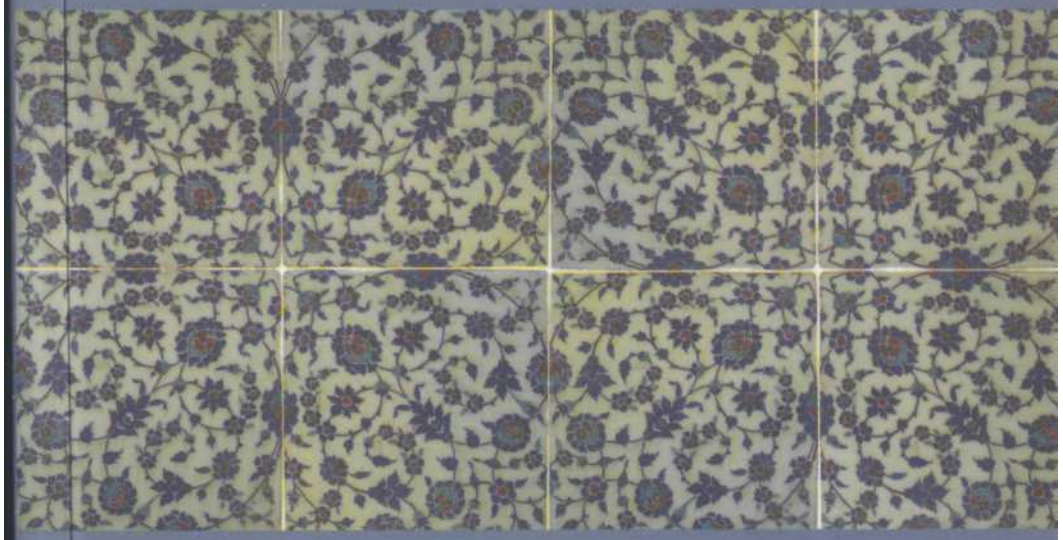
MAKERS OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

BUKHARI



Bukhari (d. 256/870) is famed throughout the Islamic world as the greatest practitioner in the field of hadith – textual reports of what the Prophet said, did or approved. Bukhari's magnum opus, the *Sahih*, is, after the Qur'an, the most widely revered book in Islam. It is a compilation of the soundest of sound hadiths. The Prophet's way (*Sunna*) is understood by Muslims as embodying both the ideal and practical reality of what the Qur'an enjoins. Accordingly, much of the edifice of rules and norms of the Islamic way of life is constructed around the hadith.

Most people read the *Sahih* as a transparent medium through which they can 'hear the Prophet speak'. In reality, Bukhari's work is a highly sophisticated argument about how hadiths are verified, what meaning and authority they carry, and how far the practice of the Prophet can be securely derived from them. When Bukhari wrote the *Sahih*, these were not settled questions. The book appeared at a turning-point in the history of Islamic scholarship, and helped determine its future direction.

In this remarkably lucid essay, addressed to the non-specialist, the author disentangles Bukhari's subtle handling and arrangement of his material, explaining how far his approach to questions about textual authenticity and authority differed from his predecessors and contemporaries. These questions, of abiding concern in all societies, have a particular relevance and urgency for modern Islamic scholarship.

Ghassan Abdul-Jabbar is a specialist in hadith studies. He did his PhD at the University of Chicago and then post-doctoral research at Oxford University. He now works in Lahore University as well as travels extensively as an Islamic teacher in the classic peripatetic style alluded to in this book.

MAKERS OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

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This series, conceived by the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, is jointly published by Oxford University Press and I.B. Tauris. The books in the series, written by leading scholars in the field, aim to provide an introduction to outstanding figures in the history of Islamic civilization. They will serve as the essential first point of reference for study of the persons, events and ideas that have shaped the Islamic world and the cultural resources on which Muslims continue to draw.

Bukhari

Ghassan Abdul-Jabbar

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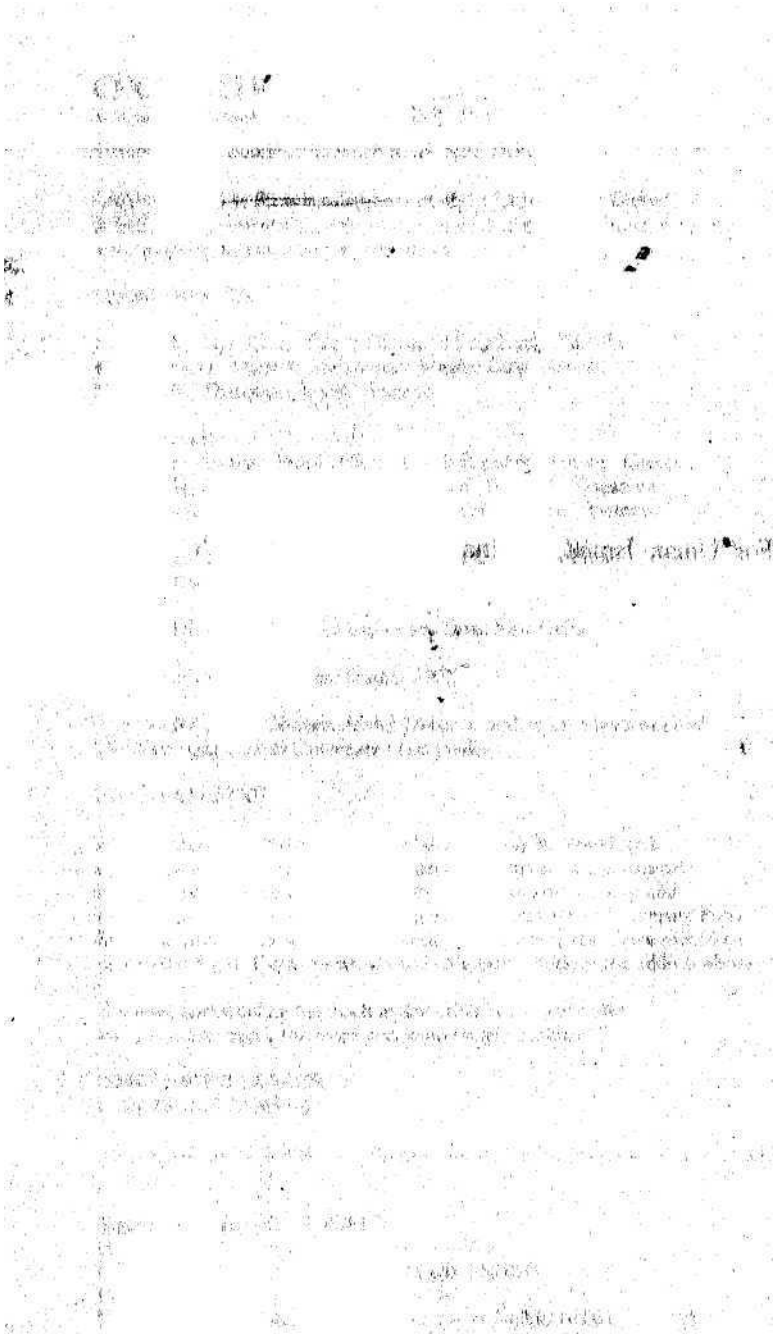

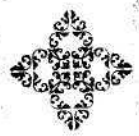

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1

Introduction

'Abd al-Wahid ibn Adam al-Tawawisi said: I saw the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) standing in a place with a group of his Companions. I greeted him and he returned my greeting. I asked him 'Why are you standing here, O Messenger of God?' He said, 'I am waiting for Muhammad ibn Isma'il'. After a few days I heard news of the death of Muhammad ibn Isma'il. Upon reflection I realized that he had died the very hour I had seen the Prophet in my dream.

(Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-sari*, 493)

Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari is one of the most well-known scholars that Islam has produced in fourteen centuries. People speak of him as 'al-Imam al-Bukhari': 'Imam' is a title that means that he is a leader among scholars, while 'Bukhari' means 'from Bukhara', the Central Asian city in what is now the republic of Uzbekistan.

Bukhari figures as one of the most well-known experts in the hadith literature – hadiths being the most important texts in Islam after the Qur'an. A hadith is a textual report of

words and deeds of the Prophet, or of words spoken or deeds done in his presence with his explicit or tacit approval. The primary text in Islam is the Qur'an. It consists of the words of God Himself. While the Prophet pronounced the words of the Qur'an, the tradition is very clear in separating his speech from God's speech. The Prophet's words have authority, but they are quite distinct from God's words. The latter make up the Qur'an. The former constitute the large corpus of texts called 'hadith'.

The Qur'an is only about 70,000 words. There are minor variants of words and brief phrases, but they have not played a significant role in scholarly debates. For all practical purposes, there has been little disagreement throughout history about the text of the Qur'an itself. By contrast, hadiths run into the tens of thousands. If we count each variant reporting as a separate hadith, there are at least a few hundred thousand hadiths preserved in the books available today. Each hadith text is an independent text with its own academic apparatus in the form of the chain of narrators through whom it is reported. Slight modifications in that chain and corresponding differences in text can generate hundreds of variants of a 'single' hadith.

To illustrate the formal appearance of hadith texts, here is the final hadith in Bukhari's magnum opus, the *Sahih:*

Ahmad ibn Ishkab *narrated to me* that
Muhammad ibn Fudayl narrated to me, *from*
'Umara ibn Qa'qa', *from*
Abu Zur'a, *from*
Abu Hurayra (God be pleased with him), *he said*
the Prophet (God's blessings and mercy on him) said:
There are two statements, which the Merciful (God) loves, which are light on the tongue but which will weigh heavy in the scale of good deeds: 'God is beyond all shortcomings, and I praise Him; God the Great is beyond all shortcomings'.

The list of names preceding the text, the 'chain of narration', is its documentation. The connecting elements (italicized above) following each name specify the claim of the documentation. For example, here the first two narrators explicitly claim that they themselves heard the text from the person they name. The next three, however, simply say that they have this text *from* the person they mention. Perhaps they heard the text from this person directly; perhaps someone reliable told them that the person mentioned conveys this text. I will return to such nuances in Chapter 5.

Bukhari dedicated his life to collecting and analysing texts like this. He had memorized a great number of them, and he was very reliable in transmitting them accurately. But his claim to fame rests upon his achievements in three disciplines connected to hadith. First, he was outstanding in his ability to derive the implications of particular hadiths for different contexts. The name for this discipline in the Islamic tradition is *fiqh* (understanding the law, jurisprudence). Second, he had a vast knowledge of the biographies of the people whose names occur in such chains of narration, and of their reliability and expertise in preserving and transmitting texts. This is the discipline of *rijal* (literally, 'men'). Third, a hadith scholar can often present several different chains of narration to support a single text. Bukhari was an expert at identifying the most reliable of these chains and any hidden technical problems in them, and hence he was an expert at identifying any weaknesses in the most reliable transmissions of a text. This is the discipline of *ilal* (literally, 'illnesses', 'blemishes'). In this book I have tried to introduce the reader to Bukhari's work in *fiqh*, *rijal*, and *ilal*.

1. WHAT THIS BOOK COVERS

After a brief look at the life of Bukhari in Chapter 2, the substance of this book is in Chapters 3–5. Chapters 3 and 4

address the problem of assigning meaning to hadith texts – Bukhari's way of doing this, and the way others approached this issue. Chapter 5 then describes the problem of verifying the authenticity of texts – how Bukhari did this and how others did it differently.

In this brief work I have limited the discussion to the two issues of meaning and verification. In each case, I have used instances from Bukhari's works to show how he has dealt with these issues, and I have tried to put his work in the context of approaches other scholars have taken.

Readers familiar with hadith studies will recognize the issue as that of the relationship of jurisprudence to hadith. A popular view is that the scholars of jurisprudence were those who relied on their own understanding of religion more than on specific texts. On this popular view, Bukhari is seen as the leader of those who argued for basing religion on texts, usually of a hadith and, in particular, of the soundest relevant hadith. One cannot understand Bukhari's work without understanding the role of texts in religious understanding. I discuss this in Chapters 3 and 4.

In Chapter 5 I turn to the academic apparatus supporting the hadith text, and to how Bukhari determined the soundness of a hadith. This is the area in which he made his greatest contribution. Here again, that contribution is best understood against the background of the history of how other hadith scholars approached that task.

Following a summary conclusion in Chapter 6, the last chapter offers suggestions for further reading.

2. WHAT THIS BOOK LEAVES OUT

a. Doctrinal controversies

A series of doctrinal controversies form important background to Bukhari's work. There was the issue of the relation

of faith to deeds. This is actually an aspect of the quarrel between the scholars of jurisprudence and the scholars of hadith. Another important controversy was over whether the Qur'an is the created word of God or whether the Qur'an is the name of 'God's Speech', which is a divine quality that has existed eternally with God. This controversy hounded Bukhari for the last eight years of his life, not allowing him peace in any city.

A treatment of each of these issues is possible and important. However, one can gain a sense of Bukhari's unique contribution to the disciplines of Islamic knowledge even without a full understanding of these doctrinal debates.

b. Source criticism and the hadith literature

I have avoided the debates on source criticism that have become the hallmark of the literature on hadith studies in the English language. When removed from a study of the sources themselves, source criticism turns into fruitless speculation. Some literary critics have proposed that literary criticism should aim to help the reader appreciate literature: in this book I would like to help the reader appreciate Bukhari and his works.

c. Love for the Prophet and piety

Bukhari's love for the Prophet and his piety are the framework for his work as they are for the work of the whole class of scholars who spent their lives in the study of hadith. What did Bukhari think he was doing in this world? Why did he put himself to so much trouble about these texts? These are framing questions for all of Bukhari's work and one can address them by a close study of those chapters of the *Sahih* that discuss these fundamental existential issues.

In a work of this size one has to make choices. I have chosen to deal with two important issues relating to Bukhari's scholarly life. Literary criticism has trained the modern mind in a way

that should make discussion of how text yields meaning familiar to the reader. Bukhari's approach to verification should be familiar to the modern reader since it is like the modern concern for verifying the academic apparatus supporting a text. These two issues seemed close at hand so I have limited myself to dealing with them.

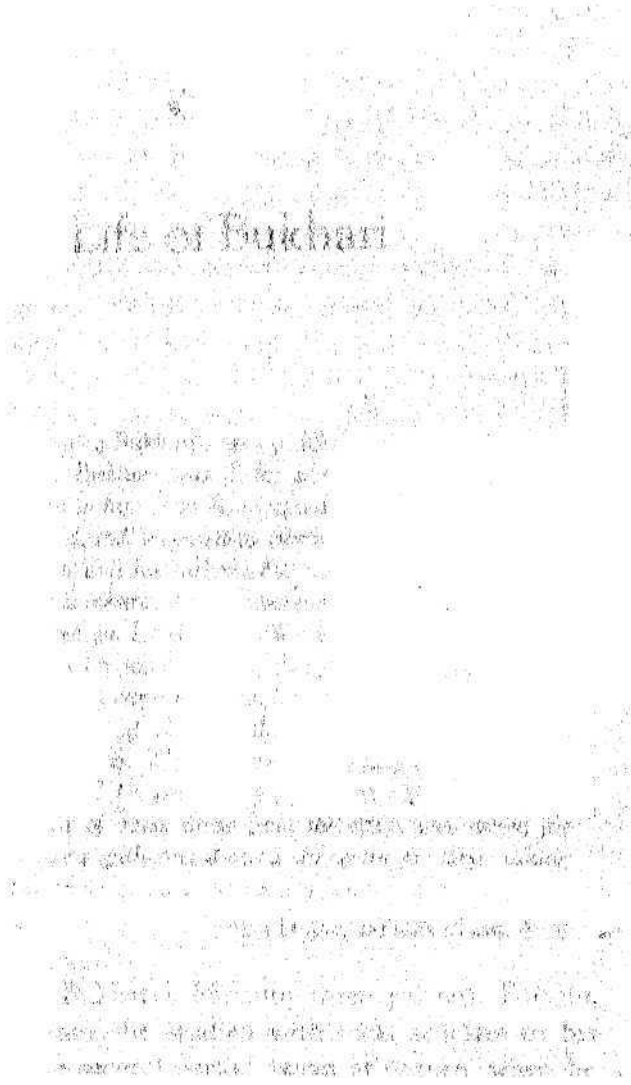
Doubtless, an essay on Hegel would gain depth by a discussion of Kant. Nevertheless, a simple exposition of the dialectic as Hegel has presented is also valuable. An essay on Einstein would gain depth by a discussion of the historical background to the theory of relativity. Nevertheless, a simple exposition of the theory of relativity as Einstein presented it is itself a considerable task. By analogy I have limited myself to a simple exposition of these two important strands in Bukhari's thought that seemed most accessible to the reader.

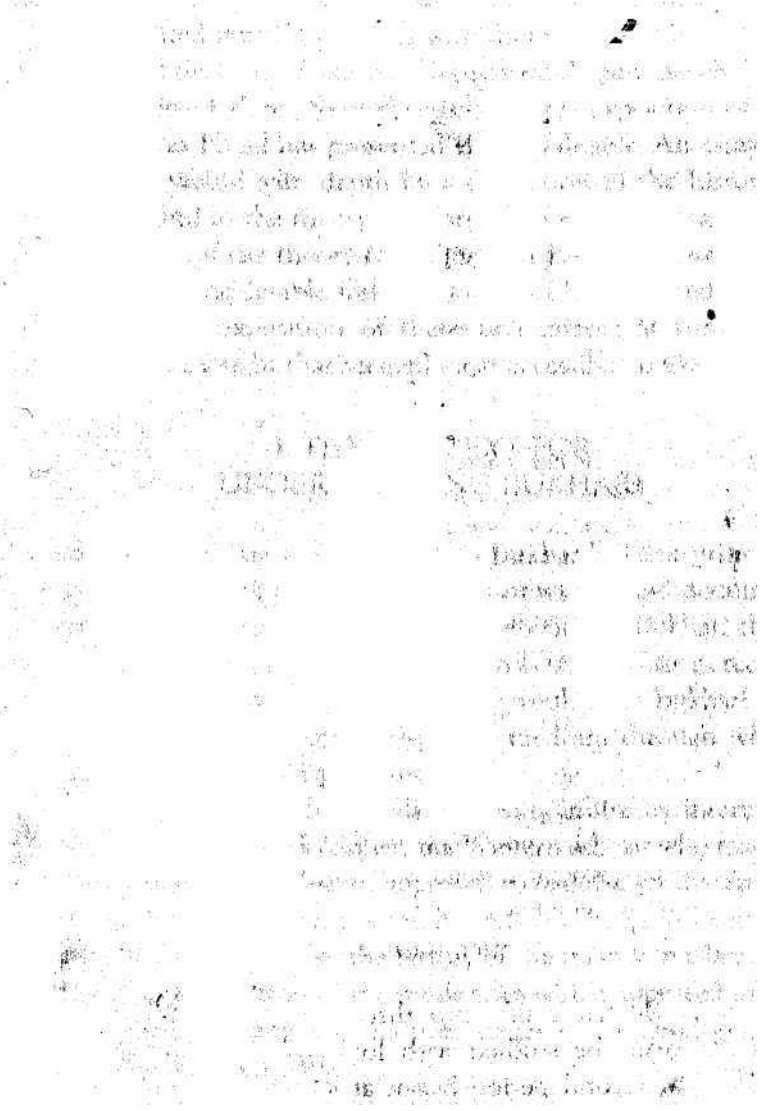
3. THE CONTEXT FOR UNDERSTANDING BUKHARI

Modern Muslims are interested in Bukhari's *Sahih* primarily as a collection of texts that come to us with sound documentation. They have only mild curiosity about why Bukhari chose to record a certain hadith or what he was trying to say in recording the hadith in a certain way. They would treat Bukhari and his *Sahih* as a perfectly transparent medium through which they can view the Prophet directly.

Non-Muslims scholars also are only indirectly interested in Bukhari's work. Goldziher, the Western scholar who inaugurated the modern Western approach to hadiths, set the agenda for Western scholarship when he stated: 'The hadith will not serve as a document for the history of the infancy of Islam, but rather as a reflection of the tendencies which appeared in the community during the maturer stages of its development' (*Muslim Studies*, i. 19).

I have tried to provide for Bukhari and his work contexts that are contemporary to his work. I have reserved centre stage for what Bukhari thought he was doing, the controversies he was addressing, the stand he took in them, and how his work affected the progress of these controversies.





2

Life of Bukhari

Ghalib ibn Jibra'il, Bukhari's host in Khartank during his final days, says that Bukhari was ill for a number of days until a messenger came to him from Samarqand asking him to come to them. He agreed and prepared to climb his mount. He put on his leather socks and his turban. He had walked about twenty steps towards his mount, while I was supporting him by his arm. He said, 'Let me go. I feel weak'. We let go of him. He called upon his Lord with some prayers, then he lay down and died. Then a lot of sweat came out from his body. He had said, 'Bury me in three pieces of cloth, without a shirt and without a turban'. We did this. We put him in his funeral shroud, performed his funeral prayers and put him in his grave. A fragrance like that of musk arose from the earth and stayed for days. People were gathering around the grave for days, taking dirt from it until we put a wood covering on top of it.

(Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-sari*, 493)

We can divide Bukhari's life into three periods. For the initial sixteen years, he studied with local scholars in his home town. The second period began at sixteen, when he

left home for *hajj*, the annual pilgrimage to Makka. This was his debut to the world of hadith scholars at an international level. In this second period, he composed his magnum opus the *Sahih*, and reached a level of fame and renown in the Islamic world that few scholars have ever known. The final eight years of his life, leading up to his death at the age of 64, were a period of trial and tragedy – a doctrinal controversy came as a cloud over his career that did not clear until his death.

1. EARLY LIFE

Bukhari was born in 194,[1] a year after the death of the 'Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Bukhari's father died while he was still a child. Since his father is also mentioned in hadith books as a narrator of hadiths, his household was probably a scholarly one. The younger Bukhari had finished his primary education, which included memorizing the Qur'an, by the age of ten.

At this age, he also started memorizing hadiths. He attended the sessions of a local hadith scholar, al-Dakhili. He had a remarkable memory and soon developed an understanding of the relative groupings of narrators over time. Thus, when al-Dakhili once narrated a hadith from Sufyan from Abu l-Zubayr from Ibrahim, the eleven-year-old Bukhari interrupted to say that Abu l-Zubayr does not narrate from Ibrahim. When al-Dakhili checked his written text, he had to admit his mistake: the hadith was from Sufyan from Zubayr (i.e. not from his father, Abu l-Zubayr) from Ibrahim.

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1 Dates are according to the Islamic (*hijri*) calendar. This lunar calendar starts from the Prophet's emigration from Makka to Madina. So 0 (*hijri*)=622 (Gregorian); 99=717; 199=814. Bukhari's life is 194–255/810–869.

By the time he was sixteen he had also had an introduction to the discipline of *fiqh*, of deriving meaning from hadith texts. Among his teachers was Abu Hafs al-Kabir, who was known for his expertise in *fiqh*.

In Bukhari's day there were many great hadith scholars in different centres of learning across the Islamic world. A student had to travel if he wished to gather the hadiths then available. So, in the year 210, at the age of sixteen, Bukhari went for pilgrimage to Makka with his mother and brother.

This journey marks the end of his initial training in his home town. By then Bukhari was already a mature scholar. Over the next forty years, his fame among scholars increased steadily. In this golden age of hadith studies, Bukhari came to be counted among the foremost experts in the various fields of hadith studies.

After the pilgrimage, his mother and brother went back while he stayed on in the Arabian Peninsula. For the next six years he travelled to various cities within the Islamic world, both to collect the hadiths of the hadith scholars in those cities and to teach others the ones he knew.

Bukhari was clearly a precocious young man. By the second year of his stay in Makka, at the age of eighteen, he had composed two works. The first, called *Fatawa al-sahabah wa-l-tabi'in* (Religious dicta of the Companions of the Prophet and of their Successors), has been lost. The second, *al-Ta'rikh al-kabir*, contains brief notices on 3600 individuals whose names appear in the chains of narrations that precede hadiths. These notices judge the ability of these narrators to narrate hadiths accurately.

This latter book is concrete evidence supporting many anecdotes of Bukhari's extraordinary memory and his command over the disciplines of hadith studies. The six major collections of hadith (to be discussed later) contain about 30,000 hadiths with a total of a little less than 7,000 narrators in their chains of narration. At the age of eighteen, soon after his

debut into the scholarly world, Bukhari was already familiar with at least 3,600 narrators.

Typical of the corresponding anecdotal evidence is this incident from Bukhari's youth: a leading hadith scholar, Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Baykandi, pointed to Bukhari and said that this young man had memorized 70,000 hadiths. When asked to confirm this, Bukhari said that not only did he have more than 70,000 hadiths memorized, for every hadith he narrated he could tell him the dates of birth of most of the narrators, along with their dates of death and where they had lived. In addition, he could tell him what passages in the Qur'an or what other hadiths one could quote to support each hadith (*Siyar a'lam al-nubala*, xii. 417).

2. THE MIDDLE YEARS

The annual gathering during the *hajj* was the season and occasion for scholars from various parts of the Islamic world to meet each other. Moreover, since travel was overland and slow, anyone going for *hajj* was also sure to make stops in all the cities along the way. It was quite common to take six months or a year or more to perform the *hajj* in this way. This movement helped to gather, exchange and integrate the knowledge in the Islamic world.

a. Bukhari's travels and his memory for hadiths

Scholars, hadith scholars in particular, needed to do more than this however. As we see, even before he left home, Bukhari had been able to learn much of the corpus of available hadiths. However, to know a hadith was not enough: it was important to hear it from the source itself.

Before printing made it possible to produce many identical copies of a single text, a student wishing to study a book from a teacher would have to copy it from the teacher's

own manuscript. An alternative was to buy a copy from a professional copyist. But, even the most careful copyist will make mistakes. So, the norm among the scholarly circles was that one was not permitted to transmit a book further until one actually heard it directly from the teacher, or read it out in front of him line by line.

Among the reasons for this, names are a particular hazard facing one who simply takes a hadith from a book. Arabic names come in five or more parts. Thus, Bukhari is fully identified as (1) Muhammad, (2) ibn Isma'il (3), Abu 'Abdullah, (4) al-Ju'fi (5) al-Bukhari. This name translates to 'Muhammad, the son of Isma'il, the father of 'Abdullah, a descendant of a person who accepted Islam at the hands of al-Ju'fi, a resident of Bukhara'. A chain of narration may contain just a single component of this name. For example it may say: 'Ibn Isma'il said to me...' A responsible narrator when taking a hadith from his teacher would make sure that he learned both, the recorded information and the unrecorded.

Bukhari would ask his teachers to identify the people whose names were in the chain of narration. If the teacher seemed reliable, Bukhari would record his hadiths as he recited them from memory. Otherwise, Bukhari would insist on copying directly from the teacher's written copy.

Bukhari must have had a phenomenal memory. One of the most famous anecdotes is of an occasion when he came to Baghdad and the scholars of the city conspired to test him. They took a hundred hadiths and attached the text of one hadith to the chain of narration of another. Then ten different scholars stood up one by one and started reciting ten hadiths at a time in front of Bukhari – asking him if he had heard these hadiths. On each hadith, Bukhari would say that he had not heard it. At the end of the session, Bukhari began from the first hadith, recited the wrong version and then told the audience the correct form of the hadith.

Knowing the correct form of the hadith is one thing. What is remarkable is that Bukhari, having heard the hundred hadiths, was able on the spot, to relate to the audience both the right version and the wrong version of each without getting confused.

Again, in Samarqand four hundred hadith scholars of the city were unsuccessful in their attempts over seven days to confuse him by mixing up texts and chains of narration. Bukhari himself says that he never had the need to write down hadiths that he heard. He relates that he would hear a hadith in one city and write it down in another.

There may be some exaggeration in anecdotes like these. But, the degree of exaggeration would be that where a source speaks of 'four hundred' scholars, there might have been 'a lot' of scholars, maybe a hundred or so, though a few hundred is not impossible. People may be inclined to doubt the substance underlying the figures in these anecdotes simply because they are unfamiliar with the particular ability being described. Exceptional ability can be nurtured and trained to extraordinary levels. For example, in our time, the annual Boston marathon in the United States has created a city with 20,000 people able to get up and run 26 miles at a stretch. Those who had never heard of the Boston marathon would suspect exaggeration in the numbers reported to complete the course.

The written sources of Islamic civilization are unanimous in the value they place on memory. Over centuries and to this very day, an individual wishing to learn the religious sciences begins with memorizing the entire Qur'an. There are still a number of scholars in Mauritania who have memorized the whole of Bukhari's *Sahih* along with two or three books of similar size. Indeed, Bukhari is only one of hundreds of people regarding whom the sources record that he had such a phenomenal memory. Only unfamiliarity with

this still living tradition of memorization brings one to doubt the anecdotes.

As I will try to show in Chapter 5, in the *Sahih* Bukhari has picked his way through a jungle of chains of narration to record hadiths with those chains that are most reliable. The mass and quality of information processing required in sifting – accepting or discarding – these chains of narration is a strong argument for the credibility of the claims made for Bukhari's memory. Nowadays, the task Bukhari accomplished in his *Sahih* could not be attempted without the assistance of computerized data processing.

b. Bukhari's thoroughness in acquiring hadiths

Even more than in his memory, Bukhari was outstanding in his thoroughness in learning hadiths. Once he came to a hadith scholar by the name of Isma'il ibn Abi Uways to hear hadiths from him. Isma'il simply took out his books and handed them over to Bukhari – asking him to identify those of his hadiths that were sound and those in which he had been mistaken. Having heard a certain text as reported through dozens of different chains of narration, Bukhari had developed the ability to distinguish erroneous reports from accurate ones.

c. The Sahih *and its composition*

During the two years of his stay in Madina after the *hajj*, Bukhari wrote his first two books. Soon thereafter he must have begun the *Sahih*. While compiling it, he went to various cities and both learned and taught hadiths. He showed the complete *Sahih* to Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241), 'Ali ibn al-Madini (d. 234), Yahya ibn Ma'in (d. 233), and other leading hadith scholars of the day. Since we know that he spent sixteen years compiling the *Sahih*, this means that he must have begun it by 217, that is, within seven years of his having left home for pilgrimage. He had finished writing it at the

age of 39. After finishing the *Sahih*, he taught it in various cities for the next twenty-five years.

According to one report, ninety thousand people heard the book from him throughout his various readings of it. Clearly, this is not an exact figure – no one accompanied him throughout these twenty-five years of teaching, counting every individual who heard the book from him. However, this was the heyday of hadith studies. The names of hadith experts run into the hundreds. So it is likely that the number of amateurs, scholars, and experts who heard the *Sahih* from him all put together might reach tens of thousand.

There must have been some incentive that persuaded so many people to put up with the difficulties of travel for the sake of hadiths. The love of the Prophet certainly played a part in this. Also, a hadith scholar had great prestige in society.

3. THE FINAL YEARS

Bukhari moved from success to success until the year 250, when he entered Nishapur at the age of 56. Nishapur was home to a leading hadith expert, Zuhali. Bukhari and Zuhali were contemporaries and had great respect for each other. Thus, when Bukhari came to Nishapur, Zuhali told his students that whoever wished to attend Bukhari's hadith sessions should do so, since he would himself be going there.

a. Nishapur and the creation of the Qur'an

This initial cordial reception was soon to sour. The year 212 had seen what is almost a unique event in Islamic history. There is no official church in Islam. The authority to decide issues of religion does not reside in any single body whether dependent on the government or independent of it. Authority naturally comes to the hands of those who busy themselves with the task of acquiring religious knowledge. As they gain

in fame and in popularity, people turn to them in disputed matters. Their decision carries weight. Though the government may sometimes intervene to *enforce* a religious or a doctrinal issue, the state does not *arbitrate* such issues.

In the year 212, the Caliph Ma'mun came to hold the view that the Qur'an is a creation of God and will, therefore, come to an end. The large majority of scholars did not agree with this position.

To attribute any of the qualities unique to God to created things is the gravest of all sins. Those who felt that the Qur'an was created argued that, since being eternal and permanent is one of God's peculiar qualities it must be an essential part of the Islamic creed to affirm that the Qur'an is created.

The traditional scholars were vehemently opposed to this position. They felt that to derive credal matters from intellectual argumentation is itself a fundamental error. An anecdote from the period of this controversy describes a debate in which a scholar was asked whether the Qur'an was God or not. If the Qur'an was not God, and God says that He is the First and He is the Last, then how can the Qur'an also be eternal?

The scholar turned the question around by quoting two statements of the Qur'an. In three places, the Quran states: 'each soul (*nafs*) will taste death' (3. 185, 21. 35, and 29. 57). In another two place, the Qur'an uses this same word *nafs* and states: 'and God warns you of [i.e. would have you fear] His *self*' (3. 28 and 3. 30). The scholar asked, 'Then would you say that God too will die?' The traditional scholars describe this manner of argumentation as 'beating one part of the Qur'an with another'. One should approach the Qur'an as judge and ask it for guidance. Instead, this approach places the Qur'an in the witness stand and subjects it to cross-examination.

Another group of scholars felt that this was not a religiously relevant question. Neither the Prophet nor his Companions nor any of the early scholars had felt it necessary to address

it. Yet another group held that the Qur'an is God's Speech. It is a quality of God, like His Seeing and His Hearing. Thus, it has always been and will always remain.

Ma'mun was prevailed upon to enforce the view that the Qur'an was created. An inquisition was instituted. Scholars were questioned: if they agreed that the Qur'an was created they were allowed to go, otherwise they were punished.

To cut a long story short, Ma'mun and two of his successors died. Then, in 234, his third successor, Wathiq, announced the end of this inquisition. Throughout this period, many leading scholars saved their lives by making equivocal statements, and sometimes by simply agreeing to what the state said. Islamic history has linked the name of Ahmad ibn Hanbal with the resistance. So when Wathiq withdrew the inquisition, it was seen as Ahmad ibn Hanbal's victory against the state.

Though most scholars were more careful, certain rather extreme formulae came to circulate in the aftermath of that victory. Thus, it was said that the paper on which the Qur'an was written was also not created; the pen writing the Qur'an and the ink used to write it were also not created. One formulation was particularly troubling: 'The words I pronounce of the Qur'an are created' – where 'words' could be taken to mean the sounds which come out of the mouth, or it could be taken to mean the Qur'anic words being pronounced. 'Words' could refer both to the human utterance of the words of the Qur'an, and to the Qur'an itself.

In Nishapur, as I said, Bukhari's circle was quite popular for a little while. Zuhali had some suspicion that Bukhari's view on the issue of 'the word' might be controversial but he had told people not to ask Bukhari about it. However, one day someone stood up and asked Bukhari what his opinion was on the 'words of the Qur'an'. Despite attempts to sidestep the question, Bukhari eventually had to respond. His

response was: 'The Qur'an is God's word and uncreated. Human deeds are created.'

Bukhari's answer was nuanced, but people were not sophisticated enough to understand the nuance. Some went away from the gathering feeling that Bukhari was implying that the 'words of the Qur'an' were created. Others felt that he had not said this. In any case, Zuhali got the report that Bukhari has said that the words of the Qur'an are created. Zuhali, a staunch follower of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, was infuriated. He forbade all those attending Bukhari's lessons from attending his own. In addition, he announced that he was not willing to live in the same town as Bukhari. This meant that Bukhari would have to leave town.

b. Bukhara and the ruler of Khurasan

Having to leave Nishapur, Bukhari headed back to his hometown, Bukhara. Again, there was a great reception. Again, it soured. The ruler of the province of Khurasan, Khalid al-Zuhali, wanted Bukhari to come to him and teach his children the *Sahih* and his book on hadith narrators. Bukhari refused. He said that Khalid was welcome to send his children to his hadith study circle – but he would not go to his home to tutor his children.

It was well known that Bukhari had a potentially controversial view on the issue of 'the word'. Khalid had some people raise the issue and was able to have Bukhari exiled once again. Bukhari headed for a small village called Khartank near the city of Samarqand, where he had some relatives. Soon he got a message from the people of Samarqand requesting that he come to them. He died on the way to Samarqand. As is often the case, after his death people joined in praise and recognition for him and his work.

4. BUKHARI'S SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION

Three kinds of Bukhari's works have reached us: works having to do with technical aspects of hadith, works arguing Bukhari's position on various disputed topics and hadith works.

Bukhari wrote three books about narrators of hadith: *al-Ta'rikh al-saghir*, *al-Ta'rikh al-awsat* and *al-Ta'rikh al-kabir* – the 'short', the 'medium', and the 'large' collection of hadith narrators. The large collection is clearly identified and published. The medium collection has been mistakenly identified as the small collection. Early scholars have left sufficiently detailed descriptions to assure us that the small collection did exist but it has yet to be discovered. Another technical work (*al-Kuna*) is devoted to identifying people popularly known by patronymics. Finally, there is a brief work regarding weak narrators, *al-Du'afa' al-saghir*.

Of the works on controversial topics, Bukhari's work *Khalq af'al al-'ibad*, ([God's] creation of human deeds) explains his position on the creation of the Qur'an and his distinction between the Qur'an, which is uncreated, and the utterances of humans reading the Qur'an, which are created. Another two works deal with disputed issues in the ritual prayer: *Raf' al-yadayn fi l-salah* (Raising the hands to the ears during the ritual prayer), and *al-Qira'at khalf al-imam* (Reciting Qur'an behind the leader of ritual prayers).

Two of his hadith works have reached us: *al-Adab al-mufrad* (a book devoted to hadiths on manners) and the *Sahih*. This last book, whose full title is *al-Jami' al-sahih al-musnad min hadith rasuli-llah wa-sunanihi wa-ayyamihi* ('the comprehensive collection recording sound and properly referenced hadiths, *sunnas*, and battles of the Prophet') is Bukhari's most important work. It brings together all of Bukhari's concerns and expertise and is a good reference point for studying him.

It is unfair to assess Bukhari's contribution to the Islamic scholarly tradition simply in terms of his written works. One must begin with the fact that people had been practising Islam, the way of life that the Prophet brought, for over two centuries when Bukhari was born. However, the position of someone practising Islam in the first century was different from that of someone doing so in the second. Being closer to the time of the Prophet, the people of the first century were confident regarding the things they heard about him.

During the second century, scholars became more and more concerned that each report regarding what the Prophet did or said should be accompanied by proper documentation. Also, many felt that the strength of this documentation should participate in the weight accorded to such reports. They developed an elaborate system for evaluating the reliability of reports about the Prophet. A class of people, hadith critics, made such evaluation their business. As hadith critics grew in their skill at evaluating the soundness of hadiths, the picture of Islam that emerged was much like the picture of the people who relied on their proximity to the life of the Prophet. But, the nature of argumentation changed. Now, the hadith critics argued that sound hadiths be given more weight in determining Islamic norms.

Bukhari's *Sahih* continues the argument of the hadith critics. At the same time, Bukhari shows a great sensitivity to the fact that a perfectly documented and authenticated text will still yield meaning only when someone interprets it. The concern for documentation and the sensitivity to the distance between text and meaning are two of the most important issues that Bukhari dealt with. Hadith texts from Bukhari's *Sahih* provide the best illustration of both issues. The next chapter discusses a number of such illustrations.

3

Understanding texts: chapter titles in the *Sahih*

> *Ibn 'Adi said: I heard 'Abd al-Quddus ibn Hammam say: I heard a number of my teachers say: 'Muhammad ibn Isma'il finalized the chapter titles of his Sahih sitting in the area between the grave of the Prophet and the Prophet's pulpit. Before finalizing each chapter title Bukhari would perform ritual prayers.'*
>
> (Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-sari*, 489)

The original meaning of the Arabic word *fiqh* is 'understanding'. It was used in this sense in the time of the Prophet and in the Qur'an itself. In the initial centuries of Islam it came to denote detailed understanding of God's commands: the subject of the field of study generally known as 'Islamic law' or 'Islamic jurisprudence'.

An adage among students of Bukhari's works is that Bukhari's *fiqh* is in his 'chapter titles'. This means both that the chapter titles in the *Sahih* show Bukhari's depth of understanding of the textual sources of Islam, and that we

can study the chapter titles in order to discover his stand on various issues in Islamic law.

The *Sahih* has ninety-seven 'books' with many 'chapters' in each. Typically, the titles of chapters in hadith works simply describe the subject matter of the hadiths the chapter contains. Often the chapter titles in the *Sahih*, too, are simple descriptions but, just as often, Bukhari uses them in far more complex ways.

In this chapter I will introduce the way in which Bukhari uses chapter titles and repetitions of hadiths to guide the reader to his understanding of the hadith. The long first section consists of seven subsections in which I describe Bukhari's use of one particular hadith ('Deeds rely on intentions') in different contexts. In the two shorter sections that follow, I discuss his use of two other hadiths. I close the chapter with an exploration of 'the significance of the chapter titles'.

1. DEEDS RELY ON INTENTIONS

Bukhari repeats the full text of the first hadith in the *Sahih* in six other places in the book, and he refers to it twice by quoting a portion of it.

a. Intention and Revelation: the context

The *Sahih* begins as follows:

1. Book On the Beginning of the Revelation: Chapter Regarding How Revelation to the Prophet (may peace and blessing be upon him) Began and the Statement of God (Whose Mention is Most Elevated): We sent revelation to you as We sent revelation to Noah and the prophets who came after him.

'Abdullah ibn Zubayr Humaydi *narrated to us*, he [Humaydi] said:
Sufyan *narrated to us*, he [Sufyan] said:

Yahya ibn Sa'id Ansari *narrated to us*, he [Ansari] said:
Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Taymi told me that *he had heard*
'Alqamat ibn Waqqas al-Laythi saying,
I heard 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (God be pleased with him)
on the pulpit, he said, *I heard*
the Messenger of God (God send mercy and blessing
on him) saying:

Certainly deeds are by intentions, and each man will earn according to his intention: so whoever migrated [from Makka to Madina] for the sake of acquiring worldly wealth or for the sake of a woman he wanted to marry, his migration is towards the things for which he migrated.

After the title of the 'book' we have the title of its only chapter. The first part is a simple statement that the chapter contains hadiths that will tell us how the Revelation to the Prophet began. But the quotation from the Qur'an ('We sent revelation to you...') is somewhat more opaque. I have quoted the first hadith of this chapter above. It is a text (from 'Certainly deeds are by intention...') preceded by the 'chain of narration' that, like a footnote, documents its sources. Unlike most footnotes, the reference here is heavily nested. It claims that seven events took place: (1) Bukhari met 'Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr al-Humaydi; (2) al-Humaydi met Sufyan; (3) Sufyan met Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Ansari; (4) al-Ansari met Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Taymi; (5) al-Taymi met 'Alqamat ibn Waqqas al-Laythi; (6) al-Laythi sat in front of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab; (7) 'Umar met the Messenger of God. In each meeting, this text was repeated.

Bukhari gives the remaining five hadiths in this chapter with their own chains of narration. Their subject matter is more clearly related to a description of how the Revelation was entrusted to the Prophet. The second hadith records the Prophet as saying that the Revelation comes to him in different ways. Sometimes it comes like the ringing of a bell, and when the ringing stops, he is left with the words of the Revelation. Sometimes the Angel appears to him as a man

who speaks the words to him. The third hadith is a description of the history of the Revelation: first, the Prophet began to have vivid, true dreams, then he took to retreat in a cave in the hills around Makka. Then follows an account of the circumstances of the first few revelations to him. The fourth tells how the Prophet would move his lips trying to memorize the Revelation even as it was being given to him. Then God told him that He Himself was responsible for making sure that the Revelation would remain with the Prophet, so that, while it was being given, he should just listen. The fifth hadith describes how each Ramadan, the Prophet would review all of the Qur'an that God had revealed to him up to that point.

The sixth hadith is a long one that records a conversation between the Roman (Byzantine) Emperor of the time and an Arab from Makka who was visiting the Emperor's court. This discussion contains a description of the Prophet and the religion he was preaching in Makka at the time.

Bukhari puts the hadith on intentions at the head of this group of hadiths to point to the global context of the beginning of the Revelation. He quotes part of the statement of the Qur'an, 'We sent revelation to you as We sent revelation to Noah and the prophets who came after him' (4. 163), which goes on to mention Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, David, and others 'whom We have not told you about'. With these words, the Qur'an places the specific Revelation to the Prophet in the broader context of previous revelations to prophets.

The hadith on intentions identifies the element of continuity in these revelations. The essence of the revelation to this Prophet and to previous prophets was to rectify human intention. The effort of the prophets was to work on human beings so that they make God's pleasure their single goal.

b. Intention and Revelation: the text

There are seven occurrences of the intentions hadith in the *Sahih*. In full, the text is as follows:

> Certainly deeds are by intentions, and each man will earn according to his intention: so *whoever migrated for the pleasure of God and his Prophet his migration is for God and his Prophet, and* whoever migrated for the sake of acquiring worldly wealth or for the sake of a woman he wanted to marry, his migration is towards the things for which he migrated.

In the first occurrence cited earlier, Bukhari has omitted the words italicized above. Some commentators suggest that this omission is an error of an early copyist. However, all the manuscripts of the *Sahih* contain exactly this omission, and the six other occurrences of this hadith in the *Sahih* have the missing words.

1	Humaydi	→	Sufyan
3	Muhammad ibn Kathir	→	Sufyan
2	'Abdullah ibn Maslama	→	Malik
5	Yahya ibn Qaza'a	→	Malik
4	Musaddad	→	Hammad
7	Abu Nu'man	→	Hammad
6	Qutayba	→	'Abd al-Wahhab

Figure 1

Figure 1 is a tabular presentation of differences in the early part of the chains of narration of the seven occurrences of the hadith. The number in the first column indicates the position of the hadith in the *Sahih* – the first occurrence is numbered 1, the second 2 and so on. The first row indicates that the first occurrence of the hadith in the *Sahih Bukhari* reports the hadith on the authority of Humaydi, who says he heard it from Sufyan. Each of the four narrators in the right-

hand column (Sufyan in 1,3; Malik in 2,5; Hammad in 4,7 and 'Abd al-Wahhab in 7) report the hadith from Yahya. Yahya reports the hadith from Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, who heard it from 'Alqama, who heard it from 'Umar, who heard it from the Prophet.

In the first occurrence with the missing words, Bukhari narrates from Humaydi from Sufyan. Perhaps, on the occasion when Humaydi heard this hadith from Sufyan, Sufyan had omitted those words. But Humaydi's own work, the *Musnad* of al-Humaydi, contains the hadith in full without the omissions. Therefore, it is unlikely that Humaydi did not hear the full text from Sufyan. We know that Sufyan knew the missing words since the text in the third occurrence of the hadith in the *Sahih* (Muhammad ibn Kathir → Sufyan) is complete. Both Sufyan and Humaydi have related this hadith to other students in full.

Bukhari's own command of the material he narrates makes it quite unlikely that Humaydi had not related the missing words to him, or that, having heard them, Bukhari had forgotten them. All of which suggests that the omission is deliberate. Why?

The hadith describes people who do what they do for the pleasure of God and His Prophet and accordingly succeed in pleasing them, and others who do what they do for worldly ends and are denied God's pleasure. To put the full text at the head of the *Sahih* might have been construed as a hint that Bukhari counted himself among the former.

Some hadith scholars are against such selective reporting of a hadith. Others allow it on condition that the narrator has a sound understanding of how meanings are derived from texts. In the absence of such an understanding a narrator might unwittingly alter the import of the text by his omission. Further, one who truncates a hadith text must have an impeccable reputation for preserving and transmitting hadiths accurately. To verify a hadith one compares, as above, different

of the Prophet and his Companions. In the middle of the book on the merits of the Helpers, there is a return to an episode by episode history of the life of the Prophet.

The chapter containing the intentions hadith has to do with the story of the Prophet's emigration from Makka to Madina. It begins with the heading:

> Chapter on the Emigration of the Prophet and his Companions to Madina. And 'Abdullah ibn Zayd and Abu Hurayra have reported from the Prophet, 'If it weren't for the emigration, I would want to be one of the Helpers'. And Abu Musa reported from the Prophet: 'I dreamed that I will emigrate from Makka to a land of date trees, so I thought that it would be Yamama or Hajar. But it turned out to be Yathrib.'

After this heading there are twenty-four hadiths with some bearing on the Prophet's emigration from Makka. The heading itself alludes to three hadiths reported by the Companions Abu Hurayra, 'Abdullah ibn Zayd and Abu Musa. The quotations here are without the supporting scholarly apparatus. Bukhari quotes the Companions directly, without mentioning his chain of narration to them.

In the main text of the *Sahih* every hadith is presented with its complete chain of narration. Only in the chapter titles does Bukhari take the liberty (as above) of referring to the text of a hadith without providing full documentation.

Factors other than deriving new meanings can contribute to the way in which a hadith is used in the *Sahih*. Each of the three hadiths mentioned in the chapter title occurs two or more times in full in the main text of the *Sahih*. No close reading of the text of the *Sahih* yields any clues as to why Bukhari has put these three hadiths in the chapter title and not in its main text. Instead, one has to look at Bukhari's criteria for including hadiths in the main text of the *Sahih*.

Whenever the text of a hadith recurs in the *Sahih*, Bukhari does his best to supply some new information. Thus, at second occurrence a text will usually have a significant variation in

its wording, or in its chain of narration, or both. For example, in all seven occurrences of the intentions hadith the final part of the chain of narration is the same (Yahya ibn Sa'id narrating from Muhammad ibn Ibrahim from 'Alqamat ibn Waqqas from 'Umar ibn al-Khattab from the Prophet), but as I showed in Figure 1, the initial part of the chain, between Bukhari and Yahya ibn Sa'id, is different in each occurrence of the seven hadiths. Otherwise, when he has no new information, Bukhari will simply allude to a relevant hadith in a chapter title or quote a few relevant phrases from it.

Here the core subject matter of the chapter is expressed in the title proper: 'Chapter on the Emigration of the Prophet and his Companions to Madina'. The second hadith in this chapter is the intentions hadith. In the context of this chapter, this hadith becomes a statement of the great value of emigration and of keeping it pure and not mixing other intentions with it. The first few hadiths introduce the emigration and its importance in this general way. Then follow detailed hadiths describing the emigration and the events that took place during it.

The chapter title refers to the sentence that both Abu Hurayra and 'Abdullah ibn Zayd quote from the Prophet in separate hadiths. The text of the hadith contains the sentence: 'If it weren't for the emigration, I would want to be one of the Helpers'.

The hadith of 'Abdullah ibn Zayd quoted in the book 'On the Battles of the Prophet' provides the relevant background. The battle of Hunayn, one of the final battles in the Prophet's career, took place right after the conquest of Makka. Accompanying the Prophet in the field were many Makkans (his own relatives among them) who had but newly, perhaps not whole-heartedly, accepted Islam.

Victory at Hunayn yielded a lot of booty, which the Prophet began distributing generously among the new Muslims. Some young men of Madina complained that these same

Makkans, against whom only a very short while before they had been fighting, were being preferred to themselves in the distribution.

The Prophet gathered the Companions of Madina and spoke of how God had favoured them with his presence. He listed all the good they had done for him and the cause of Islam, and closed with an affirmation of his attachment to them: 'Are you not satisfied that others go back with sheep and camel, and you take the Prophet of God back with you to Madina?' Among the last things he said in that speech to the Helpers was the sentence that Abu Hurayra and 'Abdullah ibn Zayd quote, 'If it weren't for the emigration ...'

Before the chapter on the emigration of the Prophet, Bukhari has already reported Abu Hurayra's hadith in the *Sahih* twice. At each occurrence of the hadith he has used an entirely different chain of narration. The hadith of 'Abdullah ibn Zayd too has already occurred twice. Here things are even more difficult: Bukhari was able to find only one chain of narration that meets his stringent standards of reliability. So, in one place, he quotes the hadith in full; in another place, with the same chain of narration, he quotes just the relevant portion of it.

Abu Musa's hadith occurs in the *Sahih* five times with exactly the same chain of narration. In one of the five occurrences Bukhari quotes it in full and in the other four places he quotes just the relevant part. As a result, having used the hadith so heavily with no new information to offer, Bukhari chooses here to refer to it by moving it from the main text to the chapter title.

Here we see that Bukhari's concern to derive meanings from the texts to come in the chapter is not enough to explain the presence of these hadiths in the chapter title. To understand the chapter title in this case, one must know the different variants of the hadith and be familiar with the issues surrounding their supporting chains of narration.

Bukhari's chapter titles are not always straightforward. He makes no promises that he will report all relevant hadiths in a section. The chapter titles are important, but they are not the main subject of the book. As Ibn Hajar, the primary commentator on the *Sahih*, has put it: 'It is clear that Bukhari restricted himself to recording the soundest of hadiths... [However,] after collecting the soundest hadiths, Bukhari felt that he should not leave his book empty of benefit to those interested in deriving meaning from texts' (*al-Hady al-sari*, 8). Bukhari's purpose is to give examples of how one can extract meaning from texts, not to gather together all the details. He uses his chapter titles only to train the reader in understanding texts, not to gather together all the evidence for or against the issue being discussed.

e. Intention and the composition of faith

Bukhari quotes the hadith on intentions again towards the end of Book 2 of the *Sahih*, the 'Book on Faith,' which begins:

> 2. Book On Faith: Chapter Regarding the Statement of the Prophet 'Islam is based on Five things,' and Faith consists of Both Verbal Confession and Practice, and Faith can Increase and Decrease...

The chapter title continues with four phrases from the Qur'an, then references to hadiths and sayings of Companions of the Prophet, of scholars who learned Islam from these Companions, and of experts in Qur'an interpretation. These references provide evidence for the claim that faith includes verbal confession and practice, and that faith can increase and decrease. The title of this first chapter of 'On Faith' is an introduction to Bukhari's arguments throughout this book.

The position Bukhari argues is rooted in doctrinal controversies of the first centuries of Islam. Professing Islam is the door to accepting Islam. However, once a person has accepted Islam, are there deeds such that one can say that the person

who does them has left the fold of Islam? Or is it that just as a person enters Islam by professing it, nothing short of another statement can make him a non-Muslim?

The other related controversy has to do with the relationship of deeds to faith. Is faith an indivisible unity so that one either has faith or one does not? Or is faith something that can increase and decrease? Do deeds participate in faith so that some deeds increase faith while others decrease it?

The hadith on intentions is in Chapter 41, the second-to-last of the 'Book on Faith'. The preceding forty chapters all argue that faith has to do with word and deed, and that it increases and decreases. Typically, in these chapters Bukhari reports a hadith that indicates that the Prophet said that a deed or a quality is a part of faith or that it is the deed or quality of a hypocrite. This is an argument that that quality or deed participates in faith or in a lack of it.

Bukhari uses Chapters 41 and 42 to close the book. Chapter 41 begins with the lengthy title:

Chapter 41: Regarding what has been related [1] that deeds are by intentions and hope of reward, and that each man will get what he intended. [2] [This statement is general so that] this refers to faith, and washing oneself in preparing for ritual prayer, and ritual prayer itself, and obligatory charity given to the poor, and performing the *hajj* pilgrimage and fasting and judicial decisions. And God Most High has said: [3] 'Say: Each works in his own way'– that is [4]... according to his own intention. [5] And a man's expenditure on his wife – in hope of Divine reward – is considered charity. And he [the Prophet] said: [6] 'but the jihad and intention to do jihad [remain]'.

'Abdullah ibn Maslama *narrated to us*, he said:
Malik told us, *from*
Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Ansari, *from*
Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, *from*
'Alqamat ibn Waqqas al-Laythi, *from*
'Umar, *that*

> the Messenger of God (may God send mercy and blessing on him) said:
>
> Deeds are by intention and each person will get whatever he intends. So whoever's emigration was towards God and His Messenger, his emigration was towards God and His Messenger, and whoever's emigration was for gaining worldly goods or for a woman he wanted to marry, his emigration was towards whatever he emigrated towards.

Two hadiths follow this one. The text of one reports that the Prophet said: 'When a person spends on his family in hope of reward from God it counts as charity on his behalf.' The second reports the Prophet telling one of his Companions: 'Whatever expenditure you undertake in order to gain God's pleasure, you will be rewarded for it, even for the morsel of food you put in your wife's mouth.'

The common element in the three hadiths is the mention of intention in the sense of a hope of God's reward and a search for God's pleasure. In Chapter 42 the chapter title and the two hadiths all speak of the importance of well-wishing: well-wishing in one's relation to God, to His Prophet, to other Muslims.

This is an overview of the two closing chapters of the 'Book on Faith'. The forty preceding chapters speak of deeds and the importance of deeds, so that we see that deeds are indeed a part of faith. Now Bukhari is pointing to the fact that along with the importance of these external deeds, their value and import rests on something internal and unseen: the intention and the goodness of heart of the doer.

The portion of the chapter title marked [1] is a phrase from the intentions hadith with the addition of the words 'and hope of reward' interpolated from the hadith that appears second in the chapter. It states that 'When a person spends on his family *in hope of reward from* God it counts as charity on his behalf.'

Bukhari's statement in [2] brings out his understanding of this hadith. Many scholars say that the point of the hadith

is that worship becomes worship by virtue of the intention of the worshipper. Thus, a person may not eat all day long, but this not-eating will become fasting only when the person has made the intention of not eating for the pleasure of God. A person may visit Makka and do all the things required in a pilgrimage but, without the intention of pilgrimage, the visit will be a sort of tourism and not a pilgrimage.

If the hadith on intentions were relevant only to worship, then deeds that assign responsibilities to the party to the deed (marriage, divorce, contracts, buying and selling, and things like oaths) would rely on external things only. The wording of the contract would determine the obligations entailed and not the parties' intentions.

Alternatively, the point of the hadith is that the reward of worship is based on the purity of intention. A person may go through the motions of worship intending only ostentation or affectation of piety: in this case he will get no reward. If this is the point of the hadith then, too, the implication of the hadith is limited to divine rewards. The hadith would not have any bearing on worldly responsibilities.

Bukhari feels that when the hadith states that 'deeds are by intentions' there is no restriction on 'deeds', so that it is about all deeds in general. After stating his position here Bukhari repeatedly returns in the *Sahih* to this importance of intentions.

f. Intentions and contracts: Hijazi and Iraqi scholarship

Again and again Bukhari uses the hadith on intentions as evidence that intentions are an integral part of contracts. Some developments in the intellectual history of the first century and a half of Islam are the background to the dispute over intentions in contracts.

After the death of the Prophet, the first caliph, Abu Bakr, lived for only two and a half years. The next caliph, 'Umar, lived for another twelve years. Many details of religious law were

settled in these twelve years. During the Prophet's life many had witnessed different aspects of his life and his decisions regarding things. The issues that came up during the caliphate of 'Umar called upon people to make public any private knowledge they might have had.

'Umar was particular about keeping the Companions grouped together in Madina. They were more likely to adhere to decisions in which they had participated. In addition, each Companion might have bits and pieces of private knowledge that needed to be reviewed in the presence of a large group of Companions. There was also the danger that if a Companion headed out to an area he would take his own understanding and knowledge of Islam with him, and the people of that area might end up identifying Islam with the understanding and knowledge of that Companion.

But the conquests of early Islam needed armies and garrison towns far afield from Madina. The centre of action was in Mesopotamia – which the Arabs knew as Iraq. 'Umar had to establish at least one centre other than Madina. He picked one of the most knowledgeable of the early supporters of the Prophet, 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, and sent him to Kufa in Iraq. Other Companions followed, but 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud was able to set up a sort of 'school' in Kufa. He trained about half a dozen students of such calibre that he was able to turn direct teaching over to them while he supervised. Kufa became a major centre of knowledge.

'Umar was only able to stall the inevitable. By the end of the first century, there were both specific points of difference between Iraqi scholars and the scholars of the Hijaz (the region of Makka and Madina), and fundamental differences in approach and method. From the turn of the first century to this very day, Islamic scholars have recognized a degree of difference between the Iraqis and the Hijazis.

The hadith specialists of the first two centuries tended to identify with Hijazi scholarship. There was a perception that

the people of the Hijaz have a tradition to back them, while the Iraqis were all intellectuals. Hijazi scholars felt that, instead of trying to understand Islam as the elders of the community understood it, the Iraqis wanted to use their own reasoning to understand religion.

Rabi'at al-Ra'y, a Madinan scholar of the latter part of the first century, asked another scholar, Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab about the indemnity for damaging a woman's finger. Sa'id said that it was ten camels. For two fingers the indemnity was twenty camels, for three fingers it was thirty. But when Rabi'a asked about the indemnity for four fingers Sa'id said it was twenty camels. Rabi'a said: 'When her injury became greater you decreased the indemnity?' Sa'id said: 'Are you an Iraqi? What I am telling you is the *Sunna* [the established exemplary way which has come to us from the Prophet].'

However, the Iraqis were not trying to base religious injunctions on their own reasoning. They simply wanted to develop a systematic understanding of religious commands and regarded such understanding as a part of the search for knowledge. The Hijazis were not comfortable with this search for system. When God's command has come to you, why do you think twice? They looked with suspicion at Iraqi scholarship as a sort of scholasticism that would kill the spirit of the law.

One of the sore points between Hijazis and Iraqis was the latter's insistence that there was a difference between a sinful transaction and an invalid transaction. They held that every human act had an aspect whose consequences were in this world and an aspect whose consequences were in the next world. For every act there is something that God will do and there is something that the human must do. Accordingly, the Iraqis put the intentions hadith among those texts that tell us how God will deal with the human being. But Bukhari feels that it 'refers to faith, and washing oneself in preparing for ritual prayer, and ritual prayer, and obligatory charity

given to the poor, and performing the *hajj* pilgrimage and fasting and judicial decisions'.

In the 'Book on Manumission' (freeing slaves) he quotes the hadith under the following rubric: 'Chapter 6. Manumission, Divorce, and the Like Performed by Mistake, or in Forgetfulness. Manumission can only be for God's Pleasure. The Prophet said: "and each man will earn according to his intention," and "the mistaken person or the forgetful has no intention".'

He holds the position that the words of the hadith are general. Here he has added the argument that freeing a slave is a good deed, good deeds are only for God's pleasure and their reward is according to the doer's intention. Thus, intention is required in manumission to qualify it as a good deed and to justify reward for the person freeing the slave.

Bukhari again records the hadith in a chapter in the 'Book on Vows' entitled 'On Intention in Vows'. The point is that one's intention is relevant in a vow. If one makes a vow mistakenly or in forgetfulness, it will not count.

Bukhari does not quote the intentions hadith in the 'Book on Divorce'. There is almost unanimous agreement that a declaration of divorce in explicit words does not need intention to be effective. However, there is a view that divorce given under duress or under intoxication will not be effective. The chapter title on manumission (quoted earlier) already suggests that divorce 'performed by mistake or in forgetfulness' will not be effective. In addition, the 'Book on Divorce' contains a chapter title that includes reference to the hadith on intentions as evidence that divorce is not valid if a person declares it under duress or during intoxication.

Bukhari introduces the 'Book on Duress' with a long chapter title quoting various sentences from the Qur'an that indicate that God forgives actions done under duress. He ends the chapter title by referring to the hadith on intentions. Again, his argument is that since real intention does not

accompany actions done under duress, such actions will be void.

g. Intentions and legal artifice

Bukhari has dedicated a book in the *Sahih* to 'Legal Artifices'.. It begins:

90. Book on Legal Artifices: Chapter 1: Regarding Not Resorting to Legal Artifices and that 'each man will earn according to his intention' in Vows and in other things.

Bukhari then quotes the hadith on intentions with its chain of narration. What is a 'legal artifice'? Consider the title of Chapter 9 in this book, quoted in full below:

Chapter 9: A person abducts a slave-girl and then claims that she has died and judgement is passed that he be compensated in proportion of the value of the slave-girl. If the owner then finds the slave-girl she will be his, and the compensation will be returned and will not count as the price of the slave-girl. But some people say: The slave-girl will belong to the abductor since the original owner has accepted her price from the abductor. This is a legal artifice for someone who desires a slave-girl who belongs to someone who does not want to sell her. He can abduct her and then pretend that she is dead until the original owner accepts compensation of her value from him. Thus, someone else's slave-girl will become permissible for the abductor. The Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) has said: 'Each person's property is forbidden for each other person. And on the day of judgement, every treacherous person will be raised up under a flag.'

Abu Nu'aym narrated to us, that
Sufyan narrated to us *from*
'Amr ibn Dinar, *from*
'Abdullah ibn 'Umar *from*
the Prophet (God send mercy and blessing on him) *that he said:*
On the day of judgement, every treacherous person will be raised up under a flag by which he will be known.

The book on legal artifices is a short one with only fifteen chapters. Every hadith in it has already occurred elsewhere in the *Sahih*. It is meant to address and dissuade those who resort to such artifices – namely, the Iraqi scholars and their followers.

Ibn Abi Shayba was one of Bukhari's teachers. His *Musannaf*, was one of the popular hadith collections that the *Sahih* and the five books composed after it (to be discussed in section 7 of the next chapter) supplanted. A sizeable part of one volume of it is devoted to a 'Book on Refutation of Abu Hanifa', who was seen as the epitome of the Iraqi approach to scholarship. Throughout his refutation Ibn Abi Shayba quotes a hadith or two and then says 'But Abu Hanifa says...' where, according to Ibn Abi Shayba, what Abu Hanifa says is the opposite of what the hadith tells us.

Bukhari himself has not named any individuals in his refutation of legal artifices. He uses the phrase 'But some people say...' in twenty-five places in his *Sahih*, fourteen of them in the 'Book on Legal Artifices'. Hadith scholars have shown that he uses this phrase when he wants to refute the position of Iraqi scholars, and not necessarily Abu Hanifa alone, on some issue.

Perhaps in this Bukhari is following in the footsteps of Ibn Abi Shayba. One should note, however, that other scholars before Ibn Abi Shayba had also used the strategy of arguing that another scholar's position on some issue goes against the apparent meaning of a hadith. For example, Abu Hanifa's leading student, Muhammad al-Shaybani, wrote a book, now published in four volumes, indicating all the places where Malik, the leading scholar of the Hijaz, had gone against what hadith texts apparently tell us.

Bukhari's tone in all this is very well-mannered, as if, rather than proving these people wrong, he wished to persuade them to desist. Bukhari approaches his opponents in two ways. Sometimes, as in the title of Chapter 9 of this book

(quoted above), he appeals to their religious sense. At other times, he shows that the one he is arguing against cannot maintain his position and must eventually contradict himself. In this way, addressing them in their own language, he seeks to dissuade the system-builders.

2. WOMEN IN THE MORNING RITUAL PRAYERS

Another example of how Bukhari repeats a hadith text in different chapters to elicit different meanings from it is the following hadith, reported by 'A'isha, the wife of the Prophet:

> The Messenger of God (peace be upon him and blessings) would perform the morning ritual prayers. Muslim women would attend prayers with him, wrapped up in their sheets. Then they would return to their houses and no one would recognize them.

Bukhari first quotes this hadith in the section on dress requirements for prayers. He uses it as evidence that all that is required of women is that they cover their bodies, no particular garment being specified. He uses the hadith again in the section on the appropriate time for morning prayers as evidence that morning prayers should be performed early enough that they end while it is still dark. He quotes the hadith twice more in two of the chapters in the section on issues related to congregational prayer. One chapter is entitled: 'That people wait for the scholar who leads prayers to get up after finishing prayers'. The other is entitled: 'How quickly women should go back from morning prayers and how little they should stay in the mosque'.

The text does indicate two issues clearly: that the morning prayers should end in the dark and that women should return quickly to their homes. Bukhari needs some help deriving the other two issues.

a. Women's dress in ritual prayer

On the issue of women's dress, Bukhari provides this support in the chapter title:

8. Book On Ritual Prayers: Chapter 13: Regarding the Number of Clothes a Woman Should wear while praying. And 'Ikrima said, 'If a woman simply covers her body in a cloth this would be enough'.

Abu l-Yaman narrated to us:
Shu'ayb informed us: *from*
Zuhri, he [Zuhri] *said*:
'Urwa told me that
'A'isha *said*:
The Messenger of God (peace be upon him and blessings) would perform the morning ritual prayers. Muslim women would attend prayers with him, wrapped up in their sheets. Then they would return to their houses and no one would have recognized them.

The quotation from 'Ikrima directs the reader's attention to the interpretation Bukhari is proposing. We would not expect that 'Ikrima's text as such to be included in Bukhari's book since it reports neither the Prophet's words nor his actions. Also, it is reported without any chain of documentation – Bukhari himself could not have heard it from 'Ikrima, who died in 104, while Bukhari was born in 192.

This is a regular feature of the *Sahih*. Bukhari has restricted himself to including only the soundest of sound hadith texts. But this restriction applies only to the main text of the *Sahih*. To derive meanings from those hadiths, he sometimes needs to use a text that is not up to his very strict standards of documentation, though it may very well be sound. Here, Bukhari has quoted 'Ikrima's opinion since he feels that the Prophet's words being reported in hadith texts are best understood in the light of sayings of scholars of the first few generations, as 'Ikrima himself is.

b. Material in the Sahih *other than the 'soundest of sound hadiths'*

In his chapter titles, Bukhari relaxes his standards of documentation – he does not discard them. In this case, 'Ikrima's opinion appears in the Musannaf of 'Abd al-Razzaq properly documented with a sound chain of narration. But since this is 'Ikrima's opinion and not a saying of the Prophet, Bukhari has moved it to the chapter title.

Within the main text Bukhari will relax his criteria only where he quotes an acceptable hadith that, nevertheless, needs some clarification in the meaning of its texts or support in its chain of narration. In such a situation, he will admit another hadith that does not fully satisfy his criteria, since it is only admitted in support of the first, very sound hadith, which does meet those criteria.

c. The leader of prayers getting up after prayers

The other issue that does not follow directly from the text of 'A'isha's hadith is that 'people [should] wait for the scholar who leads prayers to get up after finishing prayers'. Bukhari brings to bear a hadith narrated by another wife of the Prophet, Umm Salama:

> In the days of the Prophet, when the women finished ritual prayers they would get up while the Prophet and the men who had prayed with him would stay in their place for a little while. Then, when the Prophet would stand up the men would stand up with him.

With this hadith providing the context, 'Then they would return to their houses and no one would have recognized them' in 'A'isha's hadith can be understood as indicating that the congregation should not get up to leave the mosque before the leader of the congregation does so.

d. The transmission of the text

In the four narrations of this hadith of 'A'isha, Bukhari has recorded five different chains of narration (see Figure 2). Each of 'Urwa, 'Amra, and Qasim (far-right column) report the hadith on the authority of 'A'isha. 'A'isha, who narrates the hadith from the Prophet, is the daughter of Abu Bakr, the first caliph of Islam and the earliest of the Prophet's supporters. Betrothal and marriage at an early age was common among the Arabs. Abu Bakr gave 'A'isha in marriage to the Prophet when she was six. Thus she was only nineteen when the Prophet died. She herself died in the year 57 at the age of 63.

Abu l-Yaman	→ Shu'ayb		
		→ Zuhri	→ 'Urwa
Yahya ibn Bukayr	→ Layth	→ 'Uqayl	
'Abdullah ibn Maslama			
	→ Malik	→Yahya ibn Sa'id	→ Amra
'Abdullah ibn Yusuf			
Yahya ibn Musa			
→Sa'id ibn Mansur	→ Fulayh	→ 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Qasim	
			→ Qasim

Figure 2

'A'isha was outstanding among the Companions of the Prophet in her knowledge and understanding of the Prophet and his ways, both his private and his public life. She had had the privilege of direct tutelage for many years in the company of the Prophet. Then, living almost another half a century after the death of the Prophet, people had ample opportunity to benefit from her knowledge and in turn pass it on. Over 2,200 different hadith texts that she has reported have come down to us. She is the fourth most prolific reporter of hadiths among the Companions. Of the 2,600 hadiths in Bukhari's *Sahih*, 128 are from her.

Many hadith texts rely on Companions who were young at the time of the death of the Prophet and then lived long enough to develop a circle of their own students. Most of these Companions died in the sixth and seventh and, at the latest, eighth decade of the first century. 'A'isha is one of three important young Companions who form the basis of the scholarship in Madina – the other two being 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar and Abu Hurayra.

The soundest transmissions of hadith reports generally rely on a generation of people born in the third and fourth decades. Many of this generation (known as the Successors) were able to spend a decade or two in the company of those younger Companions. The most notable of the Successors, died in the last decade of the first or the first decade of the second centuries. 'Urwa, 'Amra, and Qasim are among these Successors, and were notable scholars of Madina. All three were specialists in what 'A'isha knew and had spent many years with her. Qasim is 'A'isha's nephew, the son of her brother, Muhammad. Urwa, another nephew (c. 27–94), is the son of 'A'isha's sister, Asma'. 'Amra is the grand-daughter of one of the early supporters of the Prophet. She grew up in 'A'isha's care and was known as her special student.

Although no scholar completely limited him or herself to learning from a single Companion, the generation of the Successors was a generation of specialists. Just as each of 'Urwa, 'Amra, and Qasim are known as the people to rely on if one wants to find out something from 'A'isha, so each Companion known for his knowledge has special students among the Successors who come to mind immediately when one mentions their name.

In the generation after the Successors we find the movement towards gathering together the knowledge of these specialists. Zuhri (50–124), Yahya ibn Sa'id (before 70–143), and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Qasim (before 57–126) are within

this generation that is pivotal in the transmission of hadith texts.

The problem for a hadith scholar in Bukhari's generation was to find a sound path to the hadith scholars of this pivotal generation. As a concrete example of the use of these broad generalizations we can look at the chains of narration Bukhari has used in reporting the hadith through Zuhri. First is the chain: Abu l-Yaman → Shu'ayb → Zuhri → 'Urwa. Numerous people narrate hadiths from Zuhri. The reader will recall Zuhali, who was responsible for the incident in Nishapur that led to Bukhari's embroilment in the issue of the creation of the Qur'an. Zuhali was known for his knowledge of hadiths transmitted through Zuhri. Evaluating the relative merits of people who narrated from Zuhri was one of the important topics of discussion among scholars of the third century.

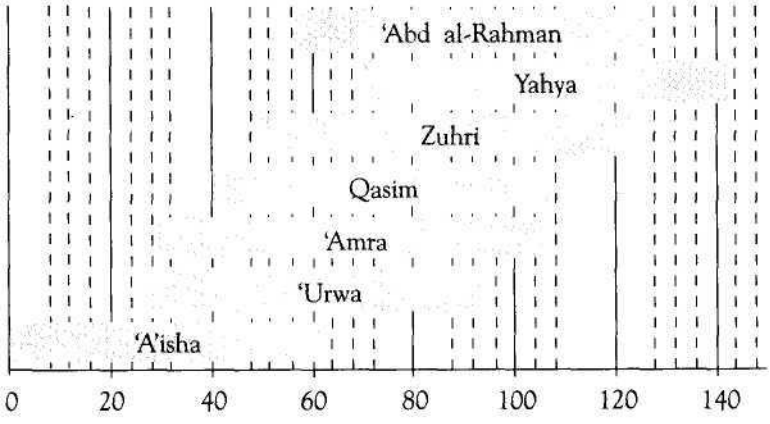


Figure 3

Shu'ayb is one of the strongest narrators from Zuhri. However, it was very difficult to get Shu'ayb to narrate hadiths. Apparently Abu l-Yaman once caught him in a good mood and was able to get permission from him to narrate all of his hadiths from Zuhri. Abu l-Yaman is the only source Bukhari has used for Shu'ayb's hadiths from Zuhri in the *Sahih*. There

are about two hundred occurrences of this chain of narration in the *Sahih*.

In the other chain of narration from Zuhri, Bukhari has taken a longer route: Yahya ibn Bukayr → Layth → 'Uqayl → Zuhri. Though this route is longer, it is as strong since 'Uqayl was one of the best narrators of Zuhri's hadiths, while Layth was a leading hadith scholar of his age.

3. 'A FLAG FOR EVERY TREACHEROUS PERSON'

Towards the end of the discussion of the hadith on intentions I mentioned the hadith: 'On the day of judgement, each treacherous person will be raised up under a flag by which he will be known'. Bukhari quotes this in disapproval of the artifice to gain possession of a slave-girl by abducting her and then getting the original owner to accept a price for her by claiming that she has died.

1	'Abdullah ibn Maslama	→ Malik		→ 'Abdullah ibn Dinar
2	Abu Nu'aym	→ Sufyan		
3,4	Sulayman ibn Harb	→ Hammad ibn Zayd	→ Ayyub	→ Nafi'
5	Musaddad	→ Yahya	→ 'Ubaydullah	

Figure 4

Bukhari quotes this hadith on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar (commonly known as Ibn 'Umar) five times in the *Sahih*. Figure 4 depicts the chain of narration of the five hadiths up to 'Abdullah ibn Dinar and Nafi' on the far right, both of whom relate the hadith on the authority of Ibn 'Umar who narrates it from the Prophet. Three of the chains of narration (3, 4, 5) of this hadith come through Nafi' → Ibn 'Umar, and two (1, 2) come through 'Abdullah ibn Dinar → Ibn 'Umar.

Bukhari quotes versions 4 and 5 of the text, narrated through Nafi', in the book on Good Manners, in a chapter 'Regarding the Fact that on the Day of Judgement People Will be Called by the Names of their Fathers'. This hadith becomes relevant to this chapter title because in Nafi' → Ibn 'Umar we have, 'On the day of judgement, a flag will be raised up for each treacherous person. It will be announced: "This is the person who dealt treacherously with so-and-so son of so-and-so".'

Versions 3 and 4 have exactly the same chain of narration. Version 4 appears in the book on 'Trials', which refers to the trials and tribulations to come as the distance from the time of the Prophet grows. Ultimately, it refers to the coming of the Antichrist, Gog and Magog, and the final days before the end of the world. The chapter title is 'When a Person Says Something in the Presence of Certain People, then Goes Back on what he Said when he Leaves them'. Nafi' says:

> When the people of Madina rebelled against Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, Ibn 'Umar gathered together his servants and his children and said: 'I have heard the Prophet say, 'On the day of judgement, a flag will be raised up for each treacherous person'. We have already pledged allegiance to this man in the name of God and His Messenger. I do not know of any treachery greater than that a man pledge his allegiance to someone in the name of God and His Messenger and then stand up to fight the person he pledged allegiance to. I will have nothing to do with any of you who rebels against him, or pledges allegiance to the rebels.

Here Bukhari has quoted only the relevant portion of the hadith. The story which provides the setting for the hadith proper, the Prophet's words quoted by Ibn 'Umar, helps support the claim of the chapter title that going back on what one says is a grave form of treachery, and there is great punishment for it.

The chain of narration here is exactly the same as in the hadith narrated in the chapter from 'Good Manners'. But

the words of Ibn 'Umar that accompany the portion of the hadith quoted make it a worthwhile repetition. Moreover, Ibn 'Umar himself simply refers to the hadith, so he has not actually quoted the words of the hadith. As a result, even though this hadith is from Nafi'→Ibn 'Umar, the sentence peculiar to the Nafi' →Ibn 'Umar hadiths is missing: 'It will be announced: "This is the person who dealt treacherously with so-and-so son of so-and-so". '

One of the 'Abdullah ibn Dinar → Ibn 'Umar versions is in the book 'On Legal Artifices'. The other is in the chapter on 'The Sin of the Person Who Commits Treachery, Whether a Pious Person or a Sinner'. This chapter is in the book on treaties (with non-Muslims) and tribute (from protected non-Muslims in Muslim lands). The relevance of the hadith is clear: one must stand by any treaties one makes.

The Companion 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar narrates the hadith from the Prophet. Like 'A'isha, Ibn 'Umar is an important source for the knowledge of the scholars of Madina. When the Prophet died, Ibn 'Umar was about twenty-three, then lived on for about fifty years. Four of the Companions are credited with narrating more than two thousands hadiths: Abu Hurayra (5,374), Ibn 'Umar (2,630), Anas ibn Malik (2,286), and 'A'isha (2,210). Of the 2,600 hadiths in Bukhari's *Sahih*, about 250 are through Ibn 'Umar.

The hadith from 'A'isha about women in the morning prayers, is narrated by three of the Successors, 'Amra, 'Urwa and Qasim, each of whom had had the benefit of her company for many years and was known as a specialist in 'A'isha's hadiths.

Ibn 'Umar too had such specialist students. Foremost among them were his son Salim and his slave Nafi'; Salim died in 107 while Nafi' died ten years later in 117. Later hadith scholars tell us that there are only three hadiths of Ibn 'Umar on which Salim and Nafi' disagree. In each case, one narrates it as a saying of Ibn 'Umar while the other narrates

it as a saying of the Prophet whom Ibn 'Umar quotes. Bukhari reports Ibn 'Umar's hadith on the flag for the treacherous through 'Ubaydullah → Nafi' → Ibn 'Umar and through Ayyub → Nafi' → Ibn 'Umar.

Bukhari was an expert in hadith from the time he was a young man. There is one man whom he himself regarded as his better. This was his teacher 'Ali ibn al-Madini, who taught Bukhari the art of picking one's way through hundreds of chains of narrations to get to the most reliable ones. Ibn al-Madini sorted Nafi''s students into four categories, from more reliable to less reliable:

1 Ayyub, 'Ubaydullah, Malik, 'Umar ibn Nafi'
2 Ibn 'Awn, Yahya al-Ansari, Ibn Jurayj
3 Ayyub ibn Musa, Isma'il ibn Umayyah
4 Musa ibn 'Uqba

As we saw, Bukhari reports this hadith through 'Ubaydullah and Ayyub: the most reliable of the narrators from Nafi'. Note also that among the second class of narrators from Nafi' there is Yahya al-Ansari. This is the same Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Ansari who figures in the hadith on intentions discussed earlier. While in general Yahya al-Ansari is a very reliable narrator, when it comes to hadiths from Nafi', Yahya is not at the top of the list. Thus, a narrator may be very reliable when he reports from one hadith scholar, and be less so when he reports from another. The hadith critic must take account of such differential assessment of reliability. Among other things, Bukhari's expertise in these differential assessments have made his *Sahih* the soundest of all collections of sound hadiths.

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHAPTER TITLES

The words of the Qur'an uttered by the Prophet are not his words, they are God's words. The Prophet's own words also

carry authority, but their authority is different from the authority of the word of God.

This dual aspect to words uttered by the Prophet could have caused great confusion. So initially the Prophet forbade people to write down anything but the Qur'an. Only when he did not fear such confusion did he allow people to write down his own words. This ambivalence towards writing things other than the Qur'an continued among some Companions, and among a few individuals in the generation of the Successors. After that, objection to writing down the Prophet's words is rare.

Writing as an aid to memory is documented from the very lifetime of the Prophet, but it is only towards the end of the first century that we find writing that the author intended others to read. Still, the organization of the material was not so refined nor the presentation so stylized and self-conscious that one would be comfortable using the word 'books' for these compositions.

After this came a period of writers who arranged their hadith material topically, attempting to cover the range of topics covered in Islamic Law. Typically, they would divide the book into three main sections: worship, interpersonal dealings, then a potpourri of hadith material on subjects such as the life and battles of the Prophet, predictions regarding the coming of the Antichrist, descriptions of heaven and hell, and accounts of the illusory nature of worldly life. The section on worship would contain hadiths that described what the Prophet did in matters regarding ritual purity, ritual prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and the annual prescribed charity. The section on interpersonal dealings would have hadiths relevant to buying and selling, marriage, divorce, custody of children and the like. The section on personal life would include hadiths that described how the Prophet would dress, eat and drink, and generally conduct himself in personal dealings.

This topical approach to organizing hadiths focuses on their meaning and normative content. The other popular trend organized the text in terms of the supporting academic apparatus: the chain of narration. The simplest form organizes the material under the writer's teachers, the teachers' names being arranged alphabetically. In a more refined form, the author would organize the material alphabetically under the names of the Companions narrating from the Prophet.

The topical approach corresponds to a primary interest in the meaning of a hadith, its *fiqh* and its possible normative content. This is the interest of the specialist in Islamic Law and Islamic jurisprudence. The arrangement by narrator corresponds to a primary engagement in establishing the text and in examining the scholarly apparatus supporting the text. This is the interest of the hadith scholar and the topic of hadith-study proper.

A popular polemic expression of these different ways of engaging with hadith-texts is to divide scholars into two classes: those who, on any issue, would check the soundness of hadith texts and then do what they find in sound hadiths – these are the hadith scholars – then those who would use their own reasoning about the issue and then they try to find meanings for hadiths, however far-fetched, to justify what they have already decided they should do: these are the *fiqh* scholars.

In cultural translation the negative connotation of the expression of this contrast is reversed. Where one is following a revealed religion, following the revelation is the thing to be admired. It is good that a blind person follow a sighted person. In matters of God's pleasure and the welfare of the next world, prophets are sighted. All others are blind. So the welfare of the average person lies in following the Prophet and not in using their own reasoning.

Bukhari's use of chapter titles clearly identifies his interest in the *fiqh* content of the hadith material. The contents of

the title are clearly a guide to understanding the hadiths reported within the body of the chapter. The attribution of texts cited or alluded to in chapter titles is often not traced back all the way to the Prophet. However, they certainly participate in constructing the meaning of the prophetic reports within the chapter.

Bukhari often presents a single text in small pieces so that one must look in several places to gather it all together. His interest in deriving the *fiqh* of the hadith appears to outweigh his interest in recording the text of the hadith in the way most convenient for the reader.

That said, it would be misleading to overstate the role of *fiqh* in the *Sahih*. With a little practice in reading hadith texts closely, it is easy enough to follow a text in the different context Bukhari provides for it. But Bukhari's primary interest in the *Sahih* has to do with problems in verifying the scholarly apparatus supporting these texts: the chains of narration. To appreciate these problems of verification requires training. Many books preceding Bukhari's *Sahih* cover the same topics that the *Sahih* covers. The novelty of the *Sahih* is that in every topic he discusses, Bukhari limits himself to using hadiths that are traced *all the way* back to the Prophet with *continuous* chains of narration.

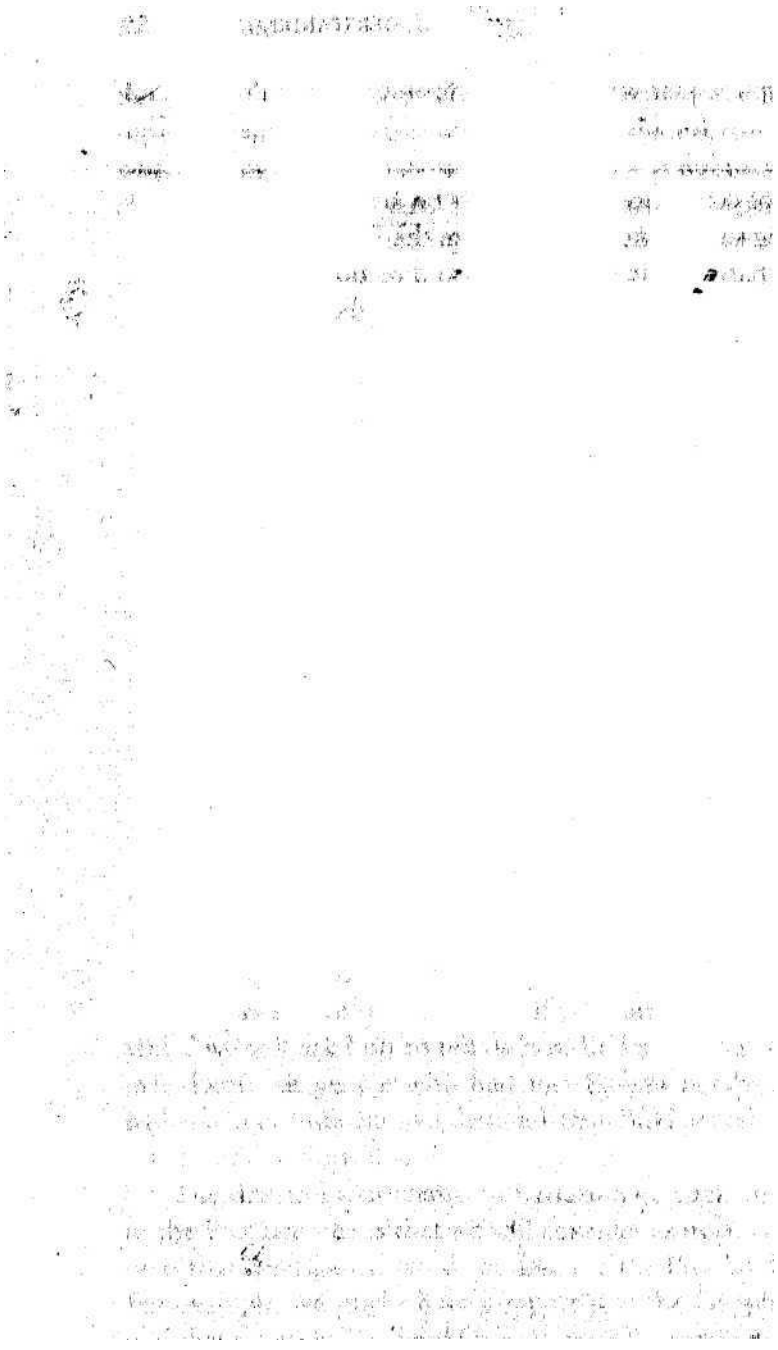
That the chain of narration be *continuous* means that before we entertain the ascription of a text to anyone we want to know its source. For example, if Bukhari says that 'Sufyan said...' we will ask him to tell us how he knows this. Bukhari met dozens of people who had met Sufyan but he himself had not met him. So, we demand that Bukhari tell us who told him that 'Sufyan said...'

The demand that chains of narration go back *all the way* to the Prophet means that we will consider as normative only texts that describe the words or deeds of the Prophet himself. For example, we might have a report that the Caliph 'Umar said that a certain act should be performed a certain way. Now

the Caliph 'Umar was a close Companion of the Prophet and well known for his understanding of religious matters. But his own opinion regarding any practice will not have the weight of a practice about which he actually says that he is narrating something he heard from the Prophet.

Bukhari's *Sahih* is novel in two directions. First, Bukhari is the first to segregate 'proper' hadiths – those that are traced *all the way* back to the Prophet through *continuous* chains – from other material. Second, the way in which Bukhari uses chapter titles along with his use of repeating and truncating hadiths in order to derive multiple meanings from hadith texts is unprecedented.

In the next chapter, I will describe two other approaches to the problem that Bukhari was addressing – reconstructing a lived life from texts describing it. After this, I will be in a better position to draw conclusions regarding the significance of Bukhari's effort in the *Sahih*. Provisionally, it is important to see that Bukhari does give separate treatment to 'proper' hadiths by relegating all other material to chapter titles. On the other hand it is also perfectly clear that he is not suggesting that one must, or even that one should, restrict oneself to using only these 'proper' hadiths for understanding the demands of God and His Prophet. He is willing to allow other material to participate in the understanding of 'proper' hadith.



Discovering practice: textual and non-textual sources

> Firabri (the transmitter of one of the canonical manuscripts of the Sahih) *says: I heard Muhammad ibn Abi Hatim the bookseller say: 'I dreamt I saw Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari walking behind the Prophet (may peace be upon him) while the Prophet was walking. Whenever the Prophet would lift a foot, Bukhari would put his foot in that same place where the Prophet's foot had been'.*
>
> (Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-sari*, 489)

God sent the Prophet in order to show human beings how to live the life that God loves. The more one starts to look, in God's eyes, like the Prophet, the more one will be loved by God and win His favour in this world and in the hereafter. Therefore the way the Prophet did something, his *Sunna*, is very important To his Companions, those who lived with him, the *Sunna* was something they observed directly and practised every day. To those who came after them it was a life they learned in apprenticeship and discipleship to them.

Then, individuals in the generation that followed would go to disciples of different Companions in order to piece together

he *Sunna*. With the passage of time the *Sunna* of the Prophet ncreasingly began to be something one learned from texts, as he possibility of learning it directly from people became more nd more remote.

Most of the *Sunna*, the exemplary life that a Muslim should ead, is agreed upon. Muslims around the world recognize it – hey will see someone leading such a life and say that this person is ery particular about following the *Sunna*. Where *Sunna* refers o how a Muslim should do all the things he has to do in 24 ours, if we were to piece together all the individual acts a person loes regarding which some say it is *Sunna* while others disagree, ve may put together perhaps one hour of such acts out of the 24. But these very differences are the focus of later scholarship. How is one to decide when some scholars claim that a certain vay of doing something is the proper way, while others make he same claim for another way?

Eventually, the answer to this question came to be: we should lecide by looking at the texts (the hadiths) that record what the Prophet did and we should prefer the hadiths that are the most eliably transmitted. However, there were other approaches to he *Sunna* before this approach that relies exclusively on texts ecame established.

I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the *Sunna*. In the econd and third sections I will speak of the textual approach nd of the problems with it. In the fourth and fifth sections I will speak of two other, earlier approaches to the *Sunna*. In the ixth I will try to place Bukhari's approach to the *Sunna* within his background. In a final section I will speak of how Bukhari's osition on the *Sunna* fared in the subsequent development of his discussion.

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPHET'S EXAMPLE

The prophet is a familiar figure in more than one religious radition. Typically, he is a man who brings news of a world to

come and a life after death, or he speaks of things like heaven and hell and of having to account before God for one's actions in one's worldly life. He demands two things of his people: faith and a life based on this faith. The prophet fulfils a real human need. He carries a message that human beings need desperately and urgently.

The Qur'an places the Prophet within this tradition of prophets. And distinguishes him as the final prophet. What, then, of the human need which the chain of prophets was fulfilling? The answer is that this particular prophet is not just to be obeyed; he is to be imitated. The Qur'an says: 'and the Messenger of God sets a beautiful precedent for you to follow' (33. 21). Also, 'Say (O Prophet Muhammad): If you love God, follow me and God will love you' (3. 31). So, part of imitating the Prophet is imitating him in his prophetic task. All followers of the Prophet are to work so that the love of God leads their own lives and the lives of humanity, and to work to endear themselves and humanity to God.

Every act in life is a means to becoming beloved in God's eyes and the guarantee of that is for an act be done as the Prophet did it, in the *Sunna* manner. This notion of the *Sunna* obliterates the distinction between the mundane and the sacred. Buying and selling, playing with one's children, eating and drinking – all qualify as religious activities, provided one engages in them in the *Sunna* way.

The Companions of the Prophet were privileged since they actually saw the lived life of the *Sunna*, tried to copy it in front of the Prophet, and had him correct them and inform them where their copy didn't come up to the required standard. Because the person of the Prophet is important, the class of people who learned his life from him under his own supervision are also important. The Companions were the last people to have direct access to the lived life that is to be imitated; everyone after them is under some measure of disability in this regard. The first two generations who came after the Companions are

also important and the scholarly tradition has also granted them a title, namely 'Successors (or Followers) of the Companions' and 'Successors' Followers' (or 'Followers' Followers').

Naturally some of the Companions were more familiar with the person and the life of the Prophet than others. But they were living close in time to the life that was the basis of the *Sunna*. Even when someone reported something they had not seen, for the Companions the report was about a man they knew. The Successors had to gain access to the *Sunna* through the Companions and many actively searched them out in order to learn the *Sunna* from them. A number of the Successors had the chance to live for years with one or more of the Companions.

Much that became important later on in the scholarly tradition was not so important at this time. Clearly, the Companions would not feel the need to preface every statement they reported from the Prophet with the words 'I heard the Prophet say...' Those who came to the Companions to learn, came to learn the way of the Prophet from them. Every normative statement or action would not require explicit reference to the Prophet.

Also, many of the Companions intentionally avoided quoting the words of the Prophet. They were afraid of mistakenly attributing things to the Prophet that he had not said. Fidelity to the word is important in the Islamic tradition. Islamic education begins with memorizing the Qur'an – a child works for years to memorize every word as it is written in the Book – to preserve the meaning is not enough.

From the time of the Companions one finds a distinction between pronouncement on a religious issue (known as giving a *fatwa*) and quoting the words or practice of the Prophet. It is easier to describe someone's words or practice in one's own words than it is to quote that person's words accurately.

The generation of the Successors felt that they were getting information directly from a reliable source. In the previous chapter we saw how some of 'A'isha's students, and then some of

Ibn 'Umar's, stayed in their company for years. This is a pattern. There were a number of Successors who had a chance to learn from the younger Companions for two decades and more. Many of these Successors were family members, or slaves, or members of the household of these Companions.

There was a sense of continuity in the life that was being passed down from the Prophet. The *Sunna* of the Prophet, the *Sunna* of specific well-known Companions, and the *Sunna* of the Companions as a whole, all had authority – they all were exemplary of life as it should be lived.

However, when the Successors came to teach this life, the continuity in the *Sunna* being passed on was no longer undisputed. Thus, among the Successors' Followers, one finds a growing concern for verification. Many of the Successors were specialists in the knowledge of one of the Companions – they were comfortable with what they had learned. The Successors' Followers tried to bring the knowledge of these specialists together. When they saw different opinions among their teachers they were forced to pick and choose.

They had to ask the question: What is the surest path to knowing that something really is the *Sunna* – the prescribed way which God wants of us, and which the Prophet was sent to demonstrate? In this chapter I shall be looking at three different approaches to discovering the *Sunna*.

2. WELL-VERIFIED TEXTS

Over the centuries the Islamic scholarly tradition has accepted Bukhari's *Sahih* as the most reliable collection of hadiths. After Bukhari others also composed such collections – but his collection has always maintained its position. The *Sahih* is special not in the *meanings* Bukhari has derived from the texts, but in the *soundness of the texts* he has chosen. His book is also distinguished by its exclusive reliance on texts that track one person actually quoting words he or she had heard from another

person until the text itself is a quote of the words heard from the Prophet himself. In more technical terms, Bukhari relies on texts with continuous chains of narrations that actually connect to the Prophet.

In hadith works before Bukhari's *Sahih* one finds authors relying quite frequently on texts which have *discontinuous* chains of narration: somewhere in the chain, a narrator quotes a person that he could not have met. Another type of text which one finds in works before the *Sahih* is the *dangling* chain of narration that does not actually *connect* the text to the Prophet himself. Thus, the chain of narration starts from the author of the hadith work and reaches a person who could have quoted the Prophet himself. But that person, instead of introducing the text by saying 'the Prophet said', simply commences reporting the text. One is left wondering whether the text being reported is the narrator's own words or those of the Prophet.

This issue is properly the concern of the next chapter where I discuss Bukhari's tools for checking the reliability of a text. Here I want to point to the contrast between concern for establishing the text and concern for deriving meaning from it. The fame of Bukhari's *Sahih* is in the way he has dealt with establishing the text. Once Bukhari's teacher Ishaq ibn Rahawayh said, 'Would that you composed a brief book limited to the reliably reported *Sunna* of the Prophet'. This appealed to Bukhari and he set about composing the *Sahih* (Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-Sari*, 7).

Bukhari was successful in collecting hadiths on a wide variety of subjects while observing very stringent standards for verification. Because of this, in the polemics regarding the 'best' approach to the *Sunna*, Bukhari's *Sahih* is most frequently used by those espousing the textual approach. The claim is that since we have these very sound and well-verified texts on every topic, why should we look anywhere else?

3. PROBLEMS IN THE TEXTUAL APPROACH

Many Western academics have been puzzled by a statement of Yahya ibn Abi Kathir (d. 132) which Darimi (181–255) records in his hadith collection, that 'the *Sunna* of the Prophet is arbitrator over the Qur'an and the Qur'an is not arbitrator over the way of the Prophet'. Now hadiths do not even claim to be exact words of the Prophet, while the Qur'an is the very word of God. So one comes to the initially puzzling conclusion that obedience to the Prophet is more important than obedience to God.

The solution to the puzzle is that the *Sunna* is more than the texts that report it. The way the Prophet did things actually represents the correct understanding of the Qur'anic text. The Qur'an is text, the *Sunna* is interpreted, 'lived' text. 'A'isha, the Prophet's wife, was one of the people with the most sound understanding of Islam, as she had been educated from childhood in the Prophet's own house. She expressed this understanding of the relation of the Qur'an and *Sunna* by stating that the Prophet's character was the Qur'an.

Abu Bakr ('A'isha's father) was the first caliph of Islam and one of the Prophet's closest and earliest Companion. In the following statement he demands that one's own understanding of the words of the Qur'an must give way to the Prophet's lived interpretation of the Qur'an:

> People: you quote the sentence of the Qur'an [5.105]: 'O people of faith, worry about yourself. Those who are misguided cannot harm you as long as you are correctly guided.' But I have heard the Messenger of God saying 'When people see a person committing injustice and they do not stop him, soon God will surround them all with His punishment'.

Here one should not understand Abu Bakr as trying to overrule the words of God by the words of His Prophet. Rather, he is suggesting that the words of God must be understood in the context of the practice of His Prophet. The Prophet understood God as demanding that a person work to stop others from

injustice. The conditional clause in the Qur'anic sentence ('as long as you are correctly guided') must be interpreted in light of this understanding. So we will say that the meaning is that as long as you are correctly guided, which includes your efforts to stop those who commit injustice, their continuing to do injustice will not harm you.

The Qur'an is the primary text. The *Sunna* is this text demonstrated, lived and interpreted. Then, recording hadiths is one attempt to establish the Prophetic practice of the Qur'anic text. Finally, *fiqh* is an attempt to reconstitute explicitly the understanding of the Qur'anic text implicit in the practice of the Prophet.

The recording and verification of texts reporting the Prophet's words and practice was one direction which the effort to preserve the Prophet's *Sunna* took. But it was clear from the earliest times that with hadith texts, as distinct from the 'lived life', one was again in need of interpretation.

For example, consider this hadith of the Prophet: 'The person who cups blood and the person whose blood is cupped both have broken their fast.' Now in Islam, fasting is the act of avoiding eating, drinking and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset. The medieval therapy of drawing out 'bad' blood by cupping should have no effect on the fast. However, the text is a reliably reported one, and it clearly states what it states.

One group of hadith scholars argue that it records the words of the Prophet but not their circumstances. These scholars then make sense of the hadith by supplying those circumstances from other hadiths. The form of fasting is controlling the three basic appetites from dawn to sunset. The spirit of fasting is to hold oneself back from all disobedience to God. A number of hadiths say of those who commit certain sins while fasting that they 'have broken their fast' – understood (from the earliest times), as meaning 'they might as well have broken their fast'. One such sin is backbiting – saying things about others behind their backs that, said in front of them, would hurt them. This is

a major sin that the Qur'an compares to eating the flesh of one's brother's corpse. So, these hadith scholars say that the 'cupper' and the 'cupped' refer to particular individuals who were both fasting, and who, while the cupping was being done, were backbiting others.

If this really is the background to the text, it completely changes the meaning of the hadith. The hadith is then not an argument against cupping while fasting; rather, it reports an instance in which the Prophet was censuring a particular 'cupper' and a particular 'cupped' for backbiting. The *Sunna* understood from the context of this hadith, then, would be rather different from what the text suggests on its own.

In this instance, the path from the text of the hadith to the *sunna* in it is rather tortuous. This illustrates one of the many ways in which simply recording and verifying the reliability of textual reports recording the Prophet's words and deeds is not sufficient as a guide to the *Sunna*. For text itself is silent – only the reader makes it speak. Historically, the textual approach to the *Sunna* was the last approach to appear on the scene and has, therefore, shaped much of the thinking of later scholars towards early Islam. In the following two sections I consider other approaches to the *Sunna* from earlier periods.

4. MALIK AND THE PRACTICE OF MADINA

The *Muwatta* of Malik ibn Anas is among the earliest hadith works to have survived. One element in Malik's approach to the *Sunna* is reliance on the continuity of practice in the community of Madina, the city of the Prophet. Malik comes two generations before Bukhari. Thus, when Bukhari reports a hadith with Malik in its chain of narration, he has to report from a narrator who quotes the text on Malik's authority.

Malik's proximity to the source is the most important factor in his approach to the *Sunna*. Below is the major part of a letter

which he wrote to a close friend and a leading contemporary scholar, Layth ibn Sa'd:

It has come to my notice that you give decisions on religious matters which go against the position of the scholars of this city of ours [i.e. Madina]. You are a leading scholar, a man of position and eminence in your area. People need you and trust you in your decisions. Because of this you must fear for yourself and tread the path that is likely to take you to safety.

God, Greatest and Most Exalted, has said in his Mighty Book: 'The earliest Muslims, the first to emigrate [from Makka] and to help them [in Madina], and those who followed them virtuously: God was pleased with them and they were pleased with God and He has prepared gardens for them underneath which streams flow and they shall live within them forever and that is great success'. God Most Exalted has said: 'Give good news to my slaves who listen to what is said and follow the good in it. Those are the ones to whom God has showed the way and they are the intelligent people'.

People are but followers of the people of Madina, the city to which the Prophet migrated, and where the Qur'an was revealed and made permissible things permissible and forbade forbidden things. Madina is where God's Messenger (may God send peace and blessings on him) was amongst the people; the people were present during the very act of Revelation. He would command them and they would obey him, he would establish *sunnas* for them and they would follow him, until God took him up to Himself and chose for him what is in His presence. May God send peace on him and keep him well, may His mercy and blessings be upon him.

Then those people came to rule who were the strictest of all Muslims in following him. Whenever something came up that they knew about, they put that knowledge into practice. If they did not have knowledge about it they would ask and then they would rely on their understanding and their proximity to the days of the Prophet to take whatever was the strongest position in the matter. If anyone opposed them or if someone said that another position in the matter was stronger, that person's position would be abandoned and no one would follow him.

After them their Followers took this same path and followed these same *sunnas*.

So when there is a clear practice in Madina and people follow it, I do not see room for anyone to go against it. This is because the people of Madina have in their hands the inherited tradition that no one else can claim or falsely attribute to themselves.

If the people of various cities were to begin saying, 'This is the practice in our area' and, 'This is what people amongst us have been doing' their claim would not be reliable. Their claim would not have the support that the claim of the people of Madina would have when they say this same thing.

So, look into what I have written for yourself (may God have mercy on you). Know that I hope that it is only well-wishing, concern and consideration for you, for the sake of God's pleasure, that has called me to write to you. Read this letter carefully for, if you do so, you will see that I have been as sincere to you as is possible.

May God grant us and yourself obedience to Him and obedience to His Messenger in all issues and in all conditions. Peace on you, and God's mercy and His blessings.

Malik's tone is remarkable: 'People are but followers of the people of Madina,' and 'the people of Madina have in their hands the inherited tradition that no one else can claim'. He is confident that the people of Madina have preserved the life of the Prophet and have passed it on faithfully to the generations after them.

This is the key to his understanding of religion. Malik was born in 92 AH. This and the following decade saw the deaths of a large group of those of the Successors who had seen and lived with a good number of Companions.

Conspicuous among those Successors were the students of various young Companions, like 'A'isha and Ibn 'Umar mentioned earlier. Malik's task was only to pick the reliable scholars from among his teachers, who would inform him of the opinions and hadiths of these associates of the Companions.

A brief review of the dates and careers of some of these associates, Malik's teachers, provides perspective on Malik's

point of view. Thus, for example, Kharija (30–99) was the son of Zayd ibn Thabit. Zayd was about twenty-four years old when the Prophet passed away. He was eleven when, around the time that the Prophet migrated to Madina, he accepted Islam. He witnessed all the events of the Prophet's thirteen years in Madina. After the Prophet's death he got another thirty-two years to learn from other Companions and in turn pass his knowledge on to various Successors. He died in 56 AH, twenty-six years after the birth of his son, Kharija.

Sa'id ibn Musayyab was the son-in-law of Abu Hurayra, the Companion credited with narrating the most hadiths. Many of Sa'id's hadiths are from Abu Hurayra. In addition, Sa'id worked hard to try to recover the knowledge of the second caliph, 'Umar. He was not able to learn directly from 'Umar but did gather so much knowledge of 'Umar's decisions and his hadiths that eventually people came to know him as a specialist on anything to do with 'Umar.

I have already introduced 'Urwa, 'Amra and Qasim. The Prophet's wife, 'A'isha, taught all three of them. I have also spoken of Ibn 'Umar's son, Salim, and his slave, Nafi'. Ibn 'Umar himself was the son of the second caliph, 'Umar. He lived through a period of civil war and was a prime candidate for the caliphate. Nevertheless, he bypassed this political opportunity because of his intense love for learning the *Sunna* of the Prophet. One of his students says that Ibn 'Umar would follow the *sunnas* of the Prophet so meticulously that one would think he was insane (*Siyar a'lam al-nubala*, iii. 213).

Malik quotes Zuhri as saying, 'Don't give anything else the weight of Ibn 'Umar's opinion. He lived for sixty years after the death of the Prophet: so nothing of the Prophet's life or that of the Companions' lives remained hidden from him'. Note that Zuhri is speaking of Ibn 'Umar's *opinion*. However, the context makes it clear that the weight of his opinion is as a record of the practice of the Prophet and that of his Companions.

These are just a few of the younger Companions and a few of their students. From where Malik stood, his teachers were people who had not merely met Successors who had studied with the Companions, but had spent a good portion of their lives as understudies to these Companions. They represented what remained of the living tradition of the Prophet's *Sunna*. So when Malik speaks of the 'way things are done' in Madina, he feels that he is describing the society that the Prophet had set up, and which the Companions preserved and transmitted to their understudies. Then, faced with a certain text that goes against this practice, Malik is not willing to give it too much weight. For example, he himself reports a hadith from Abu Zinad → A'raj → Abu Hurayra, one of the soundest chains of narration, and one through which Bukhari has included a number of hadiths in his *Sahih*. The hadith says that if a dog drinks water from a bowl, one must wash the bowl seven times before it will become clean again. Now Malik accepts this hadith as sound, but he is not willing to say that one must wash a dish seven times if a dog drinks from it. This goes against the understanding of religion that has come to him from his teachers. God has said in the Qur'an (5. 4): 'And eat from what they [i.e. trained dogs] bring for you...' God Himself says that the game a dog brings back in his mouth is permissible. So how could the water a dog drinks from be unclean?

Behind this argument is Malik's trust that this kind of irregularity goes against the sense of religion, as he has understood it from the scholars of Madina. One of Malik's most important teachers was Rabi'at al-Ra'y. I have already mentioned that he was not willing to accept that the compensation for injuring four fingers of a woman be less than the compensation for injuring three fingers.

It is not that Malik feels hadiths to be irrelevant. He himself is a great hadith scholar and an expert among hadith critics, but he is not willing to make hadith texts the sole basis for understanding God's demands on human beings. Malik's teacher

Rabi'a used to say 'A thousand people narrating from a thousand people: I like this more than one person narrating from one person' (*Hilyat al-awliya*, iii. 216).

The hadith text is one person's attempt to preserve the Prophet's practice of God's commands, and pass it on to another person. The practice of Madina is the practical attempt of the religious elders of early Madinan society to preserve the Prophet's practice. But this preservation of practice is not by trying to mould practice and lived life into a text. The elders of Madina preserve the Prophet's practice in their own practice. Then, Madinan practice does not pass this preserved practice of the Prophet on to a single person. Thousands preserve the practice of the Prophet and pass it on to thousands. The practice of Madina verifies every nuance of the life of the Prophet and preserves it.

Both Bukhari and Malik record proper hadiths going all the way back to the Prophet through sound chains of narration. Both also record decisions of the Companions and of early scholars in their books. Both use these sayings to lead the reader to the proper understanding of the sayings of the Prophet. But there is a difference.

The physical organization of the hadith texts and the other sayings reflects the difference between both books. Bukhari sometimes uses the sayings as a title to group the hadiths that he quotes in a chapter. The hadiths are the guide to what one must do. At most the sayings will help one along in understanding hadiths. Malik will also quote hadiths in a section, but it is at the end of it that he tells us whether these hadiths indicate what one should actually do. In case of a conflict, the practice of Malik's teachers, the scholars of Madina, is what will guide Malik in his decision.

5. THE *FIQH* OF IRAQ: THE LOGIC OF GOD'S COMMANDS

I mentioned the rivalry between Hijazi scholarship and Iraqi scholarship towards the end of the discussion of the hadith on intentions. While Hijazi scholarship finds its model in the practice of Madina, Iraqi scholarship centred on the city of Kufa and begins with the Companion 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud.

Ibn Mas'ud died in 32 AH at the age of 63. When the Prophet began his work in Makka, Ibn Mas'ud accepted Islam. Thus, he had the opportunity to be with the Prophet from the age of nineteen to the age of forty-one, when he was a mature man. By contrast, most of the other Companions, who became the source for later generations, were teenagers or a little older when the Prophet died. Another distinction is that the Prophet treated Ibn Mas'ud as if he was of his own family.

The caliph 'Umar sent Ibn Mas'ud to the Iraqis in Kufa to teach them about Islam. Ibn Mas'ud took his task seriously and, before he died, he had trained people who would teach in his place while he supervised. Among the most important students were: 'Alqama, Aswad, Masruq, 'Abida, 'Amr ibn Shurahbil, Harith ibn Qays. These six died in the seventh and eighth decades of the first century. It is because of them that Kufa became a major centre of Islamic learning. Outstanding among the many who learned from them was Ibrahim al-Nakha'i, said to have gathered the knowledge of all of Ibn Mas'ud's students. Ibrahim died in 95. His most outstanding student was Hammad, who died in 120. Abu Hanifa, whose name was to become synonymous with the Iraqi school, was Hammad's special student. Abu Hanifa lived from 80 to 150.

Already in Ibrahim's lifetime the difference in approach between the Iraqi school and the Hijazi school had become apparent and well known. As the Hijazis saw it, they believed in following the Prophet, while the Iraqis used their reasoning in religious matters. Sha'bi was one of Ibrahim's contemporaries

in Kufa who had also gained much of the knowledge of Ibn Mas'ud's students. At this early date one already finds those of the Hijazi inclination approvingly say of Sha'bi that he based his decisions on hadith texts, while they censure Ibrahim as a follower of reasoning.

The Iraqi approach to religion found its most famous formulation in Abu Hanifa's school of religious law. This approach is based on the conviction that there is a logic to God's commands. This is not the same as saying that God's commands can be apprehended by the use of logic alone – thus leaving no real need for Revelation. Rather, when one sees God's commands in issue after issue, in situation after situation, one can come to an understanding of the concerns on which God has based His commands in different fields. This understanding derived from hundreds of different specific issues can provide a sound basis for decisions on matters on which God's command is not clear.

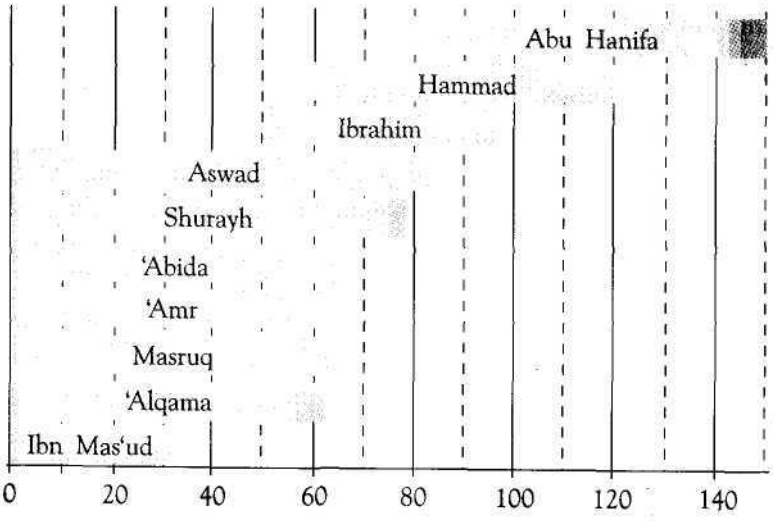


Figure 5

It is difficult to find samples of Abu Hanifa's approach to the *Sunna*, since we only have some fragments of his works. We do have works by his most senior student Abu Yusuf, who taught in his place after his death. Abu Hanifa had written a work on issues having to do with battle and war. Awza'i was a contemporary of Abu Hanifa with direct experience of the Syrian battlefront with the Byzantine empire. He felt that Abu Hanifa, sitting in Kufa, had been rather bold writing about these issues. He wrote a work in refutation of Abu Hanifa's book on the law of war. Abu Yusuf wrote a refutation of this refutation, in defence of his own teacher, Abu Hanifa. Naturally, every scholar has his own approach to issues. Nevertheless, Abu Hanifa did leave a definite imprint on Abu Yusuf's thinking.

Abu Yusuf discusses the case of a non-Muslim fighting against the Muslims who asks for protection in order to enter Muslim territory for business and then, whilst in Muslims territory, commits adultery or steals. What will his punishment be?

Awza'i feels that the man will be stoned to death (for adultery) and his hand will be cut off (for theft) if he commits these crimes. Abu Hanifa feels that the man is neither covered by any treaty with the Muslims nor has the special status of protected nations within Muslim territory. Therefore, he will be made to compensate the person he steals from but the prescribed punishments of Islamic law are not for him.

The interesting thing here is the way in which Abu Yusuf argues Abu Hanifa's position:

> What would you say: If he was the delegate of the enemy king [i.e. under diplomatic immunity] and committed adultery, would you stone him to death?
>
> What would you say: If he committed adultery with another woman who had also entered with the same temporary protection, would you stone her?

What would you say: If I had not punished them, and they both returned to enemy territory, [and it] they then re-entered in fresh protection, should I give them their punishment?

What would you say: If they came back as prisoners, should I give them the punishment of slaves or the punishment of free people when they are at this time slaves of a Muslim?

What would you say: If they don't come back to us a second time and all the enemy accept Islam, or the two of them accept Islam or they enter into the status of protected nations, will they be punished?

Or, if they did all this in the enemy territory then came to us, would we punish them? [Note that Muslims doing this in enemy territory would be liable to punishment.]

We can make an educated guess about the distinguishing feature of Abu Hanifa's approach to religion from the few surviving fragments of his works, and more from stories of his arguments with other scholars and from reports by his students. Abu Hanifa saw religious law as an edifice. If someone wants to remove a brick or replace it, Abu Hanifa would ask him what effect this would have on the rest of the structure.

Shatibi, an Andalusian scholar of the eighth century has expressed this very clearly. In his book *al-Mawafaqat*, he has tried to uncover the way in which Malik and Abu Hanifa approach the *Sunna*. Only on the least important of issues will a single hadith or a single sentence of the Qur'an provide evidence for a position. On any important issue a whole set of hadiths, sentences of the Qur'an, and many other aspects of the law, work together to constitute evidence for any position.

When we look at ritual prayers we see that the sentence of the Qur'an 'and establish ritual prayer' has come in a number of ways. There is praise for those who pray and blame for those who do not pray. Those who are in their senses are to be forced to pray and to establish prayer standing, sitting or lying down. We are told to fight those who leave prayers or those who resist it. All this is in addition to other such commands. In this same way, we are forbidden to kill a human being. Killing a human being calls for retaliatory killing and threat of

retaliatory killing. It is mentioned among the major sins along with associating partners with God, just as prayers are mentioned along with faith. The starving person is obliged to save his life. Annual obligatory charity, sympathy and help for those who are not able to take care of themselves is required and rulers and judges and kings are chosen in order to implement these things. Armies are established to stop someone who would kill humans. The person who is afraid of starving to death is commanded to save himself by eating anything permissible or even forbidden, whether it be unclean meat of a dead animal, or blood or the meat of pigs. Looking at all this and other such things we know for sure that ritual prayers are obligatory and murder is forbidden.

One often finds scholars arguing that ritual prayer is obligatory because of certain statements of the Qur'an commanding it, and murder is forbidden because of other such statements. Shatibi's position is that one can find texts commanding and forbidding other practices: but the strength of the prohibition of murder and the strength of the obligation to pray is not a result of just the text of the Qur'an. The numerous commands associated with prayer and those associated with murder all work together to make it clear that murder is a grave disobedience and prayer is very important.

Malik bases his view of religion on the practice of Madina, his temporal proximity to the source of law, and this sense of religious law being a whole. Abu Hanifa feels that Kufa, too, was a great centre of knowledge. He too feels himself to be close to Ibrahim, who gathered the knowledge of six students of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. One Successor, Qatada (d. 118), notes that over a thousand Companions had visited Kufa at various times. In addition to this connection with tradition, Abu Hanifa's style of argumentation relies on his sense that religious law has an internal logic.

It is worth reiterating that Iraqi reasoning is not a preference for reasoning above or in place of the laws of religion, but an effort, on behalf of those laws, to discern their internal logic. That logic is not accessible to someone who brings an 'open

mind' to these issues. It is accessible only to the diligent scholar who has worked through thousands of the decisions of religious law in many different fields. Only then will the scholar have a sense of what the response of this law would be in a new situation. This sort of reasoning is neither a necessary evil nor an incidental feature of religious law. It is the cement that holds up its entire structure. In an interesting parallel with the argument of Malik discussed above, if a single hadith demands something that runs against this structure, then that hadith must itself become suspect. As Abu Yusuf puts it:

> Stay away from unusual hadiths. Hold fast to those hadiths that the community of scholars has accepted, which the people of *fiqh* recognize, which is in harmony with the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. A hadith that goes against the Qur'an is not from the Messenger of God even if [sound] narrators narrate it! (*al-Radd 'ala siyar al-Awza'i*, 31)

One of Malik's students, Ibn Wahb, says: 'If God had not saved me by Malik and Layth, I would have gone astray. I thought that whatever is reported on the authority of the Prophet must be practiced' (*Siyar*, viii. 148).

In the polemic against Abu Hanifa one often finds the 'doves' saying that he didn't follow hadiths because there weren't many hadiths in Kufa. But this is simply not true. Shu'ba ibn Hajjaj, a contemporary of Abu Hanifa, was a founding father of hadith criticism, whose focus was on the hadiths of Iraq. Just as literary criticism implies the presence of literature, a hadith critic of the stature of Shu'ba implies that there were at least hundreds of hadith scholars in Iraq. A Successor, Ibn Sirin (d. 110), notes that when he came to Kufa he found 40,000 students of hadith (*Tabaqat al-huffaz*, 27). Bukhari's teacher, 'Affan ibn Muslim (d. 220) says that 'we came to Kufa and stayed for four months. We could have written down 100,000 hadiths in this period, but we chose only 50,000' (*al-Muhaddith al-fasil*, 559).

Allowing for some exaggeration in some of these figures, there is plenty of evidence that Kufa and Iraq in general were

full of hadiths and hadith scholars. Any understanding to the contrary is the result of reasoning backwards from particular hadith texts. Someone not familiar with the many details of religious law will see a hadith text and note that a certain scholar holds a position that goes against its apparent meaning. He then concludes from this that the scholar did not know that hadith.

There are three ways to explain why a scholar takes a position that, to another scholar, appears to go against the meaning of a hadith text: (1) that he did not know the hadith; (2) that he knew it but was not convinced that it was sound; or (3) that, knowing the hadith and knowing it to be sound, his knowledge of other texts and other relevant issues led him to interpret the hadith in a manner at variance with its immediately obvious sense. Here is an example:

Malik records the following hadith in the *Muwatta*:

Malik from
Nafi' from
'Abdullah ibn 'Umar that
the Messenger of God said:
The parties to a sale are at liberty to withdraw from the sale as long as they do not separate, except when they themselves specify a period within which such withdrawal must take place.

This chain of narration, Malik from Nafi' from Ibn 'Umar, is one of the strongest known chains of narration. Hadith scholars refer to it as the 'golden chain'. However, Malik follows this hadith up with the comment: 'We are not aware of a known limit for this, and there is no prevalent practice of it.'

Some later scholars expressed great surprise at this: Who does Malik distrust – himself, or his teacher Nafi', or the Companion Ibn 'Umar? Who has misreported this hadith?

As I just mentioned, there are three ways to explain this, the relevant one here being the third. From numerous individual hadiths, from the practice of business in Madina and reports regarding this practice, it is clear that conditional sales are legal,

but the conditions must be specific. Malik's comment was: 'We are not aware of any known limit for this...' How long will this option to withdraw remain? If two people are together for a long time, say in a boat, must they find a way to separate before the sale will be final? Of the hundreds of sales Malik must himself have witnessed and read about, he did not find that people felt the need to separate to finalize a sale.

In addition, if a person were to make a sale conditional upon something without a known limit, such a condition would be void. How could religious law itself specify such a condition?

For Malik, then, on the one hand there is this single hadith report that demands something. On the other hand, numerous other texts and established decisions in religious issues demand the opposite of what this text demands.

The reader will note that I was speaking of Abu Hanifa and the Iraqis, but the example I have chosen is that of Malik and the Hijazis! Abu Hanifa and Malik hold the same position on this issue. But because there is no hadith work clearly attributed to Abu Hanifa, it is easy, when he takes a position that goes against a well-known hadith, to claim that he did not know the hadith, or thought it was weak. With Malik, because of the *Muwatta*, these options are closed. He knows the hadith, he knows that it is sound; still he chooses to ignore the demands of this hadith. When later scholars attribute this same position to Abu Hanifa, they say that the Iraqis did not know hadiths!

A number of hadith scholars have attempted to identify the total number of hadiths that are relevant to issues of *fiqh* and come up with a figure of about a thousand. It is hard to claim that the Iraqis did not have access to the thousand hadiths with a bearing on *fiqh*, considering that even a brief collection of hadiths contains a few thousand hadiths. One would have to suppose that these Iraqis who claimed to be religious scholars had never bothered to pick up a single hadith collection.

In addition, though we have no books on hadith by Abu Hanifa himself, there is a long line of hadith scholars and

hadith critics who adhered to Abu Hanifa's school. Also, before coming to a final stand on any issue, Abu Hanifa used to discuss his position with his advanced students among whom there were a number of hadith scholars. It is therefore unreasonable to think that he was completely unaware of the hadiths relevant to issues of *fiqh*.

6. BUKHARI'S UNDERSTANDING OF HADITH AND *SUNNA*

Accusing an opponent of holding a position that goes against the Prophet's explicit words has always been a favourite ploy in the polemics between Islamic scholars of various persuasions. At the same time, in the context of Islamic religiosity, few acts are more impious than showing disregard for the Prophet and his example. At least in the first few centuries of Islam, piety and scholarship went hand in hand. It is quite common to find scholars who have sharp differences of opinion with each other on various details, but who, at the same time, acknowledge each other's piety.

One can identify a number of factors that contributed to the Hijazi–Iraqi controversy. Perhaps the most important is that the chief source of the Iraqi tradition is the Companion 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, while for the Hijazi or Madinan tradition the primary sources are the younger Companions, Ibn 'Umar, 'A'isha, and Zayd ibn Thabit. One could look for other such factors also. But it is clear that the difference between the two traditions is not that one follows the hadith and that the other rejects it.

Both the Iraqis and the Madinans considered the hadith to be one of a number of sources for discovering the *Sunna*. However, as the time of the Prophet grew more distant, hadith texts became increasingly important in establishing the *Sunna* – until one finds scholars who say that the only way to know the *Sunna* is through hadith texts.

A love of positive evidence is what makes scholars argue for a *Sunna* based exclusively on texts. The natural next step is then an attempt to found *Sunna* exclusively on the soundest texts. Since Bukhari has limited himself in the *Sahih* to only the soundest texts, his book has special importance to such literalist scholars.

The fact that the *Sahih* limits itself to recording only the soundest of sound hadiths has often led people to think that Bukhari thinks that argumentation on religious issues should be based exclusively on such hadiths. But Bukhari himself is far too subtle a thinker to be a literalist. In disputed issues he is guided both by the Maliki principle of looking at the practice of reliable scholars, and by the Hanafi principle of respect for consistency in one's positions on various issues.

For example, in the discussion on the hadith on intentions and the composition of faith (see above, pp. 31–4), I showed how Bukhari begins with Qur'an and hadith, but follows it up with references to sayings of the Companions of the Prophet, of scholars who learned Islam from these Companions, and of experts in Qur'an interpretation. Throughout the *Sahih*, Bukhari never hesitates to support his position by quoting the opinions of Companions, their students and later important scholars.

At the same time, the *Sahih* has many instances where Bukhari bases his argument on the principle that God's commands must be consistent (i.e. that they have an 'internal logic'). For example, to show that manumission (freeing a slave) is not valid without intention, he argues that manumission is a good deed. Good deeds carry rewards, and how can one get a reward without having intended to do the good deed?

Bukhari's book *Khalq af'al al-'ibad* has to do with his position on the controversy over the Qur'an being created or not. As an instance of Bukhari's respect for tradition in establishing the *Sunna* one can note that the entire first section of this book is devoted to establishing the position of reliable scholars before Bukhari on this issue. One can look at Bukhari's *al-*

Qira'at khalf al-'imam for an example of his appeal to consistency or structure in establishing the *Sunna*.

This book contains numerous arguments in which Bukhari establishes that in congregational prayer, the participants must all recite the opening prayer at the beginning. Another view is that the prayer leader will recite the opening prayer on behalf of all present. Bukhari points out that all are agreed that immediately upon starting ritual prayer, each participant must recite some prefatory sentences of praise of God. This prefatory praise is not obligatory, so even if someone doesn't recite it his prayer will be considered complete. Suppose someone arrives late for congregation, and joins ritual prayer when the leader has began reciting the opening prayer – all are agreed that this late-comer should recite those prefatory sentences of praise. Further, all are agreed that, whether the leader recites the opening prayer or each individual recites it, reciting the opening prayer itself is obligatory. If this is not done one's ritual prayer will be incomplete. Bukhari then argues that if the follower in ritual prayers can be allowed to recite these prefatory sentences while the leader is reciting the opening prayer, the follower should also be allowed to recite the opening prayer – especially since the prefatory sentences are not obligatory while the opening prayer is.

The two arguments just summarized illustrate Bukhari's concern for tradition and his concern for 'internal logic' in establishing the *Sunna*. There have always been literalists in the Islamic tradition. There is appeal in the idea that all I do must find its basis in clear texts that tell me that what I do is what God and His Prophet have preferred for me. At the same time, even among the hadith scholars there have always been many who are not willing to accord so much power to the texts alone.

In most situations, texts, tradition and the logic of religious law all support each other. But where should one go when the text points one in an unfamiliar direction? Many hadith scholars have recorded their suspicion of the text in such a situation. Tirmidhi, a major hadith scholar and one of Bukhari's most

important students, quotes a hadith in his collection and then notes the position of *fiqh* scholars that goes against the apparent meaning of the hadith. He follows this up with the statement: 'So say the *fiqh* scholars, and they know better the meanings of hadiths' (*Sunan*, hadith no. 990). Abu Dawud, another major hadith scholar and a contemporary of Bukhari, says that 'one cannot argue on the basis of hadiths which are not well-known, though they come to us on the authority of reliable leading scholars like Malik and Yahya ibn Sa'id' (*Risalat Abi Dawud*, 29).

Western academics studying Islam and literalist Muslim scholars have shared an assumption that throughout history hadith and hadith scholars have represented a tradition at odds with *fiqh* and *fiqh* scholars. With the help of some over-simplification, they would identify hadith scholars with the Hijazi approach and *fiqh* scholars with the Iraqi approach. The business of the hadith scholar has been to establish the text; the business of the *fiqh* scholar has been to derive meanings. So, the hadith scholars are seen as textual literalists – for every position they demand a text that clearly states or supports that position. The *fiqh* scholars are seen as rationalists – their positions are based on reasoning and general considerations. Where they quote a text it is only to support or adorn a view that they arrive at by reasoning.

It is certainly possible to imagine such a division in the Islamic scholarly tradition. Those who spend most of their time and energy collecting and establishing the reliability of quoted texts might well be tempted to demand primacy for the immediate and apparent meanings of the texts they collect. On the other side there might be those who wish to stand back and look at the global demands of the religion and then to fit in whatever might fit in of these texts.

On the other hand, it is also clear that the study of attitudes towards hadith and *Sunna* in this period must sift through a lot of polemical material. To be able to show that one's rival is not

following the example of the Prophet is to win the argument. Just as hadith scholars of the Hijazi persuasion tried to show that the Iraqis did not follow hadith, the Iraqis also tried to show that the Hijazi hadith scholars did not follow hadith. So, as I mentioned in the previous chapter (see p. 41) the leading Iraqi scholar and Abu Hanifa's student, Muhammad al-Shaybani, has a four volume book *Kitab al-Hujja 'ala ahl al-Madina* in which he enumerates many hadiths in which Malik's position on some issue goes against those hadiths.

One could gather together the accusations that the Iraqis and the *fiqh* scholars, and the Madinans and the hadith scholars, level at each other in their debates and take them at face value. As a result one might conclude that none of them valued hadith, and they were all inconsistent in reasoning, and that they cared little for the scholarly tradition that had preceded them. A more subtle reading of the situation would begin by noting that all parties to these debates appeal to each of these three elements in their arguments with each other. This itself indicates that hadith texts, consistency in reasoning and the scholarly tradition were all important in the eyes of the Madinans and the Iraqis, the *fiqh* scholars and the hadith scholars. Yes, it is possible that careful study might lead one to decide that one or more of these elements had more weight in the thinking of one group of scholars than it did in the other.

7. BUKHARI'S *SAHIH* AND THE 'SIX BOOKS'

The increasing importance of sound hadith texts underlined the need for a work that presented the hadiths that scholars of *fiqh* required while maintaining certain standards of reliability. Perhaps this was what led Bukhari's teacher Ishaq ibn Rahawayh to express his desire: 'Would that you composed a brief book limited to the reliably reported *Sunna* of the Prophet'.

Bukhari composed the *Sahih*, but his *Sahih* is a difficult book. Most of it is characterized by more or less striking editorial

decisions that must be deciphered with the help of many hints from the scholarly tradition. The many disciplines that Bukhari's work takes for granted are nowadays a rarity. For the modern reader the *Sahih* does too many things at the same time. It embodies his choice of hadiths to report and not to report – a choice based on issues both to do with the chain of narration, and the text being reported. Then, in either case, Bukhari has not taken it upon himself to collect all soundly reported hadiths, nor even all relevant such hadiths for a particular topic.

Bukhari's *Sahih* does challenge the expert in hadith criticism and the expert in *fiqh*. Anyone lacking that expertise might come away from the book feeling edified, but will not have grasped Bukhari's purposes in the *Sahih*. In the two centuries following Bukhari's composition of the *Sahih* a number of people worked on various aspects of it. Eventually, in the ninth century, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (773–852) wrote *Fath al-bari*, which remains the definitive commentary on the *Sahih*. He incorporated the work of these previous scholars and so made the *Sahih* comprehensible to anyone who was willing to work through it.

Bukhari's book came in an age when the text was gaining importance as the basis of argument. Over the third century, half a dozen hadith works appeared which attempted to do what Bukhari did, with slight differences of focus. These works gave a practical form to a thesis that had been percolating among the scholarly community throughout the second century. With the 'six books' at hand, there were texts to support just about any position that the *fiqh* scholars had argued. Now that the sound text defined the field of argument, the Madinans had to set aside their 'special access' to the decisions of the younger Companions, and the Iraqis had to set aside their understanding of the internal logic of religious commands. However, all was not lost. This is not the place for detail, but scholars of both schools did not find it too difficult to mould their argumentation to fit the idiom that the new, text-oriented approach demanded.

For example, Tahawi (229–321) of the Iraqis combined a dialectic approach with use of hadith texts. He would begin a chapter on an issue with hadiths that would be completely at odds with the Hanafi position on an issue. Then, little by little, he would quote hadiths that would cause one to doubt the conclusion that the first set of hadiths led to. In addition, Tahawi would provide an alternate explanation for the hadith text. After this second set of hadiths, the alternate explanation would no longer seem as far-fetched. Then Tahawi would come up with a third set of hadiths. In this way, by successive approximation, Tahawi would reach a meaning of the texts that supported the Hanafi position.

Nevertheless, the fact that Tahawi was forced to take this approach is itself evidence that the idiom had changed. Abu Yusuf's appeal to the 'logic of God's command' that we saw earlier in this chapter ('What would you say . . .?') does not work a hundred years later.

The approach to hadith called *tasnif* referred to collecting hadith topically and had been present even from the end of the first century. Thus, the two important works that were current before the six books swept them away were known as *musannaf* ('topically arranged work'). One was by 'Abd al-Razzaq and another by Ibn Abi Shayba. Bukhari's *Sahih* was the first attempt to organize material by topic in addition to limiting itself to sound texts narrated from the Prophet himself.

Bukhari's work brought together a large portion of those hadiths that had made it into the third century with the soundest possible chains of narration. However, Bukhari occasionally split these hadiths into several parts, and he often arranged them eccentrically. In addition, Bukhari's own work was too difficult even for scholars. Only an expert could properly benefit from it. Finally, Bukhari did not claim to have collected all the sound hadiths on an issue. He himself states: 'I have only mentioned sound hadiths in this book and I have left out more sound hadiths than I have included' (Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-sari*, 7). A

study of the *Sahih* itself makes it clear that he has not listed all the relevant sound hadiths for a topic. There are many hadiths not recorded in the *Sahih* that his student Tirmidhi claims are sound, quoting Bukhari's own judgement regarding these hadiths that they are sound.

Muslim ibn Hajjaj (204–61), one of Bukhari's closest students and friends, chose to limit himself to collecting sound hadiths that had to do with issues of *fiqh* and organizing them in a simple way. He felt that anyone who wanted to enter the field of hadith studies ought to begin by memorizing his book. He organized the most reliably reported hadiths in a logical way. Far from letting intricate derivations of meaning guide him, Muslim did not even include any chapter titles in his book. His book simply lists hadiths. Yes, there is an implicit organization. First there are the hadiths which apparently have to do with issues regarding faith, then follow hadiths having to do with worship and so forth.

Muslim's book is valuable because its texts meet a critical standard comparable to Bukhari's but it presents them in a far simpler, more straightforward way. People speak of Bukhari's *Sahih* and Muslim's *Sahih* as the *Sahihayn* – 'the two collections of sound hadiths'. Others also tried to compose works limited to sound hadith, but the scholarly community did not place them in the same class as the *Sahihayn*.

Beside the argument that sound texts should have a larger share in establishing the *Sunna* of the Prophet, Bukhari's work builds on the fact that *fiqh* scholars also need hadiths. Abu Dawud (202–75), eight years younger than Bukhari, gathered all the hadiths he could find that *fiqh* scholars used in their debates. He tried to avoid any hadiths that were unsound. Where he found it necessary to include such a hadith, he would indicate the problem with the hadith within the text of his book.

In a letter to the people of Makka regarding his work, he expressed his confidence that he had gathered all the hadiths that *fiqh* scholars of all inclinations use in their arguments. We

must take him to mean that he felt that he had gathered the hadiths *commonly* used by *fiqh* scholars. For, in fact, his work leaves out many hadiths scholars use in their debates on *fiqh*.

Abu Dawud's work also fulfilled an important need. But in trying to include all the hadiths that scholars used in their arguments, he had to leave the safe grounds of the strictly authenticated hadiths within which Bukhari and Muslim stay.

Tirmidhi (209–79), also a student of Bukhari's, managed to bring together three of Bukhari's concerns. He, too, focused on the hadiths that *fiqh* scholars need, but he defined his domain in reverse. In a kind of appendix to his book, he says that he has included only those hadiths on which at least some scholars have based their positions. He goes issue by issue through all the familiar chapters of *fiqh*, setting up one title for every well-known position on each issue. He mentions only a hadith or two as a sample, and then in a single sentence refers to the other relevant hadiths. His typical sentence is 'and in regard to this issue, there are also hadiths of so-and-so and so-and-so...' Then he names the scholars who have held the position that the hadith seems to support. Finally, he notes any technical problems with the hadith, relying primarily on what he has learned from Bukhari. As he himself puts it: 'I have not seen anyone in Khurasan or in Iraq anywhere near Muhammad ibn Isma'il [al-Bukhari] in knowledge of technical problems in hadiths, of dates of birth and death and travels of narrators, and of chains of narrations' (*al-'Ilal*, v. 738).

Another scholar, Nasa'i (215–303), also collected the hadiths that have to do with *fiqh*. He recorded the various narrations of a single hadith in one place and concentrated on the technical problems in the chains of narration.

Over the next two centuries these five books gained sufficient currency to be known collectively as the five sound collections of hadith. A later, sixth book, by Ibn Maja (209–273), was also mentioned. It was like the other five books in that it organized texts according to the topics of *fiqh*, maintaining

some criteria of soundness. However, it contained a number of hadiths that the other five didn't. The utility of the book was marred by the fact that Ibn Maja had included over twenty 'forged hadiths', i.e. hadiths falsely ascribed to the Prophet. One of the fields of effort of critical hadith study was to identify such texts. Ibn Maja's having included such texts in his work made his work defective in the eyes of experts.

Scholars of the third, fourth and fifth centuries paid considerable attention to each of these six books. The earliest works of this kind attempted to identify hadiths that Bukhari and Muslim had not included in their works, although these hadiths fit their criteria for soundness. Later scholars wrote commentaries, indices to help locate hadiths, and works identifying and evaluating the people in the chains of narration of these works.

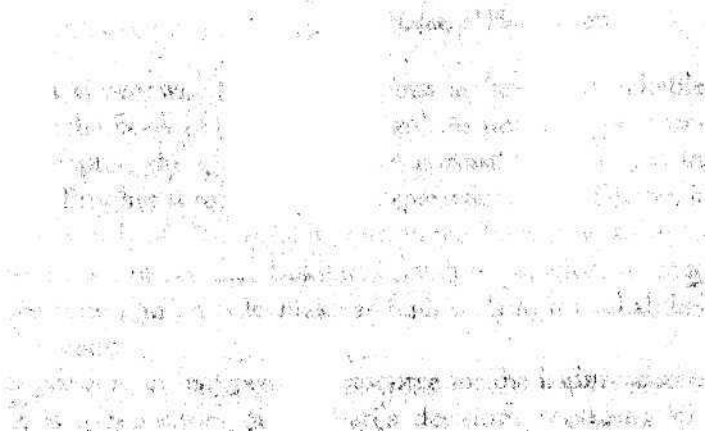
Muhammad ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi (448–507) was the first to treat all six books as a unit in an index of the hadiths in these works. Later, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Maqdisi (541–600) wrote *al-Kamal*, which discussed the narrators mentioned in these six books. Most of the subsequent compendia on narrators of hadith are based on this book. These auxiliary works and commentaries underlined the important of the six works and made them easier to use and understand.

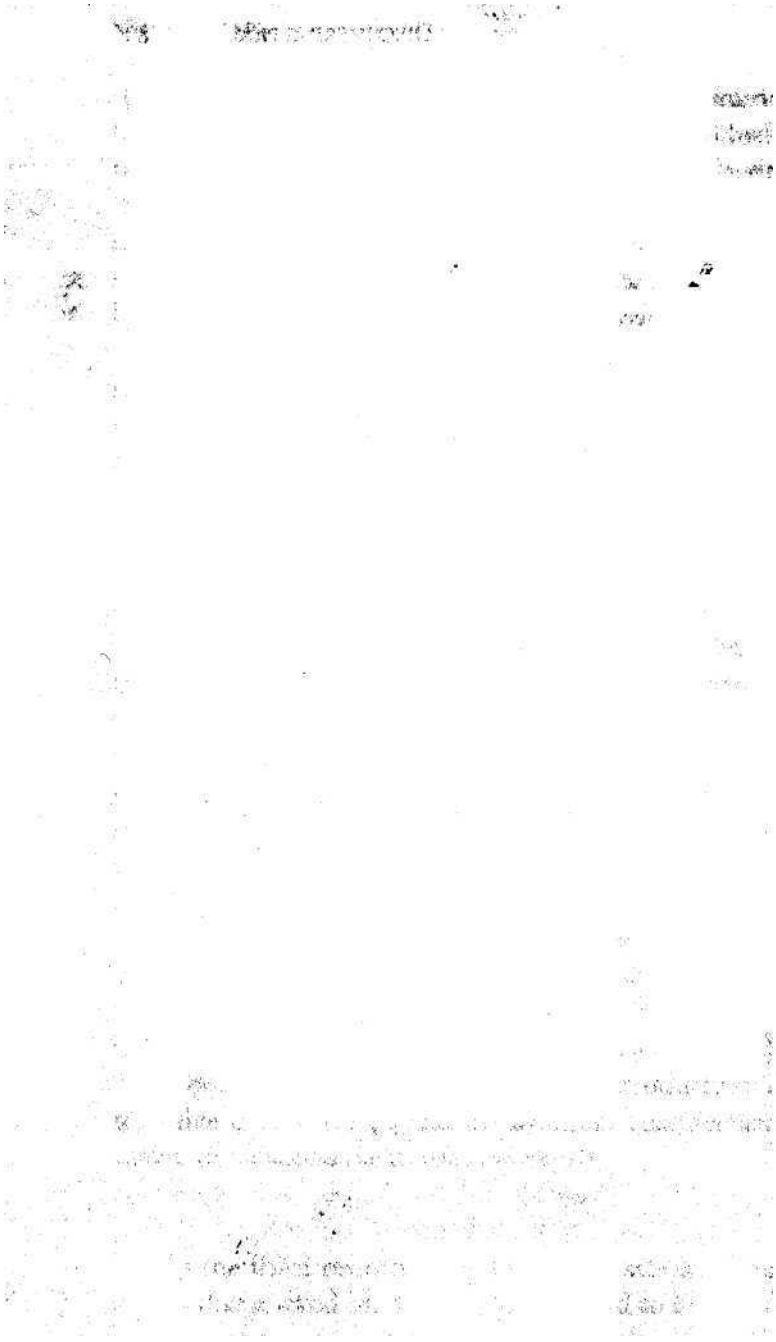
Based on an erroneous analogy with the 'canonical' Christian gospels, the literature on hadith in English language speaks of the six books as the six 'canonical' works. But the six books do not define an accepted 'canon' in contrast to a rejected 'apocrypha'. They do, however, form a very good introduction to hadith texts that deal with *fiqh*, and the wealth of commentary on them makes them accessible to the non-expert.

As the third century drew to a close, scholars had come to accept that a stand on a religious issue had to be tied directly to one text or more – either from the Qur'an or from the hadith.

It is important to understand that this victory was a gradual process. Also, it was not a victory like the victory of one enemy over the other. Rather, it was like the victory of a single voice over the many voices in the mind of a perplexed person.

The arguments of the Iraqis with the Hijazis and the arguments of hadith folk with the *fiqh* scholars often became heated. Although partisans would stress the differences, it is clear that there were many similarities in their approaches. All felt that hadith texts going back to the Prophet were important. A hadith scholar like Tirmidhi explicitly records his feeling that scholars of *fiqh* are more aware of the meanings of hadiths. Another hadith scholar, al-A'mash (d. 148) is recorded as having said to a *fiqh* scholar: 'We are but pharmacists, you *fiqh* scholars are the physicians' (*Kitab al-Thiqat*, viii. 467–8). The difference lay in the degree of importance one could give to evidence other than textual evidence. Bukhari's *Sahih* provided the impetus for the six books that collectively made it possible to demand that any position on an issue of religious law must find its support in a text.





Verifying the attribution of texts: the chain of narration

> *Bukhari said: 'I have chosen the hadiths I have included in the* Sahih *from out of 600,000 hadiths over a period of sixteen years and I have made this book my intercessor between myself and God'. Firabri says: 'I heard Bukhari saying: "I have not included a single hadith in this book without taking a bath and performing ritual prayers before doing so." '*
>
> (Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-sari*, 489)

The *Sahih* is renowned among Muslims as 'the most reliable book after the Book of God, the Qur'an'. As noted in the introductory chapter, the Qur'an does not consist of the words in which the Prophet is recounting his experience of the Divine; it is the very words of God reliably transmitted from generation to generation. So, to say that Bukhari's *Sahih* is the most reliable book after the Qur'an is to make as high a claim for reliability as can be made.

The *Sahih* is an indispensable resource for the hadith scholar since it is a repository of Bukhari's decisions regarding the

reliable versions of hadith texts, many of which are reported in dozens of versions. Those decisions are the practical application of the art of hadith criticism. They embody judgements about how reliably various narrators transmit hadiths. A scholar may base such judgements on his own experience of particular narrators or on information he received about them. Or he may derive it from comparisons of one narrator's transmission of a text with the transmission of the same text by contemporaries of that narrator. I will discuss judgements based on each type of source more fully in the first and second sections, respectively, of this chapter. The first type of source for judgement is simply a matter of information regarding a narrator. The hadith critic will have some direct experience of the people he narrates from, experience in turn narrated to later scholars. For example, the scholar might have caught a certain narrator lying. Or, he knows that a particular individual holds unorthodox views on some issue of doctrine, or that, at a certain age, a narrator's memory had started to fail him. The second source for judging the reliability of a narrator is to compare his transmission of a text with the transmission of that same text by his contemporaries. The greater the number of parallel transmissions of a text that a critic has in front of him the more reliable the results of such comparison will be. Weak memory, slips when copying, carelessness in recording and reporting – all can be the source of the error. Comparative study of parallel versions of the text will expose the error, at the same time contributing to an assessment of the qualities of the narrators involved.

Both approaches assume that one has information about a narrator – many parallel narrations, or historical information about an individual's doctrinal leanings and the like. But chains of narrations often have missing links. Sometimes there is circumstantial evidence that there is an unmentioned person in the chain of narration. Sometimes an otherwise reliable narrator narrates from an individual he never met. In the third section

of this chapter I discuss these questions of continuity in chains of narration.

1. NARRATORS: WEAK AND STRONG

As the distance from the time of the Prophet grew, the chain of narration became longer. Bukhari's *Sahih* contains just twenty-two hadiths that have only three people in the chain of narration between Bukhari and the Prophet – most of his hadiths have five or more people between him and the Prophet.

In Malik's *Muwatta* one often finds only two people between Malik and the Prophet. For example, Malik will report from (1) Nafi' who reports from (2) Ibn 'Umar who says that the Prophet did or said such and such. With such brief chains of narration Malik was in a position to pick and choose. He would not report hadiths from (1) a person generally lacking in intelligence; (2) a person who holds to an unorthodox position and is busy trying to prove it; (3) a person who lies in his daily conversations, though no one accuses him of falsely attributing sayings to the Prophet; and (4) an eminent person who is pious and prayerful but his lack of familiarity with hadiths and hadith-study makes it so that he does not know and understand the hadiths he preserves and conveys.

Malik was an expert at screening his informants. Later hadith scholars came to agree that, with the exception of four, all the narrators Malik reports from in his *Muwatta* are reliable. The criteria for screening narrators remained pretty much the same from Malik's time to Bukhari's time and onwards. However, as the number of intermediaries grew with each generation, the task of evaluating narrators became more complex. Intelligence, orthodoxy, truthfulness, and being alert to the material conveyed are qualities best examined first hand. Malik was dealing primarily with people he knew directly or with people whom his teachers knew. By Bukhari's time the names mentioned in the chains of narration were necessarily more remote. Scholars

developed a literature evaluating these narrators with a view to their expertise in narrating hadiths.

Bukhari's student, Muslim, and another near contemporary of Bukhari, Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 277), express the need for screening narrators in a simple way. They speak of three types of hadiths conveyed by three classes of narrators. The best are reports conveyed by narrators who are steady and firm in their reporting: they are free of the sort of severe differences and obvious confusion that has marred the reporting of many. Then there are reports of those who are less in control of their material. Nevertheless, their names, too, are counted among reliable narrators. Then there are good and pious people, but they have a record of making mistakes when they report hadiths. Finally there is a fourth class of people who are neither reliable nor even honest. Their hadiths are simply not worth mentioning, except in order to warn people away from them.

Bukhari's *Sahih* presents only the soundest reports from the most reliable of reliable narrators. People known for making up reports simply do not appear in the chains of narration recorded in his book. On the other hand, there was no central organization for accrediting or discrediting narrators; any hadith scholar could voice his evaluation of a narrator. As a result, one can find a negative statement or two about even the most reliable of narrators.

As we saw, Bukhari maintains the strictest standards for the hadiths presented in the text of the *Sahih*. In chapter titles his standards are just a little less strict. Ibn Hajar, in his commentary on the *Sahih*, was able to name 380 narrators whose hadiths appear in the main text of the *Sahih* and about whom some negative comment can be found in the literature evaluating narrators, and another 75 or so narrators whose names appear in the chapter titles. This is out of a total of about 1,500 narrators mentioned in the chains of narration of the hadiths in the *Sahih*. In general Bukhari has not recorded more than two or three reports from any one of these narrators who have

a blemish in their reputations. Also, Ibn Hajar's list mentions all those narrators about whom anyone has said anything negative. But, in many cases, the person criticizing the narrator was himself not reliable, and very often the negative comments were a result of a misunderstanding that later scholars have cleared up.

a. A 'worst case' among narrators

Bukhari was cautious by temperament: the whole project of collecting just the reliable reports of the Prophet indicates this caution. Nevertheless, he was just as cautious in rejecting hadiths as he was in accepting them. To take one of the severest cases in the *Sahih*, consider Asid ibn Zayd al-Jammal. Various leading hadith critics make the following comments about him:

A liar: I went to him in Baghdad and heard him relating hadiths that were all lies.
Hadith scholars are critical of him; hadith scholars have abandoned him (i.e. his narrations).
He narrates unfamiliar hadiths from reliable narrators and he steals hadiths.
His narrations are obviously weak and most of what he narrates cannot be confirmed from reliable narrators.

One does not find a single positive comment about this person as a narrator of hadith. Bukhari has narrated the following hadith from him:

'Imran ibn Maysara narrated to us,
Ibn Fudayl narrated to us,
Hushaym narrated to us from
Husayn [ibn 'Abd al-Rahman **al-Sulami], that he said,**

[Bukhari continues to say:]
Asid ibn Zayd narrated to me,
Hisham narrated to me from

Husayn [ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami], he said:
he [Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami in both chains] said,
I was with Sa'id ibn Jubayr, and he said
Ibn 'Abbas narrated to me
that the Prophet said:

The nations were brought before me. I would see a prophet walk by me with his nation. I would see another prophet walk past with a group of people. I would see another walk past with ten people. I would see another walk past with five people. I would see another walk past with five. I would see another walk past all alone. I looked and all of a sudden I saw a large mass of people. I said, 'O Gabriel, are these my followers?' He said, 'No. Look instead at the horizon'. I looked and I saw another large mass of people. He said, 'Those are your followers. Look, there are another seventy thousand in front of them: God will not take account from them, nor will they be punished'. I asked, 'Why?' He said, 'They did not use burning [cauterizing] or spells and incantations in treatment, they were not superstitious and they used to rely on their Lord'. Ukkasha ibn Mihsan [a Companion who was listening to the Prophet narrate this hadith] stood up and said 'Pray to God that He make me from amongst them'. The Prophet said, 'O God, make him from amongst them'. Then another person stood up and said 'Pray to God to make me from amongst them'. The Prophet said, 'Ukkasha has already asked for this!'

The hadith appears in four other places in the *Sahih* through three other chains of narration (see Figure 6). All the narrations of the hadith are through Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Rahman → Sa'id ibn Jubayr → Ibn 'Abbas → the Prophet.

1, 2	Musaddad	→ Husayn ibn Numayr		
3	'Imran ibn Maysara	→ Ibn Fudayl		
4	Ishaq	→ Rawh	→ Shu'ba	→ Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Rahman
5	Asiyd ibn Zayd	→ Hisham		

Figure 6

The text of the hadith is part of the reason that Bukhari was willing to include this hadith from Asid ibn Zayd. Hadith scholars are unanimous that one can relax one's critical standards when narrating hadiths that do not have any bearing on legal issues – hadiths that neither forbid nor permit things, nor express commands or injunctions.

But if Bukhari had three chains of narration for this hadith already, why did he bother with Asid ibn Zayd? A hadith critic, Ibn 'Adi, explains that Asid ibn Zayd, with all his problems, is one of the strongest narrators of the hadiths of Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami. Because Asid's narration corresponds with the narration of other reliable narrators, and he is narrating from Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Rahman, Bukhari was willing to use him as a source in one chain of narration of one text. In addition, the reader will see that Bukhari has linked two chains of narration together: the chain of 'Imran ibn Maysara (3) and the chain of Asid (5). In so doing he indicates that he is not relying on Asid's narration, but using it in conjunction with other narrations.

This kind of narrator is not at all typical in Bukhari's work. Typically, those narrators who have been criticized at all have had some negative comments made about them by one or two hadith critics, comments often based on a misunderstanding cleared up later, or the assessment of a single critic, with many others disagreeing. Where Bukhari does relax his standards, he moves the hadith of that narrator to the sides of his book. He either puts it in a chapter title, or presents it in the company of other reports of the hadith narrated by more sound narrators. Among even such cases, Asid ibn Zayd remains one of the weakest narrators I have found in the *Sahih*.

b. A confused narrator

A number of reliable narrators, in their old age, became confused in their narration of hadiths. Jarir ibn Hazim was lucky: when his sons noticed that he was becoming confused,

they restricted people's access to him and didn't let them hear hadiths from him. Others were not so lucky. Scholars would try to identify such narrators and distinguish between those students who had heard hadiths from their teacher before the beginning of his confusion and those who had heard later.

Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami was one such reliable narrator who became confused in his old age. Bukhari's sources for his hadiths are of three categories:

1 Shu'ba ibn Hajjaj, Sufyan al-Thawri, Za'ida, Hushaym al-Wasiti, Khalid al-Wasiti;
2 Husayn ibn Numayr;
3 Abu 'Awana, Abu Bakr ibn 'Ayyash, Abu Kudayna, Sulayman ibn Kathir al-'Abdi, Abu Zubayd 'Abthar ibn al-Qasim, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Ammi, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Muslim, Muhammad ibn Fudayl.

The five narrators of the first category are all known to have heard the hadiths they narrate from Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami before he became confused. Those of the third category are known to have heard after Husayn became confused. Husayn ibn Numayr is in the second category: it is not clear when he heard. As we have seen previously, Bukhari is not content to simply discard all doubtful narrations. Bukhari has picked those narrations of the third category of narrators that are consistent with narrations of other reliable narrators, while he has recorded only one hadith from the narrations of Husayn ibn Numayr.

c. *Doctrinal eccentricity*

The earliest comments that express a need for a discipline of hadith criticism are based on unease about the character and motives of the transmitter of a hadith. Where Bukhari quotes the hadith of someone who held doctrinally unorthodox views, he does so with care. Also, it is worth noting that Bukhari's objection to doctrinal eccentricity is based primarily on the potential of such eccentricity leading to bad reporting.

The chapters on doctrinal matters in the *Sahih* show that Bukhari adheres to the standard positions of hadith scholars on such matters. His work on the qualities of narrators, primarily *al-Ta'rikh al-kabir*, suggests that he allows doctrinal heterodoxy provided it does not affect the narrator's accurate reporting of hadiths. In this, he follows the tradition of earlier hadith critics.

To understand heterodoxy in Islam, we can look at the issue of how faith relates to works, an issue that has roots in some historical events. We can begin with the fact that the Prophet had no sons. So, at the time of the Prophet's death, his only possible 'heir' was his son-in-law, 'Ali. Though one of the earliest supporters of the Prophet, 'Ali was still a young man – a little over thirty – when the Prophet died. Abu Bakr became caliph on the Prophet's death, then 'Umar, then 'Uthman and then 'Ali. From the time of his caliphate (35–40) there were people who felt that 'Ali deserved more recognition, political and religious. Some felt that he should have been the first caliph, and certain extremists went so far as to claim him to be related to God, even to be God incarnate.

The lightest form of 'Ali-favouring' (*tashayyu'* in Arabic, which would translate to 'being Shi'i' in modern terms) was to consider 'Ali to be the most favoured person among the followers of the Prophet, meaning, in particular, that 'Ali was better than Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman. In this early period, the term Shi'i was reserved for this much: preferring 'Ali to the other three caliphs. For those who went beyond this, the term used was *rafidi*.

'Ali came to be caliph after some dissidents murdered 'Uthman. Dissatisfaction with how 'Ali dealt with the murderers of 'Uthman led to a second group at the other extreme from the Shi'is. These were the Kharijis who felt that 'Ali had become apostate because, by delaying the retaliation for 'Uthman's murder, he had disobeyed the Qur'an. The Kharijis were characterized by this strict adherence to the commands of religious law. They held that anyone disobeying a single command of God

became apostate. The theoretical development of Khariji thought led them to identify faith completely with works, with a corresponding development of thinking on the question of predestination. They felt that the fact that God is Just demands that we affirm freedom of will and agency for human beings, as the ground on which they are subject to God's judgement.

The opposite position on the issue of the relation of works with faith is attributed to a group called the Murji'is. This extreme – possibly a caricature drawn up as a 'straw man' by those who would argue against the position being attributed to the Murji'is – was to say that deeds were of no use, that faith alone would take one to heaven. Murji'is became identified with licentiousness. Perhaps the actual position of the Murji'is was to dissociate faith from deeds – deeds participate in validating and strengthening faith, but faith has an existence apart from deeds.

Another solution was to classify human beings into three kinds: Muslims, non-Muslims, and those who, by virtue of their deeds, are neither Muslims nor non-Muslims. Their profession of faith demands that we call them Muslims, but their deeds are the deeds of non-Muslims. The Mu'tazilis adopted this position. One cannot say that this position is in any way the identifying characteristic of the Mu'tazilis. Nor can one say that they emerged as a group or a 'school' as a result of the demand for a solution to the faith–works issue. Indeed, it is unclear at what point one is justified in beginning to speak of a Mu'tazili 'school' as such. Nevertheless, a cluster of theoretical positions did become identified with the Mu'tazilis and eventually, in the second and third centuries, one finds clear statements of theory that identify them as a school of thought. Incidentally, the Mu'tazilis of that period were also the people who held the Qur'an to be created.

These comments about the Mu'tazilis also hold for the identity or emergence of the remaining 'schools' I have mentioned. This much is clear: there were people who held to one or other

of these positions in the early period. My aim here is simply to give a taste of the kind of issues that divided the religious community at this time.

The desire to find support for one's position has often fuelled scholarship. At the same time, such desire does colour and shape one's vision, especially among the marginalized. When one heard a saying of the Prophet that appealed to one's heart, the desire to repeat it could be overpowering.

An example is the one serious blemish on the reputation of 'Abd al-Razzaq, a hadith scholar of the first rank. His book was one of the books that Bukhari's *Sahih* supplanted. 'Abd al-Razzaq was not a scholar who could hide his person or his hadiths from the light of day. The trio of Bukhari's teachers, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 'Ali ibn al-Madini, and Yahya ibn Ma'in, had all travelled to Yemen to obtain his hadiths, and had spent many months going over them with him in Yemen.

Once in a gathering of Yahya ibn Ma'in and his students, someone mentioned that Abu l-Azhar narrates the following hadith from 'Abd al-Razzaq: 'The Prophet of God looked at 'Ali and said: "You are a leader in this world, a leader in the hereafter – I love whomever you love and God loves whomever I love. Your enemy is my enemy and my enemy is God's enemy. So whoever dislikes you after me is destroyed".'

The text of this hadith is unobjectionable since many sound hadiths contain a similar subject matter. But the hadith claims, as well as the truth of its subject matter, that 'Abd al-Razzaq said that Ma'mar said that Zuhri said that 'Ubaydullah said that Ibn 'Abbas said this. A scholar of Yahya ibn Ma'in's knowledge could confidently say that neither Ma'mar, nor Zuhri, nor 'Ubaydullah, nor Ibn 'Abbas said this. On hearing it, he immediately cried out in anger, 'Who is this liar who narrates this from 'Abd al-Razzaq?' Abu l-Azhar happened to be present. He stood up and said, 'I am him'. Abu l-Azhar was known as a reliable narrator of hadiths so when Ibn Ma'in saw him he smiled and said, 'You are certainly not a liar. Someone else is at fault here'.

'Abd al-Razzaq did not dare to relate this hadith under ordinary circumstances. Ahmad ibn Hanbal was his guest for two years. However, neither he nor 'Ali ibn al-Madini nor Yahya ibn Ma'in had heard this hadith from him. It seems that one morning, when he was alone with Abu l-Azhar, 'Abd al-Razzaq was unable to restrain himself and narrated this hadith to him.

'Abd al-Razzaq did himself great harm by doing so. His reliability was held up to question repeatedly. Nevertheless, in the end the consensus was that he was a reliable narrator overall, though he had been overtaken by his Shi'i leanings in some of the hadiths he had related regarding the virtues of 'Ali.

Up into the generation of Bukhari's teachers there was a general realization that even the doctrinally eccentric could be truthful and reliable transmitters of hadith. So, when Yahya ibn Ma'in was asked about a certain narrator of hadith he said, 'He's okay, reliable'. Someone said, 'He is Shi'i'. Ibn Ma'in said, 'Shi'is can be reliable. Qadaris [those who attribute free will to humans] can be reliable' (*Su'alat Ibn al-Junayd*, 421).

The one thing even early hadith critics were unwilling to forgive is criticism of the Companions of the Prophet. The occupation of the hadith scholar is built on a trust of the Companions, and a love for them. They are the informants for the Prophet's words. One can attribute mistakes in narration to them, but doubting their religious character, their sincerity and devotion to Islam is not something these critics were willing to tolerate.

As I shall show in the next section, as a scholar's knowledge of hadiths grew he would come to wield a certain amount of power as judge over his 'teacher' in hadiths. The activity of judging the narrations of a narrator is, in itself, a religiously dubious activity. One is commanded to trust people. Discussing people's shortcomings is a major sin. Thus, one finds most books dealing with hadith criticism, and specifically books dealing with the qualities of narrators, prefaced by a section justifying the activity of the critic. The need for separating what the Prophet said from what is erroneously attributed to him is an overriding

religious need. The author of such a work will argue that for this purpose it is permissible to discuss these shortcomings of these narrators.

While justifying this activity there is an acute sense that such discussions do put one in danger. A number of early hadith scholars liken their activity to the activity of a judge. One of them said that both judges and hadith critics have been made to stand on the edge of the pit of hell. The misjudgements of a judge cause unjust harm to the person and property of the one judged, while the misjudgements of a hadith critic cause harm to the dignity and reputation of the one judged.

'Ali ibn al-Madini said: 'If you try to be a master in this field [of judging narrators] it will master you. So take help from "I think," and "I believe".' Some scholars used rather strong and colourful adjectives in expressing their indignation at narrators. Bukhari is renowned for his delicacy in criticizing narrators. Where others would use expressions like 'liar', 'a founding father of falsehood', 'his hadiths are no more than wind', the strongest words Bukhari uses are: 'There is some doubt about him', and 'hadith scholars are silent about him'. The word 'lie' figures in his judgements only when he reports someone else's judgements where he will say something like 'So-and-so has accused him of lying'.

Hadith scholars unanimously express concern for fairness and justice, and for the most part, they used their power responsibly. However, there are certain areas where later scholars have identified systematic distortions in the judgements of hadith critics. The critics themselves have been identified as severe in their judgement, or lenient or even-handed. One situation in which the judgement of a critic is often skewed is where contemporaries were on different sides of a controversy.

For example, in the previous chapter (on textual and non-textual routes to the *Sunna*), I mentioned that Malik chose not to act on the demands of the hadith that the parties to a sale are at liberty to withdraw from a sale as long as they do not

separate. When he heard this, Ibn Abi Dhi'b, a contemporary of Malik, said that Malik should be asked to repent, and if he did not do so, he should be killed as an apostate! In general when one contemporary levels such a harsh judgement at another, the many voices of reasonable observers prevail.

The early hadith critics were also quite aware of doctrinal eccentricity but are somewhat ambivalent about how to deal with it. Someone told Yahya ibn Ma'in that 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Mahdi rejects the reports of all those who hold unorthodox views on doctrinal matters. Yahya ibn Ma'in laughed at this. He listed the names of some very important narrators of hadith who had held unorthodox doctrinal views and asked him what 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Mahdi would do with them.

Of Bukhari's three main teachers, Ahmad ibn Hanbal suffered directly in the inquisition surrounding the issue of the creation of the Qur'an. One would expect him to be the harshest in his judgement of the unorthodox. Some severe judgements are indeed attributed to him. For example, one finds narrators who are criticized for being 'among the waverers'. These are people who refused to take a stand on whether the Qur'an was created or not.

Some of Ahmad ibn Hanbal's followers certainly gave great importance to doctrinal orthodoxy and refused to narrate hadiths from the unorthodox. As we saw in the way Bukhari was treated in Nishapur, insistence on orthodoxy sometimes reached the level of a regular inquisition. It is ironic that Ahmad ibn Hanbal's followers ended up instituting an inquisition as harsh as the inquisition that their leader himself had to suffer.

Books evaluating narrators are comprehensive compendia enabling one to find any accolades or condemnations one might hope to find. Bukhari himself had this heterogeneous material in front of him when he began his study of hadith. Yet, even by the early age of eighteen, he had developed a sense for the delicate nature of the work that he was doing. In applying doctrinal criteria to screening narrators Bukhari adopted the more gentle

approach of his teachers Yahya ibn Ma'in and 'Ali ibn al-Madini. His own stand on doctrinal issues is very much the stand of other hadith scholars, but he was not willing to reject narrations simply because of their narrator's doctrinal eccentricity. His even-handed approach contributed to making *al-Tarikh al-kabir*, the book on hadith narrators he had written in his youth, the basis for later works judging the qualities of hadith narrators.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HADITH CRITICAL METHOD

There is evidence from the earliest times of concern for checking the accuracy of reports about the Prophet. Various incidents attest to this from the time of 'Umar, who became caliph two and a half years after the Prophet's death. However, the problem of documentation in 'Umar's day had taken on quite a different nature and shape by Bukhari's time. I have already made some comments on the history of the reporting of hadiths. The art of hadith criticism has a parallel history.

For 'Umar, checking the documentation of a hadith was simple. If he himself had not heard the words a person was quoting from the Prophet, he would ask that person to present a witness in support of his claim. Another situation was where a person was attributing to the Prophet something that, as 'Umar saw it, went against the Qur'an.

In one such case 'Umar said that he would not leave a command in God's book on the word of someone who might be reporting accurately, or she might be mistaken, who might have remembered correctly, or she might have forgotten what was said. Had the reporter of the hadith been a close Companion of the Prophet, well known for understanding the Prophet and the way of life he brought, 'Umar would have faced more of a problem. As the reporter did not have a reputation of

sufficient weight to carry the burden of the matter she reported, 'Umar was able to dismiss the report.

Generally, at this time the accuracy of hadiths was checked only where one was in doubt. In most cases, both parties to a conversation knew the words being quoted, and knew them to be the words of the Prophet – often there was no need to explicitly ascribe them to the Prophet. Umar's caliphate ended in 24 AH. The nuclear community he had maintained in Madina began to disperse. The period that followed was the period of the younger Companions and then of their specialist students. As the first century ended and the second began, the last of this generation of specialists died.

At this point, the caliph ('Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz) asked some scholars to write down what they knew, fearing that knowledge 'might vanish' with the death of those who possessed it. The generation of people who learned from this generation of specialists are a pivotal generation. In a magisterial summary of the transmission of hadiths of the Prophet, Bukhari's teacher 'Ali ibn al-Madini states: 'Reflecting upon hadiths, I saw that chains of narration turn on six people: Zuhri (d. 124) in Madina, 'Amr ibn Dinar (d. 126) in Makka, Qatada (d. 117) and Yahya ibn Kathir (d. 132) in Basra, Abu Ishaq al-Sabi'i (d. 127) and al-A'mash (d. 148) in Kufa'.

Madina	Zuhri	50–124
Makka	'Amr ibn Dinar	46–126
Basra	Qatada	60–117
	Yahya ibn Abi Kathir	? –132
Kufa	Abu Ishaq al-Sabi'i	32–127
	al-A'mash	61–148

Figure 7. Students of the specialists: the pivotal generation (Births around 30 to c. 60; deaths from around the 120s.)

Figure 7, shows the six scholars of this pivotal generation. Ibn al-Madini goes on to name twelve scholars who acquired the knowledge of these six and composed topically arranged

collections of hadiths (Figure 8). Next he mentions the class of people among whom were his own teachers (Figure 9).

'Ali ibn al-Madini and two of his contemporaries, Yahya ibn Ma'in and Ahmad ibn Hanbal were Bukhari's most important teachers. When he finished writing his *Sahih*, these are the scholars whom he chose as reviewers. They were remarkable for their comprehensive knowledge of the hadiths being transmitted in their day. Among their teachers, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Mahdi and Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan were famous for the same vast knowledge of the corpus of transmitted hadiths.

Madina	Malik	93–179
	Muhammad ibn Ishaq	85–152
Makka	Ibn Jurayj	86–150
	Sufyan ibn Uyayna	107–198
Basra	Sa'id ibn Abi 'Aruba	70–157
	Hammad ibn Salama	c. 89–167
	Abu Uwana	90s–175
	Shu'ba	82–160
	Ma'mar	95–153
Kufa	Sufyan al-Thawri	97–161
	Wasit Hushaym	104–183
Syria	Awza'i	88–157

Figure 8. Authors of topical collections of hadith
(Births c. 90–110; deaths mostly in the 150s to 170s)

Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan	120–198
Yahya ibn Zakariyya ibn Abi Za'ida	119–182
Waki' ibn al-Jarrah	129–197
'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak	118–181
'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Mahdi	135–198
Yahya ibn Adam	130s–203

Figure 9. The generation of Ibn al-Madini's teachers
(Births c. the 120s to 130s; deaths c. the 180s and 190s)

'Ali ibn al-Madini relates that when he entered Kufa he began careful study of the hadiths of A'mash. Going through the hadiths of various students of A'mash he was able to gather together a considerable collection of A'mash's hadiths. When he came to Basra he mentioned his interest in A'mash's hadiths to 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Mahdi. Ibn al-Mahdi told him: 'Let me dictate thirty of A'mash's hadiths to you which you wouldn't have'. He not only knew A'mash's hadiths, his knowledge of the sources of A'mash's hadith was complete enough to allow him to guess which of them Ibn al-Madini would not have been able to locate.

In another such incident, 'Ali ibn al-Madini asked 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Mahdi to show him his copy of a collection of the hadiths that 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak had from Ma'mar from Hisham. Ibn al-Mahdi said, 'Why don't I just dictate those hadiths to you which you wouldn't have?' Then, he dictated just four hadiths to Ibn al-Madini.

The person listening to the hadiths of a hadith scholar would begin as a student. However, as he grew in knowledge and expertise, he would become his teacher's judge. Having heard a hadith from, say, six contemporaries, each of whom was a student of a certain narrator, the hadith scholar would be in a position to pass judgement on the seventh contemporary he would go to. Some of the most useful material in the study of hadiths is the result of such comparative study of the students of a narrator. For example, Yahya ibn Ma'in says: 'The best narrators from Abu Ishaq al-Sabi'i are Sufyan al-Thawri and Shu'ba. They are better than Zuhayr and Isra'il. Amongst themselves, Zuhayr and Isra'il are about the same.'

These brief assessments represent a summary of a comparative study of hundreds of hadiths. For example, once Ahmad ibn Hanbal said that Malik was the soundest narrator of Zuhri's hadiths while Ibn al-Madini felt that Sufyan ibn Uyayna was the strongest narrator of Zuhri's hadiths. Ibn Hanbal was able to show twenty mistakes in Sufyan ibn Uyayna's narrations of Zuhri's

hadiths, while there were only three mistakes in Malik's narrations from Zuhri. Comparison can disclose mistakes in the narrations of almost all narrators. Sufyan al-Thawri, a contemporary of Malik, said: 'Almost no narrator is able to escape making a mistake or two. But, if the major part of a narrator's hadiths shows him to be reliable, then he is reliable. If the major part of his narrations contains mistakes, he will be discredited.'

Comparison of the many narrations of a text was to be the foundation of the science of hadith criticism. The broad outlines of this science are apparent in the work of Bukhari's teachers 'Ali ibn al-Madini, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and Yahya ibn Ma'in. Ibn al-Madini was a prolific writer but today only a few of his brief works remain – one of them contains the survey of the entire field of hadith literature that I have quoted above. Scholars of up to five centuries ago mention having seen some of his larger works, so there is hope that perhaps more of his works may yet be found.

Ahmad ibn Hanbal's work is in print and contains a little less than 30,000 hadiths. Another one of their contemporaries, Ishaq ibn Rahawayh, also wrote a work with a similar organization. Although we now have only fragments of this work, it seems to have been of the same size.

The hadith collections of this period are arranged according to the chain of transmission – a reflection of the interest in comparative studies of the many transmissions of a hadith text. Two generations earlier, hadiths works were usually arranged by topic.

The work done in the generation of Bukhari's teachers was what made Bukhari's own work possible. His teachers and their teachers began the detailed development of the field. Bukhari himself and his students were pioneers in application. Bukhari, his contemporaries, and his students used the results of their teachers' studies to produce collections that brought the number of hadiths down to a manageable size by restricting their collections according to various criteria. The first organized statements of the

principles of hadith criticism began appearing in the generation of Bukhari's students. Then, the detailed articulation of the principles of hadith criticism in books devoted to the subject took up the latter part of the third and the whole of the fourth centuries.

3. CONTINUITY IN CHAINS OF NARRATION

As the length of the chain of narration grew, hadith scholars came to demand more and more precise identification of the claims embodied in the chain of narration. Consider the following hadith from Bukhari's *Sahih:*

'Abdullah ibn Yusuf *told us*
Malik informed us from Nafi' from
'Abdullah ibn 'Umar *that*
the Messenger of God said:
Whoever buys a date tree after it has been pollinated, its fruit [from that pollination] will belong to the seller, unless the buyer specifically includes that fruit in the deal.

The chain of narration preceding the text can be understood as the academic apparatus supporting the quotation. To understand the ways in which continuity can be questioned, consider the following eight statements:

1 'Religion is the opium of the masses.'
2 'Marx said that religion is the opium of the masses.'
3 ' "Marx said that religion is the opium of the masses" (in *Quotes for All Occasions*, by Mr Party-Goer, NoMan Press, Chicago, 1997).'
4 'It was Marx's view that religion is the opium of the masses.'
5 'In a private conversation Marx said that religion is the opium of the masses.'
6 'My grandfather (1850–1912) told me that in a private conversation Marx had expressed his view that "Religion is the opium of the masses".'
7 'My grandfather (1850–1912) said that he had heard Marx say "Religion is the opium of the masses".'

8 'My grandfather (1850–1912) told me that he had heard Marx say "Religion is the opium of the masses".'

a. Dangling chains

In (1) there is no hint that the words are not the speaker's own opinion. However, an educated person will realize that the speaker is quoting an opinion commonly ascribed to Karl Marx. In (2) the ascription to Marx is explicit, but it is not clear how the speaker came to know that Marx said this: there is no reference. Statement (3) suggests that the speaker does not really know that Marx himself said this: he is relying on a third source that claims to have evidence that this is Marx's saying. Statement (4) is somewhat like (2) in that there is no external reference, but perhaps one could say the speaker has taken explicit responsibility for attributing this saying to Marx.

Statement (5) quotes a conversation with Marx. However, the fact that the speaker is alive today makes it obvious that Marx's conversation was not with him, so some intermediate source is missing. Note that while the speaker can be faulted for bad scholarship, there is no element of dishonesty here since we know the dates for both the speaker and Marx.

Adapting the hadith quoted above to the pattern of Statement (5) we would have: Bukhari said that he heard 'Abdullah ibn Yusuf say that he heard Malik report that 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar said that the Prophet said...' Now, Malik was born in 93 while 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar died in 74. So it is clear that Malik never met 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar. This kind of chain of narration is known as a 'dangling' (*mursal*) chain of narration.

Had someone reliable quoted Malik as saying 'I *heard* 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar say...' the report would have been proven false. More important, Malik would have been proven to be a liar and any report containing his name would become suspect. As it is, the words 'Malik reports that 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar said' do not contain any claim that Malik actually heard 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar. Birth and death dates make it clear that

Malik did *not* actually hear this report from 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar. If one wanted to find fault, all that one could say is that this is shoddy referencing.

b. Deceptive reference

Statements (6), (7) and (8) are the most interesting, and the ones that ask for careful attention. Only (8) contains complete documentation: the speaker says, that his grandfather 'told me', and the grandfather says, 'he heard' Marx say what he said. The speaker could be lying, or his grandfather could be, or both – but the claims being made in this report are clear.

Statements (6) and (7) also give the appearance of complete documentation but it is a deceptive appearance. In (6) it is not clear whether the grandfather had actually heard the private conversation in which Marx said what he said. He might be relying on another person who had reported that conversation to him. Or worse, he might simply be conveying an unauthenticated report, somewhat like a rumour: 'It was quite well known that...'! In (7) there is the same deceptive appearance of complete documentation. Here the grandfather is explicit, but it is not explicit whether the speaker himself heard this from the grandfather, or saw it in his journal or just has it from the common knowledge within the family.

The wording of (6) and (7) leads one to think that perhaps all the references are in order. There is no circumstantial evidence to make us doubt this. But if the speaker were known to practise academic deception, one would want to nail him down in each case. One would ask: 'Did you hear your grandfather say...? Did your grandfather hear Marx say...?'

Early experts of hadith criticism had identified scholars who practised this kind of academic deception. A dangling chain also involves a dropped link: Malik reports that 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar said something, while actually Malik *had heard Nafi' saying* that 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar had said it. There is no deception involved when it is clear that the link has been dropped. It

would have been deception if Malik and 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar had been contemporaries and Malik could have heard the report directly from 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar. Then, if in addition we know from experience that Malik has a history of practising this kind of deception, we would demand that Malik explicitly say that he heard the report from 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar.

The term for this kind of deception is *tadlis*, and the practitioner is known as a *mudallis*. The most common and dangerous reason for *tadlis* was poor scholarship. An otherwise honest and reliable scholar would hear a hadith from a narrator known to be weak. However, something in the hadith appealed to him – perhaps its encouragement to piety, perhaps its support for a position the scholar favoured. Then, convinced that the substance of the hadith report was correct, he would report the hadith on his own authority, dropping the intermediate weak hadith narrator. Using ambiguous wording in relaying the source of the report would save him from actually lying.

c. Concealed dangling chains and deceptive references

The problem is ambiguous wording that fails clearly to specify that the narrator himself heard the report he is narrating. Dates of birth and death can make it clear that we have a dangling chain. The previous record of a narrator known for concealing his references can disqualify the report from consideration as another possible instance of a concealed reference. But consider the situation where these three combine – a report with ambiguous wording (1) from contemporaries (2) with no previous record of concealing references (3). How do we know that the report is one that the narrator actually heard from the person from whom he is narrating? There are a number of different opinions on this issue.

Muslim, a student of Bukhari, a famous hadith expert, has argued vehemently that, for a narrator who has no record of concealing references and who reports from a contemporary, any ambiguous wording will be taken as indicating that he

actually heard the hadith. To doubt his having heard this hadith is paranoia. Bukhari and his teacher 'Ali ibn al-Madini say that as long as we know of the two having met at some time we will ignore the possibility of a hidden dangling chain.

d. Dangling chains and early hadith scholars

Hasan al-Basri was born in 21 AH. His name is synonymous with piety in the first generations of Islam. He spent much of his life in the early Islamic campaigns in the company of dozens of Companions. But there is a problem with his narration of hadiths. He clearly met numerous Companions. However, there are many hadiths that he narrates from certain Companions whom he did meet, but from whom he did not hear those specific hadiths. He heard them from someone who heard it from the Companions in question. Instead of naming his source, Hasan would drop the source and refer the hadith to the name of the Companion directly.

In fact, Hasan would sometimes quote the Prophet directly! When one of his students asked him about this, he said: 'Listen, my man. I do not lie and I was not lied to. In a certain campaign in the area of Khurasan there were three hundred of the Companions of the Prophet with me. They would lead the prayers and recite sentences from the Qur'an...'

One can sense Hasan's indignation that a student is asking him to name his sources. He is quoted as saying that when he would hear a hadith from four or more of the Companions he would forego mentioning their names and would attribute the hadith directly to the Prophet.

Another very reliable narrator of this early period is Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab. He was born during 'Umar's caliphate but did not see him. Even so, he is known as the custodian of 'Umar's knowledge. When he grew up he put himself to finding out all he could about 'Umar. Eventually he had such knowledge of 'Umar's decisions that 'Umar's son, 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, would sometimes ask him about his own father's views.

Ibn al-Musayyab would also often quote Companions he had never met, and he too would quote the Prophet directly. However, Ibn al-Musayyab is unique in that later scholars are all satisfied that every hadith that Ibn al-Musayyab has narrated through a dangling chain can also be found reported with complete documentation of all the narrators.

As Ibn al-Musayyab specialized in 'Umar's hadiths, Ibrahim Nakha'i specialized in the knowledge of the Companion 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. Ibrahim had never seen him. However, he spent much of his life with the half a dozen or so specialist students of Ibn Mas'ud in Kufa. In this way, he too would quote 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud directly, without bothering to name his informants.

Again, when a student asked him about this he explained that if he had heard something attributed to Ibn Mas'ud from a sufficient number of sources for him to be satisfied that Ibn Mas'ud had actually said it, he would forego mention of the names of his informants. Thus, he would attribute the words directly to Ibn Mas'ud on his own responsibility. However, if he was unsure about something he would name his informants and place the responsibility on them.

There are numerous other examples of early scholars whose proximity to the source and thorough knowledge of it made them feel that there was no harm if they did not precede every report with the full documentation of how it had reached them. Those situations where the chain of narration is clearly incomplete provide no problem from the point of view of later scholars. The problem arises where these otherwise reliable scholars narrate from contemporaries and it is not clear whether they actually heard the specific report directly from the source they mention or whether there is a hidden intermediary.

Although a hadith reported through a dangling chain is itself weak, the reputation of the narrator of such a report will not suffer. However, if a reporter is caught practising academic deception, by the standards of the later scholars this is a blemish on his record. Then the later scholars would only accept those

of his hadiths that contain words that explicitly indicate that he had heard the hadith directly from the person he mentions in the chain of narration.

Birth and death dates are relatively objective criteria that are available to everyone. However, bear in mind the audience to whom the hadith scholar is narrating a hadith. It is quite possible that the scholar's audience would be fully aware that the scholar had never met the person he was naming as his informant. In other words, *in the context of that gathering*, there was no deception. Later hadith critics who were not fully aware of the biography of this scholar might feel that they were being deceived.

e. Muslim's wrath

The vehemence of Muslim's attack on Bukhari on this issue has contributed much to making the debate on concealed dangling chains one of the most celebrated in the field of hadith criticism. In his anger, Muslim does not even want to name those who hold the view he disputes. He attributes it to 'some people who lay false claim to the science of hadith...' and goes on to refute their position with great passion.

A recent scholar, Khalid Mansur 'Abdullah, has shown that careful study of the positions of Bukhari and Muslim makes it clear that in practical application the result of the theoretical difference is not so great. In the case of a possible concealed dangling chain, there is a point in the chain of narration at which there might be a break. Bukhari demands that one show positive evidence that the narrator on one side of that point had heard at least one hadith directly from the narrator above him. Muslim says that it is enough that the narrator suspected of having concealed a reference has no such history of concealment – one need not provide an actual instance of his having heard from the narrator above him.

Khalid Mansur 'Abdullah has compared the chains of narration that Bukhari has used with those that Muslim has used. He

finds that there are only twelve chains that Muslim has used while Bukhari would reject them on the grounds that there is no evidence of a single instance of the narrator below having heard a hadith from the narrator above him.

Muslim's concern is valid. He is as concerned as Bukhari is to record only the soundest of hadiths. However, he feels that Bukhari is introducing arbitrary conditions into the process of evaluating hadiths. As a result many sound hadiths will be rejected for no good reason. That said, the vehemence with which Muslim has attacked Bukhari's position remains an enigma.

4. BUKHARI AND HADITH CRITICISM

Bukhari's *Sahih* is the culmination of at least three generations of hadith scholars' attempts to develop a critical apparatus to evaluate the authenticity of hadiths. In gathering an extensive corpus of variant versions of hadith texts, Bukhari benefited from the encyclopedic collections of the hadith collectors among his teachers.

He learned the methods of hadith cricisim from Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Yahya ibn Ma'in and 'Ali ibn al-Madini. These three had, in turn, learned from 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Mahdi and Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan. These two had carried on the tradition of Shu'ba, Malik, and Sufyan al-Thawri. There was a vast corpus of detailed knowledge on various narrators being transmitted in this way. But, even more important, these three generations of scholars participated in the development of the comparative method to evaluate narrators and chains of narration. Bukhari benefited particularly from the broad vision of 'Ali ibn al-Madini, to whom later hadith scholars gave the title, 'the philosopher amongst the hadith scholars'.

Bukhari was uniquely endowed for the task he accomplished. The generations before him had developed the analytical tools and collected the corpus of hadiths. These vast collections called for someone to pare them down and come up with

a brief collection, a smaller corpus, of the most reliable hadiths from among them. Bukhari was the man for this task.

His works drew both criticism and commentary. The responses to the criticisms make it easy for the non-expert to follow Bukhari's thinking. Much of the criticism has to do with Bukhari's choice to include or exclude hadiths. Bukhari made it clear that he did not claim to have included all sound hadiths in his work. There are many perfectly sound hadiths that Bukhari chose to exclude, with the natural consequence that his choice cast suspicion on the soundness of the hadiths he excluded.

One of Muslim's teachers, Abu Zur'a voiced this concern upon seeing Muslim's book. He was angry that Muslim had introduced a new problem into the field. Now, instead of evaluating a hadith by its chain of narration, they would criticize a perfectly sound hadith simply because Muslim had chosen not to include it in his book. Although Abu Zur'a expressed his anger at Muslim, Bukhari's work gave rise to the same problem.

Thus, one direction of effort after Bukhari was to 'complete' his work. A class of books attempts to collect hadiths that Bukhari had left out although they meet Bukhari's standards. Another class of scholars compiled their own collection, limiting themselves only to the soundest of sound hadiths in emulation of Bukhari. Many tried, but no one except Muslim was able to come close.

Another direction of effort was to criticize specific hadiths and specific narrators as not being fit for mention in Bukhari's work. The *Sahih* contains a little more than 7,500 hadiths. Subtracting repeated texts, there are a little more than 2,500 hadiths. Of these, scholars have criticized 78. Here, too, the criticism is not that these hadiths are not sound, merely that these hadiths do not meet the highest levels of soundness, which Bukhari's criteria in the rest of the book demand. Finally, in many of these criticisms, later scholars have judged Bukhari's position to be stronger than that of his critics.

Similarly, the *Sahih* contains a little less than 1,750 narrators. Of these, hadith experts have made negative comments on less than 400. Many of these comments are unjustified. Some are justified but, as we saw in the example of Asid ibn Zayd (above, pp. 94–5), Bukhari has used the hadiths of these narrators as support for the main narration of texts from reliable narrators.

In the very end, there is no doubt that Bukhari might have made some mistakes both in his choice of hadiths and in the choice of narrators. The small number of texts and narrators that later scholars have been able to criticize is a tribute to his expertise.

Bukhari did not write any explicit treatise on the theory of hadith criticism. But one can follow Bukhari's practice of hadith criticism with the help of later commentaries. Though the hadith critical method was developed in the second century, hadith scholars of that period were not fond of expounding theory. The introduction to his hadith compilation by Muslim (a student of Bukhari's) is one of the first sustained works on the principles of hadith criticism. Although brief, it refers to many of the issues that occupied the attention of later scholars, who wrote more comprehensive works.

Another of Bukhari's students, Tirmidhi, incorporated many of Bukhari's judgements regarding specific hadiths in the body of his collection of hadith. In addition, Tirmidhi appended an extensive work on hadith criticism to that collection. This is the first work with a good discussion of a significant range of the topics that later came to comprise the field of hadith criticism. So we see that two of Bukhari's students wrote the inaugurating texts in this field.

6

Conclusion

> *Muhammad ibn Sulayman ibn Faris said: I heard Bukhari say: 'I dreamt I saw the Prophet and it was as if I was standing in front of him driving flies away from him with a fan in my hand. I asked a dream interpreter about this. He told me that I would drive falsely attributed hadiths away from him. This is what prompted me to write the* Sahih'.
>
> (Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-sari*, 7)

Early Islamic scholarship shows a peculiar lack of interest in the biographical details of the life of the Prophet. Dates are hard to come by. Even more difficult to explain, there are differences of opinion among scholars regarding even the sequence in which various important events in the life of the Prophet occurred.

This has led some modern scholars to the view that interest in the Prophet himself is a later development – perhaps of the second century, when the first full-length biography of the Prophet appeared and attempted to put the events of his life in a sequential order.

The early scholars' lack of interest in the biographical details of the Prophet's life is evident. It is also evident that a large group of individuals around the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century did devote their lives to identifying the way in which the Prophet did things and then following him in this. There is so much independent and mutually corroborating evidence in the literature of the second century attesting to the existence of such a group of people that denying it tasks the imagination.

Both facts make sense if we see that those in the immediate company of the Prophet and the generation after them had an overpowering interest in the Prophet but not in his biography. As the revelation confirmed it to him, the man presented himself to his people as their prophet and his sincere followers followed him as a prophet. He told them of an unseen God who had control over the universe, he spoke of the pleasures and pains in a life to come after death, and he called them to ways of demonstrating one's allegiance to this God in everyday life. Those who followed such a man would certainly have loved him and wanted to know all about him. Nevertheless, if he was successful in his mission, the *primary* interest of his followers would not be in recording his date of birth and death. Rather, they would be interested in recording what this man said about how to please the God who controls all, about the conditions of the life to come in the hereafter, and about how to live this life in order to secure contentment in the next.

The Qur'an states: 'Say (O Prophet): If you love God, follow me and God will love you'. Understanding the man as a prophet, the way in which he did anything becomes crucial. That sentence of the Qur'an understood in this light points the way to two very important intellectual projects that constitute the framework for the intellectual efforts of the second century: how one should preserve the ways of life of the Prophet, and how one should document them.

Bukhari's *Sahih* marks a watershed in the history of both of these projects.

1. CAPTURING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WAYS OF THE PROPHET

The second century opened with a concern that the way of life the Prophet had taught and exemplified should be 'captured'. When a large number of the Companions were still living, many things that were common knowledge about the Prophet could be left unsaid. However, the younger Companions lived long enough to see the need to make such things explicit. It is these younger Companions who preserved much of the knowledge we have today about the Prophet. Some of them were far-sighted enough to gather around themselves a number of younger pupils who lived with them for decades, learning from them what they had learned from the Prophet. Most of these specialist pupils of the younger Companions died in the final decade of the first century and the first decade of the second.

Thus, the second century opens with a number of statements indicating a general concern that the knowledge about the ways of the Prophet be 'captured' – lest it die away with the passing of those who had it. A number of groups of scholars espousing a number of ways of approaching this project emerged.

In the first part of the second century scholars engaged in collecting hadiths were not definitely aligned with any one style of solution to this problem. However, as the century progressed, hadith scholars came increasingly to be identified with a specific thesis regarding this problem. The strongest form of that thesis is that each stand on a religious issue must be tied directly to one or more texts – either from the Qur'an or from the hadith. Further, the strength of documentation of that text must participate in the strength of the religious position tied to it. This is the thesis that frames Bukhari's work.

The authority of textual evidence in deciding religious issues had been present from the earliest days, but Bukhari's *Sahih* helped bring it to prominence. Bukhari's contemporary Abu Dawud, younger than him by eight years, and then two students of Bukhari's, Muslim and Tirmidhi, composed books similar to Bukhari's. Before the third century came to a close, a sixth such work had been written.

Each of the six works has a style and focus peculiar to itself. However, isolating the texts that form the basis of religious argument gave at least implicit impetus to the textual thesis. Initially, there had been a certain ambiguity in the Islamic scholarly tradition about the function of what was later to be known as the 'hadith text' in deciding religious issues. Whatever Bukhari's own stand regarding that function, his *Sahih* along with the other five books provided practical support to one resolution of this ambiguity: each stand on a religious issue must be tied directly to one or more texts, and the strength of documentation of that text must participate in the strength of the religious position tied to it. After these six works, people taking other paths to understanding religious issues would be forced to contend much more seriously with the textual evidence in any religious matter.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF HADITH STUDIES AND HADITH CRITICISM

The other major intellectual project of the second century had to do with providing documentation for reports about the Prophet's words and deeds, and with evaluating such documentation. In this project Bukhari's work practically holds the position of a summary and a conclusion. This is because of his expertise in analysing the documentation of hadiths, but also because he came when he did in the history of this project.

Throughout the second century there were different positions on how one should use hadith texts and what their place should be in constructing a normative argument. But, especially

as the century progressed, all were concerned that the words and the deeds of the Prophet should be reported and transmitted accurately.

The century opened with the deaths of the specialist pupils of the younger Companions. Already their students, the 'pivotal generation', had begun to encounter people like Shu'ba who would insist on full and explicit documentation of claims regarding what the Prophet said or did. The generation of Shu'ba and Malik (the generation of 'the authors of topical collections') had collected hadiths and sayings from different sources and were aware that all the things being ascribed to the Prophet were not of equal weight.

The next two generations, that of Ibn al-Madini's teachers and that of Ibn al-Madini himself, saw this search for documentation intensify. With hundreds of narrations of a single hadith text in hand, these scholars were able to develop methods of comparing versions of a narration in order to evaluate the quality of its narrators. This method of evaluating the documentation supporting a text was a craft. History has shown that Bukhari was without doubt one of the most skilful practitioners ever of this craft. Even with the benefit of hindsight, others trying to match him were not able to do so. With great effort, later scholars were able to identify a handful of places where Bukhari might have made mistakes of judgement – however, those looking for these mistakes, made far more mistakes than they were able to find!

Bukhari's work is a summary of the third-century project of documenting hadiths and evaluating this documentation. But his work is not a summary in the sense that he collected all the sound hadiths available. Rather, Bukhari provided a collection of hadiths with such sound documentation that many centuries of hadith experts after him have been unable to find fault with them. The *Sahih* was a practical demonstration of the power of the methods of the hadith scholars in evaluating the documentation of hadiths.

Bukhari wrote no manuals describing the rules of hadith criticism. But his work summarized the hadith-critical insights of three generations of hadith scholarship. Scholars of the fourth and fifth centuries wrote manuals of hadith criticism describing what one must know to practise the art, and formulated rules and principles for distinguishing sound and weak hadiths. Bukhari's work was simply a magisterial demonstration of the art they would try to describe.

7

Further study

I heard Abu Zayd al-Mirwazi saying, 'I was sleeping [in Makka] between the corner of the Ka'ba and the place where Abraham stood to construct the Ka'ba when I saw the Prophet in a dream. He said to me, 'O Abu Zayd, how long are you going to study Shafi'i's book? When are you going to study my book?' I said, 'O Messenger of God, which is your book?' He said, 'The Sahih *of Muhammad ibn Isma'il'.*

(Ibn Hajar, *al-Hady al-sari*, 489)

Bukhari scholarship is still quite alive. Scholars continue to make significant and original contributions to understanding Bukhari's work, although none of this work is in Western languages. As such, it is hard to guide the reader to further reading in English on Bukhari. Academic and non-academic literature produced on Bukhari in the West tells us little about Bukhari.

In non-Western languages there is considerable literature on Bukhari. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (773–852) has written a remarkably comprehensive commentary on Bukhari's *Sahih*. In this single work Ibn Hajar has gathered together most of the work

of scholars before him. For the purposes of most readers this single work is quite enough. The introductory volume, entitled *al-Hady al-sari*, itself provides most of the material one needs to study Bukhari's *Sahih*. *Fath al-bari* then continues as a hadith by hadith commentary on the entire *Sahih*. (Much of this study has been based on *al-Hady al-sari*.)

The *Sahih* has been translated into English. I do hope that this book makes it clear that one cannot really understand what Bukhari was doing simply by reading a translation of his book. Bukhari is a complex thinker, and the field of his effort is itself quite complex. Although I would like to suggest a course of study to the beginner, it is simply not realistic to expect the beginner to get very far in understanding his work without considerable effort.

In addition, at this point, the type of background one needs to understand Bukhari's work is simply not available in English. A careful translation of *al-Hady al-sari* might go a long way towards remedying this situation.

a. Work in Western academia

In Western academia, hadiths are seen as a source to be interpreted in order to identify the interests of the later generations that 'fabricated' them. There is only passing interest in the tradition and technique of hadith study that Muslim scholars developed. Perhaps this is why, despite widespread acknowledgement of Bukhari's importance, there is little more than a few passages here and there about him.

b. Partisan literature

In the fourth chapter, I have placed Bukhari's work in the context of a demand that religion be based on texts. This demand is addressed to those who would base their understanding of religion on special access to a tradition that they feel close to, or to a global understanding of religion.

Bukhari associates himself with those who demand textual bases for religious argumentation. The project of separating sound from unsound hadiths itself embodies a demand that the strength of a position be correlated to the soundness of the textual evidence supporting it.

However, Bukhari's subtlety in his chapter titles suggests that he does feel that not every text yields its meaning in a straightforward way. In addition, Bukhari uses the sayings of various early scholars to provide the context for the correct understanding of hadith texts. Thus, he seems to agree that there may very well be things beyond the bare soundly-supported text that must participate in our understanding of religion. This view of Bukhari's position is further strengthened when we look at his books on controversial topics. Bukhari does not limit himself to the bare sound texts in arguing his position in these books.

These conflicting demands are quite alive in the Muslim community today. Modern Saudi Arabia is the strongest base of those scholars who feel that evaluating positions on religious issues should be reduced to an evaluation of the soundness of texts that support the various positions. They are not comfortable with appeals to a global vision of the demands of religion, or to any tradition.

Such scholars level severe criticism against those who adhere to the older schools of law, Iraqi or Madinan. The criticism is that these people would bypass words of the Prophet and establish religious law based on the words of their elders, or based on the demands of their own reasoning. In response, the adherents of the ancient schools speak of the need to understand texts. They provide contexts for the texts that bring relatively distant meanings of the texts closer to the reader.

These discussions are often quite heated. Nevertheless, they are very useful because they provide alternative and incompatible readings of the same evidence. This helps one become aware of the theoretical choices one has made in one's own reading of the textual material.

One of the hallmarks of the work of those who would emphasize sound texts is a series of abridgements, summaries, and translations of Bukhari's work. Some of these abridgements eliminate the chains of narration, or delete repeated mentions of the same hadith, or delete the chapter titles. These works convey the feeling that Bukhari's essential contribution is that he has identified the sound texts that should be the basis of religion. However, the nuances of Bukhari's position are lost in such works.

c. Understanding Bukhari's work

Bukhari's *Sahih* is one of the most noted works in the Islamic library. There are numerous commentaries on it; these usually quote a hadith or two and then discuss it, going through the entire book in this way.

Others have picked out particular aspects of the *Sahih* for their attention. There are a number of works on the chapter titles and the connection between the chapter title and the hadiths mentioned in the chapter. A few works focus on the twenty-five places where Bukhari has criticized the scholars of Iraq. These are the places where Bukhari refers to their position with the words 'Some people say...' (see above, pp. 41–2).

There is also a series of books on the debate between Bukhari and Muslim regarding dangling chains and deceptive references. Arab scholars of the last few decades have done some very good work in this field. Earlier scholars had focused on the logical merits of each position, or on the opinions of various hadith experts on these issues. Some recent scholars have taken a practical approach. They have tried to study the results each position leads to in the evaluation of specific hadith texts.

Muslim scholars throughout the world continue to study the *Sahih*. There is a feeling that Bukhari's decisions regarding the soundness of a text suffice. It is simply true that no modern hadith scholar has Bukhari's knowledge of hadiths or his experience in hadith criticism. Nevertheless, one can learn to

understand Bukhari's work through the many commentaries and critical studies of later scholars. A positive development in Bukhari studies is in the recent works that re-open the debate between Muslim and Bukhari. Such works re-introduce us to their concerns even if they do not lead us to any reliable conclusions regarding which of them was right.

d. Further reading

Muhsin Khan has done a poor translation of Bukhari's *Sahih* in nine volumes; an abridgement of this work in one volume is also available. The Shambhala Pocket Classics Series (edited by Thomas F. Cleary) published a translation of a selection of hadiths from Bukhari's *Sahih* under the title *The Wisdom of the Prophet: Sayings of Muhammad*; this work is out of print. In any case, though these works are useful for someone interested in hadiths, they do not help much in understanding Bukhari.

Muhammad Asad has done a good translation of the Books in the *Sahih* which have to do with the Prophet's biography: *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years* (New Era Publications).

Yusuf Talal Delorenzo has done an excellent translation of Bukhari's book *al-Adab al-mufrad*: his book of *Muslim Morals and Manners*. The translator's introduction contains important discussion of the hadith and *Sunna*. In addition he gathers together most of the anecdotal material which is the basis for our knowledge of Bukhari's life.

A true appreciation of the *Sahih* of Bukhari requires the help of a work like Ibn Hajar's *Fath al-bari*. Mohammad Fadel has done a study of the beginning of the introductory volume of *Fath al-bari* (published as 'Ibn Hajar's *Hady al-sari*: A Medieval Interpretation of the Structure of al-Bukhari's *al-Jami' al-Sahih*: Introduction and Translation', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 54.3 (1995), 161–97). Even this brief study introduces many of the main features of the *Sahih*.

As Bukhari's *Sahih* continues to be studied in mosque-schools (madrasas) from Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, and

Pakistan all the way to Morrocco, the material from *Fath al-bari* is available in published lecture-notes in the native languages of various teachers of the *Sahih* down the centuries. Perhaps the development of a similar tradition of Bukhari-study in English will lead to the development of such tools that would make an understanding of Bukhari accessible to the English-speaking student.

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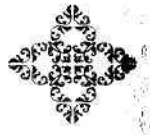

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