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KNOWLEDGE AND POWER IN ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY: A DIALECTICAL READING THROUGH THE LENS OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

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Abstract

This article examines the development of Islamic historiography through the framework of epistemic archaeology, drawing on Michel Foucault's theories of discourse, power, and knowledge. Employing a critical—historical and genealogical methodology, the study integrates close textual analysis of classical Islamic sources—such as *hadith, sīrah, maghāzī,* and *asmā' al-rijāl*—with discourse analysis to trace how historical narratives were shaped by theological, legal, and political interests. It examines the complex role of early transmitters, particularly the ṣaḥābah, in constructing the foundations of historical authority, and highlights how definitions of authenticity and legitimacy evolved amid sectarian and epistemological contestations. The research explores the transition from oral transmission to systematic historiographical writing in Arabic, followed by the Persianization of Islamic historical narratives under the Ghaznavid dynasty. Rather than treating Islamic historiography as a linear or unified tradition, this study argues that it constitutes a dynamic and heterogeneous field marked by multiple epistemic ruptures and reconfigurations. By situating these shifts within a Foucauldian analytic, the article shows how Islamic historical writing functioned not only as a record of the past but also as a mechanism for producing truth, governing memory, and regulating religious authority within diverse Islamic communities.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji perkembangan historiografi Islam melalui kerangka arkeologi epistemik, yang mengacu pada teori-teori Michel Foucault tentang wacana, kekuasaan, dan pengetahuan. Dengan menggunakan metodologi kritis-historis dan genealogis, penelitian ini memadukan analisis tekstual yang cermat dari sumber-sumber Islam klasik—seperti hadis, sīrah, maghāzī, dan asmā' al-rijāl—dengan analisis wacana untuk melacak bagaimana narasi sejarah dibentuk oleh kepentingan teologis, hukum, dan politik. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran kompleks para perawi awal, khususnya ṣaḥābah, dalam membangun fondasi otoritas sejarah, dan menyoroti bagaimana definisi keaslian dan legitimasi berkembang di tengah kontestasi sektarian dan epistemologis. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi transisi dari transmisi lisan ke penulisan historiografi sistematis dalam bahasa Arab, diikuti oleh Persianisasi narasi sejarah Islam di bawah dinasti Ghaznavid. Alih-alih memperlakukan historiografi Islam sebagai tradisi yang linier atau terpadu, studi ini berpendapat bahwa historiografi Islam merupakan bidang yang dinamis dan heterogen yang ditandai oleh berbagai perubahan dan konfigurasi ulang epistemik. Dengan menempatkan pergeseran ini dalam analisis Foucauldian, artikel ini menunjukkan bagaimana penulisan sejarah Islam berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai catatan masa lalu tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme untuk menghasilkan kebenaran, mengatur ingatan, dan mengatur otoritas keagamaan dalam berbagai komunitas Islam.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of Islamic historiography has increasingly drawn scholarly attention as a field in which questions of power, legitimacy, and truth are deeply entangled. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, *tārīkh* has never been a neutral record of past events; rather, it has functioned as a discursive arena where theology, law, politics, and communal identity intersect. Historical writings are not only repositories of memory but also instruments for defining orthodoxy, legitimizing authority, and shaping communal narratives about the past. As Zaman (1994) argues, early modern Muslim historiography was dialogical and ethical, involving negotiations over religious authority and collective memory rather than serving as mere chronicle. Hirschler (2012) similarly demonstrates that medieval historiography in Islamic urban contexts must be understood in relation to its performative and pedagogical functions, where teaching, preaching, and collective remembrance were intertwined with the production of historical knowledge. More recently, some scholars have shown that post−classical historiographical texts became arenas of contestation between competing regimes of knowledge, especially under the pressures of colonialism, reform, and modernity (Karabela, 2010; Safari, 2023). These contributions highlight that Islamic historiography is not a passive reflection of events but an active process of knowledge construction, situated within particular social, political, and epistemological contexts.

This article seeks to build upon such insights by engaging in a critical dialogue between Islamic historiography and Michel Foucault's conceptualization of power/knowledge (1980). Foucault's archaeology of knowledge provides a framework for understanding how regimes of truth emerge and become institutionalized, offering a lens to explore the epistemic conditions that make certain statements about the past possible while excluding others (Foucault, 2002). Rather than applying Foucault's ideas in a reductive manner, this study stages a dialectical encounter that respects the internal rationality of Islamic epistemology while critically interrogating its discursive formations. The central conceptual tension lies in the dual role of historiography as *riwāyah*—the faithful transmission of narrated events—and as an interpretive, often ideological, construction shaped by theological, political, and legal imperatives. By tracing how historical knowledge was produced, authenticated, and contested across time, this research illuminates the epistemic negotiations that underpin Islamic historical writing.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and interdisciplinary approach. It employs critical textual analysis and Foucauldian archaeology to examine historiographical texts from different periods, including early works such as Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrah*, al−Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, and al−Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-Dhahab*, as well as later authors like Ibn Khaldūn and Rashīd al−Dīn, who developed sophisticated reflections on the nature and purpose of history. It also considers modern figures such as Hamka, whose historical writings reveal how historiography became a vehicle for reformist thought and Muslim identity formation in the 20th century. Through a genealogical analysis, the article investigates how successive epistemes—rooted in hadith transmission, isnād criticism, dynastic legitimation, and modern reformist discourses—shaped the conditions of possibility for Islamic historical knowledge. By examining how particular discursive practices established claims to authenticity and authority, this study highlights the dynamic interplay between power and truth in the formation of Islamic historiography.

The research is premised on the hypothesis that Islamic historiography constitutes neither a transparent mirror of the past nor a mere collection of stories; it is instead a discursive site where historical knowledge is produced through negotiations of power,

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legitimacy, and collective memory. This approach situates Islamic historiography within broader theoretical debates in global historiography, challenging Eurocentric assumptions that treat Western historicism as a universal paradigm. While Foucauldian analysis has been widely applied in the study of Western historical epistemology, its dialogical application to Islamic historiography offers new insights into how power/knowledge dynamics operate in non−Western intellectual traditions. As Al−Shuqairat, Al−Maani, and Aldajah (2025) note in their systematic review of Islamic historiographical studies, there is a pressing need to integrate Islamic historiography into comparative and global frameworks without reducing it to a derivative or exceptionalist case.

This article thus contributes to scholarship in two significant ways. First, it critically examines how historical narratives within Islamic tradition have been constructed, authenticated, and transmitted as part of complex negotiations of power and truth. It shows how categories such as *ṣaḥābah*, *isnād*, and *khabar* became embedded in broader discursive formations that served political, theological, and legal purposes. Second, it explores the theoretical relevance of Foucault's power/knowledge framework for rethinking historiography beyond Western epistemological assumptions. By doing so, it offers a more pluralistic understanding of historical knowledge production and opens space for dialogue between Islamic historiography and global critical theory. Ultimately, this study argues that Islamic historiography represents a dynamic and contested field of knowledge, shaped by the interplay of authority, memory, and ideology across centuries. It invites scholars to see Islamic historical writing not as a static archive but as a vibrant intellectual tradition engaged in ongoing debates about truth, legitimacy, and the past.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AS A DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

The practice of historiography, especially within Islamic traditions, has long been framed as a means of documenting the past with accuracy and piety. However, recent theoretical developments—especially from structuralist and poststructuralist traditions—have radically altered the epistemological assumptions underlying this view. Historiography is increasingly understood not as a neutral, objective medium for truth transmission, but as a discursive formation embedded in language, power, and cultural structure (LaCapra, 2009; White, 2014).

Structuralist influences in historical thought have shifted attention away from empirical facts as external reality, focusing instead on the linguistic structures that mediate human consciousness. The work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lǎvi−Strauss shaped this paradigm, emphasizing that meaning is generated not through reference to objective reality, but through the internal differentials of language. This structuralist legacy implies that the truth claims of historical texts cannot be validated solely by their correspondence with past events, but must be read through the codes of symbolic systems and narrative syntax. As such, the pursuit of historical objectivity is deeply entangled with the unconscious structures of language and the deep grammar of cultural consciousness (Dosse, 1998).

Building upon and critiquing this perspective, poststructuralist thinkers—most notably Michel Foucault—have taken the linguistic turn further by challenging the fixity of meaning itself. In this view, language does not merely reflect reality but endlessly defers and constructs it, creating what Derrida (1978) called an "infinite chain of signification." Meaning is thus never final or closed; it is always contingent, plural, and politically charged. This has significant implications for historiography: it destabilizes the very possibility of producing a singular, coherent, and truthful narrative of the past. History, in

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this sense, becomes a text in perpetual construction, shaped by rhetorical strategies, power relations, and epistemic ruptures (Veyne, 2010).

Foucault's own contribution lies in his distinctive move from structuralism to poststructuralism, particularly through his genealogical method. Rather than tracing a linear or teleological development of ideas, Foucault conceptualizes history as a field of discontinuities, deviations, and power—laden reconfigurations (Foucault, 1980). He argues that historical knowledge is never purely descriptive but always prescriptive—governed by regimes of truth that determine what counts as legitimate discourse in a given epoch (Foucault, 2002).

For Foucault, language is the only gateway through which experience can be articulated and interpreted. It is through statements, metaphors, and symbolic systems that human consciousness "engineers" meaning, often in service of dominant socio—political interests (Flynn, 2005). In this framework, historiography becomes a practice of discursive formation in which power operates subtly and pervasively. As Foucault argues, "power and knowledge directly imply one another," reversing the Enlightenment maxim scientia potentia est ("knowledge is power") with his own radical claim: power is knowledge (Foucault, 1980).

This inversion is central to his critique of modernity and its foundational myths of rationality, objectivity, and progress. Historical writing, therefore, is never free from the cultural—psychological context of its authors. It cannot escape the "power effects" of language that determine which voices are heard, which silences are maintained, and which interpretations gain authority (Al—Azmeh, 2014; Hodgson, 1993). From a postmodern perspective, the implications are profound. Historiography can no longer be seen as a detached scholarly endeavor but as a battleground of discourses, each vying for legitimacy and dominance (Megill, 2007).

By approaching Islamic historiography through this lens, we are compelled to reexamine classical texts not merely as repositories of fact, but as arenas of epistemological and ideological contestation, shaped by theological commitments, institutional interests, and cultural grammars (Shamsy, 2020). The genealogical method allows us to map the shifts and ruptures in these narratives, to expose the forces that shape religious knowledge, and to interrogate the politics of truth embedded in the historiographical enterprise.

CLASSICAL PERIOD: THE ROOTS OF ISLAMIC HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Islamic historiography during the Classical Period was deeply intertwined with the development of other Islamic sciences, particularly ḥadīth and biographical literature. The recording of history was not solely driven by political or cultural interests but also by religious motivations, especially in preserving the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community. Historical knowledge in this era was conveyed through various genres such as *sīrah* (biography), *maghāzī* (military expeditions), and the compilation of *asma' al-rijāl* (biographies of transmitters), each contributing to the formation of a distinctly Islamic historical consciousness (Jabali, 2003).

The early Muslim historians, such as 'Urwah ibn al—Zubayr (d. 712) and his student Ibn Shihab al—Zuhri (d. 742), were among the pioneers who began to weave together disparate oral traditions into more coherent historical narratives. Their efforts laid the foundation for later comprehensive works by scholars like Ibn Ishaq (d. 767), whose Sīrah of the Prophet was further edited by Ibn Hisham (d. 834), and al—Wāqidī (747—823), who enriched the biographical tradition with detailed accounts of the Prophet's campaigns.

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These writings not only documented the Prophet's life but also became core references for both legal and theological discourses (Donner, 2012).

One of the most significant developments in this period was the emergence of the *isnād* system—the chain of transmission—which established rigorous criteria for evaluating the authenticity of historical and religious reports. This system reflects a methodological concern for reliability, as found in the ḥadīth sciences, and was later adopted by historians to validate historical claims. Works of *asmaʼ al-rijāl*, like those of Ibn Ḥibbān and Ibn Hajar al−ʻAsqalānī (d. 1449), compiled detailed biographical data about narrators, including their geographical movements, educational backgrounds, and political affiliations (Jabali, 2003)

The development of historical terminology also evolved in tandem with the needs of the growing Islamic polity. The word khabar (plural: *akhbār*) referred to reports from the past, while *taʼrīkh*—first attested around 644 CE—came to denote the chronological recording of events. These terms were used interchangeably for centuries before the modern distinction between 'history' and 'news' solidified in the 19th century. Prominent historians such as al−Ṭabarī (839−923) contributed immensely to the discipline through works like *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* (History of Prophets and Kings), offering a vast narrative that spanned from pre−Islamic times to his contemporary period. Al−Ṭabarī combined theological exegesis, political chronicle, and ethnographic observations, setting a high standard for subsequent historiography.

In tandem with historical writing, the geographical and ethnographic interests of historians like al−Yaʻqūbī and al−Balādhurī (d. 892) expanded Islamic historiography beyond Arabia, encompassing Persian, Byzantine, and pre−Islamic Arab civilizations. By the 10th century, Persian influence had become more prominent, especially under the Ghaznavid dynasty. This period witnessed the emergence of works like Firdawsi's Shāhnāmah (1010 CE), an epic poetic chronicle of Persian kingship that blended mythology, ethics, and history (Pourshariati, 2008).

The study of the Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) became central to Islamic historiography, as their testimonies were foundational for constructing both legal and theological doctrines. Fuʼad Jabali (2003) emphasizes that the status of a Companion was largely defined by their proximity to the Prophet and the perceived religious value of that relationship. The criteria for defining a Companion, however, varied across time. Early figures such as Anas ibn Mālik (d. 711) demanded prolonged companionship with the Prophet as a prerequisite, while Abū al−Ṭufayl (d. 718) accepted visual contact as sufficient.

As the number of self−identified Companions grew, scholars began refining their definitions. By the 9th century, ḥadīth scholars (*muḥaddithūn*) restricted the label to those who had both seen and heard the Prophet directly. This selective approach was reinforced in response to theological critiques from Muʻtazilites, who emphasized reason over transmission and were skeptical of uncritical reliance on the Companions (Brown, 2009).

The genre of *asmaʼ al-rijāl* became essential for navigating these debates, offering critical biographical dictionaries that detailed a narrator's reliability, orthodoxy, and social networks. These texts functioned not only as historical references but also as theological tools to defend Sunni orthodoxy. Jabali (2003) notes that the authority to include or exclude a narrator from the ranks of the Companions lay predominantly with the muḥaddithūn, whose social and political contexts must be considered in interpreting their works.

Thus, early Islamic historical consciousness was profoundly shaped by the ḥadīth tradition, sectarian debates, and emerging scholarly disciplines. The Companions and the

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scholars of ḥadīth were regarded as twin pillars of Islamic knowledge, whose roles extended beyond theology into the very structure of historical memory. While Mu'tazilite critiques catalyzed more nuanced approaches to history and transmission, Sunni orthodoxy increasingly linked sound historiography to faithful adherence to the Prophet's Sunna as preserved by trustworthy Companions.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD: CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS AND EPISTEMIC EXPANSION

The medieval period marked a significant phase in the intellectual history of the Islamic world, where scholars and historians, particularly in the post-Mongol era, demonstrated a profound interest in acquiring knowledge beyond their cultural and geographical boundaries. This intellectual curiosity and cross-cultural engagement contributed to the expansion of epistemic practices and the establishment of new ways of thinking about history, politics, and society. Three prominent figures during this period—Rashīd al-Dīn Tabīb (1247-1318), Ibn Baṭūṭah (1304-1368/1369), and Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406)—exemplify this expansive approach to knowledge. They translated, contextualized, and often surpassed the quality of foreign intellectual traditions, producing works that not only documented historical events but also engaged with political theory and social organization in ways that resonated with their own contexts.

Rashīd al-Dīn Tabīb and the Cross-Cultural Synthesis

Rashīd al-Dīn Fadhl-allāh Hamadānī, commonly known as Rashīd al-Dīn, was a polymath and historian whose work *Jami al-Tawarikh (Compendium of Chronicles)* provides a unique perspective on the cross-cultural encounters of the medieval Islamic world. Written during a time of immense political and cultural upheaval—particularly the Mongol invasions—the *Jami al-Tawarikh* is a monumental historical record that integrates the experiences of multiple civilizations. Rashīd al-Dīn's synthesis of history is remarkable because it goes beyond the typical mono-cultural narrative, embracing a transnational, cross-cultural perspective that includes not only the history of the Mongols but also the histories of Iran, the Seljuk Turks, the Chinese, and even the European world. This innovative approach represents a radical departure from earlier historical writing, which tended to focus exclusively on local or Islamic traditions. Rashīd al-Dīn's work, despite significant portions being lost, remains one of the most important sources for understanding the Mongol conquests and the broader historical dynamics of the medieval period (Adamjee & Carboni, 2003).

His *Jami al-Tawarikh* is also notable for its methodological advances in historical writing. It employs a creative technique of documenting the encounters between the Mongols and the various communities they came into contact with, providing insights into the ways in which these interactions influenced cultural, political, and religious practices across different regions. Rashīd al-Dīn's work thus exemplifies the power of knowledge in shaping both historical narratives and the political realities of the time.

Ibn Baṭūṭah: The Traveler and the Chronicler

Another key figure in the intellectual and historical landscape of the medieval Islamic world was Ibn Baṭūṭah, a scholar and traveler whose *Rihla* (The Journey) offers a comprehensive account of his travels across the Muslim world and beyond. Over a period of thirty years, Ibn Baṭūṭah visited regions from West Africa to China, engaging with a

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variety of cultures, including both Muslim and non−Muslim societies. His *Rihla* blends personal narrative, description, and observation with elements of cultural commentary and historical analysis, creating a new literary genre that combined travel writing with historical documentation (Keltoum & Wang, 2024).

The *Rihla* serves not only as an account of Ibn Baṭūṭah's personal experiences but also as a historical document that reflects the socio−political realities of the fourteenth century. In many ways, Ibn Baṭūṭah's work can be seen as a response to the Mongol invasions and the subsequent reconsolidation of the Islamic world. His accounts offer insight into the state of the Islamic world during the final stages of the Mongol Empire and the fall of al−Andalus, and they functioned as a strategic tool for political elites seeking to expand their influence. The *Rihla* was later adopted as a standard reading for educators and politicians, demonstrating its strategic importance in shaping the future trajectory of Islamic expansion (Shim, 2014).

Ibn Baṭūṭah's travelogue also provides critical insight into the functioning of global trade networks, the interaction of Islamic and non−Islamic cultures, and the complexities of religious and political power in the fourteenth century. His work, like that of Rashīd al−Dīn, exemplifies the epistemic value of cross−cultural engagement and the intellectual curiosity that defined this period of Islamic scholarship.

Ibn Khaldūn: Political Realism and the Rise of Social Science

Perhaps the most influential of these intellectual figures was Ibn Khaldūn, whose *Muqaddimah* (Introduction) is often regarded as one of the founding works of modern sociology and historiography. Ibn Khaldūn's historical theory is built upon the idea that human societies are governed by a combination of social cohesion and the pursuit of power. In his view, *ʿasabiyyah* (social solidarity) is the fundamental force behind the rise and fall of civilizations. He argues that the cohesion of a group, whether tribal or state−based, is what enables societies to achieve greatness. However, as groups expand and become more powerful, their *ʿasabiyyah* diminishes, leading to eventual decline (Khaldun, 2020).

Ibn Khaldūn's approach to history and politics was profoundly influenced by his observations of the political fragmentation that followed the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate and the rise of competing dynasties. His theory of the cyclical nature of civilizations, where states rise through the strength of collective unity but inevitably decline due to internal decay, anticipates some of the central themes of later European political theory, such as the rise of republicanism in the works of Machiavelli and Montesquieu. However, unlike Machiavelli, who emphasized pragmatic power politics, Ibn Khaldūn maintained that a successful state must balance the material needs of its population with the spiritual and ethical guidance of religious principles (Barbara, 1984).

Ibn Khaldūn's political theory was not widely appreciated during his lifetime, but his ideas gained greater recognition in the centuries that followed, particularly in the Ottoman Empire, where his theories were studied and applied to the governance of the state. The intellectual revival of Ibn Khaldūn's work in the 16th and 17th centuries, especially in the Ottoman intellectual circles, underscores the long−lasting impact of his ideas on both Islamic and Western political thought (Bektaş, 2021). His emphasis on the importance of ʿasabiyyah and social cohesion in political life resonated deeply with the Ottoman Empire's own experience of maintaining stability over a vast, diverse empire.

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The works of Rashīd al−Dīn, Ibn Baṭūṭah, and Ibn Khaldūn exemplify the dynamic intellectual landscape of the medieval Islamic world. These scholars not only engaged with knowledge from diverse cultures but also transformed and adapted it to suit their own needs and contexts. Through their writings, they produced a body of knowledge that not only enriched the intellectual traditions of the Islamic world but also laid the foundations for future epistemic expansions. Their contributions demonstrate the power of knowledge in shaping history and politics, and their works continue to influence contemporary scholars in fields ranging from history to sociology and political science.

By translating, contextualizing, and critiquing foreign intellectual traditions, these figures exemplify the medieval Islamic world's role in the broader development of global knowledge. Their legacy, however, also serves as a reminder of the profound impact that intellectual exchanges and the translation of knowledge can have on the power structures of societies, both past and present.

MODERN PERIOD: CONTESTING THE CANON

The historical writings of two distinct historians in the modern period represent how the interaction between knowledge and power has been shaped within the context of Islamic history. Ira M. Lapidus, in *A History of Islamic Societies* (2014), challenges the traditionally Middle Eastern−centered paradigm of Islamic history, which has often equated Islam with Arab culture. On the other hand, Hamka, through his Sejarah Umat Islam, uses history as a medium for social reform, aiming not only to recount the past but to influence and change the way people think.

Ira M. Lapidus and the Global Perspective of Islamic History

Ira M. Lapidus' work is often lauded for creating a new perspective on Islamic history, one that transcends the traditional boundaries that once confined the narrative of Islam to the Middle East. His approach situates Islam within a mondial (global) framework, demonstrating how Islam has evolved as a global civilization. Lapidus' writings reflect the erosion of boundaries between "core" and "peripheral" Islam, emphasizing the interconnectedness of Islamic societies across the globe.

In his examination of specific regions, such as Java, Lapidus contextualizes Islam not only as a local or regional religion but as part of a broader, interconnected global network. He notes that under the control of the Dutch colonial administration, religious movements within the Indonesian archipelago were tightly regulated. However, Singapore, under British colonial rule, became a crucial point of convergence for reformist ideas. The city housed significant communities of Arabs and Indian Muslims, and through it, reformist ideas spread, carried by students, Sufis, traders, and pilgrims. Through these networks, Islam in the archipelago became not just a localized, static religion but a cosmopolitan one, with high mobility through individuals involved in international networks.

Lapidus discusses the societal division in Java, where the *priyayi* (elite) class often collaborated with the Dutch colonial administration, while the kyai (religious scholars) maintained their independence and mobility. These kyai were instrumental in connecting Java's Muslim communities with global centers of learning, especially through pilgrimage to Mecca and studies in various parts of Arabia. Their engagement with reformist ideas played a key role in shaping a new sense of Islamic identity within the region. This reformist movement was linked to larger changes in both religious and national consciousness as Indonesia neared its independence.

The turn of the 20th century saw the rise of significant reformist Islamic movements in Indonesia. Lapidus traces the establishment of Muhammadiyah in 1912 by Haji Ahmad

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Dahlan, an organization that sought to improve the moral behavior of Muslims through education. By 1929, Muhammadiyah had already established 64 village schools and several other institutions. The response of traditional Islamic scholars to these modernizing forces led to the creation of organizations such as the Persatuan Ulama in 1921 in Minangkabau, and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1926 in East Java. These developments highlight how the traditional kyai were not only resistors of colonialism but also active participants in the creation of the modern Indonesian nation.

Hamka and the Reinterpretation of Islamic History in Southeast Asia

While Ira Lapidus brings a global perspective to Islamic history, Hamka's *Sejarah Umat Islam* (2020) focuses on reform and social change within the context of Southeast Asia, especially the Malay world. Hamka's approach to Islamic history is distinct in that it combines a popular, accessible style with a commitment to intellectual reform. His work is not only an academic recounting of events but a tool for social transformation. Hamka's historical narrative is driven by a desire to influence the way people think, challenging traditional assumptions and encouraging a new understanding of Islam's role in the world.

Unlike many historians who focus solely on intellectual frameworks, Hamka's approach is characterized by a more intuitive style, relying on "instinct" rather than rigid scholarly methods. His Sejarah Umat Islam was widely read in the Malay-speaking world and became an important part of the intellectual landscape in Southeast Asia. In his narrative, Hamka does not merely recount the facts of Islamic reform movements but uses these facts to provoke his readers to reconsider fundamental assumptions about religious communities, the role of reformers, and the place of spirituality in human history.

Hamka's work stands out for its focus on Islamic reform at the grassroots level. He emphasizes figures like Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1839-1897), who fought to transform society through their writings. The focus on reform is central to Hamka's historical project, and he uses his history to highlight the transformative power of intellectual and spiritual movements.

Furthermore, Hamka's narrative draws attention to the often-marginalized role of Southeast Asia in Islamic history. While many historians have treated the region as a mere derivative of Middle Eastern Islam, Hamka argues that Southeast Asia's Muslim communities should be seen as integral to the global Islamic tradition. This perspective marks a significant shift in Islamic historiography, as Hamka sought to give voice to the distinct experiences and contributions of Southeast Asian Muslims.

A significant portion of Hamka's work is dedicated to the history of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. One-third of Sejarah Umat Islam is dedicated to the development of Islam in Indonesia, from the ancient Hindu-Buddhist period through the arrival of Islam and the rise of Islamic kingdoms, and the colonial era. In this context, Hamka engages with both Orientalist sources and Muslim scholarship, selectively integrating them to offer a more nuanced account of Islam's spread in the region.

Hamka's critique of the Orientalist narrative is a key part of his historiographical approach. He challenges the view that Islam spread to the Malay world through Indian traders in the 11th and 12th centuries. Instead, Hamka presents evidence from Chinese, Arabic, and Persian sources indicating that Muslim traders and missionaries had been active in the region since the Umayyad period in the 7th century, offering a counter-narrative to the dominant historical paradigm.

In his work, Hamka outlines seven stages of Islamization in the Malay world, offering a systematic framework for understanding how Islam gradually took root in Southeast Asia. This revisionist approach not only challenges previous historical interpretations but also

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encourages readers to rethink the process of Islam's growth and adaptation in a global context.

The works of Ira M. Lapidus and Hamka represent a significant departure from traditional paradigms of Islamic historiography. Lapidus's A History of Islamic Societies offers a global perspective that challenges the center—periphery model of Islamic history, while Hamka's Sejarah Umat Islam emphasizes the role of Southeast Asia in shaping the broader Islamic tradition. Both historians contest the canon of Islamic history, not just by offering new narratives, but by using history as a tool for social change and intellectual reform. Their contributions demonstrate the dynamic relationship between knowledge and power in the context of modern Islamic historiography.

EPISTEMIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE MULTIPLICITY OF HISTORIES

Building upon the classical foundations of Islamic historiography, the modern academic pursuit of Islamic history must engage in what can be termed "epistemic archaeology"—an excavation of the layers of knowledge, assumptions, and interpretive frameworks that have historically constructed Islamic pasts. This approach, inspired by Michel Foucault's notion of archaeological inquiry (Foucault, 2002), emphasizes the need to analyze not merely historical content but the discursive formations that render certain historical narratives intelligible, authoritative, or marginalized.

Islamic historiography is not a monolith; it is marked by epistemic plurality. The coexistence of biographical, ḥadīth—based, legalistic, and poetic historiographical modes illustrates a rich spectrum of historical imagination. Each mode draws on different epistemic regimes—empiricism, revelation, rationalism, or aesthetics. For instance, while the *muḥaddithūn* constructed a historical method rooted in *isnād* authentication, the Mu'tazilah preferred a rationalist critique that privileged coherence and ethical consistency over transmission chains. This diversity challenges any attempt to homogenize Islamic historical writing into a single method or genre.

The idea of epistemic archaeology allows us to read Islamic historiography not just as a record of events, but as a site of contested memory and normative production. The construction of the ṣaḥābah in ḥadīth literature, as Fu'ad Jabali (2003) demonstrates, is an epistemological act that establishes theological authority. Through biographical filtering and political selection, the image of the Companion was shaped to suit particular Sunni orthodoxy, thereby excluding alternate perspectives such as those from Shiʿi or rationalist traditions.

Moreover, as recent scholarship suggests, the narratives preserved in classical Arabic sources often exhibit historiographical selectivity. Work by Donner (2012) shows how historiography during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods reflected evolving concerns of legitimacy, power, and sectarian identity. The multiple iterations of early Islamic memory—sometimes contradictory—highlight the extent to which history functioned as a political—theological discourse rather than a neutral recounting. Importantly, the temporal gap between events and their recording invites reflection on the mechanisms of remembrance and forgetting. The prioritization of certain events, figures, or geographies over others—such as the elevation of Hijaz—centric narratives at the expense of marginal voices from the peripheries—indicates how epistemic authority was unevenly distributed

By adopting epistemic archaeology, scholars can unearth not only what is remembered but also how and why. It allows for a critical engagement with the silences, biases, and exclusions that have structured the Islamic historical canon. This perspective aligns with efforts in postcolonial and decolonial historiography, which aim to recover the subaltern

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voices and decentralized epistemologies suppressed in grand narratives. In conclusion, Islamic historiography is better understood as a plural and contested field of meaning-making rather than a static tradition. The project of epistemic archaeology enables scholars to map the shifting terrains of authority, narrative, and memory, revealing a multiplicity of histories embedded within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

CONCLUSION

The study of Islamic historiography reveals a dynamic interplay between memory, theology, and authority. From the classical period, historical consciousness in Islam was shaped by biographical literature, hadith sciences, and the rigorous transmission of isnād, which together formed a narrative structure that legitimated religious knowledge and social order. Key figures such as Ibn Ishaq, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn Hajar crafted narratives that were not only descriptive but also prescriptive, delineating orthodoxy and shaping collective identity. As Fu'ad Jabali (2001) and Motzki (2010) argue, the categorization of *ṣaḥabah* was not merely historical but deeply theological and political, reflecting broader dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within the early Muslim community.

By applying Foucauldian epistemic archaeology, this paper demonstrates that Islamic historiography operates as a regime of truth—producing, disciplining, and regulating knowledge of the past through specific discursive formations such as *akhbār* and *ta'rīkh*. Rather than a single unified account, Islamic historiography encompasses a multiplicity of histories and competing epistemologies—from hadith traditionalists to Mu'tazilite rationalists and Persian literary historians—each negotiating the boundaries of authenticity and authority (Khalidi, 1994; Ahmed, 2017). Recognizing these layers of discourse allows for a more nuanced understanding of how Islamic historical knowledge has been constructed, contested, and mobilized across time.

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