

**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCE OF ḤADĪTH: KITĀB MA RIFAT ANWĀʿ ʿILM AL-ḤADĪTH.** By Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī. Translated by Eerik Dickinson. Doha, Qatar: Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization and Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2005. Pp. 356. ISBN 1859641520 (HB).

In his landmark manual of hadith science entitled *Ma rifat Anwāʿ ʿUlūm* (or *ʿIlm*) *al-Ḥadīth*, also known as the *Muqaddima*, the great Syrian master Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (577-634) brought under one roof the collected wisdom of his three great precursors – al-Rāmahurmuzī’s *al-Muḥaddith al-Fāsil*, al-Ḥākim’s *Ma rifat ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*, and al-Khaṭīb’s *Kifāya fī ʿIlm al-Riwāya* – assessing, selecting, and organizing their material into a final canon for the greater benefit and to the unanimous approval of teachers and students of ḥadīth from East to West down to our times.

Michigan and Yale graduate Eerik Dickinson, author of the 2001 *Development of Early Sunnite Hadīth Criticism*, based his rendering of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ on the definitive Syrian edition of our teacher Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, enhancing it – and its size – out of the footnotes of the 1,000-page Egyptian edition by the late ʿĀʾisha, Bint al-Shāṭiʿ. Its English and erudition rank with the works of Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Aʿzamī and the late Muḥammad Ḥamīdullah in ḥadīth culture, and redeem the genre from the spot where Muḥammad Ḥāshim Kamālī’s disappointing *Hadīth Methodology* had left it. The result is a classic in its own right and, although printed at low cost in Lebanon and subsidized by Qatari patrons, its high-end pricing by Reading’s Garnet Publishing will insure it is pirated for many years to come.

For all the footnotes, the translator overly relied on the Bint al-Shāṭiʿ edition and therefore overlooked flagging some famously problematic notions which ʿItr rectified in his otherwise sparse marginalia. In Category 30, for example, the statement attributed to Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal incorrectly puts in his mouth the condemnation of the mass-transmitted ḥadīth: “On the Day of Resurrection I will be the [prosecutor] of whoever harms a [covenantee].” In Category 62, several of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s examples for the “Reliable Transmitters Who Confused Their Ḥadīth at the End of Their Life” are disputed. In Category 41, it should have been pointed out that the claim that al-Zuhrī narrated from his student Mālik was rejected by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr.

A technical field such as the categories of ḥadīth (*ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*) requires a translator to invent terminology. Dickinson’s felicitous choices – e.g. “parallelisms” for *mutābaʿāt*, “impairing defect” for *illa qādiḥa*, “paidonymics” for *kunā*, “gentilics” for *ansāb*, “bone-setter” for *jābir* – show the intelligence of the topic one prays for. A few basic terms, however, are obscured:

- The *munqaṭiʿ* is not “interrupted ḥadīth” but “broken-chained” in one or more places of the chain.
- The *mursal* is not “loose ḥadīth” but rather “expedited,” “dispatched” over one or more missing links.
- “Misrepresentation” is a commentary for *tadlīs* but not a translation. “Concealment” and “camouflage” are both more accurate and precise since the most common type of *tadlīs* consists in occulting a name completely, and not just misrepresent it.
- “Unfamiliar” is too mild for *munkar* which is better rendered as “disclaimed” if not “rejected.”
- Even more than “analysis,” *i tibār* conveys the sense of “evaluation.”
- The *afrād* are not exactly “isolated” ḥadīths but literally “unique” ḥadīths from one or more of the perspectives Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ himself outlines in the chapter to that effect.
- Rather than the vague term “disrupted,” *muḍṭarib* is best translated as “inconsistent” or “discrepant.”
- Similarly, “contradictory ḥadīth” is not what the scholars meant by *mukhtaliṭ al-ḥadīth* but rather “reconcilable ḥadīths.” Reconcilability is indeed the driving force of the entire category in the classics of the genre such as the works of Ibn Qutayba and others.
- Rather than “mixed-up” I believe “topsy-turvy” is perfect for the *maqlūb*.
- “Licensing” is as inelegant for *ijāza* as “positive law” for *fiqh*, but “global license” for *ijāza ʿamma*? Use “general.”
- “Transference” for *munāwala* is strange and uncommitted. More literal and precise is “handover” even if it is a neologism, especially since a *munāwala* does not necessarily amount to the narrational permission “transference” suggests.
- *Mudabbaj* is not “symmetrical transmission” but “reciprocal transmission.”
- To translate “*raʿy*” as “arbitrary opinions” makes short thrift of the firmly established division of *raʿy* into sound and unsound types. Sound *raʿy* is the same as *madhhab* – what *fiqh* and *ijtihād* are all about. Capricious *raʿy* is the archway of *bidʿa* and heresy. From the earliest generation many examples of sound *raʿy* – by the Second Caliph and other major Companions – were validated by the Prophet himself, upon him and them blessings and peace. Such approval pre-empts any velleity of subsequent generations to stem the dynamism of qualified scholarly striving which the word *raʿy*, at its best, denotes, and which its translation ought to allow: please stick to “opinion(s)” or “juridical opinion(s)” or the like.
- “Source” for *makhraj* is murky and the footnote does nothing to help: “The word *makhraj* is not a technical term in the study of ḥadīth and on its own yielded very little meaning to later commentators. They tended

to interpret the clause ‘the source of which is known’ as a reference to the necessity of cohesion in the *isnād* of the fair ḥadīth.” In fact, the *makhrāj* of the ḥadīth is literally “the place/way it emerges,” its “outset,” and refers to the top links of its chain. If these links are recognized, it is a sign the chain exists in reality, but not that it is necessarily fair since the ḥadīth and/or chain could be sound, weak, or even forged. A *makhrāj* needs to be known to any pre-sixth-century authority, otherwise it is dismissed out of hand.  
 - Not *zujjāja* and *dajjāja* but *zujāja* and *dajāja*.

Contrary to the translator’s footnote at the end of Category 2, “the finest classical biographical dictionary” is not al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s *Tārīkh Baghdād* but either al-Dhahabī’s *Tārīkh al-Islām* or *Siyar A lām al-Nubalā*’ or his student Tāj al-Dīn Ibn al-Subkī’s *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyya al-Kubrā*. All four are mentioned in the bibliography (on a par with G.H.A. Juynboll, somewhat like citing a Daltonian in a textbook on Monet) but, in any case, the translator’s prefatory presentation of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ does not reflect knowledge of any of those masterpieces.

The translator warns us that “Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ did not have at his disposal that great scholarly convenience, the footnote. He therefore had to incorporate his digressions in the body of the text. In the instances where these are relatively lengthy or interrupt the flow of the argument, I have distinguished them by presenting them as an indented text block.” But his criterion for what qualifies as a digression on the part of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ is arbitrary, and other readers past and present consider those passages to be integral parts of the author’s argument. Stranger yet is his idea that “[t]he *Muqaddima* amply exemplifies what Professor Franz Rosenthal [his teacher] has called the philnomyous (*sic*) character of Islamic scholarship.” He also asks, “[h]ow can we explain the astonishing success of this work, since it clearly broke little new ground in terms of its basic format?” These two remarks – especially the first – exemplify the paradox of the graduates of Orientalism being such skilled technicians who lack a sense of the ethos of *Ilm* and the very disciplines they chair, teach, and write about.

Indeed, the translator’s entire introduction is disquieting and seems to have been dashed off on a bad day. What to say of the disparagement of the great Ḥanbalī ḥadīth Master ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī, known as Ibn Surūr (to whom such luminaries of ḥadīth and its *fiqh* such as Ibn Daqīq al-‘Id and al-Mizzī became indebted), as “a pathological troublemaker and career martyr”? Or the assessment that “Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s networking finally paid off” with his professorship at the Rawāhiyya school? Or the sarcasm that “the acquisition of the sandal of the Prophet was his [the ruler of Syria al-Malik al-Ashraf’s] major cultural

achievement”? I suggest Mr. Dickinson look up the *Siyar* for the exchange that took place between Ibn Sīrīn and ‘Abīdat al-Salmānī, followed by al-Dhahabī’s comments, to learn the place a Prophetic relic holds in the hearts of Muslims.

The volume sorely lacks an index of Arabic terms. See the *muṣṭalah* index appended to Mūsā Furber’s translation of Ibn Ḥajar’s *Nukhbat al-Fikar* in the first volume of our *Sunna Notes* series published at the Al-Qur’ān wal-Sunna Association of Birmingham.

Gibril Fouad Haddad  
 Damascus