

Written Communication and the Socio-political and Cultural Transformation in Islam

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Abstract: As a basic mode of communication, writing has been used to preserve and transmit knowledge vertically from generation to generation, and horizontally from one community to the other. The early civilizations have used various techniques of written and oral communication to influence opinion and maintain political and social control. Communication, especially the written form, has played similar roles in the rise and development of the Muslim state. The cultural and scientific contribution of Muslims to human civilization is closely linked to the adoption of writing as a viable social institution in the Muslim state. The Muslims have, in different stages of the development of their state, utilized various communication institutions for social and political control purposes.

Academic writings on communication, from the Islamic perspective, are scant and at best fragmented. Classical Orientalists have failed to study communication institutions of the various Islamic eras and to delineate their role in human civilization. The focus of these scholars was on the translation of Islamic texts, and on the explanation and interpretation of the various Islamic activities and institutions.¹ Those who focused on interpretation did not treat the texts as communication entities worth studying and evaluating, but saw them as sources of information about Islam and the Islamic era.² Those who dealt with Islamic history, or Islamic states and

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their institutions, concentrated on the linear historical evolution of the social and political institutions,³ but ignored the dimension of communication as central to the dialectical development of these institutions and to the resultant Islamic cultural, scientific and literary advancement.

The disregard of communication in orientalist writings may be attributed partly to the fact that communication as a distinct field of social studies worthy of independent intellectual investigation did not develop until the early years of the twentieth century. Few Muslim scholars, on the other hand, treated the issue of communication in Islam from an intellectual, or an academically specialized, standpoint. Those who treated the subject (mostly in Arabic) concentrated on evaluating communication activities of the Prophet (SAS) and companions, or dealt with certain texts to outline their communication values based on current theoretical considerations.⁴ Though some of these scholars boast of “an Islamic theory of communication,” their effort was not considered as rigorous scientific achievement.⁵ This article explains the social, political and cultural transformation of the Muslim state during the periods as an outcome of the social shift from oral to written communication, and evaluates some important institutions of the period from a communication perspective.⁶

The Communication Legacy of al-Madīnah: an Overview

As the political set-up of al-Madīnah, which the Prophet (SAS) established immediately after his migration to that city, developed into a full-fledged state, its social and political institutions slowly grew into “modern” institutions suitable for the time and the mission ahead.⁷ Thus, writing began to replace the oral mode of communication dominant at the time. During the life of the Prophet (SAS), writing was used in a limited form, for a few bureaucratic purposes of political correspondence, recording of treaties and preserving the revealed text.⁸ The first Caliph, Abū Bakr, did not bring major changes to the social and political order perhaps because he was trying to follow the precepts of the Prophet (SAS) as literally as possible. Additionally, the period of his reign was short (from 11 to 13 A.H.) and the state of affairs did not warrant any major changes in the bureaucratic institutions. It was, however, Caliph ‘Umar (whose

era witnessed the expansion of the state beyond the Arabian Peninsula) who laid down the foundation for the major changes that were to take place in the political and social institutions of the state.

The expansion of the Islamic state, during the eras of Caliphs 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, underlined the necessity of establishing new institutions of government capable of maintaining political control in the expanding state. One of these institutions, communication, had to undergo major changes to suit the new situation by shifting from the oral to the written pattern. This form was more suitable because it helped overcome the problem of *distance* in both its temporal and geographical dimensions. Historically, the passage of time since the demise of the Prophet (SAS) affected the authenticity of the oral texts as the number of memorizers (*the ḥuffaz*) waned and different versions of the text started appearing.⁹

Geographically, distance affected the authenticity of the oral text as the bearers had to travel long distances (and for several days) with oral messages, thus making oral correspondence less effective in delivering the political message to all corners of the burgeoning state.¹⁰ Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb dealt with the geographical dimension of distance by shifting to the written form to communicate with his far-stationed commanders and commissioners through a network of roads and rest points (which later developed into post offices) across the regions of the Caliphate. 'Umar dealt also with the temporal dimension of distance by establishing the *dīwāns* as basic governmental departments for official recording and archiving.

The role of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān in the enhancement of writing is manifested in his unification of the reading of the Qur'ān through the adoption of a single style of writing (*rasm*), an important prerequisite for the creation of a unified mindset for an Ummah that belonged to different cultural backgrounds.¹¹

The issue of the unification of readings is very crucial when viewed from a communication perspective. Culturally speaking, context plays an important role in comprehension and interpretation, thus words, phrases and expressions may have different meanings in different cultures. The concept of social construction of meaning refers to the process of collective *cultural* interpretation as social groups assign the same set of meanings

to symbols. During the era of Caliph 'Uthmān, the expansion of the Muslim world led to the evolution of a culturally diverse Muslim world in which meaning was culturally constructed and fundamental texts, including the Qur'ān, were differently interpreted. Caliph 'Uthmān's unification of the reading styles helped avoid such differential interpretations of the holy text that would open doors to religious and political differences that might have jeopardized the unity of the Ummah. The Caliph's decision was a genuine effort to sow the seeds of social harmony by creating a unified system of meaning among society members.¹²

Writing in the Umayyad and Abbasid Eras

During the first 100 years of the Islamic state, rapid political and social changes led to the emergence of new social and political institutions and subsequently, some of the old institutions had to be remoulded to fit the developing state. One of the communication institutions that witnessed reconsideration was that of the *khuṭbah* (the sermon), which the Prophet (SAS) and the Caliphs had earlier used extensively for political communication purposes.

With the expansion of the state and the influx of non-Arabs to Islam, the place of the *khuṭbah* as a medium of political communication began to decline and, as large sectors of the population were unable to comprehend the orally delivered message, the state had to emphasize new styles of communication to accommodate for the needs of non-Arab Muslims. New communication activities, like transcribing the Qur'ān and the Prophet (SAS)'s utterances, explaining and interpreting religious and political discourses, gradually took over and ushered in the era of writing. These new activities led in the long run to the development of new branches of knowledge in Islam, including '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Science of Qur'ān) and '*Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (Science of Ḥadīth).

With the expansion of the state, the Umayyads and 'Abbasids began to appreciate the urgent need for a change in the system of delivery of the political message. In the early days, the danger inherent in the oral delivery of the official message was reduced by handpicking errand officers and town criers from well-versed and highly trusted personalities. But with the expansion of the state, it

became too dangerous to rely on human memory to relay serious and highly sensitive political information to distant places to which officers had to travel for weeks and months. Under these circumstances, messages had to be scribed and sealed with the seal of the state authority.¹³ This increased use of writing for official correspondence underlined the imperative need to establish a permanent institution for both writing and mailing the official correspondence, thus ushering in the pre-eminence of two official bureaus of the state: *dīwān al-Kitābah* (bureau of writing) and *dīwān al-barīd* (bureau of post).

***Dīwān al-Kitābah*: The Ministry of Information**

No better attestation to the eminence of written communication in the society can be found other than in the place of *dīwān al-kitābah* in the Umayyad and Abbasid states. The *dīwān* was originally established as a bureaucratic institution during the Umayyad era,¹⁴ but was developed further by the Abbasids. Since a *dīwān* was equivalent to present-day cabinet ministry,¹⁵ the establishment of *dīwān al-kitābah* reflected the height to which written communication was elevated in the Islamic State.

Under the several names of *dīwān al-kitābah* (bureau of writing), *dīwān al-rasā'il* (bureau of correspondence), or *dīwān al-inshā'* (bureau of composition),¹⁶ the institution handled all the official correspondence of the Caliphs and their officers, and resembled much a "ministry of information" in contemporary political systems. Under the Caliphate of Mu'āwiyah ibn Abū Sufiyān, for example, the duties of *dīwān al-rasā'il* included disseminating official news, publicizing laws, rules, and official declarations, and undertaking necessary propaganda activities.¹⁷ Being a valued institution, its highest post of *ṣāhib al-dīwān* (Commissioner of the Bureau)¹⁸ went only to distinguished literary figures of the time, and only talented writers who were well-versed in the language were appointed to the post of *kātib* (scribe). Famous writers in the bureau included 'Abd al Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and 'Ubaid Allāh ibn 'Aws al-Ghassānī. The first of these, 'Abd al Ḥamīd, who was nicknamed *al-kātib* (the writer) in reference to his profession, was a skillful and eloquent scribe whose proficiency and mastery of the language influenced Islamic official writing for centuries to come. *Dīwān al-*

rasā'il was not an ordinary bureaucratic department that undertook the mundane duties of relaying and stamping official messages; it was, rather, a lively institution in which translation, book scribing, book authoring, and all forms of literary activities were vigorously undertaken. The *dīwān* was instrumental in enhancing the cultural and literary advancement of the whole society.

Translation and Transcription

As it spread to nations and peoples other than the Arabs, Islam came in touch with rich cultures and encountered valuable sources of knowledge in a variety of languages. To benefit from these cultures, Muslims, in all the major centres of the Islamic Caliphate, engaged in a relentless activity of translation and transcription of manuscripts. When it bore its fruits, this activity brought transcription as the basic source of knowledge and the major tool of scientific and literary advancement of Muslims.

Most historians consider the scientific and intellectual growth of the Umayyad and Abbasid eras a product of the literary activities of transcribing, translating and authoring.¹⁹ Umayyad Caliphs like Mu'āwiyah ibn Abi Sufiyān and Hishām ibn 'Abd al Malik, and the Abbasid Caliph Abū Ja'far al-Mansūr, valued much the acquisition and compilation of knowledge and encouraged literary activities of compilation, translation and book scribing. It was during this period that famous literary and scientific books were either translated from other languages (like the translation of the Indian treatise of *Brahma sphuta-Sidhanta* to *Kitab al-Sind Hind* by al-Fazāri and Ya'qūb ibn Ṭāriq)²⁰ or authored by Muslim scholars (like al-Rāzi's medical volume *al-Ḥāwī*).²¹ Though the intellectual renaissance of Muslims had begun during the Umayyad era, the 'Abbasids are credited, in Islamic history, with the great Islamic cultural awakening.

Al-Warrāqūn: The Printers and Publishers of the Era

Paper was the single most important commodity that contributed to the intellectual and cultural enlightenment of the era. Muslims came to know of the Chinese invention of paper as they extended the Islamic territories to Transoxiana (or *bilād mā warā' al-nahr*), and encountered Chinese trade and industry.²² Traders brought processed

paper to Baghdad from the Chinese territories and, with the social and political developments we described earlier, the demand for paper increased and soon a special market (*sūq*) for paper was established in the Baghdad. *Sūq al-Warrāqīn* became an intellectual centre in Baghdad as scribes and calligraphers joined in the quarters and book authors began demanding the services of these scribes. With the surge in the demand for paper in the Muslim lands, Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus soon developed their own paper industries by using plant fibre for paper production.

The *warrāqūn* were, therefore, not only paper merchants, but also those who took part in an intellectual activities. Their activities could be compared to the book publishing industry of today and, technically speaking, they may be safely described as both the “printing presses” and “publishers” of the Abbasid era. To understand the magnitude of this activity, one must remember that those were hand written volumes to which scribes attended meticulously and spent months writing a single copy. A book was a scarce commodity, and the high wage of a scribe was, therefore, justified.

The activity of scribing and copying involved several scribes who would sit to a single author who would then dictate to them his work; thus several copies of the same work would be produced after several such sessions.²³ The market value of a *warrāq* surged dramatically during the era of such Caliphs like al-Rashīd and his son al-Ma'mūn. A *warrāq* in those days would earn as much as “twenty five thousand *Derhims*,”²⁴ and al-Ma'mūn, it was told, did not hesitate to compensate an excellent *warrāq* with an amount of gold equivalent to the weight of the book he scribed.²⁵ Book production, though may not have reached the mass level of today, reached to levels that made writers like al-Qalqashandī speak of a “profession” and “industry” when referring to the ‘Abbasid period.²⁶

Cultural, Social and Political Impacts of Writing

Writers, compilers, authors, and researchers in all branches of knowledge found in the Muslim state a positive and encouraging climate for literary and scientific excellence. Books in all branches of knowledge, from poetry to astronomy, and from novel writing to engineering and medicine, were authored, copied or translated.

Schools, libraries, discussion groups and study circles thrived and the Islamic culture flourished.

Socially, this cultural advancement brought a remarkable change. Whereas orators and eloquent public speakers enjoyed a social prestige in the earlier oral community, now writers and book users received increasing attention under the new social order. Writing became a source of social prestige and, with the elevation of *dīwān al-kitābah* to a political bureau, writers and scribes became politically important as well. The attention paid by the Caliphs to the cultural refinement of themselves and their people led to a similar public concern with culture and arts. People improved their literary and cultural standards, acquired and read books, attended and engaged in literary discussions, and refined their intellectual tastes.

The social prominence of writing during the era is captured by al-Qalqashandī in his book, *Ṣubḥ al-‘Ashā’ fi Sinā‘at al-Inshā’* (Daylight for the Blind on the Profession of Composition).²⁷ This voluminous book is dedicated to elucidating the importance of writing as a social institution.²⁸ In the book, al-Qalqashandī emphasized knowledge of social, political and religious affairs as an essential prerequisite for a professional writer. A writer, al-Qalqashandī wrote,²⁹ “should possess wide knowledge of every matter, befriend the elite of society, and strive to increase his own knowledge.” With such qualities and qualifications, al-Qalqashandī declared, a writer would surely rise to “the highest echelons of authority and prestige.”³⁰

The writing bureaus, in the Abbasid Baghdad, were filled with Persians, Indians, Turks and other non-Arabs who mastered the Arabic language, engaged in translation and transcription and, eventually, gained social and political prestige. Famous literary and scientific figures like Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, Sa‘īd ibn Ḥamīd, al-Isfahānī and Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī were some of the non-Arabs who occupied elevated positions in the state. Socially, the rise of non-Arabs was the essence of the cultural awakening as this composite of cultures, races, branches of knowledge and values was brought into the melting pot of Baghdad. Politically, however, it was one of the reasons for the disintegration and devastation of the state, as the power struggle among different ethnic and religious loyalties resulted in the creation of political fission along the ethnic and cultural lines of demarcation.

Baghdad remained the centre of the Islamic literary and scientific activities until the mid-thirteenth century, when the Mongols destroyed it. The devastation of Baghdad in 1258 A.D. resulted in an equal and catastrophic cultural devastation of the Islamic scientific and literary heritage when the invaders threw the books from the libraries and learning institutions of the city into the rivers, and used them as bridges over which their armies marched. Black ink, it was told, covered the river for three days.³¹ While the major part of the heritage was literally drowned in the Euphrates and Tigris, a considerable part of the remaining heritage was taken, later during the imperial occupation of the Islamic world, to Europe.

The heritage saved was sufficient to manifest the magnitude of the Islamic literary and scientific achievements. The contribution of this heritage to human civilization is widely acknowledged by western scholars and scientists who built on the knowledge and sciences compiled and developed by the early Muslims. Many of the world-famous Muslim scientists and philosophers belong to this era, and a considerable part of the contribution of Muslims to human knowledge in sciences and philosophy was written during this period. The long list of Muslim authors and their literary and scientific works can be glimpsed in several references available both in printed and electronic forms.³²

Information Preservation: Libraries and Bookstores

The credit of preserving a rich Islamic literary and cultural heritage goes to the Umayyads and the Abbasids who established a proper system of compilation and archiving of official correspondence, documents, and manuscripts in public *dīwāns* and book houses. Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufiyān established the first *dīwān* of writing, and encouraged the official preservation of information in all forms and styles. Other 'Abbasid Caliphs were also instrumental in the promotion of these activities, as they acquired books for their private libraries and paid generously for rare acquisitions. At the official level, they established libraries and encouraged the public to use them. Able literary figures who were conversant in several branches of knowledge were chosen to oversee these public libraries. These librarians were themselves translators and authors who acquired and imparted knowledge in the libraries. Ibn Miskawaih is an example

of a librarian who was an accomplished author of many fine works. Nicknamed *al-Khāzin* (the keeper), he visited the private libraries of ibn al-‘Amīd, himself a famous literary figure of his time, and to the library of the Emir of the Buwaihīd State. Ibn Maskawīh’s books are reliable references on the history and social life of the era.³³

Libraries or “book houses,” as they were known, mushroomed all over the Caliphate and became popular centres of knowledge acquisition and dissemination during the ‘Abbasid era. The most famous libraries of the era included *Bayt al-Ḥikmah* (House of Wisdom), which Harūn al-Rashīd established in Baghdad. This library remained a basic center of Islamic knowledge dissemination until the Mongols invaded Baghdad and destroyed most of its content.³⁴ *Dar al-‘Ilm* (House of knowledge) was established by the Fatimids in Cairo and remained intact till the end of the caliphate in 1172 AD.³⁵ *The Library of Cordoba* in Andalusia (Spain) was built by the Andalusian Umayyad Caliph al-Mustansir whose extreme generosity resulted in the library’s acquisitions that exceeded more than four hundred thousand titles.³⁶

Privately-owned public libraries also increased during the Abbasid Caliphate. Ibn al-‘Amīd’s library was one of the most famous private libraries of the era because it had the largest acquisition of books and manuscripts.³⁷ Another public library was that of ibn Hamdān which “was known as *Dar al-‘Ilm* and was dedicated to the public who were never denied its use.”³⁸ Al-Isfahānī described a public library of ‘Abd al-Ḥakam ibn ‘Amr al-Jamahī who “owned a public place that contained some chess, dice, smoke-pipes, and books from all branches of knowledge.”³⁹ Libraries preserved Islamic and human knowledge and promoted authorship, research, translation and other relevant activities like bookbinding and calligraphy. The library of *Dār al-Ḥikmah* in Baghdad, which was a comprehensive university, was particularly significant in the development of Islamic sciences as it was a famous research center with observatories, laboratories and research facilities.⁴⁰

Books and Newsletters: “Mass Media” in the Muslim State

Most of the official correspondence of *dīwān al-rasā‘il*, during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras, was exchanges between the Caliph and

the holders of the official posts, the governors or commissioners, but the content of some of these correspondence frequently addressed issues of interest to the general public, for example, proclamation of new state rules or explanation of new administrative decisions.⁴¹ Such letters were either read in mosques or posted in public places. In modern parlance, this public display of state correspondence may be termed as official newsletters because they met the basic purpose of all newsletters: to communicate the information to as many members of the general public as possible. While the official correspondence was displayed as newsletters for the general public, some private newsletters were “published” and circulated by individuals and private organizations. An example of such letters is the famous treatises of “*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*” (Treatises of the Brothers of Purity), which a group of intellectuals exchanged during the Abbasid era. Known as *al-Ikhwāniyyah* (the brotherliness), these were lengthy treatises that addressed social, political and philosophical issues of the time.⁴²

Both the official and the private correspondence served, on the whole, the same purpose of modern-day mass media: to inform, entertain and/or persuade. Some of the official letters, for example, contained declaration of allegiance to the Caliph, endorsement and support of official viewpoints, breaking news about battles won or provinces conquered, and/or political directives sent by the Caliphs to their governors, agents, commanders or judges.⁴³

The private *rasā'il* varied widely in their content, from the expression of political viewpoints, to the promotion of social behaviour or the propagation of philosophical ideas. Some famous treatises covered such wide subjects like Sufism and philosophy (e.g. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafa*). Lengthy treatises covered a variety of subjects ranging from fiction (e.g., *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* by Ibn al-Muqaffa) to news of early civilizations and peoples (e.g., *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* by al-Ṭabarī) to the description of notable personalities and events (e.g., *al-Aghānī* by Abū al-Faraq al-Asfahānī). Still a fifth category advised on different matters of life (e.g., *Uyūn al-Akhhbār* by Ibn Qutaibah).⁴⁴ Al-Isfahānī's famous work, *al-Aghānī*, which comprises several volumes, narrates social incidents and occurrences the way newspapers and magazines today do in their feature sections. It also comments on these issues and

provides different viewpoints by socialites and celebrities of the time. These different discourses were the channels of social information, persuasion and entertainment; they were newsletters and newspapers of the era. Though their frequency of publication and number of copies were limited, these treatises resemble, in purpose and function, the mass media of modern times.

***Dīwān al-Barīd*: News Gathering and Political Control**

Although the ‘Abbasids established the first network for news-gathering, it was Caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb who started the activity earlier when he posted some soldiers to units of the armed forces with the sole purpose of “informing” about the state of affairs in the army.⁴⁵ Under this system, news was conceptualized from a military perspective by emphasizing information about both the enemy and the Muslim army personnel. News, under such perception, was much akin to modern-day intelligence activities as they emphasized military personnel.⁴⁶

Decades later, the Abbasids developed the same concept further by employing officers who would report on both the private and the general affairs in different regions.⁴⁷ Defined from this perspective, news referred to information about people and events that were necessary for everyday control of the state. Speed in news delivery was of paramount importance to keep the caliph up-to-date on news and information about the regions, of the increasingly expanding state.

Dīwān al-Barīd provided a speedy and dynamic system of news delivery to the Caliph. Though Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abi Sufiyān extended the *barīd* networks that Caliph ‘Umar established earlier for correspondence with his commissioners, it was Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik who transformed it into a full-fledged system of information gathering.⁴⁸ By using relays of horses, dispatches travelled to the capital from all major cities and regions of the Caliphate, and brought news twice a day to the Caliph.

Promptness in news delivery was very much emphasized in the Abbasid era; Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik insisted that the *barīd* man (postman) had free access to him at all times, day or night. Likewise, his son, Caliph Ziyād, identified, to his *ḥajīb* (doorkeeper), four

state officials who were not to be obstructed from reaching him. These included the "man of frontier," the post-person who delivered news from the battlefield because "if he (the postman) is delayed an hour, that might affect a year's work."⁴⁹ Al-Qalqashandī described the Caliph's eagerness to supply the post bureau with the "best horses, and the most able men," and to urge the authorities to attend diligently to the needs of *barīd* officers as they travelled along the major roads of the *Khilāfah*.⁵⁰

Accuracy and objectivity were important news values. In an advice to his followers, Caliph Al-Mansūr declared that the *barīd* officer, "should give an impartial and correct account of the happenings, and should scrupulously avoid distortion of truth."⁵¹ The Umayyads and 'Abbasids emphasized these values by choosing only pious and well-trusted Muslims to the post of *Ṣaḥīb al-barīd* (Post Master), and by carefully choosing the horse riders who carried the messages along the roads of the Caliphate.

Public use of the *barīd* system was less common. The public used the system with the payment of a fee but there is no explanation of how and for what purposes the public used the post and news services.⁵² Public use of the *barīd* system in those days was rare because the dissemination of social news through the system was socially insignificant. As a community accustomed to vast space and long distances, Muslims were less conscious about time and, hence, ascribed less importance to speed in the transmission of social news. To the Muslims of the time, a distant event would still be newsworthy when it reached another place several months later. News was conceptualized as information about events and occurrences of the past, and thus speed and immediacy were of less importance.⁵³ The definition of news in terms of immediacy and timeliness is a factor of the social changes that took place after the inception of the industrial revolution in Europe.

A distinction between political and social news in the 'Abbasid era is, therefore, possible. *Ṣaḥīb al-barīd* conveyed to the Caliphs political news, which included rumours about, and accounts of the conduct of, commissioners, governors, and other officials of the state.⁵⁴ No element of undercover activity was involved in the work of the *barīd* officers whose responsibility was to keep the Caliph fully informed about the state of affairs in the state.

News was defined to include political events and activities, as well as information about the conduct and behaviour of state officials, and was most important for the purpose of control of the state. On the other hand, social news of the Islamic state resembled “feature news” in modern-day journalism, and was therefore less urgent and did not need to use the official *barīd* route. But as social events, these “news items” were reported and circulated in the community through the word of mouth, or were incorporated into stories of books like Isfahānī’s *al-Aghānī*, Ibn Qutaibah’s *‘Uyūn al-Akhhbār* or Ibn ‘Abd al-Rabb’s *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*. These books that narrated incidents, profiled people, chronicled social events, and described cities and places were major sources of social information for the community at the time; using the jargon of today’s mass media, they were the feature news and stories of their era.

Conclusion

The role of the written words in the cultural and scientific advancement of Muslims is well established. This is evident through an examination of some of the social and political dimensions of writing as an institution of the Muslim state during the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid eras.

Politically, written communication was essential for political control, especially after the expansion of the state during the eras of the rightly guided Caliphs. Socially, cultural refinement followed the expansion of literary activities of book scribing, reading and authoring that overwhelmed the community in the ‘Abbasid and Umayyad eras. Such refinement was an essential prerequisite for the Muslim scientific and literary accomplishments that has contributed immensely to the advancement of human civilization.

Notes

1. Brian S. Turner ed., *Readings in Orientalism: Early Sources* (New York: Rutledge), 2000.
2. George Sale, “The Koran: Preliminary Discourse,” in *ibid*, 32-117.
3. W. Montgomery Watt, *The Majesty that was Islam* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson), 1974.

4. For a detailed criticism of Muslim writing on Islamic communication, please refer to Mahmoud M. Galander, "Islamization of Communication: A critique" (A paper presented to International Conference on Islamization of the Human Sciences, IIUM, Kuala Lumpur, August, 2000).
5. Ibid.
6. See M. Galander, "Communication in the Early Islamic Era: A Historical and Social Analysis," *Intellectual Discourse*, 10, no. 1 (2002). This is a detailed analysis of communication institutions, in both their oral and written forms, during the periods of the Prophet (SAS) and the first four caliphs.
7. For a comprehensive analysis of the political set-up of al-Madinah, see Husein Haykal, *The Life of Mohammed* tr., Ismā'īl Rājī al Fāruqī (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1976).
8. M. Galander, "Communication in the Early Islamic Era: A Historical and Social Analysis."
9. Ibid.
10. Relaying the message from the source through an intermediary leads to what communication scholars call serial communication, a situation in which the credibility of the source and the authenticity of the message is under doubt.
11. M. Galander, *Communication in the Early Islamic Era*.
12. Ibid.
13. A. Elyas Hussein, *History of the Ummah*. (Kuala Lumpur: Univision Press, 2001), 15.
14. The rudiments of the bureaucratic offices of the state may be traced to the era of the Prophet (SAS) and his Caliphs who appointed officials assigned with official writing duties. However, there was no separate writing office. See A. Ilyas Hussein, *History of the Ummah*.
15. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā' fī Ṣinā't al-Inshā'*. (Cairo: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa-al-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1963).
16. These different names reflect different emphasis by the Umayyad and Abbasid authorities.
17. Ahmed Marwa, *Al-Sahafā al- 'Arabia*, (Lebanon: Dar Manshūrāt al-Ḥayat, 1961) 89.
18. Ibid., 61.
19. Ibid., 75.
20. Nafis Ahmed, *Al-Fikr al-Jughrāphi fī al-Turāth al-Islamī* (Geographical Thought in Islamic Heritage) tr. Faṭḥī 'Uthmān (Kuwait: Dar al-'Ilm, 1984), 171.

21. A. Elyas Hussein, *History of the Ummah*.
22. Ibid.
23. Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldīn, *Al-Muqaddimah* (Cairo: Bulaq Printing Press. n.d.) IV: 146.
24. Ibid., 35.
25. Ibid., 36.
26. The term *Ṣinā'at al-Inshā'* may be translated as both "writing industry" and "writing profession."
27. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā' fi Ṣinā'at al-Inshā'*. This translation captures the meaning rather than provide a verbatim translation.
28. The book covers several of the periods that extended from the Abbasid to the various states of the post-Abbasid era.
29. Al-Qalqashandi, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā' fi Ṣinā'at al-Inshā'*. 231.
30. Ibid., 234.
31. Aḥmed Shawqī al-Fanjarī, *Al-'Ulūm al-Islāmiyah*, Part 1. (Kuwait: Kuwait Foundation for Scientific Advancement, 1985), 45.
- 32 For books listing Muslim writers and scholars see al-Fanjarī, *al-'Ulūm al-Islāmiyah*, Part 1.
33. Ibid., 112.
34. Arshad Yousuf, *al-Kitāb al-Islāmī al-Makḥṭūṭ* (Amman: Jordan Press Foundation, n.d.) 41.
35. Ibid., 42.
36. Ibid., 43.
37. Mahmūd Abbas Hammūda, *Tārīkh al-Kitāb al-Islāmī al-Makḥṭūṭ* (Riyadh: Dār Thaqīf li al-Nashr, 1991), 248.
38. Ibid, 248.
39. M. Mahir Hamada, *Al-Kitāb al-'Arabī Matbū'ah wa Makḥṭūṭah* (Dār al-'Ilm li al-Tibā' wa al-Nashr, 1984), 89.
40. Ibid., 102.
41. Ibid., 91.
42. This was an underground group that espoused political and philosophical ideas that were not tolerated at the time.
43. M. Mahir Hamada, *Al-Kitāb al-'Arabī Matbū'ah wa Makḥṭūṭah*, 93.
44. Ibid., 63.

45. A. Khurshid, *Newsletters in the Orient*, (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1988), 13.
46. Ibid., 13.
47. Ibid., 13.
48. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* (History of Prophets and Kings) (Egypt: Dār al-Ma‘ārif 1964).
49. Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā’ fī Ṣinā‘t al-Inshā’*.
50. Ibid.
51. Khurshid, *Newsletters in the Orient*, 14.
52. Ibid.
53. In contemporary Arabic, the term *akhbār* refers to news as the latest occurrences. In classical Arabic, however, the term was used in a wider sense that covered all occurrences, incidents and mythologies of the past.
54. Khurshid, *Newsletters in the Orient*, 15.