Narratives of the Prophet’s Early Life in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*: An Analytical Study of Qur’ānic References in *Sīra Nabawīyya*

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Abstract

Research into early Muslim sources has demonstrated that some verses of the Qur’ān have been seen by Muslim scholars as containing direct references to the events of the Prophet’s early life. Modern scholars, however, have questioned the appropriateness and authority of these Qur’ānic references as being accurate sources of information for the Prophet’s biography. Since the *ḥadīṭ* are regarded as an authoritative exegetical tool for understanding the meaning of Qur’ānic verses, the *ḥadīṭ* and scholars’ views on the scripture and its relationship to the narratives of *sīra nabawīyya* must be undertaken. The objectives of this present study are to explore the narratives of the Prophet’s early life as found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī* and analyse al-Buḥārī’s perspective on the role of *ḥadīṭ* as an exegetical tool for Qur’ānic references in *sīra nabawīyya*. The study is qualitative in nature, as it utilises both critical and analytical approaches for its methodology. The study suggests that al-Buḥārī employed innovative and novel approaches when presenting narratives of the Prophet’s early life. At certain places in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, by adducing certain *ḥadīṭ* in detail, al-Buḥārī endeavours to convey one distinctive and irrevocable message to the reader.

Keywords

the Prophet – genealogy – *ḥadīṭ* – prophethood – *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*

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1 Introduction: The Prophet's Early Life in the *Ḥadīṭ* Works

According to al-Zuhrānī, there were three popular styles of *ḥadīṭ* literature in the ninth century: *musnad*, *sunan* and *muḥtalaḥ al-ḥadīṭ* (works on interpreting the conflicting meanings of *ḥadīṭ*),¹ yet none of these focused specifically on the biography of the Prophet. This does not suggest that the corpus of the *ḥadīṭ* is lacking information about the Prophet's personal life; in fact, the materials they employed to constitute all these works were gleaned from occurrences and incidents that took place during the life of Muḥammad. The *ḥadīṭ* texts are essentially multifaceted: they could be understood in various meanings thus it could be used in different scope of *ḥadīṭ* literature. Any individual *ḥadīṭ* can be adapted for legislative, exegetic, ascetic or historical uses. For example, the famous *ḥadīṭ* of *al-niyya* (the intention) was employed by al-Muzanī (d. 264/877), the Šāfi'ī legist, to elaborate upon the stipulation of ablution (*al-wuḍū*),² whereas al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), the prominent Sufi, employed it as a guide for the process of soul purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*),³ and, at the same time, al-Buḥārī included it in the book of *al-ḥiğra*, in which he assembled all the *ḥadīṭ* information about the *ḥiğra* (migration).⁴

It was on the basis of the information provided by these works that the *sīra* of Muḥammad was constituted. Among these vast collections of *ḥadīṭ* reports, *Sunan Sitta* (the most prominent examples of *ḥadīṭ* literature in the ninth century) were regarded as the most authoritative, and, later, these six *ḥadīṭ* books would eventually achieve canonical status.⁵ Regarded as very informative sources for outlining the Prophet's life, it is not surprising, therefore, to hear Ḥammāda assert that simply by referring to one of the *Sunan Sitta* can the storyline of Muḥammad's life be roughly sketched.⁶ Therefore, the present study will scrutinise representative texts from *Sunan Sitta* to examine, the works and its authorial perspectives on the Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life.

1 M. Maṭar al-Zuhrānī, *Tadwīn al-sunna naṣ'atuḥu wa-taṭawaruḥu*, Medina, 1996, p. 97-98.

2 Al-Muzanī, *Muḥtaṣar al-Muzanī*, in al-Šāfi'ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, Beirut, 1990, vol. VIII, p. 94.

3 Al-Ḥāriṭ b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-mustaršidin*, ed. Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ġudda, Aleppo, Maktab al-muṭbū'āt al-islāmiyya, 1971, p. 45.

4 Al-Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, ed. Muḥammad al-Nāṣir, Beirut, Dār ṭūq al-nağā, 1422/2001-2, p. 56.

5 In his work, Brown presents the process by which this canonical status was achieved. See Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Buḥārī and Muslim. The Formation and Function of the Sunni Ḥadīth Collection*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p. 8-10.

6 In his work, Ḥammāda illustrates that, by combining all the traditions narrated by al-Buḥārī, the story of the Prophet's life can be established. Fārūq Ḥammāda, *Maṣādir al-sīrat al-nabawiyya wa-taqwīmuḥa*, Damascus, 2003, p. 57.

The significance of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī* in *ḥadīṭ* discourse is beyond question. In this paper, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī* will be scrutinised as representative of works of *ṣaḥīḥ* from the ninth century. The present study will also explore the Qur'ānic background of al-Buḥārī in order to analyse any significant factor that might have influenced him in his Qur'ānic perspective, especially as regards the Qur'ānic references that were employed as references to the Prophet's early life.

1.1 *Problem Statement*

In the Qur'ān, the Prophet Muḥammad is consistently portrayed in solidly human terms, as a most humane being.⁷ He is presented in his full human nature, and is not associated with any miraculous abilities; by contrast, the way that the *ḥadīṭ* and *sīra* present the Prophet's attributes seems at odds those as depicted in the Qur'ān. He is portrayed as a normal human being in the Qur'ān, while the *sīra* and *ḥadīṭ* articulate in some detail his capacity to perform miracles⁸ from the time he was in his mother's womb. The complicated nature of Qur'ānic references in *sīra nabawiyya* has been rigorously discussed by modern scholars such as Azmi.⁹ F. Donner asserts that some of the Prophet's appearance as portrayed in the Qur'ān do not correspond with the information provided by works of *ḥadīṭ*.¹⁰ Since the corpus of *ḥadīṭ* is regarded as an authoritative exegetical tool, one that is employed to explore more deeply the meaning of the Qur'ān and one containing a vast amount of information on the Prophet's life, it behoves scholars to analyse the works of *ḥadīṭ* and *ḥadīṭ*-scholars' views on the Qur'ānic references embedded in this oeuvre that professed to be allusions to Muḥammad's early life. In other words, the corpus of *ḥadīṭ* is the scholars' works narrating the Prophet's guidance on how best to understand Qur'ānic verses, as testified in their accounts.

⁷ See Q 41:6 and 18:110.

⁸ See Ahmad Sanusi Azmi, "Miraculous Elements in Sirah Nabawiyyah: Reassessing Quranic References in the Early Islamic Literature", *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 7/6 (2017), p. 258-67.

⁹ Ahmad Sanusi Azmi, "The Intricate Labyrinth of Qur'ānic References in Sirah Nabawiyyah: An Overview of the Orientalist Works", *Journal of Hadith Studies* 1/1 (2016), p. 1-6; see also Ahmad Sanusi Azmi, "Sirah of the Prophet's Early Life in *Musnad* of Aḥmad: An Analytical Study of Qur'ānic References in Sirah Nabawiyyah", *Sains Humanika* 9/3 (2017), p. 37-42.

¹⁰ Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins. The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 50-52.

2 Al-Buḥārī and His Qur'ānic Methodology

Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Buḥārī (d. 256/870) was a prominent Sunni traditionist. Although celebrated as an expert in the science of *ḥadīth*, scholars have also recognised him as a legist, as he presents his juridical ideas and personal opinions in the headings or titles of chapters in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.¹¹ His implicit criticism of Abū Hanīfa's legalistic thought, presented in the work, demonstrates his critical jurisprudential stance.¹² What is of most relevance to this study is his exegetical views on the Qur'ānic verses, in which he shows a remarkable approach. A thorough grounding in and knowledge of the Qur'ān is consistently at the very foundation of his views. For example, in his discussion of *al-li'ān* (one type of marriage-dissolution in Islam),¹³ he opens the subject by referring to Q 31:6, which is regarded as the origin and legal foundation of this issue. He then goes further, discussing how deaf-mutes (*al-aḥras*) can perform *al-li'ān*; in such cases, al-Buḥārī decreed that performing *al-li'ān* by writing down the words is valid, an opinion which obviously contradicted Kūfa's judiciary, especially the Hanafī scholars.¹⁴ To justify his argument against his opponents, al-Buḥārī employed Q 19:29, which recounts the story of Maryam when she used "signs" (body language) to defend herself from being accused of having had an affair. This is just one example that demonstrates al-Buḥārī's profound understanding of the Qur'ān. In his analysis, Lucas also recognises al-Buḥārī's solid

- 11 There are many works that analyse al-Buḥārī views in legal discussions. For example, Scott Lucas, "The Legal Principles of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Buḥārī and their Relationship to Classical Salafī Islam", *Islamic Law and Society* 13/3 (2006), p. 289-324; al-Mazrū' Muna, "Fiqh al-Buḥārī fi Kitāb al-salā min ḡāmi'ihi al-ṣaḥīḥ dirāsa muqārana", PhD diss., Umm al-Qura University, 2002; Ibn al-Munīr al-Iskandārī, *al-Mutawārī 'alā tarāḡum abwāb al-Buḥārī*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Maqbūl Aḥmad, Kuwait, Maktabat al-ma'alā, 1987; Ibn Ġamā'a, *Munāsabat Tarāḡum al-Buḥārī*, ed. Muḥammad Ishāq al-Salafī, Bombay, Dār al-salafiyya, 1984.
- 12 According to Ibn Haḡar, his term "some people say" (*qala ba'ḍ nas*) usually refers to and argues for the Hanafī school of thought. See Ibn Haḡar, *Fatḥ al-bārī fi Ṣarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī *et al.*, Beirut, Dār aḡyā al-turāt al-'arabī, 1960, vol. XIII, p. 187; al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-qārī Ṣarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, Beirut, n.d., vol. XIV, p. 41, and vol. XX, p. 291.
- 13 *Li'ān* is to accuse one's wife of committing illegal sexual intercourse with another man by saying, for instance, "I saw her committing adultery", in order to deny being the father of the baby she carries. See Yusuf al-Hajj Ahmad, *The Book of Nikah*, Riyadh, Dārussalam, 2014, p. 39.
- 14 In this quarrel, al-'Aynī proposes that al-Buḥārī sought to rebut the opinion of the scholars of Kūfa, while al-Kirmānī goes deeper by suggesting that the argument was focused on a group of Hanafīs. See al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-qārī*, vol. XX, p. 291.

foundation of Qur'ānic thought, concluding that, in legal matters, al-Buḥārī upholds the Qur'ān as his central reference point.¹⁵

As well as exploring legal discourses by employing a specifically Qur'ānic perspective, al-Buḥārī also demonstrates his Qur'ān-based approach towards discussions regarding creedal issues in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Refuting the Qadarī doctrine in the issue of predestination (*al-qadr*) and free will (*af'āl al-'ibād*),¹⁶ al-Buḥārī reinforces his doctrinal conceptions using Q 25:2, which implies that God has already determined every human act precisely.¹⁷ According to Ibn Ḥaḡar, by using this argument, al-Buḥārī seems to imply that anyone who claims that they are causing their own actions is actually intervening in divine autonomy, and thus playing God's role; as such, he could be regarded as a polytheist.¹⁸ In another instance, al-Buḥārī creates one specific chapter to rebut the creeds of the Ḥariḡites, a group that proclaimed that everyone who committed a grave sin would be punished eternally in hell.¹⁹ In a chapter entitled "Sins are from ignorance and a sinner is not a disbeliever unless he worships others along with Allah", al-Buḥārī employs Q 4:48 as the basis for his argument, which clearly states that Allah will forgive every sin except *širk* (polytheism). This clear meaning of the verse was employed by al-Buḥārī to show the falsity of the premise promoted by the Ḥariḡites. Based on al-'Ainī's articulation, the chapter title was designed to refute not only certain group of Ḥariḡites, but also to reproach *al-Rāfiḍa*, *al-Ibādīyya* and other groups that held the same belief.²⁰

15 Scott Lucas, "The Legal Principles of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Buḥārī", p. 299.

16 Qadarism was a movement that promoted the idea of human free will and disputed the concept of divine predestination. According to Van Ess, Becker, and McDonald, this concept was at least partially influenced by Christianity. Wensinck however, contends that the issue might have been raised internally within Islam, and have emerged as consequence of the debate between the Ḥariḡīs and Murḡī's. Qadarī ideas would subsequently form the basis of the Mu'tazilī movement. See A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, New York, Frank Cass, 1965, p. 51-71; Dmitry Frolov, "Freedom and Predestination", *EQ*; Ziauddin Ahmed, "A Survey of the Development of Theology in Islam", *Islamic Studies* 11/2 (1972), 93-111; J. Van Ess, "Kadāriyya", *EI*2.

17 Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. IX, p. 152.

18 While commenting on the *Kitāb al-qadr* (one of the books in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*), he explains the Qadarī creed and suggests that al-Buḥārī narrated a *ḥadīṭ* related to *al-qadr* to show his disagreement with their standpoint. In his work *Ḥalq af'āl al-'ibād*, al-Buḥārī mentioned in detail his views on this heated debate. See Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Fath al-bārī*, vol. XI, p. 490, vol. XIII, p. 495; al-Buḥārī, *Ḥalq af'āl al-'ibād*, Beirut, 1990, p. 25-46.

19 Al-Aṣṣārī, *Maqālat islāmiyyīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Hamid, Beirut, 1990, p. 204.

20 Al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-qārī*, vol. I, p. 203.

On the issue of “the createdness of the Qur’ān”, al-Buḥārī held a unique point of view. Supporting his master Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), al-Buḥārī is reported to have declared that “reciting the Qur’ān is an element of createdness”.²¹ This statement was presumably made by al-Buḥārī as a means of providing an alternative source of thought or reasoning for Muslims. Instead of accepting the doctrine of the Mu’tazilites (the group that champions the concept of the createdness of the Qur’ān), al-Buḥārī appears to have suggested that the element of creation is only applied to humans, not to the words of God, i.e. the Qur’ān. This idea was, however, received negatively by the Muslim community, including some prominent scholars such as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890), Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī (d. 264/877-878) and al-Ḍuhli (d. 252/866).²² At the crux of the disagreement was the meaning of the apparently ambiguous phrase *lafẓ al-Qur’ān* (“word of the Qur’ān”), in which al-Buḥārī was reported to have instead uttered *lafẓi bi al-Qur’ān maḥlūq* (“my recitation of the Qur’ān is created”), where he actually referred to the human act of reading the Qur’ān, his life was immediately at risk.²³ The consequence was swift and dramatic: he was expelled from Bukhara and then imprisoned in Baghdad.²⁴

Not only did he apply his Qur’ānic knowledge in discussions related to legal and creedal issues, al-Buḥārī also sketched historical events in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by using a similar technique. In the Book of Prophets (*Kitāb aḥādīth al-anbiyā’*), Ibn Ḥaḡar described how al-Buḥārī consistently introduced chapters in his book by specific reference to Qur’ānic verses (if, indeed, there existed one

21 This statement indicates he is being consistent regarding the idea of the creation of the act of humans (*ḥalq af’al al-Ibad*); see al-Ḍahabī, *Siyār a’lām al-nubalā’*, edited by Šu’ayb al-Arna’ūt, Beirut, Muassasat al-risala, 1985, vol. xii, p. 454-62; Christopher Melchert, “al-Buḥārī”, *El3*.

22 According to the report of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, both his father Abū Ḥātim and Abū Zur’a stopped accepting *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Buḥārī after hearing of al-Buḥārī’s opinion on this. Al-Ḍahabī and al-Subkī related that this was due to the jealousy of some scholars Nišapur, while in some accounts it is specifically said that it was through Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ḍuhli that al-Buḥārī’s reputation that was rejected. See Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Ġarḥ wa al-ta’dīl*, Hyderabad, Maṭba’at maḡlis dāirat al-ma’ārif al-’uṭmāniyya, 1952, vol. vii, p. 191; al-Ḍahabī, *Siyār a’lām al-nubalā’*, ed. Šu’ayb al-Arna’ūt, Beirut, Mu’assasat al-risala, 1985, vol. xii, p. 462; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-šāfi’iyya al-kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ṭanāhī, n.p., 1993, vol. ii, p. 230.

23 In his *Ṭabaqāt*, al-Subkī articulates in detail the meaning of *al-lafẓ*, between the words of the Qur’ān and reciting the Qur’ān. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. ii, pp. 228-31.

24 Al-Ḍahabī, *Siyār a’lām al-nubalā’*, vol. xii, p. 463; Brown, *The Canonization of al-Buḥārī and Muslim*, p. 270.

which that could be identified as a reference).²⁵ Ḥaṭarī, however, questioned al-Buḥārī's terms of reference in the story of David, for, according to him, al-Buḥārī's interpretation was influenced by *al-isrā'ilīyyāt* (narratives that usually originating in Jewish traditions or Biblical material).²⁶ In the chapter "And remember Our slave David, endued with power", al-Buḥārī cites 38:23, in part to exemplify the Qur'ānic illustration of David's attributes. To articulate this verse, he interprets the word *na'ğa* as "the women" (*al-mar'a*, which is probably an allusion to the story of David and Bathsheba);²⁷ at this point in his explanation, Ḥaṭarī argues against al-Buḥārī's definition of the word, insisting that *na'ğa* means "ewe", not "lady". As a result, Ḥaṭarī interprets sees in this the direct influence of *al-isrā'ilīyyat*.²⁸ Ḥaṭarī's assertion should be considered as *argumentum ex silentio*, since there is no evidence that al-Buḥārī intended to connect the story with the narrative of *al-isrā'ilīyyat*. It is likely that al-Buḥārī was merely offering various meanings of the word, as he mentions both words, "lady" and "ewe", together. On the other hand, this could also represent an indication of the popularity of this story at that particular time, since the Abbasid period was known as a time in which syncretism was widespread as a result of encounters between Muslims and other communities.

If the stories of the prophets are outlined within his specifically Qur'ānic approach, it is worth observing how al-Buḥārī delineates the story of Muḥammad, in which the historical figure is clearly the focal point for his composition of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. In line with the objective of the research, this study will examine only the materials related to the Prophet's early life.

3 Data Analysis and Discussion: Reference to the Prophet's Early Life in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*

Since *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* was not intended to be a biographical work of the Prophet, information about Muḥammad is scattered throughout various books and

²⁵ Ibn Hağar, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, vol. xv, p. 204.

²⁶ Tottoli adds that this term was sometimes used by western scholars to refer to resources related to biblical elements as well; see Roberto Tottoli, "Origin and Use of the Term *Isrā'ilīyyāt* in Muslim Literature", *Arabica* 46/2 (1999), p. 193-210.

²⁷ Tottoli provides a comparison of the similarity between Qur'ānic passage and biblical narrative. See Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 60; Gordon D. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1989, p. 159-60; Isaac Hasson, "David", *EQ*.

²⁸ Sayyid Ahmad Ḥaṭarī, "Manḥağ al-Imām al-Buḥārī fi al-tafsīr min ḥilāl kitābihi al-Ṣaḥīḥ", PhD diss., Umm al-Qura University, 1994, p. 644.

chapters. Using a wealth of detail from the Prophet's biography, Mahdī Rizqulla and Ḥammād illustrate that an adequate sketch of the Prophet's biography can be constructed by merely gathering together information embedded within *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.²⁹ Most of the *sīra*-related material is found in the books *al-Manāqib* (the virtues), *Aṣḥāb al-Nabī* (companions of the Prophet), *Manāqib al-Anṣār* (virtues of *al-Anṣār* "the helpers"), and *al-Mağāzī* (the battles). References to Muḥammad's early life may be summarised thematically as follows:

3.1 *The Prophet's Genealogy*

There are two *ḥadīṭ* related to this subject. The first is Muḥammad's saying: "I have been sent (as a Prophet) in the best of all the generations of Adam's offspring since their Creation". This is located in the chapter revealing the Prophet's attributes (*bāb ṣifat al-nabī*), presumably to show that not only was he chosen from the most propitious genealogical stock, but he was also sent to dwell among one of the most benign and favoured of human generations. However, it is not enough, for the purposes of this thesis, to put forward such a self-congratulatory statement as this in order to prove the true nobility of the Prophet's genealogy. Instead, al-Buḥārī offers other evidence to establish this point. Citing the dialogue between Abū Sufyān and Heraclius in the second *ḥadīṭ*-reference, al-Buḥārī seems to confirm this point through the testimony of one of the Prophet's own adversaries. In a long conversation between the Emperor Heraclius and the community leader of Mecca, both are presented as non-Muslims but nevertheless concede the excellent qualities of the Prophet. According to El-Cheikh, early Islamic sources always portrayed Heraclius in a positive light, depicting him as an ideal and religious leader.³⁰ Moreover, he was even depicted as having accepted and declared Islam as his new faith but nevertheless retracting it later.³¹ Interestingly, al-Ya'qūbī records in his *Ta'riḥ* the content of Heraclius's letter to Muḥammad; he was described as having declared the prophethood of Muḥammad, advising the Romans to accept Islam, and proclaiming his wish to serve the Prophet.³²

29 Mahdī Rizqullah Aḥmad, *al-Sīrat al-nabawīyya fī masādirihī al-asliyya: Dirāsāt tahliliyat*, Riyadh, 1992, p. 105; Ḥammāda, *Maṣādir*, p. 57.

30 Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, "Muḥammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy", *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999), p. 5-21.

31 Roberto Tottoli, "Muslim Traditions against Secular Prostration and Inter-Religious Polemic", *Medieval Encounters*, 5/1, (1999), p. 102.

32 Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḥ al-Ya'qūbī*, Beirut, Ṣarika al-a'lamī li al-matbū'āt, 2010, vol. 1, p. 399.

By placing this specific reference in the first of seven *ḥadīṭ* in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Buḥārī undoubtedly regarded this *ḥadīṭ* as one of the most important.³³ Receiving the recognition of the highest authority of the Byzantine Emperor himself, al-Buḥārī uses the *ḥadīṭ* to legitimise Muḥammad's prophethood. Part of this *ḥadīṭ* was repeated fourteen times subsequently in various chapters of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. The way in which al-Buḥārī presents his analysis, including the minute detail he goes into and his repeated mentioning and restating of key points, suggests the *ḥadīṭ*'s great value from al-Buḥārī's point of view. Compared with similar literature from the same century, this *ḥadīṭ* did not enjoy a similar appreciation as it did from al-Buḥārī. It was only partially narrated in the *Sunan* of Abū Dā'ūd and of al-Tirmidī, while Ibn Mağh does not mention it at all in his *Sunan*.³⁴ The details of the dialogue also seem to be absent from the various works of *sīra* during this period, including the *Sīra* of Ibn Hišām³⁵ and the *Mağāzī* of al-Wāqidī,³⁶ while Ibn Sa'd affords it a only modest presence in his *Ṭabaqāt*.³⁷ It is similarly absent in the *tafsīr* from that same century, such as the *Tafsīr* of Yaḥyā ibn Salām (d. 200/815), 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/826), and al-Tustarī (d. 283/896). It is almost certain, therefore, that al-Buḥārī, by recording the *ḥadīṭ* in detail, placing it near the beginning of his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, and citing the same passage several times, is endeavouring to convey the distinctive and irrevocable message to the reader that Heraclius's confirmed Muḥammad's prophethood.

33 Burge confirms that this *ḥadīṭ* plays a significant role in delivering the objective of the chapter in which it is found; see S.R. Burge, "Reading between the Lines: The Compilation of Ḥadīṭh and the Authorial Voice", *Arabica* 58/3 (2011), p. 186-88.

34 See Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan*, ed. al-Arnaūt, N.p., Dār al-risāla al-'ilmiyya, 2009, vol. IV, p. 335; al-Tirmidī, *Sunan*, Cairo, 1975, vol. V, p. 69.

35 According to Guillaume, this *ḥadīṭ* was mentioned in al-Tabarī. It seems to resonate with Ibn Hišām's abbreviation of Ibn Iṣāq's *Sīra*, the account of which has been omitted. See Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 654-57.

36 There is another story with a different character and narrative plot that is reported by al-Wāqidī. In this account, Heraclius reportedly sent his ambassador from the tribe of Ġassān to observe Muḥammad. This man then went back to Heraclius and delivered his observations, and was also said to have been profoundly influenced by Muḥammad's preaching, telling tribe to follow Islam. See al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Mağāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones, Beirut, Dār al-a'lamī, 1989, vol. III, p. 1018-19.

37 The story of Muḥammad sending a letter to persuade Heraclius to embrace Islam is mentioned here, but omits certain details of the dialogue between Heraclius and Abū Sufyān. See Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. I, p.199.

3.2 *Birth and Childhood*

As far as can be established, no *ḥadīṭ* in al-Buḥārī's *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* refers to Muḥammad's birth. The author does mention the incident of Allah protecting Mecca from the invasion of Abraha with his elephants, but it was not done in such a way as to demonstrate a connection with the event of the Prophet's birth.³⁸ Al-Buḥārī does, however, relate an account of Muḥammad's wet nurse, Tuwayba, in which, he writes, she was a servant of the Prophet's uncle, Abū Lahb. Tuwayba was freed by Abū Lahb soon after she had delivered good tidings about Muḥammad's birth to Abū Lahb, and, later, the account reveals how she breastfed the Prophet.³⁹ However, when Muḥammad began to preach about Islam, Abū Lahb was among his fiercest detractors, but due to his previous kindness to Tuwayba his chastisements in the Afterlife were reduced dramatically by God. In *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, apart from narrating the *ḥadīṭ* about Tuwayba, al-Buḥārī also gives further details about how Abū Lahb's punishment was reduced by God due to his merciful act of freeing Tuwayba. Recounting the story on the authority of 'Urwa, Abū Lahb, after his death, was said to have come to his relative in a dream.⁴⁰ Even though the *ḥadīṭ* provides us with significant detail in a biography of Muḥammad's early life, it does not convey this within a specific historical context. The *ḥadīṭ* is mentioned five times in various chapters, but each reference is cited within a specifically legal framework. It is noteworthy that, by adducing the *ḥadīṭ* of Tuwayba, al-Buḥārī seems to demonstrate his high admiration of the Prophet by conveying how, even though

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- 38 In this *ḥadīṭ*, the Prophet is reported to have said: "Allah held back the elephant (or killing) from Mecca". This was mentioned the chapters on: (1) The writing of knowledge; (2) How the *luqta* at Mecca is to be announced; and (3) The relative of the person killed has the right to choose one of two forms of compensation. In the chapter on "The conditions of *jihād* and peace treaties", al-Buḥārī narrated another *ḥadīṭ* depicting the story of his camel becoming stubborn, and unwilling to move. His Companions tried to get the camel to move but it refused, and they said to the Prophet that the camel had become stubborn. The Prophet replied: "*Al-Qaṣwā* [the camel's title] has not become stubborn, for stubbornness is not her habit; however, she was stopped by Him who stopped the elephant". All of the *ḥadīṭ* related to "the companions of the elephant" (*aṣḥāb al-fil*) narrated above had no connection to the event of the Prophet's birth. As discussed previously, later scholars began to make connections between the invasion of *aṣḥāb al-fil* and the sign of Muhammad's prophethood; see Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, p. 33, vol. 3, p. 125, and vol. 3, p. 193.
- 39 The letter *fa* in the *ḥadīṭ* connotes a consequence form that, according to Ibn Ḥaḡar, indicates that Muḥammad was breastfed by Tuwayba after she was freed. In other accounts of *sīra*, the incident is presented *vice versa*. See Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Fath al-bārī*, vol. 1, p. 123.
- 40 Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. III, p. 169, vol. VII, p. 9-11, and vol. VII, p. 67.

Muḥammad was a baby, he was portrayed as having the ability to be the cause of eliciting divine mercy, namely: (1) Tuwayba, Muḥammad's wet-nurse, was freed from slavery after the Prophet's birth; and (2) How God's divine mercy can reach every creature, even his brutal adversary Abū Lahb.

3.3 *Being a Shepherd*

Al-Buḥārī also included the *ḥadīth* that relates an account of Muḥammad being a shepherd in his adolescence.⁴¹ In a chapter specifically regarding this, the Prophet was reported to have said, "Allah did not send any prophet who did not shepherd sheep". His companions asked him, "Did you do the same?" The Prophet replied, "Yes, I used to shepherd the sheep of the people of Mecca for some *Qarārīt* (a type of currency)".⁴² The Prophet's admission that he had been a shepherd is also recorded in two other chapters, within more detailed contexts of the story.⁴³ Carimokam suggests that the purpose of portraying Muḥammad as a shepherd was to create a lineage connection between Muḥammad and two other Biblical figures, Moses and Jesus,⁴⁴ while Rogerson illustrates it as reminiscent of a Jewish figure, Akiba ben Joseph.⁴⁵ Based on his analysis, John Adair elucidates further that the depiction of Muḥammad as a shepherd implies an image of consummate leadership. The model of the shepherd is an ancient metaphor employed by classical scribes such as Homer and Xenophon in recognition of effective and honourable governance or leadership. Moreover, according to Adair, David, the King, was also given the same

41 In the *sīra*, information about Muḥammad's career as a shepherd is usually reported after the death of his grandfather, when he was living with his uncle, aged around eight, or slightly older. Some historians, however, narrate that Muḥammad look after sheep as early as his time with Ḥalīma al-Sa'diyya, when he was about five years old. See Akram al-'Umarī, *al-Sīrat al-nabawīyya al-ṣaḥīḥa*, Medina, 1994, p. 106; Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, ed. Mustafā al-Saqā, Cairo, Maṭba'at al-bābī al-halabī wa awlādu, 1955, vol. 1, p. 167.

42 Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. III, p. 88.

43 In the chapter on *al-kabāt* (the leaves of *arāk* tree), Ḡābir said: "We were with Allah's Messenger collecting *al-kabāt* at Mār al-zahrān. The Prophet said, 'Collect the black ones, for they are better'. Somebody said, 'O Allah's Messenger, have you ever looked after sheep?' He said, 'There has been no prophet but has shepherded them'". See Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. IV, p. 157 and vol. VII, p. 81.

44 Sahaja Carimokam, *Muḥammad and the People of the Book*, Bloomington IN, Xlibris, 2010, p. 32.

45 Barnaby Rogerson, *The Prophet Muḥammad: A Biography*, USA, HiddenSpring, 2003, p. 80.

attribute by the Psalmist.⁴⁶ It is no wonder that the authors of the *sīra*, such as Ibn Hišām and Ibn Saʿd, also included this *ḥadīth* in their works, presumably to establish for Muḥammad a rigorous and solid preparatory course of leadership, before entering prophetic office.⁴⁷ It is difficult, however, to prove that al-Buḥārī's objectives and emphasis were the same as those of a historian, since his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is designed as a reference for an Islamic legal compendium. Given al-Buḥārī's high standards in selecting *ḥadīth* judiciously, it is fair to assume that the image of prophets as shepherds is a particularly fitting and widely-known narrative at that particular point in history.

3.4 *Early Signs of Prophethood*

Al-Buḥārī relates three different incidents that occurred during Muḥammad's early life that later scholars employed to illustrate God's guidance upon him before he became a prophet.⁴⁸ This can be classified as God: (1) inspiring his theological thought; (2) directing his physical appearance; and (3) assisting his ritual performance. The first part can be inferred from an incident that occurred between Muḥammad and Zayd b. ʿAmr, the prominent *Ḥanīf*.⁴⁹ According to the *ḥadīth*, a meal was served to the Prophet, but he refused to eat it. The meal was then presented to Zayd b. ʿAmr, but he also rejected it and said that he would not eat anything sacrificed to an Arab's idol (*al-nuṣub*).⁵⁰ The *ḥadīth* evidently demonstrates the Prophet's theological principles in refusing to eat anything that had been slaughtered as a sacrifice for an idol. Rubin, however, contests the accuracy of al-Buḥārī's narration. According to him, based on al-Ḥākim's version, it was in fact Muḥammad himself who sacrificed the animal on a sacred sacrificial stone, roasted it, put it in a bag, and offered it to Zayd b. ʿAmr; but Zayd refused to eat it. He concludes that the textual alteration

46 John Adair, *The Leadership of Muḥammad*, London, Kogan Page, 2010, p. 17-23. See also Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muḥammad*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 17.

47 See Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, vol. 1, p. 167.

48 For example, al-Ḥarqūṣī relates the *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad's meeting with Zayd b. ʿAmr in the chapter of the Prophet's *ʾiṣma* (immunity from committing any sin), and Abū Nuʾaym al-Aṣbahānī and al-Bayhaqī locate the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet's *izār* (loincloth) in the chapter regarding the Prophet's *ʾiṣma* and God's preventing the Prophet from committing sin. See Abū Nuʾaym al-Aṣbahānī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, ed. Muḥammad Rawwās, Beirut, Dār al-nafāʾis, vol. 1, p. 189; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Amīn Qalʿaḡī, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1985, vol. 11, p. 32.

49 See Uri Rubin, "Hanif", *EQ*.

50 In the Qurʾān, the word *al-nuṣub* is typically associated with an idol. See Gerald Hawting, "Idols and Images", *EQ*.

came about in order to fit the developing Islamic concept of *ʿiṣma* (the Prophet's immunity from committing any sin). And it is reasonable to assume, as he does, that Ibn Hišām omitted the entire story from his recension of Ibn Iṣāq's *Sīra* to avoid any possible perception of Muḥammad's pre-Islamic paganism.⁵¹ Rubin's argument appears convincing. Scholars of the same century, such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Dāʿūd al-Tayyālīsī (d. 204/819), al-Fākihī (d. 272/885), al-Bazzār (d. 292/904) and Ibn Sa'd, narrate the same story, signifying that Muḥammad was, in fact, the one who offered the meal to Zayd.⁵² Yet to conclude that al-Buḥārī amended the text is difficult because he also narrates the second version, the version that relates that Muḥammad was the one who offered the meal.⁵³ If he had indeed intended to alter the text, would it not have been sensible to have excluded the second? By narrating two versions of the story, al-Buḥārī appears to offer an alternative reading, permitting the reader to contemplate and decide, while he, at the same time, maintains his respect for and honour to the Prophet by avoiding making any possible impression of the Prophet committing a sin.

Apart from depicting Muḥammad as acquiring pure theological thought, al-Buḥārī also recounts the *ḥadīṭ* that points towards God's sanction and direction in respect of Muḥammad's physical appearance and modesty in matters of dress. In the chapter on *faḍl Makka* (the virtue of Mecca) and the rebuilding of the Ka'ba, al-Buḥārī relates that Muḥammad and his uncle, al-'Abbās, participated with the Qurayš in the process of reconstructing the Ka'ba. The young Muḥammad helped them by carrying stones. As Muḥammad fulfilled his task, al-'Abbās suggested to him that he should take off his *izār* (loincloth or waistcloth) and put on his *raqba* (on his shoulder or around his neck)⁵⁴ to protect his shoulder (or neck) from bruises. Following his uncle's advice, Muḥammad took off his cloth; yet as soon as he did so, he collapsed, gazing up at the sky. Other scholars of the same century employed this incident to illustrate divine intervention over Muḥammad's physical appearance and modesty in matters of dress. Al-Azraqī (d. 250/864), for instance, relates that, while lifting his

51 Uri Rubin, *The Eye of The Beholder*, New Jersey, Darwin Press, 1995, p. 76-81.

52 See Aḥmad, *Musnad*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣākir, Cairo, Dār al-ḥadīṭ, 1995, vol. v, p. 38, 151, 379; al-Tayyālīsī, *Musnad*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Muḥsin, Cairo, Dār ḥiḡr, vol. i, p. 189; al-Fākihī, *Aḥkbar Makka*, ed. 'Abd al-Mālik 'Abdullāh, Beirut, Dār ḥidr, vol. iv, p. 82; al-Bazzār, *Musnad*, ed. Mahfūz al-Raḥmān, Medina, Maktabat al-'Ulūm wa al-ḥikām, 1988, vol. iv, p. 93; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. iii, p. 291.

53 Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. vii, p. 91.

54 Ibn Ḥaḡar interprets it as *'ātiqa*, which means shoulder, although in another version of the story, the narrator used the word *a'nāqina* ("our neck") rather than *raqba*. See Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Fath al-bārī*, vol. iii, p. 442.

clothes, the Prophet heard a voice saying “O Muḥammad! (Cover) your ‘aura (private parts).”⁵⁵ Furthermore, Ibn Abī Āṣim narrates a report that gives further details to the incident. According to his version, after taking off his clothes, Muḥammad fainted; yet once he became conscious again, he explained that he saw a man in white who told him to cover his body. By placing this *ḥadīth* in the chapter discussing early signs of Muḥammad’s prophethood, Ibn Abī Āṣim (d. 287/900) demonstrated his perception with crystal clarity: it was through God’s intervention and assistance.⁵⁶ Similarly, Ibn Hišām concurred with Ibn Abī Āṣim, as he included this *ḥadīth* in the chapter on God’s protection (*‘isma*) during the Prophet’s childhood.⁵⁷ Even though al-Buḥārī locates the *ḥadīth* in chapters that bear no relation to Muḥammad’s prophetic signs, by citing the *ḥadīth* he agrees implicitly with the story and thus preserves his admiration for Muḥammad’s early life.

Other early signs of Muḥammad’s prophetic capacity and facility are demonstrable in his unique ritual performance. Apart from depicting Muḥammad as being protected by God from the errors of committing sin and dressing inappropriately, al-Buḥārī also narrates a *ḥadīth* that demonstrates how his ritual conduct was also divinely-guided. Muḥammad is said to have joined the Qurayš in performing the *ḥaġġ* (pilgrimage). One of the requirements for accomplishing *ḥaġġ* is by performing a *wuqūf* (standing [before God]). It is standard practice for Qurayš to perform *wuqūf* in al-Muzdalifah, a specific site designated for the Qurayš, while other Arabs would perform *wuqūf* in ‘Arafa. In contrast with the Qurayš practice, Muḥammad, according to al-Buḥārī, performed *wuqūf* in ‘Arafa.⁵⁸ According to al-Azraqī and Ibn Hišām, the practice that was implemented by the Prophet was the original and true one, as it was a legacy of Ibrahim’s rite, while the Qurayš defiantly modified the ritual.⁵⁹

3.5 Qur’ānic References to the Prophet’s Early Life in al-Ṣaḥīḥ

The way al-Buḥārī dealt with the subject of legal, theological and historical discourse demonstrates the profundity and uniqueness of his Qur’ānic thought. Al-Buḥārī adopted and developed a similar approach when he met the challenges of the *ḥadīth* relating to the Prophet’s early life. His method apparently

55 Al-Azraqī, *Aḥbār Makka wa mā ġā’a fihā min al-aṭār*, ed. Ruṣḍī al-Ṣālih, Beirut, Dār al-Andalus, n.d., vol. I, p. 157.

56 Ibn Abī Āṣim, *al-Awā’il*, ed. Muḥammad ibn Nāsir, Kuwait, Dar al-ḥulafā li al-kitāb al-islāmī, n.d., p. 98.

57 Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, vol. I, p. 183.

58 Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. II, p. 162, vol. VI, p. 27.

59 Azraqī, *Aḥbār Makka*, vol. I, p. 76; Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, vol. I, p. 199.

aims to extract the gems hidden in the *ḥadīṭ* with painstaking intellectual precision and clarity of vision. Even though his work is richly furnished with informative *ḥadīṭ* illustrating Muḥammad's early life and underpinned with a deep understanding of Qur'ānic knowledge, al-Buḥārī appears, nevertheless, not to connect Qur'ānic verses directly to the Prophet's early life. As far as can be established in the present study, there are no Qur'ānic verses found or employed to establish a connection between scripture and Muḥammad's pre-prophetic days. Al-Buḥārī's methodology is obviously different from that of Ibn Rabban, who produced a work on the prophethood of Muhammad in the same century with a considerable number of Qur'ānic references in it.⁶⁰

4 Conclusion

It is worthy of note that the same verse used by scholars of this century as an allusion to Muḥammad's life is also embedded in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. However, interestingly, al-Buḥārī presents it from a unique angle, offering us an alternate interpretation, one which demonstrates most ably his unique Qur'ānic elucidation. For example, al-Tirmidī employs Q 94:1 as a reference to the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast, Ibn Rabban used Q 93:6-8 to illustrate Muḥammad's early condition,⁶¹ and al-Ġāḥiẓ cited Q 105 as an allusion to the invasion of Abraha.⁶² All these verses are adduced by al-Buḥārī in his *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* without, apparently, connecting the link to Muḥammad's particular historical circumstances. Some suggestions may be offered regarding reasons for this:

1. Al-Buḥārī had extremely rigorous standards for selecting *ḥadīṭ*. The way al-Buḥārī set up strict conditions that needed to be fulfilled before accepting a *ḥadīṭ* in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is exceptionally demanding.⁶³ One may well imagine this from his own testimony. Of around 300,000 *ḥadīṭ* that he

60 Ahmad Sanusi Azmi *et al.*, "From Christianity to Islam: An Analysis of Ibn Rabban's Approach towards Sira Nabawiyya", *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 11/1 (2017), p. 1-5.

61 Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, ed. A. Mingana, Manchester, 1922, p. 57.

62 See Sa'īd Ḥusayn Maṣṣūr, "The World-View of al-Ġāḥiẓ in *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*", PhD diss., McGill University, 1968, p. 198-200.

63 His strict criteria of selecting the *ḥadīṭ* led *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* to be highly celebrated. See al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrib al-rāwī*, ed. Naẓar Muḥammad al-Fariyābī, Riyadh, Maktabat al-kawthar, 1414/1993-94, vol. I, p. 96-107.

preserved, only around 7000 were included in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.⁶⁴ If he had been more lenient and flexible in accepting *ḥadīth*, some traditions that connect Qur'ānic verse with the Prophet's early life might have been included in his magnum opus. For example, Q 26:219 has been perceived as referring to Muḥammad's genealogy. It was narrated by Ibn Sa'd in his *Ṭabaqāt* on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās. Yet the reason behind why this kind of *ḥadīth* was not selected to be included in his work seems to be that one of the narrators of this *ḥadīth* was not recognised by other *ḥadīth* scholars.

2. Al-Buḥārī's critical exegetical approach when dealing with the interpretation of the Qur'an. This can be construed from the way he organized his discussion in the Book of *Tafsīr*. While his contemporary al-Tirmidī equated Q 94:1 with the "opening" or "expansion" of Muḥammad's breast, al-Buḥārī arrived at a different interpretation and perspective.⁶⁵ He narrated only Ibn 'Abbās's interpretation, which clearly represents his own ideas. According to the *ḥadīth* of Ibn 'Abbās, this verse denotes metaphorically, not literally, how Allah "expands" Muḥammad's breast to accept the Islamic revelation. For Al-Buḥārī, it seemed not to hold any bearing or reference to a particular historical incident.⁶⁶ It was most likely as a result of his painstakingly rigorous criteria for selecting *ḥadīth*, along with his upholding of meticulous exegetical methods, that he maintained a distance from the tendency to preserve views such as those expounded by al-Tirmidī.
3. Al-Buḥārī's priority and focus was on legal clarification, his endeavours being the result of his perceived need to serve a community's need at a particular period in history. This is probably the reason why the *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad and his wet-nurse Tuwayba was presented within an explicitly legal framework, rather than being cited as a historical episode. In

64 According to al-ʿIrāqī, on the authority of al-Firabrī, al-Buḥārī is said to have memorised 300,000 *ḥadīth*; however, according to al-Zarkaṣī, this statement was made by al-Buḥārī merely to illustrate his massive store of information about *ḥadīth* and was not intended to denote the exact number. See Ibn Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, ed. Bint Ṣāṭī, Cairo, Wizārat al-taḳāfa, 1989, vol. 1, p. 163; al-ʿIrāqī, *al-Taḳyīd wa al-idāḥ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ʿUṭmān, Medina: al-Maktabat al-salafiyya, 1969, vol. 1, p. 27; Ibn Ḥaḡar al-Asqalānī, *al-Nukat ʿalā Ibn Ṣalāḥ*, Medina, al-Ġāmiʿa al-islāmiyya, 1404/1984, vol. 1, p. 297; al-Zarkaṣī, *al-Nukat*, ed. Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn b. Muḥammad Bilā Furayḡ, Riyadh, Aḍwā al-salaf, 1998, vol. 1, p. 178.

65 Tirmidī, *Sunan*, vol. v, p. 299.

66 Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. vi, p. 172.

contrast with al-Buḥārī's focus and emphasis, Ibn Hišām connects the Tuwayba incident with the Q 28:12, apparently to ascribe and underpin a solid historical value to the event.⁶⁷ As a biographer of the Prophet's life, Ibn Hišām presumably needs to establish a firm foundation and relation between the Prophet and the Qur'ān, a priority which differs completely from al-Buḥārī's main concern.

Holding the status of "the most authentic books on the earth after the Quran",⁶⁸ *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by al-Buḥārī provides us with an alternative interpretation of the connection between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's early life. Based on information embedded within its covers, it is arguably fair to conclude that the connection between Muḥammad's early life and the Qur'ān is not as solid and seamless as has been believed in later centuries.

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67 Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, vol. 1, p. 160.

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