

Abstract

Abu ‘Abdillah Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal Shaybani (166–241 AH/780–855 CE)¹ is the founder of one of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence and his book al-Musnad ² is considered among the most comprehensive and early collections of hadith. It contains some 30,000 sayings attributed to the Prophet and the period of its writing makes it among the foremost of the *sihah al-sittah* (six authentic books) of the Sunni sect.

One of the characteristics of this work is the wide space given to hadith concerning the merits of the Prophet’s Ahl al-Bayt, most of which are confirmed from the viewpoint of Shi’ite Muslims as well. Compared to the other hadith compendiums of the Sunnis, the Musnad’s emphasis on this subject is so pronounced that it has attracted the attention of orientalists and other researchers. The writer of this article has attempted to focus on this particular point of the Musnad and its author by selecting some of the hadith mentioned in this bulky compendium with a short explanation wherever necessary.

The key words of this brief article are Tashayyu‘, Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, Hadith Compendiums, Merits of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), Hadith al-Ghadir, Hadith al-Thaqalayn, Hadith al-Manzilah.

¹. He is popularly known as Ibn Hanbal. Born in Baghdad or in Merv in Khurasan (presently the city is in the Republic of Turkmenistan), he started learning hadith at the age of 16 and travelled to different places in collecting from scholars the sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad (S). Among his prominent teachers, mention could be made of Sufyan bin ‘Uyaynah, ‘Abd al-Razzaq bin Hammam al-San’ani and Muhammad bin Idris al-Shafi’i.

He left behind many works, the most famous of which is the hadith compendium titled al-Musnad. His biographers have credited him with such characteristics as sharp memory, patience, purity of heart and thought, sincerity, courage and intellect. For further familiarity on his life, viewpoints and bases of thought, refer to the contemporary Egyptian scholar Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zuhrah’s work titled: *Ibn Hanbal – Hayatuhu wa ‘Asruhu, Ara’uhu wa Fiqhuh* (Ibn Hanbal – His Life and Times, His Views and His Fiqh), Egypt, Dar al-Fikr al-‘Arabi, 1367 AH/1947 CE.

². Musnad (pl. Masanid) is the name given to works where the hadith are arranged in order of the names of the companions who after the Prophet are regarded as the prime source by the Sunnis. Several books were compiled under this title, of which Ahmad bin Hanbal’s Musnad is the most famous one.

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