

IBN SA'D'S KITAB AL-TABAQAT AL-KABIR AND THE NARRATIVES OF THE SIGNS OF MUHAMMAD'S PROPHETHOOD: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This article conducts an in-depth analysis of the signs of Muhammad's prophethood as presented in Ibn Sa'd's Kitab al-Tabaqat, using a historiographical approach to explore these narratives' significance in early Islamic history. It seeks to identify and categorize the range of signs and miracles attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, investigate Ibn Sa'd's interpretive techniques and historical methods, and examine how these signs help construct prophetic authority and Islamic cultural memory. By analyzing each narrative in both its historical context and its theological and literary dimensions, the study addresses key issues such as Ibn Sa'd's perspective as a historian, his interpretive biases, and the ways these narratives reinforce Islamic belief in Muhammad's divine mission. The findings reveal that Ibn Sa'd's portrayal of prophetic signs operates on several levels: as a testament to divine intervention, an assertion of the Prophet's unique spiritual status, and a framework for defining the sacred in Islamic tradition. This article argues that Ibn Sa'd's narratives provide critical insights into Islamic historical methodology and the formation of religious identity, enhancing our understanding of the intersections of history, theology, and memory in shaping early Islamic religio-cultural consciousness.

Keywords: Ibn sa'd; Kitab al-tabaqat al-kabir; Historiography; Signs of prophethood.

INTRODUCTION

The examination of historical narratives often serves as a gateway to understanding the complexities of religious narratives and the shaping of belief systems (Donner, 2021). Within Islamic historiography, one of the seminal works is Ibn Sa'd's *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, a compendium that provides invaluable insights into the life of the Prophet Muhammad and early Islamic community (Mirza, 2022). In particular, this article delves into the narratives within Ibn Sa'd's work that highlight the signs of Muhammad's prophethood. Through a historiographical perspective, this article aims to analyze these narratives, exploring their origins, transmission, and significance in shaping the perception of Muhammad's divine mission. This attempt not only sheds light on the historical context in which these narratives emerged but also highlights their enduring impact on Islamic history and identity.

Ibn Sa'd's *Kitab al-Tabaqat* holds significant significance in Islamic historical literature, celebrated for its comprehensive portrayal of the early Muslim community and its leaders. Among its varied accounts, those detailing the indications of Muhammad's prophethood hold particular importance. These narratives not only attest to the exceptional nature of Muhammad's mission but also offer insights into the socio-political context of early Islam. By examining these narratives through a historical lens, this article endeavors to explore the nuanced meanings they contain, revealing the complex interaction between historical facts and religious faith (Ibrahim, 2021).

The existing body of research on Ibn Sa'd's *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* provides valuable insights into its historiographical significance, yet gaps remain that warrant further exploration. Atassi focuses on the transmission history and canonization of the work, emphasizing the dual trends of textual fragmentation and preservation within Islamic historiography (Atassi, 2012).

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Abou-Taleb, on the other hand, critically examines gender representation within the *Tabaqat*, highlighting the intersection of socio-political contexts and patriarchal narratives during the Abbasid period (Abou-Taleb, 2012). Meanwhile, Ramdzan and Azmi comparatively analyze the historiographical approaches of Ibn Hisyam and Ibn Sa'd, identifying distinct patterns in their narrations of the Prophet Muhammad's life (Mior Ahmad Ramdzan & Azmi, 2018). While these studies have enriched our understanding of the *Tabaqat's* compilation, themes, and methodologies, they have yet to specifically engage with the narratives of the signs of Muhammad's prophethood through a historiographical lens. This article addresses this lacuna by delving into these narratives, focusing on their origins, transmission, and theological implications within early Islamic history.

In exploring the narratives of the signs of Muhammad's prophethood, it becomes evident that they encompass a diverse dimensions of phenomena, ranging from miraculous events to subtle gestures. These signs, as chronicled by Ibn Sa'd (d. 845) and later commentators, serve as corroborative evidence of Muhammad's divine mission, reinforcing the faith of believers and inviting scrutiny from skeptics. However, beyond their theological significance, these narratives also reveal insights into the mechanisms of historical transmission and interpretation, shedding light on the evolving nature of religious discourse within the Muslim community.

In addition, the analysis of Ibn Sa'd's narratives of the signs of Muhammad's prophethood invites a comparative analysis with parallel accounts found in other early Islamic sources. By juxtaposing these narratives and identifying patterns of convergence or divergence, we gain valuable insights into the fluidity and plurality of historical memory in early Islam. This comparative approach enables us to discern recurring motifs, interpretive frameworks, and rhetorical strategies employed by different historians in their portrayal of Muhammad's prophetic mission, thereby deepening the comprehension of the historical realities underpinning Islamic civilization. This article reveals that a historiographical analysis of Ibn Sa'd's narratives of the signs of Muhammad's prophethood offers a nuanced understanding of Islamic identity, and historiography. By engaging with these narratives critically, this article attempts not only to enrich the understanding of early Islamic history and theology but also to contribute to broader discussions on the nature of historical inquiry, religious belief, and cultural memory in the Islamic tradition.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a historiographical approach to analyze narratives concerning the signs of Muhammad's prophethood as documented in *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* by Ibn Sa'd (d. 845). Historiography, as the methodological framework, facilitates a critical examination of the narrative construction, the historian's use of sources, and the broader historical context in which these accounts were produced. This approach aligns with the research objective of uncovering the interplay between religious imagination and historical reality within early Islamic history. The historiographical lens also allows for a nuanced exploration of Ibn Sa'd's role as both a historian and a transmitter of religious tradition, providing insights into his methodologies and biases.

The primary data for this study are drawn from the *Akhbar al-Nabi*, the first part of *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, which contains Ibn Sa'd's narratives on the signs of Muhammad's prophethood. These narratives include miraculous events and subtle signs that underscore Muhammad's divine mission. Secondary sources comprise modern scholarly works on Islamic historiography and comparative studies of Ibn Sa'd's contemporaries, such as Ibn Ishaq and al-Waqidi. These sources are used to contextualize Ibn Sa'd's narratives within the intellectual and socio-political milieu of the early Abbasid period. The selection of both primary and secondary sources was guided by their relevance to the research questions and their potential to contribute to the broader historiographical discourse on early Islamic history.

The data collection process began with the identification and selection of narratives within *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* that explicitly address the signs of Muhammad's prophethood. These narratives were systematically categorized into themes, such as miraculous phenomena, prophetic attributes, and divine interventions. Following this, a source-critical analysis was conducted to

trace the origins and transmission of these narratives, evaluating Ibn Sa'd's use of earlier historical accounts, such as those by al-Waqidi and al-Kalbi. The study also employed comparative analysis to juxtapose Ibn Sa'd's portrayal of the signs with those found in other early Islamic sources, highlighting patterns of convergence and divergence that illuminate the evolving nature of Islamic historiography.

The analysis culminates in an interpretive examination of Ibn Sa'd's narrative strategies, focusing on how he constructed and presented the signs of Muhammad's prophethood to underscore the theological and historical significance of his mission. This process involves discerning Ibn Sa'd's possible motives, whether devotional, polemical, or historiographical, and situating his work within the broader discourse on prophetic authority in early Islam (Kennedy, 2004). Through this comprehensive approach, the study not only addresses the research questions but also engages with scholarly debates on the nature of historical representation and religious memory in Islamic tradition.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Brief Sketch of Ibn Sa'd's Life

Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Sa'd b. Mani' al-Zuhri al-Basri, or known as Ibn Sa'd, was born in Basra in 168/784, and died in Baghdad on Sunday 4 Jumada Thaniyah 230/16 February 845. He was buried in Bab al-Sham at the age of 62 years (Al-Baghdadi, 2008). During his lifetime he traveled to many important cities such as Kufa and Mecca, before living for some time in 189 in Medina; here he studied under the guidance of several figures. He also studied genealogy with Hisham b. Muhammad b. al-Sa'ib al-Kalbi. Later, Ibn Sa'd went to Baghdad and settled in this city. It was here that he worked as al-Waqidi's secretary, and transmitted his works. Because of this, Ibn Sa'd is known as *Katib al-Waqidi* (Khalidi, 1994). Under the guidance of al-Waqidi he learned the letters of the Qur'an, and taught them to al-Harits b. Muhammad b. Abi Usama (Lewis, Pellat, & Schacht, n.d.). According to several biographers, Ibn Sa'd also wrote books on hadith and fiqh (At-Tabari, 1977).

While living in Baghdad, Ibn Sa'd lived during the reign of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (192-218/807-833) who made Mu'tazilah the official state ideology. Through the policy of *mihnah* (inquisition), al-Ma'mun forced the 'ulama to declare that the Qur'an was God's creation. al-Thabari, in *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, tells that in 218/833, al-Ma'mun summoned seven 'ulama, one of whom was Ibn Sa'd, and tested them about the existence of the Qur'an. They answered that the Qur'an is a creature (At-Tabari, 1977). and this is different from the view of Ahmad b. Hanbal who strongly opposed the caliph's policies. Despite this, it is not clear whether Ibn Sa'd was a Mu'tazilite, or perhaps the attitude shown in front of al-Ma'mun was only intended as an act of *taqiyah* to avoid oppression from the authorities, and simply for his personal safety.

In Baghdad, Ibn Sa'd was known to have quite a high reputation as a historian and *muhaddiths*. He attracted many students to study history and hadith. One of Ibn Sa'd's most important students was al-Baladhuri (d. 279/892) who later became a great historian, who in his later career transmitted many of Ibn Sa'd's histories through his famous work, *Futuh al-Buldan*. Even though if we look closely that his book of *Tabaqat* relies heavily on the book of *Maghazi* by al-Waqidi, hadith critics still consider him a trustworthy (honest) figure. Unlike al-Waqidi who was seen as unreliable, a liar and whose hadiths were considered weak, Ibn Sa'd was assessed by hadith critics as hafidh, 'allama, hujjah, had integrity, and the hadiths narrated showed his honesty. Watt even acknowledged Ibn Sa'd's credibility and stated that Ibn Sa'd was a very thorough historian.

Ibn Sa'd and his work entitled *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* ('Abbas, 1960; Ibn Sa'd, 1904) have a significant position in the study of Islamic historiography. Ibn Sa'd's historiographical significance lies in the assumption that his *Tabaqat* - to some extent - can be considered a historical work that offers a structure and approach that is somewhat different from that of his predecessors such as Musa b. 'Uqbah, al-Zuhri, Ibn Ishaq, and even al-Waqidi, his teacher (Affan, 2018; Al-Waqidi &

Jones, 1966; Olgac & Arslantas, 2018). More than that, Ibn Sa'd was the first Muslim historian to introduce a new genre into Islamic literature in the form of writing a biographical dictionary.

As far as biographical dictionaries are concerned, their preparation cannot be separated from the tradition of writing Islamic history in general. Franz Rosenthal stated that the biographical dictionary was an original product produced by Islamic society as a whole, and not limited only to political figures (Rosenthal, 1968). Therefore, political history is only incidental to the overall structure of a biographical work.

However, it seems difficult to determine with certainty the reasons behind writing this biographical dictionary. Some scholars argue that the emergence of biographical dictionaries was a response to the need to identify the transmitters of the Prophet's hadith (Rosenthal, 1968). Others claim that the origins of this biographical dictionary can be traced far back to the interest of pre-Islamic Arabs and the early Islamic period in genealogy (*ilm al-ansab*) and biography (*tarajim*) (Roded, 1994).

However, apart from this debate, Ibn Sa'd's *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* is the earliest work on biography. It seems that the purpose of writing this biography is to honor the companions of the Prophet who took part in the struggle to spread Islam, and in fighting the pagans of Mecca, including in the Battle of Badr, and the companions who migrated to Medina as well as the *tabi'in* who made huge contributions in transmitting hadith and developing Islam to various Islamic cities or provinces (Gibb, 1962).

Meanwhile, the main characteristic of the *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* which talks about the biography of the Prophet lies in its detailed presentation of certain aspects of the Prophet's life, such as the signs of prophethood (*alamat al-nubuwwah*), the characteristics of the Prophet, his letters and messengers, as well as his illness and death. However, Ibn Sa'd does not appear to have provided detailed information about pre-Islamic history, an aspect that Ibn Ishaq drew attention to in his *Kitab al-Mubtada'* (Newby, 2009).

Ibn Sa'd's *Kitāb al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*

As mentioned earlier, Ibn Sa'd's most important work is the *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*. This book basically consists of two parts: *Akhbar al-Nabi* which is the first and second volumes, and *Tabaqat* (the third to eight volumes) of the *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* which is currently printed. *Akhbar Al-Nabi* was compiled and perfected by Ibn Sa'd himself, handed down to, and kept by, his student, al-Harits b. Muhammad b. Abi Usamah (186-282/802-896). Meanwhile, *Tabaqat* was also designed and compiled by Ibn Sa'd, but he could not complete it himself. However, Ibn Sa'd appears to have given the materials he wrote to another of his students, Husain b. Fahm (211-289/826-901). It is narrated that Husain was a hadith enthusiast who was very enthusiastic about perfecting his work based on the blueprint that had been prepared by Ibn Sa'd. He also provided additional notes on the biographies of the hadith narrators whose names had been mentioned by Ibn Sa'd in the general draft of the book (Siddiqi, 1993).

Akhbar al-Nabi and *Tabaqat* were transmitted by the two students above to their other students. One of them is Ahmad b. Ma'ruf al-Khasasyab (d. 322/933) combined the two parts into one book, then read it to his students. Abu 'Umar Ahmad b. Abbas, one of his students, also known as Ibn Hayyuya (295-382/907-992) edited the work without making the slightest change in the text. However, it was his student named al-Jawhari (363-454/973-1062) who transmitted this work to subsequent generations (Sa'd, 1957).

First, Akhbar al-Nabi. Ibn Sa'd begins *Akhbar al-Nabi* with an introductory chapter containing the history of previous prophets who had a direct relationship with the Prophet's ancestors, both in terms of genealogy and religion, such as Abraham and Isma'il (Ibn Sa'd, 1904). The next section discusses the history of Muhammad's life, from his childhood to his prophethood. In this section, Ibn Sa'd created special chapters about the signs of prophethood before and after the revelation. Meanwhile, the remainder of the first part contains a discussion of events that occurred from the time of the prophethood until his emigration to Medina. The second part of the

first volume talks about the Medina period. Ibn Sa'd narrated in detail the Prophet's letters, messengers, character (*akhlaq*), way of life and wealth. The section containing the study of prophetic signs seems to have inspired subsequent authors who wrote *dala'il al-nubuwwah* and *shama'il* literature (Horovitz, 2021).

Meanwhile, the first part of the second volume contains the Prophet's wars (*maghazi*) in the literal sense, while the second part contains the end of the Prophet's biography which contains his illness, death, funeral, inheritance and a collection of elegies written by his friends following his death. Ibn Sa'd emphatically closed the two parts with the final hadla expression of *akhbar al-nabi*. Therefore, the part following these words is an introduction to *Tabaqat*.

Regarding the sources used by Ibn Sa'd in *Akhbar al-Nabi* from the Mecca period, the main authority was al-Waqidi. He also relied on al-Kalbi, especially in matters of genealogy, apart from relying on other individual histories. In the *maghazi* section, Ibn Sa'd again makes al-Waqidi his main authority, although he also relies on other transmission chains that lead him to three important sources: Ibn Ishaq, Abu Ma'shar and Musa b. 'Uqbah.

In presenting *maghazi*, Ibn Sa'd did not repeat the *isnad* that had been mentioned on the first occasion. Instead, he uses the words *thumma* (then) and *qalu* (they say). Although it is very clear that Ibn Sa'd narrated a large number of al-Waqidi's hadiths, this does not mean that Ibn Sa'd's *maghazi* were repetitions or photocopies of al-Waqidi. As mentioned, there is evidence that Ibn Sa'd also narrated the hadith through other *sanads*. Ibn Sa'd even mentioned the full names and number of companions who took part in the war expedition, and the year and other additional information that was not provided by al-Waqidi.

Ibn Sa'd's method in writing a biography of the Prophet is basically not much different from Ibn Ishaq's method in writing *sirah*. Both are in the historiographic tradition of the Medina school (*madhhab*). This school of historiography places emphasis on the authority of sources (*isnad*) and critical examination of the sources themselves. In addition, historians of this school have a main goal which seems to be to reveal and transmit the religious and historical significance of the Prophet's life. This historiographic tradition was born from historical concerns, and historians of this school consider that maintaining and continuing to revive the Prophet's traditions is a moral and religious task that must be carried out (Duri, 1983).

Even though there are similarities between Ibn Sa'd and Ibn Ishaq in the flow of historiography, they have several differences, especially in the structure of the presentation of their historical works. On the one hand, Ibn Ishaq tends to narrate the Prophet's history using a chronological approach. This can be seen from the organization of his work, which begins with pre-Islamic history (*kitab al-mubtada'*), then *sirah* and then the history of the caliphs (*kitab al-khulafa'*) (Beeston, Johnstone, Serjeant, & Smith, 1983; Newby, 2009). On the other hand, Ibn Sa'd was more inclined to present the Prophet's life with a topical or thematic approach, rather than purely chronological. He narrated at length the hadith relating to the signs of prophethood and the characteristics of the Prophet. In this respect, Ibn Sa'd clearly differed from Musa b. 'Uqbah, al-Zuhri and al-Waqidi, who, like Ibn Ishaq, were more chronological in their historical approach (Beeston et al., 1983).

Second, Taqat. Meanwhile, *Tabaqat* is organized into levels (classes) of *sahabat* and *tabi'in* based on 'priority' (*sabiqah*, precedence) in embracing Islam, and their closeness to the Prophet. In this section, Ibn Sa'd defends his method of presenting information using *isnad*, the same as hadith experts. Ibn Sa'd also describes each of his biographical entries with genealogical information. On the one hand, he arranges biographical levels based on tribal considerations (tribe or genealogy). More than that, he also pays attention to geographical aspects which seem to have influenced the emergence of regional biographical dictionaries in the subsequent period (Cooperson, 2000; Muhammad Yusoff, 2019).

Structurally, Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqat* is structured according to a design that mentions the companions sequentially according to religious seniority (*sabiqah*). Each entry is equipped with a biography according to the figure's social position. *Tabaqat* then mentioned the biographies of

figures who lived in important centers of Islam, such as Arabia, Iraq and Syria. At the end of *Tabaqat*, Ibn Sa'd presents biographies of female figures who played important roles in the Islamic tradition (Khalidi, 1994); an aspect not considered by other authors.

If we examine the *Tabaqat* organization carefully, we will come to the conclusion that Ibn Sa'd determined the levels based on several criteria. On the one hand, he uses 'priority' criteria, and on the other hand he also uses genealogical, chronological and geographical criteria. For example, in compiling the biography of the companions, Ibn Sa'd used genealogical criteria, but in the biography of the *tabi'in* he used a geographical approach. However, in some cases, he combined several of these criteria, so that he included the biographies of several friends more than once because they were considered to meet several of these criteria.

Despite the fact that Ibn Sa'd relied on the works of his predecessors in writing the *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, he actually not only marked the emergence of works on more complete biographies of the Prophet and the biographies of his companions, but also offered a new structure to the literature, *sirah-maghazi*. Ibn Sa'd can be considered the first biographer to introduce a thematic or topical approach rather than a purely chronological one. Nevertheless, Ibn Sa'd still used the method used by hadith experts in writing *sirah*, namely the use of *isnad*.

Ibn Sa'd can also be considered as a representative of the continuation of what is called 'sacred history' (Khalidi, 1994). In this sense, writing history is intended to fulfill religious needs. Ibn Sa'd's history regarding the signs of prophethood, for example, indicates that he believed in miracles and divine qualities that existed in the Prophet. Apparently, he intended to transmit this tradition to the next generation so that the Prophet's divine character could be used as an exemplary model.

Apart from that, Ibn Sa'd must be given credit as the pioneer of writing a biographical dictionary. This effort apparently helped meet the needs of the Islamic community at that time in identifying hadith transmitters, because Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqat* provided biographies of prominent companions who had contributed to the process of transmitting Islamic traditions.

Although in many cases al-Waqidi's history was the main authority, Ibn Sa'd also had access to other important sources, such as Musa b. 'Uqbah, al-Zuhri and Ibn Ishaq. More interestingly, he also uses Jewish sources that confirm and strengthen Muhammad's prophethood. This reality shows that Ibn Sa'd had a broad intellectual horizon and a strong awareness of historical continuity.

Different from Ibn Ishaq and al-Waqidi who are often associated with certain theological groups or schools, such as the Shiites and Qadariyah, Ibn Sa'd's personality and his theological leanings remain unclear. Even though it is reported that he declared the existence of the Qur'an in the presence of al-Ma'mun, there is not yet strong enough evidence to consider him a Mu'tazilite. Therefore, the influence of theology, if any, on the writing of biographies of the Prophet or other historical works would be a very interesting topic for future study.

Historiographical Analysis of the Signs of Prophethood

In Ibn Sa'd's works, Muhammad is seen as an Arab chosen by God. In fact, Muhammad is said to have been appointed as a Prophet when Adam, who is believed to be the first human and prophet, was still between spirit and body. Ibn Sa'd's exposition of Muhammad's biography like this seems to be influenced by the belief that the coming of the Prophet had been determined by God before the creation of Adam. Apart from that, Ibn Sa'd also narrated a hadith which stated that Muhammad had become God's messenger and the pinnacle of the prophets when Adam was still not human. In the hadith narrated by 'Irbadh b. Sariya, Ibn Sa'd narrated: "I will explain to you more about it: the prayer of my father Ibrahim, Jesus' announcement about me, and the dreams of my mother and the dreams of the mothers of the prophets." According to another hadith, when the Prophet's mother gave birth to him, she saw something (a light) that illuminated the Syrian fortress. In fact, according to another hadith in Ibn Sa'd's work, Muhammad was the first creature created and the last prophet sent by God (Sa'd, 1957).

As mentioned earlier, Ibn Sa'd was the first writer to include parts of prophetic signs and characteristics of the Prophet in his work. Although earlier biographers have included traditions regarding the Prophet's miracles (*mu'jizat*) in the *sirah*, they tend to arrange them chronologically. Different from his predecessors, Ibn Sa'd narrated the hadiths under the topic 'signs of prophethood'. Therefore, he provides more detailed information on this matter, compared to previous authors.

In this section (*'alamat al-nubuwwah*), Ibn Sa'd begins with a hadith which states that Muhammad was [the result of] Abraham's prayer and Jesus' announcement. This tradition is associated with the story of a light emerging from the stomach of Muhammad's mother which illuminated the Syrian fortress, and with the story of Muhammad's chest surgery. Ibn Sa'd also narrated the hadith of Khalid b. Ma'dan, through the authority of al-Waqidi, stated that when Muhammad was herding goats in the backyard, two people came wearing white clothes, carrying a golden bucket full of white snow. They then took the Prophet, and opened him up and removed a black blood clot from his chest. The two of them then washed their chests and hearts with the white snow. They then weighed them, and put on one side of the scales one person, ten, a hundred and a thousand people. One of the two people (angels) said to the other: "Even if all his people were placed on a scale, Muhammad would still be heavier" (Sa'd, 1957).

Muhammad's chest surgery occurred when he was living under the care of Halimah from the Banu Sa'd tribe. This event clearly had an important influence on Muhammad's subsequent career. As stated by Harris Birkeland, this incident indicates that from his youth Muhammad was prepared to become a Prophet. Therefore, the episode of chest surgery can be interpreted as a representation of the cleansing (purification) and annunciation of the Prophet. Moreover, according to Birkeland, the cleansing event was significant because Muhammad came from a paganistic Arab society (Birkeland, 1955; Rubin, 2009)

This analysis may contain truth, because another hadith also states that the black blood clots purified by the angel reflect Satan's bad character. However, this episode was believed by early Muslim writers to have nothing to do with the Prophet's social background, but rather to show that the purification implied miracles and the divine nature of prophethood in Muhammad.

First, Meeting with Bahira. In Ibn Sa'd's work there is also a history of prophetic signs related to the Bahira story (Lewis et al., n.d.; Peters, 1994). Relying on al-Waqidi's history, Ibn Sa'd mentioned a hadith about Muhammad's meeting with a Christian priest named Bahira, when he first traveled to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib. At that time, Muhammad was still 12 years old. It is reported that Abu Talib's trading group (caravan) was resting at a place near Busra, where Bahira observed them from his residence. This priest noticed that a thin cloud was floating above Muhammad's head, and protecting him from the hot sun, while the branches of the tree where Muhammad's entourage was sheltering also protected him from the hot sun. Bahira invited them to eat, but Muhammad, as the youngest child, remained in the shelter to guard the merchandise. However, Bahira asked the group to also take Muhammad to the banquet that had been provided. After talking and observing Muhammad, Bahira found a sign of prophethood on Muhammad's back, and showed Abu Talib that his nephew would become a great man in the future. This priest asked Abu Talib to protect this child from the Jews who would become his main enemies. Muhammad was the prophet of this people, he came from Arab descent, and the Jews were jealous of him because they wanted the emergence of a prophet from the Israelites (Sa'd, 1957).

Another history of Ibn Sa'd states that when Muhammad traveled to Syria with Maysarah for trade, they met a priest named Nestorius (perhaps another name for Bahira) who confirmed Muhammad's prophethood because he discovered his qualities and characteristics in the books he studied. A similar history was also recorded earlier by Ibn Ishaq which was preserved by Yunus b. Bukair. While Ibn Sa'd placed the narration under the topic of signs of prophethood, Ibn Ishaq included it under the title 'Bahira stories' (*hadith Bahira*) (Ishaq, 1978). Even though it is substantially the same, Ibn Sa'd gives a slightly different version.

Second, Jewish Affirmation. What is very interesting, in discussing the signs of prophethood, Ibn Sa'd also relies on a chain of transmission that often leads him to Jewish sources. These sources in fact provide textual evidence that strengthens Muhammad's prophethood. In a hadith of the Medina friend, Ubbay b. Ka'b recorded by Ibn Sa'd, Jewish sources provide a complete description of Muhammad. There, Muhammad is described as being neither short nor tall, with redness in his eyes, riding a camel, and so on. This source provides information as far back as the ancestor of South Arabia, namely the *tubba'* (title of the king of Yemen) named Tiban As'ad Abu Karib. According to Ibn Ishaq, this *tubba'* attacked the Hijaz, but was not allowed to attack Medina by a pair of Jewish rabbis (religious leaders) from the Quraidhah tribe who told him that this city would be the destination of Muhammad's migration in the future (Hisham & Ishak, 1955).

Apart from that, there is also a story about the *tubba'* who came to the Hijaz about a thousand years before Muhammad's birth. The Jewish scholars told him that a prophet would come whose destination of emigration would be Medina. This document was presented to Muhammad by Abu Ayyub, a companion from Medina. Jewish scholars during this *tubba'* period had settled in Medina because they were worried about what would happen to Muhammad. The *Ansar* are also said to be descendants of the Jewish rabbis of Medina. Such descriptions are widely spread as traditions (hadith).

Through the authority of al-Waqidi, Ibn Sa'd narrated a hadith explaining that the Jews of Banu Quraidhah, Nadir, Fadk and Khaybar had discovered the characteristics of the Prophet in their holy books before his prophethood, and that the destination of his emigration was Medina. In Ibn Sa'd's work there is also a hadith which confirms that the Banu Quraizah (Jews) knew the Prophet from their holy books, and taught their children about his name, characteristics and place of migration. But, when Muhammad came, they were jealous and did not want to acknowledge Muhammad's prophethood.

The arrival of the illiterate Prophet (*nabi ummi*) was also predicted in the *Majallat* (codex) of Ibrahim. In the hadith of al-Sha'bi it is narrated that several people will be born from Ibrahim's children, until the illiterate prophet comes, who will be the pinnacle of the prophets. Ibn Sa'd narrated a hadith from Muhammad Ka'b al-Qurazi, a descendant of Qurazi Jews, who predicted the coming of *nabi ummi*: "When Hajar was walking with her son, Ismail, a voice was heard stating that her son would be the father of many people, and of his descendants an illiterate prophet will appear who will occupy the *haram* land (Mecca)".

Furthermore, Ibn Sa'd narrated another hadith from Muhammad Ka'b al-Qurazi which explains God's revelation to Ya'qub: "I will send from your family kings and prophets, until I send a prophet, *harami*, whose people will build a temple, and he will be the pinnacle of the prophets, and his name will be Ahmad." Relying on 'Ali b. Muhammad, Ibn Sa'd narrated that, when the Prophet arrived at his residence, Ka'b b. Asad, who was the leader of the Banu Quraizah, is reported to have ordered the Jews to follow Muhammad because it was clear that he was a prophet whose name and characteristics could be found in their book, the Torah, and he had also been announced by Jesus. Ibn Sa'd narrated that the Prophet came to a *midrash* (Jewish holy house) and met a learned Jew, Abdullah b. Shuriya. These Jews assured that everyone knew the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad as described in the Torah (Sa'd, 1957).

The presentation of the hadiths narrated by Ibn Sa'd in the section on prophetic signs clearly supports the initial perception of Muhammad; that Muhammad had been appointed as a Prophet before the creation of Adam. This also shows that Ibn Sa'd wanted to emphasize that Muhammad's prophetic mission was a continuation of the mission of previous prophets sent by God throughout human history. Therefore, Ibn Sa'd often narrated hadiths related to Abraham's prayer and Jesus' announcement.

Third, Prophetic Calling and Mission. Muhammad's prophetic calling (*mab'ath*) is one of the points that is often debated among western scholars who want to reconstruct the episode of the first revelation in Islam. In the section relating to Muhammad's prophetic call, Ibn Sa'd narrated the hadith based on the history that reached Anas b. Malik, that Muhammad was sent to become a

Prophet at the age of forty years. He then narrated that Anas b. Malik was once asked about Muhammad's age when he was sent to be a Prophet. Anas b. Malik states that Muhammad lived in Mecca for 10 years and in Medina for 10 years. However, when Ibn Sa'd stated the hadith: "Muhammad was sent to become a Prophet at the age of 40; he was accompanied by Israfil for three years, and then by Jibril 10 years in Mecca and 10 years in Medina, and that the Prophet died at the age of 63 years," to al-Waqidi, his teacher answered that not a single *'alim* in this city believed that Israfil once accompanied Muhammad. On the other hand, al-Waqidi stated that the *'ulama* and *sirah* writers were of the opinion that the Prophet was never accompanied by anyone other than Gabriel from the time he received the revelation until the time of his death.

The Hadith of Abu Hurayrah narrates that the main mission of Muhammad's prophethood was to fight humans until they acknowledged that there was no god but God. Apart from that, the Prophet was sent to mankind to perfect morality (*akhlaq*). Muhammad's prophetic mission was also in accordance with the monotheistic tendencies of previous prophets, and therefore the Prophet also emphasized that his teachings included what was called *hanifiyyah samhah* (monotheism) (Sa'd, 1957).

The idea of *hanif* or *hanifiyyah* can be understood from two perspectives. The first is that *hanifiyyah* can be used to represent historical Islam, namely the religion revealed to Muhammad and practiced by believers. Second, *hanifiyyah* can be understood in the Qur'anic sense to refer to Abrahamic monotheism. According to this second understanding, people who practiced *hanifiyyah* actually existed in Arabia before the arrival of Islam. This perception may indicate that Ibn Sa'd was aware of the historical continuity of the prophetic mission.

CONCLUSION

In the study of Islamic historiography, the narratives of the signs of Muhammad's prophethood in Ibn Sa'd's *Kitab al-Tabaqat* serve as a crucial intersection between history, theology, and literary tradition. By subjecting these narratives to a rigorous historiographical analysis, we not only unravel the intricacies of early Islamic thought and belief but also illuminate the processes by which historical memory is constructed and transmitted within the Muslim community. This demonstrates that these narratives are not merely records of miraculous occurrences but rather multifaceted expressions of religious identity, socio-political context, and interpretive frameworks. The above analysis reveals the diverse nature of the signs of Muhammad's prophethood as depicted in Ibn Sa'd's work. These signs encompass a spectrum of phenomena, from extraordinary events such as celestial occurrences and miraculous healings to subtler indications such as ethical teachings and prophetic character. By scrutinizing the variety of these narratives, we discern the multiplicity of ways in which Muhammad's prophethood was perceived and articulated by early Muslims, reflecting the richness of religious experience and interpretation within the Islamic tradition.

In addition, the critical examination sheds light on the dynamic interplay between historical reality and religious imagination in the construction of Ibn Sa'd's narratives. While some signs may have roots in actual events or experiences, others are imbued with symbolic or metaphorical significance, serving as rhetorical devices to convey theological truths or assert the legitimacy of Muhammad's prophetic mission. By discerning the layers of meaning embedded within these narratives, we uncover the complex negotiation between faith and historical inquiry, highlighting the creative tension between myth and history in shaping religious consciousness. Finally, the historiographical analysis above underscores the role of Ibn Sa'd as a historian and narrator in shaping the portrayal of Muhammad's prophethood. Through his selection of sources, framing of narratives, and interpretive commentary, Ibn Sa'd not only transmits historical information but also constructs a specific vision of prophetic authority and divine intervention. By interrogating Ibn Sa'd's methodologies and biases, we gain insights into the historiographical processes underlying *Kitab al-Tabaqat*, illuminating the intricate dynamics of authorship, transmission, and reception within Islamic historiography.

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