

Who Wrote the History of Islam and How?

History, it has been said, is the propaganda of the victorious party.

What this means is that in any conflict, the victor can manipulate history just as it pleases him, and there is nothing that the vanquished can do about it. The victorious party can cook up a story and broadcast it as the absolute truth without any fear of being challenged by anyone. It has not only the power to cook up its own story; it also has the power to spike the story of an opposing party.

M. Shibli, the dean of India's Sunni historians of Islam, writes in his famous biography of Prophet Muhammad, *Sira-tun-Nabi*, volume I, 4th printing, published by the Maarif Printing Press, Azamgarh, U.P., India, in 1976:

"Among all those extraneous forces which affect and influence the writing of history, none is more powerful than the government. But it will always be a source of pride for the Muslims that their pen was never subdued by the sword. Work on the compilation and collation of *Hadith* was begun in the times of the Banu Umayya. For full 90 years, from Sind in India (Indo-Pakistan) to Asia Minor and Andalusia in Spain, Ali and the children of Fatima were cursed from every pulpit in every mosque after every Friday sermon.

Thousands and thousands of *hadith* (traditions; statements of the Prophet) glorifying Muawiya, were manufactured, and were put into circulation. In the times of the Abbasis, *hadith* were invented foretelling the birth and the excellence of each (Abbas) khalifa by name. But what was the result of all this stupendous effort? The traditionalists (the collectors of the statements of the Prophet) declared publicly at the same time (during the caliphates of the Umayyads and the Abbasids) that all these *hadith* were spurious, and they rejected them. Today, we are proud to say that the science of *hadith* is free from all that filth and garbage."

Almost but not quite!

In the case of innumerable *hadith*, the attempt to excise a false report from *hadith* literature, or to correct it, never caught up with the original untruths.

Even after expurgation, if there was one, that part of the *hadith* literature which relates to the personal life of Muhammad, the blessed Prophet of Islam, is full of the quaint, the curious, the fanciful and the false. There are many *hadith* which make him appear as lustful and licentious; vindictive and cruel; opportunistic and unprincipled; and treacherous and unethical. Then there are some other traditions which can only be called smutty.

But the evidence of history runs counter to such characterization of Muhammad. He could have been all these things but he was not. It is important, therefore, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to separate bunk and junk from fact and truth in studying the history of Islam.

How did such “traditions” which defy commonsense and logic, insinuate their way into the *hadith* literature, and how were the deeds and statements which can only be called shocking, attributed to the man whose real life was the epitome of all purity, truthfulness, sincerity and simplicity?

Shibli has made a rather perfunctory attempt to answer this question in the passage quoted above. He says that the most powerful extraneous “agent” influencing the writing of history in the times of the Umayyads and the Abbasids (661–1258) was the government. The government in those days had the power to get history written to its own “specifications.”

Both dynasties felt they were free to distort history or to suppress history, and whenever they believed it was in their interest to do so – to invent ‘history.’ Whereas many *hadith* were invented for political reasons, there were also those *hadith* which were invented for sensual reasons. The sybarites of the courts of Damascus and Baghdad sought “sanction” for their own pleasures in these *hadith*.

A *hadith* means a statement. If a man saw the Prophet doing something or he heard him saying something, and then he reported it to others, it would be called a *hadith* or a tradition. The companions considered it their duty to preserve all the traditions of the Prophet for the benefit of the Muslim umma for all time.

A *hadith* could also be a comment of the Prophet on some person. If he paid a compliment to any of his companions, or if he criticized someone, his remarks gained wide publicity among the Muslims. During the khilafat of Muawiya, many of these *hadith* were in circulation. He was quick to grasp their importance, and he decided to make them a political weapon in his campaign against Ali ibn Abi Talib and the Banu Hashim.

Muawiya who was the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, won for himself another “distinction.” He founded the “cottage industry” for the production of *hadith*. His successors, and after them, the Abbasi khalifas, patronized the “industry” which for a long time was busy churning out *hadith*.

Though Shibli claims that *hadith* was expurgated by highly critical, perceptive and analytic censors, there was much that escaped detection by them, and is accepted today as genuine by a vast majority of Muslims.

Muawiya appointed a team of men to make up statements favorable to himself and to the other enemies of Ali, and to attribute them to the Apostle of God as his own *hadith*. At the same time, he suppressed or tried to suppress the genuine *hadith* which were complimentary to Ali, and ordered his team to manufacture *hadith* derogatory to him. The members of this team concocted *hadith* of both varieties, and he put them into circulation.

After the death of Muawiya, this campaign was carried on by his successors. Their “ghost-writers,” “public relations personnel,” and “image-makers” skillfully blended fake *hadith* with genuine *hadith*, and synthetic history with factual history, hoping that the “mix” would “jell,” as part of the sacred lore of the Muslims.

Muawiya had one more reason for going into the business of “*hadith*-production.” He knew that the generations of the future would judge every Muslim ruler against the ideal ruler – Muhammad. He knew too that if they did, they would find him poles apart from Muhammad. He was also aware that no matter what he did, he could never rise as high as Muhammad; he knew in fact that he could not reach the heights attained even by the slaves of Muhammad.

But it occurred to him that though it was not possible for him to reach the sublime plane on which Muhammad stood, it was possible for him to bring him (Muhammad) down to the plane on which he (Muawiya) stood by the simple process of tarnishing his (Muhammad's) reputation, so that he too would look like other mortals.

Muawiya hoped that the indictment of the historians against him would be less severe if it was shown to them that even the most perfect man – Muhammad, God's Own Messenger – was not altogether free from blemishes of character. Clearly, much of the content of *hadith* literature was a conspiracy for the character assassination of Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

Muawiya and the other entrepreneurs of his “cottage industry” were “successful” in their attempt at the character assassination of Muhammad. They interspersed *hadith* literature with countless stories, anecdotes and “incidents” the intent of all of which was to make Muhammad look, in the eyes of posterity, less than prophetic.

Following is a sample of one of the “printable” traditions which has come down to us. It is quoted by Hakim Muhammad Saeed in an article published by the Hamdard Academy, Karachi, Pakistan, in 1972, in a book called *Tazkar-i-Muhammad*:

“Shortly after their marriage, Muhammad, the Apostle of God, suggested to his new bride, Ayesha, that both of them run in a race. Ayesha was thin and lean, and she easily outran her husband. Some years later, the Apostle challenged Ayesha to run against him once again. (She had put on weight during the years since the first race). Both of them ran, and this time the Apostle outran her. His comment: ‘Last time you were the winner, O Humayra (Ayesha's nickname) but this time I have won, and now the score between us is even.’ (Perhaps the defeat in the first race had rankled in the mind of the Apostle all

these years.)

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, was 54 years old when he ran in a race against a girl of 9 or 10, and he lost; and he was 60 years old when he ran against her a second time, and won!

Muslims are very jealous of the dignity of their Prophet. Is this “tradition” which most of them believe to be true, a portrait of that dignity?

It appears that the “foremen” and the “production managers” whom Muawiya had appointed in his “*hadith* factories,” had only one love, and that was quantity. They had geared the “industry” only to mass produce “traditions.” It is obvious that they had no interest in the “quality control” of their products. They planted lies in their books, and each lie left in its wake, as it invariably does, “a drop of poison,” that polluted the minds of generations of Muslims. Some of their products are extremely crude. They are, in fact, unprintable. The critics and the enemies of the Prophet, inevitably, have shown great eagerness in accepting them as authentic, and they have quoted them in their books.

These critics and enemies of the Prophet have not, however, taken into account those facts the authenticity of which is beyond any question. For example, they overlooked the fact that in Makkah, the Quraysh had offered to him the most beautiful woman or women as a quid pro quo if he would give up preaching Islam. They also forgot the fact that Muhammad was the sovereign of Medina, and that he could have married any girl. The Arab chiefs would have been proud to give him their daughters.

The Prophet married many women in Medina but most of them were widows, and they were not very young either. With the exception of Khadija, all the other women entered his household when he was in his mid-fifties or late fifties. They entered his life at a time when the spring and the bounce and the sheen and the vigor of his youth had long since departed, and their place was taken by the ever-growing burdens of an ever-growing State, and other problems of superlative complexity and magnitude, leaving him little time or inclination for such dalliance as is reported in many of the “traditions.”

For the compilation of *hadith*, Muawiya had given the following orders:

- 1.** All the traditions of the Prophet in praise of Ali or upholding his superiority in any way, should be suppressed.
- 2.** Any man narrating the virtues of Ali or quoting the *hadith* of the Prophet in this regard, would do so at his own risk. His subsidies and stipends would be withheld from him. His house and other property would be confiscated. His testimony as a witness would not be accepted in the courts, and he would be ostracized by other Muslims.
- 3.** On the other hand, every conceivable virtue should be attributed to Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and of course, to Muawiya himself. People should be encouraged to make up “*hadith*” of the Prophet in praise of these four men and their friends. Whoever invents such *hadith*, would become a favorite at the royal

court, and would receive rich rewards in rank or cash or estates etc.

Concurrently with the founding of his “cottage industry” for manufacturing “*hadith*” of the Prophet, Muawiya also set up a “brain laundry” for the Muslims. He instituted the practice of anathematizing the memory of Ali and his children from the pulpit in every mosque in his empire so that the Muslim children were born, they grew up, and they died hearing curses upon Ali, and not knowing who he was.

Whole generations lived and died in ignorance. Falsehoods were put into circulation by the government on a scale so vast that they became the staple of their lives. Muawiya and his successors kept their “brain laundries” just as busy as their “cottage industry.”

Muawiya mobilized every means for waging propaganda war against Ali and the Banu Hashim. The momentum of the blitz he launched against them, has lasted down to our own times. He waged his war from the mosques. The prayer-leaders in them were paid to put weird and fantastic interpretations upon the verses of Qur'an in an attempt to show Ali at a disadvantage. They tried to convince the rank-and-file Muslims that it would be in their interest “in both worlds” if they supported Muawiya against Ali and the Banu Hashim.

Michael C. Hudson

Incumbents have the advantage of the media and educational arms of the state, and they control through subsidies the religious establishment itself. (*Islam and Development*, p. 16, 1980)

It must now be clear to the reader that the history of Islam was written under the direction of the party which held all the instruments of power in its hands. It must also be obvious to him that much of the historical material was “laundered” at the “brain laundries” established by Muawiya before it got into his hands. Muawiya was a most consummate master of the art of propaganda.

Sir John Glubb

The full effects of propaganda have not yet become plain, yet it is already obvious that whole nations can be indoctrinated with wrong opinions and evil moral standards. Few, if any, minds are strong enough to resist the ideas constantly projected at them. (*The Course of Empire – The Arabs and Their Successors*, 1965)

If any *hadith* of the Prophet of Islam was complimentary to Ali, its narration was placed under proscription by Muawiya. This proscription was not lifted when he died in 680. It was not lifted even when his dynasty, the Umayyads, perished in 750, and it was not lifted even through the long centuries of the caliphate of the Abbasids.

The Abbasids exterminated the Umayyads but they shared with them their animosity to Ali and to the children of Muhammad. In this matter, the aims and interests of the governments of Saqifa, the Umayyads, and the Abbasids converged; there was ideological compatibility among them all.

The Umayyads and the Abbasids did their utmost to suppress the facts of history. Many of their khalifas had forbidden their subjects to say or to write anything about Ali except falsehoods. Truth was under a siege and falsehood was rampant in their dominions. And yet, Truth asserted itself.

Truth has (now) arrived, and falsehood perished: For falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish. (Qur'an. Chapter 17; verse 81)

True statements were volunteered by sources which, in most cases, were inimical to Ali. Even his most rabid enemies like the Umayyads and the Kharjis, conceded the sublimity of his character. As noted before, M. Shibli, the Indian historian, pointed out that the Shia Muslims did not write any history. Whatever history we have, has, therefore, come down to us from the non-Shia or the anti-Shia sources. It has come down to us from the archives of the governments of Saqifa, the Umayyads and the Abbasids. The story of the glorious deeds of Ali ibn Abi Talib, like the radiance of Truth itself, has filtered out of those archives.

But the modern historians are not threatened by any government for writing factual history nor are they being seduced by promises of rich rewards for writing false history. They should, therefore, curb the temptation to stifle or to distort truth. If they yield even now to this temptation, as many of their forerunners did in the past, then it can mean only that they give their loyalty, not to principles but to persons; not to truth but to the organizations and the governments; and not to their integrity but to their emotional commitments.

Loyalty is a noble quality as long as it is not blind, and does not exclude the higher loyalty to truth and to decency.

If the loyalty of the modern historians is not blind, and if it does not exclude the higher loyalty to truth and to decency, then they should scrape away the excrescences and barnacles of history, and they should also resist the temptation to invoke the "Meyers' Law" in their works. The "Meyers' Law" stipulates that:

"If the facts do not fit the theory, discard the facts."

A historian will inevitably run into truths which may be unpleasant to him but he must not suppress them. He must state all the facts as he uncovers them if he wishes to vindicate truth.

But the historian, if he is a Muslim, has no choice in this matter. He is not free to write "inspired" or "synthetic" history. All he can do, if he is writing history, is to cling tenaciously to truth. If he writes false "history" for any reason, he will only merit the displeasure of God. Here, as elsewhere, al-Qur'an al-Majid, the Book of God, is explicit, emphatic, and unequivocal in its judgment which reads as follows:

And cover not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth when ye know (what it is). (Qur'an. Chapter 2; verse 42)

Those who conceal the clear (signs) We have sent down, and the guidance, after We have made

it clear for the people in the Book – on them shall be God's curse, and the curse of those entitled to curse. (Qur'an. Chapter 2; verse 159)

If the Muslim historians make these two verses of Qur'an their "guiding stars," they will be protected from error, and they will also be protected from becoming either the agents or the victims of propaganda, consciously or unconsciously.

In trying to smirch the name of Ali ibn Abi Talib; in trying to play down his services to Islam; and in desperately trying to conceal his glorious deeds, behind a screen of propaganda, from the eyes of posterity, his enemies were casting dust into the bright face of the sun. They raised clouds of dust in the form of most virulent and sustained propaganda against him, and yet, the sun only shone brighter and brighter.

And God blots out vanity, and proves the truth by His words. (Qur'an. Chapter 42; verse 24)

God blessed Ali's name to all eternity. His name is the symbol of love of God, and the symbol of Justice and Truth. His name will endure as long as Love of God, and Justice and Truth, will endure in this world.

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