



ABDULLAH IBN UMAR'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC LAW

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Abstract. *This article analyzes the jurisprudential school of 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), one of the most renowned jurists among the Companions of the Prophet, his method of ijtiḥad, his approach to ḥadith and Sunnah, and his influence on subsequent Islamic legal schools. Ibn 'Umar was recognized among the Companions as a preeminent scholar of the Sunnah, noted for his exceptional caution in issuing fatwas and as a distinguished representative of practical jurisprudence. His fatwas subsequently influenced the Madinan school of jurisprudence formed under Malik ibn Anas as well as the other principal schools of Islamic law. The article examines his biographical background, military participation, political neutrality during the period of fitna, his role as a ḥadith transmitter (over 2,630 ḥadiths), the foundations of his jurisprudential school, the "golden chain" of transmission through Nafi', his positions on worship, commercial transactions, family law, and his ascetic spiritual life, and his enduring influence on Imam Malik, al-Shafi'i, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.*

Keywords: *'Abdullah ibn 'Umar; Companion jurisprudence; Sunnah; Madinan school; madhhab; ijtiḥad; fatwa; ḥadith transmission; golden chain; Islamic law.*

INTRODUCTION

During the era of the Companions, Islamic law developed on the basis of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and the Companions as those best acquainted with the practice of the Prophet (peace be upon him) constituted the primary source of jurisprudential authority for subsequent generations. The schools of jurisprudence and their leading representatives that took shape in the early centuries of Islam form the foundation of contemporary

Muslim jurisprudence. One of the most eminent of these Companions was ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). He was born in Mecca approximately ten years before the Hijra; his father was ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab and his mother was Zaynab bint Maz‘un; he belonged to the Banu ‘Adi tribe of Quraysh (Ibn Abdulbarr, 1992:347–352).

Ibn ‘Umar was renowned not only as a prolific narrator of hadith but also as a distinguished jurist. His jurisprudential legacy is attested not only among his contemporaries but also among the later Followers (*tabi‘un*) and the Imams of the *madhhabs*. His hadiths and fatwas were widely cited by scholars of *fiqh* including Imam Malik, Imam al-Shafi‘i, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (al-Bukhari, 2002:45). This article examines in detail his life and personality, the foundations of his jurisprudential school, and his contribution to Islamic legal thought.

METHODS

This study employs historical-analytical and source-critical methods. The primary sources consulted include the principal classical biographical and hadith works: Ibn Abdulbarr’s “*al-Isti‘ab*” (1992), al-Dhahabi’s “*Siyar ‘Alam al-Nubala*” (1985), Ibn Sa‘d’s “*al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*” (1968), the hadith collections of al-Bukhari (2002), Muslim (1991), Abu Dawud (1430 AH), al-Tirmidhi (1998), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (2001), as well as the jurisprudential works of Malik ibn Anas (1985), al-Qurtubi (1964), Ibn Qudama (1968), and al-Bayhaqi (2003). The analysis proceeds thematically, examining in succession: biographical background and early formation; hadith transmission and the “golden chain;” the foundations of the jurisprudential school; specific jurisprudential positions; students and scholarly influence; and ascetic spiritual life.

RESULTS

Biographical background and educational formation. ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab al-‘Adawi (may Allah be pleased with him) was born in Mecca between 610 and 614 CE. His father, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, was the second caliph of Islam; his mother, Zaynab bint Maz‘un, is described in Islamic historical sources as one of the pious women of the early community. His lineage is recorded in detail in classical sources of Islamic

history (al-Dhahabi, 1985:203–238). He converted to Islam at a young age and, when he was between ten and thirteen years old, accompanied his father on the migration to Medina, where he received his Islamic education directly from the Prophet (peace be upon him) and absorbed the Sunnah through lived practice. Sources record that the Prophet praised his piety.

Ibn ‘Umar participated actively in Islamic military campaigns from the Battle of Uhud onward, accompanying the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the Battle of the Trench, the Peace of Hdaybiyya, the Conquest of Mecca, and other major events. His military courage is attested in numerous narrations. Alongside these campaigns, he devoted most of his life to disseminating the Sunnah, issuing fatwas, and educating the next generation activities that together constituted the richest dimension of his jurisprudential legacy.

Political neutrality during the period of fitna. One of the most significant political characteristics of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar was his principled refusal to support any faction during the period of civil conflict (fitna). He declined to participate in the battles of the Camel and Siffin. This stance was a direct expression of his jurisprudential principle of caution and abstention from dubious actions (Malik ibn Anas, 1985:12–15). In the conflict between Mu‘awiya and ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), he equally preferred neutrality, holding that the shedding of Muslim blood was a grave sin. Historians regard Ibn ‘Umar’s neutrality as one of the most consequential jurisprudential positions in Islamic history, as it provided subsequent generations with a model of aloofness from political conflict and dedication to knowledge and worship (Ibn Hisham, 1979:220–225).

Hadith transmission and the “golden chain.” ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar is one of the most prolific narrators of hadith in Islamic history, having transmitted over 2,630 hadiths that are widely distributed across the two Sahihs and the other Sunan collections (Muslim, 1991, vol. 2:982–985). His hadiths cover in comprehensive detail jurisprudential topics including monotheism, prayer, fasting, zakat, hajj, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and commercial transactions. He was exceptionally meticulous in memorizing hadiths and narrating them with precision; if the slightest doubt arose regarding a narration, he would refrain from transmitting it (Abu Dawud, 1430 AH:165–170).

One of the principal chains of transmission of Imam Malik runs: ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar → Nafi‘ → Malik ibn Anas. This chain, known in hadith science as the “golden

chain” (silsilah al-dhahab), has received the highest praise among specialists for its reliability and authenticity (al-Tirmidhi, 1998:233–236). The hadiths transmitted through this chain constitute a primary source in Imam Malik’s “al-Muwatta.” Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi‘i and Ahmad ibn Hanbal also regarded this chain of transmission as of the highest importance and employed it extensively in their works (Ibn Maja, 1995:55–58).

Foundations of the jurisprudential school. During the time of the Companions, “madhhab” referred not to the four subsequently institutionalized schools but to the specific system of jurisprudential views and fatwas of a given Companion. The school of Ibn ‘Umar was built, first and foremost, on reference to the Holy Qur’an: he would seek answers from the Qur’an for every question, then turn to the Sunnah (al-Nawawi, 1977:300–310). In terms of adherence to the Sunnah, Ibn ‘Umar occupies a singular position. He strove to preserve every deed performed by the Prophet (peace be upon him), even in the ordinary circumstances of daily life. Nafi‘ said of him: “Ibn ‘Umar was the strongest of people in following the Sunnah.” If the Prophet had rested beneath a tree on a journey, Ibn ‘Umar would go to that very spot and rest there, repeating the action precisely even after the tree had long since withered.

Another foundational pillar of Ibn ‘Umar’s school was the practice of the people of Medina (‘amal ahl al-Madina) the transmitted customs and practices formed during the Prophet’s lifetime and inherited from generation to generation by the Muslims of Medina. Ibn ‘Umar respected these traditions and issued fatwas grounded in them. He also accepted the consensus of the Companions as a primary source (Ibn Qudama, 1968, vol. 8:96–100).

A distinctive characteristic of Ibn ‘Umar’s jurisprudential style is his preference for silence or caution in doubtful matters rather than resort to personal opinion (ra’y) and analogy (qiyas). He applied opinion and comparison only to the minimum extent of necessity. This distinguishes him sharply from the school of Abu Hanifa, which was characterized by the extensive use of opinion and analogy, whereas Ibn ‘Umar regarded deviation from the textual evidence as dangerous (al-Bayhaqi, 2003, vol. 7:305–312). His caution is equally reflected in his approach to issuing fatwas: he was not reluctant to say “I do not know” on questions whose answer he could not confirm, and some scholars praise this frankness as itself a sign of deep learning.

Jurisprudential positions on worship and commercial transactions. Prayer, fasting, and hajj were matters of worship to which Ibn ‘Umar paid particular and meticulous attention. He followed the Sunnah with exceptional precision in the rituals of hajj, teaching the rites of talbiyah, rami, and tawaf with the utmost clarity. He regularly performed the shortened prayer (qasr) while traveling. His fatwa on shortening prayers during travel was unambiguous: he performed four-rak‘ah prayers as two rak‘ahs during journeys, considering this an established Sunnah a position later accepted by all four madhhabs. In matters of zakat, he paid particular attention to the nisab threshold and the completion of the lunar year. In commercial matters, he issued fatwas grounded in the Sunnah and strongly rejected riba (usury), gharar (uncertainty), and unfair commercial practices positions that were later adopted as foundational principles in subsequent jurisprudential schools (al-Qurtubi, 1964:108–115; Ibn al-Jawzi, 1979:370–380).

Students and scholarly influence. Numerous distinguished Followers studied under ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar. The most important of these were: Nafi‘ Ibn ‘Umar’s servant and closest disciple, who transmitted a vast corpus of hadiths directly from his teacher; Salim ibn ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar’s own son, who became one of the “Seven Jurists” (Fuqaha’ al-Sab‘ah) of Medina (al-Mizzi, 1980, vol. 15:332–360); and ‘Abd al-Hamid ibn Qays. Said ibn al-Musayyab, Mujahid ibn Jabr, and ‘Ata’ ibn Abi Rabah were also among the distinguished Followers who learned from Ibn ‘Umar. Through these students, his scholarly heritage spread to Hijaz, Iraq, and Yemen and exercised a profound influence on the formation of Islamic jurisprudence (al-Daraqutni, 2004:210–218).

Imam Malik ibn Anas’s “al-Muwatta” is grounded in large part on the jurisprudential views of Ibn ‘Umar, whom Imam Malik regarded as one of the most reliable sources in Islam (Malik ibn Anas, 1985:12–15). Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi‘i and Ahmad ibn Hanbal also made extensive use of Ibn ‘Umar’s hadiths; the “Musnad” of Ahmad ibn Hanbal contains more than 2,630 hadiths narrated from him, confirming the extraordinary place of Ibn ‘Umar in the science of hadith (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 2001).

Ascetic spiritual life. ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar lived a life of great simplicity. Despite his access to considerable wealth, he consistently gave it away in charity. His asceticism and piety were admired even by his contemporaries. He loved freeing slaves: if he saw a slave performing his prayers well, he would emancipate him; some sources record that he freed hundreds of slaves an expression of Islam’s teachings on human dignity and

Muslim solidarity. His night worship was celebrated; the Prophet had seen him performing the night prayer in a dream and praised him, and Ibn ‘Umar thereafter devoted himself to the night prayer throughout his life, intensifying his devotion during Ramadan and encouraging those around him to do likewise. Al-Dhahabi’s “*Siyar ‘Alam al-Nubala*” provides extensive information about his spiritual life and piety (al-Dhahabi, 1985, vol. 3:203–238), as does Ibn al-Jawzi’s “*Sifat al-Safwa*” (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1979:370–380).

DISCUSSION

The analysis confirms that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar occupies a position of exceptional and multi-dimensional significance in the history of Islamic law. Three dimensions of his legacy are particularly noteworthy. First, in the domain of hadith transmission: his contribution of over 2,630 authenticated hadiths, anchored by the “golden chain” of transmission through Nafi‘, constitutes one of the most consequential scholarly legacies of the Companion generation for the subsequent development of Islamic jurisprudence and hadith science (al-Tirmidhi, 1998:233–236; Abu Dawud, 1430 AH:165–170).

Second, in the domain of jurisprudential methodology: his characteristic combination of strict Sunnah adherence, reliance on Madinan practice, minimal use of *ra’y* and *qiyas*, and meticulous caution in fatwa issuance established a methodological paradigm that became foundational for the Madinan school and, through Imam Malik, for the Maliki madhhab (Malik ibn Anas, 1985; Ibn Qudama, 1968, vol. 8:96–100; al-Bayhaqi, 2003:305–312). Third, in the domain of political jurisprudence: his principled neutrality during the *fitna* provided Islamic jurisprudence with an enduring model for the relationship between scholarly authority and political conflict a model that distinguished the scholarly tradition from political factionalism and placed the preservation of Muslim unity above partisan loyalty (Malik ibn Anas, 1985:12–15).

CONCLUSION

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of the most singular figures in Islamic history a man who, through his devotion to the scriptural text, his prudence, his asceticism, and his piety, provided an unparalleled example for the Muslim Ummah. His school is distinguished by its strong grounding in the Sunnah, its restrained

use of analogy, and its spirit of practical piety. His jurisprudential legacy was especially formative in the development of the Madinan school and the Maliki madhhab; from Imam Malik ibn Anas to al-Shafi‘i and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the imams of the madhhabs drew widely on his hadiths and fatwas.

His diligence in following the Sunnah and his carefulness in ijthihad constitute a living embodiment of the principle of “loyalty to the scriptural text” (al-taqayyud bi-l-nass) in Islamic jurisprudence. ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) died in Mecca in 73 AH at the age of approximately 84–87 years. His life stands as a tremendous example for the entire history of Islam: a companion loyal to knowledge and the Sunnah, far from temptation, pious, and a great jurist, whose legacy rightly constitutes a source of pride for all subsequent generations of Muslim scholarship (al-Dhahabi, 1985, vol. 3:203–238; al-Suyuti, 1996, vol. 2).

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