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THE TIME OF BIRTH OF MUHAMMAD
A STUDY IN ISLAMIC TRADITION

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Abstract

The life of Muḥammad is not the object of a continuous narrative, nor of a body of continuous narratives, but of individual accounts, each concerned with a specific event and provided with its own chain of transmission. Such accounts are subsumed under the category of *Sīra*, literally translated as “conduct” (of the Prophet). Accounts concerned with the life of Muḥammad can be found, either brought together or adduced separately, in a range of works extending from the eighth up to the nineteenth century, and covering vast areas of Sunnī as well as Shī‘ī scholarship. While the features shared by different accounts can unmistakably be ascribed to the existence of a common Tradition, which may be termed “*Sīra* Tradition”, the divergence among accounts found in different works suggests the variation of that Tradition. This phenomenon is implicitly acknowledged by most Western scholars, but is never apprehended distinctly, and thus appears as essentially chaotic and as lacking precise significance. The purpose of my work is to demonstrate that the variation of *Sīra* Tradition, once apprehended distinctly, can be reconstructed as a diachronic process on the basis of textual evidence and, on the other hand, that the dynamics animating this process can itself be reconstructed as a conceptual development. The corpus selected here is the material pertaining to the birth of Muḥammad.

The first step in the demonstration consists in the application of a method, which I have elaborated in order to permit an apprehension of the variation of *Sīra* Tradition over time and among different groups. My method is based on the distinction between “tradition” and “report”. The former term designates the unit of transmitted meaning, while the latter term designates the unit of verbal transmission. The second step involves an interpretation based on the distinction, deriving from Western scholarship, between two conceptions of the Prophet: the “functional” and the “ontological” prophet. According to the first conception, Muḥammad is a mere man invested with the function of prophethood at a

certain point of his life, namely when he was forty years old. According to the second conception, Muḥammad is a superhuman being invested with the attribute of prophethood through an election preceding his terrestrial existence.

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this work is to demonstrate, through a study of the material pertaining to the birth of Muḥammad, that the variation of *Sīra*¹ Tradition can be reconstructed as a diachronic process on the basis of textual evidence and, on the other hand, that the dynamics animating this process can itself be reconstructed as a conceptual development. The statement that the existence of *Sīra* Tradition involves continuous change will hardly come as a surprise to the scholar acquainted with the idea that the reliance upon inherited objects provokes the willingness to modify them², but is rather unexpected in the field of Islamic studies. Before presenting the method which I have elaborated in order to permit an apprehension of the variation of *Sīra* Tradition over time and among different groups, I must accordingly review the approaches offered by Western scholars. My intention here is not to produce a critical survey of Western scholarship as a whole, but simply to show that the object of the present study is foreign to any of these approaches.

¹. By "*Sīra*", I mean any kind of material concerned with Muḥammad as a historical figure. This designation will apply, for instance, to a Shī'ī description of supernatural phenomena occurring at the birth of Muḥammad, but not to a Šūfī presentation of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*. On the use of the term *sīra* among Muslim scholars, see Martin Hinds, "'Maghāzī' and 'Sīra' in early Islamic scholarship", in *La vie du Prophète Mahomet*, Toufic Fahd ed., Paris, 1983, pp. 57-66.

². As shown by Edward Shils, *Tradition*, Chicago, 1981. See especially chapter 5, "Why Traditions Change: Endogenous Factors".

1. Western approaches to *Sīra*

The earliest -and now somewhat unfashionable- approach is mainly exhibited in the "Life of Muḥammad" genre, and aims at reconstructing the historical facts behind the account of Muḥammad's career offered by Muslim scholars. For this purpose, each individual account is evaluated, and occasionally improved upon, according to the standards of modern historical criticism. The apprehension of the variation of *Sīra* Tradition over time and among different groups is precluded by two features of this kind of scholarship. On the one hand, late as well as sectarian sources, suspected of bearing the impact of dogmatic developments (and hence of lacking historical value), are not taken into serious consideration³. When, on the other hand, divergent accounts of the same event appear in sound sources, only that which fares best on the test of historical criticism is retained. Thus, the various conceptions presumably reflected in such a divergence receive at most cursory attention, and are not regarded as of any intrinsic interest. Accounts concerned with supernatural phenomena which, as we shall see, predominate in the material pertaining to the birth of Muḥammad, are relegated to the margin of the discussion, and merely serve there as evidence of the pious imagination of early Muslims. What one will generally find in the lines devoted by the Western biographers of Muḥammad to his birth is a discussion

³. Note that Martin Lings, whose primary aim is apparently to convey to the English reader the flavour of Arabic biographies, shares with historical criticism the principle "the earlier the sounder", as suggested by the title of his work: *Muḥammad. His life based on the earliest sources* (London, 1983).

on the date of that event -a historical issue indeed-⁴, and a list of supernatural phenomena gleaned from early sources⁵.

A marked departure from the patterns of the "Life of Muḥammad" genre is exhibited in the work of Josef Horowitz. The approach he offers does not aim at reconstructing historical facts but, on the contrary, at detecting the introduction of legendary elements into a basic narrative skeleton, whose historical value is otherwise conceded. For

⁴. The discussion is informed by the view that none of the various dates found in early sources represents a genuine remembrance, because the birth of Muḥammad can hardly have been recognized as an important event at the time of its occurrence. When attempting to solve this problem through recourse to the historical date of death (or of the Emigration), the Western biographers of Muḥammad are confronted with the divergence among Muslim scholars as to the duration of his life (and of his stay in Mecca). Unsurprisingly, the possibility that items such as the dating of the birth of Muḥammad in the year of the elephant and the placing of the event on Monday belong to specific conceptual frameworks is never considered. The Shī'ī placing of the birth of Muḥammad on Friday, which could have suggested that the issue of the day of the week does indeed involve a doctrinal question, is nowhere mentioned. See Aloys Sprenger, *The Life of Mohammod*, Allahabad, 1851, p. 75. n. 1; William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, London, 1858, I, p. 14; Frants Buhl, *Das Leben Muḥammeds*, Leipzig, 1930, pp. 111-112; Tor Andrae, *Mohammed. The Man and his Faith*, New York, 1935, p. 32-33 (the contribution of Andrae's *Die person Muḥammeds in lehre und glauben seiner gemeinde* to our understanding of such questions will be dwelt upon at the beginning of the third chapter of this work); Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Mahomet*, Paris, 1957, p. 59.

⁵. Such items are contrasted with the indifference presumably encountered by the birth of Muḥammad among the contemporaries of that event and provide evidence of the tendency, likewise perceptible in the biographies of other religious founders, to anticipate the divine mission, but are never taken as bearing a specific doctrinal significance. See Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, pp. 12-13; Ludolf Krehl, *Das Leben des Muḥammed*, Leipzig, 1884, pp. 1-2; Buhl, *Das Leben Muḥammeds*, p. 114; Andrae, *Mohammed*, p. 35; Regis Blachère, *Le Problème de Mahomet*, Paris, 1952, p. 28, n. 1; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Mahomet*, p. 58; Muhammad Hamidullah, *Le Prophète de l'Islam*, Paris, 1959, I, pp. 37-38. Maxime Rodinson, *Muḥammad*, New York, 1971, pp. 42-43.

this purpose, two procedures are resorted to. On the one hand, the comparison with extra-Islamic material enables Horovitz to establish the foreign origin of such elements. This procedure, though useless for diachronic reconstruction, provides literary parallels of considerable interest and generally involves a demonstration of the specific needs met by a borrowed item within the Islamic conceptual framework⁶. And on the other hand, the comparison among works produced in different periods enables Horovitz to determine when some elements were introduced. The principle implicit here may be stated as follows: when an element is found in a work W, and not in previous works, we should conclude that the element was introduced during the period separating W from the last of its predecessors⁷. This procedure indeed constitutes the embryo of a method of diachronic arrangement, but is limited by the exclusive concern for the legendary features of *Sīra*, which Horovitz shows to be relatively early, as well as by the scarcity of the sources available to him (in particular of sectarian ones). We may note that, despite these limitations,

⁶. See the Christian and Zoroastrian parallels to the purification of Muḥammad's heart adduced in "Muḥammeds Himmelfahrt", *Der Islam* IX (1919), pp. 169-170. The possibility of borrowing is supported by the argument that, although the placing of the purification of the heart before Muḥammad's journey to heaven (found in Muslim) indicates that the incident was understood as a prophetic initiation, its original significance may have been analogous to that exhibited in the extra-Islamic material, namely protection from sin. We may note, however, that such a development could be reconstructed on the basis of textual evidence, as suggested by the placing of the purification of the heart during Muḥammad's infancy found in the earliest sources (such as Ibn Ishāq's work), which involves protection from sin as the significance of the incident. See, on the other hand, Horovitz's critique of an immoderate use of Biblical parallels in "Biblische Nachwirkungen in der Sīra", *Der Islam* XII (1922), pp. 184-189 (a review of Peter Jensen's "Das Leben Muḥammeds und die David-Sage", *ibid.*, pp. 84-97).

⁷. See "Salmān al-Fārisī", *Der Islam* XII, pp. 178-180, where the mere presence of Salmān among the defenders of Medina as reported by Ibn Ishāq is contrasted with the determining role (as originator of the ditch) ascribed to him by Ibn Hishām and Wāqīdī. Thus, the introduction of the latter element is dated around the middle of the second century and can be connected with Persian claims to equal status in Islamic society.

Horovitz occasionally achieves the reconstruction of developments extending over a long time span and is unusually sensitive to the traditional derivation of material lying outside the scope of *Sira*⁸.

At the end of this review, we shall see that the procedure of diachronic arrangement first used by Horovitz was never elaborated into a full method. It seems appropriate here to mention that, in the study of Patricia Crone, this procedure is resorted to at a crucial stage of the argument⁹. After having stated that a comprehensive scrutiny of the sources will lead to the conclusion that nearly every event is the object of divergent accounts, Crone gives yet another reason why no historical fact can be reconstructed behind the account of Muḥammad's career offered by Muslim scholars: the comparison between Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī enables us to detect "the steady growth of the information", itself manifesting "the contribution of the storytellers to the tradition on the rise of Islam". This process is illustrated by the accounts of the raid of Kharrār found in Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī respectively. Crone concludes that Wāqidī "knew more" than Ibn Ishāq, hence that "[the] value [of the further information supplied by Wāqidī] is doubtful in the extreme" and, ultimately, that "if spurious information accumulated at this rate in the two generations between Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī, [...] even more must have accumulated in the three generations between the Prophet and Ibn Ishāq". Crone further states that "what [Wāqidī], Ibn Ishāq, and others put together were simply so many selections from a common pool of

⁸. See "Zur Muḥammadlegende", *Der Islam* V (1915), pp. 49-51, where Horovitz shows the chain linking the miracle of the tree which moved from its position on Muḥammad's order (as reported by Ibn Ishāq), the story of the man claiming prophethood who attempted in vain to make a tree comply with his command and then went himself to the tree (as told in the *Mustaṭraf*), the anecdote in which Jūḥa pretends to be a saint and acts in the same manner and, eventually, the European saying "If the mountain does not come to Muḥammad, then Muḥammad will go to the mountain" (the replacement of the tree by a mountain is ascribed to the influence of the evangelical statement that faith can move mountains).

⁹. *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton, 1987, pp. 223-225. See also Michael Cook,

qāṣṣ material"¹⁰. We must note that Crone's first conclusion (that the information grew during the period separating Ibn Ishāq from Wāqidī), though easily acceptable, is weakened by the absence of a definite conception of transmission. Crone obviously does not adopt the conception prevailing in the field of *Sīra* studies, where transmission is understood as the handing over of verbal forms by one individual to another, since, of course, she knows that Wāqidī did not inherit his material from Ibn Ishāq (or one of Ibn Ishāq's pupils). If, despite this fact, we should establish a diachronic relation between Ibn Ishāq's account and Wāqidī's, what are the elements shared by the two accounts that allow us to do so? Moreover, the reader is unsure as to how he should understand "storytellers": are these distinct from, or identical with, the group generally designated as "traditionists" or, according to contemporary usage, as "scholars" and to which Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī indeed belong? On the other hand, we may note that Crone does not state explicitly whether the growth of the information is specific to the period up to the turn of the second century or whether the process extended beyond that period. In fact, Crone is not concerned with this question, since her argument is directed toward an ultimate conclusion, which cannot be as easily accepted as the first one, namely that the information grew even more during the period prior to Ibn Ishāq.

Another scholar whose work departs markedly from the patterns of the "Life of Muḥammad" genre is Meir Kister. In his extensive corpus of articles, Kister does not aim primarily at reconstructing historical facts (although the concern for historicity is often exhibited there), but rather at producing a survey of the material pertaining to specific topics and issues. This kind of scholarship has the considerable advantage of using a wide range

Muḥammad, Oxford, 1983, pp. 63-67.

¹⁰. This hypothesis is derived from Marsden Jones, "Ibn Ishāq 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* XXII (1959), pp. 41-51.

of sources (including late as well as sectarian ones) and of treating potentially historical and intrinsically ahistorical material with equal care, but it has a twofold inconvenience. On the one hand, the apprehension of the variation of *Sīra* Tradition over time is precluded by the absence of any comparison among works produced in different periods. Moreover, a uniform application of the principle that late sources preserve early material tends to exclude the detection of diachronic processes¹¹. On the other hand, the doctrinal question which may be involved in the variation of Tradition as to a specific issue, in particular when the various positions are taken up by distinct groups, is seldom fully investigated.

This twofold disadvantage may be illustrated in Kister's latest article¹². Pp. 12-18 are concerned with three traditions pertaining to the circumcision of Muḥammad: the first states that he was born circumcised, the second that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib circumcised him on his seventh day, the third that Jibrīl circumcised him on the occasion of the opening of his breast. The earliest sources cited here are Abū Nu'aym (d. 430) for the first tradition (n. 10), Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571) for the second (n. 39) and Abū Nu'aym again for the third (n. 45). The relatively late attestation of these traditions (unless earlier sources have been omitted) does not receive any attention. In the case of the first tradition, Kister cites a profusion of late Sunnī sources (n. 10), as well as two Shī'ī sources, one early and one late (n. 13). The

¹¹. This principle is stated in "The *Sīrah* literature", in *Arabic literature to the end of the Umayyad period*. Alfred Beeston ed., Cambridge, 1983, pp. 366-367, but the conditions of its applicability are nowhere mentioned. See, for instance, "Rajab is the Month of God...", *Israel Oriental Studies I* (1971), p. 197, where the sources quoted for the tradition stating that Muḥammad was conceived in Rajab are Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 974) and Shāṭibī (fl. mid 9th century) [n. 43]. It may indeed be, in this case, that late sources preserve early material, but the fact that the material is not found earlier needs some explanation. In such instances, however, we cannot rule out the possibility that Kister has omitted earlier sources, since his basic view would appear to be that the period in which a work was produced gives no indication whatsoever as to the origin of the material contained in it.

¹². "... and he was born circumcised..." Some notes on circumcision in Ḥadīth", *Oriens XXXIV* (1994), pp. 10-30.

success of this tradition among late Sunnīs suggested by the first group of citations is overlooked by Kister, who focuses his attention on scholarly resistance to it. The predominance of the tradition among Shī'ī scholars suggested by the second group of citations does not receive any attention. The relation of the first and third traditions to pre-existence and purification respectively is only implicit in Kister's paraphrase (p. 13 and p. 18), though the relation of the second tradition to Abrahamic continuity is explicitly mentioned (p. 18). None of these traditions, however, is related to a specific conceptual framework.

Two pupils of Kister deserve some attention in this review.

In the introduction to his recent study¹³, Uri Rubin argues that the quest for historical facts, presented as the impulse behind almost every scholarly work on the Muslim biographies of Muḥammad, has produced little result and should be abandoned in favour of textual analysis. The analysis offered by Rubin aims at detecting in early material a process termed "the adaptation of Biblical themes to Islamic and Qur'ānic models". We must note here that the results of this analysis cannot be accepted without reserve, because no principle of diachronic arrangement is provided independently of the hypothesis that such a process indeed took place. That Rubin's study otherwise belongs to the kind of scholarship practiced by Kister will appear in several footnotes appended to the fourth chapter of this work.

The following example will illustrate the limits of Rubin's analysis. Pp. 30-35 are concerned with the statement that Muḥammad does not raise his voice in the streets, which indeed has a parallel in Isaiah 42:2. Rubin distinguishes four groups of reports containing this statement. In the first group, the statement appears as part of the Biblical description of Muḥammad, and is mentioned as such by Ka'b al-Aḥbār (and, in one instance, by Wahb ibn Munabbih). In the second group, the statement again appears as part of the Biblical

¹³. *The Eye of the Beholder. The life of Muḥammad as viewed by the early Muslims. A textual analysis.*

description of Muḥammad, but is mentioned instead by a Companion. In the third group, the statement is again mentioned by a Companion, but is preceded by a Qur'ānic verse, itself appearing as the first part of the Biblical description of Muḥammad. In a fourth group, the statement is mentioned by a Companion as part of the historical description of Muḥammad, without reference to any Scripture. The earliest sources cited here are Ibn Bukayr (d. 199) for the first and second groups (n. 42 and n. 49 respectively) and Ibn Sa'd (d. 230) for the third and fourth groups (n. 53, n. 57 and n. 69 respectively). On the basis of this distinction, Rubin reconstructs a process whereby Jewish Scripture gradually lost its role as the source of attestation of Muḥammad's prophethood: through the replacement of authorities known for their Jewish connections by genuine Islamic ones (second group), through the introduction of elements distinctively belonging to Muslim Scripture (third group) and through the transformation of Scriptural prophecy into historical account (fourth group). Since such a process is not directly documented by the sources and since, on the other hand, Rubin's view as to the chains of transmission is basically that the ultimate ascription provides evidence of the general period in which a report originated, his reconstruction, however plausible it may be thought to be, cannot be independently verified. Thus, one could likewise argue, though perhaps less convincingly, that the earliest scholars incorporated the Biblical statement into the biography of Muḥammad simply as a description befitting the Arabian prophet, and that its occurrence in Jewish Scripture was later emphasized by scholars who had discovered its usefulness in inter-confessional polemics.

In a recent article¹⁴, Michael Lecker argues that the comparison between Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī, on the basis of which scholars such as Crone and Cook have elaborated "the theory of continuing growth", should be extended to a wider range of sources. According

Princeton, 1995.

¹⁴. "The death of the Prophet Muḥammad's father: did Wāqidī invent some of the evidence?", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* CXLV (1995), pp. 9-27.

to Lecker, an extensive comparison will lead to the conclusion that the variation among scholars derives from their reliance upon distinct sources, which originated in the first century. Such a conclusion is reached by Lecker through the comparison among the accounts of 'Abdallāh's death found in various works. Lecker's results are threefold. First, the comparison among Wāqidī (as quoted by Ibn Sa'd), Balādhurī and Yāsīn al-'Umarī (d. after 1232/1817) enables Lecker to distinguish three sub-versions of a version characterized by the mention of Gaza as the destination of the trading journey which brought about the death of 'Abdallāh in Medina (pp. 13-17). The dating of these sub-versions in the first century rests on the assumption that the ascriptions found in Wāqidī's chains of transmission represent the actual source of his informants¹⁵, and hence that the other accounts must go back to parallel sources. This assumption is particularly strained in the case of Yāsīn al-'Umarī's account, which seems on the contrary to provide evidence of the growth of the information¹⁶. Second, the comparison among Wāqidī, 'Abdarrazzāq, Bayhaqī, Ibn 'Asākir and Ṭabarī enables Lecker to reconstruct the original form of a version characterized by the mention of dates as the goods bought by 'Abdallāh in Medina (pp. 17-23). Lecker achieves his reconstruction by adding the various elements found in the accounts. Even if it is conceded that the ascription to Zuhri shared by the various chains of transmission represents the common origin of the accounts, one could likewise achieve the reconstruction of Zuhri's original account by subtracting the elements specific to various accounts. The argument, put forward by Lecker in favour of addition (and against

¹⁵. While the possibility that Wāqidī's account originated in the generation of his informants cannot be excluded on cogent grounds, it seems beyond doubt that Wāqidī actually inherited the account from a previous stage of transmission. As stated by Lecker, the technical terms used by Wāqidī suggest textual preservation.

¹⁶. As noted by Lecker, his mention of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib as the instigator of the journey and specification of the time spent by Muḥammad in his mother's womb at the death of his father are absent from the other accounts.

subtraction), that the various elements found in the accounts are also present in the Gaza version is dependent for its force upon his own dating of this version¹⁷. Third, the comparison among Ibn al-Kalbī (as quoted by Ibn Sa'd) and Ya'qūbī enables Lecker to identify the version characterized by the placing of the death of 'Abdallāh after the birth of Muḥammad as a Shī'ī one (pp. 23-25). This identification is rather convincing, but does not lead Lecker to further conclusions. The material produced by Lecker indeed suggests that the position of the birth of Muḥammad in relation to the death of his father was an object of disagreement between Sunnīs and Shī'īs, but one would be curious to know what doctrinal question may have been involved in this issue. It should be obvious from my remarks that Lecker's treatment bears the distinctive marks of the school of scholarship established by Kister. It may be added that, while conducting his argument, Lecker tends to blur the distinction between the growth of the information, defined by Crone and Cook as a process indicative of the role played by a specific group (the storytellers), and the accusation of forgery thrown by some Orientalists at individual scholars.

The structural approaches offered by Rudolf Sellheim and John Wansbrough may be mentioned here.

In a long and dense article¹⁸, Sellheim argues that Ibn Ishāq's work exhibits three successive strata of material, themselves reflecting the historical milieu (known to Arabian Muslims), prophetic legends (introduced by converts) and political propaganda (conducted by supporters of the 'Abbāsīd regime) respectively. Sellheim's approach may be qualified as "structural", since it is concerned with the arrangement of a single work, but it

¹⁷. If this dating is contested, one cannot exclude the possibility that the mention of al-Ḥārith as 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's envoy found in Ṭabarī's account, and also present in the first sub-version of the Gaza version, was introduced during the transmission of Zuhri's original account.

¹⁸. "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte. Die Muḥammed-Biographie des Ibn Ishāq". *Oriens* XVIII-XIX (1965-1966), pp. 33-91.

is only moderately so. The discernment of successive strata does indeed involve a diachronic arrangement of the material. We must note here that the principle of diachronic arrangement is informed by historical data on the evolution of Islamic society, as well as by biographical data on Ibn Ishāq's own background and career, rather than being based on textual evidence. It is worth mentioning, however, that Sellheim's article contains interesting remarks on numerous points¹⁹, and provides a valuable contribution to the field of *Sīra* studies.

The structural approach offered by Wansbrough²⁰ is a radical one indeed. Here, the works of Ibn Ishāq (in the single recension of Ibn Hishām) and Wāqidī are subsumed under the literary type "salvation history", itself generated by the Biblical paradigm and characterized by the historicization of truth. Wansbrough's analysis aims at detecting the morphological constants of the Islamic version of salvation history exhibited in these works and, in particular, the narrative techniques whereby polemical *topoi* are historicized. This approach has no relevance whatsoever to the object of my study, but is unusually sophisticated and does not deserve the reductive critique to which it is often submitted²¹.

¹⁹. See, for instance, p. 60, where the light appearing before and at the conception of Muḥammad is treated as part of the second stratum, and related to historical as well as biographical data. The Iranian parallel adduced by Andrae leads Sellheim to formulate two hypotheses: that the presence of Iranian motifs in the biography of the Arabian prophet helped to overcome the cultural boundary separating the 'Abbāsīd rulers from their administrators, and that the incorporation of such motifs was achieved by scholars of Iranian stock such as Ibn Ishāq's father.

²⁰. *The Sectarian Milieu. Content and composition of Islamic salvation history*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 1-49.

²¹. Montgomery Watt's classification of Wansbrough's work among "recent attacks on the credibility of the whole corpus of sources for the early history of Islam" ("The reliability of Ibn Ishāq's sources", in *La vie du Prophète Mahomet*, p. 31) reduces it to its (indirect) historical implications, while Rubin's statement that "the range of source material used by Wansbrough seems to have been too limited to yield any comprehensive idea of the structure of the Prophet's early biographies" (*The Eye of the Beholder*, p. 3) reduces Wansbrough's treatment to an imperfect application of the Orientalist method. For a documented

The phenomenological approach recently offered by Annemarie Schimmel²² may also be mentioned here, although it is only marginally concerned with *Sīra*. This approach consists essentially in subsuming diverse pieces of information -the principle behind whose selection often escapes the reader- under general categories, themselves understood as the fundamental conceptions governing the Muslim experience throughout its various manifestations, and is as such irrelevant to the object of my study²³.

Finally, we may note that the method of *isnād* analysis elaborated by Joseph Schacht on the basis of legal material²⁴ is applicable to *Sīra*²⁵. This method rests on the hypothesis that the ascriptions found in the chains of transmission represent the projection of material originating in the second century back onto earlier authorities, and has two main components: the principle that the projection was gradually extended ("the backwards growth of *isnāds*"), and the principle that the latest transmitter shared by the chains of substantially identical traditions is indicative of the period in which the traditions originated (the "common link" principle). A rather convincing argument against the backwards growth

critique of a specific point made by Wansbrough, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "*Maḡhāzī* and the *Muḡaddithūn*: reconsidering the treatment of 'historical' materials in early collections of Ḥadīth", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* XXVIII (1996), pp. 1-18.

22. *Deciphering the Signs of God. A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, Albany, 1994. For a fine product of the phenomenological approach to religion, see Michel Meslin, *L'expérience humaine du divin. Fondements d'une anthropologie religieuse*, Paris, 1988.

23. The statements (provided under the heading "sacred time") that "For the Muslim, the history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*) begins with Muḡammad" and that "His appearance in time... constitutes the climax of human history" (p. 66) are perfectly legitimate, but overlook the variation of *Sīra* Tradition as to the determining episode of salvation history which, as will appear in the fourth chapter of this work, involves a doctrinal question of considerable importance.

24. *The Origins of Muḡammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford, 1959.

of *isnāds* has recently been made by Rubin²⁶, but the application of the common link principle to *Sīra* has not yet been systematically attempted, nor excluded on cogent grounds. It must be emphasized that, whatever degree of validity may be ascribed to the common link principle, and despite the apparent invalidity of the backwards growth principle when applied to *Sīra*, the earliest sources available to us date from the second century. This fact obviously cannot be adduced as evidence in support of Schacht's hypothesis, but it does imply that the stages of transmission of the material in the first century are irretrievable.

Finally, the second chapter of Gregor Schoeler's recent study should be reviewed here, since it is concerned with *Sīra* Tradition as such²⁷. In this chapter, Schoeler combines the investigation of *isnāds* with literary analysis in order to reconstruct the transmission of a specific "story", that of the earliest revelation. An exhaustive comparison among the sources enables him to identify successively three "recensions" of the story which, despite substantial differences, have the same central "motifs" in common. First, the link of Zuhri (d. 124/742) shared by the chains of a group of substantially identical accounts, which also share the ascription to 'Urwa and the ultimate ascription to 'A'isha, is taken as representing their common source. This Zuhri recension is characterized by the description of the earliest

²⁵. Schacht himself states that his results "apply to the *isnāds* of traditions relating to history" (p. 175).

²⁶. *The Eye of the Beholder*, pp. 234-260. The fact that the ascription to an early authority was always part of a chain of transmission does not imply, of course, the early origin of a tradition. Rubin, however, seems to take into serious consideration, on the basis of his results, "the possibility that the bulk of traditions with prophetic and Companion *isnāds* were put into circulation during the generation of the Companion to which a given tradition is attributed, i.e. already during the first century AH" (p. 237).

²⁷. *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds*, Berlin, 1996, pp. 59-117. The third chapter, which is concerned primarily with the question of authenticity, will not receive attention in this review.

revelation as an “eerie encounter” with Gabriel experienced by Muḥammad in the cave of Ḥirā’ (pp. 62-79). Second, the ascription to ‘Urwa ibn az-Zubayr (d. 94/712) shared with the Zuhri recension by a group of accounts lacking the link of Zuhri in their chains, as well as the ultimate ascription to ‘A’isha, is taken as evidence of the existence of a specific ‘Urwa recension, from which the Zuhri recension must derive. The ‘Urwa recension cannot be reconstructed on the sole basis of these accounts, which differ substantially from one another, but only through comparison with the Zuhri recension (pp. 79-89). Within this group, Schoeler identifies a recension consisting of two accounts reportedly transmitted by Ibn Lahī’a (d. 174/790) from ‘Urwa through his foster son Abū l-Aswad, and emphasizing the intimacy between Muḥammad and Gabriel at their first encounter. The narrative features of the Ibn Lahī’a recension are seen as “embellishments” and “fantastic expansions” undergone by the original story in its further transmission (pp. 81-85). Third, an account transmitted by Ibn Ishāq from Wahb ibn Kaysān (d. 127/744-745 or 129/746-747) is taken as constituting a distinct recension, itself characterized by the placing of the eerie encounter in a dream. The ascription of this account to the *qāṣṣ* ‘Ubayd ibn ‘Umayr (d. 68/687-688) is accepted by Schoeler. The ascription to a *qāṣṣ* is seen to fit with the narrative features of the Ibn Ishāq recension (“pictorial detail”, “narrative trimmings”, “repetition of motifs”), which are contrasted with those of the Zuhri recension (exhibiting the “tendency to restrict oneself to the essential”) [pp. 89-98]. On the basis of this analysis, and with the help of biographical evidence, Schoeler proceeds to reconstruct the following stages of transmission: the story of ‘Ubayd was transmitted in the Zubayrid family, and thence to Wahb on the one hand, and to ‘Urwa on the other hand. He then reconstructs a process whereby the original *qiṣṣa*, though preserved in the Ibn Ishāq recension, was subsequently transformed into a *ḥadīth* in the Zuhri-‘Urwa recension, which was in turn “re-stylized” in the Ibn Lahī’a recension (pp. 98-103).

Two points may be noted. The first is that Schoeler’s reconstruction rests on the assumption that the three groups of accounts (“recensions”), in view of their common

elements (“motifs”), must ultimately derive from the same (oral) literary source. Yet, in the absence of relevant textual evidence, these elements could alternatively suggest the existence of a traditional pool, upon which different scholars drew simultaneously. Whether the ascription to ‘Ubayd can be taken indicative of the milieu in which that pool originated would seem, in the absence of historical evidence, to be a question impossible to resolve. The second point is that Schoeler’s reconstruction is marked by a terminological ambiguity. Whereas Schoeler clarifies to some extent what he means by *qiṣṣa*, the reader is left unsure as to how he should understand *ḥadīth*. Is it solely the succinctness of the account, or is it also the ascription of the account to an authority (‘A’isha) that prompts Schoeler to use this term? Moreover, one of the characteristics of the *qiṣṣa* enumerated by Schoeler, namely pictorial detail, is likewise exhibited in the Ibn Lahī’a recension, which he ascribes to a secondary stage of transmission (as indeed is documented by textual evidence). Finally, it would seem that the different significances of the story in the three recensions may reflect doctrinal concerns (as opposed to narrative ones). The existence of such concerns, however, is nowhere considered by Schoeler.

2. Method

It has been the purpose of the preceding section to show that the object of my study, namely the variation of *Sīra* Tradition over time and among different groups, is foreign to any of the approaches offered by Western scholars. This does not mean, of course, that I intend to claim absolute originality. In fact, my work is strongly dependent upon the scholarly Tradition commonly known as "Orientalism" and, in particular, upon two individual contributions to that Tradition. On the one hand, the considerable advantage deriving from the use of a wide range of sources has been suggested to me by the work of Kister. On the other hand, it has appeared to me that the comparison among works produced in different periods, a procedure first used by Horovitz, provides the necessary basis for any diachronic reconstruction. I have noted above that Crone's recourse to this procedure is marked by a conceptual ambiguity. It seems clear that, whereas Crone's conclusion is merely weakened by such an ambiguity, the variation of *Sīra* Tradition over time and among different groups can only be apprehended through a definite conception of transmission. I propose here to introduce the conception of transmission as the handing down of meaning in a certain group during a certain period. My intention is not to do away with the conception prevailing in the field of *Sīra* studies, where transmission is understood as the handing over of verbal forms by one individual to another, but to acknowledge the existence of two distinct aspects of transmission. The distinction between these two aspects lies at the basis of my method, and calls for a specific terminology.

a. Tradition and report

My method of diachronic arrangement is based on the distinction between "tradition" and "report". The former term designates the unit of transmitted meaning, while the latter term designates the unit of verbal transmission.

Whereas a report is immediately discernible by the presence of a chain of transmission (or mention of source), a tradition can only be discerned through comparison. The following example will provide a simple illustration of the procedure involved in the discernment of a tradition. Ibn Ishāq (d. 150) reports that Muḥammad was born on Monday the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal, Wāqidī (d. 207) that he was born on Monday the tenth of Rabī' al-awwal, and az-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256) that he was born on Monday the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal when dawn broke. The combined evidence of the three reports enables me to conclude that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad on Monday constitutes a unit of meaning which was handed down in the Muslim community during the second century and the first half of the third. Likewise, the combined evidence of Ibn Ishāq's report and Ibn Bakkār's enables me to conclude that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad on the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal constitutes a unit of meaning which was handed down in the Muslim community during the same period. I shall refer to these units as "the Monday tradition" and "the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal tradition". The mere evidence of Wāqidī's report, however, does not enable me to establish that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad on the tenth of Rabī' al-awwal constitutes a tradition, nor does the mere evidence of Ibn Bakkār's report enable me to establish that the placing of his birth at the break of dawn constitutes a tradition. Until further evidence is adduced, I shall only be able to recognize these placings as distinct units of meaning within the verbal units handed over to Wāqidī and Ibn Bakkār respectively.

The structural relation between two (or among several) units of meaning in a verbal unit is termed "association". By "association", I indicate that the two (or several) units are parts of a cohesive whole. I shall say here that the Monday tradition is associated with the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal tradition in Ibn Ishāq's report, with the view that Muḥammad was born on the tenth of Rabī' al-awwal in Wāqidī's report, and with the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal tradition as well as with the view that he was born when dawn broke in Ibn Bakkār's report.

In a slightly different sense, I shall speak of the association of a narrative tradition with various events of the life of Muḥammad. A further example will illustrate this particular use of the term "association". Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī report that, when the Prophetic mission was initiated, the devils were pelted with shooting stars; in the report just mentioned, Ibn Bakkār relates that the same phenomenon occurred when Muḥammad was born. I shall conclude here that the story of the devils who were pelted with shooting stars constitutes a unit of meaning distinct from the placing of the phenomenon in time, and one which was handed down in the Muslim community during the second century and the first half of the third. I shall say that the "shooting stars tradition" is associated with the beginning of the Prophetic mission in Ibn Ishāq's report as well as in Wāqidī's, and with the birth of Muḥammad in Ibn Bakkār's report.

The contingent relation between two (or among several) units of meaning in a verbal unit is termed "combination". By "combination", I indicate that each unit is part of a distinct whole, or exists separately. I shall say here that, in Ibn Bakkār's report, the Monday tradition is combined with the shooting stars tradition.

My principle of diachronic arrangement may now be stated as follows: when an association is found in a work W, and not in previous works, I shall conclude that the association came about during the period separating W from the last of its predecessors, and that the report exhibiting this association originated during that period. I shall conclude from the evidence adduced above that the association of the Monday tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke and the association of the shooting stars tradition with his birth came about during the period separating Ibn Bakkār from Wāqidī, namely the first half of the third century, and that the former's report originated during that period.

The conclusions reached through the application of my principle will be refined, and occasionally reconsidered, in view of the fact that the scholarly method of transmission

involved the preservation, rather than the appropriation, of previous material. This fact implies that the stage of transmission of a report prior to its occurrence in a work can be retrieved. Thus, it is the source of *W*, not *W* itself, that will provide the *terminus ad quem* for the coming about of a new association.

My principle has an obvious ancestor in Horovitz's, but is productive of a full method of diachronic arrangement. Whereas Horovitz (like Crone) takes as his starting point the material found in the earliest available source with regard to a specific event or figure, and tracks this material in order to detect the introduction of new elements, I shall take as my starting point the earliest occurrence of a specific tradition in the sources, and shall track this tradition in order to discern its successive associations. Whereas the use of the former procedure manifests material changes and thus inevitably leads to the search for external factors, the use of the latter procedure manifests structural ones, and thus enables us to apprehend the internal development of *Sira* Tradition.

b. Modes of transmission

The question of modes of transmission has recently drawn the attention of Western scholars. In a study of the material pertaining to the earliest revelation, Rudolf Sellheim argues that Ibn Ishāq's work underwent a stage of essentially oral transmission until its three main recensions were definitively edited by Ibn Hishām, 'Uṭāridī (d. 272/886) and Ṭabarī respectively²⁸. In a survey of the various fields of literary production, Gregor Schoeler argues that the instability of works dating from the second and third centuries should rather be ascribed to a kind of transmission combining oral and written means²⁹.

28. "Muḥammeds erstes Offenbarungserlebnis. Zum Problem mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung im 1./7. und 2./8. Jahrhundert", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* X (1987), pp. 1-16.

29. "Die Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im frühen Islam", *Der Islam* LXII 2 (1985), pp. 201-230. "Weiteres zur Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im Islam", *Der Islam* LXVI 1 (1989), pp. 38-67. "Mündliche Thora und Ḥadīth:

The fact that early works underwent an initial stage of oral (or semi-written) transmission indeed accounts for the variation encountered here among different transmissions of the same report. On the other hand, the fact that later works (and the editions of early works) were subject to exclusively written transmission accounts for the stability of reports recorded in individual works, but is not directly relevant to the process whereby reports pass from a work to another. The term "transmission" likewise applies to this process, since the report is brought forward as an object from the past worthy of consideration in the present and, in this sense, is handed over to a new audience. The transmission of reports is achieved by scholars according to a specific mode, characterized by an ambivalent attitude toward the material: while implicitly acknowledging the value of the report, the scholar distances himself from it by means of the chain of transmission, or of the mention of a source. It is this attitude, not written transmission as such, that accounts for the textual preservation of reports.

Two terms refer to the scholarly mode of transmission. The term "adduce" is used when textual preservation cannot be documented, either because the work from which the report was transmitted is unavailable to us, or because its identity cannot be determined with certainty. The term "reproduce" is used when the comparison between the two works shows that the original form of the report has indeed been preserved.

On the other hand, the instances of textual modification encountered here should be ascribed to departures from the scholarly mode of transmission.

A first kind of departure is termed "paraphrase". This term is used when formal change is accompanied by the conscious recourse to two procedures: the condensation of the report and the reduction of its chain of transmission to the ascription.

Überlieferung, Schreibverbot, Redaktion". *Der Islam* LXVI 2 (1989), pp. 213-251. "Schreiben und Veröffentlichen. Zu Verwendung und Funktion der Schrift in den ersten islamischen Jahrhunderten", *Der Islam* LXIX 1 (1992), pp. 1-43.

A second kind of departure is termed "paraphrastic transmission". This phrase is used when the report undergoes formal change, while its size and its chain are preserved. These two features suggest that the transmitter is unaware of his modification of the original form of the report.

c. The confessional identity of reports

Unlike the tradition, the report has a confessional identity. The confessional identity of reports is exhibited in their conformity to one of two distinct patterns of ascription. According to the Sunnī pattern, reports are ascribed to a Companion³⁰ or to a Successor. According to the Shī'ī pattern, reports are ascribed to an Imam or to a disciple of one. It is on the basis of its conformity to a distinct pattern of ascription that a report will be identified as either Sunnī or Shī'ī. The body of reports thus identified as Sunnī will be termed "Sunnī Tradition". In the same sense, I shall speak of "Shī'ī Tradition".

The existence of a Sunnī and a Shī'ī pattern of ascription reflects the divergence between Sunnīs and Shī'īs on the legitimation of doctrine. It may be noted, however, that the principle underlying the Sunnī pattern of ascription could be qualified as "historical", whereas the principle underlying the Shī'ī pattern is one of pure authority: the Companion knows of an event as a contemporary and the Successor through contact with contemporaries, whereas the Imam knows of an event by virtue of his intrinsic knowledge of the past. It must be stated, moreover, that the Shī'ī pattern of ascription is first attested in sources dating from the third century, and that the Sunnī pattern can have been regarded as a distinctive one only after the Shī'ī pattern had come into being.

³⁰. For obvious reasons, the ascription to Companions is less salient in the reports concerned with events preceding the Prophetic mission. In the material pertaining to the birth of Muḥammad, for instance, we shall encounter reports ascribed to figures such as Āmina and Ḥalīma.

d. Collective patterns of selection

The variation of *Sīra* Tradition between Sunnīs and Shī'īs cannot be fully apprehended on the basis of the confessional identity of reports, because collective patterns of association are seldom discernible and, in particular, because an association is often exhibited in Sunnī as well as Shī'ī reports. This variation can, however, be apprehended through the discernment of collective patterns of selection. The existence of such patterns should be acknowledged when reports exhibiting a specific association regularly appear in either Sunnī or Shī'ī sources, while reports exhibiting a different association are uniformly absent from the sources in question.

The existence of collective patterns of selection will be expressed through the use of the phrases "Sunnī memory" and "Shī'ī memory". The term "memory" is borrowed from the works of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs³¹ and of contemporary historians³², where it expresses the idea that the past is remembered by groups, and that collective remembrance involves selection among events and their interpretation according to distinctive patterns³³. My intention here is not to affirm the existence of some collective agency of remembrance distinct from Tradition, but to take into account the fact that the individual act of transmission involves selection among associations, and that this selection may conform to collective patterns. It must be emphasized, moreover, that such patterns are

³¹. *Les cadres sociaux de la memoire*, Paris, 1925; *La topographie legendaire des evangiles en terre sainte. Etude de memoire collective*, Paris, 1941; *La memoire collective*, Paris, 1950.

³². For instance, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Seattle, 1982.

³³. A critique of the tendency to "hypostatize the collective memory" is mounted by Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, Berkeley, 1993, pp. 3-10. Funkenstein points out that remembering is a mental act, and hence utterly personal. This act can hardly be ascribed to groups, but neither can it be removed from its social context. Thus, Funkenstein redefines collective memory as a system of symbols shared by the members of a group, and the act of remembering as the instantiation of these symbols specific to each individual.

specific, not to the confessional group as a whole, but rather to the sub-group constituted by scholars sharing the same confessional allegiance.

The ultimate purpose of my method is to determine the conceptual identity of each tradition, and the conceptual development reflected in its successive associations. This procedure involves interpretation, and thus lies outside the scope of the present chapter. However, the very idea that conceptions, rather than mere tendencies, are reflected in the variation of *Sira* Tradition, is an assumption, which has permeated my review of Western approaches, and needs to be clarified here. This assumption is, in my view, justified by the scholarly character of *Sira*. This is not to say that the scholars responsible for the transmission of *Sira* Tradition were concerned with the conformity of the historical figure of Muḥammad to dogma, but rather that their historical concerns were informed by specific conceptions. The kind of existence which we should ascribe to such conceptions will be discussed at the beginning of the fourth chapter of this work.

II. The time of birth of Muḥammad in late scholarship

The specific object of my study is the variation of *Sīra* Tradition as to the time of birth of Muḥammad, which I shall attempt to reconstruct as a diachronic process. Before applying my method to the relevant material, I must turn to late scholarship, where this issue is discussed on the basis of traditional evidence. We shall see below that, without knowledge of this discussion, late developments of Sunnī Tradition would be unintelligible.

1. The scholarly discussion

The discussion about the time of birth of Muḥammad is reported in late *Sīra* literature in terms of divergence between two antagonistic views. For some, Muḥammad was born during the daytime (*nahāran*) and for others, at night (*laylan*).

The first view is supported by the following traditions:

- The Messenger of God was once asked about the Monday fast. He replied: On that day (*yawm*) I was born.³⁴

The argumentation of the scholars who adduced that report, such as Abū l-Faḍl ‘Abdarraḥīm ibn al-Ḥusayn al-‘Irāqī (d. 806/1404)³⁵, involved the gloss of “day ”as “daytime”, justified by unspecified “Qur’ānic usage”, and the remark that fasting is performed only during the daytime³⁶.

- The Prophet was born on Monday (*yawma l-ithnayn*)...³⁷

³⁴. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 143, quoting Muslim (III, p. 168). Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333, quoting Ibn Ḥanbal (V, p. 374). Ḥalabī, I, p. 93.

³⁵. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333, quoting Abū l-Faḍl’s *Mawrid*. On Abū l-Faḍl, see Sakhāwī, IV, pp. 171-178. No title beginning with *Mawrid* appears among the works mentioned by Sakhāwī in his entry on Abū l-Faḍl. Ḥājjī Khalīfa, however, mentions Abū l-Faḍl among the authors of *mawlid* works appearing in the *Ḍaw’* (VI, pp. 271-272). It is difficult to determine whether this reference was simply lacking in the manuscript used by the editor of the *Ḍaw’*, or whether Ḥājjī Khalīfa found it in another entry, but it seems reasonable to assume that the title abbreviated by Ṣāliḥī is that of the work referred to here by Sakhāwī. This hypothesis is supported by the title of two works mentioned by Brockelmann (G II, p. 522 and S II, p. 83): the *Mawrid ar-rawī fī l-mawlid an-nabawī* of ‘Alī ibn Sulṭān al-Qāri’ (d. 1014/1605) and the *Mawrid aṣ-ṣādī fī mawlid al-hādī* of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh ad-Dimashqī IBN NĀṢIRADDĪN (d. 842/1438). The biography of Abū l-Faḍl, as well as the list of his works, suggests that he was essentially a *Ḥadīth* scholar.

³⁶. Ḥalabī, I, p. 94.

³⁷. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 143, quoting Ibn Ḥanbal (I, p. 344).

- The Messenger of God was born on Monday when dawn broke (*hīna ṭala'a l-fajr*).³⁸

- The Messenger of God was born at midday (*'inda ibhāri n-nahār*).³⁹

That tradition was adduced by 'Umar ibn al-Ḥasan IBN DIḤYA (d. 633/1235)⁴⁰ and Muḥammad ibn Bahādur az-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392)⁴¹.

- A report in which 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib declares to the monk 'Īṣā after the birth of Muḥammad:

A boy was born to me last night with the break of dawn (*al-laylata ma'a ṣ-ṣubḥ*).

That phrase was adduced in support of the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke⁴².

The opposite view that Muḥammad was born at night is supported by three reports.

In the first one, a Jewish merchant proclaims:

Tonight (*al-laylata*) was born the prophet of this last community.⁴³

The second report states that, according to the custom followed by pre-Islamic Arabs when a boy was born at the beginning of night (*min taḥti l-layl*), Muḥammad was placed under a bowl after his birth⁴⁴.

38. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 143. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333.

39. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333. Ḥalabī, I, p. 93.

40. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333, probably quoting from Ibn Diḥya's *Tanwīr fī mawlid as-sirāj al-munīr*. See *E. I. 2*, art. "Ibn Diḥya" (Fernando de la Granja).

41. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333, quoting Zarkashī's Commentary on the *Qaṣīdat al-burda* of Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd al-Būṣīrī (d. 694/1294). On Zarkashī, see 'Asqalānī, *Durar*, IV, pp. 17-18. See *E. I. 2*, Supplement, art. "al-Būṣīrī" (Ed.). Zarkashī's work is mentioned by Brockelmann among the Commentaries of the *Burda* (G I, p. 311, no. 73).

42. Qaṣṭallānī, I, pp. 143-144. Ḥalabī, I, p. 93.

43. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 144, quoting al-Ḥākim (II, p. 601). Ḥalabī, I, p. 95.

44. Ḥalabī, I, p. 95, p. 109.

According to the third one, stars came down during Āmina's delivery⁴⁵. Ibn Dihya considered that report as weak, "since it implies that the birth occurred at night"⁴⁶. Only Zurqānī (d. 1122/1710) notes the inconsistency of Ibn Dihya, who dismissed the report on the ground of its content, when the problem is precisely to choose among divergent contents with the help of external considerations (evaluation of transmission)⁴⁷. Against Ibn Dihya, Zarkashī argued that "the time of prophecy is appropriate for supernatural phenomena, and stars may then fall down during the daytime"⁴⁸.

In what precedes, I have overlooked one aspect of the discussion: late *Sīra* scholars do not merely report the views of their predecessors, but are themselves involved in the discussion. However, their views are expressed, not always explicitly in argumentation, but often implicitly in their presentation of previous views. Thus, we may suppose that Qaṣṭallānī (d. 923/1517) is an advocate of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, when he characterizes the Prophetic report as decisive evidence in favour of this view⁴⁹. This hypothesis is confirmed by Zurqānī, who ascribes the same view to Qaṣṭallānī, and seems to adopt it himself⁵⁰. In a more radical fashion, Ṣāliḥī (d. 942/1535) purely and simply suppresses the argumentation in support of the view that Muḥammad was born at night⁵¹.

Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 974/1567) acknowledges the equal attestation of the two views in Tradition, but denies the contradictory character of traditional evidence. For Ibn

45. Ḥalabī, I, p. 94.

46. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 145. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333. Ḥalabī, I, p. 94.

47. Zurqānī, I, p. 135.

48. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 145. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 334. Ḥalabī, I, p. 94.

49. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 143. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-Ḳaṣṭallānī" (Carl Brockelmann).

50. Zurqānī, I, p. 136.

51. Ṣāliḥī, I, pp. 333-334.

Ḥajar, the two views are not mutually exclusive if one assumes that Muḥammad was born shortly after dawn broke (*bu'ayda tulū'i l-fajr*)⁵².

Ibn Ḥajar's preference for the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime appears in an argument formulated elsewhere. For Ibn Ḥajar, the combined evidence of the Prophetic report and the break of dawn tradition implies that Muḥammad was born during the daytime shortly after dawn (*bu'ayda l-fajr*). According to Ibn Ḥajar, the advocates of the opposite view likewise argue, not unspecifically that Muḥammad was born at night, but that he was born before sunrise (*qabla tulū'i sh-shams*). For Ibn Ḥajar, paraphrasing Zarkashī's argument, the descent of stars does not imply that Muḥammad was born before dawn (*qabla l-fajr*), "since stars may fall down after sunrise as a supernatural phenomenon". Ibn Ḥajar adds that the recourse to such a phenomenon is even unnecessary, "since stars are still visible after dawn"⁵³. The same argument is reflected in the view, reported by Zurqānī, that Muḥammad was born immediately after dawn (*'aqba l-fajr*), "when stars are still mighty"⁵⁴. What is clearly attempted here is a compromise between the break of dawn tradition and the Prophetic report, taken as evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, and a consequent specification of the result of Zarkashī's argument through the recourse to a natural phenomenon.

Ḥalabī (d. 1044/1634) adds to Zarkashī's argument that the recourse to a supernatural phenomenon is unnecessary, if one adopts the view that Muḥammad was born at dawn (*"inda l-fajr*), "since that time is a continuation of night"⁵⁵. Thus, the recourse to a natural phenomenon neutralizes here the result of Zarkashī's argument. What is apparently

52. Ibn Ḥajar's *Mawlid*, apud Nabhānī, p. 1117. See *E. I. 2*, art. "Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytami" (C. Van Arendonk).

53. Ibn Ḥajar, p. 26.

54. Zurqānī, I, p. 135.

55. Ḥalabī, I, p. 94. See *E. I. 2*, art. "al-Ḥalabī" (Johann Fück).

attempted here is a reconciliation of the break of dawn tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night.

According to Bājūrī (d. 1277/1860), the advocates of the view that Muḥammad was born at night in fact argue that he was born immediately after dawn broke (*'aqba ṭulū'i l-fajr*). When designating that time as night, they mean that "it is a continuation of night"⁵⁶. This specification, parallel to the one reported by Ibn Ḥajar (before sunrise), can hardly result from a compromise attempted between the break of dawn tradition and the view that Muḥammad was born at night, which would have produced the specification that he was born shortly before dawn broke. That the advocates of the view that Muḥammad was born at night and the advocates of the view that he was born during the daytime came up with substantially the same specification, namely that he was born shortly after dawn broke, is indeed worthy of notice.

The disproportionate role played by a Prophetic report of legal content (the Monday fast) in the argumentation of the advocates of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime clearly represents a recourse to authority. However, this report does not contain decisive evidence which cannot be found in non-Prophetic material such as the Monday tradition. Moreover, the ambiguity of the term "day" (period of light or twenty-four-hour period) precludes the constitution of such evidence. The recourse to authority is thus of polemical character, and does not overcome the situation faced by traditional scholarship: the two views are equally attested in Tradition and, for this very reason, Tradition does not provide decisive evidence for either one of them.

As appears in the discussion about the time of birth of Muḥammad, that situation was overcome by the interpretation of Tradition. Thus, through the gloss of "day" as "daytime", the Prophetic report became decisive evidence in favour of the view that

⁵⁶ Bājūrī, p. 37. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Bādjūrī" (Theodoor Juynboll).

Muḥammad was born during the daytime. More remarkably, the descent of stars, a nocturnal phenomenon par excellence, could be made compatible with that view. For less obvious reasons, a compromise was attempted between the break of dawn tradition and the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime. We may note that the anonymous advocates of the view that Muḥammad was born at night did not practice that kind of interpretation, and that Ḥalabī's attempt to reconcile that view with the break of dawn tradition represents a unique instance in *Sīra* scholarship.

2. The Scriptural argument

The association of Q 93:2 with the birth of Muḥammad is reported by Ḥalabī, for the first (and last) time in *Sīra* literature, in the following terms:

God swore by the night of his birth when He said:

By the white forenoon [v. 1]

and the brooding night.⁵⁷

This association is adduced, in the discussion about the time of birth of Muḥammad, as evidence in favour of the view that he was born at night.

In the Scriptural text, *aḍ-ḍuḥā* and *al-layl* appear as the two symmetrical terms by which God swears that He "has neither forsaken thee nor hates thee" (v. 3). Although the association of God's forsaking, the orphan (v. 6), the erring one (v. 7) and the needy one (v. 8) with events of the life of Muḥammad is reported in *Tafsīr* literature, the identification of the addressee results, not from exegesis, but from the mere acknowledgement of Muḥammad as the recipient of Scriptural revelation. The identification of the night as the night of birth of Muḥammad, however, is necessarily the product of exegesis. Unexpectedly, nowhere in *Tafsīr* literature is the night of Q 93:2 identified as the night of birth of Muḥammad. However, we may discern there preconditions for this identification.

In lexical exegesis, whether it takes the form of traditions or is achieved through analogy with profane language (poetry or *usus loquendi*), *ḍuḥā* receives considerable attention. The glosses proposed are "the heat of sun"⁵⁸, "a time of the day"⁵⁹, "the whole

⁵⁷. Ḥalabī, I, p. 95.

⁵⁸. Muqātil, II, fol. 243 b.

⁵⁹. Muqātil, II, fol. 243 b. Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XXX, p. 208. Tha'labī, *ad loc.*

day”⁶⁰, “sunlight”⁶¹ and “daylight”⁶². A precondition for the association reported by Ḥalabī may be found, obviously not in these glosses, but in the exclusive concern for the clarification of obscure terms. While focusing on *duḥā*, whose meaning is far from clear (unlike *layl*), lexical exegesis disregards the apparent symmetry of the two terms in the Scriptural text (except in the gloss “the whole day”). *Duḥā* and *layl* are not taken as a pair, but as two individual terms. In this dissociation lies a precondition for individual interpretation, of which the association of *al-layl* with the birth of Muḥammad is clearly the product.

In what seem to be relatively early traditions, *ad-duḥā* and *al-layl* are associated individually with the following episodes of salvation history: the revelation to Moses (*ad-duḥā* as “the time at which God spoke to Moses”⁶³), the conversion of Pharaoh’s sorcerers (*ad-duḥā* as “the time at which the sorcerers were cast down prostrating [20:70]”, through analogy with *wa an yuḥshara n-nāsu duḥan* [20:59]⁶⁴), Muḥammad’s journey to heaven (*al-layl* as “the night of the ascension”⁶⁵) and the eschatological manifestation of God (*al-layl* as “the night on which God will descend to the lowest heaven”⁶⁶). These identifications associate Q 93:1-2 with Muḥammad only in one case, but this case and, to a certain extent, the other three, represent a precondition for the association of *al-layl* with the

⁶⁰. Farrā’, III, p. 273.

⁶¹. Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’*, XXX, p. 208. Qurṭubī, XX, p. 73.

⁶². Māwardī, *Nukat*, VI, p. 291. Ibn al-‘Arabī, IV, p. 1934. Ṭabrisī, *Majma’*, X, p. 764.

⁶³. Tha’labī, IV, *ad loc.* Qushayrī, VI, p. 307. Zamakhsharī, IV, p. 765. Rāzī, XXXI, p. 209. Qurṭubī, XX, p. 91. Nāsafī, V, p. 374. Abū s-Su’ūd, V, p. 542.

⁶⁴. Tha’labī, IV, *ad loc.* Zamakhsharī, IV, p. 765. Rāzī, XXXI, p. 209. Qurṭubī, XX, p. 91. Nāsafī, V, p. 374. Abū s-Su’ūd, V, p. 542.

⁶⁵. Qushayrī, VI, p. 307. Qurṭubī, XX, p. 91. Abū s-Su’ūd, V, p. 542.

⁶⁶. Qushayrī, VI, p. 308.

birth of Muḥammad, itself dependent upon the conception of that event as an episode of salvation history.

In the exegesis of the free preachers (*mudhakkirūn*) as reported by Rāzī (d. 606/1209), Q 93:1-2 is abundantly associated with Muḥammad. *Ad-ḍuḥā* and *al-layl* are interpreted respectively as “Muḥammad’s face” and “his hair”, “the males of his house” and “their females”, “his mission” and “the time of the interruption of revelation”, “the light of his knowledge” and “his forgiveness”, “your [Muḥammad’s] manifest person” and “your concealed self”⁶⁷. Here, *ad-ḍuḥā* and *al-layl* are taken as a symmetrical pair rather than as two individual terms, and are associated with the person of Muḥammad rather than with events of his life. However, these interpretations reflect a widespread association of Q 93:1-2 with Muḥammad, and represent as such a precondition for the association reported by Ḥalabī.

By the time of Rāzī, then, *al-layl* had been dissociated from *ad-ḍuḥā*, associated with episodes of salvation history and with the person of Muḥammad. Now, we know from Ḥalabī’s quotation that, by his time, *al-layl* had been associated with the birth of Muḥammad. However, it seems impossible to determine precisely when and where that association took shape, and how it reached Ḥalabī. We are then left with the following question: why did Ḥalabī adduce the identification of *al-layl* in the discussion about the time of birth of Muḥammad?

The identification of *al-layl* clearly provides the view that Muḥammad was born at night with authoritative evidence. We may then suppose that the recourse to Scriptural authority, a unique instance in the discussion about the time of birth of Muḥammad, was attempted by Ḥalabī in support of that view, which was indeed a marginal one among late *Sīra* scholars.

⁶⁷. Rāzī, XXXI, p. 210. See *E. I.* 2, art. “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī” (Anawati).

The association of Q 93:2 with the birth of Muḥammad results from the marginal association of a Scriptural phrase with an already existing tradition, unlike, for instance, the association of Q 17:1 with his journey to heaven. The tradition is necessarily identical with the view that Muḥammad was born at night, and the identification of *al-layl* cannot therefore constitute independent evidence in favour of this view. Here again, the recourse to authority does not overcome the equal attestation of the two views in Tradition.

3. The Ṣūfī solution

Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak as-Sijilmāsī (d. 1155/1742) reports that he asked his master ‘Abdal‘azīz ad-Dabbāgh al-Fāsī (d. 1132/1720) about the time of birth of Muḥammad. Aḥmad first mentions the descent of stars as the traditional evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born at night, and paraphrases Ibn Ḥajar’s argument in support of the view that he was born during the daytime after dawn (*ba’da l-fajr*). Aḥmad then reports ‘Abdal‘azīz’s answer in the following terms:

He said, revealing to me the secrets of his noble soul:

The truth is indeed that he was born at the end of night sometime before dawn (*fī ākhiri l-layl qabla l-fajr bi-mudda*), and that his mother’s delivery extended until dawn broke. The time span between his separation from his mother’s belly and the end of her delivery is the time of night at which prayers are answered (*sā’at al-istijāba*) referred to by Prophetic reports.

‘Abdal‘azīz adds:

At that time the people of the assembly of saints gather from all the regions of earth. Among them are the Refuge, the seven Poles, the people of the circle and the Pillars. Their gathering takes place in the cave of Ḥirā’ outside Mecca, they are the bearers of the pillar of the light of Islam and from them the whole community seeks aid. When someone’s prayer coincides with their prayer (*fa-man wāfaqa du’ā’uhu du’ā’ahum*) and his devotions with their devotions at that time, God answers his call (*ajāba llāh da’watahu*) and fulfills his wishes.⁶⁸

The answer is attained by ‘Abdal‘azīz, as appears from the wording of his disciple’s introduction, not through a traditional argument, but by virtue of a spiritual gift which gives him access to concealed realities and, in this particular case, enables him to overcome the contradictory character of traditional evidence. We may suppose that the gift ascribed here to ‘Abdal‘azīz is that of “uncovering” (*kashf*), namely the intuitive knowledge resulting

⁶⁸. Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak, I, pp. 310-311.

from spiritual illumination⁶⁹. 'Abdal'azīz's answer seems indeed to represent an innovation, but at the same time it is dependent upon Tradition.

This dependence is first reflected in 'Abdal'azīz's own words. The Prophetical reports alluded to here are indeed adduced in *Ḥadīth* literature, and exhibit a variation on the following tradition:

God descends every night to the lowest heaven and says: Who will pray to me, so that I answer his call (*man yad'ūnī fa-stajība lahu*).

The Prophetical reports vary in the specification provided as to the time of God's descent.

In a first set of reports, that time remains unspecified, although its end is specified in one variant as the break of dawn⁷⁰.

In a second set, the time of God's descent is specified as "when the first third of night has elapsed... until dawn"⁷¹.

In a third set of reports, that time is specified as "during the second half or last third of night... until dawn breaks"⁷².

In a fourth set, the time of God's descent is specified as "when the last third of night remains " and, in some variants, "until dawn breaks"⁷³.

It is unclear which set of reports is alluded to by 'Abdal'azīz. However, the association between the time of God's descent and the birth of Muḥammad, attested in none of the four sets, is clearly dependent upon a view foreign to these reports, namely that divine grace is regularly bestowed upon man at a time blessed by virtue of the birth of

⁶⁹. See *E. I.* 2, art. "kashf" (Louis Gardet).

⁷⁰. Ibn Ḥanbal, IV, p. 116. Dārimī, I, pp. 369-370.

⁷¹. Ibn Ḥanbal, II, p. 372, p. 553. Dārimī, I, p. 370. Muslim, II, pp. 175-176. Tirmidhī, II, pp. 307-308.

⁷². Ibn Ḥanbal, II, p. 667. Dārimī, I, pp. 369-370. Muslim, II, p. 176. Ibn Māja, I, p. 435.

⁷³. Mālik, p. 142. Ibn Ḥanbal, II, p. 349, p. 352, p. 644. Dārimī, I, p. 369. Bukhārī, II, p. 298. Muslim, II, p. 175. Abū Dā'ūd, II, p. 77. Ibn Māja, I, p. 435. Tirmidhī, II, p. 309.

Muḥammad. This view is itself dependent upon the conception of transhistorical time, according to which the blessedness of time originates in history, and is manifested at every recurrence of a time blessed by virtue of a blessed event. On the other hand, the view that the saints hold an assembly in which they direct the affairs of the world clearly represents an elaboration of two familiar Ṣūfī traditions, namely the hierarchy of saints and the saintly government of the universe⁷⁴.

'Abdal'azīz's answer, then, exhibits a twofold association: on the one hand between the nocturnal time of God's descent and the birth of Muḥammad, on the other hand between this association and the view that the saints hold an assembly in which they direct the affairs of the universe. The latter association preserves the time of God's descent as one blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad, but modifies its religious significance: the regular bestowal of divine grace at that time is experienced by man, not through his devotions alone, but through their combination with the devotions of saints. Since the time of night at which prayers are answered and the saintly government of the universe could have been brought together without reference to the birth of Muḥammad, we may assume that the second association represents the only innovation here and that the association between the nocturnal time of God's descent and the birth of Muḥammad was, by the time of 'Abdal'azīz, a traditional one among Ṣūfī scholars.

⁷⁴. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-ḳutb" (Frederick De Jong).

III. The variation of Tradition

My method may now be applied to the relevant material. In the material pertaining to the birth of Muḥammad, I shall distinguish among four kinds of traditions: the dating, announcement, miracle and new order traditions. The reports will be numbered in their order of appearance, and named according to their ascription or according to the earliest work in which they occur.

1. The dating traditions

These traditions, whose primary aim is to locate the birth of Muḥammad in time, are concerned with the year, the day of the month and the day of the week on which he was born. With the last item may be associated an indication as to the time of birth of Muḥammad.

a. The Monday tradition

This tradition is reported, through various chains of transmission and in various frameworks (as the single object of a report or associated with other items of dating), in virtually all Sunnī sources⁷⁵. Unlike the traditions pertaining to the month and the day of the month, which exhibit a considerable degree of divergence, the Monday tradition may be taken as representing the Sunnī collective view as to the day of the week on which Muḥammad was born. However, as we have already noted, this tradition does not contain any indication as to the time of birth of Muḥammad (see above, p. 30).

Such an indication is associated with the Monday tradition in a report (1) adduced by Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176), with a chain going back to the *mawlā* of 'Uthmān Ma'rūf ibn Kharrabūdh, and having as intermediary link az-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870):

The Messenger of God was born in the year of the elephant... on the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal - some say that he was born in Ramaḍān, on the twelfth of that month- on Monday when dawn broke.⁷⁶

⁷⁵. Ibn Hishām, I, p. 167. Ibn Sa'd, I, pp. 80-81. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, p. 156. Ibn Ḥibbān, I, pp. 14-15. Ibn Fāris, p. 32. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 191. Māwardī, *A'lām*, p. 270. Bayhaqī, I, pp. 72-74. Ibn 'Asākir, I, pp. 53-62. Kalā'ī, I, p. 167. Ibn Sayyid an-nās, I, p. 34. Mughulṭāy, p. 5. Ibn Kathīr, I, pp. 198-200. Maqrīzī, I, p. 31. Qaṣṭallānī, I, pp. 140-142. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333. Ḥalabī, I, p. 92.

⁷⁶. Ibn 'Asākir, I, p. 57. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn 'Asākir" (Nikita Elisseeff). It seems reasonable to assume that the link of Ibn Bakkār represents the source of Ibn 'Asākir. In the case of a report pertaining to the

Here, the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke is associated with the collective view that he was born on Monday, with the majority views that he was born on the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal and in the year of the elephant, as well as with the minority view that he was born on the twelfth of Ramaḍān. Each of these items may be taken as an independent tradition. In particular, the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke constitutes a tradition independent from the Monday tradition.

In later sources, the break of dawn is associated with Monday and the twelfth of Ramaḍān⁷⁷, with Monday only⁷⁸ or with the first of Rabī' al-awwal⁷⁹.

The instability of association here confirms the independence of the break of dawn tradition. Besides, its occasional association with minority views and, more generally, its absence from major sources suggest that the break of dawn tradition never even reached the status of majority view.

death of 'Abdallāh, Lecker has proposed Ibn Bakkār's *Akhbār al-Madīna* as the source of Ibn 'Asākir ("The death of the Prophet Muḥammad's father", n. 26). This suggestion is obviously irrelevant to the present case. The work from which the report was transmitted should rather be identified as Ibn Bakkār's *Kitāb nasab Quraysh wa akhbārihim* (see Sezgin, I, pp. 317-318), which is not fully extant in manuscript and of which only one volume has, to my knowledge, been published up to now (*Jamharat nasab Quraysh wa akhbārihim*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo, 1381 AH. A comprehensive history of the text is provided in the introduction, pp. 19-51). Ibn Bakkār transmits here from Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan IBN ZABĀLA (d. toward the end of the 2nd century). Since the only work ascribed to Ibn Zabāla is one dealing with the history of Medina (see Sezgin, I, pp. 343-344), it seems reasonable to assume that the report was transmitted by Ibn Bakkār as part of the material of his teacher (rather than as part of a distinct work of his).

⁷⁷. Maqrīzī, I, p. 31, quoting Ibn Bakkār.

⁷⁸. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 143. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 333, quoting Ibn Bakkār and Ibn 'Asākir. Ḥalabī, I, p. 93, quoting Ibn Bakkār and Ibn 'Asākir.

⁷⁹. Mughulṭāy, p. 6. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 334.

Another tradition deserves some attention.

The following dating (2) appears in a passage quoted by 'Alī ibn Yūsuf IBN AL-MUṬAHHAR (alive in 703/1303) from a *Kitāb mawālīd al-a'imma*:

Some said that he was born on Monday at the end of the daytime (*ākhira n-nahār*) on the thirteenth of Rabī' al-awwal in the year nine hundred and eight of Alexander.⁸⁰

Here, the view that Muḥammad was born at the end of the daytime is associated with the collective view that he was born on Monday and with the marginal view that he was born on the thirteenth of Rabī' al-awwal. In the absence of further evidence, the origin of this view is difficult to determine, although its traditional existence at an early period can be assumed. That a Shī'ī source preserved a Sunnī view, however, is indeed worthy of mention.

Two late traditions deserve particular notice.

According to Munāwī (d. 1031/1621), "the soundest view is that he was born... shortly after dawn on Monday (*bu' ayda fajri l-ithnayn*) the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal in the year of the elephant"⁸¹.

80. Ibn al-Muṭahhar, p. 111. 'Alī was the brother of the famous Ḥasan, known as *al-'allāma al-Ḥillī*. Among the several works mentioned by Ṭīhrānī under the title *Mawālīd al-a'imma* (XXIII, pp. 235-236), that of 'Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad IBN AL-KHASHSHĀB (d. 567/1172) seems to have been the most popular. Etan Kohlberg (*A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work. Ibn Ṭāwūs and his library*, Leiden, 1992, p. 265) gives *Mawālīd al-a'imma* as one title of another popular work, that of Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Abdallāh IBN ABĪ TH-THALJ (d. 322/934 or 325/936-937). The passage quoted by Ibn al-Muṭahhar, however, does not appear in either work (in *Majmū'a nafisa fī tārikh al-a'imma*, Qum, 1456 AH). Since no other work known as *Mawālīd al-a'imma* was available to me, the source of Ibn al-Muṭahhar could not be identified. The use of the Alexandrian era suggests that the source of the unknown author was a *tārikh* work mainly concerned with the history of the Near East prior to the rise of Islam, and containing a succinct account of the life of Muḥammad.

81. Nabhānī, p. 525, quoting Munāwī's Commentary on Suyūṭī's *Jāmi' aṣ-ṣaghīr*. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-

According to Ja'far ibn Ḥasan al-Barzanjī (d. 1179/1621), “the preferable view is that his birth occurred shortly before dawn on Monday (*qubayla fajr yawmi l-ithnayn*) the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal in the year of the elephant”⁸².

According to Aḥmad ad-Dardīr (d. 1201/1786), “the received view is that he was born fifty days after the [day of the] elephant... on Monday the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal... during the daytime after dawn (*nahāran ba'da l-fajr*)”⁸³.

It appears here that, from the eleventh century upward, the Monday tradition was commonly associated with an indication as to the time of birth of Muḥammad. The view that Muḥammad was born (shortly) after dawn is attested in the scholarly discussion as the product of a compromise attempted between the break of dawn tradition and the view that he was born during the daytime, but also as a specification added to the view that he was born at night (see above, pp. 28-30). The view that Muḥammad was born shortly before dawn could result from a compromise attempted between the latter view and the break of dawn tradition, but is unattested in the scholarly discussion and, besides, is reminiscent of the Ṣūfī solution (see above, p. 36). In any case, the two views had clearly become traditions, transmitted in association with the Monday, twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal and year of the elephant traditions.

The (shortly) after dawn and shortly before dawn traditions are here reported, without apparent pattern of variation, as majority views or as views chosen on evaluative grounds. Therefore, it is difficult to determine their respective extents of diffusion. However, it seems clear that, by the twelfth century, the initial antagonism (daytime versus

Munāwī” (A. Saleh Hamdan). Since the dating of the birth of Muḥammad reported by Nabḥānī (d. 1350/1930) is absent from the printed edition of Munāwī's work, the possibility of interpolation into an original text cannot be excluded. Such an interpolation, however, is unlikely to have been achieved by Nabḥānī himself, but presumably occurred at an early stage of the transmission of Munāwī's work.

⁸². Barzanjī, p. 16.

⁸³. Aḥmad ad-Dardīr's *Mawlid*, apud Nabḥānī, p. 1278.

night) had been overshadowed by another one ([shortly] after dawn versus shortly before dawn).

b. The Friday tradition

Unlike the Monday tradition, the Friday tradition is always associated with other items of dating and, moreover, with an indication as to the time of birth of Muḥammad.

Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897) states that Muḥammad was born in the year of the elephant, according to what is reported by some ('*alā mā rawāhu ba'duhum*) on Monday the second of Rabī' al-awwal, according to others (*wa qīla*) on Tuesday night on the eighth of Rabī' al-awwal, and according to those who report from Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq (*wa qāla man rawāhu 'an Ja'far*) on Friday when dawn broke on the twelfth of Ramaḍān⁸⁴.

Kulaynī (d. 329/941) states that he was born on the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal in the year of the elephant on Friday at midday (*ma'a z-zawāl*) or, according to other reports (*wa ruwiya ayḍan*), when dawn broke⁸⁵.

Al-Mufīd (d. 413/1032) states that he was born when dawn broke on Friday the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal in the year of the elephant⁸⁶.

Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153) states that he was born when dawn broke on Friday the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal in the year of the elephant⁸⁷.

Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) quotes al-Mufīd, and adds that scholars of the previous generation whom he has met dated the birth of Muḥammad on Friday the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal in the year of the elephant when dawn broke⁸⁸.

⁸⁴. Ya'qūbī, II, p. 4. See *E. I.* 1, art. "al-Ya'qūbī" (Carl Brockelmann).

⁸⁵. Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, II, p. 434. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-Kulaynī" (Wilferd Madelung).

⁸⁶. Al-Mufīd, pp. 29-30. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-Mufīd" (Wilferd Madelung).

⁸⁷. Ṭabrisī, *Tāj*, p. 5.

⁸⁸. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl*, p. 603. On Ibn Ṭāwūs and his works, see Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*,

Ya'qūbī provides evidence that, by his time, the Friday tradition had emerged as a distinctively Shī'ī view. We must note, however, that this view appears here as a mere alternative to two views. The view that Muḥammad was born on Monday is clearly Sunnī, while the origin of the view that he was born on Tuesday night is difficult to determine. It could be argued that the coexistence of the three views simply reflects Ya'qūbī's avoidance of unmitigated sectarian positions in a work addressed to a broad audience. Since, however, Ya'qūbī states elsewhere the authoritative nature of the view ascribed to Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq⁸⁹, we may assume that a divergence existed among Shī'ī scholars as to the day of the week on which Muḥammad was born⁹⁰.

The datings of Kulaynī, al-Mufīd, Ṭabrisī and Ibn Ṭāwūs show that, by the time of the first scholar, the Friday tradition had come to represent the Shī'ī collective view. If this tradition appears in statements, rather than in reports, it is because a divergence still existed among Shī'ī scholars as to the day of the month on which Muḥammad was born and as to the time of his birth.

pp. 3-69.

⁸⁹. See, in particular, the following passage (II, p. 8): "'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib died, according to what Ja'far ibn Muḥammad reported (*'alā mā rawā Ja'far*), two months after the birth of the Messenger of God. Some said (*wa qāla ba'duhum*) that 'Abdallāh died before Muḥammad was born. The latter view is unsound, since there exists a consensus on the fact that 'Abdallāh died after the birth of Muḥammad". Note the differences of order and of wording between this passage and the previous one. The present passage is used by William Millward to illustrate his contention that "Where differences of opinion or conflict of evidence exists between two or more traditions on the same point, he [Ya'qūbī] gives precedence to Ja'far's version" ("Al-Ya'qūbī's sources and the question of Shī'a Partiality", *Abr-Nahrain* XII [1971-1972], p. 52). The combined evidence of the two passages rather suggests that, when a consensus as to a certain question existed among Shī'ī scholars and when the consensus was supported by a statement of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, Ya'qūbī adduced this statement as an authoritative one.

⁹⁰. The statement that Muḥammad was born in the year of the elephant on Monday the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal does indeed appear in Qummi's report (21) to be encountered in the analysis of the Meccan Jew

The view that Muḥammad was born on the twelfth of Ramaḍān, exhibited in the Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq report (3), is already attested as a tradition in the Ibn Kharrabūdh report (1) encountered above. The view that Muḥammad was born on the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal, exhibited in Kulaynī's dating, was clearly borrowed from Sunnī Tradition, or inherited from a Shī'ī report dependent upon that Tradition. The twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal tradition was promoted by Kulaynī as a Shī'ī majority view. By the time of al-Mufīd, the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal tradition had emerged as a distinctively Shī'ī view. This tradition was promoted as a Shī'ī majority view by al-Mufīd, followed by later scholars.

The view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke, exhibited in the Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq report, is already attested as a tradition in the Ibn Kharrabūdh report. The origin of the view that Muḥammad was born at midday, exhibited in Kulaynī's dating, is difficult to determine, although its traditional existence in the third century can be assumed. The midday tradition was promoted by Kulaynī as a Shī'ī majority view, while the break of dawn tradition was relegated by him to the status of minority view. The latter tradition was promoted as a Shī'ī majority view by al-Mufīd, followed by later scholars.

The evidence to be adduced in the analysis of the shooting stars tradition (see below, pp. 115-116) will suggest that the break of dawn tradition was actually borrowed from the Ibn Kharrabūdh report. We may mention here that, in the paraphrase of Tradition provided by Rāwandī (d. 573/1177-1178), the whole text of this report appears, except for the following variation:

The Messenger of God was born in the year of the elephant, in the month of Rabī' al-awwal, when dawn broke.⁹¹

tradition.

⁹¹. Rāwandī, I, p. 21.

The disappearance of the view that Muḥammad was born on Monday clearly reflects the accession of the Friday tradition to the status of Shī'ī collective view, while the disappearance of the view that he was born on the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal, as well as of the view that he was born on the twelfth of Ramaḍān, reflects the successful promotion of the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal tradition as a Shī'ī majority view. Rāwandī's use of the Ibn Kharrabūdh report, however, suggests that this report had been known for a long time among Shī'ī scholars as one exhibiting features appropriate to their own needs and, in particular, the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke.

We must now note that the break of dawn tradition first appears as a Shī'ī majority view, not in a historical framework, but in a transhistorical one. The precise dating of historical events serves here to identify, within each month, specific days blessed by virtue of blessed events.

After having identified the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal as a day blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad, al-Mufīd says:

The righteous among the family of Muḥammad have, since the earliest times, continuously venerated [the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal], recognized its dignity, respected its sacredness and performed on that day a supererogatory fast. Indeed, it was reported from the Imams that they had said: "Whoever fasts on the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal, that is the day of birth of our lord the Messenger of God, God ascribes to him the merit of one year of fasting". It is recommended on that day to give alms, to visit the tombs of the Imams, to perform supererogatory works and to bring joy to the faithful.⁹²

Ibn Ṭāwūs comments:

Reason, as well as Tradition, compels us to consider that the merit of fasting on that venerable day referred to here is proportional to the veneration in which God holds that blessed day, and to the profits then [bestowed by God upon mankind] through that newborn. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to assume that the year referred to in the Imams' saying is one of unequalled quality

⁹². Al-Mufīd, p. 30.

and merit... Likewise, whatever works the believer performs on that day, which are otherwise a source of particular profit and joy for him, his reward will then be even greater.⁹³

Ibn Ṭāwūs then adduces traditional evidence in favour of the visit of the tombs of Muḥammad and 'Alī, and reports the prayers to be recited on these occasions⁹⁴. The evidence in favour of the performance of these visits on the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal is apparently limited to the precedent of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, who reportedly visited the tomb of 'Alī (but not that of Muḥammad) on that day⁹⁵. Besides, Ibn Ṭāwūs reports the prayer to be recited, generally, at daybreak (*'inda rtiḥā nahār*) on the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal⁹⁶, and finally describes the inner prayer which the believer should address to God and Muḥammad toward the end of the daytime (*awākhir nahār*) on that day⁹⁷.

It appears, then, that the identification of the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal as a day blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad was associated with the view that specific works should be performed on that day.

Only in the case of fasting is it explicitly stated that a work, when performed on the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal, is of unequalled merit. Incidentally, we may note that unequalled merit was not always ascribed to the fast performed on that day. In another report indeed, this fast coexists with other fasts of apparently equal merit, in particular with the fast performed on the day the Prophetical mission was initiated. Here, 'Alī al-Hādī says:

There are four days [of supererogatory fasting in the year]. First, the twenty-seventh of Rajab, that is the day God sent Muḥammad as mercy to all created beings. Second, the day of his birth, namely the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal. Third, the twenty-fifth of Dhū l-qa'da, on which the

⁹³. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl*, pp. 603-604.

⁹⁴. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl*, pp. 604-611.

⁹⁵. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl*, p. 608.

⁹⁶. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl*, pp. 611-615.

⁹⁷. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl*, pp. 615-616.

Ka'ba was raised. Fourth, the day of the pool, on which the Messenger of God established his brother 'Alī as guide for the people and as exemplar for those coming after him.⁹⁸

The view expressed by Ibn Ṭāwūs that any work, when performed on the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal, is of unequalled merit represents nothing more than a rational exercise applied to Tradition, namely the induction of a general principle from particular evidence.

No particular merit is ascribed to the visit of the tombs on that day (nor to the prayers recited on these occasions), which essentially appear as commemorative practices.

No particular merit is either ascribed to the prayer recited at daybreak nor to the one recited toward the end of the daytime on the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal. The temporal specification exhibited here suggests that the former and the latter prayer served respectively to introduce and to conclude the performance of fasting. As such, both prayers could benefit from the unequalled merit of the fast performed on the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal, and thus acquire particular efficacy.

The (hypothetical) view that the prayer recited at daybreak on the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal is of particular efficacy clearly has nothing to do with the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke on that day. However, we should bear in mind that the promotion of the break of dawn tradition as a Shī'ī majority view coincided with the elaboration of a conception of transhistorical time.

Another tradition deserves particular notice.

The following dating (4) is quoted by Shādhān ibn Jabrā'īl (d. ca 660/1262), like most of his material, from a pseudo-Wāqidī:

The Messenger of God was born on Friday night (*laylata l-jumu'a*) before dawn broke on the seventeenth night of Rabī' al-awwal nine thousand and nine hundred years, four months and seven days after the death of Adam.⁹⁹

⁹⁸. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb*, IV, pp. 305-306.

⁹⁹. Shādhān ibn Jabrā'īl, p. 18. The use of an Adamic era suggests that the source of Shādhān ibn Jabrā'īl

The view that Muḥammad was born on Friday night appears here a tradition, transmitted in association with the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal tradition. It can hardly be doubted, however, that the Friday night tradition represents a deviation from the Friday tradition. What could then be the origin of this deviation?

The specification that Muḥammad was born before dawn broke, unlike the view that he was born shortly before dawn, hardly provides additional information. However, this specification acquires significance if we suppose that an association parallel to the one exhibited in 'Abdal'azīz's teaching (see above, pp. 37-38) accounts for the deviation from the Friday tradition.

Although God's descent to the lowest heaven was rejected as anthropomorphic¹⁰⁰, the time of night at which prayers are answered is indeed documented in Shī'ī *Ḥadīth* literature.

Three reports exhibit a variation on the following tradition:

There is a time of night at which a believer does not pray to God (*yusallī wa yad'ū llāh* [var. *yad'ū bi-da'wa*]) but He answers his call (*istajāba lahu*).

Here, the time at which prayers are answered is specified as "during the first sixth after one half of night has elapsed" or, in a variant wording, "when one half of night has elapsed until the remaining third starts"¹⁰¹.

In another report, God's descent is avoided to the advantage of a less offensive anthropomorphism:

God shouts every Friday night from above His throne, from the first until the last instant of night:

was a Shī'ī *mubtada'* work ascribed to Wāqidi. The reason for this ascription presumably lies in the alleged Shī'ī tendencies of Wāqidi, and in the reputation of his account of events occurring between the Creation and Muḥammad's mission. That a *mubtada'* was actually transmitted from Wāqidi is documented by Abū Nu'aym (see below, n. 115).

¹⁰⁰. Kulaynī. *Uṣūl*, I, pp. 169-170.

Is there a believer requesting in prayer (*vaḍ'ūnī*) something for his eternal or worldly life before dawn breaks, so that I answer his call (*fa-uḵbahu*)?...¹⁰²

In a last report, both attributions are avoided:

God sends down an angel to the lowest heaven, every night during the last third of night and every Friday night at the first instant of night, commanding him to shout:

Is there someone making a request, so that I grant his request? (*hal min sā'il fa-u'ṭiyahu*)...

And the angel does so unceasingly until dawn breaks...¹⁰³

The Shī'ī reports exhibit a twofold departure from the Sunnī reports. On the one hand, what seems to have been the dominant Shī'ī view as to the time of night at which prayers are answered, namely during the first sixth after one half of night has elapsed, differs in its content and degree of specification from all Sunnī views. On the other hand, the view emerged that this time occurs specifically on Friday night. Here, the dominant view seems to have been that the time at which prayers are answered is not a specific one, but encompasses the whole night.

We have just seen that the blessedness ascribed to the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal indeed derived from the birth of Muḥammad, but was only manifested once a year, and experienced then through the performance of fasting. In other words, Shī'ī scholars had elaborated a minimal conception of transhistorical time (a maximal conception being represented by 'Abdal'azīz's teaching), not wholly dissociated from historical concerns and permeated by legal ones.

We may suppose that this conception was unsatisfactory for less historically and legally minded Shī'īs, seeking in a time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad a temporal framework beneficial to their devotions. Such a framework had to be found within the extension of Friday, collectively identified as the day of the week on which Muḥammad

¹⁰¹. Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, IV, p. 245. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb*, II, pp. 117-118.

¹⁰². Ibn Bābawayh, *Faqīh*, I, pp. 420-421. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb*, III, p. 5.

¹⁰³. Ibn Bābawayh, *Faqīh*, I, p. 421.

was born, but could hardly be found within the too legally connoted daytime of that day. The identification provided by Shī'ī reports of Friday night as the time at which divine grace is bestowed upon man, then, fitted in particularly well with the devotional concerns of the present group. Indeed, the blessedness of Friday night was manifested once a week, and experienced then through prayer. That the blessedness of Friday night derived from the birth of Muḥammad could not be documented by the reports, but had some ground in the collective identification of Friday as the day of the week on which he was born.

The association of the time at which prayers are answered, identified as Friday night in Shī'ī reports, with the birth of Muḥammad may then account for the deviation from the Friday tradition. Since the reports specify the end of that time as the break of dawn, the specification that Muḥammad was born before dawn broke may be taken as representing a residue of that association. On the other hand, we may suppose that the group responsible for the deviation was quite indifferent to the seventeenth of Rabi' al-awwal tradition, and had simply inherited it in association with the Friday tradition.

c. The day of the elephant tradition

Among the divergent views as to the day on which Muḥammad was born, the following tradition is of particular interest:

The Messenger of God was born on the day of the elephant (*yawma l-fīl*).¹⁰⁴

Indeed, the birth of Muḥammad is here not directly located in time, but primarily associated with an episode of salvation history. The birth of Muḥammad is more loosely associated with this episode in another tradition, locating his birth "in the year of the elephant" (*'āma l-fīl*). The tradition appears in reports providing anonymous dating (The Prophet was born...), but also in personal reports adding to dating the lively dimension of individual remembrances.

¹⁰⁴. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 81. Bayhaqī, I, p. 76. Ibn 'Asākir, I, p. 58. Ibn Sayyid an-nās, I, pp. 34-35. Maqrīzī, I, p. 31.

In a celebrated report (5), the Companion Qays ibn Makhrama says:

I and the Messenger of God were born in the year of the elephant. We were born at the same time (*fa-nahnu lidān*).¹⁰⁵

Unlike the year of the elephant tradition, which came to represent a Sunnī majority view as to the year of birth of Muḥammad, the day of the elephant tradition could not overcome the considerable degree of divergence as to the day of his birth, remained a minority view and was even neutralized through the gloss of “day” as “year”¹⁰⁶.

This tradition appears in a new form in a report (6) adduced by Ibn Sayyid an-nās (d. 734/1333):

Qays ibn Makhrama said: I and the Messenger of God were born on the day of the elephant. We were born at the same time.¹⁰⁷

If the possibility of scribal confusion is excluded, this report undoubtedly results from the intrusion of the day of the elephant tradition into the previous report (5). This intrusion is unlikely to have been achieved by Ibn Sayyid an-nās himself and, at the same time, can hardly have occurred long before him. Indeed, it seems inconceivable that an early report was preserved by Ibn Sayyid an-nās alone, and ignored by all scholars prior to him. We are then witnessing, at a time where written transmission was well established, a change in Tradition, whereby a foreign tradition could intrude into a report abundantly attested in previous books. We may suppose that, when the report underwent formal change, the individual remembrance was prized for its lively dimension, but the association of the birth of Muḥammad with the episode of salvation history was sensed as excessively loose: the birth of Muḥammad could only be concomitant with the very day on which God saved Mecca, as indeed reported in the day of the elephant tradition. No indication as to the time

¹⁰⁵. Ibn Hishām, I, p. 167. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, p. 155. Bayhaqī, I, pp. 76-77. Ibn ‘Asākir, I, p. 60. Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 201. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 335.

¹⁰⁶. Ibn Sa’d, I, p. 81.

¹⁰⁷. Ibn Sayyid an-nās, I, p. 35. See *E. J.* 2, art. “Ibn Sayyid al-nās” (Franz Rosenthal).

of birth of Muḥammad, however, is associated with the day of the elephant tradition in any of its forms.

Unexpectedly, such an indication appears in a report (7) adduced by Ḥalabī:

Qays ibn Makhrama said: I and the Messenger of God were born on the day of the elephant at the time of *duḥā*. We were born at the same time.¹⁰⁸

We must first note that the day of elephant tradition appears here in the form found in Ibn Sayyid an-nās' report (6), and that the phenomenon of change in Tradition must be recognized in the further transmission of a report already resulting from change.

As to the indication itself, one could argue that it represents an early tradition, which the hazards of transmission led to be preserved in a late source only. However, its occurrence in the modified report, which, as I have just argued, is unlikely to have taken shape long before Ibn Sayyid an-nās, rather suggests late origin. But why would a new view as to the time of birth of Muḥammad appear in so late a source? One solution is to assume that the indication found in Ḥalabī should be taken, not literally as representing a new view, but as reflecting the attempt to provide an even tighter association between the birth of Muḥammad and the episode of salvation history: the birth of Muḥammad could only be concomitant with the very time at which God saved Mecca.

If my hypothesis is correct, the view that Muḥammad was born at the time of *duḥā* is dependent upon the view that the salvation of Mecca took place at that time of the day. In consideration of the polysemy of the term *duḥā*, the latter view, though not incompatible with the traditional accounts, can hardly reflect the concern with the specific time at which the salvation of Mecca took place, but rather the attempt to associate that event with Q 93:1. I have already argued that the association, achieved at a relatively early stage of the exegetical Tradition, of Q 93:1-2 with episodes of salvation history paved the way for innovations, such as the identification, reported by Ḥalabī, of *al-layl* as the night of birth of

¹⁰⁸. Ḥalabī, I, p. 95. The glosses proposed by lexicographers for the term *duḥā*, though uniformly placing that time in the forenoon, vary as to its distance from sunrise (see Ibn Manẓūr, VIII, p. 28).

Muḥammad (see above, pp. 33-34). The association of the first phrase with the salvation of Mecca, however, was not preserved anywhere in *Tafsīr*, nor in *Sīra*, literature. We may suppose, then, that the association of Q 93:1 with the salvation of Mecca was itself intended to provide an even tighter association between the birth of Muḥammad and the episode of salvation history or, in other words, that the former association was exclusively attempted during the transmission of the modified report (6). If such was the case, we can affirm that, although the view that Muḥammad was born at the time of *ḍuḥā* is dependent upon the view that the salvation of Mecca took place at that time of the day, the two views emerged simultaneously.

d. Conclusion

The results of this analysis may be stated as follows:

Sunnī Tradition seems to have been rather indifferent to the time of birth of Muḥammad, especially if that indifference is compared with the concern for the year, the day of the month and the day of the week on which he was born. The view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke is attested in an early report, but the break of dawn tradition never even reached the status of majority view. An antagonism ([shortly] after dawn versus shortly before dawn) distinct from the one exhibited in the scholarly discussion (daytime versus night), however, is reflected at a late stage of Sunnī Tradition. The view that Muḥammad was born at the time of *ḍuḥā*, attested in one late source, presumably reflects the attempt to provide the tightest possible association between his birth and an episode of salvation history.

Shī'ī Tradition exhibits a great concern for the time of birth of Muḥammad, indeed one never wholly independent from the conception of transhistorical time. The promotion of the break of dawn tradition as a majority view seems to have coincided with the identification of the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal as a day blessed by virtue of the birth of

Muhammad. The view that Muhammad was born on Friday night presumably originated in the traditional identification of that time as one of divine grace.

2. The announcement traditions

Here, the birth of Muḥammad is announced by a member of the household or by a local monotheist. Whereas the former innocently reports, as a mere witness, the unusual phenomena accompanying (or preceding) the birth of Muḥammad, the latter is informed of that event by its particular circumstances, which his inherited knowledge enables him to recognize as signs of the birth of a prophet.

a. The maid tradition

After she has given birth to Muḥammad, Āmina sends her maid to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib in order to bring him the good news, and to inform him of her experience. In a report (8) transmitted by Yūnus ibn Bukayr (d. 199/814-815) from Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), the maid says:

A boy was born to you tonight (*al-laylata*).¹⁰⁹

In the report (9) as transmitted by Ziyād ibn 'Abdallāh al-Bakkā'ī (d. 183/799) and Salama ibn al-Faḍl (d. 191/806-807), the maid merely says:

A boy was born to you.¹¹⁰

The same absence of specification is found in a variant report adduced by Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/844)¹¹¹, and in later occurrences of Ibn Ishāq's report¹¹².

¹⁰⁹. 'Uṭāridī, p. 22. On Ibn Ishāq, see Josef Horowitz, "The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and their Authors" III, *Islamic Culture* April 1928, pp. 169-180. On the pupils of Ibn Ishāq and the editors of his work, see Raif Khoury, "Les sources islamiques de la 'Sīra' avant Ibn Hishām (m. 213/834) et leur valeur historique", in *La vie du Prophète Mahomet*, pp. 7-22.

¹¹⁰. Ibn Hishām, I, p. 168. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I, p. 156.

¹¹¹. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 82. On Ibn Sa'd, see Horowitz, "The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and their Authors" IV, *Islamic Culture* Oct. 1928, pp. 521-526.

¹¹². Māwardī, *A'lām*, p. 273. Kalā'ī, I, p. 168. Ibn Sayyid an-nās, I, p. 38. Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 208. Ṣāliḥī, I,

In Ḥalabī's paraphrase of Tradition, Ibn Ishāq's report is provided with the following introduction:

After she had given birth to him, she sent [her maid] to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, who was circumbulating the House that night (*tilka l-laylata*)...¹¹³

The comparison among three transmissions from Ibn Ishāq suggests that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at night constitutes an independent tradition, associated with the maid tradition in the generation posterior to Ibn Ishāq. The absence of the indication "tonight" from later sources suggests that later scholars were dependent upon a written source lacking the indication (probably Ibn Hishām's *Sīra*). That such a dependence could be overcome through paraphrase, however, is shown by the appearance of a similar indication in a late source. The occurrence of this indication in Ḥalabī, apparently an advocate of the view that Muḥammad was born at night (see above, p. 31), may not be fortuitous.

b. The rising star tradition

The following report (10) is adduced by Ibn Sa'd, transmitting from Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823):

... When the Messenger of God was born, the Jewish doctors said: Aḥmad was born tonight, this star has risen. And when he started to prophesy (*tanabba'a*), they said: Aḥmad has started to prophesy, the star has risen which [was foretold to] rise [on this occasion]...¹¹⁴

p. 360. Zurqānī, I, p. 117.

¹¹³. Ḥalabī, I, p. 109.

¹¹⁴. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 127. On Wāqidī, see Horowitz, "The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and their Authors" IV, *Islamic Culture* Oct. 1928, pp. 498-521. It seems reasonable to assume that this report was transmitted by Ibn Sa'd from a distinct work of Wāqidī, although such a work may not have been definitively edited during the lifetime of the latter scholar. Marsden Jones has proposed Wāqidī's *Kitāb at-tārīkh al-kabīr* (mentioned by Ibn an-Nadīm) as the source used by Ibn Sa'd in his account of events preceding the Prophetical mission (introduction to the edition of Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Oxford, 1966, I, pp. 13-14).

The rising star appears as a sign of the birth of Muḥammad, located here at night, and at the same time as a sign of the beginning of his mission.

In a report (11) adduced by Abū Nu'aym (d. 430/1038), with a chain having Wāqidī as intermediary link, a shout is heard in Medina:

Here is the star of Aḥmad at whose rise [it was foretold that] he would be born (*alladhī wulida bihi*).

Years later, a similar shout is heard:

O people of Yathrib, Aḥmad has appeared (*kharaja*) and has started to prophesy...¹¹⁵

Here again, the rising star appears as a sign of the birth of Muḥammad, but the time of his birth remains unspecified. In addition, the beginning of the Prophetic mission is announced without reference to the rise of that star.

In another report (12) adduced by Abū Nu'aym, with the same chain, a Jew is heard shouting by the seven-year-old Ḥassān ibn Thābit:

The star of Aḥmad has risen, this star does not rise except at [the appearance of] prophecy (*illā bi-n-nubuwwa*)...¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, pp. 88-89. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī" (Johannes Pedersen). This report, as well as other reports of Wāqidī to be encountered below, reached Abū Nu'aym through the following chain: al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faraj [IBN AL-KHAYYĀṬ al-Baghdādī] - al-Ḥasan ibn al-Jahm [al-Wādhārī] (d. 290) - Abū 'Umar Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza [al-Haysānī] (d. 358). Abū Nu'aym informs us that al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faraj "came to Isfahan and *ḥaddatha bihā 'ani l-Wāqidī bi-l-mubtada' wa l-maghāzī*" (*Tārīkh*, I, p. 329), and that al-Ḥasan ibn al-Jahm "heard the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* from al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faraj" (*ibid.*, p. 312). The wording used by Abū Nu'aym suggests that, unlike the *maghāzī*, the *mubtada'* transmitted by al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faraj from Wāqidī (and then, presumably, by al-Ḥasan ibn al-Jahm from al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faraj) was not a distinct work, but rather isolated material. It is not unreasonable to assume, however, that Wāqidī's *Tārīkh* had a part entitled *Al-mubtada'*, which comprised the material pertaining to the period preceding the Prophetic mission (unlike his *Maghāzī*), and that al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faraj transmitted this material.

¹¹⁶. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, pp. 86-87.

Here, the rising star appears exclusively as a sign of the beginning of the Prophetic mission.

If the authenticity of the ascription to Wāqidī is conceded, the comparison among these three reports suggests that the rising star tradition was unstably associated with the birth of Muḥammad and/or the beginning of his mission in the generation of Wāqidī. We may also conclude that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at night constitutes an independent tradition, just as was noted in the analysis of the maid tradition. As in that analysis, such an independence is inferred from the wording of variant reports. Here however, the repeated association of the rising star tradition with the beginning of the Prophetic mission suggests that its association with the night of birth, rather than with the mere birth, is only an afterthought. Moreover, the origin of this association may be found in the tradition itself, which speaks of the rise of a star, a nocturnal phenomenon indeed. The association of the rising star tradition with the birth of Muḥammad could produce a slide: the nocturnal sign of his birth became the sign of his nocturnal birth.

My analysis is confirmed by a report of Ibn Ishāq. In the report (13) as transmitted by Yūnus, the Jew heard by Hassān shouts:

Tonight has risen the star of Aḥmad during whose appearance [it was foretold that] his mission would be initiated (*alladhī yub'ath fīhi*).¹¹⁷

This version is characterized by Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) as a lapse¹¹⁸.

In the report (14) as transmitted by Bakkāṭ and Salama, the Jew shouts:

Tonight has risen the star of Aḥmad during whose appearance [it was foretold that] he would be born (*alladhī wulida bihi*).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷. 'Uṭāridī, p. 63.

¹¹⁸. Bayhaqī, I, p. 110. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-Bayhaqī" (James Robson).

¹¹⁹. Ibn Hishām, I, p. 168. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 86.

In the further transmission of this version, a new arrangement of the original wording deserves some attention: except in one case¹²⁰, *ṭala'a l-laylata najm Aḥmada lladhī wulida bihi* became *ṭala'a najm Aḥmada lladhī wulida* (var. *yūlad*) *bihi fī hādhihi l-layla* (var. *hādhihi l-laylata*)¹²¹. However, this change is semantically unsubstantial, and does not necessarily reflect a slide from the nocturnal sign of the birth of Muḥammad to the sign of his nocturnal birth.

The diffusion gained by the Bakkā'ī-Salama version, and not by the Yūnus version, in later sources suggests that the rising star tradition came to be associated in Sunnī memory with the birth (but not with the night of birth) of Muḥammad.

A report (15) exhibiting the association of the tradition with the beginning of the Prophetical mission, however, is still adduced by Ibn Sayyid an-nās, quoting [Aḥmad ibn Zuhayr an-Nasā'ī] Ibn Abī Khaythama (d. 279/892). Here, an old Jurhumī met by Qurashīs on an island says:

A star has risen tonight, the mission of a prophet has been initiated among you (*la-qad bu'itha fīkum nabī*).¹²²

That the association in Sunnī memory of the rising star tradition with the birth of Muḥammad came to be of exclusive character is suggested by Ḥalabī's treatment of a report (16) ascribed to Ka'b al-Aḥbār. Here, we read:

I have seen in the Torah that God informed Moses of the time of appearance (*khurūj*) of Muḥammad, that is of his coming out of his mother's belly. Moses informed his people that when the star known among them by the name such and such becomes mobile and leaves its position, then it will be the time of appearance of Muḥammad.¹²³

¹²⁰. Kalā'ī, I, p. 167.

¹²¹. Bayhaqī, I, p. 110. Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 213. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 130. Ḥalabī, I, p. 112.

¹²². Ibn Sayyid an-nās, I, p. 99, probably quoting from Ibn Abī Khaythama's *Tārīkh*. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn Abī Khaythama" (Charles Pellat).

¹²³. Ḥalabī, I, p. 112.

Through the interpretation of *khurūj*, the original use of the word in the context of the beginning of the Prophetic mission, or at least its ambiguity, was neutralized.

c. The Meccan Jew tradition

The following report (17) is adduced by Ibn Sa'd, with the chain Abū 'Ubayda ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Abī 'Ubayda ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Ammār ibn Yāsir - Hishām ibn 'Urwa - 'Urwa ibn az-Zubayr - 'Ā'isha:

A Jew used to dwell in Mecca, where he was engaged in trade. When the night (*layla*) came on which the Messenger of God was born, he said in an assembly of Quraysh:

- Was a boy born among you tonight?

- We don't know of any.

- Then, by God, my fear was groundless. But look at me, o people of Quraysh, and remember what I tell you:

Tonight (*al-laylata*) was born the prophet of this community, Aḥmad the last one, if not among you then in Palestine...¹²⁴

A variant report is adduced by Bayhaqī, with a chain likewise going back to 'Ā'isha through Hishām and 'Urwa, but having Ibn Ishāq (rather than Abū 'Ubayda) as intermediary link¹²⁵. This report is reproduced by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372)¹²⁶, Qaṣṭallānī¹²⁷ and Ḥalabī¹²⁸. The variation exhibited here does not affect the references to the night of birth of Muḥammad.

¹²⁴. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 129. No entry on Abū 'Ubayda could be found in *Rijāl* literature, while his father 'Abdallāh is mentioned as a transmitter from his grandfather Abū 'Ubayda (see 'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb*, XII, pp. 160-161). Note the recurrence of the name Abū 'Ubayda.

¹²⁵. Bayhaqī, I, p. 108.

¹²⁶. Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 212. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn Kathīr" (Henri Laoust).

¹²⁷. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 130.

¹²⁸. Ḥalabī, I, p. 112.

Another report (18) is quoted by Kalā'ī (d. 634/1236) from Wāqidī, himself transmitting from Sulaymān ibn Suḥaym (d. during the caliphate of al-Manṣūr):

There was in Mecca a Jew named Yūsuf. When the day (*yawm*) came on which the Messenger of God was born, before anyone from Quraysh knew about his birth, Yūsuf said: O people of Quraysh, the prophet of this community was born on your territory today (*al-yawma*)...¹²⁹

In the report (19) as adduced by Ḥalābī, quoting Wāqidī, the following variation appears:

When the day, that is the time (*waqt*), came on which the Messenger of God was born, before anyone from Quraysh knew about his birth, Yūsuf said: O people of Quraysh, the prophet of this community was born tonight on your territory...¹³⁰

The ascription to Ibn Ishāq of the transmission of the 'Ā'isha report is unlikely to be authentic, since this report is not attested in any of the three main recensions of his work. If such is the case, this ascription reflects a phenomenon which may be designated as "regularization of transmission". The irregularity exhibited here lies in the obscurity of the source of Ibn Sa'd. The ascription to Ibn Ishāq of the transmission of the report provides it not only with a celebrated source, but also with a chain regularly used in this source.

The ascription to Wāqidī of the transmission of the Ibn Suḥaym report (18) may well be authentic, since the first volume of Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt* is by no means an exhaustive recension of Wāqidī's work treating the period prior to the Prophetical mission. If such is the case, the report shows that the Meccan Jew tradition once existed outside its association with the view that Muḥammad was born at night. The unique attestation of the Ibn Suḥaym report in Kalā'ī suggests that it was superseded by the 'Ā'isha report. The

¹²⁹. Kalā'ī, I, p. 167. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-Kalā'ī" (Charles Pellat). This quotation, as well as other quotations from Wāqidī to be encountered below, suggests the existence of a definitively edited work of that scholar, which may be identified, in accordance with the conclusion reached by Jones, as his *Tārīkh* (see above, n. 114).

¹³⁰. Ḥalabī, I, p. 113.

obvious reason for this supersession is the greater authority of 'Ā'isha and, in the absence of more eloquent evidence, we must be content with this hypothesis.

The existence of the Meccan Jew tradition outside its association with the view that Muḥammad was born at night seems to have posed a problem in the only occurrence of the Ibn Suḥaym report at a late period. We have seen how, in the Prophetic report (the Monday fast) and the Monday tradition, the term "day", which in itself does not contain any indication as to the time of birth of Muḥammad, was adduced by the advocates of the view that he was born during the daytime (see above, p. 26). It is probably for this reason that, in the report (19) as adduced by Ḥalabī, the same word was sensed as problematic and subsequently neutralized through the gloss of "day" as "time". Besides, the report had undergone formal change at some stage of its transmission: "today" had become "tonight". Thus, the Ibn Suḥaym and 'Ā'isha reports could coexist peacefully as innocent variants of the same tradition.

Shī'ī sources reflect the dependence of Shī'ī Tradition upon previous versions of the Meccan Jew tradition.

The following report (20) is adduced by Kulaynī, with a chain going back to Muḥammad al-Bāqir:

When the Prophet was born, a man from the people of the Book went to an assembly of Quraysh... and said:

- Was a boy born among you tonight?

- No.

- Then a boy named Aḥmad was born in Palestine...¹³¹

A variant report is adduced by Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), with a chain going back to Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, and having as intermediary link Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd [IBN 'UQDA] (d.

¹³¹. Kulaynī, *Rawḍa*, pp. 300-301.

333/944)¹³². A similar passage appears in Rāwandī's paraphrase of Tradition¹³³. The variation exhibited here does not affect the references to the night of birth of Muḥammad.

Another report (21) is adduced by Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991), with a chain going back to Abān ibn 'Uthmān (a disciple of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāzim), and having as intermediary link 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm [ibn Hāshim al-Qummī] (alive in 307/919):

... There was in Mecca a Jew named Yūsuf. When he saw the stars being cast down and becoming mobile, he said: This means that a prophet was born tonight. Indeed, we find in our books that when the last prophet is born, the devils will be pelted and debarred from [entering] the heavens.

The next morning, he went to an assembly of Quraysh and said:

- O people of Quraysh, was a boy born among you last night?

- No.

- You're unlucky, then, he was born in Palestine...¹³⁴

A variant report is adduced by Ṭabrisī, mentioning Qummī as its transmitter¹³⁵. A similar passage appears in the paraphrases of Tradition provided by Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192)¹³⁶ and Irbilī (d. 692/1293)¹³⁷.

¹³². Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, pp. 144-145. See *E. I.* 1, art. "Ṭūsī" (M. Hidayet Hosain). It seems reasonable to assume that the link of Ibn 'Uqda represents the source of Ṭūsī. The work from which the report was transmitted may be identified as Ibn 'Uqda's *Kitāb at-tārīkh* (see Najāshī, pp. 73-74).

¹³³. Rāwandī, I, p. 70.

¹³⁴. Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl*, pp. 196-197. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn Bābawayh(i)" (Asif Fyzee). Abān is credited with a *kitāb yajma'u l-mubtada' wa l-maghāzī wa l-wafāt wa r-ridda* (see Najāshī, p. 11).

¹³⁵. Ṭabrisī, *l'lām*, p. 12. It seems beyond doubt that the link of Qummī represents the common source of Ibn Bābawayh and Ṭabrisī. Kohlberg has proposed Qummī's *Kitāb al-mab'ath* (quoted by Ibn Ṭāwūs), alternatively to his *Tafsīr*, as the source used by Ṭabrisī in the *l'lām* (*A Medieval Muslim Scholar*, p. 239). The variation between Ibn Bābawayh and Ṭabrisī, however, suggests -if the report was indeed transmitted from Qummī's *Mab'ath*- that this work existed in different recensions.

¹³⁶. Ibn Shahrāshūb, I, p. 30. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn Shahrāshūb" (Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti).

¹³⁷. Irbilī, I, p. 29.

This report exhibits the combination of the Meccan Jew and shooting stars traditions (see below, pp. 115-116). The variation in Ṭabrisī, as well as in Ibn Shahrāshūb and Irbilī, does not affect the references to the night of birth of Muḥammad.

These reports show that the Meccan Jew tradition was integrated into Shī'ī memory. That process may have involved the naturalization of the 'Ā'isha report itself as Kulaynī's report (20) and Ibn 'Uqda's suggest, or the combination of elements found in the Ibn Suḥaym report (the name Yūsuf) and in the 'Ā'isha report (the reference to Palestine) as Qummi's report (21) suggests. In both cases, the view that Muḥammad was born at night was clearly inherited by Shī'ī Tradition as part of a previous version of the Meccan Jew tradition, represented in Sunnī Tradition by the 'Ā'isha report. The paraphrases of Rāwandī, Ibn Shahrāshūb and Irbilī, however, suggest that the association of the Meccan Jew tradition with this view was integrated into Shī'ī memory.

d. The monk tradition

In a report (22) adduced by Ibn 'Asākir, with a chain having as intermediary link Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Abī Shayba (d. 297/909), 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib goes "the morning of the day (*ṣabiḥat al-yawm*) on which Muḥammad was born", to 'Īṣā, a monk living in Marr az-Zahrān who used to announce during his annual visits to Mecca the imminent birth in that city of the future ruler of Arabs and non-Arabs. After having identified his visitor, 'Īṣā says: "The boy whom I used to tell you about was born on Monday (*yawma l-ithnayn*)...". 'Abdallāh replies: "In fact, a boy was born to me with the break of dawn (*ma'a ṣ-ṣubḥ*)". 'Īṣā knows that this boy is the one whose birth he had foretold, since, among other signs, "his star has risen yesterday and he was born today (*al-yawma*)"¹³⁸.

¹³⁸. Ibn 'Asākir, I, pp. 344-345. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn Abī Shayba" (Charles Pellat).

The wording just translated remains unchanged in the report as adduced by Ibn Kathīr, quoting Abū Nu'aym and the latter's chain of transmission, which also has Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān as intermediary link¹³⁹.

In the report (23) as adduced by Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and Ṣāliḥī, both quoting Abū Nu'aym and Ibn 'Asākir, "a boy was born to me with the break of dawn" disappears, and "his star has risen yesterday" is not followed by "and he was born today"¹⁴⁰.

In the report (24) as adduced by Qaṣṭallānī, quoting Abū Nu'aym and mentioning Abū Ja'far [Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān] ibn Abī Shayba as the latter's source, the visitor says: "A boy was born to me last night with the break of dawn (*al-laylata ma'a ṣ-ṣubḥ*)"¹⁴¹.

¹³⁹. Ibn Kathīr, I, pp. 222-223. The fact that this report, as well as other reports to be encountered below, is absent from the printed editions of Abū Nu'aym's *Dalā'il* calls for bibliographical remarks. Two printed editions of this work exist today: the 1950 Hyderabad edition and the 1970 Ḥalab edition. The Hyderabad edition is based on the Patna manuscript, while the Ḥalab edition is based on the Dār al-kutub manuscript no. 613 Ḥadīth for sections 1-13 -the only portion of the *Dalā'il* available in the manuscript- and on the Patna manuscript for the rest (see the introduction to the latter edition, pp. 21-22). The Syrian editors show that the Patna manuscript in fact contains an abridged version of the *Dalā'il*, and that the Dār al-kutub manuscript contains the whole text of sections 1-13. It may well be that Abū Nu'aym did not adduce all the reports pertaining to the birth of Muḥammad in sections 11-12 (*Dhikr ḥaml ummihi wa waq'ihā wa mā shāhadat mina l-āyāt wa l-a'lām 'alā nubuwwatihi*), and that reports appearing in other sections have been omitted in the abridged version. We must note, however, that other manuscripts have been left unexploited by the Syrian editors (the British Museum manuscript mentioned by Brockelmann [G I, p. 446], as well as the Berlin manuscript mentioned by the editors themselves), and that the Patna and Dār al-kutub manuscripts contain the same recension of the *Dalā'il* (see the introduction to the Ḥalab edition, pp. 20-21).

¹³⁹. Suyūṭī, I, pp. 125-126. Ṣāliḥī, I, pp. 339-340. See *E. I.* I, art. "al-Suyūṭī" (Carl Brockelmann).

¹⁴⁰. Suyūṭī, I, pp. 125-126. Ṣāliḥī, I, pp. 339-340.

¹⁴¹. Qaṣṭallānī, I, pp. 143-144.

In the report (25) as adduced by Ḥalabī, "day" in "the morning of the day on which Muḥammad was born" is glossed as "time" (*waqt*). Besides, Ḥalabī has "The boy whom I used to tell you about was born" without "on Monday". In the report as adduced by Ḥalabī, "a boy was born to me with the break of dawn" disappears. Finally, "his star has risen yesterday" is not followed by "and he was born today"¹⁴².

Only the report (22) as adduced by Ibn 'Asākir and the report as adduced by Ibn Kathīr have identical wording. Besides, the chain of Ibn 'Asākir and the chain of Abū Nu'aym, quoted by Ibn Kathīr, share the intermediary link of Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān, mentioned moreover by Qaṣṭallānī as the source of Abū Nu'aym. Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān is the author of several books, and a written work of his is therefore likely to be the common source of Abū Nu'aym and Ibn 'Asākir¹⁴³. If such is the case, the identity of wording between Ibn 'Asākir and Ibn Kathīr implies that only the latter scholar reproduces verbatim the report originally adduced by Abū Nu'aym.

I have just argued that written transmission accounts for the literal preservation of an original report. One is indeed surprised not to find confirmation of this phenomenon in the further transmission of the report by later scholars, who are dependent on Abū Nu'aym and/or Ibn 'Asākir, generally in an explicit way and implicitly in the case of Ḥalabī.

The report (23) as adduced by Suyūfī and Ṣāliḥī is cleared of the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke. In addition, a compound of "day", a term innocent in itself but adduced in the course of the scholarly discussion as evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, is suppressed. The formal change exhibited here could be ascribed to Suyūfī himself, who adduces the report in a chapter about "the miracles manifested the night of his birth", but not to Ṣāliḥī, if this scholar is recognized as an advocate of the view that Muḥammad was born during the

¹⁴². Ḥalabī, I, p. 114, p. 93.

¹⁴³. This work may be identified as Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān's *Tārīkh* (see Sezgin, I, p. 164).

daytime. For the same reason, the interpolation of "last night" in the report (24) as adduced by Qaṣṭallānī cannot be ascribed to him (see above, p. 28).

In the report (25) as adduced by Ḥalabī, the term "day" is neutralized through glossing. On the other hand, two compounds of this term are suppressed, and the report is cleared of the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke. The formal change exhibited here could be ascribed to Ḥalabī himself, who seems to be an advocate of the view that Muḥammad was born at night. However, the occurrence of a similar change in the works of scholars who cannot be suspected of holding this view makes such an ascription unlikely to be correct.

In what precedes can be recognized the impact of the view that Muḥammad was born at night on the transmission of a report exhibiting the combination of, among other elements, the Monday, break of dawn and rising star traditions. The suppression of potential references to birth during the daytime seems to reflect the antagonism exhibited in the scholarly discussion (daytime versus night). The interpolation of "last night" could have served the reconciliation of the break of dawn tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night (see above, pp. 29-30), but was not operative at a late stage of the discussion. Indeed, the modified phrase "a boy was born to me last night with the break of dawn" was reported by Qaṣṭallānī and Ḥalabī as evidence adduced in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime (see above, p. 27). In fact, the interpolation undermined the evidential character of the original phrase "a boy was born to me with the break of dawn". Qaṣṭallānī, an advocate of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, could not do away with the interpolation, which was part of the report as he had inherited it. Ḥalabī, who attempted in the scholarly discussion to reconcile the break of dawn tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night, could not use the confirmatory evidence provided by the interpolation, because the report as he had inherited it lacked the whole phrase. That he reported the modified phrase as evidence adduced in

favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime simply reflects his dependence upon Qaṣṭallānī.

e. Conclusion

In what precedes, we have encountered the view that Muḥammad was born at night as an independent tradition, associated with the announcement traditions at an early stage of their transmission.

The ephemeral association, in Sunnī sources, of the maid and rising star traditions with this view clearly does not belong to Sunnī memory.

It could be argued that the durable association, in Sunnī sources, of the Meccan Jew tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night belongs to Sunnī memory, but the supersession of the Ibn Suḥaym report by the 'Ā'isha report rather reflects a question of authority.

The occasional association, in late Sunnī sources, of the Meccan Jew tradition as it appears in the Ibn Suḥaym report and the monk tradition with this view clearly does not belong to Sunnī memory, but should rather be ascribed to a group influential among late *Sīra* transmitters.

On the other hand, we have encountered the view that Muḥammad was born at night as associated with the Meccan Jew tradition at the earliest retrievable stage of transmission of three Shī'ī reports. This association, though reflecting the dependence of Shī'ī Tradition upon a previous version of the Meccan Jew tradition, apparently belongs to Shī'ī memory.

3. The miracle traditions

Here are described miracles concomitant with the birth of Muḥammad, and occurring in the immediate surroundings of that event. An indication as to the time of birth of Muḥammad may be implicitly contained in the description and/or explicitly associated with it.

a. The falling stars tradition

In a report (26) adduced by Ṭabarī (d. 311/923), the Companion ‘Uthmān ibn Abī l-‘Āṣ says:

My mother has told me that she witnessed Āmina's delivery -that was the night she gave birth to him (*wa kāna dhālika laylata waladathu*). She said: ... I saw the stars drawing near until I said [to myself]: Surely, they will fall upon me.¹⁴⁴

In the report (27) as adduced by Abū Nu‘aym, ‘Uthmān introduces his mother's account by the following words:

My mother has informed me that she was with Āmina, the mother of the Messenger of God, when the pains of delivery struck her.¹⁴⁵

In the report (28) as adduced by Bayhaqī, ‘Uthmān says:

My mother has told me that she witnessed Āmina's delivery of the Messenger of God the night she gave birth to him (*laylata waladathu*).¹⁴⁶

The presence of stars at the delivery of Muḥammad implies that his birth occurred at night, and Zarkashī's recourse to supernatural phenomena common in the time of prophecy (see above, p. 28) should be taken as just an ingenious device intended to neutralize this

¹⁴⁴. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, pp. 156-157. On Ṭabarī and his works, see Claude Gilliot, *Exegèse, langue et théologie en islam. L'exegèse coranique de Ṭabarī (m. 311/923)*, Paris, 1990, pp. 19-68.

¹⁴⁵. Abū Nu‘aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 168.

¹⁴⁶. Bayhaqī, I, pp. 110-111.

implication. Therefore, the explicit indication that the birth of Muḥammad occurred at night is of redundant character, and is likely to have been interpolated into an original version, represented here by the report (27) as adduced by Abū Nu'aym (see diagram on next page).

The interpolation seems to have occurred at the stage of transmission following Ya'qūb ibn Muḥammad. If such was the case, we may assume that, by the middle of the third century, the view that Muḥammad was born at night had emerged as an independent tradition.

b. The cooking-pot tradition

The following report (29) is adduced by Ibn Sa'd:

After the mother of the Messenger of God had given birth to him, she placed him under a cooking-pot, and it split from above him. She looked at the Messenger of God and there he was, his eyes fixedly open, looking at the sky.¹⁴⁷

In a report (30) adduced by Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933), the tradition appears in the following form:

Their custom was, when a boy was born at the coming of night (*fī sīqāli l-layl*), to turn a cooking-pot over him until the next morning. They did that to the Prophet, and the next morning, they found the pot split in two, and the Prophet raising [his eyes] toward the sky.¹⁴⁸

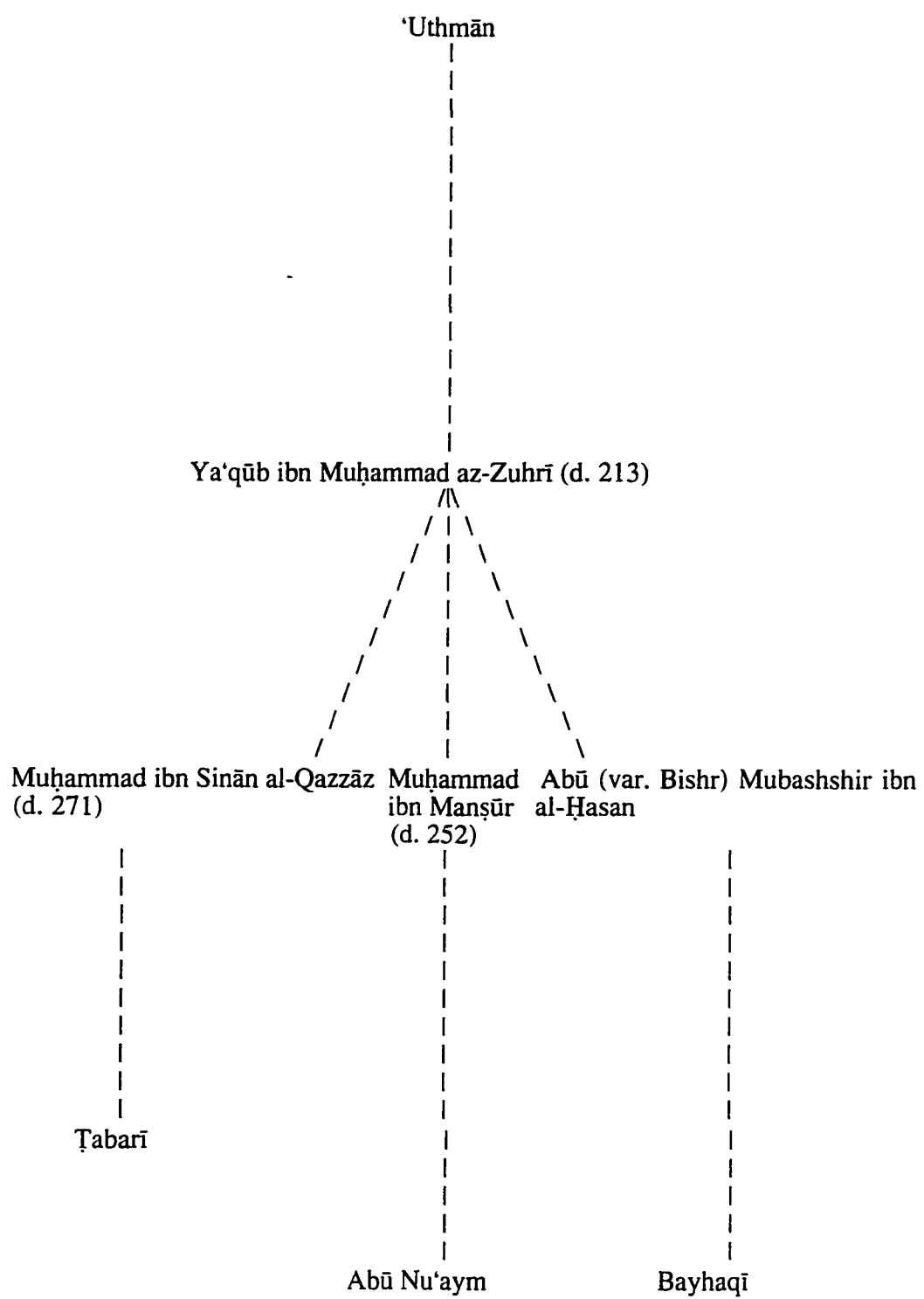
The tradition also appears in a report (31) adduced by Abū Nu'aym:

After the mother of the Prophet had given birth to him... he started to contemplate the sky with his eyes. The people turned a large cooking-pot over the Prophet, and it split from above him into two.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 82.

¹⁴⁸. Ibn Durayd, p. 8. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn Durayd" (Johann Fück).

¹⁴⁹. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 172.



In a report (32) quoted from Abū Nu'aym by Suyūṭī, the tradition appears in the following form:

In pre-Islamic times, when a boy was born to them at the beginning of night (*min taḥti l-layl*), they used to place him under a vessel and not to look at him until the next morning. When the Prophet was born, they left him under a cooking-pot. The next morning, they found the pot split in two, and the Prophet turning his eyes toward the sky...¹⁵⁰

Another report (33) is adduced by Bayhaqī:

When a boy was born in Quraysh, they used to hand him over to women from Quraysh until the next morning, and those women used to turn a cooking-pot over him. After the Messenger of God was born, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib handed him over to the women, and they turned a cooking-pot over him. The next morning, they found the pot split in two, and the Messenger of God raising his wide-open eyes toward the sky.¹⁵¹

The version shared by Ibn Sa'd's report (29) and Abū Nu'aym's first report (31) suggests that the cooking-pot tradition may not have been originally associated with an Arabian custom. In any case, the primary focus of those reports seems to have been the miracle itself. Incidentally, we may note that the split of the pot and Muḥammad's contemplation of the sky, associated in Ibn Sa'd's report as two aspects of the same miracle, are dissociated in Abū Nu'aym's report as two independent miracles.

The version shared by Ibn Durayd's report (30), Abū Nu'aym's second report (32) and Bayhaqī's report (33) suggests that the cooking-pot tradition came to be associated in Sunnī memory with an Arabian custom. This version indicates that the newborn was placed under a cooking-pot during his first night and, though implicitly in the case of Bayhaqī's report, that this custom was followed when a boy was born around the beginning of night.

In consideration of the self-sufficiency of the cooking-pot tradition, exhibited in the version shared by Ibn Sa'd and Abū Nu'aym, the Arabian custom, whatever its degree of

¹⁵⁰. Suyūṭī, I, p. 126.

¹⁵¹. Bayhaqī, I, p. 113.

historicity may be, is unlikely to have been remembered independently of its association with that tradition. Indeed, the practice of placing a vessel over the newborn is associated with nocturnal birth, but not with Arabian customs, in the biography of Iyās ibn Mu'āwiya, the *qāḍī* of Baṣra, appointed during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn 'Abdal'azīz, who became proverbial for his perspicacity. In a report adduced by Ibn 'Asākir, Iyās, whose mother is generally identified as a Persian women, says:

I remember the night on which I was born. My mother placed a vessel over my head...¹⁵²

When Ḥalabī, in his discussion of the cooking-pot tradition, paraphrased that report¹⁵³, he did not notice, or at least disregarded, the independence of the practice from Arabian customs. For him, it was the association with nocturnal birth that mattered.

That this association was not inherent in the report, however, appears in a variant adduced by Wakī' (d. 306/918):

I have knowledge of the day I was born... I came out of darkness, and did not remain long [in daylight] before I returned to darkness. I mentioned that to my mother, and she said: O my son, after I had given birth to you, I wanted to do something. So I turned a bowl over you for fear that the wolf would eat you...¹⁵⁴

Incidentally, this variant gives us some clue as to what, among other advantages, the association of the cooking-pot tradition with the Arabian custom provided. Whereas the natural character of Iyās' perspicacity was exhibited by a diurnal experience, in which the perception of darkness under the bowl was inseparable from a previous perception of daylight, the nocturnal occurrence of the split of the pot fitted in nicely with an imagery, in which the irruption of supernatural phenomena into the natural order of things was pictured as the appearance of light in darkness. If my conclusion is correct, it seems clear, not

¹⁵². Ibn 'Asākir, ed. 'Alī Shīrī, Beirut, 1995, X, p. 13. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Iyās b. Mu'āwiya" (Charles Pellat).

¹⁵³. Ḥalabī, I, p. 110.

¹⁵⁴. Wakī', I, p. 329.

merely that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad around the beginning of night derives from the association of the cooking-pot tradition with the Arabian custom, but that the concern for the time of his birth played no role in that association.

c. The Syrian castles tradition

The following report (34) is transmitted by Yūnus from Ibn Ishāq:

Āmina bint Wahb, the mother of the Messenger of God, used to say that she had a visit when she became pregnant with Muḥammad, and that the visitor said to her: You have become pregnant with the lord of this community... The sign of this is that with him will come out a light (*yakhruj ma'ahu nūr*) which will fill the castles of Buṣrā...¹⁵⁵

In a report (35) adduced by Ibn Sa'd, Āmina says:

When he was separated from my body... with him came out (*kharaja ma'ahu*) a light at the contact of which the castles of Syria and its markets became illuminated (*aḍā'at lahu quṣūru sh-shām wa aswāquhā*), so that I saw the necks of the camels in Buṣrā.¹⁵⁶

In another report (36) adduced by Ibn Sa'd, Āmina says:

When I gave birth to him, from me came out (*kharaja minnī*) a light at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*aḍā'a lahu quṣūru sh-shām*)...¹⁵⁷

In a Prophetic report (37) adduced by Ibn Sa'd, we read:

My mother saw when she gave birth to me a light shining from her (*saṭa'a minhā*), at the contact of which the castles of Buṣrā became illuminated (*aḍā'at lahu quṣūr Buṣrā*).¹⁵⁸

In another Prophetic report (38) adduced by Ibn Sa'd, we read:

My mother saw when she gave birth to me a light coming out of her (*kharaja minhā*), at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*aḍā'at lahu quṣūru sh-shām*).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵. 'Uṭāridī, p. 22.

¹⁵⁶. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 81.

¹⁵⁷. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 81.

¹⁵⁸. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 82.

¹⁵⁹. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 119.

In a report (39) adduced by Abū Nu'aym, the mother of 'Abdarrahmān ibn 'Awf says:

When Āmina gave birth to Muḥammad, what is between the place of sunrise and the place of sunset became illuminated, so that I could look at some castle in Syria...¹⁶⁰

In a report (40) quoted from Abū Nu'aym by Suyūṭī, al-'Abbās relates what Āmina told him about her delivery of Muḥammad:

... I saw a light shining from his head (*sāṭi'an min ra'sihī*), which reached the sky, and I saw all the castles of Syria [illuminated as if they were] a firebrand...¹⁶¹

In a report (41) quoted from Abū Nu'aym by Suyūṭī and Qaṣṭallānī, later by Aḥmad ad-Dardīr and Aḥmad ibn 'Abdalghānī 'Ābidīn (d. 1307/1889), the *mawlā* of Maymūna 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār relates that Āmina said:

I saw, the night I gave birth to him (*laylata waḍa'tuhu*), a light at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*aḍā'at lahu quṣūru sh-shām*), so that I saw them.¹⁶²

Unlike the presence of stars, the appearance of light at the delivery of Muḥammad does not imply that his birth occurred at night. If one tends to argue that the reports just translated contain such an implication, it is because one assumes that the Syrian castles tradition is inseparable from a miracle imagery, in which the shining of light would be enhanced by its nocturnal occurrence. However, the miraculous character of that light is exhibited, not by its illumination of a dark environment, but by its power to make remote objects visible. The comparison between the last report, adduced for the first time by Abū Nu'aym, and the rest suggests then that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at night constitutes an independent tradition, associated with the Syrian castles tradition in the course of its transmission. The absence of this report from subsequent works suggests, hardly that its content was objected

¹⁶⁰. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 169.

¹⁶¹. Suyūṭī, I, pp. 121-122.

¹⁶². Suyūṭī, I, p. 115. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 128. Aḥmad ad-Dardīr's *Mawlid*, apud Nabhānī, p. 1278. Aḥmad 'Ābidīn's *Commentary on Ibn Ḥajar's Mawlid*, apud Nabhānī, p. 1145.

to, but rather that the soundness of the source of Abū Nu'aym was questioned by Sunnī scholars. Conversely, the reappearance of the report in two late works and its persistent appearance in even later works suggest, not that the association of the Syrian castles tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night was eventually integrated into Sunnī memory, but that the material produced by Abū Nu'aym alone, previously in disrepute, had become valuable in the eyes of Sunnī scholars.

A further investigation suggests that the Syrian castles tradition was unstably associated at an early stage of Sunnī Tradition with the birth of Muḥammad itself.

Ibn Ishāq's report (34) was translated above according to the transmission of Yūnus. In the report (42) as transmitted by Bakkā'ī and Salama, we read, instead of "The sign...":

And Āmina saw when she became pregnant with the Messenger of God a light coming out of her (*kharaja minhā*), through which she saw the castles of Buṣrā.¹⁶³

In a report (43) transmitted by Bakkā'ī and Salama from Ibn Ishāq, Āmina tells Ḥalīma:

... I saw when I became pregnant with him a light coming out of me (*kharaja minnī*), which illuminated before me the castles of Buṣrā (*adā'a lī quṣūr Buṣrā*)...¹⁶⁴

In the report (44) as transmitted by Yūnus, Āmina says:

... I had a vision in my sleep (*urītu fī n-nawm*) when I became pregnant with him. It was as if a light were coming out of me (*ka-annahū kharaja minnī*), at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*adā'at lahu quṣūru sh-shām*)...¹⁶⁵

Here, the light is still seen by Āmina at her conception, rather than delivery, of Muḥammad, but this time in a dream, and thus implicitly becomes a prefiguration of the appearance of actual light (at her delivery).

¹⁶³. Ibn Hishām, I, p. 166. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, p. 156.

¹⁶⁴. Ibn Hishām, I, p. 174. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, p. 160.

¹⁶⁵. 'Uṭāridī, p. 28.

In a report (45) adduced by ‘Abdarrazzāq (d. 211/827), Āmina tells Ḥalīma:

... I saw while he was in my belly a light coming out of me (*kharaja minni*), at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*adā’at minhu quṣūru sh-shām*)...¹⁶⁶

In a Prophetical report (46) transmitted by Yūnus, Bakkā’ī and Salama from Ibn Ishāq, we read:

... My mother saw when she became pregnant with me a light coming out of her (*kharaja minhā*), which illuminated before her the castles of Syria (*adā’a lahā quṣūra sh-shām*) [var. at the contact of which the castles of Buṣrā became illuminated (*adā’at lahu quṣūr Buṣrā*)]...¹⁶⁷

These reports vary from the ones translated above in the occasion of the appearance of light. The Syrian castles tradition, previously associated with Āmina's delivery, is now associated, except in Ibn Ishāq's report (44) of Āmina's communication to Ḥalīma as transmitted by Yūnus, with her conception of Muḥammad and, in ‘Abdarrazzāq's report (45) of Āmina's communication to Ḥalīma, with her pregnancy at large.

A comparison between the respective transmissions of the first and second set of reports may now help us to determine when the variation originated.

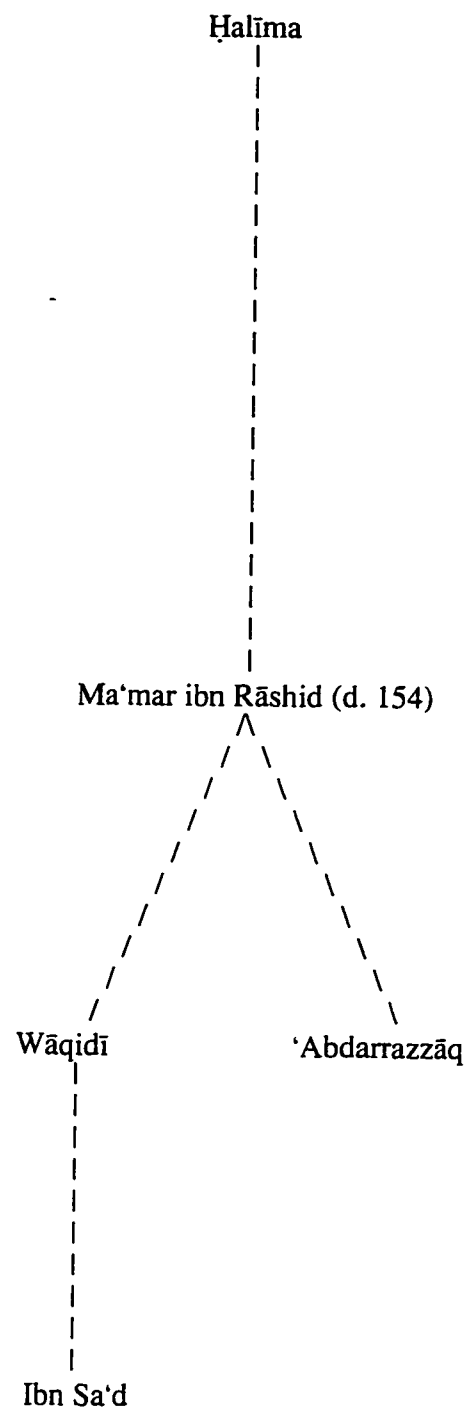
It seems already clear, if the possibility of inconsistency in Ibn Ishāq's own teaching is ruled out, that the variation among different transmissions from that scholar originated in the generation posterior to him. Besides, the variation sometimes appears among reports sharing a link in their transmission (see diagrams on next pages).

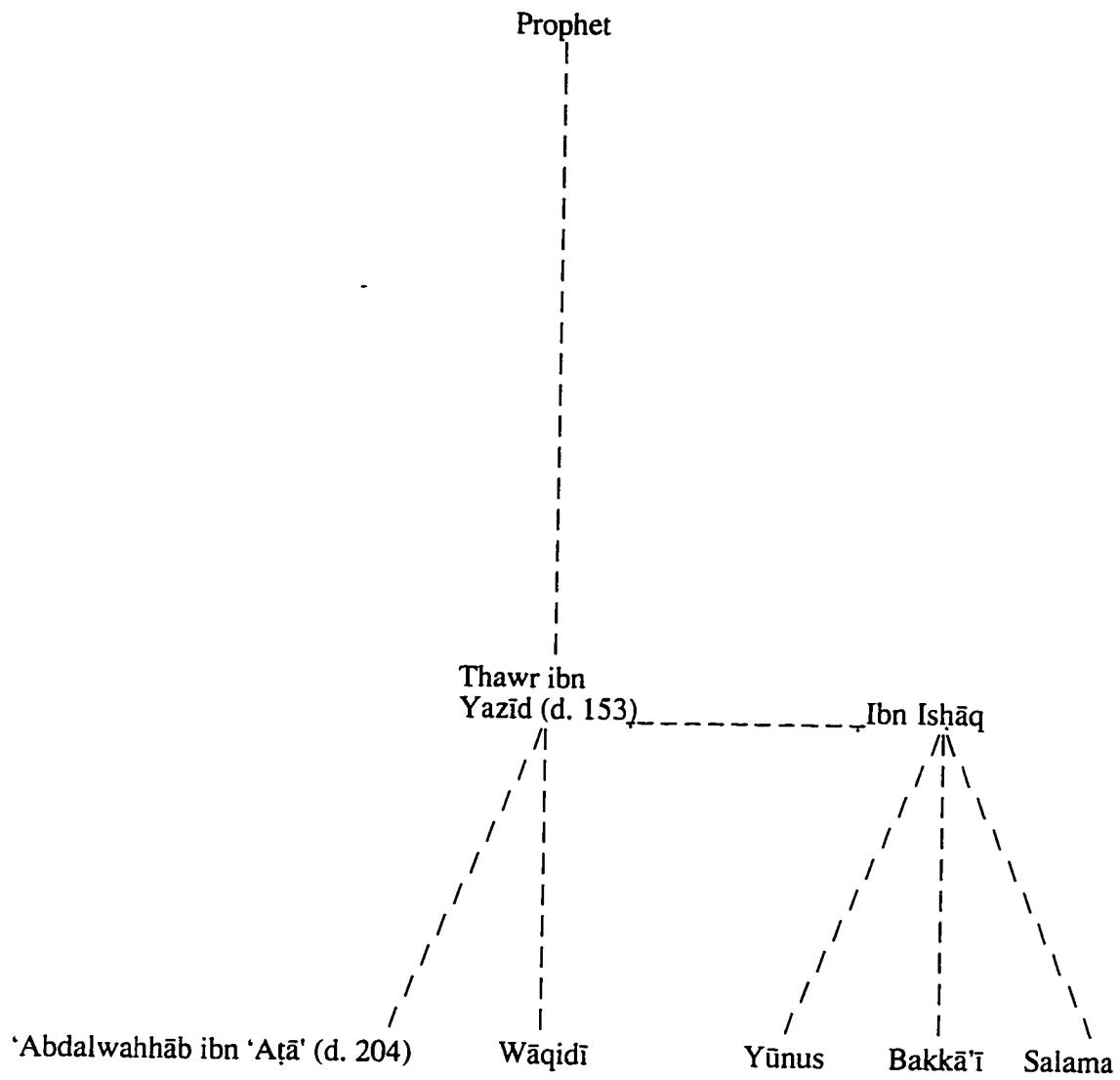
The respective chains of the first Āmina report (35) adduced by Ibn Sa’d and of ‘Abdarrazzāq's report (45) of Āmina's communication to Ḥalīma share the link of Ma’mar ibn Rāshid.

The respective chains of the two Prophetical reports (37, 38) adduced by Ibn Sa’d and of the Prophetical report (46) transmitted from Ibn Ishāq share the link of Thawr ibn Yazīd.

¹⁶⁶. ‘Abdarrazzāq, V, p. 318. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-Ṣan’ānī" (Harald Motzki).

¹⁶⁷. ‘Uṭāridī, p. 28. Ibn Hishām, I, p. 175. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, p. 165.





These chains confirm my conclusion about the different transmissions from Ibn Ishāq, namely that the variation originated in the second half of the second century. In Yūnus' transmission, the association of the Syrian castles tradition both with Āmina's delivery in the narrative report (34) and with her conception of Muḥammad in the Prophetical report (46) suggests that the two associations coexisted for a while. By the time of Ibn Sa'd, the tradition was exclusively associated with the birth of Muḥammad. It appears then that the association of the Syrian castles tradition with Āmina's conception of Muḥammad was gradually superseded by its association with her delivery of him in the course of the second half of the second century, and that this process was completed around the turn of that century. If such was the case, Ibn Ishāq's report (44) of Āmina's communication to Ḥalīma as transmitted by Yūnus may be taken as representing a stage in the process just reconstructed, at which the appearance of light at Āmina's conception of Muḥammad was neutralized through its placing in a dream, thus implicitly becoming a prefiguration of the appearance of actual light at her delivery of him. A tendency to detach the appearance of light from Āmina's body, moreover, is perceptible in two reports (34, 35) exhibiting the association of the Syrian castles tradition with the birth of Muḥammad. Whereas the wording *kharaja (or saṭa'a) minhā*, shared with the reports exhibiting the association of the tradition with the conception of Muḥammad, suggests that the appearance of light originated in Āmina's body, the wording *kharaja ma'ahu* suggests that the phenomenon originated in the process of delivery. However, we may note that, in the latter wording, Muḥammad's body is implicitly excluded as a source of the appearance of light.

If my conclusion is correct, reports in which the occasion of the appearance of light is not specified are likely to belong to the association of the Syrian castles tradition with the conception of Muḥammad.

In a Prophetical report (47) adduced by Bayhaqī, we read:

... My mother saw a light coming out of her (*kharaja minhā*), at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*aḍā'at minhu quṣūru sh-shām*).¹⁶⁸

In the report (48) as adduced by Ibn Sa'd, the Prophet says:

My mother saw as if a light were coming out of her (*ka-annah kharaja minhā*), at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*aḍā'at minhu quṣūru sh-shām*).¹⁶⁹

This wording seems to reflect the neutralization of the appearance of light at the conception of Muḥammad through its placing in a dream, and is likely to belong to the stage of transmission following the last link shared by the respective chains of Ibn Sa'd and Bayhaqī, Faraj ibn Fuḍāla (d. 177).

In a Prophetical report (49) adduced by Bayhaqī, the signs of Muḥammad's pre-existence are enumerated. Among them is "my mother's vision (*ru'yā*): she saw a light coming out of her (*kharaja minhā*), at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*aḍā'at minhu quṣūru sh-shām*)"¹⁷⁰.

In the report (50) as adduced by Ibn Sa'd, the following addition appears:

The mothers of [all] prophets have similar visions. The mother of the Messenger of God saw when she gave birth to him a light at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated before her (*aḍā'at lahā minhu quṣūru sh-shām*).¹⁷¹

When that addition became part of the report, the process reconstructed above was completed. The appearance of light at Āmina's conception of Muḥammad, already neutralized through its placing in a dream, was explicitly connected with the appearance of actual light at her delivery of him. A tendency to restrict the scope of the illumination, however, is perceptible in the addition. The wording *aḍā'at lahā minhu* combines two

¹⁶⁸. Bayhaqī, I, p. 84.

¹⁶⁹. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 82.

¹⁷⁰. Bayhaqī, I, p. 83.

¹⁷¹. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 118.

indications. The indication *minhu*, essentially identical to the indication *lahu* found in the other reports exhibiting the association of the Syrian castles tradition with the birth of Muḥammad, emphasizes the role played by the light seen by Āmina as the cause of the illumination, and thus suggests that the phenomenon existed independently of her perception of it. The indication *lahā*, shared with two reports (43, 46) exhibiting the association of the tradition with the conception of Muḥammad, emphasizes the position occupied by Āmina as the witness of the illumination, and thus suggests that the phenomenon was perceived in a vision exclusively granted by God to the mother of His prophet.

By the time of Ibn Sa'd, then, the association of the Syrian castles tradition with Āmina's conception of Muḥammad was superseded by its association with her delivery of him. The former association was not suppressed, but merely neutralized. However, that compromise was rejected by Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965).

In Ibn Ḥibbān's paraphrase of Tradition, Āmina tells 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib about her delivery of Muḥammad:

I saw in my sleep as if a light were coming out of me (*ra'aytu fī l-manām ka-annahū kharaja minnī*), which illuminated before me the castles of Syria (*aḍā'a li quṣūra sh-shām*).¹⁷²

In Ibn Ḥibbān's paraphrase of Āmina's communication to Ḥalīma, we read:

... I saw when I became pregnant with him a light coming out of me, at the contact of which the necks of the camels in Buṣrā became illuminated (*aḍā'a minhu a'nāqu l-ibil bi-Buṣrā*)...¹⁷³

Here, Āmina saw light in a dream at her delivery, and actual light at her conception of Muḥammad. This combination is diametrically opposite to the compromise just referred to and, as such, difficult to explain.

¹⁷². Ibn Ḥibbān, I, p. 37. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn Ḥibbān" (Johann Fück).

¹⁷³. Ibn Ḥibbān, I, p. 41.

The evidence provided by later sources shows that the appearance of actual light came to be associated in Sunnī memory with the birth of Muḥammad. The neutralization of the appearance of light at the conception of Muḥammad, encountered up to now as a phenomenon occurring in the course of transmission, becomes at a later period a matter of interpretation of Tradition.

Suhaylī (d. 581/1185) implicitly connected the appearance of light at Āmina's conception of Muḥammad with the appearance of actual light at her delivery of him. Suhaylī paraphrases Ibn Ishāq's report (43) of Āmina's communication to Ḥalīma and Ibn Ishāq's Prophetical report (46), both as transmitted by Bakkā'ī, in the following terms:

Ibn Ishāq mentioned the light seen by Āmina when she gave birth to him, whereby the castles of Syria became illuminated before her (*fa-aḏā'at lahā quṣūru sh-shām*).¹⁷⁴

For Ibn Kathīr, the twofold occasion of the appearance of light "implies that she saw, when she became pregnant with him, as if a light were coming out of her and that, when she gave birth to him, she saw with her eyes (*'iyānan*) the actualization (*ta'wīl*) of what she had seen before"¹⁷⁵. For Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1392), the appearance of light at Āmina's conception of Muḥammad belongs to a vision in sleep (*ru'yā l-manām*), whereas at the birth of the Prophet, she saw that light with her eyes (*ru'yata 'ayn*)"¹⁷⁶. This interpretation is adopted by Suyūṭī¹⁷⁷, Munāwī¹⁷⁸, Zurqānī¹⁷⁹, Bājūrī¹⁸⁰ and Aḥmad 'Ābidīn¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁴. Suhaylī, I, p. 192.

¹⁷⁵. Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 206.

¹⁷⁶. Ibn Rajab, pp. 87-88. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Ibn Radjab" (George Makdisi).

¹⁷⁷. Suyūṭī, I, pp. 114-115.

¹⁷⁸. Munāwī, II, p. 23.

¹⁷⁹. Zurqānī, I, p. 117, quoting Munāwī's Commentary on Suyūṭī's *Khaṣā'is*.

¹⁸⁰. Bājūrī, p. 32.

¹⁸¹. Aḥmad 'Ābidīn's Commentary on Ibn Ḥajar's *Mawlid*, *apud* Nabhānī, p. 1145.

Ibn Ḥibbān's view that ʿĀmina saw light in a dream at her delivery of Muḥammad is reported with some precaution by Muḡhulṭāy (d. 762/1360)¹⁸².

In one case, the view that ʿĀmina saw actual light at her conception of Muḥammad was neutralized through formal change. Ibn Ḥibbān's paraphrase of ʿĀmina's communication to Ḥalīma is adduced by Ṣāliḥī in the following form:

... I saw a light, as if it were a flame, coming out of me when I gave birth to him, whereby the necks of the camels in Buṣrā became illuminated before me (*aḏā'at lī a'nāqu l-ibil bi-Buṣrā*)...¹⁸³

The formal change exhibited here, as well as in Suhaylī's paraphrase just translated, reflects the association in Sunnī memory of the appearance of actual light with the birth of Muḥammad. A pronounced tendency to restrict the scope of the illumination, however, is perceptible in both cases. The indication *lahā*, here again, suggests that the phenomenon was perceived in a vision exclusively granted by God to the mother of His prophet, while the relation of causality between the light seen by ʿĀmina and the illumination is indicated by a *fa* (instead of *minhu*) in the wording used by Suhaylī, and is merely implicit in the wording used by Ṣāliḥī. Likewise, in the interpretation offered by Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Rajab, it is the quality of ʿĀmina's perception, not the quality of the light itself, that distinguishes the appearance of light at the birth of Muḥammad from its appearance at his conception.

Among the very scholars who asserted, with the implicit restriction just mentioned, the appearance of light at the birth of Muḥammad as an appearance of actual light, another interpretation emerged. Here, the light seen by ʿĀmina is connected with the "light of Muḥammad", whose radiation accounts for the diffusion of Islam.

¹⁸². Muḡhulṭāy, p. 8. See *E. I.* 2, art. "Muḡhulṭāy" (A. Saleh Hamdan).

¹⁸³. Ṣāliḥī, I, pp. 341-342.

For Suhaylī, the illumination of the castles of Syria alludes to the role played by that land in the diffusion of Islam:

Once God had granted the conquest of Syria to Muḥammad [i. e. to his successors], the caliphate was established there under the Umayyads. Thus, Syria and other lands were illuminated by the light of Muḥammad.

The analogy underlying this interpretation is based on the territorial identity shared by the illuminated object (the castles) and the source of illumination (the caliphate). Emphasis is laid here on the power of Islam to expand spatially from a political center.

Suhaylī's interpretation is supported by a parallel drawn between the light seen by Āmina and the light seen by a future companion of the Prophet:

Likewise, Khālid ibn Sa'īd ibn al-Āṣī saw shortly before the beginning of the Prophetical mission a light coming out of Zamzam, so [strong] that he could see the dates beginning to ripen on the palm trees of Yathrib.¹⁸⁴

Although he does not mention his source, Suhaylī clearly paraphrases a report (51) adduced by Ibn Sa'd¹⁸⁵. What mattered here was not that the light appeared before the beginning of the Prophetical mission, rather than at the birth of Muḥammad, nor that Khālid saw light in a dream (as explicitly stated in the original wording), rather than actual light, but that the illumination of the palm trees of Yathrib could allude to the position occupied by that city as the political center from which Islam expanded into the rest of Arabia.

A higher level of interpretation was reached by Ibn Rajab:

The appearance of light at the delivery of Muḥammad is an allusion (*ishāra*) to the light later brought by him, through which the people of earth found guidance and by virtue of which the darkness of disbelief disappeared from the earth. Indeed, [God referred to that light when] He said: "There has come to you from God a light, and a Book Manifest whereby God guides whosoever

¹⁸⁴. Suhaylī, I. p. 192.

¹⁸⁵. Ibn Sa'd. I. pp. 131-132.

follows His good pleasure in the ways of peace, and brings them forth from the shadows into the light by His leave; and He guides them to a straight path" [Q 5:15-16]¹⁸⁶.

This argument is reproduced by Qaṣṭallānī¹⁸⁷, Ṣāliḥī¹⁸⁸, Munāwī¹⁸⁹ and Aḥmad 'Ābidīn¹⁹⁰.

The analogy underlying Ibn Rajab's interpretation is based on the exceptional intensity shared by the two lights. Emphasis is laid here on the power of Islam to transcend space and time, and thus to bring about the salvation of mankind.

Shī'ī sources reflect the exclusive association of the Syrian castles tradition with the birth of Muḥammad.

In Ṭabrisī's paraphrase of Tradition, we read:

When the mother of the Messenger of God gave birth to him, she saw a light at the contact of which the castles of Syria became illuminated (*aḍā'at lahu quṣūru sh-shām*). She herself reported that, when she became pregnant with the Messenger of God, she heard a voice saying: You have become pregnant with the lord of this community... The sign of this is that with him will come out (*yakhruj ma'ahu*) a light which will fill the castles of Buṣrā...¹⁹¹

A similar passage appears in Irbilī's paraphrase of Tradition¹⁹².

Both scholars are clearly dependent here upon Sunnī Tradition and, in particular, upon Yūnus' version of Ibn Ishāq's narrative report (34).

186. Ibn Rajab, p. 89.

187. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 128.

188. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 342.

189. Nabhānī, pp. 525-526, quoting Munāwī's Commentary on Suyūṭī's *Jāmi' aṣ-ṣaghīr*.

190. Aḥmad 'Ābidīn's Commentary on Ibn Ḥajar's *Mawlid*, *apud* Nabhānī, p. 1145.

191. Ṭabrisī, *l'lām*, p. 10.

192. Irbilī, I, p. 27.

In a report adduced by Ibn Bābawayh, which is nearly identical to the al-'Abbās report (40) quoted from Abū Nu'aym by Suyūṭī, we read:

I saw a light shining from his head (*yaṣṭa' min ra'sihi*), so [strong] that it reached the sky, and I saw all the castles of Syria [illuminated as if they were] a brand of light.¹⁹³

In the continuation of Kulaynī's report (20) encountered above, Āmina tells the Meccan Jew about her delivery of Muḥammad:

... From him came out (*kharaja minhu*) a light so [strong] that I could look at the castles of Buṣrā...¹⁹⁴

In a report (52) adduced by Abū Manṣūr at-Ṭabrisī (fl. early 6th/12th century) on the authority of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, 'Alī informs a Jewish contradictor of the miracles concomitant with the birth of Muḥammad:

... From his mouth emanated (*badā min fīhi*) a light through which the people of Mecca saw the castles of Buṣrā... and the world became illuminated the night the Prophet was born...¹⁹⁵

In both reports, the Syrian castles tradition is combined with traditions associated with the view that Muḥammad was born at night.

¹⁹³. Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl*, p. 175. Since the chain of Abū Nu'aym has been omitted by Suyūṭī, the chain of Ibn Bābawayh may give us some clue as to the origin of the report. This chain goes as follows: 'Alī ibn Aḥmad [ibn Mūsā ad-Daqqāq] - Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā [ibn Zakāriyyā al-Qaṭṭān] - Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il - 'Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad - his father - Sa'id ibn Muslim - Qimār mawlā li-banī Makhzūm - Sa'id ibn Abī Ṣāliḥ - his father - Ibn 'Abbās - al-'Abbās. No entry on 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Mūsā ad-Daqqāq could be found in Shī'ī, nor in Sunnī, *Rijāl* literature. In the introduction to the 1379 AH Qum edition of Ibn Bābawayh's *Ma'ānī l-akhbār* (p. 54), 'Abdarraḥīm ar-Rabbānī ash-Shīrāzī mentions several instances of transmission from this 'Alī, but is apparently unable to identify him. No entry on Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Zakāriyyā al-Qaṭṭān could be found either. It seems clear, however, that this chain is not a Shī'ī one, and hence that the report did not originate among Shī'ī scholars.

¹⁹⁴. Kulaynī, *Rawḍa*, p. 301.

¹⁹⁵. Abū Manṣūr, I, p. 331.

We have seen that the Meccan Jew tradition is associated with this view in Kulaynī's report, as in the parallel Sunnī report (17).

The universal illumination tradition, associated with the view that Muḥammad was born at night in Abū Maṣṣūr's report, is indirectly associated with this view in a report (53) quoted from Abū Nu'aym by Suyūfī:

... When the Prophet was born, the whole world became filled with light... The night he was born (*laylata wulida*), God made seventy-thousand trees grow on the bank of the river Kawthar...¹⁹⁶

Whatever the relation between Abū Maṣṣūr's report and the latter report may be, it appears that we should not neglect the possibility of a slide. Indeed, a slide can be produced, not only by the association of two elements (see above, p. 60), but also by the combination of two traditions in a report, and such a slide may or may not be formally attested in the sources. Here, in a composite report where the view that Muḥammad was born at night is associated with one tradition, this view can slide to other traditions contained in the report. We may suppose that, in Kulaynī's report and in Abū Maṣṣūr's, the combination of the Syrian castles tradition with traditions associated with the view that Muḥammad was born at night produced such a slide.

¹⁹⁶. Suyūfī, I, pp. 117-118. Only the ascription to 'Amr ibn Qutayba is preserved by Suyūfī. 'Amr says that he heard the report from his father, whom he characterizes as "one among the receptacles of knowledge (*min aw'iyati l-'ilm*)". *Rijāl* literature provides no information on 'Amr ibn Qutayba, except that he was Syrian and, as we may infer from the few instances of transmission mentioned there, that he died around the middle of the third century. Mizzi mentions that Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) adduced in the *Mu'jam al-awsaṭ* a report transmitted from 'Amr ibn Qutayba by Nasā'ī (d. 303/915), in which Ibn 'Umar says that the Prophet interpreted the visions of his companions (XXII, pp. 190-191; cf. Ṭabarānī, II, p. 196). It seems reasonable to assume that the present report was likewise transmitted by Ṭabarānī, who appears as one of the major teachers of Abū Nu'aym, and as his main source for Syrian material. We have no clue as to the identity of the man from whom Ṭabarānī transmitted the report, but it seems beyond doubt that he was Syrian, and that the group to which he belonged regarded 'Amr ibn Qutayba as an authority. Moreover, the ascription to 'Amr (rather than to a Companion or a Successor), as well as the attribution of intrinsic knowledge to his father, suggests that the report did not originate among Sunnī scholars.

We may note that, in the al-'Abbās report as well as in Kulaynī's report and Abū Maṣṣūr's, the appearance of light is attached to Muḥammad's body which, in the Sunnī reports, is uniformly excluded as a source of the phenomenon. The wording *kharaja minhu* merely suggests that the appearance of light originated in Muḥammad's body, while the wordings *yasṭa' min ra'sihi* and *badā min fihi* suggest that the phenomenon originated in a specific area of his body. We may also note that the scope of the illumination, occasionally restricted in the Sunnī reports, is extended, in Abū Maṣṣūr's report, through the mention of the people of Mecca as the collective witness of the phenomenon.

d. Conclusion

In the analysis of the falling stars and cooking-pot traditions, we have encountered the view that Muḥammad was born at night (or around the beginning of night) as implicitly contained in the tradition (or in a widespread version of the tradition). That view, however, was explicitly associated with the falling stars tradition at an early stage of its transmission.

On the other hand, we have encountered the view that Muḥammad was born at night as an independent tradition, associated with the Syrian castles tradition in the course of its transmission. This association hardly belongs to Sunnī memory, but is specific to a single report, whose fate in Sunnī sources does not seem to depend upon its content.

Finally, we have encountered the view that Muḥammad was born at night at the earliest retrievable stage of transmission of two Shī'ī reports exhibiting the combination of the Syrian castles tradition with other traditions. This view appears here as an independent tradition which, though associated with individual narrative traditions, can slide to other traditions contained in the reports.

4. The new order traditions

Here are described supernatural phenomena concomitant with the birth of Muḥammad, but occurring in a wider spatial context. These phenomena indicate that, with the birth of Muḥammad, the old order collapses and a new one emerges. The new order is either prefigured or actualized, and, in the last case, experienced in a disturbance affecting the normal course of Arabian practices, or in the neutralization of daemonic powers.

a. The palace tradition

The following report (54) is adduced by Ṭabarī and Kharā'īṭī (d. 327/939), both transmitting from 'Alī ibn Ḥarb al-Mawṣilī (d. 265/879), with a chain going back to the Companion Hānī' al-Makhzūmī:

When the night came on which the Messenger of God was born (*lammā kānati l-laylatu llatī wulida fihā*), the palace of Kisrā became agitated by a violent motion, fourteen parapets fell down from it, the [sacred] fire of Persia subsided -it had not subsided before that for a thousand years- and the lake of Sāwa sank into the earth...¹⁹⁷

Another report (55), transmitted by Salama from Ibn Ishāq, himself transmitting indirectly from Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. ca 112/730), is adduced by Ṭabarī:

... When God initiated the mission of his prophet Muḥammad (*lammā an ba'atha llāh nabiyyahu*), Kisrā woke up one morning and discovered that, without external cause, his royal

¹⁹⁷. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, p. 166. The report is adduced by Ṭabarī in a chapter on the reign of Kisrā Anūshirwān. Kharā'īṭī, p. 73. See *E. I.* 2, art. "al-Kharā'īṭī" (Ed.). The work in which this report, as well as other reports to be encountered below, is adduced by Kharā'īṭī, the *Hawātif al-jinān*, is clearly intended to document the role of genies in salvation history. In the continuation of the report, the Arabian soothsayer Saṭīḥ, living then in the marches of Syria, interprets the fourteen parapets as the fourteen Sassanian rulers still to come before dramatic political changes occur in the area. The information about the phenomena witnessed in Persia, as well as their interpretation, was presumably communicated to Saṭīḥ by his genie.

palace had split in its middle, and that the lower Tigris had overflowed despite [the dam built by] him...¹⁹⁸

The Wahb report (55) is adduced in a slightly variant form by Suyūṭī, quoting Ibn Ishāq together with Abū Nu'aym¹⁹⁹.

The mention of Ibn Ishāq and Abū Nu'aym is something of a problem, since Ibn Ishāq's work is known to us through different recensions, and since the report is absent from the printed edition of the *Dalā'il*. We may suppose that, by Ibn Ishāq, Suyūṭī means Salama's recension, preserved in Ṭabarī's *Tārikh*, and that Abū Nu'aym is here dependent upon a parallel transmission of this recension, probably the transmission from Salama regularly used by Abū Nu'aym in his work (see diagram on next page).

The Hāni' report (54) is adduced by Abū Nu'aym and Bayhaqī, with two chains sharing the link of 'Alī ibn Ḥarb²⁰⁰.

The Hāni' report is adduced by Ibn Sayyid an-nās, with a chain having Kharā'iṭī as intermediary link²⁰¹, and by Ibn Kathīr, quoting Kharā'iṭī²⁰².

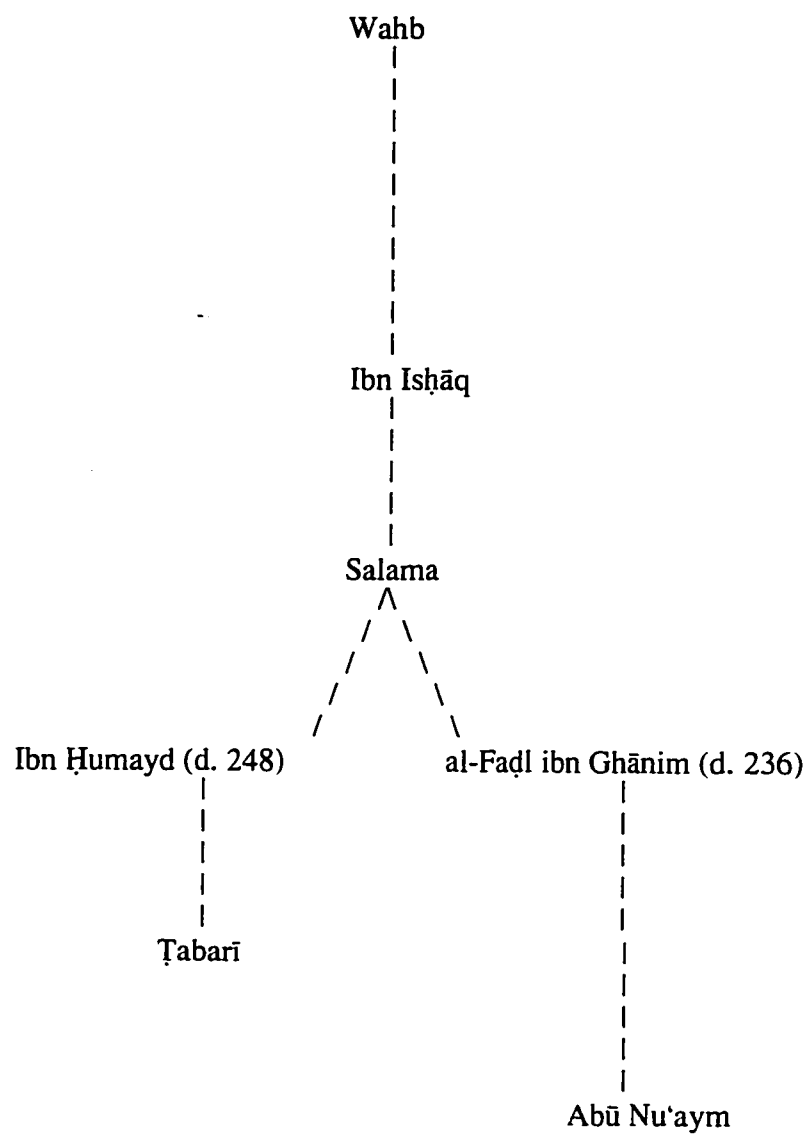
¹⁹⁸. Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II, p. 188. See *E. I.* I, art. "Wahb b. Munabbih" (Josef Horowitz). On Wahb as a source of Ibn Ishāq, see Khoury, "Les sources islamiques de la 'Sīra'", pp. 23-29.

¹⁹⁹. Suyūṭī, I, p. 272.

²⁰⁰. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 174. Bayhaqī, I, pp. 126-127. The identity of wording between Ṭabarī and Kharā'iṭī on the one hand, Abū Nu'aym and Bayhaqī on the other hand suggests that the material of 'Alī ibn Ḥarb existed in a written form, and was transmitted as such, although this material may not have been produced in a distinct work. Indeed, no such work is apparently ascribed to 'Alī ibn Ḥarb, while he is known as one who wrote down *Ḥadīth* (see 'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb*, V, pp. 294-296).

²⁰¹. Ibn Sayyid an-nās, I, pp. 36-37.

²⁰². Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 215.



The Hāni' report, together with the introduction "When the night...", is paraphrased by Mughultāy²⁰³, Ibn Ḥajar²⁰⁴ and Ḥalabī²⁰⁵.

In Qaṣṭallānī's paraphrase of Tradition, the Hāni' report is merely introduced by "Among the wonders concomitant with his birth" (*wa min 'ajā'ib wilādatihī*)²⁰⁶. The same absence of specification is found in Barzanjī's paraphrase of this report²⁰⁷. Qaṣṭallānī's paraphrase, together with his introduction, is reproduced by Aḥmad ad-Dardīr²⁰⁸.

As sources of his paraphrase, Qaṣṭallānī mentions Bayhaqī, Abū Nu'aym and Kharā'itī. Zurqānī adds "and Ibn Jarīr in his *Tāriḫh*", and reproduces the Hāni' report as adduced by the four scholars²⁰⁹.

The Wahb report is adduced by Ṣāliḫī, as a quotation from Ṭabarī, in the following form:

... When the Messenger of God was born (*lammā wulida*), Kisrā woke up and discovered that his royal palace had split without external cause, and that the lower Tigris had overflown...²¹⁰

Ṣāliḫī then adduces the Hāni' report, mentioning, as his first source and before the works of Bayhaqī, Abū Nu'aym and Kharā'itī, Ṭabarī's *Tāriḫh*²¹¹.

In the Hāni' and Wahb reports, the collapse of Sassanian civilization is prefigured by a disturbance affecting the order of things in Kisrā's kingdom, and especially the

203. Mughultāy, p. 5.

204. Ibn Ḥajar's *Mawlid*, apud Nabḥānī, p. 1118.

205. Ḥalabī, I, pp. 116-119.

206. Qaṣṭallānī, I, p. 131.

207. Barzanjī, pp. 14-15.

208. Aḥmad ad-Dardīr's *Mawlid*, apud Nabḥānī, p. 1278.

209. Zurqānī, I, pp. 121-122.

210. Ṣāliḫī, I, p. 353.

211. Ṣāliḫī, I, p. 354.

architectural integrity of his celebrated palace. Therefore, it may be conceded that each report represents a version of the same tradition. Among the different variations exhibited here, one is particularly significant: the disturbance is associated with the birth of Muḥammad in the Hāni' report, with the beginning of his mission in the Wahb report. It appears from the occurrence of both reports in Ṭabarī and Abū Nu'aym that the two associations coexisted for a while. The diffusion gained by the Hāni' report in later sources suggests that the palace tradition came to be associated in Sunnī memory with the birth of Muḥammad. That this association was not of exclusive character, however, is shown by the occurrence of the Wahb report in Suyūfī. The formal change undergone by this report in Ṣāliḥī suggests, not that the association of the palace tradition with the beginning of the Prophetical mission was sensed as irregular, but rather that its attestation in Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* posed a problem. That problem presumably arose from the very use of Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* as a source for the Hāni' report. While using -apparently for the first time in *Sira* scholarship- that work as such a source, Ṣāliḥī noticed the analogy between the Hāni' report and the Wahb report, but disregarded the one significant variation exhibited here: the latter report was not merely analogous to the former report in the phenomena described, but shared with it their placing at the birth of Muḥammad. Once the Wahb report had undergone formal change, it could become an innocent variant of the Hāni' report.

There is no reason to think that the palace tradition as it appears in the Hāni' report, adduced for the first time by scholars of the second half of the third century (Ṭabarī and Kharā'itī), ever existed outside its association with the view that Muḥammad was born at night. However, that association was not integrated into Sunnī memory. Indeed, no indication as to the time of birth of Muḥammad is involved in the formal change undergone by the Wahb report in Ṣāliḥī, nor in Qaṣṭallānī's introduction to his paraphrase of the Hāni' report, later reproduced by Aḥmad ad-Dardīr, nor in Barzanjī's paraphrase of this report.

Shī'ī sources reflect the exclusive association of the palace tradition with the birth of Muḥammad.

The Hāni' report is adduced by Ibn Bābawayh, thus providing evidence of an additional transmission in the second half of the third century (see diagram on next page)²¹².

In a report (56) adduced by Ibn Bābawayh with a chain going back to Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, and having as intermediary link Aḥmad ibn Abī 'Abdallāh [Muḥammad] al-Barqī (d. 274/887-888 or 280/893-894), we read:

That night [*i. e.* the night Muḥammad was born], the palace of Kisrā became agitated by a violent motion. fourteen parapets fell down from it, the lake of Sāwa sank into the earth... and the fire of Persia subsided -it had not subsided before that for a thousand years-.

In the continuation of this report, we read:

The royal palace of Kisrā split in its middle, and the lower Tigris overflowed.²¹³

Both passages are excerpted from the report by Ibn Shahrāshūb²¹⁴.

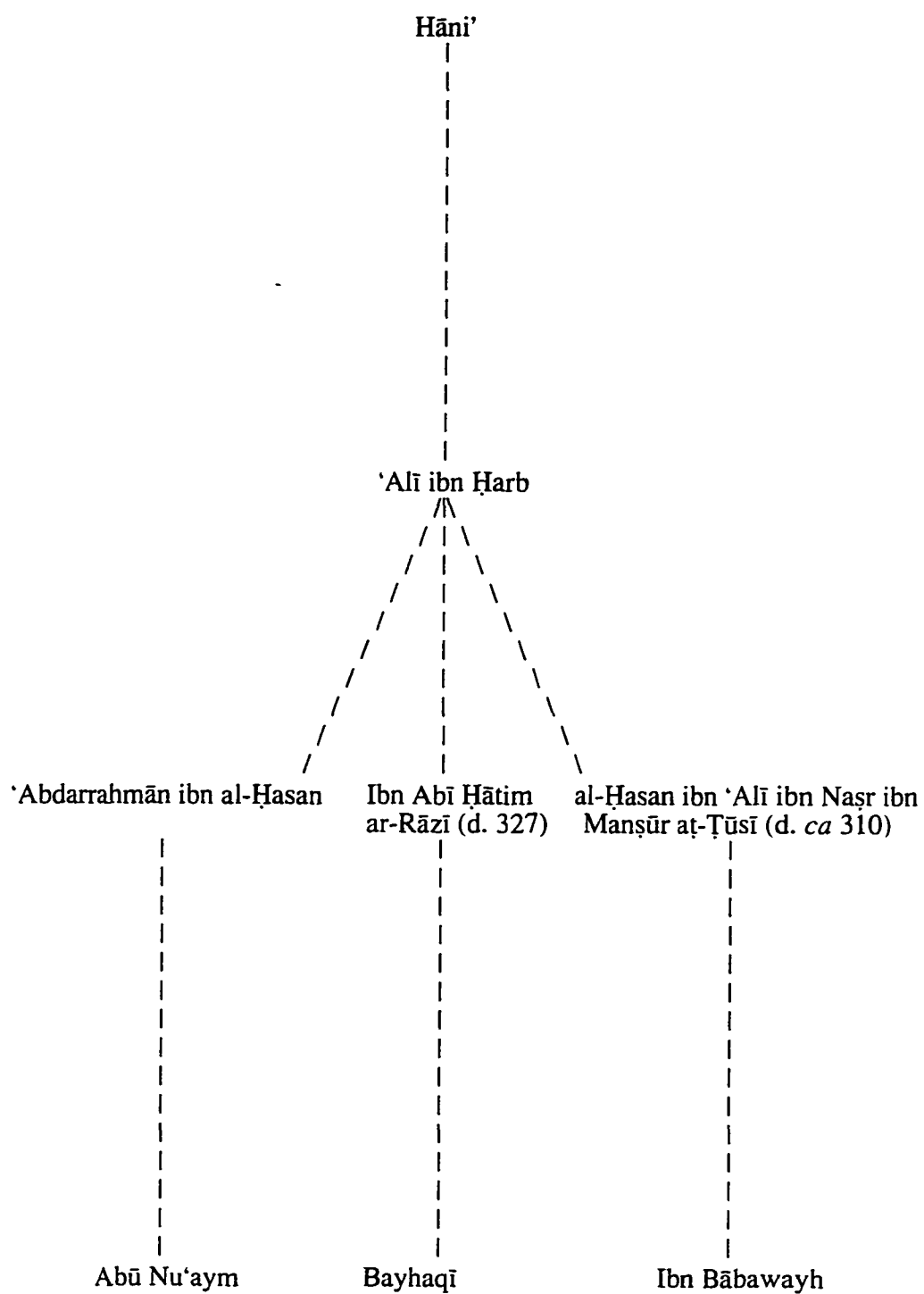
The Hāni' report is adduced by Ṭabrisī, quoting ['Abdalmalik ibn Muḥammad] al-Khargūshī (d. 407/1016)²¹⁵.

²¹². Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl*, pp. 191-192.

²¹³. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 253-254. It seems reasonable to assume that the link of Barqī represents the source of Ibn Bābawayh. The identification of the work from which the report was transmitted, however, is made difficult by the uncertainty as to whether the works of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad mentioned by Muslim scholars existed independently or as parts of the *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn*, and as to whether he or his father Muḥammad ibn Khālid composed this work (and each of its parts). A possible candidate is the *Kitāb at-ṭibyān* mentioned by Mas'ūdī (see *E. I. 2*, Supplement, art. "al-Barqī" [Charles Pellat] and Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*, p. 273 and pp. 308-309).

²¹⁴. Ibn Shahrāshūb, I, p. 30.

²¹⁵. Ṭabrisī, *I'lām*, p. 11, probably quoting from Khargūshī's *Sharaf al-muṣṭafā*. See *E. I. 2*, art. "al-Khargūshī" (Arthur Arberry).



In a passage (57) quoted by Shādhān ibn Jabrāʿīl from the pseudo-Wāqidī, we read:
That night, twenty-four parapets fell down from the palace of Kisrā. That night, the fire of Persia subsided.²¹⁶

In Irbilī's paraphrase of Tradition, we read:

On the day of his birth (*yawma wilādatihi*), the palace of Kisrā became agitated by a violent motion, fourteen parapets fell down from it and the fire of Persia subsided -it had not subsided before that for a thousand years-.²¹⁷

The following report (58) is adduced by Ibn al-Muṭahhar on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās:

When the night came on which the Prophet was born, the palace of Kisrā became agitated by a violent motion, fourteen parapets fell down from it and the lake of Sāwa sank into the earth...²¹⁸

The Wahb report is adduced by Ibn Ṭāwūs, as a quotation from Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, not in a historical framework however. Here, it is the role of stars in salvation history, documented further in the report by the celestial signs of the Prophetic mission appearing to Kisrā's astrologers, that matters²¹⁹.

The Wahb report is adduced by Majlisī (d. 1110/1700), as a quotation from Ibn Ṭāwūs, in a chapter about the birth of Muḥammad²²⁰.

These reports show that the association of the palace tradition with the birth of Muḥammad, clearly inherited from the Hāni' report, was integrated into Shī'ī memory. That process did not necessarily involve the naturalization of the Hāni' report, which continued to appear with its Sunnī chain. The ascription to Ibn 'Abbās (report 58), though attested in a late source and of unclear origin, reflects the same absence of sectarian resistance. On the

216. Shādhān ibn Jabrāʿīl, p. 18.

217. Irbilī, I, p. 28.

218. Ibn al-Muṭahhar, p. 122.

219. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj*, pp. 32-35.

220. Majlisī, XV, pp. 276-277.

other hand, Barqī's report (56) suggests that the association of the palace tradition with the beginning of the Prophetic mission was suppressed when the Wahb report crossed into Shī'ī Tradition. If the Wahb report was preserved in its original form by Shī'ī scholarship, it was only thanks to Ibn Ṭāwūs, whose interest in the report was not motivated here by historical concerns. The thorough Majlisī could not disregard a report adduced by one of his most venerable predecessors, but adduced it himself in a historical framework neutralizing the association of the palace tradition with the beginning of the Prophetic mission.

The association of the palace tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night was clearly inherited from the Hānī' report. Irbilī's paraphrase may suggest that this association was not integrated into Shī'ī memory, although his departure from the original form of the Hānī' report has no parallel anywhere.

A late fate of the palace tradition deserves some attention.

In the paraphrase of Tradition provided by the Ṣūfī Muḥammad Nāṣiraddīn al-Maghribī (d. 1240/1824), we read:

The night he was conceived (*laylata ḥamlihi*)... the sacred fire of Persia subsided -it had not subsided before that for a thousand years-... the palace of Kisrā became agitated by a violent motion and cracked, and fourteen parapets fell down from it.²²¹

Here, the disturbance affecting the order of things in Kisrā's kingdom is associated with the conception of Muḥammad. The uniqueness of this case suggests that the present association represents a late deviation from the original association with the birth of Muḥammad exhibited in the Hānī' report and, moreover, that the deviation should be ascribed to a Ṣūfī articulation of *Sīra* Tradition.

²²¹. Muḥammad al-Maghribī's *Mawlid*, *apud* Nabhānī, p. 1110.

b. The throne tradition

In the continuation of Barqī's report (56) encountered above, we read:

And every single throne belonging to a king among the kings of this world turned upside down.²²²

Here, the throne tradition is associated with the birth of Muḥammad, and indirectly associated with the view that he was born at night through its combination with traditions associated with this view, such as the palace tradition.

The phenomenon appears in an excerpt from this report adduced by Ibn Shahrāshūb²²³.

In a report (59) adduced by Abū Nu'aym, Ibn 'Abbās says:

That night, every animal belonging to Quraysh spoke and said: By the lord of the Ka'ba, the Messenger of God has been conceived, he is the safeguard of the world and the luminary of its inhabitants... And every single throne belonging to a king among the kings of this world turned upside down.²²⁴

²²². Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 254.

²²³. Ibn Shahrāshūb, I, p. 30.

²²⁴. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, Hyderabad edition, pp. 535-536. This report is adduced in section 33 (*Dhikr muwāzātī l-anbiyā' fī faḍā'ilihim bi-faḍā'il nabiyyinā wa muqābalat mā ūtū minā l-āyāt bi-mā ūtiya*), where it illustrates the equal distinction of Muḥammad and Jesus. The chain of Abū Nu'aym goes as follows: Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad [aṭ-Ṭabarānī] - 'Amr ibn Muḥammad ibn aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ - Yaḥyā ibn 'Abdallāh al-Bābaluttī (d. 218) - Abū Bakr [ibn 'Abdallāh] ibn Abī Maryam (d. 156) - Sa'īd ibn 'Amr al-Anṣārī - his father - Ibn 'Abbās. 'Amr ibn Muḥammad ibn aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ apparently has no entry in *Rijāl* literature, and is not mentioned among the teachers of Ṭabarānī in the *Mu'jam aṣ-ṣaghīr*, nor in the *Mu'jam al-awsaṭ*. It seems reasonable to assume that Ṭabarānī questioned the reliability of this 'Amr, and hence did not adduce the report in his works, but still transmitted it to some of his pupils as a curiosity. If this hypothesis is correct, the fact that Abū Nu'aym adduced the report in his work, and thus disregarded the doubts of his teacher, is indeed worthy of notice.

This report is reproduced by Suyūṭī²²⁵, partly adduced by Ibn Ḥajar²²⁶, Ḥalabī²²⁷, Aḥmad ad-Dardīr²²⁸ and Muḥammad al-Maghribī²²⁹, and paraphrased by Barzanjī²³⁰.

In a report (60) anonymously adduced by Ibn al-Muṭahhar, which is strongly reminiscent of the previous report, we read:

When Āmina bint Wahb became pregnant with the Messenger of God... every single throne belonging to a king among the kings turned upside down.²³¹

Barqī's report (56), adduced by Ibn Bābawayh, and Ibn Shahrāshūb's excerpt suggest that the throne tradition was associated in Shī'ī memory with the birth of Muḥammad.

The Ibn 'Abbās report (59), adduced for the first time by Abū Nu'aym and disappearing after him, seems rather intrusive in Sunnī sources. The report indeed reappeared in Suyūṭī, but its intrusiveness did not escape that scholar.

After having reproduced the Ibn 'Abbās report, together with two other reports adduced by Abū Nu'aym, Suyūṭī cleared himself in the following terms:

This report and the two preceding ones are of highly dubious character, and I have not quoted in the present book anything more dubious. I myself was not disposed to be happy with such quotations, and I merely followed here Abū Nu'aym.²³²

It can hardly be doubted, in view of the well-known Ṣūfī sympathies of Abū Nu'aym, that what Suyūṭī's nose detected here was the Ṣūfī flavour of these reports. The persistent appearance of the Ibn 'Abbās report after Suyūṭī suggests that his self-clearance represents

225. Suyūṭī, I, p. 118.

226. Ibn Ḥajar, p. 31.

227. Ḥalabī, I, p. 76.

228. Aḥmad ad-Dardīr's *Mawlid*, apud Nabhānī, p. 1277.

229. Muḥammad al-Maghribī's *Mawlid*, apud Nabhānī, p. 1110.

230. Barzanjī, p. 8.

231. Ibn al-Muṭahhar, p. 124.

232. Suyūṭī, I, p. 122.

a reaction to a process already initiated by the time of that scholar, and in which he himself took part when reproducing the three reports adduced by Abū Nu'aym: the gradual suppression of the boundary separating Ṣūfī material from Sunnī Tradition. It seems clear here that the association of the throne tradition with the conception of Muḥammad was eventually integrated into Sunnī memory.

Ibn al-Muṭahhar's report (60) now suggests that the association of the throne tradition with the conception of Muḥammad was borrowed from Ṣūfī Tradition and, when that borrowing occurred, was not sensed as incompatible with the association, exhibited in Barqī's report (56), of the tradition with his birth.

c. The woman soothsayer tradition

The following report (61) is adduced by Ibn al-Muṭahhar on the authority of Muḥammad al-Bāqir:

Quraysh used to have a woman soothsayer... When the night came on which the Messenger of God was born (*fa-lammā kānati l-laylatu llatī wulida fihā*), her genie went to her and said: The communication between us has been cut off...²³³

In the continuation of Barqī's report (56), we read:

And every single woman soothsayer among the Arabs was debarred from [communicating with] her genie.²³⁴

Here, the rupture between women soothsayers and genies is associated with the birth of Muḥammad, and indirectly associated with the view that he was born at night through its combination with traditions associated with this view, such as the palace tradition.

The universal rupture appears in an excerpt from this report adduced by Ibn Shahrāshūb²³⁵.

²³³. Ibn al-Muṭahhar, p. 125.

²³⁴. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 254.

²³⁵. Ibn Shahrāshūb, I, p. 30.

Before the passage of the Ibn 'Abbās report (59) considered above, we read:

And every single woman soothsayer from Quraysh and from each one of the Arab tribes was debarred from [communicating with] her genie.²³⁶

Before the passage of Ibn al-Muṭahhar's report (60) considered above, we read:

And every single woman soothsayer was debarred from [communicating with] her genie.²³⁷

In both reports, the rupture between women soothsayers and genies is associated with the conception of Muḥammad.

In Sunnī Tradition, the rupture affects individual women soothsayers and individual genies, and is never associated with the birth of Muḥammad, nor with his conception.

In a report (62) adduced by Abū Nu'aym, we read:

The people of Medina were first informed of the beginning of the Prophet's mission by the following event:

A Medinese woman used to have an informant from among the genies. He came in the form of a white bird, and dropped down upon [the top of] a wall [surrounding her house]. She said to him: Won't you come down to us, so that we can talk and exchange information? He replied: The mission of a prophet has been initiated in Mecca (*qad bu'itha nabī bi-Makka*). He has prohibited fornication and has prevented us from carrying on our business.²³⁸

In another report (63) adduced by Abū Nu'aym, we read:

There was in Medina a woman who used to be in contact with a genie. He used to speak, and people used to hear his voice. He remained absent for some time and did not [carry on his habit of] coming to her frequently. And there he was one day, looking down from a window. She looked at him and said: O Ibn Lūdhān, you didn't use to look down from the window. What's the

²³⁶. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, Hyderabad edition, p. 536. Suyūṭī, I, p. 118.

²³⁷. Ibn al-Muṭahhar, p. 124.

²³⁸. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 131.

matter with you? He replied: A prophet has appeared in Mecca (*innahu kharaja nabī bi-Makka*), and I have heard his message. Indeed, he prohibits fornication. Good-bye, then.²³⁹

The following report (64) is adduced by Abū Nu'aym, with a chain having Wāqidī as intermediary link:

'Uthmān ibn 'Affān said:

We travelled to Syria in a caravan before the mission of the Messenger of God was initiated. When we came to the marches of Syria, where a woman soothsayer used to dwell, we presented ourselves to her and she said: My genie came to me, and stood at my door. I told him: Won't you come in? He replied: I can't. Aḥmad has appeared (*kharaja Aḥmad*). Something unbearable has happened...²⁴⁰

The following report (65) is transmitted by 'Alī ibn Mujāhid (d. 182/798) from Ibn Ishāq, and adduced by Ibn Sa'd:

A woman in the Banū n-Najjār named Fāṭima bint an-Nu'mān used to have an informant from among the genies, who used to visit her. He came to her when the Prophet emigrated, and dropped down upon [the top of] the wall. She said: What's the matter with you? Why don't you come as you used to? He replied: The prophet has come (*qad jā'a*) who prohibits fornication and wine.²⁴¹

In Suhaylī's paraphrase of this report, we read:

... At the very beginning of the Prophetical mission, he came to her, sat down on [the top of] a wall surrounding the house, and did not come in. She told him: Why don't you come in? He replied: A prophet has been sent (*qad bu'itha*) to prohibit fornication...²⁴²

These reports suggest that the rupture between the woman soothsayer and her genie was associated in Sunnī memory with the beginning of the Prophetical mission. The association of the individual rupture with the Emigration, in a report (65) transmitted from Ibn Ishāq,

²³⁹. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 132.

²⁴⁰. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 132.

²⁴¹. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 132.

²⁴². Suhaylī, I, p. 239.

may have rivalled in the second century its association with the beginning of the Prophetic mission. The formal change undergone by this report suggests that, at least by the time of Suhaylī, the former association was sensed as irregular. We may note that, here, the rupture between the woman soothsayer and her genie affects their sexual relationship, rather than the communication of celestial information: the genie is debarred, willingly or unwillingly, from visiting the woman soothsayer by an article of the divine dispensation, the prohibition of fornication, supposedly proclaimed at the beginning of the Prophetic mission.

Outside Sunnī Tradition, the rupture seems to affect the communication of celestial information, and becomes universal.

Barqī's report (56), adduced by Ibn Bābawayh, and Ibn Shahrāshūb's excerpt suggest that the rupture between women soothsayers and genies was associated in Shī'ī memory with the birth of Muḥammad.

The Ibn 'Abbās report (59) shows, if the conclusions reached in the analysis of the throne tradition are accepted, that the association of the universal rupture with the conception of Muḥammad existed at an early stage of Ṣūfī Tradition. The absence of the relevant passage from the report as adduced by scholars after Suyūṭī, however, suggests that this association was not eventually integrated into Sunnī memory.

Ibn al-Muṭahhar's report (60) suggests, as in the analysis of the throne tradition, that the association of the universal rupture with the conception of Muḥammad, when borrowed from Ṣūfī Tradition, was not sensed as incompatible with the association, exhibited in Barqī's report (56), of the universal rupture with his birth.

It appears now that the association of the individual rupture with the birth of Muḥammad is specific to the Muḥammad al-Bāqir report (61). The association of the individual rupture with the view that Muḥammad was born night can obviously not have been inherited from previous material, but is analogous to the association, exhibited in the Hānī' report (54), of the palace tradition with this view.

d. The idol tradition

In a report (66) adduced by Kharā'itī, transmitting from 'Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad al-Balawī, 'Urwa ibn az-Zubayr says:

A group of Qurashīs... were one day about to gather around an idol of theirs -they had established on that day a yearly festival of great magnitude, in which they used to sacrifice animals, then to eat and drink wine, eventually-to circumbulate the idol-. They approached the idol at night, and saw it turned upside down. They did not like that, and put the idol back in position, but it immediately turned upside down in a violent motion. So they put the idol back in position, and it turned upside down for the third time. When they saw that, they became upset and grieved. 'Uthmān ibn al-Ḥuwayrith said: What's the matter with it? Why does it turn upside down all the time? This means that something has happened -that was the night on which the Messenger of God was born (*fī l-laylati llatī wulida fihā*). They put the idol back in position, and when it stood upright, a voice loudly called out to them from the idol.

The voice then proclaims in verse that all worldly powers have submitted to a newborn child and that, among them, the idols have prostrated themselves to him²⁴³.

This report is adduced by Ibn 'Asākir, with a chain having Kharā'itī as intermediary link²⁴⁴, later reproduced by Ibn Kathīr²⁴⁵, Suyūṭī²⁴⁶ and Ṣāliḥī²⁴⁷, eventually paraphrased by Ḥalabī²⁴⁸.

²⁴³. Kharā'itī, pp. 51-53. The voice calling out from the idol is presumably that of a genie (see above, n. 197). Kharā'itī indicates that he heard Balawī in Egypt. *Rijāl* literature provides no information on Balawī, while his reliability is seriously questioned (see 'Asqalānī, *Lisān*, III, p. 338).

²⁴⁴. Ibn 'Asākir, I, pp. 342-343.

²⁴⁵. Ibn Kathīr, I, pp. 355-356.

²⁴⁶. Suyūṭī, I, pp. 129-130.

²⁴⁷. Ṣāliḥī, I, pp. 350-351.

²⁴⁸. Ḥalabī, I, p. 116.

In another report (67) adduced by Kharā'itī, again transmitting from Balawī, Asmā' bint Abī Bakr says that Waraqa ibn Nawfal told the Negus:

While I was one night (*laylatan*) near an idol of ours which we used to circumbulate and to worship, I heard a voice coming from inside the idol:

The Prophet was born, the kings have submitted

Error has disappeared, disbelief has retreated

Then the idol turned over upon its head.²⁴⁹

This report is reproduced by Ibn Kathīr²⁵⁰, Suyūṭī²⁵¹ and Ṣāliḥī²⁵².

Here, the bankruptcy of Arabian idolatry is experienced in two combined phenomena, both occurring on the night of birth of Muḥammad: the voice coming from the idol and the collapse of the idol.

Elsewhere, the former phenomenon appears independently, and is never associated with the birth of Muḥammad.

In a report (68) transmitted from Ibn Ishāq by Bakkā'ī and Salama, 'Umar says that he heard a voice coming, not directly from an idol, but from a sacrificial animal "before the appearance of Islam by one month or a little less (*qubayla l-islām bi-shahr aw shay'a*)"²⁵³.

In a report (69) adduced by Ibn Sa'd, Jubayr ibn Muṭ'im says that he heard a voice coming from a local idol "before the mission of the Messenger of God was initiated by one month (*qabla an yub'atha rasūlu llāh bi-shahr*)"²⁵⁴.

²⁴⁹. Kharā'itī, pp. 76-77. Note that the two reports share the ascription to a member of the family of az-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām (Asmā' is his wife, and 'Urwa's mother).

²⁵⁰. Ibn Kathīr, I, pp. 367-368.

²⁵¹. Suyūṭī, I, pp. 130-131.

²⁵². Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 351.

²⁵³. Ibn Hishām, I, pp. 223-224. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, pp. 296-297.

²⁵⁴. Ibn Sa'd, I, pp. 127-128.

In the following reports (70, 71, 72), the same phenomenon appears in several other contexts, but without precise dating.

After a voice is heard coming from a 'Umānī idol, the witnesses of this phenomenon are informed by a Ḥijāzī traveler that "a man named Aḥmad has appeared (*ṣāhara rajul yuqāl lahu Aḥmad*)"²⁵⁵.

A Khath'amī reports his and his fellow tribesmen's reaction to a voice heard by them coming from a local idol:

We dispersed in fear, and that poem [*i. e.* the poem uttered by the voice] circulated among us until we were informed that the Prophet had appeared in Mecca, then had arrived at Medina (*qad kharaja bi-Makka thumma qadima l-Madīna*)...²⁵⁶

After a voice is heard coming from a Ḍamrī idol, the witnesses of this phenomenon are informed that "a prophet named Aḥmad has appeared in Mecca (*kharaja nabī bi-Makkata smuhu Aḥmad*)"²⁵⁷.

In a report (73) adduced by Abū Nu'aym, al-'Abbās ibn Mirdās says that he heard a voice coming from a family idol "when the Prophet appeared (*lammā ṣāhara*)"²⁵⁸.

In a variant report (74) adduced by Ibn Hishām (d. ca 215/830), Ibn Mirdās does not say when he heard the voice, but the position of this report in the *Sīra* implies that he heard it when Mecca was conquered²⁵⁹.

The report is adduced by Ibn Sayyid an-nās, quoting Ibn Hishām, in his section about the beginning of the Prophetical mission²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁵. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, pp. 142-143.

²⁵⁶. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, pp. 145-146.

²⁵⁷. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 146.

²⁵⁸. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, pp. 146-147.

²⁵⁹. Ibn Hishām, IV, p. 69.

²⁶⁰. Ibn Sayyid an-nās, I, p. 97.

In another report (75) adduced by Abū Nu'aym, a Sulamī says that he heard a voice coming from a tribal idol "when the Messenger of God left for Medina (*'inda makhraj rasūli llah wa majāzihi ilā l-Madīna*)"²⁶¹.

These reports suggest that the voice coming from the idol (or from the sacrificial animal) was associated in Sunnī memory with the beginning of the Prophetic mission. The occurrence of the phenomenon slightly before that event clearly belongs to this association. In several reports, it is unclear whether the voice was heard slightly before, during, or slightly after the beginning of the Prophetic mission, but it is clear that the phenomenon is associated with that event. The association of the phenomenon with the Emigration and its association with the conquest of Mecca seem to represent unique instances. In the last case, the shift of position undergone by the Ibn Mirdās report (74) suggests that, at least by the time of Ibn Sayyid an-nās, this association was sensed as irregular.

In these reports, the voice coming from the idol is not combined with the collapse of the idol. In the standard scenario indeed, the voice provokes in the tribesman a burst of monotheistic consciousness, and eventually leads him to destroy the idol with his own hands. Otherwise, auto-destruction is a possible outcome.

In a report (76) adduced by Ibn Sayyid an-nās, a 'Udhrī says that he heard a voice coming from a tribal idol "when the Prophet appeared" and that, when the proclamation was completed, the idol fell down on its face²⁶².

However, that tradition gained diffusion in a different version: the universal collapse of idols.

²⁶¹. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, pp. 150-151.

²⁶². Ibn Sayyid an-nās, I, pp. 96-97.

The following report (77) is adduced by Abū Nu'aym, with a chain having Wāqidī as intermediary link:

When the mission of the Messenger of God was initiated (*lammā bu'itha*), every idol turned upside down...²⁶³

This report is adduced by Ibn Kathīr, quoting Wāqidī²⁶⁴, and by Suyūṭī, quoting Wāqidī and Abū Nu'aym²⁶⁵.

Before the passage of Barqī's report (56) considered above, we read:

The morning after the Prophet was born (*ṣabīḥata wulida*), every single idol turned upside down.²⁶⁶

Here, the universal collapse of idols is indirectly associated with the view that Muḥammad was born at night through its combination with traditions associated with this view, such as the palace tradition.

In a report (78) adduced by Ibn Bābawayh, with a chain having Qummī as intermediary link, Ka'b al-Aḥbār tells Mu'āwiya that he has read seventy-two revealed books, all foretelling the signs of the birth of Muḥammad:

... The night of his birth (*laylata mawlidihī*), seventy-thousand castles were built in paradise... and all idols turned upside down...²⁶⁷

The phenomenon appears in an excerpt from this report adduced by Ibn Shahrāshūb²⁶⁸.

²⁶³. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 294.

²⁶⁴. Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 420.

²⁶⁵. Suyūṭī, I, p. 273.

²⁶⁶. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 253.

²⁶⁷. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, pp. 538-539. It seems reasonable to assume that the link of Qummī represents the source of Ibn Bābawayh. The work from which this report was transmitted may be identified, in accordance with the suggestion of Kohlberg, as Qummī's *Mab'ath* (see above, n. 135).

²⁶⁸. Ibn Shahrāshūb, I, p. 31.

In the continuation of the pseudo-Wāqidī's passage (57) encountered in the analysis of the palace tradition, we read:

And every single idol in the east and the west prostrated on its face and fell down on its forehead in submission, thus magnifying the Prophet.²⁶⁹

Here again, the universal collapse of idols is associated with the birth of Muḥammad, and indirectly associated with the view that he was born at night through its combination with traditions associated with this view, such as the palace tradition.

In the continuation of the 'Amr ibn Qutayba report (53) encountered in the analysis of the Syrian castles tradition, we read:

And all idols turned upside down.²⁷⁰

Here, the phenomenon is associated with the birth of Muḥammad, and indirectly associated with the view that he was born at night through its combination with the Kawthar tradition, itself associated with this view.

In Ḥalabī's paraphrase of Tradition, we read:

At his birth, the idols turned upside down.²⁷¹

The following paraphrase is adduced by Ibn Ḥajar:

When that noble drop [*i. e.* the semen of 'Abdallāh] settled in Āmina, the idols of this world turned upside down...²⁷²

In Ḥalabī's paraphrase of Tradition, we read:

It was reported from Ka'b al-Aḥbār that the morning after that night [*i. e.* the night Āmina became pregnant with Muḥammad], the idols of this world turned upside down.²⁷³

²⁶⁹. Shādhān ibn Jabrā'īl, p. 18.

²⁷⁰. Suyūṭī, I, pp. 117-118.

²⁷¹. Ḥalabī, I, p. 114.

²⁷². Ibn Ḥajar, p. 31.

²⁷³. Ḥalabī, I, p. 76.

The following report (79) is adduced by Aḥmad ad-Dardīr on the authority of Ka'b al-Aḥbār:

That night, a shout was heard everywhere in the heavens and on the earth: The hidden light from which the Messenger of God issues has settled tonight in the belly of Āmina, may good betide her. And the idols of this world turned upside down...²⁷⁴

The association of the universal collapse of idols with the conception of Muḥammad is likewise exhibited in Barzanjī's paraphrase of Tradition²⁷⁵.

The diffusion gained by Wāqidī's report (77) in later sources suggests that the universal collapse of idols was associated in Sunnī memory with the beginning of the Prophetical mission.

Barqī's report (56) and Qummī's report (78), both adduced by Ibn Bābawayh, the pseudo-Wāqidī's passage (57) and Ibn Shahrāshūb's excerpt suggest that the phenomenon was associated in Shī'ī memory with the birth of Muḥammad.

The 'Amr ibn Qutayba report (53), which is indeed one of the three reports quoted with great precaution by Suyūṭī from Abū Nu'aym²⁷⁶, suggests that the association of the universal collapse of idols with the birth of Muḥammad existed at an early stage of Ṣūfī Tradition.

The association of the universal collapse of idols with the conception of Muḥammad is something of a problem, since it is apparently not attested anywhere before Ibn Ḥajar. However, the figure of Ka'b shared by Aḥmad ad-Dardīr's report (79) and

²⁷⁴. Aḥmad ad-Dardīr's *Mawlid*, *apud* Nabḥānī, p. 1277.

²⁷⁵. Barzanjī, p. 8.

²⁷⁶. The other ones are the Ibn 'Abbās report (59), and the al-'Abbās report (40) encountered in the analysis of the Syrian castles tradition. It seems reasonable to assume that the al-'Abbās and 'Amr ibn Qutayba reports (omitted in the abridged version of the *Dalā'il*) were adduced, together with the Ibn 'Abbās report (preserved in the abridged version), in section 33, and were likewise intended to illustrate the equal distinction of Muḥammad and Jesus.

Qummī's report (78) suggests a common origin. Since the association of the universal collapse of idols with the conception of Muḥammad is not attested anywhere before Ibn Ḥajar, we may assume that the association of the tradition with his birth took shape earlier. Since, on the other hand, the association of the throne tradition and of the universal version of the woman soothsayer tradition with the conception of Muḥammad is only attested in the Ibn 'Abbās report (59), we may assume that the association of the universal collapse of idols with that event took shape in Ṣūfī Tradition. Since, finally, the association of the universal collapse of idols with the birth of Muḥammad is also attested in the 'Amr ibn Qutayba report (53), we may assume that the association of the tradition with his conception represents a development internal to Ṣūfī Tradition. That this development took place after the time of Abū Nu'aym, but long before the time of Ibn Ḥajar, seems to be a reasonable assumption.

The report exhibiting the association of the universal collapse of idols with the conception of Muḥammad was uniformly excluded from Sunnī sources up to the time of Ibn Ḥajar. This report was adduced in a paraphrastic form by Ibn Ḥajar, alluded to by Ḥalabī and adduced in what may be its original form by Aḥmad ad-Dardīr, not as one of distinctively Ṣūfī flavour, but simply as part of *Sīra* Tradition. Unlike the association of the universal collapse of idols with the birth of Muḥammad, appearing after Suyūṭī in Ḥalabī alone, the association of the tradition with his conception seems then to have been eventually integrated into Sunnī memory.

It appears now that the association of both the voice coming from the idol and the collapse of the individual idol with the birth of Muḥammad is specific to the 'Urwa and Asmā' reports (66, 67). The association of both phenomena with the view that Muḥammad was born at night has an obvious parallel in the Hānī' report (54), likewise adduced for the first time by scholars of the second half of the third century (Ṭabarī and Kharā'iṭī himself).

The diffusion gained by the 'Urwa and Asmā' reports in late sources suggests that the association of both the voice coming from the idol and the collapse of the individual idol with the birth of Muḥammad was eventually integrated into Sunnī memory, where they were previously associated with the beginning of the Prophetical mission, and that the two associations came to coexist in that memory. The association of both phenomena with the view that Muḥammad was born at night did not necessarily play a role in the diffusion of these reports in late sources, and may have been simply inherited as part of the reports.

e. The shooting stars tradition

In the continuation of the Ibn Kharrabūdh report (1) encountered in the analysis of the Monday tradition, we read:

Iblīs used to travel across the seven heavens. When Jesus was born, he was debarred from [entering] the three [upper] heavens, but still had access to the four [lower] heavens. When the Messenger of God was born, he was debarred from [entering] the seven heavens, and the devils were pelted with stars.²⁷⁷

The report as adduced by Suyūṭī and Ṣāliḥī, both quoting Ibn Bakkār and Ibn 'Asākir, ends with "he was debarred from [entering] the seven heavens"²⁷⁸.

The following paraphrase is adduced by Ibn Ḥajar:

That night [*i. e.* the night Muḥammad was born], the devils who used to listen by stealth were pelted from the heavens with shooting stars.²⁷⁹

The pelting of devils at the birth of Muḥammad appears in Barzanjī's paraphrase of Tradition²⁸⁰.

²⁷⁷. Ibn 'Asākir, I, p. 57.

²⁷⁸. Suyūṭī, I, p. 127. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 350.

²⁷⁹. Ibn Ḥajar's *Mawlid*, *apud* Nabḥānī, p. 1118.

²⁸⁰. Barzanjī, p. 13.

Barqī's report (56) encountered above starts as follows:

Iblīs used to travel across the seven heavens. When Jesus was born, he was debarred from [entering] the three [upper] heavens, but could still travel across the four [lower] heavens. When the Messenger of God was born... he was debarred from [entering] the seven heavens altogether, and the devils were pelted with stars.²⁸¹

Here, the shooting stars tradition is indirectly associated with the view that Muḥammad was born at night through its combination with traditions associated with this view, such as the palace tradition.

This passage is excerpted from the report by Ibn Shahrāshūb²⁸².

The same passage appears in Rāwandī's paraphrase of Tradition²⁸³.

Before the passage of Qummī's report (21) considered in the analysis of the Meccan Jew tradition, Āmina tells about her delivery of Muḥammad:

When he fell onto the earth, he protected himself against [its impurities] with his hands and knees, and he raised his head toward the sky. A light came out of me which illuminated what is between the heavens and the earth. The devils were pelted with stars, and they were debarred from [entering] the heavens...²⁸⁴

Here, the shooting stars tradition is indirectly associated with the view that Muḥammad was born at night through its combination with the Meccan Jew tradition, itself associated with this view.

In the continuation of Abū Manṣūr's report (52) encountered in the analysis of the Syrian castles tradition, we read:

The wonders which Iblīs had seen that night prompted him to travel in the heavens. He had a sitting-place in the third heaven, [where] the devils used to listen by stealth. When the devils saw the wonders, they tried to listen by stealth. They found themselves debarred from [entering] the

281. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 253.

282. Ibn Shahrāshūb, I, p. 31.

283. Rāwandī, I, p. 21.

284. Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl*, pp. 196-197.

heavens altogether, and they were pelted with shooting stars. That was a sign of Muḥammad's prophethood (*dalālatan li-nubuwwatihi*).²⁸⁵

In Sunnī Tradition, except for the Ibn Kharrabūdh report, the shooting stars tradition is never associated with the birth of Muḥammad:

In a report (80) transmitted by Yūnus and Bakkā'ī from Ibn Ishāq, we read:

When the Messenger of God was about to receive his call and when his mission was about to start (*lammā taqāraba amr rasūli llah wa ḥaḍara mab'athuhu*), the devils were debarred from hearing [words uttered in the heavens], the sitting places which they habitually used in order to listen by stealth were rendered inaccessible for them, and they were pelted with stars. Thus, the genies knew that a divine decree concerning human creatures was being carried out.²⁸⁶

The following report (81) is adduced by Ibn Sa'd:

When the mission of Muḥammad was initiated (*lammā bu'itha*), the genies were driven away and pelted with stars. Previously, they used to listen [to words uttered in the heavens], and each class of genies had a sitting-place for that purpose...²⁸⁷

The access of genies to celestial information, ending with the beginning of the Prophetic mission, is described at length in a variant report adduced by Abū Nu'aym, with a chain having as intermediary link Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Abī Shayba²⁸⁸.

The following report (82) is adduced by Abū Nu'aym, with a chain having Wāqidī as intermediary link:

When the day came on which the Messenger of God started to prophesy (*lammā kāna l-yawmu lladhī tanabba'a fihi*), the devils were denied access to the heavens, and they were pelted with shooting stars...²⁸⁹

285. Abū Manṣūr, I, pp. 331-332.

286. 'Uṭāridī, pp. 90-91. Ibn Hishām, I, p. 217.

287. Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 132.

288. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, pp. 293-294.

289. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 295.

In a report (83) adduced by Abū Nu'aym with the same chain, we read:

The devils used to listen to revelation. When God initiated the mission of Muḥammad (*fa-lammā ba'atha llāh Muḥammadan*), they were debarred from doing so.²⁹⁰

These reports vary as to the identity of the creatures in question (devils or genies), and as to the character of the celestial words heard by them (information or revelation), but they uniformly state that the creatures were debarred from hearing the celestial words at the beginning of the Prophetical mission. The phenomenon is implicitly associated with the revelation of the Qur'ān, and signifies that this process, unlike previous descents of celestial words, was concealed to all creatures until the words reached their human recipient. Indeed, those words were of unprecedentedly important content, and their communication to Muḥammad was an unprecedented event, which God's design did not allow to be shared by intrusive ears. The association of the phenomenon with the birth of Muḥammad, which seems at first sight less consistent, implies that this event, rather than the revelation of the Qur'ān, is of unprecedented character.

The reports just translated suggest that the shooting stars tradition was associated in Sunnī memory with the beginning of the Prophetical mission. On the other hand, the Ibn Kharrabūdh report (1), transmitted by Ibn Bakkār from Ibn Zabāla, shows that the association of the shooting stars tradition with the birth of Muḥammad was part of Sunnī Tradition in the second half of the second century. The disappearance of the report (except in Ibn 'Asākir), as well as its appearance in an amputated form (in Suyūṭī and Ṣāliḥī), suggests that the latter association was sensed as irregular by Sunnī scholars up to a late period. However, the reappearance of the Ibn Kharrabūdh report in a paraphrastic form (in Ibn Ḥajar) and its persistent appearance in such a form (in Barzanjī) suggest that the association of the shooting stars tradition with the birth of Muḥammad was eventually integrated into Sunnī memory. The view that Muḥammad was born at night, previously

²⁹⁰. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 296.

never associated with the shooting stars tradition, appears here as a tradition specific, obviously not to Ibn Ḥajar, but to the group responsible for the paraphrase of the report.

The reports translated above show that the association of the shooting stars tradition with the birth of Muḥammad was integrated into Shī'ī memory. That process may have involved the naturalization of the Ibn Kharrabūdh report itself as Barqī's report (56) suggests, or the combination of elements found in the Ibn Kharrabūdh report and in other reports pertaining to the birth of Muḥammad as Qummī's report (21) suggests. The association, in Abū Maṣṣūr's report (52), of the shooting stars tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night may be taken as the formal attestation of a slide (see above, p. 90).

A late fate of the shooting stars tradition deserves some attention.

In the continuation of Muḥammad al-Maghribī's paraphrase encountered in the analysis of the palace tradition, we read:

The devils who overlooked [the lower heavens] in order to listen were pelted, and Iblīs was debarred from [hearing] celestial information.²⁹¹

Like the disturbance affecting the order of things in Kisrā's kingdom, the pelting of devils is here associated with the conception of Muḥammad. As in the previous case, this association clearly represents a late Ṣūfī deviation from the original association with the birth of Muḥammad exhibited in the Ibn Kharrabūdh report.

²⁹¹. Muḥammad al-Maghribī's *Mawlid*, apud Nabḥānī, p. 1110.

f. The guardian angel tradition

The following report (84) is adduced by Suyūṭī, quoting the *Tafsīr* of [‘Abdarrahmān ibn Muḥammad ar-Rāzī] Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/939) and mentioning the ascription of the report to ‘Ikrima:

When the Prophet was born, the earth shone with light, and Iblīs said: Tonight (*al-laylata*) was born a boy who will ruin our business. His auxiliaries told him: Why don't you go to him and ruin his reason? When he came near the Prophet, God sent Gabriel, who kicked him so [violently] that he fell down at Aden.²⁹²

This report is adduced in a slightly variant form by Ṣāliḥī, quoting Ibn Abī Ḥātim without mentioning his *Tafsīr*²⁹³, and by Ḥalabī, mentioning ‘Ikrima without quoting Ibn Abī Ḥātim²⁹⁴.

In the continuation of Qummī's report (21) encountered above, we read:

The devils went to Iblīs and informed him that they had been denied access to the heavens, and that they had been pelted with shooting stars. He said: Inquire about that, something must have happened. They travelled around the world, and came back saying: We haven't seen anything. He said: I'll take care of that. He travelled across what is between the place of sunrise and the place of

²⁹². Suyūṭī, I, p. 127. On Ibn Abī Ḥātim, see Dhahabī, XIII, pp. 263-269. Since Suyūṭī has omitted the chain of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, we have no clue as to the identity of his source, although it is not unreasonable to assume that the report was transmitted from a *Tafsīr* ‘Ikrima available to him. Since, on the other hand, Suyūṭī does not mention the Scriptural phrase which the report was intended to explain, we cannot determine whether or not this phrase was associated at a previous stage of the exegetical Tradition with other events of the life of Muḥammad, or with other episodes of salvation history. The solution of the first problem must be sought in Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *Tafsīr* itself, but only a few volumes of this work have, to my knowledge, been published up to now. The solution of the second problem may be found in Suyūṭī's *Durr* (where Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *Tafsīr* is extensively used), but the Būlāq edition of this work is not provided with any index. Thus, the solution of both problems would involve a great deal of research -or of luck- and was not attempted here.

²⁹³. Ṣāliḥī, I, p. 350.

²⁹⁴. Ḥalabī, I, p. 111.

sunset. When he reached the Sacred Territory, he found it guarded by angels. When he tried to come in, Gabriel shouted at him: Go away, o cursed one!..²⁹⁵

Here, the guardian angel tradition is indirectly associated with the view that Muḥammad was born at night through its combination with the Meccan Jew tradition, itself associated with this view.

Toward the end of Barqī's report (56), we read:

Iblīs called his devils anxiously, and they came to him saying: What has frightened you, o lord? He said: Woe to you! I don't recognize the heavens and the earth tonight, something considerable must have happened. Indeed, no such thing has happened since Jesus the son of Mary was raised [to heaven]. Go and find out what has happened. They parted, and came back saying: We haven't found anything. Iblīs said: I'll take care of that matter. He plunged into the world, and travelled around it until he reached the Sacred Territory, which he found guarded by angels. When he tried to come in, they shouted at him, and he went back. He took the appearance of a sparrow, and entered [the Sacred Territory] facing Ḥirā'. Gabriel said to him: Go back, may God curse you!..²⁹⁶

A similar passage appears in the paraphrases of Tradition provided by Ibn Shahrāshūb²⁹⁷ and Rāwandī²⁹⁸. The variation exhibited here does not affect the allusion to the night of birth of Muḥammad.

In the continuation of Wāqidī's report (83) encountered above, we read:

The devils complained about that [*i. e.* about being debarred from listening to revelation] to Iblīs. He said: Something must have happened. He climbed over Abū Qubays... and saw the Messenger of God praying behind the station [of Abraham]. He said [to himself]: I'll go and break his neck.

²⁹⁵. Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl*, pp. 196-197.

²⁹⁶. Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, p. 254.

²⁹⁶. Ibn Shahrāshūb, I, p. 31.

²⁹⁸. Rāwandī, I, pp. 69-70.

He came, walking proudly, and Gabriel followed him. Gabriel gave him a kick so [violent] that it threw him down at [the place] such and such...²⁹⁹

This report is adduced by Ibn Kathīr, quoting Wāqidī³⁰⁰, and by Suyūṭī, quoting Wāqidī and Abū Nu'aym³⁰¹.

In all these reports, Gabriël serves as guardian for Muḥammad, protecting him, at a crucial moment of his life, against the mischievous plots of Iblīs, whose power is endangered by the appearance of Muḥammad at that moment. Therefore, it may be conceded that each report represents a version of the same tradition. In Wāqidī's report (83), the crucial moment is the beginning of the Prophetical mission. In the 'Ikrima report (84) and in the Shī'ī reports, the crucial moment is the birth of Muḥammad.

The diffusion gained by Wāqidī's report in later sources suggests that the guardian angel tradition was associated in Sunnī memory with the beginning of the Prophetical mission. On the other hand, the 'Ikrima report, presumably transmitted by Ibn Abī Ḥātim from some *Tafsīr*, shows that the association of the tradition with the birth of Muḥammad was part of the Sunnī exegetical Tradition in the first half of the third century. The association of the guardian angel tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night has an obvious parallel in other reports (54, 66, 67), likewise adduced for the first time by scholars of the second half of that century (Ṭabarī and Kharā'itī). Until the time of Suyūṭī, the association of the tradition with the birth of Muḥammad seems to have been restricted to its occurrence in Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *Tafsīr*.

When Suyūṭī adduced the 'Ikrima report in the *Khaṣā'is*, he used his interdisciplinary skills, but, by mentioning his source in accordance with scholarly rules,

²⁹⁹. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, I, p. 296.

³⁰⁰. Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 420.

³⁰¹. Suyūṭī, I, p. 278.

betrayed the intrusiveness of the report in *Sīra* literature. However, the report was dissociated from *Tafsīr* literature by Ṣāliḥī, and from Ibn Abī Ḥātim himself by Ḥalabī. It appears then that the association of the guardian angel tradition with the birth of Muḥammad was eventually integrated into Sunnī memory, where the tradition was previously associated with the beginning of the Prophetical mission, and that the two associations came to coexist in that memory. The association of the guardian angel tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night did not necessarily play a role in the diffusion of the 'Ikrima report in late sources, and may have been simply inherited as part of the report.

The reports translated above suggest that the guardian angel tradition was associated in Shī'ī memory with the birth of Muḥammad. The association, in Barqī's report (56), of the tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night may be taken as the formal attestation of a slide. The paraphrases of Ibn Shahrāshūb and Rāwandī suggest that this association was integrated into Shī'ī memory.

g. Conclusion

In what precedes, we have encountered the view that Muḥammad was born at night as associated with the new order traditions at the earliest retrievable stage of transmission of the Sunnī reports. The case of the shooting stars tradition represents an exception, and we should bear in mind, moreover, that, in the Ibn Kharrabūdh report, this tradition is combined with a dating tradition, itself associated with the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke. The association of the new order traditions with the view that Muḥammad was born at night hardly belongs to Sunnī memory, but is specific to reports adduced for the first time by scholars of the second half of the third century and reproduced, except for the Hānī' report, only by late scholars.

On the other hand, we have encountered the view that Muḥammad was born at night at the earliest retrievable stage of transmission of Shī'ī reports exhibiting the

combination of the new order traditions with other traditions. This view appears here as an independent tradition which, though associated with individual narrative traditions and occasionally inherited as part of previous material, can slide to other traditions contained in the reports. Such a slide is formally attested in two reports.

IV. Reconstruction

The reader may now be convinced that the method presented in my introductory chapter enables us to apprehend the variation of *Sīra* Tradition more distinctly, but has good reasons to question the claim that, through the use of my method, this variation can be reconstructed as a diachronic process. In the preceding chapter indeed, no comprehensive reconstruction was attempted, although individual diachronic processes were detected. My central argument had to be postponed, because it would be useless to reconstruct the diachronic process independently of the dynamics animating it which, as I have claimed in the introduction, can itself be reconstructed as a conceptual development. It should be obvious to the reader that such a reconstruction cannot be achieved on the basis of textual evidence, and thus involves a great deal of interpretation. My reconstruction will surely be regarded by some as too interpretative, but rests, I think, on a firm basis. I shall resort throughout my argument to conceptions of the Prophet discerned by previous scholars, and to religious conceptions whose existence is documented by evidence found outside *Sīra* literature. I must state here that the phrase "salvation history", extensively used in the present chapter, will be taken in the sense of the conception of history as animated by the salvatory will of God, itself manifested by the carrying out of a specific design as to the guidance of man. That this conception is shared by Islam with other monotheistic religions seems beyond doubt.

1. The birth of the Prophet

In a study remarkably free from the concern for historicity, Tor Andrae shows that the figure of Muḥammad gave rise to two rival conceptions of the Prophet. According to the first conception, Muḥammad is a mere man invested with the function of prophethood at a certain point of his life. According to the second conception, Muḥammad is a superhuman being invested with the attribute of prophethood through an election preceding his terrestrial existence. It appears from Andrae's study that the first conception, which is indeed exhibited in Scripture, was favoured by Sunnī scholars. The second conception was originally the product of Shī'ī and Ṣūfī speculations, but permeated, from an early period on, Sunnī Tradition too³⁰².

The distinction manifested by Andrae between two conceptions of the Prophet, which I shall refer to as the functional and the ontological prophet, provides the basis of my reconstruction. It must be noted, however, that these conceptions were discerned through a study of dogmatic material, and of traditional material directly related to dogmatic issues. The reader may already sense that the content of *Sīra* is not reducible to dogma, and hence that the distinction manifested by Andrae will have to be reconsidered in the course of my argument. I must state here that the term "doctrine", extensively used in the present section, does not suggest that the conceptions discerned in *Sīra* were formulated independently of their traditional articulation, that is dogmatically. That these conceptions are generated by concerns specific to salvation history will be one of the main claims of my interpretation.

At this point, it is convenient to state that the two conceptions of the Prophet bear different implications as to the significance of his birth, although this statement will later prove not to be strictly accurate. According to the conception of the functional prophet, the birth of Muḥammad deserves attention to the extent that it initiates the life of the prophet to

³⁰². *Die person Muḥammeds in lehre und glauben seiner gemeinde*, Upsala, 1917, pp. 290-390.

be, but has otherwise no significance in salvation history. It is the beginning of the Prophetic mission that initiates the carrying out of God's design. According to the conception of the ontological prophet, however, the birth of Muḥammad represents the emergence to personal existence of a being pre-existently invested with the attribute of prophethood. The beginning of the Prophetic mission deserves attention to the extent that it initiates Scriptural revelation, but has no deeper significance in salvation history. According to this conception, it is the birth of Muḥammad that initiates the carrying out of God's design.

a. Sunnī and Ṣūfī Traditions

It appears from the exclusive association, in the works of Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī, of all the new order traditions with the beginning of the Prophetic mission that the functional prophet was indeed the original conception among Sunnī scholars. Here, it is with the appearance of Muḥammad as a man invested with the function of prophethood that the old order collapses and a new one emerges. The establishment of a new order represents here a corollary of Scriptural revelation which, as the utmost manifestation of the salvatory will of God, has a deleterious impact on the forces leading man to damnation.

That the functional prophet was the original conception among Sunnī scholars is also reflected in the doctrinal indifference of the Monday tradition, representing already in the first half of the second century (as documented by Ibn Ishāq's work) the Sunnī collective view as to the day of the week on which Muḥammad was born (see above, p. 40). By "doctrinal indifference", I mean that, since no particular quality was ascribed to Monday in Islamic Tradition³⁰³, the Monday tradition could hardly suggest a particular

³⁰³. The reader acquainted with *Hadīth* literature will surely object that Monday was regarded as a day of divine forgiveness, and as a day of supererogatory fasting. A cursory examination of traditional evidence suffices to remove this objection. The first tradition (Monday as a day of divine forgiveness) is of ethical character. This tradition consists in the view that the deeds performed by men during the week are

significance of the birth of Muḥammad. It is difficult to determine the origin of the view that Muḥammad was born on Monday³⁰⁴, but it seems clear that the Monday tradition came to serve as a confessional emblem (against the Shī'ī Friday).

presented to God on Monday and that He forgives then the bad deeds (except those of the man who bears enmity toward his brother), not that the good deeds performed on Monday are better remunerated and the bad deeds then perpetrated more easily forgiven. The relevant reports, moreover, state that the presentation of deeds and the divine pardon occur twice a week: on Monday and on Thursday (see Muslim, VIII, pp. 11-12). The second tradition (Monday as a day of supererogatory fasting) is of a legal character. This tradition consists in the view that the fast performed on Monday is a valid practice, not that this fast is a work of particular merit. The relevant reports, except for one which associates Monday as a day of supererogatory fasting with Monday as the day of birth of Muḥammad (see below, pp. 157-158), establish the validity of two fasts: that performed on Monday and that performed on Thursday. Most reports contain a mere reference to the Prophetical precedent supporting the validity of both fasts (see, for instance, Ibn Māja, I, p. 553 and Tirmidhī, III, p. 280). In some reports, the Prophet refers to the presentation of deeds, or to the divine pardon, occurring on Monday and on Thursday. This reference is hardly intended to support the validity of the fasts performed on Monday and on Thursday, but seeks to suggest that the devotional attitude involved in fasting befits the state of greater proximity to God in which man finds himself by virtue of the presentation of his deeds (see Ibn Māja, I, p. 553 and Tirmidhī, III, p. 281). Thus, the evidence does not indicate that a particular quality was ascribed to Monday, although it seems clear that Monday and Thursday occupied in the hierarchy of days a higher position than Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Saturday.

³⁰⁴. The discussion found in Western scholarship centers upon the correspondence between the day of birth of Muḥammad and the day of his death, first noted by Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, I, p. 15. For Muir, this correspondence betrays a process whereby the day of death of Muḥammad (whose historicity is taken for granted) was "superstitiously extended backwards" to his birth, in an attempt to overcome the lack of eyewitness information about that event (whose inconspicuousness in Mecca is inferred from the rather low social status of Muḥammad). Jewish influence is claimed by Eugen Mittwoch, "Muḥammeds Geburts- und Todestag", *Islamica* II (1926), pp. 397-401. Such an influence applies, however, to the view that Muḥammad was born and died on the same day of the month (the twelfth of Rabi' al-awwal), not to the view that he was born (and died) on Monday. The "synchronism" among the birth of Muḥammad, his arrival at Medina and his death is noted by Sellheim, "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte", pp. 77-78. This

It appears from the attestation of the announcement and miracle traditions in early sources that a radical conception of the functional prophet, according to which the birth of Muḥammad and all events prior to the beginning of his mission have no religious significance at all, was never actually dominant among Sunnī scholars. According to the moderate conception of the functional prophet reflected in these traditions, the birth of Muḥammad does not represent the actualization of his prophethood, but provides a context for the manifestation of signs of his future prophethood. On the one hand, the particular circumstances of the birth of Muḥammad are recognized as such signs by the possessors of inherited knowledge within the religious communities which came to reject Islam. On the other hand, the miracles occurring in the immediate surroundings of that event are merely witnessed by the uninformed Arabs, who serve here as innocent reporters.

The case of the rising star tradition deserves particular notice.

The association, in one recension of Ibn Ishāq's work (which is likely to preserve the report originally adduced by that scholar), of the rising star tradition with the beginning of the Prophetic mission suggests that a radical conception of the functional prophet, according to which only the determining episode of salvation history provides a context for the

synchronism is related by Sellheim to a primitive form of dating, while the placing of the three events on the twelfth of Rabi' al-awwal is ascribed to Ibn Ishāq himself. The same synchronism is merely taken as evidence of the "principle of balance" (as opposed to genuine historical concern) governing the chronology of the *Sira* in Lawrence Conrad, "Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition. Some indications of intercultural transmission", *Byzantinische Forschungen* XV (1990), p. 17. In both arguments, the choice of Monday remains unexplained. Mittwoch's claim is developed by Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, pp. 190-191 (curiously enough, no reference to Mittwoch is found here). Rubin adds that "The selection of Monday seems also to stem from Jewish tradition, in which Monday and Thursday in particular were known as days of fasting" (*ibid.*, p. 191). A borrowing from an extra-Islamic Tradition is bound to remain hypothetical, but acquires some plausibility if the specific need met by the borrowed item within the Islamic conceptual framework is manifested. Rubin, however, gives no clue as to what significance ascribed by Muslims to certain events of the life of Muḥammad could bring about their placing on a

manifestation of signs of prophethood, existed among Sunnī scholars in the first half of the second century. However, it appears from the association, in Wāqidī's work, of the rising star tradition with both the birth of Muḥammad and the beginning of his mission that a moderate conception of the functional prophet coexisted with a radical conception in the second half of that century. The supersession of the latter association by the former association, reflected in later sources, suggests that a moderate conception of the functional prophet came to be dominant among Sunnī scholars.

That a moderate conception of the functional prophet came to be dominant among Sunnīs is also suggested by the revival, not much earlier than the seventh century, of the day of the elephant tradition in the modified report (6) adduced by Ibn Sayyid an-nās. The association, exhibited in this tradition, of the birth of Muḥammad with an episode of salvation history could fit in particularly well with such a conception. As an event occurring on the day God saved Mecca, the birth of Muḥammad was integrated into salvation history, but hardly superseded the beginning of the Prophetical mission. As a miracle occurring on the day Muḥammad was born, the salvation of Mecca did not manifest the actualization of his prophethood, but provided a sign of his future prophethood.

The Syrian castles tradition constitutes a particular case. Indeed, this tradition is related to the idea of Prophetical pre-existence and, more specifically, to the view that, before the first man was brought into being, the prophetical substance of Muḥammad was created as a light, and that this light was conveyed to Muḥammad by a genetic chain of transmission³⁰⁵. The phenomenon witnessed by Āmina represents a radiation of the Prophetical light, itself manifesting Muḥammad's pre-existence. It appears from the attestation of the Syrian castles tradition in Ibn Ishāq's work that the idea of Prophetical pre-

Jewish day of fasting.

³⁰⁵. As noted by Uri Rubin, "Pre-existence and light. Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad", *Israel Oriental Studies* V (1975), pp. 87-89.

existence enjoyed success among Sunnī scholars already in the first half of the second century, and coexisted then with the conception of the functional prophet.

Before going any further, we must reconsider the doctrinal dichotomy formulated at the beginning of this section. On the one hand, it appears that the conception of the functional prophet, defined above as a distinct doctrine of prophethood implying the initiatory role played by the beginning of the Prophetical mission in salvation history, did not exist independently of the significance ascribed to that event. On the other hand, it appears that the idea of Prophetical pre-existence, whose implication as to the role played by the birth of Muḥammad in salvation history was taken for granted above, in fact existed as an independent doctrine of prophethood. The doctrinal dichotomy may now be reformulated in the following terms. By "conception of the functional prophet", I mean the view, presupposing no specific doctrine of prophethood, that the carrying out of God's design was initiated at the beginning of the Prophetical mission. The conception of the ontological prophet, which still awaits documentation, may be defined temporarily as the view, presupposing (but not deriving from) the idea of Prophetical pre-existence, that the carrying out of God's design was initiated at the birth of Muḥammad.

We may now return to the Syrian castles tradition. My analysis shows that, in the second half of the second century, the birth of Muḥammad gradually superseded his conception as the appropriate occasion for the appearance of light (see above, p. 82). In order to understand the advantage of the former occasion over the latter occasion, we must dwell upon the genetic mode of transmission just referred to. The Prophetical light was transmitted from one male recipient to the next through the process of physical generation. The transmission of the Prophetical light, then, involved its transportation from the body of a male recipient to a female receptacle. Within that receptacle, the Prophetical light reached its new recipient and was placed in his body³⁰⁶. At the conception of Muḥammad, the

³⁰⁶. See the material produced by Rubin, "Pre-existence and light", pp. 91-98.

Prophetic light was transported from the body of its penultimate recipient (*Abdallāh) to its last receptacle (Āmina's womb), and thus underwent the final stage of its transmission. At the birth of Muḥammad, the Prophetic light accompanied Muḥammad's body in its motion out of Āmina's womb, and thus was definitively set free from the process of physical generation. At the conception of Muḥammad, the Prophetic light had to radiate through Āmina's body, which took part in the final stage of its transmission. At the birth of Muḥammad, the Prophetic light could radiate with no intervening substance other than the body of its ultimate recipient, and thus manifest the end of the process of transmission.

In order to understand the further developments of the Syrian castles tradition, we should bear in mind that, as a divinely created object received by Muḥammad, the Prophetic light was analogous to Scripture. An analogy between the radiation of the Prophetic light and Scriptural revelation, moreover, was favoured by the view that, together with Scripture, Muḥammad received a light. That light, whether taken as an attribute of Scripture or as a distinct entity, represented the divine agency whereby man was guided toward salvation³⁰⁷. That the radiation of the Prophetic light provided an initial guidance, however, was an implication incompatible with the conception of the functional prophet.

³⁰⁷. See, in particular, the following verses:

qad jā'akum burhānūn min rabbikum wa anzalnā ilaykum nūran mubīnan (Q 4:174).

qad jā'akum mina llāhi nūrun wa kitābun mubīnun (Q 5:15).

wa itaba'ū n-nūra lladhī unzila ma'ahu (Q 7:157).

walākin ja'alnāhu nūran nahdī bihi man nashā'u (Q 42:52).

fa-āminū bi-llāhi wa rasūlihi wa n-nūri lladhī anzalnā (Q 64:8).

See also the following line in the *Dīwān* of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a (d. ca 102/713), ed. Paul Schwarz, Leipzig, 1901, p. 73:

lā wa lladhī ba'atha n-nabiyya Muḥammadan / bi-n-nūri wa l-islāmi dīni l-qayyimi

Note that the Light is clearly taken here an independent agency of salvation, and is apparently distinguished from the body of religious precepts (rather than from Scripture).

An attempt to contrast the radiation of the Prophetic light with Scriptural revelation is occasionally reflected in the Sunnī reports. We have seen that, although a tendency to detach the appearance of light from Āmina's body is perceptible in the wording of two reports exhibiting the association of the Syrian castles tradition with the birth of Muḥammad, his body is implicitly excluded here as a source of the phenomenon (see above, p. 82). What was avoided here was presumably an analogy with the process of Scriptural revelation, which indeed involved Muḥammad's body, or rather a specific area of his body, as a medium of the manifestation of divine words. The view, implicit in the wording of the two reports, that the Prophetic light was attached to Muḥammad's body (rather than placed in it) was by no means unreasonable, since, at his birth, the process of transmission had come to an end. On the other hand, I have discerned in the wording of some reports a tendency to restrict the scope of the illumination (see above, pp. 83-84). What was avoided here was presumably an analogy with the role played by Scriptural revelation as a guidance, which indeed involved the delivery of divine words to an extensive audience. The view that the illumination was perceived in a vision exclusively granted by God to the mother of His prophet may signify, moreover, that it was through the collective experience of Scriptural revelation that the radiation of the Prophetic light, duly reported by its single witness, became intelligible as a manifestation of Muḥammad's pre-existence.

Later interpretations and paraphrases show that the birth of Muḥammad continued to be sensed as the appropriate occasion for the appearance of light and, at the same time, that the tendency to restrict the scope of the illumination persisted (see above, p. 86). On the other hand, it appears that, from the sixth century on, Sunnī scholars used their skills to neutralize the analogy between the radiation of the Prophetic light and Scriptural revelation. That neutralization was served by the very view that Muḥammad received a light during his mission, through whose action man was guided toward salvation. Through interpretative procedures, it was established that the radiation of the Prophetic light, while

manifesting Muḥammad's pre-existence, prefigured the radiation of the light of Muḥammad and thus was subordinate to it. The superiority of the latter light was exhibited in its impact on the course of human history. The territorial identity of the illuminated object, which does not seem to have drawn the attention of previous scholars, was taken by Suhaylī as an allusion to the radiation of the light of Muḥammad from Syria during the Umayyad caliphate (see above, p. 87). Suhaylī's interpretation, however, had the disadvantage, on the one hand of posing the existence of a political chain of transmission and, moreover, of emphasizing the position occupied by the controversial Umayyads in that chain, on the other hand of restricting the action of the light of Muḥammad in space and time. The remoteness of the illuminated object was taken by Ibn Rajab as an allusion to the universal and perpetual radiation of the light of Muḥammad, supposedly documented by Scripture (see above, pp. 87-88). Ibn Rajab's interpretation had the advantage of preserving the position occupied by Muḥammad as the only recipient of that light and, on the other hand, of posing the light of Muḥammad as an agency of salvation distinct from Scripture, but sharing its trans-spatiality and trans-temporality. The obvious superiority of Ibn Rajab's interpretation accounts for its diffusion among late scholars.

It appears from the Hānī' report (54), the 'Urwa and Asmā' reports (66, 67), the 'Ikrima report (84) and the Ibn Kharrabūdh report (1 [p. 115]) that the conception of the ontological prophet existed among Sunnīs in the first half of the third century (as documented by the links of 'Alī ibn Ḥarb and Balawī, and by the unknown source of Ibn Abī Ḥātim), and had appeared by the turn of the second century (as documented by the link of Ibn Zabāla). Here, it is with the emergence to personal existence of a being pre-existently invested with the attribute of prophethood that the old order collapses and a new one emerges. The establishment of a new order represents here an independent manifestation of the salvatory will of God, whereby man is enduringly protected from the forces leading him to damnation.

Since the new order traditions were exclusively associated, in the works of Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī, with the beginning of the Prophetical mission, we may assume that their association with the birth of Muḥammad represents a development of Sunnī Tradition, itself reflecting a shift of conception from the functional to the ontological prophet. Such a shift is betrayed, in one instance, by the fate of the shooting stars tradition, which loses its narrative consistency when dissociated from Scriptural revelation, as late Sunnī scholars themselves seem to have sensed (see above, p. 118).

It can hardly be doubted that the association of the new order traditions with the birth of Muḥammad, in reports adduced for the first time by Sunnī scholars of the third century, represents a development internal to Sunnī Tradition. However, this development is unlikely to reflect an evolution of Sunnī doctrine, since the reports were not adduced in the historical framework of the life of Muḥammad. We may suppose that proto-Ṣūfī scholars, that is scholars differing from the Sunnī scholars in doctrine but depending upon the Sunnī articulation of *Sīra* Tradition, were responsible for the association of the new order traditions with the birth of Muḥammad. While inheriting Sunnī Tradition, such scholars were dissatisfied with items bearing a significance incompatible with their own doctrine. In the present case, the association of the new order traditions with the beginning of the Prophetical mission could indeed not fit in with the conception of the ontological prophet.

It appears from the Ibn 'Abbās report (59 [p. 101, p. 104]) and the 'Amr ibn Qutayba report (53 [p. 112]) that, by the turn of the third century (as documented by the link of 'Amr ibn Muḥammad ibn aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ and by the unknown source of Ṭabarānī), Ṣūfī scholars had emancipated themselves from Sunnī Tradition, and had articulated a *Sīra* Tradition of their own. These reports exhibit a twofold departure from the Sunnī reports, indeed one going beyond the change likely to occur in the course of transmission from one group to a doctrinally different group. On the one hand, the new order traditions are here

associated with the conception of Muḥammad in two cases (the throne, the woman soothsayer), and with his birth in one case (the idol). The former association, never found in the Sunnī reports, reflects a radical conception of the ontological prophet: it is with the emergence to mere physical existence of a being pre-existently invested with the attribute of prophethood that the old order collapses and a new one emerges. According to that conception, the carrying out of God's design had to be initiated at the earliest moment of the terrestrial existence of Muḥammad. On the other hand, the phenomena described by the new order traditions, spatially restricted in most Sunnī reports, are here always universal ones. According to a radical conception of the ontological prophet, the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood had to affect the widest possible range of objects, and to involve the widest possible range of phenomena.

It can hardly be doubted that the universal collapse of idols, in the 'Amr ibn Qutayba report, was borrowed from a Sunnī report (77), where the tradition is associated with the beginning of the Prophetic mission. It appears then that early Ṣūfī scholars, while being dissatisfied with the Sunnī articulation of *Sīra* Tradition, were willing to borrow individual items potentially compatible with their own doctrine. The universal collapse of idols, once associated with the birth of Muḥammad, could indeed fit in with a radical conception of the ontological prophet.

The association, in the Ibn 'Abbās report, of the throne tradition and of the universal version of the woman soothsayer tradition with the conception of Muḥammad can hardly represent a direct deviation from Sunnī Tradition, where these traditions simply did not exist. It seems reasonable to assume the existence of an intermediate stage, at which the throne tradition and the universal version of the woman soothsayer tradition emerged in association with the birth of Muḥammad. Whether such a process took place at an initial stage of Ṣūfī Tradition or outside that Tradition must, in the absence of textual evidence, remain undecided.

A development analogous to the one just reconstructed is documented by the report (79) exhibiting the association of the universal collapse of idols with the conception of Muḥammad. I have already argued that this association represents a relatively late development of Ṣūfī Tradition, where the universal collapse of idols was originally associated with the birth of Muḥammad (see above, pp. 113-114). It may now be stated that the present development completed the shift of association presumably undergone by the throne tradition and by the universal version of the woman soothsayer tradition at an early stage of Ṣūfī Tradition.

It can hardly be doubted that the association, in the al-'Abbās report (40), of the Syrian castles tradition with the birth of Muḥammad was inherited from Sunnī Tradition. We have seen, however, that the appearance of light is attached here to Muḥammad's body which, in the Sunnī reports, is uniformly excluded as a source of the phenomenon (see above, p. 91). This distinctive feature suggests that the analogy with the process of Scriptural revelation was exploited by Ṣūfī scholars. Indeed, it can hardly be fortuitous that the area of Muḥammad's body through which divine words were manifested was selected here as the medium of the radiation of the Prophetical light. Thus, the radiation of the Prophetical light could manifest, not only Muḥammad's pre-existence, but also the role played by his person as a blessed presence.

Before going any further, we must reconsider the definition of the conception of the ontological prophet proposed at a previous stage of my argument (see above, p. 131). On the one hand, it appears from the Ṣūfī articulation of *Sīra* Tradition that the birth of Muḥammad, whose initiatory role in salvation history was taken above as the hard core of the conception of the ontological prophet, was gradually replaced in that capacity by his conception. On the other hand, it appears that the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood, identified above with the establishment of a new order, was provided with an additional manifestation of the salvatory will of God which only his birth could involve: the infusion of the world with blessedness through his person. The central role retained by the

birth of Muḥammad in salvation history is reflected, not only in the distinctively Ṣūfī version of the Syrian castles tradition, but also in the universal illumination tradition (report 53), which unambiguously indicates that the world was infused with blessedness through his person. Whereas the establishment of a new order represents the initial step in the carrying out of God's design, completed by the revelation of divine law, the infusion of the world with blessedness through the person of Muḥammad represents a gift exceptionally bestowed upon man. The conception of the ontological prophet may now be redefined, in more general terms, as the view that the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood had to be separated from the beginning of the Prophetical mission by the widest possible time span. The conception of the ontological prophet reflected in the association of the new order traditions with the conception of Muḥammad, which has just been qualified as radical, betrays an attempt to provide the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood with an occasion earlier than his birth. The conception of the ontological prophet reflected in the distinctively Ṣūfī version of the Syrian castles tradition, as well as in the universal illumination tradition, betrays an attempt to provide the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood with an additional dimension: the bestowal of divine grace upon man.

Finally, we may note that late Ṣūfī scholars such as Muḥammad al-Maghribī could expand the radical tendencies of their predecessors while depending upon the Sunnī articulation of *Sīra* Tradition. Indeed, the association of the palace and shooting stars traditions with the conception of Muḥammad was achieved through the paraphrase of early reports exhibiting the association of these traditions with his birth (see above, p. 100 and p. 119).

I have suggested above that, in the first half of the third century, proto-Ṣūfī scholars attempted to bend Sunnī Tradition in the direction of their doctrine. This attempt was made possible by the ambiguous position of such scholars in relation to the Sunnī group: doctrinally, they were outsiders but, confessionally, insiders. We must now note that the

proto-Šūfī attempt to bend Sunnī Tradition was rather unsuccessful, since the reports exhibiting the association of the new order traditions with the birth of Muḥammad, adduced for the first time by Sunnī scholars of the third century, later almost totally disappeared from Sunnī sources.

The case of the Hāni' report (54) indeed represents an exception, but we must remember that the new order is here prefigured, rather than actualized, by supernatural phenomena concomitant with the birth of Muḥammad. Thus, the Hāni' report was not incompatible with a moderate conception of the functional prophet, and could gain diffusion in Sunnī sources at the expense of the Wahb report (55). The reason for the diffusion of the Hāni' report and the parallel relegation of the Wahb report to a secondary position lies in the ambiguity of the palace tradition: the phenomena described by this tradition appear during the lifetime of Muḥammad, but point ahead to a later period, namely the time of the conquests. The Wahb report presupposes the initiatory role played by the beginning of the Prophetical mission in salvation history, but was of little use for the conception of the functional prophet, since the actualization of the new order is here postponed until a later period. The Hāni' report poses the birth of Muḥammad as the determining episode of salvation history and, as such, reflects a shift of conception from the functional to the ontological prophet, but was of some use for a moderate conception of the functional prophet. Although the actualization of the new order could hardly be located at the beginning of the Prophetical mission, its prefiguration could indeed be easily assimilated to the manifestation of preparatory signs.

It was only at a late period that the dominance of the functional prophet in Sunnī doctrine was endangered. The second offensive of the ontological prophet, this time a successful one, was led by Sunnī scholars receptive to Šūfī doctrine. The result was, not a development of Sunnī Tradition, but the rehabilitation, in the historical framework of the life of Muḥammad, of material hitherto excluded from Sunnī sources.

First, the reports exhibiting the association of the new order traditions with the birth of Muḥammad reappeared in the works of Ibn Kathīr (the idol), Suyūṭī (the guardian angel) and Ibn Ḥajar (the shooting stars). Those reports continued to appear up to the works of Ḥalabī (the idol, the guardian angel) and Barzanjī (the shooting stars). The Wahb report, exhibiting the association of the palace tradition with the beginning of the Prophetical mission, made an exceptional appearance in Ṣāliḥī's work in a modified form, exhibiting the association of this tradition with the birth of Muḥammad (see above, p. 95).

Second, the reports exhibiting the association of the new order traditions with the conception of Muḥammad reappeared in the works of Suyūṭī (the throne and the woman soothsayer) and Ibn Ḥajar (the idol). Those reports continued to appear up to Aḥmad ad-Dardīr's work (the throne, the idol).

It appears then that Sunnī scholars were gradually won over, from the eighth century on, by the conception of the ontological prophet and, from the ninth century on, by a radical expression of that conception, both inherited from Ṣūfī doctrine. However, the ontological prophet is unlikely to have superseded the functional prophet, a conception inherited from early Sunnī doctrine, since the reports exhibiting the association of the new order traditions with the beginning of the Prophetical mission were not excluded from Sunnī sources. The formal change undergone by the Wahb report in Ṣāliḥī's work does not represent such an exclusion, but merely reflects the diffusion gained by the Hānī' report thanks to its compatibility with a moderate conception of the functional prophet. Thus, the ontological prophet came to coexist with the functional prophet. In that coexistence, two originally rival conceptions could meet without clash. The combination of receptiveness to Ṣūfī doctrine and loyalty to early Sunnī doctrine produced what may be designated as the late Sunnī compromise.

b. Shī'ī Tradition

It appears from the exclusive association, in Shī'ī sources, of all the new order traditions with the birth of Muḥammad, and occasionally with his conception, that the ontological prophet was the only conception ever existing among Shī'ī scholars.

That no other conception ever coexisted among Shī'ī scholars with the ontological prophet is also reflected in the doctrinal significance of the Friday tradition which, by the middle of the third century (as documented by Ya'qūbī's work), had emerged as a distinctively Shī'ī view with regard to the day of the week on which Muḥammad was born (see above, pp. 44-45). Although the view that Muḥammad was born on Friday was clearly the product of the attempt to dissociate from Sunnī Tradition and, more specifically, to provide a confessional emblem substitutive for the Monday tradition, the choice of Friday may not have been an innocent one.

We have seen in the analyses of the Ṣūfī solution and of the Friday tradition, that, according to the conception of transhistorical time, the blessedness of time originates in history, and is manifested at every recurrence of a time blessed by virtue of a blessed event (see above, pp. 37-38 and pp. 47-48). According to another religious conception of time, the blessedness of time originates in God's design itself, and is manifested at every recurrence of an intrinsically blessed time. The latter conception, however, bears a historical implication, namely that the intrinsic blessedness of a time brings about the occurrence of blessed events at that time.

Shī'ī, as well as Sunnī, Tradition indeed ascribed to Friday an intrinsic blessedness, distinct from its position as the day of communal worship³⁰⁸. As the determining episode

³⁰⁸. See, for instance, the following reports:

There is on Friday a time at which, if a Muslim requests something in prayer, God grants his request (Muslim, III, p. 5).

The most excellent of your days is Friday... Pray much upon me then. Indeed, your prayers will be presented to me (Nasā'ī, III, p. 63).

of salvation history, the birth of Muḥammad was indeed an event of unequalled blessedness and, as such, had to occur on Friday³⁰⁹.

The sun never rose upon a day better than Friday. It was on Friday that Adam was created, that he was expelled from paradise, that he was forgiven and that he died... (Mālik, p. 82).

... In each category of things, God has chosen one thing. Among the days, He has chosen Friday (Kulaynī, *Furū'*, III, p. 413. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhib*, III, p. 5).

Friday is the lord of days. God doubles then the reward of good deeds and erases the bad deeds. He brings man closer to paradise and answers his prayers... (Kulaynī, *Furū'*, III, p. 414. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhib*, III, p. 2).

The night of Friday is white and its daytime is bright. The sun does not set upon a day on which more men are made immune from hellfire... (Kulaynī, *Furū'*, III, p. 415. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhib*, III, p. 3).

God has distinguished Friday from the other days. The gardens of paradise embellish themselves on Friday for those who enter them... (Kulaynī, *Furū'*, III, p. 415. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhib*, III, p. 4).

Note that the intrinsic blessedness of Friday is more explicitly documented in the Shī'ī reports.

³⁰⁹. The view that Muḥammad was born on Friday, exhibited in Kulaynī's dating, is merely taken by Rubin as additional evidence of the existence of "other sacred days of the week which also became part of the chronology of Muḥammad's life" (*The Eye of the Beholder*, p. 192). Rubin further concludes from the placing of the birth of Muḥammad on Friday, exhibited this time in Ya'qūbī and in Ṭabrisī's dating, simply that "sometimes Monday too was changed, being replaced by Friday" (*ibid.*, p. 195) or, in the same vein, that "Friday sometimes replaces Monday" (*ibid.*, p. 202). If these remarks fail to go beyond informing the innocent reader of the variation of Tradition, it is because Rubin does not distinguish the view that Muḥammad was born on Friday from the various views as to the day of the month on which he was born (the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal in Kulaynī's dating, the twelfth of Ramaḍān in Ya'qūbī, the seventeenth of Rabī' al-awwal in Ṭabrisī's dating) and, consequently, does not recognize the Friday tradition as a distinctively Shī'ī view with regard to the day of the week on which he was born. Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Rubin should not establish a relationship between the specific significance ascribed by Shī'īs to the birth of Muḥammad and a specific dimension of the "sacredness" of Friday.

Except for the Friday tradition, Shī'ī Tradition does not exhibit innovations, but reflects the transmission of previous material fitting in with the conception of the ontological prophet, and the achievement of developments serving this conception.

The announcement and miracle traditions, displaying a moderate conception of the functional prophet, did not, as a rule, cross into Shī'ī Tradition.

The Meccan Jew tradition represents an exception. In the case of Kulaynī's report (20), the reason for the transmission of that tradition can hardly lie in its doctrinal significance, but rather in a narrative feature of the 'Ā'isha report (perhaps the reference to Palestine). In the case of Qummī's report (21), the Meccan Jew tradition was made to fit in with the conception of the ontological prophet through its combination with the shooting stars tradition. The supernatural phenomenon recognized by the well-informed Jew as a sign of the birth of a prophet indeed manifested the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood.

The association of the Syrian castles tradition with the birth of Muḥammad was clearly inherited from Sunnī Tradition, but served among Shī'ī scholars the cause of the ontological prophet. Kulaynī's report (20) reflects a development parallel to the one detected in the al-'Abbās report (40), while Abū Manṣūr's report (52) seems to reflect a further development. We have seen that, in the three reports, the appearance of light is attached to Muḥammad's body which, in the Sunnī reports, is uniformly excluded as a source of the phenomenon. This feature suggests that, like Ṣūfī scholars, Shī'ī scholars exploited the analogy with the process of Scriptural revelation. It can hardly be fortuitous that, in Abū Manṣūr's report, the very organ of Muḥammad's body through which divine words were manifested was selected as the medium of the radiation of the Prophetic light. We have seen, moreover, that the scope of the illumination, occasionally restricted in the Sunnī reports, is extended in Abū Manṣūr's report through the mention of the people of Mecca as the collective witness of the phenomenon (see above, p. 91). This distinctive feature suggests that the analogy with the role played by Scriptural revelation as a guidance was

itself exploited by Shī'ī scholars. Indeed, it can hardly be fortuitous that the group to which divine words were initially delivered was selected here as the witness of the radiation of the Prophetical light. Thus, the radiation of the Prophetical light could manifest, not only the role played by the person of Muḥammad as a blessed presence, but also its role as a source of guidance.

The association of the palace tradition with the birth of Muḥammad was clearly inherited from a Sunnī report (54). The Hāni' report, transmitted by Sunnī scholars on the basis of its compatibility with a moderate conception of the functional prophet (see above, p. 139), served among Shī'ī scholars the cause of the ontological prophet. What mattered here was not that the new order had been prefigured, rather than actualized, by supernatural phenomena, but that such phenomena had been concomitant with the birth of Muḥammad, rather than with the beginning of his mission. Whereas the formal change undergone by the Wahb report in one late Sunnī source merely reflects the diffusion of the Hāni' report (see above, p. 140), an analogous change exhibited already in Barqī's report (56) suggests that the association of the palace tradition with the beginning of the Prophetical mission could not be tolerated by Shī'ī scholars.

Like the association of the palace tradition with the birth of Muḥammad, the association of the shooting stars tradition with that event was clearly inherited from a Sunnī report (1). The evidence of transmission, however, suggests that the Ibn Kharrabūdh report originated, not among proto-Ṣūfī scholars attempting to bend Sunnī Tradition in the direction of their doctrine, but among proto-Shī'ī scholars attempting to dissociate from the doctrine reflected in Sunnī Tradition³¹⁰. Confessionally, such scholars were not quite

³¹⁰. Lecker has noted that the placing of the death of 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib two months after the birth of Muḥammad is reported by Ibn Bakkār from Ibn Zabāla as a view of Ibn Kharrabūdh, and by Ya'qūbī as an authoritative statement of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq ("The death of the Prophet Muḥammad's father", p. 24). Likewise, the pelting of the devils at the birth of Muḥammad is reported by Ibn Bakkār from Ibn Zabāla as part of the historical knowledge of Ibn Kharrabūdh, and by Barqī as part of the intrinsic

outsiders to the Sunnī group, and they still depended upon the Sunnī articulation of *Sīra* Tradition. The Ibn Kharrabūdh report, which was indisputably in existence at the turn of the second century, now suggests that the shift of conception from the functional to the ontological prophet was first achieved by proto-Shī'ī, rather than proto-Ṣūfī, scholars. On the other hand, it appears that the Ibn Kharrabūdh report was predestined to serve among Shī'ī scholars the cause of the ontological prophet. This report, however, needed to be dissociated from Sunnī Tradition. While the narrative features of the Ibn Kharrabūdh report were wholly preserved in Barqī's report (56), and partly in Qummī's report (21) as well as in Abū Maṣṣūr's report (52), its dating was uniformly suppressed.

The association, in Qummī's report (21) and in Barqī's report (56), of the guardian angel tradition with the birth of Muḥammad has a parallel in the 'Ikrima report (84). The Shī'ī material exhibiting this association, however, differs from the 'Ikrima report in its narrative features, and thus reflects an independent development. Since, on the other hand, the present material is only contained in composite reports, it is difficult to determine whether this development was achieved by proto-Shī'ī scholars or by early Shī'ī scholars. In any case, it seems clear that this material served among Shī'ī scholars the cause of the ontological prophet.

knowledge of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq. This evidence suggests, rather than the "Shī'ite provenance" inferred by Lecker, a diachronic process whereby reports exhibiting features foreign to Sunnī Tradition, but containing familiar elements and conforming to the Sunnī pattern of ascription, were incorporated into Shī'ī Tradition. The scholars who put such reports into circulation clearly had Shī'ī tendencies, but were obviously not Shī'ī scholars. It seems beyond doubt that Ibn Zabāla played a major role in the diffusion of the two reports considered here, while his regular use of the rather inconspicuous Ibn Kharrabūdh as an authority is difficult to explain. We may mention that, although no direct evidence of the Shī'ī tendencies of Ibn Zabāla is to be found in Sunnī *Rijāl* literature, his reliability as a transmitter was seriously questioned (see 'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb*, IX, pp. 115-117). It is difficult to determine whether or not Ibn Bakkār shared the Shī'ī tendencies of his teacher, but it seems reasonable to assume that he played some role in the transmission of the material of Ibn Zabāla to Shī'ī scholars.

The association, in the Muḥammad al-Bāqir report (61), of the woman soothsayer tradition with the birth of Muḥammad has no parallel in the Sunnī reports. However, this report is clearly dependent upon Sunnī Tradition, where the rupture affects individual women soothsayers and individual genies (see above, pp. 104-106). Since the individual rupture is associated in Sunnī Tradition with the beginning of the Prophetical mission, its association with the birth of Muḥammad represents a development analogous to the one reflected in the Sunnī reports exhibiting the association of the new order traditions with that event. Since, on the other hand, the association of the individual rupture with the birth of Muḥammad is exhibited in an independent report, we may assume that this development was achieved by Shī'ī, rather than proto-Shī'ī, scholars. The unique occurrence of the Muḥammad al-Bāqir report in Ibn al-Muṭahhar, however, suggests that a further development was achieved by early Shī'ī scholars, which served better the cause of the ontological prophet.

The association, in Barqī's report (56) and in Qummī's report (78), of the universal collapse of idols with the birth of Muḥammad has a parallel in the 'Amr ibn Qutayba report (53). Moreover, Qummī's report shares the figure of Ka'b al-Aḥbār with the report (79) exhibiting the association of this tradition with the conception of Muḥammad. On the other hand, the association, in Barqī's report, of the throne tradition and of the universal version of the woman soothsayer tradition with the birth of Muḥammad has no parallel anywhere. Barqī's report, however, shares these traditions with the Ibn 'Abbās report (59), where they are associated with the conception of Muḥammad. As I have argued, the latter association can hardly represent a direct deviation from Sunnī Tradition, and we should rather assume that the throne tradition and the universal version of the woman soothsayer tradition emerged in association with the birth of Muḥammad (see above, p. 136). Barqī's report may provide the textual evidence wanting above, and thus suggest that the initial deviation from Sunnī Tradition was achieved by Shī'ī scholars, and carried further by Ṣūfī scholars. Since such a process can hardly be reconstructed in the case of the universal collapse of idols, it

seems more reasonable to assume the existence of a pool upon which early Shī'ī and Ṣūfī scholars drew simultaneously. In the absence of historical evidence, the ascription of this pool to a specific milieu cannot be attempted. It seems clear, however, that early Shī'ī scholars adopted a radical conception of the ontological prophet, and that a further radicalization was gradually achieved by Ṣūfī scholars.

The association, in Ibn al-Muṭahhar's report (60), of the throne tradition and of the universal version of the woman soothsayer tradition with the conception of Muḥammad was clearly borrowed from Ṣūfī Tradition. The significance of this borrowing can be found in the very anonymity of Ibn al-Muṭahhar's report. Since the Ṣūfī material was not ascribed to a Shī'ī authority, we may assume that the association of the throne tradition and of the universal version of the woman soothsayer tradition with the conception of Muḥammad did not eventually cross into Shī'ī Tradition, and hardly came to rival in any way the association, exhibited in Barqī's report, of these traditions with his birth. Since, on the other hand, the Sunnī ascription was suppressed, we may assume that the former association was no longer sensed as foreign to Shī'ī doctrine. If this conclusion is correct, we can affirm that late Shī'ī scholars, though still sensitive to the boundary separating Ṣūfī material from Shī'ī Tradition, became receptive to the radical conception of the ontological prophet elaborated by Ṣūfī scholars.

2. The time of birth of the Prophet

The various views as to the time of birth of Muḥammad must now take their place in the conceptual development just reconstructed. The first question to be addressed here is whether each of these views simply displays an imagery fitting in with the religious significance ascribed to the birth of Muḥammad, or bears a doctrinal significance of its own. For this purpose, I shall focus my attention on the implicitness or explicitness of each view, on its environment and on its degree of specification. Three principles underly this procedure. First, only an explicit view can unambiguously reflect a concern for the time of birth of Muḥammad. Second, whereas a view associated with a narrative tradition may display a mere imagery, a view associated with a dating tradition is likely to reflect an autonomous concern for the time of birth of Muḥammad. Third, whereas an imagery requires only a small degree of specification, a high degree of specification presumably has something to do with the distinctively Islamic division of time into frameworks established for the performance of works (first and foremost the legal prayer), and is thus likely to reflect a concern for the relation between two dimensions of salvation: the salvation granted through the manifestation of the divine will in history and the salvation sought through the performance of works. In the last case, it seems already clear that only the conception of the ontological prophet could give rise to such a concern, since only according to this conception does the birth of Muḥammad provide an occasion of the manifestation of the salvatory will of God.

Three hypothetical examples may be adduced here. In a report stating that a lunar eclipse took place during the birth of Muḥammad, the view that he was born at night is implicit, and thus hardly reflects any concern for the time of his birth. In a report stating that the valley of Mecca became covered with grass during the morning on which Muḥammad was born, the view that he was born in the morning is associated with a narrative tradition, and exhibits only a small degree of specification. Thus, this view presumably displays a

mere imagery. An imagery in which, say, the beginning of a blessed era is pictured as the morning of a new day, would fit in with the religious significance ascribed here to the birth of Muḥammad. In a report stating that Muḥammad was born on Saturday the twenty-ninth of Dhū l-ḥijja after sunset, the view that he was born after sunset is associated with a dating tradition, and exhibits a high degree of specification, which presumably has something to do with the temporal framework of the *maghrib* prayer. The doctrinal significance of this view would be sought in a relation between the role played by the birth of Muḥammad in salvation history and the position occupied by the legal prayer among the means of salvation.

a. Sunnī and Ṣūfī Traditions

The view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke exhibits the utmost degree of specification, and is associated in its earliest occurrence, namely in the Ibn Kharrabūdh report (1), with a dating tradition. On the other hand, the Monday tradition is here combined with the shooting stars tradition, whose association with the birth of Muḥammad represents, as we have seen, a development of Sunnī Tradition. Moreover, I have suggested that the Ibn Kharrabūdh report originated in the second half of the second century among proto-Shī'ī scholars attempting to dissociate from the doctrine reflected in Sunnī Tradition (see above, pp. 144-145). Thus, the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke is likely to bear a doctrinal significance related to the shift of conception from the functional to the ontological prophet.

We have seen that, according to the conception of the ontological prophet reflected in the development of Sunnī Tradition, the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood involves the establishment of a new order. The establishment of a new order at the birth of Muḥammad represents an independent manifestation of the salvatory will of God, whereby man is enduringly protected from the forces leading him to damnation (see above, p. 134). However, only the revelation of divine law provides man with the concrete means of

salvation. The historical and legal dimensions of salvation, associated in the conception of the functional prophet, became dissociated in the conception of the ontological prophet: the protection of man from the forces leading him to damnation introduces in the first case, and precedes in the second case, the acquisition by man of the concrete means of salvation. The conception of time, however, was unaffected by the shift from the functional to the ontological prophet. The birth of Muḥammad indeed initiates a new phase of salvation history, but perpetuates the historical time of salvation, marked by the periodic manifestation of the divine will. The revelation of divine law indeed completes the phase of salvation history initiated by the birth of Muḥammad, but initiates a new time of salvation, marked by the recurrence of temporal frameworks established for the performance of works. At the early stage of doctrinal elaboration represented by the Ibn Kharrabūdh report, the shift of conception from the functional to the ontological prophet had just been achieved. At that stage, the view that salvation can be sought in the recurrence of a time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad had not yet appeared. On the contrary, the view emerged that the salvation granted through the manifestation of the divine will at the birth of Muḥammad prefigures the salvation sought through the performance of legal works. That prefiguration was expressed through the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at a time corresponding to the beginning of the first temporal framework involved by the legal prayer (*fajr*). Indeed, the new beginning of salvation history at the birth of Muḥammad was homologous to the beginning of daily worship at the break of dawn. Thus, the association between the historical and legal dimensions of salvation was preserved.

The view that Muḥammad was born at night exhibits a minimal degree of specification, and was associated with the announcement and miracle traditions in the course of their transmission, namely in the second half of the second century (see above, pp. 57-58 [the maid], pp. 58-60 [the rising star] and pp. 62-64 [the Meccan Jew]). Two traditions here represent exceptional cases. The view that Muḥammad was born around the

beginning of night is implicitly contained in a widespread version of the cooking-pot tradition, in which this tradition is associated with an Arabian custom (see above, p. 74). The view that Muḥammad was born at night is implicitly contained in the falling stars tradition itself. However, that view was explicitly associated with the falling stars tradition in the course of its transmission, namely in the first half of the third century (see above, pp. 71-72). In the last case as in the other cases (except for the cooking-pot tradition), the view that Muḥammad was born at night clearly plays a role of its own, but is unlikely to bear a doctrinal significance, and rather displays an imagery compatible with the religious significance ascribed by the announcement and miracle traditions to the birth of Muḥammad. The association, in a moderate conception of the functional prophet, of the birth of Muḥammad with supernatural phenomena serving as signs of his future prophethood could give rise to a sense of supernaturalness about that event, although a supernatural quality of his birth is by no means contained in this association as a doctrinal implication. We may suppose that the very imagery to which the association of the cooking-pot tradition with an Arabian custom was related (see above, p. 75), and which is clearly inherent in the falling stars tradition, was applied to the birth of Muḥammad itself and thus produced the view that he was born at night. Through that imagery, in which the irruption of supernatural phenomena into the natural order of things was pictured as the appearance of light in darkness, a sense of supernaturalness about the birth of Muḥammad could indeed express itself.

The view that Muḥammad was born at night is associated with a new order tradition at the earliest retrievable stage of transmission of the Hānī' report (54), of the 'Urwa and Asmā' reports (66, 67) and of the 'Ikrima report (84). I have suggested that those reports originated in the first half of the third century among proto-Ṣūfī scholars attempting to bend Sunnī Tradition in the direction of their doctrine (see above, p. 135). We may suppose, not only that such scholars inherited the view that Muḥammad was born at night from the previous stage of Sunnī Tradition, but also that they transmitted this view in association

with the new order traditions because the imagery lying behind it fitted in nicely with the conception of the ontological prophet reflected in their development of Sunnī Tradition. Indeed, the supernatural quality of the birth of Muḥammad is contained as a doctrinal implication in the association of that event with supernatural phenomena manifesting the actualization of his prophethood. We may now note that the imagery lying behind the view that Muḥammad was born at night, though not incompatible with a moderate conception of the functional prophet, did not fit in very well with that conception. If indeed a sense of supernaturalness about the birth of Muḥammad expressed itself through that imagery, it would appear that the association of the view that he was born at night with the announcement and miracle traditions foreshadows the shift of conception from the functional to the ontological prophet, itself reflected in the association of the new order traditions with his birth.

The view that Muḥammad was born at night is contained in the 'Amr ibn Qutayba report (53), which exhibits the combination of, among other traditions, the universal illumination and the universal collapse of idols. This view appears here as an independent tradition which, though associated with one narrative tradition, can slide to other traditions contained in the report (see above, p. 90). On the other hand, I have suggested that the 'Amr ibn Qutayba report originated in the second half of the third century among Ṣūfī scholars achieving their emancipation from the Sunnī articulation of *Sīra* Tradition. We have noted, however, that such scholars were willing to borrow individual items potentially compatible with their own doctrine (see above, p. 136). We may suppose, not only that early Ṣūfī scholars borrowed the view that Muḥammad was born at night from Sunnī Tradition, but also that they transmitted this view outside of any specific association because the imagery lying behind it fitted in particularly well with the radical conception of the ontological prophet reflected in their distinctive articulation of *Sīra* Tradition. Indeed, the supernatural quality of the birth of Muḥammad is contained as a doctrinal implication in the association of that event with supernatural phenomena manifesting a twofold

actualization of his prophethood: the universal establishment of a new order and the infusion of the world with blessedness through his person.

Before turning to the scholarly discussion, we must go back to the announcement and miracle traditions, which we left at an early stage of their transmission. The reports containing these traditions were transmitted further by Sunnī scholars, because they fit in with a moderate conception of the functional prophet, dominant in Sunnī doctrine up to a late period (see above, pp. 129-130). Likewise, the Hānī' report was transmitted on the basis of its compatibility with that conception (see above, p. 139). The association of the view that Muḥammad was born at night with the announcement and miracle traditions had various fates in Sunnī Tradition. It is difficult to determine here a pattern of variation, but it seems clear that, when durably associated with such a tradition, that view did not play a role in the diffusion of a report, and was simply inherited as part of the report. Such was undoubtedly the case of the 'Ā'isha report and of the Hānī' report, both exhibiting the association of the view that Muḥammad was born at night with a tradition (respectively the Meccan Jew and the palace) at the earliest retrievable stage of their transmission (see above, p. 62-63 and pp. 92-93). It also seems clear that, when ephemerally associated with an announcement or miracle tradition, that view did not encounter resistance, but mere indifference (see above, pp. 57-58 [the maid] and pp. 60-61 [the rising star]). I have just argued that the shift of conception from the functional to the ontological prophet, reflected in the association of the new order traditions with the birth of Muḥammad, is foreshadowed by the association of the view that he was born at night with the announcement and miracle traditions. However, this view displays here a mere imagery and, as such, could hardly endanger a moderate conception of the functional prophet. At the same time, the sense of supernaturalness about the birth of Muḥammad expressing itself through that imagery was rather foreign to Sunnī doctrine. Sunnī scholars were both tolerant and indifferent toward

the view that Muḥammad was born at night because, for them, it was the preparatory role played by his birth in salvation history that really mattered.

b. The scholarly discussion and its doctrinal background

At its earliest stage, the scholarly discussion reflects the resistance encountered by the view that Muḥammad was born at night among Sunnī scholars such as Ibn Dihya³¹¹ and Zarkashī (see above, p. 28). Since, as we have just seen, Sunnī scholars were both tolerant and indifferent toward the view that Muḥammad was born at night when associated with the announcement and miracle traditions, this resistance presupposes that, by the turn of the sixth century, that view had emancipated itself from its traditional associations. The argumentation directed against the advocates of the view that Muḥammad was born at night gives no clue as to who they were, but informs us indirectly that they adduced the falling stars tradition in support of their view. The centrality of the falling stars tradition in the discussion suggests that this tradition was invested with a significance going beyond its role as evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born at night.

Like the rising star tradition, the falling stars tradition describes, in accordance with a moderate conception of the functional prophet, a supernatural phenomenon involving the behaviour of celestial bodies at the birth of Muḥammad. In the latter tradition however, it is not the appearance of an unfamiliar star in the heavens, but the motion of familiar stars that serves as a sign of his future prophethood. Whereas the appearance of the unfamiliar star is

³¹¹. The celebration of the birth of Muḥammad organized by the *amīr* of Irbil Muẓaffar ad-dīn could provide a historical context for the resistance. It was under the auspices of this *amīr* that Ibn Dihya wrote his *Tanwīr* in 604/1207. In his entry on Muẓaffar ad-dīn, Ibn Khallikān informs us that an important part of the celebration took place at night, but nowhere mentions the nocturnal birth of Muḥammad. The phrase *laylat al-mawlid* refers to the time of celebration, not to the time of birth of Muḥammad. The phrase *yawm al-mawlid* also occurs in Ibn Khallikān's account (IV, pp. 117-119). Thus, it seems more reasonable to assume the existence of a development internal to Tradition.

merely designated, according to a conventional metaphor, as an upward motion, the downward motion of the familiar stars is indeed an actual one, produced by a magnetic force deriving from the presence of Muḥammad in the terrestrial realm. For that reason, the descent of stars could be assimilated to a phenomenon manifesting the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood, and not just serving as a sign of his future prophethood. According to such an assimilation, the force attracting the stars downward emanated from the very person of Muḥammad and, as such, was analogous to the one causing the idols to collapse: just as the idols had, willingly or unwillingly, prostrated themselves to the newborn child (see above, p. 107 and p. 112), the stars had abandoned their lofty position and had drawn near to him, moved by the need to show their veneration for his person. Here, the supernatural character of the descent of stars implied the supernatural quality of the birth of Muḥammad.

The assimilation of the descent of stars to a phenomenon manifesting the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood had indeed no ground in the wording of the reports. However, the view that Muḥammad was born at night, implicitly contained in the falling stars tradition, could, by virtue of the imagery lying behind that view, be put forward as indicating the supernatural quality of his birth. The association of that view with the announcement and miracle traditions at an early stage of their transmission (see above, pp. 150-151) could provide the basis for similar developments, though in less favourable conditions. The view that Muḥammad was born at night, once put forward as indicating the supernatural quality of his birth, could emancipate itself from its traditional associations, and come to emblemize that quality.

We may suppose that the group responsible for that development was, like late Sunnī scholars, receptive to Ṣūfī doctrine, and conversant with at least some of the material excluded from Sunnī sources. In the late Sunnī compromise (see above, pp. 139-140), the coexistence of two distinct conceptions of the Prophet was made possible by the scholarly method of transmission, according to which a report was adduced as an independent unit

inherited from (an) individual source(s), without heed for its relation to other reports inherited from other sources. Here however, the distinction between the two conceptions of the Prophet was blurred in the interest of doctrinal homogeneity: what mattered was the association of the birth of Muḥammad with supernatural phenomena. In the case of the falling stars tradition and, presumably, of other traditions displaying a moderate conception of the functional prophet, the supernatural quality of the birth of Muḥammad was inferred from that association, regardless of their doctrinal significance. On the other hand, this inference presupposes that the supernatural quality of the birth of Muḥammad, contained as a mere implication in the conception of the ontological prophet, itself a product of Ṣūfī doctrine, had attained independent doctrinal existence. The latitude enjoyed in the treatment of Sunnī Tradition, as well as the subproduct of Ṣūfī doctrine retained here, suggests the existence of a group distinct from Sunnī scholars *stricto sensu*. That group, which I propose to designate as the *Sīra* amateurs, was characterized by the exclusive engagement in the transmission and interpretation of *Sīra* Tradition, rather than by the application to that Tradition of a discipline acquired in a comprehensive curriculum. Indeed, the process just reconstructed involved the departure from a golden rule of scholarly discipline: the preservation of doctrinal boundaries. If my conclusion is correct, it is hardly surprising that Sunnī scholars, when exerting their right of control over a development incompatible with that discipline, should not mention the identity of the *Sīra* amateurs.

By the turn of the sixth century, then, the view that Muḥammad was born at night had emancipated itself from its traditional associations and had become a doctrinal emblem, but had retained a minimal degree of specification and had not attained doctrinal significance. For that reason, the resistance to that view produced a counter-view exhibiting an equally minimal degree of specification and equally innocent of doctrinal significance: the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime. Moreover, the latter view lacked the degree of specification demanded by the historical narrative. Unlike night, the daytime is indeed a highly differentiated time. Whereas the view that Muḥammad was born at night

was suited to the historical narrative, the view that he was born during the daytime hardly conveyed historical information. When advocating that view, Sunnī scholars countered the emancipation of the view that Muḥammad was born at night from its traditional associations, but confronted themselves with a new problem. Whereas the advocates of the view that Muḥammad was born at night could adduce traditional evidence in favour of their view, those scholars had produced a pure innovation. What they found in Tradition was not evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, but a mere absence of specification as to the time of his birth. Since a new view had no legitimacy in Sunnī scholarship, traditional evidence had to be found. Such evidence was provided, through glossing, by the occurrence of the term “day”, not so much in *Sīra* Tradition as in a Prophetical report.

The central role played by the Prophetical report in the argumentation of Abū l-Faḍl al-‘Irāqī (see above, p. 26) and in that of later Sunnī scholars (see above, p. 28) suggests that, by the turn of the eighth century, the discussion had undergone a twofold development. On the one hand, *Hadīth* scholars such as Abū l-Faḍl had found in that report an occasion to express their view as to authority in historical matters: a question as to the life of the Prophet could only be settled by his own words. Thus, the traditional evidence adduced in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born at night was rejected, not through the practice of interpretation, but in principle.

On the other hand, the choice of the Prophetical report as authoritative evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime may not have been an innocent one. This report exhibits the association of two traditions: Monday as a day of supererogatory fasting, and Monday as the day of the week on which Muḥammad was born. The Monday fast tradition does not seem to have been originally dependent upon the view that Muḥammad was born on that day of the week. The Monday tradition, as we have seen, could hardly suggest a particular significance of the birth of Muḥammad (see above,

pp. 127-128). The association of the two traditions, in the form of a Prophetic report, was innocent of doctrinal significance: the Prophet had established the validity of the fast performed on Monday, simply referring to that day as one elevated by virtue of his birth³¹². However, that association could be interpreted as an intrinsic one, and invested with doctrinal significance. According to such an interpretation, the Prophet had established the particular merit of the fast performed on Monday, implicitly referring to that day as one blessed by virtue of his birth. What is involved here is a conception of transhistorical time compatible with a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works: the blessedness of Monday is experienced through the performance of a work conforming to a legal pattern.

In the regulation of fasting, one item is particularly relevant to the present discussion: fasting is a work performed exclusively during the daytime. According to the conception of transhistorical time involved here, the blessedness of Monday is then experienced during the daytime on that day. The experience of that blessedness is restricted to the temporal framework of fasting, but its manifestation encompasses the whole Monday. According to the gloss of "day" as "daytime", it is exclusively the daytime of Monday that is blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad. The blessedness of that time is not merely experienced through the performance of fasting, but manifested within the temporal framework of that work. Through the gloss of "day" as "daytime", then, the conception of transhistorical time becomes subordinate to a nomocentric conception of the

³¹². Paraphrasing the Prophetic report, Rubin states that "In one tradition Monday is recommended as a day of fasting because Muḥammad was born on it" (*The Eye of the Beholder*, p. 191). If Rubin erroneously sees here a relation of causality, it is, once again, because he fails to perceive in the report two distinct traditions. Since, as appears here, the two traditions emerged independently of one another, the Prophetic report hardly constitutes evidence of the close association established by Muslims between the day of fasting and the day of birth of Muḥammad, which otherwise could represent a residue of the borrowing from an extra-Islamic Tradition claimed by Rubin (see above, n. 304).

merit attached to works: the time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad coextends with a temporal framework established for the performance of a legal work.

That the preceding construction represents the actual role played by the Prophetic report in the argumentation of Sunnī scholars must at this stage of the argument remain a hypothesis, which now leads us to a further hypothesis. Since the conception of transhistorical time, when applied to the birth of Muḥammad, was necessarily a corollary of the ontological prophet and, as such, was rather foreign to Sunnī doctrine, we may assume that the interpretation of the Prophetic report according to that conception was imposed under external pressure. The view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, as I have argued, was essentially designed to counter the view that he was born at night (see above, p. 156). We may suppose, then, that what was countered here was a conception of transhistorical time incompatible with a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works, and that this conception was served by the view that Muḥammad was born at night.

A further development is reflected at a late stage of the scholarly discussion.

Among late Sunnī scholars, who generally inherited from their predecessors the resistance to the view that Muḥammad was born at night, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī was the first to use the break of dawn tradition in a -at least seemingly- creative fashion (see above, pp. 28-29). That tradition, which as such never gained diffusion in Sunnī sources, had been rediscovered in the course of the scholarly discussion as mere evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime (see above, p. 27). Ibn Ḥajar, however, attempted a compromise between the break of dawn tradition and that view (supposedly contained in the Prophetic report), and thus originated the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime shortly after dawn. We must first note that, if that tradition was resorted to, it was presumably because the mere view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime was no longer suited to countering the view that he was born at night. Only a higher degree of specification attained by the latter view could make the former view ineffective in the

discussion. The compromise attempted here is not readily understandable, since the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke and the view that he was born during the daytime are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can simply be seen as exhibiting different degrees of specification. We may suppose that, if a compromise was attempted between the break of dawn tradition and the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, it was because an ambiguity was attached to the view that he was born when dawn broke. Such an ambiguity could only arise if the specification added to the view that Muḥammad was born at night involved the absorption of the break of dawn, normally serving as the point of demarcation between night and the daytime, into night.

The evidence supplied by Ibn Ḥajar himself and, more explicitly, by Bājūrī (see above, pp. 29-30) shows that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at night was indeed provided with a specification involving the absorption of both the break of dawn and the time following it into night, and posing sunrise as the point of demarcation between night and the daytime: the view that he was born at night immediately after dawn broke (or before sunrise). This evidence bears two implications. On the one hand, the compromise between the break of dawn tradition and the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime was intended by Ibn Ḥajar, not to promote a new view, but to invest an already existing view with a new significance. Through the recourse to traditional evidence, the specification of the view that Muḥammad was born at night could become a specification of the view that he was born during the daytime. If, on the other hand, the view that Muḥammad was born at night was provided with a specification involving the absorption of both the break of dawn and the time following it into night, it was presumably because the view that he was born shortly before dawn broke posed a problem. Such a problem could hardly lie in the position occupied by the time preceding the break of dawn, unambiguously part of night, but rather in an irregularity still to be determined. Finally, we may note that the specification added to the view that Muḥammad was born at night did not involve the recourse to traditional evidence, indeed a necessary feature of scholarly argumentation. This departure

from scholarly discipline suggests the essential identity of the group responsible for the present development with the group encountered, at an early stage of the discussion, as the advocates of the view that Muḥammad was born at night, and designated as the *Sīra* amateurs (see above, pp. 155-156). If my conclusion is correct, it is hardly surprising, here again, that Sunnī scholars should not mention the identity of such amateurs.

Alone among late Sunnī scholars, Ḥalabī did not resist the view that Muḥammad was born at night, and attempted to reconcile that view with the break of dawn tradition through the characterization of dawn as a continuation of night (see above, pp. 29-30). By the time of Ḥalabī, as we have just seen, a group identified with the *Sīra* amateurs had added to the view that Muḥammad was born at night a specification involving the absorption of both the break of dawn and the time following it into night. We may then suppose that the reconciliation between the break of dawn tradition and the view that Muḥammad was born at night was intended by Ḥalabī, not to promote a new view, but to provide an already existing view with a traditional derivation. The absorption of either the break of dawn alone or both the break of dawn and the time following it into night was necessarily the product of interpretation, but the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke, unlike the view that he was born shortly after that time, could be directly documented with traditional evidence.

By the middle of the tenth century, then, the antagonism between the view that Muḥammad was born at night and the view that he was born during the daytime had been substantially resolved. The specification that Muḥammad was born shortly after dawn broke, first added by the *Sīra* amateurs to the former view, was later adjusted by Ibn Ḥajar to the argumentation supporting the latter view, and eventually refined by Ḥalabī in the interest of scholarly argumentation. The formal disagreement still existing was a matter of mere interpretation, and centered upon the role of traditional evidence. The view that Muḥammad was born shortly after dawn broke, as I have just suggested, was originally designed by the *Sīra* amateurs to counter the view that he was born shortly before dawn

broke. We may now suppose that the diffusion gained by the former view among late Sunnī scholars also reflects the resistance encountered by the latter view. If indeed the *Sīra* amateurs as well as Sunnī scholars and, in the latter group, the advocates of the nocturnal birth of Muḥammad as well as the advocates of his diurnal birth implicitly countered the view that he was born shortly before dawn broke, we may assume that what was rejected in that view was a development foreign to *Sīra* Tradition.

It can hardly be fortuitous that this very view appears in a distinctively Ṣūfī source as one superior to the various views derived from *Sīra* Tradition and, moreover, as one having traditional foundations of its own (see above, pp. 36-38). If it is conceded that ‘Abdal’azīz’s teaching was, in this case, a traditional one among Ṣūfī scholars, the construction elaborated here around the view that Muḥammad was born shortly before dawn broke may be taken as representing the conceptual framework in which that view emerged.

First, the exclusive foundation of the view that Muḥammad was born shortly before dawn broke in Prophetical reports confirms my conclusion that this view was foreign to *Sīra* Tradition. Like *Ḥadīth* scholars, Ṣūfī scholars were here distrustful of *Sīra* Tradition, and resorted to Prophetical authority. The distrust of that Tradition was, of course, offensive to the *Sīra* amateurs as well as to Sunnī scholars. The recourse to Prophetical authority may have been offensive to the former group, but was indeed acceptable to the latter group provided that the content legitimated by that authority was relevant to historical matters. The Prophetical reports invoked as traditional foundation of the view that Muḥammad was born shortly before dawn broke, however, had nothing to do with the time of his birth. The irregular derivation of that view, then, was a sufficient ground for its rejection by the *Sīra* amateurs and by Sunnī scholars.

What the Prophetical reports invoked here did contain was the view that one portion of night is an intrinsically blessed time. That the blessedness of that time originates in

God's design itself is clear from the twofold anthropomorphism involved in these reports, namely the downward motion of God from His lofty abode and His speech directly addressed to man, representing the bestowal of divine grace. However, that blessedness is not one manifested independently of the performance of works through which it is experienced but, on the contrary, one designed to benefit the performance of a single work, namely prayer.

Two kinds of prayer should be distinguished here: the prayer of worship (*ṣalāt*) and the prayer of request (*du'ā'*). The prayer of worship involves, not a semantic pattern, but a formal pattern established by law as the valid expression of man's devotion. In the reproduction of this pattern lies the merit shared by the legal prayer and the supererogatory prayer. However, the former prayer involves temporal frameworks established by law for the valid expression of man's devotion, whereas the latter prayer involves temporal frameworks established by precedent. The prayer of request involves, not a formal pattern, but a semantic pattern of infinitely variable expression. The merit of such a prayer is contingent upon its power to bring about its fulfillment. According to monotheist doctrine, the efficacy of a request ultimately derives from divine power, and can thus under no circumstances be assured. The practice of addressing a request immediately after the prayer of worship reflects the view that the fulfillment of the request is made more likely by its association with the valid expression of man's devotion. According to a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works, the legal prayer clearly occupies a higher rank than the supererogatory prayer, but the request addressed after the former prayer is not necessarily of greater efficacy than the one addressed after the latter prayer. In both cases indeed, the fulfillment of the request is made more likely by its association with the valid expression of man's devotion, not by its contiguity to this expression within the same temporal framework³¹³.

³¹³. For a general presentation of the Muslim prayer and for references to previous works on the subject,

The kind of prayer referred to by the Prophetic reports is clearly the request. The blessedness of one portion of night is designed, not merely to favour, but to assure the fulfillment of the request. The efficacy of the request addressed at that time is established by God Himself and, as such, ultimately derives from divine power. Only under such a circumstance could man, according to monotheist doctrine, be assured of the fulfillment of his request. That the request referred to here is one addressed after a supererogatory prayer seems to be a reasonable assumption. Here however, the fulfillment of the request is assured, not by its association with the valid expression of man's devotion, but by its coincidence with the increase of divine receptiveness. Through the recurrent increase of His receptiveness at a specific time, God establishes a temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request. Within that framework, the association of the request with the valid expression of man's devotion retains its practicability, but loses its indispensability.

The view that the day contains a temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request is as such not foreign to a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works, but simply points at a mode of relation between God and man distinct from the relation established through the mediation of legal works: the relation established by the bestowal of divine grace, and in which the performance of works merely plays an auxiliary role. The placing of the temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request at a nocturnal time can only be understood if we bear in mind that the increase of divine receptiveness indeed represents, not a reward for the performance of a work, but an act of grace assuring the efficacy of a work. While divine grace is bestowed upon man, the hierarchy of works based on their degree of conformity to legal patterns is overridden. Indeed, it is a work free from legal pattern that here acquires exceptional merit. The placing of the temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request at a nocturnal time signifies that, as an act of grace temporarily overriding the hierarchy of works, the recurrent increase of divine receptiveness should not overlap with the recurrence of temporal frameworks established

see Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God*, pp. 135-150.

for the performance of legal works. Indeed, the daytime contains four of the temporal frameworks involved by the legal prayer and coextends with the temporal framework of fasting, whereas night is left rather unexploited by law. Night, then, was best suited for the increase of divine receptiveness.

We have seen that the temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request is alternatively specified as the last two thirds of night, the second half of night and the last third of night. We may now note that, despite this variation, the Prophetic reports agree as to the terminal boundary of that framework, namely the break of dawn, and that its initial boundary is always placed at a time distant from the beginning of night. If the terminal boundary is uniformly placed at the break of dawn, it is clearly because that time initiates the first temporal framework involved by the legal prayer (and the temporal framework of fasting). Likewise, what is presumably avoided in a time close to the beginning of night is the last temporal framework involved by the legal prayer (*'ishā'*). The temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request, then, is placed between two boundaries: the end of the last temporal framework involved by the legal prayer, serving as a point of demarcation after which the initial boundary is variously placed, and the break of dawn, uniformly serving as terminal boundary. Within those boundaries, the recurrent increase of divine receptiveness could indeed not overlap with the recurrence of any temporal framework established for the performance of a legal work. For that reason, the variation as to the initial boundary of the temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request can hardly have a doctrinal significance, but rather originates in practice. We may suppose that the various boundaries correspond to the various extensions of the vigil as practiced by various groups or individuals. The various amounts of time dedicated to the vigil and the proportional amounts of time allowed for sleep, then, may be taken as representing various degrees of compromise between ascetic tendencies and the demands of worldly existence.

The view that divine grace is regularly bestowed upon man at a time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad clearly represents a development of Ṣūfī doctrine. We have seen that, according to the radical conception of the ontological prophet reflected in the Ṣūfī articulation of *Sīra* Tradition, the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood involves both the universal establishment of a new order and the infusion of the world with blessedness through his person (see above, pp. 135-138). As a step in the carrying out of God's design, the universal establishment of a new order does not represent an act of grace, but initiates a state of grace in which man is protected from the forces leading him away from salvation. As a gift exceptionally bestowed upon man, the infusion of the world with blessedness through the person of Muḥammad indeed represents an act of grace, but one terminating with the end of his terrestrial existence. Whereas man could benefit from the state of grace, initiated at the birth of Muḥammad (or at his conception) and completed by the revelation of divine law, by performing the works incumbent upon him, the benefit derived from the act of grace was utterly lost to him. That benefit, however, could be retrieved if God had enduringly bestowed His grace upon man by investing the time at which Muḥammad was born with blessedness. Divine grace, then, could be found in the recurrence of that time. Whereas, by virtue of the infusion of the world with blessedness through the person of Muḥammad, man could exceptionally benefit from an act of grace without mediation, he could benefit from the regular bestowal of divine grace only through the performance of a work. According to the conception of transhistorical time, then, it could be established that divine grace is regularly bestowed upon man at a time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad. Three questions, however, were still to be answered: the boundaries of the time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad, the periodicity of the bestowal of divine grace at that time, and the identity of the work through the performance of which man could benefit from that bestowal.

I have argued that early Ṣūfī scholars transmitted the view that Muḥammad was born at night outside of any specific association because the imagery lying behind it fitted in

particularly well with the radical conception of the ontological prophet reflected in their distinctive articulation of *Sīra* Tradition (see above, pp. 152-153). That view, then, was predestined to serve among later Ṣūfī scholars the conception of transhistorical time. Since, however, the view that Muḥammad was born at night exhibited a minimal degree of specification, the time blessed by virtue of his birth could not be placed between specific boundaries. On the other hand, night as such could not be exclusively blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad, but rather by virtue of all the blessed events having occurred at a nocturnal time. For that reason, divine grace could not be bestowed upon man daily, but rather on the day of the month on which Muḥammad was born (generally the twelfth of Rabī' al-awwal), or on the day of the week on which he was born (uniformly Monday). In the last case, Monday night was sufficiently specific to be exclusively blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad, and sufficiently frequent to be suited for a practice through which divine grace could be sought. The view that the grace bestowed upon man at the birth of Muḥammad is reactivated on Monday night, then, is likely to have been initially attained by Ṣūfī scholars as a satisfactory answer to the first two questions just formulated. As to the third question, the work through the performance of which man would benefit from the nocturnal bestowal of divine grace could be none other than prayer. Whether it was the supererogatory prayer or the request that would play the central role in the search for divine grace must, in the absence of textual evidence, remain undecided. In any case, the bestowal of divine grace on Monday night could not overlap with the recurrence of temporal frameworks established for the performance of legal works, with the exception of the last temporal framework involved by the legal prayer.

At this stage of the argument, we must return to the conception of intrinsically blessed time reflected in the Prophetical reports. The view that the day contains a temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request, as I have argued, is as such not foreign to a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works, but simply points at a mode of relation between God and man distinct from the relation established through the mediation

of legal works: the relation established by the bestowal of divine grace, and in which the performance of works merely plays an auxiliary role (see above, pp. 164-165). We may now note that the two modes, though distinct from one another, share a common origin in God's design itself. The placing of the temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request between the two boundaries identified above, then, simply presupposes that the practice called for by the bestowal of divine grace is distinct from the performance of legal works. The view that divine grace is regularly bestowed upon man at a time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad, however, is as such foreign to a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works. Indeed, the mode of relation pointed at here, though in conformity with God's design, ultimately originates in history. The placing of the time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad on Monday night, then, implies that the practice through which divine grace can be sought is parallel to the performance of legal works and independent from it. For that reason, the conception of transhistorical time reflected here is rather incompatible with a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works.

If it is conceded that, at an initial stage of their speculation, Ṣūfī scholars are likely to have come up with the view that the grace bestowed upon man at the birth of Muḥammad is reactivated on Monday night, and that we were simply not lucky enough to come across a distinctively Ṣūfī source (such as Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak's *Ibrīz* in the case of 'Abdal'azīz's teaching) documenting this view, it seems plausible that Sunnī scholars actually interpreted the Prophetical report according to the conception of transhistorical time (see above, pp. 158-159). Through that interpretation, Sunnī scholars could counter the specific conception of transhistorical time initially elaborated by Ṣūfī scholars. The view that Muḥammad was born at night, as I have just argued, served the Ṣūfī conception. The view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, however, did not add much to the conception of transhistorical time derived by Sunnī scholars from the authoritative words of the Prophet. Indeed, the latter conception was utterly compatible with a nomocentric

conception of the merit attached to works. Through the gloss of "day" as "daytime", Sunnī scholars attempted to deprive Monday night of the blessedness ascribed to it by Ṣūfī scholars.

By the turn of the eighth century, then, Ṣūfī scholars had presumably come up with the view that the grace bestowed upon man at the birth of Muḥammad is reactivated on Monday night. A more satisfactory answer to the three questions formulated above was later found in the view, exhibited in the Prophetical reports, that night contains a temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request. First, that framework had specific boundaries. Second, divine grace was bestowed daily upon man. Third, the work through which man could benefit from that bestowal was indeed one free from legal pattern. Moreover, the bestowal of divine grace could not overlap with the the recurrence of any temporal framework established for the performance of a legal work. The problem was, of course, that the blessedness of the portion of night originated, not in history, but in God's design itself. For Ṣūfī scholars, however, that problem was hardly insurmountable: the Prophetical reports indeed exhibited the view that one portion of night is an intrinsically blessed time, but contained as their inner meaning the view that this time is blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad.

The shift from the conception of intrinsically blessed time to the conception of transhistorical time, however, could not be achieved without adjustment. Whereas the blessedness of a punctual event (such as a birth) could recur within the extension of a time defined by its relative position (such as a specific day of a specific month, a specific day of the week, the daytime or night of a specific day), only an event coextensive with a time defined by its duration (such as one portion of night) could indeed invest that time with blessedness. An adjustment was found through recourse to the delivery, an event never punctual and, moreover, of variable extension. To equate the extension of Āmina's delivery with the duration of one portion of night was by no means unreasonable. As the time of Āmina's delivery, culminating in the birth of Muḥammad, one portion of night could be

invested with historical blessedness. However, such an adjustment could only be approximate, since the duration of one portion of night is proportional to the variable extension of night, and could then coincide with the extension of Āmina's delivery only twice a year. For that reason, the initial boundary of the portion of night blessed by virtue of Āmina's delivery was left unspecified, while its terminal boundary, that is the time immediately following the time at which Muḥammad was born, was specified as the break of dawn. Thus, the correspondence to the Prophetical reports was preserved, while the selection among the various placings of the temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request was avoided. Moreover, that undecidedness permitted a latitude of practice: whereas the ascetically minded could seek divine grace for much of night (with the exclusion of the time covered by the temporal framework of the *'ishā'* prayer), the less enthusiastic would be assured of finding it toward the break of dawn.

As I have argued, the view that divine grace is regularly bestowed upon man at a time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad is as such foreign to a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to work. The mode of relation pointed at here, though in conformity with God's design, ultimately originates in history. The identification of the time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad with the temporal framework exceptionally beneficial to the request as defined by the Prophetical reports, then, implies that the practice through which divine grace can be sought is parallel to the daily performance of a legal work, namely prayer, and wholly independent from it. For that reason, the conception of transhistorical time reflected here is utterly incompatible with a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works.

It can hardly be doubted by now that the doctrinal significance of the view that Muḥammad was born shortly before dawn broke was the main ground for its rejection by the *Sīra* amateurs and by Sunnī scholars. By the middle of the tenth century, then, this view had come to serve among Ṣūfī scholars a conception of transhistorical time utterly incompatible with a nomocentric conception of the merit attached to works. It was that

conception that the *Sīra* amateurs as well as Sunnī scholars implicitly opposed through another view as to the time of birth of Muḥammad. The view that Muḥammad was born shortly after dawn broke was indeed best suited to countering the view that he was born shortly before dawn broke. The accession of the former view to traditional existence (see above, pp. 42-44) reflects indirectly the diffusion gained by the latter view up to the twelfth century, and the resistance opposed by Sunnī scholars to that diffusion. A first group potentially receptive to the view that Muḥammad was born shortly before dawn broke was the lay audience of Ṣūfī scholars. In such a group, that view is likely to have gained diffusion together with the practice of addressing requests toward the break of dawn. A second group in which the view that Muḥammad was born shortly before dawn broke could gain diffusion was one of Sunnī scholars receptive to the Ṣūfī conception of transhistorical time. Indeed, the accession of that view to traditional existence is documented in one case. That Barzanjī belongs himself to the second group seems to be a reasonable assumption.

c. Late developments of Sunnī Tradition

We may now return to Sunnī Tradition, which we left at the stage preceding the scholarly discussion. In order to understand the developments following that stage, we should bear in mind that the origin of the scholarly discussion was related above to a development whereby the view that Muḥammad was born at night came to emblemize the supernatural quality of his birth, and that this development was ascribed to a group distinct from Sunnī scholars *stricto sensu*, and designated as the *Sīra* amateurs (see above, pp. 155-156).

The view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke is associated with the monk tradition at the earliest retrievable stage of transmission of Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān's report (22). It is difficult to determine what a moderate conception of the functional prophet could gain from the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke, but it seems clear that,

when associated with an announcement tradition, that view lost its doctrinal significance, and retained a mere imagery. The formal change undergone by Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān’s report at a late stage of its transmission, however, reflects the resistance to the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke. If that view was sensed here as irregular, it was because the break of dawn tradition had been rediscovered in the course of the scholarly discussion as evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime, and against the view that he was born at night. Indeed, in the report (23) as adduced by Suyūfī and Ṣāliḥī, and in the report (25) as adduced by Ḥalabī, the irregularity is suppressed together with a potential reference to birth during the daytime. In the report (24) as adduced by Qaṣṭallānī, the irregularity is neutralized through the intrusion of a reference to nocturnal birth, whereby the break of dawn is implicitly absorbed into night. The formal change exhibited in the three reports can undoubtedly be ascribed to transmitters aware of the scholarly discussion, and exclusively attached to the view that Muḥammad was born at night. On the other hand, this change presupposes that Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān’s report underwent paraphrastic transmission, a practice rather incompatible with scholarly discipline. The exclusive attachment to the view that Muḥammad was born at night presupposes the role played by that view as a doctrinal emblem. As a consequence of the scholarly discussion, the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke was sensed as foreign to the supernatural quality of his birth, and thus had to be suppressed or neutralized. Through paraphrastic transmission, the wording of Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān’s report was modified in the interest of doctrinal homogeneity. That we encounter here the *Sīra* amateurs as transmitters of *Sīra* Tradition, then, seems to be a reasonable assumption. If my conclusion is correct, it is indeed surprising that the modified reports found their way into the works of Sunnī scholars. That, in this particular case, a marginal group was influential enough to inflect the normal course of written transmission must, however, be acknowledged as a fact.

We have seen that the Ibn Kharrabūdh report (1) exhibits the combination of the shooting stars tradition with the Monday tradition, itself associated with the view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke. The formal change undergone by the report in the paraphrase adduced by Ibn Ḥajar (see above, p. 115) reflects, not the resistance, but the indifference to that view. Here indeed, only the essential narrative features of the Ibn Kharrabūdh report are preserved. To these features, however, is added a reference to nocturnal birth. The formal change can undoubtedly be ascribed to transmitters ignorant, rather than disregarding, of scholarly discipline and ingenuously, rather than exclusively, attached to the view that Muḥammad was born at night. What was retained in the paraphrase was the association of the birth of Muḥammad with a supernatural phenomenon manifesting the actualization of his prophethood. The addition of a reference to nocturnal birth reflects then, not the concern for doctrinal homogeneity, but the attachment to a ready-made doctrinal product. What mattered for the transmitters of the Ibn Kharrabūdh report was the supernatural quality of the birth of Muḥammad as such, not as an implication contained in the conception of the ontological prophet. The considerable latitude enjoyed in the treatment of Sunnī Tradition, as well as the subproduct of Ṣūfī doctrine retained here regardless of redundancy, suggests the existence of a group distinct from the *Sīra* amateurs themselves. That group, which I propose to identify with the free preachers, was characterized by the eclectic employment of traditional items for the sake of edification, rather than by the exclusive engagement in the transmission and interpretation of *Sīra* Tradition³¹⁴. Whereas the conception of the ontological prophet could be grasped only by

³¹⁴. On the edulcorated version of Ṣūfī doctrine diffused by the free preachers and on their use of Tradition, see Johannes Pedersen, "The Islamic Preacher. wā'iz, mudhakkir, qāṣṣ", in *Goldziher Memoria* I, Budapest, 1948, pp. 238-249. If my identification is correct, the preaching performed at the celebrations of the birth of Muḥammad may represent the *Sitz im Leben* of this development, as well as of other developments to be reconstructed below. The presence of wu'āz at the celebration organized by Muẓaffar ad-dīn is documented in Ibn Khallikān's account (see above, n. 311).

the dogmatically minded, the supernatural quality of the birth of Muḥammad was a doctrinal object readily available for edification. Whereas a certain measure of scholarly training was necessary to infer the supernatural quality of the birth of Muḥammad from the association of that event with supernatural phenomena manifesting the actualization of his prophethood, the view that he was born at night could, as a doctrinal emblem, immediately convey that quality to an unsophisticated audience³¹⁵. It is surprising, here even more than in the previous case, that the paraphrase found its way into the work of a Sunnī scholar, but it seems plausible that this process was favoured by the exclusion of the Ibn Kharrabūdh report from Sunnī sources. After a long period of exclusion, the original form of the report could indeed fall into oblivion among Sunnī scholars.

Like the monk tradition, the Meccan Jew tradition involves signs of Muḥammad's future prophethood recognized by a local monotheist in the particular circumstances of his birth and, as such, displays a moderate conception of the functional prophet. Unlike Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān's report (22), the Ibn Suḥaym report (18) exhibits a mere absence of specification as to the time of birth of Muḥammad. The two reports, however, clearly underwent parallel changes at a late stage of their transmission. Indeed, in the report (19) as adduced by Ḥalabī, the intrusion of a reference to nocturnal birth suppresses a term which was adduced in the course of the scholarly discussion as evidence in favour of the view that Muḥammad was born during the daytime. We may then suppose that, through paraphrastic transmission, the wording of the Ibn Suḥaym report was likewise modified by the *Sīra* amateurs in the interest of doctrinal homogeneity. It appears here, however, that Ḥalabī's own attachment to the view that Muḥammad was born at night led him to include in his work a development incompatible with scholarly discipline. As a Sunnī scholar, Ḥalabī

³¹⁵. Similar remarks apply to the diffusion of the view that Muḥammad was born at night in religious poetry (a development which otherwise lies outside the scope of my study), unintentionally documented by Annemarie Schimmel in *And Muḥammad is His Messenger. The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*, Chapel Hill, 1985, pp. 144-145.

could, moreover, here as in the case of Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān's report, render the remaining problematic term inoffensive through mere glossing. In the case of the maid tradition, Ḥalabī likewise could, in his paraphrase of Tradition, provide Bakkāṭ's version of Ibn Ishāq's report (9) with an introduction specifying that Muḥammad was born at night.

I have argued that, although the association of Q 93:2 with the birth of Muḥammad represents an innovation, preconditions for this association can be discerned in *Tafsīr* literature (see above, pp. 32-34). I must now determine why, while exegetical scholarship showed tolerance toward the association of Q 93:1-2 with the person of Muḥammad, the association of the second phrase with his birth was preserved by Ḥalabī alone. We have seen that both phrases were associated with episodes of salvation history at a relatively early stage of the exegetical Tradition. What mattered here was that God's oath disclosed the position occupied by an event in salvation history. That He had sworn by the time at which the event occurred, rather than by the event itself, was simply an instance of Scriptural metonymy. The implicit ascription of God's oath to His use of metonymy presupposes a certain measure of agreement, or at least the absence of a major disagreement, as to the time at which an episode of salvation history took place. In the case of Muḥammad's journey to heaven, a unanimous agreement indeed existed. Whereas the position occupied by the birth of Muḥammad in salvation history was widely acknowledged among late Sunnī scholars, the time at which that event occurred was indeed an object of disagreement. The association of Q 93:2 with the birth of Muḥammad can undoubtedly be ascribed to exegetes unaware of the scholarly discussion, and for whom the nocturnal occurrence of that event was an undisputed matter. Although the view that Muḥammad was born at night was not directly employed here for the sake of edification, we may suppose that this association itself belongs to the exegesis of the free preachers referred to by Rāzī. Unlike either a moderate conception of the functional prophet or the conception of the ontological prophet, which both ascribed to the birth of Muḥammad a specific role in salvation history, the indefinite position occupied by that event in salvation

history was indeed a doctrinal object readily available for edification. Whereas the latitude enjoyed by the *Sīra* amateurs was restricted to the treatment of *Sīra* Tradition, the free preachers did not refrain from developing *Tafsīr* Tradition itself. When appealing to Scripture, the free preachers could meet the expectation of their unsophisticated audience to find in the divine speech evidence of God's concern for every single item of the life and person of His prophet. The development could here only be frowned upon by *Tafsīr* scholars, who were indeed familiar with *Sīra* scholarship (and simultaneously engaged in it in the case of scholars such as Ibn Kathīr and Suyūṭī), not because it involved the birth of Muḥammad as an episode of salvation history, but because it presupposed an illusory agreement as to the time at which that event occurred. It appears, here again, that Ḥalabī's attachment to the view that Muḥammad was born at night led him to include in his work a development incompatible with scholarly discipline.

I have argued that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at the time of *duḥā*, exhibited in the twice modified report (7) adduced by Ḥalabī, as well as the association of Q 93:1 with the salvation of Mecca indirectly reflected here, represents a further step in the attempt to provide a tighter association between his birth and the episode of salvation history. On the other hand, we have seen that the association, exhibited in the modified report (6) adduced by Ibn Sayyid an-nās (and in the day of the elephant tradition itself), of the birth of Muḥammad with an episode of salvation history could fit in particularly well with a moderate conception of the functional prophet (see above, p. 130). We may now suppose that the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at the time of *duḥā* was intended, obviously not to modify, but rather to simplify the doctrinal significance of that association. When placed on the same day, the two events were put in close relation with one another, but were kept as distinct episodes of salvation history. Only through that distinction could the salvation of Mecca provide a sign of Muḥammad's future prophethood. When placed at the same time of the day, however, the two events were fused into a single episode of salvation history. What mattered here was that the salvatory will of God had equally

manifested itself in the birth of Muḥammad and in the salvation of Mecca. The concern with the two events as a single episode of salvation history is reflected in the ambiguity of the implicit appeal to Scripture involved here: if the salvation of Mecca and the birth of Muḥammad both took place at the time of *duḥā*, God's oath may have disclosed the position occupied by either event in salvation history. That, here again, we encounter the free preachers as transmitters of *Sīra* Tradition seems to be a reasonable assumption. Unlike a moderate conception of the functional prophet, the equal manifestation of the salvatory will of God in the birth of Muḥammad and in the salvation of Mecca was indeed a doctrinal object readily available for edification. On the other hand, the implicit appeal to Scripture involved here presupposes both the readiness to develop *Tafsīr* Tradition and a considerable latitude enjoyed in the treatment of *Sīra* Tradition. If indeed the view that Muḥammad was born at the time of *duḥā* emerged among the free preachers, we can affirm that their attachment to the view that he was born at night, already qualified as ingenuous, was not exclusive of other views, provided that such views could be employed for the sake of edification. That the twice modified report found its way into Ḥalabī's work, however, may simply be taken as evidence of his greater tolerance toward developments incompatible with scholarly discipline.

Another development deserves some attention.

The association, in the 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār report (41), of the Syrian castles tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night, is indeed difficult to explain. I have argued that the association of the announcement and miracle traditions with the view that Muḥammad was born at night achieved by early Sunnī transmitters reflects a sense of supernaturalness about his birth arising from the association, in a moderate conception of the functional prophet, of that event with supernatural phenomena (see above, pp. 150-151). On the other hand, we have seen that, although the Syrian castles tradition can be classified among the miracle traditions, this tradition bears a particular significance (Prophetic pre-existence) which

cannot be subsumed under either the conception of the functional prophet or the conception of the ontological prophet, and poses a doctrinal problem of its own, namely the analogy between the radiation of the Prophetic light and Scriptural revelation (see above, pp. 130-132). We must note here that the appearance of light does not represent a supernatural phenomenon provoked by divine intervention, since the cause of the phenomenon is a personal attribute of Muḥammad (the Prophetic light). We may suppose that the association of the Syrian castles tradition with the view that Muḥammad was born at night reflects a reductive interpretation of that tradition, whereby the appearance of light was assimilated to a supernatural phenomenon provoked by divine intervention, and that this association was achieved by doctrinally unqualified transmitters. If my conclusion is correct, the exclusion of the 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār report by Sunnī scholars save Abū Nu'aym reflects, not their resistance to the view that Muḥammad was born at night, but their awareness of the marginal origin of the report. That this awareness was strengthened by a negative evaluation of the transmission of the report seems to be a reasonable assumption. Conversely, the rehabilitation of the 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār report by Suyūṭī and Qaṣṭallānī reflects, not their attachment to the view that Muḥammad was born at night, but their leniency toward defective material. We may suppose that, in the present case, this leniency was increased by the greater tolerance of Suyūṭī toward the al-'Abbās report (40), the 'Amr ibn Qutayba report (53) and the Ibn 'Abbās report (59), themselves exclusively adduced by Abū Nu'aym.

In general, the diffusion of the view that Muḥammad was born at night in Sunnī sources was a mere side effect of the offensive of the ontological prophet. Sunnī scholars had to manage with that view, because they practiced verbatim transmission. In the particular case of the Hānī' report, which had never been excluded from Sunnī sources, verbatim transmission could occasionally be abandoned to the advantage of paraphrase. When paraphrasing the report, Qaṣṭallānī could indeed do away with the view that Muḥammad was born at night (see above, p. 95).

d. Shī'ī Tradition

The view that Muḥammad was born at night is contained in all the Shī'ī composite reports. This view appears here as an independent tradition which, though associated with individual narrative traditions and occasionally inherited as part of previous material, can slide to other traditions contained in the reports. Moreover, such a slide is formally attested in Abū Maṣṣūr's report (52 [pp. 116-117]) and in Barqī's report (56 [p. 121]). In the first section of the present chapter, I have argued that the Shī'ī reports exhibit previous material fitting in with the conception of the ontological prophet, as well as developments serving this conception. We may suppose that early Shī'ī scholars transmitted the view that Muḥammad was born at night outside of any specific association because the imagery lying behind it fitted in equally well with the various expressions of the ontological prophet reflected in their eclectic articulation of *Sīra* Tradition. We may now state that the dynamism of this view, identified as a feature of Ṣūfī Tradition (see above, pp. 152-153), is characteristic of Shī'ī Tradition. If this dynamism is better documented in Shī'ī than in Ṣūfī Tradition, it is because the supernatural phenomena manifesting the actualization of Muḥammad's prophethood were concentrated there on his birth, rather than being extended to his conception.

The view that Muḥammad was born when dawn broke is associated with the Friday tradition in the Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq report (3). I have suggested that the break of dawn tradition was borrowed from the Ibn Kharrabūdh report (1), where it is associated with the Monday tradition (see above, pp. 46-47). I have argued that, through the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at the break of dawn, proto-Shī'ī scholars expressed the view that the salvation granted through the manifestation of the divine will at the birth of Muḥammad prefigures the salvation sought through the performance of legal works (see above, pp. 149-150). We may suppose that the break of dawn tradition was extracted from the Ibn Kharrabūdh report and transmitted in association with the Friday tradition because it could thus be promoted as

a distinctively Shī'ī view and, moreover, as one independent from any narrative framework. The promotion of this tradition suggests that early Shī'ī scholars likewise felt the need to preserve the association between the historical and legal dimensions of salvation.

That the doctrinal significance of the break of dawn tradition fitted in with specific concerns is suggested by the promotion of the break of dawn tradition as a Shī'ī majority view, which coincided with the elaboration of a conception of transhistorical time (see above, pp. 47-49). The conception elaborated by Shī'ī scholars, characterized above as a minimal one, may now be contrasted with the Ṣūfī conception of transhistorical time. According to the Ṣūfī conception, divine grace is bestowed upon man daily (or weekly) at a time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad, and can be sought then through prayer. According to the conception elaborated by Shī'ī scholars, the reward granted by God for the performance of fasting is increased yearly on a day blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad. Emphasis is laid in the first case on the reactivation of the grace bestowed upon man at the birth of Muḥammad and on man's ability to experience it, in the second case on the merit inherent to a specific work and on its capacity to bring about the retrieval of the benefits granted by God at the birth of Muḥammad. The practice involved is in the first case parallel to the performance of legal works and independent from it, in the second case simultaneous with commemorative practices and indeed dependent upon a legal pattern. The view underlying the conception elaborated by Shī'ī scholars is that, while the manifestation of the divine will at the birth of Muḥammad had an enduring impact on the relation between God and man, and thus can be experienced in the present, only legal works play an effective role in this relation, and transcend time. Thus, Shī'ī scholars had reached the view that salvation can be sought in the recurrence of a time blessed by virtue of the birth of Muḥammad, but had avoided the implication that this event plays an effective role in the relation between God and man. The view, expressed through the placing of the birth of Muḥammad at the break of dawn, that the salvation granted through the manifestation of the divine will at the birth of Muḥammad prefigures the salvation sought

through the performance of legal works indeed fitted in with the concern for transhistorical time as a mere auxiliary of commemoration.

The view that Muḥammad was born on Friday night is exhibited in the pseudo-Wāqidī's dating (4). This view appears here as a tradition, itself representing a deviation from the Friday tradition. I have argued that the association of the time at which prayers are answered, identified as Friday night in Shī'ī reports, with the birth of Muḥammad accounts for this deviation. We may now state that this association represents a shift from the conception of intrinsically blessed time to the conception of transhistorical time identical to the one reflected in 'Abdal'azīz's teaching (see above, pp. 169-170), except that no adjustment was needed here and that, on the contrary, both the Friday tradition and the view that divine grace is bestowed upon man on Friday night were dependent upon the view that Friday is an intrinsically blessed day. The pseudo-Wāqidī, which was indisputably in existence by the middle of the seventh century, suggests that the genuine concern for transhistorical time first emerged among Shī'īs, rather than among Ṣūfīs, while it seems clear that this concern was quite foreign to Shī'ī scholars *stricto sensu*. On the other hand, we may note that the product of the shift from the conception of intrinsically blessed time to the conception of transhistorical time corresponds exactly to the view that the grace bestowed upon man at the birth of Muḥammad is reactivated on Monday night, a view which, as I have argued, is likely to have been reached by Ṣūfī scholars at an initial stage of their speculation (see above, pp. 166-167). Thus, this view may alternatively represent a calque of the view that the grace bestowed upon man at the birth of Muḥammad is reactivated on Friday night, involving a mere shift of confessional emblem. The choice of this alternative implies a contact between Ṣūfī scholars and a rather marginal group of Shī'īs which, in the absence of historical evidence, must remain purely hypothetical.

V. Conclusion

The reader may now be disposed to accept the claim that, through the use of my method, the variation of *Sīra* Tradition can be reconstructed as a diachronic process on the basis of textual evidence and that, through an interpretative effort, the dynamics animating this process can itself be reconstructed as a conceptual development. Two questions, however, will surely be raised.

The first question arises from the material treated in this study, and regards the area of applicability of my method as well as the scope of my interpretation. As was made clear to the reader, my method involves the discernment of units of transmitted meaning, or "traditions", and my interpretation rests on the assumption that such units serve to articulate conceptions generated by concerns specific to salvation history.

Two kinds of material were treated in this study: reports concerned with supernatural phenomena and reports concerned with dating. In the first kind of material, the discernment of traditions was made possible, to a large extent, by the placing of supernatural phenomena at various points in the life of Muḥammad. This phenomenon has parallels elsewhere in *Sīra*, which could indeed be analyzed according to the same method. The richest example is provided by the alternative placing of the purification of Muḥammad's heart at his birth, at various points of his infancy, at the beginning of his mission, and before his journey to heaven. It seems clear, however, that other supernatural phenomena know of only a single occasion and, moreover, that reports concerned with such phenomena are not characteristic of *Sīra* as a whole.

In the second kind of material, the discernment of traditions was made possible by the occurrence of variation among individual items, rather than among whole datings. This phenomenon is likely to have parallels elsewhere in *Sīra*, although I am at present unable to adduce an example. The very analysis attempted in this study, however, suggests that the application of my method to reports concerned with dating may lead to dead ends. Whereas

the variation of *Sīra* Tradition as to the day of the week on which Muḥammad was born and as to the time of his birth was shown to be more orderly than is usually assumed, the variation as to the day of the month indeed retains its chaotic appearance.

In this study, I did not treat the kind of material predominant in *Sīra*. This material consists of complex information, such as information on persons and places, and is exemplified in the extensive accounts of the military campaigns of Muḥammad. A high degree of variation is exhibited here, as demonstrated by several Western scholars. The different roles ascribed to prominent Companions, and in particular to 'Alī, by Sunnī and Shī'ī Tradition respectively provide a convenient example³¹⁶. It is questionable, however, whether such information can be reduced to simple units. Moreover, the applicability of my method to the datings found in this kind of material is made unlikely by the occurrence of variation among whole datings³¹⁷.

The assumption that traditions serve to articulate conceptions generated by concerns specific to salvation history is justified by a feature of the material treated in this study: the predominance of reports concerned with supernatural phenomena, which produces a narrative centering upon the theme of rupture in the course of events. In view of this feature, it seemed reasonable to extend my interpretation to the items of dating which coexist -sometimes in the same reports- with supernatural phenomena, instead of treating them as separate material, and of ascribing them to purely historical concerns.

Reports concerned with supernatural phenomena also coexist with the complex information characteristic of *Sīra*, but are generally subordinate to a narrative manifesting the chain of events. The account of the battle of Badr, for instance, would retain its

³¹⁶ . See Henri Laoust, "Le rôle de 'Alī dans la *Sīra* chiite", *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* XXX (1962), pp. 7-26; Meir Kister, "On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XXXVII (1974), pp. 545-571.

³¹⁷. See Marsden Jones, "The Chronology of the *Maghāzī*. A textual survey", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XIX (1957), pp. 245-280.

consistency without the passage relating the intervention of angels. Thus, it could be argued that this kind of narrative qualifies as “history”, and reflects the tendentiousness inherent in historical memory, rather than the existence of specific conceptions. It may well be, however, that we simply need a more elaborate method and a greater interpretative effort to discern here the marks of salvation history.

The second question arises from the identification of groups, which was attempted in this study, as the reader will rightly point out, without the support of biographical and historical evidence.

Two distinct procedures were resorted to in the identification of groups. In the first procedure, the existence of a group was inferred from a conceptual development detected in *Sīra*. To this procedure belongs the identification of the proto-Şūfī scholars, as well as that of the *Sīra* amateurs. Such an identification obviously cannot be supported by either biographical or historical evidence, but can be undermined by biographical evidence. As the reader may remember, the proto-Shī‘ī scholars were distinguished from the proto-Şūfī scholars on the basis of biographical evidence, or rather of the evidence of transmission. Likewise, if we were to discover the identity of some advocate of the view that Muḥammad was born at night and to come upon evidence, say, of his Şūfī affiliation, the category of *Sīra* amateurs would have to be reconsidered.

In the second procedure, by contrast, a conceptual development detected in *Sīra* was ascribed to a group whose existence was already known from other sources. To this procedure belongs the identification of the early Şūfī scholars, as well as that of the free preachers. Such an identification can either be supported or undermined by biographical evidence. The reader surely noted that, whenever the identity of transmitters was known to me, evidence of their specific affiliation was sought in *Rijāl* literature, and that this search seldom led to conclusive results. However, he may concede that, in the absence of such evidence, my identifications remain the most plausible ones. It seemed reasonable to

assume, for instance, that the radical conception of the ontological prophet was articulated both by Shī'ī and Ṣūfī scholars, rather than only by Shī'ī scholars, who would at one and the same time use Shī'ī chains and hide themselves behind Sunnī ones. The ascription of a conceptual development detected in *Sīra* to an existing group can also be supported, or undermined, by historical evidence. The search for such evidence was not attempted in this study, because it would involve a considerable amount of time and, moreover, because it would probably lead to inconclusive results. For instance, it seems unlikely that, if we were to gather the information on the free preachers found in various kinds of literature, we would discover there extensive quotations from their preaching and that, if such quotations were to be discovered, we would come upon evidence of their treatment of the material pertaining to the birth of Muḥammad.

At this point, the reader may ask why the identification of groups was attempted at all. The obvious answer is that the conceptual development reconstructed in this study had to be provided with with some flesh, however fluid that flesh may be. Of course, the reader will only accept this answer if he judges that the interpretative effort made here did indeed enable me to penetrate into the soul of the material.

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