The Influence Of Abbasid Empire and Community Needs in The Development of Ḥadīth Literature and Islamic Prophetology

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Abstract

At the time of Abbasid Empire, the Caliph's court seems to give serious attention in safeguarding the prophethood of Muḥammad and supporting the development of ḥadīth literature. Not only had the Muslims scholar, his own Caliph also produced a work on Islamic Prophetology. Caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833) has been documented as one of the Abbasid Caliph that produced a work known as Risāla fī Aʿlām al-Nubuwwa. In fact, the Abbasid ruler were also identified as participating in ḥadīth discourse and praising for the ḥadīth colloquy. This actions clearly exhibit the court's patronage of ḥadīth discourse. In his account, Ibn al-Samʿānī records that al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775), al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) and al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833) were among the Abbasid Caliphate's supporters who extolled the ḥadīth colloquium. This study aims to explore the Abbasid's court and community influence on the development of ḥadīth discourse and Islamic Prophetology. The study is qualitative in nature, in which the researcher employed both critical and analytical analysis on Islamic sources related to the subject. It is indeed an arduous task to sift the enormous amount of Islamic sources, thus, this study is focuses on works produced within the ninth century as its parameter of study. The study in its finding confirms that the Abbasid court appears as playing significant role to safeguarding the prophethood of Muḥammad and expanding ḥadīth literature. The study also ascertains salient evidences bearing witnesses to Muslim and non-Muslim encounters concerning the prophethood of Muḥammad that contribute to the development of Islamic discourse on the subject.

Keywords: Abbasid, ḥadīth literature, Islamic prophetology, Muhammad's prophethood

1.0 THE INTERMITTENT DEVELOPMENT OF ḤADĪTH LITERATURE

According to scholars of Islam, ḥadīth literature had its inception during the lifetime of the Prophet himself, as ḥadīth materials were circulated widely at the time (Arjomand, 2009; Berg 2006; Abbott, 1967; Brown, 2009; Azami, 1978). The fact that ḥadīth was originated and written in the life time of the Prophet has been a long and heated debate. Weil (1895), Sprenger (1851), Goldziher (1971), Schacht (1982), Juynboll (1983), Wansbrough (1978, 2004), Cook (1883, 2004), Crone (1979) and others clearly demonstrate their scepticism on this. In contrast, Abbot (1967), Sezgin (1991), Azami (1978), and Motzki (2005) contend that there was an active literary enterprise during the Prophet's lifetime. To conclude that the massive collections of ḥadīth are products of forgery is unconvincing. The Constitution of Medina, that purported to be produced during the Prophet's life, is one of the examples of accepted ḥadīth even by the sceptics such as Crone.

Muslim traditions recorded that the ḥadīth was incepted as the result of encouragement from the Prophet himself, largely at his insistence for the personal need to maintain a record of the ḥadīth (Brown, 2009), and for wider social (Arjomand, 2009), political (El-Cheikh, 1999; Weil, 1895), and educational purposes. Even though at the early period, the Prophet prohibited his companion from recording his saying to avoid confusion with the Qur'ān, later, he was reported as approving and encouraging it. All of these factors contributed to the development of ḥadīth literature in the early Islamic period. The death of the Prophet did not hinder or reduce the growth of this kind of knowledge; rather it was spread rapidly by his own companions through the rapid expansion of Islamic territory.

The development and pace of its progress did, however, experience a downturn during the reign of ʿUmar I, due mainly to his concern regarding a potential confusion between the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. As Abbott asserts, ʿUmar obviously feared that the Muslim community could have been confused between the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, both in their written forms and in memory. Furthermore, the apparently somewhat zealous activity of learning and transmitting Ḥadīth was deemed a potential distraction to a Muslim from learning the Qur'ān itself. For that reason, Umar, through his delegate, prohibited or limited Muslims from focusing too much upon the ḥadīth (Abbott, 1967). By the Umayyad period, the pace of the ḥadīth's development quickened, and a period of growth ensued, during which Sezgin and Aʿẓamī catalogued an immense list of ḥadīth works, which confirmed an expansion in the production of ḥadīth material within this period (Aʿẓamī, 1978). According to Motzki and Maloush, Goldziher proposes that political disputes and religious innovations and impulses were contributory factors in the proliferation of ḥadīth literature (Motzki, 2005; Maloush, 2000).

Later on, during the period of the Abbasid Empire, the landscape of ḥadīth discourse expanded exponentially. Based on the inventory supplied by Sezgin, the authors who produced works related to the science of ḥadīth in the third/ninth century were clearly outnumbered the authors of Qur'ānic field. Based on Sezgin's account, 91 ḥadīth works apparently were produced in the ninth century, compared with 20 Qur'ānic works (Sezgin, 1991). One can only imagine how excessive the demands of a community wishing to acquire ḥadīth scripture rather than the works related to pure Qur'ānic sciences.

2.0 THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE AND ITS SETTING

At the time of Abbasid realm, Islam have spread rapidly to the region of Roman and Persian territories, swiftly reaching communities that embraced different belief systems. Christianity and Judaism were rooted deeply in these multicultural societies (Samir, 2011). It was to be expected that each religion will definitely believe that they are the conveyer of the ultimate truth, and accepting others' religions implies compromising the truth of their religion. The situation becomes more intricate when religion is substantiated as an official emblem of a political constitution. Defending religion and its dignity could be considered as a legitimate task of each individual citizen. Islam was not accepted

from this well-recognised phenomenon. The contact between Muslim conquerors and the residents of subdued provinces created the grounds for each religious party to launch a defensive mode. Each religious authority endeavoured to serve their religion in their own best interests. One of the earliest religious reactions records alarm at the advance of the Arabs and its religious motivation. This is engraved in the Greek apologetic work entitled *Doctrina Jacobi* (Hoyland, 1997; 2000). Purportedly composed in 12/634, two years after the death of Muḥammad, this document did not avoid discussing the veracity of his prophethood. The author outlined the characteristic of the true prophet in a dialogue form, recording the view of a man who is well versed in scripture, saying that: "He is false, for the prophet does not come armed with the sword" (Hoyland, 1997; 2000).

These reactions, made consistently over several centuries, were engendered due to the lack of evidence of Muḥammad's prophethood. According to Camilla Adang, two major arguments against Muḥammad's prophethood were identified, as levelled by opponents of Muslims, questioning the veracity of his mission. The first concerned the absence of previous scripture's testimony on the prophethood of Muḥammad. The second argument seems similar to Muḥammad's Meccan contemporary reflection: his mission was not corroborated by any miracle (Adang, 1996). Muslims were not passive in their response to safeguard the dignity of the Prophet and of Islam. Probably one of the earliest texts demonstrating the theological response from the Muslim side is the letter of Abū al-Rabīʿ Muḥammad ibn al-Layth (d. c.203/819), which he wrote for al-Rashīd to the Byzantine emperor Constantine. Based on Barbara Roggema's analysis (Roggema, 2015), this compilation of letters was not only defending Muḥammad's prophethood; it worked as a multifunctional device, revealing the shortcomings of Christianity, reminding the Byzantines of a duty to pay tribute, and explaining theological issues from the Islamic point of view. In defence of Muḥammad's prophethood, several quotations from the Bible were adduced (Ibn al-Layth, 2006) to convince the reader that he fulfilled biblical prediction. This methods has been clearly utilised by Ibn Rabban (Azmi, 2016; 2017). As well as, more than a few evidentiary miracles were recorded in these letters; such as his ability to envisage future events; he was bestowed with skills to communicate with trees, animals and other parts of nature; and a small portion of food sufficed to feed a group through his blessing (Ibn al-Layth, 2006).

It is because of this challenging reaction from the non-Muslim world to the Islamic mission, that a specific pattern of literature has come into being. M.J. Kister suggests that the advance of Muslim penetration to the territories of those possessing ancient cultural and religious creeds, and equipped with a rich lore of prophetical beliefs and stories, contributes to the emergence of literature concerning the miracles of the Prophet (*ḥadīth and dalāʾil*) (Kister, 1983). Kister (1983) proposes that the letter sent by Harūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) to the Byzantine emperor should be regarded as evidence to confirm the cause of the appearance of this particular literature (Kister, 1983). The letter, however, contains a general sketch of arguments in defending Muslim beliefs before these were developed systematically by later Muslim scholars.

Like Kister, Sidney Griffith delves into more details exploring the Christian response to the claims of Islamic prophetology. His reading identified the *mutakallimūn* of the Muslim community within the period of Abbasid, as the community who started to develop an apologetic line of argument in defence of the truth of the prophethood of Muḥammad (Griffith, 2008). These arguments of *mutakallimūn*, fortifying the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood, were compiled in works known as *Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwa* (proofs of prophethood). Kister refers to two others names that this literature was familiar with, *Amārāt al-Nubuwwa* (signs of prophethood) and *Aʾlām al-Nubuwwa* (indications of prophethood) (Thomas, 2015). In general this literature was designed to provide a considerable range of evidence utilised by Muslims to prove the prophethood of Muḥammad. The work was padded with verses from the Quran, prophetic traditions, logical reasoning, biblical references and practical arguments exemplifying the characteristics of a true prophet. In the next section, we will discuss in

more detail the nature of this literature before exploring the references in this work to the Quran and Muḥammad.

3.0 ABBASID INVOLVEMENT IN ḤADĪTH AND PROPHETOLOGY DISCOURSE

Perceived as a religious government (Melchert, 1996; Ibrahim, 1994), Duderija (2009) points out that an innovative Abbasid doctrinal policy also seems to have had an impact upon the burgeoning production of a systematic collection of ḥadīth. Within the early period of the Abbasid dynasty, a policy towards *Zanādiqa* and the doctrine of 'the Qur'ān is created', are amongst the popular socio-religious policy gazetted by the Abbasid's Caliph.

Before al-Shāfiʿī composed his work preventing the prophethood in Islam, Abū Khalda had already been sent by the Abbasid Caliph al-Rāshid as a delegate of the Muslim court to explain to the Indian's ruler about Islam and the prophethood (Ibn al-Murtadhā, 1961). Even though it is unclear whether Indian ruler (or rulers) at that period were practising Brahminical thought, the readiness of the Abbasid court to send their man indicates a strong bond between the Court and its scholars in defending Islam and its creed. It is clear that, apart from the support from Muslim higher authority, the external challenges from non-Muslims contribute considerably to the development of systematic arguments in the later work of *ḥadīth* and *dalā'il*.

The Abbasid court seems to give serious attention to safeguarding the prophethood of Muḥammad. Not only did the Muslims scholars have their own *dalā'il*, the Caliph himself also produced a book of *dalā'il*. According to Ibn al-Nadim, Caliph al-Ma'mūn wrote a *dalā'il* book known as *Risāla fī Aʿlām al-Nubuwwa* (Ibn al-Nadīm, 1970; Thomas, 2015). Even though this book is not extant at present and not much information can be found regarding this work, it can be assumed that the work has motivated *Mu'tazilite* scholars, the official advisors of the Caliph's court, to produce a similar genre of literature. It is not unusual to see that most *Mu'tazilite* prominent scholars have produced something about prophethood in the *dalā'il* framework. This includes such works as Bishr Ibn al-Muʿtamir (d. 210/825) in his *Kitāb al-Hujja fī Ithbāt al-Nabī ʿalayhi l-salām* (The Proof in Vindication of the Prophet), Abū Ishāq al-Nazzām (d. 836/845) in his *Kitāb ithbāt al-rusul* (Confirmation of messengers), Abū Huzayl al-'Allāf (d. 225/840-850) in his *Kitāb fī al-Nubuwwa* (Book on Prophethood), Abū Bakr Ibn Shahib with his *Kitāb fī al-Nubuwwa*, and Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 244/869) in his *Kitāb al-Hujja fī Tathbīt al-Nubuwwa* (The Evidence on Confirmation of Prophethood).

Furthermore, the zeal of the Abbasid Caliph's participation in ḥadīth discourse, and praise for the ḥadīth colloquy, clearly exhibits the court's patronage of this celebrated activity. In his account, Ibn al-Samʿānī records that al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775), al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) and al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833) were among the Abbasid Caliphate's supporters who extolled the ḥadīth colloquium (Ibn al-Samʿānī, 1981). The involvement of the Caliph in ḥadīth sessions therefore clearly have an impact to the swift expansion of ḥadīth discourse.

4.0 COMMUNITY AND ITS INFLUENCE

Another factor that influence the rapid development of ḥadīth literature is the convention of *'al-rihla'*. As Guillaume (2004) describes it, the phenomenon of "searches after knowledge" (*ṭalab al-ʿilm* or *al-riḥla*); all consequently contributed to the development of ḥadīth literature. In his studies, Guillaume (2004) proposes that this intellectual phenomenon became widespread in the Muslim community within this period. If before this, the ḥadīth was only limited to the practice of certain provinces, with this new phenomenon, the ḥadīth becoming part of research, collected and spread by scholars due to their religious motivation. The journey to pursue knowledge was highly regarded as an act of piety in

which certain ḥadīth clearly honour this sacred journey, as the reward is the same as for those who participate in *jihād* (Guillaume, 1966).

5.0 LEGAL FACTOR

Beside 'al-rihla', the enthusiastic intellectual discourses on Islamic legal issues apparently playing a significant role. The emergence and blossoming of *muṣannaf*, *musnad* and *sunan* within this period is a clear indicator of a healthy development of ḥadīth discourse. The rapid emergence of *Muṣannaf* and *Sunan* (both are types of ḥadīth collection that cover principally discussions on legal topics) is one of the indications that legal discourse played a significant role in the development of ḥadīth. The scholars are however disputed on the earliest types of ḥadīth literature. Robson (2014), Siddiqi (1994), in their analysis, confirm that the *musnad* (the compilation of ḥadīth according to the name of the Prophet's companion) was the earliest type of systematic ḥadīth collection, and were produced during this period. Brown, however, contends that the *muṣannaf* (the collection of ḥadīth according the topic) was the first organized collection of ḥadīth literature (Brown, 2009). It seems very likely that the *muṣannaf* actually preceded the *musnad*. The *Muṣannaf* of Maʿmar (d. 153/770), Mālik (d. 179/795), Ibn Mubārak (d. 181/797) and Ibn Wahb (d. 197/812) had been completed prior to the emergence of popular *musnad* such as the work of al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/819), al-Ṭayyālisī (d. 204/819), Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) and Aḥmad (d. 241/855).

6.0 THE REFLECTION OF COMMUNITY'S NEED

Whichever branch of ḥadīth literature to be appeared first, either *musnad* or *muṣannaf*, both together comprise an exemplary phenomenon of an active and vigorous ḥadīth discourse and a reflection on the needs of the Muslim community. In the *muṣannaf*, works are arranged in topical order, and focus principally on Islamic legal discourse in the form of a compendium. They indicate the requirement for the Muslim community to aspire to Muḥammad's divine model and stipulations in every single aspect of an individual Muslim's life. Organized in subject order, the *muṣannaf* provides a convenient access for Muslims requiring an answer to a legal or ritual inquiry. Yet since some of the early *muṣannaf* did not provide a complete *isnād* (a record of the ḥadīth transmitter) such as *Muwattā'* of Mālik (Brown, 2009), there arose a confusion between the content of ḥadīth with the companion's opinion on legal issues, such as *Muṣannaf* of Abd al-Razzaq (ʿAjīn, 2008), and at the same time, the number of apparently fabricated ḥadīth increasing (Abū Zahw, 1378H). As a result, the *musnad* was invented in order to solve the above-mentioned conundrums.

Providing a full list of ḥadīth transmitters (*isnād*) and restricting their work to preserving only the Prophet's *sunna*, the *musnad* appears as a perfect solution to the then current demand. However, another problem now arises. Because of the *musnad* was organised according to companions' name and being a vast receptacle of ḥadīth tradition (for example, the *Musnad of Ibn Hanbal* contained 27,000 ḥadīth), there arose further difficulty to the reader to find a ḥadīth in the case of one specific legal issue. For this reason, Muslim scholars initiated yet another branch of ḥadīth literature in response to the community's growing needs. They begin to compose the *sunan*, a work designed to compile authentic ḥadīth (i.e *Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī* and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and *Sunan Sitta* (Goldziher, 1971; Abū Zahw, 1378H)), which were arranged by topic. As a result, this form of work became the most effective means of serving the Muslim community's need for guidance. The production of *muṣannaf, musnad* and *sunan* in the ninth century undoubtedly exhibits the healthy aspects of the intellectual development of ḥadīth literature in this period.

7.0 ḤADĪTH DISCOURSE IN REACTION TO COMMUNITY'S NEED

While we may observe the literary nature of Qur'ānic discussion of this century, the ḥadīth and *dalā'il* have a different setting of discourse. It is evident that the focus of the scholars of ḥadīth is a concentration on the legal and ethical discourses specifically. The ḥadīth work of this century clearly tried to accommodate the needs of Muslims concerning how to practice an ideal way of life, based on the prophetic model. Every single aspect of life is presented in considerable detail in the works of ḥadīth. It is regarded as a divine aspiration that a Muslim should implement the prophetic method in his or her personal life. The works of ḥadīth within this period are self-evidently a reflection of the spiritual needs of Muslims. The taxonomy and nomenclature of works of ḥadīth in the order of *muṣannaf*, *musnad* and *sunan* are the result of an endeavour of scholarship intended to ease the Muslim community's access to the works of ḥadīth.

Furthermore, scholars of ḥadīth have also produced booklets of discourse concerning legal or ethical discussions arranged around a specific theme. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, for example, composed a booklet on the law of drinking alcohol entitled *al-Ushriba* (The Drinks). Besides this work, he also produced a specific work of ethical discourse known as *al-Zuhd* (Asceticism). The same topic was also redacted by Abū Dāwūd in his *al-Zuhd*. Al-Bukhārī, on the other hand, composed *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, while Ibn Abī Shayba wrote *al-Adab*, both works being guidance on good manners and appropriate etiquette in relationships. In the same vein, Al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥarb's (246) discourse on conduct and good manners is entitled *al-Birr wa al-Ṣila* (The Kinds and Relationship), while al-Burjulānī (238/852) produced a work on benevolence entitled *al-Karm wa al-Judd* (Generosity and Honour). In the same period, Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī (285/898) compiles ḥadīth concerning entertaining guest entitled *Ikrām al-Ḍayf* (Entertaining the Guest).

Even though engulfed in legal and ethical discussion, works of ḥadīth are not silent in delivering information about the Prophet's early life. In fact the ḥadīth works are accounts of the Prophet's life arranged in a customary legal order. And since ḥadīth works focus on legal and ethical points of view, the historical element of the Prophet's life seems clouded in and overwhelmed by discussions of legal and ethical matters.

The massive production and emphasis of ḥadīth works on legal and ethical issues indicates the scholars' Herculean effort in responding to Muslim need for guidance on specific issues. Some topical works give us an informative indication of the social condition of Muslims in this particular period. This includes, for example, the work of Aḥmad on drinking alcohol (in his *al-Ushriba*), ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb's compilation of ḥadīth concerning women's conduct (in his *Adab al-Nisā* - The Manner of Women), and numerous works on the law of land and properties, including, for example the ḥadīth works of Yaḥyā Ibn Adam (203/818) on *al-Kharāj* (Land tax) and *al-Amwāl* (The Properties) of al-Qāsim ibn Salām (224/838).

This is a clear case of recorded educational communication between scholars and ordinary people. The immense volume of works and emphasises on moral and ethical issues implies that the social condition of the early Muslim community of that period was keen for guidance on ethics, personal morality, conduct and law. It is no wonder, therefore, that we should find that the *sīra* authors have adapted their style, tenor and emphasis in composing the biography of the Prophet to suit the community's changing needs.

8.0 NON MUSLIM COMMUNITIES AND ISLAMIC PROPHETOLOGY

The expansion of Muslim territory and non-Muslim communities' reactions to the denials of the prophethood of Muḥammad created an impact on the development of Islamic Prophetology. Vigorous refutations from non-Muslim community, specifically the Jews, Christians, Brahmins and the

philosophers (Stroumsa, 1985) (the *Falāsifah*) urged Muslims to develop a solid mechanism in defence of the status of their beloved prophet. Already in the early eighth century, the challenge against Muḥammad's prophethood had been expressed by John of Damascus (d.105/724) in his *De Haeresibus* (Hoyland, 2000; Stroumsa, 1985), repeating the claim of Muḥammad's being a false prophet, as was stated earlier by the author of *Doctrine Jacobi*. Not only familiar with the Quran and ḥadīth, it has been said that John was also involved in the debate at the Caliph's court in the Caliph's presence (Hitti, 2002).

It is hard to confirm, however, whether this work has had a significant effect on the development of prophetological discourse, since there is no clear indication of a Muslim response to his challenge. However, the argument posed consistently by the non-Muslim not in agreement with the prophethood of Muḥammad, undoubtedly played a role in shaping the development of Islamic prophetology. The diplomatic dialogue that occurred around 163/780 – 168/785, between Timothy I (207/823) and al-Mahdī (d.168/785) was another instance of discussion concerning Islam and the status of the Prophet (Hoyland, 2000). The earliest Muslim response to the polemical encounters between Muslim and non-Muslims was recorded in the letter of Abū al-Rabīʿ Muḥammad ibn al-Layth (d. c.203 /819) which he wrote on behalf of al-Rashīd (d.193 /809) to the Byzantine emperor Constantine in 179/796 (Roggema, 2015). Even though the letter was not specifically or explicitly identified by the author as a work discussing about the prophethood of Muhammad, the letter was presented in the framework of the literary and structural conventions of *dalā'il* literature, providing evidence to prove beyond doubt the prophethood of Muḥammad apart from other religious topics.

Later in 213/829, Theodore Abū Qurrā' (d. c.214 /830), a Melkite Bishop of Harran reinforced established notions of the characteristics of a 'true' prophet. These included, the question of miracles and other theological discourse, in the debate, which occurred in the presence of Caliph al-Mā'mūn (Bertaina, 2015). Purportedly written in 214/830, Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī, composed an *apologia* to his Muslim friend, Abd Allāh b. Ismāʿīl al-Hāshimī, who invited him to embrace Islam (Troupeau, 2015). Al-Kindi replied to the invitation with rigorous and challenging response, which comprised, in part, a refutation of some of al-Hāshimī's arguments, and a further explanation and clarification of the theological issues raised by al-Hāshimī. The particular ways in which al-Kindī employed the Bible, the Quran, the ḥadīth and rational reasoning imply his expert knowledge in this subject. The systematic arguments he utilised within the structure of argument in his letter suggest that the conventions employed in dialectical debates concerning theological issues between Muslim and Christian had already become established in this period.

9.0 CONCLUSION

The study in its finding confirms that reflection on Muslim community's need and the persistent disputation from non-Muslim communities arguing against the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood, have undoubtedly served to contribute to the steady growth of prophetological discourse. Furthermore, the study also finds that the Abbasid court appears as playing significant role and contributing serious attention to safeguarding the prophethood of Muḥammad and expanding ḥadīth literature. Not only did the Muslim scholars have their own works regarding prophetology, the Caliph of Abbasid himself appears as produced a book of on the prophethood of Muhammad.

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