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Lesson 24: The Intellectual Legacy of the Shi'ah

The importance of writing and compilation in the sacred laws of Islam is proverbial to all and sundry. For, one of the most significant ways of transferring knowledge and learning is through writing. The Arab society, prior to the advent of Islam had acquired the least benefit from this blessing, and only very few were able to read and write.^{[1](#)}

But the need to record and put into writing the verses of the Qur'an for learning and teaching were only felt immediately after the Prophetic mission and the receipt of revelations. As Ibn Hisham has narrated:

Before 'Umar ibn al-Khattab became Muslim, his sister, Fatimah bint al-Khattab and her husband Sa'id ibn Zayd had become Muslims and covertly and away from the attention of 'Umar, Khabbab ibn Irt was teaching them *Surah Ta Ha* on a writing parchment which was called *sahifah*.^{[2](#)}

In Medina, the Noble Messenger (S) had selected a group of Muslims who were able to put into writing the divine revelation. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ('a), in addition to being the regular scribe of the revelation, the Holy Prophet (S) constantly explained to him the definitive verses {*muhkamat*} and allegorical verses {*mutashabihat*}^{[3](#)} as well as the abrogator {*nasukh*} and abrogated {*mansukh*} verses.

'Ali ('a) had also written a book entitled, "*Sahifah al-Jami'ah*" as dictated by the Messenger of Allah (S), which encompassed the lawful {*halal*} and the unlawful {*haram*}, obligatory {*wajib*} and recommended {*mustahab*} acts, as well as laws and that which the people need in this world and in their life in the hereafter.^{[4](#)} Two other books—one entitled "*Sahifah*" about penalties {*diyyat*} and another book entitled "*Fara'idh*"—have also been attributed to the Imam.^{[5](#)}

Other companions of the Holy Prophet (S) also compiled collections of his sayings and traditions, which they called "*sahifah*". Abu Hurayrah has been narrated by Bukhari to have said:

Of all the companions of the Prophet, I have the most number of narrating the Prophet's *hadiths* with the exception of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amru because he used to write whatever he would hear from the Prophet while I was not writing them.^{[6](#)}

After the demise of the Prophet (S), however, the second caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab prohibited the writing of *hadith*.⁷ This state of affairs persisted until such time that ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz during the latter part of the first century AH annulled this prohibition and he wrote to Abu Bakr ibn Hazm to record in writing the *hadiths* of the Messenger of Allah (S).⁸

This task was not realized until the end of the first half of the second century AH because according to Ghazzali, the first writers of books on *hadith* among the Ahl as-Sunnah were Ibn Jarir, Mu‘ammar ibn Rashid, Malik ibn Anas, and Sufyan ath-Thawri⁹ who were related to the second half of the second century AH and the years of their demise were 150, 152, 179, and 161 AH respectively.

Yet, this process was never suspended among the Shi‘ah, and great Shi‘ah among the companions of the Prophet (S) such as Salman al-Farsi, Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari and Abu Rafi‘ al-Qibti made the pioneering steps in the field of writing and composition. Ibn Shahr Ashub says,

Ghazzali believes that the first book written in the Muslim world is the book of Ibn Jarir on the works and types of exegeses {*tafsir*} narrated from Mujahid and ‘Ata’ in Mecca. Next to his book is the book of Mu‘ammar ibn Rashid San‘ani in Yemen; then, the book *Muwatta’* of Malik ibn Anas in Medina; followed by the book *Jami‘ah* of Sufyan ath-Thawri. This is not correct, however, for the first book in the Muslim world is written by the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) who compiled the Qur’an. Next to him, Salman al-Farsi, Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari, Asbagh ibn Nubatah, and ‘Abd Allah ibn Abi Rafi‘ had also made steps in writing and composition. And after them, Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (‘a) composed the *Sahifah al-Kamilah*.¹⁰

Ibn Nadim also regard the first account of writing among the Shi‘ah as related to the first century AH.¹¹ In view of the Shi‘ah’s lead in writing, composition and compiling the Prophetic works, Dhahabi in describing the status of Aban ibn Taghlib thus says: “If the reliability of persons such as Aban is not accepted because of his inclination to Shi‘ism, so many of the Prophetic works and *hadiths* will perish.”¹²

As such, the jurists and *hadith* scholars {*muhaddithun*} of the Ahl as-Sunnah, particularly the founders of the four schools of thought {*madhahib*}, in addition to utilizing intermediaries to Imam as-Sadiq (‘a), had also learned from the Shi‘ah *muhaddithun* and received *hadiths* from them.¹³

Meanwhile, regarding the number of books written by Shi‘ah during the first three centuries AH, the author of *Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah* has said:

“The scholars and *muhaddithun* during the period of the pure Imams (‘a), from the time of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) up to the time of Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (‘a), have written six thousand and six hundred books.”¹⁴

The Shi‘ah during those periods made remarkable accomplishments in the various fields of knowledge of the day such as literature, lexicography, poetry, sciences of the Qur’an {*‘ulum al-qur’an*}, exegesis {*tafsir*}, *hadith*, principles of jurisprudence {*usul al-fiqh*}, scholastic theology {*‘ilm al-kalam* or simply

kalām}, history, life conduct of the Prophet (S) {*sirah*}, *rijāl*, and ethics.

They have made many writings and literary works while leading in most fields. Abu'l-Aswad Daw'ili, a Shi'ah poet, was the founder of the science of Arabic syntax {*nahw*}.¹⁵ He was the first to put the dots in the copies of the Qur'an.¹⁶ The first book on lexicography among the Muslims is *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* written by Khalil ibn Ahmad¹⁷ who has been one of the Shi'ah scholars.¹⁸

In the field of the life conduct {*sirah*} and battles {*maghazi*} of the Prophet (S), the first book was written by Ibn Ishaq who, according to Ibn Hajr, was a Shi'ah.¹⁹

After undertaking this cursory glance, we shall now explain a bit about the sciences of *hadith*, jurisprudence and scholastic theology that the Shi'ah school has a particular disposition, keeping into account its fundamentals and principles in these fields.

Hadith

Next to the Qur'an, the *hadith* or the *sunnah* which is the second source of Islamic jurisprudence, means the saying, action and tacit approval of the Infallibles (ʿa). The Ahl as-Sunnah confine the *hadith* to only the saying, action and tacit approval of the Prophet (S). The Shi'ah, however, regard the saying, action and tacit approval of the infallible Imams (ʿa) as proof {*hujjah*} and part of the corpus of *hadith*.²⁰

Now, we shall survey the works on *hadith* during the period of the presence of the Imams (ʿa) in four categories, which consist of four phases:

First Category

Based on the opinion of Najashi, the first category of the Shi'ah *hadith* recorders were Abu Rafi' al-Qibti, 'Ali ibn Abi Rafi', Rabi'ah ibn Sumi', Sulaym ibn Qays Hilali, Asbagh ibn Nabatah Majashi'i, and 'Abd Allah ibn Hurr Ju'fi.²¹ They were among the companions of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (ʿa).

Second Category

According to some scholars, there were twelve persons who had written books and treatises among the companions of Imam as-Sajjad and Imam al-Baqir (ʿa).²² One may mention Aban ibn Taghlib among them. He occupied a special station in the eyes of the pure Imams (ʿa) so much so that Imam al-Baqir (ʿa) said to him: "In the mosque of Medina you give religious edicts {*fatawa*} to the people as I want individuals like you to be seen among my Shi'ah."²³

Najashi says, "Aban ibn Taghlib, may Allah be pleased with him, was one of the forerunners in the various fields of knowledge such as the Qur'an, jurisprudence, *hadith*, literature, lexicography, and

syntax.” Aban has written about these fields such as his *Tafsir*, *Gharib al-Qur’an* and *Kitab al-Fadha’il*.^{[24](#)}

The same is true regarding Abu Hamzah ath-Thumali about whom Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) has said: “Abu Hamzah was like Salman (al-Farsi) of my time.”^{[25](#)} Among his books and treatises are *Kitab an-Nawadir*, *Kitab az-Zuhd* and *Tafsir al-Qur’an*.^{[26](#)}

Third Category

The time of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) was a period of scientific progress and advancement in the Muslim society while the Shi‘ah had enjoyed relative freedom. According to Shaykh al-Mufid, the number of students of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) was approximately four thousands.^{[27](#)}

Hasan ibn ‘Ali Washa’, a companion of Imam ar-Ridha (‘a) says that he has seen nine hundred people in Masjid Kufah who have all been narrating *hadiths* from Imam as-Sadiq (‘a).^{[28](#)} So, out of the Imam’s replies to the questions posed to him, four hundred books have been written^{[29](#)} all of which have been known as *Al-Asl* {The Principle or Essence}.

There have also been other books, apart from the ones mentioned, in various fields and sciences written by the companions and students of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a).

Fourth Category

During this period which was after the time of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a), many books on *hadith* have been written. For example, Husayn ibn Sa‘id al-Kufi, a companion of Imam ar-Ridha (‘a), has written thirty books on *hadith*.^{[30](#)}

Muhammad ibn Abi ‘Umayr, another companion of Imam ar-Ridha (‘a), has written ninety four books while Safwan ibn Bajli, a companion of both Imam ar-Ridha and Imam al-Jawad (‘a), have authored thirty books most of which have the titular appellation of *Jami‘* {collection, compendium or anthology}. The latter compilers of *hadith* such as Thiqat al-Islam al-Kulayni, Shaykh as-Saduq and Shaykh at-Tusi have benefited from those books in writing their own collections.

Lesson 24: Summary

The importance of writing in the sacred laws of Islam is proverbial to all and sundry. With the receipt of the divine revelation, the need for recording it in writing was felt, and a number of scribes of the revelation were known.

The Commander of the Faithful (‘a) and a number of other companions of the Prophet (S) had compiled some collections of the *hadiths* of the Prophet (S) which were known together as *Sahifah*.

Among the Ahl as-Sunnah, the first books on *hadith* have been related to the second half of the second century AH because the second caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab had prohibited the writing of *hadith*. This prohibition among the Shi‘ah, however, did not prevail, and the first writers among the companions of the Prophet (S) were Salman al-Farsi, Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari and Abu Rafi‘ al-Qibti.

Shi‘ah up to the time of Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (‘a) had written six thousand and six hundred books.

We shall survey the works on *hadith* written by the Shi‘ah during the whole period of the presence of the pure Imams (‘a) in four categories that consist of four phases.

First category: Companions of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (‘a).

Second category: Companions of Imam as-Sajjad and Imam al-Baqir (‘a).

Third category: Companions of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a).

Fourth category: Companions of Imam al-Kazim, Imam ar-Ridha, Imam al-Jawad, Imam al-Hadi, and Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (‘a).

Lesson 24: Questions

1. How was the writing of the Qur’an during the time of the Prophet (S)?
2. Were the companions of the Prophet (S) keeping written records of his *hadiths*?
3. Which period were the first writers of the books on *hadith* among the Ahl as-Sunnah related to?
4. Who were the pioneers in writing among the Shi‘ah?
5. What is the number of the books written by the Shi‘ah up to the time of Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (‘a)?
6. The first category of the Shi‘ah scholars of *hadith* {*muhaddithun*} was the companions of which of the infallible Imams (‘a)?
7. How was the writing of *hadith* during the time of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a)?
8. The books on *hadith* collectively known as *Jami‘* {collection, compendium or anthology} were related to which period?

[1.](#) ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn al-Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah* (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ at-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1408 AH), p. 417.

[2.](#) Abu Muhammad ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifah, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 344.

[3.](#) Surah Al ‘Imran 3:7: “It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book, while others are metaphorical.”

- [4.](#) Abu'l-'Abbas Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Ahmad ibn al-'Abbas Najashi, *Fihrist Asma' Musanfa ash-Shi'ah* (Rijal Najashi) (Qum: Islamic Publications Office affiliated to the Society of Teachers of the Islamic Seminary in Qum, 1407 AH), p. 360; Abi 'Ali al-Fadhl ibn al-Hasan Tabarsi, *I'lam al-Wara bi A'lam al-Huda* (Qum: Mu'assasah Al al-Bayt Li Ihya' at-Turath, 1417 AH), vol. 1, p. 536.
- [5.](#) Shaykh at-Tusi, *Tahdhib al-Ahkam* (n.p: Maktabah as-Saduq, 1376 AHS/1418 AH), vol. 1, pp. 338, 342.
- [6.](#) *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr Li't-Taba'ah wa'n-Nashr wa't-Tawzi', n.d.), vol. 1, p. 36.
- [7.](#) Asad Haydar, *Al-Imam as-Sadiq wa'l-Madhab al-Arba'ah*, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1390 AH), vol. 1, p. 544.
- [8.](#) *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 36.
- [9.](#) Ibn Shahr Ashub Mazandarani, *Ma'alim al-'Ulama'* (Najaf: Manshurat al-Matba'ah al-Haydariyyah, 1380 AH), p. 2.
- [10.](#) Ibid.
- [11.](#) Ibn Nadim. *Al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah Li't-Taba'ah wa'n-Nashr, n.d.), p. 307.
- [12.](#) Shams ad-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad Dhahabi, *Mizan al-I'tidal* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr Li't-Taba'ah wa'n-Nashr wa't-Tawzi', n.d.), vol. 1, p. 4.
- [13.](#) 'Abd al-Hamid ibn Abi'l-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah*, researched by Muhammad Abu'l-Fadhl Ibrahim (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, 1378 AH), vol. 1, p. 18.
- [14.](#) Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Hurr al-'Amili, *Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah*, 6th edition (Tehran: Maktabah al-Islamiyyah, 1403 AH), vol. 20, p. 49.
- [15.](#) *Al-Fihrist*, p. 61.
- [16.](#) Bastani, *Da'irah al-Ma'arif* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 788.
- [17.](#) *Al-Fihrist*, p. 63.
- [18.](#) Muhammad ibn 'Ali Ardebili al-Gharawi al-Ha'iri, *Jami' ar-Ruwah* (Qum: Manshurat Maktabah Ayatullah al-'Uzma al-Mar'ashi an-Najafi, 1403 AH), vol. 1, p. 298.
- [19.](#) Shahab ad-Din ibn 'Ali ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Tahrir Taqrib at-Tahdhib*, 1st edition (Beirut: Mu'assasah ar-Risalah, 1417 AH/1997), vol. 3, pp. 211-212.
- [20.](#) Shaykh Zayn ad-Din Shahid ath-Thani, *Dhikra ash-Shi'ah fi Ahkam ash-Shari'ah*, lithography, p. 4; *Ar-Ri'ayah fi 'Ilm ad-Dirayah*, 1st edition (Qum: Manshurat Maktabah Ayatullah al-'Uzma al-Mar'ashi an-Najafi, 1408 AH), pp. 50, 52.
- [21.](#) *Fihrist Asma' Musanfa ash-Shi'ah* (Rijal Najashi), pp. 4-9.
- [22.](#) These twelve persons were Bard al-Askaf, Thabit ibn Abi Safiyyah Abu Hamzah ath-Thumali, Thabit ibn Hormuz, Bassam ibn 'Abd Allah Sayrafi, Muhammad ibn Qays Bajli, Hujr ibn Za'idah Hadhrami, Zakariyya ibn 'Abd Allah Fiyadh, Abu Juham al-Kufi, Husayn ibn Thawir, 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn Qasim al-Ansari, 'Abd al-Ghaffar ibn Qasim al-Ansari, and Aban ibn Taghlib. See 'Abd ar-Rahim Rabbani Shirazi, *Muqaddamah Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah*, 6th edition (Tehran: Maktabah Islamiyyah, 1403 AH), p. ٥١.
- [23.](#) *Fihrist Asma' Musanfa ash-Shi'ah* (Rijal Najashi), p. 10.
- [24.](#) Ibid., p. 11.
- [25.](#) Ibid., p. 115.
- [26.](#) *Ma'alim al-'Ulama'*, p. 30.
- [27.](#) Shaykh al-Mufid, *Al-Irshad*, trans. Muhammad Baqir Sa'idi Khurasani, 2nd edition (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-ye Islamiyyeh, 1376 AHS), p. 525.
- [28.](#) *Fihrist Asma' Musanfa ash-Shi'ah* (Rijal Najashi), pp. 39-40.
- [29.](#) Abi 'Ali al-Fadhl ibn al-Hasan Tabarsi, *I'lam al-Wara bi A'lam al-Huda* (Qum: Mu'assasah Al al-Bayt Li Ihya' at-Turath, 1417 AH), vol. 1, p. 535.
- [30.](#) *Ma'alim al-'Ulama'*, p. 40.

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