

TRADITIONIST INTERNAL REFORM: MOTIVES BEHIND THE BIRTH OF THE FIRST MANUAL OF ‘ULŪM AL-ḤADĪTH

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Abstract

Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s *Muḥaddith al-fāṣil bayna l-rāwī wa-l-wā’i* has been widely accepted as the first composition in the discipline of ḥadīth sciences (‘*ulūm al-ḥadīth*). However, little is known about the real motive behind this sophisticated work. This paper seeks to contribute to ḥadīth historiography by exposing the agenda behind the composition of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*. This study suggests that the book reflects al-Rāmahurmuzī’s critical appraisal of the traditionist group and his remarkable effort to initiate an internal reform. Contrary to common supposition, his motive was not mainly to preserve ḥadīth theories and technicalities. Instead, he intended to upgrade the traditionist state of scholarship after a significant decline since the abolishment of *miḥnab khalq al-Qur’ān* (the inquisition over the createdness of the Qur’ān). His emphasis on the importance of *dirāyah* aimed to revive the excellence of past ḥadīth scholars and to close the gap that separated the traditionists from their jurist (*fuqahā*) counterparts.

Key Words: *Riwāyah*, *dirāyah*, rationalist, traditionist, reform

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Introduction

Modern Islamic scholars mostly believe that *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil bayna l-rāwī wa-l-wāʿī* (the ḥadīth specialist who distinguishes between the transmitter and the attentive listener) by Abū Muḥammad al-Rāmahurmuzī (d. approximately 360/975) is the first manual of *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* (ḥadīth sciences). This supposition commenced from Ibn Ḥajar’s (1992, 1:187) statement in which he asserts that the work “is most likely the first compilation in *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*. Undeniably, there have been compilations that dealt with specific topics before, but it was by far the most comprehensive one.” Ibn Ḥajar (2002, 38) nevertheless criticizes its content for “not covering (*lam yastawʿib*)” major topics in ḥadīth criticism. This remark implies Ibn Ḥajar’s supposition that al-Rāmahurmuzī’s work aimed to compile all matters related to the discussion on ḥadīth theories and terminologies. Therefore, it is understandable to find modern authors in ḥadīth historiography formed their perception of the book on this supposition as seen in the works of al-Sibāʿī (2003), Abū Zahw (1984), Abū Shuhbah (n.d.), ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghumārī (2008), Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr (1997), Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān (2010), ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (2008), Hashim Kamali (n.d.), and many others. Librande’s *Contrast in the Two Earliest Manuals of ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth: The Beginnings of the Genre*, is a comparative study of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* and al-Ḥākim’s *Maʿrifah fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, in which the author bases his study on this assumption. He scrutinizes both compilations in their capacities as the first attempt to compile the technical theories of ḥadīth.

Without any intention to contest the above supposition, some modern scholars have revealed other motives behind the emergence of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*. According to El-Omari (2012), al-Rāmahurmuzī authored his book due to his concern about the growing trend among ḥadīth transmitters who expressed no interest in evaluating the contents of ḥadīths that they transmitted. Similarly, Ḥātim al-ʿAwnī (1996) suggests that al-Rāmahurmuzī’s main objective was to respond to flaws in knowledge-seeking activities among ḥadīth students that affected the quality of ḥadīth preservation. These suppositions were undeniably supported by various statements prevail in many parts of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*. Nevertheless, it constitutes an incomplete picture. The primary and crucial agenda behind this remarkable work remains unexamined.

This study aims to improve our understanding of ḥadīth historiography. It argues that *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* is more than just an explanatory manual that elucidates fundamental theories in the sciences of ḥadīth. This monumental work, in fact, carries reformative ideas by which al-Rāmāhurmuzī attempted to change the state of traditionist scholarship after decades of decadence. Traditionalism's triumph over rationalism that followed the abolishment of *miḥnab kbalq al-Qur'ān* (the trial on the createdness of the Qur'ān) raised acute sensitivity to rationalism among traditionist scholars which eventually affected how they preserved the tradition. Most proponents of tradition were too occupied with collecting trivial aspects of ḥadīth and transmission, such as peculiar and elevated *isnāds*, thus they unable to give reasonable efforts to examine its contents. The anti-rationalism attitude was also the fundamental factor behind the hostility shown by traditionalists against the people of reason (*abl al-ra'y*) which mainly consists of the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and some of the jurists (*fuqabā'*). *Al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*, this study will argue, is the reflection of al-Rāmāhurmuzī's critical appraisal of the traditionist group as well as his remarkable effort to initiate an internal reform through reviving the methodology of past ḥadīth critics in ḥadīth preservation, which combined aspects of both *riwāyah* and *dirāyah*.

To prove this, the study of this paper will be divided into three parts. The first part will describe the general state of Islamic religious knowledge after the abolishment of *miḥnab kbalq al-Qur'ān* during al-Mutawakkil's administration. Special attention will be given to explicating the traditionalists' take on religious issues following their triumph over the rationalists and the formation of the Hanbalī school in Baghdād. The second part of this paper will shed light on al-Rāmāhurmuzī's intellectual life, offering some insights regarding his education and contribution to ḥadīth sciences. This part will also examine the authorities and incidents that partly formed al-Rāmāhurmuzī's conception of ḥadīths and traditionists, as well as his position in traditionalist-rationalist polemics. Finally, the third part of this paper will scrutinize al-Rāmāhurmuzī's most substantial ideas as contained in *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*. An attempt will be made to uncover the correlation between his thoughts and their socio-religious context.

Before delving deeper into the main discussion, a few terms used in this paper need to be clarified. The term traditionist refers to a

muhaddith, a person who studies and transmits tradition regardless of his theological inclination (Melchert 2001). It is different from the term “traditionalist”, which means a group of scholars who prefer textual sources in theology and legal discourse; hence, it includes jurisconsults who belong to the traditionalist movement and oppose rationalism (Makdisi 1979). This paper also emphasizes the distinctive meaning of the terms “rationalism” and “rationality.” “Rationalism” is the tendency to consider reason the principal device or one of the principal devices to reach the truth in religion, whereas “rationality” involves treating any issue by using reason without prioritizing reason (Abrahamov 1998).

I. The State of Ḥadīth Scholarship in the Post-*Miḥnab* Era

Classical Islamic scholars are basically divided into two main categories, namely, traditionalists and rationalists. This categorization is not a mere modern projection to describe the past but is realized and mentioned by classical historiographers (Makdisi, 1979; Melchert, 2001). Each of the camps applied distinctive approaches in theology and law. Traditionalists focused on the preservation of tradition and preferred to base their discussions of law and theology on textual sources (*nuṣūṣ*). They did not turn to speculative reasoning (*qiyās*) unless no ḥadīth or *athar* was found on the matter (al-Sharastānī, 2005). Some traditionalists even rejected all forms of rationality. On the other hand, rationalists, as reflected by both theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and jurists (*fuqahāʾ*), used reason extensively in exerting legal tenets from religious texts. Despite using tradition as one of their significant sources, the conclusive results of *qiyās* were commonly preferred over traditions in cases in which there was a clash of evidence (Abrahamov 1998).

Throughout Islamic history, the traditionalist and rationalist groups were involved in a series of polemics as they strived to acquire strategic positions to define the ideal religious path for Muslim society. The polemics culminated in an event called the *miḥnab* (*inquisition*), in which the Abbasid administration under Caliph al-Maʿmūn (d. 218/833) sided with rationalists and imposed severe punishments against anyone who rejected the idea of the createdness of the Qurʾān (*kbalq al-Qurʾān*). The real motive behind this controversial policy remains debatable (see, for example, Madelung 1985, Ibrahim 1994, and Arnel 1998). Nevertheless, multiple sources reveal that the *miḥnab* has claimed severe casualties in the traditionalists’ camp as hundreds of them were imprisoned, barred from intellectual activities, and even

annihilated. In this period of hardship, the *muḥaddith* of Baghdād, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), showed a heroic stance. Despite torture and imprisonment, he defied all efforts to make him accept that the Qurʾān was a creation. Instead, he firmly held to the creed of the *Salaf* (past predecessor) that al-Qurʾān is the word of God (*kalām Allāb*); hence, it is uncreated (see Hoover 2016).

The abolition of the *miḥnab* by Caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 247/861) indirectly ended rationalist domination. It also became a significant turning point for the traditionalists from the oppressed position to the highest authority in Islamic belief and jurisprudence. Perceived as the hero of the *miḥnab*, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal became the center of reference. His popularity laid the foundation for the birth of Ḥanbalism as the only theological-juristic school in Islam (Makdisi 1979, Hoover 2016). As George Makdisi (1979) notes, the Ḥanbalī school came into existence not due to a legal stance taken by its leader but rather as a result of a traditionalist theological stance against Muʿtazilite rationalism. In this school, people of tradition (*abl al-ḥadīth*) found the ultimate expression of their aspiration. As a result, the Ḥanbalites during the 4th/10th century emerged as the most influential group among the traditionalists and expanded their messages in broad-based classes dedicated to ḥadīth transmission (Holtzman 2015). According to Adam Mez (1937: 205), Ḥanbalites at that time were considered “the representatives of the Old Sunnah” and were not regarded as jurists until much later.

The triumph over the rationalists primarily increased the dependence on the *isnād* tradition among the people of tradition. It eventually escalated the number of traditionists who were occupied by collecting odd and peculiar *isnāds* but had low mastery in comprehending its content. Because of this condition, the Baghdād scholar Abū Muḥammad Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) criticized this attitude in his *Taʾwīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*. Despite his defense for traditionists against theologian’s abusive remarks, he (1995, 78) had to admit that some traditionists indeed “had refused to master what they have collected, declined from comprehending what they have compiled, and excessively fond of collecting ḥadīths from unnecessary multiple sources.” Ibn Qutaybah then stressed that the conduct is inappropriate for “someone who honestly seeks the pleasure of God by his knowledge.”

As a result of the *miḥnab*, traditionists expressed a hostile attitude toward anything associated with rationalism, especially the speculative

theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*). It generated at least two significant phenomena. First, it brought the traditionists closer to the literal approach in dealing with religious texts, which eventually made their theological and legal exposition considerably shallow. It was evident in, for example, their approach to *ṣifāt* traditions (ḥadīths with anthropomorphic content) that have a certain degree of similarity to anthropomorphism (*mushabbihab*). Therefore, many of their opponents often referred to them with the term *Ḥashwīyyāb*. Second, it affected the traditionists' opinion in the transmission grading system (*al-jarḥ wa-l-ta‘dīl*). Abū Ghuddah (1391 H) notes that some post-*mihṇab* traditionists manipulated issues of Qur’ānic status to suppress their adversaries and ruin their reputations. A significant number of scholars, including traditionists, jurists, and *sunṇī mutakallimūn*, fell victim to this scheme (Hurvitz 1994).

In turn, the anti-rationality attitude widened the gap between the traditionists and the jurists (*fuqabā’*). The two parties had been involved in a series of polemics over the concept and the authority of Sunna long before the institution of the *mihṇab*. The jurists often seemed to abandon the legal content of a ḥadīth when it contradicted another source of jurisprudence (Brown 1996). Discussing the condition of ḥadīth studies during his time, Abū Ḥātim Ibn Ḥibbān (2000, 1:19) notes the polarization of Islamic intellectuals into two main camps. The first was the seekers of ḥadīth (*ṭalabat al-akbbār*) who embarked on a journey to various countries for ḥadīth collection but were unwilling to memorize (*ḥifẓ*) and understand its content. Some of them even had inadequate expertise in distinguishing sound and unsound traditions. The second group was the students of law (*mutafaqqih*) whose main concern was legal opinions and debates (*al-ārā’ wa-l-jadal*) and had minimal interest in Sunnah studies and ḥadīth criticism.

In this context, and in addition to reemerging challenges from the revival of *kalām* movements during the Buwayhids' reign, a group of traditionalists attempted to make a difference. They established an intellectual movement that sought to restore the traditionist state of scholarship after decades of deterioration. One of the most outstanding characteristics of the group was their favorable reception of rationality. Despite the strong rejection they expressed toward speculative theology, the group actively promoted *nazar* (reasoning) as an indispensable device that all traditionists should employ. The term *nazar* (reason), according to them, meant “text-critical study,”

“forensic examination,” and “reflective reasoning” (see Gunther 2008). In other words, the group censured rationalism but supported rationality.

On this basis, the reformist group addressed significant issues faced by traditionalists in the 4th/10th century. Regarding the traditionists’ alleged poor mastery in ḥadīth content, they developed special literature on various topics including doubtful readings (*taṣḥīfāt*) due to the increasing number of prominent traditionists who misread *isnāds* and *matns* in their lectures. Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998), Abū l-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995), and Abū l-Ḥasan al-‘Askārī (d. 382/993) were among those who contributed significantly to developing the subject. On the appropriate interpretation of the ambiguous *ṣifāt* traditions, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī (d. approximately 380/990) published his “*al-Aḥādīth al-musḥkilah al-wāridah fī l-ṣifāt*” (Problematic ḥadīths on divine attributes), followed by Abū Bakar Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) with his *Musḥkil al-ḥadīth wa bayānuh* (Problematic ḥadīths and their explanation). To narrow the gap between the traditionist and the jurist, Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī composed *Ma‘ālim al-sunan*, a commentary on Abū Dāwūd’s compendium, based on a specific intention to “attract the jurists to study ḥadīth, and the traditionists to study law” (al-Khaṭṭābī 1932, 1:5).

Like other reform movements in history, the idea of internal reform divided the scholars of tradition into two camps. The first accepted and supported the ideas and developed sophisticated literature to promote a *wasafī* (middle) stance on tradition and reason. This stance prevails, for instance, in al-Bayhaqī’s extensive discussions on *ṣifāt* traditions in *Kitāb l-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt* (The book of divine names and attributes), in which he adopts a hermeneutic interpretation (see Noor 2018). He frequently cites the opinions of a particular group of scholars he refers to as *abl al-naẓar min aṣḥābinā* (the people of reason in our fraternity). The second camp, represented by the Ḥanbalites and ultra traditionists, considered the movement a deviation from the way of past pious generations (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and viewed it negatively as a continuation of Mu‘tazilite rationalism. Referring to the first camp as Kullābis or Ash‘arites, they used all possible measures to contain the spread of its influence. One of the best examples of this attitude can be seen in Abū Ya‘lā al-Farrā’s *Ibtāl al-ta’wīlāt li-akḥbār al-ṣifāt* (Negating the interpretation of *ṣifāt* traditions), which was authored to criticize Ibn Fūrak’s hermeneutical approach to *ṣifāt* traditions. He stated that “it is not permissible to reject these ḥadīths like what had

been done by a group of Muʿtazilites, nor interpret them like the Ashʿarites. It is compulsory to understand such ḥadīths based on their apparent meanings (*ḥamlubā ʿalā zābiribā*), and (to establish it as) God’s divine attributes which unlike human attributes” (1410 H, 43).

II. Abū Muḥammad al-Rāmahurmuzī: The Polymath-Traditionist

It is not an easy task to establish a comprehensive biography of al-Ramahurmuzī due to limited sources. We are confident, however, that his name was al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khallād. His *kunyah* was Abū Muḥammad. Rāmahurmuzī was his *nisbah*, which associates him with his hometown, Rām-hurmuz, a small village in Khūzistān province (located in today’s Iran). It is said that Rāmhurmuz was the birthplace of Salmān al-Fārisī, one of the reputable companions of the Prophet PBUH (al-Samʿānī 1988). In classical geography, Rām-hurmuz was located in the vast region of Persia (Fāris) with Shirāz as its capital city, known for its fertile land and agricultural products such as dates, coconuts, and oranges (al-Ḥamawī 1995). Regarding socio-religious aspects, al-Ḥamawī asserts that Muʿtazilism was a dominant school among Khuzistan’s Islamic society. Due to minimal data on the life of al-Rāmahurmuzī, some confusion has arisen in identifying his theological inclination. He was mistakenly identified with Abū Muḥammad al-Khallādī, a Muʿtazilite scholar and disciple of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʿī (d. 303/915). Librande (1976, 2009), however, clarifies that the two figures were different persons.

Available sources do not provide specific dates to determine al-Rāmahurmuzī’s years of birth and death. Based on al-Samʿānī’s information, which places al-Rāmahurmuzī’s first *riḥlah* (travel for ḥadīth seeking) in 290/903, ʿAjjāj al-Khaṭīb (1983) speculates that he was born in 265/877. A student of ḥadīth, according to al-Khaṭīb, usually would not conduct a journey for ḥadīth seeking before the age of puberty. Referring to the same information, however, Librande (1976) suggests that al-Rāmahurmuzī might have conducted his travel before puberty. Therefore, he estimates al-Rāmahurmuzī’s birth year to be sometime between 270/883 and 280/893. Regarding his year of death, al-Dhahabī (1998) suggests that al-Rāmahurmuzī still alive until approximately 350/961. Others, however, agree that he died by the year 360/970 (see al-Samʿānī 1988; al-Ḥamawī 1993).

Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s education started in his early years under the supervision of his father. Unfortunately, no biographical data about his

father seem available in biographical sources (Librande 1976). Nevertheless, according to Muḥib al-Dīn Abū Zayd (2016), his father was one of al-Ṭabarānī's *shuyūkh* (ḥadīth teachers). This notion, however, lacks supportive evidence. For instance, there is no specific entry for 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Khallād in al-Manṣūrī's extensive work *Irsbād al-qāṣī wa l-dānī ilā tarājum Shuyūkh al-Ṭabarānī* in which he listed out all of al-Ṭabarānī's teachers. The list, however, mentions 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Khallād al-Raqqī, but he seems to be a different person. Interestingly, 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Khallād al-Rāmahurmuzī, the father of Abū Muḥammad, is frequently mentioned in al-Mizzī's *Tabdhīb al-kamāl fi asmā' al-rijāl*. His name is included in the list of students who transmitted ḥadīth from Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, Zayd ibn Akhzam, Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, the author of *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Yaḥyā ibn Ḥakīm al-Muqawwamī, and others. It gives us the confidence to conclude that he was a prominent scholar of his time. For this reason, his son transmitted at least 48 traditions on his authority in *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* (Librande 1976).

Al-Rāmahurmuzī spent considerable time in Persia's cities, especially Shirāz, to study under the tutelage of their respective authorities. His pursuit of knowledge also brought him to other leading centers such as Mecca, Egypt, Kūfah (now in Iraq), Kāzerun and Sābūr (both now in present-day Iran), and Balkh (now in Afghanistan). These cities were mentioned in *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* when he conveyed certain traditions. However, it is notable that al-Rāmahurmuzī relied heavily on Iraqi scholars. He transmitted most of the traditions mentioned in the book via prominent *musnids* who lived in Baghdād, Kūfah, and Baṣrah. Among them were Abū l-Qāsim al-Baghawī (d. 317/929), Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṣā'id (d. 318/930), *al-Ḥāfiẓ* Abū Bakar ibn Abī Dāwūd (d. 316/928), *al-Ḥāfiẓ* Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥaḍramī, also known as *Muṭayyan* (d. 297/909), Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 297/909), and Abū Khalīfah al-Jumaḥī (d. 305/917). He visited 'Askar Mukram, a small city near Baṣrah, to attend a ḥadīth lecture conducted by *al-Musnid* 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Mūsā al-Aḥwāzī, who was famously known as 'Abdān (d. end of 306/918). In 'Abdān's lecture hall, he saw Abū l-'Abbās Ibn Surayj (d. 306/918), the most outstanding jurist and defender of the Shāfi'i school of his time.

Clearly, al-Rāmahurmuzī did not leave for Iraq to study ḥadīth *per se*. Instead, he came to the region to learn other disciplines such as law, jurisprudence and theology. He studied law and jurisprudence under

the tutelage of Abū Yaḥyá Zakariyyā ibn Yaḥyá al-Sājī (d. 307/919), a prominent *muḥaddith* and *muftī* of Baṣrah. Al-Dhahabī (1988) says that al-Sājī was the primary reference for Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935), the founder of Ash‘arism, in his exposition of the theological creed of the *Salaf*. Among other things al-Rāmahurmuzī received from al-Sājī was the famous *al-Risālah* of al-Shāfi‘ī, which is often considered the first composition in *uṣūl al-fiqh*. A few paragraphs of the book were cited and wisely utilized in *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*. In the same city, al-Rāmahurmuzī also attended lectures of Abū ‘Abd Allāh Zubayr ibn Aḥmad al-Zubayrī (d. 320/932), a prolific author and one of the respected Shāfi‘ī scholars. Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (1413 H, 3:295) praised him as an “*imām* who preserved the *madhabb*, good in literature and expert in genealogy.” Al-Rāmahurmuzī diligently recorded al-Zubayrī’s opinions on ḥadīth technicalities, one of which was his opinion on the minimum age for a student of ḥadīth to begin his study. He says, “It is recommended to begin ḥadīth collection at the age of 20 since it is the mature period of human intelligence” (al-Rāmahurmuzī 2016, 168).

In addition to Islamic law and theology, Arabic historiography and linguistics seemed to be at the top of al-Rāmahurmuzī’s list of interests. During his residency in Baghdād, he attended lectures conducted by several renowned linguists, such as Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Arafah al-Azdī, popularly known as *Naftawayb* (d. 323/935), Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥumayd (or Muḥammad) ibn al-‘Alā’ al-Kalābizī (d. 316/928), and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sarī al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923). He also studied Arabic history and literature under numerous scholars of Baghdād, including the famous historian (*akhbārī*) Abū Bakar Muḥammad ibn Khalaf ibn al-Marzubān (d. 309/921). The influence of these scholars prevails in various parts of al-Rāmahurmuzī’s discussions in both of his existing works, namely *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* and *Amtbāl al-Nabī*.

In 345-6/956-7, al-Rāmahurmuzī returned to his hometown as a polymath-traditionist. His versatility helped him obtain a place in the Persian intellectual milieu, where “a clerk was more honored than the theologian” (Mez 1937, 171). He reportedly corresponded with two Buwayhid viziers who were literary experts, namely, Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī (d. 352/963) and Ibn al-‘Amīd (d. 366 /977). He composed a beautiful poem to praise Buwayhid Sultan ‘Aḍud al-Dawlah (d. 372/983). All of these efforts eventually earned him his position in the Buwayhid administration. He was appointed a *qāḍī*

(judge) in the Khūz district for a while. Nevertheless, there is no clear information on who appointed him and how long he held the position.

Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s intellectual legacy is mainly reflected in his works and students. He penned at least 15 works in which he exhibited good mastery of various Islamic disciplines, including Qur’ānic interpretation, linguistics, and ḥadīth sciences (al-Khaṭīb 1983). However, al-Dhahabī (1998) notes that only two of these works survived, namely *Amtbāl al-Nabī* and *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*. The first book was preserved by his Baghdādī student Abū l-Qāsim ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad (d. 390/999). The latter was sustained by Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad ibn Ishāq ibn Kharbān al-Nahāwandī (d. approximately 410/1019) and Abū l-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī who received the book directly from its author (al-Sakhāwī 2003). Many Islamic scholars have been associated with al-Rāmahurmuzī as his students. Among them were the *Muḥaddith* Abū l-Ḥusayn of Sayda in Shām Province (d. 402/1011), *al-Ḥāfiẓ* al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad Ibn al-Layth of Shirāz (d. 405/1014), and *al-Ḥāfiẓ* Abū Bakar Aḥmad ibn Musā ibn Mardawayh of Iṣfahān (d. 410/1019). These scholars, except the pure traditionists Ibn Mardawayh and Abū al-Ḥusayn of Sayda, were famous for their affiliation with the Shāfi‘ī school. It gives us a good reason to place al-Rāmahurmuzī in the circle of Shāfi‘ī scholars, although there is no entry displaying his name appears in any of the available biographical dictionaries on Shāfi‘ī scholars.

III. Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s Reformation: Reading of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*

There is no contention among scholars about al-Rāmahurmuzī’s authorship of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil bayna l-rāwī wa-l-wā‘ī*. In fact, he and the book were almost inseparable. In his biographical exposition on al-Rāmahurmuzī, al-Dhahabī (1986, 16:73) introduces him as “*al-imām*, an excellent ḥadīth expert (*al-ḥāfiẓ al-bāri‘*), the traditionist of Persia (*muḥaddith al-‘Ajām*), Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khallād al-Fārisī al-Rāmahurmuzī, the judge, and the author of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil bayna l-rāwī wa-l-wā‘ī*.” His authorship can also be traced back through *isnāds* (chains of transmission) preserved in various *thabt* compilations. Ibn Khayr al-Ishbilī (1998), for instance, states that he attained the authority to transmit *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* from two masters: Abū l-Ḥakam ibn Ghashliyyān and Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī. The two had received their authority from Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Ali ibn Aḥmad al-Fālī, who received it

from Aḥmad ibn Ishāq al-Nahāwandī on the authority of Abū Muḥammad al-Rāmahurmuzī. Several centuries later, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (1992) reveals that he has the authority in transmitting *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* through a chain of transmission that linked him to al-Silafī.

Al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil, according to al-Dhahabī (1986; 1998), exhibits al-Rāmahurmuzī’s profound mastery in ḥadīth studies. This work earned him a respectable position in ḥadīth historiography as the architect of *‘ulūm l-ḥadīth* (al-Ṣāliḥī 2009; Abu Shuhba, n.d.). Since its publication, the work has influenced subsequent works in the field. Its contents were frequently cited by later authors of *Muṣṭalah* compositions such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (Abū Zayd 2016). In the twentieth century, *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* was published for the first time by ‘Ajāj al-Khaṭīb in 1971 based on four different manuscripts. He equipped the book with a lengthy introduction that analyzed al-Rāmahurmuzī’s intellectual life and examined the book’s overall content. The publication became the only printed edition of *al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil* until Muḥib al-Dīn Abū Zayd published the new edition of *al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil* in 2016. The latter was printed based on six manuscripts and offered corrections of mistakes and errors found in al-Khāṭīb’s edition.

The content of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* consists of 95 headings that carry various specific titles. Some of these begin with the term *bāb* (plural: *abwāb*), which means chapter. In the preface section, al-Rāmahurmuzī elucidates the social background that led to the composition of the book. He begins by mentioning a group of people who despised ḥadīth and ridiculed the people of tradition. After praising ḥadīth and traditionists, he mentions (2016, 132) an incident in which “one of the leading scholars (*shuyūkh al-‘ilm*), who has reached a high position due to his intellectual mastery and virtue,” feels disappointed about the insufficient attention he has received from the people of ḥadīth in Baghdād. They prefer to attend the lectures of a traditionist whose mastery of Islamic knowledge is far inferior. He then implicitly mocks the traditionists in some of his works. Al-Rāmahurmuzī sees this attitude as totally inappropriate. He criticizes the scholar for abusing traditionists despite most of his Islamic knowledge originating from them. He then suggests respecting the jurists (*fuqahā’*) without belittling the transmitters (*ruwāṭ*). He also encourages students of ḥadīth to study law the same way he encourages students of law to study ḥadīth.

Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s preface indicates two distinctive groups of people based on their reception to ḥadīth. Although he does not specify the identity of the people who despised ḥadīth and its scholars, he mentions a set of characteristics by which we can safely assume that he is referring to the rationalist group, which consists of theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and some of the jurists (*fuqabā’*). This group was known at that time for their negative perception of the traditionists. However, it is difficult to identify the scholar he mentions in the Baghdād incident. Through his illustration, however, he most likely belonged to the jurist camp. As a traditionist, al-Rāmahurmuzī would hardly call a theologian “one of the leading scholars,” and if he did, his suggestion to respect both jurists (*fuqabā’*) and traditionists (*ruwāt*) would carry no meaning. Therefore it can be concluded that the incident corresponded to the climate of enmity and competition between jurists and traditionists that dominated the post-*miḥnah* era.

Al-Rāmahurmuzī then addresses the students of ḥadīth and advises them to continue holding onto ḥadīth, to evaluate its contents, and to practice the highest standard of conduct in ḥadīth preservation. He also demands that they avoid all negative attitudes that could be used against them. These are al-Rāmahurmuzī’s main ideas that he develops and elucidates in the entire discussion of his book. As clearly reflected in the title, namely *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil bayna l-rāwī wa l-wā’i* (the ḥadīth specialist who distinguishes between the transmitter and the attentive listener), al-Rāmahurmuzī explicitly classifies traditionists into two distinctive groups, the transmitter (*rāwī/nāqil*) and the scholar (*wā’i*). He notes (2016, 143) that the classification was mentioned in a prophetic tradition that states, “Sometimes a person who carries (*ḥāmil*) legal knowledge is in fact not a legal expert (*faqīh*). Sometimes a person conveys knowledge (*fiqh*) to someone more intelligent.” He makes it clear that the ḥadīth is not meant to favor one group over another. Instead, he emphasizes that “the compliment given to one of the two groups is actually praise for the other.”

Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s classification reminds us of Ibn Fūrak’s statement in the opening of his *Muskbil al-ḥadīth wa bayānuh*. He classifies the people of tradition (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) into two equally important groups: first, the people of transmission (*abl al-naql wa-l-riwāyah*), whose focus is mainly to transmit ḥadīths, to preserve its chains of transmission and to scrutinize its authenticity; second, a group that focuses its efforts on mastering various methodologies of reasoning (*naẓar wa-qiyās*) and exerting argumentative aspects of the

ḥadīths. Ibn Fūrak then metaphorically illustrates the task of the first group in defending prophetic traditions as “the treasurers (*kbazanab*)” and the latter as “the guards (*baṭāriqab*).” In cases of disagreement between the two groups on any theological issues, Ibn Fūrak (2005) suggests preferring the opinion held by the people of *nazar* due to their specialty in the field of speculative theology.

It seems that al-Rāmahurmuzī holds a particular view of those whom he called as transmitters. Despite their dedication to *isnād* and *ḥadīth* compilation, the group generally had no significant expertise in technical aspects and content analysis. In fact, many of them had low mastery of Arabic grammar (*i‘rāb*) due to their negative perception of this branch of knowledge and its scholars. As a result, changes and misreading of texts (*taṣḥīf wa laḥn*) often occurred in ḥadīths they transmitted. Regarding this condition, al-Rāmahurmuzī recalls an event he witnessed in one of the lecture sessions he attended in Iraq. ‘Abdān, the Baṣran ḥadīth master, recited a ḥadīth in which a grammatical error ensued. The Shāfi‘ī jurist Ibn Surayj, who happened to be present at the session, notified him of the error. However, ‘Abdān boldly refused the correction and insisted on his version. Based on this incident, al-Rāmahurmuzī (2016, 544) suggests the need to “disregard the formal wordings of this kind of group as well as their negative perception towards Arabic grammar and its scholars.”

Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s concern about the transmitter group does not prevail only in *al-Muḥaddith al-fāsil*. A similar notion also appears in his second surviving book, *Amtbāl al-Nabī*. Upon commenting on a ḥadīth that mentions a particular people who will be forbidden from reaching the Prophet’s cistern (*ḥawḍ*) in the Hereafter, al-Rāmahurmuzī criticizes the Baghdādī traditionist Mūsá ibn Hārūn al-Bazzār, who refuses to recite the ḥadīth due to his conception that it speaks ill against the Prophet’s companions. This stance, according to al-Rāmahurmuzī (1983, 53), reflects “the opinion (*madhbhab*) of a person who has no relation to ḥadīth except its transmission (*riwāyah*).” He then clarifies that the ḥadīth does not concern the Prophet’s companions. Instead, it talks about the apostates (*abl al-riddab*) who transgressed the obligation of *zakāb* soon after the Prophet passed away.

It seems that the composition of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāsil* is based on such a notion of the transmitter group who, at the time, formed the lion’s share of the Islamic scholarly community. All discussions contained in the book aim to elevate them, as well as other students of

ḥadīth, to the highest level of mastery in ḥadīth. Therefore, the book’s content focuses its discussion on materials that encourage students of ḥadīth to practice a set of ethics and accuracy in ḥadīth learning and teaching. Unlike al-Ḥākīm in his *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, al-Rāmāhurmuzī’s book does not direct its focus to discussions of *isnād* and *matn* theories and technicalities. Instead, the work might aptly be called a “behavioral manual” in the sense that it studies the behavior befitting the *muḥaddith* in preserving ḥadīth reports (Librande 1976).

To do so, al-Rāmāhurmuzī introduces a concept that divides ḥadīth preservation activities into two major aspects, namely, *riwāyah* and *dirāyah*. *Riwāyah* associates all materials of ḥadīth with the transmission. It involves the question of memory, written means, styles of procumbents, and types of collections, all touching on how to pass on the report (Librande 1976). On the other hand, *dirāyah* is the critical study of ḥadīths that involves studies of *isnād* and *matn* technicalities. It includes the understanding of ḥadīth wordings and legal contents, the categorization of sound and unsound ḥadīths, and the identification of the correct pronunciation of transmitters’ names and *kunyabs*, which are commonly mistaken. In short, the *riwāyah* is the ability to transmit accurately, and the *dirāyah* is the ability to assess a report critically (Librande 1973). Al-Rāmāhurmuzī’s strong emphasis on the importance of *dirāyah* is the focal point of the entire content of *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*. He dedicates two lengthy chapters to exposing the merit of someone who combines both *riwāyah* and *dirāyah*. Quoting Abū ‘Aṣīm al-Nabīl, he asserts (2016, 252) that “an authority in ḥadīth without *dirāyah* is poor authority.”

Al-Rāmāhurmuzī’s emphasis on *dirāyah* echoes the position held by the reformists who advocated rationality as a vital device in preserving tradition. It also indirectly demonstrates his effort to eliminate the gap that separated the traditionists from the jurists for decades. In doing so, he fairly positions himself as an arbitrator by which he neutralizes abusive remarks from both camps. For instance, he states that the traditionists’ poor mastery in legal rulings and the jurists’ low proficiency in ḥadīth sciences are equally embarrassing. He illustrates the following (2016, p.311):

Nothing is uglier than one of our teachers, who has seen a prominent scholar for years, but wrote in his handwriting, “Wakī on the authority of Shaqīq (it should be: Sufyān) on the authority of al-A‘māsh” for more than 20 ḥadīths. All of which he put a *fatḥa* on the *qāf* (of the word Shaqīq) with confidence. He failed to

differentiate between Sufyān and Shaqīq as well as their different live periods. He also did not know the time gap between Wakī' and senior *tabi'īn* and *mukhbaḍrams*. Nevertheless, when he speaks, he points with his finger. When he issues a legal ruling for specific incidents, he closes his eyes in arrogance. This attitude is as bad as the confusion of Abū Khaythamah and his fellow traditionists when asked if it was permissible for a menstrual woman to wash a deceased body. Moreover, if the story of Abū Mūsá was true, that he was asked about a rat carcass that fell into a well and to which he replied that the well is innocent, it is far uglier than this.

The tendency to eliminate the gap can also be seen in al-Rāmahurmuzī's extensive discussions on various theoretical concepts of ḥadīth sciences. In every discussion regarding ḥadīth technicalities, he noticeably seeks to include the opinions of the jurists (*al-fuqabā'*), whom he often calls *ahl al-naẓar*. For instance, when he discusses the topic of elevation and demotion (*al-ta'ālī wa-l-tanazzul*) in *isnād*, after establishing disagreements among traditionists over which is preferable, he proceeds (2016, 204) to state that the topic was also strongly disputed among the people of *naẓar*. In some discussions, he often uses a combination of the traditionists' and jurists' analyses in elaborating principal theories in ḥadīth technical issues. On one occasion, Al-Rāmahurmuzī (2016, 355) says, "The correct opinion to me, based on both tradition and reason (*min tariq al-atbar wa-l-naẓar*), regarding the appropriate age at which a transmitter (*nāqil*) should convey his authority is when he reaches the age of 50." This aspect distinguishes him from previous ḥadīth scholars who wrote on certain aspects of ḥadīth sciences. They seldom include jurists' opinions on issues regarding ḥadīth technicalities. In fact, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajāj in his *al-Tamyīz* (1431 H, 196) clearly states, "Ḥadīth technicality (*ṣinā'at al-ḥadīth*) and mastery in criteria regarding soundness and unsoundness of ḥadīths solely belong to scholars of ḥadīth."

Regrettably, al-Rāmahurmuzī's inclination to include the jurists' framework in discussions on ḥadīth technicalities caused confusion in recognizing the methodology of early ḥadīth scholars in grading reporters. It can be seen in his disagreement with Shu'bah ibn Ḥajjāj's negative remarks on al-Ḥasan ibn 'Umārah. Shu'bah accused Ḥasan of lying because he conveyed ḥadīths from al-Ḥakam bin 'Utaybah whose legal opinion contradicted their content. Al-Rāmahurmuzī (2016, 327) criticizes Shu'bah's opinion, stating that "a *mufti* does not

have to issue a legal ruling in parallel to ḥadīth he acquired, nor has he to transmit the ḥadīth that supports his ruling.” His notion, however, is incompatible with the rule of ḥadīth criticism applied by early critics. In his *Sharḥ 'ilal al-Tirmidhī*, Ibn Rajab (2001, 2:276) asserts that Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal and most of the ḥadīth experts (*akḥbar al-ḥuffāz*) used to refute many ḥadīths when they learned that their content in conflict with the transmitter’s legal opinion. According to ‘Amr Mun‘im Salīm (n.d., 42), it is because the discrepancy indicates hidden defects in the ḥadīth in question. Admittedly, the principle has become less popular among recent scholars, who mostly hold the principle that says: *al-‘ibrāh ma rawā lā mā raʿā* (what matters is what the transmitter has narrated, not what he subjectively thinks) (Durays 1428 H, 38). I suggest that al-Rāmahurmuzī’s stand, as well as his influence on later compositions in *Muṣṭalah* literature, has to do with this significant shift in ḥadīth criticism. However, further studies are needed to prove this hypothesis.

As part of his emphasis on *dirāyah*, al-Rāmahurmuzī (2016, 313) urges anyone who is a mere transmitter (*al-rāwī al-mujarrad*) to avoid involving himself in topics beyond his expertise. The suggestion is clearly related to the typical post-*miḥnab* traditionists who participated in theological discourses out of enthusiasm. Their poor mastery in abstract and speculative discussions subsequently caused more harm than good. Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s concern has a firm basis. He recalls an incident in which the traditionist-Ḥanbalite Ḥarb ibn Ismā‘īl al-Sirjānī (d. 280/893) published a book entitled *al-Sunnah wa-l-jamā‘ah*, wherein he condemns the theologians and their opinions on various theological issues. The book then was refuted by a Mu‘tazilite scholar who did not only destroy al-Sirjānī’s arguments but also censure the entire traditionists. In this case, al-Rāmahurmuzī blamed al-Sirjānī’s negligence and arrogance as much as he criticized the Mu‘tazilite scholar for making false accusations. He indicates that if al-Sirjānī had combined his expertise in *riwāyah* with comprehension, he would likely have done better (see also el-Omari 2012).

Al-Rāmahurmuzī’s notion of al-Sirjānī’s incident clearly resonates with the reformists’ take on the traditionists’ approach to current theological issues. As mentioned earlier, many traditionists have developed a radical anti-rationality attitude in dealing with theological issues, especially regarding the meaning of *ṣifāt* traditions, which eventually brought them closer to the stance of the *Mushabbihah* (heretic sect that likens God with creature). Because of this, Abū l-

Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī (2015, 56) criticizes their approach and stresses that “the *Mushabbihah* is different from the people of ḥadīth (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) for their belief is not like theirs, and their school (*madhhab*) is different from theirs.” Long before al-Rāmahurmuzī and al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī (d. 276/889) explicitly criticized how traditionists elaborate theological issues. Commenting on polemic over the createdness of Qurʾānic utterance (*al-Lafẓ bi-l-Qurʾān*) and the tension within traditionist group that follows, Ibn Qutaybah notes (1985, 37) that the incident arose due to the nature of the topic that beyond the traditionists’ comprehension. They did not have “the analytical device (*ālat al-tamyīz*), the precision of the reflective scholars (*faḥs al-naẓẓārīn*), and the knowledge of the linguists (*‘ilm ahl al-lughab*).” A similar notion resurfaces several decades later in al-Bayhaqī’s comment on Ibn Khuzaymah, a leading ḥadīth scholar in Nishapur, who states that a person’s sound (*sawt al-musawwit*) is uncreated just like the Qurʾān. Al-Bayhaqī (2002, 2:406) finds the statement “absurd (*‘ibārah radiʿah*)” then alludes to Ibn Khuzaymah’s incompetency in theological discussions. He cites Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī who have said, “What is the relation between Abū Bakr (Ibn Khuzaymah) and theology? It is better for us and him to keep silent on topics that we have not mastered.”

Conclusion

This study reveals that *Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* is more than the first works in *‘ulūm l-ḥadīth*. It is undoubtedly one of the best articulations of the urgency of reform within the traditionist group to make them compatible with new challenges in a changing context. Through his work, al-Rāmahurmuzī attempted to revive the ethic and methodology of past ḥadīth scholars, which seemed to be fading away in the post-*mihnah* era. His agenda reemerged decades later in the works of several ḥadīth scholars. It prevails in the works of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), who became familiar with al-Rāmahurmuzī’s ideas via several authorities, namely, ‘Ali ibn Muḥammad al-Muʿaddib, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Daqqāq, and Abū l-Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Asnānī. All of these scholars received the authority to transmit *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* from Aḥmad ibn Ishāq al-Nahāwandī, al-Rāmahurmuzī’s senior disciple. Al-Khaṭīb diligently developed al-Rāmahurmuzī’s main ideas in *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil* into several independent works. For instance, he developed al-Rāmahurmuzī’s idea of reviving the ethics of past ḥadīth scholars in his famous composition titled *al-Jāmi‘ li-akblāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmi‘* (The

comprehensive composition regarding the ethics of transmitter and the attentive listener), in which the divisive terms *al-rāwī* (transmitter/student of ḥadīth) and *al-sāmi* (attentive listener/scholar) were obviously inspired by al-Rāmahurmuzī’s work (Librande 1976). Al-Khaṭīb additionally developed al-Rāmahurmuzī’s idea in explicating the rules and principles of ḥadīth criticism in his *al-Kifāyah fī ‘ilm al-riwāyah* and his apologetic defense of traditionists in *Sharaf Aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*. In short, because of al-Rāmahurmuzī’s work, al-Khaṭīb became a prolific author who produced influential compositions in ḥadīth sciences, to the extent that Ibn Nuqṭah (d. 629/1231) has famously said, “Every objective person will admit that all ḥadīth scholars coming after al-Khaṭīb are indebted (‘iyāl) to his works” (al-‘Asqalānī 2002).

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