



The Shadow of the Palace: Power Relations and the Construction of Historical Truth in Islamic Historiography

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Abstract

The relationship between political power and religious knowledge production has long been contested in Islamic intellectual history, yet its significance for understanding authority, legitimacy, memory, and narrative formation in classical Islamic historiography remains insufficiently examined. This article examines how political authority shapes the construction of religious narratives in classical Islamic historiography, with particular focus on the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, and how such patterns persist into the modern era. Employing Foucault's archaeology of knowledge as the overarching methodological framework, with Critical Discourse Analysis as its analytical strategy for examining how power, knowledge, and historical meaning are articulated in texts, this study analyzes primary historiographical sources, including the works of Al-Tabari, Al-Baladhuri, Al-Ya'qubi, and Al-Mas'udi, alongside contemporary scholarship on Islamic political thought. The findings reveal three dominant patterns: the sacralization of rulers, the systematic marginalization of opposition narratives, and the standardization of orthodoxy through selective textual transmission. These findings demonstrate that classical Islamic historiography functioned not merely as a factual record, but as an instrument of power legitimization that constructed and maintained religious orthodoxy. This study contributes a deconstructive framework to Islamic historiography scholarship by integrating the concepts of *raison d'état* and selected collective memory, offering a more critical and nuanced reading of the power-knowledge nexus in the Islamic historical tradition. The implications of this study extend to contemporary debates on the politics of memory, the formation of religious identity, and the relationship between political authority and religious doctrine in Muslim societies.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, history (*tarikh*) is not merely a meaningless chronicle, but a symbolic battlefield where identity and authority are contested. Since the early post-prophetic period, the writing of history has been a crucial tool for rulers to consolidate their divine legitimacy. This dynamic is not merely a theoretical concern: a growing body of scholarship has documented that the majority of major classical historians operated within, or in close proximity to, the patronage networks of ruling dynasties, raising serious questions about the epistemological

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independence of Islamic historical writing (El-Hibri, 1999; Kennedy, 2004; Robinson, 2003). Imam Al-Thabari narrates the story of what is known as the *Al-Uhdah al-'Umariyyah* (Umar's Covenant). Al-Thabari states that Umar's arrival was viewed as a liberation, as he came at the invitation of the inhabitants of Jerusalem following a prolonged siege by Amr bin Ash. Umar himself guaranteed the safety of their religion and property from Byzantine oppression (At-Thabari, 1992).

Yet the way this event is narrated reveals a critical gap: across diverse classical historiographical traditions, accounts of conquest and political legitimacy were often shaped by the perspectives, priorities, and political contexts of ruling authorities, while competing claims and marginalized voices received comparatively limited representation (al-Balādhur, 1983; al-Ya'qūbī; al-Mas'ūdī, 1966; Khalidi 1994; Robinson 2003; Humphreys 1991; Kennedy 2004). The gap between the official narrative and the suppressed counter-narrative constitutes the central problematic this study seeks to examine.

This contrasts with the view expressed by Hoyland, who places Arab expansion within the context of *empire* building similar to that of other great empires. Hoyland argues that the conquest was not merely the spread of religion, but a systematic effort to control economic resources, land, and trade routes. He identifies a structure of domination in which the Arab elite became a new ruling class exploiting the taxation system of the conquered indigenous population (Hoyland, 2014).

A major issue in classical Islamic historiography lies in the position of historians, who were often part of the court patronage network. Al-Thabari is indeed recorded as having consistently refused the position of *Qadhi* (judge), and his livelihood came from the proceeds of his father's plantations in Tabaristan. In fact, Al-Thabari also refused monetary gifts from the vizier Abbas. Nevertheless, Al-Thabari lived under the patronage of Vizier al-Abbas bin al-Hasan al-Jarrah, serving as a tutor to the children of high-ranking officials. This granted Al-Thabari access to intellectual resources in Baghdad (Al-Hamawi, 1993).

The impact of the relation, according to Tayeb al-Hibri, was that Al-Thabari employed narrative structures and *isnad* to legitimize the Abbasid dynasty while subtly incorporating moral criticism (El-Hibri, 1999). This phenomenon has been confirmed by recent studies. Frahm and Shamloo (2023) demonstrated that the Abbasid dynasty continuously shifted its sources of political legitimacy in response to changing political alignments, with historiography serving as a primary instrument of this process. Similarly, Babaei Siab (2022) showed that in the Fatimid-Ismaili tradition, political developments directly shaped the approach and thematic focus of court historians. A recent Foucauldian reading of classical Islamic sources further confirms that historical narratives were shaped not only by theological interests but also by legal and political contestations, such that the very foundations of historical authority were epistemologically constructed rather than objectively discovered (Soetomo, 2024).

However, these studies have largely examined single dynasties or single sectarian traditions, without offering a systematic comparative framework across multiple dynastic transitions. A cross-dynasty approach enables this study to identify recurring patterns in the production, transmission, and legitimation of historical knowledge while distinguishing them from context-specific developments, thereby moving the analysis from isolated case studies toward a broader explanation of how changing configurations of political power shaped Islamic historiography across successive regimes.

This academic issue raises a fundamental question: to what extent is the religious narrative in historical texts a pure reflection of events, and to what extent is it the result of a negotiation with power? To address this question, this study draws on three interconnected theoretical perspectives that together form a single analytical framework for examining the relationship between political power and Islamic historiography. First, Michel Foucault's concept of *archaeology of knowledge* provides the overarching analytical lens for tracing how systems of knowledge are historically constituted, particularly how certain forms of historical discourse acquire authority and become accepted as legitimate knowledge within particular configurations of power (Foucault, 2013).

Second, Foucault's conception of *power* provides the mechanism for explaining this process: power is understood not simply as coercive domination exercised by rulers, but as a productive network of relations operating through institutions, intellectual practices, and textual regimes that shape what can be articulated, preserved, authorized, and transmitted as knowledge. Third, the

epistemology of Islamic history specifies the particular domain in which these power–knowledge relations are investigated by examining how historical reports are produced, evaluated, transmitted, and authorized within changing political contexts. From this perspective, the production of historical knowledge is understood as both an intellectual and political process, in which the *raison d'état* and ideological interests of ruling dynasties may influence the conditions under which particular historical narratives gain authority (Meinecke, 1998). The three perspectives are therefore not employed as independent theoretical frameworks; rather, archaeology provides the overarching approach, the concept of power explains the dynamics underlying knowledge formation, and the epistemology of Islamic history provides the specific analytical field through which these dynamics are examined.

Power possesses the ability to determine what is considered “worthy” of remembrance and what may be marginalized, silenced, or forgotten. This process can be understood through the concept of *selected memory*, which emphasizes that collective remembrance is neither neutral nor comprehensive but is shaped by social institutions, political interests, and struggles over the meaning of the past (Halbwachs 1992; Nora 1989; Ricoeur 2004). Jan Assmann similarly argues that collective memory is sustained through processes of cultural selection and transmission, whereby particular narratives and figures are preserved because they serve the identity and normative needs of a community (Assmann, 2011). More critically, Michel-Rolph Trouillot demonstrates that power operates at multiple stages in the production of historical knowledge, influencing which events enter the historical record, whose voices are preserved, and how subsequent narratives represent the past (Trouillot, 1995).

From this perspective, forgetting is not necessarily the simple absence of memory; it can also be produced through processes of selection, exclusion, and unequal access to the means of historical representation. The transition from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasty, therefore, can be examined not merely as a change in political leadership but also as a transformation in the organization and legitimation of historical memory. The emergence of Abbasid rule created a new political context in which narratives of the preceding Umayyad order could be selectively remembered, reinterpreted, or marginalized, while accounts that legitimized Abbasid authority could acquire greater prominence. Religion functioned within this process as a moral and symbolic framework, while political power influenced the institutional and discursive conditions through which particular interpretations of the past gained authority.

Imam al-Ṭabarī was one of the major historians whose account of the Abbasid Revolution became influential in subsequent representations of this transition. In his *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, the final period of Umayyad rule is presented through narratives of political conflict, opposition, and dynastic decline, while the Abbasid accession constitutes a major turning point in the chronology of Islamic history (At-Thabari, 1992). Al-Balādhurī likewise devoted substantial attention to genealogical and political claims surrounding the Abbasid family, including the lineage of al-ʿAbbās, the Prophet's uncle, thereby providing material through which Abbasid claims to authority could be situated within the broader history of the Prophet's family (al-Balādhurī, 1996). Al-Yaʿqūbī, whose historiographical perspective differs from that of al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī, offers a more critical representation of the Umayyads and a favorable account of the Abbasid transition (al-Yaʿqūbī 1960).

Similarly, al-Dīnawarī connects the Abbasid rise with traditions concerning the Black Banners emerging from Khurāsān, thereby embedding the political transition within a broader framework of expectation and providential interpretation (al-Dīnawarī 1960). Taken together, these accounts provide an important basis for investigating how competing representations of the Umayyad–Abbasid transition were constructed and transmitted. Rather than assuming that all historians consciously reproduced a single Abbasid political agenda, the study examines how different historiographical traditions selectively organized memory, assigned legitimacy, and represented political change within their respective intellectual and sectarian contexts. In this sense, the Abbasid transition offers a particularly useful case for examining what Foucault describes as a “regime of truth,” in which historically authoritative representations emerge through the interaction of knowledge, institutions, and relations of power (Foucault, 1980).

This article aims to examine how power structures influence the epistemology of Islamic history by identifying three systematic patterns — the sacralization of rulers, the marginalization of

opposition narratives, and the standardization of orthodoxy — across the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Unlike previous studies that have focused on single dynasties or single-text analyses, this study offers a comparative, multi-source deconstructive framework integrating Foucault's *archaeology of knowledge*, the concept of *raison d'état*, and Halbwachs' *selected collective memory*. By understanding that historical texts are social products shaped by their political context, this study demonstrates that Islam is not a monolithic, static worldview, but rather a dynamic tradition fraught with competing interests — and that recognizing this complexity is essential for a more critical and honest engagement with the Islamic historical tradition.

Previous studies have established important connections between political power and the production of Islamic historical knowledge. Robinson (2003) and Hourani (2013), for instance, documented broader patterns of dynastic influence in Islamic historiography, while El-Hibri (1999) provided a nuanced analysis of al-Ṭabarī's narrative strategies in relation to Abbasid political legitimacy. More recent studies by Frahmandpoor and Shamloo (2023) and Babaei Siab (2022) have further examined the relationship between historiography and political legitimacy, demonstrating how historical narratives could participate in the construction and negotiation of dynastic authority. Studies applying Foucault's framework to Islamic sources, such as Soetomo (2024), have likewise opened new possibilities for examining the relationship between discourse, power, and knowledge, although their primary focus has been early ḥadīth and sīrah literature.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing scholarship has concentrated on individual historians, dynasties, sectarian traditions, or particular genres, making it difficult to determine whether patterns of political influence recur across successive dynastic transitions. Second, previous studies have generally examined political legitimacy without systematically connecting it to the epistemological processes through which historical knowledge was selected, authorized, transmitted, and preserved. Third, the application of Foucauldian approaches to Islamic sources has not sufficiently addressed the classical historiographical corpus as a site in which political power, knowledge production, and collective memory intersect. Consequently, the relationship between changing configurations of political authority and recurring mechanisms of historical representation across the Umayyad and Abbasid periods remains insufficiently theorized.

Against this background, this study aims to examine how changing configurations of political power shaped the epistemology of Islamic historiography across the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. More specifically, it identifies and comparatively analyzes three recurring patterns: the sacralization or legitimization of rulers, the marginalization of competing or oppositional narratives, and the standardization of claims to religious and political orthodoxy. By examining these patterns across multiple historians and dynastic transitions, the study seeks to distinguish structural tendencies from developments specific to particular political or sectarian contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of comparative scope and theoretical analysis. Rather than treating political influence as a contextual factor external to historiographical production, the study conceptualizes power as operating within the epistemic processes through which historical knowledge becomes authoritative. It therefore brings together Foucault's concepts of *archaeology of knowledge* and *regime of truth*, the political logic of *raison d'état*, and Halbwachs' concept of selective collective memory within a single analytical framework. To the authors' knowledge, this integrated framework has not previously been systematically applied to the classical Islamic historiographical corpus across the Umayyad–Abbasid transition.

The study contributes to Islamic historiography in three ways. Theoretically, it develops a framework for explaining how political configurations interact with the production and legitimation of historical knowledge. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of cross-dynasty comparison for identifying recurring discursive patterns while distinguishing them from context-specific developments. Empirically, it provides a systematic reading of classical historiographical sources that reveals how competing representations of political authority, opposition, and orthodoxy were constructed, preserved, and transmitted. In doing so, the study offers a replicable analytical model that can be extended to other dynasties, regions, and periods of Islamic history.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach (Fairclough, 2023). CDA was selected because it provides analytical tools for examining how language and discourse function as instruments of power — enabling the researcher to uncover ideological structures embedded within historical texts that might otherwise appear as neutral or objective accounts. In the context of Islamic historiography, where political interests were routinely encoded within religious and legal language, CDA offers a particularly appropriate framework for exposing the relationship between textual production and power relations. In this study, CDA is operationalized by examining how classical historians construct political actors and events through lexical choices, attribution of agency, evaluative descriptions, narrative emphasis, silences and omissions, and the positioning of competing claims to legitimacy. The analysis then relates these textual patterns to the political and intellectual contexts in which the historical accounts were produced, asking whose interests are legitimized, whose perspectives are marginalized, and how particular representations of rulers, opponents, and religious authority are normalized as authoritative accounts of the past. CDA therefore functions not as a separate theoretical framework, but as the textual analytical strategy through which the study identifies the operation of power and knowledge within the historiographical narratives (Fairclough, 2023).

The main object of study in this research is classical Islamic historiographical literature, with particular focus on texts produced during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods (7th–10th centuries CE). Primary data sources include the major historiographical works of al-Tabari (*Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*), al-Baladhuri (*Ansab al-Ashraf* and *Futuh al-Buldan*), al-Ya'qubi (*Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*), al-Mas'udi (*Muruj al-Dhahab*), al-Dinawari (*Al-Akhbar al-Tiwal*), and Ibn Khaldun (*Muqaddimah*), as well as contemporary scholarly literature on theories of power and Islamic political thought. These sources were selected through a purposive process based on three criteria. First, sources had to engage directly with major dynastic power transitions, particularly the transitions between Umayyad and Abbasid rule, so that the analysis could examine how historians represented changes in political authority and legitimacy. Second, the corpus was deliberately constructed to include historians representing different intellectual and sectarian orientations, including Sunni, Shi'ite-leaning, and rationalist perspectives, enabling comparison of whether similar patterns of historical representation persisted across divergent positions. Third, sources were selected on the basis of their historical influence and subsequent role in transmitting narratives that contributed to the formation and normalization of Islamic political and religious orthodoxy. A source was included only when it satisfied these criteria and provided substantial narrative material relevant to political authority, legitimacy, opposition, or religious claims. This procedure produced a deliberately heterogeneous corpus that permits systematic comparison while minimizing reliance on a single sectarian, intellectual, or dynastic perspective.

The research process was conducted in three systematic stages. First, the *data collection stage* involved identifying and selecting the relevant primary historiographical texts based on the selection criteria above, alongside secondary literature on power theory and Islamic historiography. Second, the *source analysis stage* involved close reading and systematic coding of the selected texts to identify passages explicitly or implicitly addressing three analytical categories. Narratives of legitimacy were identified through references to genealogy, religious authority, divine sanction, claims of rightful succession, praise or condemnation of rulers, and representations of a ruler as just, pious, or entitled to political authority. Narratives of political transition were identified through accounts of accession, succession, conquest, rebellion, dynastic overthrow, transfer of the caliphate, and explanations of why one ruling order replaced another. Narratives concerning opposition groups were identified through the labeling and characterization of political or sectarian opponents, including descriptions of rebels, rival claimants, dissenting movements, and competing religious authorities, as well as patterns of inclusion, exclusion, delegitimation, or silence. These indicators were then examined in relation to lexical choices, attribution of agency, evaluative judgments, narrative emphasis, and omissions in order to determine how particular actors and political outcomes were legitimized, marginalized, or normalized within the historical narratives.

Third, the *data analysis stage* operationalized Critical Discourse Analysis through a deconstructive reading of the selected texts. Deconstruction was therefore not employed as a separate analytical framework, but as a specific textual technique within the CDA strategy for exposing how seemingly stable categories and oppositions are constructed through discourse (Norris, 2003). The analysis identified recurrent binary oppositions—such as legitimate/illegitimate, orthodox/heretical, and loyal/rebellious—and examined how these distinctions were established through linguistic choices, narrative structures, evaluative judgments, and patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Particular attention was given to the ways in which one term was privileged over its apparent opposite and how such hierarchies contributed to the legitimation of particular political authorities, religious positions, or historical outcomes. The deconstructive reading thus enabled the study to connect textual oppositions to the broader power-knowledge relations identified through CDA, while the historical and political contexts of the texts were used to assess how these discursive constructions operated within particular dynastic configurations.

The units of analysis in this study consist of three categories: (1) *narratives of legitimacy*, defined as textual constructions that justify the authority of a ruler or dynasty through theological, genealogical, or eschatological claims; (2) *constructions of power*, defined as discursive strategies through which historians positioned certain political actors as divinely sanctioned while marginalizing others; and (3) *mechanisms of orthodoxy standardization*, defined as editorial and institutional practices — including the selection, transmission, and censorship of texts — through which dominant historical narratives were normalized and dissenting ones suppressed.

The research employs Michel Foucault's *archaeology of knowledge* as its overarching analytical framework for examining how historical knowledge is constituted within particular configurations of power. Rather than treating archaeology as a separate textual technique, this framework establishes the broader analytical questions concerning the conditions under which certain statements, narratives, and forms of historical knowledge become possible, authoritative, and accepted as legitimate. Within this framework, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as the principal textual analytical approach, operationalizing these Foucauldian questions by examining how power relations are articulated through language, narrative structures, categorizations, and patterns of inclusion and exclusion. The relationship is therefore complementary: archaeology of knowledge provides the macro-level framework for identifying the historical conditions and rules governing knowledge formation, while CDA provides the textual means through which these processes are traced in the selected historiographical sources (Foucault, 2013).

The relevance of Foucault's framework to Islamic historiography lies in its capacity to shift analytical attention away from the question of whether a historical account is "true" or "false," and toward the question of *how* and *why* certain accounts came to be accepted as authoritative within a specific political and institutional context. Traditional Islamic history is often depicted as a continuous, linear progression — from the Prophet, the Rightly Guided Caliphs, to the various dynasties. However, significant ruptures are clearly evident when examined through a Foucauldian lens. The transition from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasty, for instance, was not merely a political event but an epistemic rupture: an entirely new discursive order was constructed to redefine the boundaries of legitimate Islamic governance. Therefore, the origin of a truth is not the primary concern; what matters most is when and why a new discourse emerges, and whose political interests that emergence serves (Foucault, 2013; 1980).

FINDINGS

This study identified three main patterns in the relationship between power and religion in Islamic historiography: efforts to sacralize rulers, efforts to marginalize divergent narratives, and the establishment of standards.

Sacralization of Rulers

History often portrays leaders as the executors of God's will. The concept of *Khalifatullah* (God's Vicegerent) in Umayyad and Abbasid historiography was used to silence criticism of controversial political policies, transforming political loyalty into a religious duty. One example of

this can be seen in the views of Al-Jahiz (d. 869 CE). Although he lived in the early Abbasid period, in his treatise *Risalat fi al-Nabitah*, Al-Jahiz criticized the remnants of pro-Umayyad thought. Al-Jahiz noted that supporters of the Umayyad Dynasty believed that God would not grant power to anyone unless He approved of them. Therefore, the Umayyads' success in dominating the Islamic world, according to their supporters, was considered concrete proof that they were instruments of God's will (Harun, 1964). A critical reading of this account reveals that Al-Jahiz's framing itself is ideologically charged: by attributing the doctrine of divine sanction to "Umayyad supporters," he simultaneously delegitimizes it as a sectarian position rather than a universal truth, reflecting the Abbasid-era bias in which he wrote.

An important note was provided by Al-Baladhuri (d. 892 CE) in *Ansab al-Ashraf* that court poets and Umayyad supporters referred to the caliph as *Khalifatullah*. This concept differed from the era of the *Khulafaur Rasyidin*. During the Umayyad period, the title *Khalifatullah* was emphasized to convey the impression that the caliph's authority originated from heaven (*divine right*), not through the consensus of the community (*shura*) (Al-Baladhuri, 1996). Ibn Qutaibah (d. 889 CE), in *Al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah*, further highlights how the Jabariyah doctrine was exploited for political ends: when opponents criticized the rulers' tyrannical behavior, the Umayyads would respond that their actions were part of "God's decree," which the people must accept with patience. This positioned the caliph as the executor of divine will, not subject to human judgment

(Ibn Qutaibah, 1997). Thus, poets, theologians, and court historians collectively functioned as the primary actors of caliphal sanctification — what CDA would identify as the discursive apparatus through which political authority was translated into religious obligation.

In addition to originating from society, the sanctification of power was carried out by the caliphs themselves. Al-Thabari (d. 923 CE) noted that in Caliph Abdul Malik bin Marwan's speeches and those of his governors — including Al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf — there were explicit statements that the caliphs viewed themselves as *the Rope of God (Habllullah)*, with obedience to the caliph declared absolute. Al-Mas'udi (d. 956 CE) further confirms that Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan was the first to systematically articulate the conviction that resistance against the caliph was tantamount to opposing God's decree or *Qadar* (Al-Mas'udi, 1966). The significance of this pattern, from a Foucauldian perspective, lies not in the theological content of these claims but in their discursive function: by encoding political obedience within the language of divine will, the Umayyad regime effectively placed its authority beyond the reach of rational or legal criticism.

The analytical synthesis across these accounts reveals a clear and systematic pattern of ruler sacralization operating at three levels simultaneously: the theological (through doctrines such as *Khalifatullah* and Jabariyah), the literary (through court poetry and panegyric), and the historiographical (through the selective recording and amplification of speeches and proclamations that reinforced divine legitimacy). This triple-layered discursive construction constitutes what Foucault would identify as a *regime of truth* in operation — a self-reinforcing system in which political authority and religious knowledge mutually legitimize each other, foreclosing the possibility of dissent by rendering it not merely politically dangerous but theologically impermissible.

Marginalization of Opposition Narratives

There is a systematic pattern in the erasure or distortion of politically defeated groups in classical Islamic historiography. Opposition groups — whether the Khawarij, certain Shi'ite factions, or tribes resisting central authority — are consistently portrayed through labels such as *bughat* (rebels) or *ahlu bid'ah* (people of innovation), categories that are theological in form but fundamentally political in function. This labeling mechanism represents one of the most consequential forms of narrative marginalization: by re-categorizing political resistance as religious deviance, the dominant historiographical tradition effectively removed such groups from the domain of legitimate historical actors.

One particularly iconic historical event illustrating this pattern is the *Riddah* Wars during the reign of Caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq. The dominant narrative, as recorded by al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri, frames these wars as a response to apostasy: many Arab tribes refused to pay zakat following the Prophet's death, and Abu Bakr waged war against them to preserve the political unity of the Arabian Peninsula under a single central authority (Al-Baladhuri, 1983; Al-Thabari, 1992).

This framing, however, embeds a significant ideological assumption — that the refusal of zakat constituted a departure from Islam rather than a political act of non-recognition of the new Medinan leadership.

Counter-narratives preserved in non-dominant historiographical traditions reveal the political dimension that the mainstream account suppresses. Al-Ya'qubi, writing from a pro-Shi'ite perspective, argues that the resistance of the Arab tribes was not apostasy in a theological sense but rather a rejection of the legitimacy of Abu Bakr's leadership following the contested succession at Saqifah (Al-Ya'qubi, 1960). Al-Shahrastani (d. 1153 CE), a Sunni scholar of the Ash'ari school, similarly acknowledges in *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* that the root of the Riddah Wars was a political succession crisis rather than a theological rupture (Al-Syahrastani, 1993). Abu al-Fida' (d. 1331 CE) cites the case of Malik bin Nuwayrah — a figure killed as an "apostate" despite continuing to pray and profess Islam — as evidence that the theological label was applied selectively, driven by political rather than religious criteria (Abu al-Fida', 1907). Ibn Kathir, in *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, further distinguishes between the *Ahl al-Riddah* (followers of false prophets) and the *Mani' al-Zakah* (tax resisters who remained Muslim), acknowledging that not all those fought were apostates in terms of creed (Ibn Kathir, 1997).

The critical insight here, from a CDA perspective, lies in the asymmetry of narrative power. The dominant Sunni historiographical tradition benefited from institutional conditions that facilitated the reproduction, transmission, and legitimation of particular interpretations of the Islamic past. These included political and elite patronage of scholars and educational institutions, the incorporation of particular forms of religious knowledge into madrasa curricula, and manuscript-copying and book-distribution networks through which authoritative texts could be preserved and circulated across scholarly communities (Berkey, 1992; Robinson, 2003; Bloom 2001). Such institutional infrastructures did not mechanically determine the content of historical writing, but they significantly affected which texts received sustained scholarly attention, were reproduced for subsequent generations, and became embedded within established networks of learning. Consequently, competing narratives were not necessarily eliminated; rather, some survived primarily within alternative, regional, or sectarian textual traditions and therefore occupied less prominent positions within the dominant historiographical canon.

The forms of marginalization identified in this study are classified according to the distinct stages at which opposing narratives can be excluded, weakened, or delegitimized within the production of historical knowledge. Three types are distinguished. First, *theological relabeling* operates at the level of categorization, whereby political opponents are represented through religious labels such as heretic, deviant, or unbeliever, thereby transforming political disagreement into a question of religious illegitimacy. Second, *narrative erasure* operates at the level of preservation and transmission, whereby alternative accounts, actors, or interpretations are omitted, underrepresented, or excluded from the historiographical record through processes of selection and textual reproduction. Third, *selective emphasis* operates at the level of narrative representation, whereby events that support the legitimacy of ruling authorities are given greater prominence, while details that could undermine their authority are minimized, reframed, or left unexplored. The distinction is therefore based not simply on different manifestations of marginalization, but on three analytically different mechanisms through which historical knowledge can be shaped: the classification of actors, the selection and preservation of narratives, and the framing of events. Together, these mechanisms suggest that the marginalization of opposition narratives in classical Islamic historiography may reflect patterned processes within the political and institutional conditions of knowledge production rather than merely incidental omissions.

Standardization of Orthodoxy

Historical writing plays a role in defining "Sunni" or "Shia" as rigid identities. Historiography tends to simplify the complexity of early Islamic thought in order to create a single, coherent narrative for the identity of a nation-state or empire. Those in power determine which books are copied and disseminated, while works deemed subversive are allowed to perish or are excluded from the formal madrasa curriculum. This phenomenon is most clearly illustrated through a series of historically documented episodes of book banning and burning across multiple Islamic dynasties.

Following the end of the *Mihna* (inquisition) period, which had supported Mu'tazili thought, Caliph Al-Mutawakkil of the Abbasid Dynasty adopted the opposite policy, banning the circulation of books containing Mu'tazili thought, Greek philosophy, and speculative theology (*Kalam*). His primary goal was to restore the dominance of traditionalist Hadith scholarship and strengthen his political legitimacy through the support of orthodox religious scholars (Ath-Thabari, 1989). Critically, this policy shift demonstrates that the definition of "orthodox" knowledge was not determined by theological consensus alone but by the pragmatic political calculations of the ruling caliph — a paradigmatic example of *raison d'état* operating through epistemological control.

In 1160 CE, Caliph al-Mustanjid ordered the burning of a judge's library in Baghdad containing the philosophical works of Ibn Sina and the encyclopedic writings of the Ikhwan al-Safa. In Al-Andalus and North Africa, Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur banned and burned books on philosophy and logic, exiling Ibn Rushd (Averroes) whose works were deemed contrary to state-sanctioned religious teaching (Al-Marrakushi, 1881). Similarly, Al-Mansur ibn Abi Aamir of Cordoba systematically purged the vast Cordoba library, burning works on philosophy, astronomy, and the ancient sciences to appease conservative political factions (Al-Maqqari, 1840). The ideological bias embedded in each of these episodes is consistent: in every case, the pretext of preserving theological purity served as a discursive cover for the politically motivated suppression of intellectual currents that could provide a foundation for opposition.

All of the historians' accounts mentioned above represent a form of standardizing orthodoxy — an effort to filter which books or ideas are permissible or forbidden to consume. The primary goal was political: to maintain the *status quo*. Applying Foucault's concept of the *regime of truth* to these episodes reveals that the standardization of Islamic orthodoxy was achieved not through open theological debate but through the systematic control of textual circulation — determining which works were copied, taught, and transmitted, and which were allowed to disappear. This process produced what can be termed a *canonized collective memory*: a carefully curated version of Islamic intellectual history in which the complexity, diversity, and internal contestation of classical Islamic thought were flattened into a singular, politically functional orthodoxy. The persistence of this curated memory into the modern era where it continues to inform legal, theological, and political discourse in Muslim societies underscores the enduring relevance of the critical historiographical framework this study proposes.

DISCUSSION

The Regime of Truth in Islamic Historiography

An analysis of the phenomenon of book bans and book burnings in the history of the Islamic caliphate reveals that classical Islamic historiography operated under the umbrella of a regime of truth. As explained by Michel Foucault, truth is not a neutral, self-contained entity, but rather a product of power relations that determine which knowledge is deemed legitimate and which must be eliminated (Foucault, 1980). In the context of the caliphate, the banning of books was not merely an act of literary censorship, but a systematic effort by the rulers to establish a single orthodoxy for the sake of political stability. This study's contribution lies in demonstrating that the mechanisms through which political power shaped historical representation were not isolated features of particular rulers, historians, or dynasties, but recurring patterns across the Umayyad–Abbasid transitions examined in this study. In this respect, the findings extend Robinson's (2003) and El-Hibri's (1999) important observations concerning dynastic influence on historical writing in two significant ways.

First, whereas Robinson identifies broader relationships between political authority and historiographical production and El-Hibri closely examines al-Ṭabarī's narrative strategies within the Abbasid context, this study employs a cross-dynasty comparison to determine whether similar mechanisms recur across different political configurations and historiographical sources. Second, rather than treating political influence primarily as a contextual factor affecting historians, this study conceptualizes it as operating through specific mechanisms of knowledge formation—including the legitimation of rulers, marginalization of competing narratives, and normalization of particular claims to religious and political orthodoxy. By bringing these mechanisms together within a Foucauldian framework of power, knowledge, and discourse, the study moves from

documenting instances of political influence to explaining how such influence could become embedded in the epistemic and narrative structures of classical Islamic historiography.

The findings suggest that the relationship between political authority and theological knowledge was not confined to a particular dynasty, intellectual school, or geographical setting. Rather, across the cases examined, changes in political power were accompanied by attempts to redefine the boundaries of legitimate knowledge in ways that could reinforce the prevailing political order. The post-*Mihna* policy of al-Mutawakkil, the suppression of philosophical works in al-Andalus, and the later restrictions placed on Ibn Rushd's writings illustrate different historical manifestations of this broader dynamic (Black, 2011; Lyons, 2009; Stroumsa, 2023). The significance of these cases therefore lies less in the individual acts of censorship than in the recurring mechanism they reveal: political authorities could influence the conditions under which particular theological and intellectual positions were recognized as legitimate, tolerated, or deviant.

This pattern refines the concept of a Foucauldian *regime of truth* in the context of Islamic historiography. The findings indicate that such regimes should not be understood as fixed ideological systems imposed uniformly by a single dynasty. Instead, they were historically contingent and politically adaptive, emerging through interactions among rulers, religious scholars, intellectual institutions, and established traditions of knowledge. What changed across dynastic transitions was not simply the content of acceptable knowledge but also the institutional and discursive boundaries through which that knowledge was authorized. The cross-dynastic comparison therefore suggests that the political shaping of epistemic boundaries was a recurrent structural possibility within the classical Islamic intellectual order, even though its specific forms varied according to political circumstances, scholarly alliances, and competing claims to religious authority.

Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah*, had actually warned of the historical bias arising from the desire to curry favor with rulers (*tashayyu' ila al-ara' wa al-madzahib*), noting that the human tendency to side with a particular opinion often obscures the objectivity of historical facts (Ibn Khaldun, 2015). However, although this warning has existed since the 14th century, the practice of historical bias and filtering remains dominant due to history's central position as the foundation of Islamic law (*fiqh*). History in the Islamic tradition is not merely a record of the past, but an authoritative source that legitimizes legal and theological practices (Hallaq, 2005). The close connection between historical narratives and legal structures creates a situation where the validity of a historical event is non-negotiable: if a historical event is deemed inauthentic, the legal basis derived from it collapses as well (Kamali, 2003). This dynamic reveals a theoretical implication that goes beyond historiography proper — it demonstrates that the *regime of truth* in Islam operates simultaneously as an epistemological and a juridical mechanism, making the stakes of historical control far higher than in traditions where law and history are more clearly separated.

Thus, the *regime of truth* in Islamic historiography is shaped not only by practical political interests but also by the epistemological need to maintain the stability of *fiqh*. Authorities often prioritize the continuity of the legal system over radical historical criticism (Robinson, 2003), and Ibn Khaldun's warning regarding historical bias remains a major challenge precisely because history in the hands of authorities serves simultaneously as a shield for established legal orthodoxy and as an instrument of ongoing political legitimation.

Selected Collective Memory

Power relations in historical writing create what is termed *selected collective memory* — the process by which societies, consciously or unconsciously, choose to remember certain events and forget others in order to form a coherent group identity. Maurice Halbwachs asserts that collective memory is not an objective reflection of the past, but rather a social construction shaped to serve the needs of the present (Halbwachs, 1992). In Islamic historiography, this phenomenon is clearly evident when political authorities use historical narratives as a tool of legitimization to solidify their position before the people and their political rivals. This study advances the existing literature by demonstrating that *selected collective memory* in the Islamic context was not merely a passive outcome of political patronage but an actively engineered discursive process — a distinction that contemporary historiography scholarship has begun to recognize but not yet systematically applied to the classical Islamic corpus (Frahmandpoor & Shamloo, 2023; Soetomo, 2024).

One of the most striking examples of this practice occurred during the transition of power from the Umayyad Dynasty to the Abbasid Dynasty. When Abbasid rulers sponsored the writing of history, they systematically emphasized aspects of injustice, moral decay, and the secularism of the Umayyad rulers to validate their revolution as a “restoration” of the sacred religion

(Kennedy, 2004). The narrative constructed positioned the Abbasids as the saviors of the faithful who restored leadership to the Prophet’s family (*ahl al-bayt*), while simultaneously erasing the positive contributions of the preceding era to create a sharp dividing line between the “darkness” of the Umayyads and the light of the Abbasids (Black, 2011). Critically, this is not merely a case of biased writing — it is a case of institutionalized memory production, in which the state apparatus of historiographical patronage ensured that a particular version of the past was systematically reproduced, transmitted, and canonized across generations.

This pattern of *selective collective memory* continues into the modern era, although its institutional forms and political manifestations have changed. Modern states can similarly influence which interpretations of the past are preserved, institutionalized, and transmitted through educational curricula, official historiography, commemorative practices, and public institutions. In Indonesia, for example, the New Order regime promoted a state-centered national historiography in which particular interpretations of national history were institutionalized through authoritative history textbooks, while competing narratives and politically inconvenient episodes were marginalized or excluded (Suwignyo, 2014; Purwanta, 2018). Suwignyo demonstrates that the *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia*, particularly its New Order editions, functioned as an authoritative framework for presenting the nation’s past and contributed to a state-centered narrative that streamlined complex and competing historical experiences.

More broadly, Trouillot (1995) demonstrates that political power can shape historical memory at multiple stages of historical production, including the creation of sources, construction of archives, retrieval of facts, and attribution of retrospective significance. His analysis of the marginalization of the Haitian Revolution illustrates how unequal relations of power can determine not only what is remembered but also what becomes difficult to recognize as historically significant. These modern examples suggest that although the institutional mechanisms differ from those of premodern dynasties, the underlying structural logic remains comparable: political power can influence the conditions under which particular interpretations of the past acquire visibility, authority, and durability, while competing memories are marginalized, silenced, or relegated to alternative discursive spaces.

In many Muslim countries today, the narrative of Islamic history is often “cleansed” of complex internal conflicts, such as civil wars (*fitna*) or sharp theological disputes, in the interest of national unity or pan-Islamist ideals (Ahmed, 2018). The theoretical implication here is significant: what began as a dynastic strategy of historical control in the classical period has become a structural feature of how Islamic collective identity is constructed and maintained at the national level in the modern world. The historical filtering described above functions as an epistemological defense mechanism to preserve legal and religious authority — given that Islamic law (*fiqh*) is rooted in historical precedents, changes to the historical narrative can directly impact the validity of existing legal structures (Hallaq, 2005). Thus, the concept of *selected collective memory* demonstrates that history is always caught between facts and political functions, and that Islamic historiography remains a battleground for various regimes of truth that seek to determine how the past must be remembered in order to control how the future is shaped.

Raison d’État in Religious Doctrine

Religion is often forced to submit to the logic of *raison d’état* — the justification for legitimizing state interests. This concept prioritizes the interests of stability and the continuity of power over ideal principles, where theological values no longer serve as the primary guide but rather as instruments of power. In his study on state policy, Friedrich Meinecke explains that *raison d’état* demands that rulers do whatever is necessary to preserve the state, often by transcending common moral or religious boundaries (Meinecke, 1998). The theoretical contribution of this study, in relation to this concept, is to demonstrate that *raison d’état* was not merely a Western political phenomenon imported retrospectively onto Islamic history, but an operative logic that can be identified through close reading of the classical Islamic historiographical sources themselves —

a methodological move that distinguishes this study from broader intellectual histories that treat Islamic political thought in relative isolation from Foucauldian power analysis (Black, 2011; Hourani, 2013).

In historiographical practice, theology is often used as a *post-facto* justification for political actions already taken by rulers. When the Umayyad Dynasty adopted the Jabariyah doctrine — which emphasizes that all human actions are the absolute will of God — it was done to silence political criticism and justify their power as an unchallengeable destiny (Black, 2011). Consequently, the history of Islam we receive today is the result of centuries of filtering by strict political censorship, in which narratives deemed detrimental to the rulers' legitimacy were deliberately buried or altered (Robinson, 2003). The implication for the politics of memory is that this filtering was never merely about the past — it was always simultaneously about the present, about maintaining the conditions under which existing authority structures could continue to claim divine sanction without being subject to critical historical scrutiny.

Examining the relationship between power and text is not intended to undermine the credibility of Islamic history as a whole. Rather, this deconstruction aims to enrich our understanding that Islam is a living religion that dynamically interacts within highly complex political realities, not merely an abstract theory existing in a vacuum (Ahmed, 2018). By understanding the presence of political intervention in historical narratives, we are invited to view Muslim thinkers and rulers as historical actors grappling with the challenges of their time, not merely flawless figures in hagiographies (Hourani, 2013). The dependence of Islamic law (*fiqh*) on historical precedents further reinforces why political censorship was so crucial for past authorities: as Hallaq (2005) notes, if the historical chain of tradition is broken by contradictory narratives, the integrity of the law underpinning that society is also threatened. What we call "official history" is often the result of a compromise between objective facts and the need to maintain socio-religious coherence.

Ultimately, an awareness of the influence of *raison d'état* in the formation of historical narratives allows us to appreciate the diversity of voices that once existed but were sidelined. The broader theoretical implication of this study for the field of Islamic historiography is this: reading classical texts through the integrated lens of Foucault's *regime of truth*, Halbwachs' *selected collective memory*, and Meinecke's *raison d'état* reveals that the power-knowledge nexus in Islamic history was not an anomaly or a corruption of an otherwise objective tradition — it was, and remains, constitutive of that tradition. Studying history through this critical lens helps believers and scholars alike distinguish between the transcendent essence of religious teachings and temporal political interpretations (Kamali, 2003), and opens the door to a more intellectually honest engagement with the complexity, plurality, and dynamism of the Islamic intellectual heritage.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Islamic historiography is a complex product of negotiation between religious authority and political ambition, as evidenced by three systematic patterns identified across the Umayyad and Abbasid periods: the sacralization of rulers, the marginalization of opposition narratives, and the standardization of orthodoxy through selective textual transmission and censorship. Recognizing the influence of power in the writing of history allows us to read classical texts more objectively and critically, in order to distinguish between the essence of spiritual teachings and the pragmatic interests of past rulers. History is no longer viewed as a static record, but rather as a dynamic arena where the "Regime of Truth" is formed and maintained for the sake of social stability and legal legitimacy (*fiqh*).

This research makes a theoretical contribution by integrating the concepts of **raison d'état** and "selected collective memory" into the study of classical Islamic historiography, demonstrating that these power dynamics operated not as exceptions but as structural features of the tradition itself. By dissecting these dynamics, this study offers a deconstructive framework demonstrating that Islamic historical narratives are fluid and adaptive to the epistemological and political needs of their time, rather than mere theories in a vacuum.

For future research, it is recommended that subsequent studies take a comparative, cross-dynastic approach, analyzing the comparison between literary censorship during the Abbasid period and that of other local dynasties (such as the Fatimids or Safavids) to identify unique patterns in the formation of collective memory. Further research could also examine the impact of historical filtering on modern law, by investigating the extent to which this "filtered" historical narrative still influences the formulation of public policy or family law in modern Muslim countries. Through this critical approach, we can appreciate Islamic history as a rich dialectic between revelation, reason, and human political reality.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ma contributed to the conceptualization of the study, formulation of the research questions, development of the research framework, selection of primary historiographical sources, and preparation of the original manuscript. NH contributed to the methodological design, particularly the application of Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and Critical Discourse Analysis, and to the analysis of power-knowledge relations, political authority, and the construction of religious narratives. Ru contributed to the collection, examination, and contextualization of primary sources, including the historiographical works of Al-Tabari, Al-Baladhuri, Al-Ya'qubi, and Al-Mas'udi, as well as comparative textual analysis of narratives concerning rulers, opposition, legitimacy, and religious orthodoxy. AM contributed to the literature review, analysis of contemporary scholarship on Islamic political thought, interpretation of *raison d'état* and collective memory, synthesis of the findings, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the interpretation and discussion of the findings, critically reviewed and revised the manuscript, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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