

THE PRESERVATION  
AND COMPILATION OF  
THE NOBLE ḤADĪTH

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## Introduction

The Qur'an, the final celestial revelation, is a comprehensive yet concise one-volume book that contains spiritual, social, economic, and political guidance. Two key points exemplify the reasons behind its brevity.<sup>1</sup>

Firstly, a voluminous compilation would hinder regular readership and memorization. As gauged by academic writings in other fields, such as that of history, where books of 20-30 volumes are not uncommon. This would have perhaps rendered it nearly impossible for people of all age groups and ethnicities to read it habitually and memorize it.

Secondly, it was unnecessary for the Qur'an to be detailed. As students will agree, course books are not generally made for self-study. But rather, dependent on teacher discourse for detail and instruction. Similar is the Qur'an; it can only correctly be understood through the guidance and teachings of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلٰيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ); his Ḥadīth.

Allāh Ta'ālā has said: "*And We sent down the Reminder (The Qur'an) to you, so that you explain to the people what has been revealed for them, and so that they may ponder.*"<sup>2</sup>

It is unequivocally established from this verse that one of the roles of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلٰيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) is to interpret and explain the revelation sent to him. However, some people have questioned the credibility of the Sunnah, citing the abundance of apparently contradictory narrations, the absence of a single book with a collection of all the authentic narrations, and that the books of Ḥadīth were compiled much later than they should have been, in the third century. This article will focus on addressing the last claim. Prior to that, it will shed light on the importance of Ḥadīth and then progress to expound on its preservation and compilation from the time it emanated from the blessed mouth of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلٰيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) until today.

## The Importance of Ḥadīth

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<sup>1</sup> 'Allāmah Ḥabīb Ar-Raḥmān Al-A'zamī, *Nuṣratu 'l-Ḥadīthfi Ar-Radd 'alā Munkiri 'l-Ḥadīth*, pp.61-62.

<sup>2</sup> Holy Qur'an 16:44.

The two major themes in the Qur'an can be categorized viz; simple realities, (such as historical events, the cosmological signs of divine power and wisdom, descriptions of Paradise and Hell, etc.) and imperatives of the Shari'ah, along with other academic subjects. While the former is simple and can be understood without having recourse to another, this cannot extend to the inference of the legal rules and the interpretation of the legal and doctrinal provisions contained in the Book. Hence, the reason for entrusting the Holy Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) with the functions of teaching and explaining the Qur'ān, further indicating that independent interpretation is not open to any person, irrespective of the volume of his knowledge. Undoubtedly, Allāh Ta'ālā mentions that the Qur'ān has been made easy to understand, but this does not exclude the necessity of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)'s explanations.<sup>3</sup>

The Arabs of Makkah, who were directly addressed by the Qur'ān, undoubtedly understood the textual meanings of the Qur'ān. This primarily indicates that the explanation entrusted to the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) had to be supplementary to the literal meanings of the Book. It further indicates that notwithstanding this advantageous position of theirs, which included; witnessing events pertaining to the verses, familiarity with the Qur'ānic style and of course, mastery of the Arabic language, they were still in need of the Prophet's explanations (Aḥadīth). It is then unfathomable how the people of the present age, who lack all such advantages, will be able to understand the Qur'ān without the Aḥadīth.

### **The Preservation of Ḥadīth**

Allāh Ta'ālā has promised the preservation of the Qur'ān, in that, it will be passed across generations without being distorted. Since the Prophetic narrations are required to understand the Qur'ān, Allāh's promise of the preservation of the Qur'ān further extends to the preservation of the Sunnah.

The compilation of Ḥadīth had begun in the very early stages of prophethood. The confusion arises when erroneously assuming that documentation is the principal form of Ḥadīth

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<sup>3</sup> Muftī Muḥammad Taqī 'Uthmānī, *The Authority of the Sunnah*, p.59, Idāratul Qur'ān Karachi.

preservation. Rather, there were many other reliable methods of preserving Ḥadīth. Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī mentions four, namely: memorization, discussion, practice, and writing.<sup>4</sup>

## Memorization

The Arabs were renowned for their memories, such that they were able to memorize hundreds of verses of poetry, and know the detailed pedigrees of not only themselves but also of their horses and camels. Some poets even looked with disdain at those who would write their poetry. They believed that writings can be tampered with, whilst no one can tamper with a person's memory. The companions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), however, attributed much more significance to the preservation of Ḥadīth. Hence, they vigorously yet cautiously dedicated most of their time to learning and retaining Aḥadīth.

A group of the companions, known as the *ashāb as-suffāh*, devoted their lives to sitting in the masjid of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) learning his teachings, and spent lots of time in memorizing his Aḥadīth. The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), as well as the rich, would provide for them their food and fulfill their needs so that they can feel relieved from the worry of earning a livelihood. The leader of this group, Abū Hurairah<sup>5</sup> (may Allāh be pleased with him), after embracing Islām, devoted his life for the learning and preservation of the Aḥadīth of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). He would say: “*You are under the impression that Abū Hurairah transmits so many Aḥadīth from the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ); (bear in mind) Allāh is the great Reckoner. I was a poor man and I served the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) being satisfied with bare subsistence, whereas the Muhājirūn remained busy with transactions in the bazar; while the Ansār had been engaged in looking after their properties...*”<sup>6</sup> The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “*May Allāh brighten a man who hears my saying, understand it, remembers it, and conveys it to others, for perhaps the one carrying knowledge can carry it to one who has more understanding than him...*”<sup>7</sup> When the companions heard this, they were even more eager to hear, memorize, and convey Ḥadīth to others. He further days: “*I have divided my night into three parts. In one third of the night I perform salāh, in the second part, I sleep, and in the third, I memorize the Aḥadīth of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).*”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Muftī Muḥammad Taqī ‘Uthmānī, *The Authority of the Sunnah*, p.83, Idāratul Qur’ān Karachi.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Allāmah Muṇāzir Aḥsan Al-Kilānī, *Tadwīnū l-Ḥadīth*, p.51, Dārul Gharb Al-Islāmī.

<sup>6</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb Fadhbā il As-Ṣahābah, Ḥadīth #227.

<sup>7</sup> Jāmi’ At-Tirmidhī, Kitāb Al-‘Ilm ‘ar Rasūlillāhi (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), Ḥadīth #14.

<sup>8</sup> Imām Al-Khatīb, *Jāmi’ Li Akhlāq Ar-Rāwī*, 2/264, Maktabah Al-Ma‘ārif.

As such, Sayyidunā Abū Hurairah (may Allāh be pleased with him) narrated a great number of Ahadīth, more than any other companion of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). This method of preserving Ahadīth cannot be undermined especially since the companions made sure to not add or delete a single word from the original statement of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). An incident that can attest to this is when Marwān, the governor of Madīnah, tested the memory of Sayyidunā Abū Huairah (may Allāh be pleased with him). He invited him to his house and asked him to narrate some Ahadīth. He ordered his scribe Abū Zu'aizī'ah to sit behind a curtain and write the Ahadīth reported by Abū Hurairah. After a year, he invited Abū Hurairah again and requested him to repeat what he narrated the previous year, and ordered his scribe to sit behind a curtain and compare the present words of Abū Hurairah with the Ahadīth he narrated the year before. He found that Abū Hurairah did not omit or alter a single word from his earlier narrations.<sup>9</sup>

This prime method of preserving ḥadīth cannot be ignored when the companions, and the reporters of ḥadīth after them, fully recognized the delicacy of the matter of ḥadīth transmission. They were not only aware that their narrations would be a source of Islamic Law across the ages, but that misreporting the statements of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) can lead to the condemnation in the World and Hereafter. This sense of responsibility and accountability made them more meticulous and attentive when listening or narrating ḥadīth. In fact, some companions chose to narrate less due to the fear of them unintentionally attributing the wrong statements or interpretations to the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). Moreover, stringent conditions ascertain the standard of memory for ḥadīth transmission, along with conditions of reliability, trustworthiness and uprightness, as derived from the methodology of the ṣahābah, Tābi'ūn and Tab' Tābi'īn. Though practices of scrutiny and verification have been present at the outset, conditions were laxer in the earlier generations. This is because the primary narrators were the noble companions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and their direct students, and there was less corruption and animosity. As time went on, however, the fulfillment of all the conditions was increasingly emphasized with the progression of time.

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<sup>9</sup> Imām Dhahabī, *Siyaru A'lām An-Nubalā*, 2/598, Mu'assasatūr Risālah.

The conditions of transmitting Ḥadīth went to the extent of scholars compiling detailed biographies of thousands of narrators, recording details on who they were, where they were from, who they met, the strength of their memories, whether they were reliable or not, and other important details. Thus, the memorization method of preserving Ḥadīth cannot be deemed inferior to writing. In actuality, when weighing the two methods, both have advantages and disadvantages. The drawback of documentation is the possibility of tampering and memorizing preludes the prospect of forgetting. The existing Greek Bibles include some 200,000 variants, some differences minor whilst others very important, which is sufficient to prove that the recording of a material does not guarantee its safe preservation. In contrast to this, a text can be kept fully preserved even without it being written down. For example, even if all the books on earth were destroyed, the Qur’ān would still remain safe because millions of Muslims have memorized it completely or in parts.<sup>10</sup>

This does not exclude that memorization as well has its drawbacks which is the likelihood of forgetting. However, with due consideration for the phenomenal memories of the people of early generations, the method of preserving Ḥadīth through memorization is no less reliable — if not more reliable — than that of documentation.

## Discussion

The Ṣahābah would frequently discuss the statements of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) mutually, enthused by the very statements of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) wherein he encouraged Ḥadīth dissemination. The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “Convey to others on my behalf, even though it be a single verse...”<sup>11</sup> He also warned them from hiding knowledge when asked. He (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “Whoever is questioned pertaining to such knowledge that he has and thereafter conceals it, will be bridled by a rein of fire.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the companions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) deemed the conveying of knowledge to others as an indispensable obligation. With the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) among them, they also had the fortunate opportunity of confirming the accuracy of the statements which they heard and their correct interpretations. As such, the discussion of Ḥadīth played a vital role in the preservation of it.

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<sup>10</sup> M. Muṣṭafā Al-A‘ẓamī, *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology and Literature*, p.25.

<sup>11</sup> Ṣahīḥ Al-Bukhārī, Kitāb Ahādīth Al-Ambiyā, Ḥadīth #128.

<sup>12</sup> Jāmi‘Tirmidhī, Kitābul ‘Ilm‘ar Rasūlillāhī (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), Ḥadīth #5.

Certain narrations that were known to only some companions were being conveyed to many others, and just like that, the Ḥadīth of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) spread far and wide.

### Practice

Mankind has never witnessed, and will not ever witness, people like the companions of Prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). They revered the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and adhered to his Sunnah devotedly. They preserved all aspects of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)'s life; his worship, how he treated others, how he went about his mundane affairs, and they would imitate him earnestly. 'Urwah bin Mas'ud Ath-Thaqafī had not yet embraced Islām. In the treaty of Hudaibiyah he closely observed the Ṣahābah and finally said: *"O people! I have visited the courts of kings on many occasions. I have come face to face with the emperor of Rome, the king of Persia and Negus of Abyssinia, but by Allāh, I have not seen a people revere their king the way I saw the Companions of Muhammad revere him. By Allāh, if he as much as spits, it is rubbed on the hands, face and body of one of the Companions before it hits the ground. He does not order but they run to fulfill it. He performs ablution and the Companions compete with each other to take the dripping water. When he talks, they quell their voices. They cannot look at him fully out of awe for him."*<sup>13</sup>

The Sunnahs of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) were not just lectures and sermons that the Ṣahābah would listen to. It was a way of life. The teaching of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) were practical so the Ṣahābah made effort to bring every teaching into their life and practise upon it without fail. The Sunnah was not an oral service that they would carry out, rather it was so important to them that their lives revolved around it. They would remind each other to act in accordance with the Sunnah and would rebuke one another if they did not act upon the Sunnah of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). With this in mind, we can understand how the practice of the Ṣahābah was another key method in the preservation of Ḥadīth.

### Writing

In the early days of prophethood, when the Qur'ān was first being revealed, the companions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) were prohibited by him from writing down Ḥadīth. The reason for this was clear; the Ṣahābah were not yet familiar with the Qur'ānic style, nor were they familiar with

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<sup>13</sup> Shaykh Ibrāhīm Madanī, The Preservation of Ḥadīth, p.18.

the Qur'ānic verses and their rulings. Thus, when the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) realized that some companions were writing Aḥadīth alongside the verses of the Qur'ān, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) prohibited it out of the fear of confusion. Moreover, at the time when the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) prohibited it, in the same breath he instructed the companions to continue conveying Ḥadīth from him, he said: “Do not write (what you hear) from me, and whoever has written something (he heard) from me, he should rub it. Narrate to others (what you hear from me) and whoever deliberately attributes a lie to me, he should prepare his seat in the Fire”.<sup>14</sup>

Later on, when the Ṣahābah became more familiar with the Qurānic verses, and writing material more accessible, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) allowed, and often, even encouraged Ḥadīth documentation. One such example has been narrated by Abdullāh bin ‘Amr bin Al-Ās, he said: “I used to write everything which I heard from the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). I intended (by it) to memorise it. The Quraysh prohibited me saying: Do you write everything that you hear from him while the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) is a human being: he speaks in anger and pleasure? So I stopped writing and mentioned it to the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). He signaled with his finger to his mouth and said: Write, by Him in Whose hand my soul lies, only right comes out from it.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Abdullāh bin ‘Amr wrote many Aḥadīth of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and compiled them in a book called *as-sahīfah as-sādiqah*.

### Writing in the Era of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)

Whilst documentation was not the main method of preserving Ḥadīth, it also was not wholly disregarded. The claims of its inception in the third century is also inaccurate, as will be later discussed. The compilation of Ḥadīth did in fact start in the era of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) himself, and there were many companions that wrote down Ḥadīth. Abū Hurairah (may Allāh be pleased with him) narrated: “There is none among the companions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) who has narrated more Hadiths than I except ‘Abdullah bin ‘Amr (bin Al-‘As) because he used to write them but I would not.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Imām Muslim An-Naysāpūrī, Ṣahīḥ Muslim, Kitāb Az-Zuhd Wa Ar-Raqā'iq, Ḥadīth #92.

<sup>15</sup> Imām Abū Dāwūd As-Sijistānī, Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Kitāb Al-‘Ilm, Ḥadīth #6.

<sup>16</sup> Ṣahīḥ Al-Bukhārī, Kitāb Al-‘Ilm, Ḥadīth #55.

He also narrated: “There was a man among the Ansār who would sit with the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), and he would listen to the Aḥadīth of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and he was amazed with them but he could not remember them. So he complained about that to the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). He said: ‘O Messenger of Allāh! I listen to your Aḥadīth and I am amazed but I cannot remember them.’ So the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: ‘Help yourself with your right hand’ and he motioned with his hand as if writing.”<sup>17</sup>

‘Abdullāh bin ‘Amr (may Allāh be pleased with him) said: “We were gathered around the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) writing, when he was asked: ‘Which of two cities will be liberated first: Constantinople or Rome?’ The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) replied: ‘No, rather the city of Heraclius will be first.’” The statement of ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Amr: “We were gathered around the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) writing—” indicates that there were others with him who would write the statements of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).<sup>18</sup>

Rāfi’ bin Khadīj (May Allāh be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “You may narrate, and he should prepare his seat in the Fire, the one who deliberately attributes a lie to me.” I (Rāfi’ bin Khadīj) said: ‘O Prophet of Allāh, we hear things from you and we write them down?’ The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) replied: ‘You may write, there is no harm.’”<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, Abū Hurairah (may Allāh be pleased with him) reported: “When Mecca was conquered, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) stood up and gave a sermon. He (Abū Hurairah) then related the sermon of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). Abū Hurairah said: Then a man from the people of Yemen, who was called Abū Shāh, stood up and said: ‘O Messenger of Allāh! Write it for me.’ So the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: ‘Write it for Abū Shāh.’<sup>20</sup>

Ibrāhim At-Taimī reported that his father said: “Alī bin Abī Tālib (may Allāh be pleased with him) addressed us and said: ‘Whoever claims that we have something that we recite apart from the Book of Allāh and this document in which are the ages of camels [to be given as blood money] and rulings concerning injuries, is lying. In it, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: ‘Madinah is sacred, the area between ‘Air and Thawr. Whoever commits any offence, or gives refuge to an offender, upon him will be the curse of Allāh,

<sup>17</sup> Jāmi’ At-Tirmidhī, Kitāb Al-‘Ilm, Ḥadīth #22.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Allāmah Ḥabīb Ar-Rahmān Al-A‘zamī, Nuṣratu ‘l-Ḥadīth fī Ar-Radd ‘alā Munkiri ‘l-Ḥadīth, p.22.

<sup>19</sup> Imām At-Ṭabrānī, Mu‘jamu ‘l-Kabīr, 4/276, Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah.

<sup>20</sup> Imām Abū Dāwūd As-Sijistānī, Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Kitāb Al-‘Ilm, Ḥadīth #8.

*the angels and all the people, and on the Day of Resurrection Allāh will not accept any obligatory or voluntary act of worship from him. Whoever claims to belong to someone other than his father or to belong to someone other than his masters (who manumitted him), upon him be the curse of Allāh, the Angels and all the people, and on the Day of Resurrection, Allāh will not accept any voluntary or obligatory act of worship from him. Protection granted by any Muslim is binding upon all of them, and may be given by the humblest of them.”<sup>21</sup>* This scroll of ‘Alī (may Allāh be pleased with him) later became known as *Sahīfah ‘Alī*.

Also, Imām Ibn Shihāb Az-Zuhrī narrated from Sālim from his father that: “*The Messenger of Allāh had a letter written about charity, but he had not dispatched it to his governors until he passed away; he kept it with him along with his sword. When he passed away, Abubakr (may Allāh be pleased with him) implemented it until he passed away, as did Umar (may Allāh be pleased with him) until he passed away. In it was: ‘A sheep (is due) on five camels, two sheep on ten, three sheep on fifteen...’*”<sup>22</sup> This letter is known as the Book of Sadaqah. Imām Ibn Shihab Az-Zuhrī said: “This is the copy of the letter of the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), which he had written about ṣadaqah (zakah). This was in the custody of the descendants of ‘Umar bin Al-Khattāb. Sālim bin Abdillāh bin ‘Umar read it to me and I memorized it properly. ‘Umar bin Abdul Azīz got it copied from ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Abdillāh bin ‘Umar and Sālim bin ‘Abdillāh bin ‘Umar. He (Ibn Shihāb) then narrated the Ḥadīth.<sup>23</sup>

### Writing in the Era of the Ṣahābah

Imām Abū Zur‘ah Ar-Rāzī was asked regarding the number of companions that heard from the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and he said: “The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) passed away and the number of companions that saw him and heard his Ḥadīth were more than 100,000 male and female companions. All of them narrated something they heard or saw.”<sup>24</sup> Compare this number to other historical events and even religious scriptures that were transmitted by just a handful of people, while thousands of the companions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) heard his teachings, and transmitted them!

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<sup>21</sup> Musnad Aḥmad, Musnad ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, Ḥadīth #52.

<sup>22</sup> Imām Abū ‘Isā, Jāmi’ At-Tirmidhī, Kitāb Az-Zakāh, Ḥadīth #5.

<sup>23</sup> Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Kitāb Az-Zakāh, Ḥadīth #15.

<sup>24</sup> Ḥallāmah Muṇāzir Aḥsan Al-Kilānī, *Tadwīnū ‘l-Ḥadīth*, p.48.

The most prolific is Abū Hurairah (may Allāh be pleased with him), who transmitted 1236 Ḥadīth. At least nine of his students wrote Ḥadīth from him. Al-Hasan bin ‘Amr Ad-Dhamrī said: “I narrated a Ḥadīth in front of Abū Hurairah but he did not recognize it. I said to him: ‘I heard it from you!’ to which he replied: ‘If you heard it from me, then I should have it written with me’. He took me by my hand to his house and showed me many books containing the Ḥadīth of the Prophet (ﷺ). Then he found the Ḥadīth that I narrated and said: ‘I told you that if I had narrated it to you, I would find it written in my books.’”<sup>25</sup> Thereafter, is the position of Ibn ‘Umar (may Allāh be pleased with him); at least eight of his students wrote Ḥadīth from him. Anas bin Mālik (may Allāh be pleased with him) also transmitted a large number of Ḥadīth and at least sixteen people have Ḥadīth from him in written form, though some of them are not fully reliable. Ummu ‘l-Mu’minīn ‘Ā’ishah also transmitted many Ḥadīth, at least three people documented them, including her nephew, ‘Urwah, one of the greatest scholars amongst the successors. At least nine students of Ibn ‘Abbās documented his Ḥadīth and no less than fourteen students of Jābir bin Abdillāh, among many other examples.<sup>26</sup>

The large number of the Ṣahābah who transmitted Ḥadīth had many positive effects on the preservation and transmission of Ḥadīth. The first was that the large number meant that the teachings of the Prophet (ﷺ) were going to be preserved by many people, whilst encompassing the smallest details of the statements that were made, and events that took place. This large number even included the wives and daughters of the Prophet (ﷺ), and other female companions which meant that even the private matters and teachings of the Prophet (ﷺ) were preserved, and matters related specifically to women were thoroughly studied. The second positive effect was that some of the companions had reverted to Islam from other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Polytheism, and Zoroastrianism, thus, their knowledge of these religions helped in understanding Islam and spreading it to others. The third positive effect of the large number of narrators meant that if any narrator made a mistake — or even if an outsider wanted to fabricate a Ḥadīth — the other companions would be able to pick up on any inaccuracies, and prevent the pure Sunnah from being interpolated by fabrications.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ḥ. Allāmah Munāzir Aḥsan Al-Kilānī, *Tadwīnū ‘l-Ḥadīth*, p.71.

<sup>26</sup> M. Muṣṭafā Al-‘Aẓamī, *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology and Literature*, p.26.

<sup>27</sup> Ḥ. Allāmah Munāzir Aḥsan Al-Kilānī, *Tadwīnū ‘l-Ḥadīth*, pp.50-51.

## Chain of Narration

After the demise of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), some Ṣahābah lived for another 100 years, whilst tens of others lived for 60-80 years; spreading his Aḥadīth and teachings. Anas bin Mālik, Hirmās bin Ziyād Al-Bāhili, Mahmūd bin Rabī', Abū At-Tufail 'Āmir bin Wāthilah are names of some Ṣahābah that passed away in or after the year 100 A.H. Many books were written about the Ṣahābah, such as *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd, *As-Ṣahābah* of Ibn As-Sakan, *Al-Isti'āb* of Ibn Abd Al-Barr, *Al-Isābah* of Ibn Hajar, among other compilations, which contain the names of 10,000 Ṣahābah and their biographies.

In the study of the chains of transmission, the lives of at least 100,000 people were studied, while according to the approximation of the renowned Orientalist Aloys Sprenger [d. 1893 C.E.], the lives of 500,000 people were studied. It is a miracle, that a nation is so attached with the teachings of their Prophet and so concerned about the preservation of his Aḥadīth, that the lives of thousands of narrators have been studied and recorded. It is only in Islam that every statement of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) has a chain of narration starting from him, to the Ṣahābah, to the Tābi'ūn and so forth. Sprenger has also said: "Indeed, the world has never seen, and will not ever see, a nation like the Muslims. By virtue of the science of *Rijāl* that they have produced, the lives of half a million men has been studied!"

Shaykhū 'l-Islām Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī At-Tūqādī [d.1373 A.H.] said: "The method of authenticating Aḥadīth in Islām is the greatest way, which no other western academic methodology can match in its meticulousness and excellence. In *Sahīh Al-Bukhārī* for example, there are 2602 Aḥadīth, excluding the repeated ones, which Imām Al-Bukhārī chose from 100,000 Aḥadīth that he had memorized. In those 2602 Aḥadīth, there are approximately 2000 narrators, which Imām Al-Bukhārī selected from approximately 30,000 narrators. *Sahīh Al-Bukhārī* is originally a large, four volume book. After removing its repeated narrations, it remains as one medium sized volume. Have you heard — and has the world ever heard?! — of a historical book of this moderate size to have been narrated from 2000 authentic narrators of whom the author is

aware about their names and characteristics, and link of transmission until it reaches the source: The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)? This is not found with anyone in the world except the Muslims.”<sup>28</sup>

### Compilations in the Era of the Tābi’ūn

By the era of the Tābi’ūn, preserving Ḥadīth through writing had become even more common. Although memorization was still a very important factor of preserving Ḥadīth, many took it upon themselves to also record what they had memorized, to ensure that they did not forget and memorized correctly, especially when approaching old age. Sālih bin Kaisān said: “Az-Zuhrī and I would seek knowledge together. He said to me: ‘Let us go and write the sunan.’ So we wrote the Aḥadīth of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). Hishām bin Al-Ghāz said: “Atā’ bin Abī Rabāh [d. 114 A.H.] would be asked (Ḥadīth) and his answers would be written in front of him.” Sulaimān bin Mūsā said that he saw Imām Nāfi’ [d.117 AH], *mawlā Ibn ‘Umar*, dictating his knowledge (of Ḥadīth) whilst it was being written down in front of him.<sup>29</sup>

The compilation of Ḥadīth was officially undertaken by the Khalīfah, ‘Umar bin Abd Al-Azīz [d. 101 A.H.]. He issued an official order to all governors under his domain that they should gather the knowledgeable people from among the companions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and their pupils and write down the Aḥadīth found with them. The result of this official decree was that several books of Aḥadīth were prepared and spread all over the country. One of the pioneers in the field of the compilation of Hadīth was Imām Ibn Shihāb Az-Zuhrī. He is from amongst the greatest scholars of his time who acquired knowledge from the Sahābah such as ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Umar, Anas bin Mālik, and Sahl bin Sa’d (may Allāh be pleased with them).

Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī mentioned many books of Ḥadīth that were compiled in the first and second century, of which some were:

1. Book of Khālid bin Ma’dān [d.104 AH]
2. Books of Abū Qilābah [d.104 AH].

<sup>28</sup> Shaykh ‘Abdul Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah, *Al-Isnād min Ad-Dīn*, pp.31-32.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Allāmah Ḥabīb Ar-Rāḥmān Al-A‘zamī, *Nuṣratu ‘l-Ḥadīth fī Ar-Radd ‘alā Munkiri ‘l-Ḥadīth*, p.30-31.

3. The script of Hammām bin Munabbih, who was one of the students of Abū Hurairah (may Allāh be pleased with him). This is also known as the *Sahīfah As-Sahīhah*.
4. Books of Al-Hasan Al-Basrī [110 AH]. In At-Tahzīb it is mentioned that Humaid At-Tawīl took the books of Al-Hasan, copied them, and then returned them back to him.
5. Books of Muhammad Al-Bāqir [d. 114 AH]<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

By the third century, most — if not all — the books and scripts that were written in the first century were eventually gathered and compiled in bigger books of Ḥadīth. The result of this was that such books and scripts of the earlier scholars and Tabi‘ūn no longer remained. Instead, people started turning their focus to the new, much more comprehensive and detailed books of Ḥadīth. Thus, some of the old compilations lived on inside new covers, such as Hammām bin Munabbih’s *Sahīfah As-Sahīhah*, which is still available in the Musnad of Imām Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him), whilst other compilations never made it to the next centuries. Similarly, the paper production and printing industry improved over time which led to more and more books being compiled. At the same time, corruption increased as time progressed from that of the Prophet (ﷺ) and the memories of people decreased and weakened, hence there was an even more need for Aḥadīth to be compiled in written form. Henceforward, we can conclude the falsity of the claim that Ḥadīth was documented undesirably late, as is evident from the history of Ḥadīth preservation.

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<sup>30</sup> Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Uthmānī, *The Authority of the Sunnah*, p.113-144, Idāratul Qur’ān Karachi.

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