

{blink}NEW{/blink}

Al-Haafidh Shihabuddin Abu'l-Fadl Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Muhammad, better known as Ibn Hajar due to a fame of his forefathers, al-Asqalani due to his origin (Arabic: أبو الفاضل أحمد بن علي بن محمد) (February 18, 1372- d. February 2, 1449 852 H [1]), was a medieval Shafiite Sunni scholar of Islam who represents the entire realm of Sunni world in the field of Hadith

Early Life and Studies

He was born in Cairo in 1372, the son of the Shafi'i scholar and poet Nur al-Din 'Ali. Both of his parents died in his infancy, and he and his sister, Sitt al-Rakb, became wards of his father's first wife's brother, Zaki al-Din al-Kharrubi, who enrolled Ibn Hajar in Qur'anic studies when he was five. Here he excelled, learning Surah Maryam in a single day, and progressing to the memorization of texts such as the Quran, then the abridged version of Ibn al-Hajib's work on the foundations of fiqh. When he accompanied al-Kharrubi to Mecca at the age of 12, he was considered competent to lead the Tarawih prayers during Ramadan. When his guardian died in 1386, Ibn Hajar's education in Egypt was entrusted to hadith scholar Shams al-Din ibn al-Qattan, who entered him in the courses given by al-Bulqini (d.1404) and Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d.1402) in Shafi'i fiqh, and Zayn al-Din al-'Iraqi (d.1404) in hadith, after which he travelled to Damascus and Jerusalem, to study under Shams al-Din al-Qalqashandi (d.1407), Badr al-Din al-Balisi(d.1401), and Fatima bint al-Manja al-Tanukhiyya (d.1401). After a further visit to Mecca, Medina, and Yemen, he returned to Egypt. Ibn Hajar Al-Asqallani acquired the title of

Commander of the Faithful in the Sciences of Hadith thus Al-Haafidh, and is without equal in his field, bar none.

Following His Marriage in 1397

In 1397, at the age of twenty-five, he married Anas Khatun, who was a hadith expert in her own right, holding ijazas from Zayn al-Din al-'Iraqi. She gave celebrated public lectures to crowds of ulema, including al-Sakhawi. Ibn Hajar went on to be appointed to the position of Egyptian chief-judge (Qadi) several times, authoring more than fifty works on hadith, history, biography, Quranic exegesis (tafsir), poetry and Shafi'i jurisprudence. In 1414 (817 A.H.), Ibn Hajar commenced the enormous task of assembling his Fath al-Bari, the most valued Sunni commentary of Sahih Bukhari. When it was finished, in December 1428 (Rajab 842 A.H.), a celebration was held near Cairo, attended by the ulema, judges, and leading Egyptian personalities. Ibn Hajar read the final pages of his work, afterwhich poets recited eulogies and gold was distributed. It was, according to historian Ibn Iyaas d. 930H, 'the greatest celebration of the age in Egypt.' However, a point of controversy concerning the work was that Ibn Hajar deemed the leader of the troops that killed Shia Imam, Husain ibn Ali (d.680) at Karbala, Umar ibn Sa'ad d. 65H, to be trustworthy source of information. [2]

Sheikh ul-Islam, Imam Ibn Hajar passed away after Isha prayers on February 2, 1449 at the age of seventy-nine. His funeral in Cairo was attended by an estimated fifty thousand people, including the sultan and the caliph.

His Works

1)Fath al-Bari

2)al-Durar al-Kamina - a biographical dictionary of leading figures of the eighth century

3)Tahdhib al-Tahdhib (an abbreviation of Tahdhib al-Kamal, the encyclopedia of hadith narrators by al-Mizzi)

4)al-Isaba fi tamyiz al-Sahaba (the most widely-used dictionary of Companions)

5) Bulugh al-Maram min adillat al-ahkam (on Shafi'i fiqh).

Fath al-Bari: Commentary on Sahih al-Bukhari, Abdal Hakim Murad

Introduction to the translation of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's commentary on selected hadith
(published as a booklet by the Muslim Academic Trust)

The booklet intends to introduce non-Arabic speakers to one of the most seminal genres of Muslim religious literature, namely, the hadith commentary. It is surprising that no serious translations at present exist from this voluminous and influential body of writing, given that there are few hadith which can be understood adequately without reference to the often complex debates which have taken place concerning them between the scholars. These discussions have included investigations of the precise linguistic and lexicological meaning of the Prophetic speech, studies of the isnad, debates over the circumstances surrounding the genesis of each hadith (asbab al-wurud), and issues of abrogation by stronger or later hadiths or by Qur'anic texts. Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna, the great early hadith scholar, used to remark: al-hadith madilla illa li'l-'ulama': 'the hadith are a pitfall, except for the scholars.' For this reason no Muslim scholar of repute uses a hadith before checking the commentaries to ascertain its precise meaning, context, and application.

The importance of this literature may be gauged by the fact that at least seventy full commentaries have been written on Imam al-Bukhari's great Sahih. The best-known of these include al-Kawakib al-Darari by Imam Shams al-Din al-Kirmani (d. AH 786), 'Umdat al-Qari by Imam Badr al-Din al-'Ayni (d.855), and the Irshad al-Sari by Imam Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Qastallani (d.923). However the most celebrated is without question the magnificent Fath al-Bari ('Victory of the Creator') by Imam Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, a work which was the crown both of its genre and of the Imam's academic career. It is appreciated by the ulema for the doctrinal soundness of its author, for its complete coverage of Bukhari's material, its mastery of the relevant Arabic sciences, the wisdom it shows in drawing lessons (fawa'id) from the hadiths it expounds, and its skill in resolving complex disputes over variant readings. For Bukhari's text has not come down to us in a single uniform version, but exists in several 'narrations' (riwayat), of which the version handed down by al-Kushmayhani (d.389) on the authority of Bukhari's pupil al-Firabri is the one most frequently accepted by the ulema. This is, for example, why the new and definitive edition of the Sahih, through the authorized narration of the best-known hadith scholar of recent times, Shaykh al-Hadith 'Abdallah ibn al-Siddiq al-Ghimari, uses the Firabri version (for this text see www.thesaurus-islamicus.li). Ibn Hajar frequently uses the Kushmayhani variant as his standard text, but gives his reasons, often in complex detail, for preferring other readings where these seem to have particular merit. In doing this he makes it clear that he is authorized, through the ijaza-system, for all the riwayat he cites.

Imam al-Bukhari

Ibn Hajar considered the hadith collection of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (AH

194-256), entitled al-Jami' al-Sahih ('The Sound Comprehensive Collection'), to be the most reliable of all the hadith collections of Islam. His respect for the compiler was no less total, as is evident from the short biography which he offers of him, which portrays him as a saint as well as a scholar. He recounts, on Firabri's eye-witness authority, how the imam would make ghusl and pray two rak'ats before including any hadith in his work, and always carried on his person one of the hairs of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). He collected his Sahih in Khurasan, and arranged it in the sanctuary at Mecca, and completed it while seated between the minbar and the Blessed Prophetic Tomb in Madina.

His miracles (karamat) are numerous and well-attested. Once, after helping to build a fortress to defend the Muslim community, he provided the laborers with three small coins' worth of bread, but even though there were a hundred laborers, there was enough for all. Despite his abstemious personal habits, he was endlessly generous to his students. One of his scribes, Muhammad ibn Abi Hatim, said: 'When I was with him on a journey we would stay in a single room together, and I would see him rising fifteen or twenty times in a night to light the lantern, and work on an isnad, after which he would lie down again. I asked him: "Why do you impose all of this on yourself instead of waking me?" and he would reply, "You are a young man, and I don't wish to interrupt your sleep."' Ibn Abi Hatim further related: 'I once saw al-Bukhari in a dream. He was walking behind the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), setting his feet directly in the Prophet's footsteps.' And when he was lowered into his grave, a perfume like musk poured out from it. 'So many people took dust from his grave,' recalled another of his students, 'that we had to place a wooden fence around it.'

Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi narrated that 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Adam said: 'I once saw the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), with a group of his companions, in a dream. He was standing, and I greeted him, and when he returned my greeting, I said: "Why are you standing here, O Messenger of Allah?" and he replied: "I am waiting for Muhammad ibn Isma'il." A few days later the news of al-Bukhari's death reached me, and when I checked I realized that he had died at the moment when I beheld that dream.'