

THE CANONIZATION OF AL-BUKHĀRĪ AND MUSLIM: THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE SUNNĪ ḤADĪTH CANON. By Jonathan Brown. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007. Hb. xxii+431. ISBN: 978-90-04-15839-9.

University of Chicago graduate Jonathan Brown's *Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim* is a well-documented study, in eight chapters with an introduction and conclusion, of the time (270-450, "the long fourth century") and places (Egypt-Hijaz, Baghdad, Jurjan, Isfahan, Naysabur and environs, and Transoxiana) across which the compilations of the two Arch-Masters of hadith emerged - by the gradual general agreement of the Muslim scholars after al-Dāraqūṭnī's and his student al-Ḥākim's seminal studies - as the most authoritative representatives of the Prophetic Sunna, to be placed, starting with the fifth century, on a pedestal of conventional indisputability although recognized as fallible, since only the Qur'an is the perfect Book. The chapters bear, respectively, on "canons and canonization" (2), "the genesis of al-Bukhārī and Muslim" (3), the "period of intense canonical process" in the "long fourth century" (4), *madhhab* tensions and the pivotal role of al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (5), the grounding of authority (6), the so-called "principle of Charity" (7), "Salafis" and earlier purported canon "iconoclasts" (8), and the two *Ṣaḥīḥ* as literary "tropes" of Divine blessing.

Canon is defined along the two lines of "a criterion between truth and falsehood" and a "fixed collection and/or standardized text" which is "not simply inspired or authentic" but "binding" (p. 25-26, 38), always to be read "charitably" in the most favorable light, "to minimize contradictions" (p. 30), functioning as a "heavy weapon to fire at the enemy as well as a means of defining the collective self" (p. 32) and to "monopolize the true interpretation of a religious message" (p. 39). "Considering the powerful role of the consensus (*ijmā'*)," Brown says, "we must take care to consider the emergence of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* canon as an inclusive effort to force various sects to recognize a common medium for discussing the Prophet's legacy" (p. 40). In passing, he notes that Biblical canonicity took "well over a millenium before it reached the stringency imposed on the Qur'anic text by the caliph 'Uthmān roughly two decades after the death of the Prophet" (p. 35).

The book bows to the Orientalist prejudice that "whether or not the *Sahihayn* or any collection of hadith truly communicate the original teachings of Islam . . . is ultimately beyond the ken of historians" (p. xxi), that is, of course, per the selective Western definition, since the whole business of hadith historiography has been the method by which to assess authenticity and which the great *ḥuffāz* embodied - an endeavor Brown bizarrely names a "cult of authenticity" which "had to become more intensified and accepted in the wider Sunni community" (p. 45, 302). Chapter Four similarly forwards the notions of the "cult of Muslim", "cult of al-Bukhārī" (p. 124-135), and even "*mustakhrāj* cults" (p. 153). Brown also shares what he calls "a common first impression of the hadith tradition, that of an erratic and ultimately contrived game of religious telephone" (p. xxii).

With such fantastic preambles it is no wonder that, hundreds of pages later, the book's conclusion is itself erratic and contrived: "It seems almost incomprehensible how such a large number of people from all reaches of society could devote themselves so totally to collecting and sifting through reports from the Prophet. . . . Even more shocking is the *obvious fact* [my emphasis] that most of these hadith collectors had little concern for the actual authenticity of these reports" (p. 378). Rather, they "collected and sifted" what they viewed as the correlative of the Qur'an sine qua non; and they transmitted nothing except foreworded with a documented human chain of transmission (as Brown himself acknowledges concerning the early *Musnads*, *isnād*, and *rijāl* biographies, p. 51-52), *precisely* because they had such inordinate concern for authenticity. A book that starts with a principled denial of hadith authenticity and ends in bewilderment at the basic activities of the *muhaddithīn* cannot properly address why the two *Ṣaḥīḥ* became the two *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Although Brown says his study "examines how, when and why the two *Ṣaḥīḥ* attained their authoritative station" (p. 5), he meets only the first two claims to satisfaction.

Brown notices interesting markers such as the fact that "al-Lālakā'ī's book [*Sharḥ Usūl I'tiqād Ahl al-Sunna*] represents the first work in the Sunni creed genre to accept al-Bukhārī" (p. 143). At the same time he tends to over-inflate his topic through purported firsts and other dramatic claims, detracting from the precursors and colleagues of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the process. "Al-Bukhārī's and Muslim's compilation of works limited to authenticated reports was . . . a revolutionary act... an insolent departure from tradition... a split in the hadith tradition" (p. 47), he writes, ignoring the fact that they were both preceded and rivalled in that motive by the *Muḥannaḥ*, *Muwatta'*, *Āṭḥār*, *Musnad*, and *Sunan* efforts of 'Abd al-Razzāq, al-Thawrī, the Four School Imāms and/or their immediate circles, Ibn Abī Shayba, the two Abū Dāwūd, and others, regardless of differing criteria and mixed results. He claims al-Khatṭābī's (d. 388) *Ma'ālim al-Sunan* on al-Bukhārī as the first commentary ever on one of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* (p. 134), but the sources mention earlier commentaries on al-Bukhārī by al-Māsarjāsī (d. 365) as mentioned by Ibn 'Imād and others, Abū Aḥmad al-Ḥākim (d. 378) as mentioned by al-Dhahabī in his *Tadhkira*, and a critique by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 152) which al-Sakhāwī mentioned in *al-Tawbīkh*. "The earliest Ḥanafī scholarship on the works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim appears in the seventh century with... al-Saghānī" (p. 226), he claims, when in fact it appears in the fifth and sixth with commentaries on al-Bukhārī

by al-Pazdawī (400-482) and Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (461-537). He calls Ibn Hajar's *Attāf* the first *takhrīj* of Ahmad's *Musnad* (p. 231) when in fact he was preceded in this by al-Haythamī's *Majma' al-Zawā'id*. He claims *usūl* books across the Schools "offer nothing but silence about the place of the *Sahīh* in Islamic epistemology" (p. 252) when the latter are explicitly championed as the yardstick of authentication in al-Bābartī's commentary on Ibn al-Hājib, al-'Alā'ī's *Tahqīq al-Murād*, al-Shātibī's *Muwāfaqāt* and *I'tisām*, al-Rāzī's *Mahfūl* and the commentaries on al-Baydāwī's *Minhāj*, Ibn Badrān's *Madkhal*, al-Shān'ānī's and al-Shawkānī's *Usūl*... Etc.

Brown labels as "a well-worn stereotype" al-Ḥasan b. Abī Bakr al-Naysābūrī's advice to "be Shāfi'ī but not Ash'arī, Ḥanafī but not Mu'tazilī, Ḥanbalī but not anthropomorphist" yet the same label might apply to his own stereotypes of the Ḥanbalīs as "über-Sunnis" (p. 77, 137, 159 etc.) and Hanafis as "hadith-wary" (p. 4, 151, 180 etc.), "reason-based" (p. 175), and "very skeptical of. . . claims to be able to collect and authenticate statements transmitted orally" (p. 45) - oblivious to the early Ḥanafīs' own notable contributions to hadith scholarship a century before the *Sahihayn*. There is a cornucopia of equally dubious tidbits. The anti-Hanafī anecdotes cited from *Tārīkh Baghdād* (cf. p. 75), anti-Bukhārī story in the Hanafī sources (p. 238), and accusations of forgery against al-Sulamī (p. 156) and Shī'ism against al-Shāfi'ī (p. 160) all bear the same stamp of unreliability as the pseudo-Ahmad's "über" (read "anthropomorphist" cf. p. 190) *Radd 'alā al-Zanādiqa wal-Jahmiyya*, of which Brown asserts the attribution (p. 75) although al-Dhahabī declared it spurious. So are the myths of (i) skepticism over *ijmā'* and (ii) the belief that lone-narrated reports "could be used to determine issues of dogma and abrogate Qur'ānic verses" Brown attributes to al-Shāfi'ī and Ahmad (p. 145-146, 252). It is a relief he did not include the gossip about al-Dāraqūṭhī being also accused of Shī'ism.

Brown acknowledges that early Hanafis "did play noted roles in the transmission of the two texts" (apparently not realizing the pivotal al-Kushmīhanī was himself a Hanafī, and not just his students), yet he still claims that "they did not participate in the study of al-Bukhārī's and Muslim's works" (p. 140). He asks, "Why did the Hanafīs begin employing the canon almost three centuries after their Shāfi'ī counterparts?" (p. 141), going so far as to see a "Hanafī contempt for transmission-based scholars [which] tainted the school's view of al-Bukhārī" (p. 237). But why single out the Hanafis when the Malikis, too, did not start using the *Sahīh* until late as he also shows? Why does he not investigate the possibility that al-Bukhārī and Muslim might have been proto-Shāfi'īs in law and proto-Ash'arīs in doctrine as suggested by Shāh Walī Allāh in *al-Insāf fī Bayān Sabab al-Ikhtilāf* and Ibn Hajar in *Fath al-Bān* among others? Furthermore, the Hanafis, like the other Schools, do number "transmission-based scholars" (who were also jurists of the highest caliber) among their early authorities, such as Abū Hanifa's three companions and al-Tahāwī (d. 321).

Brown often appears to misunderstand the data. He reverses the meaning of an ultra-Ḥanafī's quip that reading al-Bukhārī is tantamount to heresy by translating it as "anyone who looks *critically* at al-Bukhārī has become a heretic" (p. 304). He claims that the ḥadīth Master Abū 'Awāna's *Mustakhrāj* of Muslim "reveals an independent mind unconstrained by rigid loyalty to Muslim's book or al-Shāfi'ī's opinion" (p. 113), while neither is Abū 'Awāna counted among the Shāfi'ī *jurists*, nor does he differ from Muslim in anything but the chains. A *mustakhrāj* is a variant-chained *matn* reduplication and not an independent work as Brown seems to assume, sounding almost surprised that "most of [Abū 'Awāna's narrations] also appear in Muslim's *Sahih*" (p. 114). He mentions "al-Shāfi'ī's opinion" that nothing passing in front of a worshipper invalidates prayer, while it is actually that of the Four Schools and Zāhirīs, less Imām Ahmad (who excepted the black dog). He deems it noteworthy of al-Dāraqūṭhī that "at no point does he claim that one of the narrations included in his *Sunan* should have been featured in the *Sahihs*" (p. 119), unaware that al-Dāraqūṭhī's *Sunan*, as demonstrated by 'Abd al-Fattāh}Abū Ghudda, was meant as a book of *gharīb*, not *sahih* hadiths. He mentions how *Mustakhrājs* could elucidate "obscure transmitters" then cites the least probative example imaginable, "the famous successor Sa'īd al-Maqbūrī" (p. 120). He claims Ash'arīs interpreted the Beatific Vision figuratively (p. 223) when their literal stance is documented from al-Ghazālī's books to *Jawharat al-Tawhīd* and its commentaries. He claims Ibn al-Subkī rejected a certain report about al-Ghazālī (p. 356) which in fact he didn't. He claims "Ibn 'Abd al-Barr rarely resorts to *takhrīj* at all" (p. 232) when his *Tamhīd* is, from beginning to end, a reference-work of *takhrīj*. He calls al-Nawawī a "firm" follower and "virtual disciple" of Ibn al-Salāh in hadith (p. 246, 254) when in fact he refutes him both in theory and practice. He claims Mālik "accepted hadiths transmitted from heretics" (p. 250) whereas he unconditionally did not. Etc.

I was thrilled at Brown's treatment of Ibn Hajar's appraisal of al-Hakim's target audience and anti-Mu'tazilī agenda in his *Mustadrak* (p. 172-183) but not at his discussion of al-Hakim's understanding of the requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim for authenticity immediately preceding (p. 162-172) where, in my opinion, he shows insufficient familiarity with the scholarship on al-Hakim's stance and should have included Ibrāhīm al-Ghumārī's study (published in 2002 by Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya as part of his *Maqālāt wa-Muhaddirāt fīl-Ḥadīth*) and Abū Ghudda's vast marginalia on al-Maqdisī's and al-Hāzimi's books of *Shurūt*. He acknowledges that al-Hakim

compiled the *Mustadrak* in his old age but not that he had intended to revise it, a task left unfinished beyond the first volume as stated by al-Sakhāwī in *Fathḥal-Mughīth*. This is proven by the fact that al-Hākim's mistakes are fewer in the first quarter of the *Mustadrak*, as confirmed by al-Dhahabī's own minimal corrections in his abridgment.

Inaccurate and all-too-brief is the section on the famous controversy over Muslim's conditional acceptance of non-specific narrative mode (*'an'ana*) from trustworthy narrators as opposed to al-Bukhārī's general stringency (p. 215). On this, see Abū Ghudda's third *tatimma* in his edition of al-Dhahabī's *Mūqizā* and his luminous remark that at times al-Bukhārī himself followed Muslim's stance - as did the majority, contrary to Brown's claim. Also incorrect is the claim that "almost all later scholars" (p. 214) accepted Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's sevenfold ranking of authentic reports, as evinced by its general rejection by the Ḥanafī school (as Brown himself glimpses p. 233, 238-239), prominent Shāfi'īs (Ibn Kathīr, al-Qaṣṭallānī, Ibn Hajar), and "Salafīs" including al-Ṣan'ānī.

A disturbing theme that appears dear to Brown is the grounding of indisputable authority in the *Sahihayn* as "an illusion conjured up in the dialogic space of debate and exposition" for what he calls "institutional security" (p. 7, 210), "interpretive gymnastics and editorial revisions" (p. 263), even "rhetorical duplicity" (p. 327), that is, in effect, a collective lie by the scholars alongside their supposed "Principle of Charity" (al-Nawawī's "act of legerdemain" p. 289, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawī's "creative roles" p. 299) "glossing over or reinterpreting" (p. 278) inconsistencies and problems, such as broken chains, for the construction of orthodoxy whether or not it coincided with truth. For, he claims, "a canonical culture must reconcile the history that was with the history that should have been" (p. 268), and "only reading the *Sahihayn* in the most favorable light could resolve the inconsistency between the canon and the rules of hadith scholarship" (p. 284). But what if what he takes for the most favorable light is actually the most probable way? Or the most thorough? As shown by al-Ṣan'ānī in *Tawḍīḥal-Afkār*, the chain-concealment (*tadlīs*) of the *Sahihayn* is fraught with conditions of authenticity - as is, ultimately, al-Mizzī's *ḥfṣn al-z'ann* remark about the *Sahihayn* (p. 286) which Brown hurriedly equates with Charity. With regard to *matn* also, there are answers to the few issues raised by Ibn Ḥazm and others which can be found in the commentaries. As for al-Albānī's typecasting as the archetype of the hounded "Salafī" critic in Chapter Eight, Brown appears genuinely unaware that the heaviest fire Albānī has drawn comes not, as he claims, "most[ly] from the pens of *Madhhab* traditionalists" (p. 325), but from diehard "Salafīs" themselves, among them the Saudis Ismā'īl al-Anṣārī, 'Abd Allāh al-Ṣāliḥī, 'Abd Allāh Duwaysh, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mushayqihī Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Shaykh, and the Egyptians 'Abd al-Qādir ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, Aḥmad Shāḥḥāta, and Maḥmūd Surūr who concluded that, on average, one out of every four of al-Albānī's hadith rulings was incorrect.

Among other false assumptions, Brown mistakes for a purely Ḥanafī rule the truism that *muhādḍiths* are unqualified to appreciate the legal implications of their texts (p. 255) whereas this is in fact a locus classicus of the early Imāms of hadith across the Schools. He trumpets as a hermeneutic truism a claim unknown before very recent times: "In the elaboration of the faith, and certainly in inter-school polemics, 'interpretation is a function of authentication (*al-ta'wīl far' 'alā al-ithbāt*)'" (p. 42). A glance at Mullā al-Qārī's lengthy interpretations of forgery after hadith forgery in his *Mawḍū'āt al-Kubrā* is enough to dismiss that pseudo-rule. His superficial discussion of consensus and dissent (p. 203-204) also fails to account for robust inter-Sunni contestations of specific claims of consensus which, whether raised rightly or wrongly, never meant the dissenter was "not truly part of the Muslim community at that moment". A look at the patent consensus on the fundamentals of doctrine and basics of worship shows the vacuity of the typically Orientalist claim that "*ijmā'* is prescriptive and not a description of reality" (p. 204).

Al-Haytamī is misspelled "al-Haythamī" (p. 308), a very common mistake. The narrator 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf is misidentified as the Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (p. 213). Ibn Mandah, like Ibn Mājah and Sībawayh a Persian name, has a final hard *hā'* and should not be spelled "Manda". The word for "acceptance", *qabūl*, is incessantly misspelled *qubūl* (p. 146, 184-185, 192-193, 199 etc.).

Beyond the flawed method, errors, and occasional jargon ("Rashīd al-Dīn's historical epistemology is itself a product of Hellenistic Near Eastern discussions of mediate and immediate (apodictic) knowledge" (p. 37)), Brown's *Canonization* provides a wealth of historical background and many insights on the function and status of the two magnificent motherbooks of the Muslim Community - an important subject that deserves more in-depth treatment. Nevertheless he keeps aloof, perhaps wisely, from the major aspects of the why question he himself asks: the perception of technique, economy, accuracy, and beauty that made the two works tower above the rest and forever retell an achievement of near-Quranic inimitability.

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