

Orientalist's Reaction on The Ḥadīth Literature: A Brief Study of the Contribution of Ignaz Goldziher

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Abstract:

In the early twentieth century, Ḥadīth had been attacked by the orientalist's campaign of abuses and doubt in their attempt to take the Moslems away from their most important source of the Islamic doctrine. However, Allah brought to this nation men who preserved Ḥadīth from these abuses and biased fabrications. They showed the right and the wrong and distinguished the right Ḥadīth from the false one. Those men defended the pure Islamic Sunnah and refuted the Orientalists' allegations with proofs and evidences. The Orientalists believe the Ḥadīth was put and invented by the men of Islamic Jurisprudence and, unfortunately, the results of their studies are considered nowadays as reliable in the European and American universities in addition to the Middle East departments in the West. Recording Ḥadīth was made doubtful by the orientalists. They maintained that most of the Prophet's Ḥadīth were not actually his, rather some others reported his ideas and thoughts.

This paper is an attempt to highlight the views on Ḥadīth Literature by the Orientalist scholar Ignaz Goldziher. He has been familiar with the non-Muslim scholarship of Ḥadīth research. Yet, instead of following Orientalist scholars' approaches and premises on the early Ḥadīth literature, he severely criticized them and decided to follow the mainstream of Muslim scholars' belief in the historicity of Ḥadīth transmission and collection.

Keywords: Islamic doctrine, Ḥadīth, Ḥadīth Literature, Orientalists, Ignaz Goldziher

Introduction:

Western Orientalist scholars of Islamic faith, history and civilization must bear a large share of responsibility for the disillusionment with Islam, skepticism and moral and spiritual apathy, and the overpowering urges of modernism and reform found in the ruling classes of Muslim countries today. The Western Orientalists are held in great reverence in the political and literary circles of the East because of their learning and scholarship and their views and conclusions are regarded by them to be the last word on Eastern and Islamic problems. A long trail of history, stretching back to the Seventeenth Century, lies behind the Western Interest in Orientology. Religious as well as political and economic factors have played their part in its growth.

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The religious factor, however, has always been pretty obvious. For the propagation of the Christian faith in the East, it was found expedient to present a distorted picture of Islam so that the superiority of Christianity could be asserted as a self-evident truth and the younger and Western educated Muslims persuaded to opt out of it as a matter of course. Hence, Orientology and proselytization have often been found to march hand in hand with each other. A large number of Orientalists are drawn from the priestly class and the Jews.¹

Orientalism:

The term Orientalism, later known as Oriental studies, began in reference to the study of languages and cultures of the so-called Orient. Although initially focused on the ancient and modern Near East, the term Orient was indiscriminately used for all of the Asian civilizations encountered by Europeans in their eastward imperial and colonial expansion. The term is derived from the Latin *Oriens* in reference to the direction of the rising sun or the east. The study of Islam and Muslim cultures during the medieval period in Europe was primarily apologetic. By the seventeenth century, Arabic and other oriental languages began to be taught in universities. The Thomas Adams (Orientalist Scholar), chair of Arabic, for example, was established at Cambridge University in 1632. Orientalist scholars translated religious, historical and literary texts from Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Chinese, but most of these translations are not considered critical editions. Modern Orientalism in an academic sense begins at the end of the eighteenth century. Napoleon's (French military and political leader who rose to prominence during the French revolution) expeditionary force that invaded Egypt in 1797 included scholars who recorded ancient Egyptian texts and monuments as well as contemporary Islamic architecture. The British presence in India, most notably in the work of the philologist William Jones, led to a field of study formally called Orientalism. The first academic society devoted to the study of the Orient was the French Société Asiatique, founded in 1821. This was followed by the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (1823) and the American Oriental Society (1842), in 1873 the first International Congress of Orientalists was held in Paris. With a few notable exceptions, most Orientalist scholars held negative views of Islam until the middle of the twentieth century. By 1973 the term orientalist was abandoned by the International Congress of Orientalists, recognizing that specialty disciplines were more significant than the vague geographical notion of an "Orient"²

From these activities and suggestions we can imagine what the real motives of the Western Orientalists are with regard to Islam and how deep is their antipathy towards it. The writings of a majority of them are directed against the very roots of Islam.

The Root of Islam:

The Root of Islamic origins, whether focussing on the Qur'ān, its Exegesis (tafsīr), the life of the Prophet (sīra), Jurisprudence (fiqh), or even Arabic grammar, has been largely confounded by a growing skepticism. While many scholars of Islam still have no qualms about the authenticity of purportedly early Islamic texts, many others have serious reservations. At the crux of this debate is the value scholars assign to the chain of transmitters (the *isnād*) which is intended to demonstrate the authenticity and indicate the province of the tradition (ḥadīth) or a book of which it is a part. The *isnād* is seen either as a reasonably reliable guarantee of the historicity of its adjoining text (the *matn*), or as a complete fabrication designed to insinuate chronological priority and hence authority into a later *matn*. Scholars holding the latter view, look not to the *isnād*, but often to the *matn* itself to provide answers to the questions of its own chronology and provenance. These two approaches to early Islamic texts in general. If the consequences of this disagreement amounted to a simple debate about whether a given Ḥadīth or text is authentic, they would not be particularly noteworthy.³

Ḥadīth:

Ḥadīth is a term indicating the sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad and constituting the reference body of literature, along with the Qur'ān in the definition of Muslim beliefs. The term Ḥadīth means “*speech*” or “*report*” and emerged in early literature along with some other terms, such as *khobar* (information or news), to indicate one saying uttered by the Prophet or one short narrative unit describing Muhammad's behaviour. Ḥadīth acquired a specific technical meaning only later on when it came to coincide with the concept of the prophetic Sunna (tradition). A complete single Ḥadīth includes a text (*matn*) and a chain of transmitters (*isnād*) through which the text is traced back to an earlier authority. The content is various ranging from historical events of the life of Muḥammad to his opinions and actions relating to issues of belief, law, ritual, ethics, etc. As a result of this, Ḥadīth literature is mentioned and quoted in all Islamic literary genres⁴.

Ḥadīth literature is the richest source for the investigation of early Islamic History. It provides material for an understanding of the legal, cultural and religious ideas of those early

centuries. Ḥadīth is also the repository of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muḥammad , which is the second principal source of Islamic legislation. Orientalist scholars have devoted much more time to Islamic literature, history and other subject than to Ḥadīth⁵.

Orientalist scholars and Ḥadīth literature:

The Orientalist scholars have been taking a keen interest in Ḥadīth collections as well as in other branches of literature connected with Ḥadīth for about two years. They made a critical study of Ḥadīth, edited and published many of the original Arabic works on these subjects, translated some of them into their own languages, and wrote learned treatises and critical articles on some of the intricate basic problems relating to Ḥadīth literature. Some of them published a comprehensive and highly critical account of the origin and the development of the subject, discussed many fundamental problems relating to it, and described most of the important Ḥadīth work, and pointed out their merits and demerits. Among them, A. Sprenger, Edward E. Salisbury, O.V. Houdas, L.Krehl, Ignaz Goldziher, T.W. Juynboll, J. Horvitz and A.J. Winsock made important contributions to the study of this subject and W. Watt. J. Schacht, J. Robson and some others are still engaged in the keen critical study of Ḥadīth literature and are making some important, contributions to its history and criticism.⁶

They raised some fundamental problems with the regard to Ḥadīth literature and its development and tried to solve them according to the modern methods of literary and historical criticism on the basis of their own researches. The first Orientalist scholar to do so was Sprenger. (As he himself claimed). In the introduction to his *Das Leben und die Lehre des Muhammad*, he summarized the results of his researches in Ḥadīth literature, and William Muir also discussed, in the introduction to his *Life of Muhammad*, the reliability of Ḥadīth. But they were far surpassed in their treatment and criticism of Ḥadīth literature by . Goldziher I who was endowed by nature with a strong intellect and keen critical faculty, and who had made a thorough study of Jewish and Christian literature. He chose Arabic language and literature in general, and Ḥadīth literature in particular, as some of the special fields of his research. He published numerous learned articles, treaties and books on some of the collections of Ḥadīth as well as on the history of the material and formal development of the subject. The most important of his works for purpose in the second volume of the “*Muhammedanische Studien*”. In it, after having discussed some preliminary matters, *Goldziher* discussed the political, the sectarian and the cultural movements in Islamic history

which influenced the material and formal development of Ḥadīth literature. He has dealt with the important Ḥadīth collections and pointed out their merits and defects according to his own view. At the end of the book, he has also shown the influence of the *New Testament* as well as of the neo-Platonic and Gnostic ideas on this subject. His general conclusion is that Ḥadīth literature does not represent the original ideas and ideals of the Prophet of Islam, but that it reflects those of a much later period. It, therefore, cannot serve as a source for the ideas preached by Muḥammad, but serves as an important source of information for the history of the development of the different aspects of Islamic culture of the later periods under the foreign non- Islamic influences⁷.

The objective of this paper is to explore Ignaz Goldziher contributions to Ḥadīth literature. According to Goldziher, the hadith does not represent what the Prophet had actually said or done, but they reflect the belief, practices and socio-cultural norms of the Muslim community at that time⁸. Goldziher says:

- i. *The word Hadith means tale communication*⁹
- ii. *The ḥadīth will not serve as a document for the history of the infancy of Islam, but rather as a reflection of the tendencies which appeared in the community during the mature stages of its development. It contains invaluable evidence for the evolution of Islam during the years when it was forming itself into an organized whole from powerful mutually opposed forces. This makes the proper appreciation and study of the ḥadīth so important for an understanding of Islam, in the evolution of which the most notable phases are accompanied by successive stages in the creation of the ḥadīth.*¹⁰
- iii. *Each single ḥadīth consists of two parts. First, there is the chain of attestors, from its originator to its last transmitter, who have handed down the particular tradition and on whose authority its authenticity is based. This whole chain is called the sanad (support), or isnād (supporting), of the ḥadīth; it contains the documentation of the ḥadīth.*¹¹
- vi. *This formal element is followed by the actual wording of the saying; this is called matn, the text of the ḥadīth. It is to be noted that the word matn is pre-Islamic and did not originally signify ḥadīth text. In old Arabic, it had been used to denote written text.*

- v. *Rather can it be assumed that the writing down of the ḥadīth was a very ancient method of preserving it, and that reluctance to preserve it in written form is merely the result of later considerations¹².*

Difference between the hadith and Sunna:

Goldziher Remarks:

- i. *The terms Sunna and ḥadīth must be kept distinct from one another. Several attempts have been made to define the difference between the two, though, on the other hand, it has also been asserted that they are identical or relatively synonymous. The latter view has some justification as far as the later development of Islamic terminology is concerned; but if only the original senses of the two words are considered, they are by no means, as ...it is quite possible that the contents of a ḥadīth may contradict the Sunna or as we might say the jus consuetudinis and it is the task of subtle theologians and harmonists to find a way out¹³.*
- ii. *for them Sunna was all that corresponded to the traditions of the Arabs and the customs and habits of their ancestors, and in this sense, the word was still used in Islamic times by those Arab communities which had been only very little affected by Muslim religion. Under Islam, the content of the old concept and the meaning of the word that corresponded to it underwent a change...The Islamic concept of Sunna is a revised statement of ancient Arab views. 'May you follow'-so the Prophet is made to say in the ways of those who preceded you, span by span, all by all, though they lead you to the lair of a lizard.¹⁴*
- iii. *We thus see that this group of sayings forbidding the introduction of innovations has special reference to Medina. This town was to become the stronghold of the Sunna, as also the oldest source of its rise and growth. in Medina lived those who first taught the sayings of the Prophet by which life was to be regulated, and for this reason it is also called the home of the Sunna, dār al –Sunna...the tradition was already current in the earliest 'Abbasid period that Umar inserted in every treaty made with a conquered town a clause that the inhabitants must not give refuge to innovators...but this tendency to extend the curse to innovators, in general, appeared even in the oldest text...¹⁵*

The Ḥadīth Literature:

Goldziher regarded:

- i. *Despite the prominent position which motives of religious life occupy in the Islamic community, it is not religious elements which determine the course of literature during the first phase of the development of the Muslim empire. Apart from the Koran, at the beginning of the literary history of Islam, we find not a religious but a secular literature. Only in the second century are the beginnings of canonic literature to be seen, and during that period former seeds of its later development, latent in the formerly suppressed religious society, attained a certain predominance¹⁶.*
- ii. *The facts of literary history reveal that this literature developed in just the opposite way. Legal literature proper, which represents the result of comprehensive thinking, is chronology prior to the literature of the hadith. The works of Abu Hanifa and his companions and disciples, Abu Yusuf and Muhammad al- Shaybani, the works of al – Shafii, the many early works on single chapters of law whose titles are listed in great number in the relevant section of the Fihrist, long precede hadith literature proper; they are the real fiqh books. These books clearly show that they were not written at a time when certain results could be deduced from fixed principles; they continually reveal the grouping's and unsteady gait of beginners, and frequently show differences of opinion within the same school.¹⁷*
- iii. *So naïve a conception of how and when the ḥadīth was collected tallies well with the view, which was previously current and which even today is often repeated, that the Sunna is by etymology and by its nature a counterpart or even an imitation of the Jewish Mishnah¹⁸.*
- iv. *There are more positive data in Islamic literary history for the beginning of tradition literature. These data, as we shall see, even anticipate a stop which was taken only later in this literature for the characterization of its development in the second century. It is said that Ahmad ibn Hanbal named 'Abd al –Malik b. Jurayi (d. 150), in Hijaz, and Sa'id b. Abi Aruba (d.156), in Iraq, as the first who arranged the existing material by Chapters. From this historian of the literature concluded – this datum is met with in nearly all later books of this kind – that these Muslim theologians represent the commencement of ḥadīth collection, this interpretation of Ahmad ibn Hanbal's account, however, rests upon a misunderstanding. The works of these*

theologians are not extant and, in judging their trend and tendency, recourse cannot be had to texts. But from some indications, it seems likely that the works of these two scholars of the second century had nothing to do with the collecting of Ḥadīths¹⁹.

- v. *As to ibn Abi Aruba we may mention that it is reported to him that he made not books (kitab) but remembered by heart all the traditions he heard. This report inspires well-founded doubts about the correctness of the conclusion concerning literary history derived from ibn Hanbal's communication. In as much as it was possible in those days to speak of systematic collections, these referred to fiqh books rather than traditions, first attempts at codices arranged in chapters of law, and also using relevant material from the traditional Sunna material²⁰.*

Through Goldziher's views, one reaches the advocacy of his the skepticism of Ḥadīth literature.

Goldziher Reaction and Scepticism:

- i. While others had expressed some doubt about the authenticity of Ḥadīths before Goldziher, it was he who in the second volume of his "*Muhammedanische Studien*". First clearly articulated this skepticism, Familiarity with the vast number of Ḥadīths in the canonical collections induced "skeptical caution rather than optimistic trust. Goldziher concluded that these *Ḥadīths* could not serve as a document for the history of the infancy of Islam, but served rather as a reflection of the tendencies which appeared in the community during the mature stages of its development. Goldziher's suspicions about the authenticity of *Ḥadīth*s sprang from several observations. The material found in later collections makes no references to earlier writer collections and uses terms in the *isnāds* which imply oral transmission, not written sources. Moreover, the ubiquitous contradictory traditions, the apparent proliferations of *Ḥadīth*s in later collections not attested to in earlier ones, and the fact that younger companions of Muḥammad(ﷺ) seem to have known more about him (that is they transmitted more *Ḥadīth*s) than the older Companions who presumably knew the Prophet for a greater length of time, suggested to Goldziher that large scale fabrication of *Ḥadīth*s took place²¹.
- ii. Goldziher provides a significantly different version of the origin and development of the *Ḥadīth* literature. Goldziher has no trouble accepting that the companions

preserved the words and deeds of their Prophet after his death, that these might have been recorded in written form in Sahifas. In this way, he remains very close to the Muslim interpretation of the development of *Ḥadīth* literature. He not only presumes the sayings and judgement of Muhammad but also that some of them likely did so in written form (that is, in Sahifas), and when these companions passed on what they had heard and recorded to the next generation of Muslims, the use of the *isnād* began. But for Goldziher, the invention of an interpolation into *Ḥadīth* also began very early, for both political and paraenetic reasons. And so mutually exclusive *Ḥadīth*s proliferated, it is not surprising that among the hotly debated controversial issues of Islam, whether political or doctrinal, there is not one in which the champions of the various views are unable to cite a number of traditions, all equipped with imposing *isnāds*.

- iii. Goldziher maintains that, while relying on the Sunna to regulate the empire was favoured, there was still in these early years of Islam insufficient material going back to Muḥammad himself. Scholars sought to fill the gaps left by the Qur’ān and the Sunna with material from other sources. Some borrowed from Roman law. Others attempted to fill these lacunae with their own opinions (ray). This latter option came under a concerted attack by those who believed that all legal and ethical questions (not addressed by the Qur’ān) must be referred back to the Prophet himself, that is must be rooted in *Ḥadīth*s. These supporters of *Ḥadīth*s (ahl –al – *Ḥadīth*) were extremely successful in establishing *Ḥadīth*s as a primary source of law and in discrediting ray. But in many ways, it was a pyrrhic victory²²
- iv. Goldziher sees in *Ḥadīth*s “a battlefield of the political and dynastic conflicts of the first few centuries of Islam, It is a mirror of the aspirations of various, parties, each of which wants to make the prophet himself their witness and authority likewise “every stream counter –stream of thought in Islam has found its expression in the form of a *Ḥadīth*s and there is no difference in this respect between the various contrasting opinions in whatever field.²³
- v. Goldziher, for all his skepticism, accepted that the practice of preserving *Ḥadīth*s was authentic and that some *Ḥadīth*s were likely to be authentic. However, having said that Goldziher is adamant in the main thing that “In the absence of authentic evidence it would indeed be rash to attempt to express the most tentative opinions as to which

parts of the Ḥadīth are the oldest material, or even as to which of them date back to the generation immediately following the Prophet's death. A closer acquaintance with the vast stock of Ḥadīths induces skeptical caution rather than optimistic trust regarding the material brought together in the carefully compiled collections". And so it is in his advocacy of scepticism about the authenticity of the bulk of the Ḥadīth material to advance a more practical theory for determining the chronology and provenance of any specific Ḥadīth. He limited his dating of Ḥadīths to the general comments like "mature stages of its development" or "*first few centuries of Islam*" although he hesitated to date the traditions, the scholars who continued his work expended considerable effort in that very²⁴.

Studies in this area done by Ignaz Goldziher created number of Skepticism regarding the authenticity of Ḥadīth literature.

Analysis:

- *Firstly*, the works on Islam and related topics, as produced by Orientalist scholars over past few centuries, is a dark patch on the face of scholarship. These scholars (who later came to be designated as Orientalists like Goldziher) have always been at loggerheads with the Prophet and ill at ease with facts surrounding him. Their efforts, on the one hand, to produce anthropological data on Muslims for the benefit of their colonial governments, and, on the other, a distorted account of Islam and its Prophet for the consumption of their peoples, especially the intellectual class, produced a mass of material that can be safely consigned to the waste box without any significant loss to humanity, but with some possible benefits²⁵.
- *Secondly*, Orientalist scholars assumed as a matter of historical criticism that any report attributed to Muhammad (ﷺ) that tells the future was naturally later forgery concocted by Muslims involved in the events that the Ḥadīth describes. Moreover, Orientalist Scholars held that Ḥadīth that seemed to uphold Sunni Orthodoxy were almost certainly forged for that purpose. Scholars like William Muir concluded that many Ḥadīths that Muslims considered authentic were forged by Muslims to glorify the Prophet. Based on his study of the contents of Ḥadīths, the Hungarian Ignaz Goldziher introduced the theory that Ḥadīths were generally forged by different Muslim groups to meet their needs as the Muslim community matured:

the Umayyads forged *Ḥadīths* supporting their rule, Shi'is forged Ḥadīths glorifying 'Ali and Sunni jurists forged *Ḥadīths* to provide the raw material for elaborating Islamic law and dogma²⁶

- *Thirdly*, the criticism of *Ḥadīth* literature did not begin with Orientalists Scholars like Ignaz Goldziher, who advocate the total rejection of all Ḥadīth. Rather, Muslims began the science of Ḥadīth criticism in a third of Islam. However, modern critics of Ḥadīth argue that since some of these Ḥadīth are false, all must be false; since some *Ḥadīth* are projected back to the Prophet to justify some legal opinions, all Ḥadīth are fabrications. This line of thought is unacceptable because it is a sweeping generalization which leads to an illogical conclusion. That some Ḥadīth is false does not imply that all Ḥadīth must be false. Some of these scholars are confused about the science of Ḥadīth because they have no knowledge of it. Critics assume that if modern literary criticism can be applied to the Bible and the Torah, it must also be applied to the *Ḥadīth*. But Muslim scholars of *Ḥadīth* began the criticism of *Ḥadīth* during the third century of Islam. They themselves rejected a large number of *Ḥadīth* as fabricated. Yet they also accepted much as authentic²⁷.
- *Finally*, Muslims raise the objection to some Islamic texts ignorantly or try to interpret them wrongly. And the matter becomes worse when the objection is based on the futility of some of the Orientalists (Goldziher) who followed a canny way to legitimize their ideology through their attempt to twist the real meanings of the Ḥadīth²⁸

Concluding Remarks:

It clearly appears that Goldziher attempts to deprive the Muslim community of this great source of life, guidance, and strength, raising doubts about the *Ḥadīth*. Dr. Muhammad Mustafa Azmi Says in his book "Studies in Early Hadith literature": "*Going through Goldziher's references, one reaches the conclusion that his picture of the religious knowledge and practice of the first century of the Hijrah is incomplete and unbalanced. Therefore, his other conclusions, on the above-mentioned assumptions, are baseless.*"²⁹ Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide the Muslim with a full understanding of the ideology of the Orientalists (Goldziher) which are being deliberately used to mislead the Muslim intelligentsia into cynicism, heresy, and apostasy.

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