of Nadwa’s madrasa in essay writing. He would assign research topics to students and publish their essays.¹⁵⁶ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī observed that the graduates who gained scholarly fame in the ensuing decades all began their literary careers writing for the journal. Similarly, Shiblī recruited a young Abū al-Kalām Azād (1888-1958) to serve as assistant editor for *al-Nadwa* between 1905 and 1906 and write articles as well. Before coming to Lucknow to serve as assistant editor, Azād had been running the monthly journal *Lisān al-Ṣidq* in Calcutta featuring literary discussions and promoting social reform between 1903 and 1905. Shiblī encouraged Azād to continue those interests by introducing Urdu readers to intellectual trends in Europe and the Middle East, and in the words of Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, through his articles for *al-Nadwa* “Abū al-Kalām Azād became ‘Mawlānā’ Abū al-Kalām Azād.”¹⁵⁷ In keeping with Shiblī’s view, Azād’s first article, titled “The Treasure Trove of Muslim Knowledge and Europe,” criticized Muslims for not doing more to preserve their literary heritage and proceeded to give a history of European study of Arabic history and literature.¹⁵⁸ He also started a column titled “*‘Ilmī Khabreṅ*” in which he curated snippets of news about intellectual, scientific, and literary developments. For example,

¹⁵⁵ In the first essay in the series, Shiblī once again states that the task of the historian is to challenge popular myths. Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, *Al-Nadwa*, vol. 3, p. 438; For a critical appraisal of Shiblī’s writings on Indian history, see Javed Ali Khan, *Early Urdu Historiography* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2005), 256–66.

¹⁵⁶ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 350–51; The first student article was published in September 1904, written by a Sayyid Sulaymān Bihārī, titled “A Short History of the Arabic Language.” It was primarily a summary of Jurjī Zaydān’s *al-tārīkh al-lughā al-‘arabiyya* published earlier in 1904. Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, *Al-Nadwa*, vol. 1, pp. 210–17.

¹⁵⁷ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 352.

¹⁵⁸ Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, *Al-Nadwa*, vol. 2, pp. 389–400.

the first news snippet in the first issue of the column provided information about the Fourth International Congress of Orientalists that was held in Algiers in 1905.¹⁵⁹

The *al-Nadwa* journal represented a new style of public engagement from ‘*ulamā*’ and was one of the first journals established by Indian ‘*ulamā*’. Generally, ‘*ulamā*’ in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century were largely absent from public discussions about Islamic history, and were interested less in fostering a broad Muslim community than competing to define narrower domains of normativity to fashion authentic Muslim subjects.¹⁶⁰ Although they did produce a large body of Urdu writings for non-scholarly Muslims,¹⁶¹ Sunni ‘*ulamā*’ sought not to address an undifferentiated public of Muslims as much as carve out communities committed to the new sectarian affiliations of Deobandī, Barelwī, and Ahl-i Ḥadīth.¹⁶² These groups and their increasing partisanship will be covered in more detail in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that because they each advanced diverging standards of religious normativity due to their differences regarding the authority of saints, *sunna*, and schools of law, their writings and public debates created a polemical and polarizing religious culture. Although religious polemics were not new among Muslims, the use of the Urdu vernacular, the expanded audience due to print, and the practice of books and pamphlets being read out loud for illiterate community members had the effect of hardening sectarian affiliation

¹⁵⁹ Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, vol. 2, p. 204.

¹⁶⁰ SherAli Tareen, “Normativity, Heresy, and the Politics of Authenticity in South Asian Islam1,” *The Muslim World* 99, no. 3 (2009): 521–52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2009.01284.x>.

¹⁶¹ Brannon D. Ingram, “The Portable Madrasa: Print, Publics, and the Authority of the Deobandi ‘ulama*,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (July 2014): 845–71.

¹⁶² Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and His Movement, 1870-1920* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2010), 68; Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 97.

in the emerging Muslim public.¹⁶³ The necessity to compete for public donations to establish and run religious institutions, replacing the system of royal patronages and endowments, further encouraged differentiation and appeals to narrower notions of community.¹⁶⁴

Indeed, the lack of journals established and run by ‘*ulamā*’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century speaks to their lack of a broad ‘Muslim’ communal vision. Perhaps the earliest ‘*ulamā*’-run journal was the *Tuḥfa-i Ḥanafīyya*. It was established in 1897-98 by Barelwīs specifically to attack the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ movement’s attempt to create an ecumenical voluntary association of ‘*ulamā*’ and discuss reforming madrasas.¹⁶⁵ Deoband would not establish its journal *al-Qāsim* until 1913.¹⁶⁶ The scholars of the famed Farangī Maḥall family would shortly follow suit in 1915 with the *al-Niẓāmiyya*.¹⁶⁷ And more generally ‘*ulamā*’ would not become more publicly active beyond the confines of sectarian partisanship until after World War I, most noticeably as part of the Khilafat Movement.¹⁶⁸

The articles featured in *al-Nadwa* pushed ‘*ulamā*’ to go beyond the limited polemics regarding specific topics of logic, theology, and Islamic law that had dominated their discourse. The journal evoked such great public interest that “even those ‘*ulamā*’ who disliked it attempted to write in a similar fashion.”¹⁶⁹ Moreover, as Shiblī wrote in an editorial in March 1905, the

¹⁶³ Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 83; Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 98.

¹⁶⁴ Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 77; Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 39–40.

¹⁶⁵ Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 85.

¹⁶⁶ Dietrich Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere: Religious Groups in India, 1900-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015064699633&view=1up&seq=20>.

¹⁶⁷ Francis Robinson, *The Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2001), 130.

¹⁶⁸ Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere*, 63–64.

¹⁶⁹ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 350.

journal defied the expectations of Muslims who previously had assumed ‘*ulamā*’ were incapable of such scholarly essays.¹⁷⁰ The Urdu literary critic and Aligarh supporter Mahdī Ifādī (d. 1921) declared *al-Nadwa* as the preeminent Urdu journal carrying the mantle that *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* had carried during Sir Sayyid’s life, despite the fact that it was issued from Aligarh’s “opposing camp [*ḥarīf kāmp*]” of ‘*ulamā*’.¹⁷¹ In a speech at Aligarh in 1906 later printed in the *al-Bashīr* magazine, he remarked that history had acquired new significance as an independent discipline [*mustaqil fann*],¹⁷² and he was glad to see *al-Nadwa* had adopted it as its main subject,¹⁷³ characterizing the journal as the “the most exemplary model of historical literature.”¹⁷⁴

While most of Shiblī’s writings were in Urdu, his Arabic critique of Jurjī Zaydān’s (1861-1914) *Tārīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī* (The History of Islamic Culture), published between 1901-1906, shed light on the ways in which modern Egyptian historical writing became intertwined with curriculum reform for madrasa students in India. In 1911, the German orientalist Josef Horowitz (1874-1931), then professor at Aligarh, made Zaydān’s book a required reading for the *mawlwī* and *fāḍil* exams. Madrasa graduates who wanted a government-recognized degree could take these exams to obtain a degree of *mawlwī* (graduate) or *fāḍil* (post-graduate) that could be used to gain employment in the colonial bureaucracy and other institutions. Although Zaydān had mentioned that he was indebted to Shiblī’s writings in pointing him to Arabic sources for early Islamic social and cultural history, sources that were not

¹⁷⁰ Nu‘mānī and Shirwānī, *Al-Nadwa*, vol. 2, p. 82.

¹⁷¹ Mahdī Ifādī, *Ifādāt-i Mahdī*, ed. Mahdī Begum (Azamgarh: Maṭba‘ Ma‘ārif, 1939), 72, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/ifadat-e-mehdi-mehdi-ifadi-ebooks-1>.

¹⁷² Ifādī, 74.

¹⁷³ Ifādī, 77.

¹⁷⁴ Ifādī, 78.

referenced in the European works he had utilized,¹⁷⁵ Shiblī considered Zaydān’s book as a veiled critique of Islam. Shiblī felt it presented the Arabs as violent and uncultured, and only after Islam had incorporated non-Arabs under Abbasid rule did cultural efflorescence take place. Even more vexing for Shiblī was Zaydān repeating the claim that ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb had ordered the destruction of the Library of Alexandria.

Shiblī had written about the myth during his time in Aligarh. He believed that Europeans repeated the myth to project negative aspects of their own history that did not conform with their notion of civilization and enlightenment [*tahdhīb-o-shāistigī*] on to Islamic history.¹⁷⁶ Many European historians had shown it had been initially ruined during the reign of Julius Caesar and destroyed during the Christian Byzantine Empire.¹⁷⁷ Despite historians as early as Edward Gibbon rejecting the historical authenticity of attributing its destruction to ‘Umar, the claim continued to have wide circulation in European and India.¹⁷⁸ The Calcutta University’s exam in logic in 1886 asked students to point out the logical fault in the statement attributed to ‘Umar when he justified destroying the Library of Alexandria: “If the books are in agreement with the Qur’an, then they are not needed, and if they disagree with the Qur’an they should be

¹⁷⁵ Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh Al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Hindāwī, 2012), 8–9.

¹⁷⁶ Nu‘mānī, *Rasā’il-i Shiblī*, 127.

¹⁷⁷ For a good review of the history of the Library in Arabic sources, see Qassem Abdou Qassem, “The Arab Story of the Destruction of the Ancient Library of Alexandria,” in *What Happened to the Ancient Library of Alexandria?*, ed. Mostafa El-Abadi and Omnia Mounir Fathallah (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 207–12.

¹⁷⁸ Nu‘mānī, *Rasā’il-i Shiblī*, 128; Bernard Lewis had argued that anti-Islamic sentiment had not played a role in the perpetuation of the myth of the destruction of the library, and in fact one of the achievements of orientalist scholarship was disproving it. “Not the creation, but the demolition of the myth was the achievement of European orientalist scholarship, which from the eighteenth century to the present day has rejected the story as false and absurd, and thus exonerated the Caliph ‘Umar and the early Muslims from this libel.” Bernard Lewis, “The Arab Destruction of the Library of Alexandria: Anatomy of a Myth,” in *What Happened to the Ancient Library of Alexandria?*, ed. Mostafa El-Abadi and Omnia Mounir Fathallah (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 216. As will be apparent in this and the following paragraph, Europeans are not as innocent in perpetuating the myth as Lewis would have readers believe.

destroyed.”¹⁷⁹ In addition to contributing to colonial inferiority, this discourse of Muslim intolerance and violence was utilized by both Christian and Hindu missionaries movements to convert Muslims.¹⁸⁰

The colonial education structure made it difficult even for madrasa graduates to escape negative historical representations of Islam. The Oxford orientalist David Margoliouth had translated the work into English, and an article in the *The Times* repeated the narrative about the Library’s destruction citing Zaydān. Moreover, Zaydān had been recommended as a professor of history at the recently established Egyptian University.¹⁸¹ Shiblī thus wrote a series of strongly worded critiques in Arabic against Zaydān’s book, which were published between January and June of 1912 in *al-Manār*, as well as published as a book in India.¹⁸² Addressing Zaydān’s claim about the Library of Alexandria, Shiblī is astounded that he makes no effort at source criticism, relying on sources written centuries after the purported event.¹⁸³

In contrast [to Zaydān’s late sources], there is no trace nor support for this report in the reliable books of the early historians. Look at the *tārīkh* of al-Ṭabarī and al-Ya‘qūbī, *al-Ma‘ārif* of ibn Qutayba, al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl of Dīnawarī, Futūḥ al-buldān of al-Balādhurī, *al-Tārīkh al-ṣaghīr* of al-Bukhārī, Thiḡāt of ibn Ḥibbān, or Ṭabaqāt al-ṣahāba by ibn Sa‘d. We have browsed through them and looked carefully at them, and even though everything about the conquest of Alexandria is mentioned in them, no mention is made of the burning of its library.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Nu‘mānī, *Rasā’il-i Shiblī*, 126.

¹⁸⁰ Nu‘mānī, *Khuṭūbat-i Shiblī*, 97.

¹⁸¹ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 447–50; Umar Ryad provides more details about the Egyptian context related to the controversy surrounding Zaydān’s book, as well as the friendly correspondence that existed between Shiblī and Zaydān prior to Shiblī’s refutation. Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity: A Critical Reading of the Works of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and His Associates (1898-1935)* (BRILL, 2009), 79-83.

¹⁸² Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *Al-Intiqād ‘alā Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī*, ed. Muhammad Ajmal Ayyub Islahi (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 2014).

¹⁸³ Nu‘mānī, 110–11.

¹⁸⁴ Nu‘mānī, 112.

For Shiblī, the reason such a poorly written work of history garnered the amount of attention and recognition it had was because the Muslims were not doing enough to empirically disprove such histories.¹⁸⁵

Shiblī's interest in historical research and writing was not only for religious apologetics and polemics, but also because it offered opportunities for intellectual progress. He wrote in an article in *al-Nadwa* that “because of the loss of the books of ancients, Islamic civilization, ethics, in fact even our picture of *sharī'a* of Islam is so far removed from what it was originally [*aṣliyat*]. Imagining its outward appearance in the present is difficult.”¹⁸⁶ Shiblī argued that new available books and new methods had made historical research integral to understand Islam.

To further facilitate access to sources for Muslim history and promote historical research, Shiblī worked to create a public library at Nadwa's madrasa in Lucknow. In 1891 he had written a review of the Khudā Bakhsh Khān's (d. 1908) impressive library for the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, expressing his amazement that a humble lawyer had succeeded in creating the most impressive library of manuscripts in India, and then transforming it from a ‘private’ library to a public [*publik*] library in 1890.¹⁸⁷ Shiblī sought to emulate Khudā Bakhsh's example. In support of that vision, Azād penned an editorial in February 1906 for *al-Nadwa* urging owners of large private collections of books to donate them to Nadwa. Azād argued that the diffusion of books and manuscripts into private collections had made it difficult to search for sources about Islam's past intellectual achievements. Thus, a “public” library with old books new publications was necessary for Nadwa's mission of enlightening the Muslim community, preserving knowledge,

¹⁸⁵ Nu' mānī, 8.

¹⁸⁶ Nu' mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, 1956, 4:13.

¹⁸⁷ Nu' mānī, *Bāqiyāt-i Shiblī*, 43.

and producing new *'ulamā'*. To kickstart the project, the editorial stated that Shiblī had agreed to donate his private collection of books from across the world to Nadwa.¹⁸⁸ Shiblī made the library project a priority while Secretary of Education for Nadwa and succeeded in convincing many private holders to donate their collections, including the large libraries of Nawāb Sayyid Ḥusayn Bilgrāmī (d. 1926) the private secretary of the Nizām of Hyderabad, and Nawāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān's library.¹⁸⁹

The public library Shiblī envisioned was more than a collection of books, and would include a building to house the books, resources for research, and rooms for visitors. Consequently, in a report for Nadwa in 1910, he wrote "if the religion, sciences, and communal history of Muslims is to be kept alive," then a library endowment for all Muslims [*waqf*] where researchers could be benefit was necessary. The library would be part of a research academy. "The project to establish an academy at Nadwa whose members' is only job is research and write – the way it exists in Europe – can only be accomplished after a great library is established."¹⁹⁰ The research academy, *Dār al-Muṣannifīn*, would not only fund research scholars, but also train madrasa graduates in conducting research. Shiblī thus proposed a two-year specialization program for junior scholars proficient in Arabic to live on campus where he would supervise their research.¹⁹¹ Ultimately, the proposal was rejected by the Nadwa leadership due to Shiblī's deteriorating relationship with them. Nonetheless, he had set in motion plans to open a separate institute and research academy on his familial land in Azamgarh before his death in 1914. The

¹⁸⁸ Nu'mānī and Shirwānī, *Al-Nadwa*, 49–54.

¹⁸⁹ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 347.

¹⁹⁰ Nadwī, 529.

¹⁹¹ Nadwī, 531–36.

fame and celebrity Shiblī had leveraged in acquiring funding and public support for Nadwa’s advancement continued to bear fruit after his demise for the new Dār al-Muṣannaifīn publishing and research academy in Azamgarh, which will be discussed further in Chapter 4.¹⁹²

While Shiblī’s endeavors while at Nadwa between 1905-1913 enhanced the importance of historical discussions among ‘*ulamā*’. The students he mentored at Nadwa would go on to focus much of their intellectual on historical research, especially Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī. Nadwa’s pioneering journal showed that ‘*ulamā*’ could gain an audience in the Urdu public sphere through essays on historical topics Muslims found relevant and interesting. Shiblī also worked to establish a research library to facilitate historical writing based on scrutinized primary sources.

Despite his responsibilities as Nadwa’s Secretary of Education and editor of their journal, Shiblī embarked on his most ambitious historical project towards the end of his time in Lucknow, his *Sīrat al-Nabī* (Life of the Prophet) project.

Historicizing the Life of the Prophet

Although Shiblī broke new ground in Islamic biographical writing with *al-Fārūq* by being perhaps the first Muslim scholar to meticulously research and synthesize newly available sources, his most enduring legacy, is his multi-volume biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, *Sīrat al-Nabī*. Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī (d. 1953), his most famous student and co-author of the book, edited and published the first volume four years after Shiblī’s death, in 1918, and the second volume in 1920. These first two volumes are mostly the work of Shiblī and sketch the biography of the Prophet from his birth to his death. The remaining five volumes deal less with history and lay out ethical and theological teachings of Islam.

¹⁹² Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, “Shadharāt,” *Ma‘ārif* 3, no. 3 (September 1918): 114–15.

Shiblī was writing at a time of heightened interest in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. Yet little analysis has been done looking at Shiblī’s work within a broader tradition of *sīra*-writing by ‘*ulamā*’. Annemarie Schimmel has noted that a “Sirat movement” emerged in the early twentieth century in India and the Middle East, and within the first half of the century, “more books were written” on the Prophet Muḥammad’s life “than all previous centuries.”¹⁹³ Tarif Khalidi has argued that this modern phase is characterized by “the polemical *Sira*, written largely to defend Muhammad’s reputation against the attacks of the European Orientalists,”¹⁹⁴ and that Indian Muslims were the first “to respond to the new breed of European lives of Muhammad.”¹⁹⁵ Kecia Ali agrees with Khalidi’s argument about modern biographical writing on the Prophet, and has argued that Muslims adopted European modes and manners in writing modern biographies of the Prophet Muhammad “for which European scholars stood as exemplars.” “What seems clear, however, is that in India and Egypt, and broadly throughout the Arab world, the terms in which success and truth are discussed are *no longer primarily indigenous* (emphasis added).”¹⁹⁶ Yet both Ali and Khalidi overlook biographies written by contemporary ‘*ulamā*’, including Shiblī, restricting the bulk of their analysis to Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898), Sayyid ‘Amīr ‘Alī (d. 1928), and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (d. 1956). These intellectuals were not interested in traditional religious scholarship, and often were very critical of it. While some ‘*ulamā*’ did have

¹⁹³ Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 231.

¹⁹⁴ Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 18.

¹⁹⁵ Khalidi, 251.

¹⁹⁶ Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 111, 112–13.

serious concerns about Europeans depictions of the Prophet, to reduce them to polemicists ignores their engagement with received traditions in a field of religious scholarship.

Thus, the following analysis aims to discern his position within and the way in which he acted in the field of religious scholarship. Shiblī added an even longer historiographical introduction to his book than in *al-Fārūq* where he surveyed previous *sīra* literature and sources, very much orienting his work as part of an ongoing tradition of scholarship. According to Shiblī, for a contemporary biography to effectively counter European works and inspire moral excellence, a more historically accurate biography was needed, one rooted in reliable sources and providing a historically plausible narrative. Boldly asserting that “to this date, no biography of the Prophet has been written that adheres only to authentic narrations,”¹⁹⁷ Shiblī proceeded to push the tradition of *sīra* in a new direction.

In calling for greater scrutiny of primary source texts and increased attention towards historical causality, Shiblī argued that his approach amounted to an application of principles from the discipline of *ḥadīth* to the discipline of *sīra*. These two disciplines, though related insofar as they both are concerned with the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, had historically been distinct.¹⁹⁸ Consequently, critical information found in *ḥadīth* compilations were missing in *sīra* literature in Arabic. He carefully notes that the reason scholars had not included all relevant

¹⁹⁷ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī* (Lahore: Maktaba Islamiyya, 2012), vol. 1 p. 36.

¹⁹⁸ Meir Kister J., “The *Sīrah* Literature,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature. Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A.F.L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 352; Martin Hinds, “‘Maghāzī’ and ‘Sīra’ in Early Islamic Scholarship,” in *Studies in Early Islamic History*, ed. Jere Bacharach, Lawrence I. Conrad, and Patricia Crone, *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 4 (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1996), 188–98; Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh Before the Classical Schools* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001); Umar F. Abd-Allah, *Malik and Medina: Islamic Legal Reasoning in the Formative Period* (Leiden: BRILL, 2013). Andreas Görke, “The Relationship between Maghāzī and Ḥadīth in Early Islamic Scholarship,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74, no. 2 (June 2011): 174; Görke, 185; Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 68.

ḥadīth in works of *sīra* was because they had adopted the *maghāzī* genre as the model for narrating the life of the Prophet, with its emphasis on battles and conquests. That was the example of history they had. But because the genre imposed upon the Prophet characteristics of a conqueror or military commander, *ḥadīth* that did not conform were left out of the narrative.¹⁹⁹

Shiblī, however, believed *ḥadīth* compilations were a more authentic source for recreating the life of the Prophet than works of *sīra* because the former had been scrutinized by *ḥadīth* experts and Shiblī believed they could be traced back to the life of the Prophet. Shiblī references the immense scholarship related to *ḥadīth* criticism to justify his skepticism towards books of *sīra*. He points out that they were written down a century or more after the death of the Prophet and unlike scholars of *ḥadīth*, *sīra* writers had not been interested in scrutinizing narrations to avoid unreliable sources.²⁰⁰ He also notes that the separation of the disciplines of *ḥadīth* and *sīra* led to complacency regarding narrations that did not explicitly deal with law or rituals. As a result, even accomplished scholars of *ḥadīth* would include narrations widely acknowledged to be weak or fabricated when discussing issues devoid of legal import, especially reports about the virtues [*faḍā'il*] of Companions and the biographical details about the Prophet.²⁰¹ Sometimes the more authentic reports in *ḥadīth* compilations significantly diverge or even contradict what is reported in books of *sīra*, but scholars have not sufficiently attempted to incorporate the two disciplines.²⁰² “There are certain events of utmost significance, about which such useful information is available in books of *ḥadīth* that they could answer all related questions, but there

¹⁹⁹ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 pp. 74–75.

²⁰⁰ Nu‘mānī, 55.

²⁰¹ Nu‘mānī, 63.

²⁰² Nu‘mānī, 35, fn.1.

is no mention of them books of *sīra* or *tārīkh*.²⁰³ He mentions one such example related to the outbreak of hostilities between the Quraysh and the Muslims after the Prophet migrated to Medina and established a political community.

By drawing on the discipline of *ḥadīth* and highlighting the immense scholarly effort that had been devoted to *ḥadīth* criticism, Shiblī sought to endow *sīra* with greater prestige, and hence more cultural capital, to encourage more rigorous scholarship about the life of the Prophet. Zaman has observed “that for him the importance of the *Sīra* is of a rather different order than it was for medieval Muslims.”²⁰⁴ The separation of *sīra* and *ḥadīth* had led to lesser prominence for the former as a scholarly endeavor. Because “the scholars of *sīra* have had to lower their standards of criticism and authentication [*tanqīd awr taḥqīq*] ... the status of *sīra* and *maghāzī* has been lower than the discipline of *ḥadīth*.”²⁰⁵ Generally the works of *sīra* did not enjoy the type of authority and scholarly attention through teaching and commenting that the canonical books of *ḥadīth* did. Even illustrious *sīra* authors such as Ibn Ishāq are not immune from criticisms in regards to their reliability.²⁰⁶ Moreover, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī (1869-1923), a colleague of Shiblī’s at Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, in a book classifying, cataloging and describing books by Indian scholars, lists biographies on the Prophet Muḥammad under the section titled “Language, Literature, and History [*‘ulūm al-lughā, al-adab, wa al-tārīkh*]” instead of the section on religious sciences [*al-‘ulūm al-shar‘iyya al-dīniyya*].²⁰⁷ In closing the gap between the

²⁰³ Nu‘mānī, 66.

²⁰⁴ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “A Venture in Critical Islamic Historiography and the Significance of Its Failure,” *Numen* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 33.

²⁰⁵ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 36, fn.

²⁰⁶ Nu‘mānī, 40–41.

²⁰⁷ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya Fī al-Hind* (Cairo: Mu’assisat al-Hindāwī Lil-Ta‘līm wal-

disciplines of *sīra* and *ḥadīth*, Shiblī endeavored to elevate the status of *sīra* in the field of religious scholarship.

Shiblī’s incorporation of *ḥadīth* compilations in narrating the life of the Prophet was not unprecedented. The Mamluk-era Damascene scholar Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) had echoed similar concerns centuries earlier.²⁰⁸ Shiblī was aware of Ibn Kathīr’s efforts but had not succeeded in securing a copy of his work while working on his *sīrat al-nabī* project.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, there were other works with similar ambitions that were available to Shiblī. Recall from the previous chapter that ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawī’s (d. 1642) *Madārij al-nubūwat* enjoyed scholarly respect because of its reliance on canonical *ḥadīth* collections. Moreover, critiques against popular *mawlid* literature had become more pronounced in the nineteenth century, and scholars wrote new *sīra* drawing on *ḥadīth* literature. Perhaps the most popular such book in Urdu the late nineteenth century was *Tawārīkh ḥabīb-i ilāh* by Mufti Muḥammad ‘Ināyat Aḥmad Kākōrawī (d. 1863), a student of Shāh Ishāq Dihlawī.²¹⁰ When Shiblī began writing his work, many people

Thaqāfa, 2012), 86.

²⁰⁸ Ibn Kathīr stated in the introduction to his universal history, *al-Bidāya wa-al-Nihāya*, from which his *sīra* is taken, that he planned “to rely upon the book of God and *sunna* of the Messenger of God, what has been authentically transmitted [*ṣaḥḥa*], what has been deemed good [*ḥasuna*], and to explain any weaknesses in all other narrations.” Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya Wa al-Nihāya* (Beirut: Maktaba al-Ma‘ārif, 1990), vol. 1 p. 6. Ibn Kathīr was also more forthright than many other medieval Muslim historians about insisting on the correct interpretation of events, as opposed to listing multiple different narrations. The historian Rebecca Williams has argued that Ibn Kathīr aspired to make *sīra* “into a *ḥadīth* science” in that he sought to write a biography of the Prophet utilizing narrations that muḥaddithīn would find acceptable. Rebecca R. Williams, *Muḥammad and the Supernatural: Medieval Arab Views* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 106–7.

²⁰⁹ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī stated in the preface to the fourth edition that Shiblī regretted not having Ibn Kathīr’s work available. Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 25.

²¹⁰ Anwar Maḥmūd Khālid, *Urdū Nathar Mein Sīrat-i Rasūl* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1989), 321–32; Kākōrawī also founded the Fayḍ-i ‘Ām madrasa in Kanpur, the place where the first assembly of the Nadwa movement met in 1894. For his biography, see the editor’s introduction to his book. Muḥammad ‘Ināyat Aḥmad Kākōrawī, *Tawārīkh Ḥabīb-i Ilāh*, ed. Muḥammad Hafīz Qurayshī (Sialkot: Maktaba Mahriyya Raḍawiyya, 1980).

told him a new *sīra* was unnecessary after Kākōrawī's.²¹¹ In many ways foreshadowing Shiblī, 'Ināyat Aḥmad Kākōrawī wrote that his book was based on reliable [*mu'tabar*] books of *ḥadīth* and *sīra*, making it the first such book in Urdu.²¹² Shiblī's work, however, differed from both the *Madārij* and the *Tawārīkh* in emphasizing the importance of finding and studying the earliest works of *sīra* along with *ḥadīth* compilations. 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawī stated that he primarily relied on the sixteenth century Persian biography *Rowḍat al-aḥbāb fī siyar al-nabī* by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shirāzī al-Ḥusaynī (d. 999/1591-92) because it was in circulation and popular.²¹³ Kākōrawī similarly relied on the *Rowḍat* and other *sīra* works that were written after the fifteenth century.²¹⁴

Shiblī acknowledged the challenge posed by the sources available for reconstructing the Prophet's life, both in *sīra* literature and in *ḥadīth*. He narrowed down the most important *sīra* works that all later biographies drew on as those of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922). However, he dismissed al-Wāqidī as completely unreliable. Shiblī's primary reason for rejecting al-Wāqidī was because of his reputation among *muḥaddithīn* as a forger of reports, as well as his own literary criticism of the scholar. He believes al-Wāqidī's accounts are too well-structured to be accurate and betray an effort to tamper with reports to create a more interesting story.²¹⁵ The remaining three are more

²¹¹ Shiblī Nu'mānī and Muḥammad Ilyās al-A'zamī, *Maktūbāt-i Shiblī* (Aligarh: Adabī Dā'irah, 2012), 103.

²¹² Kākōrawī, *Tawārīkh Ḥabīb-i Ilāh*, 237.

²¹³ 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubūwwat*, trans. Gulām Mū'in al-Dīn Na'imī (Lahore: Shabīr Brothers, 2004), vol. 2 p. 96; Muṣṭafā b. 'Abd Allāh Kātib Chalabī, *Kashf Al-Ẓunūn 'an Usāmī al-Kutub Wal-Funūn* (Beirut: Dār al-iḥyā' al-turāth al-'arabī, 1941), 922–23; Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān considered Jamāl al-Dīn's book one of the finest, but indicated that it was difficult finding a copy that did not include later additions and alterations. al-Qanūjī, *Al-Ḥiṭṭa Fī Dhikr al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sitta*, 66.

²¹⁴ Anwar Maḥmūd Khālīd, *Urdū Nathar Mein Sīrat-i Rasūl*, 325–36.

²¹⁵ Nu'mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 pp. 92–93.

reliable for Shiblī but still problematic because none were from the time of the Prophet. Hence, even though the three scholars were reputable themselves, they had to rely on known and unknown authorities of varying degrees of reliability. For example, Ibn Sa‘d often narrates from al-Wāqidī. Moreover, Ibn Ishāq’s original book had still not been discovered, and thus recourse had to be made to the redacted version by Ibn Hishām (d. c.215/830). As a result, these sources must be used with caution.²¹⁶ Additionally, relevant *ḥadīth* from the canonical and non-canonical compilations need to be consulted, and finally even European works need to be read. Thus, in his large historiographical introduction, he surveyed and commented on forty-seven works in the genre of *sīra/maghāzī* and thirty-seven books authored by Europeans.²¹⁷ Because this type of research could involve hundreds of sources, Shiblī had a staff of assistants helping him.²¹⁸

Shiblī’s preference for *ḥadīth* compilations over books of *sīra* did not entail a blanket acceptance of all *ḥadīth* reports. He continued to employ principles of *dirāya* and *riwāya* as well as draw on his theological views privileging historical causality and downplaying divine intervention. The critical use of *ḥadīth* as a source for history was a delicate issue. One of the main reasons Sir Sayyid and other modernist writers had been dismissed by the ‘*ulamā*’ was because their rejection of *ḥadīth* material as inauthentic. To bolster his claim that scrutinizing the content of reports regardless of the soundness of the chain of transmitters was not unprecedented, Shiblī quoted scholars like Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200) stating that if a report contradicts reason, it

²¹⁶ Nu‘mānī, vol. 1 pp. 44–47.

²¹⁷ Nu‘mānī, 43–54, 85–93.

²¹⁸ Nu‘mānī, vol. 1 p. 37; ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī writes that he was hired by Shiblī to translate excerpts from English books about the Prophet for 50 rupees per month, which he estimated would be worth at least 500 rupees a month by 1947. Shiblī also emphasized that he should not spend more than two hours a day. Daryābādī was still a student at Canning College, Lucknow at the time. ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī, “Shiblī Nu‘mānī,” in *Shiblī Shanāsī Ke Awwalīn Nuqūsh*, ed. Zafar Aḥmad Şiddīqī (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 2016), 191.

should be rejected. However, they did not definitively define what constituted reason.²¹⁹ To further support this controversial take, he took recourse to the disciplines of *‘ilm al-kalām* (theology) and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal philosophy). Just as narrations of a theological nature warranted extra scrutiny according to theologians, so too did narrations that held significance for early Islam because narrating the life of the Prophet had become integral to the faith of Muslims in the face of European polemics.²²⁰

However, aware that this position may leave him open to the charge of being a Mu‘tazilī, a theological school deemed unorthodox by Sunnis, he explicitly stated that they went too far in rejecting *ḥadīth* for rational reasons. Instead, Shiblī appealed to the *Ḥanafī* principle of *‘umūm al-balwā*: the greater the significance of an incident, the greater amount of scrutiny narrations reporting it must face.²²¹ To preserve the Sunni consensus on the uprightness of the Companions, Shiblī distinguishes between the authenticity of a *ḥadīth* and its veracity.²²² A narrator of *ḥadīth* may be trustworthy and honest, making his/her narration authentic, but he/she nonetheless may be relaying an imagined truth, rather than the actual truth.²²³

While surveying the entire *Sīrat al-Nabī* would take up too much space, it will be helpful to look at three specific instances from Shiblī’s work and compare it to previous works to better

²¹⁹ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 75.

²²⁰ Nu‘mānī, vol. 1 p. 34; Zaman, “A Venture in Critical Islamic,” 33.

²²¹ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 72; Shiblī does not explicitly refer to this principle as *umūm al-balwā*, but that is what he describes. For its importance in *Ḥanafī uṣūl*, see Abd-Allah, *Malik and Medina*, 124.

²²² My understanding of the distinction between authenticity and veracity is based on Rizwi S. Faizer, “The Issue of Authenticity Regarding the Traditions of Al-Wāqidī as Established in His Kitāb al-Maghāzī,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 58, no. 2 (1999): 97–106.

²²³ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 59.

illustrate his scholarly intervention in trying to joining the disciplines of *ḥadīth* and *sīra*, while employing an historicist approach. The first is Shiblī’s handling of the account of the Prophet Muḥammad travelling as a child with this uncle Abū Ṭālib to Syria and meeting a Christian monk named Baḥīra who recognized that the young boy would be a Prophet. He warned his uncle that he needed to protect him, leading Abū Ṭālib to send the young Muḥammad back to Mecca. Shiblī states that Christian authors seemed more interested in this episode than Muslim authors, seeing it as evidence that Muḥammad adopted his teachings from Christianity.²²⁴ However, even if the reports about Baḥīra were true, they did not indicate that Muḥammad learned anything from the monk. Shiblī proceeds to argue that the reports were problematic both from the perspective of *riwāya* and *dirāya*. The latter because many versions state that Abū Ṭālib sent Muḥammad back with the Companions Bilāl and Abū Bakr; the former was not yet born and the latter still a baby. Furthermore, Shiblī characterizes famed *ḥadīth* scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī’s (d. 852/1449) acceptance of the reports as a result of his over-devotion to *ḥadīth* transmitters [*ruwāt parastī*] and asserts that he contradicted his own negative judgment of one of the key transmitters of the tradition. He further adduces statements of the *ḥadīth* critic al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) criticizing the tradition.²²⁵ Thus, in engaging with European writings about the Prophet, Shiblī resorted to the *ḥadīth* tradition to reject a popular episode in the genre of *sīra* as unhistorical.

The second example concerns the covenant that the Prophet made with the Jewish tribes of Medina upon his migration. Although the so-called “Constitution of Medina” is well known

²²⁴ Nu‘mānī, 141; Ironically, its popularity in Muslim sources was in large part because it showed Islam’s abrogation of Christianity by seeking to demonstrate that unadulterated Christian scriptures prophesized the advent of Prophet Muḥammad. A. Abel, “Baḥīrā,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, April 24, 2012, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/bahira-SIM_1050?s.num=155&s.start=140.

²²⁵ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, 172.

today, it is absent in the two most popular north Indian *sīra* works of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawī and ‘Ināyat Aḥmad Kākōrawī. The details of the agreement signed by the Prophet and the Jewish tribes are only found in Ibn Ishāq’s biography and Abū ‘Ubayd’s (d. 224/838) *Kitāb al-amwāl*.²²⁶ Such early *sīra* works were not available to ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawī and ‘Ināyat Aḥmad Kākōrawī. Hence, they did not discuss them when discussing the events of the first year of the Prophet’s arrival at Medina. They only include indirect references to violation of military pacts by Jewish tribes when discussing the Prophet’s conflict with them.²²⁷ Shiblī however provides a short summary of the agreement based on Ibn Hishām’s version of Ibn Ishāq’s work, emphasizes its importance by stating it was more substantial than a mere military alliance. He highlights that one of the central points was that Jews and Muslims would maintain friendly relations with one another [*bāhum duwstāna bartā’u*].²²⁸

As far as I can tell, this is the first reference in an Urdu *sīra* to refer to the covenant with Jewish tribes. Given that in the 1930s and 1940s arguments about whether Muslims and Hindus in India constituted a single *qawm* hinged on interpretations of the Prophet’s covenant with the Jewish tribes,²²⁹ the significance of Shiblī’s introduction of the covenant to the Urdu Muslim public cannot be underestimated.

Related to his discussion about the covenant, Shiblī disagreed with the bulk of Muslim historians who believed that the Jewish tribes living in Medina were descendants of the ancient

²²⁶ Michael Lecker, “Constitution of Medina,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, June 1, 2012, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/constitution-of-medina-COM_24415.

²²⁷ Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubūwwat*, Vol 2. p. 144.

²²⁸ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, 213.

²²⁹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 33.

Israelites sent by Moses. Instead, he agrees with the orientalist David Margoliouth who argued that they were Arab tribes that had converted to Judaism, and thus characterizations of Jews in verses of the Qur'an that describe ancient Israelites did not apply to the Arab Jews in Medina and could not be used to explain the historical conflicts with the Prophet.²³⁰

Shiblī did not want to merely incorporate more narrations from the canonical sources and apply principles of *ḥadīth* criticism to works of *sīra*, however. A more relevant and comprehensive *sīra* needed to address not only what sources to use, but how to interpret them and piece them together. Thus, Shiblī also criticized prior Muslim scholarship on *sīra* for not properly contextualizing the sources to create a plausible narrative by taking into account historical causation.²³¹ This was a different concern from the *sīra* works of earlier *ḥadīth* scholars, who often incorporated narrations from *ḥadīth* compilations in their biographies of the Prophet to settle questions of chronology and precedence.²³² For example, The question of why the Prophet began organizing military campaigns does not interest Ibn Kathīr as much as how many expeditions were sent, how many the Prophet participated in, and what their order was.²³³ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq similarly mentions that fixing the chronology of events has been an important issue in the works of *sīra*.²³⁴ Ibn Kathīr’s only explanation for why the Prophet engaged in military campaigns is to quote Ibn Ishāq’s statement that it was “in pursuance of God’s

²³⁰ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, 212.

²³¹ Nu‘mānī, vol. 1 p. 68.

²³² Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 161.

²³³ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya Li Ibn Kathīr*, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Wahīd (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā li-Ṭibā‘ wal-Nashr wal-Tawzī‘, 1976), vol. 1 pp. 352–55; This is in line with Chamberlain’s contention that the ‘ulamā’ in medieval Damascus took seriously “questions of priority” and precedence, and the ability to correctly categorize characterized distinguished scholars. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350*, 161.

²³⁴ Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubūwwat*, vol. 2 p. 96.

command to fight his enemies and to fight those polytheists who were near at hand whom God commanded him to fight.”²³⁵ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq provided a similar reason for why the Prophet began engaging in battle after moving to Medina.²³⁶

By not striving to historically explain incidents from the life of the Prophet, Shiblī felt Muslims had left many relevant and interesting details unexplored. Shiblī expressed frustration over the lack of explanation given for why the Prophet dispatched armies against specific enemies because the reticence of Muslim scholars had allowed European historians to claim that the only motive was to kill unbelievers,²³⁷ and that Islamic history was one of continuous warfare and bloodshed.²³⁸

Thus, the third example from Shiblī’s narrative about the Prophet’s life deals with the cause of military battles that the Prophet sanctioned. He marshalled *ḥadīth* not included in *sīra* books discussed above to argue that the Quraysh threatened both the Muslims in Medina after the *hijra*, and that the so-called military expeditions the Prophet sent were instead diplomatic missions to forge alliances or pacts of neutrality with tribes neighboring Medina. According to Shiblī, because of the focus on warfare in the genre of *maghāzī*, these expeditions were erroneously interpreted as raids against Meccan caravans.²³⁹ Although the details of some of the pacts and

²³⁵ A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq’s Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 280; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya Li Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 2 p. 355.

²³⁶ Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubūwwat*, vol. 2 pp. 111–12.

²³⁷ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 68.

²³⁸ Nu‘mānī, vol. 1 p. 218.

²³⁹ Interestingly, when Ibn Kathīr wished to emphasize the importance of studying the *sīra*, he specifically referred to the significance of the military battles. He thus quoted a statement from al-Wāqidī attributed to al-Zuhrī: “In the knowledge of the military expeditions there is knowledge of the hereafter as well of this world.” Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya Li Ibn Kathīr*, 2: 355. The translation is from Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad: A Translation of Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Muneer Fareed, trans. Trevor Le Gassick (Reading: Garnet, 2000), 2: 234.

alliances were omitted, Shiblī believed their occurrence could be deduced because works of *sīra* at times mentioned alliances offhandedly.²⁴⁰

Shiblī further argued that Muslims in Medina were defending themselves in all military conflicts. To quote all Shiblī’s evidence would be too lengthy, but one of the main *ḥadīth* he cites to drive home the danger posed by the Quraysh – and not found in the above *sīra* works – is from the canonical compilation of Abū Dāwūd. After the Prophet’s arrival in Medina, the Quraysh sent a threatening letter to ‘Abd Allāh b. Ubayy, one of the Arab chiefs in Medina, demanding that he hand over Muḥammad, or else the Quraysh would destroy them all and enslave their women.²⁴¹ Another narration found in Ibn Kathīr but not in the Persian and Urdu *sīras* is from al-Bukhārī’s compilation. Before the Battle of Badr, Sa‘d b. Mu‘ādh, one of the leaders of the Anṣār and an old friend of the pagan Umayya b. Khalaf, visited Mecca to perform ‘*umra*, and the Prophet’s enemy Abū Jahl threatened him and the people of Medina by stating he would prevent those aiding Muḥammad from performing the pilgrimage. Sa‘d replied that in retaliation, they would cut off their trade route to Syria.²⁴² For Shiblī, this narration is further proof of the open hostility Muslims had to endure that led to the first battle. Ibn Kathīr, however,

²⁴⁰ For example, he states that even though he could not find direct evidence, the Prophet must have made peace with the Arab tribe of Juhayna prior sending out the various expeditions mentioned in books of *sīra*. When these books recount the expedition sent to Ḍumra, they state that no fighting took place between the Muslims and the Quraysh they encountered there because both groups had treaties with the leader of Juhayna, who had intervened between them. But when this treaty took place is never mentioned. Shiblī surmises it must have taken place before the other expeditions were sent. Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, 1: 221. Had he access to Ibn Kathīr’s work, he would have found evidence for his deduction. Ibn Kathīr included a *ḥadīth* reported by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and al-Bayḥaqī which stated that when the Prophet arrived at Medina, some men from Juhayna came to him and they made an alliance. This happened before the Prophet sent out any other expedition. Ibn Kathīr’s main interest was to determine which expedition was the first, and who was the first commander appointed by the Prophet. The *ḥadīth* about the alliance with the tribe of Juhayna allowed Ibn Kathīr to argue that it preceded all other expeditions. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya Li Ibn Kathīr*, 2: 359.

²⁴¹ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 218 For the reference in the original source, see <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/20/77>.

²⁴² Nu‘mānī, vol. 1 p. 219 For the reference in the original source, see <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/64/2>.

interpreted it as evidence of the predictive powers of the Prophet Muḥammad, since Sa‘d b. Mu‘ādh told Umayya that he had heard that the Muslims would kill him, and this prediction proved true in the Battle of Badr. For Shiblī, however, the *ḥadīth* proved that the Prophet was threatened by the Quraysh, and thus allowed him to plausibly argue from within the tradition that the ensuing battles were defensive.

Thus far, Shiblī’s divergent views from the *sīra* tradition has rested on careful reading of their narratives and citations from *ḥadīth* compilations to provide an explanation for why the Prophet began military ventures. The *sīra* works indicate that the Prophet reached out to create alliances with neighboring tribes, even though the sources do not detail them, and there are reports that indicate the Quraysh threatened the Muslims in Medina. However, on the question of the proximate cause of the Battle of Badr, the first major battle of the Prophet, Shiblī diverged from all prior *sīra* scholarship.

In the standard *sīra* narratives, the Battle of Badr was precipitated by the Prophet attempting to intercept a trading caravan of the Quraysh returning from Syria. However, the Quraysh found out about it, and intercepted the Prophet’s army, leading to the ensuing battle at Badr.²⁴³ Shiblī however argues that the Prophet never intended to attack the caravan when he marched out of Medina. Rather, prior to the decision to march out of Medina, he consulted with his Companions about an impending attack from the Quraysh, while some Companions unsuccessfully lobbied for raiding the caravan from Syria. Thus, the purpose of the battle was not “to plunder a trade caravan,” but rather to “defend against an attack by the Quraysh.”²⁴⁴ This in itself was not a novel argument. Syed Ameer Ali had also made the argument that the Prophet had been

²⁴³ Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubūwwat*, vol. 2 p. 119.

²⁴⁴ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 241.

“compelled, from the necessities of the situation, and against his own inclination, to repel the attacks of the enemy by force of arms, to organise his followers for purposes of self-defense.”²⁴⁵

Shiblī however understands this opinion contradicts all prior Muslim historians. He nonetheless maintains that his opinion is the most historically plausible narrative and sets about proving it through creative, careful, and detailed engagement with *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature.

Rather than rehash Shiblī’s narrative, it will be more instructive in showing his attempt to incorporate *ḥadīth* compilations into *sīra* to narrow in on the piece of evidence that represented the greatest obstacle for him. The strongest evidence against Shiblī’s view was a *ḥadīth* in al-Bukhārī in which the Companion Ka‘b b. Mālīk states that he did not participate in the Battle of Badr because like many Muslims, he thought that it was initially a raid on the caravan. Shiblī asserts that “aside from the *ḥadīth* of Ka‘b b. Mālīk, may God be pleased with him, I have come across no other *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet leaves Medina to raid a trade caravan.”²⁴⁶ Quite controversially, he proceeds to question the veracity of Ka‘b’s statement. Although it had been accepted as authentic by *ḥadīth* critics, Shiblī stated that revisiting its veracity was warranted on the grounds that greater historical distance grants greater clarity.

Ka‘b did not participate in the battle, and years after the death of the Prophet, while recounting what happened, Shiblī believed he seemed to downplay the historical significance of the battle to justify his absence from it. Careful to avoid charges of casting aspersions on the integrity of a Companion, Shiblī states that Ka‘b probably sincerely believed that the Prophet had not intended to fight the Quraysh and initially sought to go after the caravan, and thus his report is still authentic. But this does not mean for Shiblī that Ka‘b’s interpretation of the event is

²⁴⁵ Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: Life and Teachings of Mohammed*, 56–57.

²⁴⁶ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 245.

correct. Furthermore, because Ka‘b’s opinion became popular later, the view that the Prophet intended to raid the caravan became widespread.²⁴⁷

When compared with the approach of *ḥadīth* scholars like Ibn Kathīr, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, and Kākōrawī, Shiblī’s methodology is not entirely new. They utilized narrations not found in received *sīra* works to critique, expand, or defend narratives about the Prophet. Nevertheless, there were two important differences between them, namely Shiblī’s emphasis on historical causality, and his willingness to push this emphasis even to the point of questioning the veracity of narrations from the canonical *ḥadīth* compilations. Biographers of the Prophet prior to Shiblī were simply not as interested in answering why certain events happened on the basis of historical cause and effect and more interested in elaborating on supernatural causes, such as the role played by the devil in pushing the Quraysh to go to war,²⁴⁸ and support of angels fighting alongside Muslims that secured victory for them.²⁴⁹ While Shiblī recognized that “heavenly support [*ta’yīd āsmānī*]” was ultimately why the small Muslim army was able to defeat the larger Meccan army, he does not elaborate on it, and instead focuses on historical factors that caused the battle and led to Muslim victory.²⁵⁰

The foregoing discussion illustrates the great lengths to which Shiblī went in his struggle to provide more historically reliable narratives of Islamic thought and early figures. Countering European representations of Islam as a violent religion was at the forefront of his concerns. But to solely focus on his conclusion without seriously considering the way he built his case would

²⁴⁷ Nu‘mānī, vol. 1 p. 253.

²⁴⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya Li Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 2 pp. 385–87.

²⁴⁹ Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubūwwat*, 130–31.

²⁵⁰ Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 1 p. 231.

be a serious oversight regarding Shiblī's broader project of pushing the 'ulamā' to take historical research and scholarship more seriously in general, and historicist methods of writing history in particular. He sought to present a new historiographical approach that not only functioned as a defense against anti-Muslim orientalism but drew on sources of knowledge that were valued within the field of religious scholarship. In citing, referencing, and appropriating ideas and principles from the disciplines of *'ilm al-kalām*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and especially *ḥadīth*, he aspired to imbue history, and especially *sīra*, with an elevated religious significance. Furthermore, Shiblī endeavored to demonstrate how his approach did a better job than previous Muslim scholarship at explaining change and elucidating the life of significant Muslim figures because his approach required not only extensive study of a wide variety of sources for relevant details, but also a methodology for sifting through the sources and tying them together to present a coherent narrative. Shiblī believed Muslims needed to read a coherent narrative if they were going to understand and be inspired by Islamic history, especially the life of the Prophet.

Reception

Shiblī was likely the most famous *'ālim* in the Muslim public sphere at the turn of the century. His reputation was built largely on his historical studies and projects. Many Muslims certainly felt that Shiblī's project of creating a modern historiographical approach represented a novel development of Islamic scholarship. Some Muslims celebrated Shiblī because they thought he rivaled the best of European scholarship. Zafar 'Alī Khān (1874-1956), the editor of *Zamindar*, "the foremost Urdu daily in the Punjab" and "regarded as the 'national organ of the Muslims,'" ²⁵¹ thought very highly of *al-Fārūq*. He translated it into English in 1900. In his

²⁵¹ Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 184.

introduction he framed Shiblī's scholarship as an important work by a Muslim historian to be added to the main sources available to Indians on 'Umar: Gibbon's *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Muir's *The Caliphate, Rise, Decline, and Fall*, Irving's *Lives of the Successors of Mahomet*, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry on him.²⁵² Along the same lines, Salahuddin Khuda Bukhsh (1877- 1931), son of the founder of the Khuda Bakhsh Library, saw in Shiblī's works "the triumph of modern historical method." In his article "The Mohamedan Awakening," published in the *Empire* in 1906, he wrote that despite Shiblī's lack of proficiency in English, he had "opened a new vein in Indian historical criticism, and his canons of historical criticism would be accepted without demur or hesitation even by the Regius Professor of History at Oxford ... Professor Shibli may be regarded as the founder of the historical school in India. He has lighted the torch, and it is he who has handed it on to others."²⁵³

Shiblī's histories also endeared him to a new generation of Muslims exposed to western learning but critical of colonialism and seeking affirmation in their religious heritage. According to the Urdu literary scholar Mahdī Ifādī, Shiblī's histories constituted the most important religious literature for contemporary Muslims. "If the contemporary generation requires ethical perfection [*akhlāqī takmīl*] in addition to intellectual progress, then the amount of religious literature Shiblī has prepared in regard to history is more than sufficient."²⁵⁴ He went to assert that they effectively imparted necessary ethical lessons because Shiblī appropriated a philosophical and scientific historical methodology without eschewing thirteen hundred years of Islamic scholarship.

²⁵² Shibli Numani, *Al-Farooq: The Life of Omar the Great*, trans. Zafar Ali Khan (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1939), xiv–xix.

²⁵³ Salahuddin Khuda Bukhsh, *Essays Indian and Islamic* (London: Probsthain & co., 1912), 174n.

²⁵⁴ Ifādī, *Ifādāt-i Mahdī*, 194.

Indeed, some of the most active intellectual and political Muslim voices of the early twentieth century looked to Shiblī as the preeminent *‘ālim* because of his historical knowledge. Azād’s support for Shiblī’s vision of historical scholarship for the Muslim public has already been noted. ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryabādī’s (1892-1977), Shawkat ‘Alī (1873-1938) and Muḥammad ‘Alī Jawhar (1878-1971), all leaders of the Khilafat Movement, are further examples of the anti-colonial Muslim leaders who paid homage to Shiblī’s historical scholarship. After experiencing a religious crisis in his youth when ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryabādī disavowed all religions,²⁵⁵ he later wrote about his strong interest in Shiblī’s historical writings and the role they played in building his trust in the historicity of early Islamic history as well as implanting skepticism towards the works of orientalist.²⁵⁶

The ‘Alī brothers had known Shiblī since their time together at Aligarh. Muḥammad ‘Alī Jawhar in 1906 had urged Shiblī to write his essays in *al-Nadwa* about emperor Awrangzeb in response to European criticisms and introduced him to David Margoliouth’s *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam* and insisted that Shiblī write a historical biography of the Prophet in Urdu.²⁵⁷ The need for the latter work became more pressing for the ‘Alī brothers as they rose to prominence in the early twentieth century and were invited to lecture on religious subjects, despite their lack of training in Arabic. They found that even in villages Muslims were very receptive to lectures on the life of the Prophet that excluded the miraculous and marvelous, and focused on presenting him as a historical exemplar.

²⁵⁵ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf ‘Alī Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2012), 109–10.

²⁵⁶ Muḥammad ‘Imrān Khān Nadwī, ed., *Mashāhīr Ahl-i-‘ilm Kī Muḥsin Kitābeṅ* (Lucknow: Idārahe Iḥyā-e ‘Ilm-o-Davat, 2013), 38, 40.

²⁵⁷ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 359–60; Azād was later critical of Shiblī’s essays on the Mughal emperor for overly glorifying him. Khan, *Early Urdu Historiography*, 265.

It was only when I began to carry out my plan that I realised not only the eagerness of the people to listen to such discourse but the difficulty of avoiding stories that could be regarded as above the suspicion of being apocryphal. There was no biography of the Prophet in Urdu that did not contain stories of doubtful authenticity. This I had known for some time, and it was this that had made me urge on my old tutor, the late Maulana Shibli, as a great grievance, during a visit of his to me at Baroda ten years earlier ... And it was then that he had explained to me that the task was far from a light one, for in no language did such a biography of the Prophet exist as I and a hundred thousand others today desired. There were large tomes in Arabic no doubt, but they were all in the nature of material for a Life of the Prophet and would have to be threshed and winnowed by a biographer before such a Life, as a proper critical standard required, could be published. Nevertheless he recognised not only the importance of such an undertaking but the immediate urgency of it.²⁵⁸

Shibli's historical writings also helped him foster transregional links with scholars outside of India through publication in and correspondence with Egyptian journals, primarily through his publications in Rashīd Riḍā's *al-Manār* journal. In addition to appearing in *al-Manār*, his historical essays also appeared in the Egyptian journals *al-Hilāl* and *al-Muqtabas*.²⁵⁹ In the late nineteenth century, the 'Alī Pasa Mubārak (d. 1893), the supervisor of the Department of Education, had become a vocal critic of the religious curriculum at al-Azhar. "Mubarak also asserted that Azhari 'ulama taught no history, geography, or philosophy, which they viewed as a waste of time, and only a little mathematics, and they labeled those who valued such subjects as unbelievers."²⁶⁰ Rashīd Riḍā, a supporter of curricular reform, argued in favor of greater historical studies for 'ulamā' to equip them to defend Islam from Christian missionaries. In the fictionalized series of conversations between a traditionalist scholar (*muqallid*) and a reformist

²⁵⁸ Ali, *My Life, a Fragment: An Autobiographical Sketch of Maulana Mohamed Ali.*, 132.

²⁵⁹ Nu'mānī, *Al-Intiqād 'alā tārīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī*, 167–201.

²⁶⁰ Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 45.

scholar (*muṣliḥ*) that was serialized in *al-Manār*, the traditionalist recants his earlier opposition to history and admits its importance. “It has become clear to me that one acquainted with history can create uncertainty about the religious sciences that can only be refuted by one who extensively studies history. I view those scholars [*mashāyikh*] who discourage its study and allege that it weakens the mind as being clearly misguided.”²⁶¹ It was within this Egyptian context over the dispute about the importance of history for ‘*ulamā*’ that Rashīd Riḍā promoted Shiblī’s scholarship. Riḍā published Shiblī’s essay on the *jizya*, which Shiblī had translated into Arabic, in the second year of *al-Manār* in 1899.²⁶² Riḍā found Shiblī’s thesis that the *jizya* was compensation for protection and defense convincing, citing him in an article about the history of Islam in Syria written in response to Christian Arab polemics in 1904,²⁶³ and in another article in 1909 about the legality of the Ottoman cancellation of the *jizya* and conscription of non-Muslims in the army in the face of Muslim opposition to the policy.²⁶⁴

Shiblī gained further attention when Riḍā published his critical essays against Zaydān’s *tārīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī* as a separate book in 1912. Riḍā added an introduction, stating that because Europeans had taken the lead in writing about the Islamic past, there was initially enthusiasm about Zaydān’s works. However, Zaydān seemed content with European assessments and reflected their anti-Muslim and anti-Arab biases. Riḍā sought out scholars knowledgeable about history to correct and critique it. Although he felt Shiblī’s critique at times descended to

²⁶¹ Rashīd Riḍā, “Al-Muḥāwarāt Bayn al-Muṣliḥ Wal-Muqallid: Al-Muḥāwara al-Rābi’a,” *Al-Manār* 3, no. 32 (February 6, 1901): 804. The series of conversations was later published as a book. See Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, “Portrait of the Intellectual as a Young Man: Rashid Rida’s Muhawarat al-Muslih Wa al-Muqallid (1906),” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 12, no. 1 (2001): 93–104.

²⁶² Nu‘mānī, “Al-Jizya Wa al-Islām”; Nu‘mānī, “Al-Jizya Wa al-Islām (2).”

²⁶³ Riḍā, Rashīd, “Sūryā Wal-Islām,” *Al-Manār* 7, no. 6 (January 1, 1904): 225–31.

²⁶⁴ Riḍā, Rashīd, “Al-Jizya Wa Tajannud Ahl al-Dhimma,” *Al-Manār* 12, no. 6 (July 17, 1909): 433–38.

vituperations against Zaydān, Riḍā nonetheless deferred to the Indian scholar’s expertise as a historian.²⁶⁵ In a later article honoring Shiblī, Riḍā wrote that he “had become the most famous genius among contemporary Indian ‘*ulamā*’. Granted, others are considered more knowledgeable in *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, and *ūṣūl*, but it is rare to find anyone who compares or comes close to his ability to benefit people through teaching and writing about these sciences ... and he has gained such mastery over history that perhaps nobody in the entire Islamic world can equal him currently.”²⁶⁶ For Riḍā then, Shiblī represented a unique reformer (*muṣliḥ*) who could wield historical knowledge both to defend Islam but also to push for intellectual reconsideration in other branches of religious knowledge.

Shiblī’s transregional links bolstered his scholarly reputation in India. After the publication of his travelogue to the Middle East, Asaf Jah VI Nizam of Hyderabad (1866-1911) granted him a monthly stipend of one-hundred rupees starting in 1896. The *farmān* of the award stated that it was to free Shiblī from other concerns so he could focus on writing for the *qawm*, “and at the moment there is no scholar [*‘ālim*] in Hindustan that can utilize buried treasures [*zakhīron*]” the way he could.²⁶⁷ In 1912, at Nadwa’s yearly assembly, Rashīd Riḍā was the invited guest. Nadwa’s influence as far as Egypt and Syria was noted in the local press.²⁶⁸ Riḍā wrote in *al-*

²⁶⁵ Rashīd Riḍā, “Al-Taḳārīz: Intiqād Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī Wa Ādāb al-Lugha al-‘arabiyya,” *Al-Manār* 15, no. 9 (September 11, 1912): 703–7.

²⁶⁶ Rashīd Riḍā, “Muṣāb Al-Hind Wal-‘ālam al-Islāmī Bil-Shaykh Shiblī al-Nu‘mānī,” *Al-Manār* 18, no. 1 (February 14, 1905): 79–80.

²⁶⁷ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 227.

²⁶⁸ “Nadwat Al-‘Ulamā’,” *Adīb* 5, no. 3 (March 1912): 166 I am grateful to Michael O’Sullivan for bringing this article to my attention. See also Ikram, *Yādgar-i Shiblī*, 326.

Manār that it had been his “friend” Shiblī who had invited him to India.²⁶⁹ In 1913, the stipend from Hyderabad was increased to three-hundred rupees a month.²⁷⁰

If Shiblī’s reputation as a historian enhanced his standing as a religious authority in the Arabic public sphere in Egypt and Urdu public sphere in India, it marginalized him among a sizeable segment of Indian ‘*ulamā*’. By and large contemporary ‘*ulamā*’ at Deoband and from Farangī Maḥall did not view Shiblī as a scholarly peer.²⁷¹ Contemporary critics of Shiblī were often at a loss to explain the widespread popularity of his writings given his purported lack of scholarly standing, insisting that his fame must be the result of his powerful prose and pandering to modern ideas.²⁷² Shiblī was certainly aware of his ability to influence the Muslim “public,”²⁷³ gaining not only recognition but considerable income that allowed him to write independently.

Many ‘*ulamā*’ within the Nadwa movement were also opposed to Shiblī’s ideas, and resentment against him only increased as he became the public face of the association seeking to unite and lead all Indian ‘*ulamā*’.²⁷⁴ Khalīl al-Raḥmān Sahāranpūrī, the son of ‘Ahmad ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī and the Rector (*nāẓim*) of the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ movement during Shiblī’s tenure as Secretary of Education, led the internal opposition against him. He called for a public hearing at the Nadwa madrasa to determine whether Shiblī was sufficiently pious, which was only thwarted

²⁶⁹ Rashīd Riḍā, “Safar Şāhib Al-Manār Ilā al-Hind,” *Al-Manār* 15, no. 3 (March 19, 1912): 225.

²⁷⁰ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 233.

²⁷¹ Muḥammad Amīn Zubayrī, *Dhikr-i Shiblī* (Lucknow: Dānish Maḥall, 1946), 13.

²⁷² Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Alawī Raḥīmabādī, *Ḥusn Al-Bayān Fī Mā Fī Sīrat al-Nu‘mān* (Sargodha: al-Nūr Akīdimī, 1966), 62; Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Jān Ghāzīpūrī, “Tanqīd Al-Fārūq,” in *Shiblī Shanāsī Ke Awwalīn Nuqūsh*, ed. Zafar Aḥmad Şiddīqī (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 2016), 348–49.

²⁷³ Nu‘mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, 1972, 8:125.

²⁷⁴ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 492–93.

by Shiblī on procedural grounds.²⁷⁵ This internal opposition was in part due to conflicting visions for the madrasa, where Shiblī wanted to incorporate English, Sanskrit, and modern sciences at the expense of traditional books on logic and philosophy, and the ‘*ulamā*’ represented by Khalīl al-Raḥmān felt Shiblī was going too far, and feared that the study of English and modern sciences would lead to theological doubts.²⁷⁶ However in addition to conflicting pedagogical perspectives, Shiblī’s attempt to appropriate historicism and his genealogical approach to history also contributed to opposition from the ‘*ulamā*’. Some scholars associated Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ suspected that he was attempting to spread atheism [*ilhād*] the way Sir Sayyid supposedly had.²⁷⁷

Shiblī’s association with Sir Sayyid caused many to view his historical methodology as surreptitiously undermining settled Islamic beliefs. In a response written to *Sīrat al-nu‘mān*, the Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Alawī Raḥīmabādī (d. 1919) wrote that Shiblī’s attempt at source criticism through *dirāya* was nothing more than attempt to advance the *necharī* (naturalist/materialist) view of Sir Sayyid whereby any narration that seems to contradict human nature [*tabī‘at insānī*] was deemed inauthentic.²⁷⁸ This ultimately undermined the trust in the tradition of *ḥadīth* criticism as providing an authentic access to the past. In a long critique of *al-Fārūq*, Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Jān Ghāzīpūrī (d. 1919) echoed similar concerns about Shiblī’s history undermining the tradition of *fiqh* by asserting that rules related to non-Muslims and *jizya* were not necessarily sanctioned by the Prophet but rather historically contingent. “He imagines that

²⁷⁵ Nadwī, 494.

²⁷⁶ Nadwī, 499; Muḥammad Ishāq Jalīs Nadwī, *Tārīkh Nadwat Al-‘ulamā* (Lucknow: Majlis Ṣaḥafat wa Nashriyāt, 2014), vol. 2, pp. 46–47.

²⁷⁷ Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān Khān Shirwānī, “Marḥūm ‘allāma Shiblī Nu‘mānī,” in *Shiblī Shanāsī Ke Awalīn Nuqūsh*, ed. Zafar Aḥmad Ṣiddīqī (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 2016), 31–32.

²⁷⁸ Raḥīmabādī, *Husn Al-Bayān Fī Mā Fī Sīrat al-Nu‘mān*, 130–31.

there is widespread error in the Islamic world regarding rules about non-Muslim subjects [*dhimmi*] and the issues that scholars from the past centuries considered religious rules are in fact not religious rules!”²⁷⁹ He further alleged that in attempting to respond to European critics, Shiblī adopted Sir Sayyid’s approach of molding history and scripture to appease Europeanized Muslims at the expense of faithfully representing Islam.²⁸⁰

The controversy over Shiblī’s *sīra* project perhaps best captures the divergence between his public popularity and scholarly opposition. In 1912, Shiblī announced in *al-Nadwa* his plan to write a biography of the Prophet because no historically reliable biography existed in Urdu, causing educated Muslims, who will soon become the leaders of the Muslim *qawm*, to resort to biased European works. In the announcement, Shiblī requested funds to bring the project to fruition.²⁸¹ Within a month, funds started arriving. Sulṭān Jahān Begum of Bhopal (d. 1931) granted two-hundred rupees per month for the project.²⁸² In 1913, Azād published parts of the historiographical introduction discussing *dirāya* and criticisms of *ḥadīth* narrations in his newspaper *al-Hilāl*, which elicited vociferous opposition. Scholars, including many from Deoband, demanded that the Begum of Bhopal rescind her funding and a more qualified scholar be given the task.²⁸³ Shiblī complained in a letter to ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryabādī that four or five fatwas declaring him an apostate [*takfīr*] had been sent to Bhopal, and even Nadwa affiliated

²⁷⁹ Ghāzīpūrī, “Tanqīd Al-Fārūq,” 351.

²⁸⁰ Ghāzīpūrī, 345–49.

²⁸¹ Nu‘mānī, *Maqālāt-i Shiblī*, 1972, 8:32.

²⁸² Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 542.

²⁸³ Nadwī, 549.

‘*ulamā*’ were aiding in disseminating them.²⁸⁴ Muḥammad Amīn Zubayrī (d. 1947), secretary to the Begum, suggested that Shiblī send his manuscript for review to Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan Deobandī (d. 1920), the principal of the Deobandī madrasa. Shiblī obliged, but Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan refused to look at it due to pressure at Deoband. Despite this public outcry against Shiblī authoring an Urdu *sīra*, the funding from Bhopal continued.²⁸⁵

Among the most famous critics of Shiblī’s *sīra* was the renowned Deobandī scholar and Sufī ‘Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī (d. 1943). He also accused Shiblī of following in the footsteps of the “necharī” Sir Sayyid. He wrote that “these people have neither religion [*dīn*] in their hearts, nor religious respect [*dīnī ‘azmat*] for the Prophet or the saints [*awliyā*].”²⁸⁶ How can it be possible, asks Thānawī, for the Companions, the Successors, and the great Imams to have misunderstood something that these “confused ignoramuses claim to understand?”²⁸⁷ Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī (d. 1974), a student of ‘Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī, expanded on this critique of Shiblī in his *Sīrat al-muṣṭafā*, written in 1932 in response to the popularity of Shiblī’s *Sīrat al-nabī*.

²⁸⁴ Nu‘mānī, *Makātib-i Shiblī*, 1:301.

²⁸⁵ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī*, 550; The funding for the project continued after Shiblī’s death as well. See Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī’s preface to the fifth volume, where he attributes the widespread positive reception to the volumes in large part to the sincerity of the patron, Sulṭān Jahān Begum. Nu‘mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī*, vol. 5, p. 16.

²⁸⁶ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī, *Malḥūzāt Ḥakīm Al-Ummat* (Multan: Īdāra-e Ta’līfāt Ashrafiyya, 2003), vol. 6, p. 392.

²⁸⁷ Thānawī, vol. 6, p. 393; ‘Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī had signed off on a fatwa declaring Shiblī an apostate. Many supporters of Shiblī in the decades after his death urged Thānawī to rescind his agreement with the fatwa. Among Shiblī’s disciples who also developed a close relationship with Thānawī was ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī. After a phase of atheism in his youth, Daryābādī had become an important Muslim intellectual, one of the leaders of the Khilafat Movement, editor of a religiously oriented Urdu journal, and a translator of the Qur’an into English. He maintained regular correspondence with Thānawī between 1927 and 1943, and in 1936 Shiblī came up often. In Shiblī’s defense, Daryābādī wrote that when the first volume of *Sīrat al-nabī* came out, it was transformative for many English-educated Muslims like himself experiencing a crisis of faith because it appealed to their modern sensibilities. Thānawī replied that while that might be the case, it also added fodder for those seeking to belittle the past scholarly tradition. Daryābādī replied that it was through Shiblī’s writings that people like him became receptive to ‘*ulamā*’ like Thānawī. Thānawī did eventually rescind his endorsement of the fatwa of kufr against Shiblī. ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm Al-Ummat* (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1967), 465. On Daryābādī’s relationship with Thānawī, see Zaman, *Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi*, 96–103.

Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī characterized Shiblī's notion of *dirāya* to question narrations as a new *bid'a* (heretical innovation),²⁸⁸ and stated that modern *sīra* writers were so enamored by modern European philosophy and science that they attempted to twist evidence to present the Prophet as exemplifying modern European values.²⁸⁹ He rejected the suggestion that a new historical approach critical of sources and attempting to explain historical causes was needed, claiming it ultimately led to subjective interpretations and interpolations. Rather, all that was required to write the biography of the Prophet was to faithfully represent the reliable narrations about the Prophet.²⁹⁰

Shiblī's critics among the '*ulamā*' disagreed with his approach in scrutinizing the historical reliability of sources as a necessary step in writing biographies and histories. The primary purpose of historical writing should be moral instruction and ethical cultivation, not factual accuracy. Thus, even the *Ahl-i Ḥadīth* scholar Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Alawī Raḥīmabādī, who rejected Abū Ḥanīfa's legal opinions as misguided, saw no reason for Shiblī to criticize the exaggerated virtues of Abū Ḥanīfa, because "celebrating the famous figures of Islam is an endorsement of Islam."²⁹¹ For Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī, this was doubly true when it came to the life of the Prophet. He endorsed the position that when legal or theological issues were not at stake, it was not necessary to be cautious in accepting reports about the Prophet.²⁹² Thus he explicitly criticized Shiblī for attempting to dismiss the story of the Prophet meeting

²⁸⁸ Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī, *Sīrat Al-Muṣṭafā* (Karachi: Alṭāf and Sanz, n.d.), vol. 1 pp. 7–8.

²⁸⁹ Kāndhlawī, vol. 1, p. 9.

²⁹⁰ Kāndhlawī, vol. 1, p. 11.

²⁹¹ Raḥīmabādī, *Ḥusn Al-Bayān Fī Mā Fī Sīrat al-Nu'mān*, 63.

²⁹² Kāndhlawī, *Sīrat Al-Muṣṭafā*, vol. 1, p. 4.

with the Christian monk Baḥīra.²⁹³ Furthermore, ‘Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī asserted that modern *sīra* writers attempting to historicize the life of the Prophet ended up focusing on the socio-political aspect of his life and completely overlooked the more essential metaphysical aspect of his prophethood. That is why they tended to downplay the miraculous and wonderful.²⁹⁴

Conclusion

The above summary of critiques against Shiblī’s historical methodology should not be taken as evidence of Shiblī’s irrelevance in the field of religious scholarship. Drawing on the literary theorist Hans Robert Jauss, it can be argued that Shiblī’s histories represented a “literary event.” Literary events mark moments of change in a literary tradition, when new works stimulate readers to think differently or evoke new feelings in such a way that they not only become widely read for generations, but a criterion, albeit a contested one, to evaluate other works.²⁹⁵ Although most ‘*ulamā*’ rejected Shiblī’s source criticism, emphasis on historical causality, and critical engagement with European sources, those that wrote historical works were forced to nonetheless directly or indirectly address Shiblī’s ideas. Henceforth, in addition to extolling virtues of early figures such as Abū Ḥanīfa, scholars also took greater interest in reconstructing their historical thought. Shiblī’s writings thus functioned as the foil to criticize or standard to emulate.

For example, in the 1966 reprint of *Husn al-bayān*, the editors acknowledged that Shiblī had established a new standard of historical writing due to which his *Sīrat al-nu‘mān* continued to be published and printed, but those of his critics were difficult to find. Thus, they added an

²⁹³ Kāndhlawī, vol. 1, p. 96.

²⁹⁴ Thānawī, *Malfūzāt Ḥakīm Al-Ummat*, 392.

²⁹⁵ Hans Robert Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 25.

introduction almost equal in length to the original work to help it keep pace with Shiblī's book.²⁹⁶

Moreover, his call to utilize the earliest sources about the beginnings of Islam was generally accepted. This was especially the case in new Urdu *sīra* works. Idrīs Kāndhlawī devoted an extensive discussion to Ibn Hishām's report about the Prophet's covenant in Medina with Jewish tribes to push back against claims that it provided precedence for Muslims creating a political community as equals with non-Muslims.²⁹⁷

Furthermore, although Shiblī ultimately failed to consistently abide by his rule that he would weigh narrations from books of *sīra* according to standards of *ḥadīth* criticism – doing so would invalidate most of the desired material to write the Prophet's life, including the covenant in Medina with Jewish tribes – his aspiration to bring together the genres of *ḥadīth* and *sīra/maghāzī* did prompt more conscious efforts to incorporate narrations from *ḥadīth* compilations into narratives of the Prophet life in Urdu. Idrīs Kāndhlawī in his introduction attempted to downplay the fact that *ḥadīth* compilers and early *sīra* writers wrote according to divergent agendas. In doing so had to address the fact that *sīra* had not been categorized as a branch of *ḥadīth*. As was mentioned earlier, *sīra* had been considered a branch of *adab*, but Kāndhlawī argued it was a branch of *ḥadīth*, and thus endowed it with greater cultural capital in

²⁹⁶ Raḥīmabādī, *Ḥusn Al-Bayān Fī Mā Fī Sīrat al-Nu'mān*, 10–12. According to the late Mawlānā Dr. Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui, despite the critiques and shortcomings of Shiblī's al-Fārūq, it remains the single best Urdu book on the 'Umar's life and caliphate. Yāsīn Mazḥar Ṣiddiqī, "Taqdīm," in *Al-Fārūq Ek Muṭāli'a*, ed. Yāsīn Mazḥar Ṣiddiqī and 'Ubad Allāh Fahad (Aligarh: Idārah 'Ulūm Islāmiyya, 2002), 5, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/al-farooq-ek-mutala-ebooks>; The Deobandī graduate Manāẓar Aḥsan Gīlānī's (d. 1956) book on Abū Ḥanīfa is seen as building on Shiblī's scholarship. Manāẓir Aḥsan Gīlānī, *Ḥaḍrat Imām Abū Ḥanīfa Kī Siyāsī Zindagī* (Mumbai: Makatabat al-Ḥaqq, n.d.), 12.

²⁹⁷ Kāndhlawī, *Sīrat Al-Muṣṭafā*, vol. 1, pp. 455–59.

the field of religious scholarship.²⁹⁸ This is an important modern development in the tradition of *sīra* writing.

To grant Shiblī's writings represented a literary event does not negate his general lack of success in appropriating historicism in the field of religious scholarship. Indeed, despite his influence on generations of graduates from the Nadwa seminary who devoted significant energy to historical research and writing, the Nadwa madrasa never included history as a distinct discipline of study. As we will see in the later chapters on Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī and Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, perhaps the two most famous graduates of Nadwa to gain scholarly reputations as historians, they were less skeptical of early Islamic sources than Shiblī and did not carry out bold historiographical interventions to the extent Shiblī did.

While Shiblī was gaining public fame through his publications, his colleague at Nadwa, 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, was quietly and privately working on his own grand historical project. Unlike Shiblī, he wrote mostly in Arabic. And unlike Shiblī, he focused on Indian history. In turning to the analysis of 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī in the next chapter, we will explore the development of Arabo-biographical historical writing in the twentieth century that was not indebted to historicism.

²⁹⁸ Kāndhlawī, vol. 1, pp. 3–4.

Chapter 3:

‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī: Arabic Biographical Writing in Late Colonial India

Introduction

The previous chapter about Shiblī Nu‘mānī showed how he attempted to assimilate modern historicism into the religious discourse and tradition of the ‘*ulamā*’. Shiblī expressed skepticism of later historical narratives, sought primary sources to write his histories, and engaged with orientalist works about Islamic history. He considered this approach integral to properly understanding normative Islam. Although his views were well-received by large segments of the Urdu-Muslim public sphere, they ultimately proved to be unpopular among many ‘*ulamā*’, leading Shiblī to resign from the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ madrasa. This did not mean, however, that the ‘*ulamā*’ were uniformly opposed to historical research or new historiographical approaches.

In this chapter, we turn to a colleague of Shiblī’s at Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ who similarly devoted his intellectual career to researching and writing about Islamic pasts, but from a different perspective than Shiblī’s and mostly in Arabic rather than in Urdu. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī (1869- 1923), the subject of this chapter, spent his life compiling historical works that have become indispensable for anyone researching the intellectual history of Indian Muslims. Like Shiblī, al-Ḥasanī displayed a critical attitude towards prior histories written by Indian Muslims. However, his approach to history was not influenced by historicism, nor was it a continuation of the Indo-Persianate mode of historical writing. Rather, his oeuvre demonstrates the relevance of the Arabo-biographical mode of historical writing that had been marginal in India relative to the Indo-Persianate. The relevance of the Arabo-biographical mode is especially clear in his largest and most famous work, the eight-volume Arabic biographical dictionary *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir wa*

Bahjat al-Masāmi' wa al-Nawāzīr (Promenade of Thoughts and Delight of the Ears and Eyes) where he was critical of histories focused on the intrigues of courtly politics, victories of military battles, and wonders of Sufi saints. Instead, he set out to document the lives of notable Indian Muslims who learned, taught, and embodied forms of knowledge, especially Indian 'ulamā'. Fully comprehending the production of his Arabic histories requires widening our view beyond the context of the Indo-Persianate historical tradition and colonial historiography, two dominant concerns of secondary scholarship on Indo-Muslim historiography.

Many historians have pointed to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the period of the rise of historicism globally and its displacement of older modes of historical writing.¹ Speaking about premodern Arabic historical writing, Yoav Di-Capua has argued that modern historicism's focus on change, critical use of primary sources, and the state-established archives rendered premodern Arabic historical writing "obsolete" as they "were replaced by modern historical narration."² Yet precisely at this time, relying on a vast array of primary sources, and with the help of modern research libraries, al-Ḥasanī devoted his life to writing the most ambitious history of Indian Muslim scholarship, and he chose to write it in an Arabo-biographical mode of writing.

Because this mode of historical writing had not been prominent in India, al-Ḥasanī's biographical history also represents a noteworthy historiographical change in Indo-Muslim historical writing. Entries on notable Indian Muslims associated with teaching, writing, or

¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Public Life of History: An Argument out of India," *Public Culture* 20 (June 1, 2008): 143–68, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2007-020>; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2009).

² Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 4.

patronizing learning are divided into fourteen generations, called *ṭabāqāt*, from the first Islamic century to the early twentieth century, spanning eight volumes and encompassing 4,515 biographical entries. Within each of the fourteen generations, the entries are organized alphabetically.

The main argument of this chapter is that al-Ḥasanī's writings provide evidence of a greater prominence than before of the Arabo-biographical mode of writing in the twentieth century and a shift away from Indo-Persianate writing in modern Indo-Muslim historiography. 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī's preoccupation with charting the transmission of knowledge through collecting scholarly biographies showing their intellectual pedigrees and legacies, coupled with the lack of interest in memorializing saintly miracles and preeminence, distinguishes his historical approach in the *Nuzhat* from Indo-Persianate biographical works. Furthermore, this turn towards the Arabo-biographical mode of historical writing is neither indebted to modern historicism, nor reducible to a response to colonialism. While al-Ḥasanī certainly was not insulated from the effects of colonialism, his historical writing cannot be reduced to the colonial context.

The chapter will argue that al-Ḥasanī's project of discovering and documenting the intellectual history of learned Indian Muslims in the *Nuzhat* had two broad aims. First, he sought to establish a connection to a Muslim past by tracing the continuity of knowledge [*ilm*], as opposed to divine grace (*baraka*) or saintly lineage, through generations of Muslims in India. Through charting the transfer of Islamic knowledge, including both the transmitted (*manqūlāt*) and rational (*ma'qūlāt*), he sought to socially define '*ulamā*' as inheritors and guardians of religious knowledge. He aimed to increase the prestige of category of '*ulamā*' since in Indo-Persianate works the category of Sufis took precedence. The second broad aim was to affirm the

history of Indian Muslims as central to the history of Islam generally by charting transregional scholarly connections. The focus on transregional scholarly networks in al-Ḥasanī's historical project is evidence of "Muslim world-thinking" that is not indebted to anti-colonial politics, contrary to recent arguments by Cemil Aydin.³

The chapter will begin by reviewing the different representations of 'ulamā' and Sufis in Arabo-biographical and Indo-Persianate histories. It will then proceed with a discussion of 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī's upbringing and education, from 1869 to 1895, and how it shaped his historical sensibility. Next, the chapter will focus on al-Ḥasanī's writings between 1895 and 1915, when he worked for the Nadwat al-'Ulamā'. It was during this period that he likely wrote the bulk of his biographical dictionary, *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir*. Al-Ḥasanī's historiographical approach will be discussed by comparing selected themes in the *Nuzhat*, with older and contemporaneous historical works. The chapter will then move to a discussion of al-Ḥasanī's historical works written while he was the Rector of the Nadwat al-'Ulamā', from 1915 until his death in 1923. His writings from this period of his life suggest that he acknowledged certain shortcomings of the biographical genre. Finally, the chapter will look at the reception history of his historical writings since his works were published posthumously.

An important difference between the Arabo-biographical histories and the Indo-Persianate histories is the emphasis on categorizing figures as 'ulamā' in the former and Sufis in the latter. As discussed in the Introduction, although many 'ulamā' were also Sufis, the juristic tradition of the former remained distinct from the mystical tradition of the latter. The late Shahab Ahmed argued that balancing between the two traditions represented a "prominent and

³ Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), quote is from p.144; Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 230.

permanent thread of the history of Muslims ... a balance, at different times and places in history, and in different social and discursive spaces in society, often weighted more to one side than to the other.”⁴ In the *Nuzhat*, al-Ḥasanī gives pride of place to the ‘*ulamā*’. This is a work written in the Arabo-biographical genre.

Despite the ubiquitous nature of Arabic biographical dictionaries organized around the transmission of religious learning across the Muslim world that emphasized the category of ‘*ulamā*’, they were uncommon in South and Central Asia until the nineteenth century.⁵ Indo-Persianate biographical works emphasized cataloging miracles, anecdotes of Sufis, and memorable verses of poets. Cataloging the transmission of religious learning across time was less important than the above three objectives.⁶ This continued to be the case in the nineteenth century, when Sir Sayyid Aḥmad wrote his *Athār al-Sanādīd* about Delhi. The biographical section begins with Sufi masters, “men of ecstasy” [*majzūb*], and physicians before mentioning ‘*ulamā*’. C.M. Naim has suggested that the order of the presentation of the categories indicate the relative importance Sir Sayyid gave to each in his vision of what constituted Delhi.⁷

The scholar-Sufi Azād Bilgrāmī’s (d. 1786) was likely aware of the greater importance of presenting exemplary Muslims as ‘*ulamā*’ in Arabic biographical writing. Unlike his Persian *tadhkira*, *Ma’āthir al-Kirām*, where he included a section on eighty Sufis, then a smaller section on seventy-two ‘*ulamā*’, in his Arabic biographical section in *Subḥat al-Marjān* intended to

⁴ Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 24–25.

⁵ James Pickett, *Polymaths of Islam: Power and Networks of Knowledge in Central Asia* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2020), 161, 168.

⁶ Hermansen Marcia K., “Religious Literature and the Inscription of Identity: The Sufi Tazkira Tradition in Muslim South Asia,” *The Muslim World* 87, no. 3-4 (April 3, 2007): 324.

⁷ C. M. Naim, “Syed Ahmad and His Two Books Called ‘Asar-al-Sanadid,’” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 3 (May 2011): 674, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000156>.

enhance the Islamic prestige of India, he presented all the figures as *'ulamā'*. Hence the section is titled “What Has Been Mentioned about *'Ulamā'*.”⁸ Figures that appear as Sufis in the Persian work, such as Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) are also represented in Arabic work as *'ulamā'*.⁹ As noted in Chapter One, this is the same book in which Bilgrāmī remarked that Indian Muslims have focused so much on preserving the memories of Sufis that they have ignored the lives of *'ulamā'*.

Moreover, while numerous biographical collections of saints and poets are found in D.N. Marshall's bibliography of Mughal-era manuscripts, the only work identified as devoted to *'ulamā'* specifically is Azād Bilgrāmī's (d. 1786) Arabic *Subḥat al-Marjān*.¹⁰ This is not to say that Indian *'ulamā'* did not write histories, but that when important Muslims were textually memorialized, even by *'ulamā'*, it was more commonly for their role as Sufis than as religious scholars. In Persian *tadhkiras* that contain lives of various categories of Muslims, such as Sufis, scholars, judges, poets, courtiers, and others, precedent is given to Sufis.

To further illustrate the difference between Indo-Persianate and Arabo-biographical modes of writing, it is illuminating to compare the biography of a figure that appears in both. Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindhī (d. 1750), a Sindhi-born scholar who spent most of his life teaching in Medina, appears both in Bilgrāmī's *Ma'āthir al-Kirām* and in his Syrian contemporary Khalīl al-Murādī's (d. 1791) Arabic biographical dictionary *Silk al-Durar*. Al-Murādī's shorter entry provides more details about Ḥayāt al-Sindhī's books and teachers, including mentioning the name of a teacher in Sind with whom Ḥayāt al-Sindhī read books [*qara' alā*], the teacher in

⁸ Gūlām 'Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Subḥat Al-Marjān Fī Athār Hindustān* (Beirut: Dār al-Rāfīdayn, 2015), 71.

⁹ Bilgrāmī, 106.

¹⁰ D. N. Marshall, *Mughals in India: A Bibliographic Survey. Vol. 1, Manuscripts* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1967), 93.

Medina he spent the most time with [*lāzama*] and whose teaching circle he inherited, and states many *ḥadīth* scholars authorized him to transmit *ḥadīth*, specifying three prominent *ḥadīth* scholars by name.¹¹ Thus a total of five teachers are named by al-Murādī. Bilgrāmī, on the other hand, mentions no teachers from Sindh, and only two teachers in Medina, noting he gained perfections [*kasb-i kamālāt*] from one and that he was a student for a short time of the latter. No books of Ḥayāt al-Sindī are mentioned. Moreover, whereas al-Murādī mentions Ḥayāt al-Sindī in biographical entries on numerous other scholars as a teacher of *ḥadīth*, Bilgramī does not specify his students, aside from himself, but does state that elite and commoners from Hijaz, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey [*rūm*] all “gained blessings [*barakāt*] from the auspicious presence [*dhāt-i humayūn*]” of Ḥayāt al-Sindī while he taught *ḥadīth* in Medina.¹²

Turning from Bilgramī’s *tadhkira* to Indo-Persianate hagiographies in general, we can discern a greater emphasis on saintly miracles, blessings (*baraka*), and shrines than on scholarly teachers, texts, and teachings. According to Nile Green, “morality often came in a poor second to the exercise of miraculous power.”¹³ This reflects the greater relevance of memories of Sufis for creating Muslim communities in a context where Hindu traditions predominated. The *Nuzhat*, with its emphasis on transmission of knowledge and lack of interest in saintly *baraka*, shrines, and miracles, does not fit this mold of Indo-Persianate biographical writing.

Al-Ḥasanī’s choice of the Arabo-biographical mode of historical writing indicates the importance of a non-Persianate intellectual tradition that shaped and conditioned his disposition

¹¹ Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, *Silk Al-Durar Fī A’yān al-Qarn al-Thānī ‘Ashr* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1988), 4:34.

¹² Ghulām ‘Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Ma’āthir Al-Kirām* (Agra: Maṭba‘ Mufīd-i ‘Ām, 1910), 164.

¹³ Nile Green, “Making a ‘Muslim’ Saint: Writing Customary Religion in an Indian Princely State,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 3 (2005): 618.

and sensibility towards the past. One such intellectual tradition was *ḥadīth* studies in north India, and the associated culture of documenting intellectual genealogies. Recall from Chapter One that as influential Indian scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – from Shāh Walī Allāh in Delhi, to Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān in Bhopal, and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī in Lucknow – became more interested in *ḥadīth* studies, they also displayed greater proclivity for early Islamic texts, biographical material on earlier scholars and transmitters of *ḥadīth*, and tracing links between authors and texts, teachers and students.

Al-Ḥasanī’s historical works can be interpreted as the further incorporation of North India into this Arabic cosmopolis.

Family Background and Education

An exploration of al-Ḥasanī’s family background and education will help elucidate the cultural formations that conditioned his sense of history. Anthropologists Charles Stewart and Stephan Palmié have urged greater attention to cultural presuppositions that mediate relationships with the past and help societies translate events into meaningful histories. “Cultural notions as to what constitutes ‘time,’ what is an ‘event,’ what kind of agent can bring about ‘change,’ how perceived ‘change’ is set apart from the regular flow of happenings—all of these vary from society to society and modulate the understanding of what we might call history.”¹⁴ A look at al-Ḥasanī’s social and educational background will shed light on his notions of temporality, change, and agency, as well as how they set his historical worldview apart from the previously dominant Indo-Persianate mode of historical writing.

¹⁴ Stephan Palmié and Charles Stewart, “Introduction: For an Anthropology of History,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6, no. 1 (June 1, 2016): 211, <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau6.1.014>.

‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī born on December 22, 1869, in village near Rai Bareilly, Takiyya Kalan to a family distinguished by their claim to being Ḥasanī sayyids. They were affiliated with the Naqshbandī order, and had familial ties to *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, a reformist movement that began in the early nineteenth century. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī hailed from a specific sayyid family referred to as *Ḥasanī Qutbī* that traced their lineage to the Prophet Muhammad through his maternal grandson al-Ḥasan b. Abī Ṭālib, and their first ancestor to settle in India was Sayyid Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Madanī (d. 677/1279), a nephew of the Sufi master ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 561/1166).¹⁵ Through endogamous marriage practices, this branch of Ḥasanī sayyids cultivated a distinct social identity.¹⁶ Al-Ḥasanī’s birthplace further strengthened his ties to this family because the village held historical significance due to two especially prominent ancestors.

The first was Shāh ‘Alam Allāh (d. 1685), a Naqshbandi-Mujaddadi shaykh who established the village as a Sufi center, and thereafter it came to be known as Takiyya Kalan. ‘Alam Allāh was a disciple of Ādam Banūrī (d. 1643), the leading disciple of Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1625), the founder of the Mujaddadi branch of Naqshbandi Sufis.¹⁷ The village’s historical significance was also due to Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd (d. 1831), the founder of the populist reformist movement *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* and leader of a jihad against the Sikh kingdom in

¹⁵ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1999), 1:211-12.

¹⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī* (Lucknow: Maktaba-i Islām, 2012), 1:21-22.

¹⁷ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 5:588-89; Dina Le Gall, “Banūrī, Mu‘izz al-Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Brill, July 1, 2015), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/banuri-muizz-al-din-COM_25212?s.num=0&s.rows=20&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-3&s.q=adam+banuri.

Punjab. In addition to being born there, Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd also rebuilt a masjid established by ‘Alam Allāh and used the village as a training ground for his jihad.¹⁸

The intersecting affiliations – genealogical, spiritual, and reformist – led to a tradition of *tadhkira* writing to memorialize generations of Ḥasanī sayyids.¹⁹ Al-Ḥasanī’s father, Fakhr al-Dīn (d. 1908) had written the most recent works about the history of the family, which included a short work dedicated to saintly life of Shāh ‘Alam Allāh, a separate genealogical history of Ḥasanī Qutbī sayyids, and a three-volume encyclopedia of religious subjects and typologies of knowledge, which included a large section on biographies of Ḥasanī saints and scholars.²⁰ All the aforementioned were in Persian. In addition to writing down memories of family members, al-Ḥasanī’s relatives also kept notebooks (*bayāḍ*) in which they wrote down anecdotes and verses of poets.²¹ Al-Ḥasanī thus hailed from a family with a tradition of historical-writing utilizing the genre of Indo-Persianate *tadhkiras* that extended the memories of known family members with the goal of highlighting their genealogy, asserting the relevance of their Sufi lineage, and sacralizing a specific space.

Al-Ḥasanī’s own historical work, especially his *Nuzhat*, however, represented a departure from the *tadhkiras* of saints and poets, as will be discussed later. For now, it is important to consider the relevance of his exposure to *ḥadīth* studies in orienting his view of the past. Al-Ḥasanī’s family became more interested in *ḥadīth* and early Islamic history in part because of the reform movement of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd.

¹⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd* (Lucknow: Majlis-i Taḥqīqāt va Nashriyāt-i Islām, 2011), 1: 90, 380.

¹⁹ Nadwī, 1:50-51.

²⁰ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 8:376-380.

²¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥasanī, *Gul-i Ra’nā* (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 2014), 35.

The reform and jihad efforts of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd and his disciples, and especially their martyrdom, had become imbued with temporal significance for al-Ḥasanī sayyids. Not only had they supported the effort of one of their own for religious reform, but many of them had also become martyrs at the Battle of Balakot in Sayyid Aḥmad’s failed military campaign against the Sikh kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1831. This led to a valorization of activism and martyrdom.²² Al-Ḥasanī recounts that his maternal grandmother, who also had become a personal disciple of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd, would put him to sleep by singing an Urdu lullaby about becoming a martyr.²³ Moreover, in an effort to view Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd’s campaign as part of a longer history of Islamic struggles, family members turned to newly available Arabic books about early Islamic history.²⁴ The *Futūḥ al-Shām*, ostensibly written by al-Wāqīdī (d. 823), proved especially popular. Published in Calcutta between 1854 and 1862, the book recounted in dramatic fashion the Muslim conquest of Syria.²⁵ A relative of al-Ḥasanī and a grandson of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd’s brother, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kalāmī (d. 1916) had written a versified translation in Urdu of selections of it and titled it *Ṣamsām al-Islām*. Relatives memorized it and would sing it at family gatherings.²⁶

²² Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, 1:26.

²³ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Ḥasanī al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy* (Raebareili: Sayyid Ahmad Shahid Academy, 2004), 32.

²⁴ Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, 1:27.

²⁵ Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), 204. For a discussion of why the book was likely not written in the ninth century by al-Wāqīdī, see p. 204-206.

²⁶ Muḥammad ‘Imrān Khān Nadwī, ed., *Mashāḥir Ahl-i-‘ilm Kī Muḥsin Kitābeḥ* (Lucknow: Idārahe Ihyā-e ‘Ilm-o-Davat, 2013), 182-83. It was also sung often by the women of the family. A section of the Urdu book focused on the heroic actions of an early female Muslim in the Muslim conquest of Syria, Khawlah b. Al-Azwar.

Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd's movement had strengthened ties between the Ḥasanī sayyids and the family of Shāh Walī Allāh. After all, Shāh Ismā'īl Shahīd, the intellectual spokesperson of the movement, had been Shāh Walī Allāh's grandson. Moreover, because of Shāh Walī Allāh and his progeny's role in propagating *ḥadīth* studies, al-Ḥasanī's family also displayed an interest in it.²⁷

A further example of the influence of *ḥadīth* studies is a sense of temporality in as the flow of knowledge through generations of people. Garret Davidson in his study of post-canonical *ḥadīth* practices has noted that the practice of cataloging chains of *ḥadīth* transmission shaped how many Muslim scholars viewed intellectual history across all religious disciplines as the transmission of knowledge through physical bodies, ending ultimately with the Prophet Muḥammad. Within this paradigm, an awareness of the intellectual genealogy of teachers and texts was thus necessary.²⁸ This sense of temporality and its connection to the family of Shāh Walī Allāh is evidenced by the *ijāza* of al-Ḥasanī's maternal grandmother, Sayyida Ḥumayrā' b. 'Alam al-Huda (d. c. late 19th cent.), to transmit *Mūḍiḥ al-Qur'ān*, an Urdu translation of the Qur'an by Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir (d. 1814), son of Shāh Walī Allāh. Sayyida Ḥumayrā' had read through the translation and been granted an *ijāza* by Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir's daughter, who had received it from her father. Sayyida Ḥumayrā' in turn taught the text to al-Ḥasanī, her grandson, and granted him her *ijāza* and linked him to Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir through his daughter.²⁹ Thus a very recent Urdu text became a node in a broader network of knowledge and was confirmed as such through the documentation of the nodes to the author of the text.

²⁷ al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt 'Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 152.

²⁸ Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 266–67.

²⁹ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi' Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 7:1027; al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt 'Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 32–33.

Beyond the influence of his family and their connection to the Delhi *ḥadīth* scholars, al-Ḥasanī's time as a student in Lucknow and Bhopal also played a role in shaping his historical perspective. In Chapter One, I discussed the importance of 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī (d. 1886) and Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1890) in the emergence of an Arabo-biographical mode of historical writing in India. Recall that both authors were critical of the lack of historical knowledge among Indian '*ulamā*' as it concerned Muslim scholarship and had published Arabic historical works to address it. Although al-Ḥasanī did not formally study with either scholar, he had met them. Al-Ḥasanī had come to Lucknow in the 1880s to study the rational subjects of logic, theology, and philosophy, as well as Ḥanafī *fiqh*, with the '*ulamā*' of Farangī Maḥall. During that time, he also met al-Laknawī.³⁰ He also grew disillusioned with the extensive study of books about the rational subjects. In a letter to his father in 1888, he wrote that striving years to study the rational subjects was a waste of time since they were not pure religious subjects [*khāliṣ dīnī 'ulūm*]. His father replied that while they were not as important as studying the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, theology, philosophy and logic supported religious understandings [*dīn kī ta'yīd*], and that previous scholars had deemed it worthy of study.³¹ Al-Ḥasanī ultimately persevered and completed his studies in Lucknow, before traveling to Bhopal to study *ḥadīth*.

His studies in Bhopal were crucial in shaping his view of temporality as the transmission of knowledge through generations. He had greater access to Arabic historical works, both older and contemporary, greater exposure to transregional scholarly connections, and spent more time with non-Indian scholars. Bhopal had become an important center for *ḥadīth* studies due to support from Jamāl al-Dīn (d. 1882), the prime minister during the reign of Sikander Begum (d.

³⁰ al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt 'Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 78–79.

³¹ al-Nadwī, 80–81.

1868). Jamāl al-Dīn had been a supporter of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd’s movement. Patronage of ḥadīth studies continued during the reign of Shah Jahan Begum (d. 1901) thanks to Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān, the Nawab’s consort.³² Jamāl al-Dīn had invited prominent Yemeni scholars to come and teach and act as judges. One such Yemeni scholar was Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin (d. 1909), who was only one transmitter removed from the giant Yemeni scholar al-Shawkānī (d. 1834). Al-Ḥasanī studied the major books of *ḥadīth* with Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin and forged a close bond with him and his family.³³ Al-Ḥasanī also considered Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin as the leading scholar of the Muslim biographical tradition and chains of *ḥadīth* transmission [*al-rijāl wa al-siyar*] of his time.³⁴ Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin’s fame drew Arab students and scholars from Najd, Hijaz, and Yemen to Bhopal.³⁵

The publications and correspondences of Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān incorporated Bhopal, and India more broadly, into transregional discussions on *ḥadīth*-centered reforms. His sense of historical importance of Bhopal is most clearly seen in his biographical history of iconoclastic scholars, *al-Tāj al-Mukallal Min Jawāhir Ma’āthir al-Ṭirāz al-Ākhir wal-Awwal* (The Crown Bejeweled with Gems of the Virtues from the Latest and Earliest Styles). It was based on al-Shawkānī’s similar work *al-Badr al-Ṭāli’*. Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān’s work presented contemporary scholars from India, Yemen, Hijaz, Baghdad, Cairo, and Istanbul as a global community of *ḥadīth* scholars following in the footsteps of a long history of iconoclastic scholars, beginning with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), that challenged errant interpretations of Islam that had

³² Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 7:947.

³³ al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 83–84.

³⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 8:1175.

³⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, 8:1213.

become dominant. Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān also reproduced his correspondences with many Salafi scholars reaching out to him after encountering his published works in the Arab world, or asking him questions. Additionally, Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān explicitly eschewed a focus on political history stating that he preferred to focus on religious knowledge. He hoped his selection of materials would convince the reader that “despite the world being filled with injustice and darkness, and catastrophes and massacres, that there still remain secrets in Sufi lodges, knowledge and religion, love of piety, and preference for truth over the world, and abandonment of *taqlīd*, and the strength of certainty.”³⁶

Al-Ḥasanī developed a similar interest to al-Laknawī and Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān by the time he completed his formal studies in Islamic law and the rational sciences in Lucknow and *ḥadīth* studies in Bhopal in 1894. This interest in intellectual genealogy, transregional connections, and scholars as historical agents during a politically tumultuous time can be seen in a small Urdu travelogue al-Ḥasanī penned in 1895. Al-Ḥasanī decided to spend January and February of 1895 visiting living scholars and departed saints. He began with a stop in Delhi, and traveled as far north as Sirhind, about 250 kilometers, making stops at prominent *qasbas* in between, such as Saharanpur and Deoband. He recorded his itinerary and reflections in a diary that remained unpublished in his life and titled it *Armagān-i Aḥbāb* (Souvenirs for Beloveds).³⁷

The *Armagān-i Aḥbāb* is an early Urdu example of a genre of travel-writing in Arabic among scholars working within the paradigm of *ḥadīth* transmission and who wrote about *ḥadīth*

³⁶ Muḥammad Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān al-Qanūjī, *Al-Tāj al-Mukallal Min Jawāhir Ma'āthir al-Ṭirāz al-Ākhir Wal-Awwal* (Qatar: Idārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 2007), 513.

³⁷ It was later published in 1957 under the title *Dihlī Awr Uske Aṭrāf* by Urdu Academy, Delhi. *Dihlī Awr Uske Aṭrāf* (Delhi: Urdū Akādīmī, 1988); the editor mistakenly states that al-Ḥasanī's journey took place in 1894, p. 9. However, the first entry in the travelogue states that he began the journey on the Hijri date of Rajab, 14, 1312, which corresponds to January 11, 1895. See p. 30.

transmitters encountered on journeys and the texts or reports they transmitted.³⁸ It thus differs from the two most famous Urdu travelogues at that time, Sir Sayyid’s accounts of his journey to England, published initially in 1869, and Shiblī’s journey to Egypt, Syria, and Istanbul, published in 1894. While Sir Sayyid and Shiblī presented an emerging Urdu public with accounts of faraway lands, al-Ḥasanī’s travel-account is more about ‘discovering the familiar,’³⁹ in this case, transmitters of *ḥadīth* in the north Indian heartland. He states at the beginning of his account that the journey he is embarking upon is for the express purpose of seeking “religious knowledge” [*ilm dīnī*].⁴⁰ The knowledge that he records are about the *ijāzāt* he acquired for *ḥadīth* transmission and anecdotes about scholars and saints as told by those he meets.

Al-Ḥasanī was especially keen to learn the intellectual genealogies and request *ijāzas* to transmit *ḥadīth* from older scholars that had the opportunity to study with Shāh Ishāq before his departure to the Hijaz in 1842. He had limited success. Sayyid Nadhīr Ḥusayn (d. 1902), one of the most famous *ḥadīth* scholars of India with a prominent study circle in Delhi, and Rashid Aḥmad Gangōhī (d. 1905), one of the founders of Deoband, both express unfamiliarity and lack of interest in collecting *ijāzas*,⁴¹ indicating that the practice was not widespread in India. Nadhīr Ḥusayn ultimately granted al-Ḥasanī authorization to transmit *ḥadīth* through his chain by signing a document al-Ḥasanī had written with the books of *ḥadīth* he had studied with others.⁴²

He also had travelled to Panipath solely to meet Qārī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Pānīpatī (d. 1897) and

³⁸ Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 3.

³⁹ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Discovering the Familiar: Notes on the Travel-Account of Anand Ram Mukhlis, 1745,” *South Asia Research* 16, no. 2 (October 1, 1996): 131–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272809601600202>.

⁴⁰ Ḥasanī, *Dihlī Awr Uske Aṭrāf*, 30.

⁴¹ Ḥasanī, 32, 101.

⁴² Ḥasanī, 58.

record his chain of transmission through Shāh Ishāq. However, after arriving there, he found out that Pānīpatī did not directly hear *ḥadīth* from Shāh Ishāq, and thus did not have a direct line of transmission.⁴³

While obtaining permission to transmit *ḥadīth* one already knows and has already studied may seem redundant, it is a means of gaining *baraka* through multiple lines of connection to the Prophet. It is all the more desirable when the link between the Prophet is reduced through fewer transmitters within the chain. More importantly, the practice also reinforces a temporality experienced through generations of scholars and transmitters because one must learn and record the names of all intermediaries between the present and the past. This sense of continuity is highlighted by al-Ḥasanī by contrasting it with the political loss of Muslim power in India.

Al-Ḥasanī juxtaposes the political rupture of the loss of Muslim power with the continuity of knowledge through scholars. In al-Ḥasanī's account, on the train ride to Delhi he considered the fall of the Mughal Empire and the control of the British over India as a lesson [*'ibrat*] that confirmed the verse in the Qur'an, "We alternate these days [of fortune and misfortune] among people."⁴⁴ As he visited sites of lost Muslim power, he repeatedly called attention to that same lesson. Recounting the intense emotion when visiting the Red Fort, al-Ḥasanī breaks from his usual descriptive account and addresses imagined readers directly.

Readers! Forgive me. The intense sorrow upon seeing these buildings has rendered me unable to describe them. Whoever knows the history [*hīstarī*] and geography [*jīyāgrāfī*] of the fort cannot help but cry and be heartbroken while also realizing the truth of God's power and majesty ... Now neither that time [*zamāna*] remains, nor those people. There is no king, no court. Only these tattered structures remain that speak forthrightly [*zabān-e ḥāl*] about the advance and decline of Muslims.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ḥasanī, 70.

⁴⁴ Ḥasanī, 30; Quran 3:140.

⁴⁵ Ḥasanī, 46–47.

Thus, British colonialism represented an important temporal marker, separating the present from a pre-colonial Indian past.

The political decline of Muslims, in al-Ḥasanī's view, also resulted in religious chaos in Delhi. He repeatedly bemoans intra-Sunni sectarianism, especially between *Ahl-i Ḥadīth* scholars and Ḥanafīs. For example, after the Friday prayer at the Jama Masjid in Delhi, *Ahl-i Ḥadīth* preachers stand and start condemning other Muslims, going so far as to declare that those who subscribe to the authority of a legal school are doomed for Hell.⁴⁶ Similarly, when al-Ḥasanī attended a study session of Sayyid Nadhīr Ḥusayn, he noted that most of the students displayed a partisan hatred [*ta'assub*] against Ḥanafīs.⁴⁷ In addition to sectarianism, religious chaos also manifested through individuals presenting themselves as Sufis for financial gain and to profit from people's ignorance.⁴⁸ He quotes a Naqshbandi shaykh explain that "due to this age's [*zamān*] tumult, truthfulness is decreasing. Selfishness has replaced godliness in people's hearts."⁴⁹ Al-Ḥasanī ultimately exclaims, "When Islam's political power goes away, people can do what they want and say what they want."⁵⁰

In contrast to the bleak situation painted by al-Ḥasanī's reflections on political decline and their effects on religious practice, his meditation on scholars demonstrates that a positive connection to the past, and thus hope for the future, was possible through preserving the memory of scholars and charting the transmission of religious knowledge through them. For al-Ḥasanī,

⁴⁶ Ḥasanī, 62.

⁴⁷ Ḥasanī, 36.

⁴⁸ Ḥasanī, 51.

⁴⁹ Ḥasanī, 50.

⁵⁰ Ḥasanī, 62.

'*ulamā*' represent remnants of the predecessors [*baqiyat al-salaf*] insofar as they continue to embody the knowledge passed down from the earliest generations of Muslims.⁵¹

Beyond recording chains of names, al-Ḥasanī expresses great interest in collective memory of recent and not-so recent scholars and saints. By far the figure al-Ḥasanī is most interested to hear about is Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd. His movement marks significant temporal break for al-Ḥasanī as the end of Mughal rule. Whereas the latter represented political decline, the former marked religious renewal. While traveling through towns outside of Delhi, he is astonished by the number of Muslims praying in mosques, reading Qur'an, and attending assemblies of preachers.⁵² Al-Ḥasanī attributes this increase in religious observance to the reformist activities of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd and his scholarly disciples. He seeks out living disciples or offspring of his disciples and records their anecdotes about how Sayyid Aḥmad's visit to their village changed them and their families. Many of the scholars he meets also ascribe positive social changes to him. According to Gangōgī, the reformer's presence did more to change people than all the religious books that existed during his time.⁵³ When al-Ḥasanī visited Deoband, the scholars spent an entire evening sharing stories about Sayyid Aḥmad.⁵⁴ Thus, for al-Ḥasanī, the present was not a moment of civilizational decline requiring the jettisoning of the past, but rather a continuation of religious renewal inaugurated nearly a century prior. From this perspective, carriers of religious knowledge constituted important historical actors, and yet their history had not been properly preserved.

⁵¹ Ḥasanī, 106.

⁵² Ḥasanī, 117.

⁵³ Ḥasanī, 105.

⁵⁴ Ḥasanī, 87.

Al-Ḥasanī also realizes the limitations of collective memory when he learns important details about Shāh Walī Allāh and his family that were generally not known. Upon visiting the site of his old madrasa, he meets a relative of the family in possession of many of the family's writings, which al-Ḥasanī is eager to view since he did not have prior knowledge of them. He also learns the location of the graves of Shāh Walī Allāh and his family, and regrets that even though he had passed by the location in Delhi he had no idea it was their graves.⁵⁵ Similarly, he had sought to visit the grave of 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, but could not find its location and nobody was able to direct him.⁵⁶ The difficulty in finding graves of prominent scholars is disheartening for al-Ḥasanī. According to him, the presence of the pious dead can still be felt and thus continues to influence places and people. But many graves of scholars remained hidden because of the lack of interest by Muslims in their scholarly past.

Moreover, the Sufi tradition overall did not afford the same degree of continuity for al-Ḥasanī, despite his reverence for Sufi saints, because he found Sufi spiritual lineages to be discontinuous based on his study of their historical texts. At one point he asks a Naqshbandi shaykh about the gaps in their *silsila*, but the shaykh was unaware that there were breaks and thus could not provide an answer.⁵⁷ Bruce Lawrence has argued that such "temporal disparities" were tolerated in Indo-Persian Sufi *tadhkiras* because they did not detract from the hagiographer's goal, "to retell the saga of Persian/Indo-Persian Sufism as a single dramatic

⁵⁵ Ḥasanī, 60–61.

⁵⁶ Ḥasanī, 64.

⁵⁷ Ḥasanī, 42.

endeavor shaped by the Unseen for the benefit of humankind."⁵⁸ Al-Ḥasanī also records some confusion from the scholars he meets about the knowledge of famous Indian Sufi saints regarding religious texts. Nadhīr Ḥusayn, for example, stated that famous Indian Sufis, with a few exceptions such as Aḥmad Sirhindī, were famous for their asceticism and piety, but were ignorant of *ḥadīth*.⁵⁹ Rashid Aḥmad Gangōhī disagreed and characterized the founders of Sufi tariqas as being knowledgeable and wise.⁶⁰ For al-Ḥasanī these temporal discrepancies posed a challenge to a sense of continuity with the past.

The above sections about ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī’s family background and education have endeavored to show the cultural threads that formed his historical consciousness. Practices of *tadhkira* writing that focused on his family lineages and Sufi chains predisposed him to historical writing. His relation to Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd further solidified the historical importance of his family. In addition, his exposure to *ḥadīth* studies in Bhopal widened his historical geography by linking him with an Arabic cosmopolis by tying him to a transregional community of *ḥadīth* scholars. This also engendered an eagerness to discover and connect with intellectual genealogies of elderly scholars in India and learn more about past Indian scholars. In the face of the loss of Muslim political power, the history of Indian Muslim religious scholarship represented a thriving continuity to the past.

Al-Ḥasanī was not alone in viewing the ‘*ulamā*’ with a new sense of social importance. Branon Ingram and Margrit Pernau have argued that the loss of traditional patronage in the wake

⁵⁸ Bruce B. Lawrence, “An Indo-Persian Perspective on the Significance of Early Persian Sufi Master,” in *The Heritage of Sufism Volume I: Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 27.

⁵⁹ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥasanī, *Dihlī Awr Uske Atrāf* (Delhi: Urdū Akādimī, 1988), 38.

⁶⁰ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥasanī, *Dihlī Awr Uske Atrāf* (Delhi: Urdū Akādimī, 1988), 104.

of Mughal decline and consolidation of British power over the nineteenth century led to a new conceptualization of *'ulamā'*. According to Ingram, “in the wake of Mughal decline and the near-evaporation of the traditional patronage networks they had supported, the *'ulama'* rebranded themselves as custodians of public morality rather than professionals in the service of the state – a state that had largely ceased to exist – a simultaneous de-professionalization *and* privatization of the *'ulama'* through which they took on a more active role in shaping individual subjectivities and public sensibilities.”⁶¹ Here Ingram expands Margrit Pernau’s argument about the “privatization of the ulama” in the nineteenth century as royal and government patronage for institutions of learning decreased and opportunities for government service began to disappear.⁶² Ingram suggests a utilitarian focus on the rational subjects (*ma'qūlāt*) in that they functioned to prepare graduates for a life of government service.⁶³

James Pickett, however, in his study of *'ulamā'* in Bukhara, where a very similar set of texts and subjects were taught as in India,⁶⁴ has shown that the “madrasa was a stepping-stone into the world of the high Persianate intellectual.”⁶⁵ These intellectuals “taught in Islamic colleges (madrasas); they also carried out the administrative functions of the state, led mystical orders, and coordinated merchant networks” as well as carried out the roles of jurist, poet,

⁶¹ Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland: Univ of California Press, 2018), 34.

⁶² Margrit Pernau, “From a ‘Private’ Public to a ‘Public’ Private Sphere: Old Delhi and the North Indian Muslims in Comparative Perspective,” in *The Public and the Private: Issues of Democratic Citizenship*, ed. Gurpreet Mahajan (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 110.

⁶³ Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 40.

⁶⁴ Pickett, *Polymaths of Islam*, 132.

⁶⁵ Pickett, 146.

calligrapher, doctor, and occultist.⁶⁶ According to Pickett, because of the multifaceted social lives of Persianate *'ulamā'*, “biographical dictionaries specifically detailing the ulama as a collective” did not exist.⁶⁷ Pickett further argues that by the end of the nineteenth century, the Persianate world in which madrasa graduates thrived as polymaths was coming to an end. A similar situation existed in India which necessitated the kind of rebranding of *'ulamā'* explored by Ingram in his study of the founders of the Deoband movement and madrasa where they viewed themselves as custodians of “religious knowledge” as opposed to secular knowledge.⁶⁸ The novelty of this conceptualization is also why a new history was required that recast the *'ulamā'* as a collectivity united by the pursuit and transmission of religious knowledge. Al-Ḥasanī likely began such a history after he joined the Nadwat al-*'Ulamā'* movement in 1895. Before diving into his *Nuzhat*, it will be helpful to review the beginnings of the Nadwat movement to understand al-Ḥasanī's life-long support of it as well as the traces of the movement's ethos on his historical writing.

The Relationship Between Nadwat al-*'Ulamā'* and al-Ḥasanī's History

The early history of Nadwat al-*'Ulamā'* was the immediate context in which al-Ḥasanī began working on his own ambitious project of writing a history of Indian *'ulamā'*. He had attended the first two annual Nadwat al-*'Ulamā'* conferences in 1894 and 1895 in Kanpur and Lucknow respectively, before being hired as the personal secretary to Muḥammad *'Alī Mongerī* (d. 1927), the founder and first *nāẓim* (Rector) of Nadwat al-*'Ulamā'*.⁶⁹ When the organization

⁶⁶ Pickett, 21.

⁶⁷ Pickett, 168.

⁶⁸ Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 40–45.

⁶⁹ al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt 'Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 156.

decided to open up its own madrasa in Lucknow in 1898, al-Ḥasanī also was assigned teaching duties.⁷⁰ In 1904, he also became the manager of the *al-Nadwa* journal, of which Shiblī was the editor and chief contributor.⁷¹ In 1905, his duty as personal secretary of the *nāẓim* ended when he became the secretary of correspondence and public relations [*mu'tamad murāsalāt-o-daftar*].⁷² That same year, he ended his paltry salary from Nadwa because of his financially successful medical practice.⁷³ Because he had studied and trained in Yūnānī medicine [*tibb*] in Lucknow and Bhopal, his wife had encouraged him to start a medical practice in Lucknow to generate income for the family. With financial stability and the resources of an institution that attracted wide public attention, al-Ḥasanī worked on an Arabic history of Indian 'ulamā' that departed from in important ways from contemporary and past historical works that dealt with scholars.

Given al-Ḥasanī's interest in the history and lives of 'ulamā', as well as his dislike for sectarian polemics engulfing Muslims, it is not surprising that al-Ḥasanī joined the Nadwat al-'Ulamā'. Nadwat al-'Ulamā', or "Council of Scholars," began as a voluntary association in 1894 in Kanpur. Located less than a hundred kilometers southwest of Lucknow, the British military station had become a commercial center of North India in the nineteenth century. Some of the 'ulamā' and middle-class Muslims there were involved in discussions about forming an organization for reforming Islamic education and strengthening the social position of 'ulamā' in colonial India. Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Mongīrī (d. 1927), however, is credited as the founder [*bānī*] of Nadwat al-'Ulamā'. In 1892-3, he sent a delegate with a written statement he had

⁷⁰ Muḥammad Ishāq Jalīs Nadwī, *Tārīkh Nadwat Al-'ulamā* (Lucknow: Majlis Şahāfat wa Nashriyāt, 2014), 1:220.

⁷¹ al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt 'Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 168.

⁷² al-Nadwī, 170.

⁷³ al-Nadwī, 163.

drafted to different scholars and madrasas around India to gain their signatures and approval. The statement proposed the establishment of a new association [*anjuman*], the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, that would have two goals. First, it would serve as forum for ‘*ulamā*’ to propose and consider reforms in Islamic education. The current madrasa curriculum was felt to be inadequate in producing ‘*ulamā*’ that could provide religious guidance for the Muslim public. The second goal was to end sectarian quarreling among ‘*ulamā*’ that was causing them to lose public respect.⁷⁴

While intra-Muslim religious polemics were not new in the history of Islam, new technologies of travel and communication in combination with the social upheaval of colonialism had intensified sectarian fighting and led to increasingly exclusive claims to normativity among Deobandīs, Barelwīs and Ahl-i Ḥadīth. According to SherAli Tareen, the crux of their antithetical claims to normativity rested on how to define sources of Islamic norms, how to interpret them, and how to practice them.⁷⁵ The Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholars rejected the authority of the four legal schools and restricted the canon of Islamic norms to the Qu’ran and *ḥadīth*. The Deobandīs and Barelwīs rejected such a proposition as misguided and continued to adhere to the Ḥanafī legal school. They strongly disagreed though over the interpretation of the Prophet’s authority and practices related to celebrating him. For Deobandīs, the Prophet Muḥammad represented the perfection of humanity, and on that basis was worthy of emulation. The Barelwīs, in contrast, viewed this emphasis on the Prophet’s humanity an affront to his cosmic centrality as God’s truest beloved. From the charisma of the Prophet flowed a cosmological hierarchy of lovers, including other prophets and Sufi saints, and only through them could salvation be attained. To undermine the charisma of the Prophet by viewing him as

⁷⁴ Nadwī, *Tārīkh Nadwat Al-‘ulamā*, 1:100-102.

⁷⁵ SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 197–202.

only human, or challenge practices that affirmed prophetic or saintly charisma merely because they had not been performed by the earliest Muslims was misguidance and thus threatened one's salvation. In addition to the above three groups, the emergence of modernist Muslims, such as Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, skeptical of traditions of Muslim scholarship and confident in their own interpretations of Islam, further exacerbated religious polemics.⁷⁶

Despite the sectarian milieu of colonial India, however, there existed scholars who occupied liminal spaces between the exclusive normative claims above. The most famous figure was perhaps the Chishtī Sufi Ḥājī 'Imdādullāh (d. 1899). He had received Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Mongīrī's proposal for the Nadwatul 'Ulamā' association at his residence in Mecca and had approvingly signed his name to it.⁷⁷ Shortly afterwards in 1894 he wrote his famous *Fayṣala-yi Haft Mas'ala* (A Resolution to the Seven Controversies) to cool the raging polemics between his Deobandī and Barelwī disciples in India.⁷⁸ "Imdādullah's efforts to maintain intra-'ulamā' harmony were driven by a deep concern to protect the power, integrity, and gravitas of the scholarly elite in the eyes of the masses ... Polemical entanglements and skirmishes weakened the integrity of this hierarchy; that was the main threat that he sought to contain and confront."⁷⁹ 'Imdādullah exhorted Indian 'ulamā' to not allow their disagreements to devolve to such a level as to damage social relations between Muslims.

The same year that 'Imdādullāh wrote his reconciliatory tract, Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Mongīrī held the first Nadwat al-'Ulamā' conference in Kanpur from April 22-24, 1894. Scholars

⁷⁶ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 314–35.

⁷⁷ Nadwī, *Tārīkh Nadwat Al-'ulamā*, 1:102.

⁷⁸ Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*, 361.

⁷⁹ Tareen, 366.

from various madrasas and sectarian affiliations had been invited to the graduation ceremony at the Fayḍ-I ‘Ām madrasa, Mongīrī’s alma mater and an institution that was not explicitly connected to Deobandīs, Barelwīs, or Ahl-i Ḥadīth. At that first conference, ‘*ulamā*’ from all three Sunni orientations attended, as well representatives from MAO College in Aligarh, the most famous being Shiblī. Importantly, Aḥmad Riḍā Khān Barelwī (d. 1921), the founder of the Barelwī movement, also was present, as well as, Ghulām Ḥasnayn Kintūrī (d. 1918), a Shī‘ī scholar.⁸⁰ Mongīrī became the *nāzim*, or Rector, of the organization; a 16-member managing committee was selected; and a 12-member committee was appointed to take a year to prepare presentations for the a conference on the history and state of Islamic education in India, and propose reforms.⁸¹ Aḥmad Riḍā Khān Barelwī agreed to be part of this curriculum committee.⁸² In addition to giving organizational shape to Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, scholars presented ideas about the history of Islamic education in India, the necessity of reform and and importance of ‘*ulamā*’.

However, any hope of intra-‘*ulamā*’ harmony was soon dashed. Aḥmad Riḍā Khān began an anti-Nadwa campaign when Mongīrī refused to expel Shī‘ī, Ahl-i Ḥadīth, and supporters of Sir Sayyid [*necharī*]. Aḥmad Riḍā Khān had written to Mongīrī with a list of ‘slanderous’ statements the above groups had uttered against Sunni Muslims at the 1894 conference, and their continued inclusion rendered the organization an enemy to the ‘*ulamā*’. He went on to pen two hundred anti-Nadwa tracts, and sought endorsements from ‘*ulamā*’ for fatwas declaring Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ heretical innovators misguiding the Muslim masses. In 1900, he published *Fatāwā al-Ḥaramyn Bi-Rajf Nadwat al-Mayn* (Fatwas from the Two Sacred Cities Shaking the Council

⁸⁰ Nadwī, *Tārīkh Nadwat Al-‘ulamā*, 1:104; Jamal Malik, “The Making of a Council: The Nadwat al-‘Ulama,” *Zeitung Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 144, no. 1 (1994): 80.

⁸¹ Nadwī, *Tārīkh Nadwat Al-‘ulamā*, 1:106-117.

⁸² Nadwī, 1:107.

of Falsehood), a set of anti-Nadwa fatwas for which he had received signatures from sixteen scholars in Mecca and seven in Medina.⁸³ As the title of the work makes clear, Aḥmad Riḍā Khān sought to negate the notion that the Nadwat al-‘ulamā’ was truly a council of ‘ulamā’. He further established a rival organization in 1896, Majlis-i Ahl al-Sunnat wal-Jamā‘at as a council for Sunni ‘ulamā’, and from 1900 held their annual conferences at the same time and city as Nadwa’s conferences. Additionally, his supporters established a journal in 1897, *Tuḥfa-i Ḥanafīyya*, that regularly published anti-Nadwa articles in Urdu.⁸⁴ After 1902, Aḥmad Riḍā Khān’s polemics became more vitriolic, as he began deeming all sympathizers of the *Ṭarīqa-i Muḥammadiyya* of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd and Shāh Ismā‘īl as non-Muslims [*kāfir*], as well as anyone who did not agree on their status as non-Muslims.⁸⁵ Thus, ironically, Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ had the effect of galvanizing opposition and intensifying the kind of religious polemics it had sought to decrease.

In addition to highlighting sectarian conditions in India among Muslims, the above summary also points to the contested claims over who constituted the ‘ulamā’. Indeed, in an increasingly competitive religious marketplace in late nineteenth century India, to draw on Nile Green’s analogy,⁸⁶ the title of ‘ālim gained even more importance since it could confer greater authenticity, and hence a larger audience and greater resources. Recent studies on voluntary associations in colonial India has shed light on the role played by a new middle class in

⁸³ Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and His Movement, 1870-1920* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2010), 222.

⁸⁴ Sanyal, 223–24.

⁸⁵ Sanyal, 231–67.

⁸⁶ Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9–10.

supporting reformist social programs. Associations like Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ and Majlis-i Ahl al-Sunnat were “form[s] of agency perfectly suited to the cultural and socio-economic aspirations of a new hybrid urban elite, which found expression in a civilising project based on notions of individual morality and merit, civic participation, public service and social reform.”⁸⁷ Jamal Malik has argued that British civil servants, merchants, journalists, and lawyers were central players in launching and supporting the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ organization.⁸⁸ The social importance of understanding and defining ‘*ulamā*’ also explains the rise of histories of ‘*ulamā*’ in late nineteenth India.

In what follows, I will analyze al-Ḥasanī’s stated aims for writing history, followed by a short comparison with contemporary works on the history of ‘*ulamā*’. Then I will proceed with a close reading of three case studies from the *Nuzhat* to elucidate his approach to historical writing, and its departure from past works written in the Indo-Persianate mode as well as contemporary historicist writings on similar themes.

Al-Ḥasanī’s Critique of Indo-Persianate Historiography

‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī considered the study and writing of history to be of great relevance for the present. He provided a definition of the discipline in *al-Ṭhaqāfa al-Islāmiyya*, an Arabic book of his that cataloged works written by Indian Muslims based on the discipline the book fell into. He likely began writing *al-Ṭhaqāfa al-Islāmiyya* shortly after he began the *Nuzhat*, since it draws heavily on the data collected in the larger work. Under the section on “History”, al-Ḥasanī provided the following definition:

⁸⁷ Ulrike Stark, “Associational Culture and Civic Engagement in Colonial Lucknow: The Jalsah-e Tahzib,” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 48, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946461004800101>.

⁸⁸ Malik, “The Making of a Council: The Nadwat al-‘Ulama.”

The discipline of history [*'ilm al-tārīkh*] is the knowledge of the conditions of communities, their lands, their practices, their customs, their crafts, their lineages, their obituaries, among other things. Its subject is the conditions of people of the past, including the Prophets, saints, scholars, philosophers, kings, poets, and others. The purpose is to become familiar with past conditions, and its benefits include learning lessons from them and the ability to gain experiences by studying the changes that occur over time.⁸⁹

Al-Ḥasanī later states that while Indian Muslims have expended great effort in writing about kings, poets, and Sufi saints, they have neglected the history of *'ulamā'*.⁹⁰ He became further convinced of this view as he continued researching, since he wrote in 1918 in an Urdu tract, “look at our nation’s poor judgment. From the beginning until now, thousands of histories have been written under various titles, but none of them meet the standards of proper history-writing. Pick up any book and it will read as another tale of battles and banquets.”⁹¹ Similar complaints are found across his historical works.

In seeking an explanation for the lack of representation of *'ulamā'* in Indian historical writing, he blamed Indo-Persianate historiography. Its preference of a “flowery and ornate literary style of writing history,” according to al-Ḥasanī, decreased the value of historical information about Indian *'ulamā'*.⁹² Furthermore, Indian Muslims had been so occupied with ornately writing about the verses of poets and miracles of Sufis, that they failed to provide crucial information about *'ulamā'*, such as the birth and death dates, what subjects and books they studied and with whom, and what they taught, wrote, or contributed intellectually.⁹³ He acknowledges that Sufi biographical collections did provide some information about those

⁸⁹ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya Fī al-Hind* (Cairo: Mu’assisat al-Hindāwī Lil-Ta’līm wal-Thaqāfa, 2012), 61.

⁹⁰ Al-Ḥasanī, 62.

⁹¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Al-Ḥasanī, *Yād-i Ayyām* (Lucknow: Majlis-i Taḥqīqāt va Nashriyāt-i Islām, 1983), 92.

⁹² Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya Fī al-Hind*, 62.

⁹³ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:30.

associated with specific orders, but the works are silent when it comes to the intellectual pursuits of those figures. “The compiler’s entire effort is spent in detailing the unveiling and miracles [*kashf-o-karāmat*] of the saint. And every attempt is made to present the saint as a superhuman being.”⁹⁴ This led to a situation where some contemporary Muslims doubted whether certain figures actually existed, and the authorship of critical books, such as the *al-Fatāwa al-Hindiyya*, remained unknown.⁹⁵ Thus, according to al-Ḥasanī, Indian Muslims had “buried the virtues of their elders and effaced the traces of those deserving glory.”⁹⁶ Without historical data to trace the continuity of knowledge from the present generation to the past, Indian Muslims were in danger of losing their history.

The remark about Persianate styles being responsible for the lack of reliable information seems to resemble arguments made by those associated with the Delhi College. European orientalisks had believed that Persian had a corrupting influence on Arabic historiography due to its hyperbolic style and penchant for indulging in legendary tales.⁹⁷ Similarly the Delhi College graduate Karīm al-Dīn, discussed in Chapter One, had expressed skepticism in his history of Urdu poets towards Persian sources because they tend to exaggerate [*mubāligha*] and not be as factual [*muṭābiq-i wāqi*] as sources in other languages.⁹⁸ However, Meisami has also shown

⁹⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, *Yād-i Ayyām*, 92.

⁹⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya Fī al-Hind*, 13; al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 283.

⁹⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:29.

⁹⁷ Julie S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 1–3.

⁹⁸ Karīm al-Dīn, *Ṭabaqāt-i Shu‘arā’-i Hind* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdū Akādīmī, 1983), 9.

that historiographical dispute about Persianate histories and their inclusion of fanciful anecdotes and materials existed as early as the eleventh century.⁹⁹

Furthermore, it is also worth pointing out the similarities between al-Ḥasanī's critiques and those that had been expressed previously by Indian *ḥadīth* scholars and discussed in Chapter One. For example, Āzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1786) had written that Indian Muslims have been too interested in recording the states and statements of Sufis and have ignored the history of Indian 'ulamā'. He also stated that this had resulted in the loss of knowledge about authorship of some significant works by Indian scholars.¹⁰⁰ Recall also that 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Lakwawī (d. 1886) had castigated Indian 'ulamā' for their ignorance of the history of 'ulamā' in general, Indian and non-Indian.¹⁰¹

For al-Ḥasanī, if Indian Muslims were ignorant of their intellectual history, the problem was compounded with regard to the ignorance of non-Indian Muslims about Indian scholarly contributions. Al-Ḥasanī was concerned about the near total absence of Indian Muslim scholars from Arabic histories.¹⁰² His *al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya* makes it clear that his historical thinking was oriented towards a transregional Arabic cosmopolis, and not just a regional or local readership in India. In the chapter on "History," before proceeding to document the mostly Persian historical works written in India, he provides a sample of Arabic histories by seventeen scholars that he assumes are exemplary for all Muslims [*ahl al-Islām*]. Many are

⁹⁹ J. S. Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 263–65.

¹⁰⁰ Bilgrāmī, *Subḥat Al-Marjān Fī Athār Hindustān*, 72.

¹⁰¹ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *Al-Fawā'id al-Bahiyya Fai Taraajim al-Hanafaiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Na'sānī (Maṭba' Dār al-Sa'āda bi-jiwār Muḥāfazat Miṣr, 1907), 2–3.

¹⁰² Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi' Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:16.

prosopographies, such as Ibn Khallikān’s *Wafayāt al-A’yān* (d. 681/1282), that circulated even in India since the sixteenth century.¹⁰³ Yet despite their exemplary status, these works barely feature any Indians.

It will be useful to highlight some of the exemplary Arabic biographical works that al-Ḥasanī listed because it will reinforce the argument that he was oriented towards an Arabic cosmopolis instead of an Indo-Persianate one. For example, the Mamlūk-era *ḥadīth* scholar and historian al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497) wrote in his *al-Ḍaw al-Lāmi* ‘ that he included every prominent Muslim from the fifteenth century that deserved an introduction, “whether from Egypt, Syria, Hijaz, Yemen, Turkey [*rūm*], or India - encompassing the east and the west.”¹⁰⁴ Yet out of the 11,611 biographies, he only included 52 Indians, almost all of whom had traveled to Hijaz. Among them, only eleven are scholars.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the Damascene al-Muhibbī (d. 1699) in his four volume *Khulāṣat al-Athār* on 1,290 notable Muslims of the seventeenth century only included fourteen Indian ‘*ulamā*’. Finally, the Syrian Ottoman historian al-Murādī (d. 1791) in his *Silk al-Durar* about prominent Muslims of the eighteenth century included only seven Indian Muslim scholars. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī did not lay blame on the Arab historians, however, for ignoring Indians. Rather, it was the fault of Indian ‘*ulamā*’ for not making the information available.¹⁰⁶ He even took Shiblī to task. Although al-Ḥasanī described him as a leading historian,¹⁰⁷ he also wrote that Shiblī lacked knowledge about the lives of Indian ‘*ulamā*’.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Bahl, “Transoceanic Arabic Historiography,” 213.

¹⁰⁴ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi’ Li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi* ‘, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 1:5.

¹⁰⁵ al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 281; Bahl, “Reading Tarājim with Bourdieu,” 250.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:30.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Ḥasanī, 8:1242.

In fact, India overall received sparse representation from Muslim sources outside of India. The general tendency in Arabic sources had been to imagine India, al-Hind, as a vaguely defined exotic land to the east.¹⁰⁹ For example, despite the early conquest of Sind, it is almost non-existent in the universal histories of al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 897) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 923). Khalid Blankinship characterizes this tendency in the earliest Arabic works as “a general metropolitan bias often found in ancient sources. The importance of events is only measured by their nearness to and impact on the capital city.”¹¹⁰ Even in the early modern period when there was an increase in travel-writing, non-Indians continued to think about India as a bizarre and exotic place. The exoticization of India in early modern sources has led Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam to “caution against the view that the hierarchization of cultures and cultural zones, or the urge to seek out the bizarre and the exotic (even in the form of the “wonders of God's creation”), were purely European inventions or monopolies, even if this need not lead us to the assert that Europeans and Asians both constructed the world of the ‘Orient’ in the same way.”¹¹¹ Yet al-Ḥasanī was also aware of the greater contact between Indians and non-Indians. Many scholars teaching in Hijaz in the nineteenth century were Indians, many students were traveling to Bhopal and India to study *ḥadīth*, and books of Indian scholars were being printed in the Arab world. More troubling, the polemical warfare among Indian Muslims was being

¹⁰⁸ Al-Ḥasanī, 6:856.

¹⁰⁹ Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 73–76.

¹¹⁰ Khalid Yahya Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State: The Reign of Hisham Ibn ‘Abd Al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 259.

¹¹¹ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 173.

exported by figures like Aḥmad Riḍā Khān who attempted to enlist transregional support for their side.

Departure from Indo-Persianate *Tadhkiras*

In presenting a history of religious scholars from India in Arabic, al-Ḥasanī's *Nuzhat* departed in important ways from similarly themed works in the *tadhkira* genre. Although making extensive use of Indo-Persian chronicles and *tadhkiras*, al-Ḥasanī put his work in conversation with past Arabic historical works. His model of history-writing is thus based on Arabic biographical compilation he cited as exemplary. The large presence of Mamluk-era biographical compilations in al-Ḥasanī's list of exemplary histories is significant since these works conformed to expected literary standards. According to Konrad Hirschler, "they were structured by implicit rules of what was to be preserved, what was to be discarded and how it was to be collected."¹¹² Furthermore, Bahl in his research of the circulation of manuscripts of Arabic historical texts such as that of Ibn Khallikān in South Asia has noted how they served as models for some historians in South Asia writing in Arabic into the sixteenth century.¹¹³ The same seems to be true for the *Nuzhat* as well. Through the action of writing history in accordance with the norms of Arabic biographical collections, al-Ḥasanī helped to further constitute and became a participant in an Arabic cosmopolis.¹¹⁴

Nuzhat al-Khwāṭir is a series of biographical entries conforming to literary forms of Arabic biographical works from the Mamluk and early modern period described by Hirschler

¹¹² Konrad Hirschler, "Studying Mamluk Historiography. From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn," in *Ubi Sumus? Quo Vademus? Mamluk Studies, State of the Art* (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2013), 181, https://www.academia.edu/3288382/Studying_Mamluk_Historiography_From_Source_Criticism_to_the_Cultural_Turn.

¹¹³ Bahl, "Transoceanic Arabic Historiography," 213.

¹¹⁴ Bahl, "Reading Tarājim with Bourdieu," 246.

and Bahl above. The opening line sets up the most relevant aspects of the subject's life, followed by data about the subject's name, family, origin, birth. The entry proceeds to provide information about what disciplines the subject studied and with whom, relevant or interesting anecdotes, works produced as well as important students or disciples, and the death date. In an attempt to provide authenticity to the information, the authorial voice is limited and much of the entry is composed of excerpts from earlier sources, and quotations of lengthy passages are quite common.¹¹⁵ For entries on more contemporary figures, firsthand accounts and information is pointed out. The compiler nevertheless maintains control over the narrative through choices of what information, sources, and biographies to include or exclude and how they are arranged.¹¹⁶

While attempting to write in the mold of earlier Arabic biographical compilations, al-Ḥasanī was also aware of a crucial difference. Arabic biographical compilers generally presented their works as an update or a continuation of earlier works.¹¹⁷ Arab scholars continued this practice into the nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ Al-Ḥasanī, by contrast, states his work had no precedent in India. According to him, India's intellectual history [*ilmī tārikh*] was hidden in utmost darkness and that fully accurate account of it is not possible.¹¹⁹ He states in the introduction to *Nuzhat* that he found himself at times unsure what to write for some figures due to the neglect of

¹¹⁵ Yehoshua Frenkel, "Mamlūk Historiography Revisited: Narratological Perspectives in Damascene Chronicles," in *Mamluk Historiography Revisited – Narratological Perspectives*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2018), 36–42.

¹¹⁶ Hirschler, "Studying Mamluk Historiography. From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn," 181–83.

¹¹⁷ Frenkel, "Mamlūk Historiography Revisited: Narratological Perspectives in Damascene Chronicles," 42.

¹¹⁸ Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 45.

¹¹⁹ 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, *Hindustān Kā Niṣāb-i Dars Aur Uske Taghayyurāt* (Lucknow: Shu'ba-i Ta'mir-o-Taraqqi Dār al-'Ulūm Nadwat al-'Ulamā', n.d.), 4.

his contemporaries and later historians in recording dates of birth, death, and other details.¹²⁰

Years later he would describe his process as sifting through the tales of battles and banquets to find jewels of information that could be used to write history.¹²¹

This sense of distance from the past also separates his work from Indo-Persian *tadhkiras*, which “are memorative, relying on memory and remembrance to communicate with the living the legacy of prior Indo-Muslim exemplars.”¹²² In al-Ḥasanī’s view, however, it is the failure or incomplete nature of Muslim collective memory that necessitates his project of discovering the history of religious scholarship in India. This also distinguishes al-Ḥasanī’s work from the kind of modern *tadhkira* that Muḥammad Ḥusayn Azād (d. 1910) wrote in *Āb-i Ḥayāt*. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Azād, a graduate of the Delhi College, feared the loss of memory about Urdu literature contained in Indo-Persian literary *tadhkiras* among the post-1857 generation.¹²³ Al-Ḥasanī, meanwhile, took it as a given that Muslims had been suffering a state of collective amnesia when it came to their scholarly heritage in India.

In what follows, a comparative analysis of al-Ḥasanī’s *Nuzhat* with three different *tadhkiras* will be undertaken to elucidate his approach to historical writing. The three *tadhkiras* are Raḥmān ‘Alī’s (d. 1907) Persian *Tazkira-i ‘Ulamā’-i Hind*, published, in 1894, Āzād Bilgrāmī’s (d. 1786) *Ma’āthir al-Kirām*, and ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī’s (d. 1642) *Akhyār al-Akhyār*. The *tadhkiras* are chosen because of their large inclusion of ‘*ulamā*’, and in the case of

¹²⁰ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:30.

¹²¹ Al-Ḥasanī, *Yād-i Ayyām*, 41–42.

¹²² Marica K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence, “Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications,” in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 149.

¹²³ Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (University of California Press, 1994), 75.

the latter two because the compilers were also scholars of *ḥadīth* with links to Hijaz. The reverse chronological order for analyzing the *tadhkiras* is deliberate. Beginning with the nineteenth-century *tadhkira* shows al-Ḥasanī's contemporary concerns about delineating and defining 'ulamā' as preservers and transmitters of knowledge. The older *tadhkiras* in turn show how this concern is projected backwards into time, with the added challenge of finding suitable primary sources. After the comparative analysis between the *Nuzhat* and earlier Indo-Persianate works, a thematic comparison will be undertaken between historical topics that were greatly debated in the colonial public sphere in India, and the treatment of those topics by al-Ḥasanī. This will clarify that al-Ḥasanī's search for historical facts to reconstruct the legacy of Islamic learning in India cannot be explained by the rise of historicism that al-Ḥasanī's contemporaries like Shiblī were interested in appropriating for their historical projects.

The largest work before al-Ḥasanī's that focused on the 'ulamā' as a collectivity was Raḥmān 'Alī's (d. 1907) Persian *Tadhkira-i 'Ulamā'-i Hind*, published, in 1894 by the famous Naval Kishore Press in Lucknow. Raḥmān 'Alī, a minister in the princely state of Rewa, sought to move beyond the regional scope of most *tadhkiras* and encompass "Hindustan," and thus included 649 biographies of scholars from different parts of India, arranged alphabetically from the beginning of Muslim arrival to India to the nineteenth century. However, he could not find sources about scholars from the Punjab, Deccan, central India, Madras, and Bengal, as indicated by his bibliography at the end of the book.¹²⁴ Furthermore, his selection of 'ulamā' indicates a clear bias against Deobandīs, since none of the founders, including Rashīd Aḥmad and Qāsim

¹²⁴ Raḥmān 'Alī, *Tadhkira-i 'Ulamā'-i Hind* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1914), 257–61; See the introduction by Muḥammad Ayyūb Qādrī Raḥmān 'Alī, *Tadhkira-i 'Ulamā'-i Hind*, trans. Muḥammad Ayyūb Qādrī (Karachi: Pakistani Historical Society, 1961), 24–25.

Nānotwī, are included in his work.¹²⁵ Along the same lines, only a few lines are offered in the entries on Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd, Shāh Ishāq,¹²⁶ and other members of the family. On the other hand, Aḥmad Riḍā Khān Barelwī received one of the largest treatments.¹²⁷ He is presented as a great polymath who was destined from birth to be an exceptional ‘knower’ of God [*fāḍil-o-‘ārif*], a quality recognized even by the scholars in Medina.¹²⁸

Not only does ‘Abd al-Ḥayy’s book cover much more of India geographically and historically, incorporating over 300 sources, but it is much more ecumenical in including scholars with whom may have disagreed. The most obvious example is that of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān Barelwī, who had campaigned against Nadwa. Al-Ḥasanī is not without his own doctrinal goals, of course. Thus, he casts him as an exceptional legal scholar, but lacking expertise in the fields of *ḥadīth* and Qur’an. He is also characterized as an intolerant polemicist. The opening line of the biographical entry is important because it frames the information to follow, as is characteristic of Arabic biographical dictionaries.¹²⁹ “The learned scholar and jurist [*al-‘ālim wal-faqīh*] Aḥmad Riḍā b. Naqī ‘Alī ... the Afghan Ḥanafī from Bareli.”¹³⁰ Thus, far from being a polymath, his rank among the scholars is restricted to his knowledge in the field of Hanafī law. Al-Ḥasanī also points out his lack of expertise in *ḥadīth* by specifically stating he gained permission to transmit *ḥadīth* [*asnada al-ḥadīth*] from scholars in Hijaz such as Aḥmad Zaynī b.

¹²⁵ See the Introduction by Muḥammad Ayyūb Qādrī, ‘Alī, *Tadhkira-i ‘Ulamā’-i Hind*, 1961, 25–26.

¹²⁶ ‘Alī, *Tadhkira-i ‘Ulamā’-i Hind*, 1914, 178–79.

¹²⁷ ‘Alī, 15–18.

¹²⁸ ‘Alī, 15.

¹²⁹ Mohammad Gharaibeh, “Narrative Strategies in Biographical Dictionaries: The Ad-Durar al-Kāmina of Ib Ḥagar al-‘Asqalānī— a Case Study,” in *Mamluk Historiography Revisited – Narratological Perspectives*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2018), 68.

¹³⁰ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 8:1180-1181.

Daḥlān but did not formally study any books with those scholars. Towards the end of the biography, al-Ḥasanī sums up his life by stating that “few could match his mastery of Ḥanafī law, especially its particularities ... He participated in most fields of knowledge. [But] he was lacking in *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*. Many people exaggerate regarding him and consider him the reviver [*mujaddid*] of the fourteenth century.”¹³¹ No death date was given because Aḥmad Riḍā Khān was still alive when al-Ḥasanī was writing. As is evident, al-Ḥasanī concedes Aḥmad Riḍā Khān’s status as a scholar due to his links with scholarly teachers as well as his books on Islamic law, yet also qualifies his importance.

Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān also finds mention in the *Nuzhat* while being left out of *Tadhkira-i ‘Ulamā’-i Hind*. However, al-Ḥasanī makes it clear that Sir Sayyid was not an ‘*ālim*’ when he introduces him as “the great and famous man, Aḥmad b. Al-Muttaqī ... al-Ḥusaynī al-Taḳawī of Delhi.” After lauding him for his generosity, sagacity, oratory, and organizational talent, he states that Muslims have gone to extremes in either condemning him or praising him as the greatest scholar. According to al-Ḥasanī he did not reach the ranks of the ‘*ulamā*’ since he did not excel in any disciple [*fann*], but the most that can be said is that he was among the erudite [*fudalā*]. “His writings bear witness to what I have said, for if you see them, you will know that he was very intelligent but lacked knowledge [*ilm*].”¹³² Beyond helping to define the limits of the tradition of religious scholarship as al-Ḥasanī saw it, Sir Sayyid’s inclusion also had to do with his immense historical influence. Al-Ḥasanī states he influenced his and the next generation more than any of his contemporaries in numerous ways, including in politics, literature,

¹³¹ Al-Ḥasanī, 8:1182.

¹³² Al-Ḥasanī, 8:1175.

publishing and printing.¹³³ The preceding two examples of the two Aḥmad Khāns shows al-Ḥasanī's attempt to write a history of 'ulamā' that includes those whose views he disagreed with but nonetheless took part in the tradition of religious scholarship or affected it in other ways beyond teaching, writing, and embodying piety.

This ecumenical approach allowed him to identify scholars that became central nodes for intellectual pedigrees across various Sunni sectarian groups that emerged in nineteenth-century India. This also indicates that part of his approach to history was tracing the legacy of scholars through future generations to identify important nodes. One important example is Shāh Ishāq Dihlawī (d. 1846), who became the successor to his grandfather, Shāh 'Abd al-Azīz. Al-Ḥasanī could find no chain of *ḥadīth* in India through Indian scholars that did not go through Shāh Ishāq.¹³⁴ Furthermore, he became an important link for a global community of *ḥadīth* scholars through his student Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī (d. 1878), who had immigrated to Medina after 1857 and became the teacher of "Indians and Arabs."¹³⁵ His student Muḥsin b. Yaḥya al-Turhatī wrote a helpful book in 1863 in Medina cataloging Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī's teachers and chains, an indication for al-Ḥasanī of his centrality in a global network of *ḥadīth* studies.¹³⁶

In writing about Shāh Ishāq, Sir Sayyid, and Aḥmad Riḍā Khān, al-Ḥasanī relied largely on firsthand accounts he gathered from his travels as well as through correspondence, and on published works, especially about and by about the latter two. His use of manuscripts was minimal, mostly restricted to some of Shāh Ishāq's writings and the catalog of the chains of

¹³³ Al-Ḥasanī, 8:1177.

¹³⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, 7:911-12.

¹³⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, 7:1024.

¹³⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, 7:1079.

transmission of his student by al-Turhatī. But al-Ḥasanī's biographies of earlier figures required him to rely more on manuscripts. We now turn to looking at al-Ḥasanī's treatment of earlier figures, namely 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī and Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā. Al-Ḥasanī's account of the former will be compared with Āzād Bilgrāmī's (d. 1786) *Ma'āthir al-Kirām*, and al-Ḥasanī's depiction of Nizām al-Dīn will be compared with 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī's (d. 1642) biography of him in *Akhhbār al-Akhyār*.

'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī makes for an interesting case study to explore changes in historical writing because of the attention he has received in biographical sources as a *Sufi* and *ḥadīth* scholar. He had informed his son about what to include in his obituary and attach it to his tomb.¹³⁷ The son, in accordance with 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's wishes, attached a plaque with a brief biography of his father. In brief, the plaque states that after 'Abd al-Ḥaqq completed his religious studies in Delhi, he traveled to Hijaz and remained in the company of saints and *ḥadīth* scholars. After receiving authorization to guide his own disciples and spending time immersed in *ḥadīth* studies, he returned to Delhi where he lived for fifty-two years. There he trained disciples and taught *ḥadīth*. "He was attentively and fully engaged in spreading the disciplines of knowledge, especially the noble discipline of the Prophet's *ḥadīth*. He spread this discipline in such an active manner as nobody from the scholars in the Persian-speaking lands [*diyār 'ajam*], of the past or present, had been able to do before him. He gained wide renown and high praise."¹³⁸

Most biographers quoted the grave-site plaque as their main source. This included Azād Bilgrāmī in his both is Persian *Ma'āthir al-Kirām*, where he suffices with reproducing it without

¹³⁷ Scott Kugle provides a translation of this short text. Scott Alan Kugle, "'Abd Al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, an Accidental Revivalist: Knowledge and Power in the Passage from Delhi to Makka," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2008): 199–200.

¹³⁸ Kugle, 200.

any additional information,¹³⁹ and in his *Subḥat al-Marjān*, where he provides an Arabic translation in rhymed prose. Before the quote he introduces ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq as “the master of perfection, inner and outer, the sincere lover of the Prophetic beauty, attainer of widespread fame, whom historians remember succinctly and in detail.”¹⁴⁰ Azād Bilgrāmī’s works merit attention because he had bemoaned the lack of attention paid to ‘*ulamā*’ in Indian historical texts, and thus devoted a section of his *Ma‘āthir al-Kirām* to them, providing information about seventy three.¹⁴¹ However, the *tadhkira* is mainly about prominent Muslims from Bilgram in the Deccan, and thus has more of a regional focus. Nevertheless, Azād Bilgrāmī’s biographies became an important source for later Muslim historians. For example, Şiddiq Ḥasan Khān in his *Abjad al-‘Ulūm*, in the last section devoted to biographies of Indian ‘*ulamā*’, wrote that because he did not have the time to provide a full history of Indian scholars, he would rely mainly on Azād Bilgrāmī.¹⁴²

‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, by contrast, did not rely on the graveside plaque nor did he make a single text the basis of his information. Consequently, Al-Ḥasanī’s biography is much longer and characterizes ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq as not just an important *ḥadīth* scholar, but as the most pivotal *ḥadīth* scholar that changed the intellectual legacy of Islam in India. He introduces him as the foremost scholar of *ḥadīth*, jurist, and sufi who combined knowledge and action. He then specifies his most important accomplishment, “he was the first to spread the knowledge of *ḥadīth* through writing and teaching in India [*awwal man nashara ‘ilm al-ḥadīth bi-arḍ al-hind taṣnīfan*

¹³⁹ Bilgrāmī, *Ma‘āthir Al-Kirām*, 200–201.

¹⁴⁰ Bilgrāmī, *Subḥat Al-Marjān Fī Athār Hindustān*, 115.

¹⁴¹ Bilgrāmī, *Ma‘āthir Al-Kirām*, 176.

¹⁴² Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Sayyid Şiddīq Khān Ḥasan al-Qanūjī, *Abjad Al-‘Ulūm* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002), 691–92.

wa tadrīsan].”¹⁴³ On the one hand, al-Ḥasanī continues a theme initiated by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq himself (or his son) about his exceptional ability in spreading knowledge of *ḥadīth*. On the other hand, al-Ḥasanī modifies it by saying he was the “first” and restricts his influence not to “Persian lands” but to India specifically. He attempts to show how this claim about his precedence in spreading knowledge of *ḥadīth* is justified. Al-Ḥasanī lists many Indians, particularly from the region of Gujarat, from the generation before ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq that had gone to the Hijaz to study *ḥadīth*, most famously ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s only teacher ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Muttaqī, but they either remained in the Hijaz, or when they came back did not reach as wide an audience as ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq in Delhi. Al-Ḥasanī highlights that one of the ways that he was so successful in spreading the knowledge of *ḥadīth* in India was through translating books of *ḥadīth* from Arabic to Persian, as well as writing books in Persian to aid in the study of *ḥadīth* texts.¹⁴⁴ He similarly instructed his son Nūr al-Ḥaqq to write a translation and explanation of al-Bukhārī’s compilation in Persian, which the son completed in six volumes.¹⁴⁵ For Al-Ḥasanī, these were the first Persian scholarly works on *ḥadīth* and translations of *ḥadīth* in India.

Furthermore, al-Ḥasanī attempts to trace the influence of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq through his students and their students. To do this, al-Ḥasanī utilized a variety of sources such as regional and family histories, manuscripts of *ijāzas*, and more recent biographical works of Ḥanafī scholars to triangulate the Delhi scholar’s legacy. Throughout the fifth volume of *Nuzhat*, which covers the seventeenth century, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s name shows up constantly in the biographies of scholars from the next generation. For example, he cites Azād Bilgrāmī’s work to show that

¹⁴³ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 5:554.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:555.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:658.

scholars from Deccan came to Delhi to study with him,¹⁴⁶ and even request *ijāzas* for friends back in the Deccan.¹⁴⁷ There are similar uses of *tadhkiras* from other parts of India as well, as far west as Gujarat and north in Kashmir.¹⁴⁸ When possible, he cites from written *ijāzas* he found to specify when a student read books to ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, and when they listened to him read.¹⁴⁹ Finally, he also identifies a later *ḥadīth* scholar as being from the progeny of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq and provides the approximate time he lived based on a manuscript of a book that the grandson wrote which included the date of composition. Al-Ḥasanī explicitly states he saw that it was an original copy written by the author.¹⁵⁰ Al-Ḥasanī thus integrated a variety of sources he could find to highlight ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s role as a central node in the transmission of *ḥadīth* in India.

Despite a wealth of autobiographical writing left by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, as well as a large corpus of hagiographies surrounding his life, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī offers only a few anecdotes about his life, and these underscore the importance of his transregional scholarly connections for his knowledge of *ḥadīth* and practice of Sufism. Al-Ḥasanī provides a short picture of his time in Hijaz, mentioning details of his relationship with two scholars there. He quotes from unnamed source that the Ḥanafī judge and *khaṭīb* of Mecca al-Qāḍī ‘Alī b. Jār Allāh (d. 1601-2) stated that when ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq came to read sections of al-Bukhārī’s book, he gained more benefit from ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq than ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq gained from him during their discussions

¹⁴⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:548.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:594.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:534, 650.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:644.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Ḥasanī, 7:929.

[*istafadtu minhu akthar mim mā istafāda*].¹⁵¹ The selection of this anecdote likely serves to tie ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq into the Arabic cosmopolis, since , al-Qāḍī ‘Alī b. Jār Allāh is an important Meccan scholar mentioned in al-Muḥibbī’s *Khulāṣat al-Athār*.¹⁵² However, the most influential teacher ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq had in Mecca was, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Muttaqī (d. 1592-3), an Indian from Gujarat who had moved to Mecca. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy shows how ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Muttaqī combined the role of *ḥadīth* teacher and Sufi shaykh. For example, when ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq studied the *ḥadīth* book *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* with ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Muttaqī, he also learned “the etiquettes of *dhikr* and their timings, how to eat less, and the etiquettes of seclusion.”¹⁵³ It was only after these experiences in the Hijaz that, according to al-Ḥasanī, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq was able to spread knowledge more actively than those before him in India.

Al-Ḥasanī had chosen to focus on ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s role as a scholar over his role as a Sufi leader. A similar prioritization of scholarship and learning over mystical insights and miracles is noticeable when comparing his biography of the renowned Chishti Sufi Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ (d. 1325) with the biography written by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq. in his *Akḥbār al-akhyār*, “Reports on the Pious.” According to Nile Green, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq “lent emphasis to the Sufis’ moral or scholarly achievements rather than the elaborate ritual practices and festive shrine culture to which they had become attached by the early modern period.”¹⁵⁴ Green finds a general disapproval of shrine culture that had become popular in Delhi, and suggests this attitude was connected to his study of *ḥadīth*. Green’s observations hold true for Niẓām al-Dīn’s biography. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq emphasized

¹⁵¹ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:554.

¹⁵² Muḥammad Amīn ibn Faḍl Allāh al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī a’yān al-qarn al-ḥādī ‘ashar* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), 3:150-151.

¹⁵³ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 5:554.

¹⁵⁴ Green, *Making Space*, 55.

in his introduction that he would be relying on reliable sources, indicating a concern for historical accuracy.¹⁵⁵ Comparing how two north Indian *ḥadīth* scholars, one writing in the Arabo-biographical mode and the other in the Indo-Persianate mode, presented one of the most revered Indian Sufis, brings into sharp relief the different approaches of the two scholars.

In writing about Nizām al-Dīn, both ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq and al-Ḥasanī mainly utilized two sources, the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* and *Siyar al-Awliyā*. Both were written by immediate disciples of Nizām al-Dīn. The first was a record of the saint’s conversations and utterances (*malḥūzāt*) and the latter a history of Chishtī saints culminating with Nizām al-Dīn. In comparing the two different representations of Nizām al-Dīn in these two early sources, Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence detect a “tension between scholarship and sainthood,” a tension which all later biographers of the saint have had to mediate.¹⁵⁶ While both early sources on Nizām al-Dīn feature the occurrences of saintly miracles [*karāmāt*], Ernst has noted a crucial difference from later hagiographies “that are characterized by a profusion of exaggerated miracles designed to enhance the saint's prestige.”¹⁵⁷ Analyzing al-Ḥasanī’s portrayal of an iconic Indian saint sheds light on his strategies of inclusion and exclusion and thus his historical methodology, especially when compared to ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s portrayal.

‘Abd al-Ḥaqq produced a biographical dictionary devoted to Sufis and scholars titled *Akhbār al-Akhyār*, “Reports on the Pious.” In keeping with the *tadhkira* tradition, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq eschews chronology and represents the saint’s life through a series of anecdotes about him or his public discourses, which highlight his close connection to his shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i-Shakar

¹⁵⁵ Banerjee, 433.

¹⁵⁶ Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 73.

¹⁵⁷ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 78.

(d. 1266), his humility amid fame, his scrupulousness, and his knowledge of Sufism.¹⁵⁸ Most of the biographical entries in *Akḥbār al-Akhyār* lack birth and death dates. Nizām al-Dīn is one of the few exceptions, since a death date is given within the context of an anecdote towards the middle of the biography about how he gave away all possessions to the poor before he passed.¹⁵⁹ This indicates a general lack of interest in temporality, despite the chronological organization of the book.

Regarding Nizām al-Dīn's studies, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq writes that as a teenager he studied the *al-Maḡāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī and *ḥadīth* from the same teacher in Delhi, but he excelled in the study of logic [*manṭiq*] before going to Pakpattan at the age of twenty to become the devoted disciple of Farīd al-Dīn. There he read six sections of the Qur'ān with *tajwid*, and studied six chapters of Suhrawardī's *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, in addition to studying a few other unspecified works. No further information is given about teachers or fields of knowledge he studied, but the general image 'Abd al-Ḥaqq presents is of a *sharī'a*-minded saint.

This is reinforced by 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's broaching of the topics of miracles and music in relation to Nizām al-Dīn. Aside from divine intervention through dreams, visions, and prayers, no miracles of Nizām al-Dīn are related. He is in fact quoted as downplaying the importance of saintly miracles, clarifying it is only the seventeenth of one hundred levels of the spiritual path, and cautions the Sufi aspirer against becoming caught up with miracles and unveilings.¹⁶⁰

Regarding music, two anecdotes are provided from *Siyar al-Awliyā'*, and in both instances

¹⁵⁸ Abū al-Majd 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, *Akḥbār Al-Akhyār Fī Asrār al-Abrār*, ed. 'Alīm Ashraf Khān (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āthār-o-Mafākhir Farhangī, 1963), 103–13; Abū al-Majd 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, *Akḥbār Al-Akhyār*, trans. Subḥān Maḥmūd and Muḥammad Fāḍil (Lahore: Akbar Book Sellers, 2004), 129–41.

¹⁵⁹ Dihlawī, *Akḥbār Al-Akhyār Fī Asrār al-Abrār*, 110.

¹⁶⁰ Dihlawī, 112–13.

Nizām al-Dīn expresses his disapproval. In one instance he states, "*Qawwālī*, similar singing, and musical instruments [*mazāmīr*] are not permitted in the Sharia,"¹⁶¹ and in the second he clarifies that *samā* ' without musical instruments is allowed.¹⁶² The accounts of miracles and music in Nizām al-Dīn's life seem to serve 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's religious agenda "to limit Sufi devotion within the parameters of *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence."¹⁶³

'Abd al-Ḥayy's description of Nizām al-Dīn overlaps with 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's in his emphasis on piety, humility, and worship, although he gives comparatively less focus to the relationship with his shaykh Farīd al-Dīn. However, the most striking difference is that 'Abd al-Ḥayy presents Nizām al-Dīn not only as an exceptional Sufi, but also as an exceptional scholar.

The the great learned scholar, possessor of elevated ranks and evidently bright miracles [*karāmāt*], Nizām al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad ... [He] was one of the most famous saints of the land of India, and the foremost in inviting creation to God the Exalted, traveling the path of worship, separating from the world, while mastering the external sciences [*al-'ulūm al-zāhira*] and being engrossed in superior virtues.¹⁶⁴

No details are proffered about his miracles, nor any reference made to Nizām al-Dīn's discourses on the subject. He does provide his birth and death dates. Moreover, al-Ḥasanī provides more details about his teachers and studies than 'Abd al-Ḥaqq did, stating he mastered both the outward and inward sciences, including *fiqh* and *uṣūl*. He also memorized the Qu'ran after Farīd al-Dīn advised him to. This mastery is demonstrated through a long passage taken from *Siyar al-Awliyā'* and translated into Arabic. According to al-Ḥasanī, while numerous works

¹⁶¹ Dihlawī, 109.

¹⁶² Dihlawī, 112.

¹⁶³ Kugle, "'Abd Al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, an Accidental Revivalist," 238.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi' Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 2:193.

have been written about the saint, the “best” source according to al-Ḥasanī is *Siyar al-Awliyā*. He also states that the best collection of his sayings is *Fawā'id*.¹⁶⁵ The anecdote that takes up most of the entry on Niẓām al-Dīn concerns music and is not found in ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s work. It is about a vociferous and charged debate about the permissibility of listening to songs [*al-ginā*] at the court of Sultan Giyāth al-Dīn Tughluq (r. 1320-1325) of the Deli Sultanate. Many jurists in Delhi were jealous of Niẓām al-Dīn’s fame and authority, and complained to the sultan that he should be censured for allowing assemblies of devotional singing, leading to the debate. After the inconclusive debate, Niẓām al-Dīn states he was shocked at the audacity of the *fuqahā* who favored reports attributed to Abū Ḥanīfah over *ḥadīth* going so far as to state, “that *ḥadīth* was favored by al-Shāfi‘ī while he was an enemy of our scholars, so we will neither listen to it nor believe it.” Niẓām al-Dīn then fears that the lack of faith [*sū’ al-i’tiqād*] of the ‘*ulamā*’ in *ḥadīth* will bring God’s wrath and lead to the city’s ruin, a prediction which the author of *Siyar* says came true after the saint’s death.¹⁶⁶ A similar attitude towards *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* is shown through describing Niẓām al-Dīn’s preference for the Shāfi‘ī position of reciting the *fātiḥa* in prayer behind the prayer leader, contrary to the Ḥanafī position of remaining silent.¹⁶⁷ Thus in ‘Abd al-Ḥayy’s rendition, the renowned saint displayed a subtler and more profound understanding of scholarship than many of his contemporaries marred by bigoted partisanship.

Despite the entry on Niẓām al-Dīn being mostly a translated excerpt, it exemplifies al-Ḥasanī’s subtle authorial intervention. In characterizing Niẓām al-Dīn as a champion of *ḥadīth* and his opponents as bigoted partisans, al-Ḥasanī is clearly critiquing sectarian partisanship of

¹⁶⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, 2:196.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, 194–95.

¹⁶⁷ Al-Ḥasanī, 2:195.

his contemporary British India. The specific *sharī‘a* ruling about the Sufi practice of devotional music is less important for al-Ḥasanī than it was for ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq. Al-Ḥasanī’s agenda also differs from Mīr Khurd Kirmānī, the author of *Siyar al-Awliyā’*. In that work, Niẓām al-Dīn is blessed with knowledge from God, and thus does not need to prepare for the debate despite the concerns of his disciples. Thus he represents a source of knowledge that is superior to the knowledge of the court jurists. Furthermore, his prediction of the doom that would befall Delhi reinforces his saintly knowledge of the unseen.¹⁶⁸ It is also noteworthy that al-Ḥasanī also includes an excerpt from Mullā ‘Alī Qārī’s (d. 1605) biographical compilation of Ḥanafī ‘*ulamā’*. Although consisting of only a few lines that adds no new information about Niẓām al-Dīn, the excerpt gives his legacy relevance beyond the Sufi Chisti tradition of South Asia by showing that he is also part of a transregional history of Ḥanafī scholars. Additionally, al-Ḥasanī quotes Mullā ‘Alī Qārī’ lamenting that Muslims have imitated [literally, done *taqlīd*] the Hindus [*al-kuffār*] in making the grave of the saint a destination for pilgrimage and excessive reverence.¹⁶⁹ In this way, al-Ḥasanī criticizes practices he disagrees with without explicitly stating so himself.

The above analysis of al-Ḥasanī’s biographies on Aḥmad Riḍā Khān, Sir Sayyid, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, and Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ has shown that his efforts to chart out intellectual relationships and legacies on both an India-wide scale and transregionally differentiates his biographical compilation of learned and venerable Indian Muslims from Indo-Persian *tadhkiras*. The focus on placing scholars temporally and pinpointing figures as central nodes in intellectual

¹⁶⁸ Mīr Khwurd Muḥammad Mubārak al-Kirmānī, *Siyar Al-Awliyā’* (Delhi: Maṭba‘ Muḥibb-i Hind, 1885), 525–32; Mīr Khwurd Muḥammad b. Mubārak Kirmānī, *Siyar Al-Awliyā’*, trans. Gulām Aḥmad Biryān (Lahore: Mushtāq Book Corner, n.d.), 695–705.

¹⁶⁹ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 2:195.

history shows that the *Nuzhat* was not a project of preserving Muslim collective memory in danger of being lost, but rather an attempt to discover information assumed to be forgotten about the lives and legacy of Indian scholars. And in doing so, al-Ḥasanī helped to give shape to ‘*ulamā*’ as a social collectivity. Thus, Sir Sayyid was excluded from this collectivity even as his legacy was crucial to their history, and Niẓām al-Dīn was appropriated as a scholarly exemplar. The objective in pointing out al-Ḥasanī’s agenda in his history is not to cast him as a prejudiced historian, but to elucidate the questions and concerns his work dealt with. These concerns also differentiate his work from historicist works that were being written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because of colonial rule. We now turn to comparing al-Ḥasanī’s treatment of topics that had become important in the colonial public sphere. Specifically, we will look at how al-Ḥasanī approached the Muslim conquest of Sind in the eighth century and the reign of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1659-1707).

Al-Ḥasanī’s Indifference Towards Colonial Historiography

As discussed in Chapter One, the British emphasis on Indian history as a means of understanding their colonial population contributed significantly to the importance of history in the public sphere. The most influential book of Indian history in the nineteenth century was Mountstuart Elphinstone’s *The History of India: the Hindu and Mahometan Periods*, published in 1841. It reached a wide audience in India due to its popularity at Indian colleges, then through its Persian translation, and finally through its Urdu translation. This last translation was published in 1866 by Sir Sayyid’s Scientific Society, despite Muslim opposition to the portrayal of Muslims in the book. According to Elphinstone, Muslims arrived as conquerors under the Arab commander Muḥammad b. Qāsim (d. c. 96/715) in 712, held power through despotism, and were responsible for the decline of Indian civilization. Finally, the fanaticism of the Mughal

Emperor Aurangzeb ultimately led to the breakup of the Mughal Empire and paved the way for “a new wave of conquerors,” namely the British, to “unite the empire under better auspices than before.”¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Sir Henry Elliot (d. 1853) and John Dowson’s (d. 1881) eight volume *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, published between 1867 and 1877, contained translations and edited excerpts from Indo-Persian chronicles and histories from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries. This translation project engendered further negative attention to Muslim presence in Indian history. Elliot believed the Muslim historians were bigoted and superficial. He expressed great perplexity that so many Hindus viewed Muslim rule in a positive light and hoped to disavow Indians of this view through selective translation from Muslim historians that were either critical of the Muslim rulers or otherwise depicted them in a negative light. One of the most important texts he translated was the Persian *Chachnāma* written by ‘Alī Kūfī in 1226 about the Muslim conquest of Sind in 712 by Muḥammad b. Qāsim. Importantly, Elliot and Dowson’s book became a central reference for most major historians of India.¹⁷¹

Muslim writing on Indian history from the nineteenth century onwards is often cast as a response to the European framework, either to defend the record of Muslims in India against aspersions of violence and despotism,¹⁷² or to reflect on the loss of a glorious past.¹⁷³ However, this framework fails to properly explain ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī’s dedication to history. He seems uninterested in engaging with colonial historiography despite his obvious knowledge and

¹⁷⁰ Mounstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1841), 665.

¹⁷¹ Muhammad Aslam Syed, *Muslim Response to the West: Muslim Historiography in India, 1857-1914* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1988), 24–27.

¹⁷² Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*, 8.

¹⁷³ C. M. Naim, “Interrogating ‘The East,’ ‘Culture,’ and ‘Loss,’ in Abdul Halim Sharar’s *Guzashta Lakhna’u*,” in *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition*, ed. Alka Patel and Karen Leonard (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 189–204.

exposure to it. In what follows, I will analyze al-Ḥasanī's treatment of two figures that attracted immense attention in the colonial public sphere: Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim and Emperor Aurangzeb. Yet, as I argue below, al-Ḥasanī's writing about them should not be correlated with influence of colonial historiography.

The first generation that al-Ḥasanī writes about in *Nuzhat al-Khwāṭir* is replete with references to seventh and eighth-century Arab military leaders that came to India, particularly the western, Indian Ocean region of Sind. It is also the smallest section in the book, with little detail given about the lives of most of these Arab leaders due to lack of sources. The entry on Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim, however, is more substantial, and the longest entry in the first generation. It seems clear that for 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, Islam first arrived in India through Arab conquerors within the first two centuries of Islamic history.

Although it may appear that the choice to locate Islam's arrival to India in Sind through Arab conquerors indicates the influence of a colonial perspective, I believe it has more to do with his perspective on reliable sources. According to the historian Manan Asif, pre-colonial histories about Muslims in India had not centered Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim's conquest of Sind in 712 CE as the origin of Islam in India. Abū al-Faḍl's (d. 1602) *Akbarnāma*, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Badayūnī's (d. 1615) *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, and Firistha's *Gulshan-i Ibrāhīmī* (d. 1620) were all important Persian histories of Muslims in India that focused on the arrival of the Ghaznavids in the eleventh century as the real start of Islam in India.¹⁷⁴ When Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim was mentioned, it was in regional histories of Sind.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Ali Anooshahr, "Mughal Historians and the Memory of the Islamic Conquest of India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 43, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 275–300.

¹⁷⁵ Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*, 153.

Asif has thus argued that centering the conquest of Sind as the beginning of Islam in India is a reflection of colonial thought. He has provided a genealogy of colonial military officers, administrators, and scholars who framed the conquest of Sind as the beginning of Islam in India. The colonial narrative was based on their historicist reading of the *Chachnāma*. The *Chachnāma* is a thirteenth-century Persian text that may have been a translation of a missing eighth-century Arabic text written by a contemporary of Muḥammad b. Al-Qāsim about the conquest of Sind. Through excavating it from its wider Indo-Persianate historiographical context, and mining it for historical facts, the work was transformed into a source text for the origin of Islam in India. In the histories of Elphinstone, Elliot, and a host of other British writers, “712 AD became a totemic date for the rupture of the Indian past and the framework of the foreign origins of hegemony.”¹⁷⁶ The colonial narrative also catalyzed Indian anti-colonial nationalist histories. However Indian intellectuals and historians from the early twentieth century struggled to resist British colonialism while also come to terms with the powerful historical discourse of Muslims as despotic, intolerant, and foreign to India.”¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, it cannot be automatically assumed that al-Ḥasanī included Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim due to the discussions about the conquest of Sind in the colonial public sphere. For one, contrary to Manan Asif’s assertion that the conquest of Sind had not been viewed in Persian sources as the establishment of Islam in India, Azād Bilgramī (d. 1786) did begin his biographical collection of Indian saints and scholars, the *Māthir al-Kirām*, with a few lines about the conquest of Muḥammad b. Al-Qāsim. In fact, the first lines after the introduction state that in every land the emergence of saints [*awliyā*] has occurred concomitantly with Islamic conquests

¹⁷⁶ Asif, 170.

¹⁷⁷ Asif, 171.

[*futūḥāt-i Islām*]. According to Azād Bilgrāmī, this holds true for India as well, and he proceeds to summarize Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim’s conquest.¹⁷⁸

Al-Ḥasanī’s entry on Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim is made up entirely of passages from al-Balādhurī’s (d. 892) *Futūḥ al-Buldān*. The prominence given to Muḥammad al-Qāsim in the first generation seems to be due to the amount of information available about his conquest in this early Arabic source. Significantly, unlike pre-colonial historians such as Firishta (d. 1620), as well as modern European historians, al-Ḥasanī does not utilize the *Chachnāma* for his account of Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim.. Al-Ḥasanī likely utilized the Leiden edition published in 1866 since that was the one Shiblī possessed and left to the Nadwa library.¹⁷⁹ The author of the *Chachnāma* “repurposed” *Futūḥ al-Buldān* by providing more details about Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim and framing the conquest in a vastly different way than the Arabic source text.¹⁸⁰ Al-Balādhurī’s account depicts Sind as a disruptive frontier region, and Umayyad incursions result from a mixture of security concerns and financial interests.¹⁸¹ The Sind of *Chachnāma* is not a volatile region, but rather a transregional hub that has flourished when the leaders, both pre-Islamic and Muslim, have respected religious difference and have kept their military ambitions in check.¹⁸² Al-Ḥasanī likely preferred the Arabic *Futūḥ al-Buldān* over the *Chachnāma* because it predated the latter by four centuries, and because of his critical stance towards Persianate historiography.

¹⁷⁸ Bilgrāmī, *Ma ‘āthir Al-Kirām*, 5.

¹⁷⁹ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *al-Fārūq* (Azamgarh: Dārulmuṣannifīn Shiblī Akaiḍmī, 2008), 32.

¹⁸⁰ Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*, 35.

¹⁸¹ Asif, 37, 65.

¹⁸² Asif, 76.

In the *Nuzhat* al-Ḥasanī displays skepticism when later sources are more detailed and provide a smoother narrative. Perhaps the best example is his entry on Salār Mas‘ūd, an enigmatic eleventh century warrior saint believed to have been a nephew of Maḥmūd of Ghazni and whose shrine had become (and remains) a popular pilgrimage destination. Al-Ḥasanī finds it peculiar, given the popular legends that surround the figure, that no historian ever mentioned Salār in their accounts of the Ghanavid conquests. When historians do mention him, such as Firistha, his story is inserted separately from the section on the conquests. The most detailed account of his life, *Mir‘āt-i Mas‘ūdī*, was written in the seventeenth century. The work is so detailed, according to an incredulous al-Ḥasanī, it is as if the author accompanied him his whole life. Because of the lack of reliable sources, al-Ḥasanī concludes that there is not much that can be known about him.¹⁸³ Given al-Ḥasanī’s attitude towards source material, he likely restricted his account of Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim to the *Futūḥ al-Buldān* because of its older provenance and because the later *Chachnāma* provides a more detailed narrative.

When we compare ‘Abd al-Ḥayy’s redacted biography of Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim to al-Balādhurī’s original account, we see that he emphasized Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim arriving to India as a victorious *mujāhid*.¹⁸⁴ This is very different from the *Chachnāma*, written in the tradition of Persian historiography “of presenting accounts of the past as political theory for the present.”¹⁸⁵ What little details al-Balādhurī had included about pre-Islamic Sind are left out.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, details of difficulties encountered by Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim are left out, such as

¹⁸³ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:80-81.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, 1:34-36.

¹⁸⁵ Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*, 68–69.

¹⁸⁶ Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ Al-Buldān* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1988), 423.

specifics of laying siege to cities,¹⁸⁷ the continuous days of bloodshed, the use of Buddhist mediators and Indian soldiers,¹⁸⁸ and even him complaining to the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj about lack of food.¹⁸⁹ In fact, all references to correspondence with al-Ḥajjāj are left out, making it appear Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim singularly made decisions. Furthermore, details about the process of negotiations and peace treaties are also left out. In the *Nuzhat* the Muslim army led by Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim simply moved from city to city conquering through force [*anwatan*] or diplomacy [*ṣulḥan*].¹⁹⁰ When the city of Rawar, for example, relented after a siege, al-Balādhurī sheds some light on the terms of peace. The inhabitants demanded that they not be killed and their places of worship [*budd*] not be harmed, to which Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim replied, “the *budd* are like the churches of the Christians and the Jews and the fire-houses of the Zoroastrians” and thus agreed to their terms.¹⁹¹ Al-Ḥasanī left out these specifics. While al-Ḥasanī does not care to point out instances of inter-religious compromise, he also is not interested in emphasizing religious animosity. Hence, after the siege of another city, al-Balādhurī states that Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim took the family of the enemy as captive, as well as the custodians of the temple.¹⁹² Al-Ḥasanī included the captivity of the family, but left out the last part.¹⁹³ In light of the selective quotations and deletions, it is clear that responding to the colonial narrative to refute accusations of Muslim despotism, intolerance, or foreignness did not interest al-Ḥasanī.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Balādhurī, 420–21, 423.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Balādhurī, 421.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Balādhurī, 420.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:35.

¹⁹¹ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ Al-Buldān*, 423.

¹⁹² Al-Balādhurī, 423.

¹⁹³ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:35.

The *Nuzhat* is not a political history. Rather it recounts the extension and development of Muslim piety and learning in India. Hence, he represents Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim as an archetypal *mujāhid*, a warrior blessed by God with victory in India. But in addition to the *mujāhid*, martyrs also make up the earliest history of Islam. Thus, many entries in the first generation are of those who died in India. Since the names in each generation are arranged alphabetically, the very first entry of the book is of a Badīl b. Ṭuhfa al-Bajlī, who was killed in battle in India. Although the entry is only a few lines, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy takes care to note that his grave is in the city of Daybul in Sind.¹⁹⁴ He does this with other martyrs as well.

And by the second generation, *mujāhids* and martyrs are joined by poets and scholars. The very first name in the second generation is Abū ‘Aṭā’ al-Sindī (d. 180/~796), an Indian-born Arabic poet, who despite his lisp and thick accent, was one of the wittiest and most eloquent Arabic poets, and whose poems are included in the famous *Ḥamāsa* collection of early Arabic poetry.¹⁹⁵ The second name in the second generation is Isrā’īl b. Mūsa al-Baṣrī. Al-Ḥasanī relies on compendium of *ḥadīth* transmitters and states that he transmitted *ḥadīth* from venerable Muslims of the successor generation such as Ḥaṣan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) and Muḥammad b. Sirīn (d. 729). Al-Bukhārī included a narration from him in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. To justify including a Basran in his work on Indian history, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī quotes from the authoritative work on Arabic names and genealogies, Ibn al-Sam‘ānī’s (d. 1166) *Kitāb al-Ansāb*. “He used to live [*kāna yanzil*] in India so he was attributed [*nasaba*] to it.”¹⁹⁶ The use of early Arabic historical texts and works of transmitter criticism enable al-Ḥasanī to chart out connections of learning and piety

¹⁹⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, 1:31.

¹⁹⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, 1:39-41.

¹⁹⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, 1:41.

between India and the Islamic lands to the west. Hence, although Islam entered India through conquest, it very quickly began producing poets and attracting scholars, indicating its status as a blessed land.

The above discussion has shown that despite the apparent overlap between al-Ḥasanī's choice to center the conquest of Sind as the beginning of Islam in India, and the colonial narrative fixated on the conquest of Sind, al-Ḥasanī was not engaging with the colonial narrative. He showed no concern in refuting accusations of Muslim despotism, intolerance, and foreignness. Rather, he endeavored to document through the use of Arabic sources and avoidance of later Persian sources the links between eighth-century Arab warriors, poets, and scholars and the history of Muslims in India.

ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī's further lack of concern with colonial historiography can be seen in his interest in Emperor Aurangzeb. In the colonial historiography, if Muḥamad b. al-Qāsim represented the beginning of Islamic oppression of Indians, Aurangzeb's rule represented the climax of Islamic despotism. Because of the emphasis on Aurangzeb's supposed religious fanaticism, and his anti-Hindu policies of instituting the *jizya* and destroying temples, he also earned the ire of Indian nationalists who accepted the framework of colonial historiography. al-Ḥasanī was surely aware of all of this because his colleague at the Nadwat al-ʿUlamā', Shiblī Nu'mānī wrote a series of essays between 1906 and 1909 in *al-Nadwah*, the institution's journal, about Aurangzeb and explicitly criticized British works of Indian history.¹⁹⁷ The essays were published as a book in 1909.¹⁹⁸ As Alam and Subrahmanyam have explained, "writing at a time when manifestations of Hindu-Muslim communalism were becoming rather evident at the turn of

¹⁹⁷ Syed, *Muslim Response to the West*, 88–89.

¹⁹⁸ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Aurangzeb ʿĀlamgīr Par Ek Naẓar* (Lahore: Nawal Kishore Steam Press, 1909), <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/aurangzeb-alamgeer-par-ek-nazar-shibli-nomani-ebooks>.

the twentieth century, Shibli ... defended Mughal rule and culture on the grounds that the Mughals had protected, befriended, and taken care of their Hindu subjects.”¹⁹⁹ Regarding Aurangzeb specifically, Shibli wrote that based on contemporary works on the emperor, one would think that he was the worst criminal in human history. Through his essays, he aims to show that Aurangzeb was in fact not that different from his Mughal predecessors.²⁰⁰ Broadly, his essays deal with the themes of Aurangzeb’s capabilities as a ruler, his putative religious fanaticism, and his treatment of his father and brothers after he took power.

These themes are largely absent in al-Ḥasanī’s treatment of Aurangzeb. Eschewing the narrative of Islamic despotism or religious communalism, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy’s long biographical section on Aurangzeb emphasizes his apparent connection to knowledge and piety.²⁰¹ The military and political details are summed up in less than a page, and function as background context for his sense of justice, pursuit of knowledge, support of scholarship, and cultivation of piety laid out in five pages. The controversial killing of his brothers during the war of succession is cavalierly dismissed. He states it was the fault of his brothers according to the ‘*ulamā*’ at the time. Moreover, while Aurangzeb’s wars are labeled as *jihād* and the expanse of his empire is described as encompassing most of India, no specific mention is made of Hindus as the opponents.

Aurangzeb’s importance in the *Nuzhat* comes from his legacy as a scholar and a patron of scholarship. He was a “religious, pious, humble scholar, adamantly devoted to the Ḥanafī

¹⁹⁹ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 7.

²⁰⁰ Nu‘mānī, *Aurangzeb ‘Ālamgīr Par Ek Nazar*, 2–3.

²⁰¹ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 6:737-743.

madhhab.”²⁰² The remaining entry is filled with details about his pietistic daily routine, as well as his sense of justice. His many teachers, the subjects he studied with them, and the Sufi shaykhs he had relationships with are all listed. His contribution to scholarship included two different compilations of forty *ḥadīth*, and most famously establishing a committee of scholars to synthesize authoritative Ḥanafī opinions. This project resulted in the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya*.²⁰³ Despite the title, the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya* is not a collection of legal *responsa*, but an authoritative compendium of Ḥanafī law. A team of perhaps forty scholars synthesized Ḥanafī rules from a variety of legal texts to facilitate the task of a jurist or judge in answering legal questions and adjudicating cases.²⁰⁴ Not only did it become an important source for Islamic law in India, translated into Urdu and English for use in colonial British courts,²⁰⁵ but it was also utilized by Ottoman jurists in the nineteenth century.²⁰⁶ Al-Ḥasanī is quite aware of the work’s transregional fame, writing in Aurangzeb’s biography that the *al-Fatāwā* has become well-known in Hijaz, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey.²⁰⁷

Notwithstanding its transregional importance, the full identity of the compilers remained shrouded in mystery.²⁰⁸ This was partly because of the involvement of multiple scholars, but also

²⁰² Al-Ḥasanī, 6:738.

²⁰³ Al-Ḥasanī, 6:740.

²⁰⁴ Alan M. Guenther, “Hanafī Fiqh in Mughal India: The Fatawa-I ‘Alamgiri,” in *India’s Islamic Traditions: 711-1750*, ed. Richard Maxwell Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 212–14.

²⁰⁵ Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley M. Messick, and David S. Powers, “Muftis, Fatwas, and Islamic Legal Interpretation,” in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley M. Messick, and David S. Powers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 14.

²⁰⁶ Samy Ayoub, *Law, Empire, and the Sultan: Ottoman Imperial Authority and Late Hanafī Jurisprudence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 143.

²⁰⁷ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 6:740.

²⁰⁸ Guenther, “Hanafī Fiqh in Mughal India: The Fatawa-I ‘Alamgiri,” 216–19.

due to the lack of interest by the chroniclers writing about Aurangzeb's reign. The uncertainty of authorship can be seen in a published edition of the work from Egypt. It had been published by the Bulaq press in the nineteenth century, the second edition indicating its publication date as 1892-3 (1310 AH). In the margins of the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya*, a separate but smaller legal work was also published, the *Fatāwa Qādīkhān* of the Central Asian Fakhr al-Dīn Qādīkhān (d. 1196). The editor of the Bulaq press is able to provide information about Qādīkhān by quoting from the Ottoman historian Ḥājī Khalīfa's *Kashf al-Zunūn*.²⁰⁹ However, his information about the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya* is much more limited, since there is no entry about it in *Kashf al-Zunūn*. The editor states that based on the *al-Ma'āthir al-'Ālamgīriyya*, a Persian chronicle by Aurangzeb's court historian Muḥammad Sāqī Musta'idd Khān (d. 1724), the work was ordered by the emperor and the project was directed by a Shaykh Nizām. No further information, about who Shaykh Nizām was, his death date, other scholars involved, or time of completion, is included.²¹⁰

Determining the scholars responsible for the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya* constituted a major motivation for al-Ḥasanī's historical inquiry.²¹¹ It forms one of the major concerns in the fifth and sixth volumes of his *Nuzhat* corresponding broadly to the seventeenth century. The lack of a clear provenance posed an epistemological challenge to the scholarly tradition. In the epistemology of 'ulamā', and this was especially the case for *ḥadīth*-centered scholars, knowledge was embodied in people, not only in texts. A text of uncertain authorship was an orphaned text, cut off from its intellectual genealogy, and thus of questionable merit. "Alongside

²⁰⁹ al-Shaykh Nizām, *Al-Fatāwā al-'Ālamgīriyya al-Ma'rūfa Bil-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya* (Cairo: Bulaq, 1310), 1:575.

²¹⁰ Nizām, 1:576.

²¹¹ Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya Fī al-Hind*, 13.

this pragmatic concern for citing chains of transmission as a means of establishing the attribution of a book, the practice of citing chains of transmission for a book was rooted in an expanded conception of the heritage of the Prophet.”²¹² Since the Prophet was ultimately the main source for Islamic law, one could trace a continuity to the Prophet through tracking chains of legal scholarship. Furthermore, the negligence towards the compilers of one of the most important books from India contributed towards non-Indian ignorance about Indian scholarship. Al-Ḥasanī’s overarching concern with Aurangzeb thus should be seen as a response to this lacuna in the scholarly tradition.

Al-Ḥasanī mentions twenty-one scholars that contributed to the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya*. He discovered them through utilizing different kinds of sources, including chronicles, official court documents, regional histories, family histories, and Sufi histories. Through connecting the compilers to teachers and students, al-Ḥasanī further embeds them, and thus the, *al-Fatāwā*, into a wider network of Indian scholarship. For example, the Shaykh Niẓām mentioned as the supervisor of the project was Niẓām al-Dīn Burhānpūrī (d. 1681), a scholar renowned for writing fatwas and a close confidant of the emperor.²¹³ He had been a student of a controversial scholar whose mastery of *ḥadīth* led him to diverge from authorized Ḥanafī rulings, and as a result many scholars had declared him an apostate [*takfīr*].²¹⁴ His student Burhānpūrī avoided any such controversy and was appointed by Aurangzeb to supervise the entire project of compiling *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya*. Another scholar who participated in the project was Muftī Abū al-Barakāt, who prior had written a smaller legal work than *al-Fatāwā*, but with similar aims. Al-Ḥasanī

²¹² Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 255.

²¹³ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 5:656.

²¹⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:655.

quotes from the introduction to his book, where he says that due to unwieldiness of the Hanafi tradition encompassing differing reports across multiple sources, he wrote the book to facilitate navigating the legal tradition.²¹⁵ Through the quote, al-Ḥasanī signals that the *al-Fatāwā* was not simply a product of imperial edict, but the work of scholars responding to intellectual needs.

Despite his remarkable efforts in locating compilers of the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya*, the limitations of his method of quoting from diverse sources with minimal comment can also be seen. Al-Ḥasanī took his information about Niẓām al-Dīn Burhānpūrī from *Mir'āt al-Ālam*, the unofficial history of Aurangzeb's secretary Bakhtāwar Khān (d. 1685). In Burhānpūrī's biography, al-Ḥasanī also references *Mir'āt al-Ālam* in stating that Burhānpūrī delegated four scholars under him, and each was responsible for a fourth of the *al-Fatāwā* and worked with a team of scholars under them. None of the four editors are Wajīh al-Dīn al-Kūbāmawī (d. 1670). However, in the entry on Wajīh al-Dīn al-Kūbāmawī, al-Ḥasanī writes that he was tasked with compiling a fourth of the work and had ten jurists working under him. The reference here is to another unofficial history by a court official, the *Mir'āt-i Jahān-numā* by Muḥammad Baqā Sahāranpūrī (d. 1683).²¹⁶ This suggests that al-Kūbāmawī was one of the four editors tasked with a fourth of the project, which contradicts the list of editors provided earlier. Al-Ḥasanī glosses over this apparent discrepancy without any comment. For al-Ḥasanī, it was sufficient to merely present the information he had encountered in searching for the scholars responsible for the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya*. But even that endeavor, though limited in not addressing apparent discrepancies, constituted a major accomplishment in addressing a historiographical gap in the tradition of religious scholarship.

²¹⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, 6:684.

²¹⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, 5:661.

In his treatment of the beginnings of Muslims in India and the importance of Emperor Aurangzeb for Indian Muslim intellectual history, al-Ḥasanī displayed a lack of interest in colonial narratives. Rather, his aim was to respond to perceived gaps in Muslim historical knowledge. Al-Ḥasanī turned to Arabic sources that had not been widely available in India, such as the works of al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī,²¹⁷ for information about the earliest Muslim figures associated with India. He also utilized Arabic biographical compendiums on *ḥadīth* transmitters. These were sources that interested only those who participated in the tradition of *ḥadīth* scholarship. Furthermore, al-Ḥasanī drew on the same ethos of tracing the transmission of knowledge that inspired the writing of large biographical works among *ḥadīth* scholars in tracking down the scholars involved with the production of the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya*. The transregional significance the work compelled al-Ḥasanī to address the uncertainty of its authorship. Through the above discussions about early Muslims in India and the *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya*, it becomes clear that al-Ḥasanī’s purpose in, and approach to, historical writing distinguished the *Nuzhat* from the historicist mode of historical writing.

Search for Sources: Modern Libraries and the Postal Network

Had al-Ḥasanī been more interested in European publications on Indian Muslim history, he likely would have done a better job with finding sources about Muslim scholars from South India in the *Nuzhat*. He ambitiously attempted to cover the entirety of India “from the Khyber Pass to the Bay of Bengal, and the heights of Kashmir to the tip of South India.”²¹⁸ He

²¹⁷ Recall from Chapter One that Sir Sayyid’s Scientific Society did not have access to the Arabic version of al-Ṭabarī. Shiblī also mentions the difficulty of finding the Arabic text and is grateful for the Leiden edition published between 1897-1901 in fifteen volumes; Shiblī Nu’ mānī, *Safarnāmah-yi Rūm va Miṣr va Shām* (Dihlī: Maṭba‘-i Tuḥfah-yi Jannat, 1923), 90; C. E. Bosworth, “Al-Ṭabarī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, April 24, 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-tabari-COM_1133.

²¹⁸ Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 1:21.

nevertheless fell short of his geographic ambitions since south Indian scholarship, while present, is underrepresented in the *Nuzhat*. The most glaring omission is Aḥmad Zayn al-Dīn al-Malībārī (d. 1583), an important node in the Indian Ocean network of the Shāfi legal tradition and the author of *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn*, a history of Muslims in the south-western coastal region of Malabar and their conflict with the Portuguese.²¹⁹ This latter Arabic book had been translated into European languages in the early nineteenth century, including English, because it was considered an important historical source about Portuguese colonialism in Kerala and about Muslim propensity for jihad.²²⁰ Jurjī Zaydān (d. 1914), the Cairo-based historian and novelist that Shiblī had written against, included information about al-Malībārī and his work in his history of Arabic literature.²²¹ The fact that al-Ḥasanī omitted him indicates he was not well aware of historical discussions in the colonial public sphere nor was he keeping abreast of modern Arabic histories being published in the Middle East.

Notwithstanding omissions like al-Malībārī, al-Ḥasanī used over 300 sources in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu in writing the *Nuzhat*.²²² al-Ḥasanī felt compelled to research such a vast number of sources because of his focus on documenting the transmission of knowledge across generations of Muslim scholarship in India. This necessitated not only reading historical chronicles and biographical collections, but also discovering works written and taught on the various scholarly disciplines. When possible, al-Ḥasanī attempted to review these works

²¹⁹ Ayal Amer, “Al-Malībārī, Zayn al-Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Brill, April 1, 2019), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/al-malibari-zayn-al-din-COM_36091.

²²⁰ Carole Hillenbrand, “The Impact of a Sixteenth-Century Jihad Treatise on Colonial and Modern India,” in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*, ed. Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 204–22.

²²¹ Zaydān Jurjī, *Tārīkh Ādāb Al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1957), 3:337.

²²² This is based on the bibliography provided by the publisher. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawātir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1999), 8: 1417.

especially since they could provide dates to historically place authors, teachers, and even students. Thus, his research endeavors were the result of his choice to write in the Arabo-biographical mode.

Modern intuitions and technologies of communication facilitated al-Ḥasanī's project. Unlike Shiblī, al-Ḥasanī never traveled outside of India; but he did undertake limited travels within India for research. His success in discovering and utilizing an impressive array of sources were in large part due to recent libraries that had been established in the nineteenth century that housed Arabic and Persian works.

At numerous places in the *Nuzhat* while describing a work of a scholar, al-Ḥasanī mentions where a manuscript is located, especially when he had seen an autographed copy. The most important library for al-Ḥasanī was of course that of Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’,²²³ which held not only Shiblī's impressive personal collection culled from his travels and association with European scholars, but also that of Nawāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān. The latter collection included many books by scholars from Yemen,²²⁴ and thus useful for charting Yemeni scholars that traveled or settled in India.²²⁵ In establishing the Nadwa library, as mentioned in Chapter One, Shiblī had been inspired by the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library that opened in 1891, and which al-Ḥasanī references many times. He even quotes from a catalog of the Arabic and Persian collection that Khudā Bakhsh Khān (1842- 1908) had published in 1896.²²⁶

²²³ For example Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi' Wa al-Nawāzīr*, vol. 6:705.

²²⁴ Claudia Preckel, “Screening Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān's Library: The Use of Ḥanbalī Literature in 19th-Century Bhopal,” in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz, Georges Tamer, and Alina Kokoschka (2013: De Gruyter, n.d.), 187.

²²⁵ For example, see, Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi' Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 5:623-24.

²²⁶ David Sol Boyk, “Provincial Urbanity: Intellectuals and Public Life in Patna, 1880-1930” (Dissertation, Berkeley, CA, University of California, Berkeley, 2015), 209.

Two other libraries that stored extensive Arabic and Persian works were the Raza Rampur Library founded in 1892 in the princely state of Rampur and the Asafiyya Library founded in 1891 in the princely state of Hyderabad.²²⁷ These large libraries were all modern institutions insofar as they self-consciously sought to preserve an “oriental” Muslim heritage, a notion beholden to ideas about Islam as Middle-Eastern religion espoused by European orientalist, and thus focused on collecting works in Arabic and Persian, the two main ‘oriental’ languages.²²⁸ They are also components of state-sponsored projects of reform aimed at Muslim education to address the sense of decline that had befallen Muslims.²²⁹ They succeeded in amassing large collections because of a booming market for rare books and manuscripts, due in part to large European demand as well as the circulation of works looted in the aftermath of 1857 from imperial libraries in places like Delhi and Lucknow.²³⁰ Holders of private collections were willing to donate their works to these libraries because of the new notions of “civic participation, public service and social reform.”²³¹ Thus, the availability of modern institutions aimed at serving researchers such al-Ḥasanī enabled him to access hundreds of works that would have been impossible without spending a lifetime traveling.

²²⁷ For an example of his reference to the Raza Library, see Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, vol. 5:559; see also Ḥasanī, *Gul-i Ra nā*, 42n1 where al-Ḥasanī describes a visit to the Raza Library organized by a friend in the Rampur government who helped him translate some lines of Turkish. For an example of his reference to the Asafiyya Library, see Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, vol. 8:1175.

²²⁸ Naim, “Interrogating ‘The East,’ ‘Culture,’ and ‘Loss,’ in Abdul Halim Sharar’s *Guzashta Lakhna’u*,” 193–94; Boyk, “Provincial Urbanity: Intellectuals and Public Life in Patna, 1880-1930,” 199.

²²⁹ Boyk, “Provincial Urbanity: Intellectuals and Public Life in Patna, 1880-1930,” 192–93; Mohd. Suleman Siddiqi, “The Da’irat-Ul-Ma’arif: A Unique Language Institute of Hyderabad,” in *Languages and Literary Cultures in Hyderabad*, ed. Kousar J. Azam (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 205.

²³⁰ Boyk, “Provincial Urbanity: Intellectuals and Public Life in Patna, 1880-1930,” 185–86.

²³¹ Stark, “Associational Culture and Civic Engagement in Colonial Lucknow,” 4.

In addition to modern research libraries, al-Ḥasanī made judicious use of the imperial postal network. Seema Alavi has argued that the “imperial postal and telegraph departments became useful conduits that energized and expanded” the circulation of books within India in the late nineteenth century.²³² The postal network also helped extend the reach of modern *fatāwa* writing such as Deoband’s *dār al-iftā* and Rashīd Riḍā’s responses in *al-Manār*.²³³ Evidence from the *Nuzhat* as well as other sources reveal that al-Ḥasanī was indebted to correspondences with other Indian scholars interested in Muslim intellectual history who shared advice, and more importantly, their notes and unfinished manuscripts of their own histories they were writing.

For example, most of his information about Shāh Ishāq and his students in the *Nuzhat* came from a book Shams al-Ḥaqq ‘Azīmabādī (1857-1911), a Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholar and student of Nadhīr Ḥusayn, had been writing. In 1909, al-Ḥasanī, based in Lucknow, began corresponding with ‘Azīmabādī in a village outside of Patna about 500 kilometers away, requesting help with sources. ‘Azīmabādī in his reply offered encouragement to al-Ḥasanī for undertaking his historical project, requesting God’s assistance in helping him bring it to fruition. He wrote that he too attempted a similar project, but unfortunately due to the loss of some of his notes, as well as having loaned out parts of his manuscript to others writing similar historical works and not having received them back, he had been unable to complete it. One of the scholars he had loaned some of his manuscript to was ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, who also wanted to write a history of Indian ‘*ulamā*’ but needed more information about Bihar and other parts of India. Al-Laknawī

²³² Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); for the Ottoman context, see Choon Hwee Koh, “The Ottoman Postmaster: Contractors, Communication and Early Modern State Formation*,” *Past & Present* 251, no. 1 (May 1, 2021): 113–52, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtaa012>.

²³³ Brannon D. Ingram, “Sufis, Scholars and Scapegoats: Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1905) and the Deobandi Critique of Sufism,” *The Muslim World* 99, no. 3 (2009): 481; Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 50; Leor Halevi, *Modern Things on Trial: Islam’s Global and Material Reformation in the Age of Rida, 1865–1935* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 45–65.

passed away before completing the book or returning the pages he had borrowed.²³⁴ ‘Azīmabādī nonetheless sent his remaining manuscript to al-Ḥasanī in 1910, and in a letter requests al-Ḥasanī to send whatever he has written of his *Nuzhat* thus far to him for review by registered post [*dāk register shuda*], promising to return it within a month.²³⁵ ‘Azīmabādī’s letters to al-Ḥasanī reveal the reach of the imperial system in connecting villages with major cities, and a level of trust in the postal system to deliver valuable manuscripts in a timely fashion.

This is a major factor that enabled al-Ḥasanī to write a far more comprehensive and ambitious biographical history of Indian Muslim scholarship than would have been possible even a few decades prior. Bayly has shown that even into the 1850s, the older system of passing information, including personal correspondences, relied on messengers on foot. The building of railway and telegraphic lines led to a more efficient postal system in the late 1800s.²³⁶ It also led to a monopoly of postal services by the British. However, the Indian Post Act of 1854 opened up the postal system to greater use by introducing the penny post across India whereby a stamp would only cost a half *anna* (1/32 of a rupee) regardless of the distance of the destination.²³⁷ Parcels weighing below 8.2 pounds (twenty *tolas*) would only cost one *anna* (1/16 of a rupee).²³⁸ In 1901, parcels could be registered for two *annas*, and with registration the sender would

²³⁴ Muḥammad ‘Azīz Shams, *Allāma Abū Ṭayyab Muḥammad Shams Al-Ḥaqq Azīmābādī Ḥayāt Awr Khidmāt* (Karachi: Islamic Center for Academic Research, 2008), 95–107.

²³⁵ Shams, 103.

²³⁶ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 65.

²³⁷ Mark Frost, “Pandora’s Post Box: Empire and Information in India, 1854–1914,” *The English Historical Review* 131, no. 552 (September 29, 2016): 1048, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cew270>.

²³⁸ Frost, 1064.

receive receipt when the parcel was delivered.²³⁹ These policies rendered sending books through the postal system cheap and reliable. New communication networks made possible a far greater degree of scholarly collaboration, of which the *Nuzhat* was one such beneficiary. In seeking help from other scholars and libraries, al-Ḥasanī's association with Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ helped.³⁹ Modern institutions, especially one linked to regional and trans-regional networks, allowed religious actors a wider reach than scholars had before.⁴⁰ This translated into a denser network of collaborators and a wider reach in communication.

al-Ḥasanī's Histories Beyond the *Nuzhat*

In 1915, al-Ḥasanī was chosen as the Rector (*nāẓim*) of Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, increasing his responsibilities and leaving him less time to work on *Nuzhat*. While the responsibilities of leadership did not leave him as much time to continue researching and writing the *Nuzhat*, he did produce other historical works during this time based largely on the data he collected for the *Nuzhat*. Although these latter books do not match the *Nuzhat* in size or scope, their style and content suggest that al-Ḥasanī viewed the Arabic biographical genre as having limitations that he sought to overcome. More importantly, to the extent they draw on al-Ḥasanī's research in the *Nuzhat*, they also underscore the importance of the Arabo-biographical mode of historical writing for other forms of historical writing.

²³⁹ Mohini Lal Majumdar, *The Imperial Post Offices of British India, 1837-1914* (Calcutta: Phila Publications, 1990), 275.

³⁹ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Ḥasanī al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy* (Raebareili: Sayyid Ahmad Shahid Academy, 2004), 288.

⁴⁰ Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1911180>.

The sociopolitical context during al-Ḥasanī's time leading Nadwat al-ʿUlamā' is important to keep in mind. This period of leadership was marked by political, social, and financial unrest in India. World War I, the 1918-19 Flu Pandemic, and a famine all combined to create devastating conditions in India.²⁴⁰ An estimated twelve to eighteen million Indians died during the pandemic.²⁴¹ Inspired by the wave of anti-colonial sentiments in the aftermath of WWI, al-Ḥasanī ended the acceptance of the colonial government's grant for English and non-religious education that Nadwa had received since 1908.²⁴² He also refused any further assistance from the colonial state, despite the financial difficulties facing Nadwat al-ʿUlamā'.²⁴³ His historical works during this time show a greater interest in utilizing history for specific social agendas of madrasa reform and increasing Muslim collective memory of an Islamic past rooted in generations of Muslim scholars.

The first work al-Ḥasanī wrote after the *Nuzhat* was the *al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya*, an Arabic book that cataloged works written by Indian Muslims and organized according to their field of study. The bibliographic format of the work was not novel, the most famous precedent being the Ottoman Ḥājī Khalīfa's *Kashf al-Zunūn*.²⁴⁴ However, al-Ḥasanī's added an introduction to the work, a short essay surveying the changes the study of Islam in India had undergone. This introduction is based on an article he had written in Urdu for the *al-Nadwa*

²⁴⁰ Nadwī, *Tārīkh Nadwat Al-ʿulamā*, 2:161.

²⁴¹ David Arnold, "Death and the Modern Empire: The 1918-1919 Influenza Epidemic in India," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (December 2019): 181–200, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440119000082>.

²⁴² al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ʿAbd Al-Ḥayy*, 203.

²⁴³ Nadwī, *Tārīkh Nadwat Al-ʿulamā*, 2:162.

²⁴⁴ Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, 88.

journal in 1909, titled “The Curriculum of Study [*niṣāb-i dars*] in India and its Changes.”²⁴⁵

Through the essay, al-Ḥasanī made explicit a narrative of change that been implicit in his *Nuzhat*. He divided the history of the study of Islam in India into four periods to help simplify the narrative of change. “This periodization is the result of perusing through thousands of pages from works of *tārīkh*, *siyar*, *ṭabaqāt* of Sufis, *tadhkira* of poets, as well as their *maktūbāt* and *malfuẓāt*.”²⁴⁶ Ultimately, he was able to argue for this four-part periodization of change thanks to the years he spent researching information for his biographical collection of Muslim scholars.

The first period in al-Ḥasanī’s essay lasts from the seventh Hijri century to the ninth, during which Ḥanafī law and legal theory [*uṣūl*] were the most esteemed subjects.²⁴⁷ The second period begins at the end of the ninth Hijri century, when theology and other rationalist subjects like logic became more important. This was due to the scholars outside of India finding patronage under the Delhi Sultans. The third period begins in the eleventh Hijri century, and during it philosophy, rational theology, and other rational subjects became even more important, in large part due to Iranian scholars moving to India during Emperor Akbar’s reign (1556-1605), as well as other contemporary Muslim rulers in India. However, during this third period, some scholars began traveling to Hijaz for *ḥadīth* studies and then teaching when they returned to India. The most famous example was ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī. However, *ḥadīth* remained a marginal field of study for most ‘*ulamā*’ in India at this time.²⁴⁸ Interestingly, al-Ḥasanī had

²⁴⁵ al-Ḥasanī, *Hindustān Kā Niṣāb-i Dars Aur Uske Taghayyurāt*.

²⁴⁶ al-Ḥasanī, 8.

²⁴⁷ al-Ḥasanī, 9; Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya Fī al-Hind*, 15.

²⁴⁸ Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya Fī al-Hind*, 18.

placed ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī at the end of the second period in his Urdu essay,²⁴⁹ and later revised his periodization and included him in the third period in his Arabic introduction to *al-Thaqāfa al-islāmiyya*. The fourth and final period begins in the twelfth Hijri century, when the *dars-i nizāmī* method of education began, and lasts until the time al-Ḥasanī lived. During this period, philosophy and the rational subjects continued to be the most important fields of study, but their teaching focused more on inculcating the ability to decipher, interpret, and critically engage dense texts so that students could go on to study any text on their own.²⁵⁰ Additionally, thanks to Shāh Walī Allāh and his family and students, *ḥadīth* studies also became more widespread in India.

The historical overview concludes with an indictment of Islamic education in the present. Al-Ḥasanī states that a key problem in the present is that many scholars think that whatever is being taught at Islamic schools has always been part of the *dars-i nizāmī*, even though the books that are taught are commentaries from the previous century.²⁵¹ In his Urdu essay, he is even more critical of the educational curriculum at madrasas, listing six shortcomings. The first is that religious instruction is too focused on reading and deciphering specific texts, rather than gaining mastery over a subject.²⁵² His sixth criticism is the lack of history as a subject.²⁵³ The two criticisms show that for history to be taken more seriously as a subject studied at madrasas, the text-centered pedagogy would need to be revised. Moreover, both the introductory Arabic essay

²⁴⁹ al-Ḥasanī, *Hindustān Kā Niṣāb-i Dars Aur Uske Taghayyurāt*, 12.

²⁵⁰ Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya Fī al-Hind*, 19.

²⁵¹ Al-Ḥasanī, 20.

²⁵² al-Ḥasanī, *Hindustān Kā Niṣāb-i Dars Aur Uske Taghayyurāt*, 20.

²⁵³ al-Ḥasanī, 21.

as well as the original Urdu essay make clear that al-Ḥasanī believed that researching and deeply studying Islamic history in India should inform present debates and discussions about Muslim educational reform. The essay format of the introduction allowed al-Ḥasanī to argue for a history of changes in the way Islam has been studied more forcefully than the implicit narrative provided in the *Nuzhat* over eight volumes, leading him to argue in the conclusion that to reform madrasa curriculums would not be a departure from historical precedent.

After writing *Nuzhat* and *al-Thaqāfa*, al-Ḥasanī wrote a third Arabic work, *Jannat al-Mashriq wa Maṭla‘ Nūr al-Mashriq* (The Garden of the East and the Dawn of Eastern Light), to familiarize Arabic-literate audiences with relevant information about India’s geography, demographics, topography, social history, and political history, including the rise of British rule and status of Muslim princely states. Unlike the previous two books, this was not based primarily on his own original research. The one section that is based on his own research is the section on Muslim educational institutions [*al-madāris*]. Al-Ḥasanī describes eleven madrasas about which he was able to find information. In describing the madrasa of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, al-Ḥasanī points out that it was funded by Emperor Jahāngīr (d. 1627), and that ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s children and grandchildren continued teaching there after him. The institution became pivotal in disseminating knowledge of *ḥadīth* in India.²⁵⁴ These institutions are characterized with historical agency, thus indicating that despite the importance of biographies, social history that encompasses institutions is also necessary to appreciate different dimensions of Islamic history in India.

In addition to providing examples of the limitations of biographies, the *Jannat* also provides examples of al-Ḥasanī’s greater exposure to colonial knowledge during this later phase

²⁵⁴ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Hind Fīl-‘ahd al-Islāmī* (Raebareili: Dar-e-Arafat, 2001), 360.

of his life. The book dealt more directly with the reality of Muslims living under colonial rule and as a minority in a predominantly Hindu land. There are very few references to Hindus in the *Nuzhat*.²⁵⁵ However, in *Jannat*, al-Ḥasanī references the 1921 British India Census in providing population numbers for all Indians, and for the population of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians.²⁵⁶ He also briefly describes Hinduism, touching on the caste system and the belief in multiple deities. He attributes a very sophisticated tradition of learning to them, especially in mathematics, astronomy, poetry, philosophy, and music. However, betraying his exposure to colonial discourse on Hinduism, Al-Ḥasanī asserts that Hindus do not have proper knowledge of history, and what passes for history for them is a “laughingstock for children.”²⁵⁷ Colonial scholars repeatedly claimed that Hindus lacked historical traditions.²⁵⁸ Although a negative assessment of Hindu traditions by a Muslim religious scholar cannot be entirely attributed to colonialism, the possible influence of the negative perception of Europeans about Hindu historical traditions cannot be ruled out.

Nuzhat al-Khwāṭir, *al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya*, and *Jannat al-Mashriq* were al-Ḥasanī’s largest works and were intended for an Arabic-speaking audience. However, after assuming the leadership of Nadwa, al-Ḥasanī also turned his attention towards Urdu-speaking Muslim publics in India, and he did this primarily through speeches. He explained why he chose to speak about history in his speeches. “After rapturous religious speeches, history is the best way to revive the

²⁵⁵ A rare reference to a Hindu is the entry on Mahārājah Ratan Singh (d. 1851), a minister in the Kingdom of Oudh and a multilingual engineer. He converted to Islam three years before his death. See Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi’ Wa al-Nawāzīr*, 7:969.

²⁵⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Hind Fīl-‘ahd al-Islāmī*, 130.

²⁵⁷ Al-Ḥasanī, 73.

²⁵⁸ Rama Mantena, “The Question of History in Precolonial India,” *History and Theory* 46, no. 3 (2007): 97–98.

dead hearts of a community."²⁵⁹ At Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’'s annual conferences at Nagpur in central India, Pune in central-west India, Belgaum in south-west India, and Madras in south-east India, al-Ḥasanī gave speeches in Urdu about the local Muslim history of these regions. The speeches were rich with details about rulers, governors, scholars, and saints that helped transform those places as centers of learning and piety. In 1918, he was invited by the Muhammadan Educational Conference to speak about the history of Gujarat since the conference was held there. He likewise focused on the importance of the region for Muslim history. He also repeated criticisms of past Muslim histories of India for ignoring the intellectual contributions of Muslims, characterizing Muslim history in India as covered in a “curtain of ignorance.”²⁶⁰ Nonetheless, he reminded his audience that “all that is necessary is to search out the pearls from the stories of battles and banquets [*razm-o-bazm*].”²⁶¹ Al-Ḥasanī describes the past of these regions in glowing terms, and states that the legacy of Muslims who contributed to their vibrancy still endures. This is especially the case for scholars who left behind students and books. Speaking at another conference in Pune, al-Ḥasanī asserted, “although some of the scholars mentioned [in Pune] no longer survive, their names will continue to be remembered out of gratitude as long as even a single madrasa remains in India.”²⁶² He also characterizes the present as not a moment of decline, but as a continuation of religious revival began in the nineteenth century.²⁶³ By focusing on Muslim religious contributions, al-Ḥasanī sought to claim a continuity with the past. He thus addressed colonial and proto-nationalist discourses that cast Muslims as foreigners, as well

²⁵⁹ Al-Ḥasanī, *Yād-i Ayyām*, 41.

²⁶⁰ al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 217.

²⁶¹ Al-Ḥasanī, *Yād-i Ayyām*, 41–42.

²⁶² al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 216.

²⁶³ al-Nadwī, 216–17.

modernist Muslim reformers that wanted a break with the scholarly traditions. Yet in addressing these modern challenges, al-Ḥasanī took recourse to the research he had conducted for his Arabic biographical collection of Indo-Muslim scholarship.

The Posthumous Interest in al-Ḥasanī’s Arabo-Biographical History

Of his historical works, only the prepared speech from Gujarat for the Muhammadan Educational Conference in 1918 was published during his life. It seems that he had not made any attempts to publish or even widely publicize his large historical compendium, the *Nuzhat*. It was published posthumously, and its publication history sheds light on the reception of his work and thus the Arabo-biographical mode of writing that it exemplified.

The second volume of *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir* was the first to be published in 1931 because of its similarity to the famous *ḥadīth* scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s (d. 1449) *al-Durar al-Kāmina fī A’yān al-Mi’a al-Thāmina*. The book was a biographical dictionary of notable Muslims in the fourteenth century, with special attention given to scholars and *ḥadīth* transmitters.²⁶⁴ The Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif, a publishing house in Hyderabad established in 1888, decided to publish the second volume of the *Nuzhat* when it was editing and publishing Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s biographical dictionary. Funded by the Hyderabad government, the purpose of the Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif was to edit and publish Arabic manuscripts that represented significant Muslim contribution to any branch of learning. Nawab Sir Wiqār al-Mulk, the first president of the institute and a prominent member of the Aligarh Movement, specified that one of the criteria for selecting a manuscript for publication was that the work was produced between the seventh

²⁶⁴ Gharaibeh, “Narrative Strategies in Biographical Dictionaries: The Ad-Durar al-Kāmina of Ib Ḥagar al-‘Asqalānī– a Case Study,” 54.

and fifteenth century, before the perceived decline of Islamic civilization.²⁶⁵ The institution relied on a diverse team of editors that in the 1930s that included Fritz Krenkow (d. 1953), a German orientalist,²⁶⁶ Sayyid Hāshim Nadwī (d. 1974), a graduate from and former teacher at Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mu‘allimī (d. 1966), a Yemeni philologist who authored the first Arabic account explaining the editorial process of correcting manuscripts for print.²⁶⁷

Krenkow had obtained a manuscript of *al-Durar al-Kāmina* that had been written by Ibn Ḥajar’s student, al-Sakhāwī (d. 1469), and corrected by the author.²⁶⁸ This was the type of rare manuscript the institute sought to publish. Sayyid Hāshim Nadwī, who had known al-Ḥasanī and his work, decided that the second volume of his *Nuzhat* should be published as a supplement, since it covered the same period but included notable Indian Muslims that Ibn Ḥajar had left out. Although al-Ḥasanī’s work did not meet the Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif’s period criterion, an exception was made due to its seamless fit with Ibn Ḥajar’s work.²⁶⁹ Like the Cairene *ḥadīth* master’s history, al-Ḥasanī’s second volume provided information about notable Indian Muslims of the fourteenth century, with special attention given to ‘*ulamā*’ and their intellectual lineages and networks. Also, like Ibn Ḥajar, al-Ḥasanī avoided details about miracles and marvelous feats, and utilized similar formulaic statements to attribute reports of miracles regarding a person, such

²⁶⁵ Omar Khalidi, “Dā’irat Al-Ma‘ārif al-Uthmānīyah: A Pioneer in Manuscript Publishing in Hyderabad, Deccan, India,” *MELA Notes*, no. 80 (2007): 28; Siddiqi, “The Da’irat-Ul-Ma’arif: A Unique Language Institute of Hyderabad,” 207.

²⁶⁶ Kris Manjapra, “South Asian Islam and the Politics of German Orientalism,” in *Oceanic Islam: Muslim Universalism and European Imperialism*, ed. Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 250.

²⁶⁷ Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, 82.

²⁶⁸ Siddiqi, “The Da’irat-Ul-Ma’arif: A Unique Language Institute of Hyderabad,” 208–9.

²⁶⁹ al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 290.

as “miracles are mentioned about him.”²⁷⁰ While these were common characteristics of Arabo-biographical histories, they were uncommon in Indo-Persianate biographical collections.

The publication of *Nuzhat*'s second volume in 1931 brought the book to the attention of scholars in India. Its favorable reception led to the publication of the remaining volumes over the next few decades. Two scholars specifically played a pivotal role in calling for the publication of the remaining volumes. The first was Manāẓir Aḥsan Gīlānī (1892-1956), a graduate of Deoband and Professor of Theology at Osmania University, Hyderabad. He was working on a two-volume book about Islamic education, including its history, and found in the *Nuzhat* an indispensable source.²⁷¹ After he pressured the Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif, the first, third, and fourth volumes were published between 1947 and 1951. The publication of the remaining volumes had been put on hold when India absorbed the state of Hyderabad, which included the Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif. The second scholar who played a pivotal role was Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, the principal of Deoband who had supported the Congress party's call for a united India against the Muslim League's call for a separate Muslim state. He was researching saints from his family lineage who were connected to the Hijaz and India and had trouble finding sources until he read the unpublished volumes of *Nuzhat*. Thereafter, he requested Abul Kalam Azad, the Minister of Education of India, to have the remaining volumes published by Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif. By 1959, the fifth, sixth, and seventh volumes had been published. The eighth volume was published in 1968, after the

²⁷⁰ See Al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat Al-Khawāṭir Wa Bahjat al-Masāmi' Wa al-Nawāẓir*, vol. 1:91 for an example of the phrase in the biography of the Sufi saint Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī (d. 1236). Pierrepont mentions that Ibn Ḥajar used similar statements to attribute reports of miracles to figures throughout his different histories and biographical collections. Pierrepont, “Ibn Ḥajar Al-‘Asqalānī's Texts and Contexts,” 309.

²⁷¹ For more on Gilani's book, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 161–62.

author's son Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadwī completed entries for some of al-Ḥasanī's contemporaries that he had began writing but left incomplete.²⁷²

The book has remained the main source about Indian Islamic scholarship for Arab audiences. The usefulness of the *Nuzhat* for Arab scholars led to it being republished in Beirut in 1999. In a preface, the Syrian jurist and broadcaster 'Alī al-Ṭanṭāwī (1909-1999) is quoted as stating that he relied exclusively on the *Nuzhat* for information about India in his book on famous Muslim personalities in history, *Rijāl min al-Tārīkh*. The book was based on a popular radio show where al-Ṭanṭāwī would present biographies of famous Muslims from different parts of the Muslim world.²⁷³ He wanted to focus on intellectual history [*al-tārīkh al-ilmī*] rather than political history.²⁷⁴ Other scholars attempted to expand on the *Nuzhat*, such as the Saudi-based Indian scholar Qāḍī Aṭḥar Mubārakpūrī (1916- 1996) in his prosopographical work *Rijāl al-Sind wal-Hind* (1957). While acknowledging *Nuzhat* as the most comprehensive and reliable book on Indian 'ulamā', Mubārakpūrī noted that the book had left out many figures from early Arabic sources.²⁷⁵

Scholars interested in cataloging chains of *ḥadīth* transmission found *Nuzhat* similarly useful. "This connective power of" cataloging chains of transmission "made it the most enduring genre in which scholars communicated their status as the heirs of the Prophet and preservers of tradition, and it continues to serve this function until today."²⁷⁶ The Moroccan scholar 'Abd al-

²⁷² al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt 'Abd Al-Ḥayy*, 291–93.

²⁷³ 'Alī al-Ṭanṭāwī, *Rijāl Min Al-Tārīkh* (Jedda: Dār al-Manāra, 1998), 1:3-4.

²⁷⁴ al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1:7.

²⁷⁵ al-Qāḍī Abū al-Ma'ālī Aṭḥar al-Mubārakbūrī, *Rijāl Al-Sind Wal-Hind* (Bombay: Maṭba' al-Hijāziyya, 1957), 14–15.

²⁷⁶ Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 275.

Ḥayy al-Kattānī (1885-1962) helped perpetuate this practice in the twentieth century through his massive catalog of chains of transmissions, *Fihris al-Fahāris*, and due to his special interest in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Indian scholars in Hijaz that became crucial nodes in a global network of *ḥadīth* scholarship.²⁷⁷ However, information about Indian scholars, including intellectual forebears to the transmitters in the Hijaz, were difficult to find for al-Kattānī. He mentions in his *Fihris* that in 1906 during Hajj he met Abū al-Khayr Aḥmad al-Makkī (d. 1910), a scholar who spent years studying in India and cataloging his teachers in his work *al-Nafḥ al-Miskī*. Realizing that Abū al-Khayr’s catalog was a unique source of information about Indian scholars, he quickly took notes from the catalog in an abridged form.²⁷⁸ Al-Ḥasanī’s *Nuzhat* has helped to fill this knowledge gap for scholars interested in tracing intellectual genealogies that run through India.²⁷⁹

Conclusion

The utilization of *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir* by Arabic-literate audiences interested in India is a testament to the book’s comprehensiveness, use of familiar style, and the lack of similar works in Arabic. This chapter endeavored to explain why and how ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī wrote the monumental eight-volume work, and its differences with both the declining Indo-Persianate mode of historical writing as well as the ascending historicist mode. The chapter argued that al-Ḥasanī’s *Nuzhat* represented a departure from the Indo-Persianate mode of historical writing, with its focus on Sufis, miracles, and shrines, to the Arabo-biographical mode of historical

²⁷⁷ Davidson, 276–85.

²⁷⁸ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī, *Fihris Al-Fahāris* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1982), 2:584-85.

²⁷⁹ See for example the new edition of Muḥammad Muḥsin b. Yaḥyā al-Bakrī al-Taymī al-Tirḥuṭī, *Al-Yānī ‘al-Janī Min Asānīd al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghanī*, ed. Walī al-Dīn Taqī al-Dīn al-Nadwī (Amman, Jordan: Arwiqa lil-dirāsāt wal-nashr, 2016).

writing, with its focus on capturing transmission of learning through generations of scholars. In explaining al-Ḥasanī's interest in writing a history focused on 'ulamā', the chapter touched on various factors that played a role. Local factors included al-Ḥasanī's family background and their interest in historical-writing, the temporal sense of the present as a moment of religious revival initiated in the early nineteenth century, and Muslim sectarianism. Transregional factors included the rise in *ḥadīth* studies in India and the increasing links with non-Indian scholars, such as al-Ḥasanī's Yemeni teacher in Bhopal, Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin. In addition to strengthened ties between teachers and scholars from outside of India, *ḥadīth* studies also contributed to a sense of historical distance mediated by chains of scholars and transmitters across generations.

These factors shaped al-Ḥasanī's historical sensibility as he set out to write a biographical history of eminent Indian Muslims and their contribution to Islamic history more generally. Because of the necessity of tracing the transmission of knowledge over generations, al-Ḥasanī placed a premium on factual details related to time, place, authorship, and biological and intellectual genealogies. He also sought to encompass all of India, and not limit his history to specific regions. This combination of scope and concern distinguished his history from contemporary historicist works and past Persianate works. Prior critiques had been made about the lack of attention towards 'ulamā' and the works they authored, such as by Azād Bilgramī. Yet Bilgramī still employed the *tadhkira* genre to memorialize revered figures and sacralize an urban space under Muslim rule. The Indo-Persianate tradition more broadly helped reinforce a cosmic hierarchy of sultan and saints. Moreover, Manan Ahmed Asif has argued that Indo-Persianate chronicles also presented "accounts of the past as political theory for the present," and thus did not privilege historical accuracy over all other concerns.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*, 68–69.

Through case studies that explored the early history of Muslims in India, the chapter demonstrated al-Ḥasanī's reliance on early Arabic sources, especially those related to *ḥadīth* transmitters, and how this set his work apart from colonial concerns with casting Muslims as foreign invaders. Through al-Ḥasanī's entry on the Sufi saint Niẓām al-Dīn, the chapter showed how al-Ḥasanī ignored later hagiographical works in preference for contemporaneous ones, but also how his selection of information cast the saint as an exemplary Ḥanafī scholar. When writing about Aurangzeb, al-Ḥasanī took up the challenge of identifying the scholars involved in the authoritative legal work *al-Fatāwa al-Hindiyya*. This concern over scholarship and authorship was not present in older Persian works nor in contemporary colonial discourse about the emperor. Finally, in his treatment of 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī and Shāh Ishāq, the chapter highlighted al-Ḥasanī's concern with identifying central nodes in Indian scholarship.

Through studying the work of an *'ālim*-as-historian, this chapter provides a different perspective on South Asian *'ulamā'* and the colonial public sphere. Scholarship on Indian scholars in British India has been overly-focused on reformist and counter-reformist projects and their exclusive claims over normative boundaries of the Islamic tradition. Historians have analyzed fatwas, pamphlets, commentaries, and primers to reveal how the competition between Deobandīs, Barelwīs, and Ahl-i Ḥadīth intensified in their bid to gain public appeal. Al-Ḥasanī was embedded in this sectarian milieu, and his sympathies were clearly with the Deobandīs. Yet he sought to temper the sectarianism both institutionally through the Nadwa, which ultimately failed, and conceptually through his history. Historical writing was thus a practice of power insofar as legitimized specific intellectual traditions as constituting Islamic knowledge, decided who counted as an *'ālim*, and determined their relative importance for the tradition of religious

scholarship.²⁸¹ Of course, historical writing also became instrumental in differentiating each group and defining their own traditions. Greater research is still needed about failed attempts to quell the sectarianism as well as the histories produced from it.

Al-Ḥasanī's critiques of contemporary religious learning notwithstanding, his narrative is not one of civilizational or religious decline but of the continuity of Islamic learning and scholarship. Implicit in the *Nuzhat* and made explicit in his introduction to *al-Thaqāfa* and in his Urdu speeches, al-Ḥasanī viewed his contemporary moment as one of intellectual and religious progress. The movement of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd and Shāh Ismā'īl Shahīd in the early nineteenth century had increased religious observance among Muslims, the intellectual heirs of the movement had established impressive institutions of learning, and *ḥadīth* studies in India had increased in the recent past. The latter two volumes of the *Nuzhat* are filled with references to *ḥadīth* studies and scholarship, including increasing transregional networks. 'Ābid al-Sindi (d.1841), Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq (d. 1846) 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Mujaddidī (d.1878), Raḥmat Allah Kairānwī (d. 1891) all became prominent teachers in the Hijaz and thus central nodes for global Islamic scholarship. He thus presents an optimistic view of Indian history that contrasts with notions of civilizational and religious decline that have received greater coverage by academics. For example, Tareen has recently argued that Shāh Ismā'īl and his intellectual descendants "imagined their role as that of interventionists in history to change its course. Moreover, they authorized this interventionist model of reform by mobilizing a conception of time and history as

²⁸¹ "Recognition of plurality is an act of power; the ability to argue about a given tradition, what kinds of practice and interpretation belong to it, and what is to be excluded from it, is generated within the limits of that tradition." Ananda Abeysekara, "A Review Essay of Joseph Walser's Genealogies of Mahayana Buddhism: Emptiness, Power, and the Question of Origin," *Religious Theory: E-Supplement to the Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 2019, <https://jcr.org/religioustheory/2019/10/23/review-genealogies-of-mahayana-buddhism-ananda-abeysekara/>.

marked by perpetual decline and disjuncture from an original moment of perfection."²⁸² This decidedly was not the case for al-Ḥasanī, whose life's research showed how intellectually vibrant the past century had been.

Although focused on Indian history, al-Ḥasanī sought to write into existence a transregional community of Muslims connected through networks of scholarship and learning. His history thus has implications for scholars interested in notions of a global Muslim community. Al-Ḥasanī's history represents a very different type of transregional Muslim community than described by Seema Alavi in her study of the same period, where imperial rivalries and politics are primarily responsible for producing a "Muslim cosmopolis." Additionally, her characterization of this "Muslim cosmopolis" as encompassing "a universalist Muslim public conduct based on consensus in matters of belief, ritual, and forms of devotion" is incongruent with the pluralistic history of the *Nuzhat*, where the Arabic cosmopolis is characterized by a shared orientation towards learning and knowledge despite differences over rituals and forms of devotion.²⁸³ My reading of al-Ḥasanī's history also contrasts with Muhammad Qasim Zaman's suggestion that al-Ḥasanī was responding to a Muslim identity crisis created by colonialism, and thus wrote in Arabic "as a mark of cultural authenticity," because Indian 'ulamā' began viewing Islam as rooted in the Arab world.²⁸⁴ This chapter's interpretation of the *Nuzhat al-Khwāṭir* also contradicts Manan Ahmed Asif's recent argument that interest in the history of a global Muslim community arose in India only after colonialism uprooted a Persianate legacy of "Hindustan" as a multi-religious space. "Just as the British

²⁸² Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*, 55.

²⁸³ Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire*, 6.

²⁸⁴ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Arabic, the Arab Middle East, and the Definition of Muslim Identity in Twentieth Century India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 8, no. 1 (April 1, 1998): 74–75.

colonial order eliminated Hindustan as a concept over the course of the long nineteenth century, it also gave birth to the ‘Muslim World’ that flourished and took root in the early twentieth century.”²⁸⁵ Alavi, Zaman, and Asif ignore important precedents in Arabic historical writing in India and the desire to chart out intellectual genealogies across time and space by earlier *ḥadīth* scholars. Keeping in mind the cultural formations that shaped al-Ḥasanī’s historical sensibility helps to look beyond the colonial context in explaining his choice to write Arabic histories about Indian scholarship.

Al-Ḥasanī’s *Nuzhat* also demonstrates that despite the rise of historicism in the late nineteenth century, it did not completely replace older forms of Arabic historical writing. Yoav Di-Capua in his study of modern Arabic historiography in Egypt has argued that there was a decisive break in the late nineteenth century when historicism gained dominance and older forms of history were abandoned. He further argues that the creation of a public archive cemented this shift in the early twentieth century.²⁸⁶ However, al-Ḥasanī’s *Nuzhat* is proof that a history of historicism cannot be written as a linear progression slowly replacing all other historiographical traditions. Moreover, al-Ḥasanī utilized modern research libraries in writing his Arabic biographical compendium, indicating that one should be cautious of assuming that modern research institutions necessarily lead towards historicism.

While al-Ḥasanī generally avoided engaging with dominant discourses in the colonial public sphere, it became difficult for Muslim historians to refrain from addressing charges of Muslim foreignness. As anti-colonial movements gained strength and Indian nationalism became widely discussed, ‘*ulamā*’ interested in researching and writing history had to confront both

²⁸⁵ Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India*, 230.

²⁸⁶ Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 11–12, *passim*.

ideologies. The next chapter will show how Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī (1884-1953), a protégé of Shiblī and an admirer of al-Ḥasanī, wrote and published histories to address challenges he perceived Indian Muslims were facing.

Chapter 4:

Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī: Negotiating Indian Nationalism and Islamic History

Introduction

In the last chapter we looked at the salience of Arabic biographical writing in late colonial India through a close examination of ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī’s (d. 1923) eight-volume history of Indian Muslim scholars. This chapter continues to explore the importance of Arabic histories, but with a focus on their utilization in modern Urdu histories of Islam and India through selected works of Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī (1884-1953), one of the earliest and most famous graduates of Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’.

This chapter makes two arguments. First, Sulaymān Nadwī’s historical writings show how historicist notions, such as grounding history in critical readings of primary source texts to differentiate it from legends or myths, became adapted among Indian ‘*ulamā*’ in ways that did not entail the degree of skepticism towards *ḥadīth* that Shiblī had shown. Second, Sulaymān Nadwī’s writings also reveal a greater interest in and critique of the disciplinary practice of history as it came to be institutionalized in Indian universities and academies in the early twentieth century. The chapter thus addresses his adaptation of historicist methods and his critique of their institutionalized form in India.

Together, they demonstrate that for Sulaymān Nadwī, the question of how history should be written was intricately connected to why history should be written and to whom the historian was speaking. Insofar as it became necessary to historicize aspects of the Muslim past and humanize Muslim exemplars for modern Muslim publics, a kind of historicism could be employed. However, Sulaymān Nadwī also believed that claims about history being an impartial search for historical truth belied assumptions about European intellectual superiority among

Indian historians and the various communal agendas that Indian historians supported. In the context of late colonialism in India, Sulaymān Nadwī felt it naïve to embrace history as an objective science. In his estimate, as this chapter will elucidate, claims of historical objectivity entailed leaving Muslims at the mercy of orientalists when they wanted to learn about Islamic history, and it threatened to marginalize Muslims as members of an Indian nation.

Despite Sulaymān Nadwī's prolific writings on Islamic and Indian history in the first half of the twentieth century, he has not received sufficient attention in secondary scholarship. In the sparse coverage he has received, scholars have differed over how similar or different his historical approach was from Shiblī's because they have either focused on his writings related to Indian history, or his writings on early Islamic history. In a chapter on Urdu historiography, A.B.M. Habibullah wrote that Sulaymān Nadwī had "retained the basic ideological pattern of Shiblī's mind," and that "he was the most important historian in Urdu" after Shiblī.¹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, on the other hand, has argued that Sulaymān Nadwī represented a departure from Shiblī's critical approach to Islamic history as he was more interested in using exemplary history for religious reform and less interested in refuting orientalists.² Charles Adams in a chapter analyzing two of Nadwī's essays on sources for the life of the Prophet, produces a more negative assessment. "Of Sulaymān Nadwī's erudition there can be no doubt, but it does not reflect a historical consciousness."³ These differing judgments are in large part a result of not considering

¹ A.B.M. Habibullah, "Historical Writing in Urdu: A Survey of Tendencies," in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C.H. Philips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 492.

² Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "A Venture in Critical Islamic Historiography and the Significance of Its Failure," *Numen* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 35.

³ Charles Adams, "Al-Wāqidī, the Orientalists, and Apologetics," in *Consciousness & Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu*, ed. Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, Hideichi Matsubara, Takashi Iwami, Akiro Matsumoto (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 29.

the multiple audiences Sulaymān Nadwī addressed, and the differing approaches he used for each.

The chapter will begin with a short overview of Sulaymān Nadwī's life to situate him in relation to Nadwat al-'Ulamā', the school he studied at and then taught at, and Dār al-Muṣannifīn, the publishing and research academy he co-founded. It will also situate him intellectually in relation to pan-Islamic and nationalist movements in India. After this overview, the chapter will proceed to analyze Sulaymān Nadwī's historical approaches by looking at the different audiences he addressed. This will broadly follow a chronological order, beginning with his historical writings about the Qur'an and the Prophet primarily for Sunnī Muslims. Then, an exploration of histories for wider Indian audiences that included Hindus and non-Sunnī Muslims will be explored through his writings on Indian history. Finally, the third section will explore his writings addressing professional Indian historians, as well as his writings about them.

Biographical Overview

This brief overview of Sulaymān Nadwī will summarize his formative education, his institution building, involvement in Pan-Islamic causes, and caution against making assumptions about his stance on the creation of Pakistan. One should avoid reading into his historical oeuvre an ideological justification for Pakistan, the country to which he moved near the end of his life.

Born in a village near Patna, Bihar in 1884 to a family of Sufi physicians, Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī enrolled in Nadwat al-'Ulamā' in 1901 to complete his higher education. His early studies at and association with Nadwat al-'Ulamā', from where he graduated in 1907, exposed him to two influences that shaped his historical sensibility. The first was an interest in Arabic biographical histories, especially ones associated with *ḥadīth* studies. And the second was Shiblī's introduction to modern European historical works. Before meeting Shiblī, Sulaymān

Nadwī was engrossed in *ḥadīth* studies, which, in his own words, “led him to read works on *ḥadīth* transmitters [*rijāl*], which in turn led him to history.”⁴ He considered Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s (d. 1824) *Bustān al-Muhaddithīn*, al-Dhahabī’s (d. 748/1348) *Tadhkirat al-Huffāz*, and Ibn Khallikān’s (d. 681/1282) *Wafayāt al-‘Ayān* as the most memorable biographical histories during his formative phase at Nadwa. In addition to the above biographical histories, he also took interest in two bibliographical works, *Kashf al-Zunūn* of Ḥājī Khalīfa (d. 1657) and *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 385/995). Much like ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, *ḥadīth* studies stimulated Sulaymān Nadwī’s interest in history.

Shiblī, however, opened new historical vistas through introducing him to European historical works and approaches. He encouraged Sulaymān Nadwī to engage with European scholarship and approaches in his own writing. One example is Shiblī calling the young protégé’s attention to orientalist efforts in editing and publishing Arabic books. He singled out William McGuckin Baron de Slane’s (d. 1878) publication of Ibn Khallikān’s *Wafayāt al-‘Ayān* in 1842 after painstakingly searching and comparing manuscripts to determine authenticity. He further commended de Slane’s insightful introduction to the English translation. He had it translated into Urdu and published in the *al-Nadwa* journal in 1908 as an example of the “critical reading style of European scholars” as opposed to the superficial way in which Muslims read the same texts.⁵ Sulaymān Nadwī, who was working as an assistant editor for the journal, responded

⁴ Muḥammad ‘Imrān Khān Nadwī, ed., *Mashāhīr Ahl-i-‘ilm Kī Muḥsin Kitābeṅ* (Lucknow: Idārahe Iḥyā-e ‘Ilm-o-Davat, 2013), 32.

⁵ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, “Ibn Khallikān Awr Yūrap,” *Al-Nadwa* 5, no. 8 (September 1908): 13–14, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/al-nadwa-shumara-number-008-habibur-rahman-khan-sharvani-shibli-nomani-magazines-2>.

with his own essay about the historiographical importance of the book, which Shiblī also published in October and November of 1908.⁶

Shiblī also imparted the importance of studying pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabic literature, leading to a greater appreciation for historical anachronisms detectable through linguistic analysis. Before Shiblī’s arrival, his Arabic teachers at Nadwa, which included ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, had not taught Arabic literature from the earliest centuries of Islam.⁷ In one of his earliest essays for *al-Nadwa* not long after Shiblī’s arrival, Sulaymān Nadwī wrote about the history of Arabic in India. He noted that a decline in studying Arabic literature took place during the Mughal period. As a result, statements purporting to be from early Islamic figures circulated even among the most learned Muslim scholars despite the style of Arabic indicating a much later time of origin. For Sulaymān Nadwī, this indicated that Indian Muslim scholars were not sufficiently familiar with the linguistic history of Arabic and the changes it had undergone.⁸

Dār al-Muṣannifīn

Sulaymān Nadwī’s appreciation of Shiblī continued after his mentor’s death as he attempted to fulfill Shiblī’s vision of a Muslim academy devoted to supporting research and publication. Sulaymān Nadwī had been working as a professor of Arabic and Persian at Patna College since 1913. When Shiblī passed away in 1914, he resigned and moved to Azamgarh to establish the Dār al-Muṣannifīn with Shiblī’s other close disciples.

Shiblī had initially imagined the Dār al-Muṣannifīn as a research institute that would be part of the Nadwa seminary in Lucknow. It would include a research library housing books in

⁶ Nadwī, *Mashāhīr Ahl-i-‘ilm Kī Muḥsin Kitābeḥ*, 33, 227N12.

⁷ Nadwī, 33.

⁸ Sulaymān Nadwī, “‘Arabiyyat Awr Hindustān,” *Al-Nadwa* 2 (January 1905): 38–39.

multiple languages to be used by Nadwa's students, staff, as well as researchers from outside Nadwa. Additionally, Shiblī would help train and guide recent graduates from other madrasas in conducting research. However, after his resignation from Nadwa in 1913, Nadwa's leadership was not interested in the project. Hence, he decided to establish the academy in his hometown on his family's land which he endowed for the institute.

While many of Shiblī's friends and disciples were involved in establishing Dār al-Muṣannifīn, the three leading figures were Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī (1863-1930), Mas'ūd 'Alī Nadwī (1889-1967), and Sulaymān Nadwī. Farāhī was Shiblī's nephew, a graduate of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh, and the proponent of a new thematic approach to Qur'anic exegesis.⁹ Farāhī was appointed as president, and he used his family links in Azamgarh to secure neighboring property for the institute, his relationship with the government of Hyderabad to transfer Shiblī's monthly pension to the institute, and his knowledge of British Indian bureaucracy to legally register Dār al-Muṣannifīn as an institute.¹⁰ Mas'ūd 'Alī Nadwī, one of Shiblī's closest students from Nadwa, was appointed as manager and was responsible with overseeing the construction of buildings, maintenance of the property, and the running of the printing press.¹¹

Sulaymān Nadwī became the director [*nāẓim*]. He took up the task of editing and publishing Shiblī's *Sīrat al-nabī*, building a library, writing articles in the Urdu press to publicize the new institute, appeal for additional funding, and launching and editing a monthly journal,

⁹ Kamran Bashir, *The Qur'an in South Asia: Hermeneutics, Qur'an Projects, and Imaginings of Islamic Tradition in British India* (London: Routledge, 2021), 163–99, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003185208>; Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Kalīm Ṣifāt Iṣlāhī, *Dār al-muṣannifīn ke sau sāl*, Shiblī ṣadī maṭbū'āt; (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣannifīn, 2014), 11–15.

¹¹ Iṣlāhī, 100–101.

Ma'ārif, which remains in circulation today.¹² He also set the intellectual agenda for the Dār al-Muṣannifīn's numerous projects in the early twentieth century.

As a Muslim research academy, the founders of Dār al-Muṣannifīn envisioned a role for it distinct from the dār al-ʿulūm madrasas sprouting across India devoted to studying standardized curriculums with experts of religion. The Dār al-Muṣannifīn was a novel institution in the Indian Muslim landscape because of its focus on promoting and publicizing research. The overall goals of the institution were to support Muslim researchers by providing them with funding, lodging, and a research library, so they in turn could aid in the progress [*taraqqī*] of Indian nation [*mulk*] and Muslim community [*millat*] through Urdu publications. Additionally, the institution aimed to preserve a Muslim scholarly heritage that had been ignored and was in danger of being forgotten.¹³

In outlining the necessity of the institute, Sulaymān Nadwī elucidated that high quality scholarship requires an investment of resources, including funding to free up time for researchers from employment, availability of books and sources, a space for long-term studying and writing, an intellectual collegial climate to exchange and discuss ideas, and the means to publish one's findings and writings.¹⁴ Sulaymān Nadwī distinguishes between writers of essays and tracts [*maḍmūn nigār/ inshā pardāz*], and authors [*muṣannif*], stating that most Urdu writers fall into the former category and thus do not produce substantial monographs.¹⁵ The lack of time and resources make it difficult to spend years researching and writing on a specific topic. Moreover,

¹² Shāh Muʿīn al-Dīn Aḥmad Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i sulaymān* (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣannifīn, 1973), 67–105.

¹³ Nadwī, 105.

¹⁴ Nadwī, 101–2.

¹⁵ Nadwī, 100–101.

the emphasis on research suggested intellectual innovation, especially through the discovering or utilizing new sources.

Furthermore, researchers would write not for a specialized audience of *'ulamā'*, but for an Urdu public. The goal of writing original and scholarly works in Urdu also differentiated the scholars of Dār al-Muṣannifīn from many other *'ulamā'* in India. Zaman has shown how Indian *'ulamā'* during the late colonial period preferred to write in Arabic to bolster their scholarly authority, especially when producing commentaries on works of *ḥadīth* that also functioned as forums for intra-Muslim polemics. These “elitist” works were mainly addressed to other *'ulamā'*.¹⁶ Urdu commentaries by contrast were meant for non-scholarly audiences and thus presented more simplified teachings of Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. This strategy enabled the *'ulamā'* to adapt the premodern “distinctions between a general and specialized audience,” in colonial and post-colonial South Asia.¹⁷ Ingram has similarly demonstrated that when *'ulamā'* of Deoband began recognizing the importance of an Urdu public in the late nineteenth century, they started writing simple religious primers that elucidated basic teachings but also reinforced the authority of *'ulamā'* as religious guides.¹⁸ In addition to primers and simplified commentaries, Urdu also served as the medium of heated polemical exchange.¹⁹

Sulaymān Nadwī thus offers an interesting case study of a prominent *'ālim* in early twentieth-century India whose religious authority did not rest on showcasing his expertise in the

¹⁶ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 40.

¹⁷ Zaman, 58.

¹⁸ Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland: Univ of California Press, 2018), 101–15.

¹⁹ Ingram, 97–101.

scholarly tradition through Arabic commentaries or polemical tracts, but rather mainly through historical works in Urdu. Furthermore, while Sulaymān Nadwī may be the most famous representative of the Dār al-Muṣannifīn, it should be kept in mind that his preference for Urdu historical writing is representative of this institution which retains a wide readership even today.

In December 1916, Sulaymān Nadwī wrote a description of the library of the Dār al-Muṣannifīn for in *Ma‘ārif* as part of a fundraising effort. The description illuminates not only the function that Nadwī intended for the library, but also how Dār al-Muṣannifīn’s goals were similar to other modern efforts in both India and the Arab world to discover, collect, and/or publish aspects of Muslim intellectual heritage that had been forgotten or marginalized. The library housed English works, including many encyclopedias such as the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, as well as numerous works about Islam. However, Nadwī wrote that the library still needed to grow its collection of English books to include more subjects. His calling attention to English sources is noteworthy considering the opposition to studying English among many contemporary Deobandī ‘*ulamā*’.²⁰ The Persian collection was small, but it would grow once they procured publications from the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The Arab collection was the largest, featuring, according to Sulaymān Nadwī, most of the known published books of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, and biographical dictionaries. His source for publications were unnamed European catalogs [*kātalāg*] that provided updates of recently published books. Based on these, there were some histories that the library needed but would soon acquire. In contrast to the large collection of published works, there were very few manuscripts held by the library.²¹

²⁰ Ingram, 52–53.

²¹ Sulaymān Nadwī, “Khawāb-i Tamannā: Dār al-Muṣannifīn Kā Mutakhayyala A‘māl,” *Ma‘ārif* 1, no. 3 (September 1916): 7–9.

The founders of Dār al-Muṣannifin were keenly aware of a global expansion in knowledge production and positioned the institute as a mediator between the Urdu public sphere and the global intellectual world. They viewed the project as a necessary corrective to the narrow focus on madrasas on post-classical commentaries [*shurūḥ wa ḥawāshī*] and lack of encouragement to search out books beyond the curriculum.²² The founders viewed the institute contributing to an expansion of Muslim intellectual horizons [*khayālāt kī tawsī‘-o-tawdīḥ*]. Their goals were comparable to Arab Muslim reformers like Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) and Ṭāhir al-Jazā’irī (1851-1920), for whom “the rediscovery of literary, historical, ethical, and encyclopedic works as well as advice literature was a priority, reflecting their belief in the capacity of such books to raise the public’s moral and linguistic standards and thus to contribute to societal improvement.”²³ However, Sulaymān Nadwī and his colleagues were comparatively less interested in taking the initiative in searching, editing, and publishing rare manuscripts. Instead, they put more emphasis on synthesizing the large Arabic collection of recently discovered and published works held by the library to produce Urdu monographs that were scholarly but also appropriate for an Urdu public. Often this would entail utilizing the works of European authors and Muslim works printed by European publishers.

A second related goal was translating books originally in Arabic and European languages that would support the goal of intellectual advancement into Urdu. In his 1916 article introducing the library, Sulaymān Nadwī mentioned that one of the first translations the institute had undertaken was of Le Bon’s *Les Lois psychologiques de l’évolution des peuples* (The

²² Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī* (Azamgarh: Dar al-Mussannifin, 2008), 35–36.

²³ Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), 172.

Psychological Laws of the Evolution of Peoples, 1894).²⁴ The Urdu translation shows the importance of Egypt as a mediator of European works as well as the ways in which its Urdu translator positioned him as an authoritative mediator. ‘Abd al-Salām Nadwī (1883-1956), another disciple of Shiblī, translated the French book into Urdu from the 1913 Arabic translation done by the Egyptian Aḥmad Fathī Zaghlūl (1863-1914), brother of nationalist leader Sa‘d Zaghlūl (1859-1927), *Sirr taṭawwur al-umam* (The Secret of the Evolution of Nations).²⁵ Zaghlūl had glossed over Le Bon’s message of immutable racial hierarchies that made Europeans superior by using the term *umma* for race.²⁶ ‘Abd al-Salām Nadwī translated the book as *Falsafa ‘urūj-o-zawāl-i aqwām* (The Philosophy of Rise and Decline of Communities, 1916). He added a thirty-page introduction in which he compared Le Bon’s ideas – as he encountered them in Arabic – with the ideas about the rise and decline of communities [*qawm*] of Ibn Khaldūn and Shāh Walī Allāh, arguing that Le Bon’s book was a more detailed version of the ideas found in the works of the Muslim authors. ‘Abd al-Salām Nadwī highlighted that the main theme for Muslim readers was that progress and decline only happen when there are fundamental changes in the psychological characteristics [*mīzāj-i ‘aqlī*] of a people.²⁷ For the translator, this is aligned with the verse from the Qur’an “God does not change the circumstances of a people until they change what is within themselves” (13:11).²⁸ With this framing, the book became an argument

²⁴ Nadwī, “Khawāb-i Tamannā: Dār al-Muṣannifin Kā Mutakhayyala A‘māl,” 10.

²⁵ Samah Selim, “Languages of Civilization,” *The Translator* 15, no. 1 (April 1, 2009): 140, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2009.10799274>.

²⁶ Selim, 151.

²⁷ ‘Abd al-Salām Nadwī, *Falsafa ‘urūj-o-Zawāl-i Aqwām* (Lahore: Takhlīqāt, 1998), 15.

²⁸ Nadwī, 17.

about the necessity of moral reformation that Muslims must undergo if they wanted to progress as a community.

As mentioned, discovering, editing, and publishing rare manuscripts was not a priority. Libraries such as the Khudā Baksh Library mentioned in the last chapter focused much of their efforts in obtaining manuscripts while the Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif in Hyderabad worked to edit and publish rare Arabic manuscripts. However, one of the few Arabic manuscripts that the Dār al-Muṣannifīn staff helped edit and publish was Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Radd 'Alā al-Manṭiqiyīn* (The Refutation of Greek Logicians). Although published for the first time in 1949 by 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. Sharīf al-Dīn (1901-1996), an Indian editor and publisher of Arabic books in Mumbai not formally affiliated with Dār al-Muṣannifīn, it included an introduction by Sulaymān Nadwī that continues to be reproduced in more recent editions.²⁹ Part of the introduction details the history of the manuscript, an original copy dictated by Ibn Taymiyya to a student, and how it came to India from Yemen thanks to Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, was transferred to the Āsafīyya Library in Hyderabad, and rediscovered by Shiblī who had pushed for its publication. Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī had worked on editing a copy of the manuscript by adding chapter titles. He then gave it to Sulaymān Nadwī to complete. Sulaymān Nadwī in turn delegated the task to one of the Dār al-Muṣannifīn staff. Sulaymān Nadwī hoped to send the edited manuscript to Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif for publication. When they were unable to publish it, Sulaymān Nadwī gave it to 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. Sharīf al-Dīn to finish editing it and to publish it.³⁰

Although different in its objectives from religious seminaries, the Dār al-Muṣannifīn was not a rival institution to madrasas. Sulaymān Nadwī hoped to work with them, especially with

²⁹ Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-mantiqiyīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Ṣamad Sharaf al-Dīn al-Kutubī (Beirut: Mu'assisat al-Rayyān, 2005), 15–20.

³⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah, 18–20.

Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’. He looked to graduates of his alma mater to fill the roles of authors [muṣannifīn] as well as research fellows, for which the Urdu term *rufaḳā’* was used interchangeably with the Urdu transliteration of “fellow.”³¹ Research fellowships were designed for recent madrasa graduates to gain experience with research by staying on campus and working under Sulaymān Nadwī’s guidance. A summary of some early fellows and the projects they worked on will be helpful in understanding some of the early historical interests that Sulaymān Nadwī pursued through the institution.

The first research fellow was Ḥājī Mu‘īn al-Dīn Nadwī (1891-1941), whom Sulaymān Nadwī tasked with inaugurating the *Siyar al-Ṣahāba* project. This was a multi-volume Urdu series on the lives of the Prophet’s Companions, the generation after the Companions, and the generation after them based on Arabic *ḥadīth* compilations, biographical dictionaries, and Arabic chronicles. No such work existed in Urdu. After completing the first volume on the first four “Rightly-Guided” Caliphs, Ḥājī Mu‘īn al-Dīn Nadwī left to become the librarian of Nadwa, and then the librarian for the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta.³² The *Siyar al-Ṣahāba* was ultimately completed by other authors and research fellows. Many of the latter followed Ḥājī Mu‘īn al-Dīn Nadwī’s career trajectory in ultimately working for secular institutions of research and learning rather than returning to teach at madrasas.

In addition to researching early Islamic history, Sulaymān Nadwī also wanted researchers to work on Indian history. One result of this focus was the publication of *Ruḳ‘āt-i ‘Ālamgīr* (1926), a critical collection of Aurangzeb’s letters until the beginning of his reign by Najīb Ashraf Nadwī (1901-1968). He also wrote a separate introductory volume, *Muḳaddima Ruḳ‘āt*,

³¹ Nadwī, *Hayāt-i Sulaymān*, 4.

³² Iṣlāḥī, *Dār al-muṣannifīn ke sau sāl*, 115.

which provided a history of letter writing in Arabic and Persian, summarized the historical importance of the various letters, and showed that the demonization of Aurangzeb as an exceptionally cruel brother and son were ill-founded. Sulaymān Nadwī had initially assigned this project to an earlier research fellow, but his untimely death delayed the project. When Najīb Ashraf Nadwī became a research fellow in 1921, Sulaymān Nadwī tasked him with completing it. Najīb Ashraf Nadwī had been a student at Nadwa, but when Shiblī resigned in 1913, he also left in protest. While at Dār al-Muṣannifīn, Sulaymān Nadwī also advised him to return to school to complete his education, so he enrolled at Calcutta University and earned his B.A. in history in 1924, and a masters in Persian in 1926. The University’s Vice Chancellor was Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1870-1958), considered the foremost expert on Aurangzeb at the time. Sarkar gave access Najīb Ashraf access to his personal library of manuscripts, without which the *Ruq‘āt* could not have been completed.³³

Another early project that did not pan out, however, was Sulaymān Nadwī’s Urdu encyclopedia. He wanted to publish an encyclopedia with original articles written in Urdu by specialists in various fields and inclusive of different religions. He wrote in *Ma‘ārif* in 1917 about the project to solicit support and volunteers. However, it was too ambitious of a project, and ultimately, he was forced to abandon it.³⁴ One of his earliest fellows, and one that was not a Nadwa graduate, Sa‘īd Anṣārī (1894-1962), would later work on Punjab University’s Urdu encyclopedia after he moved to Pakistan.³⁵ While still a research fellow at Dār al-Muṣannifīn in

³³ Muḥammad Ilyās. al-A‘zamī, *Dār al-Muṣannifīn Kī Tārīkhī Khidmāt* (Patna: Khudā Bakhsh Oriyanṭal Pablik Lā’ibrerī, 2002), 326–37.

³⁴ Nadwī, *Hayāt-i Sulaymān*, 113–20.

³⁵ Iṣlāhī, *Dār al-muṣannifīn ke sau sāl*, 116.

1917, Anṣārī also was accepted into the Arabic Literary Association of London,³⁶ which had been established a year earlier with D.S. Margoliouth, Professor of Arabic at Oxford University, as the first president.³⁷ As these early examples of Dār al-Muṣannifīn's project shows, the institution's affiliates maintained connections with intellectuals both transregionally and locally.

Pan-Islamism and Nationalism

While Sulaymān Nadwī remained the director of Dār al-Muṣannifīn until 1949, selecting research fellows, organizing projects, and writing articles and monthly editorials [*shadharāt*] for *Ma'ārif*, he also supported pan-Islamic and anti-colonial politics. In 1919, he joined the Khilafat Movement to urge the British government to preserve the Ottoman Caliphate and not divide up Ottoman lands. Among the leaders of the Khilafat Movement were Muḥammad 'Ālī Jawhar (1878-1931), his brother Shawkat 'Alī (1873-1938), and Abū Kalām Azād. The first two were students and admirers of Shiblī since their days as students in Aligarh, and Abū Kalām Azād had worked closely with Shiblī as an assistant editor of the *al-Nadwa* journal. While the three shared a mutual admiration for Shiblī with Sulaymān Nadwī, they were not madrasa-trained '*ulamā*'. The same year as the founding of the Khilafat Movement, the Jam'iyyat al-'Ulamā' was founded to help '*ulamā*' have greater influence in Indian politics. Sulaymān Nadwī joined the organization as well. The Jam'iyyat supported the goals of the Khilafat movement, publishing *The Unanimous Fatwa of the Indian 'Ulamā'* in 1920 that stated it was permissible for Muslims and non-Muslims to have friendly relations and political alliances.³⁸

³⁶ Iṣlāhī, 117.

³⁷ Samuel Marinus Zwemer, ed., *The Moslem World* (Nile Mission Press, 1916), 432.

³⁸ Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 121.

After the failure of the Khilafat Movement to preserve the Ottoman Caliphate, the leadership turned its attention to saving the Hijaz from British control. In 1924, Nadwī was part of a delegation sent to the Hijaz to try to end the hostilities between ‘Abd al ‘Azīz al-Su‘ūd (1875-1953) and King Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (1879–1935). The delegates were supposed to press both sides to end their claims on the Hijaz and allow democratic [*jumhūrī*] governance since the land was sacred to all Muslims.³⁹ Unsurprisingly, Nadwī and the other delegates failed.⁴⁰ Sulaymān Nadwī returned in 1926 to take part in a world Muslim congress at Mecca that was meant to decide the fate of the sacred cities. However, like the earlier trip, Nadwī and his Indian colleagues failed to convince ‘Abd al ‘Azīz to relinquish control.⁴¹ After the failures of the Khilafat movement, Sulaymān Nadwī took a less active role in politics.

He nonetheless remained interested in the affairs of non-Indian Muslims and maintained transregional links. Thus, in his capacity as Dean of Education at Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, he invited the Moroccan Salafī Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī (1893-1987) to teach Arabic.⁴² Al-Hilālī accepted and taught at the seminary in Lucknow from 1930-1933.⁴³ Nadwī also travelled to Afghanistan in 1933 at the request of King Nadir Shah (1883-1933) to discuss the future of Kabul University.⁴⁴ In addition to educational concerns, Sulaymān Nadwī continued expressing political views about

³⁹ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 193.

⁴⁰ M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 399.

⁴¹ Qureshi, 400.

⁴² Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 235–36.

⁴³ Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 105–6.

⁴⁴ Nile Green, “The Trans-Border Traffic of Afghan Modernism: Afghanistan and the Indian ‘Urdusphere,’” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 03 (July 2011): 479–508.

non-Indian Muslims that In 1936, he gave a speech against British policy in Palestine at a conference in Delhi,⁴⁵ which the British attempted to censor especially in the Arab press.⁴⁶

While the specifics of Sulaymān Nadwī's political views are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to clarify that he was not an unambiguous supporter of the Muslim League's push to create Pakistan, and one should not read into his historical writings ideological support for a separate Muslim nation because of his decision to eventually move to Pakistan. He did not take a clear public stance in the way some contemporary 'ulamā' did on the question of Pakistan. For example, Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī (1879-1957), the principal of Deoband, argued for a form of 'composite nationalism' of an undivided Indian state, while his political opponent and fellow Deobandī scholar Zafar Aḥmad Uthmānī (1892-1974) argued for the creation of an Islamic state for Indian Muslims.⁴⁷ Despite the lack of an explicit stance on Pakistan, Venkat Dhulipala has argued that Sulaymān Nadwī provided religious support for the Muslim League's territorial vision of an Islamic state in the Indian subcontinent. "While Nadwi had a cordial and longstanding relationship with Nehru and other Congress nationalists, he supported the ML's push for Pakistan, especially if it were established according to Islamic laws."⁴⁸

As will be seen below, Sulaymān Nadwī's historical writings on India indicate that he continued to hold out hope for improved relations between Hindus and Muslims in India in the 1940s. Furthermore, even after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Sulaymān Nadwī did not want to

⁴⁵ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 355.

⁴⁶ Giora Goodman, "British Press Control in Palestine during the Arab Revolt, 1936—39," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 4 (August 8, 2015): 704, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2014.982413>.

⁴⁷ Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, 31–50.

⁴⁸ Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 232, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107280380>.

move to Pakistan and instead chose to move to the autonomous state of Bhopal to oversee religious affairs as *Qāḍī al-quḍāt* while remaining the director of Dār al-Muṣannifīn.⁴⁹ He also did not leave Bhopal to move to Pakistan when the Pakistani government invited him to lead a subcommittee to advise in the drafting of a new constitution.⁵⁰ When Bhopal became absorbed into the Indian Union in 1949, the elderly Sulaymān Nadwī wavered between staying in India or moving to Pakistan. His numerous letters to close friends reveal ambivalence about continuing to oversee the Dār al-Muṣannifīn in India, or moving to Pakistan where his children lived, as his numerous letters to his close friends reveal.⁵¹ Ultimately, it seems that his daughter falling ill in Karachi finally prompted him to move there to be closer with his children and their families.⁵² Sulaymān Nadwī remained in Pakistan in the final years of his life, and passed away in 1953. Nevertheless, the unfounded assumption that Sulaymān Nadwī supported the Muslim League’s “push for Pakistan” should not be read into his historical writings on Islam and India.

We now turn to analyzing selected historical writings of Sulaymān Nadwī, the approaches he adopted, and the audiences he addressed.

Historicizing Narratives and Context of the Qur’an

Sulaymān Nadwī’s first book was a two-volume work titled *Tārīkh arḍ al-qur’ān* (History of the Land of the Qur’an) that was published in 1915 by Dār al-Muṣannifīn. The book makes clear Sulaymān Nadwī’s concern with European historical scholarship about Islam. He lamented that European scholars had become authorities for Muslims about Islamic history

⁴⁹ Nadwī, *Hayāt-i Sulaymān*, 411.

⁵⁰ Nadwī, 453.

⁵¹ Nadwī, 456–59.

⁵² Nadwī, 459.

because European scholarship not only posed a potential threat to normative Islamic beliefs, but also because the authority given to their scholarship represented a kind of intellectual colonization. Orientalists such as Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) argued that Qur'anic narratives about pre-Islamic communities were mere legends and not grounded in historical truth, which Sulaymān Nadwī took exception to. Reverend Charles Forster (d. 1871), a Christian apologist, wrote more favorably about Muslims, but Sulaymān Nadwī saw no need for Muslims to consider his works, riddled as they are with errors, an authority about their own history. Beyond Nöldeke and Forster, Christian missionaries argued that Qur'an was riddled with historical inaccuracies in their polemics against Islam. Sulaymān Nadwī thus believed that a history of Arabs and the lands they inhabited written by a Muslim was necessary both as a theological defense for Islam and as an intellectual defense against colonial hegemony.⁵³

Sulaymān Nadwī felt it was necessary for Muslim writers who wanted to write about historical topics that had been the subject of European scholarship to employ a historicist approach in researching and writing. According to him, premodern Muslim authors who had written about ancient history relied mainly on unreliable oral narratives, whereas modern European scholars had utilized Greek and Roman sources, archeological findings, and Arabic sources. The latter group's research was clearly superior, and thus Muslim scholars could not rely on simply translating premodern sources into Urdu. They would have to widen their research to match European efforts.⁵⁴

To that end, he devoted the first fifty pages of his book to a critical historiographical overview of the sources available for a history of pre-Islamic Arabian communities from

⁵³ Sulaymān Nadwī, *Tārīkh arḍ Al-qur'ān*, n.d., 9–10.

⁵⁴ Nadwī, 9.

antiquity to the beginning of Islam. He divided his sources into four categories: Muslim sources, Jewish sources, Greek and Roman sources, and archeological discoveries.⁵⁵ Muslim sources included Qur'anic commentaries, Arab genealogical books, pre-Islamic poetry, and histories of Arabs.

He was generally critical of most of these sources, however. For example, Qur'anic commentaries about pre-Islamic communities usually rely on unnamed Jewish sources [*Isrā'īliyyāt*].⁵⁶ Histories of Arabs were written down in the third Islamic century, and aside from the temporal gap between them and the subjects they covered, many were no longer extant. European orientalists however had taken the lead in searching out, editing, and publishing some of these early Arabic sources, such as the *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-'Arab* (Description of the Arabian Peninsula) by the tenth-century geographer and historian al-Ḥamdānī (d. c. 334/945), published in Leiden in 1884.⁵⁷ When reviewing sources and evidence from the latter three categories, Sulaymān Nadwī relied on English works and translations, with occasional utilization of French works for which he received help from friend who was a professor at Mumbai University.⁵⁸ His main source for the section reviewing archeological discoveries was the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which provided summaries of relevant archeological discoveries made by Europeans since the sixteenth century.

In synthesizing information from all four categories, Sulaymān Nadwī argues that while the Muslim sources need to be read critically, they should not be completely dismissed as some

⁵⁵ Nadwī, 13.

⁵⁶ Nadwī, 14.

⁵⁷ Nadwī, 16–17.

⁵⁸ Nadwī, 11.

orientalists had argued. For example, he believed that although Arab genealogical works were problematic, they were not useless as historical sources, contrary to what Nöldeke claimed.⁵⁹ Sulaymān Nadwī often compared information in genealogical books with other sources rather than writing them off completely. Thus, in discussing the tribal lineages of the Aws and Khazraj, the Arab tribes that inhabited Medina during the life of the Prophet, he deemed credible sources that stated the tribes were related to the north Arabian Ghassānids.⁶⁰ However, he disagreed with all Arab genealogical books in arguing that these tribes were not originally South Arabian, but rather were descendants of the Nabateans, an ancient Arab group that became absorbed into the Roman Empire around the beginning of the first millennium of the common era.⁶¹ While recognizing that Arab historians and genealogists did not consider Nabateans Arabs,⁶² he nonetheless disagreed based on the accounts of Greek historians, such as Flavius Josephus (d. c. 100), who wrote they were Arabs. Moreover, Sulaymān Nadwī also found support from *ḥadīth* and statements from early Muslims that had been ignored by many Arab genealogists. These reports suggested for Sulaymān Nadwī that some early Arab Muslims believed they were descendant from Nabateans.⁶³

He also reconciled between Muslim sources and non-Muslim sources when the details differed by extrapolating a common theme. For example, he devoted large sections of his book to discussing the religious context of pre-Islamic Arabia in the fifth and sixth centuries immediately

⁵⁹ Nadwī, 1: 23-24.

⁶⁰ Nadwī, 2: 69.

⁶¹ Nadwī, 2: 63-65.

⁶² Nadwī, 2: 46.

⁶³ Nadwī, 2:63-64.

before Islam. In arguing for a climate of religious polemics, he provided two anecdotes, one from Muslims sources and another from Christian sources about pre-Islamic Yemen. The Christian sources told of a religious debate between Jews and Christians after the destruction of the Himyarite Kingdom of Jews in Yemen by the Christian Aksum Kingdom. During the debate, lightning flashed in the sky, and a crowned Jesus emerged, blinding all Jews present. While this story did not exist in Arabic sources, Sulaymān Nadwī mentioned reports of a debate between Jews and polytheists in Yemen, where the polytheists were burned by a flame that exploded out of a cave, while the Rabbis remained safe. Sulaymān Nadwī viewed a similar narrative motif in the two anecdotes' use of a lightening and fire destroying their opponents. This indicated for him the prevalence of religious polemics among different monotheists and polytheists.⁶⁴ He thus built on diverse sources to present the beginning of Islam occurring in a broader late antique context of imperial and religious rivalries.

When discussing the more ancient history of antiquity, Sulaymān Nadwī was on much shakier grounds. He reproduces European racial thinking by quoting Europeans, among them William Robertson Smith (d. 1894) and Nöldeke, that Arabs represented a 'purer' [*khālīs*] Semitic group than other Semitic groups.⁶⁵ Similarly, in attempting to historicize Qur'anic communities such as the 'Ād, he assumed that as Semitic predecessors to Arabs, their ancient history said something about all later Arabs. Robert Irwin in his study of orientalist has shown that Smith and Nöldeke held Arabs in low regard. "Smith treated the Arabs of the desert as fascinating barbarians, but Nöldeke did not think that they were as barbarous as all that. He was

⁶⁴ Nadwī, 1: 254-255.

⁶⁵ Nadwī, 1: 95.

a fierce Prussian nationalist and racial bigot.”⁶⁶ Nöldeke also wrote that Arab history and geography showed they could not attain the same cultural and civilizational achievements as Indo-Europeans.⁶⁷

Sulaymān Nadwī’s extensive discussion of ‘Ād is aimed at proving that Arabs also boasted an impressive history in antiquity. Stating that ‘Ād were an ancient Semitic group that existed between 2200 BCE and 1500 BCE,⁶⁸ he proceeded to argue that the empires of Hyskos in Egypt, Assyria, Phoenicia, and Carthage should all be subsumed under the category of ‘Ād on account of their Semitic origins.⁶⁹ In making this move, Sulaymān Nadwī had to argue against the popular view among Muslims that the ‘Ād were an ancient race of giants, based on an interpretation of Qur’an 7:69 that states God increased them mightily in stature. Sulaymān Nadwī argued instead that the verse meant they were great builders, which aligns with the historical record of the great kingdoms and civilizations that he thought comprised the people of ‘Ād.⁷⁰ The ‘Ād ultimately suffered divine wrath for their arrogance and disobedience. Sulaymān Nadwī nonetheless argued that they were a historical group as well as ancestors of Arabs that built great civilizations. This was an attempt to disprove claims that Qur’anic narratives lacked historical merits as well as notions of Arabs as an inferior race.

The lengthy discussion of *Tārīkh arḍ al-qur’ān* above demonstrates not only that Sulaymān Nadwī wrote about the past with present concerns in mind, but more importantly that

⁶⁶ Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (New York: Overlook Press, 2006), 198.

⁶⁷ Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, “‘Arab Invasion’ and Decline, or the Import of European Racial Thought by Iranian Nationalists,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 6 (May 12, 2014): 1050, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2012.734389>.

⁶⁸ Nadwī, *Tārīkh arḍ Al-qur’ān*, 1: 110-111.

⁶⁹ Nadwī, 1: 110-145.

⁷⁰ Nadwī, 1: 146-47.

he afforded history such seriousness as to require earnest research in multiple languages and genres. Shedding light on the historicity of Qur'anic narratives, as well as uncovering the larger late antique historical context of the Qur'an became important strategy in religious apologetics in defense of Islam. It also allowed Sulaymān Nadwī to plot Qur'anic history on to a universal linear history and thus differentiating it from mythical pasts of other religions, especially Hinduism.

The preceding historiographical introduction also hints that he attempted to convince a public audience, some of whom may have wanted to verify the soundness of his arguments by looking up his sources. Hence, he was more thorough in footnoting his sources than even Shiblī had been providing publication information. According to Chakrabarty, the notion “that the documents a historian uses as her or his sources must be verifiable by others ... derives from a fundamental principle of debate in the construction of modern “public life” (or, after Habermas, the public sphere): that such debates should be based on equal access to information.”⁷¹ Hence, Sulaymān Nadwī's citational practice reveal a clearer recognition than his mentor of the public life of history.

Finally, even as his main discursive opponents were orientalists who had advanced arguments that may create doubt among Muslims about their religion, he nonetheless acknowledged that they also produced erudite research. The demands of historical writing for Sulaymān Nadwī require that he also consider their research and discoveries, while rethinking the historicity of the Arabic sources with which he was more familiar. In his Urdu writings about the life of the Prophet, however, he displayed less amicability towards orientalists.

⁷¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 106.

Public Discussions of the Life of the Prophet in the Colonial India and England

While detailed discussions about ancient Semitic tribes may not have interested Muslims beyond a small number exposed to or interested in European scholarship, the urgency of addressing early Islamic history became more acute from the 1920s as negative portrayals of the Prophet increased in the public sphere both within India and in England. In the summer of 1924, *Rangīlā Rasūl* (The Colorful Prophet) was published anonymously. The Urdu pamphlet satirically portrayed the Prophet's marital life. It became the object of widespread Muslim scorn and gained even more publicity after Gandhi criticized it in an article. The publisher defended the pamphlet by claiming its aim was to promote social reform and because it was based on works by European scholars, it was factually accurate.⁷²

About a year later, in August 1925, an article in the *Manchester Guardian* suggested the Prophet Muhammad fainted out of fear at the Battle of Badr with the implication that he did so out of cowardice.⁷³ When Khawāja Kamāl al-Dīn (1870-1932), an Indian-born lawyer, Imam of the Woking Mosque and editor of the English journal *The Islamic Review*, wrote a letter to the editor, asking for the source, he was informed that the source was *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam* by D.S. Margoliouth, Professor of Arabic at Oxford University, referring to him as the “unquestionable highest authority.”⁷⁴ Margoliouth had himself relied on a German translation of al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* by Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918).⁷⁵ Kamāl al-Dīn wrote to

⁷² Julia Stephens, “The Politics of Muslim Rage: Secular Law and Religious Sentiment in Late Colonial India,” *History Workshop Journal* 77, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 45–64, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbt032>.

⁷³ Adams, “Al-Wāqidī, the Orientalists, and Apologetics,” 18.

⁷⁴ Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi, “European Biographies of Muhammad and Muhammad Bin Omar Al-Waqidi,” *Islamic Review* 14, no. 3 and 4 (April 1926): 135.

⁷⁵ Adams, “Al-Wāqidī, the Orientalists, and Apologetics,” 18–19.

Sulaymān Nadwī about this controversy, who wrote an essay in Urdu published in *Ma'ārif* in January 1826 about the problems with al-Wāqidī's work as a source for the Prophet's life, and Kamāl al-Dīn had it translated into English and published in the March-April issue of *The Islamic Monthly*. After Alfred Guillaume (1888-1965), Professor of Arabic at Durham University, responded to Nadwī's translated article, he wrote another article expanding on his critiques of al-Wāqidī's work.⁷⁶ This second article was published in *Ma'ārif* in January 1827 and *The Islamic Monthly* in April-May 1927. In the face of public Muslim outcry at depictions of the Prophet they viewed as insulting, writers in England and India cited the works of orientalists in justifying the historicity of their claims.

Sulaymān Nadwī attempted to undermine the authority of orientalists by arguing in his articles that European orientalists were not adept at interpreting Arabic and were ignorant of *ḥadīth* literature necessary to reconstruct early Islamic history. Referring sarcastically to Margoliouth and Wellhausen as “the learned of Oxford and Germany,”⁷⁷ he argued that they misinterpreted the Arabic verb *ghashiya* to suggest that the Prophet fainted out of fear of the larger army of his opponents, whereas the proper translation was simply that he slept.⁷⁸ Sulaymān Nadwī further argued that this was not a singular mistake for Margoliouth. He averred mistranslations that depicted the Prophet negatively were a pattern, such as when he incorrectly interpreted a *ḥadīth* to suggest Prophet and his wife Khadīja worshipped pagan idols.⁷⁹ For Nadwī, these were not just examples of sincere scholarly mistakes, but evidence of bigotry

⁷⁶ Adams, 19.

⁷⁷ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *Maqālāt-i Sulaymān*, ed. Shāh Mu'īn al-Dīn Aḥmad Nadwī, vol. 2 (Azamgarh: Maṭba' Ma'ārif, 1968), 131.

⁷⁸ Nadwī, 2:131–34.

⁷⁹ Nadwī, 2:137–38.

[*ta'asṣub*] from those that lauded themselves as objective.⁸⁰ Through a discussion of early primary sources and language, Sulaymān Nadwī attempted to diminish the credibility of orientalists as leading historical authorities.

His use of sarcasm and at times harsh tone led Charles Adams to characterize the essays as lacking “the cool objectivity of purely scholarly analysis” because Nadwī “subscribed to the unfortunate but widely held Muslim conviction that there exists a conspiracy in the West to denigrate and even destroy Islam.”⁸¹ However, accusations of conspiratorial thinking are not necessary to understand Sulaymān Nadwī’s harsh tone. Nadwī believed, and not without justification, that the historical authority of European writers drew in large part from the position of power afforded to them by colonialism.

He repeatedly criticized the preference given to European professors and their works in the faculty and syllabi of Indian universities. In an editorial in *Ma'ārif* from February 1921, Sulaymān Nadwī questioned why Europeans were appointed as professors of Arabic at Aligarh University instead of Indians. He contended that there are many Muslim professors in India just as qualified, if not more so, than the ones brought over from Europe and paid twice as much than Indian faculty. He conceded that many European orientalists were better at philology and comparative studies of Semitic languages. Nonetheless, he maintained that Indian students of Arabic did not benefit from European orientalists as much as the latter benefited from their opportunity to teach and work at Indian universities. Speaking specifically of two Europeans that held the position of Arabic professor, Josef Horovitz (d. 1931) and Charles Storey (d. 1967), he wrote that when they came to India, they struggled to read Arabic, and after they left India, they

⁸⁰ Nadwī, 2:131.

⁸¹ Adams, “Al-Wāqidī, the Orientalists, and Apologetics,” 39.

gained fame in Europe as leading orientalists. He concluded that the preference for European professors had less to do with merit and more to do with politically appeasing the colonial government.⁸²

In addition to benefitting from colonialism by gaining access to resources and positions of prestige, Sulaymān Nadwī also felt that some orientalists aided colonial domination. When he had travelled with the Khilafat Delegate to England in 1920 to argue the case for not abolishing the Ottoman Caliphate, Margoliouth was among the orientalists opposed to the Khilafat Movement and the preservation of the caliphate.⁸³ It is not inconceivable that he knew of Margoliouth's role in training colonial administrators.⁸⁴ He did not however generalize all orientalists as abetting in colonial domination. He maintained cordial relations with E.B. Browne (d. 1926) at Cambridge and Thomas Arnold at SOAS. Nevertheless, he recognized that evangelicals and Hindu reform movements relied on European works in their polemics against Islam.

In October 1925, around the time he was writing his articles against the orientalists, he gave a series of eight lectures in Madras about the Prophet that were quickly published as the widely popular *Khuṭibāt-i Madrās*. The setting and the content of the lectures show that inter-religious polemics were an important factor in Sulaymān Nadwī's project of historicizing the Prophet and other figures from early Islam. He was invited as the inaugural speaker by the Mohammedan Educational Association of Southern India. Established in 1902 in Madras to promote Islamic education in a city whose educational institutions were dominated by Christian

⁸² Nadwī, *Hayāt-i Sulaymān*, 227–28.

⁸³ Nadwī, 157.

⁸⁴ Lindsay Frederick Braun, "Suez Reconsidered: Anthony Eden's Orientalism and the Suez Crisis," *The Historian* 65, no. 3 (2003): 540–41.

missionaries,⁸⁵. The Mohammedan Educational Association of Southern India started hosting a lecture series in 1925 where they would invite a distinguished Muslim to speak for several days. The idea of the lecture series was borrowed from Madras University, which had been inviting distinguished Christian scholars for many years to speak about the life of Jesus.⁸⁶

In his lectures, Sulaymān Nadwī stressed the importance for Muslims to have knowledge of a historically authentic biography of the Prophet Muḥammad “rooted in sound proofs and reliable sources” as opposed to “merely one based on religious faith [*mazhabī aqīde ke bunyād par*]”.⁸⁷ For him, the historical authenticity of the Prophet distinguished him from central religious figures in other religions. He asserts that the early history of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism is shrouded in obscurity, and that even the believers of these religions must rely on modern research of European and American scholars to grasp at some semblance of history.⁸⁸ Reliable sources for the life of Jesus are not known either, according to Sulaymān Nadwī, since none of the Gospels were written during his time. He points out that some modern scholars have even doubted whether a historical Jesus even existed, a view Nadwī obviously did not hold.⁸⁹ Sulaymān Nadwī thus linked the truthfulness of Islam as a religion to the soundness of the historical records of its beginnings and argued that the Prophet could serve as a better ethical exemplar since his life could be historically reconstructed with greater confidence.

⁸⁵ J. B. Prashant More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras, 1930-1947* (Orient Blackswan, 1997), 57, 62.

⁸⁶ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *Khutubāt-i Madrās* (Karachi, Pakistan: Majlis Nashriyat-e Islam, n.d.), 8.

⁸⁷ Nadwī, 32.

⁸⁸ Nadwī, 32–36.

⁸⁹ Nadwī, 36–37.

He also makes a sharp distinction between history and myth [*qison-o-kahāniyon*], asserting that mythical figures are not as effective at serving as ethical exemplars. He adduces the science of psychology, using the Urdu transliteration of the English, to argue that audiences are less receptive to stories they know are not true, in contrast to ones that they believe are realistic.⁹⁰ This line of argument shows how Sulaymān Nadwī mediated between historicism’s demand for utilizing sources critically to arrive at what really happened in the past, and premodern forms of history-writing that utilized history for ethical and religious ends. Of course, this hybrid approach was not unique to Sulaymān Nadwī. Dipesh Chakrabarty has shown how in early twentieth-century India, where multiple communal projects existed, there were “conflicting views ... about the very idea of a historical fact,” and that “most researchers spoke in terms of ‘facts’ and ‘scientific history’ at the level of rhetoric.”⁹¹

This tension of gesturing towards historical authenticity while not actually employing the skeptical approach towards all sources required by rigorous historicism is most clearly seen in Sulaymān Nadwī’s earlier work about the life of the Prophet’s wife ‘A’isha, *Sīrat-i ‘A’isha*, published initially in 1920, but reprinted with modifications for the third time in 1945.⁹² As he makes clear in his introduction, the book was written to address the dearth of Urdu works on exemplary Muslim women. Sulaymān Nadwī writes that women share part of the blame with men for the current period of decline [*inhiṭāf*] because of their ignorance of Islam and their participation in superstitions, Hindu-influenced customs, and indulgence in extravagant spending during times of marriage and deaths. A realistic portrait of ‘Ā’isha, detailing her multifaced life

⁹⁰ Nadwī, 32–33.

⁹¹ Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History*, 145.

⁹² Sulaymān Nadwī, *Sīrat-i ‘ā’isha* (Lahore: Maktaba Islāmiyya, 2005), 15.

as a daughter, wife, widow, teacher, scholar, and a fallible woman who nonetheless achieved the highest levels of moral excellence could thus serve as a mirror for contemporary Muslim women in India.⁹³

The book was written during a time when Muslim religious reformers began to seriously write about and for Muslim women in India,⁹⁴ and thus the book addresses widely discussed issues such as education, travel, public role of women, and veiling. Numerous acquaintances repeatedly requested that he write a biography of her after he published articles in *al-Nadwa* about her life. Nadwī stated in the preface that after his articles, some authors had rushed to write biographies of ‘Ā’isha, indicating interest in the Urdu public sphere for biographies of Muslim women. However, Nadwī felt confident that his work with its superior scholarship would surpass them.

Sulṭān Jahān, Begum of Bhopal (1858-1930) had been among those who requested Sulaymān Nadwī to complete the book.⁹⁵ The Begum was an outspoken proponent of veiling, including the face, for Muslim women but critical of seclusion of women that kept them from educational advancement and travelling.⁹⁶ Sulaymān Nadwī explicitly argued that ‘Ā’isha’s life showed the world that a Muslim woman could be veiled [in *purdah*] and could still take a leading role in the religious, intellectual, social, and political aspects of her community.⁹⁷

⁹³ Nadwī, 17.

⁹⁴ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women’s Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12.

⁹⁵ Nadwī, *Sīrat-i ‘ā’isha*, 18.

⁹⁶ Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women, Reform and Princely Patronage: Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal*, Royal Asiatic Society Books (Routledge, 2007), 100–123 She eventually stopped veiling her face a year before her death. Ibid, 121-22.

⁹⁷ Nadwī, *Sīrat-i ‘ā’isha*, 245.

Sulaymān Nadwī’s carefully researched Arabic sources appropriate for reconstructing her life and attempted to smooth over tensions present in her various portrayals in Arabic sources. He states that he relied primarily on the books of *ḥadīth* for the biography, and avoided historical chronicles, since he deemed them to be less reliable. He makes an exception for al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/922) chronicle concerning her involvement in the civil war with the third caliph ‘Alī. He also utilized biographical dictionaries written by later *ḥadīth* scholars, especially al-Dhahabī’s (d. 748/1348) *Tadhkirat al-Huffāz* about *ḥadīth* transmitters. He also availed himself of “rare” Arabic sources that had become recently available, such the Ibn Sa‘d’s (d. 230/845) volume on early Muslim women and a small treatise by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *‘Ayn al-Iṣāba*, which collected reports of ‘Ā’isha disagreeing with *ḥadīth* other Companions transmitted.⁹⁸ Unlike what Shiblī had done in his monograph on the second caliph ‘Umar, *al-Fārūq*, Sulaymān Nadwī does not inquire into what effect the context in which his sources were compiled had on the narrative presented, despite the legacy of the early civil wars on portrayals of ‘Ā’isha. He takes for granted that the sources of *ḥadīth* are reliable.

His efforts are spent on trying to extract details about ‘Ā’isha’s life from narrations scattered across volumes of *ḥadīth* and history while also reconciling the different portrayals. Thus, he presents her as not shying away from expressing her displeasure to the Prophet,⁹⁹ yet is also an obedient wife.¹⁰⁰ She leads senior companions to protest decisions of the third caliph ‘Alī that results in a battle, yet she does not violate the verse in the Qur’an that suggests the wives of

⁹⁸ Nadwī, 17–18.

⁹⁹ Nadwī, 52–55.

¹⁰⁰ Nadwī, 55–57.

the Prophet should not leave their home.¹⁰¹ Moreover, her portrayal also contrasts with the views of many Indian ‘*ulamā*’ involving women. For example, ‘Ā’isha visits the graveyard even though most Indian ‘*ulamā*’ discouraged women from it.¹⁰²

Nadwī’s portrayal of the Prophet’s wife is quite different from the image of an ideal Muslim woman promoted by some of Nadwī’s contemporaries. For example, Barbara Metcalf has characterized ‘Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī’s book for women, the *Bihishtī Zewar* (1906), as presenting a “quintessentially feminine” ideal: “soft ... deferential, given to silence, meek in the face of dispute ... troublesome to no one, humble, never talkative.”¹⁰³ Gail Minault has argued that this is not a feminine ideal, but one promoted by Persianate *adab* for nobility in a subordinated position.¹⁰⁴ This ideal of Persianate *adab*, however, is difficult to apply to representations of ‘Ā’isha in Arabic sources used by Nadwī, where she not only taught and lectured to hundreds of men and women, but defiantly asserted her opinions when she disagreed with other senior Companions. Sulaymān Nadwī’s preference for Arabic sources also leads him to criticize Persian sources that included information about ‘Ā’isha that he is unable to trace to Arabic sources.¹⁰⁵

The role of *ḥadīth* literature and classical histories of *ḥadīth* transmitters in discussions about Muslim women in India has received insufficient attention. Asma Sayeed has documented that after the marginalization of Muslim women from the eighth century, “traditionalist Sunnī

¹⁰¹ Nadwī, 118–20.

¹⁰² Nadwī, 139.

¹⁰³ Barbara Daly Metcalf, “Islamic Reform and Islamic Women: Maulānā Thānawī’s Jewelry of Paradise,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (University of California Press, 1984), 190, <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520322332-011>.

¹⁰⁴ Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 66.

¹⁰⁵ Nadwī, *Sīrat-i ‘ā’isha*, 131–32.

Islam ... successfully mobilized numerous women in Sunnī circles after the fourth/tenth century and engaged them in the public arena of *ḥadīth* transmission.”¹⁰⁶ Many Indian scholars in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries who were engaged with *ḥadīth* studies and interested in biographical histories realized Arabic accounts of female *ḥadīth* transmitters could be resources for promoting female education and scholarship in India. When ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī wrote a short pamphlet about health and hygiene for women, he noted in the introduction that while contemporary Indian Muslims debated whether Muslim women should receive an education, there once was a time when Muslim women rivaled men in learning. He references Karīma b. al-Marwaziyya (ca. 365–463/975–1070) as paradigmatic of such a past.¹⁰⁷ “The chain of learning of Bukhārī’s book would not continue without this distinguished lady scholar [‘*ālim-o-fāḍil bīwī*]. But today how many women in India even know the name of *Sahīh Bukhārī*?”¹⁰⁸ Sulaymān Nadwī’s emphasis on ‘Ā’isha’s role in transmitting, explaining, and correcting *ḥadīth* transmission of male Companions should be seen as part of the same intellectual encounter with Arabic biographical and *ḥadīth* sources. However, given the absence of any women in histories of Dār al-Muṣannifīn, one should not overestimate the degree to which discussions about women led to actual changes for women.

Be that as it may, Sulaymān Nadwī’s goal was not to write a source-critical history of ‘Ā’isha, but rather to write an accessible and interesting Urdu biography that presented her life as exemplary for modern Muslims while being faithful to the later Arabic sources. Moreover, as his experience with assisting Shiblī on the Prophet’s biography showed, writing a source-critical

¹⁰⁶ Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 191.

¹⁰⁷ For the importance of Karīma in the revival of female participation in *ḥadīth* transmission, see Sayeed, chap. 3.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, *Ṭabīb Al-‘Ā’ila: Family Doctor* (Lucknow: Gulshan-i Ibrāhimī Press, 1912), 2.

work required immense time and resources, both of which were much more limited for Sulaymān Nadwī in the inter-war context of colonial India. While still a scholarly work that involved years of research, it does not contain detailed historiographical discussions that Shibli included in his *al-Fārūq*. He likely felt it unnecessary for the reformist objectives of the work. For the same reason, there is a near absence of references to non-Muslim writings, with one of the few exceptions being a reference to another mistranslation by Margoliouth of a *ḥadīth* wherein the Prophet told his wife he knows when she is upset with him because she swears by “the God of Abraham” instead of “the God of Muḥammad,” to which ‘Ā’isha replied that she only leaves out his name on her tongue. Margoliouth, according to Sulaymān Nadwī, interpreted this to mean that she would refuse to accept Muḥammad as a prophet when she was upset.¹⁰⁹ The lack of engagement with European scholarship is further evidence that Sulaymān Nadwī felt that that a historicist approach was not necessary for the Muslim audience he had in mind.

However, his historical writings on topics that concerned broader Indian audiences, such as Indian history, allow us to analyze Sulaymān Nadwī’s ability to combine his command over Arabic sources, knowledge of contemporary historical discussions, and a more critical historical approach.

History for Indian Audiences

Sulaymān Nadwī began more earnestly writing about Indian history in the 1920s. His writing on Indian history evince distress at the rising tide of violent riots between Hindus and

¹⁰⁹ Nadwī, *Sīrat-i ‘ā’isha*, 54–55; Nadwī is referring to the following: “When her husband displeased her, she refused him the title Prophet of Allah; and regularly submitted his revelations to a searching criticism which would have cost an ordinary Muslim his head.” Margoliouth does not provide a reference to the source for this section, however. David Samuel Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905), 451.

Muslims in the wake of the failure of and Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922 and the Khilafat Movement in 1924 where Muslims and Hindus had been allied in common political causes.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the 1920s were also when Hindu nationalism became more clearly articulated and organized. In 1921 the Hindu Mahasabha, a political party for Hindus formed in response to the Muslim League, was relaunched and united the reformist and missionary Arya Samaj with more mainstream strands of Hinduism due to a sense that Muslims had become a common enemy. The anti-British activist V. D. Savarkar also wrote *Hindutva: Who is Hindu?* around the same time, in which he coined the term “Hindutva” to differentiate his ideology from Hinduism. Although an atheist, he believed that India should be a nation for a Hindu race, while minorities such as Christians and Muslims were foreigners who must adopt Hindu culture if they wanted to live in India. In 1925 the Rashtriya Svayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) was founded to promote Hindutva.¹¹¹ “Thus there arose the idea of a Hindu Raj which would reflect the glories of the ancient Hindu civilization and keep Muslims in their place.”¹¹²

There were attempts to ease tensions between Muslims and Hindus as well. Sulaymān Nadwī, however, wrote in an editorial in *Ma'ārif* in October 1924 that they all failed to address the real cause of religious polarization: the anti-Muslim history taught at schools and colleges, and popularized in the public sphere through magazines, novels, and plays. Nadwī wrote that in an effort to mobilize Hindus for religious and political purposes, Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj, and B.G. Tilak (1856-1920), an anti-British activist responsible for transforming the Marathi ruler Shivaji (d. 1680) into a national hero, had adopted

¹¹⁰ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 234.

¹¹¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 12–16.

¹¹² Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, 235.

a colonial historiography that was meant to divide Indians. Consequently, from a young age, children are taught at schools and at fairs that Muslims invaded India from foreign lands and oppressed Hindus for centuries. Once Shivaji became a national hero, according to Nadwī, Aurangzeb became the national villain against whom Shivaji fought to free India against Muslim oppression. Nadwī further wrote that organizations and institutions are being founded and funded to publish new books and articles based on half-truths to reinforce this narrative. On the other hand, Muslims, complains Nadwī, are doing nothing to combat this propaganda masquerading as history.

Sulaymān Nadwī had written articles addressing anti-Muslim propaganda being passed off as history. One prominent example is his article “How Did Islam Spread in India?” which came out in installments over several months in 1924 in *Ma‘ārif*.¹¹³ The opening lines make explicit the reason for writing the article. “Our Arya [Samaj] friends are confused about how there could be seventy million Muslims in India when a thousand years ago there were none.”¹¹⁴ Sulaymān Nadwī lamented that groups like the Arya Samaj have adopted the narrative initially used by Christian missionaries that Muslims spread Islam by the sword. In refuting this line of thinking, his main contention is that Islam spread in India through preaching, the same “natural” [*tabī‘ī*] means through which other proselytizing religions have spread.¹¹⁵ He also emphasized that the case of Islam in India is similar the spread of other organized religions among a population that does not belong to an organized religion.¹¹⁶ In addition to illustrating the looming

¹¹³ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *Maqālāt-i Sulaymān*, ed. Şabāḥ al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, vol. 1 (Azamgarh: Maṭba‘ Ma‘ārif, 1966), 185–243.

¹¹⁴ Nadwī, 1:186.

¹¹⁵ Nadwī, 1:189.

¹¹⁶ Nadwī, 1:191.

concern over Hindu missionary and political movements in Nadwī's historical writings about India, the article also demonstrates Nadwī's appeal to notions of historical causation that could appeal to non-Muslim audiences.

He recognized, however, that his published responses were not nearly sufficient to ease communal tensions. To end communal tensions, schools and colleges needed to reform their history curriculums. Additionally, publishers need to put an end to disseminating material purporting to be history that incited hatred against Muslims. Nadwī clarified that religious organizations like the Arya Samaj could continue to proselytize by talking about the merits of their religion without demonizing others. Nadwī emphasized that more effort should be put towards writing histories that highlight Muslims and Hindus coexisted peacefully in the past and can do so again in the future.¹¹⁷

In 1929, Sulaymān Nadwī provided an example of the kind of history he had in mind to help diminish communal tensions when he gave a series of lectures at the Hindustani Academy that became the basis for his *'Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta'alluqāt* (Indo-Arab Relations). The Hindustani Academy was founded in 1927 by the Legislative Assembly of the United Provinces and based in Allahabad. Proponents of bridging the linguistic gap between Hindi and Urdu hoped the institution's events, patronage, and publications would cool communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims.¹¹⁸ Prior to the nineteenth century, Hindi was one of several terms that denoted the main vernacular spoken by many north Indians, regardless of religion. However, over the course of the nineteenth century, there was a concerted effort to purge it of Persian and Arabic words, as well as Sanskritize it, and use the Devanagari script instead of the Perso-Arabic

¹¹⁷ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 187–91.

¹¹⁸ David Lunn, "Across the Divide: Looking for the Common Ground of Hindustani," *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 6 (November 2018): 2062–63, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X1600069X>.

script. This Sanskritized vernacular came to be recognized as Hindi and many Hindus pushed for its official recognition by the British Indian government in schools and in employment. Urdu became the more Persianized and Arabic variant increasingly associated with Muslims. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Hindi outpaced Urdu in the public sphere as more publications appeared in Hindi than Urdu.¹¹⁹

Nadwī believed that Urdu was not an exclusively Muslim language, but one that had been shared between Hindus and Muslims.¹²⁰ Moreover, it could help unite India since more Indians were familiar with it, if not as their primary language, then as a second language.¹²¹ He was also critical of the relatively recent importation of Persian and Arabic words into Urdu, and urged Urdu speakers to revive older words that were commonly used before the nineteenth century. This would facilitate in making it more comprehensible for a greater number of Indians.¹²² Finally, he also recommended that the term “Hindustani” should be used instead of Urdu because of the latter term’s association with foreignness.¹²³

The Hindustani Academy provided Sulaymān Nadwī the perfect venue to share the research he had been conducting on Indian history.¹²⁴ The main argument of the book was that the history of Muslims in India cannot be reduced to one of foreign conquerors and oppressive rulers because Buddhist and Hindu Indians have had peaceful and fruitful cultural, commercial,

¹¹⁹ Tariq Rahman, “‘Othering’ Through Language: The Construction of Two Languages and Communal Identities in British India,” in *The Other in South Asian Religion, Literature and Film: Perspectives on Otherism and Otherness*, ed. Diana Dimitrova (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 60.

¹²⁰ Sulaymān Nadwī, *Nuqūsh-i Sulaymānī* (Azamgarh: Maṭba‘ Ma‘ārif, 1980), 162.

¹²¹ Nadwī, 74.

¹²² Nadwī, 76.

¹²³ Nadwī, 75–76.

¹²⁴ Sulaymān Nadwī, *Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta‘alluqāt* (Allabad: Hindustānī Akadēmī, 1930), chap. “Tamḥīd.”

and intellectual relations with Muslims. Sulaymān Nadwī blamed colonial historiography for the prejudiced view of Muslims taught at Indian schools and colleges. According to Sulaymān Nadwī, there was an overemphasis on the putative Greek influences responsible for civilizational progress in the ancient period of Indian history. Meanwhile, only a cursory overview of the Muslim period was provided. The Muslim period begins with the advent of the Prophet, described as barbaric and violent, whose followers conquer neighboring territories. Then the narrative shifts from the seventh century Arabia to the eleventh century invasions of Maḥmūd of Ghazna, continuing the trope of religious conquests. Other Muslim invasions are similarly described, giving the impression that prior to Maḥmūd there were no relations between Indians and Muslims.¹²⁵

Sulaymān Nadwī sought to correct this historical narrative through utilizing early Arabic writings from Muslim geographers and travelers that showed thriving Muslim communities in India prior to the Maḥmūd's invasions and the later establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. He also aimed to prove that non-Muslim Indians were present in Muslim lands under the Abbasids. Nadwī's incorporation of early Arabic sources was perhaps his most important historiographical intervention in Indian history. Manan Ahmed in a brief characterization of Nadwī's writing on Indian history states that he aimed to dislodge the origins of Muslims in India from the conquest narrative introduced by Sir Henry Elliot (d. 1853) and John Dowson's (d. 1881) translation and centering of the *Chachnāma*, the Persian history Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim's conquest of Sind. For Nadwī "Muslims in Sind had to be placed nearer to the time of the Prophet to make the question of origins a social one, not one based on conquest."¹²⁶ While Ahmed is largely correct in this

¹²⁵ Nadwī, 253–55.

¹²⁶ Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: 333

assessment, he leaves out how Nadwī hoped to accomplish this, namely through engaging with Arabic sources that had been ignored by historians of India.

The neglect of Arabic sources among British scholars and the near exclusive preference for Persian sources for the history of Muslim rulers and kingdoms occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Prior to that, British and British-employed scholars, such as the Austrian Sprenger whom we encountered in Chapter One, took a keen interest in Arabic sources. However, H. H. Wilson (1786-1860), Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, convinced the British officials to only fund research and publication of works relevant to Indian history, which excluded Arabic works.¹²⁷

Sulaymān Nadwī felt that early Arabic works on geography and travel-writing could fill a historiographical void left by European writers' focus on Greek sources for ancient India and then Persian sources for the period dealing with Muslim rule. It will be useful to review the most important Arabic sources he introduced. The first category are works that he relied on or were written by merchants and sailors, such Ibn Khurradādhbih's (d. c. 300/911) *Kitāb al-Masālik wal-Mamālik* (The Book of Routes and Provinces). Ibn Khurradādhbih was a bureaucrat for the Abbasids who drew on information from merchants and travelers familiar with India. Another work is *Akhhbār al-Šīn wa'l-Hind* (Reports on China and India), a book attributed to a maritime merchant named Sulaymān al-Tājir and compiled in 237/851. This work was included in a larger work, the *Silsilat al-Tawārīkh* (Chain of Histories) compiled in 302/916 by the merchant and sea captain Abū Zayd al-Šīrāfī. Finally, there was the *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Hind* by Buzurg b. Shahriyār

Harvard University Press, 2016), 172.

¹²⁷ W. Nassau Lees, "Materials for the History of India for the Six Hundred Years of Mohammadan Rule Previous to the Foundation of the British Indian Empire," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3, no. 2 (1868): 419–20.

(d. c. 399/1009), another obscure merchant and sailor. While these works are filled with wonderous tales that no historian would accept, Nadwī defended the overall works as crucial sources since they provide first and second-hand accounts of travel, trade, cultural relations, and observations of India and the wider Indian ocean world in the eighth and ninth centuries.¹²⁸ In addition to works by merchants and sailors across the Indian Ocean world, the second category he relied on are works by early Muslim geographers that visited India, such as al-Mas‘ūdī’s (d. 345/956-7) *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma‘ādin al-Jawāhir* (Meadows of Gold and Mines of Jewels), al-Iṣṭakhri’s (d. 346/957) *Kitāb al-Masālik wal-Mamālik*, and Ibn Ḥawqal’s (d. 358/979) *Ṣūrat al-‘Arḍ* (The Face of the Earth).

While Sulaymān Nadwī set his work apart from European histories on India by utilizing unique Arabic sources, his work was also quite different from premodern Arabic, Persian, and contemporary Urdu histories. In his historiographical overview, Nadwī noted that all the Arabic works mentioned above were edited and published in Europe. This is important because despite the lack of Arabic sources used by European writers of Indian histories, it is ultimately thanks to European orientalists that he had access to these early Arabic sources. Indeed, many of these sources had been ignored or marginalized by pre-modern Muslim historians writing in Arabic.¹²⁹ Nadwī’s history is also dissimilar from Persian histories such as Firistha’s (d. 1620) since the latter had linked the history of Islam in India prior to the north Indian conquests with Persia and

¹²⁸ Sulaymān Nadwī, *‘Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta‘alluqāt* (Allababad: Hindustānī Akademī, 1930), 23-36. For a recent work making a similar case for the usefulness of these and similar sources, see Suhanna Shafiq, *Seafarers of the Seven Seas: The Maritime Culture in the Kitāb ‘Aja‘ib al-Hind by Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar (d. 399/1009)* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 19: “For information regarding social and cultural history, (often) geography, maritime culture and language however, this genre of literature proves to be extremely important.”

¹²⁹ Shafiq, *Seafarers of the Seven Seas*, 26; Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36.

not Arabia.¹³⁰ Finally, while Sulaymān Nadwī appreciated contemporary Urdu histories critical of colonial historiography, such as the ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Sharar’s (1860-1926) history of Sind, *Tārīkh-i Sindh*, he felt it was too reliant on the same Persian sources used by Elliot.¹³¹

Synthesizing information from Arabic sources, Sulaymān Nadwī wrote that Muslim communities were established and thriving by the ninth century, that Arab and Indian polities were interconnected commercially and culturally, and that religious respect was extended to the differing communities. Muslim polities in Sind and Multan respected temples and did not destroy them. Likewise, many Arab travelers mention Hindu kings that maintained friendly relations with Muslims and even helped rebuild mosques.¹³² Major Muslim communities across the western, southern, and eastern coast are identified, as well as more inland communities in the Deccan and the Punjab.¹³³

Moreover, Sulaymān Nadwī argued that the north Indian conquests cannot be characterized as Muslim conquests of Hindus because the armies of Maḥmūd also fought against Muslims that had already been settled in India for centuries. Furthermore, he cited the medieval historian Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232) as evidence that Maḥmūd also enlisted Hindus in his army.¹³⁴ ‘Alā al-Dīn Khaljī similarly fought established Muslim communities. In writing about his fourteenth-century conquest near the Coromandel coast in southeast India, Nadwī shows how

¹³⁰ Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*, 156–57.

¹³¹ Nadwī, *‘Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta‘alluqāt*, 252; For Sharar’s history, see Manan Ahmed Asif, “Quarantined Histories: Sindh and the Question of Historiography in Colonial India—Part II,” *History Compass* 15, no. 8 (2017): 5–7.

¹³² Nadwī, *‘Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta‘alluqāt*, 202, 256–57.

¹³³ Nadwī, 261–303.

¹³⁴ Nadwī, 188; ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fī al-Tārīkh* (Leiden: Brill, 1862), 9:135. Ibn al-Athīr says that Maḥmūd gathered soldiers that were Turkic, Khalji, Afghan, and Indian [Hindī].

the knowledge provided by the Arabic sources of earlier Muslim settlements can clarify later Persian sources. He stated that Elliot had wrongly taken Persian sources at their word and wrote that Muslims fighting against Khaljī's army were "half-Hindu" and ignorant of Islamic teachings. However, considering the evidence of long-standing Muslim communities in the coast area, Nadwī argued that it is more likely that the Muslims also felt threatened by Khaljī's forces, and thus there is no need to attribute their defense of their home to ignorance of Islam.¹³⁵

In addition to describing early Muslim communities in India, Sulaymān Nadwī showed that Hindu and Buddhist Indians were also present in Islamic lands to the east as merchants and scholars, especially during the Abbasid period. He argued that the Barmakids, an influential family that held powerful positions as ministers in the eighth and ninth centuries in Baghdad, were originally Buddhists of Indian origins. They also patronized Indian pundits and physicians and under their influence many Indian works on mathematics, astrology, medicine, literature, and ethics were translated into Arabic.¹³⁶ He lamented that most of the names of Indians in Baghdad have been lost, but he does mention some physicians described in *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'* of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah (d. 668/1270), a biographical dictionary of physicians.¹³⁷ He stressed the high esteem that Indian scientific knowledge was held by quoting from an array of Arabic sources,¹³⁸ including the *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam* by Qaḍī Ṣā'id al-Andalūsī (d. 462/1070), a

¹³⁵ Nadwī, *'Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta'alluqāt*, 275–76.

¹³⁶ Nadwī, 102–24.

¹³⁷ Nadwī, 130–33.

¹³⁸ Nadwī, 125–30.

history of science written in Spain.¹³⁹ Nadwī also published an Urdu translation of this book in 1928.

In addition to showing the importance with which Muslims held the intellectual contributions of non-Muslim Indians, Nadwī also shows that the view held by European writers such as Elphinstone that Indians were historically an insulated people who did not venture outside the subcontinent is false. Nadwī produced Arab accounts that show Indians were present across the Indian Ocean world, from the Egypt to Indonesia.¹⁴⁰ Thus, Sulaymān Nadwī showed that it was in the interests of both Muslims and Hindus to be critical of colonial historiography.

Despite the book's efforts in showing historical precedent for peaceful relations between Muslims and Hindus, the book departed from the emerging nationalist histories of India. In opposition to communal histories such as those advocated by Hindu nationalists, nationalist historians from the 1920s argued for an Indian civilization since ancient times characterized by a tolerance to new cultures that united Indians and led to religious syncretism. "The new nationalist historiography would also show the almost automatic commitment of India's inhabitants ... to the soil of this land, to the Indian state and indeed to the Indian 'nation' in the centuries past – the priority of a 'secular', 'national' loyalty, as it were, over any loyalty to religion, caste or race."¹⁴¹ Nadwī, on the other hand, insisted on speaking of Hindus and Muslims as two separate *qawms* faithful to their respective, albeit diverse, religious traditions who nonetheless lived peacefully.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Nadwī, 211.

¹⁴⁰ Nadwī, 80–83.

¹⁴¹ Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, 247.

¹⁴² Nadwī, *'Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta'alluqāt*, 250.

In Sulaymān Nadwī's view, Muslims were a part of Indian history, but that did not mean that Indian Muslims did not have a distinct history that set them apart from non-Muslim Indians. Unfortunately, according to Nadwī, when Muslims students learned history, it was about the oppressive nature of Indian Muslim rulers. He also remained critical of nationalist historians who in their attempt to adopt European historical practices continued to depict a Muslim period of India generally dominated by oppressive rulers. According to Nadwī, this led to a situation where while Indian Muslims felt ashamed about their history, new histories glorifying an ancient Hindu past continued to be published.¹⁴³ Nadwī published comments in *Ma'ārif* from concerned readers about the negative portrayal of Muslims at Indian schools and colleges. In 1930, a friend of Nadwī's wrote that at Mewar University in Rajasthan, Vincent Smith's (d. 1920) *History of India* is taught alleging Muslims spread Islam in India by the sword. In 1934, a former civil servant of British India wrote how ashamed he felt when as thirteen-year-old, he studied Siva Prasad's (d. 1895) coverage of the Muslim period.¹⁴⁴ Hence, in addition to histories promoting communal harmony, Nadwī felt it was also important for Indian Muslims to have a history showcasing a past in which they could take pride.

His book on Arab navigation, *Arabon kī Jahāz Rānī* (1935) is an example of such a history meant to cultivate pride, confidence, and ambition among Muslims. Unlike his earlier

¹⁴³ Sulaymān Nadwī, "Shadharāt," *Ma'ārif* 26, no. 3 (September 1930): 165.

¹⁴⁴ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khān, "Islamī Hind Kī Tārīkh," *Ma'ārif* 34, no. 5 (November 1934): 367; "Siva Prasad was probably the first, at school textbook level at least, to transmit so transparently, the view, later chorused by nationalist writers, that the British perceived the propagation of a negative and hostile view of the Turks and Mughals as a means to raise public consciousness of the comparative benefits of their own rule." Avril A. Powell, "History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-Colonial Past in North-Western India in the 1860s and 1870s," in *Invoking the Past: The Use of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113.

works on early Islam, the intended audience was broader than Sunnī Indians and included Muslim Indians more generally. The book was based on a series of lectures given in March 1931 in Mumbai at the invitation of Anjuman-i Islām.¹⁴⁵ This was an educational association promoting a similar reformist Islam as Sir Sayyid’s college in Aligarh and was founded by Badr al-Dīn Ṭayyibjī (1844–1906), a Bohra Muslim, judge, and for a time president of the Indian National Congress.¹⁴⁶ The book was eventually published in 1935 by the Islamic Research Association, an institute funded by the Agha Khan III and founded by Ṭayyibjī’s family members along with the Russian orientalist Vladimir Ivanow (1886-1970), a specialist in Ismailism.¹⁴⁷

A Muslim maritime history had the advantage of appealing to many Indian Muslims while also avoiding causing rancor to Hindus by not locating a glorious Muslim past in the reign of controversial Indo-Muslim rulers. Nadwī wrote in the introduction that he had chosen the subject of Muslim maritime history specifically for his immediate audience in Mumbai, cognizant of Mumbai’s history as a port city with a diverse Muslim population and cultural memories of oceanic travel and migration.¹⁴⁸ Nadwī transformed this memory into history. He decoupled the memory from stories of saints and shrines, and expanded upon it through diligent research of Arabic sources to recover verifiable details.

¹⁴⁵ Nadwī’s biographer writes that the lectures took place in 1930. Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 301; however he states in his editorial in April 1931 that he delivered the lectures in March 1931. Sulaymān Nadwī, “Shadharāt,” *Ma‘ārif* 27, no. 3 (March 1931): 162–68.

¹⁴⁶ Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 35.

¹⁴⁷ Farhad Daftary, “Anjoman-e Esmā‘īli,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed December 30, 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anjoman-e-esmaili>.

¹⁴⁸ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *‘Arabūn Kī Jahāz Rānī* (Azamgarh: Maṭba‘ Ma‘ārif, 1935), 1–2; see also Green, *Bombay Islam*, 56–78 about Muslim memorialization of migration and travel in late colonial Mumbai .

The book was based on the same core sources as *‘Arab wa Hind*, with a few additional sources about the Red and Mediterranean Seas. Nadwī delved into pre-Islamic poetry and Qur’anic verses to advance the argument that pre-Islamic Arabs were already navigating waters and were familiar with the different kinds of ships used by Persians and Byzantines. However, after Islam, Nadwī argues, they became more innovative and ambitious. Although Muslims lost their first naval battle, fought against the Sassanian Empire,¹⁴⁹ they quickly improved and began winning naval battles.¹⁵⁰

Most of the book is devoted to the sea routes Muslims utilized, based on the Arabic sources, the ports they established, and how their knowledge of navigation and travel advanced. Moreover, although the title of the book states it is about “Arab” navigation, Nadwī never specifies what he means by Arab, and includes many Muslim communities in non-Arab lands as part of his history. Drawing on the Arab geographer al-Mas‘ūdī’s comments about how different his own experiences of traveling were from what was described by ancient Greek geographers. Nadwī argues that Muslims were successful in dominating the oceans because they combined information from Greek sources with local knowledge of currents, winds, and travel in the various geographies they traveled.¹⁵¹

For Nadwī, Muslim maritime history was important because it disproved many false claims made by Europeans and adopted by others. Nadwī used this extensive coverage to refute Martin Hartmann (d. 1918), a German orientalist, who had written in an article on China in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* that Muslims were generally afraid of maritime travel and thus were

¹⁴⁹ Nadwī, *‘Arabūn Kī Jahāz Rānī*, 44–45.

¹⁵⁰ Nadwī, 52.

¹⁵¹ Nadwī, 105–6.

never a naval power.¹⁵² Additionally, Nadwī argued that sailors, merchants, and travelers played an important role in the spread of Islam. Yet in making this argument, he adopted modern European civilizational thinking, writing that Muslims were responsible for bringing civilization [*tahdhīb-o-tamaddun*] to many ignorant and savage [*waḥshat*] people in Indonesia.¹⁵³ Thus while Nadwī writes a history showcasing Muslims as brave, knowledgeable, and adventurous, his language of Muslims civilizational superiority ends up sounding very similar at times to racist language used by those he was writing against.

Both *‘Arab Wa Hind* and *‘Araboṅ Kī Jahāz Rānī* utilized modern historicist approaches while openly defying the historicist ideal of disinterested objectivity. They were both critical histories based on carefully researched Arabic sources that Sulaymān Nadwī believed addressed important historical gaps in the works of western and Indian historians. The latter work even received a favorable review by Michael Lloyd Ferrar (d. 1971), a retired British Indian officer and examiner of Urdu at Cambridge University in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.¹⁵⁴ However, both works have unambiguous social agendas, namely showing the possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity and engendering Muslim confidence. Nadwī’s instrumentalist attitude towards history is captured in the closing lines of *‘Arab wa Hind*, where he quotes a couplet by the Persian poet Ḥāfīz

¹⁵² Nadwī, 80.

¹⁵³ Nadwī, 66.

¹⁵⁴ M. L. Ferrar, “Araboṅ Kī Jahāz-Rānī (Arab Navigation). By Syed Sulaiman Nadwi. Islamic Research Association, No. 5. 8½ × 5½, Pp. Ix + 199. Azamgarh: Mu’arīf Press. 1935. Rs. 1.,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 68, no. 2 (April 1936): 367–367, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0035869X00084665>.

“We know not the story of Alexander and Darius,
Ask us nothing save tales [*hikāyat*] of love and loyalty.”¹⁵⁵

Instead of focusing on conquerors and rulers, Nadwī suggested that Indians should work to research and teach those aspects of the past that would benefit the present generation.

Importantly, history should continue to serve as *hikāyat*, edifying lessons. These lines suggest that Nadwī held an instrumentalist view of history.

Engaging and Critiquing the Historical Discipline

Nadwī’s attitude was clearly at odds with many of his contemporary Indian historians that admired European ‘scientific’ history for what they believed was “its absolutely non-instrumental, disinterested character, a kind of truth-for-truth’s sake attitude.”¹⁵⁶ He nonetheless felt it was important to be involved in emerging historical associations and their conferences because these new institutions were playing an important role in shaping historical consciousness. He wrote in *Ma ‘ārif* in 1930 that Muslim historians should be more concerned about presentations of history at conferences that contribute to negative views of Muslims. He cautions that if they did not maintain a presence in these conferences, “mere assumptions [*mafrūdāt*] may become historical events” without them even knowing.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Nadwī, *‘Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta ‘alluqāt*, 402.

¹⁵⁶ Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History*, 73.

¹⁵⁷ Sulaymān Nadwī, “Shadharāt,” *Ma ‘ārif* 26, no. 6 (December 1930): 403–4.

Nadwī revealed an awareness of the new institutional and disciplinary dimensions of history, what Chakrabarty has phrased the “cloistered life of history.”¹⁵⁸ According to Chakrabarty the “cloistered” life of history differs from its “public” life because the former “seeks to instill a version of knowledge for which the protocols of the knowledge are designed to ensure veracity in the judgment of the practitioners.”¹⁵⁹ Those who partake in the “cloistered” life of history view themselves, and seek to be viewed by others, as experts in history. Sulaymān Nadwī positioned himself in the liminal space between the academic and public lives of history, and thus he also participated in new academic conferences for historians and wrote in a more disinterested tone than in the more public works discussed above.

This can be seen even in his most positivist work, his book on ‘Umar Khayyām (d. 526/1131). In 1930, a year after his lectures at the Hindustani Academy, Sulaymān Nadwī presented an article at the All-India Oriental Conference held in Patna on ‘Umar Khayyām. This became the basis of his monograph on the same subject, *Khayyām*. The book is a tour de force of source criticism, beginning with a lengthy historiographical chapter reviewing the latest European and secondary Persian scholarship as well as the all the possible primary sources for reconstructing Khayyām’s life. The rest of the book is devoted to specific questions rather than being a straightforward biography. He also appended Arabic treatises of Khayyām that he had referred to in the book. As an indication of the scholarly reception of the book, including its Persian translation, “in nearly all modern print editions of some of Khayyām’s treatises, it is Nadvi’s copies that are used for further translation and study.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History*, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Chakrabarty, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Mohammad H. Tamdgidi, *Omar Khayyam’s Secret: Hermeneutics of the Robaiyat in Quantum Sociological Imagination: Book 5: Khayyami Theology: The Epistemological Structures of the Robaiyat in All the Philosophical*

One question that takes up many chapters in the book has to do with the ascertaining the authenticity of a popular story involving Khayyām making a childhood pact with the famed Seljuk vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), and leader of the Ismā’īlī assassins Ḥasan-i Şabbāḥ (d. 518/1124). Sulaymān Nadwī wrote that the story had been accepted in Muslims sources as true. According to the narrative, the three made a pact when they were students in Nishapur that they would remain friends. Yet ultimately, Ḥasan-i Şabbāḥ ended up assassinating Niẓām al-Mulk. Sulaymān Nadwī noted that some orientalist doubted the story because it would imply very old ages for all three. However, he felt this suspicion is not sufficient to reject the authenticity of the story. “The rejection of such an interesting story ... murders history’s charm, and thus it is necessary to analyze it sympathetically” before judging its historicity.¹⁶¹

However, after a lengthy discussion tracing the provenance of the story, Nadwī ultimately concluded that the story could not be true.¹⁶² He deemed some sources that purported to be contemporary with Khayyām as being of a much later provenance based on linguistic anachronisms. He also utilized Arabic biographical dictionaries to determine the birth and death dates of figures that were supposed to be contemporaries of all three protagonists to prove that the story was inauthentic. Nadwī identified the oldest known source for the story was the *Tārīkh-i Jahān Gushay* by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Aṭā Juwaynī (d. 681/1283), and stated that the story became suddenly popular after its mention in the Il-Khanid historian Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh’s (718/1318) *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh*. Employing the historicist mode of writing, Nadwī wrote that

Writings of Omar Khayyam Leading to His Last Keepsake Treatise (Belmont, MA: Ahead Publishing House (imprint: Okcir Press), 2022), 202.

¹⁶¹ Sulaymān Nadwī, *Khayyām* (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣṣanifīn, 1933), 19.

¹⁶² Nadwī, 19–50.

because of its absence in sources contemporary with Khayyām, and its sudden appearance almost two centuries later, the story could not be considered historically authentic.¹⁶³

Another question Nadwī attempted to answer was how to contextualize Khayyām in Islamic intellectual history. Western sources popularly portrayed him as a libertine drunkard who was an historical anomaly among Muslims.¹⁶⁴ Nadwī found this portrayal historically inaccurate. He noted that no western or eastern writer had written about Khayyām’s teachers or the intellectual influences that shaped him.¹⁶⁵ He set out to identify prose works whose attribution to Khayyām could be verified, and then surmised that intellectually Khayyām was a philosopher and Sufi who was clearly influenced by Avicenna.¹⁶⁶ He attached the Arabic treatises of Khayyām that he relied on as appendixes so that readers could have access to the same sources and judge the strength of his argument for themselves. Additionally, he utilized Arabic histories and biographical dictionaries to identify possible students of Avicenna with whom Khayyām could have plausibly studied or interacted. Nadwī also argued that an understanding of his philosophical ideas could also help to determine which quatrains of Khayyām were likely authentic and which were forgeries.

While an impressive work of critical history, it may seem odd for a committed Sunnī ‘ālim to show this level of interest in a figure who according to Sunnism would be a heretic.

¹⁶³ Nadwī, *Khayyām*, 42; Omid Safi has written that while the story “might not be verifiable when held to positivist historicist standards, it does provide us with invaluable insight into the overlapping discourses of political fidelity and religious inquiry in the Saljūq era.” According to Safi, the story was meant to bolster Nizām al-Mulk’s legacy as a defender of Sunnī orthodoxy and thus legitimate Saljūq power. However, if the story does not predate the thirteenth century after the Saljūqs were no longer in power, as Sulaymān Nadwī argues, then the story likely was not constructed for the reason Safi suggests. Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 204.

¹⁶⁴ Nadwī, *Khayyām*, 89.

¹⁶⁵ Nadwī, 73.

¹⁶⁶ Nadwī, 312.

After all, Nadwī showed that Khayyām, like other Muslim philosophers, believed in the eternity of the world and denied the existence of heaven and hell. Despite his departure from what Nadwī considered orthodox Sunnism, Khayyām deserved his attention for two reasons. First, he was continuing Shiblī’s historical approach where theological and philosophical tendencies were explored to arrive at a fuller picture of Muslim intellectual history.¹⁶⁷ Discovering earlier theological texts and philosophical views that had become marginalized in post-classical texts was part of a reformist trend. This was how Shiblī had discovered works of Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Taymiyya, whom Nadwī considered the greatest theologian and philosopher, also provided an example of a scholar who was thoroughly versed in views he theologially opposed.¹⁶⁸

Beyond his interest in Muslim intellectual history, the second reason Nadwī wrote about Khayyām was to show that an Urdu writer could produce historical scholarship superior to European scholarship in a field of study initiated by Europeans. He recognized that the great interest in Khayyām among in the east was because of western interest in him.¹⁶⁹ He wrote in the introduction that he viewed this research as a service to the Urdu language,¹⁷⁰ and also noted the lack of a single monograph on Khayyām in Urdu.¹⁷¹ Even when he arrived at conclusions that matched what European scholars had written, such as the story of Khayyām’s childhood pact being apocryphal, he charted an independent path based on his own critical analysis of primary sources, which he claimed did more justice to history than what European scholars had produced.

¹⁶⁷ Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, “Muslims and Greek Schools of Philosophy,” *Islamic Studies* 51, no. 2 (2012): 213–21. This was originally published in 1927.

¹⁶⁸ Nadvi, 218.

¹⁶⁹ Nadwī, *Khayyām*, 2.

¹⁷⁰ Nadwī, chap. “Dībācha.”

¹⁷¹ Nadwī, 15.

Nadwī was part of wider effort among supporters of Urdu who, according to the late Kavita Datla, “hoped to challenge the increasing pervasiveness of English as the language of higher education and hence also as a language of prestige in colonial India.”¹⁷² Recent histories on modern disciplinary history in India have shown how English became “the most visible and desirable language of research and writing” from the 1920s.¹⁷³ Indian writers who opted for regional vernaculars were marginalized from access to institutions and archives that wanted to serve a nationalist historiography. Moreover, as Indian historians wrote and spoke in English, academic history became increasingly diverged from popular histories for mass Indian audiences.¹⁷⁴ Nadwī’s undermining of European scholarship is thus tied to Sulaymān Nadwī’s negative assessment of a historical public sphere in India that he felt fetishized European scholarship.

Above we have looked at Sulaymān Nadwī’s approaches in monographs that were based on lectures to different audiences, including Sunnī Muslims, nationalist Indians, and academic historians. He displayed an instrumentalist attitude towards history, even as he emphasized critically reading primary sources to ascertain historical facts. Throughout his historical writings there is a distrust of European historical scholarship. In this regard, his attitude towards history differed from positivist Indian historians in that he did not idealize European histories nor seek affirmation from European scholars.¹⁷⁵ For example, Sir Jadunath Sarkar, one of the pioneers of

¹⁷² Kavita Saraswathi Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013), 9–10.

¹⁷³ Deshpande Prachi, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (Columbia University Press, 2007), 119.

¹⁷⁴ Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History*, 165.

¹⁷⁵ Chakrabarty, 65, 89; Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 100.

disciplinary history in India and proponent of writing in English, expressed that he wrote in English so that his histories of the Mughal period would be recognized by an international “republic of letters.”¹⁷⁶ Nadwī was less sanguine than his Indian peers about the possibility of establishing “a ‘brotherhood’ of European and Indian scholars on an equal footing.”¹⁷⁷ He had noted that when the project for the *Cambridge History of India* was announced in 1922, not a single Indian historian was invited to contribute.¹⁷⁸

We have also made mention of how Nadwī expressed his frustrations with Indian historians who wanted to emulate European historians. Often these frustrations were publicized to an Urdu public through the *Ma ‘ārif* journal, and he also published comments that supported his criticisms. The journal was more than a mouthpiece for Nadwī’s views, however. It also published disagreements and critical reviews of his works as well, thus helping to establish public discussions of history in the Urdu public sphere. In 1928 and 1929, for example, articles arguing against Nadwī’s position that ‘Ā’isha was a minor when she married the Prophet were published.¹⁷⁹ As another example, the late Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh (1908-2002), the famous scholar from Hyderabad, wrote a review of *‘Araboṅ kī Jahāz Rānī* that pointed out some errors, which were published in two parts in 1936.¹⁸⁰

One of the most interesting examples is a letter from a Hindu acquaintance in December 1932 responding to Nadwī’s repeated criticisms of Indian historians. The letter, and Nadwī’s

¹⁷⁶ Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History*, 76.

¹⁷⁷ Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 100.

¹⁷⁸ Sulaymān Nadwī, “Shadharāt,” *Ma ‘ārif* 9, no. 2 (February 1922): 85.

¹⁷⁹ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 295.

¹⁸⁰ Nadwī, *‘Araboṅ Kī Jahāz Rānī*, 203.

response will be analyzed below since they help elucidate Nadwī's concerns with Indian history that go beyond questions of methodology and touch on the social conditions of history's production and reception in colonial India. Ultimately, they reveal that Nadwī believed that just as a 'republic of letters' did not exist between Europe and India, it did not even exist within India. An ideal public sphere where historical ideas could be discussed without prejudice with the most deserving argument gaining recognition on its merit was a dangerous myth that contributed to the demonization of Muslims.

In December 1932, Manohar Lāl Zutshī (1876-1948), a retired principal of the Training College in Lucknow, responded to Sulaymān Nadwī's repeated criticisms of Indian historians by stating that he was being unfairly harsh to Hindus. He had specifically named Hindu professors, most recently Professor Ishwari Prasad (1888 - 1986) of Allahabad University, for their history books taught at schools and colleges. The implication, according to Zutshī, seemed to be that the professors intended to make Muslims the target of hatred. However, Zutshī asked, is it not possible that Nadwī's disagreement with these professors is simply a difference of opinion over historical records and sources? He also addressed Nadwī's criticism of the Indian physicist and Noble laureate C.V. Raman (1888-970). Raman had repeated the accusation that the second caliph 'Umar destroyed the Library of Alexandria at a speech to college students. Zutshī stated that if Nadwī was upset at Raman for his view on 'Umar, he should have also written against Shi'ī Muslims for their negative view of 'Umar.¹⁸¹ Zutshī ultimately suggested that Nadwī's negative views towards those he disagreed with is because he was Muslim, and they were Hindus. "Are there not mistakes and among Muslims throughout European and Islamic history?"

¹⁸¹ Manohar Lāl Zutshī, "Hindustān Kī Tārīkh," *Ma'ārif* 30, no. 6 (December 1932): 406.

If so, then why the biting criticism of Hindu historians? ... I have believed *Ma'ārif* and Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī to be above anti-Hindu demagoguery and continue to do so.”¹⁸²

Sulaymān Nadwī included his response as an addendum to Zutshī's letter. He stated that the crux of his own criticisms of Indian history taught at schools was that they failed at the two main objectives of history, establishing historical truth, and creating harmony between inhabitants of the country. The history taught at schools was basic information, not historical thinking about differing perspectives and causes of events. Thus, it was not appropriate to present a singular perspective in a way that an entire community finds objectionable. He quotes an excerpt from Ishwari Prasad's textbook where he states that Maḥmūd Ghaznavid's invasions were a jihad, defining the term as an obligation on Muslims to convert or subdue non-Muslims. “Set aside the question of historical accuracy,” writes Nadwī, “what effect would this have on school children?”¹⁸³ If Professor Prasad's history book were taught as one perspective on history, Nadwī stated he would not find it objectionable, but instead it was pushed as historical fact that north Indian Muslims conquests were caused by Islamic teachings on jihad.

However, Nadwī recognized that not all historical perspectives were treated equally. Some get institutional support, selected in curriculums, taught, and included in exams, while others do not get the same hearing, irrespective of the quality of scholarship. Moreover, most history books were written and published with Hindu audiences in mind, and those in positions of authority making curricular decisions were predominantly Hindu as well. Finally, an author can easily garner greater attention and praise through anti-Muslim demagoguery.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Zutshī, 407.

¹⁸³ Sulaymān Nadwī, “Shadharāt,” *Ma'ārif* 30, no. 1 (July 1932): 404.

¹⁸⁴ Zutshī, “Hindustān Kī Tārīkh,” 408.

Nadwī tied the perpetuation of the myth of the destruction of the Library of Alexandria to the lack of concern for historical truth at colleges when it concerned Muslim history. Thus, the issue was not about ‘Umar. Even after the myth’s falseness had been repeatedly shown, both by Muslim and European historians, it continued to circulate at Indian colleges.¹⁸⁵

He clarified that his criticisms go beyond a simple disagreement over historical facts, and rather relate to how the history of Muslims was framed. Pre-Muslim history in India was generally glorified and historical research to cast it in a positive light was earnestly carried out. Meanwhile, Muslim history was researched to detail the negative aspects of Muslim rulers. To substantiate his claim about the different presentations of Hindus and Muslims, he provided an example of a history book used in Patna University where the plural form of pronouns and verbs was used out of respect for Hindu kings, but the book switched to the singular form when referring to Muslim kings.¹⁸⁶ He also clarified that his criticisms had not been restricted to Hindu historians but had encompassed Muslims historians as well. In sum, Nadwī pointed to social conditions that he believed engendered systemic bias against Muslims in the research and teaching of history.

Despite the disadvantageous conditions outlined by Nadwī, he continued to engage the Urdu public and academic historians in the hopes of enacting positive change. In the following section, two of his speeches at academic conferences were briefly analyzed. The first was his presidential speech for the Medieval History Section of the Indian History Congress in 1944, and the second his opening address at the All-Pakistan Historical Society held in Dhaka in 1953, shortly before his passing. In both he continued to argue that historical research and teaching

¹⁸⁵ Zutshī, 409–10.

¹⁸⁶ Zutshī, 411.

should have the twin objectives of finding historical truth and of constructing community, and that the two objectives were not necessarily at odds.

Serving History and the Nation

In December 1944, Sulaymān Nadwī gave the presidential address for the Medieval History section of the Indian History Congress, held in Madras.¹⁸⁷ In it, he offered advice to fellow historians on how to research and write histories that would benefit India by showing it was possible to construct a nation of Muslims and Hindus without sacrificing a commitment to historical truth. Denying that history was an exact science, he compared the historian to a potter. Just as the potter can shape malleable clay to create whatever shape is desired, the historian can use sources to construct different narratives.¹⁸⁸ However, because of the perpetuation of Indian historians of the colonial gaze, they continued, Nadwī contended, to use the same raw material to create similar products.

Better histories need to be crafted to move beyond Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Superior utilization of primary sources can help. The first step according to Nadwī was to stop uncritically relying on European scholarship, especially British histories of India since they were produced to solidify colonial control over India. Nadwī directed the audience to Elliot's introduction to his *The History of India* where he explicitly stated that his aim in translating the various Persian sources into English was to show the oppression of previous rulers and thus make clear the

¹⁸⁷ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 403.

¹⁸⁸ Nadwī, *Maqālāt-i Sulaymān*, 1966, 1:382.

putative superiority of enlightened British rule.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, Indian historians should stop perpetuating European assumptions that Muslim rulers were representative of Islam.¹⁹⁰

Nadwī further stated that less reliance on European histories meant that Indians should go back to primary source materials, entailing proficiency in multiple languages. European works on Islam, despite their many good qualities, cannot be relied upon, and “if a researcher is not proficient in the languages to carry out original research, they should pick a different topic. It does not matter how pure their intentions are. Historical blunders ... can cause communal hatred.”¹⁹¹ Regarding the Muslim period, Sulaymān Nadwī stated that the sources are not plentiful, and the Persian chronicles available were written according to the interests and standards of that period. To properly extract historical information required a great deal of patience to carefully pour through the records while also reconstructing literary and stylistic conventions of the time. Unfortunately, too often researchers are in a rush to publish and thus conduct a superficial reading of the sources and write a simplistic, preconceived narrative.¹⁹²

In addition to the Persian chronicles, historians must seek out other sources to avoid narrowly focusing on histories of courtly politics and battles to the exclusion of more social and cultural histories. Nadwī suggested greater use of Arabic sources that revealed information not available in Persian sources. He cited numerous observations made by Ibn Baṭūṭā during his visit to India that were not found in Persian sources but match up with archaeological findings. He mentioned the presence of some Indian rulers in Arabic biographical dictionaries that indicated

¹⁸⁹ Nadwī, 1:390.

¹⁹⁰ Nadwī, 1:384.

¹⁹¹ Nadwī, 1:385.

¹⁹² Nadwī, 1:388–89.

their connections to networks and traditions of Islamic learning in the Middle East. He also drew attention to ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī’s still unpublished *Nuzhat al-Khwāṭir* as an important source of intellectual history. Finally, he encouraged greater use of *tadhkiras* of Sufis and poets as a supplement to Persian chronicles.¹⁹³ Diversifying sources would not only be better for historical truth, but also move historians away from focusing on bygone battles and conflicts that feed into narratives of religious conflict.

Nadwī concluded the speech by reiterating the twin goals he believed the historical profession in India should have. “Historians do not merely write histories, but also make history.”¹⁹⁴ Through a repudiation of the colonial gaze, greater concern for religious harmony, and diversification of primary sources, Sulaymān Nadwī contended that Indian historians could serve both the discipline of history and the multireligious nation of India as they both were emerging.

He broached similar themes in 1953 in a speech at the second conference of the All-Pakistan Historical Society held in Dhaka. Sulaymān Nadwī had moved to Pakistan in 1950 to retire with his children in Karachi,¹⁹⁵ and had been invited to join the new association of Pakistani historians. In his speech in Dhaka, he continued to emphasize the importance of a critical attitude towards British histories of India and Muslims, as well as conducting research and producing histories with the aim of fostering a sense of national community. While he still mentioned that historians should work towards decreasing tensions with the new state of India,

¹⁹³ Nadwī, 1:391–401.

¹⁹⁴ Nadwī, 1:403.

¹⁹⁵ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 459.

the greater challenge was incorporating Bengalis into a broader Muslim history that united East and West Pakistan.

Yet his comments on the Bengali language show that distancing oneself from colonial history only went so far in creating Muslim unity. Nadwī considered Bengali as an obstacle in achieving Muslim unity because of its connection to Sanskrit, and he championed Urdu as a national language because of its closer connection to Arabic. He was beholden to a notion of linguistic homogeneity as a necessary component for national unity.¹⁹⁶ More generally, despite his belief that history could offer guidance for the present, he had little to say about history's lessons for peacefully managing the reality of Muslim linguistic, cultural, and religious difference.

Conclusion

Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī's invitation to join the Indian History Congress and All-Pakistan Historical Society underscored his reputation as a historian of Islam and India. He was also invited by the new Pakistani Government to head a subcommittee of *'ulamā* to advise the drafting of a new constitution, underscoring his reputation as an authoritative *'ālim*. Sulaymān Nadwī thus participated in two "cloistered lives," to once again borrow Chakrabarty's term, whose members were keen to set themselves apart as experts: professional historians and *'ulamā*'. Nadwī indicated an awareness of his peculiar position in the opening of his speech at the 1944 Indian History Congress. He began his address by acknowledging his liminal position by identifying himself as a representative of an "eastern" madrasa education who had never studied at a university but had a common interest in historical research with college-educated

¹⁹⁶ Sulaymān Nadwī, *Allāma Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī Ke Chand Nādir Khutbāt-o-Rasā'il Kā Majmū'a*, ed. Salmān Nadwī (Karachi: Majlis Nashriyat-i Islam, n.d.), 221–35.

historians.¹⁹⁷ This liminal position also accounted for his varying approaches to historical writing as well as his appeals to fellow historians and ‘*ulamā*’ to consider more seriously public discussions of history and their ramifications.

Sulaymān Nadwī believed history was important for different reasons, and those reasons dictated his methodological approach. Witnessing religious violence between Hindus and Muslims as well as movements to permanently separate, or even worse, extirpate Muslims, Nadwī believed a historical corrective could help defuse communal tensions. Thus, he urged historians to not reproduce colonial assumptions about Muslim oppression of Hindus that exacerbated anti-Muslim bigotry. He also addressed Muslims and stated that presenting a well-researched history of India was “the great obligation upon Muslims.”¹⁹⁸ Additionally, Indian universities were presenting European scholars as authorities on Islamic history. Voicing his objection to the deference given to European scholarship, Nadwī asserted that history was the soul [*rūḥ*] of a community [*qawm*], and to require Muslims to learn their history from Europeans was to deprive Muslims of their soul.¹⁹⁹ Yet he noted that Muslims, including ‘*ulamā*’, were falling to carry out historical research and produce histories for Indian and Muslim audiences.²⁰⁰ Sulaymān Nadwī viewed the function of Dār al-Muṣannifīn and its journal, *Ma‘ārif*, as helping to fill the historical void among the ‘*ulamā*’.

It was necessary that histories of India be written according to the historicist methodology to be taken seriously by Indian historians and for it to have greater chance of

¹⁹⁷ Nadwī, *Maqālāt-i Sulaymān*, 1966, 1:380.

¹⁹⁸ Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir, “Bazm-i Tārīkh-i Hind,” *Ma‘ārif* 30, no. 5 (November 1932): 330.

¹⁹⁹ Nadwī, “Shadharāt,” July 1932, 2.

²⁰⁰ Nadwī, “Shadharāt,” March 1931, 167.

convincing people. Sulaymān Nadwī's *Arab Wa Hind Ke Ta'alluqāt* was an example of this kind of history. Another example was *Tārīkh-i Sindh* (1947) by Abū Zafar Nadwī (1889-1957), Sulaymān Nadwī's nephew and a student of Shiblī. He was funded by Dār al-Muṣannifīn to research and write his history of Sindh from 1930-1935/6.²⁰¹ Abū Zafar Nadwī "consulted numismatic, epigraphic, and textual evidence to present Sind as a landscape teeming with life and culture."²⁰² The source-critical approach of both Nadwīs distinguished them from Muslim nationalists such as the principal of Deoband Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, whose historical writing focused on the *faḍā'il*, or sacred virtues, of India for Muslims based on uncritical quotations of premodern sources such as Bilgrāmī's *Subḥat al-Marjān*.²⁰³ Sulaymān Nadwī's take on Indian history was also different from views espoused by the Muslim League. One important difference was his interest in Muslims in India prior to the Turkic and Persian rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire. Another difference was his inclusion of Hindus as part of Islamic history. In contrast, Jinnah, for example, saw in the Mughal conquests of most of India precedent for a separate nation-state for Indian Muslims.²⁰⁴

In addition to his writings on Indian history, he also employed a historicist approach when engaging with European orientalists, such as in *Khayyām* and in *Tārīkh 'Arḍ al-Qur'ān*. These were efforts to reclaim authority for Muslims to speak about their history. For

²⁰¹ al-A'zamī, *Dār al-Muṣannifīn Kī Tārīkhī Khidmāt*, 312.

²⁰² Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*, 173 Asif incorrectly identified the author of the work as Sulaymān Nadwī. However, Sulaymān Nadwī only authored the introduction. He corrected the error in Asif, "Quarantined Histories," 5.

²⁰³ Barbara Metcalf, "Reinventing Islamic Politics in Interwar India: The Clergy Commitment to 'Composite Nationalism,'" in *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics*, ed. Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 394.

²⁰⁴ Barbara D. Metcalf, "Nationalism, Modernity, and Muslim Identity in India before 1947," in *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 180.

Nadwī, anti-colonialism was not just a political cause, but an intellectual one as well. As was noted, Nadwī decried that Indian universities afforded European professors and their scholarship greater authority than Indian professors. Meanwhile, European historians did not view Indian historians as equals, as evidenced by the lack of Indian representation in the *Cambridge History of India* project.

It is also important to note that Nadwī's histories of Qur'anic geography, Indo-Arab relations, and Arab navigation share many of the same Arabic sources. He likely began exploring newly available works by early Arab historians, geographers, and travel writers while working on his first book to learn about the history of Arab tribes and the Arabian Peninsula, where he took notice of early Arabic accounts of India and Indians, leading to his second book, and eventually widened beyond Arabia and India to encompass the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean histories. Thus, in addition to the colonial experience,²⁰⁵ Nadwī's works showed the role played by an interest in and availability of Arabic sources in modern Urdu historiography. The assiduous research and citation of volumes of Arabic histories, geographies, and *ḥadīth* literature cannot be reduced to the social function of history in the late colonial period.

The Dār al-Muṣannifīn's historical publications did not restrict their audiences to academics. Sulaymān Nadwī's *Sīrat-i 'Ā'isha* as well as the nine-volume *Siyar-i Ṣaḥāba* project which many authors worked on from 1930s to the 1950s, did not display the same source-critical approach as his works intended to convince non-Muslim Indians and orientalists. These works were intended for Sunnī Muslim audiences for purposes of religious edification as well as apologetics. According to Zaman, "there is not awareness here of critically evaluating the

²⁰⁵ Metcalf, "Nationalism, Modernity, and Muslim Identity in India before 1947."

material from which the biographies in question are to be written.”²⁰⁶ This was true to an extent. Compared to western historicism or the earlier works of Shiblī, these biographies were less critical of their sources. However, in line with Shiblī’s arguments about the importance of utilizing *ḥadīth* literature for early Islamic history, these works explicitly stated in their introduction that a preference had been given to the canonical *ḥadīth* compilations, then early Arabic histories, especially biographical histories by *ḥadīth* scholars. This trend in utilizing Arabic sources, giving preference to earlier works over later works, and the rhetoric of historical authenticity differentiated these biographies from the Persianate *tadhkira* tradition.

It may seem contradictory for Sulaymān Nadwī to adopt a historicist approach in works like *Tārīkh ‘Arḍ al-Qur’ān*, *‘Arab wa Hind*, and *Khayyām*, while abandoning it in other works. However, it must be kept in mind that his approach depended on the audience, both real and imagined, that he was addressing. The explanation offered by American historian Peter Novick about why he could disavow objectivity yet still write scholarly history is relevant to understanding the seemingly incompatible approaches used by Sulaymān Nadwī.

How do I win over those who can be won over and make difficulties for those who, if they could conveniently do so, would like to discredit my findings and conclusions by disparaging my scholarship? The question answers itself: by the most scrupulous adherence to *wissenschaftliche* (sometimes confused with "objectivist") norms ... If, as the result of some revolution in historiographical sensibilities, the discipline demanded that findings be presented in sonnet form, I'd chop up what I had to say into fourteen-line chunks. Addressing the existing historical profession, which has its privileged idiom, its rules about what makes you gain credibility and what makes you lose it, its fetishized procedures and modes of discourse, I do those things that gain me credibility and avoid those things that would make me less believable and more vulnerable—that would embarrass and tend to discredit me.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Zaman, “A Venture in Critical Islamic,” 40.

²⁰⁷ Peter Novick, “My Correct Views on Everything,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (June 1991): 701.

Because Sulaymān Nadwī was cognizant of the different audiences he was speaking/writing for, he adopted different modes of discourse to communicate his ideas more effectively. It was because he did not speak to popular Muslim audiences and ‘*ulamā*’ in the same fashion he did to professional historians that he achieved greater scholarly praise from the ‘*ulamā*’ than his teacher Shiblī Nu‘mānī.

Sulaymān Nadwī’s reputation as an ‘*ālim*’ sheds light on the reception of his histories in the field of religious discourse. While Sulaymān Nadwī also wrote and spoke about the Qur’an, Islamic law, theology, Sufism, and Arabic literature, he was most remembered for his historical works, and they were the ones that brought him fame. At a conference held in Bhopal in 1985 to celebrate his legacy, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadwī, one of the speakers, had to remind the audience that although people generally remember Sulaymān Nadwī as a historian, especially those familiar with senior ‘*ulamā*’, he was an exceptional scholar of the Qur’an and theology.²⁰⁸ Scholars holding diverging views held Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī in high regard, such as the Indian nationalist Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, president of Jam‘iyat al-‘Ulamā’, the apolitical Ashraf ‘Alī Thānwī, who initiated Nadwī into his Sufi network and authorized him to guide others,²⁰⁹ and Shabbīr Aḥmad Uthmānī (1887-1949), one of the strongest proponents for Pakistan among the ‘*ulamā*’. In fact, Shabbīr Aḥmad Uthmānī had recommended Sulaymān Nadwī in 1949 to head the subcommittee of ‘*ulamā*’ to guide the Basic Principles Committee in charge of drafting a constitution for Pakistan. Uthmānī felt that Sulaymān Nadwī’s ability to combine “modern and ancient” [*jadīd-o-qadīm*] traditions of knowledge made him ideally suited

²⁰⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, “Mawlānā Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī Apnī Taṣnīfāt Awr ‘Ilmī Wa Dīnī Khidmāt Kī Roshnī Mein,” in *Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī Kī ‘Ilmī Wa Dīnī Khidmāt Par Ek Naẓr*, ed. Ṣabāḥ al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣannifīn, 1985), 4.

²⁰⁹ Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān*, 540.

for the role.²¹⁰ His historical works, especially on the Prophet and early Islam, displayed his expertise in Arabic and books of *ḥadīth*, while his criticisms of European and Indian orientalists and historians displayed his familiarity with modern intellectual discussions. Even modern intellectuals like Muḥammad Iqbāl who were highly critical of *'ulamā'* and their claims to religious authority respected Sulaymān Nadwī and frequently consulted him on historical and religious topics.²¹¹

Nadwī's most popular historical works were his less critical histories. His biography of the Prophet's wife has been reprinted over twenty times by Dār al-Muṣannifīn alone,²¹² and its English translation has been an important source for many later biographies of her.²¹³ Similarly, Sulaymān Nadwī's *Bahādur Khawātīn-i Islām* (1952), a collection of historical anecdotes from the beginnings of Islam until the Mughal period of the bravery of various Muslim women, has also been an influential source for popular writings about Muslim women.²¹⁴ Ṣabāḥ al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān (1911-1987), director of Dār al-Muṣannifīn from 1974 to 1987, translated it into English as *Heroic Deeds of Muslim Women* (1961). Eugene Majied (1926–2005), the Nation of Islam journalist and cartoonist of *Muhammad Speaks*, relied on the book in his retelling of Khawla bint al-Azwar, the seventh-century female warrior mentioned in Arabic sources, as a black Muslim warrior.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Nadwī, 452.

²¹¹ Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 91–92.

²¹² al-A'zamī, *Dār al-Muṣannifīn Kī Tārīkhī Khidmāt*, 217.

²¹³ Aisha Geissinger, "A'isha Bint Abi Bakr and Her Contributions to the Formation of the Islamic Tradition," *Religion Compass* 5, no. 1 (January 2011): 45.

²¹⁴ al-A'zamī, *Dār al-Muṣannifīn Kī Tārīkhī Khidmāt*, 235.

²¹⁵ Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North

In choosing to write and publish “public” histories as opposed to addressing exclusively academic historians, Sulaymān Nadwī and Dār al-Muṣannifīn expanded the number and types of participants in historical discussions in the Urdu public sphere. In the pages of *Ma‘ārif*, one could find articles on diverse historical topics from very different perspectives. Articles authored by graduates of Indian and European universities appeared next to articles by madrasa graduates. Interestingly, an Urdu translation of a speech by Reynold Nicholson (d. 1945), Professor of Persian and Arabic at the University of Cambridge, about Sufism was printed with his permission in June 1923.²¹⁶ Furthermore, as the diaspora of Urdu speakers has expanded globally, so have the topics covered by the journal.

The reception of Sulaymān Nadwī’s histories in Arab countries has been much more limited. While he maintained contact with scholars from different parts of the Muslim world, his histories primarily addressed Indian audiences. One rare example of the influence of Nadwī in an Arabic text is the first Arabic history of Muslims in China. Badr al-Dīn Hai Weiliang (1912–?), a Chinese Muslim who studied briefly at Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ before enrolling at al-Azhar in Cairo, based his Arabic history, *al-‘Alaḳāt Bayna al-‘Arab wa al-Šīn* (1950), on Nadwī’s *‘Arab wa Hind ki Ta‘alluqāt*.²¹⁷ In the next chapter, we will look at how another scholar from Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ involved with the Dār al-Muṣannifīn, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadwī, took a different approach from Sulaymān Nadwī by writing histories for Arabic-speaking audiences.

Carolina Press, 2009), 83–84.

²¹⁶ Reynold Nicholson, “Islamī Tasawwuf,” *Ma‘ārif* 11, no. 6 (June 1923): 404–14.

²¹⁷ John Chen, “Islam’s Loneliest Cosmopolitan: Badr Al-Din Hai Weiliang, the Lucknow–Cairo Connection, and the Circumscription of Islamic Transnationalism,” *ReOrient* 3, no. 2 (2018): 135.

Chapter 5:

History as *Adab*: Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī’s Arabic Histories of an Islamic Civilization

Introduction

In the last chapter, we saw Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī move away from Shiblī’s more skeptical approach towards early Islamic sources. Whereas Shiblī was willing to question the veracity of *ḥadīth* reports in the canonical collections, Sulaymān Nadwī refrained from subjecting *ḥadīth* to such historical scrutiny. His writings on early Islamic history were more concerned with synthesizing *ḥadīth* and early Arabic sources to present a compelling and instructive narrative in Urdu for Muslim audiences in India. This chapter looks at how the most internationally famous ‘*ālim*-historian from Nadwa moved further away from Shiblī’s historicist approach.

This chapter takes up the writings of Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī (1913-1999) the younger son of ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī from Chapter 3. He was born in the North Indian city of Rai Bareilly in 1913 and received his education in the Islamic subjects primarily in Lucknow, Deoband, and Lahore. After completing his studies, he became a teacher at the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ seminary in Lucknow. In 1961, after the death of his older brother, he succeeded him as Rector (*nāẓim*) of Nadwa. He also was affiliated with international institutes. He became a part of the Syrian Academy of Sciences and Letters in 1956, and of the Muslim World League (*Rābiṭat al-‘Ālam al-Islāmī*) in 1962.¹ In 1962 he also joined the Advisory Council of the Islamic University of Medina. In 1984 he helped establish the International League of Islamic Literature (*Rābiṭat al-Adab al-Islāmī al-‘Ālamiyya*) and remained its president until his death in 1999. In

¹ Jan-Peter Hartung, “The Nadwat Al-‘ulamā’ – A Chief Patron of Madrasa Education in India and Turntable to the Arab World,” in *Islamic Education, Diversity, and National Identity. Dīnī Madāris in India Post 9/11*, ed. Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 147, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/6028/>.

addition to teaching in Lucknow, he was invited as a visiting professor at the University of Damascus in 1956 and at the Islamic University of Medina in 1963. He also lectured across the Arab world, from Kuwait to Morocco. Because of his ability to reach large audiences through his command of Arabic and Urdu, Muḥammad Qasim Zaman describes him as “the most influential Indian religious scholar of his generation.”²

This chapter will argue that ‘Alī Nadwī’s historical writings in Arabic represent an *adabization* of history. He viewed history as a genre of Arabic *adab*, which meant both literature and moral training. He thus prioritized the use of emotive language and a moving narrative to cultivate pious sentiment. While providing evidence through citing historical sources was still necessary, searching out and critically using the earliest primary sources were comparatively less important. Although Shiblī had also believed that history could provide moral guidance, he had explicitly attempted to differentiate it as a discipline distinct from literature.³

‘Alī Nadwī’s recasting of history as genre of *adab* was part of his goal of fostering a global Muslim community. His turn to writing in Arabic was due to his distress with secular Arab nationalism in the 1930s and 40s. He viewed it as a threat to the notion of a global *umma* in a post-colonial world. His vision of an *umma* was a global Muslim community united by a shared religious commitment to Islam, and above all an emotional attachment to the religion. After an early historical work in Urdu where he employed historicist views, he abandoned source-critical concerns. When he took up Arabic historical writing in the 1940s, rigorous use of primary sources took a back seat to producing an emotionally charged historical narrative in modern Arabic prose about an Islamic civilization.

² Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 52.

³ Shiblī Nu ‘mānī, *al-Fārūq* (Azamgarh: Dārulmuḥannifīn Shiblī Akaiḍmī, 2008), 41.

He thus moved even further away from Shiblī's historicist ideas than Sulaymān Nadwī. Ironically, this *adabization* of history was in part result Shiblī's transregional fame. Thanks to Nadwa's connections to the Arab world, 'Alī Nadwī had the opportunity to study with Arab scholars in Lucknow. 'Alī Nadwī's utilization of historical narrative in Arabic was in large part responsible for his transregional popularity and exceptional success in reaching wide audiences in both South Asia and the Arab world. His first major Arabic work, *Mādhā Khasir al- 'Ālam bi Inhiṭāṭ al-Muslimīn* (What the World Has Lost with the Decline of Muslims),⁴ published in Egypt in 1950, established 'Alī Nadwī's scholarly reputation in the Arab world.

His scholarly reputation in the Arab world and his ability to participate in transregional networks and institutions was built on the success of *Mādhā Khasir al- 'Ālam* when it was first published in Egypt in 1950. Before that, he was virtually unknown outside of India.⁵ The success of that work encouraged him to continue writing in Arabic. His later Arabic writings included his most ambitious and controversial work, the four-volume history of Muslim reformers *Rijāl al-fikr wa al-da 'wa* (Intellectuals and Preachers), initially published in 1956 and in its final form in 1969.⁶ His inclusion of Sufis as part of a history of Muslim reform caused backlash from Salafis.

Discussions of his transregional scholarly efforts and reputation, however, tend to be focused on his institutional relations and his association with Islamists,⁷ with comparatively less

⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al- 'ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn* (Mansura: Maktabat al-Īmān, n.d.).

⁵ al-Nadwī, 21.

⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Ḥasanī al-Nadwī, *Rijāl Al-Fikr Wa al-Da 'wah Fi al-Islām*, 3rd ed. (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2007), 1:32.

⁷ Hartung, "The Nadwat Al-'ulamā' – A Chief Patron of Madrasa Education in India and Turntable to the Arab World"; Jan-Peter Hartung, "'Ulamā' in Contemporary South Asia – Globalising the Local by Localizing the Global," *Oriente Moderno* 23 n.s, no. 1 (2004): 83–101; Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman,

attention given to the intellectual content of his historical writings.⁸ Muhammad Qasim Zaman has argued that ‘Alī Nadwī fostered transregional ties to enhance his authority within India.⁹ This chapter builds on the scholarly literature by focusing more sharply on his choice to write histories. Analysis of his historical writing sheds light on his global scholarly fame and the cultural currents with which he engaged.

This chapter focuses primarily on his first Arabic book, *Mādhā Khasir*. It will begin with recreating the local context in Lucknow that enabled ‘Alī Nadwī to successfully write Arabic prose for a modern Arab public. It will then briefly examine his first scholarly monograph, an Urdu history of the life and movement of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd (d. 1831) in 1939. It then proceeds to his second historical work, *Mādhā Khasir*. The chapter analyzes the strategies ‘Alī Nadwī utilized to narrate his history of an Islamic civilization and its supposed timeless tension with a Western civilization. This historical narrative served to craft a transregional Muslim identity rooted in the Prophet’s teachings, as understood by ‘Alī Nadwī. It also aimed to cultivate confidence and optimism about the possibility of Islamic revival. The success garnered by the book indicates that the historical narrative appealed to a large Muslim audience at a time when competing narratives of civilization and identity competed in the Arabic public sphere. The

Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 107; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 23; Itzhak Weismann, “Material Progress and Spiritual Superiority: Muslim Brotherhood Conceptions of Civilization,” *Journal of Civilization Studies* 1, no. 2 (2014): 25–42; Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 114–16; Michael Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith: Migration, Education, and the Wahhabi Mission* (Stanford University Press, 2016), 111, 153–54.

⁸ The adulatory biography by Mohammad Akram Nadwi provides extensive summaries of many of his Arabic works. Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *Shaykh Abu Al-Hasan Ali Nadwi: His Life & Works*, 1st edition (Batley: Nadwi Foundation, 2013).

⁹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 100.

chapter will also briefly discuss his second major Arabic history, *Rijāl al-fīkr wa al-da‘wa* (Intellectuals and Preachers). The latter work attempted to provide a history of Islamic revivalism, but also generated controversy due to his inclusion of Sufis as part of Islamic history.

Lucknow as a Center for Arabic Language

‘Alī Nadwī’s training in Arabic demonstrates how Nadwa became enmeshed in the broader Arab world due to Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān’s (d. 1885) promotion of *ḥadīth* studies in Bhopal, al-Ḥasanī’s interest in studying *ḥadīth*, and Shiblī’s interest in writing historical articles in Arabic. ‘Alī Nadwī thus benefitted from the previous two generations of transregional scholarly networks that had brought Arab scholars to Lucknow. His first Arabic teacher had been Shaykh Khalīl b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn (1886-1966), a scholar of Yemeni descent who had been born in Bhopal. His grandfather, Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin al-Anṣārī (1829- 1909), had been invited as a judge and *ḥadīth* teacher to Bhopal by Nawāb Siddīq Ḥasan Khān in 1862. Recall from Chapter 3 that ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, ‘Alī Nadwī’s father, studied the major books of *ḥadīth* with Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin and forged a close bond with him and his family.¹⁰

‘Alī Nadwī also benefitted from his Arabic teacher’s knowledge of pedagogical advancements in Arabic instruction in Egypt. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Shaykh Khalīl became teacher of Arabic at Lucknow University and Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’. However, due to his relationship with the al-Ḥasanī family, he taught ‘Alī Nadwī in his home along with his own younger brother. He stressed the importance of learning modern standard Arabic as well as classical Arabic and incorporated modern textbooks that were being published in Egypt and Syria. The very first textbook he used was *al-Muṭāli‘a al-‘arabiyya*, published in

¹⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Ḥasanī al-Nadwī, *Ḥayāt ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy* (Raebareili: Sayyid Ahmad Shahid Academy, 2004), 83–84.

Egypt initially in 1911, but reprinted in Calcutta.¹¹ It was written by the Egyptian feminist Nabawiyya Mūsā (1886-1951) for elementary school girls, and it focused on enabling them to effectively express themselves in spoken Arabic.¹² This was very different from the kind of Arabic education at most Indian madrasas that focused on grammar and reading a very specific set of post-classical Arabic texts, especially commentaries. In addition to this textbook, ‘Ālī Nadwī also benefitted from avidly reading major Arabic journals.¹³

The second Arab teacher that was instrumental in strengthening his Arabic skills was the Moroccan Salafī Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī (1893-1987).¹⁴ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī had invited al-Hilālī in 1930 to teach Arabic at Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, which he had accepted.¹⁵ He likely first came to know about Nadwa from his personal friendship with Rashīd Riḍā, who had visited the institution in 1912 when Shiblī had invited him. Riḍā had written about the trip to India in his journal *al-Manār*.¹⁶ Sulaymān Nadwī knew al-Hilālī since the 1920s, when he had travelled to India to study *ḥadīth* with the Ahl-i Ḥadīth Indian scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī (1867-1935).¹⁷ He thus already had familiarity with Indian Muslims. “That al-Hilali accepted this job offer also signals that he had some regard for the institution that hired him.”¹⁸ He taught at Nadwa from 1930 to 1933.

¹¹ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ālī Nadwī, *Purāne Chirāg* (Lucknow: Maktabat al-Shabāb al-‘Ilmiyya, 2010), 1: 213-14.

¹² Nabawiyya Mūsā, *al-Muṭāli‘a al-‘arabiyya* (Cairo: Hindawi Foundation, 2021), 5–6.

¹³ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ālī Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī* (Lucknow: Maktaba-i Islām, 2012), vol. 1, p. 125.

¹⁴ Nadwī, vol. 1, p. 115.

¹⁵ Nadwī, 1: 116.

¹⁶ Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism*, 4.

¹⁷ Nadwi, *Shaykh Abu Al-Hasan Ali Nadwi*, 29.

¹⁸ Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 105.

‘Alī Nadwī credits al-Hilālī for sparking his life-long interest in Arabic literature [*adab*] and for developing his skills in writing articles in Arabic. Classical Arabic literary works, such as *al-Ḥamāsa* and *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* were taught in Indian madrasas. However, ‘Alī Nadwī notes that al-Hilālī helped him to gain an appreciation for *adab* not as a set of texts, but an aesthetically pleasing way of conveying thoughts and feelings, a point to which we will return below.¹⁹

In addition to piquing the young Indian scholar’s interest in Arabic *adab*, al-Hilālī also introduced ‘Alī Nadwī to pan-Islamic discourses in Arabic journals. Nadwa thus became an extension of the Arabic public sphere. My reference to an Arabic public sphere takes into account Marwa ElShakry’s warning to not homogenize it as an undifferentiated reading community. According to Marwa ElShakry, the rise in literacy rates among Arabs by the early twentieth century “had led to the emergence of quite distinct reading communities marked by their own social and moral print economies.”²⁰ In Lucknow, however, Nadwa’s students had a snapshot of these multiple reading communities because their interest in modern Arabic prose exposed them to diverse Arabic newspapers and journals. Among the journals ‘Alī Nadwī read were *al-Hilāl*, *al-Muqtaṭaf*, *Majallat al-Zahrā’*, *al-Majma‘ al-‘ilmī*, *al-‘Irfān*, and *al-Faṭḥ*. Newspapers available included *Fatā al-‘Arab* from Damascus, and *al-Jāmi‘a al-Islāmiyya* from Palestine.²¹ Students and teachers would hold Arabic debates and discussions about topics they read in the Arab media. Shakīb Arslān’s (1869-1946) articles were especially popular.²²

¹⁹ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Merī ‘ilmī Wa Muṭāli‘atī Zindagī* (Raebareili: Sayyid Ahmad Shahid Academy, n.d.), 16.

²⁰ Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 23.

²¹ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Fī Masīrat Al-Ḥayāt* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1987), 104.

²² Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, 149.

Moreover, it seemed to ‘Alī Nadwī that Arab ‘*ulamā*’ seemed more concerned with writing about theological and legal issues that many modern-educated Muslims had no interest in. His favorite journal was the Cairo-based *al-Fatḥ* edited by al-Hilālī’s Salafī friend Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1969), because it accomplished the rare task of combining sound Islamic thought [*al-fikr al-islāmī al-salīm*] and serious Arabic literature [*al-adab al-‘arabī al-raṣīn*].²³

Further enmeshing Nadwa into the Arabic public sphere, Al-Hilālī and Sulaymān Nadwī established an Arabic journal in India, *al-Ḍiyā*, for which ‘Alī Nadwī occasionally wrote articles. It was the only Arabic journal in India at that time. “Published from 1932 to 1935, *al-Ḍiyā*” discussed the ideals of Islamic modernism and encouraged Indian Muslims to transcend their territorial enclave and to embrace a reformist project that involved the entire umma.”²⁴ In a 1934 article for the journal, ‘Alī Nadwī wrote about the unity of the Muslim *umma* despite its various linguistic and cultural diversity, and how they all also shared the experience of European colonial subjugation.²⁵ After al-Hilālī’s departure, his legacy of teaching Arabic in Arabic at Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ remained. However, ‘Alī Nadwī became less interested in the Islamic nationalism championed by Arslān that focused on Muslim material accomplishments and anti-colonialism as the basis of unity.

Before turning to analyzing his Arabic monograph, the next section will analyze his Urdu history on Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd (d. 1831). The analysis will show the importance that historical writing as a scholarly genre had gained by the 1930s due to the influence of Shiblī and Sulaymān

²³ Nadwī, *Fī Masīrat Al-Ḥayāt*, 104–5.

²⁴ Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 108.

²⁵ Lauzière, 109.

Nadwī. ‘Alī Nadwī’s subsequent decision to take up historical writing was thus in some ways a continuation of this trend.

Making His Scholarly Mark Through History: *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd*

In the 1930s, when ‘Alī Nadwī was a teacher of Qur’an and Arabic at Nadwa, he decided to research and write about the life of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd (d. 1831), resulting in his first book in 1939. The choice to inaugurate his career as an author with a historical work was noteworthy and was evidence of the significance that historical writing had attained among ‘*ulamā*’ in India. Shiblī’s legacy, despite his resignation, continued to be influential in the early twentieth century at Nadwa, and many students and staff sought to undertake research in the hopes of making intellectual contributions.²⁶ In addition to Shiblī, Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī’s personality loomed large at Nadwa. ‘Alī Nadwī in fact wanted to join the Dār al-Muṣannifin in 1931 after he had completed his education, but Sulaymān Nadwī did not grant him a fellowship. ‘Alī Nadwī wrote that he understood the decision because “at that time, I still had not shown any capability as a writer, and Dār al-Muṣannifin was prestigious institute known for research and writing.”²⁷ Writing a history about Sayyid Aḥmad and his movement was thus ‘Alī Nadwī’s attempt to show his capabilities as a researcher and writer.

The choice to write about Sayyid Aḥmad had much to do with his personal connection to him. Recall from Chapter 3 that ‘Alī Nadwī hailed from the same family of Ḥasanī Sayyids as the reformist leader and martyr Sayyid Aḥmad. He was also from the same village near Rai Bareilly as Sayyid Aḥmad where the latter had prepared for jihad with his disciples.²⁸ ‘Alī

²⁶ Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, 1: 153.

²⁷ Nadwī, 1: 136.

²⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd* (Lucknow: Majlis-i Taḥqīqāt va Nashriyāt-i Islām, 2011), 1: 380.

Nadwī's family instilled an interest in the life of the reformer from a young age. The discovery of his father's unpublished writings about Sayyid Aḥmad in his *Armagān-i Aḥbāb*, the short Urdu travelogue, and *Nuzhat al-Khwāṭir* further spurred his desire in the reformer.²⁹ These were local influences that predisposed him to historical writing, and thus help contextualize his decision to write his later Arabic history.

‘Alī Nadwī states in the introduction of *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd* that he felt concerned that Muslims were forgetting Sayyid Aḥmad, or otherwise misremembering him. Sayyid Aḥmad had been an important part of Muslim communal memory especially in north India during the nineteenth century. According to Ayesha Jalal, “the most gifted Muslims thinkers and poets of India were evidently influenced by the movement and wrote feelingly about Sayyid Ahmad’s martyrdom.”³⁰ This included poets as different as Mu’min Khān Mu’min (d. 1852), Khwāja Ḥaydir ‘Alī Ātish (d. 1847), Muḥammad Ibrahīm Dhawq (d. 1854), Muṣṭafā Khān Shefta (d. 1869), Mirzā Asadullāh Ghālib (d. 1869).³¹ Furthermore, over a series of highly publicized trials, five from 1864 to 1871, the British Indian government tried and convicted alleged supporters of Sayyid Aḥmad’s movement of sedition and treason. This had the effect of perpetuating Sayyid Aḥmad’s memory in the late nineteenth century.³² However, by the 1930s, ‘Alī Nadwī felt that Sayyid Aḥmad was largely forgotten, especially among educated Muslims.³³

²⁹ Nadwī, 1: 22-23; Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, 1: 113-114.

³⁰ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 61.

³¹ Jalal, 59.

³² Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahhabi Movement in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 200; Julia Stephens, “The Phantom Wahhabi: Liberalism and the Muslim Fanatic in Mid-Victorian India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 01 (January 2013): 22–52.

³³ Nadwī, *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd*, 23.

In addition to memorializing Sayyid Aḥmad, ‘Alī Nadwī used historical writing to correct cultural memory. Those who did know of him remembered him incorrectly, according to ‘Alī Nadwī, as a miracle-working Sufi *shaykh* who fought against the Sikh king Ranjīt Singh and was ultimately martyred with his close disciples in 1831. That was how he was portrayed in the only Urdu biography of him, *Sawāniḥ Aḥmadī* (1891) by Muḥammad Ja‘far Thānesarī (d. 1905).³⁴ The work also casted Sayyid Aḥmad as a messianic figure who did not actually die but went into occultation and would return. In *Armagān-i Aḥbāb* al-Ḥasanī also noted that many people he met in 1895 continued to believe Sayyid Aḥmad would reappear.³⁵ This interpretation of Sayyid aligns with the early modern messianic discourse that A. Afzar Moin has written about. “It prophesied the coming of a savior who would end an era of injustice and chaos and usher in a new one of peace and righteousness.”³⁶

‘Alī Nadwī, however, wanted to transform the Sufi messiah of the *tadhkira* tradition to a Sufi leader of a social movement [*taḥrīk*] locatable in history. This entailed three things. First, such a history would require discovering and researching sources to reconstruct his life. Second, to clarify not only the life and personality of Sayyid Aḥmad, but also his great religious and political movement and its enduring legacy. Finally, instead of focusing on unnecessary details and recounting endless miracles [*karamāt*], a history of his life would focus on historical events and factors that explained events.³⁷

³⁴ Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*, 63; Nadwī, *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd*, 48.

³⁵ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥasanī, *Dihlī Awr Uske Aṭrāf* (Delhi: Urdū Akādīmī, 1988), 93.

³⁶ A. Afzar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 23.

³⁷ Nadwī, *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd*, 1: 43-44.

Like historiographical introductions in the works of Shiblī and Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, ‘Alī Nadwī provided a concise summary of manuscript and published sources he utilized for the book as well as where he found the manuscripts.³⁸ His family collection of unpublished writings proved invaluable. In addition to his father’s works, he discovered many small but useful writings from relatives who had been disciples, including a travelogue of Sayyid Aḥmad’s Hajj journey.³⁹ Many manuscripts were found in the princely state of Tonk. ‘Alī Nadwī travelled there in the summer of 1936 during his summer break from teaching duties expressly for researching the book. The state library held many unpublished sources about Sayyid Aḥmad and the movement because many of the supporters were from there and Muḥammad Wazīr Khān, the Nawab of Tonk (1834-1864), had taken an active interest in Sayyid Aḥmad’s movement.⁴⁰ Because some personal collections from Tonk had been donated to the Punjab University library, ‘Alī Nadwī also availed himself of that library as well. He further noted comparing incomplete copies of the same work from Tonk and Punjab to reproduce the original.⁴¹ Both his diligent research as well as his description of manuscripts helped reinforce the historical nature of the book.

‘Alī Nadwī wanted to present Sayyid Aḥmad as a realistic anti-colonial who was committed to Islamic teachings. One of the main target audiences of the book were politically active Muslim youth drawn to the nationalist politics of the Muslim League or the militant anti-colonialism of the Khaksar Movement. The leadership of the former seemed to marginalize

³⁸ Nadwī, 1: 44-51.

³⁹ Nadwī, 1: 50-51.

⁴⁰ Nadwī, 1: 24, 44.

⁴¹ Nadwī, 1: 45-46.

‘*ulamā*’, and the leadership of the latter opposed the religious authority of ‘*ulamā*’.⁴² ‘Alī Nadwī believed that young Muslims were attracted to non-Islamic [*ghayr islāmī*] movements because they only read about non-Muslim or secular political and national leaders who were self-sacrificing, paragons of integrity, and ambitious. He felt that the masses were naturally moved by such brave heroes, and the life of Sayyid Aḥmad provided a superior example because of his religious commitments. In a not-so-subtle critique of the Muslim League, ‘Alī Nadwī asserted that, “Sayyid Ahmad did not fight and sacrifice himself so that a *qawm* called ‘Muslim’ would become dominant, but rather to establish the religion, the theology and path of Islam, to defend the oppressed law [*sharī‘at*] of the Prophet.”⁴³

‘Alī Nadwī used his biography to criticize the Muslim League, which he believed represented parochial focus on a Muslim nation shorn of any religious commitments. By contrast, Sayyid Aḥmad’s movement was committed to fighting for a religious cause. ‘Alī Nadwī’s characterization of Sayyid Aḥmad’s activities as an organized movement [*tahrik*] was part of his strategy to position Sayyid Aḥmad as an alternative to contemporary political Muslim leaders.

He nonetheless had to balance Sayyid Aḥmad’s portrayal as a political leader, Sufi *shaykh*, and religious reformer. He read into Sayyid Aḥmad’s decisions a political cause of overthrowing British rule and establishing Islamic rule from a very early age of the leader’s life. For example, when a young Sayyid Aḥmad joined the army of Tonk after not performing well as a student or finding employment in Lucknow, ‘Alī Nadwī presented it as the beginning of his anti-colonial mission. He joined the army to gain military experience and convince the Nawab of

⁴² Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, 1: 184-186; on the Khaksar Movement, see Jamal Malik, *Islam in South Asia: A Short History* (BRILL, 2008), 367-68.

⁴³ Nadwī, *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd*, 1: 57.

Tonk to join his anti-colonial cause.⁴⁴ However, according to ‘Alī Nadwī, he had also excelled through personal worship and meditation as a Sufi, so that when he went to Delhi, family members of Shāh Walī Allāh recognized his spiritually elevated rank and became his disciples.⁴⁵ Most of the first volume is devoted to anecdotes of change inspired by the reformist activities of Sayyid Aḥmad’s movement. There is no discussion of failures of Sayyid Aḥmad as a leader or his movement. For ‘Alī Nadwī, any shortcomings, such as the failed military campaign against Ranjit Singh, were singularly the fault of self-interested Muslims betraying him. This view of history as perfect or near-perfect religious revivers facing largely apathetic or self-interested Muslim leaders would continue in his later writings, as will be shown below.

As is evident from the above, ‘Alī Nadwī’s work was indebted to historicism’s legacy of prioritizing primary sources, identifying historical causes, and downplaying miracles. However, in presenting an adulatory view of Sayyid Aḥmad as a Sufi leader and giving space to divine inspiration as an explanation it also remained connected to the Indo-Persian *tadhkira* tradition.

Barbara Metcalf identified three features of older Indo-Persianate biographical writing that continued in modern Urdu biographies.⁴⁶ It would be useful to compare her insights with ‘Alī Nadwī’s work for what it reveals about the peculiarities of his historical approach. The first feature of Indo-Persianate *tadhkiras* in modern Urdu writing that Metcalf identified was the importance of visions and dreams intervening in material reality. This was also the case in ‘Alī Nadwī’s biography. Second, biographies reveal an unfolding of innate personal qualities, rather

⁴⁴ Nadwī, 1: 131; The primary sources are silent about Sayyid Aḥmad’s motivations for joining the army. Altaf Qadir, *Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi His: Movement And Lagacy From The Pukhtun Perspective* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015), 30-31.

⁴⁵ Nadwī, *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd*, 1: 155-156.

⁴⁶ Barbara D. Metcalf, “What Happened in Mecca: Mumtaz Mufti’s Labbaik,” in *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 320–27.

than a development of a person over time. Similarly, in ‘Alī Nadwī’s work Sayyid Aḥmad is blessed with leadership capabilities and divine insights that unfold throughout his life. However, in focusing on Sayyid Aḥmad’s movement, ‘Alī Nadwī does show the relevance of taking historical development into account. Third, history primarily consists of humans responding to external forces, rather than humans being active agents of history.

For ‘Alī Nadwī, however, the historical agency of Sayyid Aḥmad and his movement is a central theme. He wanted to convince readers that the reformist and political activities of a Muslim committed to Islamic teachings can create change. He explicitly called attention to this aspect of the biography, saying that its “message to the youth is that instead of changing yourselves, have the courage to change the present conditions” to realign society with Islamic teachings.⁴⁷ Asserting Islam’s capacity to inspire change by providing examples from history would be an enduring theme of his historical works.

However, due to the political changes in South Asia in the 1940s, he would shift his attention away from historical examples that might lend support to political and military movements in India. At the same time, he would expand the historical role of religious formers as central drivers of human history. The following section sheds light on both the regional and transregional contexts that shaped his views about history as he turned towards writing in Arabic. This context is important in conceptualizing his *adabization* of history.

Convergence of Arabic and Persianate Adab

‘Alī Nadwī’s writings in the 1940s revealed an overriding concern with fostering emotions conducive to cultivating piety. This affected his views on how to approach historical writing as well. The success that *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd* enjoyed after it was published in

⁴⁷ Nadwī, *Sīrat Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd*, 1: 42.

1939 reinforced for ‘Alī Nadwī the value of historical writing.⁴⁸ But his historicist concerns with identifying the earliest sources to anchor historical narrative become less important, although not altogether absent, in his Arabic histories. Prioritization was given to the power of emotional language over empirical evidence.

Both local and transregional contexts are important to understand this emotional turn. In locating the book in entangled Urdu and Arabic cultural currents at Nadwa, I am drawing on Sebastian Conrad’s argument that “interpretations of the past ... do not originate and develop within one country but rather must be understood as the product of connection and exchange between different discourses and practices.”⁴⁹ Although ‘Alī Nadwī had never travelled outside of India when he wrote *Mādhā Khasira*, he nonetheless engaged with ideas related to emotions, *adab*, and civilization that were being discussed among Arabic writers in Egypt and Syria.

Domestically, ‘Alī Nadwī noted confusion among Muslims about what shape the community [*millat*] should take. He attributed the confusion to the competition between the Indian National Congress’s call for Indian nationalism, the Muslim League’s demand of Muslim nationalism, and the Jamā‘atī Islāmī’s call for an Islamic state.⁵⁰ According to him, Muslims supporting the Muslim League and the Jamā‘atī Islāmī viewed ‘*ulamā*’ who did not support their political projects with derision and ridicule.⁵¹ He felt the Muslim League was not as active in pushing for independence from British rule as the Hindus who dominated the Indian National

⁴⁸ Nadwī, *Kārwān-i Zindagī*, 1: 187.

⁴⁹ Sebastian Conrad, “Entangled Memories: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945-2001,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 1 (2003): 86.

⁵⁰ Nadwī, *Kārwān-i Zindagī*, vol. 1, pp. 231–32.

⁵¹ Nadwī, vol. 1, pp. 184-5.

Congress were, even though, according to ‘Alī Nadwī, it was Muslims who had suffered the most under colonialism through the loss of political power.⁵²

‘Alī Nadwī had joined the Jamā‘at-ī Islāmī from 1940-42 because of their more anti-British approach than the Muslim League, but ultimately parted ways with them. His critiques offered an important perspective about his emphasis on cultivating virtuous emotions. He appreciated the sharp critiques of Abū al-‘Alā’ Mawdūdī (1903-1979),⁵³ the founder of Jamā‘at-ī Islāmī, about westernization [*maghribiyyat*] and secularism and admired his Urdu prose for its organization and clarity of thought. However, he found members of the organization dismissive of ‘*ulamā*’ and their scholarly tradition, and too concerned with academic discussions and refuting those who did not agree with the organization.⁵⁴ More importantly, he believed that the organization’s focus on establishing a modern Islamic state led to a lack of emphasis on cultivating emotions and piety. “One does not see in them a taste for religion [*dīn kī dhawq*], progress in virtuous deeds, a passion [*jadhba*] for self-reformation [*iṣlāh-i nafs*], or a serious endeavor to advance in their relationship with God [*ta‘alluq ma‘a allāh men taraqqī*].”⁵⁵ For ‘Alī Nadwī the guidance of ‘*ulamā*’ and the cultivation of piety were critical for maintaining an authentically Islamic communal identity [*millī tashakkhuṣ*].⁵⁶

⁵² Nadwī, vol. 1, pp. 249–50.

⁵³ For Mawdūdī, see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Roy Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi and Political Islam: Authority and the Islamic State* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁵⁴ Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, vol 1, 243-247.

⁵⁵ Nadwī, 1: 244.

⁵⁶ Nadwī, vol. 1, p. 251.

An important influence on ‘Alī Nadwī in the early 1940s, whose ideas confirmed ‘Alī Nadwī’s decision to leave the Jamā‘at-ī Islāmī, was Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlawī (1884 - 1944), the founder of Tablīghī Jama‘āt. Ilyās Kāndhlawī founded the Tablīghī Jama‘āt in the 1920s as a missionary movement aimed primarily at rural Muslims who were ignorant of Islam and were being targeted by Hindu missionaries.⁵⁷ Rather than relying on ‘ulamā’, Ilyās Kāndhlawī believed that lay Muslims could be taught basic Islamic teachings and empowered to preach to other Muslims. In the 1940s, while writing *Mādhā Khasira*, ‘Alī Nadwī wrote a biography on Ilyās Kāndhlawī’s life in which he highlighted the leader’s diagnosis of vices plaguing Muslims. “The most widespread disease afflicting Muslims in this age is lack of sentiments [*be-ḥissī*] and lack of desire [*be ṭalabī*] for Islam.”⁵⁸ He wrote that according to Ilyās Kāndhlawī, curing these diseases would lead to the rectification of larger social and political problems facing Muslims.

The Tablīghī Jama‘āt began producing historical literature during this period that sought to generate among Indian Muslims stronger emotional bonds with Islam. One such work was *Ḥikayāt-i Ṣaḥāba* (Tales of the Companions), which had the following subtitle: “True Stories” [*sachchī kahāniyān*]. The book was a collection of vignettes about the Companions organized around specific themes, such as “steadfastness in preaching Islam,” which constituted chapter titles. No discussion establishing the historical reliability of the “true” stories was provided. As Barbara Metcalf has written, the Tablīghī Jama‘āt continued to draw on the Indo-Persianate *adab* tradition in his historical writings. Their works presented mythical histories that collapsed the

⁵⁷ Barbara D. Metcalf, “Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jama‘at,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 3 (1993): 584–608, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2058855>; Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland: Univ of California Press, 2018), 149–59.

⁵⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Ilyās Awr Un Kī Dīnī Da‘wat* (Lahore: Tayyib Publishers, 2009), 250.

past into the present in order to fashion pious Muslim subjects.⁵⁹ “Participants in Tablīgh choose to identify with the models of ḥadīth that distance them from the life of much of their society, identifying with the sorrows and passions of great Muslims of the past and of Muslims who live the past in the present even today.”⁶⁰ While ‘Alī Nadwī’s Arabic histories would not go as far in collapsing the past in the present, he would attempt to generate emotional identification with an Islamic past as well as use history for moral instruction.

Beyond India, ‘Alī Nadwī was concerned about discussions of *adab* in the Arabic public sphere. Even after the departure of al-Hilālī from Lucknow in 1934, ‘Alī Nadwī continued pursuing his interest in Arabic *adab*. Al-Hilālī had imparted to him that *adab* was not a collection of literary texts, but “a means of expressing aesthetic [*fannī*], elevated [*buland*], and advanced [*taraqqī yāfta*] thoughts and feelings, born out of cultural [*tamaddun*] and intellectual progress [*takhayyul kī taraqqī*].”⁶¹ The connection between *adab*, development, and progress was noticeable. According to Marwa Elshakry, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, “*adab* (proper manners, morals, and taste) came to imply new norms of civility and a new kind of moral science” necessary for civilizational progress.⁶²

Discussions in the Arabic public about *adab* touched on notions of civilization. Orit Bashkin has shown that in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, discussions in Arab

⁵⁹ Barbara D. Metcalf, “The Past in the Present: Instruction, Pleasure, and Blessing in Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya’s *Aap Bīitii*,” in *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 67–95; Barbara D. Metcalf, “Nationalism, Modernity, and Muslim Identity in India before 1947,” in *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶⁰ Metcalf, “Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jama’at,” 595.

⁶¹ Nadwī, *Merī ‘ilmī Wa Muṭāli‘atī Zindagī*, 16.

⁶² Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, 19.

societies about civilization were connected to cultivating desired emotions and creating new communities based on notions of an Arab, Islamic, and international Eastern identity. These debates “suggested different definitions of the community; they indicated different ideas as to when the history of the community began ... and about the geographical boundaries of the community.”⁶³ Historical narratives also attempted to evoke emotions that “were also understood as mediating between past and present and as a key to social reform.”⁶⁴ Thus, ideas of *adab*, history, civilization, and community were commonly evoked but ambiguously related in the Arabic public sphere.⁶⁵

From ‘Alī Nadwī’s perspective in Lucknow in the 1940s, there was very little discussion about *adab*’s role in cultivating emotions towards Islam [*dīnī jadhbā/ al- ‘āṭifa al-dīniyya*]. He became critical of the lack of passionate support for Islam in the most popular literary works, singling out the “purely literary works [*adabīyya khāliṣa*] by Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manflūṭī (1876-1924), Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfi‘ī (1880-1937), and Ṭahā Ḥusayn (1889-1973) as well as the “critical and analytical works” [*ilmīyya taḥlīliyya*] by Aḥmad Amīn (1886-1954), ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād (1889-1964), and ‘Allāma Kurd ‘Alī (1876-1953).⁶⁶ It is not clear to me precisely what his distinction signifies, but the inclusion of Aḥmad Amīn is noteworthy because he was an Egyptian historian and professor of Arabic and Islamic Literature at Cairo University. His

⁶³ Orit Bashkin, “Journeys between Civility and Wilderness: Debates on Civilization and Emotions in the Arab Middle East, 1861-1939,” in *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth-Century Asia and Europe*, ed. Margrit Pernau, Helge Jordheim, Orit Bashkin, Christian Bailey, Oleg Benesch, Jan Ifversen, Mana Kia, Rochona Majumdar, Angelika C. Messner, Myoung-kyu Park, Emmanuelle Saada, Mohinder Singh, and Einar Wigen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 133.

⁶⁴ Bashkin, 135.

⁶⁵ Bashkin, 142.

⁶⁶ Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, vol. 1, p. 253.

three-part histories of the first four centuries of Islam “represented the first such effort by an Arabic-speaking Muslim to use the insights of western orientalists.”⁶⁷ His directorship of the Arab League’s Cultural Board from 1947-1952 also made him a well-known scholar throughout the Arab world.⁶⁸ ‘Alī Nadwī had read his histories in 1938 in Lucknow.⁶⁹

For ‘Alī Nadwī, *adab* was important for cultivating emotions towards Islam. While he was working on *Mādhā Khasira*, he was also compiling an anthology of literary Arabic texts. He believed that contemporary literary anthologies of Arabic texts were deficient because they left out writings of important Muslim religious scholars, selections from the Qur’an, and selections from *ḥadīth*. ‘Alī Nadwī wanted Arabic literary [*adab*] texts to refine Muslim subjectivities, and the inclusion of such religious literature was important.⁷⁰ Around the same time, he defined Arabic *adab* as “eloquent expression that stirs the soul, arouses admiration, broadens the horizons of thought, invites imitation, and instills self-confidence.”⁷¹ Thus language, thought, and behavior were connected.

He believed that historical writing could function as *adab*. He started thinking about writing this book after reading numerous Arabic histories which represented Muslims as passive responders to events in world history. He thus set out to write a “scientific” [*sā’iniḥīk*] history that demonstrated that Muslims possessed historical agency and intervened in noteworthy ways

⁶⁷ William Shepard, “The Dilemma of a Liberal Some Political Implications in the Writings of the Egyptian Scholar, Ahmad Amin (1886-1954),” *Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 2 (1980): 85.

⁶⁸ Efraim Barak, “Ahmad Amin and Nationalism,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 295, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200601114158>.

⁶⁹ Nadwī, *Merī ‘ilmī Wa Muṭāli ‘atī Zindagī*, 23.

⁷⁰ Abulḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Mukhtārāt min ‘adab ‘al-‘Arab: qism ‘al-nathr* (Beirut: Dār ‘al-Fikr ‘al-Ḥadīth, 1965), 3.

⁷¹ Abulḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Naṣarāt fī al-Adab* (Amman, Jordan: Dar al-Bashir, 1990), 22.

in world history.⁷² Because history’s potential to combine affective power through its literary appeal and intellectual persuasion through its factual basis, ‘Alī Nadwī sought to utilize it to shape people’s identity and behavior. In the introduction to the Urdu version of the book, written after he completed the manuscript of the Arabic version, he wrote, “righteous revolution and rebuilding require the awakening of the heart and preparation of the intellect. For this, properly organized and researched histories are necessary that on the one hand produce intellectual contentment and put one’s heart to rest [‘ilmī iṭmīnān aur qalbī inshirāḥ], and on the other hand produce in readers courage [hoṣla], renewed faith [nayā yaqīn], and passion for action [jowsh-e-‘amal].”⁷³

This context will help in understanding the content and approach of the book. While it is a work of history for ‘Alī Nadwī, it is also a work of *adab*. The appeal of the book lay in his impassioned rhetoric combined with its claim of objective historical scholarship.

The Popular History of an Islamic Civilization

As the title of the book indicates, a major theme of the book is the decline of Islamic civilization and how to remedy it, a topic much discussed by Muslims for decades by the time the book was written.⁷⁴ There were important aspects of ‘Alī Nadwī’s historical narrative of an Islamic civilization that set him apart. This section will focus on three significant ways in which ‘Alī Nadwī used historical analysis to strengthen his narrative of history of an Islamic civilization. First, he began his historical narrative in Late Antiquity to emphasize the advent of Islam as a

⁷² Nadwī, *Kārwān-i Zindagī*, vol. 1:257.

⁷³ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Insānī Dunyā Par Musalmānon Ke ‘Urūj va Ziwāl Ka Athar* (Lucknow: Majlis-i Taḥqīqāt va Nashriyāt-i Islām, 2010), 22.

⁷⁴ Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 154.

moral revolution. Second, he presented a reified materialistic West as essentially rooted in Greco-Roman paganism, decadence, and barbarism. Third, he eschewed a narrative of Islamic decline since an Abbasid golden age and instead presented a narrative of ebb and flow between moments of decline and moments of revival and renewal. Carefully examining each of these three aspects sheds light on the complicated ways in which ‘Alī Nadwī both engaged with the scholarly discursive tradition as well as participated in modern civilizational thinking.

The book begins with a survey of religions and empires at the advent of Islam, the *jāhilī* period, to demonstrate that Islam represented a socio-cultural and moral revolution and historical rupture. ‘Alī Nadwī opened the book by stating, “The sixth and seventh centuries of the Christian calendar ... were the lowest point in the history of humanity.”⁷⁵ He substantiated this claim through a survey of imperial subjugation of humanity, exploitation of the weak by the strong, imposition of rigid class hierarchies, and the spread of religious corruption. This section was based primarily on European sources, especially the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Gibbon’s *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and Henry Smith Williams (d. 1943) *The Historians’ History of the World*. In the section on the Sassanian Empire and Zoroastrianism, he also relied on al-Ṭabarī’s history.

Moreover, orientalist representations of non-Europeans was taken as evidence of world-wide decadence and moral degeneration. For example, when discussing Hinduism, the book highlighted its supposed exceptional sexual depravity under a subsection titled “Unbridled Sexual Lust [*al-shahwa al-jinsīyya al-jāmiḥa*]. Relying on colonial discourse that collapsed courtesans, specialized court dancers, and temple dancers as prostitutes,⁷⁶ ‘Alī Nadwī alleged

⁷⁵ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 29.

⁷⁶ Erica Wald, “Defining Prostitution and Redefining Women’s Roles: The Colonial State and Society in Early 19th
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that temple priests prostituted female devotees, and transformed temples into brothels. “If this was the case with the houses that were raised for worship and religion, then what does the reader think of the courts of kings and the palaces of the wealthy?”⁷⁷ Similarly, he described a rigid caste-based social system as representative of Hinduism’s core by focusing on *Mansumriti*.⁷⁸ This was an ancient Brahmanical text that under British rule, according to Nicholas Dirks, “took on unprecedented legal status as an ‘applied’ legal document” and “encapsulated British attempts to codify not just law but social relations in a single, orthodox “Hindu” – and therefore Brahmanical – register.”⁷⁹

Furthermore, in providing a bleak analysis of late antique religions, ‘Alī Nadwī reproduced a “world religions” paradigm that had emerged in the inter-war years “in the face of the rising tide of modernization and increasing global competition.”⁸⁰ The major religions of the world, aside from Islam, were Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and ‘Alī Nadwī characterizes them as having become corrupt, distorted, and incapable of offering a challenge to tyranny, injustice, and decadence.

The major religions became victims of jesters [*al-‘ābithīn*] and manipulators [*al-mutalā‘ibīn*], and the plaything of distorters [*al-muḥariffīn*] and hypocrites [*al-munāfiqīn*], until they lost their spirit and form. If the founders of the religions [*aṣḥābuhā al-awwalīn*] were resurrected, they would not recognize them. The cradles of civilization [*al-ḥadāra*], culture [*al-thiqāfa*], governance [*al-hukm*], and politics [*al-siyāsa*] became scenes of chaos [*al-fawḍā*], decay [*al-inḥilāl*], disorder [*al-ikhtilāl*], mismanagement [*sūw’ al-nizām*], and arbitrary rule [*‘asaf al-hukm*]. They were so engrossed in their self-interests that they carried no broader message [*risāla*] for the world, no higher call [*da‘wa*] for other nations. They were bankrupt of ideals

Century India,” *History Compass* 7, no. 6 (2009): 1470–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2009.00647.x>.

⁷⁷ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inḥitāt al-muslimīn*, n.d., 50.

⁷⁸ al-Nadwī, 51–53.

⁷⁹ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 34.

⁸⁰ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 42.

[*ma 'nawiyāthā*], and their source of life [*ma 'īn ḥayātuhā*] dried out. They possessed neither a pure lawgiver from the heavenly religion [*musharri 'an ṣāfiyan min al-dīn al-samāwī*] nor a stable system from human governance [*nizāman thābitan min al-ḥukm al-basharī*].⁸¹

In addition to summarizing his negative assessment of religions in the sixth and seventh centuries, the above quote also displays 'Alī Nadwī's use of repetition and parallelism. In an article about the use of repetition by Arabic writers in the twentieth century, Barbara Johnstone Koch demonstrated that the "strategy of persuading by repeating, rephrasing, clothing and reclothing one's request or claim in changing cadences of words" represented a recurring "persuasive device" in modern political discussions.⁸² As Arabic reformers from the late nineteenth century preferred precision and a lucid style for modern Arabic prose, they adapted styles of repetition and parallelism to imbue prose with emotional force.⁸³ 'Alī Nadwī similarly combined an analytical argument about Islam's world historical role with affective power through the use of emotive language.

After providing a snapshot of world religions in the *jāhili* period, 'Alī Nadwī discussed pre-Islamic Arabs, and deemed their paganism worse than other religions at the time. "Moral and social ills made them a nation of decaying morals, corrupting society, weakening existence, containing the worst qualities of pre-Islamic life, and far from the virtues of religions."⁸⁴ This negative assessment sets up the next section of the book where 'Alī Nadwī juxtaposes the sorry state of Arabs before Islam to their improved state morally and politically after Islam, culminating in the conquest of the Sassanian and Byzantine Empires in mere decades.

⁸¹ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al- 'ālam bi inhiṭāt al-muslimīn*, n.d., 31.

⁸² Barbara Johnstone Koch, "Presentation as Proof: The Language of Arabic Rhetoric," *Anthropological Linguistics* 25, no. 1 (1983): 48.

⁸³ Koch, 56; Hisham Jawad, "Repetition in Literary Arabic: Foregrounding, Backgrounding, and Translation Strategies," *Meta : Journal Des Traducteurs / Meta: Translators' Journal* 54, no. 4 (2009): 753–69, <https://doi.org/10.7202/038902ar>.

⁸⁴ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al- 'ālam bi inhiṭāt al-muslimīn*, n.d., 54.

Although he relied mainly on European sources and reproduced colonial prejudices in the first section of the book, ‘Alī Nadwī adopted the argument that Islam introduced a revolutionary transformation in its early followers from the universal history of the medieval Damascene scholar Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373), *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*. A manuscript for it had been discovered in Syria in 1912, and the work was published in 1923.⁸⁵ In *al-Madd wa al-Jazr Fī Tārīkh al-Islām*,⁸⁶ an Arabic essay that ‘Alī Nadwī wrote prior to *Mādha Khasir al-‘Ālim* in the early 1940s but was published after it,⁸⁷ There were many long excerpts from *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya* about how Persians and Romans looked down on Arabs, as well as Muslim messengers to Persian and Roman leaders acknowledging that before Islam they lived in a wretched state, but Islam changed them.⁸⁸ Ibn Kathīr rearranged material from previous historical works to produce a clearer narrative upholding the Sunnaī consensus about the moral integrity of the Companions.⁸⁹ The selections ‘Alī Nadwī quoted from Ibn Kathīr were intended by the latter to reinforce the special status of the Companions. ‘Alī Nadwī repurposed them as evidence of Islam’s historical capacity for producing moral change that then leads to socio-political change. Thus, the first chapters in his *Madhā Khasira* were an expansion on an earlier thesis, for which he sought confirmation in European sources.

⁸⁵ Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), 188–89.

⁸⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Al-Madd Wa al-Jazr Fī Tārīkh al-Islām* (Beirut: al-Sharika al-Muttaḥida Lil-Tawzī’, 1971).

⁸⁷ Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, 1: 255.

⁸⁸ Nadwī, *Al-Madd Wa al-Jazr Fī Tārīkh al-Islām*, 16, 20, 40, passim.

⁸⁹ Aaron Hagler, “Sunnifying ‘Alī: Historiography and Notions of Rebellion in Ibn Kathīr’s Kitāb al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya,” *Der Islam* 97, no. 1 (April 1, 2020): 203–32, <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2020-0008>.

His incorporation of premodern Arabic histories is an important aspect of the book's appeal. It shows the role played by recently discovered and published texts on modern Muslim historical thinking. Moreover, it also helps explain the appeal of 'Alī Nadwī's book. Mona Hassan in her cultural history of the symbolic power of the caliphate has elucidated the relevance of "cultural resonances across time" in extending "dynamics of collective memory that were generated in the distant past."⁹⁰ Rooting his historical argument about Islam's transformative power in premodern historical narratives lends his argument greater weight.

In addition to drawing on premodern Arabic historical narratives to argue for Islam's role in causing a moral and political change for the initial generation of Muslims, he also relied on premodern texts to argue for a cyclical view of history. Unlike many contemporary writers about Islamic decline in the early twentieth century, 'Alī Nadwī did not view Islamic history as reaching a golden age under the Abbasids and then steadily declining until the present. Rather he viewed Islamic history as undergoing cycles of rise and decline. When Muslims renew their commitment to Islam's metaphysical truths, Muslims progress politically as well. However, they eventually succumb to apathy, greed, and laziness, and thus they undergo decline. Muslim religious apathy led to the crusaders conquering Palestine, as well as the Mongol destruction of Baghdad. However, both catastrophes were followed by moments of religious revival, leading to Muslim progress once again.

The influence of Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical history is apparent. Equally important, however, is 'Alī Nadwī's indebtedness to Shāh Walī Allāh in presenting *jahiliyya* not only as a period before Islam, but a recurring state of moral degeneracy characterized by religious apathy,

⁹⁰ Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 259.

materialism, and tribalism that continues to afflict Muslims during moments of decline. ‘Alī Nadwī provided numerous references to *ḥadīth* and statements of Companions warning against allowing *jahīlī* practices or attitudes to continue.⁹¹ The kingdoms established in the wake of the Mongol conquests are also described as *jahīlī* because although they inherited Muslim cultures, they remained “a barbaric nation with no religion, science, culture, or civilization.”⁹²

There is a strong resonance between ‘Alī Nadwī’s and Shāh Walī Allāh’s characterization of aspects of pre-Islamic paganism as posing a recurring threat for Muslims. In his short treatise on interpreting the Qur’an, Walī Allāh contended that descriptions of non-Muslims in the Qur’an are meant to warn Muslims from adopting their characteristics, and yet Muslims have continuously fallen victim to the very kinds of paganism critiqued in the Qur’an.⁹³ Moreover, ‘Alī Nadwī accepted Shāh Walī Allāh’s criticisms of Muslims during his time as evidence that by the eighteenth-century, Muslims were already in the midst of a period of decline and this period of decline has extended into the twentieth century.⁹⁴ ‘Alī Nadwī had begun to draw a parallel between pre-Islamic Arab pagans and contemporary Muslims in the early 1940s after joining the Tablighī Jama‘at. He viewed its missionary activities as educating common Muslims about basic Islamic teachings as emulating the Prophet’s preaching to pagan Arabs. Thus, he wrote in his 1942 Urdu biography of Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlawī that many Indian Muslims in the early twentieth century were contemporary examples of pre-Islamic Arab *jahāhiliyya*.⁹⁵

⁹¹ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 92–95, 120–21, passim.

⁹² al-Nadwī, 131.

⁹³ Shāh Walī Allāh, *Al-Fawz al-Kabīr Fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Karachi: Al-Bushra Publishers, 2011), 19.

⁹⁴ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 137.

⁹⁵ Nadwī, *Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Ilyās Awr Un Kī Dīnī Da‘wat*, 64; Metcalf, “Living Hadith in the Tablighī Jama‘at,” 602.

The intellectual context of Shāh Walī Allāh’s Qur’anic approach and the social context of the Tablighī Jama‘āt are important correctives to the tendency in the secondary literature that lumps ‘Alī Nadwī’s ideas about *jahāliyya* with that of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) and Mawdūdī (1903-1979).⁹⁶ Their usage is more political and refers to societies that deny God’s sovereignty [*hākimiyya*] and instead adhere to human-legislated legal and political regimes.⁹⁷ ‘Alī Nadwī’s usage by contrast is much more general. Moreover, even if Muslims adopted *jāhili* characteristics, they did not cease to be Muslims according to him, although they may come very close to apostasy.⁹⁸

While ‘Alī Nadwī’s argument for Islam causing a moral and political change and the cyclical nature of Islamic history with periods of progress and decline were not entirely novel, his presentation of a civilizational conflict between Islam and the West did not have precedence in premodern histories. Unlike in premodern historical narratives where wars were framed as conflicts between specific dynasties or empires, in modern narratives, according to Aydin, “civilizational conflict was the principal lens through which global history was understood.”⁹⁹ This seemed to be the case for ‘Alī Nadwī as well. He uses both *madaniyya* and *hāqāra* to refer to Islamic and western civilizations. An example of the use of the first term is his statement that “the emergence of the Islamic civilization [*al-madaniyya al-islāmiyya*] ... in the first century ... was a new chapter in the history of religions and morals, and a new phenomenon in the world of

⁹⁶ Euben and Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, 108.

⁹⁷ William Shepard, “Sayyid Qutb’s Doctrine of Jahiliyya,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 4 (November 1, 2003): 521–45; Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, 96.

⁹⁸ Nadwī, *Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Ilyās Awr Un Kī Dīnī Da‘wat*, 62.

⁹⁹ Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 76.

politics and society, and the civilizational tide [*tayyār al-madaniyya*] turned because of it.”¹⁰⁰ An example of his usage of the second term is when he described the latest period of decline, “even though the Islamic civilization [*al-ḥaḍāra al-islāmiyya*] in India is in decline ... there were still those who had Islamic pride and religious zeal.”¹⁰¹ He also repeatedly refers to western civilization [*al-ḥaḍāra al-gharbiyya*] as the antithesis of Islamic civilization. These terms are absent in his older essay, *al-Madd wa al-Jazr Fī Tārīkh al-Islām*, where he had relied primarily on Ibn Kathīr’s history. The Muslim wars with the Byzantines and Persians were represented as a conflict with those two specific polities, not entire civilizations.

The use of the civilizational terms reveals ‘Alī Nadwī’s indebtedness to nationalist discourse in the Arabic public sphere. *Ḥaḍāra* been used by Ibn Khaldūn to denote sedentary life, as opposed to living in the desert.¹⁰² Arab reformers in the first half of the nineteenth century had begun using the term *tamaddun* to refer to European notion of civilization as a universal process of cultural and intellectual refinement and progress. However, when in the 1860s Europeans began to use ‘civilization’ to refer to a distinctly European heritage that distinguished them from the rest of the world, Arab writers used *tamaddun* to refer to a uniquely Arab civilization.¹⁰³ The term *ḥaḍāra* became more popular in the early twentieth century. The translation of Gustave Le Bon’s *La civilisation des arabes* as *ḥaḍārat al-‘arab* in Beirut in 1924

¹⁰⁰ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 113.

¹⁰¹ al-Nadwī, 210.

¹⁰² Wael Abu-‘Uksa, “Imagining Modernity: The Language and Genealogy of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Arabic,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, April 30, 2019, 672–76, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00263206.2019.1574759>.

¹⁰³ Birgit Schaebler, “Civilizing Others: Global Modernity and the Local Boundaries (French/German, Ottoman, and Arab) of Savagery,” in *Globalization and the Muslim World; Culture, Religion, and Modernity*, ed. Birgit Schaebler and Leif Stenberg (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 16–25.

further contributed to a desire to search the Arab past to delineate its civilizational identity.¹⁰⁴

“Egyptian intellectuals took from Le Bon the concept that nations possess their own distinct personality. Each national collective has a character, mentality, and soul that can be ascertained objectively and scientifically.”¹⁰⁵

Shakīb Arslān’s writings were an important source for ‘Alī Nadwī about civilizational discourse in Arabic. For Pan-Islamists like Arslān, national consciousness was not necessarily at odds with the notion of an Islamic civilization. In his widely popular book from 1930, *Limādhā ta’akhhara al-muslimūm wa limādhā taqaddama ghayruhum* (Why Muslims have fallen behind while others have advanced), he wrote that the weakness of the Islamic civilization [*al-madaniyya al-islāmiyya*], which was once scientifically advanced, was due to Muslim ignorance of the true teachings of Islam.¹⁰⁶ However, the book’s main argument was that to break out of their backwardness and become equals to Europe, Muslims must adopt an Islamic nationalism that celebrated their material and scientific heritage and promoted patriotism the way western nationalism did.¹⁰⁷ He also linked Japan’s rise at the turn of the century to its nationalism [*qawmiyya*].¹⁰⁸

‘Alī Nadwī’s prescription for improving the sad state of the Islamic civilization was not a renewed commitment to nationalism, whether Arab, Indian, or Islamic, but a renewed commitment to the teachings of the Qur’an and the Prophet. That is why the “golden age” of

¹⁰⁴ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (University of California Press, 1988), 123–25.

¹⁰⁵ Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 134.

¹⁰⁶ al-Amīr Shakīb Arslān, *Li-Mādhā Ta’akhhara al-Muslimūm Wa Li-Mādhā Taqaddama Ghayruhum* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār Maktaba al-Ḥayāt, n.d.), 119–22.

¹⁰⁷ Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 136–37.

¹⁰⁸ Arslān, *Li-Mādhā Ta’akhhara al-Muslimūm Wa Li-Mādhā Taqaddama Ghayruhum*, 91–94.

Islam for him was the generation of the Companions because of their religiosity. While he nonetheless admired Arslān, Arab nationalists deeply troubled him. Not only did secular Arab nationalism threaten the viability of a global Muslim *umma*, but it also left unchallenged, in his view, the corrupting influence of western materialism.

The contemporary period for ‘Alī Nadwī was a continuation of a centuries-long battle between the Islamic and western civilizations. He argued that the western civilization was rooted in a materialistic worldview dating back to the ancient Greeks and the Roman Empire. Thus the “other” of Islamic civilization is not a Christian West, but a materialistic west that subdued Christianity.

Christian Europe transformed into a materialistic jahilī Europe, stripped of all the spiritual teachings, moral virtues, and human principles that prophecy had bequeathed. It came to believe that only pleasure and material benefit matter in personal life, and only force and dominance matter in political life, and in social life only aggressive patriotism and brutal sexuality matter in social life ... In its continuous striving for the sake of life, its constant quest for discovery and experimentation, its continuous disdain for moral education and nourishment of the soul, its denial of what the messengers brought, its indulgence in materialism, its enormous strength coupled with the loss of religious scruples and moral barriers, Europe became a raging elephant, trampling the weak, destroying humanity.¹⁰⁹

In his history of western civilization, he once again relied primarily on western sources. This section is heavily footnoted, and it will be useful to see how his selective use of western sources helps him substantiate his claim of a continuous western civilization from antiquity to the twentieth century. He draws on *A History of European Morals* (1869) by the Irish historian William Lecky (d. 1903) in presenting ancient Greece and Rome as decadent and uninterested in religion.¹¹⁰ Lecky held a negative view of pre-Christian Rome and viewed Christianity’s moral influence positively. However, ‘Alī Nadwī does not refer to Lecky when discussing Christian

¹⁰⁹ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 225.

¹¹⁰ al-Nadwī, 147.

Rome, but instead relies on William Draper's (d. 1882) *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874) to argue that the Roman Empire distorted Christianity.¹¹¹ Because of the book's positive portrayal of Islam as being open to scientific discoveries compared to Christianity, it had become popular in Arab countries.¹¹² For 'Alī Nadwī, however, the book had a different function. It proved Christianity's failure to challenge western materialism.

Muslim battles with the Byzantine Empire, Crusaders, and European colonizers were all collapsed into a single history of Islamic civilization's conflict with western civilization. 'Alī Nadwī also provided an extensive quote from Shāh Walī Allāh's book *Hujjat Allāh al-Bāligha* wherein he said that God sent the Prophet after tyranny, oppression, idolatry, and ungodliness had reached its zenith in the Byzantine and Persian Empires. However, whereas Shāh Walī Allāh's point was to discuss the importance of just governance to maintain strong empires, and how its neglect leads to God bringing about their demise, 'Alī Nadwī framed the quote as indicating Islam's civilizational clash with western rivals from its inception.¹¹³ The fact that Shāh Walī Allāh was writing in the eighteenth century, and was thus almost a thousand years removed from Muslim battles with the Byzantines and Sassanians did not diminish for 'Alī Nadwī its importance as a historical source.

In addition to drawing on western historians, he also deftly incorporated post-World War I western critics of Europe in extending his history of western civilization to the mid-twentieth century. The most famous of such cultural critics was Muhammad Asad (1900-1992). 'Alī

¹¹¹ al-Nadwī, 150.

¹¹² M. Alper Yalcinkaya, "Science as an Ally of Religion: A Muslim Appropriation of 'the Conflict Thesis,'" *The British Journal for the History of Science* 44, no. 2 (June 2011): 161–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087410000749>; Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, 190.

¹¹³ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al- 'ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 75–76.

Nadwī considered his writings deeply influential because of their critiques of European society.¹¹⁴ He cited from the Arabic translation of *Islam at the Crossroads* (1934) in his book to highlight the negative social effects of Europe’s putative worship of material progress.¹¹⁵ The section on western civilization’s history concludes with a harrowing account of the destruction caused by America, “the messenger of peace and the leader of civilization,” when it dropped atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing reportedly between 210,000 and 240,000 people in a single day.¹¹⁶

In shedding light on the dark underbelly of the modern west, ‘Alī Nadwī joined many colonized intellectuals who challenged its supposed civilizational superiority. According to Michael Adas, in the aftermath of both World Wars, “philosophers, social commentators, and political activists” from across the world “raised fundamental questions about the effects of industrialization in the West itself as well as the ways in which that process was being transferred to colonized areas in Asia and Africa.”¹¹⁷ However, most of these critiques remained in European languages.¹¹⁸ ‘Alī Nadwī not only expanded the audience for post-war critiques of Europe and America, but also presented it as the destructive culmination of western civilizational history.

After foregrounding the danger to the world posed by the west’s violent barbarity, ‘Alī Nadwī concluded the book with a passional appeal to Arabs to shun secular nationalism and

¹¹⁴ Nadwī, *Merī ‘ilmī Wa Muṭāli‘atī Zindagī*, 23.

¹¹⁵ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 161–62.

¹¹⁶ al-Nadwī, 197.

¹¹⁷ Michael Adas, “Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology,” *Journal of World History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 61, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2004.0002>.

¹¹⁸ Adas, 62.

rekindle their love for Islam to save humanity from destruction. ‘Alī Nadwī placed his hopes for the political leadership of a global Muslim community on Arab nations and believed that the only way to take up this responsibility was by submitting to Islamic teachings and ethics.¹¹⁹ Arabs were ideal for a position of leadership because of the geostrategic location of the Middle East, their lands richness with natural resources like oil, and presence of holy cities revered by Muslims globally.¹²⁰ He also repurposed the dichotomy between a spiritual east and a materialistic west that Hindu intellectuals such as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) had appropriated from orientalist notions of the mystic east.¹²¹ This was a sharper dichotomy than found in Ḥasan al-Banna’s criticisms of the materialistic west, since he did not juxtapose the west to a mystical east.¹²² For ‘Alī Nadwī, Muslims still possessed a religious sense that Europeans had lost but ‘easterners’ still maintained. However, eastern nations like India and China were too parochial to have worldwide impact.¹²³ Islam was unique in being a global religion, and thus the best representative of the religious east. However, the revival of an Islamic civilization capable of challenging the west required the proper cultivation of this religious spirit, similar to how the Companions had undergone a religious transformation that led to sociopolitical changes in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 240.

¹²⁰ al-Nadwī, 240–41.

¹²¹ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East”* (Routledge, 2013), 93; Adas, “Contested Hegemony,” 49.

¹²² Weismann, “Material Progress and Spiritual Superiority: Muslim Brotherhood Conceptions of Civilization,” 27–28.

¹²³ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 254–55.

¹²⁴ al-Nadwī, 201–2, 226.

Despite the passionate rhetoric, the book remains highly reductive in positing a perpetual civilizational conflict between Islam and the west. Moreover, its arguments about the necessity of turning back to the example of earliest Muslims, that religious renewal would lead to civilizational progress, that western civilization was greedy and materialistic, and that the east was fundamentally different from the west because of its religious spirit were all unoriginal ideas.

‘Alī Nadwī’s contribution, however, was to synthesize these ideas into a sweeping and emotive historical narrative, and substantiate it with citations from premodern Arabic histories, *ḥadīth*, verses from the Qur’an, as well as western histories and contemporary cultural critics. Grunebaum criticized the book’s citations, stating that the "ample quotations from mostly outdated or otherwise questionable authorities do not serve the purposes of fact-finding, but serve rather as cumulative testimony in court. With the Western concept of science the Western urge to self-understanding through an analysis not only of one's own but of other civilizations is dismissed."¹²⁵ His sanguine assessment of the objectivity of western studies of the non-west notwithstanding, Grunebaum is correct in identifying that the citations often do not serve the purpose of fact-finding. But they were nonetheless strategically important in the reception of his work in the Arabic public as historical scholarship. Much of the book’s power of persuasion, however, rests in its emotive force. Even Grunebaum is forced to admit it. “It is difficult not to be impressed with the enthusiasm that permeates Nadwī’s presentation, with the drive of his unreflected conviction of the uniqueness of Islam as a religious civilization.”¹²⁶

¹²⁵ G. E. Von Grunebaum, *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), 189.

¹²⁶ Grunebaum, 188.

The success with which the book was met encouraged ‘Alī Nadwī to continue to employ a similar approach in his Arabic histories, what I have termed the *adabization* of history. More than one hundred editions of the book were printed between 1951 and 1999.¹²⁷ The following section reviews the reception of the book and suggests factors beyond the book’s presentation that may have contributed to its fame.

Arab Reception of Mādhā Khasir al-‘Ālam

An important reason the book initially received tremendous attention from Arabic readers was that Aḥmad Amīn had published it in the *Lajnat al-ta’līf wa al-tarjama wa al-nashr*, a prestigious publishing house of which he was the director. He had published his own popular three-part series on the cultural history of the first four centuries of Islam from there as well. ‘Alī Nadwī knew of his intellectual stature in the Arab world, and thus sent him a part of his manuscript of the book requesting Aḥmad Amīn to recommend it for publication. Aḥmad Amīn initially had reservations about the quality of its historical scholarship, writing back to ‘Alī Nadwī that although he found his ideas interesting, he feared people would assume it was the work of a religious scholar from al-Azhar unfamiliar with western ideas. He asked ‘Alī Nadwī to send his bibliography to verify the quality of scholarship. When he saw ‘Alī Nadwī had cited English sources, he recommended it to the *Lajnat* for publication.¹²⁸

In addition to demonstrating the important role played by ‘Alī Nadwī’s citations in the reception of his book as historical scholarship, the exchange with Aḥmad Amīn also points to the book’s appeal for Arab Muslims trying to think through the contemporary currents of Arab nationalism, pan-Islamism, and anti-colonialism. From the late 1940s, Aḥmad Amīn was

¹²⁷ Abdul Kader Choughley, *Islamic Resurgence: Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī and His Contemporaries* (New Delhi: D.K. Printwood, 2011), 102n.16.

¹²⁸ Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, vol. 1, p. 267; al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 25.

becoming more critical of western colonialism and Arab secular nationalism, while still writing sympathetically about Arab national consciousness and pan-Islamism.¹²⁹ His decision to ultimately recommend it for publication was in part influenced by the resonance of the book's political message.

The positive reception of the book in 1950 led to 'Alī Nadwī being invited to give speeches in Egypt. He had arrived in Egypt in 1951 as part of a delegation of the Tablighī Jama'āt to help the organization foster transregional links.¹³⁰ Once word spread that the author of *Mādhā Khasir al- 'Ālam* was in Cairo, Sayyid Quṭb invited him to his home to discuss the book with college students. He also requested to write an introduction for the book.¹³¹ The second edition of the book was published in 1951 by Dār al-Kitāb al- 'Arabī, a publishing house affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.¹³² In addition to including Quṭb's introduction, it also included a foreword by Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā (1899-1963), who held a doctorate from the University of Paris in philosophy and the director of its publication bureau in the 1950s.¹³³ Mūsā wrote that the book's importance lay in its use of history to address the lack of confidence of Arabs in themselves, their nation, and their religion.¹³⁴ Quṭb in his introduction stated the book was not just another work of religious scholarship, but rather an example of how Muslims should

¹²⁹ Barak, "Ahmad Amin and Nationalism."

¹³⁰ Nadwī, *Kārwan-i Zindagī*, 1: 363.

¹³¹ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al- 'ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 27.

¹³² Giedre Sabaseviciute, "SAYYID QUTB AND THE CRISIS OF CULTURE IN LATE 1940S EGYPT," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 1 (February 2018): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743817000952>.

¹³³ al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al- 'ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 28.

¹³⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al- 'ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al- 'Arabī, 1951), 4. The forward is not found in later editions.

write history. According to him, this was especially needed due to the influence of European histories that were replete with religious and racial prejudices and ostensibly lack historical rigor.¹³⁵

An additional reason for the popularity of the book in the decades after the initial publication was that the repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria left few Arab authors to write literary works critical of Arab nationalism. Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser (d. 1970) banned the Egyptian Brotherhood in 1952, and the Syrian Ba’th party followed suit in 1963. Ellen McLarney has argued that Bint al-Shāti’ (1913-1998), a female Arabic literary scholar and Islamic thinker, gained prominence in the Arabic public sphere in the 1950s and 1960s because she was one of the few literary voices writing about Islamic themes in the growing Arabic public sphere. Her most popular works were biographies about early female Muslims, such as the Prophet’s daughters, where she took a creative approach to write an appealing narrative for female audiences, rather than focus on historicity. She drew on the ideas of Sayyid Qutb in arguing that Islam promoted social justice, even as he remained imprisoned.¹³⁶ It is likely that ‘Alī Nadwī’s book continued to garner a readership for similar factors, namely the dearth of literary voices writing about themes related to Islam and civilization until the 1970s.¹³⁷

‘Alī Nadwī took opportunity of his new-found fame in the Arab world to continue writing histories. His next project after *Mādhā Khasira* continued the cyclical theme of rise and decline by focusing on specific revivers who intervened at different moments throughout Islamic history.

¹³⁵ Introduction by Sayyid Qutb, al-Nadwī, *Mādhā khasir al-‘ālam bi inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn*, n.d., 13–14.

¹³⁶ Ellen McLarney, “The Islamic Public Sphere and the Discipline of ‘Adab,’” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 3 (2011): 437.

¹³⁷ McLarney, 430.

The next section delves into this biographical history of Islam, as well as a Salafi pushback against including Sufis as part of Islamic history.

History of Religious Revivers for a Global Muslim Community

In 1956, Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī (1915-1964), the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and Dean of the Shari'a Faculty at the University of Damascus, invited 'Alī Nadwī as a visiting lecturer. He accepted the invitation and gave a series of lectures titled "Revival and Revivalists in the History of Islamic Thought." Those lectures became the basis of his four-volume book, *Rijāl al-fikr wa al-da'wa* (Intellectuals and Preachers).¹³⁸ The first volume was devoted to 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 101/720), al-Ḥasan al-Basrī (d. 110/728), 'Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), 'Abū al-Ḥasan al-'Ash'arī (d. 324/936), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 561/1166), and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273). The entire second volume was devoted to Ibn Taymiyya. The third volume covered Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1033/1624), and the fourth Shāh Walī Allāh.

The overall history sheds light on 'Alī Nadwī's historical approach in combining elements of historicism with the Arabo-biographical tradition to construct a history of Islam that includes Sufis and critics of Sufism. He wrote the work shortly after Mawdūdī wrote his *Tajdīd-o-iḥyā-i dīn* (A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam, 1952). Mawdūdī's much shorter work of about 160 pages included many of the same figures as Nadwī, apart from al-Jilānī, al-Ghazālī, and al-Rūmī. Mawdūdī's narrative is one of decline after the "Rightly Guided" Caliphs. After that, *jāhiliyya* reemerged.¹³⁹ The religious revivers covered in his book helped

¹³⁸ al-Nadwī, *Rijāl Al-Fikr Wa al-Da'wah Fi al-Islām*, 1: 20.

¹³⁹ Abū al-A'la Mawdūdī, *Tajdīd-o Iḥyā-i Dīn* (Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Jamā'at-i Islāmī Hind, 1965), 34.

curbed the negative effects of *jahāliyya*, but never fully succeeded in returning to Islam to its pure state of the early decades of Islam. “Islamic history held no value and manifested no religious truths, except during its early phase. The history of Muslim societies was not so much a testimony of divine will as an account of the fall of Islam.”¹⁴⁰ This vision of history, shared by Sayyid Qutb as well, challenged many ‘*ulamā*’s authority as the legitimate interpreters of Islam; it not only devalued their cumulative scholarly tradition but also cast the ‘*ulamā*’ in a historically negative light as potential obstacles to justice.¹⁴¹

Overlapping with this narrative of decline was a stricter definition of Islamic orthodoxy on the part of many Salafis in a post-colonial world. In the first half of the twentieth century, many Salafis were willing to put aside issues of doctrinal purity for the sake of anti-colonialism.¹⁴² However, with the specter of a common enemy not as direct in the latter half of the century, many Salafis became more insistent on defining Islam based on teachings they believed could be traced back to the first three centuries of Islam.¹⁴³ ‘Alī Nadwī’s *Rijāl al-fikr wa al-da‘wa* was thus an attempt to provide a history for a global *umma* in a post-colonial context in the face of competing Muslim claims to orthodoxy.

He begins the book by juxtaposing a notion of time as constantly moving [*mutaḥarrrika*] and evolving [*mutaṭawwira*] with the continuity offered by generations of Muslims who have transmitted the teachings of the Prophet that bridge the past and the present.¹⁴⁴ In making this

¹⁴⁰ Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, 60.

¹⁴¹ Meir Hatina, “The Clerics’ Betrayal? Islamists, ‘Ulama’, and the Polity,” in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: ‘Ulama’ in the Middle East*, ed. Meir Hatina (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 249.

¹⁴² Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 95–129.

¹⁴³ Lauzière, 130–62.

¹⁴⁴ al-Nadwī, *Rijāl Al-Fikr Wa al-Da‘wah Fi al-Islām*, 39–42.

juxtaposition, he thus drew on historicist notions of constant change and the sense of the continuity of knowledge immanent in Arabo-biographical histories. He went further and emphasized that this chain of Islamic learning and renewal is one of the distinguishing features of Islam, one lacking in all other religions.¹⁴⁵ ‘Alī Nadwī criticized those who claimed that there were long gaps of time when no reformers existed in Islamic history, and Muslims succumbed to corruption and ignorance.¹⁴⁶ According to him, this kind of narrative is dangerous because it saps Muslims of passion and confidence. “The internal power [*al-quwwa al-bāṭina*] that compels towards struggle and preaching only springs from confidence in the past [*al-thiqa bil-māḍī*].”¹⁴⁷ Thus, a proper history of Islamic revival showing its continuous nature becomes essential for improving Muslim societies.

Literary concerns continue to be important for ‘Alī Nadwī’s view of history. One the one hand, the historical context of each reviver is unique, and thus in-depth historical knowledge is necessary to recreate that unique moment. In addition, the historian must synthesize the information and utilize discerning taste in choosing the right words and expression to make the reviver’s life come alive.¹⁴⁸ ‘Alī Nadwī in a later work where he reflected on biographical writing, explained the fame of Ibn Khallikān’s biographical compendium as a result of his ability to synthesize a wealth of information according to good taste [*ḥusn al-dhawq*] and fine sensibility [*riqqat al-shu‘ūr*].¹⁴⁹ He adopted a similar approach to his history of religious

¹⁴⁵ al-Nadwī, 45.

¹⁴⁶ al-Nadwī, 53–54.

¹⁴⁷ al-Nadwī, 54.

¹⁴⁸ al-Nadwī, 56.

¹⁴⁹ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Shakhṣiyāt Wa Kutub* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1990), 7.

revivers. He admitted that although he did not present any new discoveries, the work is nonetheless a work of history due to his attempt to present all aspects of the lives he carefully chose.¹⁵⁰

The chapter on al-Rūmī highlights the approach and objectives of ‘Alī Nadwī well. Unlike the Persianate world, there had been very little written about him in Arabic, aside from some scattered translations of his poems.¹⁵¹ In introducing him to a modern Arabic public, he provided the following title for one of his sections on the Persian sage: “Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī: Caller to Love and Affection and Respect for Humans and Humanity.”¹⁵² He relied primarily on two secondary sources. A biography in Persian by the Iranian specialist on al-Rūmī, Badi‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar (1904-1970). And the second source was an Urdu biography published by Dār al-Muṣannifīn by a Qāḍī Talammudh Ḥusayn (1880-1946). He also provided Arabic translations of al-Rūmī’s poems, especially from the *Mathnawī*. Placing him in the context of political instability caused by Mongol invasions, and pedantic rationalist theological polemics between ‘*ulamā*’, he presented al-Rūmī’s contribution to Islamic history as breathing the spirit of love back into Islam. ‘Alī Nadwī framed al-Rūmī’s writings as a relevant reminder of the importance of an emotional and passionate connection with the God that serves as an antidote to materialism.¹⁵³

While his volume on Ibn Taymiyya proved to be very popular among Salafis, they viewed the sections on al-Rūmī and other Sufis as promoting unorthodoxy. ‘Alī Nadwī faced

¹⁵⁰ al-Nadwī, *Rijāl Al-Fikr Wa al-Da‘wah Fi al-Islām*, 34.

¹⁵¹ Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi - Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings, and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 553–54.

¹⁵² al-Nadwī, *Rijāl Al-Fikr Wa al-Da‘wah Fi al-Islām*, 1: 405.

¹⁵³ al-Nadwī, 1: 406.

criticisms in the final two decades of the twentieth century for his embrace of Sufis. A common assessment among his critics was that his popularity was due to his skills as a writer, not his knowledge as a scholar.¹⁵⁴ His opinions were increasingly marginalized by Salafi members of the Muslim World League and the Islamic University of Medina, two Saudi-based organizations of which ‘Alī Nadwī had been a founding member.¹⁵⁵ A Salafi researcher at the Islamic University in Medina questioned “[h]ow could Abu al-Hasan praise misguided figures such as Rumi, al-Ghazali, al-Maturidi, and several other deviant Muslims alongside a true authority like Ibn Taymiyya? Such inclusiveness was a sign of stupidity.”¹⁵⁶ In 1998, Salāḥ al-Dīn Maqbūl Aḥmad (b. 1956), an Indian-born graduate of Islamic University of Medina based in Kuwait, wrote an extensive book showcasing ‘Alī Nadwī’s penchant for Sufism. He wrote that initially he had been impressed by his Arabic literary skills, before he realized they were a cover for Sufi ideas.¹⁵⁷ He devoted most of the book to demonstrating the misguidance of the Sufis in his *Rijāl al-fikr*.

Nevertheless, sections of *Rijāl al-fikr* continue to be published as individual books, indicating a continued interest. Most recently, his biography of al-Rūmī was published in Cairo in 2021, with Arabic translations of selected poems.¹⁵⁸

Conclusion

¹⁵⁴ Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 116.

¹⁵⁵ Hartung, “The Nadwat Al-‘ulamā’ – A Chief Patron of Madrasa Education in India and Turntable to the Arab World,” 146; Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 102.

¹⁵⁶ Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 116.

¹⁵⁷ Salāḥ al-Dīn Maqbūl Aḥmad, *Al-Ustādh Abū al-Ḥasan ‘alī al-Nadwī: Al-Waju al-Ākhar Min Kitābātihī* (Kuwait: Garās, 2001), 6–7.

¹⁵⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Mawlānā Jalāl Al-Dīn al-Rūmī* (Cairo: Tanwīr, 2021).

Recently, Cemil Aydin has argued that twentieth-century civilizational thinking and the notion of a “Muslim world” is the product of colonial and post-colonial realities in which Muslims were politically weak and dominated by technologically advanced European powers. Importantly, in stressing geopolitical concerns of modern Muslim thinkers, Aydin overemphasizes the rupture between modern narratives of a Muslim world and premodern notions of a global Muslim *ummah*. Thus, he argues that historical narratives of Islam produced a certain historical “amnesia” since they were based on decontextualized readings of earlier sources in which the ideas of a Muslim world were absent.¹⁵⁹ For Aydin, the idea owed its existence wholly to colonial and post-colonial political realities with little to no precedence in premodern traditions.¹⁶⁰ Muslim intellectuals promoting pan-Islamic solidarity around the notion of a Muslim world “were not acting as pious interpreters of God’s divine will as revealed in sacred texts, though they may at times have claimed as much. Rather, what drove them was political will: the ideology they brought to their particular historical context.”¹⁶¹ Aydin does not however substantially analyze the writings of any ‘*ulamā*’ that contributed to the idea of a Muslim world in the twentieth century, focusing mostly on Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949), Abū al-A‘lā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), and Shakīb Arslān (d. 1946).

This is an important gap because it overlooks the ways in which scholars conversant with a premodern religious tradition spoke about the idea of a Muslim world. ‘Alī Nadwī’s vision of a Muslim world was indebted to multiple influences. John M. Willis has argued that transregional

¹⁵⁹ Aydin, 9.

¹⁶⁰ For critiques of this aspect of Aydin’s argument, see Mona Hassan, “Cemil Aydin. The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History.,” *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (October 1, 2018): 1294–95; And R. Michael Feener, “The Idea of the Muslim World | Reading Religion,” accessed September 24, 2019, <http://readingreligion.org/books/idea-muslim-world>.

¹⁶¹ Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 242.

Muslim world-building under late colonialism should be analyzed “as historically articulated *not only* in response to European empire, *but also* as part of specific religious, philosophical, and ethical traditions (emphasis added).”¹⁶² ‘Alī Nadwī’s view of the Muslim world was rooted in a vision of a past where the Prophet had launched a moral revolution. It was the duty of Muslims to continually remember this event, to emotionally identify with it, and to desire to reenact it, even if practically circumstances prevented them. In recounting the Prophet producing moral revolution in the Companions, ‘Alī Nadwī drew on Ibn Kathīr. In extending the notion of *jāhiliyya* to the present, he was indebted to Shāh Walī Allāh. In utilizing history for cultivating emotions, he took inspiration from Ilyās Kāndhlawī. And in his rhetorical presentation he appropriated Arab nationalist discourse.

Furthermore, even before he articulated a vision of the Muslim world through his civilizational history, he likely already imagined himself to be part of it in Lucknow. His teachers included Shaykh Khalīl from Yemen, al-Hilālī from Morocco, and he was engrossed in the literary world of Egypt. Through his father’s *Nuzhat*, he also was conscious of the transregional intellectual links between Indian Muslim scholars and the Arab world.

His ecumenical approach in his history of religious revivers was similar to al-Ḥasanī’s insofar as he attempted to include Sufis and Sufi-critics like Ibn Taymiyya as part of a common history for a global Muslim *umma*. This was an international extension of Nadwa’s attempt to bring together rival Muslim normative traditions in India. ‘Alī Nadwī nonetheless fell short of including Shias in his history of revival.

¹⁶² John M. Willis, “Azad’s Mecca: On the Limits of Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanism,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 576.

As he pulled together these very different elements, he departed from Shiblī's more historicist perspective. Shiblī had endeavored at the end of the nineteenth century to introduce in the scholarly discourse of *'ulamā'* a notion of history as a discipline separate from literature. 'Alī Nadwī had reaffirmed history's categorization as *adab*.

Conclusion

This dissertation looked at the historical writings and approaches of four ‘*ulamā*’-historians, Shiblī Nu‘mānī (1857-1914), ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī (1869-1923), Sulaymān Nadwī (1884-1953), and Abū Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī (1913-1999). None of them were formally trained as historians. All of them underwent a formal curriculum in common religious disciplines of *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, logic, Qur’an, and related subjects. Yet they all rose to fame as ‘*ulamā*’ on account of their historical works. It was their writing in a subject in which they had not received formal training that they established their reputation as religious authorities both among fellow scholars and more generally in Muslim public spheres. How did that happen?

An important component in history’s rise as a more serious scholarly pursuit among ‘*ulamā*’ has been the emergence of modern Muslim reading publics. With the spread of literacy in Muslim societies from the nineteenth century thanks to technologies of print and mass education, more Muslims were capable of learning about the past.¹ Moreover, because of the influence of modern historicist ideas about linear, progressive time, historical knowledge became crucial for conceptualizing how to be Muslim in the present and for charting the future.² Finally, the nineteenth century corresponded with a greater sense of historical distance from the past through discoveries of rare or formerly lost sources that indicated that there was much about the

¹ Margrit Pernau, “Introduction,” in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, ed. Margrit Pernau (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1–34; Margrit Pernau, “From a ‘Private’ Public to a ‘Public’ Private Sphere: Old Delhi and the North Indian Muslims in Comparative Perspective,” in *The Public and the Private: Issues of Democratic Citizenship*, ed. Gurpreet Mahajan (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 103–29; Sumit Guha, *History and Collective Memory in South Asia, 1200–2000* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), chap. 4; Juan R. I. Cole, “Printing and Urban Islam in the Mediterranean World, 1890–1920,” in *Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, 1890-1920*, ed. Leila Fawaz and C. A. Bayly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 344–64; Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 20–23.

² Faridah Zaman, “The Future of Islam, 1672–1924,” *Modern Intellectual History* 16, no. 3 (2019): 961–91.

past that Muslims in the present did not know.³ Those who could recover the past through utilizing new sources or techniques thus became important mediators between the past and the present. The four ‘*ulamā*’-historians that constituted the focus of this study saw these circumstances as an opportunity to use their training in the Islamic sciences to meaningfully engage Muslims by writing histories.

Although the emergence of reading publics was a modern phenomenon, the dissertation sought to clarify that the ‘*ulamā*’ who wrote histories did not view themselves as ruptured from their scholarly traditions. By drawing on their scholarly traditions, they made significant historiographical interventions in Islamic intellectual history that are ignored by narrowly focusing on modern European influences on Muslim historical writing. As Dietrich Jung reminds us, "like European intellectuals, non-Europeans developed their own semantics to grasp and debate the modern condition related to different historical trajectories, popular narratives and religious traditions."⁴ Reviewing some of the historiographical interventions covered in the dissertation will be worthwhile.

While adapting historicist concerns about utilizing the earliest possible primary sources, Shiblī Nu‘mānī inaugurated a novel approach to writing the Prophet’s biography by combining the genres of *sīra* and *ḥadīth* and calling for a greater application of the principles of *ḥadīth* criticism to material in *sīra* literature. Since the ninth century these had been categorized as different disciplines.⁵ Shiblī noted how this divergence led to a lack of scrutiny even by *ḥadīth*

³ Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020).

⁴ Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Modern Essentialist Image of Islam* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Pub., 2011), 115.

⁵ Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 68; Andreas Görke, "The Relationship between Maghāzī and Ḥadīth in Early Islamic

scholars of reports about the Prophets and Companions that did not have direct implications for Islamic law.⁶ Similarly, scholars did not care to compare or reconcile seemingly contradictory information about the same event in *ḥadīth* compilations and books of *sīra*. Although Shiblī's application of this approach was at times inconsistent, his emphasis on finding the earliest *sīra* works available led to a prioritization of using the earliest Arabic texts available in Urdu biographical writing concerning the Prophet and figures from the earliest centuries of Islam. One result was the recovery of the "Constitution of Medina" from early *sīra* texts that had gone unmentioned in the most popular biographies of the Prophet in India before Shiblī.

His student Sulaymān Nadwī continued this trend of Urdu biographical writing of early Islamic figures based on *ḥadīth* and early Arabic texts. His biography of 'Ā'isha, wife of the Prophet, replicated an emphasis found in Arabic sources on her learning and rivalry with male Companions. This was at a time when Muslims were debating whether Muslim women should be allowed access to education in the early twentieth century. Beyond early Arabo-Islamic history, Sulaymān Nadwī intervened in Indian historiography by advocating for the incorporation of Arabic sources. Through these sources, he presented a narrative of Indo-Muslim history that pushed back against colonial historiography's narrative of Muslims arriving in India as foreign conquerors. Through skillful use of Arabic sources ignored by most European and Indian historians, he presented Muslims as inheritors of centuries-old communities in India that lived peacefully with other religious communities. He continued this line of historical research of privileging social and cultural history of Muslims while eschewing political and dynastic histories through his history of Arabo-Muslim maritime networks.

Scholarship," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74, no. 2 (June 2011): 171–85.

⁶ Shiblī Nu' mānī, *Sīrat Al-Nabī* (Lahore: Maktaba Islamiyya, 2012), 1: 63.

While colonial historiography remained a concern for Sulaymān Nadwī, the monumental history of Indo-Muslim scholarship by ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī shows that some ‘*ulamā*’ were preoccupied with a completely different set of historiographical concerns. Building on a tradition of Arab-biographical writing in India, al-Ḥasanī devoted most of his adult life to recovering a connection to the past, as well as to a broader world of Islamic scholarship in an Arabic cosmopolis. He did this through meticulously cataloguing networks of knowledge transmission in India through writing biographies of learned Muslims, with whom they studied with, and to whom did they transmit their learning, what books they wrote, and other related questions that had been largely ignored in the vast corpus of Indo-Persianate histories. He then used the data to show how at different moments in Indian history, ‘*ulamā*’ had emphasized different disciplines, thus justifying contemporary curricular changes at madrasas. Due to an almost exclusive focus on changes generated by modern historicism, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy’s eight-volume history, and its historiographical significance, has been ignored in the secondary literature.

‘Alī Nadwī, al-Ḥasanī’s youngest son, benefitted from the deepening ties between India and the Arab world that Indian scholars had been developing through the nineteenth century. Due to the presence of Arab teachers and Arabic publications in Lucknow in the early twentieth century, ‘Alī Nadwī became intimately familiar with modern Arabic literary conventions and styles. Under the influence of the previous two generations of scholars from Nadwa focusing their intellectual energy on history, he too turned towards historical scholarship in writing for an Arab audience in the mid-twentieth century. Thus, the fame he enjoyed after the positive reception of his history of Islamic civilization in the Arab world needs to be understood in a broader context whereby Indian Muslims formerly part of an Arabic cosmopolis became integrated into the Arabic public sphere.

The above review of the major historiographical interventions of the four main subjects of this dissertation demonstrates the importance history had gained as an object of scholarly pursuit in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While scholars like Shiblī and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī built on the Arabic historical works of previous generations of Indian scholars, such as al-Laknawī’s histories of Ḥanafī *fiqh* or Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān’s history of Islamic disciplines, those older scholars had not built their scholarly reputations through their histories. The four ‘*ulamā*’-historians of this dissertation thus represented a new development in what constitutes religious authority among ‘*ulamā*’.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s heuristic devices, we can identify three components that contributed to the construction of their religious authority. First, they all had the necessary social capital through their classical education in the disciplines expected of ‘*ulamā*’ at the time, such as Arabic, *fiqh*, and especially *ḥadīth*. Second, they accumulated cultural capital in the field of religious scholarship. They did this by making a case for the importance of history in the field of religious scholarship, as well as by relating their historical works to more prominent disciplines. Finally, they accumulated symbolic capital to the extent that they wrote for modern reading publics.

According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital enables recognition outside a field of cultural production to be converted into social, cultural, or economic capital. In this case, recognition in the public sphere could become cultural capital within the field of religious scholarship. Positive reception in the public could increase a scholar’s prestige as an ‘*ālim*. It will be helpful to review how cultural and symbolic capitals functioned for each of the four ‘*ulamā*’-historians of the study.

Shiblī may have been the first Muslim scholar ever to achieve widespread accolades as an *‘ālim* almost purely on the reception of his historical writing. He gained fame and access to funding for his intellectual and institutional projects because his historical essays and books were so widely read and respected in the Urdu public sphere. His scholarly fame facilitated his connections with the Begum of Bhopal and the Government of Hyderabad. These connections were essential to securing financial support for the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, including purchasing land in Lucknow, constructing Nadwa’s magnificent building on the banks of the Gomti River, and establishing an impressive library of published books and manuscripts in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁷ Even as the *‘ulamā’* that eventually filled leadership and administrative roles in the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ benefitted from Shiblī’s popular reputation as a scholar, many also resented his prestige since they questioned his status as an *‘ālim*. His historical writings challenged aspects of the scholarly tradition. He downplayed the role of miraculous interventions in human history, exposed *ḥadīth* to scrutiny in his biographies of ‘Umar and the Prophet, and challenged the dominant theological doctrine of occasionalism to argue that history could be explained as a sequence of historical causes and effects.

The instability of public fame from histories as symbolic capital for the field of religious scholarship is captured in an anecdote about Shiblī attending a *qawwālī* music session. While in Delhi, Khwāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī (1878-1955), an Urdu man of letters and a leader in the Chishti Sufi order, invited Shiblī to a private *qawwālī* gathering for just the two of them where he had invited a famous songstress. Niẓāmī knew of his friend’s musical interests but also his reticence in transgressing behavior expected of the *‘ulamā’*. Assured that there would be no one else, Shiblī accepted the invitation and attended, but kept his face wrapped in a shawl to maintain his

⁷ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i Shiblī* (Azamgarh: Dar al-Mussannifin, 2008), 355, 375, 384.

anonymity. An elderly and portly drummer nonetheless recognized him, and as the evening's merriment concluded, he leapt at Shiblī, grasped his hands, kissed them, and bowed his head to touch them with his eyes. Gushing with emotions, the old man exclaimed "how can I show God my gratitude for fulfilling a desire I had for years?! Mawlānā! Subḥānallāh, Māshā'allāh, by writing *al-Fārūq*, you did what none could do, nor will ever do ... this humble servant wished dearly to be honored by visiting you ... today this felicity was granted to this sinner!" Shiblī, rendered motionless with embarrassment, was at a loss for words.⁸ The veracity of the anecdote is uncertain. Abū al-Kalām Azād related it to a companion while the two were imprisoned by the British and exchanging stories to keep up their spirits. Nevertheless, it captures the fame Shiblī achieved through his histories, his nonconformity with many '*ulamā*', and his desire to be considered one of them.

His eventual forced resignation from Nadwat al-'Ulamā' indicates that history's importance as cultural capital was still limited compared to the other disciplines, and that the symbolic capital obtained from his public fame could not fully make up the deficit. Yet Shiblī had increased the prestige of history within the field of religious scholarship, and younger scholars like Sulaymān Nadwī were the beneficiaries.

Of the four '*ulamā*'-historians, 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī achieved the least popular fame, in large part because his monumental history of Indian Muslim scholarship was not published in his life. He thus affords an example of how symbolic capital in the form of public recognition could have enhanced his position within the field of religious scholarship. Nonetheless, the fact that he devoted much of his adult life to writing a work of history, rather than writing in another

⁸ 'Abd al-Razzāq Malḥābādī, *Dhikr-i Azād* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2006), 129–30.

subject like *ḥadīth* in which he was an expert, indicates the significance with which history was held by him.

Sulaymān Nadwī offers the strongest example of history's importance as cultural capital and the power of symbolic capital in raising a scholar's prestige in the field of religious scholarship. His work on the historical context and narratives of the Qur'an, as well as his biography of 'Ā'isha showcased his erudition in the disciplines of Qur'an and *ḥadīth* studies, and thus functioned as cultural capital. Moreover, his essays and collected lectures defending the Prophet from orientalist and missionary representations brought him further recognition in the public sphere. It is quite telling that when the Imam of the Woking Mosque in England wanted a Muslim expert on the life of the Prophet, he turned to a young Sulaymān Nadwī, rather than a more senior *ḥadīth* teacher.

The use of history in the context of interreligious polemics afforded it greater status. Shiblī had argued for historical writing functioning as a new component of *'ilm al-kalām* because of its use in defending the Prophet historically, as well as Islamic civilization more generally.⁹ Sulaymān Nadwī's historical writings on Indian history, and his critiques of the emerging discipline of Indian history, both functioned to provide Muslims with a historical narrative that did not cast them as foreign oppressors. His public engagement with history led him to be perceived as a well-rounded scholar whose knowledge extended beyond religious texts. Hence, Shabbīr Aḥmad Uthmānī (1887-1949), one of the most ardent supporters among the *'ulamā'* for the state of Pakistan, felt that Sulaymān Nadwī's ability to combine "modern and ancient"

⁹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "A Venture in Critical Islamic Historiography and the Significance of Its Failure," *Numen* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 133; Avril A. Powell, "Modernist Muslim Responses to Christian Critiques of Islamic Culture, Civilization, and History in Northern India," in *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India's Religious Traditions*, ed. Judith M. Brown and Robert E. Frykenberg (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 61–91.

[*jadīd-o-qadīm*] traditions of knowledge made him ideally suited to lead ‘*ulamā*’ in tasked with drafting a new state constitution.¹⁰

‘Alī Nadwī enjoyed the greatest global fame out of the four scholars studied in this dissertation on account of his historical writing. He successfully leveraged the symbolic capital of his recognition in the Arab world into gaining greater prestige among ‘*ulamā*’, especially in India.¹¹ The popularity of his Arabic history of an Islamic civilization battling a western civilization led to invitations to speak in Egypt and Syria. In addition to the symbolic capital gained from the public sphere, he also pushed for greater recognition of history as a cultural capital in the field of religious scholarship by arguing it was a form of Arabic *adab* necessary for the moral advancement of Muslims. However, in ways similar to Shiblī, critics that did not recognize history as an important form of cultural capital, particularly Salafi detractors, questioned his status as a scholar by arguing his popularity was more a function of his literary skills than his religious knowledge. This led to isolation in the transregional Muslim institutions based in Saudi Arabia with which he was affiliated.

Altogether, through an analysis of the historical writings of the four scholars, the dissertation has shown that achieving popularity in Muslim public spheres as a scholar has played an important role in the modern construction of religious authority as an ‘*ālim*. By acting as symbolic capital, public recognition can enhance one’s recognition in the field of religious scholarship. Equally important, the scholars pushed for historical writing to be taken up with greater earnest by the ‘*ulamā*’ as a form of addressing Muslims in the public sphere.

¹⁰ Shāh Mu‘īn al-Dīn Aḥmad Nadwī, *Ḥayāt-i sulaymān* (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣannifīn, 1973), 452.

¹¹ Jan-Peter Hartung, “The Nadwat Al-‘ulamā’ – A Chief Patron of Madrasa Education in India and Turntable to the Arab World,” in *Islamic Education, Diversity, and National Identity. Dīnī Madāris in India Post 9/11*, ed. Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 135–57, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/6028/>.

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