Synopses and Lists
Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World

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Cover image: A fragment of a numbered and tabulated list of 22 biblical and rabbinic passages relating to the Sabbath, each referenced by means of a short lemma (T-S D1.76 from the Cambridge Genizah Collection). Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
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REVISITING LISTS IN EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY[1]

Teresa Bernheimer

Despite the impressive advances in tools to access and analyse the source material, and new possibilities in the field of digital humanities, the controversies regarding the origins and early history of Islamic historical texts remain unsolved. The debate about the reliability of the source material, allegedly compiled from earlier sources, but extant only in later synthetic forms, has long dominated the field. As I have written on in more detail elsewhere, the most controversial question in the field of Islamic historiography has long been: to what extent can sources compiled decades or centuries after the events they claim to describe be used to reconstruct the origins and early history of Islam?[2] While the answers to this question continue to be varied, even the most sceptical historians have usually regarded lists as early and authentic. What can, moreover, be agreed upon is that lists form a crucial part of early Islamic historiography: they provide the

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[2] Bernheimer and Bayhoum-Daou, 'Introduction', 1.

broad frameworks of organisation of our sources, and are ubiquitous in their content.[3]

Indeed, the common denominator of the three main categories of Islamic historiography suggested by Chase Robinson—biography, prosopography, and chronography—is the "list framework."[4] Biographical and prosopographical works are essentially lists of people fleshed out with additional information;[5] chronography is thought to have grown out of lists of caliphs, which were

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[3] The corpus of early Islamic historiography is vast, and its formation a complex phenomenon. A good introductory summary to the topic is Humphreys, 'Taʾrīkh': "The bulk of early Arabic historical texts (or more precisely, texts which claim to be early) have not come down to us in their original form but are only preserved as citations and paraphrases in a corpus of digests and compilations assembled between the mid-3rd/9th century and the early 4th/10th century.... It is true that much apparently archaic material can be dug out of the encyclopaedias and biographical dictionaries of later centuries, but this does not alter the nature of the problem. Given the present state of the evidence, then, we can determine what Arabic historiography had become by the end of Islam's first three centuries, but recovering the earlier phases of historical thought and writing has proved an extremely elusive problem."

[4] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 55ff.

[5] How kinship lines are drawn, who is included and excluded, is more a matter of design than it first appears—particularly in the Islamic context, where the whole genealogical arrangement is built around Islam and its Prophet; see Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids*, 16. For the particular problems of Islamic prosopography, see Ahmed, *Religious Elite*, 6–21.

known from Ancient Near Eastern tradition and were circulating in the contemporaneous Syriac sources.[6]

Beyond these broad organisational frameworks, the ubiquity of lists of all kinds is a striking feature of early Islamic historical works. In the following contribution, I will revisit these 'lists as content': I want to rethink lists in early Islamic historiographical works as textual practice, that is, as a form of textual communication that is integral to scholarly writing and the creation of a historical narrative. Lists are not simply enumerations of people, events, or tax payments, but an important narrative strategy in the overall historiographic project of early Islam. Understanding lists as textual practice highlights their importance in the forging of a new cultural narrative and memory, and their function as a principal scholarly form.[7] Indeed, the long tradition

[6] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 47: "The scheme itself may be explained as an expansion of skeletal lists of caliphs, which we know from the Syriac tradition to have been circulating in the middle of the eighth century, and whose use in the mature tradition is frequently betrayed. Indeed, listing—not only caliphs, but also governors, judges, and other officials—appears to have been among the *akhbārīs*' earliest enthusiasms, and one which survived the rise of the synthetic forms of the ninth century." For questions of origins and influence between early Islamic and Syriac lists, see Borrut, 'Vanishing Syria' (with a Syriac caliphal list at pp. 48–49, which appears to be based on an Umayyad era Arabic-Islamic list).

[7] For a discussion of 'cultural memory' in premodern societies, see Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*. In the historical study of Islam, some recent studies have notably engaged with memory studies: Borrut, *Entre mémoir et pouvir*; Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran*; and

of lists in the writings of Near Eastern societies forms an important backdrop to this discussion.[8]

Before examining two examples of lists in some of the main historiographical works in more detail—lists of those who died in the battle of the Ḥarra, and the administrative lists for the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik—I will briefly recapitulate how lists have thus far been understood in the scholarship, and offer some alternative perspectives.[9]

1.0. Lists as Content

Provocatively, one might say that early Islamic historiography could be reduced to two forms of writing: reports and lists. Reports (in the historical context usually called *khabar*, pl. *akhbār*; in the religious or legal context usually called *ḥadīth*, pl. *aḥādīth*)

Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces under Early Islam*. See also Borrut and Cobb, *Umayyad Legacies*, for a brief introductory discussion.

[8] For the importance of lists since the dawn of scholarly writing, see the contribution of Enrique Jiménez in this volume.

[9] For the purpose of this contribution, I have chosen a few representative chronographies for close examination. They are universal (rather than local) histories, and date to the formative period of Islamic historiography, usually taken to end in the early tenth century. These are: the *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* of Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb (d. 245/860), edited by Ilse Lichtenstädter; the *Taʾrīkh* of Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ (d. 240/854), edited by Akram ʿUmarī, by Suhayl Zakkār, and by M. N. Fawwāz; the *Taʾrīkh* of al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 283/897), edited by M. Th. Houtsma; the *Ansāb al-ashrāf* of al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), edited by W. Madelung (vol. 2) and by M. Schloessinger (vol. 4b); and the monumental *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk* by Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), edited by de Goeje et al.; there is also a 39-volume translation of this final work.

have received lots of attention, both in medieval Arabic and modern scholarship. They are composite of an *isnād* (the chain of transmission, itself a list—in the historical *akhbār,* the *isnād* is often incomplete or altogether absent) and a *matn* (the body text, which may also contain a list). The study of *akhbār* and *aḥādīth,* collectively known as the *ʿilm al-rijāl* 'science of the transmitters' (as the reliability of the transmission became a central issue), produced whole libraries of supporting literature, including the genesis of entire genres, such as biographical dictionaries of all kinds.[10]

Lists, on the other hand, have received little attention—in both medieval Arabic scholarship and in the modern context. Indeed, there is no clear technical term in Arabic for a list: the term might be *tasmiya, shajara, jadwal, qāʾima,* or another word, depending on its shape, purpose, and content.[11] Where they have been the subject of scholarly attention, lists have usually been mined for information (particularly the prosopographical and biographical lists), rather than examined for their significance in the overall corpus.

The main explanation in the scholarship for the existence of lists in Islamic historical writing has focused on their origins.

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[10] For a discussion of the *isnād* as a list and recent scholarship on *aḥādīth,* see the contribution of Maroussia Bednarkiewicz in this volume. For the development of biographical literature, see Muranyi, 'Zur Entwicklung der *ʿilm al-riǧāl*-Literatur'.

[11] The meaning of these terms may not have been stable over time, either; thanks to Julia Bray for suggesting some of these terms.

The explanation seems to be that lists are remnants of government records that were compiled from the earliest days of Arab rule, and especially from the Umayyad period (661–750 CE); these lists found their way into the composite historical works of the Abbasid period, where they were either included as lists or fleshed out with *akhbār.* As Robert Hoyland summarises:

> There had been an increasing emphasis, during the first Abbasid decades, on giving some chronological order to narratives of early Islam. Conversely and coincidentally, there was a move to flesh out *lists compiled from government records that had been kept since mid-Umayyad times, regarding the names of holders of high office and notable events for each year* [emphasis added]. From such, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 742) had drawn up a list of 'The Years of the Caliphs'; soon after, such works included pilgrimage leaders, governors, and judges. Names of those who had fallen in battle may also have been inscribed. Then, in the early 9th century, al-Haytham b. 'Adī (d. 822) and Abū Ḥassan al-Ziyādī (d. 857) composed a 'History according to Years' (*Ta'rīkh 'alā sinīn*), presumably a compendium of year by year notices. Finally, with the 'History' of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ (d. 854) and especially the 'History of the Prophets and Kings' of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī we see a full marriage between literary narrative (*akhbār*) and official annals and records (*ta'rīkh*).[12]

A brief search among the extant documents dated to the early Islamic period indeed reveals a great number of lists. The Arabic Papyrology Database, currently the most comprehensive database for early Arabic documents, gives over 1,300 items classified

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[12] Hoyland, 'Historiography in the First Abbasid Century', 215–16.

as 'list, account'.[13] Among the documents dated to the first centuries of Islamic rule, there are lists of people or goods; number
lists (recording payment sums or weights, and so on); and lists of
place names (villages that paid a certain tax). Two fascinating
examples, both dated to the seventh century, are a bilingual
Greek–Arabic papyrus that gives a list of villages in the al-
Bahnasā region where alms payments had been distributed to the
poor and needy;[14] and a long (three-folio) papyrus listing names
of people according to different (tribal?) groups, possibly relating
to military payments.[15]

  Clearly, many of the early Arabic list documents are records
of some sort of administrative concern (tax registers of various
kinds, registers of those who received alms payments or paid a
certain tax, expenses for the detachment of soldiers, and so on),

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[13] This number includes documents written on materials of all kinds,
and for the entire period covered by the database; see https://www.
apd.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/apd/show_new.jsp. Indeed, there might be
many more, which for some reason were classified in another category.
I am grateful to Michail Hradek and Leonora Sanego for additional references on the documentary sources.

[14] P.Khalili inv. 68 recto. The document was edited by Khan, *Arabic Papyri*, 49–56.

[15] P.Mil.Vogl. 6. This unusual document was edited by Grohmann, 'Arabische Papyri', 252–59. For a discussion of the document, see also
Sijpesteijn, 'Archival Mind', 165; and Sijpesteijn, 'Army Economics'
(where she suggests at p. 256 that the document "might be part of a
dīwān").

reflecting, as Petra Sijpesteijn has argued, the "Muslim bureau-
cratic instinct."[16] What is important to note for the present pur-
poses, however, is that few, if any, of these list documents have
actually been related to lists in the composite historical works.[17]
Clearly, there is more to the ubiquitous inclusion of lists in early
Islamic historiography than pure administrative interest.

Indeed, there are a great many lists in the early Islamic his-
toriographic works that serve no obvious administrative purpose
at all. For instance, one important work of early Islamic histori-
ography is the *Taʾrīkh* ('History') of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī (d. after
295/908), a caliphal history of the later ninth century that is
striking in its clear authorial voice.[18] It includes genealogical lists
(such as the children of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, a forefather of the
prophet Muḥammad), lists of suras revealed in Mecca or Medina
(2:32–33, 43), lists of battles, and lists of those who participated
or died in them. There are also lists of missions to foreign rulers
(2:82), lists of scribes (2:88), and lists of the wives of the Prophet
(between twenty-one and twenty-three women; 2:93), those who

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[16] Sijpesteijn, 'Archival Mind', 165.

[17] How documents generally relate to the composite historical works is
a subject for urgent further examination. In al-Yaʿqūbī's *Taʾrīkh*, for in-
stance, the account of the drawing up of the stipend registers (*dīwān*,
pl. *dawāwīn)* under ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appears to have been pieced
together from various sources. If among these sources there were actual
documents is unclear; in any case, documents or fragments of docu-
ments of ʿUmar's *dīwān* are not known to be extant. See al-Yaʿqūbī,
Taʾrīkh, 2:175 (translation, 3:783).

[18] For a discussion of the distinctively Shiʿi authorial voice, see Anthony,
'Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī'.

resembled the Prophet (2:131), and the Fatimas who bore the Prophet (2:135). What is striking in these lists is that they are all vested in the creation of a new Islamic world view—at times describing it (such as the list of the garrison cities in the reign of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 2:176), but at the same time clearly also creating and delineating it (as in the list of religious scholars that he includes at the end of each caliph's reign).[19]

While the lists in al-Yaʿqūbī's work are impressive, the master list-maker among the early historians is Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb (d. 245/860), a ninth-century scholar whose *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* is one of the earliest surviving attempts to arrange *akhbār* chronologically and place them in a broader historical context.[20] It is full of curious lists: there is a list of men who lost their eye in battle; one of people who limped; lists of people whose mother was a Christian or Abyssinian woman; lists of people who bought their freedom; one of all those who were the Prophet's relations only by the fact that they were related to one of the Prophet's wives; lists of women who had three husbands or more (indeed of great interest to understand certain kinship networks that are usually hidden in the patrilineal genealogies);

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[19] Though outside the scope of this paper, it should be noted that the lists in the first part of al-Yaʿqūbī's work, on the pre-Islamic period, are also part of this definition/creation project. Here al-Yaʿqūbī includes wide-ranging and often curious lists, such as lists of books by Hippocrates (1:107; translation, 2:360), lists of Yemeni tribes (1:229; 2:508ff.), and a long list of the names of the poets of the Arabs (1:304; 2:586), to mention but a few.

[20] See Tayyara, 'Ibn Ḥabīb's *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*', which examines Ibn Ḥabīb's role in the formation of Islamic universal histories.

lists of women who did homage to the Prophet, and women among the *mushrikūn* (six women who did not become Muslims together with their husbands); lists of the sons-in-law of the caliphs; lists of people who were crucified, and those whose heads were cut off; and a list of the *rāwīs* of Imraʾ al-Qays. Ilse Lichtenstädter, who first edited the *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* in 1939, notes that there are so many lists in Ibn Ḥabīb's works that he seems to have written "for the sake of classifying and catalogueing [*sic*] his material in a systematical way."[21]

But was the classifying and cataloguing of material really the main purpose of such lists? Lists organise and structure information, thus appearing to be exhaustively inclusive, or ruthlessly exclusive; but in fact they are neither. They also give a certain 'scientific' character to the narrative, they appear to give 'data'—"thereby reducing the proportion of uncertain or ambiguous knowledge," as Lichtenstädter concludes in her study of the *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*.[22] But of course, then as now, data are far from unambiguous.

Julia Bray suggests that Ibn Ḥabīb's many lists were meant "to throw up a new order of data, relational as opposed to narrative or declarative."[23] In her examination of lists in the *Kitāb al-*

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[21] Lichtenstädter, 'Muḥammad ibn Ḥabîb', 4.

[22] Cited in Bray, 'Lists and Memory', 211. Bray also notes on lists: "The mental reflexes which they (i.e., lists) harness in the reader are not entirely spontaneous; indeed, lists often cut across the grain of familiar, lazy thought and are a form of conceptual training, or an attempt at it" (p. 214).

[23] Bray, 'Lists and Memory', 222.

Muḥabbar and in Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) *Kitāb al-Maʿārif*, a fasci-
nating work of the late ninth century generally considered more
of a literary than a historical work (though its explicit purpose is
to provide a historical handbook), Bray suggests that we should
understand lists as mnemonics—that is, systems for improving
and assisting the memory: "They tell us what it is essential that
we should know, and are structured to help us memorize it."[24]
Lists, Bray says, are part of the "attempt to fashion a new kind of
cultural memory."[25] In the context of Islamic historiography, this
may indeed be the point: the forging of a cultural memory that
relates all narrative, of whatever form or genre, to the 'covenant,
betrayal, and redemption' paradigm that underlies Islamic histo-
riography.[26]

To illustrate differences and congruences in the list mate-
rial and their role in the construction of narrative, I want to look
at two examples in more detail: the lists of those who were killed
in the battle of the Ḥarra; and the lists of those who led the pil-
grimage for the reign of the famous Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Ma-
lik (d. 705), the builder of the Dome of the Rock, and in many

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[24] Bray, 'Lists and Memory', 212–13: "The whole of Ibn Qutayba's *al-
Maʿārif* claims to be mnemonic." See also Bellino, 'History and Adab',
for an argument for the educational/pedagogical aspect of the *Kitāb al-
Maʿārif*.

[25] Bray, 'Lists and Memory', 226.

[26] For the 'covenant, betrayal, and redemption' paradigm, see Hum-
phreys, 'Taʾrīkh'. The discussion has been taken further by Georg Leube,
'Subversive Philology?', who suggests viewing early Islamic history as
"a contested cultural memory." See also Borrut, *Entre mémoir et pouvir*,
esp. ch. 4.

ways the architect of what was to become the Islamic state and administration.[27]

2.0. Those Killed in the Battle of the Ḥarra

The battle of the Ḥarra (*ḥarra* means a basalt desert, "a district covered with black broken stones, which looks as if it had been burned by fire") refers to a battle outside Medina, near a place called Ḥarrat Wāḳim, in 63/683, during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya. Some of the old Arab elites—Anṣār and Muhājirūn—rebelled against the caliph, his ostentatious lifestyle, and the hereditary succession of the Umayyads, according to one version of the account.[28] In the overall historiographic picture, this does not seem like a particularly important battle—no significant turn of events, for instance. And yet, the list (here called a *tasmiya*) of those who were killed in the battle of the Ḥarra is immediately striking to anyone reading the *Taʾrīkh* of Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ (d. 240/854). It is organised by kinship group, and in the edition by Zakkār the list runs to 22 pages.[29] Ibn Khayyāṭ, whose *Taʾrīkh* is the first annalistic chronology ex-

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[27] Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*.

[28] Veccia Vaglieri, 'al-Ḥarra', gives further references, and also the names of all those listed as killed in the battle according to Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt* (a lot of names, but not nearly as many as listed by Ibn Khayyāṭ); for a contextual discussion see Kister, 'The Battle of the Ḥarra', and Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der zweite Bürgerkrieg,* 40ff.

[29] In the al-ʿUmarī edition, it is slightly less—see Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh* (al-ʿUmarī, ed.), 1:231–44—though there are fewer notes.

tant, starts his account of the year 63 (682–83): "In this year oc-
curred the affair of the Ḥarra." He gives a few accounts of what
happened, before listing those who were killed, page after page.
The section ends with the statement: "The total number of the
Anṣār who were killed came to 173 men. The total number of the
Quraysh and the Anṣār who were killed came to 306 men,"
though, as Carl Wurtzel points out in his examination of the
work, in the list Ibn Khayyāṭ names 166 casualties among the
Anṣār and 149 among the Quraysh—a total of 315.[30]

Al-Yaʿqūbī in his *Taʾrīkh* does not give a list of names, but
says only that "few people in it [in the city] were not killed" and
generally keeps the account short.[31] A list of those who died is
also included in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, though a much
shorter one: he gives the names of six *ashrāf* 'nobles' (all of whom
are included in Ibn Khayyāṭ's list) and says that altogether about
700 men were killed from the Quraysh and about the same num-
ber from among the Anṣār.[32]

That it did matter to know who died in the battle of the
Ḥarra, and the side on which they fought, is indicated also by
Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), the grand doyen of
Islamic historical writing. Al-Ṭabarī does not give a list of those
killed, but includes a report that gives some indication that there

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[30] Wurtzel, *Khalifa ibn Khayyat's History*, 104n479: "Most of the individ-
uals listed by Khalifa were not significant enough to merit an entry in
his *Ṭabaqāt*." Translations are based on Wurtzel.

[31] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2:298 (translation 3:943–44).

[32] Al-Balādhurī*, Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 4/2:43.

continued to be a fierce disagreement over who was on the right and the wrong side of history:

> Ḥaṣṣān b. Mālik (fighting for the Umayyads) remained in the Jordan district and said, "Oh people of Jordan, what do you witness for Ibn al-Zubayr and those who were killed of the people of the Ḥarrah?" They replied, "We bear witness that Ibn al-Zubayr is a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) and those of the people of the Ḥarrah who were killed are in hell." "And what do you witness for Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya and those who were killed at the Ḥarrah?," he said. They answered, "We witness that Yazīd was in the right and those of us who were killed are in heaven."[33]

Al-Ṭabarī's account reads like the reformulation in account form of the lists in other historical works—the reordering of data into narrative or declarative form, as opposed to relational, a reversal of what Julia Bray suggested for Ibn Ḥabīb's many lists. Why, given the countless battles of the early Islamic period, those who participated in the battle of the Ḥarra were given so much space in some of the works is difficult to ascertain. As Georg Leube has recently shown in his prosopographical study of the Kinda tribe, the recurring motives of the early Islamic material are often not related to the plot, but reflections of contextual debates and controversies of the world of early Islam.[34] The same might be argued for our lists. As a textual practice, the lists embellish the narration just like the motives and topoi of the *akhbār*.

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[33] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2:469 (translation by Hawting, 10:50).

[34] Leube, *Kinda in der frühislamischen Geschichte*. The foundational work on topoi in early Islamic historiography remains Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*.

Moreover, while the listed names may at some point have been relevant, in the composite works of the Abbasid period it seems more likely that they should be read as "archives of cultural identity," as Christian Junge has called it.[35] Clearly, the lists of those who died in the battle of the Ḥarra highlight the Arab and Muslim origin of early Islam, functioning as (perhaps constructed) mnemonics not of a specific moment or persons, but of a perception of the origins and early history of Islam.

3.0. Administrative Lists for the Reign of ʿAbd al-Malik

While the sources include a great variety of lists whose purpose is difficult to discern, there are some that obviously reflect and reinforce the new structures of the Islamic state: lists of governors, judges, and other officials. In the annalistic histories, these lists are usually found at the very end of each year—al-Ṭabarī, for instance, closes his account of a given year with a note on who led the pilgrimage and who was appointed to a governorship or judgeship. In addition, he sometimes gives more detailed lists: the entry for the year 78/697–98, an important time in the consolidation of the Umayyad state, is mostly comprised of a list of "[t]he officials whom al-Ḥajjāj appointed in Khurāsān and Sijistān, and why he appointed whom he did, with further details."[36] As the heading already indicates, the list is interspersed

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[35] Junge, 'Doing Things with Lists'.

[36] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2:1032 (translation by Rowson, 22:177ff).

with *akhbār,* in which the powerful but controversial governor of the East, al-Hajjāj, is made to justify his choice in direct speech.

Such lists of the main administrators of the Islamic state are included in all of the early historiographies. Ibn Khayyāṭ ends each year with those who led the winter or summer campaigns, and those who led the pilgrimage; after the death of each caliph, he gives detailed lists of the governors, judges, frontier commanders, secretaries, and attendants who served during the reign, and a list of prominent individuals who died in the period. So for instance, for the year 86/705, the year that 'Abd al-Malik died, he firsts lists some of the governors (Medina, Mecca, Yemen, Basra, Kufa, Khurasan, Sijistan); then the judges (Basra, Kufa, Medina, Syria); then the remaining governors (Sind, Bahrain, Oman, Egypt, Ifriqiyya, al-Jazira, Armenia and Azerbaijan, al-Yamama); the summer raids; the Syrian districts; those who led the pilgrimage; the head of the police force (*shurta*); the secretary for correspondence; the head of taxation and the army (*al-kharāj wa al-jund*; here he says that Sulayman b. Saʿd, a *mawlā* of the Khushayn, a clan of the Qudaʿa, was the first to use Arabic for the records of the Syrian *dīwān*); the secretaries of the official seal, the treasuries, and the warehouses; the chamberlain; the head of the guard.[37]

Tobias Andersson has suggested in his recent study of the *Ta'rīkh* that these administrative lists highlight Ibn Khayyāṭ's Sunni perspective "by bringing the continuity of the caliphate

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[37] Wurtzel, *Khalifa ibn Khayyat's History*, 161–70.

and its institutions to the foreground."[38] He further elaborates that "the list sections had two important functions besides their main purpose of structuring available administrative material: first, to provide non-narrative data within a caliphal rather than annalistic framework and, second, to illustrate the continuity and coherence of the caliphal organisation over time."[39]

While the demonstration of coherence and continuity may well be an important aspect, the practice of including lists is certainly not exclusively Sunni. Though his lists are less comprehensive, the Shi'i historian al-Ya'qūbī also gives the main postholders at the end of each caliph's reign in his *Ta'rīkh*. He similarly lists those who led the pilgrimage, the military campaigns, and the *fuqahā'* 'legal scholars' and the learned men of the time—usually his lengthiest list.[40] As Sean Anthony has recently argued, al-Ya'qūbī "filled his chronicle with narratives crafted to resonate with the vision of the early Islamic community cultivated by the Shi'a;"[41] a close analysis of his lists, in particular of the lists of legal scholars and learned men, may well add to our understanding of his Shi'i perspective in the creation of a cultural memory.

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[38] Andersson, *Early Sunni Historiography*, 8. An important list with regard to the Sunni perspective on early Islam is the order of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, i.e., the successors to Muḥammad as head of state; see Melchert, 'Rightly Guided Caliphs'.

[39] Andersson, *Early Sunni Historiography*, 187.

[40] For the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, see 2:336, translation 3:987–89.

[41] Anthony, 'Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī', 31; see also Daniel, 'al-Ya'qūbī'. Many thanks to Hannah Hagemann for sharing these (and many other) texts.

4.0. Conclusion

There is not yet a good understanding of why the authors and compilers of early Islamic historical works included so many lists. In this short contribution I have tried to start a new conversation, arguing that lists in Islamic historiography are indeed part of the textual and narrative practices of authors and compilers: they are carefully constructed and selected, and just like the topoi and motives of *akhbār*, adapted to fit the specific overall project.

The kinds of lists that are included may give us insight into individual interests and perspectives, and help uncover the assumptions, background, and world view of the authors and compilers. Ibn Khayyāṭ's training as a biographer and genealogist is apparent throughout the *Taʾrīkh*, where lists shape the overall framework of the work and form a large part of its content. Similarly, Ibn Ḥabīb's interest in genealogy—and in particular matrilineal relations—is clearly discernible in his many lists of people, wives, and Fatimas.[42] Al-Yaʿqūbī, who is also famous for his work on geography, includes lists of irrigation channels, garrison towns, and foundations of the Arabs, besides his many other lists that may reflect a Shiʿi perspective.

In all, cataloguing and systematising knowledge is certainly an important aspect of lists in early Islamic historiography; but the role of lists as a textual practice of scholarship *par excellence,* and their purpose in the overall historiographic project of early

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[42] His own situation may have been relevant here, as his claim to Arab-Islamic distinction may have come via his mother, who is said to have been a client (*mawlā*) of the Prophet's clan; see Tayyara, 'Ibn Ḥabīb's *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*', 1.

Islam, the forging of a new Islamic narrative and cultural memory, deserve a whole lot more attention.