



AKADEMIN FÖR UTBILDNING OCH EKONOMI
Avdelningen för kultur-, religions- och utbildningsvetenskap

Governance and Economics in Early Islamic Historiography

A comparative study of historical narratives of 'Umar's
caliphate in the works of al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari

Tobias Andersson

2013

MA Dissertation, Level E, 30 ECTS
Religious Studies (121-150)

Supervisor: Olof Sundquist
Ass. Supervisor: Ulrika Mårtensson
Examiner: Jari Ristiniemi

Abstract

The thesis examines the level of historical analysis in the works of two third/ninth century Muslim historians, al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari, including their underlying legal, political and socio-economic concerns as manifested in their narratives. By comparing and contextualising their histories regarding the caliphate of ‘Umar, in relation to their social institutions and scholarly disciplines, the purpose is to highlight the subjective agency of the historians as well as the structure of the historiographical discourse in which they formulated their narratives. Based on the notion of discourses as well-defined areas of social fact that defines the forms of (historical) knowledge in societies, the thesis applies de Certeau’s theory of discourses in order to analyse the formation of historical discourses in relation to social institutions and scholarly traditions. By linking the narrative differences to the historians’ scholarly contexts and political concerns, the thesis also show their subjective agency to form certain narratives of history depending on political and scholarly interests, although expressed in the form of the *khabar*-tradition of ‘Abbasid period. It is argued that the narratives represent attempts to explain social and economic factors involved in civilisational history by means of the accumulated body of what in modern scholarship is labeled “religious knowledge”. Thereby, it also problematises current debates on the level of analytical thinking in early Muslim historiography and suggest new approaches to the subject by discourse analysis.

Keywords: Islamic Historiography, Baladhuri, Tabari, ‘Umar b. al-Khattab, Rightly-Guided Caliphs, ‘Abbasids, Islamic Scholarship, Discourse Analysis.

1. Introduction	4
1.1. Background	4
1.2. Purpose and scope of the study	6
1.3. Previous studies	7
1.4. Material.....	9
1.5. Method	10
1.6. Disposition	12
2. Theory and terminology.....	13
2.1 Agency and contextualisation	13
2.2. Discourse and discourse theory	15
2.3. Khabar and khabar-history	16
3. Times and works of the historians	19
3.1. Political, economic and scholarly context	19
3.2. Historiographical context	23
3.3. Al-Baladhuri	28
3.3.1. Biography	28
3.2.2. Works.....	29
3.3.3. Historiographical methodology	30
3.4. At-Tabari	31
3.4.1. Biography	31
3.4.2. Works.....	32
3.4.3. Historiographical methodology	34
4. Narratives of the caliphate of ‘Umar	36
4.1. Governance, law and contracts.....	36
4.1.1. Al-Baladhuri	36
4.1.2. At-Tabari	42
4.1.3. Comparison.....	52
4.2. Economy and taxation	55
4.2.1. Al-Baladhuri	55
4.2.2. At-Tabari	58
4.2.3. Comparison.....	62
4.3. Registers and stipends	64
4.3.1. Al-Baladhuri	64
4.3.2. At-Tabari	67
4.3.3. Comparison.....	71
5. Concluding discussion	73
5.1. Agency and historical analysis.....	73
5.2. Historical discourses	75
References.....	81
Primary literature	81
Secondary literature	82

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Within the scholarly tradition of Islam, the second caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab has, throughout history, been regarded as the prototype for sound political governance and economic administration. Besides his rank as one of the closest companions, he is known as the leader who realised the expansion of Islam that had begun at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his first successor, Abu Bakr as-Siddiq. It was during his almost eleven-year-long reign that the Islamic *dawla* replaced the Byzantine and Persian empires as the leading political entity of the time. It meant that Islam spread to many new peoples and had to be adapted according to the different social contexts. Thereby, ‘Umar’s reign represented the establishment of the Shari’a and he became an important model for subsequent independent judgements (*ijtihad*) after the Prophet, carried out in order to apply the legal understanding (*fiqh*) of Islam in the present-day context.¹

When the subject of history developed into a separate scholarly discipline in the third/ninth century, distinguished from hadith and other sciences, over two centuries had passed from the time of ‘Umar, and the political authority of the ‘Abbasid dynasty had already begun to decline. The two historians of the present study, Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 297/892) and Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari (d. 310/923), both experienced the decline of the ‘Abbasid caliphate along with the political and socio-economic problems that the dynasty encountered. They were active participants in the scientific development of the third/ninth century when the debates on *fiqh* and *kalam* (theology) from the preceding century turned into schools, consolidating the scholarly tradition of Islam. They were well versed in the religious sciences and, during his lifetime, at-Tabari in particular, was far better known for his expertise in *tafsir*, *fiqh* and hadith as opposed to history. It is well known among contemporary scholars that their historical works reflect the same reference system of *isnad* (chain of transmission) as the discipline of hadith and a similar arrangement of narration upon narration. Less attention has been given to the influence of other disciplines, for example, the level of historical analysis in their narratives based on the legal and political trends of their time. In this study, it will be argued that the two historians articulated certain legal, political, social, economic or religious concerns pertaining to their times, but did so according to

¹ Cf. Sallabi 2002: 207-9, 340-62; al-Qurashi 1990: passim; El-Hibri 2010: 77-83.

the scholarly tradition of their time, which in terms of historical knowledge was centred around *naql* (transmission) rather than '*aql* (discursive reasoning).

Because these historians, alongside their predecessors from the end of the Umayyad period onwards, constitute the main literary informants on the early history of Islam, it is crucial to be aware of the historians' agency and level of analysis when approaching them as sources of Islamic history. To understand the historical epoch in itself, it is likewise important to recognise the scholarly context in which they articulated their narratives. As Ulrika Mårtensson has pointed out, the scholarly consensus appears to be that historians, like at-Tabari, "did not seek to explain historical processes in terms of economic and social structures and mechanisms, but rather to evaluate the moral qualities of individual historical actors".² Likewise, the early *khavar*-historians are viewed as mere compilers of narrations and few, if any, are accredited with any socio-economic historical analysis before the eight/fourteenth century scholar, Ibn Khaldun. Their works are often described as mere "salvation history" founded on a God-centred worldview, while thus assuming that the historians were only seeing history in terms of morality and divine destiny, rather than analysing any relations of power or complex interactions between different distinct social spheres and groups.

The present study seeks to re-evaluate these views by developing a more appropriate terminology, based on discourse analysis and previous research on the particular *khavar*-form of history writing. The basic thesis is that the historians indeed had a complex conception of historical development, including both its socio-economic and intellectual aspects, while analysing and articulating their concerns according to the text-centred historiographical tradition of the time. Hence, they applied their knowledge or concerns about *fiqh* and *siyasa* on civilisational development, while thereby demonstrating the universal validity of legal rights and obligations for rulers and subjects, albeit according to the form and methodology of *khavar*-history. In that sense, it is an argument against the view of the early historians as mere compilers of history for the sake of moral lessons, which stems from a limited understanding of the relation between the intellectual tradition of Islam in which they stood, the scholarly discourse in which they spoke and the socio-political context in which they worked. Moreover, the focus on al-Baladhuri's and at-Tabari's accounts of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab's

² Mårtensson 2009: 3.

consensually acclaimed governance of the early Muslim *dawla*, shifts attention from the immediate individual morality to the larger civilisational picture.

Some contemporary scholars have pointed out the level of analysis and complexity of the early historical works, thereby attempting to revise the common view of this formative phase of the writing of Islamic history. There is, however, a tendency to go too far in the other direction, thereby, as Chase Robinson puts it, forcing Islamic history into an alien mould and violating its specific character.³ Again, such an approach would lack an appropriate consideration of the historical thinking of the time and the influence of the other sciences of Islam. Although certain aspects have to be revised, this re-evaluation, represented by Ulrika Mårtensson among others, is, nevertheless, the basis for the present study. Thus, by examining the historians' narrations and subtle analyses of 'Umar's governmental reforms in relation to the overall narrative of their works, a widened understanding of both the content of the historical works and the scholarly context at the time can hopefully be achieved.

1.2. Purpose and scope of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine and define the level of historical analysis in the works of al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari, including their underlying legal, political and socio-economic concerns. Based on the notion of discourses as well-defined areas of social fact that determine the forms and expressions of (historical) knowledge, it will facilitate an understanding of the subjective agency of the historians and the historiographical discourse in which they articulated their narratives. While many previous studies have approached the early historians' narratives in order to make clear the manipulation before using them in other historical research, the present study intends to study the context of the historians in its own right. The scope is limited to two major historians (at-Tabari and al-Baladhuri) and one important set of events (governance in the caliphate of 'Umar), which is enough to at least begin developing a more considerate approach to the early Muslim historians.⁴ The two principal questions whereby the aforementioned purpose is to be achieved are the following:

1. How does each writer narrate and analyse the political process of 'Umar's economic and administrative reforms with respect to legal judgements (*fiqh*),

³ Robinson 2003: 127.

⁴ See El-Hibri 2010: 262-299 for a discussion about the historiographical importance of 'Umar.

social contracts (*bay'a*, *'ahd*), taxation (*kharaj*, *jizya*, *zakat*) and its relation to larger narrative of the early Muslim Community?

2. Why are there differences and similarities in their approach to historical analysis regarding the events in focus? How are their narratives reflecting the scholarly context and historical discourses of their time?

1.3. Previous studies

Relevant previous studies of the historians and their times could be divided into four broad categories: (1) the works and context of al-Baladhuri, (2) the works and context of at-Tabari, (3) the development of early Islamic historiography, and (4) socio-economic analytical thought among Muslim scholars until the medieval period. However, the first two are particularly significant for the present study and will accordingly be discussed below. Few studies have been specifically dedicated to the works of al-Baladhuri, but many more have brought them into consideration for the general development of Islamic historiography. One is Erling L. Petersen's *'Ali and Mu'awiya in Early Arabic Tradition* (1964), in which he attempts to reconstruct the development of Arabic historiography by examining the interpretive development of *fitnat al-kubra*. Despite some analytical flaws and a rather limited scope of material in relation to conclusions, his thesis provides important discussions about the characteristics of al-Baladhuri's and early historians' methodology and intellectual contexts. He also shows the agency of the early historians to shape their material into more or less dialectical and interpretative narratives. Another general review of al-Baladhuri in relation to the rise of Arabic historiography is found in Tarif Khalidi's *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (1994), where the author also discusses the differences between *Ansab al-Ashraf* and *Futuh al-Buldan* as well as al-Baladhuri's methodological approach, although without going into detail. Similar overviews are also found in Franz Rosenthal's *A History of Muslim Historiography* (1952) and Chase Robinson's *Islamic Historiography* (2003), but few have contributed any new insights into the works of al-Baladhuri.

Particularly relevant to the present study, however, is Stefan Leder's article, "Features of the Novel in Early Historiography: The Downfall of Zalid al-Qasri" (1990), where the author analyses the *akhbar* about Khalid al-Qasri in the works of at-Tabari and al-Baladhuri. He shows how both historians manipulated their sources to facilitate or emphasise certain narrative development and argues that they inserted their

own narrative voices in various subtle ways. Steven C. Judd (2005) later developed this approach by extending the scope to the whole Umayyad period, arguing that al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari “understood the causes of the Umayyads’ decline and the lessons to be learned from their fall very differently”, which led them to arrange and manipulate the transmitted *akhbar* for certain narrative purposes and thereby inserted their own voices as historians.⁵ In the revised edition of *Islamic History* (2009), Stephen R. Humphreys similarly provides a short but informative historiographical evaluation of al-Baladhuri’s accounts of the caliphate of ‘Uthman and the historian’s agency to demonstrate certain viewpoints (legitimising ‘Uthman’s authority) despite using seemingly contradictory sources (such as the Shi’ite Abu Mikhnaf).⁶ Some important discussions of al-Baladhuri’s accounts of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (*khulafa rashidun*) in relation to the larger historiographical context are moreover found in Tayeb al-Hibri’s *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History* (2010), where he analyses the general Muslim narrative tradition regarding early caliphs.

As for the works of at-Tabari, numerous studies have attempted to come to terms with his sources, methodology, abridgements, arrangements and other narrative features. Most relevant here are the examinations of at-Tabari’s history in relation to his context and thereby at-Tabari’s own legal, political, economic and religious concerns. Besides the aforementioned thesis by Erling L. Petersen, an early example is Marshall Hodgson’s article, “Two Pre-Modern Historians” (1968), in which he observes that at-Tabari’s reports regarding the *fitna* between ‘Ali and Mu’awiya indicate the historian’s concern for legal regulations that, among other things, would prevent conflicts of succession leading to civil strifes. This approach, currently represented by Ulrika Mårtensson, has discussed at-Tabari’s concern for rule of law in relation to the concepts of *mithaq* (covenant) and *‘ahd* (contract) in several articles.⁷ The aforementioned articles of Leder and Judd are likewise relevant for the methodological approach to at-Tabari’s history and for uncovering the historians’ agency in compiling the *akhbar*.

Ulrika Mårtensson’s contribution, in particular, to the study of at-Tabari’s *Tarikh* has been important for the understanding of the work in relation to the social-economic and legal concerns of the historian himself.⁸ She has argued that the narrative of at-Tabari represents an analysis of imperial history in terms of taxation, with significant

⁵ Judd 2005: 210.

⁶ Humphreys 2009: 98-103.

⁷ Cf. Mårtensson 2009, 2011b.

⁸ Cf. Mårtensson 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b,

implications for how we view its moral and religious dimensions.⁹ In another article, she has suggested that at-Tabari presents a free rider-analysis of the decline of ‘Abbasid state power and thereby “provides an answer to modern historians’ questions as to why the Abbasid state crumbled, and what role religion played in the political economy”.¹⁰ Along with the notion of at-Tabari’s emphasis on social contracts and religion as legal norm necessary to uphold rule of law – a prominent feature in her reading of the *Tarikh* in the monograph *Tabari* (2009) – her notice of the analytical concerns underlying the surface of *khavar*-history are central to the present study. In that sense, it represents an extension of the view of Aziz al-Azmeh and Tarif Khalidi that the foundation for Ibn Khaldun’s analytical history was based on medieval predecessors such as at-Tabari.¹¹ Thus, Mårtensson argues that at-Tabari’s *Tarikh* reflects “political economy” to the same degree as Ibn Khaldun’s *al-Muqaddima* and that the difference between them is formal, rather than substantial.¹² The present study will elaborate on this discussion and aim at refining the understanding of the analytical level in at-Tabari’s *Tarikh*. It has also been pointed out that there are two broad approaches to the research on at-Tabari’s *Tarikh*, where the majority perceive it as reflecting a religious world-view of a historian concerned with moral evaluations of history,¹³ while others view at-Tabari as concerned primarily with legal principles and broader socio-economic developments.¹⁴ A similar point can be made about contemporary research on other historians from the same era, including al-Baladhuri, and the present study therefore attempts to further develop the understanding of the political, scholarly and historical discourse of the ‘Abbasid period in the third/ninth century.

1.4. Material

The first of the two main sources is al-Baladhuri’s *Futuh al-Buldan* in the Leiden edition, edited by M. J. de Goeje and published between 1863-1866. The English translation remains my own throughout the study, despite the availability of a previous translation from 1916/1923 by Philip K. Hitti and Francis C. Murgotten.¹⁵ Because of

⁹ Mårtensson 2005, 2009.

¹⁰ Mårtensson 2011b: 203.

¹¹ Al-Azmeh 2003: 9-42; Khalidi 1994: 225-27.

¹² Mårtensson 2011a: 125.

¹³ Nöldeke 1879; Rosenthal 1962; Humphreys 1989; Gilliot 1990, 1994, 2008; El-Hibri 1999; Robinson 2003; Shoshan 2004.

¹⁴ Hodgson 1968, Tayob 1999, Mårtensson 2005, 2009.

¹⁵ References in footnotes will nevertheless include page numbers of both the Arabic edition (Leiden) and the Hitti/Murgotten (1916/1924) translation.

the restricted scope of the study, primary focus is limited to the *Futuh* and not al-Baladhuri's other major work, *Ansab al-Ashraf*. The second main source is al-Tabari's *Tarikh al-Muluk wa ar-Rusul* in the Leiden edition edited by M.J. Goeje and published as 15 volumes in 1879-1901. Page numbers in the footnotes refer to the Arabic Leiden edition, but references are also given to volume and page number of the standard English translation (SUNY) that has been used throughout the study. My only intervention is that "God" has been changed to "Allah" in the SUNY-translation in order to avoid confusion between the different translations and historians.

The reason for focusing on these two historians and their works is primarily informed by their representativity for the historical discourse of the time, their later influence and suitability for comparison due to their concern for the same historical events ('Umar's caliphate) in relation to a similar contemporary context (third/ninth century 'Abbasid society). The minor difference in genre (*futuh/tarikh*) and structural arrangement (geographic/annalistic) is regarded as an advantage for comparison in order to uncover the historians' concerns and their historical discourse. Although it is inconceivable that the subject might be fully exhausted, due to the limitations in scope and space, it may contribute some theoretical perspectives and open up the field for future in-depth research with an extended scope of material.

1.5. Method

The basic method for approaching the historical discourse of governance, law, administration and economy is contextualisation by examining the historian's accounts in relation to (1) the overall narrative of their own work; (2) each other and similar narratives in the Muslim tradition until their time; and (3) the main political, social, economic, religious and scholarly issues of the time. As Tayeb El-Hibri writes:

The fact that most of the classical writers dealing with early Islamic history began their first documented work in the middle of the eighth century has long been known, but few have ever bothered to take into account the political, cultural, and religious interests of the 'Abbasid period, especially between 750 and 861, in projecting a certain type of historical representation on the earlier period of Islamic history.¹⁶

Therefore, the first step is to overview the "political, cultural and religious interests of the 'Abbasid period" in order to provide a contextual foundation in relation to which the historical works can be examined. However, to uncover the historical discourse and the

¹⁶ El-Hibri 2010: xi.

level of analysis in the historian's works, it is necessary to examine narrative structures and arrangements, intertextual references, emphasised themes, terminology, inclusion/exclusion and other textual features in relation to their historical context.

A common method to uncover the agency of historians when compiling the narrations has been to compare different historians' usage and editing of material from one single source. According to Judd, "Evidence of subtle editing, omission and embellishment of earlier sources can offer some insight into the compiler's agenda and the themes that shaped his retelling of events."¹⁷ A number of such studies have shown that the compilers of historical reports (*akhbar*) did not simply repeat material that reached them, but arranged and manipulated them according to their concerns, thus inserting their own narrative voices in subtle ways. Although the method fulfils its purpose, it is limited by the tendency to focus too much on the moral framework of the historians and neglect other concerns pertaining to the broader political and scholarly issues of the time. The method provides a useful basis, but in order to further understand the early historiographical tradition, as well as the implications of the historians' concerns, it is necessary to examine the level of historical and civilisational analysis in the narratives, not merely concerning individual morality. Without contradicting the results of the aforementioned approach, the method of the present study is more contextualising in the sense that it continuously relates the historians' works to the context in which they articulated their narratives.

The comparative approach is taken to understand the various possibilities and regulations of the discourse in which the historians articulated their narratives, effectively by looking at how they produced meaningful narratives and analyses within their societal and intellectual context. Since Leder and Judd among others have established that the historians manipulated the material, this study takes the following step and accordingly treats the compiled *akhbar* as consciously arranged narratives, despite its appearance as mere repetitions of earlier informers. Focus is, therefore, not primarily on the informing sources or *isnads* (although they are taken into account as a part of the narrative) but on the level of political, legal and economic analysis, achieved by the compiled reports and the subtle ways of emphasizing certain aspects of the historical developments.

¹⁷ Judd 2005: 209.

1.6. Disposition

After introducing the background, purpose, material and methodology, the following chapter will further expound the concepts of agency and contextualisation, as well as the key terminology of discourse analysis. It also includes a discussion about the nature of *khobar*-history and the historiographical considerations involved. Chapter three provides an overview of the age of the historians and the political, social, cultural and scholarly interests that shaped the context in which they articulated their narratives. The same chapter also discusses the previous historiographical development and gives a biographical survey of their life and works. The main examination of the historical accounts of ‘Umar’s caliphate are found chapter four, which is divided into three categories of (1) governance, law and contracts, (2) economy and taxation, and (3) registers and stipends. Due to the limited space, comparisons between the historians and various intertextual analyses will be presented directly throughout the text, regardless if the other historian’s accounts have been mentioned. Each sub-chapter will, however, be concluded with a summarising comparison. The final discussion of the results in relation to the formulated questions and future research prospects will then take place in the concluding chapter.

2. Theory and terminology

In relation to the questions formulated in the previous chapter, the theoretical perspectives mainly concern the comparison, contextualisation and discourse analysis of the historical works. These are further divided into two categories focusing on (1) agency of the historians, and (2) the context and discourse in which they articulated their narratives. The concept of *khabar*-history is also discussed in this chapter, since it has significant implications for the theoretical perspectives on the historical works and their context, as well as for the terminological foundation of the study.

2.1 Agency and contextualisation

A useful approach to early Muslim historiography, suggested by Konrad Hirschler, is to examine the room of manoeuvre or *agency* that the authors disposed of when composing their narratives. It means focusing on the agency of the historians in relation to social context, intellectual tradition and textual environment.¹⁸ Accordingly, the concept of agency refers to “the capacity of socially embedded actors to appropriate, reproduce, and, potentially, to innovate upon received cultural categories and conditions of action in accordance with their personal and collective ideals, interests, and commitments”.¹⁹ The historians are viewed as active interpreters of their respective societies by forming meaningful understandings of the historical past in relation to contemporary contexts. Since human activity is not only structured by elements of meaning, but also by material conditions and power relations that form and limit each other,²⁰ the approach demands an in-depth analysis of the narratives in relation to the authors’ intellectual and social contexts. To develop and extend the concept of agency, however, certain terms and theoretical perspectives have been adopted from the discourse analysis. But before expounding on that, it is necessary to ground the discussion in Muslim historiography and illustrate the concept of agency. Regarding the historical and economic thinking during the ‘Abbasid period in general, and at-Tabari in particular, Mårtensson has suggested that the religious framework of their works:

reflected their institutional affiliation, Shari’a, which self-consciously identified itself with the divine principles set out in the sacred scriptures (Qur’an and *hadith*), as distinct from the state administration (*siyasa*), rather than a specific way of thinking about the political economy. By

¹⁸ Hirschler 2006: 1.

¹⁹ Emirbayer/Goodwin 1994: 1442-3.

²⁰ Hirschler 2006: 4.

analogy, the correspondence between form (religious framework) and substance (analysis) exists only on the most general level, as a concern with justice, legal and social; i.e. where the secretaries saw justice as primarily related to the institution of kingship, the *fuqaha* saw it as primarily related to God, whose guidance was a prerequisite for justice to be reflected in the human sovereign's rule. Apart from this, however, the religious framework spans several competing and contradicting analysis.²¹

The agency of the historians and the level of historical analysis in their works similarly have to be understood in relation to the context in which they articulated their historical narratives, that is, a context formed by the Islamic sciences – including *fiqh*, *hadith*, *tafsir* 'aqida and *sira* – as well as the political and economic issues of their time. Despite the annalistic character, these historical sources do “contain information that is already part of an analysis which in its turn is shaped by each historian's perception of the political economy, its problems, and the solutions to these problems”.²² What is referred to by the term *analysis* is the attempt to explain historical developments through various political, social, economic or legal theories. Its general characteristic is a breaking down of complex topics, such as imperial power, into its constituent parts in order to examine the specific and general features, as well as the interrelationships of the parts in making up the whole. This operational definition of analysis is not limited to abstract models, but attempts explaining specific events by general theories of politics, society, economy and religion. As Mårtensson concludes:

While the majority of the medieval Muslim economic thinkers did indeed postulate that causality ultimately was subject to divine omnipotence, and while their concepts of social and redistributive justice were sanctioned by reference to divine justice, it is equally evident they analyzed specific, problem-related causes and effects in terms of objective, empirical mechanisms. The religious or theological frameworks are thus of general formal but not particular substantial and analytic significance for medieval Islamic economic thought.²³

The aim of such an approach is thus to explore what Mårtensson describes as “the objectives and agendas that might have motivated the medieval historians whose works we use as sources of information, and that are expressed as the historians' efforts to analyse the causes of decline of state power”.²⁴ Examining the level of analysis thereby becomes a way of approaching the social and intellectual context of the historians. When these analytical concerns of various kinds, both social and individual, are

²¹ Mårtensson 2011a: 121.

²² Mårtensson 2011a: 126-7.

²³ Mårtensson 2011a: 123-4.

²⁴ Mårtensson 2011a: 121.

examined by comparatively looking at decisions of titles, selection, arrangements, inclusion/exclusion, terminology and so forth, the following task is to seek an apprehension of why these were expressed in certain ways and thereby begin uncovering the discourse within which they acted.

2.2. Discourse and discourse theory

To extend the concept of agency and contextualisation, the study also reflects the notion of discourse as specific well-bounded areas of social knowledge, which defines the limits and forms of expressibility, conservation, memory and reactivation of knowledge in the particular context of a definite society.²⁵ Accordingly, the practise of a historian indicate the underlying discourse and the set of rules that might have regulated historical knowledge within his particular social and intellectual context. The concept of discourse is thus grounded in a distinction between the *historical past* (events) and the *past-as-history* (knowledge), where knowledge of historical events is formed through practises of writing history, or discourses that construct the *past-as history*. Historical events are independent of discourse, but can only be represented in this form and therefore historical knowledge is discursive.²⁶ According to de Certeau, a discourse functions as a “mode of intelligibility” by organising historical knowledge along lines of causality and defining how the past is conceived in certain contexts.²⁷ Mårtensson explains regarding its application to modern conceptions of Islamic historiography:

Discourse is produced in a kind of power-field generated through the interaction of three factors: a social institution of scholarly knowledge, a discipline or tradition of knowledge within the institution, and a subject. ‘Subject’ here has the specific meaning of a dialogical relationship between the scholar as subjective being and his or her subject matter. This relationship engenders ‘subject’ as the third entity, which interacts with ‘discipline’ and ‘institution’ to produce the discourse.²⁸

Historical discourse thereby reflects these three levels of institution, discipline and subject, where the concept of agency enters in at the examination of the subject’s relation to the institution as the place in society where historical writing is practised and to the discipline as the specific tradition of knowledge in that place. For instance, if pre-modern historical writing was mainly practised in an institution of the ‘Abbasid society

²⁵ Cf. Foucault 1978: 14-15.

²⁶ Certeau 1988: 58-69.

²⁷ Certeau 1988: 21.

²⁸ Mårtensson 2005: 288. Cf. Certeau 1988: 21.

that produced scholarly knowledge (*‘ilm*) according to the discipline of history (*tarikh*), then the subject’s historical reflections are expected to be articulated correspondingly to these particular modes of intelligibility. On the one hand, it underlines that analysing historical discourses is as much a practise as the analysed discourse itself, necessitating an awareness of the differences of identities relating to institutions, disciplines and subjects, as well as practise. On the other hand, it enables a clear way of examining and discoursing regarding the institutions, disciplines and subjects that shaped the practise of historical writing in the past. Thus, it is the foundation for analysing the context in which the historians articulated their narratives and how the narratives, in turn, reflect the broader historical discourse that regulated the modes of expression and thought at the specific time. However, to further root the theories and its terminology in the actual subject of study it is necessary to clarify some historiographical perspectives on *khavar* and what is referred to as *khavar*-history.

2.3. Khabar and khabar-history

The term *khavar* (pl. *akhbar*) refers to a report about historical events and normally consists of (1) a transmission chain of authorities (*isnad*) from the witness of the event to the compiling historian, and (2) the actual text (*matn*) of historical information. Scholars of Islamic historiography have adopted the term *khavar*-history as referring to historical works pieced together by individual reports, which include both al-Baladhuri’s *Futuh* and at-Tabari’s *Tarikh*, although the latter is sometimes classified as annalistic or universal history.²⁹ It is common among modern scholars to view *khavar*-histories as expressions of a culture of traditionalism as opposed to originality where, as Robison puts it, “the best kind of knowledge is the wisdom of pious and inspired forefathers, which, whether recorded in their day or generated retrospectively by subsequent generations, can validate and guide the experience of the present”.³⁰ Reliance on the transmission (*naql*) from previous generations as the foundation of knowledge was certainly strong among the early historians and the *‘ulama* in general, but the terms “traditionalism” seem to be discursive construction of medieval scholarship as authoritative and collective in contrast to the originality of modern scholarship.³¹ It is more appropriate to discuss *khavar*-history and its epistemology in terms of transmission (*naql*) or reason (*‘aql*), which indeed is closer to its original

²⁹ Rosenthal 1968: 66-86, 133-50, Mårtensson 2005: 291.

³⁰ Robinson 2003: 85.

³¹ Mårtensson 2005: 294.

discourse. The terms *naql* and *'aql* are therefore important in the study in order to approach *khavar*-history with a terminology that does not force the discipline into modern categories alien to the original context. Another key term is *isnad*, referring to the chain of transmission that introduced each *khavar* and gave them authority by corresponding to the epistemological position that historical knowledge ought to be derived from primary sources. Besides the attempt of some modern scholars to undermine the *isnad*-methodology as mere fabrication – a question outside the scope of this study – others have regarded the differing versions of the same event *khavar*-history as incompatible with historical analysis. For instance, Humphreys writes that:

In this milieu, the historian's proper task was to convey objective knowledge of those past events which were generally believed to possess legal, political, or religious significance. Such knowledge (*'ilm*) consisted of accounts of these events which could be traced back to reliable authorities – in the ideal case, eyewitnesses of known veracity, but in any case reputable early scholars who had obtained their information from such persons. The historian's task was decisively *not* to interpret or evaluate the past as such; rather he was simply to determine which reports about it (*akhbar*) were accepted and to compile these reports in a convenient order.³²

What Humphreys describes is first of all the epistemology on which the historians based their works and, to some degree, the modes of intelligibility in the discourse where they articulated their narratives. Certainly the *isnads* were important for establishing a narration, but the general conveyance of its “legal, political, or religious significance” would inevitably involve a certain degree of conceptual thinking and analytical arrangement, whether implicit or explicit. Fred Donner has suggested that the varying *isnads* and *akhbar* of same events represent views of the emerging schools of thought and the different sub-communities within the Muslim Community, thereby forming historical memories along lines of scholarly subject-matters and terminology during the course of transmission.³³ If the various *akhbar* represented historical views of the major sub-communities and schools – including legal positions and administrative praxis – Donner's contribution could explain the purpose of citing several versions of the same event.³⁴ It might also explain why at-Tabari recorded the genealogical, geographical and scholarly affiliation of all his transmitters and presented them as a survey of references

³² Humphreys 2009: 74.

³³ Donner 1998: 138-41, 203.

³⁴ Mårtensson 2005: 296.

in an appendix (*Dhayl al-Mudhayyal*) to his *Tarikh*.³⁵ Accordingly, Mårtensson suggests that the *isnad*-based *khavar*-history highlight the contributions of previous scholars, rather than obscuring them, and that this form of history “corresponds to the epistemological position that historical knowledge is constructed in discourse”.³⁶

Significant is, also, the notion that *khavar*-history “not only exposes the transmitters, but also conveys the personal opinions of the historian who is writing”.³⁷ Many studies of particular events narrated by *khavar*-historians have shown that their view and concerns are reflected in the arrangement, evaluation and commentary on the narrations.³⁸ For instance, Tayeb el-Hibri have shown that the whole *Tarikh* of at-Tabari is a narrative unit and argues that the full meaning of the narrative of ‘Abbasid history can only be comprehended in relation the corresponding counterparts from the pre-Islamic and earlier Islamic times.³⁹ Similar studies are yet to be done regarding the narrative of al-Baladhuri, but based on the discussion above, we can assume that these *khavar*-historians arranged and transmitted their narratives according to (1) the epistemology of historical knowledge, (2) the analysis of historical development, (3) the political and scholarly practices or concerns of their time, and (4) the message they found important to communicate concerning the history of the Muslim Community in general and the various sub-communities in particular. The present study can thereby proceed to examine how the historians expressed these concerns in the historical discourse of the time, beginning with an overview of their works and historical context.

³⁵ Translated by Ella Landau-Tasseron as *History of al-Tabari XXXIX: Biographies of the Prophet's Companions* (New York: SUNY). See also Rosenthal 1989: 89-90.

³⁶ Mårtensson 2005: 297.

³⁷ Mårtensson 2005: 297.

³⁸ Cf. Petersen 1964; Hodgson 1968; Roberts 1986; Leder 1990; Judd 2005; Humphrey 2009: 98-103.

³⁹ El-Hibri 1999a, 1999b, 2004, 2010.

3. Times and works of the historians

3.1. Political, economic and scholarly context

At the time of al-Baladhuri (d. 297/892) and at-Tabari (d. 310/923), the ‘Abbasid *dawla* was more than a century old. After the initial years of caliphs pursuing a wide range of political and religious policies with dramatic consequences, the strength of the *dawla* gradually declined in the third/ninth century. As Tarif Khalidi notes, “while these shifts were instrumental in destabilising the political-military elite of the empire, they must also have contributed to the cultural vitality of the great Abbasid cities”.⁴⁰ What followed was a century of debate, recapitulation and consolidation of the intellectual tradition of Islam. As the ‘Abbasid administration reached a high degree of sophistication and complexity, a similar development occurred among the ‘*ulama* of the various sciences. The collapse of the Umayyad dynasty some 150 years earlier was not only accompanied with a sundering of the political unity of the Muslims and the end of universal jihad on all frontiers, but also with a fundamental change in the way the Muslims looked at the world. Khalid Y. Blankingship writes:

Without expansion as a main cause, the Muslims had to turn their attention inward to the internal ordering of their own society. The principle of the equality of the believers of all different origins and stations in life was strengthened. Although the establishment of an Islamic government remained an ideal, respect for the actual rulers continued to dwindle, as the ‘Abbasids discovered to their chagrin, and the Muslim religious leadership became more and more dissociated from the government in fact, if not in theory.⁴¹

Thus with the political divisions and the cease of universal jihad – although remaining important in the books of law and history – the ‘Abbasid times saw increased emphasis on consolidating the intellectual tradition, upholding the validity of *ikhtilaf* (difference of opinion) and various attempts at bringing internal unity to the Umma rather than external expansion. As strategies to centralise authority and governmental routines, both the Umayyads and the early ‘Abbasid caliphs had previously made attempts to establish consensus by bringing uniformity into legal judgements among the *fuqaha*.⁴² By the time of al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari, however, such uniformity was neither conceivable nor desirable and numerous *madhhabs* developed with different approaches to the emerging disciplines, although the emphasis on consensus (*‘ijma*) remained.

⁴⁰ Khalidi 1994: 59.

⁴¹ Blankingship 1994: 3-4.

⁴² Cf. Khalidi 1994: 44-46.

In the third/ninth century, the scholarly debates of the preceding centuries developed into schools and the intellectual tradition of Islam was elaborated, consolidated and written down by the *'ulama*. Based to the legacy of the *fuqaha* from the late Umayyad and early 'Abbasid times, the century saw a movement towards *fiqh* as a professionalised and complex discipline that became the prerogative for a distinct elite of scholars. And while the *fuqaha* developed their methodology and compiled collections of *fiqh*, great *muhaddithun* such as al-Bukhari (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875) gave definitive shape to the science of hadith. Overall, similar developments occurred in the other, increasingly specialised sciences. Thus, despite the political instability and decline of caliphal authority, the century was an age of cultural and social developments. Besides the scholarly achievements, rejuvenated cities such as Kufa, Basra and Baghdad at the centre of the 'Abbasid *dawla* provided the vitality, prosperity and ethnic variety that underpinned the new cultural expressions within comparatively less religiously regulated discourses such as poetry, philology, grammar, philosophy, history, natural sciences and literature, which was generally known as *adab*.⁴³ From the reign of al-Ma'mun (d. 218/833) onwards, a large number of foreign books were translated into Arabic and knowledge of Greek philosophy and ancient civilisations found a way into Muslim scholarship, while reaching wider sections of society through public debates and other cultural discourses in the growing cities.

In 218/833, al-Ma'mun also instituted the *mihna* (inquisition) that, apart from its political and religious implications, became a mass-scale assertion of the power of the rulers over the beliefs and conscience of the individuals in society. The *mihna* imposed Mu'tazili doctrines on the *'ulama* and thereby initiated great theological disputes that, after the end of the *mihna* some fifteen years later, contributed to the consolidation of the beliefs of the emerging schools of *'aqida*, named after its founders, Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi. One of the effects of the *mihna* on subsequent scholarship was to invite men of knowledge to emulate their caliph and, by careful reasoning, assert more forcefully than ever before their role as guardians of the tradition of the people of the Sunna.⁴⁴ After the *mihna*, as el-Hibri suggests, the traditional *'ulama* "not only placed the primary emphasis on hadith as a foundation for religious dogma, law, and exegesis, but also succeeded in making the caliphs patronize the new

⁴³ Khalidi 1994: 96.

⁴⁴ Cf. Khalidi 1994: 112-13.

orthodoxy”.⁴⁵ Besides the Mu’tazili doctrines, the ‘*ulama* also had to deal with the politically explosive question of *imama* (i.e. caliphal authority), because of the constant threat from the *shi’i* movements. At the time, the most influential among them were the Isma’ilis who in year 289/909 founded the Fatimid *dawla* in North Africa.

Moreover, the prosperous city culture and complex economic administration in the ‘Abbasid society intensified the connections between commerce, on the one hand, and the emerging schools of *fiqh*, on the other. Tarif Khalidi writes:

Behind the increasing concern with legal system and the concept of justice may be detected a greater interest in contracts and obligations by merchant classes who were then establishing far-flung networks of trade. These networks in turn reinforced the networks of scholarship with have the Islamic world one of its most distinctive characteristics.⁴⁶

Similarly, the governance and economic administration of the ‘Abbasid *dawla* required intimate connections with the *fuqaha*, whose judgements and advice at least provided the ideal foundation for their implemented policies. Contemporary to the emergence of the *madhhabs* was also the beginning of an institutional division between *siyasa* (governmental administration) and Shari’a (the revealed law).⁴⁷ In this sense, *siyasa* referred to legal procedures and judgement effected by agencies and tribunals other than those of the *qadi* (judge), which meant that the *siyasa* form of justice was independent of Shari’a, but theoretically bound by its principles.⁴⁸ One of its main features was the *shurta*, commonly translated as police, which was instituted from the Umayyad times to uphold law and order in the public space, although often empowered with judicial and executive roles beyond mere police functions. Sami Zubaida notes, “It would seem, then, that at many points in the history of Muslim polities, criminal and penal matters were dealt with predominantly in accordance with *siyasa* justice, by administrative authorities, typically the *Shurta*.”⁴⁹ Despite the institutional difference between the scholarly administered Shari’a and the governmentally administered *siyasa* and *shurta*, the two systems did overlap because of the common set of defined crimes. The difference was that the *shurta* of the *siyasa* system, for instance, could apprehend offenders and bring them to justice, while the Shari’a could only proceed in matters

⁴⁵ El-Hibri 2010: 24.

⁴⁶ Khalidi 1994: 137.

⁴⁷ The term *siyasa* generally refers to governance or political theory and practise as contrasted, but not necessarily contradictory, to Shari’a.

⁴⁸ Zubaida 2003: 56.

⁴⁹ Zubaida 2003: 56.

brought in front of the *qadi* by litigants.⁵⁰ The two systems also had other functions in common which impinged directly on the governmental and administrative policies of the *dawla*. One central issue that the *fuqaha* elaborated on was the *kharaj* (land tax), in itself “the main source of revenue for the state and an important factor in the power politics between the imperial government and the provincial governors”.⁵¹ While the *fuqaha* provided the government with legal foundations for various policies of taxation and reasoned regarding it in a discourse based on the Qur’an and Sunna, they were also involved in contemporary political and economic analysis, albeit according to a slightly different discourse than the political language and approach of the *siyasa* officials.⁵²

By the third/ninth century, the ‘Abbasids governed a huge territory which, accordingly, required an extensive civil administration to regulate the collection of *kharaj*. Nevertheless, peasants, overtaxed by provincial *muqta* (“vassals”) in the *iqta’*-system, had begun to join various uprisings or simply abandon their farmlands, which diminished the income for the *dawla*.⁵³ The decline of the central authority of the ‘Abbasids was in fact aggravated by the many Isma’ili-led rebellions, including the uprisings in the central lands among the Qaramita and the Zanj, which engaged many desperate peasants and slave workers. The uprisings were also accompanied with an increased decentralization and autonomy for local authorities, including the *muqtas*, although the central government sought their loyalty by payment from the treasury (*bayt al-mal*). As the state finances declined, however, they had to be paid by assigning lands to their commanders, which, in turn, shifted loyalties away from the caliphal government and weakened its authority.⁵⁴ It was largely the staff of the various state departments, including *wazirs* and scribes (*kuttab*), who were responsible for the financial administration. Although based on the guidelines provided by the *fuqaha*, the increased complexity of both the administrative procedures and the scholarly tradition underpinned the division between the spheres of *siyasa* and Shari’a.

A similar tendency to a cleavage between Shari’a and *siyasa* in terms of scope, language and discourse also became discernible within the scholarly disciplines, often expressed in terms of transmitted (*naqliyya*) and rational (‘*aqliyya*) sciences, or their equivalents. Sciences not directly based on, or relating to, the Qur’an and Sunna began

⁵⁰ Zubaida 2003: 57.

⁵¹ Mårtensson 2011: 120. See also Campopiano 2011.

⁵² Cf. Mårtensson 2011a: 121.

⁵³ Mårtensson 2009: 43. For discussions about the *iqta’* see Vali 1993.

⁵⁴ Mårtensson 2009: 43. See also Mårtensson 2011b.

to develop under various terms such as *siyasa*, *adab* and *hikma*, the latter primarily referring to sciences based on rational or intellectual ('*aqliyya*) proofs rather than transmission. The most enduring among the *hikma* disciplines were the natural sciences, including mathematics, astronomy, alchemy and medicine, and the philosophical sciences, including logic [*mantiq*], philosophy and dialectical theology [*kalam*].⁵⁵ Although the early 'Abbasid historians, including al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari, regarded their discipline as one of the *naqliyya* sciences and presented their narratives according to its particular discourse, the multifaceted intellectual milieu of an increasing number of specialised sciences nonetheless affected the way all scholars articulated and perceived their disciplines. The institution of the third/ninth *khabar*-historians might, therefore, be described as principally concerned with Shari'a and '*ulum ad-din*, that is knowledge derived from the religious sciences, and intimately related to its practise in the 'Abbasid society. Although involved in politics and society, the fact that the many historians were educated and/or active in the milieu of the classical religious sciences, indicates their main source of influence as well as their own perception of their practise. Thus, after looking at the institution which provided the intellectual frame of reference for the historians within the overall political and socio-economic context of the declining 'Abbasid *dawla*, the following sub-chapter will proceed to the specific discipline in which they were active and then to the historical discourses of the time.

3.2. Historiographical context

It was in the 'Abbasid period that the narratives of the Muslim Community were written down and history (*akhbar*, *tarikh*) developed as a discipline with its own particular scope and methodology. Previously, in the rise of the sciences of hadith, *fiqh*, *kalam* and history, their domains had often overlapped and were not sharply defined from one another.⁵⁶ Yet historical knowledge was an essential part of all sciences and many of the early transmitters of history were in fact leading scholars of *fiqh* and hadith, including well-known '*ulama* like 'Urwa b. az-Zubayr (d. 94/712) and Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri (d. 124/742). Subsequent scholars focusing on history, primarily prophetic biography (*sira*, *maghazi*), then began to define the scope of history as a separate discipline, some of the most prominent being Ibn Ishaq (d. 151/761), al-Waqidi (d. 207/823) and Muhammad b. Sa'd (d. 230/845).

⁵⁵ Khalidi 1994: 131.

⁵⁶ Cf. Hitti 1916: 2.

Although the scholars of *fiqh* and hadith formed the early transmission of history, their strict scope and rigorous methodology excluded a large body of historical knowledge that, by the ‘Abbasid era, was taken over by historians. The form and methodology of hadith science had provided historians with their main instrument of establishing historical veracity of reports, the *isnad*, while also inspiring attention to details and preservation of divergent accounts of events. By the time of al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari, however, the scope of history had expanded beyond the boundaries of hadith. Its methodology was inconceivable to uphold, particularly in relation to the universal perspective of history, extended to ancient foreign nations. Nevertheless, their methodology was based on transmission. Historical knowledge was regarded as principally derived from *naql* rather than ‘*aql*, thus emphasis on *isnad* remained. Outside the scholarly circles in the ‘Abbasid society, the history of the Muslim Community was met with increasing fascination as an imperial history equivalent or superseding that of the previous great nations, whose history in turn became an integral part of the narrative and universal outlook of most ‘Abbasid historians.⁵⁷

Both al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari were *khavar*-narrators who, according to the notion of history as a *naqliyya* discipline, sought to transmit large numbers of reliable and *isnad*-attested accounts pertaining to historical events or personalities. It was, however, not the only form of writing history at the time. Some works from the same period were proper digests of *akhbar* into single narratives rather than compilations, including the *Ta’rikh* of al-Ya’qubi (d. 283/897), *al-Akhbar at-Tiwal* of ad-Dinawari (d. 281/894), *Kitab al-Ma’arif* of Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) and *Muruj adh-Dhahab wa-Ma’adin al-Jawar* of al-Mas’udi (d. 345/956). Unlike the digested single narratives, the hadith-influenced *khavar*-historians brought together a number of reports and often provided different, sometimes contradictory, versions of same events. These *akhbar* narratives were not explicitly linked together, but nevertheless arranged and sometimes even abridged or paraphrased by the compiling historians. It was also a common practise to blend together various *akhbar* into single accounts, or collective reports (*talkhis*), so long as the substance was not violated. The *khavar*-based works were thus characterised by a variety of reports for each event or topic, which might repeat, counterpart, supplement, overlap or sometimes even contradict one another.⁵⁸ Besides the *naql*-oriented *khavar*-history, the third/ninth century also saw a development of a more *adab*-

⁵⁷ Khalidi 1994: 82.

⁵⁸ Humphreys 2009: 73.

oriented mood of history, treating the cultural aspects of Islam in general, which may well have broadened the perspectives and influenced the *khavar*-historians' more universal outlook.⁵⁹ Likewise, after the imposition of rationalist Mu'tazili doctrines in the *mihna*, discussion of *naqliyya* knowledge (Qur'an, Sunna) in relation to '*aqliyya* knowledge (*qiyas*, *ra'y* etc.) not only affected the *fukah*, but seemed to "weave an important thread of contention over the issue of whether it is wise (or even practicable) to rely exclusively on sunna and hadith to the exclusion of Ra'y and Qiyas".⁶⁰

Compilers of *khavar* did not claim to include all narrations available, but selected reliable *akhbar* transmitted to them and arrange these more or less coherently according to various themes.⁶¹ Most historians were, nevertheless, experienced men of affairs – often active in the religious sciences, the *hikma*-disciplines or the state administration (*siyasa*) – thus immersed in the religious, political and intellectual issues of the times. It has previously been mentioned that *khavar*-histories reflected a central aspect of the concept of knowledge among the early Muslim scholars, which regarded the historians' proper task as conveying well-attested reports of religious, legal or political significance, rather than interpreting its content.⁶² Similarly to the hadith scholars, however, the historians' personal discernment was not only important in the assessment of the soundness of the *isnad* and meaning of the text, but also for the selection, arrangement and thereby contextualisation of the reports. Since it was also common that historians abridged, paraphrased or even pieced *akhbar* together, the role of the individual historians was not unknown, although the material was discoursed and presented objectively with as little intervention as possible.

The historians presented their history according to the language and forms of thought prevalent in their institutional context, which for the *khavar*-historians in the 'Abbasid period was Shari'a and scholarly '*ilm*, including its sciences (hadith, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, '*aqida* etc.) and its public sphere of implementation (courts, politics, taxation, administration etc.). Thus, their reference system and *naqliyya* perspective on sources were derived from, or at least influenced, by the science of hadith, as reflected in the arrangement and *isnad* system. Similarly, the discursive frame of reference was derived from the science

⁵⁹ Cf. Khalidi 1994: 83-89.

⁶⁰ El-Hibri 2010: 24. Qiyas refers to logical deduction by analogy and Ra'y to "opinion, personal discretion, a legal decision based on the use of common sense and personal opinion, used where there is no explicit guidance in the Qur'an and Sunna and where it is not possible to use analogy". (Bewley 1998: 139)

⁶¹ Humphreys 2009: 73.

⁶² Humphreys 2009: 73.

of *fiqh*, as apparent in the political, economic and legal perspectives or concerns underlying the narratives. Therefore, the historical discipline might have functioned as a sphere whereby the scholars could observe history by the discernment of *fiqh* and reflect on *fiqh* by the knowledge of history. At the same time, it filled out the areas of historical knowledge not covered by the *muhaddithun* and the politics not covered by the *fuqaha*. Historical knowledge beyond prophetic hadith and *sira* was in fact important for every *faqih*. The central position of Shari'a in Muslim society required the scholars of the multicultural 'Abbasid society to possess certain acquaintance with most aspects of Muslim and indeed non-Muslim civilisation. Both al-Baladhuri and, in particular, at-Tabari, were well versed in the traditional sciences of Islam. Their principal discipline was *fiqh*, although at-Tabari mastered all the sciences and was more famous in his time for his prominence in *tafsir*, *fiqh*, hadith and *kalam*. These institutional affiliations and frame of references thereby shaped historiography in terms of methodology, presentation, scope and modes of thinking. For instance, Rosenthal remarks on at-Tabari's approach to the various sciences, "He was conscious of the fact that each of these large fields had its own vocabulary and technique of exposition, but it can be observed that his treatment of them always shows the same general traits that were characteristic of his approach to scholarship."⁶³ The same could be said about most of his contemporary '*ulama*.

Before looking further at the lives and works of the two historians, it is important to examine some of the characteristic features of the historical concerns of the scholars of the 'Abbasid times, particularly relating to significance of 'Umar's caliphate. In the historical thinking of the time, Muslim scholars tended to attribute the events, whether good or bad, to the Muslims themselves, including leaders and subjects. They primarily focused on internal rather than external factors for historical development, although based on the underlying recognition of Allah as the All-Powerful [*al-Qadir*] and direct causer of events. Thereby, the roles of individuals were emphasised and larger societal developments were often discoursed in terms of individual decisions, responsibilities and characteristics, particularly in *khavar*-history. Regarding the depiction of 'Umar's caliphate in the early historical sources, El-Hibri notes:

'Umar had ruled more like a shepherd than a king, and his officials are represented more as legatees of a religious master and keepers of a covenant than as political commanders. Everything

⁶³ Rosenthal 1989: 51.

about 'Umar's government had depended on the continued functioning of a certain moral economy of relationships between the capital and the provinces in a kind of great chain of being.⁶⁴

'Umar had taken over the caliphate after Abu Bakr. He continued the expansion in all directions and placed the crucial regions of Syria, Iraq, Egypt and large parts of Persia under Muslim governance. The new peoples, territories and social contexts naturally raised many questions of how to apply the teachings transmitted from the Prophet to these new situations. That required 'Umar to constantly take independent legal decisions (*ijtihad*) based on his recognition of the current situation, consultation (*shura*) with his companions and, above all, his own knowledge of the prophetic Sunna. In accordance with the well-known hadith that the Prophet ordered the Muslims to follow his *sunna* and the *sunna* of the rightly-guided caliphs (*al-khulafa al-mahdiyyin ar-rashidin*) after him,⁶⁵ 'Umar became the prototype for *ijtihad* in legal judgements. Besides the depictions of him as a strong and just leader at a crucial time of internal as well as external challenges to the Muslim Community, numerous improvements in economy and organisation were also ascribed to him. The reign of 'Umar represented the establishment of Islam as a well-organised and concrete social reality regulated by Shari'a and upheld by the fulfilment of its contracts (*'ahd, mithaq*), which in turn determined the success or downfall of the Muslim Community. Thus, the political, legal and administrative were closely related in the historical thinking, while the principal responsibility fell on the caliph to ensure its organisation according to the law. 'Abbasid historians tended to look for precedents for current issues in earlier history. It has, for instance, been suggested that the 'Abbasid revolution in the year 132/750 and the succession crisis after Harun ar-Rashid were both "events with precedents in the Rashidun caliphate and were therefore broached in the narratives in intertextual ways from the Rashidun to the 'Abbasid periods".⁶⁶ Thus, contemporary political, social and economic issues were often interpreted in the light of 'Umar's reign.

Regarding the on-going discussion about the legitimacy of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid dynasties, it might be noted that the 'Abbasid caliphs after the *mihna* became increasingly viewed as political leaders in line with the Umayyads. This tendency can also be observed in the historical works when comparing the narratives of the early 'Abbasid times and those of the post-*mihna* period. Despite common references to the

⁶⁴ El-Hibri 2010: 6.

⁶⁵ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad*, nr. 17142; at-Tirmidi, *al-Jami'*, nr. 2676; Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, nr. 4607; Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, nr. 42.

⁶⁶ El-Hibri 2010: 23.

‘Abbasids as *ad-dawla al-mubarak*a (“the blessed dynasty”), their religious authority, previously contrasted to the political basis of Umayyad authority, appeared symbolic and more or less consisting of lending official support for various scholarly opinions to consolidate the orthodoxy of the *ahl as-sunna*. El-Hibri notes:

Umayyad history, as well as that of the Rashidun and the conquests, was clearly being crafted in a final version of official history that did not privilege the ‘Abbasids over the Umayyads according to a singular criteria, but related both, as well as other phases of the early caliphate, to a range of moralizing and religious criteria whose complexity has yet to be fully appreciated by modern historians.⁶⁷

The growing threat from the various *shi’i* movements, who were well represented within the early historical discourse,⁶⁸ might also have contributed to the shift in focus from the Umayyad-‘Abbasid dialectic back to the early history of the first four caliphs, although the different periods generally were interpreted in the light of each other. Similarly to other scholars of the third/ninth century, historians sought to protect the inclusiveness and broad orthodoxy of the *ahl as-sunna* from the innovations (*bid’a*) of the Shi’a, Mu’tazila and similar tendencies. The century saw the consolidation of a general historical narrative of the *ahl as-sunna* and its demarcation from the Shi’a, who began to reconstruct their own legal, doctrinal and historical edifice.⁶⁹ Thereby, these legal or doctrinal disputes also shaped the form, language and archive of the historical discipline, although the scope of the historical works nevertheless included wider considerations and possibilities of reflecting the present through the past.

3.3. Al-Baladhuri

3.3.1. Biography

According to most sources, Ahmad b. Yahya b. Jarir b. Dawud al-Baladhuri was of Persian origin, but probably born in Baghdad in the beginning of the third/ninth century where he lived most of his life until his death in 297/892.⁷⁰ He studied in Syria as well as in Iraq and learned from famous historians such as al-Mada’ini, Ibn Sa’d and Mus’ab az-Zubayri. He worked as translator of Persian into Arabic and it is mentioned that his grandfather had been secretary in service of al-Khasib, the minister of finances in Egypt

⁶⁷ El-Hibri 2010: 25.

⁶⁸ Khalidi 1994: 111.

⁶⁹ Cf. Khalidi 1994: 111.

⁷⁰ Becker/Rosenthal 1986: 971. See also Yaqut, *Irshad*, II: 127-32.

under Harun ar-Rashid.⁷¹ Moreover, al-Baladhuri was a close companion to the caliph al-Mutawakkil and his influence in the ‘Abbasid court continued under al-Musta’im, until al-Mu’tamid put him out of favour. According to Becker/Rosenthal, the statement that he was a tutor of ‘Abdallah b. al-Mu’tazz, the son of the poet al-Mu’tazz, appears to be a confusion of al-Baladhuri with the grammarian, Tha’lab.⁷² Besides his distinction as historian, he is also reported to have been prominent in poetry, particularly satires, tradition and genealogy.⁷³ Many later historians used Baladhuri as a source, among them al-Muqaddasi,⁷⁴ Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamdhani⁷⁵ and al-Mas’udi⁷⁶. The *Futuh al-Buldan* is specifically mentioned in al-Mas’udi’s introduction to *Muruj adh-Dhahab*, where he states, “We know of no better work on (the history of) the *futuh* than it.”⁷⁷

3.2.2. Works

Only two works of al-Baladhuri have survived, *Futuh al-Buldan* and *Ansab al-Ashraf*, both of which early on received general acclaim for their reliability. The larger work of the two, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, is a genealogically arranged history of the Muslims that spans over several volumes, beginning with the Prophet Muhammad and then his nearest kinsmen, Banu Hashim, Banu Umayya and then the other divisions of the Arab tribes. Despite its genealogical form, however, it has many similarities to the *tabaqat*-style of Muhammad b. Sa’d and is, after all, *khavar*-based history of the Muslim Community, containing an enormous amount of historical information about the caliphs, dynasties, events and individuals. In relation to its encyclopaedic character, the style is straightforward without any apparent evaluations of the transmitted content. However, the remarkable amount of space dedicated to Banu Umayya in comparison to that of Banu al-‘Abbas indicates al-Baladhuri’s inclusiveness and aim at gathering narrations from various narrative traditions, the Iraqi as well as the Madinan and Syrian.

In *Futuh al-Buldan*, being an abridgement (*mukhtasar*) of a more comprehensive work, al-Baladhuri presents a concise history of the openings of new lands to Islam and the establishment of Muslim governance. The time spans from the *hijra* and *maghazi* of the Prophet, via the *hurub ar-ridda* (wars of apostasy) under Abu Bakr, to all later conquests in the east and west during the time of the subsequent caliphs until the

⁷¹ Hitti 1916: 6.

⁷² Becker/Rosenthal 1986: 971. Cf. Hitti 1916: 6.

⁷³ Hitti 1916: 6.

⁷⁴ al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan at-Ta’asim*, 1877: 313.

⁷⁵ al-Hamdhani, *Kitab al-Buldan*, 1885: 303, 321.

⁷⁶ al-Mas’udi, *Kitab at-Tanbih*, 1893: 358, 360.

⁷⁷ al-Mas’udi, *Muruj adh-Dhahab*, 1973: 13.

‘Abbasid period. Unlike many other histories of *futuh*, al-Baladhuri interweaves governmental, cultural and social changes with the narrative and pays attention to local administration, economic policies, treaties and contracts, as well as geographical, demographical and architectural developments. He also includes legal discussions and judgements from leading *fuqaha* relating to the historical events.⁷⁸ The *akhbar* are geographically arranged into chapters, which, in turn, are more or less chronologically organised. Another important feature is the fact that al-Baladhuri often relies on first-hand information from inhabitants of the opened regions. The style throughout is characterised by conciseness and condensation, even more so than in *Ansab al-Ashraf*, and is largely free from exaggerative narrations. The careful selection of *akhbar* also indicates an aim to, in the words of Tarif Khalidi, “construct from the most trustworthy authorities one definitive version of the conquests whose accuracy would help to establish uniformity in legal and administrative precedents”.⁷⁹ Among the most prominent sources for his *akhbar* are ‘Urwa b. az-Zubayr, Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri, Ibn Ishaq, al-Waqidi, Muhammad ibn Sa’d and al-Mada’ini, while others include Hammad b. Salama, Bakr b. al-Haytham, ‘Amir ash-Sha’bi, Sufyan b. Sa’id ath-Thawri, ‘Amr b. Muhammad an-Naqid and Hisham b. al-Kalbi.

3.3.3. Historiographical methodology

Al-Baladhuri begins *Futuh al-Buldan* with a general description of his methodology:

I have been informed by certain people of knowledge in *hadith*, *sira* and *futuh al-buldan* – whose narrations I have transmitted, abridged and brought back together – that when the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, went to Madina from Makka...⁸⁰

Besides the works of historical specialists such as al-Mada’ini, al-Waqidi and Ibn Sa’d, al-Baladhuri consulted governors, state secretaries and other scholars for first hand information beyond the ordinary narrations about the conquests. He also selected informants from among inhabitants of the regions directly involved, whose information he seems to have received by correspondence.⁸¹ Regarding the controversial transmitter, Sayf b. ‘Umar (d. 180/796), Tarif Khalidi notes:

⁷⁸ Some of the cited *fuqaha* are Malik b. Anas (d. 179/795), Abu Hanifa (d. 150/767), Abu Yusuf (d. 182/798), Sufyan ath-Thawri (d. 161/778), al-Awza’i (d. 157/774), ash-Shafi’i (d. 204/820), Ibn Abi Dhi’b (d. 159/776), Rabi’a ar-Ra’y (d. 136/753), Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri (124/741), Abu az-Zinad (d. 130/747), al-Layth b. Sa’d (d. 175/791) and Muhammad b. al-Hasan ash-Shaybani (d. 189/805). Cf. *Futuh al-Buldan*, 10, 13-14, 44-45, 56-58, 155-58 [1916: 25, 28-29, 71-72, 87-89, 238-43].

⁷⁹ Khalidi 1994: 68.

⁸⁰ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 2 [1916: 15].

⁸¹ Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 108, 193, 201.

Sayf is cited only in two places and the subsequent contrast between the two historians of the conquests is perhaps intentional. Where Sayf's battles are stirring narratives of feats of individual prowess, the battles of al-Baladhuri are more controlled accounts where the administration of the conquered regions is the primary concern. The taxes, topography and later administrative history of a province is described with the precision of a trained bureaucrat.⁸²

The methodology of al-Baladhuri is characterised by reliance on well-attested transmission traced back to primary sources, while determinedly avoiding exaggerating or controversial *akhbar*. Since the *Futuh* contains his own selection of the most important narrations from the governance in the opened regions, the concise and objective appearance of the chosen *akhbar* might also reflect a view on the nature of proper historical knowledge. The applied method would thus indicate a view on the role of the historians not only as compiling transmitters, but also as discriminators of sound narrations. The consistent usage of oral, written and archival sources, often from local regions directly involved, moreover indicates his epistemological view on historical knowledge as principally derived from transmission (*naql*) and primary sources.

Other important features, related to the methodological approach, are the frequent updating of regional developments and the inclusion of verdicts from the *fuqaha*. The latter suggests a *fiqh*-influenced methodology of not only seeking *isnad*-attested *akhbar*, but also emphasising the practical implications and legal judgements derived from history, while arranging narrations according to the historical points being made. The fact that al-Baladhuri appears to be more concerned with details when it comes to *isnads* of reports with legal implications than *isnads* of reports with general historical information, moreover shows a concern for the legal and practical aspect of history. Despite not being known as a prominent *faqih*, his structured approach to history and methodological reliance on well-attested transmission reflects a strong influence from the sciences of *fiqh* and hadith, as well as its practical implementation within the social spheres of law (*shari'a*), politics (*siyasa*) and administration.

3.4. At-Tabari

3.4.1. Biography

Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir at-Tabari was born in Amul, the principal city of Tabaristan, around the year 224/839. According to reports, he memorised the Qur'an at seven, led prayers as imam at eight, studied hadith at nine and left home on a quest for

⁸² Khalidi 1994: 68.

knowledge (*talab al-‘ilm*) at the age of twelve.⁸³ After inheriting a share of his father’s estate, at-Tabari enjoyed a modest degree of financial independence and was able to travel around the Muslim lands to study with some of the most prominent teachers of the time. In Rayy, he studied the *sira* of Ibn Ishaq with Ibn Humayd (d. 248/862), who was frequently cited in his later works. His travels continued to Baghdad, Basra, Kufa and southern Iraq where he met a number of esteemed scholars, then further to Syria, Palestine, Beirut and Egypt. He never accepted a government or judicial position, but had close relations with some of the *wazirs*, including ‘Ubaydallah b. Yahya b. Khaqan and ‘Ali b. ‘Isa, both of whom were leading in the struggle for centralisation and restoration of ‘Abbasid power in relation to the local rulers.⁸⁴ His financial and social independence enabled his total emersion in the scholarly activities and he continued studying, teaching and writing until his death in the year 310/923.⁸⁵

At-Tabari’s main discipline was *fiqh* and before founding his own Jariri *madhhab*, he was principally affiliated with the school of ash-Shafi’i, although mastering the *fiqh* of all active *madhhabs* in his time. He was already, in his own age, a renowned scholar of hadith, *kalam*, *tafsir* and Arabic, among other disciplines. His writings on *fiqh* were published first and other works, including the major *tafsir* collection (*Jami’ al-Bayan*) and the history (*Tarikh ar-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, appeared throughout his later life. According to the biographical sources, at-Tabari also mastered Greek philosophy – including dialectics and logic – which had spread in the lands of Islam during the ‘Abbasid period. He is not known to have devoted any specific work or teaching activity to philosophy, but it surely influenced the scholarly discourse in which he was active and might have contributed to his synthetic approach to the *naqliyya* and ‘*aqliyya* sciences, although *fiqh* and hadith were his principal affiliations.

3.4.2. Works

As a *faqih*, at-Tabari’s major work was *Ikhtilaf ‘ulama*. It is thematically arranged by legal topics and he begins by defining the legal issues and principles involved, after which he cites the leading *fuqaha* of his time and gives his own analysis, thereby laying the foundation for the Jariri *madhhab*. Another important work is *Sarih as-Sunna*, where at-Tabari presents his treatment of the emerging disputes of beliefs within the discipline of *kalam*. His epistemological and theological approach does, in many

⁸³ Rosenthal 1989: 15-16.

⁸⁴ Rosenthal 1989: 14, 22, 36-39, 50, 73.

⁸⁵ Rosenthal 1989: 36.

respects, appear as a forerunner for the somewhat later Ash'ari school with its synthesis of *'aql* (discursive reasoning) and *naql* (transmission and empiricism). He also began compiling a hadith collection, *Tadhib al-Ashar*, including his own commentary on the narrations. He arranged the work as a *musnad* according to the name of the narrating companion and then, under each name, according to the theme of the *matn* (content). At-Tabari's most famous work in the classical sciences is, however, the vast *tafsir* collection, *Jami' al-bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an*, which, in his own lifetime, was considered an outstanding scholarly achievement. In it he applied his extensive knowledge of *tafsir*, hadith, *fiqh*, Arabic language, *qir'at* (Qur'an readings) and other relevant disciplines of knowledge, while also providing a broad collection of previous scholarly disagreements (*ikhtilaf*) regarding *ahkam* (legal judgements) in the Qur'an.

His last major work, *Tarikh ar-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, is a universal *khavar*-based history from the first creation to the time of the author himself. It focuses on the history of Prophets from Adam to Muhammad and their communities, while also including extensive material on the Persian kingdoms. In the same way as his major work of *tafsir*, the *Tarikh* is encyclopaedic in character and follows the *naqliyya* method of the time, which was to present as many as possible of important narrations, legal opinions, scholarly positions and interpretations in relation to one's own stands. A central theme throughout the work is the question of rational versus irrational imperial government; in at-Tabari's view key factors that promote imperial strength or decline. Accordingly, he saw true religion (in his own time represented by Islam) as the source of rationality and therefore a necessary foundation for imperial strength.⁸⁶ What at-Tabari generally seemed to view as rational governance required for imperial rule, is the ability of rulers and administrators to balance resources in order to meet the interests of the ruling institutions and their related social groups, while the societal function of religion (*din*) is to provide a *nomos* that not only instructs the governance, but also morally and socially binds together the populace.⁸⁷ The narrative is presented according to the *khavar*-form of history, a technique that might reflect a view on the partiality and limitations of human understanding of historical events, which only with hindsight might guide their practise. As Mårtensson points out regarding at-Tabari's approach to *tafsir*, he held that any explanation always expresses the subjective concern of the explainer, although at

⁸⁶ Mårtensson 2011b.

⁸⁷ Cf. Mårtensson 2009: 4.

the same time expressing something about the matter explained.⁸⁸ A similar notion of textual interpretation can be found in his historical approach, since it presents *akhbar* with clear explanatory objectives that, in line with his works on *tafsir* and *fiqh*, not were ends in themselves. It is primarily in the *Tarikh* that at-Tabari distinguishes, through historical examples in certain arrangements, between what he understood as rational and irrational governance among similar political and economic issues. Unlike his other works, however, at-Tabari does not explicitly state his own positions and interpretations in the *Tarikh*, but was certainly aware of his own role as transmitter of the *akhbar*.

3.4.3. Historiographical methodology

At-Tabari makes clear in his introduction that he only relies on *akhbar* (reports) and *athar* (traditions), transmitted with *isnad*.⁸⁹ He states that he only exceptionally relies on what is learned through rational arguments and thought processes, since “no knowledge of the history of men of the past and of recent men and events is attainable by those who were not able to observe them and did not live in their time, except through information and transmission [*naql*] provided by informants and transmitters”.⁹⁰ Thus, he thus emphasises the usage of primary sources through reliable chains of transmission, while only exceptionally using reductive reasoning to establish *what* and *how* the history happened, although certainly aware of the role of reason involved in arranging the narrations and deducting their meaning in relation to each other.

In his other scholarly work, at-Tabari expresses his middle position between those who emphasised either *‘aql* or *naql*, although the weight ascribed to the different approaches would depend on the discipline. For instance, *kalam* would require more discursive reasoning than the transmission-based discipline of history. In *fiqh*, his position was that texts (Qur’an and hadith) provide the legal principles along with concrete examples of application. Accordingly, “reason should be continuously exercised on those texts in order to derive laws and ethical guidance; and to solve issues without textual foundation, reason could be applied to deduce solutions by reference to analogous cases”.⁹¹ His methodological approach to history appears to be similar and he sought to establish rational, objective principles of history based on identifiable sources, verifiable facts and repeatable methods, although being aware of the subjective

⁸⁸ Mårtensson 2009: 3.

⁸⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, p. 6 [I:170].

⁹⁰ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, p. 6-7 170 [I:170].

⁹¹ Mårtensson 2009: 4.

dimension of language and explanations.⁹² His critical examination of individuals, events and circumstances were thus based on a framework of objective principles and methods, which prevented any attempt at dismissal for subjective opinions.⁹³

According to Ulrika Mårtensson, the relationship between at-Tabari's political concerns and scholarly methodology is expressed on two levels. Firstly, he was one of the leading *fuqaha* of his time and his scholarly preoccupation with law was also political (*siyasi*) because he "saw 'rule of law' as the rational form of governance, and the 'Abbasid caliphate's way out of its crisis'".⁹⁴ Unlike in his works of *fiqh*, where he treats the theoretical aspects of law and its sources, his history provided opportunities of analytical application of the scholarly tradition of Islam on concrete historical examples. That enabled him to outline the difference between, on the one hand, rational rule of law based on revealed religion and, on the other hand, the arbitrariness of individuals and tribal groups that abuses power and subverts the order of the law. Secondly, at-Tabari's "epistemological synthesis between empiricism and idealism reflects his concern that rational governance is founded on written law, which in its turn is deduced by applying logic and analogical reasoning to textual, empirical sources".⁹⁵ He thus insisted on using written, objective sources that anyone could find, understand and refer to according to agreed methods. In his works on *tafsir*, at-Tabari was concerned with protecting the Islamic tradition from the various sectarian movements of his time. He expressed it by his incorporative approach to the accepted differences of opinion (*ikhtilaf*) and also by rejection of allegorical interpretations that departed from the empirically available surface of the texts. This concern led him to adopt a middle position between the *naqliyya* and *'aqliyya* approach to the sciences, including politics and law. It also reflects his critical loyalty to the 'Abbasid dynasty and the scholarly tradition of his time. In the *Tarikh*, at-Tabari thus expressed his preferred policies and methodological choices by historical examples, which made it both a legal scholar's study of history and historian's study of applied law.

⁹² Cf. Mårtensson 2009: 4.

⁹³ Cf. Mårtensson 2009: 4.

⁹⁴ Mårtensson 2009: 53.

⁹⁵ Mårtensson 2009: 53-4.

4. Narratives of the caliphate of ‘Umar

4.1. Governance, law and contracts

4.1.1. Al-Baladhuri

In relation to the history of all opened regions, al-Baladhuri provides several *akhbar* reflecting the importance of contracts in society, for the Muslims as *bay’a* (oath of allegiance) to the caliph and for the non-Muslims as *dhimmi*-contracts, including the *kharaj* and *jizya* in return for protection. The contracts established by treaties (*sulh*) or force (*‘unwatan*) with the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*) after the conquests naturally occupies the largest space in *Futuh al-Buldan*, but its underlying foundation nevertheless appears to be the *bay’a* given to the caliph and the loyalty among the local amirs. The basis for the successful conquests during the reign of ‘Umar is thus presented as loyalty, keeping of contracts and adherence to the Shari’a for both caliph and subjects. Characteristic for al-Baladhuri, however, is that the focus on local history and the loyalty to the caliph is often narrated from the side of the amirs. He relates with an *isnad* back to Sa’d b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, who said:

I heard some people saying that Mu’awiya, after the death of his brother Yazid, wrote to ‘Umar b. al-Khattab describing the condition of the coast-towns for him. He wrote back ordering him to repair the fortresses, set up garrisons [*muqatila*] in them, place watchmen on their towers and take means for lighting fire on the towers (to announce approaching enemies). He did not give him permission for naval expeditions, but Mu’awiya insisted so much until ‘Uthman allowed him...⁹⁶

There are many instances where al-Baladhuri presents the openings from the side of local governors, although ‘Umar’s appear as the backbone upholding the *dawla*. In the case of al-Jazira (Mesopotamia), he presents several *akhbar* about how ‘Iyad b. Ghanm established treaties with the inhabitants of the opened cities, but only briefly mentions its compliance with the instructions of ‘Umar regarding the openings and the subsequent treatment of *ahl adh-dhimmi*.⁹⁷ It reflects a focus on local history – provincial governors, customs, policies, socio-economics and architecture – rather than the central rule of ‘Umar. Often the governors appointed by ‘Umar are presented as agents in the course of events. Amirs and *‘amils* such as Abu ‘Ubayda b. al-Jarrah, Abu Musa al-Ash’ari, ‘Amr b. al-‘As and Khalid b. al-Walid are in fact mentioned more than ‘Umar himself in relation to the local history of the expansion of Islam. The history of

⁹⁶ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 129 [1916: 196].

⁹⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 172-6 [1916: 270-6].

the opening of Syria is mostly a local history of the regions and its people under the leadership of men like Abu ‘Ubayda, Khalid b. al-Walid, Yazid b. Abi Sufyan and his brother Mu’awiya.⁹⁸ Likewise, in the chapter dedicated to the governance of as-Sawad (in Iraq) under ‘Umar, al-Baladhuri only notes his role as the one sending Abu ‘Ubayda for its opening, presenting ‘Umar as a strategic supervisor with an eye for placing governmental responsibility in appropriate hands.⁹⁹

Although al-Baladhuri often mentions under which caliph openings or other events took place, local governors are often the historical agents. It is clearly reflected in the *akhbar* regarding the relation between ‘Umar and his governors during the opening of Egypt, when ‘Amr b. al-‘As advanced on his own accord to conquer Egypt and ‘Umar became “angered by that and wrote to him, rebuking and reprimanding him for acting by his own opinion and ordering him to return to his place if the letter was received before his arrival in Egypt”.¹⁰⁰ It is then mentioned that the letter indeed came to him before his arrival in Egypt, but that ‘Amr asked the messenger to conceal it and not report to ‘Umar. However, ‘Amr’s reputation is restored by his central role in opening Egypt, alongside other such as az-Zubar b. al-‘Awwam, whom ‘Umar sent along with 12,000 men as reinforcement for the conquest.¹⁰¹ In his usual way, al-Baladhuri reports that ‘Amr made the inhabitants *ahl adh-dhimmi*, imposing *jizya* on their wealth and *kharaj* on their land, in accordance with the orders of ‘Umar, who endorsed him when information reached him.¹⁰² Without moralising about individual decisions, the narrations reflect the dynamics between central and local authority, while indicating its necessary basis on local governance in accordance with the caliph’s decisions. Similar illustrations of ‘Umar’s central authority, particularly regarding economic decisions, is reported about the conquest of al-Bahrayn. Among all governors that ‘Umar appointed and dismissed, he is even reported to have dismissed and confiscated the wealth of the famous companion, Abu Hurayra, after finding out that he had become wealthy during his time at the caliph’s service. Despite not agreeing with the charges, Abu Hurayra accepted the decision and then avoided all proposals to official positions.¹⁰³

A recurring theme is, nevertheless, ‘Umar’s attentiveness to his governors and his custom of listening to their needs or advice, while also accommodating their general

⁹⁸ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 107-171 [1916: 165-265].

⁹⁹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 251 [1916: 401].

¹⁰⁰ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 212 [1916: 335].

¹⁰¹ Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 213-4 [1916: 336-7].

¹⁰² Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 213 [1916: 336].

¹⁰³ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 82-3 [1916: 125-6].

life-situation in the provinces.¹⁰⁴ The personal relationship between ‘Umar and his generals is often described in terms of consultation (*shura*). Although the decision of ‘Umar more or less always was followed, it appears to have been arrived at by mutual consultation.¹⁰⁵ A clear example is the *shura* before the battle of al-Qadisiya, during which ‘Umar was advised by al-‘Abbas and “other *shaykhs* of the *sahaba*” not to lead the army himself and accordingly decided to send Sa’d b. Abi Waqqas instead.¹⁰⁶ He is, however, presented as playing an important role in the openings by his commands and instructions to the various *amirs* from the caliphal centre in Madina.¹⁰⁷ There are several *akhbar* reporting how ‘Umar sought advice through *shura* and consulted the companions in order to follow the *sunna* of the Prophet and Abu Bakr before him.¹⁰⁸ He narrates, for instance, that the *muhajirun* (emigrants) had a certain sitting place or assembly (*majlis*) in the mosque where ‘Umar used to sit and discuss with them the news he received from the various regions of the *dawla*.¹⁰⁹ He is even said to have sought advice from al-Hurmuzan, a former Persian leader who became Muslim, which of Isbahan and Adharbaijan the Muslims should conquer first.¹¹⁰

Another significant feature is that al-Baladhuri, in between long passages of political and military narrations, often inserts various *akhbar* of a more personal character, which seem to take the history back to the role of human agency and shed light on the relation between caliph and amirs. Thus, he includes ‘Umar’s words when he heard that Sa’d b. ‘Ubayd al-Ansari was one of the martyrs of al-Qadisiyya, “His death did almost spoil the joy of this opening [*fath*] for me.”¹¹¹ When ‘Umar heard about the death of an-Nu’man b. Muqarrin, whom he sent out to open Nihawand, he, likewise, “covered his face with his hands and began to cry”.¹¹²

The contracts (*‘ahd*, *‘aqd*) established with the *ahl adh-dhimmi* after the openings are, however, given even more attention than *bay’a* and internal authority. These came into existence when non-Muslims of the lands were given three options of (1) accepting Islam, (2) paying *jizya* as *ahl adh-dhimmi*, or (3) fighting and being defeated. In al-Baladhuri’s narrative, these contracts thereby represent the necessary adherence to

¹⁰⁴ Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 138 [1916: 212].

¹⁰⁵ Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 253 [1916: 405-6].

¹⁰⁶ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 255 [1916: 409].

¹⁰⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 256-8 [1916: 410-3].

¹⁰⁸ Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 43 [1916: 69].

¹⁰⁹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 267 [1916: 424].

¹¹⁰ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 303, 380-1 [1916: 472; 1924: 117-9].

¹¹¹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 262 [1916: 416].

¹¹² al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 304 [1916: 474].

Shari'a, whether as Muslims by *bay'a* or non-Muslims as *dhimmi*. Likewise, 'Umar's upholding of the law in the public sphere is seen as a part of his contractual obligations. Regarding the people in Najran after its opening, al-Baladhuri narrates that Abu Bakr enforced upon the population a similar treaty to the one given by the Prophet, but that their number increased and they also began to practise usury (*riba*) at the time of 'Umar. Since it clearly violated the contracts and the legal norm of Islam, 'Umar expelled them. Some of the dispersed people of Najran then settled in Syria and others in what became known as the Najraniyya district of Kufa.¹¹³ The same occurred when the people of Khaybar mistreated and deceived the Muslims, including breaking the arm of 'Umar's son, 'Abdullah, after which 'Umar evacuated them from the land and divided what they had among the Muslims who had share in it.¹¹⁴ He also relates the well-known hadith that the Prophet said that there shall not remain two religions in the Arabian Peninsula, which also provides a reason for the evacuation.¹¹⁵ Besides these two instances, al-Baladhuri includes numerous *akhbar* about similar situations that emphasise 'Umar's fierce measures against those violating their contracts.

Another key aspect of these contracts is justice and mutual obligations, reflected in a narration about the inhabitants of Hims after its opening. Al-Baladhuri reports that the Muslims refunded their *kharaj* because they were too busy to protect them and thus to uphold their side of the mutual obligations that the contract involved. The Jews and Christians among the inhabitants nevertheless responded that the just rule of the Muslims was far better than the oppressive rule of the Romans under Heraclius, while supporting the Muslims until the region was secured and then agreed to paid the *kharaj* as *dhimmis*.¹¹⁶ The personal involvement of 'Umar in establishing these contracts is presented in relation to the symbolically important opening of Jerusalem (*Iliya*), after which 'Umar himself "made the peace treaty [*sulh*] with the people and wrote a document with it for them", including obligations of *jizya* and *kharaj* in return for protection.¹¹⁷ Similar narrations are also found about the openings in Khorasan, where he concludes that 'Umar made a peace treaty with its people and he then wrote a document (*kitab*) with it for them.¹¹⁸ Narrations about local governors directly in charge of treaties and taxation are, however, more common. They are thus presented as key

¹¹³ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 66 [1916: 101-2].

¹¹⁴ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 23-5 [1916: 42-5].

¹¹⁵ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 66-7 [1916: 103].

¹¹⁶ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 137 [1916: 211].

¹¹⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 138-9 [1916: 214-7].

¹¹⁸ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 403 [1924: 160].

historical agents, although ‘Umar’s central authority in long-term decisions is emphasised by narrations about his selection of governors, *qadis* (judges), *imams* and the communication between him and local amirs.¹¹⁹ A key part of the social contracts and its mutual obligations are also ‘Umar’s decisions for the sake of *maslaha*, public interest and welfare. Again with a local focus, al-Baladhuri narrates that ‘Umar encouraged building projects in unsettled regions, construction of dams in Makka and reserved public pasture lands (*hima*) in Madina for the benefit of the Muslims.¹²⁰ Al-Baladhuri mentions some disputes arising from ‘Umar’s decisions in favour of the community rather than particular individuals, but overall presents it as a decisive factor of his successful leadership.¹²¹ As discussed in the following chapters, the desire to facilitate the present and future welfare of the Muslims was also a fundamental reason for the establishment of the *kharaj*, the stipend system (*‘ata*) and the registers (*diwan*).

Other important aspects of ‘Umar’s reforms are his *ijtihad* (independent judgement) in legal issues, whose implementation depended on the loyalty of the amirs and their adherence to his judgements. These reports often mention the different circumstances at the time of ‘Umar in comparison to the time of the Prophet and Abu Bakr, which accordingly necessitated new judgements. One such instance was the division of the lands of Khaybar. In one of many narrations, al-Baladhuri relates:

The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, divided Khaybar into thirty-six shares and each share into hundred shares. He set aside a half of them for vicissitudes and what might befall him, and divided the remaining half among the Muslims. Accordingly, the share of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, included ash-Shiqq and an-Natâ and the territories with them. Among the *waqf*-lands were al-Kutiba and Sulalim. When these possessions came into the hands of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, he did not have enough *‘amils* to manage the land. He therefore turned it over to the Jews on condition that they use it and only keep half of its produce. It remained throughout the life of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and Abu Bakr. But at the time of ‘Umar, when abundant wealth came into the hands of the Muslims and they became strong in the lands, he expelled the Jews to Syria and divided the property among the Muslims.¹²²

As a confirmation of ‘Umar’s decision, he also notes that the Prophet said that there “shall be no two religions in the Arabian Peninsula”, which Umar made sure to

¹¹⁹ Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 141-2, 147-8 [1916: 214-9, 227].

¹²⁰ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 8-9, 53 [1916: 23, 81-2].

¹²¹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 8-9 [1916: 23].

¹²² al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 25-6 [1916: 46].

implement by the evacuation.¹²³ Similar short and concise narrations are also found regarding ‘Umar’s decision to expel the Jews of Fadak (in Khaybar) and other places in al-Hijaz, while paying them the price for their products in accordance with their previous agreement with the Prophet.¹²⁴ In relation to these types of legal *akhbar*, al-Baladhuri often adds judgements from the authoritative *fuqaha* relating to *zakat*, *ushr* and *kharaj*. When describing the opening of at-Ta’if, for instance, he first relates that the ‘amil of at-Ta’if wrote to ‘Umar asking about the ‘ushr on certain fruit products, to which ‘Umar answered that there are no ‘ushr on it.¹²⁵ Then al-Baladhuri discusses the legal implications of the narrations with reference to the *fuqaha*, including Abu Hanifa, Malik b. Anas and Abu Yusuf, among others, whose verdicts conform to the decisions of ‘Umar and make clear its contemporary relevance.¹²⁶ There are also some narrations explicitly mentioning the primacy of ‘Umar’s judgement and its significance for the later generations. In one of these narrations, al-Baladhuri relates:

The people of Najran reached 40,000 and then became envious of each other, so they came to ‘Umar b. al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, and said, “Move us away.” ‘Umar feared them for the Muslims, so he took the opportunity and expelled them. Then they regretted it and came to him, saying, “Reinstate us,” but he refused that. When ‘Ali b. Abi Talib succeeded, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, they came to him and said, “We plead by your right hand writing and your intercession on our behalf with your Prophet that you may reinstate us.” ‘Ali said, “‘Umar was rightly-guided in judgment [*rashid al-amr*] and I would hate to differ from him.”¹²⁷

Regarding the prominence and public acceptance of his decisions, it is also reported that ‘Umar enlarged the Masjid al-Haram in Makka and only faced minor opposition from the neighbouring people who had to give up their dwellings. When ‘Uthman later became caliph and met even more opposition when deciding to enlarge the mosque further, he referred to the previous decision of ‘Umar as justification, saying, “‘Umar did the same to you, but you affirmed and were pleased.”¹²⁸

One of the *ijtihads* of long-term economic significance is ‘Umar’s confirmation of the coinage standards that were prevailing at the time of the Prophet and his decision to institute the ratios that ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan later used for minting the first

¹²³ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 27-8 [1916: 48].

¹²⁴ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 29, 32, 34-5 [1916: 50-1, 53, 57-8].

¹²⁵ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 58 [1916: 89].

¹²⁶ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 58-9 [1916: 89-90].

¹²⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 67 [1916: 103].

¹²⁸ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 44 [1916: 73-4].

independent Islamic currency.¹²⁹ The main transmitter of ‘Umar’s *fiqh*, however, is presented as ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, the later Umayyad caliph related to ‘Umar on his maternal side.¹³⁰ For instance, Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz is reported to have said, “When a man died to whom the stipend (*‘ata*) was due, ‘Umar granted it to his heirs.”¹³¹ Al-Baladhuri also narrates regarding the opening of Alexandria that Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz said, “Not a town in al-Maghrib did we open by treaty [*sulh*] except three: Alexandria, Kafartis and Sultays. ‘Umar (b. al-Khattab) used to say, ‘Whoever of the people of these places accepts Islam will be set free along with his possessions.”¹³² Many restorations of ‘Umar’s policies, particularly related to economy, are thus attributed to ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz.¹³³ As former governor of Madina and the only unanimously praised Umayyad caliph, he came to represent sound leadership based on the Madinan tradition and the *fiqh* of ‘Umar b. al-Khattab. Similarly to his predecessor, Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz is described in narration after narration as not only the one reinstituting the *sunna* of the rightly-guided caliphs, but also as making *ijtihad* on the same basis as ‘Umar b. al-Khattab for the sake of the present and future welfare of the Umma.¹³⁴ Alongside numerous references to the leading *fuqaha*, the narrations about the legacy of ‘Umar’s judgements might reflect al-Baladhuri’s concern for providing useful historical lessons for the present times, without obstructing exaggerations or moral evaluations.

4.1.2. At-Tabari

The narrative of ‘Umar’s caliphate begins with Abu Bakr’s decision to appoint him as successor and initially at-Tabari focuses mostly on the personal qualities and decisions involved. He narrates from al-Waqidi:

When death descended on Abu Bakr, he summoned ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Awf and said, ‘Inform me about ‘Umar’. ‘Abd al-Rahman said, ‘O successor of Allah’s Messenger, he is, by Allah, a better man than your opinion of him. But there is a roughness in him.’ Abu Bakr said, ‘That is because he sees me as weak. If I entrust him with the affair, he will leave behind much of his present behaviour. O Abu Muhammad, I have done it in haste. It appears to me, if I get angry at the man for something, he shows me his concurrence about it, but if I ease up towards him, he

¹²⁹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 466, 469 [1924: 263, 267].

¹³⁰ Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 30, 43 57, 66-7, 222 [1916: 52, 70, 88, 103, 349].

¹³¹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 461 [1924: 255].

¹³² al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 222 [1916: 348-9].

¹³³ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 32 [1916: 53-4].

¹³⁴ Cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 28, 30, 32-3, 44, 58, 66-7, 73, 124, 154-5, 222, 270, 368, 441, 458. [1916: 49, 52, 54-5, 70, 88, 103-4, 112, 190, 238, 349, 428; 1924: 95, 225, 252].

shows me vehemence over it. Do not mention, O Abu Muhammad, anything of what I have said to you.' 'Abd al-Rahman said, 'Of course.'

Then Abu Bakr summoned 'Uthman b. 'Affan and said, 'O Abu 'Abdallah, inform me about 'Umar.' 'Uthman responded, 'You are better informed about him.' Abu Bakr said, 'Let me decide that, O Abu 'Abdallah.' 'Uthman said, 'O Allah, my knowledge about him is that what he does in private is better than what he shows openly, and there is no one like him among us.' Abu Bakr said, 'May Allah have mercy on you, O Abu 'Abdallah. Do not mention anything that I have mentioned to you.' [...]¹³⁵

The narrative then continues with the notion that, after receiving and reviewing the *bay'a*, the first thing 'Umar did in his caliphate was to dispatch Abu 'Ubayda and then the people of Najran for the openings to come.¹³⁶ The *bay'a* thus facilitated the loyalty to 'Umar's central authority, which, in at-Tabari's narrative, appear as either a driving force in the course of events or the one maintaining order among his subjects. The central leadership is also reflected in narrations about 'Umar having "spies in every army" that kept him informed by writing of what took place on the various expeditions.¹³⁷ In relation to central governance, however, at-Tabari often emphasises the necessity of justice (*'adl*) on the side of the leaders. For instance, he adds a narration involving al-'Abbas – the ancestor of the 'Abbasid dynasty – who reportedly said to 'Umar, "If you practice the following four customs, you deserve the title 'righteous' [*al-'adil*]: honesty in money matters, equality in dividing up, keeping up your promise [*al-wafa' bi'l-'udda*] and steering clear of disgrace; purify yourself and your people."¹³⁸ Upholding contracts, promises and justice is thereby not only presented as a characteristic of 'Umar, but also directly linked to the 'Abbasid lineage. Similarly, 'Umar is mentioned as emphasising to the men under his command that they should allow people to bring their complaints to them and "willingly take whatever is due to him on his behalf [and hand it over to him]".¹³⁹ He accordingly said, "Allah has obliged me to prevent [your] petitions from reaching Him; bring your complaints therefore to us."¹⁴⁰ Regarding the leadership obligations, At-Tabari relates that 'Umar gave a *khutba* to the people of Syria before returning to Madina in year 16/637-8, saying:

¹³⁵ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2137-8 [XI:146].

¹³⁶ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2164 [XI:176].

¹³⁷ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2208 [XI:221].

¹³⁸ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2523 [XIII:102].

¹³⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2219-20 [XII:11-12].

¹⁴⁰ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2219-20 [XII:11-12].

I have been put in charge over you and I have carried out what I had to do in respect of those matters concerning you, which Allah has entrusted to me. If He wills, we will justly distribute among you the revenues of your *fay*' lands, your living quarters and your raiding assignments. We have given you your due. We have mobilized armed forces for you, we have put your access routes in order. We have indicated places for you to settle. We have extended the revenues of you *fay*' lands for you and of that part of Syria you fought for. We have ordained your foodstuffs for you and we have given orders that you will be given your stipends, allowances [*arzâq*] and supplementary allocations [*maghanim*]. He who possesses information on a certain issue, should act upon it. Let anyone inform me (about something special he knows), the I myself shall put it into practice, Allah willing. There is not power except with Allah.¹⁴¹

At-Tabari often presents narrations from the perspective of 'Umar's central authority. Many short precepts are ascribed to him regarding leadership and its obligations, for instance, "O subjects, you have an obligation [*haqq*] to us to give advice on what is unknown and to cooperate in doing good."¹⁴² Or, as in another *khutba*, "Gratitude [*shukr*] is a safeguard against [what] the changing fortunes of time [will bring about], a way of increasing favour and establishing a claim to more. [All] this is for Allah binding on me in the orders I give you and in the prohibitions I make."¹⁴³ Although at-Tabari emphasises the loyalty to 'Umar, he also reports about how 'Umar used the booty and wealth coming in to the *bayt al-mal* in order to raise the spirit among his soldiers and make them loyal to his commands, which was a strategy that appears to have been decisive for the successful conquests.¹⁴⁴ In one of many similar instances, he relates that seven hundred soldiers of Banu Kinana and Banu Azd came to 'Umar, asking him to send them to the Syrian front, but 'Umar preferred for them the front of Iraq. The leaders of the two tribes then said to their people, "O brethren, heed the Commander of the Faithful in what he deems [necessary] and put into effect for him that [mission] that he has lodged in you," to which they all responded, "We obey you and heed the Commander of the Faithful in what he deems [necessary] and desires."¹⁴⁵ The *bay'a* to the caliph is also presented as a part of the contract [*'ahd*] with Allah as in a narration that 'Umar wrote to one of his governors, 'Utba b. Ghazawan:

Keep people far from injustice, fear Allah and take care lest fortune turn against you because of act of treasury or concupiscence committed by one of you. For though Allah have attained what you have, on the basis of a covenant [*'ahd*] the He has concluded with you, and He has shown you

¹⁴¹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2524-25 [XIII:104].

¹⁴² at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2772 [VIX:139].

¹⁴³ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2762 [VIX:128].

¹⁴⁴ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2183, 2186 [XI:196, 199].

¹⁴⁵ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2188 [XI:201]. See also at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2183 [XI:195-6].

His grace in matters He reproached you for. So fulfill the covenant with Allah [*'ahdi'llah*] and carry out his commands; then He will give you help and victory.¹⁴⁶

The central authority of 'Umar and its importance for spreading Islam is emphasised by many narrations about how 'Umar personally appointed amirs and signed contracts with the people of the opened regions, stipulating their right to life, property, law and religion, including the Muslims' obligation to protect the same. In the more distant provinces of the former Sasanid lands, at-Tabari presents the treaties signed between 'Umar's representatives and local non-Muslim leaders. Significant in relation to the central authority of 'Umar is also the notion that 'Umar "used to require his governors every year to perform the pilgrimage, thereby restraining them from any [act of] tyranny and preventing them from [doing any such thing]".¹⁴⁷ As Mårtensson has pointed out, the pilgrimage is the ritual celebration of the covenant (*'ahd, mithaq*), and to take part in it on an annual basis would thus remind the governors of their binding obligation towards the *dawla* and the Muslim Community.¹⁴⁸

Besides frequently seeking council from the people of sound judgements (*ahl ar-ra'y*),¹⁴⁹ another aspect of at-Tabari's multi-dimensional portrait of 'Umar is the pragmatic appointments of governors that were not necessarily the most pious, but rather the most experienced in strategy and politics. He narrates that 'Umar, before appointing al-Mughira b. Shu'ba as governor, asked for his opinion on appointing a weak [*da'if*] Muslim governor as opposed to someone strong and tough [*rajulin qawiyyin mushaddad*], to which al-Mughira replied, "The faith of a weak Muslim works [only] in his own interests, whereas his weakness works against your interests. The toughness of a strong, tough man will work in his own interests and his strength in those of the Muslims."¹⁵⁰ Then 'Umar sent him as governor of Kufa where he remained until 'Umar died two years later. By this, and similar narrations, at-Tabari confirms the view of political leadership as primarily based on authority (*sulta*) and sound strategies, which in the context of the third/ninth century not only addressed the declining authority of the 'Abbasid dynasty, but also the threatening religio-political idealism of

¹⁴⁶ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2544 [XIII:125]. Cf. Qur'an (48:10), "Those who give *bay'a* to you [i.e. Muhammad] give *bay'a* to Allah..."

¹⁴⁷ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2662 [XIV:34].

¹⁴⁸ Mårtensson 2009: 108.

¹⁴⁹ The term *ahl ar-ra'y* in the *akhbar* of at-Tabari and al-Baladhuri refer to people of sound judgements (literally "people of opinions") among the early Muslims, and not to the later school of thought that formed alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, the people of hadith (*ahl al-hadith*), although the relation between the two meanings are worth noting.

¹⁵⁰ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2679-80 [XIV:50].

the various Shi'a movements, particularly Isma'ilis. After opening Persia, 'Umar even stated that unity had been the key to the former success of the Sassanid Empire, which is one of many instances where the third/ninth century standards of unity, loyalty, faith and law are represented by the caliphal history of 'Umar.¹⁵¹

At-Tabari is also concerned with how 'Umar controlled the opened regions and presents many narrations about 'Umar's central leadership, constantly sending messages and messengers to the local provinces in order to regulate their governance. His control is thereby presented as based on an efficient system of messengers delivering news, information and booty to the treasury, which, in turn, enabled 'Umar to use the messengers' return to give further orders and guidelines for the local amirs. These narrations appear in more or less every section dedicated to specific conquests and, regardless of its historicity, they reflect at-Tabari's emphasis on the unifying central structure to uphold political authority and social order. It might also relate to his concern about the importance of a central structure to prevent political, social and economic disintegration resulting from "free rider"-problems that, at the time of at-Tabari, gradually fragmented the Abbasid *dawla*.¹⁵² According to Mårtensson, three levels of analysis of free rider problems can be found in at-Tabari's *Tarikh*, which are "the systemic problem of free riding landlords in a geographically wide empire with a decentralised state and related tax systems; norms and practices (upholding the feudal social contract and rule of law); and continuity and conflict".¹⁵³ Regarding its solution, she concludes that "according to al-Tabari, the systematic problem of free riding landlords could only be solved through the norm 'upholding the social contract' and the practice of 'rule of law'".¹⁵⁴ This analysis in the *Tarikh* is, however, expressed in terms of an individual moral responsibility towards Allah – being grateful or not to His favors – but nevertheless reflects at-Tabari's understanding that "the systemic problem and its management were of primary importance for the development of imperial states".¹⁵⁵ It might be one reason why at-Tabari continuously emphasises the central authority of 'Umar, while al-Baladhuri narrates more from a local perspective and thus presents 'Umar as the central focus for the rather autonomous governors.

¹⁵¹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2558-2559 [XIII:138-40].

¹⁵² Cf. Mårtensson 2011b: 203-238.

¹⁵³ Mårtensson 2011b: 233.

¹⁵⁴ Mårtensson 2011b: 233.

¹⁵⁵ Mårtensson 2011b: 234.

Particularly in relation to the opening of as-Sawad to Islam, at-Tabari includes many narrations of ‘Umar’s decisions regarding how to treat the people of the lands in accordance with the Sunna.¹⁵⁶ After the second wave of conquests, ‘Umar is reported to have sought counsel from his fellow Muslims about what to do with those non-Muslims who stayed on their land according to first treaty (‘*ahd*’), those who were forced into the Persian army and those who left the land.¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, the Muslims unanimously agreed that the treaty should be fulfilled with those who had stayed and had refrained from fighting without false claims, while others would be given the choice of paying *jizya*, exile (*jala*’) or war depending on the circumstances of their past and present attitude to the Muslim authority.¹⁵⁸ Again, *jizya* and fulfilment of contracts is emphasised, not only amongst the Muslims, but also in relation to the non-Muslim population, which the Muslims were obliged to protect as long as the *dhimmis* upheld their side of the contract. As often in at-Tabari’s narrative, ‘Umar responded in writing to the Muslims who had asked him for a judgement about the people of as-Sawad. The letter represents the view on ‘Umar’s leadership in general:

Now them, Allah the Exalted has granted in certain cases a dispensation [*rukhsa*] in every matter, except in just conduct [*‘adl*] and in the remembrance of Allah [*dhikr*]. As for the remembrance of Allah there can be no dispensation with regard to it in any event, and only abundance of it is satisfactory. As for justice [*‘adl*], there can also be no dispensation with regard to it, neither for relative nor for stranger, neither in adversity nor in prosperity. Even if justice seems to be lenient, it is stronger and more effective in suppressing injustice [*jawr*] and falsehood [*batil*] than injustice, even if it seems harsh. It is [also] more effective in uprooting infidelity [*kuf*]. Those inhabitants of *sawad* who held fast to their treaty [*‘ahd*] and did not help the enemy against you in any way have the protection [*dhimma*] and must pay the poll tax [*jizya*]. As for those who claim that they were forced [to leave the land] and did not come to you after the Persians had gone or migrated, do not believe what they have claimed, unless you wish to. If you do not so wish, revoke the treaty and escort them [*ablighhum*] to a place which is secure [*ma’mana*] for them.¹⁵⁹

The last words refer to the Qur’an (9:6), “And if any one of the idolators ask you for protection, give them protection until they have heard the words of Allah. Then convey them [*ablighhu*] to a place where they are safe [*ma’mana*].” Then it is narrated that ‘Umar’s words reached Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas and the Muslims who invited the migrating people to return as *ahl adh-dhimmi* with the obligation of paying the *jizya*,

¹⁵⁶ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2369 [XII:152].

¹⁵⁷ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2369 [XII:152].

¹⁵⁸ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2369-70 [XII:153].

¹⁵⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2370 [XII:153].

similarly to the people who had kept the treaty, although their *kharaj* (land tax) was made heavier.¹⁶⁰ Significantly, at-Tabari also reports that the “Muslims imposed upon them the land tax [*kharaj*] which had previously be levied by the Persian king [*Kisra*]. It was to be paid by every man, proportionately to the property and the land which he possessed”.¹⁶¹ Muslim governance as a continuation and refinement of Persian traditions recurs on several occasions. When reporting about the opening of Persia, at-Tabari devotes considerable space to encounters in the Persian court between the Sasanian leaders and Muslim delegations who had either been invited for negotiation or sent by ‘Umar with the three options of accepting Islam, paying the *jizya* or being fought.¹⁶² A recurrent theme in these encounters are the Persians’ treatment of the Muslims with contempt, speaking about their poverty and primitive way of life, and asserting that they do not have the military strength and sophistication needed to take on such a vast empire as that of the Persians.¹⁶³ Although the Muslims are reported to have responded arrogantly to the imperial display of the Persian court, it is nevertheless made clear that the way of Islam had transformed their primitive conditions of the Jahiliyya and made them able to establish their own civilisation.¹⁶⁴ Thereby at-Tabari not only puts forward the sophisticated nature of the pre-Islamic Persian administration, but also its adoption and refinement by the Muslim conquerors. Related to the takeover of other nations, some of the *khutbas* attributed to ‘Umar clearly connect the notion of *ni’ma* (blessing, favour) to statebuilding, politics and expansion, which at-Tabari himself mentioned in his introduction as a main subject of his historical work (gratefulness or ungratefulness to Allah for His favors).¹⁶⁵ Thus ‘Umar said to the Muslims:

Of Allah’s favors [*ni’am*] to you are those that He granted to mankind in general and others that He granted exclusively to people of your faith [*din*]. These general and special favors are continued during your turn of fortune [*dawla*], your time and your generation [...] You are appointed successors on earth and conquerors of its people. Allah has given your faith victory.¹⁶⁶

‘Umar’s and the Muslims’ gratefulness to the favours of Allah, being the foundation for the vast expansion as well as the inward prosperity, is thus presented in terms of unity, loyalty and adherence to the law on the side of both leader and subjects. In relation to

¹⁶⁰ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2371 [XII:154].

¹⁶¹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2371 [XII:155].

¹⁶² Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2240, 2242, 2272, 2273, 2284.

¹⁶³ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2236, 2275, 2279, 2280, 2352.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2270-71, 2273, 2242-42, 2268, 2283-84, 2352-53.

¹⁶⁵ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 4-5, [I:167-8].

¹⁶⁶ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2760-1 [XIV:126-27].

at-Tabari's introduction, it reflects his notion of historical change as depending on divine favour and its appreciation among the people, not only expressed as individual morals, but as political and social behaviour of larger nations. As for the more detailed features of successful governance and administration, at-Tabari narrates the history of the conquests with an emphasis on treaties, in a way similar to al-Baladhuri, but often cites them in totality. Thus he presents detailed information about the amount of gold, silver and food provision to be paid as *jizya*, sometimes regulated so that "If their property [*mal*] should increase, their payment would grow; if it should decrease, the payment would decrease as well".¹⁶⁷ An example, illustrating the centrality of taxation and contracts during 'Umar's reign, is the letter he sent to the people of Jerusalem:

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is the assurance of safety (*aman*) which the servant of Allah, 'Umar, the Commander of the Faithful, has granted to the people of Jerusalem. He has given them an assurance of safety for themselves, for their property, their churches, their crosses, the sick and the healthy of the city, and for all the rituals that belong to their religion. Their churches will not be inhabited [by Muslims] and will not be destroyed. Neither they, nor the land on which they stand, nor their cross, nor their property will be damaged. They will not be forcibly converted. No Jew will live with them in Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem must pay the poll tax [*jizya*] like the people of [other] cities, and they must expel the Byzantines [*ar-rum*] and the robbers. As for those who will leave the city, their lives and property will be safe until they reach their place of safety; and as for those who remain, they will be safe. They will have to pay the poll tax [*jizya*] like the people of Jerusalem. Those of the people of Jerusalem who want to leave with the Byzantines, take their property, and abandon their churches and their crosses will be safe until they reach their place of safety. Those villagers (*ahl al-ard*) who were in Jerusalem before the killing of so-and-so may remain in the city if they wish, but they must pay the poll tax [*jizya*] like the people of Jerusalem. Those who wish may go with the Byzantines [*ar-rum*], and those who wish may return to their families. Nothing will be taken from them before their harvest is reaped. If they pay the poll tax [*jizya*] according to their obligations, then the contents of this letter are under the covenant of Allah [*'ahd Allah*], are the responsibility of His Prophet, of the caliphs, and of the faithful. The persons who attest to it are Khalid b. al-Walid, 'Amr b. al-'As, 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf, Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan. This letter was written and prepared in the year 15/636-37.¹⁶⁸

Throughout the narrations about 'Umar's reign, at-Tabari cites numerous documents and written treaties (*kitab sulh*), written by 'Umar as well as his governors, which might also reflect at-Tabari's own views on the importance of written contracts for order in

¹⁶⁷ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2392 [XII:177].

¹⁶⁸ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2406 [XII:191].

society.¹⁶⁹ Such written documents are cited in relation to the opening of ar-Rayy, Qumis, Jurjan, Tabaristan, Azerbaijan, al-Bab, and Armenia.¹⁷⁰ In relation to these treaties, at-Tabari asserts yet again that according to his sources, “‘Umar used to require his governors every year to perform the pilgrimage, thereby restraining them from any [act of] tyranny and preventing them [from doing any such thing].”¹⁷¹ The narrative emphasis on contracts is upheld until the very end of ‘Umar’s life, when at-Tabari concludes that among the things ‘Umar said on his deathbed were:

I commend the caliph after my death the Arabs – for they are the very substance of Islam – that what is their due of alms [*sadaqa*] be taken and assigned to their poor. I commend to the caliph after my death the covenant [*dhimma*] of the Messenger of Allah that [non-Muslims] be given a compact [‘*ahd*] faithfully fulfilled.¹⁷²

At-Tabari does not explicitly focus on the legal judgments of ‘Umar in the same way as al-Baladhuri, but rather weaves it into the general history of his political and economic policies. He concludes his chapter on the thirteenth year of ‘Umar’s reign, narrating that “‘Ali b. Abi Talib – according to what has been reported – was in charge of the judiciary. It has also been said that during his reign ‘Umar had no judge.”¹⁷³ At-Tabari does, however, often mention ‘Umar’s practice of gathering a *shura* of the most prominent companions and people of sound judgments (*ahl ar-ra’y*) before all major decisions, most famously when making a decision regarding succession after him. Other important instances includes the preparation for al-Qadisiyya and at-Tabari narrates that ‘Umar, after being advised by the *shura* to send one of the *sahaba* to lead the troops, addressed the people in a *khutba* with the following words:

Almighty Allah has united the people of Islam, reconciled their hearts, and made them brethren. In all matters concerning them, the Muslims are like one body; no part of it remains unaffected by something that afflicts another part. Furthermore, it behooves the Muslims that their matters be decided in consultation among them, or, rather, among the wise men among them (*dhawu al-ra’y*). The people are subordinate to those who undertake this command. What the latter agree upon and are satisfied with is incumbent upon the people, and the people are subordinate to them in it. And those who undertake this command are subordinate to the wise men: Whatever the latter deem appropriate and are satisfied with concerning battle strategy, the commanders are subordinate to

¹⁶⁹ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2641 [XIV:9].

¹⁷⁰ Ar-Rayy: *Tarikh*, 2657 [XIV:27]. Qumis: *Tarikh*, 2657 [XIV:28]. Jurjan: *Tarikh*, 2658 [XIV:29-30]. Tabaristan: *Tarikh*, 2659 [XIV:30-21]. Azerbaijan: *Tarikh*, 2662 [XIV:33]. Al-Bab: *Tarikh*, 2665-7 [XIV:36-38]. Armenia: *Tarikh*, 2674-5 [XIV:45-46].

¹⁷¹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2662 [XIV:34].

¹⁷² at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2724 [XIX:92].

¹⁷³ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2212, 2798 [XI:225, XIV:165].

them. O people! I am like one of you, so that the wise men from among you prevented me from setting out, and I saw fit to stay and to send another person [instead of me]. I have summoned for consultation on this matter the commander of the vanguard [Talha b. 'Ubaydullah] and the person ['Ali b. Abi Talib] whom I have left as my deputy in Madina.¹⁷⁴

Although at-Tabari continuously presents the importance of social unity in that people follow their leader in the appropriate implementation of the Shari'a according to the time and context, he often combines these with narrations about 'Umar's practice of consultation before all important decisions and also his custom of listening to the opinions of people involved before commanding them.¹⁷⁵ At-Tabari even concludes the history of 'Umar with a narration that he emphasised, to his selected *shura*, that the *dawla* must remain free of tribal loyalties and administered according to the just regulations of the Book and the Sunna. He then specifically consulted three of them:

If you should take authority over the people, 'Ali, I implore you not to bring them under the power of Banu Hashim. If you should take authority over the people, 'Uthman, I implore you not to bring them under the power of Banu Abi Mu'ayt. If you should take authority over the people, Sa'd, I implore you not to bring them under the power of your relatives. Off you go! Consult together, then do what you have to do.¹⁷⁶

Although there are few discussions about the actual *fiqh* of 'Umar, the decisiveness of his judgments is clear. As Mårtensson has noted, the honorific title of 'Umar, *al-Faruq* ("the discriminator between truth and falsehood"), can be related to what at-Tabari states in his methodological introduction, where he declares the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood to be the hallmark of rationality, and accordingly, the precondition for justice.¹⁷⁷ It also relates to the narrations about 'Umar's decisions for the public welfare of the Muslim community. When mentioning 'Umar's night inspections and similar decisions for the general benefit [*silah*] of the Muslims, at-Tabari states in his own words that 'Umar "was hard on those of dubious reputations [*ahl ar-rayb*] and severe in [seeking out] Allah's truth [*haqq*] until he extracted it, but easy-going in what was owed to him until it was handed over to him and compassionate and full of pity for the weak".¹⁷⁸ Or as cited in reported *khutba*, 'Umar himself said, "Allah put me in charge of your affairs, because I am aware of what is most

¹⁷⁴ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2213-4 [XII: 4-5].

¹⁷⁵ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2218 [XII:10].

¹⁷⁶ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2723-4 [XIV:9].

¹⁷⁷ Mårtensson 2009: 107.

¹⁷⁸ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2746 [VIX:112].

advantageous for you in your present situation.”¹⁷⁹ In another narration, it is reported that a man came to ‘Umar to give him some advice, saying, “Your community finds fault with you on four counts.”¹⁸⁰ The man described the supposed faults, all of which concerned ‘Umar’s differing judgements compared to the time of the Prophet. According to the narration, however, ‘Umar explained the sound reason for his judgements and their compliance with what the Prophet had transmitted to him. By this and similar narrations, at-Tabari underlines ‘Umar’s historical importance as the model for *ijtihad* in accordance with the Book and Sunna.

4.1.3. Comparison

A shared theme in both narratives is the notion of new political and socio-economical circumstances as a consequence of conquests, conversion and the increasingly imperial nature of the Muslim *dawla*, particularly in the sense of governing a population largely consisting of non-Muslims. Both historians present ‘Umar’s political, economic and legal reforms as a response to these new challenges that, according to the same narratives, contributed to the later civil strifes (*fitna*, pl. *fitan*) among the Muslims from the time of ‘Uthman onwards. Under ‘Umar, both narratives hold that the Muslim society was upheld by his strict adherence to the *sunna* of the Prophet and Abu Bakr – representing the implemented reality of the Shari’a – as well as his initiatives for the public benefit of the community as a whole, rather than specific individuals, although constantly consulting prominent individuals by *shura*. More importantly, however, the society was based on loyalty to the caliph as well as the law and contracts that had been established with the population. Thus, a recurring theme is ‘Umar’s fierceness against any corruption or violation of contracts, to Muslims as well as non-Muslim, often expressed in relation to his governors, who, nevertheless, are portrayed as steadfast and loyal to the caliph. These narrative constructions accordingly represent the historians’ analyses of causes for social change (conquests incorporating new peoples, places and properties), factors that uphold societal order (law, contracts and divine religion) and solutions to arising problems (legal, political and economic reforms).

The similarities between the two narratives also reflect the political and economic tensions between central authority and local governance that was highly topical in the

¹⁷⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2758 [VIX:124].

¹⁸⁰ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2773 [VIX:140].

third/ninth century, leading to what has previously been referred to as free-rider problems where local authorities (*sultans* or *muqtas*), to put it simply, benefited economically, politically and militarily from the central organisation without contributing to its efforts. It likewise reflects the third/ninth century emphasis among Muslim scholars on pragmatic political rule, particularly in ‘Umar’s appointment of governors that were not necessarily the most pious, but rather the most experienced in strategy and politics. Thus, ‘Umar is also attributed with using the incoming booty strategically in order to preserve loyalty, although both historians indicate the civilisational necessity for a religious nomos – in their time Islam and the Shari’a – and fulfilment of contracts on the side of the leader as well as his subjects. In the context of the declining ‘Abbasid authority and the threatening religio-political idealism of the various Shi’a movements, this emphasis on authority (*sulta*) and justice (*‘adl*), often discussed in relation to economic concerns, clearly reflect some of the political concerns of the historians and indeed many other Muslim scholars, although the minor differences between the two narratives are perhaps more revealing.

A distinct difference between the two historians is the focus on local history in Baladhuri’s narrative and the politically centralised framework in which at-Tabari presents his narrative. While at-Tabari’s chronological and caliph-arranged narrative is built around ‘Umar as the central authority, al-Baladhuri’s geographically arranged narrative is largely presented from the viewpoint of the local governors. Thus, various cultural developments, including local customs, geographical circumstances, economic conditions and architectural developments have a more prominent role in al-Baladhuri’s history. What is also clear is that, when narrating about governance, contracts and law, at-Tabari presents more narrations about individual decisions, while al-Baladhuri often only chooses a few reports about individual behaviour to emphasise certain points. These differences might reflect their somewhat different scholarly background, where al-Baladhuri to a larger degree represents the bureaucrat’s observations of administrative details and at-Tabari gives precedence to individual agency, although the boundaries between them are not always distinct. The slightly diverse focus, local or central, might reflect different views, although not necessarily contradictory opinions, on the dynamics between centralised authority and local governance. Moreover, at-Tabari attributes much of ‘Umar’s successful reign to his strong central authority. He often mentions that the contract to the leader is a (part of the) contract with Allah, while al-Baladhuri discusses the various contracts as a key feature of the administration of the

newly opened regions. Taken at-Tabari's history as a whole, the constructed links between the reign of 'Umar and some of the prominent Persian emperors also expresses certain concerns regarding the economic and administrative structures that 'Umar inherited and refined, as well as the view that strong civilisations are necessarily upheld by law, central governance and loyal adherence of a united population, which in turn has to be based on divinely revealed religion as the overall social contract. This might also reflect the aforementioned discussion of arising free-rider problems and local disintegration in the third/ninth century 'Abbasid *dawla*, which, according to some scholars and politicians (including at-Tabari), ought to be countered by reforms to strengthen central authority. Although al-Baladhuri's view on centralisation is not made clear, his discussion of the tensions between local and central authority nevertheless indicates the on-going discussions and debates in the third/ninth century, which at least suggests the political and socio-economic awareness underlying the narratives.

Another narrative difference is the inclusion of *fiqh*. Al-Baladhuri often concludes sections with legal narrations from the *fuqaha*, thereby showing the present relevance and practicality of historical knowledge. By it, he also provides an analytical framework for understanding the relations between history and its consequences, as well as legal lessons (judgements) to be drawn from it. A structural difference with narrative implications is also that al-Baladhuri's primarily geographical arrangement gives direct focus to long-term consequences of 'Umar's reforms, while at-Tabari treats these developments throughout his whole work. Therefore, at-Tabari appears to be more concerned with individual agency in various situations and al-Baladhuri with the longer course of events. In their entirety, both narratives nevertheless provide analytical perspectives on political, economic and social factors contributing to the rise, fall and renewal of society. Although both historians expressed these perspectives in terms of contracts, unity and law, at-Tabari shows a greater concern for the sectarian tendencies of his own time, which is probably one reason behind his very inclusive narrative within the parameters of the emerging tradition of the so called *ahl as-sunna*. On the other hand, al-Baladhuri's straightforward narrative largely avoids disputes regarding religious issues, although undoubtedly representing the *ahl as-sunna* in his approach, and questions of religion seem indivisible from questions of politics in the historical developments. These different perspectives most likely reflect their slightly different disciplinary affiliations, which will be further analysed in the concluding chapter.

4.2. Economy and taxation

4.2.1. Al-Baladhuri

Alongside the *dhimmi* contracts, the obligations of *jizya* and *kharaj* (land-tax) are central in al-Baladhuri's narrative. In one report about the money, goods and services that the *dhimmis* were required to provide, al-Baladhuri relates with an *isnad* back to Aslam the *mawla* (freed slave) of 'Umar, who said:

'Umar wrote to the governors of the provinces (of Syria) instructing them to levy *jizya* on every adult, making it forty dirhams on every man from the people of silver [*ahl al-waraq*], and four dinars on the people of gold [*ahl adh-dhahab*]. And he ordered that – in order to provide the Muslims with wheat and oil – they give every (Muslim) person in Syria and al-Jazira two *mudds* and three *qists* of oil per month. He also assessed on them grease and honey, the quantity of which I do not know, and for every (Muslim) person in Egypt per month one *irdab* (of wheat), clothing, and accommodation for three days.¹⁸¹

He also asserts that 'Umar “imposed the *jizya* at four dinars on the people of gold, and forty dirhams on the people of silver, in addition to the providing subsistence for the Muslims and accommodation for three days”.¹⁸² Other narrations confirm his policy of asserting the *jizya* according to social categories, while imposing the *kharaj* on the lands and in some regions assessing certain subsistence taxes.¹⁸³ After asserting that 'Umar's measures of taxation were because of the differing economic circumstances in the various regions, al-Baladhuri follows up with a lengthy discussion regarding the *fiqh* of *zakat*, *jizya* and *kharaj*, with references to all the principle *fuqaha* and their legal judgements, which in turn were founded upon 'Umar's decisions in accordance with the Prophet and Abu Bakr before him.¹⁸⁴ In one of several narrations about the amount of *jizya* levied in different regions, he narrates from al-Awza'i:

At first, the *jizya* in Syria was one *jarib* (patch of land) and one dinar per head. Then 'Umar b. al-Khattab made it four dinars on the people of gold and forty dirhams on the people of silver, arranging them in categories according to the wealth of the rich, the poverty of the poor and the average means of those in the middle.¹⁸⁵

He also provides some illustrations of why and how 'Umar decided on his policies. In a letter to Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas after the opening of as-Sawad, 'Umar said:

¹⁸¹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 125 [1916: 191].

¹⁸² al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 125 [1916: 191].

¹⁸³ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 152 [1916: 234].

¹⁸⁴ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 73-5 [1916: 111-5].

¹⁸⁵ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 124 [1916: 190].

I have received your letter in which you state that the people have asked you to divide among them what Allah has assigned them as *fay'*. When you receive my letter, find out what possessions or trotters [*kara'*] the mounted troops have acquired and divide it among them, after taking a fifth. Leave the land and the rivers to that may be included in the stipends [*a'tiyyat*] of the Muslims, because if you divide it among those present nothing will remain for those who come after them.¹⁸⁶

Another reason mentioned for not dividing the land – besides leaving its revenue for future generations of Muslims – was a fear that the troops might begin to dispute and contest with each other about it.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the main reason was to leave the land for the future generations and collecting *jizya* and *kharaj* from the inhabitants, following 'Ali b. Abi Talib's advice to leave the lands "so that they may become means of aiding [*madda*] the Muslims".¹⁸⁸ Accordingly, 'Umar even released captives from the opening of al-Ahwaz in order to inhabit the land and assess *kharaj* on the people thereby, providing a steady income to the *bayt al-mal*.¹⁸⁹ The same development is also narrated from the opened lands of Egypt, which 'Umar commanded to be left "so that the descendants of the descendants [*habal al-habala*] may get what they desire from it".¹⁹⁰ Taxation is thus given a key role in the successful establishment of Islam in the opened regions under 'Umar.

With the eye of an administrator, al-Baladhuri reports in detail which types of land 'Umar took over and registered as property of the Muslim *dawla*, which lasted until the registers were burned at the time of al-Hajjaj b. Yusuf (d. 95/714).¹⁹¹ Taxation and administration is thereby related to social order. The contract (*'ahd*) with the people of as-Sawad reportedly came into existence by the decision of 'Umar to take *kharaj* from them, which again reflects the link between governance, economics and contracts.¹⁹² Nevertheless, it is clear from the narrations that the economic policy was not a strict system devoid of human control. Rather, the caliph was able to give land as fief to certain people when he deemed it appropriate, sometimes to prominent individuals or larger groups to reconcile their hearts in Islam, but in all cases for the general benefit of the Muslim Community.¹⁹³ For instance, al-Baladhuri narrates that 'Umar wanted to collect the *jizya* from the Christians of Banu Taghlib, but that they fled to a distant land.

¹⁸⁶ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 265-6 [1916: 422].

¹⁸⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 268 [1916: 426].

¹⁸⁸ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 266 [1916: 423].

¹⁸⁹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 377, 378, 381-2 [1924: 113, 114, 119].

¹⁹⁰ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 214 [1916: 337].

¹⁹¹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 272-3 [1916: 430-1].

¹⁹² al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 267 [1916: 424].

¹⁹³ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 12, 13, 14, 21, 351, 373-4. [1916: 27, 29, 39; 1924: 67-9, 105-8].

Then an-Nu'man b. Zur'a (or Zur'a b. an-Nu'man) remarked to 'Umar that Banu Taghlib were Arabs, too proud for the *jizya*, but severe in warfare and potential enforcement for the enemy. Then 'Umar called them back and ordered his governor to "double the *sadaqa* (i.e. *zakat*) ordinarily taken by Muslims on all livestock and land, and if they refuse that, then war with them until they perish or submit to Islam".¹⁹⁴ Thus, they were the only tribe allowed retain their religion while paying double *sadaqa* on land, livestock and wealth. Another narration also informs that 'Umar included in their conditions that they do not christen their children, which, according to another narration from 'Ali, would violate the contract (*'ahd*) and take them outside of the protection (*dhimma*) of the Muslims.¹⁹⁵ The detailed history of Banu Taghlib of it is further discussed with opinions from the leading *fuqaha*, who confirm 'Umar's judgements and explain its present application. In the attached chapter about laws (*ahkam*) of *kharaj* land, al-Baladhuri also cites the judgements of the *fuqaha*, which are all based on the historical *ijtihad*s of 'Umar.¹⁹⁶ The first of these narrations about *kharaj* goes back to Abu Yusuf, who said:

Only land taken by force, such as as-Sawad, ash-Sham and others (are subject to *kharaj*). If the leader [*al-imam*] divides it among those who conquered it, then it is tithe-land [*ard 'ashr*] and its inhabitants are slaves. If the leader did not divide it, but turned it to the Muslims collectively, as 'Umar did with as-Sawad, then its people bear the burden of the *jizya* and the land is subject to the *kharaj*, but they are not slaves. This is the verdict of Abu Hanifa.¹⁹⁷

Similar verdicts follow, based on 'Umar's decisions and explanations of its related issues by other *fuqaha*, which link the historical narrations to their present significance in Muslim societies.¹⁹⁸ History, thereby, functions as a foundation for the legal discussion and might reflect a view on history as lessons of direct practical relevance, although the details are often elaborated through historical narrations rather than legal verdicts. The conclusion to the chapter on *kharaj* is nevertheless significant for the recurring question of central authority and local governance. He narrates:

Abu Yusuf says, "If there is in the land an pre-existing foreign custom [*sunna a'jamiyya qadima*], which has not been modified or abrogated by Islam, and some people complain of it to the leader [*al-imam*] because of the harm it causes them, it is not for him to change it.

¹⁹⁴ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 181-2 [1916: 284-5].

¹⁹⁵ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 183 [1916: 286].

¹⁹⁶ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 447-8 [1924: 237-9].

¹⁹⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 447 [1924: 237].

¹⁹⁸ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 447 [1924: 237].

Malik and Shafi'i say, "He may change it even if it is ancient [*qadamat*], because he can disacknowledge any permitted custom [*sunna ja'iza*] made by any of Muslims, let alone made by the unbelievers [*ahl al-kufr*]."¹⁹⁹

The two opinions again raise the question of the central authority and local governance, or in this case local customs. Even if not giving any definitive answer, al-Baladhuri nevertheless provides some basic legal perspectives and leaves the judgement in the hands of the actual authorities.

4.2.2. *At-Tabari*

Similarly to al-Baladhuri, at-Tabari focuses on *jizya* and *kharaj* in relation to the conquests, particularly in relation to Iraq and the former Persian lands. He narrates that it was the conquest of as-Sawad that raised questions regarding the legal status of the fertile land and its inhabitants, including locals as well as settling Muslims. Some regions were opened during the early campaigns of Khalid b. al-Walid around year 12/633, after which treaties were concluded with its the people.²⁰⁰ During the second wave of conquests, questions arose regarding the status of the inhabitants who had fulfilled the treaties with Khalid b. al-Walid and the inhabitants without previous treaties, whose lands were conquered in the second stage. For instance, at-Tabari cites a letter in which 'Umar advised Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas, the commander of the Muslims at al-Qadisiyya, regarding the people of as-Sawad:

Keep the (local) peasants in their present state except those who are hostile or the ones who ran away from you to your enemy and whom you subsequently captured. Treat the peasants (outside of al-Mada'in) in the same way you treated the other peasants before them. When I write to you about (dealing with subjugated) people, always treat them in the same manner.²⁰¹

Thus, 'Umar discerned a number of groups among the people of as-Sawad, including those who stayed, those who left and then claimed that they had been forced into the Persian army, those who abandoned their land without any explanation, and those who surrendered without a fight.²⁰² The report indicates that abandoning the land and thereby not contributing to the *dawla* was understood as a hostile act against the Muslims, a violation of contract. At-Tabari narrates that Sa'd wrote to 'Umar, asking him what to do with people who did not farm the land, to which he replied:

¹⁹⁹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 448 [1924: 239].

²⁰⁰ Cf. Friedman 1992: xiv.

²⁰¹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2467 [XIII:47].

²⁰² Friedman 1992: xix.

As for all those who are not peasants, you are to make your own decision concerning them, as long as you have not already acquired their belongings as booty, that is to say, divided that up as such. As for the Persian who is hostile, abandons his land and vacates it, his land shall be yours (to do with as you like). When you summon them (to convert to Islam or else pay the *jizya*) and you receive the *jizya* from them and you send them back (to their homesteads even) before the allotment (of the moneys thereby collected) then that constitutes “protection” [*dhimma*]. In addition, if you do not summon them to convert to Islam, then everything they own constitutes lawful booty for you, destined for him whom Allah has indicated.²⁰³

At-Tabari continues with other narrations that explain in more detail ‘Umar’s decisions regarding the legal status of the land and its inhabitants, including the amount of taxes levied upon the non-Muslims and the amount of territorial booty (*fay’*) that the Muslims ought to receive.²⁰⁴ He mentions that certain lands were left in the hands for the local *dhimmis* to cultivate in exchange for *kharaj* and that certain parts of the *fay’* land was preserved rather than divided up, because it would not have been beneficial for the Muslim community.²⁰⁵ Since only the property belonging to the royal family and its supporters – scattered all over the region of as-Sawad – became *fay’* to be divided among the Muslims, it was more practical to collectively administer the division of *fay’*. Therefore, ‘Umar wrote to the amirs, instructing them to “Repair to the *sawafi*”²⁰⁶ that Allah has singled out for you and distribute their revenues among those whom Allah has indicated; four-fifths are to go to the army and one-fifth to me for me to distribute among those entitled to it.”²⁰⁷ Only the property of the Persian royal family and their followers became booty for the *ahl al-fay’*, although, as at-Tabari makes clear, this understanding of the people of Kufa was later forgotten and “their view was taken as referring to the entire *sawad*”.²⁰⁸ At-Tabari gives detailed reports about the administration of the lands and the division of revenues, while also pointing out certain legal implications of the history of as-Sawad, including the position taken by the people of knowledge (*al-‘ulama*) to refrain from dividing the land in order to prevent disputes among the Muslims.²⁰⁹

²⁰³ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2467 [XIII:47].

²⁰⁴ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2467-8 [XIII:47-8].

²⁰⁵ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2467-8 [XIII:47-8].

²⁰⁶ *Sawafi* (sg. *safiya*) is a technical term denoting opened lands and properties placed under tutelage of the *imam*, the leader of the Muslims, who decided regarding its administration.

²⁰⁷ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2469 [XIII:49].

²⁰⁸ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2375 [XII:159].

²⁰⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2372-3, 2469, 2471 [XII:155-7; XIII:49, 51].

To preserve social order and gain the goodwill of the non-Muslim population, ‘Umar is reported to have allowed all inhabitants, regardless of previous transgressions, to keep their land with the obligation of paying *jizya* and *kharaj*.²¹⁰ Adherence to the law and just taxation, based on a contract of mutual obligations, is thus presented as the foundation for strong long-term governance. Despite requests from some prominent *sahaba*, ‘Umar broke the custom of dividing land among the *mujahidun*, since it was in the interest of the larger Muslim community to let the original inhabitants retain the possession of the land and, by taxation, serve as a source of income. At-Tabari also confirms with a narration from Muhammad b. Sirin that “‘Umar and the Muslims acted with regard to the poll tax [*jizya*] and protection [*dhimma*] according to the custom enacted by the Messenger of Allah in this matter”.²¹¹ In defence of the position of the *ahl as-sunna* regarding the early history, he adds to Muhammad b. Sirin’s narration that whoever “relates things other than those done by the just imams and the Muslims is lying about them and staining their honor”.²¹²

The economic history of the Persian lands takes precedence in at-Tabari’s narrative, although detailed reports about *jizya* and *kharaj* are found in relation to Syria and other regions as well.²¹³ In many respects, ‘Umar’s reign is presented as economic and administrative continuity between the Persian and the Muslim governments. He reports that the Muslims imposed a similar *kharaj* to what had been levied by the Persian King (*Kisra*) on every man, proportionately to the property and land he possessed.²¹⁴ He thus emphasises that the Muslims under ‘Umar made extensive use of the pre-existing administration and taxation system for the benefit (*maslaha*) of the Muslim community. Likewise, the Persian peasants were employed to take care of roads, bridges, markets, tilling of the soil and guide services, while paying the *jizya* and obeying the Muslim authorities in exchange for protection.²¹⁵ At-Tabari shows that the economic life of the lands was allowed continue under Muslim rule, while its people had the option of either accepting Islam or living as *dhimmis*, both of which included certain contractual obligations. After the complete defeat of the Sasanid armies at al-Qadisiya, ‘Umar is presented as the inheritor of Persian kingship. At-Tabari even links ‘Umar and Khusraw Anushriwan with respect to the latter’s tax reforms:

²¹⁰ See also at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2368-71 [XII:150-155].

²¹¹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2373 [XII:157].

²¹² at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2374 [XII: 158].

²¹³ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2154 [XI:167-8].

²¹⁴ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2371 [XII:155].

²¹⁵ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2470 [XIII:50].

It was these tax assessments `Umar b. al-Khattab followed when he conquered the Persian lands and levied taxation on the ‘protected peoples’ (*ahl al-dhimma*) there, except that he levied taxation on every uncultivated (*ghamir*) piece of land according to its potential yield, at the same rate as he levied on sown land. Also, he levied on every *jarib* of land growing wheat or barley from one to two additional *qafiz*s of wheat; this he used for feeding his army. But in the specific case of Iraq, `Umar did not make any arrangements contrary to those of Kisra regarding the *jaribs* of land and regarding the date palms, olive trees, and the heads [of those liable to the poll tax], and he excluded from liability to taxation the people’s means of daily sustenance, as Kisra had done.²¹⁶

The connection is significant since it forms a part of at-Tabari’s recurring notion that rational tax systems and just redistribution under a central authority make up the foundation for successful *dawla*.²¹⁷ At-Tabari further confirms the validity of ‘Umar’s economic reforms by a narration about fiefs (*aqta’a*) given in the days of ‘Uthman:

If ‘Uthman committed an error, then those who accepted the error from him committed a greater one; they are the people from whom we have received our religion. ‘Umar gave a fief to Talhah, to Jarir b. ‘Abdallah, and to al-Ribbil b. ‘Amr. He gave the Dar al-Fil to Abu Mufazzir and to others from whom we took [our religion]. All the fiefs were freely divided from out of the fifth of the *fay*’.²¹⁸

‘Umar’s rational tax system and just policies – in accordance with the Shari’a and pragmatic politics (*siyasa*) – are presented in narration after narration as the foundation for the successful conquests and the subsequent establishment of Islam in the lands. The importance of economics is also reflected in ‘Umar’s words that there are four things connected with Islam that he would never neglect or abandon for anything, the first being collecting and placing wealth where Allah has ordered, while the subsequent things concerns protecting the (economic) rights of the Muhajirun, Ansar and Bedouin Arabs.²¹⁹ Another oft-mentioned reform of ‘Umar, related to administration and rational governance, was the introduction of the *hijri* calendar two and a half years into his caliphate – sixteen years after the Hijra – in consultation with ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, who suggested beginning the calendar from the Hijra because that would distinguish between truth and falsehood.²²⁰ In relation to at-Tabari’s statement in his introduction that Allah has blessed mankind with ability to “distinguish between truth and falsehood and to

²¹⁶ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 963 [V:260-1].

²¹⁷ Cf. Mårtensson 2009: 104.

²¹⁸ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2376 [XII:160].

²¹⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2775-6 [XIV:142].

²²⁰ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2481, 2749 [XIII: 59; VIX:114].

recognize what is useful and what is harmful,”²²¹ the Hijra marked the transition from the idolatry (*shirk*) of Makka to the true *din* of Madina or, as Mårtensson has noted, from irrational tribalism to rational political organisation.²²² For at-Tabari, the new system of dating represented administration and governance according to the rational nomos of Islam, while also being of symbolic significance for the discipline of history, whose name (*tarikh*) literally means dating. The calendar itself is reported to have been a response to the economic and administrative practicalities of the gradually more complex organisation of the *dawla*. It was also seen as a development of more rational administration by leaving the tribal affiliations of the pre-Islamic times, particularly since at-Tabari clearly contrasts the new calendar to the customary dating of the pre-Islamic Arab tribes (Banu Isma’il) who did not agree on one established event to date from, but used different local events and methods of dating.²²³ Another reason was also to resolve the issue of precedence (*sabiqa*) in Islam, which was the basis for the stipend system and its distribution according to each person’s achievements, precedence, usefulness and needs, rather than tribal affiliations.²²⁴ Thereby, the “rational” principle of merit, as detached from kinship, determined governance and administration. In contrast to the Arabs of the Jahiliyya, the Muslims at the time of ‘Umar not only have a universal law and a sophisticated administration (partially inherited and refined from the Persians), but also a calendar everyone agreed on. Thus the economic and administrative reforms of ‘Umar are associated with principles of rational governance and, as discussed in the following chapter, one of the most important decisions was the introduction of the stipend system (‘*ata*) and the *diwan*.

4.2.3. Comparison

Both historians share a focus on economy and taxation as key factors in historical change and narrate in detail about the importance of *kharaj*, *jizya* and *zakat* as well as the general fulfilment of (economic) contracts in the course of events. ‘Umar’s successful leadership and the strength of the Muslim civilisation under him is linked to his ability to control the economy in all regions and among all people by a just means of taxation. The various forms of taxation within the parameters of the Shari’a appear to

²²¹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, p. 3 [I:166].

²²² Mårtensson 2009: 100.

²²³ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 1254 [VI:160].

²²⁴ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2752 [XIV:118].

function as a means of expansion, establishment and control over society by putting each social group (Muslims/*dhimmis*) in its appropriate place. Thus, both historians explore the relations between different religious, social and racial groups in terms of economics, while also narrating at length regarding the balance between preserving goodwill of the local people and authority of the central governance in terms of economic policies. Again, the tensions between central and local governance appear to be decisive in both narratives, which clearly relates to the highly topical issue of the declining central power of the ‘Abbasid dynasty in relation to local authorities.

Other similarities are the discussions of links between various governmental functions, including taxation, jurisdiction, documentation and administration, and the ways they developed in relation to each other. The beginning of the gradual professionalization of the governmental organisation, attributed to the time of ‘Umar, represents in both narratives the fulfilment of the rational principles of governance brought by the Prophet, but not reaching full imperial height until the expansion under ‘Umar. Thus, civilisational prosperity is attributed to rational taxation and administration based merits, strategy and experience, rather than kinship (other than prophetic), which might reflect certain views on the professionalised ‘Abbasid administration. Most of the key economic and administrative reforms brought about by the arrival of Islam are associated with ‘Umar’s rule by principles of rational governance, particularly in at-Tabari’s narrative stretching back to the time of the Persians, which he viewed as the Muslims’ predecessors of efficient governance. Thus, at-Tabari in particular emphasises the continuation between the Persian and Muslim civilisations by marking the transition from the pre-Islamic irrational organisation of the Arabs to the Islamic rational organisation, more similar to the Persians.

One of main differences between the two historians is, yet again, al-Baladhuri’s inclusion of legal discussions, while at-Tabari only rarely points out the judgements involved. It might indicate an intention of at-Tabari to distinguish between the various disciplines he was involved in, although his legal thinking influenced the way he arranged and understood the course of historical development. Regardless of whether the legal judgments are explicit, as in al-Baladhuri, or implicit, as in at-Tabari, the fact that *fiqh* had developed in relation to events during the early history of Islam, provided a frame of reference for both historians. That included analytical perspectives regarding political, social and economic aspects of historical change, by which both historians were able to examine or at least transmit the various factors involved in rise, fall and

renewal of society, with obvious practical relevance to present-day politics. In relation to the on-going debates at the time of at-Tabari regarding taxation and economy, it is interesting that he, in comparison to al-Baladhuri, gives much more emphasis to the view that paying tax and abandoning the land without contributing to the *dawla* is a hostile act against the Muslims, a violation of contract, which was one aspect of the disintegration of the ‘Abbasid *dawla* from the third/ninth century onwards. Another difference is that, although both confirm the validity of ‘Umar’s reforms, at-Tabari is more explicit in refuting sectarian groups and views against him, which, as will later be discussed, might be related to his disciplinary affiliation to the religious sciences and concern for upholding the inclusive tradition of the *ahl as-sunna* (“Sunnis”) as opposed to the various sectarian tendencies and rebellions against the ‘Abbasid *dawla*, most notably the Shi’a, Mu’tazila, Khawarij, Qaramatians and Zanji.

4.3. Registers and stipends

4.3.1. Al-Baladhuri

Al-Baladhuri’s narrations often mention the changing conditions of the *dawla* from ‘Umar’s time, particularly due to the increasing revenues and the growing population, including Muslims as well as non-Muslims, resulting from the conquests. The new circumstances required *ijtihad* and, in turn, new political strategies as well as economic policies. Two of the major reforms discussed in al-Baladhuri’s history are the stipend system (*‘ata*) and the registers (*diwan*, pl. *dawawin*). In the attached chapter on stipends in the caliphate of ‘Umar, he begins:

When ‘Umar opened Iraq and Syria and levied the *kharaj*, he gathered the companions of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and said, “I have considered allotting the stipend to its people.” They said, “Yes, a sensible consideration, Amir al-Mu’minin.” He said, “But with whom to begin?” They said, “With yourself.” He said, “No, I will place myself where Allah has placed me and begin with the family of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.” He did that and then assigned ‘A’isha, the Mother of the Believers, may Allah be pleased with her, 12,000 (dirhams) and assigned the other wives of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, 10,000 and allotted 5,000 for ‘Ali b. Abi Talib and the same for those of Banu Hashim who witnessed Badr.²²⁵

²²⁵ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 448-9 [1924: 240].

The new stipend system is presented as a development of more rational governance, not in contrast to the previous system of equal distribution, but an improvement in line with the administrative and economic necessities of the time. One reason for the reformed stipend system is reported to have been the abundance of wealth that Abu Hurayra brought from al-Bahrayn to Madina, which made ‘Umar aware of the new economic circumstances. After consulting the Muslims, ‘Umar decided to set up a *diwan* to organise the payment to the people, similar to the practise amongst the Persians.²²⁶ The administrative reforms are thereby presented not only as an appropriate application of the guidance of the Prophet, but also as a refined continuation of the Persian traditions in line with ‘Umar’s general economic policies of just distribution. It is also connected to the practises of the people of the former Roman lands, as al-Baladhuri narrates:

When ‘Umar registered the *diwan*, Abu Sufyan b. Harb asked, “Is it a *diwan* like that of Banu Asfar (the Greeks)? If you assign stipends to the people, they will eat by the *diwan* and neglect business.” But ‘Umar said, “It is necessary, for (wealth) has become abundant for the Muslims.”²²⁷

New economic conditions thereby necessitated new economic policies, which resembled some practises of other imperial polities before Islam. By consulting Muslims with both knowledge of the legal sources (Qur’an and Sunna) and experience of politics beyond the Arab lands, ‘Umar responded strategically to the challenges. In the gathered *shura*, ‘Ali and ‘Uthman recommended that all incoming wealth be divided by careful administration to avoid disorder, after which al-Walid b. Hisham b. al-Mughira reportedly said to ‘Umar, “Amir al-Mu’minin, I have been to Syria and seen their kings, and they registered *diwans* and mobilised an army. You should register a *diwan* and mobilise an army.”²²⁸ ‘Umar then took his suggestion and ordered three scribes to “write down the people according to their ranks”, which was the beginning of the *diwans*.²²⁹ He also avoided the ascribing of any special favors to himself as caliph or his own tribe, Banu ‘Adi, but began the distribution with the family of the Prophet and those nearest to him or most beloved by him.²³⁰ As he responded to some men of his own tribe, criticising his distribution, “By Allah, if the non-Arabs come with good works, and we come without good works, they shall be nearer to Muhammad than we on the Day of Rising, for he whose works are deficient, will get no help from his

²²⁶ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 453 [1924: 245].

²²⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 457 [1924: 251].

²²⁸ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 449 [1924: 240-1].

²²⁹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 449 [1924: 240-1].

²³⁰ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 456-7 [1924: 249-50].

lineage.”²³¹ The economic policies of the new *dawla*, in contrast to the pre-Islamic tribal confederations, are thereby presented as based on merits and rational distribution.

‘Umar also said, regarding his adherence to the *sunna* of the Prophet and Abu Bakr before him, “I have two companions who travelled a road and if I contradict them, I will be contradicted.”²³² He did, however, decide to change Abu Bakr’s policy of equal distribution and increased the allotments for the early Muslims (*as-sabiqun*) and those who had taken part in the battles, arguing that those who initially fought against the Prophet cannot be put in the same category as those who fought with him.²³³ Several narrations describe in detail the amounts allotted to each category, ranked according to the merits of *sabiqa* (seniority in Islam), *jihad*, *hijra*, *bay’a* (such as that of al-Hudaybiya), knowledge and, most significantly, nearness to the family of the Prophet.²³⁴ Besides merits, which included relationship to the Prophet, the narrations also mention stipends assigned to particular people in need, including clothes and food, as well as the stipends he assigned to all new-born children of the Umma.²³⁵ The stipends are likewise mentioned as means to please the armies.²³⁶ ‘Umar himself, however, avoided praise for the distribution and remarked that the wealth did not belong to him, but to the Muslim community and should, therefore, be divided among them until nothing remains.²³⁷

Significantly, standards of measuring are also identified with the organisational development during ‘Umar’s reign, including the fixed coinage rations of the dinar and the dirham. In relation to the stipends, it is reported that ‘Umar decided the amounts of rations [*arzaq*] after measuring that two *jaribs* of food would be sufficient for every man, woman and slave.²³⁸ As the famous companion Abu ad-Darda, is reported to have said in another narration, “many major and rightly-guided *sunnas* were established by ‘Umar for the Umma of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, among them the two *mudi* and the two *qists*”.²³⁹ Moreover, ‘Umar said in a *khutba*, “We have granted you your stipends and your rations every month, and in your hands are the *mudd* and the *qist*. [...] Whoever diminishes them, may Allah do the same to him.”²⁴⁰

²³¹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 450 [1924: 241-2].

²³² al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 450 [1924: 241-2].

²³³ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 451 [1924: 242].

²³⁴ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 451, 454-61 [1924: 242-4, 247-55].

²³⁵ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 452 [1924: 244].

²³⁶ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 452-3 [1924: 245-6].

²³⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 452-3 [1924: 245-6].

²³⁸ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 460 [1924: 254].

²³⁹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 460 [1924: 254].

²⁴⁰ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 460-1 [1924: 254-5].

Thereby, ‘Umar’s reign represents the introduction of the rational principles of Islam, based on the Qur’an and the Sunna, into the reality of imperial governance after the expansion of the Muslim *dawla*. The new stipend system also provides another example of ‘Umar as a model for *ijtihad*. In one report, he said about the reforms, “I do not know what will be after me, but I extend my counsel to whoever Allah refers to me with his case”, whilst also referring to the Prophet’s words that “whoever dies deceiving his subjects, shall not smell the scent of the Garden”.²⁴¹ Just and rational governance as the foundation for social order is, yet again, emphasised when al-Baladhuri narrates that Mu’adh b. Jabal advised ‘Umar about the conquered lands, saying:

By Allah, dividing it will lead to what we dislike and large part will be in the hands of these people, who will then pass away so that it ends up belonging to one man. People will come after them, maintaining the strength of Islam, but finding nothing left. Seek therefore an order that accommodates for the first of them and for the last of them.²⁴²

Justice is directly linked to rational and strategic governance for maintaining the strength of Islam. Many other narrations point out ‘Umar’s extensive supervision of his governors and his record-keeping of their economic situation in order to avoid corruption, injustice and accumulation by means of authoritative positions. He is likewise reported to have been extremely aware of his people’s conditions. By the arrangement of these narrations, al-Baladhuri discusses both reasons and consequences of ‘Umar’s stipend reforms. The balance between *ijtihad* according to circumstances and the previous judgments of the people of knowledge, represented by the Prophet and Abu Bakr, appear to be a characteristic of ‘Umar’s successful management of the *dawla*, while upholding both a central structure and social order in the local regions.

4.3.2. At-Tabari

Besides narrations about ‘Umar’s economic and legal decisions pertaining to local non-Muslims during the opening of Persia, at-Tabari includes detailed descriptions of economic arrangements within the Muslim community, particularly concerning the stipend system and the *diwan*.²⁴³ He states that ‘Umar was the first to institute the *diwans* for the Muslims, in which he recorded people “according to their tribes and

²⁴¹ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 452-3 [1924: 245-6].

²⁴² al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 151-2 [1916: 233-4].

²⁴³ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2411-4 [XII:199-204]

assigned them stipends”.²⁴⁴ It is noted that the *diwan*, which began as a system for military payment, was an introduction that did not exist during the time of the Prophet and thus another successful *ijtihād* of ‘Umar.²⁴⁵ Similarly to the *hijri* calendar, the division of stipends according to merit – in ‘Umar’s words “seniority [*sabiqa*] in Islam, and not according to your ancestral nobility” – seems to represent a economic and administrative implementation of the rational nomos of Islam, previously not developed due to the different circumstances under the Prophet and Abu Bakr.²⁴⁶

In the pages dedicated to *diwan* at the end of the section on ‘Umar’s caliphate, at-Tabari narrates that ‘Ali and ‘Uthman recommended that ‘Umar divide the wealth and keep account of the distribution, while it was al-Walid b. Hisham b. al-Mughira who said, “O Commander of the Faithful, I have been to Syria and seen how the rulers there have instituted a state register [*diwan*] and conscripted a regular army. So you do the same.”²⁴⁷ Similarly to al-Baladhuri, he includes the narrations from Aslam, the *mawla* of ‘Umar, about how the caliph avoided any advantages and appropriately divided the wealth, in accordance with the *sunna* of Abu Bakr and the Prophet before him, saying, “we have achieved excellence only in this world, and we can only hope for Allah’s reward in the hereafter for what we have done through Muhammad”.²⁴⁸ Thus, merits, rather than tribal affiliations other than to the Prophet, are emphasised as ‘Umar reportedly said that the ones carrying out the best deeds, regardless of being Arab or non-Arab, will be nearest to Muhammad on the Day of Rising, so “Let no one rely on close relationship, rather let him act for Allah’s reward. For he whose effort falls short cannot get ahead by means of his ancestry.”²⁴⁹ ‘Umar also remarked that everyone is eligible to stipends according to their ranks as derived from the Book of Allah and their allotments from the Prophet, since it is “a man’s achievement in Islam, his precedence in Islam, his usefulness in Islam, and his need” that count.²⁵⁰ Although ‘Ali and ‘Abd ar-Rahman b. ‘Awf told ‘Umar to begin with himself when registering the payment through the *diwan*, ‘Umar decided to begin with al-‘Abbas, the uncle of the Messenger of Allah and the ancestor of the ‘Abbasid dynasty, and then continue with the next closest after

²⁴⁴ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2749 [VIX:115].

²⁴⁵ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2224 [XII:16].

²⁴⁶ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2411-2 [XII:199-200].

²⁴⁷ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2750 [XIV:115-6].

²⁴⁸ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2751 [XIV:116-7].

²⁴⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2751 [XIV:116-7].

²⁵⁰ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2752 [XIV:118].

him.²⁵¹ The mentioned groups are ranked by seniority in Islam, participation in early battles and military campaigns, and similar deeds for the sake of Allah, His messenger and the Muslim Community. Thus, the nearest ones to the Prophet, including his wives and uncle, received the highest stipends, while latecomers (*rawadif*) “received equal payment, weather strong or weak, Arab or non-Arab”.²⁵² He also made sure to give stipends to the other wives of the early Muslims and to the young boys (*sibyan*), as well as the measures of food stipulated for the destitute (*misikin*). According to at-Tabari, ‘Umar said before his death, “I planned to make the payments four thousand dirhams each: a man would give one thousand to his family; one thousand he would take with him (while traveling); for one thousand he would equip himself; and for one thousand he would equip his home”, but died before its implementation.²⁵³ Like the narrative of the earlier reforms, at-Tabari also mentions some of the initial objections to the allotments, but nevertheless presents ‘Umar’s decisions as the correct ones that the Muslims adhered to by consensus (*ijma*’).

Besides the stipends allotted to the early Muslims, at-Tabari is also concerned with the *ahl al-fay*’ who contributed to the conquests in Iraq, Persia, Syria and Egypt. In one narration, ‘Umar explains that the *fay*’ only belongs to the people of the *amsar* (garrison towns) and to those who joined them, gave them assistance and stayed with them, because they were the ones populating the villages, administering the peace treaties, collecting the *jizya* and upholding the frontiers.²⁵⁴ When ‘Umar instructed his administrators to divide wealth as stipends, someone asked if he would leave in the *bayt al-mal* provisions for unexpected eventualities, to which he replied:

It would be a temptation [*fitna*] to those who come after me. Nay, I shall prepare for them what Allah and His Messenger have commanded us [to prepare]: obedience to Allah and to His Messenger. These are our provisions, and by virtue of these we attained to what you see. If this money is the price of your religion, you will perish.²⁵⁵

Again, ‘Umar’s centralised economic policies are presented as a means to achieve public benefit for the Muslims, while its origin in the intention to obey Allah and His Messenger is made clear. Similarly to other *fiqh* decisions, he arrived at the judgement after consultation with the Muslims, who confirmed that the leader should only keep

²⁵¹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2412-3 [XII:201].

²⁵² at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2413 [XII:202].

²⁵³ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2414 [XII:203].

²⁵⁴ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2414 [XII:203].

²⁵⁵ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2414-5 [XII:203-4].

enough incoming wealth to cover his basic expenditures and then equitably distribute the *fay* among its entitled people, while putting their affair right and taking care of them at times of misfortunes until these are over.²⁵⁶ At-Tabari also includes important *fiqh* discussions, presented as historical narrations, in which the Qur’anic laws (*ahkam*) pertaining distribution of booty are explained by discussions between ‘Umar and ‘Ali b. Abi Talib of how to implement these law in relation to the present circumstances.²⁵⁷ These narrations make it clear that the *ijtihad* of ‘Umar and ‘Ali established a *sunna* for all Muslims after them. At-Tabari also clarifies the relation between the various incomes to the *bayt al-mal* and the differences between the *fay* and the *jizya*:

‘Umar then allotted the stipends from the poll tax [*jizya*] which was imposed on those who entered [willingly] into peace agreements [*sulh*] or were called upon to do so. The poll tax [*jizya*] was restored to the Muslims in moderate sums [*bi’l-ma’ruf*]. The poll tax [*jizya*] is not to be divided into fifths. It belongs to those who protect the *ahl al-dhimma*, fulfill the obligations toward them, and to those who join them and assist them, unless they willingly share the surplus [of the poll tax] with others who were not eligible to receive from it what they themselves had received.²⁵⁸

The importance of fulfilling the mutual obligations and, in turn, social order is yet again emphasised. The reign of ‘Umar is also identified with central regulations to make sure surplus wealth is put in its proper place, which ‘Umar himself describes as a following in the footsteps of his two preceding companions, the Prophet and Abu Bakr.²⁵⁹ In relation to the institution of the *diwan*, at-Tabari also includes the famous narration about ‘Umar asking Salman al-Farsi if he is a king (*malik*) or a caliph (*khalifa*), to which Salman replies, “If you collect from Muslim territory 1 dirham – or less or more – then you put it to use other than for what is by right intended, you are a king, not a caliph.”²⁶⁰ When hearing the answer, ‘Umar is reported to have wept.

It is also notable that at-Tabari includes several narrations in his chapter on the *diwans* that are not directly related to it, but rather provides anecdotal glimpses of ‘Umar’s efforts for the Muslim Community, as well as descriptions of his personal qualities.²⁶¹ For instance, his role as *muhtasib* (market supervisor) is mentioned when he used to “wander around the markets, reciting the Qur’an and making judgements among

²⁵⁶ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2415-6 [XII:204].

²⁵⁷ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2417-8 [XII:206]. Cf. *Tarikh*, 2467 [XIII:46]. See also the Qur’an 8:42 and 59:7-8.

²⁵⁸ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2418 [XII:207].

²⁵⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2417 [XII:206].

²⁶⁰ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2753 [XIV:118].

²⁶¹ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2753-6 [XIV:118-121].

the people wherever litigants caught up with him”.²⁶² In fact, most narrations at-Tabari includes rather concern ‘Umar’s interaction with the Muslims under his rule and his concern for them and the future generations of Muslims, advising them to unity, openness, companionship and avoiding divisions that would lead future generations to say “This is so-and-so’s opinion; they have divided Islam.”²⁶³ At-Tabari concludes with a narration that clearly presents ‘Umar’s outstanding *fiqh al-waqi*’ (understanding of current events), rather than individual piety, as the foundation for his successful reign. He narrates from Mujalid who reported that some people mentioned a certain man to ‘Umar, describing him as knowing nothing of evil, to which ‘Umar replied, “In this case there is more likelihood of evil happening to him!”²⁶⁴ The inclusion of these types of *akhbar* in the chapter on *diwans* reflects a narrative emphasis on centralised political and economic strategies as a foundation for upholding authority in the civilisational turn of fortune (*dawla*), while perhaps also pointing out the importance of historical awareness of the fate of former societies.

4.3.3. Comparison

Both historians’ detailed accounts of ‘Umar’s introduction of stipends and *diwans* adds another analytical dimension to the narratives of his governmental, legal and economic reforms. Again, the main reasons for ‘Umar’s reforms are said to have been the abundant wealth from the conquests, the new peoples entering Islam or living as *dhimmis* under Muslim protection, need for more advanced military organisation and the general development towards an imperial *dawla*, including its social and economic consequences. In the substantial sections dedicated to stipends and *diwans*, both historians present the reforms of ‘Umar as a development towards rational principles of governance based on merits, just distribution and professional administration. Although the influence from pre-Islamic nations are mentioned, establishing the Muslim caliphate a superior successor, the *ijtihad*-based reforms of ‘Umar are presented not as new innovations, but rather as a fulfilment of pre-existing functions from the time of the Prophet and Abu Bakr in appropriate relation to the changing circumstances. Thus, the stipend system and its administration through the *diwans* are, like most early organisational decisions, attributed to ‘Umar, albeit in this case in consultation with

²⁶² Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2755 [XIV:121].

²⁶³ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2756 [XIV:122].

²⁶⁴ Cf. at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 2757 [XIV:122-3].

prominent Muslims around him. What later developed into a highly complex and differentiated administration in the third/ninth century is thereby discussed in terms of individual responsibilities, which indeed reflects the historical discourse of politics and organisation at the time, particularly in relation to the first caliphs before the ‘Abbasids.

Moreover, both historians present division of land, leading to abundant possessions in the hands of a few, as not only unjust, but also detrimental to the upholding of civilisation and strong governance. The stipends and its administration under ‘Umar, on the other hand, is regarded as one of the early solutions to rational distribution of incoming wealth from local landowners (paying *kharaj*) without decreasing the central authority. Likewise, it is emphasised that a successful leader is one who, on the one hand, distributes wealth generously, since it does not belong to him, but, on the other hand, does not distribute authority in the same way, because a central power is necessary to direct state affairs. Although not immediately providing practical solutions to the ‘Abbasid disintegration, these narrative constructions nevertheless tune in to the discussions about caliphal politics and economics in the ‘Abbasid period, which were highly topical at the time of the historians and, as discussed below, something they were directly involved in by their institutional affiliation. There are few differences between the two historians regarding the stipends and *diwans*, but worth noting is that al-Baladhuri does not provide any legal discussion with references from the *fuqaha*, other than what the narrations themselves present. It does, perhaps, reflect a standardised version of the origins of ‘Abbasid state administration, although the emphasis on caliphal agency and strong central authority at the time of ‘Umar might indicate some views on what the ‘Abbasid dynasty lacked when facing the challenges from local *sultans* and *muqta*’s.

5. Concluding discussion

5.1. Agency and historical analysis

In order to recognise the level of historical analysis in the two narratives, we will first look at how the historians' related the political and socio-economic reforms of 'Umar to the larger civilisational narrative, which reveal their perspectives on historical change and in turn their *agency* within the specific social, intellectual and textual context. As previously discussed, the narratives represent views on centralisation, contracts, law, rational economy and taxation as key factors involved in the rise and duration of civilisations. The socio-political context of the third/ninth century, with a caliphal dynasty in gradual decline due to local *sultans* appropriating authority, made these questions of centralisation, contracts and rational taxation highly topical, within scholarly circles as well as within state administration. As for the intellectual context, the post-*mihna* period in which both historians were active saw scholars of the various sciences trying to consolidate the religious tradition of Islam in order to preserve the unity of the *ahl as-sunna* and exclude non-acceptable innovations and sectarianism. The inclusiveness of the *khabar*-form of history, as practised by the two historians, had the effect of giving authority to many different, but not ideologically contradictory, interpretations. By providing broad outlines of history, they confirmed the parameters of historical knowledge in an attempt to unify the Muslim community and avoided claims to one single privileged truth that could promote sectarian histories. Singular narratives were not unknown and the inclusive *khabar*-narratives – significant for religious unity as well as for contemporary political and socio-economic issues – exemplifies the historians' agency when innovating upon "received cultural categories and conditions of action in accordance with their personal and collective ideals, interests, and commitments".²⁶⁵ The fact that at-Tabari is more concerned with religious issues and the individual morality of the historical agents might be related to his disciplinary affiliation with the classic sciences at a time when sectarian, mostly *shi'i*, historiographies were threatening not only the historical discipline, but even more so the tradition of *fiqh*, hadith and *kalam*. Likewise, al-Baladhuri's concern with providing a useful narrative of administrative, economic and cultural relevance for scholars as well as people involved in the politics of power at the time might reflect his affiliation with the 'Abbasid state bureaucracy and *fiqh* in the sense of applied law in society.

²⁶⁵ Emirbayer/Goodwin 1994: 1442-3.

After these social and intellectual conditions in relation to which the historians formulated their narratives, it is useful to turn to the concrete textual context from where the narratives derived their meaning. By the third/ninth century, the history of ‘Umar represented not only the great expansion of Islam, but all sorts of legal, economic and administrative reforms that built up the imperial power of the caliphate. Although it is apparent in both al-Baladhuri’s and at-Tabari’s narratives, a careful examination of the socio-economic concerns, rather than merely moral or biographical, show that history also functioned as an archive of the past in relation to which current political, social or religious issues could be elaborated. As for the question of analysis, both historians indeed wrote history from a perspective of causality, subject to divine omnipotence, but nevertheless analysed historical change in terms of “objective, empirical mechanisms” including various political, religious, social, economical, demographical and geographical factors.²⁶⁶ Because of the social and intellectual context of the ‘Abbasid society, however, both of them expressed these perspectives on history according to the scholarly discourse and its frameworks that not only prevailed in the religious disciplines, but also in the political life of the third/ninth century.

Both historians presented ‘Umar’s political, legal and socio-economic reforms as decisive in the expansion and in laying the foundation for subsequent Muslim governance. The reforms were seen as responses to new challenges related to the new demographical situation after the conquests, the relations between different population groups and the radically different economic situation after the abundant incomes from the opened regions. One example is the recurring discussion about the problems arising between Muslim and Jews, Christians or other religious groups, which, according to both narratives, were largely solved by the contracts drawn up with them, including mutual obligations of *jizya* and *kharaj* on the side of the non-Muslims and offering protection on the side of the Muslims. Thereby, contracts – including caliphal *bay’a* for Muslims and *dhimmi*-contracts for non-Muslims – are presented as necessary for social order and governmental authority, while religion, in turn, would be necessary to make people fulfil their contracts and adhere to the divine law (Shari’a).

Another causal drive in the narratives is the role of religion as a uniting force, fundamental to the conquests and the Muslims’ loyalty to the caliph, particularly since religious and social unity is presented as a reason for the decline of the pre-Islamic

²⁶⁶ Cf. Mårtensson 2011a: 123-4.

civilisations in the regions that were conquered at the time of ‘Umar. It is important to note, however, that the third/ninth century concept of *din* (translated as religion) referred to the complete individual and societal life-transaction, including not only personal worship and behaviour, but all aspects of politics, warfare, economics, justice and social life. Accordingly, the key factors contributing to the rise of Islam as an imperial civilisation under ‘Umar are presented as (1) divine religion and law, (2) unity and loyalty based on contracts and religious nomos (Islam), (3) strong central leadership, (4) just economic policies and taxation, and (5) reforms in accordance with legal tradition and appropriate to the challenges facing rising polities. These could, likewise, be divided into (1) religious factors, (2) social factors, (3) political/military factors, (4) economic factors, and (5) legal factors, which are expressed by the narrators of *akhbar* and arranged in relation to each other by the historians.

Arguably, the meaning of at-Tabari’s statement in his introduction that “we only transmit to others what has been transmitted to us,” also characteristic for al-Baladhuri methodology, was that they did not only transmit the narrations that had come to him, but the broader civilisational perspective and capacity of legal (*fiqhi*) analysis that had evolved since the first generations of Muslims. As Mårtensson has noted, the difference to the later historical analyses and theories of Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406), for instance, is primarily the *form* or arrangement of the historical accounts, rather than the *substance* and analysis of them, although the analytical perspectives were certainly refined, consolidated and more consistently organised in the works of Ibn Khaldun.²⁶⁷ Driving forces in Ibn Khaldun’s views on rise and fall of civilisations – *asabiyya* (group feeling) and other economic, social and political factors – were mostly expressed by at-Tabari and al-Baladhuri in terms of the broad concept of religion (*din*), within the framework of the early Islamic sciences. However, in order to develop our understanding of these differences between different historiographical epochs, which indeed goes beyond the scope of this study, it is useful to analyse the discursive contexts in which the historians articulated their narratives and in which they originally had their meaning.

5.2. Historical discourses

Before discussing the specific historical discourses, it is necessary to recall the social institution of scholarly knowledge in which the historians were active and their

²⁶⁷ Cf. Mårtensson 2011a: 125.

affiliations with certain traditions within the institution. Both were educated and active in the institution of the 'Abbasid society that produced religious knowledge (*'ilm*). The difference between them is that while al-Baladhuri appears to have been more involved with the state bureaucracy and the more practical socio-political aspects of religious knowledge, at-Tabari was first and foremost a leading expert and teacher in the classic sciences. Their discipline was history (*tarikh*), but we know that at-Tabari's principal occupations were rather *fiqh*, *tafsir*, hadith and *kalam*, although it is unclear whether al-Baladhuri would have been primarily regarded as a historian in his own time or only posthumously. Since the institution of religious knowledge was the general frame of reference, the historians accordingly expressed analytical notions of historical change with respect to its specific archive and mode of intelligibility. As mentioned above, both historians attributed causality to divine omnipotence (or rather discarded causality because of Allah's immediate control in all situations), but nevertheless discussed historical changes in relation to empirical factors of cause and effect. Likewise, the most serious threat so far to the Muslim Community had been civil war (*fitna*) and sectarianism, which meant that questions of political and religious legitimacy as well as theology and law often functioned as an archive of references when discussing political and socio-economic history. Such narratives, apparently concerned with political legitimacy and individual morality, can be understood in their own right as attempts at understanding factors of cause and effect in historical change. The third/ninth century historians naturally did not have the same conceptual frameworks of differentiated social sectors and actors as modern ones, and to ascribe it to them would indeed be to force Islamic history into modern models and not acknowledge its specific character.²⁶⁸

In general, the mode of the religious sciences of the third/ninth century was conservative and highly tradition-oriented, particularly in the *naqliyya* sciences where reliance on transmission was the essential constituent. Thus, for a Muslim scholar, in this case a historian, knowledge was not to produce new material, but to place each narration in its proper place and context. They thereby facilitated an understanding of history (as Allah decreed it) in terms of the role of human agency as well as socio-economic factors. The main discussion of historical discourse in the third/ninth century concerns the historians' interaction with the social institution and the discipline of *khabar*-history. If the institutional affiliation regulated the general frame of reference

²⁶⁸ Cf. Robinson 2003: 127-9.

and modes of intelligibility, the disciplinary tradition defined the forms of expression and narrative arrangement. Most *khavar*-historians, including al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari, viewed *naql* transmission as the principal source of historical information and for deducting knowledge of historical developments. It does not mean, however, that they were traditionalist in the sense of hostile to individual reasoning (*'aql*). Rather, their epistemology of historical knowledge was based on the notion that, as at-Tabari puts it, “no knowledge of the history of men of the past and of recent men and events is attainable by those who were not able to observe them and did not live in their time, except through information and transmission provided by informants and transmitters”.²⁶⁹ In other words, *khavar*-historians strove to rely on primary sources from the historical events, appropriately arranged and compiled, as the basis for all further analysis or reasoning regarding historical developments. Thus, in their historical discourse, knowledge presented as *naql* with minimal intervention of *'aql* was regarded as authoritative and, furthermore, as the best way of arriving at historical knowledge.

Key features of their narratives are, therefore, the *isnads* of each narration, which in the *khavar*-tradition functioned as proof of authenticity and rooted the specific historical knowledge in the general narrative of the Muslim community, from the past events to the present times. The emphasis on *isnad* and *naql* also corresponds to the epistemological position of historical knowledge as constructed discourses, which means that there is no contradiction between historical knowledge based on primary sources (eyewitness accounts transmitted with *isnads*) and varying narrations of the same events, since it could represent a view that eyewitnesses inevitably perceive the same events differently. The historians' practice of citing different versions might even have been viewed as closer to the actual experience of history and more useful in understanding the historical consequences of these perceptions. In relation to Donner's thesis that varying *isnads* and *akhbar* of the same events represent the views of emerging schools of thought and different sub-communities within the Muslim Community, it can be added that the narratives not only represent the historical notion among historians, but also a larger historical and socio-political discourse that at least evolved among the scholars in the 'Abbasid period. In that respect, the focus on *naql* and *isnad* not only reflect the historians' epistemology, but also corresponds to the

²⁶⁹ at-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 6-7 [I:170].

discursive concern to set the historical parameters of the *ahl as-sunna* and provide inclusive narratives to avoid sectarianism.

Thus, the *khavar*-discipline expressed a well-defined epistemology of historical knowledge that gave scholarly authority to the narratives. These, in turn, expressed the historians' explanations of reasons for historical change in the past and its relevance for present-day political and scholarly concerns. The messages that al-Baladhuri and at-Tabari set out to communicate to the Muslim Community were accordingly formed by, on the one hand, a social institution of religious knowledge that provided a thematic archive and religious mode of intelligibility, and, on the other hand, a specific disciplinary tradition of history (*akhbar*) that provided the methodological and conceptual tools for approaching the sources. Important to note, however, is that both historians were highly involved in the other religious sciences, which certainly formed their particular approach to the discourse of history. These factors defined the methodological as well as the analytical perspectives applied by the historians in their narratives, while the differences show the *agency* of each individual historian to "appropriate, reproduce, and, potentially, to innovate upon received cultural categories and conditions of action in accordance with their personal and collective ideals, interests, and commitments".²⁷⁰ For instance, al-Baladhuri's recurring references to legal judgments and administrative documentation might reflect his affiliation with the discipline of *fiqh*, as well as his employment as a state bureaucrat in the 'Abbasid *dawla*. Likewise, at-Tabari's inclusive confirmation of the history of the *ahl as-sunna* and focus on individual involvement in crucial events reflect a religious scholar's concern to, on the one hand, unify the Muslim Community and, on the other hand, to understand the role of human agency in the larger course of history. Besides a methodology highly influenced by the discipline of *hadith* and a view on society influenced by the disciplines of *fiqh*, both of them share a concern for causal factors of politics and economics involved in the rise and fall of civilisations. These factors were mostly expressed by the accounts of legal reforms, social contracts, taxation and distribution of wealth (administered through the *diwan*) as well as the relation between these factors. Accordingly, it confirms Mårtensson's thesis that at-Tabari (and al-Baladhuri) indeed provided analytical observations of history such as, for instance, that the way to create strong imperial power is by a certain *misaha* system of taxation as

²⁷⁰ Emirbayer/Goodwin 1994: 1442-3.

instituted by Khusraw Anushirwan and later reinstituted by ‘Umar b. al-Khattab, which in turn attributes the decline of ‘Abbasid central power to the absence of a similar taxation system.²⁷¹ More generally, the present study has shown that both narratives expressed certain views and causal analyses of the underlying factors of ‘Umar’s successful expansion and imperial power. In the discursive context of the subsequent caliphal history leading up to the decline of ‘Abbasid authority, it certainly provided analytical explanations of the past and present, as well as indications of what might change the conditions in the future.

After having discussed some of the analytical content of the narratives and their relation to the historians’ institutional and disciplinary affiliation, it can be concluded that the *archive* and analytical frame of reference, formed by the religious sciences (*‘ulum ad-din*), corresponded to both the historians’ world-view and to the actual societies they sought to explain, which obviously did not know of the secular differentiation and high complexity of modern societies. Such medieval historical discourses, methodologies, theories and explanations therefore have to be understood in their own right. The results have shown that both historians shared a certain epistemology of historical knowledge and a corresponding system of reference (*isnads* and *akhbar*), while, moreover, being active interpreters of the past in relation to their present times. Although only explicitly mentioned in at-Tabari’s introduction, they also shared an aim to explain history in terms of religion and rational politics as well as the agency of the people (mostly élites and authorities) involved in the course of history.

Because they were Muslims within the institutional context of the Islamic sciences and accordingly regarded adherence to the Shari’a (as elaborated by the *fuqaha*) to be not only the best way of showing gratitude to Allah, but also as the best way to organise and rule society, the measure of historical developments against the fiqh of Islam is in fact the clearest example of historical analysis in the two narratives. Thus historical accounts of legal judgments, *bay’a*, *dhimmi*-contracts, *kharaj*, *jizya*, *zakat* and distribution of wealth – presented in relation to the decline of central ‘Abbasid power – indeed provided explanations of reasons for both strong imperial governance and its decline. According to their societies’ level of complexity – and, perhaps more importantly, to the level of the societies they described – their narratives expressed views on what factors contribute to the rise and upholding of imperial power. Thus the

²⁷¹ Mårtensson 2005: 330.

narratives explain historical change in terms of interrelated political, social and economic factors, while the issue of individual morals served to highlight the role of human agency and explain why certain policies were upheld or abandoned.

It is, however, important not to force the pre-modern Islamic narratives into alien models of later ages by ascribing various forms of structural analysis to them, since the historians indeed sought to explain history by focus on individual human agency and *fiqh* in the broader sense of *understanding* individual and social transactions, including their reasons and consequences. Rather, the narratives ought to be appreciated as attempts by third/ninth century religious scholars to understand history by means of the accumulated body of what, in our modern discourse, has been labeled as “religious knowledge”, while also trying to explain the conditions of the present and indicate its future possibilities. Thus attempts at measuring the analytical content of the narratives by modern historiographical standards do not give justice to the discourses of the historians and their actual perspectives on historical change. To improve our understanding of these historical discourses, however, more research is needed regarding the institutional, disciplinary and discursive interplay, beyond the very limited scope of the present study. For future research into the formative third/ninth century historical scholarship, a comparative analysis of socio-economic accounts of the whole *rashidun* period would be valuable in order to clarify the historical discourse, highlight the subjective agency of the historians and delineate the connection between the political and socio-economic thinking of the historians and their political and socio-economic context. It would also raise questions concerning where in society historical knowledge was produced (social institutions, scholarly disciplines) and how it was transmitted (as discourses), which could open up avenues for further research.

References

Primary literature

Arabic:

- al-Baladhuri, Ahmad b. Yahya b. Jabir. *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*. 1866. Ed. M.J. Goeje. Leiden: Brill.
- *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*. 1987. Ed. ‘Abdullah Anis at-Taba’. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Ma’ash.
- *Ansab al-Ashraf*. 1996. 13 Vols. Eds. Dr. Suhayl Zakar and Riyadh Zirikli. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.
- al-Tabari, Abu Ja’far Muhammad b. Jarir (d. 310/923). *Ikhtilaf al-fuqahal* (ed. Friedrich Kern; Cairo, 1902).
- *Jami’ al-bayan ‘an tawil ay al-Qur’an*. Ed. Sidqi Hamid al-‘Attar; Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995.
- *Tahdh,b al-Athar*, vol. 4: *Musnad ‘Ali b. Abi Talib* (ed. Mahmud Muhammad Shakir; Cairo: Matba’at al-Madani, 1982).
- *Tarikh ar-Rusul wa al-Muluk*. Ed. M.J. de Goeje et al. Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901.

Translations:

- al-Baladhuri. *The Origins of the Islamic State, vol I*. Trans. Philip Khuri Hitti. New York: Columbia University, 1916.
- *The Origins of the Islamic State, vol II*. Trans. Francis Clark Murgotten. New York: Columbia University, 1924.
- al-Tabari. *The History of al-Tabari I: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*. Trans. F. Rosenthal. New York: SUNY, 1989.
- *The History of al-Tabari V: The Conquest of Arabia*. Trans. Fred. M. Donner. New York: SUNY, 1993.
- *The History of al-Tabari VI: The Challenge to the Empires*. Trans. Khalid Y. Blankingship. New York: SUNY, 1993.
- *The History of al-Tabari VII: The Battle of al-Qadisiyya and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine*. Trans. Yohanan Friedmann. New York: SUNY, 1992
- *The History of al-Tabari VIII: The Conquest of Iraq, Southwestern Persia, and Egypt*. Trans. Gautier H. A. Juynboll. New York: SUNY, 1989.

- *The History of al-Tabari VIX: The Conquest of Iran*. Trans. G. Rex Smith. New York: SUNY, 1994.
- *The History of al-Tabari VX: The Crisis of the Early Caliphate*. Trans. R. Stephen Humphreys. New York: SUNY, 1990.

Secondary literature

- Abu Dawud, Sulayman b. al-Ash'ath as-Sijistani al-Azdi. *Sunan Abi Dawud*. 7 vols. Kuwait: Dar al-Gharas, 2002.
- Altman, Rick 2008. *A Theory of Narrative*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- al-Azmeh, Aziz 2007. *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Becker, C. H. and Rosenthal F. 1986. "Al-Baladhuri", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol I. Leiden: E. J. Brill. pp. 971-972.
- Bewley, Aisha 1998. *A Glossary of Islamic Terms*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers.
- Blankinship, Khalid Yahya 1994. *The End of the Jihad State: The Reign of Hisham Ibn 'Abd al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads*. New York: SUNY.
- Campopiano, Michele 2011. "Land Tax 'ala l-misaha and muqasama: Legal Theory and the Balance of Social Forces in Early Medieval Iraq (6th-8th Centuries C.E.)", in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54, pp. 239-269.
- de Certeau, Michel 1988 [1975]. *The Writing of History [L'Ecriture de l'histoire]*. Trans. Tom Conley. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Donner, Fred 1998. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Writing*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.
- El-Hibri, Tayeb 1999a. *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the 'Abbasid Caliphate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1999b. "The Unity of Tabari's Chronicle", in *Al-'Usur al-Wusta: The Bullentin of Middle East Medievalists* 11, no. 1: 1-3. N. Yavari (ed.) *Views from the Edge: Essays in Honor of Richard W. Bulliet*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pages 63-69.
- 2004. "The Unity of Tabari's Chronicle", in N. Yavari (ed.) *Views from the Edge: Essays in Honor of Richard W. Bulliet*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pages 63-69.
- 2010. *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Essid, Yassine 1995. *A Critique of the Origins of Islamic Economic Thought*. Leiden: Brill.
- Foucault, Michel 1978 [1968]. "Politics and the Study of Discourse", in *Ideology and Consciousness* 3, pp. 7–26.
- Friedman, Yohanan 1992. "Translator's Foreword" in al-Tabari, Volume XII. The Battle of al-Qadisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine. New York: SUNY Press.
- Ghazanfar S.M. (ed.) 2003. *Medieval Islamic Economic Thought: Filling the 'Great Gap' in European Economics*. London: Routledge.
- Gilliot, Claude 1990. *Ex.g.se, langue et thologie en Islam. L'Ex.g.se coranique de Tabari (m. 311/923)*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin.
- 1994. "Mythe, recit, histoire du salut dans le commentaire coranique de Tabari", in *Journal Asiatique* 282/2: 237-70.
- 2008. "Al-Tabari and the 'History of Salvation'", in Kennedy, Hugh (ed.), *Al-Tabari: A Medieval Historian and His Work*. Princeton, N.J.: The Darwin Press, Inc.: 131-40.
- al-Hamdani, Ibn al-Faqih. *Kitab al-Buldan*. Ed. M.J. Goeje. Leiden, 1885.
- Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad. *Musnad*. Ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ. 50 vols. Beirut, 1993–2001.
- Hodgson, Marshal G. S. 1968. "Two Pre-Modern Historians: Pitfalls and Opportunities in Presenting them to Moderns", in: J. U. Nef (ed.), *Towards World Community*. The Hague: Dr. W. Junk N. V. Publishers: 53-68.
- Humphreys, R. Stephen 1989. "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography", in F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys (eds.), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press: 271-90.
- 2009. *Islamic History*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Ibn Maja, Abu 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Yazid. *Sunan ibn Maja*. Ed. Muḥammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Bāqī. 2 vols. Beirut, 1980.
- Judd, Steven C. 2005. "Narratives and character development: al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri on late Umayyad history", in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, edited by Sebastian Günther. Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 209-226.

- Kennedy, Hugh (ed.) 2008, *Al-Tabari: A Medieval Muslim Historian and His Work*. Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 15. Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc.
- Khalidi, Tarif 1994. *Arabic historical thought in the classical period*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Leder, Stefan 1990. "Features of the Novel in Early Historiography: The Downfall of Xàlid al-Qasrì" in *Oriens* 32, pp. 72–96.
- Lytard, J. F. 1979 [1984], *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- al-Mas'udi. *Muruj adh-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*. Beirut, 1973.
- *Kitab at-Tanbih wa al-Ashraf*. Ed. M.J. Goeje. Leiden, 1893.
- al-Muqaddasi, Shams ad-Din. *Ahsan at-Ta'asim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim*. Leiden, 1877.
- Mårtensson, Ulrika 2005. "Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Tabari's History of the Messengers and the Kings", in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 16:3: 287-331.
- 2008. "'The persuasive proof': A study of Aristotle's politics and rhetoric in the Qur'an and in al-Tabari's commentary," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34: 363-420.
- 2009. *Tabari*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2011a. "Introduction: Materialist approaches to Islamic History", in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54, pp. 117-131.
- 2011b. "'It's the Economy, Stupid': Al-Tabari's Analysis of the Free Rider Problem in the 'Abbasid Caliphate" in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54, pp. 203-238.
- Nöldeke, Theodor 1973 [1879]. *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden. Aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari, übersetzt und mit ausführlichen Erläuterungen und Ergänzungen versehen, von Th. Nöldeke*. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt.
- Roberts, Joseph B. 1986. *Early Islamic Historiography: Ideology and Methodology* (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University).
- al-Qurashi, Ghalib 'Abd al-Kabir 1990. *Awwaliyat al-Faruq fi al-Idara wa al-Qada*. Vol 1-2. Mu'asasat al-Kutub ath-Thaqafiya, Beirut.
- Robinson, Chase 2003. *Islamic Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Rosenthal, Franz 1962. "The Influence of the Biblical Tradition on Muslim Historiography", in B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (eds.), *Historical Writings of the Peoples of Asia 4: Historians of the Middle East*. London: Oxford University Press: 35-45.
- 1968. *A History of Muslim Historiography*. Second edition. Leiden: Brill.
- Rosenthal, Franz 1989. "General Introduction" in *The History of al-Tabari: General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood*. New York: SUNY Press. Pages 3-134.
- as-Sallabi, 'Ali Muhammad 2002. *Amir al-Mu'minin 'Umar ibn al-Khattab: Shakhsiyatuhu wa 'asruhu*. Maktabat Sahaba, Shariqa/Maktabat at-Tabi'in, Cairo.
- Shoshan, Boaz 2004. *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Tabari's History*. Leiden: Brill.
- Tayob, Abdelkader I. 1999. "Tabari on the Companions of the Prophet: Moral and Political Contours in Islamic Historical Writing", in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119:2: 203-10.
- at-Tirmidhi, Abu 'Isa Muhammad b. 'Isa. *al-Jami' al-Kabir*. 6 vols. Ed. Bashir 'Awad Ma'ruf. Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1996.
- Vali, Abbas 1993. *Pre-Capitalist Iran: A Theoretical History*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Yaqut, 'Ubada. *Irshad al-Arib ila Ma'rifat al-Adib*. Ed. D. S. Margoliouth. Leiden, 1907-31.
- Zubaida, Sami 2003. *Law and Power in the Islamic World*. London: I.B. Tauris.