

THE INTELLECTUAL LEGACY OF IMAM AL-DĀRIMĪ AND HIS ROLE AMONG HADITH SCHOLARS

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Abstract. This article examines the scholarly life, intellectual contributions, and methodological approach of Imam al-Dārimī, one of the prominent muhaddiths of the third century AH. It explores his formative education in Movarounnahr, extensive journeys in pursuit of hadith, and his engagement with leading scholars across the Islamic world. Particular attention is given to his major work Sunan al-Dārimī, highlighting its significance as both a hadith compilation and a reflection of his juristic reasoning and independent legal judgment (ijtihād). The study also analyzes his expertise in the sciences of narrator criticism (‘ilm al-rijāl and al-jarḥ wa al-ta‘dīl), which earned him high recognition among his contemporaries, including leading authorities such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Abu Zur‘a al-Razi. Furthermore, the article discusses differing scholarly views regarding his works and biographical details, as well as his lasting influence on hadith methodology. Overall, Imam al-Dārimī emerges as a critical figure whose contributions significantly shaped the development of hadith sciences in the early Islamic intellectual tradition.

Keywords: Imam al-Dārimī, hadith studies, Sunan al-Dārimī, jarḥ wa ta‘dīl, ‘ilm al-rijāl, ijtihād, muhaddith, Islamic scholarship, hadith methodology.

Introduction. The development of Islamic sciences—particularly the science of Hadith—reached its “golden age” in the 3rd century AH (9th century CE). During this period, the great scholars and hadith experts who emerged from the land of Movarounnahr left an indelible mark on the history of world civilization. Among the most prominent figures of this era of intellectual flourishing was undoubtedly Abu Muhammad ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī, who was honored in his time with distinguished titles such as “Hāfiz,” “Imām,” and “Shaykh al-Islām.”

Imam al-Dārimī was not only a great scholar who collected and systematically organized hadiths, but also a distinguished mujtahid who established his own scholarly approach in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and Qur’anic exegesis (tafsir). His authority in the field of hadith is especially evident in that he lived during the same period as the compilers of the Kutub al-Sittah—such as Imams al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and al-Tirmidhī—and served as a teacher and intellectual guide to many of them.

Methods. Al-Ḥāfiz Imam ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī is regarded as one of the eminent scholars and hadith specialists who originated from the region of Transoxiana. His full name is Abu Muhammad ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Faḍl ibn Bahrām ibn ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Tamīmī al-Dārimī al-Samarqandī. The nisba “al-Dārimī” refers to Banū Dārim ibn Mālik ibn Ḥanzala ibn Zayd Manāt ibn Tamīm, which is one of the major clans of the Tamīm tribe¹. There are also instances where this nisba is rendered in the form “Doramī”². Imam al-Dārimī was born in 181 AH in Samarkand. He was raised in a virtuous family known for its scholarship and held in high esteem.

He received his initial education in his homeland of Transoxiana. In pursuit of knowledge, he traveled extensively across various regions and collected hadiths. Regarding this, he is

¹ Abū Sa‘d ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad al-Sam‘ānī. *Al-Ansāb*. – Beirut: Dār al-Jinān, 1988. – Vol. II. – p. 440.

² Abū Tāhir Khwāja. *Samarjīyya* (Meros Series). – Tashkent: Kamalak, 1991. – p. 54.

reported to have said: “I saw the scholars of the Two Holy Sanctuaries, the Hijaz, Syria, and Iraq, but I did not see anyone who had gathered more knowledge than Muhammad ibn Ismā‘īl”³. He first traveled to Khurāsān, where in the city of Marw he listened to hadiths from Naḍr ibn Shumayl and other shaykhs, incorporating these narrations into his own collection. Thereafter, he set out for Iraq, where in cities such as Baghdad, Wāsiṭ, Basra, Kufa, and Hīt, he studied under the leading hadith scholars of his time.

Later, while on his journey to perform the pilgrimage (ḥajj), Imam al-Dārimī met Yaḥyā ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥimmānī in Kufa, where they engaged in scholarly debates and discussions. As a result of these exchanges, Imam al-Dārimī became convinced that Yaḥyā al-Ḥimmānī did not belong among the reliable transmitters (ruwāt) from whom hadiths should be taken.

Results. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī relates: “When I asked Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal about Yaḥyā al-Ḥimmānī, he replied: ‘We refrained from transmitting hadith from him based on the statement of ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (al-Dārimī), for indeed ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was an imām’”⁴. This demonstrates that Imam al-Dārimī held a distinguished position not only in the transmission of hadith, but also in the critical evaluation of narrators within the sciences of jarḥ wa ta‘dīl (impugnation and accreditation).

The next destination of the scholar’s intellectual journeys was Damascus, in the region of al-Shām. There, Imam al-Dārimī heard hadiths from leading scholars such as Abū Mushir, Marwān ibn Muḥammad, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Sa‘īd al-Muftī, Zayd ibn Yaḥyā ibn ‘Ubayd, Muḥammad ibn Mubārak al-Sūrī, Duḥaym, and other hadith scholars of their rank⁵.

As a result of his tireless efforts and continuous scholarly pursuits over many years in the path of knowledge, Imam al-Dārimī rose to the rank of a leading authority in the sciences of hadith, tafsir, and fiqh, and gained widespread fame as a prominent muḥaddith. His contemporaries highly praised his intellectual excellence, sharpness of mind, strong memory, piety, God-consciousness, asceticism, devotion to worship, and his leadership in scholarship. Among them, the well-known hadith transmitter Muḥammad ibn Bashshār al-Bundār commended Imam al-Dārimī, saying: “There are four ḥuffāz who have reached the pinnacle of hadith scholarship in the world: in Rayy, Abū Zur‘a; in Nishapur, Muslim; in Samarqand, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān; and in Bukhara, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl”⁶. From the authors of major hadith collections to anyone who had even a small share in this science, all unanimously acknowledged Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal as an imam and repeatedly mentioned the virtues of Imam al-Dārimī.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, in his work Tadrīb al-Rāwī, cites the following narration: ‘Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal reports: “I asked my father (Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal): ‘O father, who are the true ḥuffāz (masters of hadith memorization)?’ My father replied: ‘My son, they were the young scholars from Khurāsān who came to us, but now they have dispersed in different regions.’ I asked: ‘O father, who were they?’ He said: ‘They were Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, ‘Ubaydullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Rāzī (Abū Zur‘a), ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Samarqandī (i.e., al-Dārimī), and Ḥasan ibn Shujā‘ al-Balkhī.’ I then asked: ‘O father, who among them had the strongest memory?’ He replied: ‘Abū Zur‘a was the fastest and most fluent in narrating hadith; Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl had the deepest knowledge of hadith; ‘Abdullāh ibn

³ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. *Hady al-Sārī Muqaddimat Fath al-Bārī*. – Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 2001. – p. 509.

⁴ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī. *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*. – Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006. – Vol. IX. – p. 558.

⁵ Ibn ‘Asākir Abū al-Qāsim ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan. *Tārīkh Dimashq*. – Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1995. – Vol. XXIX. – p. 310.

⁶ Azizkhwaja Inoyatov. *Mashhur daholar siyrati*. – Tashkent: Hilol-Nashr, 2017. – p. 194.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān (al-Dārimī) was the most precise and firm in hadith; and Ḥasan ibn Shujā‘ was the most skilled in organizing hadiths according to their chapters.”

Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad also transmits from his father the following statement: “In terms of hadith memorization, four scholars from Khurāsān reached the highest level: Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Samarqandī (i.e., al-Dārimī), and Ḥasan ibn Shujā‘ al-Balkhī”⁷. In valuable historical and biographical sources such as *Tarikh Baghdād* (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī), *Tarikh Dimashq* (Ibn ‘Asākir), *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* (Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī), and *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’* (Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī), many additional positive and highly elevated assessments of Imam al-Dārimī by his contemporaries are recorded.

Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Warrāq narrates: “I heard Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Makhrāmī say: ‘O people of Khurāsān, as long as ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is among you, do not occupy yourselves with others in his presence.’”

Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī said: “Whenever someone was described to me, I would find upon meeting him that he was not as described. However, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is an exception; I found him to be even greater than he was described”⁸.

Abū Muḥammad Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad al-Ādamī reports: “I heard the ḥāfiẓ Rajā‘ ibn Murajjā‘ say: ‘I do not know anyone who has deeper knowledge of the hadiths of the Prophet ﷺ than ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (al-Dārimī)’”⁹.

Discussion. Imam al-Dārimī, due to his deep asceticism (zuhd) toward worldly matters and his complete dedication to knowledge, refused to accept the position of judge (qāḍī) offered to him by the ruler of Samarqand. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī relates the following account: “He was among the great scholars who traveled in pursuit of hadith, and he was characterized by memorizing, collecting, and mastering hadith, as well as by reliability, truthfulness, piety, and asceticism. He was appointed as a judge in Samarqand, but he declined. When the ruler insisted strongly, he accepted the position reluctantly, issued only a single judgment, and then requested resignation. The ruler accepted his resignation.”

The sources contain varying information regarding the scholar’s works and intellectual legacy. Most historians who wrote about his biography—such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn ‘Asākir, Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafādī—mention that he authored works such as *Musnad*, *al-Tafsīr*, and *al-Jāmi‘*. However, only the *Musnad* has survived to the present day.

His work *al-Tafsīr* has been entirely lost. It is not known whether it was a complete commentary on the Qur’an or covered only certain portions. Since the rational (analytical) method of tafsir had not yet developed at that time, it is highly likely that his work was based on transmitted reports (tafsīr bi’l-ma’thūr). Considering the period in which he lived, it can be noted that he passed away approximately fifty to sixty years before Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī—who is regarded as the author of one of the earliest comprehensive tafsirs and known as the “Imam of the mufasssīrūn.” This suggests that al-Dārimī may have been among the earliest scholars to compose a work of tafsir.

As for the work *al-Jāmi‘*, it is highly probable that it is in fact identical to his *Musnad*. Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, in his *al-Ḍaw‘ al-Lāmi‘*, states: “...just as in the case of the *Jāmi‘* works of Abū ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī and Abū Muḥammad al-Dārimī, this book is also referred to as a

⁷ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr. *Tadrib al-Rāwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī* / taḥqīq by Abū Qutaybah Naẓar Muḥammad Faryābī. – Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 1994. – Vol. II. – p. 940.

⁸ Abū Ḥafṣ Najm al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Nasafī. *Al-Qand fī Dhikr ‘Ulamā’ Samarqand*. – Tehran: Āyina-ye Mīrās (Aynai Meros), 1999. – p. 297.

⁹ al-Khaṭīb Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Baghdādī. *Tārīkh Baghdād*. – Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2002. – Vol. XI. – p. 212.

Musnad”¹⁰. It appears that al-Sakhāwī considered al-Jāmi‘ and Musnad to be two names for the same work. The fact that scholars have not reached a unanimous agreement regarding the title of the work that has come down to us further supports giving weight to al-Sakhāwī’s statement. Indeed, some scholars have referred to this very work as Musnad, while others have called it al-Jāmi‘.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, in his work *Naẓm al-‘Uqyān fī A‘yān al-A‘yān*, while describing Ibn Ḥajar’s book *Ithāf al-Maharah*, uses the expression: “...it comprises books such as Aḥmad’s Musnad, al-Dārimī’s Jāmi‘, ...”¹¹. However, in *Ithāf al-Maharah*, the work of al-Dārimī is referred to as Musnad. This indicates that al-Suyūṭī also held the view that the titles Musnad and al-Jāmi‘ refer to the same book.

Imam al-Dārimī’s Sunan is not merely a collection of hadiths; rather, it is a comprehensive legal source that reflects the author’s deep juristic reasoning and capacity for independent legal judgment (*ijtihād*). His status as a mujtahid is clearly manifested in the structural composition of the work, the formulation of chapter headings (*tarājim al-abwāb*), and the personal observations he provides following the hadiths.

Imam al-Dārimī derived legal rulings independently from hadith. His methodology is, in many respects, similar to that of Imam al-Bukhārī; however, al-Dārimī adopts a simpler and more accessible language in his explanations. He does not adhere blindly to any particular legal school, but rather appears as an independent mujtahid who derives rulings directly from hadith.

His stature in hadith scholarship is defined not only by the collection of narrations, but also by his exceptional expertise in evaluating the reliability of transmitters—namely, in the sciences of *‘ilm al-rijāl* and *al-jarḥ wa al-ta‘dīl*. Imam al-Dārimī was recognized in his time as one of the foremost critical scholars most knowledgeable about the conditions of narrators. His scholarly authority in this field was highly esteemed by his contemporaries:

– Even the most rigorous authorities in *jarḥ wa ta‘dīl*, such as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī, consulted Imam al-Dārimī regarding hadith defects and issues concerning narrators, and regarded his opinions as authoritative.

– He was extremely cautious and objective in assessing narrators. His judgments—such as declaring a narrator “reliable” (*thiqah*) or “weak” (*ḍa‘īf*)—served as foundational references for all major later works in the science of narrators.

– In compiling his Sunan, al-Dārimī applied all of his expertise in *‘ilm al-rijāl* in practice:

- Selection of chains (*intiqa‘*): The author paid close attention to the character of each narrator in the chain of transmission when including a hadith in his collection. As a result, the majority of hadiths in his Sunan possess elevated and reliable chains (*‘ālī al-isnād*).

- Identification of hidden defects (*‘ilal*): Al-Dārimī demonstrated sharp insight in detecting subtle flaws in chains of transmission—such as narrations between individuals who had not actually met, or confusion arising from similar names. He would often provide brief yet meaningful remarks after citing a hadith, such as: “The chain of this hadith is uninterrupted,” or “So-and-so is alone in this narration.”

- Additional information on narrators: At times, al-Dārimī provides further details about narrators—such as their place of residence, date of death, or teachers—after the hadith text. This serves as a key tool for readers to verify the historical and scholarly reliability of the narration.

Imam al-Dārimī is regarded as one of the earliest scholars in our region to systematize this complex branch of hadith studies. He taught his students not only the texts of hadith, but also the methods of recognizing and critically analyzing narrators (*dirāyah*). His conclusions in this regard are presented in such a refined manner that even modern researchers consider Sunan al-Dārimī to be among the best sources for the practical study of narrator criticism.

¹⁰ Shams al-Dīn Abū al-Khayr Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī. *al-Daw‘ al-Lāmi‘ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi‘*. – Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1992. – Vol. VIII. – p. 10.

¹¹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr. *Naẓm al-‘Uqyān fī A‘yān al-A‘yān*. – Beirut: al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1927. – p. 46.

There are differing opinions regarding the exact date of Imam al-Dārimī's death and his place of burial. However, according to the majority of reliable sources—such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghḍādī, Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Nasafī, and Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī—his death corresponds to November 18, 869 CE. Some Turkish and Arab researchers identify Marw in Khurāsān as his burial place. However, al-Dhahabī, in his *Tārīkh al-Islām*, reports that his brother, Ibrāhīm ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī (d. 880 CE), died in Samarkand and was buried beside him, indicating that Imam al-Dārimī himself was also buried in Samarkand¹².

Additionally, Najm al-Dīn 'Umar al-Nasafī states that Imam al-Dārimī was buried in the Chokardiza cemetery, and that the funeral prayer (janāzah) over him was led by the amir of Samarkand, Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Asad. Meanwhile, in Samariyya, it is reported that Imam al-Dārimī's grave is located in the village of Ispanī (modern Ispandiy) in the Shavdor district, and that the distance between the city of Samarkand and the burial site is approximately eleven kilometers¹³. The fact that the funeral prayer of the muhaddith was personally led by the amir of Samarkand, out of respect, along with the reports regarding the burial place of his brother, indicates that the scholar's grave is located in the vicinity of Samarkand.

Conclusion. The life and scholarly legacy of Imam al-Dārimī firmly situate him among the foremost authorities of the formative period of Islamic sciences in the third century AH (ninth century CE). Emerging from the intellectual milieu of Movarounnahr he not only participated in the great hadith movement of his time but also contributed to shaping its methodological foundations. His extensive travels, engagement with leading scholars across major centers of learning, and critical independence in evaluating narrations reflect a scholar deeply committed to both the preservation and rigorous authentication of prophetic tradition.

Al-Dārimī's Sunan stands as a testament to his dual competence in hadith transmission and juristic reasoning. The work demonstrates a refined balance between riwāyah (transmission) and dirāyah (analytical understanding), revealing his capacity as an independent mujtahid who derived legal rulings directly from hadith evidence. His careful structuring of chapters, nuanced commentary, and consistent attention to the reliability of narrators underscore his significant role in the development of hadith methodology, particularly within the sciences of 'ilm al-rijāl and al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl.

Moreover, the high regard in which he was held by his contemporaries—among them leading figures such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Zur'a al-Rāzī, and others—attests to his scholarly authority and integrity. His evaluations of narrators and hadiths became reference points for later generations, further solidifying his influence within the Islamic intellectual tradition. The discussions surrounding his works, including the identification of his Sunan with al-Jāmi', as well as the partial loss of his other writings, highlight both the richness and the challenges of reconstructing his full scholarly contribution. Ultimately, Imam al-Dārimī's legacy is characterized by intellectual rigor, methodological precision, and ethical commitment to knowledge. His contributions not only enriched the hadith tradition of his time but also provided enduring tools for critical scholarship. As such, he remains a central figure in the history of Islamic thought, whose works continue to inform both classical studies and contemporary research in hadith and related disciplines.

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¹² Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī. *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-A'lām*. – Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2003. – Vol. 6. – p. 146.

¹³ Abū Ṭāhir Khwāja al-Samarqandī. *Samariyya // "Meros" series*. – Tashkent: "Kamalak", 1991. – p. 54.

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