Full paper

Sīrah Of The Prophet's Early Life In Musnad of Aḥmad: An Analytical Study Of Qurʾānic References In Sīrah Nabawiyyah

Ahmad Sanusi Azmi*

Fakulti Pengajian Quran dan Sunnah, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 71800, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: sanusi@usim.edu.my

Abstract

Reviews of early Muslim sources confirm that some verses of the Qur'ān have been perceived by Muslim scholars as direct references to the narratives of the Prophet's early life. These selected verses are deemed to contain information about Muḥammad's genealogy, birth, childhood and other aspects of his youth. Modern scholars have, however, argued about the appropriateness and authority of these Qur'ānic references as being the true bearers of information of the Prophet's biography. Since the ḥadīth is regarded as an authoritative exegetical tool employed to explore more deeply the meaning of the Qur'ān, and one of which contains a vast source of information about the Prophet's life, it is indispensable to analyse the works of ḥadīth and its scholars' views on the narratives of sīra nabawiyya. This study aims to explore the narratives of the Prophet's early life in Musnad of Aḥmad and analyse Aḥmad's perspective regarding Quranic references to the Prophet's early life. The study is qualitative in nature in which the researcher utilised both critical and analytical approached as its methodology. The study in its finding espouses that the rarity of Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life in *Musnad* of Aḥmad, an enormous inventory of ḥadīth of the ninth century, indicates one scholar's views about Muḥammad's early life. It is obvious that Aḥmad make no connection between the Quran and the narratives of the Prophet's early life, even though verses that are widely used by the author of *sīra* as an allusion to Muḥammad's early life.

Keywords: Sīra Nabawiyya, *Musna*d, Aḥmad, Prophet Muḥammad, narrative

Abstrak

Kajian terhadap sumber-sumber awal Islam mengesahkan bahawa Muslim percaya al-Quran adalah sumber utama yang dijadikan rujukan terhadap peristiwa yang berlaku dalam kehidupan awal Rasulullah. Ayat-ayat tersebut dilihat sebagai mengandungi maklumat penting berhubung perkara nasab, kelahiran, zaman kanak-kanak serta beberapa aspek daripada kehidupan Baginda Nabi. Kajian sarjana moden walaubagaimanapun mempersoalkan ayat-ayat al-Quran yang digunakan oleh penulis biografi Nabi ini. Ketepatan serta keabsahan ayat al-Quran yang digunakan di dalam sirah nabawiyyah sering dipersoalkan oleh mereka. Antara persoalan yang acapkali ditimbulkan adalah apakah benar ayat ini mengandungi maklumat sejarah tentang kehidupan awal Nabi? Oleh kerana hadith adalah sumber yang paling berautoriti dalam mengolah kandungan al-Quran, adalah tidak dapat dinafikan bahawa, kajian terhadap sumber hadith ini penting dalam memahami maksud yang cuba disampaikan oleh al-Quran. Justeru kajian ini dijalankan bertujuan untuk meneroka naratif kehidupan awal Nabi di dalam Musnad Ahmad, dan menjalankan analisis terhadap pandangan Imam Ahmad berhubung isu ayat Quran yang digunakan dalam penyampaian sirah Nabi. Kajian ini bersifat kualitatif di mana penyelidik menggunakan pendekatan kritikal dan analitikal sebagai metodologi asas kajian ini. Kajian ini menerusi dapatannya mengesahkan bahawa, sekalipun karya Imam Ahmad ini dilihat sebagai memiliki sumber hadith yang sangat besar, keasingan (*rarity*) ayat Quran yang digunakan dalam Musnad Ahmad ini menunjukkan pandangan sarjana awal Islam tentang hubungkait penulisan sejarah Nabi dan penggunaan ayat-ayat al-Quran. Hasil kajian jelas menunjukkan bahawa Imam Ahmad tidak menggunakan sebarang ayat al-Quran dalam menghuraikan atau meriwayatkan naratif awal kehidupan Baginda Nabi.

Kata kunci: Sīra Nabawiyya, *Musna*d, Aḥmad, Prophet Muḥammad, naratif

■1.0 INTRODUCTION: PROBLEM STATEMENT

In *sīra* literature, it is beyond doubt that the Qurʾān has served as a major contributor in the construction of the Prophet's biography. Early Muslim scholars regarded the Qurʾān as the ultimate authority from which to outline a narrative framework and delineate specific incidents in the Prophet's life, a practice still followed in large measure today. In the early nineteenth century, modern scholars appeared to approach material from the *sīra* within the framework of a historico-critical method. The appropriateness and authority of these Qurʾānic references as being the true bearers of information of the Prophet's biography have been major concern for modern investigation. The intricate labyrinth of Qurʾānic references in sīrah nabawiyya has been rigorously discussed by modern studies such as analysis conducted by Azmi (2016).

In order to gain a fuller picture of Muslim understanding of Qurʾānic references to Muḥammad's early life, we need to extend our observations towards the specific types of Islamic literature produced in the formative period. It is proposed at this point to focus upon the

works of ḥadīth, in which this branch of Islamic knowledge appear the classical sources written with the deliberate purpose of recording and illuminating aspects and features of the Prophet's characters, thoughts and deeds. Moreover, the works of ḥadīth were also supported by Qur'ānic verses, which, according to the authors, were regarded as references to Muḥammad's actual life, since they portray his appearance, and elucidate the basis of his thought; all of which contribute to the revelation of the close relationship between Muḥammad's own lifelong relationship with God. The specific Qur'ānic references that are employed in the works of ḥadīth to demonstrate Muḥammad's early life will be analysed in order to gain a definitive perspective of Muslim understanding of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life within this period.

■2.0 SCOPE OF STUDY: AḤMAD IBN ḤANBAL AND HIS QURʾĀNIC DISCOURSE

There is no doubt that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal b. Hilāl al-Shaybānī al-Marwazī was a prominent scholar of ḥadīth, and also the founder of the Ḥanbali School of law. Renowned for his firm opposition to and, indeed, his clear rejection of the Muʿtazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān, Aḥmad gained a wider audience during his time after having been arrested, imprisoned and persecuted as the direct result of his firm opposition to Abbasid doctrinal policy. Even though the Qur'ān is always regarded as a primary foundation of Islamic law, it is not necessarily a standard practice in Aḥmad's legal thought. Well-grounded, and with a profound knowledge of the science of ḥadīth, Melchert confirms that Aḥmad's legal judgment was dominated by his particularly rigorous ḥadīth perspective (Melchert, 2004). The influence of his master, the leader of the ḥadīth movement, al-Shāfiʿī, could be considered as one of the factors which shaped Aḥmad's ḥadīthic judgment (Ansari, 2014). Moreover, this aspect of his judgement might be also an indication of his consistently robust stance as *ahl al-ḥadīth*, scrutinising each aspect or element of discussion through the lens of ḥadīth, which offers clear evidence of his implicit confrontation with the Muʿtazila, the movement that campaign to rely primarily on the Qur'ān and not the ḥadīth. Within this period, patronised by the Abbasid court, Mu'tazilite is perceived as promoting the campaign of prioritizing reliance on the Qur'ān as an Islamic source, rather than a heavy dependence on ḥadīth, as practised by *ahl al-ḥadīth*. The unreliable status of certain ḥadīth is likely to be the main offender. Some prominent Mu'tazilite scholars, such as Abū ʿAlī Ibn Khallād and al-Jubbā'ī, were identified as rejecting the acceptance of certain types of ḥadīth (Melchert, 2001; Muḥammad al-ʿAbda, 1987; al-Duwayhi, 1995).

In exploring the meaning of the Qur'ān, Aḥmad appears to use *ahl al-ḥadīth*'s methods of interpretation, in which he approaches the Qur'ān by applying the method of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis) as a tool of guidance and interpretation. Furthermore, he admonishes Muslims to continue to employ authentic ḥadīth as an explanatory device to excavate and reveal Qur'ānic 'gems' of wisdom in the interpretation of the word of God. In this regard, he was reported to have warned Muslims by saying that "Three books that have no basis: *al-maghāzī* (stories of the battles), *al-malāḥim* (tales of eschatological nature) and *tafsīr*." In the transmission of Ibn Taymiyya's, the phrase and wording arrangement of the statement is, however, slightly different, but the meaning is similar (al-Baghdādī, 2002; Ibn Taymiyya, 1986; Leaman, 2006). This guidance, according to al-Baghdādī and Ibn Taymiyya, implies that unreliable sources and unsound materials related to these three branches of Islamic discourse persist. His statement, at the same time, seems to be a reflection on the vigorous proliferation of fallacious sources of knowledge within this same period. By highlighting the *tafsīr* as one of the branches of Islamic discourse which are mired in uncertain provenance, *Aḥmad* shows implicitly how, within this period, false elements had begun to penetrate these sources of knowledge; and that Muslims need to be more vigilant in accepting any information related to *tafsīr*.

Ibn al-Nadīm reports that Aḥmad produced a work known as *Kitāb al-Tafsīr*, a work that could provide us with an exemplar of Aḥmad's approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Al-Baghdādī, on the authority of Ibn al-Munādī, narrates that Aḥmad possessed a substantial knowledge of *tafsīr*, in which, according to him, 120,000 exegetical ḥadīth were at Aḥmad's disposal (al-Baghdādī, 2002; Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, n.d.). But since the work has not survived, later scholars have disputed the reliability of this account. Al-Dhahabī, for example, believes strongly that the work had not even existed. He expresses his doubts about this particular account by questioning how this enormous work, whose content was apparently several times larger than al-Ṭabarī's, and with Aḥmad's huge numbers of pupils to preserve and disseminate it, the work could have been lost without trace (al-Dhahabī, 2002). Even though al-Dhahabī's argument does appear to make good sense, other scholars express their belief in the existence of Aḥmad's *tafsīr*. Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Dhahabī's contemporary, for instance, offers a contrary opinion. In his *Badā'iʿ al-Fawā'id*, Ibn al-Qayyim claims to have preserved an actual fragment of Aḥmad's *tafsīr*, narrated on the authority of al-Marūzī (Ibn al-Qayyim, n.d.). Besides Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Zajjāj (311/923) and Ibn Qudāma (620/1223) (al-Zajjāj, 1988 ; Ibn Qudāma, 1968) are other scholars to share a similar opinion of Ibn al-Qayyim, confirming the existence of Aḥmad's *tafsīr*. Apart from these two figures, there are several other scholars that agree with this opinion, such as Ibn Ḥajr and Ibn Taymiyya (Yāsīn, 1994 ; al-Ṭayyār, n.d.). It therefore seems likely that Aḥmad's commentaries did apparently exist, but have not survived in a complete form. The precise original form of the work is, therefore, unknown: it might be compiled in a specific one body of work; or the work might be scattered in various accounts or reports.

Based on the reputed fragment of Aḥmad's *tafsīr* preserved in Ibn al-Qayyim's work, a few stylistic approaches utilised by Aḥmad himself were discovered. For example, Aḥmad, using an approach practised by other scholars of ḥadīth, employs ḥadīth to explain the meaning of ostensibly ambiguous word in the Qur'ān. For example when he reads verse 3:113, a normal translation might render it as 'and from the evil of darkness when it settles.' The word *ghāsiq* here is translated as 'darkness'. In Aḥmad's *tafsīr*, he articulates the word *ghāsiq* to connote 'moon' and supports his interpretation by using a ḥadīth of the Prophet. The ḥadīth was presented in dialogue form in which the Prophet is said to have held Aisha's hand and pointed to the moon, saying: 'Seek refuge with Allah from the evil of the overspread moon, (Aḥmad, 2001; al-Nasā'ī, 2001).

In certain places, Aḥmad was also found to include his own personal experience as a part of his Qur'ānic interpretation. For instance, when he elucidates verse 68:17 (which says: Verily We have tried them as We tried the People of the Garden), he casts a light on the meaning of the People of the Garden (*aṣḥāb al-janna*) by explaining that this (phrase) is an allusion to (the people of) the city of Ḍarwān. This interpretation seems to be taken from the interpretation of Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, one of the famous *Tābiʿīn*. According to Saʿīd, this was a city of Yemen, situated six miles from Ṣanʿā (al-Ṭabarī, 2000). He continues by saying that "I have passed through this city, it was near (the place of) ʿAbd al-Razzāq (in which, he was from Ṣanʿā), I saw it was (covered with) blankness and redness, an effect of being burned, and there is no trace of plantation or greenery (Ibn al-Qayyim, n.d). Furthermore, some of his interpretation seems obscure as it requires

further explanation. For example when interpreting verse 21:99, he appears to render the word 'Gods' (*āliha*) as denoting Jesus and *al-ʿUzayr*. This connotation demands the immediate attention of Ibn al-Qayyim, who preserves the account originally, and of which he argues that the interpretation was in need of further clarification. According to Ibn al-Qayyim, if this interpretation is truly Aḥmad's words, it presumably refers to 'the devils' (*al-shayāṭin*) that have been worshipped by the Christian and Jews, in which, they (the Christian and Jews) think that the devils (probably the idols) are (the resemblance) of Jesus and *al-Uzayr* (Ibn al-Qayyim, n.d.).

The mastery of Ahmad in Quranic sciences and its *tafsīr* indicate his proficiency and knowledge about the verses of the Quran. It is important for the researcher to know his Quranic background in order to explore his understanding regarding the verses that have been perceived as an allusion to the Prophet's early life.

■3.0 METHODOLOGY

The present study deals solely with texts. In order to attain the objectives of the research, textual analysis will be employed as a major tool in examining and exploring the sources. Donner (1998) outlines four major approaches that have been employed by modern scholars when dealing with raw materials of Islamic literary and narratives sources, which may be summarized as a descriptive approach, a source-critical approach, a tradition-critical approach and a sceptical approach. The present study will employ these approaches selectively and appropriately: that is, the critical approach taken will be chosen to suit the specific nature and context of the text. In order to examine the notion of sira nabawiyya and its relationship with the Quran, the present study also employed both analytical and comparative analysis. To critically analyse Muslim understanding of the nature of the connection between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's biography, the study will examine selected ḥadīth from Musnad of Ahmad, conduct a comparative analysis on any employment of Qur'ānic verses as references to the Prophet's early life and investigate why they were used as reference to it . If there are no apparent Qur'ānic verses used as references to the Prophet's early life, this study will pose the question of why the scholars of ḥadīth such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal did not deem relevant any Qur'ānic verses as an allusion to the Prophet's early life.

The arrangement of the content of *Aḥmad*'s *Musnad* differs entirely from the *ṣaḥīḥ* and *sunan*. If both of these world of literature are organised based on subject order, ḥadīth in *Aḥmad*'s *Musnad* is, in contrast, arranged according to the name of the transmitter, in the order of the original transmission. For example, in the *Musnad of Aḥmad*, he begins the work by compiling every ḥadīth narrated by Abū Bakr, the closest companion to the Prophet, in one specific chapter. He then proceeds in the next chapter to consider the ḥadīth of the second most popular companion of the Prophet, ʿUmar. He continues in this vein. This kind of arrangement has caused difficulty for the reader who wishes to find a specific ḥadīth concerning one particular issue or theme. In our study, for example, we have to work through every single ḥadīth, in order to find information related to Muḥammad's early life, since there is no specific chapter on this theme. One can only imagine the arduous task of reading over 30,000 ḥadīth embedded in this compendium. Thanks are due, therefore, to Aḥmad al-Bannā al-Sāʿātī, the Ḥanbalī modern scholar and the father of Ḥasan al-Bannā, who painstakingly edited this massive encyclopaedic ḥadīth, and arranged it according to topical order, in the form of a *sunan*. The present study relies on the arrangement made by al-Sāʿātī, in order to facilitate the analysis of every ḥadīth related to the early life of Muḥammad.

As mentioned earlier, the *Musnad* was designed in a specific setting. It was developed as a facility to compile all the ḥadīth that are regarded as being transmitted directly from the Prophet himself, in order to solve the problem of possible ḥadīth forgeries. According to Ibn Taimiyya, Aḥmad selects ḥadīth from all transmitters that are not generally regarded as bogus, even though the transmitter might not fulfil the conditions of the narrators of authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ/ḥasan*) ḥadīth (Ibn Taymiyya, 1986). That is why, therefore, we find that his *Musnad* provides a profusion of ḥadīth information about Muḥammad's early life, compared to the *ṣaḥīḥ* and *sunan*. Indeed, the authors of ṣaḥīḥ and sunan impose stricter conditions in selecting ḥadīth. The ṣaḥīḥ's authors aim to compile only authentic ḥadīth in their works, while the author of sunan is somewhat slightly freer with the employment of terms from the ṣaḥīḥ. It is no wonder, then, that Aḥmad's musnad compiles more ḥadīth than ṣaḥīḥ and sunan, since his method for selecting ḥadīth is less strict than either works.

■4.0 RESULTS

The ḥadīth related to Muḥammad's early life in Musnad of Aḥmad may be divided thematically as follows:

(i) The Prophet's Genealogy

Aḥmad relates eight different ḥadīth concerning the nobility of Muḥammad's genealogy. Most of these were subsequently gleaned by the later author of *Sunan Sitta* who included in their own work. Two out of these eight ḥadīth are, however, apparently missing from *Sunan Sitta*, which indicates either the vast scope and range of knowledge possessed by Aḥmad, which encompasses every conceivable angle of the biography of the Prophet, or that Aḥmad is more lenient in selecting and inserting ḥadīth in his Musnad compared with the author of *Sunan Sitta*. Five out of these eight ḥadīth were mentioned in the *Sunan of al-Tirmidhī*, *Ibn Mājh* and *Saḥīḥ of Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj*. Four ḥadīth were mentioned in Sunan of al-Tirmidhī and three of these were presented in Ibn Mājh (ḥadīth transmitted by Muslim ibn Hayḍam, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī and Ubay ibn Kaʿb); and one was selected by Muslim in their ṣaḥīḥ (ḥadīth narrated by al-Wā'īla).

None of these ḥadīth was chosen by al-Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd and al-Nasa'i to be included in their works. This is probably due to the differing foci of discourse emphasised by the various authors of *Sunan Sitta*, and the variable levels of stringency in selecting ḥadīth applied by individual authors. Abū Dāwūd, for instance, seems not to afford emphasis to the discussion related to *sīra*, when most of his chapters focus on legal discourse. On the other hand, al-Bukhārī, presumably due to his rigour and high standards in the selection of ḥadīth before his permitting their inclusion, has resulted in the complete absence from his work of all eight ḥadīth.

The essence of these selected ḥadīth is clear: to portray Muḥammad as the perfect human being, chosen by God from the among the most worthy of human lineage, the final prophet, the pre-existent being and leader of humankind in the world and hereafter. A considerable number of ḥadīth regarding Muḥammad's lineage might be an indication of a popular notion that occupies Muslims of the current century,

concerning the authority, credentials and pre-eminence of the final Prophet. According to Abū Mūsā al-Madīnī (d. 581/1185), Aḥmad admitted that he only assembled together for his compendium those ḥadīth which were well known (*mahshūr*) within this period, even though the status of the ḥadīth was known to be in doubt (al-Madīnī, n.d.). Even so, he does not explicitly clarify the reason why he selects one particular ḥadīth over another, or classifies the ḥadīth in chapters that might better indicate his understanding of one particular ḥadīth, the considerable number of these ḥadīth is appeared as testimony to the popularity of the accepted attributes of the Prophet. It also lends weight to the significance of genealogy in revealing the status of the prophet. Furthermore, Aḥmad appears to believe in the superiority of the final prophet, an analysis of which may be found in his other work, entiled *al-ʿAqīda* (Aḥmad, 1408H).

(ii) The Prophet's Birth

There are three different ḥadīth preserved by Aḥmad in regard with the Prophet's birth. The first is the confirmation that Monday is the day of the Prophet birth. In the ḥadīth the Prophet was been asked, why he maintains fasting on Monday, he answered that this is the day he was born. This ḥadīth is also furnished with other momentous events that occurred on Monday to emphasise the honourable status of Monday as the actual day of the Prophet's delivery. The second ḥadīth offers another fact about the time of Muḥammad's birth. In this, it corroborates that he was born in the year of elephant. The third illustrates one of the conditions of the Prophet's birth. It has been narrated in this ḥadīth that when the Prophet was born, his mother witnessed a light that illuminated the castles of *al-Shām* (greater Syria). It is worthy of mention that this last ḥadīth was referred to three times in his Musnad, albeit via a different transmitter (it was transmitted by Abī Umāma, al-ʿIrbāḍ ibn Sāriya and ʿUtba ibn ʿAbd al-Salami).

In the transmission of Abū Umāma and al-ʿIrbāḍ, it was mentioned merely that his mother saw a light. However, ʿUtba's version illuminates further. According to his narration, Muḥammad's mother saw the light radiate from her own body and illuminate the castles of *al-Shām*. The word *Quṣūr al-Shām* (castles of the Greater Syria) metaphorically denotes the element of the great and mightiness of *al-Sham*'s ruler and its government through the magnificent appearance of their grand castles and fortresses in guarding their territory. According to Ibn Rajb, the reason why the castle of the Greater Syria are emphasised in this metaphorical statement is due to the prophecy of previous sacred scriptures that anticipates that Muḥammad's Kingdom would encompass Greater Syria. In the other works, ʿAbd al-Razzāq reports that the hypocrites once argued the ability of Muḥammad to conquer the 'Castles of Syria'. Given the statement uttered by Muḥammad's adversaries, one could imagine the popularity of this term, used within the Prophet's period (or probably representing the ninth century's thought) in acknowledging the magnificent status of *al-Shām* civilization (Ibn Rajb, 2004; al-Ṣanʿānī, 1419H). Interestingly, in another version narrated by al-Ṭabrānī, this incident only occurred alone in his mother's dream. In fact al-Ṭabrāni preserved all three versions of the stories, one that says his mother only saw a light. The narration that illustrates that his mother saw a light radiate from his body; and the other account which relates that his mother experienced this in a dream.

The fact that Aḥmad preserved this story repeatedly through three different transmitters indicates his assertion of the significance of this miraculous event. He was found to employ this ḥadīth as evidence of Muḥammad's nascent faith, at a time when the people of *ahl al-kalām* were claiming that the Prophet was embracing his people's own polytheistic religion before the revelation of the Qur'ān. Refuting this claim, Aḥmad uses this ḥadīth as proof of the purity of the Prophet's belief (al-Safarīnī, 1982). Based on his argument, the 'light' in this ḥadīth symbolises the immaculate condition of his purity from the time of his birth, until his message of truth overwhelming the castles of *al-Shām*. This implies that the Prophet never actually held any belief or religion that had been embraced by the Quraysh, his own nation-race.

(iii) The Prophet's Childhood

There are four different occurrences preserved in various ḥadīth of *Musnad of Aḥmad* which relate to the childhood of Muḥammad. The first concerns Muḥammad's time as a suckling infant, in respect of which Aḥmad narrates four ḥadīth revealing that Muḥammad was suckled by his wet-nurses, Thuwayba and Ḥalīma al-Saʿdiyya. There are three ḥadīth narrated by Aḥmad regarding this. These ḥadīth are presented in the *Sunan Sitta* (except al-Tirmidhi) within a legal framework, since the content is actually focusing on Muḥammad explaining about the law of marrying foster-brothers (akh al-raḍāʿa – the sibling that suckled by the same wet nurse). The second anecdote is related to the incident of the opening of Muḥammad's breast. Regarding this, Aḥmad recounts three different ḥadīth that provide detail of the occasions. Based on his account, the incident occurred twice in Muḥammad's boyhood. The third narrative illustrates Muḥammad's time as a shepherd in Mecca, while the fourth describes Muḥammad's involvement in the process of rebuilding the Kaʿba. Of these two occurrences, Aḥmad narrates two ḥadīth providing information about the former, and five ḥadīth regarding the latter.

Although *Aḥmad* is renowned for his prolific collection of ḥadīth, and also for the rigour of his exhaustive pursuit of ḥadīth (*al-riḥla*), it is interesting to note that there are two popular stories in Muḥammad's early life that are recounted in *Sunan Sitta* which are, nevertheless, missing from the *Musnad of Aḥmad*. Muḥammad's meeting with Baḥīrā, the Christian monk and his participation in the war of *al-Fijār* are absent from his vast collection of ḥadīth. To assume that he is not aware of the story of Baḥīrā is one of the conjectures that can be made; but this seems unlikely due to the sheer popularity of the story. The story of Baḥīrā was narrated by well-known scholars of the same century such as al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Hishām, Ibn Saʿd, al-Wāqidī and al-Jāḥiẓ. In fact *Aḥmad* himself had met and narrated from ʿAbbdullah ibn Ghazwān, one of the transmitters of the story of Baḥīrā. Aḥmad himself preserves few ḥadīth from Ibn Ghazwan in his Musnad. His meeting with ʿAbdullah is confirmed by Al-Tirmidhī in his Sunan. When narrating a ḥadīth of Sūra al-Anbiyā', al-Tirmidhī said that "This ḥadīth is narrated by Aḥmad from ʿAbdullah ibn Ghazwān." Meanwhile, Abū Daud, Aḥmad's pupil himself, narrated a ḥadīth from Aḥmad, which Aḥmad transmitted from ʿAbdullah ibn Ghazwān. It might also be possible that ʿAbdullah did not pass the ḥadīth to Aḥmad. He might have omitted the ḥadīth intentionally due to the contradictory or ambiguous content of the last part of the story, or even possibly unintentionally, as the result of the enormous ḥadīth collection at his disposal.

(iv) Sign of Prophethood

Aḥmad preserves a considerable amount of information about Muḥammad's signs of prophethood. Apart from the ḥadīth about the attributes of Muḥammad that already prophesied in the Torah, in his *Musnad,* there exist others narratives of miraculous incidents that are professed as indications of the coming of the final prophet. These include an incident in which Muḥammad was greeted by a stone while he was in Mecca; an event in which a fox reveals to a shepherd information about the advent of a prophet in Yathrib (Medina); and soothsayers who had anticipated his appearance.

■**5.0 DISCUSSION**

Quranic References to The Prophet's Early Life in Musnad

In general it is difficult to find any Qur'ānic reference alluding to Muḥammad's early life made by Aḥmad in his *Musnad*. It is not an easy task to read the Musnad in order to analyse the author's thought about one particular subject. Compared to the *ṣaḥīḥ*, *sunan* and *muṣannafāt*, they are all redacted with the express purpose of dealing with community enquiries regarding certain Islamic ritual, creedal or exegetical subjects. In response to this need, scholars design the *ṣaḥīḥ* and *sunan* in thematic form to provide a convenient access to the reader in their quest to find an answer to their problem. By dividing the ḥadīth according to specific subject area, the author explicitly exhibits his thought on one ḥadīth. This cannot happen with musnad because there is no topical division. Aḥmad classifies each ḥadīth according to the name of the transmitter, a practice which offers no clear indication of Aḥmad's observations about the ḥadīth: it was, in fact, a mere compilation to isolate the ḥadīth in order to differentiate and justify it from the apparently forged one.

Indeed, there is a Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's attributes embedded in the ḥadīth concerning the People of the Book, which prophesies the advent of the final prophet. The hadith was narrated by ʿAṭā ibn Yasār, in which it was said that the Prophet attributes that engraved in the Torah is similar with what has revealed in the 33:45 of the Quran. However, the verse apparently is an original part of the content of the ḥadīth, which was not initiated by the author's initiative. Presumably, the main reason of the absence of Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad's early life in his *Musnad* is due to the objective of the composition itself.

Based on a conversation between Aḥmad and ʿAbdullah, his son, Musnad was granted the task to gather all known popularly accepted ḥadīth as guidance (*imām*) for later generations, especially in distinguishing between the true, and the false ḥadīth. Later scholars, however, argue about the status of ḥadīth in Musnad. Scholars believe that not all ḥadīth were *ṣaḥīḥ*, and indeed, some event says that there are false ḥadīth (mawdūʿ) in his Musnad. Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Ḥajr suggest that the false ḥadīth found in his Musnad was not Aḥmad's own inclusion. According to them, it was added later by his son, ʿAbdullah and al-Qaṭīʿī (Ibn Taymiyya, 1986; Ibn Ḥajr, 1401H; Al-Madīnī, n.d). His nephew narrates that Aḥmad once mentioned that if Muslims fall into dispute over the status of one particular ḥadīth, then they should refer to this (*Musnad*). If it is not found in it, it is not a ḥadīth (*falaysa bi hujja*). By using the term 'it is not a proof' (*falaysa biḥujja*), Aḥmad apparently indicates that, any ḥadīth that does not feature in his Musnad seems not to be an authentic ḥadīth, since only a genuine ḥadīth can be a proof (*ḥujja*) and guidance for Muslims. However, this is not a consistent line of reasoning: there is evidence of a ḥadīth that is not included in his Musnad, namely the ḥadīth of Bahira. Therefore, by this statement, Aḥmad probably refers to the popular ḥadīth spread widely within his particular period. (al-Madīnī, n.d.) This implies that one of Aḥmad's principal aims was to develop a massive encyclopaedia of ḥadīth as a reference for Muslims in response to the proliferation of apparently false ḥadīth within this period. The *Musnad* does, however, provide us with a comprehensive picture of contemporary Muslim understanding about Muḥammad's early life, based on popular ḥadīth preserved in this compendium. This might also offer us an indication of how 'pure' the content of one ḥadīth was required to be before it was deemed appropriate for being selected to be connected to the Qur'ān, in order to establish a solid attachment between the Prophet and God. The nature of attachment consequently develops a metaphorical image of God's authority in the world.

■**6.0 CONCLUSION**

As suggested by Melchert (2004, 2001), Aḥmad apparently lacks of reliance on the Qur'ān, especially in his legal discourse and the Sirah of the Prophets' early life account. He is found to be heavily dependent on ḥadīth for providing legal thought, rather than referring to the Qur'ān itself. His well-known confrontation with Mu'tazila (in which, according to Melchert, they promote reliance on the Qur'ān rather than ḥadīth), might be reason for the lack of Qur'ānic references in his legal discourse, for which he is also renowned. This method of approach when dealing with Islamic sources (the Qur'ān and ḥadīth) most probably influenced him to rely solely on the ḥadīth, rather than exploring the Qur'ān in depth, searching for references to Muḥammad's early life. This could be extracted from the reason of why al-Tabari was only regarded him as a traditionist rather that faqih mufassir as proposed by other Muslim scholars (Ibn al-Athir, 1997; Yaqut, 1993).

Due to the absence of Qur'ānic references to Muḥammad's early life in his Musnad, we have extended our observation to the other works of Aḥmad. It is interesting to note that verse 26:219, that was used by Ibn Saʿd as a reference to Muḥammad's genealogy was found interpreted by Aḥmad in *Masāʾīl* al-Naysabūrī. According al-Naysabūrī, Aḥmad has produced an explanation of this verse which, according to his narration, bears no connection to Muḥammad's genealogy as perceived by Ibn Saʿd. Interpreting this verse, Aḥmad employs a ḥadīth narrated by Abū Hurayra that explains the meaning of 26:219. The ḥadīth indicates that the verse is intended to picture the Prophet's ability to observe his followers at prayer, although they were behind him, and therefore not within his immediate line of vision. This implies that, the verse according to Aḥmad is better understood in this context, rather than understood as proposed by Ibn Saʿd. The word *taqallubika* denotes 'the prophet's involvement and observation of his follower's prayer', and is not to be regarded as the movement or the origin of Muḥammad's gene in the spine of the previous prophet, as has been interpreted by the author of al-Ṭabaqāt. This strengthens our hypothesis to prove that the verse actually bears no relation to the Prophet's early life or his genealogy. Aḥmad, the

leader of *ahl al-ḥadīth*, with his massive knowledge about the Prophet, does not recognize this as a Qurʾānic reference to Muḥammad's early life. It might also offer an indication of how fragile was the connection between Muḥammad and the Qurʾān within this period.

In conclusion, the rarity of Qurʾānic reference to Muḥammad's early life in *Musnad* of Aḥmad, an enormous inventory of ḥadīth of the ninth century, indicates one scholar's views about Muḥammad's early life. In spite of his considerable journeys, collecting ḥadīth from the expanse of the Islamic world, Aḥmad apparently did not includes the narration that connects the Qurʾān with Muḥammad's early life that is embedded in the book of *sīra*. This implies categorically the evident unpopularity of the widely-accepted narration, or very possibly even gives an indication of its doubtful provenance or status during the ninth century, which leads Aḥmad to deem it not to be regarded conclusively as a part of the store of reference of genuine ḥadīth in the *Musnad*.

References

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal Shaybānī. (2001)'Arna-ed. al .Musnad .ūt. Mu'assasa al-Risāla.
Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal Shaybānī (1408H). *al-'Aqīda*. ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz ʿIz al-Dīn, Dimashq: Dār Qutayba.
Al-Baghdādī, al-Khātib. (2002). *al-Jāmī' li akhlāq al-Rāwī wa Ādāb al-Sāmiʿ*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān, .Riyāḍ, Maktaba al-Maʿārif.
Al-Baghdādī. (2002) *Tārīkh Baghdād*, ed. Bashshār Maʿrūf. Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī.
Al-Dhahabī. (2002). *Siyār Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*. al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ḥadīth.
Al-Duwayhi, ʿAlī ibn Saʾd. (1995). *Arāʾ al-Muʿtazila al-Usūliyya Dirāsa wa Taqwīmā*. Riyāḍ: Maktaba al-Rushd.
Al-Madīnī, Abū Mūsā, Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Musnad. (n.d.) *Talāʾiʿ al-Musnad*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir. Maktabah al-Turath al-Islāmī. 11.
Al-Nasāʾī. (2001) *Sunan al-Nasāʾī al-Kubrā*, ed. al-Arnaʾūṭ. Bayrūt: Muʾassasa al-Risāla. 122(9).
Al-Safarīnī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. (1982). *Lawāmiʾ al-Anwār al-Bahiyya*, Dimashq: Muassasa al-Khafiqayn.
Al-San'ani, ʿAbd al-Razzāq. (1419H). *Tafsīr*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub alʾIlmiyya.
Al-Ṭabarī. (2000) *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*. ed. Aḥmad Shākir. Muassasa al-Risāla.
Al-Ṭabrāni. (1994). *al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī al-Salafī. al-Qāhira: Maktaba Ibn Taymiyya.
Al-Ṭayyār, Musāʿid. (n.d.) *Anwāʾ al-Taṣnif al-Muta'alliqa bi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*. Dār Ibn al-Jawzī.
Ansari, Hassan, et all. (2014). 'Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal', in *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and, Farhad Daftary. Brill Online. [15 December 2014]
Azmi, A. S. (2016). The Intricate Labyrinth Of Qurʾānic References In Sīrah Nabawiyyah: An Overview Of The Orientalist Works. *Journal Of Hadith Studies*, 1(1).
Azmi, A. S., Nor, Z. M., Sobali, A. M., Ismail, M. Y., & Halim, A. A. (2017). From Christianity to Islam: An Analysis of Ibn Rabban's Approach towards Sira Nabawiyya. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 11, 1.
Azmi, A. S., Nor, Z. M., Sobali, A. M., Ismail, M. Y. (2017). Kritikan Terhadap Rasulullah Dan Al-Quran: Analisis Karya Non-Muslim Zaman Umawiyyah Dan Abbasiyyah. *Journal Of Hadith Studies*, 2(1).
Donner, Fred M. (1998). *Narratives of Islamic Origins, the Beginning of Islamic Historical Writings*, Princeton.
Ibn al-Athir. (1997) *al-Kamil fiʾl-tarikh*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya.
Ibn Abī Yaʿlā. (n.d.) *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. Muḥammad al-Faqī, Bayrūt: Dār al-Maʿrifa.
Ibn al-Qayyim. (n.d.) *Badāʾiʿ al-Fawāid*, ed. ʿAlī al-Imrān, Jedda: Maṭbūʿāt al-Majmaʿ.
Ibn Rajb al-Hanbali. (2004). *Laṭāʾif al-Maʿārif*, Dār Ibn Hazm.
Ibn Taymiyya. (1986). *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Sālim, Jāmiʿah al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Saʿūd al-Islāmiyya.
Melchert, Christopher. (2004). 'Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur'an', in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Edinburgh University Press, 6(2), 27.
Melchert Christopher. (2001) Traditionist-Jurisprudents and the Framing of Islamic Law', in *Islamic Law and Society*, 403-4.
Muḥammad al-ʿAbda, Ṭāriq 'Abd al-Ḥalīm. (1987) *al-Muʿtazila Bayna al-Qadīm wa al-Ḥadīth*, Birmingham: Dār Al;-Arqam, 81-90.
Leaman, Oliver. (2006). 'Tafsīr', in *The Qurʾān: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman, Oxon, 632.
Yāsīn, Hikmat Bashīr. (1994). *Marwiyyāt al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal fī al-Tafsīr*, al-Saʿūdī: Maktaba al-Mu'ayyad.
Yāqūt (1993), *Irshdd al-arib ild ma'rifat al-adib*. Dar al-Gharb al-lslami.