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THE QUR'AN SAYS IT IS 'TIBYAN' (EXPLANATION) FOR EVERYTHING'; IN THE LIGHT OF THIS VERSE, IS THERE A NEED FOR THE HADITH TO INTERPRET AND EXPLAIN THE QUR'AN?

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I. INTRODUCTION

The fact that the *Qur'ān* is the primary revealed text of Islam has been contested by Muslims themselves during the greater part of history^{1 2}. *Sunnah* denotes a consuetude or manner³. Albeit, the *sunnah an-nabi*, i.e. the paradigmatic actions, words and silent concessions of the prophet Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh (570-632 CE), had evolved into the “queen of all *sunan*” only by the close of the earliest century AH (ca. 715 CE), and Islamic law did not depend on it in its essence at the outset but on the *Qur'ān*⁴. Subsequently, however, what determined Islamic standards besides the *Qur'ān* was “filtered and bounded by a variety of other sources”, primarily the, afore-mentioned, *sunnah* of Muḥammad^{5 6}.

Contrary to the tendency to concede predominance to the *sunnah*, “*Qur'ānic* predominance” and “*Qur'ān* only” positions, which had already existed in early Islamic history, resurfaced in India (and elsewhere) in the beginning of the twentieth century, chiefly among so-called *Ahl al-Qur'ān* groupings⁷. The outermost position, that the *Qur'ān* is to be made “the sole source” of Islamic regulations, have been expressed vocally until our present time by numerous independent groups also known as “*Qur'āniyyun* or *Qur'ānists*”^{8 9}. They referred, among other *Qur'ānic* verses, to the one stating that the *Qur'ān* is an elucidation for everything¹⁰.

During Islam's early formative period, one saw two extremes: rationalism, which derived its scriptural injunctions from the *Qur'ān*, and regulatory universalism trying to define every aspect of life by explicit, demarcated rules re-attributed to Muḥammad, later transitioning into *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* thought¹¹. Since then, the different *ḥadīth* collections have, in effect, been shaping Islam considerably, contributing remarkably to religious conservatism. Quite conspicuously, the *sunnah* as a superior, near-divine model is accepted by the traditionist, Islamist and most modernist tendencies among Muslims today¹². This is a *fait établi* and unlikely to change, without regard to the question of the *Qur'ān*'s capacity of elucidation.

¹ Brown, D. 2016, 1

² In effect, during the nineteenth century, slogans emerged such as: “the *sunnah* governs the *Qur'ān*, while the *Qur'ān* does not determine the *sunnah*” (idem, 1996, 18).

³ Ayyad, 2013, 766

⁴ see Hallaq, 2005, 69

⁵ Brown, D. 2016, 1

⁶ Most of the putative hadith compilations were put into writing no earlier than “at the beginning of the ‘Abbasid period” (idem, 775).

⁷ Brown, D. 2016, 2; Khakpur & Ahmadizadeh, 2012, 46

⁸ Musa, 2010, 12

⁹ A number of *Qur'ānists* defend that ‘the’ book par excellence, the *Qur'ān*, is fully-detailed and does not necessitate to be supplemented (see Kayum, 2009, 87). This thinking is considered extreme by rigorous *Sunnī* scholars, while purist *Sunnī* thought, in which the *sunnah* rules over the *Qur'ān*, is negated outright by *Qur'ānists*.

¹⁰ Q16:89

¹¹ see Hallaq, 1997, 18

¹² see Brown, J.A.C, 2009, 243; see Hallaq, 2005, 69

II. EARLY VIEWS IN ISLAMIC HISTORY: THE AHL AL-KALAM

Debates against prophetic traditions can be traced back to the time after Muḥammad. The early Medinense and Iraqi schools of thought are “in no way ... enthusiastic” about the traditions. The *Ahl al-Kalām* isolated certain traditions which “are contrary to reason (*nazar*) and observation (*‘iyan*)”¹³. Their strongest argument is that some *ḥadīth* run counter the *Qur’ān*, which should be “the standard by which traditions are accepted or rejected”¹⁴. What is more, commands by Muḥammad were “particular” and “applicable only to the occasion on which they were given”¹⁵. They could merely go back to “to personal privileges” of Muḥammad’s¹⁶. Traditions were poorly documented and those which were “transmitted by a single individual [could not] be accepted [as] authenticated”, according to many of the *Ahl al-Kalām*.

Sunni innovator al-Shafi’i (767–820 CE), without naming individuals, categorises the opponents of *ḥadīth* he consulted into two groups: “those who reject *ḥadīth* categorically and those who reject only part of the *ḥadīth*”, or “*al-Khāṣṣa*”^{17,18}. However, according to their standpoint, Muslims could practice according to “reports that provided certainty (*ihata*); it was not permissible to practice based on reports providing only probable knowledge (*zann*)”^{19 20}.

Debates between traditionists were rampant during the early Muḥammadan succession until *ḥadīth* codification in the ninth century CE “about whether it was allowed at all to write down” authoritative sayings besides the written *Qur’ān*^{21,22}. Religious apprentices were required to memorise traditions and forbidden to fabricate transcriptions, and this imperative was upheld in Basra and Kufa until the ninth century CE, while instructors came to neglect the rule in Hijaz in Medina from the mid-eighth century CE onwards^{23,24}. The phrase ‘prophetic *sunnah*’ (*sunnah an-*

¹³ Schacht, 1967, 45

¹⁴ see Schacht, 1967, 45

¹⁵ Schacht, 1967, 48

¹⁶ *idem*, 49

¹⁷ Hansu, 2016, 515

¹⁸ The *al-Khāṣṣa* were probably moderate Mu’tazilites (see *idem*, 533)

¹⁹ *idem*, 527

²⁰ The traditionist group of *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* “did not distinctly emerge” until more than a hundred years after the disappearance of the prophet Muḥammad (Ahmad, 1997, 13). However, there have always been those searching for answers to all questions in religion itself. They came to oppose the *Ahl al-Kalām*, a group which itself is a group rejecting everything except the *Qur’ān*, complementing it by reason (see Brown, D., 1996, 13).

²¹ Schoeler, 2010, 203

²² Traditions could only be transmitted orally, one division maintained, with the *Qur’ān* being the sole book of Islam; notes about tradition were kept out of sight and were not made public (*ibid*).

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Malik ibn Anas’ (d. 795 CE) Medinan book *Muwatta’* has been preserved, from that time, although the “texts of the different recensions of this work ... still differ substantially”²⁴. Of around 1,800 sayings, “527 are *ḥadīths* of the prophet, 613 are rulings made by companions, 285 are the rulings of successors and the remainder are Malik’s own opinions”, according to formal attribution (Brown, J.A.C., 2014, 29). Malik departed from the supposition that the most original form of Islamic conduct had survived in Medina in the form of customs and practices taught by the scholars of that city (see *ibid*).

nabī), hence, did not come into use “until the sixth and seventh decades after the Prophet, in the administration of Omar Abdul Aziz (d. 720 [CE])”^{25 26}. The *ḥadīth* were first elevated in a congruent doctrine and theory by Shafi’i, who invented the theory of *ḥadīth* coherence, according to which the *ḥadīth* did not contradict the *Qur’ān* or other *ḥadīth*^{27 28}. The *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* attitude gave rise to disputes between different evolving schools of thought. Finally, “[t]he notion of consensus (*ijmā’*...) provided the key expanding the boundaries of a widened *Sunnī* Islam”²⁹. "

III. CONTEMPORARY SUNNI STANCE

Later writers, when referring to the *sunnah*, did so almost exclusively with regard to prophet Muḥammad³⁰. The *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* with its understanding that “*sunnah* and ‘authenticated’ prophetic *ḥadīth* are ... coextensive” had established itself as the major traditionist group in classical Islam³¹. The *sunnah* had become “equal in authority to the *Qur’ān*, and more important in practice”³².

What the *Ahl al-Qur’ān* see as synonyms and basically one function comprises four prophetic functions for the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*: reciting the revelation, purifying people, teaching revelation as well as wisdom and knowledge³³. For the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, transmitted acts, words or silent approval of Muḥammad had become the ultimate basis of Islamic legal orientation (*sunnah tashri’ iyya*)^{34 35}.

The *Qur’ān* and the *sunnah* can both be seen as hermeneutically linked³⁶. Or else, *Sunnī* mainstream considers the *sunnah* as embodying “the *Qur’ānic* message”³⁷. Where there are inconsistencies in the *sunnah* or of the *sunnah* with the *Qur’ān*, followers of al-Shafi’i’s theory and

²⁵ Ahmad, 1997, 29

²⁶ The four so-called “rightly-guided Caliphs” scarcely referred to *sunan* in their administrative endeavors (ibid).

²⁷ idem, 46

²⁸ All contradictions, discrepancies and divergences are thus illusive “outward appearances” (ibid). Shafi’i argued that those who held the *Qur’ān* as sufficient as a source of religious rules and commandments could not know how to properly pray or fast, as such, he thought, required precise instructions (idem, 37). He conceded that relying on hadith for every facet and aspect of life meant “relying on a source less certain than the *Qur’ān* or living tradition”; then again, following a person who himself held the function of a prophet was preferable to using one’s own reason, deemed frail (ibid).

²⁹ Brown, J.A.C., 2006, 264-65

³⁰ Brown, D., 1996, 10

³¹ Brown, D., 1996, 14

³² idem, 2016, 1

³³ Jamsari & Mohd Nizah, 2013, 15084-85

³⁴ Kamali, 2002, 54

³⁵ However, simple and clear as this sounds, legal scholars (*‘ulemā*) sometimes disagreed on whether Muḥammad had uttered a hadith as a prophet or only in his capacity as arbitrator and head of state (idem, 57).

³⁶ Duderija, 2015, 230

³⁷ Motzki, 2000-2001, 371, citing Dutton

its follow-ups argue that the consent of the community (*ijmā'*) is binding authority validating the *sunnah*³⁸. Omitting early Islamic history after the disappearance of Muḥammad, the *Ahl al-Sunnah* refer to “uninterrupted practice [which is] proof enough” for the *sunnah*, as was the role of *ijmā'* for the confirmation of custom before Shafi'i and the establishment of the *ḥadīth* as a textual institution³⁹.

IV. ALTERNATIVE STANCES

On the other hand, the modern *Ahl al-Qur'ān* only partly accept the *sunnah* or not at all. The latter form various '*Qur'ān* only' movements. Historically, the *Ahl al-Qur'ān* re-emerged in India, more precisely the Punjab, after the departure of the historical *Ahl al-Kalām*, “in literary salons and new Urdu-language journals from the 1890s onward”⁴⁰. Ghulam Ahmad Parwez (1903-1985 CE), with his “group *Tulu-e Islam*, or Islamic Dawn, came to be the most popular among the *Ahl al-Qur'ān* as he scaled down the idea of a comprehensive, *sunnah*-based Islamic law, instead stressing the moral imperatives of the *Qur'ān*, “grasped ... by reason”⁴¹. *Tulu-i Islam* argued that the *Qur'ānic* revelation “was a self-contained missive that could be understood without external supplements, with even its odd or ambiguous verses explained by reference to other parts of the book”⁴².

The Indian *Ahl al-Qur'ān* was founded by “‘Abdalfah Chakralawl (d. 1930 CE) and Khwaja Ahmad Din Amritsari (d. 1936 CE) between 1906 and 1917” CE⁴³. Some of their disciples questioned the reliability of a number of *ḥadīth*. Others “went so far as to reject altogether the authoritativeness of the prophet's precedent”⁴⁴. In Egypt, Muḥammad Tawfiq Sidqi (d. 1920 CE), a physician, made the case that the detailed precedent of Muḥammad “was intended only to be binding on the first generation of Muslims”⁴⁵. Egyptian Rashad Khalifa (1935-1990 CE) in a 1982 book considered the *Qur'ānic* imperative to obey God and the prophet to depend on whether Muḥammad had uttered verses in his capacity and role as a messenger⁴⁶.

³⁸ Brown, J.A.C., 2009, 168

³⁹ see Brown, J.A.C., 2009, 168

⁴⁰ see Brown, J.A.C., 2014, 200-203

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Brown, J.A.C., 2009, 244-45

⁴⁵ see Brown, J.A.C., 2009, 244-45

⁴⁶ Jamsari & Mohd Nizah, 2013, 15086

V. OBEYING THE MESSENGER: THE SUNNI POSITION

Over 60 *Qur'ānic* verses ask believers to obey Allah and the messenger⁴⁷. Muḥammad has been entrusted by God to “convey the Message clearly”⁴⁸ and to “explain clearly”⁴⁹, which traditional and Islamist *Sunnī* interpret as a command to deliver the *sunnah* in addition to the *Qur'ān* instead of transmitting only the verbatim message of God, i.e. to “explain” instead of merely “proclaim”⁵⁰. Muḥammad, according to the *Qur'ān*, has also been sent to “sanctify” and “instruct” his following⁵¹. The word “instruct” is unravelled by traditional *Sunnī* as a directive to teach and clarify beyond the words of God.

There is also the order to “obey Allah and the messenger, and those in authority among you”⁵². Here, the messenger is seen in the classical *Sunnī* view as a direct authority who does not derive the whole of his words and actions from the *Qur'ān* but delivers something additional^{53 54}. In the end, the role of Muḥammad as an arbitrator between the factions and tribes of Medina is linked by *Sunnī* mainstream to his role as a prophet⁵⁵. Modernists, however, often differentiate between different roles pertaining to the religious (prophet/messenger) and political (arbitrator/mediator).

VI. OBEYING THE MESSENGER: THE AHL AL-QUR'AN PERSPECTIVE

The *Qur'ānist* reading of the commands to obey the messenger differs sharply. “[T]he messenger is not an independent agency[;] he was the agency that delivered the message, and obedience to him was equivalent to obedience to God” and the *Qur'ān*⁵⁶. To support this, the *Qur'ānists* often cite several *Qur'ānic* verses which assert that the prophet’s role is “solely” to deliver

⁴⁷ Usmani, 1991, 1

⁴⁸ Q 64:12

⁴⁹ Q 16:44

⁵⁰ Zawadi, 2011, 1

⁵¹ Q 2:129; Q 2:151; Q 3:164; Q 62:2

⁵² Q 4:59

⁵³ see Jamsari & Mohd Nizah, 2013, 15085

⁵⁴ The then-messenger is at one point portrayed as the one who can legislate with regard to his flock. Again, *Sunnī* interpret Q59:7 as the permission to utter general commands and to define taboos apart from those in the *Qur'ān*. Exeget Ibn Kathir is said to have construed the verse as a call to “execut[e] all commands by” Muḥammad and “abando[n] all the taboos and abominations prohibited by him” (Wan Mokhtar, Wan Khairuldin e.a., 2013, 4) This interpretation goes against the context in which the verse was revealed. Most *Sunnī* scholars see the divine authorisation to make things lawful and unlawful to believers, as laid out in Q7:156-157, Q9:29, as related to the distribution of war booty (see Esmail, 2006c, 4).

⁵⁵ Q4:65; Q4:58-59; see Usmani, 1991, 3; see Brown, J.A.C., 2014, 19

⁵⁶ Ahmad, 1997, 17; see Quranonly, 2013, 1

the message⁵⁷ and that “the *Qur’ānic* uses the word ‘messenger’ and not ‘Muḥammad’⁵⁸. Recurrently, according to *Qur’ānists*, the prophet is said, in the double negative, to possess no function except delivering the *Qur’ān*⁵⁹.

Fazlur Rahman and Ahmad do acknowledge that Muḥammad showed “exemplary conduct”. In contrast to an extreme *Sunnī* position on imitation, however, they assert that this “does not refer to every detail” of Muḥammad’s behaviour and “personal habits” but to spiritual matters: Muḥammad’s “faith in God’s help and victory”^{60,61}. To sum up, a frequent statement by early *Qur’ānists* is that Muḥammad should be obeyed, but as an authority “derivative” of the *Qur’ān* urging believers to follow God’s message⁶². Later *Qur’ānists*, in contrast, have not been fully opposing *sunnatic ḥadīth*.

VII. QUR'AN AS INCOMPLETE

For the *Sunnī* traditionist, the *Qur’ān* is incomplete, the *sunnah* laying out its rules in detail⁶³. The *sunnah*, in the *Sunnī* view, can also ascertain one sense of a *Qur’ānic* injunction where many are conceivable^{65,66}. The *sunnah* is, furthermore, capable of stipulating exceptions to a broad *Qur’ānic* command, it can indicate supplementary injunctions⁶⁷. The *founding sunnah* (*sunnah al-muassisah*) concerns topics upon which the *Qur’ān* is unspoken and supposedly does not contradict the *Qur’ān*, rendering parts of “the *sunnah* an independent source of law”⁶⁸. The simplified *Sunnī* notion is that the “*Qur’ān* can only be correctly understood in light of the *sunnah*”⁶⁹.

⁵⁷ Q5:99 e.a.

⁵⁸ Ahmad, 1997, 17

⁵⁹ Q42:48; Q13:40; Q5:99-100; see Khalifa, 1982, 14

⁶⁰ Ahmad, 1997, 20

⁶¹ According to one moderate *Qur’ānist* opinion, “it would not be wrong if we derive a general meaning for this verse that the Prophet provided a good example for Muslims to follow[:] none other than his staunch faith in God and strict adherence to the *Quran*” (ibid). Good example (*uswah hasanah*) is also used for the prophet Ibrahim “who was a staunch monotheist” (ibid). Jayrajpuri and Parwez emphasized interpretation by the individual believer: “no one’s understanding of the *Qur’an* - not even that of Muḥammad - is completely binding to others” (Brown, D., 1996, 48).

⁶² Brown, D., 1996, 68

⁶³ Kayum, 2009, 82

⁶⁴ This goes for the specifications of prayers (*salat*) and almsgiving (*zakāt*).

⁶⁵ idem, 84

⁶⁶ This is the case when a “general *Qur’ānic* verse [is] more specific than it [first] appear[s]” (Brown, J.A.C, 2009, 52, referring to Al-Shafu).

⁶⁷ Kayum, 2009, 85

⁶⁸ Kamali, 2002, 63

⁶⁹ Kayum, 2009, 81

To defend the *Qur'ānist* position, then, amounts to reflecting a “lack of theological common sense”; to discard the *ḥadīth*, exegesis (*tafsīr*) and Islamic history, means neglecting the *Qur'ānic* context, “along with any proof of Muḥammad’s existence”⁷⁰. This despite the fact that the *Qur'ān* was revealed concretely and “in time”^{71 72}.

VIII. THE QUR'AN AS COMPREHENSIVE

Al-Shafī'i re-defines the term *hikmah* stating “the view of ‘experts’ whom he concurred with” without specifying sufficiently⁷³. *Hikmah*, in the proper sense, is considered by the *Qur'ānists*, as “the teachings of the *Qur'ān*, or ... general wisdom that all prophet-messengers or moral teachers were endowed with”⁷⁴. In contrast, al-Shafī'i sees *hikmah* as “right understanding and practical guidance into the commands and prohibitions of” the *Qur'ān* that God gave only to his prophets^{75 76}.

The *ḥadīth* par excellence is described in the *Qur'ān* to be the “the Book” itself⁷⁷. It does not, in consequence, require any amendment. In none of its *Qur'ān* occurrences, the word story (*ḥadīth*) is connected to prophetic *ḥadīth*⁷⁸. In the reading of most *Qur'ānists*, the *Qur'ān* is “fully detailed” and “complete”⁷⁹. In some areas of the law, the *Qur'ān* “spells out exactly” what to do^{80 81}. For all other purposes, the “*Qur'ān* provides different explanations for different conditions”⁸².

⁷⁰ Syed, 2011, 1

⁷¹ Brown, J.A.C., 2014, 91

⁷² Even though the *ḥadīth* are decidedly and vastly rhetorical, they are “often more exact in their formulations of duties and obligations” than the *Qur'ān* (idem, 89). For instance, the so-called “five pillars” of Islam are “practiced and preached widely in the Muslim world[.y]et this concept comprising the slogan of faith (*'aqīda al-shahada*), prayers (*ṣalāt*), almsgiving (*zakāt*), fasting during the month of *Ramadan* (*ṣawm*, *ṣiyām*), and pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) is” nowhere clearly defined nor detailed in the *Qur'ān* (Syed, 2011, 1).

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ Brown, D., 1996, 56

⁷⁶ *Sunnī* traditionists often criticise that *Qur'āniyyun* bereave themselves of detailed prescriptions when neglecting the *sunnah*. *Qur'ānic* prayers (*ṣalāt*) are seen by some *Qur'āniyyun* as “not limited to ritualistic mode of worship” as one can remember God at any given time and in any physical position, while the majority of *Qur'ānists* cling to the traditional mode of praying (Quranonly, 2013, 1, referring to Q4:103). *Qur'ānists* often insist that instead of searching for the details of religious ritual such as prayer in the *sunnah* of Muḥammad, one should remember that these were originally revealed to the prophet Ibrahim (see Q21:72–73). In turn, “Muḥammad was to follow the religion of Ibrahim” (Musa, 2010, 15 & 17, citing Rashad Khalifa and Kassim Ahmad, resp.; see Ahmad, 1997, 19).

⁷⁷ Musa, 2010, 15, citing Rashad Khalifa

⁷⁸ Ahmad, 1997, 15

⁷⁹ Musa, 2010, 14, citing Q6:114–115 and Rashad Khalifa

⁸⁰ Ahmad, 1997, 22

⁸¹ Elsewhere, “he provides us both the principles and the methods”, whereby the “forms are connected to specific historical circumstances” and principles or general guidance are given “in places where [strict rules] would be too burdensome” (idem, 22–23). “This is especially true when the *Qur'ān* touches [upon] socio-cultural matters as they differ from place to place and among different peoples” (Ahmad, 1997, 22).

⁸² Khakpur & Ahmadizadeh, 2012, 49

Qur'āniyyun refer to the human intellect instead of imitation of the prophetic example which to them is mere guesswork⁸³. The *Ahl al-Qur'ān* stance allows for “any follower who reads the *Qur'ān* [to] interpret it based on his own case”^{84 85}. In fact, however, most followers and leaders of the *Ahl al-Qur'ān*, appear to be scripturalists⁸⁶. To them, “religious authority reside[s] exclusively in” the *Qur'ān* instead of the opinions and judgements of scholars and jurists⁸⁷.

IX. SUNNAH AS WAHY

Classical *Sunnī* scholars deriving their ideas from al-Shafi'i have maintained that the *sunnah al-nabi* is a form of revelation from God⁸⁸. It is hence “*wahy*”, which in this context signifies revelation or inspiration^{89 90}. The *ḥadīth* which are included in the *sunnah* are, according to the mainstream view, “a medium for the protection of” the *Qur'ān* itself⁹¹. But as noted before, the *sunnah* has in practice frequently overshadowed the *Qur'ān*. On the other hand, the *sunnah*, “at least in part”, is believed by strict *Qur'ānists* to be “a product of [Muḥammad's] inspired reasoning (*ijtihād*)”⁹². *Qur'āniyyun* have often replied to traditionist *Sunnī* that “Allah has explained the *Qur'ān*” instead of Muḥammad explaining the Book⁹³.

X. PRESERVATION OF HADITH AND THE AUTHENTICITY ISSUE

Ḥadīth compilations were not necessarily based on written narrations because of the interdiction, pronounced during Muḥammad's lifetime, to efface anything but the *Qur'ān*, although in “the opinions of some scholars, the instructions to efface were of a transitory nature”⁹⁴.

⁸³ Quranonly, 2013, 1, citing Q6:116; Q25:44; Q36:62

⁸⁴ Khakpur & Ahmadizadeh, 2012, 49

⁸⁵ Exegetical commentary (*tafsīr*) by 'Abd Allah Chakralawi and others endeavored an understanding without reference to the *ḥadīth*, focusing instead on ratio and science and following the principles of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (Brown, D., 1996, 44-45). Such is rebutted by *Sunnī* apologists as “self-implication”, “experimentalism, and self-rightfulness (Khakpur & Ahmadizadeh, 2012, 53 & 56).

⁸⁶ see Brown, D. 2016, 3

⁸⁷ see Brown, D. 2016, 13

⁸⁸ Kayum, 2009, 78

⁸⁹ see Saeed, 2006, 15

⁹⁰ Most of the time, *wahy* is used in the former sense, although the word allows for nuances.

⁹¹ Ashrafi, 2015, 8

⁹² Brown, D., 1996, 52

⁹³ Quranonly, 2013, 1

⁹⁴ Meherally, 2001, 6

Exceptionally, “when a person had a weak memory”, sayings were permitted to be recorded⁹⁵. But caliph Mu’āwiyah (r. 661-680 CE) reaffirmed the policy of effacement about three decades after Muḥammad’s passing⁹⁶ ⁹⁷. Only in the era of the ‘followers’ who had not witnessed Muḥammad, i.e. in the late seventh and early eighth century CE were systematic explorations for *ḥadīth* endeavoured⁹⁸. *Ḥadīth* were originally taught orally⁹⁹. It is only “as of the middle of the eighth century [CE that] systematic collections subdivided into chapters” appeared, which were codified about a century later¹⁰⁰.

Modernists often allege *ḥadīth* to be fabricated. While *Sunnī* scholars often stress the functional benefits of the *ḥadīth*, the criticism of the *Ahl al-Qur’ān* touches upon the authenticity in the sense of “historical certainty” of the sayings¹⁰¹. The *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, on the other hand, frequently conceded that the *ḥadīth* they dealt with are only doubtful or probable evidence¹⁰². In spite of that, they employed even non-*sahih* utterances in their lines of argument¹⁰³.

Within the *sunnah* theory, the question of *ḥadīth* authenticity “has proved to be the most vulnerable element”¹⁰⁴. Early traditionists were overly trusting in that the chains of transmitters (*isnad*) were reliable¹⁰⁵. Officially, carelessness as to the sayings was prohibited so to avoid false attributing to the prophet¹⁰⁶. But if the *ḥadīth* compilers Bukhari and Muslim “were unable to recognise obvious falsifications, then surely there must be something wrong with their approach”, according to the *Ahl al-Qur’ān*¹⁰⁷ ¹⁰⁸.

⁹⁵ *idem*, 7

⁹⁶ *idem*, 7

⁹⁷ There are allusions to a collection by Abdullah bin Amr of over one thousand *ḥadīth* named as-*ṣaadiqah* (Karim, 2013, 10-11). Ali abi Talib is said to have possessed so-called *Ṣahifa* comprising commands of penalties⁹⁷. There are reports of companions carrying notebooks (*ṣuḥuf*) or tablets (*alwāḥ*) (Schoeler, 2010, 202). One cannot declare these collections to be the norm, however. “All of [the] recording ... was the result of sporadic, unsystematic efforts” (*ibid*).

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ Schoeler, 2010, 199

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰¹ Brown, J.A.C., 2009b, 259-60 & 263-64

¹⁰² see Brown, J.A.C., 2009b, 262-63

¹⁰³ Brown, J.A.C., 2009b, 277

¹⁰⁴ Brown, D., 1996, 81

¹⁰⁵ *idem*, 95

¹⁰⁶ see Ashrafi, 2015, 15

¹⁰⁷ Brown, D., 1996, 96

¹⁰⁸ “Many [*ḥadīth*] about the same event or circumstance show significant variations [and m]any of them are contradictory (Farooq, 2006, 1). This involves roughly 80 narrators and 110 *ḥadīth* (*idem*, 4, citing M.M. Azami). Both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars “believe that a great number of *ḥadīths* ... were doctored or totally fabricated in later times to serve political or sectarian agendas” (Ayyad, 2013, 762). One narrator who is often invoqued is “companion” Abu Hurayrah (603–681 CE), who is said to have memorized “5374 narrations” in a matter of three years but whose transmissions are to a large extent part of al-Bukhari’s collection (Meherally, 2001, 18). Early Muslim jurists classified a “a colossal number of” *ḥadīth* as doubtful or only probable (*aḥād*), while “less than a dozen” is labelled incontrovertible (*mutawatir*) (Hallaq, 1999, 88-89). The *mutawatir* *ḥadīth* are “quantitatively insignificant” (*ibid*).

In practice, nowadays, Muslim laymen and many scholars deal with *sahih ḥadīth* as certain (*yaqīn*) – “authenticated words of the prophet”¹⁰⁹. Following the doctrine of al-Shafi’i, for the most part of history, a majority of Muslim followers have ascribed a role “in understanding what actions were acceptable or unacceptable” to *ḥadīth* transmitted by four or at least two chains^{110,111}. Recording often “involved a creative component”¹¹². One cannot ultimately know whether (or not) prophetic sayings are historical truth, even according to al-Shafi’i, if one reads closely¹¹³. But the authenticity question ignores the functionalist power of the *ḥadīth* as “touchstones of communal identification”¹¹⁴.

XI. THE PRIMACY OF THE QUR'AN ARGUMENT

Contrary to many adherents of the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, the *Ahl al-Kalām* maintains that “the *Qur’ān* must take precedence”¹¹⁵. In the earliest era of Islam before the establishment of the classical doctrines, the *Qur’ān* was still unanimously considered “the” Book of God by Muslims¹¹⁶. This impeded the writing of other books, especially those containing *ḥadīth*¹¹⁷. Two *ḥadīth* attributed to Muḥammad are the basis of this: “Do you want a book other than the Book of God?” and “Do you wish to adopt it as copies of the *Qur’ān*?”¹¹⁸.

Then al-Shafi’i intervened, arguing that isolated *ḥadīth* (*khbar al-wahid*) suffice to “establish the *sunnah* of” Muḥammad if not refuted by a higher number of traditions, is not to be contradicted by *Qur’ānic* principles or by other *ḥadīth* “capable of several interpretations”¹¹⁹. On the other hand, obedience to the prophet is “open to variant interpretations”, not merely that the *sunnah* is an independent legal source in Islam complementing the *Qur’ān* but also that Muḥammad himself was to abide by the *Qur’ān*¹²⁰. Nevertheless, the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* maintains that utterances and

¹⁰⁹ *idem*, 73-74

¹¹⁰ Brown, J.A.C., 2009, 73-74

¹¹¹ To recall once more, most *ḥadīth* are *aḥād*, transmitted by a quite limited number of chains of differing reputation (Brown, J.A.C., 2009b, 261). These “*aḥād*” *ḥadīth* are merely “probabilistic in terms of reliability” (Farooq, 2006, 16). Moreover, the question as to which audiences a *ḥadīth* was originally directed to is often “absent in the distinctions of later legal theorists” (Brown, J.A.C., 2009b, 269).

¹¹² *idem*, 285

¹¹³ *ibid*

¹¹⁴ Brown, J.A.C., 2009b, 279; Brown, J.A.C., 2006, 478-79

¹¹⁵ Brown, D., 1996, 16

¹¹⁶ Schoeler, 2010, 205

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

¹¹⁸ Schoeler, 2010, 205, citing al-Khatib 1975

¹¹⁹ Schacht, 1967, 52

¹²⁰ Kamali, 2002, 65

deeds of Muḥammad constitute “the” authoritative interpretation of the *Qur’ān*, with which it is supposedly in harmony in most of the cases¹²¹.

XII. CONCLUSION

Most of Islamic history has been marked by the understanding that *ḥadīth*, to some extent, “augment and explain the” *Qur’ān* which is not primarily a “legal manual”, with its five hundred or so, sometimes indefinite, verses carrying rules on what is permissible and what is not¹²². Early followers of al-Shafi’i’s promoted the slogan that “the *sunnah* rules over the *Qur’ān*”¹²³. *Ḥadīth* are hence able to “break with the evident meaning of *Qur’ānic* verses”¹²⁴ ¹²⁵. When it comes to the application and “substantive law”, *ḥadīth* injunctions in numerous cases do abrogate the *Qur’ān*¹²⁶.

While the *Qur’ān* constitutes manifest revelation (*waḥy ṣāḥīḥ*), the *sunnah*, which only explains it, is admitted by the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* as representing internal revelation (*waḥy bāṭin*) “largely transmitted in the words of the narrators”¹²⁷. Many sections of the *sunnah* are speculative (*ẓannī*)¹²⁸. One must admit, however, that the *ḥadīth* compilations throughout time did contribute to the conservation of the Islamic creed.

The just-mentioned factual dimensions, i.e. the *ḥadīth*’s actual importance, outweigh normative considerations as to whether the *Qur’ān* ‘should’ be considered comprehensive or incomprehensive. Although the contemporary community consent, or *ijmā’*, is prescriptive and does not constitute a notion of veracity”, it is still decisive when it comes to the importance of Islamic sources outside the *Qur’ān*¹²⁹.

¹²¹ see Khan, I.A., 2005, 52

¹²² Brown, J.A.C., 2009, 50-51

¹²³ see Brown, J.A.C., 2009, 50-51

¹²⁴ Brown, J.A.C., 2009, 53

¹²⁵ However, the Hanafi and Ash’ari schools “both upheld the principle that something that is only epistemologically probable [i.e. *ḥadīth*], cannot overrule something epistemologically certain”, i.e. *Qur’ānic* verses (Brown, J.A.C., 2014, 100).

¹²⁶ *idem*

¹²⁷ Kamali, 2002, 60

¹²⁸ *ibid*

¹²⁹ see *idem*, 2006, 264

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