

# 8. Time and Its Others

## Contesting *Telos* through a Sociospatial Analysis of Islamicate Chronotopes

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The fields of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies remain engulfed in the politics of encounter configured between the metageographies of ‘East’ and ‘West’ that animate Edward Said’s *Orientalism*.<sup>1</sup> Despite nearly forty years of vigorous debate, partial amendments, and counter-proposals, ‘orientalism’ remains a totalising discourse that eclipses a more purposeful effort to interrogate how spatial regimes of power also entail periodisation schemata defined by the purportedly progressive telos of modernity.<sup>2</sup> The historiography of Islamicate societies<sup>3</sup> produced within the emergent imperial

- 1 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978). Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen provide a prescient analysis of the linkages between space and power in the configuration of ‘Eurocentricism’ in *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- 2 Zachary Lockman reflects on the entrenched nature of these debates as they continue to shape these fields in *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Robert Irwin and Alexander Bevilacqua, by contrast, muster an assault on Said’s thesis, either directly or indirectly, by assuming an inherent neutrality in intellectual histories of encounter in, respectively, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Penguin, 2007), and *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). The resurgence of Eurocentric culturalist assumptions in contemporary scholarship thus demands new methodologies to avoid approaching ‘Islam’ as a discrete, trans-historical phenomenon juxtaposed with an evolving ‘Europe.’
- 3 Like many who embrace the vision of Marshall Hodgson (discussed in his views of world history in the chapter by Michael Geyer), I use ‘Islamicate’ to differentiate cultures and histories informed by the structures and lifecycles of Islam, but are not themselves reducible to its religious principles and modes of sociopolitical organisation. The term gestures toward the doctrinal and ethical import of Islam, but also invokes the communities, practices, and aesthetic motifs that overflow the boundedness of creedal definitions and so avoids reductive generalisations. Hodgson’s brilliance enables precision in efforts to distinguish broader processes from those moments in which religion *does* pointedly serve as an activating force or explanatory mechanism. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Srinivas Aravamudan suggests that ‘Islamicate’ equals “the hybrid trace

metropolises of the nineteenth century, particularly in the form of *Islamwissenschaft*,<sup>4</sup> continues to shape how scholars investigate and students consume knowledge about Islam as a late antique phenomenon and its evolution into a disparate geopolitical terrain. However, defaulting to an oppositional discourse that pits the ‘inauthentic’ Eurocentric misrepresentation against the ‘authentic’ affectivity of historical actors and agents reinforces several problematic assumptions. First, this oppositional discourse assumes that nineteenth century contexts were inherently ‘European’ rather than precisely produced as such within a transregional imperial field wherein participants deployed the alterity of time and culture so as to refine a civilising discourse of superiority.<sup>5</sup> Entrenched binaries further render incomprehensible the methods by which actors from Islamicate contexts within this trans-regional imperial field *also* produced visions of a holistic past that masked complexity so as to assert unity. Second, the totalising images invoked in the nineteenth century reified Islam as a monolithic category that persists today even in scholarship attentive to diversity. And finally, a meta-geography that purposefully conflates ‘West’ with ‘European’ and ‘East’ with ‘Islamic’ entails a politics of incommensurability dependent in turn on a politics of time: the ‘modern’ and the ‘unmodern.’<sup>6</sup>

Scholars of Eurasia have purportedly triumphed over the nineteenth-century masters of this progressive *telos*, who explicitly deployed the Ottoman Empire as an index of the ‘un-modern.’ Max Weber’s ‘sultanism’<sup>7</sup> characterised a patrimonial model of rule leading to despotism rather than bureaucratisation, and Karl Marx’s ‘Asiatic mode of production,’ linked despotism to the political economy of an amorphous

rather than pure presence or absence of Islam” in “East-West Fiction as World Literature: The Hayy Problem Reconfigured,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014): 198. See also “Islamicate Cosmopolitan: A Past Without a Future, Or a Future Still Unfolding?,” *Franklin Humanities Institute*, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/islamicate-cosmopolitan-past-without-future-future-still-unfolding/>. In contrast, I use the term ‘Islamicist’ to identify scholars from variable contexts who objectify the past via the lens of Islam.

- 4 For this development of *Islamwissenschaft*, see the chapter by David Moshfeg in this volume.
- 5 Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).
- 6 For ‘un-modern’ or ‘non-modern,’ see Greg Anderson’s usage in his argument for a new ethical ontology that arguably reasserts difference as a necessary angle for analysis: “Retrieving the Lost Worlds of the Past: The Case for an Ontological Turn,” *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 787–810. See also the chapter by Özen Dolcerocca in this volume.
- 7 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, trans. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). On patrimonialism as “one of the most important elements of communal action,” see, 1: 322–324 and 336. For the Ottoman Empire as a despotic example of patrimonial rule, one that unites spiritual and political power in the personage of the sultan and thus precludes rational intervention in coercive power, see vol. 1: 231–232, 237 and vol. 2: 1017 and 1031.

east.<sup>8</sup> Each generated schemata of ‘West’ and ‘non-West’ that reappear in debates concerning the nature of power in contexts as diverse as the seventh-century Arabian Peninsula and seventeenth-century Istanbul. Yet most efforts to rebut these theories do so through arguments of specificity: identifying distinctive features of varied contexts so as to demonstrate the erroneous nature of these conceptual schemata.<sup>9</sup> Specificity, however, has not unseated the triumph of *telos* and reinforces the oppositional discourses and comparative models on which this *telos* depends. More recently, intrepid scholars have sought to link conceptual models—or ideal types, in Weberian terminology—to a politics of time (the invention of ‘medieval’ as antithesis to ‘modern’) that masks the constitutive linkages between emergent colonial power and histories of slavery and enslavement.<sup>10</sup> This linkage between technologies of power and the historicisation of time posits a global chronoscape.<sup>11</sup> In so doing, scholars attentive to sovereignty as well as a temporal hegemony, allow us to move beyond the language of commensurability or difference.

The theory of commensurability, initially proffered as an alternative to careless comparative histories, correctly identified the comparative instinct as complicit in analyses that reproduced discrete civilisational units. Commensurability was also intended as a move beyond ‘encounter’ as comparative praxis, recognising in turn that narratives of contact also fortified engagement with the ‘West,’ as the moment in which history was realised.<sup>12</sup> Arguably these problems also afflict the work of scholars who adopt ‘commensurability’ as a means to assess most prominently ‘Eurasian’

- 8 The outlines of what would become the “Asiatic mode of production” appeared in correspondence between Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels between 1857 and 1861 and then in Marx’s article “The British Rule in India,” see volumes 28 and 13 of *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986).
- 9 Scholarship in this vein also tends to reinforce the historical uniqueness of the movements they follow: Robert G. Hoyland, *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and, Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).
- 10 The invention of the ‘medieval’ in the Renaissance humanist enterprise and its revitalisation within Michel Foucault’s narrative of an emergent disciplinary order demonstrates the early conflation of periodisation and hegemonic power. Anthony Grafton provides an example of this mode within the Renaissance moment in *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Anne Clark Bartlett highlights some of the problematic aspects of Foucault’s approach in “Foucault’s ‘Medievalism,’” *Mystics Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1994): 10–18.
- 11 Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and, Sarah Davis-Secord, review of *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West: Tracing the Emergence of Medieval Europe*, by Daniel G. König, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 111–114.
- 12 Jerry H. Bentley, “Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History,” *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (1996): 749–770.

centralising regimes of the fifteenth through to the eighteenth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Global historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam's commitment to questioning hidden assumptions of connected histories charts one significant way out of the morass of both civilisational units and encounter as inherently inflected by Eurocentrism.<sup>14</sup> Originally the 'connected' was, for Subrahmanyam, expressive of the designation 'early modern' and employed to track parallel strategies of centralising courts and mobile circuits across sovereign terrains from the fifteenth through to the early eighteenth centuries. Increasingly disenchanted with the *telos* of the 'early modern' designation, Subrahmanyam led a new charge against 'commensurability' and its tendentious erasure of difference—a difference understood as constructed rather than innate. More recently, he turned to theories of scale and suggested that the 'commensurable' emerges at the imperial or national level and masks the microhistories of the regional—the town, village, shrine, or law court (and his Conclusion to this volume elaborates these ideas). This masking was deliberate rather than casual and signals courtly establishments' efforts to territorialise sovereign power across composite and disparate realms. Subrahmanyam cautions that if we base our narratives of the past unreflectively on those commissioned to sustain the fiction of imperial invulnerability, then we are caught *within* a politics of time rather than tracing its emergent practices.

## Challenging the 'Islamic' and the 'Historical' via Conflicting Rubrics of Time

Together, these cautionary tales of a troubled analytic conflation between cultural and temporal categorisations and the erasure of difference invite a new frame for "thinking" time in the past. In the following pages I embrace Subrahmanyam's call to reflect on periodisation as a problem *in* the past and not just a problem of investigation *about* the past.<sup>15</sup> Here, then, I seek to explore how temporal distinctions became fields of

13 For more recent examples of this approach, see the work of Kaya Şahin in, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and, Kaya Şahin and Julia Schleck, "Courtly Connections: Anthony Sherley's Relation of His Travels (1613) in a Global Context," *Renaissance Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2016): 80–115.

14 His resounding clarion call for a connected past appears in "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–762. For one of the many examples of later work that embraces this analytic mode, see *Courtly Encounters Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

15 See the Conclusion to this volume.

knowledge production within the Islamicate context and, within these fields, attempt to reveal how the evolution of conflicting rubrics of time embody, or are linked to conflicting visions of social and spatial order. While I identify several examples of how organisational rubrics for time capture or produce distinct sociopolitical formations between the eighth and the seventeenth centuries these are intended to illuminate but certainly do not exhaust possibilities for future inquiries. Instead, my examples represent three general interventions. First, that there is no all-encompassing ‘Islamic’ notion of time and history. This should be obvious, but the case is revelatory, as even when assessing sacred scripture and sacral time the sobriquet ‘Islamic’ obscures the conflicted rubrics and power play *through* time that this essay seeks to reveal. Second, while generating rubrics of time indeed includes the field of ‘history-writing’ as such, our exploration should not be limited to linear treatments of the past. Further, the actions of annalists and chroniclers *themselves* become purveyors of conflicted visions of temporal order and, more pointedly, often did so by inserting into their narratives other types of textual and material artifacts and forged temporal visions that were often in conflict with each other. Modes of marking time and thus of making time cross generic boundaries of bureaucratic record-keeping practices, biographies of the Prophet and the bibliographic dictionary, encyclopedic compilations, philosophical treatises, jurisprudence manuals, court records, illuminated manuscripts, and memoirs of travel and pilgrimage.

I thus hope to demonstrate that producers of texts constructed hybrid narratives and combined both the moral and the operative norms of seemingly discrete practices: the sacred quote enhancing the didactic manual of advice; the elegy for a ruler’s legacy prefacing a legal code; a court decision ratified through both the normative judgment of sacred law and the diverse customary practices in regional contexts; the biography of the Prophet deployed as an interpretive device for the annals of dynasties. Such attention to hybridity as *in itself* a form of history-making resists modular or typological approaches to temporal logics (as suggested by Jörn Rüsen in this volume). Instead, I suggest that the ‘historical’ marks both temporal conflicts (the effort to shape circumstance into meaning) and sociospatial processes (the re-use and re-articulation of genres in new contexts of meaning-making) and thus that neither ‘Islamic’ nor ‘historical’ serve as fixed referents but rather represent generative practices of many different *chronotopes* (i.e. narratives of time-space).<sup>16</sup>

Finally, this effort to exemplify the inherently conflicted and sociospatial elements of temporal distinctions within Islamicate contexts posits the *chronotope* as a means to emphasise that the rhetoric of time-making alerts us to the *use* of time as a means to

16 For the notion of the *chronotope* as time-space, see Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258.

*position* actors within a competitive field of power. In other words, time sanctions the *right* to historical agency. The question posed here, then, is not “how do we correct the imposition of Eurocentric historical frameworks on an Islamicate past” but rather, “how do we foreground the ways in which deploying time as an organizational method is inherently an act of power in the history-making formations of both scholarship *about* this past and textual practices *in* that past?” Scholars and actors within both formations deploy the past, and methods for differentiating periods of time, to shape their present into a legible universe, at the same time masking conflicts that disrupt this unity of vision, and thus asserting their own right to agentic power.

## Crafting Revelatory Time

While I argue that there is no such thing as an ‘Islamic’ conception of time, and instead, identify varying sociabilities and spaces wherein the creation of time-marked identities, or identities shaped by the marking of time, emerged, it is important to note that a first *chronotope* did appear in early efforts to inscribe as communal history the movement of Muhammad in the early seventh century Arabian Peninsula.<sup>17</sup> Early narratives of this emergence wrestled with the relationship between a divine time of creation, the Prophetic time of revelation, and a human time conceived as the embodiment of the two. Thus, the emergent chronicle tradition incorporates the Qur’an into an unfolding of history, posits the revelatory moment as the intervention of the divine into the human world, and defines revelation as itself a ‘reminder’ to the world of the radical oneness of god. This revelatory moment, and the Prophetic mission of Muhammad, heralded both a ‘reminder’ of that which had been ‘forgotten’ by previous monotheistic communities, and the harbinger of a future day of judgment when all individuals and communities would be evaluated against this standard of ‘remembrance’ of a reclaimed truth. This ‘truth,’ of the radical oneness of god, was thus immediately established as a “historical” truth, one that marked human time by groups who either remembered or forgot the monotheistic message of a god then deployed to define a path of daily practice, a path that would ultimately lead back to a reunion of the divine and human worlds, i.e., divine and human times, in the advent of a cosmic day of judgment.

This particular *chronotope*, which highlighted the interaction between divine, prophetic, and human history, thus appeared in the earliest histories and biographies

17 Fred McGraw Donner’s book maps this itinerary with attention to the misattribution of religious sentiment and Muslim unity in the early formation of a political identity in *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>18</sup> Although no extant text exists of one of the earliest example of these, by Ibn Ishaq (d. 767), it was widely circulated, copied, and redacted into later works of history writing such as those composed by Ibn Hisham (d. 833) and al-Tabari (d. 923).<sup>19</sup> Ibn Ishaq's work, ultimately reproduced under the auspices of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–75), founder of Baghdad and patron of diverse forms of speculative inquiry, interwove several itineraries of time: the beginning of time, i.e., the moment of creation and the story of Adam and Eve; the time of the Prophet; and the time of the conquests and expansion of the Muslim community (*umma*) out from the Arabian Peninsula and into the former imperial strongholds of the Byzantines and Sassanians (i.e. Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, and beyond). Ibn Ishaq thus identified a new rubric for interweaving divine/prophetic/human time—creation, the emergence of monotheistic voices, the perversion of a monotheistic truth, Muhammad as the clarion call for its reinstatement, and then a narrative depiction of the events that followed his death. The *chronotope* thus introduced *epochal* time, with the Prophet Muhammad dividing an age of ignorance (*jahiliyya*) from an age of awareness or awakened knowledge. But it was also a *political* time, as the time marker that became year 0 for chronicle writing in the decades and centuries that followed was not of Muhammad's birth, but rather of the immigration of his movement/community of followers from Mecca to Yathrib in 622 CE (later re-named Medina, or city of the Prophet). Thus, time was marked or born from a point of embarkation, a departure from a past way of *being in time* and the commencement of a distinct political and economic identity that took full form only after the Prophet Muhammad's death.<sup>20</sup> Efforts to sustain a revelatory vision necessitated a new kind of time, that of the political body that *administered* the message of the Qur'an as the formation of an ethico-political apparatus for rule and expansion.

The Qur'an, when it emerged as a codified scripture, resists its use as an administrative apparatus, however, because it in itself disrupts the narrativisation of time. By the third successor to the Prophet Muhammad, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (644–56), codices circulated across the expanding zones of conquest and assimilation that extended

18 Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writings* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998), 125–146 and 275–290.

19 See Mustafa al-Suqa, Ibrahim al-Abyari and Abdul Hafidh Shalabi, eds. *Tahqiq Sira an-Nabawiyyah li Ibn Hisham* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath, 1979) and *The History of Al-Tabari*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 28 vols. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985–89). On Ibn Ishaq and the biographical tradition as an act of history-making, see Gordon Darnell Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia, S. C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

20 See Stephen J. Shoemaker for a careful assessment of how the early movement that developed around the prophetic revelations of Muhammad only crystallised into a distinct creedal body in its sociopolitical formation after his death: *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

the reach of this nascent political community beyond the frontiers of the Byzantine and Sassanian empires. Robert Hoyland defines the Qur'an as the epitome of a "late antique" text, given that it threads together the diverse religious, discursive, philosophical, and apocalyptic trends that epitomised the era.<sup>21</sup> This diversity is sustained as an organisational and animating principle within the archetypal codex. The orality of revelation, a speech act, became narrativised into a canonical codex sanctioned by 'Uthman and intentionally formed to resist counter authoritative communal claims. But, as is commonly known, the Qur'an defies chronology, organised instead from the longest to the shortest revelatory moment. The time of revelation, then, becomes captured in the oratorical/recitational (or reading/perusal) length of a chapter (*sura*) that sustains the eternal now of revelation.<sup>22</sup> The *suras* of "The Pen" and "The Poets," amongst others, further distinguish and elevate the *word* of revelation from the poetic fetes of rivalry common to the Arabian Peninsula, as well as from judgments of evil-doing that are not premised on revealed scripture.<sup>23</sup> The *now* of revelation supersedes all preceding instances of textual authority.

## Social Chaos and the Integration of Revelatory Time into Narrative

The epoch gestated by the political birth of the believers' movement was recorded and narrated through a chronographic itinerary of expansionary movements, battles, personages, cities, and geographies folded into the embrace of this new political identity.<sup>24</sup> But it was also a narrative of contestation—one born out of conflicting conceptions of leadership—and later chroniclers explicitly addressed how political

21 Robert Hoyland, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1053–1068.

22 For a truly remarkable effort to capture the 'soundscape' of the Qur'an and its inherent orality, along with an introduction to how to 'read' the text, see Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1999).

23 The *suras* with accompanying commentary illuminate the triumph of the revelatory word over all other authoritative statements. For a translation that includes a detailed mapping of the interpretive tradition as one that extends the sacred into the historical, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 906–927 and 1400–1407.

24 The most important collection of these narratives can be found in Ahmad ibn al-Baladhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State Being a Translation from the Arabic: Accompanied with Annotations, Geographic and Historic Notes*, trans. Philip Khuri Hitti and Francis C. Murgotten (New York: Longmans and Green, 1924).

fragmentation also disrupted a vision of epochal time (a time of awakened knowledge) and descried the dangers of internal divisions. They thus introduced a new *chronotope*, that of social chaos (*fitna*) and the dispersive consequences of rival political claims. This *chronotope* was initially fashioned by ‘Abbasid-era chroniclers, such as al-Tabari, working to cement a consensus concerning the emergence of Islam, a consensus that would gradually be defined as the way, the Sunna, or later the Sunni, thus inventing along with it a vision of narrative and communal purity, one that began with the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad and continued through his first four successors termed the “rightly guided,” despite the contentious nature of each.<sup>25</sup> Even annalistic narratives of later dynasties were disrupted by the “time of the Prophet,” as evidentiary reports composed by his companions were privileged as records of the community’s emergence, expansion, and re-definition.

However, the ‘evidentiary report’ of the eyewitness was fashioned as the historical standard *not* by the authors of chronicles, but rather by jurists and theologians. Intent on creating manuals to guide the proper ritual observance of the community, they too dealt with divine/prophetic/ human time as they sought for the means to legislate contemporary affairs through the auspices of a revealed text and law. The bridge between text and law, in all its intricacies, cannot be dealt with here. Suffice it to say, especially through the work of the jurist and founder of the Maliki legal school Malik ibn ‘Anas (d. 795), that the practice of the Prophet became a lodestone for the practice of law, and gradually, the practice of the community became its own guiding principle (a mode of legal interpretation known as *maslaha*).<sup>26</sup> The jurist and then those who adopted orthopraxic modes of knowledge, sought a standard of verifiability, one that moralised time and affixed truth to distance—proximity to the prophet became explicitly linked to veracity and foregrounded the speech act as

25 The ‘rashidun’ or rightly guided successors to the Prophet Muhammad represents its own *chronotope*, referenced but not fully explored here. These four leaders sustained the movement after the Prophet Muhammad’s death in 632: Abu Bakr (632–634); ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644); ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan (644–656); and ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (656–661). Each successor contended with rival claimants and sociopolitical unrest both internal to the believer’s movement and generated by resistance to its expansion. Thus ‘Umar was assassinated by a slave likely of Persian origin, and ‘Uthman by a contingent from the garrison city of Fustat in Egypt disgruntled by favoritism to Meccan personages and likely encouraged by ‘Ali, son-in-law and cousin to the Prophet Muhammad. This assassination led to the first of three violent civil wars that convulsed the community until the stratagems of the house of ‘Abbas united discontent under the banner of the ‘Abbasid caliphate in 750. Hugh Kennedy provides an excellent overview of these dynamics in Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004).

26 *Al-Muwatta’ of Imam Malik Ibn Anas*, ed. Abdalhaqq Belwey, trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley (London: Diwan Press, 2014); and Gibril F. Haddad, *The Four Imams and Their Schools* (London: Muslim Academic Trust, 2007).

the lodestone of evidentiary proof. Tracing proximity through a chain of speech acts, known as a system of *isnad* (sound proof of authenticity) and a *silsila* (chain) of connectivity, constitutes the legal and communal apparatus of the *hadith*—the collected deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>27</sup> The systematic nature of proof was not universal but led instead to variable collections of *hadith*, with their own organised contents derived from differing, and often conflicting, assessments of the veracity of both the chain and the individuals who embodied it. *Hadith* then, as an instantiated speech act inscribing the past time of the Prophet Muhammad into the unfolding of the present, would become a tropic form in itself, manipulated at will by those who sought to critique what they deemed present corruptions via past forms of purity.<sup>28</sup> The *hadith* created an eternal now or *nunc*. This moralised timescape appeared in diverse forms during periods of political crisis from ninth-century Baghdad to twenty-first century digitised forms of legal pronouncements.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the reported speech acts of the Prophet's deeds and sayings (*hadith*) were parsed into texts, be they of the jurist, the philosopher, the chronicler, or the theologian, as both the epitome of a normative past and a projection for future action. Each, in various ways, inserted a frame of judgment, the judgment of time understood in terms of a past purity and a present corruption, into their various fields of knowledge production. In this way, reported deeds and sayings were also de-sacralised and defined as simply “reported speech or news,” threads of which served as both the expository and evidentiary basis, first of chronicle writing and then of an evolving literary corpus (*adab* in the languages of the region), and finally even in administrative reporting for tax collection purposes in various dynastic and regional polities.<sup>30</sup>

27 Wael B. Hallaq provides a general overview of this process and its use as the basis of a legal system in *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

28 Jonathan A. C. Brown, “Did the Prophet Say It or Not? The Literal, Historical, and Effective Truth of *Ḥadīths* in Early Sunnism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 192: 2 (2009): 259–285.

29 Jonathan Brown traces the interpretive tradition as contested history across various timescapes, from debates over the Prophet's wife, 'A'isha and her purported infidelity to the treatment of slavery and domestic violence in *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choice of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2014).

30 For the formation and circulation of a literary sensibility in the period consult Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Patricia Crone provides a synoptic overview of the links between legal, political, and religious authoritative modes in *From Kavād to Al-Ghazālī: Religion, Law, and Political Thought in the Near East, c. 600–c. 1100* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). And for a general approach to the hybrid nature of history-making in the Islamicate textual tradition, see Snjezana Buzov, “History,” in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 182–199.

## Crafting Unification from Conflicted Histories of Truth

For one example of the admixture of truth, time, and variant moral *chronotopes*, we can turn to the genre-bending treatises of al-Shahrastani (d. 1153).<sup>31</sup> I have elected to focus on the corpus of al-Shahrastani for three reasons: to depart from the customary use of well-known philosophers and theologians such as al-Farabi (d. 950), ibn Sina (d. 1037), and al-Ghazali (d. 1111); to highlight the import of the Khurasani zone (the region that extends to the northeast past the borders of contemporary Iran into Central Asia and Afghanistan), for the complex interweaving of geographic and chronographic realities in the expanding Islamicate universe; and, as I will show, for the innovations specific to making and marking time that appear in his various treatises. Al-Shahrastani's itinerant learning exemplifies Islamicate geographies of knowledge production. His name, like many, derives from the town of his birth (1086) in Shahrstan, but he studied with theological masters in Nishapur and then Baghdad where he taught in the al-Nizamiyya, an institution dedicated to the Ash'ari school of interpretive inquiry that guided much of al-Shahrastani's career and speculations.<sup>32</sup> It is worth pausing on his position as a disciple of the Ash'ari school, as contained within this allegiance to a tradition of knowledge is a chronotopic discourse that definitively shapes the intellectual universe of the period. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Isma'il ibn Ishaq al-Ash'ari (874–936), established an interpretive theological school now referenced as the epitome of Sunni orthodoxy. Yet he had also charted an intermediary path within the volatile debates concerning the nature of the interpretive act within a community shaped by revelation. As the revelatory universe of the believers became increasingly entangled with the philosophical traditions translated from Greek, these debates escalated and became the site of claims to both political and religious authority.<sup>33</sup> Al-Ash'ari embraced the importance of debate and discourse, even as he resisted schools of thought, such as the Mu'tazilite, that prioritised speculative inquiry above and against the "source

31 His full name is Taj al-Din Abu al-Fath Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani. For a translation of one of his most significant treatises "The End of Steps in the Science of Theology," see *The Summa Philosophia of al-Shahrastani Kitāb nihāyatul-iqdam fī 'ilmi 'l-kalām*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

32 For an excellent summary of the evolution of these traditions, see Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, 15–68. His *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2018) provides a more detailed investigation of these broader debates.

33 Elizabeth Key Fowden and Garth Fowden, *Contextualizing Late Greek Philosophy* (Athens: Diffusion de Boccard, 2008). See also Garth Fowden, "Pseudo-Aristotelian Politics and Theology in Islam," in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. Peter F. Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 130–148.

texts” of the Qur’an and *hadith*.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that theological interpretation (*kalam*), was inherently an interpretive enterprise, thus despite al-Ash‘ari’s orthopraxy, he also departed from legal schools that insisted on the *hadith* as the only true realm into which the Qur’anic principle could be extended, to fit contemporary contexts (known as the *ahl al-hadith*, or people of the hadith, and best epitomised by the legal school of Malik ibn ‘Anas, d. 795). Thus, the Ash‘ari model transforms the universalist time of the philosopher into a *method* for yoking revelation to the unfolding of human practice in a post-prophetic world. Conflicting orientations yielded a chronotopic interpretive discourse.

Al-Shahrastani, writing from within a world of proliferating versions of truth and rival claims to caliphal succession from the courts of Cordoba, Cairo, and Baghdad, sought to demonstrate the means by which plurality might be enfolded into singularity, the singularity of a timescape defined by the Qur’an as the word of God capable of reshaping difference into a unified conceptual framework. Revelation, in his conception, was the ordered presentation of words, and these words contained within them their own timescape, word made time and thus the time of others (other traditions or interpretations) could be integrated back into the word of revelation. He further transformed the sociopolitical chaos (*fitna*) of multiplicity into a *history* of difference in his monumental work that traced the evolution of philosophical and religious schools of thought across the bounded limits of Qur’anic history.<sup>35</sup> In other words, he folded the Qur’anic moment into a genealogy that began before Islam and then developed in disparate ways after the prophetic moment of Muhammad. More pointedly, his primary rubric for assessing religious phenomena was textual—the presence or absence of written scriptures. In part, of course, here he follows the Qur’anic dictate that privileges “peoples of the book” for their presumably monotheistic tendencies. But he removes this privilege in a synoptic glance at the diversity of religious belief and practice that identifies recorded texts as a marker of difference without moral attribution.

34 For a general introduction to the theological tradition, see Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology from Muhammad to the Present*, trans. by Thomas Thronton (Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener, 2000). J. R. Peters provides an excellent reading of the early speculative movements that wrestled with the relationship between divine acts and human history in *God’s Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu‘tazili Qadi al-Qudat Abu al-Hasan ‘Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad al-Hamdani* (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

35 *Kitāb al-milal wa ‘l-nihāl*, William Cureton, ed. (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1923). The section on the Muslim religious communities was translated into English by A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wa ‘l-nihāl* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

## A New Universalism: Time as Globalised History

However, plurality into singularity was only one strategy for addressing diversity. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the Islamicate worlds were politically fragmented by conquest and plague that convulsed the region from the Iberian Peninsula to Central Asia. The Chinggisid invasions (1219–1260) that reconfigured the geography of rule, and the plagues and famines that disrupted the timescapes of the harvest, also led to a new chronographical imagination. Despite the fissures of political control from internal rebellions and cycles of nomadic invasions, the Islamicate terrains re-emerged into a world defined by shared commercial and conceptual zones that encompassed both land and sea routes. The invasions themselves became “swallowed” by the rhythms of an intellectual, institutional, and administrative system within a sovereign space inflected by the dictates of Islam. New foundations of colleges, monasteries, caravansaries, and saintly shrines cloaked the invaders in the clothing of legitimacy modelled by self-professed Muslim rulers. Accompanying these experiences of cyclical travails were new models of universalist time. As two preeminent yet distinctively variant examples, the universal histories of Rashid al-Din (d. 1318) and ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) expanded the time of Islam to include the time of the Other, and reconceptualised epochal history, now divorced from the truths of Islam and intent instead on incorporating or assessing the volatility of political sovereignty.<sup>36</sup> Both relied on epochal conceptions, but these epochs foregrounded human rather than divine time, creating a *chronotope* that fit pre- and post-Qur’anic history into a shared timescape.

Rashid al-Din personally embodied the period’s contrapuntal dynamics. Born Jewish and trained as a physician, he converted to Islam and then served Sultan Ghazan’s court (r. 1295–1304), ultimately becoming the most powerful vizier of the Ilkhanid empire.<sup>37</sup> Commissioned to write a history of the Mongols and thereby insert them into the revelatory history of Islam, Rashid al-Din shifted scale and departed from the localised political configuration of the Mongols to adopt an encyclopaedic “history” of lives, geographies, dynasties, legends, myths, systems of organisation, feats of military victory and scientific exploration, and much more. Notably, he sought to inscribe a comprehensive portrait of both synchronic and diachronic scales, and in so doing unseated both the Mongols and Islam from positions of primacy. This ‘history’ was more compendium than chronology, however, and despite the dynastic

36 The two narrative histories referenced here are Rashid al-Din Hamadani’s *Jāmi‘ al-Tawāriḥ* (Compendium of Chronicles) and Abu Zayd ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun al-Hadrami’s *Muqaddimah*.

37 Mahmud Ghazan is best known for professing the truth of Islam and then turning Mongol rule into an Islamicate empire under the Ilkhans (subordinate khanate of the Chinggisid empire that includes the modern territories of Iran, Azerbaijan and central and eastern parts of Turkey).

itineraries inserted within the volumes posited a universalist and globalised vision of human time extending across space.

Rashid al-Din thus presented *not* a unified chronicle, but rather a multivocal “compendium of chronicles,” as the title clearly indicates. This compendium, however, was commissioned as a monumental text of the court, with monies and resources lavished on an artisanal workshop housing the calligraphers, illustrators, and scribes that produced a text then copied and emulated as the preeminent model of text as ornament. The illustrated manuscript ‘ornamented’ the dynastic court, and thus reinforced a vision of imperial power. Even if its contents were multivocal, it still served as a monument—and thus an instantiated event—that of the Ghazan court.

By contrast, the wave of encyclopaedic knowledge that engulfed the region during this period displaced the court and the court historian with the knowledge accumulated through the trades of the street and the scribe. Perhaps most vividly captured in the *Ultimate Ambition of the Arts of Erudition*, by the Mamluk accountant and scribe Shihab al-Din al-Nuwayri (d. 1333).<sup>38</sup> Al-Nuwayri delightfully shifted in and out of reported speech, philosophical conceptions of cosmic and human homologies, folkloric knowledge, remedies for bodily and sexual ailments, in addition to incorporating dynastic and bureaucratic histories. He also de-sacralised the *hadith*, deployed here haphazardly along with the poetic fragment, the anecdote, and inserted text from other scholars, bibliographers and jurists. The encyclopaedia, therefore, adopts the *chronotope* of universalism but does so with an eye for the everyday rather than that of either the sacral history of religious emergence or the dynastic chronicle. Yet, the encyclopaedic compendia indeed lends itself to the imperial gaze, as it adopts an expansive eye and therefore maps in its textual itinerary the geography of composite empires.<sup>39</sup> Still, these compendia linked together timescapes that had once been opposed: the eternal, the historical, the prophetic, and the everyday.

Ibn Khaldun, by contrast, insisted on a “science” of investigation and named history as a field of knowledge unto itself, distinct from the embrace of religious traditions and its pantheon of interpreters. Born in Tunis (1332) to an elite Andalusian family that fled Seville after its reconquest in 1248, he then lost his parents to the so-called Black Death and served various regional rulers of the Maghreb (western Islamicate lands),

38 Shihab al-Din al-Nuwayri, *The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition*, trans. and ed. Elias Muhanna (London: Penguin, 2015). See also *World in a Book: Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

39 Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh, *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3–39 and, Elias Muhanna, “Why Was the Fourteenth Century a Century of Arabic Encyclopaedism,” in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Jason König and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 343–356.

amidst an ever fragmenting political landscape.<sup>40</sup> His bravado and scholarly acumen equipped him well in a constant quest for patrons (periods of imprisonment aside), and he set about composing a multivolume “Book of Lessons” that remained incomplete. Ibn Khaldun’s intent, however, is palpable within the introduction, or *Muqaddimah*. Notably, he embraced the Galenic concept of the “body politic” to inscribe the lifecycle of the individual into a schema for assessing intra-group dynamics.<sup>41</sup> This cyclical vision of historical order, or disorder, was defined by sociopolitics rather than revelation, and represented a radical departure. Dismissing the theologians and jurists as ensnared by tradition, he turned his gaze to the horizontal and embraced observational methods as a disciplinary act. Ibn Khaldun thereby disrupted the *chronotope* of revelation with that of cyclical history.

All of these visionaries of the universal emerged out of expanding networks of scholarship that knit together disparate courts and patrons from Qayrawan, to Cairo, Tunis to Tabriz and Samarkand. Together, the universal history-writer and the encyclopaedist pivoted between the normative and the descriptive, but also purported to present globalising rather than sacral or regional histories. Thus, while characterised as *universal* histories, they are born precisely out of a concern to fit multiple, competing *chronoscapes* into a synthetic, all-encompassing historical narrative.

## The Time of the Empire

These all-encompassing and totalising urges were in turn co-opted to form an imperial narrative space, as the scholars *cum* bureaucrats in the courtly establishments of the Timurids, Ottomans, Mughals, and Safavids fit visions of dynastic legitimacy into universalist conceptions of time—time that their imperial houses both enfolded and abrogated, like the early narrative chroniclers of Islam’s emergence.<sup>42</sup> This imperialisation of time also

40 There are many excellent introductions to ibn Khaldun’s life and conceptual innovations, for some recent summaries, see Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2015); and, Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh: Ibn Khaldun and the Science of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

41 Glen Cooper, “Medicine and the Political Body: A Metaphor at the Crossroads of Four Civilizations” (Presentation given at the symposium *The Healing Arts across the Mediterranean: Communities, Knowledge and Practices*, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, March 28, 2014).

42 Patricia Blessing, “Introduction: Reframing the Lands of Rūm,” in *Rebuilding Anatolia after the Mongol Conquest: Islamic Architecture in the Lands of Rūm, 1240–1330* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2014), 1–20; Abdurrahman Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Stephen P. Blake, *Time in Early*

yoked the cosmic to temporal power in novel ways, with the astrological conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn and millenarian apocalypticism harnessed to proclamations of universalism precisely amidst a field populated by competitive claims to sovereignty.<sup>43</sup> Here I will focus on the Ottomans, and the multiple mechanisms by which actors within these courtly establishments produced a time of the empire. The displacement of regional customs by an imperial law and the transitory post of the court historian established under Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520–66), briefly illustrate an imperial effort to displace rival timescapes. Both also represent the inherently conflicted processes by which disparate territories and rival histories were subsumed into a vision of invulnerable imperial order.

The regulatory framework of the Ottoman bureaucratic establishment depended on a legal vocabulary that generated, even as it fixed, the circulation of goods, services, and subjects into a clearly defined space of imperial provision. It thus depended on record-keeping practices that affixed the realm into the timely ordering of command and supply, a ‘seasons of empire’ if you will. The legal regulations (*kanunname*) dispersed from the palace enfolded regional ‘custom’ into an imperial category in itself—a sleight of hand that became a framework for legal interpolation.<sup>44</sup> References to “what went before” (*mā hadath min qabl*), “from the old days (*min ayām-ul qadīm*), and “according to formerly established methods” (*üslüb-i sâbika üzere*) transferred “scattered” (*perakende*) practices into “new defters” (*defterler-i cedid*) of recorded knowledge. This mobile and evolving archive of administrative practice invoked the terminology of customary law (Ottoman Turkish, *örf*; Arabic, *‘urf*), but displaced it so as to assert a customary time of the empire. The legal terrain, and thus the temporal order of previous rulers, became part instead of a legal *chronologies* of imperial sovereignty.<sup>45</sup>

Parallel to this effort to create a legible legal order, the Ottoman establishment under Süleyman sought, through language, monumental architecture, and further legal reform, to replace the heteroglossia of the realm with a unified sovereignty of empire.

*Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal and Ottoman Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

43 Cornell H. Fleischer, “Mahdi and Millennium: Messianic Dimensions in the Development of Ottoman Imperial Ideology,” in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilization*, ed. Kemal Çiçek, Nejat Göyünc, İlber Ortaylı, and Güler Eren, no. 3, *Philosophy, Science and Institutions* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), 42–54; Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Sheldon Pollock, “India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000–1500,” *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 41–74.

44 Guy Burak, “Between the *Ḳānūn* of Qāyṭbāy and Ottoman *Yasaq*: A Note on the Ottomans’ Dynastic Law,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 26, no. 1 (2015): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etu038>

45 For an extensive treatment of this subject, see chapter two in Heather Ferguson, *The Proper Order of Things: Language, Power, and Law in Ottoman Administrative Discourses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018). Guy Burak argues that law and sovereignty are linked in *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

This effort is visible within the scroll and codices of Seyyid Lokman, who composed his *Quintessence of Histories* from the position of court historian, the *şehnâmeçi*.<sup>46</sup> Both the scroll and the codices position the dynastic house of Osman within a genealogical history that begins with a cosmological chart of the world's origins, and then draws parallel connections to the prophets and kings of ancient Persian and other pre-Islamic dynasties emanating out from the first humans, Adam and Eve. Although this genealogical map inserts the Ottomans within a diverse lineage, with the arrival of the Ottoman dynasty all contemporary rivals disappear. The suggestion that the Ottoman dynasty possesses no parallels (imagistic or textual) reinforces Lokman's presentation of the Ottoman dynastic genealogy as a "final world order."<sup>47</sup> These efforts result in an imperial golden ageism, where the 'golden' meant centralised, well-administered, equitably distributed resources, and a lack of sociopolitical upheaval. Despite efforts to produce a legible and invulnerable imperial time, what emerges instead is a sense of fragility—of the always present possibility of upheaval mustered via either the sword or the pen, and wresting imperial time away from its conquerors.

## Conclusion: Chronotope as Method

This tour of Islamicate *chronotopes* ideally demonstrates that remaining fixed within the oppositions of the 'Islamic' with the 'Eurocentric,' or the 'medieval' with 'modern,' misses not complexity, but rather the mechanisms by which timescales always contain within them contradictions of differing logics. In this case, the conflicting logics of revelation and history, sacral and human, the anecdote and the global. Born out of shifting sociospatial identities, these logics in turn shape categories of being by marking and making the temporal legible. This chronotopic analysis of conflicting logics and hybrid texts reveals variant projects of meaning-making and suggests that these projects actively construct or reinforce particular power formations through the manipulation of time. As a method and praxis, the *chronotope* as a shifting sociospatial phenomenon avoids oppositional and exclusionary discourses of 'Other' times and histories.

46 Christine Woodhead's scholarship remains the standard treatment in the field: "An Experiment in Official Historiography: The Post of Şehnâmeçi in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1555–1605," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 75 (1983): 157–182; and, "Reading Ottoman 'Şehnames': Official Historiography in the Late Sixteenth Century," *Studia Islamica*, no. 104/105 (January 1, 2007): 67–80. On the *Quintessence* as both scroll and codice, see Emine Fetvaci, "From Print to Trace: An Ottoman Imperial Portrait Book and Its Western European Models," *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 2 (June 2013): 243–268.

47 Fetvaci, "Print," 174.

