

**QUR'ĀNIC REFERENCES TO PROPHET MUḤAMMAD'S EARLY LIFE:
AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WORKS OF THE THIRD/NINTH CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses Qur'ānic references purported to be allusions to the Prophet Muḥammad's early life. Observations of the use of Qur'ānic references in the early *sīra* sources substantiate the fact that each of the authors of *sīra* employed greatly differing numbers of Qur'ānic references. In fact, the use of Qur'ānic references within the work of *sīra* is occasionally obscure or even, at times, inconsistent. Therefore, the present study seeks firstly to investigate the earliest Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life recorded in Muslim sources of the ninth century, and further, to explore the ninth century context and early Muslim hermeneutical responses to and understanding of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life. Finally, the thesis will analyse for what specific reasons these references were developed, and their various socio-religious contexts. The study is qualitative in nature, and is one in which the researcher will employ both descriptive and source-critical approaches. Its analysis will seek to argue for and confirm the rarity of Qur'ānic references to the Prophet's early life in the works of ninth century Islamic literature. The study in its findings will argue that the use of Qur'ānic references in constructing the Prophet's biography is the result of several factors. These include the substantiation of miraculous elements in the narratives, the elucidation of lexical ambiguity in the texts and the 'Qur'ānisation' of stories and traditions about the Prophet's life. It will recommend and extended other areas of future study and analysis of early Islamic literature, in order to explore more deeply the nature of the connection between the Qur'ān and the narratives of the Prophet's life.

DEDICATION

To my parents,

Haji Azmi Abdul Manap and Hajah Rokiah Abdul Wahid

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading the major works of *sīra*, one might, within a very short time, come to realise that the use of Qur'ānic references within the work of *sīra* is occasionally obscure or even, at times, inconsistent. Moreover, the frequency of references taken directly from the Qur'ān itself fluctuates considerably. Observations on the use of Qur'ānic references in the early *sīra* sources substantiate the fact that each of the authors of the *sīra* employed greatly differing numbers of Qur'ānic references between the first chapter of their works to the topic of the revelation of *wahy*. Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828), for example, employs only fourteen Qur'ānic references between these topics,¹ while Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) utilised a larger number from his contemporary, with twenty-one references from the Qur'ān.² A more confusing situation, however, occurs when the later authors of the *sīra* produced a new and greater number of Qur'ānic references in their work that had never been quoted in the works of their predecessors. Al-Šālihī (d. 945/1535) for example used more than thirty Qur'ānic references as an explicit allusion to the Prophet in his descriptions of the Prophet's and his early life.³ It appears as the

¹ This observation on Qur'ānic references between the first chapter of his works to the topic of the revelation of *wahy* on the *Sira* of Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra, al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqā, (Maṭba'a al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduh, 1955), pp.1-239.

² Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. 'Umar 'Alī Muḥammad, (al-Qāhira: Maktaba al-Khanjī, n.d), pp.1-166. Observation is conducted on Qur'ānic references between the first chapter of his works to the topic of the revelation of *wahy*.

³ The number is actually bigger than this. This amount is selected from the explicit Qur'ānic references to the Prophet from al-Šālihī first chapter of the book to the part of the revelation of *wahy*. See, al-Šālihī, Muhammad ibn Yusuf, *Subul al-Hudā wa al-Rashād fī Sīra Khayr al-'Ibād*, (Lubnan, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya), p.1/89-2/120.

thought and interpretation of Qur'ānic verses perceived as related to the Prophet's life grew larger with the passing of time.

What becomes apparent through the reading of *sīra* literature is not so much an awareness of a developing account of the Prophet, but the inception of a Qur'ānic biography that reflects the concerns of the Muslim world of the ninth and tenth centuries. Analysing the number of verses used by early *sīra* authors, including Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, and Ibn Sa'd, one notices the obvious differences between the usage of, and number of verses employed by, different biographical authors, which sparks a stimulating question in the researcher's mind: how and why did details of biographical information about the Prophet's early life become progressively linked with the Qu'rān?

Successive research has led us to accept that it is not an easy task to comprehend and focus upon the appearance of Muḥammad through the lens of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān appears as not a book of biography, hagiography or history. Welch concludes: "It contains no historical narrative or description, and it does not have as its purpose the recording of history or biography."⁴ The complex nature of its narrative puzzles one who ventures to grasp its message.⁵ The intricate grammatical usages urge the reader to apply critical analysis to understand the meaning of its text; and the issue of shifting and fluctuating pronunciations in various verses often mires the researcher in perplexity. For instance, Rippin found that, "There are occasions in the Qur'ān in which

⁴ A.T. Welch, 'Muhammad's Understanding Of Himself: The Koranic Data', in R.G Hovannissian and S.Vryonis, Jr. (eds), *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, (Malibu, 1983), p.15.

⁵ Roberto Totolli, *Biblical Prophet in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.1-13.

we might have thought that the singular would have been more appropriate if Muḥammad were to be seen as the addressee of the text but yet the plural is used; this also happens the other way around.”⁶

In fact, the same problems confront Muslim scholars as they try to discern the real meaning of the Qur’ān, when its frequently opaque and ambiguous wording and lexical structures have led to various interpretations through the centuries. However, some scholars are optimistic about reconstructing the Prophet’s biography, based on various extant materials survived in our hand. Faith is the one factor which has facilitated and unravelled the intricate labyrinth which comprises the biography of the Prophet. Faith enables Muslims to understand the core message in scripture. In line with their beliefs, Muslim scholars have developed a clear historical life of Muḥammad based on the verses embedded in the Qur’ān and the Prophetic traditions. Even though this method has been criticised in academic circles for interpreting sources uncritically, Muslims have put their confidence in the system of *isnād*,⁷ by which the chain of authority instituting the biography of Muḥammad has been well developed and a timeline of his life, has become established within Islam.

It is beyond question that Sunni Muslims believe that the most authoritative material providing significant information about the Prophet’s life is the Qur’ān, God’s word to Muḥammad. However, taking the Qur’ān as a historical source is a stance that has been disputed by numerous scholars on many different grounds. The most crucial argument concerns the reliability of the text, since the earliest manuscript of the Qur’ān does not

⁶ Andrew Rippin, ‘Muḥammad in The Qur’ān: Reading Scripture in The 21st Century’, in H. Motzki (ed.), *The Biography Of Muḥammad: The Issue Of The Sources*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p.300.

⁷ Tracing the chain of authorities who have transmitted a report (ḥadīth) of a statement, action, or approbation of Muḥammad, one of his Companions (*saḥāba*), or of a later authority (*tabī*); the reliability of the chain of authorities determines the validity of a ḥadīth.

date back to Muḥammad's lifetime, nor was the Qur'ān designed to record a biography or history of a particular person or event.⁸ While maintaining the need for rigorous scrutiny, some scholars have accepted that the Qur'ān has a potential for actually establishing basic information about the Prophet of Islam. On the basis of the principle 'by their fruits you will know them', William Montgomery Watt has deduced an outline of Muḥammad's history, based on the data found within the Qur'ān itself.⁹ Alfred T. Welch has delineated Muḥammad's characteristics thematically, basing his description exclusively on the verses of the Qur'ān,¹⁰ while many others have regarded the Qur'ān as an authoritative source for reconstructing the historical Muḥammad.

According to traditional Islamic scholarship, Muḥammad was, in an absolute sense, a vessel that conveyed the word of God to humankind. His appearance in the Qur'ān indicates the close relationship between Muḥammad and God. Traditional Muslim belief is that the Qur'ān was revealed to Muḥammad, who took on the role of a Messenger of God and some verses even clearly include his name. References to Muḥammad in the scripture were evidently noted: his name occurs four times, or five times, if one includes the name of Ahmad, although none of these verses is addressed to him directly. On the basis of believing in the informative nature of this divine book, Muslim scholars have designed biographies of the Prophet formulated solely on the verses preserved between the covers of the Qur'ān.

⁸ Furthermore, if we accept John Wansbrough and Yehuda D. Nevo's thesis, the Qur'ān is a syncretistic text composed from separate collections of texts which had already achieved religious status in the diverse communities from which they originated, and at different times, the Qur'ān would never have been able to transfer any knowledge related to Muḥammad since, according to them, neither the Qur'ān nor Islam originated from Muḥammad himself: they were not even the product of Arabia. See, Wansbrough, John, *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, (New York, Prometheus Books, 2004), and Nevo, Yehuda D and Koren, Judith, *Crossroad to Islam*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003).

⁹ William Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad's Mecca History in the Qur'ān*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p.1.

¹⁰ A.T. Welch, 'Muḥammad's Understanding Of Himself: The Koranic Data,' pp.15-52.

Muḥammad ‘Izzat Darwaza, for instance, composed three volumes of *Sīra al-Rasul* based on the description illustrated in the Qur’ān. Explaining his methods of writing in the preface of the book, ‘Abdullah Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ansārī,¹¹ said: “And because of the Qur’ān was revealed with the words uttered by The Creator, it is the best means to exemplify the character of the Prophet.”¹² Dr ‘Abd al-Sabūr Marzūq, the author of *al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya in the Qur’ān*, recognizes that even though the *sīra* has cast an illuminating historical perspective upon the life of the Prophet, it was not as revealing as the information about the Prophet’s life which is presented in the Book of Allah. He points out ten important facts which explain the uniqueness of the Qur’ān’s expression in advancing the narrative of God’s messenger.¹³

Notwithstanding the above reading, Rippin argues the validity of scripture with reference to Muḥammad. Analysing the word ‘thee’ in chapter 93, he argues “there is nothing absolutely compelling about interpreting this chapter in the light of the life or lifetime of Muḥammad. According to him, the “thee” of this passage does not have to be Muḥammad at all. It certainly *could* be but it does not *have* to be.”¹⁴ Moreover, the complex nature of the pronoun in the Qur’ān puzzles one who aims to recognise the addressee in a verse. Even though the verse was believed to be revealed to Muḥammad, a verse that comes with second-person singular pronoun does not necessarily refer specifically to him. Neal Robinson, for instance, discovers that “at least four passages, which are neither quoted discourse nor prayers, in which the second person singular is

¹¹ He is the Director of Religious Affairs of Qatar and the patron of conference on *al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya* where the book was published in conjunction with the seminar.

¹² Darwaza, Muḥammad ‘Izzat, *Sīra al-Rasūl Suwar Muqtabasa Min al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, (Bayrūt: Manshūrat al-Maktaba al-‘Asriyya), pp.3-6.

¹³ Marzūq, Abd al-Sabūr, *al-Sīra al-Nabawīyyah fī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, (Miṣr: al-Hai’a al-Miṣrīyyah al-‘ammah Li al-Kitāb, 1998), pp.15-40.

¹⁴ A. Rippin, ‘Muḥammad in The Qur’ān: Reading Scripture in The 21st Century’, in H. Motzki (ed), *The Biography Of Muḥammad: The Issue Of The Sources*, (Brill, 2000), p. 299.

employed for an addressee other than Muḥammad.”¹⁵ Such arguments encourage the researcher to investigate in more depth on what basis Muslims believe that a particular verse is referring to Muḥammad and, moreover, how this understanding is founded, especially in verses that are believed by Muslims to be an allusion to Muḥammad’s early life.

Given the fact that the Qur’ān is not an easy text to understand, on account of the relatively complex nature of its text, the researcher approaches the conundrum not only of why, but of how, in fact, these verses had been selected and included by the early biographers of the Prophet. Analysing and assessing once again the gradual development of connection between the Qur’ān and the *sīra*, the researcher ponders about whether or why there exists a number of different versions of the Qur’ān employed by the *sīra* authors. Why does each individual author have a different understanding of particular verses? How and why does the number of Qur’ānic references in the *sīra* sources progressively increase? How do the authors understand the verses as having relation to the Prophet’s early life? Why does only a small number of them select only certain verses, while others select different references from the Qur’ān? Do they share a similar understanding with the *mufasssirūn*, the scholars perceived as experts in Qur’ānic lexical and semantic analysis? All these questions are raised in the researcher’s mind, and must be addressed.

It seems that a productive way forward might be to analyse the development of thought about the Qur’ānic verses that authors have claimed to be references to the Prophet’s early life. Therefore, the focus needs to turn to the early formative period of the

¹⁵ Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, (London: SCM Press, 2003), pp.240-255.

Prophet's biography, not so much to examine what those years reveal about the man himself, but rather to provide us with a view of the way in which ideas about the Prophet developed in a hagiographical tradition.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Reviews of early Muslim sources confirm that some verses of the Qur'ān have been perceived by Muslim scholars as direct references to the narratives of the Prophet's early life. These selected verses are deemed to contain information about Muḥammad's genealogy, birth, childhood and other aspects of his youth. As referred to above, some scholars have, however, argued about the appropriateness and authority of these Qur'ānic references as being the true bearers of information of the Prophet's biography. These references are problematic from a number of different points of view. Firstly, the Qur'ānic references that are perceived as allusions to the Prophet's life are employed only by certain scholars. For example, the use of 94:1 as reference to the event of the Prophet's breast is only found in al-Timirdhī's *Sunan* of the ninth century, while Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa'd, scholars of the same century, did not employ the verse directly, while, nevertheless, elaborating upon the occasion in their writing. It appears as if they were not aware, or they did not perceive, the verse as direct reference to the event. It seems likely that these particular forms of Qur'ānic references to the Prophet's life were not widely accepted at the time. There is a further consideration that the thought regarding the verse evolved in later period, which implies that the genesis of the thought is disputable.

Secondly, the statistical frequency of Qur'ānic references in the works of *sīra* is constantly fluctuating and inconsistent. This implies differing degrees of understanding

of certain Qur'ānic verses between one scholar and another. As mentioned in the introduction, the quantity of verses used by Ibn Hishām differs from Ibn Sa'd's. In fact, Ibn Sa'd, in his discourse about the Prophet's genealogy, utilised a different verse to illustrate the topic that has been discussed by Ibn Hishām. Furthermore, some verses that are used as references to Muḥammad seem not to have had a literal connection with the story of the Prophet's life. Finally, the authenticity of ḥadīths or traditions that connect particular verses with incidents in the Prophet's life are disputed. The selected verses may also seem to vary considerably or display ambiguities in the nature of their interpretation: on the one hand, certain verses could be understood as conveying the narrative of the Prophet's early life; but equally, it might also be deemed otherwise.

Obviously, there is a different statistical usage of Qur'ānic verses and a divergence of thought among scholars, regarding Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's life, it is necessary therefore, to explore, the genesis of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad as perceived by early Muslims, in order to analyse the probable reasons and contexts that lead to the emergence of a perceived connection between the Qur'ān and the narrative of Prophet Muḥammad's life. Since the ninth century appeared as the formative period of the development of biographical literature of the Prophet, this study aims to scrutinise forms of literature of the ninth century that contain biographical information about the Prophet's early life.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

Due to the argument levelled over the disputed verses that may be perceived as references to the Prophet's early life, this study aims to provide answers to the questions below, in order to gain a clearer picture of the connection between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's early years.

1. What precisely are the Qur'ānic verses that are employed by Muslim scholars of the ninth century as references to the Prophet's early life?
2. When was the first Qur'ānic reference initiated by Muslim scholars as reference to the Prophet's early life and who initiated the reference?
3. How do Muslim scholars of the ninth century view the verses?
4. Why do Muslim scholars of the ninth century believe that these selected Qur'ānic verses are references to Muḥammad's early life? What are the reasons that lead scholars to make a connection between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's early life during the early years of Islam up to the year 900?

1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

It is an interesting fact that, even with the infrequency of its references, this condition cause no hinder to a Muslim. A complete biography of the Prophet's life was produced completely equipped with its references from the Qur'ān in the ninth century. Remarkably, the number of Qur'ānic verses, employed by Muslim scholars expanded in the later period. What is more perplexing is when we found that the modern Muslim scholars can rely solely on the Qur'ān to sketch a complete biography of the beloved Prophet. It seems that by relying exclusively on the Qur'ān, a Muslim can draw a full

account of the Prophet's early life. The flowering of Qur'ānic references that emerged in a later period stimulate researcher to investigate the reason of why these Qur'ānic references appear late, as it is a novel discovery that is missed by Ibn Ishāq. This is where the significance of the study lies, since it seeks to explore further information about the Prophet's early life, especially the Qur'ānic references that have been perceived as sources of evidence of Muḥammad's early life. The present study aims to investigate the nature of Qur'ānic references that are used by Muslim authors from the ninth century as allusions to the Prophet's early life, and examine the possible factors that influence the establishment of these references.

By examining each of the verses that have been employed by the authors of *sīra* in turn, one becomes aware of the different understandings between individual scholars. In fact, it becomes possible to trace, by examining individual texts, the development of understanding about the nature of connection between the Qu'rān and the life of the prophet, through the ninth and early tenth centuries. The picture that evolves is less a biography of the Prophet, but more the revelation of a hagiographic tradition, in which verses from the Qur'ān, to a lesser or greater degree, are employed to give authority to the hagiographic tradition.

Secondly, a literal reading of the Qur'ān apparently is hard to produce any clear biographical information since there is no clear reference to Muḥammad's early days in these verses.¹⁶ Only by applying an interpretative method Muslim scholars are able to identify which verses are related to his life. Most of the references singled out by Muslim scholars are embedded in the Qur'ān in an indirect form. On the surface, the verse literally does not seem to be related to Muḥammad; but with the interpretative tools, the verse turns out to be one of the references in constructing the Prophet's

¹⁶ This will be discussed in details in Chapter Two.

biography. Therefore, Muslim scholars' understanding of these kinds of references fires an interest to execute an investigation of how and why the idea was established. To discover the real meaning of the Qur'ān's references to Muḥammad is relatively difficult; but analysing the works of early Muslims would at least enable the development of Muslim viewpoint with regard to the verses, and cast a light on how the idea was initially established. A socio-religious reading seems ideal to be applied here in order to explore how the notion was evolved and fashioned. A question such as, "Who initiated the reference; for whom it was intended; for what reason it was developed, and in what setting?" shall be rigorously imposed in the course of scrutinising the data.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the verses that have been employed by the scholars of the ninth century as references to the Prophet's early life.
2. To investigate the earliest Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life recorded in Muslim sources of the ninth century.
3. To explore the ninth century context and early Muslim hermeneutical response to and understanding of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life.
4. To analyse for what reasons these references were developed, and its socio-religious context.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Indeed, it is an arduous task to sift through each page of the enormous body of Islamic literature to explore the use of Qur'ānic verses as references to Muḥammad's early life. It would seem more sensible, therefore, for us at this point to set a limit to the parameters of the literature that require to be examined.

Donner summarised that there is no record of the complete compilation of *sīra* dedicated to Muḥammad before the end of the first century.¹⁷ A number of biographical records attributed to figures earlier than the ninth century such as 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 93/712 or 94/713), Sa'īd b. al Musayyab (d. 94/713), and Abān b. 'Uthmān (d. around 95/714 or 105/723). Their narrations were recorded in collections of later compiler. For example, one might find the collections of Muḥammad's biographical information that preserved in Muṣannaf of 'Abd al-Razzāq and Muṣannaf of Ibn Abī Shayba attributed to the Successor generation, the earliest generation that probably transmitted the memoir of the Prophet's life.

This information are however, scattered in several sources. It is quite difficult to determine the earliest specific works (known as *sīra*) gathering solely biographical information about Muḥammad. As summarised by Goerke, there are number of opinions arguing about who was the first author of the *Sīra*.¹⁸ Mursī al-Ṭāhir claimed that 'Urwa's work was the first *sīra* in Islam while Schoeler regarded him as one of the first and the most important sources of the *sīra*.¹⁹ Others might have considered that Ibn Ishāq's work as the earliest complete biography of the Prophet.

¹⁷ Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, (Princeton, The Darwin Press, 1998), p.147.

¹⁸ Andreas Goerke, "Authorship in the *Sira* Literature", in: Lale Behzadi, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (eds), *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts*, (Bamber: University of Bamberg Press, 2015), p.63.

¹⁹ Gregor Schoeler, *Biography of Muhammad Nature and Authenticity*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.20.

Exploring 'Urwa's historical works, one of the earliest sources on Muḥammad's life, al-Duri identifies eighteen topics covered by 'Urwa regarding the Prophet's biographical information.²⁰ These narratives transmitted by 'Urwa were seemingly encompass the life of the Prophet after his first call. Al-Duri organised the discussion about Urwa's narratives beginning with the topic of Muḥammad's call (*bi'tha*). Apparently, there is no narration about the Prophet's early life, the researcher therefore decided to look to the other sources that used Qu'rānic verses as references to Muḥammad's early life.

Using Maktaba al-Shamila v3.52 as an analysing instrument, the researcher have also endeavour to run a preliminary analysis on the works produced within eight century. Works including Ṣahīfa of Hammām, Jāmi' of Ma'mar ibn Rāshid, Muwaṭṭā' of Mālik, al-Zuhd and Musnad of Ibn Mubārak, Muṣannaf of 'Abd al-Razzāq, Musannaf of Ibn Abī Shayba and few other works, were selected to be the subject of scrutiny. In this analysis, the researcher aims to find any Qu'rānic reference that have been used by the authors to make a connection with the Prophet's early life specifically his genealogy, his birth, childhood and early sign of prophethood. As far as the researcher able to explore, it is hard to find Qu'rānic reference employed in the narrative of the Prophet's early life. Given the previous result, it might be more rewarding to examine the work of ninth century since the sources of eight century are hardly to yield positive result.

Based on our preliminary reading, Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life started to emerge and become evident at the outset of the third/ninth century. Although Ibn Ishāq (based on Ibn Hisham's transmission) has already adduced verses of the Qur'ān as his references in constructing the Prophet's biography, the number of the

²⁰ 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, ed. and trans. by Lawrence I. Conrad, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp.79-88.

verses employed as allusions to the Prophet's early life are not as many as may be identified in the later third/ninth century. Scholars after him adduced still more Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life. The emergence and development of these extra references stimulates our enquiring mind to investigate what makes the authors of this century to adduce Qur'ānic references that are not adduced by their master of *sīra*, Ibn Ishāq? Since this is the earliest formative phase that can be found concerning the use of Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life, the present study will focus on this early phase, the third/ninth century, as its major scope of analysis.

Besides this, the present study will also focus on four major kinds of literature that have been regarded as principal sources in constructing the biography of the Prophet. They are the books of *sīra*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il*. The researcher will select a number of books from each body of literature as representative of each one, in order to analyse closely the Qur'ānic references as presented in these sources.

1.7 THESIS ORGANISATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study deals solely with texts. In order to attain the objectives of the research, textual analysis will be employed as a major tool in examining and exploring the sources. Donner outlines four major approaches that have been employed by modern scholars when dealing with raw materials of Islamic literary and narratives sources, which may be summarized as a descriptive approach, a source-critical approach, a tradition-critical approach and a sceptical approach.²¹ The present study

²¹ Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins, the Beginning of Islamic Historical Writings*, (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1998), pp.5-31.

will employ these approaches selectively and appropriately: that is, the critical approach taken will be chosen to suit the specific nature and context of the text.

The first chapter is an introductory section which will set out and establish the background of the study by identifying and focusing upon the problem that the researcher intends to explore. The rationale of the study will be explained. It will also outline the objectives of the research and define the salient questions of the study that need to be addressed, disentangled and, it is hoped to be resolved. The methodology of the study is also discussed in this chapter, in order to explain the researcher's approach in handling and organising the breadth of the study. It is also important to note that when Ibn Ishāq's work is mentioned in this study, most of its source is taken from the transmission of Ibn Hishām. Unless there are quoted from other sources, the researcher will clarify its source.

The second chapter of this study will employ a descriptive and critical approach where the chapter will highlight and analyse the problematic and disputed Qur'ānic verses adduced by the early Muslim authors as a specific reference to Muḥammad's early life. All the verses that appear in the *sīra* as an allusion to the Prophet's early life will then be compared with the work of *tafsīr* of the same century, in order to demonstrate the subtle nuances and differences between the understandings and emphases of these scholars. Discussion will be organised thematically, beginning with the Prophet's genealogy, his birth, childhood and early signs of his prophethood.

In this chapter, the researcher will also consult the narrations of earliest *tafsīr* available in our hand such as the narrations attributed to Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d.103/722), al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d.105/723), al-Suddī (d.128/745) and Ibn Jurayj (d.149/766). Although the reliability of these kinds of *tafsīr* has been a centre of disputation among scholars, the

inclusion of these kinds of works would probably provide an insight for the connection of the early tafsīr and the narrative of the Prophet's early life. On the criticism of the reliability of early tafsīr, Leemhuis addressed one important question: "are the claims of the authors of the late second and the third Islamic centuries, that they merely pass on the material of older authorities, historically correct?"²² There are two contradicting opinion on this. The first camp championing the notion that early tafsīr has its origin that can be traced back to the second century of Islam, in which they believed that exegetical traditions ascribed to the group of scholars from this century deemed as authentic. Fuat Sezgin, Nabia Abbott, Harris Birkeland, Isaiah Goldfeld and Heribert Horst are among the proponent of this thought.²³ Meanwhile the authenticity of early tafsīr has been disputed by Goldziher, Wansbrough and Rippin. Wansbrough asserts that tafsīr that seems to contain *haggadic* features originated later than it was thought.²⁴ To resolve conflicting views on this subject, Leemhuis and Versteegh as viewed by Berg, initiate a middle ground where they both proposed to accept the basic historical framework of the Qur'ān and its tafsīr.²⁵ While in this study, the tafsīr that have been alleged as originated from the first and second century scholars such as the tafsīr of Ibn 'Abbās and Mujāhid will be used to explore Muslim views on the content of their tafsīr.

The third chapter is both analytical and comparative in nature. To critically analyse a ninth century Muslim understanding of the nature of the connection between the Qur'ān

²² Fred Leemhuis, "Origins and Early Development of the tafsir Tradition," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 13-30"; see also, "Ms. 1075 Tafsir of the Cairene Dar al-Kutub and Mujahid's Tafsir", in Proceedings of the ninth congress of the Union europeenne des arabisants et islamisants, Amsterdam, 7th to 9th September 1978, ed. Rudolph Peters (Leiden: Brill, 1981), pp.169-180.

²³ Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.66-77.

²⁴ John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, (New York, Prometheus Books, 2004), 144, 179; Andrew Rippin, "Studying early tafsir texts," *Der Islam* 72 (1995), 310.

²⁵ Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, p. 93.

and the Prophet's biography, this chapter will examine the selected works of ḥadīth of the ninth century, trace any employment of Qur'ānic verses as references to the Prophet's early life and investigate why they were used as reference to it . If there are no apparent Qur'ānic verses used as references to the Prophet's early life, this chapter will pose the question of why the scholars of ḥadīth did not deem relevant any Qur'ānic verses as an allusion to the Prophet's early life. After exploring the scholars of *tafsīr*'s understanding of such verses (in chapter two), scholars of ḥadīth are selected on account of its status as the second primary sources in delineating the Prophet's biography. Three major ḥadīth sources are examined critically as representative of this literature. These include are, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* and *Musnad Aḥmad*.

These three works of ḥadīth were selected as representative of *Sunan Sitta* and *musnad*, the two types of literature that comprise a profusion of information in assisting the construction the Prophet's biography. Attributed as being very revealing and helpful sources for outlining the Prophet's life, it is not surprising, therefore, to hear Ḥammāda assert that only by referring to one of the *Sunan Sitta*, can one develop an approximate narrative of Muḥammad's life.²⁶ Therefore, the present study will scrutinise representative texts from *Sunan Sitta* and *musnad*, to examine the works and their particular authorial perspectives on the Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life. The *Musnad* of Aḥmad is selected as a representative of *musnad* works of the ninth century, one of the most prominent examples of ḥadīth literature in the early period. The immense number of ḥadīth compiled by Aḥmad is identified by Siddiqi and Melchert as a mine of ḥadīth materials which serves as a significant source for various

²⁶ In his work, Ḥammāda illustrates that by combining the traditions narrated by al-Bukhārī, one can establish the story of the Prophet's life. Fārūq Ḥammāda, *Maṣādir al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya wa Taqwīmuha*, (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 2003), p.57.

writers of different genres of Arabic literature.²⁷ The significance of *Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī* in ḥadīth discourse is beyond question. In this section, the *Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari* will be scrutinised as representative of works of *ṣaḥīḥ* of the ninth century. *Al-Jāmi‘ of al-Tirmidhī* will be the second representative work of *Sunan Sitta*, since, according to Hammāda, among the *Sunan of al-Arba‘a* (*Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā‘ī and Ibn Majh), al-Tirmidhī’s *Sunan* is the most valuable and informative in gathering together the traditions regarding the prophet’s biography.²⁸ In this chapter, this study will also explore in more depth the Qur’ānic background of each of the scholars themselves, namely Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī. This is done in order to explore any significant factors that might possibly have influenced them in their particular Qur’ānic perspectives, especially the Qur’ānic references that have been employed as references to the Prophet’s early life. The selection of only three representatives of ḥadīth works does not imply that the rest of the ḥadīth literature of the ninth century is neglected. Indeed, the canonical ḥadīth works, known as the *Sunan Sitta*, will also be analysed in order to gain a fuller picture of Qur’ānic references to Muḥammad’s early life in the work of ḥadīth in the ninth century.

The fourth chapter will continue a similar analysis and comparative study of the previous chapter. This chapter will examine another branch of Islamic literature that also has been utilised as a source for the Prophet’s biography, which is the *dalā’il*. Hammāda in his analysis identifies the works of *shamā’il* and *dalā’il* as the second and third position of the most informative sources for the life of Muḥammad, after the

²⁷ See Siddiqi, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, pp. 49-52.; Christopher Melchert, ‘The Musnad of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: How It Was Composed and What Distinguishes It from the Six Books’, in *Der Islam*, 82(1), (2005), pp.32-51.

²⁸ Apart from *Sunan Sitta*, some scholars of ḥadīth coined the term ‘*Sunan al-Arba‘a*’ to refer to the *Sunan* of Abū Dawūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā‘ī and Ibn Maja. See, Aḥmad Shākir, *al-Bā‘ith al-Hathīth*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d), p.1/27.; Abū Shahba, *Ḍifā‘ ‘an al-Sunna*, (Maktaba al-Sunna, 1989), p.1/26; al-Qarḍāwī, *Kayf Nata‘āmalu Ma‘a al-Sunna*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 2000), p.1/78.

Qur'ān and ḥadīth. While Raven recognises this specific literature as one of the major sources for providing biographical information of the Prophet's life (*sīra*). Due to its revealing nature, this study will analyse three available sources from this types of works from the ninth century, namely; the book *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla fī Ithbāt Nubuwwa al-Nabī Muḥammad* by Ibn Rabban, *Kitāb al-Hujja fī Tathbīt al-Nubuwwa* of al-Jāḥiẓ and *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* of Ibn Qutayba. A similar approach will be employed in this chapter, where the study will explore whether there any Qur'ānic references are used in *dalā'il* as reference to the Prophet's early life. The chapter will begin with an analysis of Qur'ānic background of each scholars (Ibn Rabban, al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba), in order to analyse any significant factor that might probably influence them in their Qur'ānic viewpoint. The chapter will then scrutinise why particular verses (if any) were used, in order to explore the same century's scholars' understanding of Qur'ānic verses that are employed in an attempt to reconstruct the Prophet's biography.

The fifth chapter of the present work reaches its apogee. In this section, the arrangement of analysis used will be slightly change. The study will focus on specific Qur'ānic references in the works of *tafsīr*, *sīra*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il*, and analyse the reasons why these references emerged in those specific works. The analysis will be presented thematically in order to focus on specific Qur'ānic references relating to specific topics. The discussion will start from the standpoint of scrutinising Qur'ānic references that are used as references to the genealogy of the Prophet's, his birth, his childhood and his early life. Each one of the Qur'ānic verses that have been adduced by the authors of the ninth century will be analysed critically. If Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life are difficult to find in the works of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il*, the question is raised concerning which influences or controls caused the *sīra*'s authors to initiate these references in the first place. This chapter aims to examine why, if the scholars of the

sīra used these verses as an allusion to Muḥammad, did the scholars of *tafsīr* not share the same understanding? What influences make the *sīra* establish a connection between the biography of the Prophet and the Qur’ān? This chapter also tries to answer the following salient questions: who initiated the references; for whom was it intended; for what reason was it developed, and in what context?

The sixth chapter provides the conclusion of the study, in which the thesis will summarise the principal findings of the study by revisiting its original objectives and research questions.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

In *sīra* literature, the Qur’ān has served as an important contributor in the construction of the Prophet’s biography. Muslim scholars (such as Al-Mubarakfurī,²⁹ Farūq Hammādah,³⁰ and Maḥdī Rizqullah³¹) regarded the Qur’ān as the ultimate authority from which to outline a narrative framework and delineate specific incidents in the Prophet’s life, a practice still followed in large measure today. In the early nineteenth century, modern scholars appeared to approach material from the *sīra* within the framework of a historico-critical method. The translation of *sīra* works has elevated the scholarship on *sīra* to a higher level of significance. The *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa’d, al-Ṭabarī and al-Wāqidi are among the *sīra* references that have been translated into European languages.

²⁹ Saḥī al-Raḥmān al-Mubarakfurī, *al-Rahīq Al-Makhtūm*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Hilal, 1427H)

³⁰ Farūq Hammādah, *Masādir al-Sīra al-Nabawīyyah wa Taqwīmuḥā*, (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 2003)

³¹ Maḥdī Rizqullah, *al-Sīrah Al-Nabawīyyah Fī Masādirihī Al-Asliyyah: Dirāsah Tahlīliyah*, (Riyāḍ, 1990)

In 1843, Gustav Weil inaugurated an advanced method of analysis, when he applied a historico-critical approach on *sīra* texts in his study of the life of Muḥammad and his introduction to the Qur’ān.³² Weil apparently notices the close relationship between the Qur’ān and the narratives of the *sīra*, when he relates the relative poverty of Muḥammad’s early life and the reaction to and treatment of him by the Quraish, as stated in 43:30. In this work, Weil offers an alternative reading of the relationship between the revelation of the Qur’ān and Muḥammad’s epilepsy.³³ Of Weil’s work, Arthur Jeffrey, however, concludes that the limited source of available materials during Weil’s period of study confines and constricts his academic investigation. Comments on the use of Qur’ānic verses as references to the Prophet’s biography are not as many as appear in later works by Aloys Sprenger and William Muir.

It is worthy of note that in 1851, with his expert medical background, Sprenger provides a remarkable commentary regarding Qur’ānic verses purported to be allusions to the Prophet’s early life. In the story of Abraha’s invasion, for example, Sprenger, in quoting Reiske’s thoughts in highlighting the incident, articulates how small pox broke out at Abraha’s camp. Sprenger holds that this disease, as well as measles and croup, had never been known before in Hijāz, while through the eyes of the Arabs, the event is perceived as a miracle from Allah to protect the Ka’ba.³⁴ Commenting on the sources of the *sīra*, Sprenger expresses his ideas about the nature of the Qur’ān as the source of *sīra*. He asserts that “The Qur’ān contains many passages which are not in harmony

³²Gustav Weil, *Mohammed der Prophet, sein Leben und seine Lehre*, (Stuttgart : Metzler, 1843),; An Introduction to the Qur’ān, *The Biblical World*, v5/3, (1895), pp.181-191, *A History of Islamic Peoples*, trans., Khuda Bukhsh, (University of Calcutta, n.d) ; Silverstein, Adam, et.al., *The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions*, (Oxford University Press, 2015), p.221; Ali, Kecia, *The Lives of Muḥammad*, (Harvard University Press, 2014), p.45.

³³ Philip Almond, *Heretic and Hero: Muḥammad and the Victorians*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989), p.24.

³⁴ Aloys Sprenger, *Life of Mohammed from Original Sources*, (Allahabad: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1851), p.35.

with the ideas of the Muslim; and Muḥammad was obliged to make many confessions which were not creditable to him.”³⁵ Most of the *sīra* sources, according to him, were derived from tradition or *ḥadīth*. Sprenger also appears to be very familiar with the Qur’ān. In certain places, he relates the narratives of the *sīra* with ideas that are embedded in the Qur’ān.³⁶ He did not, however, make a further commentary on these types of verses. With regard to the Prophet’s early life, Sprenger focuses primarily on the mental and physiological development of the Prophet in the early period.

Muir (1856-1861) sets forth a deeper analysis of the use of the Qur’ān as a source of *sīra*, compared with Sprenger’s explorations.³⁷ In his introduction, Muir describes meticulously and explores in great detail the genesis, composition and nature of the Qur’ān as major reference for constructing the biography of the Prophet. Critical question are cast in order to scrutinise the reliability of the scripture; and at the end, Muir infers that “Of Muḥammad’s biography, the Koran is the keystone.”³⁸ Not only does Muir provide a weighty prolegomenon, but he also examines thoroughly events in the Prophet’s early period that appear to have an association with specific Qur’ānic verses. In the event of Abraha’s invasion of Mecca, for instance, he finds an apparently anomalous connection between the assault and chapter 105 of the Qur’ān. Commenting on Gibbon’s idea, he claims: “Gibbon says of this passage (*sūra al-fīl*) that it is ‘the seed’ of the marvellous details of Abraha’s defeat. But it must have been partially at least the other way.”³⁹ Of Muḥammad’s childhood, Muir refers to 93:6, the chapter that

³⁵ Ibid., p.73.

³⁶ For example in exploring the story of Zayd of the ‘Adiy, Sprenger explains the influence of Zayd on Muḥammad’s thought and the ideas seem presented in many places of the Qur’ān (Ibid, 41-43). He also gives references from the Qur’ān for few events in the *sīra* such as the building of the Ka’ba (Ibid, 55) and Muḥammad’s early condition (Ibid., 84, 92-118).

³⁷ Although in term of number, Sprenger appear to notice larger number of connection between the events of the Prophet’s life and Qur’ānic verses.

³⁸ Muir, Sir William, *The Life of Mohammad from Original Sources*, (Edinburgh, 1923), xiii-xxix.

³⁹ Ibid., cxviii.

is renowned as portraying an image of the Prophet's early condition. Interestingly, the depth of analysis conducted by Muir enables him to interpret further and connect the narrative of Muḥammad's encounter with Bahira at Baṣra with certain verses from the Qur'ān (5:82 and 5:116), even though it was not to be found in Ibn Ishāq's work.

Margoliouth (1905) composes another fascinating Qur'ānic biography. At many junctures in his work, he reconstructs the Qur'ānic version of Muḥammad's life story. The early condition of Muḥammad's life, his experiences travelling on sea and over land, his command of commercial language, his characteristics of a young man of promise, as well as the occasion of the enlarging of his breast, are all, indeed, rendered from scrupulous reading, interpretation and renovation of the Prophet's biography, all based on meticulous Qur'ānic references.⁴⁰

A similar and more comprehensive composition was accomplished by William Montgomery Watt. His *Muḥammad's Mecca History in the Qu'rān* (1988) is epitomised as a new benchmark of Qur'ānic *sīra*, in which he endeavours to establish the Prophet's biography based on an interpretation of Qur'ānic material.⁴¹ Basing his work on the references within the Qur'ān, Watt establishes in depth a reconstruction of the specifically Arabian background and Muḥammad's early life. A similar method has also been applied by A.T. Welch (1988) when he compiles an account of the Prophet's characteristics, using Qur'ānic data.⁴²

Most of the biographies of Muḥammad within the nineteenth and twentieth century apply similar descriptive methods by critically rereading Qur'ānic references appearing to have connections to the account of Muḥammad's life, in order to reconstruct the

⁴⁰ David S. Margoliouth, *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam*, Third Edition, (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 2003), pp.45-82.

⁴¹ Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca History in the Quran*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988).

⁴² Welch, 'Muḥammad's understanding of himself, The Koranic Data', pp.15-52.

Prophet's biography. In his quest for the historical Muḥammad, F.E Peters (1994) proposes a critical evaluation about the Qur'ān as the principal reference for the Prophet's life. Questioning the nature of the text, he asserts that: "Even if we were far more certain of the size and sequence of the original revelations recorded in it, the Qu'rān would still not be terribly useful for reconstructing the Meccan milieu nor the life of the man who uttered its words: it is a text without context."⁴³ A similar problem has been remarked upon by Maxime Rodinson (1968), when he argues that the nature of its verses are always 'enigmatic'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, according to Michael Cook (1983), reliance on the Qur'ān would not be able to produce any comprehensive biography of Muḥammad, even though some Muslim scholars have claimed to have completed their works of biography based solely on material in the Qur'ān itself.⁴⁵ For this reason, Robert Hoyland (2007) reiterates the idea that any biography that was to rely only upon the Qur'ān must also be consulted, along with the prophetic ḥadīth.⁴⁶ Moreover, Herbert Berg (2006) insists that "the sources do not evince the Qu'rān's role in the construction of the figure of Muḥammad until one has assumed it."⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Rippin advances an insightful argument in which he levels further critical analysis, questioning the person mentioned in certain verses of the Qur'ān: is the verse really an allusion to Muḥammad?⁴⁸

A further third group appears to accept the Qur'ān as a source of the Prophet's biography, while simultaneously imposing a critical reading on Qur'ānic texts which

⁴³ F.E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origin of Islam*, (New York: State University of New York, 1994), pp.257-268.

⁴⁴ Rodinson, Maxime, *Muhammad the Prophet of Islam*, (London: Tauris Parke Paperback, 2002), p.vii.

⁴⁵ Michael Cook, *Muhammad*, (Oxford University Press, 1983), p.71.

⁴⁶ Robert Hoyland, Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Solutions, *History Compass*, 5/2, (2007), 581–602.

⁴⁷ Herbert berg, Context: Muhammad, in Andrew Rippin, (edt) *Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, (Blackwell, 2006), pp.187-204.

⁴⁸ Andrew Rippin, "Muḥammad in the Qur'ān, Reading Scripture in the 21st Century", in Harald Motzki (ed.), *The Biographies of Muhammad the Issue of Sources*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp.298-309.

produces a new and innovative critical reading of Qur'ānic biography that may be claimed to contradict Islamic tradition reading. For example Watt analysis on the word *ummī* in which according to him connotes 'gentile' rather than 'illiterate' as popularly known in Islamic tradition.⁴⁹ Watt also produced another interesting reading of manners of revelation.⁵⁰ Scholars such as Muir, and Margoliouth were other individuals that have applied this method.

There persists, indeed, a long list of critical analyses about the Qur'ān and its relation to the *sīra*. But apparently one of the aspects that has eluded examination is the use of obscure Qur'ānic verses in establishing prophetic narratives. In fact, there are certain excellent biographies (such as Tor Andrea's (1960) and Michael Cook's) that discuss the early condition of Muḥammad's life, without any observations on the use of Qur'ānic verses by Muslim scholars. Indeed, each author himself, it could be argued, has a different focus of analysis. It is precisely where this lacuna occurs which the present study aims to fill by clarification and analysis. The present study seeks to understand exactly why these kinds of verses are used as allusions to the story of Muḥammad's life. For example, the use of chapter 105 of the Qur'ān, the story of the invasion of Abraha, is often employed as an early sign of the Prophet's emergence. Certainly, Muir, Sprenger and Gibbon have voiced their doubts about the application of this apparently obscure chapter, and assert that it does not reveal any evidence of the advent of the Prophet.

Similar difficulties are encountered when a number of apparently ambiguous verses are also used to outline the Prophet's genealogy, early childhood, and other events in his early life. Therefore, the present study seeks to explore and analyse the genesis of

⁴⁹ Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca History in the Quran*, p. 51-54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

Qur'ānic references that have been utilised as an allusion to Muḥammad's life in the early biography of the Prophet. Questions to be posed will include: what are the Qur'ānic references which are used by the early biographers of Muḥammad to develop an ideal role model of the Prophet's life? Why do individual authors select particular verses? Did scholars of the same century share a similar understanding of the original Qur'ānic texts? All these questions will be posed, and a response elicited, in order to critically understand the genesis of such Qur'ānic references in the *sīra*.

In terms of the nature of relations between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's biography, Henry Lammens (1910) casts forth a stimulating idea. According to him, the *sīra*, for the most part, is merely an interpretative form of narrative in which the greater share of the *sīra*'s account has its origin in the Qur'ān.⁵¹ In other words, the *sīra* is exegetic in nature; it was created originally as a mechanism to interpret ambiguous verses of the Qur'ān itself; and for this reason, many of the stories in it are invented. In fact, *sīra* is an extraction of interpretation of the Qur'ān itself in the form of narrative. Its stories were compiled, which assisted in developing the complete body of the *sīra*. Rubin, however, offers a contradictory reading of Lammens's analysis. In the chapter *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, he contends the idea that the *sīra* was designed to provide a context for the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of the Qur'ān. Based on his painstaking scrutiny of the nature of the connection between the Qur'ān and the *sīra*, Rubin concludes that "nothing in the early biographies of Muḥammad seems to corroborate the belief that the material which came to be known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* had its origin in the exegetic expansion of Qur'ānic verses."⁵² Regarding these two contradictory ideas, Wansbrough

⁵¹ Henri Lammens, 'The Koran and Tradition: How the Life of Muḥammad was Composed', in Ibn Warraq (ed.), *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, (Amherst, Prometheus, 2000), pp.169-187.

⁵² Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad As Viewed by the Early Muslims--A Textual Analysis*, (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997), pp.226-233.

agrees with both. According to him, there are two characteristics of narrative techniques that are employed in the *sīra*. Firstly, there is the exegetical, namely an extract from the scripture to provide the framework for extended narration. Secondly, there comes the parabolic, in which the narration is itself an allusion to the scripture.⁵³

Taking this point further, the present study aims to venture to explore further the nature of connection between the Qur'ān and the *sīra*. Either the *sīra* is originated from exegetical reading of the Qur'ān or it is a later authentication tools to substantiate the narratives, it would be best to attempt to understand early Muslim thought regarding this, as a starting point, to explore its genesis. Apart from the authoritative nature of the Qur'ān, it is fair and appropriate to examine whether there are any other reasons that inspire Muslim biographers to include Qur'ānic verses in their work. Would there, for instance, be any specific reason why Qur'ānic references were adduced? Is it possible to point to any particular influence such as political or social movements which created a connection between the Qur'ān and the *sīra*? The present study will delve deep into early Islamic materials themselves, in order to explore the nature of the connection between the Qur'ān and the *sīra*, and arrive at a specifically Muslim understanding of it.

⁵³ John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, (Oxford, 1978), p.2.

CHAPTER 2

***TAFSĪR, SĪRA* AND QUR'ĀNIC REFERENCES TO THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S EARLY LIFE**

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Qur'ānic References in *Sīra* Literature and the Associated Problems

In the Qur'ān, Muḥammad is consistently portrayed in solidly human terms, as a most humane human being.⁵⁴ He is presented in his full human nature, and is not associated with any miraculous abilities. Every time when an adversary asks him to perform signs or miracles (*āya*), the Qur'ān asserts continually that signs can come only from God (6:109) and Muḥammad is only a 'messenger' (13:7). By contrast, the way the *sīra* presents Muḥammad's attributes seems discrepant with his attributes as depicted in the Qur'ān. He was portrayed as a normal human being in the Qur'ān, while *sīra* articulates in detail his capacity to perform miracles since the time he was in the womb of his mother. He was born circumcised⁵⁵ and accompanied with light,⁵⁶ he then fell on the ground, leaning on his hands, raised his head toward Heaven and made a supplication to God immediately after he was born.⁵⁷ On the day he was born, fourteen pillars in Kisrā's palace cracked and rolled down, the Persians' sacred fire died down and some churches on Lake Sawā sank and collapsed.⁵⁸ All these extraordinary features were aspects of a convention that recurs frequently in the works of *sīra*. What is of immediate

⁵⁴ For example; in 41:6 and 18:110.

⁵⁵ Ibn Ḥibbān, *Sīra al-Nabawiyya wa Akhbār al-Khulafā'* (Bayrūt: al-Kutub al-Thaqafiyya, 1417H) p. 58.; al-Asbahānī, *Dalā'il* (Bayrūt, Dār al-Nafa'is, 1986), p.154.

⁵⁶ There are various narrations on the Prophet's and its association with the light. This will be discussed in the subchapter entitled 'The Luminous Child' in this chapter.

⁵⁷ Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1405H), p.1/88 and p.1/136.

⁵⁸ Al-Asbahānī, *Dalā'il*, 138, al-Māwardī, *A'lām al-Nubuwwah*, p.138, al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, p.126.

interest is the references they make to the Qur'ān in an attempt to give a solid value to the doctrine they deliver. For example, to verify the story of the opening of Muḥammad's breast by the angel, they used verse 94:1, even though Muslim exegetical scholars never applied this particular verse to this story before this time.⁵⁹ In fact, none of the early *sīra* authors (the Prophet biographers) connected this event to any verse of the Qur'ān.⁶⁰ In later centuries, a few *Sīra* authors, however, started to make a link between this occasion and chapter 94 of the Qur'ān. Al-Bayhaqī (d.458/1065) and al-Maqrīzī (d.845/1441), were instances of authors who connected this chapter with the remarkable event.⁶¹ In his *Dalā'il*, al-Bayhaqī commenced a discussion regarding the opening of Muḥammad's breast by citing the first verse of chapter 94.

The Qur'ān, the scripture that always seems to portray Muḥammad specifically and steadily as a human being who possessed great humanity, was used frequently by authors of the *sīra* to depict specific qualities which they deemed to have been possessed by the Prophet. The way the *sīra* presents apparently unique features of Muḥammad by using the Qur'ān as its references needs to be scrutinised carefully. Many Qur'ānic references are employed by authors of the *sīra* to support their argument for Muḥammad's prophethood and his miraculous attributes. In the following section, these Qur'ānic references are analysed in considering how Muslims of different centuries, especially scholars of the third/ninth century, understand references from the Qur'ān that they believe to refer to Muḥammad directly. This analysis is conducted on

⁵⁹ This issue will be discussed in a particular section about the opening of the Prophet's breast. As far as the present investigation is concerned, the first *tafsīr* that referred this chapter to the event is *Tafsīr Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, an exegetical work formulated by al-Rāzī. It was however preceded by al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan* which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

⁶⁰ Such as Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Sa'd and Ibn Hishām.

⁶¹ Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, p.2/5.; al-Maqrīzī, ed. al-Namisi, *Imtā' al-Asmā'* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), p.3/33.

the works of *tafsīr* and *sīra* in order to observe and compare the progressive development of understanding regarding particular verses used in *sīra* literature.

2.2 Qur'ānic References to The Prophet's Genealogy

One of the most important aspects in learning about the life of Muḥammad is his genealogy. It is not an exaggeration to say that almost all the biographies of Muḥammad commence their discussion by introducing his lineage. The introduction of the Prophet's genealogy appears as to substantiate the connection of Muḥammad with his prophetic lineage. He was described as sharing a line of pedigree with the other prophets. The presentation of this genealogical discourse in the works of *sīra* implies that Muslims believe that the final Prophet was chosen from the noblest ancestry. According to Islamic traditions, his line of descent can be traced back to Abraham, although the reliability of this has been much disputed.⁶² This notion is believed to have been developed from prophetic traditions that elaborated the Prophet's genealogy.⁶³ The traditions transmitted by Muslim ibn Hajjāj (d.261/874) comprise such witness. In the chapter entitled "The Merit of the Prophet's Genealogy", he records a narration that elucidates the Prophet's lineage: the Prophet said, "Allāh chose Ismā'il from the children of Ibrāhīm and from the children of Ismā'il, He chose the children of Kināna, then from the children of Kināna Allāh chose the Quraysh and chose the children of Hāshim from the Quraysh, then Allāh chose me from the children of Hāshim."⁶⁴ Aḥmad

⁶² Al-Mubarakfurī, *al-Rahīq Al-Makhtūm* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Hilal, 1427H), p.39.; Aḥmad, Maḥdī Rizqullah, *Al-Sīrah Al-Nabawīyyah Fi Masādirihī Al-Asliyyah: Dirāsah Tahlīliyah*, (Riyād, 1992), p.105.

⁶³ In *Dalā'il Al-Nubuwwah*, Al-Bayhaqī created a specific chapter named "Chapter of the Laurels of Prophet's Origin and his Pedigree" which contains 23 hadiths of various degrees of authenticity. See, Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, p.1/165).

⁶⁴ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Bayrūt: Dār Ihyā' al-Turath al-'Arabī, [n.d.]) p.4/1782.

Ibn Ḥanbal (d.241/855)⁶⁵ and al-Tirmīdhī (d. 279/892)⁶⁶ provide a different tradition on this particular subject. According to them, Muḥammad is said to have been born into the noblest family of the noblest clan (Banī Hāshim), of the noblest tribe (Quraysh).

In order to support the rigour of the ideas of the Prophet's nobility, specific verses of the Qur'ān have been consulted. Al-Kharkūshī⁶⁷ (d.407/1016) and Abū Nu'aym al-Asbahānī⁶⁸ (d.430/1038) cite 26:219 in their works, even though Ibn Ishāq (d.151/768), the prominent biographer of the Prophet, does not make any specific reference to the Qur'ān in this regard. Chronologically, Ibn Sa'd⁶⁹ (d.230/844) seems to be the earliest Muslim historian to have connected this verse with this particular subject, and other later scholars follow his step by quoting other hadith (with different wording, but conveying the same meaning). He quotes Ibn 'Abbās's (d.68/687) interpretation of the verse, which says: "and when thou turnest about among those who bow". According to Ibn 'Abbās, this verse refers to the Prophet's position in the lineage of prophets before him.⁷⁰ Analysing Ibn 'Abbās's interpretation, the word *taqallubaka* ('your turn' or 'movement') and *al-sājidīn* (those who bow or prostrate) should not necessarily be taken literally; rather it should be grasped in the light of semantics. It is very unusual to find this verse being quoted with reference to the Prophet's genealogy in the early Muslim biographies of Muḥammad.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Al-Shaybānī, Abū 'Abdillāh, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Hadīth, 1995) p.2/397.

⁶⁶ Al-Tirmidhī, Abū 'Isā, Muḥammad ibn 'Isā, *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1998) p.6/7.

⁶⁷ Al-Kharkūshī, *Sharf al-Muṣṭafā* (Makka: Dār al-Basha'ir, 1424H), p.1/285.

⁶⁸ Al-Asbahānī, Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Nafa'is, 1986), p.58.

⁶⁹ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1990), p.1/22. The tradition says (مَنْ نَبِيٍّ إِلَى نَبِيٍّ. وَمَنْ نَبِيٍّ إِلَى نَبِيٍّ حَتَّى أُخْرِجَكَ نَبِيًّا)

⁷⁰ The exact words as narrated by al-Asbahānī are (مَا زَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَتَقَلَّبُ فِي أَصْلَابِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ، حَتَّى وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ)

⁷¹ Most of the early *sīra* scholars did not quote this verse in reference to the Prophet's genealogy, including Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām.

2.2.1 Analysis of Verse 26:216

From a literal point of view, this verse does not appear to have any bearing on the status of the Prophet's lineage. The surface meaning of the verse appears to be too wide to be related to this subject. It seems that the general context of this passage is a command and guidance from God to Muḥammad to deliver his message to his family members. To make the picture clear, the verse begins with an order to Muḥammad to admonish his family: "And warn thy clan, thy nearest kin. Lower thy wing to those who follow thee, being believers; then, if they disobey thee, say, 'I am quit of that you do. Put thy trust in the All-mighty, the All-compassionate who sees thee when thou standest and when thou turnest about among those who bow. Surely He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.'"⁷² The passage as a whole is articulate and coherent. The main message seems to be a command to Muḥammad to reprimand his kin in a courteous manner, but if they do not accept this, he is asked to remind them that he disassociates himself from all that the wrongdoers have committed. God asks Muḥammad to put his trust in God because He always monitors his messengers. This is clearly the general meaning of the passage. It seems that the words were not intended to illustrate the apparent purity of Muḥammad's lineage; and it was only the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās that initiated the idea of a connection between this verse and the Prophet's pedigree.

2.2.2 Exegetical Commentaries on 26:216 in the Works of *Tafsīr*

A review of exegetical commentaries carried out by second-century Muslim scholars shows that none of them offers this kind of interpretation, even though they were of the

⁷² 26:214-219

generation closest to the Prophet.⁷³ Most of them were prominent pupils of the Prophet's companions and learned the Qur'ān directly from them: therefore it is somewhat unusual that none of them, including Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d.103/722), the famous disciple of Ibn 'Abbās himself, connected this verse with the status of the Prophet's lineage. The other commentaries produced by other scholars in the same century, such as al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d.105/723), al-Suddī (d.128/745) and Ibn Jurayj (d.149/766) did not cover this verse in their works.⁷⁴ According to Mujāhid, the verse conveys two meanings.⁷⁵ The first one shows how the Prophet prayed with the believers; the word *taqallubaka* "means his movement in the prayers" and the word *al-sājidīn* (the prostrators) should be understood as *al-muṣallīn* (those performing a prayer). In general, the meaning of this verse correlates precisely with the previous verses, where the meanings is, "And rely upon the Exalted in Might, the Merciful, Who sees you when you arise and your movement among those who prostrate". The second meaning is a little more obscure than the first. Mujāhid said that the verse could be interpreted as "the Prophet could see everyone who is performing a prayer behind him".⁷⁶ In any event, neither interpretation makes any connection with the suggested nobility of the Prophet's lineage.

The same understanding is indicated by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.150/767) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d.161/777) in their exegetical commentaries. Both of them believed that this

⁷³ This includes Mujāhid ibn Jabr, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. See, Mujāhid ibn Jabr, *Tafsīr al-Imam Mujāhid ibn Jabr*, ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Salām, (Maḍīna Naṣr: Dār al-Fikr al-Islami al-Haditha, 1989) p.514.; Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thaurī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983), p.230.; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil* ed. Ahmad Farid, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), p.466.

⁷⁴ See, al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Mazāḥim, *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk*, ed. Muhammad Shukrī, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Salām, 1999), p.639.; al-Suddī, Ismā'il ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān, *Tafsīr al-Suddī* ed. Muhammad 'Ata, (Mansura: Dār al-Wafā, 1993), pp. 366-368.; Ibn Jurayj, 'Abd al-Mālik ibn 'Abd Al-Azīz, *Tafsīr Ibn Jurayj*, ed. Ali Hasan, (al-Qāhira: Maktaba al-Turath al-Islami, 1992) p.259.

⁷⁵ Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, p.514.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.514

verse actually refers to the appearance of the Prophet's movements when he prayed with the believers.⁷⁷ Yaḥyā ibn Sallām (d.200/815) and al-Ṣan'ānī (d.211/826),⁷⁸ both third/ninth century scholars, also express a similar interpretation. Yaḥyā did not only shed light on the meanings of the words but also conflated his explanation with the tradition of the Prophet to support his interpretation.⁷⁹ It is worth noting that, even al-Tabarī (d.310/922), who is greatly known as the compiler of the prevailing traditions, did not connect this verse with the status of the Prophet's lineage at all.⁸⁰

The first exegetical interpretation which relates this verse with the Prophet's genealogy can be traced in Ibn Abī Hātim's (d.327/928) works.⁸¹ He articulates three different interpretations, citing prophetic traditions to support each opinion. The first interpretation shows that this verse clearly illustrates the Prophet's connection with the previous prophets. By adducing the prophetic traditions narrated by Ibn 'Abbās, this notion appears to be rigorous. Ibn 'Abbās said that the meaning of the verse is "from prophet to prophet until you have been turned as a prophet". Another tradition, also reported from Ibn 'Abbās, says: "Still the Prophet remained moving in the back bone of prophets until his mother bore him."⁸² Ibn Abī Hātim was not the only fourth-century scholar who put forward this novel idea; it was also transmitted by Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d.373/983). Without quoting any prophetic tradition, al-Samarqandī

⁷⁷ Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, p.466.; Al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, p.230.

⁷⁸ Al-Ṣan'ānī, 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām, ed. Mustafa Muslim, *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq*, (al-Riyad: Maktaba al-Rushd, 1989), p.2/77.

⁷⁹ Al-Basrī, Yahya ibn Salām ibn Abī Tha'laba, *Tafsīr*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2004), p.2/529.

⁸⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Ahmad Shakir, (Muassasa al-Risāla, 2000) pp.19/411-413. (He did mention the tradition that interpreted the word *al-sājidīn* as meaning "the previous Prophets", but none of the traditions indicate the connection between this verse and the Prophet's lineage. At the end of his compilation of all the traditions regarding this verse, he adds a brief explanation that expresses his preference for the interpretation that the verse refers to the Prophet's movement in his prayer.

⁸¹ Ibn Abī Hātim, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Muḥammad ibn Idris al-Tamīmī al-Hanzalī al-Razī, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azīm*, (al-Mamlaka al-Sa'ūdiyya: Maktaba Nizār Mustafa al-Bāz, 1419AH), p.9/2828.

⁸² Ibid, pp.9/2828-2829. The second and the third opinions are the same as that given by Mujāhid, as mentioned above.

confirms that this verse means “your movement in the back bones of the fathers and in the wombs of the mothers, from Adam to Noah, until Abraham and the prophets after him, may God’s peace be upon them”⁸³. This notion was then transmitted to other scholars in later centuries, and came to be included not only in exegetical works but also in biographies of the Prophet.⁸⁴

Even though the main idea is traced back to Ibn ‘Abbās, it sparks curiosity as the narration does not appear to have been recorded in the book of *tafsīr* till the fourth/tenth century. The major exegetical references of the early Islamic era appear as silent on this. The attribution of the narration to Ibn ‘Abbās and his disciple ‘Atā’ (d.114/732) makes it seem very sound.⁸⁵ An analysis of its chain of narrators does not raise any obvious doubts; but an examination of each of the transmitters indicates that one of the narrators was unable to be identified. According to Ibn Abī Hātim,⁸⁶ ‘Atā’ narrated this tradition to his pupil named Sa‘īd, while most other scholars believed that it was Sa‘dān ibn al-Walīd.⁸⁷ Even if we accept the opinion of the majority about Sa‘dān ibn al-Walīd as the transmitter from ‘Atā’, this raises another problem. Sa‘dān ibn al-Walīd has been labelled as *majhūl* (unknown) by scholars of biographical evaluation (*‘ilm al-rijāl*),⁸⁸ so, in terms of the tradition’s status (the hadith), it seems that this tradition or narration

⁸³ Al-Samarqandī, Abū al-Layth Naṣr ibn Muḥammad ibn Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm, *Bahr al-‘Ulūm*, p.2/570.

⁸⁴ This notion was also mentioned in the works of al-Tha’labī, al-Qushayrī, al-Baghawī, Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Qurtubī and al-Khāzin in their *Tafsīr*. See, al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf wa al-Bayan ‘an Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2002), p.7/184.; al-Qushayrī, *Latā‘if al-Ishārāt* (Miṣr: al-Hai’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Ammā li al-Kitāb, [n.d]), p.3/21.; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1420H), p.3/483.; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī ‘ilm al-Tafsīr* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1422H), p.3/350.; al-Qurtubī, al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1964), p.13/144.; al-Khāzin, *Lubāb al-Ta’wīl fī Ma’ānī al-Tanzīl* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1415H), p.3/334.

⁸⁵ Since Ibn ‘Abbās is conceived among Muslim as an important figure in *tafsīr*, the used of his name seems to give a credit to the narration and convince the reader about this interpretation.

⁸⁶ Ibn Abī Hātim, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, 9/2828.

⁸⁷ According to al-Tha’labī, Abū Nu’aym al-Asbahānī, al-Wāhidī and others, the person that received this tradition from ‘Ata’ was Sa’dān ibn al-Walīd.

⁸⁸ Among them was al-Haythamī (in his *Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id*, p.9/257). Al-Hākim and al-Dhahabī identified him as “Qalīl al-ḥadīth, wa lam yukhrijā ‘anhu” (he is only narrated a few hadith and al-Bukhari and Muslim never transmitted any hadith from him). See, al-Ḥuwaynī, Abū Ishāq, *Nath al-Nubal bi Mu‘jam al-Rijāl*, ed. Abū ‘Amrū Ahmad (Miṣr: Dār Ibn ‘Abbās, 2012), p.2/51.

cannot be easily used to support the interpretation of this verse as applying to genealogy. The other narration⁸⁹ that adduced by Ibn Abī Hātim in his *Tafsīr* is, however, recognised by al-Haythamī as acceptable.⁹⁰ To enhance our understanding of the Qur'ān, one should provide only authentic and reliable information that can be used as a tool for better understanding the Qur'ān.

Another question to ponder is why this connection should only emerge in the works of *tafsīr* at early phase of the fourth/tenth century of Islam. It is quite interesting to note that Ibn Sa'd, the author of the Prophet's biography of the third/ninth century, appear as the one whose works preceded the works of *tafsīr* in delivering this narration. It is quite evident that there was no scholar before them connecting this verse with Muḥammad's lineage; and it seems that the reference made by later scholars was part of a gradual theological development in the Muslim understanding of the Qur'ān.

2.3 The Prophet's Birth

According to Muslim tradition, Muḥammad was born in the Year of the Elephant, the year of Abraha's unsuccessful expedition against Mecca. If we rely on the Qur'ānic text alone, not a single verse of the Qur'ān refers definitively to the event of Muḥammad's birth. However, some Muslim biographers have taken the chapter of The Elephant in the Qur'ān as an early sign of the Prophet's emergence, while others always attributed this chapter to the actual birth of the Prophet Muḥammad. Al-Ṣāliḥī was among them, and in his chapter "The Story of the Destruction of the Companions of the Elephant", he illustrates in detail his opinion on the exegesis of this chapter. The emergence of the

⁸⁹ The narration is similar with Ibn Sa'd's narration. See footnote 16.

⁹⁰ The wording of this narration is however slightly different that Ibn Abi Hatim's. See, al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawa'id* (al-Qāhira, Maktaba al-Qudsī, 1994), p.7/86.

elephant troops should be understood as *al-irhāṣāt* (the sign of prophecy before someone become a prophet) and *al-muʿjiza al-mutaqaddima* (the preceding miracle; i.e., the advance signs of Prophecy).⁹¹ The explanation given by al-Ṣāliḥī indicates that there is an embedded connection between this chapter and Muḥammad's birth, even though the general meaning of theses verse does not directly touch upon any discussion of Muḥammad's life.⁹² Examining the works of early Muslim scholars, we find that this idea is actually presented by al-Jāḥiẓ.⁹³ Although he was not popularly known as an exegete nor the Prophet's biographer, it is stimulating to ponder upon the connection that he made in the third/ninth century.

In general, this chapter of the Qur'ān appears to be entirely about a famous incident in the Arabian Peninsula that took place before the beginning of the preaching of the Islamic message. It occurred prior to the birth of Muḥammad, and the entire chapter has been dedicated to this occurrence. Every verse in the chapter articulates scenarios of the occasion; and apparently there is no ideal connection to be alluded to the event of Muḥammad's birth. Most of the second-century Muslim's exegetes only give a literal interpretation of each verse. Mujāhid (d.102/722) and al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d.105/725), for instance, focus on explaining the meaning of particular words, and both of them seem to concentrate on presenting their understanding of the words *abābil* and *ma'kūl*⁹⁴. Philological elucidation and linguistic approaches dominate their nature of interpretation; and yet there is no clear association between this chapter and the birth of the Prophet in Muslim sources from the first half of the second century.

⁹¹ Al-Ṣāliḥī, Muhammad ibn Yūsuf al-Shāmī, ed. 'Ādil Aḥmad, et. al., *Subul al-Hudā wa al-Rashād fi Sīra Kayr al-'Ibād* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), p.1/214.

⁹² Indeed, this chapter of the Qur'ān has been adduced by Sira scholars like Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Sa'd, but they did not make a direct allusion, as presented by al-Ṣāliḥī.

⁹³ Further analysis about the connection he made will be presented in Chapter Four.

⁹⁴ Mujāhid Ibn Jabr, *Tafsīr* (Madina al-Naṣr: Dār al-Fikr al-Islami al-Hadītha, 1989) p.749.; al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Mazāhim al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr* (Cairo: Dār as-Salām, 1999) p. 987.

However, when it came to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.150/767), the way Muslims understood the Qur'ān indicates a slight growth in theological development. In his *Tafsīr*, Muqātil made a brief allusion to the event of Muḥammad's birth in his interpretation of the chapter, suggesting that the Prophet was born forty years after the incident.⁹⁵ Muqātil seems to be among the earliest exegetes to connect these verses of the Qur'ān to the occasion of Muḥammad's birth. However, this connection did not become a regular feature of Qur'ānic exegesis. The third century Muslim scholars al-Ṣan'ānī⁹⁶ (d.211/826) and al-Tustarī⁹⁷ (d.283/896) did not mention this particular event in their *Tafsīr* of this chapter: Al-Ṣan'ānī simply quotes Ma'mar ibn al-Rāshid's (d.153/770) commentary⁹⁸, while al-Tustarī writes only a simple explanation when interpreting this chapter. There is no direct reference to Muḥammad in this context in either of their works.

It is interesting to note that al-Ṭabarī (d.310/923), an eminent scholar renowned for compiling all the available sources, did not make any reference to Muhammad's birth when commenting on this chapter in his *Tafsīr*. Two related conclusions may be drawn from an analysis of his works: he appears to have believed that there could not have been any possible relationship between this chapter and the narrative of the Prophet's birth. In this particular *sūra*, there is certainly no evidence that al-Ṭabarī developed any theological interpretation of his own in writing *tafsīr*. His technique appears as entirely

⁹⁵ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2003) p.3/523.

⁹⁶ Al-San'ānī, 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām, *Tafsīr*, (al-Riyādh, Maktabat al-Rushd, [n.d]) p.2/396.

⁹⁷ Al-Tustarī, Abū Muhammad Sahl Ibn 'Abdullah, *Tafsīr* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1423H) p.206.

⁹⁸ As explained by Gilliot, the works of 'Abd al-Razzāq contained almost entirely material from Ma'mar ibn al-Rāshid. See, Gilliot, Claude, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, (ed.) Jane Dammen McAuliffe, (Washington: Georgetown University) Consulted online on 18 January 2017. On the nature of 'Abd al-Razzāq's tafsir, see also Andrew Rippin, "Studying early tafsir texts," *Der Islam* 72 (1995): 321-322; Andreas Goerke, "Remnants of an Old Tafsir", in *Islamic Studies Today Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, Majid Daneshgar and Walid A. Salih (ed.), (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 36.

derivative in this *sūra*, as he did not develop his own theological interpretation of the chapter, but merely adduced traditions related to it. In the same vein, neither did Ibn Abī Zamanayn (d.399/1008), a fourth-century Muslim commentator on the Qur'ān, make any reference to the Prophet's birth in his commentary on *Sūra al-Fīl*.⁹⁹ Examining all these kinds of Muslim exegeses, it is worth noting that most of Muslim scholars, from the first to the end of the fourth century did not mention any particular relationship between *Sūra al-Fīl* and the birth of Muḥammad. Most of them simply drew their attention to a literal elucidation of the chapter.

Muslim understanding of references to Muḥammad's birth in the Qur'ān was gradually nurtured at the outset of the fifth/eleventh century, when al-Tha'labī (d.427/1036) tried to determine the exact date of the invasion of Mecca led by Abraha.¹⁰⁰ In his *Tafsīr*, al-Tha'labī presented all reports related to the Prophet's birth and the invasion of Abraha. While it is uncertain precisely why he used Muḥammad's birth as the point from which to deduce the exact date of Abraha's invasion, it should be noted that the connection between these two events was thus revitalised. Al-Baghawī¹⁰¹ (d.510/1116) and al-Zamakhsharī¹⁰² (d.543/1148) did the same in their *Tafsīr*, without any further explanation of the connection between these two events.

When it came to Ibn Kathīr, the association between Muḥammad's birth and Abraha's invasion became more significant. According to Ibn Kathīr, chapter 105 of the Qur'ān was not only revealed to remind the Quraysh of one of the favours God had done them;

⁹⁹ Ibn Abi Zamānin, Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdullāh, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīz* (Cairo: al-Fāruq al-Haditha, 2002), p.5/164.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Tha'labī, Abū Ishāq Ahmad ibn Muḥammad, *al-Kayhfu wa al-Bayān*, (Lubnān: Dār Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabī, 2002) p.10/288

¹⁰¹ Al-Baghawī, al-Husain Ibn Mas'ud, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzil* (Bayrūt: Dār Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabī, 2000), p.5/308.

¹⁰² Al-Zamakhsharī, Abū al-Qāsim Mahmud ibn Amru, *Al-Kashshāf* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1407H), p.4/798.

but it was also regarded as giving a sign to them from God, and preparing the way for the coming of the Messenger of Allāh. Ibn Kathīr said: “However, this was a means of giving a sign and preparing the way for the coming of the Messenger of Allāh. For verily, he was born during that same year, according to the most popular opinion. So the tongue of destiny was saying, ‘We will not help you, O people of Quraysh, because of any status you may have over the Ethiopians (Abyssinians). We are only helping you in order to defend the Ancient House (the Ka‘ba), which We will honour, magnify, and venerate by sending the unlettered Prophet, Muḥammad, the Finality of all Prophets.”¹⁰³

The connection between Muḥammad and this chapter deepened in later centuries. When examining these verses, Sayyid Quṭb elucidates this chapter as a revelation from God that conveys a significant message about the authenticity of Muḥammad’s mission. Every single action accomplished by him, even anything related to his surroundings, was purely designed by God alone. In his *Tafsīr*, Sayyid Quṭb adduces the tradition that relates the story of how Muḥammad’s camel sat down some distance from Mecca on the day when the Hudaibiyya peace agreement was concluded. Muḥammad said: “She has been prevented by the same will which debarred the Elephant from entering Mecca.” Even though this tradition is presented to show Muḥammad’s acknowledgment of Abraha’s invasion, it also implies that there is a clear development of thought among Muslims through the ages. Sayyid Quṭb’s *Tafsīr* presents novel and additional information that we might not find it in sources from previous generations. He also adduced the narration of Muḥammad’s speech on the day of the conquest of Mecca. Muḥammad said: “Allāh has protected Mecca against the Elephant but He allowed His messenger and the Believers to conquer it (few years later).”¹⁰⁴ Both these

¹⁰³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* p.8/483.

¹⁰⁴ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur’ān*, al-Fil p.8/100.

traditions indicate a strong relationship between the Prophet and the God who reveals the Qur'ān; and it implies that the failure of Abraha's invasion and the later conquest of Mecca led by Muḥammad demonstrate part of God's delicate plan and his satisfaction with Muḥammad's accomplishment.

In sum, after analysing the facts that accumulated from the various kind of Muslim *tafsīr*, there is a strong indication that Muslim exegetes, from the first to the end of the fourth century did not refer to any particular relationship between *Sūra al-Fīl* and the birth of Muḥammad. Indeed, the story has been mentioned by some *mufasssīrīn* including Muqātil, but it is hard to find Muslim commentators who relate this chapter as a sign of prophethood, when the chapter itself apparently fails to yield any connection to the event of the Prophet's life. Their centre of discussion in this chapter focuses mainly on linguistic points of view. It is surprising, however, that the connection between the Sūra and the event of the Prophet's birth is to be found in the work of al-Jāḥiẓ, the third/ninth century scholar. Further analysis need be done in the next chapter in order to scrutinise how this connection appears.

2.4 The Luminous Child

One of the most prevalent themes in the Qur'ān is light, which always represents an emblem of truth, God's guidance, features of Islam and faith. The Qur'ān itself was not only characterised as guidance for mankind (2:185), but is also itself referred to as a light (4:174). One of the *sūras* of the Qur'ān is called "the light" (*al-nūr*), and Islamic tradition relates that the Prophet himself named this chapter.¹⁰⁵ In this chapter, the

¹⁰⁵ Ibn 'Ashūr, Muḥammad al-Ṭāḥir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al- Ṭāḥir ibn 'Ashūr al-Tunīsī, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (al-Dār al-Tunisiyah Li al-Nashr, 1984) p.18/139.

Qur'ān describes God as a source of light: "Allāh is the Light of the heavens and the earth." Standing as evidence of truth, the miracle of other Prophets is also portrayed as a form of spiritual illumination. For instance, God granted Moses nine miracles (27:12) and one of them was that his hand appeared as white (i.e. luminous) (20:22)¹⁰⁶.

Muḥammad was not excluded from this theme of luminosity, either. Even though there is no obvious verse that specifically refers to Muḥammad as a light, some interpretations of the Qur'ān maintain that the word light in the Qur'ān alludes to Muḥammad. 5:15 says: "O People of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger making clear to you much of what you used to conceal of the Scripture and overlooking much. There has come to you from Allāh a light and a clear Book." The word "light" at the end of this verse was interpreted as meaning Muḥammad by many Muslim commentator in their exegetical works¹⁰⁷ In another passage (7:157), the Qur'ān confirms that Muḥammad was equipped with light from God: "Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong, and makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits for them the evil, and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them. So they who have believed in him, honored him, supported him and followed the light which was sent down with him; it is those who will be the successful". And in (33:46) he was ascribed as possessing personal illumination (*munīra*).

In the *sīra* tradition, the light also serves as a symbol of Muḥammad's prophetic signs, and this concept is illustrated extensively. His father was said to possess a shining blaze

¹⁰⁶ Some Muslims have interpreted this as meaning his hand was shining like a lamp. For instance, Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, "He brought it out, and by Allah, it was as if it were a lamp" (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, p.5/280).

¹⁰⁷ Including al-Ṭabarī (p.10/143), al-Samarqandī (p.1/378), al-Tha'labī (p.4/39), al-Baghawī (p.2/32), al-Rāzī (p.11/327) and al-Suyūṭī (1/139)

between his eyes, a sign of the prophetic seed latent in his body¹⁰⁸. When his mother was conceiving him, she is said to have had a vision of light emerging from his body illuminating the palaces of Buṣra in Syria.¹⁰⁹ Muḥammad was born with light: he was described as casting no shadow, even in bright sunlight or in moonlight.¹¹⁰ Confirming this notion, al-Nasafī cites Prophetic tradition in order to support the concept of the Prophet having no shadow. He narrated on the authority of ‘Uthmān, saying that “Allāh did not put the Prophet’s shadow on the Earth in case someone trod upon it.”¹¹¹ One of the most famous stories concerning the birth of Muḥammad is that he was born with a light. It is recorded by many Muslim biographers in various versions that Muḥammad’s mother is believed to have said: “When he was born, there was a light that issued out of my pudendum and lit the palaces of Buṣra in Syria,”¹¹² while, according to the mother of ‘Uthmān ibn al-‘Aṣ, who witnessed the event, the light shone over everything until she could not see anything but light.¹¹³

When this story is examined, it appears that it is not in fact narrated by Ibn Ishāq in his description of the circumstances of Muḥammad’s birth,¹¹⁴ but rather was included in his *Sīra* as part of his explanation of Muḥammad’s mother’s vision when she conceived

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Ishāq, trans. by Guillaume, p.69; al-Aṣbahānī, *Dalā’il*, 1/130.

¹⁰⁹ The element of light (nūr) in this hadith denotes the command of truth that will overcome the Darkness of oppression or polytheism. Since the Qur’ān itself symbolises the Darkness as representing polytheism and oppression, it is reasonable to assume that the word ‘light’ that engulfs the palaces in Buṣra, Syria, in this hadith denotes the image of the truth of Islam that will overcome the Darkness (of polytheism or oppression) embraced by the Syrian ruler. The prophet also mentions that he saw the light engulf the castles of Persian and San’ā (Yemen) while digging a trench in preparation of the Battle of al-Khandaq (the Trench). See, al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il*, p.1/83.

¹¹⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Imtā’ al-Asmā’* (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1999), p.2/170, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Shamā’il al-Sharīfa*, (Dār Tair Al-Ilm, [n.d]), p.45.; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul Al-Hudā wa Al-Rashād*, p.2/90.

¹¹¹ Al-Nasafī, Abū Al-Barakāt ‘Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Mahmūd, *Madārik Al-Tanzīl wa Haqāiq At-Ta’wīl*, (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Kalim Al-Tayyib, 1998), p.2/492.

¹¹² Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, p.1/45.; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, p.1/158.; Ibn Hibbān, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, p.1/53.; al-Kharkūshī, *Sharf Al-Mustafā*, p.1/289.; al-Asbahānī, *Dalā’il*, p.1/135.; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il*, p.1/82.; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra*, p.1/228.

¹¹³ Al-Asbahānī, *Dalā’il*, 1/135, al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Turath, 1387), p.2/157.; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra*, p.1/207.

¹¹⁴ Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p.69.; Ibn Ishāq, ed. al-Mazidī, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyya li Ibn Ishāq* (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 2004), pp.96-99.

him.¹¹⁵ Ibn Ishāq then recounts it again when describing the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. There is nothing in Ibn Ishāq's chapter about the birth that gives any detail about an apparent light. Depicting the situation of Muḥammad's birth, Ibn Ishāq only mentions a few particulars regarding the date, the place where he was born and a story about a Jew who witnessed a star that he believed was a sign of a coming prophet. He then added to the chapter with an extra information about what his mother and his grandfather did after he was born, and the stories end with a discussion of his suckling period.

In contrast with his predecessor, Ibn Sa'd clearly locates this story in the chapter of the Prophet's birth,¹¹⁶ recording five different versions of traditions referring to the light that accompanied the birth of Muḥammad. A similar step was taken by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, who both engraved this theme of light in their momentous works.¹¹⁷ It appears, however, that neither of them cite any verses from the Qur'ān to support this remarkable occurrence: the story relies solely on the traditions narrated by earlier generation of Muslims.

As far as the present author has been able to discover, al-Ṣāliḥī was the first of Muḥammad's biographers who employed verses from the Qur'ān to establish a fundamental connection with this story.¹¹⁸ He said: "and the light that accompanied the birth of the Prophet is a sign of what he brings together with him which is a light of guidance that will be a pathfinder for the people of the earth and expunge the darkness of polytheism. As God says 'There has come to you from Allāh a light and a clear Book. By which Allāh guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings

¹¹⁵ Guillaume, *Life*, p.69.; Ibn Ishāq, ed. al-Mazidi, *Sīra*, p.97.

¹¹⁶ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 1976) pp.1/206-207.

¹¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, pp.2/156-165.; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra*, pp.1/206-207.

¹¹⁸ Al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-Hudā wa al-Rashād*, 1/342.

them out from darknesses into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path' [5:15-16].” Clearly the central discussion in this passage is of the light associated with Muḥammad’s birth. By citing this verse, al-Ṣāliḥī appears to suggest that the word “light” in this verse refers to the event, and should be interpreted within this context.

This novel connection and fresh reading was actually preceded by Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī.¹¹⁹ In the eighth/fourteenth century, he wrote a book entitled *Latā’if al-Ma’ārif fīmā li Mawāsim al-‘ām min al-waḥā’if* (*The Subtleties of Learning Concerning the Devotions of Various Seasons*), which was intended as a guide to the virtues and devotions that should be practised by obedient Muslims at every specific times. When discussing the rituals of the month of Rabī‘ al-Awwal, he commenced the chapter by articulating how the Prophet’s birth (*Mawlid*) should be regarded¹²⁰ and, in order to prove the prophecy of Muḥammad, Ibn Rajab provided an extensive range of Prophetic traditions, including the story of the light, alluding to the tradition narrated by Ibn Ishāq. It is in this passage that he initially links the story with verse 5:15 of the Qur’ān.¹²¹ Even though this idea was initially proposed by Ibn Rajab, it seems that the notion was not widely circulated in the field of *sīra* scholarship until it was then quoted by al-Qaṣṭalānī in his *al-Mawāhib*.¹²² Al-Ṣāliḥī then includes it in his work, but using his own words, without citing any other scholar’s words as quotations (although there was a probability that he had been influenced by Ibn Rajab’s thought). It seems that the idea

¹¹⁹ Since the book was not intended to focus the discussion on *Sīra* material, al-Ṣāliḥī’s notion is referred to first even though chronologically speaking, Ibn Rajab preceded Al-Ṣāliḥī.

¹²⁰ Al-Hanbalī, ‘Abd Al-Rahmān Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rajab, *Latā’if al-Ma’ārif fīmā li Mawāsim al-‘Ām Min al-Waḥā’if* (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1989) pp.94-115.

¹²¹ Ibid., p.105.

¹²² Al-Qaṣṭalānī, Ahmad Ibn Muhammad, *al-Mawāhib al-Laduniyya bi al-Minahi al-Muhammadiyya* (Bayrūt: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2004), p.1/128. Others may consider al-Qaṣṭalānī as the first biographer of Muhammad to associate Q 5:15 with this miraculous event, but since he was just quoting the exact words of Ibn Rajab, it is reasonable to suggest that al-Ṣāliḥī was the first.

penetrated the sphere of *sīra* discourse in the tenth/sixteenth century, since both of them al-Ṣāliḥī and al-Qastalānī lived in the same era.

In order to acquire a fuller picture of Muslim understanding of this verse, we must also scrutinise Muslim exegetical works. As it is hard to find references in *sīra* works, the connection between this light at Muḥammad's birth and 5:15 of the Qur'ān was never mentioned in the early Muslim commentaries on the Qur'ān. Second-century commentators never alluded to this verse to be part of this event; and, furthermore, the word "light" in this verse was never interpreted as referring to Muḥammad in any way. Muqātil, for instance, simply elaborates the meaning of the word literally, without proposing any allegorical interpretation. The word "light" was translated literally as "*diyā*" (which means shine or luminosity)¹²³, and it seems that the word was not perceived to have any veiled meaning. The same phenomenon occurs in the third century of Islam. Al-Ṣan'ānī and al-Tustarī did not even attempt to give an exegesis of this verse in their works, suggesting that the meaning of the verse was well understood and did not require an interpretation.¹²⁴ When it comes to the fourth/tenth century, a theological development may be detected in Muslim exegetical works. Al-Ṭabarī starts by suggesting that this word should be interpreted as "the light which came with Muḥammad",¹²⁵ whereas Ibn Abī Zamanayn suggested that the word should be interpreted as referring to the Qur'ān¹²⁶. Without alluding to the words of earlier scholars, these commentaries seem to be purely the result of their own ideas.

As time went by, the initial literal thoughts about the word "light" gradually evolved with a specific theological interpretation. The word "light" was constantly being

¹²³ Muqātil Ibn Sulayman, *Tafsīr*, p.1/288.

¹²⁴ Al-Ṣan'ānī, *Tafsīr*, pp.1/181-186, al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, p.1/58.

¹²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, p.10/143.

¹²⁶ Ibn Abī Zamanayn, Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdullāh Ibn Isā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz* (Cairo: al-Farūq al-Tibā'ah li al-Nashr, 2002), p.2/17.

interpreted as referring either to Muḥammad or the Qur'ān; and within three centuries, this became the accepted view. Commenced by al-Ṭabarī, then al-Tha'labī followed in his footsteps by offering the same meaning in his *Tafsīr*.¹²⁷ Al-Baghawī¹²⁸, and al-Rāzī¹²⁹ confirm that the word refers to Muḥammad, while al-Zamakhsharī¹³⁰ and Ibn Kathīr¹³¹ prefer to understand it as referring specifically to the Qur'ān. As far as the investigation of the present author is concerned, no Muslim Qur'ānic commentators have attached their understanding of this word or verse to the event of the “luminous” birth of Muḥammad. Most of them have interpreted the verse in its Qur'ānic context alone, without connecting the verse to any particular event.

When examining the use of this particular tradition¹³² in the Muslim commentaries of the Qur'ān, the researcher finds that another similar tradition has also been mentioned in various commentaries on other chapters. The tradition that was also narrated by Ibn Ishāq in a longer version recounted that some of Muḥammad's companions asked him to tell them about himself. He said: “I am what Abraham my father prayed for and the good news of (my brother) Jesus. When my mother was carrying me she saw a light proceeding from her which showed her the castles of Syria.”¹³³ This tradition has been used to provide an auxiliary explanation of certain verses in the Qur'ān; but even so, none of these verses refers to the occasion of Muḥammad's birth. For instance, al-Ṭabarī cites this tradition to elucidate the meaning of “Good tiding of 'Isā” in 6:61,¹³⁴ while Ibn Kathīr quoted it to explain the meaning of 2:129 regarding Abraham's prayer.

¹²⁷ Al-Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, p.4/39.

¹²⁸ Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, p.2/32.

¹²⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, p.11/327. Al-Rāzī expounds the word in detail by discussing three different meanings of the word.

¹³⁰ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*, p.1/617.

¹³¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, p.3/68.

¹³² The tradition that elaborates the emergence of light at the event of the Prophet's birth.

¹³³ Guillaume, *Life*, p.72.

¹³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, p.23/359

It is apparent that following our investigation of this verse and its interpretation, all the readings have led us to conclude that they contain no clear reference to the event of Muḥammad's birth. As a matter of fact, it is hard to see that the early Muslim commentators interpreted the word 'light' in this verse as referring to Muḥammad in any significant way. It was actually later generations who developed a new sight of interpretation, until it was used by a biographer of Muḥammad to establish a connection between this verse and the occasion of Muḥammad's birth.

2.5 The Opening of The Prophet's Breast

According to the prevailing tradition, it was customary in Mecca to place nursing infants in the care of a desert tribeswoman, so that the child would grow up in the free, fresh air away from the cramped conditions and contaminating atmosphere of the city, and learn the wholesome ways of the Bedouins.¹³⁵ Consistent with Arab culture, a foster mother was found for Muḥammad; he was taken in by Halīma Sa'diyya, a wet-nurse from the tribe of Banī Sa'd. Through the length of this nursing period, a few extraordinary incidents took place around him. One of the anecdotes of miracles that happened during this time was the story of the opening of Muḥammad's breast, which has been narrated by Muslim scholars including Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa'd (al-Tabaqāt), al-Bukhārī, Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj, al-Bayhaqī. Abū Nu'aym and al-Zarqanī.¹³⁶ and to which varying attitudes are adopted. None of the early *sīra* authors connect this event to any verse of the Qur'ān.¹³⁷ A few scholars, however, mostly Muslims with a background in exegesis, linked this occasion to the chapter 94 of the Qur'ān. Al-Ṣāliḥī

¹³⁵ Al-Mubarakfurī, *al-Rahīq Al-Makhtūm* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Hilal, 1427H), pp.63-66.

¹³⁶ Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa'd (al-Tabaqāt), al-Bukhārī, Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj, al-Bayhaqī. Abū Nu'aym and al-Zarqanī. However there is no consensus about the exact year when this incident occurred.

¹³⁷ Including Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Kathīr in his *al-Bidāya*.

was one of the *sīra* authors who connected this chapter with this remarkable event. In his work, he commences the discussion regarding the opening of Muḥammad's breast by presenting a very detailed commentary on *Sūra al-Inshirāḥ*. His discussion is supported by an explicitly Muslim interpretation of chapter 94 of the Qur'ān, and at one blow indicates a strong foundation for this notable occasion.¹³⁸

It is noteworthy to state that the first three verses of chapter 94 of the Qur'ān support our discourse on the relationship between this event and Muslim understanding of the Qur'ān. According to Sayyid Quṭb, this chapter was revealed soon after the revelation of chapter 93, as if it were a continuation of it.¹³⁹ The first three verses are: "Did We not expand for you, your breast? (1), And We removed from you your burden (2), which had weighed upon your back (3)". An examination of second-century Muslim exegeses shows that none of them connected these verses with the story of the opening of the Prophet's breast. However, the way they understood the second verse of this chapter is striking. The word *wizraka* (your burden) has been widely interpreted as the Prophet's "sin", which implies that the concept of *'iṣma*¹⁴⁰ was not yet absolutely established in this period. Mujāhid interpreted the word *wizraka* to mean "your sin"¹⁴¹, while al-Ḍaḥḥāk illustrated it as *shirk* or polytheism.¹⁴² This kind of interpretation prevailed at least until the sixth century of Islam. Al- Ṣan'ānī¹⁴³ and al-Ṭabarī¹⁴⁴, were among the scholars of the third and fourth centuries who thought this verse referred to a sin that was burdening the Prophet; and in the fifth century al-Tha'labī and al-Baghawī were among the scholars who continued to reiterate the same interpretation. It is worth noting

¹³⁸ Al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul Al-Hudā wa Al-Rashād*, p.2/80.

¹³⁹ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fi ḏilāl al-Qur'ān*, p.6/3929.

¹⁴⁰ The term "*'iṣma*" denotes Muḥammad's immunity against evil powers due to God's protection.

¹⁴¹ Mujāhid ibn Jabr, *Tafsīr*, p.736.

¹⁴² Al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Mazāhim al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr*, p.976.

¹⁴³ Al- Ṣan'ānī, 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām, *Tafsīr*, (Bayrūt: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1419H), p.3/437.

¹⁴⁴ Al- Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, *Tafsīr*, p.24/492.

that al-Tha‘labī was probably the first Muslim exegete to refer to the concept of *‘iṣma* when commenting on these verses, without any further explanation of the concept as it is widely understood today.¹⁴⁵ At the moment he interpreting the second verse, he says: “Probably one of the meanings of this verse is ‘we preserve you from shouldering sins’.” Thus, until the sixth century, it is hard to find any connection between these verses and the incident of the opening of the Prophet’s breast. Even al-Bukhārī, one of the eminent hadith scholars who reported that event, never connected it with these verses when commenting on this chapter in his *ḥadīth* collection, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*¹⁴⁶

The seventh century of Islam witnessed the initial association between the Muslim exegetes’ understanding of this chapter and the opening of the Prophet’s breast. Al-Rāzī was the first to interpret the first verse as to mean that Allāh expanded the Prophet’s breast by sending Gabriel to purify the black spot in his heart. Commenting on the first verse, he endeavours to clarify the meaning of “expanding your breast” by presenting two different views. Al-Rāzī illustrates that there are two aspects of meaning associated with the term “expanding your breast”. The first is related to the tradition depicted as God sent Gabriel, who came down to Muḥammad, cut open his chest, took his heart, washed, purified and filled it with knowledge and faith and then returned it back to his chest. While the second possible meaning of “opening your breast” is that God illumined Muḥammad’s heart with the light of knowledge and obedience. Al-Rāzī even expounds on this verse by adding a considerable theological discussion.¹⁴⁷ In the same century, al-Bayḍāwī elaborated in his *Tafsīr* that these verses probably referred to the traditions that portray the event of the opening of the Prophet’s breast.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, p.10/232

¹⁴⁶ Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mughīrah, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Bayrūt: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1987), p.4/1892.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr (Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb)*, p.32/206.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, p.5/321.

Ibn Kathīr's commentary on this chapter offers another notion. He suggests that the verse "Did We not expand for you, your breast?" (94:1) refers to God's expanding the Prophet's breast on the night of *al-Isrā'* (the night of the Prophet's Journey and Ascension to Heaven). By adducing a tradition narrated by Mālik ibn Ṣa'ṣa'a and al-Tirmidhī, he links the chapter firmly to the event of the opening of the Prophet's breast on the night of *al-Isrā'*.¹⁴⁹ This interpretation by Ibn Kathīr indicates that scholars of the eighth century had moved to another level of understanding of the Qur'ān and its relation to Muḥammad. It is interesting to note that, even though the hadith of Mālik ibn Ṣa'ṣa'a has also been mentioned in Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, there is no mention of verse 94:1 in the discussion. There are wide interpretation could be made on this issue. One of them, it might probably due to the different approach when he write the biographical information about the Prophet and when he is writing the tafsīr. The verse might need more clarification from hadith so then he provided available sources at his disposal, including the tradition of Mālik ibn Ṣa'ṣa'a. While when writing the sīra, it is probably clearer to cite another hadith rather than providing verse which could probably contain diverse or clouded meaning.

Compared with the previous interpretation, we notice that there is a development of Muslim thought on this chapter, which gradually became connected to the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. It is hard to find any correlation between the chapter and this event in Muslim exegetical works before the seventh century of Islam. An initial link may be found in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, an exegetical work formulated by al-Rāzī. Even though some Muslim scholars have argued against the originality of al-

¹⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, p.8/429.

Rāzī's work,¹⁵⁰ the theological interpretation he presents manifests the starting point for connecting this chapter with the story of the opening of the Prophet's breast.

Even though the connection is not found in the works of *tafsīr* of the third/ninth century, it is interesting to note that an examination of other Muslim literature confirms that the connection was actually initiated in third/ninth century scholarship, in the work of al-Tirmidhī. (Further discussion regarding this will be presented at the third chapter of this thesis.) The most important question is what made this connection emerge after almost three centuries, for it had never been associated with the event before. Another aspect to be considered is why the first verse is the only verse of this chapter that has been used as a premise to link the Qur'ān to this occasion, while the remaining verses seem to have no significant association with the story.

2.6 General Picture of Early Life in the Qur'ān

Probably the most significance reference to Muḥammad's early life is found in *Sūra al-Duhā*, chapter 93 of the Qur'ān:

“By the white forenoon and the brooding night, Thy Lord has neither forsaken thee nor hates thee and the Last shall be better for thee than the First. Thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied. Did He not find thee an orphan, and shelter thee? Did He not find thee erring, and guide thee? Did He not find thee poor, and suffice thee?

¹⁵⁰ Al-Dhahabī mentions in his *Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn* that Al-Rāzī did not finish his *Tafsīr*, but that it was completed by one of his students. However, Dr Muhsin ‘Abd al-Hamīd has argued against al-Dhahabī's statement. In his PhD thesis, he asserts that al-Rāzī did finish his *Tafsīr* and it is completely his own intellectual work.

As for the orphan, do not oppress him, and as for the beggar, scold him not; and as for thy Lord's blessing, declare it.”

Ibn Ishāq quoted these verses while elaborating the lapse of revelation scene.¹⁵¹ According to him, when the Qur’ān was revealed to Muḥammad, Gabriel was delayed from coming to him for a number of days. Therefore, Muḥammad, as a Messenger of Allāh, was deeply affected by this. The idolaters then began to say, “His God has abandoned him and hates him.” So Allāh revealed the verse: “Your Lord has neither forsaken you nor hates you.”

Even though this chapter only appears in the passages that discuss Muḥammad’s revelation phase, an essential part of the chapter seems to focus on his early life. The words “orphan”, “erring” and “poor” clearly illustrate the poverty and lack of direction in his early life. Ibn Kathīr quoted Qatāda as saying: “These verses are describing stages of the Prophet’s life before his prophetic mission”¹⁵² An examination of Muqātil’s *Tafsīr* shows that he describes these verses slightly differently from other exegetes. He begins his interpretation of verse six by saying “And then Allāh reminds him (Muḥammad) about his mercy and Gabriel said to him ‘Did He not find thee an orphan, and shelter thee?’” And when he moves on to the next verse, he again begins with the same phrase: “and Gabriel said to him: ‘Did He not find thee erring, and guide thee?’”¹⁵³ The way he repeats the phrase “and Gabriel said to him” in commenting on these three verses (94:6-8) elicits a totally different understanding. By adding the phrase “and

¹⁵¹ According to the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the *wahy* has been delayed for certain period of time. See, Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, p.112.; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, p.2/22.; *Tafsīr* p.4/36.; al-Suyuti, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Bayrūt: Mu’assasa al-Kutub al-Thaqafiyya, 2002), p.296.

¹⁵² Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr*, p.8/427.

¹⁵³ Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, p.3/495

Gabriel said to him” at the beginning of each verse makes it appear that all these verses are spoken by Gabriel, as he is in the first person (the speaker), Muḥammad is in the second person (the addressee) and Allāh is in the third.

The word “orphan” accords with the tradition that Muḥammad was born after his father’s death and that his mother died when he was young. Afterwards, Muḥammad was under the guardianship of his grandfather, until he died when Muḥammad was eight years old. His uncle, Abū Ṭālib, then took over responsibility for him and continued to protect him and assist him, and even to restrain his people from harming him.

The word “erring” raises some questions and needs to be defined. The word “*dāllān*” in the original is derived from the root *ḍ l l*, which has several meanings in Arabic. One of the meanings is to be lost in error and deviation; another meaning is to be unsure of the way and perplexed as to which way one should choose; another is to be lost and astray¹⁵⁴. According to al-Tha‘labī, “Muḥammad in error” could be interpreted to mean that he was brought up in an ignorant society, where erring ways and practices abounded, and Allāh guided him through his revelation. Al-Tha‘labī also presented four different stories that link this verse to the life of Muḥammad.¹⁵⁵ According to him, Muḥammad was once lost in the desert and was found by Abū Jahl. Al-Tha‘labī asserted that this was one of God’s gifts of grace to Muḥammad: he was lost in the desert and God returned him to his grandfather at the hand of his enemy (Abū Jahl).¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Al-Mawdūdī, Sayyid Abū Al-A‘lā, *Tafhim al-Qur’ān*, (Internet version: tafheem.net) Surah al-Duḥa.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, pp.10/226-229.

¹⁵⁶ Another three stories that show Muhammad as in error are:

1. Muḥammad once was lost when he was under the guardianship of Ḥalima al-Sa’diyya.
2. He once joined the merchant’s caravan led by Maysara. When he was riding at night, Iblis took his camel’s reins and caused him to become lost. Then Gabriel came and saved him.
3. During the night of his journey and ascension to heaven, Muḥammad was lost when he was left far behind Gabriel.

Ibn Kathīr says in his *Tafsīr* that this verse refers to Muḥammad’s nescience or ignorance, supporting this assertion by referring to 42:45: “And thus We have revealed to you an inspiration of Our command, You did not know what is the Book or (what is) faith, but We have made it a light by which We guide whom We will of Our servants.” However, as scholars understand it, the word “erring” seems to have been used in the Qur’ān as an imperative description of Muḥammad before he received guidance.

Finally, the third word in this chapter that portrays Muḥammad’s early life is “poor”. The obvious reference of this situation is to his marriage to Khadīja. This marriage with the daughter of one of Mecca’s successful entrepreneurs was extremely fortunate for Muḥammad. Al-Baiḍāwī explains this verse as meaning that Allāh is reminding Muḥammad that He enriched him through his trading achievements. It is worthy of note that the Qur’ān’s attestation of Muḥammad’s position in his early life is mentioned in this verse, since Ibn Ishāq’s *Sīra* commentary makes no reference to suffering or poverty. Although his financial status became more comfortable later, the Quraysh, nevertheless, did not recognise him as a leading merchant. This is suggested in 43:31, in which his opponents say: “Why was this Qur’ān not sent down upon a great man from (one of) the two cities (Mecca and al-Ṭā’if)?” In conclusion, al-Mawḍūdī drew his observation on these verses by making a comparison between Allāh’s favours to Muḥammad and Moses. He said: “Here, one should also keep in view verses 37-42 of *Sūrah Ṭaha*, where Allāh, while sending the Prophet Moses to confront a tyrant like Pharaoh, encouraged and consoled him, saying: ‘We have been looking after you with

kindness ever since your birth; therefore, you should be satisfied that you will not be left alone in this dreadful mission. Our bounty will constantly be with you.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Al-Mawdūdī. *Tafheem al-Qur’ān*, Surah ad-Ḍuḥā (Tafheem.net)

2.7 Concluding Remark

The Connection of the Ninth Century

The present chapter has concluded that the earliest connections between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's early life are to be found in works of the ninth century. The references might have been initiated even earlier than this but what becomes apparent in the sparse remaining available sources of the period is information which shows that this is a phase in which a clear connection begins to become apparent. It is worthy of note that even though all the narratives about Muḥammad's early life are structured on Ibn Ishāq's framework (through the transmission of Ibn Hishām), the earliest complete extant of the Prophet's biography, Ibn Ishāq nevertheless, finds it hard to claim a direct connection between the events in Muḥammad's early life and the Qur'ān itself. For example, delving deeper in his *sīra*, Ibn Ishāq actually cites only 105; and the other three Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life appear in later works of the ninth century, namely Ibn Hishām (28:12), and the works of other scholars, including Ibn Sa'd (26:219), al-Tirmidhī (94:1) and al-Jāḥiẓ (Q105). It seems that the earliest complete account of the Prophet's biography appears very definitely silent from associating the events of the Prophet's early life with the Qur'ān.

The Nature of Qur'ānic Discourse in the Ninth Century

It is worthy of note that even though the main focus of the present study aims to explore the Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life in the ninth century, based on our observations, it is apparent that there is no book of *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic commentaries) that has survived which initiates the connection between the Qur'ān and the events of

Muḥammad's early life. Analysis of the Qur'ānic commentaries of this century shows that the *mufasssīrūn* tend to focus more on the lexical elaboration of the selected verses rather than establishing a historical value within the verses. Examination of selected verses in the works of *tafsīr* of this century including the *tafsīr* of al-Ṣan'ānī, al-Tustarī, and Yaḥyā Ibn Sallām, indicate that these verses in *mufasssīr*'s view do not have any bearing on the historical element of the Prophet's early life. What is apparent is that these scholars are elucidating the verses with their emphasis specifically focusing upon the sciences of linguistics and stylistics rather than a straightforward historical reading. The plain linguistic elucidation of the verse could be regarded as conventions of the relative contemporary existing fashions in style and emphasis embraced by the scholar of *tafsīr* at this particular period.

Moreover, the massive production of literary analysis of the Qur'ān seems to be the fundamental setting of Qur'ānic discourse in this century. Within this period, Muslim scholars apparently produced a considerable number of Qur'ānic commentaries works based on linguistic discourses. The titles of these particular works obviously indicate the nature of their content. These linguistic-centred commentaries can be found in the works of al-Farrā's (d. 208/823) and al-Akhfash (d. 215/830) entitled *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* (The Meaning of al-Qur'ān), Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthanna's (d. 210/825) and his *Majāz al-Qur'ān* (The Metaphor of the Qur'ān), 'Abdullah ibn Yaḥyā al-Yazidi (d. 237/849) and Ibn Qutayba in their work of *Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (The Ambiguous Qur'ānic Words), Yahya Ibn Salam (d. 280/893) and his *al-Taṣārīf: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān Mimmā Ishtabahat Asmā'uhu wa Taṣarrufāt Ma'ānih* (Commentaries of the Qur'ān on Its Ambiguous Names and Equivocal Meanings) and *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa I'rābuhu* (The Meaning of the Qur'ān and Its Grammar) of al-Zajjāj (ca. 230/844-311/923). The profusion of works of Qur'ānic discourse produced in this century clearly indicates that

their major discussion mostly centred on a specifically linguistic discussion of the Qur'ān. This, at the same time, implies that a historical analysis might not have been either a priority nor in the mainstream of Qur'ānic discourse within this period.

The Development of Muslim Thought

The present chapter has also demonstrated that Muslim understanding of references to Muḥammad in the Qur'ān underwent an evolution in Muslim intellectual works, reflecting their immediate Islamic context. Traces of a gradual development of Muslim thought, based on the specific cases from the Qur'ān, have been detected; this indicates that the references they made to Muḥammad were the fruit of intellectual reaction within their contemporary framework. There are two types of development which have been noted:

a) The first is the introduction of novel ideas of which there has never been found in the early period. These are totally new interpretations invented by later Muslims reflecting the progress and development of Islamic knowledge. The reference to Muḥammad in Q 5:15 is the best example of this development. The idea that this verse is linked with the event of the Prophet's luminous birth is scarcely to be found in Qur'ānic commentaries from the seventh to fourteenth centuries (CE). Remarkably, the connection was then discovered in *sīra* works, whose central discourse is the Prophet's biography and not specifically Qur'ānic interpretation. This new type of understanding is rarely accepted by later commentators for the simple reason that there is no supporting tradition that upholds the tradition. What is apparent is that connections between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's early biography in commentaries of the ninth

century are sparse. When such connections appeared at a later date, they would be regarded as of doubtful provenance, or even unconventional.

b) The other form of development in Muslim thought is the expansion of ideas based on existing notions. Typically, the early Muslim commentators had produced a basic thought in their interpretation of particular verses. This interpretative thought was then gradually expanded over time in response to the development of Muslim knowledge about the Qur'ān. The development in the interpretation of Q94:1-3 confirms this observation. As was usual in the early phase, these verses were interpreted in simple linguistic framework. The interpretation subsequently moved to another level, beginning in the 11th century when al-Tha'labī introduced an element of theological interpretation by using the phrase “*wa'aṣamnāka*” (we defend or purify you), to suggest the meaning of the verse. This phrase indicates that the existing theological concept of the Prophet's *'iṣma* (infallibility)¹⁵⁸ was beginning to be introduced into the interpretation of these verses. Later on, Muslim understanding of these verses ascended to another level when al-Rāzī in the thirteenth century began to associate the interpretation with the occasion of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. In the eight/fourteenth century, Ibn Kathīr then extended this notion by adding more information regarding this incident. According to him, the verse alluded to the event of the opening of Muḥammad's breast during his night journey and ascent to heaven (*al-isrā' wa-al-mi'rāj*), although these verses had never been connected to this particular event before. It is likely that these verses may, in the future, be understood in other very different dimension that we have not yet been imagined or contemplated. This progressive nature of the development of Muslim understanding of the Qur'ān implies

¹⁵⁸ The concept of *'iṣma* initially introduced by the Sunni al-Raghib al-Asfahani in the third century of Islam. See, Al-Matrafi, *Āyāt 'itāb al-Mustafā fī Ḍaw al-Isma wa al-Ijtihād*, 2005, p.3.

that the meaning which we perceive in the present does not necessarily align with the original intention of its designer.

The *Sīra*-Qur'ān relationship

In this chapter, the *Sīra* works have been employed as an auxiliary source to identify which verses in the Qur'ān were traditionally regarded as references to Muḥammad. An analysis of these particular verses raises the question of what factors influenced the constant development of Muslim understanding of the Qur'ān, and particularly of the verses that were believed to refer to Muḥammad. Some observations can be made here.

Based on the observed cases, most of the references to Muḥammad in these verses were initially made or amended in the early centuries of the Abbasid period.¹⁵⁹ Under the Abbasid Empire, specifically in the first two centuries, one thought system that was in circulation and given legitimacy by the authorities, was the Mu'tazili school of thought, which emphasised reason and rationality. The Mu'tazilis' analysis of religion through the lens of reasoning reached its peak when they scrutinised the ontological aspect of the Qur'ān and proclaimed the doctrine of the created Qur'ān. However, it is quite strange to find that even in this reason-focused, rational environment, some superstitious *sīra* narratives were still merrily introduced in some Muslim commentaries.

The extraordinary narratives embedded in works of *sīra* were certainly exposed to this rational approach; and it would not have been easy for Muslims steeped in rational

¹⁵⁹ (1) The Prophet's genealogy, started by Ibn Sa'd in his *Tabaqāt* and Ibn Abī Hātim in his *Tafsīr*; (2) The Opening of the Prophet's breast, introduced by al-Rāzī in his *tafsīr* and al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan* and (3) The chapter Sūra 105 of the Qur'ān began to be linked with the birth and sign of Muhammad's prophethood by al-Jāhiz. The verse 5:15 began to be referred to as related to Muhammad's luminous birth by Ibn Rajab, after the collapse of the Abbasid Empire.

thinking, to accept such superstitious stories as features in the *sīra* works. The Qur'ān itself was the only means available to counter this situation and in order to give authenticity to the well-known works of *sīra*, verses from the Qur'ān were employed to construct an irrefutable foundation. Linking an extraordinary event in the *sīra* with the Qur'ān would make a great impact and provide a solid premise as a means of preventing the inherited traditions from being rejected by Muslims. In a nutshell, it seems that one of the objectives that scholars had when they endeavoured to forge a connection between *sīra* tradition and the Qur'ān was to counter the inclination towards rationalism that was gradually becoming accepted among Muslims. The Qur'ān appears to act as an instrument of authentication for the information provided in the *sīra*. In this situation, the *sīra* needed the Qur'ān more than the Qur'ān needed the *sīra*.

In a different context, we find a contrasting situation. It is worth having another look at the case of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. In this case, Rubin has analysed the account meticulously.¹⁶⁰ According to him, the earliest version of this story was narrated by al-Zuhrī and the phrase that was preserved in his narration is "and cut open his belly" (*fa-shaqqa baṭnahu*). Later, however, the transmitters shifted the original words to more closely resemble the language of the Qur'ān; they started to use the phrase "and my heart was expanded" (*fa-shuriḥa ṣadrī*) to make the narrated tradition sound more like 94:1. This shift was clearly initiated to create a coherent connection with the Qur'ān and thus to establish the *sīra* intellectually on a firm Qur'ānic foundation. This development of knowledge actually made a major, if unintentional, impact on the Qur'ānic sciences. The later works of commentary started to use the *sīra* traditions as an interpretive tool to discover the hidden message of the Qur'ān. In this

¹⁶⁰ Uri Rubin, *The Eye of The Beholder* (New Jersey: Darwin Press, 1995), pp.59-75.

situation, the Qur'ān seems quite dependent on the *sīra*; it needs the *sīra* as an interpretative tool, just as the *sīra* needs the Qur'ān as a device of authentication.

The Qur'ān and Its Interpretation

A study of the selected verses of the Qur'ān shows that depictions of Muḥammad's appearances in it are generated through the lens of interpretation. Without interpretation, there is no clear connection between the text and Muḥammad's life. Reading the verses through their literal context, one would never perceive any allusions to the Prophet of Islam. All four of the examples chosen lead us to the same conclusion: with a literal reading of the verses, it is difficult to sense any relationship with between the text and Muḥammad's appearance; but by employing interpretation as a tool, an image may easily be discerned. Chapter 105 is a clear example. The entire chapter illustrates how God obliterates the people of the elephant and thwarts their stratagems. Read literally, there is not even a clear description of the people of the elephant, and even less for creating an allusion to the Prophet's birth. But with the later development of Muslim intellectual works, this chapter appears to be an allusion to the event of the Prophet's birth and a sign of his miraculous prophethood.

The absence of interpretive tools and the abundance of ambiguous words in the Qur'ān contribute to the on-going growth of the Qur'ānic sciences. The emergence of *asbāb al-nuzūl* is one of the interpretative tools invented to unfold the message hidden in this scripture.¹⁶¹ The same phenomenon exists in other fields of knowledge. It seems that

¹⁶¹ Modern scholarship has provided interesting discourse on the nature and origin of *asbāb al-nuzūl*. Berg for example argues on the complicated nature of this kind of traditions. Significant questions posted by him seems convincing in arguing the originality of traditions of this genre. On the other hand, Rippin explore deeply on the materials of this genre. He found that "the essential role of the material is found in haggadic exegesis; that is, the *sabab* functions to provide an interpretation of the verse within a basic narrative framework. I would tentatively trace the origins of this material to the context of the *quṣṣaṣ*,

the Qur'ān needs *sīra* or other Islamic knowledge as an interpretive device to convey its message. Without this, the message seems to be obscure and inaccessible. Even though this apparatus may have a significant impact on shaping Muslim thought regarding the Qur'ān, a reliance on secondary tools can hardly reveal the original intention of its speaker; in fact, it would only drive us in the direction intended by the designer of that tool. Furthermore, the existence of ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān will continue to contribute to the constant production of interpretive works with their own specific intentions and orientations.

the wandering story-tellers, and pious preachers and to a basically popular religious worship situation where such stories would prove both enjoyable and edifying.” While Rubin in explaining the origin of *asbāb al-nuzūl* contends that the traditions that have been used in the works of *tafsīr* have their birthplace in the *sira*. They only known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* after it were gleaned by *mufasssīr* as a part of exegetical mechanism of some verses of the Qur'ān. See, Herbert Berg, Context: Muhammad, in Andrew Rippin, (edt) *Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, (Blackwell, 2006), pp.196-197; Andrew Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre *Asbāb al-nuzūl*: A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985): 1-15; Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad As Viewed by the Early Muslims -A Textual Analysis*, (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997), pp.226-228.

CHAPTER 3

THE BOOKS OF ḤADĪTH AND QUR'ĀNIC REFERENCES TO THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S EARLY LIFE

3.1 Introduction

In order to gain a fuller picture of Muslim understanding of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life, we may extend our observations towards other types of Islamic literature produced in this period. Since the works of *tafsīr* and *sīra* have already been discussed in the previous chapter, it is proposed at this point to focus on the works of ḥadīth, in which this branch of Islamic knowledge appear as classical sources written with the deliberate purpose of recording and illuminating aspects and features of the Prophet's characters, thoughts and deeds. Moreover, the works of ḥadīth were also embedded with Qur'ānic verses, which, according to the authors, were regarded as references to Muḥammad's actual life, since they portray his appearance, and elucidate the basis of his thought; all of which contribute to the revelation of the close relationship between Muḥammad's own lifelong relationship with God. The specific Qur'ānic references that are employed in the works of ḥadīth to demonstrate Muḥammad's early life will be analysed in order to gain a definitive perspective of Muslim understanding of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life within this period.

3.1.1 The Development of Ḥadīth Literature

According to scholars of Islam, ḥadīth literature had its inception during the lifetime of the Prophet himself, as ḥadīth materials were circulated widely at the time.¹⁶² The ḥadīth was allegedly incepted as the result of encouragement from the Prophet himself.¹⁶³ This subject is however highly problematic where there are heated debates among scholars of this field.¹⁶⁴ The death of the Prophet of Islam did not hinder or reduce the growth of this kind of knowledge; rather it was spread rapidly by his own companions through the rapid expansion of Islamic territory. The development and pace of its progress did, however, experience a downturn during the reign of ‘Umar I, due mainly to his concern regarding a potential confusion between the Qur’ān and ḥadīth.¹⁶⁵ By the Umayyad period, the pace of the ḥadīth’s development quickened, and

¹⁶² The fact that Ḥadīth was originated and written in the life time of the Prophet has been a long and heated debate. Weil, Sprenger, Goldziher, Schacht, Juynboll, Wansbrough, Cook, Crone and others clearly demonstrate their scepticism on this. In contra, Abbot, Sezgin, and Azami contend that there was an active literary enterprise during the Prophet’s lifetime. To conclude that the massive collections of Ḥadīth are products of forgery is unconvincing. The Constitution of Medina, that purported to be produced during the Prophet’s life, is one of the examples of accepted Ḥadīth even by the sceptics such as Crone. See, Arjomand, Said Amir, ‘The Constitution Of Medina: A Socio-legal Interpretation Of Muḥammad’s Acts Of Foundation Of The Umma’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Cambridge University Press, 41/2 (2009), p.555.; Berg, Herbert, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, (New York, 2000), pp.6-64; Nabia Abbott, *Early Development of Written Tradition*, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II: Qur’anic Commentary and Tradition*, (University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp.5–32.

¹⁶³ Even though at the early period, the Prophet prohibited his companion from recording his saying to avoid confusion with the Qur’ān, later, he was reported as approving and encouraging it. Brown, Jonathan, *Ḥadīth: Muḥammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, (England, 2009), p.18.

¹⁶⁴ There is a long-standing debate on the method of ḥadīth transmission. Cook in his study argues the nature of oral transmission in the early ḥadīth development. Indeed, oral transmission in consequence leads to the doubt on the authenticity of ḥadīth. While Schoeler on the other hand come with details alternative. To him the early ḥadīth transmission come in both oral and written transmission. The oral and written ḥadīth conceived as complementary rather than exclusive mode of transmission. The written ḥadīth was usually used as mnemonic aid. See, Michael Cook, "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam," *Arabica* 44 (1997): 437-530; Gregor Schoeler, "The relationship of literacy and memory in the second/eighth century", in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, Vol. 40, (2010), pp. 121-129.

¹⁶⁵ As Abbott asserts, ‘Umar obviously feared that the Muslim community could have been confused between the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth, both in their written forms and in memory. Furthermore, the apparently somewhat zealous activity of learning and transmitting Ḥadīth was deemed a potential distraction to a Muslim from learning the Qur’ān itself. For that reason, Umar, through his delegate, prohibited or limited Muslims from focusing too much upon the Ḥadīth. See Nabia, Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II*, p.7.

a period of growth ensued, during which Sezgin and A'zamī catalogued an immense list of ḥadīth works, which confirmed an expansion in the production of ḥadīth material within this period.¹⁶⁶ Goldziher proposes that political disputes and religious innovations and impulses were contributory factors in the proliferation of ḥadīth literature.¹⁶⁷

Later on, during the period of the Abbasid Empire, the landscape of ḥadīth discourse expanded exponentially. Based on the inventory supplied by Sezgin, the authors who produced works related to the science of ḥadīth in the third/ninth century clearly outnumbered the authors of Qur'ānic field.¹⁶⁸ One can only imagine how excessive the demands of a community wishing to acquire ḥadīth scripture rather than the works related to pure Qur'ānic sciences. Perceived as a religious government,¹⁶⁹ Duderija points out that an innovative Abbasid doctrinal policy also seems to have had an impact upon the burgeoning production of a systematic collection of ḥadīth.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, the zeal of the Abbasid Caliph's participation in ḥadīth discourse, and praise for the ḥadīth colloquy, clearly exhibits the court's patronage of this celebrated activity. In his account, Ibn al-Sam'ānī records that al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775), al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) and al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833) were among the Abbasid Caliphate's supporters who

¹⁶⁶ Al-Azami, M.M, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature*, (Indiana, 1978), pp.28-106.

¹⁶⁷ Goldziher's idea has been intensely discussed by later scholars, and some have accepted the notion, while others have rejected it. See, Motzki, Harald, 'Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey', *Arabica*, 52 (2005), pp.204–253; Maloush, Ṭalal, *Early Ḥadīth Literature and The Theory of Ignaz Goldziher*, (unpublished thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2000).

¹⁶⁸ 91 Ḥadīth works were produced in the ninth century, compared with 20 Qur'ānic works. See Sezgin, Fuad, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, (Riyāḍ, 1991), pp.1/19-313.

¹⁶⁹ Within the early period of the Abbasid dynasty, a policy towards *Zanādiqa* and the doctrine of 'the Qur'ān is created', are amongst the popular socio-religious policy gazetted by the Abbasid's Caliph. See Ibrahim, Mahmood, 'Religious Inquisition As Social Policy: The Persecution Of The 'Zanādiqa' In The Early Abbasid Caliphate', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, California State University, (1994), pp.53-72; Melchert, Christopher, 'Religious Policies of the Caliphs from al-Mutawakkil to al-Muqtadir, AH 232-295/AD 847-908', *Islamic Law and Society*, Brill, (1996), pp.316-342.

¹⁷⁰ Duderija, Adis, 'Evolution in the Canonical Sunni Ḥadīth Body of Literature and the Concept of an Authentic Ḥadīth During the Formative Period of Islamic Thought as Based on Recent Western Scholarship', in *Arabic Law Quarterly*, (2009), p.407.

extolled the ḥadīth colloquium.¹⁷¹ The involvement of the Caliph in ḥadīth sessions, the enthusiastic intellectual discourses on Islamic legal issues¹⁷² and, as Guillaume describes it, the phenomenon of “searches after knowledge” (*talab al-‘ilm* or *al-riḥla*);¹⁷³ all consequently contributed to the development of ḥadīth literature. The emergence and growing of *muṣannaf*, *musnad* and *sunan* within this period is a clear indicator of a healthy development of ḥadīth discourse. Robson and Siddiqi, in their analysis, confirm that the *musnad* (the compilation of ḥadīth according to the name of the Prophet’s companion) was the earliest type of systematic ḥadīth collection, and produced during this period.¹⁷⁴ Brown, however, contends that the *muṣannaf* (the collection of ḥadīth according the topic) was the first organized collection of ḥadīth literature.¹⁷⁵ It seems very likely that the *muṣannaf* actually preceded the *musnad*. The *Muṣannaf* of Ma‘mar (d. 153/770), Mālik (d. 179/795), Ibn Mubārak (d. 181/797) and Ibn Wahb (d. 197/812) had been completed prior to the emergence of popular *musnad* such as the work of al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/819), al-Ṭayyālīsī (d. 204/819), Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) and Aḥmad (d. 241/855).

Whichever branch of ḥadīth literature to be appeared first, either *musnad* or *muṣannaf*, both together comprise an exemplary phenomenon of an active and vigorous ḥadīth

¹⁷¹ Ibn al-Sam‘ānī, ‘Abd al-Karīm Ibn Muḥammad, *Adāb al-Imlā’ wa al-Istimlā’*, (Bayrūt, 1981), pp.18-22; Nabia, Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II*, p.49.

¹⁷² The rapid emergence of *Muṣannaf* and *Sunan* (both are types of Ḥadīth collection that cover principally discussions on legal topics) is one of the indications that legal discourse played a significant role in the development of Ḥadīth.

¹⁷³ In his studies, Guillaume proposes that this intellectual phenomenon became widespread in the Muslim community within this period. If before this, the Ḥadīth was only limited to the practice of certain provinces, with this new phenomenon, the Ḥadīth become researched, collected and spread by scholars due to their religious motivation. The journey to pursue knowledge was highly regarded as an act of piety in which certain Ḥadīth clearly honour this sacred journey, as the reward is the same as for those who participate in *jihād*. Guillaume, Alfred, *Tradition of Islam An Introduction to the Study of Ḥadīth Literature*, (Bayrūt, 1966), pp.56-77.

¹⁷⁴ Robson, J, ‘Ḥadīth’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online, [accessed 10 November 2014]; Siddiqi, M. Zubayr, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, (Cambridge, 1994), p.44.

¹⁷⁵ Brown, *Ḥadīth*, pp.25-28

discourse and a reflection on the needs of the Muslim community. In the *muṣannaf*, works are arranged in topical order, and focus principally on Islamic legal discourse in the form of a compendium. They indicate the requirement for the Muslim community to aspire to Muḥammad's divine model and stipulations in every single aspect of an individual Muslim's life. Organized in subject order, the *muṣannaf* provides a convenient access for Muslims requiring an answer to a legal or ritual inquiry. Yet since some of the early *muṣannaf* did not provide a complete *isnād* (a record of the ḥadīth transmitter) such as *Muwattā'* of Mālik,¹⁷⁶ there arose a confusion between the content of ḥadīth with the companion's opinion on legal issues, such as *Muṣannaf* of Abd al-Razzāq,¹⁷⁷ and at the same time, the number of apparently fabricated ḥadīth increasing.¹⁷⁸ As a result, the *musnad* was invented in order to solve the above-mentioned conundrums. Providing a full list of ḥadīth transmitters (*isnād*) and restricting their work to preserving only the Prophet's *sunna*, the *musnad* appears as a perfect solution to the then current demand. However, another problem now arises. Because of the *musnad* was organised according to companions' name and being a vast receptacle of ḥadīth tradition (for example, the *Musnad of Aḥmad* contained 27,000 ḥadīth), there arose further difficulty to the reader to find a ḥadīth in the case of one specific legal issue. For this reason, Muslim scholars initiated yet another branch of ḥadīth literature in response to the community's growing needs. They began to compose the *sunan*, a work designed to compile authentic ḥadīth (i.e. *Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī* and

¹⁷⁶ Since it was organized according to subject order, *Muwattā'* of Mālik is considered as one of the *Muṣannaf* by Brown and Siddiqi. His *Muwattā'* is identified as providing partial-isnad, in which some Ḥadīth are narrated with a complete chain of transmitter, while some are not. See Siddiqi, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, pp.7-11.; Brown, *Ḥadīth*, 25.

¹⁷⁷ 'Ajīn identifies that, 'Abd al-Razzāq in his *Muṣannaf* preserved not only the Ḥadīth but also compiled the opinions of *Ṣaḥāba*, *al-Tābi'īn*, *Tābi' al-Tābi'īn* and his personal commentary as well. See 'Ajīn, Asmā' Ibrāhīm, *Manhaj al-Hāfiz 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī fī Muṣannaḥihī*, (al-Qāhira, 2008), p.146.

¹⁷⁸ Abū Zahw, *al-Ḥadīth wa al-Muḥaddithūn*, 332-342.

Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and *Sunan Arbaʿa*),¹⁷⁹ which were arranged by topic. As a result, this form of work became the most effective means of serving the Muslim community's need for guidance. The production of *muṣannaḥ*, *musnad* and *sunan* in the ninth century undoubtedly exhibits the healthy aspects of the intellectual development of ḥadīth literature in this period.

3.1.2 The Prophet's Early Life in the Ḥadīth Works

It is undeniable that ḥadīth is actually the primary source of the Prophet's biography. Even though Muslims regard the Qur'ān as the first and principal Islamic source to reveal the Prophet's biographical details,¹⁸⁰ the content preserved in the scripture concerning Muḥammad's life is somewhat scant compared with what is provided by the collection of ḥadīth. In traditional Muslim perspective, the biography of Muḥammad, the *sīra*, is actually constituted of the accumulation of ḥadīth tradition pertaining to the Prophet's life. On contrary, Goerke provides an insightful opinion on this matter. His study found that the *sīra* and ḥadīth are actually emerge from a very different nature. Goerke conclude that: "...neither can the maghāzī be regarded as secondary to and derived from the ḥadīth, nor can the opposite view be upheld."¹⁸¹ On

¹⁷⁹ In early Muslim tradition, the scholars of ḥadīth considered only five books of ḥadīth as their main references of Islamic law and source of knowledge; Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī and Sunan al-Nasā'i. Until the tenth or eleventh century, Ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdīsī (d. 507AH/1113CE) included Sunan Ibn Majh as one of these major references. It became known popularly as *Sunan Sitta* (the Six books of Ḥadīth). See Abū Zahw, Muḥammad, *al-Ḥadīth wa al-Muḥaddithūn*, (al-Qāhira, 1378H), p.418.; Goldziher, Ignaz, *Muslim Studies*, (State University of New York Press, 1971), p.2/240.

¹⁸⁰ Even though the Qur'ān is accepted as a principal and primary sources of Muḥammad's biography by Muslim, in a deep discussion, Rubin argues that the Qur'ānic element in the *Sīra* cannot be regarded as the origin of narrative framework of Muḥammad's biography. He proposes that the Qur'ānic element emerged as a part of *Sīra* through the process of Qur'ānization. See, Rubin, Uri, *The Eye of The Beholder: The life of Muḥammad as Viewed By The Early Muslims*, (New Jersey, 1995), pp.226-33.

¹⁸¹ Andreas Goerke, "The relationship between maghazi and ḥadīth in early Islamic scholarship," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74 (2011): 171-185.

the other hand, Donner reiterates the previous argument highlighted by other scholars, asserting that, some of Muḥammad's appearance as portrayed in the Qur'ān did not coincide with the image of the Prophet illuminated by the works of ḥadīth.¹⁸² Since the ḥadīth is regarded as an authoritative exegetical tool employed to explore more deeply the meaning of the Qur'ān, and one which contains a vast source of information about the Prophet's life, it is indispensable to analyse the works of ḥadīth and its scholars' views on the Qur'ānic references embedded in this oeuvre that professed to be allusions to Muḥammad's early life. In the other words, the corpus of ḥadīth is the scholar's initiative offering prophetic guidance on how best to understand Qur'ānic verses, as testified in their accounts. And later on, in the sciences of the Qur'ān (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*), this method of understanding the Qur'ān is recognised as *'tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-ma'thūr*' (interpreting the Qur'ān with the tradition).¹⁸³

According to al-Zuhrānī, there are three popular styles of ḥadīth literature in the ninth century, which are known as *musnad*, *sunan* and *mukhtalaf al-ḥadīth* (works on interpreting the conflicting meanings of ḥadīth).¹⁸⁴ Even so, none of this type of literature focuses specifically on the biography of the Prophet. This does not suggest that the corpus of the ḥadīth lacks of information about the Prophet's personal life. In fact, the materials they employed to constitute all these types of works were gleaned from the occurrences and incidents which took place in the life of Muḥammad. The ḥadīth texts are essentially multifaceted: they could easily be understood in a broad exegetical spectrum, and thus apply to any kinds of ḥadīth literature. One particular

¹⁸² Donner, Fred M, *Narratives of Islamic Origins The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, (New Jersey, 1998), pp.50-52.

¹⁸³ Saeed, Abdulla, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, (New York, 2006), pp.42-46.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Zuhrānī, Muḥammad Maṭar, *Tadwīn al-Sunna Nash'atuhu wa Taṭawaruḥu*, (al-Madīna, 1996), pp.97-98.

ḥadīth can be adapted for legislative, exegetic, ascetic or historical uses. For example the famous ḥadīth of *al-niyya* (the intention), was employed by al-Muzanī (d. 264/877), the Shāfi‘ite legalist, to elaborate upon the stipulation of ablution (*al-wuḍū*),¹⁸⁵ whereas al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), the prominent *ṣūfī* employed it as a guidance for the process of soul purification (*tazkiyya al-nafs*),¹⁸⁶ and during the same period, al-Bukhārī similarly included it the book of *al-hijra*, in which al-Bukhārī assembles all the ḥadīth information about the prophet’s historical moment, the *hijra* (migration).¹⁸⁷

Among these vast collections of ḥadīth reports, *Sunan Sitta* were regarded as the most authoritative. In a later period, these six ḥadīth books eventually achieved canonical status.¹⁸⁸ Attributed as being very informative sources for outlining the Prophet’s life, it is not surprising, therefore, to hear Ḥammāda assert that only by referring to one of the *Sunan Sitta*, can one develop roughly the storyline of Muḥammad’s life.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the present study will scrutinise representative texts from *Sunan Sitta* and *musnad*, (the two most prominent styles of ḥadīth literature in the ninth century) to examine, the works and its authorial perspectives on the Qur’ānic references to Muḥammad’s early life. *Musnad* of Aḥmad will be examined as a representative of *Musnad* works of the ninth century. The immense number of ḥadīth, compiled by Aḥmad, identified by Siddiqi and Melchert as a mine of ḥadīth materials, in which it

¹⁸⁵ Al-Muzani, *Mukhtaṣar al-Muzani*, in al-Shāfi‘ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, (Bayrūt, 1990), p.8/94.

¹⁸⁶ Al-Muḥāsibī, al-Ḥārith ibn Asad, *Risāla al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abd al- Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, (Sūriyā, 1971), p.45.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad al-Nāṣir, (n.p.: Dār Ṭūq al-Naja, 1422H), p.56.

¹⁸⁸ Brown, in his works, articulates the progress of gaining this canonical status. See, Brown, Jonathan, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim The Formation and Function of the Sunni Ḥadīth Collection*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp.8-10.

¹⁸⁹ In his work, Ḥammāda illustrates that by combining the traditions narrated by al-Bukhārī, one can establish the story of the Prophet’s life. Ḥammāda, Fārūq, *Maṣādir al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya wa Taqwīmuha*, (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 2003), p.57.

serves as significant source for various writers of different genre of Arabic literature.¹⁹⁰ The significant of *Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī* in ḥadīth discourse is beyond question. In this part, *Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari* will be scrutinised as a representative of works of ṣaḥīḥ of the ninth century. While, *al-Jāmi‘ of al-Tirmidhī* will be the second representative of *Sunan Sitta*, since, according to Hammadah, among the *Sunan of al-Arba‘a* (*Sunan* of Abū Dā‘ūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā‘ī and Ibn Māja) al-Tirmidhī’s *Sunan* is the most informative in gathering together the traditions regarding the prophet’s biography.¹⁹¹ In this chapter, this study will also explore Qur’ānic background of each scholars (Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī), in order to analyse any significant factor that might probably influence them in their Qur’ānic perspective, especially to the Qur’ānic references that has been employed as references to the Prophet’s early life.

¹⁹⁰ See Siddiqi, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, pp. 49-52.; Melchert, Christopher, ‘The Musnad of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: How It Was Composed and What Distinguishes It from the Six Books’, in *Der Islam*, 82(1), (2005), pp.32-51.

¹⁹¹ Apart from *Sunan Sitta*, some scholar of ḥadīth coined the term ‘*Sunan al-Arba‘a*’ as referring to the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā‘ī and Ibn Majh. See, Aḥmad Shākir, *al-Bā‘ith al-Hathīth*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d), p.1/27.; Abū Shahba, *Ḍifā‘ ‘An al-Sunna*, (Maktaba al-Sunna, 1989), p.1/26; al-Qardawi, *Kayf Nata‘āmalu Ma‘a al-Sunna*, (Dār al-Shuruq, 2000), p.1/78.

3.2 Al-Bukhārī and His *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*

Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mughīra b. Bardizba al-Ju‘fī al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) was a prominent Sunni traditionist. Although celebrated as an expert in the science of ḥadīth, scholars have also recognised him as a legalist, in which he presents his juridical theory and personal opinion in the headings or titles of chapter in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.¹⁹² His implicit critique of Abū Hanīfa’s legalistic thought, presented in the work, implies his critical jurisprudence stance.¹⁹³ What is of most relevance to this study is his exegetical views on the Qur’ānic verses, in which he shows a remarkable approach. A thorough grounding in the Qur’ān is consistently at the very foundation of his views. For example, in his discussion about *al-li‘ān* (one types of dissolution of marriage in Islam),¹⁹⁴ he opens the subject by adducing verse 31:6, which is clearly regarded as the origin and legal foundation of this issue. He then goes further, discussing the legal status of deaf-mutes (*al-akhras*) in performing *al-li‘ān*, using his writing. In this case, al-Bukhārī approves the validity of performing *al-li‘ān* by using notes, the opinion of which is obviously contradict the Kūfa’s judiciary, especially the Hanafite scholars.¹⁹⁵ To justify his argument against his opponents, al-Bukhārī legitimises his point by presenting 19:29 of the Qur’ān, which recounts the story of

¹⁹² There are works dedicated to analyse al-Bukhārī views in legal discussion. For example, Lucas, Scott, ‘The Legal Principles of Muḥammad B. Ismā‘īl Al-Bukhārī and Their Relationship to Classical Salafī Islam’, *Islamic Law and Society*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006); al-Mazrū‘ Muna, *Fiqh al-Bukhārī fī Kitāb al-Salā min Jāmi‘ihī al-Ṣaḥīḥ Dirāsa Muqārana*, (unpublished thesis, Umm al-Qura University, 2002); al-Iskandārī, Ibn al-Munīr, *al-Mutawārī ‘Alā Tarājum Abwāb al-Bukhārī*, (Kuwayt, 1987); Ibn Jamā‘a, *Munāsabāt Tarājum al-Bukhārī*, (al-Hind, 1984).

¹⁹³ According to Ibn Ḥajar, his term ‘some people say’ (*qāla ba‘ḍ nās*) most of the time usually refers to and argues the Hanafite school of thought. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Bayrūt, 1379), 13/187; al-‘Ainī, *‘Umdah al-Qārī*, (Bayrūt, n.d) p.14/41, p.20/291.

¹⁹⁴ Li‘ān is to accuse one’s wife of committing illegal sexual intercourse with another man by saying, for instance, “I saw her committing adultery”, and in denial of the paternity of the baby with which she is pregnant. See, Ahmad, Yusuf al-Hajj, *The Book Of Nikah: Encyclopaedia of Islamic Law*, (Dārussalam, 2014), p.39.

¹⁹⁵ In this quarrel, al-‘Ainī proposes that al-Bukhārī aims to rebut the opinion of the scholars of Kūfa, while al-Kirmānī goes deeper by suggesting that the argument is focusing on a group of Hanafites. See, Al-‘Ainī, Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad, *‘Umda al-Qārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, p.20/291.

Maryam when she used ‘signs’ (body language) to defend herself from being accused of having an unlawful affair. This is one of examples which demonstrate al-Bukhārī’s profound exploration of the Qur’ān. In his analysis, Lucas also recognises al-Bukhārī’s solid foundation of Qur’ānic thought. He concludes that in legal principles, al-Bukhārī upholds the Qur’ān as his premier reference.¹⁹⁶

Apart from exploring legal discourses by employing a specifically Qur’ānic perspective, al-Bukhārī also demonstrates his Qur’ānic-based approach towards discussions regarding creedal issues in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Refuting the doctrine of Qadarite in the issue of predestination (*al-qadr*) and humans’ free will (*af’āl al-‘ibād*),¹⁹⁷ al-Bukhārī reinforces his doctrinal conceptions by presenting 25:2 of the Qur’ān, implying that God had already determined each of human acts with precise determination.¹⁹⁸ According to Ibn Ḥajar, in this argument, al-Bukhārī seems to signify that anyone who claims that he is creating his own actions is actually intervening in divine autonomy, and playing God’s role; and by that action, he could be regarded as polytheist.¹⁹⁹ In another instance, al-Bukhārī creates one specific chapter to rebut the creeds of the Kharijites, the group that proclaims that everyone who commits grave sins would be

¹⁹⁶ Lucas, Scott. C, ‘The Legal Principles of Muḥammad B. Ismā’īl Al-Bukhārī and Their Relationship to Classical Salafi Islam’, *Islamic Law and Society*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p.299.

¹⁹⁷ Qadarite was known as a movement that promoted the idea of human free will and disputed the concept of divine predestination. According to Van Ess, Becker and McDonald, the genesis of this debate has something to do with the influence of Christianity. Wensinck however, contends that the issue might be raised internally, and emerged as consequence of the debate between Kharijite and Murji’ite. The idea initiated by Qadarite was to form subsequently a basis of thought for t Mu’tazilite. See, Wensink, A.J., *The Muslim Creed*, (New York, 1965), p.51-71, Frolov, Dmitry, ‘Freedom and Predestination’, in *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, (Leiden, 2002), pp.267-271; Ahmed, Ziauddin, ‘A Survey of the Development of Theology in Islam’, *Islamic Studies*, (Islamabad, 1972), pp.93-111; Van Ess, ‘Kadāriyya’, in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, [accessed 13 October 2014].

¹⁹⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 9/152.

¹⁹⁹ While giving his commentary on the *Kitāb of al-Qadr* (one of the books in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*), he explains the creed of Qadarite and suggests that al-Bukhārī narrates a ḥadīth related to al-Qadr to show his disagreement with their standpoint. In his work entitled *Khalq Af’āl al-‘Ibād* (the Creation of Human’s act), al-Bukhārī mentioned in detail his viewpoint in this heated debate. See, Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, p.11/490, p.13/495; al-Bukhārī, *Khalq Af’āl al-‘Ibād*, (Bayrūt, 1990), pp.25-46.

punished eternally in hell.²⁰⁰ In the chapter of ‘Sins are from ignorance and a sinner is not a disbeliever unless he worships others along with Allāh’, al-Bukhārī consults 4:48 as his solid foundation, in which the verse clearly connotes that Allāh will forgive every sin except *al-shirk* (polytheism). The plain meaning of the verse was employed by al-Bukhārī to show the false premise promoted by the Kharijites. Based on al-‘Ainī’s articulation, the heading of the chapter was designed not only to refute certain group of Kharijites, but also reproach *al-Rāfiḍa*, *al-Ibāḍiyya* and other groups that held the same belief.²⁰¹

Not only applying his Qur’ānic knowledge in the discussion related to legal and creedal issues, al-Bukhārī also outlined the historical account by using similar technique in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. In the Book of Prophets (*Kitāb aḥādīth al-anbiyā’*), Ibn Ḥajar describes how al-Bukhārī consistently introduced chapters in his book by specific reference to Qur’ānic verses (indeed, if there existed one which could be identified as a reference).²⁰² Khaṭarī however, questions al-Bukhārī’s terms of reference in the story of David, for according to him, al-Bukhārī’s interpretation is prone to be influenced by *isrā’īlīyyat*, (the narrative that usually originated from Jewish traditions or Biblical material).²⁰³ In the chapter of The Statement of Allāh Taa’la: “and remember Our slave David, endued with power”, al-Bukhārī cites 38:23, in part to exemplify the Qur’ānic illustration of David’s attributes. To articulate this verse, he interprets the word *na’ja* denoting ‘the women’ (*al-mar’a*, which is probably an allusion to the story of David and Bathsheba).²⁰⁴ It is at this point in his explanation that Khaṭarī argues al-Bukhārī’s

²⁰⁰ Al-Ash‘ārī, *Maqālat Islāmiyyīn*, ed. ‘Abd al-Hamīd, (Bayrūt, 1990), p.204.

²⁰¹ Al-‘Ainī, *‘Umda al-Qārī*, p.1/203.

²⁰² Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, p.15/204.

²⁰³ Tottoli adds that, this term was sometimes employed by western scholar implying resources related to Biblical elements as well. See, Tottoli, Roberto, ‘Origin and Use of the Term Isrā’īliyyāt in Muslim Literature’, *Arabica*, (1999), pp.193-210.

²⁰⁴ Tottoli provides a cross-check of the similarity between Qur’ānic passage and biblical narrative. See Tottoli, Roberto, *Biblical Prophets In The Qur’an And Muslim Literature*, (Oxon, 200), p.60.; Newby,

definition of the word, insisting the word *na'ja* means 'ewe', and not 'lady'. As a result, Khaṭarī interprets this as a direct influence of *al-isrā'ilīyyat*.²⁰⁵ Khaṭarī's assertion should be considered as *argumentum e silentio*, since there is no clear indication that the author intended to connect the story with the narrative of *al-isrā'ilīyyat*. Presumably, al-Bukhārī was merely offering various connotations of the word as he mentions the two words together, 'lady' and 'ewe'. On the other hand, this could also represent an indication of the popularity of this story at that particular time, since the Abbasid period was known as a time in which syncretism was pervasive through encounters between Muslims and other communities.

If the stories of prophets are outlined within his specifically Qur'ānic approach, it is worth observing how al-Bukhārī delineates the story of Muḥammad, in which the historical figure is clearly the focal point of his composition of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. In line with the objective of the research, this study will examine only the materials related to the Prophet's early life.

3.2.1 Reference to The Prophet's Early Life In *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*

Since the work was not intended to be a biographical work of the Prophet, information about Muḥammad was disseminated throughout various books and chapters. Using a wealth of detail from the Prophet's memoirs, Maḥdī Rizqulla and Ḥammād illustrate that an adequate sketch of the Prophet's biography may be gleaned by merely gathering together information embedded within *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī. Most of the *sīra*-related

Gordon D., *The Making of The Last Prophet*, (University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp.159-160; Hasson, Isaac, 'David', in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. J. McAuliffe, Brill, pp. 495-497.

²⁰⁵ Khaṭarī, Sayyid Ahmad, *Manhaj al-Imām al-Bukhārī fi al-Taḥfīr Min Khilāl Kitābihi al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, (unpublished thesis, Umm al-Qura University, 1994), p.644.

material is amassed in the books of *al-Manāqib* (the virtues), *Aṣḥāb al-Nabī* (companions of the Prophet), *Manāqib al-Anṣār* (virtues of *al-Anṣār*-the helper), and *al-Maghāzī* (the battles). References to Muḥammad's early life may be summarised thematically as follows:

The Prophet's genealogy

There are two ḥadīth related to this subject. The first is his saying: "I have been sent (as a Prophet) in the best of all the generations of Adam's offspring since their Creation." This is located in the chapter revealing the Prophet's attributes (*bāb ṣifa al-nabī*), presumably to exhibit that not only was he chosen from the most propitious genealogical stock, but he was also sent to dwell among one of the most benign and favoured of human generations. However, it is not sufficient for the purposes of this thesis to put forward such a self-proclamatory statement as this in order to prove the true nobility of the Prophet's genealogy. Indeed, al-Bukhārī offers other evidence to establish this point. Adducing the dialogue occurring between Abū Sufyān and Heraclius, in his second reference of ḥadīth, al-Bukhārī seems to verify his point through the testimony of one of the Prophet's own adversaries. In a long conversation between the Emperor Heraclius and Mecca's community leader, both present as non-Muslims, but nevertheless concede the excellent qualities of the Prophet. According to Nadia El-Cheikh, early Islamic sources always portrayed Heraclius in a positive light, depicting him as an ideal and religious leader.²⁰⁶ Moreover, he was even depicted as

²⁰⁶ El-Cheikh, Nadia, 'Muḥammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy', *Studia Islamica*, 89 (1999), pp.5-21.

accepting and declaring Islam as his new faith but nevertheless retracting it later.²⁰⁷

Interestingly al-Ya‘qūbī records in his *Tārīkh* the content of Heraclius’s letter to Muḥammad. He was described as declaring the prophethood of Muḥammad, advising the Romans to accept Islam, and proclaiming his wish to serve the Prophet.²⁰⁸

Locating this specific reference in the first of seven ḥadīth in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Bukhārī undoubtedly classifies this ḥadīth as among the most important.²⁰⁹ Receiving the recognition of the highest authority of the Byzantine Emperor himself, al-Bukhārī uses the ḥadīth to legitimise Muḥammad’s prophethood. Part of the ḥadīth was subsequently repeated fourteen times in various chapters of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. The way in which al-Bukhārī presents his analysis, including minute detail and his mentioning and restating key points repeatedly, implies the significant value of the ḥadīth from al-Bukhārī’s point of view. Compared with similar literature of the same century, this ḥadīth did not enjoy a similar appreciation as did al-Bukhārī. It was only narrated partially in the *Sunan* of Abū Dā‘ūd and al-Tirmidhī, while Ibn Māja does not mention it at all in his *Sunan*.²¹⁰ The details of the dialogue seems also absent from the *sīra* during this period, including the *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām²¹¹ and Maghāzī of al-Wāqidī²¹², while Ibn Sa‘d affords it a

²⁰⁷ Tottoli, Roberto, ‘Muslim Traditions Against Secular Prostration And Inter-Religious Polemic’, *Medieval Encounters*, Brill, 5(1), (1999), p.102.

²⁰⁸ Al-Ya‘qūbī, Aḥmad ibn Abī Ya‘qūb, *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī*, (Bayrūt, 2010), p.1/399.

²⁰⁹ Burge confirms that, this ḥadīth plays a significant role in the delivery of the objective of the chapter in which it belongs. See Burge, S.R., ‘Reading between the Lines: The Compilation of Ḥadīth and the Authorial Voice’, *Arabica*, 58(3), (2011), pp.186-188.

²¹⁰ See, Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, p.4/335; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, (Al-Qāhira, 1975), p.5/69.

²¹¹ According to Guillaume, the ḥadīth was mentioned in al-Tabarī. It seems to resonate with Ibn Hishām’s abbreviation of Ibn Ishaq’s *Sīra*, the account of which has been omitted. See, Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad*, pp.654-657.

²¹² There is another story with a different character and plot of narrative reported by al-Wāqidī. In his account, Heraclius reportedly sent his ambassador from Ghassān’s tribe to observe Muḥammad. This man then went back to Heraclius and delivered his observations about Muḥammad. The man not only accomplished his task, but was also attributed as having been profoundly influenced by Muḥammad’s preaching and proclaiming to his tribe to follow Islam. See, al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, (Bayrūt, 1989), pp.3/1018-1019.

modest presence in his *Ṭabaqāt*.²¹³ It was similarly absent in the *tafsīr* of the same century, such as the *Tafsīr* Yaḥyā ibn Salām (d. 200/815), ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/826), and al-Tustarī (d. 283/896). It is palpably clear, then, that al-Bukhārī, by adducing the ḥadīth in detail, places it in the early phase of his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and recalls the same passage several times; is endeavouring to convey the distinctive and irrevocable message to the reader about Heraclius’s vindication of Muḥammad’s prophethood.

Birth and Childhood

As far as can be established, there is no ḥadīth reference to Muḥammad’s birth in *Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī*. The author does mention the incident of how Allāh protected Mecca from the invasion of Abraha with his elephant troop, but it was not presented in such a way as to demonstrate any connection with the event of the Prophet’s birth.²¹⁴ Al-Bukhārī, however, relates an account of Muḥammad’s wet nurse, Thuwayba, in which, according to him, she was a servant of the Prophet’s uncle, Abū Lahab. Thuwayba was freed by Abū Lahab soon after she had delivered a good tidings about Muḥammad’s birth to Abū

²¹³ The story of Muḥammad sending a letter to persuade Heraclius to embrace Islam is mentioned here, but omits particular details of the dialogue between Heraclius and Abū Sufyān. See, Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, p.1/199.

²¹⁴ In this ḥadīth, the Prophet is reported to say: “Allah held back the elephant (or killing) from Mecca.” This was mentioned the Chapter of (1) The writing of knowledge, (2) How the *luqta* at Mecca is to be announced and (3) The relative of the killed person has the right to choose one of two compensations. In the chapter of ‘The Conditions of Jihad and Peace Treaties’, al-Bukhārī narrated another ḥadīth picturing the story of his camel becoming stubborn, unwilling to move. His companion tried to get the camel to move but she refused. They said to the Prophet that the camel has become stubborn. The Prophet replied: “The ‘*Al-Qaṣwā*’ (the camel’s title) has not become stubborn; for stubbornness is not her habit, but she was stopped by Him who stopped the elephant.” All of the ḥadīth related to ‘the companions of the elephant’ (*ashāb al-fīl*) narrated far from having any connection to the event of the Prophet’s birth. As discussed in previous chapter, scholars of later century begin to make connection between the invasion of *ashāb al-fīl* with the sign of Muhammad’s prophethood. See, al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.1/33, p.3/125 and p.3/193.

Lahab. Later on, the account reveals how she breastfed the Prophet.²¹⁵ When Muḥammad began to preach about Islam, Abū Lahab was among his fiercest detractors. But due to his previous kindness to Thuwayba, his chastisements in his ‘after-life’ were reduced dramatically by God. In his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, apart from narrating the ḥadīth about Thuwayba, al-Bukhārī also gives further details about how Abū Lahab’s punishment was reduced by God due to his merciful act of setting Thuwayba free. Recounting the anecdote on the authority of ‘Urwa, Abū Lahab, (after his death), intervention was said to have come in the form of the dream of his relative.²¹⁶ Even though the ḥadīth provides us with significant detail in a biography of Muḥammad’s early life, it does not convey this in a specific historical context. The ḥadīth is mentioned five times in various chapters, but each reference is adduced within a specifically legal framework. It is noteworthy to mention that by adducing the ḥadīth of Thuwayba, al-Bukhārī seems to demonstrate his high admiration of the Prophet by conveying how, even though Muḥammad was a baby, he was portrayed as having the ability to be the cause of eliciting divine mercy, namely: (1) Thuwayba, Muḥammad’s wet-nurse, was freed from being a slave accordingly after the Prophet’s birth, and (2) How God’s divine mercy will reach every creature, even that of his brutal adversary, Abū Lahab.

Al-Bukhārī also transcribed the ḥadīth which relates an account of Muḥammad’s being a shepherd in his adolescence.²¹⁷ In a specific chapter regarding this, the Prophet was reported to say, “Allāh did not send any prophet who did not shepherd sheep.” His

²¹⁵ The letter ‘fa’ in the ḥadīth connotes a consequence form, in which according to Ibn Ḥajar indicates that Muhammad was breastfed by Thuwayba after she was freed. In other accounts of *sīra*, the incident is presented *vice versa*. See, Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*.

²¹⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.3/169, p.7/9-11 and p.7/67.

²¹⁷ In the *sīra*, information about Muḥammad’s career as a shepherd is usually reported after the death of his grandfather, when he was living with his uncle, aged about eight years old or more. Some historians, however, narrate that Muḥammad shepherded sheep as early as his time with Ḥalīma al-Sa‘diyya, which was when he was about five years old. See, al-‘Umarī, Akram, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, (al-Madīna, 1994), p.106; Abū Islam, *Subul al-Salam*, (‘Amman, 1428/2007), p.44.; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, (al-Qāhira, 1955), p.1/167.

companions asked him, “Did you do the same?” The Prophet replied, “Yes, I used to shepherd the sheep of the people of Mecca for some *Qarārīt* (type of currency).²¹⁸ The Prophet’s admission of being a shepherd is also recorded in two other chapters, within more detailed contexts of the story.²¹⁹ Carimokam suggests that the purpose of a portrayal of Muḥammad as a shepherd is intended to create a lineage connection between Muḥammad and the other two Biblical figures, Moses and Jesus,²²⁰ while Rogerson illustrates it as reminiscent of a Jewish figure, Akiba ben Joseph.²²¹ Based on his analysis, John Adair elucidates further that the depiction of Muḥammad as a shepherd implies an image of consummate leadership. The model of the shepherd is an ancient metaphor employed by classical scribes such as Homer and Xenophon in recognition of effective and honourable governance or leadership. Moreover, according to Adair, David, the King, was also designated the same attribution by the Psalmist.²²² It is no wonder to find that, the authors of the *sīra* also, such as Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa‘d, included this ḥadīth in their works, presumably to establish for Muḥammad a rigorous and solid preparatory course of leadership, before entering prophetic office.²²³ It is difficult, however, to offer proof that al-Bukhārī’s objectives and emphasis were the same as those of a historian, since his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is designed generally as a reference for an Islamic legal compendium. Given al-Bukhārī’s high standards in selecting ḥadīth

²¹⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.3/88.

²¹⁹ In the chapter of *al-kabāth* (the leaves of *al-Arāk* tree), Jābir said: We were with Allah's Messenger collecting *al-kabāth* at Mār Al-Zahrān. The Prophet said, “Collect the black ones, for they are better.” Somebody said, “O Allah's Messenger, have you ever shepherded sheep?” He said, “There has been no prophet but has shepherded them”. See, al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.4/157 and p.7/81.

²²⁰ Carimokam, Sahaja, *Muḥammad and the People of the Book*, (USA, 2010), p.32.

²²¹ Rogerson, Barnaby, *The Prophet Muḥammad: A Biography*, (USA, 2003), p.80.

²²² Adair, John, *The Leadership of Muḥammad*, (London, 2010), pp.17-23. See also, Ramadan, Tariq, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muḥammad*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), p.17.

²²³ See, Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, (Al-Qāhira, 1955), p.1/167; Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1/100.

judiciously, it is fair to assume that the image the Prophet being a shepherd is a particularly fitting and widely-known narrative at that particular point in history.

Early Signs of Prophethood

Al-Bukhārī relates three different incidents that occurred during Muḥammad's early life, which later scholars employed to illustrate God's guidance upon him before he became a Prophet.²²⁴ This can be classified as (1) God inspiring his theological thought, (2) conducting his physical appearance and (3) assisting his ritual performance. The first part can be inferred from the incident occurring between Muḥammad and Zayd ibn 'Amr, the prominent *Hanīf*.²²⁵ According to the ḥadīth, a meal was served to the Prophet, but he refused to eat it. The meal was then presented to Zayd ibn 'Amr, but he also rejected it and said that he would not eat anything sacrificed to an Arab's idol (*al-nuṣub*).²²⁶ The ḥadīth evidently demonstrates the Prophet's theological principles in refusing to eat anything that had been slaughtered as a sacrifice for an idol. Rubin, however, contests the accuracy of al-Bukhārī's narration. According to him, based on al-Ḥākim's version, it was Muḥammad himself, in fact, the one who sacrificed the animal on a sacred sacrificial stone, roasted it, put it in a bag, and offered it to Zayd ibn 'Amr; but Zayd refused to eat it. He concludes that the textual alteration came about in order to fit the developing Islamic concept of *ʿiṣma* (the Prophet's immunity from committing any sin). And it is reasonable to assume that, according to him, Ibn Hishām

²²⁴ For example, al-Kharqūshī relates the ḥadīth of Muḥammad's meeting with Zayd ibn 'Amr in the chapter of the Prophet's *ʿiṣma* (immunity from committing any sin), Abū Nu'aym al-Aṣbahānī and al-Bayhaqī locate the ḥadīth of the Prophet's *izār* (loincloth) in the chapter regarding the Prophet's *ʿiṣma* and God's preventing the Prophet from committing sin, See, Abū Nu'aym al-Aṣbahānī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, (Bayrūt, 1986), p.1/189; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, (Bayrūt, 1405H), p.2/32.

²²⁵ See, Rubin, Uri, 'Hanīf', in *Encyclopaedia of the Quran*, Brill, v2, pp.402-403.

²²⁶ In the Quran, the word *al-nusub* is typically associated with an idol. See, Gerald, Hawting, 'Idols and Images', *Encyclopaedia of the Quran*, Brill, v2. 481-483.

omitted the entire story from his recension of Ibn Ishaq's *Sīra* to avoid any possible perception of Muḥammad's pre-Islamic paganism.²²⁷ Rubin's argument appears to hold firm ground. Scholars of the same century, such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Dā'ūd al-Tayyālīsī (d. 204/819), al-Fākihī (d. 272/885), al-Bazzār (d. 292/904) and Ibn Sa'd, narrate the same story, signifying that Muḥammad was, in fact, the one who offered the meal to Zayd.²²⁸ To conclude that al-Bukhārī amended the text is difficult, because he too narrates the second version, the version that relates that Muḥammad was the one who offered the meal.²²⁹ Yet if he had indeed intended to alter the text, would it not have been more appropriate to have excluded the second? By narrating two versions of the stories, al-Bukhārī appears to offer an alternative reading, permitting the reader to contemplate and decide, while he, at the same time maintains his respect for and honour to the Prophet by avoiding the creation of any possible impression of the Prophet committing a sin.

Apart from depicting Muḥammad as acquiring pure theological thought, al-Bukhārī also recounts the ḥadīth that points towards God's sanction and direction in respect of Muḥammad's physical appearance and modesty in matters of dress. In the chapter of *faḍl makka* (the virtue of Mecca) and rebuilding the Ka'ba, al-Bukhārī relates that Muḥammad and his uncle, al-'Abbās participate with Quraysh in the process of the reconstruction of the Ka'ba. The young Muḥammad helps them by carrying stones. As Muḥammad fulfils his task, al-'Abbās suggests to him that he should take off his *izār* (loincloth or waistcloth) and put on his *raqba* (on his shoulder or around his neck)²³⁰ to

²²⁷ Rubin, Uri, *The Eye of The Beholder*, (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997), pp.76-81.

²²⁸ See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, (al-Qāhira 1995), p.5/38, 151, 379; al-Ṭayyālīsī, *Musnad*, (Misr, 1999), p.1/189; al-Fākihī, *Aḥkām Makka*, (Bayrūt, 1414H), p.4/82, al-Bazzār, *Musnad*, (al-Madīna, 1988), p.4/93, Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, p.3/291.

²²⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.7/91.

²³⁰ Ibn Ḥajar interprets it as *'ātiqa*, which means shoulder. But in another version of the story, the narrator used word *a'nāqina* (our neck) rather than *raqba*. See, Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, (Bayrūt, 1379H), p.3/442.

protect his shoulder (or neck) from bruises. Following his uncle's advice, Muḥammad took off his cloth; yet as soon as he did so, he collapsed, gazing up at the sky. Other scholars of the same century employed this incident to illustrate divine intervention over Muḥammad's physical appearance and modesty in matters of dress. Al-Azraqī (d. 250/864), for instance, relates that while lifting his clothes, the Prophet heard a voice saying "O Muḥammad! (Cover) your *'awra* (private parts)."²³¹ Furthermore, Ibn Abī 'Āṣim narrates a report that contributes further details of emphasis to the incident. According to his version, after taking off his clothes, Muḥammad fainted; yet once he became conscious, he explained that he saw a man in white who told him to cover his body. By placing this ḥadīth in the chapter discussing Muḥammad's early signs of prophethood, Ibn Abī 'Āṣim (d. 287/900) demonstrates his perception in terms of crystal clarity: it is through God's intervention and assistance.²³² Similarly, Ibn Hishām concurs with Ibn Abī 'Āṣim, when he includes this ḥadīth in the chapter about God's protection (*'iṣma*) during the Prophet's childhood.²³³ Even though al-Bukhārī locates the ḥadīth in chapters that bear no relation to Muḥammad's prophetic signs, by adducing the ḥadīth, he agrees implicitly with the story, and thus preserves his admiration of Muḥammad's early life.

Other early signs of Muḥammad's prophetic capacity and facility are demonstrable in his unique ritual performance. Apart from depicting Muḥammad as being protected by God from the errors of commit sin and dressing inappropriately, al-Bukhārī also narrates a ḥadīth which demonstrates how his ritual conduct is similarly divinely-guided. Muḥammad is said to have joined the Quraysh in performing *ḥajj* (pilgrimage). One of the requirements of accomplishing *ḥajj* is performing a *wuqūf* (standing (before

²³¹ Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, p.1/157.

²³² Ibn Abī 'Āṣim, *al-Awā'il*, (Kuwait, n.d) p.98.

²³³ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, p.1/183.

God)). It is standard practice for Quraysh to perform *wuqūf* in al-Muzdalifah, a specific site designated for the Quraysh, while other Arabs would perform *wuqūf* in ‘Arafa. In contrast with the Quraysh practice, Muḥammad, according to al-Bukhārī, performed *wuqūf* in ‘Arafa.²³⁴ According to al-Azraqī and Ibn Hishām, the practice that was implemented by the Prophet is the original and true one, as it is a legacy of Ibrahim’s rite; but the Qurasyh defiantly modified the ritual.²³⁵

3.2.2 Qur’ānic Reference to The Prophet’s Early Life In *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*

The way al-Bukhārī deals with the subject of legal, theological and historical discourse demonstrates the profundity and uniqueness of his Qur’ānic thought. Al-Bukhārī adopts and develops a similar approach when he meets the challenges of the ḥadīth relating to the Prophet’s early life. His method apparently aims to extract the gems treasured in the ḥadīth with painstaking intellectual precision and clarity of vision. Even though his work is richly furnished with informative ḥadīth illustrating Muḥammad’s early life and underpinned with a deep understanding of Qur’ānic knowledge, al-Bukhārī appears, nevertheless, not to connect Qur’ānic verse directly with the Prophet’s early life. As far as can be established in the present study, there are no Qur’ānic verses found or employed to establish a connection between scripture and Muḥammad’s pre-prophetic days.

It is worthy of note that the same verse used by scholars of this century as an allusion to Muḥammad’s life is also embedded in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. However, interestingly, al-Bukhārī presents it from a unique angle, offering us a conventional alternate interpretation,

²³⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.2/162, p.6/27.

²³⁵ Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, p.1/76; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, p.1/199.

which demonstrates most ably his unique Qur'ānic elucidation. For example al-Tirmidhī employs 94:1 as a reference to the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast,²³⁶ Ibn Rabban used 93:6-8 to illustrate Muḥammad's early condition²³⁷ and al-Jāḥiẓ cited 105 as an allusion to the invasion of Abraha.²³⁸ All these verses are adduced by al-Bukhārī in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* without, apparently, connecting the passage to Muḥammad's particular historical circumstances. Some suggestions may be offered regarding reasons for this:

1. Al-Bukhārī has an extremely rigorous standard of selecting ḥadīth. The way al-Bukhārī sets up strict conditions that need to be fulfilled before accepting the ḥadīth of al-Ṣaḥīḥ is exceptionally demanding.²³⁹ One may well imagine this from his own testimony. Among 300,000 of the ḥadīth which he preserved, only around 7000 were approved to be included in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.²⁴⁰ If he had been more lenient and flexible in accepting ḥadīth, some traditions that connect Qur'ānic verse with the Prophet's early life might have been included in his magnum opus. For example, the verse 26:219 of the Qur'ān has been perceived as referring to Muḥammad's genealogy. It is narrated by Ibn Sa'd in his *Ṭabaqāt* on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās. Yet since one of the narrators of this ḥadīth is not recognised by other ḥadīth scholars, this seems to be the reason behind why this kind of ḥadīth was not selected to be included in his work.

²³⁶ To be discussed in the next part of this chapter.

²³⁷ Ibn Rabban, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, ed. Mingana, (Manchester, 1922), p.57.

²³⁸ See Maṣṣūr, Sa'īd Ḥusayn, *The World-View of Al-Jāḥiẓ in Kitāb Al-Ḥayawān*, pp.198-200.

²³⁹ His strict criteria of selecting the ḥadīth led *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* to be highly celebrated. See, al-Suyūfī, *Tadrib al-Rāwī*, ed. al-Fariyābī, (Miṣr, 1414H), pp.1/96-107

²⁴⁰ According to al-'Irāqī, on the authority of al-Firabrī, al-Bukhārī is said to have memorised 300,000 ḥadīth; however, according to al-Zarkashī, this statement is made by al-Bukhārī to illustrate his massive store of information about ḥadīth and not intended to portray the exact number. See, Ibn Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, ed. Bint Shāṭi', (al-Qāhira, 1989), p.1/163.; al-'Irāqī, *al-Taḥqīd wa al-Idāḥ*, (al-Madīna, 1969), p.1/27.; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Nukat 'Alā Ibn Ṣalāḥ*, (al-Madīna, 1984), 1/297; al-Zarkashī, *al-Nukat*, (Riyāḍ, 1998), p.1/178.

2. Al-Bukhārī's critical exegetical approach when dealing with the interpretation of the Qur'ān. This can be construed from the way he organizes his discussion in the Book of *Tafsīr*. While his contemporary, al-Tirmidhī equates verse 94:1 with the event of the 'opening' or 'expansion' of Muḥammad's breast, al-Bukhārī demonstrates his arrival at a different interpretation and perspective.²⁴¹ He narrates only Ibn 'Abbās's interpretation, which clearly represents his own construal. According to the ḥadīth of Ibn 'Abbās, this verse denotes metaphorically, not literally, how Allāh 'expands' Muḥammad's breast to accept the Islamic revelation. For Al-Bukhārī, it seems not to hold any bearing or reference to any particular historical incident.²⁴² It is most likely as a result of his painstakingly rigorous criteria for selecting ḥadīth, along with his upholding of meticulous exegetical methods, that he maintains a distance from the tendencies of preserving views such as expounded by al-Tirmidhī's.

3. Al-Bukhārī's priority and focus is on legal clarification, his endeavours being the result of his perceived need to serve a community's need at a particular period in history. This is probably the reason why the ḥadīth of Muḥammad and his wet-nurse, Thuwayba is presented within an explicitly legal framework, rather than being adduced as a historical episode. In contrast with al-Bukhārī's focus and emphasis, Ibn Hishām connects the Thuwayba incident with the Qur'ānic verse 28:12, apparently to ascribe and underpin a solid historical value to the event.²⁴³ As a biographer of the Prophet's life, Ibn Hishām presumably

²⁴¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, (Bayrūt, 1998), p.5/299.

²⁴² Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.6/172.

²⁴³ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, (al-Qāhira, 1955), p.1/160.

needs to establish a firm foundation and relation between the Prophet and the Qur'ān, a priority which differs completely from al-Bukhārī's main concern.

Holding the status of 'the most authentic books on the earth after the Qur'ān',²⁴⁴ *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī provides us with an alternative interpretation of the connection between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's early life. Based on information embedded within its covers, it is arguably fair to conclude that the connection between Muḥammad's early life and the Qur'ān is not as solid and seamless as has been adduced in later centuries.

²⁴⁴ Ibn Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, ed. Nuruddīn 'Itr, (Bayrūt, 1986), p.1/18.; al-Nawawī, *al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr*, (Bayrūt, 1985), p.26.; al-'Irāqī, *al-Taqyīd wa al-Īdāḥ*, (al-Madīna, 1969), p.25.

3.3 Qur'ānic References in *Sunan* Of Al-Tirmidhī

Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā ibn Sawra b. Mūsā²⁴⁵ ibn al-Daḥḥāk al-Sulamī al-Būghī al-Tirmidhī al-Ḍarīr is a prominent ninth century ḥadīth scholar. He is celebrated for his innovation of a new term, *al-ḥasan*, which was the cause of al-Tirmidhī's achieving eminence as a profound thinker and distinguished scholar of ḥadīth. His works form one of the six canonical texts which lay the foundation of major reference of ḥadīth. The story of how he refused to accept his master's opinions indicates his intellectual rigour and his own convictions in his opinions and outlook. Indeed, it has been reported that he queried his masters, al-Bukhārī and al-Dārimī, regarding the most sound ḥadīth on the subject of *istinjā* (cleansing) with water.²⁴⁶ Initially, neither expressed an opinion sufficiently resolute to answer this question to Al-Tirmidhī's satisfaction. But when al-Bukhārī included one particular ḥadīth in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* pertaining to this subject, al-Tirmidhī realised that, this is how al-Bukhārī exhibits his thought in response to his question; by using his selection of ḥadīth and includes it in the *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Al-Tirmidhī was reluctant to accept his master's opinion, and refused to include it in his *Sunan*. Moreover, he replaced it with another ḥadīth that was more appropriate to his understanding. This clearly shows a profound awareness of the ḥadīth, with a strong and rigorous foundation in the science of ḥadīth.

In Qur'ānic thought, al-Tirmidhī is, however, inclined to resemble his master, al-Bukhārī, since he adopts a similarly conservative and traditional approach to his

²⁴⁵ In this part, there is confusion between scholars regarding the name of his grandfather's father. Robson named it as Shaddād, while Aḥmad Shākir in his introduction of *Sunan* al-Tirmidhī confirms it as Musa. See, Robson, 'The Transmission of Tirmidhī's *Jāmi'*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Cambridge University Press, 16(2), (1954), p.258.; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, (al-Qāhira, 1978), pp.82-83.

²⁴⁶ When recounting the story, Aḥmad Shākir does not mention precisely what is the topic that al-Tirmidhī is asking about. But since Aḥmad Shākir says that it is ḥadīth number 17 that was being disputed, it is fair to suggest this topic since the ḥadīth is located in the chapter of *istinjā* with water.

master's. The way in which he arranges the discussion in the introduction to The Chapter of Qur'ānic Interpretation (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*) indicates a somewhat strict and traditional method in interpreting the Qur'ān. For this part, he seems to be attempting to prevent the reader from applying any novel interpretation which originate outside the knowledge and practice developed by the scholar of ḥadīth. He truly speaks his mind when commencing the chapter by narrating a ḥadīth, reminding the reader that any personal interpretation of the Qur'ān 'without knowledge' (*bi-ghayri 'ilm*) will reserve for the interpreter a place in hell. By 'without knowledge', he is presumably referring to the group of *mutakallimūn* such as Mu'tazilite, the group that identified with innovative and novel approaches to the Qur'ān.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, the term 'without knowledge' is also employed by al-Bukhārī when refuting the Mu'tazilites regarding the issue of *lafẓ al-Qur'ān* (word of al-Qur'ān),²⁴⁸ while al-Dārimī uses it in contending the Jahmite (*al-jahmiyya*) in the issue of *ṣifat Allāh* (God's attributes).²⁴⁹ Since both are al-Tirmidhī's masters, it is reasonable to assume that there might be a certain degree of influence from his mentors in the application of his understanding and approach. The correspondence of these ḥadīth scholars' use of the specific term 'without knowledge' indicates the possibility of its intended audience being members of a group or groups identified by ḥadīth scholars as promoting heretical (*bid'a*) teachings. The application of the term 'without knowledge' indicates very clearly the likelihood of strong 'intellectual understanding' and unity in refuting their opponents. As illustrated by Lapidus and Abū Zahw, there occurred an unequivocal contention between *ahl al-*

²⁴⁷ Explaining this ḥadīth, Ibn Ḥajar suggests that this admonition is an allusion to *ahl al-bida'* (the group of heretics), and he provides a few scholars as instances. Abū Bakr al-Aṣam (d. 279/892), Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/916) and 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) are among names mentioned by Ibn Ḥajar as example, where all of them are mu'tazilite figures. See, Al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfa al-Aḥwazī*, (Bayrūt, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d), p.8/223.

²⁴⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Khalq Af'al al-Ibad*, (Riyadh, n.d.), p.105.

²⁴⁹ Al-Dārimī, *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya*, Badr ibn Abdulla, (Kuwayt, 1995), p.92.

ḥadīth and *mutakallimūn* within this century regarding certain issues in Qur'ānic discourse.²⁵⁰ At the same time, his contemporaries, al-Bazzār, Abū Dā'ūd and al-Nasā'ī emphasize a similar discourse in their own works, which demonstrates a strong correlation of ideas and compassion between ḥadīth scholars waging intellectual confrontation against ideas which did not meet with the approval of the scholars of the ḥadīth movement.²⁵¹

Al-Tirmidhī continues, suggesting that the most effective way of exploring the Qur'ān is by employing the authentic ḥadīth as an exegetical tool. He illustrates his point in precise terms by submitting a ḥadīth that contains a forewarning from the Prophet, prohibiting Muslims from fabricating words not uttered by the Prophet himself. Emphasizing the need to rely on authentic ḥadīth in interpreting the Qur'ān, al-Tirmidhī seems to be reflecting on the vigorous wholesale production of false ḥadīth in the ninth century. According to Robinson, the eighth and ninth centuries were a period in which fabricated ḥadīth were mass-produced.²⁵² As a result, Abdul-Raof deduces that this is the main reason why the *Ṣaḥīḥ* movement was instigated at this particular time, in order to confront specifically the vigorous profusion of ḥadīth forgeries.²⁵³ Since, *Sunan* al-Tirmidhī is also recognised as one of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* works,²⁵⁴ it is no wonder that we should discover al-Tirmidhī's inclusion of this particular ḥadīth as a constituent element in the

²⁵⁰ See, Lapidus, Ira. M., *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.130.; Abū Zahw, *al-ḥadīth wa al-Muḥaddithūn*, p.316-332.

²⁵¹ Al-Bazzār and al-Nasā'ī record the same ḥadīth regarding this, while Abū Dāwūd creates a specific topic about this and narrates another ḥadīth with a similar thought. See, al-Bazzār, *Musnad*, p.11/61.; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, p.7/285;

²⁵² Robinson, Neal, *Islam: A Concise Introduction*, (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), p.89.

²⁵³ 'Abdul-Raof, Hussein, *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, (Routledge, 2010), p.35.

²⁵⁴ Al-Hākim and Khāṭib al-Baghdādī categorised *Sunan* al-Tirmidhī as among the *Ṣaḥīḥ* works. Abū al-Faḍl al-Maqdīsī even recognised his *Sunan* as better than al-Bukhārī and Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Ibn Kathīr and a few others however don't acknowledge his *Sunan* as among the *Ṣaḥīḥ* work since its also contains weak ḥadīth. See, Ibn Ṣalāh, *Muqaddimah Ibn Ṣalāh*, ed. 'Abd al-Laṭīf, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2002), pp.1/110-111.; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bā'ith al-Hathūth*, p.1/31, al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, ed. Aḥmad Shākīr, pp.87-90.

method of interpreting the Qur'ān. It evidently appeared as a reaction to the then current intellectual cultural milieu and practice, while he, at the same time, promoted and reinforced more rigorous method of *ahl ḥadīth* in exploring the meaning of the Qur'ān.

In concluding the justification of his approach to Qur'ānic interpretation, al-Tirmidhī reiterates an earlier point by narrating a ḥadīth that proposes that anyone who interprets the Qur'ān from the perspective of his own opinion is actually committing a mistake, even though his actual understanding is the true one. Again, at this late stage, he continually reminds the reader to stay away from reliance solely on their personal opinion, without actually consulting any authentic ḥadīth in interpreting the Qur'ān. He seems to assert that even though one could produce an 'authentic' interpretation by employing bare reason alone, doing so would be entirely misguided, since the interpreter is not using a method that has been developed by the scholars of ḥadīth. For this reason, al-Tirmidhī's method and approaches in the interpretation of the Qur'ān is deeply-rooted in the established practices of legitimate scholars of ḥadīth.

3.3.1 The Prophet's Early Life in Sunan of Al-Tirmidhī

According to Ḥammāda, among four popular *Sunan al-Arba'a* (the four books of ḥadīth),²⁵⁵ *Sunan* al-Tirmidhī's is the most informative in gathering together the traditions regarding the Prophet's biography.²⁵⁶ Apart from his *Sunan*, al-Tirmidhī was also renowned for his meticulous scholarship in delineating the apparent beauty of the Prophet's appearance and his excellent moral qualities in his seminal work, *al-Shamā'il* (sg. *shamīla*, 'good quality'). As Schimmel describes it, this is the first work that establishes a basis for later literature extolling Muḥammad's internal and external superiority which, at the same time, indicates a sign of the veneration of the Prophet in this period.²⁵⁷ In his *Sunan*, most of the narration regarding the Prophet's life was assembled in a specific chapter named *Kitāb al-Manāqib* (the book of virtues). References to Muḥammad's early life may be established thematically as follows.

The Prophet's Genealogy

Most of the ḥadīth related to this subject are embedded in the chapter of *faḍl al-nabī* (the Prophet's quality). The chapter encompasses a considerable part of *Kitāb al-Manāqib*, in which al-Tirmidhī records fourteen ḥadīths to convey his understanding of the lofty status of the Prophet among the other prophets. Among this number, four ḥadīths explicitly illustrate his position as having been the one chosen by God, and being a product of a genealogy of the most high status family. Two out of these four

²⁵⁵ Apart from *Sunan* Sitta, some scholar of ḥadīth coined the term '*Sunan* al-Arba'a' as referring to the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Majh. See, Aḥmad Shākir, *al-Bā'ith al-Hathīth*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d), p.1/27.; Abū Shahba, *Ḍifā' 'An al-Sunna*, (Maktaba al-Sunna, 1989), p.1/26; al-Qardawi, *Kayf Nata'āmalu Ma'a al-Sunna*, (Dār al-Shuruq, 2000), p.1/78.

²⁵⁶ Ḥammāda, *Maṣādir al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya wa Taqwīmuhā*, (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 2003), p.57-58.

²⁵⁷ Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muḥammad Is His Mesenger The Veneration of The Prophet in Islamic Piety*, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p.33.

ḥadīth clearly exemplify the nobility of the Prophet's lineage. The ḥadīth emphasise the significance of his family lines (the Kināna, Quraysh and Banū Hāshim) as being chosen by God. The remainder of ḥadīth in this chapter elaborates on the Prophet's ranking as being held in the highest esteem among humankind.²⁵⁸

The appearance of such a substantial amount of ḥadīths adduced in this chapter is surely an indication of al-Tirmidhī's high admiration of the Prophet. The presentation of Muḥammad in this chapter is predicated on his status as a pre-existing being, having existed even prior to the existence of humankind.²⁵⁹ Muḥammad maintains his pre-eminence, even after the destruction of humankind, and its resurrection in the life hereafter.²⁶⁰ The fact that al-Tirmidhī emphasizes Muḥammad's distinguished position among other prophets, and presents him as being of the highest rank, nevertheless seems to be in conflict somewhat with the essence of the ḥadīth as narrated by his master, al-Bukhārī. In his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Bukhārī relates six ḥadīth of the Prophet's prohibition from making any distinction among the prophets.²⁶¹ Al-Tirmidhī, however, did not include any of these accounts in his *Sunan* even though his other contemporaries such as Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Abū Dāwūd selected the ḥadīth to be included in the corpus of their *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and *Sunan*.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ The last two ḥadīth of this chapter seem quite different from the others. One of the two explains about the attributes of Muḥammad already mentioned in the Bible, while the other illustrates the luminous atmosphere in Medina upon Muḥammad's arrival there, and how gloomy the world appeared when he died. See, al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, p.5/588.

²⁵⁹ Muḥammad was already assigned as a 'prophet' even before Adam was created. See, Ibid., p.5/585.

²⁶⁰ Muḥammad was pictured as leading other prophets on the day of resurrection. See, Ibid., pp.5/585-587.

²⁶¹ According to the ḥadīth, there was an argument between a Jew and a Muslim regarding the status of their prophets. Both were claiming that their prophet was better than the other, until the Muslim slapped the Jew. This incident was reported to the Prophet Muḥammad and he said: Do not give me superiority over the other prophets. In the other account he is reported to mention Moses specifically by name. See al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.4/157, 6/59, 8/108, 9/13, 9/139.

²⁶² Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.4/1844, Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, p.4/217.

The Prophet's Birth

In his *Sunan*, al-Tirmidhī produces one specific chapter related to the Prophet's birth. Entitled 'The chapter of the Prophet's birth' (*Bāb mā jā'a fī mīlād al-nabī*), the author narrates only one ḥadīth. The ḥadīth, presented in a dialogue form, is apparently selected by the author to give confirmation regarding the time of the Prophet's birth as occurring in a year named as the 'year of the elephant'. Qubāth ibn Ashyam, one of the figures featured in the ḥadīth recounts that he even witnessed the changing colour of the elephant's dung (*khadhq al-fīl*), an indication that seems to illustrate that the incident had only recently occurred. Including the ḥadīth in this specific chapter, al-Tirmidhī appears to be trying to offer his reflections regarding this subject. None of the other authors of *Sunan Sitta*, however, included this particular ḥadīth in their work, due to its possible lack of authenticity. As noticed by al-Tirmidhī himself, this ḥadīth is only transmitted through the account of Ibn Ishāq, the *sīra* biographer, and its status has been disputed among scholars of ḥadīth. By accepting this ḥadīth, al-Tirmidhī appears to enter into a compromise by accepting ḥadīth that was related by a questionable transmitter. Compared with the work of *sīra* in this period, al-Tirmidhī nevertheless, maintains his position as a worthy scholar of ḥadīth methods in narrating ḥadīth. Most of the extraordinary narratives recorded by Muslim scholars concerning the Prophet's birth are regarded as weak (*ḍa'īf*) by later scholars.²⁶³ All of the miraculous elements that are argued to have happened at the time of the Prophet's birth, as portrayed by Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa'd, are absent from this chapter.

²⁶³ Al-Ghazālī, Muḥammad, *Fiqh al-Sīra*, (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 1427H), p.61.

Muḥammad's Childhood

Illustrating Muḥammad's sign of prophethood, al-Tirmidhī relates a ḥadīth that casts a light on Muḥammad's meeting with Baḥīrā the monk (*al-rāhib*). The story depicts that, when he was a boy,²⁶⁴ Muḥammad accompanied his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, on a trading journey to *al-Shām*. It is in this region that Muḥammad was recognised by a monk, which attested to his being a prophet based on a number of miraculous 'signs' concerning Muḥammad, together with a physical mark on his back, which the ḥadīth attributes as 'the seal of prophethood'. Worried about the young Muḥammad's safety, Baḥīrā advised Abū Ṭālib to send Muḥammad to Mecca, while also warning Abū Ṭālib to avoid Rome,²⁶⁵ where, according to Baḥīrā, the Romans had heard rumours of the coming of an apparent prophet and would kill him if Muḥammad was to be recognised. Abū Ṭālib, therefore sent Muḥammad to Mecca, escorted by Abū Bakr and Bilāl. According to Akram Ḍiyā' al-'Umarī, the account adduced by al-Tirmidhī is the soundest report preserved by the early Muslim scholars, except for the last part of the story, which features Abū Bakr and Bilāl, the prominent companion of the Prophet.²⁶⁶ This part clearly contradicts the other tradition, since Bilāl was only freed by Abū Bakr²⁶⁷ after Muḥammad had commenced his mission and was experiencing persecution from the Quraysh. Moreover, a few scholars such as Ibn Ḥajar and al-Mubārakfūrī agree that Bilāl was not even born at that time.²⁶⁸ For this reason, al-

²⁶⁴ In some traditions, it was said that, the Prophet was nine or twelve years old when he was travelling to al-Sham with his uncle. See, Abel, A., 'Baḥīrā', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, et al., Second Edition, Brill Online, [accessed 11 December 2014],; al-'Umarī, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, (al-Madīna, 1994), p.106.

²⁶⁵ In Ibn Hishām's version, the monk warns Abū Ṭālib to evade Jews, as he argues that they would become a formidable enemy of the Prophet. See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Mustafa al-Saqa, (Misr: Maktaba Sharika al-Babi al-Halabi, 1955), 1/182; Rubin, Uri, *The Eye of The Beholder*, p.50.

²⁶⁶ Al-'Umarī, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, p.107.

²⁶⁷ While working as a servant of Abū Jahl Bilāl was heavily persecuted by his master after embracing Islam. See, Ibn Majh, *Sunan*, (Dār Ihya al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d), p.1/53; Aḥmad, *Musnad*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-ḥadīth), 1995, 4/53.

²⁶⁸ Al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfa al-Aḥwazī*, p.10/66; Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-Mīzān*, p.4/68; *al-Muḥḥirī, al-Mafātīḥ fī Sharḥ al-Maṣābiḥ*, (Kuwayt: Dar al-Nawadir, 2012), p. 6/258.

Dhahabī considers this part of the narrative as fabricated, while Rubin suggests that it is clearly a separate version that was interpolated later.²⁶⁹

The way in which al-Tirmidhī locates the ḥadīth in the chapter which discusses the inception of prophethood (*bad' nubuwwa al-Nabī*) implies his obvious desire to employ the ḥadīth as an instrumental means of confirming the attestation of Muḥammad's prophethood by the well-versed monk during the early phase of his life. His comment on the ḥadīth is worthy of note here. Al-Tirmidhī in fact, realized the dubious status of the ḥadīth, since at the end of the ḥadīth, he categorises it as *ḥasan gharīb* (good and lone).²⁷⁰ According to M. M. Ali, al-Tirmidhī rarely used the term *ḍa'īf* (weak) to indicate the inferior status of that particular ḥadīth in his *Sunan*. Instead of using the word '*ḍa'īf*' (weak), he is found to employ the term *gharīb* to connote the fragile status of a ḥadīth. In this narration, apart from calling the ḥadīth as *ḥasan gharīb*, he at the same time admitted that "we never know the ḥadīth except through this *wajh* (*isnad* - chain of transmitter)." By accepting the ḥadīth, the author appears to be compromising in accepting uncertain/weak ḥadīth for the purpose of addressing issues that he wishes to use to express his thought.

The matter in question now concerns what makes al-Tirmidhī decide to include the ḥadīth, considering his acknowledgment of its weak ḥadīth status. There might well be something of significance in the reasons that influenced al-Tirmidhī to preserve this ḥadīth in his *Sunan*. Since there is no explanation offered by the author, a few conjectures could be made. The reason is likely to be due to the popularity of discussion

²⁶⁹ Rubin, *The Eye of The Beholder*, p.51; al-'Umarī, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, p.107; al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I'tidāl*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1963) p.2/153.

²⁷⁰ According to M. M. Ali, al-Tirmidhī rarely used the term *ḍa'īf* (weak) in his *Sunan*. Instead of *ḍa'īf* (weak) he employs the term *gharīb* in which connotes the weak status of the ḥadīth. See, Ali, M. Mansūr, *Al-Tirmidhī And The Role Of The Isnad In His Sunan*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2009), p.133.

concerning this figure within this period that made al-Tirmidhī include it in his work. Apart from being narrated by the scholars of ḥadīth,²⁷¹ the story also attracts the attention of *mutakallimun* like al-Jahiz,²⁷² historians and biographers like Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa‘d.²⁷³ Moreover, the story of Baḥīrā also plays a crucial role in providing the Muslim with an attestation from the Christian²⁷⁴ or Jewish²⁷⁵ side on the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad. The narrative emerged as a perfect solution in response to the absence of biblical and non-Muslim predictions of Muḥammad’s prophethood. On the other hand, the current pervasive milieu of interreligious discourse should also be considered as one of the reasons for a Muslim author to insert a particular story in his work. The composition of the legend of Baḥīrā by an anonymous Christian author, purported to be around late second/eight or third/ninth centuries, is presumably one of the indications of the popularity of this discourse which might encourage a Muslim author to include the ḥadīth, despite its possible unreliable status.²⁷⁶ For this reason, the story of Baḥīrā became not only a central focus of interest and discussion regarding the biography of Muḥammad, but it also became a polemical, interreligious discourse. In

²⁷¹ See, Al-Ṣan‘ānī, ‘Abd Razzāq, *al-Musannaf*, ed. al-A‘zamī, (Johannesburg, al-Majlis al-Ilmi, 1972), p.5/318; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Kamāl al-Hūt, (Riyāḍ, Maktaba al-Rushd, 1409), p.6/317.

²⁷² Al-Jāhiz, *al-Mukhtār fī al-Radd ‘Alā al-Naṣārā*, ed. al-Sharqawī, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jil, 1991), p.1/60.

²⁷³ In Ibn Hishām’s version, the meeting with Baḥīrā occurred when Muḥammad was leading a trading caravan of Khadija. See, Al-Waqidi, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), p.2/29; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Mustafā al-Saqā, (Misr: Maktaba Sharika al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1955), pp.180-184, p.188; Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), p.1/97.

²⁷⁴ Ibn Hishām depicts him as a well-versed Christian. See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, p.1/181.

²⁷⁵ ‘Abd al-Razzāq adduced a narration picturing the monk as a Jew from Tamim. In al-A‘zamī’s edition, he suggests that the monk is a Jewish of Taymā’, instead of Jewish of Tamīm. The word ‘Tamīm’ probably is a result of a typographical error in publication. See, Al-Ṣan‘ānī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Musannaf*, (n.p, 1972), p.5/318.

²⁷⁶ According to Griffith, Christian writers are also responsive to the Islamic tradition. They adapted and formed the story based on their own religious perspective and views. For more discussion regarding this, see Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World*, (Princeton University Press, 2008), pp.38-39; Roggema, Barbara, A Christian Reading of the Qur’ān: The Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā and Its Use of Qur’ān and Sīra, in *Syrian Christian Under Islam The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas, (Leiden, 2001), pp.57-74; Roggema, Barbara, *The Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā Eastern Christian Apologetic and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, (Leiden, 2009); Szilagyi, Krisztina, Muḥammad and The Monk: The Making of The Christian Baḥīrā Legend, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arab and Islam*, (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2008), p.34, pp.169-219.

this milieu, then, it is not impossible that al-Tirmidhī was one among many scholars who reacted to the religious milieu of the time.

The Opening of The Prophet's Breast

One of the most phenomenal moments of Muḥammad's early life is the occurrence of the opening of his breast. In this incident, Muḥammad is depicted as being visited by angels, who cut open his breast, cleansed his heart of any imperfection that was evident with Zamzam or snow, and sealed it back as its original condition. Muslims believed that the event occurred as part of a course of preparation for the Prophet, to clean and protect his heart from impurity. It was also regarded as one of the early signs of Muḥammad's prophethood.²⁷⁷ According to Islamic tradition, this incident occurred three times in the Prophet's lifetime: once when he was a child, the second before his revelation, and the final took place at the time of the Prophet's ascension to heaven.²⁷⁸ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Muslim, al-Bazzār and 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd record traditions that demonstrate that the event took place when Muḥammad was a child (*al-ṣibyān*). On the other hand, al-Bukhārī and al-Fākihī record a narration that illustrates that the incident occurred at the time of Muḥammad's journey to heaven.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ See, Birkeland, Harris, *The Legend of the Opening of Muhammed's Breast*, (Oslo: Kommissjon Hosjacob Dybwad 1955); Abū Islām, *Subul al-Salām*, Amman, (Maktaba al-Ghuraba, 1428), pp.42-48, al-'Umarī, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, pp.103-106; Abū Shahba, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya fī Daw al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna*, pp.196-203.

²⁷⁸ Abū Shahba confirms the incident occurred three times. Akram Diya al-'Umarī, however, suggests that the incident only occurred twice. See, al-'Umarī, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, (al-Madīna, 1994), p.103; Abū Shahba, *Sīra al-Nabawiyya fī Daw al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna*, (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 1992), pp.196-203.

²⁷⁹ In the version of Aḥmad, al-Dārimī and ibn Abī 'Āsim, , the angels were illustrated as cleansing his heart with snow, while in al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī, his heart was purified using water of Zamzam. See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.29/195; al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, p.1/97; Ibn Abī 'Āsim, *al-Āḥād wa al-Mathānī*, p.3/56; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.1/78; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.1/149, al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, p.1/124.

While most of his contemporaries locate the story within a specific period during Muḥammad's lifetime, it is interesting to note that al-Tirmidhī did not, however, place the ḥadīth in a specific chapter that would give an indication of when the incident took place. However, the wording of the ḥadīth adduced by al-Tirmidhī connotes that it occurred during his '*al-isrā' wa al-mi'rāj*', the Prophet's ascension to heaven. What is most interesting is that al-Tirmidhī locates the ḥadīth in the book of *tafsīr* and links the incident with 94:1 of the Qur'ān. He was likely to have been the first Sunni Muslim scholar to connect the incident with the Qur'ān.²⁸⁰ Analysing the ḥadīth works of this century, many relate the story in their works; and yet none of them have connected it with any verse of the Qur'ān.²⁸¹ A discussion of the Qur'ānic reference to this miraculous incident will be discussed in the next part of this section.

3.3.2 Qur'ānic Reference to the Prophet's Early Life in *Sunan* of Al-Tirmidhī

Based on our observation on al-Tirmidhī's *Sunan*, there are evidently some ḥadīth that presented by the author demonstrate the conditions of Muḥammad's early life. He mentions a considerable number of ḥadīths about the nobility of the Prophet's genealogy, a ḥadīth on Muḥammad's birth, and two ḥadīths concerning incidents that occurred in his childhood. In his *Sunan*, there is no apparent Qur'ānic reference employed as an allusion to Muḥammad's early life, except one. It is in the book of

²⁸⁰ Rubin suggest that al-Huwārī, the Ibadī comentaror of the Qur'ān, was among the first *mufasssīrūn* of this century that connect the incident to the Qur'ān. See Rubin, Uri, *The Eye of The Beholder*, p.72.

²⁸¹ This ḥadīth was engraved by many of ḥadīth scholars in this century including: al-Dārimī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Bazzār, al-Fākihī, al-Nasā'ī, and Ibn Abī 'Āṣim. See, al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Bashair, 2013), p.1/112; Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.19/251; 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd, *al-Muntakhab min Musnad 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd*, (al-Qāhira: Maktaba al-Sunnah, 1988), p.1/390; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.9/149; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.1/147; al-Fākihī, *Akḥbār Makka*, p.2/24; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, p.5/442; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, p.1/224.

Qur'ānic commentary (*tafsīr*), and al-Tirmidhī appears to make a connection between verse 94:1 of the Qur'ān and the event of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. As mentioned earlier, al-Tirmidhī did not give any indication of when, according to him, the event took place. But since, the event was perceived as occurred three times according to Islamic tradition, including Muhammad's childhood life, it is reasonable to have a closer look into this event, especially when al-Tirmidhī connects it to the verse of the Qur'ān.

In the book of *tafsīr*, al-Tirmidhī, as usual, uses ḥadīths as explanatory devices to explore the meaning of words in the Qur'ān. When it comes to verse 94:1 (in which the verse said: “Did We not expand your breast”) al-Tirmidhī relates a ḥadīth that illustrates the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. By presenting the ḥadīth in this way, Al-Tirmidhī apparently connects this incident with the verse in the Qur'ān. Based on his commentary, he is likely to suggest that the verse should be understood in a literal, not metaphorical, interpretation. Applying his literal reading, the words ‘We expand’ (*nashrah*), this, therefore, should be understood as ‘We cut’, which becomes an innovative interpretation. As a result, the verse in general connotes that God literally send his angel to Muḥammad, and cut his breast for the purpose of cleaning and purifying his heart. As discussed early in chapter two, it is difficult to find a Sunni Muslim commentator who would interpret the word ‘expand’ (*sharḥ*) as connoting ‘cut’. With particular reference to the word *sharḥ* in the Qur'ān, this term is used five times in various *sūras*.²⁸² If we read ‘cut’ in all of these verses, the connotation of the verse would be somewhat incongruous, even peculiarly outlandish.

²⁸² The word *sharḥ* recurs five times in the Qur'ān in different forms of the verb. For example see, 6:125, 16:106, 20:25, 39:22 and 94:1.

Analysing the use of words in this narrative is quite interesting. The way al-Tirmidhī selects the version of narration to include in his *Sunan* is rather striking. Al-Dārimī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, al-Fākihī, and al-Bazzār²⁸³ relate the aḥādīth that employ the words ‘and he cut his/my belly’ (*fashaqqa baṭnah/baṭnī*).²⁸⁴ Al-Bukhārī, his master, choose to record the account that uses the words ‘and he opens my breast’ (*fafaraja ṣadrī*). Al-Tirmidhī however, narrates a ḥadīth that uses the words ‘and he expands my breast’ (*fasharaḥa ṣadrī*),²⁸⁵ that is, words that are similar to those of the Qur’ān. Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj records every version with a variety of words to cast a light on the incident in every particular detail.²⁸⁶ The way in which al-Tirmidhī selects his own particular version, that is, employing terms which reflect and connote the most similar words as are evident in the Qur’ān, implies his tendency to equate ḥadīth with the verses of the Qur’ān.

Exploring the work of ḥadīth, *sīra*, *dalā’il* and *tafsīr*, which were produced within this same century, it is a difficult task to find Sunni Muslim authors who have connected the verse in question with the incident of the opening of Muḥammad’s breast. Al-Bukhārī, for instance, creates one specific chapter to cast a light on the meaning of verses in the Qur’ān. When it comes to 94:1, al-Bukhārī summarises the verse by adducing the opinion of Ibn ‘Abbās in which he interprets it as God has having ‘expanded’ Muḥammad’s heart/breast for (receiving) Islam (*sharaḥAllāhu ṣadarahu lil*

²⁸³ Al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, p.1/112; Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.19/251, al-Fākihī, *Akhbār Makka*, p.2/24; al-Bazzār, *Musnad*, p.9/436

²⁸⁴ Al-Fākihī narrates the ḥadīth that uses a passive verb, the story of which is related in the first person form, which indicates that the Prophet himself recounts the story. He says ‘and my belly was cut’ (*fashuqqa baṭnī*).

²⁸⁵ In *Tuḥfah*, al-Mubārakfūrī annotates it in the passive voice, *fashuriḥa*. The phrase, according to him, connotes “and my heart was expanded”. See, Al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfah*, p.9/139.

²⁸⁶ Muslims narrates three different versions that used various wordings, which are: ‘and my heart was expanded’ (*fashuriḥa ṣadrī*), ‘and he cut his heart’ (*fashaqqa ‘an qalbihi*) and ‘and he opened my heart’ (*fafaraja ṣadrī*). See Muslim, *Sunan*, pp.1/147-148.

islām).²⁸⁷ A similar notion is demonstrated by Ibn Abī Shayba, another scholar of ḥadīth of this period. In his *al-Muṣannaf*, Ibn Abī Shayba applies a metaphorical interpretation of the verse, when he proposes a new meaning by depicting Muḥammad's heart as being filled with wisdom and knowledge (*mulī'a hukmā wa 'ilmā*).²⁸⁸ Both *muḥaddith* seem, did not make any apparent connection between the incident and this verse. Al-Tustarī, the Sunni *ṣūfī* commentator, offers other way of parallel reading. Based on his reading, the verse should not be taken literally; rather, it should be comprehended within the framework of rhetorical expression. He reads the verse as “did We not widen your heart/breast with the light of (divine) message and we create it as mineral for the truth?”²⁸⁹ Ibn Rabban has also included verses 94:1-4 as his Qur'ānic references in his *dalā'il* to demonstrate the early signs of Muḥammad's prophethood. Adducing this passage, Ibn Rabban, however, elaborates only on how God has exalted Muḥammad to a higher status. Again, there is no apparent link between the Qur'ān and the event itself. As far as it is possible to observe, only al-Huwārī, the Ibādī Qur'ānic commentator, makes a similar connection to that made by al-Tirmidhī. He presents a similar ḥadīth to that employed by al-Tirmidhī, but with different phrasing. In his version, the ḥadīth appears to use the term '*fashaqqa nahrī*' rather than '*fashuriḥa ṣadrī*', the phrase that is employed by al-Tirmidhī.²⁹⁰ However, since al-Huwārī did not attach the *isnād* (chain of transmitter) of the ḥadīth, it is difficult for us to examine the ḥadīth source of acquisition and interpretation.

Despite there being only one Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life in the *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, this contributes significantly to the corpus of observations of Muslim

²⁸⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *Sunan*, p.6/172.

²⁸⁸ Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, p.6/311.

²⁸⁹ He interpreted the verse as “*alam nuwassi' ṣaḍraka binūr al-risāla faja'alnāhu ma'danā li al-haqā'iq*.” See, al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, p.1/198.

²⁹⁰ Al-Huwārī, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allah*, p.1302.

intellectual theological advancement. Collating all these Qur'ānic references together might enable us to show how the scholars of the third/ninth centuries thought about the close relationship between the Prophet and God. Within this period, Muslim scholars appear to be trying to depict a closer and intimate relationship between Muḥammad and God. Although a few links between Qur'ān and *sīra* were made, in general there was an interest in this.

Since al-Tirmidhī did not make any particular commentary on why the ḥadīth has been selected for elaboration 94:1, some suggestions are possible be made. Apart from the milieu of Islamic religious scholarship, and the developing tradition of the veneration of the Prophet, al-Tirmidhī's own personality, drive and creativity, along with his passionate reverence for the Prophet himself, might contribute to the initiation of a link between Muḥammad's life and the Qur'ān. Besides his *Sunan*, Al-Tirmidhī was also celebrated for his renowned life's work, *al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyya*, a work that manifests his elevated admiration for the Prophet's ethical and physical perfections. Based on around 400 ḥadīths, al-Tirmidhī delineates every single detail of Muḥammad's physical beauty and his excellent qualities.²⁹¹ According to Sezgin, this work has won the huge appreciation of 31 later scholars from various countries and centuries, who have elaborated upon the work by producing *shurūḥ* (commentary on the work).²⁹² At the same time, this also implies how enthusiastic the Muslim community's demand to learn about every particular aspect of their Prophet's life can be. Even though the event of the opening of the Prophet's breast was not included in his *al-Shamā'il*, the event clearly illustrates the purity and holiness of the Prophet's

²⁹¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyya*, ed. 'Izzat 'Ubayd al-Da'as, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1988), p.5.

²⁹² Fuat Sezgin, *al-Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, (al-Mamlaka al-Sa'udīyya: al-Jāmi'a al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd, 1991), pp.305-309.

being. It could be considered as an element of *al-Shamā'il* in al-Tirmidhī's *Sunan* as well. By linking the occurrence with a Qur'ānic reference, al-Tirmidhī appears to give a picture of divine intervention through the purification and revelation of the inner beauty of the Prophet, which, at the same time provides a clear significance to this miraculous narrative.

Above all, the rarity of a perceived connection between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's early life in al-Tirmidhī's work very probably indicates the actual condition of Muslim thought within this century. The only connection made by him, presumably implies an early phase of the connection which might have been influenced by the contemporary intellectual and religious milieu, as well as the author's own personal approach.

3.4 Qur'ānic References in Musnad Of Aḥmad

There is no doubt that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal b. Hilāl al-Shaybānī al-Marwazī was a prominent scholar of ḥadīth, and also the founder of the Ḥanbali School of law. Renowned for his firm opposition to and, indeed, his clear rejection of the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān, Aḥmad gained a wider audience during his time after having been arrested, imprisoned and persecuted as the direct result of his firm opposition to Abbasid doctrinal policy. Even though the Qur'ān is always regarded as a primary foundation of Islamic law, it is not necessarily a standard practice in Aḥmad's legal thought. Well-grounded, and with a profound knowledge of the science of ḥadīth, Melchert confirms that Aḥmad's legal judgment was dominated by his particularly rigorous ḥadīth perspective.²⁹³ The

²⁹³ Melchert, Christopher, 'Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur'an', in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Edinburgh University Press, 6(2), (2004), p.27.

influence of his master, the leader of the ḥadīth movement, al-Shāf'ī, could be considered as one of the factors which shaped Aḥmad's judgment with regard to ḥadīth.²⁹⁴ Moreover, this aspect of his judgement might be also an indication of his consistently robust stance as *ahl al-ḥadīth*, scrutinising each aspect or element of discussion through the lens of ḥadīth, which offers clear evidence of his implicit confrontation with the Mu'tazilites, the movement that campaign to rely primarily on the Qur'ān and not the ḥadīth.²⁹⁵

In exploring the meaning of the Qur'ān, Aḥmad appears to use *ahl al-ḥadīth*'s methods of interpretation, in which he approaches the Qur'ān by applying the method of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis) as a tool of guidance and interpretation. Furthermore, he admonishes Muslims to continue to employ authentic ḥadīth as an explanatory device to excavate and reveal Qur'ānic 'gems' of wisdom in the interpretation of the word of God. In this regard, he was reported to have warned Muslims by saying that "Three books that have no basis: *al-maghāzī* (stories of the battles), *al-malāḥim* (tales of eschatological nature) and *tafsīr*."²⁹⁶ This guidance, according to al-Baghdādī and Ibn Taymiyya, implies that unreliable sources and unsound materials related to these three branches of Islamic discourse persist. His

²⁹⁴ See, Ansari, Hassan, et al., 'Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal', in *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and, Farhad Daftary. Brill Online. [accessed 15 December 2014]

²⁹⁵ Within this period, patronised by the Abbasid court, the Mu'tazila is perceived as promoting the campaign of prioritizing reliance on the Qur'ān as an Islamic source, rather than a heavy dependence on ḥadīth, as practised by *ahl al-ḥadīth*. The unreliable status of certain ḥadīth is likely to be the main offender. Some prominent Mu'tazilite scholars, such as Abū 'Alī Ibn Khallād and al-Jubbā'ī, were identified as rejecting the acceptance of certain types of ḥadīth. See, Christopher Melchert, 'Traditionist-Jurisprudents and the Framing of Islamic Law', in *Islamic Law and Society*, Brill, (2001) vol. 8, no 3, pp.403-4; Muḥammad al-'Abda, Ṭāriq 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, *al-Mu'tazila Bayna al-Qadīm wa al-Ḥadīth*, (Birmingham: Dār Al-'Arqam, 1987), pp.81-90.; al-Duwayhi, 'Alī ibn Sa'd, *Arā' al-Mu'tazila al-Uṣūliyya Dirāsa wa Taqwīmā*, (Riyād: Maktaba al-Rushd, 1995), pp.321-346.

²⁹⁶ In Ibn Taymiyya's version, the phrase and wording arrangement of the statement is slightly different, but the meaning is similar. See, al-Baghdādī, al-Khātib, *al-Jāmi' li akhlāq al-Rāwī wa Ādāb al-Sāmi'*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān, (Riyād, Maktaba al-Ma'ārif) p.2/162; Ibn Taymiyya, *Minḥāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Sālim, (Jāmi'ah al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1986), p.7/435; Leaman, Oliver, 'Tafsīr', in *The Qur'ān: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman, (Oxon, 2006), p.632.

statement, at the same time, seems to be a reflection on the vigorous proliferation of fallacious sources of knowledge within this same period. By highlighting the *tafsīr* as one of the branches of Islamic discourse which are mired in uncertain provenance, *Aḥmad* shows implicitly how, within this period, false elements had begun to penetrate these sources of knowledge; and that Muslims need to be more vigilant in accepting any information related to *tafsīr*.

Ibn al-Nadīm reports that Aḥmad produced a work known as *Kitāb al-Tafsīr*, a work that could provide us with an exemplar of Aḥmad's approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ān.²⁹⁷ Al-Baghdādī, on the authority of Ibn al-Munādī, narrates that Aḥmad possessed a substantial knowledge of *tafsīr*, in which, according to him, 120,000 exegetical ḥadīth were at Aḥmad's disposal.²⁹⁸ But since the work has not survived, later scholars have disputed the reliability of this account. Al-Dhahabī, for example, believes strongly that the work had not even existed. He expresses his doubts about this particular account by questioning how this enormous work, whose content was apparently several times larger than al-Ṭabarī's, and with Aḥmad's huge numbers of pupils to preserve and disseminate it, the work could have been lost without trace.²⁹⁹ Even though al-Dhahabī's argument does appear to make good sense, other scholars express their belief in the existence of Aḥmad's *tafsīr*. Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Dhahabī's contemporary, for instance, offers a contrary opinion. In his *Badā'i' al-Fawā'id*, Ibn al-Qayyim claims to have preserved an actual fragment of Aḥmad's *tafsīr*, narrated on

²⁹⁷ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1997), p.1/281.

²⁹⁸ See, al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, ed. Bashshār Ma'rūf, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2002), p.111/12; Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. Muḥammad al-Faqī, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), p.1/8, p.183.

²⁹⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyār A'lām al-Nubalā'*, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2002), p.10/512.

the authority of al-Marūzī.³⁰⁰ Besides Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Zajjāj³⁰¹ (311/923) and Ibn Qudāma³⁰² (620/1223) are other scholars to share a similar opinion of Ibn al-Qayyim, confirming the existence of Aḥmad's *tafsīr*.³⁰³ It therefore seems likely that Aḥmad's commentaries did apparently exist, but have not survived in a complete form. The precise original form of the work is, therefore, unknown: it might be compiled in a specific one body of work; or the work might be scattered in various accounts or reports. The mastery of Aḥmad in Qur'ānic sciences and its *tafsīr* indicate his proficiency and knowledge about the verses of the Qur'ān. It is important for the researcher to know his Qur'ānic background in order to explore his understanding regarding the verses that have been perceived as an allusion to the Prophet's early life.

3.4.1 The Prophet's Early Life in the Musnad of Aḥmad

The arrangement of the content of Aḥmad's *Musnad* differs entirely from the *ṣaḥīḥ* and *sunan*. If both of these world of literature are organised based on subject order, ḥadīth in Aḥmad's *Musnad* is, in contrast, arranged according to the name of the transmitter, in the order of the original transmission. For example, in the *Musnad of Aḥmad*, he begins the work by compiling every ḥadīth narrated by Abū Bakr, the closest companion to the Prophet, in one specific chapter. He then proceeds in the next chapter

³⁰⁰ See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Badā'ī' al-Fawā'id*, ed. 'Alī al-Imrān, (Jedda: Maṭbū'āt al-Majma', n.d.), pp.3/1015-1040.

³⁰¹ See, Al-Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa I'rābuh*, ed. 'Abd al-Jalīl Shalabī, (Bayrūt) 'Alam al-Kutub, 1988), p.4/8.

³⁰² Ibn Qudāma was a prominent scholar of Ḥanabilite, the adherent of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal school of law. See, Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī*, (Maktaba al-Qāhira, 1968), p.9/540.

³⁰³ Apart from these two figures, there are several other scholars that agree with this opinion, such as Ibn Ḥajar and Ibn Taymiyya. See, Yāsīn, Hikmat Bashīr, *Marwīyyāt al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal fī al-Tafsīr*, (al-Sa'ūdī: Maktaba al-Mu'ayyad, 1994), pp.8-16; al-Tayyār, Musā'id, *Anwā' al-Taṣnīf al-Muta'alliqa bi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, (Dār Ibn al-Jawzī), p.78.

to consider the ḥadīth of the second most popular companion of the Prophet, ‘Umar. He continues in this vein. This kind of arrangement has caused difficulty for the reader who wishes to find a specific ḥadīth concerning one particular issue or theme. In our study, for example, we have to work through every single ḥadīth, in order to find information related to Muḥammad’s early life, since there is no specific chapter on this theme. One can only imagine the arduous task of reading over 30,000 ḥadīth embedded in this compendium. Thanks are due, therefore, to Aḥmad al-Bannā al-Sā‘ātī, the Ḥanbalī modern scholar and the father of Ḥasan al-Bannā, who painstakingly edited this massive encyclopaedic ḥadīth, and arranged it according to topical order, in the form of a *sunan*. The present study relies on the arrangement made by al-Sā‘ātī, in order to facilitate the analysis of every ḥadīth related to the early life of Muḥammad.

As mentioned earlier, the *Musnad* was designed in a specific setting. It was developed as a facility to compile all the ḥadīth that are regarded as being transmitted directly from the Prophet himself, in order to solve the problem of possible ḥadīth forgeries. According to Ibn Taimiyya, Aḥmad selected ḥadīths from all transmitters that are not generally regarded as bogus, even though the transmitter might not fulfil the conditions of the narrators of authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ/ḥasan*) ḥadīth.³⁰⁴ That is why, therefore, we find that his *Musnad* provides a profusion of ḥadīth information about Muḥammad’s early life, compared to the *ṣaḥīḥ* and *sunan*.³⁰⁵ The ḥadīth related to Muḥammad’s early life may be divided thematically as follows:

³⁰⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, ed. Muḥammad Salim, (al-Sa‘ūdī, 1986), 7/97.

³⁰⁵ Indeed, the authors of *ṣaḥīḥ* and *sunan* impose stricter conditions in selecting ḥadīth. The *ṣaḥīḥ*’s authors aim to compile only authentic ḥadīth in their works, while the author of *sunan* is somewhat slightly freer with the employment of terms from the *ṣaḥīḥ*. It is no wonder, then, that Aḥmad’s *musnad* compiles more ḥadīth than *ṣaḥīḥ* and *sunan*, since his method for selecting ḥadīth is less strict than either works.

The Prophet's Genealogy

Aḥmad relates eight different ḥadīth concerning the nobility of Muḥammad's genealogy. Most of these were subsequently gleaned by the later author of *Sunan Sitta* who included in their own work.³⁰⁶ Five out of these eight ḥadīth were mentioned in the *Sunan of al-Tirmidhī*, *Ibn Māja* and *Saḥīḥ of Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj*.³⁰⁷ None of these ḥadīth was chosen by al-Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd and al-Nasā'ī to be included in their works. This is probably due to the differing foci of discourse emphasised by the various authors of *Sunan Sitta*, and the variable levels of stringency in selecting ḥadīth applied by individual authors. Abū Dāwūd, for instance, seems not to afford emphasis to the discussion related to *sīra*, when most of his chapters focus on legal discourse. On the other hand, al-Bukhārī, presumably due to his rigour and high standards in the selection of ḥadīth before his permitting their inclusion, has resulted in the complete absence from his work of all eight ḥadīth.

The essence of these selected ḥadīth is clear: to portray Muḥammad as the perfect human being, chosen by God³⁰⁸ from the among the most worthy of human lineage, the final prophet,³⁰⁹ the pre-existent being³¹⁰ and leader of humankind in the world and hereafter.³¹¹ A considerable number of ḥadīth regarding Muḥammad's lineage might be an indication of a popular notion that occupies Muslims of the current century,

³⁰⁶ Two out of these eight ḥadīth are, however, apparently missing from *Sunan Sitta*, which indicates either the vast scope and range of knowledge possessed by Aḥmad, which encompasses every conceivable angle of the biography of the Prophet, or that Aḥmad is more lenient in selecting and inserting ḥadīth in his *Musnad* compared with the author of *Sunan Sitta*.

³⁰⁷ Four ḥadīth were mentioned in *Sunan of al-Tirmidhī* and have been discussed in a previous section. Three of these were presented in *Ibn Māja* (ḥadīth transmitted by Muslim ibn Ḥayḍam, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī and Ubay ibn Ka'b); and one was selected by Muslim in their *ṣaḥīḥ* (ḥadīth narrated by al-Wā'ilā).
³⁰⁸ This is the essence of ḥadīth al-Wā'ilā ibn al-Asqa' and 'Abd al-Muṭālib ibn Rābi'a. See Aḥmad, *Musnad*, ed. al-Arna'ūt et. al, (Muassasa al-Risāla, 2001), pp.28/193-194, p.29/58.

³⁰⁹ This was extracted from the ḥadīth of al-'Irbād ibn Sāriya. See Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.28/379.

³¹⁰ Muḥammad is pictured as having been created before other creature existed, in the ḥadīth of al-'Irbād ibn Sāriya and 'Abdulla ibn Shaqīq. See Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.28/379, p.34/202.

³¹¹ This conception is contained in the ḥadīth of Abū Sa'īd and Ubay ibn Ka'b. See Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.17/11, p.35/169.

concerning the authority, credentials and pre-eminence of the final Prophet. According to Abū Mūsā al-Madīnī (d. 581/1185), Aḥmad admitted that he only assembled together for his compendium those ḥadīth which were well known (*mashhūr*) within this period, even though the status of the ḥadīth was known to be in doubt.³¹² Even so, he does not explicitly clarify the reason why he selects one particular ḥadīth over another, or classifies the ḥadīth in chapters that might better indicate his understanding of one particular ḥadīth, the considerable number of these ḥadīth is appeared as testimony to the popularity of the accepted attributes of the Prophet. It also lends weight to the significance of genealogy in revealing the status of the prophet. Furthermore, Aḥmad appears to believe in the superiority of the final prophet, an analysis of which may be found in his other work, entitled *al-‘Aqīda*.³¹³

The Prophet’s Birth

There are three different ḥadīth preserved by Aḥmad in regard with the Prophet’s birth. The first is the confirmation that Monday is the day of the Prophet birth.³¹⁴ This ḥadīth is also furnished with other momentous events that occurred on Monday to emphasise the honourable status of Monday as the actual day of the Prophet’s delivery. The second ḥadīth offers another fact about the time of Muḥammad’s birth. In this, it corroborates that he was born in the year of elephant. The third illustrates one of the conditions of the Prophet’s birth. It has been narrated in this ḥadīth that when the Prophet was born, his mother witnessed a light that illuminated the castles of *al-Shām* (greater Syria). It is

³¹² See, al-Madīnī, Abū Mūsā, *Khaṣā’iṣ al-Musnad*, in *Ṭalāṭ al-Musnad*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, (Maktabah al-Turath al-Islāmī), p.11.

³¹³ Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad, *al-‘Aqīda*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Iz al-Dīn, (Dimashq: Dār Qutayba, 1408H), p.129.

³¹⁴ There is another ḥadīth in Musnad that provide implicit information about the day of the Prophet’s birth. In the ḥadīth the Prophet was been asked, why he maintains fasting on Monday, he answered that this is the day he was born. See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, ed. al-Arna’ūṭ et. al, (Muassasa al-Risāla, 2001), p.37/244.

worthy of mention that this last ḥadīth was referred to three times in his Musnad, albeit via a different transmitter.³¹⁵ In the transmission of Abū Umāma and al-‘Irbād, it was mentioned merely that his mother saw a light. However, ‘Utba’s version illuminates further. According to his narration, Muḥammad’s mother saw the light radiate from her own body and illuminate the castles of *al-Shām*.³¹⁶ Interestingly, in another version narrated by al-Ṭabarānī, this incident only occurred alone in his mother’s dream.³¹⁷

The fact that Aḥmad preserved this story repeatedly through three different transmitters indicates his assertion of the significance of this miraculous event. He was found to employ this ḥadīth as evidence of Muḥammad’s nascent faith, at a time when the people of *ahl al-kalām* were claiming that the Prophet was embracing his people’s own polytheistic religion before the revelation of the Qur’ān. Refuting this claim, Aḥmad uses this ḥadīth as proof of the purity of the Prophet’s belief.³¹⁸ Based on his argument, the ‘light’ in this ḥadīth symbolises the immaculate condition of his purity from the time of his birth, until his message of truth overwhelming the castles of *al-Shām*. This implies that the Prophet never actually held any belief or religion that had been embraced by the Quraysh, his own nation-race.

³¹⁵ It was transmitted by Abū Umāma, al-‘Irbād ibn Sāriya and ‘Utba ibn ‘Abd al-Salamī. See Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.36/596, p.28/395, p.29/196.

³¹⁶ The word *Qusūr al-Shām* (castles of the Greater Syria) metaphorically denotes the element of the great and mightiness of *al-Sham*’s ruler and its government through the magnificent appearance of their grand castles and fortresses in guarding their territory. According to Ibn Rajb, the reason why the castle of the Greater Syria are emphasised in this metaphorical statement is due to the prophecy of previous sacred scriptures that anticipates that Muḥammad’s Kingdom would encompass Greater Syria. In the other works, ‘Abd al-Razzāq reports that the hypocrites once argued the ability of Muḥammad to conquer the ‘Castles of Syria’. Given the statement uttered by Muḥammad’s adversaries, one could imagine the popularity of this term, used within the Prophet’s period (or probably representing the ninth century’s thought) in acknowledging the magnificent status of *al-Shām* civilization. See, Ibn Rajb, *Laṭā’if al-Ma’ārif*, (Dār Ibn Hazm, 2004), p.1/87; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1419H), p.3/34.

³¹⁷ In fact al-Ṭabarānī preserved all three versions of the stories, one that says his mother only saw a light. The narration that illustrates that his mother saw a light radiate from his body; and the other account which relates that his mother experienced this in a dream. See, al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī al-Salāfi, (al-Qāhira: Maktaba Ibn Taymiyya, 1994), p.8/175, pp.18/252-253, p.22/333.

³¹⁸ Al-Safarīnī, Shams al-Dīn Abū al-‘Awn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, *Lawāmi’ al-Anwār al-Bahiyya*, (Dimashq: Muassasa al-Khafiqaayn, 1982), p.2/306.

Muḥammad's Childhood

There are four different occurrences preserved in various ḥadīth of *Musnad of Aḥmad* which relate to the childhood of Muḥammad. The first concerns Muḥammad's time as a suckling infant, in respect of which Aḥmad narrates four ḥadīth revealing that Muḥammad was suckled by his wet-nurses, Thuwayba³¹⁹ and Ḥalīma al-Sa'ḍiyya.³²⁰ The second anecdote is related to the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. Regarding this, Aḥmad recounts three different ḥadīth that provide detail of the occasion. Based on his account, the incident occurred twice in Muḥammad's boyhood. The third narrative illustrates Muḥammad's time as a shepherd in Mecca, while the fourth describes Muḥammad's involvement in the process of rebuilding the Ka'ba. Of these two occurrences, Aḥmad narrates two ḥadīth providing information about the former, and five ḥadīth regarding the latter.

Although *Aḥmad* is renowned for his prolific collection of ḥadīth, and also for the rigour of his exhaustive pursuit of ḥadīth (*al-riḥla*),³²¹ it is interesting to note that there are two popular stories in Muḥammad's early life that are recounted in *Sunan Sitta* which are, nevertheless, missing from the *Musnad of Aḥmad*. Muḥammad's meeting with Baḥīrā, the Christian monk and his participation in the war of *al-Fijār* are absent from his vast collection of ḥadīth. To assume that he is not aware of the story of Baḥīrā is one of the conjectures that can be made; but this seems unlikely due to the sheer popularity of the story. The story of Baḥīrā was narrated by well-known scholars of the

³¹⁹ There are three ḥadīths narrated by Aḥmad regarding this. These ḥadīths are presented in the *Sunan Sitta* (except al-Tirmidhī) within a legal framework, since the content is actually focusing on Muḥammad explaining about the law of marrying foster-brothers (akh al-raḍā'a – the sibling that suckled by the same wet nurse).

³²⁰ The information about his suckling period in Banī Sa'd comes implicitly from a ḥadīth related to the incident of the opening of the Prophet's breast. See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.19/195.

³²¹ According to al-Daqr, he travelled to more than ten regional centres of learning of the ḥadīth, including Kūfa, Basra, Mecca, Medina, al-Shām (greater Syria), Yemen, Morocco (al-Maghrib), al-Thughūr, Khurasān, al-'Irāqiyyīn (provinces of Iraq) and Faris (provinces of Iran). See, al-Dār, 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Aḥmad Imām ahl al-Sunna*, (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 1999), pp.31-32.

same century such as al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa‘d, and al-Jāhiz.³²² In fact *Aḥmad* himself had met and narrated from ‘Abdulla ibn Ghazwān, one of the transmitters of the story of Baḥīrā.³²³ He might have omitted the ḥadīth intentionally due to the contradictory or ambiguous content of the last part of the story, or even possibly unintentionally, as the result of the enormous ḥadīth collection at his disposal.

Signs of Prophethood

Aḥmad preserves a considerable amount of information about Muḥammad’s signs of prophethood. Apart from the ḥadīth about the attributes of Muḥammad that already prophesied in the Torah,³²⁴ in his *Musnad*, there exist others narratives of miraculous incidents that are professed as indications of the coming of the final prophet. These include an incident in which Muḥammad was greeted by a stone while he was in Mecca;³²⁵ an event in which a fox reveals to a shepherd information about the advent of a prophet in Yathrib (Medina);³²⁶ and soothsayers who had anticipated his appearance.³²⁷

³²² The popularity of this narrative has been discussed in previous section on al-Tirmidhī.

³²³ Aḥmad preserves few ḥadīth of ‘Abdulla ibn Ghazwān in his *Musnad*. His meeting with ‘Abdulla is confirmed by Al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan*. When narrating a ḥadīth of Sūra al-Anbiyā’, al-Tirmidhī said that “This ḥadīth is narrated by Aḥmad from ‘Abdulla ibn Ghazwān.” Meanwhile, Abū Dāwūd, Aḥmad’s pupil himself, narrated a ḥadīth from Aḥmad, which Aḥmad transmitted from ‘Abdulla ibn Ghazwān. It might also be possible that ‘Abdulla did not pass the ḥadīth to Aḥmad.

³²⁴ In the ḥadīth of Abū Sakhr al-‘Uqaylī and ‘Aṭā’ ibn Yasār. See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.11/193.

³²⁵ In the ḥadīth of Jābir ibn Samura. See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.34/419.

³²⁶ This incredible occurrence was narrated by Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, arising from three different isnād (chains of narrator). See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, pp.18/315-316.

³²⁷ In the ḥadīth of Jābir ibn ‘Abdulla. See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.11/221.

3.4.2 Qur'ānic References to the Prophet's Early Life in Musnad

In general it is difficult to find any Qur'ānic reference alluding to Muḥammad's early life made by Aḥmad in his *Musnad*.³²⁸ Indeed, there is a Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's attributes embedded in the ḥadīth concerning the People of the Book, which prophesies the advent of the final prophet.³²⁹ However, the verse apparently is an original part of the content of the ḥadīth, which was not initiated by the author's initiative. Presumably, the main reason of the absence of Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life in his *Musnad* is due to the objective of the composition itself. Based on a conversation between Aḥmad and 'Abdullah, his son, Musnad was designed to gather all known popularly accepted ḥadīth³³⁰ as guidance (*imām*) for later generations, especially in distinguishing between the true, and the false ḥadīth.³³¹ His nephew narrates that Aḥmad once mentioned that if Muslims fall into dispute over the status of one particular ḥadīth, then they should refer to this (*Musnad*). If it is not found in it, it is not a ḥadīth (*falaysa bi hujja*).³³² This implies that one of Aḥmad's principal

³²⁸ It is not an easy task to read the Musnad in order to analyse the author's thought about one particular subject. Compared to the *ṣaḥīḥ*, *sunan* and *muṣannaḥāt*, they are all redacted with the express purpose of dealing with community enquiries regarding certain Islamic ritual, creedal or exegetical subjects. In response to this need, scholars design the *ṣaḥīḥ* and *sunan* in thematic form to provide a convenient access to the reader in their quest to find an answer to their problem. By dividing the ḥadīth according to specific subject area, the author explicitly exhibits his thought on one ḥadīth. This cannot happen with musnad because there is no topical division. Ahmad classifies each ḥadīth according to the name of the transmitter, a practice which offers no clear indication of Aḥmad's observations about the ḥadīth: it was, in fact, a mere compilation to isolate the ḥadīth in order to differentiate and justify it from the apparently forged one.

³²⁹ In the ḥadīth narrated by 'Aṭā ibn Yasār, it was said that the Prophet attributes that engraved in the Torah is similar with what has revealed in the 33:45 of the Quran. See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.11/193.

³³⁰ Later scholars argue about the status of ḥadīth in Musnad. Scholars believe that not all ḥadīth were *ṣaḥīḥ*, and indeed, some event says that there are false ḥadīth (*mawḍū'*) in his Musnad. Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Ḥajar suggest that the false ḥadīth found in his Musnad was not Aḥmad's own inclusion. According to them, it was added later by his son, 'Abdulla and al-Qatī'ī. See, Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, p.7/28, 7/399, Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Qawl al-Musaddad fi al-Dhab 'An al-Musnad*, (Qāhira, 1401H), p.1/4.

³³¹ See Al-Madīnī, Abū Mūsā, *Khaṣā'is al-Musnad*, p.5.

³³² By using the term 'it is not a proof' (*falaysa bihujja*), Aḥmad apparently indicates that, any ḥadīth that does not feature in his Musnad seems not to be an authentic ḥadīth, since only a genuine ḥadīth can be a proof (*hujja*) and guidance for Muslims. However, this is not a consistent line of reasoning: there is evidence of a ḥadīth that is not included in his Musnad, namely the ḥadīth of Bahira. Therefore, by this

aims was to develop a massive encyclopaedia of ḥadīth as a reference for Muslims in response to the proliferation of apparently false ḥadīth within this period. The *Musnad* does, however, provide us with a comprehensive picture of contemporary Muslim understanding about Muḥammad's early life, based on popular ḥadīth preserved in this compendium. This might also offer us an indication of how 'pure' the content of one ḥadīth was required to be before it was deemed appropriate for being selected to be connected to the Qur'ān, in order to establish a solid attachment between the Prophet and God. The nature of attachment consequently develops a metaphorical image of God's authority in the world.

As suggested by Melchert, Aḥmad apparently lacks of reliance on the Qur'ān, especially in his legal discourse. He is found to be heavily dependent on ḥadīth for providing legal thought, rather than referring to the Qur'ān itself.³³³ His well-known confrontation with the Mu'tazila (in which, according to Melchert, they promote reliance on the Qur'ān rather than ḥadīth), might be reason for the lack of Qur'ānic references in his legal discourse, for which he is also renowned. This method of approach when dealing with Islamic sources (the Qur'ān and ḥadīth) most probably influenced him to rely solely on the ḥadīth, rather than exploring the Qur'ān in depth, searching for references to Muḥammad's early life.

Due to the absence of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life in his *Musnad*, we have extended our observation to the other works of Aḥmad. It is interesting to note that verse 26:219, that was used by Ibn Sa'd as a reference to Muḥammad's genealogy was found interpreted by Aḥmad in the *Masā'il* of al-Naysabūrī. According al-

statement, Aḥmad probably refers to the popular ḥadīth spread widely within his particular period. See, Al-Madīnī, Abū Mūsā, *Khaṣā'is al-Musnad*, 5-7; al-Daqr, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, p.41.

³³³ Melchert, Christopher, 'Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur'an', in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2004) p.27.

Naysabūrī, Aḥmad has produced an explanation of this verse which, according to his narration, bears no connection to Muḥammad's genealogy as perceived by Ibn Sa'd. Interpreting this verse, Aḥmad employs a ḥadīth narrated by Abū Hurayra that explains the meaning of 26:219. The ḥadīth indicates that the verse is intended to picture the Prophet's ability to observe his followers at prayer, although they were behind him, and therefore not within his immediate line of vision. This implies that, the verse according to Aḥmad is better understood in this context, rather than understood as proposed by Ibn Sa'd. The word *taqallubika* denotes 'the prophet's involvement and observation of his follower's prayer', and is not to be regarded as the movement or the origin of Muḥammad's gene in the spine of the previous prophet, as has been interpreted by the author of al-Ṭabaqāt. This strengthens our hypothesis to prove that the verse actually bears no relation to the Prophet's early life or his genealogy. Aḥmad, the leader of *ahl al-ḥadīth*, with his massive knowledge about the Prophet, does not recognize this as a Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life. It might also offer an indication of how fragile was the connection between Muḥammad and the Qur'ān within this period.

In conclusion, the rarity of Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life in *Musnad* of Aḥmad, an enormous inventory of ḥadīth of the ninth century, indicates one scholar's views about Muḥammad's early life. In spite of his considerable journeys, collecting ḥadīth from the expanse of the Islamic world, Aḥmad apparently did not include the narration that connects the Qur'ān with Muḥammad's early life that is embedded in the book of *sīra*. This implies categorically the evident unpopularity of the widely-accepted narrations, or very possibly even gives an indication of its doubtful provenance or status during the ninth century, which leads Aḥmad to deem it not to be regarded conclusively as a part of the store of reference of genuine ḥadīth in the *Musnad*.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

Qur'ānic References to The Prophet in the works of Ḥadīth

An analysis of three representatives of ḥadīth literature has provided us with a picture of a somewhat fragile connection between Qur'ānic references and the narrative of the Prophet's early life. Among these works of ḥadīth, al-Tirmidhī is the only author to connect a verse with one of the incidents occurring in Muḥammad's early life. Al-Bukhārī and Aḥmad make no connection, even though verses that are widely used by the authors of *sīra* as an allusion to Muḥammad's early life evidently exist in the works of both. Apart from their appearance in the text, no connection is made between the Qur'ānic verses and Muḥammad's early life. Aḥmad and al-Bukhārī provide a different explanation of the Qur'ānic verses from that of the *sīra*'s authors. For instance, in the interpretation of 94:1 provided by al-Bukhārī in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and the reading of Aḥmad in exploring the meaning of 26:219, both are offering different understandings and interpretations that clearly have no bearing on any of the incidents of the Prophet's early life.

Muḥammad's Genealogy

Besides al-Wāqidī, other books of *sīra* of this century have allocated a specific chapter reporting traditions that contain information about Muḥammad's genealogy.³³⁴ In comparison with the *sīra*, the works of ḥadīth, however, illustrate a unique mode of

³³⁴ Ibn Hisham mentions this in his chapter of *Dhikr Sard al-Nasb al-Zakī* (Recounting the Genealogy of the Brilliant), and Ibn Sa'd put it in the chapter of *Dikr Man Intamā Ilaihi al-Rasūl*, (The Account of Whom the Prophet was Descended) and the chapter of *Dikr Nasb al-Nabī* (Mentioning the Genealogy of the Prophet). See Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, (Maktaba Mustafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awalāduh, n.d.), pp.1-4; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, (Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990), p.1/17, p.1/46.

expression in elaborating topics related to the Prophet's genealogy. This is evident in the way they structure the titles of chapters regarding this theme, which indicates a sense of veneration of the Prophet. It seems like *ahl al-ḥadīth* are the one who specifically expresses their admiration of honour to the Prophet's genealogy, which is clearly evident in the lexis and titles employed. Titles such as 'the Excellent Qualities of Prophet's Genealogy' (*Bāb Faḍl Nasb al-Nabī*), 'the Virtues that Endowed to the Prophet' (*Bāb Mā 'U'tiya al-Nabī Min al-Faḍl*),³³⁵ 'the Virtues of Quraysh' (*Bāb Faḍl Quraysh/Bāb Manāqib Quraysh*), and 'the Eminence of Our Prophet Over the Whole Creation' (*Bāb Tafḍīl Nabīyyanā 'Alā Jamī' al-Khalā'iq*) are evidently reverential, and demonstrate with the utmost clarity their high regard for the Prophet's genealogy. In fact, this kind of wording style is barely to be found in the work of *sīra*, in which most subtopics are descriptive, presented in a straightforward style, without embellishment, and without explicitly expressing any particular tone of reverence.

Indeed, it is clear that the purpose of their writing might be the principal factor that influences these distinctive styles. *Ahl al-ḥadīth* of this formative period was probably still undergoing the process of constituting the ḥadīth as the second legitimate authority of Islamic jurisprudence. Initiated by al-Shāfi'ī, the later adherents of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* movement continued to incept and develop a concrete foundation in promoting the ḥadīth as the second authority of legal sources for Muslims.³³⁶ The *muṣannafāt*, *sunan* and *ṣaḥīḥ* are all designed to provide and preserve a systematic legal guidance based on prophetic tradition. By creating a specific chapter on the Prophet's genealogy, the

³³⁵ Al-Dārimī, *Sunan al-Dārimī*, ed. Husayn al-Dārānī (al-Sa'ūdī: Dār al-Mughnī, 2000), p.1/193.

³³⁶ The works of Schacht, especially his *Introduction to Islamic Law* and *The Origin of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, suggests that al-Shafi'i was immensely influential in the development of ḥadīth as the prime authority in Islamic law. See Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, (Clarendon, 1982).; Schacht, *The Origin of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, (Clarendon, 1950). See also, Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.24-26; Burton, *The Source of Islamic Law*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp.10-17.

authors seem to emphasise the high status of Muḥammad as an heir to previous prophets, highlighting the continuity of a mission delegated by God to Adam through to the final prophet. Not only connected through genealogy, Muḥammad is pictured as the culmination of the previous prophets' mission. Based on these accounts, Muḥammad was appointed as the final prophet, even before the existence of Adam.³³⁷ This seems to imply that the messengers who were sent before him were sent only to complete the purpose of the creation of Muḥammad. He is above all prophets. Not only he, but also his own tribe was portrayed as having played an important role, besides being a vessel through which to deliver this prophetic genealogy. Based on al-Marwazī's account, al-Shāfi'ī, the leader of the ḥadīth movement, was reported as praising the exemplary effort of the Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe, in supporting the mission of Islam.³³⁸ The scholars of ḥadīth in this century, including Aḥmad, al-Dārimī,³³⁹ al-Bukhārī, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Abū Dāwūd,³⁴⁰ al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Abī 'Āsim,³⁴¹ and al-Marwazī, who each narrated a ḥadīth, or presented evidence illustrating the nobility of the Prophet's genealogy.

Discussion of the nobility of Muḥammad's genealogy might also be viewed as the direct result of the impact of a particular political dispute or context. As suggested by Khalidi and Cook, ḥadīth literature is typically a reflection of specific political influences, either

³³⁷ A man asked the Prophet: "When did you receive prophethood? The Prophet said: I received prophethood when Adam was between the soul and body." See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, p.27/176; al-Dārimī, *al-Radd 'Alā al-Jahmiyya*, p.145; Ibn Abī 'Āsim, *al-Aḥād wa al-Mathānī*, p.5/347, al-Bazzār, *Musnad*, p.11/476, Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, p.1/118.

³³⁸ Based on his account, al-Marwazī narrates al-Shafi'ī's statement on how the Quraysh are endowed with an honourable genealogical connection with the Prophet, and have united in supporting the Prophet's mission within the context of the influence of their tribe. See al-Marwazī, *al-Sunna*, ed. Sālim al-Salāfi, (Bayrūt: Mu'assasa al-Kutub al-Thaqafiyya, 1408H), p.51.

³³⁹ Al-Dārimī, *Sunan al-Dārimī*, ed. Husayn al-Dārānī, (al-Sa'ūdī: Dar al-Mughni, 2000), p.3/1640.

³⁴⁰ Even though he does not create a specific chapter regarding the Prophet's genealogy, a few ḥadīth preserved in his Sunan indicate the honourable status of the Quraysh. For example, ḥadīth regarding al-Mahdī. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ed. al-Arna'ūt, (Dār al-Risāla al-'Alamiyya, 2009), p.6/335.

³⁴¹ He created a specific chapter about the virtues of Quraysh in his work, *al-Sunna*. See Ibn Abī 'Āsim, *al-Sunna*, ed. al-Albānī, (Bayrūt: al-Maktab al-Islamī, 1400H), p.2/632.

implicitly or explicitly.³⁴² Duderija in this regard has discussed this further in explaining how a particular political environment had an impact upon the development of ḥadīth, particularly in topics related to genealogical matters.³⁴³ Genealogy plays a significant role in giving an advantage in the pursuit of power within this early period. One of the criteria for the ideal Caliph (according to Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī and Aḥmad,) is the possession of a blood-tie with the Prophet's tribe. Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī and Aḥmad, the chiefs of *ahl-ḥadīth* camp, considered the heir of Quraysh as a preferable Caliph candidate.³⁴⁴ This completely contradicts the Kharijite and Mu'tazilite's points of view, in which they did not view the heredity of the Quraysh as an essential requirement of an ideal leader. By asserting the nobility of Quraysh in their works, the scholars of ḥadīth of this century seem to express implicitly their support of the leadership of Quraysh, as promoted by the major *ahl al-ḥadīth* leader. Although known for their comprehensive discussions on this topic, it is hard to find evidence of their connecting Qur'ānic reference with the nobility of the Prophet's genealogy. Most of the arguments are based on the ḥadīth material itself.

³⁴² See, Khalidi, Tarif, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.19; Cook, Michael, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.44-45.

³⁴³ Apart from providing clear instances of political ḥadīth, Duderija demonstrates how the ḥadīth has also shaped the political environment of the early Muslim community. See, Duderija, Adis, *Aḥadīth and Politics in Early Muslim Community*, NewAgeofIslam.com, <http://www.newageislam.com/islamic-history/adis-duderija-new-age-islam/aḥadīth-and-politics-in-early-muslim-community/d/7118>.

³⁴⁴ Ibn 'Arabi quoted Malik's saying that there is no caliphate (*al-imama*) except for Quraysh. Al-Shafi'i and Ahmad express this notion in their works, *al-Umm* and *al-'Aqida*. See, al-Shafi'i, *al-Umm*, ed. Rif'at Abd al-Muttalib, (Dar al-Wafa', 2001), p.2/309; Ahmad, *al-'Aqida*, ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Sirwān, (Dimashq: Dār Qutayba, 1408H), p.124; Ibn al-'Arabi, *Aḥkam al-Qur'an*, ed. Muhammad 'Ata, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2003), p.4/153.

The Prophet's Birth

Reading the Qur'ān alone, it is barely to find any verse alluding to the event of Muḥammad's birth. Neither is it possible to find any Qur'ānic verse appearing to have any bearing on Muḥammad's birth. It is only the work of *sīra* and ḥadīth that afford this momentous event with precise accounts. His mother, Āmina, has been described as having a trouble-free pregnancy,³⁴⁵ receiving good tiding when she conceived him, hearing a voice advising her to name the boy 'Muḥammad', and she was even described as seeing a light come forth from her.³⁴⁶ Muḥammad was similarly depicted with extraordinary features: he was born circumcised and accompanied by light. At the moment of his birth, he fell to the ground, leaning forward on his hands, and raising his head towards heaven in supplication to God..³⁴⁷ All these narrative forms may be traced in the work of *sīra* of this period. Later investigation on the *isnād* (chains of narrators) of these accounts, does, however, imply that most of the miraculous narratives are, in fact, unreliable.³⁴⁸ Consequently, the most important fact that may be established is that there is no single Qur'ānic verse that was employed as reference to this extraordinary occurrence in the work of *sīra* of this period.

The works of ḥadīths are, however, less detailed than the *sīra*'s accounts.³⁴⁹ Since they were not composed with the purpose of providing a complete biographical account of the Prophet, the works of ḥadīth, such as *muṣannaf*, *musnad*, *sunan* and *ṣaḥīḥ*, do not

³⁴⁵ Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, ed. 'Alī 'Umar, (al-Qāhira: Maktaba al-Khanjī, 2001), p.1/78.

³⁴⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Ahmad al-Mazīdī, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2004), pp.96-96.

³⁴⁷ Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, pp.82-83.

³⁴⁸ See Akram Diyā' al-'Umārī, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya al-Saḥīḥa*, (al-Madīna: Maktaba al-Ulūm wa al-Hikam, 1994), pp.98-102.; al-Mubarakfūrī, *al-Rahīq al-Makhtūm*, (al-Hind, al-Jāmi'a al-Salafiyya, 2007), pp.54-55.

³⁴⁹ Since the *Sīra* is also regarded as a branch of ḥadīth literature. By ḥadīth, I mean the selected work of ḥadīth that are comprised in the *muṣannafāt*, *musnad*, *sunan* and *ṣaḥīḥ* framework, and produced within this period, especially the works known as *Sunan Sitta*.

provide much supporting information as may be found in the *sīra*.³⁵⁰ Most of these kinds of ḥadīth works were designed to compile legal traditions as specific references for practising and developing Islamic jurisprudence. Within this legalistic nature of composition, some authors of ḥadīth have included traditions concerning Muḥammad's birth. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, for example, records a ḥadīth offering information about the day of the Prophet's birth, while Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Abī 'Āṣim and al-Bazzār provide a ḥadīth regarding the year of elephant as the actual year of his birth. Even though these two ḥadīth were perceived as related to the day of the Prophet's birth, it was in fact, presented within a specifically legal framework. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj actually narrates the ḥadīth in the Book of Fasting, in which he explains the virtue of fasting on Monday and Thursday, in which Monday is attributed as the day of the Prophet's birth. Al-Tirmidhī recorded the ḥadīth in the specific chapter called The Chapter of *al-Manāqib* (the virtues). The other authors of *Sunan Sitta* seems to absent himself from narrating any ḥadīth concerning this occasion; and yet again, none of the authors has cited verses from the Qur'ān as reference to this event.

Even though there is no connection to be found between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's birth, repeated narrations about the year of elephant as the year of his birth might provide an inspiration for later scholars to form a connection between these two rudimentary elements. The connection is, however, still hard to find in the next century. There is no clear indication of a connection between *sūra* 105 and the incident, even in the *Tafsīr Jāmī' al-Bayān* and *al-Tārīkh*, both the work of al-Ṭabarī, the tenth century

³⁵⁰ On the relationship between ḥadīth and sira, see, Andreas Gorke, "The relationship between maghazi and ḥadīth in early Islamic scholarship," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74 (2011): 171-185.

scholar who was renowned for his compilation of the popular narrations of his predecessor.

Muḥammad's Childhood

There is no doubt that the narrative about the Prophet's childhood was expanded and embellished extensively in the works of ḥadīth. Since the discussion in the *muṣannafāt*, *sunan* and *ṣaḥīḥ* is arranged within a legal framework, accounts of Muḥammad's childhood also were mostly presented in the context of juridical discourse. As far as our observation in the present study goes, there is only one Qur'ānic references employed by the scholars of ḥadīth as an allusion to Muḥammad's childhood period; and this is the incident of the opening of his Muḥammad's breast. Al-Tirmidhī, in his *Sunan*, has connected verse 94:1 to this extraordinary event.

The matter in question now is what reasons make al-Tirmidhī connect this verse with the incident? Further investigation on the text of ḥadīth suggests that al-Tirmidhī might have chosen this ḥadīth intentionally, as the result of the similarity between terms employed in it, and a similar one in the Qur'ān. At the end of the *matn* (the text of ḥadīth), al-Tirmidhī has made a brief note about the ḥadīth itself. He seems aware that the ḥadīth was also narrated by a few other transmitters: he acknowledges that "the ḥadīth was [also] narrated by Hishām al-Dustūwā'ī and Hammām from Qatāda, and also [narrated] from Abū Dzar." An analysis of the *matn* narrated by Hishām and Hammām reveal that both of them use the words *fashuqqa min al-naḥr ilā marāq al-baṭnī* (and my belly was cut open from upper part of chest to lower part of belly), which is totally different from the narration that is used by al-Tirmidhī. Al-Tirmidhī decides to preserve the narration from Sa'īd ibn Abī 'Arūba, the version that employed a phrase

that is, apparently, similar to a verse of the Qur'ān. In Sa'īd's version, the phrase *fashuriḥa/fasharaḥa* is used; and this phrase seems to be more aligned with the wording of 94:1 of the Qur'ān. In fact, the word *fasharaḥa/fashuriḥa* shares the same root word with *nashraḥ* of the Qur'ān. It might also be possible that the similarity of the words inspired al-Tirmidhī to initiate a connection between the incident and verse 94:1 of the Qur'ān.

The same version of ḥadīth was narrated by Yaḥyā ibn Salām in his *Tafsīr*, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* and al-Fākihī in *Akḥbār al-Makka*.³⁵¹ None of them has ever connected the ḥadīth, or the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast, with 94:1 of the Qur'ān. Yaḥyā, the scholar of *tafsīr* used the ḥadīth merely as an explanation of 17:1 of the Qur'ān, in which the verse that is perceived as a revelation of the Prophet's night journey to heaven.

The connection initiated by al-Tirmidhī might also be viewed as his own personal intellectual innovation. He is celebrated for his use of the novel inventive term of *ḥasan*, an intermediate status of ḥadīth between *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḍa'īf*. On the other hand, Al-Kandahlawī suggests that *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* was the first ḥadīth work to deliver a discussion about comparative law.³⁵² Furthermore he was also recognised by Ibn Rajab as the first ḥadīth critic to arrange a discussion about *al-'Ilal* (Defects of ḥadīth) in thematic order.³⁵³ His original and resourceful reading of ḥadīth is also acknowledged when he refuses to accede to the opinion of al-Bukhārī in the ḥadīth of *istinja*'.³⁵⁴ Apart from his highly evident admiration of the Prophet, it is his creative interpretation which

³⁵¹ Yaḥyā Ibn Salam, *Tafsīr*, p.1/101; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, pp.1/147-149; al-Fākihī, *Akḥbār al-Makka*, p.2/23.

³⁵² Al-Kankuhī, *Kawkab al-Durrī 'Ala Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Zakariyyā al-Kandahlawī, (Lajna al-Ulamā' Lakahnu, 1975), p.1/3.

³⁵³ Ibn Rajb, *Sharḥ 'Ilal al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Hammām Sa'īd, (Riyāḍ: Maktaba al-Rushd, 2001), p.1/345.

³⁵⁴ This has been discussed in the section of al-Tirmidhī's brief biography.

might be one of the factors that leads to this connection between the Qur'ān and the incident of Muḥammad's early life.

Early Signs of Prophethood

The fact that al-Bukhārī, the prominent ḥadīth scholar, created a specific chapter on *'Alāmāt al-Nubuwwa* (the Prophet's sign of Prophethood) indicates the significance of this topic to him. In fact, a specific literature was developed in order to deliver a discourse on this particular topic, which was known as *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*. In the work of ḥadīth, there are a few miraculous incidents that occur in the early phase of Muḥammad's life that are considered as early signs of prophethood. Nevertheless, such accounts however, remain silent about, and are unable to offer a coherent argument to connect them directly with any verse in the Qur'ān itself.

Conclusion

The rarity of Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life in the work of ḥadīth of the ninth century leads us to conclude that any attempt to form a connection between the Qur'ān and the story of Muḥammad's early life in this literature is quite evidently fragile. Arguably, there is to be found no more than one Qur'ānic reference connecting to the incidents of Muḥammad's early life. Despite the strict method applied by ḥadīth scholars in narrating ḥadīth, the very different nature of the composition is yet another reason that might produce a different approach and understanding between the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and the scholars of *sīra*.

CHAPTER 4

THE BOOKS OF *DALĀ'IL* AND QUR'ĀNIC REFERENCES TO THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD'S EARLY LIFE

4.1 Introduction

After the death of Muḥammad, this monotheist faith spread rapidly to the region of Roman and Persian territories, swiftly reaching communities that embraced different belief systems. Christianity and Judaism were rooted deeply in these multicultural societies. It was to be expected that each religion will definitely believe that they are the conveyer of the ultimate truth, and accepting others' religions implies compromising the truth of their religion. The situation becomes more intricate when religion is substantiated as an official emblem of a political constitution. Defending religion and its dignity could be considered as a legitimate task of each individual citizen. Islam was not excepted from this well-recognised phenomenon. The contact between the Muslim conquerors and the residents of subdued provinces created the grounds for each religious party to launch a defensive mode. Each religious authority endeavoured to serve their religion in their own best interests. One of the earliest religious reactions records alarm at the advance of the Arabs and its religious motivation. This is engraved in the Greek apologetic work entitled *Doctrina Jacobi*.³⁵⁵ Purportedly composed in 12/634, two years after the death of Muḥammad, this document did not avoid discussing the veracity of his prophethood. The author outlined the characteristics of a true prophet in a dialogue form, recording the view of a man

³⁵⁵ Hoyland, Robert G., *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam*, (New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1997), p.55.

who is well versed in scripture, saying that: “He is false, for the prophet does not come armed with the sword”.³⁵⁶

The reaction of non-Muslim on Muḥammad’s prophethood, made consistently over several centuries, were engendered due to the lack of evidence of Muḥammad’s prophethood. According to Camilla Adang, two major arguments against Muḥammad’s prophethood were identified, as levelled by opponents of Muslims, questioning the veracity of his mission. The first concerned the absence of previous scripture’s testimony on the prophethood of Muḥammad. The second argument seems similar to Muḥammad’s Meccan contemporary reflection: his mission was not corroborated by any miracle.³⁵⁷ Muslims were not passive in their response to safeguard the dignity of the Prophet and of Islam. Probably one of the earliest texts demonstrating the theological response from the Muslim side is the letter of Abū al-Rabī‘ Muḥammad ibn al-Layth, which he wrote for al-Rashīd to the Byzantine emperor Constantine. Based on Barbara Roggema’s analysis,³⁵⁸ this compilation of letters was not only defending Muḥammad’s prophethood; it worked as a multifunctional device, revealing the shortcomings of Christianity, reminding the Byzantines of a duty to pay tribute, and explaining theological issues from the Islamic point of view. In defence of Muḥammad’s prophethood, several quotations from the Bible were adduced³⁵⁹ to convince the reader that he fulfilled biblical prediction. As well as, more than a few evidentiary miracles were recorded in these letters; such as his ability to envisage future

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 57.

³⁵⁷ Adang, Camilla, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Ḥazm*, (Leiden, E.J Brill, 1996), p.141.

³⁵⁸ Roggema, Barbara. ‘Risālat Abī l-Rabī‘ Muḥammad ibn al-Layth allatī katabahā li-l-Rashīd ilā Qusṭanṭīn malik al-Rūm,’ *Christian-Muslim Relations 600-1500*, ed. David Thomas. Brill Online, 2015. (accessed 10 March 2015).

³⁵⁹ Abduh, Khalid Muḥammad (ed.), *Risālat Abī l-Rabī‘ Muḥammad ibn al-Layth allatī katabahā li-l-Rashīd ilā Qusṭanṭīn malik al-Rūm*, (Maktaba al-Nāfizah, 2006), p.51.

events; he was bestowed with skills to communicate with trees, animals and other parts of nature; and a small portion of food sufficed to feed a group through his blessing.³⁶⁰

It is because of this challenging reaction from the non-Muslim world to the Islamic mission, that a specific pattern of literature has come into being. M.J. Kister suggests that the advance of Muslim penetration to the territories of those possessing ancient cultural and religious creeds, and equipped with a rich lore of prophetic beliefs and stories, contributes to the emergence of literature concerning the miracles of the Prophet.³⁶¹ Kister proposes that the letter sent by Harūn al-Rashīd to the Byzantine emperor should be regarded as evidence to confirm the cause of the appearance of this particular literature.³⁶² The letter, however, contains a general sketch of arguments in defending Muslim beliefs before these were developed systematically by later Muslim scholars.

Like Kister, Sidney Griffith delves into more details exploring the Christian response to the claims of Islamic prophetology. His reading identified the *mutakallimūn* of the Muslim community as the community who started to develop an apologetic line of argument in defence of the truth of the prophethood of Muḥammad.³⁶³ These arguments of *mutakallimūn*, fortifying the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood, were compiled in works known as *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* (proofs of prophethood). Kister refers to two others names that this literature was familiar with, *Amārāt al-Nubuwwa* (signs of prophethood) and *A'lām al-Nubuwwa* (indications of prophethood). In general this literature was designed to provide a considerable range of evidence utilised by Muslims

³⁶⁰ Abduh, *Risālat Abī l-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth*, pp.23-25.

³⁶¹ M.J Kister, The Sīra Literature, in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature. Arabic literature to the end of the Umayyad period*, ed A.F.L Beeston, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.355.

³⁶² Ibid., p.355.

³⁶³ Sidney Harrison Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p.96.

to prove the prophethood of Muḥammad. The work was padded with verses from the Qur'ān, prophetic traditions, logical reasoning, biblical references and practical arguments exemplifying the characteristics of a true prophet. In the next section, we will discuss in more detail the nature of this literature before exploring the references in this work to the Qur'ān and Muḥammad.

4.1.1 The Definition of *Dalā'il* and Its Names

Dalā'il is one of the genres of early Islamic literature. The word is a plural form of *dalālah* or *dilālah*,³⁶⁴ which denotes a sign, indication, guidance, symbol or symptom.³⁶⁵ It was derived from the Arabic root word of d-l-l, ³⁶⁶ which means to prove, establish, or verify. *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* means the proofs of prophethood; in Islamic literature this term refers to the traditional account that assembles and embraces all types of evidence related to the Prophet Muḥammad, signifying the veracity of his prophecy.³⁶⁷ It is relevant to note here that rather than using the term '*Dalā'il*', some Muslim scholars employed other terms for their works bearing the same meaning and similar objectives to the composition of *Dalā'il*. *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa* (the confirmation of the prophethood), for instance, was used by al-Shāfi'ī³⁶⁸ (d.204/820) and Abū al-

³⁶⁴ Both are correct according to *Lisān al-Arab*. See also Ibrāhīm Mustafa, *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, (Cairo, Dār al-Da'wa, n.d.), p.294.

³⁶⁵ Al-Ba'albakī, Rohī, *al-Mawrid a Modern Arabic English Dictionary*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ilm Li al-Malāyīn, 1995), p.550.

³⁶⁶ Al-Zamakhsharī, Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Amrū ibn Ahad, *Asās al-Balāghah*, ed. Muḥammad Basil 'Uyun al-Saud, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), p.295.

³⁶⁷ Hammādah, Dr Farūq, *Masādir al-Sīra al-Nabawiyyah wa Taqwimuhā*, (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 2003), p.68.

³⁶⁸ Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn Abū Naṣr 'Abd al-Wahb ibn 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Kāfi, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Tanāhi, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d) 5/146; al-Salāmasī, Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm, *Manāzil al-A'imma al-Arba'a Abī Ḥanīfa wa Mālik wa al-Shāfi'i wa Aḥmad*, (al-Mamlaka al-Sa'ūdīyya: Maktabah al-Mālik Fahd al-Waṭaniyya, 2002), p.204; Kahālāh, 'Umar Ridha, *Mu'jam al-Muallifin*, (Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1993), p.3/116.

Ḥusayn al-Zaydī³⁶⁹ (d.421/1030) for their works. *A' lām al-Nubuwwa* (the signs of prophethood) was the term employed by Al-Mā'mūn³⁷⁰ (d.218/833), Sulaymān al-Farrā'³⁷¹ (d.269/882) and others.³⁷² 'Alī al-Madanī³⁷³ (d.224/838) entitled his book *Ayāt al-Nabī* (the evidence of the prophet), while *al-Ayāt al-Bayyināt* (the clear evidence) was used by Ibn Diḥya al-Kalbī³⁷⁴ (d.633/1235). And *Amārāt al-Nubuwwa* (the indications of the prophethood) used by al-Jūzajānī³⁷⁵ (d.259/872). Among these terms, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* was the most popular term used by Muslim scholars within this genre. The traditions of Islamic scholarship show that in every century, there be a work entitled *Dalā'il*, with a two-fold purpose: a response to non-Muslim scholarship, and to bring into effect a specifically Muslim commentary which is educational in terms of its ability to increase and widen contemporary understanding of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*.

³⁶⁹ Al-Zaydī, Abū Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Hārūn al-Harunī al-Hasanī, *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa al-Nabī*, ed. Khalil Aḥmad Ibrahim, (Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d)

³⁷⁰ Ibn al-Nadīm, Muḥammad ibn Ishaq, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, trans. ed. Bayard Dodge, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p.1/254; Thomas, David. 'Risāla fī a' lām al-nubuwwa', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*. ed. David Thomas. Brill Online. [accessed 10 March 2015]

³⁷¹ Al-Khushānī, Abū Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Hārith ibn Asad, *Qudhah Qurtuba wa 'Ulamā Ifriqiyyah*, (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Khanjī, 1994), p.286; Muḥammad Yusef, *al-Musannafāt al-Maghribiyya fī al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, p.241.

³⁷² Such as Dāwūd ibn 'Alī al-Asfahānī (d.270/883), Abū Muḥammad Abdulla ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba al-Daynūrī (d.276/889), Abū Hātim al-Razī (d.277/890), Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d.283/896), Abū al-Husayn Aḥmad ibn Faris al-Lughawī (d.395/1004), 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Muḥammad al-Qurtubī al-Andalusī (d.402/1011) and others.

³⁷³ Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, p.1/130.

³⁷⁴ al-Sibtī, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb 'Amrū ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Diḥya al-Kalbī al-Andalusī al-Sibtī, *al-Ayāt al-Bayyināt Mā Fi A'da' Rasulullah*, ed. Jamal Azzūn, (Maktabah al-'Umrayn al-Ilmiyyah, 2000).

³⁷⁵ Al-Juzajānī, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Ya'qūb, *Amārāt al-Nubuwwa*, (Riyāḍ: Dar al-Tahāwī, 1990).

4.1.2 The Origin and Development of *Dalā'il* Literature

It is hard to say how and when this literature was begun, when most of the earliest works on this subject have not survived.³⁷⁶ However, it is very likely the result of the development of the concept of prophethood in Islam. *Sahīfah Hammām ibn Munabbih* (d.101/719),³⁷⁷ compiled at least five *ḥadīth* relate to the Muhammed's prophethood, which have been the subject of commentary in later *Dalā'il*. All of these *ḥadīth* were then developed by al-Bukhārī (d.256/868) in a specific chapter named Chapter of the Signs of Prophethood, in his work, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.³⁷⁸ *Ṣaḥīfah Hammām* contained only 139 *ḥadīth*, originating, crucially, in the second century following the death of the Prophet. Such events being included in this account suggest that these *ḥadīth* indicated the concept of prophethood as having a specific, significant value to Hammām the *ḥadīth* compiler. At this time, *Dalā'il* was not redacted in the form of a complete and coherent composition as in later ninth century editions.³⁷⁹

The earliest compilation of the proof of prophethood was initiated by Ma' mar ibn Rāshd (d.153/770) in his *al-Jāmi'*.³⁸⁰ He designated one specific chapter entitled *al-Nubuwwa* (the prophethood) to bring together traditions that have been considered as evidential proof of Muḥammad's prophethood. This chapter provides a clear example of early

³⁷⁶ Such as *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa* by al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Hujjah fī Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa* by Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir al-Mu'tazilī, *Āyāt al-Nabī* by 'Alī al-Madanī and *A'lām al-Nubuwwa* by al-Khalīfah al-Ma'mūn al-Abbāsī. In fact, it is hard to say either the work does really exist or not. These works have been recorded by unpublished assignement notes by Aḥmad ibn Muhammad Fukayr from the Faculty of Art nad Humanities, University Agadir, Morocco, entitle *Min Maṣādir al-Sira al-Nabawiyya, Kutub Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*. (see, <http://shamela.ws/rep.php/book/4007>)

³⁷⁷ According to *Encyclopedia of Islam* (second edition) and Ibn Sa'd he died in 101H, while the other sources suggested 132H. See the Introduction section of *Sahīfah Hammām* edited by Dr Rif'at Fawzī 'Abd al-Mutallib, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanjī, 1985).

³⁷⁸ Al-Bukhārī, Abū Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Dār Ṭūq al-Najāh, 2001), p.4/191.

³⁷⁹ According to Stroumsa, the ninth century works has already reaches a well-shaped prophetology. See: Stroumsa, Sarah, *The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature*, p.106.

³⁸⁰ Al-Azadi, Ma' mar ibn Rāshid, *al-Jāmi'*, ed. Habīb al-Rahman al-A'zamī, (Bayrūt: al-Maktaba al-Islāmī, 1982), pp.11/276-280.

Muslim thought on the standards and conditions of true prophethood, in an entire chapter was dedicated to preserve evidence-based proof of Muḥammad's prophethood. It contains four specific miracles performed by Muḥammad and one physical sign of prophethood. The author acknowledges Muḥammad's phenomenal foreknowledge and foretelling of future events; his miracle, in which he produces water from his own hand for a believer; his producing, as a result of his blessing of a small portion of food that is sufficient to feed a large number of people; how he turned a stick to a sword in the battle of Uhud and the manifest physical sign of prophethood that was located between his shoulder. This chapter comprises 'the evidence', but without any comment or explanation from its author. It shows that Ma'mar's method of writing pursues the conventions of early *ḥadīth* literature, which compile traditions according to topic, with no explanation. The way he selected the traditions is remarkable. By assembling the proof of prophethood in one chapter, entitled 'Prophethood', the author indicates the significance of his endeavour to verify the legitimacy Muḥammad's prophethood. Accordingly, his work also helps us to identify and understand an early development of the concept of prophethood and *Dalā'il* in Muslim community. There is no indication of a foreign influence that specifically leads Ma'mar to create this specific chapter on prophethood in the presentational framework and literary conventions of *Dalā'il*. Moreover, Fikh Akbar, the theological work attributed to Abū Hanīfa, already mentions the doctrine of the Prophet's signs (*āyāt*).³⁸¹ This reveals that the concept of *Dalā'il* was already established in the milieu of Muslim community during the mid-eight century.

Concurrently, with the expansion of Muslim territory, the non-Muslim communities' reactions to the denials of the prophethood of Muḥammad created an impact on the

³⁸¹ Abū Hanīfa, Nu'mān ibn Thābit, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, p.69.

development of *Dalā'il*'s literature. Vigorous refutations from non-Muslim community, specifically the Jews, Christians, Brahmins³⁸² and the philosophers³⁸³ (the *Falāsifah*) urged Muslims to develop a solid mechanism in defence of the status of their beloved prophet. Already in the early eighth century, the challenge against Muḥammad's prophethood had been expressed by John of Damascus (d.105/724) in his *De Haeresibus*,³⁸⁴ repeating the claim of Muḥammad being a false prophet, as was stated earlier by the author of *Doctrina Jacobi*.³⁸⁵ Not only familiar with the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, it has been said that John was also involved in the debate at the Caliph's court in the Caliph's presence.³⁸⁶ It is hard to confirm, however, whether this work has had a significant effect on the development of *Dalā'il*, since there is no clear indication of a Muslim response to his challenge. However, the argument posed consistently by the non-Muslim not in agreement with the prophethood of Muḥammad, undoubtedly played a role in shaping the development of *Dalā'il*. The diplomatic dialogue that occurred around 163/780 – 168/785, between Timothy I (207/823) and al-Mahdī (d.168/785) was another instance of discussion concerning Islam and the status of the Prophet.³⁸⁷ The earliest Muslim response to the polemical encounters between Muslim and non-Muslims was recorded in the letter of Abū al-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth (d. c.203 /819) which he wrote on behalf of al-Rashīd (d.193 /809) to the Byzantine

³⁸² According to Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādī, al-Shāfi'i composed a book on Dalā'il in order to refute the argument levelled by the Brahmins. (see: al-Subkī, al-Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya, p.5/146)

³⁸³ According to Stroumsa, this group was sometimes referred as al-Dahriyyah as in al-Jāhiz's work. See Stroumsa, Sarah, *The Signs of Prophecy*, p.104.

³⁸⁴ Hoyland, Robert, *The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: an appraisal* in H. Motzki ed., *The Biography of Muḥammad, the issue of the sources*, (Leiden, 2000), p.276; Stroumsa, Sarah, *The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature*, pp.105-106.

³⁸⁵ Hoyland, Robert G., *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*, p.55.

³⁸⁶ Hitti, Philip K, *History of Syria Including Lebanon and Palestine*, (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2002), p.2/ 499.

³⁸⁷ Hoyland, Robert G., *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*, pp.472-475.

emperor Constantine in 179/796.³⁸⁸ Even though the letter was not specifically or explicitly identified by the author as *Dalā'il*, the letter was presented in the framework of the literary and structural conventions of *Dalā'il* literature, providing evidence to prove beyond doubt the prophethood of Muḥammad apart from other religious topics. Later in 213/829, Theodore Abū Qurrā' (d. c.214 /830), a Melkite Bishop of Harran reinforced established notions of the characteristics of a 'true' prophet. These included, the question of miracles and other theological discourse, in the debate, which occurred in the presence of Caliph al-Mā'mūn.³⁸⁹ Purportedly written in 214/830, 'Abd al-Masīh ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, composed an *apologia* to his Muslim friend, 'Abd Allāh b. Ismā'il al-Hāshimī, who invited him to embrace Islam.³⁹⁰ Al-Kindī replied to the invitation with rigorous and challenging response, which comprised, in part, a refutation of some of al-Hāshimī's arguments, and a further explanation and clarification of the theological issues raised by al-Hāshimī. The particular ways in which al-Kindī employed the Bible, the Qur'ān, the *ḥadīth* and rational reasoning imply his expert knowledge in this subject. The systematic arguments he utilised within the structure of argument in his letter suggest that the conventions employed in dialectical debates concerning theological issues between Muslim and Christian had already become established in this period.

At the crux of the issue of the factors which have influenced the inception of *Dalā'il* literature is the question of its earliest influences. The difficulty persists around the question of earliest sources. Indeed, the lack of early textual reference to the sources which have influenced *Dalā'il* literature obscures the debate considerably, and has led

³⁸⁸ Roggema, Barbara. 'Risālat Abī l-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth allatī katabahā li-l-Rashīd ilā Qusṭanṭīn malik al-Rūm' in ed. David Thomas, *Christian-Muslim Relations*. Brill Online, [accessed 10 March 2015]

³⁸⁹ Bertaina, David, 'Mujādalat Abī Qurra ma'a al-Mutakallimīn al-Muslimīn fī Majlis al-Khalīfa al-Ma'mūn', in ed. David Thomas, *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*. Brill Online. [10 March 2015]

³⁹⁰ Troupeau, G., 'Al-Kindī, 'Abd al-Masīh', in ed. P. Bearman, et. al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Brill Online, [22 March 2015]

to assertions that the nature and conventions of *Dalā'il* arise from external influences, especially Christian influences. There has arisen the understanding that *Dalā'il* literature is, in fact, a response to a Christian critique. Nevertheless, there are clear and established references in *ḥadīth* literature which suggest strongly that the *Dalā'il* arose spontaneously out of a Muslim context. In particular, the early Muslim scholars were fired by a deep spiritual need to acquire details about their beloved prophet. Al-Asbahānī (d.430/1038), the author of *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* explains in his introduction his purpose of writing.³⁹¹ According to him, his pupils were asking him to accumulate all traditions related to *al-Nubuwwa* (the prophethood), *al-Dalā'il* (the proofs of prophethood), *al-Mu'jizāt* (the miracles) *al-Ḥaqā'iq* (the trueness) and *al-Khaṣā'is* (the prophet special features). As a result, he produced his own *Dalā'il*. Furthermore, the establishment of *Dalā'il* was clearly a part of the swift development of the *ḥadīth* literature. Most of the works of the *ḥadīth* produced in the ninth century contain one specific chapter discussing or collecting evidence for the proof of Muḥammad's prophethood.³⁹² The persistent disputation from non-Muslim communities, arguing against the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood, has undoubtedly only served to contribute to the steady growth of *Dalā'il* literature.

³⁹¹ Al-Asbahānī, Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, ed. Dr Muḥammad Rawwās Qal'ajī, Bayrūt: Dār al-Nafāis, 1986, 32.

³⁹² Ma' mar entitled the chapter as *al-Nubuwwa*, al-Bukhārī named it as '*Alāmāt al-Nubuwwa*', in al-Tirmidhī, it was known as *Bāb Ayāt Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa*, it was also mentioned in *Sahīh Ibn Hibbān* and *al-Mustadrak* by al-Hākim.

4.1.3 *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* in the Ninth Century

As discussed earlier, the theological discourse concerning the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood had a considerable impact on the development of *Dalā'il* literature. Discussions regarding the concept of prophethood in Islam had already begun in the middle of the eighth century in the work of Abū Ḥanīfa and Ma'mar ibn al-Rāshid. At the same time, Wāsil ibn Atā' (d. 131/748) also established his concept of prophethood by suggesting that prophethood is a gift (*amānah*) from God; something that could not be gained by any other means.³⁹³ The concept of *Amānah* is 'trustworthiness', the trust which God places in humans, and requires to be fulfilled. In contrast, Abū Khālid al-Hamdāni proposed that prophethood can be obtained by good deeds alone. The later scholars of the Mu'tazila such as Bishr ibn Mu'tamir (209/825), Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 220-230/835-845) and Abū Huzayl al-Allāf (d. 226/840), show their support for Wāsil's concept. This notion could be viewed as a reaction to the emergence of the Muslim false prophets of that period³⁹⁴. Bayān ibn Sam'ān³⁹⁵ (d. 119/737) and al-Mughīra ibn Sa'īd were amongst the figures that claimed prophethood as belonging to them.³⁹⁶ Both were subsequently killed and burned by Khālid ibn Abdulla al-Qasrī (d. 126/743) for their claim to prophethood.³⁹⁷ In the reign of al-Rāshid (d. 193/809), the conversation about Muḥammad's prophethood also attracted the attention of the Indian's court (as recorded by Ibn al-Murtadhā) when they asked al-Rāshid to send a

³⁹³ Al-Himyārī, Nashwan, *al-Hūr al-'Ayn*, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanji, 1948), p.264.

³⁹⁴ The consistent emergence of false prophets in the Muslim world claimed scholars' attention and established indirectly the initial concept of prophethood in Islam. Soon after the death of the Prophet of Islam, Musaylima, Buzākha, al-Aswad al-'Ansī, and Sajāh of the Tamīm, were names that appeared claiming the prophethood as actually belong to them.

³⁹⁵ Walker, Paul E. 'Bayān b. Sam'ān.' *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition. ed. Gudrun Krämer, et. al., Brill Online, [23 March 2015]

³⁹⁶ Al-Ash'ari, Abū al-Ḥasan, *Maqālāt Islāmiyyīn*, p.56

³⁹⁷ Ibn Hazm al-Andalusī, *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Milal*, (al-Qāhira: Maktabah al-Khanjī, n.d) p.4/141.; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, (Muassasah al-Halabi, n.d) p.153.

Muslim scholar in order to explain Islam to them. The prophethood of Muḥammad was one of the issues raised by them.³⁹⁸

In the ninth century, the scholars' debate on the concept of prophethood deepened and widened. The Mu'tazila, the group that always deliver their discussion to within its own five pillars, expressed their enthusiasm in this topic by incepting ideas on the conventions of prophethood within Islam. In defending the authenticity of Muḥammad's prophethood, miracles (*mu'jizāt*) were regarded as one of the main instruments to measure and verify the veracity of his prophethood.³⁹⁹ Most Muslim scholars believe that the Qur'ān was the major evidence (*al-mu'jiza al-kubrā*) of Muḥammad's prophethood.⁴⁰⁰ In contrast with the majority's opinion, al-Nazzām and al-Murdār (226/841), however, deemed that the human, with his or her own intellectual faculty is capable of composing and structuring a book that is equivalent to the level and quality of the Qur'ān.⁴⁰¹ This thought, consequently, compromised the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. Furthermore, the greatest miracle of the Qur'ān has also been discarded from being one of the proofs due to its nature of its 'createdness'⁴⁰² (*al-a'rāḍ*)⁴⁰³. Rejecting the Qur'ān as the proof of Muḥammad's prophethood, Hishām al-Fuwāṭi (218/833) and 'Abbād ibn Sulaymān (c. 210/825) considered the Qur'ān as an

³⁹⁸ Ibn al-Murtadhā, *Tabaqāt al-Mu'tazila*, (Bayrūt: Dar Maktabah al-Haya, 1961), p.59.

³⁹⁹ Al-Hamadhānī, 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthman, (Maktaba Wahbah, n.d) p.568; *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd al-'Adl*, ed. Dr Mahmūd Muḥammad Qāsim, p.168.

⁴⁰⁰ Al-Ash'arī, Abū al-Hasan 'Alī ibn Isma'īl, *Risāla ilā Ahl al-Thaghr*, ed. Abdulla Shākir, (al-Sa'ūdī: University of al-Madīna, 1413), p.55, 97; al-Safarīnī, Abū al-'Awn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, *Lawāmi' al-Anwār al-Bahiyya*, (Dimashq: Muassasah al-Khafiqīn, 1982), p.177.

⁴⁰¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal.*; al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt Islāmiyyīn*, p.56.

⁴⁰² In his *Maqālāt*, al-Ash'ari explains six different views proposed by Mu'tazilite on the 'createdness' of the Quran. Some of them argue that the Quran was a *jism* (body) which clearly indicates the nature of the createdness of the Quran. The others insist that the Quran was 'arad, another element that attributes the Quran as a 'creation'. (see: Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt Islāmiyyīn*, ed. Nu'aym Zarzūr, (al-Maktabah al-'Asriyya, 2005), p.1/154.)

⁴⁰³ 'Araḍ (p. A'rāḍ) according to Rahman is a translation of the Aristotelian term know as accident; which is defined as that which cannot subsist by itself but only in a substance (*jawhar*) of which it is both the opposite and the complement. (see Rahman, F.. 'Araḍ.' *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online. [15 March 2015].

‘accident’ (*al-a’radh*), one of the elements of createdness, which according to them is not fit to offer proof of the prophethood of a person.⁴⁰⁴ This vigorous discussion concerning the topic of prophethood occurred in the ninth century, and illustrates some pictures of Muslim thought on the concept of prophethood. At the same time, this intellectual theological discourse prepares Muslims scholar, especially the Mu‘tazila, with a strong basis of thought when composing work in defence of the veracity of Muḥammad’s prophethood. It is not, therefore, an unusual phenomenon, when most of the Mu‘tazila figures in the same century possess a work related to the *Dalā’il*’s conventions.

The earliest work known that resembles the concept of *Dalā’il* in the ninth century was *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa* by al-Shāfi‘ī. In the words of Abū al-Manṣūr al-Baghdādī, al-Subkī narrated that al-Shāfi‘ī produced a book in defence of the prophethood of Muḥammad⁴⁰⁵. The work is actually al-Shafie’s attempts to pacify the refutation of the Brahmins’ thought (*al-Barāhima*) on the prophethood of Muḥammad. The term *al-Barāhima* always appeared in the *Kalām* debates, arguing for the necessity of prophets. They assert that, the prophethood was neither necessary nor real, for according to them, one could acknowledge the existence of God through reason alone, without any need to recognise the prophethood.⁴⁰⁶ This idea appears to penetrate Muslim theological discourse and has an impact on them. According to al-Dhahabī, al-Nazzām, one of the Mu‘tazila figures, seems to be influenced by this notion; but he concealed his beliefs

⁴⁰⁴ Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt Islāmiyyīn*, p. 1/179

⁴⁰⁵ Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn Abū Naṣr Abd al-Wahb ibn Ali ibn Abd al-Kāfi, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah al-Kubra*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Tanāhi, (Cairo: Dār al-Ihya’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, n.d), p.5/146; al-Salāmāsī, Abū Zakariā Yahya ibn Ibrāhīm, *Manāzil al-Aimmah al-Arba‘a Abī Hanīfa wa Mālik wa al-Shāfi‘i wa Aḥmad*, (al-Sa‘ūdī: Maktaba al-Mālik Fahd al-Wataniyya, 2002), p.204; Kahālah, ‘Umar Ridhā, *Mu‘jam al-Mu‘allifīn*, (Muassasa al-Risāla, 1993), p.3/116.

⁴⁰⁶ Crone, Patricia. ‘Barāhima,’ *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*. ed. Gudrun Krāmer, et. al., Brill Online, [20 March 2015].

deliberately, possibly worried about its consequences.⁴⁰⁷ The Mu‘tazila doctrine promoted by the Abbasids, where reason and logic were used as a basis of thought, would have had indirect support for the acceptance of Brahmins logical arguments. It is because of this intellectual influence that Muslim scholars, including al-Shāfi‘ī, had to compose a book to refute the notion spread by Brahmins. Al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) was another *Dalā’il* author that makes a brief comment on the Brahmins’ thought, rejecting their arguments regarding the prophethood.

Before al-Shāfi‘ī composed his work preventing the prophethood in Islam, Abū Khalda had already been sent by al-Rāshid as a delegate of the Muslim court to explain to the Indian’s ruler about Islam and the prophethood.⁴⁰⁸ Even though it is unclear whether Indian ruler (or rulers) at that period were practising Brahminical thought, the readiness of the Abbasid court to send their man indicates a strong bond between the court and its scholars in defending Islam and its creed. It is clear that, apart from the support from Muslim higher authority, the external challenges from non Muslims contribute considerably to the development of systematic arguments in the later work of Dalā’il.

The Abbasid court seems to give serious attention to safeguarding the status of the prophethood of Muḥammad. Not only did the Muslims scholars have their own Dalā’il, the Caliph himself also produced a book of *Dalā’il*. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Caliph al-Ma’mūn wrote a *Dalā’il* book known as *Risāla fī A’lām al-Nubuwwa*.⁴⁰⁹ Even though this book is not extant at present and not much information can be found regarding this work, it can be assumed that the work has motivated the Mu‘tazila

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Dhahabī, Shamsuddīn Abū Abdillā Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Siyār A’lām al-Nubalā’*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), p.8/529.; al-Safadī, Ṣalāhuddīn Khalīl ibn Aibak, *al-Wāfi bi al-Wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arna’ūt, (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth, 2000), p.6/15.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibn al-Murtadhā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mu‘tazila*, (Bayrūt: Dār Maktaba al-Hayā, 1961), p.59.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, trans. ed. Bayard Dodge, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 1/254; Thomas, David. ‘Risāla fī A’lām al-Nubuwwa’, in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*. ed. David Thomas. Brill Online, 2015. [10 March 2015]

scholars, the official advisors of the Caliph's court, to produce a similar genre of literature. It is not unusual to see that most Mu'tazila prominent scholars have produced something about prophethood in the *Dalā'il* framework. This includes such works as Bishr Ibn al-Mu'tamir (d. 210/825) in his *Kitāb al-Hujja fī Ithbāt al-Nabī 'alayhi l-salām*, Abū Ishāq al-Nazzām (d. 836/845) in his *Kitāb ithbāt al-rusul* (confirmation of messengers), Abū Huzayl al-'Allāf (d. 225/840) in his *Kitāb fī al-Nubuwwa*, Abū Bakr Ibn Shāhib with his *Kitāb fī al-Nubuwwa*, and Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhiz (d. 244/869) in his *Kitāb al-Hujja fī Tathbīt al-Nubuwwa*.

4.1.4 External Factors

Muslim sources have shown that the intra-Muslim discourse on prophethood already existed and was well-developed in the second/eight and third/ninth centuries. Mu'tazila discussions about God's justice, Abū Ḥanīfa's doctrinal text, and the Muḥaddithūn's compilation of *ḥadīth* of prophethood were among accounts that survived, recording Muslim understanding of Muḥammad's prophethood. Apart from Muslim internal discourse, the ninth century witnessed active encounters between Muslim and non Muslims, regarding the prophethood of Muḥammad.

There is salient evidence bearing witnesses to Muslim and non Muslim encounters concerning the prophethood of Muḥammad. Corrie Block has recorded at least ten Christian authors' perspectives on the subject of Muḥammad and his prophethood between the seventh and eighth centuries.⁴¹⁰ He was regarded variously as a trader, a

⁴¹⁰ Block, Corrie Jonn, *Expanding the Qur'ānic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur'ān in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends*, (unpublished thesis, University of Exeter, 2011), pp.124-148. The list as below:

king, a monotheist revivalist, a lawgiver and a false prophet by the Christians.⁴¹¹

Writing in Syriac, Theodore Bar Koni expresses his beliefs regarding Muḥammad and his teaching. First he argued Muḥammad's teaching on baptism. His comments suggest that Muḥammad's message could not have been from God. Furthermore, he asserts that Muḥammad might have been influenced by his teacher, Bahīrā.⁴¹²

There exists not only textual evidence, but also a series of verbal encounters recorded by non Muslim authors. As mentioned previously, it has been said that John of Damascus (d. 105/724) was involved in the debate at the Caliph's court in the Caliph's presence.⁴¹³ The diplomatic dialogue that occurred around 163/780 – 168/785, between

1- *Doctrina Jacobi* (c.13/634) illustrates Muḥammad as "He is false prophet for the prophets do not come armed with a sword"

2- *History of Sebeos* (Pre-41/661), according to Block, in this text, the teachings of Muḥammad are affirmed as he is called a "preacher," "by God's command."

3- *The Chronicle of John bar Penkaye* (67/687) opines on Muḥammad, whom John calls *mhaddyānā*. To Muḥammad's teachings John attributes the Islamic honouring of Christianity.

4- *The Disputation of the Monk of Bet Hale and the Arab Notable* (c.101/720), the monk attributes Muḥammad's monotheism to the influence of Sargis Bahīrā.

5- *The Addendum to the Chronicle of 640* (w.c.105/724), also known as *The Chronicle of Thomas the Presbyter*. What is most compelling about this text is the section title: "A notice of the life of Muḥammad, the *rasūl* of God.

6- John of Damascus in *De haeresibus* (d. ca.754) designates to Muḥammad the title of 'false prophet,' and suggests that Muḥammad knew Christian doctrine through direct contact with the Old and New Testaments, and through the influence of an un-named Arian monk. The Qur'ān is to John a fabrication of Muḥammad, and composed of "ludicrous doctrines."

7- In *The Chronicle of 741*, Block explain: "the author's description of Muḥammad is interesting. Muḥammad is described as the leader of the Saracens, of noble birth, and as one who can see the future. The author seems to have an empathetic view of the Muslim prophet."

8- In *On the Unified Trinity* (137/755), the Christian author reverses a Qur'ānic phrase which refers to Muḥammad, "mercy and guidance," to read "guidance and mercy," in reference to Jesus, creating a curious parallel between Jesus and Muḥammad. This phrase refers three times to Moses, and ten times to Muḥammad in the Qur'ān.

9- In the discussion between 'Umar II (r.717-720) and Leo III, Leo addresses the accusation of the falsified Paraclete directly, on etymological grounds.

10- In 164/781 Caliph al-Mahdī asks Timothy I about the corruption of the Gospel, again centering his argument around the Biblical concept of the Paraclete as a prophecy of Muḥammad in the Gospels, revealed in Q7:157 and 61:6.

⁴¹¹ Hoyland, Robert G., *The Earliest Christian Writing on Muḥammad: An Appraisal*, in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of Sources*, ed. Harald Motzki, (Brill, 2000), pp.276-297.

⁴¹² Samir, Samir Khalil, 'The Prophet Muḥammad As Seen By Timothy I And Other Arab Christian Authors', in *Syrian Christians Under Islam The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas, (Brill, 2001), pp.76-77.

⁴¹³ Hitti, Philip K, *History of Syria Including Lebanon and Palestine*, (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2002), p.2/ 499.

Timothy I (207/823) and al-Mahdī (d. 168/785) was another instance of discussion concerning Islam and the status of the Prophet.⁴¹⁴

In the ninth century, the dialogue between Muslim and non Muslim regarding the prophethood of Muḥammad recurred. Abū Hudhayl al-‘Allāf is recorded as having a debate with a Jew pertaining to this matter. In the dialogue, the Jew clearly refutes Muḥammad’s prophethood, and concludes that since Muslims concede the prophethood of Moses as the one who has been recognized as possessing prophethood, it would be more advisable to follow Moses than Muḥammad, the one disputed in his apparent prophethood.⁴¹⁵

During the same period, Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī (d. c.204/820) conveys his refutation of Muḥammad’s prophethood in a systematic way. He commences his argument by denying the prophethood of Muḥammad and by saying, “he was not a prophet”. He then offers an alternative view on Muḥammad’s status by saying that “he was only a King whom God favoured”. To support his proposition, he has provided a statement based on Biblical interpretation. He said “God accomplished by him and through him his promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael”. According to Samir, this statement is a reference to Genesis 21. 12-13.⁴¹⁶ There is also a serious criticism posed by non Muslim of this period. In his work entitled *Refutation of the Saracens*, Theodore Abū Qurra (c.a 213/829) levelled heavy criticism on Muḥammad’s prophethood. He attributed

⁴¹⁴ Hoyland, Robert G., *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*, pp.472-475.

⁴¹⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmīyya Fī Ta’sīs Bida’ihim al-Kalāmīyya*, (Majma’ al-Mālik Fahd Li al-Ṭibā’a al-Mushaf al-Sharīf, 1426), p.4/101.

⁴¹⁶ Samir, Samir Khalil, *The Prophet Muḥammad As Seen By Timothy I And Other Arab Christian Authors*, in *Syrian Christians Under Islam The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas, (Brill, 2001), pp.76-77; Marcuzzo, Giacinto Bulus, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī à Jérusalem vers 820 : étude, édition critique et traduction annotée d'un texte théologique Chrétien de la littérature Arabe*, (Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 1986), p.321.

Muḥammad as being “the insane false prophet of the Agarenes, a liar, and demon possessed”.⁴¹⁷

Purportedly written in 214/830, ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, composed an apologia to his Muslim friend, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ismā‘īl al-Hāshimī, who invited him to embrace Islam.⁴¹⁸ Al-Kindī replied to the invitation with a rigorous and challenging response, which comprised, in part, a refutation of some of al-Hāshimī’s arguments, and a further explanation and clarification of the theological issues raised by al-Hāshimī. Regarding Muḥammad’s prophethood, Al-Kindī reinforced the established notion about this by asserting that Muḥammad’s prophethood was not foretold in the Bible, and his mission was not accompanied by any miracle.⁴¹⁹ The particular ways in which al-Kindī employs the Bible, the Qur’ān, the *ḥadīth* and rational reasoning imply his expert knowledge in this subject. The systematic arguments which he utilised within the structure of argument in his letter suggest that the conventions employed in dialectical debates concerning theological issues between Muslim and Christian had already become established in this period.

Around 267/880, Butrus al-Bayt Ra’si composed a book entitled *Kitāb al-Burhān*. What is of immediate interest is his interpretation of Matthew 20.1-16. According to Samir, the author’s interpretation implies that Muḥammad has no covenant; and therefore Samir affirms that this is a classical Christian way of saying that he does not belong to any calls or divine sanction.⁴²⁰ In *The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem*, the absence of prophecy regarding Muḥammad’s advent is again utilized by the author to

⁴¹⁷ Block, Corrie Jonn, *Expanding the Qur’ānic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur’ān in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends*, p.134.

⁴¹⁸ Troupeau, G., ‘Al-Kindī, ‘Abd al-Masīḥ’, in, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman, et. al. Brill Online, [22 March 2015].

⁴¹⁹ Samir, Samir Khalil, *The Prophet Muḥammad as Seen by Timothy I and Other Arab Christian Authors*, in *Syrian Christians Under Islam The First Thousand Years*, pp.76-77.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, pp.82-84

deny his prophethood. The author, however, observes that Muḥammad has really brought the Qur'ān, which was corrupted later by Uthman.⁴²¹ The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā was another document produced by an anonymous Christian author. It was a projection of an early Islamic history through the lens of Christian perspective.⁴²² In this legend, Muḥammad has been portrayed as being influenced predominantly by Baḥīrā. Roggema provides details of examples of how the Qur'ān could possibly have originated in Christian circles, instead of being the subject of revelation.⁴²³ Moreover, Ammār al-Baṣrī (c.a 840-850) maintains that miracle must be considered as the main element in evaluating the authenticity of prophethood.⁴²⁴

The persistent disputation from non Muslim communities arguing against the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood, has undoubtedly served to contribute to the steady growth of *Dalā'il* literature. The use of Biblical verses and intensifying *Dalā'is* with evidentiary miracles indicates the authors' endeavour to pacify the argument launched by the non Muslim. The works of Ibn al-Layth and Ibn Rabban are among the instances of products initiated by Muslims to confront non Muslim arguments.

⁴²¹ Block, *Expanding the Qur'ānic Bridge*, p.135.

⁴²² Ibid, p.135.

⁴²³ Roggema, Barbara, A Christian Reading of the Quran: The Legend of Sergius-Bahira and Its Use of Quran and Sira, in *Syrian Christians Under Islam The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas, (Brill, 2001), pp.57-73.

⁴²⁴ Block, *Expanding the Qur'ānic Bridge*, p.140.

4.2 Dalā'il's Works and the Qur'ānic references to The Prophet

In order to explore more deeply Muslim theological theory and discourse in respect of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad, the next sections will analyse the Qur'ānic references cited in the work of *dalā'il* published in the ninth century. Specifically, the works of Ibn Rabban, al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba will be analysed as representative of this period. Each verse referring to Muḥammad's early life in these works will be analysed deeply, and consideration will be given to the development of Muslim thought, along with an analysis of the apparent authenticity and source of the reference.

4.3 Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī and The Book *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*

Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī was a Christian convert to Islam who subsequently became a table companion of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil and the previous caliphs. Known as an expert in medicine, his professional background was described variously as a 'Christian writer' (*al-Kātib al-Naṣrānī*)⁴²⁵, the secretary of Governor Māzyār ibn Qārīn (*kātib Mazyār*)⁴²⁶, and also a medical doctor (*al-Ṭabīb*). Al-Qifṭī attributed him as an authority in medical sciences, an expert in philosophy, a devotee of the natural sciences.⁴²⁷ His considerable abilities as an administrative secretary and writer testify to his ability or, indeed, probable mastery of the Arabic language, which would have helped him greatly in his understanding the meaning and interpretation of the Qur'ān.

⁴²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, *al-Tārīkh*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Turāth, 1387H), p.9/85, 9/86, 9/90, 9/96.

⁴²⁶ Ibn Maskawayh, *Tajārub al-Umam wa Ta'āqub al-Himam*, (Tehran, 2000), p.4/255; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1997), p.358.

⁴²⁷ Al-Qifṭī, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Hasan 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, *Akhbār al-'Ulamā' bī Akhyār al-Hukamā'*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2005), p.1/178.

Early Muslim sources frequently associate Ibn Rabban's name with his former Christian belief. Christian titles such *al-Naṣrānī*⁴²⁸ and *Masīḥī*⁴²⁹ evidently accompanied his name. In fact, in his work, *al-Rad 'alā al-Naṣārā*, he openly acknowledges his first seventy years of life as a Christian, as he does in respect of his book *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*, in which he clearly concedes his Christian origins.⁴³⁰ It is undeniable that his uncle, Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn al-Nu'mān, a prominent Christian scholar and expert in debate, is likely to be the source of his Christian and theological knowledge. In discussions of the polemical topic of the authenticity of the Qur'ān and the signs of prophethood, he quotes twice his uncle's own words as his source of information.⁴³¹ This implies that he was no ordinary Christian, but that he was nurtured in a family with a thoughtful Christian faith.

According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn Rabban's conversion to Islam occurred in the reign of al-Mu'taṣim.⁴³² However, the warmth of the statement which he makes regarding Caliph al-Mutawakkil in his work *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla* leads A. Nuwayhid and D. Thomas to suggest that he converted in the period of al-Mutawakkil.⁴³³ Meyerhof offers other evidence for the date of his conversion. Based on his reading, Ibn Rabban produced his medical treatise entitled *Firdaws al-Hikma* eight years after the death of al-Mu'taṣim; and since there is no Qur'ānic citation and 'Muhammadan sentences' in the work, he argues that Ibn Rabban's conversion could not have occurred in the reign

⁴²⁸ As mentioned in al-Tabarī's *Tārīkh*.

⁴²⁹ In Ibn Khalīkan's *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, p.5/159; al-Safadī, *al-Wāfi bi al-Wafayāt*, p.3/62; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tawdīh al-Mushtabih*, (Mu'assasa al-Risālah, 1993), p.4/132.

⁴³⁰ Ibn Rabban, *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*, p.98.

⁴³¹ Ibid, p.98; 189.

⁴³² Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1997), p.358. In this he calls Ibn Rabban as Ibn Rabal.

⁴³³ Ibid, p.15; Thomas, David. 'Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī,' in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*. ed. David Thomas. Brill Online, 2015. [23 March 2015].; Thomas, D.. 'Al-Ṭabarī,' *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman, et. al., Brill Online, 2015. [23 March 2015].

of al-Mu'taṣim and suggests that its happened in the era of al-Mutawakkil.⁴³⁴ In contrast, Bouyges asserts that the absence of Islamic language and references in *Firdaws* does not prove that he was not Muslim at the time he composed the book.⁴³⁵ What galvanized him to convert to Islam is left tantalizingly unclear. Adang adduces three modern scholars' opinions regarding this. According to her, Ibn Rabban's conversion seems to be attributed to ulterior motives; whereas Noldeke conceives him as an opportunist; Macdonald identifies his conversion as nominal and professional; while Meyerhof suggests that it was Caliph's pressure that influenced his conversion. Since there is no clear statement or confession regarding his conversion, these theories remain conjecture. Even though his conversion came late in his life, after seventy years of life as a Christian, his acquaintance and contact with the Qur'ān and Islamic knowledge appears to have occurred long before his conversion, while he was still a practicing Christian. In conversation between him and his uncle regarding rhetorical aspects of the Qur'ān and the miracles of the Prophet, Ibn Rabban acknowledges freely that such discussions took place while he was a practising Christian.

The focus of the greater part of Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī's works concern knowledge of medical and health sciences; and as a result, al-Dhahabī called him 'the author of medical works' (*ṣāhib al-taṣānīf al-ṭibbīya*).⁴³⁶ Twelve titles of his works are recorded by Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn al-Qiftī, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a and Ibn Isfandiyār, and three of them were published⁴³⁷. One of them served as a reference for the medical sciences and was recognized as one of the oldest Arabic compendiums of medicine, entitled *Firdaws al-*

⁴³⁴ Max Meyerhof, 'Ali al-Tabari's "Paradise of Wisdom", *One of the Oldest Arabic Compendiums of Medicine*, (The University of Chicago, Isis, 1931), 16(1), p.11.

⁴³⁵ Adang, Camilla, *Muslim writers*, (Brill Leiden, 1996), pp.24-25.

⁴³⁶ Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Abū Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashāhir wa al-A'lām*, (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2003), p.7/247.

⁴³⁷ Thomas, D.. 'Al-Ṭabarī,' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. ed. by, P. Bearman, et. al., Brill Online. [23 March 2015]

Hikma. The other two, *al-Dīn wa al-dawla* and *al-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, contain his theological reflections on the Islamic creed, employ the rhetorical devices of an *apologia* and provide a critical re-assessment of his former Christian faith.

A survey of *Firdaws al-Hikma* leads us to conclude that there is no direct reference to the Qur’ān cited in this work. Meyerhof’s analysis confirms this. According to him, there is no Qur’ānic citation and ‘Muhammedan sentences’ (he probably means *ḥadīth* by this) in *Firdaws al-Hikma*. However, some terms that have been used in the book indicate the influence of Islamic thought (or Muhammedan practice) such as *inshā Allāh*, (if God wills) *bi iznillāh* (with the permission of God) and *bi ‘awnillāh* (with help of God). These terms, especially the term *inshā Allāh*, is a particular Muslim practice based on the Qur’ānic teaching of verse 18:23-24.⁴³⁸ Even though there is no clear citation from the Qur’ān, the influence of its teaching appears to suffuse this work. The same influences apply to *al-Radd*. This work is actually incomplete and its content may be retrieved solely from quotations which appear in the works of al-Ḥasan b. Ayyūb’s and Ibn Taymiyya.⁴³⁹ Apparently, the work is also absent of Qur’ānic quotation which leaves no choice but to examine his *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*, the only piece of his work that is published and furnished with Qur’ānic citations as references to Muḥammad.

⁴³⁸ According to Muqātil this verse was revealed when Muḥammad was asked by Abū Jahl about the story of the people of the Cave, he said, "I will tell you tomorrow" without saying *inshā Allāh* (if God wills). Allāh revealed this verse as admonishment to him. According to Muqātil, Allāh wants to inform Muḥammad that he should say “*insha Allāh*” before the *wahy* regarding the People of the Cave reveal to him. Allāh says: And say not of anything: Lo! I shall do that tomorrow, except if Allāh will. And remember thy Lord when thou forgettest, and say: It may be that my Lord guideth me unto a nearer way of truth than this.

⁴³⁹ There is in existence a unique manuscript of part of the work. Al-Hasan’s work has not survived independently, but only in Ibn Taymiyya’s *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. See Thomas, David. ‘Al-Radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā,’ in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*. ed. David Thomas. Brill Online, [accessed 23 March 2015].

4.3.1 The Book *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla fī Ithbāt Nubuwwa al-Nabī Muḥammad*

It is undeniable that Ibn Rabban's name was familiar among Muslim biographers. This work is, however, did not enjoy a similar awareness and popularity. The work seems hard to be found associated with him when Muslim biographers introduced his memoirs and his works. It was also difficult to find the book, *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*, being cited by Muslim scholars, and due to its unpopularity, modern scholars have consequently expressed their doubts about the authenticity of this work. Paul Peeters voices his suspicions when he asserts that there is no reference to *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla* to be found in the works of later authors.⁴⁴⁰ In contrast, David Thomas confirms that the work was used as a reference by the 4th/10th century authors al-Ḥasan b. Ayyūb and Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-ʿĀmīrī (d. 381/992). Indirect references may also be identified in the work of 13th century scholar entitled *Takhjīl Man Harafa al-Tawra wa al-Injīl* by Taqī al-Dīn al-Jaʿfarī (d. 688/1289). According to the editor of this work, Maḥmūd ʿAbd al-Rahman, al-Jaʿfarī relies completely on *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla* in order to develop the tenth chapter of this work which discusses the prophecies of Muḥammad in the Gospels and Bible.⁴⁴¹ Besides Peeters, Maurice Bouyges is another scholar to articulate his doubts about this work. He declared the work as a “fraud and a product of modern forgery”: according to him, the work employed a too modern style and vocabulary, a new division of Biblical chapters and a suggestion of a lack of awareness of the religious and political milieu during al-Mutawakkil's reign.⁴⁴² The issue of its

⁴⁴⁰ Adang, Camilla, *Muslim writers*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p.27.

⁴⁴¹ Al-Jaʿfarī, Abū al-Baqāʾ Ṣalīḥ ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Hashimī, *Takhjīl man harrafa al-Tawra wa al-Injīl*, ed. Maḥmūd ʿAbd al-Rahman Qadh, (Riyadh, 1998), p.1/64.

⁴⁴² Maurice Bouyges, Bouyges, Maurice. 1924. Le "Kitab ad-Din wa' d-Dawlat" recemment edite et traduit par Mr. A. Mingana est-ii authentique? Lettre a Monsieur le Directeur de la John Rylands Library, Manchester. (Beirut, 1924); Adang, Camilla, *Muslim writers*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp.27-28.

authenticity has been largely agreed upon by scholars, and now regarded as resolved as a result of the reading and findings adduced by Thomas, Adang and others.⁴⁴³

Compared with *Risāla* by Ibn al-Layth, the circumstances that influenced Ibn Rabban to compose the work are somewhat ambiguous. But since the work cites several times the name of Caliph al-Mutawakkil, and praises him, scholars tend to accept the idea that this work was conceived to fulfill the Caliph's own request.⁴⁴⁴ Minggana asserts that the work written under the directive of al-Mutawakkil, and portrays it as a semi-official defence of Islam from the opponent of the state religion, especially the Christians at the time.⁴⁴⁵ This possibly makes sense; but his work named *al-Radd* by the author is rather more appropriately to be assumed as a defensive device against the Christians' argument. Meyerhof offers a similar suggestion with different purpose, which, according to him the Caliph himself, commissioned Ibn Rabban to produce the work in order to test the authenticity and sincerity of his own conversion. Adang argues that it seems unlikely because, according to her, the Caliph must have been sufficiently satisfied by the time he attacked Christianity in his work, *al-Radd*. Graff's suggestion appears hesitant: his view is that Ibn Rabban might have written the book on his own initiative, to justify his conversion, or possibly even in response to Christian attacks, while simultaneously attempting to please the Caliph.⁴⁴⁶

What is clear is that Ibn Rabban's intention was to compose a comprehensive and enlightening work as a reference for both Muslims and non-Muslims on this particular topic. In the introduction, he explains that the previous works by other authors on this

⁴⁴³ Pulcini, Theodore, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures*, (USA, 1998), pp.23-25; Adang, Camilla, *Muslim writers*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp.27-28, Thomas, D. 'Al-Ṭabarī,' *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.

⁴⁴⁴ The *al-Dīn wa-dawla* is an apologia for the authenticity of the prophethood of Muhammad, hence in the genre of *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*.

⁴⁴⁵ Minggana, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, (Manchester, 1922), p.v.

⁴⁴⁶ Adang, Camilla, *Muslim writers*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p.29.

topic are inadequate, as they have abridged, curtailed, and have not explained the truth of Islam satisfactorily.⁴⁴⁷ Indeed, this work might also be regarded as an extension of *al-Radd*, a compilation of several sources of evidence to prove the truth of Islam. If *al-Radd* is designed to refute the Christian argument, this work seems to provide wide-ranging sources of guidance for Muslims and other communities, since the work contains a profusion of Qur'ānic and prophetic tradition, and supplements the argument with Biblical references as proof of the veracity of Islam. Since most of the discussion focuses on the authenticity of the prophethood of Muḥammad, it is reasonable to assume that there must be a root cause that inspires Ibn Rabban to organize the structure of the discussion to focus on the theme of Muḥammad's prophethood. The cause might arise from a particular Christian argument concerning the prophethood of Muḥammad; or possibly as a result of dialogue with the Caliph himself, since he was his close associate⁴⁴⁸; or even, possibly, at the community's request for him to express his opinions on this topic from his own particular perspective.⁴⁴⁹

4.3.2 Qur'ānic References in *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*

It is an established practice in which the Muslim authors of creedal works begin their discussion with Qur'ānic references related to the core topic of the work. As with Ibn al-Layth, Ibn Rabban introduces his own work by adducing five references from the Qur'ān, declaring the veracity of the faith to which he now adhered. The first two verses (2:136 and 2:285) reveal that previous prophets had belief in and received divine

⁴⁴⁷ Ibn Raban, *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*, p.35.

⁴⁴⁸ In the introduction, he clearly mentioned that he has been inspired by or guided from him (*ihṭadaitu bihi*) and benefitted from his words (*istafadtū 'anhu min al-fāzihi*)

⁴⁴⁹ According to him, the first reason that most people who contradicted with Islam is due to their doubts on the reports regarding the Prophet.

messages from the same God, and, indeed, Muḥammad is regarded as one of them. The third reference is a declaration of disassociation from the polytheist in which the entire chapter 112 of the Qur'ān is cited to make a clear distinction between Islam and other faiths. The author calls upon the people of the book to 'the common word' and, as usual, 3:64 is raised. He then concludes the prologue with verse 9:109 to confirm that this call is inspired and founded on piety towards Allāh. Among these references, none of them is cited previously by Ibn al-Layth except for verse 3:64, which is related to 'the common word'. This is probably due to different circumstances at the time of its composition: Ibn Rabban's preface is more likely to tackle a wider general audience, compared to Ibn al-Layth's, in which *Risāla* has the specific objective to persuade the Roman Emperor and his people.

The author then outlines ten proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood, each proof will be discussed in a specific chapter. Each chapter is furnished with references from the Qur'ān, except for chapters eight and nine, which support his argument.

4.3.3 Qur'ānic References to The Prophet Muḥammad's early life

Most of Ibn Rabban arguments in this work are actually developed from the foundations of Biblical scripture. His style of interpreting Biblical passages, as suggested by Adang, indicates a possible dependence on Ibn al-Layth's letter.⁴⁵⁰ However, the way in which he presents Qur'ānic references seems not to be in accordance with Ibn al-Layth's perspective. Selections of Qur'ānic verses regarding the Prophet's victory and his miracles are among the body of evidence considerably differing understandings

⁴⁵⁰ Adang, *Muslim Writers*, p.145.

between these two scholars.⁴⁵¹ Furthermore, it would appear that Ibn Rabban imposes his own standards of selection and interpretation of Qur'ānic verses when he applies it as reference to the Prophet life.⁴⁵² Most of the Qur'ānic references in this work focus upon Muḥammad's ability to foretell future events, as well as portraying his particular characteristics. References to Muḥammad's genealogy, birth, childhood and early signs of prophethood are arranged as follows:

a) Muḥammad's genealogy

There is a specific chapter which discusses Muḥammad's precursors' prophecies of his prophethood. The chapter focuses on Ishmael's prophecies of Muḥammad's advent rather than discussing the nobility of the Prophet's particular genealogy.⁴⁵³ No Qur'ānic verses are cited here as reference.

b) Muḥammad's birth and childhood

A miraculous occurrence during the Prophet's birth is mentioned here. Ibn Rabban recounts an event at Muḥammad's birth, in which his mother saw a bright light which accompanied his birth. Ibn Rabban describes how Muḥammad fell on all fours, his face and sight being directed towards heaven.⁴⁵⁴ Since the story is located in the chapter of Muḥammad's signs (*āyāt*), this implies that Ibn Rabban seems to consider the event as among the early

⁴⁵¹ In discussing the topic of the Prophet's victory against the prevailing religions, Ibn Rabban cited very different verses in comparison with the verses quoted by Ibn al-Layth. The way Ibn Rabban selects verses regarding to the Prophet's miracles also seems very different. In this regard, Ibn Rabban focuses on Muḥammad's night journey and God's protection of him while Ibn al-Laith emphasizes the evidence of shooting stars as Muḥammad's sign of prophethood.

⁴⁵² In the discourse regarding the Prophet's illiteracy, no Qur'ānic reference is made, even though it can be found in the Quran. The same thing happens when discussing the Prophet's miracles: only two are selected, even though the previous scholars have already provided examples.

⁴⁵³ Ibn Raban, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, pp. 77-84.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., p.32.

signs of his prophethood. This account is clearly gleaned from Muslim tradition, and there is no Qur'ānic reference cited here.

Ibn Rabban, however, cites 93:6-8 as a reference to Muḥammad's early life. He is described as being 'alone' (*waḥīdan*), 'unique' (*farīdan*), an 'orphan' (*yatīman*), and 'poor' (*ā'ilān*) in the seventh chapter. No further interpretation is offered by the author in citing these verses.⁴⁵⁵ It is worthy of note that among the three attributes alluded to in the verses about Muḥammad (orphan- *yatīman*, lost-*dāllān*, poor- *ā'ilān*), Ibn Rabban seems to avoid mentioning the word *dāllān* (lost or misguided) in this regard. This omission might have been made deliberately to avoid giving a possibly negative impression of the image of the Prophet's early life.

In chapter five, verses 94:1-4 are mentioned. These are cited to reveal how God will raise the Prophet's status to a more exalted status. A brief interpretation of the verses implies that Ibn Rabban chose to read the verses quite literally, rather than to interpret them on a deeper level, as been the case in work of later scholars.⁴⁵⁶ It also shows that the story of Muḥammad's life had already begun to acquire its own form and meaning during this period; and that gradually, some of the Qur'ānic elements only began to penetrate this account in later decades.

Overall, Ibn Rabban seems to have established and maintained his own particular standards in his selection of Qur'ānic references, and thus provides a unique Qur'ānic interpretation. His references from the Qur'ān regarding Muḥammad's early life are

⁴⁵⁵ Ibn Raban, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, pp.57-61.

⁴⁵⁶ Later scholars relate this verse to the event of the opening of the Prophet's breast.

simply too few in number to give it credence.⁴⁵⁷ Some references which might be regarded as an allusion to Muḥammad's life are perceived by Ibn Rabbān from a different point of view.

Given an understanding of relevant biographical details, it is clear that Ibn Rabbān has a good relation with the Caliph's court and great familiarity with its very fruitful intellectual resources and milieu. It is documented very soundly that he remained in the service of the Caliph through the reign of three Caliphs, al-Mu'taṣim, al-Wāthiq and al-Mutawakkil. The long period of service in the Caliph's court certainly provided him with unparalleled access to the fertile intellectual Islamic resources of literature and scholarship. In fact, given an analysis of his *al-Dīn wa al-dawla*, one might notice that he not only mastered a knowledge of Qur'ānic and ḥadīth sciences, but also featured as an expert on issues concerning other religions. Not only Islamic theological discourses were consulted in his works, but references to Jewish, Christian, Sabian (*al-ṣābi'ūn*), Manichean and Zoroastrian faiths are also adduced. Being at the centre of public and intellectual life in the capital of the empire indicates his accessibility to valuable Islamic intellectual resources. Moreover, his endeavour in writing about the prophethood of Muḥammad reflects his concern to explore comprehensively aspects of the Prophet's life. Providing directly the Qur'ān as his evidence as he does suggests his awareness and understanding of Qur'ānic references to the Prophet's life. With all his access to intellectual, scriptural and theological sources, and being a central figure at the Caliph's court, his works do, however, reveal the absence of those specific Qur'ānic verses that are used as references to Muḥammad's early life in later period. For this reason, the

⁴⁵⁷ Compared to the entire Qur'ānic references made by Ibn Rabbān cited in the whole work which comprises approximately 90 references.

apparent absence of clearly attributable Qur'ānic in his works suggests strongly that such links were not generally made at this time.

4.4 Al-Jāhiz and His *Kitāb al-Hujja fī Tathbūt al-Nubuwwa*

Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiz was an eminent Arab multidisciplinary scholar, Mu'tazilite theologian, and an expert in both literature and political polemic. Born into a family of considerable deprivation,⁴⁵⁸ his condition in life seems to have shaped his robust determination to become an independent figure of some standing and renown. The famous disagreement and argument between him and his master, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām, testifies to his strength of character.⁴⁵⁹ Being fatherless and destitute did not prevent him from admission to Qur'ānic school at Banū Kināna residential.⁴⁶⁰ He also attended *al-Kuttāb*⁴⁶¹ (a type of primary school) where he nurtured and developed his early promising intellectual faculties. Known as a fervent intellectual, he was seen to be an active participant in academic circles, particularly among the group called *Masjidiyyūn*⁴⁶² in Basra, to which he was introduced. There he learned from distinguished experts in philology, lexicography and poetry, namely al-Aṣma'ī, Abū 'Ubayda and Abū Zayd al-Anṣarī. These celebrated scholars did not only prepare him admirably with a mastery of Arabic literature and linguistics, Aḥmad Amīn noted that his personal style and technique in literary works was probably inherited from these masters.⁴⁶³ Apart from its emphasis upon linguistic disciplines, the Basra

⁴⁵⁸ Pellat, Ch. 'Al-Djāhiz', in *Encyclopaedia Of Islam*, Second Edition. ed.. P. Bearman, et.al., Brill Online. [accessed 20 Aug 2014] ; Murād, Barakāt Muḥammad, 'Al-Jāhiz Al-Faylasūf Al-Sākhir wa al-Adīb al-Nāqid', in *Journal Al-Masār*, (2011), p.77.

⁴⁵⁹ He even composed a specific work in this regard entitled *Kitāb Al-Radd 'Alā Abī Ishāq Al-Nazzām* (Refutation Of Abū Ishāq Al-Nazzām).

⁴⁶⁰ Pellat, *The Life And Works Of Jāhiz*, (University Of California Press, 1969), p.3.

⁴⁶¹ Landau, J.M.. 'Kuttāb', in *Encyclopaedia Of Islam*, Second Edition. ed., P. Bearman, et. al. Brill Online, 2014.

⁴⁶² Taha al-Hājirī suggests that the term masjidites connotes an eclectic group of litterateurs, poets, and thinkers who used the great mosque of Basra as a place in which to congregate and to debate a variety of issues and topics. See: Montgomery, James E., 'Al-Jāhiz On The Masjidites Of Basra', *Journal Of Arabic Literature*, 24(3), (Brill, Leiden, 1993), p.236;

⁴⁶³ Amīn, Aḥmad, *Fayḍ Al-Khātir*, (Cairo: Maktaba al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1943).; Ḥusayn, al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Muḥammad, *Al-Sukhriyya fī Adab al-Jāhiz*, (Libya: al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī' wa al-I'lān, 1988), p.73, 89, 134.

school had a pronounced influence on al-Jāḥiẓ's Qur'ānic knowledge. The Basra school was recognised as an important educational institution in the development of the science of Qira'āt and *Tafsīr*.⁴⁶⁴ As Pellat concludes, receiving an early education in one of the finest institutions of Arabic and Qur'ānic education, the birth place of Arabic prose,⁴⁶⁵ helped to develop al-Jāḥiẓ's undoubted flair in literacy and also his intellectual skills, which became the most significant interpretive device in his exploration of the meaning of the Qur'ān.

Besides linguistic proficiency, the intellectual fellowship provided by his association with *al-Kuttāb* and the Masjīdites nurtured and enriched his fundamental knowledge of religious matters quite considerably. The *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, al-Jāḥiẓ mentioned names that could be regarded as his Qur'ānic instructors. The first is Mūsā ibn Sayyār al-Aswārī,⁴⁶⁶ who al-Jāḥiẓ described as one of the 'wonders of the world', a scholar eloquent in delivering Qur'ānic exegesis in Arabic and Persian languages. Furthermore, al-Jāḥiẓ honoured him as the next best Qur'ānic reciter after Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, the Prophet's companion.⁴⁶⁷ Even though Mūsā won praise from al-Jāḥiẓ himself, he seems not to have been a very familiar figure among *Mufasssirūn* (the Qur'ān's commentators). Mūsā's opinion is only recorded in *Tafsīr al-Baḥr Muḥīṭ*⁴⁶⁸ and *Tafsīr al-Dur al-Maṣūn*⁴⁶⁹ with regard to the method of recitation, (*al-Qirā'āt*) and not as Qur'ānic interpretation. The other Qur'ānic scholar mentioned by al-Jāḥiẓ in this

⁴⁶⁴ See Shah, Mustafa, 'Exploring The Genesis Of Early Arabic Linguistic Thought: Qur'ānic Readers And Grammarians Of The Baṣran Tradition (Part II)', *Journal Of Qur'ānic Studies*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 5(2), pp.1-47

⁴⁶⁵ Pellat, *The Life And Works Of Jāḥiẓ*, p.3.

⁴⁶⁶ Al-Ziriklī in his *al-A'lām* pronounces his name as al-Aswārī, while in Harūn's edition of *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, his name is voweled as al-Uswārī. See al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām*, (n.p, 2002), p.7/323; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, ed. A.S Harūn, p.1/368.

⁴⁶⁷ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, ed. A.S Harūn, p.1/368; Kilito, Abdelfateh, *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, (Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp.21-26.

⁴⁶⁸ Al-Andalusī, Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf ibn 'Alī, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī al-Tafsīr*, (Dār al-Fikr, 1420H), p.8/425.

⁴⁶⁹ Al-Halabī, Abū al-'Abbās Shihābuddīn Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf al-Ma'rūf bi al-Samīn al-Halabī, *al-Dur al-Maṣūn Fī 'Ulūm al-Kitāb al-Maknūn*, Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, p.9/75.

work is Abū ‘Alī al-Uswārī, who, according to him, was a master in Qur’ānic exegesis, and who delivered his lectures for thirty six years in mosques. Al-Jāhiz illustrates his Qur’ānic expertise by emphasizing the meticulous care and time he consumed in explaining just one verse of the Qur’ān. According to him, because of Abū ‘Alī’s immense knowledge of the *siyar* (the Prophet’s history), *wujūh al-ta’wīlāt* (different kinds of Qur’ānic interpretations) and ḥadīth, his explanation of one verse could take weeks to complete.⁴⁷⁰ Not similar with Mūsā al-Aswārī, Abū ‘Alī seemed to have gained popularity among *Mufasssīrūn*. His opinion is cited in the *Tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī,⁴⁷¹ al-Tha‘labī,⁴⁷² Ibn ‘Aṭiyya,⁴⁷³ Ibn al-Jawzī,⁴⁷⁴ al-Qurṭubī,⁴⁷⁵ Ibn Kathīr,⁴⁷⁶ al-Shawkānī⁴⁷⁷ and others. Apart from in the area of Qur’ānic studies, al-Jāhiz was also renowned as a pupil of scholars of ḥadīth,⁴⁷⁸ theology (especially the Mu‘tazilite doctrine)⁴⁷⁹ and, similarly, in Arabic literature and language. His amassing of this great wealth of knowledge on religious subjects undoubtedly sharpened his view and enhanced his understanding, in particular of his study of the Qur’ān.

The intellectual works of al-Jāhiz evidently impressed his contemporaries or even the later scholars. Indeed, Abū Muḥammad al-Andalūsī is most fulsome, even hyperbolic, in his praise of al-Jāhiz, and asserts that he “would be more than satisfied to swap the graces of the heaven with the works of al-Jāhiz”.⁴⁸⁰ More than 200 titles of his works

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, pp.368-369.

⁴⁷¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, (Muassasa Al-Risāla, 2000), p.14/193

⁴⁷² Al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, (Bayrūt: Dār Ihya’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2002), p.5/27.

⁴⁷³ Ibn ‘Aṭiyya, *al-Muharrar al-Wajīz*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1422H), p.1/72.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibn Al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr Fī ‘Ilm al-Tafsīr*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-Arabī, 1422H), p.2/249.

⁴⁷⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi’ li al-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, (Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1964), p.2/135, 8/106.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1419), p.1/48.

⁴⁷⁷ Al-Shawkānī, *Fath al-Qadīr*, (Dimashq: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1414H), p.1/27, 1/168.

⁴⁷⁸ In ḥadīth, it was said that he learnt from Abū Yūsuf Al-Qādī (Pellat, *The Life And Works Of Jāhiz*, p.4) and Ḥajjāj Ibn Muḥammad Al-Masīṣī (Aḥmad Amīn, *Fayḍ al-Khāṭir*, p.290)

⁴⁷⁹ He studied theology under Abū Hudhayl al-‘Allāf, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Sayyār al-Nazzām, Thumāma ibn Ashras, Bishr ibn Mu‘tamir and Aḥmad ibn Abī Dū‘ad. See Aḥmad, ‘Izzat al-Sayyid, *Falsafa al-Akhlāk ‘ind al-Jāhiz*, (Dimashq: Manshūrat al-Ittiḥād al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 2005), p.13.

⁴⁸⁰ Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), p.4/1517.

are known.⁴⁸¹ Of these, many comprise specific discussions of Qur'ānic discourse, including *Masā'il al-Qur'ān*, *Ma'āni al-Qur'ān*, *Āyy al-Qur'ān*, *Naẓm al-Qur'ān*, *Kitāb Khalq al-Qur'ān*.⁴⁸² Al-Jāḥiẓ's undoubted dedication to the composition of particular works devoted to Qur'ānic discourse indicates his fresh notions and broad knowledge of Qur'ānic discourse.

A distinguishing feature of al-Jāḥiẓ's work is that, occasionally, the titles of al-Jāḥiẓ's compositions appear as a mainspring (or possibly an emblem) of Qur'ānic inspiration. Arifin's observations suggests that the title of al-Jāḥiẓ's work, *Kitāb al-Zar' wa al-Nakhl wa al-Zaitūn wa al-A'nāb*,⁴⁸³ (The Book of Agriculture and the Cultivation of Palm, Fig and Grapes) is adapted from verse 16:11 of the Qur'ān.⁴⁸⁴ Montgomery offers another intriguing analysis. According to him, al-Jāḥiẓ's work, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* may be more appropriately translated as 'The Book of Living' rather than 'The Book of Animals'. He finds evidence that al-Jāḥiẓ himself alludes to this meaning. However, what is more important is that this translation is in profound congruence with the Qur'ānic notion alluded to in 29:64. In this verse, the word *al-Ḥayawān* connotes 'living'; and therefore Montgomery believes that al-Jāḥiẓ intended this title to convey the unique nature of the specific Qur'ānic context of the word.⁴⁸⁵ These interesting

⁴⁸¹ See Pellat, 'Al-Djāḥiẓ' in *Encyclopedia Of Islam* Second Edition; Thomas, David, 'Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr Ibn Baḥr Al-Fuqaymī Al-Jāḥiẓ,' in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*. ed. David Thomas. Some even suggest more than 300 of his works were recorded, see Murād, Barakāt Muḥammad, 'Al-Jāḥiẓ Al-Faylasūf Al-Sākhir wa al-Adīb al-Nāqid', *Journal Al-Masar*, p.77. Shatūh proposes that al-Jāḥiẓ works reach 400 works, See Shatūh, 'Āmir, *Malāmiḥ al-Taḥkīr al-Simā'ī fī al-Lughā 'Ind al-Jāḥiẓ Min Khilāl al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, (unpublished thesis, Kasdi Merbah University, 2009), p.27.

⁴⁸² Al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyya al-'Arifin Asmā' al-Mu'aliffin wa Athār al-Muṣannifin*, (Istanbūl, 1951), pp.1/802-3.

⁴⁸³ This work is lost. The full title is mentioned by him in *Kitāb Al-Hayawān*. According Yaḥyā, al-Jāḥiẓ received 5000 dirham from Ibrāhīm abn al-'Abbās al-Sūlī for dedicating this book to Ibrāhīm. See Yāqūt, Mu'jam al-Udabā', p.5/2118; Pellat, *The Life And Works Of Jāḥiẓ*, p.6.

⁴⁸⁴ Arifin, Zamri, *The Islamic Tendency In Al-Jāḥiẓ's Prose Works: A Study Of Selected Texts From The Rasā'il Al-Jāḥiẓ Collection*, (unpublished thesis, University Of Lampeter, 2005), p.80.

⁴⁸⁵ Montgomery, James E., *Al-Jāḥiẓ: In Praise Of Books*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp.9-10.

observations show al-Jāḥiẓ's both profound and penetrating understanding of the Qur'ān.

It is apparent that Qur'ānic thought is established as the fundamental bedrock of his work, and the pervading influence of Qur'ānic teaching may be traced throughout it. Zabidi found that al-Jāḥiẓ's satirical work, *Kitāb al-Tarbī' wa al-Tadwīr*, demonstrates a very strong Qur'ānic influence, both in language and content.⁴⁸⁶ Al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Bukhālā'* is yet another work that witnesses the impact of Qur'ānic discourse, especially his allusion to Satan and his actions.⁴⁸⁷ Al-Jawzī offers another instance in which, according to him, the story of Cain and the concept of *al-ḥasad* (envy) is clearly evident and al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Rasā'il al-Adabiyya* bears strong evidence of Qur'ānic inspiration.⁴⁸⁸

4.4.1 *Kitāb al-Ḥujja fī Tathbīt al-Nubuwwa*

The full title of the work is *Kitāb al-Ḥujja fī Tathbīt al-Nubuwwa*, which appears in *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, a title ascribed by al-Jāḥiẓ himself.⁴⁸⁹ Later scholars, however, bestow several different names to this work, possibly due to the loss of the complete original work, which necessitated the re-naming of the work, based on the remaining content which survived only in fragments.⁴⁹⁰ Some parts of the work are clearly absent.

⁴⁸⁶ Zabidi, A.M., 'The Impact Of The Qur'ān And Hadith On Medieval Arabic Literature', in *Arabic Literature To The End Of The Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et. al., (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.336.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, p.336.

⁴⁸⁸ Al-Jauzī, 'Abd al-Majīd, *Makānah al-'Aql Fī Falsafa al-Jāḥiẓ*, (unpublished thesis, al-Jāmi'ah al-Jazā'ir, 2004), pp.78-82.

⁴⁸⁹ The title mentioned twice in *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*. In the introduction (1/12), al-Jāḥiẓ mentions the full title of the work while in (7/120), it was only referred as *Kitāb al-Ḥujja*. See, al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. 'Uyūn al-Sūd, M Bāsil, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1424H).

⁴⁹⁰ According to Arifin, al-Rawandi names it *al-Akhhbār wa Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa*, al-Murtaḍa calls it *Kitāb fī Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa*, Yāqūt addresses it as *Kitāb al-Ḥujr wa al-Nubuwwa*, while Pellat and Brockelmann entitle the work *Kitāb Hujja al-Nubuwwa*. See Arifin, Zamri, *The Islamic Tendency In Al-Jaijiz's Prose Works: A Study Of Selected Texts From The Rasail Al-Jāḥiẓ Collection*, p.261.

For example, in *Kitāb al-Hayawān*, al-Jāḥiẓ elaborates the event of Abraha's incursion into Mecca with his elephants and refers specifically to the event, which he declares "has a long discussion on it and we have delivered it in the *Kitāb al-Hujja*."⁴⁹¹

It is problematic to determine with any accuracy the precise dates of composition of the work. Al-Ḥājirī proposes that it was between 233/848 and 236/852, while al-ʿAttār suggests that it was produced between 237/851 and 247/861.⁴⁹² What is clear, however, is that, both seem to agree that the work was composed during the reign of al-Mutawakkil, in which the new policy of the court was established, and which abolished the doctrine of Muʿtazila and restored the teachings of traditionalist scholars.⁴⁹³

In the preface, al-Jāḥiẓ established the scope of discussion he aims to deliver. However, when approaching the work in its entirety, it becomes apparent that, some topics indicated in the preface seem to be absent from the actual document, and that this is most likely the result of the absence of the complete original text.⁴⁹⁴ The first part of the work seems to follow closely Ibn Rabban's method of focusing on, clarifying and classifying the evidence. He starts by defining a typology or classification of the evidence (*ḥujja*), discerning the types of evidence, and elaborating upon the reasons why earlier generations (*al-salaf*) became distracted first from collecting the proofs of

⁴⁹¹ al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Hayawān*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1424H), p.7/120. In this context, *Kitāb al-Hujja* here in high possibility is referring to the present work. See Thomas, David, 'Kitāb al-Hujja fī Tathbīt al-Nubuwwa' in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas. Brill Online.; Arifin, Zamri, *The Islamic Tendency In Al-Jaijiz's Prose Works: A Study Of Selected Texts From The Rasail Al-Jāḥiẓ Collection*, p.260.

⁴⁹² See El-ʿAttār, Jamal F, *The Political Thought Of Al-Jāḥiẓ With Special Reference To The Question Of Khilafa (Imamate): A Chronological Approach*, (unpublished thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1996), p.2/251, /2387 and /2395; Arifin, Zamri, *The Islamic Tendency In Al-Jaijiz's Prose Works*, pp.262-263.

⁴⁹³ Ibid. It appears that al-Jāḥiẓ is a scribe who understood well how to adapt his politics and keep a good relationship with the Caliph's court. In the early phase, during which al-Muʿtazila gained influence over Abbasid policy, al-Jāḥiẓ produced works favouring al-Muʿtazila's dogma, for example *Kitāb Khalq al-Qurʾān* and *Fī Naft al-Tashbīh*. At a later time, when al-Mutawakkil changed this policy, he was found to have presented his work in accordance with the new government order. See El-Attar, Jamal F, *The Political Thought Of Al-Jāḥiẓ*, (University of Edinburgh, 1996), pp.418-419, 342-343.

⁴⁹⁴ As mentioned above, the story of Abraha and his elephant's army is one of the examples of the missing discussions in this work.

Muḥammad's prophecy and, furthermore, explaining the need to compile it. The nature of discussion sometimes exhibits the influence of Mu'tazili style, specifically in those parts where the author has employed reason as his principal tool of argument. Dialectical and analogical analysis is interspersed within the discourse. Even though the title appears to seek to discuss the proof of prophethood, in fact, the major part of the work clearly dominates the discussion by defining the evidence and classifying the narration (*al-akhbār*). No wonder that Pellat regards it as one of the works which delivers discussion on the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* (which also known as *al-akhbār*) and the inimitability (*i jāz*) of the Qur'ān.⁴⁹⁵ Only towards the end of the work does al-Jāḥiẓ enumerate the proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood.

According to al-Jāḥiẓ, the following are among the proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood:

1. Muḥammad predicts verifiable future events, and has the capacity to read the human heart and its secrets.
2. Muḥammad's prayers are always fulfilled. In this regard, al-Jāḥiẓ provides three instances recorded in the *ḥadīth* as proof that Muḥammad's prayers are never rejected by God, in which all of the stories were related to the *Kisrā* (Khusraw) in differing degrees.⁴⁹⁶ Highlighting the *Kisrā* in these three instances reveals al-Jāḥiẓ's desire to convey a clear message to his Persian readers,⁴⁹⁷ that Islam is clearly the true religion as revealed by God through Muḥammad, His prophet.

⁴⁹⁵ Pellat, C, 'al-Jāḥiẓ', in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et. al., (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.85.

⁴⁹⁶ The first instance seems to have been an indirect allusion to *Kisrā*, in which the account shows how Muḥammad's prayer had resolved the problem of fertility, something that *Kisrā* was unable to bring about. The second and third *ḥadīth*, however, have a direct association with the *Kisrā*, in which the Prophet's prayer for the obliteration of *Kisra* and his empire was a phenomenon which Muslims subsequently perceived as something that had been answered by God, when the Muslim expansion overpowered the Persian Kingdom. al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā'il*, ed. Harūn, pp.267-269.

⁴⁹⁷ It is hard to deny that Persia has its own influence in the Abbasid era. All of the following factors contribute to the emergence of Arab Persian Muslims, in which they retained and continued to practise

3. Muḥammad's virtues and nobility of character is one of the proofs of his prophethood. Neither Qur'ānic reference nor *ḥadīth* is presented here in support of this particular argument. Since Ibn al-Layth, Ibn Rabban and now al-Jāḥiẓ assert the excellence of Muḥammad's morality as a proof of his prophethood, it is fair to assume that within this period, the discourse regarding his character developed and became a matter of public interest. Two imperatives may be considered here as key factors that influence the development of this kind of literature: the first is the establishment of *ḥadīth* literature, especially the specific discussion on the Prophet's traits, known as *al-Shamā'il*.⁴⁹⁸ Muslim interest in and veneration of the personal details of Muḥammad's personal life inspired Muslims to establish this particular branch of literature which provides a rich source for the *Dalā'il*'s authors in support of their argument for Muḥammad's prophethood, based on his qualities of benevolence and physical beauty.⁴⁹⁹ Another factor is the existence of external challenges to Islam from non-Muslim communities arguing against Muḥammad's prophethood by questioning his perceived morality.⁵⁰⁰

their own culture: first, the employment of Barmakids administrators; the role of *Kuttāb* (secretaries, in the early Abbasid period, in which most of them are said to have been Persian converts); the conversion of Persians to Islam in order to gain an exemption from tax; and the development of the Abbasid capital in the eastern region, an area rich with the influence of Persian culture, See, Lewis, Bernard, *The Middle East*, (New York, 1995); Marin-Guzman, 'The 'Abbasid Revolution In Central Asia And Khurāsān: An Analytical Study of the Role of Taxation, Conversion, and Religious Groups in its Genesis', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, (Islamabad, 1994), p.231; Zaman, M.Q, 'The 'Abbāsīd Revolution: A Study of the Nature and Role of Religious Dynamics', *Journal of Asian History*, (1987), 21(2), pp.119-149.

⁴⁹⁸ Al-Zahrānī identifies at least four *al-Shamā'il* works known to be produced within this period, *Kitāb Ṣiḥā al-Nabī* by Abū al-Bakhtārī (d.200/815), *Kitāb Ṣiḥā al-Nabī* by 'Alī al-Madā'inī (d. 224/838), *Kitāb Ṣiḥā Akhlāq al-Nabī* by Daūd al-Asbahānī (d. 270/883) and *Kitāb al-Shamā'il al-Nabawīyya* by al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892). Al-Zahrānī, Dayf Allah, *Maṣādir al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya*, (al-Madīna: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li Tibā'a al-Mushaf, n.d), p.1/53.

⁴⁹⁹ Shimmel, Annemarie, *And Muḥammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of The Prophet in Islamic Piety*, (The University of North Carolina, 1985), pp.31-32.

⁵⁰⁰ At the early stage, the non Muslim has already doubted Muḥammad's prophethood by questioning his morality issue: for example in Doctrina Jacobi Muḥammad was cited as "He is false prophet for the prophets do not come armed with a sword".

4. The extraordinary account of the defeat of Abraha and his elephants is among the signs of Muḥammad's prophethood. This account survives in *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, in which al-Jāḥiẓ clearly states that "this topic has a long discussion on it and we have delivered it in the *Kitāb al-Ḥujja*." At the beginning of the discussion on the episode concerning the story of the elephants (*Qiṣṣa al-Fīl*), al-Jāḥiẓ adduced Jāhilī poetry (*al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī*) and confirms the authenticity of its source. Therefore, according to him, the extraordinary incident actually happened, has its own historical value and shows that God, through this miraculous intervention, has demonstrated a sign of Muḥammad's prophethood. At the end, al-Jāḥiẓ cites 105:1-5 of the Qur'ān supporting his understanding.⁵⁰¹ In this regard, Mansur in his thesis said that "He (al-Jāḥiẓ) holds the miracle (the event of the elephants) as an affirmation in advance of Muḥammad's prophecy and an exaltation of his position."⁵⁰²

4.4.2 Qur'ānic References in *Kitāb al-Ḥujja fī Tathbīt al-Nubuwwa*

Qur'ānic references cited by al-Jāḥiẓ in this work are infrequent. This might be the result of his particular mode of discourse, which was influenced by Mu'tazila methods of reason and logic, in which such an argument is usually presented within a particular rational and logical framework rather than drawing solely on religious tradition. Of Ibn al-Layth, Ibn Rabban and al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Jāḥiẓ cites the fewest Qur'ānic references: only sixteen references are given in this work, and this includes some of the verses which are later repeated two or three times. Nevertheless, like the other authors, Qur'ānic

⁵⁰¹ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, (Bayrūt, 1424H), pp.118-120.

⁵⁰² Manṣūr, Sa'īd Ḥusayn, *The World-View of Al-Jāḥiẓ in Kitāb Al-Ḥayawān*, pp.198-200.

references employed by al-Jāḥiẓ are included to support his argument on a particular issue. The references may be summarised as follows;

1. At the beginning of a discussion, al-Jāḥiẓ explains that certain evidence is sometimes insufficient in itself to achieve the objective that was intended by its author. According to al-Jāḥiẓ, this phenomenon has already been elucidated in the Qur'ān when the Prophet was sent with all of his divine guidance and evidence but was, even so, still unable to convince the unbeliever to accept its veracity. In this regard, al-Jāḥiẓ offers references from the Qur'ān (9:33 and 61:8), which illustrate that God has sent his prophet with guidance 'to prevail' (*liyuzhirahu*) over all religions, but the non-believer is persistently denying and refusing to accept the guidance. Explaining the meaning of verse 9:33, the author proposes that "the most basic level on which 'to prevail' is by presenting the evidence (*iẓhār al-ḥujja*) to those who resist God." Setting the references (9:33 and 61:8) in context, these verses actually alluded to the People of the Book (*ahl al-Kitāb*), in which this phrase usually connotes the Jews and Christian.⁵⁰³ Considering this context, it is reasonable to suggest that al-Jāḥiẓ in his introduction has offered an indication or intimation to his audience, to whom the work was addressed, by quoting these references from the Qur'ān. The third reference cited by al-Jāḥiẓ strengthens this hypothesis, when he introduces verse 34:28 of the Qur'ān, which says "We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin)." This verse apparently indicates that the intended audience of the work (the Proof of Prophethood) was not exclusively Muslim, but included the non-Muslim too, and Jews and Christians specifically.

⁵⁰³ The verse 9:33 was repeated twice in the Qur'ān, another one is in 61:9, while verse 61:8 has its similar meaning in 9:32, in which in all of its places in the Qur'ān, the verses were alluded to the People of the Book.

Commenting on verse 9:33, al-Jāḥiẓ suggests that at a fundamental level, the proclamation of guidance and prevailing upon the audience the religion of truth is two-fold: the first stage is achieved by adducing true evidence (*iẓhār al-ḥujja*);⁵⁰⁴ the second is established through acquiring political power.⁵⁰⁵ This unique interpretation seems to be a novel analysis propagated by al-Jāḥiẓ. Previous commentators, including Muqātil,⁵⁰⁶ Yaḥyā ibn Salām, al-Ṣanʿānī and al-Tustarī had never attained the originality of al-Jāḥiẓ's approach, method or reasoning. It would not be until about a century later that al-Maturīdī, in his *tafsīr*, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, produced a reading which employs an approach similar to al-Jāḥiẓ's. Interpreting the verse, al-Maturīdī clarifies its meaning by proposing two possible interpretations. According to him, the first is God disseminates his guidance and the religion of truth by endowing the Prophet with evidence and proofs (*bi al-ḥujaj wa al-āyāt*). The second interpretation is that God reveals the religion of truth through his Prophet, by the expansion of Islamic territory. Al-Jāḥiẓ's proposition, with his original commentary of the verse, implies his deep understanding of the Qur'ān.⁵⁰⁷

2. With regard to the reason why God sends the prophets, al-Jāḥiẓ cites 4:165. Chronologically, this verse has been used by Ibn al-Layth in same ground; to explain the reason for sending the prophets. Among *mufasssirūn*,⁵⁰⁸ Muqātil's

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risāla fī Ḥujaj al-Nubuwwa*, Harūn's edition, p.225.

⁵⁰⁵ In this regards, al-Jāḥiẓ said: It is not enough that this religion be proclaimed without Muslims holding supreme power and receiving tribute. See, al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risāla fī Ḥujaj al-Nubuwwa*, p.268.

⁵⁰⁶ When interpreting verse 9:33, Muqātil expounds how God reveals His religion of truth over all other religions by Islam prevailing over all other faiths. And when clarifying verse 61:9, he give a second opinion by saying that God will ensure Islam prevails through the victory of Muḥammad over other religions, until they have to contribute tributes to the Prophet. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, ed. Shehātah, (Bayrūt, 1423H), p.2/168, 4/316.

⁵⁰⁷ Al-Maturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, ed. Majdī Baslūm, (Bayrūt: Dār Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2005), p.5/360.

⁵⁰⁸ Within this period, between the eighth and ninth centuries.

commentary seems to be in agreement with this reading. However, he places the verse in a specific context. According to him, verse 4:165 is apparently revealed within a specific setting, namely the one in which Jews were questioning Muḥammad about Moses. It is in response to this question that God revealed 4:164 to clarify the issue. Elucidation continues with 4:165, in order to explain the reason for sending the prophets.⁵⁰⁹ Furthermore Al-Jāḥiẓ elaborates that humankind is in need of prophets in order to learn ways of worshipping God, learning the stories of previous nations and prophets and identifying benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) for them.

3. Furthermore, al-Jāḥiẓ continues to illuminate the astounding truth of Muḥammad's message: even in the contexts of differing races, human nature and cultural backgrounds, the people of the world embrace his mission with astonishing rapidity. He then develops his line of reasoning by arguing that human beings of widely differing backgrounds, coming from different provenance still may identify a message of truth. For this reason, the willing acceptance of Muḥammad's prophethood by people from diverse multiracial backgrounds from different nationalities proves the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood. By explaining the diversity of humankind and their countries, al-Jāḥiẓ supports the significance of loving one's homeland by adducing verse 4:66 from the Qur'ān and claiming: 'God compared the attachment to ones homeland with attachment to life itself'.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹In his *Tafsīr*, Muqātil relates dialogue of the Prophet with the unnamed Jew. The Jew was asking the Prophet about the reason why Gods sent prophets to their people. See, Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, p.1/423.

⁵¹⁰ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risāla fī Hujaj al-Nubuwwa*, Harūn's edition, p.244.

4. It is obvious in this work that, one of al-Jāhiz's methods of adducing Qur'ānic references is by employing them to illustrate the circumstances of historical events. For example, to give a picture of how the Jews refused Moses' message, he quotes 7:138, 4:153 and 5:24, all references which illustrate the Jews' refusal to embrace Moses' call.⁵¹¹ In portraying the rejection of the message of Muḥammad by the people of Mecca, and their excuses for refusing to accept and believe in the Qur'ān, al-Jāhiz quotes 8:31, 25:32, 10:15 and 25:4.⁵¹² He also offers chapter 105th of the Qur'ān to depict the story of the companions of elephant.⁵¹³ As mentioned before, this last reference is only found in *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* in which al-Jahiz alludes the discussion as 'we have delivered it in the *Kitāb al-Hujja*'⁵¹⁴.

4.4.3 Qur'ānic References to The Prophet Muḥammad's Early Life

Not only are the Qur'ānic references found in this work is small in number, the references to Muḥammad's early life are almost as hard to trace. There exist only two direct references to the Prophet's early life. The first reference is to his admirable attitude and personal conduct, as recognized by the Arabs before his ascendance to the prophethood. In fact, no Qur'ānic reference is employed here.

The second reference concerns the story of Abraha's incursion into Mecca with his elephant troops, during which God's divine intervention protected the holy city from an aggressive invasion. Only in this section does al-Jāhiz cite chapter 105 of the Qur'ān

⁵¹¹ Ibid, p.272.

⁵¹² Ibid, p.276.

⁵¹³ al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, (Bayrūt, 1424H), p.7/118-120.

⁵¹⁴ Regarding dating, this makes *Hujja* earlier than *Hayawān*. *Hayawān* can be dated to pre-850, giving a terminus ante quem for *Hujja*.

to give a solid historical value and context to the story. Analysing the story and its Qur'ānic context, al-Jāḥiẓ in his *al-Hayawān* asserts that the elephants that were used by the Christian ruler of Yemen to attack Mecca is a proof of Muḥammad's prophethood. The elephant at the head of the incursion stopped short of the boundary of the city, refusing to advance. The name of the elephant as mentioned by al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Hishām, was 'Maḥmūd'.⁵¹⁵ Maḥmūd's fellow fighting elements followed his lead and similarly refused to attack. The account of Maḥmūd's stubborn refusal to attack the city of Mecca is offered as a proof of Muḥammad's impending advent. It is reasonably self-evident that 'Maḥmūd' foreshadows 'Muḥammad' (in his fight protecting the truth), and that the other elephants are a metaphor for the *Umma*. For this reading, it is no wonder that Manṣūr in his thesis proposes that: "He (al-Jāḥiẓ) holds the miracle (the event of the elephants) as an affirmation in advance of Muḥammad's prophecy and an exaltation of his position."⁵¹⁶

So far as this research is able to establish, there is no other reference to Muḥammad's early life in this work. There is just one Qur'ānic verse employed by al-Jāḥiẓ to allude to Muḥammad's early life. Even so, al-Jāḥiẓ does mention the famous battle which took place during the war of *al-Fijār*, in which the Prophet participated in his teenage years. However, this story as presented by al-Jāḥiẓ is not employed as reference to Muḥammad; rather, it is mentioned by the author to illustrate his acquaintance with the narrative itself. With his deep understanding of the Qur'ānic sciences and his wide knowledge of *ḥadīth* and the Islamic tradition, al-Jāḥiẓ seems hesitant to ascribe an occurrence during Muḥammad's early life as tangible evidence of his prophethood.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, 7/126/127; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, ed. al-Saqā, (al-Qāhira, 1955), p.1/52.

⁵¹⁶ Manṣūr, Sa'īd Ḥusayn, *The World-View of Al-Jāḥiẓ in Kitāb Al-Ḥayawān*, pp.198-200.

In the other works, al-Jāhiz is cautious and lists those instances that indicate his acquaintance with the account of Muḥammad's early life. This includes, for example, the nobility of the Prophet's genealogy;⁵¹⁷ mention of Muḥammad's wet nurse, Ḥalīma al-Sa'diyya;⁵¹⁸ his account of the *Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl* (league of the virtuous)⁵¹⁹ ; and his narration of the events of *Ḥarb al-Fijār* (sacrilegious war)⁵²⁰, both incidents which were attended by the Prophet. All of these accounts imply al-Jāhiz's knowledge of Muḥammad's early biography. Again, in all these narrations, no Qur'ānic verses are cited, which leads us to conclude that even with his profound understanding of the Qur'ān and intense familiarity with the Prophet's history, it is difficult to establish a strong relationship between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's early life in al-Jāhiz's work, especially in his *Kitāb al-Ḥujja*.

Given his biographical details, one might realise that al-Jāhiz was a central figure during this particular period. He was widely recognised as a celebrated scholar in Basra and Baghdad. Having learned from distinguished experts in a multiplicity of intellectual disciplines, his own intellectual discourse evidently impressed his contemporaries, and even later scholars. In fact, he was appointed initially by the court to provide an education for the children of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil. Given recognition by the court, and being a figure of public audience at the centre of the Islamic empire, he was possessed of a very advanced level of scholarship, having good access to intellectual works and discourse, and was known as a prominent scholar of his time. Nevertheless, his discourse about the Prophet's life, adduces barely any references from the Qur'an.

⁵¹⁷ al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb Faḍl Hāshim 'Alā 'Abd al-Shams*, in *Rasā'il al-Siyāsiyya*, (Bayrūt: Maktaba al-Hilāl, n.d) pp.412-417.

⁵¹⁸ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, (Bayrūt: Dār Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1424H), p.6/331, 7/148.

⁵¹⁹ Ibrahim, Mahmud, 'Social and Economic Conditions in Pre-Islamic Mecca', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, (1982), 14(3), pp.343-358.

⁵²⁰ Landau-Tasseron, Ella, 'Fijār', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*, ed. Kate Fleet, et. al., Brill Online, 2014.

This suggests that the connection between the Qur'ān and the narratives of the Prophet's life is fragile, and was not an association that was either made or widely understood at the time.

4.5 Ibn Qutayba and his *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*

Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdullah ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba was a Sunni theologian, a proficient and gifted writer of *adab* and an expert in philological interpretation of Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*. Not much is known about his childhood and teenage years. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad proposes that Ibn Qutayba’s early life was no different from the lives of other contemporary children in Baghdad at that time: attending *Kuttāb* (primary school), learning and memorizing the Qur’ān, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and other Islamic knowledge.⁵²¹ What is apparent is that his first experience of school was at home, learning the *ḥadīth* and *adab* under the guidance of his father. Ibn Qutayba recorded some of the knowledge he acquired from his father in *‘Uyūn al-Akḥbār* and *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*.⁵²² Besides his father, Mackay and Lecomte identify three other scholars, expert Sunni theologians, traditionalists and philologists, who had a profound influence on Ibn Qutayba’s thought. They are Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Rāḥawayh al-Ḥanzalī (d. ca. 237/851), Abū Ḥātim Sahl b. Muḥammad al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 250/864) and al-‘Abbās b. al-Faraj al-Riyāshī (d. 257/871).⁵²³ Of these three, Abū Ḥātim, an expert in philology and Qur’ānic sciences,⁵²⁴ seems to have been the scholar who had the greatest influence on Ibn Qutayba’s Qur’ānic understanding. His name is mentioned by Ibn Qutayba many times when explaining the meaning of Qur’ānic words in the works of *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-*

⁵²¹ ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, Muḥammad Amin, *Ibn Qutaybah's Contribution to Qur’ānic Exegesis: An Analytical Study Of His Work Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān*, (unpublished thesis, University of Melbourne, 2011), p.12.

⁵²² In *‘Uyūn al-Akḥbār* (1/227, 2/330) and *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, he quotes *ḥadīth* traditions from his father several times. See; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma’ārif*, ed. Tharwat ‘Ukāsha, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ma’arif, 1969), p.36; Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān*, ed. al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Turāth, 1973), p.3.

⁵²³ Lecomte, Gerard, art. ‘Ibn Qutayba’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. ed. P. Bearman, et al. Brill Online, 2014.

⁵²⁴ According Ḥājī Khalīfa, Abū Ḥātim produces works on Qur’ānic sciences such as *Kitāb I’rāb al-Qur’ān*, *Kitāb al-Qira’āt*, Ḥājī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, (Baghdād: Maktaba al-Muthannā, 1941), p.1/81, 2/1449; Al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyya al-‘Arifin*, (Bayrūt: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1951), p.1/411; Ḥaṭīṭ, Kāzīm, *Ibn Qutayba fī al-Aqīda al-Islāmiyya*, (Bayrūt, 1990), p.12.; Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān*, ed. al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Turāth, 1973), p.4.

Qur'ān and *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*. Furthermore, when Abū Bakr al-Anbārī, one of Ibn Qutayba's rivals, criticizes his work of Qur'ānic discourse in *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, al-Anbārī does not simply contest Ibn Qutayba's thought but also condemns his Qur'ān's mentor, Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī.⁵²⁵

As well as his fame for eloquence and fluency in Arabic literary traditions, Ibn Qutayba is also distinguished in his expertise in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Ibn al-Nadīm recognizes him as 'an authority on language, grammar and obscure words in the Qur'ān and its meaning'.⁵²⁶ Ayoub, in his analysis of *Majāz al-Qur'ān* (metaphor in the Qur'ān), asserts that Ibn Qutayba was the first traditionalist to treat this subject systematically and was someone who laid the foundations of this specialism within the field of Qur'ānic studies.⁵²⁷ His works in Qur'ānic discourse bear evidence of his mastery in this field. Lecomte lists all of the authentic works of Ibn Qutayba, in which four works are related to Qur'ānic studies. These are *Kitāb Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (Commentaries on Lexical Difficulties in the Qur'ān), *Kitāb Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān* (Interpretation of Obscure Meaning in the Qur'ān), *Kitāb I'rāb al-Qur'ān* (Syntactic Analysis of the Qur'ān) and *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* (Science of Qur'ān Readings). All four works demonstrate Ibn Qutayba's expertise in the philological and literary analysis of Qur'ānic language. These works become essential references for later scholars, especially scholars of Qur'ānic studies. The meaning of Qur'ānic words, analysed by Ibn Qutayba have been recognized as one of the important methodological devices in articulating the meaning of the Qur'ān. Şaqr, for example, confirms that Ibn Qutayba's

⁵²⁵ 'Abd al-Şamad, Muḥammad Amīn, *Ibn Qutaybah's Contribution to Qur'ānic Exegesis*, p.14.

⁵²⁶ Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ramaḍān, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1997), p.1/105; see also, Ouyang, Wen-chin, *Literary Criticism in Medieval Arabic-Islamic Culture: The Making of a Tradition*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.213.

⁵²⁷ Ayoub, Mahmoud M., 'Literary Exegesis of the Qur'an: The Case of al-Sharif al-Radi', in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qu'ran* ed. Issa J Boullata, (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.296.

Gharīb al-Qur'ān has been regarded and employed as a basic material source by the commentators on the Qur'ān, including al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Abū Hayān al-Andalūsī.⁵²⁸

Ibn Qutayba's knowledge of the Qur'ān is not only confined to the works he produces specifically for Qur'ānic studies. He also integrates and applies this Qur'ānic notion to other disciplines and areas of knowledge and discourse. For instance in his *Kitāb al-Anwā'*, the seminal guide to astronomy and meteorology of the Arab,⁵²⁹ Ibn Qutayba employs Qur'ānic verses when defining the meaning of *al-Naw'*⁵³⁰ (meteorology),⁵³¹ when introducing discourse about the phases of the moon,⁵³² and explaining the philological derivations of the names of the stars.⁵³³ In *Adab al-Kātib* (a compendium of philology for the use of secretaries)⁵³⁴, he makes continual references to the Qur'ān, employing it as a reference 'tool' in articulating the usage and connotation of Arabic words. Moreover, he also bases and presents historical events in the light of Qur'ānic concepts in his work, *al-Ma'arif*. It becomes apparent that every single piece of knowledge delivered by Ibn Qutayba is given in the light and spirit of the Qur'ān. Taking Ibn Qutayba's works as an example, the connection he made between the Qur'ān and other fields of knowledge indicated very clearly an established correlation between these two disciplines during this period. To put this in a wider context, the

⁵²⁸ Ibn Qutayba, *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣāqir, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1978), p.7 (÷).

⁵²⁹ Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Anwā' fī Mawāsim al-'Arab*, (India, Hyderabad, 1956), p. 2, 4, 5, 7, 15; Lecomte, Gerard, art. 'Ibn Qutayba' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.

⁵³⁰ Literally, the word *al-naw'* denotes rain (al-Ba'albakī, *al-Mawrid*, Bayrūt, 1995, 1194), rise (al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās al-Balāgha*, (Bayrūt, 1998), p.2/306-307) and the word was usually used in explaining the raising of stars for the travelers and forecasting weather (Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, (Bayrūt, 1414), pp.1/176-177)

⁵³¹ Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Anwā'*, p.7, 15.

⁵³² Ibid, p.16, 17.

⁵³³ Ibid, p.35.

⁵³⁴ J. S. Meisami, P. Starkey, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol.1, (London, 1998), p.361; Lecomte, Gerard, 'Ibn Qutayba' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.

Arab apparently not only translated into Arabic the knowledge acquired from contact and association with the Persian, Greek, Roman and Indian worlds but he was of central importance in the assimilation and configuration of this imported knowledge within a specifically Qur'ānic framework and context.⁵³⁵

4.5.1 Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*

Since the complete original text of the work is lost, the remainder appears in fragmentary forms under various titles, which most likely indicate the principal areas of discourse. It was called *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* by Ibn al-Nadīm (438/1046),⁵³⁶ Ibn al-Anbārī (577/1181),⁵³⁷ al-Qazwainī (623/1226),⁵³⁸ al-Qifṭī (646/1248),⁵³⁹ al-Ṣafadī (764/1362),⁵⁴⁰ al-Suyūṭī (911/1505),⁵⁴¹ and Ḥājī Khalīfa (1067/1656),⁵⁴² *A'lām al-Nubuwwa* by al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ (544/1149),⁵⁴³ Ibn Khayr al-Ishbīlī (575/1179),⁵⁴⁴ al-Dhahabī (748/1347),⁵⁴⁵ and Ibn Ḥajar (852/1448),⁵⁴⁶ and *A'lām al-Nabī* by Abū al-

⁵³⁵ In his work on anthology of prose and poetry entitled *Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, Ibn Qutayba's has been identified as offering a synthesis of Arab, Persian and Greek materials. (See Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature, Volume 1, 361). The work is also found as furnished with Qur'ānic material as he usually did, applying an integration between the Qur'ān and other knowledge.

⁵³⁶ Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p.1/105.

⁵³⁷ Ibn al-Anbārī, Abū al-Barakāt 'Abd al-Rahman, *Nuzha al-Albā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Udabā'*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Samarā'i, (Maktaba al-Manār, n.d) p.1/160. The full title as mentioned by Ibn al-Anbārī is *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa min al-Kutub al-Munazzala ala al-Anbiyā' alaihim al-salam*.

⁵³⁸ Al-Qazwaynī, 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm, *al-Tadwīn fī Akhhbār Qazwayn*, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987), p.1/81.

⁵³⁹ Al-Qifṭī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, *Inbāh al-Ruwā 'ala Anbāh al-Nuhā*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1982), p.4/349.

⁵⁴⁰ Al-Ṣafadī, Khalīl ibn Ayyub, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, (Bayrūt: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth, 2000), p.17/326.

⁵⁴¹ Al-Suyūṭī, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abū Bakr, *Bughya al-Wu'ā fī Ṭabaqāt al-Lughawiyīn wa al-Nuhā*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, (Misr: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), p.2/63.

⁵⁴² Ḥājī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, (n.p,1941), p.1/760.

⁵⁴³ Al-Yaḥsūbī, al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ ibn Mūsā, *Tarīb al-Madārik wa Taqrīb al-Masālib*, ed. al-Ṭanjī et. al., (al-Maghrib: Matba'a Faḍāla, 1965), p.5/273.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibn Khayr al-Ishbīlī, *Fihrisa*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998), p.1/128.

⁵⁴⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, ed. Bashshār Ma'rūf, (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2003), p.6/565.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibn Ḥajar, *Mu'jam al-Mufahras Aw Tajrīd al-Asānid*, ed. al-Mayadīnī, (Bayrūt: Muassasa al-Risāla, 1998), p.76.

Qāsim Ismā‘īl al-Asbahānī (535/1140).⁵⁴⁷ However, based on an incomplete manuscript of Ibn Qutayba’s work, preserved in Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriyya, the name of the work engraved in the title page of the manuscript is *A‘lām rasūl Allāh al-munzala ‘alā rusulihi ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhim fī al-tawrāt wa al-injīl wa al-zabūr wa al-Qur’ān wa ghayr dhālika wa dalā’il nubuwwatihi min al-barāhīn al-nayyira wa-al-dalā’il al-wādiha*.⁵⁴⁸ If this is indeed the original title of the work, it is therefore not surprising when later scholars, as mentioned above, shorten its title to reflect and include the discourses embedded in the work.

Schmidtke asserts that Ibn Qutayba’s work exceeds in popularity the previous works of *Dalā’il* by Ibn Rabban and al-Jāhiz. Adang points out that Ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdīsī (355/966) appear to be the earliest authors to employ Ibn Qutayba’s *Dalā’il* as one of his sources.⁵⁴⁹ The work evidently maintained its prestige in the tenth and eleventh centuries among Muslim communities. Al-Baghdādī records that Abū al-Faḍl Ibn al-Mahdī claimed that: “We learned *Kitāb Dalā’il al-Nubuwwa* of Ibn Qutayba from him (Abū al-Ḥasan al-Khāṭib d. 411/1020).” Even though the work has not survived in a complete form, parts of its content are preserved or referred to in *Sharf al-Muṣṭafā* of al-Kharkūshī (407/1016),⁵⁵⁰ *Tathbūt Dalā’il al-Nubuwwa* of ‘Abd al-Jabbār (415/),⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁷ Al-Asbahānī, Ismā‘īl Ibn Muḥammad, *Dalā’il al-Nubuwwa*, ed. Muḥammad al-Haddād, (Riyādh, 1409H), p.1/137.

⁵⁴⁸ Schmidtke, Sabine, The Muslim reception of Biblical Materials: Ibn Qutayba and his A‘lām al-Nubuwwa, in *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 2011, 22 (3), p.252.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., p.251; Adang, Muslim Writers, pp.35-36, 48-50.

⁵⁵⁰ Al-Kharkūshī, Abū Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Mālik ibn Abū ‘Uthmān Muḥammad, *Manāhil al-Shifā wa Manāhil al-Safā bi Tahqīq Kitāb Sharf al-Muṣṭafā*, ed. Abū ‘Āṣim al-Ghumārī, (Dār al-Bashāir al-Islāmiyya, 2003), p.1/175. Actually al-Kharkūshī did not mentioned Ibn Qutayba’s *Dalā’il* directly in this work. However, based on the account of Hagar and Sarah and the word he used to deliver the story has influence the editor of the work to conclude that this part of story was taken from *Dalā’il of Ibn Qutayba*.

⁵⁵¹ Al-Hamdhānī, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbūt Dalā’il al-Nubuwwa*, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Mustafa, n.d), p/3/352; based on the similarity of an excerpt from Ibn Qutayba’s words in *Tathbūt* and *al-Wafā*, Reynold suggests that both excerpt are from the same source; which is Ibn Qutayba’s *Dalā’il*. (Reynolds, Gabriel, *A Muslim theologian in the sectarian milieu: ‘Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian origins*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p.185.)

al-Uṣūl wa al-Furū' of Ibn Ḥazm (446/1064),⁵⁵² *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* of Abū al-Qāsim al-Asbahānī (535/1140),⁵⁵³ *al-Wafā'* of Ibn al-Jawzī (597/1200),⁵⁵⁴ *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Ibn Taymiyya (682/1328),⁵⁵⁵ *Hidāya al-Hayāra* of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (751/1350),⁵⁵⁶ *Imtā' al-Asmā'* of al-Maqrīzī (845/1442),⁵⁵⁷ *al-Mawāhib al-Laduniyya* of al-Qaṣṭālānī (923/1517)⁵⁵⁸ and others. This long list of scholars who make reference to Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il* in their works, are a testament to the widespread familiarity with this work, stretching from the eastern lands of Islam to those in the west, and at the same time clearly indicating the popularity of this work.

Even though Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il* is celebrated world-wide, there is only one particular topic that attracts the scholars' attention and encourages them to cite the work repeatedly. It is the biblical prediction of the prophethood of Muḥammad. In fact, of ten scholars mentioned above, only one, Abū al-Qāsim Ismā'īl al-Asbahānī, refers to Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il* as his reference in the topic that has no relation with the biblical

⁵⁵² Ibn Ḥazm, 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd al-Andalusī, *al-Uṣūl wa al-Furū'*, ed. 'Ātif al-Ḍarīqī et. al., (al-Qāhira: Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya al-Diniyya, 2004), p.158; Adang, Camilla, Some Hitherto Neglected Biblical Material in the Work of Ibn Hazm, *al-Masaq, Studia Arabo-Islamica Mediterranea*, (1992), 5, pp.17-28.

⁵⁵³ Al-Asbahānī, Ismā'īl Ibn Muḥammad, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, (Riyadh, 1409H), pp.1/137-138.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Farj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Alī, *al-Wafā' bi Aḥwāl al-Mustafā*, ed. Mustafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Atā', Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2012, 56-68; Adang has made a translation of this fragment of Ibn Qutayba's work in her *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden, 1996); while Schmidtke did a critical edition of the first eight section of the text in her article *The Muslim reception of Biblical Materials: Ibn Qutayba and his A'lam al-Nubuwwa*.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*, ed. 'Alī ibn Ḥasan et. al., (al-Sa'ūdī: Dār al-'Āsima, 1999), p.5/199, 209.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr ibn Ayyūb, *Hidāya al-Hayārā Fī Ajwiba al-Yahūd wa al-Naṣārā*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Hāj, (al-Sa'ūdī: Dār al-Qalam, 1996), p.1/324, 2/345, 347, 349, 370, 391.

⁵⁵⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, Aḥmad ibn 'Ālī ibn 'Abd al-Qādir, *Imtā' al-Asmā' bimāli al-Nabī min al-Aḥwāl wa-al-Amwāl wa-al-Hafada wa-al-Matā'*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hamīd, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), pp.3/383, 345-395.

⁵⁵⁸ Al-Qaṣṭālānī, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr, *Al-Mawāhib al-Laduniyya bi al-Minah al-Muḥammadiyya*, (al-Qāhira: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, n.d) p.1/455, 2/550-556.

reference to Muḥammad. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya⁵⁵⁹ and al-Qaṣṭalānī⁵⁶⁰ quote excerpts from Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il* in a discussion in relation to biblical and non-biblical references. Other scholars use material provided by Ibn Qutayba in his *Dalā'il* concerning the prediction in previous scriptures on the advent of Muḥammad as a prophet. A new, more austere policy towards non-Muslims at that time, which had been introduced by al-Mutawakkil, might be one of the reasons which promotes Ibn Qutayba's discourse on biblical testimonies on Muḥammad's prophethood. This might also give us an indication of the reason why his biblical references are apparently the only aspects of his works that have appealed to scholars to preserve in their own works..

In the case of Abū al-Qāsim al-Asbahānī, he includes three traditions, which, according to him, were reported in Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il*. Those three traditions illustrate Muḥammad's miraculous ability to predict future events, and his phenomenal capacity to detect the unseen or lost property.⁵⁶¹ It is worth mentioning that two of these three traditions were actually narrated previously by Ibn Rabban in his *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*.⁵⁶² Apart from the similarity of biblical references cited in Ibn Rabban's *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla* and Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il*, these two very similar traditions suggest that Ibn Qutayba was not only using *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla* as his source of biblical citation, but was also employing it as a source of *ḥadīth* references to Muḥammad.

⁵⁵⁹ Apart from quoting Ibn Qutayba's discussion on the subject that relates to the biblical prediction, Ibn al-Qayyim has also reported a tradition concerning the people of Syria, in which rumours of the coming of the Prophet who will be known as 'Muḥammad'. See, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāya al-Ḥayārā*, pp.2/390-391.

⁵⁶⁰ According to al-Qaṣṭalānī, there is no child that has been named 'Muḥammad' before this time. According to him, this illustrates God's conservation of this name to keep it special as He did to Yahya (John). The rarity of Muḥammad's name is considered as one of the signs of his prophethood. (al-Qaṣṭalānī, *al-Mawāhib al-Laduniyya*, p.1/455.)

⁵⁶¹ Al-Asbahānī, Abū al-Qāsim, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, pp.1/137-138.

⁵⁶² Ibn Rabban, *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*, pp.78-79.

4.5.2 Qur'ānic References in Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il*

Since *Dalā'il* of Ibn Qutayba has not survived in its complete extant form, Qur'ānic references in the work may similarly not be fully retrievable. Based on the above-mentioned works, only seven Qur'ānic verses are found in Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il*, and they are 5:13, 22:28, 7:158, 3:64, 2:146, 13:43 and 17:88. Six of these are preserved in Ibn al-Jawzī's *al-Wafā'*, and another two, 17:88 and 33:45 are traceable, embedded within Ibn Ḥazm's *al-Uṣūl wa al-Furū'*.⁵⁶³

The first Qur'ānic reference (5:13) is deserving of special attention. Ibn Qutayba employs it to support the claim of *al-tahrīf*, the alteration of words in the Bible by the Christian and Jews. According to Ibn Qutayba, the word in Matthew 11:14 is supposed to be rendered as *Ahmad* rather than *Ilīyā*⁵⁶⁴ (Elias/Elija).⁵⁶⁵ He claims that 'they (the People of the Book) changed it (the word), as Allāh says (in the Qur'ān) "they change the words from their (right) places" (5:13). This is apparently not in agreement with

⁵⁶³ Based on Adang's translation of *al-Uṣūl wa al-Furū'*, there are actually three verses of the Qur'ān recorded in the book which are; 22:28, 33:45 and 17:88. The sentence 'O prophet, We have sent you as witness, and good tidings to bear warning' is annotated by Adang as a verse of the Qur'ān. This is obvious when she numbers the sentence with (S33:45), which apparently indicates that it was considered as an entire verse from the Qur'ān. However, since the earlier part of the sentence states that "'Abdulla ibn 'Umar said: I found in the Torah: 'O prophet, We have sent you as witness, and good tidings to bear warning'", I have decided not to count it as a verse of the Qur'ān, since the early part of the sentence appears like Ibn Qutayba, to try to adduce a quotation from the Torah, and not from the Qur'ān, to prove the previous scriptural prediction of the advent of Muḥammad. For verse 22:28, since it has been mentioned in *al-Wafā'*, it is better to consider that only 17:88 has been mentioned in this work to avoid repetition of discussion on 22:28. See, Adang, Camilla, *Some Hitherto Neglected Biblical Material in the Work of Ibn Hazm*, in *al-Masaq, Studia Arabo-Islamica Mediterranea*, 1992, Vol 5, 21; Ibn Hazm, *al-Uṣūl wa al-Furū'*, (2004), pp.158-159.

⁵⁶⁴ In *Imtā' al-Asmā'*, al-Maqrīzī uses the word *Ilyāhū* rather than *Ilīyā*. See, al-Maqrīzī, *Imtā' al-Asmā'*, p.3/391.

⁵⁶⁵ The translation of this passage is missing from Adang's translation. She however, did mention it when discussing about the authentic of the Jewish scriptures on page 225. See, Adang, *Muslim Writers*)

previous scholars such as Ibn al-Layth⁵⁶⁶ and al-Jāḥiẓ⁵⁶⁷. According to them, *al-taḥrīf* is a distortion in interpretation of the text and is not to be applied to the text.⁵⁶⁸

The second verse (22:28) was used by Ibn Qutayba to elaborate the meaning of biblical reference. In Isaiah 5:26, it says: And He will raise an ensign for all the nations from afar and will whistle for them from the corners of the earth and lo, swiftly they come (cf. Isa 5:26). According to Ibn Qutayba, the meaning of ‘whistle for them from the corners of the earth’ is an allusion to the calling of *haji*, hailing them to perform pilgrimage. He then adduces verse 22:28 of the Qur’ān to support this interpretation by saying: “This is like Allāh’s words in 22:28. Chronologically, Ibn Rabban⁵⁶⁹ and al-Jāḥiẓ⁵⁷⁰ probably preceded Ibn Qutayba in using this biblical quotation as a reference to the prediction of Muḥammad’s prophethood. What is different between Ibn Rabban, al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba is that Ibn Rabban, a former Nestorian Christian,⁵⁷¹ and al-Jāḥiẓ, did not employ any verse of the Qur’ān to interpret this biblical reference. In interpreting the passage in Isaiah,⁵⁷² they all agree a similar interpretation, in which the nation to whom God whistled refers to the Son of Ishmael. Ibn Qutayba, however, invents a new approach to this discourse by explaining the meaning of Isaiah 5:26 using 22:28 of the Qur’ān. His novel idea is accepted by the later scholars, including Ibn

⁵⁶⁶ Shboul, Aḥmad M. H., ‘Arab Islamic perceptions of Byzantine religion and culture’, in J. Waardenburg (ed.), *Muslim Perceptions Of Other Religions*, (New York, 1999), p.129.

⁵⁶⁷ Block, Corrie John, *Expanding the Qur’ānic Bridge*, pp.122-124.

⁵⁶⁸ On *al-taḥrīf*, see Lazarus-Yafeh, Hava, art. Taḥrīf, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. ed. P. Bearman, et. al., Brill Online, 2014.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibn Rabban, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, p.94.

⁵⁷⁰ Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū Uthman ‘Āmrū ibn Baḥr, *Rasāil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. A. S. Harun, p.3/335.

⁵⁷¹ N. Swanson, Mark, ‘Abū l-Faḍl ‘Alī ibn Rabban al-Naṣrānī’, in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*. ed. David Thomas. Brill Online, 20 October 2014; according to Adang, Samir shows that he was originally a Nestorian. (see, Adang, Muslim Writers, p.24). Nurtured in a family with a thoughtful Christian faith and being a Christian for seventy years, as he admits, might help him a great deal in understanding the meaning of the Biblical reference.

⁵⁷² cf Isaiah 42:11f.

Ḥazm,⁵⁷³ Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya,⁵⁷⁴ and al-Maqrīzī,⁵⁷⁵ who include this style of commentary in their works.

Ibn Qutayba employs a third verse (17:88) of the Qur'ān to elucidate the genuine nature of messages embedded in the Qur'ān, asserting that the Qur'ān is something that could not be produced by either a human or *jinn*. However, since he cites this verse at the end of his explanation on the biblical passage, it seems likely that he, at the same time, attempts to equate the authenticity and clarity of evidence embedded in the Psalm (cf. Psalm 149) as being at the same level of the Qur'ān and the Sunna. And by mentioning the Sunnah and the Qur'ān at the conclusion of his biblical reading, he also appears to imply that the Qur'ān and the Sunna are among the tools that need to be used to understand passages from previous scripture, the biblical texts. At the outset of the discussion of David's enunciation of Muḥammad's prophethood, Ibn Qutayba adduces a biblical passage from Psalm and renders an interpretation of the passage. The passage says: The righteous ones among them rewards with honour; they praise him upon their beds and extol God with ringing voices and with two-edged swords in their hands. Through them God wreaks vengeance on the nations that do not worship Him, and they bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters (cf. Psalms 149).⁵⁷⁶ According to Ibn Qutayba, the word 'two-edged sword in their hands' is an allusion to the Arab and the one who wreaks vengeance on the nation that did not worship God, refers to Muḥammad. Moreover he confirms that the only prophet sent by God with a sword is a clear indication of Muḥammad himself.

⁵⁷³ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Uṣūl wa al-Furū'*, p.158.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāya al-Ḥayārā*, p.2/361.

⁵⁷⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Imtā' al-Asmā'*, p.3/391.

⁵⁷⁶ The translation taken from Adang's article in *al-Masaq, Studia Arabo-Islamica Mediterranea*, (1992), 5/ 21.

In this regard, Ibn Rabban actually has already preceded Ibn Qutayba with this reference and interpretation.⁵⁷⁷ The only thing that he did not achieve successfully was to fail to incorporate the Qur'ānic element in the discussion on biblical interpretation. In contrast, Ibn Qutayba expands this notion slightly further. At the end of his commentary, he concludes the discussion by emphasizing that what is embedded in the Psalter (*al-Zabūr*), the Qur'ān and the Sunna is like a mutually-enlightening source of illumination, clear evidence of the vindication of Muḥammad's prophethood, and the position of the Qur'ān as an impeccable source, a phenomenon that cannot be produced by human or jinn, as Allāh says in 17:88. By reminding the reader of the illuminating message contained in the Psalter (*al-Zabūr*), the Sunna and the Qur'ān, he seems to hint that acquiring all this knowledge of the Psalter, the Qur'ān and the Sunna will help a person to understand the meaning of this passage, since there are notions of warfare and use of the sword in the Qur'ānic commentaries⁵⁷⁸ and the *ḥadīth*.⁵⁷⁹

The remaining four verses (7:158, 3:64, 2:146 and 13:43) are employed to justify the originality and unique nature of the message revealed in the Qur'ān. If, previous to this, the content of the Qur'ān has been used to clarify the message in the Bible, this time it is employed conversely. Ibn Qutayba concludes the discussion on the Biblical enunciation of Muḥammad's prophethood by saying that: "if these accounts were not in their books (the previous scriptures), then there would not be any evidence of what the Qur'ān says in them." Here it is clear that Ibn Qutayba attempts to convince the reader that the message of the Bible is actually to justify the authenticity of the content

⁵⁷⁷ Ibn Rabban, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, p.91.

⁵⁷⁸ In their *Tafsīr*, Muqātil, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī and Ibn Qutayba himself did mention about using a sword in warfare, in specific circumstances and conditions. cf. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 2/104 and 2/182; al-Ṣan'ānī, *Tafsīr* 'Abd al-Razzāq, 2/159; Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, (al-Qāhira: 1978), p.1/190.

⁵⁷⁹ In a ḥadīth narrated by Aḥmad, the Prophet is reported to say: I have been sent ahead of the Hour with the sword so that Allah will be worshipped alone. See, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, (al-Qāhira, 1995), p.4/516.

of the Qur'ān. Within this limited access to the fragmentary part of *Dalā'il* of Ibn Qutayba, we may see how his Qur'ānic thought has had influence in shaping the framework of discussion regarding the proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood.

4.5.3 Qur'ānic Reference to The Prophet Muḥammad's Early Life

In this work, there are but a few accounts recorded by Ibn Qutayba as references to Muḥammad's life. This includes an account of the Prophet's ability to forecast the as yet unseen events in the future, which are preserved in the work of Abū al-Qāsim al-Asbahānī. However, based on limited sources, there exist only two references to Muḥammad's early life which have been preserved by Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and al-Qaṣṭalānī. Ibn al-Qayyim in his work, *Hidāyā al-Hayāra*, recounts the story of how the people of Syria (*Shām*) have already heard about the becoming of the last prophet named 'Muḥammad'. The narration is used by Ibn Qutayba to show how the news about the advent of last prophet has spread to other nations, and whose details are already known. Meanwhile, the account preserved by al-Qaṣṭalānī illustrates the rarity of the name 'Muḥammad' among the Arabs at that particular time. This according to Ibn Qutayba, is God's plan to 'reserve' the name, and for the name to remain unpopular until Muḥammad was actually born. In these accounts, there is no Qur'ānic reference involved in the discussion.

Indeed, based on these fragments, it is hard to draw a clear conclusion on apparent Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad in Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il*. This is because the content is not complete, and the surviving extant fragments are scattered within various excerpts of other scholars' work. But since its authenticity has been proven by modern

scholars, it is perhaps justified to perform an analysis of this work. For at least it may give us an indication of how the change in political circumstances had some influence on Muslim discourse regarding the story of Muḥammad's life and its connection to the Qur'ān. The rise of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*, a group of movement, of which Ibn Qutayba was a member, strengthened the use of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* in Islamic theological discourse, including the discussions about the proofs of the prophethood of Muḥammad. One of the examples is the use of the Qur'ān as a basis of understanding meaning in the Bible. If, before this time, Ibn Rabban and al-Jāḥiẓ had never used elements of Qur'ānic theology to interpret Biblical quotations, Ibn Qutayba invented an innovative and ultimately successful new approach, exploring the meaning of scripture previously understood exclusively through Judaeo-Christian theological methodology alone. The innovation was to use the 'lenses' of the Qur'ān to offer a shift of focus and perspective, offering fresh insight and discourse on aspects of the texts which were previously unclear or uncertain. Besides this, after brief observations on the *Dalā'il*, and other two works of Ibn Qutayba's related to Qur'ānic commentaries, (the *Mushkil al-Qur'ān* and the *Gharīb al-Qur'ān*) this writer believes that, at this stage, there is no strong connection between the account of Muḥammad's early life and references from the Qur'ān.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁸⁰ In order to acquire a close view on Ibn Qutayba's thought on Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life, we have expanded our scope to analyze his ideas. Employing two of his Qur'ānic commentaries as our main source, (*the Mushkil al-Qur'ān* and *Gharīb al-Qur'ān*), we did a research on popular verses that have been used by the later *Dalā'il* author as allusion to Muḥammad's early life. The verses include:

1. 26:216: The verse that used by Ibn Sa'd to refer to Muḥammad's genealogy.
2. 5:15: The verse that is used by Ibn Rajab referring to his illustrious birth.
3. 105:1-5: The verse of the Elephant that used to prove the early sign of his prophethood
4. 72:1-28: The chapter of Jinn that used to show the early sign of Muḥammad's prophethood

Among all of these references to Muḥammad's early life, only in the chapter of the Jinn, Ibn Qutayba has indicates that the shooting stars and the strict protection of the heaven is one of the signs of Muḥammad's prophethood. (cf. *Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 1/242). See, Ibn Qutaybah, *Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn; Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr, (Bayrūt, 1978).

4.6 Concluding Remarks

Qur'ānic References in the works of *Dalā'il*

It is undeniable that the Qur'ān plays an important role in the work of *Dalā'il*. The *Dalā'il* was employed principally as an instrument of authority to justify the reported signs of Muḥammad's prophethood. In his work, Ibn Rabban even structures one complete section whose subject matter encompasses an argument about Muḥammad's prophethood, which is predicated on Qur'ānic references alone. Although the Qur'ān is employed quite extensively in some of these works of *Dalā'il*, a specific Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life is barely in evidence; and even if a reference is to be found to signs of Muḥammad's prophethood, the resulting interpretations differ from the one that is portrayed by the author of *sīra*.

Since the *Dalā'il* seems to have been intended for both a Muslim and non-Muslim audience, specifically Qur'ānic references might not be the most effective means of convincing a reader from a non-Muslim backgrounds. As is evident in the works of the *Dalā'il* of the ninth century, Biblical references constitute a considerable part of the work. The works of Ibn al-Layth,⁵⁸¹ and Ibn Rabban provide profuse citations from Biblical references as a part of their argument to prove the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood. There are also traces of references from the Psalter (*al-Zabūr*) in Ibn Qutayba's *Dalā'il*. Al-Jāḥiẓ goes further by mentioning numbers of samples from various communities to form his argument in support of the veracity of Muḥammad's

⁵⁸¹ It was considered as among *Dalā'il* works based on considerable arguments presented by him which were concentrated on the prophethood of Muḥammad. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār's account, the letter was written to put pressure on the Byzantines to pay tribute. However, based on our observation, less than 15% of the content of the letter deals with that matter. Most of the content (indeed, 85% of the letter) deals with theological discussion, including the concept of tauḥīd (the oneness of God), the sign of prophethood, arguments on the concept of trinity, disputation of the divinity of Jesus and Biblical predictions on Muḥammad's prophethood. And since the content about Muḥammad's prophethood appears to constitute the greater part of the letter, it has been considered as a work of *Dalā'il*.

prophethood. Groups such as Nestorian (*Nisṭūriyya*), Jacobite (*Ya'qūbiyya*), Manicheans (*al-Mānīyya*) and Zoroastrians (*al-Mājūs/Zaradusht*) were cited by al-Jāḥiẓ within various topical discourses to strengthen his argument. All of these references made by the author of the *Dalā'il*, imply that the target audience of the author was strikingly diverse. With their multi-religious backgrounds and varieties of races, it is difficult to rely entirely on the evidence provided in the Qur'ān alone. The wide diverse scope of audience might be the major reason of why Qur'ānic references, especially the references to Muḥammad's early life were hardly to be found in the *Dalā'il*.

Aside from the constituency and diversity of its audience, the scope of discourse might also lead to the lack of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life. Based on the discussion provided by *Dalā'il* works, Muḥammad's early life might not be the centre of discourse that is judged necessary to be highlighted by the author. In the prologue of *al-Dīn wa al-Dawla*, Ibn Rabban clearly alludes to one of the reasons that leads Christians to refute Islam, which includes the absence of miracles (*āyāt*) of the Prophet in the Qur'ān. Therefore, he provides extensive proof of Muḥammad's miracles to counter the Christian argument. Unfortunately, most of the evidentiary miracles offered by the author are ones that occur after he had begun to be regarded as a Prophet. Indeed, there is a breadth of miraculous anecdotes which occur in Muḥammad's early life,⁵⁸² but most of the exceptional occurrences highlighted by the authors of *Dalā'il* to substantiate his prophethood are concern on the miracles that took place after his prophetic vocation. In fact, Ibn al-Layth and Ibn Rabban seem to emphasize Muḥammad as a normal human being at his early life, rather than picturing him as a

⁵⁸² Ibn Rabban recounts an event at Muḥammad's birth, in which his mother saw a bright light which accompanied his birth. Ibn Rabban describes how Muḥammad fell on all fours, his face and sight being directed towards heaven. See Ibn Rabban, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, p.32.

‘supernatural’ one.⁵⁸³ And since the focus of discussion about Muḥammad’s miracles is confined mostly to the period *after* his prophethood, the scope of biographical information about his early life appears limited. This restraint on the scope of discussion consequently minimises Qur’ānic citations, and as a result, the works produce only a limited amount of Qur’ānic reference to Muḥammad’s early life.

Every author of *Dalā’il* has his own style and method of discourse; and it is the individual styles of the *Dalā’il* authors which might have been one of the reasons for the rarity of Qur’ānic references to Muḥammad’s early life in *Dalā’il* works. Al-Jāḥiẓ, for example, is renowned for his extensive knowledge about the Prophet’s biography, he was however, found to use the Qur’ān as a source of information in a rather minimal way in his *Dalā’il*. Recognised as one of the Mu’tazlite scholars, nevertheless, it could be argued that he is probably prone to employing a ‘reasoning’ method in presenting his argument rather than providing specific references from the Qur’ān. Ibn Rabban, the Christian convert, might well prefer to glean Biblical references, as he might probably feel more comfortable with citing references from his familiar Christian milieu. With his familiarity with both Christian and Muslim scripture, and the great likelihood of his belief in the authenticity and power of scripture to convince a possibly sceptical reader, Ibn Rabban’s methodology was to employ a greater number of Qur’ānic and Biblical references compared with al-Jāḥiẓ. In the works of both Ibn Rabban and al-Jāḥiẓ, there is, however, only one Qur’ānic reference to Muḥammad’s

⁵⁸³ According to Ibn al-Layth, Muḥammad was an orphan, powerless (ḍa’if), an employee or worker (ajir), in need (‘ā’il), illiterate, and had not inherited wealth. Some of the words he uses clearly indicate the Prophet’s fallible nature as a human being, such as negligent (sāhī) and having the ability to be distracted by frivolous amusements (lāhī). While Ibn Rabban pictured Muḥammad described as being ‘alone’ (waḥīdan), ‘unique’ (farīdan), an ‘orphan’ (yatīman), and ‘poor’ (‘ā’ilān) in the chapter seven of his work. See, Ibn al-Layth, *Risāla*, p.10.

early life. Ibn Rabban cites 93:6-8, the widely held verses that are used habitually to describe Muḥammad's early condition.

After analysing the authors, the audiences of the works and the scope of *Dalā'il*'s discourse, it is appropriate for us to thoroughly examine the Qur'ānic verses itself. Most probably, it is the literal meaning of the verses that are employed by the author of the *sīra* itself that constitute the reason why they are not employed by the *Dalā'il*'s author to be references to Muḥammad's early life. Literally, verse 26:219, 5:15, 12:28, 94:1, 105-1, do not have any bearing on reference to Muḥammad's actual early life. That is probably why we find that verse 94:1-4 is used by Ibn Rabban in an entirely different means of interpretation. Rather than use it as reference to the Prophet's actual early life, he employs the verse to illustrate God's exultation of the Prophet's status.

Overall, *Dalā'il* works have provided us with a plethora of information about Muḥammad's biography. In a later period, this literature became recognised as one of the sources of the *sīra*, the story of Muḥammad's life. With its decisive coverage of Muḥammad's biography, the literature offers the most cursory Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life. The rarity of these references, indeed, indicates the fragility of the connection between the Qur'ān and a verifiable account of Muḥammad's early life.

CHAPTER 5

QUR'ĀNIC REFERENCES TO THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S EARLY LIFE:

AN ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, we have analysed Qur'ānic references that were used by the authors of *sīra*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il* as allusions to Muḥammad's early life. It is evident that in the early commentaries and classical sources of the ninth century, connecting the Qur'ān with the early phase of Muḥammad's life is uncommon.⁵⁸⁴ The rarity of these references in the works chosen leads us to pose the question: what drove particular authors of the ninth century to quote the Qur'ān as a reference to Muḥammad's early life? The present chapter aims to explore the reasons that influence certain authors to make such specific reference to the Qur'ān, and further, to consider it as a credible allusion to Muḥammad's early life.

5.2 Intellectual Ambience of the Ninth Century

5.2.1 Qur'ānic Discourse

It is worthy of note that even though the main focus of the present study aims to explore the Qur'ānic references from the ninth century to Muḥammad's early life, based on our observations it is apparent that there are no surviving books of *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic

⁵⁸⁴ Based on the observation of the present study, there are four Qur'ānic references cited by various authors as an allusion to Muḥammad's early life. These four have formed in particular the basis of our examination in the selected scope of the present study.

commentaries) which make the connection between the Qur'ān and the events of Muḥammad's early life. Analysis of the Qur'ānic commentaries of this century show that the *mufasssirūn* tend to focus more on the lexical elaboration of the selected verses rather than establishing a historical value within the verses. Examination of selected verses in the works of *tafsīr* of this century including the *Tafsīr* of al-Ṣan'ānī, al-Tustarī, and Yaḥyā Ibn Sallām, indicate that these verses in the view of the *mufasssirūn* did not have any bearing on the elements of the Prophet's early life that were referred to in works of other genres. What is apparent is that these scholars are elucidating the verses with emphasis specifically focusing upon the sciences of linguistics and stylistics rather than a straightforward historical reading. The plain linguistic elucidation of the verse could be regarded as conventions of the relative contemporary existing fashions in style and emphasis embraced by the scholar of *tafsīr* at this particular period.

Moreover, the massive production of literary analysis of the Qur'ān seems to be the fundamental setting of Qur'ānic discourse in this century. Within this period, Muslim scholars apparently produced a considerable number of Qur'ānic commentary works based on linguistic discourses. The titles of these works obviously indicate the nature of their content. These linguistic-centred commentaries can be found in the works of al-Farrā's (d. 208/823) and al-Akhfash (d. 215/830) entitled *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* (The Meanings of al-Qur'ān), Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthanna's (d. 210/825) and his *Majāz al-Qur'ān* (The Metaphor of the Qur'ān), 'Abdullah ibn Yahya al-Yazidi (d. 237/849) and Ibn Qutayba in their work of *Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (The Ambiguous Qur'ānic Words), Yaḥyā Ibn Sallām (d. 280/893) and his *al-Taṣārīf: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān Mimmā Ishtabahat Asmā'uḥu wa Taṣarrufāt Ma'ānih* (Commentaries of the Quran on Its Ambiguous Names and Equivocal Meanings) and *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa I'rābuhu* (The Meanings of the Qur'ān and Its Grammar) of al-Zajjāj (ca. 230/844-311/923). The

profuse works of Qur'ānic discourse produced in this century clearly indicate that their major discussion mostly centred on a specifically linguistic discussion of the Qur'ān. This, at the same time, implies that a historical analysis might not have been either a priority nor in the mainstream of Qur'ānic discourse within this period.

5.2.2 The Ḥadīth Discourse

While we may observe the literary nature of Qur'ānic discussion of this century, the ḥadīth, *sīra* and *dalā'il* have a different setting of discourse. It is evident that the focus of the scholars of ḥadīth is a concentration on the legal and ethical discourses specifically. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, the ḥadīth work of this century clearly tried to accommodate the needs of Muslims concerning how to practice an ideal way of life, based on the prophetic model. Every single aspect of life is presented in considerable detail in the works of ḥadīth. It is regarded as a divine aspiration that a Muslim should implement the prophetic method in his or her personal life. The works of ḥadīth within this period are self-evidently a reflection of the spiritual needs of Muslims. The taxonomy and nomenclature of works of ḥadīth in the order of *muṣannaf*, *musnad* and *sunan* are the result of an endeavour of scholarship intended to ease the Muslim community's access to the works of ḥadīth.⁵⁸⁵

Furthermore, scholars of ḥadīth have also produced booklets of discourse concerning legal or ethical discussions arranged around a specific theme. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, for example, composed a booklet on the law of drinking alcohol entitled *al-Ushriba* (The Drinks). Besides this work, he also produced a specific work of ethical discourse known

⁵⁸⁵ See the introduction of Chapter Three on the development and the changing of arrangement of ḥadīth works to suit Muslim needs.

as *al-Zuhd* (Asceticism). The same topic was also redacted by Abū Dāwūd in his *al-Zuhd*. Al-Bukhārī, on the other hand, composed *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, while Ibn Abī Shayba wrote *al-Adab*, both works being guidance on good manners and appropriate etiquette in relationships. In the same vein, Al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥarb's (246) discourse on conduct and good manners is entitled *al-Birr wa al-Ṣila* (The Kinds and Relationship), while al-Burjulānī (238/852) produced a work on benevolence entitled *al-Karm wa al-Judd* (Generosity and Honour). In the same period, Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī (285/898) compiles ḥadīth concerning entertaining guest entitled *Ikrām al-Ḍayf* (Entertaining the Guest).

Even though engulfed in legal and ethical discussion, works of ḥadīth are not silent in delivering information about the Prophet's early life. In fact the ḥadīth works (that are shaped to the specific needs) contain various materials including the Prophet biography. And since ḥadīth works focus on legal and ethical points of view, the historical element of the Prophet's life seems clouded in and overwhelmed by discussions of legal and ethical matters.

The massive production and emphasis of ḥadīth works on legal and ethical issues indicates the scholars' Herculean effort in responding to the Muslim needs for guidance on specific issues. Some topical works give us an informative indication of the social condition of Muslims in this particular period. This includes, for example, the work of Aḥmad on drinking alcohol (in his *al-Ushriba*), 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb's compilation of ḥadīth concerning women's conduct (in his *Adab al-Nisā* - The Manner of Women), and numerous works on the law of land and properties, including, for example the ḥadīth works of Yaḥyā Ibn Adam (203/818) on *al-Kharāj* (Land tax) and *al-Amwāl* (The Properties) of al-Qāsim ibn al-Salām (224/838). This is a clear case of recorded educational communication between scholars and ordinary people. The immense

volume of works and emphasises on moral and ethical issues implies that the social condition of the early Muslim community of that period was keen for guidance on ethics, personal morality, conduct and law. It is no wonder, therefore, that we should find that the *sīra* authors have adapted their style, tenor and emphasis in composing the biography of the Prophet to suit the community's changing needs.

5.2.3 *Sīra* Discourse

Al-Duri in his work proposes that the style of scholars of ḥadīth apparently had a significant influence on the method of the writings of history among the Arabs.⁵⁸⁶ Reading the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq, one might notice that the arrangement and the content of the work focuses on the construction of a coherent biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. His basic narrative structure is founded on various sources, including the ḥadīth, Arab poetry, the stories of nations past and narratives of story-tellers. By analysing the *isnād* and its style of presentation, al-Duri notices and remarks upon the style of ḥadīth scholars in Ibn Ishāq's method of *sīra* composition.⁵⁸⁷ As time went by, the method and focus of Muslim scholars must have evolved to suit the community's growing need for guidance. Indeed, the strong emphasis of ḥadīth scholars on legal and ethical discourse appears to influence the *sīra*'s work. If the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq and *Maghāzī* of al-Wāqidī appear to stress the historical aspect of Muḥammad's life, the emphasis on moral and ethical value may be traced in the work of Ibn Sa'd. His *Akḥbār al-Nabī* portrays the Prophet as a perfect model of humankind which, at the same time,

⁵⁸⁶ Al-Duri's analysis of the works of *sīra* including Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī traces the influence of ḥadīth style and method on the historical writing. In fact according to him, the interest in the study of ḥadīth has become one of the factors in the rise of historical discourse. See, al-Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, ed. and trans. L.I. Conrad, (Princeton, 1983), pp.33-41.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

affords an invaluable guide to pious Muslims on how they should present themselves and act with decent manners. The *sīra* in this form now becomes not only a historical source but also a divine aspiration which ought to be emulated. This is evident when Ibn Sa‘d delineates the magnificence of Muḥammad’s appearance and his excellent moral qualities. The emphasis of such blandishments could be regarded as a response to the then current community’s need to follow a perfect model of the Prophet in order to produce a Muslim of strong physical and moral qualities, and to accommodate and reflect upon some social issues. The novel structure of *sīra*, initiated by Ibn Sa‘d helps to establish the foundation of a further branch of prophetic discourse, known as *al-Shamā’il* (the excellent qualities of the Prophet).

5.2.4 *Dalā’il* literature

Dalā’il literature also offers another perspective on the intellectual discourse of the richness and diversity of the ninth century milieu. Rich in multicultural and diverse religious background and tradition, the ninth century community was immersed in a constant interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and the fertile and productive underlying intellectual discourse between them. As proposed in Chapter Four, works of *Dalā’il* have provided additional significant information of the Prophet’s early life in its specific socio-political context. Moreover, *Dalā’il* literature employed Qur’ānic verses as references to the Prophet’s biography. Overall, *Dalā’il* literature has provided us with a plethora of information about Muḥammad’s biography. In a later period, this literature became recognised as one of the sources of the *sīra*, the story of Muḥammad’s life. With its exhaustive coverage of Muḥammad’s biography, the literature offers only the most cursory Qur’ānic references to Muḥammad’s early

life. The rarity of these references, indeed, indicates the fragility of the connection between the Qur'ān and a verifiable account of Muḥammad's early life.

5.3 Miraculous Elements and Qur'ānic References

It is quite clear that any Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life is hard to find in Muslim classical sources produced in the ninth century. Based on our observation of the selected literature, only four references from the Qur'ān employed by the authors as an allusion to the Prophet's early life may be traced. Among these, there persists one criterion shared by them all, which is the fact of their employment in reference to supernatural aspects in Muḥammad's life. This embraces Muḥammad's pre-existence (26:219), the remarkable nature of his breastfeeding period (28:12), the opening of his breast (94:1) and the incident of Abraha's invasion (105:1-5). All of these events reveal clear evidence of elements of miracles, and at the same time implies divine intervention in Muḥammad's life.

It is not difficult to conclude that the involvement of Qur'ānic reference in these miraculous events lends a tangible value and credible solidity to the account. By connecting an event to the Qur'ān, the story appears authentic and the reader would, for this reason, certainly find it more expedient, if not also convenient, to accept the account. But one big question remains: why did not every author who relates a similar account do the same? Why is it only Ibn Hishām who adduces 28:12 when recounting Muḥammad's suckling? And why do others not follow his lead? One might suggest that the reason is probably related to the personal style and approach of each author (which will be discussed in the next section); but since the nature of the story has a far greater

connection with elements of miracles, it seems productive to take a brief examination of the epistemological view of Islamic miracles of the ninth century.

In the Qur'ān, discourse on miracles and miraculous elements is usually associated with the term *āyāt* (sg. *āya*).⁵⁸⁸ This literally denotes a sign, token, lesson or example,⁵⁸⁹ and the term is invoked in many places in the Qur'ān as a vessel for conveying apparently miraculous episodes, such as anecdotes of the evidentiary miracles of Moses (7:133, 17:101, 27:12), the phenomenal story of the sleepers in the cave (2:259), the extraordinary account of Joseph's life (12:7), the miraculous gift of the camel of Ṣāliḥ (7:73, 11:64), the marvellous account of Mary and Jesus (19:21, 21:91, 23:50), and the story of Noah's salvation in the flood (29:15). The term also appears as an announcement of a great message of God's intervention in human affairs, principally in its form as an educative means, as well as in the form of an admonition, which, at the same time, illustrates that miracles comprise one of the proofs of the truth of God and His messenger. A discussion of the miracles of the prophets and saints appears in the *Fiqh al-Akbār*, in which the author maintains the same term as employed in the Qur'ān.⁵⁹⁰ The term *āyāt*, however, did not last long, and was reintroduced at a later period, when Muslims started to employ a new term in the delivery of discourse on miracles. They started to use *mu'jiza* as a new term. Even though the term is not to be found in the Qur'ān, it became popular in the later period.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁸ The word occurs 51 times in the Qur'ān. The word *āyāt* also denotes a 'verse of the Qur'ān', which means that the verse of the Qur'ān itself is a miracle, a proof of its authentic provenance from God, and a sign of Muḥammad's prophethood. See also, Thomas, David, 'Miracles in Islam', in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, ed. Graham T. Twelftree, (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.199-215.

⁵⁸⁹ Al-Ba'albakī, al-Mawrid, 212; Jeffery, A.. 'Āya', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.

⁵⁹⁰ See, al-Qārī, 'Alī ibn Sulṭān Muḥammad, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhār Fī Sharḥ al-Fiqh al-Akbār*, Bayrūt, Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 1998, 235; Wensinck, A.J., *The Muslim Creed*, New York, 1965, 193.

⁵⁹¹ According to Wensinck, the term *mu'jiza* was not apparent within this period. It is only al-Ījī who delivers a complete and systematic discussion of the term. See Wensinck, A.J.. 'Mu'jiza,' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Ed. P. Bearman, et al., Brill Online.

In the ninth century, the term *mu'jiza* may be traced in the work of some prominent scholars including al-Wāqidī,⁵⁹² al-Jāhiz,⁵⁹³ Abū Bakr al-Warrāq (d. 240/854)⁵⁹⁴ and Ibn Qutayba.⁵⁹⁵ Interestingly, al-Ṭabarī (224/839-310/923) and al-Zajjāj (855-310/923)⁵⁹⁶ shared a similar method and process of describing miraculous elements in the Qur'ān.⁵⁹⁷ Both combine together the Qur'ānic term of *āya* 'side to side' with new popular term of *mu'jiza* in their works. It appears as the word *mu'jiza* in the earliest phase, and is used as an adjective for the term *āya*, in which as a result, it denotes 'confounding miracle'. Al-Zajjāj is even more specific when he is usually found to combine these two terms (*āya mu'jiza*) in explaining the stories about the miracles of the prophets, including the prophet Ṣāliḥ, Joseph, Solomon and Moses.⁵⁹⁸ The lack of a general employment of this word (*mu'jiza*) in the ninth century, and merely the briefest discussions of miracles may indicate the paucity of an ongoing theological discourse on this subject. Some sources, however, have shown a definite Muslim concern about miracles.

Besides *mu'jiza*, Muslim scholars have also employed the further term '*alāmāt* (signs) as an adjectival appellation which indicates miraculous elements in Muḥammad's life. Understood literally, this term has a similar meaning to the Qur'ānic term of *āyāt*. In the works of *tafsīr*, Muqātil, Yaḥyā Ibn Salām, and Abū 'Ubayda al-Baṣrī interpret the

⁵⁹² See, al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), p.2/147.

⁵⁹³ Al-Jāhiz describes the high quality of the Qur'ān's language as a miracle (*mu'jiza*). See al-Jāhiz, *Rasā'il al-Adabiyya*, (Dār wa Maktaba al-Hilāl, 1423H), p.1/56;

⁵⁹⁴ Abū Bakr al-Warrāq is reported to say: "A prophet is not considered as a prophet because of his *mu'jiza* (miracle) but rather due to him being sent by Allah with a *wahy* (revelation). See, al-Kalābāzī, Muḥammad ibn Abī Ishāq al-Bukhārī al-Ḥanafī, *al-Ta'āruf li Mazhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d) p.1/72.

⁵⁹⁵ According to Abū Ṭayyib al-Ḥalabī (d.351/962) Ibn Qutayba has produced a book on *Mu'jizat al-Nabī*. See al-Ḥalabī, *Marātib al-Naḥwīyyīn*, (al-Qāhira: Maktabah Nahḍa, n.d.), p.85.

⁵⁹⁶ Both live at least half of their life in the ninth century.

⁵⁹⁷ See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, (Muassasa Risāla, 2000), p.9/357, 9/393, 18/413.

⁵⁹⁸ See, al-Zajjāj, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sirrī, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa I'rābuh*, ed. 'Abd al-Jalīl Shalabī, (Bayrūt, 1988), p.2/350, 3/110, 4/120, 4/237.

word *āyāt* as connoting '*alāmāt* (signs).⁵⁹⁹ The term seems to have a specific usage in the work of ḥadīth. Miracles of Muḥammad are usually brought together under a chapter called '*alāmāt al-nubuwwa* (signs of prophethood). It is a clear indicator of how miracles were recognised by the scholars of ḥadīth as a proof of Muḥammad's prophethood. Al-Dārimī, al-Bukhārī and Ibn Abī Usāma were among ḥadīth scholars that allocated a specific chapter recounting the miracles of Muḥammad under a chapter of '*alāmāt al-nubuwwa* (signs of prophethood).⁶⁰⁰

Regarding the miraculous events of Muḥammad's early life, Muslim scholars may be divided into two different camps. According to al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1100), the school of Basra did not consider miraculous events of Muḥammad's early life as a part of *mu'jiza*; rather it was only recognised as *al-irḥāṣat*.⁶⁰¹ This view is contradicted by the scholars of Baghdad's opinion who acknowledges it merely as *mu'jiza*. Due to the dispute on categorisation of the miraculous events of Muḥammad's early life, some scholars might well have decided not to include a report on the miraculous events of Muḥammad's early life, since it was not widely recognised by some scholars as a *mu'jiza*. Arguably, this could be one of the reasons for the lack of coverage on the miraculous occurrences in the Prophet's early life.

⁵⁹⁹ See, Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, ed. 'Abdullā Shahāta, Bayrūt, (Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth, 1423H), p.2/225, 2/319, 2/578, 3/386, 3/410; Yahyā ibn Salām, *Tafsīr*, ed. Hind Shalabī, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), pp.2/650-653; al-Baṣri, Abū 'Ubayda, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Fuad Sezgin, (Cairo, 1381H), p.1/45, 1/77.

⁶⁰⁰ See, al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, ed. al-Ghumārī, (Dār al-Bashā'ir, 2013), 1/93; al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.4/191; Ibn Abī Usāma, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥārith, *Musnad al-Hārith*, ed. Husayn al-Bakrī, (al-Madīna, 1992), p.2/866.

⁶⁰¹ Scholars of tenth century were found to classify miracle of Muḥammad (*mu'jiza*) into two types. Miracles that occurred before Muḥammad's prophetic period is called *al-irḥāṣ*. While any miracle that performed by Muḥammad after entering the prophetic office is termed as *mu'jiza*. In this regard we found that Ibn Fawrak attributed the incident of Abraha's intrusion as among the *irḥāṣ* of the Prophet. So did al-Jaṣṣāṣ when he attributed a few miraculous incident of Muḥammad's early life as *irḥāṣ*. See Ibn Fawrak, *Tafsīr Ibn Fawrak*, ed. Suhaymah Bukhārī, (al-Sa'ūdī, 2009), p.3/277; al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Abū Bakr, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān li al-Jaṣṣāṣ*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Shāhīn, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutb al-'Ilmiyya, 1994), p.2/16.

In our analysis, the finding is, however, quite different. According to al-Jishumī, the Basran scholars were the ones who hesitated to acknowledge the miraculous events of Muḥammad's early life as a *mu'jiza*. Yet based on the present study, some scholars who recount and connect Qur'ānic references to these incredible accounts at least have a tangible connection with the Basra school. Al-Jāḥiẓ for example, was born and grew up in Basra, and was among those who regarded the apparently miraculous events of Muḥammad's early life as indeed *āyāt* (miracle). In his *Kitāb al-Ḥujja*, he includes the incredible story of the people of the elephant (*aṣḥāb al-fīl*) as an illustration of Muḥammad's sign of prophethood.⁶⁰² Furthermore, al-Jāḥiẓ also explains in detail, in his *al-Ḥayawān*, the miracle of elephant (*al-āya fī al-fīl*) and how God employed the creature to protect Mecca and establish the base of Muḥammad's prophethood (*ta'sīsā li nubuwwa al-nabī*) and a medium through which to glorify this holy place (*ta'ẓīmā li shā'niḥ*).⁶⁰³

Besides al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Sa'd was another scholar of Basra origin who emphasises the miraculous elements of Muḥammad's early life in his work.⁶⁰⁴ He gathers more than 30 various reports of incredible incidents, including a wide range of miraculous events and prophecies from the Judaeo-Christian traditions, all assembled under one specific chapter entitled 'the sign of Muḥammad's prophethood before the revelation of *wahy*' (*'alāmāt al-nubuwwa fī rasūlillah qabla 'an yūhā ilaih*).⁶⁰⁵ Not only does Ibn Sa'd assemble an assortment of supernatural accounts in his *Ṭabaqāt*, by segregating

⁶⁰² Al-Jāḥiẓ mentions this in his *al-Ḥayawān*. The exact account in *Kitāb al-Ḥujja* is, however, did not survive. See, al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1424H), p.7/120.

⁶⁰³ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, pp.7/126-127.

⁶⁰⁴ He was born and grew in Basra, and is therefore attributed by scholars as al-Baṣrī. He was also described as growing up and receiving his early education in Basra. See al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām*, (Dār al'Ilm al-Malayiīn, 2002), p.6/136; Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, (Bayrūt: Dār Sādir, 1971), p.4/351; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā al-Mutammim li Tabi'ī Ahl al-Madīna wa man ba'dahum*, ed. Ziyād Maṣṣūr, (al-Madīna, Maktaba al-'Ulūm wa al-Hikām, 1408H, p.1/17.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, (Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), pp.1/150-1/169.

meticulously a specific episode of Muḥammad's early life and putting it under the precise chapter of 'signs of prophethood', Ibn Sa'd appears to make an effort to employ the miraculous events of Muḥammad's early life as a medium of recognition of the authenticity of his prophethood. It is also quite interesting to witness how a book that was arranged within the framework of *Ṭabaqāt/Tarājum*, (a work that is designed to compile a biography of ḥadīth narrators), has a specific chapter concerning the signs of prophethood. It is difficult, however, to confirm whether the education or environment of Basra had influence on al-Jāḥiẓ or Ibn Sa'd in their acceptance of the miraculous elements in Muḥammad's early life as a discussion in each of their works. On the other hand, it is evident, as suggested by Martin, that discussion about prophethood and miracle have once become a heated debate among Muslim of ninth and tenth centuries.⁶⁰⁶ The existence of the accounts of miraculous incidents in the early phase of the Prophet's life indicates in particular the significance of these events in his biography. To understand the establishment of a connection between these events and the Qur'ān does, however, need to be examined further, in order to observe thoroughly each author's approach to and understanding of the Qur'ān and the Prophet's early life.

5.4 Idiosyncratic Approach and Interpretation of the Scholars

To begin with, one of the most obvious features in analysing Qur'ānic references in the selected works produced in the ninth century is the variety of styles and diversity of interpretation presented by authors when analysing and construing their choices of

⁶⁰⁶ See also, Martin, Richard. C, The Role of the Basrah Mu'tazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, (The University Chicago Press, 1980), pp.175-189.

Qur'ānic references. Indeed, it would seem that each individual author consults verses that were never quoted by other scholars of the same century. Ibn Sa'd, for instance, uses 26:219 to confirm the nobility of Muḥammad's genealogy, while other authors of *sīra*, ḥadīth, *tafsīr* or *dalā'il*, despite being authors living in the same century, never employed it in their works for the same purpose, nor, indeed, offer similar insights or interpretation. As previously discussed in the second chapter, the verse was used by various author with different understandings from the one presented by Ibn Sa'd. Scholars such as Mujāhid, Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, Yaḥyā ibn Salām, 'Abd al-Razzāq, Muslim Ibn Khālid, al-Farrā', al-Humaydī have mentioned and express their thought regarding the verse. Not one of them specifies or interprets a similar reading as adduced by Ibn Sa'd, except Muqātil alone. Muqātil offers a similar interpretation to Ibn Sa'd; but in fact, that particular reading arose while he was elucidating an interpretation of Sūra al-Aḥqāf, not Sūra al-Shu'arā', the sūra that was employed by Ibn Sa'd.

Ibn Hishām adduced 28:12 to explain the circumstances and context of Muḥammad's breast feeding period, and again, no other scholars employ it or share a comparable understanding. Al-Tirmidhī, apparently interprets 94:1 as an allusion to the event of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. During the same period, no other *sīra* or ḥadīth scholars conjure with a similar awareness or interpretation. Indeed, the individual interpretation of each scholar regarding the cited verses implies a particularly idiosyncratic understanding of each scholar approaching the Qur'ān with a view to establishing specific references to institute an accurate biography of Muḥammad.

Further analysis of Qur'ānic references used by the authors of *sīra* in explaining the history of previous prophets and the condition of Arab before the emergence of Muḥammad seems to support this proposition. In the works of *sīra* (such as Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Sa'd), the authors begins the biography of Muḥammad customarily with the

histories of previous prophets, in order to illustrate the solidity of a link between Muḥammad and other prophets in history. Furthermore, the social and geopolitical context of Arabia is evoked, in order to create in reader's mind an accurate and appropriate understanding of setting in terms of its geographical, political and social framework significance, before the advent of the final prophet. In doing so, Ibn Hishām in his works adduces nineteen verses from the Qur'ān, while Ibn Sa'd produces twenty four verses from the same source, the Qur'ān as a reference to the history and biography about the previous prophets. It is interesting to note that none of the verses employed by Ibn Hishām in this section was used by Ibn Sa'd in his work for an otherwise similar introductory part. And incredibly, none of the verses used by Ibn Sa'd was selected by Ibn Hishām. Remarkably, neither author quotes same verse in his preliminary section of Muḥammad's biography, and no two identical verses appear in either work.⁶⁰⁷ This heterogeneity implies that either scholar only cites Qur'ānic verses that are deemed to be appropriate to a particular historical event or biographical incident on which they intended to cast light. For example, in delineating the biography of Noah, both Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa'd cite dissimilar references from the Qur'ān, even though the scope of discussion is very similar. For example, Ibn Hishām chooses to quote 71:23-24 to evoke a picture of Noah's people as worshippers of idols while Ibn Sa'd attaches 54:11-12 in his effort to visualise and emphasise the atmosphere and social context of the great flood. Indeed, different foci and objectives might drive the author to employ different verses; but again, it is the personal understanding, purpose and approach of the author that controls his selection. The obvious diversity of Qur'ānic references adduced by Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa'd at the same time, indicates the nature of self-

⁶⁰⁷ This is based on observation of the use of Qur'ānic references starting from the first page of the work, until the section before the revelation of *wahy*.

determination and the independence of the authors in deciding the verses which they are free to define as an appropriate reference, therefore lending authority to the composition.

Al-Ya‘qūbī, another historian of the same century has utilised a different approach when creating an introduction to the history of Muḥammad’s life. He does not make any specific Qur’ānic reference when delivering the subject about previous prophets and the condition of Arabia. Indeed, the first Qur’ānic reference adduced by him is 96:1, the verse that is popularly identified as the first revelation to Muḥammad. It seems, according to al-Ya‘qūbī’s work, that there is no Qur’ānic reference to any event before the revelation of the first verse of the Qur’ān. This implies unambiguously that the verses employed as allusions to the introductory events before Muḥammad’s life were probably the result of the author’s personal interpretation alone. That is probably the reason that al-Ya‘qūbī only starts to cite the Qur’ān after the event of the first revelation. Some Qur’ānic elements, however, may be traced in his composition about Muḥammad’s early life, and the social and geopolitical context delineating Arabia. For instance, when describing the religions of the Arabs before Islam, al-Ya‘qūbī narrates the history of the existence of idols in the Arabian Peninsula. Some of the words used in the dialogue between the Arabs and the Quraysh seem to resemble 39:3.⁶⁰⁸ Moreover, in recounting the event of Muḥammad’s birth, al-Ya‘qūbī describes the situation of how the devil was prevented by fire as a means of preventing his entry into heaven. This is reminiscent of 67:5 and 72:9.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁸ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, p.307.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, p.328.

5.5 Different Focus and Objective of Composition

Besides personal styles and somewhat idiosyncratic and highly individual interpretations of the Qur'ān, different foci, objectives and emphases in the original compositions might have similarly influenced the existence of Qur'ānic references in the story of Muḥammad's life. Ibn Hishām models his story of Muḥammad's life to focus solely and specifically on the related material that fits his own personal interests, and presents it in the framework of *sīra*. His approach, focus and objective is not the same as Ibn Sa'd's, whose al-Ṭabaqāt is modelled in a '*tarājum*' framework. Al-Ṭabaqāt is composed in order to introduce the personality of the transmitter of the ḥadīth or fiqh. His work is known or categorised in the branch of *tarājum* literature instead of being categorised within the group of *sīra* works. But as a result of the immense information about Muḥammad's life provided by him in his al-Ṭabaqāt, the work is also regarded as one of the important Islamic source of the story of Muḥammad's life. Both works are apparently not in accordance with the style, focus or objective of composition aimed for and structured by al-Tirmidhī's Sunan, the work that emphasises the material concerning *fiqh*, the discussion on Islamic law.

As a compiler of a biographical dictionary, Ibn Sa'd sought to gather all possible material to provide the fullest possible source of biographical information, not only from the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth, but from a plethora of sources available with him. It is no wonder then, that we find that the author employs such a diversity of sources in his work, since his perspective and focus is primarily as an expert of *tarājum* (the knowledge of the biographies of Islam's transmitter's biography) to offer possible information of one's background. The arrangement of his work clearly and definitively indicates his focus, as he organizes it according to the name of the transmitter whose biographical information follows. Naturally, it is the Prophet himself who is the first

figure who Ibn Sa'd seeks to introduce. He begins the first chapter, therefore, with a report of the Prophet's ancestry by providing a material link between Muḥammad and previous prophets. And in this respect, it is the Qur'ān, the book of God, which supplies the most apposite references for consultation; and since there is a ḥadīth that connects 26:219 with the nobility of Muḥammad's genealogy, Ibn Sa'd includes it not only to supply information about Muḥammad's lineage, but also to create an implicit and irrevocable connection between Muḥammad and the previous prophets.

ANALYSIS

5.6 QUR'ANIC REFERENCES TO THE PROPHET 'S GENEALOGY

The discussion in the previous chapters have demonstrated clearly that the connection between the Qur'ān and the story of the Prophet's life is both rare and obscure in works of the ninth century. The works of *tafsīr*, *sīra*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il* yield few references from the Qur'ān that may be regarded credibly as allusions to the Prophet's early life. In this section, the arrangement of analysis used will be slightly change. Since only few Quranic references were found in the previous analysis, the present section will focus on specific Qur'ānic references in the works of *tafsīr*, *sīra*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il*, and analyse the reasons why these references emerged in those specific works. An analysis will be presented thematically in order to focus on specific Qur'ānic references relating to specific topics. The discussion will start from the standpoint of scrutinising Qur'ānic references that are used as references to the genealogy of the Prophet's, his birth, his childhood and his early life.

Examination of works of *tafsīr*, *sīra*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il* reveals that Ibn Sa'd has employed 26:219 as reference to the Prophet's genealogy, while the reference is absent in other literature. This stimulates interest in the investigation of a particular reference presented in Ibn Sa'd *Tabaqat* in greater detail.

5.6.1 Ibn Sa'd and his *Ṭabaqāt*

According to Horovitz, before it was included as a part of *al-Ṭabaqāt*, the biography of Muḥammad that was written by Ibn Sa'd was actually a discrete work known as *Akḥbār al-Nabī* (Reports of the Prophet's life). This work was then amalgamated and became

the first part of the celebrated work, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, by Ibn Maʿrūf.⁶¹⁰ *Al-Ṭabaqāt* is considered as a complete biography of the Prophet, following Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*'s renowned account. Ibn Saʿd was a creative *muḥaddith* who presented a biography of the Prophet, elucidating the events of his life with a novel and distinctive style and fresh overview. Horovitz identifies the crucial differences in the nature of the *sīra*'s in Ibn Saʿd's *al-Ṭabaqāt*. He was not only delivering the *sīra* within the framework established by Ibn Ishāq, by focusing in particular on historical events in the life of the Prophet, but he also developed a new approach in the presentation of *sīra*. Ibn Saʿd in this way incepts a new emphasis upon Muḥammad's legal undertakings and accomplishments, and presents an illustration in great detail of his moral deeds.⁶¹¹ The latter approach represents a hitherto unexplored and groundbreaking consideration of a new branch of ḥadīth literature known as *al-Shamā'il*, on which, according to Juynboll, *Shamā'il of al-Tirmidhī*, the first work in *Shamā'il* style, was modelled, based on Ibn Saʿd's *al-Ṭabaqāt*.⁶¹² The assertion of ethical values and elements of *Shamā'il* in the Prophet's biography is an innovative development in *sīra* literature of the ninth century. If Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī present the story of Muḥammad's life as a prophet, statesman and military commander, Ibn Saʿd evokes and emphasises Muḥammad's excellent moral qualities and physical perfections.⁶¹³ His innovative

⁶¹⁰ Horovitz, Josef, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors*, ed. Lawrence Conrad, New Jersey, 2002, 119.; Raven, Wim, 'Sīra and the Qur'ān', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Brill. 2006, v5, 29-49.

⁶¹¹ Hurvitz, Nimrod, 'Biographies and Mild Asceticism: A Study of Islamic Moral Imagination', *Studia Islamica*, (1997), 85, p.58.

⁶¹² Juynboll, G.H.A., 'al-Tirmidhī', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. ed. P. Bearman, et al. Brill Online. [accessed 27 March 2015].

⁶¹³ Apart from inventing a new perspective of the *sīra*, Ibn Saʿd also brings to the the *sīra* new comprehensive details, compared with those of his master, al-Wāqidī. See, Hadī, Riad, 'Ibn Saʿd wa manhajihī fī al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr Dirāsa fī al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya', *Journal of College of Islamic Science*, (Mosul University, 2014), v8, (18/1), pp.198-230.

thought, however, is not confined only to style and content, but also the use of Qur'ānic references.

Relying on the Qur'ān as his source of Muḥammad's biography, Ibn Sa'd alludes to a profusion of verses from the Qur'ān. Based on a comparative analysis between his contemporaries' works (including Ibn Hishām, al-Ya'qūbī, and al-Balādhurī), he clearly surpasses them in terms of his application of an abundance of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life. In citing a particular verse, Ibn Sa'd usually names his source and the whole *isnād*, which is a typical practice of *ahl al-ḥadīth*. This practice is intended to declare its authenticity and validate his source. In Ibn Sa'd's discussion of Muḥammad's early life, most of the Qur'ānic references he adduces are from Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī and al-Wāqidī.⁶¹⁴ In fact, these two masters, according to Horovitz, were identified as his primary sources in delineating the Prophet's biography.⁶¹⁵ Using the Qur'ān as his reference, Ibn Sa'd is found to gather more than that which has been cited by his master. For example in his discussion about the specific genealogical connection between Muhammad and previous prophets, Hishām al-Kalbī cites only 25:38 as his Qur'ānic reference in his *Jamhara al-Nasb*;⁶¹⁶ while Ibn Sa'd, apart from this verse, adduces numbers of verses, covering a wide discussion of genealogical topics including the Prophet's Arab origins, reference to the nobility of his lineage, and a few verses are gathered to expound his forebears as honourable prophets. It is worth noting here that verse 26:219, the main focus of our discussion here, is not derived from his well-known masters, al-Wāqidī and Hishām al-Kalbī, but rather from al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Makhlad al-Shaybānī, the scholar from Basra. The

⁶¹⁴ This is based on our observation from the starting page of al-Ṭabaqāt, until the topic of the first revelation to Muḥammad.

⁶¹⁵ J. Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors*, (Princeton, The Darwin Press, 2002), pp. 116-123.

⁶¹⁶ Al-Kalbī, Muḥammad Ibn al-Sā'ib, *Jamhara al-Nasb*, p.1/10.

authenticity of this source, however, appears ambiguous since most of the popular biographical dictionaries (*Kitāb al-Tarājum*) refrain from mentioning Ibn Sa‘d as a pupil of al- Ḍaḥḥāk.⁶¹⁷

The way in which Ibn Sa‘d delineates his introductory section to Muḥammad’s life is noticeably different from Ibn Ishāq’s *Sīra*. In the preliminary section of Muḥammad’s biography, Ibn Ishāq’s emphasis focuses specifically on the social, political and geographical background and condition of Arabs before the birth of Muḥammad; while Ibn Sa‘d seems to pay no attention to this and focuses more upon the genealogical connection between Muḥammad and the previous prophets. To strengthen his argument, a number of Qur’ānic verses were adduced in order to demonstrate a solid basis for the idea. The way in which Ibn Sa‘d presents Qur’ānic verses is similar to the *ahl al-ḥadīth* method. This technique comprises mentioning a source and providing a full list of its transmitters. By declaring his sources, he indicates implicitly that the verses and their interpretation probably, but not necessarily, originated from his own thought but rather were a transmission of a past generation. Since he barely expresses a personal remark on this collection of traditions and Qur’ānic references, it is difficult to conclude his own notions about the use of Qur’ānic verses in outlining the Prophet’s biography. The least that we can infer is that within his time, or even probably earlier than that, the Qur’ān had already been used and perceived as a reliable source of information to depict certain part of the Prophet’s early life.

⁶¹⁷ Most of the popular biographical dictionaries provide information about the biography of al-Ḍaḥḥāk including a list of his pupil. The name of Ibn Sa‘d is however missing in this list. See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, p.13/1; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta’dīl*, p.4/463; Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqqāt*, p.6/483; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, p.24/356; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, p.5/332.

5.6.2 Verse 26:219 in the Ninth Century

In his *al-Ṭabaqāt*, Ibn Saʿd employs a number of Qurʾānic verses as references to Muḥammad's early life. The introductory section of Muḥammad's biography⁶¹⁸ already included sixteen verses from the Qurʾān, which were employed primarily to illustrate information about the previous prophets. It is in this prologue that Ibn Saʿd employs 26:219 to demonstrate the genealogical connection between Muḥammad and the previous prophets. Since the content of the verse does not appear to bear any literal connection with the Prophet's lineage, it is necessary to examine closely selected works of *sīra*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il* literature in order to analyse whether the contemporary scholars of Ibn Saʿd's time hold a similar point of view. The works of scholars of *sīra*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il*, as discussed in previous chapters, bear at least some minor references to the Prophet's early life. However, based on our reading, not one of the biographical authors from a multiplicity of backgrounds has employed 26:219 to delineate the Prophet's lineage.

Even though verse 26:219 is barely found to be used as reference to the Prophet's genealogy, this does not mean that it has never been referred to at all. It is evident that the verse was cited widely in the works of ninth century scholars. Due to its wide-ranging and multifaceted nature, the verse has been employed in various contexts, including doctrinal, ascetical and biographical discourse. In the doctrinal debate, Abū Saʿīd al-Dārimī (d. 280/893) cites the verse to refute al-Marīsī's argument in their dispute about the attributes of Allāh. Al-Marīsī asserts that God's attributes have one important element: God's attributes are not the same as the attributes of other living beings; and the human intellect possesses no faculty to perceive God's attributes.

⁶¹⁸ The prologue section, before Ibn Saʿd's account narrates the account of Muḥammad's birth. See, Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, pp.4-90.

Therefore, he describes God's attributes as all the same one, in which according to him, there is no different between God's attribute of All-Seeing and All-Hearing.⁶¹⁹ Disagreeing with al-Marīsī, Abū Sa'īd adduces verses from the Qur'ān, the Word of God himself, that discern various features of God's attributes, including verses 26:218-219. The verses are adduced to elaborate upon the attributes of the All-Seeing Allāh (*al-ru'ya* or *al-baṣīr*).⁶²⁰ Later on, this doctrinal debate is recorded by Al-Jishūmī. In his work, al-Baghdādiya is identified as the group that hold the same belief as al-Marīsī; and al-Jishūmī refutes them using the same verse employed by Abū Sa'īd.⁶²¹ Indeed, there is no indication of genealogical discourse in their discussion related to this specific verse.

On the other hand, the scholars of ḥadīth have widely different applications and perspectives on this verse. It was considered by some of them as illustrating Muḥammad's miracles (*khuṣūṣiyya* or *mu'jiza*) in which, according to them, the verse illustrates the Prophet's ability to observe prayer taking place behind him, even though he is not facing the congregation at prayer (*ṣalāt al-jamā'a*). Al-Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834) in his Musnad recorded a ḥadīth of Mujāhid in describing the meaning of the verse. According to Mujāhid, the verse connotes that the Prophet has the ability to monitor prayer taking place behind him.⁶²² A similar understanding is also held by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, a prominent scholar of ḥadīth. At one time, Ibn Ḥanbal, is asked about the meaning of an ambiguous ḥadīth. In the ḥadīth, the Prophet is reported as saying

⁶¹⁹ Al-Marīsī cited as saying: وَلَيْسَ السَّمْعُ مِنْهُ غَيْرَ الْبَصَرِ. See, Al-Dārimī, Abū Sa'īd Uthmān Ibn Sa'īd ibn Khālīd al-Dārimī, *Naqd al-Imām Abū Sa'īd Uthmān Ibn Sa'īd 'Alā al-Marīsī al-Jahmī al-'Anīd Fī Mā Iftarā 'Alā Allah Azza Wa Jalla Min al-Tawhīd*, ed. Rashīd Ibn Ḥasan, (Maktaba al-Rushd, 1998), p.1/221.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, pp.1/221-222.

⁶²¹ Zarzūr, 'Adnān Muḥammad, *al-Hākīm al-Jishūmī wa Manhajihī fī al-Tafsīr*, (Bayrūt: Muassasa al-Risāla, n.d.) p.180.

⁶²² Al-Ḥumaydī, Abū Bakr 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr al-Ḥumaydī, *Musnad al-Ḥumaydī*, Hasan al-Dārānī, (Sūriyā: Dar al-Saqā, 1996), p.2/192.

“Occupy (your *saf*),⁶²³ I can see you from the rear as I can see you between me”.⁶²⁴

Uncertain about the meaning of the ḥadīth, someone has questioned Ibn Ḥanbal about it, and in response, Ibn Ḥanbal explains, and at the same time alludes to 26:219, indicating that the verse connotes a similar meaning to the ḥadīth. Al-Bukhārī and Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī are also among the scholars of ḥadīth that lend their interpretations of this verse. They, however, do not make a comment on the whole verse but focus on the meaning of the word *al-sājidīn* (the ones who prostrate) in verse 26:219.⁶²⁵ According to them, the word connotes ‘the ones who pray (*al-muṣallīn*), a definition that is clearly not in agreement with the interpretation of Ibn Sa‘d.⁶²⁶ These scholars and their understanding of verse 26:219 are evidently at variance with the ideas presented by Ibn Sa‘d in his *al-Ṭabaqāt*. The disagreement between scholars on the interpretation of this verse might be one of the reasons why the scholars of ḥadīth refrain from using the verse as reference to the Prophet’s genealogy as Ibn Sa‘d did.

Discussion on the verse is also evident in works on sufism. As early as eighth century, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī makes a commentary on the verse. In his view, the verse is interpreted as evidence that God is always monitoring the movement of Muslim prayer when they are performing *al-khalwa* (seclusion), one of the means by which sufis maintain solitary ascetic retreat.⁶²⁷ In a later period, the verse is employed as one of the foundation of the concept of *al-Iḥsān*, in which according to the sufis’ viewpoint, Muslims must always feel the existence of God, and God should always be observed in every single movement of His servant’s prayer. And again, according to this point of view, the verse

⁶²³ *Saf* is the line of congregation prayer.

⁶²⁴ The exact text is “ترأصوا فإني أراكم من خلفي كما أراكم من بين يدي”

⁶²⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.6/111,; Abd al-Razzāq, *Ṭaḥṣīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, p.2/468.

⁶²⁶ According to Ibn Sa‘d’s tradition, the word *al-muṣallīn* is an allusion to the previous prophets. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.6/111.

⁶²⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Farj ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn ‘Alī, *Nuzha al-A‘yun al-Nawāzīr Fī Ilm al-Wujūh wa al-Nawāzīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Radī, (Bayrūt: Mu’assasa al-Risāla, 1984), p.1/506.

is deemed as clearly related to the physical undertaking of prayer itself, not as presented by Ibn Sa‘d in his specifically genealogical perspective.

5.6.3 Ibn Sa‘d and his Perspective

As suggested by Rosenthal, genealogy plays a central role in historiography. An account of genealogy serves as an instrument to legalize kinship in the Arab tribal world.⁶²⁸ To prove the authentic lineage of the final Prophet, the authors of *sīra* gather all accessible information, including verses from the Qur’ān. In genealogical discourse, Ibn Sa‘d derives his knowledge from Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī, a prominent Arab genealogist. Ibn Nadīm lists around 150 titles of Hishām’s work in his *Fihrist*, in which most of these works are devoted to genealogical exposition.⁶²⁹ According to Yāqūt, Hishām even composes a special genealogical work, entitled *al-Farīd fī al-Ansāb* (The Unrivalled in Genealogy) which is dedicated to al-Ma’mūn, the eminent Abbasid ruler. Another work, known as *al-Mulūkī fī al-Ansāb*, was presented to Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā al-Barmakī, the Khurasan ruler.⁶³⁰ Gaining his factual basis from Hishām, Ibn Sa‘d seems to follow some of Hishām’s method. His particularity of style in using the Qur’ān in the context of genealogical discourse might, indeed, be the legacy of his master. In fact, of sixteen verses of the Qur’ān related by Ibn Sa‘d in his preliminary genealogical discourse in Muḥammad’s biography, seven of these derive from Hishām al-Kalbī. Hishām’s use of the Qur’ān to confirm the connection of Muḥammad’s lineage with the previous prophets might well have influenced Ibn Sa‘d to follow his

⁶²⁸ Rosenthal, F.. ‘Nasab’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. ed. P. Bearman, et. all, Brill Online, [accessed 27 March 2015].; Raven, Wim. ‘Sīra and the Qur’ān’, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*. ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, (Leiden: Brill, 2006) v5, pp.29-49.

⁶²⁹ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, pp.124-127.

⁶³⁰ Yāqūt Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’*, ed. Iḥsān Abbās, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ghrib al-Islāmī, 1993), p.6/2779.

approach. The quotation of 26:219 may be seen as his effort in gathering together all Qur'ānic verses related to the Prophet's lineage as the result of what he learn from his master.

Besides his master's influence, the debate taking place among Muslims about the status of Muḥammad's ancestry also seems to inform Ibn Sa'd's intellectual background. In this early period, some Sunni scholars believed that the Prophet's father, Abdulla, was a non-believer. This is based on a few ḥadīth narrated by Sunni scholars, such as the ḥadīth narrated by Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, in which, according to Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, the Prophet himself conceded that his father would be punished in hell because he was a non-believer.⁶³¹ In contrast with this belief, other Shī'ite sources suggest the opposite. The Shī'ite sources provide arguments confirming the purity of Muḥammad's pedigree. It is in this quarrel that the verse 26:219 is employed to confirm that all of Muḥammad's ancestors were the *sājidūn* (the ones who prostrate, i.e., the believers); and Muḥammad's gene originate from and move in (*taqallub*) the vessel of pure blood and backbones (*aṣlāb*) of the *sājidūn*. According to Muḥammad al-Kāzīm, three of the Twelve Imams of Shī'ite, al-Bāqir (d. 114/732), al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765 and al-Kāzīm (d. 185/799) maintained this particular interpretation of the verse for centuries.⁶³² Believing in the teaching of their Imams, Abū Ḥayān, while commenting on this verse, state that, the Rāfiḍī use this interpretation in order to authenticate the Prophet's ancestors as pure believers (*mu'min*). Such intellectual concepts and notions were nurtured in the early centuries of Islam and have resulted in a reverence for the Prophet's descendants. It is therefore quite possible that a similar line of reasoning

⁶³¹ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p.1/191.

⁶³² Al-Kūfī, Abū al-Qāsim Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kāzīm, (Tīhrān: Wizāra al-Thaqāfa wa al-Irshād al-Islāmī, 2000), p.304.; Al-Qummī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr al-Qummi*, ed. al-Sayyid al-Jazā'irī, (Matba'a al-Najf, 1387H), p.2/125.; al-Tabrisi, Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Murtaḍā, 2006), p.7/260.

reached the receptive understanding of Ibn Saʿd. Moreover, according to Brockelmann, al-Wāqidī, his major source of knowledge, is actually a Shīʿī Muslim.⁶³³ If this is true, the strong bond between Ibn Saʿd and his master al-Wāqidī might have become a firm conduit to the transference of Shīʿīte doctrine, especially their particular perspective on the interpretation of 26:219. Appearing to have connection with the Prophet's genealogy, it quite probably leads Ibn Saʿd to include the recitation in his *Ṭabaqāt*.

To arrive at an authentic understanding of the actual meaning of verse 26:219 would seem to present almost insurmountable difficulties; but implicit within the verse, Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt* shows us how Muslims of the ninth century were, in fact, informed about the exegetical meaning of the passage. Ibn Saʿd, as has been mentioned before, is not an author to always include personal remarks in *Ṭabaqāt*. His decision to include the verse at all implies, at the very least, an initial connection of this verse with the Prophet's genealogy within the *sīra* framework. Since his predecessor and contemporaries in *sīra* scholarship, such as Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidī, Ibn Hishām and al-Yaʿqūbī, refrain from linking the verse with Muḥammad's lineage, it is therefore reasonable to suggest that Ibn Saʿd has conceived an insightful foundation for the connection of Muḥammad's lineage with that of previous prophets. The connection that is based on the Quranic verse would have been accepted at the time as an established fact within Islamic scholarship. Furthermore, in a multi-religious society, and since the status of Muḥammad as a prophet would have been debated and argued within this period, Ibn Saʿd's effort would have, at the same time, provided a steady and well-founded image of the last prophet, who is perceived among Muslims as an actual inheritance of the previous prophets sent by God. There might also have been the

⁶³³ Brockelmann, Carl, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-ʿArabī*, ed. ʿAbd Halīm al-Najjār, (al-Qāhira, Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d) p.3/16.

influence of other forms of literature in Ibn Sa‘d’s milieu. Rubin, in his analysis of 26:219 and the concept of the pre-existence of Muḥammad, argues for the existence of fragments and reminiscences of some pre-Islamic texts. The notion of the ‘pre-existence’ of Muḥammad in the being or existence of previous prophets has a resonance with and follows a similar pattern to Jewish and Christian traditions. He suggests, furthermore, that the resulting concept that emerged in Ibn Sa‘d’s work might have had its origin in Islam’s polemic with Christianity.⁶³⁴ Within the diverse theological environments of this debate, this notion would serve as an instrument to validate Muḥammad’s prophetical predecessors as pre-ordained Muslims.

⁶³⁴ Uri Rubin, ‘More Light On Muḥammad’s Pre-Existence: Qur’anic And Post-Qur’anic Perspectives’, in Andrew Rippin and Roberto Tottoli, eds., *Books And Written Culture Of The Islamic World: Studies Presented To Claude Gilliot On The Occasion Of His 75th Birthday*, Brill, Islamic History and Civilization 113, (Leiden, 2015), pp.288-311.

5.7 QUR'ĀNIC REFERENCES TO THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD'S BIRTH

There are two Qur'ānic references cited by Muslim scholars as allusions to the Prophet's birth. The first is Q105, which is made reference to by al-Jāḥiẓ, and in which, according to him, the destruction of Abraha and his elephant troops to invade Mecca and their destruction is a sign of the advent of the final prophet. Indeed, a literal reading of the Q105 does not hold any information about the Prophet's birth; but later scholars tend to use it as an allusion to the sign of the emergence, the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁶³⁵ In the *sūra*, Ibn Ishāq (through the transmission of Ibn Hishām) adduce verses from the *sūra*, merely to demonstrate the religious, historical and social context and milieu of the event by using the words of the Quran itself. Furthermore, according to Ibn Ishāq, when the Prophet was rejected by his own people, God revealed this *sūra* to remind them of God's mercy in protecting Mecca and surrounding major trade routes of trade from any harm.⁶³⁶ Al-Jāḥiẓ, however, offers a novel appraisal. Rather than employing the *sūra* as an auxiliary element to elucidate the context and scope of the event, al-Jāḥiẓ provides a further inference to the purpose of the *sūra*, in which, according to him, the whole *sūra* is an evidentiary instrument to vindicate the truth of Muḥammad's prophethood. Moreover, he deems the miraculous event as an initial sign of the advent of the Prophet.⁶³⁷

In order to analyse the *sūra*, it would seem appropriate to examine the entirety of the verses in the *sūra*. The *sūra* says: "Have you not considered, (O Muḥammad), how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their plan into misguidance? And He sent against them birds in flocks, Striking them with stones of

⁶³⁵ For example Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṣāliḥī in their *Sīra*. See, Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, p.8/483; Al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul Al-Hudā wa Al-Rashād*, p.1/248.

⁶³⁶ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, pp.1/54-55.

⁶³⁷ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, p.7/120, 7/126-127.

hard clay, And He made them like eaten straw” Q105:1-5. Literally, the *sūra* does not appear to have any bearing on the Prophet’s birth or the sign of the emergence of the Prophet. In fact, the events narrated in the *sūra* were described somewhat ambiguously. The identity of *aṣḥāb al-fīl* (the People of the Elephant) was obscure; and the reason for God’s destruction of them is uncertain. What is apparent on the surface, however, is that, God reminds Muḥammad to ponder the story of how He deals Himself with the People of the Elephant, whereas the rest of the *sūra* explains how God foils the plan organised by the People of the Elephant. It is worthy of note that there is not much detail regarding either the characters or the plot of the story. In contrast, the Islamic tradition is furnished in great detail with personalities and the plot of the story. The *aṣḥāb al-fīl* are identified as Abyssinians; their leader is Abraha; the target is the Ka‘ba; the elephant’s name is Maḥmūd, the *mahout* (*sā’is*, or elephant-handler) is Unays; and the Meccan negotiator is ‘Abd Muṭṭalib. The paucity and obscurity of information in the actual *sūra* is, in fact, elucidated in great detail in the work of *sīra*.⁶³⁸

Beside the considerable detail, the *sīra* also employs verses of Q105 to cast a light on the event. They provide an interpretation of the verse to illuminate the narration. According to Ibn Ishāq, the *sūra* was revealed to remind the Quraysh of God’s mercy to them.⁶³⁹ However, Ibn Hishām offers a literal interpretation of apparently ambiguous words in the *sūra* (i.e. *abābīl* and *sijjīl*).⁶⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that al-Jāḥiẓ comes to offer a different and more confident interpretation: besides a parallel reading with Ibn Ishāq in recognising the *sūra* as a mechanism to silent Muḥammad’s opponents, al-Jāḥiẓ in his *al-Ḥayawān*, asserts that the event as pictured in the *sūra* is, in actual fact,

⁶³⁸ See Shahīd, Irfan. ‘People of the Elephant,’ in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Brill Online, [accessed 28 March 2015].

⁶³⁹ Ibn Hisham, *Sīra*, p.1/55.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid, p.1/55.

an early sign of Muḥammad's prophethood. He informs the reader, moreover, that the topic has already been covered thoroughly by him in his special discussion about Muḥammad's prophethood in his work entitled *Kitāb al-Ḥujja* (The Book of Evidence).⁶⁴¹ This idea recurs in his other work, *Risāla Faḍl Hāshim 'Alā 'Abd Shams*. In this epistle (*risāla*) the event is described as *irhāṣ*, a theological term which denotes an early sign of prophethood.⁶⁴² Asserting the same concept in his various works repeatedly implies the depth and serious nature of al-Jāḥiẓ in convincing the reader of his certain belief that the miraculous incident is, without doubt, an early sign of Muḥammad's prophethood.

Al-Jāḥiẓ appears to consider this phenomenal event as a historical fact.⁶⁴³ To validate his argument, he adduces extensive lines of pre-Islamic (*jāhili*) poetry as his main evidence which, according to him, originate from indisputable sources (*lā yartābu bihā aḥad min al-ruwā*).⁶⁴⁴ The supposedly authentic pre-Islamic poetry (*al-shi'r al-jāhili*) derive from the narrations of Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat, Ṭufayl al-Ghanawī, Abū Umayya Rabī'a ibn Abī al-Ṣalt, Nufayl ibn Habīb al-Khath'amī and al-Mughīra ibn 'Abdullā al-Makhzūmī. Finally, to strengthen his stance and prove the authenticity of the account, al-Jāḥiẓ presents Q105 to persuade the reader that not only is the event recorded by human hands, but it is also engraved in the Book of God. To conclude his message, al-Jāḥiẓ maintains that even though the reader does not witness the incident at first hand, it does not necessarily mean that it never actually occurred. He adduces 89:6, 25:45 and 3:143 and comments logically that all these past events are events that we cannot, by

⁶⁴¹ This part is however missing from the current copy of *Kitāb al-Ḥujja* available now.

⁶⁴² Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Risālah al-Siyāsiyya*, (Bayrūt: Dar wa Maktaba al-Hilāl, n.d.), p.1/412.

⁶⁴³ Al-Jāḥiẓ is not alone in believing the authenticity of the story. The great number of sources that record the story indicates the popularity of the incident, as it happened. According to al-Azraqī, even if the Quran did not mention the story, this extensive number of accounts of the story would definitely influence anyone to believe the story. See, al-Azraqī, *Akhbār al-Makka*, p.1/149.

⁶⁴⁴ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 7/118. See also Rubin, Uri, 'Abraha', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Three. ed. Kate Fleet, et. al., Brill Online, [accessed 28 March 2015]

their very nature, witness directly [but these events did happen, as told in the Quran].⁶⁴⁵

Al-Jāhiz's reliance on the Quran is obvious here. To avoid any rational argument regarding the authenticity of the extraordinary occurrence, he employs the Quran not only to reassure and reduce any hesitation in belief concerning the authenticity of the events, but also to anticipate further questions that could be raised by the reader. If the reader chooses to argue about the eye-witnesses of the event, al-Jāhiz reminds us that there are numerous events in the Quran that were not witnessed but which are nevertheless held firm, and are central to our belief.

The *sūra* infuses and informs the works of al-Jāhiz. He cites the *sūra* three times in various topical discourse in his encyclopaedic works, *al-Hayawān*. The first use was to describe how God makes use of animals as instrument of punishment against human beings (*Āyāt fī ta'zīb al-nās bi al-hayawān*). The second is a discussion of Qur'ānic verses related to birds (*Mā jā'a fī dhikr al-ṭayr*). And the last one, indeed, the most important one for our purposes in the present work, is his discourse on the story of the elephant (*Qiṣṣat al-fīl*). It is this part in which he arrives at the conclusion that the event is one which elicits proof of Muḥammad's prophethood. He even creates a specific topic entitled 'the Evidence in the Elephant' (*Al-Āya fī al-fīl*), in which he proposes that the event is regarded as the initial foundation of the Prophet's prophethood (*ta'sīsā li nubuwwat al-nabī*).

The use of Qur'ānic verses as reference to Muḥammad's early life is evident here. When al-Jāhiz employs the word *irhāṣ*, it is clearly an allusion to the Prophet's early life. The word *irhāṣ*, literally means 'laying of a foundation',⁶⁴⁶ and is a theological term that is

⁶⁴⁵ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, p.7/120.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, (Bayrūt: Dār Sādir, 1414H), 7/44; see also, Yusuf, Badmas 'Lanre, *Sayyid Qutb: A Study of His Tafsir*, Malaysia, (Islamic Book Trust, 2009), p.215.

used to refer to any anticipatory miracle of the Prophet before his call.⁶⁴⁷ In this context, the author suggests that the miraculous event of the People of the Elephant is an evidentiary miracle (*akbar al-āyāt wa a'ẓam al-burhānāt*) of Muḥammad's prophethood, and an initial basis of his emergence, the birth of the Prophet. Based on al-Jāḥiẓ's statement, Maṣṣūr in his thesis concludes that: "He (al-Jāḥiẓ) holds the miracle (the event of the elephants) as an affirmation in advance of Muḥammad's prophecy and an exaltation of his position."⁶⁴⁸ Al-Jāḥiẓ's objective in using this Qur'ānic reference is clear, which is to strengthen his point that the event did really happen, and did not do so gratuitously, without meaning or cause. In this connection, al-Jāḥiẓ appears to propose that the revelation of the *sūra* was not only to remind the Quraysh about God's mercy to them; but it was also to remind them that the event is an early sign of the emergence of the final Prophet.

The connection made by al-Jāḥiẓ between the *sūra* and Muḥammad's prophethood is apparently an innovative enterprise. It became apparent in the previous chapter that it is hard to find any authors of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *dalā'il* and *sīra* of the ninth century that make any tangible connection between the *sūra* with the emergence of Muḥammad's prophethood. For example, al-Farrā' (d. 208/823), al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 211/826), al-Akhfash (d. 215/830), al-Azraqī (d. 250/864) and al-Tustarī (d. 283/896)⁶⁴⁹ have a discussion about the *sūra*; but none of them makes a personal remark connecting the *sūra* with the emergence or sign of Muḥammad's prophethood.⁶⁵⁰ Only later authors of *tafsīr* and *sīra*, such as Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) al-Ṣāliḥī (d. 942/1535), and other modern

⁶⁴⁷ Houtsma, M. Th., E. J., *Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936*, (Brill, 1993), p.4/744.

⁶⁴⁸ See, Maṣṣūr, Sa'īd Ḥusayn, *The World-View of Al-Jāḥiẓ in Kitāb Al-Ḥayawān*, pp.198-200.

⁶⁴⁹ See, al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, 3/291; al-Ṣan'ānī, *Tafsīr*, (Bayrūt, 1419H), pp.3/460-461; al-Akhfash, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, (al-Qāhira, 1990), p.2/585; al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, (Bayrūt, 1423H), p.1/206;

⁶⁵⁰ The detail observation regarding this has already presented in the second chapter of this present study.

scholars like Abū Shahba and Akram Ḍiyā' al-ʿUmarī,⁶⁵¹ begin to associate the *sūra* with the Prophet's birth. At this early stage, most scholars tend to describe only various details of the event and give a lexical discourse of the *sūra*, rather than developing further reading on the verse. It seems that al-Jāḥiẓ is the only author to initiate a connection. The matter in question now is what makes al-Jāḥiẓ initiate this connection in the first place?

Since al-Jāḥiẓ mentions that a discussion about the *sūra* has already been delivered in detail by him in his *Kitāb al-Ḥujja* (al-Jāḥiẓ's specific work discussing on the proof of Muḥammad's prophethood), there exists the possibility that the connection was initiated due to the heated debate concerning the authenticity of Muḥammad's prophethood. According to Adang, there are two arguments raised by the non-Muslim that question Muḥammad's prophethood. One of them is the absence of miracle performed by Muḥammad.⁶⁵² The dispute about Muḥammad's prophethood probably leads al-Jāḥiẓ to compile miraculous incidents that occur around the Prophet's life in order to establish and cement the proof of his prophethood. In this respect, it would seem that al-Jāḥiẓ is trying to attest that not only is Muḥammad able to perform miracles, but that there are also miraculous occurrences that took place before his prophethood. These occurrences, according to al-Jāḥiẓ, are, in fact, the proof of Muḥammad's prophethood, and signs of his emergence. That is why we found that al-Jāḥiẓ vigorously compiles available materials to substantiate the authenticity of this otherwise incredible-sounding account. Moreover, he also emphasises that all his sources are, in fact, originally pre-Islamic (*jāhili*) and are indisputable evidence. Not

⁶⁵¹ See, Abū Shahba, *al-Sūra al-Nabawiyya fī Daw' al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna*, (Dimashq, Dār al-Qalām, 1992), p.169; al-Umarī, Akram Ḍiyā', *al-Sūra al-Nabawiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, (al-Madīna al-Munawwara, 1994), p.98; Abū Islam, *Subul al-Salām*, (Ammān, 1428), pp.31-32.

⁶⁵² Adang, Camilla, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, p.141.

only that, he cites statements of scholars such as Bakr ibn ‘Abdillā al-Muznī who support his idea. According to al-Muznī, this incident is a proof (*āya*) that occurred in the pre-Islamic period (*jāhili*) and persists as a sign of Muḥammad’s prophethood (*irhāṣ li al-nubuwwa*).⁶⁵³ The climax of this discussion is when al-Jāḥiẓ adduces the Quran itself as his ultimate proof. Even if pre-Islamic poetry and scholarship are not accepted, then the Word of God itself should certainly not be rejected. At the end, al-Jāḥiẓ concludes that an event that is not witnessed ourselves does not necessarily imply that it never happened. He adduces verses from the Quran and says: “This is all that we never witness it”. His conclusion completes our hypothesis, in which al-Jāḥiẓ stands firm in the midst of a debate. His method is noticeably dialectical: he starts with providing profuse evidence in support of his own argument; and at the end, he concludes his discourse and clinches his own argument by anticipating and forestalling possibly sceptical question that might be raised by his opponent. The heated debate about Muḥammad’s prophethood apparently leads al-Jāḥiẓ to cite Q105, as evidence in support of his own line of reasoning, and accordingly connects the *sūra* with events of Muḥammad’s early life.

There is another question should be considered here: if the connection was made by al-Jāḥiẓ as a result of his own eagerness to compile evidence and prove the authenticity of the event, what is it that makes al-Jāḥiẓ believe that the event is indeed a proof of Muḥammad’s prophethood? The answer may lie in the way in which al-Jāḥiẓ interprets the Quran, and the methodology underpinning his reasoning. In his discussion, The Human Weakness and Its Limited Capacity, (*‘Ajz al-Insān wa Sighar Qadrihi*), al-Jāḥiẓ explains how God inflicts chastisement on humans, using tiny creature to illustrate how weak the human species may be. He then adduces verse 7:133 as an example, in order

⁶⁵³ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Hayawān*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1424H), p.7/121.

to demonstrate how God sent a small creature as medium of punishment to the unbeliever during the time of Moses.⁶⁵⁴ Al-Jāḥiẓ goes further by emphasising that all of these small creatures, including locusts, lice, frogs and blood, are actually ‘the best signs’ [of truth] sent by God to His enemy (*afḍal āyātihi wa al-‘adhab alladhī arsalahu ‘alā a’dā’ihi*).⁶⁵⁵ It is evident here that al-Jāḥiẓ is trying to highlight how a small creature may function as a mechanism of punishment on the enemy of Moses; and yet, at the same time, it may be regarded as a sign of the truth. When comparison is made between the story of Moses and the story of the People of the Elephant, some elements appear as obvious similarities in both narratives. The enemy of God in Q105 is Abraha and his elephant troops (*aṣḥāb al-fīl*); the small creatures are the flock of birds (*abābil*); and the story in its entirety is a sign of the truth of Muḥammad’s prophethood.

An evident conviction and zeal to authenticate the story of the People of the Elephant seems to have influenced al-Jāḥiẓ to include Q105 as a solid basis of evidence of the whole truth of this narrative. When the Quran itself attributes God’s punishment as a sign of truth (*āyāt*), it would seem reasonable to assume that al-Jāḥiẓ deems the punishment of God on the People of the Elephant as an evidential sign of Muḥammad’s prophethood. The inclusion of Q105 in the discussion of the signs of Muḥammad’s prophethood, leads us indirectly to make an initial connection between the Quran and the emergence of Muḥammad, the messenger of truth.

⁶⁵⁴ To gain a fuller picture and context of the story, the translation of the passage of the verse runs: And We certainly seized the people of Pharaoh with years of famine and a deficiency in fruits that perhaps they would be reminded (7:130). But when good came to them, they said, "This is ours [by right]." And if a bad [condition] struck them, they saw an evil omen in Moses and those with him. Unquestionably, their fortune is with Allah, but most of them do not know (7:131). And they said, "No matter what sign you bring us with which to bewitch us, we will not be believers in you" (7:132). So We sent upon them the flood and locusts and lice and frogs and blood as distinct signs, but they were arrogant and were a criminal people (7:133). And when the punishment descended upon them, they said, "O Moses, invoke for us your Lord by what He has promised you. If you [can] remove the punishment from us, we will surely believe you, and we will send with you the Children of Israel (7:134).

⁶⁵⁵ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Hayawān*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1424H), pp.5/288-289.

5.8 QUR'ĀNIC REFERENCES TO THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD'S TIME AS A SUCKLING INFANT

According to Islamic tradition, after the birth of Muḥammad, there was an event that was accompanied by various miraculous elements. His grandfather brings him to the Ka'ba to thank Allāh for His gift, returns the baby back to his mother, and then seeks a wet nurse. When a group of wet nurses came to Mecca in search of their foster-son, no one agreed to take Muḥammad when they discovered that the baby was an orphan. They said: "An orphan, and what will his mother and grandfather do?"⁶⁵⁶ Since payment was a big issue, no one agreed to take the young Muḥammad. Ibn Ishāq narrates that, Ḥalīma al-Sa'diyya too, in the first instance was reluctant to take the young Muḥammad when she discovered that he was an orphan. But then, after failing to claim for herself any foster-son, she decided to return to Muḥammad and take him. It is recorded that, after agreeing to take Muḥammad as her foster-son, her journey was accompanied by miraculous blessings. Her breasts, which had previously been bereft of milk, immediately overflowed. What is more, the udders of the camel on which they made their journey were full instantly, allowing the whole family to benefit from its milk; her donkey, previously enervated, became active and moved far faster than before; her herd of cattle yielded more milk. In short, Ḥalīma's family were awarded with blessings from the moment that Ḥalīma took Muḥammad to her breast. This bounteous plethora of blessings was notified by her companions, who told her: "You have taken a blessed creature."

The status of Ḥalīma as a blessed wet nurse of the Prophet was consequently widely recognised in the ninth century. It has been mentioned in various sources, including the

⁶⁵⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muḥammad*, trsl. Guillaume, (Oxford University Press, 1967), p.71.

works of Abū Dāwūd,⁶⁵⁷ al-Wāqidī,⁶⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥabīb (245/859),⁶⁵⁹ Ibn Qutayba,⁶⁶⁰ al-Fasawī (277/890),⁶⁶¹ Ibn Abī Khaythama,⁶⁶² and al-Jāḥiẓ.⁶⁶³ The account of Muḥammad being wet-nursed by Ḥalīma was discussed in detail in the works of Ibn Ishāq (in Ibn Hishām's transmission), Ibn Sa'd,⁶⁶⁴ al-Balādhurī,⁶⁶⁵ and Ibn Abī 'Āsim.⁶⁶⁶

Interestingly, the blessings granted to Ḥalīma occurred and endured solely during her period nursing Muḥammad. Apparently, the blessings and prosperity eluded her and her people after a time. When Muḥammad was already grown-up and married to Khadīja, Ibn Qutayba records an account of how Ḥalīma came to the Prophet's house, lamenting (*shakat*) about the drought in her homeland (*jadb al-bilād*) which had brought famine and starvation. In response to Ḥalīma, the Prophet discussed her plight with Khadīja, and subsequently they gave Ḥalīma 40 lambs and camel with a *hawdah* to help her.⁶⁶⁷ The account is also preserved by Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī, without mentioning the specific difficulties faced by Ḥalīma.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁵⁷ Abū Dāwūd narrates a ḥadīth concerning how Muḥammad expresses his respect when Ḥalīma comes to visit him. The Prophet himself spread out his cloak for her so she could sit on it. See, Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ed. al-Arnaūt, (Dār al-Risāla al-'Ilmiyya, 2009), p.7/457.

⁶⁵⁸ Actually, al-Wāqidī did not include the story of Muḥammad's suckling in his *Maghāzī*. But he did confirm that Ḥalīma is the Prophet's wet-nurse when describing Muḥammad's relations with Abū Sufyān, the leader of Mecca. According to al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad is Abū Sufyan's foster-brother since they both are being wet-nursed by Ḥalīma. See, Al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, (Dār al-A'lamī, 1409), p.2/869.

⁶⁵⁹ Al-Hāshimī, Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb Abū Ja'far al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Maḥbar*, (Bayrūt: Dār Āfāq al-Jadīda, n.d) p.10.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Thawrat 'Ukāsha, (al-Qāhira, 1992), p.126, 131.

⁶⁶¹ Al-Fasawī, Ya'qūb ibn Sufyān al-Fārisī, *al-Ma'rifa wa al-Tārīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyā' al-'Umari, (Bayrūt: Muassasa al-Risāla, 1981), p.3/267.

⁶⁶² In his *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, Ibn Abī Khaythama records a ḥadīth that transmitted from Ḥalīma herself, in which the Prophet in his statement concedes that he has been wet-nursed in the village of Bani Sa'd, Ḥalīma's hometown. See, Ibn Abī Kaythama, *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, ed. Ṣalāḥ Hilāl, (al-Qāhira, 2006), p.2/816.

⁶⁶³ al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Hayawān*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1424H), p.6/331, 7/148.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, p.1/120.

⁶⁶⁵ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, ed. Suhayl al-Ziriklī, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), p.1/93.

⁶⁶⁶ Al-Shaybānī, Abū Bakr Ibn Abī 'Āsim, *al-Āḥād wa al-Mathānī*, (al-Riyād: Dār al-Rāya, 1991), p.6/239.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, ed. 'Abdullā al-Jabūrī, (Baghdād: Maktaba al-'Anī, 1397H), p.1/619.

⁶⁶⁸ Al-Ḥarbī, Ibrāhīm ibn Ishāq, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, (Makka: Jāmi'a Umm al-Qurā, 1405H), p.1/54.

It is worthy of note that despite there being a profusion of sources that provide information about the account of Muḥammad's suckling with his wet nurse, not one of these connects the story with any Qur'ānic reference, except Ibn Hishām. In Guillaume's translation of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*, not even Ibn Ishāq, the master of Ibn Hishām, cited the verse as reference to Muḥammad's suckling. The narrative has been delivered in details by the scholars of *Sīra* of the ninth century. However, none of them is found to make a connection with any verse from the Qur'ān. It is obvious that the connection initiated by Ibn Hishām is a novel enterprise. Our observation presented in the previous chapters show that there is no scholars of *tafsīr*, *sīra*, ḥadīth and *dalā'il* of the same century who links 28:12 with the narrative of Muḥammad's nursing. The matter in question now is: what prompted Ibn Hishām to cite the verse at the beginning of the miraculous story?

In order to analyse the question, it is worth making a reference to the verse and related passages in the Qur'ān to gain a fuller context of the subject. The verse is located in the opening section of *sūra al-Qaṣaṣ*, the passage in which the story of Moses' infancy is narrated. According to Qur'ānic commentaries, Pharaoh one day was warned by his priests (*al-kahana*)⁶⁶⁹ or a warner (*ḥāzira*)⁶⁷⁰ about the upbringing of a boy (*ghulām*) who would one day bring an end to his reign. Worried about the prediction, he commanded that all new-born boys must be killed.⁶⁷¹ The Qur'ān (28:7) reveals that God inspired Moses' mother (*wa awḥaynā ilā umm mūsā*) to place the young Moses in

⁶⁶⁹ See Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, 1/522; Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 3/336; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, (Muassasa al-Risāla, 2000), p.19/518.

⁶⁷⁰ Qatāda was only describes it as a warner, without specifically ascribe it as a priest (*al-kāhin*). See, Yahyā Ibn Sallām, *Tafsīr*, 2/579; al-Ṣan'ānī, 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, 2/486; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, (Muassasa al-Risāla, 2000), p.19/518.

⁶⁷¹ The Qur'ān seems does not mention the details, but most of the *tafsīr* scholars interpreted verse 28:6 as denoting the warning of God of the advent of a boy who will bring to an end his reign. The interpretation is recorded in the tradition of Mujāhid (1/522), the works of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (3/338) and Yahyā Ibn Sallām (2/579).

a chest (*al-tābūt*)⁶⁷² and cast him into the river (*al-yamm*) in order to protect Moses from the mass-execution (*yudhabbiḥu abnā'ahum*). The baby was then found by Āsiā,⁶⁷³ Pharaoh's wife, who was captivated by the baby and afforded him sanctuary from the massacre (*lā taqtuluh*) (28:9). She tried to find him a wet nurse but failed. According to the Qur'ān, this was God's deliberate strategy, wherein He prevented Moses from acquiring any wet nurse except his own mother (28:12). This is the verse that is cited by Ibn Hishām in the narrative of Muḥammad's suckling. The verse declares: "And We had prevented from him [all] wet nurses before, so she said, "Shall I direct you to a household that will be responsible for him for you while they are to him [for his upbringing] sincere?" (28:12). Obviously, there is a similar theme between both narratives, which is that the wet nurse, and the appointment of the wet nurse, is decided by God. In the Qur'ānic story of Moses' suckling, God averts (*wa ḥarramnā*) any wet nurse from being able to nurse Moses, while in the case of Muḥammad, as narrated by Ibn Ishāq, each wet nurse offered to nurse Muḥammad, but all of them refused to take the infant as their foster-son. The similarity of the theme in the account of Moses might influence a reader to view 28:12 as reminiscent of the account of the baby Muḥammad's time as a suckling infant.

The citation of 28:12 in the story of Muḥammad's suckling seems to be based on reasonable grounds. In the case of Ibn Hishām, there are two suggestions which may be offered in order to analyse the reason why 28:12 was cited in the story in the first place. The first is Ibn Hishām, who adduces the verse to cast a light on the linguistic anomaly in the statement of Ibn Ishāq, which is related to the story. It is well known that the *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām is an abridged version of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*. This was stated

⁶⁷² Based on Sahih International and Yusuf Ali's translation. Pickthall translates it as 'the ark'.

⁶⁷³ Her name was not mentioned in the Qur'ān. It is narrated in later works of *tafsīr*.

in the prologue of the work, in which he describes that he narrates only significant or relevant facts to include in his *Sīra*, and refrains from citing any irrelevant materials from the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq. In the story of Muḥammad's time as a suckling infant, Ibn Hishām is transmitting tradition received from Ibn Ishāq. In the passage, Ibn Ishāq claims that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib searches for him (Muḥammad) a wet nurse (*al-ruḍā'a*). The word used by Ibn Ishāq for wet nurse here is *al-ruḍā'a*, which is an unusual term to use.⁶⁷⁴ In order to elucidate the meaning of the word '*al-ruḍā'a*', Ibn Hishām makes an aside comment in which he claims "*al-marādi*" as an explanation for the word *al-ruḍā'a*. In lending credence to this claim, he cites 28:12 to support his proposition and explanation, since the verse itself contains the same word, *al-marādi*. The word is the most apposite, since it is also mentioned in the Qur'ān. Therefore, the citation made by Ibn Hishām needs to be viewed primarily as a linguistic explanation rather than as a particularly Qur'ānic interpretation of the event. This is not the first time that Ibn Hishām makes use of the Qur'ān to elaborate upon the meaning of word he transmits. For example, in other reference, Ibn Hishām employs 6:111 to explain the apparently ambiguous meaning of a word in the poetry of Abū 'Ubayda.⁶⁷⁵

There is also another interpretation for the Qur'ānic reference cited in the story. Ibn Hishām's citation of 28:12 could be regarded as expression of his evaluation of the parallel status of prophethood between Muḥammad and Moses. It is evident that Ibn Hishām frequently mentions traditions that depict and develop similarities between these two prophets in his *Sīra*. For instance, he narrates ḥadīth that present the first revelation of Muḥammad in parallel with the revelation to Moses; and the character

⁶⁷⁴ The word means foster brother rather than wet nurse. The peculiarity in the selection of word is also noticed by al-Suhaylī. He comments on the use of the word in his work. See, al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-Unf*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām, (Bayrūt, 2000), pp.2/101-102.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, p.1/310.

traits of the Quraysh that ensured that they were always questioning Muḥammad is described as sharing similar attributes with the followers of Moses; and the victory of Muḥammad is ascribed in similar terms to the triumph of Moses over Pharaoh.⁶⁷⁶ In some instances, Qur'ānic references are also employed in the association of Muḥammad with Moses, as, for example, in the focus of our study, in verse 28:12, and verse 2:108. The analogy is also sometimes embedded in lines of poetry. For example, in the poetry of 'Abdullah ibn Rawāḥah: "God declared your well-being [as] an affirmation of Moses, and a triumph as a victory to whom He granted."⁶⁷⁷ In the poetry of 'Abbās Ibn Mirdās he states: "and Muḥammad is a servant, a messenger of God who will not go astray nor oppress; we found him (Muḥammad) a Prophet, like Moses".⁶⁷⁸ Moreover, Ibn Hishām also narrates a ḥadīth concerning how the Prophet himself embodied and represented himself as the Prophet Moses and 'Alī as the Prophet Hārūn (Aaron), Moses' brother. This frequent analogous repetition and association of Muḥammad as a corresponding prophet to Moses implies how the concept is substantiated very clearly in Ibn Hishām's view. It is, therefore, reasonable to propose that the citation of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's suckling is a representation of his thought regarding the clear correspondence of status between Muḥammad and Moses.

The association of Muḥammad's suckling period with Moses' did not only occur in the ninth century. Most likely because of its similar theme, some scholars of the later period might have also made a connection between them. For example Ibn 'Āshūr (d. 1394/1973) the scholar of fourteenth/twentieth century, in his commentary of 28:12,

⁶⁷⁶ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, p.1/238, 1/548, 2/277.

⁶⁷⁷ He says: *fathabbatallahu mā a'ṭaka min ḥasanin tathbīta Mūsa wa naṣran kalladhī nuṣīrū*. Ibid, p.2/374.

⁶⁷⁸ He says: *bi anna Muḥammadan 'abdun rasūlun li rabbi lā yaḍillu walā yajūru, wajadnāhu nabīyyan mithla Mūsā*. See Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, p.2/451.

adduces the account of Ḥalīma and her nursing to Muḥammad as a parallel example to the Moses' infancy narrative.⁶⁷⁹ Without referring to 28:12, other scholars may have analogized these two accounts as conveying a similar concept. For example, al-Manṣurfūrī considers that the exalted status of Ḥalīma was conferred to her is the consequence of her great deed in nurturing the Prophet, as similar to how God exalted the status of Āsiā in protecting and raising Moses.⁶⁸⁰ Ṣiddīqī likens the negligence of wet nurses to wet-nurse Muḥammad as resembling the inability of wet nurse to suckle Moses.⁶⁸¹ The similarity of themes between the storylines of Moses and Muḥammad might invite the scholar to deem the account of Muḥammad's time as a suckling infant as reminiscent of Moses' narrative. It also therefore possible that a reading of 28:12, might foresee the period of Muḥammad's suckling, or vice versa.

In conclusion, there are two possible reasons which lead Ibn Hishām to adduce 28:12 in his account of Muḥammad's time as a suckling infant. The first is to highlight and underscore the apparent linguistic irregularity in the narration of Ibn Ishāq. The second is to indicate and give credence to the similarity between the accounts of two prophets. And the third possibility is that either he or Ibn Ishāq constructed the story on the basis of the Moses story in the Qur'ān.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibn 'Ashūr, Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, Tunis, Dār al-Tunisiyya li al-Nashr, 1984, 20/84.

⁶⁸⁰ Al-Manṣurfūrī, Muḥammad Sulaymān, *Raḥma lil 'Ālamīn*, (Riyād: Dār al-Salām li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', n.d), p.1/526.

⁶⁸¹ Ṣiddīqī, Muḥammad Yāsin, *al-Hajamāt al-Mughraḍa 'Alā al-Tārīkh al-Islāmī*, trans. Sāmīr Ibrāhīm, (Dār al-Ṣahwa li al-Nashr, 1988), p.32.

5.9 QUR'ĀNIC REFERENCE TO THE PROPHET'S MUḤAMMAD'S CHILDHOOD

Islamic tradition portrays Muḥammad's childhood as a somewhat limited and unpromising experience. Even though Muḥammad's origins are recorded as being from a noble clan, he is nevertheless depicted as experiencing a somewhat humble lifestyle; and indeed, at times, a lifestyle of considerable deprivation. In fact there is a passage in the Qur'ān that is employed by many scholars to portray the poverty and deprivation of his childhood. In this passage, Muḥammad is described as an orphan, lost and wandering (*ḍallān*) and poor. The Qur'ān pronounces: 'Did He not find you an orphan and give [you] refuge? And He found you lost and guided [you], And He found you poor and made [you] self-sufficient' (93:6-8). Even though these verses have been the subject of controversy among some scholars (including Rippin),⁶⁸² the passage seems to have been accepted by majority of the Muslim scholars, since most of these concur that the verses are indeed a reference to Muḥammad's early life.⁶⁸³ What is more, the direct and clear message embedded in the verses might lead reader to perceive it as an apt description of Muḥammad's early life. Beside this, there is also another verse, which

⁶⁸² See, "Muḥammad in the Qur'ān: Reading Scripture in The 21st Century," In H. Motzki, *The Biography Of Muḥammad: The Issue Of The Sources*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), pp.298-309.

⁶⁸³ These verses appear in Sīra sources, albeit with differing usages and interpretations. Some scholars like Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, al-Suhaylī use the verses in the section of 'the halt of revelation' (*faṭra al-wahy*) and assert that the verse was revealed to remind Muḥammad about God's mercies on him. Al-Bayhaqī and al-Ṣālihī employ the verses to show God's generosity in ameliorating Muḥammad's life. In his work, al-Ṣālihī pictures Muḥammad as being among the poor (*al-faqīr*), and God bestowing prosperity upon him. Using the verse as reference, Aḥmad Ghalush suggests that Muḥammad's prosperity was bestowed upon him only after his marriage to Khadija. 'Abd al-Muḥsin depicts the difficulty that Muḥammad experienced in his early life as God's wisdom in nurturing the Prophet's personality. See, Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, p.1/135; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, p.1/241; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, p.7/62; al-Suhaylī, *Rawḍ al-Unf*, p.2/281; al-Ṣālihī, *Subul al-Hudā*, p.1/487; Ghalush, Aḥmad, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya wa al-Da'wa fi 'Ahd al-Makkī*, (Muassasaal-Risāla, 2003), p.1/241; al-Badr, 'Abd al-Muḥsin, *Min Akhlāq al-Rasūl al-Karīm*, (Dār Ibn Khuzayma, 2000).

attracts our attention even more directly, which is the use of 94:1, as another Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life.

Contrary to the assertions made in the works of some modern scholars on the Qur'ānic commentary and Muḥammad's life, the notion of 94:1 as reference to the event of the opening of Muḥammad's breast may be made. Scholars like Ṭaṭṭawī,⁶⁸⁴ Ḥikmat Yāsīn,⁶⁸⁵ Wahba al-Zuhaylī,⁶⁸⁶ and al-Dabīsī,⁶⁸⁷ explicitly mention both the event and the verse, as there is a solid, viable connection between these two elements. However, when exploring early Islamic sources, it is very difficult to find early scholars of the eighth and ninth century who cite 94:1 as a specific reference to the Prophet's early life. As far as our observation goes, there are only two scholars from the ninth century (which is probably the date of the earliest connection made) who associate the event of the opening of the Prophet's breast with verse 94:1.

The first connection is made by al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan* while the other is by Hūd ibn Muḥakkam al-Hawārī (d. c.a 280/893)⁶⁸⁸, the oldest extant Kharijite Qur'ānic commentary.⁶⁸⁹ Probably due to his association with the Ibādī doctrine, al-Hawārī's commentary is apparently not very popular among Sunni sources. This connection between 94:1 and the extraordinary event had in fact become a popular notion centuries

⁶⁸⁴ Ṭaṭṭawī, Muḥammad Sayyid, *Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, (al-Qāhira: Dār Nahḍa, 1998), p.15/436.

⁶⁸⁵ In his exegetic Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān, Ḥikmat clearly relates the verse with an incident in the Prophet's childhood. He employs consciously the tradition of Muslim ibn al-Hajaj rather than al-Tirmidhī. See, Yāsīn, Ḥikmat ibn Bashīr, *Mawsū'a al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Masbūr Min al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*, (al-Madīna al-Nabawiyya: Dār al-Ma'thar, 1999), p.4/646.

⁶⁸⁶ Al-Zuhaylī, Wahba Ibn Mustafā, *Tafsīr al-Munīr*, (Dimashq, Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'asir, 1418H), p.30/294.

⁶⁸⁷ Al-Dabīsī, Muḥammad ibn Mustafā, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya bayna al-Āthār al-Marwiyya wa al-Āyāt al-Qur'āniyya*, (al-Qāhira: al-Jāmi'a 'Ain Shams, 2010), p.1/186.

⁶⁸⁸ Regarding his period of life, it was suggested by the editor of his tafsir that Hūd died around 280H. See, al-Huwari, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allah al-Azīz*, ed. Balhāj Sharīfī, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 17-18.

⁶⁸⁹ Gilliot, Claude, 'Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval' in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Brill, 2002, v2. 99-123.

later. Most of the scholars to acknowledge the connection between the verse and the event mention al-Tirmidhī as a major source. The discourse can be found in the work of al-Qurṭubī,⁶⁹⁰ Ibn Kathīr, al-Sharbīnī, Ibn ‘Āshūr, Ibn Ḥajar.⁶⁹¹ According to al-Sharbīnī, this verse seems to be an allusion to the event that occurred during Muḥammad’s childhood,⁶⁹² while Ibn Kathīr specifically states that the incident occurred during the Prophet ascent to heaven (*al-isrā’*).⁶⁹³ Furthermore, Ibn ‘Āshūr aptly identifies the fact that al-Tirmidhī is the one who initiated the connection in the first place (*wa huwa ṣāhir ṣanī’ al-Tirmidhī*).⁶⁹⁴ Interestingly, Ibn ‘Āshūr and al-Alūsī assert that with a profusion of traditions reporting the occurrence, not one of the traditions could be an actual interpretation of the meaning of the word *sharḥ* (open) in the verse.⁶⁹⁵ This implicitly suggests that the basis of connection between the verse and the incident was a mere personal interpretation of al-Tirmidhī, and therefore lacks authority.

The matter in question now is what reasons made al-Tirmidhī connect this verse with the incident? As discussed previously, the connection is made between the verse and the event inscribed in the chapter of *tafsīr* (Qur’ānic commentary) in the Sunan of al-Tirmidhī. To interpret the meaning of 94:1, al-Tirmidhī quotes the ḥadīth that conveys the story of the opening of Muḥammad’s breast. By inserting the ḥadīth in the interpretation of 94:1, al-Tirmidhī quite obviously intends the event to be an interpretation of the verse. In other words, this verse according to al-Tirmidhī is a

⁶⁹⁰ Al-Qurṭubī, Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardunī, (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1964), p.20/104.

⁶⁹¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, ed. Muhib al-Dīn, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma’rifa, 1379H), p.8/712.

⁶⁹² Al-Sharbīnī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Khātīb, *al-Sirāj al-Munīr*, (al-Qāhira: Maṭba‘a Būlāq, 1285H), p.4/554.

⁶⁹³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, ed. Sāmī Salāma, (Dār Tayyiba li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī’, 1999), p.8/429.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibn ‘Āshūr, Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, (Dār al-Tunisiyya li al-Nashr, 1984), p.30/409.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid; Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, ed. ‘Alī ‘Aṭiyya, (Bayrūt: Dār Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1415H), p.15/388.

specifically Qur'ānic reference to the event of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. It seems appropriate to suggest that his creative elaboration of the verse might be one of the factors that leads to this connection between the Qur'ān and the incident in Muḥammad's early life.

Further investigation on the text of ḥadīth suggests that al-Tirmidhī might have chosen this ḥadīth intentionally. This may be deduced as the result of the similarity between terms employed in it, and similar ones in the Qur'ān. At the end of the *matn*, al-Tirmidhī has made a brief note about the ḥadīth itself. He is apparently aware that the ḥadīth is also narrated by a few other transmitters: he acknowledges that “the ḥadīth was [also] narrated by Hishām al-Dustūwā'ī and Hammām from Qatāda, and also [narrated] from Abū Dhar.” An analysis of the *matn* narrated by Hishām and Hammām reveals that both of them use the words *fashuqqa min al-naḥr ilā marāq al-baṭn* (and my belly was cut open from upper part of chest to lower part of belly), which is totally different from the narration that is used by al-Tirmidhī.⁶⁹⁶ Al-Tirmidhī decides to preserve the narration from Sa'īd Ibn Abī 'Arūba, the version that employed a phrase that is, apparently, similar to a verse of the Qur'ān. In Sa'īd's version, the phrase *fashūriḥa/fasharaḥa* is used; and this phrase seems to be more aligned with the wording of 94:1 of the Qur'ān. In fact, the word *fasharaḥa/fashūriḥa* shares the same root word with *nashraḥ* of the Qur'ān. It might also be possible that the similarity and semantic connection between the words inspired al-Tirmidhī to initiate a connection between the incident and verse 94:1 of the Qur'ān.

⁶⁹⁶ The hadith of Hishām al-Dustūwā'ī and Hammād is narrated by Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, Muslim and al-Nasā'ī. See, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, ed. Al-Arna'ūt, (Muassasa al-Risāla, 2001), p.29/370; al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.4/109; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.1/151; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, p.1/217.

The same version of ḥadīth is also narrated by Yaḥyā ibn Salām in his *Tafsīr*, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* and al-Fākihī in *Akbār al-Makka*.⁶⁹⁷ Not one of them has ever connected the ḥadīth, or the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast, with 94:1 of the Qur'ān. Yaḥyā, the scholar of *tafsir*, used the ḥadīth merely as an explanation of 17:1 of the Qur'ān, in which the verse is perceived as a revelation of the Prophet's night journey to heaven.

The connection initiated by al-Tirmidhī might also be viewed as his own personal intellectual innovation. He is celebrated for his use of the novel inventive term of *ḥasan*, an intermediate status of ḥadīth between *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḍa'īf*. On the other hand, Al-Kandahlawī suggests that *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* was the first ḥadīth work to deliver a discussion about comparative law.⁶⁹⁸ Furthermore he was also recognised by Ibn Rajb as the first ḥadīth critic to arrange a discussion about *al-'Ilal* (Defects of ḥadīth) in thematic order.⁶⁹⁹ His original and resourceful reading of ḥadīth is also acknowledged when he refuses to accede to the opinion of al-Bukhārī in the ḥadīth of *istinjā*'.⁷⁰⁰ Apart from his highly evident admiration of the Prophet, it is his innovative explanation of the verse which might be one of the factors that leads to this connection between the Qur'ān and the incident of Muḥammad's early life.

Apart from his creative interpretation, the developing tradition of the veneration of the Prophet and al-Tirmidhī's own personality, drive and creativity, along with his passionate reverence for the Prophet himself, might contribute to the initiation of a link between Muḥammad's life and the Qur'ān. Besides his *Sunan*, Al-Tirmidhī was also

⁶⁹⁷ Yaḥyā Ibn Sallām, *Tafsīr*, p.1/101; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, p.1/147-149; al-Fakihi, *Akhbār al-Makka*, p.2/23.

⁶⁹⁸ Al-Kankuhī, *Kawkab al-Durrī 'Alā Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Zakariyya al-Kandahlawī, (Lajna al-'Ulamā' Lakahnu, 1975), p.1/3.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibn Rajb, *Sharḥ 'Ilal al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Hammām Sa'īd, (Riyād: Maktaba al-Rushd, 2001), p.1/345.

⁷⁰⁰ This has been discussed in the section of al-Tirmidhī's brief biography.

celebrated for his renowned life's work, *al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyya*, a work that manifests his elevated admiration for the Prophet's ethical and physical perfections. Based on around 400 ḥadīth, al-Tirmidhī delineates every single detail of Muḥammad's physical beauty and his excellent qualities.⁷⁰¹ Even though the event of the opening of the Prophet's breast was not included in his *al-Shamā'il*, the event clearly illustrates the process of cleansing and purifying the Prophet's being. It could be considered as an element of *al-Shamā'il* in al-Tirmidhī's *Sunan* as well. By linking the occurrence with a Qur'ānic reference, al-Tirmidhī appears to give a picture of divine intervention through the purification and revelation of the inner beauty of the Prophet, which, at the same time providing a clear significance to this miraculous narrative.

Nevertheless, there is another conjecture that could be proposed. The connection is made in all probability rather earlier than al-Tirmidhī's *Sunan*; but it is revealed only by him, or has survived only in his and al-Hawārī's work. Based on al-Hawārī's elaboration of the verse, he starts his commentary with the words 'they said' (*dhakarū*). This seems a clear allusion to a group of people who are already in possession of the concept, and who subsequently convey the idea of a specific connection between the verse and the event. Since Al-Hawārī was contemporary with al-Tirmidhī, his statement that refers to the group of people before him who had made this connection previously implies that there was already a group of scholars who deemed the verse as a Qur'ānic reference to the event of Muḥammad's breast. Therefore, this might suggest that al-Tirmidhī and al-Hawārī are drawing on earlier traditions of belief that had not been documented.

⁷⁰¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyya*, ed. 'Izzat 'Ubayd al-Da'as, (Bayrūt: Dār al-ḥadīth, 1988), p.5.

Not only in the interpretation of 28:12,⁷⁰² this verse (94:1) has also been used by some scholars to make a comparison between previous prophets and Muḥammad. They see the verse as a continuation of God's blessing upon the Prophet, and a higher status being afforded to Muḥammad, compared with other previous prophets. In this case, Moses again is the subject of comparison. If Moses had to ask God to expand his breast (heart), Muḥammad was bestowed the blessing without the need to ask. Al-Māturīdī (853-944) in his commentary of verse 20:25 makes this comparison.⁷⁰³ The passage contains the story of how God demanded of Moses to meet Pharaoh and convey to him His message of truth. Upon receiving the instruction, Moses prays for God's blessing. The verses say: Go to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed, [Moses] said, "My Lord, expand (*ishrah*) for me my breast [with assurance], and ease for me my task, And untie the knot from my tongue, That they may understand my speech (20:24-28).

When explaining verse 20:25, Al-Māturīdī adduces 94:1 to make a comparison between Muḥammad and Moses. It seems likely that Al-Māturīdī's primary aim is to highlight the higher level of the Prophet Muḥammad compared with other prophets. Indeed, Al-Māturīdī was a master of Islamic theology. One may say that his reading of the Qur'ān is reliant on a theological discourse in which a Muslim will theologially deem Muḥammad as the greatest prophet. But associating with other races and religions that believed in other prophets might also spark a subject of discussion specifically about the status of Muḥammad as a prophet. As we have seen previously, surrounded by a similarly rich religious and cultural milieu and conditions, innovative and diverse branches of knowledge have emerged, known as *dalā'il*. It is not surprising, therefore, that the concept of the superiority of Muḥammad as the final prophet achieved

⁷⁰² The verse that used by Ibn Hishām in the story of Muḥammad's and his wet nurse.

⁷⁰³ Al-Māturīdī, Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, *Tafsīr Al-Māturīdī*, ed. Majdī Baslūm, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2005), p.7/277.

ascendancy during this period due to a process of familiarisation, or even, possibly, of assimilation, between Muslims and other religious groups. It is worthy of note that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the master of ḥadīth, also made a similar comparison between Muḥammad and Moses, wherein he conveyed his opinion about the notion of ‘seeing’ God. By employing verse 94:1 as his reference, Aḥmad explains that God has expanded Muḥammad’s heart in order to witness God (by implication, with his heart), while Moses’ heart was expanded by God as preparation to speak with Him.⁷⁰⁴ Evidently, Ibn Hishām is another scholar who places Muḥammad side by side with Moses, to effect a comparison or juxtaposition, as if they exist as countertypes. This comparison, by using the same verse, is also evident in the later works of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī,⁷⁰⁵ and al-Kharkūshī.⁷⁰⁶ It is also not impossible therefore, that within a medley of multi-religious communities, the idea of positing the event of the opening of Muḥammad’s breast in 94:1 so as to make apparent a comparative evaluation, has led al-Tirmidhī to perceive an authenticity and legitimacy through such a connection.

5.10 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Qur’ān-*Sīra* Connection

Based on the present analysis, each branch of literature has revealed significant information about the Prophet’s early life and, more importantly, has cast a light on the nature of the connection and relationship between the Qur’ān and the narratives of Muḥammad’s early life. The rarity of Qur’ānic references in discussion of

⁷⁰⁴ Al-Yaḥṣubī, Qādī ‘Iyyād ibn Mūsā, *al-Shifā’ bi Ta’rīf Huqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, ‘Umman, (Dār al-Fayhā’, 1407H), p.1/381.

⁷⁰⁵ Al-Makkī, Abū Ṭālib Muḥammad ibn ‘Aṭīyya, *Qūt al-Qulūb fī Mu’āmalat al-Maḥbūb*, ed. ‘Āṣim Ibrāhīm, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2005), p.2/108.

⁷⁰⁶ Al-Kharkūshī, *Sharf al-Muṣṭafā*, (Makka: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1424), p.4/121.

Muḥammad's early life implies the early phase of connection between these two literatures. Information embedded in various genres of literature of the ninth century about Muḥammad's early life and the available Qur'ānic references to it do indeed, contribute significantly to illuminate the nature, context and rationale of the initial association of the Qur'ān with *sīra*. There is a number of reasons which may be proposed as the principal stimulus which provides a spark to an early connection between the Qur'ān and the *sīra*. They may be listed as follows:

1- The Use of the Qur'ān as Lexical Explanation.

While some modern scholars believed that the stories in the *sīra* are created at a later date to explain or give further illumination upon apparent ambiguities in the use of particular words or phrases in the Qur'ān,⁷⁰⁷ the connection made by Ibn Hishām indicates that the reverse is the case. In his *sīra*, specifically in his use of 28:12, Ibn Hishām employs the Qur'ān as lexical tool to support his thought and interpretation of the narration, which he recounts from his master, Ibn Ishāq. It is undeniable that some narratives in the *sīra* might have their basic origin in the the Qur'ānic pericope; but in this specific sample, however, the insertion of Qur'ānic verses is obviously presented to elaborate upon the narrative which he related from Ibn Ishāq. This, at the same time, implies that Qur'ānic elements in the *sīra* could have emerged later. For another instance, in explaining the features of an angel that came to help Muslims in the Battle

⁷⁰⁷ Some modern scholars believe that on certain occasions, narratives in the *sīra* are created later to explain apparently ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān. Scholars who uphold this proposition include Lammens and Rippin. In contrast, Rubin is a strong opponent of this idea. He disagrees with this, labelling it as a misleading outlook of the *sīra*. His analysis claims that the *sīra* comes wholly independently of any Qur'ānic origin. It is only in a later period that Qur'ānic references were employed in the *sīra* for various particular reasons. Commenting on Lammens and Rubin, Raven concludes that: "Both points of view are extremes, but there are enough cases where the exegetical impulse is obvious and where no qur'ānization can be discovered." See Rubin, *The Eye*, pp.226-233; Raven, Wim. 'Sīra and the Qur'ān,' in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Second Edition.

of Uḥud, Ibn Hishām was again found to employ a Qur’ānic reference to elucidate the word *sīmā’* (mark) used by Ibn Ishāq.⁷⁰⁸ In these specific cases, it shows that the Qur’ān has been employed as an auxiliary tool, and as such, has a secondary status in edifying the phrase adduced by the author.

2- The *Sīra* as Exegetical Tool

Indeed, in other cases, the *sīra* is employed as a tool of elaboration for Qur’ānic verses. This can be deduced in the connection made by al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan*. To elaborate the meaning of 94:1, al-Tirmidhī, in the chapter of *tafsīr*, cites the tradition of the event of the opening of Muḥammad’s breast which, by implication, may be viewed as al-Tirmidhī’s own enterprise in his allusion to the event as a tool of elaboration for verse 94:1. In his work, Birkeland suggests that the story of the opening of the Prophet’s breast is ‘exegetical materialisation’,⁷⁰⁹ an innovation of expanded narrative, to elaborate the meaning of Qur’ānic verses. This proposition might be contested, however, in the context of al-Hawārī’s tradition. According to his narration, the idea of connection between 94:1 and the event of the opening of Muḥammad’s breast is, apparently, a portrayal of an earlier generation’s thought regarding the meaning of 94:1. If the origin of this thought can be proved, or traced, there is a probability that the idea of Qur’ānic connection with the event is actually an original early Muslim elaboration of the story, and not an invented narrative created in later period to amplify the vague meaning of Qur’ānic verses.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, ed. Mustafā al-Saqā, (Miṣr, 1955), p.2/107.

⁷⁰⁹ Birkeland, *The Legend of the opening of Muhammed’s breast*, (Oslo, 1955), 40 ; Rubin, *Eye of Beholder*, 59-74 ; Buhl, F, et al. ‘Muḥammad,’ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. ed. P. Bearman, et al. Brill Online, [accessed 28 March 2015].

3- Authorization of the Narratives.

All of the narratives of Muḥammad's early life in this study have a connection with Qur'ānic references, apparently related to somewhat miraculous elements in Muḥammad's early life. There is first his astounding pre-existence in the loins of previous prophets, the extraordinary victory of the Meccan populace over the elephant army that appeared soon before his birth, amazing occurrences during his wet-nursing period with Halima and the phenomenal event of the opening of his breast. All these accounts share one similar element: their miraculous features. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that, in the era of the Mu'tazila ascendancy, along with their idea of rationalisation of Islamic thought established as court policy, the insertion of Qur'ānic references in these miraculous narratives occur to give weight and authority to the accounts. In fact, as reported by al-Jishumī, some scholars of Basra did not recognise the extraordinary elements in Muḥammad's early life as miracles at all. 'Abd al-Jabbār is recorded as yet another later Mu'tazila scholar who refused to accept miraculous elements in Muḥammad's early life as the Prophet's own miracles.⁷¹⁰ He asserts that any putative miracle of the Prophet would have happened only after his prophetic call. By adducing the Qur'ān as their reference to the miraculous events of Muḥammad's early life, Muslim scholars appear to consider it as bestowing an overwhelmingly empowering authority to the reports, in order to allow the narratives to be accepted among a Muslim audience, especially in the period where Mu'tazilas forced scholars to embrace its doctrine.⁷¹¹

⁷¹⁰ Al-Alūsī in his *Tafsīr* refutes the idea of 'Abd al-Jabbār, arguing that there are a lot of miraculous occurrences that taken place before Muḥammad's prophethood and Muslim recognised it and call these as al-Irhāṣ, which literally means 'laying foundation' before the prophetic vocation. See, Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, ed. 'Alī 'Aṭīyya, (Bayrūt: Dār Kutb al-Ilmiyya, 1415H), p.15/387.

⁷¹¹ Ibn Sa'd was among the scholars who had been ordered by the Caliph court to declare his support toward Mu'tazila's doctrine. Al-Jāḥiẓ was actually a supporter of Mu'tazila's doctrine, but appears reverted in the reign of al-Mutawakkil.

4- The Qur'ānisation of the Nature of the Story.

Modern studies of the origin of the *sīra* acknowledge the influence of previous scriptures and their elements within the *sīra* narrative. Some important *sīra* scholars are recognised as well-versed in biblical and other pre-Islamic heritage, including Wahb ibn Munabbih, on whom, according to Khoury, Ibn Ishāq is highly dependent as a source of biblical narratives, and indeed, Ibn Hishām establishes him (Wahb ibn Munabbih) as major reference in his *Kitāb al-Tījān*;⁷¹² and Hishām al-Kalbī, who according to Horovitz, is the source of biblical pre-history for Ibn Saʿd.⁷¹³ Such scholars are regarded as opening the floodgates to the insertion of ‘foreign’ features in the *sīra* narratives. Some narratives of Muḥammad’s early life are clearly similar to, or inspired by, previous biblical prophet narratives, such as the concept of pre-existence (as traced by Rubin),⁷¹⁴ the sign of the emergence of the prophet in the miraculous event of the elephant army⁷¹⁵ and the extraordinary speed and marks of physical maturity in Muḥammad’s wet-nurse period with Ḥalīma, which, according to Raven, indicates a parallel occurrence with Jesus’ precocity in the Gospels of the Infancy.⁷¹⁶ Besides, as discussed before, Muslim scholars such as Ibn Hishām and others⁷¹⁷ consistently make parallel comparison between Muḥammad and biblical prophets. The profuse ‘foreign’ elements embedded in the Islamic *sīra* might not cast a favourable image upon the

⁷¹² See, Khoury, R.G.. ‘Wahb b. Munabbih,’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. ed. P. Bearman, et. al., Brill Online, 2015; Raven, Wim, ‘Sīra and the Qur’ān,’ in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Brill Online, 2015.

⁷¹³ Horovitz, Josef, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors*, ed. Lawrence Conrad, (New Jersey, 2002), p.120.

⁷¹⁴ See, “More light on Muḥammad’s pre-existence: Qur’anic and Post-qur’anic Perspectives”, in Andrew Rippin and Roberto Tottoli, eds., *Books and written culture of the Islamic world: studies presented to Claude Gilliot on the occasion of his 75th birthday*, Brill, Islamic History and Civilization 113 (Leiden, Boston, 2015), pp. 288-311.

⁷¹⁵ Muir deems the stories as analogous with the attack of Persian and Gauls on Delphian Temple, in which it might be considered as having a foreign origin. See, Muir, William. *The Life of Mahomet*. 1861. Reprint. (London: Forgotten Books, 2013), pp.289-90.

⁷¹⁶ Raven, Wim. ‘Sīra and the Qur’ān,’ *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, Brill Online, 2015.

⁷¹⁷ Including Aḥmad and al-Tirmidhī, see Chapter Five.

Prophet of Islam among Muslims. It is reasonable, therefore, to suggest that the process of Qur'ānisation was developed in order to neutralise the 'foreign' accounts and provide a more Qur'ānic image to the final prophet. In the *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām, the process of how God protects Muḥammad from being wet-nursed by any other woman except Ḥalīma has noticeably similar concepts, of protection and God's plan for His prophet, with the narrative of Moses. Apart from providing a lexical explanation of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*, the insertion of 28:12 as Qur'ānic reference to this event might (arguably) also be perceived as Ibn Hishām's effort to Qur'ānise the narrative.

Al-Jāhiz's Qur'ānic reference is another instance. In the story of the companion of the elephant, he provides a considerable amount of material from pre-Islamic poetry to convince the reader that the story has a historical value. Rubin even traces that the wording of the reports is apparently free from Qur'ānic terminology or phrases, which indicates the independent origin of the story from Qur'ānic pericope. At the end of his explanation, however, al-Jahiz begins to adduce Q105, not only to give an authorization of the story but also so that it may be seen as an embellishment of the report with a specific Qur'ānic element. A comparable style might also be traced in Ibn Sa'd's account of Muḥammad's genealogy (i.e. as a pre-existent being). In his account, 26:219 is used as Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's genealogy. Since the concept of pre-existence has its basis in another religious tradition⁷¹⁸ the insertion of 26:219 could be regarded as a part of the process of Qur'ānisation, insofar as it is an ornamentation of the account. Analysing the verse, one might notice that the verse has no apparent connection with genealogical discussion. It would therefore seem judicious to deem the

⁷¹⁸ See Uri Rubin, 'Pre-Existence and Light-Aspects of the Concept of Nur Muhammad', *Israel Oriental Studies* 5, (Tel Aviv University, 1975), pp.62–119; 'More light on Muḥammad's pre-existence: Qur'anic and Post-qur'anic Perspectives', in Andrew Rippin and Roberto Tottoli, eds., *Books and written culture of the Islamic world: studies presented to Claude Gilliot on the occasion of his 75th birthday*, Brill, Islamic History and Civilization 113 (Leiden, Boston, 2015), pp. 288-311.

involvement of 26:219 in the Prophet's genealogical tradition as an element in the process of the Qur'ānisation of the *sīra* account as well.

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the intentions of this study are to explore Qur'ānic references to the Prophet Muḥammad's early life as recounted in specific ninth century sources, and to analyse early Muslim understanding of these references. Chapter Two highlights the disputed Qur'ānic verses employed by the authors of *sīra* as specific references to the Prophet's early life. The chapter traces the earliest references employed by early Muslim scholars and provides comparative analysis with the work of *tafsīr*, the group of Qur'ānic scholars who are perceived as possessing authority in exegetical studies, in order to demonstrate the subtle nuances and differences between the understandings and emphases of these scholars, and to observe the development of Muslim thought regarding these Qur'ānic references. Taking these points further, the works of *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il* are examined in Chapters Three and Four in order to delve deeper and elicit a broader picture of Muslim thought about the Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life. Chapter Five provides a summary of the socio-religious and intellectual setting of the ninth century, and analyses all Qur'ānic references to the Prophet's early life that may be found in various Islamic literature sources within this period. The chapter also casts light on the reasons that might lead to the emergence of particular connections between the narratives of Muḥammad's early life with the Qur'ān. The present chapter looks over the previous chapters and discusses their main findings.

6.2 Revisiting the Research Questions

To analyse whether the study has provided salient answers to the questions posed, it is inevitable to revisit, at this final stage, the main questions of the study. In order to gain a clearer picture of the connection between the Qur'ān and the narratives of the Prophet's early life, the researcher posits four major questions at the outset of the study.

6.2.1 First and Second Questions

The first two questions were proposed in order to explore the earliest connection between the Qur'ān and the narrative of Muḥammad's early life. The research has elicited specific questions. In the first instance, when was the first Qur'ānic reference initiated by Muslim scholars as reference to the Prophet's early life? Secondly, who initiated the reference? Finally, what precisely are the Qur'ānic verses that are employed by Muslim scholars of the ninth century as references to the Prophet's early life?

To explore the first and second questions, Chapter Two undertook a thorough analysis on the body of Islamic literature in order to trace any connection made by Muslim authors between the Qur'ān and the story of the Prophet's early life. Exploring the works of the eighth and ninth centuries, with the support of searching device for Islamic source, the *Maktabah Shāmila*, Chapter Two of the present study has concluded that the earliest connections between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's early life are to be found in works of the ninth century. Chapter Two has also elicited that what is apparent in the available sources is information which reveals that the ninth century is a period in which a clear connection begins to become apparent. It is worthy of note that even though all the narratives about Muḥammad's early life are structured on the framework of

reference initiated by Ibn Ishāq, the earliest complete extant account of the Prophet's biography, Ibn Ishāq himself, nevertheless finds it hard to lay claim to a direct connection between the events in Muḥammad's early life and the Qur'ān.

Delving deeper in the works of ninth century, the study also confirms that there are only four Qur'ānic references adduced by the authors of the ninth century as a references to the Prophet's early life. The verses are: Q105, which has been used by al-Jahiz as a sign of the emergence of the Prophet; verse 28:12, adduced by Ibn Hishām; verse 26:219 that was employed by Ibn Sa'd in explaining the Prophet's genealogy; and verse 94:1 that is cited by al-Tirmidhī in the narrative of the opening of Muḥammad's breast.

The situation does, however, change gradually in later centuries. As time went by, the Prophet's early life became more Qur'ānic; that is to say, the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *sīra* became more intimately connected. Qur'ānic references that are absent in the earliest works of *sīra* appear to blossom prolifically in various kinds of literature of the ninth century. Muslim scholars began to picture his early life from a specifically Qur'ānic point of view. In fact, these Qur'ānic biographical perspectives found in non-*tafsīr* works have influenced the later mufasssīrūn to include these historical interpretations in their *tafsīr* works, even though such interpretations had never been mentioned by early *mufasssīrūn*. The emergence of later Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life in the works of the ninth century implies, therefore, a clear development of Muslim thought concerning the relationship between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's biography.

6.2.2 Third Question

To analyse further concerning early Muslim perspective about the connection between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's early life, the researcher has posted a third question, in order to examine Muslim viewpoint on this specific issue: how do Muslim scholars of the ninth century view these verses?

This is, indeed, a very interesting question to be examined. In Chapter Two, the present study confirms that the Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life are to be found mostly in the non-*tafsīr* works, namely the works of *ḥadīth*, *sīra* and *dalā'il*. In other words, scholars of *tafsīr* appear themselves as not making any specific connection between those selected verses and the Prophet's biography. The absence of historical reading in the interpretation of any *mufasssīr* concerning the disputed verses has lead the researcher to explore the non-*tafsīr* works which are the works of *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il*, in consecutive chapters. Chapters three and four were employed as primary tools to scrutinise Qur'ānic verses in the non-*tafsīr* works. The findings are not only very interesting, but revealing too. Analysis conducted within these two chapters elicits that the connection between the Qur'ān and the narratives of Muḥammad's early life does, in fact, have its origin in these non-*tafsīr* works.

Even though these Qur'ānic references were found in these sources, an analysis of these has provided us with a picture of a somewhat fragile connection between Qur'ānic references and the narrative of the Prophet's early life. Among the works of *ḥadīth*, al-Tirmidhī is the only author to connect a verse with one of the incidents occurring in Muḥammad's early life. Al-Bukhārī and Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal make no connection, even though the same verses that are used by the author of *sīra* as an allusion to Muḥammad's

early life are highly evident in the works of both. Apart from their appearance in the text, no connection is made between the Qur'ānic verses and Muḥammad's early life. Aḥmad and al-Bukhārī provide a different explanation of the Qur'ānic verses from that of the *sīra*'s authors. For instance, in the interpretation of 94:1, al-Bukhari clearly demonstrates his arrival at a different interpretation and perspective. Furthermore, while al-Tirmidhī equates verse 94:1 with the event of the 'opening' or 'expansion' of Muḥammad's breast, al-Bukhārī concludes that the verse should be read metaphorically, not literally. The account concerns how Allah 'expands' Muḥammad's breast metaphorically, in order to achieve the spiritual conditions necessary to accept the Islamic revelation. The same occurs in the reading of Aḥmad in exploring the meaning of 26:219, in which he offers understandings and interpretations that clearly have no bearing on any of the incidents of the Prophet's early life. This, indeed, lends support to our hypothesis that the connection made by the authors of *sīra* is not actually a widely-accepted (nor indeed, popular) line of discourse of this period. It was initiated by some scholars of the ninth century, and it expanded gradually in that specific context.

A similar phenomenon is also found in the works of *dalā'il*. Indeed, *dalā'il* works have provided us with a plethora of information about Muḥammad's biography. In fact, in later times, this literature became recognised as one of the sources of the *sīra*. However, despite its decisive coverage of Muḥammad's biography, Qur'ānic reference to the Prophet's early life is hard to find. The rarity of this connection indicates the fragility of the connection between the Qur'ān and a verifiable account of Muḥammad's early life. Chapter Four has shown us how the same verses that are used by the *sīra* authors can be found readily in the works of *dalā'il*. Ibn Rabban, for example, cites 94:1 in his *al-Din wa al-Dawla*. He adduces a different explanation, however, which bears no relation to the events of Muḥammad's early life as depicted by the later scholars of *sīra*.

Basing our analysis on the examination of the works explored in Chapters Three and Four, it is fair to conclude that among Muslim scholars of the ninth century, it is unusual for them to allude to or connect verses from the Qur'ān as specific references to Muḥammad's early life. The rarity of Qur'ānic references to the Prophet's early life in the works of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il* does, indeed, substantiate our proposition that this line of thought is actually not prevalent among Muslims at this particular period. It emerges only in certain works for specific reasons, and under the particular conditions as were presented in Chapter Five.

6.2.3 A Fourth Question

The matter in question now is to establish what factors contribute to the emergence of apparent connections between the Qur'ān and the narratives of the Prophet's early life at this particular period. This line of inquiry has resulted in a fourth question, in which the researcher is compelled to explore the reasons why Muslim scholars of the ninth century hold the belief that these selected Qur'ānic verses are references to Muḥammad's early life? What are the specific reasons and contexts that lead scholars to make a connection between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's early life during the early years of Islam up to the year 900?

In order to analyse the possible answer for the fourth question, Chapter Five was designed to scrutinise those conceivable factors that might have possibly lead to the emergence of the connection between the Qur'ān and the narrative of the Prophet's life. Based on its analysis, Chapter Five argues that the use of Qur'ānic verses as references to Muḥammad's early life in constructing the Prophet's biography is the result of several factors. These include the substantiation of miraculous elements in the

narratives; the elucidation of lexical ambiguity in the texts; and the ‘Qur’ānisation’ of stories and traditions about the Prophet’s life.

6.3 The Nature of *Sīra* in the Ninth Century

Indeed, there was a progressive movement at the very heart of ninth century Islam: the new religion was at once looking outside and beyond itself; and at the same time, it was looking inwardly, seeking to define itself within the community. It seems likely that given the extent of growth and expansion of Islam in the ninth century, setting down roots in the diverse intellectual and religious ferment of sophisticated courts far from Mecca, there was a need within the growing religion to establish the authority of the central figure of Islam, to unite people as diverse as peasants, caliphs and clerics. It appears likely that as a result of a need to find a unifying element within the rapidly-burgeoning community over a vast geographical area, an even greater emphasis fell upon the figure of the Prophet himself; and therefore, a tradition of the Prophet’s life then came to be the focus. The literature of *sīra* was developed, establishing a classical tradition, which in its turn sparked a hagiographic tradition which continues to try to piece together a credible and truthful portrait of the Prophet to this day.

The earliest proponents of the life of Muḥammad were not detached historical critics or disconnected observers: they were principally attempting biography, and were responsible, above all, for the transmission of tradition. They apparently took any narration or anecdote about the Prophet, even, on occasions, contradictory accounts or narrations which revealed Muḥammad as imperfect, but from sources which were treated as significant and sacred. Two hundred years after the death of Muḥammad, they therefore looked both inwardly and outwardly. Throughout the early growth of Islam, the emphasis is on the character of Muḥammad, with his exceptionally gifted

qualities of leadership, and recognition of the spiritual needs of his people and, by extension, the wider world.

The apparent contradictions of accounts of the writers of the *sīra* can be of no surprise: the writers were men of their times, hagiographers at once concerned to hold the *umma* together, and defend it against other equally or more well-established religious traditions. It might well be more productive to view the *sīra*'s principal value not so much as an attempt to provide an exegesis of the life of Muḥammad, but as a part of a greater hermeneutic, whose resonances still resound today, not only in the world of academia, but in popular cultural imagination too. It is very hard, through exegetical or hermeneutical means, to attest to the veracity of factual details of Muḥammad's biography as presented in the *sīra*'. Biography and hagiography, by their very nature, are written with audiences in mind; and the ninth century audience, like the extensive Islamic empire, was hugely diverse. Large parts of it, particularly in the educated courts beyond Mecca, were driven by a ninth century rationalism, an attempt to understand a man called 'prophet'.

With its repeated patterns, apparent contradictions, circumlocutions and diverse emphases, in which no one part is given distinction or importance over another, the *sīra*' itself contains the totality of what the compilers could gather, as scrupulously as they found possible. But the *Sīra*' as presented can be regarded mainly as a tool of hermeneutics, its chief value being to illuminate the diversity of perspectives at a rich time of diversity and the spread of Islam. The hagiographic authors of the *sīra*' record Muḥammad's significance with admiration and clear devotion; but there is very little evidence of his early life. Legends abound and are recorded with reverence. In the

Qur'ān itself, there is little evidence of Muḥammad's early biography, with scarcely any details before the receiving of his revelations around the age of forty.

6.4 *Sīra* and Qur'ānic Connection in Academic Discourse

Based on our study of the Qur'ānic references to the Prophet's early life, it seems reasonable to conclude that the earliest Qur'ānic references that were perceived as direct allusions to the Prophet's early life are to be found in works of the ninth century. A comparative analysis of a variety of sources in Islamic literature of this century shows that the idea of a connection between the verses and events of the Prophet's life was simply not regarded as of any particular value or significance in this particular period. Moreover, those specific Qur'ānic verses adduced by the scholars of the ninth century as references to Muḥammad's early life appear as their own novel enterprises for various reasons, audiences and conditions. The references were then employed by later scholars and became used more widely at later dates, since the references clearly appear to claim their origin from the first century of Islam.

Lexical explanation, authorisation and Qur'ānisation of the *Sīra* account in the rationalist atmosphere of the ninth century drove some authors to refer to the Qur'an as a supportive mechanism, to strengthen and provide a solid ground for what they were saying about Muḥammad. As discussed in earlier chapters, the explanation of *sīra* stories and the attachment of Qur'ānic references appear to be influenced by their contemporary socio-political and religious contexts, as well as the authors' own personal interpretations.

And yet the rarity of a perceived connection between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's early life in the selected works of the ninth century indicates and illuminates the actual

condition of Muslim thought within this period. The connections made by the authors themselves imply, presumably, an early phase of the connection, which might well have been influenced by the contemporary intellectual and religious milieus, as well as the authors' own personal spiritual concerns, and their social and historical approaches and preoccupations.

In terms of contributing to academic discourse, the present study provides a mediating focus for two major perceptions of the connection between the Qur'ān and *Sīra*. As discussed in the preliminary chapter, Lammens insists that the *Sīra* is an account that was developed based on Qur'ānic verses as exegetical tool to unfold the meaning of ambiguous verses of the Qur'ān. In contrast, Rubin argues that the *Sīra* is, in fact, a body of independent sources, which was transmitted independently with no explicit connection with the Qur'ān. This is precisely the lacuna that the present study aims to fulfil. The study in its finding both confirms some elements of discourse, while proving the paucity of the arguments of others, according to their contexts. For example, the connection of 94:1 with the narratives of the opening of the Prophet's breast seems to have its origin in the Qur'ān. This connection appears as a resemblance of the notion suggested by Lammen's thesis. While the association of 28:12 with the stories of Muḥammad's period as a suckling infant has been identified in this study as a later addition by Ibn Hisham, and this is in line with the idea proposed by Rubin. A similar case may be suggested in the citation of Q105 by al-Jahiz, and also the connection of 26:219 with Ibn Sa'd's explanation on the Prophet's genealogy.

In order to gain a more inclusive picture on the connection of the Qur'ān and the *Sīra*, the researcher suggests that future study needs to be extended to the narratives of the Prophet's life as a whole, beyond the scope of his infancy, which has been the focus of this particular thesis, by including the complete biography of his life. In addition, it

would seem that an extremely productive application of the methodology employed in the present study would be its application in the area of two subjects of great contemporary interest: in the role of women in Islam, and also in terms of challenging radicalism among groups of young Muslims who understand the Qur'ān only in the narrowest of contexts.

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