A Critical Analysis of

Ḥadīth As Scripture; Discussions on the Authority of Prophet Traditions, by Aisha Y, Musa

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Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................................. 2

Authenticity ................................................................................................................................................. 3

Authority ...................................................................................................................................................... 4

The inception of “those who negate (the authority of) ḥadīth” ............................................................... 4

Books........................................................................................................................................................ 4

ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb (d.23 AH/ 644 CE) and the Question of ḥadīth ............................................................... 5

Analyzing what has come to us from ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb ................................................................. 7

Authority of ḥadīth mentioned in the Qurʾān ........................................................................................ 10

Shāfiʿī vs. modern critiques on the authority of ḥadīth ........................................................................ 10

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................. 12

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................................... 13
Introduction

The term ḥadīth (pl. aḥādīth) has been defined by Gordon D. Newby in the following words; “In religious use this term is often translated as ‘tradition’ meaning a report of the deeds and sayings of MUḤAMMAD and his COMPANIONS. These reports form the basis of Islamic law, QURʾĀN interpretation (TAFSĪR) and early Islamic history and lore.” (D.NEWBY, Gordon, 2002, pp.69-70)

A similar definition is presented by Ian Richard Netton in A Popular Dictionary of Islam. (NETTON, Ian Richard, 1992, p.90) Muslim scholars give, more or less the same definition adding an additional piece; (a report of the deeds and sayings of MUḤAMMAD) or ‘consent’ (taqrīr) attributed to him, i.e. subsequent to an action of a companion there is no disapproval from the Prophet. This is thus interpreted as his consent.

According to many Muslims the Qurʾān & Ḥadīth are sources of law and are interpreted in various ways; just as western law and constitutions are interpreted in various ways (such as liberal, conservative, or literalist approaches).

On the other hand, there are two groups of people; one which does not accept the authenticity of ḥadīth to begin with (it’s attribution to the Prophet Muḥammad or his companions), and the other who does not believe in the authority of ḥadīth (acceptance as a source of law). At times, these will intertwine. Explaining the difference between these two terms, Aisha Musa says, “First, there are two trends evident in the opposition to the ḥadīth: opposition to ḥadīth as a source of scriptural authority that might rival the Qurʾān and to a particular ḥadīth whose absurd or even outrageous content made the religion a potential object of ridicule.” Aisha further mentions, “The question of authenticity refers to whether or not a particular saying or action reported in a hadith can be traced back with any historical certainty or probability to the Prophet or his companions [...]. Authority refers to the position granted to the ḥadīth as a source of religious law and guidance.” (Y.MUSA, Aisha, 2008, pp.2,4)
In the course of this paper, the issue of authority of ḥadīth will be tackled primarily. The book of Aisha Y. Musa, *Ḥadīth As Scripture; Discussions on the Authority of Prophet Traditions in Islam*, will be used as a base. The author of this book attempts to prove that the opposition of ḥadīth being an authority in rival to the Qurʾān is no new phenomenon, rather it is a debate as old as 2nd century Islam. She believes that due importance was not given to this position and requires a second glance by intellectuals of this day and age. (Y.MUSA, Aisha, 2008, p.109)

**Authenticity**

I do not wish to delve into this topic as the author has also just touched the surface of it and the main topic of contention is in regards to authority. Nevertheless I will quote and encompassing understanding mentioned by Juan E. Campo, “Since the late 19th century, Western scholars of Islamic studies, especially those known as Orientalists, have treated the ḥadīth with even more scepticism than medieval Muslim scholars. They have argued that the ḥadīth were either verbalized survival of pre-Islamic custom, legitimated during the Islamic period by attributing them to Muḥammad and his companions, or they were fabricated a century or more after Muḥammad’s death to legitimate practices and beliefs that emerged after the seventh century. Scholarly consensus in recent decades has moved closer to the position accepted by most Muslims- that many, if not most, of the ḥadīth are authentic, but they will demand critical assessment.” (E.CAMPO, Juan, 2009, p.280)

Also Azami says after providing details in regards to the writing of ḥadīth, “Recent research has proven that almost all the ḥadīth of the Prophet was written down in the life of Companions, which stretched to the end of the first century.” (M.M.AZAMI, 2012, p.31)
Authority

The inception of “those who negate (the authority of) Ḥadīth”

The author does a good job in trying to determine who exactly was the first to negate the authority of hadīth by consulting various books. Due to discrepancies in names, etc, Aisha Musa says that it is possible that different people in different times probably adhered to this view or the authors of those books “were working with incomplete or inaccurate information.” (Y.MUSA, Aisha, 2008, p.19) I think a narration of the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī is critical to this topic:

A woman came to the wife of the Prophet Muḥammad, Aisha, and asked her if women were required to make up the prayers they missed during their menses. Aisha asked her, “Are you a Harūrīyah? We would be in our menses in the presence of the Prophet and he would not instruct us to do as such.”

Aisha asked this woman if she was a Harūrīyah. Ibn Ḥajar says in the commentary of this narration that the word Harūrīyah is a possessive attribution to the city of “Harūrah” which is two miles from Kūfah. He says that the Khawārij were famous by this nickname because this is the city where they initially formed a rebellion against ʿAlī, and “it is from their agreed upon principles to take what the Qurʾān alludes to and to reject whatever is from the ḥadīth.” (AL-ASQALANI, Ahmed b.Ali b.Hajr, 1996, p.422 v.I)

This narration gives an idea that a group notorious for rejecting the ḥadīth as a source of law existed in the time of Aisha (d. 58 CE/ 678 CE).

Books

Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d.204 AH/820 CE) was probably the first person to address this issue at length. Shāfiʿī wrote two pieces on this topic, the Risālah and Kitāb Jimāʿ al-ʿIlm; Risālah being an independent book and the latter being a chapter in his compendium al-

1 Hadith #321
Other works are, *Taqwil Mukhtalif al Hadith* by Ibn Qutaybah (d.267 AH), and *Sharh Ma‘ani al-\(\text{\`A}\text{\dh}ar \& Mushkil al-\(\text{\`A}\text{\dh}ar* by Ab\=u Ja‘far Mu\={a}ammad al-\(\text{\`A}\text{\dh}awi (d.321 AH). In this day and age, the material of both the “proponents” and the “opponents” of *\(\text{\`A}\text{\dh}ith* is in great multitude, but the former outweighing the latter in terms of (so to say) followers and influence.

**‘Umar b. Khaṭṭāb (d.23 AH/ 644 CE) and the Question of Ḥadīth**

Chronologically speaking, ‘Umar b. Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph of Islam subsequent to the caliphate of the successor of the Prophet Muḥammad, Abū Bakr (d.634 CE), is said to be one of the earliest to voice an opinion pertaining to the seperation of the authority of the Qur\=\={\i}n & Ḥadīth. Linda Kern discussed ‘Umar in her 1996 Harvard dissertation and suggests that he (Aisha Musa quotes from Linda Kern) “radically seperated the authority of the Messenger from his Message...[and] distinguisched the Book as an independent truth source to which no stipulation could be made.” (Y.MUSA, Aisha, 2008, p.22) We will discuss the reports attributed to ‘Umar which allude to this claim.

One of the earliest and detailed biographies of the people of the past is found in *al-\(\text{Tabaq\={a}t al Kub\={a}ra* of Muḥammad b. Sa‘d (168-230 AH/784-845 CE). Narrations from this book are primarily used to advocate ‘Umar’s position. (1) The first narration which Aisha Musa quotes in regards to ‘Umar is from Ibn Sa‘d; “He cites a story from Sufy\={a}n ibn ‘Uyaynah (d. 198 AH), on the authority of al-Zuhr\={i} that ‘Umar wanted to write out the Traditions (al-sunan), so he spent a month praying for guidance; and afterward, he became determined to write them out. But then he said: ‘I recalled a people who wrote a book, then they dedicated themselves to it and neglected the Book of God.’” (Y.MUSA, Aisha, 2008, p.23)

Promptly, Aisha Musa removes any possible objection on the transmission chain of the narration. She says even though the report is *mursal*, as there is a missing link between al-Zuhr\={i} and ‘Umar, it should not be discarded. She says that “both al-Sh\={a}fi‘i and Ibn Qutaybah are known to have accepted *mursal* reports from trustworthy individuals. (Ibid)
No doubt, there has been ongoing debates in regards to mursal narrations from the time of Shāfiʿī. But a point of contention over here is that Musa says that “al-Shāfiʿī” is “known to have accepted mursal reports from trust worthy individuals”. The reality of the matter is that the ḥadīth scholar, Nawawī, mentions in al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr that mursal is weak according to al-Shāfiʿī and accepted by Abū Ḥanīfah and Mālik (if the narrator is trustworthy). Suyūṭī mentions in Tadrīb al-Rāwī, the commentary of al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr, that if the narrator is not trustworthy then there is consensus that the narration will not be accepted. Later Nawawi mentions and Suyūṭī expounds that according to Shāfiʿī a mursal narration is accepted if there is another narration (mursal or not) undergirding the first mursal narration. (SUYOOTI, Abdul Rahman, p.224 v.I) Therefore, that attribution to Shāfiʿī is not correct.

She then quotes a report mentioned in the fifth volume of the Ṭabaqāt of Ibn Saʿd, (2) “It is related on the authority of al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 106 AH)—the grandson of Abū Bakr, another of Mumammad’s closest companions and the first of the rightly guided Caliphs who led the Muslim community after Mumammad’s demise. When al-Qāsim was asked by his student ‘Abd Allah ibn al-ʿAlāʾ (d. 164 AH) to dictate ḥadīth, he refused, saying, “The ḥadīth multiplied during the time of ‘Umar; then he called on the people to bring them to him, and when they brought them to him, he ordered them to be burned. Afterward, he said, ‘a Mishna like the Mishna of the People of the Book,’” “From that day on,” ‘Abd Allah ibn al-ʿAlāʾ continues, “Al-Qāsim forbade me to write ḥadīth.”” (Y.MUSA, Aisha, 2008, pp.23-24)

From the above two reports the claim that ‘Umar did not believe ḥadīth to hold authority in Islamic Law is not completely proven, rather it can be said that he was only objective of the writing of ḥadīth, not transmitting. Hence, Musa quotes another report from the Ṭabaqāt of Ibn Saʿd which is found in the sixth volume, “perhaps the strongest and most compelling story about ‘Umar’s attitude toward prophetic traditions”. (3) “Here, Ibn Saʿd relates the story of ‘Umar’s instructions to a delegation of companions that he is sending to the region of Kūfah to serve as administrators. He orders them not to distract the people from the Qurʾān with the transmission of ḥadīth.
Again, the wording attributed to ʿUmar is significant, “Lā tasaddūhum bil-aḥādīth fa-tashghalūnahum. Jarridu al-Qurʾān wa-aqillū al-riwāyāt ʿan Rasūl Allah” (Do not distract them with the ḥadīths, and thus engage them! Bare the Qurʾān and spare the narration from God’s Messenger!)."

Her concluding remarks prior to her next sub-heading are notable, “According to these stories, ʿUmar strongly opposed both the writing and the transmission of ḥadīth—not because he disapproved of writing or of sharing information, but because he feared that they would gain a status equal to or even greater than that of the Qurʾān itself.” (Y. MUSA, Aisha, 2008, pp. 245-25)

Analyzing what has come to us from ʿUmar b. Kaṭṭāb

Now to analyze these narrations, beginning with the last one: The translation of “-aqillū al-riwāyāt ʿan Rasūl Allah” as “spare the narration from God’s Messenger”. The -aqillū al-riwāyāt ʿan Rasūl Allah) should be translated as “minimize” is more of an accurate translation because it is the closest dictionary meaning.

2) Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr mentions the above narration also in his book Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm wa Faḍlih and mentions subsequent to it that this narratives suggests that he is preventing them from profusely narrating from the Prophet as opposed to a small amount. “And if he disliked narrating and he was to degrade it he would have prohibited from (narrating in) a small amount and profuseness.” (AL-BARR, Abu Umar Yusuf b. Abd, 1994, p. 1003 v. II)

A plausible question to arise at this juncture would be; why would ʿUmar prevent people from narrating profusely? This is also addressed by Ibn ʿAbd al Barr. He says that the strength to recall for those who narrate less is much stronger than those who narrate profusely, and the former is further from mistakes which cannot be avoided if one was to narrate a lot. (Ibid)

Therefore, we see that ʿUmar is not against the writing, nor the narrating of ḥadīth. This interpretation is further buttressed by a narration mentioned in several books of ḥadīth (some
contain omissions) in which ʿUmar addresses people in a sermon in regards to stoning of an adulterer. He says that the (recitation of the) verse of stoning has been abrogated, but the Prophet has done it in his lifetime and it will continue. He then says, “Whoever secures it, understands it, and memorizes it, should narrate it wherever their destination is, and those who cannot secure it, I do not permit for them to forge a lie against me.” (Ibid)(DAWUD, Abu, p.144 v.IV)

This narration clearly explains the stance of ʿUmar b. Khaṭṭāb in regards to ḥadīth. In the narration quoted by Ibn Saʿd, ʿUmar said to “minimize” narrations, and over here he is saying that if one is able to secure the narration they should narrate it. Hence, the prohibition in the narration quoted by Ibn Saʿd is clearly explained by this narration; ʿUmar was very cautious when it came to attributing something to Prophet Muḥammad. This extra caution is probably because of the narration mentioned in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī, the Sunan of Abū Dāwūd (#3651) and other books that the Prophet said, “Who deliberately lies about me should make himself an abode in the fire of hell.”

If it is said that both narrations are (hypothetically) contradictory, when in reality they’re not, then both narrations will be discarded. This latter possibility is very unlikely and does not appeal to principles or logic. ʿUmar’s cautiousness in regards to the ḥadīth was known to all in his time. This is why Muʿāwiyyah said, “Take the ḥadīth which are from the era of ʿUmar, because he instilled fear in people in respect to the narrations of the Messenger of Allah.” This narration has been cited from Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ (1/7) of Dhahabi in Tadwīn al-Ḥadīth of Munazir Ahsan Ghilani. (GHILANI, Munazir Ahsan, 2005, p.283)

Similarly, the narration related on the authority al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 106 AH) will:

a) Have to be interpreted in a different manner due to the aforementioned, more authentic narrations which demonstrate that ʿUmar was only cautious about narrating and allowing others to narrate and write ḥadīth.
b) Be discarded because the narration is *munqati'*(one with a missing link in the transmission chain) as al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 106 AH) was only born after the passing of ‘Umar.

In ending the chapter regarding ‘Umar, I will present some more narrations which explicate that ‘Umar was a proponent of the authority of *ḥadīth* rather than an opponent. These narrations will not only substantiate the fact that ‘Umar was a proponent of *ḥadīth*, but even the claim that ‘Umar was extra-cautious in narrating it will also be substantiated:

- It has been mentioned in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (#2062) that Abū Mūsá al-Ashʿarī came to ‘Umar and sought permission [from him to enter his house]. When there was no response, he returned. When ‘Umar became free he went to see who it was and found no one there, but recognized the voice he heard. When Abū Mūsá was asked by ‘Umar why he returned, he said this is what we have been instructed to do. He was asked to bring a witness to corroborate this ruling. When this was done, ‘Umar said, “This instruction of the Messenger of Allah was unknown to me. Business in the markets left me unaware.” (B. ISMAIL, Muhammad, 2000)

- In the *Muʿaṭṭa* (#775/3540) of Mālik, there is an additional information in this narration. At the end, ‘Umar says so Abū Mūsá, “As far as I am concerned I do not accuse you [of deceit], rather I fear that people will forge things about the Messenger of Allāh.” (B. ANAS, Malik, 2004)

This narration clearly demonstrates ‘Umar’s acceptance of *ḥadīth*, his cautiousness in its acceptance, and accepting it as an authority.
Authority of Ḥadīth mentioned in the Qurʾān

Shāfiʿī vs. modern critiques of the authority of ḥadīth

Both the proponents and the opponents of the authority of ḥadīth use the Qurʾān to prove their point. Aisha Musa brings the arguments of Shāfiʿī who uses the Qurʾān to prove the obligation of obeying the Messenger. He builds upon this premise by mentioning the need for ḥadīth to know what the Messenger commanded. For example, the particulars of prayer, charity, and fasting. The opponents of Shāfiʿī get stonewalled by such arguments and are left dumbfounded.

Rashad Khalifa, an opponent of the authority of ḥadīth concurs that “obeying the Messenger is obligatory”. But he says that “Muḥammad is represented by the Qurʾān alone”. (Y.MUSA, Aisha, 2008, p.89) He also attempts to refute the argument of Shāfiʿī in regards to the particulars of acts of worship. Aisha Musa says, “Khalifa’s response to ‘their favourite’ question is that all religious practices come to us from Abraham, in support of which he cites verse 22:78…” (Ibid, p.90)

The inconsistencies in many of the responses of Rashad Khalifa are evident. How would one know the particulars of the acts of worship without the Prophet demonstrating them to people? If they follow his particular mode of praying, then they have accepted ḥadīth and its authority, especially when Rashad Khalifa believed that ḥadīth were fabrications and sources of misguidance. Aisha Musa says, “To further emphasize his point that the Quran is the only hadīth to be followed, and that all other hadīths are blasphemous and misleading fabrications , Khalifa follows citation of 45:6-11 with 39:23 and 31:6-7.” (Ibid, p.92) If one does not accept ḥadīth, how would they pray and know the particulars of ritual prayer? The verse on Abrahamic worship? This argument is also echoed by Kassim Ahmad [p.96] but is debunked; leaving Khalifa back at square one.

It is possible that the inconsistency in deducing evidence from the Sacred Text has left contemporary opponents of the authority of ḥadīth in great differences. Edip Yuksel, a friend and colleague of Rashad Khalifa, believes that there are only three prayers a day as opposed to five. The postures mentioned in the Qurʾān and the units (rakaʾāt) are left to our discretion.
(Ibid, p.100) Others believe prayer just to be “a connection to the almighty Himself and therefore one’s primary focus must always be the “Mind” and the “Message”...” (Ibid, p.101)

Some believe it is to “recite God’s allegiance twice every-day.” And finally to some it is “the commitment, the covenants, the obligations, the duties, which humans must uphold among each other.”(Ibid, p.102) If one was to look into every argument presented they will see inconsistencies and contradictions everywhere.

I will end this discussion by presenting a few verses which have neither been quoted by Shāfiʿī nor presented by Musa. First of all, the verses of alcohol. There are three verses related to alcohol mentioned in the Qurʾān. The proponents of the authority of ḥadīth believe that the prohibition of alcohol came over time as the people were very accustomed to it, 5:90 being the final verse. Initially in 2:219 Allah mentioned that there is benefit and harm in alcohol, but the harm outweighs the benefits. This verse does not look like it is prohibiting anything, just information in regards to alcohol. 4:43 prohibits one from praying while intoxicated. If ḥadīth is not taken into consideration, how will someone reach a sound conclusion of the abrogated and the abrogator? Someone can assume that the strict prohibition came first to stop the Muslims from drinking alcohol and when they stopped, Allah allowed them to drink again, but limited it (i.e. do not pray while intoxicated).

Muḥammad Taqi ‘Uthmani mentions around thirteen verses in his commentary of Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī from the Qurʾān to prove the authority of ḥadīth. Each of these verses mentions a command that was issued, but cannot be located in the Qurʾān. One of these verses is, “And when Allah promised you one of the two groups [...]” This promise is nowhere to be found in the entire Qurʾān. Another verse is 2:143, “And we did not make the direction of prayer which you are upon except that we may expose those who follow the messenger from those who turn by their heels.” (UTHMANI, Muhammad Taqi, pp.27-29) The test for the Muslims was to pray towards the Mosque of al-Aqṣa in Palestine, because of their immense love for Makkah. This proved to be
difficult but they followed the command nonetheless. The command to pray towards Palestine is not mentioned anywhere in the Qurʾān, rather it is in the ḥadīth.

**Conclusion**

Aisha Y. Musa puts together a good book which proves that the rejection of the authority of ḥadīth is not a new methodology; rather it is from the early stages of Islam. Although she was not able to trace a single name or group name who adhered to such a viewpoint, she took it for granted that al-Shāfiʿī, Ibn Qutaybah, and Ḥaṭīb al-Baghdādi wrote against this group (which could be a sect of non-Muslims or a group of Muslims with deviated beliefs) to be Muslims. The layout and separation of each topic in the book is also note-worthy, beginning with the earliest of groups until modern day objections. Nevertheless, the issue of opposing the authority was something which died out in the past and might just die out once again as I feel that the reasons for rejection are weak and inconsistent with scriptural realities. Some arguments might hold some weight if viewed narrowly and in isolation.
Bibliography


Later, hadith from the Prophet was narrated and preserved by Medina's residents, according to 'Aisha Y. Musa, it is called 'sunnification of hadith and hadithification of sunna' all at once. Social circumstances that were new viewpoint for Islam and its culture had not been so scientific and was impossible for strict narration as in Mashriq. 

Hadith as scripture: Discussions on the authority of prophetic traditions in Islam. Book. Jan 2008. Aisha Musa. This work explores the earliest extant discussions on the authority of the Hadith in Islam and compares them with contemporary debates. 

Aisha Musa has taken on the discussion of the authority of the 'hadith' (used in this context to mean sayings alleged to have been from the Prophet Muhammad) in this book, rather than focus on the (historical rather than Quranic) authenticity of the hadith. With clear