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AL-AZAMI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD OF HADITH STUDIES IN LIGHT OF MODERN WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP

Sumaiya Akram

The study of hadith, as a discipline developed by Western scholars, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Traces of a growing interest within academic discourse can be glimpsed in the late seventeenth century,¹ however the origins of the field of enquiry as we understand it today most likely dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. The study was formed in the context of a wider interest in the history of Islam, including its legal systems and the biography of Muhammad. It was soon determined that Muslim scholars considered the hadiths of Muhammad as a prime legal source of Islamic Law after the Qur'ān. The German academic, Eduard Sachau (1845-1930), was one of the first to identify the strong correlation between hadith and Islamic laws, in that hadith, alongside the Qur'ān, was the foundation of the shariah laws.²

The developing interest in this matter resulted in hadith studies becoming an entirely independent discipline, thereby becoming increasingly comprehensive over time. Two, amongst the most noteworthy studies, were: Ignaz Goldziher's, *Muhammedanische Studien* (1889-1890),³ and

1 M. Salem, Alshchri. 2014. *Western Works and Views On Hadith: Beginnings, Nature, and Impact*. 204.

2 Ibid: 205.

3 English translation: *Muslim Studies*, 1977.

Joseph Schacht's, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (1950). Subsequently, despite scholars having produced several works, there was little added to the findings of Goldziher and Schacht, which, to date, remain the principal references of Islam and hadith studies in Western academia. The views expressed in both their works continue to dominate the views of the West, including scholars such as Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), Henri Lammens (1862-1937), and David Samuel Margoliouth (1858-1940), who were heavily influenced by Goldziher's views.⁴

The Conventional Position of Western Academia

In short, Goldziher's core argument states that the majority of hadiths found in traditional Islamic works are derived from the social and religious growth that occurred in the early Muslim community. As a result, early and extensive fabrication of hadiths took place, which could not be attributed to Muhammad. This fabrication was aimed at fulfilling the legal requirements of the growing Muslim society during those times where the Qur'an had not specified how to address a particular issue. Schacht, following Goldziher, built upon his predecessor's ideas. His views gained a foothold within academic discourse and became the de facto opinion of Western academics.

The harmful nature of the presuppositions that are latent in the contributions of these authors should give pause. As recently as 1970, the prevalent assumption amongst Western academics was that the corpus of hadith narrations claiming to have originated from Muhammad consisted mainly of false attributions, and most efforts were directed towards quantifying the extent of their fabrication. This conclusion was arrived at without proper consideration for the rich body of work that had developed in a parallel manner from within the Islamic tradition. Moreover, the views expressed by these authors were not confined to the realm of Western academia; their arguments posed challenges to several contemporary Muslim scholars, necessitating a response. The reactionary works ranged from full acceptance

⁴ Alshehri. 2014: 211

of the criticism of *Hadith*, to outright rejection (in a similar manner to the disregard with which Western academics conducted their research).

Relevance of the Research

The life and works of Dr Mustafa al-Azami has had a profound and lasting effect on the field of hadith studies. The purpose of this research is to qualify this effect; to what extent did his works alter the prevalent ideas considering the evaluation and academic discourses surrounding hadith. The secondary purpose is to determine how, if at all, this effect was received differently amongst scholars within Western academia and those within traditional Islamic discourses surrounding the conception, preservation, and transmission of hadith narrations. It will evaluate al-Azami's contribution to hadith studies, its influence, and its importance in the wider context of hadith studies. It will also look at the shortcomings or limitations of al-Azami's works and their unfinished parts. The study will then conclude with a summary of the assessment of his contribution.

The Contribution of al-Azami to Hadith Studies

This chapter considers the contribution of al-Azami to the field of hadith studies. It begins with a detailed evaluation of those factors that set al-Azami apart from his contemporaries. It is then followed by a discussion on how his work was received after publication. In this way, it will be possible to determine not just the effect that his works had on the field itself, but also the reasons why it was so impactful. Finally, it concludes by demonstrating that al-Azami's contribution has had a lasting effect on academics writing after him, but that there is still much to be desired when it comes to further developments in the field.

The Distinguishing Features of al-Azami

There are three important factors that distinguish al-Azami amongst those who have contributed to the field of hadith studies: his extensive subject knowledge and proficiency in numerous languages, his commendable methodology, and the sheer volume of examples that he brings for his arguments which serves to demonstrate their soundness. The following paragraphs discuss each of the distinguishing factors in turn, and demonstrate the necessity for any academic writing after al-Azami to at least engage with his theories.

Educational Background

The first of these is the vast amount of knowledge that al-Azami had. He undertook rigorous training in traditional Islamic Sciences at Dar al-Ulum Deoband, one of India's most prestigious seminaries for Islamic studies. His strong background in traditional sciences was augmented by his knowledge of the Urdu, Arabic and English languages, increasing the number of sources he was able to access and utilise. Consider for instance the works of Nur al-Din Itr, who makes a compelling argument that hadith began to be written down as early as the year 35 A.H.⁵ The entirety of his argument would be inaccessible to Schacht and the predominant Western academics at the time, who faced a language barrier when approaching original source material and thus relied on translations – without being able to verify their

Moreover, al-Azami undertook further research in leading Western institutions, giving him a unique edge over others. It meant that he was able to combine the practices of both academic traditions and engage with scholarly discussions at the highest level. Regarding his PhD research, Arberry heralded it as “one of the most exciting and original investigations in this field in modern times.”⁶

5 Nūr al-Dīn, 'Itr. 1981. *Manhaj al-Naqd fi 'Ulum al-Hadith*. Damascus: Dar al-Fikr: 46 & 465

6 See A.J. Arberry, 2004. *Oriental Essays: Portraits of Seven Scholars*. Lahore: Suhail Academy: 233-256.

Methodology

The second distinguishing factor is al-Azami's use of the Qur'ān as a primary source and evidence for his theories. This is a common practice amongst traditional Islamic scholars, who are in agreement on the supreme authority of the Qur'ān. Due to his educational training, al-Azami was an expert on Qur'ānic Studies as well as hadith. He had a special focus on the history and development of the Qur'ān. He has written refutations within this field in a similar way as he has with hadith studies. Regarding the positions of Schacht and others, al-Azami writes that:

“Most Orientalists reject all reports that cite recordings and compilation of the Qur'ān during... Muhammad's lifetime. Many of them even deny that any final compilation occurred during Abu Bakr's reign, while some accept the role of... Uthman in this regard. Only *fifteen years* lapsed between the Prophet's death and Uthman's distribution of written copies. [...] Viewing this interval with serious misgivings, Orientalists have often focused on the possibility of deep-seated corruptions crawling into the text within this timespan.”⁷

Conversely, in *History of the Qur'ānic Text* al-Azami shows that he has an insightful understanding of Biblical scriptures as well as the history the Torah according to Jewish sources and modern scholars. This undoubtedly adds to his credibility. He is well-versed in citing scripture as a primary source in academic works, and is similarly able to use the Qur'ān as a source when discussing matters related to hadith studies. This is of fundamental importance as it is not possible to conduct a comprehensive study of hadiths without reference to the Qur'ān. This is especially true for legal matters, given the primacy of both the Qur'ān and hadith as legal authorities.

For example, when discussing literary activities at the time of Muhammad, al-Azami refers to Q2: 282, where the Qur'ān instructs readers to write down transactions and to have witnesses present.⁸ Similarly, when discussing the

7 Mustafa, al-Azami. 2003. *The history of the Qur'ānic text: From revelation to compilation : a comparative study with the Old and New Testaments*. Leicester: UK Islamic Academy: 15-16.

8 al-Azami. 1992:5.

meaning of the word 'hadith', al-Azami first sees how the Qur'an uses the term and highlights the variety of ways it was used in society at the time of Muhammad. Likewise, al-Azami provides a compelling refutation of Schacht and others who claimed that the aim of Muhammad "as a Prophet was not to create a new system of law;"⁹ that he "made no attempt to work out any comprehensive legal system"¹⁰; and that "Mohammad [himself] knew too well how little qualified he was for legislative work".¹¹

Remaining consistent with his methods, al-Azami brings Qur'anic evidences first to disprove the idea that Muhammad had no legal role in society. He makes it very clear that the Prophet was a legislator and someone to be obeyed - as instructed by the Qur'an itself: Q7:157, Q4:64, Q3:32, Q3:132, Q4:59, and Q4:80.

Extensive Use of Examples

The third compelling feature of al-Azami's writings is that he always presents a large amount of examples and evidences for any given point. This can only give support and credit to his arguments. He does the same when refuting Schacht - he doesn't only just refute one or two examples but so many that it raises doubt about the validity of Schacht's theories. After al-Azami, even supporters and proponents of Schacht are unable to justify his claims in a confident way.

Consider for example, when discussing the judicial activities of the Prophet. al-Azami is able to name fourteen companions that were entrusted with being administrators of justice, and brings another thirteen persons that were sent as judges to Basra in Iraq alone. These judicial appointments are sourced from much earlier works, and causes one to lose confidence in anybody writing about the Prophet as a legislator without reference to, or even awareness of, these works.¹²

al-Azami refutes Schacht's arguments in a meticulous manner, scrutinising his examples in great depth. Where it is not possible to refute every single

9 Schacht.1950:v.

10 J.N. D. Anderson, 1950. 'Recent Developments in Shaira Law,' *Muslim World*, 40:245.

11 Hurgonje, C. Snouck. 1916. *Mohammedanism: Lectures on its origin, its religious and political growth, and its present state*. London: G.P. Putnam's Sons:60.

12 al-Azami. 1985:21.

example one by one, he refutes twenty-four. A flaw in almost half of the cited examples is most certainly enough to illustrate his point. Again, this is dissimilar to the methods of those preceding al-Azami. Many, including Schacht, often bring only one example or a very small number to prove their point. Coulson comments on this, stating that a scarcity of examples cannot affect the fundamental validity of Schacht's thesis, [but] it can call into question the degree to which the thesis holds true.¹³ If one is able to bring large amount of evidence for their argument it will naturally give that argument more authority.

Each of the factors mentioned above (strong educational background, coherent methodology, robust arguments) set al-Azami apart in the academic arena of hadith studies. Up until his works, leading authorities in the field did not have a need to adhere to this standard of scholarship, and theories were able to develop and gain popularity despite being founded upon questionable grounds. al-Azami raised those questions and, as mentioned, this necessitated those who followed him to engage with his ideas. However, commentators hold differing opinions with regards to the effectiveness of his contributions.

How al-Azami's Contributions Were Received by Others

Many of those who have commended al-Azami for his methods and approaches have also noted how he is often followed uncritically and without due regard to accuracy. Whilst this criticism is directed more towards others than to al-Azami himself, it does indicate that certain flaws and inaccuracies have been perceived in his works. Melchert, for example, remarks that "al-Azami's criticism is mostly the sort that will only convince believers".¹⁴ It is unsurprising that this comment would be made by Melchert, however, who reluctantly recognises the logical and systematic approach taken by al-Azami whilst attempting to minimise its effectiveness by simply labelling him as a "dogmatist".¹⁵ He likens al-Azami's approach to that undertaken by scholars of the Christian tradition who hold and propagate untenable arguments, whilst providing flawed and erroneous examples of his own in order

13 N. J. Coulson. 1997. *A history of Islamic law*. Delhi: Universal Law Publishing Co: 69-70.

14 Christopher Melchert, 2000-2001. 'Review: On Schacht's *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* by M. Mustafa al-Azami; *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* by Norman Calder', *Journal of Law and Religion* 15 (1/2):363-365.

15 Ibid:365.

to illustrate the point.¹⁶ Interestingly, Melchert cites Schacht as the authority of his own refutation whilst at the same time recognising the inferiority of Schacht's citation methods.

The fact that al-Azami's refutation levied accurate criticisms against Schacht's findings as well as methods was lauded by numerous scholars including Melchert, Rahman and others. Rahman called al-Azami's work an "effective response to Schacht", stating that "[o]ne must admire [the] meticulous and painstaking scholarship in pointing out Schacht's failures in detail".¹⁷ He goes on to herald al-Azami as the single most well-versed and learned scholar within the field of hadith studies, and states that his methods could render an "unprecedented service" to the field. Mustansir Mir also considered al-Azami's contribution in a similar manner. He identifies al-Azami's superior command of primary and secondary sources, as well as his ability to construct a compelling argument, as those features which "confirm his standing as an outstanding scholar".¹⁸ This sentiment is shared by numerous commentators, most likely as it is so readily evident in his writings. As Hallaq aptly notes, one simply cannot engage with the works of al-Azami with a degree of intellectual honesty and fail to take his arguments seriously.¹⁹

Hadith Studies After al-Azami: Traditional Islamic Scholarship

After looking at how al-Azami's works were perceived by his contemporaries, it is helpful to consider how they affected the prevalent opinions amongst those who followed him. The response from Western academic was fairly substantial, whereas there are only a few examples that exist amongst scholars in the Arab world. Setting aside the unsubstantiated and underdeveloped responses to Schacht from amongst the Arabic-speaking scholars, those who attempted to directly engage with Schacht's positions after al-Azami did not do so with the same rigour and intellectual independence.

16 Ibid

17 Fazlur, Rahman 1988: "Review: *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* by G. M. [sic] al-Azami", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 47 (3):228-229.

18 Mir, 2007:95-7.

19 See Wael Hallaq, 2002-2003. "The Quest for Origins or Doctrine? Islamic Legal Studies as Colonialist Discourse", *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law*, 2, 1-31.

For example, Itr provides a convincing corroboration of al-Azami's refutation with regards to the writing of hadith.²⁰ Whilst his arguments are compelling, and his use of source material is sound, there is nothing offered in his enquiry that is original. Rather, the work attempts to build on al-Azami's refutation by substantiating some of the claims and supporting them with additional evidences. This is also the case with Khalid al-Dris, who analyses Schacht's methodology "more completely than his contemporaries", whilst relying solely on al-Azami's interpretation from the outset. Thus, far from developing a rich body of literature that can compete with, and correct the errors of, Western scholars, uncritical followers of al-Azami would often "repliate and compound his errors".²¹

Hadith Studies After al-Azami: Western Academia

The reception of his efforts were hindered by problems of a different kind within Western academia. It is important to note firstly that his work was not accepted by Western academics immediately – nor by everyone. al-Azami himself acknowledges this and felt his academic work had been generally ignored in Western academic circles because the findings are judged as 'unacceptable'. Hallaq mentions that al-Azami's critique of Schacht had been "greeted by Orientalists with total disregard" because he was an "outsider", as if to say that only Islamicists could be "objective", "scientific" and "scholarly".²²

Melchert and Motzki are two examples of those who belittled al-Azami's contribution. Melchert writes, "Regrettably, al-Azami's criticism is mostly the sort that will only convince believers."²³ Meanwhile, Motzki considered al-Azami's "accusations" to be "highly exaggerated and excessively generalised". He writes:

"His argumentation is too imprecise and polemically tinged to convince. What he offers as a substitute for Schacht's theory is based on sources whose reliability is doubted by many non-Muslim scholars. al-Azami has not eliminated this doubt."²⁴

20 Itr. 1981:46 & 465.

21 Alhomoudi. 2006:56.

22 Hallaq. 2002–2003:1–31.

23 Melchert, 2000–2001:364.

24 Harald Motzki, 2002. *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*, trans. Marion H. Katz. Leiden: Boston and Köln. 39–45.

Nonetheless, similar to the reluctant recognition proffered by Mechart, Motzki does accept that al-Azami showed "that the *e silentio* method stands on very insecure basis, and that Schacht's datings can easily be shaken by sources which escaped him or which have newly emerged." For al-Azami, part of the issue is not what Islamic sources say but rather how Islamicists want Muslims to perceive it. Professor C.E. Bosworth, one of the editors of Brill's *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, was asked why Muslim scholars were not invited to contribute to the Encyclopaedia's essential articles on the Qur'an, hadith and so on - even those trained in Western institutions. He responded that this work was by the "Western pen for Western people."²⁵

There is certainly a common perception within Western academia that Muslims should learn Islam from non-Muslims in order to avoid their natural biases. Until this outdated assumption is removed, the issues of general acceptance and confirmation bias will continue to exist. Moreover, there is an argument to be made to the contrary. Mir states that:

"Certainly anyone can write on Islam, but only a devout Muslim has the *legitimate* prerogative to write on Islam and its related subjects. Some will consider this biased, but then who is not? Non-followers cannot claim neutrality, for their writings swerve depending on whether Islam's tenets agree or disagree with their personal beliefs, and so any [of their] attempts at interpretation must be unequivocally discarded."²⁶

It seems more appropriate to me to take a merit-based approach. There is utility from having a well-informed insiders perspective as well as a well-informed outsiders perspective. In terms of evaluating historical methods of research, preservation and dissemination of material, belief or non-belief in the divine authority of said material doesn't necessarily affect the evaluation. What is more important is that the works are well-informed. As long as the research is undertaken with intellectual integrity it should always be possible to engage with it in a substantive and productive manner.

25 al-Azami. 2003:xix.

26 Mir. 2007:96.

Thus we can conclude that al-Azami stands out amongst contemporary scholars in the field of hadith studies. His contribution interrupted the progress of a school of thought that was flawed in its fundamental assumptions and theories. It helped to correct those flaws in a manner that was unique to al-Azami, and commentators have recognised the superiority of his methods and approach. Those writers who followed him in his thinking did not have the same educational preparation, nor the same distinguishing characteristics as mentioned above. It can be stated with confidence that there are few if any in the field of hadith that have assumed the same stature and authority in both Western academia and traditional Islamic scholarship.

Evaluation of al-Azami's Work

This chapter considers the respective merits and limitations of al-Azami's works, with particular focus on his critique of Schacht's theories and methods. It then evaluates the changing opinions of Schacht's ideas as propounded by other before discussing the derivative theories that have been developed subsequently after al-Azami's interruption of the 'Schachtian discourse'. It also highlights some of the limitations of al-Azami's work, and considers the extent to which these detract from his overall contribution. It will conclude with a summary of the elucidated opinions, and suggestions as to the future of hadith studies after al-Azami.

al-Azami's Critique of Schacht's Theories

al-Azami tackles Schacht's main arguments quite extensively in his '*On Schacht's Origins...*'. In his extensive refutation, al-Azami utilises multiple examples to illustrate the inconsistencies in Schacht's theories. He critiques Schacht's research methods and is not shy to point out the mistakes and misunderstandings that he deems are clear in Schacht's writings.

al-Azami dedicates a large portion of this work in clarifying Schacht's definition of 'sunnah' and his theory on the 'living tradition'. Despite accepting that the term sunnah had some vagueness in the early stages, al-Azami argues that there is no evidence to suggest that Sunnahs other than those of

Muhammad were somehow, "according to the 'ancient schools'", superior than traditions from Muhammad.²⁷ To verify this, al-Azami sieves through the evidences cited by Schacht of when the various schools had supposedly rejected traditions because they went against the 'living tradition'. For example Schacht states that "Mālik quotes a decision of Zuhri, ending with the words: 'this is the sunnah'; and Mālik adds that he has found this to be the doctrine of the scholars of Medina".²⁸ Schacht has misunderstood this statement, presuming that Zuhri has classified his own opinion as Sunnah, and Mālik followed him in that by mentioning the practice (or 'living tradition') of Medina. al-Azami provides the clarification that what had happened in fact was that Schacht had only used part of the hadith to reach this conclusion. If one were to examine a larger section of the passage then it would be clear that what Zuhri describes as sunnah was not based on personal discretion but on a well-known hadith of Muhammad.²⁹ This is just one of the numerous examples that al-Azami discusses on this point alone.³⁰

al-Azami argues that the term 'sunnah' existed and was very much in use at the time of Muhammad. This was not just in society by, say, followers of Muhammad, but was also used by the Qur'an in several places with varying meanings. Moreover, al-Azami argues that Schacht contradicts himself on this matter. Although he wants to argue that the concept 'sunnah of the Prophet' is a second century phenomena, he quotes Goldziher whose opinion is that the term sunnah was originally a pagan term that was later adapted by Islam.³¹ Thus, al-Azami concludes, it is difficult to see how the term could be used in the pre-Islamic era, then used in the Qur'an, and then not used again by scholars or the community until the middle of the second century.³²

27 Ibid

28 Schacht.1950:62.

29 al-Azami, M. M. 1985. *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan jurisprudence*. Riyadh : New York: King Saud University; Wiley.46-47.

30 For further examples see al-Azami.1985:45-51.

31 Schacht.1950:58.

32 al-Azami.1985:105.

Fundamental Flaws in Methodology

al-Azami argues and devotes numerous chapters to show that there were inconsistencies both within Schacht's theories and in the use of source material, leading to unwarranted assumptions. He also argues that Schacht was unscientific in his methods, misunderstood facts, and misinterpreted the meaning of the texts quoted and the method of quotation of the early scholars.³³ To prove this, al-Azami goes into much detail of about half of Schacht's forty-seven examples.

Regarding Schacht's inconsistencies in the use of source material, a definite point of contention is Schacht restricting himself to only legal traditions. He states: "So far we have discussed the growth of legal traditions from the Prophet only."³⁴ However, al-Azami makes clear that out of the twenty-four that he investigates, five are not from Muhammad and thirteen are not legal hadiths according to Schacht's definition rather they are ritual. Only ten hadiths are in fact are legal traditions. Whilst the distinction between ritual and legal hadiths is not an issue to Muslim scholars in terms of reliability or standards of verification, one should expect Schacht to adhere to his own principles. The discrepancy between what has been stated by Schacht and what he has actually carried out is shown clearly by al-Azami, and the most lenient critique would be that Schacht's definitions are applied inconsistently.³⁵

A further argument that al-Azami makes is that Schacht's methods were 'unscientific' and mere

'unwarranted assumptions'. He refutes Schacht's e-silento theory because this method depends on a number absurd assumptions, not least of which is that if an early scholar was ignorant about a certain tradition then that is clear proof that the tradition is a forgery.³⁶ al-Azami further lists numerous examples of early scholars not making use of a tradition whilst we

33 Ibid:116.

34 Schacht.1950:150.

35 al-Azami.1985:118.

36 Ibid:118-119.

know that the scholar was aware of it, for example if it is mentioned in another of his works. Not mentioning a hadith in a given discussion does not indicate that it was not known or that it did not exist at that time. To make the readers fully comprehend the weakness in Schacht's argument, al-Azami gives a modern days scenario as follows:

"...this argument would mean that if one writer in the Middle East failed to mention London as one of the major cities in the world, then all other writers who mentioned it later would be guilty of collusion in creating a fictional city."³⁷

Looking at al-Azami's arguments and such examples, one can see exactly how the *e silentio* argument of Schacht is very weak. This is not to say that the argument is completely void. As Chaudri points out, it could be used as indicative evidence which might create doubt on a certain tradition, but only after an extensive study of all of the available material.

al-Azami addresses the inherent inconsistencies present within Schacht's conception of the common-link theory (CLT) in a similar way. Further, al-Azami comments on the numerous mistakes found in Schacht's factual knowledge. The examples that Schacht brings to show Hadith fabrication can be refuted by reference to other sources that show contemporary or earlier scholars were aware of the *aḥādīth* in question. For this, al-Azami points to eight of the examples that Schacht puts forth, showing again that the error is not an isolated incident but a common problem throughout the work.

False Assumptions and Misunderstandings

In a similar way, al-Azami proves that Schacht's methodological errors are compounded by basic misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the methods of the early scholars. The examples that al-Azami brings to prove this point (as well as the above flaws) are discussed extensively. It is interesting to note a compelling aspect of al-Azami's critique here: when illustrating these errors he follows the same pattern set by Schacht and almost always utilises

37 Ibid:116.

the same sources. Had al-Azami used classical hadith collections it would have been much easier for him to demonstrate the errors, however this method serves to discredit Schacht (and by implication those who followed him) in a much more robust manner.

Conversely, consider the following example regarding not destroying the property of the enemy in war.³⁸ Schacht uses this example to date the tradition between Abu Yusuf and Shaibani, and to state that it is a *mursal* tradition. Interestingly, in al-Azami's analysis the first thing that he does is refer to the Qur'an, which allows the laying waste of enemy property during war.³⁹ As mentioned, this is a typical method utilised by traditional scholars given that the Qur'an is seen as the primary source of Islamic law. Many of Schacht's misinterpretations occur simply because he ignored what the Qur'an had to say on the matter. al-Azami goes on to provide a compelling refutation of Schacht's claim, reconciling seemingly contradictory hadith narrations and citing sources that reference the tradition before the time of Abu Yusuf and Shaibani.⁴⁰

Throughout the work, al-Azami's arguments against Schacht are logical and convincing. He is able to demonstrate that Schacht's arguments do not hold up when the original Arabic text is referred to, clearly showing that an in depth knowledge of the Arabic Language is crucial to Hadith studies. Schacht's lack of proficiency in the Arabic language led to critical misunderstandings and misinterpretations of textual sources. To base an argument on that is inexcusable and, ultimately, untenable. However, al-Azami doesn't rely on false premises alone. He offers a systematic refutation of Schacht's latent and overt theories by addressing his general assertions and specific examples. By varying his methodology, as mentioned above,

38 Schacht.1950:144-5.

39 Q59:5.

40 Ibn Hishām, ' a., Shalabī, ' a., Abyārī, I., & Saqqā, M. 1955. *al-Sirah al-nabawiyah*. al-Qāhirah. Vol. 3:219.

al-Azami dismantles Schacht's work from a variety of approaches until all that remains is a number of baseless and unfounded assertions – and a vacuum where there once was a leading authority in the field of Hadith Studies.

al-Azami's Influence on the 'Schachtian Discourse'

Given the comprehensive nature of *'On Schacht's Origins...'* it is understandable that the work overcame the extant limitations of the field and received such widespread recognition. It is also unsurprising that his critique came to be supported and corroborated by others who made efforts to write on the topic of Hadith studies after him. Contributions put forward by al-Azami's contemporaries serve to enhance his arguments and provide additional context in answering some of the questions that he raised regarding Schacht's work. By evaluating a selection these contributions it becomes possible to determine the true extent of al-Azami's contribution.

Writing in 2006, Alhomoudi attempts to discredit Schacht's position as a leading authority in hadith studies through an unrelenting critique of his 'common-link' theory. By looking at the development of the CLT in relation to Schacht's 'comprehensive' perspective on hadith studies, Alhomoudi shows that it is the flawed cornerstone upon which the rest of Schacht's discourse is constructed. According to Alhomoudi, Schacht's basis for the CLT is deficient from the outset. Taking two specific examples of hadith fabrication (which Alhomoudi later goes on to dispute) cannot be generalised and applied to the entire hadith corpus as Schacht attempts to do. Moreover, his selected model narrations are shown by Alhomoudi to be irregular in their transmission.⁴¹ After raising these issues, Alhomoudi recognises that he has only added to the discussions undertaken by Azami, which had been largely ignored by mainstream Western scholarship.

Ozkan builds on this evaluation of the CLT by assessing how it developed under the efforts of Juynboll.⁴² Relying primarily on the *Fath al-Bari* of Ibn Hajr (d. 852/1448), and the *Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi* of al-Mubarakfuri (d.

41 Alhomoudi, 2006:65.

42 Halit, Ozkan. 2004. 'The Common Link and Its Relation to the Madār' *Islamic Law and Society*. 11 (1) 42-77.

1353/1934), Ozkan argues that there is no practical use in attempting to conflate the term 'common-link' with the traditional term 'madar' which was used by early Muslim scholars in their discussions on hadith authenticity. He recognises that there is some overlap in the two terms and a "vague structural similarity",⁴³ but that there are important, considerable, and discernible differences between them. The consequence of this is that attempts to find equivalent terms in Muslim hadith literature can corrupt one's understanding of either the newly-coined term, or the pre-existing hadith literature. Ozkan provides a convincing argument that terms that emerge under different circumstances (ie. time and space) and within different terminological structures cannot easily be reconciled, and perhaps it should not be attempted.

I would go further and say it is somewhat presumptuous for Juynboll to claim that early Muslim scholars had an awareness of the Schachtian common-link theory. It must be more correct to say that Schacht has come close to a concept that has existed within hadith scholarship for centuries, 'madar', and work towards elucidating and understanding that term in its own context. To attempt to overwrite these early developments suggests a sense of intellectual superiority in Juynboll that is also evident in Schacht's writings.

Despite this, there are those who describe Schacht's work as organised and scientific, or at least when compared with Goldziher's. Still, a comparatively organised discourse cannot take away from fundamental flaws contained within in. For example, consider the analysis of Mawlana Zeeshan Chaudri.⁴⁴ After outlining Schacht's positions and major theories in 'Origins', he offers an evaluation of the critiques undertaken by al-Azami and Motzki. He echoes al-Azami's criticism of Schacht regarding the issue of Muhammad as a lawmaker, citing authors who preceded Schacht who subscribed to the traditional Muslim view (that he did indeed have a legal role in society).⁴⁵ Whilst Chaudri is reserved in his conclusion of Schacht's work, he recognises its initial significance in the field of hadith studies whilst questioning how authoritative it will remain after al-Azami and Motzki.

43 Ibid:75.

44 See Chaudri. 2018.

45 Ibid:3.

Potential Limitations: Chaudri on Insufficient Reliability

On the other hand, Rahman raises an important question regarding al-Azami's efforts: what does it ultimately amount to? What effect does al-Azami's work have on Western scholarship? Rahman claims that al-Azami exaggerates the importance of Schacht's work, that hardly anybody accepts Schacht's conclusions entirely (perhaps with the exception of Juynboll). This seems to be more of a refutation attempt by Rahman, as the questions raised by al-Azami have certainly taken root within the field of hadith studies, as evinced in the works of Rahman himself, as well as Motzki, Alhoumudi and others. Nonetheless, it is prudent to consider the limitations of al-Azami's efforts.

Of those that have been raised, the most valid limitation is that al-Azami did not succeed in providing a convincing alternative to sceptical readers who do not agree with the authenticity of his sources. In other words, the parts of the refutation which relied upon the earliest source material assumed that these works were reliable and historically accurate. For example, whereas Melchert writes that al-Azami's arguments will only convince believers, Chaudri writes that his proof for the reliability of traditions would "only convince those who already accept the authenticity of these [hadith] materials". This was stated matter-of-factly due to al-Azami's so-called extensive use of hadith and biographical material to describe the authentication of hadith reports during the early period of Islamic history.

The implicit alternatives, indicated by Chaudri's following paragraphs on the Motzki dialectic, are 'source reconstruction' or 'Isnād-cum-matn'.⁴⁶ In these acceptable methods of verification, biographical material is used solely as supporting evidence, and only when it "coincides with the reality of the traditions".⁴⁷ What is interesting is that this reality is arrived at after an evaluation of each narrator in the isnād, looking at who he studied under and how long he spent with that teacher. It also looks at different adaptations of that particular report and any 'editing' (ie. alterations made) in later transmissions.⁴⁸

46 Ibid:6, 8.

47 Alhoumudi. 2006:7.

48 Harald, Motzki. 2012. 'Motzki's Reliable Transmitter: A Short Answer to P. Gledhill', *Islamic Law and Society* 19:198.

Whilst a comprehensive criticism of these two ‘acceptable’ methods of verification is outside the scope of this study, it should suffice to say that this determination of reality coincides with the same methodology described by al-Azami.⁴⁹ al-Azami discusses four different kinds of textual comparisons undertaken at the time of narration, including teacher-student comparisons, as well as authentication methods based on reasoning and ethical or moral standards. The difference is, and this is perhaps a genuine limitation of al-Azami’s study, is that al-Azami assumes that these methods were undertaken in truth – and that any number of examples will suffice as proof. By re-introducing similar methods some fourteen centuries later, Motzki effectively ignores statements and efforts made at the time of the report itself.

Potential Limitations: A Perceived Lack of Objectivity

Similarly, the claim that al-Azami is writing in defence of a religious doctrine does seem to be true. Rahman agrees with Alhoumidi that al-Azami’s work is very much ‘apologetic’. He notes that al-Azami tends to bring forth only that part of the evidence that seems to support his views and rejects that which tends to detract from his thesis – the textbook approach of an apologist rather than that of an objective scholar.⁵⁰ However, al-Azami can only be said to be attempting to protect the tenets of the Islamic faith or theology to the same extent that Schacht attempted to discredit them. It is not clear that this was the primary objective of either author.

Melchert has also pointed to that there are instances where Schacht’s translation is more precise than al-Azami’s. He gives the example of *fi ashab al-nabi*, agreeing with Schacht that it means “referring to the companions of the Prophet”. al-Azami’s literalistic translation of “in the companions of the Prophet” requires further explanation in order to make sense.⁵¹ Although it is important to make note of these examples, they do not substantially affect the overall effectiveness of the criticisms levied by al-Azami.

49 al-Azami. 1985:109-115.

50 See:Rahman 1988.

51 Melchert, 2000-2001:365.

To conclude, al-Azami's contribution remains the most extensive review of Schacht till date. Whilst commentators have downplayed the prevalence of a 'Schachtian discourse' on hadith, others have noted that al-Azami has altered the established ideas regarding hadith within Western academia. This, despite the flaws that have been highlighted after its publication, some of which have been exaggerated and others which have been built upon by Alhomoudi, Motzki and others. al-Azami's contribution evoked strong responses both in support and in opposition to his ideas. However, regardless of the particular responses from individual commentators, "we are no longer safe in assuming that the entirety of the *sunna* is inauthentic, or in ignoring the terminology and methodology of Muslim scholarship."⁵²

Conclusion

In Western academia, the conventional belief is that an early and extensive fabrication of *Hadiths* took place, which meant that numerous traditions could not be attributed to Muhammad. This was made popular by the likes of Goldziher and Schacht, who were both lauded as leading authorities in the field of *Hadith* Studies and contributed greatly to the prevalent opinions within the field.

Yet, despite their influential methodologies and theories, their status has more recently been brought into question. Their claims have been prone to widespread criticism and their works, in particular Schacht's, have been subject to numerous refutations. Scholars such as Powers, Coulson, Sezgin, Abbott and al-Azami have all levied substantial criticisms towards their conclusions, with al-Azami's work becoming the most comprehensive critical analysis of Schacht till date. al-Azami was the first Muslim author to particularly engage with Western academia and refute the claims of Islamicists in a clear, well-presented, and systematic manner.

al-Azami's extensive knowledge of numerous languages, educational training in the traditional Islamic sciences, and insightful understanding of Western academia clearly put him in a position where few scholars can claim to be. The result of this was his invaluable contribution to hadith studies in

⁵² Alhomoudi. 2006:159.

such an original way that it will remain a prominent authority for some time and will shape the future development of the field. This has already begun and can be seen in the rise of fresh works from Western scholars such as Ozkan, Motzki, Rahman, Alhomoudi and others. These authors have all developed the ideas introduced by al-Azami by investigating the questions he raised regarding Schacht and assessing the veracity of his (al-Azami's) counter-arguments. His impact amongst Muslim scholars has also been enhanced by his engagement with Western academia and has helped to bridge the gap between the two academic arenas. In this way, the stigma regarding Muslim contributors has somewhat lifted and it is no longer viable, in either arena, to dismiss a work out of hand due to preconceived notions. Works must be evaluated on merit; on the argument's construction and soundness of methodology and evidences, irrespective of the background and biases of the writer.

When al-Azami passed away on the 20th December 2017, he was in the middle of numerous projects. His sons, Aqil and Anas al-Azami, as well as students and colleagues such as Imtiyaz Damiel and Andrew Booso, are now in the process of completing some of these works so that his contribution can continue even after his demise. A second edition of *The History of The Qur'ānic text* was being worked on at that time, and it is hoped that this may still be published in the near future.

While this study has shown al-Azami's significant contribution to hadith studies, it has also shown the need for further critical research to settle the competing theories and methodologies and allow the field to develop further. It is heartening to see al-Azami's contribution to Qur'ānic Studies is being researched by Sohaib Saeed, who is undertaking a PhD on 'The Contribution of Shaykh al-Azami to Qur'ānic Studies'. Similarly, al-Azami's works with manuscripts, the completion of his research efforts, and the continuation of his computerisation project are all promising signs for the future of scholarship in this area. Once these works and projects come to fruition, we will have a better indication of the true extent of al-Azami's contribution to Islamic sciences, and also to entire arena of Western scholarship at large.

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