



# ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ

*The Early Years of Islam*

BEING THE HISTORICAL CHAPTERS OF  
THE *KITĀB AL-JĀMI' AṢ-ṢAḤĪḤ*  
COMPILED BY IMĀM ABŪ 'ABD-ALLĀH  
MUḤAMMAD IBN ISMĀ'ĪL AL-BUKHĀRĪ

TRANSLATED AND EXPLAINED

by

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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION (1938)

THE WORK which is now being placed before the public comprises the historical chapters of the most important compilation of Traditions, the *Kitâb al-Jâmi' as-Şahih* by Imâm Muḥammad ibn Ismâ'îl al-Bukhârî, and depicts the beginning of the Prophet's revelation and the early years of Islam up to and including that decisive turning-point of Islamic history, the Battle of Badr. The five instalments of which the present volume consists will be followed in the course of time, God willing, by thirty-five more instalments containing my translation of, and commentary on, the whole of the *Şahih al-Bukhârî*.

The idea of rendering the *Şahih* into English – a task never before attempted – occurred to me during my five years' sojourn at Medina, when I was studying the science of *ḥadîth* in the Prophet's Mosque. In that serene atmosphere, the necessity of finding once more a direct contact with the original spirit of Islam presented itself to me with overwhelming force. It is not enough, I realized, to know what this or that great man of the past thought about matters Islamic; it is not enough to live in the shadow of thoughts that have been thought at a period so remote from us that they can hardly have any immediate bearing on the exigencies of our present-day life. What we most urgently need today is a new understanding and a *direct* appreciation of the true teachings of Islam. In order to achieve this we must once again make real the voice of the Prophet of Islam – real, as if he were speaking directly to us and for us: and it is in the *ḥadîth* that his voice can be most clearly heard.

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The term *ḥadîth* (pl. *aḥâdîth*) primarily denotes a narrative or a report; in Islamic theological usage it has come to mean the records of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muḥammad, and is hence translated as "Tradition".

It was as much from the Master's example as from the Qur'ân that the Companions of the Prophet derived their beliefs and their rules of conduct. For the later generations of Muslims, who no longer had the life of the Prophet before their eyes, the exact knowledge of the records enshrining his teachings became an even greater necessity: and so people began to compile and write down the Traditions handed down to them by the Companions and their immediate successors. The prodigious memory of the Arabs, so amply borne out by history, was a great advantage for a faithful preservation of Traditions. Besides, even in the lifetime of the Prophet a few of his Companions (e.g., 'Abd Allâh ibn 'Amr) used to commit these reports to writing, and the increasing distance from the time of the Prophet made this practice imperative. However, until the beginning of the third century after the Hijrah, there was no system in these collections, and the individual *aḥâdîth* were hardly ever critically sifted. In consequence, much unreliable material got mixed up with the genuine; and as a reaction to this, the critical investigation of Traditions was taken up and rapidly developed into a science.

In the case of any historical document relating to a time anterior to its composition, the means of verification are, firstly, a corroboration of the evidence adduced in the document concerned by other, independent sources; and, secondly, a thorough investigation of the reliability of the authorities – or the chain of authorities – responsible for the transmission of the historical facts underlying the document in question. This principle was gradually, and with increasing rigour, applied to the Traditions. Different accounts bearing on one and the same incident or saying were critically compared, and every chain of narrators (called *isnâd*) subjected to very intense scrutiny. In order that a Tradition be recognized as "sound" (*şahih*), all facts about the lives of its narrators, commencing with the Prophet's Companion or Companions who first reported it, must be known and historically established, including the fact of an un-

broken contiguity in the line of narrators, and a positive proof that every one of them was in personal contact with his authority, i.e., the person who communicated to him the *ḥadīth* in question. Every one of the narrators must be known to be truthful, pious, just and possessing a faultless memory – so much so that any substantiated challenge (*ta'wīl*) on any of these points automatically removes the narrator concerned from the rank of trustworthy authorities (*thiqāt*). And, finally, if two or more persons who otherwise could be regarded as reliable narrate *intrinsically conflicting* Traditions on the same subject, they lose their position of unquestioned authority, with the result that no Tradition reported by them can by itself (i.e., without corroboration by another chain of narrators) be classified as *ṣaḥīḥ*.

It is not intended to give here the full methodology of *ḥadīth*; the above lines should merely explain one of the reasons for the extraordinary esteem in which Al-Bukhārī's *Kitāb al-Jāmi' aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ* has always been held throughout the Muslim world. This appreciation is due to the high sense of intellectual and moral responsibility and the extreme severity with which its author – who lived in the first half of the third century after the Hijrah (corresponding to the ninth century of the Christian era) – approached the problem of *ḥadīth*. His standards of investigation and scrutiny are far more rigorous than those of any other Traditionist before or after him; and it can safely be said that to this day they answer to the most exacting demands of historical criticism.

Our realization that the Traditions regarded as *ṣaḥīḥ* by this most rigorous of all Traditionists are indeed historically reliable is of the utmost importance to the ideological future of Islam: for it is in the Sunnah – the way of life – of the Last Prophet that the spirit of Islam finds its authentic, concrete expression; and it is through *aḥādīth* alone that the Prophet's Sunnah is fully conveyed to us. In other words, our knowledge of *ḥadīth* is an indispensable key to a full understanding of the Sunnah and, thus, of Islam.

The necessity, for a Muslim, of following the Sunnah of the Prophet is firmly established in the Qur'ān itself. But one could ask: Assuming that the Traditions as such are genuine and reliable, do the present-day conditions of the world and society permit a full application of the Sunnah to the practical life of the Muslims, or would such an application – as some assert – result in complete social rigidity, and thus constitute a permanent drawback to the cultural possibilities of the Muslim world?

To this we have a definite answer: If, despite the clear-cut Qur'anic injunctions relating to the Prophet's Sunnah, that Sunnah were not practicable at this or any other time, the only possible conclusion would be that the relevant Qur'anic injunctions are, in themselves, meaningless and impracticable. For a Muslim, who regards the Qur'ān as the Word of God, this proposition is obviously unacceptable. Consequently, if we have reason to believe that the sources from which we draw our knowledge of the Sunnah – that is, the *aḥādīth* – are historically reliable, then this Sunnah, rightly understood, *must* be practicable at all times and cannot be a drawback to Muslim life.

But what does “the Sunnah, rightly understood,” mean? Has its interpretation – nay, the interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān itself – been fixed for us, once and for all, at some remote period of the past? This, unfortunately, would seem to be the attitude of the vast majority of Muslims. Since many centuries they have ceased to think *independently* about the teachings of Islam and contented themselves with the mere repetition of ideas and conceptions formed not later than in the fourth century after the Hijrah, and often reflecting the meanderings of Neo-Platonic philosophy which loomed so large in the minds of many Muslim scholars from the second century onwards: ideas and conceptions which do not in every case coincide with the intentions of the Last Prophet and his Companions. In short, it was the rigidity of medieval Muslim thinking *about* the Prophet's teachings and not a supposed “rigidity of the Sunnah” as such that was undoubtedly one of the main causes of the cultural decay of the Muslim world. To be sure, none can pretend that the works of the early Muslim generations could be dispensed with in our days; they are as necessary for us as they were necessary for our predecessors. But are we to assume that *all* possibilities of religious knowledge have been exhausted by those early works, and that nothing remains for us but to follow them blindly, without the right to scrutinize and interpret them anew?

Obviously, it cannot be so. The very greatness of the Qur'ān – and, consequently, of the Sunnah of its Apostle – consists in the fact that the more our worldly knowledge increases, the more new and hitherto

hidden meanings appear in them. The piety and the religious ardour of the Muslims may be lower in our days than in the earliest centuries of Islam; but certainly not our means of understanding. The interpretation given to the teachings of Islam by the Last Prophet will forever remain binding on a Muslim; but beyond this, he is free – in fact, *required* – to use his own intellect and his own conscience. This, and nothing else, was the attitude of the great Islamic thinkers whom we describe as *imâms* (“leaders”). They never pretended to be infallible; they were learned men devoted to the search for truth, and they knew that the duty of thinking could never cease to be a duty for man. It was a duty for Abû Ḥanîfah as well as for Ibn Ḥazm or Ibn Rushd; for Al-Ghazâlî as well as for Ibn Taimiyyah or for Shâh Walî Allâh; and it is a duty for you and for me.

A genuine revival of Islam is impossible without an intensive inquiry into its original spirit. We must build further and higher on the foundations supplied by past generations of scholars and thinkers. We cannot accept the idea that the teachings of Islam could ever be exhausted in all their depth; and no word of anyone below the Prophet can ever be considered to be final: all of us who labour at a better understanding of the Word of God and the Example of His Prophet are but travellers aiming at new discoveries in the domain of the spirit.

And in this endeavour of ours we cannot find a better aid and companion than the immortal *Ṣaḥîḥ al-Bukhârî*.

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While translating the *Ṣaḥîḥ*, I have tried to render its meaning as literally as possible – sometimes, I am afraid, at the expense of the English language. Whatever I have had to say myself has been confined to the explanatory notes, and whenever an addition was unavoidable in the text itself for the sake of clarity, I have used brackets to indicate the additions thus made. Each Tradition has been divided, by means of different sizes of type, into two parts: the documentary evidence of transmission (*isnâd*) and the textual substance (*matn*). Al-Bukhârî’s explanatory remarks (*tarâjim al-abwâb*) which precede some of the sections are printed in italics. The letter *T* before some of the *isnâds* shows that the Tradition to which it belongs is a *ta’lîq* (“suspended” *isnâd*) on account of a missing link in the chain of narrators. The letter *h* indicates a *tahwîl* (“transfer”) to another line of transmitters.

Some of my friends have questioned the necessity of including the full *isnâd* in my translation – an inclusion which, according to them, is irrelevant to the understanding of the *ḥadîth* as such, and therefore of no interest to the general reader. This, I am convinced, is an entirely erroneous view. The *isnâd* is an essential part of every *ḥadîth* – as essential as is the skeleton in the body of every higher animal, including man: for it is with the *isnâd* that the authenticity of a Tradition stands or falls. Without an *isnâd*, a Tradition is no more than a hearsay report, to be blindly accepted or capriciously rejected; with the *isnâd* before him, on the other hand, the reader is able to see for himself with what meticulous attention to detail and authenticity every *ṣaḥîḥ* Tradition has been recorded: and thus his acceptance of the Tradition becomes endowed with consciousness and ceases to be blind.

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And now a word about the printing of the Arabic text side by side with the translation. In Muslim countries, this system has been well received, because it enables the reader to compare, at every step, the translation with the original. But some European scholars have pointed out to me that this unnecessarily increases the volume of the work and, consequently, the cost of production; and that the student could well avail himself of any of the existing copies of the *Ṣaḥîḥ* whenever he feels the necessity of independent criticism. I cannot admit this objection as valid. The old style in which this and other compilations of Traditions are printed makes it, in many cases, exceedingly difficult to separate the frequent interpolations of the transmitters from the textual substance (the *matn*) of the Tradition, and sometimes even leads to a confusion of utterances of different persons with the narrator’s statement of facts contained in the *matn*.

Thus, the Arabic text in the present edition – arranged as it is on the same principle as the English translation – presents the *Ṣaḥīḥ* for the first time in an easily readable form which, moreover, contains every textual improvement gained from a collation of the most reliable editions.

My translation is based on the most accurate of all existing editions, namely, that printed by order of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd at *Al-Maṭba‘ah al-Amiriyyah*, Cairo, 1313 H. Other well-known editions have, of course, been frequently consulted.

MUHAMMAD ASAD

*Lahore, Muḥarram 1357 H. (March 1938).*



## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

WELL over four decades have passed since this volume was first published. Issued in five instalments by Arafat Publications in Lahore between December 1935 and May 1938, it was to represent the beginning of a gradual publication of my complete work on the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhârî* projected for the following five or six years.

But man proposes and God disposes. The outbreak of the Second World War interrupted the publication. Just as it was about to be resumed, in the summer of 1947, the chaos and the inter-religious holocaust which followed upon the partition of the Indian subcontinent and the establishment of Pakistan (for which I myself had worked and striven since 1933) resulted in a great personal loss – to me as to so many others. Since the end of the war I had been living in the eastern (now Indian) part of the Punjab; and at the outbreak of the partition troubles the manuscripts of nearly three-quarters of my annotated translation of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* were barbarically destroyed. With my own eyes I saw a few scattered leaves of those manuscripts floating down the river Ravi in the midst of torn Arabic books – the remnants of my library – and all manner of debris; and with those poor, floating pieces of paper vanished beyond recall more than ten years of intensive labour.

And yet. . . .

Although a resumption and repetition of that wantonly destroyed labour was and remained out of the question, it gradually dawned on me that my work on the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhârî* was not totally lost. On the contrary, I realized with growing conviction that the ten years spent on analyzing, translating and clarifying the *Ṣaḥīḥ* were a God-willed preparation for a work which for a very long time had represented an enticing dream to me: a new rendering into English of the message of the Holy Qur'ân and a commentary based on the principle that the doors of *ijtihâd* have never been and never could be closed to man's searching intellect. I had always known that absolute familiarity with the science of *ḥadîth* was an indispensable pre-condition for any independent approach to the Qur'ân. Thus, irrespective of whether my work on Al-Bukhârî's *Ṣaḥīḥ* was fully published or not, it was bound to bear fruit in the form of my dreamed-of commentary on the Holy Qur'ân.

By the grace of God, that dream has at last been fulfilled, and my life-work completed and published under the title *The Message of the Qur'ân*; and any scholarly reader of that work will easily recognize how much of the spirit of *ḥadîth* – and, hence, of the immortal labour of Al-Bukhârî – has gone into my interpretation of the Word of God.

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For technical reasons connected with the photographic reproduction of the first edition of this work, it has become necessary to omit Abû Sufyân's story of his meeting with Emperor Heraclius, as well as Ibn an-Na'ûr's account of the Emperor's reactions to the message of Islam. Both these accounts are found at the end of the first chapter of the original.

MUHAMMAD ASAD

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