

AN INTRODUCTION TO
Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY, RECENSIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS



MUṢṬAFĀ AL-AʿZAMĪ

Translation, Notes and Appendices

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Chapter 1

IMĀM BUKHĀRĪ'S LIFE AND TIMES

After an intermission in sending prophets, Allah ﷻ sent Muḥammad ﷺ and thereby sealed the institution of prophethood. He universalized his message for all of creation—including jinn and mankind, Arab and non-Arab—and made it unrestricted by the limits of time and place. Through His sheer mercy and kindness, Allah ﷻ has taken the responsibility of preserving His Book from all forms of adulteration, for He states, “We have sent down the Qur’ān Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it.”¹ Furthermore, He directed towards it the hearts of His sincere believing slaves, the pious and righteous. Thus, they remain occupied with it during the hours of the night and throughout the day in memorization, teaching, correct pronunciation of its verses, ritual recitation, contemplation, study and practice.

Allah’s direct promise to protect His Book entails an indirect promise to protect His Prophet’s Sunna, because it elucidates and clarifies [the Book] as well as having legislative authority itself. Allah says, “We have sent down the message to you too [Prophet], so that you can explain to people what was sent for them, so that they may reflect.”² While describing His Prophet, He says, “And who makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful.”³ Just as Allah enlisted His bondsmen to protect His Book, He also enlisted many attentive, sincere, righteous and pure individuals—the likes of whom in their purity were never witnessed by the heavens—for the service of His Prophet’s Sunna through study, practice, preservation and dissemination.

Hundreds of thousands of the greatest of this civilization have sacrificed their lives for the service of the Prophetic Sunna. Allah ﷻ created them for this purpose, so he endowed them with

phenomenal memory, granted them sincerity, made the pen subservient to them, put time in their service, and conferred blessings in their lives and deeds. As a result, a voluminous and unparalleled library of Ḥadīth was produced. They diversified their methods in the field by utilizing every means at their disposal.⁴ To proceed: it was in this academic atmosphere that Imām Bukhārī  was born in a house of knowledge and piety.

Family

[His grandfather was] Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mughīrah ibn Bardizbah al-Ju‘fī. Mughīrah embraced Islam at the hands of al-Yamān al-Ju‘fī, who was the governor of Bukhara and the grandfather of the Ḥadīth scholar ‘Abdullāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far ibn Yamān al-Ju‘fī al-Musnidī.⁵

In *Kitāb ath-Thiqāt*, Ibn Ḥibbān includes Ismā‘īl ibn Ibrāhīm, Bukhārī’s father, and states, “He narrates from Ḥammād ibn Zayd and Mālik, and the Iraqis narrate from him.”⁶ In *at-Tārikh al-Kabīr*, Bukhārī writes, “Ismā‘īl ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mughīrah heard from Mālik and Ḥammād ibn Zayd, and he accompanied Ibn al-Mubārak.” In *Tārikh al-Islām*, Dhahabī writes, “Bukhārī’s father was among the scrupulous scholars. He narrated from Abū Mu‘āwiyah and others. Aḥmad ibn Ja‘far and Naṣr ibn al-Ḥusayn narrated from him.”⁷ Iṣḥāq ibn Aḥmad ibn Khalaf said that he heard Bukhārī say, “My father heard from Mālik ibn Anas, saw Ḥammād ibn Zayd, and shook hands with Ibn al-Mubārak using both hands.”⁸ Aḥmad ibn Ḥafṣ states, “I came to Abū ‘l-Ḥusayn Ismā‘īl ibn Ibrāhīm during his final moments and he said, ‘I do not know of a single dirham from all my assets that was earned through dubious means.’”

It was into this family of piety and knowledge that Imām Bukhārī was born on the 13 Shawwāl 194 AH after the Jumu‘ah prayer in Bukhara. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Balkhī relates from his father that Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl lost his sight during his childhood. His mother then had a dream of Ibrāhīm  who gave her glad tidings, “Indeed, Allah has restored your son’s sight.”⁹ He lost his father at a young age and was reared by his righteous

mother. Allah blessed him with a miraculous memory, just as He inspired him to be particular with his time. Bukhārī began writing at an early age. By age of eighteen, he authored *Qaḍāyā aṣ-Ṣaḥābah wa 't-Tābi'īn* (Verdicts of the Companions and the Successors). There are countless works, lengthy and brief, to his name.

Travels, Study and Authorship

Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Warrāq, Bukhārī's copyist, states,

I asked Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, "How did you begin your study of Ḥadīth?" He replied, "I was inspired to memorize ḥadīths while I was still in school."

Correcting his teacher: I then asked, "How old were you?" He said, "I was ten years old or younger. I left school when I was ten. I frequented the study-circle of Dākhilī and others. One day while teaching, Dākhilī said, 'Sufyān, from Abū 'z-Zubayr, from Ibrāhīm.' I told him, 'Abū 'z-Zubayr did not narrate from Ibrāhīm,' but he rebuked me. I said to him, 'Consult your source-text.' He went home, consulted the source-text, returned, and said, 'How is it supposed to be?' I said, 'It is Zubayr ibn 'Adī, from Ibrāhīm.' He took my pen, amended his book, and said, 'You were right.'"

Bukhārī was asked, "How old were you when you corrected him?" He said, "Eleven years old. At the age of sixteen, I memorized the works of Ibn al-Mubārak and Wakī', and I was versed in the discourse of these people [i.e. the partisans of *ra'y*]. I then left with my mother and brother Aḥmad to Makkah. After completing the pilgrimage, my brother returned with my mother while I remained behind in the pursuit of Ḥadīth."¹⁰

He also said,

Authoring Books: I heard Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl say, "At the age of eighteen, I began compiling the verdicts and verbal proclamations of the Companions and the Successors. This was during the era of 'Ubaydullāh ibn Mūsā. At that time, I wrote the *Tārikh* by the Prophet's grave during the moonlit nights. Nearly

everyone in history has an anecdote [that I could document], but I disliked lengthening the book.”¹¹

Academic Adjudication: And I heard him say, “I came to Ḥumaydī once when I was eighteen years old. He was disputing an issue related to Ḥadīth with someone. When Ḥumaydī saw me, he proclaimed, ‘The one to adjudicate between us has arrived.’ When they both presented their arguments to me, I judged in Ḥumaydī’s favour. His interlocutor would have died a disbeliever had he persisted and died upon his claim.”¹²

Al-Faḍl ibn Ishāq al-Bazzāz said: Aḥmad ibn Minhāl al-‘Ābid narrated to us that Abū Bakr al-A‘yan said, “We wrote from Bukhārī at the door of Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Firyābī and he did not have facial hair. We asked, ‘How old are you?’ He said, ‘Seventeen years old.’”¹³

Ishāq ibn Rāhawayh told his students, “You should compile an abridgment on the Prophet’s *sunan*.” This remark settled in Bukhārī’s heart. Abū ‘Abdillāh [al-Bukhārī] said, “I was in the company of Ishāq ibn Rāhawayh when one of our companions said, ‘You should compile an abridgement of the Prophet’s *sunan*. That settled in my heart, so I set out to compile this book.’”¹⁴

Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim said,

I heard Bukhārī say, “I entered Baghdad for the eighth and final time—each time I sat with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. As I bade him farewell, he said, ‘Abū ‘Abdillāh, how could you leave knowledge and the scholars, and return to Khurasan?’ I still recall his words to this day.”¹⁵

Abū ‘Abd [Allāh] al-Ḥākim writes that Bukhārī first arrived in Nishapur in 209 AH and visited again for the final time in 250 AH, whereupon he resided and taught Ḥadīth for five years consecutively.

[Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Firabrī] said, “While staying in Bukhārī’s house one night, I observed that he rose and lit the lamp at least eighteen times to make notes of things that came to his

mind.” Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim said, “During our travels, Abū ‘Abdillāh and I would share a house except during the midsummer days. He would rise fifteen to twenty times in one night, lighting a lamp each time to write ḥadīths and take notes.”¹⁶

Hāni’ ibn an-Naḍr said,

We were in the company of Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Firyābī in the Levant. We enjoyed ourselves like young men eating mulberries and the like. Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl was with us, but he did not partake in our activities; he was busy seeking knowledge.¹⁷

Imām Bukhārī details his dedication to seeking knowledge in the following words:

During my stay in Nishapur, I would receive letters from my relatives in Bukhara conveying their greetings. I would intend to respond to their greetings, but their names would escape me, so I never replied—however, rarely did I forget knowledge.

Explaining his method of writing as a student, he said,

My writing of ḥadīth was unlike that of others: If I wrote from a competent narrator, I asked him his name, agnomen, affiliation and background in Ḥadīth. Yet if he was lacking [such competency], I requested his source-text and copied it. As for others, they care little about what they write or how they write it.¹⁸

Memory, Knowledge and Intelligence

In *Tārīkh Bukhārā*, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ghunjār said,

I heard Abū ‘Amr Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Muqri’: I heard Mahīb ibn Sulaym: I heard Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Qaṭṭān, the Imām of Karmīniyah: I heard Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl say, “I wrote from over a thousand teachers, and from each teacher over ten thousand ḥadīths. I remember the chain for every ḥadīth that I know.”¹⁹

Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim said,

Abū ‘Abdillāh read to us *Kitāb al-Hibah* (the Book of Gifting) and said, “Wakī’s treatise on gifting only contains two or three *musnad* ḥadīths [i.e. via unbroken chains] and ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak’s collections contain roughly five. However, this book of mine contains five hundred or more.”

I heard Abū ‘Abdillāh say, “I thought about the students of Anas and three-hundred names came to mind immediately.” I also heard him say, “I never visited anyone except that they benefited from me more than I benefited from them.”²⁰

Aḥyad ibn Abī Ja‘far, the governor of Bukhara, said,

Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl once said, “At times, I would write in the Levant a ḥadīth that I heard in Basra, and I would write in Egypt a ḥadīth that I heard in the Levant.” I asked, “Abū ‘Abdillāh, in its entirety?” He remained silent.²¹

Bukhārī once said, “I did not sleep last night until I counted the number of ḥadīths included in my works: there were roughly two-hundred thousand *musnad* ḥadīths.”²² Abū Bakr al-Kalwādhānī said, “I never saw anyone like Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl: he would borrow a book from scholars, examine it briefly, and memorize most of the *atrāf* (first parts) of its ḥadīths.”

Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Firabrī said,

I heard Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Warrāq say in the appendix to Abū ‘Abdillāh’s *Shamā’il*—I [Dhahabī] say: this is not found in the recension of Ibn Khalaf ash-Shīrāzī—“I heard Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī say, ‘I did not start teaching ḥadīth until I recognized authentic from dubious, studied the books of *ra’y*, and visited Basra nearly five times. While there [in Basra], I wrote down every authentic ḥadīth found in Basra, except for what did not become apparent to me.’”²³

Yaḥyā ibn Ja‘far al-Bīkandī said, “If I could increase Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl’s lifespan by sacrificing mine, I would have done so because

my death would be the death of one man, but his death would result in the loss of knowledge.” He once told Bukhārī, “Were it not for you, I would find no pleasure in living in Bukhara.”²⁴

Scholarly Praise

Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād said, “Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl is the jurist of this Community (*ummah*).”²⁵ Ya‘qūb ibn Ibrāhīm ad-Dawraqī said, “Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl is the jurist of this Community.”²⁶

Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim said,

I heard Abū ‘Abdillāh say, “The students of ‘Amr ibn ‘Alī al-Fallās discussed a particular ḥadīth with me, and I said, ‘I do not recognize it.’ They were pleased to know that, so they informed ‘Amr, who said, ‘A ḥadīth not recognized by Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl is not a ḥadīth.’”²⁷

Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf said,

We were with Abū ‘Abdillāh in the company of Muḥammad ibn Bashshār, who asked him about a ḥadīth and he responded. He then said, “This is the most knowledgeable of Allah’s creation in our times,” pointing to Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl.²⁸

Ismā‘īl ibn Abī Uways said,

No one has taken [ḥadīths] from me like Muḥammad [ibn Ismā‘īl]: he noticed that my source-texts were worn out, so he said, “Would you permit me to re-write them for you?” I responded affirmatively. He extracted all my ḥadīths with this ruse.²⁹

Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb, the Ḥadīth expert, relates from his father, “I saw Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj sit in front of Bukhārī, asking him questions [by humbling himself] like a child.”³⁰ Muḥammad ibn Ḥamdūn said, “I heard Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj tell Bukhārī, ‘O teacher of teachers, master of the Ḥadīth scholars, expert of subtle defects in ḥadīths, allow me to kiss your feet.’”

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