

Recent Studies of
Women and the
Production of
Islamic Knowledge

Women transmitting/interpreting/contesting Tradition (*Sunna*)

The Prophet's female kin transmitting hundreds of hadiths of (Umm Salama; Fatima and Aisha)

Aisha has 2,210 hadiths to her name (297 of those are in the sound collection of al-Bukhari containing **7,275 hadith**) <https://sunnah.com/bukhari>.

These transmissions were exegetical and became the basis of Islamic law on the matters they tackled.

Abu Musa al-Ash'ari said: 'Whenever any matter became difficult for us, the Companions of the Prophet- PBUH - then we asked Aishah about it: we found she had got knowledge of that. (Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat*, 2007, p. 248)

His female companions/disciples also transmitted important hadiths. Asma' bint 'Umayy, narrated 60 hadiths.

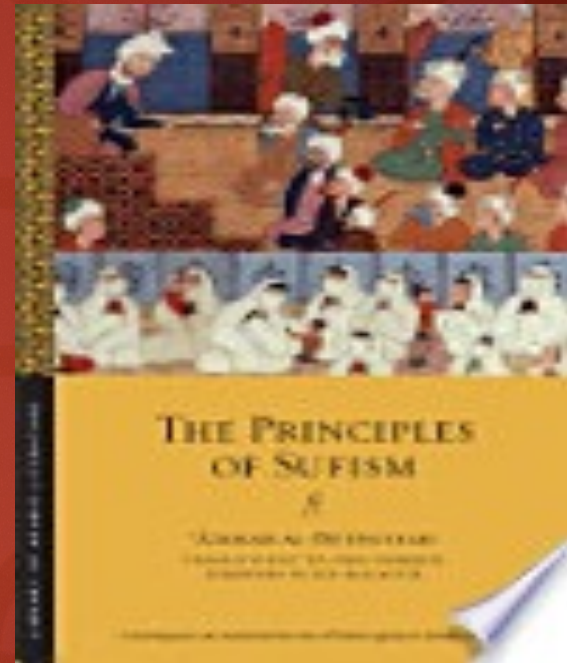
Shuhda al-Katiba, an Iraqi Hadith Scholar and a calligrapher (482–574/1089– 1178)



Aisha al-Ba'uniyya, d. 1516

A Syrian theologian and a Sufi teacher

- ▶ Repentance
- ▶ Sincerity
- ▶ Remembrance
- ▶ Love



Female Access to Religious Knowledge - Textual Foundations

Al-Khāṭīb al-Baghdādī, an 11th c Iraqi religious scholar, in his book *al-Faqīh wa-l-mutafaqqih* (Jurists and Seekers of Jurisprudential Knowledge) states that it is permissible for women to do *fiqh* (rationally measuring the religious permissibility of any course of action in light of revealed texts) on the basis of a saying by the Prophet where a woman is reported to have asked him about ritual purification for women who have nocturnal dreams of a sexual nature. His wife, Aisha, who was present, rejoined: You are an embarrassment to women but the Prophet replies: 'Be patient Aisha, do not prevent the women of Ansār from acquiring a deep understanding of the religious practice/jurisprudence (vol. 1, p. 174).

Female Capacity to Produce Religious Knowledge

- ▶ Al-Nawawī, 13th C Syrian scholar from Damascus, in a treatise on *The Etiquette of Fatwā* he discusses the conditions required to authorise others to practice jurisprudence and issue *fatwās* (religious rulings of a consultative nature), states that if the necessary knowledge of the religious disciplines is acquired then ideally *muffī* (a person who gives *fatwā*) mustbe a responsible adult Muslim, who is trustworthy and pure from corruption or moral faults; who possesses a perceptive mind, a sound intellect, and (a capability for) coherent thought; and who is exact in action, accurate in reasoning and generally attentive. It does not matter if the *muffī* is a free person, a slave, a woman or a blind person. The *muffī* could be a mute person if s/he can write or make gestures understandable to others (p.19).

Contemporary Shifts

- ▶ The Rise of Specialised Islamic Studies Schools and Colleges for Girls and Women
- ▶ 1964 Founding the Women's Faculty at al-Azhar in Egypt, for example
- ▶ The Revival of Islamic Studies and Education (goes back to 19th Century)



Rereading the tradition: The case of female prophethood

1. **Abu al-Barakat al-Nasafi al-Hanafi (d. 710/1310)**
2. **Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 419/1028)**
3. **Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī (d. 508/1115)**
4. **Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhirī (d. 456/1064)**
5. **Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273)**
6. **Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936)**
7. **Abu ‘Uthman al-Jahiz (d. 255/868–869)**
8. **Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449)**