

## Book Review

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*Pioneers of Islamic Scholarship* by Adil Salahi Published by the Islamic Foundation Rat by Lane, Markfield, U.K , 2006 / 1427 A.H , pp. 204 (and six preliminary pages), ISBN 13: 9780860375706 and ISBN 10: 0860375706.

The book appears to be an attempt on the part of Islamic Foundation to promote a better understanding of Islam. It serves as an insight into the glorious intellectual tradition of Islam. The author while focusing on the contribution of eleven eminent scholars, in the field of Islamic jurisprudence, has made a very appreciable attempt to enlighten the readers with the fact that how the Muslim intellectuals responded to their contemporary challenges in the most excellent way. While studying their account one feels fascinated by their way of pursuing learning, mental sharpness in relating the message of Islam to the changing concerns of the day and their altruistic mission of guiding fellow Muslims in the varied life situations. Notwithstanding their difference of opinion on a variety of issues, they used to uphold the basic principles of ethics of disagreement. The most striking common ground among all of them is their unflinching commitment to the primary sources of Islamic law – the *Qur'ân*, the *Hadith* and the *Sunnah*.

The book provides an account of eleven eminent scholars of Islam including Abu Hanifah (80/700–150/767), Malik ibn Anas (93/712 – 179/795), Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi (150/767 – 204/-819 or 820), Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164/781 – 241/856), 'Ali ibn Hazm (384/994), Zayd ibn 'Ali '(80/700 – 122/ 740) Ja'far al – Sadiq

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(80/700 – 148/765), 'Abdullah ibn 'Ibad', Jabir ibn Zayd (18 or 21/639 or 642 – 93/711), 'Izz al-Din ibn 'Abd al Salâm (578/1182-660/1262) and Ibn Taymiyyah (661/1263 – 728/1328). It is spread over ten main chapters, in addition to a foreword, Introduction, Epilogue and very valuable Index.

Infact, the book gives a detailed introduction of the founders of eight schools of Islamic Jurisprudence, the five Sunni Schools including the Zahiri School as well and the two Shia'h Schools and the Ibâdi School. The author focuses upon the mutual interaction and the reciprocity that existed between them besides providing an insight into the basis of their methodologies. The book also contains short notes on other scholars who were teachers or predecessors of these eminent scholars. In addition to this, the author separately gives an account of 'Izz al-Dîn ibn 'Abd al-Salam and Ibn Taymiyyah who made great and varied contribution to Islamic scholarship and influenced political and historical events. According to the author they had to come up with original rulings some of which particularly in the case of Ibn Taymiyyah, differed not only with his own school of *Fiqh*, but also with all the four popular schools. In the case of al-'Izz al-Dîn his contribution provided a turning point in history that Muslims today urgently need to emulate.

While giving a treatment to all these eleven eminent scholars separately, the author gives an account of their early life, their education and training, their times, contribution and eventually their impact on the Muslim society and at the same time he does not fail to give a brief description of their main works, wherever applicable.

In the chapter first of the book the author after giving a brief account of the early life of Imam Abû Hanîfa, comments that Kûfa was a city where different trends of knowledge had converged. Abû Hanîfa aimed to achieve full understanding of these four trends of *Fiqh* scholarship;

1) Umar's *Fiqh* based on what benefits people, which Abû Hanîfa learnt from Nafi', Ibn Umar's servant and transmitter of his learning ;2) 'Ali's *Fiqh* based on deduction and a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of Islamic Law ; 3) 'Abdullah ibn Masud's *Fiqh* based on analogy and 4) Ibn 'Abas's thorough knowledge of the *Qur'ân*. He acquired this from 'At: Ibn Abi Rabah in Makkah. The author also includes some of the descendants of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم among the teachers of Abû Hanîfa like Zayid ibn 'Ali' (d. 122 A.H.), Muhamad al-Baqir (d. 114 A.H) and 'Abdullah ibn al-Hasan (d.145 A.H.). Abû Hanîfa was undoubtedly the most distinguished student of Hammad ibn Abi Sulayman and when the latter died in 120 A.H., Abû Hanîfa succeeded him.

The author, while commenting on the high caliber of Abû Hanîfa, quotes one statement each of Imâm Shâfi and Imâm Mâlik stating "In *Fiqh* all people are dependent on Abu Hanîfa" and "Abû Hanifa is a true scholar of *Fiqh*" respectively. While referring to *Tarikh-i-Baghdâd* (Vol. 13, p 368), the author states that Abu Hanifa outlined his method in these words;

I rely on God's Book, and when I do not find applicable text, then I rely on the *Hadith* of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم when I have nothing available in either, I take what the Prophet's companion said, but I take any of their views when I have more than one. I do not leave what they say to take up any body else's view. When a question is left to Ibrahim al Sha'bi and al Hasan [i.e the Tabi'in scholars], they are simply people who endeavored to arrive at a ruling based on scholarly discretion. I will make my own.

The second chapter of the book deals with the life, career and contribution of Malik ibn Anas. Besides the list of his teachers, the author comments on Imam Malik's commendable book on *Hadith* entitled *al-Muwattâ*, wherein he mentions that Malik divides his book on the basis of the topics of *Fiqh* including *Ahadith* relevant to each topic as well as the prevailing practice in Madinah. Malik also refers to views of *Taba'in* and then records

his own views on the matter in question. The Maliki school of *Fiqh* remains predominant in South Africa as well as in the most of the Sub-Sahara African Countries.

In the third chapter of the book the author gives an elaborate account of life, career, contribution and works of Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i. Shafi'i recorded his disagreement with Imâm Malik in the book entitled *Khilaf Malik* and his disagreement with the Hanafi scholars in another book entitled *Khilaf al-'Iraqiyyin*. This established him as the founder of a third school of *Fiqh*. The author gives a detailed introduction of al-Shafi's other two works entitled *al-Risalah* and *al-Umm*. In *al-Risalah* al-Shafi' outlines the rules and methods of deduction and construction. Infact, the book deals with the new discipline of *Fiqh* methodology or *Usul al-Fiqh*. *Al-Umm*, the revised version of his *al-Hujjah*, is al-Shafi's great book on *Fiqh* in which he records his legal views on a variety of issues.

In chapter four the author gives an assessment of life, career and achievements of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, whose birth took place about fourteen years after Abû Hanîfa had passed away and fifteen years before the death of Imâm Mâlik. He was a student of Imam al Shafi', 'Abd al-Razâq ibn Hammam, Abû Yûsuf and Hushaym ibn Bashîr (d 183 A.H). The author asserts that despite the numerous trends of scholarship with which Baghdad was bustling at that time, Ahmad rejected any study that was not based on the *Qur'ân* and the *Hadith*. He would not take merely a logical approach to faith, nor would he discuss matters of faith in a purely rational or philosophical way. His *Fiqh* scholarship was based on his excellence in *Hadith*. When al-Bukhari completed his *Sahih* anthology, he chose Ahmad, one of his best known teachers, to review it for him.

The author in his explanatory note on *al-Musnad* of Ahmad affirms that the system of classification followed by him is different from that of other main anthologies of *Ahadith*. Al-

*Musnad* is classified according to the first reporter of each Hadith, which means that it relates all the *Ahadith* reported by one companion of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, regardless of subject matter. This method of classification is useful in knowing the scholarly standpoint and views of each companion of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The author then enumerates nine main characteristics of Imam Ahmad's *Fiqh*.

In chapter five and six the author gives an account of life, career and achievements of 'Ali ibn Hazm and Zayd bin 'Ali' respectively. The former whose name is synonymous with the *Zahiri* school of thought and *Fiqh*, wrote a commentary on *al-Muwatta*. Ibn Hazm according to the author was a scholar endowed with sharp memory, gifted intelligence and deep thinking. His writings cover a wide variety of subjects including some psychological studies; such as his famous book, *Tauq al-Hamamah* (Ring of the Dove), a five volume book devoted to explain the beliefs and practices of all religious sects, the author, however, does not mention the title of this work, *al-Ikham fi Usul al-Ahkâm* in four volumes, which is an in-depth study of *Fiqh* Methodology, *al-Muhalla*, which many scholars regard as the encyclopedia of Islamic *Fiqh*.

Zayd ibn 'Ali', the grandson of Husayn ibn 'Ali' (Rad. A) is regarded as the founder of *Zaydi* school. He authored a book entitled *al-Majmu'* on the subject of *Fiqh*. According to the author he was a great scholar having deep insight into *Qur'ân* and the *Sunnah* and contributed a lot in upholding the *Shari'ah* at a very critical juncture of the History.

In chapter seven of the book the author makes an assessment of the genealogy, education and contribution of Ja'far al-Sâdiq, the founder of Ja'afari school of Islamic jurisprudence with people like Abu Hanifa and Imam Malik among his students. His students achieved positions of excellence and high repute as

scholars of *Hadith*, *Fiqh* and history. The author outlines the Fiqh methodology of Jaf'ar al Sadiq in a lucid manner.

The author besides giving valuable account of Abdullah ibn Ibâd and Jabir ibn Zayd outlines the characteristics of Ibâdî school of *Fiqh* in the next chapter of the book.

The life education travels and contribution of "Izz al-Din Ibn 'Abd al-Salam and Ahmad 'Abd al Halîm Ibn Taymiyyah are given somewhat detailed treatment in the chapters nine and ten respectively. The author opines that 'Izz al Din belonged to the Shafi'i school of *Fiqh*, but he was a versatile scholar, qualified to exercise *ijtihad*, in order to establish new rulings on the basis of the *Qur'ân* and the *Sunnah* and authored a number of books including *Majaz al-Qur'ân*, *Qawa'id al-Ahkam* and *Shajarat al-Maa'rif Wal Ahwal*.

The author raises the position of Ibn Taymiyyah to that of a *Majtahid Mutlaq* who was qualified to make his ruling without having to refer to any school of *Fiqh*. His scholarship can be gauged from the fact that the great commentator of the *Qur'ân*, Ibn Kathir was among his students. Among his prominent works the author mentions *Dar' Ta'rud al-'Aql Wa'l Naql*, published in ten volumes, in which Ibn Taymiyyah substantiates that there can be no contradiction between religious evidence and rational thinking, *Daqa'iq al-Tafsir* which is a commentary on the *Qur'ân* and comprises four volumes. His ruling or *Fatawat* on all questions put to him which he answered in writing run into thirty seven (37) large volumes. The author while presenting Ibn Taymiyyah as a model scholar summarizes his views in these words:

He was ready to go to war with sword and armament when the danger is a military one, threatening the existence of the Muslim state. At the same time, he was ready to fight with his pen and argument when the danger was an intellectual one. He would not have minded any sort of disagreement based on understanding of the *Qur'ân* or the *Hadith*. But he was certainly a fighter when

people introduced into Islam some alien concepts or philosophies like the Sufis did when they introduced the concept of pantheism. Other alien concepts were introduced by philosophers who tried to superimpose Greek logic on the fundamentals of Islam.

Throughout the book the author seems very conscious about this fact to enlighten the readers that despite certain superficial differences between them (these great scholars of Islam) there existed the great spirit of *Akhuwah* and reciprocity. In this context he comments in his epilogue

the interaction is seen most clearly in a line of contacts in which we see al Shafi'i reading under Malik for nine years, and Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, the one who collected and documented all Abu Hanifa's scholarship, reading under Malik for three years during which he and al-Shafi'i were colleagues....

The book is a very commendable attempt in the right direction. It has content for both average readers as well as very serious scholars interested in studying the Islam in general and Islamic jurisprudence in particular. The author while providing biographical notes has referred to primary sources and the authentic secondary sources. The book is replete with the instances that can tend to generate interest and curiosity among the students of Islamic studies and feel proud of the legacy of the predecessor scholars that can prove to be a motivational force for the generations together to contribute dispassionately in an objective and responsible manner. The Islamic book foundation deserves special appreciation for this attempt.