



The Importance of Kūfah

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Background

- When the Muslims conquered ‘Irāq in 17 AH, at the hands of Sayyidunā Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqās *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu*, under the caliphate of ‘Umar *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu*, the destiny and influence of this place was bound to be significant.
- ‘Umar *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* would generally not allow the learned ṣaḥābah to leave Madīnah, except in rare instances. Kūfah was one of these exceptions.
- Sayyidunā ‘Umar *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* sent Sayyidunā ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* in an envoy led by Sayyidunā ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* to Kūfah to teach the people about the rulings of Islām. Sayyidunā ‘Umar *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* wrote to the people of Kūfah:

إِنِّي قَدْ بَعَثْتُ إِلَيْكُمْ عَمَّارَ بْنَ يَاسِرٍ أَمِيرًا وَعَبْدَ اللَّهِ بْنَ مَسْعُودٍ مَعْلَمًا وَوَزِيرًا وَإِنَّهُمَا مِنَ النَّجْبَاءِ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ بَدْرٍ وَقَدْ جَعَلْتُ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ بْنَ مَسْعُودٍ عَلَى بَيْتِ مَالِكُمْ فَتَعَلَّمُوا مِنْهُمَا وَاقْتَدُوا بِهِمَا وَقَدْ آثَرْتُمْ بِعَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنَ مَسْعُودٍ عَلَى نَفْسِي

Indeed, I have verily sent to you ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir as a leader and ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd as a teacher and vicegerent, and indeed they are from amongst the distinct companions of the Prophet Ṣallallāhu ‘Alayhi Wasallam and [from amongst] the participants of Badr, and I have placed ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd in charge of your treasury, so seek knowledge from him, and follow him, thus indeed I have given preference to you people over myself with regards to ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd.

[Ahmad, ‘Faḍā’il al-Ṣaḥābah’, (Makkah: Jami’ah Umm al-Qura, 1983), pg.841-842][Al-Bayhaqī, ‘Al-Madkhal Ilā Kitāb al-Sunan’, 2:561]

Sayyidunā ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd *Raḍiyallahu ‘Anhu*

- Sayyidunā ‘Umar *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* said with regards to Sayyidunā ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu*:

كنيف مليء علما

[He is] a small container filled with knowledge.

- For a long period of time, Sayyidunā ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* remained in Kūfah teaching the people about their religion and instilling within them the thirst for sacred knowledge. He later returned to Madīnah and passed away there in approximately 33 AH during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu*. **[Al-Bakrī, ‘Footnotes upon *Husn al-Taḳāḍī*’, 1:22]**
- Indeed, the Prophet ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam had said:

رضيت لأمتي ما رضي لها ابن أم عبد

I am happy for my Ummah with whatever Ibn Umm ‘Abd (the agnomen of Ibn Mas‘ūd) is happy for them.

[Ibn Abī Shaybah, ‘*Muṣannaf ibn Abī Shaybah*’, (Jeddah: Dar al-Qiblah, 2006), 17:192-4][Al-Bayhaqī, ‘*Al-Madkhal Ilā Kitāb al-Sunan*’, 2:560]

- Imām al-Bukhārī *rahimahullah* (d.256 AH) narrates that ‘Alqamah ibn Qays *rahimahullah* has related:

قدمت الشام فصليت ركعتين ثم قلت اللهم يسر لي جليسا صالحا فأتيت قوما فجلست إليهم فإذا شيخ قد جاء حتى جلس إلى جنبي قلت من هذا؟ قال أبو الدرداء فقلت إني دعوت الله أن يسر لي جليسا صالحا فيسرك لي قال ممن أنت؟ قلت من أهل الكوفة قال أوليس عندكم ابن أم عبد صاحب التعلين والوساد والمطهرة؟ أفياكم الذي أجاره الله من الشيطان يعني على لسان نبيه صلى الله عليه وسلم؟ أو ليس فيكم صاحب سر النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لا يعلم أحد غيره؟

I came to Shām (the Levant), performed two Rak’ah Salah, then I prayed, ‘Oh Allah, create ease in me meeting a pious companion,’ so I came to a group of people and sat with them. Suddenly, an old man came and sat beside me, I asked, ‘Who are you?’ The man responded, ‘Abu al-Darda,’ I said, ‘Indeed, I had called upon Allah that he creates ease in me meeting a pious companion and so he has created this ease.’ He asked, ‘From which people are you [from]?’ I said, ‘From the people of Kufa,’ he asked, ‘Do you not have by you Ibn Umm Abd (the agnomen of ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd RaḍiyAllāhu ‘Anhu)? The one who oversaw the sandals [of the Prophet], the pillow [of the Prophet] and the cleansing bowel [of the Prophet]. Do you have amongst you the one whom Allah has protected from the devil? i.e. [based] upon the statement of His Prophet ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam? Is there not amongst you the person who was privy to the secrets of the Prophet ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam, those which no one knows besides him?’

- Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī *rahimahullah* (d.852 AH) explains:

المراد الثناء عليه بخدمة النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم وأنه لشدة ملازمته له لأجل هذه الأمور ينبغي أن يكون عنده من العلم ما يستغنى طالبه به عن غيره

The intention [of Abū al-Dardā] was to praise him (‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd) due to his service of the Prophet ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam and that due to his incredible companionship of him (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam) through these duties, it is appropriate that he has with him the knowledge that makes a student of sacred of knowledge independent of those besides him.

- We have expressed earlier that ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* was a ṣaḥābī who preferred to look at the deeper meanings and objectives of the Qur’ān, Sunnah and ijmā‘. In fact, in this regard, he was inspired by ‘Umar *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* whom he considered a mentor and inspiration. This is to the extent that Masrūq states that ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* would reconsider his opinion on a certain mas’alah if he found that ‘Umar *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* is contradicting him. In fact, many of the students of ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu* also travelled to Madīnah to acquire knowledge from ‘Umar *raḍiyallahu ‘anhu*. Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal *raḥimahullah* (d.241 AH) states:

أصحاب عبد الله كانوا يرحلون من الكوفة إلى المدينة فيتعلمون من عمر ويسمعون منه

The companions of ‘Abdullah would travel from Kūfah to Madīnah, and hence they would learn from ‘Umar and listen to him. [Ibn Aḥmad, ‘Al-‘Ilal wa Ma‘rifah al-Rijāl’, 2:162][Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, ‘Al-Jāmi‘ li Akhlāq al-Rāwī’, (Egypt: Dār al-Lu’lu’ah, 2019), 1:143][Ibn al-Jawzī, ‘Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad’, (Cairo: Dār Hijr, 1409 AH), 1:278-9]

- Thus, Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Zarqā’ *raḥimahullah* () writes:

وإن طريقة عمر الفقهية كانت حجة خالدة لمدرسة "أهل الرأي" في العراق من فقهاء الطبقات التالية التي سيأتي ذكرها فقد تأثر هؤلاء بفقهِ ابن مسعود في الكوفة وكان هو يسير على طريقة عمر رضي الله عنهما

And indeed, the fiqhī approach of ‘Umar was an everlasting evidence for the Ahl al-Ra’y in ‘Iraq for the fuqahā’ of the following generations whose mention will soon come. Thus, these individuals were influenced by the fiqh of Ibn Mas‘ūd in Kūfah, and he (Ibn Mas‘ūd) would tread the path of ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with both of them. [Al-Zarqā’, ‘Al-Madkhal al-Fiqhī al-‘Ām’, 1:178]

- Accordingly, ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd instilled within his students the attitude of looking at the deeper meanings found within the Qur’ān, Sunnah and ijma‘. With Kūfah already being a city flowing with creativity and ideas, this only increased the activity of looking at the deeper meanings of the Qur’ān and Sunnah. Shaykh Sohail Hanif writes:

The Iraqi city of Kufa was arguably the greatest centre of Islamic legal thought for much of Islam’s first century and a half. [Hanif, ‘A Tale of Two Kufans’, pg.173]

- Shaykh Zafar Ishāq Anṣārī writes:

Iraq, one of the earliest centres of human civilisation, was conquered by the Arab Muslims in 15 AH. At th time of the conquest, the country was part of the Sassanid Empire...Being a part of the orbit of Persian culture, the intellectual climate of Iraq was quite different from that of Hijaz. For the same reason, the Iraqians were familiar with religious doctrines and philosophical ideas with which the Arabs of the peninsula were either inconvenient or of which they were only vaguely aware...Moreover, there was a large number of local non-Arab converts, which constituted a much greater proportion of the Iraqi Muslim society than did the non-Arab convers in Hijaz. Being a melting pot of different religious and cultural traditions, it was no wonder that the Iraqians were, in general, less conservative, the pact of intellectual activity there was faster, and its level, higher than in the rest of the Islamic world...During the Umayyad period, the non-Arab Muslims had, on the whole, only a nominal share in political power. Thanks to this, their ambitions chose cultural and literary channels for their self-fulfilment. Being possessed of a tradition of learning and of a mind sharpened by intellectual tradition and sedentary existence, their role assumed paramount importance in the development of all Islamic sciences. It is significant that they played the pioneering role even in the foundation and development of the sciences related to Arabic language, not to mention the purely Islamic sciences such as tafsīr, sīrah, etc...It is from Iraq that most of the theological schools sprang up and most of the currents of theological thought originated. [Ansari, ‘The Early Development of Islamic Fiqh in Kūfah’, pg.317-8]

Ḥadīth in Kūfah

- Considering this, many of the chains of narrations of the aḥādīth found in the six famous books of ḥadīth are found to have originated in Kūfah. Dr. Aḥmad Snobar writes:

ومن هنا يتضح سبب النشاط الحديثي في مدينتي الكوفة والبصرة مع ضعفه في المدن الأخرى مثل مصر واليمن والشام فلم ينزل أي من كبار الصحابة مصر مستقرا بها وكذلك اليمن والحال في دمشق على ما ذكرت وعليه فمن الطبيعي أن نجد أكثر من ثلثي الأسانيد في الكتب الستة ترجع إلى هذه المدن الثلاثة المدينة المنورة فالكوفة ثم البصرة بل إن هذا الاهتمام انسحب على القراءات القرآنية فنجد أن أربعة من أئمة القراءات العشر من الكوفة واثنان من البصرة واثنان من المدينة وواحد من مكة وواحد من الشام!

And from this, the attention towards ḥadīth in the two cities of Kūfah and Baṣrah becomes apparent with it being weaker in the other cities such as Egypt, Yemen and the Levant. Thus, from amongst the elderly ṣaḥābah none remained permanently there, and similar to this is Yemen and the state in Damascus is as I have mentioned. Based upon this then, it is natural that we find that two thirds of the chains of narrations in the six famous books of ḥadīth goes back to these three cities; Madīnah Munawwarah, then Kūfah and then Baṣrah. In fact, this attention seeped into the Qur'ānic recitations, hence, we find that four of the ten a'immaḥ in qirā'ah were from Kūfah, two from Baṣrah, two from Madīnah, one from Makkah and one from the Levant.

[Snobar, 'Min al-Nabī Ṣallallahu 'Alayhi Wasallam Ila'l-Bukhārī', pg.112-3]

- In another place, Dr. Snobar writes regarding Sayyidunā 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd raḍiyallahu 'anhū:

فمألها علما وتعلما وفقها وتفقهها مما جعلها مدينة يمكن لنا إطلاق اسم "المدينة الفقهية" عليها فقد ضاهت المدينة النبوية في الحركة العلمية في ذلك الوقت ونافستها في كثير من الأحيان

So, he filled it with knowledge, teaching, fiqh and the development of fiqhī abilities which made it into a city upon which the name 'The City of Fiqh' could be applied, thus indeed it was an equal to the Prophetic city of Madīnah in terms of the development of knowledge in that time, and it (Kūfah) competed with it (Madīnah) in many issues.

[Snobar, 'Min al-Nabī Ṣallallahu 'Alayhi Wasallam Ila'l-Bukhārī', pg.134]