# HELLENISM AND MODELS OF RHETORIC IN THE BIRTH OF ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

Diego Melo and José Marín
Universidad Adolfo Ibánez and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso
Chile

Date of receipt: 17th of January, 2020
Date of acceptance: 15th of June, 2020

## Abstract

After an overview of the Near East and the Fertile Crescent as a liminal (border) space where cultural transgressions and exchanges take place, this study aims to show how Hellenistic influences were present in the formation of Arab-Islamic historiography. We argue that the latter incorporated rhetorical and methodological notions already installed in the late Mediterranean and added them to strictly Semitic traditions. The interaction of two 'parallel' cultural worlds —the Hellenistic and the Islamic— is detected in the rhetorical uses expressed in historiographic production. The culmination of this process is exemplified in Al-Tabari[1].

## Keywords

Borders, Rhetoric, Historiography, Hellenism, Islam.

## Capitalia Verba

Limites, Ars Rhetorica, Historiographia, Hellenismus, Religio Mahometana.

## 1. Introduction: The Levant as a liminal space

In a way, the Late Antiquity period can be conceived as a border in itself[2]: it is a period of transition between one (ancient) civilization and the three civilizations of the Middle Ages: the Latin West; the Greek-Byzantine East; and the Arab-Islamic world. While the "borders" of these three spaces contain cultural transgressions[3] in the Mediterranean, it is above all in the Levant —with its eastern projection, in the space that we call the Fertile Crescent, land of rich traditions— that they meet and intertwine. From Syria to the north, Yemen to the south, the Levant to the west, and Mesopotamia to the east, we can identify a "threshold" (a border, a transgression zone) in which the cultures advance, retreat, and ultimately knot among themselves influences of different sorts and thicknesses. These cover the early Arab worlds and their projections; the powerful influence of old empires (Rome and Persia); and the Alexandrian Hellenistic legacy (not to mention local cultures, such as Hebrew, Syrian or Coptic).

This zone of cultural transgressions facilitated widely-radiated creative syntheses, part of which was classical rhetoric. Already installed in the Mediterranean, both in its Latin and Greek aspects, rhetoric was creatively incorporated by the Christians before being expressed in Islam. Its connection to Islamic historiography may be established by taking into account uses of rhetoric —the presence of prologues,

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[1] This article is part of a research project entitled "Proyecto Fondecyt Regular", financed by the Ministry of Education of Chile (nº 11130061).

[2] Fritsch-Rössler, Waltraud. "Frontier, Transgression, Liminality", *Handbook of Medieval Studies. Terms-Methods-Trends*, Albrecht Classen, ed. Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2001: II, 1507.

[3] See Marín, José. "El *finis terrae* y la última frontera. A propósito de la Edad Media de Chile", *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum*, 13 (2019): 363-365, especially 365: "…las fronteras pueden ser lugares de desencuentro y separación, como también de síntesis, de creación y de encuentro; zonas de consonancia histórica, diría Héctor Herrera. Cuando concebimos los contornos no como líneas que separan sino como verdaderas franjas o espacios fronterizos, ya no hablamos de *limes*, sino de *limen*, de "umbral", y "pasar el umbral", anota Van Gennep, "significa agregarse a un mundo nuevo", constituyéndose entonces este *umbral* en una zona de *transgresiones* culturales. Esas *transgresiones* son a veces también *agresiones*, quizá porque se trata de zonas de *ingresos*, como asimismo de *egresos*, *progresos* y *regresos*, esto es, regiones de tránsitos y traspasos. Esos umbrales también pueden *congregar*, aunque en sus límites siempre móviles al comienzo hayan *disgregado*. Todas estas palabras derivan de *gradus* y en su raíz se reconoce la idea de *andar*, porque los umbrales se crean y se atraviesan andando, y al andar el espacio es apropiado *gradualmente* e integrado a una identidad; y cuanto más lejos se avanza, y más profundo se penetra hacia el otro lado del umbral, más perceptibles son los rasgos originales de los nuevos espacios integrados". ["…Thus, borders can be places of disagreement and separation, as well as places of synthesis, creation and encounter; zones of historical harmony, Héctor Herrera would say. When we conceive of borders not as lines that separate but as broad swaths or border spaces, we no longer speak of *limes*, but of *limen*, of "threshold"; of this "crossing the threshold", notes Van Gennep, "is to unite oneself with a new world". This threshold then becomes an area of cultural *transgressions*. These *transgressions* are sometimes also *aggressions*, perhaps because they are areas of *ingress*, as well as of *egress*, *progress* and *regress*, i.e. regions of transits and transfers. These thresholds can also *congregate*, even if they have been *disaggregated* in their always mobile boundaries at the beginning. All these words derive from *gradus* at their root, of Latin, "*to walk*". Thresholds are created and crossed on foot, and as one steps forward, space is *gradually* appropriate and integrated into an identity; and the further one advances, and the deeper one penetrates the other side of the threshold, the more perceptible are the original features of the new integrated spaces.]

for example[4]—; applications of inquiry methods; and the audiences themselves, saturated with Hellenistic culture, across the Mediterranean East. Indeed, Muslim writers seem to address an audience that, as usual, is receptive not only to these rhetorical resources, but also to the intrusion of non-historical artifacts into the historical narrative. The above will be shown in the construction of the *Sīra* and the *Maghazi*, prototypes of Islamic historiography which, with al-Tabari, would reach its full maturity.

## 2. The Arab factor

Before the appearance of Islam upon the horizon of history, three important moments had manifested themselves in the Arab world: the *ḥimyarí* culture; that of the *ṭamūdi*; and finally that of the Nabataean. The first developed on the margins of the trade route for perfumes and spices coming from South Asia and the Indian sub-continent, characterized by an agricultural and commercial vocation. In the case of the *ṭamūdi* people, some of the important archaeological remains (preserved especially in Palmyra) are linked to Mesopotamian culture and the Persian world; and later, to the Hellenistic and Roman civilization[5]. They were characterized by their sedentary condition and their dedication to trade. Regarding Nabataeans —of whom the first references were made by Diodorus Siculus in 312 BC[6]— the remains of their presence is most salient in the city of Petra, the royal seat of Arabia[7] (and notoriously influenced by Hellenistic and Roman cultures, branded so by fire)[8]. Around 106 BC, Trajan annexed the kingdom of the Nabataeans, turning it into a Roman province with the name of Arabia[9].

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[4] Part of this rhetorical tradition is the custom of introducing a prologue to historiographic works, a decision of a literary nature, and which goes back to the origins of the genre. The rhetoric of the prologues in late Latin and Greek antiquity, as a Christian projection of the classical traditions, although with its own twists, is an obvious fact. See Marín, José. "El prólogo como género específico en obras históricas (siglos IV-VII)", *Studi Medievali*, 55/2 (2014): 521-550; Marín, José. "La Historia y el Historiador. Introducción a la Historiografía Bizantina a través de sus Prólogos (s. IV-VII)", *Studi Medievali*, 60/ 1 (2019): 29-58.

[5] See Bowersock, Glen. *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*. Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1990: 7 and following.

[6] Diodorus of Sicily. *Biblioteca Histórica*, trans. Francisco Parreu. Madrid: Gredos, 2001: II, 402; Moscati, Sabatino. *Las antiguas civilizaciones semíticas*. Barcelona: Garriga, 1960: 215.

[7] "Como ya hubiera predispuesto a ambos, cogió por la noche a Hircano, escapó de la ciudad y a través de una rápida huida consiguió salvarse en la llamada ciudad de Petra, donde estaba la corte real de Arabia" [And when he had predisposed them both to do what he would have them, he took Hyrcanus by night, and ran away from the city, and, continuing his flight with great swiftness, he escaped to the place called Petra, which is the royal seat of the king of Arabia]. Flavius Josephus. *Las Guerras de los Judíos,* trans. Jesús Nieto. Madrid: Gredos, 1997: I, 107.

[8] See Bowersock, Glen. "Hellenism in Late…": 5 and following; also, Cruz Hernandez, Miguel. *Historia del Pensamiento en el mundo islámico*. *I*. Madrid: Alianza, 1981: 28.

[9] Dio Cassius. *Historia*, ed. Herbert Baldwin Foster, trans. Earnest Carey. London: Loeb Classical Library, 1925: VIII, 388-389 (lxviii, 14); Amiano Marcelino. *Historia*, trans. María Luisa Harto Trujillo.

Small conglomerates also developed in the south, under the power of the Sabaean and Minaean confederations, founders of the Qataban and *Ḥaḍramūt* kingdoms, respectively[10]. The latter, around the 2nd century AD, was absorbed by Saba; thus, around the 3rd century AD, southern Arabia reached the height of its power with the largest political conglomerate in the region[11]. When these kingdoms entered into decline, around the 5th and 6th centuries AD, entire groups of tribes would move northwards, giving impetus to the activity of Petra as well as Palmyra[12], a city that was entirely bilingual, like many in Greater Syria, including Damascus, Homs, and Bosra[13].

Despite the tendency to think that these peoples lived in a kind of isolation, evidence of caravanner and merchant livelihoods show that they had contacts with various groups of Christian and Jewish people[14]. At the same time, it is important to frame the Arabian Peninsula as a border space within the eastern quadrant of the imperial *limes*. Through its inherently permeable nature, this border position facilitated a series of transfers among movement of nomadic and Arab merchants who not only transported goods, but also fashions, ideas and beliefs[15]: as is always the case, trade routes are also cultural dissemination routes. Examples are found among Nabataean inscriptions in Aramaic, or the Hellenistic influences present (above all) in art[16]. The area of Syria would become a key zone for circulating influences between the Mediterranean and the Near East[17]. That space, as we have outlined it, witnessed the gestation of an amalgamation process in which Arab foundations, local elements, and Aramaic and Greco-Roman influences converge[18].

Among the dominant religious ideas present, both Judaism and Christianity were already relatively ancient prior to the preaching of Muḥammad. The former-most, though well-documented since the second century AD[19], may have settled earlier

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Madrid: Akal, 2002: 136 (xiv, 8, 13). See Bowersock, Glen. *Roman Arabia*. London: Harvard University Press, 1983: 76 and following; Griffin, Miriam. "Nerva to Hadrian", *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 11*: *The High Empire AD 70-192*, Alan Bowman, Peter Garnsey, Dominic Rathbone, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 125-126; Donner, Fred. *Muḥammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2010: 27 and following; Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 216.

[10] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 211.

[11] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 213.

[12] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 218.

[13] Bowersock, Glen. "Hellenism…": 29.

[14] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 218.; also, See Bowersock, Glen. "Hellenism…" 71 and following.

[15] Cruz Hernández, Miguel. "Historia del pensamiento…": 40.

[16] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 215.; also, Herrera Cajas, Héctor. *Los orígenes del arte bizantino. Ensayo sobre la formación del arte cristiano*. Valparaíso: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 2008: 26 and following.

[17] Vryonis, Speros. "Byzantium and Islam, Seven-Seventeenth Century". *East European Quarterly*, 2/3 (1968), ahora en: Vryonis, S. *Byzantium: its internal history and relations with the Muslim World*. London: Variorum Reprints, 1971: IX, 208.

[18] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 227.

[19] Sartre, Maurice. "L'Asie Mineure et l'Anatolie d'Alexandre à Dioclétien (IVe s. av. J.-C./IIIe s. ap. J.-C)". *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 101/1 (1999): 320.

—perhaps after the Babylonian diaspora, since trade relations between Jews and Arabs date back to very ancient times. Regarding the Christians, their appearance in Medina and Mecca is documented since the end of the 2nd century AD[20]; however, it is difficult to pinpoint any tendencies professed within their churches, whose main dogmas were not, at this point, consolidated[21]. Nevertheless, in this space of constant circulation, monotheistic religions established themselves, above all, in the northern zones of the peninsula. Jewish nuclei had been established since ancient times in the area, and had set up a series of commercial colonies[22]; it is known that they had assimilated both Arab language and customs while keeping their religious tradition intact[23]. The primitive monasticism of Christian communities would come to importance and projection among the Arabs, gaining followers, especially in Yemen, whence contacts were established with the opposite shore of the Red Sea, that is, Abyssinia[24].

## 3. The Hellenistic factor. Hellenism and Judeo-Christianity

In these areas of open spaces and frontiers, Hellenistic culture also penetrated deeply by either diffuse, indirect —or cultural and direct— means[25]. Whether expressed in the Greek tongue, Hellenism became the pillar of identity of the area occupied by Byzantium and Persia which, despite their differences and rivalries, were not sufficient to disturb the character of the cultural entity of the Near East, whose belonging to the Mediterranean world is undeniable. The adoption of Hellenism thus differentiated this space from other cultural areas, such as India, Central Asia or China, as S. Vryonis notes[26].

Hellenistic thought, on the other hand, manifested itself first in Syriac —and then in Arabic— terrains, more or less penetrated by what could be called the *Greco-Semitic episteme* —as M. Arkoun has called it[27]— where Platonism, Aristotelianism[28], Plotinism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Pythagoreanism, Hermeticism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, ancient Semitism, Judeo-Christian revelations, etc.[29], were mixed simultaneously. The Arabian peninsula as pivot[30] exposed it to influences from both east and west, forming a real cultural corridor, not only of land routes, but also of fundamental maritime routes that crossed the Red Sea[31].

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[20] Sartre, Maurice. "L'Asie Mineure…": 328.

[21] Cruz Hernández, Miguel. "Historia del pensamiento…": 41.

[22] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…" 230.

[23] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 230.

[24] Moscati, Sabatino. "Las antiguas…": 230.

[25] Arkoun, Mohammed. *El pensamiento árabe*. Madrid: Grupo Planeta, 1992: XXXV, 45.

[26] Vryonis, Speros. "Byzantium: its internal…": 206.

[27] Arkoun, Mohammed. "El pensamiento…": 46.

[28] Griffel, Frank. "Muslim philosophers' rationalist explanation of Muḥammad's prophecy", *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, Jonathan Brockopp, ed. New York: Cambridge University Press (2010): 159.

[29] Arkoun, Mohammed. "El pensamiento…": 46; Harrison, Robert. "Hellenization in Syria-Palestine: The case of Judea in the third century BCE". *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 57/2, 1994: 106.

Now, of all these influences, Stoicism had a fundamental role, especially since the Hellenization of the Jewish populations; this was due to the fact that Stoicism became a true pillar of Hellenic universalism, giving the conceptual support of the Hellenic koine, from its cosmopolitanism and its idea of a *logos* that governs and unifies all reality[32]. The koine, in this case, allowed a unified world to conform, ecumenical, expressed in a communities of language and of philosophical, religious and cultural ideas. It reached its maximum expression in the first century A.D., in Roman times[33], with phenomena of accentuated synoikism (συνοικισμός) and syncretisms (συνκρετισμός)[34] generated between the Eastern and Western mystery cults and inspiring a certain universal religious feeling[35]. A fundamental character throughout the Hellenization of the Jewish world was Philo of Alexandria, who adopted the Greek *paideia* within Judeo-Hellenism as an organic element[36]: even in religious discussions (or evenvthrough non-Greek means: Philo addresses the Jews, not the Greeks, in Greek), it was necessary to resort to Hellenic thought and its categories[37].

It is plausible to think, then, that many intellectual and literary models, including the conception and writing of history, did not emerge by chance. Indeed, it is reasonable that Persian and Christian models influenced the birth of Arab-Islamic historiographic tradition[38]. This is especially noticeable in relation to chronography —so appreciated by the Greeks and later continued by the Christians— which had a notable influence in Syria[39]. This is in addition to the understanding that most of the centers of culture in the process of Hellenization of the East were established in that area or around it[40].

Furthermore, and although we do not have an accurate knowledge of all the ways Hellenism came to the territories of the Arabian Peninsula, we do know how it reached Syria and Persia during the period of expansion of Alexander the Great's Empire. We may point to the consolidation of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt as a significant turning point[41], with an active commercial role in the Red Sea[42] through the Roman period to the development of a series of ports that facilitated contacts with Egypt, the area of Yemen, and the Indian Ocean[43]. Additionally, although the framework of Hellenization in Egyptian territories was not represented through institutions of a true Greek *polis*, it was so through educational institutions, especially literature and art[44]; this was already achieved, at all levels of the population, at the time of Roman occupation[45]. By the time of Philo of Alexandria, that city, the administrative center of Egypt, was, after Rome, the second most important city of the Roman Empire: a nexus of cultural adoption and irradiation whose influence —through the production of papyrus, among other things— was felt all over the Roman world.

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[30] Saman, Tahir. "El Medio Oriente". *Anales de la Universidad de Chile*, 83-84 (1951): 261.

[31] Herrera Cajas, Héctor. "Los orígenes…": 27.

[32] Pacheco, José Antonio. "El universalismo judeo-helenístico en Filón de Alejandría y Pablo de Tarso". *Convivium*, 17 (2004): 168.

[33] Pacheco, José Antonio. "El universalismo…": 168.

[34] Pacheco, José Antonio. "El universalismo…": 169.

[35] Pacheco, José Antonio. "El universalismo…": 169.

[36] Pacheco, José Antonio. "El universalismo…": 174; Alesso, Marta. "Los géneros literarios en el primer cristianismo". *Circe de clásicos y modernos*, 10 (2006): 25.

[37] Jaeger, Werner. *Cristianismo primitivo y Paideia Griega*. México Federal District: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965 (1961): 49.

[38] Robinson, Chase. *Islamic historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003: I, 41.

[39] Robinson, Chase. *Islamic*...: 49; Millar, Fergus. *The Roman Near East*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1993: 401; Saman, Tahir. "El Medio…": 265.

[40] Saman, Tahir. "El Medio…": 165.

But Philo is one among a significant number of Jewry who, early on, constituted a *polythema* (*πολίτευμα)*; that is, a quasi-independent political entity with rules of operation, but lacking real autonomy. Indeed, Pharaoh Ptolemy II supported the Greek version of the Bible, the so-called *Septuagint* version, writing to the High Priest of Jerusalem to send a delegation of wise men who knew Greek and Hebrew to translate the sacred books of Judaism[46]. The Alexandrian world opened up new possibilities for the Hebrews, who maintained a twofold attitude: on the one hand, they remained loyal to Mosaic law; and, on the other, they integrated themselves into social life under the *gymnasion* educational system[47]. It is in this symbiosis that a character like Philo is understood; simultaneously Platonic and Stoic, while stating that Moses is the first source of philosophy[48]. Therefore, this geographical proximity and, above all, the gradual expansion of Jewish Hellenism in the Near East was fundamental to the cultural framework whence Islam emerged and the traditions that surround and contextualize it.

Of the multiple factors that would influence the gradual expansion of the Hellenistic matrix in the peninsula was the development of Jewish and Christian communities that had cemented their tradition from the existence of a Greco-

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[41] Sayago de Warner, Ana María. "La política urbanizadora de los lágidas y la helenización de Egipto", *XIII Simposio Nacional de Estudios Clásicos (La Plata, 19-23 September, 1994)*. La Plata: Universidad Nacional de La Plata. Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, Centro de Estudios Latinos, 1996: 268.

[42] De Lacy. *Arabia before Muḥammad*. AMS Press: Open Library, 1973: 71-74.

[43] Millar, Fergus. "The Roman…": 387; Tomber, Roberta. "Rome and South Arabia: new artefactual evidence from the Red Sea", *Proceedings of the seminar for Arabian studies (London, 17-19 July, 2003)*. London: Archaeopress, 2004: 351; Sidebotham, Steven. "Aelius Gallus and Arabia". *Latomus*, 45/3 (1986): 602.

[44] Sayago de Warner, Ana María. "La política urbanizadora…": 269.

[45] Morkholm, Otto. *Early Hellenistic Coinage from the Accession of Alexander to the Peace of Apamaea (336-188 BC)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991: 53.

[46] López Férez, José Antonio. "Filón de Alejandría: obra y pensamiento", *Synthesis*, 16 (2009): 15.

[47] López Férez, José Antonio. "Filón de Alejandría…": 17; Harrison, Robert. "Hellenization in Syria-Palestine…": 99.

[48] López Férez, José Antonio. "Filón de Alejandría…": 71; Daniélou, Jean. *Philo of Alexandria*, trans. James Colbert. Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2014 (1958): 60 and following.

Roman cultural base[49]; in fact, the formation of various theological schools in the Syrian space were deeply related to Hellenistic philosophical currents[50].

However, in the Syrian case, the Hellenistic matrix was incorporated not only through Egyptian-Judaic influence: at the death of Alexander the Great, Syria took, in the hands of Antigonus, its fundamental place in the politics of the initial Hellenism that materialized in the construction of Antigonia[51] and that was consolidated from the existence of the Tetrapolis (Antioch, Seleucia Pieria, Apamea, and Laodicea)[52]. Such Hellenization presupposed the development of a political, urban, and religious system of syncretic character based on the Greek language, displacing Aramaic. This persisted and was accentuated throughout the Roman period[53], evidence of which is mainly in architecture and art[54].

During the period of Roman domination, Syria would become the eastern border of the empire, from where the empire would continue and accentuate the Hellenistic tradition, becoming a sort of sentry of the civilization of the West in the East[55]. However, the Sassanids, with their claim to Achaemenid descendance, saw themselves as the enemies *par excellence* of the West[56]. Despite being a border between Rome and Persia, Syria and Mesopotamia formed a largely uniform culture, constituting in the Fertile Crescent a truly cosmopolitan world, open at both ends[57]. Notwithstanding, on the eastern Roman border toward the 3rd century A.D., another factor was present: the desert tribes of Syria and Arabia. These were a potential enemy, located in no man's land, who could ally either Rome or Persia. For the same reason, Rome had a suspicious attitude towards these tribes; it was not for profligacy that she built the *limes arabicus*: with the prevailing idea that these tribes would either ally or submit[58], a line of forts were situated at regular intervals along the main road from Damascus and Palmyra, to Sura on the Euphrates[59].

At the same time, it is no mystery that Christianity emerged and developed on a Hellenized cultural basis that was quite consolidated in these spaces. In fact, perhaps the most important propagator of Christianity, Paul of Tarsus, was a son of the Roman

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[49] De Lacy, "Arabia before…": 125-126.

[50] Baum, Wilhem; Winkler, Dietmar. *The church of the East, a concise history*. London: Routledge, 2010: 44.

[51] Antela-Bernárdez, Borja. "Ciudad y territorio en la Siria Helenística: conquista, control y redefinición desde Seleuco Nicator", *Transforming Historical Landscapes in the Ancient Empires*, Borja Antela-Bernárdez; Antoni Ñaco del Hoyo, eds. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports Oxford, 1986: 121.

[52] Antela-Bernárdez, Borja. "Ciudad y territorio…": 129.

[53] De Jong, Lidewijde. "Narratives of Roman Syria: a historiography of Syria as a province of Rome". *Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics Paper*, (2007): 3; Harrison, Robert. "Hellenization in Syria-Palestine…": 98.

[54] De Jong, Lidewijde. "Narratives of Roman Syria…": 4.

[55] Garrido González, Elisa. "Siria y el enfrentamiento romano-sasánida en el siglo IV dC." *Polius, Revista de ideas y formas políticas en la Antigüedad Clásica*, 2 (1990): 144.

[56] Garrido González, Elisa. "Siria y el enfrentamiento…": 144.

[57] Brown, Peter. *El primer milenio de la cristiandad occidental*, trans. Teófilo De Lozoya. Madrid: Crítica, 1997 (1996): 149 and following.

[58] Garrido González, Elisa. "Siria y el enfrentamiento…": 144.

[59] Garrido González, Elisa. "Siria y el enfrentamiento…": 146.

Hellenistic world and of the Greek koine[60]. But, as we have seen, this Hellenistic influence manifested itself long before in Judaism, prior to the evangelizing process of the first apostles and fathers of the church. This was due to the fact that the Greek language had established itself as the language of administration, and had filtered into commercial uses and exchanges; becoming a universal language, a *lingua franca* of the Eastern Mediterranean, it set Aramaic aside. In fact, many writings originally composed in Hebrew, began to be translated into Greek[61]. However, it must be pointed out that this process was not uniform, nor systematic, nor did it coincide between lower and higher strata. It is likely that the more educated saw in Greek thought a possibility of cultural and economic growth[62].

In this environment of Christianization and evangelization, and following the Hellenic models, the first literary genre to spring forth would be the *bios*. Aimed at a cultivated reader, *bios* also had a sub-genre of a popular nature: the exemplary life, a sort of popular hagiography that crossed all levels of society[63]. This took over the tradition that circulated orally, repeated through a language that accounted for certain formulas of orality[64]. To establish the validation of the information that these accounts gave, it was necessary to recognize certain authorities who gave value to the information. Thus, these biographies became a fundamental element in the emergence of Eastern monasticism, especially in Syria, with a considerable ascetic literature that has been little studied[65].

The truth is that this information and these genera circulated widely in the areas of Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia, and were especially cultivated by the first Christian communities of the East, where, above all, they served as *exempla* in the generation of the first monastic communities[66]. It is indeed plausible that Muḥammad had access to knowledge of some form of Hellenized Christianity —some information may have come to him through the influence of Sergius Baḥīrā, an enigmatic and controversial character, probably a Nestorian monk[67]—; however, this in no way meant the abandonment of local traditions[68]. It is rather the symbiosis that is of special interest to us: the development of both ethnic and cultural fusions, consistent over time, give the territory a particular character[69]. Between the 7th and 9th centuries, while the period was marked by religious disputes between Christians and Muslims, there was also contact and reciprocal influence[70]; the Arabian peninsula was a gigantic resonance chamber for religious conflicts between Christians, an issue that Muḥammad would eventually resolve with his absolute monotheism[71].

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[60] Alesso, Marta. "Los géneros literarios en el primer cristianismo". *Circe de clásicos y modernos*, 10 (2006): 20.

[61] Alesso, Marta. "Los géneros literarios…": 24.

[62] Alesso, Marta. "Los géneros literarios…": 25.

[63] Francisco, Héctor. "Santos y obispos en la Siria tradorromana. La historia Philotheos de Teodoreto de Cirros y la construcción del monacato oriental". *Byzantion Nea Hellás*, 19-20 (2000): 115.

[64] Alesso, Marta. "Los géneros literarios…": 31.

[65] Francisco, Héctor. "Santos y obispos…": 115.

[66] Sizgorich, Thomas. "Narrative and community in Islamic late antiquity". *Past & present*, 185 (2004): 11.

[67] "Through this type of contact, together with the assimilation of Eastern Christian culture to early Islam through religious conversion, the perception of monks being on intimate terms with the Divine became current amongst Muslims too. The monk as miracle-worker, the monk as advisor to the ruler, the monk as healer, the monk as diviner— all these images, so familiar in Christian hagiography, survived in the minds of Muslim writers. When the monks appeared in the *akhbār* of early Islam as heroes heralding the advent of Islam, they were represented as having distanced themselves from the allegedly corrupted religious faith and practices of mainstream Christians. However, leaving aside their apologetic purposes, these stories are essentially a witness to the absorption of the Eastern Christian hagiographical tradition and the world which it represents. The shared cultural landscape that underlies the apologetic end-products which form the central theme of this book can explain how the Islamic story of Baḥīrā would have made sense to its audience and how its narrators did not need a Syriac legend to find inspiration for

## 4. Arab traditions in rhetoric. History and Narration

During the period known as *Ŷāhiliyyah* (the dark period)[72], the Arab tribes developed a narrative that was rooted in memory (and in the preservation of memory) where the poet is the depository; it is a "tribal memory", proud of a past that combines heroic tradition, memorable events, the building of prestige (and, therefore, of honor): in short, a memory of the essential values of pre-Islamic Arab societies. While they are narratives, they are more so an accumulation of discontinuous and timeless news that denote a partial awareness of the past, all amalgamated into a story that does not distinguish reality from legend[73]; the information is juxtaposed, it is concise and deformed, a result of its orally transmitted origins[74]. The continuous reinvention of the story as a discursive and stylistic element characterizes this type of ahistorical narration, acquiring a certain plasticity when the past is shaped by the narrator, deepening the use of memory[75] and, for this particular case, following the

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a miraculous event, involving the founder of their religion and an esteemed old monk (*bḥīrā*) who was a witness to the truth of his mission": Roggema, Barbara. *The Legend of Sergius Bahira. Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 2009: 59-60; Abel, Armand. "Bahira", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 1986: 922 and following; Baum, Wilhem; Winkler, Dietmar. "The church of the East…": 42.

[68] Sartre, Maurice. "L'Asie Mineure…": 333.

[69] Saman, Tahir. "El Medio…": 257.

[70] See Thomas, David; Roggema, Barbara. *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History, Vol. 1 (600-900)*. Leiden: Brill, 2009: 2: "The history of this period is largely one of controversy and confrontation, though behind this lies a less aggressive story of shared living and reciprocal borrowing of both knowledge and wisdom", and p. 5: "In these early centuries of Islam, more is known about encounters and mutual influence between followers of the two faiths in urban than in rural settings".; also, Goddard, Hugh. *A History of Christian Muslim Relations*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000: 19 and following.

[71] Brown, Peter. "El primer milenio…": 157. See also, Brown, Peter. *El mundo de la Antigüedad Tardía. De Marco Aurelio a Mahoma*, trans. Juan Antonio Piñero. Madrid: Gredos, 2012 (1971): 190 and following.

[72] We have dealt with these issues in two articles: Melo, Diego. "La Yahilliyya: oscuridad y luces en la Arabia pre-islámica". *Intus-Legere*, 7/1 (2003): 123-138; and also Melo, Diego. "Gloria, sacrificio y martirio en la tradición preislámica y en el Islam clásico". *Revista Tiempo y Espacio*, 18: 79-89.

[73] Maíllo, Felipe. *Vocabulario de Historia Árabe e Islámica*. Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1996: 44.

[74] Maíllo, Felipe. *De Historiografía árabe*. Madrid: Abada Editores, 2009: 24.

[75] Robinson, Chase. "Islamic…": 10.

model of poetry and prose. All this, of course, is not exclusive to the Arabs, but is repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, across all tribal societies[76].

All these accounts provide certain information on the values, the social and ethical environments, of pre-Islamic society. Some of the characteristics that stand out in these poems refer to tribal solidarity: the *asabiyyah*, the backbone and soul of Bedouin society[77]; Bedouin ideals such as the *muruwwa*[78], related to manhood, virility, courage, sobriety, dignity, fidelity, generosity, and hospitality; a kind, *mutatis mutandis*, of Arab *virtus*[79].

Furthermore, these stories especially concentrate on developing a certain genealogical pride, manifested in the transmission of some lists that in their day were transformed into true treatises –*gamharah*. In them, truth is mixed with falsification, even, in some cases, the incorporation of Adam as an ancestor; all this, with the purpose of giving the greatest glory to the group[80]. This effort to define and establish the origin of a certain tribe will contribute to the birth of an incipient historiographic form, *nasab*, that is, genealogy[81].

Thus "Islamic fact" mutated through stories, incorporating new elements to the pre-Islamic tradition, especially in relation to the genealogical validation of the information or news that formed the *corpus* of the new historiographic genres. Tribal memory is fundamentally the genealogy of the tribe; the focal aspect was not generally the reality of the story (which, as such, remains caught between legend and myth). Moreover, in this perspective, individuals were subsumed into community. Nevertheless, after Muḥammad, attention was fixed on the individual, whose story, moreover, became that of an exemplar life[82]. Hence the importance of recording the reliability of information.

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76. Ibarra, Ana Carolina. "Entre la historia y la memoria. Memoria colectiva, identidad y experiencia: discusiones recientes", *Memorias (in) cógnitas: contiendas en la historia*, Maya Aguiluz Ibarguren, Gilda Waldman, coords., México: Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Ciencias y Humanidades-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Colección debate y Reflexión), 2007; Retso, Jan. *The Arabs in antiquity: their history from the Assyrians to the Umayyads*. London: Routledge, 2013; Von Grunebaum, Gustave. "The nature of Arab unity before Islam". *Arabica*, 10/ 1 (1963): 5-23.

77. Corriente, Federico; Sala, Juan Pedro, eds. *Las Diez Mu'allaqat: poesía y panorama de Arabia en vísperas del Islam: traducción literal y completa de los diez poemas originales, anotada y comentada en los aspectos literario e histórico*. Madrid: Hiperión, 2005: 78. See, also, Gabrieli, Francesco. "ʿAsabiyya", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, Johannes Hendrik Kramers, Évariste Lévi-Provencal, Joseph Shacht, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1986: I, 681.

78. In relation to the complexities involved in this concept, see: Farès, B., "Muruʾa", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Emeri Johannes Van Donzel, Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, Charles Pellat, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1993: VII, 636-638; Vernet, Juan. *Lo que Europa debe al Islam de España*. Barcelona: Acantilado/Quaderns Crema, 2006: 43.

79. Maíllo, Felipe. *Diccionario de Derecho Islámico*. Guijón: Ediciones Trea, 2005: 255.

80. Maíllo, Felipe. "Diccionario…": 82.

81. See Lacoste, Yves. *El nacimiento del tercer mundo: Ibn Jaldún*. Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1971: 254. Khalidi, Tarif. *Arabic historical thought in the classical period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994: 5; Rosenthal, Franz. *A History of Muslim Historiography*. Leiden: Brill, 1952: 19-21.

82. Roberts, Nancy. "Imitatio Christi, Imitatio Muḥammadi, Imitatio Dei". *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 47/2 (2012): 227-248.; Schimmel, Annemarie. *And Muḥammad is his messenger: The veneration of the Prophet in Islamic piety*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Books, 2014.

It is in this way that one of the first concerns of the nascent Islamic community, at least during the first century of the Hegira, was centered on the tradition of the prophet; the validity of any source referring to him would form the germ of the methodology (heuristics) to reconstruct his life.

The novel aspect of this discussion lies in the fact that, during the pre-Islamic period, attention had been focused on the compilation of stories and news of the *jabar* (pl. *abjār*) type —that is, news, newness, information, tradition of a historical nature[83]— which, not subject to any formal organization, instead gave accounts of those memorable events[84]. According to Pedro Chalmeta, these referred to a history of anecdotal and timeless character, where it mattered more what happened (the event) than when it happened (the time). In this sense, the story did not obey a chronology, because neither did it admit any kind of nexus that connected two or more events; rather, it privileged, above all, short or anecdotal stories or poetic inserts, where there was no story[85].

These *abjar* would become the default model to tell the story of events in the early stages of the development of the Islamic community, regardless the inherent risks of additions and losses that this would entail. Thus, this information would become the "cornerstone" of the record that shapes history at the dawn of Islam, and would be distinguished by the use of articulations such as *ḥaddaṯa-nī* (I informed myself), *ajbara-ni* (he told me), *qāla* (so-and-so said), *sami'tu* or *sami'nā* (I heard-we heard), among the most relevant and present in almost all the works of the early historiographic genres, and all of which gives an account of the value placed on the authority of the one who tells it[86].

Related to these *abjār*, although of a different nature, are the so-called *ḥadīṯ*, which has the meaning of "story" or "news". As a technical term, however, *ḥadīṯ* refers to a short story or anecdote about the Prophet Muḥammad, "whether one of his deeds is witnessed by one of his contemporaries, or one of his sayings taken from his own mouth[87], or even his silences"[88]. This narrative form seems to derive from a hagiographic tradition common to all the religious cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean and, in this specific case, is quite similar to the legal tradition of the Talmud[89]. Given the connections and evident transfers of traditions which we have indicated, it is therefore possible to establish that these first historiographic manifestations in Islam resulted from the adaptation of Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and others that followed the guidelines of Hellenistic apologetics and philosophy that manifested itself in the elaboration of the lives of saints, legal treatises, sermons, and commentaries on the Scriptures[90].

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[83] Maíllo, Felipe. "Vocabulario…": 124; Rida Najl, Mohamad. "Islamic Historiography", *History and Historiography: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam,* Gholamali Haddad Adel, Mohammad Jafar Elmi, Hassan Taromi-Rad, eds. London: EWI Press Ltd., 2012: 13-14.

[84] Viguera, María Jesús. "Tiempo e Historia en el Islam", *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares,* LIX/1 (2004): 57-81. Rosenthal, Franz. "A History of Muslim…": 59-63; Rida Najl, Mohamad. "Islamic…": 13-14.

[85] Chalmeta, Pedro. "Una historia discontinua e intemporal (jabar)", *Hispania*, 123 (1973): 35-36; Chalmeta, Pedro. "Historiografía medieval hispana: arabica", *Al-Andalus: revista de las Escuelas de Estudios Árabes de Madrid y Granada*, 37/2 (1972): 360; Leder, Stefan. "The use of composite form in the making of the Islamic historical tradition". *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, 6 (2005): 126. Robinson, Chase. "Islamic…": 15.

[86] Maíllo, Felipe. "De Historiografía…": 33.

[87] Maíllo, Felipe. "Vocabulario…": 96.

[88] Maíllo, Felipe. "De Historiografía…": 28. See Motzi, Harald. *Hadith: Origins and development*. Alderchot: Routledge, 2004.

All *ḥadīṯ* tend to be stereotyped, following the same model: an exordium, which always starts with a "he said", "I heard", "he told me" —as had been established for the *abjār*— and a subsequent list of people (*riyal*) involved in the telling[91]. This constitutes two portions of the story: the *Isnād*, which is the chain of transmitters (the "genealogy of information"), which is presented as the support of authenticity and authority of the story; and the *Matn*, which is the news or information, or rather, the text itself[92]. Thus, the reliability of a *ḥadīṯ* depends on the consistency of its chain of transmission and, depending on the above, they are to be classified as: *saḥīḥ* (true); *ḥasan* (acceptable), *ḍa'īf* (weak), *muḍṭarib* (discarded, for verifiable falsehood or for contradicting general principles) or *mawḍū'* (apocryphal)[93]. This resulted in the development of the so-called *ḥadīṯ* sciences or *ḥadīṯ* criticism sciences[94], which would eventually become the method for validating the legitimacy of all kinds of news and which was developed over the centuries. Pedro Chalmeta adds that this genre has among its characteristics: timelessness, since they are never dated; exemplarity —mimesis[95]—, since Muḥammad is always the model to follow; an anecdotal and oral character[96], reminiscent of the *abjār*; and its ahistorical character[97].

The early attempts to consign news related to the prophet's life, or to reconstruct that past, did so from validated accounts that do not necessarily obey a chronological construction. Therefore, the great effort made by the compilers was focused, fundamentally, on the authentication of the information through the analysis of the chains of transmitters, that is, authorities responsible for the story[98]. This tool was widely used by early historians[99] to authenticate the news as reflects a model of community; it is, to a certain extent, the basis of a genre structured similarly to hagiography[100]. It was known, no doubt, to some Arab tribes that circulated in those frontier spaces where different discourses and traditions were associated, such as, for example, from the sanctuary of Symeon the Stylite[101].

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[89] Newby, Gordon Darnell. "Imitating Muḥammad in Two Genres: Mimesis and Problems of Genre in Sîrah and Sunnah". *Medieval Encounters*, 3/3 (1997): 267.

[90] Newby, Gordon Darnell. "Imitating Muḥammad…": 270.

[91] Gómez García, Luz. *Diccionario de islam e islamismo*. Madrid: Espasa, 2009: 126.

[92] Minguet, Aránzazu. "Técnicas narrativas en los hadices naturales",*'Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones*, 8 (2003): 74; Martos, Juan. "Islam y derecho: las escuelas jurídicas en al-Ándalus", *Arbor: Ciencia, pensamiento y cultura*, 731 (2008): 436. In greater depth is the work of Motzi, Harald. "Hadith…"; Khalidi, Tarif. "Arabic historical…": 22; Melo, Diego. "Notas en torno a los fundamentos jurídicos del Islam: Corán, Sunna y Shari'a. Definiciones y precisiones conceptuales", *Revista História: Questões & Debates*, 41/2 (2004): 57-72.

[93] Gómez García, Luz. "Diccionario de islam…": 126.

[94] Minguet, Aránzazu. "Técnicas narrativas…": 73; Donner, Fred. "Modern approaches to early Islamic history", *The New Cambridge History of Islam, I*, Chase Robinson, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011: 630; Senturk, Recep. *Introducción a la ciencia del hadiz: Anatomía de la red de transmisión del hadiz (610-1505)*. Al Ándalus Editores, 2008: 24; Lowry, Josep. "The prophet as lawgiver and legal authority", *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, Jonathan Brockopp. New York: Cambridge University Press (2010): 93-96.

[95] Newby, Gordon Darnell. "Imitating Muḥammad…": 266.

[96] Chalmeta, Pedro. "Una historia discontinua…": 26-27.

[97] Newby, Gordon Darnell. "Imitating Muḥammad…"; Hallaq, Wael. "The authenticity of prophetic Hadith: a pseudo-problem". *Studia Islamica*, 89 (1999): 75-90; Motzi, Harald. "Hadith…".

Regardless, one genre that is assuredly associated with hagiography are the stories composed by Muḥammad's direct companions, giving rise to the *sīra* (conduct, way of life, procedure, biography, or life)[102]. This is justified by the fact that, from the development of the Islamic community, oral history would be intermingled with the development of a written history, and whose first concern was Muḥammad[103]. In fact, the aim of the *sīra* was, on the one hand, to localize Muḥammad in a certain time and space and, on the other hand, to give him a certain historical significance[104]. It is, therefore, from the above that al-Zuhrī[105] began to compose a biography of the prophet from multiple oral traditions, which we know was later collected by Ibn Isḥāq[106], the disciple of the former[107]. The first tells a story that goes back to Adam and Eve, incorporating the time from the Creation to Muḥammad (which the second would later edit[108]). That first work includes much material that is not from the *Sunnah*, such as *maghazi* literature; and poetry, a tradition that, as we have seen, goes back to pre-Islamic times. It also incorporates material from Jewish sources —known as *Isra'iliyyat*[109]— especially for the pre-Muḥammad period. This was all facilitated by the cultural circulations in the Peninsula. That said, this work has still been criticized for its method, which does not always apply the *ḥadīṯ* sciences[110].

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[98] Senturk, Recep. *Introducción a la ciencia del hadiz: Anatomía de la red de transmisión del hadiz (610-1505)*. Al Ándalus Editores, 2008: 25.

[99] Rasul, Muḥammad Gholam. *The origin and development of Muslim historiography*. Muḥammad Ashraf, 1968: 9.

[100] Schimmel, Annemarie. "And Muḥammad…".

[101] Sizgorich, Thomas. "Narrative and community…": 18.

[102] Raven, Wim. "Sira", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Emeri Johannes Van Donzel, Wolfhart Heinrichs, G. Lecomte, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1997: IX, 660-663. Khalidi, Tarif. "Arabic historical…": 30; Robinson, Chase. "Islamic…": 20.

[103] Robinson, Chase. "Islamic…": 11.

[104] Newby, Gordon Darnell. "Imitating Muḥammad…": 268.

[105] See also: Duri, Abd Al. "Al-Zuhri. A Study on the beginnings of history writing in Islam", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 19 (1957): 1-12. Mujani, Wan Kamal. "Sirah in Early Muslim Historiography", *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences*, 6 (2012): 961-962; Robinson, Chase. "Islamic…" 24-25; Rida Najl, Mohamad. "Islamic…": 16-17.

[106] Ishq, Ibn Ishaq. *The Life of Muḥammad*, introduction and notes by Alfred Guillaume, Oxford University Press, 2004; Galmés de Fuentes, Álvaro. *La Épica Románica y la Tradición Árabe*. Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 2002: 33-34; Khalidi, Tarif. "Arabic historical…": 34-39; Gabrieli, Francesco. "Arabic Historiography", *Islamic Studies*, 18/2 (1979): 83; Mujani, Wan Kamal. "Sirah in Early…": 962-963; Watt, Montgomery. "The materials used by Ibn Ishaq", *Historians of the Middle East*, Bernar Lewis; Peter Malcom Holt, eds. London: Unviersity of London, 1962: 23-24.

[107] Rasul, Muḥammad Gholam. "The origin…": 19.

[108] Milby, Katherine Amanda. "The Making of an Image: The Narrative Form of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah". *Thesis, Georgia State University*, 2008: 6.

A sub-theme built on the basis of the same materials is that of the *maghazi* or military campaigns in which the Prophet[111] participated. Cultivated in Medina —where the traditions that gave rise to them were accepted[112]—, this genre was significantly contributed to by al-Wāqidī (d. 823)[113], the first major compiler of these exploits recorded in his work, *Kitab al-Maghazi*[114]. To compile his record, al-Wāqidī cites a series of testimonies from residents of Medina[115]; notably, he does so following a chronological sequence, focusing his account on the years from the Hegira (622 A.D) to the death of Muḥammad (632 A.D), giving priority to the campaigns against the Quraysh and the Jews[116]. In this sense, this type of story evokes those contained in the *Ayyām al-'Arab*[117], but with the exception that it is not based on tribal memory; rather, it employs a series of authorities and testimonies scrutinized by the author[118] and which allow the work to be given a hagiographic tinge centered on the actions of the Prophet[119]. However, in these "there are as many chronological differences between the known facts as between the different recensions"[120], which makes an orderly follow-up of events almost impossible.

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[109] Vajda,G. *Isra'iliyat*, EI277.

[110] Milby, Katherine Amanda. "The Making…": 7.

[111] Maíllo, Felipe. "De Historiografía…": 36.

[112] Zaman, Muḥammad Qasim. "Maghazi and Muhaddithun: Reconsidering the Treatment of "Historical" materials in Early Collections of Hadith", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28/1 (1996): 1-18.

[113] In this regard, see: Jones, Marsden, ed. *The Kitab al-Maghazi of al-Waqidi*, 3 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966; Khalidi, Tarif. "Arabic historical…": 44; Horovitz Josef. "The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and their autors", *Islamic Culture*, 2 (1928): 24; Robinson, Chase. "Islamic…" 29; Rida Najl, Mohamad. "Islamic…": 18-19; Al-Baladhuri. *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, trans. Philip Khuri Hitti. New York: Columbia University, 1916: 9.

[114] Al-Wa'kidy. *History of Muḥammad's campaigns*, ed. Alfred Von Kremer, J. Thomas, Baptist Mission Press, 1856; Faizer, Rizwi. "The issue of authenticy regarding the traditions of al-Waqidi as established in his Kitab al-Maghazi", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 58/2 (1999): 97-106.

[115] Faizer, Rizwi. "The issue of authenticy…": 99.

[116] Faizer, Rizwi. "The issue of authenticy…": 102; *The Life of Muḥammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab Al-Maghazi*, ed. Rizwi Faizer. London: Routledge, 2013.

[117] Faizer, Rizwi. "The issue of authenticy…": 100.

[118] Faizer, Rizwi. "The issue of authenticy…": 106. It is interesting how the first part of the text presents these testimonies and, above all, the chain of transmitters: "Abu Muḥammad al-Hassan b. Alí b. (ibn, son of) Muḥammad al-Jawharì informed us of what Abu Umar Muḥammad b. al-Abbás b. Muḥammad b. Zakariyya b. Hayawayh related to us, word for word. He said: It was read from the book of Abu l-Qasim Abd al-Wahhab b. Abi Hayya, while I listened. and he confirmed it, on Saturday morning, in the house of Abu Abdullah al-Warraq, the district of Shabib, the gate of al-Sham, by the Gate of Gold in the Alley of Balkh, in the month of Jamada l-Akhira in the year 318 AH. He said: Abú Abdullah Muḥammad b. Shuja al-Thalji nos relató diciendo: Muḥammad b. Umar al-Waqidi related to me that Umar b. Uthman b. Abd al-Rahman b. Said b. Yarbú al-Makhzumi, Musa b. Muḥammad b.Ibrahim b. al-Harith al´-Taymi, Muḥammad b – Abdullah b. Muslim, musa b. Yaqub b. Abdullah b. Wahb b. Zamaa, Abdullah b. Jafar b. Abd al-Rahman b. al-Miswar b. Makhrama, Abu Bakr b. Abdullah b. Muḥammad b. Abi Sabra, Said b. Uthman b. Abd al-Rahman b. Abdullah al-Taymi, Yunus b. Muḥammad al-Zafari, Aidh b.yahya, Muḥammad b. Amr, Muadh b. Muḥammad al-Ansari, Yahya b. Abdullah b. Abi Qatada, Abd al-Rahman b. Abd al-Aziz b. Abdullah b. Uthman b. Hunayf, Ibn Abi Habiba, Muḥammad b. Yahya b. Sahl b. Abi Hathma, Abd al-Hamid b. Jafar, Muḥammad b. Salih b. Dinar, Abd al-Rahman b. Muḥammad

None of the first accounts of the life of the prophet (*sīra*) have come down to us in their original form[121]; the version we have is that of al-Bakkā'ī[122], through the abridged recension of Ibn Hišām (d. 835)[123]. It is not a mere summary or a minor work; on the contrary, its main contribution is the analysis of the information collected by Ibn Isḥāq, eliminating the poetic inserts of the original version[124], and also some information that was considered "foreign material"[125]. Furthermore, to give it a more biographical stance, Ibn Hisham begins his account in a similar way to the Gospel of Mark, —that is, by establishing a genealogy[126]—, and provides, as Luke and Matthew do, a brief account of Muḥammad's childhood in a constant attempt to demonstrate the early vocation of the Prophet through the introduction of miracles, a resource that may be due to contact with Jews and, in particular, with Christians[127]. This is perhaps due to the fairly consolidated ecumenical grouping among the Arabs[128] and, from this perspective, exchanges of certain models of writing had already taken place. According to Peters, these were "the result of an imitative or polemical piety and sometimes —and perhaps at an even earlier stage— of a simple desire to entertain and its manifestation are not difficult for the historian to discern and eliminate"[129]. Nevertheless, the problem always referred to the existence of sources and their veracity[130] (or the lack thereof); however, it followed the model of certain writings of a hagiographic nature that

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b. Abi Bakr, Yaqub b. Muḥammad bm Abu Sasaa, Abd al-Rahman b. Abi l-Zinad, Abu Mashar, [Page 2] Malik b. Abi l-Rijjal, Ismail b. Ibrahim b. Uqba, Abd al-Hamid b. Imrán b. Abi Anas, and Abd al-Hamid b. Abi Abs, all related to me about this in portions, and some of them were more reliable than others regarding their traditions. Others also related to me, and 1 wrote down all that was related to me.", in: Faizer, Rizwi. "The Life of Muḥammad…": 3.

[119] Galmés de Fuentes, Álvaro. "La Épica Románica…": 34.

[120] Maíllo, Felipe. "De Historiografía…": 39.

[121] Rasul, Muḥammad Gholam. "The origin…": 20.

[122] Jones, John Marsden. "Ibn Isḥāq and al-Wāqidī: The Dream of'Ātika and the Raid to Nakhla in Relation to the Charge of Plagiarism". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 22/1 (1959): 41.

[123] Maíllo, Felipe. "De Historiografía…": 36. In relation to the publication of Ibn Ishaq, see: Galmés de Fuentes, Álvaro. "La Épica Románica…": 34 and Hisham, A.; Ibn Ishak, M. *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Isḥāqś Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*. Oxford University Press, 1980. Mujani, Wan Kamal. "Sirah in Early…": 964; Al-Baladhuri. "Kitab…": 4-5.

[124] Rasul, Muḥammad Gholam. "The origin…": 20.

[125] Peters, Francis. *Muḥammad and the Origins of Islam*. New York: SUNY Press, 1994: 263.

[126] 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām. *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allah*. Ed. Guillaume, Alfred; Isḥāq, M. I. Oxford University Press, 1967: 3-4.

[127] 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām. "The Life of Muḥammad…": 69-82.

[128] Sizgorich, Thomas. "Narrative and community…": 12.

[129] Peters, Francis. "Muḥammad and the Origins…": 263.

[130] Sizgorich, Thomas. "Narrative and community…": 13.

were developed in that symbolic space represented by the Semitic *koine*[131]. We are faced with the problem of introducing non-historical elements into the historical narrative[132], a frequent issue in classical and Christian historiography[133]. Since this rhetorical resource has been shown to exist also in the Islamic world, it must be because the audiences had not changed substantially, nor had the conceptions about the irruption of the wonderful in the everyday. This matter is accepted by the Islamic narrators who, in short, are part of that same audience which they addressed[134]. These historical-religious conceptions, both in relation to the writers and their audiences, coincide in their notion of 'rhetorical community', applied to Mediterranean culture in the late antiquity. Here we understand the Mediterranean in the Braudelian sense, that is, a mass of land that extends beyond its shores, rising up rivers, literally "overflowing", and where a true "Mediterranean identity"[135] is manifested. This implies sharing certain visions and lifestyles that can even overcome political or religious differences.

## 5. In concluding

Long-standing traditions, such as poetry and genealogies, have been shown to converge at the origin of historical narratives in nascent Islam. Elements rooted in a certain historical memory are connected to legendary traditions used to explain the origin of the tribe. In this area, oral tradition is of essential value.

We consider the Fertile Crescent a liminal space, constituted of cultural exchanges. Where newborn Islam meets the well-established Hellenistic traditions, it would feel their influence in Arab-Islamic culture. This is above all in the incorporation of a discursive logic established in Hellenism, where the encounter between the Arab and the Christian (and Jewish) worlds allowed for and developed the circulation of ideas and literary and scientific works.

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[131] Sizgorich, Thomas. "Narrative and community…": 15.

[132] Según expresión de Collingwood, Robin George. *Idea de la Historia*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura económica de España, 2004.

[133] "La inclusión de elementos sobrenaturales —apunta Catalina Balmaceda— o la intervención divina en la narración no la excluye por sí misma de la categoría histórica, como se [aprecia] también en las narraciones de Heródoto o Tito Livio, que consignan tales intervenciones como hechos consumados, sin preguntarse por su autenticidad" ["The inclusion of supernatural elements," says Catherine Balmaceda, "or divine intervention in the narrative does not in itself exclude it from the historical category, as can also be seen in the stories of Herodotus and Titus Livius, who describe such interventions as faits accomplis without questioning their authenticity]: Aurell, Jaume; Balmaceda, Catalina; Burke Peter; Soza, Felipe. *Comprender el pasado. Una historia de la escritura y el pensamiento histórico*, Madrid, 2013: 61; Candau Morán, José Maria. "El Universo referencial de los historiadores griegos tardíos". *Las letras griegas bajo el Imperio*, Maximo Brioso; Francisco José González Ponce, eds. Sevilla, 1996: 150 and following.

[134] See Marín, José. "La Historia y el Historiador…": 29 and following.

[135] See Abulafia, David. *El Gran Mar. Una historia humana del Mediterráneo*, Rosa Salleras Puig, trans. Barcelona: Crítica, 2014 (2011): 11 and following.

All of the above played a fundamental role in the construction of an Islamic historiography, from the genres linked to the Sīra and the Maghazi —which involve indigenous elements and local traditions— to its culmination with the work of al-Tabari. It is the corollary of a way of thinking about history that uses different opposing sources and addresses a narration that is not only local, but also universal, in which the possibility of integrating the history of the Empire into a larger story stands out, leaving behind indications of the influences of Mediterranean traditions.

There is a community of rhetoric in the Mediterranean that is manifested in the narrative modes, the method (sources), the inclusion of a prologue, as well as in certain writers and receptive audiences that, throughout Late Antiquity, have encouraged the incorporation of non-historical facts in the historical narrative. We find these elements in the Latin and Greek Christian historiographic tradition —which is based on classical and Hellenistic traditions— but also in the early Arab-Islamic historiography, which is transformed, within the sphere of circulation, in its projection towards new frontiers.