

Hadith

As the subject of Hadith is a very large one about which much has been written, it is unnecessary here to go into detail in discussing it. This introduction must confine itself to material which will help the students of technical subjects in understanding the sayings of the Prophet (S.M.).

Hadith and Sunna are the two words, either of which might with some justification be translated “tradition”, are commonly used but differ in their significance. Hadith really means a story, or a report, and so represents an account of what happened, whereas Sunna means a practice or custom. Within the community of Islam, it is only natural that these words come to be applied more particularly to matters relating to the Prophet and to the customs followed by him and his immediate followers. Records were collected telling what the Prophet said and did, and his reaction to things, said or done in his presence. When the study developed it came to be known under the title al-Hadith. The word hadith, which could be applied to any kind of story, was thus given a new technical meaning when used in connection with information about the Prophet. Sunna is more general, referring merely to the practice of the Prophet or his community, and there could be examples of Sunna in connection with which there was no hadith. Briefly, the Sunna is what was practiced and the hadith is the record of what was practiced. When at a later date works containing collections of traditions were compiled, each tradition was prefaced by a chain of authorities (isnad) through whom it was transmitted. In this way the authors of these works provided not merely the information they had compiled about the Prophet, but also its documentation. Every tradition must have an isnad as well as the text (matn).

Establishing of upholding authority of the Sunna: There were different schools of thought in early Islam, one of which was the party which upheld the importance of tradition traced back to the Prophet, and it was only after a period of contention and dispute that the traditionists won the day. The one who deserves most credit for establishing Tradition as a basis of Islam was Shafi'i (150-204 A.H.), the great exponent of jurisprudence. Largely as a result of his work the opponents of tradition lost the battle, and the tradition traced back to the Prophet came to be recognized as a basis of Islam second in importance only to the Qur'an. One of Shafi'i's arguments for the high status of Tradition was to quote the Qur'anic phrase “the Book and the Wisdom” (Qur'an, II, 151; III, 164; IV, 113; LXII, 2). By this means he argued that, the prophetic tradition is a type of divine inspiration; for while the Book refers to the Qur'an, the Wisdom is explained as being the Tradition. The Qur'an says that God taught the Prophet the Book and the Wisdom, and in consequence it was argued that the tradition is not merely a record of what Muhammad said and did, but is a record of his words and deeds which were subject to divine guidance. The doctrine holds that while the Qur'an is the eternal, uncreated word of God which is not subject to any human, adaptation of wording, the Tradition also contains an element of inspiration. In the Qur'an Muhammad was given the actual words of God; in the Tradition the words used were his own, but they were uttered under divine guidance As, the community developed and circumstances arose for which no

specific law could be found in the Qur'an, it was essential that some satisfactory principle should be followed. Matters should not be dealt with according to the discretion of rulers or magistrates; there must be some authority on which they should base their judgments. It is therefore not surprising that the community eventually came to accept Tradition as its second basis, for when a secondary authority was sought, no higher one could be found than the record of the words and deeds which were traced back to the Prophet.

It may safely be assumed that from the very beginning Muslims were interested in what the Prophet said and did and that after his death, when Islam spread widely, new converts would be anxious to hear about him. Those who had associated with him would be listened to eagerly as they told about him, and in course of time a great amount of material became current. While this was largely conveyed by word of mouth, there is reason to believe that some men made small collections for their own use. These can hardly be called books, but nevertheless the material they contained was incorporated in later works. It was a considerable time before any real collection of traditions was made, giving material supported in each instance by a chain of authorities tracing it back to the Prophet. A notable work, not normally considered to be a Hadith work, was the *Sira* of ibn Ishaq (151 A.H) which has been preserved in the recession of Ibn Hisham (d. 218 or 213 A.H). Another was the *Maghazi* of Waqidi (130-207 A.H.). These books make use of the principle of *isnad*, but they do not use it in such a thorough going manner as we find in the later Hadith works, for it is sometimes partial, sometimes complete, but sometimes omitted altogether. Their purpose is to give a record of the Prophet's career, which also is different from the plan of Hadith works, in which the traditions all stand by themselves and do not present a connected narrative. The first book to be compiled on a principle approaching what we find later was the *Muwatta'* of Malik (c. 93-179 A.H.) the great Medina doctor of law. He gives *isnads*, but not always in the complete manner of hadith works, and he arranges his material according to subject matter. Although the *Muwatta'* is really a handbook on law, it has been held by some to be one of the basic Hadith works. Malik sometimes traces traditions back to the Prophet, sometimes is content to trace them back to a companion of the Prophet, and sometimes gives his own opinion about matters.

Among the earliest collections of Hadith which are still extant and in print are the *Musnad* of Abu Daud Tayalis (d. 203 or 204 A.H.) and the *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Hanbal (164-241 A.H) compiled by his son. The term *musnad* (attributed) was used because such books grouped together the traditions coming from the same Companion, giving all the traditions attributed to one Companion and then going on to another. While this method had its interest, it was not very practical, as people would be anxious to find information on particular subjects and would require to do a great amount of reading before finding the point which interested them.

A better method was afterwards adopted, called *musannaf* (classified), by which the material was arranged, not according to the Companion through whom it came, but according to the subject matter. This method, which Malik had earlier used in the *Muwatta'*, made it possible for people to find guidance on any particular subject more easily, and this type of book gained popularity. While *musnad* works continued to be quoted, the books which were later

recognized as most authoritative were all of the musannaf type. In course of time six of these books came to be recognized by Sunnis as the most authoritative of all. These were the Sahih of Bukhari (194-256 A.H.), the Sahih of Muslim (c. 202-261 A.H.), and the four Sunnan works of Abu Dawud (202-275 A.H.), Tirmidhi (d. 279 A.H.), Nasai (215-303 A.H.) and Ibn Majah (209-273 A.H.). They were not all recognized immediately, but the two Sahih's fairly quickly commended themselves. The collection which took longest to gain acceptance was the work of Ibn Majah which was accepted in the East before it commended itself in the West. But as late as the seventh century Ibn as Salah (577-643 A.H.), a great authority who taught in Damascus, made no reference to Ibn Majah in his 'Ulum al-hadith. Ibn Khaldun (732-808 A.H.), who belonged to Tunis, still spoke of the five books, Ibn Majah being omitted by him. While Tirmidhi's work was earlier than Ibn Majah's in receiving recognition, it also had to wait quite a considerable time. In view of the importance of his notes this may seem surprising, for his work was a valuable contribution to the study of hadith. Perhaps the reason for the delay was the fact that he includes some traditions which suggest Shi'i tendencies.

The subject matter of Hadith is very comprehensive, covering almost every topic on which guidance might be sought. This may be illustrated from a consideration of the subjects covered by Bukhari in his Sahih which is divided into 97 books. He starts with three books on the beginning of the revelation, faith and knowledge. Next come 30 books connected with ablution, prayer, zakat, pilgrimage and fasting, most of them dealing with different matters concerning prayer. This is followed by 22 books dealing with matters of business, trusteeship, and in general with conditions of employment and various legal matters. Then come three books on fighting for the faith and dealing with subject peoples, followed by one on the beginning of creation. The next four deal with prophets and with the fine qualities of various contemporaries of the Prophet (S.M.), including some account of the Prophet's life up to the Hijra. The next book deals with the Prophet's career in Medina. Then follow two books giving commentary on passages from the Quran. The next three deal with marriage, divorce and the maintenance due to one's family. From here to book 95 various subjects are treated, among which are such matters as food, drink, clothing, seemly behavior, medicine, invitations, vows, the expiation of broken vows, blood-revenge, persecution, the interpretation of visions, civil strife and the trials before the end of the world. Book 96 stresses the importance of adhering to the Qur'an and the Sunna, and the last book, which is fairly lengthy, deals with God's unity.

This summary account of the contents of Bukhari's Sahih gives some idea of the material dealt with in Hadith. Muslim's Sahih covers very much the same ground. The four Sunan works confine themselves to matters of religious observance, law, personal relationships, and eschatology, but Tirmidhi includes some commentary on the Qur'an, and devotes to the fine qualities of various people, a book in which he includes material about the prophet, his family, and his companions. Tirmidhi's work is sometimes called a sahih.

One reason for compiling large collections of traditions was to supply the community with information which was considered by their authors to be worthy of being preserved. It was early recognized that a considerable amount of spurious material was being fabricated, and so efforts were made to counteract this. By the second century the criticism of traditions was well developed, and warnings were given against unreliable transmitters. Indeed, the principle of the criticism was rather to discuss the men who transmitted traditions than to investigate the material itself. One result of this was the production of biographical works in which information was provided regarding the men whose names appear in isnad. A very important work of this nature is *Kitab al-jarh wat ta'dil* by Ibn Hatim ar Razi (d. 327 A.H.) in which details are provided about a large number of traditionists and quotations are made from earlier authorities regarding their reliability. At times, however, this material is confusing, for we may find that while one authority considered a certain man reliable another considered him unreliable. Apart from such statements about the quality of transmitters, it was also important to know when traditionists were born and when they died, where they lived and where they travelled in the course of their studies, who the authorities were with whom they studied and who came to study with them and transmitted tradition's from them. The date when a man lived was important, for a knowledge of this would show whether those who were said to have transmitted from him could have met him, and whether he could have met those from whom he claimed to have received traditions. There are many biographical dictionaries which are fortunately available in print. Among these mention may be made of Dhahabi's *Tadhkirat al huffaz* (4 vols., Haidarabad, 1315 A.H) and his *Mizan al-ital* (3 vols., Cairo, 1325 A.H.); Ibn Hajar al- 'Asqalani's *Tahadhib at-tahdhib* (12 vols., Haidarabad, 1325-28 A.H.) and his *Lisan al-mizan* (6 vols., Haidarabad, 1329-31 A.H.); Ibn al-Imad's *Shadharat adh-dhahab* (8 vols., Cairo, 1350-51 A.H.). There are also works on the men of particular legal schools, and of people of particular centuries, as well as more general works containing biographies of men of all types, not confined to traditionists. *Shadharat adh-dhahab* really belongs to this class, but it is particularly valuable for information about traditionists, as it covers the long period up to the year 1000 A.H.

The vast development of traditions reputed to come from the Prophet (S.M.) made it necessary to adopt certain principles regarding their criticism, for example, Bukhari, in compiling his work, said he had collected 600,000 traditions, and yet he included only 7,275 altogether in his *Sahih*, a total which is said to be reduced to 4,000, or even 2762, when repetitions are eliminated. Abu dawud out of 500,000 traditions included only 4,800 in his *sunan*, and of these he said that some were not sound. It should be understood, however, that when one speaks of 600,000 traditions, for example, this does not mean that number of separate items of information. Each tradition has two parts, the isnad (the chain of authorities through whom it is transmitted) and the matn (text). If therefore we found the same text with, say, three different isnads, that would be considered to represent three traditions. But even when one makes allowance for such a consideration, it is still obvious that a vast number of traditions were discarded by reputable traditionists.

Origin and Development of the Science of Hadith

What was known as “Ilm al-hadith (the science of Tradition) gradually developed. The first writer to compile a comprehensive work of this type was Abu Muhammad ar-Ramahurmuzi (d.c.370 A.H.). His work, entitled *Kitab al-muhaddith al-fasil bain ar-rawi wal wa'i*, is preserved in a number of MSS, but has not yet been published. He was soon followed by al-Hakim Abu ‘Abdallah Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah an-Naisaburi (321-405 A.H.) who compiled *kitab ma’rifat ‘ulum al-hadith*, in which he deals with the whole subject, dividing his material into 52 categories. An edition of this work has been published by Dr. Mu’azzam Husain (Cairo, 1937). One other work of importance which may be mentioned is by Abu ‘Amr ‘Uthman b. ‘abd ar-Rahman ash-Shahrazuri known as Ibn as-Salah (d. 643 A.H.). In his introduction he calls it *Kitab ma’rifat anwa’ Him al-hadith*. A lithographed edition was published ‘ulum al-hadith, and an edition entitled ‘*Ulm al-hadith* was published in Aleppo in 1350/1931 along with the commentary on it by Zain ad-Din ‘Abu ar-Rahim b. al-Husain al-‘Iraqi (d.806 A.H) called *at-Taqyid wal idah lima utliqa wa ughliqa min muqaddimat Ibn as-Salah*. This work which divides the material into 655 categories has been greatly valued, as is shown from the commentaries written on it, and the selections made from it. It may with justice be called the classical work on the subject. Such works were a natural and necessary development to systematize the various studies which had been developed since traditionists began to investigate the credentials of transmitters and the value of their traditions.

Classification of Hadith

Traditions have commonly been divided into three main groups: (1) *sahih* (sound), (2) *hasan* (good), and (3) *daif* (weak), or *saqim* (infirm). All the traditions given by Bukhari and Muslim are reckoned *sahih*, as are those not given by them which fulfill the conditions laid down by either or both of these men, and also others which are thoroughly reliable in the opinion of other authorities.

There is more difficulty in determining the *hasan* traditions, because different explanations have been given of this term. Ibn as Salah in ‘*Ulm al-hadith*, PP. 30 ff., discusses the matter at length. He tells that Abu Sulaiman al-Khattabi (d. 386 or 388 A.H.) said *hasan* traditions are those whose source is known and whose men are well-known, are the largest class which is recognized, and are accepted by most of the learned and made use of by the doctors of the law. Tirmidhi explained *hasan* as the type whose *isnad* contains no one suspected of falsehood, which does not disagree with what is generally reported, and which has something similar transmitted by another line. Ibn as-Salah also quotes a later scholar whom he does not name, but who is said to be Abul Faraj b. al-Jauzi (d. 597 A. H.), to the effect that *hasan* traditions contain some very slight weakness and are so very nearly right and admissible that they are fit to be used as a basis for legal decisions.

All the traditions other than those of Bukhari and Muslim which he renders are called hasan, whereas this group contains a number which do not come up to the standard required to merit that title.

While hasan traditions have been recognized as valid bases for legal decisions this cannot apply to daif traditions; but all traditions called da'if are not rejected out of hand. Those which exhort people to do good, or which tell incidents may be quoted. Abu Dawud quite often uses da'if traditions when he can find nothing better to illustrate the point with which he is dealing. There are various grades of weak traditions with different types of defects descending from those which may on occasion be quoted, through those with links missing or with other defects in the chain of transmission, traditions which disagree with what is commonly reported, or which conceal defects, to traditions which are fictitious.

In the course of the Mishkat it will be noted that a number of technical terms are used by Tirmidhi in referring to the nature of traditions which come from his collection. In the works of Abu Dawud, Nasai and Ibn Majah remarks are often made about the quality of traditions, but none have done this in such a thoroughgoing manner as Tirmidhi. He normally adds a note at the end of his traditions to indicate their nature. At the end of his collection he has a book in which he begins to explain the technical terms he uses, but unfortunately he has not done it as fully as one might desire.

It may be convenient here to explain some of the technical terms used in connection with traditions.

Gharib is sometimes applied to the matn and sometimes to the isnad. It may refer to the only tradition known by a certain line of transmission, although the same tradition may be known by other lines, this type being gharib regarding the isnad. It may refer to a tradition whose matn has only one transmitter, this type being gharib regarding both isnad and matn. It may refer to a tradition which comes only from a man who is considered reliable, or in which some addition to what is found in other lines of the same tradition is made by a man of this quality, such a tradition being called gharib shaih.

Mauquf refers to an isnad which stops at one of the Companions and does not trace the tradition to the Prophet.

Muallal is used of a tradition which may ostensibly be sound but has some not readily apparent weakness This may consist of pretending that a mursal tradition has a full isnad, or that a mauquf tradition goes back to the prophet; or two traditions may be jumbled together, or there may be some misconception introduced by a transmitter.

Munkar is used of a tradition from a weak transmitter which disagrees with what is generally reported.

Munqati' is an isnad with a link missing at the beginning, middle, or end.

Mursal is used of a tradition where a man in the generation following that of the Prophet's companions quotes the Prophet directly.

Shadh is used of a tradition coming from a single transmitter and contradicting another. If the transmitter is a recognized authority, it deserves examination, but if he is not, the tradition is to be rejected.

There are a number of other technical terms relating to traditions, but I have confined myself to these terms as they seem to me quite enough for the interdisciplinary students as basics of the science of hadith.