

The Depiction of Al-Bukhārī's travels in classical Islamic literature

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ABSTRACT

Travel (rihla) after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the geographically disparate locations of his companions made travelling for the acquisition of knowledge, and for the attainment of reliable ḥadīth an absolute necessity and it was regarded as a key component in the acquisition of this sacred knowledge. The present paper thus, investigates al-Bukhārī as a major figure in ḥadīth compilation. Furthermore, it discusses more specifically how he is perceived and exemplified in biographical literature (ṭabaqāt/tarājim). It subsequently, analyses the historical references (kutub al-tārīkh), in search of any possible subsidiary details. Finally, by providing a chronological listing of these sources and looking at the included and excluded details, also the possible and acceptable explanations of any incongruities befallen, the present paper will determine whether the information provided is consistent or if it is the subject of embellishment.

Keyword: *Rihla, ḥadīth, al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ, ṭabaqāt, tarājim*

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Introduction

When one engages in the study of Islamic history and civilisation, one will find exemplary individuals who have contributed to society and civilisation as a whole. As an example, one could perhaps mention ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (d.86/705) from the Umayyad Dynasty, who reforms the Arabic language and instructs the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. His son, Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d.96/715) is famed for building the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. From the Abbasid dynasty, Hārūn al-Rashīd (d.193/809) merits mentioning. He builds the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-Ḥikma*), as a major Abbasid public academy and intellectual centre in Baghdad. His son Al-Ma’mūn (d.218/833) during his reign expands the House of Wisdom further, sets up observatories and raises it to an unrivalled centre for the study of human and other sciences, including mathematics, astronomy, medicine, chemistry, zoology and geography. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d.504/1111) who synthesizes and unifies philosophy and Sufism into a systematic theology, is yet another name to remember in this connection.

Among those who have helped shaping up the history of Islam and who have contributed to the development of its sciences and civilisation, there are many other men and women one could refer to. These honourable scholars have been milestones in the history and tradition of Islam and therefore, subject of numerous pages devoted to them by the historians and biographers of Islamic studies and researches from their era to the present time. In the field of *ḥadīth* and its sciences in particular, the immense contribution made by such scholars as Muḥammad b. Isma‘īl al-Bukhārī (d.256/810) is specially worthy of mention. His magnum opus *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* more specifically, with its profound impact on the *ḥadīth* tradition and the genesis of its sciences, has been the prime interest of a number of commentators such as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 1449/852), in the commentaries they have devoted to it (Ibn Hajar,1969).

It should be noticed that after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, the geographically disparate locations of his companions make travelling for the acquisition of knowledge and in particular, for the attainment of reliable *ḥadīth* an absolute necessity. This has led to a major topos amid the early Muslim scholars amongst whom Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d.256/810) stands out. Al-Bukhārī plays a key role in travelling for the purpose of compiling and recording the most authentic *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muḥammad. The *ḥadīth* and the accounts of the Prophet’s sayings and actions are now well compiled in his magnum opus *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. This authentic collection has left a profound impact on the *ḥadīth* tradition

and the genesis of its sciences and is known to be the second most important source of Islamic law and practice after the *Qur'ān*.

Methodology

It has to be underlined that the concept of travel or *riḥla* itself is further, regarded as a key component in the acquisition of this sacred knowledge. This prompts a chronological study of the genesis of literature written on the subject, which commences from the early works of biographical dictionaries, such as those written by Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1002), Yūsuf b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī (d.743/1342) and Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Ḥajar al-Asqalānī (d.852/1449) amongst many others.

Results and Discussion

The terms, '*ilm*, *ṭalab al-'ilm* and *ṭālib al-'ilm* in Arabic language and their connotations in Islam may roughly be translated into English as 'knowledge', 'the search and quest for knowledge', and 'the seeker or hunter of knowledge', respectively. However, every term translated is a term distorted, regardless of the careful considerations devoted and the hard efforts made to find the most relevant and meaningful equivalent in English (Rosenthal,2006). In this context, the translation of '*ilm* from Arabic into English is no exception. 'Knowledge' in English is not a precise representative or a genuine equivalent of '*ilm* in Arabic and in fact, falls short of fully reflecting all the factual and emotional content of '*ilm*, in the Arabic language and Islamic culture (Rosenthal, 2006). It has to be noticed that '*ilm* despite of being widely translated as 'knowledge', should also be given the meaning of learning (Netton, 1995). In the Islamic tradition, '*ilm* is therefore, a concept that holds a significant importance as it has an impact on the intellectual, religious, political, and daily life of Muslims, and has indeed been a decisive factor in shaping up the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Islamic civilization. A good number of Muslim scholars such as Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d.463/1071) and Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) have written on the topic at length (Rosenthal, 2006).

As to the concept of *riḥla fī ṭalab al-'ilm*, the *ḥadīth* literature clearly reflects the link between the search for knowledge and the actual physical moving from place to place for its realization. This idea is underlined repeatedly in *ḥadīth* collections via such allusions such as the high value and status of teachers and the learned ones as the most noble people in any community, the outstanding merit of seeking and spreading knowledge, the importance of travelling as the ultimate means of searching for knowledge, and the possession of

knowledge as a sign of grace and the just indicator of rank and distinction amongst Muslims. Thus, travelling in classical Islamic thought and tradition is to provide the traveler with enlightenment whilst contributing to his/her intellectual abilities and improving his/her knowledge and insight to higher stages (Gellens,1990), a notion which is also attended to and underlined in certain verses of the *Qur'ān* such as in the following:

For there should separate from every division of them a group [remaining] to obtain understanding in the religion and warn their people when they return to them that they might be cautious (The Holy Qur'ān, 9:122).

From the perspective of *ḥadīth*, there are many instances, such as the following, where the idea of travelling in search of knowledge is referred to and advocated:

“One who treads a path in search of knowledge has his path to Paradise made easy by God” (Ibn Māja, 1998)

The above-mentioned quotes from the *Qur'ān* and the *ḥadīth* reflect the importance that Islam places on knowledge, its virtues and travelling in the pursuit of knowledge, which has consequently, led the idea to become a central and dominating theme and practice in Islam presenting the Islamic Civilization with its unique aspects and characteristics (Netton,1995). The merit of knowledge and its acquisition via travelling is particularly underscored in the collections of *ḥadīth* where separate chapters are devoted by the compilers to the notion of knowledge/ *‘ilm* and its magnitude.

The motive of travels as such however, goes beyond just the compilation of *ḥadīth*. It encompasses vaster domains and further, contributes to the materialization of such issues as those mentioned below:

1. Acquisition of *ḥadīth* /*Taḥṣīl al-ḥadīth*.
2. Authentication of *ḥadīth* and their legitimacy/*Al-Tathabbut fī l-ḥadīth*.
3. Identification of *ḥadīth* elevation in the chain of transmitters/*Ṭalab al- ‘uluw fī l-sanad*.
4. Inspection of the lives of the narrators of *ḥadīth*/*Al-Baḥth an aḥwāl al-ruwāt*.
5. Discussions with researchers and scholars regarding the critiques and defects of *ḥadīth*/*Mudhākarat al- ‘ulamā’ fī naqd al-aḥādīth wa ‘ilalihā* (Al-Baghdādī, 2016).

The intense and somewhat passionate interest in travelling for the purpose of scholarship in *ḥadīth* literature makes it a normative feature in Muslim education. Despite the influential and manipulative power of the local and regional traditions over the religious and intellectual life of people, early Muslims continue to foster their zeal and expand their

knowledge on the subject persistently and beyond any borders and boundaries the outcome of which is their mastery over the canonical syllabus of learning that encompasses the *Qur'ān*, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr* or explanation and exegesis, and the *qirā'a* or recitation, as it is widely referred to. These scholarly journeys are frequent and often lengthy both time-wise and in distance, and are also alluring. A knowledge traveller can pursue his studies in several different cities, be guided by as many scholars as he can access in each location and still wish for more trips until he returns home. Muḥammad b. Isma'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/810) is one vivid example of such knowledge explorers.

Muḥammad b. Isma'īl al-Bukhārī, a Scholar on the move

Abū 'Abd Allah, Muḥammad b. Isma'īl b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mughīra b. Bardizbah, al-Ju'fī, al-Bukhārī (d.256/810), is established as one of the most authoritative and greatest Muslim compilers and scholars of *ḥadīth*, with the heart of an explorer and the soul of a thinker. A Persian Muslim intellectual, historical sources have it that al-Bukhārī was born in 194/810 in Bukhara, Central Asia, now in Uzbekistan, during the reign of the 'Abbāsids, and died in 256/870, in Khartank, near the city of Samarkand. He is known to have begun learning the utterances and actions of the Prophet Muhammad by heart while still a child. His skill to learn and memorize traditions at the age of ten and even correcting his teachers, as he has been credited with, indicate his exceptional intellectual abilities. His remarkable memory is said to have guided the companions of his to correct the traditions and narratives they had written down according to what he recited by heart.

Al-Bukhārī is recognised as an extremely scrupulous *ḥadīth* compiler who has shown great critical discrimination and editorial skill in his selection of traditions as the authentic ones. The most valuable contributions of al-Bukhārī to the field of *ḥadīth* literature is his *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, which has taken him sixteen years to compile and complete. From a mass of approximately 600,000 traditions that he gathers, al-Bukhārī selects only about 7,275 *ḥadīth* that he estimates completely reliable and therefore, worthy of inclusion in his *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Al-Bukhārī, according to historical sources, does not insert a *ḥadīth* in the book before having first a bath and praying two units/*rak'a*. This collection of *ḥadīth* which claims to contain only *ḥadīth* of the highest authenticity and *ṣaḥīḥ* as its title suggests, belongs to the classified or *muṣannaḥ* category, since al-Bukhārī has arranged his collection of materials according to their subject matter (Ibn Hajar,1969).

Al-Bukhārī is from a wealthy family of landowners. His great-grandfather converts to Islam from Zoroastrianism in the hands of Yamān al-Ju‘fī, the Arab governor of the city at the time. Al-Bukhārī himself lives off properties he rents out on a monthly or yearly basis. He starts studying *ḥadīth* at a young age, learning from local Bukhārān experts, and in his late teens, he begins writing books on the sayings of the Companions and the Successors. His pilgrimage to Mecca at the of age sixteen is the beginning of a long career of travelling that connects him to the most praised *ḥadīth* scholars of all time.

In Khurāsān he visits Balkh, Marv and Naysābūr, where he studies with Ishāq b. Rahwayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stays in Rayy and make numerous trips to Baghdād, where he studies with Ibn Ḥanbal (d.241/855) and Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn (d.233/848). In Basra, he makes the acquaintance with ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī (d. 234/849), who later becomes one of his main mentors.

Al-Bukhārī’s studies take him further to Wasit, Kufa and Medina. In Mecca he puts himself in contact with ‘Abdalla b. al-Zubayr al-Ḥumaydī, a well-known Shafī’i jurisprudence scholar (d. 219/834), and becomes one of his pupils. His educative trips encompass also Egypt and such cities as ‘Asqalān and Ḥims in Greater Syria. Whether he actually visits the cities of upper Mesopotamia/al-Jazīra, and if he practically reaches Damascus is doubtful and still a subject of ongoing debates. However, Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, the late 10th early 11th century Isma‘ili scholar, in his *Tārīkh Naysābūr*, states that al-Bukhārī arrives in Naysābūr for the last time in 250/864–5. Al-Bukhārī passes away in the village of Khartank, a few miles from Samarqand, in the year 256/870 (Brown, 2007).

Al-Bukhārī has no doubt left behind a meaningful legacy in *ḥadīth* studies. For instance, Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/923), has pointed out that: “I have not seen beneath the heavens anyone more knowledgeable in *ḥadīth* than Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī.” (Ibn Hajar, 1968). Likewise, Ibn ‘Adī is said to have heard al-Bukhārī’s student, Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Firabrī (d.320/932), saying that al-Najm b. al-Faḍl has seen the Prophet Muhammad in a dream, with al-Bukhārī walking exactly in his footsteps right behind him (Ibn Hajar,1968).

Ibn Ḥanbal, the Arab Muslim jurist, theologian, ascetic, and *ḥadīth* traditionist (d.241/855), believes that the mastery of *ḥadīth* ends with four people from Khurāsān: Abū Zur‘a (d. 264/878), al-Bukhārī, al-Dārimī (d. 255/869) and al-Ḥasan b. Shujā‘ al-Balkhī (d.266/880). Ibn al-Nadīm, the Arab Muslim bibliographer (d.385– 8/995–8), registers al-Bukhārī as one of the sixty-three transmission-based jurists in Islamic history, whom along

with some others such as Sufyān al-Thawrī, the great *ḥadīth* compiler (d.161/778), 'Alī b. al-Madīnī, the Sunni Islamic scholar in the science of *ḥadīth* (d.234/849), and al-Tirmidhī, the Persian Islamic scholar and *ḥadīth* collector (d.279/892), he describes simply as the experts and trustworthy narrators/*thiqa* (Ibn Hajar,1968).

As for the portrayal and implementation of al-Bukhārī's scholarly travels and expeditions in the early sources, the present study focuses on selecting the most popular and common sources amongst the biographical dictionaries chronologically, and on including other sources in different genres in order to identify and avoid any possible exaggerations and / or inconsistencies in the information accessed. As mentioned earlier, the sources directly related to al-Bukhārī and his works and educative travels are myriad, vast and varied, which makes the present article limit itself to those commonly known as the most popular ones and that are mainly oriented towards the biographical dictionaries and history (*al-ṭabaqāt wa al-tarājim wa al-tārīkh*), as well as to the sources which focus on *ḥadīth* transmitters (*kutub al-rijāl*), and *ḥadīth* commentaries (*shuruh al-ḥadīth*).

A biographical dictionary in a general term could be described as a prose work and a type of encyclopaedic primarily structured over a series of biographies, and which is limited to biographical information regardless of their order of succession (Qādī,1995). Based upon this definition, the works that fall into the category of biographical dictionaries in the Arabic Islamic library are to be one of the two following kinds. The first one is the General Biographical Dictionaries which contain biographies, historical and critical accounts and events of the lives of people from all walks of life, professions, epochs, places, ranks, beliefs, lifestyle and related issues, from the earliest evidences to those of the present time. Two reputable examples of this category are one, the voluminous *al-Wāfi bi l-Wafayāt* by Ṣalaḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī's (d. 764/1362), and the other, the massive volume of *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* by Ibn 'Imād al-Ḥanbalī's (d. 1089/1678).

The second type of biographical dictionaries is known as The Restricted Biographical Dictionaries. The dictionaries in this category encompass biographies of people who share one common, yet specific, trait. These individuals most frequently belong to the same academic discipline/s. For instance, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d.911/1505), in his *Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssirīn* records only the biographies of the interpreters of the *Qur'ān* whereas Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī (d.742/1341), devotes his *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* to the transmitters of *ḥadīth*, and Abū Ishāq al-Shirāzī (d. 476/1083), in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā* provides his readers with the lives of the jurists among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (Qādī,1995).

One of the most noticeable features of the Arabic biographical dictionaries is perhaps the fact that they do not make an appearance until the beginning of the third/ninth century as the emergence of Ibn Sa'd's (d.230/845) *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* and Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī's (d. 231/846) *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-Shu'arā*, being the two earliest extant dictionaries, indicate. This by itself is a highly noteworthy issue since it shows that the genre of biographical dictionaries evolve in Islamic civilisation at the time when the civilisation starts to develop a clear self-image, and when it initiates reaching towards formalizing its stances and perspectives. The Arabic Biographical Dictionaries, therefore, form a genre which is by no means preliminary or simple rather, one which is the product of the age that the civilisation it arises from starts to develop and thrive. There are however, indications that this genre is preceded by the single biography, or monograph being seemingly a simpler genre of writing (Qādī,1995).

As to al-Bukhārī in this landscape, very few brief biographies and references appear in the literature of the 4th/ 10th century such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī's (d.327/938) *al-Jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*, Ibn Ḥibbān's (d.354/965) *Kitāb al-majrūhīn*, and Ibn al-Nadīm's (d.385–8/995–8) *al-Fihrist*. More details and information on al-Bukhārī's life and career are given in such sources like Ibn 'Adī al-Jurjānī's (d.365/975–6) two-volume book titled: *al-Kāmil fī ḍu'afā' al-rijāl* and *Asāmī man rawā 'anhum Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī min mashāyikhīhī alladhīna dhakarāhum fī Jām'ī ihī al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.

It must be acknowledged that *Tārīkh Naysābūr* by al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, the leading traditionist of his age (d.405/1014), is the earliest comprehensive source regarding al-Bukhārī (Al-Jurjānī, 140). Although now lost, this work is quoted at length by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, (d.463/1071), in his *Tārīkh Baghdād* also by al-Dhahabī (d.748/1348), a famed Islamic historian and *ḥadīth* expert, in his *Tārīkh al-Islām*. A few fragments of *Tārīkh Naysābūr* have survived being embedded in an eighth/fourteenth-century abridgement by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn Khalīfa (d.720/1320)(Brown, 2013, p.64).

Further and more detailed accounts on al-Bukhārī are provided by *Muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth* and *Rijāl al-ḥadīth/ Kutub al-rijāl*, being the genre that lays stress upon the science of *ḥadīth* also on the transmitters of *ḥadīth*. The literatures that fall in the genre of *Muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth* are strongly associated with the study of the reporters of *ḥadīth/rijāl al-ḥadīth*. In order to scrutinise the reporters of a *ḥadīth* carefully, the authenticating or disparaging remarks made by the recognised critics in the field, whether among the Successors (*Tābi'īn*), being the generation of Muslims who followed the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad, or those

after them, are no doubt crucial and greatly helpful. The earliest remarks cited in the books of *Rijāl al-ḥadīth* go back to a host of Successors and those after during the first three centuries of Islam. Amongst the earliest available works in this area *The Tārīkh* of Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn (d. 233/848), *Ṭabaqāt* of Khalīfa b. Khayyāt (d. 240/854), *Tārīkh al-kabīr* of al-Bukhārī, *al-Jarḥ wa al-ta’dīl* of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī and *Ṭabaqāt* of Muḥammad b. Sa‘d (d. 320/932) could be mentioned.

The first major such work is the ten-volume collection of biographies of *ḥadīth* narrators authored by ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī (d.600/1204), a classical scholar and a prominent *ḥadīth* master. Interestingly enough under the biography of al-Bukhārī in this book al-Maqdisī points out that:

raḥal fī ṭalab al-‘ilm ilā sā’ir al-amṣār, wa katab bi Khurāsān wa al-Jibāl wa mudun al-Irāq kullihā wa al-Hijāz wa al-Shām wa Miṣr wa warad Baghdād dafa ‘āt’

He (al-Bukhārī) travelled to all of the cities for the acquisition of knowledge. He wrote (ḥadīth) in Khurāsān and Jibāl, in all of the cities of Iraq, Hijāz, Shām and Egypt and he came to Baghdād many times (Al-Maqdisi, 2014, p.133).

Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī (d.742/1341) subsequently prepares an edited and abridged version of this work but with a number of proofs and additional information regarding the names, places and the reporters’ countries of origin. Al-Mizzī titles his book *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī asmā’ al-rijāl* and presents it in several volumes. It is interesting to see that the information given here under the biography of al-Bukhārī is the same as what his predecessor has stated in his edition (Al-Mizzi, 2014, p.431).

Furthermore, al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347) who is one of al-Mizzī’s pupils, summarises his teacher’s work and produces two abridgements: a longer one called *Tadhhīb Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā’ rijāl*, and a shorter one titled *al-Kāshif fī asmā’ al-rijāl al-kutub al-Sitta*. In these books of his being the summarized versions of his teacher’s work, al-Dhahabī adopts the same wording to describe the travels of al-Bukhārī (Al-Dhahabi, 2004, p.32).

Likewise, similar efforts are made by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, (d. 852/1448), who rewrites the work of al-Mizzī and produces a lengthy but abridged version in twelve shorter volumes with about one-third of the original materials being excluded, and titles it *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*. In this work, Ibn Ḥajar delves into searching the status and virtues of al-Bukhārī

leaving aside the travel pursuits that he has engaged himself with in search of authentic *ḥadīths* themselves (Ibn Hajar, 1996, p.47). Later, he abridges his work further to a relatively humble two-volume book which he calls *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*. This book being an abridged version of the above mentioned work, bears only the rank and virtue of al-Bukhārī in the field of *ḥadīth* as they are stated by Ibn Ḥajar as well as his age which is specified after he passes away (Ibn Hajar, 1996, p.825).

The commentaries or *shurūḥ* on *ḥadīth* as a genre, play an important role in the formation of systematic commentaries and interpretations in the study of *ḥadīth* collections. As for al-Bukhārī more specifically, there are numerous commentaries on his *ḥadīth* collection *al-Jāmi‘al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. However, when it comes to discussing al-Bukhārī’s travels and his persistent passion for and his pursuits of knowledge, the allusions become strikingly scarce and/or undetailed. In this orbit, the Shāfi‘ī *ḥadīth* scholar Ḥamad b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (d.388/998) is the first to compile a commentary titled *‘Alām al-ḥadīth* on al-Bukhārī’s *al-Jāmi‘al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. He however, delves into the *ḥadīth* without shedding any lights on al-Bukhārī himself (Al-Khattabi, 2007, p.107).

Following the work of al-Khaṭṭābī, there is the *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* penned by ‘Alī b. Khalaf b. Baṭṭāl al-Qurṭubī (d.449/1057). Ibn Baṭṭāl’s work is regarded as the second commentary written on the *al-Jāmi‘al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Between these two scholars there are however, three more commentaries on al-Bukhārī’s *ḥadīth* collection which are lost over the course of history. These works are authored by al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Dāwūdī, a Mālikī jurist born in the north of Ifrīqiya (d. 402/1012), Muhallab b. Aḥmad b. Abī Ṣufra (d.435/1044) and his student Muḥammad b. Khalaf al-Murābiṭ al-Andalūsī (d.485/1092), who produces a summarised version commentary (Ibn Baṭṭāl, 2003, p.37). Ibn Baṭṭāl, just like his predecessor al-Khaṭṭābī, commits himself to simply writing commentaries on the *ḥadīth* he undertakes and avoids paying any serious attention to or discussing their compiler al-Bukhārī.

The methodology applied by the commentators in their commentaries up to this point of time is therefore, governed by focusing on the investigation and evaluation of al-Bukhārī’s *ḥadīth* with no attempt to discuss his lineage, background and more importantly his travels. However, a slight shift of interest starts dawning in the content of the commentaries produced from this date on. For instance, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad notably known as Ibn al-Munīr al-Iskandarānī (d. 683/1284), in his *al-Mutawārī ‘alā abwāb al-Bukhārī* applies an approach which shows a slight contrast to the methodology implemented by his predecessors in the sense that he does in fact, provide a brief account on the background of al-Bukhārī. Albeit

relatively very succinct, al-Iskandarānī's quotes when referring to the travels of al-Bukhārī, come directly from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī in a single paragraph (Ibn al-Munayyir, 1990, p.40).

In the same spirit, Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Kirmānī (d.786/1384) compiles his *al-Kawākib al-Darārī*, where he underlines '*raḥal raḥalāt wāsi'a* / he travelled extensively' in the introduction he gives on al-Bukhārī. Nonetheless, there is no sign of diving below the surface as he provides no specific indications of any of the towns and cities that al-Bukhārī travelled to in the pursuit of *ḥadīth* knowledge (Al-Kirmānī, 2010, p.11).

Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad, famously known as Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d.795/1393), is yet another commentators of al-Bukhārī who pens *Fath al-Bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* but gives no introduction on him, neither does he mention anything in relation to the travel pursuits of al-Bukhārī (Ibn Rajab, 1996).

The commentary of Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d.852/1448), *Fath al-Bārī* is looked upon as one of the most valued and popular commentaries written on the *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (Ludweg, 2009, p136). It is a rather massive work, yet with the exception of a brief introduction, lacks any discussion devoted by Ibn Ḥajar to the biography and travel pursuits of al-Bukhārī. However, Ibn Ḥajar in another work of his titled *Hidāyat al-Sārī* (Ibn Hajar, 2011) focuses exclusively on the biography and intellectual merits of al-Bukhārī including his travels in search of knowledge (Lewis, 1986, p.776). Likewise, it must be underlined that further attention has been paid to al-Bukhārī by Ibn Ḥajar in his *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, where his quests and educative travels albeit partially, are looked into (Ibn Hajar, 2017).

Likewise, Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī (d.855/1453), a scholar of the Hanafī school of law and also a contemporary of Ibn Ḥajar in his commentary '*Umdat al-Qārī*, brings al-Bukhārī's travels into view in a brief quotation from him saying that:

aqamtu bi l-Baṣara khams sinīn, ma'ī kutubī uṣannif wa aḥujj kulla sana wa arji' min Makka ila l-Baṣara,

I stayed in Baṣra for five years compiling my books and I would perform Hajj every year and I would return from Mecca to Baṣra (Al-'Aynī, 2005, p.5).

Further attempts in this orbit are materialised by Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qastalānī (d.923/1517), another scholar specialized in *ḥadīth* and theology (El-Rouayheb, 2015, p.273). In his commentary *Irshād al-Sārī*, al-Qastalānī provides exhaustive detailed

accounts of the travel pursuits of al-Bukhārī which are mainly and mostly disregarded or left not fully explored in the commentaries of Ibn Ḥajar and his counterparts. The detailed accounts that Al-Qastalānī provides of the travels of al-Bukhārī are however, similar to those provided by Muslim historians such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī in his *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām* (Al-Baghdādī, 1966).

The books written on the history/*Tārīkh* of Islam provide generally details and extensive information about a particular period of time and its dignitaries and such popular scholars as al-Bukhārī. In the case of al-Bukhārī in particular, it is especially fascinating to see that the books in this genre present the reader with a rather complete index of al-Bukhārī's teachers and students, his works, and his date of birth and death and so forth, but skip any information regarding his reasons for embarking upon the study of law, or any explanation for his professional successes and failures and his personality quirks as the possible reason for all that. The provided such details in the present article are thus, mainly drawn from the references in the genre of commentaries of *ḥadīth* or *shurūḥ al-ḥadīth*, and the books related to the narrators and transmitters of al-Bukhārī known as *kutub al-rijāl* (Cooperson, 2000, p.3).

Thus far, in each of the two genres of history and commentary, there are books that provide information on al-Bukhārī's travels, and books that pass by the issue entirely perhaps to avoid repetitions. It must be underlined that the information recounted in the related books is precisely identical and each author seems to have copied exactly the same information into his work. Furthermore, the details provided on the travels of al-Bukhārī do indeed stipulate the towns and the cities he visits to collect *ḥadīth*, as discussed already.

As to the ongoing activities and events in those towns however, the sources in the said genres encompass no details but make a wealth and plethora of information available to the readers regarding al-Bukhārī himself. What is also distinctive in each genre is that each author in that genre provides his own specific chain of transmission or *isnād* with relatively an identical report which reinforces and contributes to the validity of the information provided. The following few examples from the books written on the history of Islam/*Tārīkh al-Islam*, are to shed some lights on the mentioned approach, which is applied in these books to project the travels of al-Bukhārī.

Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d.463/1071) compiles *Tārīkh Baghdād* or The History of Baghdad, which is considered to be a very important work in the history of Islam (Ibn Hajar, 2014, p.45). *Tārīkh Baghdād*, whilst being a history book recounting often chronological past events and developments, further explores the activities of the scholars,

when for instance narrating the trips which certain scholars and intellectuals undertake in the pursuit of knowledge, and the extent to which the intellectual movement in various Islamic cities are spread. The greatest significance of *Tārīkh Baghdād* without doubt lies in the field of *ḥadīth*. In this book, al-Baghdādī recounts the biographies of a plethora of *ḥadīth* narrators from more than seven thousand biographies and details them alphabetically (Brown, 2015, p.227).

In the fragment devoted to al-Bukhārī, al-Baghdādī after presenting his genealogy, provides his chain of transmission and states the following lines on the travels of al-Bukhārī:

'raḥal fī ṭalab al- 'ilm ilā sā'ir al-amṣār, wa katab bi Khurāsān wa al-Jibāl wa mudun al-Iraq kullihā wa al-Hijāz wa al-Shām wa Miṣr wa warad Baghdād dafa 'āt'.

He (al-Bukhārī) travelled to all cities and towns for the acquisition of knowledge and he wrote (ḥadīth) in Khurāsān and Jibāl and in all of the cities of Iraq, Hijāz, Shām and Egypt and he came to Baghdād many times (Al-Baghdādī, 1966, p.322)

Another historian, 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Hibat Allah b. 'Abd Allah, famously known as Ibn 'Asākir (d.571/1176), writes *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq* or *The History of the City of Damascus*. This book which is regarded as one of the most important books written about the Islamic history of Syria, embraces the life of important people who have resided in or visited Damascus. 'Asākir's collection is not limited to the assessment of the narrators of *ḥadīth 'ilm al-rijāl*, it goes much further and includes the historical and political figures as well (Lindsa, 2001). The full and lengthy accounts provided in this book in relation to the scholars and personalities introduced, are the evidence of Ibn 'Asākir's endeavours to collect all possible source materials which are written about these personalities. The Authenticity of the materials presented however, is debatable and demands minute verification and research studies.

Ibn 'Asākir's book shows also the attention that the author pays to specifying the complete chain of narration or *isnād* and further, contains an impressive collection of Arabic poems (Ibn 'Asākir, 2010). Although Ibn 'Asākir in his accounts on al-Bukhārī does not follow the same path as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī does, he does indeed, underline that al-Bukhārī has heard his *ḥadīth* in Dimashq (*sami'a bi Dimashq*), and then continues by

providing the names of the provinces and cities, namely Mecca, Hims, ‘Asqalān, Rayy, Khurāsān, al-‘Irāq and Baṣra that al-Bukhārī has visited.

Ibn ‘Asākir seems to have been more than al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī interested and specific in providing information about the cities. Nonetheless, there is a report where the works of both authors exemplify al-Bukhārī’s travels such as his visiting Shām and Egypt, as seen below:

‘rubba ḥadīth sami ‘tuh bi l-Baṣara katabtuh bi al-Shām wa rubba ḥadīth sami tuh bi al-Shām katabtuh bi Misr’,

Many ḥadīth I heard in Basra I wrote in Shām and many ḥadīth I heard in Shām I wrote in Egypt (Ibn ‘Asākir, 2010).

Ibn ‘Asākir and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, both provide similar accounts in their works although at times with different chains of narration.

In the same relation, there is *Wafayāt al-‘A’yān*, a work which has been considered to be of high importance due to its contribution to the civil and literary history of Islam and Muslims, authored by the 13th century Shāfi‘ī scholar, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm, famously known as Ibn Khallikān (d.681/1282) (Adamec, 2009, p.139). In this book, Ibn Khallikān references al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī with the same quotation: *‘raḥal fī ṭalab al-‘ilm ilā sā’ir al-amṣār’*, but provides just a very minimal account of al-Bukhārī’s intellectual achievements and travels (Ibn Khallikān, 1982, 188).

Further, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, the historian and *ḥadīth* expert (d.748/1348), in his *Tārīkh al-Islām*, which is considered to be the largest biographical encyclopaedia of Islam (De Somogyi, 1932, p.815) inserts the same information as al-Baghdādī but in different chains of narration (Al-Dhahabī, (1987,p.140). Al-Dhahabī however, has compiled another two books: *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāz* and *Siyar ‘alām al-nubalā’*, wherein the latter is more informative than the former in providing the names of the cities al-Bukhārī has visited (Al-Dhahabī, 1992).

The mentioning of al-Bukhārī’s travels and the idea behind them is also attended to by Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, a historian and a student of al-Dhahabī (d.764/1363), in his *al-Wāfi bi l-wafayāt*, which is established as one of the most important biographical dictionaries of Islamic and Arab civilisation (Rosenthal, 2012). However, al-Ṣafadī in specifying the names of the places al-Bukhārī has visited, copies everything from al-Dhahabī (Al-Ṣafadī, 2013, p.148).

Further indications of the same nature could be seen in *Al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya*, which is a compilation materialised by Ismā'īl b. Kathīr, a highly influential historian, exegete and scholar during the Mamluk era in Syria (d.774/1373). Here under the section of al-Bukhārī one reads that:

'fa aqāma bi Makka yaṭlub bihā al-ḥadīth thumma raḥal ba'd dhālik ilā sā'iri mashāyikh al-ḥadīth allatī amkanathu al riḥla ilayhā wa katab 'an akthar min alf shaykh wa qad dhakhal Baghdād thamān marrāt'

He (al-Bukhārī) stayed in Mecca to study ḥadīth then after that he travelled to the scholars of ḥadīth where possible and he wrote ḥadīth from more than a thousand scholars and he visited Baghdād eight times (Ibn, Kathīr, 2009, p.24).

Ibn Kathīr, as one sees in the aforementioned statements, does not give any details here about the places that al-Bukhārī has visited except for Baghdad.

And Lastly in this landscape, Ibn 'Imād al-Ḥanbalī (d.1089/1678), a historian and theologian of the Hanbali school from Syria in his *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī akhbāri man dhahab*, which is a rather lengthy biographical dictionary encompassing the first ten centuries of Islamic history, speaks of al-Bukhārī. Ibn 'Imād too, uses the same quote from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī:

'raḥal fī ṭalab al-'ilm ilā sā'ir al-amṣār, wa katab bi Khurāsān wa al-Jibāl wa mudun al-Irāq kullihā wa al-Ḥijāz wa al-Shām wa Miṣr'

He (al-Bukhārī) travelled to all of the cities for the acquisition of knowledge. He wrote (ḥadīth) in Khurāsān and Jibāl, in all of the cities of Iraq, Hijāz, Shām and Egypt (Ibn 'Imād, 1966, 253).

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be underlined that travel or *riḥla* from the early days of Islam has played a very important role in crystallising the Islamic sciences and education. Inspired and influenced by the verses of the *Qur'ān*, the sayings of the prophet Muhammad and *ḥadīth* in relation to the value and significance of travel and travelling, also guided by their own beliefs in and perspective of travelling as a virtuous and worthy initiative, Muslim scholars of various scientific disciplines have devoted considerable portions of their lives to travel in the pursuit of knowledge. As seen in the discussions above, an interesting number of scholars have

thrived in each era by writing, contributing and recording the data of their forerunners and predecessors.

In this tapestry, al-Bukhārī as a prominent scholar in the field of *ḥadīth*, stands out. This is mainly and mostly due to the attention paid to him in the course of Islamic history, and the discussion materialised upon his life and works by the researchers and authors in different genres, whether history or commentary and science of *ḥadīth*, to portray his personality and merits as an intellectual and a scholar of *ḥadīth*.

Interestingly, the information provided by historians and commentators on al-Bukhārī's genealogy and hagiography, and in this context his travels, is comprehensive, concrete and substantial. However, when it comes to the details of his travels the information presented is often unspecific, relatively limited and at times scarce in comparison.

Although al-Bukhārī's travels and the cities and places he has passed through for the sake of his *ḥadīth* compilation are reported in various sources, the details of his activities and the happenings in those places are left unattended and remain thus, obscure.

It is worth noticing that the collectors who make allusions to al-Bukhārī and his travels, regardless of the genre they belong to, often heavily rely on one another in the information they provide, and in fact the similarity of the accounts narrated suggest strongly that they have copied them from each other, which indeed exclude them from being genuine and reduces their value for being questionable first-hand materials.

Furthermore, the descriptions related to al-Bukhārī and his travels in the genres of history and commentary also *riḥla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth* are sometimes thorough and in-depth and other times brief and blurred. The chains of transmission however, is mentioned in each genre which is a unifying factor of the sources included in that genre and if followed up and compared in various sources, can in fact contribute to the corroboration of the reports presented in those sources. The latter issue however, demands further studies and investigation in the chains of transmission, which is beyond the immediate scope of the present article.

Al-Bukhārī's stepping back in time travels in the genre of *riḥla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth* is a domain which has not yet been fully explored and merits many more detailed comparative studies. In this orbit the most thorough work amongst the available sources so far is *Tārīkh Baghdād* (The History of Baghdad), compiled by Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. In providing information on al-Bukhārī, all the sources that follow al-Baghdādī's *Tārīkh*

Baghdād rely heavily on the materials presented in this book in order to discuss al-Bukhārī's pursuit of knowledge in the framework of *riḥla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth* genre.

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