With the vastly expanding use and popularity of the world wide web in the closing decade of the 20th century, Muslims began presenting themselves on the web through trusted texts, images and stories. This transmission includes hadith, the sayings and acts of the Prophet. Studying the transmission of the hadith through the internet and its function in the on-line discourse helps in understanding the conception of a new discourse of Islamic jurisprudence. Through the description of different formats of hadith, it is possible to analyse the complex relation between the texts and the new medium.

The relation between text and medium changes over time and space, because of the varying cultural systems in which messages are produced and the ongoing development of information technologies, among other factors, to transmit it. A comparison between the printed and on-line hadith is necessary for understanding in which ways the ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ traditions differ, but that is not enough. A tradition is also a transmission protocol, so a description of technical characteristics of the internet can be useful for understanding how the information circulates and by whom it is produced and consumed.

Hadith means news, but in this particular case it denotes the news about the Prophet transmitted by way of his companions and later generations of Muslims. As the imitation of Muhammad’s example is a moral and legal principle, too, the hadith constitutes next to the Quran one of the most important sources of Islamic jurisprudence and theology.

The oral transmission of the hadith was soon replaced by written transmission, being a more efficient means of communicating them over the rapidly expanding Muslim world. In written format it was also easier to control their authenticity and limit the production of apocrypha. The source of a particular hadith led to the composition of a number of canonical hadith collections, known as the six books – the six books – six books. Most of the canonical collections are canonical, as such.

A traditional hadith is composed of two parts: the chain of transmitters, usually called the guarantee of authenticity, and the message or text, matn. But in written works, as in oral discourses, they are often introduced by the Prophet said without citing the chain of authorities. This makes it difficult to verify whether the hadith are actually taken from one of the classical compilations.

**Hadith on the web**

The web can be found either complete or incomplete, or in different formats, either simple text and colourful images, or audio files, and sometimes used for decorating web sites and electronic postcards. Through the same medium, some hadith and verses of the Quran have been used since early Islamic times for decorating mosques and objects. For centuries they have been used in elaborated calligraphy. More recently, they can be found written on walls as political slogans.

Apart from presenting their CVs, Muslim authors sometimes present themselves on personal homepages with a collection of hadith, in particular when they explain the main features of Islam and its civilization. Sometimes even hadiths related to the holy or divine sayings attributed, albeit indirectly, to God – are presented (see www.ifrance.com/abchir-m). The analysis of all these texts and verify the quality of the translations. The same is true for establishing whether the hadith collection on-line have been published on-line without any modifications.

The most common collections on-line comprise, in order of importance, the following:

- The complete Bukhari collection, As-Sahih, is to be found on two web sites: Al Islam, (www.al-islam.com) and the Iman Student Association (MSA) of the University of South California’s site (www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/index.html). The latter is translated by Muhsein Khan. Fifteen other web sites copied or linked their pages to this website. Among them, French and Arabic versions are available on 22 home pages. In French no complete collection is available on the web.

- The complete Abu Muslim collection, As-Sahih, is available in Arabic on the Al-Islam site and, translated into English by Syyid Abdul Hameed, on the MSA site. Thirteen web sites are linked to the latter. In French there is no full collection as it has not been completely translated. There are three web sites that publish the Imam An-Nawawi’s translation of English, translated by Denis Johnson Davies and Ezzeddin Ibrahim. In Arabic there is only one site. Al-Ilm translated into French, and the siteCentre Islamique de la Reunion, www.islam.ifrance.fr/islam, and Les Nessonaren Islamiques, www.chez.com/ akbouhama), translated by The International Islamic Federation of Students (Kuwait).

The language-author ratio is similar to that of the printed production of hadith in Western languages. Most of the on-line hadith are in English and the Imam Bukhari’s As-Sahih is certainly the most published collection – on the web as well as in print. Most of these web sites are created by Muslim students in the US or are hosted by American servers. The most important centres of production of English books, however, are located in the Indian Subcontinent and managed by professional editors.

### Hadith On-line: Writing Islamic Tradition

Notes


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