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Chapter 2

Constructions of the Past in and about India: From Jahiliyya to the Cradle of Civilization. Pre-colonial Perceptions of India

Jamal Malik

Abstract

Jamal Malik deals with Muslim constructions of the past in and about India in the period of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the Mughal empire (1526–1857). His contribution is based on an analysis of the writings of Zia al-Din al-Barani (1285–1357 CE) and Amir Khusrau (1253–1325 CE), two important political theorists, as well as those of Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624 CE), famous for his theological critique, and of Ghulam `Ali Azad al-Bilgrami (1704–1786 CE), a prominent historian. Malik analyses the writings of these actors and their discourses related to the interpretation of history. His protagonists re-constructed and re-narrated historical accounts by referring to specific notions of the past and Malik shows that their positions toward Hindu, Greek, and Islamic norms and their perceptions of the past differed significantly. Nevertheless, two major trends can be made out in this context. On the one hand, this was the *adab* tradition, which increasingly defended the norms of shari`ah in their narrow judicial sense; on the other stood a set of Persianate norms of comportment informed by ethical literature, liberal Sufi discourses, and a flexible interpretation of Islamic law, which Malik calls the *akhlaqi* tradition. These norms were highly influenced by the Persian polymath Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (1201–1274 CE), who refers to a large degree on Aristotelian ethics. Looking at his protagonists, the author shows that the construction of Muslim histories in India always required and were subject to the character of the Prophet Muhammad, who functioned as the prime reference point. Nevertheless, the authors' narratives differed: some (like Barani and Sirhindi), following the *adab* tradition, criticized the decline in the present, while others (Khusrau and Bilgrami) saw India as some sort of paradise on earth. Generally, these writings were religious and normative and included orientation and positioning, and an insistence on continuity or on change. They historized or de-historized cultural memories or silenced variant reading and tradition. Thus meanings and relevance were produced and appropriated events were transposed into the past. It might be self-assertive and drawing boundaries, including or excluding people (othering people). According to Malik, historiography was of special importance in situations of uncertainty and conflict, when social and political roles and power structures were contested.

Introduction

Historiography and the constructions of the past have always been influential sources of authority – of change as well as continuity, of self-assertion as well as coercion. These processes of self-canonization are informed by semantic displacements that adopt a self-referential normative function in people's collective memory. It seems that particularly in conditions of uncertainty, conflict and contestation, religious actors tend for various reasons to historicize or de-historicize their environment, not only in order to create their own spaces to be legitimized but also to set limits and draw boundaries, not only to overcome difference but also to create shared tradition. This historicization is always informed by the past enmeshed in questions and interests of and in the present to serve the future. To quote Jörn Rüsen:

By remembering, interpreting, and representing the past peoples understand their present-day life and develop a future perspective on themselves and their world. 'History' in this fundamental and anthropologically universal sense is a culture's interpretive recollection of the past serving as a means to orient the group in the present.¹

Hence, it is not a historical record of things that happened which matters, but rather the construal of the past and the potential meanings with which this construal can be invested. It is the communities' construals of the past – ascertainable in historical sources – that must be investigated. This is also true for the various Muslim communities stretching from North Africa to Indonesia and from Europe to South Africa and in this way constituting a very heterogeneous Islamic, nay Islamate world, merely bracketed by a loose and imagined notion of the *ummah* – the totality of Muslims. In fact, Muslim historians of different schools of thought have been prone to constructing their respective pasts with contesting references to ancient times, thus arguing for a plethora of normativity and agency, be it from the margin or from the centre, from the platform of the marginal or from the stage of patronage – for example, in annals, biographies, and dynastic narratives. Issues most often discussed related to authenticity (from the beginning to ca. 1500 CE), and its relation to the sciences of the sayings ascribed either validly or invalidly to the Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*), and to discrete anecdotes and reports (*akhbar*), thereby silencing variant readings and traditions for different reasons, as can be derived from a critical reading of and on Muslim historiography.²

Just as in every historiography, also in Muslim historical writing the construction of the past occupies a prominent role in cultural memory as it is equipped with normative properties. The construction of antiquity and the ancient past is just such a powerful and functionally endowed concept of orientation and positioning. Thus, considering antiquity

1 RÜSEN 1996: 8; see also RÜPKE 2011.

2 See HIRSCHLER 2006; HUMPHREYS 1991; MEISAMI 1999; NIZAMI 1983; NOTH 1994²; ROBINSON 2003; ROSENTHAL 1968²; WALDMAN 1980; WANSBROUGH 1978; ALAM 2004; HARTMANN 2004.

as both an epoch and a normative frame of reference, one can trace fabulous and legendary paragons that serve as exemplary folios to be imitated, but that can also be surpassed by individual or collective efforts. In this context, the notion of “classical antiquity” evolved into a self-reflective tool animating both the self and the other, offering paradigmatic roles and typical situations, subsequently congealed into myths, and later additionally idealized, and eventually ontologized.³ Therefore, a hermeneutics of suspicion is well-placed.

The normative Islamic historical thinking behind canonical texts is, as it seems, basically informed by the master narrative that history would serve religion and law. On the one hand, this exemplifying nature of Islamic historiography seems to be endowed by the idea of salvation history epitomized in the postulate of *khatm al-nubuwwa*, the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad. On the other hand, the challenge arises from the perennially agonizing problem of the authenticity of source materials, their paucity and unavailability. Muslim historians themselves were quite aware of this problematic nature of the sources, as can be seen from the painful processes in the genesis of Muslim historiography, which of course was a reflection of the making of a fledgling religion – with all its hermeneutic impassibilities. Yet Islamic history, as it came to be constructed in historiographical writings, is attached, like any other religious historiography, to contemporary societal discourses and therefore can never be entirely objective or neutral. Organizing Islamic knowledge therefore cannot be an innocent process, since it is equipped with normative properties; it helps toward achieving orientation and constructing coherent identity and moral order.⁴ Such a narrative inevitably becomes rhetorical and the representation of the past becomes involved in a discourse of power.

The complex processes of self-canonization can also be traced in their alternative, expanding semantics, adopting self-referential, normative functions in the collective memories of competing and disputing people to be used in a field of power and contestation. In the Indian Muslim context, there is no dearth of such self-referential, competitive endeavours and their semantic displacements in exogenous and endogenous images of a glorious past. Contingent as they may be, the historiographical constructions unfold notions inclusive as well as exclusive in nature, especially when the chronological and territorial co-existence of peoples was made into an issue either by those who were/are politically in charge, or/and by the concerned religious communities themselves. Such traditions can be considered self-reflexive, having been discussed and legitimized within their religious traditions. The ancient past therefore lives on in many forms up to the present, in a process of integration and renewal, a re-creation – or re-invention – of tradition. Indeed, antiquity and Islam are not pitted against each other as unchangeable blocks but are reference figures that changed and both antagonized and also overlapped each other in historical contingent processes, with quite mutual recognition.⁵

3 See CANKIK 2007: 537, 538.

4 For a very useful introduction to different problems pertaining to Muslim history and the processes of its codification, see ROBINSON 2003.

5 See further CANKIK 2007: 542.

The Making of Islamic Historiography

Jahiliyya, usually perceived as the Age of Ignorance (of divine truth) or pre-Islamic paganism, is one such powerfully and sustainably construed religious or religiously legitimated boundary, providing Muslims with identity and solidarity, and with an Islamic master narrative framing normative order. Thus, the notion of *jahiliyya*, which in itself reflects the polemical situation of early Islam, stands for the origin of an Islamic master narrative. Derived from the linguistic root *j-h-l*, which appears twenty-four times in the deed of foundation of Islam, the Qur'an, the term is perceived as the pre-Islamic condition of ignorance and barbarism. This perception, however, is difficult to sustain, unless it is understood purely as a metaphor for the breach of tradition, that is, from the history of pagan Arab society, in order to consolidate identity and enhance solidarity among the fledgling monotheistic Muslim community. Consequently, *jahiliyya*'s barbarism is opposed to *halim*, "administered," so that Qur'anic translators construe *jahil* as "not knowing God, the Prophet and the Law," or "lawless," and *jahiliyya* as a "time of ignorance" and "heathendom." In Muslim cultural memory, "*jahil* is opposed to *hilm*," one who knows God⁶ or who possesses the quality of self-control.⁷

For example, one of the earliest Arabic dictionaries, the *Kitab al-'Ain*, by al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi (died 170/786),⁸ considers *jahiliyya* in terms of the time before the advent of Islam, that is, a time without a prophet. Similarly, the best-known and most comprehensive dictionaries of the Arabic language, *Lisan al-'Arab* (711/1311), by Jamal al-Din Abu al-Fadl (died 713/1312),⁹ is of the view that *jahiliyya* is the situation of Arabs before Islam. *Kashshaf Istalahat al-Funun*, published in 1159/1745 by the Indian scholars Muhammad A'la ibn 'Ali al-Tahanawi,¹⁰ states that it means the time before the prophethood of Muhammad or the time before the conquest of Mecca. The Indian Murtaza al-Zabidi (died 1205/1719),¹¹ who settled in Egypt to become the teacher of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti (died 1241/1825), offers the most detailed explanation of *jahl* in his celebrated *Taj al-'Arus min Jawahir al-Qamus*.¹² He provides three meanings of *jahl*: to be ignorant, having disbelief in something, and finally "*jahil* is mentioned most of the time as negative trait; sometimes it is mentioned but not as negative."

Yet, "[w]hile attributing to the *djähiliyya* the faults condemned in the Qur'an, Muslims do not fail to recognize a certain number of virtues among the ancient Arabs, such as honour ... generosity ... courage and dignity ... and hospitality."¹³ These pre-Islamic val-

6 See further IzUTSU 1959: index.

7 For an enlightening discussion of "Ignorance," see SHEPARD 2002a.

8 al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi, *Kitab al-'Ain*, Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiah (2003), vol. 1, 270. The dates given refer to the Islamic era (after 622 Chr. era), followed by Christian dates.

9 Jamal al-Din Abu Al-Fadl, *Lisan al-'Arab*, Dar al-Ma'arif (no date mentioned), vol. 9, 714.

10 Muhammad A'la ibn 'Ali al-Tahanawi, *Kashshaf Istalahat al-Funun*, Calcutta 1862, 547.

11 On Murtaza al-Zabidi see REICHMUTH 2009.

12 Murtaza Al-Zabidi, *Taj al-'Arus*, ministry of information Kuwait in 1993AD/1413AH, vol. 28, 255.

13 Ed., "Djähiliyya," 1991, , 383f.

ues were now – in the Islamic context – meant to serve God and the Muslim community (*ummah*). Notwithstanding the ambiguity of the term and the ambivalence of the pre-Islamic past as a source for the reconstruction of Islamic history, a strategic re-invention of tradition rather than a radical breach from tradition is suggested, since new beginnings are basically related to the past. Insofar, one has to inquire what tradition actually means. Instead of regarding tradition as a firm and authoritative part of religious and cultural identity, one may emphasize the cultural and discursive limitations of what is negotiated as tradition: “tradition is not the sum of actual past practices that have perdured into the past; rather, tradition is (as a modern trope), a prescriptive representation of socially desirable (or sometimes undesirable) institutions and ideas thought to have been handed down from generation to generation.”¹⁴

Thus, while the Qur’an’s version of *jahiliyya*

refers primarily to the moral condition of the pagan Arabs, it came later to refer primarily to the epoch in which they lived. The reasons for this are not hard to imagine. What was a living force when the first Muslims confronted their pagan neighbors became in time a matter of history, the characteristics of a past age.¹⁵

The appropriation and recognition of pre-Islamic virtues and practices – such as other, later appropriations and expansions of Islamic semantics – were not marginal to Islam and its societal praxis but constituted its tradition and therefore contributed to and changed its comprehensive image.

Other narratives, in contrast, celebrate India as the hub of the universe to accommodate non-Muslim cultures in an Islamicate rather than Islamic environment.¹⁶ These differences in historiography were constructed along social, ethnic and religious lines, just to mention a few. Thus, Muslims in South Asia had contingent ways of looking at the distant past, overshadowed, however, by the idea that history came to India through them alone. One would assume, however, that these Muslim narrative designs of the distant past were compounded with the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, the paragon and source of continuity with the past.

14 Vlastos, S. (1998), “Tradition – Past/Present Culture and Modern Japanese History,” in S. Vlastos (ed.), *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, 3, quoted in DEEG 2003: 32.

15 See SHEPARD 2002: 38.

16 See HODGSON 1975: 59, who argues that a culture that does not refer to religion in the first place, “but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.” Also see GILMARTIN/LAWRENCE 2002.

The Indian Scene

In the complex Indian scene, one can make out many such contesting trends in situations of conflict; in what follows, I paradigmatically explore two different dynastic periods: the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the Mughal Empire (1526–1857), in which I exemplify the construction of the ancient past and for that matter antiquity in some writings of Zia al-Din al-Barani (1285–1357) and Amir Khusrau (1253–1325), both followers of the well-known Islamic mystic (*sufi*) Nizam al-Din Awliya of Delhi (died 1325). While the former is considered to be one of the most important political theorists of the fourteenth century, bemoaning the decline of ethnic heredity – a heredity that he relates to the indifferent politics of Muslim Turks vis-à-vis Hindus – the latter, in contrast, celebrates India in his poems as paradise on earth. Both these narratives provide important rationales for the cultural memories of different religious and political actors in the evolution of the making of the past for the orientation of the future. The second pair is represented by Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624) and Ghulam `Ali Azad al-Bilgrami (died 1786). The first is remembered by the title “Renewer of the Second Millennium” and, as such, is known for his theological critique addressed to the ruling parties. The latter became a famous historian only later, among other reasons, for his attempt to establish the idea of India as the cradle of civilization where Adam descended from heaven.

Our selected protagonists, then, did indeed re-construct and re-narrate historical accounts by referring to specific notions of the past, a past that hearkened back to both the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and the Sassanian traditions. One can distinguish two major trends: on the one hand, the *adab* tradition, that is, prescribed Islamic etiquette and practical norms of conduct with an ethical code involving every aspect of life. Initially, *adab* stood for civility and courtesy, developed some notion of humanitas, but eventually was reduced to “the specific meaning of ‘the knowledge necessary for given offices and social functions.’”¹⁷ It increasingly defended the norms of shari`ah in their narrow juridical sense – as well as, in fact, the dispensation of justice according to shari`ah,¹⁸ and thereby nevertheless appropriated Persian kingship. All the same, reference to the Qur`an and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*) are often quoted to encourage *adab*.

On the other hand stands the powerful written record of Persianate norms of comportment, which is informed by ethical (*akhlaqi*) literature, liberal Sufi discourses, and a flexible interpretation of Islamic law to attune with the new – Indian non-Islamic but Islamicate – environment at the expense of Prophetic tradition and its relevance as an ethical ideal. These Persianate norms exercised enduring influence through Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (597–672/1201–1274), the Persian polymath who was writing during the turbulent period of Hulagu’s invasion of Iran and the fall of the Abbasid caliphate. His political treatise, “Nasirean Ethics” (*Akhlaq-e Nasiri*) (1235), which was essentially based on Aristotelian ethics, had a very practical orientation, ideally providing guidance for all persons,

17 GABRIELI 1986: 175f.

18 ALAM 2004: 27f.

not only Muslims, to achieve perfection. Following inclusivistic traditions, further *akhlaqi* texts were written to elaborate upon imperial etiquette and their discourses, perceiving political organisation as cooperation achieved through justice. This justice was to be promoted by the ruler, who was supposed to be affectionate and favourable, rather than to use his power to command and seek obedience only. The aim of these texts was “to provide a philosophical, non-sectarian and humane solution to emergent problems that India’s Muslim society encountered.”¹⁹ In this way, India’s Islamicate traditions were to become more versatile and inclusive, as the immigrant Muslim communities in a way subversively adapted to Indian environments as the bearers of a different civilisation and faith.

Therefore, some of the icons of the ancient Greek past, such as Alexander the Great, played a significant role in boosting Muslim self-consciousness.²⁰ The celebration of this emperor, whose story came to the Muslims through Syrian sources, had indeed a long and resilient tradition in the Perso-Islamic historiography,²¹ as he epitomized the norms and virtues of victory and morality, and of immortality. In fact, he had been Islamized as a monotheistic hero and equated to a prophet in Nizami’s (1141–1209) *Iskandernamēh*.²²

Amir Khusrau and the Ambiguity of Ideals

Amir Khusrau (1253–1325),²³ a famous thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Indian musician, scholar and poet of Turkic descent, passed on this image in a slightly degrading view, however, when considering Alexander merely a saint (*wali*).²⁴ Yet Khusrau’s narrative finally establishes “Alexander’s destiny not merely to a universal kingdom, but also to a kingdom of Islam.” To the Persianate author, Alexander was a paragon of Persianized Islam, whose primary mission was to establish everywhere the *din Muhammadī* – the Muhammadan religion.²⁵

Turning to the actors of Indian Islam: in his epic of conquest, the *Khaza’in al-Futuh* or *Treasures of Victory*, Khusrau praised the Delhi Sultan ‘Ala al-Din Khilji (reigned 1296–1316) for his achievement in keeping the warring Mongols out of north India and for his oppression of the Hindus, thereby equating him with first caliph Abu Bakr (reg. 632–634),

19 ALAM 2004: 12, 46ff; WALZER 1986: 325f.

20 Compare BROCKER 1966: 79; MARÍN 1991; STONEMAN 2003.

21 For scholars like Firdousi and Nizami, Alexander is a son of the Persian King Darius, by a daughter of the Macedonian Philip; see the translator’s preface to MIRKHOND (1891), *The Rauzat us-Safa or the Garden of Purity*, 10. (<http://www.archive.org/stream/rauzatussafaorg01unkngoog#page/n4/mode/1up> [08.09.2014]).

22 See further BÜRGELE 1996.

23 Khusrau was born to an immigrant Turk of the Lachin tribe.

24 SUBRAHMANYAM 1995: 74.

25 Similarly, in his *A’inha-ye Iskandari*, Khusrau eulogized Afghan ruler ‘Ala al-Din Khilji (reigned 1296–1316), who had called himself the “second Sikandar” (*Sikandar-e thani*), for his achievement in keeping the Mongols out of northern India. SUBRAHMANYAM 1995: 73–75.

and Delhi with Baghdad. Thus, iconoclasm for Khusrau meant the removal of polluted space ultimately traced to Satan, and it signified the purification and conversion of Indian lands into the world of Islam.²⁶ We ought to bear in mind that he was writing panegyrics of Muslim conquerors, in a time of political instability, when the policy of price control aimed to finance a large standing army against Mongol threat, and state interventionism tried hard to replace ethnic superiority with merit and loyalty.

In the face of these anti-Hindu accounts, it is difficult to understand Amir Khusrau's conjuring up of the virtues of India, when he excelled in taking pride in his Indian parentage: his maternal grandfather was a converted high-caste Hindu who served as defence minister under Balban (reigned 1265–87) and his mother was Indian-born. Thus his mixed parentage is represented in his ambiguous genealogical position.²⁷

In one of his well-known poetic contributions, *Nuh Sipih* (*Nine Skies*), Khusrau presents the achievements of Hindus in ancient India as part of a common historical heritage,²⁸ and calls it superior to Khurasan. He gives several poetical arguments celebrating India as paradise on earth (*kishwar-e hind ast behishte be-zamin*):

Greece has been famous for its philosophy, but India is not devoid of it. All branches of philosophy ... are found here.²⁹ ... In divinity alone the Hindus are confused, but, then, so are all the other peoples. ... They worship, no doubt, stones, beasts, plants and the sun, but they recognize that these things are creations of God and adore them simply because their forefathers did so.³⁰

Hence, Khusrau was "proud of his Turkish descent but was loud in his praise of India."³¹ And in his endeavour to show the superiority of Brahmans' knowledge over the knowledge of "Rumis" (= Greeks) Khusrau proclaimed that "There is a Brahman whose [ex-

26 DAVIS 1997: 90f.

27 Khusrau also wrote in the reign of Mubarak Shah Khilji (r. 1316–1320), who abrogated his father's repressive policy and called himself *Khalifat Allah* in 1317, thereby exalting himself to prophetic status.

28 Amir Khusrau praises India particularly in the third *Sipih*.

29 Logic, astrology, *kalam* (metaphysics) – in fact every science – is found. Besides, physics, mathematics, astronomy, divination of the past and the future are all known.

30 Khusrau elaborates on instances of Indian superiority, ranging from profane knowledge to mathematics, narratives, music, and games: 1) Knowledge and learning are widespread, 2) Indians know all languages of the world, 3) Learned people have come to India but no Brahmin travelled outside India, 4) Hindsa and the numerical system originated in India, 5) *Kalila wa Dimna* was composed in India, and translated into many languages, 6) Chess was invented in India, 7) Kalila and Chess are both popular around the world, 8) Indian music is superior, 9) Indian music charms also animals, and 10) Khusrau is from India; see MIRZA 1962: 183f.

31 This stands in contrast to statements such as of Khawajah Kalan Beg "Sipahi," an ally of Babur: "If once I cross the India in peace and safety and think again of returning to India, may my face be blackened (i.e., I would not like to go there again; J.M.)" (*agar bekhair o salamat guzr az Sind kunam, siyah ruyeh shawam agar hawa-ye hind kunam*). See MIRZA 1962: 233.

treme] knowledge annuls the laws [or *Qanun*] of Aristotle"³² (*barhamane hast ke dar`ilm o khirad – daftar-e qanun-e aristo be-darad*).³³

In any case, these different concepts of the past were designed to re-discover Muslim agency in a situation of intensive culture encounter, in which the court was a hotbed of intrigues. After all, Khusrau was associated with the royal courts of more than seven rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, at a time when Mongols had virtually overrun large parts of Central Asia.

Al-Barani, the Islamic Version

Ambiguous views of the past are hardly observable in the writings of Zia al-Din al-Barani (1285–1357), a contemporary of Khusrau, and one of the most important political theorists of the fourteenth century. In contrast to the *akhlaqi* tradition, which interpreted shari`ah quite loosely, al-Barani played out the *adab* tradition to give high priority to shari`ah understood in its strict juridical sense. For him justice was radically subject to shari`ah, rather than being the cornerstone of social organization and social harmony. Thus, the duties of a "just and pious" Islamic ruler stood in contrast to the "sinful" *padishah* of the Iranian tradition (a superlative royal title, which was adopted by several monarchs claiming the highest rank), such as the "drunkard" `Ala al-Din Khilji, who presumptuously would call himself the second Alexander,³⁴ and who had been praised by Khusrau. Yet due to the vicissitudes of Muslims in a region dominated by non-Muslims, al-Barani's interpretations took on a pragmatic twist.

For example, in his political theory, al-Barani draws a picture of the sound ruler with a rather Machiavellian amorality, elevating kingship over Islamic law and ethics, to serve the return to the pristine times of the early *ummah*, the community of the Prophet. He pondered over the ruler's role in an ideal Islamic state, so that in this scenario Mahmud of Ghazni (reigned 998–1030) was portrayed the archetypical Islamic warrior and ideal ruler, the promoter and the guarantor of shari`ah. Consequently, various progenitors of the Hellenistic tradition, such as Abu Ya`qub al-Kindi (died 870), Abu Nasr al-Farabi (died 950) or the rationalist and Persian polymath Ibn Sina (died 1037), were considered heretics, while the legendary justice of the Sassanid ruler Anushriwan (died 687) was overshadowed by a justice associated with second caliph Umar (reigned 634–644).³⁵

Avowedly detesting Hindus, who dominated and controlled trade at the time, al-Barani in his *Fatawa-ye Jahandari* (1358) vehemently stood for *ashraf* supremacy, referring to

32 Aristotle is not, in Medieval Muslim literature on ethics and politics, the father of scientific learning and philosophy, but one of the most wise and pious sages; see Ziyâ al-Dîn BARANI, *Fatâwâ-ye Jahândârî*, edited by A. Salim KHAN (1972), Lahore, 31.

33 ASKARI 1992: 21f, 46; DEHLAWI 1949: 162

34 Ziyâ al-Dîn BARANI, *Târikh-e Firoz Shâhî*, 391f.

35 Alam 2004: 34, 38.

the Qur'anic text into which he read the division of aristocrat, *ashraf*, and low-born, *ardhal*. Aristocratic birth and superior genealogy were to him the prime human traits. Consequently, al-Barani considered a policy of alleged indifference toward Hindus and the lower strata as a lack of religiosity, basing his argument on ethnic grounds. He advocated the active delimitation and exclusion of Hindu political participation. The urge of the sultan to aggrandize is seen as a threat to the nobility's stability, which can be controlled only if political firmness is based on ethnicity and birth, dismissing infiltration of the ruling class by non-Turkic actors. The principle of strict Muslim heredity was the only way of saving Muslim rule from political upheaval and ethnic strife. Al-Barani identified such contaminating tendencies in Muhammad Tughluq's (reigned 1324–1351) policy of rigorous cultural and religious integration, which, in fact, stood for the co-option of foreigners and recent Hindu converts. Yet Tughluq, whose reign saw the beginning of the disintegration of the empire of Delhi, referred to his empire as *Dar al-Islam*, abode of Islam, thereby expanding Islamic territorial and juridical semantics to provide ample space for non-Muslim participation. Al-Barani, therefore, advocated not only the re-establishment of the old order, but also a repressive policy against Hindus – in spite of being a spiritual disciple of the mystic Nizam al-Din Awliya (died 1325).³⁶ Yet al-Barani also recalled the virtues of the ancient Hellenic times, in which Alexander emerged as a God-fearing, pious saint and Aristotle as one of the wisest and most pious sages.³⁷ He considered both icons to be symbols of truth, obedience and dutifulness,³⁸ which epitomized the virtues of ancient times, and his praise culminated in the phrase: "Alas, if Aristotle only had seen this, my history (i.e. *Tarikh-e Firozshahi*)."³⁹

It is interesting to note that in one case, one author (Khusrau) presented Indian traditions in ambiguous ways, while the other (al-Barani) conjured up the unilateral re-establishment of Muhammadan society. Both were followers of the same Sufi master Nizam al-Din Awliya, known for his exceeding inclusivism. Both called the same icons of Greek antiquity to witness. Thus, the (Hellenic) other – the peripheral, the excluded – re-emerged in the midst of structures of the meaningful, as it were. Different perceptions of the past seemed to oscillate within a historiographical force field of Hellenic, Hindu and Islamic traditions, within which other actors played out roles of other dimensions.

36 Nizam al-Din was a famous Sufi saint of the Chishti order, one of the main mystic orders that evolved in the twelfth century. Like many other Sufis, he stressed the element of love as a means of realisation of God and humanity; see Nizam Al-Din Awliya, *Morals for the Heart*, translated and annotated by Bruce B. LAWRENCE (1991). For a comprehensive introduction to Sufism, see SCHIMMEL 2006; KNYSH 2000.

37 BARANI, *Fatâwâ-ye Jahândâri*, 31.

38 BARANI, *Târîkh-e Firoz Shâhî*, 396f.

39 BARANI, *Târîkh-e Firoz Shâhî*, 210. Barani could not present the book personally to Firoz Shah due to intrigues at the court.

In the Mughal context,⁴⁰ *akhlaqi* traditions were still important as they represented justice and mutual love as the cornerstones of governance, with an emphasis on maintaining social balance and peace with all (*sulh-e kull*). Influenced by a strong political tradition of accommodation, effected by *akhlaqi* texts and liberal Sufi texts, Akbar (reigned 1556–1605), who was regarded as the most illustrious ruler of the Mughal Dynasty, and his son Jahangir (reigned 1605–1627) were thus able to adjust more flexibly to local Indian peculiarities and to legitimize their wide-ranging reforms.⁴¹

The Idea of Renewal

Ancient Greek traditions received through *akhlaqi* traditions were, however, increasingly challenged by reference points based in shari`ah alone. In Islamic parlance, we come across the powerful idea of the reformer or renewer, *mujaddid*, which harkens back to a tradition according to which the Prophet had said that, at the beginning of each century, God will send a man, a descendant of his family, who will explain the matters of religion.⁴² In fact, messianism occupied a central role in the Qur`an and was the kernel of Muhammad's prophecy: God will hold a Last Judgement at the end of the time (84:1–2).

The recurrent notion of *mujaddid* came to be radically revitalized in the sixteenth century C.E., which is around the year 1000 of the Hegiran calendar. The Egyptian scholar Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (died 1505)⁴³ had already initiated the hope that doomsday could be “postponed indefinitely if religion were revitalized on the eve of every century.”⁴⁴ Chil-iastic expectations thus unleashed new references to history;⁴⁵ at a time when high expectations floated in a sort of millenarian force field between the apocalypse and the reordering of the known world.

It is in this context that Mughal Emperor Akbar in about 1581 commissioned a compilation of a 1000-year history of Islam, from the death of the Prophet (*rihla*) down to his millennium. This unfinished “History of the Millennium” (*Tarikh-e Alfi*), written in

40 The Mughals were descendants of the Timurids and Genghis Khan and controlled most of the Indian Subcontinent from 1526 to 1857. With the accession of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar (reigned 1556–1605), the Mughal dynasty enjoyed much of its cultural and economic progress, while its decline is usually accredited to Aurangzeb (died 1707); for a different view, see MALIK 2008.

41 ALAM 2004: 46ff.

42 The “theory of hundred year’s cycle seems to have exercised deep influence on the medieval Muslim mind. The concept of the birth of a *mujaddid* (reformer) after every century is an expression of the same belief.” NIZAMI 1983: 43.

43 For this context, see also MEIER 1985; SARTAIN 1975.

44 FRIEDMANN 1971: 14.

45 Such references revealed patterns of high culture as well as constant incremental alignment with indigenization; see SUBRAHMANYAM 1995: Ch. 5 “Sixteenth-Century Millenarianism from the Tagus to the Ganges.”

simple language and free from Arabic verses, was to celebrate the millenary of the *Hijrah* (Hegira) in 1591/92 and thus adopted the *rihla* year in preference of Hegiran chronology, thereby paving the way for a change in the chronological framework⁴⁶ and contesting orthodox historiography. In fact, the very strength of Akbar's empire made Mughals virtually autonomous from the Muslim courts of Istanbul, Cairo, and Isfahan. Yet Alexander the Great and *akhlaqi* norms seemed to lose their exemplary roles, gradually ousted by the Prophet Muhammad, specifically the study of *hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, as will be elaborated below in the context of Adam in India.

As millennial movements nourished the hope to reform and change the societal fabric, namely, with supernatural help, they drew their hope from situations of crisis in which prophetic messengers appeared to promise the millennial empire. In fact, they condensed the sense of crisis in their own person and sought solidarity with the destiny of society, compounded with the experience of a visionary and auditory mission and assignment to collective and saving action. This form of apocalyptic, messianic expectation turned the messiah into a person of the future who was expected to release the people from the enemy's yoke. Thus, concepts of Messiah were converted concepts of authority, as they no more constituted the repressive right of the ruler but his potential subject's claim for autonomy. The concept of the Messiah or Mahdi (as a title of authority) thereby was altered in an emancipative way, as the chosen one was sacred; his line of attack was the centre of power. This was the context which prompted chiliastic movements worldwide to come up with alternative perceptions of the past to provide orientation for the future.⁴⁷

Around this time, Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), much later remembered as the "Renewer of the Second Millennium," dabbled in Islamizing the political discourse of the Mughal court.⁴⁸ He was a member of that Muslim functional elite and gentry which had relied on state patronage but increasingly had become uneasy with Akbar's inclusivistic policies, which were conducive to non-Muslim participation in Mughal administration. The third volume (the *Akbarnama*) of the official history of Akbar's reign called *A'in-e Akbari* was commissioned by the emperor to document in detail the recording of his administration. It was authored by his vizier Abu al-Fazl (1551–1602); it attests precisely to the absence of religious bias and represents Indian culture as a composite entity to which both Hindu and Muslim traditions have contributed.⁴⁹ Similarly, Abu al-Fazl's translation of *Mahabharat* served as an invitation to Muslims to appreciate and appropriate Indian traditions.⁵⁰

46 See "Tarikh – Alfi (1585)," in SINGH/SAMIUDDIN 2003: 967–972.

47 On the boom in sixteenth-century millennial movements, see Subrahmanyam 1995: Ch. 5 "Sixteenth-Century Millenarianism from the Tagus to the Ganges."

48 Originally rooted in Chishti tradition, Sirhindi was initiated into the Naqshbandi order in 1599, which until then accounted for a rather inclusivist order.

49 Yet the same source mentioned caste under the heading "Animal Life"; see ALLAMI 2001: 126ff.

50 ALAM 2004: 67.

These reminders of religious pluralism became a bone of contention in theological debates, ironically at a time when central Muslim political power was at its height. Consequently, Sirhindi polemicized against Akbar;⁵¹ his warning letters (*maktubat*)⁵² stressed strict observance of shari`ah, rejected all sorts of innovation (*bida`*) and advocated discrimination against non-Muslims. Thus, he termed India the “lower country” (*diyar-e sufla`*), as opposed to Transoxania, the “upper country;” for the Brahmins had falsified the prophetic messages and misled the community.⁵³ Equating *tajdid* – renewal – with rigorously performing shari`ah, Sirhindi equipped his eschatological cosmology with an imaginative counter-imagery and concept of time.

The relation of the two individuations of Muhammad – the profane and the sacred, the first being of horizontal, the latter of vertical nature – had become unbalanced after the death of the Prophet, Sirhindi argued. After 1000 years, the first individuation was weakened dramatically, leaving the community devoid of “the lights of prophetic guidance emanating from Muhammad’s human aspect.” Muslims had become strangers in an alien environment. The process of decline and the shift of power had provoked divine displeasure, which could be stopped, or in fact reversed, only by means of *tajdid*, the revival of shari`ah. Thus, the *mujaddid* possessing prophetic perfections was “to fulfil some of the Prophet’s tasks with regard to the community.” In this narrative, decline and revival were symbolized by diminishing the first *mim* of Muhammad’s name being “replaced by an *alif* standing for divinity (*ulûhîyat*). Muhammad came to be Ahmad.”⁵⁴

The idea of the diluted worldly power of Muhammad and its revival by a self-aggrandizing *mujaddid* was of course heavily criticized by traditional scholars. Yet in Sirhindi’s perceptions, Muhammad was endowed with a prominent role, as the emulation of Prophetic tradition exemplified a model for ethical perfection; observing Prophetic qualities would empower man to harmonize the degenerated moral order with the divine and to call for Muslim fraternization.

The reflection about the continuity of Islamic genesis on the one hand and the perceived discontinuities of the present on the other provided Sirhindi with an eschatological space and time reference. Couched in the metaphor of diacritical discontinuity, his concept could be used as a marker for cultural difference amid the desperate demand for self-affirmation. In fact, he is still remembered for his profound anti-non-Muslim stand.⁵⁵ His was a distinctively Indian-Sufic answer, which, while addressing both the

51 Particularly in his *Ithbat al-Nubuwwah*; see FRIEDMANN 1971: 33f.

52 Writing *maktubat* is a method reminiscent of Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (died 1538), who was famous for his critical shari`ah-based epistles to the Lodhis and early Mughals nearly a century ago. On Gangohi, see DIGBY 1975; KHAN 1977; DAMBREL 2002.

53 FRIEDMANN 1971: 69, 71.

54 FRIEDMANN 1971: 15f, 18. In fact, *alif*, “with the numerical value one, isolated and yet active, became the divine letter par excellence. To know the *alif* meant, for the Sufis, to know the divine unity and unicity...” SCHIMMEL 2006: 417. The Arabic *alif* is, just as the Hebrew *aleph*, the Greek *alpha* and the Latin *a*, descended from Phoenician *’āleph*.

55 FRIEDMANN 1971: 72ff.

widespread chiliastic expectations and the perceived non-Islamic environment, hardly referred to any icons of Greek antiquity.⁵⁶

Apparently, after an era of making a pluralistic religious milieu facilitated by *akhlaqi* norms and liberal Sufi texts, prophetic tradition and its relevance as an ethical ideal had returned to learned discourse and religious praxis, at a time when Mughal India was facing a major crisis on the eve of fratricidal wars following Shah Jahan.

The Indianness of History: Dara Shiko

The conflictual and contestatorial aspects of history-writing can also be illustrated in the work of Dara Shiko (died 1659), brother of the last great Mughal, Aurangzeb (died 1707), for he was another famous voice in the process of the historiographical, eastward-looking construction of religion. Dara devoted much effort toward finding a mystical language common to both Islam and Hinduism, thus ignoring the Hellenic past.⁵⁷ In the introduction of his *Sirr-e-Akbar* (The Greatest Mystery) or "The Upanishads: God's Most Perfect Revelation," he proclaimed his speculative hypothesis that the opus referred to in the Qur'an as *Kitab al-Maknun* or *The Hidden Book*, was none other than the Upanishads.⁵⁸ Also, in his "The Meeting Place of the Two Oceans" (*Majma' al-Bahrayn*) Dara elaborated on correlations between Sufi and Upanishadic cosmologies, beliefs and practices, and proposed that understanding the Upanishads required understanding the Qur'an – a proposition that eventually cost him his life.⁵⁹ It is another matter that later European Orientalists read and appropriated Dara's Persian translation, without even mentioning his contributions. This Orientalist amnesia was especially conspicuous, since it occurred at a time when authorship was emerging as a prime principle of textual attribution and accreditation.⁶⁰ Many scholars of contemporary India, however, refer to Dara and Khusrau to establish a continuous tie of historical narration in shared tradition. Be that as it may, this way of appropriating religion and the reception of traditions and practices were not marginal to the tradition or societal praxis; rather, they constituted it and contributed to the completion of the religious image that they changed.

56 It is debatable whether Sirhindi was trained in the Hellenic tradition as he indifferently and anachronistically pooled Jesus with Plato; see FRIEDMANN 1971: 54.

57 He completed the translation of 50 Upanishads from their original Sanskrit into Persian in 1657 to make them accessible to Muslim scholars.

58 Thus says Dara: "After gradual research, I have come to the conclusion that long before all heavenly books, God had revealed to the Hindus, through the Rishis of yore, of whom Brahma was the Chief, His four books of knowledge, the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda." TALREJA 2000: 45.

59 But as Carl Ernst has pointed out, Dara expressed contempt for the generality of both Hindus and Muslims; associating only with the esoteric elites of both groups, he had nothing to do with the common people of either community. For a critical study, see ERNST 2003.

60 See TAVAKOLI-TARGHI 1996.

Adam in India: Azad Bilgrami

However, the tendency of associating India with Islamic rather than Islamicate traditions became increasingly present, such as in the ideas of Ghulam `Ali Azad al-Bilgrami (1704–1786), a prolific historiographer, a Sufi, and a scholar who had a strong command of Persian and Arabic. He committed to paper his imaginative elaborations following the political collapse of the Mughal empire and the emergence of successor states (that is, a period of fledgling emancipative ideas that received a strong impetus from pietistic discourses of urban trading communities well before the encounter with Europe). One of the features of these discourses was the call for a renewal of ethics and re-conversion, informed by the revival of the study of prophetic traditions and the science of *Hadith*, literally the new, news.⁶¹ Al-Bilgrami had studied *Hadith* at the feet of well-known contemporary scholars such as Muhammad Hayat Sindi (d. 1750)⁶² in Mecca and Medina. After extensive *Hadith* studies he returned to India to settle down in Aurangabad where he stayed for the subsequent forty years until he died.

In his *Subhat al-Marjan fi Athar Hindustan* (Coral Rosary of Indian Antiquities), written in Arabic and completed in 1764, we can trace processes of memorization. This anamnesis, that is, invocative visualization of the past and re-memorization, required much use of *Hadith*, which in turn reflected the revival of *Hadith* studies. In fact, al-Bilgrami's prime sources were Qur'anic commentators, such as the influential al-Tabari,⁶³ and *Hadith* scholars, particularly al-Suyuti as well as the six canonical authoritative *Hadith* collections of which he evidently had a high command. In his *Rosary*, he imagined India (*ard al-Hind*), precisely Ceylon, as the place of Adam's descent to earth after his expulsion from paradise. The scholar succeeded in claiming that India was the cradle of civilization, and thereby endowed central meaning to the symbolic significance of Adam's descent and presented India as a space where God first empowered man to rule.⁶⁴ Thus, India was turned into the realm of vice-regency (*dar al-khilafa*). In the four chapters comprising this account, al-Bilgrami gives details about Adam and his relationship to India.⁶⁵

61 Compare also MALIK 2012

62 On Sindi's contribution to hadith, see NAIFI 2006.

63 Tabari's *Rusul al-Muluk*, for example, has a chapter on the descent of Adam to Ceylon (121-136), which brings several authorities who share the tradition that Adam was sent by God to India to a place called Budh (Suyuti calls it Nudh), precisely to Sarandib (Serendip), the highest mountain in the world, whose peak is called Wasim. Hence, the revelation came to India first. Adam brought with him a branch of every tree in heaven. Hence the smell that comes from India is the same that came with Adam from heaven. The trees and fruits as well as the smell coming from heaven are only available in India. India thus became the source of good smell. Adam also brought with him the black stone from heaven. Eventually, he went from Hajj to Mecca and returned to Ceylon together with Eve. He died in Budh.

64 See ERNST 1995; Bilgrami, *Subhat al-marjan fi athar Hindustan*; MALIK 2013

65 The first chapter refers to verses in Hadith and Qur'an about India, the second is about biographies of famous Indian Muslims, the third concerns rhetoric in Sanskrit and Arabic, and the fourth considers love poetry written in Arabic and Sanskrit.

In the first chapter, he counts some virtues of India that are known in Qur'an and Hadith. Here, in India, the fountains of knowledge (*hikma*) originated, here Adam's footprint bears testimony to mankind's origin, and here the story of Cain and Abel occurred – that is, the initial, pristine features of mankind: jealousy and selfishness. The narration then goes on to relay that Adam went to visit Mecca but returned to India where he and Eve were buried. Since the Holy Spirit first descended on Adam in India and informed the first prophet (Adam) about the last prophet (Muhammad), prophecy and revelation were initiated in India to the point where the Muhammadan light, a topos developed by Khusranian Sufis in thirteenth century, was transferred through Adam and finally delivered to Muhammad. Hence, India was the source of light, which assumed its final physical form only in Arabia.⁶⁶ Finally, all the people on earth are Indians because their father, Adam, was originally Indian. It was only later that his descendants migrated to the seven continents.⁶⁷

Now this treatise is extremely interesting as it stands in the tradition of appropriating historical accounts, even though anachronistically, to construct an Islamic past by quoting Islamic canonical texts for authorization, referring to the father of mankind and persuasively establishing a connection between him as the first and Muhammad as the last apostle. It is, however, difficult to suppose al-Bilgrami was serious about Adam's descent in India, as he was well aware of the apocryphal character of the sources he used and their fabulous meaning. After all, he was a master in *Hadith* criticism and hermeneutics.

Perhaps more profanely, al-Bilgrami strove to rehabilitate Ceylon, which in Hindu mythology was the realm of Ravana, the evil villain and Ramayan demon-king of Lanka.⁶⁸ Surely, it was all very well for al-Bilgrami to praise India, as the contemporary Nizams of Asif Jahi dynasty (ruled 1720–1948 in Hyderabad/Deccan) were among the wealthiest people in the world and patronized every sort of fashion and culture. Thus, the saying goes that no Nizam ever left India since “the Sovereign is too precious to his people ever to leave India.”

66 Moreover, the call for *millat hanifi* (the community adhering to the religion of Abraham) started from India and thus the Muhammadan kingdom actually germinated from here. Indeed, the black stone of Ka'aba descended here for the first time. Similarly, Noah hailed from India where all the god-given amenities such as diamonds, professional tools, good smell, pious tree, fruits etc. appeared for the first time.

67 The second chapter deals with biographies of famous Indian Muslim scholars, while the third covers the linguistic qualities of Sanskrit: as poetry took root in India and reached Arabia only later, it is superior to any other poetry. Admittedly, the Greeks and their followers were more qualified in mathematics (*riyadiyahat*), but Indians excelled in arithmetic (*hisab*) and especially in music, which is their cherished claim to fame. A comparison between Arabic and Sanskrit ends in a tie, however. Finally, the last chapter sets out to commend two things by quoting the Prophet: “in this world there are two things that I like the most: *tayyib* (good smell) and women.” Both of them first descended in India with Adam. Hence Indians have more, indeed a very special knowledge of both matters.

68 Rama's principal antagonist, who had abducted Sita, was vanquished and killed in a ferocious battle. Thus, Sita was restored to her husband Rama, the luminous example of the virtuous ruler.

Perhaps al-Bilgrami's accommodation of non-Arab polytheists into Muslim taxonomy ventured – possibly like his contemporary, Umaru Pulavar⁶⁹ – toward establishing common ground for participating in a global horizon of looming Hindu-Muslim-Christian trade. Against the backdrop of the collapse of the tottering Mughal Empire and of attempts to centralize regional dispensation by successor states such as Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, it seems plausible that new visions of the ancient past sought to legitimize evolving regional powers vis-à-vis the decaying central political power. The Prophetic tradition was a proven device for this sort of functional transfer and for the projection of images of the ancient past.

Finally, al-Bilgrami's idealization might have anticipated European Orientalism, which perceived India as a medium of mythical imitation and heroic self-perception and self-fashioning.⁷⁰

Conclusion

So what do we make of what was negotiated as tradition? Is the narrative a source of identity, conceived of as a static and consistent way things always have been and always should be, or was it the most important source of authority? Was tradition used as an open form to negotiate between claims to truth and realities of historical change and continuity? Or was it merely a romantic cult of originality? No doubt, the seminal event, that is, Adam's descent, produces meaning in which "the past is symbolically constituted as an unchangeable whole, situated 'out of time,' that is out of history."⁷¹ Hence, the traditionality of religion implies the construction of a place beyond chronology, and thereby gives significant meaning to the present and contains the future by remembering the past.

At any rate, the diverse historiographical narrations presented eventually seem to be compounded with the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, the paragon and source of continuity with the past – in situations of increasing depravity and insecurity but also of new beginnings. And the narrations seem to be embedded in some sort of normative Muslim thinking characterized by eulogistic phrasing and by notions of a religiously prescribed history of salvation used for restoring the glory of early Islamic time. Moreover, Muslim historiography seems to be perceived in terms of a moral and meaningful science serving religion and shari'ah⁷² – fixed and endowed with normative properties that call for an

69 The mutual use and adaptation of religious vocabulary and cultural elements is reminiscent of the seventeenth-century epic *Chirapuranam* or *The Life of the Prophet*, written by Umaru Pulavar in Tamil. Patronized by merchants, Pulavar expanded the semantics of the Islamic ancient past by appropriating Muslim figures in Hindu popular piety and ritual. The aim was probably to advocate the accommodation of merchants who dealt in different commodities. See NARAYANAN 2001; and NARAYANAN 2003.

70 See, for example, INDEN 1986; KING 1999.

71 HERVIEU-LEGER 2008: 257.

72 See CONERMANN 2002: Introduction.

expansive and sweeping claim to interpretation. Whether we can read into these narratological communalities some sort of a homogenizing force with a standardized habitus, the *adab* (the product of a system of grooming), seems, however, too early to state. Surely such standardization can potentially account for making communication and communion easier beyond given boundaries. Yet given the contingency and complexity of – and in – Muslim historiography, oscillating between processes of strategic mimesis (imitation), structural amnesia (mental blank), and imaginative anamnesis (remembrance and visualization of the past), and between their transformations and projections of notions of the past, one can fairly well trace “accounts for the continued momentum and possibilities of growth and adjustment.” The past referred to is alive and is becoming a reservoir with the potential to turn *imitatio Muhammadi* into *representatio Muhammadi*, to paraphrase Peter Brown. Insofar, it is precisely “the bringing of a bundle of human excellences associated with the Prophet into the present”⁷³ that radically calls for the rediscovery of multi-voicedness in the remaking of ancient past in time and space. Tradition thereby serves as a quarry for the construction of hermetically sealed differences and boundaries as well as of shared tradition and creative mutuality. This fascinating dynamic shows the existence of contesting historiographies, when *akhlaqi* and *adab* traditions existed side by side or challenged each other. Thus, for the making of the future, the designing of the past is as socially relevant as the past itself, and it relies on creative tensions.

In any case, the constructions of Muslim histories in India required and were subject, eventually, to the character of Prophet Muhammad who, for centuries, had been celebrated as the sublimation of the sublime, the perfect individual, the moral and aesthetic ideal,⁷⁴ though differently translated and interpreted. It seems conspicuous, however, that the prophet had been forgotten after the first centuries of Muslim rule and was reawakened only in the wake of the first Islamic millennium to become once again the major player on the historiographical stage. Even now, his community in Medina is often used as the prime reference point for self-historicizing: a canonized past with its effective patterns for describing alterity, social and religious distinction and also discrimination. In

73 See the illuminating remarks in BROWN 1984: 34ff.

74 See, for example, the *dala'il* and *shama'il* literature: Muhammad, the beautiful and spiritual model. As Rudi Paret, a German Orientalist, said: “In case of emergency, the Muslim might deny his faith, but he would never be willing to utter a word of slander against Muhammad or to renounce him, even though he were facing death in case of refusal to do so.” And the Canadian W.C. Smith explained: “Muslims will allow attacks on Allah; there are atheists and atheistic publications, and rationalistic societies; but to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most ‘liberal’ sections of the community a fanaticism of blazing vehemence” (quoted in SCHIMMEL 1985: 5). This tradition is based on the reverence for the *sahaba* and the following three generations, so that the biographies (*tabaqa* and *sira*) of the *ashab al-nabi* were indemnified from scrutiny. This correction of the *sahaba* (*'adalat al-Sahabah*) is still untouchable; it supersedes, collectively, the following two generations, the followers of the companions, and the followers of the followers of the companies (*al-tabi'un* and *tabi'u al-tabi'in*). Thus, it has a highly problematic impact on critical historiography.

Islamic parlance, this othering is remembered as the era of union and bliss (*asr al-sa'ada*), actually the domination of Islam in distinction to what is perceived as a *jahil* (ignorant) pagan culture. This ideal of a heroically transfigured distinctive Islamic tradition, which is couched in narratives of de-historicizing breaches of tradition and anachronisms, provides contemporary Salafism with legitimation and efficacy.

Thus, historicizing (both explicit self-historicizing and historicizing the other, that is, transposing appropriated events into a modus of the past) produces meanings and relevance. Moreover, the visualization of the past or the processes of re-remembrance or imitation may lead to searching for one's own historical basis, such as the deliberate construction of the Orientalist topos of Indian amnesia; hence, historiography serves identity-building and solidarity, which often focus on a founding event that demands the construction of a place beyond or outside history, such as was the case with al-Bilgrami. Such processes of canonization may well be based on the idea of self-survival and self-ascertainment in specific historical situations informed by unassertiveness and nemesis. However, the complex processes of the development and production of historical narrative and their relationship to historical contexts – in short, the social location of the historical narrative and the procedure of remembrance – are neither easy to establish nor unambiguous, as the case of Khusrau showed. Historical narratives have to be contextualized with reference to specific processes of institutionalization, of professionalization and thus of identity-building, or indeed of coping with religious pluralism. Finally, in order to understand the impact of historical narratives it is also important to reconstruct the modi and channels involved in such diffusion and reception.

History, as it is constructed in historiographical writings within a spatio-temporal setting, never “only” represents facts of the past, as we have seen, but is always also a reflection of the context of its creation. Since it is always attached to contemporary societal discourses, such a history is never entirely neutral. Social change is always associated with negotiations of collective and individual memories and with a new way of dealing with history, as the millennial turn suggests (Sirhindi). This is perhaps banal, but the colonial and post-colonial periods of South Asian history and historiography illustrate the cognizant and strategic detachment from the entanglement of those negotiations in current discourses of power, and increasingly of violence, as can be traced in nationalist historiography and as elaborated in post-colonial discourses.

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