

STATISTICAL FREQUENCY OF QURANIC REFERENCES IN THE WORKS OF HADITH: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE NARRATIVES OF THE PROPHET'S EARLY LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Reading the major works of hadith, one might come to realise that the use of Quranic references within the work of hadith is occasionally obscure or even, at times, inconsistent. Moreover, the frequency of references taken directly from the Quran itself fluctuates considerably. Observations on the use of Quranic references in the early hadith sources substantiate the fact that each of the authors of hadith employed greatly differing numbers of Quranic verses as an allusion to the Prophet's life. This study aims to explore the statistical frequency of Quranic references employed in the works of hadith as specific reference to the narratives of the Prophet's early life. The study is qualitative in nature in which textual analysis was employed as a major instrument for this study. The study in its finding confirms that hadith literature works have provided us with a plethora of information about Muhammad's biography. With its decisive coverage of Muhammad's biography, the literature offers the most cursory Quranic references to Muhammad's

early life. The rarity of these references, however, indicates the fragility of the connection between the Quran and a verifiable account of Muhammad's early life.

Keywords: Frequency, statistical, Quran, sirah nabawiyyah, hadith

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reviews of early Muslim sources confirm that some verses of the Qur'ān have been perceived by Muslim scholars as direct references to the narratives of the Prophet's early life (Azmi, 2016). These selected verses are deemed to contain information about Muhammad's genealogy, birth, childhood and other aspects of his youth. Some scholars have, however, argued about the appropriateness and authority of these Quranic references as being the true bearers of information of the Prophet's biography. These references are problematic from a number of different points of view. Among them is the Quranic references that are perceived as allusions to the Prophet's life are employed only by certain scholars. For example, the use of 94:1 as reference to the event of the Prophet's breast is only found in al-Timirdhī's *Sunan* of the ninth century, while Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa'd, scholars of the same century, did not employ the verse directly, while, nevertheless, elaborating upon the occasion in their writing. It appears as if they were not aware, or they did not perceive, the verse as direct reference to the event. It seems likely that these particular forms of Quranic references to the Prophet's life were not widely accepted at the time. There is a further consideration that the thought regarding the verse evolved in later period, which implies that the genesis of the thought is disputable. Therefore the study aims to explore statistical frequency of Quranic verses that employed as references to the Prophet's early life.

1.1. Statement of Problem

The statistical frequency of Quranic references in the works of *sira* is constantly fluctuating and inconsistent. This implies differing degrees of understanding of certain Quranic verses between one scholar and another. As mentioned in the introduction, the quantity of verses used by Ibn Hishām differs from Ibn Sa'd's. In fact, Ibn Sa'd, in his discourse about the Prophet's genealogy, utilised a different verse to illustrate the topic that has been discussed by Ibn Hishām. Furthermore, some verses that are used as references to Muhammad seem not to have had a literal connection with the story of the Prophet's life. Moreover, the authenticity of hadith or tradition that connect particular verses with incidents in the Prophet's life are disputed. The selected verses may also seem to vary considerably or display ambiguities in the nature of their interpretation: on the one hand, certain verses could be understood as conveying the narrative of the Prophet's early life; but equally, it might also deemed otherwise.

Obviously, there is a different statistical usage of Quranic verses and a divergence of thought among scholars, regarding Quranic references to Muhammad's life, it is necessary therefore, to explore, the genesis of Quranic references to Muhammad as perceived by early Muslims, in order to analyse the probable reasons and contexts that lead to the emergence of a perceived connection between the Qur'ān and the narrative of Prophet Muhammad's life. Since the ninth century appeared as the early formative period of the development of

biographical literature of the Prophet (Azmi, 2017c), this study aims to scrutinise forms of literature of the ninth century that contain biographical information about the Prophet's early life.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study is both analytical and comparative in nature. To critically analyse an early Muslim understanding of the nature of the connection between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's biography, this study will examine the selected works of hadith of the ninth century, trace any employment of Quranic verses as references to the Prophet's early life and investigate why they were used as reference to it . If there are no apparent Quranic verses used as references to the Prophet's early life, this chapter will pose the question of why the scholars of hadith did not deem relevant any Quranic verses as an allusion to the Prophet's early life.

The works of hadith are selected on account of its status as the second primary sources in delineating the Prophet's biography. Three major hadith sources are examined critically as representative of this literature. These include are, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* and *Musnad Aḥmad*. These three works of hadith were selected as representative of Sunan Sitta and musnad, the two types of literature that comprise a profusion of information in assisting the construction the Prophet's biography. Attributed as being very revealing and helpful sources for outlining the Prophet's life, it is not surprising, therefore, to hear Ḥammāda assert that only by referring to one of the Sunan Sitta, can one develop an approximate narrative of Muhammad's life. Therefore, the present study will scrutinise representative texts from Sunan Sitta and musnad, to examine the works and their particular authorial perspectives on the Quranic references to Muhammad's early life. The *Musnad of Aḥmad* is selected as a representative of musnad works of the ninth century, one of the most prominent examples of hadith literature in the early period. The immense number of hadith compiled by Aḥmad is identified by Siddiqi and Melchert as a mine of hadith materials which serves as a significant source for various writers of different genres of Arabic literature (Azmi, 2017). The significance of *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī in hadith discourse is beyond question. In this section, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhari will be scrutinised as representative of works of *ṣaḥīḥ* of the ninth century.

Al-Jāmi' of al-Tirmidhī will be the second representative work of Sunan Sitta, since, according to Hammāda, among the Sunan of al-Arba'a (Sunan of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Majh), al-Tirmidhī's Sunan is the most valuable and informative in gathering together the traditions regarding the prophet's biography. In this chapter, this study will also explore in more depth the Quranic background of each of the scholars themselves, namely Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī. This is done in order to explore any significant factors that might possibly have influenced them in their particular Quranic perspectives, especially the Quranic references that have been employed as references to the Prophet's early life. The selection of only three representatives of hadith works does not imply that the rest of the hadith literature of the ninth century is neglected. Indeed, the canonical hadith works, known as the Sunan Sitta, will also be analysed in order to gain a fuller picture of Quranic references to Muhammad's early life in the work of hadith in the ninth century.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tsunami An analysis of three representatives of hadith literature has provided us with a picture of a somewhat fragile connection between Quranic references and the narrative of the Prophet's early life. Among these works of hadith, al-Tirmidhī is the only author to connect a verse with one of the incidents occurring in Muhammad's early life. Al-Bukhārī and Aḥmad

make no connection, even though verses that are widely used by the authors of *sira* as an allusion to Muhammad's early life evidently exist in the works of both. Apart from their appearance in the text, no connection is made between the Quranic verses and Muhammad's early life. Aḥmad and al-Bukhārī provide a different explanation of the Quranic verses from that of the *sira*'s authors. For instance, in the interpretation of 94:1 provided by al-Bukhārī in his al-*Ṣaḥīḥ* and the reading of Aḥmad in exploring the meaning of 26:219, both are offering different understandings and interpretations that clearly have no bearing on any of the incidents of the Prophet's early life.

3.1. Muhammad's Genealogy

Besides al-Wāqidī, other books of *sira* of this century have allocated a specific chapter reporting traditions that contain information about Muhammad's genealogy (Ibn Hisham, n.d; Ibn Sa'd, 1990). In comparison with the *sira*, the works of hadith, however, illustrate a unique mode of expression in elaborating topics related to the Prophet's genealogy. This is evident in the way they structure the titles of chapters regarding this theme, which indicates a sense of veneration of the Prophet. It seems like *ahl al-hadith* is the one who specifically expresses their admiration of honour to the Prophet's genealogy, which is clearly evident in the lexis and titles employed. Titles such as 'the Excellent Qualities of Prophet's Genealogy' (*Bāb Faḍl Nasb al-Nabī*), 'the Virtues that Endowed to the Prophet' (*Bāb Mā 'U'tiya al-Nabī Min al-Faḍl*) (al-Darimi, 2000), 'the Virtues of Quraysh' (*Bāb Faḍl Quraysh/Bāb Manāqib Quraysh*), and 'the Eminence of Our Prophet Over the Whole Creation' (*Bāb Tafḍīl Nabīyyanā 'Ala Jamī' al-Khalā'iq*) are evidently reverential, and demonstrate with the utmost clarity their high regard for the Prophet's genealogy. In fact, this kind of wording style is barely to be found in the work of *sira*, in which most subtopics are descriptive, presented in a straightforward style, without embellishment, and without explicitly expressing any particular tone of reverence.

Indeed, it is clear that the purpose of their writing might be the principal factor that influences these distinctive styles. *Ahl al-hadith* of this formative period was probably still undergoing the process of constituting the hadith as the second legitimate authority of Islamic jurisprudence. Initiated by al-Shāfi'ī, the later adherents of the *ahl al-hadith* movement continued to incept and develop a concrete foundation in promoting the hadith as the second authority of legal sources for Muslims (Schacht, 1950, Crone, 1987). The *muṣannafāt*, *sunan* and *ṣaḥīḥ* are all designed to provide and preserve a systematic legal guidance based on prophetic tradition. By creating a specific chapter on the Prophet's genealogy, the authors seem to emphasise the high status of Muhammad as an heir to previous prophets, highlighting the continuity of a mission delegated by God to Adam through to the final prophet. Not only connected through genealogy, Muhammad is pictured as the culmination of the previous prophets' mission. Based on these accounts, Muhammad was appointed as the final prophet, even before the existence of Adam (Ahmad, 2001; al-Darimi, 2000). This seems to imply that the messengers who were sent before him were sent only to complete the purpose of the creation of Muhammad. He is above all prophets. Not only he, but also his own tribe was portrayed as having played an important role, besides being a vessel through which to deliver this prophetic genealogy. Based on al-Marwazi's account, al-Shāfi'ī, the leader of hadith movement, was reported as praising the exemplary effort of Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe, in supporting the mission of Islam (al-Salafi, 1408H). The scholars of hadith in this century, include Aḥmad, al-Dārimī, al-Bukhārī, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Abū Dāwūd (2009), al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Abī 'Āṣim (1400H), and al-Marwazī, who each narrated a hadith, or presented evidence illustrating the nobility of the Prophet's genealogy.

Discussion of the nobility of Muhammad's genealogy might also be viewed as the direct result of the impact of a particular political dispute or context. As suggested by Khalidi and Cook, hadith literature is typically a reflection of specific political influences, either implicitly or explicitly (Khalidi, 1994; Cook, 2004). Duderija in this regard has discussed this further in explaining how a particular political environment had an impact upon the development of hadith, particularly in topics related to genealogical matters. Genealogy plays a significant role in giving an advantage in the pursuit of power within this early period. One of the criteria for the ideal Caliph is the possession of a blood-tie with the Prophet's lineage. Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī and Aḥmad, the chiefs of *ahl-hadith* camp, considered the heir of Quraysh as a preferable Caliph candidate (Shafi'i, 2001, Ahmad, 1408H; Ibn Arabi, 2003). This completely contradicts the Kharijite and Mu'tazilite's points of view, in which they did not view the heredity of the Quraysh as an essential requirement of an ideal leader. By asserting the nobility of Quraysh in their works, the scholars of hadith of this century seem to express implicitly their support of the leadership of Quraysh, as promoted by the major *ahl al-hadith* leader. Although known for their comprehensive discussions on this topic, it is hard to find evidence of their connecting Quranic reference with the nobility of the Prophet's genealogy. Most of the arguments are based on the hadith material itself.

3.2. The Prophet's Birth

Reading the Qur'ān alone, it is barely to find any verse alluding to the event of Muhammad's birth. Neither is it possible to find any Quranic verse appearing to have any bearing on Muhammad's birth. It is only the work of *sira* and hadith that afford this momentous event with precise accounts. His mother, Āmina, has been described as having a trouble-free pregnancy (Ibn Sa'd, 2001), receiving good tiding when she conceived him, hearing a voice advising her to name the boy 'Muhammad', and she was even described as seeing a light come forth from her (Ibn Ishaq, 2004). Muhammad was similarly depicted with extraordinary features: he was born circumcised and accompanied by light. At the moment of his birth, he fell to the ground, leaning forward on his hands, and raising his head towards heaven in supplication to God (Ibn Sa'd, 2001). All these narrative forms may be traced in the work of *sira* of this period. Later investigation on the *isnād* (chains of narrators) of these accounts, does, however, imply that most of the miraculous narratives are, in fact, unreliable (al-Umari, 1994; al-Mubarakfuri, 2007). Consequently, the most important fact that may be established is that there is no single Quranic verse that was employed as reference to this extraordinary occurrence in the work of *sira* of this period.

The works of hadith is, however, less detailed than the *sira*'s accounts. Since it was not composed with the purpose of providing a complete biographical account of the Prophet, the works of hadith, such as *muṣannaḥ*, *musnad*, *sunan* and *ṣaḥīḥ*, do not provide much supporting information as may be found in the *sira*. Most of these kinds of hadith works were designed to compile legal traditions as specific references for practising and developing Islamic jurisprudence. Within this legalistic nature of composition, some authors of hadith have included traditions concerning Muhammad's birth. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, for example, records a hadith offering information about the day of the Prophet's birth, while Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Abī 'Āṣim and al-Bazzār (1988) provide a hadith regarding the year of elephant as the actual year of his birth. Even though these two hadith were perceived as related to the day of the Prophet's birth, it was in fact, presented within a specifically legal framework. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj actually narrates the hadith in the Book of Fasting, in which he explains the virtue of fasting on Monday and Thursday, in which Monday is attributed as the day of the Prophet's birth. Al-Tirmidhī recorded the hadith in the specific chapter called The Chapter of *al-Manāqib* (the virtues). The other author of *Sunan Sitta* seems to absent himself from narrating

any hadith concerning this occasion; and yet again, none of the authors has cited verses from the Qur'ān as reference to this event.

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

3.3. Muhammad's Childhood

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

The matter in question now is what reasons make al-Tirmidhī connect this verse with the incident? Further investigation on the text of hadith suggests that al-Tirmidhī might have chosen this hadith intentionally, as the result of the similarity between terms employed in it, and a similar one in the Qur'ān. At the end of the *matn* (the text of hadith), al-Tirmidhī has made a brief note about the hadith itself. He seems aware that the hadith was also narrated by a few other transmitters: he acknowledges that "the hadith was [also] narrated by Hishām al-Dustūwā'ī and Hammām from Qatāda, and also [narrated] from Abū Dzar." An analysis of the *matn* narrated by Hishām and Hammām reveal that both of them use the words *fashuqqa min al-naḡr ilā marāq al-baṡnī* (and my belly was cut open from upper part of chest to lower part of belly), which is totally different from the narration that is used by al-Tirmidhī. Al-Tirmidhī decides to preserve the narration from Sa'īd Ibn Abī 'Arūba, the version that employed a phrase that is, apparently, similar to a verse of the Qur'ān. In Sa'īd's version, the phrase *fashuriḡa/fasharaḡa* is used; and this phrase seems to be more aligned with the wording of 94:1 of the Qur'ān. In fact, the word *fasharaḡa/fashuriḡa* shares the same root word with *nashraḡ* of the Qur'ān. It might also be possible that the similarity of the words inspired al-Tirmidhī to initiate a connection between the incident and verse 94:1 of the Qur'ān.

The same version of hadith was narrated by Yaḡyā ibn Salām in his *Tafsīr*, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj in his *Ṣaḡīḡ* and al-Fākihī in *Akbār al-Makka* (Ibn Salam, 2004; Muslim, n.d). None of them has ever connected the hadith, or the incident of the opening of Muhammad's breast, with 94:1 of the Qur'ān. Yaḡyā, the scholar of *tafsīr* used the hadith merely as an explanation of 17:1 of the Qur'ān, in which the verse that is perceived as a revelation of the Prophet's night journey to heaven.

The connection initiated by al-Tirmidhī might also be viewed as his own personal intellectual innovation. He is celebrated for his use of the novel inventive term of *ḡasan*, an intermediate status of hadith between *ṣaḡīḡ* and *ḡa'īf*. On the other hand, Al-Kandahlawī suggests that *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* was the first hadith work to deliver a discussion about comparative law (al-Kankuhi, 1975). Furthermore he was also recognised by Ibn Rajb as the first hadith critic to arrange a discussion about *al-'Ilal* (Defects of hadith) in thematic order (Ibn Rajb, 2001). His original and resourceful reading of hadith is also acknowledged when

he refuses to accede to the opinion of al-Bukhārī in the hadith of *istinja*'. Apart from his highly evident admiration of the Prophet, it is his creative interpretation which might be one of the factors that leads to this connection between the Qur'ān and the incident of Muhammad's early life.

3.4. Early Signs of Prophethood

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

4. CONCLUSION

The rarity of Quranic reference to Muhammad's early life in the work of hadith of the ninth century leads us to conclude that any attempt to form a connection between the Qur'ān and the story of Muhammad's early life in this literature is quite evidently fragile. Arguably, there is to be found no more than one Quranic reference connecting to the incidents of Muhammad's early life. Despite the strict method applied by hadith scholars in narrating hadith (Azmi, 2017a), the very different nature of the composition is yet another reason that might produce a different approach and understanding between the *ahl al-hadith* and the scholar of *sira*.

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