

Notes and Brief Communications

**A Man for All Seasons:
Ibn ʿUqda and Crossing Sectarian Boundaries in the 4th/10th Century**

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Editor's Note

A previous version of this article was published in al-ʿUṣūr al-Wuṣṭā 20/2 (2008), 55-58. For unknown reasons, however, the published text was a draft version of the article that contained errors. Prof. Jonathan Brown offers here a revised and slightly expanded version of his article.

It is well known that the sectarian boundaries of classical Islam had not formed in the first, second or even third centuries AH – it was not until the dawn of the fourth century that we can say that the major boundary markers had been set. By the early 300/900's, Ibn Ḥanbal and his cohort had established the central tenets of the *Ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'a*,¹ with

1. The earliest datable mention of the phrase *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* that I have found is in the writing of Ḍirār b. ʿAmr (d. 200/815), who uses the phrase “*ṣāḥib sunna wa jamā'a*” dismissively to refer to what seems like early Sunnis, and he writes of the sultan supposedly thanking him for saving him from the “*ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a*”; Ḍirār b. ʿAmr, *Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*, ed. Hüseyin Hansu and Mehmet Keskin (Istanbul: Sharikat Dār al-Irshād; Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2014), 104, 130. The earliest datable usage by someone identifying with the term comes from al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), *Jāmiʿ*

scholars such as Abū al-al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-6) beginning to integrate rationalism and speculative theology into the expanding Sunni tent. Between 260/874 and 329/941 the final occultation of the twelfth Imam transpired, providing the defining element of Imami Shiism.

During the first two centuries of Islam, it was therefore not at all unusual for scholarly interactions and influences to occur that would seem impossible in the sectarian milieu of later classical Islam. Early scholars and ḥadīth transmitters later seen as pillars of Sunni Islam could be seen receiving ḥadīths from or studying with Shiite or Kharijite teachers, for example. Sometimes such common

al-Tirmidhī: kitāb al-zakāt, bāb mā jā'a fi faḍl al-ṣadaqa.

ground was explained through necessity. The second/eighth century Kufan ḥadīth scholar Jābir al-Juʿfī (d. 128/745-6) was so deeply ensconced in the often-extremist moil of early Shiite thought that even later Imāmī Shiites preferred to keep their distance from him.² But he appears in major Sunni hadith collections, such as the *Sunans* of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah. As the prominent second/eighth-century Sunni scholar Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812) said, “If not for Jābir al-Juʿfī, the people of Kufa would be without ḥadīths.”³ Other times Sunni scholars believed that a Shiite’s sectarian leanings did not affect his overall probity and reliability – Ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/848) says of one ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Sāliḥ: he may be a Shiite, but “he would rather fall from the sky than lie about half a word.”⁴

Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad Ibn ʿUqda, the subject of this article, is a fascinating case. A native of Kufa who died in 332/944, we need not attempt to determine his actual character or trace his life story. Suffice it to say that he was widely esteemed by all for his colossal memory (being in command of a corpus of at least 500,000 narrations) and his astounding library (600 camel loads).⁵ Most importantly for

2. Hussein Modaresi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shiʿite Literature Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 92.

3. *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī: kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb mā jāʿa fī faḍl al-adhān*. As the later Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Rajab pointed out, this is patently not true. Kufa enjoyed a slew of major ḥadīth transmitters in that era, such as al-Aʿmash and Abū Ishāq al-Sabīʿī; Ibn Rajab, *Sharḥ ʿIlal al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, 2 vols. (n.p.: n.p., 1398/1978), 1:69-70.

4. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh al-Baghdād*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1417/1997), 10:260.

5. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mizān* (Beirut:

us, Ibn ʿUqda represents a vestigial tract of common ground after the Islamic sectarian boundaries had reified. The Sunni, Imami Shiite and Zaydi Shiite traditions all accorded him great respect as a transmitter of revealed knowledge and as an architect of formalized Muslim scholarship; this despite their recognition of his strong sectarian leanings.

Sunni scholars and ḥadīth critics of the fourth/tenth century onwards leveled serious but not uncommon critiques at Ibn ʿUqda: he was a Shiite who narrated ḥadīths insulting the Companions in dictation sessions, with one ʿAbdān al-Ahwāzī saying that “Ibn ʿUqda exited the boundaries of the *Ahl al-ḥadīth*, and he should not be mentioned as one of them.” Another accusation was that he brought ḥadīth notebooks of highly dubious authenticity into Kufa and attributed them to Kufan teachers.⁶

These are noteworthy criticisms, but other Sunnis before and after Ibn ʿUqda (such as al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, d. 405/1014) were tarnished with comparably barbed accusations, and they remained none the worse for wear. What is salient about Ibn ʿUqda is that the criticisms about him were not limited to such clichéd and abstract accusations. They were tangible and highly objectionable. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) blames Ibn ʿUqda by name for circulating the forged hadith of the sun’s reversing itself miraculously so that ʿAlī could make up a prayer.⁷

Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 1:264.

6. Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mizān*, 1:265.

7. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ʿUthmān, 3 vols. (Medina: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1386-88/1966-68), 1:356-7. Aside from *isnād* criticisms, Ibn al-Jawzī and others pointed to the supposed ḥadīth contradicting

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) notes that one severe Shiite (al-‘Abbās b. ‘Umar al-Kalūdhānī, d. 414/1023) took unacceptable ḥadīths on the virtues (*faḍā’il*) of early Shiites narrated by Ibn ‘Uqda and attributed them to the widely admired Sunni chief judge of Kufa, al-Maḥāmīlī (d. 330/941).⁸

another Prophetic saying that the sun was only ever reversed for Joshua (*lam turadd al-shams illā ‘alā Yusha‘ b. Nūn*). For versions of the ḥadīth of the sun being reversed for ‘Alī, narrated through Asmā’ bt. ‘Umayy and al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (*kāna rasūl Allāh fi ḥujr ‘Alī wa huwa yūḥā ilayhi fa-lammā surriya ‘anhu qāla yā ‘Alī ṣallayta al-‘aṣr? fa-qāla lā, fa-qāla Allahumma innaka ta‘lamu annahu kāna fi ḥājatika wa ḥājat rasūlika fa-rudd ‘alayhi al-shams fa-raddahā ‘alayhi fa-ṣallā wa ghābat al-shams / annahu ‘alayhi al-ṣalāt*), see Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dūlābī (d. 310/923, of Rayy then of Egypt), *al-Dhurriyya al-ṭāhira al-nabawīyya* (Kuwait: al-Dār al-Salafiyya, 1407/1986), 91-2. Another version of the ḥadīth comes through Jābir from the Prophet (*anna al-Nabī amara al-shams fa-ta’akhharat sā‘atan min nahār*); Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muṣjam al-awsaṭ*, ed. Ṭāriq b. ‘Awaḍ Allāh al-Ḥusaynī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Ḥaramayn, 1415/1995), 4:224. The best amalgamation of these narrations was made by Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/932), *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūtī, 16 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1994), 3:92-104. Ibn al-Jawzī relied for parts of his criticism on al-‘Uqaylī (d. 323/934); Abū Ja‘far al-‘Uqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍu‘afā’ al-kabīr*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mu‘ṭī Amīn Qal‘ajī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1404/1984), 3:337. For other scholars who considered this ḥadīth to be forged, see Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Mizān al-i‘tidāl fi naqd al-rijāl*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, [n.d.], reprint of 1963-4 Cairo ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī edition), 3:170; Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1606), *al-Asrār al-marfū‘a*, ed. Muḥammad Luṭfī Ṣabbāgh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1986), 213, 397-8 (though he notes that al-Ṭabarānī and others included this ḥadīth via a ḥasan *isnād*); Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999 CE), *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ḍa‘īfa wa’l-mawḍū‘a* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1400/2000), 2:395-402 (an extensive discussion of the *isnād*

Yet Sunnis heaped praise on Ibn ‘Uqda as well. In his dictionary of criticized ḥadīth transmitters, Ibn ‘Adī (d. 365/976-7) calls him “a master of knowledge and memory, at the forefront of this science (*ṣāhib ma‘rifa wa ḥifẓ wa muqaddam fi hādhihi al-ṣan‘a*).” He adds that, if not for his commitment to mentioning all impugned ad/ transmitters in the book, he would otherwise have left such an esteemed scholar as Ibn ‘Uqda out. Abū Ya‘lā al-Khalīlī (d. 446/1054) calls Ibn ‘Uqda “one of the ḥadīth masters (*min al-ḥuffāz*

and *matn* flaws of the narrations). Many scholars, however, have considered this ḥadīth to be *ṣāḥiḥ*, for example al-Ṭahāwī (op. cit.), Qāḍī ‘Iyād (d. 544/1149), *Kitāb al-Shifā* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2002), 177 (it is *thābit*); Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-La’ālī’ al-maṣnū‘a fi al-aḥādīth al-mawḍū‘a*, ed. Ṣāliḥ Muḥammad ‘Uwayda, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1416/1996), 1:308-13 (he argues that, since no prophet was given a miracle without Muḥammad being given its like or better, and the sun was reversed for Joshua, then Muḥammad must have produced the same miracle); idem, *al-Khaṣā’iṣ al-kubrā*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, reprint of 1320/1902-3 Hyderabad edition), 2:82 (here al-Suyūṭī claims some of the *isnāds* for this ḥadīth meet the criteria of *ṣāḥiḥ*); Ismā‘īl al-‘Ajlūnī (d. 1748-9 CE), *Kashf al-khafā*, ed. Aḥmad Qalāsh (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, n.d.), 1:255-6, 516 (following al-Suyūṭī’s reasoning). Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791 CE) considered the ḥadīth to be reliable and offered rebuttals of Ibn al-Jawzī’s criticism. He notes how one of Ibn al-Jawzī’s objections is that once the prayer time ends the prayer is not admissible anymore even if sun returns. Al-Zabīdī presents scholarly opinions that, if the sun returns, then the time returns and performing the prayer becomes valid; Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn sharḥ Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Tārīkh al-‘Arabī, 1414/1994), 7:191-2. Abdallāh al-Ghumārī (d. 1993) says the ḥadīth is *ṣāḥiḥ*; al-Ghumārī, *Afḍal maqūl fi manāqib afḍal rasūl* (Cairo: Makatabat al-Qāhira, 2005), 24.

8. Al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 12:160.

al-kibār),” adding, “and he is the *shaykh* of the Shiites.” Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), no lover of Shiites, calls Ibn ‘Uqda “the ḥadīth master of his age and the oceanic ḥadīth scholar (*ḥāfiẓ al-‘aṣr wa al-muḥaddith al-baḥr*).” Al-Dhahabī says he even devoted a small book to just his bio.⁹

In his biographical dictionary of the Shāfi‘ī school of law, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) lists Ibn ‘Uqda as one of “the ḥadīth masters of the Shariah,”¹⁰ noting that vaunted Sunni ḥadīth scholars like al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995), Ibn al-Jī‘ābī (d. 355/966) and al-Ḥākīm all said, “I’ve never seen anyone with more mastery of ḥadīth than Ibn ‘Uqda.”¹¹ Al-Ḥākīm used Ibn ‘Uqda as a transmitter in his *Mustadrak*, a collection of ḥadīths he claimed met the lofty standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and al-Dāraquṭnī used him in his *Sunan*. In addition, other Sunni ḥadīth collectors such as al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) and al-Silafī (d. 576/1180) also included ḥadīths transmitted by Ibn ‘Uqda in their works. One story in particular seems to epitomize the grudging respect that Sunnis paid Ibn ‘Uqda for his expertise in ḥadīth. In his *Tārīkh*, Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Ḥāfiẓ tells that one Ibn Ṣā‘id narrated a ḥadīth the *isnād* of which Ibn ‘Uqda rejected. Ibn Ṣā‘id, however, had powerful connections, and Ibn ‘Uqda was dragged before the vizier to be interrogated about his insulting criticism. The vizier wanted to know who

9. Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, ed. Zakariyyā ‘Umayrāt, 4 vols. in 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1419/1998), 3:40-42.

10. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī and ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Hujr, 1413/1992), 1:314-6.

11. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:222.

could settle the matter, and no less a vaunted expert than Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938) was called in to consult. He sided with Ibn ‘Uqda.¹²

Furthermore, not only did leading Sunnis approve of Ibn ‘Uqda as a ḥadīth transmitter, they accepted him as a ḥadīth critic. In other words, they accepted his opinions on the worthiness of *other* ḥadīth transmitters. Both al-Dhahabī and Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 897/1402) list him as one of the authoritative ḥadīth transmitter critics,¹³ although al-Sakhāwī notes how he is an example of a critic whose opinions need to be considered in the light of his ideological/sectarian stances.¹⁴ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) uses him as a critical source in at least three biographies in his *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*. The earliest surviving evaluation of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim comes from Ibn ‘Uqda, and, in fact, he composed the earliest known *mustakhraj* on the basis of al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*.¹⁵

Ibn ‘Uqda is even used as an exemplar, and his scholarly works and opinions are cited as compelling precedent by later Sunnis. In his foundational work on the ḥadīth sciences, the *Jamī‘*, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī employs Ibn ‘Uqda as an

12. Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, 1: 266.

13. Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, “al-Mutakallimūn fī al-rijāl,” in *Arba‘ rasā’il fī ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 6th ed. (Beirut: Maktab al-Maṭbū‘āt al-Islāmiyya, 1419/1999), 111; al-Dhahabī, “Dhikr man yu‘tamadu qawluhu fī al-jarḥ wa’l-ta‘dīl,” *Arba‘ rasā’il*, 207.

14. Al-Sakhāwī, *Fath al-mughīth bi-sharḥ Alfīyyat al-ḥadīth*, ed. ‘Alī Ḥusayn ‘Alī, 5 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1424/2003), 4:363.

15. Al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 14:454; Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 127.

example of how it is acceptable for contemporaries to narrate from one another. In the anecdote provided by al-Khaṭīb, Ibn ‘Uqda’s Shiism is prominent. A scholar from Isfahan meets Ibn ‘Uqda in Kufa and asks to hear ḥadīths from him. When Ibn ‘Uqda discovered that the man was from Isfahan, he began railing against the city for being antagonistic to the Family of the Prophet and housing their enemies. To this the man replies that there are in Isfahan plenty of Shiites who love ‘Alī. Then Ibn ‘Uqda examined in him on whom he had studied with in Isfahan, responding angrily when the man admitted that he had not heard from people that Ibn ‘Uqda thought were superb. He was also upset that the man had not heard the *Musnad* of Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 204/820), since “its well spring is from Isfahan.”¹⁶

In his seminal work on the ḥadīth sciences, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) uses Ibn ‘Uqba’s allowing the narration by *ijāza* as proof of its acceptability (along with other examples like al-Khaṭīb and Dāraquṭnī).¹⁷ When Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Irāqī (d. 806/1404) rendered Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s book in poetic form, Ibn ‘Uqda’s name even graces a verse.

In the Zaydi Shiite ḥadīth tradition, Ibn ‘Uqda is seen as a founding figure (he seems to have espoused the Jārūdī Zaydi view). His book listing and identifying those people who transmitted ḥadīths from Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (some 4,000 in all) is seen by Zaydi scholars like Ṣārim al-Dīn al-Wazīrī (d. 915/1508) as the starting point of Zaydi

16. Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Jami‘ li-ikhtilāf al-rāwī wa ādāb al-sāmi‘*, ed. Muḥammad Ra‘fat Sa‘īd, 2 vols. (Mansoura, Egypt: Dār al-Wafā’, 1422/2002), 2:242.

17. Abū ‘Amr Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*, ed. ‘Ā’isha ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1411/1990), 343.

ḥadīth scholarship.¹⁸ Al-Wazīrī also notes that Ibn ‘Uqda wrote a book on the ḥadīth of Ghadīr Khumm, in which Muḥammad commands his followers to take ‘Alī as their master, mentioning a total of 105 chains of transmission for the report.¹⁹

Moving further away from Sunnism, Imami Shiites also held Ibn ‘Uqda in high esteem, this on the basis of his book on the students of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq as well as his commitment to preserving and transmitting the *uṣūl*, or the ḥadīth collections copied from the various Imams.²⁰ Etan Kohlberg notes that Imami Shiites respected him despite his Jārūdī Zaydi leaning. In fact, he was so prominent a transmitter in the four Shiite canonical ḥadīth collections that he was indispensable.²¹

Conclusion

It is not unusual to come across a major Sunni ḥadīth transmitter or prominent ḥadīth critic whose reputation was tarnished by *accusations* such as Shiism. But what is interesting about Ibn ‘Uqda is that he actually *was* Shiite -no one ever debated that. This would have been acceptable two hundred or even one hundred years earlier, before the

18. He was a main source for later Zaydi scholars; ‘Abdallāh Ḥamūd al-‘Izzī, *‘Ulum al-ḥadīth ‘ind al-zaydiyya wa al-muḥaddithīn* (Ṣa‘da: Mu‘assasat al-Imām Zayd b. ‘Alī, 1421/2001), 225.

19. Ṣārim al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīrī, *al-Falak al-dawwār fi ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth wa al-fiqh wa al-āthār*, ed. Muḥammad Yaḥyā ‘Azzān (Ṣa‘da: Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islāmī and Dār al-Turāth al-Yamanī, 1415/1994), 105.

20. Etan Kohlberg, “Al-Uṣūl al-arba‘umi’a,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987): 130-1.

21. Kohlberg, “Al-Uṣūl al-arba‘umi’a,” 130, 135.

categories of Sunni and Shiite had gelled. In the early to mid fourth/ninth century, however, Ibn ‘Uqda’s case is unique. That he became and remained a respected figure to three competing sectarian traditions (Sunnism, Zaydism and Imami Shiism), suggests that Muslim scholarly society had criteria for expertise that could transcend sectarianism. It is not unusual

to come across a ḥadīth transmitter in major Sunni ḥadīth collections who was accused of Shiism but was nonetheless accepted. But Ibn ‘Uqda, uniquely as far as I know, was accepted as a ḥadīth *critic*. It is interesting that we have no record that Ibn ‘Uqda ever contested charges that he was a Jārūdī Shiite – he was indeed a man for all seasons.