

Muslims' Historiography and Abu Ali Ahmad's (Ibn-e-Maskwiah) Concept of History

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Abstract

Muslims historians have a great weightage due to their remarkable contribution in the discipline of historiography as the advent of Islam influenced as a large on the almost discipline of knowledge and boosted up them with practical approach. In the discipline of history, many historians contributed to write and preserve the success and achievements of the initial phase of Islam not only but explored the historical progress through critical approach. Among the prominent historians Ibne Maskwiah considered as a fair and impartial even he was associated with different rulers but he did not neglect the primary responsibility to present an accurate material of history for the future. This research article is an attempt to highlight the historical concept of Ibne Maskwiah.

Keywords: Muslim, Ibne Maskwiah, Historiography, Impartiality, Theory

Introduction

Shams al-Fuqarā' Abū 'Alī Aḥmad ibn-Muḥammad ibn-Yaqūb Miskawayh al-Rāzī was a Persian official in the Buyid period, recognized as a philosopher and historian hailing from Parandak, Iran. Miskawayh's ethical perspectives, positioned between Neoplatonism and its Islamic interpretation, have been central to his impact on Islamic philosophy. He was born in Rey, which was under the

Ziyarid dynasty at the time.ⁱ Miskawayh voluntarily accepted Islam at some point in his family lineage, indicating a conversion from Zoroastrianism; however, it seems more plausible that it was one of his ancestors who converted. His formative years were spent in Baghdad serving as a secretary to Muhallabi, the vizier of the Buyid emir Mu'izz al-Dawla. He likely had a command of Middle Persian sufficient to translate several pre-Islamic texts from that language into Arabic. This gifted scholar continued to reside in Iraq, working under the Buyids for many years, and later spent seven years at the court of Rukn al-Dawla alongside the Buyid vizier Abu'l-Fadl ibn al-'Amid. In 966, a group of ghazi advanced towards the Library of Rey, which would have been destroyed if not for Miskawayh's intervention. In 970, following the death of Abu'l-Fadl ibn al-'Amid, Miskawayh was still employed by his son, Abu'l-Fath. He later moved to Baghdad in 975 in his company. Afterwards, he took on roles as a secretary and librarian for various viziers, including 'Adud al-Dawla. Some contemporary accounts link him to the Brethren of Purity, asserting that some of his works contributed to the compilation of their Encyclopedia. He passed away in 1030 in Ray, which was then under Qaikbad rule.ⁱⁱ One of his significant contributions to Islamic philosophical literature on ethics is *The Refinement of Character*, or *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, which primarily addresses practical ethics, behavior, and the enhancement of one's character. *Tajārib al-Umam*, detailing the experiences of nations, is among the earliest eyewitness accounts of contemporary events by a Muslim historian. Miskawayh, in his capacity as an official under the Buyid vizier al-Muhallabi, had insider access to the court's internal affairs. This chronicle provides a universal history from the inception of Islam but concludes near the end of 'Adud al-Dawla's reign. This study is intended to examine how Miskawayh approached historiography, viewing it as a proponent of impartiality. Ibn Miskawayh was a notable intellectual from Persia; he was a historian, alchemist, and philosopher. As a distinguished poet, he participated in the *Darbar al-Buyah*. He produced numerous works, among which the *Tejaratul-ul-Imm* is well-respected. There is no doubt that Miskawayh did not merely recount history; he documented historical events based on their causes and effects. He strived for the utmost neutrality in his recounting of events and refrained from showing undue support for any side involved.

Discussion

The exuberant fertility of Muslim scholarship is most characteristically revealed in the rich variety of historical literature ranging from the chronicles of important events and epochs, eminent classes and dynasties, particular cities and countries to the annals of the entire inhabited space, not to speak

of the work of biographies and genealogies, the field of its practical interest. But amidst this manifold variety, what attracts a modern student is the monograph treatment of historical events which specially provides us with great number of works of collection, memoirs, memorabilia, and the like. It is in these works of analytic insight that history appears not as a mere record of what happened in the past, but why it happened at all, as it did, bringing to light some fundamental principle of human nature or that of the government of the world." The famous protagonist of this type of historical writing is al-Madaini (d. 831), who wrote 'monographs on individual battles, conquests, biographies, and single exploits.' Al-Hytam, Abu Mihnal, and Ibn Habib are other monographists of the same era.

Historiography, in the world of Islam, had its origin in the basic need of 'preserving and reflecting the achievements of the Muslim mind.' It owes nothing to Greek history and little, if any, to Persian history; it also appears to be independent of pre-Islamic Arabian chronicles. Greek literature indeed present parallels to almost all the varieties of historical writings which the Arabic language has to its credit, but in the huge pile of the translations of Greek works there appears to be no trace of the translation of a Greek historian into Arabic. Not only the Greek, but also the Syriac historians have been ignored. Persian chronicles of Biblical times may have been used for the ancient Persian history. Not only independence of external influence, but also freedom from internal bias and prejudice characterise the Muslim historiography. Religious or patriotic sentiment no doubt tends to vitiate it here and there, but despite this occasional vitiation, on the whole, a very high standard of impartiality, of Ibn Miskawaih is an outstanding example. Lastly, Muslim historiographers are very assiduously given to the accuracy and exactitude of their data, which they secure, firstly, by dating the event by the year, month, and even by the day, a practice which, according to Backle, is not traceable in Europe earlier than the year 1597ⁱⁱⁱ and, secondly, by tracing the event, where possible, to the original eye witnesses through a chain of known transmitters, a device originally applied to testing of the links by which a saying or doing of the Prophet has reached a particular generation. However tedious and tiring, this system of isnads may be its value, in making for accuracy cannot be questioned and the Muslims are justified in taking pride in their science of tradition,^{iv} Muḥammad bin Jarir Abu Jaf'ar al-Tabari (d. 923), the author of the celebrated *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, a world history brought down up to 915, stands far above the rest in the series of the great early Muslim historiographers. He brought to his work the scrupulousness and indefatigable long windedness of the theologian, the accuracy and love of

order of the scholarly jurist, and the insight into political affairs of the practicing lawyer politician."^v The remarkable patience and industry which he exhibits in selecting the really historical matter out of the works of al-Mada'ini (d. 831) and others, indeed, leaves us in no doubt as to his 'performing for history a task similar to what Bukhari and Muslim did for the science of tradition.'^{vi} Given to exactitude, he jealously adheres to the annalistic presentation of events together with the long chains of their transmitters. But of his own times, his account is lacking both in insight and details, for here his point of view is obviously that of the ruling caliphs which readily makes him ignore the details unfavourable to the caliphate of the time.^{vii}

With the acumen of a philosopher and the insight of a moralist, Ibn Miskawaih, the nationalist historiographer of Persia, goes far beyond al-Tabari in presenting his material with intelligent accuracy and coherence. Up to his own time, his principal source is al-Tabari whose Annals he heard' from Abu Bakar ibn pupil and an authorator of al-Tabar's the Waragh of Muhammad binChronicle of Thabit bin Sinan (4, 974).the reign of Muqtadir to the year 970. Of his times, his information is chiefly derived from Muhallabi and Al-Fadl ibn 'Amid, the viziers to the Buwaihid rulers Mu'izz Daulah and Rukn al-Daulah, respectively. Besides, as hottb secretary) he himself was associated with the courts of Adad al-Daulah and Bahaal-Daulah which gave him the oppor tonity of knowing even the secret motives that lay behind the royal decrees. To these undisputed sources, Abu Shuja' adds Taji, the official history of the Buwaihids, composed by Abu Ishq Ibrahim, the Sabian, under the orders of Adad al-Daulah. Taji, so writes Abu Shuja' is a work original in structure and excel. lently composed, for Ibrahim was one of those masters of elo- quence who never stumble or miss. I find the later part in such close agreement with the Experiences of Nations that even the phraseology is similar in the Epilogue, and the two works terminate at the same point.'^{viii} But in contrast to Abu Shuja', Ibrahim himself, as reported by Ibn Khallikan, described his work to be no more than a 'pack of lies.'^{ix} This raises the suspicions of Margoliouth as to the authenticity of Ibn Mis- kawaih's rather unfavorable account of the beginnings of the Buwaihids,^x if indeed he made use of the Taji. 'Adad al- Daulah, as the sotry goes, did nurse a grudge against Ibrahim, the Sabian, leading to the latter's imprisonment as soon as the former ascended to the throne of Baghdad. But he was released, later on, subject to his writing the Taji, named after Taj al-Millah, the official title of Adad al Daulah,^{xi} Placed in this context, Ibrahim's sarcastic remark of 'pack of lies' tends to suggest an unduly favorable rather than an antagonistic account of the ruling family. This does away with the fears of Margoliouth as

to the validity of Ibn Miskawaih's unfriendly account of the origins of his Buwaihid lords, even if he made use of the aforesaid Taji. As to his indebtedness to Ibrahim, the Sabian, Ibn Maskwiah makes no mention of him, as he does of Thabit bin Sinan, a historian of the same sect. Moreover, the Taji itself is not extant to day, and the fragments of it preserved in the Yalimah of Tha'alibi and the Tarikh-e-Yamani of 'Utbi are too scanty to prove or disprove the contention that much of the Taji is embodied in the Tajanih al-Umam of Ibn Maskwiah. One of the striking features of Ibn Miskawaih's History is its fairly impartial estimate of the royal personages and their trusted lieutenants. All along his career, he was associated with Bawaihid rulers or their viziers, but this in no way makes him ignore their reprehensible acts of follies and intrigues. Thus, 'Imadal Daulah, the real founder of the Buwaihid fortunes, is represented as a 'dexterous but unscrupulous adventurer." Mu'izz al-Daulah is reprovved for the treachery with which he began his career, and so too Rukan-al-Daulah is censured for sacrificing the interests of his subjects to a 'quixotic sense of loyalty to his friends.' 'Adad al-Daulah is highly praised for his personal virtues, without, however, making a secret of his success being due to the good counsel of Ibn 'Amid I. Likewise, with all his praise for him, 'Muhallabi's unscrupulous extortion of money for Mu'izz al-Daulah's palace' escapes not his censure. The katibs, he thinks, owing 'to their extensive knowledge of the affairs of the State,' have a rightful claim to the office of the vizierate, and so he unreservedly condemns the promotion to the said office of Abu Tahir bin Baqaiyyah, an official of the royal kitchen. Nevertheless, as against Bakhtyar, he never fails to recognise him as a man of courage, resources, and resolution." As to Abu Haija, he seems to make a hero of him as opposed to his Buwaihid patrons who were constantly at war with him. And indeed what pleases him most in 'Adad al-Daulah is his 'large-minded toleration' shown to the members of various religious sects. And as to Ibn Maskwiah himself, it would indeed be possible to read his massive Tajarib al-Umam (brought down from the Deluge to the year 979) 'without- except in one passage-learning that the author was a Muslim.^{xii} Al-Tabari treated history as a plain record of past events, arranged according to the year of their happening, coupled with the long chains of their transmitters. Ibn Miskawaih discards the tedious chains of transmitters^{xiii} but retains the annalistic presentation of events. He, therefore, makes his chronicle especially instructive in respect of the underlying human aspirations, actions and the analysis of the causes of political discontent, economic unrest, and the success or failure of military expeditions. The very title of his massive work, Tajarib al-Umam Taaqub al-Himam - The Experiences of Nations and the Pursuit of ambitions-outlines explicitly

both its aim and method. Beginning about the time after the Deluge, since the information about the events before it is little trustworthy, it takes no notice of the miracles of the prophets and their political achievements, for the people of our time,' according to the author, 'can gain experience for the tasks they will face in the future only from human behaviour that is unconnected with anything miraculous.^{xiv} This marks a definite advance from a purely factual to a really critical view of history. The historian should ensure not only the authenticity of his data, but should also possess a keen grasp of what is historically essential, ignoring all that is irrelevant to the intelligent reconstruction of the past in terms of human interests. Legends and miracles are thus historically inessential, and so are the religious accounts of the creation and the political achievements of the prophets. With his purely human concern.^{xv} Ibn Maskwiah evolves into the world's initial logical historian of Islam by establishing history as a fundamental psychological element in its extended definition. His critical philosophy of history consists of the following main characteristics when presented in a logical manner:

Historical records contain beyond mere data of past events because they reveal the reasons behind every event that occurred. Historians should delve into events from exterior analysis to expose the underlying motivational aspects of human ambition. Through man's aspirations and hopes, History exists as an active evolutionary development that differs from stationary historical body events.

The historic process exists exclusively through human desires and objectives. The historical tide accomplishes no divine purpose whatsoever except those that people create within it as the prophetic narratives, including their political deeds and supernatural deeds, remain outside historical understanding.

According to the principles of history, human purposes and counter purposes create a dialectical process that overrides definitive stages or phases in historical progression.

Historical events from the previous epoch create the psychological state which defines our current age. Fourthly, history is never wrong. Complete moral values and societal patterns together with political attitudes appear because the spirit dominating an epoch determines them. Ibn Maskwiah establishes the Sassanian monarchy as his primary subject because it stood as a symbol of Persian anti-Arab reaction during the Buwaihidi Shi'ite princeling period,' the time the princes dominated across the 'Abbasid Caliphate empire.^{xvi}

Fifthly, history makes us wise. It brings to light certain eternal truths, bearing upon the rise and fall of nations, that may be usefully employed by the rulers, generals, statesmen, and the general public alike.^{xvii} This concept of usefulness makes history to be essentially a vehicle for the propagation of ideas, opening the way for the reinterpretation of transmitted facts so as to conform to the ideas the historian wishes to propagate. Given to this high aim, Ibn Maskwiah stands committed to an idealistic account of historical knowledge which in modern times is associated with the names of B. Croce and R.L. Colling. wood. History, as the very title of his Chronicle indicates, is a record of 'the ambitions of men and their experiences in the bid to achieve them.' Now the experiences of men are the experiences of minds, and we can grasp them in their concrete details just because we have minds ourselves. We can re-live these experiences in imagination, by putting ourselves in place of the person's past or present. History, in other words, is intelligible because it is the expression of the mind. Therefore, it cannot be all on the surface. It has an outer crust and an inner core, the former consisting in the overt events, the latter in the dynamic human ambitions. And since it is the burning ambitions that constitute the inner core of history, dates and events being the outer crust, the job of the historian is to break through the outer crust of events to grasp the surging ambitions that set history in motion. With the boldness of imagination and the fertility of hypothesis characteristic of a metaphysician, Ibn Maskwiah, therefore, undertakes to rewrite history, especially the ancient Persian one, in terms of inner human content alone. The story about Hushang and Tahmarz's being served by Jinns and satans is thus traced to their device of employing the ruffians as labourers in the mines and mountains, whom analogically they called devils and demons.^{xviii} Likewise, the fable of Zuhak's having a pair of snakes on his shoulders, fed on two human brains daily, is attributed to his over-fleshy shoulders which on public occasions he used to set in motion, saying that these are snakes, so that the ignorant masses may be subdued with awe and terror.^{xix} The virtues of a metaphysician are the vices of a historian, and so it is just possible that these psychological explanations may not be above doing violence to facts, but nevertheless, they vindicate the author's firm determination to make history explicable in human terms alone, eliminating all that is miraculous or super- natural in it, and thereby raising it from the level of an 'entertaining story and idle talk, serving no purpose except that of making one fall asleep'^{xx} to the status of a scientific discipline and philosophical pursuit, aspiring to direct the policies of States and preside over the destinies of nations. It is this aspect of his History that makes

L. Caetani, an Italian Orientalist, characterize it with a 'plan which is much akin in method to the principles followed by the Western and more modern historians.'^{xxi}

Armed with the idealistic theory of historical knowledge, Ibn Maskwiah looked deep into the mind that makes history, only to find therein a network of intrigues and treacheries, of sordid lures and tricks by which ministers are overthrown and appointed and 'men are induced to betray their masters.' His- tory, as a vehicle of concrete self-expression, thus turns out to be no more than an unscrupulous striving for amassing wealth and power, a struggle in which man reveals himself to be more ferocious than a lion and more cunning than a fox, leading to the conclusion, as also arrived at by Lord Acton, that 'all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.'

An idealistic theory of historical knowledge has its limitations, of which Ibn Miskawaih, in his enthusiasm for the new approach, seems to be quite unaware. History, to be sure,

is the expression of mind, and we can understand it just because we have minds ourselves, but not, of course, without personally undergoing the corresponding experience. Mystic experience, by the very nature of the case, thus falls entirely beyond the ken of this method; being exceptionally unique and personal, it cannot be re-lived by another man short of a mystic and that too in a restricted sense, for the experiences of no two mystics are the same. Lacking wholly in gnostic experience, Ibn Miskawaih has tried in vain to grasp the con- tent of 'I am God', the ecstatic utterance of Hallaj, and finding nothing corresponding to it in his experience, con- tented himself with describing him as a 'vulgar imposter.'^{xxii} G. Ryle^{xxiii} contends that epistemologically, what is true of mystic phenomena is true of all mental phenomena. We speak of a man's overt acts and inner thoughts and argue that history is to pass from the overt behaviour to the inner states of mind. This rather sets an impossible task for the historian since the states of mind are 'private to the person who has them,' and are accessible to none else, confronting him with the vexing problem of the knowledge of other minds.

The utilitarian-cum-idealistic view of history which opens the way for the reinterpretation of transmitted facts confronts us with another challenging problem, the problem of objectivity in historical thinking. History aspires to be a science, but in order to attain that status it must reflect the scientific ideal of impartiality. But the different and contradictory accounts of the same event by different historians obviously belie this pretension. Ibne Miskawaih's reinterpretation of Hushang and Tahmarz's being served by the Jinns and of Zuhak's having two snakes on his

shoulders, fed on two human brains daily, is enough to show the apparent lack of objectivity in historical thinking. Inescapably, it suggests that historical knowledge is 'radically and viciously subjective.' Here we are faced with the 'most important and most baffling' paradox of the analytic or critical philosophy of history. 'Every history is written from a certain point of view, and makes sense only from that point of view. Take away all points of view,' as W.H. Walsh would say, 'and you will have nothing intelligible left, any more than you will have anything visible if you are asked to look Ibne Maskwiah 's Theory of History object, but not from any particular point of view.'^{xxiv} And yet it is these very 'points of view' that make our knowledge of the past fall short of objectivity. History functions as a scientific field, although Ibn Maskwiah views it as concrete rather than abstract. The science focuses on following individual events step by step. Science reveals what previously took place while simultaneously revealing its causes for occurring in that particular way. Knowledge about past events does not completely lack relevance to upcoming developments. Historical understanding provides future insights as the fundamental quality that allows concrete historical science to generate generalizations. The historical experiences of different nations explicitly demonstrate general principles about national development and extinction to other nations. Ibn Maskwiah requests the rulers and generals and public to focus on prevalent examples found within his work. Europe wants to write. How should history be written? How can I write so much history with such chaos that when the events of today are found, they will come? More than that, what is a story or a story or a useless detail has been written about this point. historian Ibn Maskwiah also looks at history from the same perspective. When I read the stories of nations and kings and the books of history, I found in them things that happened, similar events that happened. And I expected them to happen. Because the events of the world are similar to each other and their events are interconnected. Then he writes:

And I saw that such events have been mixed with these things, which are the work of superstitions, which have no benefit except that listening to them makes you sleepy or enjoying their magical events. Ibn Maskwiah deeply regretted that the art of history had strayed from its original center. People's attention is generally focused on those events that would help them establish the chain of cause and effect. The result of this is that the productive events are not given special attention and they too are included in these general and fruitless events and become useless. So he says? Until these real events have become mixed up in these apocalyptic events. And it was not possible to

benefit from them. The reader and listener have such a sequence in these events: The events become connected. Then he writes:

That is why I compiled this book and most of the leaders can benefit from this book. They are mostly related to worldly matters, such as ministers and military officers and foreign countries. The author has kept this purpose in mind throughout the book, and the events that do not have this purpose. They are generally ignored. He has kept this purpose in mind so much that he does not mention miracles in the cases of the prophets because, according to him, miracles are separate from the chain of cause and effect. Thus, he writes: And for this reason I have not mentioned the miracles of the prophets (peace be upon them) because people today cannot gain any experience from them regarding future events. However, I have written about those events that have occurred as human arrangements by the prophets, in which there is no mixture of miracles. There are many far-fetched events in the history of Iran. Ferdowsi's poetic coloring has turned history into a novel. Ibn Maskavih everywhere explains these legends as Iranian superstitions, and in some places, he tells what the real event was and how its appearance changed due to the misuse of words and the people's superstition. For example, at one point, he writes: And the Iranians narrate many superstitions on this occasion and think that they were the servants of the devils. The story of Dahhak is mentioned in all Iranian histories. He had two snakes on his shoulders whose food was the brain of a man. Ibn Maskawiyah writes about this incident: And on his shoulders were two glands which he could move whenever he wanted, just as he could move his hands. Dahhak revealed that these two were snakes with which he intended to terrify the people and the foolish, and he kept them hidden inside his clothes. The story of Dhammurah is generally known that the devil and the jinn were his slaves and worked on his buildings etc. Ibn Maskawiyah reveals the truth of this incident as follows: He called the wicked people and expelled the devils, that is, the evildoers, from the country.

In short, Ibn Maskawiah is convinced of the interconnectedness of the events, while he says to present the causes and causes of events along with impartiality in history. He also emphasizes the importance of describing events in historiography that he believes are the result of human scope and human activity while shying away from describing matters beyond human control. "Tijrib al-Ummum" shows that he had a keen eye and was a free thinker. He studied history as a philosopher and scientist and was, therefore, more interested in the causes than in the events themselves. He used to try to know the people who participate in the life and rise and fall of nations, what are the

motives of their actions and actions? Why does an event occur? According to him, although history is related to the past, it also has a lesson for the future, by which people can avoid the mistakes that led people to failure and decline in the past. According to him, history is a continuous movement in which all its events are interconnected and interdependent. History is the interpreter of human nature and the manifestation of its intentions and aspirations. This human soul is the real source of this movement, the study of which is, in a way, the study of the human soul, and this is the reason why history is based on facts, not on miracles and legends. It is a means of understanding the facts. He has established a dialectical concept of the process of history, but this dialectical process is related to human opinions, thoughts and ideas, intentions and purposes rather than material forces. According to them, there are no definite periods of history. Every era has its own soul under which morality, politics or society takes on a certain color. In his books on history, the experiences of al-Umm are very famous. This is a general date starting with Noah's flood and ending in 319 AH (931 AD). That's why he wrote many books on ethics in addition to history.

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