

The Ḥadīth in Christian-Muslim Dialogue in 19th Century India

Alan M. Guenther

“The light in which we view the stories of former times, varies with the medium through which they have been handed down to us”. So wrote William Muir (1819–1905) in 1853 to start his biography of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹ This fundamental assertion led him to challenge the reliability of the Ḥadīth, the collection of traditions on which early Muslim history is based. Muir went on to publish a four volume history of Muḥammad, followed later by other histories of Islam after the death of Muḥammad.² But it was his *Life of Mahomet* which had the greatest impact, both on European and Indian Muslim views of the Ḥadīth and of the historiography of early Islam.³ Muslims such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) felt compelled to respond to Muir’s critical assessment of both the historical sources and the character of Muḥammad.⁴ In the process of writing a rebuttal, these Muslim scholars at times defended the traditional Muslim approach to writing history, while at other times adopted European methodologies and adapted them for their purposes. Christian missionaries working in India also made use of Muir’s history, finding it useful in

1 William Muir, ‘Sources for the Biography of Mahomet’, *Calcutta Review* 19 (1853), 1–80.

2 William Muir, *The life of Mahomet and history of Islam to the era of the Hegira: With introductory chapters on the original sources for the biography of Mahomet, and on the pre-Islamite history of Arabia*, vol. 1–2, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1858; vol. 3–4, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861. The subsequent historical works were *Annals of the Early Caliphate*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1883; *The Caliphate, Its Rise, Decline, and Fall*, London: Religious Tract Society, 1891; and *The Mameluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt, 1260–1517*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1896.

3 Subsequent editions of the biography in 1877 and 1894 contained a summary of the original four volumes but without the extensive footnotes, and with a few other minor alterations. The section analyzing the textual sources remained intact as an appendix, but with the rejoinders by Muslims and other critics having no noticeable effect on its content.

4 Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary thereto*, London: Trübner, 1870. I have examined Muir’s writings and Ahmad Khan’s response in ‘Response of Sayyid Aḥmad Ḥān to Sir William Muir’s Evaluation of Ḥadīth Literature’, *Oriente Moderno* 21 (2002), 219–254.

their own efforts to create an ordered understanding of the Muslims to whom they were presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Their approach, however, was not to determine “what had actually happened” in early Islam, but to define Islam as it was lived out by Muslims in 19th century India.

Thomas Patrick Hughes (1838–1911) and Edward Sell (1839–1932), both from England, were missionaries in India with the Church Missionary Society. Both made major contributions to the Western understanding of Islam in the late 19th century in the form of Hughes' *Dictionary of Islam* (1885) and Edward Sell's *Faith of Islam* (1880).⁵ Both included significant sections on the topic of the Ḥadīth in their writings, approaching the subject with an Orientalist and Evangelical bias similar to that of Muir, but focusing on the role of the Ḥadīth in contemporary expressions of Islam rather than solely in the history of early Islam as Muir had done. Writing primarily for a Western audience, they sought to impress upon their readers that the Ḥadīth was as foundational in the life of a Muslim as the Qur'ān, since it formed the basis of Muslim law. The writings of Hughes and Sell also demonstrate an awareness of revivalist movements in India such as the Ahl-i Ḥadīth which sought to revitalize and renew the practice of Islam through a fresh and focused study of the Ḥadīth. Throughout their writings on Islam, Hughes and Sell engaged in dialogue with another Muslim movement that was increasing in visibility, that of Muslim modernists such as Ahmad Khan as well as Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1928) and Cheragh Ali (1844–1895). While at times dismissive of this new expression of Islam, the missionaries also regularly relied on the writings of these modernists as authoritative statements of Muslim belief.

Christian Missionary Scholarship and Bias

Both Hughes and Sell attended the Church Missionary College, in Islington, London, and were ordained together along with a number of other prospective missionaries, in 1864. The Church Missionary College had opened in 1825 for the purpose of providing training for prospective missionary candidates with the

5 Thomas P. Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam: Being a Cyclopaedia of the Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs, Together With the Technical and Theological Terms, of the Muhammadan Religion*, London: W.H. Allen, 1885; reprinted in 1896; Edward Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1880. The same publishers printed a revised edition in 1896. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London, published another revised and enlarged edition in 1906.

Church Missionary Society. Its main work was to provide training to prepare non-graduate men for service as missionaries through a three-year course followed by ordination by the Bishop of London before they went abroad. The Church Missionary Society to which Hughes and Sell belonged had its origins with the prominent Evangelicals of the Clapham Sect of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It had been the main expression of the missionary concern of Evangelicals within the Church of England, and had grown rapidly in terms of missionary activity in England.

Hughes' missionary career began with his departure for India in 1864 to work in the city of Peshawar. He worked as an evangelist among the Afghan people of that area until 1884 when he left India. In addition to two major books and numerous articles on Islam and missionary efforts among Muslims, Hughes wrote extensively on the Afghans, compiling a selection of Pushto prose and poetry entitled *The Kalid-i-Afghāni*. Upon retiring from CMS, he and his family moved to the United States where he was involved as a clergyman in several churches in the New York area before his death in 1911. He received recognition of his scholarship by being awarded membership of the Royal Asiatic Society of England and Ireland, becoming one of the original Fellows of the University of the Punjab at Lahore, being awarded a B.D. by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1878 and an honorary LL.D from St John's College in Annapolis, Maryland in 1897.

Edward Sell left England in 1865, a year after Hughes' departure, to work in Madras as Headmaster of the Harris High School, with a specific assignment to direct his ministry towards the Muslim population. He continued in active ministry in southern India for fifty-seven years in a variety of missionary tasks, including an abundance of research and literary work, and died in Madras ten years after his official retirement. He left a legacy of writings about Islam as well as studies about the Christian scriptures and doctrines. He was a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, was made a Fellow of Madras University, and received a BD from the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1881 and a DD from the University of Edinburgh. He was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold medal in 1906.

Both Sell and Hughes were typical of CMS missionaries in that they had little formal education before they left for their field of service. Nevertheless, their contribution to the new missionary scholarship was considerable. The writings of both missionaries up to 1888 will serve as the basis for an analysis of their perspectives on the Ḥadīth and Islam more generally. Their articles, published in both Indian and British journals, frequently formed the foundation of their later books as they continued to revise and add to their original data and conclusions. Hence, Hughes' review of R. Bosworth Smith's *Mohammad*

and Mohammedanism⁶ contained themes that were expanded into his *Notes on Muhammadanism*, in which he stated that those “notes” would later become the basis of the *Dictionary of Islam* he was compiling.⁷ Edward Sell’s *Faith of Islam* was drawn from a series of articles he published in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* and went through two subsequent revisions in 1896 and 1907. The writings of this period were generally intended for a European audience and not as contributions to the genre of controversial writings that had arisen, though Sell’s *Faith of Islam* was translated into Urdu as *ʿAqāʿid-i-Islamiyyat* by Mawlavī Ḥamīdī Shafqat Allāh and published by the American Mission Press in 1883. Although Hughes intended to assist those engaged in such controversy through his *Notes* and his *Dictionary*, he did not direct his writings to the Muslim audience as “a controversial attack on the religious system of Muḥammad”.⁸

T.P. Hughes placed great importance on personal knowledge and experience as the primary qualifications for writing on the Orient. He began his review of Smith’s book with a general lament that Christian writers up until the beginning of the 18th century held “the most absurd opinions” about the founder of Islam and had not made any attempt “to give either Muḥammad or his religion a fair and impartial consideration”.⁹ Hughes recognized that he, as a missionary, would be viewed as being equally biased and lacking impartiality. He acknowledged that the assumption would be made by critics that “when a Christian Missionary approaches the consideration of Muhammadanism, he must necessarily bring with him all the bias and party spirit of one whose life is devoted to the work of proselytism”.¹⁰ But he felt that the intimate contact one in such a profession could have with practitioners of the religion under examination more than compensated for such possible bias. He insisted that a missionary who daily interacted with Muslims in discussions with their religious leaders and in regular social contacts, gained his credentials through his constant study

6 R. Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism: Lectures delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in February and March, 1874*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1874.

7 In a letter to Christopher Cyprian Fenn, Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, T.P. Hughes wrote from Peshawar on 21 Aug. 1874, that he wanted his review of Bosworth’s book to be returned if it was not going to be published. He added, “I have for some time been a careful student of Muhammadanism and have been for a long time engaged on a *Dictionary of the system*”. C 11/0 147 CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

8 Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. v.

9 Thomas P. Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary on Muhammad and Muhammadanism’, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, new series, 10 (1874), p. 330.

10 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, p. 331.

of their system of religion—both in terms of religious texts and field research. In his view, such a one was, “to say the least, as likely to form as true and as just an estimate of the character of Muḥammad and his religious system as those who have but studied the question with the information derived from the works of English and Continental writers”.¹¹ He contrasted a writer such as Smith who “can lay no claim to original Oriental research, and has not had any practical experience of the working of that great religious system which he has undertaken to defend”, to one like Muir or fellow missionaries in India, Africa, Turkey, Persia, or Afghanistan who had an “intimate acquaintance with the system”.¹² Hughes clearly considered the work done by Muir on manuscripts of al-Wāqidi, previously unavailable in the West, and his own regular interviews with Muslim religious leaders to have greater scholarly merit than reconstructions of Islam made by non-specialists such as Smith solely on the basis of Orientalist writings in European languages.

Like Hughes, Edward Sell also took issue with the Orientalist scholars of his day by whom, in his view, much was “written either in ignorant prejudice, or from an ideal standpoint”.¹³ He stressed, as did Hughes, that a greater qualification than being well-versed in the writings of the Europeans, was to live among the people and to know their literature. Not only the Orientalist scholar, but also the traveller came under criticism. With reference to practices such as divorce and polygamy, Hughes stated, “It is but seldom that the European traveller obtains an insight of the interior economy of the Muhammadan domestic life, but the Christian Missionary, living as he does for a lengthened period in the midst of the people, has frequent opportunities of judging the baneful and pernicious influence of Muhammadanism on domestic life”.¹⁴

11 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, p. 331.

12 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, p. 340. Hughes’s criticism does reveal a major weakness in Smith’s work. In listing his sources, Smith did mention Ahmad Khan’s *Essays* and Amīr ‘Alī’s *A Critical Examination*, but stated that he had not heard of these two books when he wrote the substance of his lectures in 1872, and in enlarging his work, he “purposely abstained from consulting them” since he had heard that they advocated from the Muslim point of view what he was seeking to advocate from the Christian stand-point. He felt his work would have greater impact if similar conclusions were reached independently, thus opening himself up to the charge of a lack of “original Oriental research”. Smith, *Mohammad*, pp. xvi–xvii.

13 Sell, *Faith of Islam*, 1880 ed., p. x. See also Edward Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 27, no. 104 (Apr. 1878), p. 33, 34.

14 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, *CMI*, p. 338.

Hughes rested the authority of his own research on Muslim texts, confirming from living witnesses that those principles still formed the basis of their faith and practice. In the introduction to his *Dictionary* he stated that, while he made use of some European works, he had also, during a long residence among Muslims, “been able to consult very numerous Arabic and Persian works in their originals, and to obtain the assistance of very able Muhammadan native scholars of all schools of thought in Islam.”¹⁵ In an earlier article, as a footnote to his description of Wahhābī beliefs, he stated that his information could be considered reliable because of his intimate acquaintance with the chief disciple of Sayyid Aḥmad (1786–1831) of Rae Bareli, and because he had “studied Islamism under the tutorship of the second son of that Wahabi divine”, who was living near Peshawar at that time.¹⁶ In addition to religious scholars he consulted in India, Hughes spent a brief time in Egypt visiting mosques and questioning scholars in places like al-Azhar.¹⁷ However, Hughes did acknowledge a greater debt to certain European writers such as Muir, Gustav Weil, and Aloys Sprenger than did Sell.¹⁸

In emphasizing the advantage of direct knowledge, Hughes directly confronted several issues which are key components of modern discussions of Orientalism. In his use of primary sources and his checking of facts with local religious leaders, he separated himself from that class of Orientalists which Edward Said has described as circumscribing the Orient “by a series of attitudes and judgments that send the Western mind, not first to Oriental sources for correction and verification but rather to Orientalist works”.¹⁹ Hughes’ statement regarding earlier negative assessments of the Prophet Muḥammad is significant in the light of writings by Norman Daniel and Jabal Buaben.²⁰ After his very thorough survey of mediaeval Christian writings on Muḥammad, Daniel proceeds to find the same themes in more recent Western writings, especially in those of conservative, British Christians of the nineteenth century such as Muir and other missionaries.²¹ Buaben follows a similar analysis, with a detailed

15 Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. vi.

16 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, *CMI*, p. 337.

17 Thomas P. Hughes, ‘A Week in Egypt’, *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1, second new series (1876) pp. 216–218.

18 Hughes, *Dictionary*, pp. vi, 387, 643–646.

19 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 67.

20 Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, rev. ed., Oxford: Oneworld Publications Ltd., 1993; Jabal M. Buaben, *Image of the Prophet Muḥammad in the West: A Study of Muir, Margoliouth and Watt*, London: The Islamic Foundation, 1996.

21 Daniel *Islam and the West*, pp. 326–327.

study of Muir's biography of Muḥammad. Both conclude that the negative assessments made of Muḥammad and Islam indicate a continuation of the mediaeval attitudes and therefore also of mediaeval methodologies of study, considered inferior to more modern, scientific and objective approaches. However, Hughes was aware of the ignorance regarding Islam expressed in earlier writings and deliberately sought to distance himself from them by researching original sources and involving himself in a continuous dialogue with Muslims from a variety of sectarian backgrounds.

Unlike Muir, who had focused on the early history of Islam and made a study of early texts to construct what he imagined Islam to be, Sell and Hughes focused more attention on expressions of Islam current in their time, once again appealing to their experience and relationships with the practitioners as their authority. Sell stated in his essay on "The Church of Islam" that he had not discussed whether Muḥammad had been deceived or self-deceived, an apostle or an impostor, or other theoretical questions of the origins of Islam, "but what Islam as a religious system has become, and is; how it now works; what orthodox Muslims believe, and how they act in that belief".²² The factors which prompted him to do this research, rather than to write a biography of the Prophet or the history of the political spread of Islam, as Muir was doing, were the practical realities faced by both the missionaries and the colonialist government who had to deal with "Islam as it is, and as it now influences those who rule and those who are ruled under it".²³ Hughes also, in a brief review of the first edition of his *Notes*, was described as having represented Islam "as it really is, not as it is supposed that it might be", in contrast to "the speculations current in literary society" in England.²⁴

Hughes, in the introduction to his *Notes*, stated his aim to provide information to missionaries and others who might be interested.²⁵ In his *Dictionary*, he broadened his target audience, writing that he hoped that it would be useful not only for Christian missionaries engaged in controversy with Muslim scholars, but also for government officials, travellers, and students of comparative religions.²⁶ Both Sell and Hughes were consciously writing from a context in

22 Sell, 'The Church of Islam', *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, p. 335.

23 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, 1880 ed., p. ix.

24 Hughes, 'A Week in Egypt', with following editorial note. *CMI*, p. 224.

25 T.P. Hughes, *Notes on Muhammadanism, being outlines of the Religious System of Islam*, 2nd ed., London: Wm. H. Allen, 1877, p. ix. Unless indicated otherwise, all references to Hughes's *Notes* will be to this 2nd edition.

26 Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. viii. Robert Needham Cust, in his review of the book, considered it of but limited value because of Hughes' limited knowledge and experience of Islam

which the Ottoman Empire was a world power to which England had to relate, in which England was also the ruler of the largest Muslim nation—India, and in which Islam was a vast system with which the Christian Church had to come to terms. Thus, while in their close interaction with the practitioners of the religious system they were describing they differed considerably from other European Orientalists, their major writings were not intended for Muslims or other “Orientals”, but for Westerners, to construct an image of Islam which they felt more accurately reflected the reality they had experienced.

The Revivalist Movement of the Ahl-i Ḥadīth

Both Hughes and Sell made the Ahl-i Ḥadīth movement, which they commonly referred to as the “Wahhābī” movement, a special focus of their study. In his 1878 article on the movement in the *Christian Missionary Intelligencer*, Hughes traced its history in Arabia and also in India as led by Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvi in Oudh.²⁷ He disagreed with W.W. Hunter’s (1840–1900) assessment of its political threat to the British in India, seeing its continuing influence in the subcontinent as being more in the area of Muslim religious thought than in that of political resistance.²⁸ This reform movement tended to deny “the validity of mediaeval law schools in favor of the direct use of the textual sources of the faith, the Qurʾān and the *hadis*, which were to be interpreted literally and narrowly”.²⁹ One reason why the followers of this movement attracted the attention of the missionaries was that they, along with the Deobandis, were in the forefront of those who debated with both reformist Hindus and Christian missionaries.³⁰ The political activities of the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth found their most

beyond his contact with the Afghans of Peshawar. See Robert Needham Cust, ‘Islam’, *Notes on Missionary Subjects. Part II, Essays on the Great Problems outside the Orbit of Pure Evangelistic Work, but which the Missionary has to Face*, London: Elliot Stock, 1888, p. 53.

27 Thomas P. Hughes, ‘The Wahhabis of Najd and India’, *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 3 second new series (1878) pp. 98–100, 160–165.

28 Hughes, ‘The Wahhabis’, p. 163. For Hunter’s views, see, William Wilson Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* London: Trübner, 1871. Sayyid Ahmad Khan had written a review of the book which appeared as a series of articles in *The Pioneer* from November 1871 to February 1872; see abridged version in Ahmad Khan, *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, compiled and edited by Shan Mohammad, Bombay: Nachiketa Publications, 1972, pp. 65–82.

29 Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 265.

30 Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, p. 279.

prominent expression in military campaigns against the Sikhs in north-western India under Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi in the first half of the nineteenth century. The British administration in India had launched a major effort to clean up left-over fighters on the frontier in 1863, followed by trials of suspected leaders in Ambala and Patna from 1864 until 1871.³¹ In this context, it was no wonder that British administrative officials such as Hunter would see the presence of this group primarily in terms of a political threat. Ahmad Khan, in his review of Hunter's work, pointed out the fallacy of extrapolating the localized conditions of the Bengal region to include all of India, and, further, to include all Muslims.³² He saw the accusations as being particularly inapplicable to the Afghans in the north-western frontier region. Since this was the context in which Hughes wrote his works, it is understandable that he would share Ahmad Khan's convictions as to the non-political thrust of the movement. During his brief stay in Egypt, Hughes made a careful search for any influence of "Wahhābiism", but found no evidence for such a religious revival there.³³

Like Ahmad Khan, Hughes saw the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth movement in Islam as analogous to that of the Protestants in Christianity.³⁴ This would have been another major factor in drawing the attention of Protestant missionaries to this movement. Hughes was convinced that the movement represented "the earliest teachings of the Muslim Faith as they came from Muḥammad and his immediate successors".³⁵ As an Evangelical, he would have been attracted by the emphasis on rejecting mediaeval accretions to faith in favour of recourse to textual sources interpreted quite literally. He would also have appreciated their radical approach to religious practice that emphasized the individual responsibility over a blind following of past religious authorities. He may even have felt some empathy for their general religious and psychological orientation consisting of an "urgent quest for a single standard of religious interpretation and an exclusiveness and sense of embattlement against all others",³⁶ and the fact that they were Muslims by conviction, not merely by birth. The major differ-

31 Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, pp. 280–281.

32 Ahmad Khan, *Writings and Speeches*, pp. 67–70.

33 Hughes, 'A Week in Egypt', p. 221.

34 Hughes, 'The Wahhabis', p. 164; Ahmad Khan, *Writings and Speeches*, p. 68. See also *The Pioneer*, Apr. 4, 1871, p. 4 and Apr. 5, 1871, p. 5, where Ahmad Khan again makes the comparison, as well as proclaiming himself "a friend of Wahabeeism" while at the same time a "liberal Mahomedan".

35 Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. v.

36 Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, pp. 269, 295.

ence that Hughes saw between the Protestant and Ahl-i-Ḥadīth movements was that the former asserted the paramount authority of Scripture over tradition, while the latter asserted the authority of Scripture *with* tradition.³⁷ This, then, led him to examine the role that tradition, or the Ḥadīth, played in their construction of Islam.

Hughes saw the rise of the study of Ḥadīth in general as a consequence of “Wahhābism”,³⁸ and strongly disagreed with European writers who saw in the movement an attempt to strip the religion of its traditions and restore it to the simple teaching of the Qur’ān.

Wahhabism is simply a revival of the teaching of the Traditions, to the partial rejection of the third and fourth foundations of faith, namely, the Ijma’ and Qiyās. The Wahabīs of India never speak of themselves as Wahabīs, but as “*Ahl i Hadīs*”, or the People of the Traditions; and it is entirely owing to this revival that so great an impetus has been given to the study of the Hadīs, printed copies of which are published by thousands at Bombay, Lucknow, and Delhi.³⁹

He saw tradition as occupying a totally different place in Islam from that occupied in Evangelical Protestant Christianity.⁴⁰ Duties and dogma within Islam that were held to be divinely instituted most often found their source not in the Qur’ān but in the Ḥadīth.

Edward Sell similarly attributed the rise of the Arab reformer, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abdul Wahhāb (1703–1792) to the latter’s conviction that the Qur’ān and the traditions had been neglected in favour of “the sayings of men of lesser note and the jurisprudence of the four great Imāms”.⁴¹ While, in one sense, the movement sought to cleanse Islam from the traditionalism of later ages, he argued, in no sense could it be said that the Wahhābīs rejected Tradition.⁴² They accepted as binding not only the Qur’ān, but also the Ḥadīth as recorded on the authority of the Companions. Sell did not see the resulting movement as a progressive return to first principles, but rather as one that bound “the fetters

37 Hughes, ‘The Wahhabis’, p. 164.

38 Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. 643.

39 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, p. 337.

40 Hughes, ‘The Wahhabis’, p. 164; Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. 661.

41 Edward Sell, ‘The Sects of Islam’, *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, 28, 109 (Jul. 1879), p. 594.

42 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 105; see also p. 11.

of Islam more tightly”.⁴³ In thus denying the legitimacy of the modernists to transform Islam, Sell and other missionaries like him found in the reformist Ahl-i-Ḥadīth movement a confirmation that Islam could not change to meet the demands of a changing world and was antagonistic to the Western ideals of liberty and free thought.

The Authority of the Ḥadīth

Their criticism of Orientalist European writers led both Hughes and Sell to a discussion of the authority of the Ḥadīth for the beliefs and practices of Muslims. Both were critical of writers who presumed the Qurʾān to be the all-embracing code of Islam. Such a position, they felt, ignored the fact that much of what made up Islam was based on the body of traditions that rose subsequent to the writing of the Qurʾān and were viewed as authoritative by Muslims. Hughes argued that all groups—Shīʿī, Sunnī, or Ahl-i-Ḥadīth—received the traditions of the sayings and practices of Muḥammad as obligatory, along with the pronouncements that he declared as revealed from Allāh.⁴⁴ Sell echoed the view that there was not one sect whose faith and practice was based on the Qurʾān alone. “Its voice is supreme in all that it concerns, but its exegesis, the whole system of legal jurisprudence and of theological science, is largely founded on the Traditions”.⁴⁵ In another essay he declared, “Without going so far as saying that every Tradition by itself is to be accepted as an authority in Islam, we distinctly assert that there can be no true conception formed of that system if the Traditions are not studied and taken into account”.⁴⁶ He was of the opinion that it would be very difficult for someone who had not “lived in long and friendly intercourse” with Muslims to realize how the Ḥadīth were the foundation for so much of their religious life and opinions, thoughts and actions.⁴⁷ This conviction regarding the centrality of the Ḥadīth was born out of Sell’s experience in discussions with Muslim religious leaders.

43 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 106.

44 Hughes, *Notes*, pp. vii–viii, 50.

45 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 1. See also his paper on ‘Muhammadans’, *The Missionary Conference: South India and Ceylon, 1879*, Madras: Addison, 1880, pp. 336–339.

46 Edward Sell, ‘Muhammadan Exegesis of the Qurān and the Traditions’, *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, 28, 110 (Oct. 1879), p. 757.

47 Sell, ‘Muhammadan Exegesis’, p. 760.

Every missionary to the Muhammadans knows that for one text from the Koran quoted against him in controversy he will get a dozen from the Sunnat. In vain does he say it is tradition, and not the “book”. The answer is ever ready, it is to us what your four Gospels are to you—neither more or less.⁴⁸

Here, again, Sell was confronting those who wrote on Islam from a distance, imagining an ideal which did not match with what he had experienced as reality. The comparison of Ḥadīth literature to the Gospels was made repeatedly, as another tool to stress its authority to the European reader. The Muslim would view the Gospels as a record of what Jesus said and did, handed down by his companions, just as the Ḥadīth was a record of what Muḥammad said and did, similarly handed down by his companions. Sell quotes Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) as his authority for this comparison.⁴⁹ Hughes further compared the authority of the Ḥadīth for the Muslim to that of the Pauline epistles for the orthodox Christian.⁵⁰

In their objection to the European characterization of Islam as “a simple system of Deism unfettered by numerous dogmas and creeds”, Hughes and Sell were reacting to criticism of the missionary movement which was supposedly thus “fettered”.⁵¹ In contrast, in their own construction of Islam, it was the multiple layers of tradition that were added to the simple pronouncements of the Qurʾān that became a vast burden now hanging as a “dead weight” upon the religion.⁵² Sell blamed this body of tradition, along with the authority it had acquired as an infallible and unvarying rule of faith, for the “immobility of the Muhammadan world” and its inability to progress according to the European notion of progress.⁵³ He described how horrified the pious Muslim would be to learn of the “progress” his English friends envisioned him making, since innovation was a crime, a sin, in his eyes.⁵⁴ Sell also disagreed with those who diminished the importance of the example of the Prophet in an attempt to excuse what was seen as his jealousy, cruelty to the Jewish tribes, licentiousness, and other weaknesses.⁵⁵ Hughes, in his focus on the Ḥadīth,

48 Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, p. 329.

49 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 10.

50 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, p. 337.

51 Hughes, *Notes*, p. vii.

52 Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, p. 332.

53 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 13.

54 Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, p. 335.

55 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 13.

was also replying to those who questioned the Evangelical rejection of Muḥammad's message partly on the basis of his "private vices". He felt that these critics had a wrong estimation of the place the example of Muḥammad occupied in Islam.⁵⁶

The approach of Sell and Hughes to the study of the Ḥadīth differed from that of Muir in its basic intention. Whereas Muir's exploration of the sources of the traditions was to arrive at a historically reliable assessment of the life and character of Muḥammad, Hughes and Sell were describing Islam in its contemporary form and argued that that description was ultimately an expression of Muslims' attempts to follow the example of their Prophet in all details of life.⁵⁷ It was in the Ḥadīth that the roots of many of the contemporary expressions of Islam were to be found. It was also a study of these traditions that would assist the missionary or other European wishing to understand how normative Islam should manifest itself.

Cheragh Ali, writing as a Muslim modernist prepared to jettison the reliability of the Ḥadīth, censured the Orientalists for placing such importance on the authority of the Ḥadīth and insisting on refusing Islam any prospect of change. "The European writers like Muir, Osborn,⁵⁸ Hughes, and Sell, while describing the Muhammadan traditions, take no notice of the fact that almost all of them are not theoretically and conscientiously binding on the Moslems".⁵⁹ He considered the sifting of the traditions done in the third century to have been done too late, and the method of analyzing their authenticity by *isnād* as merely "pseudo-critical," without any sifting on critical, historical, or rational principles nor any examination of subject matter or internal and historical evidence.⁶⁰ Such traditions could not be authoritative and thus not binding on Muslims, though jurists continued to insist on using them as the basis for common law. He wrote, "This is tantamount to our acting in accordance with traditions even when our reason and conscience have no obligations to do so".⁶¹ This interaction with authors such as Muir, Hughes, and Sell demonstrates that

56 Hughes, 'An Indian Missionary', pp. 332–333.

57 Hughes, 'An Indian Missionary', p. 333.

58 Robert Durie Osborn (1835–1889) was part of the British military force in India, participating in the suppression of the Revolt of 1857 and in the Afghan war in 1878 before retiring as Lt.-Colonel in 1879. He wrote *Islam under the Arabs* (1876) and *Islam under the Khalifs of Bagdad* (1877) as well as a number of journal articles.

59 Cheragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and other Mohammadan States*, Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1883, p. xx.

60 Cheragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, p. xix.

61 Cheragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, p. xx.

the Muslims were not only aware of their writings, but actively confronting their ideas with creative arguments that had the effect of transforming Muslim discourse in India.

Defining the Ḥadīth

In their preliminary definitions of Ḥadīth, Hughes and Sell both emphasized how foundational the body of tradition was to both dogma and ritual in Islam. A related concern was the degree of inspiration attributed to this body of traditions, since that had a direct bearing on its authority. Hughes summarized the traditions as consisting of 3 types of Sunna—what Muḥammad did, what he said should be practised, and what was done in his presence.⁶² The collections of these traditions were called Ḥadīth and constituted the body of oral law of Muḥammad with an authority that was next only to the Qurʾān.⁶³ “Tradition in Islam is nothing less than the supposed inspired sayings of the Prophet, recorded and handed down by uninspired writers, and is absolutely necessary to complete the structure of faith”.⁶⁴

Sell’s definition was very similar: “It is the collection of the sayings of the prophet in answer to inquiries as to the correct ritual to be observed in worship, as to the course of action to be followed in the varied relationships of social and political life. It is too something more, viz., the record of the actions of the prophet”.⁶⁵ With respect to inspiration, Sell stated that Muslims believed in the divine inspiration of all Muḥammad’s words and actions, with the resulting high authority of the Ḥadīth in the religion. In the Qurʾān the very words were God’s, while in the Sunna, “the ideas are divine, the outward form human”.⁶⁶ He supported this idea with a quote from al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) on the necessity of the second part of the *kalima* or creed, emphasizing the authority of the Prophet.⁶⁷ He designated the revelation contained in the Qurʾān as “objective”, while Muḥammad’s sayings as collected in the Ḥadīth were received by “subjective” but still true inspiration.⁶⁸ In *Faith of Islam*, Sell gave a more

62 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, p. 333.

63 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 50.

64 Hughes, ‘The Wahhabis’, p. 164; see also Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. 661.

65 Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, p. 329; see also Sell, ‘Muhammadan Exegesis’, p. 757.

66 Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, p. 329.

67 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 10.

68 Sell, ‘Muhammadan Exegesis’, p. 757.

detailed description of the degrees of inspiration.⁶⁹ *Wahy* was considered to be inspiration given directly to major prophets in the form of words to be written in a book, while *ilhām* was inspiration given to a saint or prophet who delivered a message about God from his own mind. The degree of inspiration applied to the Ḥadīth was a lower form of *wahy* called *ishārat al-malak*, denoting a sign given by the angel Gabriel, but not words from his mouth. Sell noted that this was denied by some who said that the Qurʾān alone was inspired by *wahy*, but stated, “The practical belief is, however, that the Traditions were Wahī inspiration, and thus they come to be as authoritative as the Qurʾān.”⁷⁰

According to Hughes and Sell, the authority of the Sunna, that is, the way of Muḥammad contained in the traditions that comprise the Ḥadīth, rested fundamentally with the Prophet himself. Traditions stating that Muḥammad had commanded his followers to follow his example, and those recording the subsequent practice of his Companions to that effect, abounded.⁷¹ Hughes quoted Ahmad Khan on the belief of every Muslim that the Prophet always acted in conformity with the injunctions of the Qurʾān, and thus became the exemplar that every Muslim must follow.⁷² Hughes argued that the example of Muḥammad was for the Muslim what the example of Christ was for the Christian, an idea repeated by Sell.⁷³ Sell further added that, on the basis of the sinlessness of the Prophet, obedience to him was considered obedience to God.⁷⁴ He stated, “It is the belief common to all Musalmāns that the Prophet in all that he did, in all that he said, was supernaturally guided, and that his words and acts are to all time and to all his followers a divine rule of faith and practice.”⁷⁵

However, both Hughes and Sell failed to include Ahmad Khan’s qualifier that Muslims saw all of the Prophet’s words and actions concerning secular matters to be the same as those of any other virtuous and pious individ-

69 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, pp. 37–38.

70 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 38.

71 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 13 ff. Here Sell cites as his source for some of the traditions: Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, Written in Egypt during the Years 1833, 34, and 35, partly from Notes Made during a Former Visit to that Country in the Years 1825, 26, 27, and 28*, London: Charles Knight, 1846, vol. 1, p. 354.

72 Hughes, ‘An Indian Missionary’, p. 333; quoting Ahmad Khan, *Essays*, p. 190.

73 Sell, *Faith of Islam*, p. 16.

74 Sell, *Faith of Islam*, pp. 12–13.

75 Sell, *Faith of Islam*, p. 10; Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, p. 329.

ual, unless they were clearly indicated to be of divine origin.⁷⁶ The position adopted by Hughes in his review of Smith's book on the comprehensive authority of the Prophet's example seems similar to that of Muir's, to which Ahmad Khan was reacting with his insistence on the limitation of that authority. However, in his *Notes*, published only a few years later, as well as in his *Dictionary*, Hughes moved closer to Ahmad Khan's interpretation as he included the concept of secondary revelation, as Ahmad Khan did, in reference to the authority of the Ḥadīth.⁷⁷ Hughes described this type of revelation as similar to that which Christians believed the writers of the Christian Scriptures received, a concept Ahmad Khan had discussed in his commentary on the Bible.⁷⁸

The Historical Collection of the Ḥadīth

In tracing the collection of the Ḥadīth after the death of the Prophet, both Hughes and Sell tended to follow the analysis of Muir as given in his *Life*. Hughes simply quoted Muir extensively in his *Dictionary*, focusing on the natural tendency to fabricate stories about a past hero and on the need for broader source material generated by an expanding empire.⁷⁹ The major weaknesses of the body of traditions, as explained by Hughes, were the lack of written testimony by contemporary witnesses and the unreliability of oral transmission. Sell also closely followed Muir in describing the rise of the Sunna based on an authoritative body of traditions.⁸⁰ During the Prophet's lifetime, believers could ask him directly on aspects of worship, and his replies would be taken as divine instructions. As the empire grew after his death, new questions arose, leading to the development of *qiyās*, or analogical reasoning, based on previous revelation, to determine correct practice. While the first four "rightly guided Caliphs" lived, people could question them, since they could recall Muḥammad's words and actions. But as time went on, the community came to rely more and more on devout men who had memorized the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and the judgments of the rightly guided Caliphs. Sell saw in this progression a

76 Ahmad Khan, *Essays*, p. 208.

77 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 60; Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. 639.

78 Ahmad Khan, *The Mohommedan Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. 1, Ghazeeopore: self-published, 1862, pp. 13–14.

79 Hughes, *Dictionary*, pp. 643–646, from Muir. *Life*, pp. xxviii–xxxvi, xlii.

80 Sell, 'The Church of Islam', pp. 330–331.

temptation to create spurious sayings of the Prophet to settle disputed matters.⁸¹ He summed up the weaknesses of such a system in the following words: "It is not difficult to see that a system which sought to regulate all departments of life, all developments of men's ideas and energies by, to use Muslim terms, Sunnat and Quias, was one which not only gave every temptation a system could give to the manufacture of tradition, but which would soon become too cumbersome to be of practical use".⁸²

In summarizing the history of the growth of the body of traditions, Hughes stated that, in spite of severe warnings from Muḥammad, many spurious traditions abounded, as evidenced by the numerous traditions that Abū Dā'ūd and Bukhārī rejected from those they had preserved in their standard collections. Since the rule of faith in Islam was based on that body of Ḥadīth, it was necessary that a science of evaluating the traditions or *'ilm-i-ḥadīth* be developed. In the first edition of his *Notes*, completed during a short trip to England in 1875 after eleven years in India, Hughes had taken the rules and categories for the reception and rejection of traditions directly from Ahmad Khan's *Essays*. In the 1877 edition, completed after returning to Peshawar, he arranged the material on Ḥadīth according to the description of the various categories of Ḥadīth and the strength of the chain of transmitters as given in the Arabic treatise, *Nukhba al-Fikr*, by the 15th century Ḥadīth scholar and jurist, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (1372–1449).⁸³ Hughes recorded that copies of the six authoritative collections, along with that of Imām Mālik, were printed and available in India, but the most widely read, especially by the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth,⁸⁴ was the *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ* a collection of the most reliable traditions translated into Persian by Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith Dihlawī (1551–1642) during the reign of Mughal emperor, Akbar (1542–1605), and translated into English by Captain Matthews in 1809.⁸⁵ Hughes used this collection extensively in his publications, and had even planned to have a new edition published.⁸⁶

81 Sell, 'Muhammadan Exegesis', p. 757.

82 Sell, 'Muhammadan Exegesis', p. 331.

83 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 52, footnote; this treatise had been edited by W. Nassau Lees and published in Calcutta in 1862.

84 Hughes, 'The Wahhabis', p. 163, footnote.

85 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 57.

86 Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. 353. In a letter to C.C. Fenn, London, 11 Oct. 1875, T.P. Hughes enclosed a specimen title page for a new edition of *The Mishkat-ul-Masabih, or A Collection of the Most Authentic Traditions of the Precepts and Practice of Muhammad*, to be published by Wm. H. Allen & Co. Subsequent correspondence would indicate that a lack of subscriptions and a lack of enthusiasm for the project on the part of William Muir

Hughes combined the approaches of Muir and Ahmad Khan in assessing the authenticity of the Ḥadīth. He expressed his confidence that “the compilers of the books of tradition were sincere and honest in their endeavours to produce correct and well authenticated traditions of their Prophet’s precepts and practice”.⁸⁷ But sincerity would not be enough to guarantee accuracy. He quoted Muir with regard to the weakness of oral transmission in not providing the proper check against “the license of error and fabrication”.⁸⁸ But, along with Muir’s objections to the system of Ḥadīth criticism, Hughes also took note of Ahmad Khan’s response to Muir in his *Essays*. In his *Dictionary*, Hughes quoted Ahmad Khan’s essays extensively with regard to the various styles of transmission, degree of authenticity, causes of diverse accounts, and apocryphal Ḥadīth.⁸⁹ However, he left out Ahmad Khan’s criticism of Christian writers ignorant of these rules regulating the study of Ḥadīth, which directly followed that section.⁹⁰ Perhaps he felt he was meeting this objection through his own thorough study. When he noted that Ahmad Khan actually confirmed Muir’s critical assessment of the reliability of the Ḥadīth, in that he considered only the Qur’ān and a few—not more than five—traditions were accepted as fully reliable and authoritative in faith and practice, Hughes wrote of him, “The learned Sayyid is in this, as in almost everything he writes on the subject of religion, his own refutation.”⁹¹ The factor leading Hughes to study the traditions was not the necessity of gaining an accurate account of the life of Muḥammad, as it was for Muir. Rather, he felt that it was significant that though “shrouded with a degree of uncertainty,” this body of traditions still occupied a central place in the theological structure of Islam.⁹² In this perspective of the value or importance of Ḥadīth, his approach reflected that of Ahmad Khan more than that of Muir.

discouraged Hughes from continuing. In his letter to Mr. Gray, 25 Aug. 1877, he comments on the withdrawal of the agreement to publish the *Mishkāt*. C 11/0 147 CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.

87 Hughes, *Notes*, pp. 58–59.

88 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 59.

89 Hughes, *Dictionary*, pp. 640–642; see Ahmad Khan, *Essays*, pp. 195–203.

90 Ahmad Khan, *Essays*, p. 203.

91 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 59. In the first edition of his *Notes*, Hughes’s assessment was harsher: “The learned Syud, however, is not considered an orthodox Muslim by his co-religionists in India, and, therefore, cannot be regarded as a true exponent of the Muslim creed”. Hughes, paradoxically, nevertheless relies heavily on Ahmad Khan’s work to expound Islam. Thomas P. Hughes, *Notes on Muhammadanism*, London: Wm. H. Allen, 1875, p. 33.

92 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 60.

In discussing the authoritative collections of Ḥadīth for the Sunnis, Hughes followed Ahmad Khan in giving special attention to Imām Mālik. Ahmad Khan had included the early jurist as a seventh major collector after the standard six, Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Abū Dāʿūd, Nasāʿī, and Ibn Mājah.⁹³ This reflects the tendency initiated by Shāh Walī Ullāh (1703–1762) to elevate Imām Mālik’s *Muwattaʿa*’ above all other collections of traditions and to place it alongside the canonical collections in the highest category of reliability.⁹⁴ Hughes, while not including him with the six, stated that Imām Mālik’s work was still held in great esteem and believed by many to be the source from which the others derived most of their material.⁹⁵ In his *Dictionary*, he focused on the beliefs and practices of the Sunnis primarily, with indications where the Shīʿa or Ahl-i-Ḥadīth might differ.⁹⁶ This focus was in contrast with the writings of earlier evangelical missionaries such as Karl Gottlieb Pfander (1803–1865) who drew more on Shīʿī sources.⁹⁷ Hughes did mention the five differing collections accepted by the Shīʿa, seeking to refute the idea of some European authors that this sect rejected tradition altogether.⁹⁸

When evaluating *siyār* or biographical literature, Hughes again relied on Ahmad Khan, who saw Ḥadīth literature as most in need of emendation in connection with the biography of the Prophet.⁹⁹ Hughes provided a list of both traditional and popular biographies of the Prophet. Earlier in his *Notes* he had indicated that the only “Life of Muḥammad” in the English language which he considered of any pretension to original research was that of Muir, once again demonstrating his synthesizing of selected aspects of Muir’s works with those of Ahmad Khan.¹⁰⁰ Ameer Ali had likewise addressed the matter of the use of early biographies as historical sources, in his book, *A Critical Examination*. Like Ahmad Khan, he considered the writings of al-Wāqidī and his Kātib, on which Muir’s *Life* was in large measure based, as “regarded in the Mohammedan world as the least trustworthy and most careless biographers of

93 Ahmad Khan, *Essays*, p. 180.

94 Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 128.

95 Hughes, *Dictionary*, pp. 642–643.

96 Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. v.

97 Avril Ann Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India*, London Studies on South Asia, 7, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993, p. 148.

98 Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. 643.

99 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 162.

100 Hughes, *Notes*, p. 5.

Mohammad".¹⁰¹ To support his contention, he quoted Ibn Khallikān (1211–1282) concerning the feeble authority of al-Wāqidī's traditions and the doubts as to his veracity. Ameer Ali also disagreed with Muir's negative evaluations of Ibn Hishām (d. 834), and stated in his preface that his own research would be based on the writings of Ibn Hishām and Ibn al-Athīr (1160–1233), the former whom he considered to occupy "the position of the most careful and trustworthy biographer of the Prophet".¹⁰²

Sell's account of the Ḥadīth was a summary of the orthodox Sunni position, with a Ḥanafī bias, based as it was on the *Sharḥ-i-Wiqāya* by 'Ubayd Allāh Ibn Mas'ūd al-Maḥbūbī, (d. 1346), a Ḥanafī jurist of Bukhāra, and did not differ greatly from that given by Ahmad Khan in his *Essays*.¹⁰³ He stated that the unwillingness to commit the sayings of Muḥammad to writing from the beginning was a consequence of the Prophet's own command. Another of his commands regarding careful transmission of his words resulted in the formation of rules insisting on the recitation of the chain of transmitters or *isnād* of the traditions to prevent the rise of spurious ones. Here, Sell quoted the tradition word for word from the English rendering in Ahmad Khan's work.¹⁰⁴ However, false traditions continued to circulate, necessitating the rise of Ḥadīth scholars to collect and sift the false from the true. Sell proceeded to list the six major collections, giving brief biographical accounts of their compilers' lives, emphasizing the enormous number of traditions they dealt with, as well as their piety, qualifying them to make decisions on authenticity. His list did not differ from that given by Hughes, and, like Hughes, only briefly mentioned the alternate authorities accepted by the Shī'a, indicating that they flourished much later.¹⁰⁵ His emphasis was that no group of Muslims accepted the Qur'ān alone as their authority, even if there were differing opinions on which traditions were authoritative. "There is by no means an absolute consensus of opinion among the Sunnīs as to the exact value of each Tradition, yet all admit that a 'genuine Tradition' must be obeyed".¹⁰⁶ Sell followed a standard classification of the traditions based on the strength of the *isnād*, glossing over the finer details and subdivisions of class. He ended his account with a statement

101 Syed Ameer Ali, *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1873, p. vii.

102 Ameer Ali, *A Critical Examination*, p. ix.

103 Sell, 'Muhammadan Exegesis', p. 762. The subsequent summary is taken from pp. 757–763.

104 Sell, 'Muhammadan Exegesis', p. 757; see Ahmad Khan, *Essays*, p. 193.

105 Sell, 'Muhammadan Exegesis', pp. 758–759. These are listed by name in his *Faith of Islam*, p. 16n.

106 Sell, *Faith of Islam*, p. 16.

we have seen forming such a foundational principle for both Muir and Ahmad Khan, “It is the universally accepted rule that no authentic Tradition can be contrary to the Qurʾān”.¹⁰⁷

The Use of the Ḥadīth in Muslim Law

Sell wrote less than did Muir and Hughes on the categories of authentic Ḥadīth, focusing rather on schools of jurisprudence that developed, again in keeping with his emphasis on lived Islam. He discussed the four major Sunni schools in the light of their approach to the Ḥadīth. The Ḥanafī School, which he described as most widely spread and which was dominant in most of India at the time, was founded by Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) who admitted very few traditions as authoritative in his system.¹⁰⁸ Mālik Ibn Anās, who delighted in collecting traditions, developed the Māliki School, a system which was much more historical and more directly based on traditions. Imām al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820) and Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), in reaction to the Ḥanafites, gave greater weight to tradition as well. Sell attributed the vast collection of tradition that became such an integral part of the religion to these later systems.¹⁰⁹ In characterizing the difference between the schools of *fiqh* with respect to tradition, a *maulavi* friend of Sell’s stated that a Ḥanafī jurist would be satisfied to make a judgment on just one passage in the Qurʾān or Ḥadīth while a Shāfiʿī jurist would require many traditions.¹¹⁰

In order to maintain his conception of Islam as bound for all time by unchanging traditions without any ability to adapt to changing circumstances, Sell rejected the idea proposed by “apologists for Islam”, presumably lawyers such as Ameer Ali, that this process of law formation could be extrapolated so that fresh imāms could arise and deduce new judgments in keeping with the times. He pointed to the *fatwas* or legal decrees issued by the ‘*ulamā*’ in the Ottoman Empire as proof of “how firmly a Muslim State is bound in the fetters of an unchangeable law”.¹¹¹ He felt a rejection of the continued use of *ijtihād* was justified on the basis of his discussions with religious leaders who insisted

107 Sell, ‘Muhammadan Exegesis’, p. 762.

108 Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, p. 331. In the 1896 edition of *The Faith of Islam*, London: Paul, 1896, he added that Abū Ḥanīfa selected so few because of the rigorous conditions the traditions and its transmitters had to meet, quoting Ibn Khaldūn as his authority; p. 27.

109 Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, p. 332.

110 Sell, ‘The Church of Islam’, pp. 332–333.

111 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. ix.

that no *Mujtahid*, one with authority to exercise *ijtihād*, had arisen since the four Imāms, and that discussions even in new situations must be according to one of the four schools.¹¹² He disagreed with Ameer Ali's reinterpretation of *ijtihād* and considered it historically inaccurate, stating that even if one were to accept some of Ameer Ali's revised definitions, that in no way proved that Islam had any capacity for progress.¹¹³ He emphasized that according to the author of the *Sharh-i-Waqāyah*, following one of the four schools of jurisprudence was a necessary extension of the authority of the Qur'ān and the Sunna.¹¹⁴ Because of the abundance of spurious traditions, the four Imāms were needed, even though there had been no such institutions at the time of the Prophet. He concluded, "In short, the orthodox belief is that the only safe way is to follow the Imāms, and to believe and act according to the dogmas and rule of the Mazhab, to which the particular person belongs".¹¹⁵

In his first book, *The Proposed Political, Legal & Social Reforms*, Cheragh Ali directly addressed Sell's writings on the rigidity of Islam due to the inflexibility within the schools of law. He opposed Sell's statement that no *mujtahid* had arisen after the four Sunni Imāms and that all legal decisions had to be made within the confines of their four schools of *fiqh*.¹¹⁶ He argued that no such authority had been claimed by or conferred on the Imāms. The authors Sell claimed to have consulted, Cheragh Ali characterized as those who practised *taqlid*, those blindly following "any one of the four doctors or schools of jurisprudence, without having any opinion, insight discretion, or knowledge of their own".¹¹⁷ Cheragh Ali's rating of the four Imāms was slightly different from that of Sell. He agreed that Abū Ḥanīfa had used few traditions, and that Mālik Ibn Anas and Imām al-Shāfi'ī used more. But Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal came under severe disapproval for discarding the principle of analogical deductions and

112 Sell, 'The Church of Islam', p. 334.

113 Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 34. The 1896 edition contained no significant revision of this position, except to include that Ameer Ali had admitted in an article in the *Nineteenth Century* (1895) that the description as given by Sell of the orthodox position was historically accurate.

114 Sell, 'Muhammadan Exegesis', pp. 762–763.

115 Sell, 'Muhammadan Exegesis', p. 763.

116 Cheragh Ali, *The Proposed*, p. vi. He also joined the controversy between Sell and Ameer Ali on the matter of *ijtihād*, arguing that though the word was now a technical term, it had not been so in Muḥammad's time. He preferred to emphasize the principle of personal opinion by qualified jurists; see pp. xxxvii–xl. Sell continued the discussion in an appendix to his 1896 edition of *The Faith of Islam*.

117 Cheragh Ali, *The Proposed*, p. vii.

incorporating 30,000 traditions in his system, most of which were inauthentic fabrications, though some justification was found in his system as a corrective to other excesses.¹¹⁸ He concluded that in its historical context, “every system was progressive, incomplete, changeable and undergoing alteration and improvement”.¹¹⁹ Ameer Ali’s description of the schools was similar, with an interesting comment that Abū Ḥanīfa often quoted the sixth Shī‘ī Imām as his authority for the traditions he used. He attributed Abū Ḥanīfa’s willingness to use analogical reasoning to this influence of the house of the Prophet, namely ‘Alī’s lineage.¹²⁰

Conclusion

The prominent place of the subject of Ḥadīth in the writings of both Thomas P. Hughes and Edward Sell indicates that they had achieved a greater understanding of its importance in Islamic religious discourse in India than had been previously acknowledged. A strong undercurrent in their writings was a reaction to what they perceived to be a superficial conception of Islam expressed in the writings of English Orientalists. They strongly opposed any attempt to present Islam as an idealized form of Deism, with a minimum of dogma and a theology free of tradition. They saw the body of traditions known as the Ḥadīth as composing the essential structure of Islam, and saw in the rise of the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth a movement to restore the purity of that traditional structure.

Hughes and Sell approached Islam and the subject of Ḥadīth from a world-view fundamentally shaped by their Evangelical ideology and their missionary profession. They saw the ultimate religious truth as residing only in Christianity and believed in the primary importance of spreading that truth to all people. Consequently, they criticized alike the British government for trying to restrict missionary movement and the modernist movements in India that introduced rationalism and scepticism which questioned the supernatural element in religion. Their view of Islam, at least initially, was that of a lifeless religious tradition bound by fetters of tradition, unable to change because that tradition composed the essence of the religion.

Their discussion of the Ḥadīth differed from that by Sir William Muir in that the questions they were asking were quite different. While Muir sought

118 Cheragh Ali, *The Proposed*, pp. viii–xi.

119 Cheragh Ali, *The Proposed*, p. xii.

120 Ameer Ali, *The Personal Law of the Mahommedans*, London, 1880, p. 19.

to determine the authenticity of traditional stories in order to construct what he saw as a historically accurate biography of the Prophet, Hughes and Sell sought to describe Islam “as it is”. They were more concerned with living expressions of Muslim religiosity and with understanding the foundations of Islamic institutions such as its forms of worship and its legal code. These concerns led them to seek to understand the historical development of the Ḥadīth and its relevance to diverse religious groups and movements in India and the broader Muslim world.

Hughes and Sell seem to have been more open to the influence of their interaction with Indian Muslims. Due to their own limited training in Orientalist studies, they had much to learn and applied themselves to learning both from local religious leaders and from classical and contemporary writings. Thus they continually compared and contrasted the teachings of newer movements with those of the “orthodox”. They felt free to adopt the ideas concerning Ḥadīth they found in Ahmad Khan’s *Essays*, while at the same time rejecting some of his modernist trends as a complete departure from traditional Islam. The compounded effect of his writings, together with those of Amīr ‘Alī and of Chirāgh ‘Alī, however, was that both Hughes and Sell seemed to modify their views, and began to acknowledge some of the positive aspects of Islam.