

The Destruction of Books by Traditionists

La destrucción de libros por los tradicionistas

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This paper is a survey of the destruction of books particularly by traditionists (collectors, transmitters, and critics of hadith) and particularly in the ninth century CE and before, offered as an addendum to Omar Ali de Unzaga's forthcoming study of book burning in Islam. The destruction of books from distrust of written transmission has been adequately brought out by Michael Cook. What I chiefly add to previous scholarly accounts are some additional examples, a brief consideration of destroying books for the sake of orthodoxy, and a better account of pious reasons for destroying books, which had much to do with distrust not of writing hadith but of teaching it as a temptation to pride and a distraction from weightier things.

Key words: Destruction of books; Distrust of written transmission; Traditionists; Teaching hadith.

Este artículo ofrece una panorámica de la destrucción de libros especialmente por parte de los tradicionistas (compiladores, transmisores, críticos del hadiz), especialmente en el siglo IX de la era cristiana y antes, que sirve como una adenda al estudio (en curso de publicación) de Omar Ali de Unzaga sobre la quema de libros en el islam. La destrucción de libros a causa de la desconfianza hacia la transmisión escrita ha sido analizada en profundidad por Michael Cook. Lo que me interesa añadir a la investigación previa son algunos ejemplos adicionales, unas breves consideraciones sobre la destrucción de libros en pro de la ortodoxia, y una mejor presentación de las razones piadosas para destruir libros, razones que tenían mucho que ver con la desconfianza no tanto de poner escrito el hadiz, sino de enseñarlo, en tanto que tentación para caer en la vanidad y distracción de asuntos más importantes.

Palabras clave: Destrucción de libros; desconfianza hacia la transmisión escrita; tradicionistas; enseñanza del hadiz.

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¹ Cook, "The opponents of the writing of tradition in early Islam".

scholarly accounts are some additional examples, a brief consideration of destroying books for the sake of orthodoxy, and a better account of pious reasons for destroying books, which had much to do with distrust not of writing hadith but of teaching it as a temptation to pride and a distraction from weightier things.

For most of the eighth century CE, it was controversial whether hadith should ever be written down.² The technical language of hadith transmission stresses direct oral transmission. *Ḥadīth* itself means ‘utterance’ and plainly corresponds to the oral law of the Rabbis as opposed to the written law (for the Rabbis, the Pentateuch; for Muslims, the Qur’ān). Rather than writing it down, one was supposed to hear it, keep it in one’s memory, and then dictate in turn what one knew from memory. ‘Do not write on my authority (‘*annī*)’, reads a prophetic hadith report in Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*. ‘Whoever writes down on my authority anything but the Qur’ān, let him erase it. Relate things on my authority orally (*ḥaddithū ‘annī*) without embarrassment.’³ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal relates five variants, in one of which Abū Hurayrah relates how he and some other Companions, on hearing the Prophet’s prohibition, made a pile of their notes and burnt them.⁴ Abū Dāwūd mentions an occasion when a Companion related a hadith report to the caliph Mu‘āwiyah, the caliph had someone write it down, then the Companion had it erased in obedience to the Prophet’s prohibition.⁵

A great deal of theoretical literature on orality identifies its chief feature and advantage as the possibility of continually reshaping tradition

² The controversy is splendidly surveyed by Cook, “The opponents of the writing”. V. also the series of articles by Gregor Schoeler referred to by Cook, esp. “Die Frage der Schriftlichen oder mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im frühen Islam” and “Schreiben und Veröffentlichungen. Zu Verwendung und Funktion der Schrift in den ersten islamischen Jahrhunderten,” also available in translation (by Uwe Vagelpohl) with additional notes (by James E. Montgomery) as *The oral and the written in early Islam*. His work has now culminated in Schoeler, *The genesis of literature in Islam: from the aural to the read*, rev. and trans. by Shawkat M. Toorawa. I tend to be more sceptical than Schoeler when it comes to the reliability of attributions to and biographical reports of the earliest figures, one reason for my discounting pressure from the Umayyad caliphs as an explanation for why the writing of hadith either became normal or met resistance.

³ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-zuhd wa-l-raqā’iq* 16, *bāb al-tathabbut fi kitābat al-ḥadīth*, no 3004.

⁴ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad imām al-muḥaddithīn*, 3:12-13 = Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-imām*, ed. al-Arna’ūt, 17: 156-9; other parallels at *Musnad*, 3:12, 21, 39, 56 = ed. al-Arna’ūt, 17: 149-50, 151-2, 250-1, 443, 18:94, the third of which includes the description of burning.

⁵ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-‘ilm* 3, *bāb fi kitāb al-‘ilm*, no 3647.

to suit the present moment.⁶ That a great deal of such reshaping took place in the course of transmitting hadith seems hard to deny.⁷ The tradition acknowledges that dictation from memory was liable to distortion. For example, Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/777?) is quoted as saying, ‘If I told you I’ve been relating hadith to you just as I’ve heard, I’d be lying.’⁸ ‘Go by the first version heard’ was the reported advice of Abū ‘Uthmān (probably al-Nahdī, Kufan, l. Basra, d. 95/713-14?) to ‘Āsim al-Aḥwal (Basran, d. after 140/757-8) when someone complained that he would dictate a particular hadith report differently on the second occasion.⁹ Al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) and before him, reportedly, Mālik (d. 179/795) required that the traditionist be knowledgeable of the law, lest he overlook the significance of any change in wording and transmit wrongly.¹⁰ In other words, transmission by paraphrase (*al-riwāyah bi-l-ma‘nā*), although plainly too common to forbid, had to stop at changes that would entail unforeseen juridical consequences. Only expertise in jurisprudence would ensure that a transmitter made only harmless changes.¹¹

⁶ Two classics are Goody and Watson, “The consequences of literacy” and Ong, *Orality and literacy*.

⁷ Speight, “A look at variant readings in the *ḥadīth*”; Speight, “Narrative structures in the Hadīth” and Speight, “Rhetorical argumentation in the hadīth literature of Islam”. On the long controversy over the authenticity of prophetic hadīth, v. Motzki, *The origins of Islamic jurisprudence*, chap. 1, and Berg, *The development of exegesis in early Islam*, chap. 2. Motzki advocates what he calls the *isnād-cum-matn* method to identify variant wordings with particular transmitters, for which v. Motzki, “Dating Muslim traditions”. The connection between oral transmission and drift is briefly made by, among others, Patricia Crone: “The purpose of such reports was to validate Islamic law and doctrine, not to record history in the modern sense, and since they were transmitted orally, as very short statements, they easily drifted away from their original meaning as conditions changed. (They were also easily fabricated, but this is actually less of a problem.)” So in Crone, “What do we actually know about Mohammed?”. Some Muslim scholars have observed the alleged connection between drift and oral transmission and argued that, contrary to what the traditionists themselves said, writing was always crucial to the transmission of hadīth, notably Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic literary papyri 2: Qur’anic commentary and tradition*, and Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:53-84. But the phenomenon of drift seems massive, whether explained by oral transmission or not.

⁸ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-‘Ilal wa-ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, 1:550 = Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘ fi l-‘ilal wa-ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, 1:201 (henceforward, references to latter edn in italics).

⁹ Abū Khaythamah, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 22.

¹⁰ Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Risālah*, 1001; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*, 1:44; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta‘dīl*, 2:32. Additional citations of Mālik in Dutton, *The origins of Islamic law*, pp. 17, 186.

¹¹ Described as a later compromise position between advocates of transmission verbatim and by paraphrase by Jonathan Brown, *Hadīth*, p. 23, citing al-Khaṭīb al-Baghhdādī, *al-Jāmi‘ fi akhlāq al-rāwī*, an edition I have not seen. *V.* also, apparently at greater length,

However, the possibility of reshaping is not cited by advocates of purely oral transmission, rather (apart from not allowing anything to threaten the status of the Qurʾān as *al-kitāb*) control over who should gain access to it. For example, here is the Syrian jurist al-Awzāʿī (d. 157/773-4?) against writing:

This matter was once clear, splendid, and noble. They used to remind one another of it (*yatalāqawnahū baynahum*). When it went into books, its light disappeared and it reached unqualified persons (*dhahaba nūruhū wa-šāra ilā ghayr ahlihi*).¹²

For al-Awzāʿī, purely oral hadith transmission was attractive above all because it was exclusive. But al-Awzāʿī was also quoted more favourably to written notes; for example, saying that hadith from books that had been handed on but not orally dictated were not to be passed on by dictation but were good enough to guide practice, or recommending the books of his disciple al-Walīd ibn Mazyad [d. 203/818-19?] as the soundest record of his own teaching.¹³ He is also said to have been less reliable than a certain Basran in transmitting hadith from a certain Yemeni because his notebooks had been lost.¹⁴

Secondarily, it was sometimes held that memory was more reliable than written notes. A minor Kufan traditionist is said to have sent his son to ask al-Shaʿbī (d. after 100/718) what to do about some notes (a *ṣahīfah*) in what he recognized as his own handwriting, sealed by what he recognized as his own signet: might he testify to what was in them? ‘Only if you remember it’, said al-Shaʿbī. ‘People write what they please and seal what they please.’¹⁵ Similarly, Mālik is said to have ruled out accepting something from a thoroughly trustworthy man who saw an addition he did not recognize in his notebook (*kitāb*).¹⁶ There was presumably some chance that one had once knowingly written down something worthless.

al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāyah fī ʿilm al-riwāyah*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ al-Tijānī, ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥasan Maḥmūd, pp. 265-317 = ed. Aḥmad ʿUmar Hāshim, pp. 205-247, with many more examples; also al-Rāmahurmuzī, *al-Muḥaddith al-fāsil*, pp. 533-543.

¹² Abū Zurʿah al-Dimashqī, *al-Tārīkh*, 1:364. A slightly different version *apud* al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taqyīd al-ʿilm*, p. 64, cited by Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 471.

¹³ Abū Zurʿah al-Dimashqī, *al-Tārīkh*, 1:264, 2:723; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ*, 1:205; Ibn Ḥajar, *Kitāb Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, 11:150-1. Cf. Judd, *Religious scholars and the Umayyads*, p. 74, who interprets passages in Abū Zurʿah differently.

¹⁴ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ*, 9:61.

¹⁵ Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah al-awliyāʾ*, 4:314.

¹⁶ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ*, 2:32.

Sahīfah and *kitāb* are the two words that have come up here for written records, along with the plural of the latter, *kutub*. With eighth-century references, from the period when writing hadith was controversial, we should normally envision notebooks, contents arranged by order of reception. Deliberately-arranged books in the modern sense, meant to be published in multiple identical copies, became common only in the ninth century. As a transitional stage, some early books were published in multiple redactions; e.g. the *Muwattaʿ* of Mālik.¹⁷ In general, publication in multiple identical copies seems to have prevailed sooner in the field of *adab*, meaning roughly belles-lettres, than hadith.¹⁸

At first, writing was grudgingly accepted as a private, ancillary activity, not allowed in public. Students would hear dictation in the mosque, then write down at home what they had heard to help them remember it. For example, ʿAlqamah ibn Qays (Kufan, d. after 60/679-80?) thought writing reprehensible (*makrūh*) but accepted it from Masrūq ibn al-Ajdaʿ (Kufan, d. 63/682-3?) if he should erase it after memorization.¹⁹ In time, though, it became accepted in the mosque as well.²⁰ The last experts of whom we hear strong opposition to all writing were men who died in the early ninth century. The transition is captured by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal’s reminiscence of sitting by the blind side of Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah (d. 198/814), a Kufan who had transferred to Mecca, so that he would not notice that he was taking notes, which he forbade other auditors to do if he noticed it.²¹ At that, there are also stories indicating that Sufyān, too, used written notes; for example, the Meccan ʿAmr ibn Dīnār (d. 126/743-4) is said to have reproached him on hearing that he wrote hadith: ‘When I was your age, I memorized hadith.’²²

¹⁷ Brockopp, “Rereading the history of early Mālikī jurisprudence,” esp. p. 235, and Dutton, *The origins of Islamic law*, pp. 22-26.

¹⁸ Schoeler, *The oral and the written*, pp. 34-35. For positive enthusiasm for books from devotees of *adab*, v., for example, Günther, “Praise to the book! Al-Jāhīz and Ibn Qutaybah on the excellence of the written word in medieval Islam”.

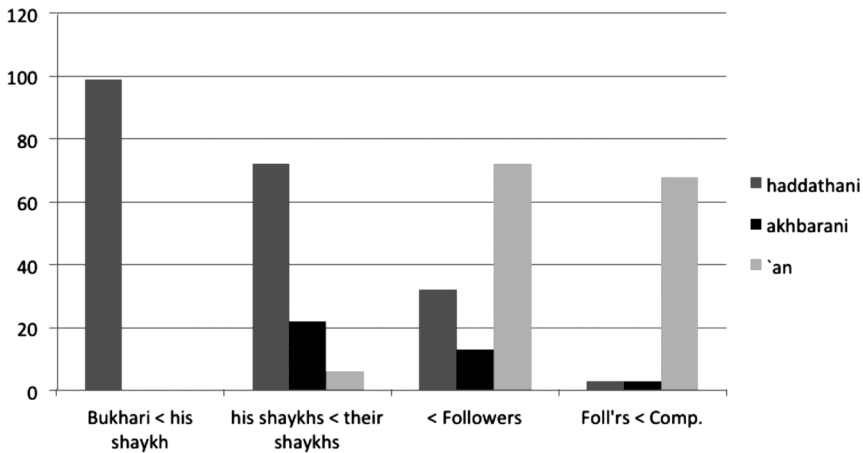
¹⁹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-ʿIlal*, 1:216 1:97; similarly Abū l-Ḥasan al-ʿIjlī, *Tārīkh al-thiqāt*, arranged Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī, additions by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Qalʿajī, p. 340.

²⁰ Although I doubt the implications of her evidence for the authenticity of hadith going back to the Prophet, Nabia Abbott (*Studies in Arabic literary papyri* 2) deserves credit for her original exposition of how oral and written hadith transmission were actually combined in the ninth century.

²¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-ʿIlal*, 3:383 2:235; cited by Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 468.

²² Abū l-Qāsim al-Baghawī, *al-Jaʿdiyāt*, 1:483.

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) was one of the most prominent hadith collectors and critics of the ninth century.²³ He himself strongly advocated the use of written notes. He forbade his son ‘Abd Allāh and his Basran contemporary ‘Alī ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234/849) to relate hadith without their notebooks at hand. He almost never related hadith himself without a notebook in his hand.²⁴ He told Ibn Hānī’ (d. 275/888-9) that he preferred him to read out a hadith report from his notebook as both looked at the book, rather than just letting the student listen to Aḥmad read it aloud.²⁵ But even he said that someone who relied on written transmission alone always distorted (*yuṣaḥḥifu*).²⁶ And notice that the form of oral transmission was maintained: he did not just lend Ibn Hānī’ his notebook to copy from. It was at about the turn of the ninth century when *ḥaddathanī* and *akhbaranī*, which expressly pointed to direct oral transmission, replaced unspecific ‘*an* in reported chains of transmission (*asānīd*). Here is a chart showing the rise and fall of different terms for transmission among different generations of traditionists in Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* (percentages of a sample of 238):



²³ Bashīr ‘Alī ‘Umar, *Manhaj al-imām Aḥmad fi i’lāl al-ḥadīth*; Abū Bakr ibn Laṭīf Kāfī, *Manhaj al-imām Aḥmad fi l-ta’līl*, and Melchert, *Aḥmad ibn Hanbal*, chap. 2.

²⁴ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 5:279-80.

²⁵ Ibn Hānī’, *Masā’il al-imām Aḥmad*, 2:224.

²⁶ Ibn Hānī’, *Masā’il*, 2:225.

That is, it was just when writing was coming to be universally accepted, in the late eighth century, that the overwhelming majority of transmitters evidently took it to be important to specify that transmission had been direct and oral.

Some instances of destroying books have been noted by Franz Rosenthal and Michael Cook. On his deathbed, ‘Abīdah al-Salmānī (Kufan, d. 72/691-2?) had his books erased, saying ‘I fear that someone after me should get them and put them where they do not belong.’²⁷ Abū Qilābah (Basran, d. 105/723-4?) bequeathed his books to Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (Basran, d. 131/748-9?) with instructions otherwise to burn them.²⁸ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) had a servant burn his books (*ṣaḥīfahs*).²⁹ Shu‘bah (Basran, d. 160/776) ordered that his books be washed on his death, which his son saw to.³⁰ Sufyān al-Thawrī transferred his books to ‘Ammār ibn Sayf (Kufan) with instructions to bury them when he died.³¹

I have come across some others. The Companion Ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652-3?) had a *ṣaḥīfah* containing hadith washed, then burnt.³² The Companion Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (d. 50/670-1?) washed the ink from

²⁷ Ibn Sa‘d, *Biographien*, 6:63 = *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 6:94 (henceforward, references to latter edn in *italics*); cited by Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 480, with additional references. Cook offers the translation, ‘I’m afraid that someone may get possession of them when I’m dead and misconstrue them.’ I suppose that the issue is who has access to them; that is, someone dependably orthodox or not. ‘He called for his books to be burnt or erased’ according to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*, 1:215 1:97.

²⁸ Ibn Sa‘d, *Biographien*, 7/1:135 7:185; cited by Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 481.

²⁹ Ibn Sa‘d, *Biographien*, 7/1:127 7:174-5; cited by Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 481.

³⁰ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghādī, *Taqyīd al-‘ilm*, p. 62; cited by Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 481.

³¹ Ibn Sa‘d, *Biographien*, 6:271 6:388; cited by Rosenthal, “Of making many books there is no end,” p. 41, and Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 481. An early Ḥanbalī source mentions that some were burnt, some washed and resold (as blank sheets), and some buried: Ḥarb al-Kirmānī, *Masā’il al-imām Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal wa-Ishāq ibn Rāḥawayh*, p. 494. An Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥārithī is remembered as having retrieved from burial by Sufyān himself a notebook from which Sufyān had related hadith to him personally: Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyah*, 7:64.

³² Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, *Kitāb al-adab* 149, *fi iḥrāq al-kutub wa-maḥwihā* = ed. al-Luḥayḍān, 8:552. This section includes four reports, one of ‘Abīdah’s destroying his books, two apparently concerning letters. Muslim ibn Yasār (Basran, d. 101/719-20?) would erase the name of God before throwing away a letter (*loc. cit.*). Here, the issue seems to be the respectful treatment of the sacred name. Similarly ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s section on the burning of books has Tāwūs (Yemenī, d. 106/725?) burn letters in which the *basmalah* was written, whereas Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī (Kufan, d. 96/714?) disapproves of burning writing that mentions God: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:425.

a book his son had written of his talk.³³ The Companion ‘Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn (d. Basra, 52/672) erased something that Ḥumayd ibn Hilāl (Basran Follower) had written of his hadith, saying ‘Memorize as I memorized.’³⁴ ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/712-13?) burned some books of his containing *fiqh* (law) on the Day of al-Ḥarrah (26 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 63/26 August 682), when the Medinese repulsed an expedition from Syria near the start of the Second Civil War.³⁵ ‘Alī ibn Mus’hir (Kufan, d. 189/804-5) buried his books after going blind; i.e. at the point at which they no longer served to keep the hadith there in his own memory.³⁶ Muḥammad ibn Aslam (d. Nishapur, 242/856) ordered his books to be buried on his death.³⁷ Ibn Abī Ḥātim ordered the notes of his father, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890), and Abū Zur’ah al-Rāzī (d. 264/878) to be buried.³⁸ Ibn al-Ji’ābī (Baghdadi, d. 355/965) ordered his books to be burnt on his death.³⁹ The Companion stories just mentioned seem intended to document the undesirability of writing hadith. In all the other cases, the point would have been to prevent persons from relating hadith from these notebooks as if they had directly, physically heard them from their collectors. They might have misinterpreted the handwriting. Possibly, they contained dubious hadith reports that their compilers would not have repeated to anyone. Numbers of quotations indicate distress among traditionists at the thought that false hadith should be published on their authority; for example, from Shu’bah, ‘By God, I am safer with regard to poetry than I am with regard to hadith’ and ‘I am worried about nothing else that I fear might put me into the Fire’, meaning hadith.⁴⁰

³³ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*, 1:214 1:96.

³⁴ Abū Zur’ah al-Dimashqī, *al-Tārīkh*, 1:555.

³⁵ Ibn Sa’d, *Biographien*, 5:133 5:179. ‘Urwah is also quoted as saying, ‘We used to say, “Let us take up no book besides the Book of God,” so I erased my books. By God, I wish that I had my books. The Book of God has steadfastly endured’ (Abū Nu’aym, *Ḥilyah*, 2:176). Unlike Ibn Sa’d’s report, this one plainly has to do with allaying fears that writing hadith would threaten the Qur’ān.

³⁶ Ibn Numayr, *apud* Yaḥyā ibn Ma’in, *al-Tārīkh*, recension of ‘Abbās al-Dūrī, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr Sayf, 2:423.

³⁷ Abū Nu’aym, *Ḥilyah*, 9:241.

³⁸ Al-Khalīlī, *al-Irshād*, abr. al-Silafī, ed. ‘Āmir Aḥmad Ḥaydar, p. 229, s.n. Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī.

³⁹ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Musabbīḥī, *apud* al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 26 (351-380 H.): 128.

⁴⁰ Ibn Sa’d, *Biographien*, 7/2:38 7:280-1. On the riskiness of poetry, consider the

Sometimes, one speculates that the burying of books was posited to explain someone's weakness. Mu'ammal ibn Ismā'il (Basran, d. Mecca, 206/822) was said by someone to have buried his books, then tried to relate hadith by memory and made mistakes. But there are many other reports of his weakness that do not mention the burial of books, only his making many mistakes and imagining things.⁴¹ This would be comparable to the case of Ibn Lahī'ah (Egyptian, d. 174/790?), discussed by Erik Dickinson. Different reports indicate that Ibn Lahī'ah became unreliable after he lost his books to a fire, after he became senile, after he suffered a stroke; alternatively, that he himself was careless or that some but not all of his students were careless.⁴² Altogether, it seems plain that traditionists knew certainly that Ibn Lahī'ah was associated with some hadith reports they accepted and with others they rejected, and that reports of burnt books, senility, stroke, and so on were simply guesses as to why.

Sometimes, books were expressly said to have been destroyed because they contained misattributed hadith reports. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal told someone to leave or burn a collection of questions from Khālid ibn Abī 'Imrān (African *qādī*, d. 129/746-7?) to the prominent Followers al-Qāsim and Sālim falsely attributed to al-Zuhrī (Medinese, d. 124/741-2?).⁴³ Ibn Sa'd reports Sufyān al-Thawrī's command that his books be buried without explanation. By another account, however, Sufyān had regretted some things that he had written from some persons, saying, 'I was led to it by lust for hadith (*shahwat al-ḥadīth*).'⁴⁴ This touches on renunciant distrust of the culture of hadith. Yaḥyā ibn Ma'in (d. 233/848) burnt what he had written down from Khālid ibn

widely-reported dictum of the Prophet, 'It would be better for one of you for his interior to be filled with pus than that it be filled with poetry': Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-adab* 92, *bāb mā yukrahu an yakūna al-ghālib 'alā al-insān al-shi'r*, nos 6154-5; Muslim, *Jāmi'*, *Kitāb al-shi'r* 7-9, nos 2257-8; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-adab* 87, *bāb mā jā'a fi l-shi'r*, no 5009; Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'*, *Abwāb al-adab* 105, *bāb mā jā'a la'an yamtali'a jawf ḥadikum shi'ran*, nos 2851-2; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-adab* 42, *mā kuriha min al-shi'r*, nos 3759-60; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* 1:175, 177, 181, 2:188, 331, 355, 391, 478, 480 = ed. Arna'ūt, 3:95-6, 116, 139, 13:258-9, 14:109, 294, 15:42, 16:153-4, 164; Ibn Abi Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:512-14.

⁴¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Kitāb al-Tahdhīb*, 10:381.

⁴² Dickinson, *The development of early Sunnite hadith criticism*, pp. 99-101, 124-125.

⁴³ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-'Ilal*, 2:56-7 1:224.

⁴⁴ Abū Nu'aym, *Hilyah*, 7:64; alternatively, *shuhrat al-ḥadīth*, 'the fame of hadith', at 7:38, meaning the prospect of achieving it.

al-Qāsim al-Madāyini (d. 211/826-7), whom others accused of being weak or becoming senile.⁴⁵

Renunciants (*zuhhād*) apparently destroyed notebooks either because hadith transmission tended to make them self-important or lest hadith study distract them from recollecting God.⁴⁶ Al-Ḥasan ibn Rūd-abār (Kufan, d. late 2nd/early 8th cent.) buried his books, saying it was not suitable to spend all one's life on hadith.⁴⁷ Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā' (Basran, d. Kufa, 154/770-1?), one of the famous seven readers of the Qur'ān, burnt his books when he devoted himself entirely to worship.⁴⁸ Dāwūd al-Ṭā'ī (Kufan, d. 165/781-2) sat with Abū Ḥanīfah till he acquired a reputation for talking much, then grew silent and later threw his books into the Tigris, after which he devoted himself to worship and withdrew from society.⁴⁹ The story is told that Abū Usāmah Ḥammād ibn Usāmah (Kufan, d. 201/817) objected to Ibn al-Mubārak that the previous generation had not sorted hadith by topic and put together written collections, provoking Ibn al-Mubārak to abstain from dictating hadith for about 20 days. When he was observed dictating again to a circle of auditors, Ibn al-Mubārak lamely told him, similarly to Sufyān, 'lust for hadith (*shahwat al-ḥadīth*)'.⁵⁰ Yūsuf ibn Asbāṭ (d. 195/810-

⁴⁵ Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-Mizān*, 2:384.

⁴⁶ Some of the following examples were also brought up in an earlier article by me, "Early renunciants as *ḥadīth* transmitters," p. 413, where fuller explanations of renunciant distrust are offered. This is to disagree with Rosenthal ("Of making many books," p. 43), who explains renunciant hostility to books by 'the pietistic/mystic attitude and the long tradition of philosophers (such as Socrates) and, above all, mystics who feel revulsion at the thought of profaning their insights'. The books in question here comprise hadith, not mystical thought, and such explicit derogations of collecting hadith as I have come across show no concern for profaning mystical insight.

⁴⁷ Abū l-Ḥasan al-'Ijlī, *Tārīkh al-thiqāt*, p. 114.

⁴⁸ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 1:321; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāyah fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrā'*, 1:290. Cook, citing al-Jāhiz, says 'the stated motive is that he turned to Koranic recitation (*taqarra'a*)': Cook, "The opponents of the writing," p. 495fn. However, this verb was also commonly used in the sense of becoming a *qāri'*, meaning a renunciant; e.g. Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyah*, 6:290, where Abū l-Tayyāḥ (Basran, d. 128/745-6) associates it especially with fasting. This sense is confirmed by Ibn al-Jazarī, who quotes the Basran grammarian Abū 'Ubaydah (d. ca. 210/825-6) as describing how Abū 'Amr's notebooks (*dafātīr*) filled a house to the ceiling, 'then he became a renunciant (*tanassaka*), so he burnt them and devoted himself solely to worship.'

⁴⁹ Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyah*, 7:336. But other stories of his becoming silent and withdrawing from society do not mention the destruction of his books (notably at *Ḥilyah* 7:342), so this was not an essential detail.

⁵⁰ Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyah*, 8:165. On Abū Usāmah's destruction of notebooks v. *infra*.

11) buried his books near Wasit where the flood would later destroy them. He explained, ‘I wanted my concern to be one.’⁵¹ He also reportedly associated hadith transmission with conceitedness, as in telling a man he saw with a *daftar* (notebook) in his hand, ‘You ornament yourselves as you like, but God will not give you more of anything but lowliness.’⁵² He later related hadith from memory, but, without his notebooks, it did not come out as it was supposed to.⁵³ ‘Aṭā’ ibn Muslim al-Khaffāf (Kufan, moved to Aleppo, d. 190/806) was a pious man (*ṣāliḥ*) likened to Yūsuf ibn Asbāt. He buried his books, then related hadith from memory and imagined things.⁵⁴ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf (Ishfahani, d. ca. 200/815-16) buried his books, saying, ‘Grant you were a judge—so what (*fa-kāna mādhā*)? Grant you were a mufti—so what? Grant you were a traditionist—so what?’⁵⁵ He is also quoted as expressly warning against the tendency of hadith transmission to make one conceited: ‘Relate hadith to the people and teach them, but when people gather around you, observe how your heart is.’⁵⁶

Abū Usāmah buried his books, then later borrowed others’ books and illicitly transmitted what he had copied from them.⁵⁷ I have found no explanation for his burying those books, but he had a reputation for being a renunciant (*kāna yu’addu min al-nussāk*), so it was presumably from pious humility.⁵⁸ Bishr al-Ḥāfi (d. Baghdad, 227/841) had eighteen containers of his books buried.⁵⁹ Salm ibn Maymūn al-Khawwāṣ (*fl.* early 3rd cent.) was a worshipper who buried his books, then related hadith from memory, on which account he was accused of making mis-

⁵¹ Al-‘Uqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍu‘afā’ al-kabīr*, 4:454.

⁵² Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyah*, 10:170.

⁵³ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, 8:385; cited by Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 481.

⁵⁴ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ*, 6:336; cited by Cook, “The opponents of the writing,” p. 481.

⁵⁵ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyah*, 8:227.

⁵⁶ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyah*, 8:234-5.

⁵⁷ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*, 3:209 2:161. Other references to his burying his books *apud* Ibn Ḥajar, *Kitāb Tahdhīb*, 2:3. Despite his practice, Abū Usāmah appears in all of the Six Books.

⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Ammār, *apud* Ibn Ḥajar, *Kitāb Tahdhīb*, 2:3. This Ibn ‘Ammār may have been the preacher Maṣūf (d. Baghdad, early 200s/ca. 820?), on whom v. Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 13 (191-200 H.): 409-14, with further references.

⁵⁹ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghādādi, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 7:71 = Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghādādi, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, 7:551.

takes.⁶⁰ Abū Nuʿaym quotes two stories from al-Sulamī and adds a third from another source describing how the Syrian Ibn Abī l-Ḥawārī (d. 246/860) cast his books into the Tigris. A representative example quotes him as saying, ‘What a good guide you were; but pre-occupation with the guide after one has arrived is preposterous (*muḥāl*).’⁶¹ Muḥammad ibn Muʿadh (d. 334/945-6) said he was 120 years old and had heard hadith from Abū l-Walīd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 224/838-9) and others, then become a Sufī and buried his books. He consequently forgot all but one of his old hadith reports before resuming his collection.⁶² His biographers reasonably doubt whether he was really that old, but it seems significant that becoming a Sufī was taken to be a plausible reason for someone to have buried his books.

The most famous example of destroying books on account of renunciant concerns is that of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (*fl.* late 4th/10th cent.), who was blamed for burning his.⁶³ He adduced in his own defence the examples of Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ, who buried his books, Dāwūd al-Ṭāʾī, who threw his into the sea (i.e. river), Yūsuf ibn Asbāt, who threw them into a cave that he then blocked up, Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī, who burnt his, and Sufyān al-Thawrī, who tore up a thousand fascicles and threw them to the wind.⁶⁴ The one of these for which I have not found an independent report is Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (Syrian, d. 215/830-1?). However, what Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī quotes Abū Sulaymān as saying to his books is a slightly more elaborate version of what his younger contemporaries al-Sulamī (d. Nishapur, 412/1021) and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. Isfāhan, 430/1038) attribute to Abū Sulaymān’s disciple Ibn Abī l-Ḥawārī (quoted above). Both Abū Sulaymān and Ibn Abī l-Ḥawārī had reputations for transmitting hadith, although Ibn Abī l-Ḥawārī’s was greater (e.g. his name appears in two

⁶⁰ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ*, 4:267.

⁶¹ Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah* 10:6-7 (Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Mūsā is al-Sulamī). Two quotations, including the one here translated, are also expressly attributed to al-Sulamī, *Tārīkh al-ṣūfiyyah* by al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 18 (241-250 H.): 54-5.

⁶² Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān*, 5:385, citing Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh*, s.n. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Muḥammad al-Yaḥsubī, but I have not found such a biography in *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq* itself.

⁶³ Reviewed by Rosenthal, “Of making many books,” p. 40; at greater length by Wadād al-Qāḍī, “Scholars and their books: a peculiar view from the fifth/eleventh century”.

⁶⁴ Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb*, ed. Margoliouth, 5:389 = ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 5:1931; trans. by al-Qāḍī, “Scholars,” pp. 638-639.

of the Six Books).⁶⁵ The multiplicity of quotations suggests elaboration over time; so does their mystical tinge. Neither attribution, then, seems certain. On balance, however, I tend to favour Ibn Abī l-Ḥawārī as the one who destroyed his books.

At least once, a book was destroyed from sheer malice. Hushaym ibn Bashīr (d. Baghdad, 183/799) lent his book (*ṣaḥīfah*) of hadith from al-Zuhrī to Shu'bah, who threw it into the Tigris from envy.⁶⁶ Destruction of books in hadith circles for the sake of suppressing wrong ideas is reported only rarely. Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād (d. Baghdad, 228/843?) paid fifty dinars for some books from Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Yaḥyā (d. al-Ḥadath, 191/806-7?), a traditionist of mixed reputation sometimes cited by al-Shāfi'ī, then tore them up when some turned out to report Qadarī and Jahmī positions.⁶⁷ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal recommended that if someone dies leaving many books of *ra'y* (meaning jurisprudence not founded on Qur'ān and hadith), they should be buried, even though he have debts (which would make it tempting to sell them).⁶⁸ Otherwise, he commanded that wrong passages be struck out, such as hadith from unqualified persons, misrepresentations of his own opinions, or hadith falsely said to have been related by him.⁶⁹

Striking out particular hadith is mentioned much more often than destroying whole books. In Aḥmad's own books, it was observed that he had struck out hadith from 'Alī ibn al-Ja'd, Sa'id ibn Sulaymān, 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī, and others who had answered as bidden at the Inquisition.⁷⁰ Ibrāhīm ibn Ṭahmān (Khurasani, d. Mecca, 163/779-80?) is quoted as having written to the people of Nishapur commanding them

⁶⁵ For Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī, v. al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 15 (211-220 H.): 252-5; for Ibn Abī l-Ḥawārī, al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 18 (241-250 H.): 51-5, both with further references.

⁶⁶ Khalīlī, *al-Irshād*, p. 19.

⁶⁷ Ibn Ḥajar, *Kitāb al-Tahdhīb*, 1:158-9, apparently quoting 'Abbās al-Dūrī < Yaḥyā ibn Ma'in, but I have not traced the quotation in his *Tārīkh*.

⁶⁸ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābilah*, 1:347, s.n. Muḥannā ibn Yaḥyā. The printed text refers to *kuṭub al-rāzī*, which I take to need correction, confirmed by the version in al-'Ulaymī, *al-Manhaj al-aḥmad fi tarājim aṣḥāb al-imām Aḥmad*, 2:163.

⁶⁹ For hadith from unqualified persons (*qawm lā yasta'hilūna an yuḥaddatha 'anhum*), v. Šāliḥ ibn Aḥmad, *Masā'il al-imām Aḥmad ibn Hanbal*, no 518. For misrepresentations of Aḥmad's opinions, v. al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, ed. 'Aṭīyah ibn 'Aṭīq al-Zahrānī, 7:95-100 = ed. Abū 'Aṣīm al-Ḥasan ibn 'Abbās ibn Qutb, 2:335-8. For someone who said he had related hadith of Aḥmad, v. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-'Ilal*, 1:34, also *apud* Ibn Ḥajar, *Kitāb al-Tahdhīb*, 11:244, s.n. Yaḥyā ibn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥimmānī.

⁷⁰ Abū Zur'ah al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Ḍu'afā'*, 3:546-7; al-'Uqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍu'afā'*, 3:239.

to erase whatever they had written down of his transmission from Abū Ḥanīfah.⁷¹ Ibn al-Mubārak (Khurasani, d. Hit, 181/797) is said to have struck out the hadith of Abū Ḥanīfah (in his own notes) a few days before he died.⁷² ‘Īsā ibn Yūnus (d. al-Ḥadath, 191/806?) told traditionists to strike out hadith in their notebooks from Ismā‘il ibn ‘Ayyāsh and Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Yaḥyā.⁷³ Someone noticed that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī (d. Basra, 198/814) had struck out some hadith in a notebook of his. On being asked, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān explained, ‘Yaḥyā (ibn Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān) informed me that he was accused of holding the opinion of Jahm (ibn Ṣafwān, that the Qur’ān was create), so I struck out his hadith.’⁷⁴ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī commanded that hadith from ‘Alī ibn Abī Hāshim (Baghdadi, d. 220s/835-45?) be struck out because he had refused to take a position on the creation of the Qur’ān.⁷⁵

There are probably two reasons why traditionists seldom burnt books. First, books were expensive, so that books with wrong ideas would have seldom come into their possession. Secondly, theirs was still largely an oral culture, albeit dependent on private notebooks. This is why, when Harūn al-Rashīd (*r.* 170-93/786-809) tried to suppress what he considered unorthodoxy, he did not have books burned, rather forbade the unorthodox offender to lecture.⁷⁶ As for the traditionists, they aimed to suppress wrong ideas mainly by not talking about them. ‘They left his hadith’ is a common expression of rejection; for example, what Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī did to hadith he had heard from al-Bukhārī after he received a letter charging him with an unorthodox opinion about the pronunciation of the Qur’ān.⁷⁷ Sometimes it was applied to persons; e.g. the feckless Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Yaḥyā mentioned above, of whom the critics al-Bukhārī said ‘disreputable of hadith (*munkar al-ḥa-*

⁷¹ Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Majrūhīn*, 3:71.

⁷² Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*, 3:269 2:187.

⁷³ Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Majrūhīn*, 1:107. Ismā‘il ibn ‘Ayyāsh was a Homsī (d. 181/797-8?) accused of inaccuracy, especially in what he related of Hijazis and Iraqis (summary in Ibn Ḥajar, *Kitāb al-Tahdhīb*, 1:321-6). ‘Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Yaḥyā’ seems to indicate Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Ḥayyāh, a Meccan (*fl.* later 2nd/8th cent.) roundly accused of inventing hadith (v. Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān*, 1:52-3, 124).

⁷⁴ Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyah*, 9:6.

⁷⁵ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ*, 6:195.

⁷⁶ So with regard to the Basran Ismā‘il ibn ‘Ulayyah (d. 193/808-9) for saying the Qur’ān was create, according to Ibn Hānī, *Masā’il*, 2:160, and Ṣāliḥ ibn Aḥmad, *Sīrat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, p. 67.

⁷⁷ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ*, 7:191.

dīth'), al-Nasā'ī 'weak', and al-Dāraquṭnī simply 'left (*matrūk*)'.⁷⁸ They would strike out names and hadith reports in notebooks to keep themselves from repeating them to others. As Sufyān al-Thawrī was quoted as saying, 'Whoever hears an innovation, let him not take any of it to those with whom he sits, not casting it into their hearts.'⁷⁹

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⁷⁹ Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyah*, 7:34.

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