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Justifications Of Ibn Qutaybah And Ibn Hajar

Third Reason: Justifications Of Ibn Qutaybah And Ibn Hajar

Ibn Qutaybah¹ and Ibn Hajar,² as well as other historians,³ have attributed the reason for the prohibition of reporting and recording the Hadith to the matter that most of the Sahabah had not mastered writing.

As faced by criticism and scrutiny, this opinion has proven its inaccuracy. Further, it has been opposed by many objections and refutations, such as that of Mr. Muhammad `Ajjaj al-Khatib who says,

“Having found out that there were more than thirty clerks recording the Revelation for the Holy Prophet and many others were in charge of other clerical affairs, we cannot accede to the opinions of Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn Hajar. Also, we cannot believe in the scarcity of those who could write in that period; therefore, Ibn Hajar’s generalization is unproven.”⁴

In his book entitled *al-Sunnah qabl al-Tadwin* (The Holy Sunnah before the recordation), Mr. Muhammad `Ajjaj al-Khatib says,

“In such a deep thesis, we should not submit to the traditional reasons the authors used to use for justifying the refraining from recording the Holy Sunnah. Furthermore, we cannot accept their claim that the paucity of the records of the Holy Sunnah during the Holy Prophet’s lifetime was due to the irregularity of recording in general and the small number of those who were able to write as well as the miswriting that was common at that time.

We should not accept such false claims after we have found out that there were more than thirty clerks recording the Revelation for the Holy Prophet, and many others were in charge of the other clerical affairs.

We should not also agree to the claim of the fewness of people who could write and the miswriting in that era, because we know for certain that there were proficient writers in that period, such as Zayd ibn Thabit and `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn al-`As. Supposing we accept the claim of the scarcity and

unavailability of the writing tools, how could Muslims record the Holy Qur'an without difficulties?

If they had had the desire to record the Hadith, they would have easily done it in the same way as some individuals had asked the Holy Prophet's permission to record the Hadith, and he permitted them. Therefore, there must have been other reasons... etc.”⁵

Dr. Mustafa Al-A`dhamiy has said,

“If we accept the charge that people who lived in the time of the Holy Prophet did not master writing, how can we accept the reports telling that the Holy Qur'an was recorded in that period? We all know that the Sahabah used to record the holy verses as soon as they were revealed. What is the meaning of the Holy Prophet's instruction, ‘Record not anything about me except the Holy Qur'an?’

Such an instruction would be unnecessary if people in that time could not write. Nevertheless, the previous report itself bears out that they used to record the Holy Qur'an as well as other things. The existence of a big number of clerks who worked for the Holy Prophet violates the aforementioned claim; and the administration of a big state, like that reigned by the Rashidite caliphs,⁶ required the presence of people mastering writing, arithmetic, and similar basic sciences.

As a result, it is inescapable to admit to the fact that a big number of people, including the Sahabah themselves, could read and write in that time. Furthermore, the Holy Prophet's educational policy brought forth its initial fruits during his lifetime, and consequently, the fruits must have increased manifold afterwards. On this account, albeit that most of people in the Holy Prophet's time could not read and write, there were many others who could read and write and could meet the clerical requirements of that time.”⁷

Aiming at identifying a convincing reason beyond the prohibition of recording the Hadith, Mr. al-Khatib returned to some of the traditional reasons by which he fell upon others, saying,

“The reason beyond the official prohibition of recording the Hadith during the Holy Prophet's lifetime was not the Muslims' having been illiterate; rather some of them could read and write and, thus, they recorded the Holy Revelations.

As a matter of fact, there were other reasons, such as the fear that the Holy Qur'an would be confused with the Hadith and that Muslims would engage themselves with the recordation of the Holy Sunnah and consequently would ignore the recording, study, and memorization of the Holy Qur'an.”⁸

Dr. `Abd al-Khaliq has fallen in the same mistake; refuting the words of Ibn Qutaybah, he says,

“The narration of Abu-Sa`id al-Khidriy seems to be the basic evidence on the prohibition of recording the Hadith. However, the narration confirms that the Holy Prophet permitted the recordation of the Holy Qur'an in the same time as he prohibited the recordation of the Hadith. Providing the reason beyond the prohibition was the fear of miswriting, how did he permitted recording the Holy Qur'an?”⁹

Mr. Ma`ruf also has his own opinion,

“As a result, it has been proven that writing was not as scarce as described by al-Buladhiriyy who says, in *Futuh al-Buldan*, that only seventeen Qurayshite men could read and write when Islam emerged, and only eleven from the tribes of al-Aws and al-Khazraj could learn from their neighbors. Since the literate persons among people of Quraysh and people of Yathrib (later al-Madinah) were as few as the aforementioned numbers, one could hardly find a single literate person among the people of the other tribes and towns.”¹⁰

Ahmad Amin’s opinion has been previously cited.¹¹

Dr. Subhiy al-Salih says,

“As long as the Sahabah, regarding the preservation of the Holy Sunnah, depended upon the hearts of those who had memorized it, not documents, it has been necessary to find another reason rather than the traditional ones to which everybody has referred whenever this topic is concerned.

It is impracticable to accept the claim that the reason beyond the prohibition of recording the Hadith had been the scarcity of the tools of writing during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, because such tools were not as scarce as they described.

However, they might have been one of the factors, and undoubtedly not the one and only factor, which resulted in the negligence of recording the Hadith, because such a factor had not precluded the companions of the Holy Prophet from exerting all efforts for sake of recording the Holy Qur’an entirely on rocks, leaves of date-palm trees, shoulders of animals, and other tools.

Had their psychological motives towards the recordation of the Hadith been as enthusiast and strong as the motives they had had towards the recordation of the Holy Qur’an, they would have certainly found the proper tools.

Rather, they, having followed the instructions of the Holy Prophet as well as their own desires, compiled the Hadith in a way completely different from that used in the compilation of the Holy Qur’an.”¹²

Sayyid al-Jalaliy, commenting on Ibn Hajar’s opinion, has said,

“It is very odd that a Hadithist, a biographer, and a historian as weighty as Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalaniy had missed such an apparent fact, claiming that the reason beyond the prohibition of recording the Hadith was that people were illiterate!

By such a phrase, it is understandable that Ibn Hajar meant all the people of that time. Taking notice of such a flaw, al-Suyutiyy had to put the situation in order and thus say that most of the people in that time could not read and write!”¹³

From the previous quotations and comments, we realize that the generalization of illiteracy on all of the companions of the Holy Prophet has been unsound, because it is illogical to warn an illiterate against recording! The Holy Prophet's forged prohibition from recording the Hadith is in itself a proof on the existence of those who could read and write or, more precisely, on the actual occurrence of the recording, otherwise to warn intensely against a nonexistent thing is meaningless.

Explaining the Hadith of 'Do not write anything from my wording except the Holy Qur'an, and anyone who has written any material must erase it,' the reviser of the book of '*Thabt al-Baladiy*', comments,

"The words of this Hadith proves that the Hadith was written down during the lifetime of the Holy Messenger..."¹⁴

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1. Abu-Muhammad Abdullah ibn Muslim ibn Qutaybah (died in AH 376): Ta'wil Mukhtalaf al-Hadith 366. For further details, see Shaykh Tahir al-Jaza'iriy: Tawjih al-Nadhar 10.
 2. Ahmad ibn `Ali ibn Hajar al-`Asqalaniy (died in AH 852): Huda al-Sari4.
 3. Such as al-Dhahbiy, in Siyar A`lam al-Nubala' 18:541; Tadhkirat al-Huffadh 3:1183 (Biography of Abu'l-Walid Sulayman ibn Khalaf al-Bajiy).
 4. Muhammad `Ajjaj al-Khatib: Usul al-Hadith wa Ulumuhu wa Mustalahuh 146.
 5. Muhammad `Ajjaj al-Khatib: al-Sunnah qabl al-Tadwin 301-2.
 6. The Rashidite caliphs are respectively Abu-Bakr, `Umar, `Uthman and Imam `Ali who governed the ummah before the sovereignty of the Umayyad rulers.
 7. Mustafa al-A`dhamiy: Dirasatun fi'l-Hadith al-Nubawiy, 73.
 8. Muhammad `Ajjaj al-Khatib: al-Sunnah qabl al-Tadwin 340.
 9. Abd al-Ghaniy Abd al-Khaliq: Hijjiyyat al-Sunnah 430 and 444.
 10. Hashim Ma'ruf: Dirasat fi'l-Kafi wa'l-Sahih 14.
 11. For more details: see Ahmad Amin: Fajr al-Islam 13-4.
 12. Subhiy al-Salih: Ulum al-Hadith wa Mustalahuh 6.
 13. Sayyid Muhammad Rida al-Jalaliy: Tadwin al-Sunnah al-Sharifah 392-3. Al-Suyutiy's saying has been quoted from his book entitled Tadrib al-Rawi 1:88.
 14. Thabt al-Baladiy 77.

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