CHAPTER VI

ARRANGEMENT AND PRESENTATION OF THE MATERIAL

The method of recording and presenting the historical information had already developed to its perfection before the time of Ibn al-Athir. Its evolutionary process may be considered to have taken not a very long time, because within/first two centuries of Islamic era, the discipline of historiography, like all the branches of Islamic learnings developed to a recognized standard. Many historians adopted both-chronological and annalistic orders for compiling historical works, which later culminated into the great work *Tarikh al-Rusul w al-Muluk* of Tabari.

When Ibn al-Athir designed to produce a comprehensive, rich and balanced history of Islam, he had the example before him of the history of Tabari. Though, he had introduced certain deviation from the already set pattern and technique of historiography, its fundamental structure and basic principle remained unchanged. He followed both the methods-chronological and annalistic which were unavoidable for his voluminous history, *al-Kāmil*. The portions of prophetic history, technically called al-Mubtada and the history of Persia, Greece, Rome, and Pre-Islamic Arabia have been recorded according to chronological order. This order does not tell the exact year in which a particular event had happened though it observes the order of
succession in time. Thus the happenings recorded under this order do not express confusion about their succession. Since it was very difficult rather impossible, to know the exact year the historians followed this method in writing the history of antiquities. This method was especially applied in recording the antiquities by the Persian and Greeks authors. Moreover, the example of Torah was before the Greek authors which in later times served as a standard for the Syrians.

Ibn al-Athir has followed this method when he begins the history with the creation. From Adam to the Prophet Muhammad all the account have been arranged under this system.

The flight of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina provides a new situation in the field of Arab historiography. Historians fixed the event of flight for time reckoning. Ibn al-Athir persued it for putting the information under each year according to succession in This discipline is called annalistic. The period of the Prophet Muhammad, from the time of his flight, and the parallel account of the neighbouring countries is followed by the history of the pious Caliphs. Then, the Umayyads and Abbasides are described successively. The contemporary events have been preserved under the same system.

Ibn al-Athir records important and big events under separate heading in each year. So that a reader may find a complete story without deliberation and may not fall into distraction. After narrating the full account, he again mentions
each part of it in respective months and years. Those which are of little importance are recorded together under one heading at the end of the year. Such events are like the death of an important person, famine, natural calamities, earthquakes and inundation. The death of kings, distinguished persons, and scholars have especially been recorded under this heading.

The contribution to methodology made by Ibn al-Athir is that a coherent and complete picture of an event is presented at one place even if it occurred in several months and years. For example if an event took place during one or two years, then our historian does not cut it into pieces and furnish each one in respective year in which it occurred; but he records the whole account at one place.

He violated the annalistic discipline. When Ibn al-Athir reaches his own time and records the account of Tatar's invasion in the year 617 A.H.

The early historians especially Tabari has presented an account, though sometimes of contradictory nature, according to the months and years in which it occurred. If an event is very long and takes many months or years, he cuts it into parts and

2. Ibid., Vol. 12/137.
notes down each part of it according to its accuracy. This way of recording the event creates trouble and confusion, because, at first sight, the full event is not grasped or understood by a reader. It requires a prolonged consideration and keen attention. Ibn al-Athir has deviated from this method. Moreover, he does not narrate contradictory statements about the same event in full, but the most authentic tradition is selected and narrated along with brief reference to contrary points. This fact can obviously be noted when Tarikh al-Tabari and al-Kamil are comparatively studied.

Another point which deserves special mention is that Ibn al-Athir has completely dropped the chain of transmitters while Tabari has utilized the chain because he was very much particular about it. For, the time of Tabari was very near to the period in which historiography was under great influence of Hadith science so he was bound to follow the same discipline. The story tellers, "Akhbariūns" strictly adopted the chain of transmitters; because if they avoided it they had to face severe criticism. They were already considered to be a suspicious class by the traditionist. Their authenticity was doubted. So it was highly impracticable for the story-tellers to drop the chain of their Khabar. Thus influence of traditionists continued to dominate until the period of Tabari. Tabari himself was a noted traditionist. He was fully aware which of the importance of chain/could have not been separated from a Khabar in any circumstance; even in the field of historiography it was indispensable element to authenticate the event.
Since the art of historiography, which had already matured as an independent subject, continued its reformatory development, the value of chain in connection of historiography received discouragement. Historians began to detest lengthy chain which unnecessarily made the book lengthy. A number of historians, before Ibn al-Athir, dropped it from the contents.

The annalistic method of arranging the information was developed and pursued by many historians long before Ibn al-Athir. Now a question arises as to how and when this discipline was evolved by the Arabs. Whether the Arab historians independently arrived at the idea or it was a direct or indirect result of foreign influence. An affirmative answer to the latter question is difficult to be held. A hypothesis to this effect can be formed having a historical perspective in view. The Greek influence of historiography, particularly in connection with Annalistic order, is hardly permissible; because all the works translated from Greek or Syriac into Arabic were of later period when the annalistic order had already been in practice among the Arab historians. Further, it is not established that even the translated works were written according to the order of Annal.

Professor Rosenthal remarks, "it is a common knowledge that none of the classical works of Greek historiography ever reached the Arabs, nor do we have any express information about
the existence of complete Arabic translations of Byzantine chronographies", but he further deliberates that"in Byzantine literature the existence of Annalistic chronicles is not to be denied. He feels that when John Malalas reaches his own time he employs annalistic form, "in the same year, at the end of the same indication."¹ There were some books which preserved cultural history as well as datas concerning scholars, philosophers, and church dignataries. Natural calamities, like earthquake, thunderstorm, flood, plagues famines have been recorded which characterize Annal form of historiography. From this Professor Bosenthal has speculated that probably a Greek Arabic cultural relation, in the beginning of Islamic expansion might have kindled the idea in the minds of Arab scholars.

Notwithstanding the above speculation, the evidence actually supports the idea that Annalistic form was developed by the Arabs along with all round evolution of Islamic learnings. The development of Islamic learnings had started during the end of the second and the beginning of the third century A.H. Hadith, Fiqh, Tafsir, literature and other branches of Islamic learnings took many steps in their evolutionary march. They were speedily taking shape as an independent science. Hadith and Akhbar literature were being collected, scrutinized and compiled. A number of great traditionist were born who advanced

the progress of Hadith literature. Thus the creative genius of Muslim scholars took initiative in other fields too.

An urgent need to give law, based on Islamic teachings, to the society, compelled the intellectuals to take interest in the formative efforts of Islamic jurisprudence. For this purpose a number of jurists appeared in the second century and most of them mastered in Hadith themselves. Since Qur'an and Hadith were two keystone upon which the whole system of Islamic jurisprudence was to be built, the perfection in these two branches was necessary for being a doctor of Fiqh. Thus these sciences, inter related with other subjects, made a tremendous progress during the third and fourth century. This was to happen due to the inner urge and self-consciousness of the rising Muslim society.

The inner upsurge of the Arab society ushered into preserving its glorious heritage which was splendid and most wonderful. Therefore historical studies received attention of the people. A class of story-tellers or (Akhbariyun) appeared who tried to preserve not only the pre-Islamic heritage, but also they began to collect the information of the neighbouring nations. Some translations from Pehlvi and Syriac books were rendered into Arabic which enriched the historical consciousness of the Arabs.

These story-tellers arranged the material in chronological order which was prevalent among the Persians. It is an established fact that the Islamic era was already current since
the time of the pious caliph - Umar. The existence of Islamic era might have struck the mind of the historians to arrange materials in a more scientific and accurate way and thus they might have developed Annalistic system quite early.

It is not known who first applied this system, but the first extant book written according to annalistic order is the great history of Abu Jafar Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari which became a pioneering work in many ways for later historians. But it is doubtful to hold that it was the first book written in annalistic order. It seems unthinkable that such a system would have developed and applied suddenly without prior evolutionary process. It is quite reasonable to think that a beginning in this direction must have been made much earlier from the time of Tabari. Ibn Nadim records that Haytham b. Adi (207 A.H.) wrote a book entitled *Kitab al-Tarikh al-Sinini* which propounds that annalistic order had already been practiced by an early historian. Another storyteller or (Akhbari) Jafar b. Muhammad b. al-Azhari b. Isa (276 A.H.) had applied the annalistic order in his book.1 These

evidences greatly support that annalistic form was already in practice before the time of Tabari which facilitated Tabari in adopting this discipline and making it more refined and developed.

After Tabari annalistic system has been followed by many historians like, Masudi, Ibn Miskawayh, Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Jowzi and others who wrote general, dynastic, and regional histories. Ibn al-Athir has followed the system. His second book Tarikh al-Atabeka is also compiled under the same system.

"Comparison with other historical works of similar type." The first and most important historical book which is to be compared with Al-Kamil is Tarikh al-Rusul w al-Muluk of Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari. It was a pioneering work in the field of universal history which reached us and to which our historian owes too much.

The comparison between Tarikh al-Rusul w al-Muluk and Al-Kamil finds sufficient ground for the assessment. Two very broad divisions can be made when a comparative study is to be initiated. The first one concerns technical aspects; that is methodology of arranging the material; and the second one purely concerns the subject matter. The first aspect is already given due consideration. The discipline and method do not vary between the two historians. Both of them employ the annalistic order to record the events. Although Tabari is
forerunner, even then there are some points of difference. For example the traditional way of reporting the events, with strict observance of Asnad, was given up by Ibn al-Athir. We do not see the long chain of transmitters which is purely a characteristic of Hadith literature in *al-Kamil*. This difference is not merely a superficial change which differentiates history from Hadith but it also signifies the conceptual change which took place during the time of Ibn al-Athir or little before. The subject of history and its field was given separate and independent entity. It was thought as an outer expression of human will thus history freed itself from the vestige of Hadith influence both in technique and form. Tabari was bound owing to environmental and personal reasons, to observe Asnad. I say environmental because no one could escape the sever criticism of Muhaddithin when he did not mention chain during the time of Tabari. He was considered unreliable fabricator and liar.

Ibn al-Athir treats of historical account without abiding himself with Hadith technique. It means that while arranging the material, he again does not follow Tabari. For instance Tabari narrates an account even if it happened during one or more years deviding it into pieces and then arranging it according to the months and the years, but Ibn al-Athir does not do so. He first furnishes the account in full length the at one place and after it describes/event again according to the months.
Ibn al-Athir has another difference in the technique of arrangement, with Tabari, that is, he forms an independent and separate heading at the end of each year under which the account of minor importance or small one have been recorded. He entitles "ذكر عدة حوادث في هذه السنة". Though Tabari records the information of title importance too but he does not set separate title for it. I think it is not a particular quality only of Ibn al-Athir. Although Masudi, Ibn Miskawah have not evolved it yet another historian who preceded Ibn al-Athir, in fact, developed it. We find Ibn al-Jowzi (597 A.H.) sets the title though it varies in word "ذكر من توفي في هذه السنة من الأكابر" which, later, most possibly became an example for Ibn al-Athir.

The second sphere in which a substantial difference exist between Tarikh of Tabari and Al-Kamil is the material one. Both historians look at history from different point of view which consequently bears influence on the selection/the material. This point has been dealt with in the last chapter wherein such questions have been touched.

A striking feature of Al-Kamil is its comprehensive nature which we do not find in any other book of similar type. It is continuously held, though not without exaggeration, that Al-Kamil, from the subject view point, is the reproduction of the history of Tabari which terminates at 303 A.H. This view

is based perhaps not very much on the comparative study of both the texts.

Ibn al-Athir admits in the very beginning that he has largely compiled from the book and preserved all the information which Tabari has furnished in his history. But a large portion of the historical account has been furnished without the help of Tabari. The portion which describes pre-Islamic Arab history provides sufficient proof to this effect. The Persian history in *Al-Kamil* also owes other source than that of Tarikh Tabari. The Roman account again goes to the same direction.

The Umayyad accounts vary from Tarikh al-Tabari both in contents and volume. Ibn al-Athir has recorded some very important information which Tabari, due to his prejudice against the Umayyads, has carelessly avoided. The additional information was taken from the original sources of which I have already discussed at a considerable length. The Andalusian account has completely been neglected by Tabari, while Ibn al-Athir has proportionately given it due place in *Al-Kamil*. Ibn al-Athir records not merely those happenings connected with the Muslim period, but he, as a true historian shows keen interest in too pre-Islamic history of Andalus. It reflects the tolerant attitude of the historian. The vast area which Ibn al-Athir has covered, the huge information which he has furnished make his book outstanding/world history, more comprehensive than any other work of similar type.
Another remarkable difference between *Al-Kamil* and Tarikh al-Tabari is that the former preserves some occasional criticism in regard to certain portion of the history. For example Ibn al-Athir expresses doubt on the veracity of Persian antiquities. The number of Persian dynasties their succession and highly exaggerated deeds attributed to them, have been put to criticism. He criticises their authenticies and he remarks:

\[\text{He again remarks in connection with Bourasb or Izdahtag:}\]

This and alike criticism which occasionally has/appeared in *Al-Kamil* determines the attitude of Ibn al-Athir towards history. It seems that Ibn al-Athir valued not only the authority but/the statement of the narrators/have got equal importance for him. He emphasised on the nature of account as well as on its narrators. This kind of rational thinking of Ibn al-Athir is not to be witnessed in the history of Muhammab b. Jarir. This discrepancy exists not because of Tabari's

2. Ibid., Vol. 1/27.
inferiority, the only reason is the difference of time and personality.

Muhammad b. Jarir was of a Persian origin. Therefore his natural learning towards Persian history and culture is understandable. He lived during the early of the fourth century when the political power of Islam was in fact in the hand of the Buwahids, which is to be considered the climax of Persian revivalist tendency so it was very logical to bear influence on the mind of the learned class and Muhammad b. Jarir was not an exception. He has copiously recorded Persian history without least criticism. On the other hand, he has shown antipathy to Pre-Islamic Arab history which may be taken as an intolerant attitude of the historian. The complete absence of Andalusan history in Tarikh al-Rusul is also wonderful omission. This, if I am allowed to say calculated negligence of the historian has made the work not very balanced and unbiased.

A notable work which preceded Al-Kāmil is Al-Muntazim fi Tarikh al-Mulūk w al-Umam of which the last six volumes out of ten have been discovered and published from Hyderabad. The fifth volume starts with the account of 257 A.H. This book, though it has been one of the sources of Ibn al-Athir, is far behind of Al-Kāmil. Abu al-Farj has collected the material not of general character but he has attached much
importance to persons and to their biographical sketches. Therefore his history is mainly concerned with individuals. A few accounts have been narrated which possess general political characteristics. His area of interest is also comparatively limited. So *Al-Kamil* exceeds *al-Muntazim* regarding the historical material.

The next book which possesses certain characteristics of a universal history is *Kitab Tajrib al-Umm wa Taqib al-Hamam* of Ibn Miskawah. It deserves to be compared with *Al-Kamil*. So far the material of the book is concerned, it is arranged by Ibn al-Athir according to the same order which has followed. But the author has treated of subject while keeping certain principles before him and applying them in selecting the material. His conception of history is pragmatic which guides him in handling the material.

It is a fact that Ibn Miskawah was a Persian. Therefore it was natural for him to pay more attention to the Persian history. The *Tajarib* contains disproportionately Persian account. Pre-Islamic Arab history attracted his attention. So far it had relation with the Persian, a lot of Battle-days, were neglected by the author. The Prophet's history is furnished not generously. The accounts of Arab kingdom has meagerly been recorded. When he comes to describe the contemporary events, his main interest lies in the Buwahids who virtually
I have tried to trace all the books which are mentioned by Ibn al-
Athir as his sources. For the remaining information, I have adopted
a comparative method in ascertaining their sources. I have compared
the accounts with those recorded by preceding historians and have
tried to find out similarities or dissimilarities between them.

The sixth chapter discusses technical aspects of Ibn al-Athir's
historical writings. The method of presenting the material adopted
by the historian has engaged my attention. In this regard, a
comparison of Al-Kamil with other similar works has been made.

The seventh chapter evaluates Ibn al-Athir as a historian.
In this chapter I have tried to assess his attitude and approach
towards history and the manner in which he has dealt with historical
events. This assessment has been based on a detailed study of the
historical works of Ibn al-Athir.

I submit that chapters three to seven are original and contribute
to knowledge regarding Ibn al-Athir in particular and Arab
historiography in general.

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ruled all over the Abbasid dominion. Thus Ibn Miskawah has recorded the account bearing regional character. What was happening in Egypt, Africa and the Umayyad of Andalus is completely missing in the Tajarii. Perhaps he was so much obsessed with the official environment which was in fact anti Arab, that it never allowed him to look beyond the Buwahid's territory and their interest. Thus the Tajarii al-Umam covers a limited area of Islamic history. The first two volumes, though, they contain historical information of Ancient Persia, Greece and Rum, display comparatively deficience. Contrary to the Tajarii, Al-Kamil provides more comprehensive and valuable information. The last portion of Tajarii again shows unbalanced and disproportionate characteristics of the book. The contemporary account furnished by Ibn Miskawah is indeed recorded with great length which could not have been completely preserved in Al-Kamil. We see that Ibn al-Athir records the accounts already furnished by Ibn Miskawah in abridged form. This characteristic of Al-Kamil distinguishes it from Tajarii and make it the most comprehensive and universal history.

The above comparison does not mean to minimize the importance of Tajarii. The information especially about the Buwahids, though not completely free from Political insinuation, is of high value. It is rich and reliable. It is due to this fact that Ibn al-Athir, while dealing with the period under discussion has enormously copied from Tajarii.
Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh is one of the greatest universal histories which attained celebrity not only in its own time but also in later centuries too. It had, indeed, removed the defects found in Tarikh al-Rusul of Tabari and thus it deserves to be called a more sound, comprehensive and harmonious work on the Islamic world history. Ibn al-Athir tried hard to record the account of all the then accessible region to the historian, and, in doing so he has shown a remarkable skill, vast knowledge and great accessibility to the sources. Probably, he learnt Syriac and Persian for consulting original sources which may be considered two very important vehicles for imparting the ancient Greek, Roman and Persian historical information. His brother Ziya al-Din was acquainted with Syriac language. I have already discussed the point that Ibn al-Athir our historian knew Persian language but so far the Syriac language is concerned his knowledge of it is not certain. The persuasive point in this respect is that Ibn al-Athir might have acquired a little knowledge of the language for its more utilitarian characteristic because Ibn al-Athir needed the knowledge of language more than his brother - Ziya al-Din. It had more importance from historical point of view than that of literary.

The proportionate historical accounts recorded by Ibn al-Athir generates admiration in the mind of a reader. It is only Al-Kamil which shows remarkable balance, according to
Rosenthal, in material. No dynasty, region or political allegiance engrossed the mind of the author which might have made him to fall in unnecessary admiration. This kind of restraint in handling the material is discernable only in *Al-Kamil*, though, when he reaches his own time, he becomes a bit more elaborative and disproportionate.

The universal characteristic of *Al-Kamil*, in fact, provides an added evidence for its distinction and richness. Though the historian rightly expressed that, some one in Musul must necessarily miss up an event of the remotest region of east and west, but to the best of his knowledge he tried hard to catch up the account of numerous regions and of various peoples, which may not be very much authentic but, in fact, it serves as the mine of rich information. Owing to this richness that almost all the historians of later period like Sibt Ibn al-Jowzi, Ibn Khallikan, Ibn Kathir, Abu Fida and Ibn Khalladun extensively relied on *Al-Kamil* and it became standard source for the historians.

2. Ibid.
   Studies on the civilization of Islam, Gibb. p. 126.