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IBN ḤABĪB’S KITĀB AL-MUḤABBAR AND ITS PLACE IN EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORICAL WRITING

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Biographical evidence about Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb (d. 860) is slim. Almost nothing is known about his father, and even the name ‘Ḥabīb’1 is believed to be associated with his mother. Al-Ḥāshimī and al-Baghdādī are two nisbas attached to Ibn Ḥabīb, the first of which derives from his mother being a client (mawla) of a Ḥāshimī family, and the second of which implies that Ibn Ḥabīb spent a considerable part of his life in Baghdad. The long list of works ascribed to Ibn Ḥabīb testifies to his multifaceted scholarly interests in genealogy, grammar, history, and poetry. Many of his teachers were prominent genealogists and philologists, but he was predominantly influenced by Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 819).2 He was also the narrator of many earlier literary works, particularly those of al-Kalbī.

A reference to Ibn Ḥabīb’s authority on Arab genealogy and pre-Islamic history appears in the Fihrist where we are told that he composed a book titled Kitāb al-Qabā’il al-Kabir wa-l-ayyām at the request of al-Fāth b. Khāqān (d. 860).3 Not only does this account testify to Ibn Ḥabīb’s expertise in these areas, it also implies that he maintained good relations with the ’Abbasid court.4 His contribution to the evolution of genealogical writings seems to be related to the assumption that his Kitāb

1 Although the name ‘Ḥabīb’ is a masculine form, Muslim biographers associate it with Ibn Ḥabīb’s mother.
3 Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist, 171.
4 Ibn Khāqān was a patron of famous literary figures and an influential person at the court of al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861).
_al-Mushajjar_ was the first Islamic work to offer a tabular arrangement of genealogies in the form of a family tree. References to Ibn Habib's writings in later Islamic sources figure primarily in the context of genealogy and poetry, but rarely in history. Ibn Habib's historical writing, which is neglected by later Muslim historians, appears primarily in his _Kitāb al-Muḥabbar_, the focus of the current article.

### 1. LITERATURE OF THE FIELD

The relatively scant studies on Ibn Habib's works appear primarily in the context of pre-Islamic poetry, genealogies, and history. For example, his _Kitāb man musiba ilā ummihi min al-shu'arā_ (The Book of poets named after their mothers) was the subject of an investigation by Giorgio Levi Della Vida. Among Ibn Habib's works to draw the most scholarly attention is _Kitāb al-Muḥabbar_. Ilse Lichtenstädter, the first to edit the _Muḥabbar_, offers general biographical details about Ibn Habib and examines the content of this work. The _Muḥabbar_ figures in Alfred Beeston's study of the story of Yemeni women who celebrated the Prophet's death. The use of the _Muḥabbar_ in conjunction with Ibn Habib's other works as sources for genealogical information appears in some studies. For example, Asad Ahmed refers to Ibn Habib's writings in the context of matrilineal genealogical narratives and their

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7 al-Āṣfahānī, _Kitāb al-Aghānī_ (eds. Iḥsān 'Abbās, Ibrāhīm al-Saʿāfin, and Bakr ʿAbbās; Beirut: Dār Ṣadīr, 3rd edn., 2008), ii. 60, 63, 68–9, 86; iii. 79–92.


10 An allusion to Ibn Habib's intention to underline the importance of these works and present himself as a knowledgeable scholar can be seen in his use of the pattern _mufa‘al_ in the titles of his books, such as _al-Muḥabbar_, _al-Munammaq_, _al-Muwashshā_, _al-Mushajjar_, and _al-Mudhahhab_.


prosopographical implications. Yet, some scholars underestimate al-Muḥabbār’s importance as a historical work.

Ibn Habib’s historical writing and that of other Muslim scholars are compared in some studies. Such is the case with Julia Bray who compares Ibn Habib’s arrangement of lists with that of Ibn Qutayba (d. 889). Ilkka Lindstedt refers to al-Muḥabbār to illustrate al-Madāʾīnī’s (d. 844) influence on Ibn Habib’s writings. The Muḥabbār as a universal history is examined by Monika Springberg-Hinsen within her discussion of the emergence of early Islamic universal histories. She refers briefly to al-Muḥabbār and its content, pointing out that this work constitutes the earliest form of Islamic universal history. Indeed, the connection between the Muḥabbār and early Islamic universal historical writing is also made in passing by Bray. However, these two studies stop short of providing either concrete examples of universal history or a textual analysis of these forms.

This paper examines Ibn Habib’s historical writing in al-Muḥabbār in terms of narrative strategies, thematic structure, and historical objectives. It is premised on the claim that the Muḥabbār reflects an important stage in the evolution of early Islamic historiography in

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19 Bray uses the phrase ‘outline of universal history from the Creation’, ‘Lists and Memory’, 211.
20 For the different stages in the evolution of early Islamic historical writing, I follow primarily Chase Robinson, who identifies three phases in the development of Islamic historiography. During the first (610–ca. 730) Islamic interest in history revolves primarily around the life of the Prophet, his teaching, and battles. The second stage (ca. 730–ca. 830) was the real beginning of Islamic historiography,
general and the emergence of early forms of Islamic universal histories in particular. I use, for this study, a comparative textual examination along with isnad analysis whenever it is possible. I begin, however, with a brief account of the background against which early Islamic universal histories evolved.

2. **AL-MUHABBAR AND EARLY ISLAMIC UNIVERSAL HISTORICAL WRITINGS**

A cursory look at the Muhabbar's major themes and structure might give the inaccurate impression that this work primarily concerns genealogies and tabular presentations of jāhilī (i.e., pre-Islamic) and early Islamic history. A closer textual analysis of the work's narrative arrangements and structure, however, illustrates its important role in the evolution of early Islamic historiography and particularly the rise of universal historical writings. Among early Islamic universal histories, which appeared between the second half of the ninth century and into the tenth century, are the works of Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), al-Ya'qūbī (d. 897), al-Dinawarī (d. 898), al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Masʿūdī (d. 956), and al-Maqdisī (d. ca. 970).

Universal histories in general begin with remote origins and continue to the time of the author, while portraying other known nations and cultures on the way. Among the main themes presented in early Islamic universal histories are: the creation story; prophetic (biblical) history; history of kings, lands and nations; pre-Islamic history; Muḥammad's life and prophethood (mubuwwa); and the caliphate. Early Islamic universal histories emerged primarily with the history of the caliphate, in Muḥammad Yālṭqāyā and Rīfʿat Bilgah al-Ḵilīṣī (eds.), Kashf al-Zunūn an asārī al-kutub wa-l-funūn (Tehran: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 3rd edn., 1967), i. 293.


For an excellent survey of the content of these works see Bernd Radtke, Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung im Mittelalterlichen Islam (Beirut and Stuttgart: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1992), 9–95.
histories revolve around the objective to present Islam in comparison with other religions and nations as the most significant achievement in human history. This distinctive status of Islam is exclusively premised on Muhammad’s unique status as the ‘seal of the prophets (khatam al-nabiyyin)’. Not only does this term indicate that his prophethood is the last in the succession of divine messages that began with Adam, it also signifies that Islam concludes previous messages. Efforts to emphasize this distinguished place of Islam, therefore, is closely connected to the religious needs of the early Islamic community to preserve the Prophet’s biography and legacy. These endeavours constitute the earliest forms of Islamic historical thought, where the focus was limited to local and religious Arab-Islamic concerns. At this stage, Qur’ānic narratives, prophetic tradition (hadīth), genealogies (ansāb), biographies (tabaqāt), and jahili traditions were the principal sources used by early Muslim scholars to conserve the Prophet’s memory and tradition.

Muslims’ encounters with other religions and nations stimulated new historiographical endeavours to extend local Arab-Islamic viewpoints to broader historical correlations and universal contexts to give Islam a more conspicuous place in world history. Not only did this transition entail the rearrangement of Arab-Islamic narratives, but also instigated the search for new non-Islamic sources to supplement insufficient information. Biblical-Jewish materials were the first sources that Muslims consulted to highlight the prophetic origins and the sequentiality of Muhammad’s nubuwwa.


25 Fred Donner believes that the needs of the Islamic community were initially moral rather than historical. Explaining the evolution of Islamic historical thought, he offers four models of legitimization: pietistic, genealogical, theocratic, and historicizing. See Donner, Narratives, 97–144.


The thematic and chronological reorganization of prophetic narratives and the incorporation of new sources, particularly biblical materials, initiated the earliest stages in the process of allocating Islam a prominent place in universal history. This orientation is evident in the appearance of different models for the chronological arrangements of prophetic materials, which early Muslim historians classified under the rubric of periodization of history (ta’rikh). Genealogical materials related to the Prophet served, as we shall see, as a connecting channel in transforming Islamic presentations of prophetic narratives from an Islamic religious milieu to a universal setting. Three major non-Islamic chronological systems influenced early Islamic chronological arrangements: Jewish, Christian, and


30 Rosenthal was among the first scholars to draw the connection between genealogy and historiography in general and universal history in particular. See A History, 21–2.

31 Al-Mas‘ūdī was among the first Muslim historians to give a detailed discussion of these different eras. See Charles Pellat (ed.), Murūji al-dhahab wa-mdh‘adn al-jawhar (Beirut: Manshūrat al-Jāmi‘a al-Lubnānīyya, 1965), ii. 415–16.

32 Jewish calculations were based on the Old Testament that appears in Islamic sources in three versions: Hebrew, Greek, and Samaritan. See al-Ṭabari, Ta’rikhb, i. 17–18 (ed. De Goeje, i. 16); Hamza al-Isfahānī, Ta’rikh sini mutak al-arḍ wa-lambiyyār (ed. I. M. E. Gottwald; Leipzig, Petrograd: Leopold Voss, 1844–8), 153; Abū al-Fidā, al-Mukhtasār fi akhbār al-bashar (eds. Muhammad Zaynum, Muhammad ’Azab, Yahyā Husayn and Muhammad Fakhr al-Wasif; Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1999), i. 15–18; Everett Rowson, A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and Fate: Al-‘Amīrī’s Kitāb al-Āmād ‘alā l-’abad (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1988), 62 (transl., 63).

33 Christians followed two models of chronology, the first of which was the Old Testament, which is based on the Septuagint. They also calculated time according to the era of Alexander the Great. See al-Ṭabari, Ta’rikh, i. 18 (ed. De Goeje, i. 16); al-Birūnī, al-Āthār al-bāqiyar ‘an al-qurān al-khāliyya (ed. Parviz
However, Islamic incorporation of these eras was a gradual process in which biblical-Jewish sources were the first to affect Islamic chronological portrayals of prophetic narratives and methods of time calculations. Ibn ʿAbīl Habīb’s al-Muḥabbār represents, as this article will illustrate, one of the earliest Islamic efforts to chronologically reconfigure prophetic materials, eventually creating broader thematic interconnections and universal historical contexts. The following sections provide textual analysis of certain accounts that testify to features of universal historical writings in the Muḥabbār.

3. PROPHETIC NARRATIVES

Ibn ʿAbīl Habīb opens the Muḥabbār with chronological mapping of prophetic history, demonstrating both the sequentiality and finality of Muḥammad’s prophethood. The section is divided into three tabular models, each of which offers a different chronological angle showing progression in prophetic history. The first section concerns the prophetic intervals between Adam and Muḥammad, whereas the second part follows chronologically the significant phases in prophetic narratives and important events in Jewish history. Ibn ʿAbīl Habīb’s third account of prophetic narratives revolves around a list of biblical prophets along with their life-spans.

3.1 Prophetic intervals

Under the first part of the Muḥabbār’s prophetic presentation one finds the following account:

Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sukkari said: Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb related to us saying that Abū Ḥatim al-Bajali mentioned on the authority of Hishām b. al-Kalbī and his father, of Abū ʿAlī, of ʿAbdallah b. ʿAbbās recounting that: 2200 years were between Adam, may peace be upon him, and Noah; 1143 (or according to others 1142) years separated Noah and Abraham, may peace be upon him; from Abraham to Moses 575 (or 565) years; between

Azkāʾ; Tehran: Mirās-i Maktūb, 2001), 183; Rowson, A Muslim Philosopher, 188–92.

34 Ibn Qutayba, Maʾārif, 58; al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, i. 18–19 (ed. De Goeje, i. 17); al-Birūnī, Athār, 114–15.

Moses and David 590 (or 579); between David and Jesus 1053; and 600 years separate Jesus and Muhammad, may God praise and protect him as well as all prophets. This is Ibn al-Kalbī’s version (qawl).

The account is narrated by Ibn Ḥabīb’s student, Abū Saʿīd al-Sukkārī (d. 888), and includes a full chain of transmission (isnād), which is uncharacteristic of the Muḥabbār. An analysis of both the report and its isnād suggests, as we shall see, features of the shift in early Islamic historical thought from local concerns to broader historical representations. To start with the content, Ibn Ḥabīb portrays chronologically prophetic intervals separating Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Ṭūḥa. His narrative arrangement resonates with the Islamic belief in the successiveness and finality of Muhammad’s prophethood. With the exception of David and Solomon, who appear in Islamic sources as prophet-kings, these names are considered in Islam leading prophet-messengers associated with important junctures in prophetic history. This narrative structure signifies, therefore, early Islamic efforts to place Muhammad’s prophethood within a larger context of prophetic narratives and broader historical interconnections. The reference to two versions for these intervals seems to indicate different sources used by Muslim scholars, but it also shows that chronological organization of prophetic materials came at a later stage in Islamic historical writing. Ibn Ḥabīb’s conclusion, saying that this is Ibn al-Kalbī’s version, shows the influence of the latter on him, and also suggests the important role that early Islamic genealogical tradition played in the placement of prophetic narratives within universal historical contexts. To further assess these conjectures, it is constructive to first analyse the report’s isnād and then compare it with those of other Muslim scholars.

3.1.1 The isnād of Hishām al-Kalbī → Muḥammad al-Kalbī → Abū Sāliḥ → Ibn ‘Abbās

The report’s isnād includes the names of Abū Ḥātim al-Bajalī, Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 819), Muḥammad b. Sāʿīb al-Kalbī (d. 763-64),

38 I was unable to identify Abū Ḥātim al-Bajalī. Lichtenstädter raises the possibility that he was Abū Ḥātim b. Ḥibbān al-Qabīd b. al-ʿAdl. Interestingly, the name of Abū Ḥātim appears in the Maʿārif as one of Ibn Qutayba’s
Abū Ṣāliḥ (d. 719), and ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 687). The names of Hishām al-Kalbī, Muhammad al-Kalbī, Abū Ṣāliḥ, and Ibn ‘Abbās figure prominently in several *akhbār*-oriented accounts that reflect efforts to chronologize Arab–Islamic events or non-Islamic narratives. Such is the case with the story of Adam’s fall, biblical figures, the Flood, the number of years that separate Adam and the Prophet’s birth, the building of the Ka’ba, pre-Islamic history, the Prophet’s lineage and prophetic genealogies, the Prophet’s birth and his life-span. This *insād* reflects, I believe, significant phases in the evolution of early Islamic historiography, particularly with regards to chronological representations and the placement of local Arab-Islamic themes within larger historical settings. To further evaluate these conjectures some biographical information about these scholars is in order.

To start with Ibn ‘Abbās, he is one of the well-known Companions who figures prominently in Islamic sources as a trustworthy *hadith* transmitter and narrator. He is also portrayed as an expert in Qur’ānic exegesis, poetry, and genealogy. Reference to Ibn ‘Abbās also appears in early Islamic historical writings, particularly in reports associated with prophetic stories and the chronologization of important events in the formative phases of Islam. As for Abū Ṣāliḥ Bādhām (or Bādhān), he


41 Ibid, i. 163–67 (ed. De Goeje, i. 165–70).

42 Ibid, i. 185–9 (ed. De Goeje, i. 192–7).

43 Ibid, i. 237 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1071).


46 Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqat*, i. 47, 58; al-Baladhurī, *Ansāb*, i. 10, 17, 55.


was one of Ibn 'Abbās' students and the mawla of Umm Ḥāni' (d. ca. 661), the daughter of Abū Ṭālib. He transmitted reports regarding Qur'ānic exegesis and prophetic tradition on the authority of many Companions, such as Umm Ḥāni' 52 Abū Hurayra (d. 681), and Ibn 'Abbās. 53 Muslim scholars considered Abū Sālih, on the whole, as a trustworthy scholar and an authority on Qur’ānic exegesis and biblical stories. 54 However, some Muslim scholars question his reliability when it comes to religious reports that he relates on Ibn 'Abbās' authority. 55 Abū Sālih's trustworthiness is even more problematic when it concerns reports that the Kalbīs traced back to him.

The contributions of Muḥammad al-Kalbī and his son, Hishām, to the evolution of early Islamic historical writing are undeniable. 56 This is evident in the multifaceted areas of knowledge that Muslim biographers ascribe to the Kalbīs, such as Qur‘ānic exegesis, genealogy, philology, Arab-Islamic history, and non-Islamic materials, particularly biblical sources. 57 The process of cultivating these scholarly areas began with Muḥammad al-Kalbī and was developed by his son, Hishām. 58 Scholarly associations between Abū Sālih and Muḥammad al-Kalbī echo in some Islamic sources. 59 For example, Ibn al-Nadīm relates that Abū Sālih was the main authority for Muḥammad al-Kalbī on the genealogy of the Quraysh that the former received from 'Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib (d. ca. 669), an authority on the subject. 60 However, other

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52 al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rikh, i. 295–6 (ed. De Goeje, i. 329–30).
54 Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, vi. 299–300.
57 Ibn Sa’d frequently transmits reports on the authority of the Kalbīs: Ṭabaqāt, i. 27, 30, 60–5, 250–1; ii. 244; iii. 31–2; iv. 100, 145; 231; vi. 117, 179.
59 Ibid, i. 39–41.
60 Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist, 152; Caskel, Šamharat, i. 118.
Muslim scholars deem as untrustworthy some religiously-oriented reports\(^{61}\) that Muḥammad al-Kalbī related on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ.\(^{62}\) This orientation is even stronger in later biographical dictionaries, where some scholars preserve accounts in which al-Kalbī admits that all he took from Abū Ṣāliḥ on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās was false.\(^{63}\)

The above-mentioned information about these four figures offers insights into the process in which early Muslim historians restructured Arab-Islamic materials to transcend local concerns in favour of broader thematic and chronological settings. As authorities on genealogy, the Kalbis played an important role in this transitional stage in which Islamic sources, such as Qurʾān, hadith literature, sīra, were combined with biblical materials and reorganized to achieve a conspicuous placement of Islam in universal history. No wonder that the influence of Hishām al-Kalbī on many historians, particularly on Ibn Ḥabīb, is noticeable.

The transition from local Arab-Islamic themes to universal portrayals becomes clearer as we compare Ibn Ḥabīb’s account of prophetic intervals with those of other Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Saʿd (d. 845),\(^{64}\) al-Ṭabarī (d. 923),\(^{65}\) and al-Maqdīsī (d. ca. 970).\(^{66}\) It is beneficial to our discussion to compare first the reports of Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn Saʿd because the differences between their accounts are more distinct than the differences from the other historians, and because they were closer in time to each other.

Ibn Saʿd’s chronological organization of the prophetic narratives consists of three consecutive reports, where only the third is comparable to that of Ibn Ḥabīb. He applies the term, ‘generations (qurūn)’\(^{67}\) to chronologically define prophetic intervals presented in the first two reports. Ibn Saʿd transmits the first report on the authority of ‘Ikrima.

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\(^{61}\) Ibn al-Nadīm relates, for example, that Muḥammad al-Kalbī composed a Qurʾānic exegesis that some scholars criticized for not being compatible in certain points with Islamic beliefs. See Fihrist, 152.


\(^{63}\) Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdīb, i. 417; ix. 178–9; al-Mīzī, Tahdīb, xxv. 250; Ibn Qudāma, al-Muntakhab, 127; al-Dhahābī, Mizān, ii. 3–4.

\(^{64}\) Ibn Saʿd, Ṭabaqāt, i. 44–5.

\(^{65}\) al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrikh, ii. 237–8 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1072).

\(^{66}\) al-Maqdīsī, Badʾ, ii. 153.

with a different isnād reporting that ten generations were between Adam and Noah. The same report appears in the works of Ibn Qutayba and al-Tabari, where the latter provides an isnād going back to Ibn ‘Abbās. Ibn Sa’d presents the second report without isnād on the authority of the historian al-Waqi’dī (d. 823), relating that ten generations (qurūn) were between Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Ibn Sa’d concludes his narration by defining the term qarn, as equal to 100 years. The use of qurūn as a chronological structure in these two reports serves as a further indication of the shift in the presentation of prophetic narratives from local-religious needs to a broader chronological structure reminiscent of universal historical presentations.

Ibn Sa’d’s third report, equivalent to that of Ibn Habib, specifies the number of years separating Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. Using the same isnād, he relates that between Moses and Jesus 1900 years passed and 569 years separated Jesus and Muḥammad. Ibn Sa’d provides an explicit number for these three intervals seemingly because the three competing monotheistic religions are associated with these prophets. The differences between Ibn Sa’d and Ibn Habib are not only expressed in the number of years, but also in the absence of David from the former’s account. These distinctions seem to suggest that Ibn Sa’d’s narrative organization signifies an earlier stage in Islamic incorporation of biblical sources, focusing on distinguishing Islam’s religious identity from Judaism and Christianity. The absence of David from Ibn Sa’d’s account, versus his appearance in the other reports, further substantiates this conjecture.

Ibn Habib’s presentation of prophetic intervals resembles those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Maqdisī. Besides differences in the number of years, these accounts differ primarily in the narrative placement. While Ibn Habib opens the Muḥabbār with the prophetic chronology, al-Ṭabarī, who uses an annalistic arrangement, places this topic under the presentation of the

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68 ‘Iqrima was the mawla of Ibn ‘Abbās and one of his prominent students. See Ibn Qutayba, Ma’ārif, 445–57; Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhib, vii. 22–34.
69 The isnād includes Qabīsa b. ‘Uqba (d. 830), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 778), and Sa’d b. Masrūq al-Thawrī (d. 744).
70 Ibn Sa’d, Taḥqīqāt, i. 44.
71 Ibn Qutayba also adds another version on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 732) using the term patriarchs (ābā’); see Ma’ārif, 57.
72 al-Ṭabarī, ii. 235 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1069).
73 The isnād includes Basran scholars: Muḥammad b. Bashshār (d. 866), Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīṣī (d. 818), and Hammām b. Yahyā (d. 781), and Dī‘āma (d. 735).
74 Ibn Sa’d, Taḥqīqāt, i. 44.
75 Ibid, 44–5.
Prophet’s birth. Al-Maqdisi, who transmits his report on the authority of Ibn Išāq (d. 767), situates it thematically under the discussion of historical eras. These choices of narrative organization and strategies further substantiate the assertion that the chronological arrangements of prophetic materials constitute the first context where early forms of Islamic universal historical writings appeared.

3.2 Jewish history as chronological pointer

Ibn Habib relates the second section of prophetic history on the authority of al-Haytham b. ‘Adī (d. 822), saying:

Abū Ḥātim al-Bajali narrated on the authority of al-Haytham b. ‘Adī, who took this information from the people of the book (ahl al-kitāb), that from the time of Adam, peace be upon him, to the Flood there are 2256 years; 1020 years are between Abraham’s death and the Flood; 75 years separate Abraham’s death and the arrival of the Israelites (Banū Isrā‘il) in Egypt; from Jacob’s entrance to Egypt and the Exodus of Moses 150 years; 260 years are between the Exodus of Moses and the construction of the First Temple; 2240 years are between the consecration of the First Temple and the kingship (mulk) of Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of the Temple. This is al-Haytham b. ‘Adī’s version, whereas it was claimed that others corrected him saying that it was 1245 years. Consequently, 258 years are between the year 245 AH and the time when the Prophet, may God praise and protect him, was entrusted with his prophetic mission (māb‘āth).

Ibn Habib offers here a combination of his chronological presentation of prophetic intervals with important junctures in Jewish history. He presents his account without isnād on the authority of al-Haytham b. ‘Adī whose information originates in Jewish sources. Before examining this account, let us provide some information about Ibn ‘Adī. Islamic sources describe him as a well-versed scholar in non-Islamic history, Arab genealogies, and poetry. Yet his reliability is greatly questioned when the transmission of religiously-oriented reports is involved. Ibn ‘Adī’s contributions to the evolution of Islamic historical writing are evident in a number of areas. He was among the earliest Muslim historians to combine tabaqāt and ta‘rikh into historical writing while

76 al-Maqdisi provides seven reports showing the use of different systems for calculating time. Bad‘, ii. 151–5.
77 Ibn Habib, Muḥabbār, 2.
incorporating events and biographies into a chronological framework.\textsuperscript{79} He was also, if not the first, among the earliest historians to write annalistic history as is evident in his book, \textit{al-Ta‘rikh ‘alā al-sinîn} (History according to the years).\textsuperscript{80} No doubt, Ibn `Adî’s historical writing in terms of sources, themes, and style influenced later Muslim historians. His impact on Ibn Ḥabîb can be seen in the tabular presentations of persons,\textsuperscript{81} and themes, such as the \textit{mathālib}.\textsuperscript{82} The fact that Ibn al-Nadîm reports that Ibn `Adî wrote a book titled \textit{al-Muḥabbar} lends further support to Ibn `Adî’s influence on Ibn Ḥabîb.\textsuperscript{83}

As for the report’s content, Ibn Ḥabîb presents a timetable for important phases in prophetic narratives juxtaposed with turning points in Jewish history. By applying this structure, he offers a different angle to portray prophetic eras and situate them chronologically within the larger context of biblical-Jewish history. The narrative arrangement of this account bears a great resemblance, primarily in terms of structure, to \textit{Seder Olam Rabba}, which represents Babylonian Rabbinic stance on biblical chronology.\textsuperscript{84} Such is the case with using the Flood,\textsuperscript{85} the arrival of the Israelites in Egypt,\textsuperscript{86} and the destruction of the Temple\textsuperscript{87} as chronological eras. A comparison between Ibn Ḥabîb’s report here and his first account of prophetic intervals seems to signify a gradual process within which early Muslim scholars sought to conceptually and chronologically define narrations and historical interconnections. This assumption can be further substantiated by comparing Ibn Ḥabîb’s account with that of al-Ṭabarî.\textsuperscript{88} The content and the arrangement of these reports are almost identical; minor variations exist primarily with regard to the number of years and the interconnections between the different eras.\textsuperscript{89} However, the main distinction between these two accounts is that al-Ṭabarî includes the reign of Alexander the Great as an

\textsuperscript{79} Leder, \textit{Korpus}, 30–3.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 253–4; Noth, \textit{Early Arabic Historical Tradition}, 42–3.
\textsuperscript{81} Leder, \textit{Korpus}, 202–8; 220–2.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 232–7.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibn al-Nadîm, \textit{Fihrist}, 160.
\textsuperscript{84} Heinrich Guggenheimer (transl. and commentary), \textit{Seder Olam, the Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology} (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998), x–xiii.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 3, 12, 46.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 30, 37–40.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 217–19, 228, 237.
\textsuperscript{88} al-Ṭabarî, \textit{Ta‘rikh}, 238 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1070).
\textsuperscript{89} al-Ṭabarî relates, for example, that between Jacob entering Egypt and the Exodus of Moses 550 years passed, and 446 years separates the building of the first Temple and its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.
era. The appearance of Alexander demonstrates a later phase in the search for new sources, where Greco-Roman materials begin to surface in Islamic historical writings. Again, these distinctions, testify to the gradual evolution in Islamic application of non-Islamic materials to create clearer historical accounts based on more developed systems of periodization.

3.3 The life-span of Prophets

Ibn Habib’s third section of prophetic narratives lists the names of biblical figures along with their life-span. He bases this account on certain Jewish scholars and compares this information with that of Hishām b. al-Kalbi. According to this report, Ibn Habib narrates that:

The life-span of Adam, peace be upon him, was 930 years; Seth 712 years, but Ibn al-Kalbi claimed 930 years; Enosh (Anūsh) 905 years or 957 according to Ibn al-Kalbi; Kenan (Qinān) 910 years or 920 according to Ibn al-Kalbi; Mahalalel 895 years; Jared (Yarid) 962 years. Enoch (Ahnūk), Idris, who was the first among Adam’s children to be entrusted with prophethood... lived to be 305 years, but Ibn al-Kalbi claims that his life amounted to ... 165 years. Methuselah (Mithūshlakh) son of Enoch 969 years and 1170 years according to Ibn al-Kalbi; Lamech (Lumak) 777 years. Noah’s (Nāḥ) life-span was 950 years and God entrusted him with prophethood when he was 480 years. He called upon his people to follow the prophetic message, but only a few followed him. God then commanded him to build the ship... and he boarded it... he lived after [the Flood] 350 years while others claim 598 years, but Ibn al-Kalbi maintains 900 years; Arpachshad’s (Arfakhshad) life-span was 498 years; Shelah’s (Shālih) 433 years, but 493 years according to Ibn al-Kalbi; Eber

90 Ibn Habib recounts that he took this information from Jewish scholars who lived in the area of ‘Nathan River’, about which I was unable to find any information.

91 The same number of years appears in Genesis 5: 5.
92 Seth lived 912 years. Genesis 5: 8.
93 The same number of years in Genesis 5: 11.
94 The same number of years in Genesis 5: 14.
95 The same number of years in Genesis 5: 17.
96 The same number of years in Genesis 5: 20.
97 Enoch lived 365 years. Genesis 5: 23.
98 The same number of years in Genesis 5: 27.
99 The same number of years in Genesis 5: 31.
100 The same number of years in Genesis 9: 29.
101 The same phrase appears in Genesis 9: 28.
102 Arpachshad’s life-span was 438 years, according to Genesis 11: 12–13.
103 The same number of years in Genesis 11: 14–15.
('Ābir) lived 134 years\textsuperscript{104} or 463 according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Peleg (Fālīgh) 239 years\textsuperscript{105} or 290 according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Reu (Argbuād) 232 years,\textsuperscript{106} or 269 years according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Serug (Ashrug) 230 years;\textsuperscript{107} Nahor (Nahūr) 148 years;\textsuperscript{108} Terah (Ṭāriḥ) who is Āzar 250 years.\textsuperscript{109} Abraham (Ibrāhīm), peace be upon him, lived to be 175\textsuperscript{110} years or 195 years according to others; Isaac (Ishāq) 150 years,\textsuperscript{111} 185 years according to others; Joseph (Yūsuf) 120 years;\textsuperscript{112} Moses (Mūsā) son of ʿImrān . . . 120 years;\textsuperscript{113} Aaron (Hārūn) son of ʿImrān 123 years;\textsuperscript{114} Job (Ayyūb) . . . 200 years;\textsuperscript{115} and David (Dāwūd) . . . 70 years.\textsuperscript{116} The discrepancies between these versions are extensive, particularly between the first one and that of Ibn al-Kalbī and God knows better. For I was unable to pinpoint the correct version.\textsuperscript{117}

Ibn Ḥabīb’s use of life-span as a chronological framework provides an additional model for sequential interconnections in prophetic history. The influence on the account of biblical sources, particularly the book of Genesis, in terms of the names and narrative arrangement, is apparent. This resemblance is evident mostly in Ibn Ḥabīb’s tabular construction of the generations from Adam to Noah, which is presented in Genesis 5, and from Arpachshad to Terah, as in Genesis 11. 10–32. Again, Ibn Ḥabīb applies here prophethood both as a connecting theme and chronological pointer. The centrality of prophethood is evident in Ibn Ḥabīb skipping Noah’s sons and moving immediately to Arpachshad, who is considered in Islamic sources as the father of prophets and messengers.\textsuperscript{118} Finally, the absence of Ismāʿīl or other Arab prophets in this passage is noticeable; I believe it has to do, primarily, with considerations related to Ibn Ḥabīb’s narrative structure. Specifically, it seems that he intends to show parallels between pre-Islamic Arab genealogies and Jewish history at a less controversial stage of the

\textsuperscript{104} 433 years according to Genesis 11: 16–17.
\textsuperscript{105} The same number of years in Genesis 11: 18–19.
\textsuperscript{106} 239 years in Genesis 11: 20–1.
\textsuperscript{107} The same number of years in Genesis 11: 22–3.
\textsuperscript{108} The same number of years in Genesis 11: 24–5.
\textsuperscript{109} 205 in Genesis 11: 32.
\textsuperscript{110} The same number of years in Genesis 25: 7.
\textsuperscript{111} 180 years in Genesis 35: 28.
\textsuperscript{112} 110 years in Genesis 50: 26.
\textsuperscript{113} The same number of years in Deuteronomy 34: 7.
\textsuperscript{114} The same number of years in Numbers 33: 39.
\textsuperscript{115} According to Job 42: 17, he lived 140 years.
\textsuperscript{116} The same number of years in 2 Samuel 5: 4.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibn Ḥabīb, Muhābbar, 2–5.
\textsuperscript{118} al-Ṭabarī, Tāʾrīkh, 205 (ed. De Goeje, i. 216).
Prophet’s lineage. This orientation is evident in Ibn Ḥabīb’s efforts to synchronize the pre-Islamic Arab genealogical past with Jewish history under his discussion of pre-Islamic eras, particularly where he refers, as we shall see, to Ma‘add and the ‘ām al-tafarruq (Year of Dispersal).

Ibn Ḥabīb’s narrative organization of the life-span of biblical figures reflects early Islamic efforts to incorporate biblical materials in order to place Arab-Islamic genealogies within remote biblical origins and a universal context. In this manner, the Muḥabar represents a middle position between early Islamic endeavours in this regard and universal histories composed during the second half of the ninth century. To assess this conjecture, let us compare Ibn Ḥabīb’s presentation here with those of other Muslim scholars.

To begin with Ibn al-Kalbī’s Jamharat, this work, which is narrated by Ibn Ḥabīb, reflects local Arab concerns focusing on the Prophet’s lineage. It provides a detailed discussion of Arab genealogies, emphasizing the Prophet’s superiority among Arabs and the tribe of Quraysh. To that end, Ibn al-Kalbī structures his account around three major ancestral circles arranged from the largest to the smallest: northern Arabs; Quraysh; Banū Ḥāshim.119 The smaller the circle, the closer to the Prophet and the higher its rank. However, the Jamhara ends the Arabs’ ancestral genealogies with Ma‘add without mentioning previous prophets or even including Ismā‘īl. Interestingly, a similar narrative organization occurs in Ibn Ḥabīb’s al-Munammaq fī akhbār Quraysh (The embellished book on the history of Quraysh), which he composed before the Muḥabar.120 These differences between the Muḥabar, on one hand, and the Jamhara and the Munammaq on the other, seem to reflect a shift in Islamic historical presentation of genealogical materials from an Arab-local to a broader prophetic-biblical context.

Ibn Hishām’s narrative arrangement of the Prophet’s genealogies in the Sīra resembles that of Ibn al-Kalbī’s Jamhara, but contains new information. Relying on Ibn Ishāq, he opens the Sīra with a genealogical list, tracing the Prophet’s lineage back to Adam. He structures his account around four genealogical frames, arranged from the lesser to the greater units: Banū Ḥāshim, Quraysh, northern Arabs, and biblical prophets. As the eponym of northern Arabs and the connecting link with biblical genealogies, Ismā‘īl plays a significant role in Ibn Hishām’s

These narrative organizational features reflect early Islamic attempts to combine Arab genealogies and biblical materials in order to provide broader mapping of the Prophet Muhammad’s lineage at both the Arab and prophetic levels. The placement of Arab-Islamic genealogies within a larger prophetic context and remote biblical lineage is the principal strategy employed here to achieve this objective. Ibn Hishām’s account, however, lacks any references to the life span of these prophets, except in the case of Ismā’il.

Moving to Ibn Sa’d’s Tabaqāt, one finds new information and a different narrative strategy for the incorporation of biblical figures. He refers, like other Muslim scholars, to biblical prophets as part of his treatment of Muḥammad’s prophetic lineage. Similar to Ibn Hishām, he arranges his narrative around the four cycles of the Prophet’s genealogical connections. However, he organizes these spheres from the greater to the smaller: prophetic origins, Arabs (northern Arabs), Quraysh, and Banū Hāshim. Ibn Sa’d then provides, on the authority of Hishām al-Kalbī, a list of 19 prophet-messengers that begins with Adam. His list also includes new names, such as Jesus and the Arab prophets (Hūd and Ṣāliḥ), but without referring to their life spans. A similar narrative arrangement appears in al-Balāḏurī’s Ansāb. However, while Ibn Sa’d’s account can be characterized more as religious-prophetic, al-Balāḏurī’s presentation mirrors Arab-genealogical concerns, focusing on the northern and southern Arabs’ genealogical issues.

The comparison of Ibn Ḥabīb’s list of prophets’ life-spans with the portrayals of this topic in early Islamic universal histories further demonstrates the influential position of al-Muḥabbar in early Islamic historiography. Combining Qur’ānic narratives and biblical materials, Ibn Qutayba opens the Ma‘ārif with the creation story, followed by the presentations of biblical prophets starting with Adam and concluding with Dhū al-Kifl. His references to prophets’ life-spans are limited to important figures, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ismā’il, and Moses. Ibn Qutayba’s presentation of prophetic history reflects primarily religious-prophetic concerns. His sequential narrative

122 Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, i. 17–22; 39–44.
123 Ibid, i. 45–6.
124 al-Balāḏurī, Ansāb, i. 7–74.
125 Ibid, 17–100.
126 Ibn Qutayba, Ma‘ārif, 9–17.
arrangement and its placement in primordial origins mirrors features of universal historical writing.

As for al-Ya‘qūbī, he begins the Ta’rikh with a chronological presentation of prophetic history from Adam to Jesus in separate accounts detailing their religio-historical background. He concludes each section with the life-spans of these prophets.¹²⁸ Notably, al-Ya‘qūbī’s account of biblical prophets (particularly from Adam to David) closely resembles that of Ibn Ḥabīb. Such is the case with the names of the biblical prophets, the number of years they lived, and the absence of Ismā‘il or other Arab prophets. In fact, al-Ya‘qūbī places his treatment of Ismā‘il and other Arab prophets under the treatment of pre-Islamic Arab history.¹²⁹ Justifying his choice of narrative organization, al-Ya‘qūbī says that the historical interconnection between Ismā‘il and his children, on one hand, and the Prophet and caliphs, on the other, is the rationale for this arrangement.¹³⁰ A similar narrative placement of biblical prophets can be found in al-Maṣ‘ūdī’s Murūj.¹³¹

Al-Ṭabarī’s Ta’rikh provides detailed information about previous prophets that he situates annalistically under the discussion of biblical stories. His narrative arrangement reflects primarily religio-prophetic concerns, emphasizing God’s will in history, the transmission of His divine message, and the finality of Muḥammad’s prophethood.¹³² Like al-Ya‘qūbī, al-Ṭabarī refers to the life-span of biblical figures at the end of each section of prophetic stories. His narration in terms of the number of years and names echoes other historians, yet he differs on the placement of these narratives. For example, al-Ṭabarī refers to Ismā‘il in two different locations: under Abraham’s story¹³³ and as part of his discussion of the Prophet’s lineage.¹³⁴ In some cases he also provides isnāds, some of which are traced back to Ibn ‘Abbās or associated with the chain of Hishām al-Kalbī→Muḥammad al-Kalbī→Abū Sāliḥ→Ibn

¹²⁸ al-Ya‘qūbī, Ta’rikh (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), i. 5–80.
¹³⁰ Providing the rationale for his narrative arrangement, al-Ya‘qūbī says: ‘We delayed our discussion of the history of Ismā‘il and his children and concluded with them the history of nations because God Almighty sealed prophethood and kingship with them and also because their history is contiguous to the narration of the Messenger of God and the caliphs.’ Ta’rikh, i. 221.
¹³¹ al-Maṣ‘ūdī, Murūj, i. 75–83.
'Abbās. Such is the case with Adam,135 Kenan,136 Noah,137 Khidr,138 and Moses.139

Al-Ṭabari’s presentation of biblical stories provides a different angle, showing a gradual incorporation of biblical sources into Islamic presentations of prophetic history as well as the strategies applied in narrative arrangements. The use of isnāds not only provokes questions of authenticity, they also testify to this gradual process. Al-Ṭabari’s treatment of the prophets’ life-spans represents, as in the case of al-Muḥabbar, another strategy for the chronological arrangement of prophetic narratives. These comparisons between Ibn Ḥabib’s third report of prophetic narratives and those of other scholars, therefore, testify to the important position that the Muḥabbar occupies in the transition from Arab-local needs to universal historical settings.

Pre-Islamic eras

Ibn Ḥabib’s presentation of important events in pre-Islamic history, which marked the beginnings of a new era, are further examples of chronological arrangement. He particularly refers to three distinctive events in the jahili period: the Year of Dispersal (‘ām al-tafarruq),140 the Year of Perfidy (‘ām al-ghadr), and the Year of the Elephant (‘ām al-fil). Again, Ibn Ḥabib makes Muhammad’s prophethood the basis from which these events can be chronologically measured, and the thematic link to the Muḥabbar’s previous sections.

1. The Year of Dispersal

Referring to his sources, Ibn Ḥabib writes, ‘Some people whom I encountered related to me that the era of the Arabs (Ta’rikh al-arab) from which they began to reckon is the Year of Dispersal.’141 At the centre of his presentation is the departure of Maʿadd b. ʿAdnān from Makkah to Syria, escaping Nebuchadnezzar’s punitive invasion of Arabia. Ibn Ḥabib’s narrative arrangement is based on the thematic combination of Jewish materials, Qur’ānic narratives, and pre-Islamic Arab genealogies aiming to create interconnected historical contexts. Ibn Ḥabib first

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136 Ibid, 164 (ed. De Goeje, i. 185).
141 Ibn Ḥabib, Muḥabbar, 5.
links his narration to Jewish prophetic history. He begins his presentation explaining that God inspired Berechiah, son of Hananiah\textsuperscript{142} (Ibrākhīā b. Ahniyā), who was a prophet from the tribe of Judah, to instigate Nebuchadnezzar to carry out a punitive campaign against the Arabs for killing their prophet. Nebuchadnezzar's campaign ended up, adds Ibn Habib, in Yemen in a place called Ḥudūr, where three of Ismā'il's sons lived. Ibn Habib then situates his narration within the Qur'ānic framework by associating the people of Ḥudūr with that of the Rass (ašāb al-rass) and citing verses from Surat al-Anbiyā'.\textsuperscript{143} He then mentions that the prophet that the people of Ḥudūr killed was Hanzala b. Safwān, whose identification in Islamic sources is debatable.\textsuperscript{144}

Ibn Habib's second synchronization of the 'ām al-tafarruq with Jewish history is linked with the Jewish prophet, Jeremiah, son of Hilkia (Irmiyā b. Ḥalqīa).\textsuperscript{145} He claims that God inspired him to rescue Ma'add b. 'Adnān from Nebuchadnezzar, adding that one of Ma'add's descendants is destined to be a prophet at the end of time. Jeremiah then took Ma'add out of Makka to Syria and returned with him back to Makka once Nebuchadnezzar had left Arabia. By applying this narrative arrangement, Ibn Habib aims primarily to establish historical associations between Jewish history and Muhammad's Arab and prophetic genealogical origins. His organization of the 'ām al-tafarruq narrative, therefore, is distinctive. He even seems to be one of the earliest Muslim scholars to portray this event as marking the beginning of an era. To evaluate the extent to which his portrayal of this event is unique, we can compare it with other Islamic sources.

As the son of the eponym of northern Arabs ('Adnān), Ma'add, figures prominently in early Islamic genealogical and historical writings as part of the discussions of the Prophet's lineage and the Arabs' origin.\textsuperscript{146} Muslim scholars refer to a ḥadīth in which the Prophet prohibits tracing

\textsuperscript{142} It seems likely that Ibn Habib is referring here to the Berechiah who appears in 1 Chronicles 3: 17–20.

\textsuperscript{143} Qur'ān 21: 12–15.

\textsuperscript{144} al-Maṣūdi, Murūj, i. 72; ii. 168. Most Islamic works, particularly tafsīr, remain silent when it comes to the identity of the prophet sent to the people of the Rass. Al-Qurtubi was among the few scholars to associate this prophet with Hanzala. See 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (ed.), al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 2007), xi. 242.

\textsuperscript{145} According to 2 Kings 22: 8, Jeremiah, son of the High Priest, Hilkiah, was a Jewish priest during the kingship of Josiah in Judah.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibn Hishām, Sīra, i. 11–15, 25; Ibn al-Kalbī, Jamhārat, i. 18–19; al-Baladhurī, Ansāb, i. 18–26; Ibn Hazm, Jamhārat ansāb al-'arab (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn; Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1962), 8–9; Webb, Imagining the Arabs, 88–94.
his lineage beyond a certain ancestor, but there are disagreements whether he meant Ma‘add or `Adnān. This might be the reason that motivated Ibn Durayd (d. 933) to claim that once Arab genealogies moved beyond `Adnān and Qaḥṭān, they were dependent on information derived from the ‘People of the Book (ahl al-kitāb)’. The presentation of Ma‘add as the remotest ancestor, which is first preserved in al-Kalbi’s Jamhara, enjoys more circulation among Muslim scholars, particularly historians. Al-Kalbi’s account begins with referring to the ḥadith that prohibits tracing the Prophet’s ancestry beyond Ma‘add. More importantly, he transmits this ħadith through the isnād of Hishām al-Kalbi → Muhammad al-Kalbi → Abū Sālih → Ibn ‘Abbās. Yet, Ibn al-Kalbi’s portrayal is limited to Arab genealogies without making associations with Jewish history.

Al-Kalbi’s treatment of the Ma‘add’s story appears in Ibn Sa‘d’s Ṭabaqāt under his treatment of the Prophet’s lineage. Ibn Sa‘d’s presentation, however, provides more details that obliquely synchronize Ma‘add’s time with Jewish history. He relates on the authority of Hishām al-Kalbi that Ma‘add’s genealogy is mentioned in a book written by Baruch, son of Neria (Burukh b. Ṣarīyya), Jeremiah’s scribe (kātib ḳirmiya). Ibn Sa‘d also alludes briefly to the story that Ma‘add was with Nebuchadnezzar when the latter invaded Yemen. However, unlike Ibn Habīb’s account, nothing is mentioned in Ibn Sa‘d’s report about ʾām al-tafarruq or the placement of Ma‘add’s story within Jewish history.

References to both the presentation of Ma‘add and Jewish history (particularly Jeremiah) appear in some early Islamic universal histories, but the connection between these accounts is absent. Al-Ṭabarī’s Taʾrikh is the first place where one encounters a narrative arrangement reminiscent of Ibn Habīb’s account. He first relates that he bases this report on scholars other than Hishām al-Kalbi, who were knowledgeable in the akhbār of the old nations, but without specifying the identity

147 al-Kalbi, Jamharat, 17; Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabaqāt, i. 46–7; al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrikh, i. 271 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1112); al-Maṣʿūdī, Tanbih, 228.
150 al-Kalbi, Jamharat, i. 17.
151 Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabaqāt, i. 46–7; al-Maṣʿūdī, Murūj, iii. 6.
152 Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabaqāt, i. 49.
153 Ibn Qutayba, Maʿārif, 63–4, 47–8; al-Yaʿqūbī, Taʾrikh, i. 65, 223.
of these other scholars.\footnote{154} Al-Ṭabarī’s account, as in the case of Ibn Ḥabīb, is structured around the interconnection between the Maʿād story, Nebuchadnezzar’s punitive invasion of Arabia, and Jewish history. Unlike Ibn Ḥabīb, he presents both Berechiah and Jeremiah\footnote{155} as joining hands to rescue Maʿād. Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī neither defines this event as ‘ām al-tafarruq nor considers it as an era in pre-Islamic history.

A clear consideration of ‘ām al-tafarruq as an era is found in al-Maṣūdī’s Tanbih, yet his narrative organization is different from that of Ibn Ḥabīb. Al-Maṣūdī’s does not associate this event with Maʿād; rather he depicts it as part of the diffusion of the children of Nizār b. Maʿād. He also does not synchronize this account with Jewish history.\footnote{156} These comparisons between Ibn Ḥabīb’s account of ‘ām al-tafarruq and those of previous Muslim historians, therefore, demonstrate that his presentation is exceptional. His narrative chronological arrangement and its placement within a broader historical context and biblical origins emphasize this distinction.

2 The Year of Perfidy

The era of the Year of Perfidy is associated, according to Ibn Ḥabīb, with the story of two brothers from the tribe of Tamīm, Aws and Ḥaṣāba, who journeyed to perform the pilgrimage. Arriving in Makka, they encountered near the idols, placed in the Precinct, a king carrying the Kaʿba covering. Aws and Ḥaṣāba killed the king and took the covering. When the other tribes learned about this murder, they betrayed the Tamīm by fighting them during the forbidden months. Ibn Ḥabīb’s presentation of this event and particularly its designation as an era is unique.\footnote{157} No mention of these events is found in previous sources or in early Islamic universal histories. Al-Maṣūdī seems to have been the first universal historian to refer to the ‘ām al-ghadr as part of his discussion of pre-Islamic eras. It seems that al-Maṣūdī is influenced here by Ibn Ḥabīb, because he mentions seven pre-Islamic eras some of which he transmits on Ibn Ḥabīb’s authority.\footnote{158} Indeed, the Year of Perfidy is limited to local Arab domain, but it functions as one of the important events, along with the Year of the Elephant, by which Ibn Ḥabīb chronologically situates Muḥammad’s prophethood.

\footnote{154} al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrikh, i. 559–60 (ed. De Goeje, i. 673–5).
\footnote{155} al-Ṭabarī offers a report on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih in which Wahb identifies Jeremiah with al-Khīdr. See Taʾrikh, i. 366 (ed. De Goeje, i. 415).
\footnote{156} al-Maṣūdī, Tanbih, 189.
\footnote{157} Lichtenstädter, ‘Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb’, 15–16.
\footnote{158} al-Maṣūdī, Tanbih, 189.
3 The Year of the Elephant

Early Islamic sources are abundant with references to the Year of the Elephant, in which the king of Ethiopia attempted to destroy the Ka’ba. No doubt, the association of this event with the year in which the Prophet was born turned this era into an important chronological signifier in early Islamic historical writings. Ibn Ḥabīb’s narrative arrangement of the Year of the Elephant has certain distinctive features. Other Muslim scholars apply the Prophet’s birth as the chronological axis through which the Year of the Elephant and other related events intersect. Such is the case with al-Balādhurī, Ibn Qutayba, al-Ya’qūbī, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Masūdī. Unlike these historians, Ibn Ḥabīb uses the beginning of Muhammad’s prophetic message as the chronological axis. For example, he relates that forty years separate the Year of the Elephant and the beginning of Muhammad’s prophethood, and one hundred and fifty years are between the Year of Perfidy and the year he was entrusted with prophethood. Ibn Ḥabīb also synchronizes the beginning of Muhammad’s prophethood with the rulership of Persia, Hira, and Yemen. For example, he relates that the year in which Muhammad was entrusted with prophethood coincides with the twentieth or the sixteenth year of the reign of Khusrau II Abarwiz (r. 590/1–628), when Bādhām Abū Mihrān served as the governor of Yemen. Ibn Ḥabīb’s narrative organization of the era of the Year of the Elephant points to his intention to link it with his previous presentations of prophetic history that revolve chronologically around Muhammad’s prophethood.

CONCLUSION

Ibn Ḥabīb’s Kitāb al-Muḥabbār represents, as this paper illustrates, a significant phase in the evolution of early Islamic historical thought in general and gives insights into the emergence of universal historical writing in particular. This assessment is exemplified in the author’s narrative organizations to reconfigure the chronology of prophetic and genealogical materials so as to create broader thematic interconnections.

159 Ibn Hishām, Sīra, i. 183; Ibn Saʿd, Ṭabaqāt, i. 80; Ibn Qutayba, Maʿārif, 150; al-Balādhurī, Ansāb, i. 75–7; al-Yaʿqūbī, Taʾrikh, ii. 9; al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrikh, i. 154 (ed. De Goeje, i. 966).
160 al-Balādhurī, Ansāb, i. 100; Ibn Qutayba, Maʿārif, 150; al-Yaʿqūbī, Taʾrikh, ii. 9; al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrikh, i. 154 (ed. De Goeje, i. 966); al-Masūdī, Tanbih, 228.
161 A similar chronological arrangement for Muḥammad’s prophethood is provided by al-Masʿūdī, Murūj, ii. 229.
and universal historical contexts. Chronological narrative arrangements related to the successiveness and finality of Muhammad’s prophethood constitute, therefore, the beginning of Islamic universal historical writings.

Ibn Ḥabīb’s chronological construction of prophetic history and the application of certain organizational strategies aim to create thematic and sequential interconnections between Islamic narratives and biblical-Jewish histories. Muhammad’s prophetic mission (*nubuwwa*) serves as the main thematic and chronological axis around which Ibn Ḥabīb’s arrangements of prophetic history revolve. An analysis of these narrative arrangements demonstrates shifts in early Islamic historical presentations from local Arab-Islamic needs to broader universal settings. This process seems to have begun with endeavours to place Arab-Islamic themes (such as pre-Islamic Arab genealogy and history) within a larger prophetic historical context. To that end, Muslim scholars began to search for new sources to supplement insufficient information about previous prophets. Biblical-Jewish materials were the first to be consulted and integrated into the new Islamic narrative organizations.

The analysis of the arrangements of prophetic history in the *Muhābbar* also demonstrates that the process of Islamic incorporation of biblical sources was gradual; and reflected different stages in the evolution of the early Arab-Islamic community’s religious identity and historical consciousness. Two major motives prompted the incorporation of biblical sources into early Islamic presentations of prophetic history: religious-prophetic and Arab-genealogical. Arab genealogies as preserved in the works of the Kalbīs were critical in the shift in early Islamic prophetic narratives from local Arab-Islamic themes to universal settings and biblical origins. Muhammad’s prophethood and his lineage function in these presentations as a connecting link between the religious-prophetic and Arab-genealogical facets. These chronological narrative organizations, strategies, and sources that feature in the *Muhābbar* paved the way for the emergence of early Islamic universal histories during the ninth and the tenth centuries.