

STANDARDS APPLIED BY MUSLIM TRADITIONISTS

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ORTHODOX Muslims believe that the Qur'ān is the eternal uncreated word of God, so it has always been the supreme rule of faith and life. But when the Muslim conquests spread throughout the world problems not met with in Arabia had to be faced, and some source of guidance was required for circumstances about which the Qur'ān did not provide regulations. Eventually Tradition came to be recognized as a second basis of Islām. People had been recounting stories about the Prophet's deeds and words, at first quite informally, and as time passed a vast amount of material became current. Much of it was oral tradition, but even in the first century¹ some men kept for their own use written copies of the traditions they had learned. By the second century some books containing traditions began to appear, and in the third century the books which became canonical were compiled. For a time many people rejected Tradition, but in course of time it came to be recognized as a source of law second only in importance to the Qur'ān. It was pointed out that the Qur'ān said Muḥammad was sent to teach the Book and the Wisdom (cf. ii. 146; iii. 158; iv. 113; lxii. 2), and it was argued that as the Book was the Qur'ān the Wisdom was Tradition. But many spurious traditions were being fabricated, and therefore traditionists gradually developed standards by which they could decide what was genuine and what was spurious and preserve and transmit this important source of guidance for the direction of the community.

Muslim tradition as we know it is presented in the form of a text supported by a chain of authorities, called the *isnād*, through

¹ The Muslim era began on 16 July 622 A.D. The year is lunar and so is shorter than our year by eleven days, which means that a century in the Muslim calendar represents roughly ninety-seven years in ours. When dates are mentioned in this article I have given only the Muslim dates, as this indicates the period in the history of Islām to which reference is being made.

whom it is said to have been transmitted. Great importance is laid on the *isnād*, for it serves as documentation ; but while the standard books of tradition provide complete *isnāds* right back to the Prophet, enough is not known about how and when the practice developed. A number of statements are quoted as from men who lived at a fairly early period. For example, Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110) is reputed to have said that when the civil strife arose people insisted on traditionists quoting their authorities, adding that those who followed the *sunna* were considered and their traditions were accepted, whereas innovators were considered but their traditions were rejected.¹ Schacht² objects to the genuineness of this statement because he holds that the civil strife in question was that which began with the killing of the Caliph al-Walīd b. Yazīd in 126, sixteen years after Ibn Sīrīn's death. But there were two serious civil wars before that, one between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya and the other between 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubair and the Umayyads when he claimed to be Caliph. The reference might therefore be to either of these. But while one draws attention to the fact that Ibn Sīrīn had the opportunity of knowing about civil wars, one may raise questions about his statement on other grounds. We know that after his time a strict system of *isnād* was not always followed, so he could hardly have meant what traditionists take him to mean. He belonged to the generation of the Followers, so possibly all he could have meant was that people were asked from which Companion of the Prophet they had received their information. We may also wonder what he meant by the *sunna*. He had settled in Basra, and it is not clear that in his day any idea of the *sunna* was universally held.

To take another example, Zuhri (d. 124) is reported to have rebuked Ishāq b. Abū Farwa for repeating traditions without *isnāds*;³ but we know that Zuhri himself is not always represented as giving a full *isnād* for his traditions. When Ibn Ishāq quotes his traditions we find that Zuhri sometimes gives a full *isnād*,

¹ See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Introd., chapter on *al-isnād min al-dīn*.

² Joseph Schacht, *The origins of Muhammadan jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950), p. 36 f.

³ See al-Hākim, *Ma'rifaṭ 'ulūm al-ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1937), p. 6.

sometimes a partial one, and sometimes none at all. If Zuhri, who was a distinguished traditionist, really did insist on others giving a full *isnād*, one must assume that he was not always consistent when he transmitted traditions himself.¹

One feels, in considering statements like these attributed to fairly early distinguished men, that if they really said these things they did not mean what later traditionists meant when they spoke of *isnāds*. In earlier times an *isnād* must have been something more undefined than it came to be later. The idea of quoting authorities was, I am sure, adopted before the first century of Islām was over, but it certainly was not so thoroughgoing as the later practice, which gives one reason to wonder how many *isnāds* were later manufactured so as to trace traditions back to the Prophet.

Ibn Ishāq (d. 151) wrote a life of the Prophet which contains many traditions, but he did not always feel it necessary to provide them with a complete *isnād*. He sometimes dispensed with it altogether, sometimes gave it incompletely, and sometimes gave it in full.² The same applies to *al-Muwatta'* produced by Mālik (d. 179). Most of his *isnāds* do not go back to the Prophet, and there are places where he is content to give his own opinion, or quote the practice of Medina. This suggests that the necessity of a complete *isnād* traced to the Prophet was not realized by the middle of the second century. It should be noted, however, that traditionists do not recognize Ibn Ishāq's life of the Prophet as a book of tradition, and that although many have acknowledged Mālik's work as such, it is properly a law book. The earliest book of traditions available to us in print is the *Musnad*³ of Ṭayālisī (d. 203 or 204). Here we find the use of complete *isnāds* throughout. The same applies to the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241), a work arranged by his son. We may therefore assume that during the second half of the second century the necessity of a complete *isnād* came to be realized.

¹ Cf. BULLETIN OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY, xxxviii (1955-6), 462 f.

² Ibid. pp. 451 f.

³ A *musnad* work is a collection of traditions arranged according to the companion of the Prophet to whom they are traced. This is in contrast with a *muṣannaḥ* (classified) work which arranges the traditions according to the subject matter.

But over against this we find that Shāfi'ī (d. 204), who more than anyone else established Tradition as a basis of Islām, does not always give a complete *isnād* when he quotes traditions. When we get on in the third century, when the works which have become authoritative were produced, a complete *isnād* is found to be invariable.

However genuine or otherwise the *isnāds* in the canonical works may be, they have always been accepted as genuine by Muslim students of Tradition who have paid minute attention to them. But all *isnāds* were not accepted as genuine, for as time passed it became obvious that many spurious traditions were being foisted on the public, so it was important to separate the genuine from the spurious. This was done chiefly by examining the quality of the men whose names appeared in *isnāds*, for a tradition was commonly judged by the *isnād*. Books were compiled about these men and statements were recorded regarding their degree of reliability or otherwise. It was also important to know when they were born and when they died, for this gave guidance as to whether they could have met the men they quoted, and whether the men who quoted them could have met them. But this was mainly a development from the third century onwards, although it is said that some people even of the first century collected material of this nature. It is, of course, reasonable to infer that much material was handed down from an early period and incorporated in later books, for one can hardly imagine that the information about the men of the first two centuries is fictional. Arabs were notable as genealogists, so we can believe that, although books may have been late in appearing, the materials for compiling them were available. But whatever may be said about the details of birth and death and such like, one is faced by rather a problem through finding that everyone does not agree about the quality of the men who are discussed. The question which arises is which statement is to be believed when authorities differ.

This leads us on naturally to consider the criticism of the men, a subject which goes under the title of *al-jarḥ wal-ta'dīl* (disparaging and declaring trustworthy). Some people felt that the whole subject was unworthy, and they seem to have continued this

disapproval for a long time. Muslim in the introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ* emphasizes the necessity of examining the credentials of traditionists, and as he was recognized early as a very great authority, one might imagine that his arguments would settle the matter, but that did not happen. For example, al-Ḥākim (d. 405) argues at length in his *Madkhal ilā kitāb al-ikhlāl*¹ that the practice of investigating the credentials of transmitters is justified, and he returns to the subject in his *Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*.² Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463) deals with the matter in his *Kitāb al-ḳifāya fī ʿilm al-riwāya*³ where he devotes considerable space to it. It should be noted that such criticism did not affect the Companions of the Prophet who transmitted traditions from him, because everyone agreed that they were all beyond reproach; but there must have been quite an influential body of opinion which disapproved of the criticism of traditionists of subsequent generations to make it necessary for others to argue in support of the practice.

Although some people objected, a number of books were written on the subject, the most famous of the early ones being *Kitāb al-jarḥ wal-taʿdīl*⁴ by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (240-327). That this was recognized as a standard work is shown by the fact that the Khaṭīb in his *Kifāya* and, about two centuries later, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643) in his *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth*⁵ were content to quote the categories of traditionists given by Ibn Abū Ḥātim. About him and his book the Khaṭīb tells an interesting story.⁶ When Ibn Abū Ḥātim was reading his book to a company of scholars, Yūsuf b. al-Ḥusain al-Rāzī (d. 304) entered and asked what he was reading. He replied that it was a book on *al-jarḥ wal-taʿdīl*. Yūsuf asked what that was, and when he explained that he showed in it which traditionists were reliable and which were not, Yūsuf said, "I am ashamed of you, Abū Muḥammad. Many of these people have dwelt in paradise for a hundred and two hundred years, yet you are mentioning and slandering them on the face of the earth." When Ibn Abū

¹ J. Robson, *An Introduction to the Science of Tradition* (London, 1953), pp. 43 f.

² Pp. 52 ff.

³ Ḥaidarābād, 1357/1938. See pp. 31 ff.

⁴ Ḥaidarābād, 1371-3/1952-3, 9 vols.

⁵ Aleppo, 1350/1931.

⁶ Op. cit. p. 38.

Ḥātīm heard this he wept and said : “ If I had heard this statement before I had composed this book, I would not have composed it.” This may be nothing more than one of the pious stories so dear to Muslim writers, for the book was certainly not withdrawn. Having told the story the Khaṭīb goes on to argue that there are certain traditionists against whom warning must be given, and he insists that this does not involve slander.

Ibn Abū Ḥātīm mentions four grades of men whose traditions may be accepted.¹ The first grade are called *thiqa* (trustworthy), or *mutqin* (exact). To these terms Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ adds *thabat* (reliable), *ḥujja* (proof), *ḥāfiẓ* (one who knows his material by heart) and *ḍābiṭ* (accurate).

The second grade are called *ṣadūq* (truthful), *maḥalluhu al-ṣidq* (his station is veracity), or *lā ba’s bihi* (there is no harm in him). People to whom such terms are applied are not so authoritative as the first grade, but they are considered quite respectable and their traditions are written down and considered. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ approves of this statement, saying that these terms do not declare a man to be accurate and therefore it is right that one should consider his traditions before accepting them. But he goes on to quote Yaḥyā b. Ma’īn (d. 233) to the effect that when he used *lā ba’s bihi* he meant that a man was trustworthy ; otherwise he called him *ḍa’if* (weak). As Ibn Abū Ḥātīm was born seven years after Ibn Ma’īn died we get some indication of a fairly short period within which *lā ba’s bihi* went down in meaning, at least in the estimation of Ibn Abū Ḥātīm.

The third grade is *shaiḫh*. This type of transmitter is treated in the same way as those of the second grade, but is considered somewhat inferior to them. It is a little peculiar that this term should be applied as belonging to a separate category, for it is commonly used quite generally for the authority from whom one learns, without any suggestion that he is not of a very high grade. For example, Bukhārī and Muslim are often called the two *shaiḫhs*.

The fourth grade is called *ṣāliḥ al-ḥadīth* (good, or upright in tradition). The traditions of such a man are written down for

¹ For these and for the four grades of lower authority, op. cit. I, i, p. 37. Cf. al-Khaṭīb, *Kifāya*, p. 23 ; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *‘Ulūm*, pp. 133 ff.

the purpose of comparing them with those of other traditionists. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says that 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī (d. 198) used this phrase of a man who, while truthful, had some weakness.

Ibn Abū Ḥātim also gives four grades of people whom he considers of lower authority. The first is *layyin al-ḥadīth* (easygoing in tradition). He says that his traditions are written down and compared with others. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ quotes Dāraquṭnī (d. 385) as saying that this term is applied to one who is not rejected, but is criticized for something not serious enough to impugn his general trustworthiness.

The second grade is *laisa bi-qawī* (not strong). This type of man is treated in the same way as the preceding, but is of lower grade.

The third grade is *ḍa'if al-ḥadīth* (weak in tradition). This type is not rejected outright although inferior to the second grade, but his traditions are written down and compared with others to see whether they find support elsewhere.

The fourth grade consists of men called *matrūk al-ḥadīth* (abandoned respecting tradition), *dhāhib al-ḥadīth* (rejected), or *ḡadhḡāb* (liar). Needless to say, one does not write down the traditions of such men.

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ adds a number of terms which Ibn Abū Ḥātim did not explain.¹ They are *qad rawā al-nās 'anhu* (people have transmitted on his authority), *wasat* (middling), *muqārib al-ḥadīth* (approximating with regard to tradition), *muḍṭarab al-ḥadīth* (confused in tradition), *lā yuḡtajj bihi* (not adduced in argument), *majhūl* (unknown), *lā shai'* (nothing), *laisa bi-dhāḡ* (worthless), *laisa bi-dhāḡ al-qawī* (not at all strong), *fīhi*, or *fī ḡadīthihi ḍa'f* (in him, or, in his traditions there is weakness), this latter being called a term of lower grade than *ḍa'if al-ḥadīth*. Of those who are not rejected *mā a'lam bihi ba's* (I know no harm in him) is used, but it is inferior to *lā ba's bihi* (there is no harm in him). That is understandable, for the latter is a categorical statement, whereas the former merely says one knows no harm in him, without any guarantee that everyone else is equally ignorant of such harm.

This scheme sounds very cut and dried, but the matter is not always quite so simple, for there is no universal agreement about

¹ Op. cit. pp. 136 f.

the class to which individual traditionists belong. While some are generally recognized as unimpeachable authorities, there are others who are considered such by some but as less trustworthy by others. Then we find that sometimes men who are recognized as reliable at one period of their lives are not to be trusted at a later period. This may be due to the effect of senility, about which something will be said later ; or a reliable man's books may have been destroyed by fire, and he may have kept on transmitting traditions although he could not guarantee to remember all he had accumulated. In this latter instance it is important to know what the man transmitted before the fire, as that may be accepted as reliable, whereas one cannot trust what was transmitted after the fire. Biographical information was carefully kept, but it is one thing to know the age of a man when he became unreliable and another to know what was transmitted before and what after that period. In the event of such information not being available, however, one can always compare his traditions with similar ones transmitted by reliable authorities, as that may give some guidance regarding their trustworthiness. Another difficulty is that, even when one finds an *isnād* containing a series of men who are accepted authorities, the tradition may not be reliable, for some people have been guilty of attributing traditions to authorities and so pretending that what they invented is genuine. Ḥākīm has something to say about such *isnāds* in his *Ma'rifat 'ulūm al-ḥadīth* (pp. 58 ff.), where he indicates that this presents great difficulty, and that such weaknesses can be detected only by one's thorough knowledge and by constant discussion with learned men.

The subject of the qualities necessary in a man whose traditions may be accepted is also approached in a more general way. Here I quote from Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Ḥāzīmī (d. 584) in his *Shurūṭ al-a'immāt al-khamsa*,¹ pp. 39 ff. He mentions five qualifications. (1) The traditionist must be a Muslim, but if he has heard traditions before accepting Islām and transmits them after becoming a Muslim, there is no harm in this. (2) He must have intelligence. One who is not in his right mind cannot have his traditions accepted, and Ḥāzīmī adds

¹ Cairo, 1357/1938.

that the same applies to a young child. If one becomes confused in later life the traditions he transmitted before that happened can be accepted if one is in a position to distinguish between what he transmitted before and after this calamity. (3) He must be truthful. If anyone puts forward false traditions intentionally, what he transmits must never be accepted, even if he repents. But if he admits an unintentional mistake his traditions can be accepted. If one is known to be a liar regarding other matters his traditions are rejected; and the same applies if he allows people to suggest he has transmitted traditions which he has not transmitted, or if he is known to be easygoing in hearing and passing on traditions. (4) He must not be one who conceals defects in his traditions. (5) He must be trustworthy. Even a complete *isnād* back to the Prophet is not acceptable unless the men are all trustworthy. Trustworthiness involves obedience to God's commands, avoidance of what He has forbidden and of wicked deeds, maintaining truth, and being careful to say nothing which could affect one's religion or manly qualities. It is not enough to avoid great sins: lesser sins must be avoided also. One who is recognized as trustworthy must also be known by traditionists to be a student of tradition and to pay great attention to it. What he knows should have come from the learned and not from books; in other words he is not acceptable if self-taught. He must be accurate regarding what he hears and must verify what he transmits from his *shaiḫh*. He should, among other things, be dignified, and he should avoid wrong ideas and innovations.

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (pp. 114 ff.) also gives an account of the qualities expected in an acceptable traditionist, agreeing in general with what has been quoted from Ḥāzimī, but going into the subject in greater detail. He adds that the traditionist should know his material by heart if he transmits from memory and should keep his book accurate if he transmits from it. If he quotes traditions according to the sense without adhering strictly to the actual wording he should have such a thorough knowledge of the language as will keep him from making any change in the meaning. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ also expresses disapproval of accepting payment for transmitting traditions.

The age at which one could begin to hear and transmit traditions is also an important subject, but opinions differ regarding it. The Khaṭīb and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ provide very much the same information on the subject, so I confine myself mainly to what Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says. He disagrees with those who reject the traditions of young people, pointing out that some of the young Companions of the Prophet transmitted traditions which were accepted without any distinction being made between what they learned before growing up and what they learned afterwards. He says that in earlier and later times it has always been the custom to allow boys to attend sessions at which traditions are being transmitted, and to accept their transmission of what they learned at that time.¹

Regarding the writing down of traditions Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Zubairī (d. 236) is quoted as saying the approved age to begin is twenty, for the mental capacities are fully developed then. Mūsā b. Iṣḥāq (d. 297) said the people of Kufa did not send young people to study Tradition till they were twenty years old. Mūsā b. Hārūn (d. 295) said the Basrans wrote down traditions from the age of ten, the Kufans from twenty and the Syrians from thirty. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ considers that young people should be made to hear traditions as early as this can properly be done, and they should write, collect and verify them when they have the capacity. This varies with the individual and is not confined to a particular age.² Opinions differ not only about the age when young people may write traditions, but also when they may begin to hear them. Mūsā b. Hārūn said a child could hear traditions when he was able to distinguish between a cow and a beast of burden, or, as another version says, between a cow and a donkey. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal said a child could hear when he was able to understand and be accurate. When told that someone had said a boy must first be fifteen years old, he objected to that. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says traditionists of later times accepted traditions from one who was five years old and upwards at the time when he heard them, and from one below five years whether he had gone to the session or had been taken there. He holds that if a child has advanced beyond those who cannot understand and

¹ Op. cit. p. 137.

² Op. cit. p. 138.

cannot give a reply it is right for him to hear traditions, even if he is younger than five. If the child has not attained such capacity it is not right for him to hear traditions; indeed the same applies to a man of fifty. He quotes some stories of precocious children to uphold his view, but recognizes that such stories do not establish a general rule. Each case must be judged on its merits.¹

He deals also with the age at which a young person may transmit traditions, and expresses his opinion that when there is a need for the material which the young person possesses he has a right to transmit it, no matter what his age. He then quotes Abū Muḥammad Ibn Khallād (d. 360)² who said the proper age was fifty because this is the end of the period of maturity when one's powers are fully developed; but he allowed it at forty because Muḥammad began his prophetic office at that age. But 'Iyād (d. 544) objected to this, pointing out that some famous traditionists of earlier times had not lived to the age of forty or fifty. Mālik is said to have held sessions for transmitting traditions when he was a little over twenty, but one report says he did this at the age of seventeen. Although his masters were still alive, large numbers came to hear him. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ attempts an explanation of Ibn Khallād's statement by suggesting that he was speaking more particularly of people who put themselves forward before they were properly advanced in their knowledge. He considers it is only right that such people should wait till they have reached a mature age, but he argues that there have been men who showed great ability at an early age. They did not put themselves forward, but were asked by others to transmit traditions to them because they recognized that they were capable of giving valuable information.³

There is also the question of when one should stop transmitting traditions. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says the proper time for this is when a man becomes senile and there is fear that he may be confused and transmit material he has not himself received. He adds that a particular age cannot be specified, as people vary. When a man becomes blind it is also advisable that he should

¹ Op. cit. pp. 139 f.

² This is al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Khallād al-Rāmahurmuzī, who was the first to write a book on the general science of Tradition.

³ Op. cit. pp. 203 f.

cease to transmit traditions, for he cannot guarantee that people will not introduce alien matter among his traditions. Ibn Khallād thought the eighties were the period when one was in danger of being senile and that people should generally stop then, but he recognized that some retained their keenness of intellect even to an advanced age, and so he said that if they were still alert he wished them well. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ does not express an opinion on this statement, having already said that one cannot specify a fixed age for everyone, but he mentions some traditionists who continued their activity to an advanced age, some even continuing when they had become centenarians.¹

Something should now be said about the methods by which traditions may be received. These vary in importance, but everyone is not agreed about the relative importance of some kinds. The simplest way of dealing with the subject is to take Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's divisions, for he has arranged the material better than any other I know.²

The first method is *samā'* (hearing). The *shaiḫh* may speak from memory or read from his book, and he may do this in the form of dictation, or by telling the traditions without dictating them. To hear the traditions directly from the *shaiḫh's* mouth is generally held to be superior to any other method of getting them.

The second method is *al-qirā'a 'alal shaiḫh* (reciting to the *shaiḫh*). This is commonly called *'ard*, which means submitting the material to the *shaiḫh*, just as one does when learning the Qur'ān. It is the same whether one recites oneself or hears someone else reciting. This recitation may be done from memory or from a book, and it does not matter whether the *shaiḫh* knows the material by heart or does not; but in the latter case he should have his book with him, or another reliable authority should consult his book. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says most of the Ḥijāzīs, Kufans, Medinans including Mālik, as well as Bukhārī and some others have considered this method equal in importance to hearing, but most Easterns consider it inferior, and theirs is the correct view.

¹ Op. cit. p. 204.

² Op. cit. pp. 140-69.

The third method is *ijāza* (licence). This means that a *shaiḫh* gives someone licence to transmit his traditions, and the nature of the licence is divided into seven different classes : (1) *Licence for specified material given to a specified person*. Some have objected even to this on the ground that it would make journeys in search of traditions unnecessary, and some have considered it unlawful, or as providing an opening for falsehood. But Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ argues that when one has informed another of his material and given him licence to transmit it, this is similar to his informing him of it in detail. (2) *Licence to a specified person for something unspecified*. The *shaiḫh* may say, " I give you licence for all I have heard ", or, " for all I transmit ". There is even greater disagreement about this type of licence, but the majority consider it allowable. (3) *Licence to someone unspecified in general terms*. One may say, " I give licence to all the Muslims ", or, " to everyone ", or, " to my contemporaries ", etc. People of later times have criticized this although they allowed the general principle of licence. It was felt that if some qualifying phrase was added it came nearer to being allowable, but this is not expressed in any cordial manner. The Khaṭīb allowed this type of licence, but Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says he has neither seen nor heard of anyone whose example is followed who employed this form of licence or transmitted by means of it. (4) *Licence to someone unknown, or for something unknown*. One may say, " I give licence to Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Dimashqī " when there are a number of people of that name and nothing is said to specify which one is meant. Or one may say, " I give licence to so and so to transmit from me *Kitāb al-sunan* ", when he transmits a number of books with that title, but does not specify which one is meant. This is a corrupt and useless form of licence. (5) *Licence to a non-existent person*. This is to be combined with giving licence to an infant. One may say, " I give licence to those who are born to so and so ". It would be better to say, " I give licence to so and so and to those who are born to him ", or, " I give licence to you and your children and your descendants as long as the line is maintained ". The Khaṭīb allowed licence to a non-existent person even without relationship to someone existent being mentioned, but Ibn

al-Ṣalāḥ does not allow licence to a non-existent person on the ground that giving licence is equivalent to giving information, so the idea of giving licence to a non-existent person is just as unsound as that of giving information to a non-existent person. But he considers it allowable to give licence to an infant, holding that he may transmit the material when he has acquired the capacity for doing so. (6) *Licence to transmit material which the one who gives it has not yet heard, this is to take effect when he has heard it.* Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says that if licence is treated as equivalent to giving information, this type is not allowable. If it is treated as equivalent to permission, it is considered on the basis of giving an agent permission to sell something one means to buy before one has bought it. Though some members of the Shāfi'ī school allowed such a practice, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ holds that it is wrong. So if anyone is given licence to transmit all that a *shaiḥ* has heard he must transmit only what the *shaiḥ* had heard before he gave the licence. (7) *Licence for material for which one has oneself received licence.* While this is generally considered allowable one must consider the nature of the licence received by one's *shaiḥ* himself so as not to transmit anything it does not include.

Having discussed these types of licence at length Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ lays it down that licence is approved only when the one who gives it knows what he gives licence for, and the one to whom it is given is a learned person. One wonders how this fits in with Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's approval of giving licence to an infant. He says further that when the one who gives licence writes it he should also express it by word of mouth, for a written licence is inferior to one which is spoken.

The fourth method is *munāwala* (handing over). This is of two kinds. The first is combined with licence and this has subdivisions. The *shaiḥ* may hand over a written copy which has been verified, saying this is what he transmits and giving licence to transmit it. The one who is handed the copy may be allowed to keep it, or to copy and return it. Another type is when one brings a *shaiḥ* some of his traditions which have been written down. The *shaiḥ* examines them, and if he is satisfied that they are his traditions he returns the script to the one who brought it, telling him he has examined it and found that it contains traditions

of his. He then says, "Transmit them on my authority", or, "I give you licence to transmit them on my authority". This is a variety of *'arḍ* (submitting material) called *'arḍ al-munāwala* to distinguish it from the kind mentioned earlier, called *'arḍ al-qirā'a*, when a student reads over a *shaiḥh*'s traditions to him. Another type is when the *shaiḥh* hands the student a copy of his traditions and gives him licence to transmit them, but does not let him keep the book. This type is therefore considered inferior, but Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says that if the student can get possession of the book or of a verified copy of what he has been given licence to transmit, he may transmit that. Some say this type is like getting licence for something specified, others say it is of no value, others say it has a quality which deserves consideration, but God who is blessed and exalted really knows. A fourth type is when a student brings a *shaiḥh* a script, saying this is what the *shaiḥh* transmits and asking him to hand it to him and give him licence to transmit the traditions. If the *shaiḥh* merely hands the script back without examining it and verifying that it really contains what he transmits, this is not allowable unless the man who presented the script is one who can be trusted and is himself learned. The Khaṭīb considered this allowable provided the *shaiḥh* said, "Tell on my authority what this book contains if it is from my traditions, but I am not responsible for any error or wrong conception". The second main division is *munāwala* without licence, when the *shaiḥh* merely says the book contains his traditions or what he has heard, but does not tell the man to transmit them on his authority and does not give him licence to do so. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ considers that this does not give the student the right to transmit the traditions, but he tells that a number of traditionists considered that it did.

The fifth method is *muḳātaba* (correspondence). The *shaiḥh* may write traditions for someone, whether absent or present and licence may or may not be given. Some hold that this material may be transmitted although licence has not been given, but others say it may not. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ argues that if the student knows the *shaiḥh*'s handwriting he is perfectly justified in transmitting the material, but when he does so he should say, "So

and so wrote to me saying . . .". If licence is given, this method of transmission is on an equality with *munāwala* combined with licence.

Another method is called *waṣīya* (bequest). The book may be left to someone on the death of the *shaiḳh*, or entrusted to him when the *shaiḳh* goes on a journey. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ insists that, in spite of what some people say, one has no right to transmit material received in this manner.

Finally there is *wijāda* (a find). This is used of finding a book in the handwriting of the man who transmitted its contents. The one who finds the book never met the writer, or if he met him he never heard the traditions from him, or received licence to transmit them. If one wishes to transmit the material he has found he must be careful to say that he found it in the handwriting of so and so, or in so and so's book, as this gives a suggestion of a connected *isnād*. But if he finds a book containing a *shaiḳh's* traditions which have been copied by someone else, all he may say is that so and so mentioned the traditions, or said such and such. This does not give any suggestion of a connected *isnād*.

Some at least of these methods were used in the third century and possibly earlier. For example, Bukhārī has a chapter on reading over traditions to a *shaiḳh*, and also on *munāwala* and *mukātaba*.¹ The practice of making journeys in search of traditions was prevalent at an early date, when it was considered necessary to receive traditions directly from authorities who were known to transmit them.

Traditionists not only had a variety of methods of receiving traditions, they also had much to say about what words might be used when one transmitted material. The use of 'an (from, on the authority of) presents some problems. In the *Muwatta'* Mālik is normally quite content to use 'an without indicating how the information was received. He may use *qāla* (he said) of his immediate authority, but he is usually satisfied with 'an for other stages of the *isnād*. In his *Risāla*² Shāfi'ī often begins with

¹ *ʿIlm*, 6 and 7. Tirmidhī, in the concluding section of his *Sunan* speaks of reading over material to a *shaiḳh* (ed. publ. Būlāq, 1292/1875, ii. 337 f.).

² Cairo, 1358/1940.

aḥḥbarānā (he informed us), after which he uses ‘*an*, but often he uses ‘*an* throughout. One may contrast this with Ṭayālisī who, while he often uses ‘*an*, frequently uses some other word to indicate how the information was received. For example, he can use an *isnād* which, literally translated, goes : Abū Dāwūd told us he said, Hammām said, Qatāda told us he said, Zarāra b. Aufā told me from Abū Huraira from the Prophet. Another slightly different goes : Abū Dāwūd told us he said, Shu‘ba told us he said, Qatāda informed me he said, I heard al-Naḍr b. Anas telling from Bushair b. Nahīk from Abū Huraira that. . . . Here one notes that at certain stages men report not merely that the tradition came from so and so, but that they heard so and so telling how he got it.

There is fairly general agreement that ‘*an* is allowable in certain circumstances. Shāfi‘ī (*Risāla*, p. 373) considers its use allowable provided the one who uses it is not a man known to have concealed defects in his transmission of traditions. But he says that, while this is allowable regarding Tradition, a witness in a court of law is acceptable only if he uses such phrases as “ I heard ”, or “ I saw ”. One might imagine, however, that the method of documenting traditions is as important as the method of giving testimony in a court. Muslim, in the introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, has a section on the validity of using a *mu‘an‘an* tradition as a basis of proof. He holds that if a recognized reliable authority quotes another using ‘*an*, his transmission is authoritative provided the two could have met. He even goes so far as to suggest that it is not necessary to know that they met, although some hold that it must be known that they met at least once. He obviously trusts his authority not to use ‘*an* unless he has really heard the tradition from the one he quotes. He argues that those who disapprove of using ‘*an* are wrong, because some who are known to have met the people they quote sometimes use ‘*an*. That being so, those who disapprove would need to assume that such a transmitter was trying to hide something. Ḥākim¹ recognizes that ‘*an* is allowable when used by people who do not conceal faults, but not when used by people who do. The Khaṭīb² justifies ‘*an* on the ground that to write out the method

¹ *Ma‘rifā*, p. 34.

² *Kifāya*, p. 390.

of transmission in detail becomes burdensome, especially when the *isnād* is long. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ¹ also approves of 'an, but only when the people are known to have met one another and the one who uses it is not suspected of concealing faults.

Traditionists speak of the different words which are used to report the transmission of traditions. There are such words as *ḥaddathanī* (he told me), *ḥaddathanā* (he told us), *aḥḥbaranī* (he informed me), *aḥḥbaranā* (he informed us), *sami'tu* (I heard), *anba'anī* (he announced to me), *anba'anā* (he announced to us). In 'Ilm, 4 Bukhārī quotes a statement attributed to Ibn 'Uyaina (d. 198) that he considered *ḥaddathanā*, *aḥḥbaranā*, *anba'anā* and *sami'tu* to be equivalent. He follows this with reference to Companions who used *ḥaddathanā*, *sami'tu* or simply 'an. Bukhārī makes no comments on these quotations, and their appropriateness at the head of the chapter is not very obvious, but presumably he would not have quoted them without comment unless he approved of them. It may be of some interest to notice that the one tradition given in that chapter uses *ḥaddathanā* for the manner in which Bukhārī got it, but the rest of the *isnād* has only 'an.

Hākim is very precise in his statement about the significance of the different words.² He says that the preferable view in his opinion and in that of his *shaiḥhs* and the leading men of his time is that one should use *ḥaddathanī* only when one hears a tradition by word of mouth from a *shaiḥh* when no one else is present; if others are present one should say *ḥaddathanā*. If one reads traditions over to a *shaiḥh* when no one else is present one should say *aḥḥbaranī*, but if one hears another reading traditions over to a *shaiḥh* the word to use is *aḥḥbaranā*. If one submits traditions to a *shaiḥh* and is given licence by word of mouth to transmit them, one should say *anba'anī*. If, however, one receives written traditions from a traditionist in another town without licence by word of mouth, the phrase to use is *ḥataba ilayya* (he wrote to me). He follows this by an *isnād* going back to Shu'ba (d. 160) who told that al-Manṣūr (d. 132) had written a tradition to him. Later, on meeting al-Manṣūr, he asked him about it and he replied, "Did I not tell it to you? (*ḥaddathtuka*

¹ 'Ulūm, pp. 67 f.

² Op. cit. p. 260.

bihi). When I write to you I have told it to you.” This seems to come in rather inconsequently, for no further remark is made although it seems to contradict what Ḥākim has just been saying.

Tirmidhī had already quoted something similar to the views Ḥākim mentions.¹ He attributes to ‘Abdallāh b. Wahb (d. 197) the same statement about *ḥaddathanī*, *aḥḥbaranī* and *aḥḥbaranā* as we have noted from Ḥākim. But at the same time Tirmidhī quotes Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān (d. 198) as saying that *ḥaddathanā* and *aḥḥbaranā* mean one and the same thing. He also tells that when he read some of Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Madanī’s (d. 242) traditions to him and asked what he should say, he was told to say *ḥaddathanā*. This suggests that the views expressed by Ḥākim had not become so fixed a century before his time as he says they had in his day.

The Khaṭīb, who died more than half a century after Ḥākim, does not express himself as categorically as Ḥākim does, but in general is content to quote the views of various people of earlier times. The one point on which he does express a definite opinion is where he says that *sami‘tu* (I heard) is the term of highest grade,² as people rarely use it of traditions they receive by licence or correspondence, or when they try to conceal defects. Yet he quotes Mu‘tamir b. Sulaimān (d. 207) as saying that *sami‘tu* is inferior to *ḥaddatha* or *aḥḥbara*, because one can hear traditions when the *shaiḥh* is not formally transmitting them ; for there is a difference between merely telling some traditions and holding a formal session to transmit them. Without going into further detail, it is sufficient to say that the Khaṭīb quotes a variety of views expressed by people of the second and third centuries, from which all one can gather is that there was no generally agreed distinction made between the various terms. This view is strengthened by the large number of quotations given at a later date by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. Indeed, he is the only one I have noticed who clearly recognizes the fact that the practice varied at different times.³ That seems to be the only reasonable conclusion about the whole matter.

There are various views about how traditions should be transmitted, and there are also rules about the transmission of

¹ *Sunan*, ii. 338.

² *Kifāya*, p. 284.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 141.

books containing collections of traditions. Even down to modern times there have been some people who have preserved an *isnād* telling how books have come down to them by a continuous line of transmission traced back to the compiler. Very often details are included of the manner in which the transmission was carried out, and even of the date when this took place. But while this may interest some people it does not have a very practical purpose at the present day. In earlier times, and especially before the invention of printing, such a practice did have importance, and because of that it is not surprising that it should have continued to a much later date. But one is interested to notice that Nawawī (d. 676), in the introduction to his commentary on Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, quotes Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ as saying that in his time and for a long time before it the connected transmission of Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* was not important.¹ I have not been able to find any such statement in '*Ulūm al-ḥadīth*'. Presumably Nawawī is quoting some other work, but one wonders a little about this, because Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ gives many rules regarding the methods of transmitting works on Tradition, mentioning among them regulations about writing on one's copy the manner in which one received the material. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says that one should not only verify one's copy, but should also add the *isnād* telling how it was successively transmitted.² When one examines manuscripts of compilations of Tradition one usually finds the writer's *isnād* appended. Nowadays we have printed copies of the great compilations, and while they are usually traced to some important scholar at an early date, there is no attempt to trace the lineage down to the date of publication. One is satisfied nowadays with a printed copy which has been verified as a correct version of the original.

It has been possible in the space at our disposal to consider only a few aspects of the subject. For example, traditionists had other branches of the study of the men whose names appear in *isnāds* besides those we have considered. They also developed a large number of technical terms to distinguish different grades of tradition as well as different grades of transmitter. We have confined ourselves to some of the standards applied, and it must

¹ Cairo, 1283/1866, 5 vols. See i. 9.

² '*Ulūm*', p. 183.

have been apparent that these include some which were not universal in the early days before the canonical collections were compiled. The authority of early scholars is frequently quoted, but even granting that these quotations are all genuine, one notices that the views expressed often vary, and so it cannot be assumed that the principles set out by later writers were always in force. Much of the material we have been considering is rather an attempt to give an appearance of a regular system which did not necessarily always prevail. But while such principles may not have been applied by all the compilers of books of Tradition, they formed a method by which works could be judged, and they also gave guidance to people of later times regarding their transmission of the material which came down to them.

The more one considers Tradition the more one is impressed by the immense amount of study which has been devoted to it. One would imagine that with so many minute details everything should be very accurately preserved, yet we find variants occurring between different versions. But there is a more fundamental difficulty with which these studies cannot deal satisfactorily. Even in the most authoritative collections there are many traditions which the candid observer cannot accept as genuine; but the damage was done long ago and there is no means of proving conclusively how the obviously spurious traditions came to be accepted as genuine. The community was careful to reject many spurious traditions, and yet it clearly preserved many which are to be found in books which few good Muslims would dare to question. This makes one feel that the vast structure of learning which has been erected is something in the nature of a façade to decorate a building which is not quite so stable as appearances would suggest. But when one says this, it is necessary to add that the scholars who engaged in this earnest study were honest men who tried their best to preserve what they felt to be a basis of Islām second only in importance to the Qur'ān itself.