

## THE *SĪRAH* LITERATURE

*Sīrah* literature (biography of the Prophet), inspired as it was by the imposing personality of the Prophet and bearing the marks of the stormy political events of the conquests, of the social changes in the Muslim community and of the struggle of the different factions, came into being in the period following the death of the Prophet. It developed in the first half of the first century of the *hijrah*, and by the end of that century the first full-length literary compilations were produced. The development of *Sīrah* literature is closely linked with the transmission of the *Ḥadīth* and should be viewed in connection with it. Most of the reports about utterances and orders of the Prophet were, during his lifetime, transmitted orally, and few of them seem to have been written down. Although some accounts about the recording of the utterances, deeds and orders dictated by the Prophet to his Companions are dubious and debatable<sup>1</sup> and should be examined with caution (and ultimately rejected), some of them seem to deserve trust. The pacts which the Prophet concluded with the different groupings in Medina after his arrival in that city were apparently written down so as to serve as the legal basis for their communal life. His letters to rulers, governors and chiefs of tribes are recorded in some of the compilations of the *Sīrah*. The *Sīrah* also contains accounts of pacts concluded between the Prophet and conquered tribes or localities and of grants bestowed upon tribal leaders.

Information about tax-collectors appointed by the Prophet was conveyed to the tribal units to which they were dispatched. The news about the victories of the Prophet and his conquests were widely circulated in the vast areas of the Arabian Peninsula. All this material came to form an essential part of the *Sīrah*.

In addition to this, the affection of the Companions of the Prophet and

<sup>1</sup> E.g., on the *ṣahīfah* of 'Alī, cf. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, II, nos 1306, 1307, 1297. The Prophet did not single out the 'Alids by anything not granted to others; the only thing by which they were singled out was the *ṣahīfah* attached to the scabbard of 'Alī's sword (or in other sources that of the Prophet or that of 'Umar). It contained some short utterances about taxes imposed on camels (or, according to some, sheep), about the sanctity of Medina, the obligation to give protection to the People of the Book, etc.

their loyalty, respect and awe for him, in contrast to the attitudes, customs and practices of other communities towards their rulers, leaders and chiefs, constituted a favourite topic of conversation at the gatherings of his Companions as well as of his enemies, and were embodied into the compilations of the *Sīrah*. The daily contacts of the Prophet with his family and relatives, his adherents and adversaries, formed the subject matter recorded by the transmitters. The *Sīrah* aimed at giving information about the men who aided the Prophet loyally and faithfully, about stubborn opponents and enemies who persecuted him and those who later fought him, about hypocrites who concealed unbelief and hatred in their souls and about Companions who suffered and fought for him. Consequently the *Sīrah* became a record of the life of contemporary society, reflecting as it did the mutual relations between the Prophet and this society. Every member of this society is therefore assessed as to his virtues, views and actions and is placed on a graded scale according to his rank as believer, fighter, adherent and supporter, or as enemy or hypocrite. It is thus plausible that, in the early compilations of the *Sīrah*, people eagerly compiled lists of the first men who embraced Islam, the first who suffered for the cause of Islam, the first who emigrated to Abyssinia, the first Medinans who gave the oath of allegiance, the men who opposed the Prophet in Mecca, etc. Later special treatises dedicated to such subjects, the *awā'il*, were compiled.<sup>2</sup> The careful evaluation of the deeds and actions of the Companions of the Prophet gave rise to the compilation of biographies of the *Ṣaḥābah*.

Furthermore, certain passages in the Qur'ān, pointing to some events in the life of the community, required explanation and elucidation. It was necessary to specify to what people or events certain expressions or phrases referred. For an interpretation to be reliable in the opinion of the Muslim community it had to be based on an utterance ascribed to the Prophet or to one of his Companions. These utterances, stories or reports expounded the background and the circumstances of the verses of the Qur'ān, establishing to whom they referred and providing details of the event recorded. These groups of Traditions, forming an essential part of the *Sīrah*, developed into an independent branch of Quranic exegesis, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* ("the reasons for the revelations"). The lengthy passages from the early *Tafsīr* of al-Kalbī recorded by Ibn Ṭāwūs,<sup>3</sup> the bulk of Traditions transmitted on this subject of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* by many scholars in their commentaries bear evidence to the richness of this material and its role in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. On the other hand the *Sīrah* compilations recorded verses of the Qur'ān, providing corresponding

<sup>2</sup> For the *awā'il* literature, cf. Sezgin, *G.A.S.*, 1, 176, 196, 522.

<sup>3</sup> *Sa'd*, 209-20.

material of the circumstances of the revelation. The development of *Sīrah* literature thus ran on parallel lines with that of the *Tafsīr*, intertwining and overlapping, corroborating and sometimes contradicting it.

#### EARLY COMPILATIONS

A subject of considerable importance in the formation of *Sīrah* literature, comprehensively dealt with also in some commentaries on the Qur'ān, was the stock of stories about the creation of the world, as well as about the messengers and prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān, who were sent by God to different peoples. These stories were extended and supplemented by additional material derived from Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian sources, transmitted by converts from these religions to Islam. It is evident that these "biblical stories" had to get the approval of the orthodox circles. This could only be achieved, as is usual in Islam, by an utterance transmitted on the authority of the Prophet. The utterance used in this case ("Narrate [traditions] concerning the Children of Israel and there is nothing objectionable [in that]") legitimized the flood of the "biblical" legends and stories which poured into the domain of Islam. The first compilation of this kind seems to have been the book of Ḥammād b. Salamah (d. 167/783), a contemporary of Ibn Ishāq, entitled *Akhhār Banī Isrā'īl*.

The process of elaborating and enlarging upon the stories of the Qur'ān widened the scope of the Muslim conception of history. The biography of Muḥammad and the formation of his community were decreed by God before the creation of Adam. Muḥammad was destined to be a prophet long before the creation of Adam. Were it not for Muḥammad, God would not have created Adam. Nine thousand years before things were created, says a Tradition, God created the Light of Muḥammad. This Light turned around the Power (*qudrab*) and praised Him. From this Light God created a jewel; from this jewel He created sweet water and granted it His blessing. For a thousand years the water raged and could not come to rest. Then, from this Light God created ten things: the Throne, the Pen, the Tablet, the Moon, the Sun, the Stars, the Angels, the Light of the Believers, the Chair and Muḥammad. The Light of Muḥammad, which resided in the pure ancestors of the Prophet, was transmitted in the line of descendants until it reached the Prophet. God granted Adam the *kunyah* (honorific name) Abū Muḥammad. The name of Muḥammad is written on the Throne of God; Adam saw this inscription when he was created. When he committed his sin, he begged God to forgive him by referring to the name of Muḥammad.

The contact between the Muslim conquerors and the population of the conquered territories, bearers of ancient cultural and religious traditions with a rich lore of prophetic beliefs and stories, brought about the appearance of literature concerning the miracles of the Prophet. Stories about miracles, either performed by the Prophet himself or wrought for him by God, were widely current and were later collected; compilations of stories about his miracles were *Amārāt al-nubuwwah*, *A'lām al-nubuwwah*, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwah*. The miraculous power granted the Prophet by God, and his extraordinary feats, are often compared in these books with the miracles performed by the preceding prophets.<sup>4</sup> Tradition emphasizes that the Prophet was superior to other prophets in the graces granted to him and the miracles performed by him. God enjoined the prophets to tell their peoples of the appearance of Muḥammad and to bid them embrace his faith. The assumption that this genre of the *dalā'il* grew up under the impact of the contact with other faiths is confirmed by the account of a letter sent by Hārūn al-Rashīd to the Byzantine emperor in which he recorded the "proofs of the prophethood" (*a'lām al-nubuwwah*) of Muḥammad. The letter was compiled by Abū 'l-Rabī' Muḥammad b. al-Layth al-Qurashī after a detailed perusal of the "books of the foreigners".<sup>5</sup> Al-Ma'mūn, the son of Hārūn, is credited with a book entitled *A'lām al-nubuwwah*; this seems to be the earliest compilation on this subject. It was followed by a treatise of al-Jāhīz (d. 256/870), entitled *Dalā'il al-nubuwwah*,<sup>6</sup> and by al-Jūzajānī's (d. 259/873) *Amārāt al-nubuwwah*. Later Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) compiled his *A'lām al-nubuwwah*. Books of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* were compiled in the same period by Ibn Abī 'l-Dunyā (d. 281/894) and Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī. Other *dalā'il* books were compiled by al-Firyābī (d. 301/914), Ibrāhīm b. Ḥammād b. Ishāq (d. 323/935), Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Naqqāsh (d. 351/962), Abū 'l-Shaykh al-Isfahānī (d. 369/979), Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Shāshī (d. 365/975) and Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. Shāhīn (d. 386/996). A comprehensive book of *dalā'il*, entitled *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*, was compiled by 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Khargūshī (d. 407/1016). The "proofs of prophethood" form a considerable part of this compilation; however, it contains extremely rich material about the life of the Prophet. The author touches upon the pedigree of the Prophet, his virtues, his battles, his proverbs, his dreams, virtues of his family, virtues of Medina and of the Mosque of the Prophet, virtues of his Companions, virtues of Mecca and stories foretelling the appearance of the Prophet. Al-Khargūshī's book was widely circulated and it is often quoted by both

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. al-Māwardī, *A'lām*, 68–70.

<sup>5</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīṭ*, 1, 77–8.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. al-Sandūbī, *Rasā'il*, 117–54; *Ḥujaj al-nubuwwah*.

Sunnī and Shī‘ī authors. The famous Mu‘tazilī scholar ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1024) discusses in his *Tatbbūt dalā’il al-nubuwwah* the miracles of the Prophet against a wide background of historical situation, having recourse to comparisons with other religions and entering into polemics with the unorthodox sects of Islam.

The compilations of the first half of the fifth century, the *Dalā’il* of Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) and the *Dalā’il* of Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), became very popular. Another book of *dalā’il* was written in the same period by Abū Dharr al-Harawī (d. 435/1043). Often quoted in later compilations of the *Sīrah* literature is the compilation of the great scholar al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), *A’lām al-nubuwwah*. In the same period, the *Dalā’il* of al-Mustaghfirī (d. 432/1040) was compiled.

Among the many compilations of this genre the famous book of Qāḍī ‘Iyād al-Yaḥṣubī (d. 544/1149), *al-Shifā’ fī ta’rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, deserves special mention; it became one of the most popular and most admired books in some Muslim countries.

The glorification of the person of the Prophet, as expounded in these compilations of the “proofs of prophethood”, was indeed a continuation of a very early trend which, as mentioned above, began shortly after the death of the Prophet. The miracles wrought by the Prophet, or for him, form an essential part of the *Sīrah* of Ibn Ishāq; in the *Jāmi‘* of Ma‘mar b. Rāshid, a special chapter is devoted to this subject. Miraculous elements were included in the *Sīrah* of Mūsā b. ‘Uqbah<sup>7</sup> and in the *Sīrah* traditions reported by al-Zuhri.<sup>8</sup> The earliest *Sīrah* compilation, the *Sīrah* of Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110/728 or 114/732), contains an unusual amount of miraculous stories as attested by the fragments of the papyri.<sup>9</sup> Fück was right in his conjecture, made before he read the fragments of the papyri, that the *Sīrah* of Wahb was a work in which truth and legend about the life of the Prophet were interwoven, turning it into an entertaining story.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the fragments of the papyri of Wahb contain the same kind of miraculous elements as can be found in later compilations. The role of the Devil in the council of the Meccans, convened to get rid of Muḥammad, corresponds to what we have in later biographies of the Prophet. The setting of the story of the *hijrah* in the papyrus is similar to the accounts in later compilations: it contains, for instance, the miraculous story of Umm Ma‘bad, recorded, with few variants, in almost every later *Sīrah*; the story of Surāqah; the story of the dove and the spider at the entrance of the cave and the dust thrown at the heads of the watching Qurashī guard

<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. Sachau, “Berliner Fragment”, 469 (the story of Surāqah); 470 (the Prophet sees in his dream Jesus performing the circumambulation of the Ka‘bah).

<sup>8</sup> Duri, “al-Zuhri”, the story of Surāqah.

<sup>9</sup> Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 118–75.

<sup>10</sup> Fück, *Muḥammad*, 4.

besieging the house. All these stories are essential elements of the later biographies. Some passages of the papyrus of Wahb cannot, however, be traced in later compilations; they were apparently discarded. Such are the cases of al-Ṭufayl b. al-Ḥārith's letter to Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib in Abyssinia and the story of Abū Bakr's meeting with the Devil; neither could be traced in other stories. A part of the papyrus contains a record of an expedition of 'Alī against Khath'am. This story fully attests the impact of the Shī'ī trend on the development of early *Sīrah* literature.

A number of scholars have analysed with insight the various stages of the early compilations. The fragments of Wahb's *Sīrah* corroborate the conjectures of these scholars about the popular and entertaining character of the early *Sīrah* stories, a blend of miraculous narratives, edifying anecdotes and records of battles in which sometimes ideological and political tendencies can be discerned. These stories were widely circulated among the believers; pious men used to narrate the *Sīrah* in mosques and to discuss the *maghāzī* at their meetings. It was considered less binding as a duty to narrate the *maghāzī* than to transmit utterances of the Prophet. Scholars refrained from recording *Ḥadīth* utterances transmitted by unreliable scholars while they did not hesitate to relate *maghāzī* material on their authority. It was only later, in the first half of the second century, that *Ḥadīth* scholars reacted strongly against the popular *Sīrah* literature and made attempts to discard dubious folk-stories by applying strict rules of *Ḥadīth* criticism. They did not, however, succeed; the *Sīrah* literature absorbed these narratives and they continued to be transmitted there. The fragment of Wahb's papyrus reflects the very early stage of the formation of the legendary type of *Sīrah*; the *Sīrah* of Ibn Ishāq is in fact a selective collection of this material. Late compilations such as *al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyyah*, *al-Sīrah al-Shāmiyyah*, al-Zurqānī's *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib* and Mughulṭāy's *al-Zahr al-bāsim* contain references to early popular Traditions not incorporated in the generally approved *Sīrah* compilations.

#### POETRY IN THE *SĪRAH*

A characteristic feature of early *Sīrah* literature is the numerous poetical insertions.<sup>11</sup> The heroes of the stories narrated often improvise verses referring to the events recorded; in these poetical passages opponents blame others in verse, fighters expound their virtues and extol the virtues of their clans or their leaders, poets or relatives bewail the warriors killed in battle. These poetical compositions are generally of rather poor quality. The poetical passages attached to the *maghāzī* stories closely resemble the

<sup>11</sup> Cf. below cap. 18, "The poetry of the *Sīrah* literature".

poetry of the *ayyām* (days of battle). A part of this poetry is false, and some of these forgeries were convincingly shown to be so by 'Arafāt;<sup>12</sup> a certain portion seems, however, to be authentic. But even the fake poems, reflecting as they do the internal struggles in the Muslim community, are of some importance: the historical allusions in these verses may help to gain an insight into the event referred to; the activity of the forgers had its inception in the first decades of the first century, and the forgers were closely acquainted with the details of the event.

Of interest are popular verses in the *Sīrah* literature. Some are attributed to unseen persons, who recited them to the jinn, to idols, to the Devil or to his progeny. Such specimens of popular poetry can be found in the fragments of Wahb's *Sīrah*, in the compilations of Ibn Ishāq, al-Ṭabarī, Abū Nu'aym, al-Bayhaqī and in the later biographies of the Prophet. This trend is well represented in the *Sīrah* compilations of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Bakrī.

Poems in praise of the Prophet preserve elements of the laudatory poems addressed to tribal leaders.

The contents of the eulogies of the Prophet differ, however, in some respects; they specially stress his prophetic mission, emphasize his spiritual qualities, praise the new religion and point out personal or tribal allegiance to the Prophet and Islam. They breathe a spirit of the new faith and stress the moral values of Islam, often coupling them with the old ideas of tribal pride and boasting.

Some observations on the change of attitude towards poetry in the early period of Islam may help us to gain a better insight for evaluating the poetry of the *Sīrah*. The attitude towards poets and poetry in the Qur'ān was clearly and explicitly unfavourable.<sup>13</sup> Some pious circles persisted in their negative attitude towards profane poetry, further supporting their argument by the famous utterance attributed to the Prophet: "It is better for a man that his body be full of pus than that he be full of poems."<sup>14</sup> It is in accordance with this view that 'Ā'ishah vigorously denies, in a Tradition attributed to her, the claim that Abū Bakr ever recited poetry. In a speech ascribed to Mu'āwiyah poetry is counted among the seven things forbidden by the Prophet.

A version of the Prophet's saying contains the following addition, which demonstrates the tendency to restrict its scope: "than that he be full of poems by which I was satirized".<sup>15</sup> According to this enlarged version the transmission of poetry which does not contain satirical verses against the Prophet is permitted.

<sup>12</sup> 'Arafāt, "Aspect", 32-3; 'Arafāt, "Early critics", 453-63.

<sup>13</sup> Qur'ān, xxvi.225-8.

<sup>14</sup> Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, II, 56.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, 226-8.

The same trend of concession and compromise is reflected in another Tradition attributed to the Prophet. The Prophet is said to have stated that some poetry is wisdom. A considerable part of poetry containing aphorism, exhortation, edification or moralizing clearly won the approval of orthodox circles.

Another utterance attributed to the Prophet permits poetry if its aim is to gain justice from oppression, to gain means of deliverance from poverty and expression of gratitude for a favour received.

It was pointed out that the reason why the transmission of poetry was forbidden was the fact that it served to excite inter-tribal discussions and disunity. The libellous and defamatory verses which might threaten the peaceful relations in Islamic society were dangerous and harmful. Such poetry was censured and rejected. But poetry supporting the Prophet and his struggle against the Unbelievers and verses written for the cause of Islam were, of course, praiseworthy. The exceptive phrase in Qur'ān xxvi.228 was explained as referring to the poets of the Prophet, who were commended. They were described as striking the Unbelievers with their verses. Consequently *Sīrah* literature and *adab* compilations record stories that the Prophet encouraged poets who composed poems in praise of God, and liked to listen to good and beautiful poetry recited by poets. Abū Bakr, a Tradition says, came to the Prophet and, in his presence, met a poet who recited a poem. Abū Bakr asked: "How is that? Qur'ān and poetry?" "Sometimes Qur'ān and sometimes poetry," answered the Prophet.<sup>16</sup>

There was thus good poetry, which was permitted and which the Prophet even sometimes recited, and bad poetry, which was forbidden. 'Ā'ishah formulated it as follows: "There is good and bad poetry: take the good and leave the bad."<sup>17</sup> A similar Tradition is attributed to the Prophet: "Poetry is like speech; good poetry is like good speech, bad poetry is like bad speech."<sup>18</sup> According to this utterance the ban on poetry is almost entirely lifted; the listener had to distinguish between good and bad poetry and choose the good, just as he ought to distinguish between good and bad speech and choose the good. The pious Ibn 'Umar indeed acted in this way: he listened to a recitation of a poet; when the poet began to recite unseemly verses he stopped him.

A further step in the development of the favourable attitude towards poetry was the legitimization of Jāhiliyyah verse. A Tradition, attributed to the Prophet on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, states that the Prophet gave licence for the transmission of Jāhiliyyah poetry with the exception

<sup>16</sup> Al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, I, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Jilānī, *Faḍl*, II, 324, no. 866.

<sup>18</sup> Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, XIII, 150.

of two poems (one of Umayyah b. Abī 'l-Ṣalt, the other of al-A'shā). The same idea is reflected in Traditions that the Prophet used to sit with his Companions and listen to their recitation of pre-Islamic poetry, smiling (that is, with approval). Among the pieces recited in the presence of the Prophet are verses of praise, of contemplation on life and death, of belief and piety; there are also some erotic verses, verses recited by women at a wedding celebration, and even a complaint of a poet deserted by his wife.<sup>19</sup>

The favourable attitude towards poetry is represented in Traditions stating that the four Orthodox Caliphs were poets, that they either quoted verses or listened to recitations of poems. 'Ā'ishah is said to have had a good knowledge of poetry; she recited verses of Jāhilī poets and encouraged people to study poetry. Ibn Mas'ūd used to recite poetry of the *ayyām* (battles of the pre-Islamic Arabs).

Abū Dharr (d. 604/1207) quotes an opinion of a Muslim scholar, that the ban on the transmission of poetry was imposed when there were conflicts between Muslims and unbelievers. But once people had embraced Islam and animosities between believers had disappeared there was no objection to transmitting poetry. This view is in fact based on the actual situation in Muslim society of the first century. Poetry was widely transmitted; poems were recited at private meetings, in the markets and even in the mosques. The great scholar al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721) recited poetry in the mosque of Kufa. 'Abdullāh b. al-Zubayr was surprised to find a group of people reciting poetry in the court of the mosque of Mecca; they argued that it was not the kind of poetry which was forbidden. When 'Umar reproached Ḥassān for reciting poetry in the mosque of Medina, he said: "I recited poetry in this mosque in the presence of a man who was better than you." Ḥassān was referring, of course, to the Prophet. 'Umar left him and permitted poetry to be recited in the mosque. Muḥammad b. Sīrīn was asked, when in the mosque, whether it was permitted to recite poetry during the month of Ramaḍān (some people even went so far as to claim that recitation of poetry nullified the ritual ablution). He immediately recited a verse which was far from being chaste, and stood up straightaway to lead the prayer. It was Ibn Sīrīn who, when rebuked for reciting a Jāhilī verse, said: "What is disliked is poetry composed in Islam; poetry composed in the period of the Jāhiliyyah has already been condoned." It is possible to guess at the identity of those who persisted consistently in stubborn opposition to the transmission of poetry from a significant remark by Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab. Having been told that some people in Iraq disliked poetry, he said: "They became ascetics in a non-Arab fashion."

<sup>19</sup> See al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 218-19.

Transmission of poetry was encouraged by rulers and governors; poetry became one of the subjects essential to the education of the Umayyad prince. Poetry continued to be one of the most favoured preoccupations of Muslim society in the first century and even fighting troops on the battlefield showed a vivid interest in it. What poet surpasses others in the art of poetry? Who is the best poet? These were common subjects of talk and discussion.

An alleged saying of the Prophet accurately reflects the love of poetry of the Arabs: "They will not give up poetry until camels give up yearning [for their resting places]." <sup>20</sup> Ibn Abī 'l-Sā'ib al-Makhzūmī expounded it in an utterance very much to the point: "By God, were poetry banned, we would be punished at court several times every day [that is, for reciting it]." <sup>21</sup>

The origin of the *Sīrah* poetry, its formation and growth have to be viewed against the background of the uninterrupted transmission of poetry and the struggle for its legitimization. Simple, not elaborate, but vivid, it became a regular component of the early *Sīrah* literature, and was popular and widespread. It was not earlier than the second/eighth century that the content of the early *Sīrahs* came under the scrutiny of scholars and the criteria of *Ḥadīth* scholars were applied to assess their validity. This applied to the poetry in the *Sīrah* as well as to its prose portions.

#### GENEALOGY

Genealogy was an essential subject of the *Sīrah* literature. Traditions stress the purity of the Prophet's pedigree and the qualities of his ancestors. Special chapters were dedicated to the virtues of Quraysh and the family of the Prophet, the Hashimites.

Utterances attributed to the Prophet tried to prove that there was a close link between the ancestors of the Prophet and Islam. Ka'b b. Lu'ayy is said to have foretold the appearance of the Prophet. The Prophet is said to have forbidden the disparagement of Muḍar because he was a proto-Muslim. Other versions of the utterance of the Prophet forbid the disparagement of Rabī'ah, Imru' al-Qays, Asad b. Khuzaymah, Tamīm and al-Ḥārith b. Ka'b; they all were said to have been Muslims or believers in the faith of Abraham. Another list of the ancestors of the Prophet whom it was forbidden to abuse, because they were true believers, includes 'Adnān, Ma'add, Udad, Khuzaymah, Tamīm, Asad and Ḍabbah. Khuzaymah b. Mudrikah was the first who uttered the testimony of faith. Al-Yās b. Muḍar was also a true Believer; he was the first who offered

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Rashīq, *Umdah*, 1, 17.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

sacrifices in the *ḥaram* of Mecca and it is forbidden to abuse him. Ma'add was a follower of the Ḥanīfiyyah of Ibrāhīm (Abraham), 'Adnān acted according to the Ḥanīfiyyah; he was the first who clothed the Ka'bah with leather clothes. Nizār was endowed with the "light of prophethood", which was handed on to Muḥammad.

The glory of the pedigree of the Prophet was extended, as a matter of course, to include the whole of Quraysh; the idea of the excellency of Quraysh was embodied in the rich literature of *Fada'īl Quraysh*. Quraysh, says a Tradition traced back to 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās, were the light in the presence of God two thousand years before the creation of Adam; this light, repositied first in Adam, passed on and was transmitted to the Prophet.<sup>22</sup> The excellence of the pedigree of the Prophet is formulated in an utterance of the Prophet: "The best of the Arabs are Muḍar; the best of Muḍar are 'Abd Manāf; the best of 'Abd Manāf are Banū Hāshim; the best of Banū Hāshim are Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. By God, since God created Adam never was there a division of people into two parts without my being in the better one."<sup>23</sup> An opposite tendency, that of depreciating the excellence of Quraysh, is evident in a Tradition stating that all the Arab tribes have their share in the pedigree of the Prophet. Pious circles in the Muslim community, struggling against the excessive study of genealogy, nevertheless stressed the value and importance of the genealogy of the Prophet.

The interdiction on tracing genealogical lineages beyond Ma'add was not followed in the case of the pedigree of the Prophet; his genealogy was traced back to Abraham and the close link of descent and prophecy between him and Abraham was especially stressed.

#### FACTIONALISM

The constant struggles between the various political and ideological factions in Islamic society left their mark on the formation of the *Sīrah*. Invented stories and alleged utterances served the cause of the rulers, pretenders and rebels. Some examples are quoted below.

The 'Abbasid bias can be clearly seen in the story of the attempt to sacrifice the father of the Prophet, 'Abdullāh. It was al-'Abbās, according to this version, who drew him out from under the feet of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, trying to save his life. It was al-'Abbās who was the first to kiss the Prophet after he was born; his mother took him to the abode of Āminah, the Prophet's mother, and the women in the house drew him to the cradle of the Prophet, encouraging him and saying: "Kiss thy brother!" The same tendency is evident in the story that al-'Abbās took the oath of

<sup>22</sup> Ghanamah, *Manāqil*, fols 3b-4a.

<sup>23</sup> Suyūṭī, *Durr*, III, 294-5.

allegiance from the Anṣār for the Prophet at the 'Aqabah meeting. Not less tendentious is the report that al-'Abbās embraced Islam before the battle of Badr and served as a spy of the Prophet in Mecca. The utterance attributed to the Prophet, "Al-'Abbās is indeed my trustee (*waṣī*) and my heir; 'Alī and I are closely related",<sup>24</sup> bears the mark of an 'Abbasid and anti-Shi'ite tradition, standing in contrast to the Shi'ī tradition about the trusteeship of 'Alī.<sup>25</sup> The general expression "'Alī and I are closely related" merely serves to emphasize the special position of 'Abbās.

The famous utterance of the Prophet known as the "Tradition of the Garment" (*Ḥadīth al-kisā*'), when he is said to have covered 'Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn with a garment, establishes the entity of the "Family of the Prophet" (*Ahl al-Bayt*) and provides an essential argument for the legitimacy of 'Alī's claim to the caliphate; it has its counterpart in an opposing Tradition, according to which the Prophet covered al-'Abbās and his sons with a garment and said that they were the Family.

It is not surprising to find a Shi'ī Tradition describing how al-'Abbās and Abū Lahab instigated people against the Prophet and publicly denounced him as a liar.

The Tradition about the pact of fraternity (*mu'ākhab*) between the Prophet and 'Alī<sup>26</sup> is contradicted by a Tradition that the Prophet said: "If I had chosen a friend I would have chosen Abū Bakr, but he is my brother and Companion."<sup>27</sup> The Tradition which talks about the close fraternal relation between the Prophet and 'Alī is of crucial importance for proving 'Alī's legitimate claim to the caliphate.

The contradictory reports about the first man to embrace Islam, whether it was Abū Bakr, 'Alī or Zayd b. Ḥārithah, reflect the different opinions of the religio-political parties. The Shi'ah vigorously affirm, of course, that the first believer was 'Alī.

An Umayyad bias can be noticed in a peculiar Tradition reporting that the family of Abū Sufyān, himself an Umayyad, were the first to be admonished and warned by the Prophet. Abū Sufyān rejected the scornful words of his wife, saying that the Prophet was not a liar or a wizard.

There are divergent and contradictory reports about various events in the life of the Prophet. Some incidents, even very prominent ones, are subject to debate by transmitters and scholars. Only a few cases may be reviewed here.

Varying Traditions about the number and identity of the children of the Prophet were further blurred by the tendentious inventions of the

<sup>24</sup> Al-Muttaqī 'l-Hindī, *Kanz*, XII, 280, no. 1649.

<sup>25</sup> Ganjī, *Kifāyat*, 260-1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, XI, 49.

religio-political factions. A Shī'ī report stated that Ruqayyah and Zaynab were the daughters of Hālah, the sister of Khadījah; another Tradition claimed that they were the daughters of Jahsh.<sup>28</sup> This served as a weighty argument in Shī'ī polemics against 'Uthmān, who was called Dhū'l-Nūrayn, it was said, because he had married two daughters of the Prophet.

There are different reports also about the date of birth of the Prophet, of his revelation, about the age of Khadījah when she married the Prophet, about the *hijrah*, the change of the *qiblah* (direction of prayer) and about the chronology of the battles and raids of the Prophet.

Lists of participants in crucial events were deliberately rearranged or changed. Some of the Anṣār, says a report of Ibn al-Kalbī and al-Wāqidī, omitted certain names from the list of participants at the 'Aqabah meeting, substituting the names of their relatives, who had not attended the meeting. The lists of participants at the battle of Badr were also a subject of debate. Ibn Sa'd felt constrained to consult the genealogy of the Anṣār, and having done this, he removed a spurious name from the list of those who took part in the battle of Badr.<sup>29</sup> The reports about the number of the Companions who were present at the oath of allegiance at al-Ḥudaybiyah are divergent. There were conflicting Traditions about the person appointed to take charge of Medina when the Prophet went out to Badr and the one bidden to divide the booty after the battle. Reports concerning the warriors who remained with the Prophet at Uḥud and those who deserted the battlefield are similarly divergent; among the latter group Shī'ī tradition counts Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān, while 'Alī was, of course, of those who stayed with the Prophet and defended him.

How far political interests had a bearing upon the transmission of the *Sīrah* can be seen in the following story. Al-Zuhrī told his student, Ma'mar b. Rāshid, that it was 'Alī who had written out the treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyah, and added, laughing: "If you asked these people they would say it was 'Uthmān who wrote the treaty." By "these people", Ma'mar remarks, "He meant the Umayyads."<sup>30</sup>

Another anecdote illustrates the attempts made by the Umayyads and their governors to denigrate 'Alī in the *Sīrah*. Khālīd b. 'Abdullāh al-Qasrī bade al-Zuhrī write down the *Sīrah* for him. Al-Zuhrī asked: "If I come across events related to 'Alī, may I mention them?" "No," said Khālīd, "except when you see him in the lowest part of Hell."<sup>31</sup> In another story al-Zuhrī courageously refuses to transfer the guilt of slandering of 'Ā'ishah from 'Abdullāh b. Ubayy to 'Alī.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al Abī Ṭālib*, I, 138, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III, 513.

<sup>31</sup> Horowitz, "Biographies", 49.

<sup>30</sup> 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, v, 343, no. 9722.

<sup>32</sup> Horowitz, "Biographies", I. C. II, 41.

The favours bestowed on al-Zuhrī by the Umayyads and the close relations between him and the rulers aroused the suspicions of independent *Ḥadīth* scholars as to his integrity. The pious Sa'd b. Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf chided al-Zuhrī for transmitting a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said that a caliph may not be invoked. Sa'd mentioned a case in which the Prophet was invoked and said: "How can it be that the Prophet was invoked and al-Walīd should not be invoked?"<sup>33</sup> It is evident that the aim of the Tradition invented was to encourage respect for the Umayyad rulers.

Salamah b. Dīnār Abū Ḥāzim, a pious scholar, sent to al-Zuhrī a lengthy letter censuring him for his co-operation with the oppressive Umayyad rulers and criticizing him severely for helping them in caring for their power and authority and in their aiming at worldly gain. He serves the oppressive rulers, "who have turned him into the axle of the wheel of their falsehood and into a bridge for their deceit and error", says Salamah. By his services they sow doubts in the souls of scholars and gain the favour of the ignorant. It is hard to deny that these accusations have some foundation, and the assertion that he (i.e. al-Zuhrī) "was not influenced by political parties and tried to give an impartial account of what he had seen in Medina"<sup>34</sup> is open to doubt. The possibility that his Traditions concerning the *Sīrah* were influenced by his ties with the Umayyad court cannot be excluded. Shī'ī scholars counted him among the Traditionists whose attitude towards 'Alī was hostile. Although highly respected by Sunnī scholars engaged in assessing the credibility of *Ḥadīth* transmitters (*jarḥ wa-ta'dīl*), he was nevertheless recorded in the lists of the *mudallisūn*. An early report of al-Aṣma'ī, traced back to Hishām b. 'Urwah, states that al-Zuhrī used to expand or abbreviate the long accounts recorded by his father, 'Urwah. A closer examination of the activities of al-Zuhrī and of the Traditions transmitted by him may help us to acquire an insight into the formative stage of the development of *Sīrah* lore and *Ḥadīth*.

It is, furthermore, important for the evaluation of the formation of *Sīrah* literature to consider the differences between the various schools of Tradition, especially those between Medina and Iraq. These differences were often pointed out in the literature of *Ḥadīth* and a special compilation was dedicated to this problem. The attacks against the Iraqi school were fierce and passionate, and the Traditions of its scholars were often stigmatized as lies. It is noteworthy also that divergences and contradictions could be found between the accounts transmitted by the disciples of the same Traditionist.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Durayd, *Mujtanā*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Duri, "al-Zuhrī", 10ff.

## MAJOR SĪRAH COMPILATIONS

The section on the biography of the Prophet in the *Ta'rīkh* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) records a wealth of early Traditions carefully provided with *isnāds*. The philologist and commentator on the Qur'ān, al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) is credited with a *Maghāzī* compilation.<sup>35</sup> Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Anṣārī al-Dimashqī (d. 353/964) wrote a book entitled *Ṣifat al-nabī*. The great scholar of *Ḥadīth*, Muḥammad b. Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d. 354/965), the author of a book on the *Ṣaḥābah*, compiled a biography of the Prophet. At the end of the fourth century the philologist Aḥmad b. Fāris compiled a book on the names of the Prophet and another about the life of the Prophet. A concise *Sīrah* compiled by Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064)<sup>36</sup> was based on the terse biography of the Prophet composed by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), *al-Durar fī khtīṣārī l-magnāzī wa-l-siyar*.

The later compilations, like the commentary of al-Suhaylī (d. 581/1185) on Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah*, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf*, the *Bidāyat al-su'ūl* of 'Abd al-'Azīz b. 'Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 660/1262), the *K. al-Iktifā'* of al-Kalā'ī (d. 634/1236), the *Khulāṣat siyar Sayyid al-bashar* of al-Muḥibb al-Ṭabarī (d. 684/1285), the *'Uyūn al-athar* of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (d. 734/1333), the section of the *Sīrah* in al-Nuwayrī's (d. 732/1331), *Nihāyat al-arab*, and the section of the *Sīrah* in Ibn Kathīr's (d. 774/1372) *al-Bidāyah wa-'l-nihāyah* contain a great number of early Traditions derived from lost or hitherto unpublished compilations.

Of special importance is the work of Mughultāy (d. 762/1360), *al-Zabr al-bāsim*. Arguing in his polemic against al-Suhaylī's *al-Rawḍ al-unuf*, Mughultāy records an unusually large number of quotations from various recensions of *dīwāns*, collections of poetry, compilations of genealogy, philology, lexicography, commentaries on the Qur'ān, biographies of the Prophet, books of *adab* and history. The painstaking efforts of Mughultāy to establish correct readings, his checking of variants, his pursuit of every record and Tradition, his comprehensive knowledge, turn his compilation into a veritable treasure for the study of *Sīrah* literature and help towards a better understanding of the controversial ideas of the scholars about the activities of the Prophet and his personality.

Summarizing compilations of the *Sīrah* were provided by Yaḥyā b. Abī Bakr al-'Āmirī (d. 893/1488) in his *Bahjab*, and by Taqī 'l-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441) in his *Imtā'*. Three late compilations deserve special attention: the *Subul* (= *Sīrah al-Shāmiyyah*) of Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Ṣāliḥī (d. 942/1535), the *Insān al-'uyūn fī sīrat al-amīn al-ma'mūn* (= *al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyyah*) of 'Alī b. Burhān al-Dīn (d. 1044/1634), and the commentary

<sup>35</sup> Cf. cap. 16, "The *Maghāzī* literature".

<sup>36</sup> *Jawāmi'*.

by al-Zurqānī (d. 1122/1710) on the *al-Mawāhib al-laduniyyah* of al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 923/1517). *Al-Sīrah al-Shāmiyyah* is one of the most comprehensive compilations of the biography of the Prophet. Al-Ṣāliḥī drew, according to his statement in the preface, on more than three hundred books. He accumulated an enormous number of Traditions, narratives and reports from *sīrah* compilations, *Ḥadīth* collections, books of *dalā'il*, *shamā'il*, *khaṣā'is*, histories of cities and dynasties, biographies of transmitters of *Ḥadīth*, and treatises of asceticism and piety, recording carefully the variants of the reported Traditions and attaching detailed lexicographical explanations of difficult words and phrases.

*Al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyyah*, although extracted mainly from *al-Sīrah al-Shāmiyyah*, contains a great deal of additions by al-Ḥalabī. It is one of the characteristic features of this compilation that al-Ḥalabī records divergent and contradictory Traditions and strives to harmonize them.

Al-Zurqānī gives, in his meticulous commentary, a wealth of Traditions corroborating or contradicting the reports recorded by al-Qaṣṭallānī.

The late compilations thus contain an immense wealth of material derived from early sources. Some of these Traditions, stories, reports and narratives are derived from lost or hitherto unpublished sources. Some Traditions, including early ones, were apparently omitted in the generally accepted *Sīrah* compilations, faded into oblivion, but reappeared in these late compilations.

Only a small part of the *sīrah* compilations have been mentioned above. The uninterrupted flow of transmission of Traditions on the life of the Prophet embedded in the rich literature of Qur'ān commentaries, collections of *Ḥadīth*, works of *adab*, history, polemics of religio-political parties and works of piety and edification, is remarkable. The ramifications of *Sīrah* literature, such as the literature on the *Ṣaḥābah*, on the ancestors of the Prophet, on his genealogy, servants, secretaries, on the habits and characteristics of the Prophet, on his birth, on the "night-journey" (*isrā'*) and "ascent" (*mi'rāj*), are indispensable for an adequate study of the development of the conception the Muslim community formed, throughout the ages, of the person of the Prophet.

The narratives of the *Sīrah* have to be carefully and meticulously sifted in order to get at the kernel of historically valid information, which is in fact meagre and scanty. But the value of this information for the scrutiny of the social, political, moral and literary ideas of the Muslim community cannot be overestimated; during the centuries, since Muslim society came into existence, the revered personality of the Prophet served as an ideal to be followed and emulated.