

Early Sunnī Historiography: A Study of the Tārīkh of Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, by Tobias Andersson (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 324 pp., ISBN: 9789004383173, \$155.00USD, €129.00 (hb)

My first encounter with Khalīfah ibn Khayyāt (d.240AH/854CE) was during my undergraduate study, where in one of the courses I was assigned to review the development of the genre of *ṭabaqāt* (prosopography arranged by affiliation or generation) in early Islam. It was then that I learned that Khalīfah has gained his reputation as a distinguished scholar of history, particularly among the *sunnī* scholars of post canonization of *ḥadīth* scholarship, by virtue of his two works *Ṭabaqāt* and *Tārīkh*. The scholar marks the emergence of a distinct genre of *ḥadīth*-influenced historical writing in Muslim tradition as illustrated by Akram al-‘Umarī who studied the methods and sources of Khalīfah in his edition of *Tārīkh*. Recently, al-‘Umarī’s treatment proves to be a useful source for both Ḥusayn ‘Āṣī in his Arabic survey of Khalīfah’s method in *Ṭabaqāt* and *Tārīkh*, and Tobias Andersson, the author of the present work in review. Furthermore, Khalīfah’s *Tārīkh*, as identified by its first reviewer in the West, Josef Schacht in 1969, as well as Andersson himself in the present work, is the oldest Islamic chronicle that ever survived. Coincidentally, Khalīfah’s *Ṭabaqāt* is also one of the oldest preserved biographical dictionaries of *ḥadīth* transmitters, besides the famous *Ṭabaqāt* of Muḥammad ibn Ṣa‘d (d. 230AH/845CE). The effort of Andersson to “reassess and reappraise Khalīfah’s *Tārīkh* by means of a detailed analysis of both the text and the context of its compilation,” therefore, is a welcomed contribution to not only our apprehension of Islamic historiography, but also to the field of *ṭabaqāt* and *ḥadīth* studies.

Andersson’s historiographical study of Khalīfah’s work has successfully addressed all the crucial aspects demanded by such an endeavor, covering the transmission of Khalīfah’s work; the social and intellectual context of the work; different categories of its sources from main direct informants to major indirect sources; the author’s methodology as reflected by his epistemological outlook of historical knowledge, his system of reference and his selection and evaluation of

transmitters; and ultimately the structure and arrangement of the work which was formed by its concept of chronography, its method of annalistic and caliphal chronology, and its structure of individual years and lists. Following Fred Donner's development of Albrecht Noth's notion of themes in early Islamic historical tradition, Andersson provides us with two appended chapters delineating the treatment of four themes, i.e., prophethood, community, hegemony, and leadership. Moreover, Andersson's work applies the said framework to an early second *hijrī*/eighth century treatise whilst Donner had mainly based his outline on third/ninth and fourth/tenth century works. Aided by his familiarity with the methodologies of *ḥadīth* compilers, Andersson manages to demonstrate Khalifah's distinctive approach to these themes. For instance, in dealing with the theme of prophethood, Andersson shows that Khalifah did not pack his work with materials about *shamā'il*, *mu'jizāt*, *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* or succession of Prophets and Messengers before Prophet Muḥammad, rather he focused exclusively on the post-*hijrah* political and administrative history of the Prophet's life. By so doing, it reveals the stark difference between Khalifah's *tārikh* compilation and the general *ḥadīth* compendia that treat the subject of history. It also illustrates Khalifah's near exclusive rumination on chronology and political-administrative history in the *Tārikh*, as can be appreciated as well from his other attitudes in the book such as his little attention to materials normally associated with *maghāzī-sīrah* and establishment of laws pertaining to *ʿibādah* and *muʿāmalāt*. In short, *Tārikh* seems to be more interested in political administration narrative although its target audience, as evidently established by Andersson, are the proponents of Sunnī *ḥadīth* tradition. Khalifah's tendency to de-emphasize certain controversial subjects further supports his adoption of early Sunnī views of many third/ninth century *ḥadīth* scholars.

This most important conclusion concerning administrative materials portrays Andersson's prowess in comparing and contrasting Khalifah's *Tārikh* to other early, contemporaneous, or later works on *sīrah*, *maghāzī*, *futūh*, *kbilāfab*, etc. Simultaneously, it also provides a problem to his thesis. Andersson locates Khalifah amongst the Basran *ḥadīth* scholars of the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries, many of whom, according to him, are known to have shared Khalifah's early Sunnī perspective and his transmission-based approach. Hence, Khalifah's methods, selection of sources and concerns can be explained by embracing this context. Andersson has

also ventured to demonstrate Khalīfah's reputation as a *ḥadīth* scholar himself. Citations of Khalīfah in al-Bukhārī's *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* are listed in the appendix of the publication. Taking into consideration his Baṣran background and prominent sources, readers might argue that the scholar's purpose was to legitimize and strengthen the authority of his own scholarly community. It may support the thesis of cultural memory in interpreting early historiographical work. Andersson was quick to notice this and provides the framework of *ḥadīth* authority in the epistemology of historical knowledge as a mechanism of defense. Elsewhere, he stresses that "rather than speaking of local historiographical schools to explain the different types of historiography that were compiled in different places during first three centuries AH, it might be more useful to discuss them in terms of different scholarly traditions and networks in addition to local concerns." This illustrates the awareness of the author of the ongoing debate in modern academia. However, Andersson seems to leave the possibility of diverse *madāris* (schools) within the *ḥadīth* tradition itself, its competition, and their possible different expressions of own traditions, although he did assess criticism levelled against Khalīfah by *ḥadīth* scholars, following the principles of *al-jarḥ wa l-ta'dīl*. Additionally, the Baṣran intellectual history and development, as well as the wider Mesopotamian pre-Islamic influences would require further investigation to see possible nexuses. On a smaller note, as a Malay, I was surprised by the mention of Malays in the first *hijrī* centuries of Baṣrah (p. 74), prior to knowing more of the distantly related al-Sayābijah and al-Zaṭṭ (cf. Jat people) in *Le milieu Basrien* of Charles Pellat.

Immersed in the technicalities of *isnād* criticism and study of transmitters, the work in review exhibits high proficiency with *ḥadīth* terminologies and principles. Andersson has also demonstrated that despite being influenced by *ḥadīth* scholars of his time, Khalīfah upheld a realistic view on historical knowledge and applied it in the less strict field of *akhbār* history. Not only that Khalīfah was consistent with the specific transmission formula such as *ḥaddathanā* (so-and-so narrated to us) and *ḥuddithnā 'an* (it was narrated to us that so-and-so said), he was also well aware of his inclusion of both *ṣaḥīḥ* and *da'īf* reports in the work. Again, this buttresses the working of a distinct trend of *muḥaddith-cum-akhbārī* that paved the way for a more stringent *sīrah and tārikh* criticism in the modern period. It would be interesting to learn how many reports that were considered acceptable

by Khalīfah are contested in later or contemporary times. The study of such may shed more light into the development of criticism with regards to materials of historical knowledge.

All in all, I am of the opinion that Andersson's claim of the treatment of three main areas of inquiry pertaining to the early Islamic historical writing is successfully justified. He lists: (1) the contexts, the methods, and the concerns of Khalīfah, (2) the study of chronography among the early *ḥadīth* scholars; and (3) the articulations of pre-classical Sunnī views in early historical tradition. The outline and the arrangement of Andersson's work are undeniably impressive. The presentation is neat and clear, although the use of end-of-line hyphenation is distracting and possibly not suitable for a work that deals with an immense number of technical terms and transliterations. It is discomforting to see the second part of words such as *Khal-īfa's*, *schol-ars*, *consid-erably*, *corre-spondence*, etc at the beginning of a new line especially when the current word processor can automatically maintain a consistent overall look of the text block. Apart from this, the book deserves to be listed amongst the most essential readings particularly for those interested in *sīrah*, *maghāzī*, *ḥadīth*, *ṭabaqāt*, *ruwāt*, *futūḥ*, *khilāfab*, and definitely *tārikh*. It is also useful as an exemplified guide to preparing an academic proposal and writing a thesis for postgraduate researchers in Islamic studies. Although Andersson's study is based on the recension made by Baqī ibn Makhḷad al-Qurṭubī (d. 276AH/889CE), it manages to enhance our understanding of the scholarly enterprise of Khalīfah ibn Khayyāṭ and enriches the academic investigation of the history of early Islam.

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