CHAPTER FIVE

CANON AND COMMUNITY:
AL-ḤĀKIM AL-NAYSĀBŪRĪ AND THE CANONIZATION
OF THE ṢAḤĪḤAYN

Introduction

Around the end of the fourth/tenth century, the Ṣaḥīḥ collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim first emerged as kanōns of authenticity. Representatives from the two divergent strains of the transmission-based school, the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunnis and the nascent Shāfī‘ī/Ash‘arī camp, agreed on the Ṣaḥīḥayn as common references for the Prophet’s authentic legacy. The study and exploration of the Ṣaḥīḥayn took place at the hands of a network of devoted Ḥadīth scholars, but the canonization of the two works would result from the activities of a different cadre. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī was the common link. He both inherited and participated in the study of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections, yet he employed the ijlzāmāt genre for a new ideological purpose. Al-Ḥākim’s vision of the critical standards that the two scholars had followed in compiling their works was designed to meet the demands of both Sunni Ḥadīth scholars and the Ḥadīth-wary Mu‘tazilites who rivaled them. Al-Ḥākim used the “standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim” as a measure of authenticity to extend this common requirement to a vast new body of Ḥadīths.

In the long fourth century, the broader Muslim community developed a new vision of the authority that Prophetic Ḥadīths could attain when validated by communal consensus. By the mid-fifth/eleventh century, this leap had led legal theorists from the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Mu‘tazilite, Ḥanbalī and Shāfī‘ī/Ash‘arī schools to a common belief that Ḥadīths accepted by the umma yielded epistemological certainty. It was this principle that two of al-Ḥākim’s close associates, one from the budding Shāfī‘ī/Ash‘arī tradition and the other from the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni school, would use to declare the Ṣaḥīḥayn a common body of authentic Ḥadīths agreed on by these two vying groups.
The Life and Works of al-Hākim al-Naysābūrī

Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī was born in 321/933 in Naysābūr and began studying ḥadīth at the age of nine. He studied extensively with over two thousand teachers in Kufa, Rayy, Baghdad, Abādān, Hamadhān, Merv, Transoxiana, and his native Naysābūr.1 His primary mentors in the sciences of ḥadīth collection and criticism were three major members of the Sahihayn Network: Abū ‘Alī al-Naysābūrī, Abū Ḥāfīz al-Ḥākim and al-Dāraqūṭnī, as well as Muḥammad b. ‘Umar Ibn al-Jibīḥī (d. 355/966).2 Al-Ḥākim traveled twice to Baghdad for his studies, once as a youth and again in 368/978–9.3 Throughout his career he and his Baghdad teacher al-Dāraqūṭnī had an uneasy and tense relationship. Al-Ḥākim’s student al-Khalīfī mentions that his teacher sat and discussed (nāẓara) ḥadīth with al-Dāraqūṭnī and that the latter was pleased with the student from Naysābūr.4 In another report, however, it is said that when al-Ḥākim arrived in Baghdad he asked to see al-Dāraqūṭnī’s collection of ḥadīths from a certain shaykh. When the young scholar looked at the first ḥadīth and saw it was from a transmitter whom he considered weak, he threw down the papers and never looked at them again.5 As we shall see, al-Ḥākim and al-Dāraqūṭnī would remain in an ongoing correspondence characterized by serious disagreements over the nature of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s methods.

In Naysābūr’s rigid division between the Ḥanāfī school and the transmission-based scholars, al-Ḥākim adhered firmly to the latter’s moderate Shāfi‘ī strain. He studied the Shāfi‘ī tradition with Abū Sahl al-Ṣu‘lūkī (d. 369/980) as well as others and even composed a book on the virtues of the school’s eponymous founder (Fadā‘īl al-Shāfi‘ī).6 He complained about the way in which the Ḥanāfī Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd al-Bawraqī used to forge ḥadīths for that school, such as the following report attributed to the Prophet: “There will be in my umma a man named Abū Ḥanīfa, and he will be its lamp . . . and there will be in my

---

1 Al-Dhahabī, Siyar, 17:163.
2 Al-Dhahabī, Siyar, 17:165.
3 Al-Khalīfī, al-Irshād, 324.
4 Al-Khalīfī, al-Irshād, 324. Al-Subkt frankly admits that al-Ḥākim and al-Dāraqūṭnī were often at odds; al-Subkt, Tabaqāt, 4:164.
5 Al-Khaṭīb, Tārīkh Baghdad, 3:94. Al-Khaṭīb adds, “Or so he said (aw kamā qāl).”
6 Cf. al-Dhahabī, Tadhkīrāt al-huffāż, 3:164; al-Subkt, Tabaqāt, 4:156.