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ḤADĪTH. In Islam *ḥadīth* is the term applied to specific reports of the prophet Muḥammad's words and deeds as well as those of many of the early Muslims; the word is used both in a collective and in a singular sense. After the Prophet's death, his companions collected reports of what he had said and done, and they recounted the reports among themselves in order that the living

memory of Muḥammad's example might influence the community of believers. As preserved for subsequent generations these reports, or *ḥadīth*, take the form of usually short, unconnected pieces, each of which is preceded by a list of its authoritative transmitters. Although the reports were originally transmitted orally, some transmitters began early to record them in writing. The compilers were careful not to tamper with the texts as they received them from recognized specialists in *ḥadīth* transmission, and the collections reflect their spoken origins. The language is direct, conversational, active, often repetitive, with a characteristic use of formulaic expression. The *ḥadīth* literature is one of the best examples of Arabic prose from the period of the beginnings of Islam.

After two centuries of collecting, transmitting, and teaching *ḥadīth*, during which the quest for reports became one of the most respected occupations of the Muslim community, scholars intensified the work of codifying the bulk of the material. The ninth century CE produced six massive collections, which have won almost universal acceptance by the Sunnī community as the most authoritative. They are commonly known by the names of their compilers: al-Bukhārī (d. 870); Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 875); Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī (d. 888); Ibn Mājah al-Qazwīnī (d. 887); Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 892); and Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nasā'ī (d. 915). Two other collections as well have always enjoyed great favor with the Sunnīs, namely those of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855). These are only the most important examples of the large number of collections that appeared during this period and later, which classified thousands of reports according to the transmission of different authorities.

The Shī'īs use the above collections, but they are selective in their recognition of the companions as valid authorities. In addition, they consider *ḥadīth* from the imams as fully authoritative. From the standpoint of their particular beliefs, the Shī'īs revere four books as particularly significant, the collections by Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 940), Muḥammad ibn Bābūyah al-Qummī (d. 991) and Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī (d. 1068) who compiled two collections.

Science of Ḥadīth Criticism. By the time these collections had been completed a science of *ḥadīth* criticism had developed, the purpose of which was to determine the authenticity of *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet and to his companions and to preserve the corpus from alteration or falsification. The scholars verified each report with a chain of authorities (sg., *isnād*), going back, insofar as it was possible, to the Prophet himself. In order to decide on the degree of authenticity of a text, traditionists examined the chains of transmission from three points of view: that of the number of transmitters (sg., *rāwī*), ranging from a great many persons, representing all generations up to the classical compilers, narrating a single report, so that its authenticity was absolutely assured (a *mutawātir ḥadīth*), to a limited number of narrators, and even to a single chain (*āḥād ḥadīth*); that of the credibility of the transmitters, which consideration gave rise to an extensive biographical investigation in which the individual narrators were judged according to their personal qualities and professional achievements (*'ilm al-rijāl*, science of the sources of information); that of the continuity of the chains, ranging from an uninterrupted *isnād* (*musnad*, supported) going back to the Prophet, to chains presenting various kinds of lacunae.

The nature of the *ḥadīth* text (*matn*) constituted another criterion for testing the authenticity of the material. Scholars suspected reports that were illogical, exaggerated or of a fantastic or repulsive character, or that contradicted the Qur'ān. They called attention to a common practice of fabricating *ḥadīth* (*waḍ'*) carried out by those who propagated false teachings, but also by teachers of the truth who sought by inventing *ḥadīth* to expose heresy. Still others spread false *ḥadīth* for personal advantage or to express zealous piety. A voluminous literature emerged because of concern for the *matn*: works dealing with the historical context of *ḥadīth*, lexicographical studies of difficult words, the study of texts which were abrogated by other *ḥadīth*, the explanation of apparent contradictions found in authentic *ḥadīth*, and the so-called "divine *ḥadīth*" (*ḥadīth qudsī*), a category of material in which the Prophet assumed the role of transmitter and reported sayings of God himself. *Matn* criticism also included discussion by scholars of the comparative value of reporting *ḥadīth* word for word as opposed to transmitting reports by their meaning only. Both of these tendencies are seen in the collections, and, as a result, many variant readings of texts exist. Although the authority of *ḥadīth* in the community is very great, its inspiration is considered to be of a lower degree than that of the Qur'ān, which is believed to be the very word of God.

Muslims use three terms of a general nature to assess the relative validity of *ḥadīth* texts: *ṣaḥīḥ* ("sound"), the most acceptable; *ḥasan* ("good"), somewhat below the first in excellence; and *ḍa'īf* ("weak"). Scholars usually

apply these terms in a relative way, depending upon the type of criteria that are used to judge the *ḥadīth*.

Another aspect of *ḥadīth* science is the technique of transmission. With the passage of time the number of transmitters increased enormously. Measures of control emerged to ensure that *ḥadīth* were properly passed on from teacher to students or from scholar to scholar. The manuals describe eight ways whereby people could become accredited transmitters of the *ḥadīth* material that they learned. These mechanisms of control are applied in cases ranging from a most direct and personal exchange between teacher and student to the situation of a scholar who might discover a previously unknown or neglected written collection by a respected authority, and be authorized to transmit it.

Throughout the history of Islam the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* have functioned together to shape the life of the community worldwide. *Ḥadīth* provide the basic sources for the biography (*sīrah*) of the prophet Muḥammad, filling in details regarding events mentioned briefly in the Qur'ān and providing a wealth of information on the personality, the family, and the career of the Prophet. Also Muḥammad's example in word and deed, as recorded in the *ḥadīth*, helps Muslims to interpret the Qur'ān by pointing out the circumstances in which portions of the Book were revealed, by giving the meanings of obscure verses and words, and by recounting incidents in which the Qur'ānic texts were applied to situations in life.

As the record of the *sunnah*, or example of the Prophet, the *ḥadīth* literature is one of the sources of Islamic law (*sharī'ah*). How legal thinking evolved in the community is a complex question, but it is clear that by the early ninth century CE *ḥadīth* were officially accepted as a basic source of law. Many of the collections of *ḥadīth* are arranged according to the subject matter of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), thus showing that these compilations early became the tools of the legal profession.

To return to the first function of *ḥadīth*, that of preserving the record of the Prophet's biography, this element is of greater scope than a merely formal *sīrah*. The vast number of supplicatory prayers, exhortations, theological statements, practical counsels, words of encouragement and comfort, warnings, and predictions contained in the *ḥadīth* have always served to direct the piety of Muslims, to provide an overall framework for reflection and practice, all the more significant because by it the Qur'ān is, so to speak, embodied and exemplified in the flesh of the Prophet and his companions.

Ḥadīth have continued their multiple functions in the Muslim community through the centuries, and no one today doubts that they retain their place of supreme importance in the religious consciousness of Muslims. The formal study of *ḥadīth* has continued, too, although, after the period of the classical collections and the codification of rules for judging authenticity and for transmission of reports, the style of research naturally changed. Scholars examined the "Six Books" from every angle, wrote commentaries on them, gathered selected material from them for smaller, more accessible collections, and wrote treatises on all aspects of the science of *ḥadīth*.

As study of the written collections became more formalized, the place of teaching changed from private homes and mosques to schools dedicated to learning and transmitting the material. Muslim historians describe a certain decline in devotion to *ḥadīth* research beginning around the twelfth century. It was then that institutes began to be founded called *dūr al-ḥadīth* (sg., *dār*; "houses of *ḥadīth*"); the first was in Damascus, then spreading to many Muslim lands. Until recent centuries, they kept alive a concern for *ḥadīth* scholarship. In the mid-twentieth century Morocco established a modern Dār al-Ḥadīth in Rabat for graduate study in connection with the university and for research and publication. The modern universities in Muslim countries may include courses on *ḥadīth* in their departments of *sharī'ah*, in some of which the methods of the social sciences are beginning to be applied to the study of the literature. Venerable institutions such as Dār al-'Ulūm in Deoband, India, and al-Azhar in Cairo are centers for *ḥadīth* studies.

Modern Approaches. In the Arab world, as well as in India and Pakistan, the editing and publishing of ancient manuscripts have been marked features of the present scene. Scholars such as Nabia Abbott and M. M. Azami have opened new perspectives by their investigation of recently discovered material, but, in general, Muslims of today have not gone beyond the treatises and commentaries of *ḥadīth* scholars from former centuries. A few books are being published on rhetoric in the *ḥadīth*, continuing an interest that goes back to much earlier times. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ (*'Ulūm al-ḥadīth wa-muṣṭalaḥuh;* Beirut, 1959) and Nūr al-Dīn 'Iṭr (*Manhaj al-naqd fī 'ulūm al-ḥadīth;* Beirut, 1972) are representatives of a number of writers who have composed thoughtful modern restatements of the ancient manuals of *ḥadīth* science. They do not propose any radically

new course for research, but their works show some sensitivity to modern problems. By far the most serious issue with regard to *hadīth* themselves is the attack on their authenticity. The attack has been made from two main quarters and from two different motivations.

From one side, the Orientalists, headed by Ignácz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht, called into question the attribution of *hadīth* to the Prophet and the reliability of the chains of transmission. They did so in the interest of scientific historical research. Muslims have almost unanimously rejected the orientalists' critique, but only a few have gone beyond negative counterattacks. Fuat Sezgin (*Buhârî'nin kaynaklar: hakkında araştırmalar;* Istanbul, 1956) has done original work on the written sources of al-Bukhārī, in partial refutation of the orientalists' positions. The critics have pointed out that Muslim *hadīth* scholars through the centuries dwelt almost exclusively upon the evaluation of the *isnād* ("chain of authorities") to the neglect of the *matn* ("text"). Nūr al-Dīn 'Iṭr takes this criticism seriously in the work cited above, and he proposes a new enterprise of research in which equal attention is given to *matn* and *isnād*. He points out that the canons of *matn* criticism have always existed. Modern research in the direction that he suggests would involve simply the reestablishment of the equilibrium needed in an integral program.

From another side, some Muslim reformers have called *hadīth* into question as a part of their struggle to overcome *taqlīd* (slavish conformity to ways of the past) and to promote the use of reason. Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898) in India, Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā (1935) in Egypt, and others wrote with varying degrees of forcefulness to decry the way traditional Muslim thinking had refused to apply a rigorous critique to the *hadīth* literature. Their writings influenced others, and one, Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah, published a highly critical book in 1958 (*Adwā' 'alā al-sunnah al-muhammadīyah,* Cairo) that provoked much discussion in the Middle East. G. H. A. Juynboll has written a useful account (*The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt;* Leiden, 1969) of the course of these and other exchanges among the intellectual elite. However sharp the attacks may have been there was no basic opposition to *hadīth*. Critics only wanted Muslims to be more discerning in their acceptance of material attributed to the Prophet. As yet, however, no comprehensive program has emerged for a

revival in *hadīth* study along the lines proposed by the reformers.

In the 1990s Islamic political and ideological movements are in the ascendancy. The theoreticians of these parties use *hadīth* to support their arguments without taking the time to discuss the problem of how to approach the literature. Among the masses, attachment to the *hadīth* constitutes a veritable ethos, and popular leaders depend on carefully chosen *hadīth* texts to give prophetic authority to their directives.

A few voices give promise of new directions in *hadīth* research. They represent no movement, no school of thought, but their views are respected by many. Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), a Pakistani who spent many years at the University of Chicago, points out the crucial fact that *hadīth* provide the only access Muslims have to Muhammad and the Qur'ān. To facilitate this access for the present generation, Fazlur Rahman feels that scholars should study, using modern techniques, the connections between Muhammad and the early Muslim community, between the evolution of thought and practice and the growth of *hadīth* (see his *Islam;* 2d ed., Chicago and London, 1979, pp. 66, 67). [*See the biography of Rahman.*]

The Algerian philosopher Mohammed Arkoun, of Paris, describes *hadīth* as a "cultural expansion" of the phenomenon of Holy Scripture (Qur'ān); as such it is far more than an intellectual achievement. To understand it adequately requires an integrated approach taking into account both the rational development of the community and its creative imagination (see his "The Notion of Revelation: From Ahl al-Kitāb to the Societies of the Book," *Die Welt des Islams* 28 [1988]: 75–76). [*See the biography of Arkoun.*]

Modern technology has facilitated the cataloging and publication of manuscripts that have lain unused for centuries. Also Muslims are using the computer to gain better physical access to the thousands of reports that make up *hadīth* collections. One of the most concrete results of several recent international conferences on *hadīth* and *sīrah* has been to put in motion a project to computerize *hadīth*. In 1991 M. M. al-Azami reported ("A Note on Work in Progress on Computerization of Hadīth," *Journal of Islamic Studies,* 2.1 [Jan. 1991]: 86–91) that prototype CD-ROM discs were produced in 1990 containing the material of seven collections of *hadīth* and translations of selected texts in ten languages, 75,000 *hadīth* in all.

[*See also* Law; Muhammad.]

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