

minist countries reflect the EU's unique transformative power.

Although it is easy to agree with Hill that the EU's potential to be among the strongest powers tends all too often to be forgotten, it would be fair to recognize the role that the candidate countries themselves have played in this transformation. With its system of law and rules, the EU provides the model of change to the countries that are in the process of accession in the same way as its multidimensional political leadership pushes the applicants to make the necessary changes. But still there is an important role to play by the political leadership of each applicant country, as the changes demanded must be transformed into a functioning legislation and social and political practices of those very countries as well.

The most complex and perhaps the most vulnerable position for the EU is its role as a global actor because of its relations with big powers like Russia, China, the Middle East and even the US. Here, Hill's view of the potential of the European model starts to appear more controversial. The author pays tribute to the European strategy of patience and to its policy of long-term engagement with partners like Russia and China. This approach, according to the author, is not only more efficient than the US' model geared towards a more rapid change but is also more appreciated by the partners

themselves. In a world where many of the new powers appear to operate on an international scene that resembles the multipolar order of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as their primary source of inspiration, it is difficult to find evidence to Hill's argument according to which it is the European order of multilateralism and international arbitration that draws their main attention.

*Europe's Promise* is in many ways a provocative and exuberant book. Its narrative is consistent and well-structured and its presentation is clear. The purpose of the book – to correct the misunderstanding of Europe among the American people – appears well justified. Europe is too often assessed on the basis of the state-centric model represented by the US itself. Europe should be understood more in terms of its own unique type of international actor, a role that is undoubtedly different. However, going to the other extreme of portraying Europe as a perfect model should also be avoided. And this is what the book does on too many occasions. The European model also has its own weaknesses and there are areas where Europe could do well to learn from the US. A slightly more balanced approach to Europe's exemplariness would have increased the credibility of the argument.

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## **The Biography of Muhammad: Nature and Authenticity**

**By Gregor Schoeler**

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Gregor Schoeler's *The Biography of Muhammad: Nature and authenticity* was first published in German in 1996, which the

author claims was an attempt "to demonstrate that we could reconstruct, on the basis of the sources available, reports which

go back to persons in very close contact with Muhammad.” The author’s current book is an extension of the same thesis that has now been published as a part of *Routledge Studies in Classical Islam*.

In addition to three lengthy chapters, the book has an introduction and a short note on “truth and historical tradition” in which the author justifies his research mainly based on information gathered from oral history. In the introduction, Gregor Schoeler gives a short review of books published on the subject since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, he doesn’t seem to make any distinction between serious scholarships evidenced, for example, in Fuat Sezgin and dull polemics found in Ibn Warraq. Nevertheless, in the next three chapters the author skillfully demonstrates the validity of oral traditions related to the Prophet. According to the author, “the oral transmission practiced *until* the first systematic collectors (e.g. from ‘Aisah to ‘Urwah) was supplanted by a kind of lecture system, in which the use of writing as a mnemonic aid for students and teachers played an increasingly important role (115-116).”

The theme of the book is very important, particularly in the context of growing pseudo-scholarship challenging Ernest Renan’s famous assertion that, “Islam was born in full light of history.” For Muslims there is nothing new in Renan’s statement. But at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Islam was under threat from all directions, this assertion and recognition by Renan enhanced Muslim confidence in their faith and history. The new attack on Muslim historiography by Wansbrough and others like him during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has little impact on Muslims. Muslims hold the Qur’an as God’s word revealed through Muhammad (peace be on him), as guidance for governing life in this world

for which we would be accountable in the hereafter. Because of such revered positions both the Qur’an and the person of Muhammad are highly regarded by Muslims. For Muslims, their faith is not just spiritual; it is based on history and rationalism. This is why Gregor Schoeler’s work is a significant contribution from the Muslim perspective, for it establishes the validity of some source materials about the Prophet’s life story.

Emphasizing the importance of the subject and information of this period, the author claims that, “Some scholars reject them entirely, seeing in them products of the Muslim community’s idealization of its history, while others accept them at face value, reasoning that, if not exact versions of events, the events could not have differed too much from their descriptions.” This poses a serious challenge to Muslim historians such as the present reviewer. Are the sources for biographical information about the Prophet so weak that idealization of the Prophet’s life and character would appear irrational? Is irrational idealization capable of creating inspiration? Or should one totally separate faith from rationalism?

Historiography on the compilation and preservation of the Qur’an and the life of the Prophet is very important for Muslims because it establishes their faith on the basis of history and rationalism. In other words this affirms the faith on the criteria developed by the Enlightenment tradition. One could take the example demonstrated in *surah* or chapter 93, which was revealed during the very early days of the Prophet’s life in Makkah, assuring him that his future was going to be better than his past and he would be satisfied with what was going to happen in the future (4,5). Muslim historiography firmly establishes the positive changes that the Prophet experienced during his early days of prophethood in

Makkah and his last days in Madinah. This, in turn, establishes the Divine origin of the Qur'an through evidences from history. In fact, this part of Muslim historiography has the potential to take up the question that the 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), raised about the possible correlation between what he called the *noumenal* and phenomenal worlds.

In our opinion, such reconciliation is possible. One needs to understand the general nature of preservation of information during this period. The culture was mainly based on oral and there was a heavy reliance on memory, although a weak written practice existed in the society. The written culture was promoted by the Prophet. But then the community was very careful not to confuse the text of the Qur'an and what came to be known as *hadith*. Since both came to the community through the speech of the Prophet, this caution was necessary.

Gregor Schoeler has highlighted this. But then with the passage of time sayings of the Prophet or *hadith* were corrupted and attempts were made to attribute false ideas to the Prophet. This led scholars to determine a methodology to distinguish between the true and false sayings of the Prophet. However, because of heavy reliance on oral tradition on the one hand, and self-interested motivation by some others, the problem of the authenticity about the Prophet's life and sayings persists. And many Muslims are taking the serious interest on the subject. Israr Ahmad Khan's *Authentication of Hadith: Redefining the Criteria*. (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2010) is a manifestation of this. Gregor Schoeler's work on the subject, in my opinion, is a welcome contribution in this renewed interest in the subject.

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