Hadith On-line: Writing Islamic Tradition

With the vastly expanding use and popularity of the world wide web in the closing decade of the 20th century, Muslims began presenting themselves on the web through sacred texts, images and stories. This transmission includes hadith, the sayings and acts of the Prophet. Studying the transmission of the hadith through the internet and its function in the Islamic on-line discourse helps in understanding the conception of a new discourse of Islamic jurisprudence. Through the description of different formats of hadith, it is possible to analyze the complex relation between the texts and the new medium.

The relation between text and medium changes over time and space, because of the varying cultural systems in which messages are produced and the ongoing development of information technology. Empowering the web through sacred texts, images and stories is a new tradition taking shape following the example of new media. As the imitation transmission includes the web through sacred texts, images and stories. This can be useful for understanding how the information circulates and by whom it is produced and consumed.

Hadith means news, but in this particular case it denotes the news about the Prophet transmitted by way of his companions and later generations of Muslims. As the imitation of Muhammad’s example is a moral and legal principle, tapiled, the hadith constitutes next to the Qur’an one of the most important sources of Islamic jurisprudence and theology.

The oral transmission of the hadith was soon replaced by written transmission, being a more efficient means of communicating it over the rapidly expanding Muslim world. In written format it was also easier to control their authenticity and limit the production of apocrypha. Thus, a great part of the hadith led to the composition of a number of canonical hadith collections, known as the hadith qudsi. Throughout the same medium. Outside of the virtual world each format is realized by a particular, means, either through writing, calligraphy, architecture or popular art. On the web a certain kind of content, the content of a hadith in particular when the explain the main features of Islam and its civilization. Sometimes hadith qudsi – the holy or divine sayings attributed, albeit indirectly, to God are presented (see www.ifrance.com/abchir-m).

The language-author ratio is similar to that of the printed collection was found, even if there are two collections, one in Arabic, and in French, two (Le Centre Islamique de la Réunion, www.islam.ifrance.fr/islam, and Les Ressources Islamiques, www.chez.com/ abuhamza) translated by The International Islamic Federation of Students (Kuwait).

The language-author ratio is similar to that of the printed production of hadith in Western languages. Most of the on-line hadith are in English and the Imam Bukhari’s As-Sahih is certainly the most popular collection – on the web as well as in print. Most of these web sites are created by Muslim students in the US or are hosted by American servers. The most important centers of production of English books, however, are located in the Indian Subcontinent and managed by professional editors.

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These diverse ‘statuses’ of texts do not exist in printed works. All the pages included in a book towards the same text of the publisher have control over the entire text. Muslims from all around the world are using the internet to communicate, to present their beliefs and their practices. The hadith are an important part of their ‘virtual image’. A new tradition is taking shape following the new medium and its uses. The main difference between print and on-line literature is that the medium and not in the texts themselves, because they use basically the same words. However, centres of production, editors’ competences, formats used and means of diffusion are completely different. Cultural and religious changes in the information era are not always voluntarily caused by authors but by the medium itself.

The internet is creating another language that is neither written nor oral, it is a world wide web made of images, sounds and written words. Moreover, in cyberspace there is no memory because sites that shut down do not leave a trace of their existence, and all the efforts made to keep track of such a site can suddenly fail.

Some effects of the new media become evident in discussions about the authenticity of the fundamental texts of Islam. The MSA website (www.usc.edu/dept/MSA) hesitantly suggests that a digital copy of the Qur’an is as sacred Good Muslim should perform the necessary ablutions before reading a digital copy of the Qur’an. On the contrary, the Al-Hadith and Al-Muhaddith (www.al-muhaddith.com) refuses to publish the hadith and the Qur’an on-line because they do not consider the internet a ‘suitable’ means for its publication. Thus, considering that a protocol of transmission of religious knowledge, not is yet formulated and accepted, it seems to be too early to affirm that a ‘virtual Islamic tradition’ has been born. However, one who considers how much the virtual text informs the real one and not leaves a trace of its existence.

Notes
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None of you should wish for death, nor should he call for it before it comes to him, because when his time comes, his actions are terminated, and certainly the age of a believer adds nothing but good.

[Muhammad]