More than half a century ago, Fazlur Rahman made a provocative argument about the nature of the *sunna* of the Prophet Muḥammad and its relationship to the vast body of *ḥadīth* literature. He wrote, “[T]he actual content of the Sunnah of the early generations of Muslims was largely the product of *Ijtihād* when this *Ijtihād*, through an incessant interaction of opinion, developed the character of general acceptance or consensus of the Community, i.e. *Ijmāʿ*” (italics in original).1 While *sunna* was a dynamic reality that reflected the actual practices of early Muslims, *ḥadīths*, in his opinion, were “the sum total of aphorisms formulated and put out by Muslims themselves, ostensibly about the Prophet, although not without an ultimate historical touch with the Prophet” (p. 76). As for legal *ḥadīths*, Fazlur Rahman was unambiguous: “We must view the legal *Ḥadīth* as a problem to be re-treated and not as ready-made law to be directly applied” (p. 78).

At first blush, Fazlur Rahman’s radical hermeneutics vis-à-vis the *sunna* and *ḥadīth* literature appear to have little to do with *The Sunna and its Status in Islamic Law: The Search for a Sound Hadith*. Nine of this book’s ten chapters are short articles concerned with the nature of *sunna* in the formative period of Islam. Three of them (chapters 1, 2, and 4) have very little to do with Islamic law, and none of the ten has any obvious relation to the subtitle of the book, “The Search for a Sound Hadith.” The chapters range from original research, such as Harith bin Ramli’s excellent contribution, “From Tradition to Institution: *sunna* in the Early Ḥanbali School,” to restatements of recent scholarship, such as Gavin Picken’s chapter, “The Concept of *sunna* in the Early Shāfī‘i Madhhab,” which draws heavily on

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the important studies by Joseph Lowry and Ahmed El Shamsy. Particularly welcome is Ersilia Francesca’s chapter devoted to the concept of *sunna* in the Ibāḍī legal school, which traces its entire history, from Jābir b. Zayd to twentieth-century Omani scholars. Particularly troubling is the lack of coverage of the concept of *sunna* in the Ismāʿīlī, Zaydi, or Imāmī Shīʿī legal traditions. It is also puzzling that the Mālikīs are absent from this book, while their most aggressive critic, Ibn Ḥazm, is present in Amr Usman’s insightful chapter on the Zāhirīs. The remaining two pre-modern chapters, by Usman Ghani and Ali Altaf Mian, cover the concept of *sunna* in Muʿtazilī and medieval Ḥanafī thought.

The book’s editor, Adis Duderija, states in the Introduction that the purpose of *The Sunna and its Status in Islamic Law* is “to equip readers with a better understanding of the nature and scope of the concept of *sunna*, in both pre-modern and modern Islamic discussions on the topic” (p. 1). He claims that for the first three centuries of Islam, there existed a “non-ḥadīth-dependent concept of *sunna*,” and that during the ‘Abbāsid caliphate, Sunna underwent a process of “ḥadīthification.” Why this change is worth revisiting is not immediately apparent from the introduction. After all, Western Islamicists have a long tradition of distinguishing between prophetic *sunna* and *ḥadīth* in the formative period, as well as of crediting Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī with restricting prophetic *sunna* to sound prophetic *ḥadīth* texts, and nothing in *The Sunna and its Status in Islamic Law* challenges this scholarly consensus. So what is the purpose of this book?

The answer emerges in chapter ten, written by Duderija, and titled “The Relative Status of *Ḥadīth* and Sunna as Sources of Legal Authority vis-à-vis the Qurʾān in Muslim Modernist Thought.” After nine chapters devoted to early and classical jurists and *ḥadīth* scholars, the reader is abruptly introduced to Javed Ghāmidī (b. 1951), Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), Muḥammad Shaḥrūr (b. 1938), Ghulām Parwez (d. 1985), and, very briefly, Adis Duderija himself. What these intellectuals share in common is a mission to liberate the *sunna* from the textual tradition of *ḥadīth* in pursuit of the broader objective of modernizing Islam. For Javed Ghāmidī of Pakistan, the *sunna* is not *ḥadīth* but rather “bodily perpetuations of numerous individuals” (p. 213) concerning ritual practices upon which the earliest Muslims were in agreement. Fazlur Rahman’s hermeneutic, like that of many liberal Muslim reformers, demanded elevating the Qurʾān above the *ḥadīths* and divesting non-concurrent *ḥadīths* (the *ḥadīth wāḥid*/aḥādī) of any independent legal authority. For Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, according to Duderija, Muḥammad was a fallible *mujtahid*, so his *sunna* and *ḥadīths* fall outside of his role as a prophet or messenger and are essentially *fatwās*, not divine revelation. Ghulām Parwez is quoted as saying