

# French Ecole des Annales and Iraqi Response: A Study of its Impact on Early Iraqi Historiography

Mahmoud Abdulwahid\*

## **I. Introduction**

The Ecole des Annales had its great impacts on the European, American and Middle Eastern historiography in general and the Arab Historiography in particular. The paper will focus on the spreading of annals school impact to Iraq and its perception by the first Iraqi historians as Abdulaziz Al-Duri (1919-2010) and Salih Ahmed Al-Ali (1918-2003), in addition to Iraqi sociologist, Ali Al-Wardi (1913-1995). The school has reflected in their historical writings, and theses. The three writers had graduated from European and American institutions which received the annals impacts since the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The paper will follow the European influences on Iraqi historians and historiography during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is an attempt to understand the development of Iraqi historical writings through their interaction with international academia. Arab world and Turkey were a part of this epistemological exchange with other nations although they had suffered from colonial invasion since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is interesting to indicate that the Iraqi founding generation who established for new approach of social and economic history paralleled the same generation which Halil Inalcik (1916-2016) belonged in Turkey. Inalcik lived in the same environment of the influence of Ecole des Annales in London and Paris, when he met with Bernard Lewis in School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and Ferdinand Braudel. The latter had impacted on his approach to focus on social and economic aspect of Ottoman history.

\* College of Arts-University of Baghdad DOI: 10.37879/9789751749987.2022.17

He worked at Chicago university(1974-1986),Princeton and Harvard universities(1990-1992),and Bilkent university since 1992. Inalcik had introduced the Ottoman history as a global phenomenon, and used the annals paradigm to understand the Ottoman history. He had been influenced by Henri Pirenne and Mark Bloc. Inalcik had became, as Al-Duri,Al-Ali and Al-Wardi, as a global historian by his international contributions.

The paper will reveal the international circle of annals school through comparing the achievement of Iraqi academic elites and comparing with what happened in Turkey by the late historian Halil Inalcik.

## **II. Ecole des annales and European Historiography:**

Sine the end of the World War I, the European historiography had saw structural developments following the spread of Methodological school after the 1870 war between France and Germany. The war had showed the weakness of French thought which led to the defeat. The methodological approach had focused on political history and documents as a basis of historiography. The founders of the school were Charles Seignobos(1854-1942),and Charles Victor Langlois(1863-1929). The French methodological school was influenced by the German historical thought, and its impact had extended to other European countries<sup>1</sup>. The school had attempted to end the gap of rupture of French history since the medieval to present times. The Methodological paradigm had reread the French history as one circle without any shortage of its long periods. The Methodological School paradigm had great impact on the historical studies and historiography to the end of the World War I. The European and international crises of interwar period led the younger generation of historians to search the new paradigm for understanding the universal situations.

In light of a weakness of methodological approach and its failure of responding to the war catastrophes, the French historians searching for new intellectual alternative, the Ecole des Annales was the new French response of the serious situations. Its rise preceded the economic crisis of (1929-1932),but the crisis had headed the school early emergence and its interest of the economic factors of the history . The school had attempted to resolve the problem of rupture in French history since the revolution of 1789 to the present<sup>2</sup>. The early history of the Annales is now well-known. Founded in

1 Michael Harsgor,"Total History: the Annals School", in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Jan., 1978), p. 1-3.

2 Mahmoud Al-Qaysi, *French Ecole des Annales and Renewal of Historiography*, Baghdad,

1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre at the University of Strasbourg as the *Annales d'histoire economique et sociale*, the journal moved with its founders to Paris in the mid-1930s and took its current name in 1946. Bloch and Febvre intended to create an open forum for interdisciplinary research and to promote concrete, collaborative work that would not be tied to the "positivism" of traditional historical scholarship in France<sup>3</sup>.

By the mid-1950s, the *Annales* and its associated historians had transformed the initial anti-establishment coterie into an alternative establishment institution in its own right. After the war, the journal was associated with the newly founded Sixth Section for economic and social sciences of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*. Under Febvre and then under his successor Fernand Braudel (between 1956 and 1968), the reins of the Sixth Section and the *Annales* were held in one, increasingly powerful hand. In 1970, the Sixth Section and the *Annales* moved into the new *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*, which was built with funds from the Ministry of National Education and the Ford Foundation, and in 1975 the Sixth Section became the independent *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*. The *Annales* school's reputation for leadership in historical methodology reached far beyond French borders in the 1960s and 1970s. Its remarkable rise to prominence was chronicled in scores of articles and books<sup>4</sup>.

According to Traian Stoianovich, the author of a book on French Historical Method (subtitled *The Annales Paradigm*), 'it is clear that no other group of twentieth-century scholars in any country has made a more valuable contribution to historiography and historical method than the *Annales* School'. Such recognition was not limited to followers of the 'new' history. In his introduction to the *International Handbook of Historical Studies*, George Iggers described the relationship between the Sixth Section and the *Annales* in these terms: 'Nowhere else in the West, however, did the new interdisciplinary history possess the firm institutional basis and the influence over the profession that it did in France'. In the same handbook, which included articles on Italy, Japan, the Soviet Union, Poland, Romania, Latin America, India and Africa, there were more index entries for the *Annales* than for any other subject except Marx and Marxism. Even those unassoci-

---

Adnan Press, 2013, p. 16-17.

3 Lynn Hunt, "French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the *Annales* Paradigm", in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Twentieth Anniversary Issue (Apr., 1986), p. 209-210.

4 Lynn Hunt, Op. Cit, p. 210-211.

ated with or critical of the Annales school from within the French historical profession have had to bow to its prestige. Thus, reviews of contemporary French history written by French scholars customarily begin with a consideration of the Annales and its ascendancy<sup>5</sup>.

The Annales had interested of long and short durations, in addition to the social and economic history. It had focused on studying peasants and labors, and the relationship between the past, present, history, other humanities and social sciences. The Annales had introduced alternative of the traditional enumeration methods prevailed in France since the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1940s. The school had concentrated on the field research which renewed the historiography and historian profession. One of the school invention was its focusing on the collaboration of the humanities and social sciences as a new interdisciplinary. But history was in the center of all these sciences<sup>6</sup>.

### III. The Annales' Impacts on Early Iraqi Historians:

The first generation of Iraqi historians had learned historiography in the European and American schools of orientalism. The fathers generation was represented by Abdulaziz Al-Duri, Salih Ahmed Al-Ali, and Ali Al-Wardi, the first were historians majored in Islamic studies and the third was a sociologist used historiography to develop the sociological theory concerning Iraqi society. Al-Duri had graduated from SOAS of London university 1942, Al-Ali had got his PhD from Oxford university 1949, and Al-wardi had his certificate from University of Texas 1950. The Annales had impacted on the three Iraqi scholars through moving its paradigm to Great Britain and United States. Al-Duri had worked with his supervisor Vladimir Fedorovich Minorisky (1877-1966) and then with Bernard Lewis, who had sent by his supervisor Hamilton Gibb to France to understand the new *ecole des annales*. Lewis had spent one year (1936-1937) in Paris, and contacted with several French orientalist as Louis Massignon. The influences of Annales had appeared in Lewis article on "Islamic Guilds"<sup>7</sup>, which translated by Al-Duri in 1939. The latter wrote a new article on "the rise of asnaf and hiraf", which published in 1959. Al-Duri had become acquainted with new wave through scholars and students of SAOS<sup>8</sup>.

5 Ibid., p. 211-212.

6 Mahmoud Al-Qaysi, Op. Cit., p. 17-18

7 Bernard Lewis, "Islamic Guilds", in: *Economic History Review*, Vol. 1937, p. 20-37.

8 Sami Ahmed Al-Zahao, *American Orientalism Trends and Islamic History*, PhD thesis, College of Education-Mosel University, 2010, PP32-35; Mahmoud Al-Qaysi, Op. Cit., p. 102-103.

Gibb had urged “his students to mix the oriental studies and social sciences”, when he moved to United States to found the Oriental Studies Chair in 1963. He criticized the classic orientalists who focused only on the annals books, and neglecting the Islamic culture and society<sup>9</sup>.

The Lebanese historian, Radhuan Alsayed, had pointed out to the relationship between A-Duri and Ann Lambton, the British orientalist. The two historians had influenced by the French historian, Claude Cahen, on the feudalism and its comparison with Islamic feudality. Al-Duri had pointed out in his writings of the relationship of the past with present, the theme which was one the interest of Annales. Reading of Al-Duri publications since the 1940s indicates to his focusing on the relationship between history with present. We can realize the fact since his first PhD thesis on “Economic History of Iraq in the 4<sup>th</sup> century of Hejra”, which discussed at 1942, and translated into Arabic at 1948, in addition to another book “Introduction to Economic History of Arabs” published in 1969, and his other articles and books after returning back to Iraq at the first half of forties. In the context of Annales path, he wrote on the economic and social Islamic movements, as the bottom of Moslem society, margins as apprentices, guilds, traders, bankers, popular movements, prices and markets<sup>10</sup>.

Another Iraqi historian who responded to the new methodological wave was Saleh Ahmed Al-Ali. Al-Ali has a fruitful experience of study in Iraq (1935-1941). He had interested of Arab civilization history since his undergraduate studies in Cairo university (1943-1945). When he arrived to Oxford University, he had a good understanding of history according to Arabic sources. The impacts of the new paradigm of Annales had resulted in the first academic work of Al-Ali on “Early History of Basra Organizing of an Islamic Misr”, which translated into Arabic in 1953 by “the social and Economic Organizations in Basra at first century of Hijra”. In addition to the commercial background of Al-Ali, and his study of the Greek and Roman history in Cairo, the impact of Gibb was clear in his response to the new wave from France. Al-Ali had focused on the Arab tribes in Basra, Kufa and other Misrs. He had studied the Arab administration in early Islamic

9 Hamilton Gibb, *Area Studies Reconsidered*, London, University of London, 1963, p. 3-6; Toru Miura, “Area Studies as a Third Path between the Humanities and Social Sciences: The Potentials of Comparative Studies”, in: *Islamic Area Studies Paper Series*, No. 32, 2002-03, Tokyo, Japan, p. 1-3.

10 Radhuan Alsayed, Abdulaziz Al-Duri and Islamic History Studies, *Middle East Newspapers*, No. 11683, Nov. 23, 2010.

period in Arabia and Misrs since pre-Islamic period until the Moslem periods. One of the topics related to Al-Ali interest was “Khutat-Planning”, by studying the planning of Basra, Meka, Medina, Baghdad, Samara and Fustat. One of the lessons which Al-Ali had learned in Oxford was “the first steps to study any problem are the study of place and its history”<sup>11</sup>. This is the same approach of the Annales and one of their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Ferdinand Brudel, in his first academic work on the Mediterranean and Mediterranean World at Reign of Philip II. The city was that place according to Al-Ali, as his studies on “Basra Planning and its Area” 1986, “the Architectural Appearances of Meca” 1989, and “Architectural and Administrative Appearances of Baghdad” 1989<sup>12</sup>.

Al-Ali had criticized the political aspect of the Moslem society, because it focused on the Arab rulers and not the peoples. The long academic life of Al-Ali had founded for a new paradigm of Islamic history by studying the social and economic aspects of Islamic history<sup>13</sup>. Most of Al-Ali concerns indicated to his influence by Annales through concentrating on social and economic aspects of Islamic history. Even when he wrote on the political aspect of early Moslem period, he showed the life of people.

The two historians had represented the Arabist(national) approach of Islamic history, but they have adhered to the scientific method of reading the texts of Islamic history. Al-Duri was catching of the texts and used them in his economic studies, and Al-Ali had attempted to take the spirit of the texts. One of Al-Duri students, Murtadha Al-Naqib, described him as a “movable Text”. Through their long life, the two historians developed a new approach and paradigm of Islamic and Arab history and civilization depended on the Arab achievement in social and economic aspects which regarded as Moslem inventions. The impacts of Al-Duri and Al-Ali had extended to other Arab countries as the pioneers of Islamic Studies in Arab world.

11 Naser Abdulrazaq Al-Mula Jasim, the Historian Saleh Ahmed Al-Ali the Founding Voyage for Academic Methodology of Studying the Arab History, Beirut, Markaz Dirasat Alwahda Alarabia, 2010, p. 39-42, 43-56.

12 Naser Abdulrazaq Al-Mula Jasim, the Civilizational Approach of Salih Ahmed Al-Ali”, in: *Studies in History and Archaeology*, College of Arts-University of Baghdad, No.1, 2001, p. 162-175.

13 Ibid., p. 168-169.

The third Iraqi scholar of early generation is the Iraqi Sociologist, Ali Al-Wardi, who graduated from Texas University at 1950. He is regarded as the first Iraqi sociologist who used the Socio-historical paradigm. Al-Wardi was the pioneer to use the historical texts, from Islamic and modern times to understand the Iraqi modern society. He applied the Duality of Personality Behavior, and social Disobedient on Iraqi Society<sup>14</sup>.

His first work was “A Study of the Sociology of Islam, which was M.A. thesis from Texas University, 1948. He had analyzed the relationship between Idealist and Realist. He applied the western theory of the early Islamic period (Prophet Era). His PhD thesis was on “A Sociological Analysis of Ibn Khaldun’s Theory A Study in the Sociology of Knowledge, Texas University, 1950. From Sociology of Islam to Sociology of Knowledge (Ideal vis real, power vis right, religion vis rationalism, Islam vis Badouism), Al-Wardi had developed his approach of socio historical perception of Iraqi society<sup>15</sup>.

Al-Wardi wrote some socio historical publications as “Sultan Preachers, Baghdad, 1954, which used Islamic texts to understand the Islamic society, and Social Glimpses of Modern History of Iraq, Baghdad, 8 Vols, 1969-1979, which used Modern texts since Ottoman period to understand the modern Iraqi society. The two publication of Al-Wardi had used the Islamic and Ottoman text to explain the Iraqi personality and society. The two book regarded as the first Iraqi and Arab contributions mixed of history and sociology. The école of annales paradigm had impacted on Al-Wardi mind<sup>16</sup>.

Thus, Al-Wardi had been influenced by the annals school since his American studies and developed this paradigm in Iraq by using the historical texts to extract the sociological fact. The three scholars had worked together at college of Arts of university of Baghdad and focused in their publications and articles on the social, societal and economic history of Iraq and Moslem societies.

14 Mahmoud Al-Qaysi, Ali Al-Wardi and Historical Sociology, Baghdad, 2014, PP. 9-25.

15 For publications of Al-Wardi and his contributions, see: Murtadha Al-Naqib, “Ali Al-Wardi and Modernization in Iraqi Sociology”, in Ali Al-Wardi Various Approaches, edited by Lahai Abdulhussein and Mahmoud Al-Qaysi, Beirut, AlRafidain, p. 171-192.

16 Mahmoud Al-Qaysi, Ali Al-Wardi and Historical Sociology, p. 26-30.

#### IV. Conclusion:

The *ecole des annales* had impacted on the historical methods in all the world. Since its rise, it had change the concern of historical institutions from political to social and economic aspects. Iraq was one of the countries which influenced by *Annales*, through the fathers generation of Iraqi historians who had studies in European and American institutions. Al-Ali, Al-Wardi and Al-Duri were the founders of historical and sociological knowledge in Iraq. Al-Duri was the founder of College of Arts, the first researching institution in Iraq, and Al-Ali was the first head of history Department in the university of Baghdad, and Al-Wardi had founded the department of sociology and extended the sociological perspective of Iraqi society. The three scholars were majoring in Islamic history and sociology and established the Iraqi academia in the field of historical studies<sup>17</sup>.

Through their experience in England, Europe and US, they founded for new approach of historiography depended on *Annales* paradigm, by studying the history of margins and the bottom of society. The economic and social history was the first concern of those three scholars which was the *ecole des annales* method. Although the three scholars had regarded as a part of Anglophonic world, the reading of their publications and concerns ensured that the *Annales* had great impacts on their achievements.

The political situations in Iraq had impacted on the two historians, Al-Duri had obliged to depart from Iraq at the beginning of 1960s, and lived in Jordan until his death at 2010, Al-Ali and Al-Wardi had still lived in Iraq up to their death at the same year of American occupation of Iraq at 2003 of the first and at 1995 of the latter. The three scholars still adhered to their academic rules and regarded as the founders of historical academia in Iraq and Arab world. The three scholars had founded the Islamic perception of Arab civilization depended on western techniques and Moslem understanding. The Ottoman history and knowledge were a part of their interest.

17 See the form on the impact of *ecole des annales* on Iraqi historiography.

Form

Ecole des Annales' Impact on Iraqi Historiography

Ecole des Annales, Strasburg- France 1929



