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# Historiographical Analysis of Farag Fouda's Thought in *Kebenaran yang Hilang*

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## Abstract

*Kebenaran yang Hilang* (KYH), a historical work by Farag Fouda, has garnered significant criticism, especially from Islamist groups, due to its unconventional methodologies and Fouda's lack of formal training as a historian. These critiques reflect broader debates in Islamic historiography regarding the boundaries of historical scholarship and who is deemed qualified to contribute to this discourse. This study addresses two central issues: the historiographical nature of KYH and its legitimacy as an Islamic historical text, particularly in its treatment of early Islamic political history. Through historiographical analysis, the research explores Fouda's reliance on traditional sources, his historical methods, and his diachronic, liberal perspective. The analysis places KYH within the theoretical frameworks used by informal historians. Despite Fouda's non-traditional background, this study demonstrates that KYH meets key criteria for a valid historical work by integrating both traditional and modern historiographical approaches. The research introduces fresh perspectives on Islamic history, while simultaneously challenging established narratives. It contends that, despite its controversial reception, KYH holds significant value as a historical text and makes a meaningful contribution to the field of Islamic historiography, meriting further scholarly critique and engagement.

**Keywords:** Fouda, Informal Historian; Islamic Historiography, *Kebenaran yang Hilang*.

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## 1. Introduction

*Kebenaran yang Hilang* (the Absent Truth) is a work by an activist, social commentator, and Egyptian intellectual, Farag Fouda, first published in Egypt in 1984 under the original title *al-Haqiqa al-Gha'iba* (Panggabean, 2007). The work discusses the history of the Islamic caliphate, from the *Khulafa' al-Rashidun* to the Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties. In his work, Fouda examines the history of the Islamic caliphate from a different perspective. Instead of showcasing the achievements, exemplary behavior, and grandeur of the caliphs, Fouda depicts them within the framework of political intrigue, power struggles, the glamorous life of the palace, indulgence in women (sing. *jariya*, pl. *jawari*), and even sexual deviancy (Hannan, 2024b).

Presenting the history of the caliphs in an unconventional manner, the work has caused a stir in Egyptian public opinion. The Egyptian government promptly banned and withdrew the book from circulation. The group most affected by the presence of the book were fundamentalist Islamic groups, whose aspirations include establishing an Islamic state modeled on the caliphate (*khilafa al-Islamiyya*). The presence of *al-Haqiqa al-Gha'iba*, which reveals the dark side of the political practices of the Islamic caliphate, was seen as undermining their aspirations. Moreover, explicitly in the book, Fouda attacks fundamentalist groups and their aspirations for an Islamic state. The controversy surrounding the book did not end with its banning and withdrawal from circulation; it also led to the shooting of the author in 1992 by two Islamic fundamentalists known to be affiliated with the *Jama'a Islamiyya* group.

Undeniably, the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism also occurs in Indonesia, especially in the post-Soeharto era. The opening of the doors to democracy in 1998 allowed the emergence of fundamentalist Islamic groups among other Islamic groups. One prominent fundamentalist Islamic group is Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). One of HTI's important visions is to establish an Islamic governance system modeled on the *khilafa* in Indonesia. For them, the era of the *Khulafa' al-Rashidun*, the Umayyad Dynasty, and the Abbasid Dynasty was the best period in terms of practicing Islamic teachings, as it was the period closest in time to the era of the Prophet (Muhtadi, 2009). They believe that the *khilafa* governance system can end all problems in Indonesia, such as corruption, poverty, crime, and so on. In pursuing their vision, they are confronted by the Indonesian government, which adheres to a democratic governance system, and by other extremist groups, such as the Liberal Islamic Network (JIL), which strongly oppose the idea of an Islamic state (Maksum, 2017; M. Ali, 2005; Nurdin, 2005; Hannan, 2024a).

The phenomenon has led to the publication of a translated version of *al-Haqiqa al-Gha'iba* titled *Kebenaran yang Hilang: Sisi Kelam Praktik Politik dan Kekuasaan dalam Sejarah Kaum Muslim (KYH)*. The translation was done by Novriantoni Kahar, an activist from JIL (Liberal Islam Network), and was first published in Jakarta in 2007 by the Balai Penelitian dan Pengembangan Agama (Institute for Religious Research and Development), Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, in collaboration with Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina. It was later reprinted in a revised edition in 2008 by Dian Rakyat in collaboration with Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, Jakarta. A. Malik, the Head of the institute at the time, provided a foreword for the book. In one sentence, he stated, "...this book offers a new critical perspective or reading on the bitter historical reality during the classical Islamic political and power practices, which have long been regarded as

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the golden age and glory of Muslim history, which some Muslims today view as an inspiration and ideal model for efforts to realize a ‘religious state’ in the modern era” (Malik, 2007).

KYH received appreciation from various parties. Azyumardi Azra, a historian from UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, stated that “Farag Fouda’s work critically and courageously exposes the bitter historical reality of the classical Islamic era ... this work can awaken Muslims to view history more objectively, in order to draw lessons for today and the future” (Fouda, 2007). Samsu Rizal Panggabean, an academic from Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, said “Farag Fouda has made his contribution, through his work and also his death, to the importance of diversity in Egyptian society” (Panggabean, 2007). Syafii Maarif, a historian and figure of Muhammadiyah, urged everyone to re-read Fouda’s work (KYH) because it is “very important to see how cruel and brutal the rulers of the past Arab Muslim era were, acting in the name of God and still continuing to this day” (Basri, 2024). Meanwhile, senior journalist Goenawan Mohamad said “he [Fouda] questioned the validity of the khilafa position. He was a disturber of absolutes, but it happened in Egypt, not in Indonesia. Perhaps this is a remarkable feature of Islam here [in Indonesia]; it was actually the Ministry of Religious Affairs that published *Kebenaran yang Hilang*” (Fouda, 2007).

Criticism of the book came from the INSISTS (Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilization) group, an Islamic-oriented research institution based in Jakarta. Through their official website, *insists.id* (2015), they called KYH confusing and methodologically weak to be a historical work. They claimed that Fouda, a graduate in agricultural economics, did not have the capacity to write a historical work. His name only became prominent in the media because he once debated with a scholar as prestigious as Shaykh al-Ghazali (1917-1996). In addition, KYH was also deemed unsupported by sufficient sources. Unfortunately, their criticism was not followed by clarification regarding the Islamic history they believed had been manipulated by Fouda.

This article will discuss the criticisms from INSISTS, especially to answer two important questions: how is the writing of history in KYH? While all studies explore Fouda’s critique of Islamic governance and his secular stance, this article uniquely examines KYH from a historiographical perspective, treating it as an authoritative historical text despite Fouda’s lack of formal training. In contrast, Zaenal Alimin focuses on Fouda’s political views in KYH, and Ario Putra, Achmad Fatturohman, and Alex Medani analyze his ideas on the separation of religion and state without addressing the historical aspects of his work. Ana Belén Soage, meanwhile, emphasizes Fouda’s struggle for freedom of expression and the political persecution he faced. Thus, while other studies focus on Fouda’s intellectual and political contributions, this article adds a new dimension by evaluating the historiographical significance of his work, as illustrated in the table below.

**Table 1.** Similarities and Differences with Previous Research

Research	Similarities	Differences
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<p>Zaenal Alimin, "Pemikiran Farag Fouda Tentang Realitas Politik Islam" (2017)</p>	<p>(a) Both works analyze Fouda's political ideas, focusing on his critique of Islamic governance and the concept of the caliphate; and (b) both touch on Fouda's liberal perspective and opposition to political Islam.</p>	<p>(a) My article employs a historiographical analysis of KYH as a historical text, whereas Alimin's research primarily focuses on Fouda's political philosophy in KYH; and (b) my study frames Fouda as an informal historian, while Alimin's article views him as a political thinker.</p>
<p>Ario Putra and Achmad Fatturohman, "Tragedi Intelektualitas Islam dalam Perspektif Filsafat Politik-Keagamaan" (2021)</p>	<p>(a) Both works discuss the intellectual tragedies in Islamic history and highlight Fouda's role as a victim of intellectual intolerance; and (b) both address Fouda's assassination as a culmination of political and religious conflict.</p>	<p>(a) My research focuses on historiographical methods and the validity of Fouda's work as a historical text, whereas Putra and Fatturohman focus on the intellectual tragedy within Islamic philosophical and political thought; and (b) the emphasis in my work is on Fouda's historiographical contributions, while theirs is on the broader implications of intellectual violence in Islamic history.</p>
<p>Alex Medani, "Pandangan Farag Fouda tentang Hubungan Agama dan Negara" (2014)</p>	<p>(a) Both works examine Fouda's views on the separation of religion and politics; and (b) both acknowledge Fouda's opposition to the caliphate and traditionalist interpretations of Islamic governance.</p>	<p>(a) My article includes a historiographical critique of KYH and assesses it as a historical text, while Medani's work focuses more narrowly on Fouda's political views regarding the state-religion relationship; and (b) Medani's work engages in doctrinal analysis of Islamic political theory, while mine is framed within a historical-critical context.</p>
<p>Ana Belén Soage, "Faraj Fawda, or the Cost of Freedom of Expression" (2007)</p>	<p>(a) Both works address the controversies and social-political backlash Fouda faced due to his ideas; and (b) both recognize Fouda's liberal approach and his opposition to Islamic fundamentalism.</p>	<p>(a) My article offers a historiographical analysis, emphasizing KYH as a historical text, while Soage focuses on Fouda's broader struggle for freedom of expression and the socio-political environment in Egypt; and (b) Soage's work delves more into the personal and political persecution Fouda faced, while my work explores his contributions to historical discourse.</p>

**2. Methods**

**2.1. Research Design**

This study employs a historiographical research design to evaluate KYH as a historical work. The historiographical method is used to identify and analyze key elements that constitute a historical text, including themes, source materials, methodologies, concepts, models, and perspectives (Abdurrahman, 1999; Tamburaka, 1999). By critically examining these components within KYH, the study seeks to determine whether it meets the minimal requirements for historical analysis (Yakub, 2013). Additionally, the study draws upon the theory of informal or amateur historians (Azra, 2002; Kuntowijoyo, 2003), assessing Fouda’s position as a historian without formal training but with the ability to produce significant historical contributions.

**2.2. Data Sources**

The primary data source for this research is KYH, authored by Fouda. As the central focus of this study, KYH is treated as a primary text for a detailed content analysis. Secondary sources consist of scholarly works on historiography and Islamic historiography that provide theoretical and methodological frameworks, including those by Abdurrahman, 1999, Tamburaka, 1999, Yakub, 2013, Azra, 2002, and Kuntowijoyo, 2003. These secondary sources inform the study’s approach to evaluating Fouda’s historical methods and his status as an informal historian, offering context for Fouda’s work within the broader Islamic historiographical tradition.

**2.3. Data Processing Techniques**

To analyze the content of KYH, this study uses the content analysis technique, a research method for the objective, systematic, and qualitative description of manifest content (Berelson, 1959). Through this method, themes, perspectives, and historical methods found in KYH are extracted and analyzed. This technique allows for the identification of Fouda’s narrative approach, the types of source materials used, and his interpretive models. The study also contextualizes these findings by comparing them with the historiographical frameworks established in the secondary literature. This dual analysis provides insights into both the historical value of KYH and Fouda’s role as a non-traditional historian.

**Table 2.** Data Sources and Collection Methods for Historiographical Analysis of KYH

Source Type	Data Sources	How Data was Obtained	Data Collected
Primary Source	Kebenaran yang Hilang (Fouda, 2007)	Content analysis of the book	Themes, methods, source materials, concepts, historiographical models

Secondary Sources	Metode Penelitian Sejarah (Abdurrahman, 1999); Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah, Teori Filsafat Sejarah, Sejarah Filsafat & Iptek (Tamburaka, 1999), Historiografi Islam Indonesia: Perspektif Sejarawan Informal (Yakub, 2013), Historiografi Islam Kontemporer: Wacana Aktualitas dan Aktor Sejarah (Azra, 2002), Metodologi Sejarah (Kuntowijoyo, 2003)	Literature review and theoretical analysis Historical methods, definitions of informal historians	
Secondary Sources	Other related works on Farag Fouda and Islamic historiography	Critical analysis and comparison	Context of Fouda's thought, critiques of Islamic governance

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. A Biographical Sketch of Fouda

Farag Fouda (Arabic: Faraj Fawda) was a prominent Muslim scholar, human rights activist, politician, and influential columnist in Egypt. He was born in Cairo, Egypt, specifically in Danietta near the Nile, on August 20, 1945, with the full name Farag Ali Fouda. There are not many references that reveal details about his personal life or family, except that he had four children; two sons, and two daughters (Alimin, 2017). Fouda tragically passed away on June 8, 1992, at the age of 46, as a result of two bullets fired into his body by two men known to be affiliated with a fundamentalist Islamic group in Egypt, the Jama'a Islamiyya (Fouda, 2007).

Fouda obtained his bachelor's degree in agriculture (January 1967), then a Master's degree in Agriculture (1975), and his doctoral education in agricultural economics (1981) with a dissertation titled "Iqtisadiyat Tursyidu Istikhdama Miyah al Ray fi Misr." All of these degrees were obtained from the same university, Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt, where he also taught (Alimin, 2017). Upon careful observation, Fouda's academic background is not directly related to the Islamic issues he often addressed later on. His skill in presenting Islamic arguments was influenced by his activism in a civil society organization specifically focused on human rights called the Egyptian Society for Enlightenment. This organization brought Fouda into discussions on Islamic politics, particularly on the discourse of the separation of religion and state.

Furthermore, his insightful thoughts on Islamic politics cannot be separated from his involvement in political parties. It is known that Fouda was affiliated with two parties, namely the Wafd Party and the Mustaqbal Party, successively. Fouda left the Wafd (the representative) Party in 1984 because the party decided to affiliate with the Muslim Brotherhood, a prominent fundamentalist Islamic group in Egypt, at the insistence of Shaykh Salah Abu Ismail, a party leader who is also known to be the father of the Salafi leader, Hazem Abu Ismail. Fouda opposed the party's change in orientation from secular to conservative, which led to his decision to leave the party and establish his own party, the Mustaqbal (the future) Party (ibid.).

Fouda's activism, both in civil society organizations and political parties, had a strong influence on his arguments about his ideas on Islamic politics, especially about

the separation of religion and state. He became the staunchest, bravest, and foremost opponent of Egyptian fundamentalist Islamic groups advocating for the unity of religion and state. Fouda adhered to the principle of separating politics from religion, between the state and Islam. According to him, this separation is necessary for the good of both religion and state. Religion is protected from political manipulation, and governance is carried out without the burden of religious particularism. Fouda also rejected the call for a khilafa system advocated by Islamist groups, considering this system nothing more than one of the systems in Islamic history with many dark sides. Learning from the 'Uthman case, to ensure the welfare of the people, to organize the power system, to achieve justice, and to guarantee security, it is not only necessary to have a good leader, noble Muslims, and Islamic law fully applied. But everything must be regulated by a system that governs the relationship between the ruler and the people (Medani, 2017).

Fouda's thoughts are reflected in his works, including *al-Haqiqa al-Gha'iba* (the Absent Truth, 1984), *Qabla al-Suqut* (Before the Fall, 1985), *Hiwar Hawla al-Almaniyya* (Discussion on Secularism, 1987), *Nakun aw La Nakun* (We Be or Not to Be, 1988), *Zawaj al-Mut'ah* (Pleasure Marriage, 1990), *al-Mal'ub* (the Played with, 1985), *al-Nadzir* (the Warning, 1989) (Soage, 2007).

Fouda's ideas in *Kebenaran yang Hilang* challenged the concept of the unity of religion and state (khilafa) promoted by Islamist groups, which allegedly led to a fatwa declaring him an apostate and sanctioning his death. His murder by two men affiliated with *Jama'a Islamiyya* was justified by Shaykh al-Ghazali during the trial, who affirmed that Fouda's apostasy made his blood halal (allowed under Islamic law). Interestingly, the defendants admitted to not having read the book they condemned (Hasan, 2019; Fiddaraini, 2021), highlighting the strong influence of fundamentalist doctrine. Fouda was part of a broader liberal movement in Egypt, alongside figures like Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah, who often clashed with Islamist leaders such as Shaykh al-Ghazali and Ma'mun al-Hudaybi, as well as moderates like Muhammad 'Imara. The rise of liberal ideas, spurred by the Arab defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War (Britannica, 2024), reflected a push to reconcile religion with modernity, as exemplified by Fouda's advocacy for the separation of religion and state.

### 3.2. Historiography of *Kebenaran yang Hilang*

*Kebenaran yang Hilang* is Fouda's endeavor to uncover some early historical facts about Islam, particularly from the time of the companions to the Abbasid Dynasty. These periods are considered closest to the time of the Prophet and most ideal for modeling an Islamic state. Fouda's exploration of historical works reveals contradictions. For Fouda, Islamic history was perfect during the time of the Prophet, while the subsequent eras depict Muslim history that does not reflect Islam. Therefore, Fouda argues that the time of the companions and beyond was ordinary and should not be used as justification for establishing an Islamic state. To reinforce his thesis, in *KYH*, Fouda deliberately addresses the dark aspects of political practices of early Muslim rulers, including political intrigue, coups, the glamorous palace life of caliphs, indulgence in alcohol, fondness for women, and even sexual deviations. These themes, acknowledged by Fouda, are topics avoided by everyone, especially supporters of the khilafa system in recent times.

Fouda represents the political intrigue or coup in the early history of Islam with the tragedy of the death of the second caliph, 'Uthman b. Affan. It is narrated that

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'Uthman, due to his policies that only favored certain groups, had a bad reputation among Muslims. Most Muslims at that time, who were companions of the Prophet, opposed him to the extent of drawing their swords. Among his staunchest opponents were 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Awf and Talhah b. Zubayr. 'Uthman was killed in his house after being besieged. His body was not immediately buried because the Ansar refused to bury him in the Baqi' cemetery (the Muslim cemetery) and even forbade anyone to pray for him. When 'Uthman's body was at the door, Umayr b. Dhabī'i came and spat on it, even breaking one of his teeth. After two nights, 'Uthman's body could only be buried in Hish Kawkab, a Jewish cemetery area. During the burial process, many people pelted 'Uthman's body with stones (Fouda, 2007).

Similarly, alongside the advancement of knowledge, nightlife during the Abbasid Dynasty was also highly developed. Singing, music, and alcoholic beverages were the main menu of cafes or nightclubs that could easily be found throughout the city of Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Dynasty. Not only the common people, even the caliphs themselves enjoyed drinking alcohol (khamr) in public. They relied on the fatwas of scholars from the Hijaz region permitting music and singing, and the fatwas of scholars from Iraq permitting alcoholic beverages. Creatively, they combined these two fatwas to create an "alternative school of thought" (ibid.).

The tragedy of 'Uthman's death is undoubtedly heartbreaking, considering he was killed by fellow Muslims. Both 'Uthman and his killers were companions of the Prophet promised paradise. According to Fouda, instances of a Muslim being killed by another Muslim were widespread after the time of the Prophet. Fouda also exemplifies his policy of attacking those deemed apostates for refusing to pay zakat to the Bayt al-Mal, instead distributing zakat directly to those in need (ibid.). Furthermore, Abu 'Abbas's massacre of the entire Umayyad family did not escape Fouda's attention. It is recounted that the first caliph of the Abbasid Dynasty, al-Saffah, invited the entire Umayyad family to a dinner party, then brutally murdered them all. Not stopping there, al-Saffah also dug up the graves of the Umayyad rulers and tortured whatever remained. An account by Haytham b. Uday al-Ta'i narrates that among the Umayyad family members whose graves were dug up, only Hisham's body remained intact, which was then whipped 80 times and burned (ibid.).

Fouda also highlights the Abbasid caliphs' penchant for collecting thousands of female slaves. This occurred during a period referred to as the golden ages, or the early period of Abbasid rule. Harun al-Rashid was one of the famous Abbasid caliphs. He had thousands of female slaves (Kathir, 1994). He was also known for buying multi-talented slaves at very high prices. He even indulged every wish of a female slave, Dhat al-Khal, whom he dearly loved (Al-Asfahani, 1992). In addition to al-Rashid, al-Mas'udi mentioned that al-Mutawakkil ala Allah had 4,000 female slaves whom he all slept with (Al-Suyuti, n.d.).

Furthermore, there were also caliphs who liked and enjoyed collecting handsome young men called ghilman (young men who were handsome and beardless) like al-Amin and al-Wathiq (Fouda, 2007; Al-Suyuti, n.d.). Especially al-Wathiq, he was very obsessed with his male slave named Muhaj. Once, the caliph's staff were puzzled because the caliph was very distraught. After investigation, it turned out he was distressed because Muhaj had previously refused to meet him. Indeed, al-Wathiq was completely devastated when Muhaj passed away (Hitti, 2006).

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The political intrigues of the caliphs, the killing of one Muslim by another, the penchant for alcohol and playing with women, and even liking the same gender, are some of the things deliberately chosen by Fouda to show the dark side of the early Muslim political practices, which the Islamists consider as a model for the later Islamic state or khilafa system. Fouda wanted to show the brutality committed by the caliphs. They killed their political opponents even though they were fellow Muslims. They applied Islamic teachings in their governance. Indeed, a period called the "golden ages" in Islamic history was also marked by the moral decay of the Muslim community and its rulers.

In uncovering the historical facts mentioned above, Fouda refers to historical sources widely accepted among Muslims, such as the works of al-Tabari, al-Mas'udi, and al-Suyuti. The works of these historians have become common references in the field of early Islamic history. Al-Tabari's work, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, is the most important reference compared to other works in the field of Islamic history (Adnan, 2014; Bhat, 2022), and this work has led to al-Tabari being hailed as a great Muslim historian (A. Abdullah, 2015). Meanwhile, al-Mas'udi is known as a historian who contributed to the use of empirical data in writing history. He also introduced methods of using heavenly books and Greek philosophical books in composing a historical work (Lestari, Hak, and M. N. Ali, 2023). Similarly, although categorized as a traditionalist historian, al-Suyuti wrote history very critically, as evidenced in his famous work *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*. Among the strengths of this work are: the use of Quranic and Hadith evidence as justifications for historical facts; presenting both the negative and positive aspects of historical facts (Safari, 2016).

Fouda uses historical methods, which include heuristic, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. In the heuristic phase, Fouda has gathered the necessary historical sources according to the themes to be discussed. As previously explained, Fouda collects data from sources widely followed and accepted by Muslims. Fouda does not elaborate in detail on how he criticizes historical sources. However, he ensures that he "feels he has read history diligently, analyzed it carefully, examined it thoroughly, and often criticized the logic that sometimes pulls me to the left or right" (Fouda, 2007). Furthermore, criticism of sources that have become common references for Islamic history is not too significant. In the interpretation phase, Fouda demonstrates his expertise. In Fouda's hands, historical facts come alive. He is able to correlate historical sources written centuries ago with contemporary contexts. He firmly states that historical facts cannot be taken at face value but must be understood in their intended context (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, regarding the historiographical aspect of Fouda's work, it is as discussed in the overall study.

In terms of approach, Fouda shows his appreciation for conventional history, where historical works focus on rulers or significant events. In this regard, Fouda focuses on discussing the behavior of the caliphs, from the *Khulafa' al-Rashidun* to the Abbasid caliphs. At the same time, Fouda also applies a new approach or total history approach in presenting early Islamic history (T. Abdullah, 1999; Azra, 2002; Hannan, 2024a). This second approach is particularly evident in discussions about social life in Baghdad, life in the caliph's harem, education of female slaves, and sexual orientation matters. With this second approach, it is not excessive if chapters in the book are titled 'a new reading' of the history of the *Khulafa' al-Rashidun*, Umayyad history, and Abbasid history because total history allows historians to explore aspects of historical events that are often

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overlooked. In writing KYH, Fouda uses a diachronic concept. Derived from the Latin word *dia*, meaning 'through,' and *chronicus*, meaning 'time,' diachronic means history is written longitudinally over time and limited in space, or history focused on chronology. Diachronism in Fouda's work can be seen in the chronological chapters of his book from the history of the Khulafa' al-Rashidun, Umayyad Dynasty, to the Abbasid Dynasty. At the same time, Fouda also uses the synchronic concept (*syn* meaning 'together' and *chronous* meaning 'time' (Kuntowijoyo, 2001). This is very evident in each chapter of KYH. Each chapter discusses one or two issues in detail supported by reliable reference sources. Moreover, Fouda often correlates the discussions in his book with the developments faced in his time.

As a liberal Muslim, Fouda vehemently rejects the idea of an Islamic state or the amalgamation of religion and state. The historical work he produced also cannot escape Fouda's liberal perspective. Upon closer examination, almost the entirety of KYH contains ideas that contradict the establishment of an Islamic state or the establishment of a khilafa institution (Kurzman, 2003). Fouda's perspective becomes even more apparent, especially when juxtaposed with the historical narrative constructed by traditional circles. In the writings of the latter group, the caliphs appear as extremely pious, intelligent, strong, and just figures. Although they also touch on some negative aspects of the caliphs, this does not diminish the positive impression highlighted.

### 3.3. Fouda as an Informal Historian

Based on the study of the historiographical elements above, there is no reason not to accept KYH as a historical work. Based on the theme, data sources, methods and approaches, models and concepts, as well as perspectives, it has fulfilled the elements of a historical work agreed upon by historians. However, questioning whether KYH is an authoritative historical work or not is not the focus of this study. Such questions are indeed worth asking and require further examination, not only regarding KYH but also regarding every widely accepted historical work, as people question the validity of historical facts in the works of al-Tabari, al-Mas'udi, and al-Suyuti. Syariati, 1995 and Hodgson, 1961 criticized al-Tabari for only selecting and documenting his narratives verbatim, without criticizing and interpreting them. Similarly, al-Mas'udi was criticized for including myths in his historical work, having a tendency towards Shia, and lacking references (Lestari, Hak, and M. N. Ali, 2023), and he is referred to more as a litterateur than a historian (Pellat, 1961). Meanwhile, Safari, 2016 shows that al-Suyuti's work, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*, is more accurately described as "referring to the past" rather than as the "past" itself.

Although Fouda is not academically trained in history writing, this does not automatically disqualify his work from being called a historical work. In recent developments, history is a scholarly discipline that is very open to being written by anyone, as long as it meets the elements of a historical work. History is not the monopoly of those who graduate from history departments but can also be written by anyone who is engaged in history, even if they come from different fields of study. Therefore, historians themselves categorize historians into two types: academic historians or professional historians and informal historians. The former are historians who have received education in history. The latter are those who have not been trained in history departments but engage in history (Azra, 2002; Kuntowijoyo, 2003).

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In this framework, Fouda falls into the latter category of historians, informal historians. Fouda received education at Ain Shams University in the field of agriculture, from bachelor's to doctoral levels. However, thanks to his activism in civil society organizations and involvement in practical politics, he has a good understanding of Islamic knowledge, including Islamic history. *KYH* is a work of Islamic history he wrote, making him an informal historian. In the Islamic world, there are many informal historian figures like Fouda. In Egypt, he can be compared to Ahmad Amin, a teacher and expert in Arabic literature who also wrote several historical works, among the most important of which are *Fajr al-Islam* and *Dhuha al-Islam* (Armando et al., 2005; Mazyad, 1963). In Indonesia, he can be compared to HAMKA, Joesoef Sou'yb, and Ali Hasjmy (Yakub, 2013). HAMKA is basically an exegete. He has a famous exegesis work entitled *Tafsir al-Azhar*. However, he is also a (informal) historian due to his historical writings such as *Sejarah Umat Islam* (History of Islamic Society) (Syaikhu, 1996).

The excellence of *KYH* lies in its uniqueness in discussing early Islamic history. Its focus is on the negative aspects inherent in the early Islamic caliphs. This differs significantly from other works on early Islamic history, which typically focus on narrating the lives of the caliphs, the course of their rule, and their achievements, chronologically, as done by historians like Ibn Hisham (d. 833). Books similar to *KYH* are very rare, unlike the latter type of book, which is abundant to this day. *KYH*'s uniqueness also lies in its use of total history in examining early Islamic history. With *KYH*, Fouda has opened up space for the study of early Islamic history, a topic rarely touched upon by works in general.

However, *KYH* is not without its weaknesses. As expressed by its critics, *KYH*'s references are quite minimal for a controversial historical work. Some crucial points in *KYH* are not accompanied by references, such as the action of al-Dhabi'i spitting on the corpse of 'Uthman and breaking one of its joints (Fouda, 2007). This is certainly controversial because it involves one of the Islamic caliphs guaranteed paradise. The absence of references would only allow existing controversies to escalate wildly and could even serve as a reason for anyone who disagrees to attack Fouda, the author.

Nevertheless, not all criticisms leveled against Fouda are true, especially the criticism suggesting that Fouda seems to only choose sources that support his thesis (Team, 2024). Except for the points that are not sourced, the sources used by Fouda in *KYH* are legitimate. Moreover, he utilizes authoritative sources such as the works of al-Tabari, al-Athir, Ibn Kathir, and al-Mas'udi as his primary sources, whose authority is widely accepted in the Muslim world. The selection of these sources cannot be separated from the synchronic concept used in *KYH* and Fouda's position as a liberal Muslim. The synchronic concept allows a historian to discuss a particular topic in detail at a certain period, elaborating on it, including quoting points or sources from different periods. Furthermore, a historian, whoever it may be, including Fouda, can never be free from their subjectivity influenced by the social context and epistemic community surrounding them (Kosim, 1984; Abdurrahman, 2011). Therefore, Fouda feels the need to cite sources that support the thesis or ideas of liberal Islam. Expecting Fouda to support the theses of traditionalist or Islamist groups is certainly impossible.

Whether acknowledged or not, the criticisms leveled against Fouda and *KYH* are merely prejudices, suspicions, and accusations. None of these criticisms have proven facts contrary to what *KYH* reveals. It is important for Fouda's critics to present counter-

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narratives or corrections, for example, regarding the history of ‘Uthman’s death (which is depicted as tragic in Fouada’s narrative), which they consider to be the most legitimate. Some of the criticisms that have emerged are more in the form of popular opinions or essays rather than books or academic articles (Team, 2024; Amin, 2020).

#### 4. Conclusions

Through a comprehensive historiographical analysis, this study uncovers the thematic richness, methodological innovation, and interpretive complexities embedded in *Kebenaran yang Hilang* (KYH). Fouada’s work goes beyond conventional historiography by shedding light on often-overlooked truths within early Islamic history, challenging readers to question and reevaluate established historical narratives. His adept use of diverse and authoritative sources, coupled with a balanced application of traditional and modern historiographical approaches, reflects a thoughtful engagement with historical inquiry. Positioning Fouada as an informal historian expands the scope of historical scholarship, highlighting the importance of methodological plurality and the value of alternative perspectives, even in controversial works. Despite the critiques KYH has faced, its contributions are significant; it provokes critical discourse and encourages a deeper understanding of Islamic history’s complexities. Ultimately, KYH serves as a transformative text in Islamic historiography. By introducing fresh insights and stimulating scholarly debate, it opens new avenues for future research and positions itself as an essential reference point for those studying early Islamic history and historiography.

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