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Article

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Is Ibn Qutaybah The Author of *Al-Imamah Wa Al-Siyasah*?

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Objection

The book “*al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah*” was not authored by Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari and scholars have doubts in regard to its attribution to him. Orientalist scholars have also criticized its attribution to him and as such, none of them see it as a reliable work. The main objection these scholars [raise against accrediting the work to him] is that the title *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah* has not appeared in any of the indices of his works.

The [Dutch] Orientalist [Reinhart] Dozy [d. 1883 C.E] believed that the [present] book was neither pre-modern (*qadimi*) nor authentic as it contained many historical errors as well as imaginary and irrational stories¹. In this sense, attributing the work to Ibn Qutaybah is a weak [attempt by some] and [essentially] impossible [that he authored the work].

Reviewing the Objection

قال وإن أبا بكر رضي الله عنه تفقد قوما تخلفوا عن بيعته عند علي كرم الله وجهه فبعث إليهم عمر فجاء فناداهم وهم في دار علي فأبوا أن يخرجوا فدعا بالحطب وقال والذي نفس عمر بيده لتخرجن أو لأحرقنّها على من فيها ففعل له يا أبا حفص إن فيها فاطمة فقال وإن فخرجوا فبايعوا إلا عليا فإنه زعم أنه قال حلفت أن لا أخرج ولا أضع ثوبي على عاتقي حتى أجمع القرآن فوقف فاطمة رضي الله عنها على بابها فقالت لا عهد لي بقوم حضروا أسوأ محضر منكم تركتم رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم جنازة بين أيدينا وقطعتم أمركم بينكم لم تستأمرونا ولم تردوا لنا حقا.

When Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) found a group of people [that had gathered] near ﷺ Ali (may Allah bless his face) who had fallen back on pledging allegiance to him [i.e. Abu Bakr], he sent

ﷺ Umar to them. He came and called them out while they were in the house of ﷺ Ali but they refused to come out. ﷺ Umar then called for wood [to be brought] and said: “by the One who [holds] ﷺ Umar’s soul in His Hands, if you do not come out I will burn this house along with whoever is in it”. And it was said to him: “Oh Abu Hafs (ﷺ Umar), even if Fatimah is in the house?!” And he (ﷺ Umar) said: “Even if!”

So they came out and pledged allegiance except for ﷺ Ali. ﷺ Ali then declared by saying: “I vowed that I would not leave or put on my cloak over my shoulder [in order to leave the house] until I [finished] compiling the Qur’an”

Then Fatimah (may Allah be pleased with her) [went and] stood by the door of the house and said: “there is no one among people whose presence to me is worse than your [ﷺ Umar] presence. You left the funeral of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) while you [took] the matter [of the khilafah] and cut it [into pieces] among yourselves while you did not seek to consult us nor did you return us our right.”

See: al-Dinawari, Abu Muhammad ﷺ Abd Allah b. Muslim b. Qutaybah (d. 276/889). *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah*, ed. Khalil al-Mansur (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1418/1997), I: 16; Shiri edition, I: 30; Zayni edition, I: 19.

One of the doubts which Wahhabis set forth, which in reality is cast in order to escape certain [historical] realities, is that the work *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah* was not written by Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari. Given that Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) was counted as one of the [most] prestigious, renowned and excellent of scholars among Sunnis [in various fields such as] literature, history, law (*fiqh*), *hadith*, the sciences of the Qur’an etc., Wahhabis have not been able to question his credibility or personality. [As such], they prefer to focus their efforts [in casting doubt] on *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah*’s attribution to Ibn Qutaybah and thus [bidding] to debase its reliability. Therefore, we make it incumbent upon ourselves to investigate and answer these unscientific claims.

First, this book has been countlessly printed in Egypt and other countries under the name of Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari whose manuscripts are available in libraries across Egypt, Paris, London, Turkey and India.

Second, as long as there are Islamic scholars, what need is there to rely on Orientalists like Dozy (who is far from being an actual Islamic scholar!) in order to establish the reliability or unreliability of [an Islamic] work? Why is there a need to refer to Orientalists who in many instances have even denied the existence of the Prophet Muhammad (s)? It is clear that our Sunni friends have come short in regard to their proofs and as such, [they have had no choice] but to take refuge in Orientalists.

Third, many scholars among Ahl al-Sunnah, even contemporary ones, have explicitly authenticated and attributed the book to Ibn Qutaybah and have cited its historical traditions. Here we will briefly point out a few [examples]:

1) **Ibn Hajar al-Haythami** in his book *Tathir al-Jinan wa al-Lisan*. See Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Abu al-ʿAbbas Ahmad b. Muhammad b. ʿAli (d. 973/1565), *Tathir al-Jinan wa al-Lisan* (n.p), 72.

2) [**al-Qadhi Abu Bakr**] **Ibn al-ʿArabi al-Maliki** in his book *al-ʿAwasim min al-Qawasim* [where the author] narrates some of the contents of the book [*al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah*] and attributes them to Ibn Qutaybah. See: Ibn al-ʿArabi, Muhammad b. ʿAbd Allah Abu Bakr (d. 543/1148). *al-ʿAwasim min al-Qawasim fi Tahqiq Mawaqif al-Sahabah baʿd wafat al-Nabi* (s), ed. Muhib al-Din al-Khatib & Mahmud Mahdi al-Istanbuli (Beirut: Dar al-Habil, 1407/1987), I: 261.

3) **Najm al-Din ʿUmar b. Muhammad al-Makki**, known as “**Ibn Fahd**”, when mentioning the events of the year 93 A.H (711 C.E) writes in his book *Itihaf al-Wara bi-Akhbar Umm al-Qura*:

...و قال ابو محمد عبدالله بن مسلم ابن قتيبة في كتاب الامامة و السياسة

Abu Muhammad ʿAbd Allah b. Muslim b. Qutaybah said in his book al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah.

See: Ibn Fahd, Najm al-Din ʿUmar b. Muhammad al-Makki, *Itihaf al-Wara bi-Akhbar Umm al-Qura* (n.p: n.d), under events of 93 A.H. Afterwards, [Ibn Fahd] narrates Saʿid b. Jubayr’s (d. 95 A.H/711 C.E) arrest from the same book.

4) **Qadhi Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Tanuzi**, known as “**Ibn Shabbat**” in his book *al-Silat al-Samtiyah*. See: al-Tanuzi, Abu ʿAbd Allah. *al-Silat al-Samtiyah* (n.p: n.d), part II, section 34.

5) **Taqi al-Din al-Fasi al-Makki** in his book *al-ʿAqd al-Thamin*. See: al-Fasi al-Makki, Taqi al-Din, *al-ʿAqd al-Thamin* (n.p: n.d), VI: 72.

6) **Yusuf Ilyan Sarkis** in his book *Muʿjam al-Matbuʿat al-ʿArabiyyah*, mentions his book when recounting the life of Ibn Qutaybah:

الإمامة والسياسة ابتداءً فيه بذكر فضل أبي بكر وعمر. مط النيل 1322 جزء 2 بتصحيح محمد محمود الراجعي مصر 1327 ص 395 مط الفتوح الأدبية جزء 2 1331 ص 181 و 184

al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah begins by mentioning the virtue[s] of Abu Bakr and Umar. Al-Nil pub. 1322 A.H/1904 C.E v. II, ed. Muhammad Mahmud al-Rafiʿi Egypt 1327 A.H/1909 C.E, p. 395 al-Futuh al-Adabiyah pub. v. II 1331 A.H/1912 C.E, pp. 181 and 184.

See: Sarkis, Yusuf Ilyan, *Muʿjam al-Matbuʿat al-ʿArabiyyah* (Qum: Maktabat ʿayat Allah al-Marʿashi al-Najafi, 1411/1990), I: 211.

7) **Farid Wajdi** writes in his book *Daʿirat al-Maʿarif al-Qarn al-ʿAshrin*:

....أورد العلامة الدينوري في كتابه الامامة و السياسة

Allamah al-Dinawari, in his book al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah, cited [the following]...

See: Wajdi, Farid, *Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-Qarn al-Ashrin* (n.p: n.d), II: 754.

In another instance, he also writes:

كتاب الامامة و السياسة لابی محمد عبدالله بن مسلم الدينوري المتوفى سنة 270 هـ ...

... [the] book *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah* [which] belongs to Muhammad ﷺ Abd Allah b. Muslim al-Dinawari (d. 270 A.H). *Ibid*, 749 [...]

8) **Dr. Ahmad Zaki Safut**, the famous contemporary Egyptian writer and professor of Arabic, has cited [various] material from *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah* in a number of places in his book *Jamharat Khutab al-Arab* which he attributes to ibn Qutaybah:

وزاد ابن قتيبة في الامامة والسياسة: والله يا أهل العراق ما أظن هؤلاء القوم من أهل الشام إلا ظاهرين عليكم

...and Ibn Qutaybah added in his book *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah*: *Oh People of Iraq! By Allah, I reckon that the people of the Levant (al-Sham) only show their facades to you [and not what is inside their hearts].*

See: Safut, Ahmad Zaki, *Jamharat Khutab al-Arab* (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-Ilmiyah, n.d) I: 422.

وزاد ابن قتيبة في الإمامة والسياسة: فرق الله بيني وبينكم وأعقبني بكم من خير لي منكم وأعقبكم

[...] and Ibn Qutaybah added [the following tradition from Ali ibn Abi alib] in his book *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah*: “May God separate me from you, and replace you as my followers with someone who is better for me [as followers]. And make you to be replaced [after me with a new leader...].”

See: *Jamharat Khutab al-Arab*, I: 426.

نص آخر لخطبة طارق. وروي ابن قتيبة هذه الخطبة في الإمامة والسياسة بصورة أخرى

[...in] another text for the sermon. Ibn Qutaybah narrated this sermon in his *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah* in another way.

See: *Jamharat Khutab al-ʿArab*, II: 316.

Is the emphasis of all of these great scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah in attributing this book to Ibn Qutaybah not sufficient?

Fourth: a number of Sunni scholars, despite having attributed the book to “Ibn Qutaybah” as well as having accepted some of the bitter and unpleasant historical realities that have been narrated in the book in regard to the first part of Islam’s history, have nevertheless criticized Ibn Qutaybah as to why he did not gloss over, censor or distort (*tahriif*) history [when it comes to the Companions]! They have stated that he, like other scholars, must show self-restraint in narrating certain [problematic historical] realities.

al-Qadhi [Abu Bakr] ibn al-ʿArabi² [d. 553 A.H/1148 C.E] in his book *al-ʿAwasim min al-Qawasim* states:

ومن اشد شيء على الناس جاهل عاقل أو مبتدع محتال فأما الجاهل فهو ابن قتيبة فلم يبق ولم يذر للصحابه رسما
في كتاب الامامة والسياسة ان صح عنه جميع ما فيه

*One of the worst thing[s] [to befall] on people is a learned simpleton or deceitful innovator (mubtadiʿ). However, the simpleton (jahil) [here] is Ibn Qutaybah who has not observed the custom (rasm) [of censorship] with regard to [the faults of] the Companions (sahabah) in the book al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah, [that is] if everything in the book can be authentically [attributed] to him.*³

See: Ibn al-ʿArabi, Muhammad b. ʿAbd Allah Abu Bakr (d. 543 A.H/1148 C.E), *al-ʿAwasim min al-Qawasim fi Tahqiq Mawaqif al-Sahabah baʿd wafat al-Nabi (s)*, ed. Muhib al-Din al-Khatib & Mahmud Mahdi al-Istanbuli (Beirut: Dar al-Habil, 1407/1987), I: 261.

If there were no other proofs in attributing this book to Ibn Qutaybah except for the above statement of al-Qadhi Ibn al-ʿArabi, it would have been enough for truth-seekers (*ahl al-haqq*). This is because in addition to establishing the attribution of the book, Ibn al-ʿArabi’s statement also sheds light on the motives behind the Sunni attempts to deny the book’s attribution to [its proper author].

The Sunnis believe that when confronted with traditions related to the problematic behavior of the Companions, it is incumbent on historians and traditionists [alike] to remain silent, hide and cover-up those traditions.

When it became necessary to show restraint in merely narrating the minor disputes of the Companions, the avoidance of narrating the oppression, abuses and injuries that Imam ʿAli (a), Fatimah the Purest (a) and the rest of Ahl al-Bayt (a) faced became ubiquitous and the necessity for censorship became more extreme. It is interesting that even Shaykh ʿAbd al-Hamid Ismaʿil Zehi, the [Sunni] imam for Friday prayers in Zahedan (Iran) admitted this in one of his interviews:

ما موظف به حفظ حرمت صحابه هستيم. ما نمی گوییم که صحابه معصومند و گناه نمی کنند؛ اما نباید به جای یادآوری خوبیها و اعمال صواب آنها، متذکر خطاهایشان باشیم....

It is incumbent upon us to preserve the sanctity of the Companions. We do not say that the Companions were infallible and that they did not sin. However, instead of remembering their merits and good deeds, one should not mention their mistakes...

See: *Nida-yi Islam* (Journal), Hawzah-yi ʿIlmiyah-yi Dar al-ʿUlum-i Zahidan, 1st year, no. 4, p. 11.

Conclusion

With the acknowledgement of some of Sunnism's great scholars, [we can ascertain that] *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah* was indeed authored by Ibn Qutaybah and as such, the motive behind rejecting [the authenticity of the book] is to hide the [bitter historical] realities that Ibn Qutaybah candidly exposed.

1. Translator's note: there are a number of criticisms directed against the book that are unwarranted. For example, Dozy claims that the book indicates that the author had travelled to Damascus whereas in reality Ibn Qutaybah had never left Baghdad except to Dinawar. This objection is not warranted given that first, there is no strong evidence that Ibn Qutaybah never travelled outside of Baghdad and Dinawar. Second, there are reports that Ibn Qutaybah did in fact travel out of Baghdad, including to cities like Kufa. See ʿAbd al-Rahman b. ʿAli b. Muhammad al-Jawzi (Abu Faraj), *al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Muluk wa al-'Umam* 19 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Nashr & Dar al-Sadir 1358 A.H/1939 C.E), XII, 276 (in other prints, 277).

Other objections include the fact that Ibn Qutaybah narrated from people who were not alive during his time, or that he narrated from Egyptians whereas he had never travelled to Egypt. These criticisms are also problematic and perhaps even naïve. With regard to the first objection, Dozy does not consider the practice of *irsal* and *rafʿ* in hadith transmission where narrators often skip or omit intermediate narrators in their chains of transmission for various political, religious and/or personal reasons.

This is a practice that was not alien to Ibn Qutaybah (al-Bukhari, for example, has a number of *mursal* and *munqatiʿ* (disconnected) traditions in his *Sahih*) and can be regularly found in his works in general (including the narrations that Dozy cites to prove his point). On the second objection, Dozy ignores the all-too-evident historical fact that many Egyptians travelled to Baghdad and shared their traditions with Iraqi scholars and transmitters.

As such, it is quite ironic that Dozy's problematic and even naïve understanding of hadith is used by some modernist Sunnis as a standard for discrediting *al-Imamah wa al-Siyasah* when Dozy himself thought that the vast majority of hadiths in Islam (his study having looked at Sunni hadiths in particular) were blatant fabrications. See R.P.A. Dozy, *De voornaamste Godsdiensten, Het Islamisme* (Leiden, 1863), 81; this view was also echoed by his contemporary Alfred Von Kremer in *Geschichte der herrschenden Ideen des Islams* (Leipzig, 1868), 142–43; idem, *Culturgegeschichte des Islams unter den Chalifen* (Wien, 1875), I, 477–81.

2. Translator's note: not to be confused with the mystic Muhi al-Din Ibn ʿArabi (d. 638 A.H/1240 C.E).

3. Translator's note: Ibn al-ʿArabi does not question the book's attribution to Ibn Qutaybah. His reservations are only directed to parts that seem abhorrent to him. He does not, however, expand on this point and leaves it as it is. Therefore, it does not seem that these reservations of his are too serious.

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